

**Comparative Study of Martial Art Traditions of India and Japan:
A Case Study of Kalarippayattu and Budo**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

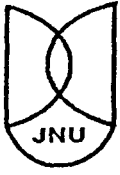
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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “Comparative study of Martial Art Traditions of India and Japan: A Case study of Kalarippayattu and Budo” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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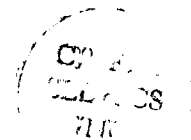
CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the new age warriors who are committed to the fight for social justice and a better world.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

‘(Human) History has been the history of Warfare’¹. While today the term warfare has associations with guns, missiles, tanks, bombs, chemical weapons and the like, there was a period in history when it was associated with swords, bows and arrows and hand to hand combat and spoken of in glorious terms of chivalry, valor, honor and so on. The medieval world has always fascinated people as being a ‘glorious’ age of brave knights and duels for the sake of honor. Glimpses of that period are seen even today in literature, popular dramas and animations. Another area where we see the imprints of the pre-modern modes of warfare is martial arts.

While we hardly ever associate the various martial arts, which popular culture accepts as sports or self-defense forms, with military warfare; it is a fact that most martial art forms have their origin in the history of martial² warfare. Karl Friday writes of how warfare and martial power, particularly in pre-modern societies, had forms and purposes beyond just solving interstate disputes. Warfare, he states, can be ‘a form of communication’, ‘a means of divination’, ‘competition’, ‘a means of entertainment or self expression’ or it can serve ‘a judicial role’³. Of these various forms and purposes, the one form which survived till the present is that of martial arts- a means of self- defense, physical training and competition.

Admittedly ‘martial arts’ is a modern term. Most dictionaries define martial art as ‘a sport that is a traditional Japanese or Chinese form of fighting or defending

¹ Godfrey Reggio, American filmmaker, social activist, educator

² While the terms military and martial are most often than not used interchangeably, I would like to make a distinction here. While martial is a general word to do with tradition of warfare, military tradition seems to be a more modern connotation implying army organization etc. hence I would like to use the term martial tradition and not military tradition in the following pages.

³ Friday, Karl F. (2004), *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan*, New York: Routledge, p 19

yourself⁴ or 'a sport such as judo or karate, in which you fight with your hands and feet. Martial arts were developed in Eastern Asia'⁵. These definitions are neither adequate nor accurate. Firstly labeling martial arts as sports or mere self-defense forms is limiting. Rather they are physical culture or combat training systems and as already mentioned have their origins in the martial warfare of the pre-modern societies. They are not necessarily of East Asian origin, but are found in various different parts of the world⁶. Nor are they all weaponless combat systems. Many of these martial arts provide training in a variety of traditional weapons. The Han History bibliographies completed by Hanshu Yiwenzhi around 90 A.D. define martial arts simply as "skills" or "techniques" to practice use of the hands and feet, and to facilitate the use of weapons to gain victory through offense or defense⁷.

Martial traditions are linked to the history, the social structure, the religion and many other aspects of a country and exert their influence on many different aspects of society as well. It would not be wrong to say that martial arts are an integral part in understanding the history and culture of different countries. The history of these traditions needs to be studied seeing the growing popularity of martial arts in the present society and the fact that the relevance in the present is often because of the links to the past. In the case of *kalaripayattu*, for example, its socio-historic significance made it a vehicle that carved out a Malayali identity, making it important to do an in depth study of its history.

For ages, the only Indian martial art form, among the various different martial arts

⁴ Cambridge Advanced Learner's dictionary, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

⁵ Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Indian reprint), Longman Group Ltd.

⁶ There are martial art traditions in America, Europe, Africa and other parts of the world. A form of shadow boxing (*skiamachia*) and military dances (*pyrrhichia*) were practiced in the West over two thousand years ago. There are many more such examples. For details see Draeger, Donn F. and Robert W. Smith (1969), *Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts*, Tokyo: Kodansha International

⁷ Henning, Stanley E. (1981), "The Chinese Martial Arts in Historical Perspective", *Military Affairs*, 45 (4): 173-179

across the country which was internationally acknowledged, was wrestling⁸. Other martial arts like *silambam*⁹ and *kalaripayattu* of Kerala, *garadi* of South Canara, *thang ta*¹⁰ of Manipur and many others are not that well known. Out of these some like *garadi* have disappeared while others like *silambam* have gone on to become popular in neighboring countries. Academic work on these martial arts is negligible and research in this field should be encouraged.

In the past the link between India and Japan has always been more cultural than political. Recently it has undergone a shift towards bilateral trade and exchange of technological know-how, but the cultural aspect still continues to be important. Martial arts could be a further link in forging and deepening Indo-Japan cultural ties.

1.1 Research objective

The main objective of this research is a comparative study of *kalaripayattu*- martial art form of Kerala¹¹ and *budo*- martial art tradition of Japan, through a socio-cultural perspective. Not only will this dissertation be an introduction to the historic development of both the martial art traditions, but it aims to look into the society and the feudal systems in which they flourished in order to deepen the understanding of each other's society and customs through a comparative study of both the traditions.

⁸ Wrestling is said to have existed even before the Aryan invasion from *ca* 1500 BC and onwards. There are hundreds of wrestling techniques which are used in various combinations and variations. *Malla yudha*, *pehalwani*, *vajra mushti* are some of the forms of wrestling. Draeger, Donn F. and Robert W. Smith (1969), *Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts*, Tokyo: Kodansha International, p 141-154

⁹ A form of stick fighting which originated in the Kurinji hills of Kerala. It is said to have influenced *silat*, the martial art form of Malaysia.

¹⁰ Thang Ta, "The Art of the Sword and Spear", is the traditional martial art of Manipur in Northeast India. It integrates various external weapons - the sword, spear, dagger, etc. - with the internal practice of physical control through soft movements coordinated with the rhythms of breathing. It is part of the great heroic tradition of Manipur. Nongmaithem, Khilton and Dainis Jirgensons (1998), "Thang-Ta, The Martial Art of Manipur India", *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, 7(4): 46-59, Accessed on 14th July 2008, URL: <http://themanipurpage.tripod.com/culture/thangta.html>

¹¹ Although usually associated with Kerala, it would be more accurate to say that *kalaripayattu* is a South Indian martial art tradition, as the state of Kerala was formed only in 1956.

1.2 Methodology

The first stage of this research was an in-depth study of the history of the two martial traditions, mainly focusing on the medieval period. The issues discussed in this dissertation look into how these martial traditions evolved, who were involved in the practice of these martial combat training systems, for what purpose, what was their position in society, the role they played, the influence these martial arts had or have on society etc. For this, books, articles and other material on these subjects were referred. Interviews and discussions with scholars and students who have been involved in this area of study also helped in understanding the problem at hand. Following which an attempt was made to compare the two traditions from a socio-cultural perspective after identifying certain aspects for comparison and contrast.

This research has its limitations, particularly since most of the available material on the Japanese martial tradition was by Western scholars and very few works by Japanese scholars were available in India. Hence the Japanese martial tradition has been looked at from the Western perspective rather than the Japanese one. This gives a one sided view of the subject.

1.3 Scope and relevance of the research

Cultural links and exchange are a very important part of bilateral relations. At a time when both India and Japan are looking at each other as strategic partners in trade and other sectors, it is important to explore cultural similarities and links and understand each other's societies and cultures. This research is an attempt to deepen this understanding through the comparative research of the respective martial traditions through a socio-cultural perspective.

There have been studies done in each country regarding their respective martial traditions, their origin, development and significance etc. although academic work

from the socio-cultural perspective is limited in the case of *kalarippayattu*. Along with Japanese scholars like Asakawa Kan'ichi, Ishii Susumu-etc., western scholars like Stephen Turnbull, John W. Hall, Karl Friday, and Jeffrey P. Mass have studied the Japanese military tradition and the warrior class in detail. There are works comparing European chivalry and Japanese *bushido*, Chinese and Japanese martial art traditions; however to the best of my knowledge a comparative study of the martial art traditions of India and Japan from a socio- cultural perspective has not been taken up before. In recent times some Japanese have come to Kerala to learn about Ayurveda and *kalarippayattu*; however these have been more of individual pursuits rather than serious academic work.

1.4 Organization of the dissertation

This dissertation has three main chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to *kalarippayattu*. To give a brief summary here, *Kalarippayattu* is a very well-developed ancient martial art form. It is believed by some to be the 'mother of all martial arts' or particularly to be the origin of karate¹². Present day *kalarippayattu* also includes the *varma ati* or *ati murai*, which is the Tamil martial art form practiced in the South Travancore region of Kerala and the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. While different theories link the origin of *kalarippayattu* to the Dhanur Vedic tradition, to the myths related to the origin of Kerala etc. it can definitely be traced back to the Sangam period of South Indian history (circa BC 200-600 AD). The tribal system of warfare and combat training that existed in the age prior to the Sangam period combined with the systematized martial combat system of the immigrant Aryan Brahmins to form a single composite martial system of warfare that

¹² Although this is the generally accepted theory in India and Japan and a Chinese writer, Hu Tsan is said to have come to India to explore this link. This theory was contested by Chinese scholars like Tang Hao and Xu Jedong in 1930's I believe that the link cannot be ignored completely. There has to be some historical basis to the earlier theory

is known as *kalarippayattu* in the present day. This combat system was taught to the Brahmin youths in *salais* and to commoners in training centers called *kalaris*. With time the Brahmins gave up practicing martial arts and the *salais* became restricted to centers of Vedic learning. *Kalaris* provided warriors for the militia of the land. The social conditions created by the long war between the southern kingdoms of Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas and the disintegration of the Cheras and the rise of small chieftaincies and principalities and constant strife between them ensured that the importance of *kalaris* as centers of combat training continued. Unlike North India, where a distinct Kshatriya class existed whose profession was ruling and warfare, there was no well defined warrior class in Kerala and warriors came from various different castes and communities. Nevertheless, a majority of the warriors belonged to Nair community or the *Izhava* community (*chekors*) thus giving the impression that the Nair community was the warrior class of Kerala. Warriors on completing their training in the local *kalaris* would enlist with the local chieftain or king and either join the king's retinue or guard or go back to ones village to come when summoned.

Kalarippayattu, which provided society with able warriors, influenced almost all aspects of art and culture and also had links with the ancient system of health care and medicine-Ayurveda. In fact a school of medicine known as *kalarichikitsa* or *marmachikitsa* came into existence which specializes in treatment of diseases through the knowledge of the *marmas* or vital points of the body.

The second chapter deals with the martial tradition of Japan. Japan is a country known for its martial arts, its swords, swordsmanship and the samurai tradition along with many other things. The initial phase of the martial tradition saw the implementing of the *ritsuryo* codes following the Chinese model. This system involved conscription of the peasants to the militia of the state. This model however

did not prove to be very successful and was replaced by the period of privately trained warriors. Those skilled in martial combat perceived that they could use their skills for banditry, capturing lands etc. The lords realized the benefits of hiring similarly privately trained warriors to control the situation. The system of retainers came into existence. Gradually a distinct warrior class arose which went on to rule the country for hundreds of years and changed the course of Japan's history. These warriors trained in various weapons, the bow and the arrow, the sword etc at specific training schools which emerged from time to time from the Nara period (710- 794 A.D.) onwards.

This chapter elaborates the historical development of the tradition and the position and role of the warriors. It also looks into the role of *budo* in society and its influence on the art forms, literature and language of Japan.

The third chapter is a comparative analysis of the two martial art traditions. It attempts to highlight the differences in the stages of development of the two traditions in spite of the similar circumstances of origin. Linked to this are the differences in the roles the traditions played in society and the influences they had on the social systems and structure as well the art forms. The section dealing with social systems and structure, focuses on the roles and functions of the warriors other than that of the military and police force, their participation or non-participation of the warriors in administration, whether they played a role in the judicial matters and the impact on the position on women and the system of inheritance. The analysis is summed up in the conclusion along with identifying the future tasks.

Chapter 2

Kalaripayattu: History and tradition

Kalaripayattu, one of India's traditional martial art forms can be explained as 'the systematized physical exercise and combat technique imparted through the institution called *kalari*'¹. It is seen as having a 'multiplicity of meanings' - 'an ancient martial art encapsulating Kerala's cultural and mytho-historical heritage, a traditional psycho-physiological discipline which cultivates mental, physical and spiritual benefits, an effective practical fighting art, a scientific system of physical-culture training beneficial to sportspeople, dancers and actors, a streetwise art of self-defense'².

In the medieval period it was an important institution more as a means of military training.

In the days when man's ingenuity had not invented the deadly poison gas [*sic*], when bombs and machine guns had not replaced hands and the sword, when personal prowess had more to do in deciding a battle than destructive engines the power of Malayali manhood had its military training in the *kalari* of Malabar. Every year it sent out of its portals hundreds of youthful warriors who fought and conquered or died, but never yielded³.

In the present day it is thought of more in terms of being a 'carrier' or symbol of Kerala's tradition and cultural heritage. This chapter aims at introducing the various aspects of the art before moving on to a comparative analysis with the Japanese martial arts.

The term '*kalari*' said to be derived from the Tamil word '*kalam*' denoting a

¹ Vijaya Kumaran K. (1993), *Military system of Kerala with special reference to Kalaripayattu*, MPhil Dissertation, Calicut: University of Calicut, p. 91

² Zarrilli, Philip B. (1998), *When the body becomes all eyes- paradigms, discourses and practices of power in Kalaripayattu, a South Indian Martial Art*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p.10

³ Ibid, p 53

This was a narrative read before performances by K. Narayanan Nayar and his students during the 1960s and 1970s. K Narayanan Nair is the son of C V Narayanan Nair, the Kalari Gurukkal who is credited with reviving Kalaripayattu in the Telicherry region. This particular school of Kalari belongs to the Malabar region-northern part of Kerala, hence the usage 'Kalari of Malabar'.

gymnasium, open space, training ground, or battlefield where as 'payyattu' is derived from the Tamil word 'payil', 'to become trained, accustomed; practice' ⁴. Although the compound 'kalarippayattu' is said to have been first used in the twentieth century, the separate Malayalam terms with their idiomatic meanings are traced to the eleventh or twelfth century when the martial practice is thought to have achieved a structure and style close to that extant today.⁵

Kalarippayattu while being art of warfare was also a performance art. Prasad gurukkal⁶ sees the development of *kalarippayattu* through the course of history as a sequential flow from the primitive stage of *naayaattu*⁷ (hunting) to that of a martial art (warfare) and finally to the present stage of being a fine art. The Dhanur Veda⁸ talks about *abhyasakazcha* or demonstration. As instructed in Dhanur Veda, it is a usual practice in *kalarippayattu* for the practitioners (or warriors) on completing their training to participate in public demonstrations before an invited audience (also known as *chuvadumaattam*). Today, in a way it is this aspect of *abhyasakazcha*, which existed in the medieval period as well, that has gained prominence over the other aspects.

The following section takes a brief look at the origin and historical development of the martial art.

⁴ Another theory is that 'kalari' comes from the word 'khalurika' (battlefield) and 'payyattu' from 'payarchi' however it is the first which is generally accepted these days.

⁵ Zarrilli, op cit, p.25

⁶ Chief instructor of Sree Bharat Kalari, Chirakkal, Kannur. Son of Chirakkal T. Sreedharan Nair, well known Kalari Gurukkal and Author of many books on Kalarippayattu

⁷ *Naayaattu* in Kerala was 'developed to the level of a ritual'. The 18 types of 'vili' and 'teli' of *naayaattu* i.e. terminology for the hunters informing about the position or movement of the quarry, are said to have influenced the *vaythaari* or spoken instructions of *kalarippayattu*. Also the 'highly disciplined ethical code' of *naayaattu* is thought to have influenced *kalarippayattu*

⁸ Dhanur Veda is considered one of the eighteen traditional branches of knowledge. Although the oldest extant texts are a collection of four chapters in the Agni Purana, it is believed to have been written or collected in the 5th or 6th century. It was the means of education in warfare for all those called upon to fight. Zarrilli, op cit, p. 301

2.1 History

There are various theories about the origin of *kalarippayattu*. The first one, which was accepted for a long time, states that after Parasurama⁹ created the land of Kerala from the sea, by throwing a *mazhu*¹⁰, he brought 36000 Brahmins and settled them in the region. It is said that he established 108¹¹ *kalaris* for the training of martial arts. According to this theory the martial art tradition is said to have originated in the Dhanur Veda (tradition), which expounds about martial warfare and weaponry etc. Prof. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai¹², the first to come up with a historical theory for the establishment of *kalaris*, was of the opinion that *kalarippayattu* came up in the 12th century during the 'Hundred year's war' between the Cheras and the Cholas. This theory has however been disproved by later scholars.¹³

Most scholars today accept the theory that what we today see as *kalarippayattu* is the amalgamation of the Dravidian tradition of warfare which existed in the native people of Kerala before the immigration of the Aryan Brahmins and the pan-Indian Dhanur Vedic tradition brought by them. It is also argued that the myths regarding Parasurama establishing *kalaris* and appointing Brahmin warriors to impart knowledge about martial warfare was a conscious attempt by the Brahmins to appropriate the authority over martial arts in order to establish their hegemony over the region.

Zarrilli, one of the first scholars to study *kalarippayattu* from an academic point of view, explores the two major source traditions of *kalarippayattu* – the Dravidian tradition that dates from the early Sangam culture and the Sanskrit Dhanur Vedic Traditions. The Dhanur Veda (literally the science of archery) gives pre-eminence to the bow while *kalarippayattu* considers the sword and the shield to be premier

⁹ Mythological hero of the Hindu epics, believed to be one of the ten *avatars* (incarnations) of Vishnu

¹⁰ Also known as *parasu*, the Malayalam term for axe, thought to have been the weapon of Parasurama

¹¹ Some versions say 1008, some 42

¹² Pillai, Elamkulam Kunjan (1970), *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam: National Book Stall

¹³ Vijayakumar, op cit p.93

weapons¹⁴. Also the most important and final stage of *kalarippayattu* training is *verumkai prayogam* or free hand fighting techniques, which the Sanskritic tradition considers to be the lowest form of fighting. In fact in some of the foreign accounts, Brahmins are said to have favored the bow and arrow while the Nair warriors the sword.¹⁵ The concept of *kuzhikalari* (pit *kalari*) and *uzhicchal* (oil massage) are also believed to be aspects that belong to the pre-Dhanur Vedic influence tradition.

The Sangam period (the first five centuries of the Christian era) in the history of Kerala is said to have been the formative epoch of Kerala history when it was a part of the larger unit of Tamilakam. This period saw three dominant political powers flourishing in South India, namely the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas. It was a period characterized by a predominant martial spirit and the absence of caste divisions and social exclusions. 'The importance of the martial hero in the Sangam age is evident in the deification of fallen heroes through the planting of hero-stones (*veerakal*; or *natukal*, 'planted stones') which were inscribed with the name of the hero and his valorous deeds'¹⁶. The king is said to have been personally present during wars and there seems to have been a trend of self-immolation by retainers and vassals in case of death of the king¹⁷. From the Tamil heroic poetry of that age it is known that the martial art practitioners used to undergo training in target practice, horse riding, training in weapons mainly the spear (*vel*), sword (*val*) and shield (*kedaham*) and bow (*vil*) and arrow. The martial combat techniques of this age later combined with the techniques and martial practices of the Brahmin immigrants from the north to form the present day *kalarippayattu* techniques¹⁸. The systematization of the martial

¹⁴ Zarrilli, op cit p.260, Notes-54

¹⁵ Concept of pollution by touch. Killing the opponent without having to go close to him or actually touch him was preferred.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 29, cited from Kailasapathy, K. (1968), *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.235

¹⁷ Comparable to the phenomenon of *jyunshi* prevalent in late medieval to modern Japan

¹⁸ The differences in the various schools of *Kalarippayattu* are a result of this amalgamation, i.e. to

tradition of the Sangam period took place due to this influence of Dhanur Vedic tradition.

In the second Chera rule (c.800-1124) there existed *salais*¹⁹, attached to temples, which imparted Vedic education along with training in martial warfare exclusively to Brahmin youths known as *Chattiras* (also referred to as *cattars* or *yatras*). It is thought that there could have been *kalaris* for the training of common soldiers from non-Brahmin communities. However later on the Brahmins, except for one sub-caste, gave up training in martial arts and the *salais* became centers restricted to imparting knowledge in the Vedas and *kalaris* became the centres for martial training.²⁰

The *Cheraman Perumal* (the Chera King) had a capital force (*maula sainya*) of thousand 'Nayakas' or Nairs under him, under each of whom were ten common soldiers (known as *chekons*). The kingdom was divided into various 'nadu' (districts) governed by *naduvazhis* (chieftains) with rights of criminal and civil jurisdiction. Next in authority were the *deshavazhis* who were in charge of maintenance and training of the local *kalari*²¹. The *naduvazhis* had military organizations (*nootu kootams*) under them, organizations in hundreds known as *munnurvar* (three hundred), *anjuttuvar* (five hundred), *arunuttuvar* (six hundred) etc. These comprised the local militia.

Sreedhara Menon²² in his description of the Chera rule writes that compulsory military training through *kalaris* was established during the period. A *chaver*²³ army,

what extents the old techniques and practices were retained and which of the new practices were adopted etc.

¹⁹ Equated to *ghatikas* of the Gupta period. The *Kandaloor salai* in particular was of much importance causing the Chola forces to destroy it in an attempt to defeat the Cheras.

²⁰ It is interesting to note that once the Brahmins had established an intellectual hegemony over the then society they gave up martial art training and declared that it was beneath them. The sub-caste of Brahmins who continued to practice martial arts, namely the *Chathira (yatra) Namboodiris* were scorned by the others.

²¹ Zarrilli, op cit, p.38

²² Menon, A. Sreedhara (2007), *A Survey of Kerala History*, Kottayam: D C Books

²³ The concepts of *chaver*, *lokar*, *kaval*, *akampati janam*, *changatham* etc which were found in the subsequent periods are thought to have originated during this period.

a group of men sworn to die for the king, was formed and it was that which turned the tide against the Chola forces.

The disintegration of the Chera kingdom in the twelfth century, led to the development of 'smaller principalities and minor chieftaincies'. From amongst the numerous small 'nadu', four emerged dominant political powers (*swarupams*) - Kozhikode (ruled by the Zamorin), Kochi (Maharaja), Venad (Maharaja) and Kolathunadu (Kolathiri).

It was a period of constant warfare which necessitated the maintaining of a body of fighters at the beck and call of the various power centres thus creating the circumstances which made the establishment of *kalaris* essential as they provided 'the institutional base for the body building and training in combat'²⁴. Each of these *swarupams* had their forces (*swarupa janam*). The Zamorin (also pronounced *samootheri*) along with having a very efficient administrative setup and record keeping system is said to have had the strongest military force in Malabar²⁵. The *swarupa janam* of the Zamorin comprised of *chaver*, *lokar*, *kaval* (protection force of the castle), *akampati janam* (retinue) and *changatham*.

Chaver is defined as 'one who has bound oneself to death [*sic*] for the honor of one's country'²⁶. Both foreign²⁷ and local records mention the existence of such men who having partaken the rice²⁸ given by the king, swear by their sword to serve him till their death. Purchas²⁹ in his book *Purchas His Pilgrimes* writes

²⁴ Kurup, K.K.N. and Raghava Varier, M.R., *Kalaripayattu: The Traditional Martial Art of Kerala*, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala and the Malappuram Tourist Promotion Council, p 2

²⁵ Sansom writes 'the Zamorin, anxious to extend his authority, had built up not only his naval forces, and he had at his command not only seamen who had sailed the Indian Ocean for more than a millennium but also soldiers of the Nair caste, a warlike community that had a well developed military organization of a somewhat Spartan character.' Sansom, G. B. (1977), *The Western World and Japan*, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., reprinted 1987, p.57

²⁶ Pillai, Elamkulam Kunjan, op cit, p 284

²⁷ Accounts of D. Barbosa, Francis Day, Abu Zayed, Marco polo include descriptions of these warriors. For details see Zarrilli, op cit; VijayaKumar, op cit

²⁸ Or liquor

²⁹ Purchas, Samuel(1708), *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, Vol. X, Glasgow: James MacLehose and sons, p.

'The King of Cochin hath a great number of gentlemen which he called Amochi³⁰ and some called Nairi. These two sorts of men esteem not their lives anything, so that it may be for the honor of the King...if the prince is slain, the Amochi who are numerous would avenge him desperately. These are soldiers who swear to defend the King's life with their own.'

The term *chaver* is often associated with the *Maamankam* festival³¹ of Tirunavai, which used to be held once in twelve years till it was discontinued in the year 1766. The position of the convener and protector of the festival was with the Valluvanad Raja but was taken over by the Zamorin killing two Vellatri princes in the process. In the subsequent festivals the *chaver pada* of the Valluvanad Raja would attack the guard of the Zamorin in an attempt to kill the Zamorin and avenge the death of the princes and the earlier *chaver* warriors. This sentiment is associated with '*kutipaka*' (blood feuds), a custom wherein the death of a family member or relation would be avenged even at the cost of death.

Lokar is a comparatively lesser known term. Its structure and function not much known except that *lokar* used to reside within the castle towns and were probably part of the contingent force. *Changatham* was the term used for warriors who could be hired to guard institutions, government offices (*kaval changatham*) but mostly to escort travelers to their destinations. There are records of even Portuguese traders hiring them for their safe transport. This was a source of revenue for the Zamorin.

On completing his martial training, each warrior would be escorted in state to the Zamorin and would be hired following a small ceremony, after which he could either join the Zamorin's akampati janam or kaval, or go back to his village and join the militia of the Deshavazhi to come when required by the Zamorin³². Other than being

103 quoted in Pillai, Elamkulam Kunjan, op cit, p 284

³⁰ The terms 'amochi' or 'amoucos' that are found in the Portuguese accounts of that period are thought to be a corruption of the Sanskrit term '*amokshya*'

³¹ This festival was held based on the belief that every twelve years the holy river Ganga would descend from the heavens to the Bharatapuzha river making it as holy as the Ganga. It was held at the banks of the river at Tirunavai.

³² Kalarippayattu warriors while enlisting were instructed to 'protect Brahmins and cows', an expression which was a reflection of the intellectual hegemony of the Brahmins. Thus the warriors

part of the 'military fabric' of the society, the warriors also played a role in the civil and administrative setup especially for dispute settlement. For this judicial purpose of solving disputes between wealthy and landed families or among ordinary people, there existed an institution called '*ankam*'³³. The disputing sides hired fighters and the issue was decided based on the victory or defeat of the warrior. Fees was paid to the fighters as well to the local or regional political authority in the form of the *naduvazhi* or *desavazhi* (*anka kizhi*-fees for the fighters, *vetu kizhi*-fees paid to the house the fighter belongs to and *naatu kizhi*- paid to the local authority). Thus these were a source of income to the political authority as well as a way to mitigate the loss of lives³⁴. Another type of duel fought known as the '*poithu*' was a means of interpersonal dispute settlement without informing the authorities.

The arrival of the Portuguese with their firearms did not bring about a decline of *kalaripayattu* rather the warriors turned out by the *kalaris* formed the 'best fighting material against the invading armies'. It was during the British rule when firearms became widespread and hand- to hand combat became redundant that *kalaripayattu* declined³⁵. The European style of standing army, and police force, education and training etc that were introduced contributed to the subversion of the system as the rulers didn't feel it worthwhile to maintain *kalaris* and keep a large army of men trained in the traditional martial arts.³⁶

fought to protect what was 'sacred' and due to the loyalty towards the king or *naduvazhi* who paid them their salary during the period of the war and would take care of their families in case of their death.

³³ A special form of duel legislated to settle disputes

³⁴ There seems to have been a similar institution in Sri Lanka in the Kandyan country where the *harmba salawa* martial art tradition flourished. Kurup, K.K.N. and M.R.Raghava Varier, op cit, p.2,7

³⁵ MacDonald, Ian (2007) "Bodily practice, performance art, competition sport :a critique of Kalaripayattu, the martial art of Kerala", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 41(2):143-168

³⁶ For example, in the system of warfare followed till then, each side paid great attention to the convenience of the other side and much regard was to given to ceremony and decorum. An attack would be announced beforehand, and about hundred fighters would be sent from each side at one time till one side admitted defeat. This system had to be abandoned as the Portuguese always attacked unannounced. There are accounts of how the Portuguese were surprised and amused when the Zamoorin announced an attack beforehand. Though the Zamorin's massive forces were defeated that time they soon recovered and fought back and defeated the Portuguese in 1510.

However the Portuguese and later the British could not fail to be impressed by the martial abilities of the warriors who 'sprung on them like a swarm of bees' and fought till death with agility and skill. The guerilla warriors of Pazhashi Raja of Kottayam³⁷, who lead an armed revolt against the British from 1796 to 1805, caused much trouble for the British and led to a ban on possessing weapons and martial art training in Malabar in 1804. A similar ban was issued in Travancore following the revolt led by Velutambi Dalawa in 1809. This was followed by a long period of suppression when Kalaris went into ruin and most people either gave up training or shifted to practice of medicine (*kalari chikilsa*) and only a few spirited people continued to practice in an underground manner.

There was a re-emergence of the art in the 20th century along with the 'mass anti-colonial agitations'. It was in that period that C.V. Narayanan Nair and his teacher Kanaran Gurukkal; Chirakkal T. Sreedharan Nair etc revived the martial art with their efforts. They combined traditional techniques with new innovations for public demonstrations and once again popularized *kalaripayattu*.

Post independence when the state of Kerala came into existence, a need was felt to carve out an exclusive Malayali identity. The festival of Onam and *kalaripayattu* demonstrations as part of it became a vehicle for that purpose. *Kalaripayattu* was projected as 'an image of Kerala's cultural and mytho-historical heritage to the world' and staged demonstrations of *kalaripayattu* became part of many festivals showcasing India across the world. There were others like Keeleri Kunjikannan Nambiar who used the physical training aspect of *Kalaripayattu* to develop the first indigenous circus.

The Kerala *Kalaripayattu* Association was formed in 1958 and there are more than 500 *kalaris* around Kerala at present. However the period of glorification and

³⁷ Not to be mistaken for the present day Kottayam in South Kerala but situated in the Kannur district.

celebration of a 'Malayali' identity during the formative years of Kerala seem to have now faded away into a period of negligence. Off late the image of bare bodied young men doing seemingly impossible acrobatic twists and jumps with swords and other weapons in hand is used not only to promote tourism but also to sell vitamins and other health products. While these images remind Malayalis of *kalaripayattu*, a symbol of their cultural and mytho-historical heritage, whether the images of kalari fighters performing leaps with sword and shield in hand for health product commercials gets associated with *kalaripayattu* among non-Malayali audiences is doubtful. Even in Kerala, the days when Taccholi Othenan³⁸ and Aromal Chekavar³⁹ were the heroes are long gone. What is required is more academic research into the topic and to see things in the correct perspective- into the historical development of the martial art tradition, the actual position and nature of the *kalaripayattu* warriors, the role of the martial art form and its relevance in the present day society.

2.2 Warriors

Unlike North and central India where the Varna ashrama⁴⁰ was strictly implemented, in Kerala this four-tiered system could not be implemented in the same manner. When the Brahmins migrated to this region, they made an attempt to establish a system of caste-based professions like that in North India, which if it had succeeded, Kerala would have had a kshatriya caste, a warrior class by profession. However this did not happen. Instead we have a society where there is a miniscule kshatriya class and the groups which were involved in warfare mostly belonging to the so called lower caste-shudras. This could be because of the nature of the Sangam age society. As

³⁸ A Robin Hood type hero oft mentioned in the ballads and folklore of Malabar, known to be a great warrior

³⁹ Another warrior oft mentioned in the Ballads of Malabar

⁴⁰ This divides the society into four sections, according to profession, that of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. These gradually became hereditary.

Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai opines the 'spirit of Dravidian culture was castelessness'⁴¹.

While the general opinion that there were no caste restrictions in *kalaripayattu*, does not seem plausible given the ritual purity and untouchability practiced in the Post Sangam period which restricted the freedom of movement to a large extent, records indicate that it was practiced by people from different social groups. Zarrilli opines that practicing the martial art was an exclusive right and privilege given to certain groups of practitioners designated to serve the ruler, this being a distinct imprint of the Aryan brahmanical culture⁴².

Usually *kalaripayattu* is associated with the Nair community and accounts of foreign travelers of the medieval period mostly mention Nair warriors. A Portuguese poet Luis de Camoens, who came to India (Calicut) in 1553, wrote the following description in his epic poem 'The Lusiad':

'Pooleas the labouring lower classes are named;
By the proud Nayres the noble rank is claimed;
The toils of culture, and of art they scorn,
The warrior's plumes their haughty brows adorn;
The shining falchion brandished in the right,
Their left arm wields the target in the fight;
Of danger scornful, ever armed they stand
Around the king, a stern barbarian band.'⁴³

VijayaKumar writes that according to the *Keralolpatti*, Parasurama organized the Nairs into '*taras*' and gave them the function of *kan* (eye), *kai* (hand), *kalpana* (order)⁴⁴ and adds that most of the important government functions fell upon this section of the society. Nairs who constitute almost a quarter of the population of Kerala have many subcastes and divisions, ranging from High ranking Nairs like the

⁴¹ Pillai, Elamkulam Kunjan, op cit, p103

⁴² Zarrilli, op cit, p 27,28

⁴³ Fawcett, F. (1901), *Nayars of Malabar*, Madras: Asian Educational Services, reprinted with biography 1990, p 185

⁴⁴ Gundert, Herman(1961), *Keralolpatti*, Trivandrum: Balan publications; Vijaya Kumaran K. (1993), *Military system of Kerala with special reference to Kalaripayattu*, MPhil Dissertation, Calicut: University of Calicut, p 83

Zamorins, who by virtue of their military power and matrimonial alliances with the Namboodiris, developed into landed aristocracy, to lower ranking Nairs who served as military trainers, soldiers; as managers, washer men etc. for the Namboodiris and the High-ranking Nairs. Thus while Barbosa⁴⁵ was not exactly correct in saying that Nairs 'had no other duty than to serve in war', it is a fact that those involved in martial training and practice enjoyed a superior status in society. The Nairs' warriors were each given portions of land in exchange of their service and are said to have received a daily salary while a war was on. Their families were taken care of in their absence and in the eventuality of death. If injured their treatment was also taken care of by the ruler.

Apart from the Nairs, Izhavas (Tiyya community), Pulayas, Parayas, Kaniyans and Christians and Muslims also practiced the martial art. This is evident from the fact that the names 'Panikker' or 'Kurup' which were awarded to *kalari gurukkals*⁴⁶ are found as suffixes in all these communities. As mentioned earlier, Brahmins who also used to train in martial arts earlier gave up this training proclaiming it to be an inferior vocation. However one sub-caste of the Brahmins, the Chathira Brahmins continued to practice and master the techniques.

Among the Izhavas, the Chekavars were the prominent group of fighters. Chekavars also enjoyed a higher rank and status in society by virtue of their martial skills and were eulogized in the folklores and ballads. They were mainly involved in fighting *ankams* to solve disputes between Namboodiri or high-ranking Nair families and tax collection.

Zarrilli quotes a section from one of the ballads in which the famous hero of the

⁴⁵ Duarte Barbosa, Portuguese trader and writer, who traveled with Ferdinand Magellan on the Armada de Molucca expedition. His book *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, published in 1518, gives an account of the lands bordering the Indian Ocean.

⁴⁶ The Kalari gurukkal who supervised the training of the princes in the royal family of the Zamorin had special status and used to be referred to as Thamme Panikkar or Dharmothu Panikkar.

Ballads of North Malabar, Aromal Chekavar informing his brother about his departure
for an Ankam says:

Grain or wealth we can buy or borrow,
But honour we cannot beg or borrow. When father went for combats...
How much younger was I than you now are.
Father asked my consent,
Which I readily gave;
Even so I ask of you.
Our forefathers came here
Adorned as professional combatants...
When one is born a Chekavan
The Chekor has to earn his bread at the point of his sword.
If anybody comes for Ankam
He cannot refuse to go...
Better to die with honour
Than to die a plain death...
Have you not heard of the four states?
Ankam fighting alone makes a Chekor,
As girding the sword makes a Nayar.
And the sacred thread makes a Namboodiri,
And wearing the tali makes a woman⁴⁷

Thus was the martial spirit of the Chekavars.

While the Ballads and folklores talk of great women warriors like Unniarcha etc.,
indicating that at least in certain martial families of the Nair and Izhava communities
women were also given martial training, it is doubtful whether women widely trained
in martial arts. There is also mention of the King of Quillon's (Kollam) castle guard
containing three hundred women archers⁴⁸ however it was certainly not a very
common feature.

⁴⁷ Raghavan, M.D. (1932), A Ballad of Kerala, *Indian Antiquity*, January 9-12, April 72-7, June 112-16,
August 150-4, November 205-11; quoted in Zarrilli, op cit, p 42,43

⁴⁸ VijayaKumar, op cit, p 82

2.3 Kalaripayattu: Structure and system

It is necessary here to give a brief introduction to the structure of *kalaris* and the various stages of *kalari* training.

Kalaris can be classified according to their size, the most common one being *nalpatheeradi*, 42 feet long and 21 feet wide. The other types are *aimpatheeradi* (52" X 26"), *muppatheeradi* (32" X 16"), *patinetteeradi* (18" X 9"), *pantheeradi* (12" X 12"-the only square shaped *kalari*).

The *kalari* arena is mainly of two types a '*kuzhikalari*'⁴⁹ or '*nilakalari*'⁵⁰. Other types of *kalaris* mentioned in the folklore and ballads include - *ankakalari*⁵¹, *todu kalari*⁵², *totuvor kalari*, *cherukalari* etc. In the south-west corner⁵³ of the *kalari* known as *kannimoola* is the '*poothara*' - a semi-circular platform with varying number of steps from which place the '*kalariparadevata*' or the *kalari* gods are thought to preside over the practice sessions. Next to it is the '*guruthara*', or the seat of the guru, 'the preceptor of the art' and the different generations of gurus. There are around 45 deities believed to reside and protect the *kalari*. It is believed that the *kalari* symbolizes the universe. The *kalari* practitioners perform an elaborate ritual of prayer along with the *vaythaari* (oral instructions given by the *gurukkal*) before the start of training each day. There are variations in the construction of *kalaris*- the techniques taught, the mode of training and practice, etc of different regions and different *kalaris*.

Usually boys and girls start training at the young age of seven years at which stage the

⁴⁹ This type of *kalari* is common in North Kerala; a pit (*kuzhi*) is dug of depth about 6 feet. It has a thatched roof of plaited coconut or palm leaves to protect from heavy rain and sun. The floor is kept rammed and smooth. This kind of a structure prevents the practitioner from getting tired due to sweating too much. It is thus suited to the tropical climate of Kerala

⁵⁰ More common in South Kerala, the required area for the arena is enclosed by mud or stone walls of about 5 feet, with plaited coconut leaves forming the roof

⁵¹ *Kalaris* for *ankams* or duels usually an *arupatheeradi* (62" X 31")

⁵² *Kalaris* thought to have been used for imparting knowledge of secret techniques *Marmaprayogam* - usually a *pantheeradi*.

⁵³ South symbolizes destruction while West symbolizes Peace; hence the south west corner is representative of the spirit of *Kalaripayattu* which is destruction for the purpose of establishing peace.



body can still be molded and made flexible. A few days after being initiated to the *kalari*, the practitioner is given an oil massage (*uzhicchal*)⁵⁴ by the *gurukkal* for a period of 14 days. This removes extra fat, improves blood circulation and helps to make the body supple and flexible. It is also a norm to apply oil before practice each day which helps to maintain the body temperature during the strenuous exercise. The tying of the *kaccha* (loincloth usually made of red silk), the traditional dress of *kalarippayattu* is also a ritual. It is six feet long and one foot wide. The *kaccha* is wrapped tightly around the hips and loins, giving protection to the naval region where the life force of a person is supposed to reside. The Ballads and folklore mention different styles employed by warriors in tying the *kaccha* and how even after being mortally injured the warrior stays alive till the untying of the *kaccha*⁵⁵.

Moving on to the stages of training, the first stage of *kalarippayattu* is 'meipayattu' (also known as *meiotukkapayattu*) or physical training. *Meipayattu* is divided into 18 stages or *adavus*⁵⁶. An 'adavu' is a combination of *chuvadus* and *vadivus* and leg exercises (*kaal eduppu* or *kaaluyarttal*). The first part of the training are eight leg exercises – *nerkaal*, *veetukaal*, *konkaal*, *tiricchukaal*, *iruttikaal*, *pakarchakaal* involving kicks and leg swings.

Chuvadu consists of basic steps or movements by the practitioners. There are five *chuvadus* – *aakkachuvadu* (firm step on the ground), *neekachuvadu*, *konchuvadu*, *chaattachuvadu* or *ottakaaalchuvadu* (steps of the soles in jumps), *vattachuvadu* (circular movement) etc. Each *chuvadu* is for a specific purpose. Out of these *neekachuvadu* and *vattachuvadu* are for resistance and attack; while *aakkachuvadu* and *chaattachuvadu* are for leaps and jumps.

⁵⁴ *Uzhicchal* is of two types- *kai uzhicchal* (with hand) for young children and *chavutti uzhicchal* (with feet) for adults

⁵⁵ Vijaya Kumar, op cit, p 111

⁵⁶ At present only 12 *adavus* are taught at *kalaris*.

Vadivu are postures adopted when defending oneself from an attack or when preparing to attack. These are derived from different poses animals adopt during attack, contrived to give maximum speed, agility, power or force. There are 8 such *vadivus* namely *gaja vadivu* (elephant pose), *ashwa vadivu* (horse pose), *simha vadivu* (lion pose), *varaha vadivu* (boar pose), *matsya vadivu* (fish pose), *marjara vadivu* (cat pose), *kukkuda vadivu* (cock pose), *sarpa vadivu* (serpent pose) and some styles have an additional *vadivu* known as *mayura vadivu* (peacock pose). These *vadivus*, *chuvadus* and leg exercises are combined in a sequence to form *adavus*. These are practiced in strict accordance to the oral instructions of the *gurukkal* known as *vaythari*. With repeated practice of these *adavus* the practitioner achieves perfect body control, agility and nimbleness (*meivazhakkam*), good reflexes and concentration (*ekagrata*) where 'the body becomes the eyes'.

The next stage is *kolthari* or training in wooden weapons like *keettukari*⁵⁷ (*sareervadi*), *cheruvadi* (*muchan*), *otta*⁵⁸, *gada* (club or mace) etc. *Kolthari* practice, in particular *keettukaripayattu* is thought of as a preparatory stage for the training of more dangerous metal weapons.

Next is *ankathari* or training with advanced weapons or metal weapons like *katthi* (dagger), *kadhari*⁵⁹, *vaal* (sword) and *paricha* (shield), *urumi*⁶⁰, *kuntham* (spear) etc. Earlier archery and weapons like *ponthi*, *trishul*, and axe were also practiced.

The last stage is *verumkai prayogam* or empty-hand fighting. These unarmed combat techniques of disarming the opponents by hitting their vital points, are believed to have been the base of several other eastern martial arts like karate. Select students,

⁵⁷ A long cane staff, the height of the practitioner from the foot to the eyebrow.

⁵⁸ A short wooden staff of length 18 to 20 inches with a curved blade, the shape of a sickle. Considered to be the highest training stage of *kolthari*.

⁵⁹ A double edged dagger with a curved blade

⁶⁰ A very popular weapon according to the ballads with a long (4 1/2 to 5 1/2 feet), thin and flexible blade with spring action.

who are trusted to not use the knowledge indiscriminately, are taught the secret techniques of *marma prayogam* or knowledge of the vital points (*marmas*) of the body. This knowledge of *marmas* and the necessity to treat injuries during training or combat has led to the development of a special branch of medicine known as *kalarichikitsa* or *marmachikitsa*. Not only are *kalari gurukkals* equipped for orthopedic treatments like setting bones etc, they are also knowledgeable in treating various wounds and diseases. In fact in recent times, this aspect of *kalaripayattu* along with *uzhicchal* has become quite popular and profitable.

Kalaripayattu can be broadly divided into three styles- that of North Kerala, Central Kerala and South Kerala. Each of these again has different schools or styles. Although the basic steps and poses are common, there are differences in the mode of training, weapons taught etc.

At present in most *kalaris* training is not imparted throughout the year but only in the monsoon season for 3 months.

2.4 The role and influence of *Kalaripayattu*

Kalaripayattu is the product of the socio-cultural aspects/conditions of Kerala and vice versa it has influenced almost all spheres of life and culture of that region. This section examines two dimensions of the influence- the influence on the social structure and the influence on the culture- art forms, language and literature etc.

2.4.1 Influence on social systems and structure

a) Role in Society:

Along with providing able warriors for the militia of the land, *kalaripayattu* also played a role in the judicial institution. As has been explained earlier in 2.1, *kalaripayattu* warriors played a major role in solving disputes through the institution of *ankam*. It also had contributions to the economy of the state as it generated revenue for the king in the form of fees for *ankams* and *changatham*.

Kalaripayattu was also a way of mitigating loss of lives by war as has been mentioned earlier. During war between kingdoms or chieftaincies, attacks were

always announced in advance, involving only the trained combatants, hardly affecting the common people. It also acted as a horizontal equalizer in a society with rigid caste stratification. *Kalari gurukkals* and other skilled *kalari* warriors were highly respected irrespective of their caste.

In the present context, *kalaripayattu* is a unifier, a common cultural, mytho-historical heritage which unifies Malayalis, as was intended by the state government which supported and encouraged the art as a symbol of Malayali identity during the years after the formation of the state.

b) Emergence of the system of *marumakkattayam* (matrilineal system):

In Kerala, many communities - Kshatriyas, Nairs, Nampidis, Variers, Kudans and many more followed the matrilineal system. In this system property is inherited in the female line, i.e. it is the daughters who inherit property and not the sons. However they cannot claim this property as the family land and property is common and shared by all members of the family under the control of the *karnavar*, the eldest male member of the family (maternal uncle)⁶¹. Polygamy and polyandry were also prevalent in some of these communities. This matrilineal system of Kerala has come under much scrutiny by sociologists and anthropologists. Scholars have opined that the matrilineal system along with the trends of polygamy and polyandry are linked to the martial tradition; to free the young men to fight wars and not have responsibilities in the family. This is not universally accepted though and different scholars have different opinions about it. 'Kathleen Gough has argued that the Nair matriliney in Calicut and Cochin, with its special features of matrilocal residence, polyandrous and polygamous marriage and the negation of paternity, was consistent with a special type of military organization. Matrilocal residence kept the old men and women to guard the house and land, while the younger men occupied a peripheral position and were free to move in service of the king'⁶². The same is believed about the matrilineal system among the Khasi tribe in Meghalaya, the Jaintias and to some extent the Garos of Nagaland.

'Traditionally, it has been assumed that in those societies where married children

⁶¹ Not to be mistaken with the matriarchal system wherein it is the women who are head of the families

⁶² Gough, Kathleen, K. 'Changing Kinship Usages in the setting of political and economic change among the Nayars of Malabar', *Journal of Royal Anthropological Society*, LXXXII, p.77 quoted in VijayaKumar, K(1993), op cit, p 84

live near or with kin, residence will tend to be patrilocal if males contribute more to the economy and matrilineal if women contribute more (Ember and Ember, 1971; Divale, 1974). Ember and Ember (1971) have also mentioned that those cross-cultural evidences also suggest that in societies where war exists amongst the neighboring communities, residence is almost always matrilineal.⁶³

We find that the areas where a matrilineal system exists also have a history of warfare and often a martial art tradition, be it Kerala, the North Eastern States, South Canara region of Karnataka, Sree Lanka etc. Even in the present day, in African nations like Angola where there is a long history of civil strife and war, we see something similar to a matrilineal system wherein women control the resources and also a trend of polyandry. However there is no conclusive evidence whether there is any link between the matrilineal system and martial tradition, and this subject requires an in-depth study beyond the scope of this dissertation.

2.4.2 Influence on art forms, language and literature

Kalarippayattu is said to have influenced almost all art forms of Kerala either directly or indirectly, be it folk dances like *kolkali*, *poorakali*; classical arts like *kathakali* and *krishnanaatam*; ritualistic arts like *teyyam* etc. Some art forms have a direct influence of the martial art tradition in the form of the physical culture training, also at times in the form of content, and many others have an indirect influence of having developed in a time when the martial art tradition was a vital aspect of the society. Kurup and Varier opine that not only has the *kalari* system and its growth in the medieval feudal order greatly influenced the development of classical and folk art forms but it has shaped the culture of Medieval Kerala society⁶⁴.

⁶³ Divale, W.T. (1974), 'Migration, external warfare, and matrilineal residence', *Behaviour Science Research*, Vol. 9, pp. 75-133; Ember, M. and C.R. Ember (1971), 'The conditions favouring matrilineal residence', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 73, pp. 571-94.

quoted in Das, Madhumita (2001), *Changing family system among a matrilineal group in India*, Accessed on 30th May 2008, URL: http://www.iussp.org/Brazil2001/s10/S12_04_Das.pdf

⁶⁴ Kurup, K.K.N. and Raghava Varier, op cit. , pp.21,22

Vijaya Kumar has identified twelve out of eighty two folk arts of Kerala, which have been directly influenced by *kalaripayattu* and forty two which have an indirect influence. 'Direct influence of body dynamics is clear in heroic *teyyams*, *kathakali*, *poorakali*, *kolkali*, *chavittunatakam*, *kongan pada* and *ochirakali*. Surface, fluid or accessory influence is seen in *kudiyattam*, *kuthiyottam*, *kanyarkali*, *chavittukali*, *dappumuttu* etc.'⁶⁵

'Oil massage, physical exercises, acute body bending, use of shield and sword are the common features of many of these art forms and *kalaripayattu*'⁶⁶.

In this section I would like to look into the influence of the martial art of *kalaripayattu* on these art forms, discussing one example of each type of art form. To begin with, I would like to discuss the influence on *kathakali* which is said to be one of the best examples of this widespread influence of *kalaripayattu*.

Kathakali (a classical art form):

Kathakali, a form of dance-drama, one of the classical art forms of Kerala which has won national and international acclaim in recent years, is said to have its origin in Bharatamuni's concept of '*natyashastra*' (the science of dance), the folk tradition of Kerala and from the physical training of *kalaripayattu*. Vijaya Kumar⁶⁷ opines that 'as the heart and soul of Kerala are influenced by *kalaripayattu* it is inevitable that an art form like *kathakali* be influenced by it.' The link with *kalaripayattu* goes back to the age in Kerala history (8th -12th century) when 'nair' *kalari* fighters were employed by the kings in their armies. The aristocracy which patronized arts like *kathakali* recognized that these soldiers were well suited to play the male characters which were mainly required to portray traits such as valor (*veer rasa*), strength etc⁶⁸. Thus with *kalari* practitioners participating in *kathakali*, a lot of practices were imbibed into it. Later on it turned into a norm for *kathakali* actors to also learn *kalaripayattu*. *Kathakali* training centers are also known as *kalari*.

'For classical art forms like *kathakali* and *kudiyattam*, the body is the sole means of expression'⁶⁹. *Kalaripayattu* training provided them with great flexibility of body, smooth and graceful movements which 'articulate the expressive capacity of various

⁶⁵ Vijaya Kumar, op cit., p.144

⁶⁶ Kurup, K.K.N. and Raghava Varier, op cit. , p.21

⁶⁷ Vijaya Kumar, K (2000), *Kalaripayattu: Keralathinte shakhtiyum soundaryavum*, Thiruvananthapuram: Department of Cultural Publications, Government of Kerala, p. 274

⁶⁸ Usually the female characters were also played by male actors.

⁶⁹ Kurup, K.K.N. and Raghava Varier, op cit. , p.18

parts of the human body'. The practice of *chuvadus* gave the actor good balance and also helped in withstanding strenuous practice sessions and long hours of standing.

Thus this link resulted in the present day similarities between the two in the various rituals and practices. For example, *kathakali* artists before starting their daily practice perform a prayer to the *poothara* which is very similar to the ritual followed by *kalaripayattu* practitioners. The custom of the *gurukkal* performing an oil massage on the practitioners for a period of fourteen days in order to increase flexibility and improve the smoothness of their body movements, has also been adopted by *kathakali* teachers (also known as *gurukkal*). They also practice *uzicchil* (massage), usually *chavutti uzicchil* (massage with feet) on the artists for the same purpose, although the time period is longer- about two to three months⁷⁰.

In *kathakali* as is the case in any art form, the initial stage involves repeated practice of the various stances and postures and basic movements of hands and feet. This initial training is in fact adopted from the *chuvadus* and *vadivus* taught during the *meipayattu* stage of *kalaripayattu* training. *Kathakali* themes often involve duels between *devas* and *asuras*, wherein the knowledge of *payyattu* comes useful.

Thus almost every aspect of *kathakali* has the influence of *kalaripayattu*. As Vijaya Kumar⁷¹ writes 'starting with the storylines, physical training and going on to body movements, performances, the whole process of *kathakali* is so much influenced by *kalaripayattu* that it is possible to say that the role it has played developing *kathakali* into an internationally acclaimed art form has been decisive'.

Martial folk arts

This group includes play or practices which had a martial origin or military purpose. In Medieval Kerala, mock combats and public demonstrations of martial techniques during local and regional festivals was quite common. This kept the warriors in practice and also kept the martial spirit alive. War dances like *ochirakkali*, *kongan pada* are enactments of historic battles where the movements, sword play and the choreography are influenced by *kalaripayattu*; in fact the actors are mostly trained in local *kalaris*.

⁷⁰ However there is also an opinion among Kalari *gurukkal* that this form of massage is not very proper and in fact leads to bow legs among *Kathakali* practitioners which though helpful in the usual stance adopted during a *Kathakali* performance, results in the artist having bow legs for life.

⁷¹ Vijaya Kumar, K.(2000), op cit., p. 275

Teyyam (A ritualistic art form)

Teyyam is a ritualistic folk art form peculiar to Malabar;⁷² it is the 'Ritual propitiation of deified ancestors and heroes⁷³ who practiced *kalaripayattu*', 'a legacy of the early Sangam age deification of warriors'. The performers sing about the exploits of these warriors and 'enact their lore and deeds'. These performances are held to invite the blessings of these demi-gods. To be able to imitate the warriors and to perfect the footwork and body movements these performers undergo *kalaripayattu* training as well as *uzhicchal*. The *tottam paattu* (songs) of *teyyam* are descriptions of the lives and deeds of these warriors and different aspects of *kalaripayattu*. Thus the focus is not just on the physical aspect of *kalaripayattu* but also the cultural aspect.

There are also ritualistic or religious arts (being associated with local temples) like *parichamuttukali* and *vattakali*, *velakali*, *kondotti*, *sanghakkali*, in which performers simulate *kalaripayattu* practices. Kurup and Varier⁷⁴ note that these are patronized by the peasants, artisans and laborers and must have come into prominence to maintain the physical culture and the religious rituals associated with the local shrines.

Kolkali (a recreational folk art form)

It is believed that '*kolkali* might have developed in the confines of a muslim *kalari* in Malabar' and in fact that it is practiced in *kalaris* of North Kerala following the *vattenthiruppu* style of *kalaripayattu* as a recreation. 'The vibrant yet graceful movements of *kolkali* have striking resemblance to those of *payyattu*. *Kolkali* performers wield a short staff while dancing to the music. This short staff is very similar to the one used in *payyattu* but shorter and thinner. 'Their forward and backward movements, the way they lift their legs and kick then in the air and their body movements are almost identical to those of *maithozhil*, while the way they wield the staff is similar those in *kolthari* of *payyattu*.'⁷⁵ *Kolkali* performers are mostly trained in *kalaris*. Like in the case of *kalaripayattu*, there are variations in the *kolkali* styles practiced in the north, south and central regions of Kerala.

⁷² Zarrilli, op cit, p.49

⁷³ Eg. Kathivanu Veeran (Mandappan), Taccholi Othenan, Oor Pazhasshi, Kaari Gurukkal etc.

⁷⁴ Kurup, K.K.N. and Raghava Varier, op cit., p 20

⁷⁵ Prasad, S.R.D. and S.R.A.Das (2007), *Kalaripayattu*, Chennai: Westland Publications, p. xiii

Nadan paatukal (folk songs)

Kalaripayattu has also influenced literature, particularly one branch of literature – that of folk songs. Like any other region in India, Kerala has a rich tradition of folk songs called *nadan paatukal*. These songs mostly composed and sung by unknown poets mostly peasant women are still not fully documented. They sing the lament of the oppressed, satire on the behaviors of their ‘superiors’ but the main themes are elaborate descriptions of the *kalari* system, and training; feuds, duels and battles; the valor and skill of the warriors like Aromal Chekavar, Taccholi Othenan, Unniarcha, Payyamballi Chandu etc. This rich oral tradition of songs mainly composed between the 16th to 19th century, can be divided into two sections- the more famous *vadakkan paatu* (the ballads of North Malabar) and *tekkam paatu* (Ballads of South Kerala). These songs are a good source of information about not only the feudal order of medieval Kerala but also the *kalari* system of that period.

Kalaripayattu has also contributed to Malayalam, the language of Kerala. There are about 300 expressions in Malayalam which are some way or the other related to the *kalaripayattu* tradition. There are a many place- names, which are remnants of the once glorious tradition, e.g. *kalari parambu*, *kalarivadikal kshetram* etc.

In the modern times *kalaripayattu* has influenced the development of the first indigenous circus. Keeleri Kunjikannan Gurukkal had established the first circus in Telicherry and combined traditional techniques of *kalaripayattu* with new styles and innovations. Thus it can be said the base of the tradition of Indian circus is *kalaripayattu* training.

There are quite a few dramatic troupes and dance schools, in India and abroad, who have adopted some aspects of *kalaripayattu* training, in particular *meipayattu* to improve the stamina, suppleness and grace of their performers.

Kalaripayattu is slowly regaining some of its popularity as a form of physical

training and self-defense in Kerala. With its growing recognition outside India, many foreigners come to Kerala every year to attend short term training courses in kalarippayattu and some have gone back to open kalaris in their respective countries. Thus *kalarippayattu* continues to influence the society and culture of Kerala and the outside world.

Chapter 3

Budo- its history and tradition

While in the case of Kerala, the term *kalarippayattu* can be used to indicate the martial art tradition, in Japan's case there is a range of different martial arts with their individual histories. And while a lot of work has been done on the military history of Japan recently, the common history of the development of these martial arts is unclear. The term '*budo*' used here is literally translated to be 'martial ways'. There are a few other synonyms like '*bujutsu*' which could be translated as 'martial techniques' and '*bugei*' which literally means 'martial art'.

While the terms '*kyuba no michi*' (way of the bow and the horse), or '*yumiya no michi*' (way of the bow and the arrow) were used as early as the Heian period (794-1185 A.D.), the term generally used for the combat systems in the medieval period is '*bugei*'. These combat systems underwent a gradual shift from being '*bugei*' to '*bujutsu*' and '*budo*'. Donn F. Draeger and Robert W. Smith write that '*bugei*' were developed by the warrior as 'fighting arts', 'combatively practical and vigorous', which 'provided him the necessary training for the development of the right frame of mind and technical skills by which to defend or promote the cause of the superior to whom he had sworn allegiance'. On the other hand '*budo*' are less combatively oriented and 'are concerned with spiritual discipline through which the individual elevates himself mentally and physically in search of self-perfection'. They opine that *budo* is a twentieth century development and these arts have developed out of *bugei*¹.

The *bugei* were founded and sustained by traditional family organizational groupings

¹ Draeger, Donn F. and Robert W. Smith, op cit, p 90-91

called *ryu* and later by non-bloodline organizations called *ryu-ha*². Each bugei was perpetuated in the distinct manner of the individual *ryu* or *ryu-ha*. These combat systems exist today in the form of various *jutsu* – *kenjutsu*, *iai-jutsu*, *kyujyutsu*, *sojutsu*, *bojutsu*, *jujutsu* etc. The *budo* which developed from one or the other of these *jutsu* forms have the *do* suffix. These *budo* and bugei are categorized into classical and modern forms³. In this dissertation I have used *budo* as a collective term to indicate the Japanese martial art tradition which includes the spiritual or philosophical aspects of martial arts as well. Ueshiba Morihei, the founder of *aikido* says ‘*budo* is a divine path established by the gods that leads to truth, good news, and beauty; it is a spiritual path reflecting the unlimited, absolute nature of the universe and the ultimate grand design of creation’.

‘From ancient times
deep learning and *budo* have been
the two wheels of the path;
through the virtue of practice
enlighten both body and soul.’⁴

While this spiritual aspect may be one of the popular attributes of Japanese and East-Asian martial arts in the modern day, it is a recent development.

The next section highlights the martial history of Japan to the development of *budo*.

3.1 History

Mention of weapons and martial accomplishments is found in the oldest works of Japanese literature – *Kojiki* and *Nihon-shoki*⁵. The origin-myth of Japan talks about a bejeweled spear which was used by the god *Izanagi*, along with the female god

² Ibid, p 84

³ *Kenjutsu*, *bojutsu*, *iai-jutsu*, *sojutsu* etc being the classical *bugei* forms and *karate-jutsu*, *taiho-jutsu* (police restraining techniques) etc being modern forms. Similarly *kendo*, *iai-do* etc are classical *budo* while *karate-do* is a modern form.

⁴ Ueshiba, Morihei (1991), *Budo-Teachings of the founder of Aikido*, Translated by John Stevens, Tokyo: Kodansha International

⁵ Both *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* were compiled by the order of the Emperor Temmu, and were attempts to establish the authority of the Imperial Family as descendants of the Sun- Goddess. *Kojiki* was presented in the court in 712 and *Nihonshoki* in 720.

Izanami, is create the Japanese islands by stirring the seas. One of the three possessions of the Sun-goddess Amaterasu, originally said to be Izanagi's and later handed down to the Imperial family, is the sword which is now placed in the Ise shrine⁶. Her grandson, Ninigi and his son, Jimmu, and much later Prince Yamato⁷ are all reputed to have done great exploits with the same sword. Other than the spear and the sword, the bow and arrow also finds mention in these Chronicles. Emperor Jimmu, believed to be the first emperor, is always depicted with a long bow and arrow.

While a lot of these chronicles are myths, the variety of weapons – swords, shields, spears, bows and arrows, daggers etc and other equipment like armours, helmets etc found in the burial tombs in Japan from about the fourth century A.D. 'clearly attest to the highly sophisticated martial orientation of Japanese society even before the dawn of fully recorded history'⁸.

In the prehistoric Jomon period (10000 BC to 250 BC) weapons were used for tribal warfare, probably also for rituals and principally for hunting. In the Yayoi period, the weapon became a symbol and instrument of political authority.⁹

In the seventh and eighth century the court maintained a national army conscripted from the peasantry. There was no samurai or warrior class, 'the duty of service fell equally upon all subjects though certain clans received special privileges. In particular the Otomo clan was honored as the hereditary place as palace guards'¹⁰.

⁶ The other two possessions as part of the sacred regalia are a mirror and jewel, which are thought to symbolize 'knowledge' and 'mercy', inexorably linked to 'courage' symbolized by the sword. Warner, Gordon and Donn. F. Draeger (1982), *Japanese Swordsmanship- Technique and Practice*, Tokyo: Weatherhill, reprinted 1983, p 20

⁷ Son of Emperor Keiko, who was dispatched to Kyushu as punishment for the murder of his elder brother, exaggerated tales of whose exploits find mention in the ancient Chronicles

⁸ Varley, H. Paul with Ivan and Nobuko Morris (1970), *The Samurai*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p 13-14

⁹ Onuma, Hidehara with Dan and Jackie Deprospero (1993), *Kyudo- The Essence and practice of Japanese Archery*, Tokyo: Kodansha International, p 1

¹⁰ Turnbull, Stephan.R. (1977), *The Samurai- A Military History*, London: Osprey Publishing Ltd., p 8

During the turn of the eighth century, the *ritsuryo* military apparatus modeled on the Chinese T'ang system was adopted wherein the centre had an exclusive right to sanction the use of force, authority of mobilization of forces etc. Internal police affairs and defense from external invasion was treated equally and handled by the same forces. While some aspects of this system continued till the Meiji Restoration, gradual restructuring was done to achieve a workable system.

It is generally accepted that it was in the ninth and tenth century that the warrior class which ruled Japan in the medieval and pre-modern period emerged. While the samurai in the late medieval period considered the Heian period (794-1185A.D.) – in particular the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries to be the golden age of the samurai but studies have revealed that while treacheries and brutalities were considerably lesser, most of the glorious depictions are more fiction than fact.

This period, unlike the medieval period in which the sword and the spear became prominent, was that of mounted archers¹¹, that of 'the way of the bow and arrow' or 'the way of the horse and the bow'.

Gradually the government gave up on conscripting and training the peasantry, preferring to make use of privately trained elite professional warriors. Initially they were given military posts and titles as reward which system gradually gave way to giving rights to tax-free land in return of their services.

Due to the political situation in the centre, lower ranked nobles and dispossessed aristocrats moved to the provinces and established private estates there (known as *shoen*). These provincial lords could not depend on the centre for protection from bandits and rebels, thus added on to the demand for martial talents of the privately trained elites. 'Increasingly from the late eighth century onward, skill at arms'¹²

¹¹ The Japanese long bow is thus made to make it easy to use from the back of horse/to suit mounted archery

¹² While in later periods, the sword became the symbol of the samurai, the Heian period warriors were

offered a means for an ambitious young man to get his foot in the door for career in government service or in the service of some powerful aristocrats in the capital'. With increasing opportunities, more and more young men turned to the profession of arms and this 'order of professional fighting men which emerged in the countryside and the capital' came to be known as the '*bushi*'¹³. Supporters of the powerful landlords called themselves 'samurai' or 'those who serve' ('samurai' comes from the verb '*samurau*' or '*saburau*' which means 'to serve')¹⁴. Among these provincial governors, there were those who had a mutually supportive career at the centre. Such figures were known as '*miyako no musha*' (warriors of the capital) and mostly belonged to a few of the illustrious families like the Taira, Minamoto, Fujiwara, Hojo, Tachibana etc.

There was a long drawn struggle for supremacy at the centre between the Taira and the Minamoto families that came to be known as the *gempei* wars which became the setting for the famous epic- Heike Monogatari. After the downfall of the Taira, Minamoto no Yoritomo¹⁵ became shogun of Japan and established the first military government of Japan, Kamakura Shogunate¹⁶ (1156-1333) which was to set the precedent for the next few centuries. With the courts permission, he set up a system appointing *jito* or stewards to supervise the private estates (*shoen*) and *shugo* who was the highest agent of the *bakufu*(military government) in that province. The *shugo* was the coordinator of the *gokenin* (vassals/house-men) of that province during war and in peacetimes (for guard duty in Kyoto), control local rebellion and also act as judicial officials. These appointments served as rewards in return for service and also

identified with 'the way of the bow and the arrow' or 'the way of the horse and the bow'.

¹³ Friday, op cit, p 6

¹⁴ Turnbull, op cit, p 15

¹⁵ His brother Yoshitsune who helped him defeat the Taira, but whom he exiled later is a more popular warrior figure

¹⁶ A military government in Kamakura parallel to the court in Kyoto controlled by Taira Kiyomori

helped to control the warriors. After Yoritomo's death, his sons did not prove to be as able administrators as him and the rule was taken over by the Hojo regents. It was during this period that the two attempted invasions by the Mongols took place and although the samurai are said to have put up a valiant defense it were storms which came to be known as *kamikaze*, which on both occasions which wrecked havoc on the enemy fleet.

The medieval period of Japan is considered to be from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century. The Kamakura *bakufu* was overthrown when its retainers Ashikaga Takauji and Nitta Yoshisada crossed over to the side of the Emperor Godaigo who was trying to regain the throne. However it was a period when loyalties switched over in no time and Godaigo was forced to move out of the capital by those Takauji himself. Thus started the Ashikaga period (1336-1573) a long period of strife and warfare, which saw the *Nanbokuchō*¹⁷, a series of peasant revolts¹⁸ and the Onin civil war¹⁹ (1467-77). Stephan Turnbull describes how during this time the status of the samurai was not rigid and anybody with skill and drive had opportunities of upward mobility and military ranking. With the Onin war started which came to be known as the *sengoku* period²⁰. While the provincial lords (*daimyos*) were busy fighting amongst themselves in the capital, their vassals took over the control of the provinces. These feudal barons who came to be known as *sengoku daimyo* (as opposed to *shugo daimyos*) fortified their domains. There was constant strife

¹⁷ In 1337 two separate courts were set up, one by Emperor Komyo (Northern court in Kyoto) supported by Ashikaga Takauji and the other by Emperor Godaigo (Southern court in Yoshino) leading to the country having two emperors which continued till 1392

¹⁸ The peasants mobilized themselves into 'leagues for mutual defense' known as *ikki*, for details see Turnbull, op cit, pp 112-121

¹⁹ A decade long war which was fought in the capital city of Kyoto between the factions of Yamana Mochitoyo and Hosokawa Katsumoto about shogunal succession which led to devastation and total destruction of the capital

²⁰ literally 'the period of the warring states', a term borrowed from China though not very accurate in the case of Japan.

amongst these domains for territorial hegemony.²¹

With the arrival of the Portuguese in the 1540's, firearms were introduced to Japan. Although it took time for the samurai to realize the importance of this type of a weapon, they gradually spread and became a part of the Japanese army. Among the local lords who used these developments to their advantage and grew to power was Oda Nobunaga, who replaced the Ashikaga shoguns in government. His ruthless persecution of the warrior monks of Mt. Hie and other opposition earned him the reputation of a ruthless and cruel warrior. This marked the beginning of the Azuchi-Momoyama period which saw the emergence of three great warriors of Japan- Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Iyeyasu.

It was Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who though himself from a peasant family, strictly enforced the four-tiered class structure (*shi-no-ko-sho*) - samurai, peasants, artisans and merchants. He restricted all movement between the classes. He forbade the other three classes from possessing weapons and ordered a collection of arms from the non-samurai classes.²² His death once again led to a dispute over succession but by the early seventeenth century, Tokugawa Iyeyasu had suppressed all opposition and established a stable system of governance which continued for around two hundred and fifty years till the Meiji restoration in 1868. Deprived of their traditional occupation of war, the warriors, who constituted around six percent of the country's population²³, were given duties of guarding, maintenance and repair of the castles etc. In order to maintain their superior social- status they took to romanticizing and glorifying their ancestors and their deeds through literature and other arts and also

²¹ This feature of the period following the Onin war was termed '*gekokujo*' or overthrowing of the upper strata by the lower strata. The *ashigaru* or foot-soldiers of this period were an unorganized, ruffian lot who continued with plundering and loot even after the end of the war. There was large scale social upheaval. Wherein daimyous seized power of the shogunate, vassals took over the lordship in the absence of their daimyous etc.

²² This came to be known as '*katanagari*' or 'sword-hunting' 1588

²³ Lehmann, Jean- Pierre (1982), *The Roots of Modern Japan*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., p 8

formed a samurai code of ethics for themselves which came to be known as bushido. Bushido also known as 'the way of the warrior', is a code of conduct for the samurai, which emphasizes on eight characteristics or virtues expected in a warrior- that of valor, honor, veracity, benevolence, rectitude etc. Paul Varley opines that it was precisely because they were unable to engage in warfare that the samurai became self-conscious of their identity as a class and their unique role in the history of Japan²⁴.

Another opinion is that as the warriors enjoyed a lot of power- were exempt from taxes and had the right to kill a disrespectful commoner on the spot, it was to prevent them from exploiting their position that bushido came into being. 'In many respects, it was similar to the Western codes of knightly chivalry the same period. Doubtless there were times when both codes were observed more in theory than practice'.²⁵

Maurice Keen explains chivalry as 'a cultural and social phenomenon, which retained its vigor because it remained relevant to the social and political realities of the time'.²⁶

The later part of Tokugawa period saw a decline in the position of the samurai. Most of them were driven into poverty and into the hands of the merchant class which became powerful. Some were forced to sell their swords, their family crests and names to the merchants for money.

With the arrival of Commodore Perry, Japan's isolation from the world came to an end. The daimyos who were opposed to the Tokugawa *bakuhau* government saw the signing of the 'unequal treaties' as a betrayal of the nation and rallied behind the slogan of '*sonnoji*'- 'revere the emperor and expel the barbarians'. This resulted in

²⁴ Varley, H. Paul with Ivan and Nobuko Morris, op cit, p 121-122

²⁵ Williams, Bryan (gen. ed.) (1975), *Martial Arts of the Orient*, Leicester: Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd., reprinted 1987, p 6

²⁶ Keen, Maurice (1984), *Chivalry*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p 219

the overthrowing of the Tokugawa bakufu and the Meiji restoration. The leaders of the restoration and the new government though belonging to the samurai class were an enlightened section dedicated towards building Japan into a strong and modern nation at par with the Western powers. The feudal order was abolished which invited a strong revolt by the samurai led by Saigo Takamori and others. The suppression of this revolt is marked as the end of the long history of the samurai.

The Meiji period was a period of modernization and decline of the combat traditions, the shift being towards martial arts. Some like *kendo* were taught in educational institutions to build the morale of the youth, some became popular as self defense forms, and many acquired the form of competitive sports in order to survive the times.

This covers a brief outline of the historical development of the martial tradition through the ages. A brief description of the development of some of the individual martial arts is imperative to give a comprehensive idea about the martial tradition.

Sumo is perhaps the oldest of the Japanese martial art and the Nihon-shoki mentions a sumo contest as having taken place in 23 BC. 'Sumo was not a general skill possessed by the warriors for use in combat but employed only by chosen fighters representing various sides in a dispute. The use of such formalized single combat often avoided masses confrontations and undue bloodshed'²⁷. In the Nara period, an annual wrestling championship was instituted wherein wrestlers from different parts of Japan participated. Wrestlers attained a 'special social status' in the society and many went one to be appointed as guards to the court. Sumo transformed into a spectacular sport in the Heian period and Emperor Ninmyo is said to have regarded sumo as symbol of nation's military strength. A little later in this period it began to be used for combat. In the Kamakura period, the *bushi* transformed sumo to full

²⁷ Williams, Bryan, op cit, p 66-67

battle effectiveness. The *kumi-uchi* military grappling technique etc was developed from sumo by making alterations to perfect grappling techniques irrespective of the dress of the opponent and position of the warrior. While the military government contributed to battlefield sumo reaching its zenith, by the end of the Azuchi-Momoyama period it lost importance as a combat technique and reverted to being a sport, which continues till date.

After sumo the next oldest *bujutsu* is probably *kyujutsu*. It is unclear whether the bow and arrow an important weapon in Japan's martial history was brought from the mainland or was an indigenous development. Irrespective, it seems to have to been present from the 3rd century AD onwards. There seems to have been an influence of Chinese archery in the Nara period. From being used for hunting and court rituals (a Chinese influence) the bow and arrow started being used for military purposes in the twelfth century. While different designs of the bow and arrow seem to have been introduced to Japan at different times in history, the long bow continued to be the most favored. The bow and arrow is said to have played an important part in the *gempei* wars between Taira and Minamoto. Archery flourished in the Kamakura period (1185-1333) and was in common use until the introduction of firearms which led to a decline. *Kyujutsu* training in the feudal period included shooting a thousand arrows a day, long distance shooting (*enteki*), shooting moving targets like dogs (*taka inu*), stationary objects like animal dummies, *yabusame* etc.

From being a combat practice it turned into a form of 'amusement' and finally to *kyudo* which emphasizes cultivating self-discipline and 'spiritual values' as much as proper shooting stance and hitting the target.

The bow and arrow might have played a very important part in Japanese martial history but the weapon which has always been associated with the samurai tradition, the symbol of the *bushi* is the sword. The two bugei related to the sword are *kenjutsu*

and *iai-jutsu*. While *kenjutsu* deals with sword fighting techniques with a drawn sword, *iai-jutsu* deals with the techniques which start with the drawing of the sword. The initial swords developed were wooden and stone swords and the development of metal swords was only after the second century B.C. with the introduction of metals to Japan. The two handed Japanese sword with a single edge and curved blade is said to have been developed in the Nara period by Amakuni, who is believed to be the Japan's first swordsmith. Like the development and popularization of the long bow suited for mounted archery from the tenth century onwards along with horsemanship becoming popular and the shift from infantry to cavalry, this change also 'necessitated the use of the curved blade'. Systematic training of *kenjutsu* is said to have started in the Nara period although the systematization process is said to have been completed only by the Muromachi period (1333-1568A.D.). This period saw *kenjutsu* flourishing and the wooden sword (*bokken*) became popular not just for training purposes but also for individual combat. With peace being established in the Tokugawa period, the need for practical combative techniques decreased leading to the shift to *kendo*²⁸. Post Meiji restoration, *kendo* became a vehicle for the spiritual training of the youth and for developing a feeling of nationalism among them. There seem to have been over fifty different styles of *bugei*²⁹ and each have their individual histories. However, giving the history of different *bugei* is not the purpose of this dissertation and so the histories of the other martial arts has not been included.

3.2 The Warrior class of Japan- the *bushi*

Japan is said to have a strong martial temperament because of its distinct warrior class- the *bushi* (literally fighting men), though samurai is a better known term outside

²⁸ Legendary swordsman(*kenshi*) Miyamoto Musashi etc contributed to this transition

²⁹ Donn, Draeger F. and Robert W. Smith give a list of 34 *bugei* identified by scholars like Fujita Seiko and Watatani Kiyoshi. Donn Draeger F. and Robert W. Smith, op cit, p 83-84

Japan. As mentioned earlier the word samurai originates from the term '*samurau*' which means – 'to serve'. The samurai were a set of people who were retainers of the Imperial family, the nobles or warlords. The strict division of the four classes was enforced only in the sixteenth century and till then a commoner could hope to become a samurai on the basis of his martial skills. However this was not very common as these warriors belonged to considerably elite families (*buke*) and because of 'the samurai status having significant connotations of kinship'³⁰. Many of the powerful warrior families or clans were descended from the various branches of the imperial family.

These warriors were used to control the rebels and bandits, to guard the court etc. In fact the first recorded military usage of the term samurai seems to be in connection with the guards at the imperial court at Kyoto in tenth century A.D. The warriors gained legitimacy to use their martial skills from the imperial family. In return for their service they gained posts in the court and in the provinces³¹.

The interference by the bushi in court matters gradually increased till the day military government was established at Kamakura. Under this government, the system of *gokenin* (or house retainers or vassals) was started. The warriors of the Heian and Kamakura period are often believed to have been the embodiment of all the characteristics of ideal warriors as given in bushido however the virtues of loyalty and honor credited to them in the nostalgic memories of the warriors in the fourteenth century and later were more often than not exaggerated. The turbulent medieval period witnessed the expansion of the warrior class as the power in the provinces shifted to a new section of warriors while the existing military houses were busy fighting amongst themselves. This period is said to have been one of uncontrolled,

³⁰ Turnbull, Stephan.R. (2000), *The Samurai Sourcebook*, London: Cassell, Reprinted in 2004, p 8

³¹ During some periods of Japanese history, warriors were given non-taxable lands in return for their service which system was put to an end in the Tokugawa period.

callous, ruthless warriors- the low point in the 'glorious' martial history of Japan. During the Tokugawa period the samurai status was made hereditary and they were the only class permitted to possess or train in weapons. With no wars to fight, the samurai image was redefined to being 'men of learning' as well. Cultural activities and arts like calligraphy, painting, the way of tea etc were all thought as part of the individual development of the warrior. However money matters continued to be thought of as beneath them which along with the lifestyle they lead drove them to the clutches of the merchant class. After the Meiji restoration the class system was abolished and the samurai were deprived of the special privileges that they enjoyed- surnames, family crests, carrying two swords and a distinctive hairstyle known as the *chonmage*. Thus the samurai as a distinct class ceased to exist.

Women of samurai families were taught martial arts usually *naginata* and short dagger, so that they could defend themselves and protect their families while the samurai were at war. There are occasional mentions of female warriors, like Tomoe Gozen, the wife of Minamoto no Yoshinaka who charged into the enemy army to give her husband time to commit ritual suicide when defeat was inevitable. However these were exceptions to the rule and martial arts and warfare was undoubtedly a male territory.

There is a section of warriors who do not get the same attention as the samurai, the *ashigaru* (literal- 'light feet') or foot soldiers. The foot soldiers were commoners- peasants, miners, iron-smiths etc who had been recruited into the militia from the late fifteenth century onwards. It was only in the *sengoku* period that the samurai realized the disadvantages of uncontrolled *ashigaru* and the advantages of cultivating a feeling of loyalty even among them. This was achieved by dressing the *ashigaru* in uniforms, giving promotions in rank and pay rise. These *ashigaru* were included in the samurai class (albeit the lowest ranks of the samurai) when the stratification was done by Hideyoshi and it was prohibited for other classes to possess or use weapons. With that

the position of the ashigaru as professional soldiers was established. Whereas the bow and arrow and the sword were the weapons of the samurai, the ashigaru used the spear, bow and later on the arquebus. There were also ashigaru who acted as bearers, attendants etc.

The *Sohei-warrior* monks also need to be mentioned. These were Buddhist monks of powerful temples like Enryakuji (Mt. Hie) and Todaiji etc who were proficient in martial arts and engaged in warfare during conflicts with the aristocracy, amongst temples, or samurai families. They were proficient in weapons like the halberd (*naginata*), spear (*yari*) and other such weapons. They were a force to be reckoned until the time when Oda Nobunaga launched a major campaign against them, ordering mass executions and destroyed the temples

3.3 The role and influence of the Japanese martial tradition

It is inevitable that a tradition which occupied center stage for a major part of Japanese history would leave an impact on the social structure, the language and the art forms. However while the military history has been studied in detail and the links with the rise of nationalism and Japanese imperialism has been much talked about, the influence on other aspects of society has been neglected.

3.3.1 Influence on the social system and structure

a) Role in society

From the twelfth to the nineteenth century (and later if one considers the fact that almost all the leaders of the Meiji period had origins in the samurai class) the reigns of ruling power were in the hands of the bushi. Hence it goes without saying that all laws and policy matters were decided by them. The bushi were a major factor in deciding the course of Japanese history.

Along with constituting the military and the law-enforcing body of the society, the

warrior class was an important part of the administration of the country as well. The institutions of *gokenin*, *shugo*, *jito* that were established in the rule of the Kamakura bakufu ensured that the administrative setup remained under the control of the military government and served the dual purpose of controlling the warriors as well.

b) Impact on the position of women

The Japanese imperial family may proudly claim to be descended from the sun-goddess, Amaterasu but excepting a short period in pre-historic Japan when a matriarchal society is said to have existed, Japan has always been a male dominated society. Women have been considered inferior to men and hardly had any rights. However the situation of women belonging to aristocratic or samurai families was considerably better. From the time when Empresses Himiko and Suiko ruled the country there was a progressive deterioration in the position of women³². This sidelining of women and the formation of an increasingly male-centric society is definitely linked to the warrior tradition of Japan.

Women in the warrior class had rights to inherit property in the Heian period and even in the Kamakura period. The Goseibai Shikimoku³³ includes codes related to property rights for women. With the establishment of the *ie* system of lord-vassal relationships during the later part of Kamakura period women's role was made peripheral. They were needed only in 'their reproductive capacity and as an article of exchange to boost alliances'³⁴. In the strife ridden *sengoku* period, a period of intense

³² Here I am mainly referring to women in the warrior class. The position of women in the courtier families seems to have undergone a similar trend which is attributed to the marital links between the warriors and the courtiers

³³ A body of warrior codes originally issued in 1232, numbering fifty-one articles at first but with over 700 revisions added throughout the Kamakura period. Tonomura, Hitomi (1990), "Women and Inheritance in Japan's Early Warrior Society", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32(3): 592-623

³⁴ This trend is seen in almost all cultures, wherein marital links are used to forge friendships, secure kingdoms etc. the marital links between the Mughals and the Rajputs is a similar example

rivalry and competition, the economic dependency and consequent subordination of women was to the advantage of the warriors. The Confucian ideology which stresses that a woman should obey her father, her husband and later on her son further assisted this subordination. Appropriation of female sexuality, as is the norm in patriarchal structures, was ensured by legislations like death punishment for extramarital relationships (including rape) etc.

Tomomura Hitomi writes about 'women's subordination to the progressively ossified patriarchal structure, which culminated in Japan's last shogunal phase under the centralized Tokugawa regime' stating that 'in that period, with the help of appropriate Confucian norms, the state institutionalized economic, sexual, and ideological subordination of women in the ruling warrior class'³⁵. Thus was the impact of the martial history on the position of women and the system of inheritance.

3.3.2 Influence on Japanese arts, language and literature

When it comes to influence of the warrior culture on the art forms, what usually finds mention is the cultural developments in the period of history when warriors were ruling Japan. Rather than going into decline, the arts received a new vigor and vibrancy under the influence of the warrior culture. As Louis Frederic states 'a new spirit began to develop, less superficial, more heroic, something of a contrast to the effeminacy of the preceding epoch'³⁶. There was a trend to return to the fundamentals, to purely Japanese concepts. In contrast to the grandeur and elegance of the arts of the aristocratic culture in the Heian period, the warrior culture is associated with simplicity, rawness, a oneness with nature and vibrancy. These aspects are also true of Zen Buddhism which was closely linked to this warrior culture. In fact it might be

³⁵ *ibid*, op cit, p 592-623

³⁶ Frederic, Louis (1973), *Daily Life in Japan at the Time of the Samurai 1185-1603*, Translated by Eileen M. Lowe, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., p 215

more accurate to say that the major influences on art forms in this period were influences of the Zen philosophy. However it was the social conditions created by the martial tradition which led to the acceptance and popularization of Zen philosophy in the Kamakura period and later. The meditation techniques in Zen were useful for the warrior in developing self-discipline and concentration and thus Zen started being practiced by warriors at large.

Thus the concepts of *mono-no-aware*³⁷, *wabi*³⁸, *yugen*³⁹ and related developments in the art of tea ceremony, ikebana, noh drama, painting etc could be thought of as a combined influence of the warrior culture and Zen philosophy. Not only did the warriors patronize various arts, they practiced them as well and contributed to the flourishing of the art forms. Every samurai was expected to be proficient in at least one musical instrument and be able to compose poetry.

In the Tokugawa Period, which was essentially a period of peace the samurai were deprived of their profession of war and were forced to look for other options. This included teaching martial arts, practicing 'peaceful arts' like poetry, painting, tea ceremony, calligraphy, classical drama etc. Like Ruth Benedict points out 'two hundred years of peace is a long time and mere sword swinging had its limits'⁴⁰. Again the establishment of Confucianism as state religion was a policy of the Tokugawa regime to make smooth the governance. The creation of a 'moral philosophy', *bushido*, (from Zen, Confucian and Taoist philosophies) as a code of

³⁷ A literary and aesthetic ideal cultivated in the Heian period. At its core is a deep, emphatic appreciation of the ephemeral beauty manifest in nature and human life, and it is therefore usually tinged with a hint of sadness; under circumstances it can be accompanied by admiration, awe, or even joy. Suzuki, Setsuko et al (eds.) (2003), *Bilingual nihonjiten*, Tokyo: Kodansha International, p 247

³⁸ An aesthetic and moral principle emphasizing a simple and austere type of beauty and a serene, transcendental frame of mind. Suzuki, Setsuko et al, op cit, p 244

³⁹ 'Profound beauty', an aesthetic sentiment which transcends the shape of things in order to find the hidden meaning. Hisamatsu Senichi(1965), "The characteristics of beauty in the Japanese Middle Ages", *Acta Asiatica*, 8:40-53 quoted in Frederic, Louis, op cit, p 216-217

⁴⁰ Benedict, Ruth (1946), *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword- Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Boston: Tuttle Publishing, reprinted 2003, p. 64

ethics for the warriors is also to the credit of the martial tradition of Japan.

Other than the indirect influences on the art forms mentioned above, the martial tradition has directly influenced the theatre forms and dances. Themes of theatre forms like *noh*, *kabuki* and *yoruri* during the medieval period reflected this warrior culture and were usually depictions of warriors and battles. Kabuki which developed in the Edo period (1600-1868A.D.) as primarily a merchant class entertainment had historical plays (*jidai mono*) as one of its main themes. One of the famous plays was (and continues to be) *Kanjinchō*- the story of Yoshitsune and his vassal, Benkei. Another famous play was *Chushingura*- the story of the forty seven ronin⁴¹. A central aspect of *kabuki* acting- the display of stylized gestures and forms (*kata*) which include dance-like stylized fighting moves (*tate*) also show a marked influence of the martial art tradition.

Dance forms like *kowakamai* (sometimes known as *mai-no-soshi* or dance narratives), a form of ballad-drama which had developed into a mature dance form by the sixteenth century also had as one of the main themes stories of warriors and their lives, the favorite being tales involving Yoshitsune. These ballad dramas were based on the oral tradition of songs sung by women to forget the drudgery of their work of transplanting rice plants. These songs known as *taueuta* have been compiled later in the seventeenth century as *Tauezoshi*. While there are a variety of songs depicting awe and amazement for the wonders of the city, its contrast to the countryside, descriptions of seasons and nature etc, warrior tales also constitute an important part⁴².

Sports like *yabusame*⁴³, mock fights and demonstrations of martial skills during

⁴¹ Masterless samurai who lived a vagabound life

⁴² For details see Hoff, Frank (1981), City and country: song and performing arts in sixteenth century Japan, in George Elison and Bardwell L. Smith, *Warlords, Artists & Commoners-Japan in the Sixteenth Century*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press

⁴³ Mounted archery, i.e. shooting arrows at targets from the back a galloping horse, a pursuit for high

various festivals, along with enactment of glorious battles; are other examples of direct influence of the martial art tradition. *Tango no sekku*-the festival for boys celebrated every year on the fifth of May is reminiscent of a warrior past and aims to cultivate the martial spirit in the youth. The *tokonoma*⁴⁴ (alcove) is decorated with a *kabuto* (samurai helmet) or toy models of the boy-hero of Japan- Yoshitsune, one of the most popular warrior figures in Japanese martial history. Fish-shaped streamers known as *samurai-uo* (warrior-fish) are hoisted above each house with a male child.

Like the art forms, literature also underwent change with the advent of a militarist government. A new vigorous trend reflective of the cult of heroism was seen with romantic works being replaced by heroic tales of warfare glorifying the spirit and exploits of the warriors (this literary genre is known as *Gunki Monogatari*, *Taiheiki* and *Heike Monogatari* being some examples). The turbulence caused by constant strife also led to the Buddhist philosophies like transitoriness of this world (*mapposhisou*) and the like finding an important place in the literature of this period.

The martial tradition has also contributed terms, expressions and phrases related to the *bushi*, weapons etc to Japanese language. For example in the following poem the poet uses the description of a bow to describe his attachment to his beloved.

Omowazu ya	unthinkable
Tanarasu yumi ni	that I should forsake you even for a night
Fusu take no	would be like separating a bamboo slat
Ichi yo mo kimi ni	from a familiar bow
Hanaru beshi to wa ⁴⁵ .	

The next chapter is a comparative analysis of the two martial traditions.

ranking warriors as part of their military training which later developed into a kind of ritual offering to the gods at Shinto shrines. It is still practiced and demonstrated at Tsurugaoka Hachimangu (Kamakura), Toshogu (Nikko), Kasama Inari Shrine etc.

⁴⁴ An alcove in Japanese style rooms wherein a flower decoration or painting etc finds a place of honor.

⁴⁵ A poem in *Genju sanmi Yorimasa kyoshu*, quoted in Friday, Karl F., op cit, p 69

Chapter 4

Kalaripayattu and Budo - a comparative analysis

The previous chapters highlighted the main aspects of the martial traditions of India and Japan. This chapter attempts to make an analytical comparison of the two traditions with regards to the factors or social conditions leading to the growth of the two traditions, their utility and the impact they had on their respective societies. The impact on the position of women and the system of inheritance and the influence on arts and the concept of death in both traditions too are dealt with in detail.

The origin of both martial traditions is shrouded in myth¹. It is easier to fix the period of origin *kalaripayattu* since it is a single composite combat system,. As mentioned in 2.1, *kalaris* existed as centers of martial training as early as the Sangam period between the first and fifth century. The martial spirit was predominant in this period and evidences still exist in the form of *veerakals* for the deification of the heroes. In the case of Japan, a variety of weapons have been found in the tombs from about the fourth century indicating a martial tradition. Earlier scholars write of conscription of peasants (commoners) into a militia in the seventh and early decades of the eighth century and their public training and it was only in the middle decades of the eight century onwards that privately trained warriors came to be preferred. The history of individual martial arts indicates that systematic practice of certain *bujutsu* developed as early as Nara period. The earliest mention of systematic practice (of swordsmanship) is made in the Nara period about a method then known as *tachi-uchi*

¹ It is interesting to note that the creation myths of both Kerala and Japan are similar and involve weapons. While the Kojiki accredits the creation of Japan to the stirring of the seas by Izanagi with his spear, the origin myth of Kerala states that it emerged from the seas following the throwing of the *mazhu* by Parasurama from the foot of Mt. Gokarana. And that the tremors of newly risen land had to be calmed by the establishment of *kalaris* and temples.

*shiai*². *Kenjutsu* is thought to have developed systematically during the succeeding Heian and Kamakura periods to be formalized in a system in the Ashikaga period³. The first ryu of *kyujustu* (the bow and arrow being the basic weapon) is said to have been established sometime in the tenth and eleventh century⁴. Hence while *kalaris* had existed before the fifth century, training centers for various *bujutsu* seem to have come up gradually from the eighth century onwards.

While the development of the system of martial warfare, which paved the way for the conception of modern day martial arts, took place in the medieval period the course of development was different in both cases. The medieval period was one of strife and constant warfare in both countries. In Kerala the medieval period is said to begin in the twelfth century with the disintegration of the Chera kingdom and the emergence of small principalities and chieftaincies. By this time the system of warfare had progressed from individual combat to functioning in organized units. In fact by the thirteenth century when the four major principalities had established themselves, an efficient system of *swarupa janams* comprising of *chaver*, *lokar*, *kaval* and *akampati janam* had been ossified and warriors after completing their training from the respective *kalaris* would enlist for service with the king to be called when required. These enlisted warriors or retainers were mostly from the Nair community while the warriors from the *Izhava* community- the *chekors* were mostly private warriors who could be hired for fighting duels for dispute settlement. However this institution of *ankam* was also under the supervision of the *naduvazhis*. In Japan although soldiers (*heishi*) were organized into military units (*gundan*) in the

² Draeger, Donn F. and Robert W. Smith, op cit, p100

³ The credit for developing *kenjutsu* into a system is given to Izasa Ienao, who became the shogunate *kenjutsu* teacher following an invitation by Ashikaga Yoshimasa. He founded the style which is known as Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto ryu, Draeger, Donn F. and Robert W. Smith, op cit

⁴ Although 'the way of the bow and arrow' was predominant in the Heian period, these weapons were used mostly for hunting and ceremonial purposes and became popular as a military weapon only in the twelfth century.

ritsuryo system adopted around the eighth century, changing social conditions made these units redundant and gave way to 'small, highly mobile squads' till the late medieval period when once again troop organization became significant. "Early samurai 'armies' were hodgepodge conglomerations of small war bands led by individual bushi"⁵. Thus whereas individual combat was the norm for a major part of Japanese military history, in Kerala the style was of organized militia and group combat from a very initial stage. In fact while warriors were organized in groups of hundreds under *nayaks* as early as the time of the Cheras, the organization of foot soldiers in units under a samurai (*ashigaru taisho*) came about only in mid-sixteenth century.

In both *budo* and *kalarippayattu* traditions we find the bow and arrow giving way to the sword which would become the symbol of the samurai as well as the Nair warriors of Kerala. The samurai who practiced the way of the 'bow and the horse' were mounted archers in the Heian period and early Kamakura period but went on to become swordsmen or *kenshi*. Wearing two swords became a symbol of the samurai. While the trend was similar, the reasons in case of Kerala are thought to be very different. The Brahmins who used to practice martial arts earlier seemed to have preferred the bow and the arrow which scholars link to the concept of ritual purity (or pollution by touch). Using the bow and arrow allowed them to kill a person without going near to them. The warriors who came up later, especially those belonging to the Nair community preferred the sword as their primary weapon so much so that it became a symbol of Nair youths. However it can also be assumed that the change in the style of warfare down the ages could also have been an important factor which gave the sword an edge. Nair warriors fought in organized units and sword fighting probably suited group action better.

⁵ Friday, Karl F., op cit, p 36

In the case of Japan where individual combat was the norm, a witness was important for recognition and reward. And thus collecting the heads of the enemy warriors became a way of proving ones skill and being rewarded and promoted⁶. While medieval military history of Japan is full of tales of bloody battles and head hunting, villainous warriors etc. (as opposed to the idealized image of the Heian and Kamakura warriors) by the medieval period, warfare in medieval Kerala had become an affair which concerned mainly the warriors thereby restricted the loss of lives and destruction to property. It was a very structured system with fixed numbers of warriors fighting an equal number of warriors from the opposite side. Even in one-to-one duels the next move was announced. As Zarrilli notes, 'in *kalarippayattu* the borders of combat and exercise were blurred'⁷.

Karl Friday talks about how the early medieval warriors in Japan fought to kill (or protect) individuals or men rather than to defend or invade land or territories⁸, hence troop organization did not become important till much later. In Kerala, the wars between the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas created the conditions which necessitated troop organization and thus expedited the evolution of the martial tradition.

In both traditions, we see a reification of the martial spirit along with glorification of martial skills in order to legitimize the use of force and warfare. This is seen in the erecting of 'hero stones' (veerakal) in the Sangam period of Kerala history (c. 200BC-200AD)⁹, in the lyrics of the ballads of North Malabar and similarly in the *gunki monogatari* (war tales) of Japan and the enshrinement of warriors as gods across Japan. As sociologist Ikegami Eiko has written, 'the rise of the ethos of the

⁶ There are also cases where the collected heads were used to intimidate potential enemies. The task of cleaning and presenting the collected heads fell on the samurai womenfolk.

⁷ Zarrilli, op cit,

⁸ Friday, Karl F., op cit , p 165

⁹ For details see Kurup, K.K.N (1977), *Aspects of Kerala History and Culture*, Thiruvananthapuram: College Book House, pp 13-19

honorable warrior was a catalyst of social change as it was its result¹⁰. In the case of Japan we see a code of ethics emerging in the sixteenth and seventeenth century which glorifies the past warrior tradition and looms over the whole image of the martial tradition for ages to come. Bushido which is often said to be similar to the *kshatriya dharma* of India finds no equivalent in the martial tradition of Kerala. While the values of valor, honor, loyalty etc. are given much emphasis in kalarippayattu as well, the significance assigned to bushido in the Japanese martial tradition is much more. In the case of Kerala the warriors were hardly ever able to come to the top of the hierarchy because of caste system and a ruling warrior class never did emerge. That could be one of the reasons that no chivalric code as such was required, there being no reason for a sense of nostalgia towards the past and the system and religion sufficed to keep them under control.

The differences in the factors of development of two martial traditions are evident not only from the above points in history but also in the impact it had on the society and arts which act as indicators.

4.1 Role and Influence on the social systems and structure

The initial purpose or objective of the evolution of any martial tradition is usually hunting and individual defense. The development of the society and the phases of its development decide the course of the further evolution of the martial tradition and in some cases the reverse is true as well. Hence, the role played by the martial tradition and the warriors as part of it, together with the influence on arts and society are important point in comparing two traditions.

4.1.1 Administrative and judicial function

¹⁰ Ikegami, Eiko (1995), *The Taming of the Samurai- Honorific Individualism and the making of Modern Japan*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, p 95

Other than the usual role of military and law enforcement, warriors have often shown entrepreneurship to venture into other related professions. In the military government established by Yoritomo in the Kamakura period, the warriors became part of the administrative setup. He created the post of *shugo* who acted as coordinators between the *gokenin* in the provinces and the Kamakura government. The warriors becoming part of the administration ensured the continuation of the power structure with them at the top of the hierarchy and again this itself was an indicator of their hegemony in society.

On the other hand the warriors were never part of the administrative set up in Kerala. Nonetheless they played an important role in the settling of feuds and disputes through the institutions of *ankam* and *poithu* as explained in 2.1. *Ankam* is comparable to the role sumo had in the Japanese society of settling disputes based on the strength of the warriors rather than full scale fights or battles thus avoiding mass confrontations and bloodshed. However sumo was not practiced by warriors (at least not until they realized the potential and developed the *kumi-uchi* technique) and anyhow there is no information whether the bushi fought duels to settle disputes.

Another role of the *chaver* warriors was of *changatham*, of protecting individuals, buildings, travelers etc while this system has parallels in North India and China. 'In the 1800's in China, Private protection agencies (*biaoju*) flourished. Run by professional martial artists, they served to escort transported goods and to protect the homes of the wealthy, banks, pawn shops, and other commercial enterprises'¹¹. Similarly in western India mainly Gujarat, a section of Baluchi-turned-Qasbatis¹²

¹¹ Zhou Jiannan, *Wogou Xiri-zhi Baobiao yu Huyuan* [Our Nation's Bygone Era of Escort and Guard Agencies], Wutan [Martial Forum], Taipei, vol. I, no. 11 (April 1972), 19-21

Quoted in Henning, Stanley E. (1981), "The Chinese Martial Arts in Historical Perspective", *Military Affairs*, 45 (4): 173-179

¹² Qasbatis were a powerful warlike body comprising of Muslim soldiers of Rajput, Baluchi and Pathan origin. Mercenaries who escorted individuals and caravans, raided villages and even enlisted in

took to escorting caravans and mercenary soldiering. However while historical dramas (*jidai geki*) depict warriors being hired to secretly follow and protect lords on their journeys, no documented evidence was found to show the existence of such a role in the case of Japan.

4.1.2 Position of women and the system of inheritance

The impact on the position of women in the warrior class and the change in the system of inheritance is another interesting point of comparison. In the case of Kerala we see a matrilineal system of inheritance emerging, along with trends like polygamy and polyandry, all of which one can suppose to be linked to the existence of a martial tradition. The matrilineal system which was followed by many communities in Kerala meant that the property was descended in the mother's line and the assets and property was controlled by the maternal uncle. There was uxori-local pattern of kinship where the wife receiving the husband was the norm. The male members of the families (except for the maternal uncle) were free to fight wars and their death would not affect the distribution of property. The premise for this argument is that the same trend is seen in other areas and communities with martial traditions like in south Canara, Khasi and Garo tribes in the north-eastern region of India, Sri Lanka etc.

On the other hand in Japan we see the warrior culture leading to the development of an increasingly male-centric social structure- sidelining of women with their role restricted to being heir-breeders, women being deprived of property rights, sodomy or homosexuality on a rise etc. Women enjoyed considerable rights in the Heian period and initial part of Kamakura period with a cognitive system of inheritance¹³ etc. The system of matrilocal residence is said to have existed in early Japan with courtiers

armies for short periods. For details see Gommans, Jos J.L. and Dirk H.A.Kolf (eds.) (2001) *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia: 1000-1800*, New Year: Oxford University Press

¹³ A system wherein property could be inherited in both father's lines and or the mother's line. If a family had only daughters, the primary daughter would stand to inherit the prime piece of property and her husband would be adopted into the family.

visiting the houses of their wives. Even among warrior classes bilateral kindred relationships were common and daughter's right to inheritance was not connected to their marital status. Separation and remarriage were also common. 'The second half of the Kamakura period saw the beginning of a decline in women's property rights. This took place in the atmosphere of economic hardship and increasing rivalry among warriors, caused in part by the parcelization of property over generations'¹⁴. These along with factors such as natural calamities, population growth etc indicate a scarcity of resources and competition which necessitated more control over distribution of assets and property. As has been explained by Engels in *Origin of family, private property and state* control over resources and wealth is a major reason behind the control of female sexuality and the subordination of women through the institution of family and inheritance. We see this in the legislations which put an end to inheritance in the female line and the confining of women's role to the houses (led to the creation of the word '*kanai*' for wife which translates into '(somebody) in the house'). This influence spread to the courtier classes with whom the warrior class had marital relationships.

Thus the impact on the position of women in the warrior classes and the system of inheritance seems to have been entirely different in both cases. Further in depth study would lead to a better understanding of the two traditions and societies.

4.2 Influence on arts forms, language and literature

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the influence on the art forms can be in two ways- the influence of the martial spirit and that of the physical culture of the martial training. The same martial spirit also influences the literary trends and language. If the martial tradition involved only a specific class it is probable that the influence on

¹⁴ Tonomura, Hitomi, op cit, p 592-623

art forms would be limited to a small number. There is also the possibility of influence by observation and imitation of the arts of the warrior classes. However if the martial training and the martial spirit is a widespread phenomenon then it cannot fail to influence almost all art forms. *Kalaripayattu* shows both direct and indirect influence on a wide spectrum of arts as elaborated in 2.4. Apart from *kalaripayattu* demonstrations, mock fights, enactments of historical battle scenes, the other influence seen is in the form of stylized movements of many art forms which are influenced by *kalaripayattu*. The physical training aspect of *kalaripayattu* along with the oil massage is used as a base for developing stamina, agility, flexibility for the performers of many art forms. Direct influence is seen in a wide range of arts like *teyyam*, *kathakali*, *poorakali*, *kolkali*, *chavittunatakam*, *kongan pada* and *ochirakali*. Accessory influence is seen in art forms like *kudiyattam*, *kuthiyottam*, *kanyarkali*, *chavittukali*, *dappumuttu*, *margamkali* etc.

The influence of *budo* is likewise seen in the martial art demonstrations during festivals, mock fights and enactments of battles. However while direct influence is seen on theatrical forms like *noh*, *kabuki* etc in their themes as well as movements, the influence on other art forms- dances etc do not find mention. Rather the development of arts under the patronage of the bushi is what is emphasized. As elaborated in 3.3.2, the rise of the bushi and the coming to power of the military government gave a new vigor to the development of various arts. The influence of the heroic martial spirit and along with the influence of Zen lent a fresh, raw, simple touch to the art of those times and led to the development of aesthetic concepts like *yugen* and gave new meaning to the existing concepts like *mono-no- aware*.

The bushi took over from the courtiers in the patronage of arts such as calligraphy, the tea ceremony and related arts like *ikebana*, painting etc. thus contributing to their development. The Azuchi-Momoyama period saw the building of huge, magnificent

castles as well as an impetus to arts like painted partitions (*shoheki-ga*) - folding screens, sliding screens, wooden panels etc.

The samurai tradition influenced the acceptance and popularization of philosophies like Zen in the Kamakura period and Confucianism in the Tokugawa period to suit the needs of the warrior culture. Despite the spiritual aspects of *kalarippayattu* having strong links to the Hindu faith with its worship of *Bhadrakali* and other gods, it is believed to have been a secular tradition in the sense that Christians, Muslims also practiced, taught *kalarippayattu* and are part of the *kalari* tradition. In fact it is believed to have played a unifying role in society so that at the creation of the state of Kerala, it was projected as the symbol of unified Kerala.

In the field of literature while there are a good number of literary works on warrior tales (*Gunki monogatari*s), samurai culture, military history, bushido etc., except for the oral tradition of ballads, *kalari* warriors and tradition figure in very few works of mainstream literature.

The reason that the direct influence of *kalarippayattu* is seen in so many arts and while Japanese martial art tradition does not seem to have an equally widespread influence is probably because *kalarippayattu* was a basic tenet of Kerala society and the practitioners came in contact with various art forms, while in Japan the martial arts had become restricted to a small section of the society. On the other hand this small section comprised a section of society important enough to figure in mainstream literature and even created literary works themselves.

4.3 Concept of death in the two martial art traditions:

This section explores the concept of death in these martial art traditions. The great warrior of late medieval Japan, Miyamoto Musashi wrote 'generally speaking, the way of the warrior is resolute acceptance of death'. Thus we find that 'death' has

always figured an important place in the martial tradition of Japan. While this aspect of Japanese culture has intrigued people across the world and much has been written on it, a comparison to that in the martial art tradition of Kerala has not been looked into before.

Mainly three aspects have been examined to study the concept of death in the two traditions: honor in death, honor suicides and suicide squads.

1) Honor in Death

In every tradition warriors are associated with virtues like bravery, valor, honor etc. Most warrior tales recount how death is acceptable to a warrior but not defeat. But where do these concepts or images come from? Is it a universal quality of warriors? In most traditions we find there is reification of the martial spirit, fallen war heroes are deified and their lives and deeds glorified.

Hagakure, which is at times referred to as the samurai bible, says '*bushido to ha shinukoto to mitsuketari*' i.e. the essence of bushido is in dying. Furukawa Tesshi in his essay 'The Individual in Japanese Ethics'¹⁵ explains that this '*shinu koto*' should be interpreted as becoming simple and pure and not just in the literal sense of dying. However it does advocate death to protect ones honor and killing to avenge wrongs at the cost of one's death.

As explained in 2.1, in medieval Kerala, the martial art practitioners on completing their training, joined the militia of the king or chieftain by becoming one of the *kaval* (guard) or *akampati janam* (retinue), or went back to their villages to be part of the militia there. These men were known '*chaver*' are sworn to defend the honor of the king at the cost of their lives.

The same sentiment is seen in the famous tale of samurai vendetta in Japan -

¹⁵ Furukawa, Tesshi 'The Individual in Japanese Ethics', in Charles A. Moore (ed) (1967), *The Japanese Mind*, Charles E. Tuttle Company: Tokyo, reprinted in 1973, p.232

Chushingura, and numerous other tales wherein the samurai are ready to fight till death for their lords and in case of his being killed, would not rest till revenge is taken.

However while in India the emphasis was always on honor related to valor in battle and bravery in the face of death, in the late medieval period of Japan, honor is most often than not associated with death in particular self-willed death. To be more precise, descriptions of death, honor suicides exceed those of battlefield exploits or bravery. This is evident from the accounts of *seppuku* in *Taiheiki* and other war epics of the late medieval period. The *Taiheiki* recounts sixty eight separate instances of *seppuku* involving a total of two thousand four hundred and ten men.¹⁶ While these mass suicides were more fiction than fantasy and in fact most of these glorified images of warriors and their deaths were created in the sixteenth century by samurai writers with a feeling of nostalgia rather than being facts.

Nevertheless, honorable death became almost an obsession with the samurai of the late medieval period of Japan which was never the case in the history of martial traditions of India.

2) Suicide

a) *Seppuku*- in the battlefield and in peacetimes

Seppuku, known in the West by the more vulgar term '*hara-kiri*', is defined as 'suicides by the nobles and the samurai in case of disgrace, real or fancied, and commanded by the government to certain disgraced officials; disembowelment'.¹⁷ As is clear from the definition, *seppuku* was both self-willed to protect ones honor and also a form of punishment to disgraced officials. It is on the former that this section focuses on.

¹⁶ Ikegami, op cit, p.105

¹⁷ 'Hara-kiri', Webster's New International Dictionary, quoted in Seward, Jack(1968), *Hara-kiri – Japanese Ritual Suicide*, Charles E. Tuttle Co.: Tokyo, p. 14

The initial accounts of seppuku in Japanese literature are mostly of *seppuku* in the battlefield and accounts of *seppuku* in peacetime and as a capital punishment became much more common in the later period. As mentioned in the earlier section, the later part of the medieval period saw a glorification of this form of self-willed death. There are numerous accounts of mass suicides in the event of defeat, or death of different lords. This kind of honor suicide is unheard of in the martial tradition of Kerala except in the Sangam period wherein the custom of vassals committing suicide following the death of their king is said to have existed¹⁸.

b) Suicide squads

Today everybody is familiar with suicide squads like jihadis of the Middle-east, or the Japanese kamikaze. Medieval Kerala also had its suicide squads.

The term suicide squad is mostly associated with the *chaver pada* in connection with the *Maamankam* festival¹⁹ of Tirunavai²⁰. There are also records which accredit the defeat of the Chola Kingdom by the Cheras to the *chaver pada* of the Cheraman Perumal who wrecked havoc in the enemy's territory.²¹

The forty-seven *ronin* (masterless warriors) of Chushingura, who avenge the wrongs done to their lord, the Baron of Ako domain are comparable to the *chaver pada* of Medieval Kerala, in sentiment and action.

Thus, in both martial art traditions, honorable death was considered preferable to defeat and living in disgrace and honor was considered worth dying for. The virtues of valor, fidelity were emphasized upon and along with bravery in the battlefield and being prepared to die for the sake of ones country or domain, vendetta in loyalty

¹⁸ The custom of women especially Rajput women comiting *sati* following the death of their husbands is often mentioned in connection with honor suicides however it is an entirely different social custom and therefore not considered here.

¹⁹ This festival was held based on the belief that every twelve years the holy river Ganga would descend from the heavens to the Bharatapuzha River making it as holy as the Ganga. It was held at the banks of the river at Tirunavai.

²⁰ For details refer to 2.1

²¹ For details see Pillai, Elamkulam Kunjan, op cit.

towards ones lord, even at the cost of death was another feature of both traditions. In this regard the 'suicide squads' in both traditions are a common feature.

Having said that, it has to be mentioned that while emphasis on valor and honorable death in the battlefield are more prominent in the Indian martial art tradition, self willed death in the name of honor, becomes prominent in the ideology and literature of late medieval Japan and occupies a major part of the image of Japanese warriors today. This 'glorification' of death almost to the extent of obsession is not to be seen in case of martial tradition of Kerala.

The above chapter looked into the various differences in the course of development of the two martial traditions of India and Japan and the variation in the impact they had on the respective societies. The inferences from the above analysis are summed up in the conclusion.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to compare the two martial traditions and the warrior classes with the objective of understanding the similarities and differences in the socio-cultural aspects of the two societies.

Whereas both the martial combat systems got crystallized under similar conditions of strife and warfare the evolution of the two systems followed different courses. The *kalarippayattu* tradition got systematized at a very early stage by the influence of the Dhanur Vedic tradition and training centers in the form of *salais* and *kalaris* existed in the Sangam period which was spread across the first five centuries of the Christian era. As opposed to this, the adoption of the Chinese model of military apparatus gave an organized structure to the 'armies' in and around the eight century but had to be dismantled soon as it proved to be ineffective in the Japanese system. Small, mobile squads of privately trained warriors proved more effective in checking banditry and controlling the provinces. It can be assumed that this spurred the development of training centers of various different *bugei* the first of which seem to have appeared in the Nara period. The development of distinct *ryu* of different *bugei* which further diversified into *ryuhas* was probably a consequence of this atmosphere of competition among the private warriors.

There is similarity in the preference given to the bow and arrow in the early period and a shift to the sword which became a symbol of the samurai and the Nair warriors. The promotion and reward of these warriors depended on individual skills and performance during the battles, evaluated on the basis of the number of enemy heads collected. This system ensured the continued prominence of individual combat throughout Japanese military history and the negligence towards troop organization. In spite of the presence of foot soldiers, the maximum utilization of them through troop coordination took place only in the mid-sixteenth century. On the other hand

kalari warriors excepting duels in the form of *ankam* or *poithu* fought in groups. The organization of troops into distinct categories of *kaval*, *akampati janam*, *changatham*, *chaver* and *lokar* and into groups of hundreds (*nootukootams*) even within *chaver* armies, was in place by the eleventh century. The reason for this faster evolution of the martial tradition in Kerala is probably because of the long war between the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas. On the other hand battles (and the power struggle) in Japan had less to do with territorial disputes and more to do with killing or protecting individuals.

Warfare in Kerala increasingly became a ritualized affair concerning only the warriors involved and even then giving due consideration to decorum and the convenience of the other side, thereby mitigating the loss of lives and general destruction.

As is the case in almost every society with a martial tradition, legitimization of the use of force and bloodshed was achieved through the reification of the martial spirit. This took the form of hero-stones and ballads eulogizing the skills and personalities of the warriors in Kerala and enshrinement of the warriors and a multitude of literary works in Japan. A moral philosophy (code of ethics) also emerged around the sixteenth century which with a sense of nostalgia for the 'glorious' past, advocating an idealized conduct and behavior. This idealized image of the *bushi* was to dominate the image of the Japanese warrior in the coming ages and draws comparisons to the chivalry of European knights. By contrast, while the *kalari* warriors were attributed virtues of honor, valor, loyalty etc. a code of ethics never emerged probably being unnecessary in the absence of a nostalgia towards the past or a need for an idealized present to keep the warriors under control¹.

Along with the above aspects, the role and impact of the two martial traditions are important points of comparison. Other than the usual role of military and

¹ Acts like '*Kirisute gomen*' are unheard of in the case of Kerala.

law-enforcement, the warriors also performed other functions. Warriors in Japan became part of the administrative setup which proved helpful in establishing and maintaining their hegemony. As opposed to this *kalari* warriors never became part of the administration, instead they had an important role in the judicial system by fighting duels (*ankams*) to settle disputes, which along with *changatham* (a form of protection force or escort service for hire) also contributed to the revenue of the state. The impact on the position of women and the system of inheritance in the two systems is contrasting. The need to free the men for battles and the risk to life involved in the profession of arms, contributed to the development of a matrilineal system of inheritance and trends of polygamy and polyandry in Kerala. As opposed to this, the competition and rivalry among the warrior houses for the limited resources spurred the need for a more structured system of inheritance than the cognitive system which existed till the Kamakura period. This along with the influence of Confucian teachings lead to the subversion of women's rights to inheritance and the social, economic and sexual subordination of women in the warrior class. This contrasting aspect requires further study and is a task for future research.

A study of the influence on art forms and literature revealed that while *kalarippayattu* has influenced almost all of the eighty four performing arts of Kerala directly or indirectly, such a widespread influence on Japanese performing arts is not evident. The influence on art forms in Japan is more in terms of the influence of the martial spirit which invoked new vigor in the different arts leading to new developments and trends in those fields. The influence of the warrior culture in influencing the religious and philosophical trends in society for example Zen, also indirectly influenced the art forms be it calligraphy, painting or tea ceremony. Moreover, this heroic spirit had a major impact on literature, and a new genre of literature in the form of war tales emerged. The destruction and devastation brought about in the medieval period due to

constant strife also resulted in works reflecting Buddhist philosophies like transitoriness of the world and such like.

By contrast *kalarippayattu* and *kalari* warriors find mention more in the oral tradition of ballads than mainstream literature. This confirms the idea that Japanese martial combat systems got restricted to a section of the society thereby not having much direct influence on the folk arts. By contrast *kalarippayattu* was more connected to the masses than the ruling class and had a much wider influence among them.

Another contrasting point identified through this research work is the concept of death in the two traditions. The emphasis on honor even at the cost of death is a common feature of both traditions (probably every martial tradition). Both traditions have ample examples of fighting till death to protect ones honor, king or country; for the sake of vengeance for some wrongdoing etc. However in the late medieval period of Japan, honor in death dominates the ideology, so much so that rather than fighting to death, warriors would commit honor suicides to prevent being the dishonor of being killed by the enemy. This was probably linked to the gory custom of head-hunting.

While many of the references in the literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth century were exaggerated, the fact remains that there was a glory attached to honorable death more than valor.

The concept of suicide squads existed in both traditions although honor suicides were not very common in the *kalarippayattu* tradition except in the Sangam period wherein the custom of vassals committing suicide following the death of their king is said to have prevailed.

The inference reached from the above factors is as follows. The martial tradition in Japan, though initially involving people from all strata, went on to become the monopoly of a select section of the society who rose to power. Hence it influenced the social structure, the acceptance and popularization of religions, the general trends in

arts and literature during various periods and other such macro level changes in the Japanese society but got detached from the lower strata or the masses. This is evident from the fact that direct influence of the martial arts is not seen on folk arts and other forms of art. On the other hand, *kalarippayattu* tradition was always a support system of the state in the form of military and law-enforcement and warriors never came to power, yet or maybe because of that very reason it remained connected to the masses. Hence its influence was more on the base level- on the oral tradition, folk arts etc. it did not impact things at the macro level like policies or affect the course of history in any way. Hence it does not find much mention in mainstream literature. However being connected to the masses was a reason why it could also act as a unifier, a symbol of the Kerala identity.

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Interviews/Discussions

Had discussions with experts on *kalarippayattu*, Kerala history and society:

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Mr. Vijaya Kumar, Retired Professor of History, Government Sanskrit College,
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Dr. Rajan Gurukkal, Professor and Director, School of Social Sciences, Mahatma
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