We know that martial arts and their evolution took place over thousands of years. Martial arts originated along with mankind's first cultural formations. In ancient India, China and Greece, martial arts were created as a form of resistance and tool for survival. As you might know, we measure cultures or civilisations through the presence of their tools and weapons. It is the discovery of tools and weapons that help us recognise and study cultures.

From stone flints and arrowheads, they moved to iron and other metals. As the tools changed, culture changed. Civilisational history is a history of conflict, of war. Along with wars, the arts related to war developed. The cave paintings and other pictographs from ancient cultures around the world show that military training or martial arts training was an integral part of society.

Naturally such training must have existed before they were committed to paintings by artists of even cave dwellings.

Consider the paleolithic age. Spears were a prominent weapon during the lower paleolithic age. Dhanush or bow and arrow and associated Dhanurvidya became significant in the upper paleolithic age. As far as Bharatha is concerned, historians state that Dhanurveda developed alongside Yajur Veda between 1700 and 1100 BC.  It is the veda of the Dhanus or bow. It is an upa veda of Yajur veda. This veda was compiled by either Brigu or Vishwamitra or Bharadwaja or Sadashiva. It has been attributed to many sages.

The Dhanurveda contains knowledge about Mushti yudha or bare hands/fist fighting, Dhanurveda about bow and arrow, chariot based warfare Ratha Chalana, Aswa chalana or horseback fighting. The text also discusses army formations or vyoohas. It is a very elaborate and incredible compilation that brings together diverse techniques.

The [Vishnu Purana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu_Purana) text describes dhanuveda as one of the traditional eighteen branches of “applied knowledge” or [upaveda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upaveda" \o "Upaveda), it evolved along with *shastrashastra* .. *yuddha kalā*,

We can see Shaktiyadipani...mukthamsyad

yandramuktham saradikam

mukthamuktham cha yastyadi

ramuktham kshurikabhikam

meaning weapons like Shakti come under the panimuktham category or weapons that leave the hand towards the enemy. Spears are thrown.

Tool or yantra propelled weapons are yantra-mukhta like the arrow or shara that is sent from a bow. Here the arrow gathers more strength as it is launched from a tool rather than the arm.

There is the mukthamuktha category. Weapons like eti…valari which are released from the hand but can be recovered. Think about the boomerang.

Amukhta weapons do not leave the hand. Like the sword or dagger or churika in Kalari. Thus experts say that kalaripayattu weapons belong to the amukhta category of Dhanurveda.

This shows We where well trained warriors , authentic

The oldest recorded organized unarmed fighting art in the Indian subcontinent is mallayudha where the opponent use knee strikes to the chest, punches to the head, hair pulling, and strangleholds.  the term *dwandwayuddha* referred to a duel, such that it was a battle between only two warriors

Epics often shows The [malla-yuddha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malla-yuddha" \o "Malla-yuddha) for eg. Dwandwa between [Bhima](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhima" \o "Bhima) and [Jarasandha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jarasandha" \o "Jarasandha)  the *dwandayuddha* between [Parasurama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parasurama) and [Bhishma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhishma)  [Krishna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna) and [Jambavan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jambavan)  [Bali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bali_(Ramayana)) and Dundubhi,

The [Manusmriti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manusm%E1%B9%9Bti" \o "Manusmṛti) tells that if a warrior's hair knot comes loose during such a fight or duel, the opponent must give him time to bind his hair in between

**Sangam period ……………………………………………**

The combat techniques of the Sangam period were the earliest forefather to kalaripayatu ……we can find the References in “Silappadikkaram” in Sangam literature which date back to the 2nd century

But if we examine the Sangham era.. ..literatures like Akampaadal and Purampaadal, Manimekhala, kundalakesi, akananooru, purananooru etc we can see the terms kalam, kalari, kalipokina kalari etc

This shows Evidently kalaripayattu flourished and was well established before the Sangam period. The first Sangam period or Aadi sangam era is attributed to Agasthya as its foremost sage ,who is the guru of kalaripayattu ,silambam and varmakalai.

[Sangam literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sangam_literature) of about the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD.

The [Akananuru](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akananuru" \o "Akananuru) and [Purananuru](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purananuru" \o "Purananuru) describe the use of spears, swords, shields, bows and [silambam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silambam" \o "Silambam) in the Sangam era.

The word [kalari](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalari" \o "Kalari) appears in the *Purampadal*  (verses 225, 237, 245, 356) and *Akam* (verses 34, 231, 293) to describe a lot about the social structure . we can see The word *kalari tatt* denoted a martial feat, *kalari kozhai* meant a coward in war. Warriors in the Sangam era is specialized in one or more of the important weapons of the period including the spear (*vel*), sword (*val*), shield (*kedaham*), and bow and arrow (*vil ambu*).

In the Sangam literature, we can find several warriors who underwent systematic martial arts training. Such military seems to have already been structured in society. Target practise for archery, horseback fighting, elephant back fighting etc were separately taught in a regular manner. We also know about the variety of swords and spears. Shields and types of bows and arrows are all mentioned in different points in the sangam classics. Sangam era is also known as Veera yuga. Bravery and courage in battle was most prized.

It was an era when mothers used to be happy if their sons died with a wound to the chest. They prayed for such a valiant death for their sons. After such battle glory, these warriors would be immortalised with hero stones which went on to become worshipped as gods. So we can say that such a martial arts culture became firmly rooted in southern India.

**Kerala kalari**

Kalaripayattu in Kerala practised in Kalaris……. find equivalent space in Garidis in Karnataka and Silambam or Varma Kalai in Tamil Nadu. More than historical records, we have myths and legends and oral traditions in this area. Thus Parashurama is also considered a paramaguru of Kalaripayattu.

Texts like Keralolpathi state that Parashurama brought the land of Kerala out of the ocean and established 108 Kalaris. He is also said to have given the charge to 21 Kalari gurukkals. For southern style or Thekkan kalaripayattu, Agasthya is considered Paramaguru. We have with us many texts attributed to Agasthya himself whereas Parashurama's story doesn't provide further instructional or illuminating texts attributed to him. We have several dozen texts from Agasthya and the 18 siddhars about Kalari practise, pressure point techniques or Marma, kalari based healing system etc.

Though a single word Kalaripayattu is used to refer to the martial arts form in Kerala, we have diverse styles being practised in the state. Parashurama is Paramaguru for northern style and Agasthya for the southern style.

The northern style or Vadakkan style is flourishing in the Malabar or northern Kerala with its  highly structured and disciplined system of training.

The southern style ,we Agasthyam preach …puts more emphasis on Marma or pressure points and southern compact skills

There is another style called Madhyakerala or central style. There are also Kalamchavittu and Baali Sampradayam style. Baali sampradayam focuses on drawing strength from the enemy itself. Pressure point based style is called Varmakalai. Here the damage is done by focusing on pressure points of the enermy.

Silabattam is also part of the southern style. It is formed from the essence of all these various styles. So even today the teaching is done with different elements from these diverse forms.

Southern Kalaripayattu is more than self defense. It is said "thodathe thodathe thottal vidathe" meaning we must never touch our enemy unless they make the first move on us. Gurus strongly and repeatedly instruct that we must try to avoid any attack on us at least three times. So we must not touch our enemy as much as possible and if we are forced to defend and counter attack, then we must ensure that they are fully subdued.

Healing martial art

Another important aspect is that Kalaripayattu is the only martial arts form in the world which has a healing or treatment system associated with it. Kalarichikistsa and siddha chikitsa was very prominent here for years and still we hve dedicated practicners ….

The healing system thus forms a protection system. The gurukkal is responsible for the health and well being of the society around him. There have been several historical studies about Kalaripayattu's growth. Prominent historian Sreedhara Menon states that

Kalaripayattu is the strength and foundation of Kerala . History always travels with the warriors. And our warriors came from our Kalaris. It was the strength and beauty of Kerala. There was never any discrimination based on sex, religion, caste or creed in Kalaripayattu training. All boys and girls were administered this basic form of education. Thus a society of warrior leaders was created from the Kalaris and immortalised by their courage.

Duarte Barbosa the portuguese traveler who came to Kerala in the early 16th century wrote that kids start Kalari training to make their bodies flexible from the age of 7. The practise begins early in the morning. They practise twice a day. They seem to get extremely loose joints which make them highly flexible. Then the weapons training is imparted. Archery, sticks and dagger is used. The practise continues till death. He discusses the different types of Kalaris belonging to the Nairs, Thiyyas, Muslims, Christians and Dalit.

He talks about Thiyyas wearing gold ornaments as well as having the urumi or flexible sword on around their waist like a belt. Both men and women used to do this. He mentions that they can take it off with lightning speed in case of an attack.

The Vadakkan Kalaris became famous through the Vadakkan Paatu or Ballads. They praise the bravery of warrior like Thacholi Othenan, Aromal Chekavar, Unniarcha. Unniarcha famously used only her wet towel to fight against assailants in Nadapuram.

In 1804, the British banned Kalaripayattu in [Kerala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kerala) in response to the [Kottayathu War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotiote_War" \o "Cotiote War), a rebellion against British rule in Kerala led by the Keralite king [Pazhassi Raja](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pazhassi_Raja" \o "Pazhassi Raja). resulting in the closure of most of the major *kalari* training grounds in Kerala. Following the ban, many Keralite *[gurukkals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guru" \o "Guru)* of Kalaripayattu resisted the ban and continued to teach Kalaripayattu to their students in secret. *Students*  learned and preserved the martial art with extreme devotion and were responsible for preserving Kalaripayattu into the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as sparking the revival of Kalaripayattu in kerala .

Kalari system requires 12 years of training to create an excellent warrior. The learning begins with Meyyorukkam or preparation of the body. It gets the body to become flexible and agile, to turn and twist as required. At our Agasthyam Kalari now, we incorporate breathing also into such flexibility training. This forms the foundation. Then we move to Kaaleduppukal or leg exercises to bring strength and flexibility.

After that we begin the Chuvadu or basic moves. These are meant to defend against attack from four sides. They are called Ottakal chuvadu because the pivoting happens with the left feet firmly placed on the ground. We have around 15 ottachuvadu and then koottachuvadu or combination steps. Next comes Kaiporu or bare hands attacks. It is about defending and locking the attacks that focus on arms and legs. We also learn Poottukal and Pirivukal which is about the different ways of locking the enemy and how we can escape if such locks are used against us. There are many interesting techniques in Kaiporu.

After bare hands we move to kuruvadi or short staff or stick fighting. Subsequently long bo staff training is imparted. The long stick is perhaps the oldest weapon man started using. All our initial defenses involved sticks and stones. We learn fights and swinging of bo staff.

The metal weapons enter the training with Kadara or dagger. Then comes axe or kodali or kandakodali. It is only in advanced training that sword and sword, sword and shield and flexible sword Urumi come into play. We also have spear and shield or marapidicha kuntham. In Kathiyum Thalayum, we learn self defense using our clothes in case of a knife attack.

After weapons training we move onto marma sastra. It is about the 108 pressure points in the human body. How they can be attacked and how to evade. Also about reviving people who might have collapsed because of a hit or block to their pressure point. Then the trainee also starts marma chikilsa or pressure point healing. Thus it is a complete system of understanding the body, its weaknesses and strength and curing ailments. The warrior training is complete only with the healer training.

Kalari being a well rounded study trains your mind to become calm to become peaceful in every moment .it teaches you to care even your enemy ..this is a greatest lifestyle ..the life style of wisdom

Thus we suffixed Agasthyam the wellness and wisdom of kalari

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**The essence behind Kalaripayattu**  
  
The word ‘Kalari’ means a ‘training space’, usually associated with the practice of Kalaripayattu. It is the oldest surviving martial art in India and was developed with inspiration from the power, strength, and fighting techniques of an animal; Lion, Tiger, Snake, Elephant, Peacock, and Wild Boar, to name a few.  
  
The primary weapons used are swords, shields, sticks, daggers, spears, etc. Furthermore, it also contains rituals and philosophies adopted from Hinduism. Taught in accordance with the Indian ‘Guru -Shishya’ system, Kalaripayattu is being practiced throughout the globe today. The master is usually known as ‘Gurukkal’  
. This is the common belief as Kalaripayattu is being mentioned in the ‘’Vadakkan Pattukal’’, a collection of ballads written about the Chekavar of the Malabar region of Kerala.                    
  
Even though there isn’t a specific age to start learning Kalari, it is usually considered good to begin at least at the age of 7. There isn’t any upper limit for the age as it varies for everyone, depending upon their physical conditions.  
  
The primary aim of practicing Kalaripayattu is the ultimate coordination between one’s mind and body. Besides, it also gives importance to the specialization in indigenous medicinal practices including, ‘Ayurveda’, ‘Siddhachikitsa’ ‘Marmachikitsa’. Moreover, Kalari helps us gain flexibility, agility, stress relief and, strengthen the lungs. This indicates that it allows professionals like dancers to perform better, as flexibility is vital for them.  
  
Physical fitness, self-confidence, strong willpower, and immunity are essential qualities an individual must possess in the 21st century. Kalaripayattu is sure to assist us in enhancing these qualities and bringing more balance in life.