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Mallayuddha: The traditional Indian martial art

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Abstract

The mallayuddha is the oldest sport, which may be literally translated as “wrestling combat.” The term mallayuddha is used very infrequently and is regarded by most wrestlers as an archaic designation. On account of its classical derivation, it is used primarily by people educated in Sanskrit. The root word malla, translated simply as “wrestler,” is used in conjunction with two other common terms. Mallakala is translated as the “art of wrestling,” and mallavidya as the “knowledge of wrestling.” Both terms, which are used somewhat more frequently than mallayuddha, indicate that wrestling is regarded as a complex system of meaning.

Keywords: The Malla, Mallayuddha, martial art, types, history, training etc

Introduction

Mallayuddha is one of the oldest forms of combat on which we have many well documented records. Even before the historic era, Stone Age man had developed a form of Mallayuddha, which bordered on the scientific lines. Stone Age man had to strengthen himself for physical combat. Mallayuddha at that time was not only the primary type of warfare among men but also extended to clashes between men and beasts. In that age Mallayuddha was significantly a brutal activity. Mallayuddha ling is an ideal sport to prepare men for combat duty. It has an equal value for any young man in developing his physical powers and extensive psychological benefits, which can be derived from competition in this fine art of sport. Owing to rigorous nature, it not only provides a fine mental tonic towards development of an aggressive attitude, but it is unexcelled as a means of acquiring physical efficiency, co-ordination, poise and effective use of the body.

The Mallas

The great Sanskrit scholar Gustav Oppert talks about the Mallas in his famous work “The Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsa or India”.

The name of the Mallas appears in various forms in Sanskrit literature. As the name of a people, we meet it in Malaka, Malada, Malaja, Malla, Mallaka, Mallava, Mala, Malava, Malavarti, as the name of a demon in Malayaja (Rahu), Malla (perhaps also if not connected with mala, garland, in Malyavan and Malini), as the name of a human being in Malayaketu, Malayadhavaja, Malayanarapati, Malayaprabha, Malayasimha, Malayagandhini, Malayavasini, Malavi, as the name of a country in Malaya, Malayadesa, Malayabhumi, Mallabhumi, Mallarastra, Mala, Malava, Malavadesa, Malavaka, as the name of a mountain or mountain-range in Malakuta, Malaya, Malaya-parvata, Malayabhuhrt, Malayacala, Malayadri, Malyavan, as the name of a plant in Malayaja, Malayadruma, Malayodbhava (sandal); Mallaja (Vellaja, black pepper).

The Mallayuddha

Mallayuddha literally "wrestling combat", is the martial art of classical Indian wrestling. Mallayuddha is described in the Indian epics as the fighting style of warriors such as Bhima. From extrapolation of the epics, the art is supposed to have gained maximum prominence in ancient India at the time when the oral tradition of the Mahabharata was conceived. As the Mahabharata was compiled in textual form around the 5th century BC and the epic's setting has a historical precedent in Vedic India, it is believed then that mallayuddha was regarded as a prominent martial art in that era.

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Martial Art

Indian martial arts refer to the fighting systems of the Indian subcontinent. A variety of terms are used for the English phrases "Indian martial arts", usually deriving from Sanskrit or Dravidian sources. While they may seem to imply specific disciplines (e.g. archery, armed combat), by Classical times they were used generically for all fighting systems. (Translation warfare art, knowledge of arms, science of being a warrior, science of weaponry. and Science of archery art of self-defence).

Types

Generally Indian wrestling can be divided into two categories. The malla krida and the mallayuddha. Malla krida is the sports version while mallayuddha is the combat wrestling version. According to the techniques and methodology used, the wrestling is divided in four types. Bhimaseni, Hanumanthi, Jambuvanathi, and Jarasandhi.

Bhimaseni: Bhimaseni wrestling stresses the acquiring of strength and its use. Most suitable person's like to huge build and strength.

Hanumanti: Hanumanthi type concentrates on the technical superiority of the wrestler and here superior skill will help one to beat an opponent of greater strength.

Jambuvanti: Jambuvanathi wrestling uses locks and holds to force the opponent into submission. And

Jarasandhi: Jarasandhi is the most lethal form among the above as it concentrates in breaking of the limbs and joints.

History

Wrestling in South Asia has a history of 5000 years, predating the Indo-Aryan invasions circa 1500 BC. Competitions held for entertainment were popular among all social classes, with even kings and other royalty taking part. Wrestlers represented their kings in matches between rival kingdoms; death matches before the royal court served as a way to settle disputes and avoid large-scale wars. As such, professional wrestlers were held in high regard. In pastoral communities, people would even wrestle against steers.

The first written attestation of the term mallayuddha is found in the Ramayana epic, in the context of a wrestling match between the vanara King Bali and Ravana, the king of Lanka. Hanuman, the monkey god of the Ramayana, is worshipped as the patron of wrestlers and general feats of strength. The Mahabharata epic also describes a wrestling match between Bhima and Jarasandha. Other early literary descriptions of wrestling matches include the story of Balarama and Krishna. The Manasollasa of the Chalukya king Someswara III (1124–1138) is a royal treatise on fine arts and leisure. The chapter entitled Malla Vinod describes the classification of wrestlers into types by age, size and strength. It also outlines how the wrestlers were to exercise and what they were to eat. In particular the king was responsible for providing the wrestlers with pulses, meat, milk, sugar as well as "high-class sweets". The wrestlers were kept isolated from the women of the court and were expected to devote themselves to building their bodies. The Manasollasa gives the names of moves and exercises but does not provide descriptions.

Training

Mallas train and fight in a traditional arena or akhara (school of mallayudhdha). Matches take place in a clay or dirt pit, thirty feet across and either square or circular in shape. The

soil of the floor is mixed with various ingredients, including ghee. Before training, the floor is raked of any pebbles or stones. Water is added approximately every three days to keep it at the right consistency; soft enough to avoid injury but hard enough so as not to impede the wrestlers' movements. Mallas begin each session by flattening the soil, an act which is considered both a part of endurance training and an exercise in self-discipline. During practice, mallas throw a few handfuls of dirt onto their own bodies and that of their opponents as a form of blessing. Once the arena has been prepared a prayer is offered to the gym's patron deity, most commonly Hanuman. Every training hall has a small makeshift altar for this purpose, where incense is lit and small yellow flower garlands are offered to the god. This is followed by paying respect to the guru by touching the head to his feet, a traditional South Asian sign of respect for elders.

Conclusion

My opinion is that peers back into the time and examine arts such as those practised by the mallayudhdha fighters and marvel at the sheer wonder and history of it all. Over centuries, such arts were developed, who knows to what amazing degree; for no video cameras existed and no cable television networks were there to broadcast the struggles of these time-forgotten athletes. It takes several decades, and the work of many, to develop an art to the point where it's level of effectiveness outweighs its theoretical musings but sadly, with the passing of only one generation it can all be forgotten as if it had never existed at all. The world is growing smaller; history and legends fade by the minute but if we pay attention and keep our hearts open, much can still be preserved.

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