

THE KALARIPPAYATTU¹ MARTIAL MASTER AS HEALER TRADITIONAL KERALA MASSAGE THERAPIES²

BY PHILLIP B. ZARRILLI, PH.D.



The state of Kerala along India's southwestern coast has an antique tradition of massage therapies intended for health maintenance, strengthening, and rejuvenation or as physical therapies. Vayaskara N. S. Mooss, a member of one of Kerala's most distinguished lineages of Ayurvedic physicians, notes that, while the standard classical works on Indian medicine by Charaka and Susruta mention massage therapies, it is only in Kerala that one still finds these traditions practiced today (1983, vii; see also Gode, 1955). This essay is intended as a brief introduction to some of these therapies as practiced by Kerala's traditional martial masters, those who practice *kalarippayattu*. It is also intended as a supplement to my other essays covering *kalarippayattu* and the cultural assumptions which inform its practice (Zarrilli, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1992, 1989, 1984a).

In addition to their expertise as a martial artists, Kerala's traditional *kalarippayattu* practitioners are also highly skilled therapists. As a practicing therapist, the *kalarippayattu* master follows the fundamental principles of India's traditional system of medicine, Ayurveda, when giving treatments. The master's medical practice is a special branch of Kerala's version of Ayurveda and is considered a *kriyaprayogam*, treatment by direct application to or manipulation of the body. Treatments are of four types: ❶ health-giving and maintaining full-body massages; ❷ muscle and body-strengthening applications; ❸ treatments for specific injuries or pathological conditions including bruises, dislocations, bone breaks, general weakness of the muscles and limbs, or complex crippling injuries; and ❹ emergency counter-applications for potentially deadly shocks or blows to the body's vital spots. Applications are primarily massage treatments with the hands, arms, or feet. Internal medicines are also prescribed when necessary.

OPPOSITE PAGE:
LANDSAT SCENE OF
NORTHERN KERALA,
A STATE IN SOUTHWEST
INDIA. THIS DETAIL OF
ROUGHLY ONE HUNDRED
SQUARE MILES SHOWS
THE COASTAL SECTION
RUNNING BETWEEN POINTS
NORTH OF CALICUT AND
CHOCHIN.

Photograph available from
the U.S. Department of the
Interior, U.S. Geological
Survey EROS Data Center.
ID#: LM8118404450500.

FIGURE 1:
MARTIAL TRAINING AS WELL
AS TREATMENTS ARE GIVEN IN A
TRADITIONAL SUNKEN "PIT" KALARI,
DUG OUT OF THE EARTH.
THE LOCAL VILLAGE KALARI IN
CHEMBAD IS OVERSEEN BY MASTER
SREEJAYAN IN KOZHIKODE DISTRICT.



FIGURE 2:
A MODERN KALARI-AND-"CLINIC."
THE C. V. N. KALARI,
THIRUVANANTHAPUR, IS OF
MODERN BRICK AND CONCRETE
CONSTRUCTION. INSIDE IS THE
TRADITIONAL TRAINING SPACE
WITH EARTHEN FLOOR AND
SEPARATE AREAS FOR MASSAGE,
AND OTHER HANDS-ON THERAPIES.



What distinguishes the kalaripayattu master's medical expertise from that of many other Ayurvedic specialists is his psychophysiological training as a martial artist and his practical knowledge of the body's vital spots (*marmam*) (Zarrilli, 1992). His psychophysiological training gives him extraordinary control over his body and thus control of the vital energy or wind (*prana vayu*) (Zarrilli, 1989). The assumed efficacy of treatments is in part based on his ability to control and channel this life-force in his body and limbs when giving massage therapies.

The traditional setting for both health-giving and pathological therapies is the *kalari* or place of training itself (Figure 1). When every village had its own kalari, it was common knowledge that the treatments noted above were available from the local master. In both rural and some urban areas, masters still receive and treat patients informally when they come to their homes or kalari. In addition to the informal, personal, and very local context of traditional treatments, there are also kalari "clinics" modeled on a more Western bio-medical model of health-care delivery with separate waiting and treatment rooms, dispensaries for prescriptions, etc. (Figure 2).

Traditionally therapies and treatments are given by the master himself and/or by an advanced student who serves as his assistant. However, at the *Shafi Dawah Khana*, Urdu for "Recovery Hospital," near Kozhikode in northern Kerala, traditional kalaripayattu therapies have become part of a larger, all-encompassing therapeutic system that includes not only kalaripayattu therapies, but yoga, Unani medicine, and Ayurveda, as well as natural and

homeo-medical principles and practices administered by a large staff of doctors and therapists (Figure 3).

The practice of *kalaripayattu* exercises as well as therapies are related primarily to the circulation and condition of the wind/breath or wind humor (*vayu*; *vata*). In a lengthy interview, Ayurvedic physician V. K. Varrier explained the importance of the wind humor, *vata*:

Without *vata* there is no movement [within the channels of the body]. Only when *vata* acts can phlegm (*kapha*) and fire (*pitta*) act. Every function of the body is dependent on the condition of the *vata*. If the *vata* is put in order, all else can come to order. Whatever the disease, when it gets to a pathological state, it is *vata* that must first be brought under control.

Vata is always provoked by weakness in the tissues, exhaustion, or problems with the system's internal channels (*nadi*) or when its movement is broken and denied its normal action.

Vata may be kept in balance by the positive massage therapies and seasonal exercise practiced in the *kalari* or through other forms of psychophysiological exercise such as yoga. Massage and exercise are understood to keep the *vata* coursing freely through the subtle body's channels (*nadi*). Conversely, *vata* complaints and pathological conditions are treated by manipulations and applications which unblock restricted channels.

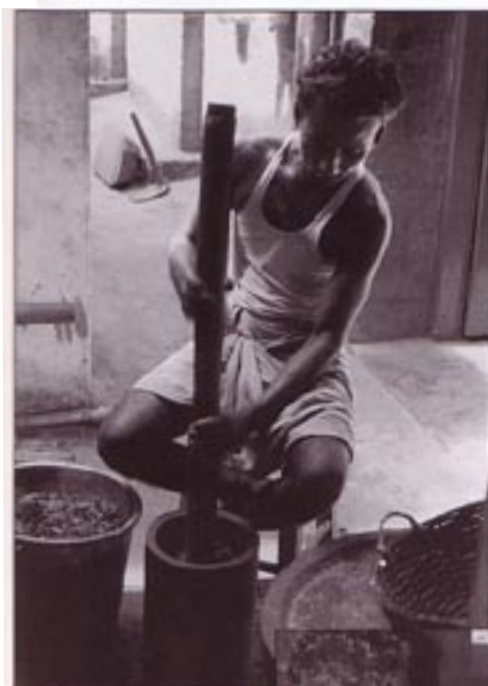
Typical conditions and injuries treated by a *kalari* master are those most closely associated with martial practice or diseases affecting the muscles and bones, including fractures (*asthiban-gam*); dislocations (*sandhi bhramsam*); general bruises (*ksatam*); major shocks to the body (*abhighatam*); major shocks to the vital spots of the body (*mammabhighatam*); bruises to the chest (*uraksatam*); sprains (*ulukku*); "catch" in the hip (*pidutham* or *kadi graham*); generally weak or rheumatic condition (*pesi sosam*); cut or wound (*murivu*); swelling of joints (*sopham*); inability to lift a limb (*apabahu*); and general joint pain, arthritis, or rheumatism (*vadam*). All are attributable either to martial arts-related activities (injuries from exercise or external shocks or wounds) or pathological conditions affecting one's ability to exercise (weakness or muscular complaints). All are conditions affecting the wind humor.



FIGURE 3:
AT SHAFI DAWA
KHAN NEAR KOZHICODE,
A TEAM OF MASSAGE
THERAPISTS GIVE A FULL
BODY MASSAGE TO A
YOUNG CHILD WITH POLIO.
LONG-TERM THERAPEUTIC
REGIMENS ARE SET FOR
SUCH PATIENTS AND
INCLUDE NOT ONLY
MASSAGE, BUT THERAPY
IN THE FORM OF YOGA
PRACTICE.

Massage, exercise, and hands-on treatments are all understood to achieve their effects through some combination of an oleaginous nature (*snehana*), or external application, with fomentation (*swedhana*), or sweating. Rubbing or exercising any part of the body is understood to create "heat." This "heating" is understood to both open the pores of the surface skin, allowing the medicinal oils to enter the body, and to unblock restricted internal channels. Master Govindankutty Nair told me that:

FIGURE 4:
AN ASSISTANT TO MASTER
GOVINDANKUTTY NAIR OF
THE C. V. N. KALARI,
THURIVANANTHAPURAM,
CUTS AND POUNDS HERBS
AS HE PREPARES A
SPECIAL RECIPE FOR
AN OIL PREPARATION.



to get the maximum effect from the oil, the soaking softens the spot of the body where applied and it will ooze into the joint and therefore the system with time so that the effects of the medicinal contexts will enter the system.

Consequently, when patients exercise or receive massage therapies, they are required to wait for a specific period of time at the conclusion of the therapy with sufficient oil applied to the area being treated so that it can "soak in." After exercise, the student "cools down" naturally. When bandages are applied, they are soaked in the treatment oil so that seepage continues after the patient leaves.

The antique authority Charaka identified many forms of "sweating" (*swedhana*) therapy which he divided into two types: (1) *niragniswedhana*, therapies producing sudation without the application of direct heat (for example, physical exercise, physiotherapy or massage, or sunbath), and (2) *agniswedhana*, therapies producing sudation with the application of direct heat (Charaka: 1949). Some forms of kalari treatments also produce sudation by the application of direct heat in addition to massage. In these cases, the oil (or pudding) is heated over fire and then applied.

After diagnosis of the condition, the preparation and selection of specific oils is the next important component of the therapeutic process (Figure 4-5). Traditionally each individual practitioner prepares his own medicines from recipes obtained from his master(s). Masters carefully guard their recipes, which range in number from one to as many as nine or more. They usually only dispense their oils to their own patients. Given the time, increasing scarcity of and difficulty of gathering traditional plants used to prepare recipes, and the skyrocketing cost involved in making traditional preparations, some masters make use of readily available oils produced in mass quantities by Ayurvedic medical companies, which manufacture and distribute through Ayurvedic pharmacies like the internationally known Kottakkal (Kerala) Ayurveda Shala.

FIGURE 5:
IT TAKE DAYS
TO PREPARE
OILS THROUGH
COOKING AND
DECOCTION.
DECOCTION
RESULTS IN
A HIGHLY
CONCENTRATED
MEDICINE, IN THIS
CASE AN OIL, TO
BE APPLIED
EXTERNALLY.



GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND RULES GOVERNING KALARIPPAYATTU MASSAGE THERAPIES

Several rules govern the massage therapies practiced by kalaripayattu martial masters. The practitioner must consider the body type of the client: ❶ the body characterized by the dominance of the wind humor (*vata* type) is lean and thin, with a small bony frame and relatively undeveloped muscles; ❷ when bile dominates the body is of muscular, medium build (*pitta* type); ❸ where phlegm dominates the body is fat, smooth, slow and pale (*kapha* type). The body type and condition determine the number of strokes and the pressure used, healthier clients receiving more strokes and pressure and martial arts and dance students receiving the maximum pressure possible in order to build strength and gain flexibility.

Massage is not normally given to those suffering wind diseases, those with an excess of bile or suffering from stomach complaints, to very old men, or very young children. Massage of any type is best given in the cool season and should be avoided in the hot season since the body is considered to be weak then. The best time for massage is the early morning or before noon. Under some circumstances some massages may be given in the late afternoon or early evening (4-7 p.m.).

Massages are given either to a few parts of the body or to the entire body and may be administered either while the patient is standing or lying down. Normally massage should not be performed in a room that is either too cold or too hot.

When the patient or student is in a standing position, the master also stands. When the patient or student lies on the ground, depending on the method of application, the master either lies on the ground or holds onto ropes suspended from the ceiling. Strokes are administered in one of four ways: (1) palm massage (*kayulicil* or *samvahanam*) is the lightest form (Figures 6-7); (2) forearm massage (*mustiulicil*) uses a medium amount of pressure; (3) foot massage (*kalulicil* or *utsadanam*) uses the most pressure (Figures 8-22 on pages 72-73, and 76-77); and (4) massage may employ hand-held bundles of specially prepared medicinal herbs wrapped in cloth (*kili*) (Figure 27).

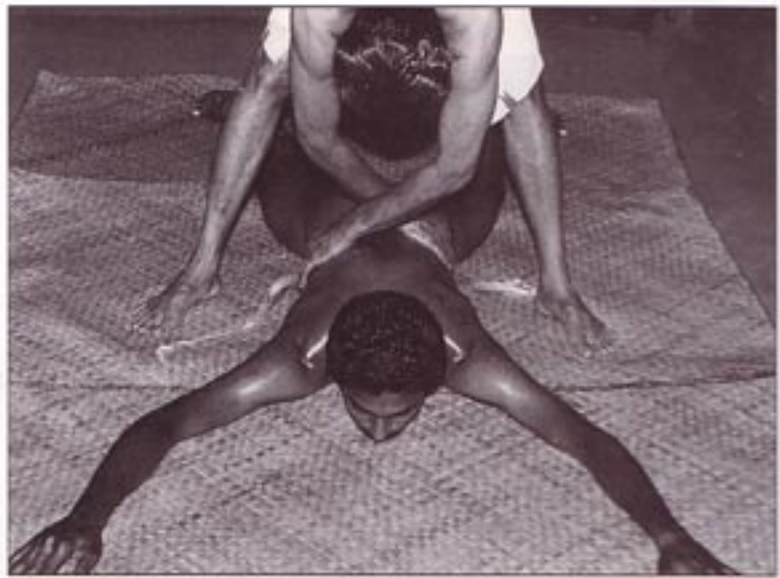


FIGURE 6:
HAND MASSAGE –
LIGHTER STROKES
ARE APPLIED
ALONG THE RIBS.



FIGURE 7:
INTEGRATION STROKES
ARE APPLIED ALONG
THE ENTIRE LENGTH
OF THE BODY.

When administering massage, pressure is administered only "in the direction of circulation," down the legs from the hips, out the arms from the shoulders (Figure 13), and down the chest or back from the shoulders (Figure 7).

During return strokes, the hands pass over the body in the direction opposite to "circulation," but only slight tactile pressure should be applied (Figure 6). The practitioner must know the potentially deadly spots (*marmmam*) of the body to avoid injury when passing over them (Zarrilli, 1992).

FIGURE 8:
MASTER SREEJAYAN
APPLIES OIL TO THE
STUDENT'S BODY BEFORE
BEGINNING MASSAGE.



FIGURE 9:
THE MASTER TOUCHES
THE MOST IMPORTANT
JOINTS OF THE BODY
WHILE REPEATING A
SACRED MANTRAM TO
REMOVE OBSTACLES IN
THE WAY OF THE FULL
EFFECT OF THE MASSAGE
AND INSURE THE
STUDENT'S SAFETY.



FIGURE 10:
MASTER SREEJAYAN
ADMINISTERS THE FIRST
STRIKE IN THE MASSAGE
ACROSS THE SMALL OF
THE BACK, HOLDING ONTO
ROPES SUSPENDED FROM
THE CEILING OF THE KALARI.
BY HOLDING ONTO THE
ROPES, HE CAN APPLY HIS
FULL BODY WEIGHT IN
GIVING EACH STROKE.



FIGURE 11:
APPLYING THE
APPROPRIATE AMOUNT OF
PRESSURE, THE MASTER'S
STROKES MOVE BACK AND
FORTH ACROSS THE SMALL
OF THE BACK AS THE
MASTER HIMSELF
CROSSES FROM THE
STUDENT'S RIGHT TO
LEFT AND BACK
AGAIN AND AGAIN.



FIGURE 12:
STROKES ARE GIVEN ACROSS THE BACK AND
OUT ALONG THE EXTENDED ARMS.

FIGURE 13:
STROKES CONTINUE ALL THE WAY DOWN
TO THE FINGERTIPS.

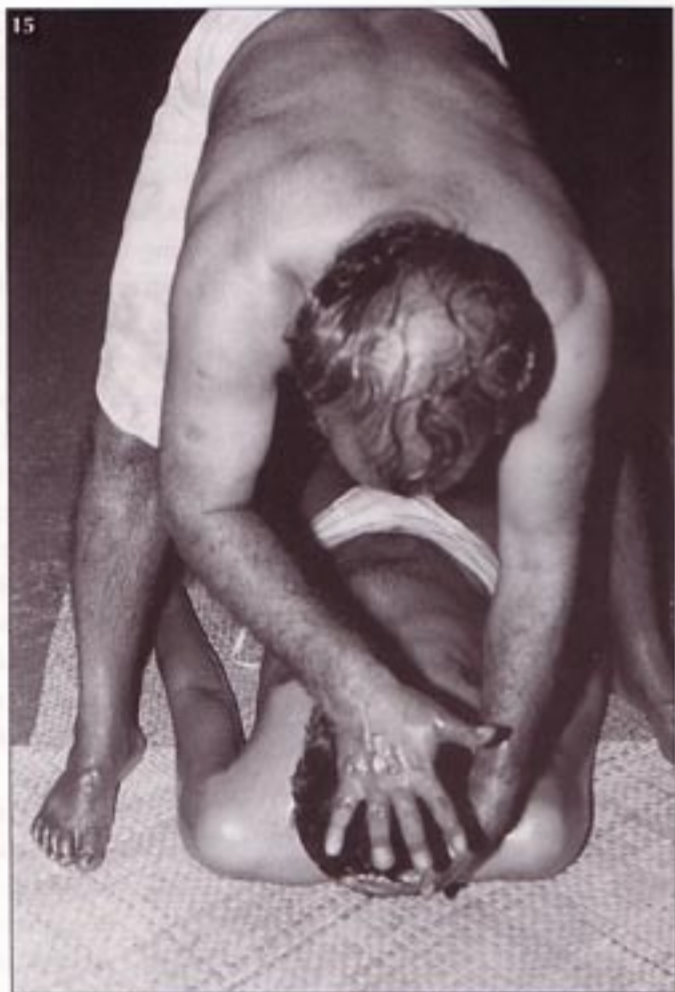
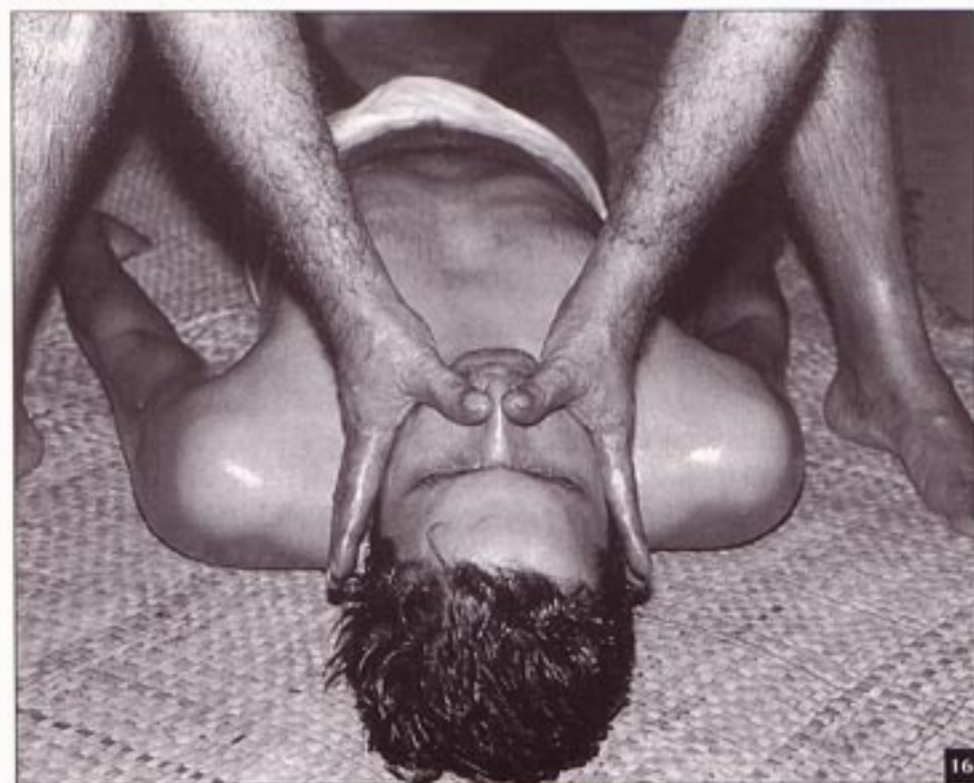


FIGURE 14:
FOR THE HEAD AND NECK,
THE MASTER APPLIES
STROKES WITH THE HANDS.

FIGURE 15:
MASTER SREEJAYAN
APPLIES A STRONG SLAP
WITH THE PALM OF HIS
HAND TO THE TOP OF
THE STUDENT'S HEAD,
WHERE THE SAHASRARA
CAKRA IS LOCATED, TO
"AWAKEN THE SENSES."

FIGURE 16:
THE FACE RECEIVES A
FULL MASSAGE WITH
THE MASTER'S HANDS.



POSITIVE THERAPIES: MASSAGE AND EXERCISE

As discussed elsewhere (Zarrilli, 1994c, 1989), Ayurveda has always promoted seasonal exercise and massage appropriate to one's constitution as a way of naturally establishing congruence among the three humors. The special kalaripayattu full-body massage (*ulicil*), administered with feet and/or the hands, is traditionally administered for one of three reasons: (1) as part of the training of the martial-arts or dance student as an essential part of their body preparation (Zarrilli, 1984b, 120ff.); (2) as an annual seasonal massage to maintain good health; and (3) as a therapeutic treatment. When given seasonally for general health or development of the martial arts student, the full-body kalaripayattu massage with hands or feet takes fifteen days to administer. Each day both pressure and number of strokes increase up to the mid-point of the massage period. On the eighth day the student takes rest and purges his system with a laxative, and then from the ninth through the fifteenth days, the pressure and number of strokes gradually decrease so that on the last day the pressure and strokes are the same as they were on the first day. Where the muscles are strong (thighs and buttocks), the strokes are circular. For the chest, stomach, and back the force applied must be less than that applied to the legs, back, and arms.

*... the master is able
to control the
vital energy
(prana-vayu), ...
understood to course
through his limbs
as he administers
therapeutic massages.*

When the full-body kalaripayattu massage is given by a Hindu master, it is circumscribed by ritual: worship with offerings of flowers, incense, and lighted lamps (*puja*) is traditionally performed to initiate the process on the first day, master and student pay respects to the deities of the kalari, and the student prostrates himself before the master. The student applies a special oil to his head and then applies a different oil to promote flexibility to his entire body. The student lies face down on the mats as the master applies additional oil as required to the student's body (Figure 8). Beginning on the student's right, the master then touches each of the important joints in the student's body, beginning with the head, then neck, shoulders, and small of the back (Figure 9). With the fingers touching the small of the back, he silently repeats a special set of sacred syllables (*mantram*) clearing obstructions in the way of the success of the massage and effectively serving to "concentrate or fix the mind" (*manasinne urap-pikukka*) on the process to follow.

Whether the massage is administered with the master's hands or feet, the student's body position and the types and direction of strokes are similar. The massage begins at the small of the back with the student on his stomach (Figures 10, 11). After his back is completely massaged, the student turns over on his back and his entire front side is massaged, beginning just below the navel. Just before the last stroke of the massage, the master touches the student's head and repeats the same *mantram* with which he began the process (changing the tense of the verb from present to past). The last stroke is then given down along the chest, across the navel, down the thighs, and off the body at the knees.

When leg massage is concluded, the master stands before the student who

vigorously rubs the master's legs. At the end of the fifteen-day period, the student traditionally gives special offerings (*daksina*) to the master, and may also present offerings to Lord Ganesh, the elephant-headed god of new beginnings.

Only given to very healthy students of the martial arts (or dance), the special massage with the feet allows the master to apply his full body weight in administering a stroke (Figures 17 thru 21). During the most intense middle days of the massage, when the master is applying the most pressure, so deep and painful are the strokes that the student may cry out in pain and even have difficulty standing up when the massage is over. But stand up he must since immediately after the massage he must perform the complete set of *kalarippayattu* exercises. Once on the earthen floor of the *kalari*, as the student begins to exercise, the pain gradually subsides. This massage, like other Ayurvedic therapies, is understood to have its full effect only over a period of time. It may be weeks or even months of more training before the student realizes the flexibility and strength provided by the massage.

Just as the master is able to control the vital energy (*prana-vayu*), raise his internal power (*sakti*), and channel both out through his hands and arms during exercise or in armed and unarmed combat, likewise, he controls and applies his vital energy and power through his hands, feet, and forearms for healing. His vital energy is understood to course through his limbs as he administers therapeutic massages. He channels the appropriate degree of power into each stroke, and his own vital energy and power are transmitted directly through the palm, foot, or forearm into the student's or patient's body, thereby stimulating the internal wind of the student or quieting the enraged wind humor when giving a massage as a treatment.

The special *kalarippayattu* massage (*ulicil*) is understood to affect the humoral balance and the alignment of the body as well as the channels and centers of the subtle body. According to a number of masters, this massage originates and terminates at the small of the back opposite the navel region (corresponding to *muladhara-cakra*) at the point of confluence of many of the major channels of the subtle body. Administering massage strokes out from and back to this region stimulates and circulates the internal wind (*vayu*) to move through the channels (*nadi*) of the subtle body and thereby promotes the student's gradual embodiment of correct form through which strength and power emanate outward from the navel region. The massage process begins by slowly stimulating the region of the small of the back and hips. Gradually the patterns of the strokes extend outward from the navel region through the limbs (the legs, upper torso, arms); the internal wind, stimulated and manipulated by the master, is circulated as it should be during exercise.

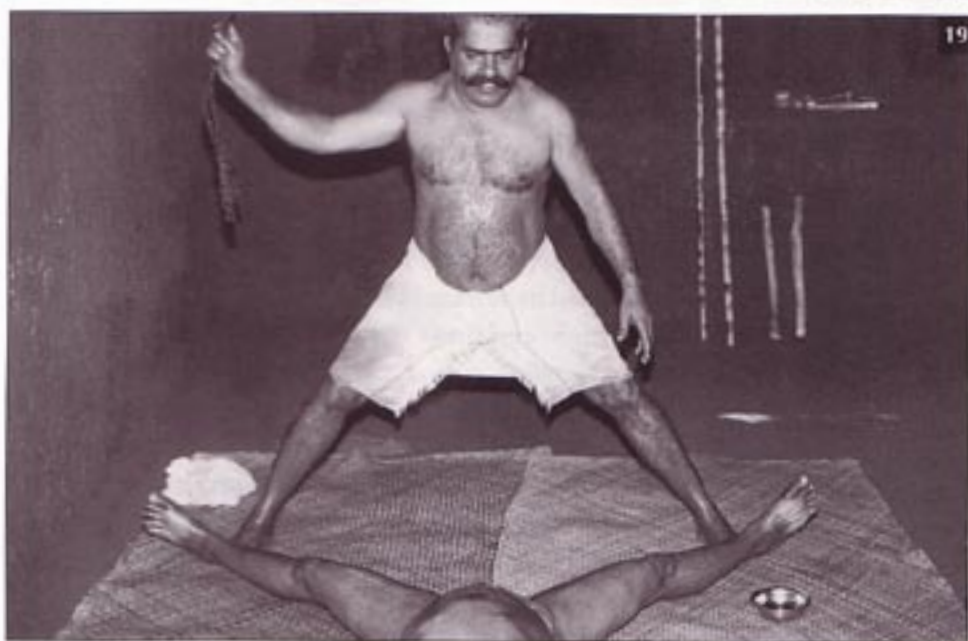
Master Govindankutty Nair explained that the full-body massage concludes at the small of the back with a strong slap delivered with the palm of the right hand to the depression between the hips in order to "awaken the vital energy and all the channels which originate here." Similarly, in the midst of the massage, to complete strokes to the face and head, a firm slap is delivered directly to the top of the head where *sahasrara-cakra* is located to "awaken the senses." In both strokes and slaps the master transmits his own vital energy into the student with this massage and further implants the correct form in both physical and subtle bodies.



FIGURE 17:
MASTER SREEJAYAN APPLIES HIS FULL WEIGHT
TO THIS STUDENT'S THIGHS TO INCREASE
FLEXIBILITY IN THE HIP AND THIGH REGION.

FIGURE 18:
THE MASTER USES HIS KNEES AND HANDS TO INCREASE
FLEXIBILITY ALSO IN THE HIP AND THIGH REGION.

FIGURE 19:
BALANCING HIMSELF WITH THE AID OF A ROPE,
THE MASTER SPREADS THE STUDENT'S LEGS AS
WIDE AS POSSIBLE WITH HIS FEET AND FOLLOWS
WITH A HAND MASSAGE.



20

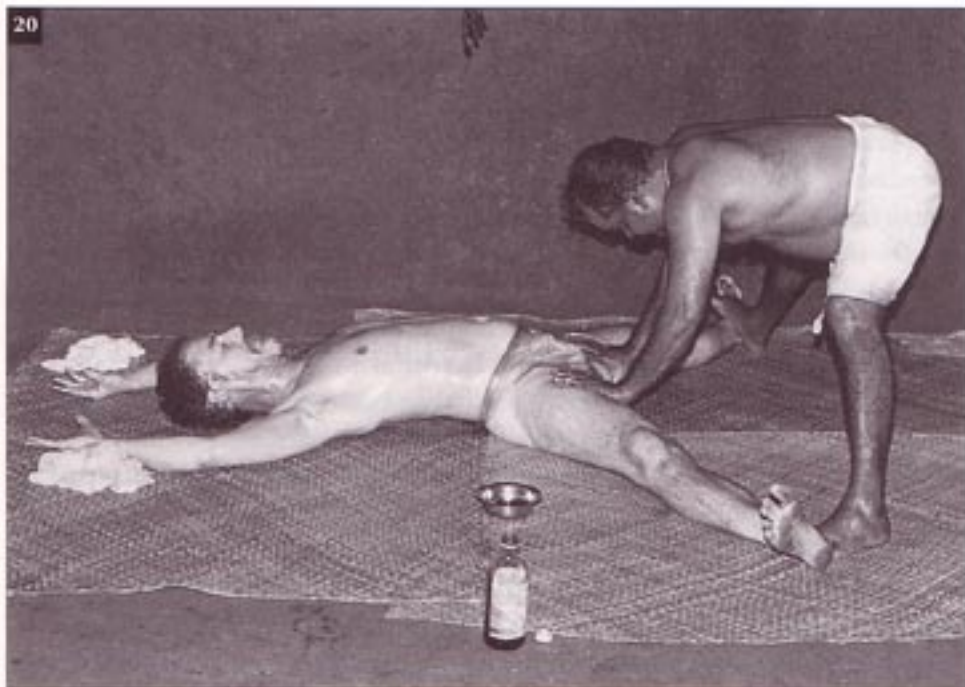


FIGURE 20:
FOLLOWING FIG. 19,
THE MASTER THEN
MASSAGES THE THIGHS
WITH HIS HANDS.



21

FIGURE 21:
WITH THE MASTER'S FULL
WEIGHT ON HIS THIGHS,
THE STUDENT MUST PERFORM
SIT-UPS.

FIGURE 22:
TOWARD THE CONCLUSION OF THE
MASSAGE, THE STUDENT STANDS,
AND THE MASTER ADMINISTERS
LONG STROKES ALONG THE SIDES OF THE BODY.



22

THE SPECIAL YOGA MASSAGE—NADI SAMPRADAYAM

In addition to the full-body kalarippayattu massages discussed thus far, a very few practitioners also administer and teach a special form of yoga massage known as *nadi sampradayam*, a hand and finger massage specifically intended to clear the channels of the subtle body. Master Chandran, the instructor from whom I learned the massage in 1989 and who teaches and practices both kalarippayattu and yoga, points out that this massage “opens the channels of the subtle body because they tend to become blocked with phlegm. Through this massage the tension within the channels decreases and therefore flexibility of the body will increase.” What differentiates this form of full-body massage from the kalarippayattu full-body hand massage is that the strokes are specifically given with the fingers as they trace the lines of the internal channels, rather than the more generalized strokes of the kalarippayattu massage given with the palm of the hand or the soles of the feet (Figures 23-26).

Additional special restrictions must be observed when receiving this delicate and intricate form of massage therapy: the student must rest during the fourteen days of the massage and for fourteen days thereafter; one cannot be overly exposed to the sun while receiving the massage; yoga practitioners may continue to practice yoga during the evening hours if receiving the massage in the early morning, but may not take any other form of vigorous exercise. Because of the strength of the strokes administered, if one were to take heavy exercise, he would become fatigued and lose strength. At the conclusion of the massage, one should feel completely rejuvenated.

FIGURE 23:
MASTER CHANDRAN OF
AZHICODE IN KANNUR
DISTRICT ADMINISTERS
THE DELICATE STROKES
OF THE SPECIAL YOGA
MASSAGE, NADI SAMPRA-
DAYAM, TO THE CHANNELS
ALONG THE SPINAL COLUMN.

FIGURE 24:
THE FINGERS TRACE
THE PATHS OF THE BODY'S
CHANNELS OUT TO THE ENDS
OF THE FINGERTIPS.

FIGURE 25:
MASTER CHANDRAN'S
RIGHT THUMB TRACES
THE CHANNEL ALONG
THE RIGHT CALF WHILE HIS
LEFT HAND FIRMLY GRIPS THE
LEG SO THAT ADEQUATE
PRESSURE CAN BE APPLIED
TO CLEAR THE CHANNEL.

FIGURE 26:
MASTER CHANDRAN
TRACES THE CHANNELS
ALONG THE NECK AND
DOWN THE THROAT.

The Special Yoga Massage



OTHER MASSAGE TREATMENTS

In addition to their positive health or strength-giving massages, martial-arts masters also treat a variety of injuries. They conduct their diagnosis primarily with their hands. In addition, the master's hands should be able to judge the relative temperature of the injured area of the body. He touches the injured area and quickly moves his hand to an unaffected area to judge the difference in heat. If there is heat in the injured area, it indicates the flow of blood and fluids is restricted. This is interpreted as a complaint of the wind humor, and a suitable treatment is initiated.

During my apprenticeship to Master Govindankutty Nair, he helped treat or witnessed a wide range of conditions typically treated by kalari masters with their specially prepared medicinal oils and/or massage therapies. They included:

- ❶ minor bruises treated simply with oils or ointment and hand massage;
- ❷ dislocations requiring relocation of the joint and massage;
- ❸ major bruises or shocks requiring application of bags of medicinal herbs (*kili*) (Figure 27);
- ❹ bone breaks requiring setting and massage (Figure 28);
- ❺ general weakness requiring extended, complex massage;
- ❻ complex special cases such as polio, rheumatic conditions, acute arthritis, or crippling injuries requiring extended multiple therapies, and
- ❼ emergency counter-applications with the hands or special manipulations of the limbs to counteract an injury to one of the body's vital spots.⁴

A few examples will illustrate the martial-arts master's repertoire of therapies. Bruises are one of the most common injuries treated by the kalari master. In spite of ritual protection, the use of weapons in training inevitably results in fingers, arms, ribs, and other body parts getting hit and badly bruised. When a bruise occurs during a training session, the master immediately massages the joint, perhaps using an ointment made from *cenjallyam kulambu*, the gum of a tree. Cenjallyam is ground into a powder and mixed with gingeley [sesame] oil to make a thick, clear paste. To the thick paste a little water is added resulting in a white ointment. The ointment is applied directly to the joint and the finger is massaged by firmly pressing and pulling from the joint at the hand out to the tip of the finger. Cenjallyam is used primarily for emergency treatments to reduce pain and swelling. Application may be made for one, three, five, or seven days.

One of the most common types of bruise injuries brought to Master Govindankutty Nair's urban kalari in Thiruvananthapuram is sports injuries. Such cases are often treated with simple application of medicinal herbal oil and massage. For bruises the oil preparation is specifically intended to reduce pain and swelling. For stiffness, a different oil will be used to "loosen" the joint and



FIGURE 27:
ONE IMPORTANT THERAPY
IS APPLICATIONS OF
CLOTH BAGS OF SPECIALLY
PREPARED HERBS (*KILI*) TO
INJURIES. HERE MASTER
K. NARAYANAN NAIR
OF PALGHAT TREATS A
"CATCH" LOCATED IN THE
RIGHT CHEST REGION OF
ONE OF HIS STUDENTS.

FIGURE 28:
C. SANKARANARAYANA
MENON OF THE S. N. G. S.
KALARI, CHAVAKKAD,
APPLIES A NEW SPLINT TO
A BROKEN ARM. SPECIALLY
PREPARED MEDICINAL OILS
ARE APPLIED AS THE ARM
IS MASSAGED BEFORE
THE SPLINT IS SET.



"return normal activity." When fractures are treated, not only does the therapist set the bone with splints and a temporary plaster, he also has the patient return every three or seven days to have the injured area massaged with herbal oils to insure that the wind humor continues circulating thus speeding the mending of the bone.

Masters also give treatments for very bad bruises, sprains, muscle pulls, and swollen or painful joints and occasionally for strengthening with bags of specially prepared and decocted herbs bound in cloth bags (*kili*) dipped in heated oils (Figure 27). One master has five different *kili* preparations in his repertoire, each for a different injury or condition. Regardless of different ingredients and purposes, all special *kalari kili* are applied in the same way: the bag is dipped in a heated oil and applied with simple massage strokes to the weak or injured area of the body for three, five, or seven days in each cycle of treatment.

Kalaripayattu masters regularly set all types of bone breaks (Figure 28). Splints and temporary casts are used. What differentiates the kalaripayattu mode of bone-setting from that of Western medicine is that after the setting, medicinal oils are applied to the area of the break, and the casts must be replaced every three days. Before each new cast is applied, the muscles of the limb are appropriately massaged so there is less "wastage" of muscle tissue than with the application of fully immobilizing biomedical plasters.

Another unique therapy administered by kalaripayattu masters is counter-applications for injuries to the body's vital spots. It is the body's 107 or more vital spots that are attacked and defended in traditional martial arts practice; therefore, it is essential for the martial arts master to know how to treat penetration of these spots, since they can cause anything from incapacitation to instant death. Counter-application to a vital spot which has been penetrated is usually performed by administering a firm slap with the palm of the hand to the opposite side of the body or by administering a set of manipulations to the body's limbs (Zarrilli, 1992).

TRAINING AND THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE MASTER

The ability to control the vital energy and power in administering massage therapies is acquired by apprenticeship to the martial arts master. The apprentice's own progress toward psychophysiological mastery in practice *per se* is inseparable from his abilities as a potential healer. As he discovers the internal aspects of practice through exercise and thereby gains an intuitive ability to allow his internal energy to course through his body and limbs and as he is able to control and channel his power, he may eventually be allowed to begin to give massage therapies.

The student is usually introduced to "hands-on" therapies by learning hand massage for seven days and later foot massage for an additional seven to fifteen days. After ritually initiating the process, the master instructs the student as he demonstrates the massage on a student. The student learning the massage then administers the entire massage with the master giving corrections. The advanced student receiving the massage can also tell if too much or too little pressure is applied by the novice. When the first strokes are taught, the master may place his own hands on those of the student and literally guide and manipulate them.

Once the initial course of instruction is complete, the student is on his own. He is often put in charge of massaging the young students in training at a kalari. In this arduous repetitious administration of massage, the fledgling masseur eventually learns the correct amount of pressure to apply for appropriate body types and constitutions and further develops the practical ability to focus his concentration, control his power, and channel his energy out through his limbs, gradually sensitizing his hands and feet for more difficult tasks of diagnosis and therapy. The practical ability to direct the flow of his vital energy coalesces through practice. When a practitioner is able to heal as well as harm, he can be said to be approaching a higher level of accomplishment in this martial/medical tradition.



REFERENCES

- Charaka. (1949). *Charaka Samhita* (Vols I-VI). (Shree Gulab, Ed.). Jamnagar: Kunverba Ayurvedic Society.
- Gode, P. K. (1955). History of the practice of massage in ancient and medieval India. *Annals of the Bhandarkar*, 36:85-113.
- Mooss, Vayaskara N. S. (1983). *Ayurvedic treatments of Kerala*. Kottayam: Vaidyasarathy Press.
- Nair, C. T. S. (1983). *Massage (uliccil): An old method of treatment (Malayalam)*. Calicut: Cannannore Printing Works, Inc.
- Rosu, A., & Jobard, M. (1987). Arts de sante et techniques de massage en Inde. *Annales de Kinesitherapie*, 14, 3:87-91.
- Susruta. (1981). *The susruta samhita* (Vols I-III). (Kaviraj Kunjalal Bhishagratna, Trans. and Ed.). Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. (1984a). The transmission of performance knowledge in a traditional martial art. *Asian Theatre Journal*, 1, 1:191-206.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. (1984b). *The kathakali complex: Actor, performance, structure*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publishers.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. (1989). Three bodies of practice in a traditional south Indian martial art. *Social Science and Medicine*, 28, 2:1289-1309.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. (1992). To heal and/or to harm: The vital spots in two south Indian martial arts. *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, 1, 1:36-67; 1, 2:1-15.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. (1995a, forthcoming). Repositioning the body: An Indian martial art and its modern pan-Asian publics. *Modern Sites: Cultures and Contestation in a Postcolonial World*. (Carol A. Breckenridge, Ed.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. (1995b, forthcoming). Back toward the next millennium: [Re]considering history, discourses/representations, and positionality in the Indian arts through Kerala's kalarippayattu and kathakali. *Culture in the New Millenia—Classical dance*. (Shanta Serbjeet Singh, Ed.). New Delhi: Wiley Eastern Ltd.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. (1994c). Actualizing power(s) and crafting a self in martial practice: Kalarippayattu, a south Indian martial art and the yoga and ayurvedic paradigms. *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, 3, 3:10-51.

NOTES

¹ A note on diacritics: technical terms which appear in this essay have not been transliterated from Malayalam or Sanskrit due to technical difficulties and additional expense.

² This report includes extensive photographic documentation of specific massage therapies. The reader should be aware that it is extremely dangerous to attempt any of these techniques without undergoing instruction from a certified traditional master of these techniques. Serious injury might result from any unqualified, uncertified use of the techniques documented here.

³ Before his death, Chirakkal T. Sreedharan Nair (1983) published a manual (in Malayalam) describing these primary modes of therapeutic massage. See also Rosu and Jobard (1987) for an illustrated description of techniques.

⁴ For a more complete account of these emergency counter-applications among both *kalaripayattu* and *varma ati* practitioners, see Zarrilli, 1992.