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FIRM FEET AND INNER WIND: INTRODUCING POSTURE IN THE SOUTH INDIAN MARTIAL ART, KAḶARIPPAYARR̥

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Abstract

KaḶarippayarr̥ developed as an intertwined martial and medical system in various styles across South India. While its final śāstric authority resides in the body and practice of a *gurukkaḷ* (“lineage-holder”), in contrast to *haṭhayoga* contexts, a *kaḶarippayarr̥ gurukkaḷ* safeguards, consults and transmits his lineage’s manuscripts and thus this relationship between practice and text offers potential insight into traditions where that connection is either lost or never existed. Like yogis, practitioners of *kaḶarippayarr̥* conceive it as a form where the gross physical body is employed to activate and affect a subtler inner body with which it is fundamentally interconnected. Focussing on the CVN lineage of “northern style” or “Malabar” *kaḶarippayarr̥* and drawing on both its practices and manuscripts, this chapter examines how *vaṭiv̥* (“posture”) relates to the inner *kaḶari* body and how the foundational principle of *cuvāṭ̣*, the action of the feet, initiates the circulation of *vāyu*, a subtle inner wind that gives virtuosity in *kaḶarippayarr̥*. I also consider how this lineage differentiates the control of *vāyu* in *kaḶarippayarr̥* with what is perceived to be the deeper *prāṇa* accessed by the more static *āsanas* of *haṭhayoga*.

KEYWORDS

KaḶarippayarr̥, Martial Art, Posture, South India, *Vāyu*.

Introduction

In a volume which seeks to examine the relationship of *haṭhayoga* to other Indian physical disciplines, the role of posture in these presents an obvious starting point, and so this chapter offers an introductory study of posture in the South Indian martial art *kaḷarippayarr̥*¹ as practised at CVN² Kalari Sangham in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) in Kerala. Specifically, I examine the interplay between instructions contained in the CVN lineage manuscripts and the actuality of the lived physical practice. In comparison to the much more substantial body of work in the field of Yoga Studies, scholarship on the relationship between practice and text in *kaḷarippayarr̥* is in its infancy. However, whereas texts have little or no connection to the lived physical practice of contemporary ascetic yoga practitioners (Bevilacqua 2018: 191), there is a living interplay in *kaḷarippayarr̥* between the practice of each lineage-holder and his textual inheritance, suggesting potential insight into the imbrications of text and practice in fields where that connection, where it existed, has ruptured. While intrinsically distinct, aspects of yoga share many similarities with *kaḷarippayarr̥*, including a conception of the body broadly common to various Indic traditions (Sieler 2015: 8) and related religious contexts. Following an introduction to the wider context of *kaḷarippayarr̥* and the CVN lineage in particular, an outline of the *kaḷari* body, and the role of *vāyu* (“wind”) in the practice, I examine the nature and role of *vaṭiv̥* (“posture”) in *kaḷarippayarr̥*, and tender some reflections on its relationship to *yogāsana*.

To do so, I draw on my relationship with CVN Kalari Trivandrum that began in 2002, and has since 2010 included seven extended periods of intensive study and training.³

¹ For Malayalam, I follow the ISO 15919 transliteration of Devanagari and related Indic scripts into Latin characters, with the exception that I retain the *candrakala* (ँ), a symbol denoting the half *u* according to its originator, Hermann Gundert (1872: xi), or the schwa vowel /ə/ according to Ophira Gamliel (2020: 7). Regarding the pronunciation of the word *kaḷarippayarr̥*, note that the Malayalam phoneme *ra* when doubled is pronounced similarly to an English hard *t*, which accounts for the confusing multiplicity of the martial art’s spellings in Roman script. While *kaḷarippayarr̥* operates in Kerala where Malayalam dominates, the language has many regional variations, and Sanskrit, Tamil and Tulu terms are also common. Where words are generally familiar from Sanskrit, I retain their Sanskrit orthography following the conventions of IAST. Regarding the names of deities and where Sanskrit and Malayalam terms are in compound (e.g. *kaḷaricikitsa*), I adhere to Malayalam orthography. In Tamil, I follow Roman Sieler (2015).

² The initials are those of the founder of the lineage, Chambadan Veedu Narayanan Nair.

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In 2012, I was initiated into *kaḷarippayarr̥*'s medical system, learning its therapeutic massage (*uliccal*) at the hands of the *gurukkaḷ* ("lineage-holder")—a phrase which speaks to the place of physical transmission in this practice—by *gurukkaḷ* G. Sathyanarayanan Nair (hereafter Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*).⁴ In addition to training daily in the martial art, mainly under the guidance of the *kaḷari*'s senior teacher, N. Rajasekharan Nair, I attended forty hours of individualised *kaḷaricikitsa* ("kaḷari medicine") classes with the *gurukkaḷ* and his wife, the *kaḷari*'s Ayurvedic doctor, Sandhya P. J., B.A.M.S.,⁵ and I observed and assisted daily in the *kaḷari* clinic over a period of two months. From this, I draw much of my understanding of the *kaḷari* body.⁶ At this time, on Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*'s suggestion, we began together a documentation project, seeking to articulate aspects of *kaḷarippayarr̥* we both felt previous studies had omitted, which established the pattern for my ongoing research. These investigations have found a more academic framework since 2017 and are presently the locus of my doctoral research, so that what began as training and investigation related to my dance practice is now being remade as ethnography. My research was co-initiated with Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* and its ongoing co-creation with him follows a decolonial methodology.⁷ Our conversations, from which I draw extensively, evolved over many years, and Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* stresses that the views expressed are particular to him and not necessarily universal among *kaḷarippayarr̥ gurukkaḷ*s. He spoke spontaneously during our exchanges and would likely frame his

⁴ As Nair is a widespread family and caste name in Kerala and a number of people at the *kaḷari* share it, I henceforth refer to him as Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*.

⁵ Bachelor in Ayurveda, Medicine and Surgery.

⁶ I adopt the phrase "*kaḷari* body" from its frequent use at CVN Kalari. Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* uses it to describe both a physical body shaped by regular practice of *kaḷarippayarr̥* and the inner body associated with it. Implicit in the term is the acknowledgment that while the *kaḷari* body is related to other Indic understandings of the inner body, it remains specific to its *kaḷari* context.

⁷ This research fulfils Linda Tuhiwai Smith's criteria for indigenous and decolonial research practices to "tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology" (2012: 15–16), and her suggestion that the ownership, scope, control and benefit of research be shared between the community in which it is conducted and the researcher (ibid.: 10). Regarding Graham Smith's four models by which non-indigenous researchers may ethically undertake culturally appropriate research, mine sits somewhere between the *tiaki* model, in which authoritative indigenous people guide it, and the *whangai* model, in which a researcher forms life-long relationships with the people and communities involved, and is incorporated into their daily lives (ibid.: 179–180). As attitudes towards both race and gender intersect with perceptions of the body and practice, a feature of this decolonial approach is to strive to give equal weight and credit to embodied and ethnographic elements of the research as I do to textual sources. This includes specifying dates of the many interviews conducted with Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* rather than citing them as an undifferentiated event, equivalent to how I separate texts written by a single scholar over a period of time when citing them.

thoughts differently were he to lecture more formally on the subject. As with us all, his views are not static and themselves develop over time. As such, the interweaving of the material in this chapter is my own, as are its conclusions and any errors therein.

This study began with and remains rooted in practice, and the importance of my other somatic experience (dance since 1975 and formal yoga since 1992) has become increasingly clear over time, because it informs and shapes the dialogue between us, and has given me access to information that is not usually shared. Such information is normally withheld because, as with many Indic systems, there are degrees of initiation within *kaḷarippayarr̥* granting progressive access which is only fully realised by a lineage-holder. The medical knowledge is given only to students judged to possess particular qualities who are, moreover, committed seriously to practising *kaḷaricikitsa*, and the contents of manuscripts are customarily only transmitted to someone in the process of becoming a teacher, and then only partially, with a more substantial transmission occurring between a lineage-holder and his inheritor. While *kaḷarippayarr̥* is male-dominated, it has never been all male⁸ in its medical practice because of the prohibitions on massaging patients of another gender, and in its martial aspect because girls historically trained alongside boys until puberty. Furthermore, while certain castes were historically privileged, *kaḷarippayarr̥* was and continues to be practised across Kerala's many social and religious groups, and since the 1970s has included a small but steady stream of non-Indian students, with Cécile Gordon and Phillip Zarrilli probably the most prominent among these. The true locus of a *kaḷari śāstra*, in its martial, medical and ritual expressions, is the embodied practice of its lineage-holder, its *gurukkaḷ*, whatever the reverence given to manuscripts (Zarrilli 1998: 92–93). Thus theory not underpinned with deeply embodied understanding is poorly regarded at the *kaḷari*, where *kaḷarippayarr̥* is described by Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* as a “practising tradition” (personal correspondence, 2 January 2018). My notes from our discussions, together with approximately twenty hours of recorded interviews between 2012 and 2018, my records of the *kaḷaricikitsā* teachings, and what embodied knowledge I have gleaned from many hours of physical training at the *kaḷari*, form the basis of this chapter.

Various styles of *kaḷarippayarr̥* originate in Southwest India, from southern Karnataka, crossing Kerala, to the southern tip of what is now Tamil Nadu. Broadly, “northern style” or Malabar *kaḷarippayarr̥*'s language is Malayalam, its medical practice Ayurvedic, and Paraśurāma, the axe-wielding incarnation of the god Viṣṇu, is cited as its founder.

⁸ Roman Sieler observes a similar phenomenon in *kaḷarippayarr̥*'s southern counterpart, *varmakalai* (2015: 5).

Northern style is practised in *kalāris*, a term referring to the temple-building housing the practice, as well the martial art itself (*kalāri* is a colloquial abbreviation of *kalārippayarr̥*). In contrast, “southern style” *kalārippayarr̥*, more correctly *varmakalai*, is concentrated in the far south, in Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli districts of Tamil Nadu, and the southernmost portions of Kerala. Its language is Tamil, its medical system Siddha, and practitioners normally invoke the sage Akastiyar (Sanskrit: Agastya) as the founder (Sieler 2015: 47–49).⁹ CVN Kalari Trivandrum belongs to the northern style of *kalārippayarr̥*, despite its geographical situation in the southern heartlands.

Even within northern style lineages, there are distinctions in the understanding of the focus and purpose of *kalārippayarr̥*, most obviously that traditions differ in the extent to which ritual and religious life play a part, and that practice is not homogenous. Laura Silvestri (2013: 15; 2015: 7) notes that codified verbal instructions (*vāyttāri*) and named postures can correspond to different movements in different schools as the set forms (*meypayarr̥*) of lineages differ. Emphasis on weapons or empty-handed practice may also vary (Sieler 2015: 122). Each school draws from its own particular manuscripts, passed down through the lineage-holder’s family. CVN Kalari Sangham Trivandrum emphasises the importance of training in a ritualised, mythologised environment, an atmosphere understood as essential to enabling the form’s transformative aspects. Silvestri’s (2013: 7) experience, learning from a Muslim *gurukkaḷ* who prefers to keep practice as secular as possible, is very different in this respect. These are not superficial discrepancies but result in a fundamental shift in the focus and purpose of *kalārippayarr̥* among lineages. An important reason to focus on a single lineage is the value placed on loyalty noted by Silvestri (2013: 24), an unsurprising emphasis given that *kalārippayarr̥* is transmitted via *guru-śiṣya-paramparā* (“teacher-student line-age”), implying close relationship between student and teacher, a certain exclusivity, and the requirement for particular qualities in a student. For all these reasons, this chapter is exclusively focussed on the CVN lineage of practice and texts.

CVN Kalari: Context and Background

The mythical origin of northern style *kalārippayarr̥* is intertwined with the birth of the land of Kerala in the figure of Paraśurāma, the warrior *avatāra* of the god Viṣṇu, credited with founding them both. The two main sources for the account shared by Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* of the origins of *kalārippayarr̥* are the family manuscripts, which he estimates to be at least 300 years old, and the recension of the *Kēraḷōlpatti* (*The Birth of*

⁹ On the geography of *varmakalai* see Sieler 2015: 10–16; on its training grounds, see Sieler 2015: 99; for an overview of *varmakalai*’s martial and medical systems, see Sieler 2015: 98–132.

Kerala, 1868) edited by the 19th-century German missionary and philologist, Hermann Gundert.¹⁰ The story goes that Paraśurāma, “a north Indian person [...] an āryan brahmin”¹¹ came south to Gokarna, and from the Western Ghats discovered the land of Kerala, though whether he did so or not by throwing his axe into the sea and thus causing the waters to recede depends on which version you follow. After clearing the land of its snake infestation, he brought Brahman families down from the north, making them caretakers of the new land and commanding them to learn *āyudhavidya*, “weapons technique,” though implicit in this, according to Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*, is the concept of working with the body. The family manuscripts name four *illam*, households of extended matrilineal Brahman families: Ugraṁvaḷḷi, Drōṇaṁvaḷḷi, Uḷḷutturuttiyāṭ and Ghōraṁvaḷḷi (10 December 2012).¹² CVN’s lineage is Drōṇaṁvaḷḷi’s, of which there are two *sampradāyas* (“traditions”), *piḷḷatāṇṇi* and *aṛappukkaiyan*, the latter practised at CVN. Enclosed to the west by the Arabian Sea, to the north and east by mountains, *kaḷarippayaṛṛ* was bounded to the south by the Korapuzha, a river flowing through Kozhikode (Calicut) district, beyond which it was not permissible to teach, hence its “northern style” appellation (7 December 2012). In fact, Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*’s father, C. V. Govindankutty Nair, was the first person to bring Malabar *kaḷarippayaṛṛ* south into Travancore when he was invited to teach near Kottayam some years before establishing the present *kaḷari* in Thiruvananthapuram. This was founded in 1956, shortly after the creation of the modern state of Kerala, when, wishful for the capital of the new state to house a representative of this north Keralan art, the Travancore royal family invited him to establish the present *kaḷari* at East Fort.

It is unclear exactly how far back the practice of *kaḷarippayaṛṛ* extends, although Zarrilli (1998: 25) argues that the Tamil roots of the word trace to the 1st century CE, while the martial system probably assumed a version of its present form around the 11th or 12th centuries. The term *kaḷari* is context-dependent and polyvalent in Malayalam and does not necessarily relate to the martial art, and Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* believes that while the Tamil connection is probably true for southern style, the Malabar *kaḷari* traditions are likely more closely related, both etymologically and in practice, to the roughly similar “*garadis*” of Tulu Nadu that existed over a similar time period (4 December 2018; see Naṁdāvara 2011). There is much work to be done before we can establish the detail of *kaḷarippayaṛṛ*’s history with any certainty. However, we do know that by the late 19th

¹⁰ For a helpful analysis, see “The *Kēraḷōḷpatti* as History” in Veluthat 2010: 129–146.

¹¹ All quotations hereafter, unless otherwise specified, are of G. Sathyanarayanan Nair, Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*.

¹² Unless otherwise stated, dates in this format refer to interviews with G. Sathyanarayanan Nair, Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*.

century, due to various invasions and political upheavals (Tarabout 1986: 12), *kaḷarippayarr̥* was nearly extinct and only two lineages survived. What we now know of *kaḷarippayarr̥* derives from two main figures in its revival, Mudavungattil Sankunni Panikkar of Vallabhatta Kalari from the Thrissur district of central Kerala (Vallabhatta Kalari n.d.), and Kottackal Kanaran Gurukkal (1850–1935) from whom the CVN lineage derives, both credited with gathering what knowledge remained and developing their own methods. A *brahmacārī* (“celibate”) of the *tiyyar* community, Kottackal Kanaran Gurukkal was around seventy-six years of age when he met Chambadan Veedu Narayanan Nair (CVN), who was about twelve or thirteen years of age at the time, and despite social disapproval of an upper-class *nāyar* boy touching the feet of a lower-caste *tiyyar* teacher, Kottackal Kanaran Gurukkal was invited to establish a *kaḷari* in the family compound in Thalassery (10 December 2012). He and his student were instrumental in the early 20th-century revival of *kaḷarippayarr̥*, travelling around Kerala giving demonstrations, while C. V. Balan Nair, C. V. Narayanan’s younger brother, played an important role in documenting material and continuing the instruction of C. V. Narayanan’s eldest son, C. V. Govindankutty Nair, following his father’s premature demise. As with the modern resurgence of yoga in India, the revival of *kaḷarippayarr̥* took place at the time of burgeoning Indian independence when the valorisation of the Indian body in response to demeaning colonial stereotypes took on particular political significance (see Singleton, 2010: 98–111). Further parallels, in particular with T. Krishnamacharya’s role in the early 20th-century popularisation of yoga, include the use of demonstrations and royal patronage.

The *kaḷari* in which practice takes place is essentially a temple, complete with installed deities, where CVN Kalari follows the Tantric Śiva-Śakti *saṃkalpa*¹³ of its Brahmanic *paramparā* (“lineage”), which coheres with its Śaiva Tantric articulation of the *kaḷari* body (see below). The present *kaḷari* building at East Fort follows the stipulations of *vāstuśāstra* (“the rules of Indic architecture”). These stipulate that a *kaḷari*’s width equal its height at the centre, each measuring twenty-one *padam̐*, where a *padam̐* is equivalent to eight *aṅgulaṃ* and an *aṅgulaṃ* is the distance from the middle knuckle of the right thumb to the thumb-tip. The *kaḷari*’s length, at forty-two *padam̐*, should be double these. However, in the improvisation often noted when śāstric building theory meets prosaic concrete limitation (Parker 2003: 12; Raz 1834: 15–16), the dimensions of the *kaḷari* at East Fort are smaller than what is laid out in the manuscripts due to the size of the plot of land available, with the length measuring approximately thirty-seven *padam̐*,

¹³ This polyvalent term refers to the conception of divinity that animates the various aspects of the *kaḷari*’s space and practices (10 December 2012).

although the traditional proportions are retained (personal communication, 23 May 2020).

The *kaḷari* is conceived to support practice, an enclosed space set below ground “like a cocoon” (20 December 2012), with the circulation of air designed to keep it relatively cool while avoiding detrimental contact between direct wind and sweating bodies. The *kaḷari* is also designed to nurture positive mental attributes of humility, devotion and focus in the practitioner. Each person ritually touches the packed-earth floor, then the forehead and heart upon entry, and then circumambulates the space, repeating this salutation to the *kaḷari*’s many gods and *gurus*. While popular representations of these are placed around the *kaḷari*, all but two of the installed deities are abstract in form and unrecognisable to the uninitiated. In its southwestern corner, the *kaḷari*’s primary deity is Kālabhairava and Kālabhairavi combined (Dark Terrible Śiva and Śakti). Next, along the western wall, are the Nāga *saṃkalpa*, then Gaṇapati (Gaṇeśa), represented as serpent and elephant respectively. Next is the *gurupīṭhaṃ*, where the lineage’s teachers are honoured, followed by Antimahākāḷan (an incarnation of Śiva) in the northwest. Bhadrakālī (the fierce form of the goddess Kālī) is in the northeast, and Vēṭṭaykkorumakan (a Kerala hunter god, son of Śiva and Pārvati) in the southeast (10 December 2012; personal communication, 12 August 2018).

Śarīra Saṃkalpa of Kaḷari: The Kaḷari Conception of the Body

It is significant that the *gurukkaḷ* combines the role of full-time medical practitioner with responsibility for the martial lineage.¹⁴ In this, he stands at the confluence of related but distinct streams of knowledge, resulting in a somatic understanding of unusual depth. *Kaḷaricikitsa* is rooted in Ayurveda, although its practitioners define it as a specialised branch of this, with distinct medicines, practices and treatments. The active symbiosis of the two traditions can be seen at work in the busy *kaḷari* clinic, overseen by Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* and his wife Sandhya P. J., now joined by their son, S. Sandeep, who also embody the hereditary principle as the eighth and ninth generation of Ayurvedic doctors of her family. Similarly to the embodied transmission of *varma maruttuvam*, southern style’s medical system (Sieler 2015: 20), knowledge of *kaḷaricikitsa* is transmitted practically via the traditional Indian form of apprenticeship.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, information in this section comes from *kaḷaricikitsa* tutorials with Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* and the *kaḷari*’s Ayurvedic doctor, Sandhya P. J. B.A.M.S., at CVN Kalari Sangham, Thiruvananthapuram, between 7 November and 21 December 2012.

The *kalari* conception of the body is broadly recognisable to anyone familiar with the Indic traditions of Ayurveda, yoga and Tantra, although *kalariṣṭayār* has its own particular articulation within this larger picture. CVN Kalari's manuscripts describe ninety-six *tattvas* ("principles") (1 December 2012). While this differs from the twenty-five numbered by Sāṃkhya (Burley 2007: 180) that are found in yoga contexts, it coheres with the number of *tattvas* described in the Siddha medical system (see Iyer 1933: 41–50) and thus points to the complex imbrication of influences on *kalariṣṭayār*. The foundational *tattvas* are common to all three, so that the building blocks of all manifestation are the *pañcamahābhūtas* ("five great elements"): *ākāśa* ("space"), *vāyu* ("wind" or "air"), *agni* ("fire"), *jalam* ("water"), and *prthvī* ("earth"). All manifest existence is imbued with *guṇas* ("qualities"). These are: *sattva*, described as brilliance, balance, equanimity, stability, and the necessary quality for a suitable practitioner of *kalaricikitsa* or any student wishful to penetrate the deepest layers of the martial art; *rajas*, described as activity, movement, and a tendency in a person to reactivity or to be led by ego; and *tamas*, described as inactivity, darkness, and in a person the tendencies to laziness, moodiness, lack of focus and projection of personal faults onto others. One of the *kalari*'s Malayalam verses compares *sattva* to calm water which is adaptable to what comes, *rajas* to boiling water which moves too much to take anything in, and *tamas* to stagnant water (22 November 2012).

The *pañcamahābhūtas* manifest in people in three forms: as *doṣas* (so-called "humours"), *dhātus* ("body tissues"), and *malas* ("waste products").¹⁵ Together, *dhātus* and *malas* form the *sthūla śārīra*, the "gross physical body," which is understood as inactive and unconscious unless animated by *ātman*. *Sūkṣma śārīra*, the "subtle body," cannot be physically touched or felt. It includes *manas*, which bridges *ātman* and the *pañcamahābhūtas* and controls the *pañcendriyas* ("the faculties of hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell"). Whereas *manas* acts as an information processing system, *buddhi* encompasses the intellectual consciousness of a person and the capacity for judgement, its character determined by a person's individual balance of *guṇas*. For someone to be healthy, the physical body, mental psychology, intellectual and spiritual faculties, thus both *sthūla* and *sūkṣma śārīras*, must harmonise (27 November 2012).

The *doṣas*, which can easily be disturbed, are formed in the *koṣṭha*, a channel running from mouth to anus, which is conceived as a central system of the body and is roughly, though not exactly, equivalent to the modern anatomical concept of the alimentary tract. From their genesis in the *koṣṭha*, the *doṣas* transfer to the *dhātus* of the body and are in time eliminated in various forms as *malas*. *Kaphadoṣa*, comprised of earth and

¹⁵ See Wujastyk 2003: xvii–xviii for an overview of these.

water, has its seat in the thoracic cavity, stomach and head, and gives a body cohesion, shape, firmness, resilience and coolness. It binds the body and is involved in the building of all cells and tissues. *Pittadoṣa*, of fire and water, is seated in the small intestine and governs the body's metabolic functioning and the energy released by the body's biochemical processes. *Vāradoṣa*, which can be felt but not seen, is of air, is seated in the *koṣṭha*, and is the most important *doṣa* in the context of *kaḷarippayaṛṛ*, both because it governs movement, and because it sets the other two *doṣas* in motion (28 November 2012).

Understanding the subtle workings of the body is indispensable to a knowledge of the functioning of the gross physical vehicle, as each is intimately embedded in and affects the other. Essential to this is the movement of *prāṇa*, a term mentioned as early as the *R̥g Veda*,¹⁶ which is often substituted at the *kaḷari* with the words *vāyu* or breath, indicative of *prāṇa*'s double-meaning as both physical breath and subtle life-force, and the implicit relationship between the two. The *kaḷari* recognises seventy-two thousand conduits of *prāṇa*, called *nāḍīs*, a number dating back to *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.¹⁷ The tradition refers to its system of *prāṇa* distribution as its *kaḷari nāḍī sampradāya*, although somewhat confusingly, the term *nāḍī* refers both to *saṃjñā vāhana*, the signal carriers or nerves of *sthūla śarīra*, the “physical body,” and also to *ūrja vāhana*, the life-force carrier of *sūkṣma śarīra*, the “subtle body,” the latter conceived as common both to *kaḷarippayaṛṛ* and the Tantric body adopted by much of yoga. Thus the term *mahānāḍī* can refer both to the spinal cord and to *suṣumṇā nāḍī*. The *kaḷari* body also contains three hundred and sixty bones, thirty million skin pores, ten winds (*vātas*) and one hundred and seven *marmmaṃ* (Sanskrit *marman*), often translated as “lethal spots” because of the word's derivation from the Sanskrit root *√mr* (meaning die or kill), although Sieler's (2015: 2) translation of “vital spots” is more helpfully indicative of their function.

The most important conduits of *prāṇa* are the seven *mahānāḍīs*. Chief amongst these is *suṣumṇā*, which travels along the central axis of the body, the spine. The *kaḷari*'s manuscripts describe its origin two finger-widths below the penile shaft (as in Ayurveda and yoga, the reference-body in *kaḷari* is always male) and two finger-widths above the

¹⁶ *rayir na citrā sūro na sandrgāyur na prāṇo nityo na sūnuḥ ||* (*R̥g Veda*, 1.66.1).

¹⁷ *kena punaḥ krameṇa suṣupto bhavati? ityucyate-hitā nāma hitā ityevaṃnāmnyo nāḍyaḥ śīrā dehasyānnara-saviṇḍābhūtāḥ, tāśca dvāsaptatiḥ sahasrāṇi, dve sahasre adhike saptatiśca sahasrāṇi tā dvāsaptatiḥ sahasrāṇi, hṛdayāt-hṛdayaṃ nāma māṃsapinḍaḥ-tasmānmāṃsapinḍātpuṇḍarikākārāt, purītatam hṛdayapariveṣṭanamā-cakṣate, tadupalakṣitam śarīramiha purītatamabhipratiṣṭhanta iti śarīram kṛtsnam vyāpnuvatyo 'śvatthapārṇarājaya iva bahirmukhyah pravṛttā ityarthah |* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 2.1.19).

rectal shaft. It is shaped like a hollow bamboo stick, cut diagonally at the bottom, underneath which tip is situated *mūlādhāra* (“root location,” see below). The seven *mahānāḍīs* originate in *mūlādhāra* and pass through *nāḍikāṇḍa*, from which all other *nāḍīs* emanate. *Nāḍikāṇḍa* is said to resemble an egg-shaped potato situated on all four sides of *maṇipūra* (see below), and from it emerges upwards a stem with four faces. This stem divides into four *nāḍīs*, which further subdivide into all the body’s other *nāḍīs* (4 December 2012).

As observed by Alexis Sanderson (1988: 687–688), while the system of six *cakras* (literally “wheels,” but also understood as “power centres”) in time became ubiquitous throughout India, the only traditions in which it originally occurred were the Kaula cult of Kubjikā and the cult of Tripurasundarī. More commonly referred to as *ādhāras* (“locations,” “supports”) in the *kaḷari* system, a term shared with early South Indian texts such as the circa 13th-century Śaiva Tantric *Matsyendrasaṃhitā* (Kiss 2009: 97), the *kaḷari* manuscripts adhere to this number, emblematic of *kaḷarippayār*’s Tantric antecedents, and describe six principle *ādhāras* along *suṣumṇā nāḍī*. *Mūlādhāra* consists of three petals and is molten gold in colour. *Kuṇḍalinī śakti* resides here in eight folds, and Śiva as *agnisvarūpaṃ* (Śiva in the form of Agni) is the presiding deity. Two finger-widths above *mūlādhāra*, at the *liṅgamūla* (“root of the penis”), Śiva as *brahmasvarūpaṃ* (in the shape of Brahma) presides over *svādhiṣṭhāna*, which is square and blood-red. Ten finger-widths above this, at the level of the navel, Śiva resides in *maṇipūra* with the brightness of Sūrya, again as *agnisvarūpaṃ*. *Maṇipūra* consists of ten petals and is the colour of fire. All food is digested by this particular *agni*. A further fourteen finger-widths above, at the heart, is *anāhata*, which is the colour of lightning and consists of twelve petals. Here Śiva presides as Viṣṇu *jīvarūpaṃ*, the giver of life-force. Six finger-widths above *anāhata*, at *śuddhi*, presides Śiva as Candra *amṛtasvarūpaṃ* (“in the form of the nectar of immortality”). Located at the root of the collarbone, *śuddhi* is made of six petals, and is the colour of glass. At the centre of the brow, nine finger-widths above *śuddhi*, is *ājñā*. *Ājñā* is “most blue” and consists of two petals. Śiva resides here, *sarvabhūtarūpaṃ*, in the form of all beings, all-pervading. The manuscripts describe a hole at the top of *suṣumṇā nāḍī*,¹⁸ looking down from which is *kapāla padma*, a thirty-two-petalled flower, where Śiva presides over *suṣumṇā nāḍī* as Sadāśiva (“ever-auspicious”) (4 December 2012).

The *marmmaṃ* system of northern-style Malabar *kaḷaris* derives from Ayurveda, unlike Siddha-inspired *varma maruttuvam* (Sieler 2015), and *kaḷari*’s model of *marmmaṃ* differs to varying degrees both from those of Ayurveda and *varma maruttuvam*. Others have

¹⁸ Possibly the *daśamadvāra*, as described by Mallinson and Singleton (2017: 178).

noted the difficulty of resolving the polyphony of *marmmaṃ* theories into a consistent whole.¹⁹ At CVN Kalari, a *marmmaṃ* is the location of a pulsation of air (*vāyu*), which causes pain or discomfort if compressed, *marmmaṃs'* relationship to *vāyu* being indicative of their role in the distribution of the body's life-force, *prāṇa*. Direct injury to such a point, either by cutting, bruising or infection, can cause death. The *kaḷari* shares its number of *marmmaṃ*, one hundred and seven, with Ayurveda's *Suśrutasamhitā*, but claims greater specificity in its descriptions of symptoms and remedies for *marmmaṃ* injuries (10 and 12 December 2012).

In this way, it should be understood that the *kaḷari*'s conception of the body is one in which prosaic physical matter is intimately connected with the subtle body, and that each profoundly influences the other. Thus, in another parallel with yoga, the gross physical body can be employed as an instrument to access and affect the more ineffable aspects of the subtle body. According to Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*, the entire *siddhānta* ("founding principles") of *kaḷarippayarr̥* turn on this understanding, so that the deepest levels of practice of the martial system create a change in something more than the physical body, and ultimately, the practitioner's development should go beyond the physical.

Vāyu and Kaḷarippayarr̥

Vāyu ("wind" or "air") plays a central role in *kaḷarippayarr̥*, in a similar manner to the notion of *prāṇa* in many yoga contexts (Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 128–29, 173–74). The *kaḷari* recognises three types of *vāyu*: *śvāsaṃ*, the "physical breath," *vāta*, and *prāṇa* as *ūrja vāhana*, the "life-force carrier." The terms air, breath, *vāyu*, *vāta* and (less often) *prāṇa* are frequently used interchangeably at the *kaḷari*. It is a practitioner's *vāyu* which determines the quality of his or her *kaḷarippayarr̥*, and the control of *vāta* is directly related to the proficiency of the *kaḷari* physician. *Vāta* is understood as the driving force of life, and in its manifestation as *vāyu* is closely related to, and in some instances interchangeable with, *prāṇa* (4 December 2012). The architecture of the *kaḷari* reflects this sensitivity to *vāyu*, whose access and control is essential to the practice; it is built along an east-west axis, "because of the direction of the winds" (7 December 2012). *Vāyu* is intrinsic to the practitioner's ability to transcend the gross physical body and awaken the inner body, which enables access to the "heart of the art" (12 December 2013), and

¹⁹ Sieler (2015: 76) observes that: "While every practitioner knows and utilizes a particular set of vital spots, and classifies these into different categories, neither categories nor, it appears, the loci themselves are established, fixed concepts accepted by all," while Zarrilli (1998: 197) gathered fifteen different versions of the vital spot system.

its cultivation requires suitable mental qualities, which come from a healthy dose of *sattva guṇa*. The ritualised nature of the practice space and its atmosphere are held to nurture and support these desirable attributes.

A key point in the body for accessing and circulating *vāyu* is the *nābhimūla* which, conversely to its usual location at the navel in yoga contexts, is positioned lower in the *kaḷari* body.²⁰ According to the CVN manuscripts, the *nābhimūla* is a point inside *mūlādhāra*, two fingerwidths from both *gudādvāra* (the “anal opening”) and *liṅgamūla* (the “root of the penis”) (26 February 2020), from which all movement should originate and to which everything should connect. Most importantly, a practitioner’s virtuosity is dependent on circulating *vāyu* through the *nābhimūla* and originating all *kaḷarippayarr̥* movement from this point:

As a science of *nāḍīs* [...] [*kaḷarippayarr̥*] is essentially the circulation of energy. Instead of being a force from outside, it has to start as a force which is developed from inside. And that is the spine. And that’s where all the *nāḍī* things work. So that is the basis, and then slowly you start to release your centre. The centre means the *nābhimūla* becomes more focussed, you start using more and more air in that area, then you start holding, releasing the air from that part, and as you do that, the whole process starts to change, and your control of things also will change (3 October 2018).

Vāta is said to be more important than overt physical ability, and its mastery overcomes physical limitations:

Vāta is the thing which controls. Basically, it’s all about control. It’s not about force, but about controlling the force. This part is very important. You either connect to that deliberately by thinking about it, or just in the practice you get it. At one point, you start getting the fine control because the breath is used in a certain way. And even sometimes [if] the mind is disturbed [it] means you will not get it (ibid.).

Artistry in *kaḷarippayarr̥* is coterminous with the fine control of breath or *vāyu*, and the entire system of training is based on this fundamental understanding. “If you don’t

²⁰ For example, the circa 13th-century *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* describes the *dehamadhya* (“centre of the body”) as a point apparently identical to the *kaḷari* description of the *nābhimūla* (2.10), but goes on to describe a *nābhi* as the centre of a *kanda* (“bulb”) nine fingers above it and larger than the *kaḷari nābhimūla* (*Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 2.11-12).

have that, if that breath is out of your control, you will see it in the work also. You're not focussed physically. The skills get affected because of lack of control of breath" (14 December 2012). However, while Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* recounts stories of his grandfather, CVN, practising *prāṇāyāmas* ("breathing exercises") to give power in *cāṭṭams* ("jumps") (19 December 2012), these appear rare, and no explicit *prāṇāyāma* techniques are now taught in the *kaḷari*. Instead, in a conventional practice, physical virtuosity and command of *vāyu* are inseparable, where skill and correct attention in *kaḷarippayarr̥*'s corporal training internalises the process of mastering *vāyu*, whether the practitioner is consciously aware of this or not. Command of the external form brings with it the desired changes in the inner body:

You are becoming one with your *vāyu* so that you have better control of your body, without being aware of that. When your form becomes correct, your *vāyu* becomes right. Your breathing is the final thing which decides how good your form is (7 and 18 December 2012).

Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* emphasises the importance of mental equanimity in connecting to *vāyu*, while he also distinguishes between connecting "deliberately by thinking about it" and getting it "in the practice." Traditionally, the first possibility was unlikely, because these concepts would not be articulated to students until they reached the stage of becoming teachers themselves. Such principles are still in the main learnt through the regularity of physical practice and are not discussed. If mastered, students may or may not reflect on them and articulate them to themselves. It was, and is still, quite possible to embody these principles without intellectually knowing one embodies them.

Vaṭiṽ (Posture)

An obvious point of comparison with *āsana*, the Sanskrit term usually understood as "posture" in yoga contexts, is the use of *vaṭiṽ*, the Malayalam term denoting posture in *kaḷarippayarr̥*. I examine here how aspects of *vaṭiṽ* are described in Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*'s family texts in relation to what is physically practised in the *kaḷari*.²¹ Before exploring the detail of this, however, it is necessary briefly to outline the training process of *kaḷarippayarr̥* and where *vaṭiṽ* fits within this overall framework.

²¹ While the examples given here focus on the interplay of practice and text in the martial training aspect of *kaḷarippayarr̥*, I am unsure how this tension is expressed in medical applications and their relationship to both the material and inner *kaḷari* bodies. Further fieldwork is required to clarify this, which I hope to carry out during the course of my doctoral research.

There are three stages of training in *kaḷarippayarr̥*. The first two are considered the locus of “the real art inside the *kaḷari* system” (7 December 2012) and comprise *meyttāri*, “the body process,” the first stage of training for any new practitioner and the foundation for all other stages, and *kōlttāri*, “the process of wooden training weapons.” The third stage of training is *aṅkattāri*, “the metal weapons process.” *Vaṭiv̥* is first encountered within *meyttāri*, where principles of practice follow the fundamental sequence: *cuvāṭ̣*, *nila*, *nīkkaṁ*, which roughly equates to “feet, stance, move.” The importance of this sequence is illustrated by Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*’s emphasis that “First you must step, and then the posture, and you move in that posture” (3 October 2018).

Cuvāṭ̣ is the action of using the feet, and “is the primary component for everything else to take place” (ibid.). A teacher looks for a student to gain “stability of his feet,” a foundation taught via *kaḷarippayarr̥*’s eight codified leg exercises. “Stability of his feet” is acquired while moving the body through space, through the activity of the feet in the turning, balancing and gripping demanded by the leg exercises. While cultivating this “firmness of feet,” the student should also start to embody a sense of lightness and ease in movement, beginning to transcend crude physical effort. Such lightness is a sign that the *nābhimūla* is engaging in the process of moving. Placement of feet is one of the most frequent corrections we receive from N. Rajasekharan Nair in the *kaḷari*, and Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* asserts that “firmness of feet” must be attained before attempting posture (or anything else) in *kaḷarippayarr̥*:

Before you go for *nila*, you have to have the *cuvāṭ̣* fixed: how the feet are placed, how the feet are centred, how the feet get their lightness from the centre [*nābhimūla*], all that, and how they are connecting to the centre. All that is important (ibid.).

Nila, a general term for “stance” or “positioning,” occurs in various contexts in Malayalam, whereas *vaṭiv̥* is a more technical description of a *kaḷari* posture. In contrast to the stability usually associated with *yogāsana* (most famously in *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* 2.46),²² postures in this lineage of *kaḷarippayarr̥* are transitions between movements rather than the implied stillness of *yogāsana*, and while they should be fully realised, are not lingered over (8 October 2018). *Nīkkaṁ* refers to transitions between forms; essentially, they are the movement of *kaḷarippayarr̥*.

There are two kinds of text in *kaḷarippayarr̥*: *vāyttāri* and manuscripts. *Vāyttāri* are the codified verbal commands that accompany all aspects of practice, whereas the

²² *sthira-sukham āsanam* (“posture should be steady and comfortable”), *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*: 2.46 (translation Bryant 2009: 283).

manuscripts, in a process which I am still working to understand, appear to evolve over time. Each generation rewrites and updates the manuscripts, so that the original palm leaves, themselves copies of earlier versions before these disintegrated, now mainly seem to function as ritual objects, the centrepiece of the items laid out before the three goddesses worshipped at the annual rituals of *kaḷaripūja*. The lineage “manuscripts” referred to by each *gurukkaḷ* are not so much fixed objects as living, evolving entities. They tend to be closely guarded, passing between *gurukkaḷ* and his inheritor, and are not usually available to students of *kaḷarippayaṛ*. Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*’s manuscripts divide into three sections: practice, medicine and *mantras*. It is from handwritten copies he made for me of portions of his father’s rendition of the practice manuscripts that I take what follows.

An introductory section on *vaṭiv* instructs the following: that the student should touch the feet of the *guru* and take his blessing, that these techniques are “something deadly” and thus not to be divulged “to people with criminal tendencies,” and that this is “special knowledge, superior to other techniques, *śreṣṭhama upavidya*.” The practitioner should “pray” the *mantras* associated with the postures to obtain the *siddhi* (“special power”) of the *mantra*, which comes from repeated chanting. It goes on to name four *vaṭiv* *mūla* (“root”) *mantras*: *gaṇapati mantram*, *narasiṃha mantram*, *aśva ārūḍham*, *varāhi* (4 October 2018), which correspond to the names of four of the eight CVN Kalari *vaṭiv*.

Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* highlights a foundational passage on *vaṭiv*²³ that links breath, *vāyu* and the action of the feet, interpreting it thus:

When you are firmly in the posture, that is, when you are assuming the stance, you have to hold your breath in the *nābhimūla* and also in the finger of the feet (i.e., toes) which are on the ground, and with the breath you have to get *balam* (“strength”). You have to gain the strength from the breath. Literally, that is the thing. But technically, how it is done, it’s more like a practice (8 October 2018).

Thus, as mentioned previously, the embodiment of these principles is taught in the practice rather than verbalised to a student. Fundamental is that the practitioner should be “firmly in the posture,” hence the necessity of the “firmness of feet” learnt in *cuvāṭ* prefiguring *vaṭiv*. This activity of feet is emphasised by the term *ūnnukāl*, which is: “Not the whole foot but where the feet are really firmly gripping the ground. This is

²³ *vaṭivīṅkal uraṇunilkumpōḷ, nābhimūlattilum, pinne ūnnukālilum, nannāyi śvāsatte urappicc, balam nēnnu koḷḷuka vēṇam.*

when you are gripping hard” (4 October 2018). The notion that the “breath” should be concentrated in the feet as well as in the *nābhimūla* becomes more accessible when we remember the equivalence at the *kaḷari* between breath and *vāyu*. Here, what Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* refers to as “a natural suction of the feet,” which motors this *vāyu*, mirrors the diaphragmatic breath, with a cycling of gripping (inhalation) and releasing (exhalation), generating the wind which circulates through the triangle of the feet and *nābhimūla*, which is then redistributed through the body by the *nābhimūla*, feeding this cycle of breath, feet and ground, and activating the circulation of *vāyu* (8 October 2018):

Because when there is a connection between these triangles of the *nābhimūla* and the two feet, then that force changes. It starts to become more like, I would say it’s more like a circulating force. Because it connects to the centre, goes back to the feet and then comes back to the centre again. That movement always is happening. That’s the way it is designed, so that there it is coming, drawing back to the centre and releasing from the centre, drawing from the centre and going out. This is the way it works each time.

This active connection of feet, *nābhimūla* and breath underlies the practice of all *vaṭiv*, of which there are eight in the CVN lineage. First come *gaja* (“elephant”), *siṃha* (“lion”), *aśva* (“horse”) and *varāha* (“wild boar”), followed by *sarpa* (“serpent”), *mārjara* (“cat”), *matsya* (“fish”) and *kukkuṭa* (“rooster”). In an illustration of the importance traditionally given to practice over discussion, it is a relatively recent phenomenon that students know the names of these postures. Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* recounts that it was only when he started translating between his father and Zarrilli, by which time he was already winner of several state competitions and a full-time apprentice in the *kaḷari* clinic, that he learnt that *vaṭiv* have names. Before then, he knew them from the *vāyttāri*, the codified verbal commands, most commonly *amarṇṇ* (“crouch”).

From the principles of feet and *vāyu* applicable to all *vaṭiv*, I turn now to the examination of one posture in detail, *aśvavaṭiv* (“horse posture”). A common format of CVN manuscript *vaṭiv* descriptions is to begin with instruction of how to make a posture, followed by a description of that posture’s applications. The description of *aśvavaṭiv* follows this structure, with the first section explaining how to enter the *vaṭiv*.²⁴ Its title makes clear this should happen sequentially: “*aśva nila kramam*,” the

²⁴ *aśva vaṭiv* (*aśvanilakramam*)

valatt kāl valapure nikkicavuṭṭi. itatt kāl nikkicavuṭṭi kaikaḷ nilattūnnumār muṭṭi taḷli munkanṭ maṭakki amarṇṇ nilayurappikka.

process of the horse stance. Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* describes the text thus: “*valatt̃ kāl valapure nikkicavuṭṭi*” is an instruction to rotate the right leg out to the right; “*iṭatt̃ kāl nikkicavuṭṭi*” instructs to stretch the left leg forward; “*kaikkaḷ nilattūnnumār̃*” makes clear the leg must be sufficiently stretched forward that both hands are on the ground; “*muṭṭ̃ taḷḷi. mūnkaṇṭ̃ maṭakki*” instructs that “the left knee should be forward and bent”; finally, “*amarñ nilayuraṇṇipikka*” indicates “then you have to go down.” The written instructions end here, but the practice contains further subtleties and alignments which must be elucidated by the teacher (11 October 2018).

In practice, *aśvavaṭiṽ* is made by standing with the feet together, pivoting on the right heel to turn the foot out by ninety degrees, then taking a large step forwards with the left leg, keeping the midline of the left knee and foot pointing forwards. From here, both hands are placed on the ground in line with and to the inside of the left foot, with the *nābhimūla* and gaze directing forward. Points to be learnt from the teacher and which are not in the text can be seen in Figure 1. These include aligning the two hands on the ground with the front foot, which gives a slight sense of optical illusion that blurs the differentiation between hands and feet when moving into and out of *aśvavaṭiṽ* at speed, and an externally perceivable straight line through the body from the edge of the back foot to the head. The outer edge of the back foot should fully touch the floor, which requires considerable mobility in the back ankle (see Fig. 2), thus enabling full contact between both feet and the ground, so allowing for the action of the feet outlined above, which is so crucial to the circulation of *vāyu* in *vaṭiṽ*. The gripping of the feet does not transfer to the hands, on which weight rests only briefly, as this is rarely a position in which the practitioner spends much time, and in fact the challenge is as much accurately moving into and out of the posture at speed as the *vaṭiṽ* itself.

The second section of the text gives an application of *aśvavaṭiṽ*, explaining, according to Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*, that: “If you strike from here [*aśva*] and then thrust, even a strong man cannot resist that thrust.” It goes on to describe a charge called *kutirappāccil*, followed by a movement from *aśvavaṭiṽ* where the practitioner steps around his opponent, driving his left knee into his ribs. While this is not stated in the text, Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* is clear that this attacks a *marmmaṇ* connected to two important (and potentially lethal) *mahānāḍis*: *iḍā* and *piṅgalā* (11 October 2018). His knowledge of this comes from the *kaḷari* medical practice, from which he also knows that a particular surface (in this case, the elbow) must be used in order to reach the point next cited. Next the practitioner is instructed to take the hand back and execute a movement similar to *sarpavaṭiṽ*, called *carakaṇ*, striking a point on the front of his opponent’s chest called *asthipūṭṭ̃*, which will cause the recipient to vomit blood. Three different

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Figure 1: *Aśvavaṭiv*. L. M. Constantini, 2013.



Figure 2: *Aśvavaṭiv* variation before the *pūttara* at CVN Kalari, East Fort. Photograph of Aswathy S. S. by Krishnan Unni, 2019.

striking attacks are described, for which corrective measures must be performed within one and a half *nāḷikka*²⁵ in order to save the person who receives them. However, this is only possible in the case of a strike mentioned, not of a thrust. The damage caused by the thrust cannot be undone and the person will die. Therefore, both Sathyan *gurukkal* and the text emphasise that this technique is only to be employed as a last resort.

It can be tempting to trace a relationship between *aśvavaṭiv* and the *vīrabhadra* (“warrior”) type *āsana*s of modern yoga. While of course a link is not impossible, it remains speculative to ascribe *kaḷarippayaṛṛ* as the source of these and Sathyan *gurukkal* himself has expressed wariness to me of such statements on a number of occasions. Considering *kaḷarippayaṛṛ* was undergoing its revival from near extinction at a similar time to Krishnamacharya’s experiments which led to the development of the prevailing systems of modern yoga, one wonders where he might have seen *kaḷarippayaṛṛ* in order to borrow from it. While it remains possible that he crossed the Western Ghats to observe developments underway in Kerala, it is at least as likely that he was influenced by practitioners closer to home in Mysore.²⁶ The function of *vaṭiv* in general, the descriptions of the activity of the inner body in them, and the instructions for *aśvavaṭiv* in particular, are also distinct from what we find in yoga contexts. Lunge-type actions tend to occur in any movement form which trains articulate legs, and it is feasible, though not certain, that practitioners in different contexts at different times adopted variations of these independently.

Conclusion

For an analysis of the nature and function of yoga and *yogāsana*, I defer to those who have written on these at length²⁷ and confine myself to observing that a salient feature of *kaḷari vaṭiv* as practised in the CVN lineage is their essential connection to movement. In fact, it is hard to find a still position that can be isolated in at least two of the eight CVN *vaṭiv* (*sarpa* and *varāha*). From *kaḷarippayaṛṛ*’s viewpoint, *yogāsana* is relatively stationary (implicit in *āsana*’s meaning, “seat”), and its real activity occurs deeper in the inner body than in *kaḷarippayaṛṛ*. *Kaḷarippayaṛṛ* is vigorously physical.

²⁵ A *nāḷikka* is an old Malayalam term for time measurement equating to twenty-four minutes, according to Gundert’s Malayalam dictionary (1872).

²⁶ On Krishnamacharya’s innovations, see Singleton 2010: 175–210. See Birch and Singleton 2019: 51–59 for a discussion of further possible influences on his work.

²⁷ In particular the editors of this volume and their colleagues on the Haṭha Yoga Project, Jason Birch and James Mallinson.

“We are in the, doing the, *karma* (i.e., action, work)” says Sathyan *gurukkaḷ*. Perhaps because of this, he describes *kaḷarippayarr̥* as *madhyama*, “a middling path,” whereas he sees yoga as *uttama*, “the higher path” of practice (5 January 2013). When he compares *kaḷarippayarr̥* and yoga, Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* refers not to its modern globalised incarnations but to the yoga generally understood to be practised by ascetics, some of whom have at various points in history resided with the family. Like yoga, however, *kaḷarippayarr̥* is understood to be a physical practice that accesses a more subtle level of experience. Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* believes:

[I]t is not just a physical practice but a practice for the inner body. It’s an outer body practice for the inner body. But at the same time, it also helps you to move, to control, to gain strength or force, or whatever it is (8 October 2018).

“An outer body practice for the inner body” is arguably an equally useful description of *haṭhayoga*, whose practitioners have not always confined themselves to the pursuit of liberation, as evidenced by historical orders of militant yogis (Singleton 2010: 39–41). Other characteristics the two systems share include the belief that success is achieved through practice rather than theoretical study (*Haṭhapradīpikā*, 1.65), the exhortation to work gradually, avoiding strain (Birch 2011: 530–31), the teaching that over-exertion is ultimately counter-productive (*Haṭhapradīpikā*, 1.15), and inclusivity (Mallinson 2014: 238). Sathyan *gurukkaḷ* echoes many of *haṭhayoga* texts in his focus on the inner body over its physical counterpart. However, he also specifies that: “This *prāṇa* [of *kaḷarippayarr̥*] is different. It’s more of a *vāyu*” (15 January 2013). Whereas he sees *haṭhayoga* working deep in the endocrine system, engendering chemical changes in the body which alter the mind and give rise to the various powers for which yoga is known,²⁸ *kaḷarippayarr̥* involves the neuromuscular body and *nāḍīs*:

When you are talking about *kaḷari* there are clear, distinct differences between the deep *prāṇic* forces [of yoga] and the energy in the *nāḍīs*. This is two different things completely. *Nāḍīs* are more like neuromuscular body, no? They are not really like the deeper forces which start to influence the mind. That’s a completely different level at which it works. So the *nāḍīs* are about skills, work, forces, control, all that comes from the *nāḍīs*, so their role has to be distinguished (1 October 2018).

²⁸ For example, *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, third *pāda*.

This distinction between the neuromuscular emphasis of the *nāḍīs* in *kaḷarippayarr̥* and the *prāṇa* of yoga coheres with a wider Indic understanding of multiple inner energies moving through and co-existing in the prāṇic system. Yoga sources are full of descriptions of five *vāyus*, with *kaḷarippayarr̥*'s neuromuscular *vāyu* reminiscent of the movement potential of the last of these, *vyāna*.²⁹ *Kaḷarippayarr̥*'s *vāyu* affects virtuosity of movement and gives "more efficiency, focus, force and action, but this you get from not exhausting the physical body. The physical body becomes a vehicle and the inner body is the one which drives everything" (15 January 2013), so that a skilled practitioner feels the energy of the internal body heating and cycling in a continuous flow (5 January 2013). Moreover, a *kaḷari* traditionally functioned as part of a community and *kaḷarippayarr̥* is held to be a more suitable practice than yoga for householders because the inner changes it engenders are not so deep as those from yoga and thus it allows practitioners to continue to fulfil their roles within conventional families and society.

Other areas of crossover include *mantra* and *nyāsa*, indications of both yoga and *kaḷarippayarr̥*'s Tantric heritage. *Mantras* are integral in the transmission of higher knowledge in *kaḷarippayarr̥* (13 December 2012), and also, more rarely now, feature as a device to focus the mind, where they create a *bhāva* ("feeling") that engenders *bhakti* ("devotion") or power (18 December 2012). In the days of battles and duels, warriors would practice *upāsanas* ("penances" in *kaḷarippayarr̥*), analogous to the austerities practised by some yogis. These included *mantras* that were thought to confer extraordinary martial powers by stimulating endocrinal functions to hyperactivity (13 and 19 December 2012). Nowadays, a *mantra* is more likely to be given when someone is initiated into higher levels of training, such as *uḷiccal* ("therapeutic massage"), where it is said to deepen connection to the practice and teacher. *Upāsanas* also involved *nyāsa*, "the installation of deities in the subtle body" (13 December 2012), echoing certain Tantric teachings, for example, *Matsyendrasaṃhitā* 8.48–67, which interestingly describes a series of intricate visualisations to install Śiva in the *ādhāras*, of which the *kaḷari* manuscripts' *ādhāra* descriptions appear a less elaborate and more medical iteration.

Finally, there is an intriguing geographical overlap with Tulu Nadu and the Konkan, just north of Malabar, and other spheres of practice in this area. James Mallinson (2019) has written about Nāth yogi activity, while Rich Freeman (2006; 2003) has traced links

²⁹ See *Niśvāsattatvasaṃhitā* *Nayasūtra* 4.122–125 (in Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 191) and *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 2.51. For an Ayurvedic perspective, see *Suśrutasaṃhitā* 2.1 (in Wujastyk 2003: 117). For *vyāna*'s role in the Siddha system, see Iyer 1933: 75.

between *teyyam*, the ritualised deity possession of Malabar, yogis, and possibly *kaḷarippayarr̃ gurukkaḷs*. Historically, this is an area that *kaḷari* masters visited for “higher teachings” (10 October 2018), although the detail of what they learnt there remains shrouded in mystery. Connections are for now speculative, but future investigations into the ritual landscapes that inform *kaḷarippayarr̃* may shed light on whether these have substance.

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