

## Indian Martial Arts – UPSC Notes

Martial arts are codified systems and traditions of combat practices, which are practised for a variety of reasons - self-defence, competition, physical health and fitness, entertainment, as well as mental, physical, and spiritual development.

India has an ancient tradition in diverse martial arts. Nearly every part of India has evolved one or the other form of popular martial art.

### Introduction

- 'Martial Arts', as the name suggests, are popular art forms that give training in different kinds and dimensions of fighting - fighting with a spear or a sword, physical combat, resisting cavalry attack, single combat or combat with many, etc.,
- Although the term martial art has become associated with the fighting arts of eastern Asia, it originally referred to the combat systems of Europe as early as the 1550s.
- The term is derived from Latin, and means "**arts of Mars**", the Roman god of war.

### Origin

- Even at the dawn of man's existence, one of the first arts men were forced to learn, for self-preservation, was the art of self-defence and therefore the origin of martial arts anywhere in the world will ultimately always be traced back to the origin of man.
- Early man had to learn not only to effectively defend himself against his enemies but also against marauding and carnivorous animals.

### List of Martial Arts in India

Here is a list of famous Indian martial arts with different histories, backgrounds and styles. They are briefly discussed below:

List of Famous Indian Martial Arts	
Name of the Martial Art	Associated Famous Place
Silambam	Tamil Nadu, South India

Kalaripayattu	Kerala
Lathi Khela	North India
Gatka	Punjab
Thang-Ta	Manipur
Mardani Khel	Maharashtra
Pari Khanda	Bihar
Kathi Samu	Andhra Pradesh

## Silambam

- Silambam is an Ancient Martial art of Tamil Nadu.
- The origin and historical development of Silambam fencing may have begun with the early Dravidians from ancient Tamil Nadu.
- "Silambal" is a word generally used to denote the sound created by a fast-flowing spring, the murmur of leaves, the chirping noises of birds etc.
- It might have been originally used to describe the "whooshing" sound created by the swinging of the long staff and the clashing sound of the swords.
- Thus, Silambam became the popular word to describe a martial art that used long staff and various kinds of swords, knives and lances.
- Silambam is a **traditional stick martial art** from South India.
- Silambam is a weapon-based Indian martial art from Tamil Nadu, but also traditionally practised by the Tamil community of Sri Lanka and Malaysia.
- It is closely related to Keralan kalaripayat and Sri Lankan angampora.
- Silambam was originally practised with bamboo sticks, and later with steel swords and shields.

## Kalaripayattu

- Kalaripayattu is a martial art that originated as a style in Kerala during the 13th Century AD.
- The word Kalari first appears in Sangam literature to describe both a battlefield and combat arena.

- The word Kalari tatt denoted a martial feat, while Kalari kozhai meant a coward in war.
- It is considered to be one of the oldest fighting systems in existence.
- It is now practised in Kerala, in contiguous parts of Tamil Nadu.
- It was originally practised in the northern and central parts of Kerala and the Tulunadu region of Karnataka.
- Kalaripayattu means battlefield practices or training that takes place in an arena or a gymnasium of specific dimensions with mud flooring.
- This is an ancient traditional martial art form of Kerala, India.
- Basis of all martial art forms like Karate, Kungfu was originally developed from Kalaripayattu.

## Lathi Khela

- Lathi Khela, stick play, is a very popular martial art, especially in north India.
- A polished stick typically six to eight feet long and at times metal-tipped is used to ward off the enemy through various wielding techniques, steps and posturing.
- At one time very popular in Bihar and Bengal (now Bangladesh), the sport has seen a decline over the years.
- The wielder of the lathi is known as a lethel or lathial.

## Gatka

- Gatka is one of the most popular and ancient martial art in the region of Punjab.
- A wooden stick and a shield are usually used in the sparring match, and points are scored when vital spots in the body are touched.
- Swords and shields are also used in gatka which is in fact training in the professional use of swords.
- The Mughal Emperor Akbar, it is said, practised gatka with sword and shield.
- Gatka is a martial art associated with the Sikhs of the Punjab region.

## Thang-Ta

- Thang-Ta, India's popular martial art, is originated from Manipur.
- The art developed from the war environment of the tiny state of Manipur in North-east India, which was an independent kingdom since the early Christian era.
- Thang-Ta is performed in the Manipur state of India, where it is a cultural heritage art

- Its traditional name is Huyen Langlon. Huyen Langlon means (Huyen means War and Langlon means Knowledge of Art) knowledge of War Art.
- "Thang" and "Ta" are the main weapons of this art, so people commonly know the art as Thang-Ta.
- In this art, movements of swords intended to ward off evil spirits are shown, while other dance moves indicate protection.

## Mardani Khel

- Mardani Khel is a weapon-based Indian martial art from Maharashtra.
- It is particularly known for its use of Indian Patta (sword) and Vita (corded lance).
- The early history of Mardani Khel as a distinct system is difficult to trace prior to the 16th century, but it is said to owe its development to the particular geographic conditions of Maharashtra.

## Pari Khanda

- Pari Khanda is a form of the sword dance, its steps and techniques are used in Chhau dance of Bihar.
- It is a fighting technique created by Rajputs and is still practised in many parts of Bihar.
- Pari means shield and Khanda means sword.
- It is even practised in some parts of Jharkhand and Odisha.

## Kathi Samu

- Kathi Samu is one of the ancient martial arts that originated in Andhra Pradesh, and is practised by the royal armies.
- Kathi means sword, and Kathi Samu is a martial art that involves fighting with swords.
- This prestigious martial art employs various kinds of swords.
- The place where Kathi Samu is performed is known as '**garidi**'.
- Historically, the technique was patronised by the Kingdom of Vizianagaram, and Karvetinagaram.

## Benefits of Practising Martial Arts

The benefits of practising or training martial arts are multifold, which are as follows:

1. **Physical fitness** is boosted as the whole body is exercised and the entire muscular system is activated. The training results in strength, stamina, flexibility, movement coordination etc.
2. **Mental Health** is enhanced by an increase in self-esteem and self-control.
3. **Emotional and Spiritual well-being** are therapeutic effects of martial arts learning.

## Right to Self Defence

- Sections 96 and 97 of the Indian Penal Code are supportive of self-defence.
- It is officially reported that the common man when threatened can rise in self-defence.
- The right to self-defence can be exercised in cases falling under the categories of theft, robbery, mischief and criminal trespass whether the movable or immovable property belongs to him or any other person.
- The right to self-defence is subject to the restrictions contained in Section 99.

## Other Popular Martial Arts

The martial arts commonly practised universally are:

1. Kickboxing
2. Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu
3. Muay Thai
4. Taekwondo
5. Karate
6. Boxing
7. Aikido
8. Judo
9. Sumo Wrestling
10. Hapkido