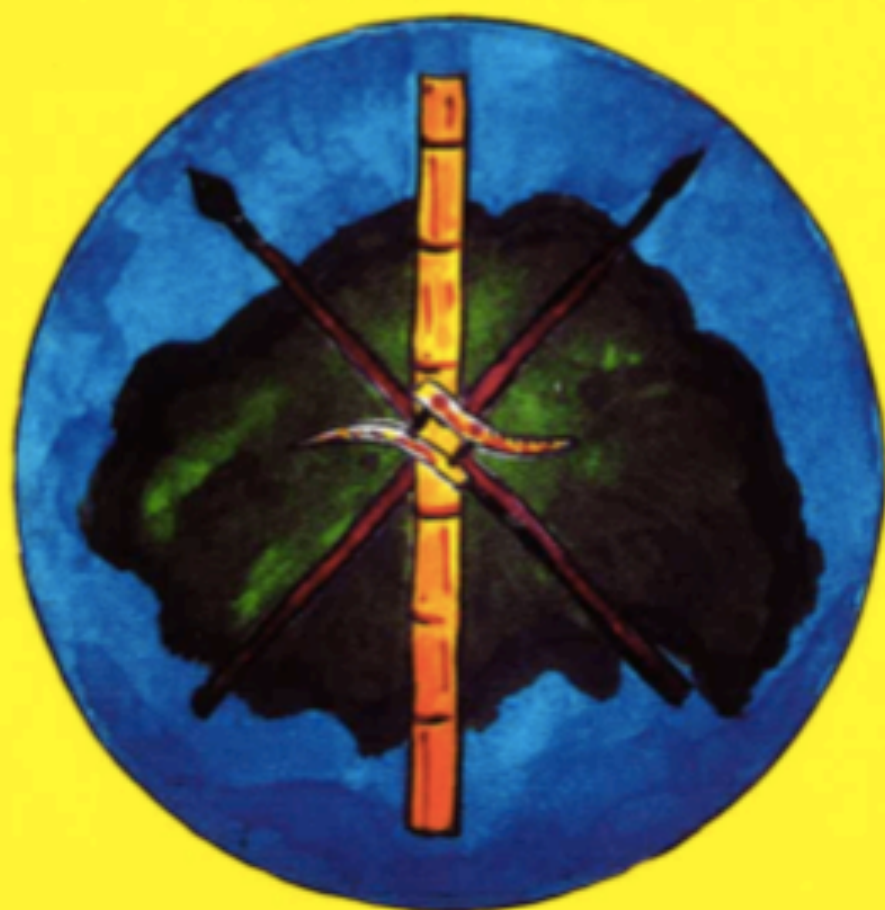


# Silambam

**The Martial Art of Dravidian**

**India:**

**Book One**



**Devin Wilkey**

**Remyswamy Anbananthan**

Silambam: The Martial Art of Dravidian India-Book One

By Devin Wilkey and Remyswamy Anbananthan

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## Vanakkam

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This book is for all of you. –Devin Wilkey



**From left to right: Amuthan, Devin, Master Anba, and Muniesvaran**

# **Preface-**

## **What Does Silambam Have to Offer?**

Vanakkam. My name is Devin Wilkey and the martial arts are my magnificent obsession. Having studied them since childhood I have seen a great variety of them. I have spent time in both the mundane and esoteric arts and see the value of them all. I study, teach, and travel to better understand these vestiges of human culture. Several years ago I began to write a history of the martial arts and something became apparent. Nobody, at least in the West, knows where the roots of the martial arts come from. It is often assumed that Japan and Korea were the source, but this is laughable as these were little more than outposts when China was already a great Asian civilization. But even China is not the answer to the question. At first it seems so, as China does have such an ancient martial tradition but that tradition explicitly credits India with its origins. Now this is not to say that China did not do much to develop their own unique fighting methods, because they certainly did. They are a land of many sophisticated methods of combat but those are generally linked to Buddhism, originally, and Buddhism is a foreign import into China, an import from India.

I then set about studying India's martial lineage. There is much to study but there are major themes in Indian martial arts. They have wrestling and combat, separate schools of thought. Indian wrestling is brutal and effective but, by virtue of being a wrestling style it is not the root of sophisticated battlefield pugilism. There are many

other Indian fighting methods as well such as the Sikh art of Gatka. This has similarities to Chinese fighting methods but it did not originate until recent times as far as the Chinese are concerned. The next possibility is Kalaripayattu which looks exactly like many of the old Kung Fu styles. This is probably one of the primary roots of Kung Fu but even it cannot be traced back effectively more than 1500 years or so. I have no doubt that Kalari had impact on China, but due to the relatively recent genesis of Kalaripayattu I had to assume that it evolved from an earlier form. I continued to push back into Indian history and found Silambam.

I had heard the name Silambam because it is a common demonstration in Southern India. It is much like the Poi spinners of the Pacific the way it is usually shown. There exists, however, a deeper understanding of this art. I could not possibly have known what I was going to uncover when I went to see Master Anba. I thought perhaps that a sophisticated method like Kalari had perhaps evolved from a simple, basic, and quaint fighting method handed down from an ancient world...but this hypothesis was wrong.

I now understand that Silambam in its true form is no simple technique that evolved into modern arts, but was rather an utterly sophisticated ancient training method meant to unlock the potential of the human body and mind. Its basic practice serves to keep the body healthy and limber, as well as keeping the mind sharp and disciplined. It is in through this integrated method of training that Silambam's power as a martial art is unleashed. Silambam practice is an excellent physical exercise which ultimately

generates great martial skill in a practitioner. Most martial artists have this aim but there are many common complaints about the present standards of martial arts instruction. People tell me that they have a black belt but they cannot defend themselves or they tell me that martial arts techniques don't work. It is because of this that the Mixed Martial Arts and Grappling schools of thought have risen. They use simple tactics to accomplish simple results, such as choking. I do not wish to offend but these methods are nice for the ring, one man evenly matched against another, however they don't work well otherwise. A small woman must work too hard to keep even a moderately sized man off of her, a small man can give himself a heart attack trying to choke out some juggernaut, and a child has not a prayer of wrestling an aggressive adult down. The reason it does not work is that it was built for competition; so many things we do are built for competition, it has been built into our society over thousands of years. Grappling has become the form that people see as "fighting" in a time when most adults are not coordinated enough to climb a tree. In this age people rely on technology to protect them, they rely upon the government, they rely upon whomever will do it aside from them. This is dangerous as the only useful weapon is the one in your hand at the right time; the government is notorious for not responding as quickly as you'd hope, and other people are often quite comfortable with social loafing themselves. What this means is that if you are not able to take sudden and drastic action to defend your life when it is threatened, then it may be taken. Trying to choke out or arm bar a drug fueled gunman can be a great disappointment indeed. Self defense must be a union of the mind and the body to deceive, demoralize, and control and opponent. Any martial art that uses excessive grabbing relies

too much on strength and will ultimately fail when tested in extremes. Fortunately, I have been made aware of more drastic methods.

Silambam approaches martial arts from an absolutely pragmatic point of view, the pragmatism of warfare. The type of warfare of which we speak is the ancient kind, that which existed before armor and steel and generals. The type of warfare that Silambam was built for is a fearless clash powered by the nimble usage of the body. The art is always in motion to avoid arrows and javelins, and today bullets. Every hit is simply the result of throwing the body's weight at an opponent whether through a staff, spear, or one's own hands. Silambam takes no time to grab, it does not directly resist attack, it does not require great strength as momentum does the work. The art is highly kinetic spending little energy on exacting stances and precise strikes and more energy turning the practitioner into a wrecking ball even if they are a little imprecise at first. This tactic of combat is markedly different from many others as it not linear. Even Kalaripayattu is primarily linear in its practice due to its usage in large scale classical warfare by the Aryan peoples of India. In contrast, Silambam is associated with the Dravidian Tamils of the south of India. The Dravidian family of martial arts, most likely the oldest, is characterized by non linear, rhythmic, and stunningly agile combat that is in no way dependent upon physical size and strength. There are certain portions of the Silambam syllabus which favor a large body but there are just as many or more other portions that favor a slim, agile frame. The Dravidian martial arts were so excellently conceived and time tested that they require only physical health, coordination, and mental awareness to develop expertise. The Dravidian people have existed so long that their experience has



led them to understand that many more human beings can hope to develop the aforementioned traits than can hope to acquire a large and powerful body.

The way Silambam was designed it can be used with equal effect by the small and large, weak and strong. Because nimble feet are the source Silambam's power, many more are capable of succeeding in it than say the Chinese or Japanese arts. Whether a master will level with you or not, the truth is that you really do need to get your body quite strong to be good at Kung Fu and its descendants, strength that many don't have time to acquire these busy days. Also, Silambam teaches how to make optimal use of improvised weapons as well as focusing on explosive and shocking tactics that need not be employed with perfect precision. Because of these elements, even a beginning Silambam practitioner can defend himself effectively.

Silambam deals with the true nature of self defense, combat where nothing is assumed. Many of the well known martial arts become incestuous because they were generated during a certain period for certain purposes. Some arts try to avoid harming an opponent as much as possible while others make excessive use of grabbing, while others refuse to move to avoid danger and thus take direct impact. Silambam supports none of these courses of action and starts with the usage of the feet and eyes in concert with the weapon in hand. Between these three things a practitioner is taught to control space and to keep himself out of harm's way. This is the first step without which you would likely die in war. Silambam has been around long enough and seen enough wars to know that

even when you can't win, you can survive. Sometimes the key to winning is just to continue surviving until an opportunity presents itself.

Silambam prepares a student for extreme circumstances the likes of which the modern human mind cannot fathom, but rest assured that diligent practice of this art will bring you a new and inspiring confidence. There are no official uniforms, no belts, no standard training facility. The training facility is nature, the clothing is whatever makes you comfortable, the training tool is natural fiber taken from the forest. Respect for fellows, teachers, and the natural world are paramount. Silambam unleashes the hidden potential locked within each individual. So take a journey with me back to an ancient world where man and spear must become one to survive. Take note of the sophistication of the arts of the Indians that were born of unity with nature and the necessity of survival. This art not only teaches physical lessons but helps the practitioner to come to understand themselves as a warrior and all that it means to be one. In Silambam there is no ranking but student and teacher and these are together an endless journey towards understanding. The only person who can truly know where a student is, is that student himself, and well it should be. The student must be given something useful and must come to trust and believe in it because as my wise Master Anba always warns his students, " On the battlefield.....It is **you!**" **Your** understanding, **your** composure, and **your** confidence; these are what herald **you** through the battles of life.

Do not read this book haphazardly as all of the words have been carefully chosen. We at Nilaikalakki Silambam honor our many gurus by producing this book that such a treasure might not be lost. We will happily provide as much supporting information as we

can to all interested. This has been a labor of love to help inspire the martial arts that are today losing their luster and their place. Silambam is no gimmick or scheme, it is no fad or game. It is sacred knowledge born of ancient human wisdom, practice with sincerity and your rewards will be great. Real Silambam has always been secret, but it is time for it to be revealed.

Thank you Master.

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# Silambam:

## The Modern Value of an Ancient Art:

Though almost unknown in the West, India is a wealth of martial information that has been kept secret largely because of centuries of oppression by the British. Only now are the warrior arts of India beginning to make their way across the globe. The oldest Indian martial art is called Silambam, Silambambo, or Silambattam which are the general terms used to denote this ancient Dravidian martial art believed to have 5,000 years of history. The art is weapon based but contains empty hand as well.

Silambam places the simplest and most natural of all weapons in the hands of the beginner: a stick just short of the height of the practitioner. The student is then taught to rotate this weapon in a fluid and powerful matrix around his body until that skill can then be extended to use any tool he has at his disposal. This smooth fluid exercise is used to condition the body and mind. Silambam provides many of the same benefits enjoyed by Taiji practitioners because it is practiced in much the same way. Silambam requires focus and relaxation, while stretching and strengthening the body. Ultimately the skill that is cultivated in manipulating such tools and bolstering them with the body's power leads the practitioner to better understand their own body and its intricacies. It is at this point that the martial side of Silambam begins to display itself to the practitioner.

Silambam practitioners benefit greatly from extensive practice and conditioning, but the art does not require an exponent to be overly strong, heavy, or even fast. It does not take long to begin to be able to use this martial art. The art is frightfully mobile and ferocious even at the beginning stages, so even someone who is only minimally capable or can only practice occasionally still knows several important things:

- 1: The weight of the body is a weapon in itself.**
- 2: Deft movement can confuse and evade even a determined attacker.**
- 3: Anything that can be held in one or both hands can be spun with the body's momentum to strike with great power. Thus the Silambam man is armed wherever he goes.**