

Saamu – Andhra Martial Art

Introduction

Martial Arts literally mean “War Arts”. To many when they hear about Martial Arts they think about fighting, killing, rage, aggression. But for a few it is actually a way of life. In Martial Arts we don’t know what kind of situation we will face and the mind is trained to build decisions instantly and execute them. So when we have too many problems tomorrow in our daily life, we will be in a position to take a decision immediately. So the same principles which we have learned in fighting can be applied in our daily life too. In this way it becomes a way of life.

This way of life or path followed by many led to manifold indigenous forms in India. Every region in India depending upon their socio-political, religious, cultural and historical context have come out with their own Martial Arts forms

Hunting(during the early period of Man), Vedas, Puranas, Buddhism, Weapons, Civilizations, Avatars of God, Aryans, Mughals and most importantly the wars which we fought for the domination and survival – all left their traces in our Indian Martial Arts.

As such even the region of Andhra Pradesh holds the distinction of possessing an indigenous art, named “Saamu”.

Saamu

It literally means “*exercise*” and is popularly known as “Kara Saamu” or Kathi Saamu”. These are the two terms which come to one’s mind when we hear about the word “Saamu”. But Saamu by itself is a complete martial art. It includes everything like weapon training and hand-to- hand combat.

History

There is no dated history. It flourished a lot during Vijayanagara Empire. It is also revived once again during the Razzakar Movement.

Types of Saamu

We can classify Saamu on the basis of ways of practicing. In all the types rotations with the stick is common. It helps to open up the joints.

Type 1: More concentration on rotation of the stick. Mock fighting was practiced for performing shows.

Type 2: This is very traditional. It is found in the areas of Vijayanagaram area. They use very ancient weapons like Dal, Talwar etc. They emphasize more on deep stances.

Type 3: This is found in the internal villages of Andhra Pradesh. It is meant for street fighting. This was developed for the sole purpose of attacking rivals and defending from them. They replaced the ancient weapons with most easily accessible improvised or make-shift weapons, which are more practical. There are no deep stances.

This type is most suitable for the present day civilians as it does not include deep stances and ancient weapons.

Free style fighting is the most interesting aspect of this type which replaced earlier mock fighting.

Specific reflex drills called “*Varasalu*” and “*Vorisi Kottadam*” are present in this type. It is meant to build up speed. The practice is more by weapons.

Basic Routine of Saamu in each Stage:

Salami (Greetings)

Rotation

Attacks

Fighting Sequences

Stages in Saamu: (Specifically Type 3)

- *Chikku Thiyadam* – Exercises
- *Adugulu* – Foot work
- Weapons
 1. *Long Stick (Kara)*
 - a. *Vanti Kara* – one stick
 - b. *Rendu Karalu* – Two Sticks

Starts with Salami and followed by exercise with one and two sticks.

c. *Banakata Varasi* – 1st drill for the free style fighting starts.

Two persons are called upon. One person will continuously attack the other person and the other person needs to defend himself. Attacks are not pre-planned instead they are random and rapid.

After sometime the defender turns to be the attacker and the attacker turns to be the defender.

To put it simply A – B and B – A

Total individual hits of A and B are taken into count.

d. *Varisi Kottadam* – Hitting and Blocking – 2nd drill of free style fighting

This provides strength and conditions our body for hitting.

e. *Dhomi Kara* – 3rd drill for free style fighting

- ✓ *Thati Kottu*: One to One fight. In this both the persons who are called upon will fight. A – B in parallel with B – A.
- ✓ One to Many fight: A person is placed in the centre and surrounded by a group of people. The group will hit the person in the centre spontaneously one after the other in random order. The person in the centre needs to defend or block the attacks.

2. *Short Stick – Bharila Varisi*

We can find the traces of the short sticks in Indonesia martial art – Kaali. Salami, Rotation, Attack and Fighting Sequences are the various levels.

One more addition here is fighting with two sticks (We won't do this in long stick). *Varasalu* (Reflex Drills) is paid more attention.

Training about throws, locks, punches are also learned here.

They use 3 – 4 varieties of sticks and length is a criterion for the classification viz; Elbow, Hip, Knee, Ankle length sticks. The reason for using variations in stick is to

condition the fighter to use any kind of stick which will be available to him during a fight.

A special attraction is a small stick through which a nail is pierced. This is used as Ballem. (We can find a similar thing in the Japanese Art called Yavara)

Using such techniques is termed as “Bonku”(cheats) in Saamu.

Patta Varisi – Using ten swords at a time.

This is considered as the ultimate stage of Saamu weapons practice. Though the historical background could not be traced, a few say that the body guards of kings were the one who specialized in this skill.

3. *Swords*

Normal swords are used. Instead of Dallu (shield) we use stick.

4. *Veta Kodavali*

5. *Veta Goddali*

6. *Bakku (Short Knife)*

They also use *Mutti* sometimes instead of Bakku.

- Hand –to – Hand Combat

Different formats like “*Pattu*”, “*Bandinchu*”, and “*Kata Kusti*” are present here.

Art in Danger:

Saamu is often related to “Kara Saamu” or “Kathi Saamu”. It is not considered a complete martial art. On the other hand “Kalaripayattu” of Kerala is not viewed in the disintegrated form. The blame can be borne by both the students and teachers.

Students who are willing to learn often pick flashy things like rotating the stick and leave the rest of the art.

Masters on the other hand concentrated more on maintaining the art in the dance form instead of keeping alive the fighting spirit. More concentration is on performances and mock fighting sequence has put the art in the peril.