

An Anthropological Approach to Traditional Martial Art of Angampora

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Abstract:- Sri Lanka, as an island with great cultural heritage, has its indigenous martial art of Angampora, which has changed with the dynamics of cultural changes. For centuries Angampora was kept obscure and confined as the early traditional Angampora masters taught this traditional martial art in secrecy. However, today Angampora is popular among the modern generation. According what was found in the research, there is a new tendency among the modern generations to learn this precious martial art over other foreign martial arts. The research was based on the fifty informants were purposively selected from Piliyanadala and Kalutara areas. Mainly, data was collected through a questionnaire survey. Furthermore, general observation, case studies and interview method based on semi- structured interview schedule were occupied in the research. Collected data was analysed narrative analysis. Most of them claimed that they have not met Angam masters they can satisfy about. The results of this survey revealed the importance of conserving this traditional martial art, and therefore suggest the importance to identify qualified Angam masters in the island. A national policy should be established to fulfill this timely need, which will contribute to get rid of fake Angam masters. Similarly, the quality and status of this indigenous martial art should be improved. The research recommends learning and preserving Angampora as an intangible cultural heritage for the future generation is a national necessity.

Keywords:- Culture, Angampora, Martial Art, Intangible, Generation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a country which enriched with a great intangible cultural heritage and *Angampora* is one of the most fundamental and traditional martial arts within this culture. The martial art of *Angampora* has changed as a result of different kinds of cultural changes. Today *Angampora* is popular among the younger generation, although it had been suppressed for decades. Early traditional *Angampora* masters taught this traditional martial art in secrecy. However, the modern generations have gained exposure to this art through various sources. This research, which reveals many factors pertaining to *Angampora* that are veiled and kept in restricted, can be considered as a research which combines both ancient and modern aspects of this martial art.

➤ Historical Evidence Pertaining to Angampora

There are many ideologies with regard to the origin of *Angampora*, and evidence tread 33,000 years back in time. Chronicles and folklore suggest that many ancient kings have used this traditional martial art to train their armies. There have been a number of kings and queens who applied this martial art in warfare.

When King Vijaya arrived to Sri Lanka, Kuveni, who was a princess of Sri Lanka, could fight with the army of Vijaya with the support of this traditional martial art (Amalka, 2015).

Among them King Dutugamunu and his giants had taken the maximum use of this martial art. They used *Angampora* techniques in the battles against the Warlord Elara, which can be proved through the great chronicle of Mahawansa (Mahavansa, 2009).

Similarly, Kataragama Mahasen, who belonged to Yakka tribe, is a well-known great *Angam* warrior. The popular mythological character King Ravana is also a person descends from Yakka tribe who was an elite *Angam* warrior. According to historical resources *Angampora* was introduced to Sri Lanka with the arrival of Mahinda Thero who brought Buddhism to the island. There is much evidence to support this idea; for instance a wood carving at Embekka Devalaya of 14th century AD, depicts *Angam* fighters engaged in one of the main locks in *Angam*. Moreover, the two ancient scripts named the *Varga Purnikawa* and *Pancha Rakkhawaliya* give details of this traditional martial art and that it is founded by nine hermits.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at Piliyandala and Kalutara in Western Province. The study area and sample were selected purposively. 50 informants were selected from two above mentioned areas. Moreover, purposive sample of the study will sufficiently consist of *Angampora* artists, *Angampora* students, villagers, informative elders, community leaders and officials. This research thoroughly examined the family backgrounds of the people who expressed their ideas on the traditional martial art of *Angampora*. As a subject field of Anthropology, family plays a vital role in learning new things. Similarly, family plays a vital role as a passer of cultural elements.

➤ Collection of data

Collected data are categorized into four main categories: written primary data, unwritten primary data, written secondary data and unwritten secondary data. Data deals with the qualitative approach while adopting quantitative data. It was obtained written primary data via reports, information and data Divisional Secretariat Offices of relevant areas. General observation, case studies and interview method based on semi-structured interview schedule were used as unwritten primary data collection methods in this study. Related publications and e-sources were used as secondary data.

➤ Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative). Qualitative data were given the prominent place in the analysis. Analysis was done based on main perspectives such as relationship with *Angampora* and personal attitudes. Hence, the analytical method of the study was narrative analysis and its focused experiences shared by people to answer the research problem.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to many opinions pertaining to *Angampora*, the origin of *Angampora* is not clear, but also it can be proved as an indigenous martial art of Sri Lanka based on different factors. Accordingly, it is clear that *Angampora* is an ancient martial art that originated in Sri Lanka. First human was born around one million years ago. Emergence of martial arts can be considered a result of finding solutions to problems faced by people in challenging environments. This can be identified as a circumstance that contributed to the origin of *Angampora*. As an indigenous martial art *Angampora* consists of its own styles.

Due to different circumstances everything is rapidly changing in the world. *Angampora* has also faced that fate. On the other hand, it has become popular as a highly disciplined martial art in the world. It is not taught to unqualified people who are not disciplined. Similarly, checking the horoscope of the recruits and inspecting their potential to learn it is also a part of this art. Similarly, the *Angam* masters check the horoscopes of the recruits for their hidden spiritual powers. One of the duties of *Angam* masters is developing spiritual potentiality of the students who are to learn and who are learning this martial art. *Angampora* is a combination of spiritual body and physical body. The ultimate achievement of *Angampora* is “Kundaliniyogaya”. If one can acquire that, he or she can battle against anyone. Similarly, the person who has this “Kundaliniyogaya” is capable of entering into some one’s bodies. “Yantra Manthara” (chantings), meditation power and astrological powers are included in *Angampora*, which was described by our Lord Buddha. According to our Lord Buddha there are two types of meditations. They are Samatha and Vidardhana. If someone wants to attain “Nibbana” (enlightenment) that person should practice Vidardhana meditation. When it

comes to Dewdath Thero he has practiced Samatha meditation profoundly and achieved the state of a magician. The one who masters *Angampora* is not merely a fighter but also a master in indigenous practices, healing, spiritual practices, astrology and the like. Hence, the person who learnt this naturally becomes a multitalented person. Before someone practices *Angampora* he or she worships Lord, Buddha and prays for King Ravana. They have two types of worships pertaining to this. First, they worship Lord Buddha and they use a certain style for pray for Ravana. Secondly, they worship their master.

Worshipping of the sun was done for God “Raa” in Egyptian civilization. It is mentioned that Ravana is God ‘Raa’ in a Ravana ola leaf book (Obesekara, 2012).

They think that they need a spiritual power to engage in this art this and they invoke the powers of the earth and universe. Before they start practicing, they light a lamp, which they believe, provides them power to acquire energy. Hence, they do not let it blow out until they finish their practice session. According to other beliefs they can invoke power from demons like “Mahason”. Then they cannot control their bodies by themselves. They use the assistance of some other spiritual powers to control it. This martial art is adapted according to different geographical differences of the country; wallows, streams, forest covers and many other geographical differences. Therefore, the enemies could not understand how to face for these warriors. Sometimes *Angampora* fighters were waiting for enemies on trees, rocks, mountains and other secret places. Similarly, also they practiced “Nila Shasthra” using goats.

Angam martial artists could recognize the weak points of humans. Similarly, they knew the art of attacking enemies to die within few days (Hettige, 2005).

Even today there are many masters who know this method. This Martial art is practiced by both males and females, as a way of maintaining their body shapes. Similarly passing this art from one generation to another was very important and therefore they deliberately had to learn this art without rejecting or hesitating. This martial art is consisting of an identical healing system; any injury when practicing was recovered by touching sensitive points of the body. Similarly, there have been certain indigenous medicines related to these injuries. Compared to other martial arts, *Angampora* can be considered a very significant one, because most of the other martial arts do not have healing systems. When they practice *Angampora* they always refrain from consuming certain food items; sometimes they are prohibited food or food taboos. In Sinhala it is called “Killa” concept too. This martial art cannot be passed to other clans. If the masters did not have children, it is prohibited to be given to someone else. Due to these kinds of cultural factors this martial art began to decline, and as a result, many masters emerged without proper knowledge.

When it comes to the nature of the family, many types of family structures in these two areas and many differences in those families could be identified. According to different socio-cultural and economic settings, family members of each family had decided to learn this martial art as a cultural element. Their personal desires had also played a vital role in fulfilling these purposes.

According to the observations, it was found that without commercial support most of the youngsters are unable to learn this martial art. Therefore, fulfilling their goals of learning this martial art has become easier with the support of their families. As a qualitative research many numerical details were not concerned. However, it was identified that the contribution of the family members and the support given by the members of the family are very crucial. Moreover, many economic and social advantages have become another major circumstance for learning this art. Target members of each family unit stated that urban family backgrounds in this area have become a major barrier against learning *Angampora*. Accordingly, it was found that if people from rural backgrounds are motivated, they will tend to follow this martial art.

Under these circumstances it is very important to realize the nature of the family units of these interviewed persons. According to accumulated information there are nuclear, complex nuclear and extended families. Nuclear families can be considered as a very simple unit. In this research, it could be discovered that nuclear families as the most common ones, which could provide certain important factors regarding the research topic. Learning capability of this traditional martial art is very rare compared to other foreign martial arts. Receiving real *Angam* knowledge in Sri Lanka also has turned out to be a very difficult. However, the members of these family units have made their contribution so that the youngsters may find out appropriate masters for them. According to the views of the youngsters who have followed and are still following this traditional martial art, sudden changes of in the social structure have provided the platform to learn *Angampora*. Economically, learning in nuclear families can also be considered as major reason for learning this martial art. According to the views and ideas of the interviewees, lack of responsibilities in the nuclear family units is a supportive factor for learning this martial art.

According to the respondents, the newly introduced cultural trend has affected the learning of this martial art. As mentioned by some respondents, the family is another reason for that motivates learning this martial art. As mentioned by some other respondents, changes in the thinking pattern of the new generation have influenced finding out better masters for learning *Angampora*. Conversely, opinions of the new generation are crucial factors in forming this necessity in the society.

IV. CONCLUSION

Culture of a country includes many precious things; traditional martial arts are given a prominent place among them. The reason behind this specialty is that it preserves many cultural values and elements. Accordingly, *Angampora* is given a very important place as a Sri Lankan traditional indigenous martial art. However, the martial art of *Angampora* has changed due to different cultural dynamics. Nowadays it is very popular among the modern generation; unlike in the early decades, in the present, almost everyone in the country knows about this martial art. Nowadays the younger generation of Sri Lanka is influenced by nationalism. Therefore, now there is a tendency to appreciate and acquire these kinds of intangible cultural heritages, and as a result, it has become a national necessity. Hence, this martial art has been commercialized, and it has become the basic theme of many films in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the new generation is learning and studying this martial art in a large scale. However, this has become easier with the support of their families. Nevertheless, certain critical problems pertaining to this traditional art has been identified. Actual *Angam* knowledge is very rarely discovered in the country due to various factors such as modernization, development, and commercialization. However, youngsters are observed making attempts to find out appropriate masters for them. As a whole, it can be observed that some changes in this traditional martial art have been inevitable. By and large some areas of *Angampora* have perished forever. However, some of the most significant areas of this precious traditional martial art have been preserved by some of the *Angam* masters, which can be pointed as an encouraging factor for the next generation of the country and people who are interested in this traditional art all over the world.

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