



## **Bodymind Connection: The Influence of Yoga and Kalaripayattu on Contemporary Actor Training**

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**Abstract:** Yoga and Kalaripayattu are two renowned ancient Indian psychophysical disciplines, which serve as pillars for achieving a profound sense of unity within the body and the mind. These practices are widely acknowledged for their role in cultivating the inner energy of individuals. The significance of these disciplines in pre-performative training has garnered attention from numerous theatre practitioners, with Phillip Zarrilli emerging as a notable figure in recent discourse. Zarrilli has contributed substantially to the development of his unique interpretations and insights into psychophysical acting training. His exploration extends to support the psychophysical approach to enhance an actor's embodiment, presence, and emotional authenticity on stage. This research paper undertakes an analysis of the effect these psychophysical practices can have on a practitioner's physical strength, flexibility, awareness, mental clarity, and the interconnectedness of body and mind. Through a comprehensive survey, it attempts to identify whether these disciplines have positively influenced the professional capabilities of participants. The objective of this study is to determine the potential benefits of integrating these practices into formal acting training programs. By examining their effects on bodymind connection and performance quality, the paper seeks to provide insights into the efficacy of incorporating such ancient disciplines into contemporary actor training methodologies.

**Key Words:** Yoga, Kalaripayattu, Bodymind, Psychophysical, Pre-Performative, Awareness, Sensory Perception

### **1. Introduction**

Yoga and Kalaripayattu stands as two acclaimed ancient Indian psychophysical disciplines experiencing a rapid resurgence in the modern era. These disciplines are looked upon as a practical tool for leading a healthy life and to cultivate wellness. These disciplines are believed to be instrumental in awakening the inner energy of an individual. These psychophysical disciplines make an important part of the pre-performative acting training in contemporary theatre practices. These disciplines help in achieving a sense of communion within an actor's body and mind. This embodied communion or bodymind connection further



generates the highest level of awareness and sensory perception which is an essential element for an actor and acting training.

“Yoga is a discipline to improve or develop one’s inherent power in a balanced manner. It offers the means to attain complete self-realisation. The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word Yoga is ‘Yoke’. Yoga can therefore be defined as a means of uniting the individual spirit with the universal spirit of God. According to Maharishi Patanjali, Yoga is the suppression of modifications of the mind” (Pandey, 2016: 1). Yoga is a psychophysical discipline aimed at cultivating harmony between the body and the mind. Originating from the Sanskrit word ‘yuj’ meaning ‘to yoke’ or ‘to unite’ the essence of yoga lies in its aim to integrate the mental and physical aspects. “All practices of Yoga work on body and mind likewise so that body and mind form a unit, and the human potential can be fully developed. One comes to oneself in the silence of meditation, to the very centre of oneself and one recognises one’s own uniqueness and strength as a part of a strength which stands behind everything which happens” (Pandey, 2016: 1). The philosophy and practice of yoga includes various branches and ideas leading towards spiritual evolution, self-realisation and liberation. Developed and refined over the centuries within the rich culture of India, the practice of yoga embarks a journey towards enlightenment.

Kalaripayattu is primarily a martial arts form for self-defence. Martial art traditions have been part of Indian culture since antiquity and one can find references in epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. Kalaripayattu is a discipline which combines physical-mental training and self-discipline. It incorporates the knowledge about the bodymind, the knowledge of traditional medicine and the art of massage. The origins of this martial art can be traced back to the twelfth century and the techniques used in it are close to the practice of yoga. “Kalaripayattu is practically and conceptually informed by yoga, as well as Ayurveda. Just as the hatha yoga practitioner begins by learning basic postures (asana) and breathing exercises, so the kalaripayattu practitioner at first tames both body and mind via poses, body exercises, and breath-control exercises” (Zarrilli, 2009: 67). Zarrilli (1998) specified that since at least the twelfth century, Kalaripayattu has been observed across the state of Kerala



and adjacent areas of Coorg in Karnataka. This martial art tradition has been particularly linked with a specific section of Hindu Nayar's, who were tasked to serve military duties.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Psychophysical refers to sharing mental and physical qualities. Psycho is derived from the Greek word psyche. Psyche can mean 'life, spirit, soul, self'. Psychophysical acting training aims to cultivate a profound connection between the body and the mind. It was first explored and formulated by Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), a prominent figure in theatre. Stanislavski revolutionised the approach towards acting and actor training by exploring the concept of psychophysical within the realm of theatre practice. He emphasised the significance of uniting psyche and physicality in actor training and performance, laying the groundwork for what later became known as the psychophysical acting training approach. He subscribed to an authentic internally driven approach to acting and urged actors to delve deep into the connection between the psyche of the character and the physical actions. Subsequently directors and theatre practitioners like Michael Chekhov, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and Phillip B. Zarrilli developed their own understanding and interpretations of Psychophysical acting training. Phillip Zarrilli further expanded on the ideas, exploring the psychophysical approach to enhance actor's embodiment, presence, and emotional authenticity in performances. Zarrilli mentions that 'psychological' means are not sufficient for contemporary theatre making. "I argue here that the 'psychological' is no longer-if it ever was-a paradigm with sufficient explanatory and/ or practical power and flexibility to fully inform the complexities of the work of the contemporary actor" (Zarrilli, 2009: 8). The recent developments in the field of psychophysical acting training are formulated by Zarrilli. He acknowledged the compound nature of the term psychophysical which encapsulates the integration of the body and the mind. He developed a unique training process and delved deep into the intricate relationship between the body and the mind, employing Asian martial arts form Kalaripayattu and yoga as transformative tools to re-educate the bodymind. "Asian martial arts use concrete physiological processes to destroy the automatisms of daily life and to create another quality of energy in the body. All Asiatic martial arts show a decided body ready to leap and to act. This attitude takes the form of extra daily technique, of the position of an animal ready to attack or defend itself" (Barba, 1991: 197). Asian martial arts and Yoga



offer a unique pathway for understanding the principles of energetics in acting. According to Barba's perspective, only the physical training of the body proves insufficient without the full engagement of the mind. Barba's standpoint underscores the importance of mental presence, advocating that an actor's awareness of their surroundings and their own body's kinetics is fundamental to delivering a captivating performance.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Descartes (1641) developed his theory of mind-body dualism, which is also known as Cartesian dualism. This theory suggests that the mind and the body are two distinct substances with different natures, and they interact to form the human experience. Descartes argued that the mind or consciousness is a non-physical, thinking substance. In contrast, the body is a physical, extended substance that occupies space and has a definite size and shape. Descartes dualism has been highly influential in the history of philosophy, providing a framework for understanding the relationship between mental and physical phenomena. However, it has also faced significant criticisms over the years.

In response to the Cartesian mind-body dualism, several philosophers and thinkers began exploring alternative views that sought to bridge the gap between the body and the mind. One such approach was the adoption of the term 'psychophysical,' which aimed to acknowledge the interconnected nature of mental and physical phenomena. The term 'psychophysical' emerged as a way to express the idea that mental processes (psyche) and physical processes are inherently linked and cannot be fully understood in isolation from each other. This perspective rejected the strict separation between the body and the mind.

The term whole body refers to the bodymind or psychophysical as one compound term. A strong bodymind connection entails cultivating a heightened awareness and energy enabling actors to engage fully with themselves and the immediate environment. Most contemporary actors lack the ability to inhibit the whole body/bodymind and use it effectively. Psychophysical acting training rejects the compartmentalising of the self and challenges the approaches which refer to the bodymind dualism. The psychophysical sees the body and the mind as indivisible and considers it as a whole. In light of new scientific



discoveries and extensive exploration of non-western practices, psychophysical acting training emerges as a valuable tool for training actors. Drawing inspiration from non-western traditions such as yoga and kalaripayattu, this approach offers a deeper understanding of fundamental elements of acting, such as the interconnectedness of body, mind, action, impulse, and emotion. In the psychophysical acting training approach emphasis is given on the ‘pre-performative’ phase, where actors undergo a comprehensive preparation process, sharpen their skills and attune themselves to the demands of the performance ahead. As a result, actors gain a deep sense of embodiment, sharpened focus, and emotional availability, setting the stage for authentic theatrical experiences. “The limits of the physical body can never be transgressed without knowledge and thoroughly mastering the sensory impulses which govern the process of living. The vital instincts and rhythms can only be acted upon and mastered through a very expert technique. It is this technique which is called yoga” (Mishra, 2018: 7). Over the years, India has developed a rich tradition of psychophysical disciplines aimed at bridging the perceived gap between the mind and the body. The disciplines, such as yoga and Kalaripayattu, emphasise holistic practices that integrate physical postures, breathing techniques, and mental concentration. Through consistent and prolonged engagement in these practices, individuals cultivate a profound awareness of the interconnectedness between their physical sensations, mental states, and emotional experiences. “Yoga presupposes the ‘mind-body’ link that has now become a widely shared ‘holistic’ view of the person. Exploring this ‘mind-body’ connection is an integral part of the world view known as the New Age” (Pandey, 2016: 55).

Pandey (2016) mentions that Yoga traces its origins back to Lord Shiva, who is believed to have imparted knowledge of over 8,40,000 asanas or postures. The earliest reference to yoga can be found in the Rig Veda, an ancient Indian text. Sage Patanjali formalised and elaborated on the practice of yoga in his seminal work, the ‘Yoga Sutras’. Patanjali elaborated on the eight limbs of yoga, providing a comprehensive framework for spiritual and physical development. These limbs encompass ethical principles (yama and niyama), physical practices including postures and breath control (asana and pranayama), and meditative techniques such as withdrawal of the senses, concentration, and meditation (pratyahara, dharana, and dhyana). The ultimate aim of these practices is to attain samadhi,



a state of profound spiritual bliss and self-realisation. It is essential to understand that yoga transcends religious boundaries; it is not a religion in itself but rather a potent tool for self-discovery and self-realisation. Through disciplined practice, individuals can explore the depths of their being and cultivate harmony between mind, body, and spirit. (Pandey, 2016: 4-5) Pandey also clarifies that the Yamas represent restraints, while the Niyama's denote observances. These elements are regarded as prerequisites for advancing in yogic practices. Asanas, which aim to establish stability of both body and mind, entail assuming diverse psycho-physical postures, enabling individuals to sustain a particular bodily position, a state of stable awareness of one's structural presence for an extended duration. Another important aspect of Yoga is 'Pranayama' which involves cultivating an awareness of one's breathing fostering conscious regulation of respiration. The practice fosters an understanding of breath initially starting with the awareness of inhalation and exhalation. "The Prana may be defined as the finest vital force in everything which becomes visible on the physical plane as motion and action and on the mental plane as thought. The word Pranayama, therefore, means the restraint of vital energies" (Mishra, 2018: 163).

Zarrilli (2009) highlights one of the notable branches of Yoga which is called Hatha Yoga. Hatha yoga represents a distinct method of psychophysiological training. It encompasses a comprehensive set of practices including controlled breathing exercises, physical postures (asana), and dietary guidelines. These elements work simultaneously to influence both the physical body (sthula sarira) and the subtle body (sukshma sarira). In classical hatha yoga, practitioners engage in repetitive breath control exercises and assume various postures, aiming to harmonise the body and the mind. This holistic approach to hatha yoga acknowledges the interconnectedness of the physical and subtle realms, with practices designed to awaken and balance vital energy (prana) within the practitioner. By integrating these practices into their lives, individuals can cultivate a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationship to the world around them, facilitating personal growth and spiritual development. (Zarrilli, 2009: 65) Hatha yoga is experiencing a surge in global recognition and is increasingly being regarded as a therapeutic modality. Across diverse cultures and regions, practitioners, researchers, and healthcare professionals are increasingly acknowledging the multifaceted benefits of Hatha yoga. In recent years, extensive scientific



research has been dedicated to exploring the physiological, psychological, and even neurological effects of Hatha yoga practices. “Yoga as exercise or alternative medicine is a modern phenomenon which has been influenced by the ancient Indian practice of Hatha yoga. A survey released in December 2008 by the U.S. The National Centre for Complementary and Integrative Health found that Hatha yoga was the sixth most commonly used alternative therapy in the United States during 2007, with 6.1 percent of the population participating.” (Pandey, 2016: 51)

Zarrilli’s ethnographic monograph ‘When Body Becomes All Eyes’ (1998), offers a thorough exploration of kalaripayattu within the cultural context of Kerala. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, interviews, and Zarrilli’s own immersion in the practice of Kalaripayattu, the monograph provides a rich and multifaceted account of kalaripayattu’s significance and practice within the region. Zarrilli (2009), specified that like Yoga, achieving mastery in kalaripayattu, necessitates the attainment of ‘complete knowledge of the body’. This understanding traditionally involves gaining knowledge of three distinct bodies of practice: the fluid body, the physical body (sthula sarira) and the subtle body (sukshma sarira). In Indian philosophy, the concept of the subtle body refers to a dimension beyond the physical form, encompassing energy channels known as nadis and energy centres called chakras. These nadis and chakras are believed to play a pivotal role in regulating the flow of vital energy (prana) throughout the body, influencing physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. By possessing knowledge of these three interconnected bodies of practice, practitioners of kalaripayattu and Yoga can attain a deeper level of awareness. Through dedicated practice, practitioners gradually overcome physical limitations and mental distractions, allowing them to cultivate focused attention. Over time, the ability to endure physical and mental challenges is enhanced, leading to a balance between the three bodies of practice.

Zarrilli (2009) elaborates that in Indian perspectives, the subtle body is conceived as a conceptual framework utilised by yogis and martial artists to articulate and comprehend their psycho-spiritual experiences. It serves as a tool for mapping the intricate terrain of psychophysical disciplines, providing practitioners with a language and structure to explain





the transformative effects of their practices on both the body and the mind. This subtle body framework enables practitioners to integrate their physical and mental experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between the two. “Psychophysical Acting Training provides an alternative conceptualization and model of the actor’s work based not on acting as representation, but on an ‘energetics’ of performance. It explains how energy is activated, how perceptual/sensory awareness is heightened, animal like, as the body “becomes all eyes,” and how both are applied to a variety of dramaturgies” (Zarrilli, 2009: 1). Through sustained and focused practice, individuals refine their sensitivity to the subtle dimensions of their being, attuning themselves to energetic shifts, mental states, and the interplay between external movements and internal sensations. By exploring the subtle body, practitioners gain insight into how psychophysical exercises influence their physical, mental, and emotional states. This heightened awareness facilitates a profound journey of self-discovery and personal growth.

### **3. Research Method and Materials**

3.1. Aim of the study: The study aims to ascertain the potential benefits of practicing psychophysical disciplines. It aims to evaluate the effectiveness of practicing yoga and kalaripayattu in enhancing the bodymind relation.

3.2. Objectives of the study: To evaluate the extent to which the practice of yoga and kalaripayattu contributes to the improvement in physical strength, flexibility and on cultivating a harmonious bodymind relation among the participants.

3.3. Research Methodology: The study adopts an analytical approach with an empirical focus to examine the impact of yoga and kalaripayattu on various aspects of practitioners. Each participant was presented with a structured close ended questionnaire through Google forms consisting of items designed to measure different components related to the practice of yoga and kalaripayattu. The questionnaire utilised a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Agree” (1) to “Strongly Disagree” (5), allowing respondents to express their opinions.







50-59	5
60-69	7
Total	90

Table 3: Demographics of the type of practice

Type of Practice	Number of Participants	Percentage
Yoga	51	56.7
Kalaripayattu	20	22.2
Both Yoga and Kalaripayattu	21	23.3
Total	90	100

Table 4: Participants Responses to Survey Questions

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Has practising Kalaripayattu and/or Yoga improved your physical strength and flexibility?	75 (82.4%)	15 (16.5 %)	1 (1.1%)	-	-



Has practising Kalaripayattu and/or Yoga enhanced your body awareness and control?	69 (76.7%)	20 (22.2%)	1 (1.1%)	-	-
Do you feel more emotionally connected to your body through the practice of Kalaripayattu and/or Yoga?	63 (70%)	22 (24.4%)	5 (5.6%)	-	-
Has Kalaripayattu and/or Yoga helped you manage stress and maintain mental clarity?	57 (63.3%)	26 (28.9%)	5 (5.6%)	2 (2.2%)	-
Has Kalaripayattu and/or Yoga helped you attain a better bodymind relation?	60 (66.7%)	28 (31.1%)	2 (2.2%)	-	-

### 3.8. Research Survey Findings

- Improvement in physical strength and flexibility: A majority of participants (98.9%) either strongly agree or agree that practising Kalaripayattu and/or Yoga has improved their physical strength and flexibility.
- Enhancement of body awareness and control: A majority of participants (98.9%) either strongly agree or agree that practising Kalaripayattu and/or Yoga has enhanced their body awareness and control.
- Emotional connection to the body: A majority of participants (94.4%) either strongly agree or agree that practising Kalaripayattu and/or Yoga has made them more emotionally connected to their bodies.



- Stress management and mental clarity: A majority of participants (92.2%) either strongly agree or agree that practising Kalarippayattu and/or Yoga has helped them manage stress and maintain mental clarity.
- Attainment of a better bodymind relation: A majority of participants (97.8%) either strongly agree or agree that practising Kalarippayattu and/or Yoga has helped them attain a better bodymind relation.

Two questions were formulated for drawing final conclusions.

- Do you believe that your experience in Kalarippayattu and/or Yoga has positively influenced your working abilities?

#### Positive Influence on Working Abilities

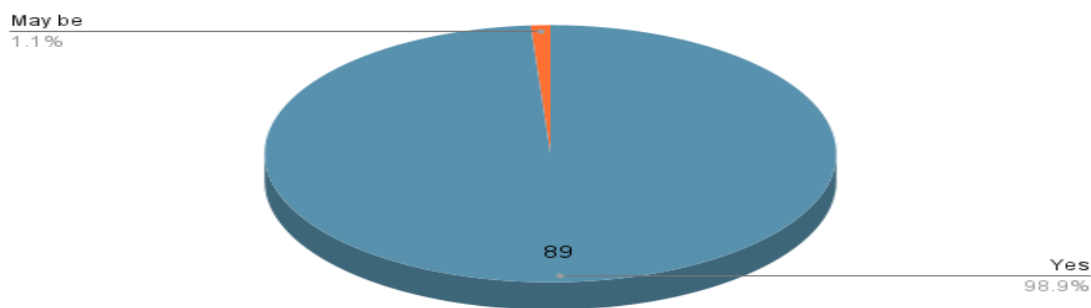


Figure 1. depicting the positive influence on working abilities.

Yes- 89 participants (98.9%)

May be- 1 participant (1.1%)

- Do you think that elements of Kalarippayattu and/or Yoga should be integrated into formal acting training programs to enhance an actor's bodymind relation?



### Opinion on Integration of Yoga and Kalarippayattu into Acting Training

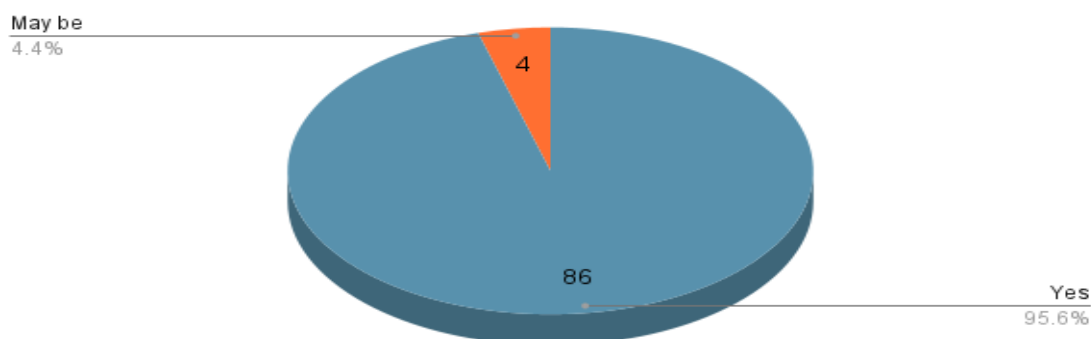


Figure 2. depicts the opinions on integration of Yoga and Kalarippayattu into formal acting training.

Yes- 86 participants (95.6%)

May be- 4 participants (4.4%)

The data suggests that practising Kalarippayattu and/or Yoga has a positive impact on various aspects, including physical strength, flexibility, body awareness, emotional connection to the body, stress management, mental clarity, and bodymind relation.

**Positive Influence on working abilities:** The overwhelming majority of participants (98.9%) believe that their experience in Kalarippayattu and/or Yoga has positively influenced their working abilities. This indicates a strong perception among practitioners that these practices contribute to their professional skills and performance.

**Support for integration into formal acting training programs:** A significant majority of participants (95.6%) believe that elements of Kalarippayattu and/or Yoga should be integrated into formal acting training programs to enhance an actor's bodymind relation. This aligns with the aim of the research paper and supports the recommendation for incorporating these practices into the acting training curriculum.

## 4. Conclusion



The reported benefits and support for integration into formal acting training programs strongly suggest that incorporating elements of kalaripayattu and yoga can enhance an actor's bodymind relation and overall working abilities. The findings of this study reinforce the potential benefits of integrating elements of kalaripayattu and yoga into formal acting training programs. In this approach the actors are invited to integrate elements of psychophysical disciplines in a manner that serves the art of acting.

According to Zarrilli, traditional practices are an active embodied doing. Yoga and Martial arts are a technique of disciplining the body. These are technologies of the body in Foucault's sense, i.e. practices through which humans develop knowledge about themselves. The interplay between training methodologies and performance genres highlights the deeply contextual nature of acting and performance. Each mode of training is designed to shape the performer's bodymind to meet the unique demands of different performance styles in which they operate. Training techniques act as a technology of the body which systematically alters and prepares the actor or performer. The rigorous physical training and mental discipline required by classical ballet differ significantly from the methods used in contemporary dance. In theatre the method acting approach contrasts with traditional Indian theatre because of different sets of cultural values and philosophical beliefs. These practices are informed by the ongoing discourses about the body and performance. The technology of the body are these specific training techniques which cannot be separated from the discourses that inform them. It is crucial to situate the techniques within a broader socio-cultural and historical landscape because it influences the act of performance itself.

The way acting is understood and practised varies significantly across cultures. It is deeply rooted in their unique paradigms of the bodymind relationship. In India, the concept of embodiment in acting is intricately linked to several indigenous theories and practices that shape aspects of performance. Ayurveda is the traditional Indian system of medicine which offers a humour-based understanding of physiology and health. Yoga philosophy and practice provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the effects of physical and mental exercises on the bodymind. Yoga and Kalaripayattu help actors achieve greater control over their bodymind leading to enhanced presence and expressivity on stage. The



central elements are the concept of prana vayu and kundalini shakti (awakened inner energy). In this context, both prana and Kundalini shakti can play a significant role in enhancing the skills and channelising the energy. When awakened through these specific practices, this energy leads to heightened states of awareness which can be transformative for actors.

The recent developments in the field of psychophysical acting training are formulated by Phillip Zarrilli. He acknowledged the compound nature of the term psychophysical which encapsulates the integration of the body and the mind. He developed a unique training process and delved deep into the intricate relationship between the body and the mind, employing Asian martial arts form Kalaripayattu and yoga as transformative tools to re-educate the bodymind. Asian martial arts and Yoga offer a unique pathway for understanding the principles of energetics in acting. According to Barba's perspective, only the physical training of the body proves insufficient without the full engagement of the mind. Barba's standpoint underscores the importance of mental presence, mentioning that an actor's awareness of their surroundings and their own body's kinetics is fundamental to delivering a captivating performance.

**Ethical Considerations:** The authors affirm that the study adhered to the ethical guidelines for a questionnaire study and obtained consent from all participants. The participants were aware of the research.

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