

THE INNER BODY IN MOTION IN A SOUTH INDIAN MARTIAL ART

Lucy May Constantini

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17:30

Seminar Room 1
of the Department of South Asian,
Tibetan and Buddhist Studies,
University Campus,
Spitalgasse 2, Hof 2.7, 1090 Vienna



Picture Credit:
G. Sathyanarayanan Nair & N. Rajasekharan Nair at CVN Kalari Sangham, East Fort. ©CVN Kalari Sangham

This talk draws on Lucy May Constantini's doctoral research on *kaḷarippayarr̥*, a martial art and associated medical system from the Malabar region of Kerala, South India. Lucy's study focuses on the voices and experiences of long-term practitioners, placing the practice of *kaḷarippayarr̥* within its unique lineage, religious, and social context. Her main argument is that embodied and indigenous practices should be studied on their own terms, and that doing so helps decolonise academic culture by highlighting voices and knowledge systems that have often been marginalised. In this talk, Lucy will explain how the methods used in her research align with the goals of the MANTRAMS project. She will discuss how focusing on embodied knowledge and combining it with detailed ethnography helped deepen the understanding of the *kaḷari* body in ritual and practice. Lucy will also explore how the embodied practice of *kaḷarippayarr̥* informs textual descriptions of the body's subtle qualities, revealing them as observable and repeatable, rather than merely metaphorical. Additionally, she will outline the role of *mantram* in the transmission of *kaḷarippayarr̥*.

Lucy May Constantini recently joined the ERC-funded Synergy Project, MANTRAMS, at the University of Vienna as postdoctoral researcher. Her PhD at the Open University in the UK explored the relationship between practice and textual traditions in *kaḷarippayarr̥*, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council's Open-Oxford-Cambridge Doctoral Training Partnership. This interdisciplinary research encompassed ethnography, drawing on a relationship since 2002 with CVN Kalari Sangham in Thiruvananthapuram, where she spent roughly 24 months over several intervals, and the study of manuscripts in Malayalam and Sanskrit. Her methodology is informed by her background in dance and somatic practices, where her work investigates the confluence of her praxes of postmodern dance, martial arts and yoga.



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