

# ***Acrobatic sculptures***

***- Deepthi R. Bhat, Bengaluru.***

Acrobatics, literally meant “to walk on tip-toe,” or “to climb up”. In the past it referred to the specialized and ancient art of jumping, tumbling, and balancing. Later the use of an apparatus like poles, one-wheel cycles, balls, barrels, tightropes, trampolines, and flying trapezes came to be included.

But why do we consider acrobatics special? It is because, not everyone can do it! Yes. It is skill that can be executed perfectly only after a continuous periods of practice and one requires a highly flexible body with good stamina. These days, we usually get to see this in Circuses or reality shows.

It was astonishing to find acrobatic sculptures carved on the walls and pillars of Vijayanagara era temples, leaving us in awe. The fact that they are found in temples, is a testimony to the notion that acrobatics were a common element in the society of those times; and Temples have encouraged it.



It might have been carved as a reference to Indian forms like Dombarata, Kusti(Wrestling), Mallayudha too. Acrobatics were not new to India. The martial art, Kalaripayattu, said to be the mother of all martial arts, has many acrobatic movements.

Bharata’s Natyashastra also gives us an indication of the possible acrobatic movements in its vocabulary. Nritta Ratnavali, a treatise written by Jayasenapati also indicates many Desi nritta-s which are might have inspired these sculptures.

**The following are a few aerobic sculptures found in temples:-**



fig 1.1

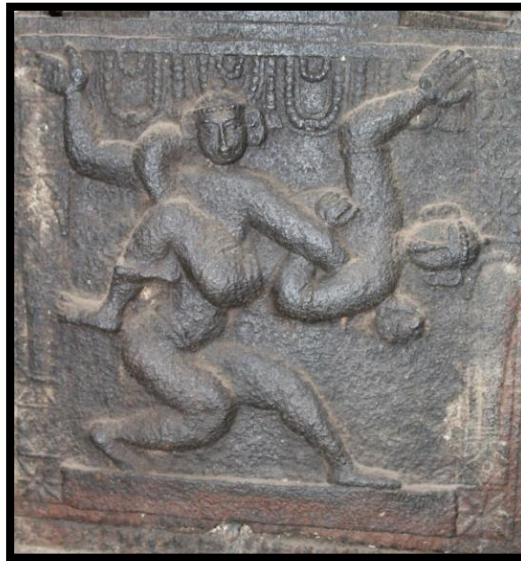


fig 1.2

The above sculptures are seen in Kurudumale Someshwara temple, Kolar. In figure 1.1 we can observe two men creating a circle by holding one of each other's legs. Both the men have stretched their left leg to form the line in between and their right leg creating the circle. Both their hands are holding each other's legs. As we can see this requires high flexibility and the lower man requires the strength to balance the man in air.

In figure 1.2 we can see that the man is balancing the other man hanging over his stomach. The man in air has his legs around his shoulders and interlocked with his other leg. Even one of their hands are locked. They create a plus like pattern.



fig 1.3

We find this sculpture in the pillar of Lepakshi temple. In this figure we can see that the body is completely off the ground. He is carrying the weight of his entire body with hands and his chin placed on the hands which are crossed together. This is similar to the Gangavatarana Karana and Shirshaasana of Yoga. We can see such poses in Kalaripayattu as well.

**These are the examples of acrobatics used in different activities in present times:-**

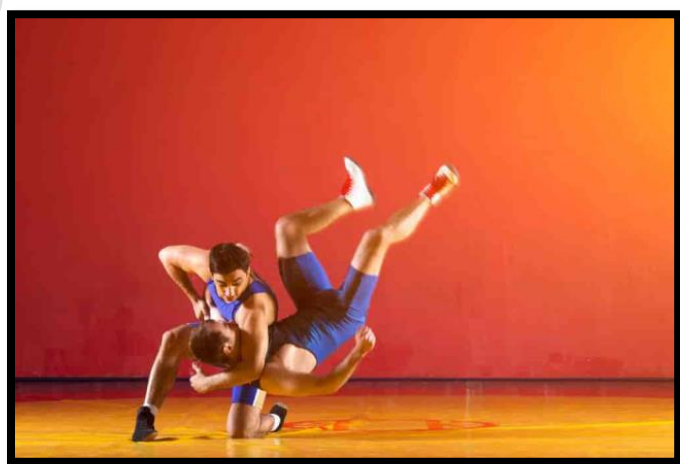
In India there are many activities that involve complicated movements involving balance and strength like :-

**Dommarata –**



Dommarata is a historic folk dance, involving both men and women who perform dance together as a group. Women dance in rhythm with special steps, while men balance wooden sticks made of Bamboo or other wood forms, on their shoulder. Other men slowly climb the wooden sticks and balance themselves, in tune with the rhythm.

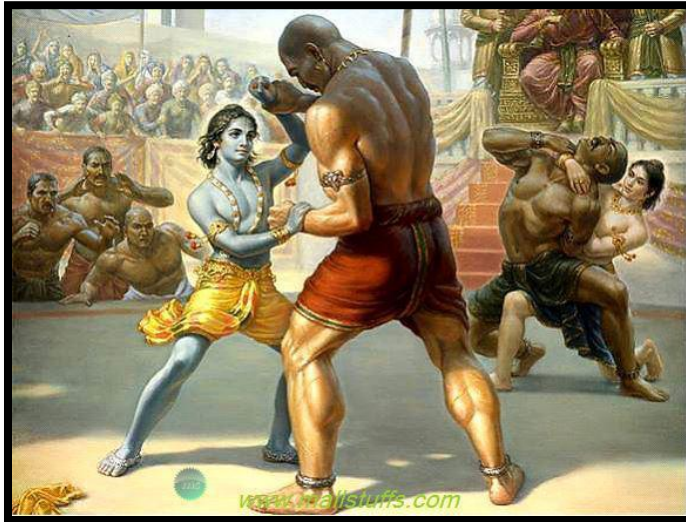
**Kusti (Indian Wrestling)**



It is a form of wrestling contested in South Asia. The words pehlwani and kushti derive from the terms pahlavani (heroic) and koshti (wrestling, lit. Killing) respectively, meaning Heroic wrestling.



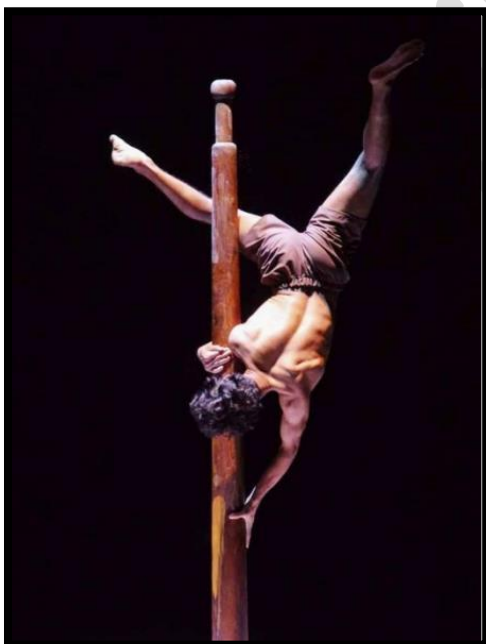
## **Malla yuddha**



It is the traditional form of combat-wrestling originating in India. Malla-yuddha incorporates wrestling, joint-breaking, punching, biting, choking and pressure point striking. Matches were traditionally codified into four types which progressed from purely sportive contests of strength to actual full-contact fights known as Yuddha. The second form, wherein the wrestlers attempt to lift each other off the ground for three seconds, still exists in south India.

Additionally, Malla-yuddha is divided into four categories namely, Hanumanti – concentrates on technical superiority, Jambuvanti – uses locks and holds to force the opponent into submission, Jarasandhi – concentrates on breaking the limbs and joints while fighting, Bhimaseni – focuses on sheer strength.

## **Mallakamba**



It is a traditional sport, originating from the Indian subcontinent, in which a gymnast performs aerial yoga or gymnastic postures and wrestling grips in concert with a vertical stationary or hanging wooden pole, cane, or rope. The word Mallakhamba also refers to the pole used in the sport. The pole is usually made from sheesham polished with castor oil.

**The following are some western activities that involve acrobatic movements :-**



In 1859, Charles Blondin's crossing of Niagara Falls on a tightrope, rekindled public interest in aerial gymnasts and acrobats. This was how the concept of acrobatics was first introduced.

We find acrobatic movements in many Western activities like-

**Contemporary** – a dance form where the dancer performs graceful movements along with tricks involving balance of hands and legs.

**Cheerleading** – is an activity in which the participants (called cheerleaders) cheer for their team as a form of encouragement.

**Contortion** – Performance art in which performers called contortionists showcase their skills of extreme physical flexibility.

**Corde lisse** – Aerial circus skill or act that involves acrobatics on a vertically hanging rope.

**Gymnastics** – Sport that includes physical exercises requiring balance, strength, flexibility, agility, coordination, and endurance.

**Figure skating** – Sport in which individuals, pairs, or groups perform on figure skates on ice.





### **Conclusion :**

The sculptures and the photographs clearly indicate the strength, flexibility, stability, power and energy required to execute such difficult stances with precision. The perfect pose is possible only when everyone involved gives their best. These poses not only require physical strength but also require mental stability and concentration. Even if one link is found weak, the whole pose might crumble like a fortress of cards. The cheer and applause from the audience should not distract the performers.

As a dancer, we all know how much of perfection with focused practice is essential even to get a simple sequence of events, flawlessly. As an onlooker of acrobatics, the perfect rendition of the poses creates a sense of awe and makes one wonder how much of effort and seamless hours of practice must have gone into creating a sculptural pose like this. Heartfelt gratitude to the sculptors, who preserved these poses on stone for posterity. It is but through these evidences, that we can understand the skill of our ancestors who, without much claim to fame, did their duty with utmost dedication.

### **Acknowledgement –**

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### **About the Author**

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Learning dance from 10 years. Disciple of Dr. Dwaritha Vishwanath.

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