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## Vajra Mushti Kalaga the traditional Indian martial art

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### Abstract

Vajra Mushti is a unique Indian martial art that incorporates various techniques of hand-to-hand combat like grappling, wrestling and striking techniques. Vajra Mushti, which literally means Thunderbolt Fist, is characterised by the utilization of a knuckleduster, a small metal weapon. The knuckleduster, also known as Vajra Mushti, usually made of animal horns like buffalo, elephant (ivory), is worn on the knuckles of the fighter. The main objective of this Indian martial art form is to neutralize the opponent and counter his weapon.

**Keywords:** Vajramushti, martial art, history, types, matches, the Jyesthimalla's etc.

### Introduction

Vajramushti is an ancient, grappling based fighting art that had one main difference from its modern day equivalent the contestants wore knuckledusters on their right hands to add a devastating power to their blows. Blows that could maim even kill the Jyesthimallas are the keepers of this ancient and formidable art, an art in which a knuckleduster is tied on to the wrestler's right hand and used in ways that would make the hardest veteran, since in disbelief. this art form is by no means, a modern day adaptation of the wrestling and striking arts, it has a history, a lineage and traditions that take us back to the middle Ages and possibly beyond the Mallapuram as Indian culture has produced a plethora of Puranas, (ancient texts), ranging from writings on ancient ayurvedic medicine, classical architecture, from warfare to love making and these collections of ancient wisdom have been written, re-written and handed down from generation to generation till modern day. One such Purana, the Mallapurana is kept at the Oriental research Institute in Poona, India. It is written in the Devangari script and dates back to the year 1731 A.D. It describes many of the practices and traditions of the Vajramushti wrestlers in particular; some of which will be described in this work. It also mentions the Jyesthi malla's or Jyesthi clan of fighters, who still carried on the practice of this art in to recent times. The term Jyesthi translates as 'the best' and comes from the word Jyestha meaning most prominent or senior most. The Jyesthi mallas still inhabit the Gujarat region of India till these days too; renowned Jyesthi malla's were also present in Mysore and Hyderabad regions.

### Vajramushti

The name of the martial art is derived from the Sanskrit word, Vajra, which means Thunderbolt or Diamond and is of much religious significance in both Hinduism and Buddhism; and the Sanskrit word Mushti, which means closed or clenched fist. Thus Vajra Mushti literally means Thunderbolt fist or Diamond Fist.

The Vajramushti In this fierce style of wrestling, the combatants wear the Ayudha or Vajramusti on their right hand. This weapon, commonly known today as the knuckleduster, is usually made out of buffalo horn or ivory. It has several small holes along its length, so that it may be tied onto the hand with thread, so as not to become dislodged during the fight. A weapon similar to the Vajramushti was also used in the ancient Greek and Roman world. It was used by boxers and Pancrationists, and was called the Cestus. It was a ring, usually made of bronze, worn around the knuckles, to add power to a blow. Many variations of this weapon have been described in both ancient Greek and Indian literature. The Vajramushti's that were used in warfare had sharp spikes or blades extending from each end.

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In training, the Vajramushti wrestlers are taught many ways to lock-up and immobilize the arm that holds the Vajramushti. These locks are applied with the arms, or legs and sometimes a combination of both. Various methods of striking and defending are also part of the main stream training regimen. Takedowns, knees and elbows are also employed although striking with the weapon to any target below the chest is considered an illegal technique.

### **Martial Art**

Indian martial arts refer to the fighting systems of the Indian subcontinent. A variety of terms are used for the English phrases "Indian martial arts", usually deriving from Sanskrit or Dravidian sources. While they may seem to imply specific disciplines (e.g. archery, armed combat), by Classical times they were used generically for all fighting systems. (Translation warfare art, knowledge of arms, science of being a warrior, science of weaponry, science of archery, and art of self-defence).

### **History**

Vajramusti (Sanskrit: "thunder fist" or "diamond fist") refers to a knuckleduster like weapon and also a form of Indian wrestling in which the weapon is employed. The weapon is sometimes called Indra-musti which means Indra's fist. The vajramusti is usually made of ivory or buffalo horn. Its appearance is that of a knuckleduster, slightly pointed at the sides and with small spikes at the knuckles. The variation used for warfare had long blades protruding from each end, and an elaborate bladed knuckle.

The first literary mention of vajramusti comes from the *Manasollasa* of the Chalukya king Someswara III (1124–1138), although it has been conjectured to have existed since as early as the Maurya dynasty. Matches were patronized by royalty and wrestlers thus became held in high regard. Vajramusti and its unarmed counterpart mallyayuddha were practiced by the jasthimalla ("The most excellent wrestlers"), a jatti of Krishna-worshipping the first mentioned in the 12th century. The Jyesti clan trained specifically in mallyayuddha and vajramusti. The *Malla Purana* is a Kula Purana associated with the Jyesti sub-caste, and is thought to date back to the 13th century. It describes the wrestlers' diet, the preparation of the arena, and the various exercises used. By the 16th century, the Jyestimalla were synonymous with fighting, renowned athletes and professional fighters who would act as bodyguards for the rich.

This ancient Mallapurana text contains eighteen chapters, describing everything from the diet, Training practices and stages of the fight in detail. From the syntax and Spelling of certain words contained therein, there is evidence enough to suggest that it was copied in the 1700's from another, even older source that may have dated back to even centuries earlier.

During the Mughal era, Negrito aboriginals of Gujerat (sometimes mistakenly referred to in European writings as being from Madagascar due to their appearance) were trained in vajra-musti from infancy. The Portuguese chronicler Fernao Nunes records the practice of vajramusti in the southern Vijayanagara Empire.

### **Types**

Vajra-mushti is divided into four distinct types; The First is Dharanipata, in which the loser is brought to the ground. Asura, a free fight in which there is only one foul, that of striking below the chest. The first man downed is the loser.

Considering what happened in the first bout, this is probably a good safety feature. Nara was the third type. In this a jatti could announce that he surrendered whether he fell or not. Finally, the ultimate form of Indian combat was Yuddha. This was similar to the Greek Pankration in that the loser had the possibility of being killed. As was also true of the Pankration, very few participants actually were Vajramushti was restricted to the caste of Jethis, or professional wrestlers.

### **Matches**

The Vajramushti match on the day of the match, the combatants heads are shaved clean, except for a small tuft of hair on the crown of the head. Several Neem leaves are tied to this tuft of hair as a good look of men. The wrestler's body is then rubbed down with red ochre, which is supposedly meant to keep the body cool during the fight. Before leaving their family Akhada for the match, both fighters pray to their family God. For this worship, a square altar is temporarily constructed in the middle of the wrestling pit, upon which a branch of the Neem tree is planted. To the east of this altar, a small platform is placed, upon which, the weapons of the wrestlers are placed. After prayers and rituals are completed, the fighter is given the Vajramushti, which is tied to his right hand. Upon leaving their family's place of training, the wrestlers make their way to the public arena, where they enter in a zig-zagging, jumping fashion. The object of the match was to bring the other fighter to the point of submission; either by blows or a locking up of the Vajramushti-wielding arm. It is a limited-rules engagement, where knees, kicks and strikes are all legal techniques to be used in conjunction with grappling techniques. Both fighters receive payment after the match, with the winner receiving double the amount of his defeated opponent. If the match was a draw, and neither fighter was submitted, then the prize was shared.

### **The Jyesthimalla's**

The Jyesthimalla's are now found in the Indian states of Gujarat, Mysore, Hyderabad and Rajasthan. In Baroda the capital of Gujarat several of the better known Jyesthimalla's have been kept training Akhada's right up to present day. It is interesting to note that the Jyesthimalla's have been referred to in ancient literature, as far back as the 12th and 13th centuries. The Jyesthi's living in the 16th century were renowned athletes, and thought of as being synonymous with fighting. In fact, to this day, there is an expression in the state of Gujarat, 'the Jyesthimallas are fighting', and it is used to describe any serious duel between two combatants. The Jyesthi's have had a long tradition of working as bodyguards to marriage parties, and have been patronized by kings, princes and rulers for many centuries. In the early 19th century, the Jyesthimallas were sponsored by the Gayakwads, and so, many were invited to Baroda from Dalmal and Hyderabad. Those that came from the Hyderabad continued to maintain their family's fighting tradition right up until modern day; but sadly, by the late 1980's there were only several surviving practitioners of this ancient art still living in Baroda and in Mysore. Even then, it was an art on the verge of extinction

### **Conclusion**

If we want to save our Martial Arts, we should think as being Indian and not be narrow minded on division of states and whose art is the oldest or best. Arts get lost not because of time, but because of lack of ability to spread/share among different races. My opinion is that peers back into the time

and examine arts such as those practised by the Vajramushti fighters and marvel at the sheer wonder and history of it all. Over centuries, such arts were developed, who knows to what amazing degree; for no modern technology and audio video existed and no mobile camera, no face book any twitter app networks were there to broadcast the struggles of these time-forgotten athletes. It takes several decades, and the work of many, to develop an art to the point where it's level of effectiveness outweighs its theoretical musings but sadly, with the passing of only one generation it can all be forgotten as if it had never existed at all. The world is growing smaller; history and legends fade by the minute but if we pay attention and keep our hearts open, much can still be preserved.

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