

Research Paper

## Constructing Mental Health through Martial Arts: Positive Vibes and Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

Human Mental Health is directly associated with the physical culture. Throughout the civilization the physical activities of mankind influenced its mental health and the betterment of mental health also inspired the possibilities of sports and physical development. Martial Arts are not just only self defence technics but also the age-old traditions of betterment of physical and mental health. Beyond the physical demonstration of various martial arts, the proper practice of them also played key role in the development of mental stability and concentration and mental peace. The oriental martial arts like Yoga, Tai Chi, Quigong are specifically significant for the betterment of mental health. Martial Arts like Karate, Kung Fu, Jijutsu, Judo, Akido, Kalaripayathu, Gatka, Thang Ta, Malkhamb etc also have their active role in human body development and mental health construction. But those things have also specific conditions and technics of perform. Proper performances of various martial arts through devoted practice procedures used to fulfill the targeted goal of achieving physical development along with mental peace and stability. According to father of modern Karate Gichin Funakoshi the proper practice of Karate used to bring inner peace of a Karateka to make proper mental development of the individual and as Yamaguchi Gogen also echoed the ancient voice of Bodhidharma that without proper mental peace no one can make proper practice of martial art. As the physicality and mental health are supportive to each other thus the proper practice of martial arts used to bring developments of both sector of the performers.

**Keywords:** Human, Physical, Mental Health, Martial Art, Practice, Training, Culture, Yoga, Karate

Martial Arts are great physical activities. To construct healthy human body martial arts are very significant. Along with self-defense techniques martial arts are also very much helpful to develop healthy and tough physical figures for both men and women. Along with the physical perspective martial arts always secure the development of mental health, because without mental peace the martial techniques cannot be learn properly. Martial Arts in any form and irrespective of culture and country always prefer about psychological development because human physical health is directly related with mental status of an individual. Martial Arts are not just physical technics but at the same time mostly psychological philosophies. Eastern Martial Arts or Asian Martial Arts are mostly associated

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## Constructing Mental Health through Martial Arts: Positive Vibes and Challenges

with high philosophical orders and thus always prefers better mental health along with healthy physical postures. <sup>(1)</sup>

All the Eastern Martial Arts thus always given importance to mental health. Concept of peace has significant importance with these martial technics. They are mostly defensive in nature and prefers the high morality of non-violence. Religious concepts of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism are associated with most of the Eastern Martial Arts. Thus, along with physical technics martial arts always delivers high ideologies for psychological development. Kalaripayathu of India has been considered as the oldest among all the existing martial arts. Almost 3000 years older this martial technology give equal importance to physical and mental health. The concept of medical treatment and healing are also directly associated with this martial art. So, it always prefers of a mental peace and healthy mental background creation before the conduction of physical training. <sup>(2)</sup> Bodhidharma, the 6th century AD Pallava Prince took the concept of Martial Art and Ayurvedic Medical treatment process to China from India. He also embraced Buddhism and developed the concept of Zen Buddhism in China. Bodhidharma's skills spread initially in China and thereafter spread all over East and South East Asia. He became famous as Damo in China and Daruma in Japan. Along with the combative technics high philosophical preaching for psychological development also argued by him through the forms of martial art. Therefore, the Eastern Martial Arts like Kung-Fu and Karate always mention about mental health and philosophical peace keeping along with physical development. <sup>(3)</sup>

All types of Indian Martial Arts highly endorse the concept of peace. Not just only peace of outer world but also the concept of mental peace always given utmost importance. The concept of Vermakalai developed only to ensure the concept of psychological calmness to learn the physical activities. Yoga also always works to develop mental health and psychological betterment. In Chinese martial arts also, the mental state of the practitioner always given utmost importance. Thus, the concept of Tai Chi developed to create mental peace before learning the physical side of the martial arts. Without proper mindset and inner peace of mental state the physical activities cannot be learn in proper way. Almost all the Eastern Martial Arts prefer this concept. So, inner peace in always given importance. Martial Arts are mostly defensive in nature. So, aggression and unwanted violence are destructive for the practice of martial arts. Physical growth is always connected with mental state of an individual. Thus, martial arts always endorse the concept of mental health along with their physical benefits. <sup>(4)</sup>

Karate is the most famous form of martial art that originated in Okinawa Island and developed in Japan and spread successfully all over the world. This particular form of martial art born in 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Tokugawa Shogunate colonial expansion in Ryuku Islands of Okinawa. Though the concept of sports karate only developed in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century but traditional Karate has long roots in history. Karate is a martial art which means 'empty hand'. The Samurai ideology with the assimilation of Chinese Boxing developed the format of Traditional Karate which had three basic schools- Shuri Te, Naha Te and Tomari Te and from these later on various modern schools of Karate have been developed, such as- Goju Ryu, Shotokan Ryu, Shito Ryu, Wado Ryu, Kyokushinkai, Budokan, Issen and Uechi. But whatever may be the style or school karate always prefers the concept of peacekeeping and always upheld the ideology of mental peace. Thus, Karate played a very significant role in developing mental state of a dedicated practitioner. Karate always go with the term 'Do' and Do means 'Way of life'. Karate is not just a self defense physical activity but it is a life long philosophy. It is a philosophy of positive 'kime' or energy which gives equal importance to physical strength and mental development. <sup>(5)</sup>

## Constructing Mental Health through Martial Arts: Positive Vibes and Challenges

Though the modernization of Karate started with the efforts of Master Higaonna, the founder of Goju Ryu in 19<sup>th</sup> century but it was Gichin Funakoshi who developed the concept of free sparring and thus made the proper modernization of Karate. Gichin Funakoshi the founder of Shotokan style of Karate used to be the Pan world figure to be considered as the 'Father of Modern Karate'. It was his initiative that Karate became a part of the academic curriculum of Japanese Universities since the 1920s. Funakoshi was born in 1868, the year of Meiji Restoration and beginning of the modernization of medieval Japan. Thereby it is significant that Funakoshi played a key role in modernization of Karate. But Funakoshi himself was a very traditional man in his personal way of life and Karate technique as he was a direct student of the Masters like Asatsune Azato and Anko Itosu who were the great traditional masters of this oriental martial art. Funakoshi developed a bridge between traditional way of Karate and the modernization of Karate. Yet he always considered Karate as a life long philosophy which has direct influence over physical and psychological perspectives of the human practitioners. Funakoshi always given importance to the preparation of healthy mind before learning the physical techniques of Karate. According to him a disturbed mind cannot learn the proper ideologies of martial art and it is the martial art practice where proper concentration can bring peace of mind, Karate has certain process and practices to develop psychological strength among the individual practitioner and considered meditation as an essential part of Karate learning.<sup>(6)</sup> The almost same type of concepts also preached by Tatsuo Shimabuku, the founder of the Issen Ryu of Okinawan art. Miyagi Chozen and Yamaguchi Gogen of Goju Ryu also believed similarly that martial art practice is directly associated with character building and developing of mental strength.<sup>(7)</sup>

Various field studies and psychological tests in modern times proved that the practice of martial arts developed psychological maturity and attraction towards high and positive ideologies. These experiments and tests proved that the martial arts practitioners are less aggressive in nature and also showed better results in anger management. Certain tests also showed the results like the Karate practitioners are more democratic in nature and can easily provide leadership to various group works. Similar types of psychological analysis also showed that the senior performers of Kung Fu are best decision takers and are very good in distress management.<sup>(8)</sup> The Aikido practitioners not just only are very flexible in physical activities but are also liberal and flexible in their mind and thoughts. These results of various experiments with different persons in different places showed the significance of martial arts in the development of mental health.<sup>(9)</sup>

Mostly the practice of martial arts provides significant betterment in psychological sphere of an individual. But it also has certain challenges. On certain cases some of the occidental martial arts prefers use of more aggression and violence in their practice. Certain Martial Arts are not defensive in nature and thus often their aggressive nature caused serious mental pressure for the practitioners. During the second half of twentieth century various sporting activities and competition started worldwide based on various martial arts. It is beyond doubt that the different forms of martial arts become more popular through the sporting measures but at the same time the over emphasis on the sporting success also deteriorated the ethical values of martial arts. In addition to this on various occasions the films and media programmes based on martial arts also projected violent measures and aggressive attitudes and these are completely against of the high ideologies of oriental martial arts. These things also perverted the original philosophical base and ideologies of various martial arts. These things often created negative aspects of the mental condition on the practitioners of various martial arts. It used to create serious challenges in front of the psychological base of the practice of martial arts.<sup>(10)</sup>

## Constructing Mental Health through Martial Arts: Positive Vibes and Challenges

These challenges can be dealt with. Sports Martial Art have to be healthy in nature. Fighting must not be practice in a vigilante way or with excessive violence or hatred. Rather they must be practiced with utmost sportsmanship. International organizations like World Karate Foundation and others also develop this concept of peacekeeping nature through their rules for the bouts. On the other hand, films and media must not demonstrate the martial arts with terrific and raw violence rather the violence can be projected in an artistic way. It is also true that the 1970s martial arts-based movies of Bruce Lee played a key role behind the spread of worldwide popularity of Martial Arts. <sup>(11)</sup> Vinod Kumar of Indian martial art Malkhamb have stated that the Indian Martial Arts are very much protective and defensive in nature and vested with high philosophical ideologies. Thus, they never enhance the concept of violence of aggressiveness. Therefore, these Martial Arts always instigate high philosophical ideology and calmness in psychological order. Most of the Indian Martial Arts are associated with the concept of Yoga and meditation and thus always promote the concept of the necessity of a strong mental health for the creation of powerful and strong physical health. The traditional Chinese and Japanese martial arts also reflected the same ideologies. For example, Karate is associated with the concept of Zen Buddhism thus it promotes the concept of peace. The Pinan (Heian in Shotokan Style) and Jion Kata are formed in such way that they deliver the concepts of not only physical peace but also the mental peace. The concept of Kung Fu is basically based on mental stability and inner peace along with proper mental calmness and stability. Tai Chi and Wu Su are the physical exercises to attain proper meditation and accurate concentration. <sup>(12)</sup>

The gender oriented psychological perspective also can be addressed through the practice of martial arts. The girls who are directly associated with martial arts are not just only physically well built but are more confident and mentally strong in nature. Through certain tests carried on over Karateka girls of Poland and Kung Fu girls of China this result has been outcome. The girls who used to practice any type of martial art, especially any form of Oriental martial arts is found more psychologically strong and of stronger mind than the other general females. In fact, high level of concentration and determination have been found in the martial art practitioner females through various psychological researches and specimen studies. <sup>(13)</sup>

Martial Arts are the warring forms. Most of them are significant for self-defense. Thus, different types of martial arts need different types of training and technics. But to learn any of them the students must be courageous, attentive and full of dedication. All these three perspectives needed mental peace and concentrative mind. Thus, the teaching of martial arts very much required positive thinking attitude and intelligence of mind. So, martial arts trainings are not just limited with physical perspective but also required the attentive and intelligent mind which can be created through development of concentration level and that can be attained through proper meditation processes. The skill of martial arts very much balanced through physical and mental activities. <sup>(14)</sup> Martial Arts practice are the combinations of physical and mental balance. With proper co-ordination of physical fitness and mental strength one can achieve perfection in any format of martial arts. Silambam, Thang Ta, Pari Khanda, Gatka of India, Penchak Silat of Indonesia, Silat of Malaysia, Mua Thai of Thailand, Krav Maga of Israel, Capoeira of Brazil etc. all types of traditional and modern martial art need perfect co-ordination of mind and body. The co-ordination also can be created through proper practice of martial arts. Martial Arts are serious practices for the development of inner energy of an individual. That requires the positive approach towards life and which can be attend through well-built physical torso along with healthy mental condition. Legendary Martial artist and actor Bruce Lee along with Joe Lewis repeatedly argued about that. To ensure the perfect composition and combination of mind and body

## Constructing Mental Health through Martial Arts: Positive Vibes and Challenges

Bruce Lee developed new genre of martial art Jeet Kune Do with the synthesis of Wing Chung, Boxing, Fencing and Jujitsu. <sup>(15)</sup> Concentration is the key factor of practicing martial art and the proper practice of martial arts also instigate the betterment of mental health. The martial art of kickboxing is a hybrid one. Kickboxing style popularized by Japanese and American Athletes and professional promoters from 1970s. But it originally developed from the art of Thai Boxing or Muay Thai. Later Jim Arvanitis mixed the Greek martial art of Pankration with it the developed a combination of oriental and occidental combination within the martial art of kickboxing. To Arvanitis Kickboxing has the features of both physical and philosophical elements. It empowers both the physical strength and mental health at the same time among the true practitioners. The same thought had been shared by the great kickboxing legends such as Joe Lewis, Raymond Elder, Bill Wallace and Toshio Fujiwara also. <sup>(16)</sup> The Worldwide different steps had proven this fact through various sample experiments. The concept of meditation and building of stronger mind present within the practice processes of various martial arts. Thus to get healthy body and to develop strong mental health different formats of martial arts can be the path finders.

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## Constructing Mental Health through Martial Arts: Positive Vibes and Challenges

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

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