



## Traditional and Cultural Sport of Maharashtra: Mallakhamb

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**Abstract:** Mallakhamb is a form of traditional sport which developed originally in the state of Maharashtra. It is the combination of yoga, gymnastics and martial arts. Its practicing plays significant role in developing flexibility, grace, swiftness in rhythm, strength and stamina, concentration and coordination of individual and combat game's player. It enhances the immunity power of individual and combat game's player. It enhances the immunity power of individual, increases competitive spirit, and to find the stress level in an organised and better ways. It is considered as a perfect exercise because it is intermingled with various poses and postures of yoga. Mallakhamb is of three types: rope Mallakhamb, pole Mallakhamb and cane Mallakhamb. The research material for this article were sourced from different secondary sources like library, internet, ResearchGate, web-based videos and historical references that influences the development of Mallakhamb and the work done by several researchers have been analysed and interpreted. The main aim of this article is 1. Mallakhamb as hybrid physical practice- and incorporation of ancient Indian wrestling forms emerged with yoga and evolve with British colonial sports and its significance in better health conditions. 2. In cultural terms, it is considered as Marathi Hindu physical practice associated with a particular deity, Hindu God, Hanuman. Mallakhamb is inherent ability to adopt oneself according to changing environment. Now the status of Mallakhamb is not very appreciable, even though it has lots of importance as far as physical, social and mental growth and development of the people concern. Special attention must be given by the sports Anthropologists to promote and proliferate this traditionally established sports.

**Keywords:** Mallakhamb, Yoga, Hybrid Physical practices, Martial Arts

### Introduction

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Mallakhamb is considered as “the mother sport of ancient India”. It is the most scientific ancient art of making the body swift, supple, agile and healthy. It needs concentration, flexibility and speed.

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Mallakhamb is the traditional sports of Maharashtra. It can be defined as a form of areal yoga or gymnastics performed on a vertical pillar, traditionally a sheesham or Indian rosewood pole polished with the castor oil. Mallakhamb can be identified as ancient martial arts intended as training apparatus to perfect martial arts moves which they could later use on opponents in the ring of battlefield.

The ancient Indian sport of Mallakhamb is a type of gymnastics on a vertical pole, first gained the widespread recognition and attention on the sidelines of the Berlin 1936 Olympics. Mallakhamb is a kind of yogic practices. The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root “Yuj”, means to join or to yoke. It is a practice which gives union of individual self to universal self. India has rich tradition of yogic practices. Nowadays, yoga is gaining a lot of attention.

Recently, in 2013 Mallakhamb was declared as the state game of Madhya Pradesh. It is a systematic, scientific and really organised mode of exercise. Mallakhamb provides the correct tone and type to muscles and ideal management over each part of body. The Mallakhamb has brilliant show of inventive and tough feats, that shows the worth of patience in game and how it gradually develops the concentration level of a practitioner. Thus, Mallakhamb being one of the most ancient art forms in the field of physical culture.

## Origin and History

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Origin of Mallakhamb can be considered as a form of Martial arts training, Mallakhamb has been evolved into spectacularly engaging performance sport over the years. Mallakhamb is referred to as the mother of all the ancient Indian sports, mallakhamb's exact origins are almost impossible to trace. Reference of some form of Mallakhamb can be found in ancient Indian epics like Ramayana, ancient chandraketugarh pottery dating back to the second to first century BCE and also accounts of Buddhist Chinese pilgrims to India. Earliest mention of mallakhamb was found in Manasollasa, penned by Chalukya king Someshvara III, who ruled in present day South India at that time in 1135 AD.

Later from late 1600s to 1800s, the art form of Mallakhamb remained somewhat dormant until the interest was developed by Balambhatta Dada Deodhar the fitness and sports instructor of the legendary Maratha King Peshwa Bajirao II, who revived the art form as a training method for Peshwa's army. There have been references that Maratha empire figures like Laxmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, Tantia Tope and Nana Saheb Practised Mallakhamb as for preparing themselves for warfare. The training methodology which had balance, dexterity and discipline particularly suited Maratha

warriors who were known to be the pioneers of guerilla warfare.

Mallakhamb bears striking resemblances to the human skeletal structure. Initially focused on wrestling techniques, it has evolved to incorporate elements of gymnastics. The sport demands exceptional physical attributes, including flexibility, strength, focus, and breath control. Modern Mallakhamb challenges athletes with increasingly complex maneuvers, pushing the boundaries of human ability.

The popularity of Mallakhamb during the Maratha empire made this tradition sport as one of the most widely practice game in the Indian state of Maharashtra and in the meantime, Maharashtra became the hub for this age old yet one of the most efficient and useful art form.

Mallakhamb as a competitive sport was first developed by Mallakhamb Federation of India in 1981 and rules and regulations for the game were also introduced for the very first time in the first National championships held in 1981. At the competitive level Mallakhamb at National level first made its appearance in 1958 at National Gymnastics Championships, which was held in Pahadganj Stadium, New Delhi, India.

Later, Bamshankar Joshi and other mallakhamb enthusiasts at Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, founded an all India level Organisation which was named as Mallakhamb Federation of India.

The first ever global championship of Mallakhamb was conducted in 2019 in Mumbai. It can also be defined as an ancient Indian sport and coaching system during which the professional performs gymnastic aerial yoga postures and wrestling grips on a standing or hanging wooden pole or cane. It may also be performed on a hanging rope. Contemporary pole performing arts or pole yoga is believed to own its roots in Mallakhamb.

## **Types of Mallakhamb**

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Mallakhamb has several versions but basically three types of sport are widely practiced since 1937.

1. Pole Mallakhamb
2. Hanging Mallakhamb
3. Rope Mallakhamb

It involves the use of different apparatus for its practice. Two of the most commonly used are a 2.25m wooden pole and a 5.5m by 20mm thick cotton rope. The apparatus is saluted with the traditional gesture of respect which involves touching the forehead and the heart chakra before any training on the apparatus begins.

Both pole and rope mallakhamb were first created as grappling and training tools for wrestlers. The pole in its size and weight replicates the human mass of an opponent. Or...

**Mallakhamb** primarily consists of two main variations:

- **Pole Mallakhamb:** This is the traditional form where athletes perform on a vertical wooden pole.
- **Rope Mallakhamb:** Here, athletes perform on a suspended rope.

The terms “unjustified Mallakhamb,” “stuck bottle Mallakhamb,” and “inclined and suspended Mallakhamb” are **not standard or recognized terms** in the world of Mallakhamb.

1. **Pole Mallakhamb:** Traditionally, pole mallakhamb has been a male-dominated discipline. One contributing factor to this gender disparity is the symbolic association of the pole with the phallic representation of the deity Hanuman. Consequently, women’s involvement in pole mallakhamb has been culturally discouraged.

The pole, typically crafted from sheesham wood, is a sturdy, oiled structure. Its dimensions, including a tapered shape and a rounded top, contribute to its phallic symbolism. The oil applied to the pole enhances grip and reduces friction, similar to practices in Indian wrestling. Despite its weight and size, the pole is engineered for stability, even supporting multiple athletes in pyramid formations. The standard height of a pole mallakhamb pole is 2.25 meters, with varying circumferences along its length.

2. **Rope Mallakhamb:** Also known as cane mallakhamb, rope mallakhamb involves athletic exercises performed on a suspended rope. Traditionally made from cane, the rope is now often crafted from cotton due to material scarcity. It is typically 5.5 meters long with a diameter of 1-2 millimeters. Athletes ascend the rope using a unique toe grip, avoiding contact with the sole of the foot, a technique mirroring climbing a banyan vine.

Once secured on the rope, performers execute a range of dynamic poses, often resembling natural human movements. Contemporary variations include balancing the rope on 32 glass bottles arranged on a platform. While traditionally a male-dominated discipline, rope mallakhamb has seen increasing female participation. The rope is symbolically linked to the tail of the deity Hanuman, and practitioners demonstrate exceptional flexibility, balance, and daring feats.

- 3. Hanging Mallakhamb:** Hanging mallakhamb is a dynamic variation of the traditional pole form, employing a suspended pole attached to hooks and chains. This scaled-down version presents unique challenges due to its constant swinging and rotating motion. Unlike the stationary pole, the hanging pole simulates the experience of grappling with a moving opponent. Consequently, it is considered an advanced discipline primarily practiced by male athletes. The inherent instability of the hanging pole demands exceptional strength, balance, and agility.

### Physiological Significance

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Mallakhamb is a unique exercise system that differs significantly from conventional workout regimens. Incorporating elements of yoga, it involves a harmonious blend of physical and mental exertion. Unlike high-impact exercises, mallakhamb focuses on gradual development of the entire body, from core to extremities. Performed with a wooden pole, this discipline emphasizes strength, flexibility, and balance through a variety of holds, twists, and suspended positions. It enhances overall physical fitness, particularly targeting the abdomen, back, arms, and thighs. Beyond physical benefits, mallakhamb is believed to boost energy levels, improve longevity, and enhance performance in other sports.

Mallakhamb training effectively builds lean muscle mass. The core, back, arms, and legs experience significant development through these exercises. These physical benefits extend beyond aesthetics, enhancing overall strength and performance in various sports, including gymnastics and wrestling. Unique among physical activities, mallakhamb engages the entire body, contributing to increased vitality, longevity, and mental alertness.

Mallakhamb encompasses a diverse range of movements, including salutations, ascents, twists, grip-strengthening exercises, crawling maneuvers, balancing poses (both vertical and horizontal), and intricate body contortions. These exercises significantly enhance shoulder strength, a crucial component of wrestling. Mallakhamb serves as a training ground for many wrestlers, with its core workouts designed to mirror the demands of the sport. Beyond physical strength, mallakhamb cultivates flexibility, grace, speed, and coordination, qualities essential for gymnastics.

Mallakhamb significantly strengthens the shoulder and forearm muscles while enhancing wrist flexibility. Its dynamic movements can be beneficial for athletes in various sports. For instance, cricketers can improve their diving catches, while football and hockey goalkeepers can refine their saving techniques. Even diving and horseback riding can benefit from the balance, grip, and upper body strength developed through mallakhamb.

Beyond physical attributes, mallakhamb promotes holistic well-being. Combining elements of yoga, martial arts, and gymnastics, it offers a comprehensive workout that improves overall health and mental clarity. By enhancing muscle strength, reflexes, and coordination, mallakhamb empowers athletes to excel in their respective fields. This unique form of physical culture remains relatively unknown in many parts of India.

## Cultural Significance

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Considered as Marathi-Hindu practice and there is a spiritual connection to a particular deity, and it is the Hindu god Hanuman, the monkey a central figure in the Indian epic tale, the Ramayana.

The pole mallakhamb is performed and practiced by men only because of its significance as worship to lord Hanuman. In rope mallakhamb, they do not touch the sole of the foot to the rope as it is disrespect to Hanuman. At the end of the apparatus or “tail” the inner core of the rope is exposed and plaited to resemble a monkey’s tail and so it is again a symbolic reference.

One of the research studies suggests, Hanuman appearing before the great warrior figure Balambhatta Dada Deodhar who was Bajirao’s physical instructor. Hanuman teaches Ballambhatta the wrestling skills he will need to fight two visiting Peshawar warriors who have challenged him. Hanuman uses a tree trunk to demonstrate his skills in this art and this led to a revival in the practice of pole mallakhamb.

## Conclusion

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In conclusion, Mallakhamb emerges as a comprehensive physical discipline encompassing a wide array of exercises. Deeply rooted in Indian culture, particularly among the Marathi Hindu community, its significance is intertwined with the mythology of the Ramayana. The practice is gaining global recognition due to its multifaceted physiological benefits and alignment with contemporary wellness trends, such as yoga and mindfulness. Research indicates that mallakhamb enhances motor skills, reduces heart rate, and increases respiratory capacity.

Mallakhamb is a structured and scientifically designed exercise regimen that promotes optimal muscle development and control. Graceful and fluid movements, including turns, bends, and coils, characterize the practice. Beyond physical conditioning, mallakhamb stimulates mental acuity. Controlled breathing and balanced postures contribute to holistic well-being. The dynamic interplay between athlete and apparatus enhances coordination, reflexes, and focus. The skills cultivated

through mallakhamb are transferable to a wide range of sports, including wrestling, judo, gymnastics, athletics, and horseback riding.

Mallakhamb has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to evolve in response to changing circumstances. Its contemporary form is a testament to the fusion of diverse cultural elements. This hybrid nature has proven to be its greatest strength, allowing it to endure not only as a sport and fitness regimen but also to flourish as a dynamic performance art in circus, dance, and theater.

### **Practical Implications of Mallakhamb**

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A comprehensive study on Mallakhamb can yield significant practical implications for various sectors:

#### ***Sports and Physical Education***

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- **Curriculum Development:** Integration of Mallakhamb into physical education curricula at schools and colleges can promote overall fitness, flexibility, strength, and balance.
- **Talent Identification:** Identifying potential athletes through Mallakhamb training can contribute to the development of national sports teams in gymnastics, wrestling, and other disciplines.
- **Injury Prevention:** The core strength and body awareness developed through Mallakhamb can help prevent injuries in various sports.

#### ***Healthcare and Wellness***

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- **Rehabilitation Programs:** Incorporating Mallakhamb elements into rehabilitation programs can aid in recovery from injuries and improve overall physical function.
- **Geriatric Care:** Mallakhamb's focus on balance and strength can be beneficial for older adults in maintaining independence and preventing falls.
- **Mental Health:** The mind-body connection inherent in Mallakhamb can contribute to stress reduction and improved mental well-being.

#### ***Tourism and Cultural Promotion***

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- **Heritage Tourism:** Promoting Mallakhamb as a cultural heritage can attract tourists and boost local economies.

- **Event Tourism:** Organizing Mallakhamb competitions and festivals can generate revenue and create employment opportunities.
- **Cultural Exchange:** International collaborations in Mallakhamb can foster cultural exchange and understanding.

### *Community Development*

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- **Youth Empowerment:** Mallakhamb can provide a platform for youth development, fostering discipline, teamwork, and leadership skills.
- **Social Inclusion:** Promoting Mallakhamb as an inclusive sport can break down barriers and create opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Developing Mallakhamb-related businesses, such as equipment manufacturing and training academies, can create employment.

### *Research and Development*

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- **Biomechanics:** Studying the biomechanics of Mallakhamb can lead to innovations in sports equipment and training methods.
- **Physiology:** Research on the physiological benefits of Mallakhamb can contribute to the development of new exercise programs.
- **Cultural Studies:** Exploring the cultural and historical aspects of Mallakhamb can deepen our understanding of Indian heritage.

By focusing on these areas, a comprehensive study on Mallakhamb can have a far-reaching impact on society, promoting physical and mental well-being, cultural preservation, and economic growth.

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