

On Saturday, November 6, 2006, Professor Dr. J David Manuel Raj, the “founding father of modern Silambam staff fencing”, made the following presentation at the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Tamil Nadu State *Silambatta Kazhagam* (Silambam Association). The presentation, entitled “*Reminiscences*”, recounts how this worthy son of Southern India has engaged in a spirited and unflagging life-long effort to propagate the Dravidian art of stick-fighting and lift it to the lofty status it enjoys today. Dr. Raj wrote:

On August 15th, **1947** my father, brother and I rang the “Joybells” at the Bishop Caldwell’s Church at Idaiyangudi (Tirunelveli District), to celebrate the Independence of India and started our contribution to Silambam fencing, an ancient Indian Martial Combat Sport that originated around 3000 BC. This art was practiced by Proto-Dravidian Tamils who were spread out from Mohan-Ja-dora and Harappa of the Sind river basin in the north, down to the southern tip of the Indian sub-continent. On that red letter day of Indian Independence, the British ban on Silambam fencing was lifted and the three of us presented the first drafts of the exciting techniques of foot-work and various patterns of wielding the Silambam staff as well as the rules.

Ten years later, on September 27th, **1957**, my newly-wed wife, Mrs. Jessie Priscilla Manuel Raj – who was a teacher by profession - dedicated herself to the cause of promoting Silambam fencing (one of the 64 arts of ancient Tamil Nadu) by helping me in many ways. Not only did she collect data for this Indian martial sport; but also encouraged me with financial support.

Ten year later (**1967**), my wife was instrumental in helping me to submit the first-ever Master’s Degree Thesis (MPE) on Silambam Fencing at the Rani Lakshmi Bai National College of Physical Education at Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh State. My thesis secured me First Rank in the MPE Degree Course and I received the highly-coveted Gold Medal Award.

Ten years later (June 12, **1977**) I received my Ph.D. degree in Physical Education and Sports from the University of Oregon in the US. My dissertation was entitled “History of Silambam Fencing – an Indian Martial Combat Sport.” My wife again played an important role in this accomplishment as she paid for my flight to the USA, encouraged me, and helped me obtain a Graduate Teaching Assistantship in 1973.

Ten years later (**1987**), I was invited by Prime Minister Rajeev Ghandi to coach and lead the first-ever Indian Silambam Fencing Contingent in the capacity of “Chef-de-Mission”. Our contingent, which included Mr. Angappan (team captain) and eight other fencers from Salem (including two teen-aged girls), went to Tashkent, Bokaro, and Samarkand in the Republic of Uzbekistan (USSR) for 20 days to display and impart the knowledge of the techniques and technologies of Silambam Fencing and its History, as well as to interpret the rules of Silambam Fencing.

Ten years later (**1997**), I was able to look back on and revel in the fact that on December 25th and 26th, 1994 participants from seven countries - India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Mauritius, Pakistan, Srilanka and Bhutan - at the South Asian Federation Games (held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai) were able to witness a colorful and hair-raising demonstration of Silambam which exposed one and all to the intricacies of the multifarious foot-movements and varied patterns of wielding the Silambam staves.

Ten years later (**2007**) – we, the promoters and fans of Silambam fencing, foresee that the Indian Silambam Stick-fencing Federation (which currently has branches in 22 of India's 29 states) together with the Tamilnadu Silambatta Kazhagam, which has 30 District Associations in Tamil Nadu, will engage in a joint venture to extend Silambam to every Indian State. It is my dream that eventually Silambam Fencing will spread its wings like an eagle and hover the whole world in its promotional flights, especially from the dawn of the third millennium.

In short Dr. Raj, who has been involved with Silambam for nearly seven decades, has been a pioneer in its revival. Moreover, his Ph.D. dissertation (entitled “The Origin and Historic Development of Silambam Fencing”) from the University of Oregon, and his Masters Thesis (entitled “Silambam Techniques and Evaluation”) submitted to Jiwaji University, Gwalior have both left indelible marks on the art's rejuvenation and modernization.

Dr. Raj, of course, does not take all the credit for the rise of Silambam for he attributes his own successes to “the Herculean efforts of all members, organizers, officials, practitioners of Silambam Fencing and coaches (Aasans) of the Tamil Nadu Silambatta Kazhagam Association and the Indian Silambam (Stick Fencing) Federation.” Nevertheless, it is largely due to his pioneering inspiration that there are now Silambam Fencing Circles in Malaysia, Singapore, USA, USSR, UK, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and India. For a more detailed account of Dr. Raj's activities and publications dealing with Silambam, see the glossary entry under his name in Dr. Edward L. Powe's Hanuman's Warriors. See also the glossary entry in the same book entitled “Modern History of Silambam” for further historic details about Dr. Raj's many contributions.

Other luminaries in the Silambam movement, according to Dr. Raj, include: 1) M. Thevarajoo (Malaysia) the elected President of the International Silambam Fencing Federation; 2) R. Masilamani (Malaysia), the elected Secretary General of the same organization (ISFF); 3) P. K. Muthu Ramalingam (India), Deputy President of the ISFF; 4) M. Amanullah (India), ISFF Vice-president; 5) S. Mohideen Pillai (India), ISFF Organizer; and 6) C. Chandrasekaran, ISFF Tournament Director of the first-ever International Silambam Fencing competition for boys, girls, men and women of various weight categories.

The following chart recapitulates Dr. J. David Manuel Raj's literary contributions dealing with Silambam:

Title	Number of Pages	Time of Publication
Silambam Technique & Evaluation (English)	286	March 1971
Silambam Adimuraigalum Varalararum (Tamil)	200	March 1973
Silambam Fencing from India (English)	225	August 1975
The Laws & Officiating Technique of Silambam Fencing (a Booklet)	40	December, 1977
Silambam Fencing: A wielding Sport of India for Women and Men (Published in 4 parts in a Quarterly Magazine)	160	January, April, July, October 1976
Silambam Vithimuraigal (Tamil)	32	March, 1981
Laws of Silambam Fencing (English)	32	March, 1981
History of Silambam Fencing (English)	194	November, 1993
Souvenir Booklet of The 1 st International Silambam Fencing Championship	-	June 12, 1994
Silambam: Agila Ulaga Vilayattu Vaanil (Tamil)	190	December, 2000

Dr. Raj, who is both eager and able to travel the far corners of the earth to promote the art of Silambam is presently teaching Silambam to girls at Queen Mary's College in Chennai. He can be contacted by e-mail at david.manuelraj@rediffmail.com.