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Hindu Nationalism, Cultural Spaces, and Bodily Practices in India

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With the opening of India to the global economy, technology, and culture, questions of national identity are being starkly posed and tested. An attendant rise in militant Hindu nationalism can be seen as a bold strategic response to this question as it attempts to place India among the most powerful nations in global modernity. Analyses of this attempt to fundamentally transform India have tended to be pitched at the institutional levels of economics and politics, yet the Hindu nationalist methodology is essentially a cultural project. This article will examine two forms of embodied cultural practices in India, each offering a contrasting set of cultural meanings and political possibilities and each highlighting the complexities and contradictions of the globalization-nationalism nexus in contemporary India.

Keywords: globalization; India; Hindu nationalism; Shakha; kalariappayattu

Since the late 1980s, the call to embrace globalization has been the mantra sounded by many of India's economic and political elites. The first tentative attempts by multinational companies to prize open India's vast but hitherto protected consumer markets have brought in their wake a far more tumultuous process of social and cultural globalization. One of the most significant ways in which these processes have been manifest is in debates over national identity. Thus, it is significant that the period in which India embraced the logic and ideology of globalization is also the period in which extreme forms of Hindu nationalism have emerged center stage in the Indian polity. Yet, as Chatterjee (1993) has argued, it is within civil society, in what he calls the "inner" domain of culture that "nationalism launches its most powerful, creative and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' culture that is nevertheless not Western" (p. 6). Here, discourses of Indian-ness and globalization increasingly frame diverse popular cultural spaces, be it cinema with the narratives of nationalist heroism in Bollywood (Bhatia, 2002) or sport with the claims to global respectability in cricket (McDonald, 1999a).

Although the sporting spaces of contemporary India are dominated by team games that emerged out of the British *Raj*, they have to a greater or lesser extent

undergone their own processes of decolonization and what Appadurai (1996, pp. 97-105) has referred to in cricket as “vernacularization.” It is in the period since gaining independence in 1947 that cricket emerges as “not so much India’s national sport as its national obsession” (Guha, 1994/1995, p. 257) and so becomes heavily imbued with nationalist sentiment. Thus, in opening his account of the cultural significance of the game, Ashis Nandy declares that “cricket is an Indian game accidentally invented by the English” (Nandy, 1989, p. 9). However, as a consequence of its mass following, transcending religious and caste affiliations in its appeal if not so much in its power structures, cricket is an extremely awkward and ambivalent cultural form for Hindu nationalists to exploit (e.g., see Marqusee, 1996). Field hockey is often cited as India’s premier sport, based on the fact that India dominated international hockey for decades (not losing a match in the Olympics from 1928 to 1960). However, the introduction of artificial pitches in the 1970s, which has placed a premium on pace and aggression as opposed to skill and trickery, has seen India descend the international rankings, thus divesting it of national prominence and nationalist significance. Soccer is an increasingly popular and growing sport in India (Dimeo & Mills, 2001), but its popularity is as a regional sport, and unlike cricket, the national side is far from one of the world’s better teams. So for different reasons, the dominant colonial but decolonized sports of India have hitherto not lent themselves to easy accommodation to a Hindu nationalist agenda. Less understood and analyzed, but arguably more significant, is the impact of globalization and the attendant rise in Hindu nationalism on the micropolitics of bodily practices that are situated in everyday and mundane public spaces, in the shadows of those theaters of populist spectacle, the cinemas and stadiums.

This article will examine two forms of bodily practice in India, each offering a distinct and contrasting engagement with the challenges posed by globalization and Hindu nationalism. The first bodily practice is *shakha* training. It is a form of physical training undertaken by members of an extreme Hindu nationalist organization called the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In the *shakhas*, a combination of Western-style military drill and indigenous games and exercises are used to inculcate a sense of kin attachment to the Hindu *rashtra*, an exclusionist notion of a future Indian nation-state—a case of “keeping an eye on the body,” as work on the body forms the starting point in the creation of the new nation. The second bodily practice is *kalarippayattu*, an indigenous martial art from the state of Kerala in South India. Self-realization is sought through prolonged immersion in this arduous practice, culminating in an optimal state of body-mind consciousness such that the “body becomes all eyes.” Thus, there are two forms of bodily practice, both seeking a form of body-mind unity and both embedded in their respective globalizing cultural socioscapes yet offering a contrasting set of cultural meanings and political possibilities.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE RISE OF HINDU NATIONALISM

During the early stages of theorizing the cultural significance and ramifications of globalization, many theorists warned against a privileging of homogeneous processes, whether it was called Americanization, McDonaldization, or whatever, against which various local forces either resisted, subverted, or were subsumed (Featherstone, 1990; Robertson, 1992). As Appadurai (1990) commented:

The central feature of global culture today is the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another and thus to proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular. (p. 308)

Robertson (1992) in particular argued against a simple viewing of universalism as principles or processes that apply to all and particularism as a reference to locality. Rather, he asserted the necessity to “direct attention *both* to particularity and difference *and* to universality and homogeneity” (p. 100) in a way that articulated dialectical rather than binary relationships. The universalism-particularism problematic denotes the increasing belief that on one hand, there is “no limit to particularity, to uniqueness, to difference and to otherness” (Robertson, 1992, p. 102) (the universalization of particularism). On the other hand (the particularization of universalism), there is the increasing expectation of universality, reflected, for example, in the call for recognition of differences. Thus, even the ostensibly most radical break with what is constructed as a “Western modernity” presupposes a modern and universalized language of a right to recognition. Therefore, it is posited that apparently antiglobal (or anti-postmodern) movements, such as forms of religious fundamentalism, cultural nationalism, and the multifarious discontents of globality, should be conceived as constitutive components of globalization.

Many analyses of the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1990s situate it firmly in the context of globalization (Jaffrelot, 1996; Kurien, 1994; Rajagopal, 2001; Vanaik, 1997). Hansen (1996, 1999) outlines how the contemporary politics of Hindu nationalism in India can be seen as the postcolonial expression of an attempt to overcome its subordinate position vis-à-vis the West and a desire to be accepted alongside the “great” nations of the world. According to Hansen (1996), the Hindu nationalist strategy for achieving equality is “through the assertion of difference, unity and strength” (p. 613). Economic prosperity, a strong state, and an authentic and unequivocal cultural and national identity all are imagined within Hindu nationalist discourse as the necessary ingredients for realizing the promise of recognition in global modernity. The fact that such a

strategy is imagined is not meant to imply “false consciousness” or “fantasy.” Following Appadurai (1996), it synthesizes the cultural Marxist ideological critique of “the image,” Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community,” and the postmodern sense of the “imagination” (as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations) to produce “the imagination as a social practice” (p. 31). Such a social practice in turn underpins “*imagined worlds*, that is the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 33). Drawing on the universalism-particularism dialectic, Hansen surmises that similar to other forms of radical cultural nationalism (e.g., found in Serbia and the Caucasus), the Hindu nationalist imagination has

sought to compensate for the loss of economic importance of their nation in the world, or the loss of coherence and efficiency of the ruling political project, by the worship of strength, masculinity, cultural purity and radical difference from the west. (Hansen, 1996, p. 613)

Hindu nationalist ideology, known as Hindutva, asserts that to be Indian is to be Hindu and that India’s huge Muslim population and other religious minorities are at best conditionally Indian. In fact, advocates of Hindutva argued that the secularist Indian state has in reality discriminated against the majority Hindu population in its protection of India’s religious communities (Vanaik, 1997). If India is to become a great nation once again, it has to realise its essential Hindu heritage and culture. In the words of Golwaker, one of the most important ideologues of Hindutva, non-Hindus must

adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ungratefulness towards this land and its age old tradition but must cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead—in a word they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation, claiming, deserving no privileges, far be any preferential treatment—not even citizen’s rights. (cited in Bardhan, 1992, p. 6)

This passage reveals some of the structuring principles of Hindutva: infusing Hinduism with cultural, religious, and racial characteristics; anti-secularism/communalism; majoritarianism; and an implied threat to those who refuse to accept the prescribed order. This is a threat that not only includes other religious minorities but is also extended to socialists and others deemed to be anti-national and therefore anti-Hindu. Furthermore, as the Dalit scholar Ilaiah (1996) has pointed out, the ideology of Hindutva also reflects the Brahminical (upper-caste) hegemony by privileging particular texts, myths, and gods that suit a strident nationalist and communalist agenda in which upper-caste Hindus stand to gain the most. Other commentators have highlighted that Hindutva is still largely restricted to Northern and Western states and that it has yet, and is

unlikely ever, to enjoy the same influence in the non-Hindi-speaking Southern states (Bhatt, 2001; Hansen & Jaffrelot, 1998). Despite this regionalist obstacle to Hindutva's geographical spread, it has emerged to become the key political force in Indian politics. In the 1998 general elections, the main Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), emerged as the largest single party in Parliament, mirroring the increasing influence of Hindutva throughout India and paving the way for them to establish a coalition government (Hansen & Jaffrelot, 1998). The BJP is but one part of the Sangh Parivar, a combine of organizations operating in different spheres of society to transform India into a Hindu *rashtra*. The ideological and strategic leadership of the Sangh Parivar is supplied by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

RSS SHAKHA TRAINING: KEEPING AN EYE ON THE BODY

The role of the RSS is to educate and train a cadre of committed Hindu patriots who will provide leadership in the various spheres of society. It is a long-term strategy "building up hegemony through molecular permeation" (Sarkar, 1993, p. 164) to advance Hindutva's agenda, akin to Gramsci's notion of a fascist "passive revolution" (Forgacs, 1999, p. 247). It is not the ephemeral electoral success in parliament that the RSS believe is key to transforming India but long-term cultural work, particularly as it mediates the quotidian practices (re)shaping the Hindu habitus. Nowhere is this cultural intervention and habitus formation more explicit than in the training camps run by the RSS, a notorious, uniformed, all-male voluntary organization.

For the RSS, the battle for the soul of Indian nationalism starts with the bodies of India's Hindu men and boys and is waged in the daily arenas of the *shakhas*. There are several million *swayamsevaks* (estimates range from 2.5 million to 6 million followers) and about 20,000 *shakhas* throughout India (Bhatt, 2001, p. 113). Each *shakha* will typically be attended by between 10 and 80 volunteers. Significantly, the RSS deliberately targets and attracts boys at the impressionable age of 12 to 15 years (Basu, Datta, Sarkar, Sarkar, & Sen, 1993). *Shakhas* are held every morning and evening in open public spaces such as parks, urban clearings, and school grounds throughout India. The fact they are held in open spaces is extremely important: *Shakhas* are not secret training camps for the creation of formidable *ubermensch*, they are a familiar part of the urban landscape that routinely involves respected members of the community. The regular presence of *shakhas* in mundane public spaces reflects a civic legitimization strategy that is instructive of their fascistic modus operandi.

The *shakha* sessions begin with the participants standing in rows to salute the saffron-colored flag (not the national flag). Known as the *bhagva dhvaj*, the flag is considered the sacred symbol of the nation. The main part of the *shakha* is taken up with an assortment of military drill, exercises, games, and indigenous

sports such as *kho-kho* and *kabaddi*. The physical activities are designed to imbue the participants with the desired values such as courage, teamwork, leadership, sacrifice, brotherhood, and utmost loyalty to the Hindu nation (Anderson & Damle, 1987.) Significantly, many of the games are framed in a narrative of aggressive nationalism. A *shakha* that I attended while doing field research on the RSS in Mumbai in 1998 contained a game that preached the regional imperialistic ambitions of Hindutva. The boys were holding each other by the arms, forming a circle around a small stone. A slogan about the neighboring Pakistani city of Lahore was repeatedly and each time more aggressively shouted by the *shakha* leader, *Lahore Kiska Hai* (“Whose is Lahore?”). Each time the leader’s shout is answered with matching levels of aggression: *Lahore Hamara Hai* (“Lahore is ours”). At the appropriate moment, the *shakha* leader blew a whistle, the signal for the players to let go of each other and be the first to grab the stone, the symbol of Lahore (McDonald, 1999b, p. 352). In a review of the television documentaries on the RSS by Lalit Vachani, Deshpande (2002) reports how one game begins with the boys shouting “Kashmir belongs to us!”

Usually the last quarter of the *shakha* is given over to ideological lessons on Hindu mythology or a discussion on a contemporary issue. A popular myth retold in the *shakha* is taken from the Hindu epic *the Ramayana*, which tells the story of how Rama rescued his wife Sita from her evil abductor, Ravana, demonstrating the virtues of strength, masculinity, and warfare. The *shakha* finishes with a patriotic song and salute to the sacred flag.

An organicist philosophy underpins this physical culture regime. Organicism is a cultural nationalist philosophy that was first developed in 18th century German Romantic thought (Bhatt, 2001). It was Friedrich Jahn who translated such philosophies into concrete organizations, with the formation of open-air gymnasiums in 1811 for the promotion of activities that would elicit the deep and latent nationalist spirit within all Germans (Ueberhorst, 1979). The authoritarian tendencies inherent in organicist approaches were made explicit in its appropriation by interwar fascist movements in Italy and Germany. The Nazi sports theorist Alfred Baeumler declared that “The honour of the body is one part of the collective honour of the nation” (cited in Hoberman, 1984, p. 163). Significantly, European fascist ideology of the 1920s and 1930s provided much inspiration for the founders of Hindutva. In 1938, Golwaker, who was the leader of the RSS from 1940 to 1973, opined,

To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races—the Jews. National Pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has shown how well nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by. (cited in Jaffrelot, 1996, p. 55)

Although Golwaker later denied the fascistic nature of the RSS project (Golwaker, 1996, p. 519), contemporary apologists for the RSS, such as Elst,

have attempted to rationalize such statements by placing them in their historical context: "At first sight, Guruji's [Golwaker] seemingly laudatory reference to Nazi Germany is highly embarrassing. Upon closer examination, it isn't that bad" (Elst, 2001, p. 136). Archival evidence uncovered by Casolari (2000) demonstrated that there was systematic contact between leaders of the Hindu nationalists and members of the Italian fascist state, including Mussolini, which directly influenced the structure and philosophy of the RSS *shakhas*. In common with fascist ideologist of the interwar years, the RSS recognizes the power of embodied nationalism and the need, therefore, to maintain a close governmental and organizational "eye on the body." It is no accident that understanding and emotional attachment is inculcated through the body to procure the required dominating instincts over the "enemies within."

KALARIPPAYATTU: WHEN THE BODY BECOMES ALL EYES

Kalarippayattu is a traditional form of martial art unique to the Southern Indian state of Kerala. Although there are considerable varieties of styles, the common elements in this martial system include a series of physical, breathing, and meditative exercises designed to prepare the practitioner's body and mind for a number of combat forms. These combat forms include empty-hand techniques, fighting with long sticks, fighting with short sticks, and combat with sword and shield. The activities take place in a *kalari*, which is the technical term for a roofed pit dug out of the ground where *payattu* (exercise) is practiced. Whereas traditional *kalaris* were literally pits dug into the ground, modern *kalaris* are purpose-built constructions. For example, the *kalari* I visited in Thiruvananthapuram (the capital city of Kerala) is an impressive two-story building that contains a pit *kalari*, a separate massage area, bathing facilities, a medicinal preparation kitchen, living quarters, an office, a waiting room, and a separate viewing area for interested observers. Significantly, many of the observers happened to be Western tourists attempting to capture a slice of authentic Keralite heritage with their smuggled-in cameras.

Kalarippayattu sessions usual begin early in the morning at about 6:30 a.m. The following is a description of a typical session that I observed in the Thiruvananthapuram *kalari* from the designated spectator balcony overlooking the *kalari* pit. After the cacophony of noise and engine smells of the already busy streets outside, the serene and contemplative mood of the *kalari* is immediately apparent. The air is rich with many scents as wicks flicker and gingili oil is burned in small brass oil lamps, strategically placed around the *kalari*. The *kalari* pit is rectangular in shape, measuring approximately 12 meters in length and six meters wide, with high brick wall surrounds and a reddish-brown earthed floor. The pit is actually a poor noun that fails to convey the strict architectural guidelines that have to be adhered to in order to ensure an appropriate and

auspicious *kalari*. It would be better to describe the *kalari* as a form of “exercise-temple.” Thus, having changed from their everyday clothes into the traditional loin-cloth (except for the few female students, who wear loose clothing), students descend a few steps to enter the *kalari* with their right-foot first, the tradition upon entering Hindu temples, before touching the floor, the forehead, and chest with the right hand. The students then cross the *kalari* and perform a brief *puja* (worship) by touching the base of a seven-tiered platform known as the *puttara*, the guardian deity of the *kalari*, positioned in a designated corner. A number of other deities are placed around the perimeter to which students, with differing degrees of intensity, pay their respects (see Zarrilli, 1998, pp. 61-83, for explanation and analysis of the different deities). If the students talk at all, it is in hushed tones as they massage oil into their bodies and go through a series of warming up exercises until their bodies begin to glisten with sweat in preparation for the next stage.

Typically, there will be between 15 to 20 students at a session. Similar to the Thiruvananthapuram *kalari*, most are based on Hindu deities, although there is a significant minority of Muslim and Christian *kalaris* in Kerala, reflecting a state population where two fifths are non-Hindus (Chiriyankandath, 1998, p. 204). Students do not need to attend a *kalari* that matches their religious identity, but in reality, this seems to be the pattern. Most of the students are men in their late teens, although it is not uncommon to see boys as young as 12 years and men in their 40s. After 30 minutes of warming-up exercises, in which the students work at their own pace, the instruction phase begins. In steps the *Gurukkal* (master) with his right foot first, touching the floor and then the *puttura* and other deities. The students respectfully acknowledge his entrance by stopping their exercises and touching his feet. All of the students then line up at the correct end of the *kalari* to be led through a series of increasingly strenuous exercise sequences and basic combat techniques. The *Gurukkal* spends a short time with a couple of the newer students, but after 30 min or so, all of the less skilled and inexperienced students are instructed to leave, which they do after paying their respect once again to the deities around the perimeter.

With only the more experienced students left, the *Gurukkal* offers instruction in various forms of long-stick combat, spear versus shield and sword, and finally short-stick combat. Even during combat, the silence and calm demeanor of the students are striking. There are no aggressive grunting or intimidatory tactics—just students in intense concentration, bordering on the meditative, engaged in combat using powerfully elegant balletic maneuvers. The *Gurukkal* and the most senior student give an impressive demonstration in short-stick and long-stick combat. Such is the breathtaking rapidity of attacks and counterattacks that I inquire whether such movements are in some sense choreographed. It is explained to me that the key to understanding the almost superhuman pace and skill of the combatants is found in the eyes. With their heads perfectly still and their eyes wide open and fixed on the eyes of the opponent, years of training have positioned the combatants in a heightened state of awareness and self-

realization, where the “body becomes all eyes” (Zarrilli, 1998, p. 19). When the body becomes all eyes, body-mind unity is expressed through a physical capability that transcends the contrasting demands of intuition and control. The final 15 minutes of the session are taken up by two advanced students performing an incredible feat of technique and athleticism, where they manage to leap and then twist in midair in order to kick a football suspended from the ceiling at a height of 2.5 meters. By 8:30 a.m., the *kalari* is emptied, as the two advanced students finish by paying their respect to the deities.

Historically, *kalarippayattu* emerged in the 11th century in a society dominated by warfare between rival kingdoms in South India. It was used as a form of military training by all castes, but especially the higher *ksatriyas* and *brahmins*, and also by Muslims and Christians in the service of particular principalities. Most villages had their own *kalari* where the youth from families whose duty it was to provide military service went for training (Zarrilli, 1998, pp. 25-39). Gradually, in keeping the evolutionary, hierarchical, and ordered caste system, it was one particular *jati* (groups associated with traditional occupations) called the *Nairs* that came to occupy this role. Although it was primarily a male activity, it was not unknown for *Nair* women to receive training. But an ethos of fearlessness, duty, and sacrifice developed among the *Nairs* in the service of their king, and they were soon renowned for their martial spirit and practices, as Zarrilli (1998) notes,

So important was *kalarippayattu* in medieval Kerala that both its heroic demeanour and its practical techniques were constantly on display whether in “actual” combat, such as interstate warfare or duel, or in forms of cultural performance from mock combats or displays of martial skills at public festivals to dance-dramas where the heroic was virtually displayed as heroes vanquished the forces of evil. (p. 48)

The arrival of Vasco de Gama and the Portuguese at the end of the 15th century heralded the arrival of colonialism in Kerala, and with it the introduction of firearms that was to erode the necessity for martial training and therefore for *kalarippayattu*. It was not until the 1920s that a revival occurred in sport and physical culture as a reaction against British colonial rule (Dimeo, 2002; Gupta, 1998). In particular, the colonial discourse of the effeminate Indian lacking in Victorian masculine virtues “over time became a pejorative self-image” (Alter, 2000, p. 52) and was targeted by the reawakening of interest in physical culture:

Broadly speaking, the discipline and physical training which characterized this physical fitness movement may be seen as a form of cultural politics wherein the primary concern was to decolonize the subject male body and remasculinize its effete character. (Alter, 2000, p. 53)

Alter’s (2000) focus is on the role played by wrestling and in particular on the discourses of nationalism, physical culture, and wrestling in the story of “Gama

the Great,” the legendary Indian Muslim who was the unbeaten world champion of wrestling from 1910 to 1950. A resurgence of interest in kalarippayattu in the 1920s was part of this reaction against colonial discourses of Hindu effeminacy. Its successful reemergence was worked out and altered in combination with and reaction to precolonial legacies and colonial influences. A revised format simultaneously challenged stereotypes of effemiteness while contributing to the forging of a distinctly Kerala (rather than a national) heritage through an emphasis on performance and display. Kalarippayattu was celebrated in public discourse as an encapsulation of Kerala’s valorous martial spirit and an idealization of Malayali manhood, and thus symbolized a common Malayali identity and past. Such narratives continued into postcolonial India and were crucial in legitimizing and giving cultural coherence to the Malayali-speaking state of Kerala, which was formally recognized in 1956. Thus, kalarippayattu became inextricably linked to Kerala and its heroic mythico-historical heritage.

There are just more than 100 active *kalaris* throughout Kerala, and the Kerala Kelarippayat Association (KKA) has approximately 600 members, all masters of the martial art (Zarrilli, 1998, pp. 58-59). One of the responsibilities of the KKA is to conduct annual interdistrict and state championships, where competitors are judged on the basis of style and form in preliminary exercises and weapons practice. However, the significance of kalarippayattu does not lie in its competitive structures as a sport. Rather, it is the social and cultural meanings generated as an ancient martial art rooted in Kerala’s cultural, mytho-historical heritage; as a traditional psycho-physiological discipline aimed at self-realization; as a technique for effective self-defense and combat; and as a form of training for other dance forms (such as Kathakali) and sports.

One of the most significant impacts of globalization on kalarippayattu has come in the pressure to accommodate to new images of martial arts based on karate and street fighting. Long-standing arts traditions such as kalarippayattu are under pressure to reformulate their ethos and practice to meet the fantasies of contemporary youth, providing an example of how transnational movements of the martial arts as mediated by Hollywood and Hong Kong film industries are creating “new cultures of masculinity and violence in national and international politics” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 305). As a practitioner schooled in the “traditional” method of training, Zarrilli (1998) is keen to position the new approaches as lacking in authenticity:

The re-packaging, mediation and transnationalization of kalarippayattu to fit the cosmopolitan self-defense paradigm has transformed it from a complex, embedded, local (martial, therapeutic and fighting) art where its powers are ritually, ethically, spiritually and socially circumscribed into a spectacular and melodramatic one where its powers are either decontextualised or recontextualised. (p. 235)

However, it is not clear how far this process has occurred, and Zarrilli (1998) may be hasty in referring to the transformation of kalarippayattu. Certainly, subjected to an image-centered mediascape that focuses on a discourse of aggressive self-confident masculinity, there are a handful of *kalaris* that are prepared to adapt kalarippayattu so as to privilege the spectacular and the melodramatic elements. Although further research is required to speak with more confidence, the transformation of the like Zarrilli describes is likely to be a more uneven and contested process. And there are other ways in which the impact of globalization is reshaping kalarippayattu. For example, the increasing value of tourism to Kerala's economy is placing increasing demands on kalarippayattu as a form of display representing "Keralite history and culture." At the Thiruvananthapuram *kalari*, the *Gurukkal* expressed his concern over the pressure to emphasize the dance elements in kalarippayattu as a way of training students for stage demonstrations.

It might be expected that given Hindutva's stress on martial history, masculinity, heroism, sacrifice, and street fighting, it would be drawn to appropriating kalarippayattu in the service of the Hindu *rashtra*. It might be thought that under the conditions of global modernity, some means of marrying kalarippayattu to the masculinization of the Hindu man would be found. In fact, there is little evidence of the communalizing of kalarippayattu, although again, this may be due more to lack of research into the issue rather than it not being an issue. However, the fact that the BJP have failed to make significant inroads in Keralite politics suggest that the politics of Hindu nationalism will have a minimal impact on the evolution of kalarippayattu. Chiriyankandath has identified a number of contributing factors to explain the relatively unimpressive electoral record and influence of the BJP and the broader Hindu nationalist movement in Kerala:

The densely populated state . . . is not only more than two-fifths Hindu, it also features a powerful sense of regional (Malayali) identity, a Hindu population for whom caste identities have been politically significant for nearly a century, a formidable leftist movement, and a legacy of political mobilization on the basis of class as well as caste. (Chiriyankandath, 1998, p. 203)

In other words, it is the deep association of kalarippayattu with Keralite history and Malayali manhood and identity, coupled with the state's particular political and social trajectory since independence, that has afforded it some immunity from both the influence of Hindutva and the reconstitution of cultural space and its associated physical practices as a manifestation of Hindu *rashtra*. Globalization poses challenges to this indigenous discipline, but it is less in the shape of Hindu nationalism and more through the impact of different consumerist imperatives associated with tourism and the commodification of Asian martial arts.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

When the Indian government headed by the BJP successfully exploded nuclear devices at Pokharan in the Rajasthan desert in May 1998, there was jubilation in the streets of many cities. Millions of people danced in celebration of this manifestation of national strength and becoming. This was a demonstration to the West of India's scientific and technical achievement and a warning message to its Muslim neighbors, Pakistan. However, it resulted in immediate retaliatory tests by Pakistan and "assured not 'Resurgent India,'" writes Bhatt (2001), "but raised the threat of mutual destruction fuelled by a now more equalized nuclear capability, a disastrous south Asian nuclear arms race, and ignominy heaped upon the BJP leadership both domestically and internationally" (p. 177). Unfazed, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, an RSS affiliate and the religious counterpart to the BJP, called for a temple dedicated to *Shakti* (the goddess of power) to be built at Pokharan, while the leader of the Mumbai-based Shiv-Sena declared that Hindus were "no longer eunuchs" (Bhatt, 2001, p. 2).

This episode in contemporary Indian history exemplifies the postcolonial nationalistic fusing of modernist technology, religious mythology, and masculinist anxiety within the framework of global modernity. It offers a neat if terrifying case of the universal-particular problematic that has underpinned the theme of this article. However, as we have seen, the way in which the two forms of bodily disciplines articulate with this problematic is far more heavily mediated than the narrative of the "Hindu bomb." These corporeal cultural practices are subjected to a myriad of different influences shaping their production, presentation, and consumption. Yet, the micropolitics of bodily practices is a crucial battleground for the Hindu nationalist movement if it is to maintain the level of patriotic fervor elicited by the bomb tests and secure its hegemonic position in India and its status as a global power. The RSS recognizes this, which is why it places physical training at the center of its strategy for influence. Meanwhile, the relative impermeability of kalarippayattu to Hindutva is testimony to India's diversity and regional politics. When it comes to cultural meanings, all bodily disciplines possess a greater or lesser degree of ambiguity, especially with regard to the possibilities they offer for self-realization and/or to domination. Although there are different and contradictory pressures on the cultural spaces occupied by *shakha* training and kalarippayattu, each in their own way highlights the constitutive role of physical culture in the cultural and political life of a globalizing Indian society.

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