

PhD Thesis Abstract

Bayam, Male Body and Masculinity: An Exploration of the Bayam Samitis and Akharas of Kolkata

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This thesis is an ethnographic study in the *bayam samitis* (traditional gymnasiums) and *akharas* (wrestling gymnasiums) of Kolkata to understand the embodied practice of *bayam* (exercise) in relation to male body and masculinity. By employing historical ethnography, the thesis firstly tries to understand the masculine discourse of the colonial and anti-colonial politics of the early twentieth century to locate the rise of the *bayam samitis* and *akharas* in Calcutta (Kolkata), Bengal as places of indigenous resistance. Secondly, by using sensory perceptions and experiential understandings, the thesis tries to understand the space and place of *bayam samitis* and *akharas* as masculine domains that seeks to uphold itself through necessary exclusions. Thirdly, the thesis tries to delve into the modern discourse of fitness and health to interrogate the difference of *bayam* in context of contemporary fitness discourse and locates the basis of the practice of *bayam* in breath control (cultivation of *dom*) and semen control. Finally, the thesis argues that pain, contrary to popular understandings, is not opposed to but a necessary element in the embodied practice of *bayam*. By bringing in the idea of everyday pain and *bayam*'s pain, the thesis argues that pain remains significant in understanding masculinity and male body in context of *bayam*. The thesis, thereby tries to argue that the male body in *bayam*, can be seen through the lens of ascetic masculinity, where it bases itself in norms of *songjom* (self-restraint), detachment and the ascetic masculine ethos of the places of *bayam samitis*. The male body in *bayam* opens us into newer possibilities of understanding health, pain and body through the embodied practice of *bayam*.

