

## Abstract

The labels attached with 'martial arts' and 'martial artist' in the Indian socio-cultural context have varied across ages. During the Vedic ages, martial arts and study in the art of warfare was considered to be a highly revered skill in India. The Indian epics attest to the popularity of martial art training. For instance, Parashurama, Lord Krishna, Dronacharya, Lord Hanumana, Jarasandha were highly skilled martial artists and the martial traditions practised by them retained popularity in India over the ages. Even during the Mughal period, the Gupta period and during the rule of Rajputs, attaining knowledge in martial skills was a significant part of education in India. Later on, during the colonial rule, martial training was banned by the British because they did not want the Indians to form communities capable of protesting and revolting against them. In spite of the strict regulations imposed on physical cultures and martial art training in India, the Indians maintained secrecy while continuing with their practice in *akharas* and *samitis*. Those who were found involved in training, teaching and learning martial arts and combat techniques were imprisoned and were tagged as rebel nationalists. So as we can understand, the study of martial arts in India has a paradoxical past. During the ancient times, it was a skill that had to be learnt as part of educational curriculum. The colonial rule in India made martial art studies take a backseat but after Independence, people from different sections of the society started showing interest in learning martial arts yet again. This was a result of globalization and the influence of action films, the increasing popularity of combat sports, the impacts of cultural icons like Bruce Lee and IP Man in India and worldwide. Martial arts like Karate, Kung fu, Taekwondo, Krav Maga, Muay Thai started gaining popularity in India during these times and more people started expressing interest in martial art studies. Besides the reception of martial arts from Japan, China, Thailand, Israel and the USA, the sustained interest of people in martial arts in a culturally diverse country like India allowed the development of culturally rich, indigenous martial

traditions across different states. In Bengal, lathi khela (stick fight) and wrestling were widely practised. Besides the prevalence of martial arts, martial dance traditions like Chhau and Raibenshe were also practised. In Kerala, Kalaripayattu has been in practice whereas in other states, we come across different martial traditions like Silambam, Kuttu Varisai in Tamil Nadu, Naga wrestling in Nagaland, Thang ta in Manipur, Pari khanda in Bihar and Gatka in Punjab and Haryana as well as yoga and meditation all over India. The practice of martial arts along with a study of healing techniques in the field of martial arts reflected the cultural transmission of martial arts in India. Although there is a long standing history of martial art practice in India, research has not yet been done in the field of martial art studies in our country, by people residing in India.. As an attempt to fill in the void that existed in the field of research in martial arts and culture, its reception and transmission in India, my thesis has explored the ways in which cultural transmission of martial arts has taken place in India. Reception and subject formation are addressed, while exploring the process of cultural transmission in the field of martial art studies in India. Literary texts, especially those belonging to the genres of folklore, mythology, graphic novels and children's literature and performances as well as oral narratives of survival are deeply embedded into the consciousness of the masses, the identity formation through these texts regarding the reception of martial arts have largely shaped our subjective thinking. The everyday discourse revolving around martial arts, its practice, research and implementation in the present socio-cultural context of India is often derived from diverse forms of collective representation of the same, be it narrative, performative or literary. This thesis is an exploration and analysis of what the diverse Indian culture allows to be tagged as important and what it marginalizes, in the realm of the insignificant. This thesis has encapsulated negotiations between opposing elements in our perceptions of martial arts in general. A study of how transmission of martial arts takes places across cultures can further help us in understanding the mode of simulation

that opens up the dialogic space between the licit and the illicit as well as the sacred and profane, between pure and hybrid, normativity and transgression. This thesis has also charted out the mechanisms adopted by the martial art practitioners in subject formation through knowledge acquisition about these arts. Cultural transmission of martial art studies in India is invariably dependent on the influence of sport, performance, texts, oral narratives and the lived experience of people, with regard to martial arts.

Indigenous martial arts and related healing techniques have been in practice since ages but there has been little to no information about the development of martial arts training in India, the impact of the Indian martial culture on self development and the cross-cultural transfers which took place when martial disciplines from Japan, Thailand, China and other parts of the world started getting influenced by the Indian martial arts and also started influencing the existing Indian martial forms. Cultural differences are inevitable parts of the Indian society and these inherent variations in vibrant cultural traditions make the traditions more valuable. A study in cultural transmission of the study of martial arts in India is concerned with the reception, transmission, production and consumption of cultural forms, literary texts, performances, epistemologies and ideas across time and space. The intersection of arts, literature, theory and popular culture, within the context of the thesis, has been considered in accordance with the embodiment and ethnography of martial arts practice, with special focus on its cultural transmission in India, the politics of subject formation and performance in the martial art training and pedagogy. The transition from writing in and about the art form to that of sharing lived experience of the same has been explored. Various methods of ecological analysis and their implicit relationship with cultural practices in Japanese martial practice, as reflected in texts and practice are inscribed in the mode of reception across

boundaries of the nation. These have been analysed in the final chapter of the thesis to provide an eco-critical reading of martial arts.

Through the integration of the martial culture in India, varied overtones of the martial code of conduct, way of life and ethos have been found enmeshed in the cultural, performative and literary landscape of India. Embroidered by the culturally vibrant traditions of indigenous martial forms, martial training in India has assumed eminence. Being positioned in the cross-currents of Indian socio-cultural sentiments, this portrayal of martial culture has been exalted into a state of purity and reverence. The performative equation is embedded with the mellifluousness of different martial arts and martial dance traditions. The narrative becomes something which is not made overtly visible but asks the viewer to introspect upon the scene – a meditation that is forced by humans behind the guise of nature and the divine. The thesis has analyzed the academic essentialization of the incommensurability between the non-modern and the modern and the licit and the illicit, with regard to elements of cultural transmission and reception of martial arts in India. The tradition of the martial art and the related performance of healing can be viewed as a signifying system which can delineate conceptual categories about enchanted, sacred spaces of performance. Its alliance with discursive formations of Liberal Studies as well as Cultural Studies can also be charted out.

This thesis examines the inter-relationship between aesthetics and governance, the situation of body-politics and the extent to which it is allowed, both by the self and the state. Rituals and expressions in the performance have been studied as dialectic movements, as a rite of passage, in a pattern of separation and integration. The conceptualization of the liminal, in its understanding of the body within the performative arena, ritualistic, aesthetic or social has also been explored.

Martial Art Studies has been ascribed an important status as cultural heritage in the Indian topos. Much of the internal world of the martial art traditions in India, in their indigenous and raw nature, and the stories of its native performing body have not been documented in detail, to help clear the air about subject formation and identity. Moreover, the concern of experiencing the synthesized life world in the context of cultural encounters could only be studied through the narrative of the martial body, involved in training and performance, through its history in India. The type of martial dance and martial arts that existed in the ceremonial milieu gradually stepped out of its initial setting in akharas, samitis and varied events for the advent of new areas of performance which were secular in nature. This opened up a two-dimensional approach. It was observed that martial artists went out of their home to acquire training in these arts, to teach the art in their new adopted habitat, but retain the strict principles of their own indigenous martial traditions, while others went out to seek secular spaces for entertainment, livelihood and acclaim in the field of sports and performance.

The core world of the autochthonous martial culture and martial arts tradition in India was regulated by strong foundations of ethical and moral values drawn from the beliefs and practices of the people. It manifests the torment in a calamity of a cultural being, where their martial art had been structured, its image framed by the contours of their memories of survival, related narratives and remembrances, their traditional knowledge systems, their thoughts and ideas in intense relationship with their own natural habitat and environment. It had suffered the weight of hegemony, an impoverishment of the inhabitant wealth through colonial imposing of rules against martial practice, exploitation and appropriation of available resources.

Through experiments in the theatres, action films, field of sports, martial arts in India is signified by the use of the performing body, utilizing movements which are deliberately based on the contemporary body usage and behaviour, thereby re-structuring interstices and

processes of performance, but at the same time freeing the performer's psyche from traditional orthodoxies and hierarchical values of physical cultures. It aims at some future state of freedom and emancipation, while envisioning respect and preservation of substantive values of identity and tradition, within the corpus of martial arts.

While situating the study of martial arts in India within Comparative Cultural studies, it is important to note that geography and history inform much of literature and performing arts, though their presence in Indian martial arts may strike us with singular force. When one does not have to travel very far in any direction to be confronted by land's end, a consciousness different from that of its regional assurance develops. The dwellers of this nation represent a scattering of people and their martial traditions throughout a culturally diverse scattering of states, with their own unique cultural practice. The awareness of the rich tradition of martial arts in India is therefore, immediate and historical.

The variegated voices of the martial artists and performers reflect something of the history of performance, something of the landscapes, city-scapes, and human scenes that make the receiving regions of India a vibrant site of cultural assimilation. For majority of the inhabitants, the ongoing struggle lies in transforming history from a reality that must be suffered or endured to one that has been achieved through a greater degree of self-determination. Given the global nature of modern economic forces, and the tendency of multinational corporations to see the value of the region in terms of preserving the talent pool and low-cost centers for management of the same, such quest is likely to be epic in length. There has been an overlapping of motions from past to present and back to the cultural past, from the realm of the personal to the realm of the social, and finally from specific performative areas of martial arts, while we study the cultural transmission of martial arts in India and the spread of Indian martial traditions to various corners of the world and back again to the centre.