

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION- MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT

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‘Transforming ‘Indigenous Sport’ – A Study of The ‘Physical Culture Clubs In Western India – Jummadada Vyayammandir (Baroda), Hanuman Vyayam Prasarak Mandali (Amaravati) and Maharashtra Mandal (Pune) c. 1900-1950’.

A SUMMARY

This research project sought to map the transformations in traditional ‘indigenous’ sporting regimes in the first half of the twentieth century. Many experiments in physical culture were being undertaken all over western India and new institutions were being founded. The project focused on some of the iconic but under-investigated institutions, all of which survive till today.

The project mainly aimed to question the common assumptions of ‘decline’ and ‘revival’ of ‘indigenous sports’ in historical scholarship of the early twentieth century. While it is true that western India saw the founding of several gymnasiums, locally referred to as *akharas*, *vyayamshalas* and *vyayammandirs*, at the turn of the twentieth century, my work questions the tendency to perceive this activity as a corollary to anti colonial nationalism. It thus argues against characterizing the foundation of several *akharas*, including those under investigation here, as ushering in a ‘revival’ of ‘indigenous sport’. My work interrogates the institutional culture of this ‘revival’, and demonstrates that the movement sought to proselytize sports among the educated middle classes, and discipline and regulate some ‘indigenous sports’. The leading ideologues of physical culture were urban educated middle class men, who negotiated with ideas emanating from the North Atlantic world and utilized the vernacular public sphere to creatively translate and reformulate foreign regimens and moor them to indigenous idioms, and a new regime of physical training was created. Hence, ‘revival’ is a term that is reductive and one that tends to obscure the more complex process of conscious selection. The movement, as I demonstrate through a close reading of the literature produced by the movement, sought to create a sporting canon, and subsequently was instrumental in creating a curriculum of physical education for use in schools. Through on-site fieldwork, interviews with practitioners and a survey of historical literature and archival material, my work delineates the various facets of the physical culture clubs under study thus illuminating sporting history of the region.

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