

Yoga and Physical Education: Swami Kuvalayananda's Nationalist Project

Joseph S. Alter

Abstract

In the 1920s, Jagannath G. Gune adopted the title Swami Kuvalayananda and established a research centre for the scientific analysis of yoga in Lonavala, a hill station near Pune. Gune's training under Rajratna Manikrao had been in 'traditional' athletics and gymnastics, as these were understood to be the means by which to promote a form of strong, masculine, assertive anti-colonial nationalism. However, once Gune became the disciple of the sage Madhavadasji, and received training in *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*, he began to reconceptualise the logic of physical education and physical fitness. For Kuvalayananda, yoga was inherently scientific, but also in need of scientific analysis to prove its relevance in the context of modernity. Based on laboratory research on the physiological effects of *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*, and by virtue of his appointment as the director of physical education and sports in the Bombay Presidency, Kuvalayananda developed a 'scientific' regimen of both individual and mass drill *āsana*. In this article, I examine the logic of Kuvalayananda's reconceptualisation of physical education by means of yoga with special reference to questions of gender and nationalism in the discourse of science and in the embodiment of that discourse in practice.

Keywords

yoga, Hindu nationalism, physical education, gender, muscular Christianity, Swami Kuvalayananda

Epigraph

8.3.10. Health of the mind should be coupled with the health of the spirit. Towards this, yoga and meditation should be propagated widely among the youth. Yoga, in particular, should be taught in the schools.¹

Introduction: muscular Christianity and nationalism

The history of institutionalised physical education is directly linked to the ideology of muscular Christianity and broader philosophy of health reform that was influential in shaping educational institutions all over the world in

¹ Youth Policy 2003 issued by the Government of India Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports: http://yas.nic.in/yasroot/policies/youth_policy_03.htm

the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.² Muscular Christianity was a socio-religious movement focused on masculine ideals of courage, selfless service and moral character development. As a number of scholars have recently shown, various articulations of muscular Christianity were also integral to the project of empire building and the development of colonial rule.³ However, the ideals of muscular Christianity have also played a significant role in the emergence of regional nationalisms that are anti-colonial, thus complicating any simplistic binary of coloniser and colonised.⁴ In this essay, I will take up one specific dimension of this complexity by examining Swami Kuvalayananda's nationalist campaign to develop postural yoga as a form of physical education. The specific focus will be on the way in which yoga complicates the mind/body equation in physical education and the way in which a gendering of this equation can help to explain a degree of ambiguity in how yoga is thought to fit into the modern history of Indian physical culture.

Swami Kuvalayananda was born Jagannath Ganesh Gune in Dabhoi Gujarat on 30 August 1883. Awarded a Jagannath Shankarsheth Sanskrit Scholarship, he studied at Baroda University graduating in 1910. During his years in college, he was heavily influenced by both Aurobindo Ghose and Lokmanya Tilak and decided to dedicate his life to the cause of nationalist activism and social service and reform. In 1916 he joined the Khandesh Education Society and was principal of the National College at Amalner when the British government in 1920 shut it down on the grounds that it was promoting nationalist agitation and anti-colonial sentiments. While Gune was both an intellectual and a nationalist he was also interested in what he called 'the Indian system of physical education' and between 1907 and 1910, when he was in his mid-20s, he joined the well-known Jummadado Vyayamshala in Baroda and became a disciple of Rajratna Professor Manikrao. Under Manikrao, Gune engaged in wrestling and the kinds of diet and exercise associated with wrestling. He also trained in *lāṭhi* (stave) drill and the unique form of exercises that Manikrao had developed, all of which had a distinctly martial character. Manikrao himself blended military-like drill and disciplinary regimens with the ideology of muscular Christianity, the title 'Professor' being common among physical culturists of the period.

Gune was an ardent nationalist but was not active in politics or direct protest. Rather, he conceptualised nationalism in terms of social service and reform, particularly within the realm of education. Given his affinity for physical

² MacAloon 2006; Putney 2003.

³ Abe 2006; Mangan 1998.

⁴ See, for example, Foster 2006 and Abe 2006.

fitness and his work with boys and young men in Amalner, it is clear that he was committed to an ideal of muscular masculinity that resonates almost perfectly with the ideal espoused by Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, except for the fact that it was based on—or attributed to—yoga philosophy rather than Christianity, for rather obvious reasons.⁵ While this may sound contrived, it is not; or at least no more contrived than what was said at school convocations, team rallies and in sermons from a range of different denominational pulpits in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While very influential, Hughes's explication of the 'manly life of Jesus' was no more an articulation of mainstream Christianity than was Gune's reformulation a literal interpretation of medieval *hatha* yoga.⁶

Regardless of its nominal religious specificity—and the profound significance of this for those who profess Christianity—in practice the ideals of muscular Christianity can easily be translated into the idioms of different ideologies and still maintain their force. In fact, it is precisely this plasticity that has enabled the transformation of muscular Christianity as such into a powerful force in the shaping of postcolonial civil society, and has made it possible for various local mutations of muscular Christianity to articulate complex expressions of nationalism.⁷ Arguably, however, heavily gendered masculinity is a constant that underlies the range of transformations and mutations.

As I have indicated elsewhere, yoga fits somewhat ambiguously into the discourse and practice of muscular Christianity, in part for historically developmental reasons.⁸ It is not a sport, and, therefore, along with Swedish drill, Indian club swinging and other regimens of physical fitness, was marginalised as team sports and sportsmanship gained precedence around the turn of the century.⁹ In part, for gendered reasons, yoga's association with asceticism and world renunciation, as well its primary concern with restraint, can easily be interpreted as effete and the very antithesis of muscular masculinity.¹⁰ Furthermore, the discipline of yoga is one of the most profoundly self-oriented forms of human activity and, therefore, rather at odds with 'society' as such, and most certainly at odds with the inherently social principles of fair play, team

⁵ Hughes 1989.

⁶ Hughes 1879.

⁷ MacAloon 2006.

⁸ Alter 2006.

⁹ Alter 2004a.

¹⁰ Notably, a similar anxiety is reflected in the efforts of some advocates of muscular Christianity—nervous of how one might interpret advocacy for meekness and admonitions to 'turn the other cheek and render unto Caesar'—to highlight the manliness of Christ, if not so much in terms of robust physiological fitness as with reference to courage, conviction, and compassionate leadership (MacAloon 2006, p. 689) .

work, and public service-oriented fraternity.¹¹ This made it possible for some advocates of yoga to develop innovative hybrid exercise regimens and engage directly with advocates of muscular Christianity to articulate amendments, elaborations and pointed critiques on specific methodological and philosophical points.¹² However, for Swami Kuvalayananda and other nationalistic advocates for both the Indian System of Physical Education and what might be called ‘pure postural yoga’, the problem was somewhat more vexing.

Swami Kuvalayananda: science, yoga and physical education

By some accounts, Gune was first introduced to postural yoga techniques in Jummadado Vyāyamaśāla (gymnasium)—at almost the same time that Aurobindo sought out the aid of yogis to advise him on the practice of haṭha yoga—but it was not until 1919, under the guidance of Parmahansa Madhavadasji Maharaja of Malsar, that he received formal and extensive training. Ultimately the primary thrust of Kuvalayananda’s work was in the scientific study of yoga, the search for ‘rational’ explanations for the physiological effects of *āsana* (postures) and *prāṇāyāma* (breathing exercises) and for the development of yoga therapy for the treatment of various diseases. However, early in his career as a nationalist reformer he articulated three interrelated but distinct goals: ‘1) To prepare the young generation for service of the country; 2) To master the Indian System of Physical Education and integrate it with general education; and 3) To bring together science and spirituality by coordinating the spiritual aspects of Yoga with modern science.’¹³ This begs the question whether yoga is part of the Indian System of Physical Education, and if so how it is integrated. Ultimately there is no definitive answer to this question, although clearly, since Kuvalayananda began his physiological experiments, it has been conceptualised as a form of physical education.

As I have discussed in more detail elsewhere, Gune began experimenting on the physiology of yoga at the state hospital in Baroda sometime around 1920.¹⁴ His research agenda was, in essence, to subject various *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma* techniques and *kriyā* (actions) to laboratory tests in order to measure the effect on blood pressure, digestion, circulation, nerves, respiration and so forth. The general hypothesis was that by measuring various kinds of changes one would be able to experiment with the manipulation of those changes for the

¹¹ Alter 2007.

¹² Alter 2006.

¹³ Wakharkar 1984, p. 3.

¹⁴ Alter 2004b.

development of health and fitness. Thus if an *āsana* or series of *āsana* reduces blood pressure it can be prescribed for hypertension; if a *prāṇāyāma* technique increases lung capacity or the oxygen level in blood it might be prescribed for asthmatics. After some initial successful experiments at the state hospital, Gune decide to establish a research institute for the scientific study of yoga and in October 1924 he inaugurated Kaivalyadham Yoga Ashram in the village of Valvan near the town Lonavala between Bombay and Pune. Throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s the Ashram expanded with the addition of a pathological laboratory and two branch health centres, one in Bombay and the other in Rajkot. In 1944, he established an umbrella organisation called the Kaivalyadham S. M. Y. M. Samiti to coordinate the growing scale of scientific and literary research as well as the robust publishing activities of the Ashram.

Three years after Independence, in 1950, the Samiti undertook a major expansion of activities by establishing the Seth Gordhandas Seksaria College of Yoga and Cultural Synthesis. The function of the College was to train yoga educators in general, but to turn out certified teachers of yoga physical education in particular. Ultimately this project was directly linked to an integration and consolidation of the three goals that Gune had set out for himself while in college, and brought together Gune's two areas of expertise: a scientific understanding of yoga and advocacy for the Indian System of Physical Education.

In developing yoga as a system of physical education, and also integrating it into the broader Indian System of Physical Education, Kuvalayananda did three specific and discrete things that were at the time quite novel, if not completely new. First he theorised, on the basis of his research, the comprehensive effect of discrete *āsana* on the different physiological systems of the body. Second, given the static postural form of each *āsana* he tried to determine the optimal length of time to 'hold' each posture for best physiological effect, and how best to build in a system of progressive advancement to higher and higher levels of accomplishment. Third, given the fact that there is no inherent logic to perform a given sequence of specific *āsana*, and no guidelines in any of the then extant literature—both contemporary and historical—for determining a rational order, he set about establishing a 'course' outlining a series of *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *mudrā* (seals), *kriyā*, and *bandh* (locks). He published this in the Kaivalyadham research journal, *Yog Mimamsa*, in 1925.

A full course in yogic physical culture: embodying self-discipline

One of the most interesting and innovative ways in which Kuvalayananda reconceptualised modern scientific yoga in general was in terms of the distinc-

tion he drew between meditative poses—which include all of the *bandhs* and the cross-legged postures—therapeutic poses, and cultural poses. The designation ‘cultural’ is somewhat confusing until one takes into account that the term ‘physical culture’ was very much part of the vocabulary of physical education in the 1920s. Thus Kuvalayananda established a clear distinction between three obviously interrelated but functionally quite different ways of engaging the body, one concerned with meditation and transcendence, one remedial and the other proactive and oriented toward the development of a specific kind of physical fitness. Much has been said about the way in which yoga and other articulations of South Asian culture blur the distinction between mind and body, but for Kuvalayananda to develop yoga as physical education he not only had to disarticulate mind and body, but also make a secondary distinction between all postural forms based on the difference between healing and what he called the development of ‘physiological advantage’. Needless to say, Kuvalayananda was at pains to maintain the fundamental integrity of mind and body in yoga, but in practice he was concerned with their functional differences.

Yoga-Śāstra unmistakably recognizes the inter-dependence of body and mind. . . .

As will become clear from the following chapters, Āsana are divided into two principal grounds: Cultural and Meditative. . . . Individuals who take to the practice of Āsana are also of two types: Those who seek only physiological advantages and those who are anxious to secure spiritual advantages also. People of the first type may be called physical culturists and those of the second type may be termed spiritual culturists.¹⁵

As Kuvalayananda goes on to explain, the physical advantage gained by doing cultural poses is in ‘training the nervous and endocrine systems’. In other words, while yoga involves the muscles, muscular exercise is not the primary physiological function of the cultural poses. For example, in his discussion of *Uddiyāna* (abdominal lock) and *Nauli* (abdominal rotation), where the recti muscles are isolated and rotated, the goal is to give a complete ‘vertical massage to the abdominal organs’. In the relatively rare case in which muscle strength is produced through a cultural pose, the function is to hold the internal organs securely and to maintain good posture and support for the spine.

One might ask, then, how this fits into the discourse on physical education and ‘muscular’ Christianity. In fact, much of the language used to talk about the physiological benefits of *fin-de-siècle* exercise was in terms of nerves, and in the early decades of the twentieth century there was considerable debate on the relative advantages of muscular development of the sort popularised by

¹⁵ Kuvalayananda 1993, p. 27.

Eugen Sandow¹⁶ and the kind of energetic and rhythmic balance reflected in Swedish drill.¹⁷ Advocates of physical training drill were often as concerned with countering the effects of lethargy, neurasthenia—a mental condition thought to be linked to the underdevelopment or enervation of the nerves—and poor digestion, as they were with the development of good posture, robust flexibility and cardiovascular stamina. Kuvalayananda clearly identified yoga as the Indian form of Swedish drill, and turned to the fundamental unity of mind and body in yoga to explain the ultimate functional utility of his system of working through the body to develop an ‘enlightened’ person with powerful strength of character, conviction and courage.

We believe the evidence that we have put forth up to now is sufficient to establish the interdependence of body and mind. Both of them affect each other favourably as well as adversely. But if we probe the question of interdependence a little deeper, we find that the mind has the strength to raise superior to all the influences of the body. To verify the truth of this statement we have simply to study the lives of the heroes of different nations who had to undergo terrible physical sufferings in order to serve their motherland. Their iron will not only knew no bending but it ever grew stronger and stronger as they were forced to face physical tortures. We read the glorious history of religious martyrs who did not in the least swerve from their convictions even when their bodies were actually burnt to ashes!!¹⁸

As Kuvalayananda invokes the manliness of Christ—among others—he uses the argument of the embodied mind’s physiological development through yoga to point out that a body that is simply muscular and physically fit is not really very strong:

On the contrary we find the strongest bodies being paralyzed, if man is overcome by fear. The healthiest constitutions are shattered under the baneful influence of worries. Physical giants actually totter when in a fit of rage and are not able to effectively use their strength. We personally know two youths turned impotent in a moment because of imaginary misgivings.¹⁹

Although Kuvalayananda’s focus is primarily on the cultural poses, he is very precise on defining the context for *āsana* performance and stresses the significance of careful preparation to ensure the effectiveness of yoga physical education. Given that he claims that the mind has a much greater impact on the body than the body does on the mind, it is somewhat surprising that he does not primarily contextualise the cultural poses, and outline the criteria for preparation, within the broader framework of meditation. Instead he

¹⁶ Chapman 1994.

¹⁷ Guttman 1994.

¹⁸ Kuvalayananda 1993, p. 31.

¹⁹ Ibid.

points out that the cultural poses are only effective to the extent that one is disciplined in the performance of *yama* (moral discipline) and *niyama* (self-discipline), the first and second limbs of *aṣṭāṅga yoga* (eight-limbed yoga) that immediately precede *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*. *Yama* entails adopting a lifestyle committed to non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, chastity, and greedlessness; *niyama* entails self-discipline focused on restraint that produces purity of mind and body, contentment, renunciation, learning based on study, and devotion to God.

What is most interesting about this is that it is in terms of *yama* and *niyama* that the moral and ethical features of yoga are highlighted, and this makes the rhetoric associated with yoga physical education sound almost identical to the discourse on muscular Christianity, even though in terms of some specific ethical questions—the question of violence, for example, recalling that Thomas Hughes taught and advocated boxing—they are rather different. Consider the following statement

Yamas and Niyamas put together constitute ten principles of conduct which, if followed faithfully, invariably give supreme mental peace to a student of Yoga. He is freed from all violent emotions. His adamant faith in the Lord develops in him a robust optimism. He can maintain a clear conscience and can carry the sunshine of happiness wherever he goes. In short he is able to ensure perfect health for his mind.²⁰

Although this resonates with many statements in *Tom Brown's School Days*, yoga physical education reverses the direction of causality by defining moral conduct and a lifestyle of self-discipline as prerequisites for, rather than the derived benefit of, physical development.²¹

Physical education

Given the way in which British and, even more so, North American physical education and sports quickly came to dominate the government discourse on the need for physical education in school, it is interesting to note that in 1882 the India Education Commission recommended the promotion of interest in 'native games, gymnastics and other exercises'.²² No action seems to have been taken on this recommendation, but in 1895 the question of making physical education a compulsory part of education was taken into

²⁰ Kuvalayananda 1993, p. 32.

²¹ Hughes 1989.

²² Kamlesh 1988, p. 371.

consideration. Although there was nominal support for this there was no institutionalised structure to provide guidelines and training. Ultimately this was not remedied until 1920 when the YMCA College of Physical Education in Madras began turning out certified instructors.

Well before the government began to take physical education seriously, sports and the ‘games ethic’ had become an integral part of imperial rule and administration. As J. A. Mangan has pointed out, the ideals of muscular Christianity were explicitly applied in Indian public schools as a mechanism by which to convert and civilise.²³ The growing number of public schools in India after 1860 provided an environment where the ideals espoused by Hughes and Kingsley took firm root among the English educated élite. Certainly by the time Gune was studying at Baroda, muscular Christianity had become a powerful and pervasive trope for understanding how body, mind and spirit—as well as morals, ethics and character—were linked together in the context of education.

Even as they found the basic logic of muscular Christianity persuasive and appealing, and recognised its structural utility in forming a powerful nationalist response to colonialism, there were various individuals and groups in India who, not surprisingly, found it explicitly imperialist. This generated a number of responses, a brief schematic review of what can help to contextualise Kuvalayananda’s arguments concerning yoga, and provide points of reference for understanding his involvement in the politics of institutionalised physical education.

One response is reflected in the establishment in 1914 of Sri Hanuman Vyayam Prasarak Mandal (HVPM) by the Vaidya Brothers. Although, as I have argued elsewhere, the HVPM reflects a complex and unique engagement with the multiple modernities of colonial and post-colonial India,²⁴ basically what the Vaidya brothers were trying to do was to provide a modern institutional structure for training in ‘traditional’ forms of Indian physical culture. In the process, these forms of physical culture were systematised and routinised, as happened with the game of *kabaddi* (vigorous team-tag).²⁵ In any case, the HVPM was conceptualised both as a means by which to counteract the growing hegemony of European forms of sport and exercise as well as promote nationalist ideals of self-determination and self-rule by means of ‘traditional’ sports and exercise programmes. Unlike other individuals and organisations, the Vaidya brothers did not advocate a kind of directly oppositional muscular

²³ Mangan 1998.

²⁴ Alter manuscript.

²⁵ Alter 2000.

Hinduism to counter the principles of muscular Christianity. Rather they stressed secular, democratic and egalitarian values and identified the Indian National Congress as their political and ideological inspiration.

A second response, inherently more intellectual, is manifest in D. C. Mujumdar's *Vyayam Jnanakosh*, a 10-volume encyclopaedia of Indian Physical Culture that was published in Marathi between 1936 and 1949. An abridged, one volume edition in English was published in 1950. Mujumdar's purpose is not only to document forms of Indian physical culture so as to promote their practice, but also to counteract the popular, colonial perception that there was no tradition of physical fitness in India. In many ways Mujumdar's project is a fairly straightforward indigenisation of muscular Christianity, with faith in the nation replacing faith in God. As in many other comparable projects, the colonial project of conversion and civilisation was turned on its head to become a nationalist project involving the development of courage, character and moral purpose. Mujumdar's focus is on youth and the development of young men and, to a lesser degree, women, with a sense of purposeful self-confidence reflected in their strength, physique, character and commitment to community.

A third response is found in another book dedicated to the 'Youth of India' written by Professor Kodi Ramamurthy Naidu, the 'Indian Hercules'. Ramamurthy is one of the more colourful characters in the history of Indian physical culture, given his Sandow-like showmanship and Bernarr MacFadden-like self-promotion. After joining an *ākhāra* (gymnasium) in Vizianagaram, Andhra, where he was staying with his uncle, he went to Madras and continued an intensive programme of physical training. By his own account, he tried all forms of physical exercise but in the end returned to the practices he had learnt in the *ākhāras* and became a staunch advocate for the Indian system of physical culture. While a physical training instructor in Vizianagaram, he started a circus and began his career as a professional strong man with such feats as breaking chains wrapped around his chest, lifting heavy weights and stopping cars from moving by holding them back with iron chains. After performing for King George and Queen Mary at Buckingham Palace he was given the title 'Indian Hercules'. Although clearly a strong man cut in the mould of Eugene Sandow, who he challenged to a lifting contest when Sandow toured India in 1905—he was snubbed—there are intriguing hints of yogic influences on his regimen. His ability to break iron chains wrapped around his chest by breathing deeply reflects a unique application of *prāṇāyāma*, and one report claims that he underwent surgery without anaesthetic by using yogic techniques to overcome the pain.²⁶

²⁶ B. M. G. 2002

Professor Kodi Ramamurty Naidu's book, *Physical Culture*, published in 1923, is interesting for a number of reasons, but primarily because it targets for criticism not simply young men who are sickly, weak and simpering but also the failure of western-style physical education to effect a transformation of these young men.²⁷ His account, which is merciless in its mockery of failed muscular Christianity—but also very much in the tradition of muscular Christianity (and also very funny)—is worth quoting at some length, if only because it puts Kuvalayananda's earnestness in some perspective:

All that is available is the din and bustle of busy streets and a dull dust-laden atmosphere; and in it an ill ventilated and incommensurable building, unintended and undersigned for school or college purposes, with as limited a compound as possible for any useful purpose. In this limited space the occasional visitor can see in a corner a rickety or half-broken horizontal bar or a partly planted parallel bars together with other accessories of a gymnasium. On week days the ill-paid and meagerly clad (mostly in the relics of bygone military glory) Drill teacher or Gymnastic instructor, often a pensioned half-famished and weather beaten sepoy with a gray beard hidden under a paint and attempting to stand erect while his half-fed and ill-nourished back pulls him down, makes his unwelcome presence on these scanty grounds. The poor man has to go through all that he can teach in a brief period of about forty minutes and that too at the end of the day's routine when the boys are left with no energy due to the excessive mental worry that is demanded by the courses in our present day school curricula. Exhausted by the day's work and attendance not being compulsory, as many of the boys as could conveniently escape, scarcely make their appearance on the grounds.... After the usual preliminaries... comes the turn of the boys to mount the bars. The Drill teacher cannot even sufficiently express himself in proper language as to what he wants the pupils to do. To add to this if he happens to be an irritable person a stripe or two with his half-rent cane will set the boys fleeing to a corner where, after shedding ample tears, they curse themselves for not having followed the example of their comrades in making their appearance at all in the field. Next a more plucky fellow may partly attempt the feat himself, but half-way on the bar his dhoti gets loose; then away with feats and gymnastics to the great laughter of his fatigued friends.²⁸

Ramamurty continues his harangue by lampooning Collegians with their posture ruined by carrying heavy books and sitting all day on benches; they graduate to become gentlemen only to reach adulthood with their 'pipe already smoked out'. Then they spiral downward, coming to embody at the end of their lives the opposite of the ideals of muscular Christianity

²⁷ He appears on the title page of this edition, and in the references below, as 'Professor Kodi Ramamurty'. He was commonly known, however, as 'Prof. Ramamurthy Naidu', or simply 'Ramamurty'.

²⁸ Ramamurty 1923, pp. x–xi.

The very fact that he enters life with no vitality, courage and will power left in him is a constant source of anxiety to him and the worry consequent on his ill-health coupled with it weighs him down until it proves too much for him and at last he succumbs to it contributing nothing either to himself or to the land of his birth.²⁹

Significantly Ramamurty contrasts physical education in modern Indian universities of the early twentieth century with a romantic vision of ‘ancient forest universities’ where students studied in a natural environment where billowy white clouds, cool streams, thick forests and fragrant meadows populated with peacocks, antelope, song birds and ‘floating *bataks* [ducks] in ponds’ provide an idyllic setting for young *brahmacāris* (celibate disciple) to engage in ‘a model program of VYAYAM i.e. bodily exercise: Pranayama—Breathing Exercise’. In striking contrast to the image of the ‘half famished and weather beaten sepoy’ trying to drill boys in a dusty, musty, broken-down room-that-serves-as-a-gym, Ramamurty focuses on the Guru of the forest university who, in addition to being handsome and the perfect example of ‘a sound mind in a sound body’ is a symmetrically proportioned giant: eight feet tall and endowed with an eight foot arm span. One is reminded here of Kuvalayananda’s evocation of the narrow-waisted, broad-shouldered yogi. Fundamentally, however, the institutionalisation of physical education in India undermines the idea of yoga as physical education, and exposes the contrived logic—born of the union of muscular Christianity and nationalism—manifest in Ramamurty’s vision and Kuvalayananda’s original project.

Yoga and institutionalised physical education

In 1937 the Government of the Bombay Presidency constituted a committee to plan a ‘comprehensive scheme of physical education’ for the region. Swami Kuvalayananda was appointed as the chairman. On the committee’s recommendation, a permanent Board of Physical Education was established and Swami Kuvalayananda presided as chairman of the board until 1950. During this thirteen-year period he successfully integrated the Indian system with other systems of physical education and was able to negotiate government funding for ‘traditional’ *vyāyamsālas* and *ākhāras*. He was also directly involved in making a series of recommendations to the Central Government that ultimately lead to the establishment of the Physical Education College in Kandivali in 1938 and subsequently, in 1957, the Lakshmibai National College of Physical Education in Gwalior.

²⁹ Ramamurty 1923, p. xiii.

In many respects, therefore, the establishment of the College of Yoga and Cultural Studies on the Ashram campus in Lonavala, where yoga instructors-to-be were drilled in the Full Course in Yogic Physical Culture, must be understood in the broader context of the history of physical education in modern India. Although it is not possible here to go into the details, it seems clear that with the establishment of several physical education training colleges in the 1930s two significant things occurred. First the ex-military physical training instructors at schools and colleges were replaced by certified physical educators. And second, with the notable exception of the Hanuman Vyāyama Prasarak Maṇḍal, there was increasing consolidation of the physical education curriculum so that yoga came to be defined as a sub-type of general exercise.³⁰ This trend is clearly apparent in the organisation of the National Fitness Corps Handbook published in 1965. Although most of the exercises discussed in the section on ‘exercise tables’ are standard P. T. drill techniques, *dand* (jackknifing pushup) *sada dandā*, (standard jackknifing pushup) *aṣṭāṅg dand* (*sūrya namaskār*) (jackknifing push up in eight positions) and *cakra dand* (rotating jackknifing pushup) exercises are included from the ‘Indian System of Physical Education’. These are, however, the only ones that are ‘marked’—albeit only nominally—in terms of cultural heritage; all others are simply exercises although their origin is probably Swedish or German. Yoga is defined as a very specific kind of exercise that has very particular benefits. Thus, as physical education came to be defined more and more in terms of the physiology and the science of kinesthetics, *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* came to fill a specific niche within, rather than be seen as an alternative to, the western system of physical education.

Yogic Exercises have a great physiological value and have healthy influence on the various systems of the body such as the respiratory, the circulatory, the nervous and the endocrine. These exercises also have a posture training value. Exercise in Yoga if practiced daily help to maintain good health and adequate energy for work after life.

According to expert opinion, yogic exercises may play an important role in the prevention of disease and maintenance of positive health. The therapeutical claims of yogic exercise are significant, and cannot, therefore, be ignored. The teacher should impress on the students these advantages.³¹

The ‘expert opinion’ is clearly Kuvalayananda’s, but it is difficult to know what he thought about the way in which yoga seemed to be included into the curriculum, not so much as an Indian system of physical education as a therapeutic supplement to the general scheme of National Fitness. In any case, it can

³⁰ Alter manuscript.

³¹ Ministry of Education, Government of India 1965, p. 64.

be argued that as Kuvalayananda became more and more involved in the development of a policy on physical education he realised that if yoga were subsumed by physical education it would be marginalised. Beyond this, by comparing his work on the Board of Physical Education with the growth and development of his vision for the College of Yoga and Cultural Studies, it seems clear that he was somewhat ambivalent about the place of yoga in a curriculum of physical education.

While the College of Yoga and Cultural Studies was exclusively devoted to training yoga instructors, Kuvalayananda's pre- and post-Independence involvement in the development of a comprehensive national strategy for physical education in India was much more eclectic. Over time I think this led him to change his perspective on yoga in a subtle but significant way. Instead of seeing it as a type of physical culture that could be incorporated into physical education, as he did in the 1920s, by 1950 he came to regard it as a different kind of physical education altogether. In part this is probably because, in the context of his chairmanship, he could easily read the writing on the wall.

Conclusion: muscular masculinity and the marginalisation of yoga

Needless to say, as a life-style, as a quasi-spiritual system of New Age physical self development, and as a holistic form of personal self improvement, postural yoga has become extremely popular on a global scale. But although it has remained part of the curriculum in post-Independence India, four factors have marginalised yoga's significance in the context of formal physical education: 1) The transformation of the struggle for independence in the 1930s and 1940s into the politics of state building in the 1950s and 1960s; 2) the violence and trauma of partition; 3) the emphasis placed on India's participation in the 1948 Olympics and its hosting of the Asian Games in 1951; and 4) the impact of the 1962 border conflict on government attitudes towards national fitness.

Arguably there is an important way in which a gendered discourse of muscular masculinity relates to these issues. This discourse was not, by any means, entirely new to the post-colonial context. Despite Gandhi's decidedly non-masculine, anti-colonial nationalism, there were a number of clearly articulated forms of nationalism that were gendered in terms of masculinity.³² However, at least on one level, the problem of masculinity—or of presenting an image of independence, national strength, vision and courage in terms of

³² Alter 1994.

masculinity—became much more important for the Indian State than it was for the largely Gandhian influenced Indian National Congress. In the context of the Swadeshi movement, one can easily appreciate the appeal of yoga as a form of physical culture, purely in terms of its cultural value. And, as has been noted, it was possible to rhetorically construct an image—however contrived—of the idealised yogi as a muscular strongman. In practice, however, *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* produce the effects described in the *National Fitness Corps Handbook*. If not necessarily regarded as effete, *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* were simply not linked to muscles, masculinity and fitness at a time when that link was of critical national importance.

Significantly, *The National Fitness Corps Handbook*, which became the standard for school curriculum development after 1965, grew directly out of the National Discipline Scheme that took shape under the direction of J. K. Bhonsle, a Sandhurst trained senior officer in the Indian Army.

The National Discipline Scheme could very well be compared with the ‘Patriotic Gymnastic’ movement initiated by Ludwig Jahn in Germany in the early part of the nineteenth century to make the masses aware of the importance of physical fitness and the spirit of nationalism. The National Discipline Scheme, as the name itself indicates, was initiated to infuse in the young minds at school, spirit of discipline and indoctrinate them in the philosophy of nationalism and cultural heritage through physical activity.³³

Bhonsle’s inspiration was based on his admiration for Japanese patriotism, sense of duty and loyalty as well as on their embodied discipline. However, he was directly motivated to establish a scheme under the direction of the Central Government in the aftermath of partition and the chaos of refugee resettlement. In many respects, the professed goals of the Scheme are precisely those of muscular Christianity as well: ‘to make the youth of the Country healthy in body and mind and instil in them a sense of patriotism, self-reliance, tolerance and self-sacrifice and to develop human values and build in them a desire to serve the country and humanity at large’.³⁴

Although the National Discipline Scheme started out with an emphasis on mass drill and marching, by the early 1960s it had incorporated ‘the best features of physical education and sports’.³⁵ Although it included both men and women, it is clear that the Scheme celebrated masculine virtues in seeking to define a national vision of physical fitness and self-discipline. Although the Scheme explicitly accommodated ‘indigenous activities such as *lezim* [bow

³³ Kamlesh 1988, p. 387.

³⁴ Kamlesh 1988, p. 389.

³⁵ Kamlesh 1988, p. 390.

exercises] *malkhamb* [wrestler's pillar] *bhangra* [vigorous dance] *khokho* [tag race game] and *kabaddi*, etc., which are more wholesome than many imported activities', to the best of my knowledge the Scheme makes no mention of yoga.³⁶

In some respects, J. K. Bhonsle's nationalist vision was not that different from the nationalist vision of Rajratan Manikrao, under whom J. G. Gune received instruction in the Indian System of Physical Education. And, as I have argued, the logic of muscular Christianity that inspired Professor Manikrao and Gune came to be applied to the nationalist development of yoga physical culture under the direction of Kuvalayananda. Ultimately, however, the incipiently gendered discourse of muscular Christianity—recall here that Christ's 'masculinity' had to be defended by Hughes—and the explicitly masculine features of nationalism have made it very difficult for a form of training that is truly concerned with the holistic development of body, mind and spirit to be regarded as physical education in modern India.

References

- Abe, Ikuro 2006, Muscular Christianity in Japan: The Growth of a Hybrid, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23: 714–38.
- Alter, Joseph S. 1994, 'Somatic Nationalism: Indian Wrestling and Militant Hindusim', *Modern Asian Studies*, 28: 557–88.
- 2000, 'Kabaddi, A National Sport of India: The Internationalism of Nationalism and the Foreignness of Indianness', in Noel Dyke (ed.), *Getting Into the Game: The Anthropology of Sport*, Oxford: Berg, 81–116.
- 2004a, 'Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46: 497–534.
- 2004b, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Philosophy and Science*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 2006, 'Yoga at the *Fin de Siècle*: Muscular Christianity with a "Hindu" Twist', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23: 759–76.
- 2007, 'Yoga and Fetishism: Reflections of Marxist Social Theory', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (NS), 12: 763–83.
- n.d., 'Hanuman Vyayam Prasarak Mandal: Physical Education, Sport and the Problem of Modernity in India'. (manuscript under review).
- B. M. G. 2002, 'Indian Hurcule', *The Hindu*. <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/mp/2002/08/12/stories/2002081200920200.htm> (Last accessed 24 October 2006).
- Chapman, David L. 1994, *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugene Sandow and the Beginning of Bodybuilding*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Foster, Robert J. 2006, 'From Trobriand Cricket to Rugby Nation: The Mission of Sport in Papua New Guinea', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23: 739–58.

³⁶ Ibid.

- Guttmann, Alan 1994, *Games and Empire: Modern Sport and Cultural Imperialism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hughes, Thomas 1879, *The Manliness of Christ*, London: Macmillan.
- 1989 [1857], *Tom Brown's School Days*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kamlesh, M. L. 1988, *Physical Education: Facts and Foundations*, Faridabad: P. B. Publications.
- Kuvalayananda, Swami 1993 [1933], *Asanas*, Lonavla: Kaivalyadhama.
- MacAloon, John J. 2006, 'Introduction: Muscular Christianity after 150 Years', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23: 687–700.
- Majumdar, Boria 2006, 'Tom Brown Goes Global: The "Brown" Ethic in Colonial and Post-Colonial India', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23: 805–20.
- Mangan, J. A. 1998, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, London: Frank Cass.
- 2006, 'Christ and the Imperial Playing Fields: Thomas Hughes's Ideological Heirs in Empire', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23: 777–804.
- Ministry of Education, Government of India 1965, *National Fitness Corps Handbook*, Central Government Press.
- Mujumdar, D. C. 1950, *Encyclopedia of Indian Physical Culture*, Baroda: Good Companions.
- Putney, Clifford 2003, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ramamurty, Professor Kodi 1923, *Physical Culture: Being a Scheme Prepared for the Indian Universities*, No Publisher. Printed by Dharma Vijaya P. Press, Ahmedabad.
- Wakharkar, D. G. 1984, *Swami Kuvalayananda—His Contribution to Humanity*, Swami Kuvalayananda Birth Centenary Souvenir, Lonavla: Kavalyadhama.