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Author(s): Joseph S. Alter

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The Body of One Color: Indian Wrestling, the Indian State, and Utopian Somatics

Joseph S. Alter
Goshen College

Introduction

South Asian scholars are well aware of the central place of the Hindu body in ritual, ascetic, and artistic life. A great many scholars who have examined the Hindu body have studied the somatic parameters of purity and pollution as the structuring principles of caste hierarchy. Others have focused on the relationship between power and purity in ritual, exchange, and transaction (Dumont 1970; Marriott 1968, 1976); the structural logic of dietetics in *ayurvedic* science (Khare 1976; Zimmermann 1983, 1988); the psychosomatic experience of identity (Daniel 1984), personality (Kakar 1990), and emotion (Lynch 1990; Trawick 1990); and the embodiment of gender in various sociopolitical arenas (Chatterjee 1989; Mani 1987).

In the literature on these and other themes there is general consensus that a South Asian view of the body is quite different from its Western counterpart. Put simply, most scholars accept that modern Hindu concepts of self and society are not guided by a simple notion of Cartesian mind-body duality. Rather, the whole person is regarded as a complex, multilayered indivisible synthesis of psychic, somatic, emotional, sensory, cognitive, and chemical forces (cf. Parry 1989; Staal 1983–84).¹ Too much should not be made of this stark opposition, however. When particular instances of somaticity in either Europe, America, or India are given careful study, there appear to be degrees of congruity: Judeo-Christian dualism expands into complex three dimensions when the individual body is subject to the workings of spirit, soul, sin, and salvation (cf. Parry 1989:512–514), just as the Hindu body seems, at times and in places, to be fabricated in terms of such dualities as subtle consciousness and gross materiality. However, Hindu philosophy seems to accommodate a fluid synthesis of “cognitive” and “somatic” factors to a much greater degree and with less contorted rationalization than do most Western philosophies.

In this article I will provide an example of how a psychosomatic synthesis characterizes a particular category of person in northern India: the *pahalwan*, or Indian wrestler.² I will argue that the wrestler’s identity is the product of a precise

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“disciplinary mechanics” and that this psychosomatic identity is central to an ideology of national, moral reform.

The case of the wrestler is of particular interest on a theoretical level. Michel Foucault’s work on the relationship between the body and power shows how the details of body discipline—exercise, etiquette, and immunization, for example—are implicated in the objectification of the individual in various arenas of domination (1979). One of the central features of Foucault’s argument is that changing European conceptions of the body made various disciplinary techniques possible and effective as mechanisms of control. The docile body—stripped of meaning and regimented according to programs of utility and efficiency—became the building block of state power as reflected in such seemingly dissimilar and unrelated phenomenon as assembly line choreography, prison architecture, school-room etiquette, hospital sanitation, and the collection of census data. In his genealogy of the body, Foucault refuses to accept that these and other technologies of control in modern life can be explained, or made sense of, with reference to the logic of post-Enlightenment reason or rational analysis. Rather they are the product of a history of errors and “contingent conjunctures” that must be understood not through a decoding of symbols but in terms of a somatic, materialist exposé of power (Turner 1984:159). Foucault is critical of the Cartesian legacy, which, to a large extent, allowed for the body to be objectified and thereby subject to the domination of so-called rational ideas. This process may be seen in political theories of individualism that correlate autonomy and free will with the exigencies of capitalist enterprise. A discourse of “possessive individualism” (Macpherson 1962) defines the whole person as private property and assigns control to the individual as free agent. However, as Abercrombie et al. have argued, as individuals become so reified, they become easier to control and manipulate precisely because they are objectified as unique (1986:189). They are subjugated by virtue of their autonomy in a situation that the authors call Foucault’s Paradox.

What Foucault’s work suggests, among other things, is the possibility for a demystification of power and knowledge through a detailed examination of various forms of body discipline. Spivak (1988:18–19), cross-referencing Chatterjee (1988:387–388), has pointed out that modern European “regimes of power,” in the Foucauldian sense, are mitigated—or exacerbated or confounded—to some extent by “older modes of power” manifest in non-European environments. The mix of old and new—of two or more historical tangents coming together—opens up a range of hybrid modes of domination in the modern colonial and postcolonial state (cf. Arnold 1988; Tolen 1991).

Although directly related to the theoretical issues raised in these and other contextually situated studies, the question that arises from a reading of Foucault in my own work is this: what is the relationship between power, knowledge, and the body in an arena where Cartesian dualism does not operate and where individualism has a different history? What are the consequences of various disciplinary techniques when the mind-body totality is able fundamentally to resist docility? In this article I can provide only some preliminary and summary remarks that are intended as a point of departure for further study.³

In taking up the issue of power and resistance, it is important to note that in articulating separate domains for mind and body, Cartesianism not only laid the foundation for disciplinary projects, but in so doing also suggested the basis for a somatic critique of power. This is perhaps best represented in the work of a number of critical feminist scholars who have written about the “embodiment of opposition” to the apparatuses of patriarchy (Bordo 1989; Martin 1985; Young 1990). As the female body is subject to various medical and legal technologies of control, it can also become a site of powerful resistance to those technologies. The Western body in general, and the female body in particular, is, therefore, not a passive object. For instance, as Young argues, the experience of pregnancy undermines a notion of Cartesian dualism (1990:161), creating a fundamental problem, or contradiction, in the administration of medical treatment. In this regard, Emily Martin has written about how women’s bodies can be deployed against a discourse of medicalization (1985:194–203). Like pregnancy, abortion is also a situation in which the body can be made into an agent of resistance at the same time that it is subject to control. If resistance is possible within a Western framework of at least putative dualism, it would stand to reason that forms of “somatic protest” against power might be more well developed, or develop in different ways, in a context of mind-body synthesis.

Preeminently concerned with the discipline of his psychosomatic self, the *pahalwan* of northern India is a case in point for an analysis of somatic protest. Exercise, dietary prescriptions, hygiene, sartorial concerns, and the regulated elimination of bodily wastes constitute the coordinates of his everyday life. What links this discipline most directly to questions of power in Foucault’s terms is the end to which the wrestler develops his body. This end is fundamentally political in nature, for in the logic of wrestling rubric, to be a strong, healthy, and moral wrestler is to be a strong, healthy, and moral citizen of the modern Indian state. One’s moral, ethical, and partisan responsibility to the nation is couched, most primarily, in terms of one’s dedication to self-development through wrestling exercise.

Wrestlers characterize the state, and in particular state power, in terms of benevolent paternalism. Their attitude toward this paternalism is somewhat ambivalent. The state is regarded both as a source of needed support and guidance and as an agent of illegitimate domination and control. As one wrestler put it, the state is directly implicated in creating a “rotten environment” where corruption and immorality afflict the body of the citizen. Wrestling provides an example of a project of disciplined resistance to this corrosive, somatic control. What wrestlers are primarily concerned with, I will argue, is a self-conscious reappropriation of their bodies: a kind of structured escape from docility and degeneracy.

The Body of One Color

Wrestling in India is far more than a competitive sport. It is a complex way of life that defines a person’s identity. To be known as a wrestler, a *pahalwan*, is to lead a certain type of life and to develop what is called “a body of one color”—

ek rang ka sharir. Although the term *rang* means color, the whole phrase refers to the texture, essence, energy, strength, and balance of a person who develops his character through a regimen of mind-body discipline.

In the North Indian city of Banaras where I conducted field research, there are between 100 and 150 active wrestling gymnasia. Most of these gymnasia are Hindu, but wrestlers come from all caste groups and from both ends of the class spectrum. Although the vast majority of wrestlers are Yadavs or Ahirs, a lower-caste group with considerable political power in the region, it is not uncommon to find BA candidates wrestling with illiterate artisans or wealthy Brahmans working out with peasant Ahirs. Most wrestlers in Banaras are either enrolled in school or have graduated with the equivalent of a high school diploma, but some also hold higher degrees. Older wrestlers are often not so well educated. Because dairying is a Yadav caste occupation, many wrestlers are dairy farmers and purveyors of milk products. However, there are also many wrestlers involved in retail trade, transportation, and government service.

A large part of the wrestling ideology is concerned with an ideal of nonsectarian, noncommunal, classless integration. In many of the Banaras gymnasia, Hindu wrestlers disparage the modern trends of "casteism," sectarian communalism, and class chauvinism. The extensive popular literature on wrestling, which is not restricted to Banaras, has served to canonize many of these sentiments. Having examined this important question elsewhere (Alter 1992a), I will restrict my comments in the remainder of this article to the disciplinary regimen that seeks to transcend divisive differences—a regimen that allows the Brahman and the untouchable Chamar to develop bodies that are politically and morally the same.

The *akhara*, or gymnasium, is the spatial and conceptual center of the wrestler's life. It is made up of four primary elemental dimensions: earth, air, water, and trees. The pit and surrounding exercise area are earthen. Every *akhara* has a water source, usually in the form of a well, where wrestlers bathe. The best *akharas* are located in places where the air is cool and fresh—in a garden, a park, an orchard, a forest, or on the bank of a pond or river. Ideally, an *akhara* should be shaded by three types of tree; *nim*, *pipal*, and *banyan*. The roots of the *nim* in particular are thought to mix with the water and soil to give the well water a distinct flavor and certain tonic properties. In general, the elements of an *akhara* combine to produce an enclosed, picturesque environment of natural health and vitality.

In addition to identifying with their *akhara* in terms of membership and affiliation, wrestlers affect a material bond with the substance of their *akhara*.⁴ The power of the earth rubs off and is absorbed by them as they wrestle. The properties of the water saturate their bodies and, among other things, purify, cool, and promote good digestion. The shade cools the air that fills their lungs and calms and focuses their thoughts. The exchange of substance is not one-way, however, for the earth of the pit absorbs the sweat and heat of the wrestler's body and is thereby made more powerful (Atreya 1972). Wrestlers speak of the *akhara* as a world unto itself: insulated, self-contained, and special. In this regard, the *akhara* is a place

where the body gets in touch with a particular matrix of natural elements that serve to orient the body properly to the world.

In theory, and to some extent in practice, the wrestler's regimen is structured in terms of a micro-physics of control. In addition to the obvious features of training—exercise, diet, and practice—every aspect of daily life is regulated. What are usually thought of as basic needs or the rudimentary facts of biology are, in the wrestling scheme of things, subject to an elaborate regimen of detailed rules. There is, of course, ample precedent for such prescriptions in everyday Hindu life (cf. Diehl 1956).

The wrestler is enjoined to wake up three hours before dawn when the air is of the best quality. He should drink a glass of cool, fresh water mixed with a small amount of lemon juice. Having done this, he should go out into an open space and defecate. Some wrestlers get very specific on how to defecate, with the most common injunction being not to strain. Defecation is also taken as an indication of health and fitness. As one commentator put it, "The stool of a healthy man should lie coiled like a snake ready to strike."

Wrestlers place a considerable emphasis on dental hygiene, for which the prescriptions are characteristically detailed. A wrestler knows exactly what types of twigs are appropriate, how thick they should be, how long to brush, and in what position to squat while performing these ablutions. Although many wrestlers are rather careless or lax in their daily brushing, there is a sense in which one could, as a wrestler, brush one's teeth without a single inappropriate or random movement.

Having defecated and brushed his teeth, a wrestler should run between three and five kilometers, the exact distance being determined by his guru. This builds stamina and strengthens his feet and legs. Most wrestlers say that after running—and having purified oneself by washing feet, face, and hands—one should go and be of service to his guru. This means waking him up, fixing his meal, washing his clothes, preparing his bath, massaging his feet, and any number of other such activities. What is significant is that these activities are thought of in terms of the larger program of *akhara* activities. Thus, washing one's guru's clothes or drawing water for his bath is as much a form of exercise as it is an act of devotion and service.

The wrestler's next move is to the *akhara* where he begins his formal regimen at about 4:30 or 5:00 a.m. with a bath. This bath does a number of things. It purifies the body by washing away the residual impurities of social life. The bath also cools the wrestler's body and prepares him for the rigors of exercise and practice. Although cooling, the bath is also regarded as invigorating in the sense of promoting vital energy.

Having bathed, the wrestler dons his *langot*, or G-string. Although commonly worn as an undergarment, the *langot* that a wrestler wears for practice is regarded as pure and charged with a certain amount of energy. As will be discussed later, this energy is associated with sexuality in general and semen in particular.

Langot secured, the wrestler applies mustard oil to his body. Starting usually at the navel, he anoints his chest, shoulders, and thighs in particular, but also his knees, elbows, and ankles. The oil is said to work its way into the body as the wrestler sweats. This makes his muscles, tendons, and joints both flexible and strong. Oil also makes the wrestler's skin shine and glow with what is spoken of as an aura of vitality. In his book, *The Art of Indian Wrestling*, Ratan Patodi describes in detail how an oil massage ought to be done (1973b:50; cf. Alter 1992a). He then elaborates on the beneficial effects:

Pure mustard oil is absolutely the best. Oil applied to a tired body will increase the volume of blood. The body becomes quick and muscles develop. The skin becomes beautiful and stays clean and radiant. Exhaustion is expunged and one ages happily. Old age is kept at abeyance, and even in old age one feels youthful and invigorated. Oil cures all kinds of asthmatic and breathing ailments. It promotes good vision and helps you to sleep better. It makes you beautiful. [1973b:50]

After having oiled up, one wrestler takes responsibility for the pit preparation. With a heavy *pharsa* (hoe) he digs or "turns" the pit, sometimes adding water to give the dry earth a soft texture. Once dug, the pit is smoothed out, first by kicking the dug furrows flat and then by leveling the pit with hands and fingers. This is regarded both as a form of service and as an excellent type of exercise for the legs, lower back, hands, and wrists.

Before entering the pit, the members of an *akhara* collectively invoke Hanuman's name.⁵ Hanuman is asked to protect the wrestlers from harm, to bestow strength and courage, and to give each wrestler the necessary skill to become successful. Sticks of incense are lighted in honor of Hanuman, and the smoke is wafted by each wrestler toward his face and chest. This, it is said, transfers Hanuman's strength and energy to each wrestler in a tangible sense. To the same end, many wrestlers also swallow a small piece of earth before they begin their regimen.

Wrestling practice begins when the two most senior wrestlers take to the pit and begin to grapple. Under their guru's instruction, they practice moves and countermoves while the more junior members look on. At the guru's or senior member's discretion, junior members are then instructed to pair off and apply moves on one another. Practice of this sort is known as *jor*, which means "to exert force." Although *jor* is regarded as a form of training that develops skill, it is also thought of as a form of general exercise. Wrestlers often practice *jor* for one or two hours with up to ten different partners. The idea is to work so hard and to exert so much force that one is covered with mud and sweat from head to toe. *Jor* also has a clear aesthetic dimension. Skilled wrestlers can make *jor* look like a carefully choreographed dance where force and counterforce end up creating dynamic, fluid movement. This is not simply a matter of having a repertoire of moves and countermoves, it is an issue of inspired and somewhat ineffable improvisation.

Jor is followed by a number of different exercises that are usually done in pairs. One of these is *ban*, a type of isometric exercise. Two wrestlers face off

and lean into each other while gripping the other's upper arms. Each wrestler pushes against his partner's arms, first on the right and then on the left, in quick succession. *Ban* strengthens one's forearm, tricep, pectoral, and lower neck muscles. It also toughens up the skin of the upper arms. Another pair exercise, *sawari* (passenger), is performed in various ways, perhaps the most common being when one wrestler tries to lift his head and upper back as another kneels on his neck. Wrestlers also carry one another around the pit to develop strength, balance, and agility.

Gradually the practice session ends, and wrestlers reenter the pit and cover themselves with earth to dry their sweat-saturated bodies. As they dry off, younger members are instructed to rub, massage, and scrape the earth from the bodies of the senior members. Once dry, a wrestler urinates in order to expel residual body heat. Then he bathes and applies mustard oil to his body and hair. The post-practice bath and oil application is spoken of in highly sensual—although certainly not erotic—terms. The feeling is said to be one of invigorating passion, or *masti* (cf. Lynch 1990). Alternatively, some wrestlers interpret the experience as more akin to *anand*, which, in this context, may be glossed as bliss, satisfaction, or invigorated peace.⁶ As Atreya writes:

In my view, he who is able to daily cover himself with earth is certainly the most blissfully satisfied. Even the happiness of heaven is not as great. Only he who has wrestled in the earth is capable of really understanding the mysteries of self-consciousness; he is fully absorbed into the godhead. . . . The emotion can not be explained. It is like asking a deaf mute to describe the taste of sugar. [1972:30]

Wrestlers return to the *akhara* in the late afternoon to begin the second major part of the day's regimen by defecating, bathing, and again entering the compound. At this time the focus of activities turns away from group participation and collective action and toward individual development and refinement. The afternoon session is termed *vyayam*. Although wrestlers have a large repertoire of exercises—which range from rope climbing to pulling buckets of water up from deep wells—by far the most common and significant exercises are *dands*, a kind of jack-knifing push-up, and *bethaks*, deep knee bends.⁷

In instructing their wards on how to execute these exercises, gurus are very specific about such details as hand, head, and neck placement. On a number of occasions, I watched a guru correcting the posture of one of his wards by telling the young wrestler to place his hands slightly farther apart (just wider than shoulder breadth) and to point his fingers straight forward; to look at a spot on the ground about one and a half meters ahead; to position his feet closer together; to breathe in through his nose while arching his back and lifting his buttocks into the air, and out while diving and sliding his chest down in a curve just above the ground between the imaginary plane of his hands, and up again on extended arms with back arched and hips thrust toward the earth.

Every guru can explain in great detail, and with some variation in speed, angle, and weight distribution, the "right" way to do a *danda* or a *bethak*. Even so, *dands* and *bethaks* are relatively simple to perform. What is most striking

about them, however, is the sheer number that a wrestler will do. Young men in good health who are well disciplined in their *vyayam* regimen can do more than 1000 *dands* and 1500 *bethaks* a day. *Dands* and *bethaks* together constitute a whole body workout that develops shoulder, upper arm, chest, and leg strength. Typically, *dands* and *bethaks* are done in a relatively private corner of the *akhara* where the wrestler can spend an hour or more rhythmically bobbing up and down as he breathes in and out with each repetition. This experience is likened to the metronomic recitation of *mantras*, and some wrestlers spoke of *vyayam* as yogic meditation of a highly variant kind.

Wrestling discipline also entails a very specific dietetics, which I can only outline briefly here. In addition to regular fare, wrestlers are enjoined to consume huge quantities of milk, *ghi*, and almonds. While actual consumption is restricted by each wrestler's individual means, most wrestlers agree that to drink more than two liters of milk, a half liter of *ghi*, and a kilogram or more of almonds per day is essential for proper physical and moral development. These items are not only regarded as nutritious, but they are also thought of as cooling and *sattva* by nature.⁸ Thus, a diet rich in fat adds mass to the wrestler's physique and also functions to cool down and render peaceful a body that has been heated and agitated through exercise.

Moreover, milk, *ghi*, and almonds are all more or less explicitly associated with semen. For the wrestler, semen is the locus point of all of his strength and character.⁹ To lose semen is to become weak and immoral. As I have indicated elsewhere, wrestlers have an exaggerated, almost pathological fear of sex and sexuality (Alter 1992a). To drink milk and *ghi* helps to protect one's store of semen by cooling the heat of passion. Many wrestlers reason that it is easy for the body to turn milk and *ghi* into semen since the two substances are already alike in so many ways. Milk, *ghi*, and semen are, in the wrestler's view, highly energized but fundamentally nonerotic.

The primary dimensions of wrestling are reflected in *jor*, *vyayam*, and diet. However, being a good and successful wrestler also requires a particular lifestyle. The emphasis here is on such values as hard work, humility, honesty, and public service. It is antithetical to his goals for a wrestler to be immoral, for immorality undermines strength and energy. Similarly, to be lazy is both a sign of weakness and a condition that produces weakness. In this regard, moral actions are seen as forms of self-discipline that contribute directly to the development of one's physique. Moral failings are, conversely, visibly embodied. On a number of occasions, wrestlers would indicate that a particular person must be immoral because of such physical evidence as sunken cheeks; dull, vacant eyes; dried-up skin; and a generally thin, listless, and stooped physique. By contrast, the physique of the wrestler is taken as a prototype for embodied virtue. The combination of a moral lifestyle and a regimen of disciplined physical training produces a "body of one color."¹⁰

The Docile Citizen

Wrestlers spend a great deal of time in the *akhara* subjecting themselves to a rigorous regimen. When reflecting on the nature of what it is they are doing,

they often begin to talk about the political and moral climate of modern India. They are highly critical of the government's role in public welfare and policy. Wrestlers are also very critical of the character of modern Indian men, particularly young men, who are seen as preoccupied with sex, greed, and sensual gratification of all kinds. Senior wrestlers in Banaras would often point out and vocally criticize young men for sporting "hippi-cut" hair styles, tight-fitting "bush shirts," and snug polyester trousers.¹¹ In talking with these wrestlers I got the feeling that, for them, these stylish youth were, as one man put it, listless victims of modern culture. But oddly enough—since wrestlers tend to be rather conservative and at least obliquely patriotic—the West is not usually blamed for this demise. It is as though young men have been made vulnerable through the corrosive agency of various "generally modern" technologies—film, television, and motorcycles—and Western fashion simply fills the void because it is the only cultural form appropriate for a weak, vacuous, and docile body. The failure of government is seen as symptomatic of this more general demise of individual moral integrity, and the logic of this critique is rooted in the wrestler's understanding of identity, individuality, and the psychosomatic body.

When criticizing the government, wrestlers, like many other Indians, talk of corruption, greed, and dishonesty at all levels of public administration. Those with whom I spoke were particularly critical of the impersonal, dehumanizing bureaucratic maze that can leave one feeling powerless. One man explained in graphic terms how he returned home physically and emotionally exhausted after a long day of seeking admission for his children to a special government school. Others explained that it would be impossible to conduct business if they did not pay off, or otherwise remunerate, the official whose services were required. Criticism of this kind is not restricted to government. Corruption and deceit are taken as symptomatic of modernity in general and are thought, by the most disillusioned, to be the *modus operandi* of public life.

One Banaras wrestler told me a story of his efforts to get a young boy enrolled in one of the state athletic hostels. Having overcome one hurdle after another by seeking favors and persuading bureaucrats, officials, and administrators to admit the young boy, the wrestler took him to the railway station to send him on his way. He gave the conductor Rs 50 of his own money—a considerable sum (about U.S. \$2.50), given his modest means—to ensure a safe and comfortable journey. However, at the last minute, the boy got cold feet and refused to go, saying he would be all alone in the hostel and would rather stay in Banaras. The point of the story was less about the young boy's indecisiveness—although this, too, was taken as symptomatic of the larger moral problem—than it was about the effect that doing something as seemingly simple as this can have on the body of those involved. The wrestler concluded his story by saying that he returned home demoralized and physically exhausted to such an extent that he spent the next three days in bed. In great detail, he described how he was drained of energy almost to the point of delirium, and that he only revived when his mother fixed a rejuvenating and cooling salve of mango pulp to place on his palms and on the soles of his burning feet. One might say—and not simply in a metaphorical

sense—that “the body of one color,” in resisting the duplicitous docility of an intransigent bureaucracy, had caused so much friction between morals, muscles, and an ethical sense of self as to generate overheated delirium.

In some ways, corruption is seen as penetrating and dominating the body of the citizen. This is nowhere more apparent than in the area of government ration subsidies and in basic commodity retail markets.¹² Many people in India lament the fact that common food items like cooking oil, sugar, wheat, and milk are often adulterated and generally of inferior quality. Whether or not this is true, a number of people argue that poor health, particularly among children, is directly correlated with the mixing of water with milk or the mixing of cheap vegetable oil with pure *ghi*. In a less dramatic way, I have heard some people argue that wheat ground on an electric mill tastes bad and is somehow less nutritious than wheat ground on a hand or water-powered stone mill. Among wrestlers, at least—and, I would guess, also among a certain class of Indians—there is a feeling that food processed and distributed by the government, and also food that has been marketed by large commercial interests, is food that does not promote good health.

Although the nature of this critique is by no means unique to the wrestling community, wrestlers take this issue very, very seriously. In their view, the government is directly implicated in a tacit erosion of public health.

Although food and food quality is a primary issue, wrestlers also point to the government-run family-planning program as a clear example of how the government systematically—although blindly and without obvious malice—assails the bodies of its citizens. A number of articles in a popular wrestling journal attack the government for a policy aimed at the mass sterilization of men.¹³ In the wrestler’s view, nothing could be more of an anathema. The government penetrates the male body and renders it weak at exactly that point at which there is so much raw potential for individual growth and productive energy.

Why has the government usurped the hard earned money of the people and taken it upon itself to implement this unnatural means of contraception? Why are they making energetic young men have these operations? Why do these young men submit themselves so passively like herded goats, bridled horses and yoked oxen? How can this be the solution to a human problem? What satisfaction will be left in life? This policy fits the maxim: kill the patient to cure the disease. Any living soul on god’s earth who values, above all else, manners, refinement, progressive thinking, knowledge and wisdom and yet submits himself to a vasectomy—is he any better than an animal? [K. P. Singh 1972:29]

In the wrestler’s view, modern life in the shadow of a monolithic state threatens to render the body docile and subject to an array of technologies and strategies of power. Wrestlers argue, for example, that the state-run school system produces students who simply go through the routine of learning—wearing uniforms, reciting memorized passages, performing writing drills—but who do not gain knowledge or an integrated understanding of who they are. They only learn what they must by dispassionately and disinterestedly “going through the motions.” The popular literature on wrestling is full of laments, appeals, and admonishments

directed at the docile masses who labor under the burden of a state apparatus that has, among other things, turned education into an alien and alienating process.

Wrestlers feel that modern Indian men are subject to a state-mandated way of life that undermines their integrity at every turn. As I have indicated in another context, modern Indian cinema, ready-made synthetic clothes, fashionable hair styles, body lotions, and deodorants are all implicated in this demise (Alter in press). Specifically, wrestlers point to government-licensed liquor stores as a clear instance of how policy undermines individual health. From the wrestler's conservative perspective, the use of alcohol is not simply immoral; like the state's family-planning policy, the licensed sale of liquor hits at the very core of the male body. Liquor burns up semen. Moreover, it creates a situation of emotional instability, making one more likely to fall victim to sensual passion. The consumption of liquor in conjunction with other suspect activities, such as viewing erotic material in popular films, is, in the view of almost every wrestler I spoke with, tantamount to allowing oneself consciously to be drained of vital life energy—vital life energy that has been rendered vulnerable through the agency of school discipline, vasectomies, government rations, and so forth.

An Earlier State of Affairs

There is, of course, no preordained logic that presumes a natural connection between state policy and the erosion of public morality, civic responsibility, and health. After all, modern capitalist society is at least in part dependent on maintaining a clear—although largely contrived—distinction between these domains in the interest of both mollification, maximum utility, and profit. For example, in an oxymoronic and rather ambivalent sense, one can, in the United States, be a self-interested private citizen with virtually no sense of civic responsibility (Bellah et al. 1985). The American experience has most clearly shown that the decentralized bureaucratic rationalism of a democratic form of government tends to alienate the private citizen from the political process by imposing what Tocqueville called “administrative despotism”: the “peaceful slavery” of the masses to the professional manager (Bellah et al. 1985:209–210). The citizen can abdicate personal responsibility for just about any matter of public concern by “legitimately” claiming the priority of self over society—a “let whoever is in charge take care of it . . . but not in my backyard” attitude; and stultifying powerlessness is the handmaiden of this kind of narcissistic freedom.

In a related but slightly different vein, Crawford (1985) has argued that there is an inherent structural tension in Anglo-American society between the hedonism of consumption and the discipline required for production. In late-20th-century middle-class Anglo culture, the norm—albeit a rather contradictory one—is that hard work does not, or should not, have to impinge upon pleasure. There are diets that don't require any sacrifice to taste or satisfaction; easy ways to give up smoking; 30-minute workouts that replace two-hour regimens; and a leisure “weekend culture” that takes precedence over the productive weekday “grind” (1985:92–93). Questions of productivity, health, and public welfare get caught in the vortex

of this culturally contrived opposition of labor and leisure, producing a crisis of faith in labor power, willpower, free will, and the terms of national health. As Bryan Turner has noted, elements of this political crisis are etched onto the body by various technologies of power (1984:177–203).

These concerns help define the parameters—in a rather breathless, comparative frame—of a specific historical question: why, in particular, are the wrestlers of modern, democratic India so bent on reconciling morality, health, and civic responsibility within an explicitly political context? That is, why do they refuse to let their bodies become purely self-referential, individuated objects? A partial answer may be found in a consideration of modern wrestling's most immediate historical antecedent.

Until independence in 1947, the most public and prestigious wrestling venue was the royal court of many princely states. Any number of examples can be given to illustrate the paramount relationship that existed between court wrestlers and their royal patrons. The best example is India's most well-known champion wrestler, Gama, who at the time of his greatest fame in the first quarter of this century was affiliated with the Maharaja of Patiala (Ali 1984:98–112; Pathak 1972). The relationship between a court wrestler and his patron was fairly simple and straightforward. Princes and wealthy landlords "recruited" well-known wrestlers and established athletic "stables" on their estates for as many as 2000 or 3000 individuals. Under the best circumstances, these wrestlers would receive food, primarily (but not exclusively) in the form of milk, *ghi*, and almonds, and also a stipend of some value. The wrestlers would live in a special compound and practice in *akharas* built under the auspices of their royal benefactor.

Many contemporary wrestlers are nostalgic of this so-called golden age of Indian wrestling. It was ostensibly a time when wrestlers were able to commit themselves unequivocally to the discipline of their art. Their every need was taken care of. What is often emphasized in such retrospectives is the political symmetry of the relationship: the patron raja as a powerful ruler and the wrestler as a physically fit icon of the princely state. A clear analogy is drawn between the court wrestler's magnificent physique and the raja's royal authority. Wrestlers were often called upon to play out their role as "muscular metaphor" by walking in procession on ceremonial occasions, by being present when the royal court was in public session, and, of course, at wrestling contests, when the analogy was played out to its full extent. In these arenas, the wrestler's body was emblematic of a particular relationship between ruler and ruled. The generosity of the royal patron was reflected in the health and stature of his iconic subject's physique. In other words, the relationship was not based on a simple analogy between political power and physical strength. In an all-important way, political power provided the only context within which the disciplinary mechanics of a wrestling way of life had legitimacy. Among other things, this helped to establish, in the minds of the wrestlers at least, an unambiguous connection between state power, public health, and the integrity of those who were subject to princely rule.

The rajas and maharajas did not support wrestling simply because it was a fine art. They supported it because it strengthened their rule, and because it served to unite

numerous special interests. Support was given to wrestling in order to foster this kind of unified rule. [Patodi 1972b:12]

I hasten to add that the power and political autonomy of the raja or maharaja in the princely state was neither simple nor straightforward (cf. Dirks 1987). The extent and nature of British imperial authority in these so-called independent states was multiplex and subtle. What concerned the wrestlers, however, was the power of the raja as a patron of the arts and physical culture—a fact that often led to a degree of “studied *naïveté*” regarding the ruler’s own subject status on the larger political stage.

Under British administration and the “relative autonomy” of the princely states—notably Kolhapur, Indor, Patiala, Darbhanga, Rampur, and Baroda—the wrestler-ruler relationship seems to have flourished (Patodi 1972a:11–14, 1972b:11–15, 1973a:11–13; Atreya 1971:32–37). Both Patodi and Atreya say that the British attitude toward *akharas* and “native physical culture” in general changed dramatically after the 1857 uprising, when strict restrictions were placed on many forms of public association and organization. However, many of the royal *akharas* remained active, particularly those affiliated with rajas who had supported the British during the uprising. By the turn of the century, however, there seems to have been a modest revival in wrestling throughout the country. Until 1947, the rajas were regarded as primary advocates for the art.

At the turn of this century, wrestling in general, and wrestling in some of the royal courts in particular, became explicitly politicized as a medium of anti-imperialist nationalist protest (Alter n.d.; Rosselli 1980:131).¹⁴ In 1910 a Bengali millionaire named Sharatkumar Mitra sponsored Gama, India’s champion wrestler, to take part in the world wrestling championship organized by the John Bull Society of London. Though at first considered too short to compete, Gama challenged any one of the assembled wrestlers to take him on. On the first day he defeated three wrestlers one after the other. The next day, he dispatched ten British wrestlers in short order. He was then matched with the world champion Polish wrestler, Zbyszko, and ended up winning the title. Gama returned to India a national hero, having demonstrated India’s physical prowess in public, on the world stage, at the very heart of the British Empire. One writer for *The Times* pointed out that what was at issue in this contest were the relative merits of Gama’s “oriental, fluid physique” versus the pugilistic might of the “occidental strongman”—and of the results there was little doubt (9 August 1916). Gama was recruited by the Maharaja of Patiala, under whose sponsorship he wrestled in numerous bouts until independence.

Independence meant, of course, freedom from imperial rule and the cultural hegemony of colonial domination. It also meant the institution of a radically different kind of government, a democratic republic. Few would argue that this was not a change for the better. After all, Gandhi, Nehru, and Gama—among any number of others, quotidian, subaltern, and elite alike—were all working toward this end. Although democracy worked as a means to redistribute power to the masses, it had the attendant effect of making the masses vulnerable to the vicis-

situdes of political freedom. In other words, with democracy came a sense of uncertainty regarding the new relationship between ruler and ruled. What could be expected by way of control and regulation within the new rubric of freedom? What was the new relationship between the citizen and the state? What would the government give to the people, and what would it expect in return?

The wrestler's unique position demands very specific answers to these questions and therefore presents a detailed case of the relationship between politics and body discipline. Even though this may seem like a marginal and somewhat esoteric case—wrestlers, after all, constitute only a fraction of the population—my argument is that the wrestler has a rather privileged perspective on those aspects of state power that affect the “body politic” of society in general. Through the medium of his own body, he reflects on the health of the average citizen and the populace as a whole.

With the final demise of princely autonomy and the institution of democratic government, the wrestler was left, essentially, with a body that suddenly lacked meaning; its meaning had been dependent on a very specific form of power. In the new Indian Republic, power that had been consolidated under the banner of British rule and regional princely authority was systematically redistributed throughout a reformed political apparatus.¹⁵ Readily manifest and centered power, reflected in tangible personae—Bhawani Singh of Datiya, Maharaja Holkar of Indor, Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur—dissolved into the disembodied labyrinth of bureaucracies, administrative policy, and legal procedure. Power was transformed into an impersonal, elusive force over which any one person had very little control. There was no longer a tangible enemy—much less a demarcated stage—with whom (and on which) the likes of Gama could fight and win. To be sure, Nehru, Gandhi, and many others were great leaders, but from the wrestler's perspective, at least, their stature as autonomous political leaders—as distinct from Freedom Fighters—was compromised by a highly impersonal and disarticulated system of government.

In this climate, with no central, absolute power remaining to hold it in place, the wrestler's body succumbed to a similar fate and began to disintegrate. Because of this, many wrestlers are critical of the politico-moral condition that emerged in post-independence India. After talking at length about how ministers and politicians of all kinds have usurped the management of “wrestling associations” and have turned themselves into “petty patrons” of a defrauded art, Ratan Patodi makes the following contrast between past and present.

This condition is the cause of wrestling's demise. It is one fly among many that have fallen into the pure milk of freedom. Under imperial rule wrestlers had self-respect. The rajas and maharajas never created an environment in which wrestlers had to compromise themselves in any way. In addition to self-respect, humility was a virtue which was hammered into each wrestler. Honesty and incorruptibility was a hallmark of their character. [1973a:11]

In another passage, Patodi is even more direct in his criticism: “Where England was unable to break down our traditional arts, our language, our resolve, and our

character,” he writes, “independent India has succeeded” (1972b:11). Shanti Prakash Atreya echoes this view when he writes, “Even under the English who did not want us to be strong, the situation was never as bad as it is now” (1971:40–41).

Most wrestlers—as well as other Indians—would agree that individual freedom is preferable to domination, control, and subject status. But that is not really the primary issue here. More significant is the degree to which the body as a whole is integrated into the political climate of the postcolonial state. Under the *raja*, although the wrestler was subject and relatively powerless, he had a fully animated, healthy body; that is, as an icon of royal power, the wrestler’s body was energetically emblematic. Democracy, on the other hand, created a situation in which power and control of a different kind left the wrestler’s body docile, or at least vulnerable to the disciplinary mechanics that resulted in docility. As K. P. Singh writes:

In the preceding era *rajas* and *maharajas* revered and developed wrestling and other arts. Today ministers are given portfolios over departments about which they care and know nothing. Now, how can that department accomplish anything? Who will pose the deeply important questions about progress and advancement? The true government servant is worthy of martyrdom, but there is no one in government who is so qualified. [1978:31]

Utopia and the Iconic Individual

As a self-consciously oppositional project, wrestling seeks to reanimate and invigorate the docile, subject citizen. The body of one color is, in this regard, a bulwark against state penetration and control. Although this is achieved through the regimented discipline described above, it is envisaged in terms of a utopia of grand and heroic proportions. In this utopia, the individual reigns supreme and is held directly and personally responsible for the collective health of the new polity. In other words, an implicit opposition is set up in the wrestling ideology between an abstract and impersonal state—the monolithic bureaucracy of putative efficiency and encompassing power—and the very concrete and eminently human persona of the heroic citizen wrestler. There are many examples of this in the popular literature on wrestling. Ratan Patodi, for example, contrasts the wrestler’s radiant physique with that wilful icon of state administration, the *babu*, or office clerk. Whereas the *babu* is weak, pale, lethargic, and clothed in effete white, the wrestler is naked, covered with earth and oil, and literally beaming with health and energy (1973b:35).

This projection outward from the individual to the state is clearly reflected in an essay by K. P. Singh (1978). He shows how the wrestler’s particular relationship with the *raja* is used as a model for the more general relationship that should exist between the government and all citizens. Singh begins his essay by describing a wrestler’s primary virtues. Wrestling is built on the cornerstones of self-control and commitment, health and energy, agility and stamina. Wrestling prepares one to “win the battle of life.” The wrestler is not just the heroic cham-

pion of many tournaments, K. P. Singh continues. Nor is he simply one who consumes huge quantities of *ghi* and does thousands upon thousands of exercises:

He, too, is a wrestler who does only two or three hundred exercises and eats a balanced and basic diet. . . . A wrestler need not enter the pit like a bull buffalo, but may instead make wrestling his primary duty in life. [K. P. Singh 1978:29]

And wrestling is for everyone, Singh continues, since it enlivens both mind and body and obliterates any perception of superior or inferior status. “High and Low caste alike grind their knees into one another’s necks” (K. P. Singh 1978:30).

In every village everyone from the common laborer to the wealthiest person would enter the pit together. Everyone on everyone else’s back with knees on necks. There was no stigma; no enmity, anger or threats. The *akhara* was a pilgrimage point of social equality; a temple of brotherly love. [K. P. Singh 1980:21]

Singh then gets to the heart of his argument.

Fifty years ago there was an *akhara* on every lane of every neighborhood of every village. In some villages there were eight or ten in which youth from all social backgrounds would come together—

There was no need for doctors then
 There was no disease, no troubles
 Everyone ate plain, wholesome food
 It could be digested, and everyone was satisfied.
 There was no shortage of milk and yogurt
 There were countless cows and buffalos. [1978:30]

What wrestlers seem to have in mind—and in body—is an image of a reformed nation in which all men are equal as wrestlers. Developing a moral physique taps into the vital energy reserves of the human body and directs this energy to productive and virtuous ends. Thus, the wrestler who is a dairy farmer will milk more cows and produce more milk. The wrestling politician will serve the public interest with greater energy and more conviction. The wrestling police officer will not take bribes. The wrestling merchant who distributes government rations will not add vegetable shortening to *ghi*. Reform of this kind is envisaged in rather mundane, everyday terms. The utopian society of the future is something of a bucolic paradise where all fields are green, all streets clean, all houses well kept and neat, and all animals healthy. This is a rural vision where the aesthetic of the *akhara* compound is expanded outwards to encompass the landscape, so that all earth is as soft and clean as the earth of the pit, and all water as fresh as the water from an *akhara* well. As the *akhara* expands to incorporate the nation, all citizens of the state are guided by the discipline that structures a wrestling lifestyle.

However fanciful and arcane this image may be in fact, what is of particular interest is the level of discourse that is employed. Here is a utopia that is envisioned in fundamentally material and somatic terms. There is no philosophy or doctrine, only a poetics of power that is inscribed in earth, water, food, and ex-

ercise. What the wrestlers are doing, in my view, is confronting the power of the state at its most basic level by making physical fitness a form of political protest and civic reform.

There are, of course, problems and inconsistencies in this utopian discourse, not the least of which is the fact that it is purely male. Wrestling is a male domain, and wrestlers are blind to the fact that, in advocating a utopian somatics coded to male bodies, they are excluding over half the populace. On a related level, although Hindu wrestlers vocally advocate Hindu-Muslim unity in the *akhara*, and often do so effectively, their use of Hindu religious idioms to achieve these results can end up alienating some Muslim wrestlers.

There is also an inherent problem in turning a disciplinary regimen that begins and ends with the body into a form of rhetorical discourse. Muscles do not translate well into metaphors when substance is more at issue than meaning. In the work of K. P. Singh, Ratan Patodi, Shanti Prakash Atreya, and other wrestling commentators, there is often a degree of ambivalence about the practice of writing about wrestling. There is a feeling that it is far better to “just do it”—which is to say, embody it unequivocally—than to spend time trying to articulate it in the alien medium of language. When writers write about wrestling, what they end up saying is either highly metaphorical or else highly abstracted, and in either case there is a *de facto* disjuncture of signifier and signified. As a result, what wrestlers end up saying about themselves and their bodies can end up sounding like a politicized ideology of protest against inequality and corruption, when the endeavor itself is really about exercise and discipline. Which is to say that K. P. Singh and others can, and do at times, sound like Mahatma Gandhi, militant Hindus, and socialist reformers; as wrestlers, however, they look, feel, and act quite different. Ironically, the production of a wrestling literature to some extent undermines the oppositional potential of embodiment by turning the whole business into just another kind of rhetoric where advocacy and action are disengaged from one another and from the individual. On the level of discursive writing, therefore, wrestling as a strategy sounds very much like many modern Western programs of reform, the early-20th-century playground movement in the United States, for example, or the YMCA position on the moral value of physical education. But in neither of these cases, or in others that might be cited, is the whole body taken as a comprehensive agent of reform.

Regardless of whether or not utopian success is realized, it is remarkable that the problem and its solution is perceived in these terms. These are terms made possible, I would argue, by a particular understanding of personal identity and the relationship of that identity to the body/mind of the individual in Hindu India.

Foucault and others have noted that the state is directly implicated in a political anatomy of regulating bodies through medical, demographic, and community development programs. One of the most powerful aspects of state domination and control is that it operates unconsciously or covertly in areas that are seemingly insulated by virtue of their apparent insignificance. The argument is that power and various technologies of control are not recognized for what they are because they operate on a microscopic level. Moreover, the state is able to

control individual bodies with relative impunity by virtue of the fact that, according to the Cartesian formula, the Western body is, at least on one level, thought of as a relatively inanimate and therefore politically benign object. It can be controlled and manipulated by virtue of its potential docility. Where the body is regarded as the seat of a particular moral order, and therefore at least nominally animated with virtues of one kind or another, there is certainly a degree of vitality. One can see this in the 17th-century Leveller's philosophy of individualism (Macpherson 1962:137–141), in Locke's political theory, and also in the broader Protestant ethic (Weber 1958). Docility does not preclude discourses of self-determination and predestination, for it operates on a different plane. In fact, it depends on them as modes of rationalization, as escapes from what Weber called "the unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual" (1958:104), who must abide by the commandments but is not chosen. The fictions of free will, salvation, and individual autonomy are maintained largely because the animated qualities of reason, logic, and rationality are regarded as independent of the body's docile utility. In other words, even when domination is experienced, it is experienced in terms of a Cartesian logic that assigns primacy to the intellect. It is difficult for the body to protest or to be the object of protest for the same reason that it can be rendered docile. Consequently, Foucault is very cautious in his discussion of how the body can resist power (1980:56–57), since "an awareness of one's own body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body" (1980:56). The discursive mechanisms available allow the state—and many other institutions—to intrude between "reason," on the one hand, and "biology," on the other. The citizen of the Western state is controlled and dominated by virtue of this contrived opposition.

In this regard, the relevance of the wrestler's particular form of protest against potential docility is illustrated on two fronts. First of all, wrestlers understand the micro-physics of power wherein domination is felt and experienced on the level of semen loss, poor digestion, bad eyesight, and weak knees. Second, and more important, is the degree to which the unitary mind/body synthesis becomes a political discourse and a political regimen within the *akhara*. In this regard, I think there are some interesting, if formally incongruous, parallels between the embodiment of oppositions in the *akhara* and the embodiment of opposition to medical and legal technologies by women in the United States. What is held in common—although by means of quite different histories—is a confrontation of power on the level of the whole self. As both Iris Young (1990) and Emily Martin (1985) point out, for women this begins on the level of an experience that must reconcile mind and body. For the wrestler, it is a matter of resisting the various apparatuses of power that try to separate the two.

By virtue of the fact that the wrestler does not think of himself in purely intellectual terms, he does not react to state domination by means of rational protest or even in terms of rationalized apathy. Not even temporary solace can be found in depoliticized narcissism where personal character is disconnected from questions of citizenship and national health. The wrestler is implicated by virtue of who he is, and he must, therefore, either fundamentally embody his protest or

else run the risk of totally losing his identity. He cannot retreat into the comfortable rationalization of mind over matter. As a result, docility is confronted on its own terms. Through the disciplined construction of iconic individuality, the state is resisted and reformed by systematically conflating reason and biology to develop an integrated political identity.

Notes

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¹Parry's view of the Hindu body is slightly different from that of Staal (1983–84), Marriott (1976), and Daniel (1984). Where Marriott posits a radical distinction between Hindu monism and Cartesian dualism, Parry seeks to find a more syncretic set of somatic principles (1989:494–495). Parry is also of the opinion that, although “divisible monism” may in fact characterize Hindu concepts of self in general, one must not overdraw the distinction between this protean sense of self and the more ideologically based sense of self encoded in caste principles (1989:494).

²When I speak of the Indian wrestlers in this article, I am speaking of North Indian Hindu wrestlers primarily. There are many Muslim wrestlers in India, and many more in Pakistan. Although Hindu and Muslim wrestling is virtually identical in form and technique, the way of life associated with each tradition is slightly, but significantly, different. Muslim wrestlers eat large amounts of meat with almonds and pistachios, a habit that puts them radically at odds with vegetarian Hindu wrestlers. Obviously, Hanuman, a Hindu deity, does not figure into the devotional routine of the Muslim wrestler.

³Although I discuss some features of history in this article, I make no pretense of characterizing my work as historiography in any sense. What I have tried to do is work elements of Foucault's genealogical method into an analysis of a specific contemporary problem. To do justice to this method would entail a comprehensive analysis of the Hindu body—or elements and variations thereof—over an extended period of time and in a myriad of contexts.

⁴*Akharas* can be either rural or urban. Membership is ad hoc to the extent that *akharas* are regarded as open to the public. Large *akharas* in Banaras—of which there are four or five—have an irregular membership of 60 or 70, with about half attending on any given day. Wrestlers range in age from 8 to 65 years, with the majority being in their late teens or early twenties. For a more detailed discussion of *akhara* demographics, see my monograph *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India* (1992a).

⁵Hanuman is the patron deity of all Hindu wrestlers. Hanuman plays an important role in Tulsi Das' epic *Ramacharitmanas* wherein he assists in finding Lord Ram's captive queen

Sita and in destroying Lanka, the kingdom of Ravana, her captor. As I have written elsewhere, Hanuman is known for three main attributes: his *shakti* (superhuman energy and strength), *bhakti* (devotion) to Lord Ram, and his *brahmacharya* (celibacy) (Alter in press). These three attributes provide the wrestlers with a specific model upon which to base their own somatic identity.

⁶Nita Kumar has written extensively on the place of leisure in the Banaras urban ethos (1985, 1986, 1988). She demonstrates how *akhara* culture in general, and the aesthetic of *masti* and *anand* in particular, fits into the rubric of this larger question. For a more complete discussion of the relationship between leisure and discipline in the context of the *akhara* regimen, see “The Sannyasi and the Indian Wrestler: The Anatomy of a Relationship” (Alter 1992b).

⁷There are many other types of exercises: one-legged *dands*; one-handed *dands*; *dands* done while a partner holds your legs; *bethaks*, which require jumping off the ground between each squat; *bethaks*, where you jump forward and then back; *dhakulis*, where wrestlers jump and flip, rotating on their heads before they land on their knees or side; cartwheel *dhakulis*; one-handed cartwheel *dhakulis*; *shirshasan*, or headstands; swinging dumbbells in a rhythmic arch from side to side, up from waist to chest in a slow, extended arch, and then down again to hip level; *gada*, or mace swinging; *jori*, or club swinging; and many others that are less common but regularly prescribed by some gurus. In *Adhunik Malla Yuddha* (1981) and his other publications (1984a, 1984b), Harphool Singh gives a fairly detailed account and catalog of various *vyayam* regimens (cf. Gupta n.d.; Muzumdar 1950; Patodi 1973b).

⁸For purposes of health and classification, food and other substances—including individual people and classes of people—are categorized according to the mix and balance of three psychosomatic principles, or *gunas*: *sattva* (cool, light, white), *raja* (desire, heat, anger), and *tama* (darkness, lethargy). A diet can be structured to balance the forces of the three *gunas* or to counteract the effect of a psychological, social, or environmental force that has created disequilibrium.

⁹A number of authors have pointed out the importance of bodily fluids in general, and semen in particular, as they relate to concepts of psychological, social, and physical health in South Asia (Carstairs 1958; Daniel 1984; Edwards 1983; Kakar 1981, 1990; O’Flaherty 1980; Zimmermann 1988). Elsewhere, I have elaborated on how wrestlers interpret the significance of semen for their somatic identity (Alter 1992a).

¹⁰It does not follow that all big, and seemingly well-built, men have “bodies of one color.” In fact, bulk is not a crucial factor at all (although it is highly valued in and of itself). In addition to being told many stories of “thin” wrestlers who were prototypically strong in the holistic sense of balanced energy, I was also told stories of “fat wrestlers”—or ex-wrestlers—who were weak because their bulk and “brute strength” was derived from excessive consumption of beer.

¹¹“Hippi-cut” and “bush shirt” are used to signify a general Western style of dress, comportment, and sartorial fashion that is more an exaggerated stereotype than an actual style per se. The stereotype is of young men with long, styled hair who wear zip-up, pointed, calf-length boots; tight trousers of a synthetic material; and tight-waisted shirts open at the neck with wide collars and lapels.

¹²To ensure a modicum of equity and price control, the Indian government has instituted a

ration system whereby a person may apply for a ration card and purchase a set quantity of subsidized rice, wheat flour, sugar, kerosene, and other staples from licensed merchants.

¹³During the 1970s sterilization was promoted by the government and various foreign development agencies at least partly because it was a virtually 100% effective, irreversible method of contraception. It is not known whether or not vasectomies have ever been performed against someone's will. Certainly, many men have taken cash or prizes—radios, blankets, wristwatches—in exchange for being sterilized. During the emergency (1975–77), when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suspended civil liberties and due process, Sanjay Gandhi, her son and the leader of the Youth Congress, tried to institute a strict policy of forced sterilization based on regional and district quotas. Although his efforts were short-lived on account of widespread resistance and hostility, many wrestlers look to this period not as an exceptional case of draconian irrationality, but as simply the logical extreme of a generally more benevolent policy that continues to pose a very real threat because of its underhanded persistence.

¹⁴Rosselli's account is of particular interest. He shows the correspondence between physical culture and elite nationalism in Bengal toward the end of the 19th century. He argues that physical education in general, and a revival of *akhara* culture in particular, enabled Bengali nationalists to reject an image of themselves as effete handmaidens of the British Empire. To accomplish this, Rosselli argues, the Bengali elite plumbed the "traditions" of the lower-class, out-caste, and Muslim groups in Bengal to re-embodiment the strength and vigor that English education had purged from the upper classes. Toward the end of the 19th century the Bengali elite also drew on European experiments with physical education to counteract their effete self-image. Regardless, there seems to have been an implicit, and often explicit, sense in which the Bengali elite felt that effete docility could be counteracted by appealing to a more "natural," less corrupted form of physical culture. From Rosselli's account, it is difficult to determine the extent to which lower-class practitioners of physical culture, who were the object of this discourse, participated in its construction.

On a more general level, it is likely that the history of contemporary "utopian somatics" in wrestling practice may be traced to the latter half of the 19th century. My own research on this question is as yet incomplete, but it appears as though the wrestlers' concern with "somatic nationalism" draws on the elite discourse in Bengal as well as on a broad array of parallel discursive frames in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh. The wrestlers' present-day concerns with strict dietetics, celibacy, good health, and "aggressive nonviolence" owe a great deal to the likes of Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, B. G. Tilak, M. K. Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai, as well as more militant figures of the early 20th century.

¹⁵Of course, the postcolonial Indian state inherited a colonial bureaucratic infrastructure. The form and structure of administration did not change radically under the new democratic government. The point to emphasize is that under British rule the government structure was clearly linked to a very specific, albeit alien, structure of power represented by district officers, regional governors, the Viceroy in Delhi, and, ultimately, the Queen of England. Although certainly illegitimate, this structure of power gave the vast infrastructure of tax collection, railway timetable coordination, canal building, road construction, and so forth a sense of integrated continuity similar to that structure of power found in the various princely states.

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