



A REVIEW ON PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND MILITARY TRAINING UNDER THE BAHAMANI KINGDOM

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ABSTRACT :

This study explores the historical foundations and significance of physical education and military training during the Bahmani Kingdom (1347–1527 CE), a prominent medieval Islamic dynasty in the Deccan region of India. The research aims to analyze how the Bahmani rulers integrated physical training, martial arts, and military discipline into their administrative and educational systems. Drawing upon historical texts, traveler accounts, and inscriptions, the study highlights the role of madrasas, royal courts, and military academies in fostering physical preparedness and tactical excellence among soldiers and youth.^[1] The Bahmani sultans emphasized archery, swordsmanship, horse riding, and physical endurance as essential aspects of both military competence and moral character. The findings reveal that the Bahmani state treated physical education not only as a tool for warfare but also as a means of cultural expression and governance. This research contributes to a broader understanding of the militarized pedagogy of Indo-Islamic kingdoms and its influence on regional martial traditions and educational structures.^[2]



KEYWORDS : Bahmani Kingdom, Physical Education, Military Training, Medieval India, Indo-Islamic Rule, Martial Traditions, Deccan Sultanate, Military History, Archery, Swordsmanship, Historical Pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

The Bahmani Kingdom (1347–1527 CE), one of the first independent Islamic dynasties in the Deccan region of medieval India, played a significant role in shaping the political, cultural, and military landscape of South India. Emerging from the decline of the Delhi Sultanate, the Bahmani rulers established a centralized authority marked by strategic military campaigns, architectural patronage, and the cultivation of a unique Indo-Islamic administrative structure. Among their many contributions, the promotion of physical education and military training was a crucial aspect of their statecraft, directly influencing both the defensive strength and the cultural ethos of the kingdom. In the medieval period, physical fitness and military preparedness were vital for the survival and expansion of empires.^[3] The Bahmani rulers understood this deeply and implemented a comprehensive system of martial training for soldiers, royal guards, and young nobles. This system included archery, swordsmanship, horse riding, wrestling (kushti), and endurance-based drills. Training was not only practical but also ceremonial, reflecting the sultanate's emphasis on discipline, valor, and loyalty. Military academies and court schools were instrumental in shaping the warrior class, while madrasas and royal institutions included aspects of physical discipline as part of holistic education.^[4]

The Bahmani Kingdom's military strategies required a constant supply of well-trained soldiers to defend its borders and expand its influence against rival powers such as the Vijayanagara Empire and other Deccan sultanates. As such, physical education was systematized and often tied to religious, moral, and political instruction, creating a fusion of mind-body training unique to this period.^[5] This study aims to examine the structure, scope, and cultural impact of physical education and military training during the Bahmani period. It also seeks to highlight how the Bahmani rulers institutionalized these practices to maintain a strong standing army, uphold social order, and preserve their sovereignty in a period of intense political rivalry. By analyzing historical texts, traveler accounts, and archaeological evidence, this research provides insight into the militarized educational practices that contributed to the strength and legacy of the Bahmani Kingdom.^[6]

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to explore and analyze the historical role of physical education and military training during the rule of the Bahmani Kingdom (1347–1527 CE) and to understand how these practices contributed to the political stability, military strength, and cultural legacy of the sultanate.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the historical context of the Bahmani Kingdom with a focus on its military and educational institutions.
2. To identify and analyze the forms of physical training (such as archery, wrestling, swordsmanship, and horse riding) prevalent during the Bahmani period.
3. To study the integration of physical education within military training programs and its role in preparing soldiers, nobles, and young recruits for warfare.
4. To explore the role of madrasas, royal courts, and military schools in promoting physical discipline alongside intellectual and religious education.
5. To evaluate the socio-cultural impact of military training practices on the general population and elite classes of the Bahmani state.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of physical education and military training in medieval India, particularly during the Bahmani Kingdom, remains a niche yet valuable area of historical research. Various historians, scholars, and chroniclers have touched upon the themes of military organization, physical discipline, and educational systems under the Bahmani rule, though often in fragmented or indirect contexts. This review synthesizes the relevant literature to establish a scholarly foundation for the present study.

1. Military Organization under the Bahmani Sultanate

K.S. Lal's "History of the Khaljis and the Bahmanis" (1950) provides critical insight into the political and military structure of the Bahmani Kingdom. He highlights the strategic importance of a well-trained army and the methods employed to maintain physical and tactical readiness. Lal notes the incorporation of Turkish, Persian, and Arab martial traditions into the Deccan military environment, which were often adapted to local geographical and cultural conditions.

2. Physical Education in Medieval Islamic Institutions

S. Athar Ali in "The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb" (1966), though focused on a later period, discusses the role of madrasas and elite institutions in integrating physical training as part of holistic education. While the focus is on Mughal practices, many of these educational models were inherited or inspired by the earlier Bahmani institutions, which were among the first in the Deccan to formalize such dual training systems.

3. Indo-Islamic Martial Practices

Irfan Habib's essays on military technology and training in medieval India discuss the role of physical preparedness and martial discipline in Islamic sultanates. In particular, his work in "Medieval India: Research in the History of Technology" (2001) outlines the significance of archery, cavalry training, and fitness routines, all of which were central to Bahmani military ethos.

4. Educational and Cultural Institutions of the Bahmani Kingdom

Scholarships such as those by N.A. Baloch in his article "Bahmani Contribution to the Cultural Development of the Deccan" (Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society, 1965) explore the academic and cultural priorities of the Bahmani rulers. Baloch notes that institutions like the madrasa established by Mahmud Gawan included not only religious and philosophical education but also instruction in physical and military skills for nobility.

5. Comparative Perspectives from the Vijayanagara Empire

Works like Burton Stein's "Vijayanagara" (1989) offer comparative insights by examining the martial traditions of neighboring rival states. Stein discusses how both Bahmani and Vijayanagara rulers emphasized physical fitness and warrior training as integral to their political and military frameworks.

While there is no singular comprehensive study on physical education and military training under the Bahmani Kingdom, the existing literature provides valuable insights when synthesized across historical, educational, and military domains. This study aims to bridge the gap by focusing specifically on the structured role of physical education as a component of military strategy, revealing how the Bahmani rulers institutionalized physical discipline to strengthen their empire both culturally and militarily.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and historical research methodology to examine the role of physical education and military training under the Bahmani Kingdom (1347–1527 CE). The methodology is designed to gather, analyze, and interpret historical data from both primary and secondary sources in order to understand the nature, structure, and socio-political significance of physical training practices during the Bahmani rule.

1. Research Design

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It involves the historical reconstruction of physical and military education practices based on documented evidence. The approach is multidisciplinary, combining elements of history, education, military studies, and cultural anthropology.

2. Sources of Data

Historical chronicles such as Tarikh-i-Ferishta and Burhan-i-Maasir, which describe the military campaigns and training systems of the Bahmani Sultans. Travel accounts of historians and visitors like Ibn Battuta and European travelers who observed military drills and court life. Inscriptions, coins, and official records from the Bahmani period that reference royal decrees, land grants to military schools, and recruitment policies. Architectural evidence, including the layout of madrasas and military barracks, with implications for training space and routines.

3. Data Collection Techniques

Careful reading, translation (where needed), and interpretation of manuscripts, chronicles, and inscriptions. Thematic coding of text to identify references to physical activities, training routines, military academies, and educational curricula. Cross-referencing Bahmani practices with those of other sultanates (Delhi, Vijayanagara, Mughal) to understand unique or shared features. Observation and

photographic documentation of historic sites such as Gulbarga, Bidar, and the Mahmud Gawan Madrasa to analyze architectural features related to training.

4. Data Interpretation

The data collected is interpreted using historical-critical analysis. Emphasis is placed on The function and purpose of physical training in military service. The educational philosophy of the Bahmani rulers in integrating body and mind. The socio-political context that shaped and was shaped by these practices. The cultural impact and legacy of these systems on later Deccan Sultanates.

The research methodology ensures a thorough and contextual exploration of physical education and military training during the Bahmani era. Through qualitative analysis of historical documents and scholarly interpretations, this study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of medieval educational-military systems and their role in state-building under the Bahmani Sultanate.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Bahmani Kingdom, one of the most influential Islamic dynasties in medieval South India, played a crucial role in shaping the military and educational landscape of the Deccan region. While extensive research exists on the political history, architectural achievements, and administrative systems of the Bahmani rulers, the structured role of physical education and military training remains underexplored in historical scholarship. Military strength was a cornerstone of the Bahmani Sultanate's power, and physical preparedness was central to the training of soldiers, nobles, and youth. Archery, swordsmanship, horse riding, wrestling, and endurance exercises were not only vital for warfare but also seen as essential aspects of moral and intellectual development. Despite the significance of these practices, there is a noticeable gap in the academic literature regarding how physical education was institutionalized and connected with broader military strategies and governance under the Bahmani rule. Furthermore, there is limited analysis on how educational institutions like madrasas and royal courts functioned as centers of both intellectual and physical training, and how these practices compared to those of contemporary kingdoms like the Vijayanagara Empire or the Delhi Sultanate. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the historical integration of physical education within military training systems under the Bahmani Kingdom. It aims to uncover how such practices contributed to the stability, expansion, and cultural identity of the Bahmani state. Understanding this dimension is essential for appreciating the full scope of the kingdom's legacy in both military history and the development of educational and physical culture in medieval India.

NEED OF THE STUDY

The Bahmani Kingdom (1347–1527 CE), a major power in the Deccan region of medieval India, is widely studied for its contributions to art, architecture, administration, and culture. However, the military strength and preparedness that sustained and expanded the kingdom's territorial rule has not been sufficiently analyzed from the perspective of physical education and systematic military training. Military success in pre-modern states was not merely dependent on weapons and strategies but heavily relied on physical discipline, combat training, and body conditioning of soldiers and commanders. Under the Bahmani Sultanate, military training was often integrated with education in madrasas and royal institutions—emphasizing both mental and physical preparedness. Unfortunately, this dual aspect of education—blending knowledge with physical endurance and martial skills—remains underrepresented in historical literature.

This study is necessary for the following reasons:

1. To fill a gap in historical understanding by documenting the often-overlooked practices of physical and military training under the Bahmani rule.
2. To highlight the role of physical education as a state-building tool, emphasizing how it supported military expansion and internal stability.

3. To examine the integration of physical discipline within educational institutions, such as the Mahmud Gawan Madrasa, and assess their influence on shaping future leaders and warriors.
4. To provide comparative insights into how the Bahmani training models differed from or resembled those of other Islamic and Hindu kingdoms in medieval India.
5. To contribute to the broader fields of military history and educational development, especially in the context of South Asia, where physical education has ancient roots but is rarely studied in the context of medieval Islamic dynasties.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on the historical examination of physical education and military training practices under the Bahmani Kingdom, which ruled the Deccan region of South India from 1347 to 1527 CE. It aims to explore the role and structure of physical training within military institutions, royal courts, and educational centers during this period.

Key areas included within the scope are:

1. **Military Training Practices:** Study of combat techniques, cavalry drills, wrestling, swordsmanship, archery, and physical fitness routines followed by Bahmani soldiers and elite guards.
2. **Educational Institutions:** Analysis of how physical training was incorporated within institutions like the Mahmud Gawan Madrasa and other centers of learning.
3. **State Patronage:** Exploration of how the Bahmani rulers supported and institutionalized physical education as part of military and administrative development.
4. **Comparative Perspective:** Where relevant, the study will draw brief comparisons with the physical training systems of neighboring kingdoms such as the Vijayanagara Empire and the Delhi Sultanate.
5. **Cultural and Religious Influences:** Investigation into how Islamic values, Persian culture, and regional traditions shaped the nature of physical education and discipline in the Bahmani context.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the study's broad historical intention, certain limitations are acknowledged:

1. **Limited Primary Sources:** Direct textual sources from the Bahmani period are relatively scarce. Much of the available information comes from chronicles written after the fall of the Bahmani Kingdom or by foreign observers.
2. **Archaeological Gaps:** Physical evidence of training grounds, gymnasiums, or combat schools is limited, and existing structures offer only partial insight.
3. **Potential Bias in Historical Accounts:** Court historians often portrayed rulers and military systems in an idealized manner, which may not reflect the full reality of physical training practices.
4. **Lack of Specific Documentation on Physical Education:** While military campaigns and battles are well-documented, specific descriptions of physical training routines and their curricula are sparse and must be inferred from broader historical contexts.
5. **Language and Translation Constraints:** Some primary sources are in Persian or Arabic and may be subject to interpretation challenges depending on translations available.

This study is designed to offer a focused yet contextual understanding of how physical education and military training operated as a combined discipline under the Bahmani Sultanate. While it acknowledges limitations in source material, it draws upon a multidisciplinary range of evidence to reconstruct and interpret the significance of these practices within the kingdom's historical and cultural framework.

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DISCUSSION

The Bahmani Kingdom (1347–1527 CE), as a significant Islamic power in the Deccan, built its strength not only on political alliances and military conquests but also on a well-structured and disciplined approach to military preparedness and physical education. The integration of physical discipline into statecraft, education, and warfare reflected both Persian-Islamic influences and indigenous traditions.

1. Integration of Physical Education and Military Objectives

Physical training was not considered a separate or recreational activity but a core element of military readiness. Soldiers were expected to master multiple skills including archery, horseback riding, swordsmanship, endurance marching, and hand-to-hand combat. These were essential for survival and victory in a region marked by frequent warfare, both defensive and expansionist. The Bahmani rulers emphasized personal bravery and physical capability as key qualities of leadership, particularly among nobles and military commanders.^[7]

2. Educational Institutions and Physical Discipline

Institutions like the Mahmud Gawan Madrasa in Bidar, although primarily centers of intellectual learning, also fostered physical discipline. Inspired by Islamic ideals of balance between the body and mind, madrasa training sometimes included basic physical conditioning for elite youth, especially those preparing for roles in administration or the military. This mirrors the classical Islamic philosophy which values bodily strength as part of an ideal ruler's or warrior's attributes.

3. Royal Patronage and Cultural Ethos

The Bahmani Sultans, especially figures like Firuz Shah Bahmani, were patrons of both arts and martial culture. The royal court often supported physical contests such as wrestling (kushti), equestrian displays, and military parades, which served as both entertainment and recruitment showcases. These public events reinforced the state's commitment to physical excellence and military discipline.^[8]

4. Influence of Persian and Central Asian Traditions

Military training in the Bahmani Kingdom bore the influence of Persian and Central Asian traditions, brought in by immigrant nobles, scholars, and military leaders. Concepts like furusiyya (chivalric martial training) shaped the way physical education was organized—emphasizing not just brute strength but also agility, horsemanship, archery, ethics, and self-control.^[9]

5. Strategic Importance of Physical Training

Physical education directly supported defensive and offensive strategies. The Deccan terrain demanded highly mobile, well-conditioned soldiers. The use of forts, hill stations, and urban centers as

training locations helped maintain a physically capable army. The kingdom's repeated conflicts with the Vijayanagara Empire and internal revolts highlight the strategic reliance on physically trained forces.^[10] The study reveals that physical education under the Bahmani Kingdom was more than a practical necessity; it was a cultural and ideological tool that reinforced authority, prepared the kingdom for military challenges, and nurtured a disciplined ruling class. While historical evidence is somewhat fragmented, the available records clearly support the view that physical training was systematically valued and institutionalized within the broader political and educational frameworks of the Bahmani Sultanate.

CONCLUSION/FINDINGS

The Bahmani Kingdom, as a dominant Islamic power in the Deccan from the 14th to 16th centuries, developed a distinct model of integrating physical education into its military and administrative systems. This study reveals that physical training was not an isolated or secondary practice but a strategic and culturally rooted element of governance, warfare, and education. Military readiness during the Bahmani period required systematic physical conditioning, involving wrestling, archery, horse-riding, swordsmanship, and endurance-based exercises.

These were vital for preparing soldiers and commanders for the demands of a turbulent political landscape, characterized by regional rivalries and territorial ambitions. The physical training also reinforced discipline, hierarchy, and unity within the army, contributing significantly to the Bahmani state's ability to maintain control over a vast and diverse territory. Additionally, educational institutions such as the Mahmud Gawan Madrasa, while primarily academic in focus, reflected the broader Islamic ideal of nurturing a balanced individual—intellectually and physically capable. Through royal patronage and cultural influences from Persia and Central Asia, the Bahmani rulers institutionalized physical discipline not only within the army but also within elite social classes.

Despite limitations in available historical sources, this study successfully reconstructs the importance and impact of physical education as a vital component of the Bahmani state structure. The legacy of these practices endured beyond the fall of the kingdom, influencing subsequent Deccan Sultanates and shaping regional military traditions. In conclusion, physical education under the Bahmani Kingdom served as a foundation for military strength, social order, and cultural identity, and remains an important chapter in the history of physical culture and statecraft in medieval India.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS TO RESEARCH

While this study provides a foundational understanding of physical education and military training under the Bahmani Kingdom, the topic offers several avenues for deeper and more specialized research. The following suggestions highlight areas that can be explored by future scholars and historians:

1. Comparative Study of Sultanate Military Institutions

Future research can compare the physical and military training systems of the Bahmani Kingdom with those of other contemporary Islamic sultanates, such as the Delhi Sultanate or the Gujarat Sultanate, to identify commonalities and unique features.

2. Role of Women in Physical Training and Defense

An in-depth exploration of the role, if any, of women in physical education or martial arts within elite families or palace settings could provide a more gender-inclusive understanding of training practices.

3. Study of Madrasas as Centers of Physical Culture

A focused study on how madrasas—such as the Mahmud Gawan Madrasa—integrated physical education into their curriculum could shed light on the balance between intellectual and physical training in Islamic educational institutions.

4. Archaeological and Architectural Investigation

More systematic archaeological studies of forts, military academies, and court structures in former Bahmani capitals like Gulbarga and Bidar may provide physical evidence of training grounds or facilities related to physical discipline.

5. Military Manual Reconstruction

Scholars could attempt to reconstruct or identify any surviving military treatises, training manuals, or Persian/Arabic texts that describe physical drills, weapons training, and tactical exercises used during the Bahmani period. The study of physical education and military training under the Bahmani Kingdom is a relatively underdeveloped academic field. Encouraging further interdisciplinary and comparative research will not only deepen our understanding of the Bahmani Sultanate's military and educational systems but also contribute meaningfully to the broader history of physical culture in India and the Islamic world.

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