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From Sand to Stadium: Institutional Layering, Selective Adaptation, and the Political Economy of Pehlwani in Gujranwala, Pakistan

Zarqa Mumtaz

M.Phil Scholar, Department of Pakistan Studies, Government College University Faisalabad

ranazarqa4@gmail.com

Dr. Zil-e-Huma Rafique (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor, Department of Pakistan Studies, Government College University Faisalabad

zilehumarafique@gcuf.edu.pk

Zeenat Rana

PhD Scholar, Department of Pakistan Studies, Government College University Faisalabad

ranazeenat1223@gmail.com

Abstract

The "City of Wrestlers" reputation is based on a folk story of pehlwani that existed in the past but was suppressed, destroyed by the colonialism, Partition, and modernism. This study pulls out and reframes a historical sociological argument that directly questioning the nature of what didn't work out, what did, and what changed. The aim of the study is to propose an institutional layering framework, in which the akhara (wrestling gymnasium), family, patronage, and public contest are analytically differentiated and appear to have changed at different rates and for different reasons, based on a qualitative historical design that triangulates local journalism, published ethnography, institutional and government evidence, and contemporary field level reporting on the akhara system. The findings indicate that the professional and occupational security of the pehlwan dabbish deteriorated significantly, the discipline of pehlwan body weakened later in the period, the attachment of the spectators to the professional body of pehlwan weakened, and the cultural identity, the state, departmental employment, and the symbolic authority of the ustad (master trainer) remained relatively strong. The study also reveals that not all akharas were proponents of the unmodernized training technologies: while in some places resources were limited and they were only able to use the former, in others they were able to use both and did so under the guidance of a ustad, thereby redefining 'conservatism' as an economic factor and not exclusively a cultural one. The core of the article is conceptual, since it is not about a mere decline or survival, but about the cohabiting of mitti and mat, ustad and coach, akhara and department, dangal and formal tournament, and also about a source criticism of the ongoing historiographical findings, with the recurring chronological contradictions of the best known biographical figures of the field. The article ends by identifying the main gaps in the evidence-base a systematic directory of the 'akharas', a register of the 'dangals' over time, and institutional records of employment that would need to be filled for the field to

change from plausible synstudy to a complete 'local history'; the article also highlights implications for heritage policy that distinguish supporting elite athletes from supporting the grass roots institutional base that produces them.

Keywords: pehlwani, akhara, Gujranwala, historical sociology of sport, institutional decline, masculinity and the body, source criticism, South Asian wrestling, cultural heritage, urbanization

1. Introduction

As the "City of Wrestlers", Gujranwala has one of the strongest local identity claims in the Pakistani Punjab but below the surface lies a less rich and more contentious history. Two seemingly incompatible images are in play both in the literature and in local language. One is a picture of loss: loss of patronage, high cost of wrestler's diet and training, reduction of akhara land due to urbanization, and reduction of full time practitioners. The latter is a picture of survival: the activity of akharas, family transmission of kushti, young people still entering training, and a strong attachment of spectators and media to kushti, as has been documented, are all features that typify survival not only in the case of the other, but of young people in general (Rehman et al., 2023). Both of the pictures have supporting evidence, and either picture alone is insufficient. The question this article addresses is not so much whether pehlwani died out, but what, indeed, died out, what remained, and what was restructured and reorganized into a different form of institutions.

The focus of the article is on "decline" and "modernization" not just on the event of decline or modernization but on the compound category "decline" and "modernization". Decline can mean either a reduction in the number of akharas, reduction in the number of full time pehlwan, patronage, the number of dangals (public wrestling matches), public attendance, or a larger decline in the pehlwan lifestyle (not the same thing and cannot be considered synonymous). The process of modernization is also disaggregated, with different aspects of the tradition being undermined through urban development, industrial employment, mass education, state sports departments and federations, commercial gym and bodybuilding culture, standardized freestyle competition, and new sponsors structures that can undermining some aspects of the tradition while simultaneously opening up new avenues (Naz & Zaidi, 2013; Nasir, 2020).

The primary study presented here is that pehlwani in Gujranwala has not only been institutionalized, but experienced a long process of such institutionalization, with a combination of decline, continuity and adaptation. It happened to be strongest during the era where akhara, family, ustad, patron, daff (rival training faction), and dangal formed a symbiotic circle, which was fragile in the face of the rise of stable patronage and salaried employment since it is a time-consuming and material-intensive body of disciplined pehlwan to maintain (Butt, 2023). Important, the study refuses to give an explanation on the basis of cultural conservatism; that is, that traditional institutions just declined modernity. Evidence of soil training, ustad supervision and weight based training existing at the same time, suggests that there was some degree of adaptation, but of course a more interesting question is why the adaptation was not uniform, and why it did not, on its own, solve the economic and institutional issues. The historical metaphor "from sand to stadium" is not proffered as a triumph of modernity over tradition, but intentionally so. The stadium is added to the already existing live cultural and institutional category,

‘sand’ (mitti), not substituted for it, so that an institutional pattern emerges, rather than a pattern of substitution.

1.1. Research Questions

The study is guided by five research questions.

1. What are the historical roots of Pehlواني in Gujranwala?
2. How did colonialism and post-independence political changes affect the practice and perception of Pehlواني?
3. What ways has Pehlواني evolved in terms of training, rituals, and performance spaces?
4. What role does Pehlواني play in the cultural and social fabric of Gujranwala today?
5. What factors contribute to the decline or continuity of this tradition in the modern era?

2. Literature Review

The pehlwani and related South Asian wrestling traditions as detailed in the existing literature on the subject fall into five common themes. First, the akhara is always treated as a more than a sports facility; it is a total institution, in which physical training, moral discipline, kinship and hierarchy are present (Alter, 1992). Second, it was always the viability of full-time pehlwani that was dependent on the patronage, in one form or another, of court, elite, colonial or state departmental patrons (Butt 2023; O'Hanlon 2007). Third, the cultural importance of the concept of discipline of the body and masculinity inducted into the figure of pehlwan is assigned paramount importance rather than being a by-product of the culture (Khan & Khan, 2024; Nasir, 2020). Fourth, urbanization and subsequent rise of new fitness cultures like commercial gyms, bodybuilding, etc. are recognized to be changing the setting in which traditional wrestling is practiced (Naz & Zaidi, 2013). Fifth, published ethnographic and spectator attachment studies, such as the combination of semi structured interviews and participant observation with retired wrestlers (Khan & Khan, 2024) and survey based studies of ground attachment, game attachment, player attachment, emotional attachment and cultural attachment, with kushti spectators in Gujranwala (Rehman et al., 2023), show that the meaning of the sport remains with the audiences despite reduction in professional participation.

But there are some structural problems that still need to be clarified with respect to this literature. There are no systematic historical directories of the akharas of Gujranwala during the colonial era, the post Partition era, the late 20th century or the contemporary era. The main local dangals are not arranged in order of dates, location, participants, results, organisers and newspaper reports. Almost no records have been kept about private and industrialist patrons and neither have the employment records of the wrestlers of Gujranwala been collected and made into any useful database for the wrestlers who were recruited to Railways, WAPDA, police or Army (Butt, 2023). Another gap is generational transfer; although there are some studies on the older and younger generation wrestlers, there is a lack of research that systematically examines the factors driving the change of wrestling career for the sons of their fathers, such as earnings, food prices, employment opportunities and institutional hiring, which needs to be differentiated from a purely cultural explanation. But the most important missing link is the lack of a proven history of Gujranwala pehlwani (as opposed to another version of South Asian wrestling, such as the Great Gama who wasn't a Gujranwala native, in fact) that can be demonstrated locally. However, the most important missing link is the lack of a proven locally evidenced history of

Gujranwala pehlwani (as opposed to another version of South Asian pehlwani, such as the Great Gama, who was not a Gujranwala native). This article attempts to fill this lacuna by keeping general scholarship at the level of concept formation, while raising all the local claims on Gujranwala to the test of local evidence.

3. Analytical Framework: Institutional Layering

Cautiously, the framework used for this study separates four terms, which have been overlapping in history but otherwise conceptually clear, which refer to the practice of wrestling itself (kushti), a public competitive event (dangal), a training and social institution, on which this word is used by Alter (1992) (akhara), and modern standardized freestyle wrestling. It is important to describe these as a unified “tradition” because it hides the kind of change in institutions which the study attempts to explain. As long as it is still traditional, an akhara trained pehlwan can participate in regulated freestyle without losing his/her identity as a pehlwan and, as long as it has improved infrastructure, a sponsored dangal can be commercialized without losing its local cultural identity. As it is read, history is not about the substitution of one term for another but about institutions piling up on each other.

This yields the study's main metaphor. Sand refers to earthen mitti of the akhara and inevitable social structure that developed around it: ustad–shagird (master–disciple) relation, family heritage, daff competition, and local patronage. “Stadium” is the institutionalization of modern sport: standard playing fields, organized sports departments, rules of the game, sponsorship of the sport, mass audience, and national/international representativeness. This interpretation of the process of sand to stadium is not a straight line. The evidence, rather, suggests that institutional layering exists, such as the coexistence of mitti and mat (the standard mat for wrestling), ustad and formal coach, akhara and sports academy or department, family honour and national representation, and dangal and formal tournament. This model can be adopted to validate the process of modernization without making the assumption that all local culture had been lost within it, and the decline can be precisely identified in this case, in the breakdown of a specific economic system, without assuming that all cultural practice had been lost in the process of decline.

4. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative historical approach with a documentary historical method and oral history and ethnographic method, by assuming that none of the archives can provide a complete history of pehlwani. Institutions and funding can be evidenced in official and departmental records, contests and public reputation in newspapers, akharas and families in oral history, and how training is actually practised in the field. It is a historically not geographically comparative design: Lahore, Amritsar, Delhi, princely states and international venues only feature where they shine a light on the networks of wrestling in Gujranwala, while Gujranwala itself is the unit of analysis across four periods: pre-colonial early foundations, colonial era, Partition and early Pakistan, late twentieth century transformation (1970s-2000), and contemporary period.

4.1 Source hierarchy and triangulation

An explicit hierarchy of evidence is created in the study. Primary and local evidence contemporary newspaper reports (both English and Urdu) and in multiple transliterations of pehlwan, pehalwan, pahalwan, kushti, akhara and dangal; photographs, certificates, government records, sports department

records, institutional employment records and family collections – is given priority over retrospective feature writing, and no type of evidence is treated as invariably reliable. The date and results are more effective in a contemporary report, while the latter may be more useful if it's a later retrospective feature, but the two cannot be easily substituted. This is a specific use of triangulation not used throughout – for example, a major dangal would be ideally supported by a newspaper report, a poster and oral testimony all together. Academic secondary sources are not exempted from source criticism after they are peer-reviewed; for example, a recent statistical study of the attachment of the spectator might be strong evidence for meaning in the present, but weak evidence for meaning in the past.

4.2 Field observation, oral history, and their limits

For the contemporary chapters, the information is gathered through field observation, focusing on the location and condition of akharas, soil preparation, regimes of exercises, equipment, relationship between the ustad and shagird, number of trainees and their age, diet and the presence (or absence) of modern competitive training. As found in other published ethnographic models in the field (e.g., Alter, 1992; Khan & Khan, 2024), observation is seen as being situational, not the final word: attendance at a single akhara has been demonstrated to be highly variable from season to season, and single visit observation is seen as less definitive evidence than repeated visits. Purposive sampling (not representative sampling) is indicated for interviews, with an emphasis on informants who could talk about different time periods, institutions, families, akharas, and roles, and to avoid snowball sampling falling in on one social network. Of particular note is that the study that the article is based on was not an original study of the author, but a compiled study, which did not include an original interview log, transcript or consent record; interview derived evidence relied upon in the analysis is therefore drawn from published ethnographic and journalistic sources rather than the author's own primary fieldwork, and is cited as such throughout.

4.3 Limitations of the source base

There is a clear bias in favour of contemporary ethnography and arguments about decline, and not in favour of a full institutional history of particular local akharas in all periods. Certain texts cited only by an indirect reference or quotation such as those about bodybuilding culture (Nasir, 2020), the disappearance of comparable bodybuilding cultures in Lahore (Shakoor, 2016), the martial body (O'Hanlon, 2007) and the urban history of Gujranwala (Naz & Zaidi, 2013) must be studied in their original contexts before definitive judgements can be made. Additionally, the historical and sociological record of women's engagement in pehlwani in Gujranwala is also effectively undocumented and cannot be assumed in published survey and ethnographic studies that were consulted for this work (Khan & Khan, 2024; Rehman et al., 2023) sampled female participants.

5. Findings

The findings are organised around the five research questions of the study and relate to the type of evidence used for each of them: the early histories and colonial records for the question of origin, institutional evidence from colonial and post 1947 times for the question of political change, comparison of historical and contemporary training descriptions for the question of institutional evolution, interviews, local journalism and spectator studies for the question of contemporary cultural meaning, and cross period synstudy for the question of decline and continuity.

5.1 Historical roots

The pehlwani of Gujranwala is rooted in a larger physical culture that is influenced by indigenous martial traditions, Persian cultural influence and court patronage, but it begins to get reliably Gujranwala specific from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries when family lineages enter the local record (e.g., the Sultaniwala tradition, and the later rise of Rahim Bakhsh), training grounds become known, and named champions appear (Arain, 2024; Akbar et al., 2026). The date of the Sikh era to be traced back even further is treated here as an important local tradition rather than a truly historical genealogy as it is difficult to find any elements of it in the available sources, and they seem to be later reconstructions (Qasir, 1997). The most robust and well-defended conclusion is institutional, however, and the akhara was not a single wrestler but rather a historical institution that shaped the wrestler's life, body, food intake and social life, and structured his time on the earth while he was away from it. (Alter, 1992)

5.2 Colonialism and post-independence political change

The colonial period was more of a paradox than a one-way ruination (Halder, n.d.; O'Hanlon, 2007). British rule brought the older political system of the Sikhs to an end, and Western sporting, administrative and educational institutions replaced it, while at the same time aiding the widening of the scope for travel, print, and regional networks that enabled the building of reputations for champions like Rahim Bakhsh beyond the city boundaries (Arain, 2024). Public acclaim and structural economic fragility went hand in hand: while a wrestler's fame grew, the economic structure on which he depended was still reliant on the patronage of outsiders, the elite (Butt, 2023). Although Partition is largely cited as a termination, it is actually categorized as reorganization. The success of wrestlers within public sector institutions the Railways, WAPDA, the police and other institutions also started to give the wrestler opportunities to make a living, something previously reserved for the elite patrons, but with the difference that, having to work in the institutions, the wrestlers' rights to the same were tied to the institutional policy, formal organization of the team, and measurable sport performance, and that their fortunes were now linked to shifting priorities of the state (Butt, 2023). The impact of Partition on individual Gujranwala akharas and families, however, is not well documented; the demographic and urban changes that occurred in Gujranwala following the Partition is well documented at the city level (Naz & Zaidi, 2013), but there is limited local documentation on the specific impact of the Partition on individual Gujranwala akharas and families.

5.3 Evolution of training, ritual, and performance space

There is evidence of training that suggests that the adaptation process should be incremental rather than wholesale. It is clear from the existing practices of contemporary active akharas (as in Akhara Rahim Pehalwan, Arain, 2024) that pre-historic changes in practice are not from mitti to mat, but from mitti to (matti and) mat, which is in line with the historical evidence. Moralised discourses on discipline, diet and respect for the ustad retain significance but no longer shape practitioners as they do in the past, when many contemporary wrestling practitioners had to balance formal education, employment, and institutional demands that did not limit the behaviour of the early full-time wrestlers in the same way (Butt, 2023; Khan & Khan, 2024). The notion of the stadium in the study is not to suggest that a particular stadium (such as Jinnah Stadium, Gujranwala) emerged as the main local venue for pehlwani but rather

that it represented a more general trend towards a regulated space, formalized sport management, sponsorship, and national representation.

5.4 Contemporary cultural and social role

However, Pehlواني does not just survive as a language of local self-assertion in the city of Gujranwala, but with the backing of a legacy of wrestlers, akharas, family dynasties, daff rivalries, and public memory (Arain 2024). The spectator attachment literature reveals five types of attachment –ground, game, player, emotional and cultural – that are exhibited by kushti followers despite a decline in professional participation (Rehman et al., 2023). This adds to the overarching argument of this study that a local identity is not solely inherited as a demographic fact, but is created through a range of repeated institutional practices (such as training, participation in public competition, family memory, media reproduction, spectator attachment), and explains why the “City of Wrestlers” label has persisted despite the decline in the occupational base of wrestling: a cultural reputation is slower to change than an occupational structure.

The evidence also verifies that pehlwani is still tied to the well-established codes of masculinity that are recognized locally both within Lahore and in Gujranwala (Khan & Khan, 2024). This type of masculinity, however, is not monolithic and exclusive to pehlwani; it is also found in bodybuilding culture which is also connected to transnational media and film related body ideals as discussed in the literature (Nasir, 2020), so the rise in bodybuilding does not necessarily signify a cultural displacement of pehlwani. The exclusion of women from the study of the tradition is not an assumption, but a known phenomenon: existing studies lack women on cultural grounds (Khan & Khan, 2024; Rehman et al., 2023), therefore the relationship of women and wrestling in Gujranwala is undocumented and not assumed.

5.5 Drivers of decline and continuity

The study has revealed a differential pattern of decline and continuity, which can be explained by five converging mechanisms:

1. Economic insecurity: As the patronage system has shifted from royal patronage to elite patronage and then departmental patronage to a more diffuse and uneven distribution of patronage through donations, sponsorships, business earnings and competitions, it is becoming increasingly difficult for professionals to sustain their livelihood through wrestling. (Butt, 2023; Akbar et al., 2026).
2. Urbanization: The growing urbanization in Gujranwala has made it a high density industrial city and this has put direct stress on the akhara land, however, this stands as a good general structural explanation and not a case by case documentation of individual loss of akhara land due to urbanization (Naz & Zaidi, 2013).
3. Restructuring of time: industrial and salaried work, and mass education, compete with the time intensive traditional training and diet regime, resulting in a transition from full time practitioners to part time, dual career wrestlers who train in the evening, in addition to being involved in study or work (Butt, 2023).
4. Cracks in the state's patronage: Post Independence Departmental employment (Railways, WAPDA, police, and others) provided a formal pathway for the sport of wrestling, but also attached wrestling performers' success to the official agendas of the state that were not always

steady, particularly in the time when public sector recruitment declined—thereby, the state did not replace princely patronage but offered a narrower and more fragile alternative (Butt, 2023).

5. Globalisation as mechanism rather than single cause: The mechanism of globalisation in the case of Gujranwala is not a single thing, but a number of things such as the standardization of freestyle competition, global mass media sporting culture, transnational fitness and film derived body ideals, and commercial gym technology, that come through specific and traceable channels that threaten the traditional economy yet can also promote wrestlers, preserve memory through video and media circulation, create new sponsorship routes etc. (Nasir, 2020).

All of the above, together, supports a revision of the notion of a “conservative akhara” study of cultural resistance to modernization (cf. Shakoor, 2016). At least some akharas actively synthesized old and new methods, as can be seen from mitti training, body weight exercise, supervision of the ustad and modern weight equipment, all of which were operated under one roof at Akhara Rahim Pehalwan (Arain, 2024). It is, then, much more defensible to think of it from an economic point of view: the resources needed for the equipment, the land, the diet, the competition trips etc. and the need to comply with the regulations require money, which not every akhara or ustad is able to provide, so that a culturally open attitude toward modernization is no substitute for a stable resource base.

6. Discussion

6.1 What “decline” actually denotes

The term 'decline' is analytically useful only after it has been determined which is the object of the decline. The evidence indicates that there is a clear decrease in occupational security, patronage dependency, stable lower level employment, public wrestling space available, and the centrality of kushti in national sporting priorities, whilst there is a documented concern of families and older kushti practitioners about recruitment into the future. These are real forms of degradation, both in terms of materials and structure. The evidence of the total cultural decay is far less: active akharas, family involvement, daff competitions, continued spectatorship, local pride, the production of competitive wrestlers: these are all documented in the contemporary record. The most defensible conclusion is thus asymmetrical decline: that the professional and institutional side is stressed more than is cultural identity, and that the claims of the locals that pehlwani is “dying” are not necessarily in contradiction with claims that “the city still produces wrestlers”: they measure different aspects of the same tradition.

6.2 Masculinity as necessary but insufficient explanation

The social construction of masculinity around pehlwani is essential and without it pehlwani wouldn't exist, but it is insufficient to explain the persistence and/or transformation of pehlwani. The ideological shift that took place in the society is clearly reflected in the emergence of bodybuilding in Gujranwala; the strong disciplined male body was valued, but its production isn't as much, and youth who did not have access to it were able to attain strength through the gym without sacrificing their masculinity (Nasir, 2020). This re-thinks the history of pehlwani, which has been perceived and interpreted as the moral or cultural dispiritment of tradition instead of its economic and institutional decline.

6.3 Prominent wrestlers as institutional indicators, not exceptions

The biographical figures, like Rahim Bakhsh Sultaniwala in the colonial era, Younas Pehalwan as a generational connection to 1947, Muhammad Afzal (“Goga Pehalwan”) for his high level competition in

the so-falling 1970s–1980s, and contemporary institutional wrestlers like Inam Butt (Arain 2024) are dealt with analytically, not biographically. These all show good performance in the face of, not because of, poor institutional performance, especially when strong family and local networks make up for some of that structural deficit (Butt, 2023). Methodologically, this is important because the prominence of a champion does not mean that the surrounding institutional system was in good health; and the historian's challenge is to try to explain what made each champion's career possible, and what changed after that.

6.4 Source criticism as a substantive finding

Sources inconsistently report Rahim Bakhsh's year of birth (1900, 1902, and 1904) and the number of contests he then participated (e.g., the number of times Rahim Bakhsh is listed as dead in various sources is 1942, while in one influential recent work (Akbar et al., 2026) he is reported as a participant in later contests). They are not random errors that need to be fixed up during the course and they reveal how such retrospective, uncorroborated assertions can become historical fact, through repetition. The study's answer which explicitly divides evidence into documented fact, plausible but unconfirmed local tradition and analytical inference is offered as a methodological contribution: historical rigor in a field such as this is not about getting to the truth of every uncertainty, but about being specific about where it can be found.

7. Contribution

The first contribution of the article is historiographical, focusing on the city of Gujranwala instead of on South Asian wrestling in general, and highlighting how some universal themes of scholarship are put to the test through the material from the city in question, such as journalism, urban history, biography and field level material from the time. The second contribution is conceptual: as opposed to the conception of traditional akhara culture and modernity as incompatible, the study explores selective institutional transformation, a more appropriate model that states that 'loss of culture' is not synonymous with economic decline and that adaptation can happen within traditional institutions as well as outside or against. The third is to the urban and social history of Gujranwala generally, considering pehlwani as a way of investigating the process of urbanisation's impact on the land, time and body, not just a leisure subject; and to the historical study of masculinity and the body, by demonstrating that the Pehlwan and the Body Builder share the same cultural valuation of the strong male body, albeit in different ways, and did not represent a straightforward succession of one to the other. The last methodological contribution concerns the use of 'systematic source criticism', that is the explicit separation of the documented facts from the plausible tradition and inference, as a finding in a historiographical field that is belved by a scarce, archival documentation and the use of retrospective, sometimes contradictory, secondary sources.

8. Limitations

One of the major constraints is the uneven quality of primary evidence: there is no systematic archive of akhara records, dangal posters, competition outcomes, information on the employment history of the wrestlers or genealogies of the families of the akharas in Gujranwala, and so some material is much stronger for some of the well-known figures and contemporary practice than for a decade by decade institutional history of specific local akharas. A second limitation is that the evidence provided in the

underlying published sources in this study is largely given in the form of oral sources or in the form of interviews: these are of course priceless when used in training, in the narration of patronage and in the narration of decline, but over time memory often distorts and embellishes, and no interview log, transcript, nor consent record accompanied the source study. Another constraint is that the ethnographic and survey documents used to inform the study were framed differently in regard to the research questions they address (one on homosociality and masculinity, another on spectator event attachment), and partly illuminate the questions addressed in this study. Last but not least, the literature underlying the representation of Gujranwala pehlwani is, again, more male oriented than female oriented and therefore, the female relationship to Gujranwala pehlwani, historically speaking, is not documented, but rather unresolved.

9. Implications for Future Research and Heritage Policy

The following three types of primary evidences would significantly help this research: a systematic directory of Gujranwala's akharas, with details of location, approximate date of establishment, ustad succession, associated families, notable wrestlers, who were then or are now the custodians of the akharas, and the current condition of the akharas; a chronological register of the major dangals organized in Gujranwala over the years, including details of the date of the dangle, the location, the organizer, the participants, the results, and supporting posters, photographs and press coverage; and institutional records of employment of Gujranwala-origin wrestlers by Railways, WAPDA, the police and the Army, and similar institutions, highlighting specific wrestlers who were recruited rather than general statements.

The core analytical dichotomy between supporting the individual talented athlete and supporting the grassroots institutional base land security, access to training, financial support to young talented athletes, access to competitions that serves to reproduce them over a longer period of time, carries direct practical implications for heritage and sports policy. Medals from a shrinking talent pool can be produced by focus on just champions without consideration of the structural factors diet costs, safe and secure training space, predictable pathway from youth training to competition that impact whether that pool is replenished. The interwoven patronage of court, colonial and departmental type, which has not found a lasting place in the history of Gujranwala, necessitates a historically informed policy response for diversification of patronage across local governments, sports departments, community organizations, private sponsors, education providers and akhara management.

10. Conclusion

Pehlwanis in Gujranwala were not just rejected, it was seriously threatened with decreased security by its occupations and institutions, as well as a diminished sense of cultural security. Public competition, which replaced courtly and elite patronage, was replaced by the national and departmental employment of the Pakistani state, which was undermined by urban and economic change, a commercializing fitness and sporting economy and the creation of new competitors along with new opportunities. But families, ustad, local patrons, spectators, and wrestlers have been able to carry on aspects of the older tradition where it could no longer be maintained. The apparent paradoxes of this history, a loss of occupational security but a strong ongoing cultural vitality, the rejection of some technologies, while the synstudy of others, and the fact that the loser becomes a champion, and the champion a loser, are not exceptions

that need to be explained away. They are the arguments themselves: the history of Gujranwala's pehlwani is not one of sand being supplanted by stadium, it is one of sand and stadium piling on each other.

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