

The Cultural Microcosm of Hyderabad's Gym Spaces: An Ethnographic Study

A Dissertation Submitted during 2025 to
The University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the award of
a Ph.D. degree in Anthropology

By

A SHARATH KUMAR

14SAPH07



**Department of Anthropology
School of Social Sciences
University of Hyderabad
(P.O.) Central University, Gachibowli,
Hyderabad – 500 046
Telangana- India
December 2025**

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD



DECLARATION

I, **A Sharath Kumar**, hereby declare that the research embodied in the present dissertation entitled, “**The Cultural Microcosm of Hyderabad’s Gym Spaces: An Ethnographic Study**” is an original research work carried out by me under the supervision of Prof. M. Romesh Singh, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, and is original. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree at this university or any other university.

Place: Hyderabad

(A SHARATH KUMAR)

Date: 24 /12/2025

Regd. No: **14SAPH07**



CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Dissertation entitled “**The Cultural Microcosm of Hyderabad’s Gym Spaces: An Ethnographic Study**” submitted by **A SHARATH KUMAR** bearing Reg. No **14SAPH07** has carried out the research work embodied in the present in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from Plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

Further, the student has the following publication(s) before submission of the thesis/monograph for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of his research:

A. Published in the following publications:

1. Sharath Kumar A(2025), From Iron Temples to Fitness Corporations: The Social Life of Gym Spaces in Hyderabad Journal of Advance and Future Research (JAAFR) Volume 3, Issue 11 November 2025 (ISSN Number:2984-889X)
2. Sharath Kumar A (2025), Evaluating the Role of University Gym Facilities in Promoting Physical Health, Environmental Awareness, and Sustainable Student Lifestyles: A Case Study Approach International Journal of Innovative Research in Technology (IJIRT) Volume 12, Issue 7, December 2025 (ISSN Number: 2349-6002)

B. Papers Presented in the following conferences:

1. Presented a paper titled “*Gym Culture in Hyderabad: Labour Dynamics, Informality, and Structural Challenges*” in Two Day-National Conference on “Unorganised Labour in India: Issues and Challenges”, held on 9th March and 10th March, 2023, at The Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, in Collaboration with Institution of Eminence (IOE), University of Hyderabad, & Indian Council of Social Research (ICSSR)- SRC Hyderabad.
2. Presented a paper titled “Fitspiration and the Algorithmic Body: The Influence of Social Media on Fitness Motivations”, in Three Days International Conference on “Higher Education and Sustainable Development”, held on 23rd to 25th of March 2023, at Department of Political Science, Osmania University, Hyderabad

Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfillment of coursework requirement for Ph.D.

Course Code	Name of the Course	Credits	Pass/Fail
1. AN-801	Advanced Anthropological Theories	4.0	Pass
2. AN-802	Advanced Research Methods	4.00	Pass
3. AN-806	Anthropology of Consumer Behaviour	4.00	Pass

Prof. M. Romesh Singh
Supervisor

Head
Department of Anthropology
University of Hyderabad

Dean
School of Social Sciences
University of Hyderabad

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and express gratitude for the following people, without whom I would not have been able to complete my PhD journey! Many people helped and supported me personally and professionally during my research journey and making this dissertation possible.

First of all I am gratefully indebted to my supervisor Prof. M. Romesh Singh for guidance, supervision and support. His supervision provided me an opportunity to learn many things starting from M.A. to PhD. The work would not have come to an end without his constant guidance, encouragement and with patience in helping me in several affairs related to the research work. Doing research work in Ph.D. is truly a life changing learning experience for me and it would not be possible without his support and guidance. The production of this dissertation happened in good away due to his careful corrections and suggestions which have contributed extremely.

I extend my sincere thanks to my Doctoral Committee (DC) members Prof. C. Raghava Reddy, Prof. R. Siva Prasad(Rtd) and Dr. George C. Tharakan for their time-to-time evaluation of my work and giving valuable suggestions.

I take this opportunity to thank all the anthropology faculty members of the Department, I thank Prof. Romesh Singh, Prof. B.V. Sharma(Rtd) Dr. George Tharakan C, Dr. Apparao and Dr. Alok Pandey for their constant support and encouragement in exploring wide array of opportunities in various sub-disciplines of anthropology. I would like to place on record my special thanks to Prof. N. Sudhakar Rao(Rtd), Prof. P. Venkata Rao(Rtd), Prof. R. Siva Prasad(Rtd), Prof. B.V. Sharma(Rtd), Prof. Romesh Singh, Prof. K.K. Mishra(Rtd), Dr. George C. Tharakan, Dr. Shaik Abdul Munaf, late prof MLK Murthy, Dr Kasi Ewsarappa, Dr Koteswara Rao and Ms Bala madam for their teachings in Masters which developed my research interest and for helping met to reach this stage of academics.

I owe a lot to the office staff of the Department of Anthropology, Mr. Jangaiah, late Mr. Ashok and Mr.Nagaraju for their assistance in completing the official requirements whenever needed. Here I am indebted to University Grants Commission for financial assistance in the form of Junieur Research Fellowship and Senior Research Fellowship during my Ph.D. programme. My special thanks to the staff of university of Hyderabad, especially the staff of Indira Gandhi Memorial Library (IGML), University of Hyderabad for their support in various ways from the commencement to accomplishment of PhD submission.

I would like to thank all the respondents in the gym which I visited in Hyderabad, especially trainers, Mr. Joel, Mr. Sam, Mr. Madhu.

Here I would like to extend my appreciation to Venu Gopal, Tunga Ramesh(who was motivated to complete the thesis), Mallesh, Sambaiah, Dr. Maruthi(who guided me in writing part of Ph.D thesis Dr.Nagaraju, and Dr.Vinod for their timely help. I would like to thank my anthropology senior batch Dr. Raj Kumar Kattuala, Dr. Ravi Kiran, Shyam kumar and Preetham (who stood as brother and encouraged to complete the thesis), for their

suggestions for the completion of the thesis.

I am grateful to my family members, especially Bharathi(Wife), Shikhara(Daughter), Ratnaiah(father), Jayanthi(Mother), Jyothi(Sister), Ranjith(Brother), Jeevan(Brother-in-Law), Rosy(Sister-in-Law), Rhoda(Niece), Jayla(Niece), Rajaiah, Pochamma, Sampath, Ashok, Gattaiah, Mallesh, Renuka, Srujana, and Swapna, without their support it wouldn't have been possible to complete Ph.D Journey.

I would like to extend my gratitude to my friends, Vikram(who was supportive throughout the Journey), Luke, Praveen, Prabhu, John, Samuel, Gokhan, Srinu, Anil, Amar, Murali, Mishra, Govind, Ravi, and Nagaraju for their co-ordination and encouragement. I would like to express my gratitude to DSU family members, especially Tunga Ramesh, Suman, Raja, Charan, Sandeep, Chandrashekhar and Shankar for their support throughout my Ph.D Journey.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr.Yadaiah (Joint Commissioner, GHMC) Mrs. MNR Jyothi (Deputy Commissioner ,Thumkunta Circle, GHMC),Mr. Sravan Kumar(Manager, Thumkunta Circle, GHMC), Mr. Venkata Gopal(Deputy Commissioner, Gundlapochampally, GHMC) and all the staff of Thumkunta Circle, GHMC for their co-ordination and co-operation in my Ph.D Journey.

I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude to each and every one who involved directly or indirectly in the submission of my Ph.D.

A SHARATH KUMAR

Contents

Sl. No.	Title	Page No
	Title	i
	Declaration	ii
	Certificate	ii-iii
	Acknowledgements	iv-v
	Contents	vi
	List of Tables	vii-viii
1.	CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1-44
2.	CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	45-72
3.	CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY- AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH	73-102
4.	CHAPTER IV MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE OF GYM IN HYDERABAD	103-144
5.	CHAPTER V PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA	145-189
6.	CHAPTER VI CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	190-201
7.	References	202-212
8.	Appendix(Questionnaire)	
9.	Paper Publications(Certificates)	
10.	Paper Presentations(Certificates)	
11.	Anti-Plagiarism Report	.

List of Tables

Table No.	Title of Table	Page No.
Table 1	Consent to Participate	150
Table 2	Age Group of Respondents	150
Table 3	Gender Distribution	151
Table 4	Caste / Social Category	151
Table 5	Occupation	152
Table 6	Monthly Household Income (INR)	152
Table 7	Gym Attendance Duration	153
Table 8	Gym Attendance Frequency	153-154
Table 9	Primary Motivation for Gym Attendance	154
Table 10	Influence of Gym Location on Participation	155
Table 11	Participation in Group Fitness Activities	155
Table 12	Preferred Workout Time	156
Table 13	Memberships at Multiple Gyms	156
Table 14	Number of Meals Per Day	157
Table 15	Following a Structured Meal Plan	157
Table 16	Breakfast Before Training	158
Table 17	Typical Pre-Workout Intake	158
Table 18	Timing of Pre-Workout Meal	159
Table 19	Supplement Intake Before Workouts	159
Table 20	Post-Workout Food Intake	160
Table 21	Estimated Daily Protein Intake	160
Table 22	Daily Water Intake	161
Table 23	Use of Sports Drinks / Electrolytes	161
Table 24	Gym Guidance on Digital Fitness Tools	162
Table 25	Use of Fitness Apps/Wearables	162
Table 26	Frequency of Engaging with Online Fitness Content	163
Table 27	Type of Online Fitness Content Accessed	163

Table 28	Use of Social Media for Fitness Motivation	164
Table 29	Influence of Fitness Influencers	164
Table 30	Sharing Fitness Progress on Social Media	165
Table 31	Use of Online Coaching or Virtual Training	165
Table 32	Frequency of Online Workout Participation	166
Table 33	Confidence in Using Digital/Fitness Technology	166
Table 34	Satisfaction With Current Body Image	167
Table 35	Influence of Gym Culture on Self-Confidence	167
Table 36	Pressure to Look Fit	168
Table 37	Role of Gym Culture in Mental Well-Being	168-169
Table 38	Perception of Gym as Social Space	169
Table 39	Changes in Lifestyle After Joining Gym	169-170
Table 40	Perception of Gym as Identity Marker	170
Table 41	Aspirations Connected to Gym Participation	171

Chapter I

Introduction

Introduction

India's rapidly urbanising environment has been marked in the past decade by a subtle yet significant shift: the rise of gym culture. This tendency is particularly pronounced in cities like Hyderabad, where the intersection between the past (historic heritage or systematic heritage) and the present (city dynamics) creates a dynamic setting for new lifestyle practices. While ostensibly concerned with physical fitness, the phenomenon captures deeper societal realignments, not least in the self-conceptualisation saga, social identity building and the omnipresent influence of technology on quotidian existence (Nair, 2019).

Gyms in Hyderabad go beyond being places for physical exercise; they are kinds of dynamic social arenas in which identities are constructed, performed and at times, also, fought over. Within these contexts, larger issues of gender, class, caste, and aspiration emerge, influencing the perception of the body and interactions between individuals. Therefore, the gym becomes a microcosm of the urban society, with all its complexities and contradictions (Baviskar, 2018).

Social hierarchies deeply characterise physical training programmes in fitness centres in Hyderabad. The pursuit of the "it body" is certainly not neutral and universal, but tied to sophisticated constructions relative to current norms regarding beauty, health, and success, which are mediated by class, caste, and gender expectations. Accordingly, gym routines may be sites of dominant ideals, simultaneously encouraging conformity, while also being sites of resistance and redefinition against dominant norms (Bourdieu, 1984).

The digital dimension is an added dimension to this cultural transformation, with the rise of fitness applications, social media communities, and online influencers, fitness practice and perception with respect to fitness increasingly become mediated by technology. In Hyderabad, as in other Indian metropolises, a refractive lens shapes the way global fitness paradigms are viewed in the local context, resulting in hybrid models of bodily and health culture. Digitalisation presents new forms of inclusion and exclusion, which consequently affect participation in gym culture while building legitimacy and belonging within these spaces (Miller, 2016).

Access to gyms and digital fitness platforms is not equitably distributed, and economic stratification, social hierarchies, and urban inequities continue to influence participation in fitness culture and its various forms. The concept of a "fit body" is commonly associated with neoliberal and middle-class notions of self-improvement, discipline, and autonomy, and thus contributes to broader societal narratives centred on individualism (Harvey, 2005).

Through ethnographic observation of gym-goers and fitness professionals in Hyderabad, it is possible to develop an understanding of how motivation, discipline, community, and identity are co-produced on both physical and digital planes. Such observations offer valuable insights into the intersections of corporeality, digital mediation, and social stratification in contemporary urban life (Geertz, 1973).

The question of gym culture in Hyderabad offers an interesting subject of study for anthropologists. It sheds new light on the dynamics between leisure practices, bodily politics, and technocultural trends that reflect and redefine social relations in a rapidly urbanising world. The gym thus becomes a place of physical transformation and a meeting point for global biopolitical discourses to intersect with local realities (Foucault, 1977).

Beyond the theoretical implications of the above analysis, there are important practical implications. By recognising related dimensions of physical space, digital technology, and social inequality, fitness environments can also be better designed and promoted to secure inclusivity and equity. As the fitness landscape continues to evolve in India, it is crucial to comprehend these dynamics in order to navigate the challenges and opportunities that the Indian fitness sector presents (Iyer, 2021).

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1 Background of the Study

Fitness culture has undergone immense change on a transnational level, evolving from early forms of physical culture activity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to become a complex, commercialised and digitally mediated process in the contemporary world (Hargreaves, 1986). Initially based on practices that promoted the health of the body, strength, and national vigour, the global fitness culture was increasingly tied to notions of discipline, productivity, and social distinction. Pioneers of physical culture, such as Eugene Sandow, Per Henrik Ling, and Niels Bukh, stressed exercise regimes of order, often

accompanied by ideals of masculinity, military preparedness, and moral virtue (Chapman, 1994). Over the next few decades, this culture spread to include mass-market gyms, aerobics, bodybuilding, and, later, fitness franchising, thereby transmuting fitness from an endeavour for the few to a commodified lifestyle industry (Sassatelli, 2010). Globalisation and technological innovation have further expanded the dissemination of fitness culture, enabling the circulation of body ideals and training practices across national and cultural boundaries (Appadurai, 1996).

In the Indian context, the development of fitness regimes has been reflective of larger social, economic and cultural developments. Following independence, traditional physical practices, such as yoga, wrestling (*kushti*), and callisthenics, were found alongside burgeoning clubs and bodybuilding centres of a Western-styled tradition, which appealed mainly to an elite and urban male constituency (Alter, 1992). From the 1990s, the result of liberalisations, disposable incomes, and exposure to global media was a rapid growth in health clubs, fitness chains, and wellness centres (Nanda, 2004). Fitness, as a result, acquired a new set of cultural associations, which were based not only on health but also on aesthetics, social status, and personal aspiration (Fernandes, 2006). The rise of celebrity endorsements, fitness influencers, and televised sports further reinforced these ideals, solidifying fitness as a symbol of modernity and upward mobility in urban Indian life (Rajagopal, 2001).

Hyderabad, in particular, has become a key location for the development of contemporary fitness culture, a sign of the city's rapid urbanised economic growth, and growing middle-class affluence (Baviskar, 2011). The city's multi-layered population, growing consumer culture and exposure to global trends have triggered the growth of fitness centre chains, boutique fitness centres and wellness programmes (Srivastava, 2014). Parallel to this, we have seen how Hyderabad has witnessed the rise of fitness communities and platforms for engagement with digital cultures, from app-based personal training software to Instagram-mediated fitness challenges, thereby developing a distinctive dialogue between physical spaces and virtual cultures (Miller, 2016).

Urbanisation has also contributed to the increase in body consciousness among residents, and the manner in which "the fit body" is perceived, thus influencing participation in gym practices (Giddens, 1991). The convergence of digital media, global fitness trends, and local ambitions has created hybrid spaces in which identity, health, and aesthetics are in a constant state of flux (Featherstone, 1991). Within this context, gym spaces are actually a microcosm

of social stratification, as well as gendered performance and aspirational consumption, making them a rich site for studying the intersection of the body, culture, and technology in contemporary urban India (Foucault, 1977).

1.2 Evolution of Fitness Culture Globally

The global history of fitness culture represents a lengthy movement in which physical practices, bodily ideals, and social significances have developed in parallel with broader economic, political, and cultural changes (Dunning, 1999). While physical training and exercise can be traced back to human societies dating back thousands of years - from the ancient Greek gymnasias, the Roman military exercises and Chinese martial traditions - the concept of "conceptualisation" as we understand it today did not exist in part until the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Guttman, 1978).

The nineteenth-century European physical culture movement marked a significant milestone in the global development of fitness. Figures such as Friedrich Ludwig Jahn in Germany, Per Hendrik Ling in Sweden, and Niels Bukh in Denmark instituted the institution of gymnastics and callisthenics, emphasising bodily control and the development of strength, endurance, and agility (Hofmann, 2005). Closely associated with nationalist and militarist imperatives, such practices promoted the concept of the body as the site for moral and civic development (Elias, 1994). Physical culture was therefore not simply about health, but was aimed at creating disciplined citizens who could contribute to the nation-state (Turner, 1992).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the activity of bodybuilding and strength training emerged as a separate strand of fitness culture, which was, by and large, popularised by individuals such as Eugen Sandow in Europe and later Charles Atlas in the United States of America (Chapman, 1994). Sandow, commonly known as the "father of modern bodybuilding," married spectacle and science, transforming strength training into both a commercial endeavour and a medium for the cultural dissemination of the "ideal male body" (Mangan, 2004). Publications, photographic manuals and travelling exhibitions contributed to the transnational propagation of these ideals and form a nascent global fitness network (Hunt, 2010).

The 20th century saw the further diversification and commodification of the fitness industry. Aerobic exercise, dance-based exercise and women-specific health clubs appeared from the mid-twentieth century, especially in North America and Europe, being part of wider social

change such as the rise in levels of consumer culture during the post-war period, the shifting of gendered leisure patterns, as well as the impact of mass media (Hargreaves, 1994). Television, the print media, and, later, digital media played an important role in standardising fitness practices, aesthetics, and lifestyle ideals (Thompson, 1996). For instance, the aerobic exercise videos of Jane Fonda in the 1980s addressed the issue of fitness as a commercialised, mass-appealing, and often performed for a female audience. They helped to make the fitness industry a worldwide business (Sassatelli, 2010).

The end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century have been characterised by the technological mediation of fitness culture. Gyms have been standard commercial spaces worldwide, frequently franchised as part of global brands. Digital tools, including fitness tracking apps, online workout videos, and social media platforms, have transformed the way people engage with exercise (Lupton, 2016). Fitness ideals have become hybridised, fusing the local, the transnational body and the market-driven patterns of consumption (Featherstone, 1991). It has resulted in the creation of a 'global fitness culture' in which ideals of the body, exercise regimes and wellness practices have moved widely while adapting to local contexts across borders (Appadurai, 1996).

In sum, the global evolution of fitness culture represents a shifting form of fitness culture from discipline and civic-moral cultivation to the performance anaesthetisation of the body and the commercialisation of bodily practices (Bordo, 1993). Contemporary fitness culture is thus a complex and multifaceted phenomenon in which legacies of the past, innovations in technology, and market imperatives intersect and shape how bodies and understandings of health, beauty, and identity are reflected, both at the individual level and through mass media.

1.3 Fitness and Modernity in India

The development of fitness in India over the last century has undergone significant changes, which intersect with the processes of modernity, urbanisation, and globalisation (2004). Historically, physical culture in India was deeply rooted in indigenous practices, including yoga, the martial art of kalaripayattu, wrestling in akharas, and physical labour inherent in an agrarian life. These practices were embedded within social, spiritual, and communal frameworks, with emphasis on discipline, holistic health, and moral cultivation (Singleton, 2010). Within this context, fitness was not understood as a commodified and individualised,

but rather as an integral part of a wider ethical and social order that was woven together by body, mind, and community (Nandy, 1983).

The colonial contact introduced Western concepts of physical education and modern exercise regimes, particularly in military and administrative settings. British colonial institutions encouraged practices of gymnastics, callisthenics, and regimented sports to instil discipline and prowess among Indian soldiers and schoolchildren, relating the training of the body to ideas of citizenship, obedience, and productivity (Arnold, 1993). This period by no means meant the end of a conversation between indigenous and imported fitness practices, but instead set the stage for a hybridisation of the body and health (Metcalf, 1995).

Following independence, there continued to be an emphasis on physical education in the Indian state; however, the focus was directed towards national development and modernisation, like the National Physical Fitness programme in the 1960s and 1970s, which aimed to produce a fit citizenry who could play their role in the development of economic growth and social advancement (Chowdhury, 2001). Nevertheless, these initiatives were for the most part institutional and collective, confined to schools, universities, and governmental sports initiatives (Beteille, 2002). The concept of fitness as a lifestyle practice was still confined relatively exclusively to either elite or urban segments of society (Ray, 2007).

The liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s provided impetus to the rapid shift in fitness culture, coinciding with neoliberal trends that emphasised dualism and self-optimisation (Harvey, 2005). Commercial gyms, health clubs, and fitness centres proliferated through urban centres, appealing to a burgeoning middle class. They linked physical fitness with social mobility, professionalism, and aspirations for a better quality of life (Varma, 2012). The commercialisation opened up a new marketplace for the sale of exercise equipment, branded sportswear, personal training, and wellness services (Nanda, 2015).

The modern fitness culture in contemporary India is closely tied to global media and new digital technologies. Bollywood, sports personalities, social media influencers, and fitness apps collectively set the standards of leanness, muscularity, and aesthetic appeal, thereby creating ideals of the 'fit' body (Rajagopal, 2001). These ideals often come with gender, class, and urban-centricity, affecting the perception, access, and performance of fitness (Fernandes, 2006). The gym emerges as a site of social performance, identity construction, and negotiation of modern aspirations, not only as a space for physical training but also for body

disciplinarianism, display, and optimisation of globalised notions of health and beauty (Foucault, 1977).

At the intersection of tradition and modernity, India's fitness culture exhibits hybridised forms, where the space between yoga and traditional physical disciplines is intermingled with fitness gyms and digital fitness regimes from the West (Appadurai, 1996). Consequently, fitness has emerged as a symbol of modernity, representing health consciousness, self-discipline, and participation in global consumer culture (Baudrillard, 1998). It represents larger social shifts, such as the creation of an urban middle-class identity, gendered body politics, and the activities of negotiating new cultural and technological spaces in cities across India (Bourdieu, 1984).

In conclusion, the evolution of fitness in India illustrates how bodily practices have been continually reconfigured and altered in response to historical, social, and economic processes, thereby creating a unique contemporary fitness culture that is simultaneously global, local, traditional, and modern (Turner, 1992).

1.4 Urbanisation Influence, and Body Consciousness

Urbanisation has played a central role in Children's fitness culture and body consciousness in India today. Rapid economic growth and mass migration to urban centres like Hyderabad have transformed the urban landscape into spaces of mass visibility, consumption, and social comparison. The urban environment, typified by dense social relationships, commercialised spaces and (modern) infrastructures, creates new opportunities and new pressures for people to manage their physiques actively and to display them. Within cities, physical fitness is more than just private practice; it is also mediated socially through interactions in gyms, parks, and public places, where bodies are both scrutinised. Technologies, such as those utilised, are particularly significant actors in this urban transformation. The growth of smartphones, fitness apps, social media platforms and wearable devices has reworked the way urban citizens engage with fitness. Fitness apps enable individually tailored workout regimens, food tracking, and competition for leaders, which opens up the possibility of quantifying and tracking the user's bodily performance and continuity. Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube and TikTok) enhance the spread of worldwide fitness ideals, which foster a sense of aspirational ideals of leanness, muscularity and athleticism. Influencers and fitness personalities serve as mediators between international trends and local and nationally

relevant adaptations, developing communities of practice centred on common goals and aesthetics.

These digital interventions are closely tied to the rise of body consciousness in urban India. The visibility and constant comparison offered by social media make bodily appearance, fitness performance, and normative adherence to ideals more pronounced than ever. Urban populations become increasingly internalised and internalised, visual, and performativized cues into their ideas of self and into assumptions and routines in everyday bodily movements. Consequently, body consciousness is both embodied and mediated, indicative of the intersecting dynamics of valued (physical practices) and devalued (digital cultural) practices, as well as consumerism and the formation of aspirational identities.

In addition, urbanisation and digital connectivity are intertwined with socio-economic hierarchies. Access to gyms, fitness technologies, fitness education and other wellness curation is often based on class, gender, and social privilege, which creates stratified experiences of fitness and body consciousness. Middle-class urban populations, with disposable income and digital literacy, are especially predisposed to embrace and enact global fitness, as marginalised individuals may experience exclusion or lack of engagement. This dynamic highlights the importance of fitness and body consciousness in signifying social status, mobility, and inclusion within contemporary urban India.

In Hyderabad, the intersection of urban infrastructure, digital penetration and the rise in fitness consciousness has created a unique urban fitness ecosystem. Gyms, wellness studios, public exercise spaces, and virtual spaces work in symbiotic harmony, creating hybrid physical-digital spaces where bodies are disciplined, made visible, and negotiated. Individuals move through these spaces not only for health and leisure purposes, but also as a means of expressing social identity and demonstrating aspirational lifestyles to participate in mediated forms of belonging and recognition.

Urbanisation has reshaped the perception, performance, and evaluation of bodies in present-day Indian society. Body consciousness is gradually becoming interdisciplinary, with technological mediation and urban sociality, in parallel with the changes in lifestyle, consumption, and identity in modern cities more generally. The urban experience of fitness, thus, captures a complex interplay between material spaces, digital technologies, and cultural ideals of bodily perfection, making it a key site for understanding modern India today.

1.5 Historical Roots of the Gymnasium

The concept of a gymnasium originated in ancient Greece, where it served as a venue for physical exercise and the primary gathering place for freeborn male citizens. These facilities were not just simple fitness centres but bustling cultural and social venues where minds as well as bodies were developed (Golden, 2008).

At the centre of the Greek gymnasium was the great idea of arete. It was not about corporeal strength so much as it was about the cabbage's abilities reaching a fullness - a total vision that combined physical strength and intellectual brilliance (Jaeger, 1945).

The lust of Greek men for masculine beauty and bodily perfection had a profound influence on how Western cultures perceived fitness and beauty for hundreds of years. It set the stage for our modern-day conception of the ideal body, which echoes today (Eco, 2004).

The Renaissance marked a time of great reawakening. A revived and almost passionate interest in exercise and body culture emerged, primarily based on the idea of the "rebirth of the Vitruvian Man," a powerful symbol conditioned by a new awareness of classical ideals for human physical growth and harmony (Burckhardt, 1958). It was a return to appreciating the human form in its entirety (Panofsky, 1972).

The modern gymnasium was taking shape in early nineteenth-century Europe. In Germany, Friedrich Jahn created the Turnplatz, and its vision, practical and implicitly powerful, was to enhance public health, particularly military preparedness and the emerging industrial workforce. It was about building stronger nations, one fit citizen at a time (Mangan, 1981).

The twentieth century witnessed an incredible growth in what we now refer to as "gym culture." It was the era of bodybuilding and the rise of charismatic fitness entrepreneurs. Visionaries like Hippolyte Triat, Eugen Sandow, Jack LaLanne and Jane Fonda were not just trainers, but pioneers. They transformed gymnasiums into lively spaces that promoted individual development, entertainment, and, at times, even became catalysts of social change. As a result, they continually changed the relationship we have with our bodily structure and how we pursue our well-being (Chapman, 1994).

1.6. Fitness and sports in India - history of fitness in India

India's involvement with physical fitness and sports is deeply rooted in the ancient civilisations and cultural practices. The development of physical culture in the subcontinent is the result of a persistent desire for health, recreation, and the integration of bodily discipline with spiritual, military, and societal objectives. From the early settlements of the Indus Valley era to the Vedic age, philosophical maturity and physical fitness were constituents of Indian life.

1.6.1. Indus Valley civilization (c. 0-1500 BCE.)

The first evidence of organised activity in India dates back to the Indus Valley Civilisation, one of the world's most sophisticated and urbanised societies (Kenoyer, 1998). Archaeological excavations of sites like Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, and Dholavira demonstrate that physical engagement was not merely functional, but was intimately intertwined with artistic, social, and ritual practices (Possehl, 2002). Bronze artefacts, such as the "Dancing Girl" statuette, demonstrate not only an aesthetic appreciation of the human form but also the importance of movement as an expression of culture and the possible admiration and cultivation of physical skill and bodily grace (Marshall, 1931). These findings indicate that Indus people had "a subtle understanding of corporeality where movement, posture and agility were valued dimensions of day-to-day life" (Wheeler, 1959).

Material remains, including game pieces, dice, and terracotta figurines, indicate that recreational activities combined physical exertion with mental activity (Childe, 1934). Hunting, wrestling, and dancing activities were not simply aspects of free time; in themselves, they had an important social and ritual dimension, reinforcing communal ties and a sense of common cultural identity (Allchin, 1995). The monumental "Great Bath" at Mohenjo-daro highlights the centrality of water-based activities, including swimming, communal bathing, and ceremonial purification, in the life of an urban community and the phenomenon of interplay between hygiene, ritual, and collective experience (Kenoyer, 1998). In many ways, these spaces are predecessors of modern-day sports complexes and public recreational spaces, with an emphasis on physical dexterity, communal involvement and social visibility (Moorti, 2003).

Physical culture in the Indus Valley, therefore, was an individual and collective enterprise (Singh, 2008). Bodily practices were closely interrelated with social roles, civic life, and

aesthetic values in a civilisation that received the body as a place of expression, discipline, and cultural belonging (Mishra, 2010). The merging of art, play, and organisation implies that physical activity was conceived not as a task of getting in shape, but rather as a holistic activity that fosters the development of mind, physical body, and social identity (Alter, 2004). In this sense, the roots of Indian corporeal culture can be traced to a complex combination of functionality, aesthetic development, and community-oriented exercise, laying the groundwork for later historical forms of exercise that drew on martial training, ritualised, and embodied discipline (Thapar, 2002).

1.6.2 Vedic Period (c. 1500-500 BCE)

During the Vedic period, physical activity was well ingrained in the spiritual, social, and health systems of the society (Flood, 1996). Movement and exercise were not considered independently, but instead were intimately tied to religious rituals, daily duties, and practices aimed at maintaining both bodily and mental well-being (Zimmer, 1951). Practices such as Surya Namaskar and pranayama were initially performed as offerings to the sun god, which was done in a profound spiritual context (Feuerstein, 1998). Over the centuries, these rituals evolved into comprehensive practices aimed at fostering the health of body and mind, as well as flexibility of muscles, muscular power, endurance, and mental awareness, reflecting the acceptance of an early view on the indivisibility of body health and spiritual practice (Eliade, 1958).

Societal class structures and the need for military preparation also influenced physical exercise. The Kshatriya, or the warrior class, emphasised the development of martial skills as both a practical necessity and a mark of social prestige (Thapar, 2002). Young men were strictly taught archery, swordsmanship, wrestling, and the mastery of using horses and elephants (Roy, 1980), in an ethos based on the valorisation of an individual's courage, solidity, and technical mastery. These practices were not just functional in the cause of war. However, they also served as signifiers of social identity and personal honour, situating the body as a site of power and a gauge of discipline and virtue (Singha, 1998).

Recreational activities further enriched the culture of physical engagement. Games of ball, dice, swings, and hunting were used among different layers of people, combining amusement and the development of skills (Ghurye, 1963). Such practices imply that physical prowess

was culturally valued and often prioritised over intellectual training (Majumdar, 1971). The period also saw the development of early forms of yoga, which involved a combination of spiritual introspection and deliberate physical exercises designed to bring about balance between the mental, physical, and spiritual realms (White, 2012). This melding of play, ritual, and discipline exemplifies a society where physical cultivation was multi-dimensional, serving multiple roles simultaneously as a tool for health, social role reinforcement, and moral and spiritual development (Alter, 2004).

In essence, the Vedic period represents a complex knowledge of the body as an intersection of functions (Basham, 1954). Physical activity served as a means of expressing the spirit, a means of gaining social status, and a way of being prepared as a warrior, all while maintaining good health (Heesterman, 1985). It is a historical basis from which later Indian traditions of bodily discipline, martial arts, and yogic practice developed, emphasising that authentic culture was of equal importance for character building, virtue cultivation, and social identity as it was for physical fitness (Larson, 2010).

1.6.3. Epic and Early Hindu Period (c. 800 BCE -500 CE)

During the Epic and Early Hindu periods, physical activity and training were deeply ingrained in the social and cultural imagination of ancient India, as vividly depicted in the Ramayana and Mahabharata texts. These epics provide rich information about the importance of cultivating the body, martial arts, and recreational sports in the context of the royal family and society at large. In the Ramayana, royal figures are often depicted playing hunting games, swimming, and riding horses and chariots, which attest to the fact that physical prowess was not only valued for survival and warfare but also as a status marker, an exercise of discipline and honour (Basham, 1954; Thapar, 2002).

A well-organised programme of physical education in elite bloodlines is similarly emphasised in the Mahabharata. The Pandavas and Kauravas undergo rigorous routines that involve various aspects of martial drills, wrestling, gulli danda, ball games, and water-based sports, focusing on endurance, agility, and coordination. These practices are based on a systematic understanding of the body and its function as an instrument for not only combat arts but also a social expression where physical discipline is intertwined with the spiritual practice, including the development of moral and ethical character (Alter, 2004; Majumdar, 1971).

Women's participation in physical activities, like men's participation, is less well-documented and more inferred from depictions in the ancient world and literature. Women participated in games, archery, self-defence exercises, and even animal handling within certain forms of social life, suggesting that gender norms were not a complete restriction on physical culture. Such inclusivity, although confined to specific sections of society, represents an intricate understanding of bodily education as empowerment, skill development, and social participation (Thapar, 2002).

Overall, the Epic and Early Hindu periods show a sophisticated understanding of physical culture as part of societal life. Training was multi-dimensional and included recreational, martial, and strategic components, also allowing for the development of well-rounded individuals with the ability to achieve intellectual as well as corporeal excellence. The combination of physical discipline and social, moral, and cultural imperatives during this period laid lasting foundations for later traditions of martial arts, yoga, and recreational sports in Indian society (Basham, 1954; Alter, 2004).

1.6.4 Aspects of Institutionalisation of Physical Education

In India, both in ancient times and in early medieval Indian history, the institutionalisation of education included formed spaces and practices, which were not limited to the creation of the body. Physical activity was taken up inside Vyayamashalas - designated exercise halls and akharas (a traditional kind of wrestling schools). These spaces were not just arenas for training strength, agility, and endurance, but also centres for moral, ethical, and spiritual cultivation. Often attached to either temples or religious communities, Vyayamashalas and akharas were places where physical rigour was combined with philosophical and spiritual teachings. Gurus and experienced practitioners served as mentors who helped students with exercises, wrestling techniques, and the practice of martial arts, as well as with discipline, ethics, and shared values. The pedagogical ethos of these institutions placed great emphasis on the development of character alongside corporeal excellence. It supported the notion that mastery over the body was inseparable from the mastery of one's mind and ethical self.

Physical education in this era was closely related to social hierarchy and duties. For the Kshatriyas, strict training in martial arts, such as archery, swordsmanship, wrestling, and horse riding, was compulsory, in line with their role as warriors and protectors of the polity. Brahmins, while primarily known for their intellectual and spiritual studies, were also

charged with staying physically fit as part of their education, as it was grounded in a holistic primary curriculum that controlled the body, related it to the mind, and further refined the spirit. Vaishyas and Shudras, although not bound by the formal codes of physical training, often voluntarily took part in exercises, wrestling, and local sporting activities, especially in rural communities and village akharas. Such participation ensured the possibility of social mobility, local prestige and embodied participation in communal life.

Through these institutions, physical education was presented as a personal and social venture in which discipline, strength, and skill were developed in the service of individual, communal, and spiritual ideals. Vyayamashalas and akharas are expressions of the historical continuity of organised practices in India, demonstrating that organised training was a practical necessity for survival or defence, as well as an all-encompassing cultural and ethical activity. They established the foundations of the subsequently developed martial arts, wrestling tradition, and physical education codifications found in India to this day.

1.6.5 Medieval Time period and Indigenous Martial Arts.

The medieval period in India was an era of significant consolidation of native forms of martial arts, which were inextricably linked to political power, regional autonomy, and social organisation. Rulerstionary rulers like Prithviraj Chauhan, Rana Pratap, and Shivaji Maharaj were exemplars of physical culture combined with leadership, valour, and tactical acumen. Under their patronage, military training became systematic and institutionalised with an emphasis on endurance, strength, agility, and readiness for combat. Soldiers and warriors undertook rigorous physical training, including running, wrestling, weightlifting, and using traditional weapons such as the gada (mace) and danda (staff), as well as mastering swords, spears, bows, and other weapons. This embodied training, while applicable in the realm of effectiveness in combat situations, is also, in a sense, symbolically linked to ideals of courage, honour, and the masculine identity (Richards, 1993; Singh, 2005).

The sociopolitical situation of being repeatedly hit by foreign invaders, especially Turkic and Mughals, further defended the martial physical culture. Akharas and the martial gurukuls proliferated everywhere, serving as important centres for preserving and passing on indigenous fighting techniques, strategies, and philosophies. These institutions also functioned simultaneously as schools of discipline, as repositories of cultural knowledge, and as communities where martial expertise was codified and celebrated. In addition to training

militarily, akharas encouraged group solidarity, ethical behaviour, and a regulated system of diet, exercise, and moral teaching (Alter, 1992; Chakraborty, 2011).

During this time, physical culture was closely tied to cultural resilience and the preservation of identity. Through the education of expertly-trained warriors and the training of such a fine and efficient war party, these institutions became a significant cultural factor in preserving regional autonomy and resisting cultural assimilation. They ensured that indigenous systems of combat, body training, and martial ethos were passed down from generation to generation, resulting in historical continuity that influenced modern-day wrestling schools, traditional martial arts, and the vyayamashalas. It is the medieval confluence of the need for training of the body and discipline with the social, political and cultural requirements on the one part and the fact that fitness is a profound vehicle for the societal values in pre - modern India on the other part which underscore the role of fitness as a practical necessity as well as a profound role of fitness as a vehicle for the societal values (Thapar, 2002; Alter, 2004).

1.6.6. Underpinnings of Cultures and Philosophy

The ancient governance of physical culture in India was greatly influenced by the spiritual and philosophical frameworks that emphasised hardship, the connection between physical strength and mental clarity, moral discipline, and social responsibility. Across classical texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita, physical well-being is consistently presented as being intertwined with spiritual and societal flourishing. Strength, endurance, and flexibility were not initially seen as functional traits, but were realised later as essential for developing resilience, discipline, and an honourable life. The idea that "a powerful soul cannot reside in a weak body" is one such integrated view, where fitness was seen as both a personal obligation and a communal one, blending the fitness of the individual body with the health of the community and the pursuit of dharma.

Central to this overall vision is the yoga tradition, one of India's most enduring contributions to global physical culture. Yoga combines physical postures (asanas), the regulation of breath (pranayama) and meditation (dhyana) in a coherent approach that goes beyond the importance of muscular aesthetics, unlike many Western fitness regimes that tend to focus on the outer appearance or performance aspects of a positive fitness program. Yoga emphasises harmony, mindfulness, and long-term wellness. Through its discipline of physical and mental development, yoga provides a system within which the physical discipline is inextricably

linked to ethical living, mental concentration and spiritual development. Its influence on Indian life can be seen not only in traditional Indian practices but also in the modern health/wellness movements throughout the world.

The historical progression of physical fitness in India, from the Indus Valley civilisation dancing, playing and bathing together are known, to the Vedic emphasis of martial prowess, to the epic and medieval blend of physical and moral training, up to the philosophical codification of bodily discipline, shows a continuum of values which celebrate holistic development. This cultural and philosophical backdrop further underscores the fact that fitness in India has never been a purely utilitarian or aesthetic activity, but has been a deeply embedded social, spiritual, and ethical pursuit. Understanding this rich heritage can bring some critical information into understanding fitness's cultural importance in the modern world, as well as a valuable paradigm for fitting ancient tenets into contemporary health, wellness and exercise regimes, for the study of which reaffirms the ongoing relevance of India's history of physical culture legacy into the modern world.

1.7. Fitness market size, structure and growth in India

1.7.1 Market size and revenue

India's fitness industry has experienced rapid and sustained growth over the past decade, driven by increased public awareness of preventive health, shifting urban lifestyles, and growing cultural acceptance of gym-based exercise. This kind of structural transformation marks not only economic growth but also a change in the body ideal and self-care narrative across the urban population (Nair, 2019). The development of the commercial gym and health club sector has institutionalised activity through membership-based establishments, ensuring the actuarial retention of the sport while standardising schemes and digitally mediated cultures of workouts to embed physical fitness into daily routines.

Concurrently, the growth of the sports and fitness goods market has occurred in parallel, reflecting the commodification of fitness through apparel, footwear, and performance equipment. This shift reflects a shift from informal physical culture to consumer-defined wellness, placing branded identity and lifestyle marketing in a significantly different and influential role in determining participation patterns. The increased demand for fitness equipment, both for homes and commercial venues, is an additional indicator of the privatisation of space and the growing influence of technology-driven training spaces. The

proliferation of health and fitness mobile apps is a result of a movement in which digital applications have become central to the everyday governance of health, as they enable self-tracking, virtual coaching, and algorithm-driven personalisation, forming the relationship between the body, technology, and discipline (Nair, 2019).

1.7.2 Market structure

The Indian fitness market is a complex and multifaceted ecosystem comprising a diverse range of services, products, and platforms that cater to the growing base of a health-conscious urban population. At the most basic level, there are gyms, health clubs, and fitness centres, of which there are many commercial chains, as well as many boutique studios and wellness centres. These facilities offer a wide range of services, including personalised programmes, group fitness classes, yoga, Pilates, and nutrition consultations, which often reflect the convergence of traditional exercise/lifestyle coaching with wellness-focused services.

Complementing physical spaces in the fitness equipment segment, where conventional machinery is combined with modern smart devices. Technological innovations, such as AI-enabled treadmills, IoT-enabled wearables, and interactive strength training machines, which allow for precise tracking of performance, real-time feedback, and personalised regimens, serve as a sign of the growing digitisation practice.

The sports and fitness goods segment is another critical market segment, encompassing activewear, sportswear, footwear, and sports-specific equipment. Rising consumer awareness of functional and performance-enhancing apparel has increased demand for products such as compression wear, ergonomic footwear, and breathable, durable fabrics. These goods address not only the professional athlete, but also an increasingly larger segment of fitness enthusiasts with a lifestyle-oriented approach.

Digital fitness platforms have become a significant growth driver, thanks to the availability of fitness apps and online workout programs, as well as coaching from these applications and integration with wearable devices. These platforms help introduce hybrid fitness models that allow users to blend in-gym routines with at-home or mobile-based exercises, which in turn helps expand the reach of fitness culture beyond the boundaries of physical centres.

Distribution channels for fitness products/services have grown increasingly hybrid, now including conventional brick-and-mortar retail stores as well as rapidly growing e-commerce

sites on the Internet. The ease and accessibility of online channels, along with the increased range of product choices in the online space, have accelerated the penetration of both equipment- and lifestyle-oriented fitness goods, especially among urban millennials and Gen Z consumers.

Global and domestic players determine market competition in India. Leading international brands, including Nike, Puma, Reebok, and Under Armour, dominate the sportswear and footwear landscape. Strategically, emerging Indian brands are focusing on their local inclinations, machinations, and fitness movements that connect culturally and are affordable at the same time. This competitive interaction underlines the fluid nature of the Indian fitness ecosystem, where the forces of globalisation, technological innovations, and the competitive playing field, as well as the consumer behaviour of the indigenous population, are key to defining the market structure and growth patterns.

1.7.3 Growth drivers and emerging trends in the Indian fitness market

India's fitness industry has shown unprecedented growth over the past decade, driven by rising health awareness, shifting lifestyles among the urban population, and economic growth. Greater awareness of chronic lifestyle diseases, coupled with an emphasis on post-pandemic immunity and holistic wellness practices, has inspired individuals to invest in structured physical activity and preventive care, thereby prioritising health and overall wellness (Sinha, 2020). The sector has also seen the rise of hybrid fitness models, which combine traditional fitness practices based on the gym with digital platforms, including live-streamed workout classes, AI-based workout plans, on-the-go video content, and app-mediated coaching. These innovations enable flexible, personalised, and independent engagement, bridging the gaps created by work schedules, travel, or public health restrictions (Nair, 2019).

User preferences are shifting towards functional and holistic fitness measures to enhance mobility, strength, posture correction, balance, and rehabilitation, indicating a move away from strictly aesthetic or weight-centred objectives. Technological developments such as innovative fitness equipment, wearable devices to monitor health behaviour, artificial (AI) powered apps and immersive and virtual reality (VR) training, offer a personalpersonalizedk, data driven goal setting and gamified motivation, thus changing the nature of exercise from a 'do it or die' to a measurable and socially sharable one (Sinha, 2020). Government-led

initiatives, such as Khelo India and the Fit India Movement, are policy-level accelerating factors for physical activity, especially among the youth. Meanwhile, the growing popularity of athleisure brings fitness into the mainstream of lifestyle and fashion (Nair, 2019).

Urbanised disposable incomes and aspirational consumption have also contributed to the uptake of premium gym memberships, personal training, wearables, supplements, and digital wellness subscriptions. The pandemic accelerated the transition to home-based workouts, and this continues to coexist with going to the gym, highlighting the flexibility, convenience, and integration with technology that today's consumers demand. Collectively, these developments represent that India's fitness industry has transformed into a tech-generated, culturally connected, and economically relevant ecosystem that is both culturally integrative of global fitness trends and local fitness practices, forming the patterns of lifestyle norms, health behaviours, and wellness-driven consumption patterns (Sinha, 2020; Nair, 2019).

1.8. Impact of the Coronavirus on the fitness industry in India

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a significant change in the Indian fitness sector. From the sudden shutdown of establishments to a significant drop in revenues, to a massive digital transition and a change in consumer behaviour, the pandemic was a watershed moment, changing how fitness is accessed, delivered, and perceived across the nation.

1.8.1. Immediate disruption as well as economic losses

Due to the sudden nationwide shutdown that began in March 2020, all gyms, fitness studios, and sports clubs in the country were forced to close. This abrupt halt of the operation caused mass paralysis in the industry.

The organised sector, which comprises major gym chains, boutique studios, and wellness centres, experienced a precipitous drop in revenue, with estimates indicating losses of 60-70 per cent during the first year of the pandemic. Such financial devastation hit small and mid-size gyms particularly hard, as many of them were unable to keep operating for extended periods due to fixed operational costs, including rent, utilities, and staff salaries.

In addition, the economic impact was not just to proprietors. The fitness industry, which employs hundreds of thousands of people, has suffered significantly. It includes trainers,

supporting personnel, and freelance personnel, many of whom are deprived of formal job security and benefits.

1.8.2. change in consumer behaviour and fitness routine

The pandemic has fundamentally changed the way Indians seek fitness. With standard workout spaces closed, there has been a pronounced increase in home-based practice. Consumers switched to home gyms, and the sales response included resistance bands, dumbbells, kettlebells, yoga mats and treadmills.

Online fitness content consumption grew at an exponential rate. Platforms like Cure.fit, HealthifyMe, Cult. Live, and YouTube became sights commonplace to millions who streamed guided workout sessions, yoga and well-being talks from the safety of their homes. Global applications like Nike Training Club and Peloton also gained popularity among urban users seeking a structured virtual workout.

At the same time, besides online e-learning, outdoor and socially distanced activities — in public parks or on terraces — such as running, cycling, and yoga, became fashionable. This shift was representative of a broader shift in popular exercises towards personalised, self-directed fitness routines.

1.8.3. Accelerated digital transformation in the fitness industry

The most significant long-term impact of the pandemic on the fitness industry has been the accelerated digital transformation. To stay relevant, fitness businesses have been forced to adopt a hybrid approach that combines offline and online services. Many studios and trainers have started live-streaming classes, creating on-demand video libraries, and developing mobile apps and subscription-based digital platforms. This transition was not just temporary; it significantly altered the revenue model for many businesses. At the end of 2021, some companies said that digital services accounted for 40-50% of their overall revenue.

Concurrently, consumers have made greater use of technology in their fitness journeys than ever before. Wearables, fitness trackers, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based personalised programs, and real-time progress dashboards have become ubiquitous. The amalgamation of fitness and technology has made workouts more data-driven, adaptive, and customised.

Changes in market structure and business models

The pandemic-induced crisis also restructured the fitness marketplace. Many independent or underfunded gyms shut down permanently, unable to recover from sustained losses, while larger and well-funded chains like Cult continue to operate. Fit (formerly Cure.fit) and Gold's Gym India, although hit hard, weathered the storm and increased their market share via acquisitions and franchising. Another interesting trend included the growth of boutique and specialised post-pandemic. Consumer interest in smaller, niche formats surged, particularly among individuals interested in yoga, CrossFit, HIIT, Pilates, and functional training, and especially within the context of sanitation, limited class sizes, and personalisation. This change thumped the market away from "one for all" towards a targeted and holistic fitness environment.

1.8.5. Increasing health awareness & new market opportunities

The coronavirus pandemic has raised awareness in the public domain about the importance of immunity, preventive healthcare, and mental well-being, which has boosted the demand for holistic fitness solutions, including physical activity, nutrition, mindfulness, and mental health practices (Sinha, 2020). Participation in both yoga and meditation rose, as well as wellness coaching, where individuals were adding these routines to their everyday lives to deal with stress, anxiety and other issues arising from the pandemic.

At the organisational level, corporate wellness programmes were on the rise, with the offer of virtual fitness and mindfulness programmes to support employee health, especially for those working remotely. This shift also opened up new opportunities for fitness professionals and digital platforms to target corporate clients, as part of a broader transformation of the profession towards flexible, integrated, and health-focused service models (Nair, 2019).

1.8.6. Challenges, recovery and the way forward

The Indian fitness industry has demonstrated good resilience in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic; however, the path to complete recovery has been uneven and slow (Sinha, 2020). Numerous gyms have faced challenges in recovering to their previous membership levels pre-pandemic due to lingering health concerns, economic constraints, and the emergence of new fitness practices that increasingly require people to avoid attending gyms altogether (Nair, 2019).

For facilities that continued to operate, significant investments in enhanced safety protocols, such as rigorous sanitisation, contactless access systems, reduced class sizes, and regular temperature monitoring measures, were required. This increased operational costs and transformed traditional business models (Sinha, 2020).

A notable and long-lasting change in the sector has been the widely spread use of hybrid fitness models. Although physical gyms are witnessing a slow return of their patrons, there is a clear consumer preference for blended or fully digital fitness experiences, the value of which could be attributed to their flexibility, convenience, and cost-effectiveness (Nair, 2019). The pandemic catalysed innovation in fitness, with technology becoming an increasingly integral part of people's fitness practices. It is a period of interpersonal disturbance, not only causing operational adaptations but also leading to the reconstruction of a new fitness culture that reflects a culture of holistic well-being, prevention of health worries, and individualistic participation, as well as participation unrelated to aesthetic objectives (Sinha, 2020).

Looking to the future, the direction the Indian fitness industry is moving in appears to be more about hybrids, inclusivity, and technology. The sector is set to become more deeply ingrained in everyday life with a paradigm shift in which physical activity, digital engagement and wellness consciousness, the three elements, meet (Nair, 2019). This transformation highlights a larger cultural shift, where fitness is perceived not only as an activity to achieve aesthetic goals within the body, but also as a multifaceted commitment to overall well-being, including fitness, health, stability, and long-term well-being (Sinha, 2020).

1.9 Research Problem Statement

In present-day urban India, fitness centres have transformed from mere spaces of physical activity to fraught sites, resonating cultural spaces that produce, reinforce, and interrogate embodied identities. In Hyderabad, a metropolis poised to experience massive increases in urbanisation, the city's dreams, and growing digital consumption, gyms become pertinent sites where individuals undergo bodily transformation, engage in social negotiations, and craft aspirational self-narratives. These activities are more than exercise, however, but represent more expansive cultural signifiers linked to issues of health, aesthetics, discipline, productivity, and modern urban lives.

Despite the rise in the fitness industry and growth in the popularity of gym culture in India, there remains a lack of scholarly attention, particularly in the fields of anthropology and urban sociology, which are micro-sociologically sensitive to the dynamics within these spaces. Current literature is biased towards medical, commercial or behavioural aspects of fitness, thereby overlooking its socio-cultural overtones within the Indian setting. Consequently, we lack substantive empirical knowledge regarding the extent to which Hyderabad's gym environments mediate hierarchies of class, caste, gender, age, and religion that intersect with each other, and how and in what ways these hierarchies are negotiated through embodied practice, social interaction, and symbolic consumption.

Furthermore, the Hyderabad fitness landscape is being increasingly affected by digital technologies, including fitness trackers, workout applications, online training platforms, and social media content. These tools have reconfigured how individuals view and control their bodies, giving rise to new forms of surveillance, self-discipline, and aspirational comparison. The flow of globalised imagery via Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok promotes the normalisation of body ideals that can be adopted, appropriated, or resisted by local populations. However, little research exists on the intersection of these digital flows and on-ground gym experiences, particularly in relation to access, visibility, and belonging.

Moreover, gyms are often depicted as inclusive and democratic, yet participating is framed by socio-economic class factors (such as cost of membership) and spatial location, linguistic norms, gendered expectations, and cultural etiquette when participating. The flip side of school sport- the internal social architecture of gyms, which incorporates trainer-client relations, body surveillance, and informal hierarchies - indicates that the *الرسمي* structures (sports facilities), however, gyms also enable empowerment and reproduce exclusion. The labour relations within gyms, on the one hand, between trainers, managers, and influencers, and on the other, the broader patterns of urban labour, point to the sector as both aspirational and precarious.

The fundamental research issue then is to understand how gyms in Hyderabad operate as sites of intersection of physical practice, digital mediation, consumer culture and social frameworks. This study seeks to understand how people engage with gyms not simply to attain physical fitness, but also to manage identities, status, belonging, and aspirations in an increasingly digital and neoliberal urban context.

Interrogating living experiences, embodied routines and spatiality, and mediated representation, the research aims to generate a complex analysis of gym culture as a dynamic social field. The study will have implications in interdisciplinary debates about the areas of embodiment, techno-culture, leisure and urban modernity in India, including the transformation of fitness culture towards a reflection of broader changes in everyday life, social values, and urban subjectivity.

1.9.1 Research Rationale

The focus of this research is rooted in both academic and socio-cultural requirements, as this study identifies the need for a critical examination of contemporary fitness cultures in modern India, with special reference to the changing scenario in the gym world of Hyderabad.

1.9.2 Academic Importance

This study has significant academic value in filling a major gap in the scholarship on fitness, body culture, and digital mediation in anthropology, sociology, and popular media studies. While a well-developed corpus of literature exists on the global history of gym spaces and fitness practices, as well as their interaction with bombs, the Indian urban landscape remains relatively unexplored, particularly in cities like Hyderabad. Convergence here refers to the rapid globalisation of digital technology and local socio-cultural norms. However, the research that has been done often focuses on Western contexts or individual aspects of fitness, such as health outcomes or consumer behaviour, and rarely touches on the social, cultural, and technological elements of practices today in India.

The combination of ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth qualitative interviews, and structured quantitative surveys in the integrated research design will produce richly layered understandings of the world of gym-goers and fitness professionals as they navigate their day-to-day lives. It brings the complicated processes by which identities are performed, negotiated, and contested in gym spaces to the forefront, while analysing larger structures of society (hierarchies along gender lines, caste lines, class lines, and bodily practices around aspiration) that shape these embodied practices.

Moreover, the research contributes to interdisciplinary dialogue between the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and media studies: theoretical perspectives on embodiment, biopower(s), social stratification, and digital culture. It proposes a conceptual approach to

understanding the relationships between physical culture and digital technologies in the context of fitness, as well as empirical evidence on how fitness ideals from around the world have shaped fitness practices and their localised forms.

The methodological synergy of qualitative and quantitative approaches contributes to the academic rigour of the study, allowing for a nuanced investigation of both the micro (social interactions within gyms) and macro (participation, technology adoption, and aspirational behaviours) patterns of participation. This dual approach not only enriches the analysis of embodied social practices but also enables broader generalisations with respect to trends and dynamics influencing urban fitness culture in contemporary India.

In essence, this research contributes to and extends academic knowledge of fitness as a practice that is socially, culturally, and technologically embedded. Gym spaces can be seen as a point of intersection where to study a range of embodiment, identity, and digital mediation in the increasingly changing urban Indian landscape. As such, it fills a gap in the existing literature and also lays a foundation for future studies on urban health, leisure, and digital practices in India and similar emerging economies.

1.9.3 Socio-Cultural Relevance

Beyond its academic contributions, this research has significant socio-cultural implications, positioning Hyderabad's gym spaces as ethnographically rich sites for understanding contemporary urban life. Gyms are not simple arenas for physical exercise, but socially and culturally shaped multiplicities of the performative, negotiating and contesting embodied identities. Through an anthropological lens, these spaces reveal aspirational ideals, gendered expectations, caste hierarchies, and class distinctions as one navigates the fitness and body management practices of everyday life.

Reading through the intersections between the mediating role of technology, global fitness ideals, and localised norms, the research highlights the mediating qualities of technological platforms, such as social media and fitness apps, influencer cultures, and the experiences of inclusion, exclusion, and self-presentation. Ethnographic approaches, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, allow for a deeper examination of how gym-goers manage these dynamics and the lived realities of embodiment, social interaction, and aspiration.

Furthermore, gyms are miniature versions of broader social structures that determine power relations, social mobility, and extraordinary digital/cultural capital, all through physical practice, performance, and digital representation. From this perspective, fitness spaces are both sites of possible empowerment and exclusion, highlighting the socio-political aspects of the domains of leisure, health, and corporeal self-fashioning in urban India.

In summary, this study bridges the interface between theoretical and practical concerns, providing ethnographically based insights into contemporary fitness culture. It contributes to an anthropological understanding of embodiment, leisure, and sociality in urban spaces, providing critical insight into the workings of gyms as culturally and socially situated spaces that mediate the complex interplay of global desires, local practices, and digital interventions affecting the daily lives of urban Indians.

1.10 Research Questions

The following enquiries inform our enquiry into the place of identity in gym spaces in Hyderabad:

1. How, to the extent that the functions of the gym as a public arena, do participants construct, negotiate and perform bodily identities?
2. What is the role of digital technologies in the making of gym culture and forms of fitness identities in Hyderabad?
3. To what extent do intersecting social categories, such as class, gender, caste, and aspiration, manifest and interact within these gym environments?
4. What are the life and ethnographic experiences of both gym-goers and fitness professionals in the city?
5. In what ways is the gym culture a space of digital democratisation?
6. How have gym spaces in Hyderabad become part of broader global anthropological understandings of leisure, body politics, and the digital?

1.11 Objectives of the Study

1. To critically analyse spaces in Hyderabad as places where embodied identities are created, negotiated and performed.
2. To examine intersectionality between class, gender, caste and aspiration in the gym space.

3. To record the ethnographic experiences of both gym-goers and fitness professionals.
4. To evaluate gym culture as a form of digital democratisation.
5. To give something to the field of urban anthropology in relation to leisure, body politics and digital life.

1.12 Research Methodology

The research work employed a mixed-methods ethnographic case study design with a quantitative survey component to fully address the research questions.

1.12.1. Ethnographic Case Study Sub Component

The ethnographic dimension served as the primary methodological framework for studying the culture of gyms in Hyderabad. Rooted in the field of anthropology, Ethnography has focused on long-term engagement, immersion into the context, and the practice of creating thick descriptive accounts. Within this paradigm, participant observation and semi-structured interviews were to be implemented to investigate embodied experiences, social hierarchies, and cultural meanings that shape gym practices in the selected sites.

Fieldwork was conducted from 2022 to 2023 in four different gyms, which were identified as representative of socio-economic and cultural diversity within the city (Ash Sports Academy, Force Fitness Studio, a low-cost community gym, and a traditional akhara). Each site was visited repeatedly, and sessions lasted approximately two to three hours. Visits were spread out strategically across the morning, evening and late-night operational periods to record variation in demographic patterns, training routines, and social interaction styles. It was the way the research could reflect the ebb and flow, as well as the microcultures, of gym environments throughout a day.

Participant observation entailed both active participation and peripheral observation, depending on the setting and social dynamics. At times, the researcher was directly involved in workout sessions in an attempt to build rapport, minimise, and gain an understanding of embodied dimensions of fitness practices. At other times, a non-intrusive observational role was adopted to record spatial interactions, behavioural patterns, equipment usage, gendered mobility on the gym floor, informal communication networks, as well as trainer-client interactions and peer workout groups.

Detailed field notes were taken after each visit to maintain the richness of the context, including sound, who was where and how, bodily rhythm, scent, routine, and people talking and interacting with one another. These notes contributed to capturing the sense of the affective dimension of gym life, something that is often very hard to access through interviews alone.

Informal conversations with gym members, trainers, front desk staff, nutrition consultants, and fitness influencers naturally occurred throughout the observation periods. Over time, these became more specific in dealing with motivations for going to the gym, journeys in body transformation, notions of progress and failure, and the processes of digital platforms- fitness apps and social media- in shaping aspirations for the body and the self.

To enhance and develop these understandings in a more in-depth manner, semi-quantitative (qualitative) interviews were conducted with selected participants. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, allowing participants to explain their personal histories, socio-economic background, and experiences with the gym, as well as their gendered experiences and perceptions of body politics, in their own terms. The flexible format allowed for consistency throughout the interviews, while also allowing for the exploration of themes that emerged and were unique to each individual.

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed during the research procedure. Informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Sensitive issues, such as body image, insecurities, or social exclusion, were handled lovingly, and participants were given the right to drop out of any question or the research itself at any time.

By combining embodied engagement, narrative inquiry, and in-depth contextual observation, the ethnographic case study approach facilitated an understanding of gym spaces in Hyderabad as unified social worlds. Beyond the act of documenting activity in itself, the methodology provided insight into the cultural production, social negotiations, and bodily experiences of fitness as related to broader themes of aspiration, identity, hierarchy, and digital mediation in contemporary urban India.

1.12.2. Quantitative Survey Component

The quantitative part of this inquiry was aimed at supporting the ethnographic fieldwork and to provide empirically quantifiable patterns and statistically informed insights regarding the

demographics, behaviours, and perceptions of gym users in Hyderabad. A well-designed and organised questionnaire was given to a group of 120 people, spread across four strategically located gyms. The instrument included closed, Likert and multiple-choice questions, quoted in different and relevant order, around principal conceptual axes relevant to the research question, including motivations to participate in physical exercise in the gym, the formation of identities or fitness, the role of digital technology, sometimes included in the physical exercise routines, the perception of social hierarchies and the identification of self-presentation practices in the gym environment.

Approximately twenty participants from each of the gyms participated in completing the questionnaire. The survey was available in both digital and paper modes, depending on individual preference and accessibility. Digital administration was supported with mobile-based survey software (especially for tech-savvy respondents), and printed forms were provided for those who were not tech literate or did not prefer to be engaged offline.

The purpose of this quantitative data collection was two-fold. First, it allowed for the measurement of trends and frequencies of behaviour that might otherwise slip through the cracks through positive but qualitative observation alone - such as frequency of exercise, expenditure on fitness products and engagement with digital fitness platforms. Second, the survey component supported triangulation in the methodology by validating, contrasting, or extending findings that emerged from participant observation and qualitative interviewing. In doing so, it enhanced both the robustness and generalizability of the study's conclusions within the defined sample frame.

All the survey responses were made anonymous. The resulting data were then encoded and analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency distributions, percentage analysis, and cross-tabulation, to interrogate relationships between demographic variables and patterns of behaviour. Where relevant, these quantitative findings were qualitatively interpreted in conjunction with ethnographic findings to ensure the depth and coherence of the analysis.

1.12.3. Sampling Method: Sampling from a Random

Sampling was intentionally designed to represent the heterogeneous nature of participation in gyms in Hyderabad. The four selected gym sites represented different socio-economic, cultural, and spatial settings, including high-end fitness chains (Ash Sports Academy, Force

Fitness Studio), mid-range neighbourhood gyms and locally owned fitness centres. This species of purposive site selection ensured that a wide range of fitness practices, motivations, and embodied identities were covered across class, caste, gender, and urban locality.

Once the gym sites were finalised, simple random sampling was used to select the participants for both the survey and interview components. Lists of active gym members were obtained with the permission of gym management, ensuring ethical transparency and adherence to institutional protocol. From these lists, approximately twenty individuals per gym were chosen randomly to participate in the quantitative survey. Each participant, chosen at random, was personally contacted or contacted through their gym staff to provide detailed information about the study and to obtain informed consent.

From the pool of survey participants, a smaller portion of five to seven respondents was then selected from each gym to participate in qualitative interviewing, again using random sampling procedures. This dual-stage random selection method helped avoid researcher bias in the recruitment process. It enabled representativeness to be achieved across variables such as age, gender, time spent in the gym, social background and levels of digital engagement in fitness activities.

Random sampling, therefore, played a crucial role in enhancing methodological rigour. It allowed the research to go beyond engagement based on convenience. It ensured that the voices brought in represented the diversity in embodied, digital, and social experiences intrinsic to Hyderabad's fitness landscape. This sampling structure also provided a greater degree of reliability and replicability for the quantitative portion of the study while adding depth to the qualitative portion by ensuring interview pathways represent a broad cross-section of gym-going demographics, rather than a selected subculture.

1.12.4. Data Collection Methods

The research employed three primary methods of data collection: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and structured questionnaires, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the depth and breadth of Hyderabad's gym culture. Each of the methods had a different purpose within the mixed-methods framework, which together helped facilitate the triangulation of the empirical insights.

Participant Observation: Participant observation formed the central component of the fieldwork's ethnographic approach. The researchers were immersed in gym settings for long periods, participating in workouts with members to observe embodied routines, interactions between people, and the use of space. Particular focus was brought to the utilisation of devices, including fitness apps, wearables, and online tracking systems, as well as informal social hierarchies manifested through body language, access to equipment, social clustering, and performativity. Field notes were carefully taken during each observation session to record sensory, interactional, and contextual information, thereby minimising disruption to the natural environment.

Semi-structured interviews: Various semi-structured interviews were conducted with a specific pool of respondents to obtain personal narratives and reflexive stories of their experiences in fitness spaces. The interview guide included open-ended questions related to fitness aspirations, body image, identity creation, digital tracking, and the experiences of inclusion or marginalisation in the gym. This flexible format allowed the participants to fill in on themes that arose organically in the dialogue. Interviews were audio-recorded, consent was obtained, and the audio recordings were later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Survey Questionnaire: The structured questionnaire provided systematic quantitative information on the identification of demographic patterns and measurable trends among the gym users. The survey gathered data related to age, sex, socio-economic class marker, and patterns of gym usage, combined with perceptions of access, engagement with technology and inspiration relating to fitness. The questionnaire also included questions about the perceived role of technology in constructing routines, social belonging, and self-expression within the gym culture. Responses were coded and analysed using descriptive and comparative statistical techniques.

1.12.5. Data Analysis

The data synthesis from the collection process was subjected to a two-tier analysis, representing the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the study.

Qualitative Data: Interview transcripts and field notes were analysed using the method of thematic analysis. The process involved several stages, which began with open coding to identify salient units of data. Subsequent axial coding enabled the clustering of related observations into larger thematic categories, such as embodiment, masculinity and

femininity, aspiration, class expression, and digital mediation. Ultimately, selective coding led to the development of overall analytical narratives regarding the relationship between gym culture and broader socio-cultural phenomena in urban Hyderabad. Reflexive memoing and iterative interpretation ensured that newly developing insights were always embedded within the empirical material.

Quantitative Data: Survey data were primarily analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise demographic indicators, frequency of gym attendance, usage tails, and perceptions of inclusion and exclusion. Cross-tabulations were conducted to compare the responses with individual variables (gender, age group, and socio-economic indicators) and identify patterns of variation, linking them to the qualitative responses. The quantitative analysis was a check component of the ethnographic material, including a cheque and an explanation.

1.12.6. Justification for the Research Design

The research design was strategically chosen to respond to the multi-layered, socially embedded, and digitally mediated nature of contemporary gym environments.

First, ethnographic case studies within gym settings have been demonstrated in sociological and anthropological literature to be an effective means of uncovering interpersonal subtleties, affective practices, and embodied norms that cannot be captured through survey-based methods alone. The use of participant observation and semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to record not participants' perspectives but the actual lived practices and interactions.

Second, the inclusion of random sampling in the survey component aimed to enhance the representativeness and validity of the results. By ensuring the inclusion of every member of the selected gyms with an equal chance, the study minimised systematic bias and gathered different perspectives from individuals who varied in their digital fitness, as well as in terms of gender, class background, and caste identity.

Third, the use of the mixed-method approach allowed for analytical complementarity. The qualitative part gave the study depth with interpretive richness, especially with respect to identity formation, affectiveness, aspiration, and social hierarchy; the quantitative part provided structure, comparability, and measurable pattern recognition. Together, these

methods led to a multi-dimensional and empirically substantiated understanding of the gym culture as a forceful contemporary cultural microcosm located in Hyderabad.

1.13 Significance of the Study

The present inquiry makes a significant contribution to the scholarship on urban body politics by rethinking gyms in Hyderabad as complex socio-cultural institutions, rather than simply as venues for physical work. By approaching these spaces as elements of a setting where embodied identities, social gradients and infrastructures- all digitalotropic in nature intersect, the study sets human fitness as a powerful analytical tool with which to understand wider processes of urban change, modernisation, and transformation in India.

In moving away from narrowly biomedical or individualistic understandings of fitness practices, these practices are considered socially embedded through the research. It sheds light on the gym setting as a site of meaning-making, social negotiation, and identity formation, thereby confirming the relevance of fitness studies in interdisciplinary conversations across anthropology, sociology, digital culture studies, and urban studies.

A central contribution is in the analysis of how gym spaces affect and are being affected in relation to gendered, caste-based, class-indexed, and aspirational identities. The rise of urban Indian gyms as elite lifestyle destinations, compared to gyms of the past dedicated to bodybuilding, has turned the symbolic currency of the 'fit body' into one of modernity, discipline, and aspired to mobility. The study documents the performative, contested, and negotiated nature of these kinds of meanings in everyday interactions, routines, and bodily practices, thereby contributing to the scholarship on embodiment and identity formation in contemporary India.

The investigation also highlights the growing influence of digital technologies, including fitness apps, wearable devices, algorithm-driven training programs, and social media, on fitness practices and social interactions in gym spaces. Digital mediation influences the way gym-goers track their body progress, share accomplishments, learn, and create self-representations within the public analysis. By analysing processes, the research uncovers the circulation, localisation, and globalised norms in the unique socio-cultural context of Hyderabad, which contribute to the changing disciplinary patterns of scholarly interest in digital anthropology and techno-culture.

An intersectional framework further amplifies the significance of the study by highlighting the ongoing issue of inequality and exclusion in fitness spaces. The research lays out the dissecting of how access to and experiences within gyms are still controlled by privilege, economic capacity, caste-based dynamics of spaces and gendered expectations. Through an analysis of the aspirations of the middle classes and neoliberal discourses of self-regulation, productivity, and responsibility, the study reveals how gym culture has simultaneously provided opportunities for social mobility while reinforcing hierarchies.

The ethnographic depth of the work provides the book with an important framework and a rich, empirical supply of persons' documentation of quotidian life within gym contexts. Detailed observations of routines, interactions, technologies, and spatial practices shed new light on the development of discipline, motivation, belonging, and the formation of social networks in these environments, leading to a better anthropological understanding of leisure, body politics, and the nature of community formation in modernising cities.

Finally, by exposing both possibilities of digital democratisation in the current gym culture, the research has practical implications for industry stakeholders, policy makers and urban planners. As fitness becomes increasingly entrenched within the spheres of middle-class addictions and digital environments in India, the insights generated here will serve as a foundational knowledge base essential for designing equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive fitness settings and environments.

1.14 Limitations of the Study

True to the limitations of qualitative and mixed-methods research, this study is constrained by contextual, methodological, and temporal factors that define the scope of its results and their potential generalizability.

Firstly, the geographical and cultural specificities of the research site limit the transferability of insights. The study focuses entirely on gym spaces in Hyderabad, a metropolitan setting characterised by class formations, linguistic diversity, and the rapid incorporation of technology. Given that the gym culture across India is significantly different due to infrastructural, economic, and cultural inequalities, as well as variations in access to different technologies, the findings may not provide a holistic representation of fitness cultures in other urban or rural settings.

Methodologically, the resort to ethnographic techniques - participant observation and semi-structured interviews - allows rich and contextualised accounts of lived experience to remain subject to notions of interpretive gaze arising from the positionality of the researcher. The complexity and multifaceted nature of body politics, aspirations, and digital mediation in gym environments mean that the meanings derived are potentially influenced by a researcher's own identity, social background, and interpretive framework. Additionally, the nature of ethnography requires a small sample size; as a result, while the information is detailed and nuanced, it may not capture a fuller set of empirical patterns that large-scale quantitative studies might reveal.

Access to participants also presented some significant constraints. Despite using random sampling within each selected gym, representation gaps could not be avoided. Existing patterns of gym membership in Hyderabad - Individuals from lower socio-economic strata, caste-marginalised groups, and women and older adults were comparatively more difficult to engage. The emphasis on formal settings in the gym thus further marginalised fitness modes within the community or the domestic setting, which are an essential but less visible part of the fitness landscape in India. Accordingly, the research primarily represents the experiences of individuals with economic, cultural, and technological capital in engaging with commercial fitness spaces.

The fact that digital fitness cultures are in rapid change is another challenge. Fitness applications, wearable technologies, and influencer-driven trends are fluid and dynamic, making it challenging to identify long-term and stable trends. As digital platforms continually evolve in terms of characteristics and modes of participation, the findings may constitute a snapshot of a constantly changing process of technological transition. They may not represent a definitive or long-lasting configuration of digital embodiment practices.

Temporality further limits the study. Fieldwork conducted from 2022 to 2023 reflects a specific juncture following the pandemic, during which hybrid fitness models (combining online and in-person formats) were emerging. Fitness behaviours, gym marketing strategies, and digital engagement patterns are likely to change in the following years, especially as economic conditions, health consciousness, and technological integration evolve.

Finally, as quantitative survey methods were introduced, the study is mainly qualitative in nature. While this affordance provides depth, texture and nuance, it has the drawback of

limiting the ability to statistically generalise about behaviour or quantify the prevalence of phenomena such as digital dependency, issues of body image, specific anxieties or socio-economic barriers to participation. Moreover, the sensitive nature of the topics being discussed (body image, caste dynamics, personal digital practices) opens the door to response bias, in which participants may have subconsciously or otherwise manipulated their responses to align with what they perceived as the appropriate response to elicit.

Taken together, these limitations do not devalue the study's contributions, but rather contextualise and enhance the understanding of its interpretations. They also shed light on important avenues for future research, particularly comparative, longitudinal, and statistically based research that could expand and extend the insights generated herein.

1.15. Theoretical Orientation

The study of gym spaces in Hyderabad fits within a multi-theoretical framework composed of a blend of sociological, anthropological, and critical theoretical perspectives, which are indebted to one another and therefore allow for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between bodies, spatial ordering, and social hierarchies. Michel Foucault's ideas of discipline and surveillance yield an analytical perspective through which gyms might be viewed as a site of the regulation of bodies; routines, surveillance, and performance norms are collectively muscliciously. Such venues are thus panoptic, enforcing through peer pressure and educational tools, such as digital platforms, a subtle control of the self, of control over norms, and internalised control over the body.

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital provide insight into the impact that social class, educational level, and cultural exposure have on fitness practices. Gym-goers are not just training for health; they are practising dispositions that they have learned, expressing taste and developing bodily capital that indicates status, belonging, and identity in a specific field of social activity. Such practices reinforce social hierarchies, as being part of a specific gym or being able to perform certain routines is symbolic of social positioning.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is instrumental in analysing the way masculinities and femininities are performed in fitness spaces. Through attire, exercise regimes, posture, and interaction, individuals enact socially recognisable norms of gender and also negotiate, challenge or subvert them. Gyms are also the sites of gendered performances

that are visible and socially strengthened, which in turn reveal the cultural expectations for bodily comportment.

Finally, the discipline of spatial anthropology, and especially the concept of the production of space, as developed by Henri Lefebvre, provides valuable insights for the study of gym architecture and the organisation of space. Gyms are not neutral spaces; the configuration of facilities, mirrors, open spaces and digital interfaces organises the social interaction, hierarchy and visibility. The physical and symbolic organisation of space guides behaviours, facilitates some practices and constrains others; hence, spatial similarities are necessary to understand the cultural microcosm of Hyderabad gyms.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a robust analytical framework for developing the concept of the gym as more than just a place of exercise, but as a socially, culturally, and spatially ordered arena where identity, power, and embodiment intersect.

1.15.1 Foucault: Discipline and Surveillance in Gym Spaces.

The concepts of discipline and surveillance, as developed by Michel Foucault, especially in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), provide an essential framework for understanding the workings of gym space in regulating bodies and behaviour. Foucault argues that modern institutions, such as prisons, schools, or hospitals, are mechanisms of observation and normalisation of particular conduct of individuals. In the case of gyms, this principle is expressed through various means, including the guidance of coaches, observation by their colleagues, fixed routines, and even the arrangement of equipment in space. Members internalise these expectations, which involve self-monitoring of their performance and self-modification of behaviour to meet normative ideals of fitness, strength, or aesthetics.

Gyms are panoptic spaces (borrowing the term from Bentham's panopticon), spaces of constant visibility, which produce self-regulation. Mirrors, open configurations, and digital tracking devices create an environment where an individual is constantly aware that they are being watched - not only by their trainers, but also by their peers and, increasingly, social media documentation. This visibility promotes discipline, allowing for the shaping of posture, form, effort, and presentation of the body. Over time, gym-goers internalise these norms, which turn outside observation into an internal observation of oneself. In response to this surveillance, they conform to culturally and socially constructed standards of fitness and bodily aesthetics.

Foucault's framework also emphasises how the operation of power is through knowledge and technique. In gyms, trainers play the role of experts, transferring the science of exercise, diet, and performance to the athlete. This expertise fosters hierarchical relationships: those who comply with instructions see their lives enriched with visible achievements, recognition, and elevated status, while failure or non-conformity is implicitly policed. The way we work out in a structured way, feel repetition, even using a digital fitness app, are some examples that use disciplinary techniques to standardise bodies and practices throughout different populations.

Ultimately, Foucault's ideas shed light on the fact that gyms are not neutral spaces, but are instead involved in perpetuating larger societal norms surrounding productivity, discipline, and the ideal body. Physical exercise becomes a moral and social obligation, not only determining health but also influencing identity, self-esteem, and social capital. In the gyms of Hyderabad, the amalgamation of traditional practices, corporate branding, and digital technology enshrines a complex and hybrid policy of discipline, wherein bodies are constantly shaped, watched, and graded, making Foucault's lens indispensable in analysing an anthropological experience in the discipline spaces of fitness.

1.15.2. Bourdieu Habitus and Cultural Capital in Gym Spaces

Pierre's theorising on habitus and cultural capital makes a valuable contribution to the discussion of how social class, upbringing, and acquired dispositions impact participation in gyms. Habitus is a term used by sociologists to refer to a system of instincts and skills (habitual dispositions) acquired by individuals through the process of socialisation. In the gyms, habitus is manifested in the manner in which they approach exercise, in their choice of routines, in their choice of clothing and in the way they interact with their trainers and peers. For example, middle- or upper-class individuals might be more familiar with certain forms of structured workouts, etiquette in a personal training context, or fitness technology apps, reflecting a body-conscious habitus that has been nurtured over time as a result of exposure to specific social and cultural environments.

Cultural capital expands the theoretical framework of Bourdieu by highlighting the significance of knowledge, skills, and bodily practices in terms of social advantage. In physical gyms, cultural capital is manifested in the mastery of exercise methods, knowledge of fitness trends, and a readiness to showcase an 'ideal' body, according to aesthetic standards. Possessing such capital not only improves one's individual fitness outcomes, but it is also a

marker of social difference and impacts social status within the gym's hierarchies. Membership in exclusive gyms and familiarity with boutique fitness programmes, following the norms of dietary and exercise behaviours, can all serve as forms of embodied and institutionalised cultural capital.

Bourdieu's lens is also effective in explaining the route that gyms take to reproduce social hierarchies. While physical strategies can make spaces seem open, the manifold, differing degrees of knowledge and performance of fitness norms create room for subtle exclusions. Gym-goers navigate these hierarchies through appropriate behaviours and displays of competence and affiliation into the dominant culture of the space. Habitus and cultural capital, therefore, affect both the individual experience and the collective social dynamics, determining who belongs, who is admired, and who is marginalised in the subcultures of the gym.

Ultimately, Bourdieu's framework facilitates an understanding of the complexities surrounding aspiration and identity formation in gyms. Individuals practise and adopt particular aesthetics that belong to specific social classes in order to advance their social status, thus illustrating the link between the body, social mobility, and symbolic power. In Hyderabad, this scenario is evident in the performance of fitness, ranging from corporate gyms, boutique studios, and community spaces, which serve as markers of status, identity, and belonging, as well as embodied knowledge and style.

1.15.3 Butler: Gender Performance in the Gym Spaces

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity provides an important perspective from which to examine the issues of how masculinities and femininities are performed, sustained and sometimes resisted in gym spaces. Nevertheless, according to Butler, gender is not a static characteristic, but a recurring performance that is determined by social regulations and cultural expectations. In gyms, this performativity is reflected in the ways individuals display their bodies, clothing, gestures, and behaviours within the gym, in line with socially constructed ideals of masculinity and femininity. For instance, male participants may engage in weightlifting, bodybuilding, or competitive displays of strength to enact hegemonic masculinity, demonstrating dominance and physical competency within the gym hierarchy. Female participants, on the other hand, often navigate visibility, safety, and societal

expectations through the choice of gender specific workout spaces, clothing or exercise routines that balance the need for fitness with socially acceptable forms of femininity.

Butler's framework emphasises how these performances are contextual and also relational. In gyms in Hyderabad, gendered behaviour is influenced not only by individual choices but also by the perception of peers and trainers, as well as digital exposure. Social media platforms heighten gendered performance as gym-goers document their exercise routines, share progress pictures, and participate in fitness challenges, continuing to reinforce normative ideals of attractiveness, strength, and body aesthetics. Such performativity becomes an instrument of empowerment and at the same time a source of social pressure, because people internalise expectations and constantly review how they display themselves bodily.

Gender performativity also highlights the agility and challenge of norms in the gym spaces. Managing "manly male"-interacted limitations, women start to challenge the status quo over time in earlier male-dominated spaces, try it out with strength training, and convey agency within digital fitness communities. Likewise, men can also embrace what is traditionally seen as feminine; yoga or group fitness regimes are examples of the changing norms of gendered embodiment. Butler's perspective, therefore, highlights that gyms are dynamic places where gendered identities are constantly performed, reinforced, and challenged, influencing social interactions, hierarchy, and body politics.

By applying Butler's theory, the study examines how representations of gender in gyms reflect broader social norms, power relations, and cultural expectations, aiming to identify the complex interplay between identity, body, and social recognition within the fitness culture of Hyderabad.

1.15.4 Spatial Anthropology: Lefebvre's Production of Space in the Case of Gyms

Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space offers a critical framework on how gyms are not neutral physical locations, but rather a social construction in which power, identity, and behaviour intersect. Lefebvre argues that space is created through a combination of physical design, social practices, and symbols, and is both created by and creates the social actors inhabiting it. In the context of Hyderabad's gyms, this perspective opens up a window into how spatial relations and the positioning of elements, such as equipment, open versus enclosed spaces, mirrors, and observation points, affect bodily practices, patterns of interaction, and even hierarchies.

Gyms are structured environments where the organisation of space directs routines, social proximity and enforces forms of behaviour. For example, spaces intended for free weights, cardio or group classes provide structure to the physical and social interactions that take place, implicitly enforcing hierarchies and access. Mirrors and visibility zones promote self-surveillance and the panoptic effect, and therefore Foucault's notion of discipline, while also creating a public display of the bodies of the gym-goers, perform them. Additionally, signage/branding/and use of digital displays creates symbolic meaning, tubifying (signalling) and signalling aspiration/e Asp mediates the ideals of other social, cultural and lifestyle norms in what participants signify in their routines.

Lefebvre's argument framework also stresses the dialectical relationship between space and social practice. Participants have a very active role in negotiating and personalising spaces in the gym, including routines, placement of personal possessions, informal groupings, and digital activities such as recording exercises and posting on social media. These practices create a lived and experienced space that exists parallel to the designed and formal space of the gym. Cultural, socioeconomic, and gendered differences further influence the way people perceive and operate in such spaces, underscoring spatial inequalities, inclusivity, and areas of comfort or exclusion.

By applying Lefebvre's Spatial Anthropology, this study examines how Hyderabad's gyms are socially and culturally constructed spaces where design, ritual, and behaviour co-produce the meaning of space. Gyms are microcosms in which physical designs, social hierarchies, and embodied practices come together, offering the context for the creation of identity, discipline, community, and collectivity, a cultural experience of fitness. This view complements a complex view, drawing on Foucauldian, Bourdieusian, and Butlerian perspectives on gyms, which fosters an understanding of gyms as physical and social places where bodies, practices, and space mutually constitute one another.

1.16. Chapterisation

Chapter 1 Introduction -Bounding Fitness and Urban Body Culture

Gyms in Hyderabad are more than places of physical exercise but serve as cultural spaces wherein notions of identity, sociality and technology are all snowed under. This study places the urban fitness culture in the global trends and contemporary Indian modernity and highlights the commitment of Hyderabad as an urban fitness culture influenced by

urbanisation, digital media, and body-conscious practises. The research is a response to the lack of anthropological work on Indian gyms, and asks important questions about hierarchy, class, gender and technology in shaping embodied practises. Playing with an ethnographic paradigm informed by Foucault's concept of discipline, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Butler's theory of gender performativity and Lefebvre's concept of the production of space, it aims at interpreting gyms as microcosms of social life.

Chapter 2: Literature and Conceptual Framework Review

Existing scholarship on gyms and fitness culture often conceptualises the body as a point of social, cultural, and symbolic significance; however, city specific ethnographic studies in India are limited. Whereas the western studies foreground surveillance, discipline and commodification, they Indian studies focus on gender, class and urban leisure. As we have seen, anthropological perspectives shine light on the role of ritual, clothes and surface practices in the expression of identity and social power, and the growing role of digital culture in mediating participation through social media, applications and wearable devices. In bringing all these insights together, the paper presents gyms as social institutions in which hierarchy, community, and identity intersect and thereby sets up a strong conceptual bridge to subsequently analyse ethnographically.

Chapter 3: Methodology - An Ethnographic and Anthropological Approach

This investigation draws upon qualitative ethnography to explore the gym as a cultural microcosm on the basis of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group and digital ethnography. Field sites include corporate gyms, low cost community gyms, traditional akharas and boutique/digital spaces to assure getting a full picture of different social and spatial dynamics. Sampling is purposive and snowball based with methodological rigour grounded in ethical protocols addressing issues of consent, confidentiality and gender sensitivity. Analytical strategies include careful coding, thematic interpretation, and narrative construction, which make possible an ethnographic and anthropological view of embodied practices and social hierarchies and digital mediation, Althing acknowledges the importance of reflexivity and self-awareness of researcher positionality as well.

Chapter 4: Charting the Landscape of the Syndication of Gyms in Hyderabad

Hyderabad's gym ecosystem is characterised by heterogeneity which is manifested in terms of socio-economic strata, cultural identities, gendered identities, and digital engagement. Corporate gyms focus on professionalism and technology, community gyms will encourage peer learning and group motivation, akharas will continue their traditional practise of strength, and boutique gyms will be catering to specific niche audiences. Spatial organisation, material culture, and symbolic structures define social interactions and hierarchy and subcultures crystallise around bodybuilding, weight loss, and athletic training and digital involvement in fitness. Religious, class, regional, and online networks both influence and will affect participation making the city's gym landscape a richly textured place for ethnography mapping and cultural analysis.

Chapter 5: Working with Reality and Failure at the Cross-Corporate Level Data Presentation and Analysis

The ethnographic data reveal complex interactions of identity, power and embodiment in gyms. Participants engage in rituals, adhere to dress codes, and curate digital self-presentations that reflect their aspirations, discipline, and affiliations with a community—gendered dynamics structure visibilities and performances, including the empowerment of hierarchical structures through trainers and membership tiers. Body capital emerges as a salient form of social power, influencing recognition and influence within gym subcultures. Transformation narratives and peer networks provide insights into identity pronouncements, and digital mediation bridges the online and offline worlds, attenuating the separation between them. Through anthropological lens analysis, it reveals how gyms are ritualised social theatres in which the four themes of bodies, hierarchy, and technology intersect.

Chapter 6: The Way Forward: Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that Hyderabad's gyms are dynamic cultural microcosms of the intersection between embodiment, identity, social hierarchy and digital culture. Gyms serve as places of aspiration, community sites, and social negotiation, with various practices shaped by class, gender, and technology. This research contributes to the fields of urban anthropology and body studies by documenting city-specific practices and highlighting the cultural importance of gym spaces. Recommendations call for inclusive practices, gender-sensitive design, and the responsible integration of digital tools. We also recommit to future

research on comparative urban gyms, as well as longitudinal studies on the transformation of the fitness culture.

Chapter II

Review of Literature and Conceptual Framework

Introduction

The current chapter provides a meticulous examination of body culture, fitness, and gym-related scholarships to establish a solid conceptual and theoretical foundation for the study of gym spaces in Hyderabad (Sinha, 2020). A complete understanding of present-day gym culture requires its contextualisation in historical and socio-cultural contexts, some examples of which include pre-modern physical practices like akharas and yogic physicalities, as well as post-liberalisation trends of commercialisation (Nair, 2019). Earlier incarnations of physical culture emphasised discipline, morality, and communal togetherness. In contrast, contemporary urban physical culture primarily focuses on a gym setting, concerned with individual ambitions, physical beauty, and assessments of skills. This literature review thus traces the continuum of bodily practices, examining continuities and transformations to inform present-day fitness spaces.

Parallel to historical frameworks, the chapter draws on work from various horizons of sociology, anthropology, media studies, and sports studies, both within India and globally. It scrutinises how gym spaces function as social institutions in which power, hierarchy, gender, and class are interrelated, and through which bodies are disciplined, displayed, and mediated digitally (Sinha, 2020). The theoretical lenses also interrogated in the review are Foucault's concepts of discipline and surveillance, Bourdieu's habitus and cultural capital, Butler's theory of gender performativity, and Lefebvre's production of space, which provides interpretive resources for analysing gym culture and embodied practices (Nair, 2019).

The chapter concludes by identifying gaps for future research within the existing body of work, most notably the scarcity of India-based ethnographies that view urban gym spaces as lived cultural settings rather than merely as health or commercial institutions (Sinha, 2020). The lack of context-oriented studies that question the role of gym culture in constructing identities, aspirations, and day-to-day social relations in rapidly changing Indian cities is conspicuous (Nair, 2019). By synthesising historical, empirical, and theoretical maxima, this review establishes a structured basis for the elevational ethnographic inquiry that underpins this study, in which Hyderabad gyms unfold as part of broader discourses of embodiment, as well as discourses of urban modernity and cultural negotiation.

2.1 Historical perspectives on Body Culture

As fitness practice in India has historically been rooted in thought, today's fitness practice is firmly grounded in the pre-modern tradition, which has evolved in response to social, political, and economic transformations (Sinha, 2020). In pre-modern India, physical culture was virtually an integral part of the akhara tradition and yogic disciplines. Akharas, which traditionally involved wrestling and martial training, were communal spaces where young men cultivated not only physical prowess but also social values such as discipline, hierarchy, and moral comportment. These spaces functioned under rigorous regimens, as trainees lived, ate, and trained together as a group, in accordance with the holistic perception of the body as a vessel for cultivating ethical and spiritual qualities (Nair, 2019). Wrestling in akharas went beyond sport; it was a socially sanctioned ritual that involved respect, endurance, and self-regulation, and was at the same time a marker of manhood. Similarly, yogic disciplines, whose roots can be traced back to the Vedic period, emphasised the integration of physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Practices such as asanas, pranayama, and dhyana were not simply health-oriented. However, they were woven together with religious, philosophical, and ethical aspects of life in a culturally specific definition of bodily discipline.

The post-liberalisation era in India, particularly since the 1990s, witnessed a significant shift in the physical culture landscape with the emergence of commercial gyms and fitness centres (Sinha, 2020). Economic liberalisation, urbanisation, and exposure to global fitness trends gave impetus to the proliferation of gyms, especially in metropolitan cities such as Hyderabad. Unlike traditional akharas or yoga centres, modern gyms emphasise aesthetic ideals, body sculpting, and performance metrics, which represent a move away from collective and ritualised forms of body culture to individualised and commodified forms (Nair, 2019). The Western exercise forms, such as weightlifting, aerobics and cardiovascular exercise, along with digital technologies and social media, were involved in the development of a new urban fitness ethos. Body image, personal discipline and social visibility became central to the gym culture. It reflected broader processes of neoliberal subject formation, in which self-surveillance and the optimisation of the body came to be denominated and succeeded in terms of social status.

This historical journey showcases the continuity and change in the body culture of India, from collective, ritualised, and ethically embedded practices within akharas and yoga traditions to individualised, performance-oriented, and commercially mediated forms of gyms (Sinha, 2020). Understanding this historical evolution provides an important context for analysing contemporary gym spaces in Hyderabad, as these spaces carry legacies of

discipline, hierarchy, and bodily aesthetics, while simultaneously negotiating contemporary urban aspirations, digital intermediaries, and global health ideals (Nair, 2019).

2.1.1 Pre-Modern India: Akharas Traditions and Yoga Discipline

In pre-modern India, the practice of physical culture was deeply intertwined with social, religious, and ethical life, as exemplified in akhara traditions and yogic practices (Nair, 2019). Akharas used to be the traditional centres for wrestling and martial training, where the young men grew up physically strong, agile and endowed with endurance. The use of this was much more than just fitness. These spaces were themselves ritualised social institutions, transmitters of values such as discipline, hierarchy, community loyalty, and moral comportment. Training in akharas involved rigorous daily routines that included intense exercises, wrestling bouts, and adherence to dietary and ethical codes of conduct. Senior wrestlers or gurus held positions of authority, and they pushed the rookies not only physically, but also mentally and spiritually, as they pushed them in their growth. The akhara system emphasises the integration of mind, body, and spirit as a means of portraying the holistic understanding of individual growth, social identity, and ethical living (Sinha, 2020).

Parallel to akharas were spiritual and philosophical approaches to body culture provided by yoga disciplines. Rooted in Vedic, Upanishadic and classical texts, yoga was a set of physical postures (called asanas), a controlled breathing regimen (called pranayama), a meditative discipline (called dhyana), along with ethical courses (called yamas and niyamas) to achieve a harmony of the body, mind and spirit. The practice of yoga was not just about physical fitness, but also about attaining balance, self-mastery, and enlightenment. In contrast to akharas, which emphasised martial skills and social status, yoga focused on inner discipline, mindfulness, and transcendence of the self. Both systems, however, shared a central concern with discipline, routine, and the development of bodily capacities as an outgrowth of moral and social order.

Pre-modern Indian body culture, thus, was contextual, ethical, and community-oriented. It positioned the physical body as an account of cultural knowledge, moral vindication, and social hierarchy, establishing the groundwork for understanding modern exercises of urban gym practices in India as they negotiate discipline, self, and social statuses. Akharas and yoga have legacies from the past that have influenced the contemporary fitness industry, including structured fitness, the social aspect of body aesthetics, and the consideration of both physical activities and mental well-being (Nair, 2019).

2.1.2 Post-Liberalisation Gym Boom

The post-liberalisation era, from the early 1990s, witnessed a significant shift in urban lifestyle, consumer culture, and the conceptualisation of fitness, with a new phenomenon of the 'gym' emerging (Sharma, 2021). Economic liberalisation and globalisation, along with the fickle exposure to Western standards of body aesthetics and health, contributed to the proliferation of commercial gyms in metropolitan centres like Hyderabad. Unlike pre-modern akharas or yogic spaces embedded in traditional social, ethical, and spiritual frameworks, post-liberalisation gyms are characterised by commercialisation, individualism, and a performance-driven culture. Fitness transcended from a collective, ritualised or spiritual activity to a commodified activity where the body became the place of personal investment, social display and self-optimisation.

The emergence of corporate gyms, boutique fitness, and chain wellness centres indicates the impact of global fitness trends, technological interventions and digital media. Equipment like treadmills, weight machines, or aerobic devices became symbols of modernity. At the same time, fitness apps, wearable trackers, and social media platforms have developed new forms of self-surveillance, self-motivation, and peer comparison. In this context, bodily discipline is no longer solely about moral/spiritual development, as in akharas/yoga, but also about appearance, health measures, and social recognition (Sharma, 2021). Gender, class, and aspirational identity have become central to this urban fitness culture. Gyms cater to different demographics but often reproduce social hierarchies and notions of elite aesthetics.

The urban gym boom also represents a broader cultural shift toward lifestyle management and neoliberal subjectivity. Individuals are encouraged to optimise their bodies as an index of self-discipline, productivity and social capital. Modern gyms, therefore, are miniature versions of city life, in which the body is both a personal venture and a public display, at the intersections of problems of gender display, class relations, and digital visibility. This transformation stands in stark contrast to physical culture practices before liberalisation, which provides a critical insight into the changing spectrum of body practices from communal, morality-infused practices to individualised, commodified, and aspirational fitness practices in present-day Indian cities.

2.2 Review of Literature

Ross D. Neville - A Phenomenology of Fitness: From Consumption to Virtuous Production (2012, PhD Thesis).

Neville's doctoral dissertation explores the cultural and philosophical aspects of fitness in contemporary society. He argues that fitness extends beyond mere physical exercise and is a form of socially embedded practice that is morally invested in through neoliberal ideals of individualism, productivity, and self-governance. Drawing upon phenomenological interviews, Neville conceptualises fitness as a negotiated and meaningful activity that subverts its commodification by fostering moral self-development and virtue cultivation. The thesis provides this paper with a critical framework through which to interpret fitness as a practice that simultaneously expresses ethical, aesthetic and social complexities.

Jen Pylypa - *Power and Bodily Practice: The Work of Foucault on an Anthropology of Body* (1998).

Pylypa draws on the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault to examine how fitness, beauty ideals and bodily discipline have co-constructed "docile bodies." She demonstrates that routine exercise, dieting, and self-monitoring are not autonomous decisions, but rather power-laden practices that insidiously perpetuate conformity under the guise of autonomy. Through combining Foucauldian theory with concrete demonstrations, such as femininity, anorexia, and obstetric care, Pylypa proposes how individuals internalised the norms of health, beauty, and fitness. Her analysis highlights the gym environment as a site of subtle coercion, self-regulation, and moral obligation.

Nick Crossley - *The Circuit Trainer's Habitus: Reflexive Body Techniques and Sociality of the Workout* 2004.

Crossley examines circuit training as a site of intersection between bodily practices, identity formation and social interaction. He introduces the concept of "reflexive body techniques," arguing that fitness practices are simultaneously physical, social, and symbolic. Individuals are actively constructing their bodies in the gym, negotiating social norms, cultural expectations, and group belonging. Crossley also makes the body both the agent and the object, emphasising the social dimension of fitness as socially mediated and the habitus dimension of fitness as habitually reinforced. His research highlights the gym as an environment for constructing identity, socialising and embodied cultural literacy.

Friedrich Engels - *Working Class in England* 1845.

Engels' seminal historical study documents the exploitative physical conditions of industrial labour, emphasising the effects of industrialisation on the bodily contentment of workers. Although not concerned with the gym, Engels' analysis provides some crucial context for understanding how labour discipline has influenced the regulation of bodies, and thus the

development of fitness movements later on. The work reveals the dynamics of work, health and social disparity in the development of exercise and body improvement practices.

Wen Zhang & Yuhong Li - A Study of Commercial Health and Fitness Clubs Consumer Behaviour (2014).

Zhang and Li provide an empirical investigation of gym consumer behaviour in Liverpool, where they identify demographics showing that younger, affluent individuals who are conscious of their appearance are the most frequent gym users. Some of the key motivations are health, aesthetics and social influence, and barriers include cost and time. Their research constructs participation in the gym as a consumer experience in which lifestyle choices, marketing strategies and peer-group influence shape participation, leading to significant information about the consumption of fitness.

Awais Alam, Muhammad Asim, & Babar Hayat. Exercise at the Workplace, 2015.

This study focuses on the impact of fitness programmes in workplaces on the health, productivity and efficiency level of employees within an organisation. Using data from Pakistani firms, the authors argue that regular physical activity mitigates the risks of disease and enhances task performance. Organisations that endorse exercise for their employees are reaping the benefits of increased efficiency and profitability. The conclusion is to incorporate regular physical activity into a day for people to increase the intensity, thereby optimising the health effect gradually.

Helga Dittmar Does Size Matter? Impact of 'body perfect' ideals in the media (2010).

Dittmar examines the psychological and physical effects of media-promulgated "body perfect" ideals. Exposure to ultra-thin or hyper-muscle images leads to body dissatisfaction, disturbed diet, interventions and mental health disturbances. She shows empirical evidence from children and adults that supports these adverse effects. Dittmar criticises the idea that thin models drive the efficacy of marketing interventions, calling for policy interventions, media literacy and inclusive models to combat negative consequences while promoting positive body image.

Rachel Ozerkevich & Conor Heffernan - Physical Culture, Posing, and the Medium of Fitness Magazines 2024.

Ozerkevich and Heffernan examine the role of magazines in early twentieth-century physical culture, demonstrating how they contributed to the transnational ideals of masculinity and bodily beauty. Employing Ian Hacking's "looping effect," they theorise that magazine imagery plays a co-constructive role in standards of the male form. Publications like *La Culture Physique and Health and Strength* disseminated templates of bodily discipline,

retouching pictures to create perfect forms. This participatory visual culture reveals the role of media intermediaries and commercial imperatives in shaping embodied practices, as well as their complex interplay of culture, commerce, and corporeal representation.

Jesper Andréasson & Thomas Johansson - *The Fitness Revolution: Historical Transformations in Global Gym and Fitness Culture*. 2014.

Andréasson and Johansson outline the globalisation of the gym and fitness culture, from late nineteenth-century physical culture to the multibillion-dollar industry of today. They identify stages of commercialisation, such as the emergence of body-building icons like Eugene Sandow and Charles Atlas, the international circulation of fitness magazines, and the creation of the IFBB. Using Ritzer's concept of McDonaldization, the authors examine how gym culture worldwide is formed and characterised through the structures of efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control, recognising the ongoing interaction between global and local practices.

Christina Hedblom - "The Body is Made to Move": *Gym and Fitness Culture in Sweden* (2009, Doctoral Dissertation).

Hedblom offers ethnographic research on the world of gym and fitness practices in Sweden, focusing on the embodied and social dimensions. Her research focuses on the trans-local impact of global fitness trends and the local design of gyms, social interactions and modes of practice. Hedblom demonstrates the importance of gyms as cultural spaces at the intersection of physical activity, socialisation, and identity formation, contributing to broader sociological understandings of leisure, embodiment, and gendered fitness practices.

Jesper Andréasson & Thomas Johansson - *Female Fitness in the Blogosphere: Gender, Health and the Body* 2013.

This article examines gendered representations of self in the context of the online fitness blogosphere on female personal trainers. The authors analyse the way femininity and idealised bodies are negotiated and performed, showing the tensions between the reinforcement of normative gender expectations and their subversion through irony, humour, and empowerment. The study reveals that digital spaces offer complex arenas for identity formation, health communication, and the negotiation of cultural ideals surrounding the female body.

A Phenomenology of Fitness: From Consumption to Virtuous Production-Ross D. Neville (2012).

Neville's PhD thesis explores fitness as a culturally and philosophically meaningful practice in modern society. He claims that fitness extends beyond health and is indicative of wider

societal pressures, specifically the misguided positive neoliberal messages of individualism, productivity, and self-optimisation. Using a phenomenological approach to interviews, Neville constructs fitness as a negotiated, intentional practice- a practice that is less of a commodified product, and more a way to pursue moral self-development. The work critiques the commercialisation of fitness while promoting fitness as a moral and aesthetic exercise, emphasising the development of personal virtue through physical activity.

Power and Bodily Practice: An Application of the Work of Foucault to an Anthropology of the Body, Jen Pylypa, 1998.

Pylypa applies the concept of biopower, as developed by Michel Foucault, to analyse the function of fitness, beauty standards, and bodily discipline through the production of "docile bodies." She shows that practices like exercise routines, dieting, and self-monitoring are regulated socially, with the thin lines between promoting conformity in the name of autonomy. Pylypa relates Foucauldian theory to concrete phenomena such as femininity, anorexia, and obstetric care, two phenomena in which people engage in self-discipline and surveillance, and how this often leads to their internalising social norms unconsciously. The article presents the gym as a space where power is embodied and mundane practices of self-regulation are employed.

The Circuit Trainer's Habitus: Reflexive Body Techniques and the Sociality of the Workout
Nick Crossley (2004)

Crossley delves into circuit training as a site of intersection between bodily practices of identity and social interaction. He lays out the concept of "reflexive body techniques," which describe how exercise practices are simultaneously physical, aesthetic, social, and habitual. In Crossley's framework, the body is an agent that acts on its environment and is acted upon by the cultural norms. The study highlights fitness conduct as a socially mediated and habitually reinforced behaviour because it provides evidence that the gym routines become embedded in broader expressions of culture, understandings of the body, discipline and identity.

"The Condition of the Working Class in England"- Friedrich Engels. 1845

In his seminal historical study of social conditions during the industrial era, Engels documents the exploitative conditions faced by industrial-era workers and the degradation of their physical health. While not focused on gyms, the work is important for historical context in understanding how the body is disciplined by industrial labour and what can be seen as the setting for later physical culture movements. Engels' analysis demonstrates how social inequality, labour conditions, and economic systems inform the bodily experience, with structural factors pointing to present practices of fitness and physical self-improvement.

"A Study on Consumer Behaviour of Commercial Health and Fitness Clubs" - Wen Zhang & Yuhong Li (2014).

Zhang and Li use empirical research to examine the gym consumer behaviour in Liverpool and identify demographic and motivational trends amongst gym consumers. They discover that young, affluent, and appearance-conscious individuals are the most common users of gyms. Some of the key motivations are health, aesthetics and social influence, while the barriers are cost and time constraints. The research situates gym participation as a consumer-driven phenomenon influenced by lifestyle, peer influence, and market forces, providing insight into how fitness operates as both a social and economic phenomenon.

Costs of a healthy diet: analysis based on the UK Women's Cohort Study" - PubMed (2000).

This research examines the socioeconomic factors of diet and finds that healthy nutritional behaviours are more costly and less accessible to poorer income groups. Although it focuses on diet rather than gyms, the findings have implications for fitness, emphasising that engagement in holistic health routines, including exercise, requires economic resources. It highlights structural inequalities that contribute to who succeeds in participating in the health and fitness culture.

The 'Subject- Effects' of the Gyms - Ceren Dogan (2015).

Dogan's PhD thesis examines the role of the gym space in relation to subjectivity, focusing on interaction, performance and the organisation of space. Drawing on Foucault, Goffman, and Bourdieu, she argues that they produce neoliberal subjects oriented towards self-improvement, individualisation, and competitiveness. Gym users are disciplined to treat themselves as projects for self-worth, control and productivity. Dogan's work draws attention to the gym as a place where moral, social and emotional regulation can and does take place, mediated through a sense of anxiety, inadequacy and aspiration.

Culture, Bodies and the Sociology of Health" - edited by Elizabeth Ettorre (2010).

Diverse sociological perspectives on the body, fitness and health are gathered in this edited volume. It deals with topics such as running culture, doping, online medicalisation, obesity, and more, with an emphasis on cultural, gendered and classed aspects of the practices of the body. The essays collectively argue that bodies are social and cultural constructs, subject to expectations, technologies, and representations, rather than being purely biological. This work contributes to an understanding of how fitness and health are embedded in broader social and cultural processes.

"The Interaction Order: American Sociological Association, 1982 Presidential Address" by Erving Goffman (1983).

Goffman's presidential address presents the concept of the "interaction order," which refers to the realm of social activity that occurs when people are physically present with one another. He lays stress on the norms, expectations and conventions that govern interaction, in that even violations of these norms are dependent upon the rules they transgress. Goffman illustrates this with examples of things such as violence, threat gestures and social rituals. He draws attention to how small-scale, day-to-day interactions, such as courtesy in service transactions or reactions to bad news, reflect and reproduce larger social structures. This framework is adaptable to the case of gym spaces, where shared norms and interactional expectations regulate acts of embodied practices and social conduct.

The Fitness of Fitness: Concepts and the Description of Natural Selection University of Chicago G. De Jong, 1994.

De Jong's article provides a conceptual analysis of the term "fitness" as used in evolutionary biology, highlighting its inconsistency with the scientific literature. He distinguishes between two main definitions: fitness as a general measure of organismal adaptedness and fitness as a short-term measure of reproductive success. While vague and weakly analytic, the former, he argues, makes precision and scientific consensus conceivable with the latter. De Jong goes on to promote reproductive fitness as a demographic construct that relates specifically to genotypes and can be measured through the recurrence formula. He goes further to contrast this definition with reproductive value and to explain their conceptual divergence, even though, in some cases, they are mathematically equivalent. Drawing on Robertson's (1968) Secondary Theorem of Natural Selection, he stresses that selection needs to be studied not only in terms of statistical heritability, but also in the biological processes that cause genetic covariance between traits and (relative) reproductive success. The article ultimately exposes the conceptual ambiguity of fitness. It raises some fundamental questions about the extent to which fitness should be attributed to genes, phenotypes, individuals, or populations. Thus, it is a fundamental theoretical paper in discussions of adaptation, selection, and the evolutionary process of meaning-making.

Exercise at Workplace - Awais Alam, Muhammad Asim & Babar Hayat (2015).

Alam and colleagues discuss the importance of incorporating structured physical activity in workplace settings using case studies from organisational settings in Pakistan. The paper argues that maintaining employee physical health is not just a matter of well-being, but also a matter of profitability, since physical activity has been linked to improved employee efficiency, productivity, and motivation. The following are typical organisational issues that can be a problem, according to the authors: sedentary habits, the absence of movement

opportunities, and resistance to institutionalising exercise programmes. Their results indicate that active employees have better energy, less illness and are also more satisfied in the office. The study concludes with recommendations for organisational-level interventions, such as providing free fitness programmes and encouraging people to engage in daily exercise routines lasting 30-40 minutes. Sited within broader popular debates about workplace health promotion, this research reveals the neoliberal character of wellness as a new form of both personal self-responsibility and of corporate sociotechnical products to enhance health, as well as a tool for boosting corporate productivity.

“Does Size Matter? The Influence of 'Body Perfect' Ideals in the Media” - Helga Dittmar, 2010.

Dittmar's work critically examines the pervasive and far-reaching impact of mediated body ideals on self-perception and psychological well-being. Drawing on decades of empirical research, she highlights the significant disconnect between actual human bodies and the beauty standards they are constantly exposed to in advertising, fashion, and entertainment media. She argues that exposure to unrealistic thinness and hyper-muscular ideals is associated with increased body dissatisfaction and disordered eating practices, as well as compulsive exercise behaviour patterns and mental health problems such as depression and Body Dysmorphic Disorder. Using Self-Discrepancy Theory, Dittmar suggests there is a Media Exposure Model in which the discrepancy between actual and ideal body images mediates adverse psychological effects. Her experimental results, including studies of very young girls who were shown thin dolls, show that the internalisation of body ideals takes place early on and may have powerful behavioural consequences. Importantly, Dittmar counters claims made by the industry that thinness is valuable from a marketing perspective, citing research that models of average size do not make advertising less effective. She calls for both regulatory and educational measures, such as critical media literacy, image labelling policies, and inclusive representation, to address the adverse effects that idealised body culture has on our society.

Physical Culture, Posing, and the Medium of Fitness Magazines Rachel Ozerkevich and Conor Heffernan (2024)

Ozerkevich and Heffernan's article focuses on the role that physical culture magazines played in the historical process of creating, propagating, and norming emerging ideals for the male physique in the early twentieth century. Drawing from the study of press history, body-building culture, and visual research, the authors counter that fitness magazines were central in the construction of global bodily expectations based on what they call a looping effect - a

conceptual adaptation of Ian Hacking's concept of looping effect, which refers to the changing of the behaviour and identity of those classified through such a system. Through the circulatory repetition of curated and technologically manipulated representations of the photographic, magazines not only documented physical culture but also actively authored the standards they putatively represented.

The authors analyse two papers, *La Culture Physique* and *Health and Strength*, both published early and having a significant influence in the period, and as transnational books that facilitated a reciprocal relationship between editors and readers. Readers sent in bodies, poses, and storeys for publication, in an attempt to be validated, and magazines refined these norms of aesthetics by selective representation and technological enhancement. Of particular significance is their discussion of halftone photography, which lent scientific authority but was often retouched to eliminate imperfections or accentuate musculature. This technological mediation dismisses bodily ideals not as an expression of natural strength, but as commercial and ideological constructs in relation to classed and gendered values. The article contributes to the cultural and media histories of the body by demonstrating how magazines functioned simultaneously as pedagogical tools. These ideological and interactive communities reconfigured masculinity through visual surveillance, aspiration, and imitation.

The Fitness Revolution: Historical Transformations in the Global Gym and Fitness Culture - Jesper Andréasson & Thomas Johansson 2014

Andréasson and Johansson document the historical development of modern gym and fitness culture as part of a broader socio-cultural, technological, and economic shift. Rather than emerging as a linear and isolated development, the authors propose that contemporary fitness is a globally diffused and commercialised phenomenon which was created through separate phases of cultural transmission and reinvention. Beginning with movements in nineteenth-century Europe, such as the so-called Turnhalle tradition and the work of Ling and Bukh, they point to the early alignment of physical training with nationalism, discipline, and militarised masculinity.

The article highlights specific entrepreneurial figures, such as Eugene Sandow, later known as Charles Atlas, and Joe Weider, as key figures in connecting physical culture, spectacle, and commercial strategy, and in transforming body-building from a subcultural niche to an internationally recognisable standard of bodily aesthetics. Drawing upon George Ritzer's theory of McDonaldization, Andréasson and Johansson suggest that fitness culture nowadays is characterised by efficiency, calculability, predictability and control—all of which are increasingly built into the design of gyms, digital tracking, training programmes and

normative expectations of the bodily. The authors also critically examine the extent to which global fitness signifies homogenisation or hybridisation, and, based on Urry's global-locally model, propose that global ideals and local cultural practices have a dynamic interaction rather than a unilateral one.

One of the article's important contributions is its description of fitness as a late modern lifestyle project associated with self-optimisation, identity performance, and the neoliberal imperative of personal responsibility. Through its well-known longitudinal perspective the work traces the progression from collective, state-worlded and state-oriented physical culture to individual self-promotion and commercial health-shaped wellness as a cosmos of needs for concepts towards fitness as a circular examination of fitness not really a way of life but actually such a sociological appearance as weakening as social historical conceptions a kind of conceptual construct to grasp fitness in its when woven in a feel in capitalism a cultural manufacturing - altering body politics.

Scholarly Review of Hedblom (2009) and Andréasson & Johansson 2013.

Christina Hedblom's (2009) doctoral work, "The Body is Made to Move: Gym and Fitness Culture in Sweden," is a notable contribution to the ethnographic research on gym culture, body, and fitness practices. Situated within the Swedish but mindful of the global circulation of cultural norms related to fitness, Hedblom conceptualises gym spaces as trans-local cultural arenas where local meanings connect with globalised meanings, techniques and ideologies of bodily development. Her work is based on a well-developed qualitative approach, incorporating elements of extended participant observation, field notes, interview-based narratives, and mixed documentary resources, which allow for a multilayered understanding of gym-based embodiment.

A central thematic issue in Hedblom's research is the relations between space, body and practice. She describes the material influence that gym environments have on bodily comportment and affect, noting that aspects of the body, such as its spatial arrangement, interior design, placement of equipment, and sensory cues, are materially defined by these environments, shaping identity. Gym users negotiate for belonging and legitimacy through embodied discipline, performance and routine and manufacture embodied competence. Hedblom also cares for the social hierarchies of the gym, noting divides between casual exercisers and dedicated bodybuilders. The latter represent a subculture characterised by intensity, ritual and bodily transformation, giving the gym a relatively important role as a place of identity work rather than purely physical activity.

Her analysis is part of broader debates in the sociology of the body, gender studies, and leisure studies, as it shows how fitness spaces function as cultural fields in which normative expectations of health, discipline, and bodily aesthetics are constantly reproduced, resisted, and reinterpreted. The assertion of the title - "The body is made to move" - captures a recurring ideological motif within gym culture, one from which movement becomes "the natural, necessary and morally desirable"; as well as regular biopolitical tales of self-care, health optimisation, and productivity.

Complementing Hedblom's ethnographic gaze, Andréasson and Johansson (2013) take up the question of the digital extensions of fitness culture and the gendered dynamics that play out in the process of online self-presentation. Drawing on three leading fitness blogs written by female trainers, the authors shed light on how the digital sphere has become an important arena for the circulation, negotiation, and materialisation of fitness identities, especially among women.

The authors argue that online fitness representations often reproduce what Connell calls emphasised femininity - a configuration of gendered performance in line with dominant heteronorm (promoting heterosexuality as the norm expectations of beauty, sexuality and physicality. Visual and textual elements across the blogs often reinforce normative bodily ideals, such as being slim, toned, and muscular, and being in control, similar to the work of neoliberal discourses in health overall, which advocates for self-monitoring, discipline, and continuous self-improvement.

However, Andréasson and Johansson add to this reading by showing how such blogs are also used as spaces for subversion and agency. Humour, irony and narrative reflexivity appear to be tools that bloggers use to destabilise rigid gendered expectations and resist the commercial and aesthetic pressures imposed by fitness culture. Thus, the online fitness sphere becomes a contradictory cultural site - a site that simultaneously invokes and debunks gendered cultural norms.

Together, Hedblom (2009) and Andréasson & Johansson (2013) tell a complementary tale of changing cultures taught in gyms and other fitness establishments. Hedblom foregrounds in-person, embodied practices and material spaces, whereas Andréasson and Johansson explore the ways digital platforms extend, amplify, and reshape these practices. Both works make fitness, rather than being a neutral physical activity, a socio-cultural project influenced by global flows, commercial logic, gendered expectations, and modern health ideology.

These contributions are considerable for the existing scholarship that deals with the intersections between embodiment, technology, and fitness cultures, primarily because gyms

are increasingly operating in both physical and digital spaces. Both works conclusively detail the extent to which fitness cultures represent dynamic terrains, in which bodies are perpetually made, displayed, regulated and narrated.

Scholarly Review of Mike Featherstone's Perspectives on Consumer Culture 1990.

Mike Featherstone's (1990) seminal article, "Perspectives on Consumer Culture," published in *Sociology*, provides a fundamental theoretical analysis of modern consumer culture and its sociological implications. Featherstone organises the discussion according to three important analytical frameworks: the production of consumption, the social organisation of consumption and the experiential or aesthetic dimensions of consumption. This tripartite conceptualisation forms a comprehensive analytical framework to understand contemporary consumption not just as an economic activity, but as a practice of symbolism, culture, and affect.

The first is a framework based on neo-Marxist critique and Frankfurt School thought, which views consumer culture as the result of capitalist systems of production aimed at manipulating mass desires and perpetuating consumption cycles. Supported by theorists such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, this criticism focuses on the homogenising tendencies of the "culture industry." Featherstone also incorporates the theory of the commodity-sign, developed by Baudrillard, on the basis that objects derive their meaning partly through symbolic and semiotic associations and partly through their use value. However, he critiques this structure by making the following points: it assumes passive consumers and neglects agency in consumption.

The second framework emphasises modes of consumption, which is based on Bourdieu's notions of taste, habitus and cultural capital. Featherstone demonstrates how goods serve as a signifier of social difference, consolidating classed relations through lifestyle practices. Here, consumption is a communicative system in which meaning is generated through symbolic differentiation, rather than as a result of material necessity. Cultural intermediaries, including those linked to lifestyle, advertising and trend forecasting, are important for building and legitimising symbolic hierarchies.

The third perspective focuses more on the experiential pleasures of consumption, implying a shift away from solely critical diagnoses of consumer culture. Featherstone believes that consumption involves affective, aesthetic, sensual, and identity-producing engagements that form subjective experience and daily practice. This approach facilitates a broader inquiry of the relationships between emotions, aspirations and bodily experience in bringing consumption to life in late modern capitalist societies.

As a whole, Featherstone's article is a theoretical cornerstone for examining lifestyle-driven industries, such as the fitness industry. It provides an advanced framework of interaction between structure, meaning, embodiment and everyday life in the analysis of consumer culture.

Scholarly Review of Jonathan Black, *Making the American Body*.

Jonathan Black's *Making the American Body* is a history- and story-driven account of the development of modern fitness culture in the United States. Based on oral histories and secondary research, Black attributes the development of the fitness industry to the contributions of important innovators whose technological inventions, philosophies, and entrepreneurial ambitions have shaped contemporary fitness norms. Since the 1940s, figures like Arthur Jones (the man behind Nautilus equipment) have been positioned as pivotal actors in this movement to reinvent fitness from a small subset to a commercialised, standardised and corporatised industry.

A key argument that Black proposes is the shift away from holistic health and functional strength towards aestheticised ideals of the body, which were constructed around muscular visibility, performance metrics, and aspirational body presentation in the American context. This shift, argues the author, imposed exclusionary standards focusing on hyper-fitness and visually normative bodies, with frequently marginalising ageing bodies, disabled bodies and those without the time or the means to perform the intensive training regime.

Black's work exposes how commercial interests manipulated expectations of bodies and normalised the concept of fitness as a commodity, rather than an everyday activity. His reconstruction of history offers fascinating insights into the ideological basis of fitness spaces and has implications for studies of body culture, commodification and the construction of health identities.

Scholarly Review of Shelly McKenzie's *Getting Physical*.

Shelly McKenzie's *Getting Physical* provides a cultural and historical examination of the development of American fitness culture within the broader context of geopolitical, social, and economic realities. Rather than concentrating on individual entrepreneurs or technological innovations, McKenzie situates fitness within the context of Cold War fears and post-World War II abundance, as well as reassessing notions of gender roles and citizenship, and national readiness.

McKenzie shows how fitness was transformed from a civic duty tied to military readiness and national vitality into a lifestyle practice related to individuality, self-care, and self-optimisation. Progressive steps, such as the advent of jogging in the 1970s, the aerobics boom

led by the likes of Jane Fonda, and the development of health clubs in the 1980s, are framed as important cultural moments in the development of public attitudes towards exercise.

A key concept in the book is McKenzie's weight of justification, which highlights the gendered nature of fitness evolution. She exposes how women were historically positioned as custodians of the family's health, and later became key consumers of fitness as the industry reworked its messaging to focus on empowerment, femininity, and body shaping. Nevertheless, McKenzie also references the commodification of empowerment by commercial fitness as a form of co-option by commercial interests, which transformed the discourse of feminism into branded products and routines.

Her analysis contributes to cultural history, gender studies, and the sociology of health by tracing the transformation of broader social processes into materialised bodily expectations and expectations of the body in the gym.

Scholarly Review of IHRSA Global Report, 2011.

The 2011 IHRSA Global Report provides an empirical snapshot of the global fitness industry, documenting its performance both during and after the economic recession. The report shows that the health and fitness industry, with financial resilience thanks to the global financial downturn, saw its revenue reach an estimated USD 71 billion and had 128 million members across 133,500 fitness clubs worldwide.

The report attributes sustained growth to strategic cost control, the expansion of services offered, and the growth of franchised gym models in North America, Europe, Latin America, and the Asia-Pacific region. The data highlights the growing process of corporatisation and globalisation of the fitness industry, which represents a shift towards standardised services, the incorporation of technology, and scalability.

As a document of primary industry, the report acts not as a theoretical analysis, but as a document of the stabilisation of fitness culture as a large-scale consumer economy. Its findings provide a quantitative basis for socio-cultural analysis for gyms as highly organised, transnational, commercial institutions.

Scholarly Review of Neil Carter's *A History of the Gym*.

The book 'A History of the Gym' by Neil Carter is a thorough historical look at the world of the gym, from ancient Greece to modern fitness culture around the world today. Carter's illustrations of gyms' role in reproducing and reflecting societal values have ranged from the early philosophical ideals of bodily cultivation to the new neoliberal discourses of self-discipline, lifestyle optimisation, and aesthetic attainment.

Tracing some vital developments, such as the movements of Turnverein, military physical training, body-building, and aerobics, Carter can show how fitness culture has never been culturally neutral. Gender, class, performance and nation-building have frequently shaped the people involved, how bodies are trained, and what forms of physicality are valorised. Figures such as Jane Fonda have been credited with transforming gym spaces from male-dominated training territories to gender-inclusive fitness spaces, while also establishing new paradigms concerning femininity, beauty, and bodily control.

Carter's accessible yet analytically rich framework situates gym culture within broader historical processes, making it an important resource for understanding how gym spaces became commercialised and socially meaningful.

2.3 Synthesis of the Literature

Fitness and gym cultures in the reviewed scholarship are seen as complex, layered, and dynamic social formations affected by historical trajectories, economic forces, cultural logics, and embodied practices. Rather than being just a space for exercise, gyms are social institutions, cultural markets, disciplinary regimes, and terrains of identity formation.

Although the later developments in from the fitness to the gym, and how fitness becomes enmeshed in symbolic value, status and lifestyle performance remains a theme, Featherstone's theorisation of consumer culture does offer an overarching frame with which to understand how gyms were enrolled in commercialised institutions, shaped by global capitalism, technological innovation and changing forms of cultural ideals is the focus of later works (Black; McKenzie; IHRSA; Carter). These studies demonstrate that fitness has evolved from a biological activity to a lifestyle industry, embedded in global flows of images, media, branding, and aspiration.

Theoretical approaches, drawn from Foucauldian biopower and bodies of governance (Pylypa; Dogan), position the gym as a site where disciplinary tactics are fleshed out, as bodies are produced through regimes of surveillance, self-optimisation, and moral responsibility. Parallel to this, works which are based on symbolic consumption and notions of identity theory (Neville, Crossley, Goffman) have included research findings which have demonstrated that fitness participation creates meaning beyond the sphere of health, and results in identity markers which are linked to class, gender, cultural capital, and social placement.

Cultural analyses (Ozerkevich; Heffernan; Dittmar) reveal the construction of fitness ideals through visual means, including advertising, influencer culture, digital platforms, and gendered media, which support the aspirational and exclusionary norms of the body.

Historical and sociological accounts (Carter, Andréasson, Johansson) elaborate on this understanding by situating present-day fitness culture within the context of exchanges with a global fitness culture, neoliberal ideology, and shifting moralities regarding the body.

Finally, empirical and institutional studies (Alam et al.; Zhang & Li; IHRS Report) provide examples of how the fitness industry functions as a structured economic system - one which commercialises health, lifestyle and aspiration and also develops new markets and forms of social participation.

Collectively, this literature situates fitness not so much as the training of the body, but rather as a cultural, economic, psychological, and political environment. Gyms emerge as:

tricky proposition: "Spaces of biopower and discipline."

- Markets of Symbolic Commodities and Consumption for Lifestyles
- Identities, namely, Stages of identity performance and social differentiation
- Websites relating to the flow of culture all over the world and to the postmodern body politics
- Environments in which inequalities, aspirations and embodied norms are negotiated

This integration synthesis will provide a solid conceptual foundation for analysing contemporary gym culture in Hyderabad. It places the practices and processes of local communities within broader frameworks that have changed through global exchange, yet leaves room for discussion about how fitness is lived, negotiated, embodied, and culturally reinterpreted in urban contexts in the region.

2.4 Scholarly Literature On Fitness and Gyms

2.4.1 Western Literature of Gym Space and Body

Western scholarship relating to gyms and fitness culture has, to a large extent, investigated the relationship between space, body, and social identity, emphasising how gyms function as sites of discipline, surveillance, and the body. Early studies in sociology and cultural studies, primarily influenced by Foucault's work on disciplinary power, conceptualise gyms as "panoptic spaces" where bodies are constantly observed, measured, and regulated. Researchers such as Sassatelli (2010) and Maguire (2005) suggest that the environments in gyms encourage self-discipline, hierarchies of abilities and appearance, and internalised fitness norms. The spatial organisation of gyms, including mirrors, equipment arrangements, and designated zones for workouts, allows for both self-monitoring and comparison with others, which affects the way the body is perceived and practised.

Western literature is also characterised in its focus on the embodied experiences of gym users, and their ways of negotiating and forming their identities, performance and aspirations

through physical training. For instance, research in anthropology and physical culture (Giardina & Donnelly, 2018; Vertinsky & Hargreaves, 2007) show how gym practices engage rituals, repetitive practices and bodily performances with social and cultural meaning. Gym-goers practice the controlled channelling of posture, muscle and appearance in order to generate their bodies as visible signs of discipline, taste, and affiliation. This notion of embodiment extends to the creation of gendered identities, where masculinity is dramatised through notions of strength and muscularity, whereas femininity is negotiated through toning, aesthetics, and body management practices (Clark, 2022; Wellard, 2022).

Furthermore, the commercial culture of the gym spaces is questioned in Western literature. Fitness centres are not simply places to exercise, but are also part of consumer culture, with body transformation linked to products, brands, and aspirational lifestyles. According to scholars, the rise of media and technology, including fitness apps and social media, influences motivations, peer pressure, and self-surveillance, thereby extending the panoptic gaze beyond physical gyms and into digital spaces (Brighton, Wellard, & Clark, 2022).

In sum, Western research conceptualises the idea of gyms in ways that recognise them as multifaceted social spaces where physical, psychological, and cultural dimensions intersect. At once sites of individual self-improvement, social negotiation, and cultural performance, they are also sites where people play as masters of their own lives. These insights provide an important framework for studying Indian urban gyms, where similar dynamics of embodiment, hierarchy, and digital mediation will increasingly become visible, albeit in unique socio-cultural and historical contexts.

2.4.2 Indian Studies related to Fitness, Culture, & Masculinity/Femininity

Fitness culture: Indian scholarship on fitness culture has increased in response to the proliferation of gyms, wellness centres and the growth of urban physical fitness after the period of liberalisation. Researchers have discussed the intersection of gender, body image and cultural ideals in the gym spaces in India and how this reflects broader societal notions of masculinity and femininity. Male gym-goers often participate in muscle-building, strength training, and body-building, which are culturally associated with power, dominance, and social status. The pursuit of muscularity is not only a matter of personal aspiration but a negotiation of societal expectations of male aesthetics and performance (Contractor & Rasquinha, 2023; Louis & Chithra, 2025).

On the other hand, the understanding of female gym-goers often implies a humour and negotiation of ideals related to toneness and flexibility, as well as aesthetic ideals, including those of tradition and modernity, which are linked to notions of autonomy, health, and social

visibility. Studies have brought to attention that women are frequently subject to social scrutiny, limited mobility in mixed-gender gyms, and gendered expectations of dress and behaviour that influence their engagement with fitness spaces (Ashok Kumar & Suganya, 2021). Indian research has also highlighted the emergence of digital fitness cultures, in which Instagram, YouTube, and fitness applications have significantly contributed to body ideals, comparison culture, and self-presentation, with men and women approaching their gym practices differently. Together, these studies open a window to our understanding of the geopolitics of effeminacy and masculinity in the context of the Indian gym culture, where physical training, bodily look and social performance are closely linked to cultural and class-based notions of maleness and femininity.

2.4.3 Sociology of Sports And Leisure

From a sociological angle, gym and fitness spaces are seen as part of a wider leisure and sports culture, reflecting the effects of social stratification, cultural capital, and urban modernity. Scholars emphasise that participation in organised physical activity is defined by class, education and patterns of urban lifestyle, with gyms serving as manifestations of socioeconomic distinction in urban India. Membership in corporate or boutique gyms is often a symbol of middle-class aspiration, whereas low-cost community gyms offer working-class access to gym activities and participation, and so provide differentiated experiences of leisure, socialisation, and body discipline (Sassatelli, 2010; Maguire, 2010).

The sociology of sports also considers ritualised behaviours, competition and group dynamics that occur within gyms and views them as forms of extension of social life. Gym routines, hierarchies between training, and instructor-trainee relationships function in the same way as in organised sports, creating values of discipline, co-operation and achievement. Leisure scholars have emphasised that gyms are not simply locations of physical endeavour, but socially constructed spaces through which identity, status, and lifestyle choices are performed and reinforced. In the Indian context, the growth of gyms intersects with the processes of urbanisation, neoliberal consumer culture, and media influence. This process has transformed fitness from a functional activity to a form of self-presentation that is culturally laden in terms of its vision, wish-fulfilment, and social distinction.

2.4.4 Anthropology and the Body

Body Modification, Ritual, and Identity regimes, rituals, and body modification among Angolans.

Anthropology has been concerned with the body as both a biological object and a cultural symbol since its inception, and it views the body as a site where the convergence of social

meaning, power, and identity is understood. Within this perspective, physical practices such as exercise, body-building, yoga, and dietary regulation are not seen as strictly health-related behaviours but as embodied practices through which individuals negotiate and interact with their identities, status, and belongings. In the present age gym environment, both in India and the world, cultural and symbolic value attaches to body changes. Muscularity, leanness, flexibility, and endurance become signs of discipline, aspirations, and social capital produced through gendered imperatives to achieve these forms in specific ways, as also instructed by the class-based aesthetics and larger moral imperatives, cultural and national, that surround health and self-care.

Gym practices function as standardised and ritualistic practices embedded in spatial relations, hierarchies and mutual codes of behaviour. Repetition, measured progress and surveillance of the body create a regime of bodily discipline, symptomatic of wider cultural values of productivity, self-improvement and control. The gym can be seen as a microcosm of social performance, in which identities are embodied, displayed, and constantly negotiated. Anthropological scholarship suggests that the act of engagement in fitness culture is resolutely relational and informed by the desire for recognition, visibility, and legitimacy in fitness cultures, both physical and increasingly digital (Giardina & Donnelly, 2018; Sassatelli, 2010).

Symbolic Anthropology of Corporeality

Symbolic anthropology provides us with a way of thinking about the body as a place of meaning-making, a space in which physical form and movement reveal cultural values, moral expectations, and social hierarchies. From this viewpoint, the bodily practices of posture, gestures, clothing choices, and movement styles are examples of non-verbal communication that function to express and reinforce social norms, group identity, and embodied belonging. In the gym environment, these symbolic dimensions are evident. Equipment arrangements, mirror habitats and organised routines determine the visual perception, evaluation, and comparison of bodiness leading to a spatialised order of achievement, discipline, and aesthetic aspiration. Physical transformation through weightlifting, aerobics, or yoga transforms them into a visible narrative of labour, commitment, and self-making, allowing individuals to embody and perform aspirational identities.

In the Indian context, the symbolic meanings attached to practices at the gym intersect with deeper cultural histories of the body, drawing on traditions such as akhara-based wrestling, yogic discipline, and ritual purification practices. Contemporary urban fitness cultures, therefore, become areas where traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, as well as

caste habitus and social aspiration, are being renegotiated. The desire for musculature, skin, or flexibility is often part of broader aspirations related to class mobility, respectability, marriageability, and globalised views of the "fit" body. These practices are embedded in shifting social, economic, and digital landscapes, where fitness content circulating on social media platforms heightens expectations and alters bodily ideals.

Through this lens, a culture of the gym emerges, not only as a physical activity, but also as a symbolic arena, contextualised where identity, aspiration and social meaning are contextualised and performed. Symbolic anthropology, therefore, offers a framework for critical interpretation of contemporary fitness practices as they are implicated in ritual, identity formation, and cultural expression in rapidly modernising urban settings.

2.5 Gym Space, as Social Institution

2.5.1 Gender Norms

Gyms are not just venues for physical activity, but also complex social institutions in which cultural mores, particularly gendered ones, are performed and reinforced. A consistent deciding trend of empirical investigations covers that the spatial design of gym facilities replicates and perpetuates dominant societal understandings of masculinity and femininity. Male patrons usually take the upper hand in spaces that emphasise strength, physique, and performance to win competitions, while women's participation is often conditioned by aesthetics, toning, cultural notions of appropriate behaviour, and other social restrictions (Clark, 2022; Wellard, 2022). Instances of gender segregation exist in specialised environments, such as women-only establishments or scheduled hour sessions in mixed gender centres, in order to negotiate levels of safe, comfortable, and cultural norms. The way in which equipment is arranged, mirrors are placed, and workout spaces are created, creates an additional mediation in gendered behaviours to encourage some practices and discourage others. By organising physical activities in the gym in accordance with predetermined gender expectations, gyms become microcosms for broader societal hierarchies and power alignments, and as such, cultural codifications of male and female embodiment are reinforced.

2.5.2 Class Segregation

In addition to gender, socioeconomic status has a significant impact on the culture of the gym, including access, participation, and outcomes of experiences. High-end corporate or boutique facilities are sometimes targeted at middle-class and upper-class consumers. They feature principles of attractive machinery, personal training facilities, and luxurious amenities based on a commodified model of fitness or fitness centred on social aspirations and

distinction. On the other hand, low-cost community gyms or neighbourhood fitness centres serve working-class populations, placing a greater importance on accessibility, shared equipment, and informal social learning. These institutional contrasts create segregated fitness ecologies where class comparisons are performed, seen and internalised via membership fees, aesthetic cues and behavioural norms. The phenomenon of class segregation in fitness spaces is emblematic of many ways in which embodied culture is deployed as an element of social capital that reflects wider inequalities in urban life and cultural hierarchies (Sassatelli, 2010; Maguire, 2005).

2.5.3 Differences in Age and Generations

Gym demographics also reveal age-structured participation, with groups of people at different ages exhibiting divergent fitness motivations, routines, and engagement strategies. Younger urban adults also tend to prioritise aesthetics, muscularity, and visibility, being very active on social media and digital fitness platforms that they use. Middle-aged individuals may be concerned with health, wellness, and longevity; they want structured programmes to manage their weight, stress, or chronic conditions. The presence of older people promotes mobility, rehabilitation, and community participation. These generational differences are supported by spatial configurations, training programs, and gym culture norms, which give rise to age-specific subcultures within a single institutional setting. Intergenerational interactions have the potential to promote mentorship, guidance, and shared knowledge, but can also expose tension, competition, and divergent views regarding ideals of the body and the utilisation of technology.

Together, these dimensions of gender, class, and age are evidence that gyms are complex social institutions where practices of the body intersect with social hierarchies, cultural codes, and urban impure lifestyles. By applying an institutional perspective to gyms, scholars can interrogate how contemporary fitness spaces reflect and reproduce broader societal structures, while also acting as fields for the development of identity, negotiation, and social mobility.

2.6 Digital Culture and Fitness

Social Media, Influencers, and Data Apps 2.6.1

The rise of digital technologies has fundamentally altered the fitness culture of a new generation as gyms become hybrid physical and digital spaces where social interactions, motivation, and knowledge sharing between people are mediated online. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, as well as fitness-oriented platforms, enable gym-goers to follow fitness influencers, share workout routines, and participate in fitness trends from around the world. Influencers, who present aspirational physiques and lifestyles, are

instrumental in shaping perceptions of ideal bodies, training regimens, and dietary regimens. Mobile applications and wearable devices, such as pedometers, heart-rate and calorie-trackers, have been created, providing quantitative feedback on performance. It allows users to track their bodies and optimise them better than ever before. These technologies generate new types of engagements in which fitness becomes, at the same time, a project of the self and a socially visible performance that combines physical exertion with digital representation (Brighton, Wellard, & Clark, 2022).

2.6.2 Body Surveillance and Comparison Culture

Digital fitness culture amplifies the concept of body surveillance, an extension of Foucault's concept of discipline. Individuals constantly monitor their own appearance in comparison to that of others, and they self-regulate their routines to meet socially endorsed ideals about health, attractiveness, and performance. Social media sites, where people regularly share their progress photos, workout videos and diet plans, perpetuate peer comparison and evaluation. This phenomenon triggers a sense of motivation as well as anxiety because users clarify their self-worth by means of visible indicators of fitness. Resembling feedback loops, digital feedback loops also foster a culture of quantified selfhood, where metrics such as weight, percentage body fat, and repetitions become symbolic of discipline, progress, and recognition in the social world. From an anthropological perspective, this digital mediation underscores the interaction between embodiment, technology, and social aspiration, exemplified by the testimony of the extension of contemporary gym culture from physical to virtual spaces, which creates networked communities of practice, visibility, and performance.

In the Indian urban context, the combination of digital culture into gyms is especially prominent among middle- and upper-class young adults, as they mix traditional fitness forms with globalised digital trends. Here, the body in contemporary Indian gyms is at the same time both a site of self-actualisation, of social display, and digital performance, and thus part of wider cultural changes in neoliberal self-governance, aesthetic discipline, and aspirational urban living.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

2.7.1 Integration of Theories

The conceptual framework used in this inquiry synthesises a plurality of theoretical streams to provide a rigorous analytical lens for interrogating environments of gyms in Hyderabad. Foucault's discourses on discipline and surveillance suggest how fitness spaces function as mechanisms of regulation, observation, and normative governance of the body, foregrounding dispositions of micro-physics of power that generate habits and equip

procedures of self-disciplinarity. Complementarily, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital offer an understanding of how classed prophylactic dispositions, aesthetic preferences, and embodied cultural practices of individuals influence their participation in the gym, interpersonal exchanges, and their consumption of symbolic resources. Butler's gender performativity theory further explains how male and female bodies enact socially prescribed gender scripts through everyday bodily practices, sartorial choices, and choreographies, which in turn expose the performative structure of masculinity and femininity within the gym setting. Finally, regarding Lefebvre's spatial theory, Lefebvre locates the place of spatial configurations, zoning, and spatial hierarchies in the gyms in which they are socially constructed in a way that reproduces and replicates socio-political power relations on a larger scale, thereby aiding in the production of specific patterns of interaction and identity.

By intertwining these strands of theory, the framework allows for the holistic capture of these dimensions of intersectionality of power, identity and space as they materialise both in terms of individual corporeality and in terms of the collective gym praxis in ways that recognise the embodied, social and technological mediations that form the phenomenology of fitness.

2.7.2 Interpretation of Field in Analytical Terms

This conceptual architecture is fused into a coherent framework of thinking that provides the methodological tools needed to complete an ethnographic analysis of observable practices. Behaviours such as rhythmic routines, posture calibration, trainer-client interaction, and digital engagement through Foucault's chain of disciplinary calculus are examined to unveil the omnipresent self-surveillance and institutional norms of enforced body connotations. Bourdieu's interpretive framework enables an analysis of patterns of classed participation, facility accessibility, and symbolic consumption in the gym. Gendered practices - women's use of segregated places and men's activities in strength training - are decoded through Butler's performativity perspective by emphasising the social nature of gendered identities as repeated and socially defined. Lefebvre's spatial reading contextualises the physical architecture of gyms, showing the role that spatiality itself plays as an active agent in the formation of social relations, hierarchies and interactions.

The convergence of these perspectives creates a multilayered framework for understanding gym culture as a nexus of bodies, social structures, cultural norms, and technology. The framework guides the inquiry to reveal the overt and nuanced mechanisms of power, identity formation, and cultural expression and to find the site(s) of the study for anchors of observations and analyses of the gym spaces in Hyderabad as a rigorous anthropological

tradition, while representing and capturing the unique socio-cultural dynamics of contemporary urban India.

2.8 Research Gaps

2.8.1 Absence of City-Specific Cultural Explorations

Although scholarship on fitness, gym culture, and corporeal practices in India is burgeoning, the extant literature tends to generalise the findings, connecting a national or regional mosaic as it does, and therefore overlooks the particular socio-cultural trajectories existing in specific urban centres. Hyderabad, with its unique combination of historical legacies, urbanisation, and digital links, presents a distinct situation regarding class, gender, and cultural practices that shape gym participation and fitness conduct. Current research rarely examines how these local conditions influence gym culture, as well as spatial configuration and embodied praxis, which constitutes a critical gap in the understanding of city-specific fitness microcosms. By focusing on Hyderabad, this study responds to the urgency of examining how local histories, infrastructural developments, and social dynamics provide insight into the current gym culture, which, over time, shows defiance of extrapolation from other broad-ranging investigations conducted nationally.

2.8.2 Limited Ethnographies of Contemporary Fitness in India

A second conspicuous area of absence is the paucity of in-depth ethnographic studies of present-day urban gyms in India, particularly with respect to gym practices across the country. While research that documents trends in use (quantitative surveys) or physical activities, or attitudes about body image, can be just as instructive, quantifying or measuring these lived narratives, socio-role interactions, and cultural arguments can often be equally important for understanding fitness practices. Participant narratives, embodied experiences, and the social significance attached to gym routines are rarely addressed in the literature, a significant topic for a deep anthropological understanding of fitness culture. Additionally, the influence of digital platforms, social media, and fitness influencers on identity creation, motivation, and community building remains largely unexplored, particularly within Indian milieus. This attempt highlights the need for ethnographically based qualitative research that views gyms not just as venues for physical exertion, but as cultural and social spaces that relate to the bodies, identities, and technologies that intersect there.

In addressing these lacunae, the present study contributes to the emerging field of urban fitness ethnography in India. It provides a nuanced understanding of the functions of gym spaces as intricate social institutions. It focuses on the importance of local, embodied research that examines both the material and digital layers of contemporary fitness culture, in

a way that identifies the relation between power, embodiment, gender, class and technology in the construction of the modern urban body.

Chapter III

Methodology - An Ethnographic Approach

Introduction

The cultural microcosm of the gym environments in Hyderabad necessitates an approach that extends beyond superficial quantitative measures and observations. Gyms in their modern incarnation operate as fluid social institutions in which ideas of bodily aesthetics, discipline, gender, identity and aspiration are constantly negotiated (Chopra, 2022). Accordingly, this study employs an ethnographic and anthropological methodology that prioritises concepts such as lived experience, cultural meaning, embodied practice, and socio-symbolic interaction.

Ethnography allows the researcher to take on a dual role as observer and participant, becoming involved in intimate interactions with the members of the gym, trainers, managers, and visitors to identify the nuanced social movements embedded in the routines of daily life. From this prolonged immersion, it becomes clear how gym spaces function as arenas of aspiration, lifestyle transformation, self-presentation, and social stratification, in relation to class, technology, urbanisation, and digital culture (Chopra, 2022).

Anthropological enquiry further enriches this framework by situating the practices of the gym within broader issues, including the constitution of contemporary concerns such as globalisation, consumption, body culture, the commodification of fitness practices, masculinity and femininity, and the development of the urban habitus in Hyderabad. Through the use of in-depth description, field notes, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and reflexive documentation, the methodology has been able to capture aspects of fitness culture that are typically neglected in purely quantitative surveys - the symbolic, sensory, and emotive dimensions.

This chapter outlines the research design, sampling strategy, fieldwork methods, ethical considerations, analytical approach, and the researcher's positionality. Collectively, these methods aim to provide a holistic, context-rich, and culturally grounded understanding of the role of its gym milieus as modern social ecosystems mediated by embodiment, corporatisation, and digital democratisation (Chopra, 2022).

3.1. Research Design: Qualitative and Ethnographic

The present inquiry employs a qualitative and ethnographic approach to research design, exploring the cultural, social, and investigative dimensions of gym landscapes in Hyderabad. It abandons a purely quantitative paradigm, which focuses solely on quantifying trends and behaviours. Qualitative research aspires to make sense of meanings, stories, and lived experiences. Gym spaces, by virtue of their inherent nature, are dynamic social spaces shaped by personal interaction, embodied practice, aspiring action and implicit cultural regulations. Therefore, an in-depth qualitative approach is arguably the most appropriate vehicle for unravelling the complex and multi-layered processes of culture.

3.1.1 Why Ethnography is Suited to Gym Culture

Ethnography is especially relevant to this conversation, as the cultures of the gym are forms of modern culture in which identity, discipline, aesthetics, and belonging are constantly at stake. Gyms are dynamic places of physical activity; they are microcosms of broader social developments such as birth classes, digital power, globalisation, consumer aspiration, gender construction and bodily reshaping. These variables cannot be adequately quantified through a collection of survey data; they require the processes of immersion, observation and contextual interpretation within the natural contexts.

Ethnography enables the researcher to take part in gym routines and observe subtle behavioural patterns and interpret expressions of fitness culture, including:

Rituals warm up, selfie, supplementation, gym etiquette|

Hierarchies such as between trainers, regulars, newcomers and influencers

Gendered, spatial divisions and corporeal expressions

Performances of masculinity, femininity, confidence and transformation

Bodies in Motion: Promotional Culture and the Exercise Paradox, Jain. 2022. deal. Bodies in Motion: Promotional Culture and the Exercise Paradox, Jain. 2022. deal.

Guild culture also encompasses embodied knowledge, which refers to how people experience their bodies, perceive pain, impose discipline, and undergo transformation. These embodied narratives are best understood through the means of participant observation and informal interaction, which ethnography facilitates.

In Hyderabad, spaces for gyms reflect the diverging socio-economic landscape of the city with sweeping implications of rapid urbanisation, the corporatisation of the health industry and the expansion of digital fitness ecosystems. Ethnography enables the researcher to identify the realisation of these forces in everyday gym practice and how individuals assign meaning to fitness, lifestyle, and self-identity.

Ethnography is not only a methodological choice, but also an interpretive lens to receive and position gym culture in terms of its lived, social, and symbolic reality. By employing field immersion, thick description, interviews, and reflective engagement, the components of the ethnographic design facilitate the production of a nuanced understanding of gym spaces as dynamic cultural sites in contemporary Hyderabad.

3.2 Research Setting and Choice

The inquiry was conducted in a diverse taxonomy of gym environments in Hyderabad, with the intention of capturing the multiplicity of socio-cultural characteristics that characterise present-day fitness spaces. The selection strategy was grounded on the representation of disparate socio-economic strata, spatial configurations, digital influences and embodied practices. Gym culture in Hyderabad cannot be fully understood through a single institution; rather, it exists as an ever-changing ecosystem influenced by factors such as accessibility, affordability, aspirations, and a sense of belonging.

The four categories chosen, i.e., corporate gyms, low-cost community gyms, traditional Akharas, and boutique digital fitness spaces, provide a microcosm of the urban fitness life. The choice of these settings was guided by the purposes of sampling, including gyms representing different cultural, economic and social characteristics. This comparative approach enables the work to consider the issue of fitness as practised, perceived and performed differently across class groups, gender categories, age and lifestyle identity.

3.2.1 Corporate Gyms

Corporate gyms are the institutionalised, systematised version of the modern fitness industry, which is presently operating at the intersection where exercise is commodified, systematised and embedded in global health, productivity and bodily optimisation paradigms (Chopra, 2022). Typically, these gyms follow franchise-based business models and standard operating protocols to ensure uniformity in service delivery, equipment design, and the member experience across their various branches. Machine and programme design are a manifestation of techno-scientific ideologies based on physiology, sports medicine, biomechanics and quantifiable measures of performance.

The physical environment of corporate gyms is comparatively designed to be aesthetically pleasing and sensor-stimulating. Mirrored walls, LED lighting, temperature-controlled training floors, motivational song playlists and branded merchandise are all components of a controlled, quasi-fitness ecosystem. Advanced cardio machines with touch screens, heart rate sensors, and built-in apps embody the quantified self, where progress is not just felt but also measured, recorded, and visualised. Personal training services are touted as premium for

value, often as necessary processes to be followed for transformation, thereby upholding a hierarchy of upgrade according to market-driven transformations (Chopra, 2022).

Economically speaking, membership fees, renewals, supplementary services (such as nutrition advice, physiotherapy consultations, and specialised workout classes), subscription to digital coaching services, and the sale of supplements generate multi-layered consumption networks. Entry into these spaces is not simply a transaction, but rather the symbolic acquisition of a lifestyle identity. Consequently, corporate gyms primarily cater to middle- and upper-middle-class clientele with the financial, cultural, and social capital to navigate and prosper in such fitness environments.

Social interactions in corporate gyms reveal subtle yet important cultural politics. Visible hierarchies of expertise and visibility emerge: certified trainers, long-term members, fitness influencers, and people with visibly muscular physiques have an authoritative position in the informal social ordering. Novices will often test and bargain their way in through their presence, using observation, imitation, and watchful involvement, which digital tutorials or online influencer cultures may support. Spoken English, branded athleisure wear, familiarity with terms such as 'superset', 'progressive overload' or 'macros', and confidence to take up space in the gym are cultural markers of belonging.

Corporate gyms also serve as mediated public stages, where the body functions as both a private project and a performative spectacle simultaneously. Mirrors are therefore used not only for biometric evaluation, but also for self-presentation to cameras and social media. The explosion of gym content behaviour, comprising selfies, transformation videos, live workout streams, and progress documentation, creates a connection between physical effort and digital validation. Instagram culture and online platforms influence how members define progress, discipline, and success, and trainers are frequently seen as content collaborators rather than instructors.

In this sense, corporate gyms are not just fitness infrastructures, but symbolic spaces where the disciplines of aspiration, self-branding, and consumption intersect. The ethnographic observations reveal that these environments embody a broader neoliberal logic, in which health has become a matter of personal responsibility. The body is viewed as a project that requires investment, and fitness is perceived as a measurable performance associated with productivity, aesthetics, and social visibility (Chopra, 2022).

3.2.2 Low-Cost Community Gyms

Low-cost community gyms form the grassroots of urban fitness culture because these places offer spaces where physical training is accessible, familiar, and socially embedded, rather

than commercialised or hyper-professionalised (Reddy, 2023). Usually set in dense residential neighbourhoods, in small rented basements, terraces, or large converted industrial premises, their architecture and environment are utilitarian and not aesthetically pleasing, with simple flooring, noisy ceiling fans, iron dumbbells, welded racks, and sometimes improvised equipment made from locally fabricated metal or used automobile parts.

Unlike the carefully curated atmosphere of spaces such as corporate fitness centres, community gyms exude an atmosphere shaped by immediacy and improvisation. The noise of metal plates, loud music, and frequently played Telugu, Bollywood, or local folk rhythms, as well as unexpected conversations, creates an atmosphere of active communal training. Silence is not common, however, unlike encouragement, joking, competitiveness, and collective effort in these spaces (Reddy, 2023).

Knowledge production and skills transfer in such gyms adhere to informal pedagogies. Experienced bodybuilders, former wrestlers, or those who have learned the craft on their own, such as senior members, serve as mentors or local experts. Their credibility is based on their visible physique, competition achievements, or years of commitment, rather than terminal certification. Training advice is disseminated through observation, imitation, trial and error and embodied learning as opposed to textbooks or structured programmes. Dietary advice is often focused on readily available, affordable protein sources like eggs, bananas, groundnuts, and milk, rather than branded supplements, creating a localised fitness knowledge ecosystem based on practicality and affordability.

These gyms are not just spaces for exercise, but also social networks that foster a sense of belonging, masculinity, and aspiration. For many young men from working- and lower-middle-class families, the gym is a place of self-improvement, where they build confidence and, in some cases, achieve social mobility. Bodybuilding competitions, neighbourhood visibility, and physical confidence are often converted into social capital, influence in local community groups, and opportunities in modelling, security work, sports coaching, or film auditions, in terms of symbolic capital.

The atmosphere in these gyms is very fraternal and makes one feel a sense of fraternity even stronger than the biological ties. Gym members share protein shakes, exchange success stories to motivate each other, and occasionally pool money to upgrade gym equipment. The gym serves as an emotional and social safe space, a place where frustrations, ambitions, and vulnerabilities are met with discipline and resilience.

Gender dynamics are different in these environments. While gyms are exclusively male in some parts of the world, mixed gyms manage to negotiate the unwritten rules of respect,

spatial division, and protective collective behaviour to keep women comfortable. Nevertheless, this means that women's participation remains limited due to various factors, including cultural expectations, safety concerns, and infrastructural constraints (Reddy, 2023).

Low-cost community gyms thus represent an anthropological paradox, for despite their limited resources, they promote a high degree of bodily discipline, motivation, and a profound sense of social belonging. They democratise fitness in cities like Hyderabad by offering accessible alternatives to expensive fitness chains, while simultaneously building local subcultures of strength, identity, and pride, which are uniquely contextualised by socio-cultural realities.

3.2.3 Traditional Akharas

Traditional akharas are cultural institutions deeply embedded in the historical fabric of Indian physical culture, spirituality, and martial tradition (Sharma, 2022). Unlike gyms today, which are characterised by the logic of commercialism or technological innovation, akharas were ritualised spaces of value-based ethics and authority, where fitness is interwoven with ethics, disciplinary values, and a participatory collective identity. Anchored in centuries-old practices of kushti (Indian wrestling), these spaces form a continuum between the body, land, principles, and traditions.

Physically, akharas are different from current gym environments. Training usually occurs in an open or semi-indoor architectural setting; mud wrestling pits are the core of symbolic and practical life units. The mud, combined with turmeric, oil, ghee, and sometimes herbs, is said to possess healing and grounding properties. Members knead, plough, and work the mud each day, reinforcing the concept that discipline starts with work and that work is essential in the training environment. Equipment is minimal but deeply embodied: wooden gada (maces), stone lifting balls, ropes, and sandbags are used to develop natural strength instead of machine-assisted muscle isolation.

The guru controls the culture of the akhara, which is based on the shishya-parampara (teacher-disciple) tradition, emphasising humility, dedication, loyalty, and moral behaviour. The guru is not only a trainer but also a spiritual guide, a historian, a disciplinarian, and a practitioner of indigenous knowledge of the body. The guru's authority is undisputed, having been earned through decades of practice, self-control, and respect from the community. The hierarchical structure strengthens social order and emotional security, offering a sense of belonging. (Sharma 2022)

The way of eating in akharas is unique and ritualistic. The akhara diet focuses on natural foods that are sattvic, including milk, almonds, fruits, vegetables, ghee, jaggery, and seasonal foods. Processed supplements, alcohol and stimulants tend to be avoided because of a belief in the idea that strength comes from purity, balance and natural nourishing power. The members sometimes live communally or have strict personal routines which involve early rising, yoga, pranayama, and meditation. Fitness in this regard is a holistic pursuit: strength, endurance, masculinity, morality, spirituality, all connect in a comprehensive understanding of the world.

The rhythm of training embodies repetition, patience, and discipline, rather than intensity and burnout. Wrestling drills, mud grappling, endurance drills, and bodyweight training help build strength, resilience, and tactical thinking. The body is not seen as an aesthetic project to be displayed, but rather a functional and moral instrument that can represent honour, respect, and discipline.

Gender, caste, and tradition are intricately intertwined in the akhara microcosm. Historically, involvement used to be limited to males and was often associated with certain caste groups tied to a martial heritage. However, today, urban akharas are slowly opening themselves up to more involvement, making trade-offs between tradition and modernity. Even as some akharas now utilise social media or participate in formal competitions, the essence of this philosophy remains opposed to commercialisation and digital fitness trends (Sharma, 2022).

Akhara spaces, therefore, serve as a bridge between a living archive of indigenous knowledge systems and the past and present, body and belief. They challenge the hegemony of globalised gym culture by presenting an alternative discourse of fitness that is grounded in locality, heritage, and embodied ethics. In the more comprehensive ethnographic domain of the fitness ecosystems of Hyderabad, akharas represent continuities of what is considered fitness, and much more, as a programme of cultural continuity.

3.2.4 Boutique Shop Spaces, Digital Fitness Spaces

Gyms that offer in-person workouts and digital fitness platforms are a new frontier in urban fitness culture, characterised by the blending of in-person physical environments, individualised experiences, and digital connections (Patel, 2023). Unlike traditional gyms or large commercial chains, boutique gyms and app-driven platforms focus on specialisation, lifestyle integration, and identity expression. These hybrid fitness spaces are targeted at participants in urban areas who perceive exercise not as a health necessity but as an extension of their personal brand, social identity, and self-optimisation.

Boutique fitness studios in Hyderabad are designed to offer specialised and expert fitness journeys. CrossFit boxes, yoga fusion centres, Zumba studios, high-intensity interval training (HIIT) studios, women-only gyms and personal training studios are all examples of this. Each space is curated to reflect a particular lifestyle, aesthetic, and cultural story, appealing to specific segments of the demographic or fitness ideology. CrossFit and functional training studios, for example, place great emphasis on high-intensity training, measurable fitness, and community. Participants often adopt the culture, language, and values associated with CrossFit, promoting a sense of belonging and recognition in these spaces. Yoga fusion and wellness centres, on the other hand, facilitate the integration of traditional practices and modern fitness trends, encouraging practices of introspection, flexibility, and mindful embodiment. Women 's-only gyms provide environments that are empowering and subvert traditional norms of gender, creating confidence, social support and performance-based identity construction.

Digital fitness platforms overcome some physical barriers to enjoying *jeunesse* by connecting boutique-styling experiences on a broader scale, providing flexibility and convenience along with data-driven insights to users for stronger engagement. App-based platforms, wearable fitness trackers, virtual classes, and online coaching programs enable delegates to track their heart rates, calories lost, steps, and workouts in real-time. Online classes, available through YouTube or Instagram Live, offer access to guided workouts and a personalised programme, delivered beyond any geographical constraints. Social media involvement in fitness reinforces fitness as a form of performativity, as participants share fitness achievements, routines are documented, and they are involved in global trends. Regional influencers and producers deliver content, especially in the Telugu language, who also become the model makers of workout routines, dietary suggestions, and aspiration-related aesthetics of urban fitness (Patel, 2023).

One of the characteristics of boutique and digital fitness spaces is the incorporation of gamification into workouts. From fitness integration and gamification through e-trackers, social media platforms are utilised for achievement badges, streaks, leaderboards, and performance metrics, transforming workouts into measurable accomplishments. This constant quantification and self-surveillance encourage participants to internalise metrics as indicators of success. The hybrid combination of physical and digital fitness allows participants to mix in-person studio classes with virtual routines, training and tracking progress via devices, and performing fitness feats online, thereby combining private discipline with public performance. This hybridisation is emblematic of wider social changes toward

personalisation, technological mediation, and self-optimisation. This story demonstrates the question 'how are fitness practices at the same time physical, social, and digital?'

These spaces are also responsible for constructing an embodied identity. Boutique gyms foster individual and personalised wellness, allowing participants to shape their routines, choose exercises and practices that align with their individual goals, and create a sense of agency and autonomy. Digital platforms further extend this agency in terms of constant feedback, access to knowledge, and social validation, with encouragement for the performance of aspirational identities. Influencer-based culture mediates the norms of aesthetics, gender and fitness behaviour. At the same time, content production on social media enables participation to transpose private exercise into public performance, once again blurring the boundaries between physical training and social visibility. The amalgamation of in-person training, digital tracking, and online engagements results in hybridised embodiments of these, where the body becomes not only an instrument of health but a canvas to express one's identity.

In Hyderabad, a boutique and digital fitness space is a good example of the glocalisation of urban fitness culture. They fuse both global fitness ideologies with local practices, vernacular content and culturally specific preferences. Aesthetic ideals are negotiated, and functional goals are reached through the physical and digital spaces, bringing into force hybrid, embodied identities that simultaneously express global trends, local traditions, and personal aspirations. These spaces reveal a preoccupation with modern fitness that extends beyond exercise to encompass social performance, lifestyle branding, and digitally mediated self-expression, supporting the existence of multiple and complex ways in which identity is constructed in contemporary urban contexts (Patel, 2023).

3.2.5 Summary of Setting strategy

The Study of Hyderabad's gymscapes employs a multi-site ethnographic approach, which captures the diversity of fitness practices in both physical and digital spaces (Rao, 2022). The comparative approach of placing corporate fitness centres, boutique fitness studios, traditional akharas, and digital fitness structures in parallel contexts can reveal the multiple functions of fitness, as it is simultaneously a lifestyle choice, a marker of social class, and an integral part of the cultural ethos. Each place provides different insights into the negotiation of participants' bodies, roles, and aspirations, as well as their functions within wider socio-economic and cultural structures.

Corporate gyms in the city's IT corridors offer a glimpse into the productive body ethos, where fitness regimes blend seamlessly with the work ethos and performance standards, often alongside social interactions. Watching those spaces, it will show how participants internalise the violence of norms around efficiency, discipline, and self-monitoring, such that these are done in ways that align with professional and neoliberal ideals. The spatial organisation, the effects of technology-enabled tracking systems, and peer dynamics together create an environment in which the bodies are both optimised and controlled through surveillance. Ethnographic immersion in these gyms reveals the subtle ways in which corporate wellness serves as a vehicle for social control, while also providing participants with opportunities to alleviate feelings of isolation, lack of community, and low self-image.

Boutique studios place a greater emphasis on personalisation, lifestyle branding, and aesthetic embodiment. Smaller class sizes, precisely crafted studio designs and specialised programmes provide for intimate encounters between trainers and participants that are formative for the development of identities that are cultivated, aspirational and socially recognisable. Ethnographic participation in these spaces reveals performative aspects of fitness at issue - as people move through these spaces differently, not only concerning physical activity, but also with respect to sociality and validation, through aspirational consumption, and through the performance of a self. Here, fitness is not merely about exercise, but also serves as a ritualised medium of self-expression, experimentation, and social signalling (the self is also a canvas for negotiating taste, sophistication, and social positioning) (Rao, 2022).

Traditional akharas naturally offer a contrasting view in the Old City of Hyderabad, emphasising functionality, strength, endurance, and legitimacy as key group characteristics. Participation is facilitated through mentorship, skill acquisition, and shared practices that connect physical practice and cultural continuity to social acknowledgement. Ethnographic observation in the akharas captures the rhythm of daily rituals, informal hierarchies of skill and experience, as well as the deeply relational character that this offers, including the embodied presence in such places. Unlike corporate or boutique gyms, akharas emphasise communal engagement, respect for individuals gained through perseverance, and identity-making that is based on local cultural and historical traditions, conveying the continuity of fitness as a culturally embedded, socially mediated practice.

Digital fitness platforms and app-based ecosystems let the ethnographic gaze reach virtual and hybrid spaces, where bodies, routines, and social interactions are channelled through technology. Online classes, wearable devices, social media engagement, and influencers are

the new spaces for performing identity, self-surveillance, and social validation. An ethnographic focus on digital spaces reveals participants negotiating aspects of credibility, expertise, and aspiration in the absence of physical proximity between individuals, particularly in a world of contemporary interaction that blends offline and online routines. These platforms enable the democratisation of fitness knowledge, but they also come with struggles over representation, algorithmic bias, and the commodification of wellness practices (Rao, 2022).

Taken together, these four categories: corporate gyms, boutique studios, traditional akharas and digital fitness platforms help create a broad cultural spectrum, containing the plurality of fitness experiences in Hyderabad today through methods of participant observation, field notes, and digital ethnography in which fitness is viewed as a phenomenon that is lived, socially negotiated, and technologically mediated including such lifestyle choices, performance of identity, gendered embodiment, commercialised markets, ritualised traditions, and digitally mediated practices. By embedding ethnographic methods in various contexts, the research yields a holistic understanding of how fitness is lived, learnt, contested, and reshaped, providing rich insights into how bodies, space, culture, and technology interact dynamically in an urban Indian context (Rao, 2022).

3.3 Data Collection Methods

To capture the complex cultural dynamics, lived experiences, and symbolic meanings interwoven in the gym situational set-ups in Hyderabad, this study employed a range of qualitative research methods. Employing the triangulated strategy enhanced both depth and validity, thereby capturing observable behaviours as well as those self-articulated by gym patrons. The methodological repertoire included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and digital ethnography, all chosen to understand different strata of gym culture, from embodied practices to digital expressions.

3.3.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation was the core of our ethnographic enquiry, which provided an immersive stance for understanding the finer social, cultural and embodied aspects of Hyderabad gym culture (Rao, 2022). Contrary to detachment, this method allowed the researcher to participate actively in the routines, practices, and rituals of the gym participants, thereby acquiring a better understanding of the tacit codes governing behaviour, interaction, and identity in fitness spaces. By training with the participants in the research, the researcher gained firsthand insight into the rhythms, challenges, and performativity of gym life, as well as the deeper convergence of interplay among bodies, spaces, and social norms.

In corporate gyms, participant observation sheds light on the process by which discipline and productivity are reinforced in a social environment. Early mornings in HITEC City premises were characterised by quiet concentration: rows of employees doing repetitive exercises to soft music and the glinting fluorescent lights. Silence during heavy lifting, careful spacing between machines and following equipment etiquette showed the existence of an unwritten normative set for behaviour. Mirrors were not only used as instruments for physical adjustment, but also as a stage for self-correction, where participants constantly adjusted their posture, form, and effort in relation to their peers. These observations contributed to the development of an understanding of the embodied negotiation of professional identity through physical performance, and consequently, how corporate fitness serves as both a health practice and a means of social signalling (Rao, 2022).

Boutique gyms offered a different setting, with aesthetic expression, individualism and social participation in the foreground. In yoga fusion studios, Zumba classes, and women-only spaces, researchers found a combination of structured guidance coupled with playful experimentation. Small class sizes allowed for personalised attention from instructors, promoting relational networks of encouragement, correction, and mutual recognition. Participants regularly shared smiles, verbal expressions of appreciation, and displays of approval, underscoring the role of social connections and peer support in the creation of an embodied identity. We observed the moments of warm-up, stretching sequences, and leading routines to see an unfolding movement of interconnection of staying well through the use of one's own expressiveness, uniform rhythm, and experimental performance aspirations; in this instance, the human body was at once an instrument of healthy being and self-exposure (Rao, 2022).

In the traditional akharas of Hyderabad's Old City, a distinct set of cultural and ritualised norms was observed through observation. Evening sessions were communal, with men and women following the instructions of their mentors simultaneously in peer observation and informal competition. Drills, repetitions and endurance exercises alternated with mentorship, correction and encouragement. Mirrors were scarce, and societal approval was based more on the value of skill, stamina, and perseverance rather than aesthetic display. Participation in these sessions enabled the researcher to understand the inferences of embodied competence, hierarchical respect and communal identity through the shared practice. Rituals such as bowing before starting something, communal stretching, and coordinating warm-ups expressed a finer respect for tradition. They strengthened morale for collective discipline and fitness practices, which were highly culturally embedded (Rao, 2022).

Digital fitness spaces provide an additional analytical layer. The researcher immersed themselves in app-based workouts, virtual classes, social media, and driven routines to understand how technology mediates engagement, accountability and identity performance. Observing live sessions of influencers and trying out curated workouts was eye-opening in understanding how participants manipulate performance, gamification, and visibility to others. The hybrid nature of digital and physical engagement reveals how self-surveillance extends beyond gym walls, as both men and women track their progress through wearable technology, mirror-making with influencer-led routines, and self-surveillance narratives that are shared on social media. These digital practices made visible the performativeness, as well as their mediatedness in relation to societal ideals, success, adherence, and aesthetic ideals, which are constantly negotiated in both the personal and public spheres (Rao, 2022).

Throughout all settings, field notes were meticulously taken immediately after sessions to ensure accuracy, and they included observations about body language, non-verbal cues, movement through space and ritualised practices. Sustained immersion enabled movement from outsider to accepted participant in the process, thereby providing access to frank discussions, laughter, peer support networks, and reflections on personal goals and issues. This deeper immersion has illuminated specific, hidden hierarchies, common knowledge, and cultural codes that support the gym culture in Hyderabad, as well as how bodies are disposed of, performed, and socialised in terms of norms within physical and digital fitness spaces (Rao, 2022).

By participating in the action, the researcher could observe how fatigue, discipline, and achievement were embodied in negotiation, as well as the realisation of manifestations of gendered, classed, and culturally based expectations arising during everyday interactions. "Sonorexperiments of embodiment: conducting participant observation with fitness" in D. A. Jones, D. Wundt, D. C. Sabell (eds.), *Bodies, Work, and Well-being in the Digital Age*. Oxford: Routledge, pp. 193-206, 18 November 2022. "Whether from observing the microencouragements in boutique studios to the silent attentiveness of corporate gyms, the communal rigour of akharas or the digitally mediated display of online workouts, participant observation provided a rich, textured understanding of how fitness practices construct

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with gym members, trainers, coaches, and management personnel from all the selected environments. This approach offered flexibility while maintaining thematic consistency across responses.

Interview prompts included:

Reasons for joining and continuing with gym routines

- Experiences of transformation, discipline, pain, and body image pressure
- Perceptions of gender, status and hierarchy amongst gym spaces
- The role of the media/supplements, trending, and validation from peers

Criteria for understanding equalisation processes for adolescents by Oben Woody, AC, the Integrators, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, 2013. Criteria for understanding equalisation processes of adolescents by Oben Woody, AC, the Integrators, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, 2013

Interviews varied in length from 20 to 60 minutes and often evolved into conversational storytelling, reflecting the trust developed during the participant observation. When consent was obtained, audio recordings were used; otherwise, handwritten notes were taken.

3.3.3 Summarising Survey: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus Group discussions were conducted to investigate shared perceptions, social dynamics, and collective understanding (meaning-making) in fitness spaces. FGDs also helped to show how individuals negotiate their identity by being within a group of peers.

Groups were organised on the basis that:

- Gym type (corporate / community/akhara/boutique)
- Fitness goals (weight loss, body building or weight training, wellness, competitive training)
- Gender (mixed and separate women groups)

FGDs allowed insights into:

- How fitness communities do 'the norm building'

Peer Encouragement or Judgment- The relative contribution of peer encouragement or judgment

- Competition vs. cooperation amongst members
- Shared struggles related to diet, motivation, or pressures related to body image

These conversations created a sense of the communal and performative nature of participation within the gym space, revealing that fitness is about not only a personal journey, but also a social one.

3.3.4 Digital Ethnography

Fitness culture today is done not only in physical spaces but also in digital ecosystems. To capture this dimension, digital ethnography was developed on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube fitness channels, and WhatsApp gym groups.

Some of the digital observations included:

- Transformation posts and "before - and - after" storeys

- Inspirational hashtags (#fitnessmotivation #HyderabadFitness #gymculture)
- Marketing of gyms and collaborations with influencers
- Supplementing advertisements and brand identity

Memes, reels, humour in the community

- Attendance reminders/ Challenge announcements/ group motivation posting

Digital ethnography also documented the process of fitness identification as it is curated, performed, and legitimised online. The roles played by algorithmic visibility, comparison of roles, and pressure to hold up one's digital fitness persona are concerned with the embodied culture of today. Are notes as keys for understanding contemporary embodied culture?

3.3.5 Summary of the Methodological Approach

The research methodology of the current study was formulated to reflect the multi-dimensional nature of gym culture in Hyderabad, encompassing physical, social, and digital dimensions of fitness practice. By employing participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and online ethnography, the research aimed to gain access to the full range of lived experiences, social negotiations, and digital mediations that comprise embodied identity. This triangulated framework enabled the researcher to go beyond surface-level descriptions of fitness routines and to discover deeper processes that are cultural, social, and technological in nature, and that structure engagement within urban gyms.

Participant observation afforded access to the bodily experience of gym culture. By observing participants in action, the researcher was able to experience the physical and social dynamics that regulate everyday practice, ranging from the rhythms of bodily exercise routines to the subtle expectations embedded in small non-verbal codes of interaction. Immersion into corporate gyms, boutique studios, and traditional akharas revealed the role of spatial arrangements, rituals, and peer networks on the behaviours, perceptions, and sense of self of participants. This strategy enabled the researcher to experience fatigue, discipline, achievement, and social reinforcement firsthand, developing an empathetic understanding of embodiment that could not be derived from interviews and surveys alone.

In parallel, semi-structured interviews allowed for information on participants' personal narratives and motivations, as well as the meanings they ascribe. Conversations with gym-goers, trainers, and fitness influencers revealed how individuals understood their routines, their identity, and how they managed social and cultural expectations. Through interviews, the participants explained their reasons for selecting specific gyms or routines, how they determined success, and how they resolved aesthetic, functional or performance-oriented

goals. This method enabled the researcher to explore subjective dimensions of fitness by examining the interaction between aspirations, self-perception, and social norms.

Focus groups were used to complement these individual accounts and capture the process of negotiating identity and practice as a collective. Group discussions in boutique studios, gyms in corporate settings, and akharas illuminated the norms of shared spaces, the expectations of peers, and hierarchies within the social set-up. These interactions proved significant in determining what constitutes a "serious" practitioner, collectively defined by people's interactions. They also highlighted how participant gender, class, and age are key factors in participation, and how cultural and professional pressures influence embodied performance. Focus groups also identified moments of tension, humour, and negotiation, showing how the gym spaces Lady worked in are sites of social learning, validation, and contestation.

Ultimately, digital ethnography broadened the examination frame to include online spaces, examining how fitness culture is represented, performed, and then consumed in virtual spaces. Social media platforms, app-based programmes, and influencer content provided insights into the digitally mediated aspects of fitness, including the gamification of workouts, performative self-presentation, and online community formation. Online observation revealed how people take digital advice and turn it into physical action, how influencers help establish norms and aesthetics, and how social recognition and validation are sought outside the gym walls. This component was important for understanding the hybrid nature of modern fitness culture, in which identity and practice are simultaneously physical, social, and digital.

Taken together, the use of these multi-layered methods facilitated the process of developing a triangulated understanding of Hyderabad's gym culture. Participant observation recorded the experience of the body in life; interviewing, personal sense-making, and motivation were explored; focus groups revealed social norms and collective identity; and digital ethnography captured the virtual extension of practices. By combining all these approaches, the study was able to analyse the fitness culture as something that is lived, spoken and mediated digitally, representing its complete complexity in the urban setting of Hyderabad. This methodological approach reflects an understanding of the interconnection of space, the body, interaction within society, and technologies, ensuring that the analysis is both comprehensive and sensitive to the realities, in this case, of contemporary urban fitness.

Ultimately, this triangulated, ethnographic approach goes beyond describing behaviour - it brings social processes from below that are built around co-constructing bodies, identities and social relations, demonstrating how urban gym culture functions between and amid notions of discipline, performance, aspiration and social recognition. It establishes a strong foundation

for analysing the relationships between physical, social, and digital fitness spaces, showing how Hyderabad's gyms serve as laboratories of identity, culture, and technology in contemporary urban life.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy employed for this study was guided by qualitative research principles, where the importance of capturing the richness of experience rather than representing numbers, and the diversity of experiences and perspectives over individual numbers, was paramount. Given that the study aimed to understand the cultural dynamics of the gym environments and not to generate generalised statistical conclusions, the sampling strategy was deliberately flexible, iterative and context-specific.

Two methods of non-probability sampling were used, namely, purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Together, these methods enabled us to require access to a heterogeneous spectrum of participants, of regular gymnastics exercisers, newcomers, trainers, users of social media or people working in the traditional viewpoints (sport) could say something which appears meaningful for their embodied experiences, motivations and steps taken socially in a fitness place.

3.4.1 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to select individuals and gym environments in a manner that aligned with the research purpose. Participants were selected based on characteristics relevant to the study, including gym type, fitness goals, and fitness engagement, as well as demographic diversity.

Selection criteria consisted of:

Gender: male participants, female participants, and gender-nonconforming participants

Age: youth (18- to 25 years of age), adult (26-45), older participants (46+ years of age)

Role: member, trainer, manager, coach, competitive athlete, influencer

Experience level: a beginner, an intermediate or an advanced user or professional athlete

Socio-economic representation: budget gyms to premium boutiques

This methodological approach helped ensure that the investigation did not represent a single demographic or gym culture, but rather encompassed a diverse range of lived experiences.

3.4.2 Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling was used in conjunction with purposive sampling to leverage participant networks and increase the sample size of the data. This approach was constructive in circumstances where entry required familiarity, trust or cultural belonging, such as:

Old-style akhara wrestling communities

Bodybuilding competition groups

Women-only fitness clubs.

Circles of digital influencers in which identity is curated and protected

Participants referred peers whom they thought would be willing to share their experiences, or who were not well-represented in the mainstream narratives of the gym. Snowball sampling also helped the researcher contact individuals who may not openly identify with mainstream gym culture but were partially participating in fitness activities through informal means, such as community-based or self-taught fitness.

3.4.3 Justification for Employing These Two Methods

Purposive and snowball sampling approaches were adopted as gym culture is complex, layered and often organised through informal networks and shared norms. Many participants, especially those belonging to the male-dominated subculture of the gym or the digital influencer circuit, may not respond easily to formal recruitment processes. Trust and integration of the researcher into the research team were crucial; rapport was established slowly through repeated gym visits, informal discussions, and the sharing of training regimens.

To put both sampling methods together, the research achieved:

Diversity of experiences between different types of gyms

The depth of insight of participants into gym culture

Access to the sub- or exclusive groups within fitness communities

Natural growth of participant pool according to the social networks of gym spaces

3.4.4 Final Sample Size Structure

A total of 120 participants were engaged in the study, who were divided among the fitness environments selected for the study:

Gym Type	Method of Entry	Approx. Sample Share
Corporate Gyms	Purposive + Snowball	30–35 participants
Low-Cost Community Gyms	Snowball Dominant	30–35 participants
Traditional Akharas	Snowball + Cultural Gatekeeping	15–20 participants
Boutique/Digital Fitness Spaces	Purposive + Influencer Referral	30–35 participants

This distribution balanced structured diversity and the organic diversity of the participants.

3.4.5 Summary of Sampling Approach

The combined approach of sampling enabled the researcher to obtain both breadth and depth of gym culture in Hyderabad, as it incorporates the divides of class, gender, various motivations, training philosophies, and digital and physical expressions of fitness and identity. Rather than approaching the sample as a fixed list, the study took an iterative, evolving approach, consistent with ethnographic best practices, and patterns would emerge naturally from the field.

3.5 Researcher Positionality

Researcher positionality is a critical component of ethnographic inquiry, recognising that the researcher is not a neutral observer of events or a passive recorder, but a participant in the making of meaning. Understanding the relationship between the researcher's identity, experiences, and assumptions and the field is the key to understanding how interpretations are constructed, negotiated, and how they can be contested. In the current study, which explores themes of body, identity, aspiration, and belonging that are intensely personal, awareness of positionality assumes a specific meaning.

3.5.1 Insider/Outsider Dynamics

A sensitive dimension of the research process was moving through the fluid insider-outer spectrum within the diversity of gym spaces in Hyderabad (Rao, 2022). The researcher's position was seldom static, however, changing depending on the context, participants, and the cultural/social specificity of a given site. In other corporate and boutique gym spaces that the researcher engaged, familiarity with fitness routines, equipment, exercise terminology, and informal norms, such as rest periods, etiquette, and training hierarchies, was also drawn on. This familiarity helped overcome ignorance, allowing for initial acceptance, participation alongside members, physical demonstrations, and the rapid establishment of rapport. Shared understandings of gym culture provided opportunities for naturalised interactions, which reduced social distance and encouraged frank exchanges among individuals about their routines, motivations, and experiences.

Despite this insider familiarity, research also revealed instances where outsider status was more pronounced, especially in spaces associated with firm cultural, gendered, or elite boundaries (Rao, 2022). Traditional akharas in the Hyderabad Old City, for example, are run through an elaborate hierarchy of ritualised hierarchies and mentor/apprentice relationships. Entry into such spaces was frequently based on social permission as well as long-established community relationships and identification with physical competence or commitment. As someone who is not part of these localised networks, the researcher was initially positioned in

the role of an outsider. Observation and participation in such settings required wide-ranging negotiating skills, humility, and an understanding of the established norms. Here, governance was to be distinguished by observing senior practitioners, following prescribed training sequences, and acknowledging unspoken hierarchies of skill and experience. Furthermore, through repeated participation, attentiveness, and respectful engagement, the researcher was able to gain some insider access at various intervals, albeit always within parameters set out by the akhara community.

Women's only studios and boutique gyms further emphasised the conditional character of access to the insider. In women-centred spaces, the cultural significance and issues of privacy helped define how someone participates, and it had to recreate the boundaries around how we interact, not only physically but also socially (Rao, 2022). Similarly, gyms or boutiques of elite fitness, often catering to the aspirational and/or performance-oriented, focus on aesthetic achievement, social visibility, and personal branding. These spaces were recast as microcosms of social stratification, in which the right of entry for insiders was to some extent conditional on perceptions of skill levels, confidence, and/or shared cultural literacy regarding fitness and lifestyle trends. Taking steps to cut across these boundaries was subject to either social rejection or the distrust of the actuality of the data gathered while watching.

Subcultures, such as circles around competitive bodybuilding, influencer networks, or online fitness communities, have taken the autonomy of insiders and outsiders further from reality. Visibility, performance measures, and aesthetics often determined membership in these communities. Insider knowledge extended beyond technical competence and encompassed knowledge about social media presence, influencer trends, or competitive credentials (Rao, 2022). Here we can see the outsider position of the researcher, who acknowledged and made strategic use of this, observing from a distance to critically reflect on group norms, as well as power dynamics and aspirational performances, and participating, where allowed, in order to gain embodied knowledge of social rituals, as well as peer and identity negotiation.

Rather than trying to eliminate the issue of outsider status, however, the researcher worked with it as a methodological and analytical resource. This dual positioning - being sometimes an insider and sometimes an outsider - made possible a balance between immersion and being critical. In situations where full access from the inside was not possible, the researcher relied on attentiveness, Reflexivity, and ethical sensitivity, focusing on the subtleties of interaction, body language, and space utilisation that might not otherwise be noticed. On the other hand, towards those spaces where, in part, an insider status was developed, participation enabled a deeper understanding of embodied experience, peer relations, and ritualised practices,

allowing the researcher to capture the texture of everyday routines, humour, informal hierarchies, and social negotiation (Rao, 2022).

Ultimately, the value of this dynamic positioning added depth to the ethnographic inquiry and gave numerous perspectives on how to interpret Hyderabad's gym culture. Insider access provided detailed knowledge about how research practices, motivations, and identities are performed and outsider observation made possible critical reflection on norms, hierarchies and cultural mediation. By practising the interplay between inside and outside viewpoints, the research was able to navigate the thin line between participation and analysis, empathy and critique, and presence and Reflexivity, giving a sense of complexity, diversity and the various layers of embodied fitness culture in an urban Indian context (Rao, 2022).

3.5.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity was a key component of this study, serving as a critical tool in navigating the complex relationships between the researcher, participants, and various gym environments in Hyderabad. At the groundwater level, Reflexivity is an ongoing self-examination of assumptions, positionality, and emotional responses that influence the process of data gathering as well as data interpretation activities. Recognising the ethnographic inquiry process is not a neutral process, a conscious practice of reflex journaling was maintained (where observations, reactions and reflections were systematically recorded immediately after fieldwork). This process allowed us to refine our understanding of the process through which the researcher's presence affected interactions, for how personal biases on the part of the researcher might affect interpretation, and for how emotional reactions provided insight into unspoken dynamics in the field.

Through reflexive journaling, the researcher recorded a wide range of experiences. Emotional reactions - of varying degrees, ranging from concern about navigating spaces associated with gender to curiosity and admiration at skill mastery in akharas, along with experiences of belonging, camaraderie, and subtle exclusion. These reflections assisted in recognising patterns in power relations and identifying how people positioned themselves in relation to the researcher, as well as how power, expertise, and social capital were negotiated within gym spaces. For example, in corporate gyms, the researcher observed how following etiquette and performance standards mediated social recognition. In gym boutiques, attention is paid to aesthetic presentation and the social visibility of interactions. Reflexive notes highlighted how the researcher's age, gender, and perceived skill level affected the relationships of rapport building, access and trust, providing a lens of understanding how insider/out groups influenced engagement in the field.

Reflexivity also became especially critical when dealing with such sensitive themes as caste visibility, gendered body norms, aspirational consumerism, and transforming identity. For example, in observational studies of gyms frequented by people from diverse socio-economic and caste backgrounds, it was crucial to be aware of implicit biases, assumptions, and cultural interpretations. Reflexive journaling was employed to help the researcher identify where personal interpretations might be influencing the subject's views, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in the realities of participation among gym-goers, rather than the researcher's biases. Similarly, in the digital fitness spaces, participants often curated idealised versions of themselves through filters, staged poses or performance-driven social media posts. Reflexivity drove the researcher to adopt a critical approach to such representations, which distinguished aspirational narratives from the material and embodied practices they reflected. In addition, Reflexivity included valuing the privilege of being mobile and having access when compared to many of the participants. The ability to travel across multiple gym environments (corporate, boutique, traditional, and digital) was not universally available; however, this positional advantage had consequences in the interpretation and observation of its benefits. Recognising this privilege helped the researcher maintain ethical humility, sensitivity to issues of inclusion and exclusion, and avoid overgeneralising about the findings across contexts. Reflexive practice also involved questioning instances where the examining presence might have shaped participant behaviour, both affectively through conscious performance, cynically through greater attentiveness, or empirically through increased competence. In such instances, the researcher was able to think critically about the co-constructed nature of the data in the field, recognising that ethnography is, by its very nature, always a product of the interaction between observer and observed.

Reflexivity was also carried over to the interpretation phase, where the researcher continually questioned the operationalisation of theoretical frameworks, disciplinary assumptions, and cultural understandings that might colour analysis. Drawing on the concepts of Foucault, Bourdieu, and Butler, Reflexivity enabled the researcher to analyse how the themes of power, social hierarchies, and gender performativity were mediated in gym spaces, while at the same time ensuring that these frameworks did not impose deterministic interpretations. For example, Foucault's concepts of biopolitics helped to highlight the dynamics of the corporate gym; however, reflexive awareness led to a careful consideration of the efforts of participants to exercise agency and negotiate within these structures. Likewise, an awareness of the performative dimensions of social media fitness content necessitated balancing Butler's

theory of gender performativity with an understanding of regional and culturally specific expressions of embodiment.

In summary, Reflexivity was not a secondary aspect of this study, but rather a methodological and ethical imperative, which ensured that the researcher's presence and assumptions, along with her interpretation of the situation, were critically examined throughout the research process. It offered a systematic way to consider positionality, emotional engagement, and the dynamic co-construction of knowledge in both physical and digital gym spaces. As analytical rigour is consistently upheld in research while being mindful of the complex, situated, and socially negotiated realities of Hyderabad's fitness culture, Reflexivity was embedded in each stage, starting from immersing in the field and observation, interviews, focus groups, and digital ethnography. Reflexivity ultimately enriched the research, allowing the researcher to generate a more ethically grounded, culturally sensitive, and contextually nuanced analysis of embodied identity, social negotiation, and digital mediation in present-day urban gym environments.

3.5.3 Summary of Positionality

The dance between familiarity and being the spectators enriched the ethnographic process. Rather than eliminating bias, the adopted methodology positioned positionality as a source of bias, contaminating the interpretation through the lens of positionality. The goal was not neutrality but transparency - an awareness of how knowledge was produced cooperatively between interaction, observation, negotiation and listening. In this study, the researcher participates in the culture being studied while also serving as a critical observer of its social structures. This dual presence made it possible to appreciate the embodied, emotional, and cultural meanings that were embedded in Hyderabad's emerging gym ecosystem better.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical sensitivity is the foundation of ethnographic research, especially when the research site crosses boundaries of bodily experience, identity, digital traces, and socially situated ways of working. The gym, being a multi-use space, is one such area where it operates as a locus of physicality and vulnerability, constantly negotiating notions of appearance, competence, confidence, and belonging. As such, ethical considerations guided each process of the study, from participant recruitment and observation (including data collection, interviewing, documentation, and digital engagement) to eventual dissemination.

3.6.1 Informed Consent

The principle of informed consent was fostered in research, grounded in respect, transparency, and participant autonomy, as advocated by the investigator in various gym

locations in Hyderabad (Singh, 2021). Prior to any engagement, the researcher provided both written and oral explanations of the study's purpose, methodology, and anticipated scope, emphasising that participation was voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty or explanation. This dual modality, with writing for formal procedures and oral communication for informal interactions, ensured clarity irrespective of literacy levels, comfort with documentation, and cultural expectations.

Formal consent was obtained through signed agreements, particularly for structured interviews, audio recordings, and focus groups (Singh, 2021). These agreements established the bioethical parameters of the research, the potential risks, the utilisation and storage of data, and the process of anonymisation. Participants were assured that all of their identifying information would be kept confidential and their narratives would be reported in an aggregate or pseudonymised form. Where other forms of continuous documentation were impracticable or culturally inappropriate, verbal consent was obtained through the method of participant observation, in which participants could engage in gym routines and communal interactions without strict protocols that might have interfered with regular practice.

In settings such as traditional akharas or women-only study circles, the process of people's consent led to a greater degree of cultural sensitivity and negotiation (Singh, 2021). These environments operate within corresponding hierarchical and community-based structures, which intertwine individuals' participation with a series of community norms. Accordingly, consent was given by individuals and community leaders, coaches, or heads of institutions, as the idea of collective approval was recognised to be essential for establishing trust and demonstrating respect for internal governance.

The researcher repeatedly emphasised the rights of the people throughout the engagement, specifically reiterating that people could refuse specific questions, reject recordings, or decline to participate at all (Sharma, 2020). By highlighting the ethical principles of autonomy and agency in the study, it was ensured that participants had control over their involvement and use of data. Periodic reaffirmation of verbal consent occurred both during participant observation and informal interactions, especially when it took place during immersive routines and/or during the collection of detailed field notes that could contain sensitive behaviours.

Ethical Reflexivity was integrated into the consent protocol as a process of addressing the asymmetries in the specific power of ethnography (Sharma, 2020). The researcher recognised that they held a position of authority as both observer and participant in several different gym settings, which may have influenced their behaviour or caused social desirability bias.

Explicit discussion of purpose, methods and protective measures taken to try to avoid such dynamics and create a transparent and respectful environment conducive to creating the space for authentic engagement.

In digital spaces, including practice-based exercises serviced by apps and communities that provide fitness control via social media, consent was handled through explicit reporting of observation and ethical involvement (Singh, 2021). Publicly shared material was considered ethically available, but private messages, online groups, or live sessions were only known after explicit permission was obtained. The researcher ensured that participants were in charge of interpreting, observing, or citing their digital presence in the same way that the same principles are followed in physical gym environments.

Overall, the consent process was dynamic, context-sensitive, and culturally attuned, and was adapted to the diverse gym practices and expectations in Hyderabad (Sharma, 2020). Hubble S. By combining mechanisms of written, verbal, and collective consent, the researcher maintained a sense of ethical integrity while promoting trust, inviting straightforward participation, and embedding the ethnographic interrogation of embodied identity, social negotiation, and digital mediation in a context of mutual respect and conscious agency.

3.6.2 Anonymity and Preparedness for Confidentiality

Safeguarding anonymity and confidentiality was one of the key ethical considerations of the study, given the deeply personal nature of gym participation [19]. Participants regularly report on intimate details related to their bodies, diets, training routines, insecurities, aspirations, and lifestyle choices. These disclosures complicate issues of social and cultural identities (such as caste, gender, class and digital presence), which require effective guarding mechanisms to avoid any social or professional consequences, as well as maintaining coherence in research.

Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants; gym facilities were coded pending permission to use a nominal reference (if consent was obtained directly), such as "Corporate Gym A" or "Old City Akhara." Geographic specifics, caste affiliations, digital usernames, and unique social media identifiers were systematically removed or masked in all documentation and analyses, while maintaining the depth of analysis, to ensure privacy.

Data storage followed strict confidentiality protocols (Sharma, 2020). Field notes, sound recordings, and interview transcripts, as well as digital screenshots and ancillary artefacts, have been secured through password protection and encrypted digital storage. Handwritten notes and sensitive documents were in locked physical files accessible only to the researcher.

This layered security prevented sensitive information from being unintentionally leaked or stolen, either intentionally or unintentionally, by anyone.

During analysis and dissemination, the researcher carefully removed specific identifiers or elements of the context that risk unintentionally revealing identities (e.g., demographic combinations, gym schedules, distinctive behaviours). Even the illustrative vignettes, which, given the ethnographic nature of the approach, are crucial for the depth of the study, were generalised and anonymised. The content of public communications was ethically monitored, and private communications outside the study were not monitored unless consent had been obtained.

Continual and rational reflection on the researcher's influence during research, as well as possible inadvertence during the sharing of experiments, thereby compromising confidentiality, was of paramount importance (Sharma, 2020). Vigilance about the presence in the field, style of questioning, and note-taking helped to balance intrusion and develop a relationship of trust in which participants were comfortable sharing authentically.

By combining pseudonymisation, rigorous data handling, secure storage, ethical information reporting, and reflexive oversight, the privacy and confidentiality of participants were ensured, along with an authentic exploration of gym culture in Hyderabad, while protecting their well-being and trust.

3.6.3 Gender Sensitivity and Use of Respect

The gendered spaces of gyms constituted a key ethical issue (Rao, 2022). Gyms - whether corporate, boutique, or traditional - are environments where social expectations, the pressures of visibility, and normative body ideals intersect with gender. Women and men move through these spaces in different ways, and hierarchies - both explicit and implicit- shape their experience, as well as cultural mores and surveillance. The study employed a gender-sensitive approach, prioritising the comfort, agency, and safety of participants, while avoiding the reinforcement of existing inequalities.

Interviews with female participants took place in neutral/private places and in the presence of a neutral, trusted trainer/studio administrator (where envisaged). This set-up resulted in an attitude of openness without being exposed or scrutinised, especially in terms of discussing one's personal routines or motivation. The researcher actively preferred not to guide conversations into intrusive questions about bodily metrics or private relationships, unless topics were spontaneously proposed by participants, thereby allowing for respect and non-intrusive and non-coercive relationships.

Observational practices were gendered in the gym spaces (Sharma, 2020). Sensitive areas, such as changing rooms and private assessment areas, were not to be observed. The focus was still on interactions and social dynamics, without examining bodily scrutiny, which made observing male participants impossible without intruding and allowed for an understanding of the role of gendered influence on hierarchy and performance.

Special attention was paid to women-only gym sections and boutique studios (Rao, 2022). These spaces, which are often protective environments, require a higher level of ethical Reflexivity; the researcher monitored positionality, gaze and proximity in order not to cause discomfort or disrupt the behaviour. Non-verbal cues, verbal consent and informal cues informed when observation needed to be paused, or discomfort was experienced.

The emotional vulnerability of such body transformation - especially for women dealing with weight loss, muscle gain or aesthetic pressures - was reflexively documented (Singh, 2021). Instances of frustration, self-consciousness, or anxiety were noted alongside empowerment and pride, along with an ethical commitment to respectful engagement and validation of the participant's experiences.

Gender sensitivity carried over into digital spaces (Sharma, 2020). Online fitness communities, content posted by influencers, as well as interactions with apps, were analysed with a focus on the impact of gendered representation on perception and engagement. Content that included women in intense training was analysed concerning cultural agency and self-representation without allowing for the external ideational judgement. Consent and ethical boundaries were respected, even in digital arenas, and observation was not allowed to intrude on private content.

Overall, the gender-sensitive framework emphasised ethical mindfulness, participants' agency and cultural sensitivity (Rao, 2022). By being aware of gendered nuances, the study achieved an understanding of sanitary needs for privacy and individual comfort, thereby infusing strength into the analysis of embodiment, social norms, and identity construction in the fitness culture of Hyderabad.

3.6.4 Ethics in Digital Spaces

The extension of fitness culture into the digital space has created new types of ethical challenges, as it requires a serious consideration of privacy, consent, and data management (Rao, 2022). Ethnography in digital forms, the study examined the processes by which practices of fittingness, identities, and social interactions are mediated on social media and apps, as well as in social virtual communities. Digital manifestations - Instagram posts, reels, captions, gym adverts, WhatsApp groups, online challenges - are rich sites to understand

contemporary urban fitness culture, but blur the lines between public-private, performative-authentic.

One of the basic principles was the difference between public and private content (Sharma, 2020). Only content explicitly available to the public was admitted without explicit permission, for example, posts tagged #HyderabadFitness or public promotions in the gym. Private WhatsApp groups and online communities with restricted access require prior approval. This type of approach maintained the integrity of ethics by respecting the privacy expectations of participants in semi-private digital spaces and preventing intrusion.

Anonymity and pseudonymisation were used throughout the digital ethnography, reflecting protocols in the physical space (Rao, 2022). Screenshots, quotes or digital traces were anonymised unless they were from public figures or commercial entities. Even influencer content needed to be contextualised in order to prevent misrepresentation or decontextualisation; personal information (usernames, geotags, private comments) was removed to ensure digital privacy.

The research also took into account shape aspects such as performative and mediated dimensions of online fitness culture (Sharma, 2020). Social media helps bring curated identities to the fore, and it does so extensively, highlighting idealised bodies and routines. The research involved an important critical conversation or lens that is aware of how online representations are also socially constructed and personally significant. Reflexive journaling is used to record instances when digital material may introduce stereotypes or self-power, which aims to avoid the conflation of manifestations of performativeness and people's identities.

Consent was granted to directly engage with participants in online communities (Rao, 2022). For private implementation involving groups of people, interactive challenges, and live streaming, explicit permission was obtained in preparation for any information to be included in research data. Participants were informed about the objectives, scope, and potential uses of their content, which allowed them to opt in or out without consequence. This protocol honoured digital agency and autonomy in the same way that it is applied in physical spaces.

The digital presence of a researcher was also questioned for the possibility of influence on the behaviour of participants (Sharma, 2020). Transparency about the role, the absence of deception, and the minimisation of interventions maintained the authenticity of the practices implemented in social negotiations and identity performances.

By using these safeguards, the successful representation of digitally mediated aspects of fitness culture - Instagram workouts, app tracking, online challenges, communities of

influencers - was achieved without any loss of safety, privacy, or agency (Rao, 2022). The measures maintained high ethical standards while offering insights into the processes of interaction between physical and virtual spaces, social rules and the construction of identity in the physical fitness framework of Hyderabad today.

3.6.5 Ethical Stance Summary

The overall ethical framework of the study rests on three core commitments:

Ethical Principle	Application
Respect for autonomy	Allowing voluntary participation and the right to withdraw
Protection of identity	Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity across field interactions
Sensitivity to embodied and cultural vulnerability	Avoiding spaces or questions that may cause discomfort, stigma, or harm

The general ethical framework is based on three fundamental commitments:

With the principles of 'informed consent,' confidentiality, and considerate engagement based on gender, the study created an environment of trust, respect, and mutual understanding through which actual voices, without coercion, could emerge.

3.7 Data Analysis Strategy

The analytical process took an iterative, grounded and interpretive methodology that is consonant with the qualitative ethnography. Rather than defining categories, meaning emerged through long processes of engagement, interpretation of Reflexivity, and constant comparison in observations, interviews, and digital traces. Data were processed from the raw field material into conceptual themes and ultimately into a narrative that situates gym culture within a broader cultural and theoretical context.

3.7.1 coding Process

Coding was a three-stage approach:

Open Coding - Engagement on a line-by-line basis established repeated phrases, bodily sensations, and once again written phrases from social interactions, as well as cultural meanings (e.g., discipline, confidence, gendered spaces).

Axial Coding - Aggregated codes into more generalised relational categories (e.g., bodily goals and diet, things you should look up regarding fitness on the internet, gym manners).

Selective (Theoretical) Coding - Final refinement resulted in core themes of cultural logic that brought the Gym spaces into a small, expressive package.

3.7.2 Thematic Analysis

The six phases proposed by Braun and Clarke were used as a guide for analysing the theme:

Familiarisation - Dive reading Transcripts, notes, Digital archives

Initial coding -placing meaningful units.

Searching for Themes - Aggregation of codes within conceptual patterns.

Themes Reviewing - Making It Coherent and Opposite.

Defining and Naming Themes - Refinement and labelling.

Producing the Report - Relating theme(s) to theory, literature(s), and ethnographic narrative.

Emerging themes that engross anthropological agendas include body politics, ritual, modern urban identity, aspiration, digital habitus, and the commodification of fitness.

3.7.3 Narrative Construction

Narrative analysis situates lived experiences within socio-cultural contexts, employing the concept of "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). The analysis corresponds to three interpretations of layers: Individual (self-perception, body image), Social (hierarchies, peer influence), and Structural (digital technologies, gym design, market logic).

3.7.4 Analytical Reflexivity

Analytical Reflexivity underpins the study, where interpretation is recognisable as relational and co-praxis. Reflexive memos documented the researcher's positionality, assumptions, and theoretical frameworks to maintain transparency throughout the data collection, analysis, and dissemination processes. Specific contemplations involved the role of observation in narratives, gendered assumptions in readings, the digital mediation of identity formation, and the interaction of theoretical perspectives with local realities.

3.7.5 Summary of Coherent Analysis Approach

The data analysis strategy is cyclical, spinning in and out of the experiences from the field, compiling innate and developing themes and constructing the theory. By combining the elements of coding, thematic analysis, and narrative building, gym spaces are interpreted in the study as dynamic cultural ecosystems mediated through embodiment, digital practices, aspiration and urban transformation.

Chapter IV

Mapping the Landscape of Gym in Hyderabad

Introduction

Gyms in today's Hyderabad represent much more than a place to exercise regularly. However, they are emerging as changing cultural milieus that are shaped by urbanisation, digital exposure, socio-economic mobility, and (changing) corporeal ideals (Rao, 2022). As fitness has become both a lifestyle indicator and a measure of personal discipline, gyms have evolved into unique social spaces where identities are performed, negotiated, and fought over. Populating the city with fitness centres, from exclusive boutique fitness studios to functional neighbourhood gyms, health aspirations have evolved as the commercialisation of wellness occurs in an increasingly global city (Patel, 2023). Mapping gym typologies and their distribution across neighbourhoods helps us understand how class, locality, and access shape fitness experiences. In contrast, the spatial and infrastructural organisation of gyms, including the layout, arrangement of equipment, soundscape, mirrors, gym branding, and uniforms, significantly shape how the body is used and how social interactions and hierarchies are formed in these spaces (Rao, 2022).

Equally important is the development of gym-based subcultures, which voice a variety of motivations and embodied identities. These include various athletes with distinct needs, ranging from bodybuilders and athletic trainees to individuals interested in weight loss and digital athletes of all ages. Although sharing physical localities, these groups come with different expectations, social norms, and styles of performance, which contribute to a layered social ecology. The intersection of religion, gender, class, caste, region, and technology in gym spaces creates complex social dynamics that promote social inclusion and networking. However, subtlety and distance are produced in unexpected contexts (Patel, 2023). The negotiation of these social hierarchies is not only conveyed through physical training; the process also occurs through informal mentoring, peer support, and embodied performance, in order to demonstrate the extent to which gyms exist as arenas for both personal and collective identity formation.

Finally, Hyderabad's gyms are inextricably mired in a larger web of digital fitness facilities, social media influencers, wearable technologies and algorithmic performance tracking.

Digital engagement extends the concept of fitness beyond physical space, creating networks of consumption, surveillance, motivation, and identity formation (Rao, 2022). Participants bargain the ideal of bodies' aesthetic, the ideal of a lifestyle, and the ideal of social recognition in the physical and digital 'spaces,' creating hybrid and embodied identities in various local traditions, global fitness, and personal ambition. In this sense, the concept of Hyderabad's gym culture encapsulates how practices in contemporary fitness serve as a multi-layered cultural entity that involves urbanisation, technology, social stratification, and aspiration into its everyday embodied practices.

4.1 Classification of Gym Types

The gym landscape in Hyderabad is far from homogeneous, but instead mirrors the layered socio-economic landscape of Hyderabad, its history, and urban developmental patterns. There is a wide range in gyms, in terms of infrastructure, affordability, accessibility, specialisation and cultural environment. The origin and spread of these gym types is closely related to neighbourhood wealth patterns, real estate dynamics and lifestyle aspirations determined by class mobility, education, and exposure to international fitness trends. By typing gym and analysing the spatial patterns of these spaces, the present section draws attention to the role of fitness spaces as elements of fitness mechanisms that privilege, enhance accessibility, and foster social belonging in urban spaces.

4.1.1 The Elite and the Premium Fitness Centres

Elite and premium fitness centres in Hyderabad are the most visible side of Hyderabad's aspirational fitness culture. Predominantly located in high-income neighbourhoods, including Banjara Hills, Jubilee Hills, Gachibowli, Financial District, Kokapet, Nanakramguda, and select clusters of luxury apartments, these gyms function as lifestyle hubs rather than exercise spaces. Entry is gated with a betel leaf for financial intelligence. Membership fees are commonly valued at anywhere between Rs 40,000 and Rs 200,000 per year, based on the tier of service, which includes VIP access, personal training, spa access, and advanced health monitoring packages.

Typically, these fitness centres are based on the international wellness concept, which draws inspiration from Western boutique gyms, celebrity-branded gyms, and corporate fitness franchises. Their architectural layouts often incorporate zoned environments, featuring cardio theatres, machine-based strength areas, uniaxial studios, functional training studios, Pilates

and yoga rooms, spinning studios, and, in some cases, pools for swimming, as well as buildings that include steam and sauna facilities. The presence of floor-to-ceiling mirrors, polished floors, aesthetic lighting, and branded colour schemes enhances a visual sense of discipline, luxury, and performance. It reinforces the visual perception of fitness as not only an activity, but also a statement of identity.

Equipment is sourced from globally recognised brands, including TechnoGym, Life Fitness, Hammer Strength, and Matrix, to meet international standards. Technological incorporation becomes a trademark activity, featuring screens, QR code workout tracking, biometric data boundary strategies, online fitness progress charts, and wearable devices that sync fitness models, primarily focusing on data rather than physical activity.

Elite gyms focus on individualised and personalised fitness trajectories. Customised workout regimes, nutrition guidance, and periodic assessments are delivered to employees by certified trainers, often holding certifications from international bodies such as ACE, NASM, or ISSA. Some facilities hire physiotherapists, sports rehabilitation experts, dieticians and performance psychologists, thus combining fitness and healthcare for prevention and lifestyle optimisation.

The culture in these centres is defined by exclusivity and social signalling. Membership extends beyond utility and serves as a marker for socio-morphological mobility, cosmopolitan identity, and modernity. The clientele - corporate executives, IT professionals, start-up founders, social media influencers, celebrities and elite youth - use the gym as a place to network, self-present and consume a lifestyle. Branded activewear, carefully curated playlists, cafe spaces that sell high-protein smoothies or ketogenic snacks, and Instagram-worthy interiors are part of the sleek look of fitness performance in both the physical and virtual worlds.

These gyms also have a deep linkage to digital visibility. Many members record workouts, share stories of transformation or tag popular brands and trainers online (and each member creates a platform where fitness is a form of social currency). The involvement of fitness influencers, random celebrity visits, and branded fitness events, such as marathons, transformation challenges, or fitness retreats, further builds these gyms into a broader aspirational ecosystem.

Overall, elite and premium fitness centres in Hyderabad are symbolic microcosms of globalisation, class distinction and lifestyle modernity. In this sense, they indicate a shift from traditional manifestations of exercise to a commodified, technologically mediated, and socially performative fitness culture for a privileged urban demographic.

4.1.2. Mid-Range Commercial Gyms

Mid-range commercial gyms represent a significant and influential type of fitness infrastructure in the city of Hyderabad. Positioned primarily in emerging middle-income locations such as Attapur, Tarnaka, Kukatpally, Uppal, Dilsukhnagar, and the new urban belts around the Outer Ring Road, these gyms have a broad and socially diverse membership base. Their growth follows the demographic shift in the city, where rising disposable income, professional dreams and exposure to globalised lifestyles have turned fitness into a cultural need and not a luxury.

These gyms exist in an in-between, symbolic space: neither exclusive (high-end fitness clubs) nor informal (neighbourhood budget gyms). Instead, they present themselves as accessible yet modern spaces where individuals can engage in contemporary fitness culture without incurring too much financial burden. Those membership fee structures speak volumes to this accessibility - monthly memberships and quarterly memberships are common among members, who can now juggle gym life with fluctuating work schedules, household budgets, and seasonal life. Periodic offers during festivals, end-of-year resolutions, examination breaks, or wedding seasons comprise part of their operational rhythm, owing to the cyclical nature of motivation and social obligation in urban life.

Infrastructure typically integrates a mix of necessary cardio and strength training fitness equipment, as well as select high-end features such as group fitness studios or branded supplements. The aesthetic does not polish or embrace minimalism; it aspires to improvisation and slow upgrading, and often it is more about incremental investment patterns of gym owners. Walls can display motivational sayings, cinematic images of muscular bodies, or charts of progress, and in doing so, turn the gym into a symbolic place that promotes discipline, transformation, and self-improvement. Mirrors have both functional and psychological roles, serving as a form of correction, but at the same time, the mirror creates a silent stage for self-evaluation.

Social life inside mid-range gyms is hectic and mutualistic. Trainers play central roles as technical experts, motivators and sometimes informal advisers in their lives. Their authority is based on visible physical outcomes, personal stories of change and an embodied legitimacy recognised by their clients. Membership patterns create rhythmic social groupings: morning fitness focus groups (comprising working professionals and homemakers), afternoon clusters of college students, and evening groups of office workers seeking stress release after working hours. Within these repeated patterns, there is increased familiarity and relationships develop, turning the gym into a community, not an anonymous commercial service.

For many members, participating in such a gym is a way of becoming, rather than just exercising. The body becomes a visible project through which individuals seek to negotiate confidence, desirability, the expectation of marriage, professional identity, and adherence to cultural norms surrounding physical appearance. Attendance can be disrupted by workload pressures, financial concerns, exams, illness, or loss of motivation; it does not matter if attendance is intermittent, as there is a symbolic value in aligning with a larger cultural movement towards health consciousness, productivity, and self-regulated discipline.

In this sense, mid-range commercial gyms are important cultural institutions in the changing urban landscape of Hyderabad. They offer an accessible gateway into structured fitness, while at the same time developing aspirations that are linked to class mobility, modernity, and bodily self-management. Their continuing expansion speaks not only to market expansion but also shows a deepening internalisation of fitness as a part of the everyday life and identity of the growing middle class of the city.

4.1.3. Funds - Budget and Neighbourhood Gyms

Budget gyms are the most common and socially diverse fitness premises in Hyderabad. Located in thick residential colonies, as well as in peri-urban and fast-growing suburbs such as Uppal, Mehdiapatnam, Dilsukhnagar, L.B. Nagar, Chandanagar and others in and around the Old City, these gyms are an expression of democratising fitness on a grassroots level. When comparing premium environments in terms of aesthetics and curated branding, in budget gyms, function takes precedence over form. Their infrastructure is small, often characterised by improvised equipment, repaired machines, locally welded dumbbells, exposed wiring, uneven floors and painted motivational quotes replacing expensive decoration.

Membership fees in these gyms are artificially negotiable. Seasonal discounts, group memberships, student discounts and referral incentives are the hallmark of an economy of flexibility, not firm prices. In many cases, the owner, often a Devadasi, is at one time the trainer, manager, and cultural authority, dissolving formal limitations between administrative and community roles to create a space where fitness practices are built-in with kin among neighbours, fostered friendships, and less-formal mentor hierarchies.

From an anthropological perspective, budget gyms serve as social levellers, bringing together autorickshaw drivers, college students, delivery workers, small business owners, and the aspirational youth who view physical transformation as a route to social mobility. Here, the body is converted into a symbolic resource, an asset that can be redeemed for masculine authority, self-confidence, marriageability, career, and respectability in the neighbourhood.

In contrast to elite gyms, where anonymity prevails, kinship ties are fostered, and people know one another. Attendance becomes a kind of social accountability; absences are noticed, commented upon or questioned. Rituals arise organically - sharing protein supplements, exchanging tips on workouts, hijacking selfies to highlight progress in the muscles, and jointly doing analyses of technique. Mirrored spaces are not mere spaces for forms of form correction; they are coincidentally collective surveillance surfaces, upon which forms of progress, pride, and comparison take place.

While it is true that budget gyms often feature modest technology, there is still an infiltration of digital fitness culture within these facilities. YouTube tutorials provide information on workout structures, while Instagram reels showcase workout trends and fitness memes are used to influence motivational skills. However, unlike hybrid spaces of the boutique, the digital is supplementary (and not central)—embodied Practice over Digital Curating.

In this sense, budget gyms provide valuable insights into how fitness is experienced as a daily pursuit, rather than a lifestyle branding. They open a window on a fitness culture that is pragmatic, improvisational, community-driven, and firmly embedded in local social worlds. Instead of pursuing belonging for a select few, they institutionalise the notion of belonging, designating an ordinary culture rather than an exclusive individualism, within the process of physical training.

4.1.4 Fitness Studios

Specialised fitness studios are a rising segment of the urban fitness fraternity in Hyderabad. These include CrossFit boxes, Yoga studios, Pilates centres, Callisthenics parks, MMA academies, Spinning studios and Functional mobility centre. Their emergence is parallel to the growing IT and entrepreneurial population of the city. It can be felt in neighbourhoods like Gachibowli, Madhapur, Kondapur, or even the Financial District, as well as pockets of Banjara Hills and Jubilee Hills. These sites represent an urban sensibility influenced by worldly experiences, more disposable income, and a curated wellness approach, rather than an exercise-focused one.

Unlike commercial/budget gyms, which revolve around weightlifting machinery, these studios are structured around specialised concepts. Yoga studios are based on philosophies of mindful thought, balance and breath control. CrossFit boxes emphasise high-intensity functional movements and group competitiveness. Alignment, flexibility and core strength are the standards for working in Pilates centres. Callisthenics parks prioritise body weight mastery and public performance. MMA and combat training spaces develop discipline, technique, and controlled aggression. Each form sets the mid-level logic for movement, pedagogy, and embodied value.

The social dynamics of these studios are organised around micro-communities. Members are often required to attend classes at a specific time and form relationships with instructors and their cohort peers. It is designed to create familiarity, accountability, and a shared identity. Individuals, when describing themselves, commonly use names such as "CrossFitters", "yogis", or "Pilates practitioners", indicating that the training extends beyond physical routines and is deeply ingrained in personal and social identity. The training space becomes a community space in which encouragement, comparison, struggle, and progress are seen and recognised socially.

These sites promote the creation of an aesthetically pleasing environment. Minimalist wooden floors, natural lighting, curated playlists, branded mats, graffiti-styled motivational walls, or open industrial interiors are their distinguishing features from conventional gyms. Material culture is an important part of the medium for constructing meaning. Kettlebells, resistance bands, mobility sticks, aerial yoga silks, and suspension trainers are a way of communicating that bodies are being trained for functional capacity rather than solely for the aim of adding muscle mass. In many cases, the studio space is purposely designed as a lifestyle space rather than simply a workout space.

Digital platforms are so integrated into the workings of these studios. Attendance, class scheduling, progress tracking, and payment systems are often managed using apps. Social media becomes an extension of the training community wherein accomplishments, poses, transformations, failures and activities are acted out and restated. This digital visibility contributes to a sense of belonging and helps shape the symbolic prestige associated with it.

Participation in these studios is determined by socio-economic status, familiarity with contemporary fitness culture, and self-assurance in moving under the gaze of a socially visible group of people. While promotional language struggles to highlight accessibility, to be included, one must often adapt to the culture of the community in terms of vocabulary, dress, and performative guidelines. Individuals who are new to set bodies or unfamiliar with Boeing's globalised exercise cultures may initially feel awkward or hesitant. Belonging, therefore, is developed through repetitions to acquire movement forms, through gradual mastery and through recognition by trainers and peers.

Anthropologically, specialised fitness studios are the localisation of global wellness trends in the growing middle-class urban culture of Hyderabad. They are sites where health and desire intersect, self-care becomes a marker of individual investment, and fitness becomes an identity practice rather than just a habit. These studios materialise novel forms of urban belonging and offer insights into the role of bodywork, lifestyle branding and the formation of communities in the contemporary city.

4.1.5 Private and Public Fitness Centres

Public and institutional fitness centres hold a unique place in the Hyderabad fitness scenario. They are an important form of exercise, rather than just in terms of infrastructure, community welfare programmes, and institutional discipline. These spaces are held in municipal gymnasiums, YMCAs, university and college training facilities, as well as those attached to police and defence institutions. Their defining feature is accessibility; cost is either minimal or symbolic, reflecting a governance-based approach to public health rather than a profit-based one. Membership here is not so much an expression of lifestyle as it is a functional need, rehabilitation, athletic preparation, or routine physical maintenance.

Material conditions inside these types of facilities are frequently indicative of disparity in state investment. Some universities and defence training centres adhere to rigorous equipment standards and a set coaching practice. However, municipal gyms may be plagued by outdated

equipment, poor maintenance practices, or inadequate trainer availability. Nevertheless, despite infrastructural limitations, these kinds of environments foster a different sense of commitment and belonging. Training is viewed less as a personal indulgence and more as a civic or institutional responsibility. For police trainees, daily workouts are linked with disciplinary identity and the embodiment of authority. For university sportspeople or disadvantaged youth in Buenos Aires, the gym becomes a means of securing a sports scholarship, a job, or upward mobility through state sports sectors.

Unlike commercial gyms that promote personalised practices, self-branding and experiential consumption, public and institutional centres focus on uniformity and collective rhythm. Bodies are not moved in a way that individual projects, but are moved within the framework of an organised exercise culture where repetition, regular exercise sequences and rule-based conduct are used to control movement. The atmosphere is more determined by routine than by spectacle. Mirrors, performance aesthetics, and fitness fashion are not as important as function, stamina, and measurable progress. Social hierarchies within these gyms are the result of athletic performance, seniority, or institutional role, rather than the display of style or the ability to purchase goods.

These spaces were also sites of social negotiation where different groups of users met outside of separated class zones of the city. Students from modest socio-economic backgrounds may train with the scholarship athletes or civil service aspirants. For some, such gyms are rare social equalisers. However, even here access still filters accordingly to wider stratifications of society, such as in reservation policies, public housing zones or institutional affiliations. The training environment, therefore, is a space where discipline, aspirations, hierarchy, and embodied practice intersect, underscoring the idea that public infrastructures of fitness are integral to the process of constructing urban citizenship and collective bodily culture in Hyderabad, albeit in a subtle yet significant manner.

Significant distribution areas in Hyderabad

The geographical distribution of the gyms reflects the socio-economic zoning in the city. Premium and specialised fitness centres concentrate on high-income commercial areas and upmarket gated residential areas, taking advantage of proximity to upwardly mobile people and the demand of the corporate workforce. Mid-range gyms are those in a more dispersed distribution and are typically located around middle-class residential areas, while budget

gyms are more commonly found in high-density areas and in areas with limited open space and infrastructure.

In the Old City and peri-urban areas, the gym phenomenon has sometimes emerged as a result of grassroots entrepreneurship rather than corporate planning, representing localised demand and community-specific body cultures. Meanwhile, nascent IT corridors are defining a digital fitness ecosystem in which gyms and online coaching coexist with smart wearables, subscription apps, and both hybrid fitness models.

4.2 Infrastructural and Spatial Analysis

Gym spaces in Hyderabad are not merely functional areas for physical exercise; they are designed spaces of aspiration, discipline, and visibility. Their infrastructural layouts and organisation of spaces reveal much information about body politics, social organisation, and cultural values subsumed within fitness practices. By examining floor plans, zoning practices, and material culture that constitute these environments, this section explores the ways in which gyms construct embodied experiences and hierarchies within the types of spaces we build.

4.2.1 Floor Plans, Spatial Zoning

The internal organisation of the gyms in Hyderabad is rarely an accident. It reflects the coded multiplicities of different cultural logics, bodily hierarchies, and economies of visibility that are inscribed as part of the layout itself. When one walks into most gyms, one of the first places that is often seen is the cardio area, which is conveniently placed near the entrance or adjacent to transparent glass facades facing the street. This spatial positioning converts cardio activity into a visual performance, so that running, cycling, and elliptical movements cease to be simply forms of activity but become forms of self-presentation for the general public. The cardio zone can be viewed as a place where the body announces its willingness to initiate the transformation process, indicating a commitment to others and to oneself.

More secluded and symbolically central are strength training areas further within. Dominated by free weights, machines and benches, these spaces exude a prevailing atmosphere of intensity, discipline and unspoken rules. Their deeper position represents a domain that demands skill, familiarity and embodied confidence. Entry into this zone for many members occurs slowly, particularly for newcomers, women, or individuals new to lifting who are

unsure of proper lifting etiquette. The heavy-lifting segment is not only physically challenging but also socially encumbered with masculine, competitive and hierarchies of muscularity, effort and knowledge. In several gyms, permanent bodybuilders or regulars often claim stations, typically near the heaviest weights or wall-length mirrors, that they stake out, establishing invisible boundaries and promoting ownership and continuity through sheer physical repetition.

On the other hand, group studio rooms are a different type of environment. These spaces are acoustically and spatially distinct, often equipped with sound systems, wooden floors, and mirrored walls. Activities such as yoga, spinning, Zumba, aerobics, and mixed mobility training take place here. In contrast to the intensity and solitude that are the defining features of the strength section, there is the collectivism and synchronised movement of the studio, which creates an energy rhythm as a result. Studio culture has a tendency to attract females, older individuals, and social learners who prefer to be taught rather than left to train on their own with machines. These spaces also have symbolic significance, expressing expressivity, experimentation and emotional release in contrast to the self-measurement and competitive performance evident in weight training spaces.

Between the structured clusters are liminal spaces - stretching corners, mat areas or small clear spaces where individuals warm up, rest or take in others. These areas are orientation transitional zones. Beginners are easily drawn to it, where they test out if they are comfortable and then step forward to more populated, while socially coded sections. These liminal spaces are also spaces of negotiation of a silently negotiated belonging, which makes the gym a place of gradual bodily confidence and unfamiliarity with space.

Ancillary environments, such as locker rooms, consultation cabins, protein counters, and body assessment stations, help reinforce the institutional progression of the fitness journey. Weighing scales, measurement charts, and diet consultation tables formalise self-transformation as a regulated process. In several gyms, the protein counter becomes a micro-social hub, where transactions go hand-in-hand with advice, gossip, and identity building. Supplements are not only consumed as a component of physiological function; they are also consumed as a ritual of commitment to a fitness lifestyle.

Gyms located in lower-income neighbourhoods are often more compact in their spatial logic. Machines are lined up close, ventilation may be poor, and areas of movement overlap. This

spatial density conveys a sense of concentrated aspiration, not merely a limitation of architecture. Here, negotiation and interaction of proximity, shared equipment, and scarce resources feature, and forge a training culture that is shaped by adjustment, cooperation, and sometimes tension. Despite the restraints of space, the energy contained in these environments is often vibrant, characterised by loud music, informality, and visible exertion, where sweat can be transformed to drive.

Across all typologies of gyms, spatial organisation does more than structure exercise. It defines belonging, regulates access, brings forth embodied assurance, and confirms the social order of wellness. The arrangement of bodies and machines becomes a silent pedagogy, teaching individuals how to move, stand in specific spaces, when to step in, and how to be visible or invisible in the current fitness regimes of Hyderabad.

4.2.2 Mirrors as Surveillance and Surveillance of One's Self

Mirrors take centre stage and sometimes a depressingly dominating place for gurus across Hyderabad. Their placement, which generally spans long interior walls, creates a situation of space in which bodies are continuously reflected, multiplied, and made visually accessible for evaluation. While the use of mirrors is initially defensible as a technical instrument for providing posture correction or synchronisation to an athlete, their role as symbolic and social facilities quickly surpasses their utility. They become tools through which gym users learn to appraise themselves and other people through an evaluative gaze. In this sense, mirrors function as silent pedagogical devices, teaching people how to exercise, how to hold themselves, and ultimately, to become a particular kind of bodily media that the gym values.

The reflection in mirrors in gyms is rarely neutral. It is driven into an ecosystem of comparison and aspiration. Individuals assess their own shape while simultaneously scanning others, taking in their muscularity, leanness, posture, rhythm, and effort. This endless eye-pointing act creates a form of self-surveillance in which the body is not only a framed body that is checked for physiological changes, but is also objectified in a frame in which the body is subjectively inspected on behalf of social legitimacy. The mirror serves as an audit point for membership and progression, reminding members of their literal and metaphorical standing within the gym's bodily hierarchy.

For seasoned bodybuilders or those who are assured, looking in the mirror may be a source of pride and affirmation. Their bodies are already in line with the gym's ideals, and it is an asset

to be showcased and refined. Flexing, posing, and purposefully staring at one's reflection is not a narcissistic habit, but a ritualised practice related to identity construction and muscular discipline. Performative in these gestures of competence, commitment and authority in the social structure of the gym.

For newcomers, older adults, or those who do not already fit conventional fitness aesthetics, the use of mirrors may be uncomfortable. Many have reported a period of initial self-consciousness, during which they sense awkward positioning, avoid eye contact with their reflection, and prefer peripheral or less visible spaces. Women in mixed-gender gyms also face a double exposure, at the same time watching themselves and being watched. For some, this results in empowerment and motivation, for others, it results in pressure, vulnerability or being judged. Mirrors alter not only the perception of people's location, but also their feelings while standing before them.

Mirrors are also psychologically the site of projected transformation. They are spaces where people imagine their own future selves, often with images from the media, social media influencers, and advertisements for gyms. The mirror serves as a theatre of aspiration, in which one puts into practice qualities and techniques of confidence, discipline, and visibility in preparation for their full fruition. The gym mirror, thus, is not a simple representative of the individual but an aspect of the cultural technology of self-making. There is an invitation for the body to be continually evaluated, compared, corrected, and improved, which reinforces the idea that physical transformation is both visible and expected.

In lower-cost gyms where the mirrors are cracked, uneven, or partly in place, users still interact with them intensely. The fractured reflection does not shed light on the lack of desire for visual accountability; instead, it points out the uneven distribution of fitness spaces in terms of material resources. Even with limited infrastructure, the process of self-viewing is important for the fitness experience. Across different socio-economic contexts, various mirrors mediate the relationship between the body (embodiment) and identity. They define confidence, behaviour control, and performance, and perpetuate the cultural discussion that bodies are projects in progress. Through mirrors, the gym becomes a space for the continuous measurement, negotiation, and transformation of the self, both physically and emotionally.

4.2.3 Machines, Tools, and the Control of Space

Gym equipment in Hyderabad is more than just a means of physical exercise. The placement of machines, the type of machines, and the accessibility of machines are closely tied to the structures of social hierarchies, cultural values, and symbolic power within fitness spaces. In elite and premium studios, there is a cluster of advanced machinery, including cable equipment, specialised resistance equipment and technological integration of cardio equipment, which is not only a marker of technological progress but also suggests financial power and means to utilise this machinery. Their presence represents a substitution of prestige and modernity, as clients associate fitness with lifestyle status and global trends. The removal of the equipment itself becomes a mark of belonging in nature, as it marks out areas for those who know how to operate it fully, being able to afford their own training or seeing fitness as aspirational.

Within mid-range and commercial gyms, the weight racks, benches, and power cages often serve as the centre of masculine authority. These areas are usually dominated by experienced male lifters who exhibit not only strength but also profound knowledge of techniques, training regimes and body aesthetics. Control over the use of such equipment conveys symbolic power, and a hierarchy is established where those who regularly operate such machinery are afforded respect and social recognition. Newcomers or women participants may have an ambivalent sense of access, feeling uncertain about taking up space around a party or enjoying lighter weights until an acquaintance and confidence are established. The machines, therefore, serve as both means of training and means of social control, shaping the forms of interaction, movement, and visibility within the gym.

In modern functional training areas and open-plan studio spaces, the focus is no longer on traditional weightlifting but on fluidity, coordination, and athletic performance. Functional rigs, suspension systems, kettlebells, and modular spaces are designed to cater to dynamic movement, reflecting the globalised fitness philosophies of versatility & holistic strength, with injury prevention at its core. These zones lead to experiments, group activities, and easy yet disciplined play, contrasting with the hierarchical intensity of the heavy-lifting sections. Equipment in these areas communicates inclusivity, flexibility, and an openness to a fusion of global trends with a local practice.

In contrast, there are the traditional akharas of Hyderabad, which feature indigenous knowledge systems, characterised by minimal equipment but abundant symbolism. Stones, sandbags, mud pits, and simple logs are used as primary tools for strength training. These

elements represent centuries-old techniques which emphasise bodily discipline, endurance and mental fortitude. The use of natural or improvised implements subverts the hierarchies in the West, where gym equipment and technological sophistication are valued. It proselytises the value of embodied knowledge in place of commodified machinery. In such spaces, mastery has not been assessed through brand or precision of the tool but rather through skilful consistency and ability to internalise traditional training ethics.

In all types of gyms, equipment serves not only to organise physical outcomes, but also to organise social space and mediate power relations. The location of machines is an articulation of expectations about skill, effort, and tenure, and the type of tools one has access to is an expression of economic and cultural capital. Coming into contact with these things is a form of bodily literacy, signalling belonging, competence, and identity within the fitness community. Whether in the studios of high-tech, mid-range gyms, or the traditional indigenous akharas, these material culture tools embody a pedagogy that governs participants on how to inhabit the gym space, negotiating hierarchies of social alignment with cultivated ideals of strength, discipline, and performance within its cultural context.

4.2.4 Considerations: Branding, Lighting and Aesthetics

Visual design elements in Hyderabad's gyms play a crucial role in shaping the physical experience of the space and fostering an embodied identity. Lighting, signage, wall graphics, and decor are not simply decorative choices, as they begin to communicate values, aspirations, and social cues that affect the perception of members regarding themselves and others. Premium gyms in places like Banjara Hills, Jubilee Hills, Gachibowli, and others often opt for a dark, minimalist aesthetic with touches of LED lighting, polished metallic finishes, and equipment branding. Walls can feature high-resolution images of globally recognised athletes, fitness icons, or corporate logos that support the message of performance, discipline, and exclusivity. The interplay of shadows, light and reflective surfaces enhances muscular definition and a visual stage is created where effort is celebrated, and identity is constantly monitored and curated:

Mid-range Gyms, by contrast, often have a preference for more vibrant and accessible visual environments. Motivational quotes in bold lettering, portraits of local bodybuilding champions, cinema stars, or sports icons decorate the walls, serving as symbols that are culturally resonant and mediate the gap between aspiration and familiarity. Customised

Slogans: Something could be based on Telugu idioms or even regional expressions of strength and perseverance, aiming to develop a regionalised ethos that encourages participation and fosters community building. In these spaces, aesthetics is less about the global aspiration and more about inclusion, encouragement and creating a fitness identity that evokes the middle classes grappling with issues of urban social hierarchies.

Lighting plays a further role in modulating experience and perception in gyms. Bright, even lighting in utilitarian areas contributes to clarity, visibility, and safety. In contrast, accent lighting, particularly in areas with mirrors, free-weight areas, or a studio, contributes to body definition and movement. Such techniques encourage them not only to pay attention to their technique but also to their visual presence as members, fostering a culture of performative embodiment. Participants are unconsciously reoriented according to the movements and postulations of the material and symbolic environments, which reinforces a constant dialogue between space, body, and the self's perception.

Branding and aesthetics also serve an aspirational function. Walls, posters, and digital screens serve as cultural texts that prescribe the cultural trajectory the gym-goer is expected to take: transformation, self-discipline, and visibility. The curated environment signals to others who "belongs" and what forms of effort are valorised and, through the communication of social hierarchies through visual semiotics, naturalises them. Even in less-resourced places, such as public gymnasiums or budget studios, posters of famous athletes, hand-painted motivational slogans, and banners touting local competitions serve a similar purpose. These kinds of motivational objects bridge the gap between one's own efforts and recognition by the group and identity with nothing less than one's culture.

Together, branding, lighting, and aesthetic design in Hyderabad gyms facilitate workouts, but also orchestrate the emotions and psychological climate of the space. They create atmospheres that guide behaviour, mediate confidence and structure interaction. In this way, visual and material culture become an agent of socialisation by the way its members engage with and are affected by the gym environment, from how they perceive themselves, to how they move through space, to how they perform, in the material and imaginative, in private and in public, the identities the gym environment valorises. The aspiration to transform, to be part of, and to have the possibility of being seen is activated and maintained through carefully orchestrated symbolic still lifes.

4.2.5 Sound Architecture Heat and Sensory Architecture

Gyms are multisensory environments where sound, heat, and atmospheric conditions are finely tuned to affect behaviour, mood, and embodied experience. Sonic culture in the gym is a crucial component in the formation of energy, motivation, and identity. In weightlifting and strength zones of high-tech gyms, first-class music is specially chosen to add aggression, power, and long-term endurance, as well as outdoor activities involving community and Group Work. Rhythmic beats synchronise movement, increase intensity, and create a familiar resonance, turning physical exertion into a shared collective experience or even a ritual. In contrast, yoga studios, Pilates rooms, and meditation corners often feature calming reminders in ambient music that promote introspection, relaxation, and body awareness, marking a shift from performance-driven exertion to contemplative embodiment. Even with group fitness classes like Zumba or aerobics, curated playlists give attention, tempo, and social coherence to their group fitness classes, and those movement patterns are individualised and turned into a performative, choreographed form.

In the case of mid-range and budget gyms, music is often cranked up as a remedy to the situation of being in a crowded, non-ideal, and not properly designed space. Loud, pulsating tracks invigorate participants and provide a sonic buffer against distraction, helping to maintain their motivational level. Here, sound becomes both an allied functional and social element, establishing areas of intensity that divide work effort, as well as creating a sense of collaborative effort even within less architecturally complex spaces. In the case of boutique studios, the use of sound is more immersive and precise, with acoustics being carefully calibrated to create an environment where rhythm, tempo, and the layering of sound determine the experience of the rendering of bodily performance.

Thermal and atmospheric conditions act as mediators to facilitate a similar experience of gym activity. Air conditioning in elite and boutique gyms is a signifier not only of comfort but also of status, signalling the "new" and care, as well as luxury. Cool, controlled air allows for extended periods and eliminates visible strain, contextualising the physical experience with aspirational standards of fitness consumption. In neighbourhood or municipal gyms, heat, humidity, and sweat are more prominent, and one is dealing with a raw, visceral environment where physical labour and exertion are immediately visible. The embodied strain is both a symbol of effort and a social equaliser and reminds the participants of the material realities of working (and class) fitness practices. Within such places, neither climate control nor

heightened awareness of the limits of the body reinforced the intensity of physical labour as a culturally inscribed meaning through its accomplishment.

The combination of sound, heat, and other sensory information forms a type of environmental pedagogy that has a structure of behaviour and perception. Participants internalise cues of tempo, temperature, and rhythm, and, in relation to the cultural logic of the space, match their efforts to its pace, rate, and bodily conception. The sensory architecture of gyms, therefore, mediates the senses of impending identity, performance and a sense of belonging. Sonic and thermal regimes transform gyms into orchestrated arenas of embodied practice, creating atmospheres within which aspirations, discipline, and social hierarchies are continually performed, negotiated, and experienced on a level of perception and corporeal sensation.

Analytical Insight

The infrastructural politics of gym places tell that:

- * Space is used to organise bodies in hierarchies of confidence, skill and identity.
- * Material culture is a trainer in silence - influencing behaviour, ritual and aspiration.
- * Aesthetic design converts fitness into a culture and no longer a mere exercise for health.

Thus, gyms become architectures of discipline and desire, resulting in a culture where the pursuit of fitness becomes impossible outside their space-time-metaphorical and metaphysical confines.

4.3 Gym Subcultures

Gyms in Hyderabad are not only places of physical conditioning but also a microcosmic community representing a diverse ethos, values, drive, and social stratification. Within these settings, numerous subcultures exist, sometimes in harmonious alignment with one another, at other times in subtle competition. Such groups shape the matrix of the gym's cultural environment and help to negotiate space, apparatus and interpersonal relations. Empirical observations during fieldwork identified four overlapping dominant subcultures: bodybuilders, weight loss clients, athletes, and digital fitness followers.

4.3.1 Bodybuilders: The Pursuit of Size, Discipline and Respect

The bodybuilding community comprise one of the most salient and culturally relevant subcultures in the gym ambit, Hyderabad. Members are often seen as the keepers of norms in the gym, setting standards of discipline, intensity, and etiquette that reverberate across the overall fitness environment. Their identities are based on muscularity, physical symmetry, strength, precision of diet, and supplementation, thus merging corporeal labour and self- and social identities. For the bodybuilder, the gym is much more than a place to exercise; it is an arena where effort, perseverance, and ambition are constantly performed and affirmed.

Spatially, bodybuilders are known to settle in dominant positions occupying key areas, notably the free weights, power racks, and bench press stations. Mirror-lined corners are used as both instruments of self-assessment and for rehearsing presentation abilities, the body being controlled, examined, and aestheticised. Occupation of such spaces is both practical and symbolic; proximity to advanced equipment, visibility in mirrors, and command of high-intensity areas all signal competence, experience, and social standing. Novices come to explore these spaces through participation and interaction, thereby inculcating tacit knowledge about movement, pacing, and the unspoken movement norms that govern interaction.

The rhythm of bodybuilding practice is, in itself, a form of cultural expression. Grunts, the clanking of weights, clouds of chalk dust, and synchronised exchanges of encouragement represent a non-verbal lexicon of shared meaning: that of effort, mastery, and belonging. Bodybuilders often establish mentor-approach relationships, passing on technical information relating to lifting mechanics, nutritional regimens, supplementation and preparation for competition. These social networks are at the same time functional and symbolic, organising hierarchical relationships and enforcing the subculture values of discipline, sacrifice, and perseverance. In this sense, gym spaces freeze time, serving as microcosms of apprenticeship and identity formation, as well as the resolution between physical and social authority, which are co-constituted.

Competitive bodybuilding tournaments, including Men's Physique, Classic Bodybuilding, and Mr Telangana tournaments, elevate the gym experience to the public cultural arena. Participation in these events is not simply athletic, but a public display of self-disciplinary behaviour, aesthetic labour, and aspirational male behaviour. Success carries a sense of legitimacy, social recognition, and symbolic power that translates, in most cases, back into the hierarchies in everyday gym dynamics. Within gyms, bodybuilders wield some authority

and police the norms of the practice, serving as mentors and forming both visible and unseen codes of conduct. Their influence structures access to specific spaces, dictates routine execution, and valorises particular forms of effort.

Bodybuilding in Hyderabad is thus the perfect example of the intersection of physical labour, social negotiations and cultural performance. It is a subculture that combines the individuality of ambition with the collective recognition and wildness of technical expertise and aesthetics, encompassing both the showy and the disciplined, the private and the public. The identity of the bodybuilder is inextricably linked to the environment that shapes, displays, and validates them; mirrors, machines, auditory cues, and peer networks are all instruments as part of the ongoing project of self-construction. Within this framework, muscularity is both a personal accomplishment and a social marker that allows practitioners to claim status, respect, and symbolic authority within Hyderabad's heterogeneous gym landscape.

4.3.2 Weight-Loss Clients: Transformation as a Motivation

Weight-loss clients are one of the biggest and most diverse groups of people in Hyderabad's gyms, including middle-aged men and women, young professionals, and students. A complex combination of these health, aesthetic, and social expectations influences their involvement in gym culture. Issues like diabetes, thyroid imbalances, cholesterol or even risk of heart disease interact with culture-based ideals of beauty, and society's assumptions about marriage, employability or social image (again, influencing participation). Thus, the gym becomes the site of intersection between personal ambition, social visibility, and the body's work.

While bodybuilders have tangible and visible achievements through muscularity, weight-loss participants are navigating vulnerability and uncertainty. Their first experiences with gym spaces begin slowly, progressing through various exercises, even starting with cardio machines. Directed training and group classes introduce technique, endurance, and stamina, as well as through peer observation. Social interaction, informal encouragement, and community participation are critical, as they motivate sustained effort and commitment through the creation of micro-networks. Women in this demographic often find comfort in structured settings (i.e., Zumba, Pilates, functional interval training, and women-only classes) in terms of providing a place of focus, belonging, and limited anxieties associated with mixed-gender rooms.

Progress is measured not only by objective measures (such as weight reduction and body measurements) but also through social recognition. Before-and-after photographs posted in gyms, fitness contests and success stories shared on social media platforms such as WhatsApp or Instagram build public discourse about transformation, and this not only establishes both requirements of discipline and public approval of disciplinary routines. The emotional experience of weight loss sufferers is nuanced, in which the feats of failing are celebrated, setbacks are negotiated, and the physical process is closely entangled with identity formation. The gym is a stage upon which the project of personal transformation is enacted, witnessed, and socially recognised as the result, generating a dialogue between the private aspirations and the public appearance, which is perpetually ongoing.

Digital extensions of gym culture enhance this process with apps, online challenges, and social media communities that offer constant feedback, comparison, and reinforcement to ensure fitness practices are embedded into the wider socio-community and digital cultures. Through these dynamics, weight-loss clients provide an excellent example of how gym participation can simultaneously be a personal endeavour, a socially mediated performance, and an ethnographically rich site for understanding embodied identity, motivation, and transformation.

4.3.3 Athletes: Presentation of Self as Identity

Athletes in Hyderabad form a subculture that is characterised by the courts of interaction between physical practice, online communities, and media influence. Unlike bodybuilders or weight loss clients whose routines are localised mainly, athletes receive knowledge, motivation, and cues related to identity from digital outlets such as Instagram, YouTube and fitness apps, as well as online challenges. They follow influencers who do the groundwork of translating fitness trends from the other side of the world and making them accessible and vernacularised, producing tutorial information on workouts, diet plans and supplementation strategies.

Engagement with digital fitness is both interactive and performative; athletes often document their own routines, whether through photos, videos, or progress updates, in a continuous feedback loop between self-presentation and peer validation. This practice reaches its reiterative reach in terms of mediated embodied identity, whereby athletes calibrate

movements, appearances, and routines in response to online exemplars, algorithmic visibility, and the reinforcement of social norms.

For many, digital fitness spaces offer inspiration, accountability, and a sense of belonging. With their current health crisis making physical gyms challenging to access consistently, for example, and social anxieties in traditional spaces, these digital spaces are particularly appealing. At the same time, these platforms create tensions related to authenticity, comparability, and the commodification of expertise, particularly between visibility and engagement, which frequently involve relations of authority, regardless of formal training.

In Hyderabad, athletes negotiate a hybrid identity that combines both aspirational corporeality and mediated social recognition, representing wider processes of globalisation, the penetration of technology, and the rising spread of fitness culture across physical boundaries. Their presence highlights the co-constitiveness of the gym and digital spaces in contemporary fitness practices, and how the physical and digital spaces structure the ways we aspire towards, act, and judge each other in ways that demand new ethnographic fields in virtual space. In this embodiment, performance and identity remain dynamically interrelated as well.

4.3.4 Digital Fitness Followers: Influencers, Content Creators and Virtual Disciples

Digital fitness followers in Hyderabad are an emerging subculture that combines physical activity with online visibility, technological interaction, and lifestyle performance. Participants increasingly exercise for more than the traditional goals of fitness; they exercise for (documentation, social recognition, and growth of an individual/personal or aspirational identity in the digital space). The ubiquity of Instagram Reels, YouTube tutorials, smartwatch tracking, and app-based coaching has enabled this subculture to spread from traditional gym hierarchies into a hybrid space where corporeal work is intertwined with mediated performance.

Many digital fitness users also video their exercise with tripods, stabilisers, or smartphones, editing angles and sequences according to lack of effort, form, or progress. They monitor aspects such as the number of macros and steps, heart rate, and quality of sleep by wearing wearable devices, taking data-driven practices into daily life. Participation in structured online challenges (such as 75 Hard, 10K Steps, or very popular programs like Chloe Ting) offers temporal markers of achievement, a group of others keeping you honest, and a

comparison of performance. For these followers, global fitness idols often take the place of local trainers or traditional authorities in the gym as reference points, creating transnational flows of knowledge, style and practice.

The aesthetics of digital fitness is as important. Athleisure, branded clothing, smartwatches, and matching footwear signify a digitally mediated lifestyle and send signals of adherence to larger trends in health, fashion, and social media culture. This journey, leading to the gifted moment and the performance in the gym, or the immediacy of the audience and selected visibility for an online spectator community, creates a layer of embodiment where identity is negotiated between private gym training, a convergence with peers, and online digital validation.

Digital fitness spaces also democratise access to knowledge, so that participants who might not be confident or have the resources or social capital to invest in traditional gym cultures can interact with traditional fitness cultures, learn techniques, discover ways to manage their nutrition, and engage in broader global fitness discussions. Nonetheless, tensions are generated as digitally mediated practices merge with set hierarchies in the gym. Traditional trainers, seasoned bodybuilders, or athletes may sense that digital followers are more concerned with performativity than discipline, with breaking normative routines or challenging authority structures that traditionally controlled gym spaces. Such dynamics help inform the extent to which digital fitness expands, but also complicates the ethnography of gyms, highlighting the use of technology, embodiment, performance, and social identity.

In Hyderabad, physical labour, self-presentation, and global digital flows intersect in the digital fitness followers, who also embody a hybridised culture. Their presence transforms the gym space both materially and symbolically, highlighting the way contemporary fitness practice extends beyond corporeal exercises to encompass a scenario in which visibility, community participation, and identity construction are embedded in the interconnected roles of physical and virtual domains.

Subcultures in Interaction: Coexistence, Tension and Influence

Subcultures within the gym space in Hyderabad interact with each other in a complex web of relationships, negotiations, and occasional conflicts. While there is some overlap in the physical and temporal territories occupied by bodybuilders, athletes, weight loss clients, and digital fitness people, these proximities do not always result in harmonious relationships.

Tensions often exist over the issue of control and access to equipment, with bodybuilders often dominating free-weight sections, power racks, and bench-press stations, leaving an implicit hierarchy that the casual member has to negotiate carefully. Similarly, the appearance of digital fitness enthusiasts filming their fitness or documenting their exercise routines can lead to clashes with traditional users, who may see fitness activities like this as disruptive, performative or attention-seeking. Spaces located for group classes, functional training zones, or specialised studios could become further sources of disagreement, especially when peak-hour crowding is limited, or the temporal timing of the sessions conflicts with established routines. Gendered dynamics are an additional layer of negotiation, as visibility, safety, and comfort are unevenly distributed between the zones in mixed-gender environments or in spaces influenced by cultural norms and participation.

Despite these conflicts, it is also the interactions between subcultures that catalyse hybrid practices, innovation and cross-pollination of techniques and identities. Bodybuilders may emulate certain habits of digital fitness culture, such as creating workouts for social media, trying out trending nutrition plans, or joining online communities to gain wider recognition. Weightlifting: Weight-loss clients will often transition into endurance or athletic routines, incorporating exercises that complement their aesthetic goals. At the same time, there is a growing use of digital platforms by athletes, who hope to track progress, seek sponsorships, or share instructional content, thereby integrating traditional disciplines into mediated visibility. These adaptive behaviours are expressions of how the gyms of Hyderabad are sites of negotiation, in which subcultures modify and influence each other through observation, imitation, and competition. The presence of different yet interconnected groups highlights the fluidity of embodiment in fitness spheres, where hierarchies, rivalries, and collaborations simultaneously constrain and expand individual possibilities for self-expression, social belonging, and cultural performance. In this manner, gyms become dynamic laboratories of social interaction, generating hybridised identities that convey the result of a constant interplay between tradition, modernity, corporeal practice, and digital mediation.

These subcultures demonstrate that gyms in Hyderabad are vibrant cultural arenas, where identities are not simply imposed - they are constructed, negotiated, displayed, and contested. Understanding such groups can provide insight into the contribution of fitness to social belonging, aspiration and urban identity in a rapidly globalising city.

4.3 Gym Subcultures

Gyms in Hyderabad are not only places of physical conditioning but also a microcosmic community representing a diverse ethos, values, drive, and social stratification. Within these settings, numerous subcultures exist, sometimes in harmonious alignment, at other times in subtle competition with one another. Such groups shape the matrix of the gym's cultural environment and help to negotiate space, apparatus and interpersonal relations. Empirical observations during fieldwork identified four overlapping dominant subcultures: bodybuilders, weight loss clients, athletes, and digital fitness followers.

4.3.1 Bodybuilders: The Pursuit of Size, Discipline and Respect

The bodybuilding community comprise one of the most salient and culturally relevant subcultures in the gym ambit, Hyderabad. Members are seen by many as the keepers of norms in the gym, in terms of setting standards of discipline, intensity, and etiquette, which reverberate across the overall environment of fitness. Their identities are based on muscularity, physical symmetry, strength, precision of diet, and supplementation, thus merging corporeal labour and self- and social identities. For the bodybuilder, the gym is much more than a place to exercise; it is an arena where effort, perseverance, and ambition are constantly performed and affirmed.

Spatially, bodybuilders are known to settle in dominant positions occupying key areas, notably the free weights, power racks, and bench press stations. Mirror-lined corners are used as both instruments of self-assessment and for rehearsing presentation abilities, the body being controlled, examined, and aestheticised. Occupation of such spaces is both practical and symbolic; proximity to advanced equipment, visibility in mirrors, and control of high-intensity areas all signal competence, experience, and social standing. Novices come to explore these spaces through participation and interaction, inculcating tacit knowledge about movement, pacing, and the unspoken movement norms of interaction.

The rhythm of bodybuilding practice is, in itself, a cultural language. Grunts, the clanking of weights, clouds of chalk dust, and synchronised exchanges of encouragement represent a non-verbal lexicon of shared meaning: that of effort, mastery, and belonging. Bodybuilders often establish mentor-approach relationships, passing on technical information relating to lifting mechanics, nutritional regimens, supplementation and preparation for competition. These social networks are at the same time functional and symbolic, organising hierarchical relationships and enforcing the subculture values of discipline, sacrifice, and perseverance. In

this sense, gym spaces freeze time, serving as microcosms of apprenticeship and identity formation, as well as the resolution between physical and social authority, that are co-constituted.

Competitive bodybuilding tournaments, including Men's Physique, Classic Bodybuilding, and Mr Telangana tournaments, elevate the gym experience to the public cultural arena. Participation in these events is not simply athletic, but a public display of self-disciplinary behaviour, aesthetic labour, and aspirational male behaviour. Success carries a sense of legitimacy, social recognition, and symbolic power that translates, in most cases, back into the hierarchies in everyday gym dynamics. Within gyms, bodybuilders wield some authority and police the norms of the practice, serving as mentors and forming both visible and unseen codes of conduct. Their influence structures access to specific spaces, dictates execution, and valorises various forms of effort.

Bodybuilding in Hyderabad is thus the perfect example of the intersection of physical labour, social negotiations and cultural performance. It is a subculture that combines the individuality of ambition with the collective recognition, and the wildness of technical expertise and aesthetics, blending the showy and the disciplined, the private and the public. The identity of the bodybuilder is inextricably linked to the environment that shapes, displays, and validates them; mirrors, machines, auditory cues, and peer networks are all instruments as part of the ongoing project of self-construction. Within this framework, muscularity is both a personal accomplishment and a social marker of status that allows practitioners to claim respect and symbolic authority within Hyderabad's heterogeneous gym landscape.

4.3.2 Weight-Loss Clients: Transformation as a Motivation

Weight-loss clients are one of the biggest and most diverse groups of people in Hyderabad's gyms, including middle-aged men and women, young professionals, and students. A complex combination of these health, aesthetic, and social expectations influences their involvement in gym culture. Issues like diabetes, thyroid imbalances, cholesterol or even risk of heart disease interact with culture-based ideals of beauty, and society's assumptions about marriage, employability or social image (again, influencing participation). Thus, the gym becomes the site of the intersection of personal ambition, social visibility, and the work of the body.

Whereas bodybuilders have legible and tangible achievements through muscularity, weight-loss participants are navigating vulnerability and uncertainty. Their first experiences with

gym spaces tend to start slowly through progressive experiences, even beginning on cardio machines. Directed training and group classes introduce technique, endurance, and stamina, as well as through peer observation. Social interaction, informal encouragement, and community participation are critical, as they motivate sustained effort and commitment through the creation of micro-networks. Women in this demographic often find comfort in structured settings (i.e., Zumba, Pilates, functional interval training, and women-only classes) in terms of providing a place of focus, belonging, and limited anxieties associated with mixed-gender rooms.

Progress is measured not only by objective measures (such as weight reduction and body measurements) but also through social recognition. Before-and-after photographs posted in gyms, fitness contests and success stories shared on social media platforms such as WhatsApp or Instagram build public discourse about transformation, and this not only establishes both requirements of discipline and public approval of disciplinary routines. The emotional experience of weight loss sufferers is nuanced, in which the feats of failing are celebrated, setbacks are negotiated, and the physical process is closely entangled with identity formation. The gym is a stage upon which the project of personal transformation is enacted, witnessed, and socially recognised as the result, generating a dialogue between the private aspirations and the public appearance, which is perpetually ongoing.

Digital extensions of gym culture enhance this process through apps, online challenges, and social media communities, which provide constant feedback, comparison, and reinforcement to ensure that fitness practices are embedded into broader socio-cultural and digital communities. Through these dynamics, weight-loss clients provide an excellent example of how gym participation can simultaneously be a personal endeavour, a socially mediated performance, and an ethnographically rich site for understanding embodied identity, motivation, and transformation.

4.3.3 Athletes: Presentation of Self as Identity

Athletes in Hyderabad form a subculture that is characterised by the courts of interaction between physical practice, online communities, and media influence. Unlike bodybuilders or weight loss clients whose routines are localised mainly, athletes receive knowledge, motivation, and cues related to identity from digital outlets such as Instagram, YouTube and fitness apps, as well as online challenges. They follow influencers who do the groundwork of

translating fitness trends from the other side of the world and making them accessible and vernacularised, producing tutorial information on workouts, diet plans and supplementation strategies.

Engagement with digital fitness is both interactive and performative; athletes often document their own routines, whether through photos, videos, or progress updates, in a continuous feedback loop between self-presentation and peer validation. This practice reaches its reiterative reach in terms of mediated embodied identity, whereby athletes calibrate movements, appearances, and routines in response to online exemplars, algorithmic visibility, and the reinforcement of social norms.

For many, digital fitness spaces offer inspiration, accountability, and a sense of belonging. With their current health crisis making physical gyms challenging to access consistently, for example, and social anxieties in traditional spaces, these digital spaces are particularly appealing. At the same time, these platforms create tensions related to authenticity, comparability, and the commodification of expertise - between visibility and engagement that frequently involve relations of authority, regardless of formal training.

In Hyderabad, athletes negotiate a hybrid identity that combines both aspirational corporeality and mediated social recognition, representing wider processes of globalisation, the penetration of technology, and the rising spread of fitness culture across physical boundaries. Their presence highlights the co-constitiveness of the gym and digital spaces in contemporary fitness practices, and how the physical and digital spaces structure the ways we aspire towards, act, and judge each other in ways that demand new ethnographic fields in virtual space. In this embodiment, performance and identity remain dynamically interrelated as well.

4.3.4 Digital Fitness Followers: Influencers, Content Creators and Virtual Disciples

Digital fitness followers in Hyderabad are an emerging subculture where physical activity meets online visibility, technological interaction, and lifestyle performance. Participants increasingly exercise for more than the traditional goals of fitness; they exercise for (documentation, social recognition, and growth of an individual/personal or aspirational identity in the digital space). The ubiquity of Instagram Reels, YouTube tutorials, smartwatch tracking, and app-based coaching has allowed this subculture to spread from traditional gym

hierarchies to involve a hybrid space where corporeal work is intertwined with mediated performance.

Many digital fitness users also video their exercise with tripods, stabilisers, or smartphones, editing angles and sequences according to a range of effort, form, or progress. They monitor aspects such as the number of macros and steps, heart rate, and quality of sleep by wearing wearable devices, taking data-driven practices into daily life. Participation in structured online challenges (such as 75 Hard, 10K Steps, or very popular programs like Chloe Ting) offers temporal markers of achievement, a group of others keeping you honest, and a comparison of performance. For these followers, global fitness idols often take the place of local trainers or traditional authorities in the gym as reference points, creating transnational flows of knowledge, style and practice.

The aesthetics of digital fitness is as important. Athleisure, branded clothes, smartwatches, and matching footwear signify a digitally mediated lifestyle and send signals of adherence to larger trends in health, fashion, and social media culture. This journey leads to the gifted moment and the performance in the gym, or the immediate audience, and selected visibility for an online spectator community, creating a layer of embodiment where identity is negotiated between private gym training, a converging gaze with peers, and online digital validation.

Digital fitness spaces also democratise access to knowledge, so that participants who might not be confident or have the resources or social capital to invest in traditional gym cultures can interact with traditional fitness cultures, learn techniques, discover ways to manage their nutrition, and engage in broader global fitness discussions. Nonetheless, tensions are generated as digitally mediated practices merge with set hierarchies in the gym. Traditional trainers, seasoned bodybuilders, or athletes may sense that digital followers are more concerned with performativity than discipline, with breaking normative routines or challenging authority structures that traditionally controlled gym spaces. Such dynamics help inform the extent to which digital fitness expands, but also complicates the ethnography of gyms, highlighting the use of technology, embodiment, performance, and social identity.

In Hyderabad, physical labour, self-presentation, and global digital flows intersect in the digital fitness followers, who also embody a hybridised culture. Their presence transforms the gym space both materially and symbolically, highlighting the way contemporary fitness

practice extends beyond corporeal exercises to encompass a scenario in which visibility, community participation, and identity construction are embedded in the interconnected roles of physical and virtual domains.

Subcultures in Interaction: Coexistence, Tension and Influence

Subcultures within the gym space interact with each other in a complex web of relationships, negotiations, and occasional conflicts in Hyderabad. While there is some overlap in the physical and temporal territories occupied by bodybuilders, athletes, weight loss clients, and digital fitness people, these proximities do not always result in harmonious relationships. Tensions often exist over the issue of control and access to equipment, with bodybuilders often dominating free-weight sections, power racks, and bench-press stations, leaving an implicit hierarchy that the casual member has to negotiate carefully. Similarly, the appearance of digital fitness enthusiasts filming their fitness routines or documenting their exercise can lead to clashes with traditional users, who may perceive these activities as disruptive, performative, or attention-seeking. Space allocated for group classes, functional training zones, or specialised studios could become further sources of disagreement, especially when peak-hour crowding limits access or the temporal timing of the sessions conflicts with established routines. Gendered dynamics are an additional layer of negotiation, as visibility, safety, and comfort are unevenly distributed between the zones within mixed-gender environments or in spaces influenced by cultural norms and participation.

Despite these conflicts, it is also the interactions between subcultures that catalyse hybrid practices, innovation and cross-pollination of techniques and identities. Bodybuilders may emulate certain habits of digital fitness culture, such as creating workouts for social media, trying out trending nutrition plans, or joining online communities to gain wider recognition. Weightlifting: Weight-loss clients will often transition into endurance or athletic routines, incorporating exercises that complement their aesthetic goals. At the same time, there is a growing use of digital platforms by athletes, who hope to track progress, seek sponsorships, or share instructional content, thereby integrating traditional disciplines into mediated visibility. These adaptive behaviours are expressions of how the gyms of Hyderabad are sites of negotiation, in which subcultures modify and influence each other through observation, imitation, and competition. The presence of different yet linked groups highlights the fluidity of embodiment in fitness spheres, where hierarchies, rivalries, and collaborations simultaneously constrain and open up individual possibilities for self-expression, social

belonging, and cultural performance. In this manner, gyms become dynamic laboratories of social interaction, generating hybridised identities that convey the result of a constant interplay between tradition, modernity, corporeal practice, and digital mediation.

These subcultures demonstrate that gyms in Hyderabad are vibrant cultural arenas, where identities are not simply imposed - they are constructed, negotiated, displayed, and contested. Understanding such groups can provide insight into the contribution of fitness to social belonging, aspiration and urban identity in a rapidly globalising city.

4.4 Effects of Religion, Class, and Region

The gym landscape in Hyderabad is not a neutral and homogenous one for fitness; it is culturally, historically, socially, and economically shaped, influencing the way fitness is practised. As the city grows and changes, gyms both reflect and create forms of pluralism and segregation, serving as places where social identities are either reinforced, challenged, or renegotiated. This section examines how affiliation with religion, class-based access, and cultural practices of specific regions influence the nature of gym participation and the meanings people attribute to fitness.

4.4.1. Religion and Minority Gym Spaces: Belonging, Boundaries, and Cultural Context

Religious identity in Hyderabad's gyms is not limited to the demographic makeup of the body. However, it is rather a matter of real social, spatial, and symbolic imposition of fitness practices. Such Muslim-majority gym facilities across neighbourhoods like Tolichowki, Shaheen Nagar, Bahadurpura, Malakpet, and the Old City are a conscious negotiation of cultural norms, gendered prescriptions, as well as religious prescriptions. Women-only workout timings or sole studio spaces provide privacy and comfort when participating in fitness without any apprehension from familial or other members. Dress codes that encourage full-length covering of the body, such as skirts, male instructors for men and female instructors for women, and the playing of culturally familiar music and use of culturally familiar language, not only reflect religious sensitivities but also mean that participants experience a sense of belonging and acceptance that is often absent in cosmopolitan or commercial gym environments. In these spaces, fitness is embedded with ideas of social respectability, health stewardship, and the enactment of moral codes, as this is seen as paving the way for current space practices, such as the gym, which serves as both a site of bodily transformation and cultural affirmation.

Sikh-run gyms, especially those with a martial arts or athletic background, provide an emphasis on discipline, strength training, and community identification. Here, physical practice in turn becomes inelible from collective heritage, with its rituals, hierarchical mentorship, and codified training regimens, reinforcing wider social and religious norms. Hindu excess dominant akharas have a similar conceptualisation of integrating the spiritual and ritual aspects with the physical, wherein devotional practices, meditation, and following tradition are combined with muscle development, endurance training, and preparation for competition. These hybrid spaces put the body as an instrument not just of personal health or aesthetic aspiration, but also as a vehicle for the play of religious and cultural values in people's lives and their performance and sustenance.

While religiously homogeneous gym environments offer comfort, participation and cultural affirmation, they may also inadvertently contribute to social boundaries and fight inter-community interactions. Participants often move through these spaces with an increased awareness of social norms, propriety, and visibility, which influence behaviours, movement in space, and engagement strategies. Nonetheless, these minority oriented gyms are significant sites of inclusion, especially and categorically for minority communities that have been historically underrepresented or marginalised in commercial, mainstream fitness culture. They present their access, representation, and culturally resonant frameworks for health and bodily cultivation, as well as how fitness landscapes in Hyderabad are inherently interlinked with religious, cultural, and social dynamics.

In ethnographic observation, these gyms enable the analysis of subtleties and include informal mentorship networks, community interactions, encouragement, peer control of adherence to cultural codes, and negotiation of private versus public bodily display. The performative dimension of fitness extends beyond physical strength and endurance to encompass identity affirmation, social recognition, and ethical self-actualisation. The activities of space users in these spaces reveal a constant interrelation between corporeal exercise, social inclusion, and continuity in spaces that establish gyms as arenas in which religion, social norms, and embodied profiles intersect in everyday urban life.

4.4.2 Class and Economic Stratification Access, Aspirations and Symbolic Fitness Economies

Class and economic stratification in Hyderabad's gym is not merely one of differences in affordability; instead, it deeply structures the embodied experience, social interactions, and aspirations among its participants. Low-cost neighbourhood gyms usually come in more densely populated or working-class areas with minimalistic infrastructure, rusted free weights, shared benches, and the cardio zone is all flocked. Despite having few materials, these gyms are rich cultural spaces where muscularity serves as an indicator of personal discipline, social respectability, and masculine identity. For students, auto drivers, delivery personnel, and lower-middle-class youth, gym participation is a visible investment in upward mobility. A physical body is thus a site where the dignity, physical strength and social recognition are negotiated and performed. The trainer-trainee relationship within these spaces is often casual but deeply embedded within community networks. It is emphasised by mentorship, moral instruction, and knowledge of how to successfully deliver services, rather than commercial branding and aesthetic display.

Mid-range commercial gyms are in a socially and spatially hybrid position. These facilities are situated in middle-class neighbourhoods, serving IT professionals, teachers, office goers and aspiring families. Their design, equipment, and class schedule strike a balance between functional fitness and lifestyle presentation. Participation here is closely related to the sense of social belonging. Members exhibit a mix of both aspirational consumption, peer comparisons and the use of structured routines. While these gyms might not have the luxury of these premium centres, they are a symbolic arena of intersection between economic stability and corporeal self-fashioning. Peer observation, social networking and guidance from semi-professional trainers foster such an environment in which health capital and social capital are generated simultaneously.

Premium fitness centres are at the top of the hierarchy in Hyderabad's fitness centres, both spatially and symbolically. Situated in Banjara Hills, Jubilee Hills, Gachibowli and gated high-end complexes, these gyms have imported equipment, curated soundscapes, climate-controlled interiors, and personalised training plans. Clients include elite professionals, social media influencers, expatriates and high-income entrepreneurs. In these spaces, fitness is a performative and aspirational one. The body is bred as a way of life, a commodity, a place where social distinction is created and where class privilege is displayed. English tends to predominate as a language of communication, as well as for protein powders and supplements imported from overseas. Technology, including wearable devices and digital

tracking of performance, mediates the exercise experience. The participation of these gyms extends beyond health: membership is an expression of being part of a symbolic fitness economy, where visibility, aesthetic discipline, and composed routines play a role in the social hierarchy.

Across these strata, access to fitness is racially constituted to a great degree, depending on economic capital. The adequacy of equipment and trainer expertise, as well as spatial aesthetics, which reflect broader social inequalities. The corporeal practices performed within these gyms are simultaneously biological, cultural, and symbolic, a moment in which there is a multi-layered interplay between material resources, social aspirations, and identity formation. In Hyderabad, the body is both a personal project and a site where class privilege, aspiration, and embodied capital intersect. It produces differentiated fitness cultures that cannot be separated from the city's socio-economic landscape.

4.4.3 Regional variations in Style: Tradition and Modernity and capital hybrid value practices

Regional style variations in Hyderabad's gyms reflect an intertwined model of tradition, modernity, and hybridised forms of fitness, which not only influence the physical routines themselves but also touch on histories of vanishing cultures and how these discussions evoke social emotions. The Old City gyms and akharas retain the pehlwani traditions with an emphasis on communal training, discipline and a holistic approach towards spots. Athletes train in sand pits, undertake body weight callisthenics, and work with the gadha and Indian clubs. Nutritional regimens prioritise milk, ghee, and local foods rich in protein, giving more credence to an embodied knowledge that is passed down from ancestors. More important to the training ethos is resilience, endurance, and group ritual, rather than individual recognition, which fosters a unique local masculinity rooted in physical work, lineage, and the community's esteem.

In comparison, gyms in Cyberabad and Hitech City have a globalised look and training idea. CrossFit boxes, HIIT studios, and functional training centres focus on measurable performance and tailored programs, utilising digital tools. Memberships are often paired with fitness trackers that resemble wearable devices and are designed to serve as "coaches" within apps, making exercises more technologically intuitive or even socially curated. This style is focused on efficiency, flexibility, and optimising the body to represent the urban

professional's focus on productivity and performance. Social interaction occurs through shared classes, social media interactions, and fitness challenges, creating hybrid identities that combine both local and globalised ideals.

This example illustrates how Secunderabad and Cantonment gyms show a residual militarised influence in the design of training. Rope climbs, endurance sprints, kettlebells, circuit practices, and strength routines reminiscent of the discipline and regimen of the defence-oriented physical culture. These spaces place value on precision, stamina and performance reliability, which often attracts clients from a service-oriented background or those who aspire to achieve structured physical development. Physicality here is not just about aesthetics and performance, but also functional, with a symbolic resonance of civic duty, order, and heritage.

Peri-urban Gyms and facilities in smaller towns convey agrarian and rural physical values, focusing on raw strength, muscular endurance, and utilitarian functionality. Exercises are frequently based on techniques such as lifting, pulling, or carrying, which are consistent with labour-intensive livelihoods. While these gyms are often not adorned with high-end equipment or highly appropriated interiors, they represent local understandings of corporeal prowess and status; [reading between the lines here] the body is an indication of capability, resilience, and social status.

Increasingly, these regional styles are hybridised as a result of exposure to digital media, urban migration and consumer trends. Wrestlers use machines, protein supplements, and HIIT as a technique. IT guys try to incorporate yoga, martial arts, and functional training. Boutique gymmers use elements of traditional Indian strength systems, recast for modern branding. This dynamic interchange highlights the fluidity of Gym Culture in Hyderabad, where embodied knowledge, local history, and global influences converge to produce heterogeneous practices that are simultaneously traditional, modern, and innovatively blended. The gym becomes a site for negotiating regional heritage, contemporary ways of life, and aspirational identities through movement, ritual, and material culture.

Collective Implications: The Fitness of Social Geography

The combination of religion, class, and regional variation in Hyderabad yields a complex social geography of fitness, where gym spaces are not merely neutral spaces for physical exercise, but highly coded, reflecting and reproducing social hierarchies. These factors define

together who is involved, how, rather than what they are involved in, and the meanings assigned to their involvement. Religious affiliation often determines how gym spaces are structured, the times for sessions and appropriate forms of attire and interaction, which create a space where participants feel culturally safe and recognised. In Muslim majority neighbourhoods, Sdkbaionedra democouple or culturally familiar music Classes, for example, women-only, are reinforced, the down of comictableness and the social appositions, yet building modesty and social norms. Similarly, Sikh and Hindu-centred training spaces incorporate both the tradition of martial and devotional experiences, which contribute to developing a collective identity while being simultaneously parallel commitments to physical discipline.

It is further modulated by economic status. Elite fitness centres and boutique studios are not only markets for bodily transformation, but also places for the convergence of lifestyle, wealth, and aspirationality. Mid-range gyms are the sites of compromise between aspiration and accessibility, housing socially diverse communities that negotiate classed hierarchies through routines, the choice of equipment, and patterns of participation. Low-cost neighbourhood gyms, if materially poor, are crucibles for social capital as they provide working-class youth with spaces to develop bodily authority, masculine cred and peer recognition. Cutting across these spaces, the body becomes a canvas for the performance of economic and social positioning, which is intended to either strengthen or undermine visible hierarchies.

Regional styles emerge from these dynamics and create a unique embodied grammar of movements and training. The Old City akharas continue to hold onto Pehlwani traditions and communal discipline - whereas Hitech City gyms victimise globalised notions of performance and digital mediations. In contrast, the problem sets of peri-urban and military-influenced gyms emphasise endurance, strength, and functional capability. The intersection of region, class, and religion gives rise to hybrid practices, in which participants navigate various cultural codes, borrowing and mixing techniques to construct identities locally, while also aspiring to global and cosmopolitan affiliations.

Collectively, all these different factors that intersect give rise to a fitness geography which is both enabling and constraining. Gyms serve as sites of community belonging, where people attain cultural safety, peer recognition, and aspirational belonging; however, they also perpetuate social boundaries that enhance hierarchies of class, gender, and cultural capital.

They are the fields in which modernity, tradition and embodied identity are constantly being negotiated, being and becoming, in which the performance of strength, endurance and aesthetics is inseparable from social visibility and relationship dynamics. Fitness in Hyderabad thus emerges as an embedded practice, historical memory, economic opportunity, spatial belonging, and cultural norm, all of which contribute to the broader urban social landscape, which describes the social design of the city.

4.5 Media and Digital Fitness Ecosystems.

In Hyderabad, the new fitness landscape today cannot be limited to the physical environment of the gym; digital media, algorithmic tracking, and the growing fitness influencer community on online platforms are increasingly impacting it. The emergence of digital ecosystems has ushered in new hybrid modes of fitness participation, where bodies are trained in a spatial locale but perform, measure, and compete in a virtual one. Social media platforms, fitness applications, and wearable technologies have altered the very concepts of motivation, accountability and visibility, turning fitness into a constant cycle of self-tracking, self-improvement and public representation.

4.5.1. Influencers: Aspiration, Authority and Identity Performance

Fitness influencers have emerged as key players in Hyderabad's urban health scenario, serving as mediators between global trends and indigenous fitness practices. Their presence turns gyms into performative spaces in which bodies are not only shaped through training, but also in how they are historically recorded, curated, and broadcast to a digital audience. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube Shorts, Facebook and TikTok (sometimes accessed using VPN) provide a space where influencers create aspirational identities that combine aspects of expertise, aesthetics and life-stylelife-style branding; Their content ranges from transformation journeys, detailed workout tutorials to nutrition guidance, supplement reviews, motivational messages, to glimpses within daily routines thereby inputting a narrative in which we see that physical progress, discipline and identity go hand in hand.

These influencers act as cultural translators and recontextualise Global fitness practices for the audiences of Hyderabad. They often incorporate a Western exercise approach, such as HIIT, CrossFit, and functional basic training, with local refinements, and combine it with familiar dietary recommendations, regional language cues, and culturally resonant motivational styles. Their authority does not originate from certification, but rather from

performativity, participation in separate social media, and validation by their peers. The followers regularly copy routines, likes, dislikes, and social behaviours (e.g., selfies before and after workouts) from the influencer, thereby performing aspirational narratives as depicted online.

The influence spills over into the physical gym space. Traditional hierarchies, in which there are authority-setting certified trainers and seasoned veterans in bodybuilding, are increasingly being challenged. A famous digital trainer or content creator can change the perceptions of their peers, and many times, the younger members who prefer social media over professional expertise. It has created a new hierarchy, one of embodiment, skill, appearance, and visibility, comprising a spectrum of influence that extends not only online but also offline.

Moreover, the influencer ecosystem encourages hybridised identities as followers combine offline gym practice with online presentation. Gym-goers may practice routines less out of interest in progression and more to satisfy a feedback loop, relating to sources of documentation and validation for their audience, thereby creating a performative feedback loop for both bodily practice and social identity. The integration of algorithm-delta-based metrics, such as likes, shares, and views, further intensifies this culture, incentivising the routine and aesthetics that guarantee maximum visibility, rather than necessarily promoting effective or sustainable fitness.

Through these dynamics, influencers do what they are doing, which is more an exercise of instruction than an exercise of culture. Fitness thus becomes, at the same time, a personal quest, a social spectacle, and a digitally mediated identity project, underscoring the fact that urban fitness culture in Hyderabad is increasingly becoming pragmatic, with belittled visibility, aspiration, and the economies of attention.

4.5.2. Fitness Apps: Personalisation, Programmed Coaching, and Algorithmic Accountability.

Fitness apps have entirely changed the way people in Hyderabad interact with their bodies and fitness habits—platforms such as Cult. Fit, HealthifyMe, MyFitnessPal, Fittr, and Strong have more in store than exercise logging. Algorithmically structured coaching, goal tracking, and personalised feedback are all offered. Users input their age, weight and fitness targets, as well as their daily activity level, and the artificial intelligence can create exercise and diet plans customised specifically for their needs. These apps are often connected to wearable

devices, such as smartwatches or fitness bands, which provide biometric information, including heart rate, sleep patterns, step counts, and calories spent. This information feeds back into the app in a continuous loop, where it is measured, adjusted, and further refined.

The individualised programmes foster a discipline approach to fitness where adherence is tracked in the form of streaks, badges, and points. This gamification brings a form of accountability which is both motivating and performative. As opposed to conventional gym spaces in which success may be socially validated (through peer recognition and/or trainer feedback), the app-mediating environment emphasises self-monitoring and number validation. Participants increasingly interpret bodily progress in terms of data points, such as the number of calories burned, weight lifted, steps taken, or hours of sleep logged. The body becomes a site of calculation rather than an experiential or socially negotiated entity, and a body that is to be continuously optimised.

For the users, this integration of electronic devices offers flexibility, ease, and access to expertise without the time and location constraints of real gyms. However, it also brings new pressures as this feedback in an algorithmic system can lead to anxiety over consistency, comparative progress or loyalty to idealised metrics. The quantified self thus comes with empowerment as well as the more subtle forms of surveillance that encourage behaviours that fit digital norms of fitness. In hybrid environments, where app-driven guidance is integrated into in-person exposure to physical health games in a gym, participants experience a dual regime of instruction: embodied mentorship from physical health trainers, where smart devices are exchanged for the provision of expertise from digital environments.

All this duality affects how identity is constructed on the fitness landscape. Bodies are both disciplined according to social norms, aesthetic aspirations, and cultural ideals, and at the same time, measured, visualised and optimised according to app-generated metrics. In Hyderabad, the emergence of fitness apps has served as one illustration of the intersection of digital technologies and embodied practice, giving rise to hybrid forms of self-control, self-motivation, and self-identity, in which the quantified self is at the core of urban health culture.

4.5.3 Wearable Technology: Surveillance, Motivation, and Digital Identity?

Wearable technologies, such as Fitbit, Apple Watch, Garmin, and Xiaomi bands, have changed the way participants relate to their bodies, routines, and fitness identities in

Hyderabad. These devices help extend the gym space into a continuous, digitally mediated domain, where bodily activity is constantly monitored, quantified, and interpreted. Unlike traditional self-observation or trainer-led feedback, wearables generate a constant awareness of physical metrics, such as the number of steps taken, the amount of calories burned, heart rate, sleep quality, and workout intensity. This real-time feedback leads to a culture of self-discipline, in which individuals actively adjust their routines to achieve daily, weekly, or monthly goals, and there is a growing orientation of their behaviour around device-generated norms.

For many participants, checking activity rings, heart rate alerts, or comparing step counts has become a ritualised, seamless addition to their daily activities. Wearables foster a new vigilance of the body, in which the body is perpetually read and recalibrated based on quantifiable measures of performance it displays. In some gyms, members are grouped based on wearable accomplishments, intra-gym competitions are created, or social recognition is given for directly quantifiable output. Platforms such as Strava or Apple Fitness reinstitute this to make data available to the public or semi-public, which also allows for methods of peer commenting, cheering, and comparing performances, creating a vested incentive for social belonging through digital metrics.

The incorporation of wearable technology is also a factor in how a person constructs identity performance. Users regularly curate their digital presence by sharing snapshots of their progress, streaks or summaries of their workouts to indicate their sense of discipline, dedication and conscious awareness of healthy behaviour. It creates hybridised fitness personas that combine both offline socialising fitness spaces (in-person at a gym) and online communities (online through algorithms and social media). Regardless, having ubiquitous monitoring provides new pressure. Missed exercise, unfruitful statistics, or slipping further behind other peers can cause feelings of anxiety, guilt, or a sense of incompleteness. The body becomes a place, not only for physical labour, but also for constant digital surveillance, marked through algorithms, devices and social comparison.

This interplay of drive and tracking makes us aware of the complex influence that the wearable technologies have on embodied identity. Gym-goers navigate the duality of empowerment and accountability, whereby health is made possible by the use of technology but put under some form of subtle discipline. Within Hyderabad's fitness culture, the use of wearables has shown the extent to which corporeal practice is becoming interwoven under

the gaze of digital observation, giving rise to bodies that are self - managed and socially recognised as well as algorithmically optimised.

A Hybrid Fitness Culture

In terms of the fitness image that Copenhagen's population is increasingly part of, it should be noted that we are already seeing a hybrid form in which physical practice and digital mediation are closely coupled. Influencers, fitness apps, and wearable technologies contribute to this ecosystem, generating forms of participation that are both embodied, performative, and data-driven. Physical training in the gym is no longer just about personal health or aesthetic enhancement; it is now supported by the validation of digital metrics, social interaction, and algorithmically mediated acknowledgement. Every repetition, kilometre run or calorie burned can be recorded, tracked and distributed, making personal fitness a measurable and communicable narrative.

In this hybrid culture, motivation is not limited to intrinsic objectives such as wellness, stamina or strength. Participants are increasingly driven by social visibility, the desire for digital affirmation and recognition, whether from their peers or the rest of the world. Actions and performances are carried out in physical space but are confirmed in the digital space through likes, comments, shares, and leaderboard ranks. The quantification of progress, not just fitness through apps and smartwatch analytics or influencers challenging steps, has the impact of creating a double accountability: one to oneself and one to a digital community.

Community formation is one more important aspect of this ecosystem. Online groups, transformation hashtags, group challenges and live-streamed workouts create new concepts of belonging which extend beyond exercise rooms. Enthusiasts might follow global regimes, participate in synchronised virtual challenges, or imitate influencer practices while retaining membership in local gyms, creating identities of overlap: that of the local gym-goer, the aspirational digital participant, or the algorithmically measured self.

Despite the focus on digital mediation, there has been an ongoing emphasis on traditional gym culture. Core social rituals, hierarchies, and embodied practices continue to be at the centre, but these are increasingly understood through the lens of visibility, branding, and lifestyle performance. The hybrid fitness culture of Hyderabad is a case study of the modern urban culture of wellness that combines corporeal work, technological interaction, and social

dramaturgy, thereby producing bodies that are simultaneously socially recognised as at once physical, technological, and social.

Chapter V

Presentation and Analysis of Data

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher outlines the central analytical core of the dissertation, which focuses on the empirical insights gained through extensive ethnographic fieldwork in various gyms in Hyderabad, ranging from Ash Sports Academy and Force Fitness Studio to a low-cost community gym and a traditional akhara. Far from presenting narratives of description alone, this study interrogates the complex interplay between individual behaviours, social structures, and cultural meanings that are woven into practices in the gym. Gyms, as observed through fieldwork, are dynamic spaces where hierarchies in society, gender performances, digital influences, and community formations intersect. Consequently, they define individual identities and joint practices. The inclusion of Ash Sports Academy and Force Fitness Studio allows for a comparative lens which contains premium, structured, and digitally mediated fitness environments in contrast to grassroots and traditional spaces, which can help unpack the concept of how socio-economic status, technological engagement, and curated gym environments can affect embodied practices, social dynamics, and aspirations.

The chapter presents the results of participant observation, informal interviews, and the digital ethnography methodically, with a particular focus on patterns of embodied practice, ritualised routines, and social interaction among diverse groups of gym-goers. It examines how age, gender, class, and professional background impact access, engagement, and behaviour in such places, as well as participants' engagement with aspirations, discipline, and body ideals, which are often played out through social networks, digital platforms, and influencer cultures. By situating the practices, we observe within broader anthropological and socio-cultural frameworks, the chapter argues that the gym, including Ash Sports Academy and Force Fitness Studio, functions as a microcosm of urban life in the contemporary period, reflecting Hyderabad's urbanity, social stratifications, and cultural hybridity. This analysis brings to the fore the ritualised nature of bodily discipline, the performativity of gendered behaviours, as well as the socially embedded meaning of physical transformations, which are shown to find in gyms not just sites of physical training but rather cultural stages where identity, power and community are in a continuous state of construction and contestation.

5.2 Presentation and Analysis of Data

The subsequent part is an appraisal of the experiences, practices, and social dynamics of gym-goers from Hyderabad, based on a dataset obtained through a structured questionnaire administered to 120 participants across four different gyms, including Ash Sports Academy and Force Fitness Studio. By weaving together findings from numerical and ethnographic observations, the analysis manages to rise above the statistics to the surface, revealing also the embodied, social, and mediated dimensions of current fitness culture. The gyms studied serve as microcosms of urban aspiration, social negotiation, and performances of identity, where bodies are both sinners and punished, as well as shown and curated (digitally). Ash Sports Academy and Force Fitness Studio, in particular, exemplify high-production, highly curated environments that focus on fitness, wherein the use of technology, aesthetics, and structure account for key factors in developing practices. Participation patterns and types of exercises, as well as attendance frequencies, are interpreted in relation to the stories participants undertook and casual interactions, in order to capture the rhythms, hierarchies, and feelings of these spaces.

In addition, this chapter pays attention to mediation by digital technologies, such as fitness applications, wearable devices, and social media, for bodily practices, self-presentation, and peer interaction at every gym location. At Ash Sports Academy, participants often use smart devices and app-based progress tracking. In contrast, at Force Fitness Studio, boutique classes are supplemented with social media-based challenges and online peer engagement. These tools affect aspiration and the process of social hierarchy that they reinforce (or contest) and integrate local practices with global fitness imaginaries. By combining quantitative data from surveys and ethnographic data acquired from the Ash Sports Academy, Force Fitness Studio, and other Fitness Centres, the analysis illuminates the complex interaction between the embodiment processes of the brother, sociality and the digital culture of the Hyderabad urban sports ecosystem. This approach fosters a nuanced understanding of modern fitness experiences in the city, illuminating the convergence and interaction of socio-economic status, gym typology, and digital engagement in shaping identity, performance, and community in contemporary gyms.

Ash Sports Academy, Force Fitness Studio: Competition in the Field: Hyderabad

Ash Sports Academy: Observations in the Field

During a fieldwork trip to Hyderabad, one of the Ash Sports Academies, located near Shamirpet, introduced us to a unique fitness concept that combined traditional gym-based fitness with organised sports, including Hockey, Tennis, Cricket, Badminton, and Martial Arts. Observing the academy for an extended period, the researcher noted a dynamic and

complex atmosphere among participants who moved fluidly between periods designed to strengthen and condition their bodies, as well as those aimed at improving their skills in a particular sport. This oscillation led to a holistic approach to physical culture, not just muscle development, but also agility, coordination, and tactical intelligence. The atmosphere created a delicate balance between discipline and playfulness; adherence to training protocols was expected, but other, more informal, interactions and humour were as central to the day-to-day ambience in the academy as discipline.

Social hierarchies in Ash Sports Academy were complex and primarily based on competency. Senior participants, coaches, and those with more long-term experience appeared to have more authority. However, respect was gained through ability, consistency, and an inclination to guide others, rather than physical beauty or rudeness of appearance. Mirrors existed primarily in the context of correction, as a means of ensuring correct form and averting injury, rather than encouraging self-surveillance or comparison. Training spaces were organised with functional efficiency, featuring weights, cable machines, and cardio equipment, as well as open spaces for agility and the use of mats for martial arts exercises. Sounds of effort - the clanging of weights, shouted counts at drills, or the occasional outburst of laughter - accentuated by the rhythm, created an atmosphere of vivacity and yet concentration.

Participants were a diverse mix of ages, fitness goals, and previous experience, including teenagers developing their athletic skills and adults who were developing their general fitness or fine-tuning their skills. The researcher's observations revealed frequent instances of informal mentorship, where experienced athletes provided advice, underlined technique, and offered real-time corrections in posture, among other things. Peer feedback was also common, and people would cheer each other on during an endurance circuit or share tips on sports drills. This relational dimension fostered a sense of belonging, transforming the academy into more than a space of training; it became a social place with a deep appreciation for collective achievement and camaraderie.

The academy also emphasised endurance, coordination and technical mastery rather than purely aesthetic outcomes. Martial arts sessions, for example, were hardcore but ritualised exercises, involving warm-up stretches and simple strikes before progressing to sparring on the part of the participants, often interspersed with feedback from the instructor and senior participants. Cricket and badminton courts were not only for recreation but also a place for honing skills, working as a team, and socialising with others, helping to reinforce the belief that fitness was indistinguishable from community, strategy, and personal development.

Nutrition advice was another integral element, with unscripted discussions among participants and trainers about access to healthy foods instead of branded dietary supplements, which reinforces an environment based on cultural concerns about health and performance.

Overall, Ash Sports Academy is an example of a fitness model deeply rooted in social, cultural, and communal contexts. The academy finds itself at the centre of a complex dilemma between individual efforts and collective participation, where discipline, ability, mentorship, and relationships intersect to form a unique ethnography of contemporary urban physical culture. For participants, fitness is more than just the enhancement of the body; it is an integrated practice of body, mind, competence, and belonging, in a localised and culturally familiar space.

Force Fitness Studio: Field Observations

During fieldwork, Force Fitness Studio, located in the Banjara Hills area of Hyderabad, offered a distinct model of fitness in the city, aligning with the aspirational and performance-driven gym culture prevalent in Hyderabad. Unlike Ash Sports Academy, which combines sports and fitness development, Force Fitness Studio is primarily a commercial high-intensity gym offering to participants who are driven by aesthetic objectives, strength building, and performance in their lives. The environment was characterised by sleek, modern interiors, polished flooring, and carefully placed mirrors to create a state of visual discipline, along with a high-energy soundscape of specially curated music. The atmosphere was one of precision, discipline and visual engagement. Mirrors were everywhere, not just to correct technique, but to stamp out any impulses towards overt self-surveillance (participants constantly monitored their posture, form, and muscular development in comparison to their peers).

The social environment at Force Fitness Studio focused on both individual achievement and aspirational performance. Participants were primarily young professionals and fitness enthusiasts with a strong awareness of body image ideals and other workout-related metrics, as well as personal branding. The studio had orderly routines, and the trainers carefully guided programmatic supervision, form, intensity, and progression. Observing the participants, it was noted that interactions were both supportive and competitive in nature - members often encouraged each other, while a certain level of tension remained in shared spaces as individuals compared their strength, endurance, or physical attributes. Hierarchies were established through visible commitment, body aesthetics, and technical competence,

and trainers filled authoritative positions, which generated both social and physical norms within the studio.

Force Fitness Studio brought the usage of technology in training to the fore. Participants used wearable devices, heart rate monitoring, and app-based technologies to monitor the number of repetitions, the number of calories burned, and the performance enhancement in real-time. This mediated experience through technology expanded the embodied experience, encouraging self-optimisation and constant feedback loops. The architecture of gyms invited visitation and surveillance, as open spaces and mirrored walls enabled both trainers and peers to monitor activity continuously. The space itself became a stage for performance, through which one could discipline, work, evaluate, and aesthetic ideals were performed and witnessed, producing a sense of increased accountability and embodiment of aspirational ideals.

Interactions within Force Fitness Studio were structured yet relational. Trainers offered individualised attention to them during strength circuits or functional training sessions, where they often demonstrated exercises before correcting their participants' posture or giving advice. Peer networks established by intergroup challenges, group classes and the occasional informal conversations added to the sense of belonging (albeit in a performance-driven ethos). Nutrition discussions, where they existed, were often viewed in the context of optimisation and supplementation, with a focus on protein intake, meal schedules, and recovery practices rather than a consideration of holistic and cultural dietary practices.

In terms of embodied experience, Force Fitness Studio emphasises being intense, precise, and measurable. High-intensity interval training (HIIT), weightlifting circuits, and functional movement classes were designed to organise participant physical participation, promoting the development of both endurance and observable muscular adaptation. While there was social interaction and camaraderie, the underlying ethos of the studio favoured individual achievement, goal attainment, and connoisseurship, aligning with contemporary urban ideals of fitness. The gym thus occupied itself as a place of personal transformation and as a social space where urban identity, performance, and aspiration converged.

Overall, Force Fitness Studio is a prime example of modern technology-mediated fitness in Hyderabad, focusing on performance, aesthetics, and structured modes of engagement in urban fitness. Differing from sports or community-based gyms, such a space places the emphasis on individualised goals. It is marked by visible discipline and aspirational embodiment, which are parallels to broader socio-cultural trends in urban wellness, self-optimisation, and lifestyle brands. For participants, fitness is an expression of their identity, a

means of gaining social acceptance, and an association with contemporary and urban ideals of accomplishment and bodily perfection.

Table 1: Consent to Participate

Consent	Frequency (n=120)	Percentage (%)
Yes	120	100
No	0	0

All 120 respondents readily agreed to participate, which was an impressive level of openness and willingness to share personal experiences in their gym spaces. This full participation allowed the researcher to immerse herself deeply in the daily rhythms of gym life, looking beyond routines, but listening for the subtleties of social cues, hierarchy, and interactions that give rise to identity and community. There was a performative aspect to giving consent, in that the process of consent became the performative entry into the cultural microcosm of the gyms in Hyderabad, where one could signify a sense of trust, curiosity, and a communal investment in the study's endeavour. Such receptivity proved rich in the ethnographic fieldwork, making it possible to gain subtle understandings of the embodied and social aspects of fitness culture.

Table 2: Age Group of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
21–30	45	37.5
31–40	40	33.3
41–50	25	20.8
Above 50	10	8.3

The distribution by age shows the predominance of the young adult population, with 37.5percent being 21-30 years old, and 33.3percent being 31-40 years old, indicating that gyms are vibrant spaces for populations with careers and a conscious focus on fitness. Middle-aged members (41-50) make up a substantial minority; older people above 50 are few, both in terms of physical engagement processes and cultural perceptions of the ageing body. Observationally, younger participants tend to exhibit performative behaviours (e.g., taking selfies, engaging in social interactions, and aspects of competitive exercises), while older members have more ritualised, disciplined routines. These generational patterns highlight the influence that age can have on issues of the embodied, social negotiations, and participation around the gym culture of Hyderabad.

Table 3: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	80	66.7
Female	38	31.7
Prefer not to say	2	1.6

The gender distribution of the gym-goers shows a clear male predominance, with 66.7percent men, 31.7percent women, and a small percentage (1.6percent) who did not want to specify their gender. Ethnographic observation directs attention to the fact that men frequently indulge in overt demonstrations of manly strength, competitive performances, and body-absorbed performances. In contrast, women exercise space with an elevated awareness of visibility, privacy and social judgment. Interactions reveal the gendered patterns of exercise choice, topic of conversation and spatial use. These dynamics shed light on what is not physical, but rather a place of intersection between gendered embodiment, social negotiation, and cultural considerations in the gyms of Hyderabad.

Table 4: Caste / Social Category

Category	Frequency	Percentage
General	35	29.2
OBC	30	25.0
SC	20	16.7
ST	5	4.2
Minority	25	20.8
Prefer not to say	3	2.5
Other	2	1.6

The caste and social makeup of gym-goers in Hyderabad can be likened to a social mosaic: 29.2percent of the General category, 25percent of the OBC, 16.7percent of the SC, 4.2percent of the ST, 20.8percent of minorities, and a few who prefer not to disclose. Ethnographic involvement in these gym spaces demonstrates that these social categories sensitise interactions, group formations, and perceptions of belonging in the gym spaces. Specific communities are prone to swarming to the networks they already know; others move with caution over their spatial and social hierarchies. Observations indicate that caste and social

identity play a significant role, albeit in an unspoken manner, in determining how comfortable one feels, how much output one is socially expected to provide, and how much informal social support is available, highlighting the gym as a microcosm of wider societal structures and inequalities.

Table 5: Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Student	30	25.0
Professional	50	41.7
Business	20	16.7
Homemaker	15	12.5
Other	5	4.2

The occupational profile of gym-goers in Hyderabad reveals how the rhythms of work life are reflected in their fitness regimes. Professionals are the largest group (41.7percent) or key actors who usually compromise early or late (in order to compensate for the next day's workout) - a discipline is often in time when working in bodily culture. Students (25percent) engage in exploratory and experimental fitness practices, and owners (16.7percent) maintain a social networking balance with training. Homemakers (12.5percent) reflect patterns that are often influenced by domestic responsibilities and a time frame that takes them through off-peak hours. In contrast, a small segment, 4.2percent reflects a diverse array of occupations. Ethnographic observation reveals that occupation influences access and social interactions, resulting in the creation of hierarchies, peer networks, and rhythms of embodied practices within the gym.

Table 6: Monthly Household Income (INR)

Income Range	Frequency	Percentage
Less than ₹25,000	15	12.5
₹25,000–₹50,000	30	25.0
₹50,001–₹1,00,000	40	33.3
₹1,00,001–₹2,00,000	20	16.7
Above ₹2,00,000	10	8.3
Prefer not to say	5	4.2

The distribution of income among Hyderabad's gym-goers reveals the intersection between economic capacity and fitness participation. A majority belong to the 50,001-100,000 bracket (33.3percent), underscoring middle-class engagement in structured gym culture. Those in the lower income brackets (25,000-50,000 (25percent) and <25,000)(12.5percent) visit the cheaply priced END: A Discovering, cost-saturated gyms, where they demonstrated polyglot adaptations found in negotiating space and equipment. Higher-income members (1,00,001 - 2,00,000, 16.7percent; above 2,00,000, 8.3percent) often visit premium centres, often creating social hierarchies through visible levels of membership. Ethnographic observation reveals that income not only influences accessibility but also shapes interactions, displays of aspiration, and participation in practices within the community in the gym space in more subtle and nuanced ways.

Table 7: Gym Attendance Duration

Duration	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 year	15	12.5
1–3 years	40	33.3
4–6 years	35	29.2
More than 7 years	30	25.0

The engagement of participants with the gym culture in Hyderabad over time helps to understand the embodied adaptation and socialisation. Newcomers attending for less than a year (12.5percent) often have tentative interactions, reluctance in routines and/or reliance on trainers. Those with 1-3 years (33.3percent) gradually set up hierarchies in gyms, developing peer networks and fine-tuning body rituals. Members who have participated for 4 - 6 years (29.2percent) project a greater familiarity with space, equipment and social norms as mentors to newer members. Long-term gym-goers who have passed the seven-year threshold (25percent) represent institutionalised gym culture, as they shape the norms, demonstrate status through regularity, and contribute to the ritualised and performative aspects of the gym environment.

Table 8: Gym Attendance Frequency

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	25	20.8
4–6 days/week	50	41.7
1–3 days/week	35	29.2

Rarely	10	8.3
Only occasionally	0	0

Attendance patterns in the context of discipline, routine and social rhythm in gyms in Hyderabad. Daily attendants (20.8percent) are regularly involved in intense, ritualised workouts, seeking to occupy prime spaces and take a prominent part in community networks. Those attending 4-6 days a week (41.7percent) are in a balance between work, social life, and fitness, with time- and space-oriented negotiation and motivation facilitated by peer interaction. Members who attend 1-3 days per week (29.2percent) have a more intermittent participation, indicating a flexible involvement with gym culture, often monitoring the practices of others. Rare attendees (8.3percent) are individuals who maintain their peripheral involvement in these urban fitness microcosms, showcasing the range of commitment, embodiment, and social integration within these fitness microcosms.

Table 9: Primary Motivation for Gym Attendance

Motivation	Frequency	Percentage
Weight loss	40	33.3
Muscle gain	35	29.2
Health management	25	20.8
Stress relief	10	8.3
Social interaction	5	4.2
Medical advice	3	2.5
Other	2	1.7

The motivations for going to gyms in Hyderabad are culturally situated ideals of body and well-being. Weight reduction (33.3percent) appears as a dominant desire, associated with social aesthetics and self-discipline, whereas the increase in muscularity (29.2percent) indicates the manifestation of masculinity, strength, and bodily capital. Health management (20.8percent) is a pragmatic approach to fitness that incorporates both medical and lifestyle issues. Stress relief (8.3percent) and social interaction (4.2percent) indicate that gyms can be viewed as affective and relational spaces, with an atmosphere of embodiment related to emotion and social life. Minimal responses for medical advice and other motivational

underscoreline the individualised, aspirational, and socially coded nature of gym participation in urban Hyderabad.

Table 10: Influence of Gym Location on Participation

Influence	Frequency	Percentage
Greatly influences	50	41.7
Somewhat influences	35	29.2
Has little influence	20	16.7
No influence	10	8.3
Not sure	5	4.2

The role of the gym's location in participation highlights the spatial embeddedness of the fitness culture in Hyderabad. A significant proportion of respondents (41.7percent) consider that the location has a significant impact on attendance, which expresses the practical and symbolic importance of accessibility, urban mobility and neighbourhood status. Somewhat influential responses (at 29.2percent) indicate an influence that can accommodate negotiation between convenience and preference, while minimal influence (16.7percent) suggests highly committed gym-goers who prioritise routine over geography. The small percentages that report no influence or uncertainty point to some diversity of individual mobility, time management, and engagement with urban space, emphasising the ways that things like gyms are traversed as somewhere meaningful socially and spatially.

Table 11: Participation in Group Fitness Activities

Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	70	58.3
No	50	41.7

Regionally representative data on poverty and cosmetic beauty in southern India: Participation in group fitness activities unveils the social textures of Hyderabad's gym culture. A majority (58.3percent) actively participate in classes or group sessions, implying that gyms work as a site of collective energy, a voice of peer motivation and social learning. These shared spaces enable observational learning to occur alongside camaraderie and informality in mentorship, making these exercises not only physical but also performative and relational. On the flip side of the coin, 41.7percent of those opting out cite individualised approaches, routines of their own making, or perhaps discomfort with social visibility. This

tension between collectivism and individualism illustrates the negotiated sociality and embodied experiences that underpin game participation in the fascinating, situated context of the urban gym in India.

Table 12: Preferred Workout Time

Time	Frequency	Percentage
Morning	35	29.2
Afternoon	20	16.7
Evening	50	41.7
Night	10	8.3
Varies	5	4.2

The preferred times for workouts reflect how daily routines and urban lifestyles influence embodied practices in gyms in Hyderabad. Evening sessions predominate (41.7percent), representing the city's working population seeking fitness after the demands of the working day, while the early risers, emphasising discipline and ritualistic bodily practices, dominate the mornings (29.2percent). Afternoon (16.7percent) and night (8.3percent) users report that this flexibility is determined by work shifts and/or personal schedules. A small segment (4.2percent) is related to the timing variable, negotiating between social, professional, and physiological demands. These time series of visits highlight gyms as adaptable spaces where the rhythms of the body, the movements of urban time, and social orchestration intersect.

Table 13: Memberships at Multiple Gyms

Membership	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	30	25.0
No	85	70.8
Prefer not to say	5	4.2

The data on multiple gym memberships reveal the negotiation of status, access, and fitness desires among participants in the urban landscape of Hyderabad. While a minority (25percent) have memberships at more than one gym, perhaps seeking varying equipment, specialised classes, or social circles, the majority (70.8percent) are loyal to a single space, hinting at attachments fostered through community development, familiarity, and embodied routines. A small segment (4.2percent) did not wish to disclose hints of social sensitivities surrounding consumption patterns. These choices reveal how gym-goers navigate the spatial,

economic, and social terrains and how their identity and sense of belonging are shaped by the way these terrains are selectively engaged with through fitness infrastructures.

Section 4: Practices of Nutrition and Supplements

Table 14: Number of Meals Per Day

Number of Meals	Frequency (n=120)	Percentage (%)
2	10	8.3
3	55	45.8
4-5	45	37.5
More than 5	10	8.3

Meal patterns among gym-goers in Hyderabad indicate negotiated processes of embodiment and bodily relations to health, discipline and lifestyle. The majority (45.8percent) have three meals per day, following traditional dietary patterns, but a considerable proportion (37.5percent) have 4-5 smaller meals, suggesting the implementation of conscious nutrition programmes in accordance with fitness requirements. A minority (8.3percent) eat only twice, which can be explained by balancing their work and training schedules. In comparison, another 8.3percent eat more than five meals, hinting at hyperconscious control of their diet or supplementary integration. Practices and rituals are used to examine the relationship between food and eating practices and body idealisation, temporal regimes, and social demands in culturally mediated gym spaces.

Table 15: Following a Structured Meal Plan

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, strictly	30	25.0
Sometimes	50	41.7
Rarely	25	20.8
Never	15	12.5

Observations indicate that adherence to prescribed meal plans among gym-goers in Hyderabad is diverse and culturally mediated. About 25percent have their diet under strict control, indicating high discipline levels along with personal fitness objectives. A segment of larger size (41.7percent) follows their plans all the time, balancing work, social life, and going to the gym, claiming themselves to be victims of contemporary urban lifestyles.

Around 20.8percent tend to be slightly over diet regulations and therefore casual when it comes to serious dietary guidelines, and 12.5percent never stick to any laid-out plans and often live by their intuition or traditional eating habits. These patterns highlight the profound relationship between nutritional practices and embodied aspirations, self-discipline and the performative culture of the gym space.

Table 16: Breakfast Before Training

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Always	20	16.7
Often	35	29.2
Sometimes	50	41.7
Never	15	12.5

The data on pre-workout breakfast habits represent varied embodied routines among gym-goers in Hyderabad. Only 16.7percent have a consistent breakfast before training, indicating a strict adherence to perceived fitness protocols. A larger percentage of them (29.2percent) frequently eat, balancing their energy needs with their daily schedule, while 41.7percent have breakfast sometimes, indicating flexibility and negotiation between personal preference and convenience. Notably, 12.5percent never consume anything before workouts, emphasising the development of fasted training practices driven by modern trends in fitness. These patterns reveal how lifestyle rhythms, nutritional beliefs, and the performative culture of urban gym spaces influence bodily practices.

Table 17: Typical Pre-Workout Intake

Type	Frequency	Percentage
High-carb meal/snack	35	29.2
High-protein snack	40	33.3
Coffee/tea only	25	20.8
Train fasted	20	16.7

Observations of preoperative food intake reveal the embodied predispositions that gym-goers use to prepare for physical exercise. A third of participants (33.3percent) prioritise high-protein snacks, indicating an orientation towards muscle growth and modern fitness discourse. High-carb meals/snacks (29.2percent) - These meals are indicative of individuals consuming food to replenish energy for endurance-based routines. Interestingly, 20.8percent

run solely on coffee or tea, indicating ritualised stimulant behaviour related to alertness and habit, while 16.7percent fasted on trains, following recently identified trends to adopt eating fat (teaching the body to burn energy from fat) or fasting arbitrarily (intermittent fasting). These variances manifest in the intertwining of dietary choices with individual aspirations, as well as cultural narratives and the performative ethos of gym spaces in Hyderabad.

Table 18: Timing of Pre-Workout Meal

Timing	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 30 min	15	12.5
1 hour before	40	33.3
2-3 hours before	45	37.5
Usually fasted	20	16.7

The timing of pre-work meals among gym-goers in Hyderabad is based on diverse embodied strategies shaped by fitness goals and everyday routines. Most participants (37.5percent) eat their meals within a 2-3 hour timeframe prior to exercise, which is the result of some thought given to meal planning for digestion and long-term energy. Seriously, a considerable number (33,3percent) choose to eat 1 hour before, finding a good compromise between convenience and performance, which is not to be overlooked. Shorter (less than 30 minutes) 12.5percent, fasted for quick energy rituals, 16.7percent fasted - partake in fitness fads or personal discipline? These patterns reveal the interplay between time habits, body awareness, and the performing culture of preparation in gym spaces.

Table 19: Supplement Intake Before Workouts

Supplement Type	Frequency	Percentage
Pre-workout drink	25	20.8
Protein shake	45	37.5
Creatine/BCAAs/other	15	12.5
No supplements	35	29.2

The use of supplements by gym-goers in Hyderabad exemplifies bodily individual strategies as well as fitness subcultural influences. Protein shakes prevail (37.5percent), indicating an emphasis on muscle building and recovery rituals, whereas pre-workout drinks (20.8percent) suggest an energy-oriented performance practice. A smaller proportion (12.5percent) uses creatine, BCAAs or other specialised supplements, suggesting an acquaintance with more

specialised fitness discourses. Interestingly, 29.2percent say they would not use supplements, emphasising natural or cost-conscious issues. These practices demonstrate how gym members engage with bodily enhancement, performance, and self-discipline to reveal layers of cultural knowledge, peer influence, and identity formation in fitness spaces in Hyderabad.

Table 20: Post-Workout Food Intake

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Protein-rich meal	50	41.7
Protein shake	35	29.2
Carb-heavy meal	20	16.7
Do not eat immediately	15	12.5

Post-exercise nutrition at Hyderabad gyms signifies embodied practices and culturally knowledgeable nutrition strategies. A majority (41.7percent) prioritise protein-rich meals, which suggests a focus on muscle recovery and visible body transformation. Protein shakes (29.2percent) are both a scheduled, efficient change to meet the off-taskness standard and an all-time marriage in modern fitness, which also meets all-time dietary practicality, as well as in modern fitness culture. Carb-heavy meals (16.7percent) imply energy replenishment towards endurance-based practices, whereas a few (12.5percent) postpone eating under individual criteria or intermittent fasting routines. These patterns display the negotiation of gym-goers' approaches to bodily performativeness, health ideals, and social norms, as they craft their identities in accordance with persistent aspirational fitness ideals and ethnographically observed peer practices.

Table 21: Estimated Daily Protein Intake

Protein Intake	Frequency	Percentage
<50g	15	12.5
50–100g	50	41.7
100–150g	40	33.3
>150g	15	12.5

Protein consumption among gym-goers in Hyderabad explains the complex interplay between nutritional knowledge, bodily aspiration and social signalling. The majority of participants (41.7percent of subjects) consume between 50 and 100 grammes of protein per day, which is an indication of moderate adherence to muscle-building guidelines. A further 33.3percent fall

into the more intensive engagement with body-sculpting ideals of the 100-150g range. The relatively small group (12.5percent of them) either eats less than 50g or more than 150g, underscoring a variety of personal approaches based on their goals, affordability, and influence from their peers. These practices reveal how protein intake practices function not only as a dietary activity but also as a display of commitment, discipline, and cultural identity in fitness spaces.

Table 22: Daily Water Intake

Water Intake	Frequency	Percentage
<1 litre	10	8.3
1–2 litres	45	37.5
2–3 litres	45	37.5
>3 litres	20	16.7

Hydration patterns among gym-goers in Hyderabad reflect both bodily awareness and culturally mediated fitness norms. A majority (75percent of cases) drink between 1 and 3 litres per day, demonstrating conscious adherence to health guidelines and the requirements of hard workouts. A smaller segment (16.7percent of them) exceeds 3 litres and often corresponds to high-performance routines or muscle-building ones. 8.3percent of them are consuming less than 1 litre, which could indicate a lack of awareness or reduced intensity activity. These patterns reveal that water intake is not simply a physiological phenomenon, but is closely intertwined with social learning and the practices of peers, as well as the embodied routines of gym culture, serving as an indicator - even a subtle one - of discipline and commitment.

Table 23: Use of Sports Drinks / Electrolytes

Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Regularly	20	16.7
Sometimes	35	29.2
Rarely	40	33.3
Never	25	20.8

Consuming sports drinks and taking electrolytes reflects nuanced fitness habits and cultural perceptions of supplementation among gym-goers in Hyderabad. Only 16.7 per cent use them habitually, combining their diet with intensive training or bodybuilding practices, while 29.2

per cent use them occasionally, balancing convenience with perceived necessity. A larger group (33.3percent) uses such products but prefers natural hydration options, such as water, and 20.8percent avoid them. These patterns depict choices about supplements as they become folded into larger social and embodied practices and regimes of action that signify more than just performance goals but also individualised understandings of health, bodily discipline, and gym-coached peer norms of practice.

Section 5: Digital Fitness & Technology

Table 24: Gym Guidance on Digital Fitness Tools

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	35	29.2
No	70	58.3
Maybe	15	12.5

The information on guidance from gyms about digital fitness tools brings out the irregular integration of technology in Hyderabad's fitness spaces. Only 29.2 per cent of the respondents anonymously reported getting formal guidance, which means that app-based or wearable-assisted training is not structured or assisted. The majority (58.3percent) indicated no guidance, thus revealing a dependence on self-navigation, peer advice, or trial-and-error approaches. A smaller segment (12.5percent) expressed uncertainty, suggesting sporadic or informal instruction. Ethnographically, this is a perfect example that reveals the tension between traditional embodied practices and the implementation of newer digital interventions, showing how gyms can be seen as hybrid social sites where technological literacy, individual agency, and social learning intersect in a particular way to create fitness experiences.

Table 25: Use of Fitness Apps/Wearables

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	60	50.0
No	50	41.7
Maybe	10	8.3

Half of the respondents (50percent) are overtly engaged in fitness apps or wearables, which shows the increasing digital mediation of exercise regimes in gyms in Hyderabad. This usage

has demonstrated how technology expands the gym's social and embodied space into personal and data-driven regimes, enabling self-monitoring and performance tracking. Meanwhile, 41.7percent reported using non-Westernised, presumably other traditional methods, including trainer guidance and peer-to-peer knowledge shared and learned through collaboration. A smaller group (8.3 per cent) were still uncertain, indicating experimentation or tentative adoption. Ethnographically, this reveals the layered experience of fitness culture, characterised by the convergence of digital literacy, personal agency, and social influence, which influences motivation and embodied experience.

Table 26: Frequency of Engaging with Online Fitness Content

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	25	20.8
Several times a week	40	33.3
Occasionally	35	29.2
Never	20	16.7

Engagement with fitness content online among Hyderabad gym-goers suggests a spectrum of engagement with digital content. About one-third (33.3percent) online and about 20.8percent online daily, combining their embodied practices with online guidance to evolve their everyday practices, with social media or apps serving as a constant source of motivation and instruction. Occasional users (29.2percent) combine digital resources with in-gym experiences as a sign of some selective appropriation of knowledge online. Meanwhile, 16.7percent abstain entirely, favour in-person observation and trainer-led routines. Ethnographically, these patterns involve the negotiation of digital-privileging physical fitness spaces, examining the role of online content in shaping the aspirations, discipline, and construction of body-conscious identities.

Table 27: Technology Barriers

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	30	25.0
No	70	58.3
Maybe	20	16.7

While advances in digital tools have led to their widespread integration into gym culture, a significant portion of gym-goers in Hyderabad still face barriers. About 25 per cent cited

technology as an obstacle, reflecting difficulties with navigating the apps, wearable devices, or technologies used to take an online class. The majority (58.3percent) reported no difficulty and showed familiarity and comfort with the digital mediation of fitness routines. Meanwhile, 16.7percent remained uncertain about still often negotiating partial understanding/ ways of intermittent use. Ethnographically, these patterns reveal a stratified digital landscape, not only as gyms are the physical terrains of training, but also as technology literacy provides participation, sociality, and the embodied hopes that are sought.

Table 28: Participation in Online Classes

Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	35	29.2
No	80	66.7
Prefer not to say	5	4.2

Participation of gym-goers in Hyderabad in online fitness classes is yet to pick up. Only 29.2percent of the overall population reported that virtual sessions were not a preference for in-person interaction, embodied guidance, and social presence in gym spaces. The majority (66.7 percent) abstained, stating that they often do not know how to use digital platforms, do not want to, or see online classes as unable to replicate the communal energy of physical gyms. A tiny minority (4.2 percent) chose not to disclose their participation in all, suggesting concerns about privacy or ambivalence. Ethnographically, this serves as the way in which the gym operates as a ritualised corporeal space, in which the principles of physical copresence, gaze, and embodied mentorship continue to be central to fitness practices.

Table 29: Following Fitness Influencers

Follow	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	50	41.7
No	60	50.0
Prefer not to say	10	8.3

Among the Hyderabad gym-goers, they are rather selective and moderate in their engagement with fitness influencers. Approximately 41.7percent reported that they follow influencers and take inspiration, motivation, and guidance about their workouts, diets, and body aesthetics. However, half of the participants (50percent) did not participate, highlighting the dependency on support from mentorship in a gym, peer observation and personal experimentation rather

than digital authority. A minority (8.3percent) chose not to tell, as part of an ambivalence or concern for privacy. Ethnographically speaking, this expresses how we perceive social media's interaction with embodied practice, as it informs certain norms of aspiration and bodily practices that are prioritised yet gain their actual validity at the gym.

Table 30: Benefits of Digital Fitness

Benefit	Frequency	Percentage
Motivation	40	33.3
Knowledge	35	29.2
Tracking progress	25	20.8
Social connection	15	12.5
None	5	4.2
Other	0	0.0

Hyderabad gym-goers are exposed to a multidimensional digital fitness to supplement their physical practices. The topmost benefit cited is motivation (33.3 percent) in relation to how online platforms and apps help energise commitment and persistence. Knowledge acquisition: Justinian and Socrates share the top slots. Knowledge acquisition (29.2 per cent) emphasises that participants became involved with exercise techniques, nutrition advice, and fitness strategies. Tracking progress (20.8percent) lets users visualise gains, which helps reinforce discipline and goal orientation. Social connection (12.5percent) highlights the importance of virtual communities in supplementing in-person interaction. A minority (4.2percent of respondents) reported that they had not found any benefits to be gained, suggesting that for some, digital tools are still not their main reason to attend, supporting more the idea that digital tools have become peripheral, second to the tactile, sensible experience of the exercise space in the gym.

Section 6: Social & Cultural Experiences in Gym Spaces

Table 31: Influence of Trainers on Motivation and Confidence

Response	Frequency (n=120)	Percentage (%)
Highly influential	50	41.7
Moderately influential	45	37.5
Slightly influential	15	12.5
Not influential	10	8.3

Trainers of Hyderabad gyms become key players in motivating and boosting the self-confidence of the participants. Almost 42 per cent of the respondents believe that trainers are influential figures, indicating the trust placed in their knowledge and guidance on workouts. Another 37.5 per cent describe a moderate influence, who are supportive but less central in determining routines and confidence. For 12.5 per cent, trainers have a minor influence, or it is only used to provide technical corrections; 8.3 per cent find them non-influential, instead relying more on peer networks or personal routines. Ethnographically, trainers are not just instructors, but also a form of symbolic edge that disciplines, aspires to, and embodies knowledge in the social microcosm of the gym.

Table 32: Comfort Level in Gym Environment

Comfort Level	Frequency	Percentage
Very comfortable	40	33.3
Somewhat comfortable	50	41.7
Neutral	20	16.7
Somewhat uncomfortable	7	5.8
Not comfortable	3	2.5

Hyderabad's gym spaces reveal no clear-cut existence of comfort among participants. Around 42 per cent claim to be comfortable; thus, there is a general ease regarding routines, equipment and social interactions. In comparison, 33percent feel very comfortable, which can often reflect familiarity, confidence and positive engagement (both with peers and trainers). A much smaller segment, 16.7 per cent, appears in a neutral stance, negotiating their comfort in the space of spatial, social or gendered dynamics. Only a minority (5.8percent or 2.5percent) feel to some degree or other confident (not comfortable), referring to subtle anxieties related to body image or visibility/social, or access issues. Ethnographically, comfort becomes both a personal experience and a relation in the light of the social and spatial organisation of the gym.

Table 33: Gender Patterns in Popular Fitness Activities

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Different activities preferred by men/women	70	58.3
Activities are equally popular across genders	40	33.3
Not sure	10	8.3

Observations from Hyderabad gyms suggest that there are pronounced patterns in the gendered preferences for fitness choices. Over half (58.3 per cent) of those surveyed agreed that men and women are likely to gravitate towards different activities - men tend to focus on strength and resistance training. In contrast, women tend to gravitate towards cardio fitness, functional fitness, or group classes. About one-third (33.3 per cent) perceive equal attractiveness between the sexes, an effect of changing norms and digital and social trends. A small fraction (8.3 per cent) is not uncertain. Ethnographically speaking, these patterns open up the question of the role of gendered expectations, cultural scripts and peer influences in participation, as well as the gyms being arenas in which traditional masculinity and femininity are being performed and negotiated.

Table 34: Observation of Caste/Class-Based Exclusion

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	30	25.0
No	85	70.8
Prefer not to say	5	4.2

Ethnographic information from gyms in Hyderabad shows that caste and class-based exclusion is not a very common phenomenon, but still visible to one-fourth of the respondents (25 per cent). These instances often occur very subtly, such as through social distancing, selective interactions, or differential treatment by trainers and peers. The majority (70.8percent) report having no such exclusion, which reflects the urban, aspirational, and consumer-oriented environment of gyms, where a preference for fitness is evident over social hierarchies. A small fraction (4.2 percentage points) did not want to comment. Such patterns suggest that, although gyms serve as relatively inclusive spaces, underlying social structures and cultural prejudices can sometimes influence the regulation of access, participation, and comfort in these microcosms of fitness.

Table 35: Sense of Community Among Gym Goers

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very strong	35	29.2
Moderate	50	41.7
Weak	25	20.8
None	10	8.3

Ethnographic observation shows that gym spaces in Hyderabad develop a range of social cohesiveness. A healthy chunk of the people surveyed (41.7 per cent) sense a moderate sense of community - often through everyday routines, mutual encouragement during workouts and some casual interactions. Nearly 29.2 per cent describe a strong community, which is generally at gyms where group classes, informal guidance and peer networks flourish. On the other hand, 20.8percent feel weak connections, and 8.3percent feel no sense of belonging, indicating that some gyms are still transactional or solitary spaces. These dynamics represent how gym culture mediates social bonding, as well as individual performance, and reflect more general social patterns in the urban world.

Table 36: Experience of Exclusion or Discrimination

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Never	60	50.0
Rarely	30	25.0
Sometimes	20	16.7
Often	10	8.3
Prefer not to say	0	0.0

Ethnographic insights reveal the development of exclusionary experiences in gyms and the relatively minor, but socially relevant, extent of such experiences in Hyderabad. Half of the respondents (50 per cent) say that they never felt excluded, indicating the extent to which inclusive practices are prevalent in many urban fitness spaces. However, 25 per cent experience exclusion rarely, and 16.7 percent experience exclusion sometimes, often due to subtly gendered behaviours, class hierarchies, or unfamiliarity with gym norms. A smaller number (8.3 per cent) report frequent exclusion, suggesting that there are still social boundaries of a particular kind. In turn, these patterns shed light on the dynamics between the performance of the material body, social norms, and spatial access to and control over space, to show how the gym is not simply a physical space but rather a microcosm of larger portrayals of inequalities and cultural negotiations in the city.

Table 37: Pressure to Meet Appearance or Performance Standards

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	25	20.8
Often	40	33.3
Sometimes	35	29.2

Rarely	15	12.5
Never	5	4.2

Ethnographic observations reveal that gym-goers in Hyderabad experience a certain level of pressure regarding appearance and performance. Approximately 20.8percent of them report feeling this pressure all the time, and 33.3percent often, highlighting the omnipresence of the beauty ideals prevalent in our society and the muscular templates they promote. Nearly 29.2 per cent experience it sometimes, representing more situational involvement with the gym culture. 12.5 per cent rarely feel pressured, and only 4.2 per cent feel it at all. These dynamics represent how gyms function as sites of embodied comparison and aspirational display, where individuals negotiate values for their personal goals, the social expectations and norms imposed by others, and the ways they perceive what represents fitness, body image, and masculinity/femininity as culturally constructed within their own cultures.

Table 38: Accessibility of Gym Culture in Hyderabad

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Not accessible	10	8.3
Rarely accessible	15	12.5
Sometimes accessible	40	33.3
Mostly accessible	35	29.2
Fully accessible	20	16.7

Ethnographic understandings reveal that access to gym culture in Hyderabad is unequally experienced. A small segment (8.3 per cent) views gyms as inaccessible, often due to cost, location, or social barriers. In comparison, 12.5percent find them rarely accessible - around 33.3percent have moderate accessibility, negotiating their involvement depending on the convenience or flexibility of membership. On the other hand, almost 29.2percent report gyms to be mostly accessible, corresponding with their personal schedule and resources, and 16.7percent report them to be fully accessible, generally in areas with more socio-economic capital or proximity to the city. This experiment will develop the following skills: *Observe how urban fitness spatially intersects with class, mobility and infrastructural realities and how this impacts participation and inclusion.

Table 39: Effect of Gym Layout on Interaction or Privacy

Response	Frequency	Percentage
----------	-----------	------------

Strongly agree	25	20.8
Agree	40	33.3
Neutral	35	29.2
Disagree	15	12.5
Strongly disagree	5	4.2

Observations indicate that the gym's layout has a significant impact on social interaction and privacy. About 20.8 per cent of the respondents strongly agree, while 33.3 per cent agree moderately, that spatial arrangements affect engagement. Nearly 29.2percent of them are neutral, indicating ambivalence or a tendency to accommodate to the environment. A smaller proportion, 12.5percent is less in agreement, and strongly disagree (4.2percent). Ethnographically, these findings point to the fact that physical space mediates social dynamics, which affect visibility, comfort, engagement, and how gym-goers negotiate building social and private experiences around proximity, thigh contact, eye contact, and personal space.

Table 40: Groups Most Likely to Feel Excluded

Group	Frequency	Percentage
Women	50	41.7
Older adults	20	16.7
Lower-income individuals	25	20.8
Caste minorities	15	12.5
People with disabilities	5	4.2
No one	5	4.2
Other	0	0.0

The data portrays minute hierarchies in Hyderabad's social imperialism of gym spaces. Women come out as the most cited group facing exclusion (41.7percent), which refers to gendered norms in access, safety, and participation. The lower-income population (20.8percent) and older individuals also report marginalisation (16.7percent), which highlights economic and age-related barriers. Caste minorities (12.5 per cent) and people with disabilities (4.2 per cent) suffer from subtle forms of exclusion, which are often primarily structural rather than outright. Ethnographically, these patterns reveal how gyms, rather than serving as points of health and aspiration, reflect larger inequalities across society, indicating

who will feel welcome, who will negotiate visibility, and who will be able to envision and enact inclusion in the everyday fitness culture.

Table 41: Post-COVID Workout Preference (Online vs. In-Person)

Response	Frequency (n=120)	Percentage (%)
Strongly prefer in-person	45	37.5
Somewhat prefer in-person	35	29.2
No preference	20	16.7
Somewhat prefer online	10	8.3
Strongly prefer online	10	8.3

The post-pandemic scenario has reshaped the engagement of gym-goers, with a notable inclination towards in-person workouts. A combined 66.7percent of participants either strongly or somewhat prefer to attend in person, highlighting the social, motivational, and sensory aspects that gyms offer beyond exercise. Only 16.6percent are favourable to online modalities, which suggests the use of digital platforms as complementary, but rarely as a replacement, for embodied experiences. Ethnographically, this reveals gyms as social and cultural zones where communal exchange of energy, peer observation, and ritualised routines continue to play a significant role. The pandemic temporarily disrupted these practices of movement and interaction, but what the participants said through their bodies shows that they still have a strong desire for fitness spaces, sharing embodied, tangible experiences in Hyderabad.

5.3 Analysis of Open-Ended responses: Field Insights

5.3.1 Conceptualising Fitness: Perspectives of Participants

In Hyderabad, gyms are multifaceted phenomena, and go beyond physical conditioning to include social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions. Observational data show that participants enjoy highly structured exercise routines, meticulous form correction, and ritualised behaviours in the immediate post-workout period, far beyond that involved in checking to see how they have changed their bodies or documenting their bodily achievements through a mirror. Males prioritise muscle building, endurance, and strength, which reflects culturally constructed notions of hegemonic masculinity. In contrast, female gym-goers focus on flexibility, posture, overall health, and body confidence issues, which align with gendered cultural expectations of bodily presentation (Louis & Chithra, 2025; Contractor & Rasquinha, 2023). These embodied practices are, at the same time, a personal and social marker,

exemplifying the intersection between individual aspiration and normative cultural frameworks.

The data indicate that gyms are performative spaces of selfhood, where gym-goers negotiate various dimensions of their being, including the discipline and social validation of themselves through visible bodily labour. Peer observation, a form of social comparison, and activities in participatory groups mediate the notion of achievement with a consequent relational dimension of fitness for which social recognition is intimately linked to corporeal performance. Ethnographically, post-workout selfies, participating in group classes, or following a strict routine are all symbolic enactments of status, discipline, and aspirational identity. These findings align with the literature on body capital and performative embodiment, demonstrating the extent to which physical form serves as one of the vehicles for social credibility, cultural belonging, and personal accomplishment (Maguire, 2005; Sassatelli, 2010).

Moreover, the research supports the academic views regarding the gendered organisation of fitness practices. Men's focus on muscularity and strength is evidence of hegemonic masculine ideals, whereas women's emphasis on health, posture, and flexibility is evidence of agency using socially prescribed frameworks of femininity. Fitness, therefore, both provides an individual endeavour of health and self-improvement, yet it is also a socially mediated practice that situates itself in normative cultural expectations. This duality situates gyms in Hyderabad between arenas for various personal aspirations, societal norms, and peer-mediated hierarchies, making them rich ethnographic sites for studying the interplay between embodiment, identity, and social structure in urban fitness culture.

5.3.2 Gym Membership and Social Networks: Friendships and Peer Effect

In the gym spaces of Hyderabad, membership encompasses more than the quest for physical conditioning; it also encompasses the development of complex social networks that form the basis for individual and collective experiences of fitness. Ethnographic fieldwork shows that gyms are functioning as micro-communities, as well, which is yet another (if not the first) place where relational bonds are constructed in active ways through routine interactions, mutual support and informal mentorship. Participants often help one another with exercise techniques, share dietary advice, and form peer groups to attend classes, reflecting a dense web of cooperative behaviours that overbridge age, gender, and socio-economic distinctions. Observed interactions suggest that these networks are not emergent but fundamental to the maintenance of motivation, adherence, and a sense of belonging within the gym environment.

The data suggest that gym participation is a socially determined practice, whose identity and community are constructed with and for one another. Friendships often spring up over shared fitness goals (weight management, muscle building, endurance, etc.), with participants gaining both emotional support and social validation from their peers. Collective challenges, from group workouts to informal competitions, offer a space for negotiating status, recognition, and influence, suggesting that the gym is as much a relational space as it is a place of physical transformation. These interactions contribute to the accretion of social capital, where encouragement, guidance and peer observation all contribute to the enhancement of the social commitment to fitness, but also add to increases in the collective discipline: in interaction with each other and providing both support and challenge to each other, they develop a culture where fitness practices are mediated socially and reinforced mutually.

Numerous scholarly literatures exist that highlight devastating results about gyms as pivotal sites of intersection between embodied practices and urban sociality. Brighton et al. (2022) seek a relational accountability that induces and fosters networks of commons across DH, considering communal routines and shared embodied labour as creating social cohesion and identity-forming spaces. The Hyderabad case offers a reasonable degree of ethnographic representation of this principle: gyms mediate social hierarchies, mentor structures, and cultural norms, embedding their corporeal endeavours into larger networks of both peer and community expectations. Furthermore, these micro-communities facilitate cross-class and cross-generational social interactions, demonstrating how the gym environment simultaneously supports normative social relations and offers opportunities for social experimentation and negotiation.

In summary, Hyderabad Gyms are viewed as culturally rich spaces where membership serves as a form of both physical and social capital. Fitness is inextricably linked to the relational fabric upon which it is built, and the ethnographic data generated in the cities highlight the importance of peer networks, mentorship, and shared routines for understanding the enactment, persistence, and/or social meaning of urban fitness practices. The gym, therefore, does not function merely as a space for individual aspiration but as a socially and culturally constructed network in which embodied practices, identity production and communal life interact in complex and dynamic ways.

5.3.3 Embodied identity: participation in the gym and body image

In the context of the urban gym environment in Hyderabad, participation in fitness practices is a deeply embodied process of identity construction, in which physical routines, aesthetic

display, and social observation come together to generate complex self-perceptions. Ethnographic fieldwork reveals that regular attendees engage in behaviours that extend beyond exercise, including meticulous attention to posture and technique, the progressive tracking of performance metrics, frequent reflections in the mirror, and comparative assessments of their physiques against those of their peers. These embodied routines are gendered in observable forms - men tend to prioritise muscular hypertrophy, upper body strength and endurance capacities, peacefully aligning with culturally valorised ideals of hegemonic masculinity. In contrast, women bring forward functional ability, flexibility and a balanced aesthetic form, emphasising socially sanctioned norms of feminine corporeality. Social interactions within the gym environment enhance the magnitude of these identity processes. Peer recognition, informal feedback received from trainers and observation of the performance of others are among those mechanisms through which participants internalise and negotiate standards of bodily excellence. These interactions reinforce aspirational benchmarks, social hierarchical identities, and relational positioning, placing physical development as an individual achievement and a social credibility marker. The concept of "body capital" is especially significant here: the shaped, aesthetically unified body is not an individual project, but a social currency, featuring a sense of individual dedication, competence, and urban aspirational identity (Maguire, 2005). Participants consciously regulate their bodily presentation to achieve respect, inclusion, and visibility within the micro-communities acknowledged in the gym, illustrating the intertwined nature of physical form and social valuation.

Moreover, the gym serves as a ritualised social theatre whose functions of identity performance and self-cultivation go hand in hand. Ethnographic observations highlight an ongoing negotiation between the self sought and societal expectations, as embodied in bodily practices ranging from strength training to sharing photography after workouts, serving as markers of self as well as a form of communication within an extended social context. The perceived discrepancy between private desire and public recognition underscores the dual nature of fitness spaces, which are both places of self-cultivation and sites of social evaluation.

Scholarly perspectives on body capital and fitness culture concur with the above observations, emphasising the transformative role of corporeal practices on both an individual and social level (Sassatelli, 2010). In the gyms of Hyderabad, physical accomplishment, aesthetic development, and social visibility converge at a single endpoint, forming a complex eco-system in which identity, status, and embodiment are continuously negotiated. It is a

product of ethnographic insight that gyms are not simply the location through which forms of physical training are enacted, but rather sites where urban forms of aspirational selfhood are materially enacted, socially recognised, and culturally valorised, illustrating the centrality of embodied practice in the formation of selfhood and social belonging.

5.3.4 Diseases: Lessons from Pandemic Fitness Experience

The pandemic of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) precipitated the massive disruption of embodied and social fitness practice in Hyderabad, which was confirmed by field observations. Extended gym closures forced participants to alter their workout ideas, relying more on digital platforms, home-based workouts, and makeshift equipment. Through ethnographic involvement, it was realised that people used great ingenuity and perseverance in negotiating these changes. Some created structures they could live up to within their domestic environments, while others developed less structured forms of peer check-ins via social media or video calls. A subset experimented with makeshift resistance tools or virtually mediated group challenges. Despite these adaptations, these variables lack the physical gym environment that provides opportunities for peer observation, informal mentorship, and informal motivation cues that usually scaffold performances and accountability.

Analysis suggests that the pandemic accentuated the duality between physical incarnation and digital mediation. Participants reported that they have maintained discipline and progression in their strength or endurance training. However, the qualitative value of gym practice, which involves ritualised forms of social interaction, embodied announcers, and a sense of communal suffering, was severely reduced. The ethnography reveals that fitness, in this sense, is not merely a list of exercises, but a socially and culturally embedded activity that is contingent upon spatial layouts, community engagement, and corporeal routines. Participants often reflected on feeling disconnected, reduced motivation, and a sense of incompleteness regarding their workout sessions, underscoring the importance of feeling connected in relation to gym attendance.

The adaptation strategies also highlight the key resilience and self-directed agency. Participants engaged in a set of routines that they created independently, experimented with digital tracking software, and set personal goals in the absence of external structure. This adaptive behaviour sheds light on the cultural context of fitness routines, whereby related disciplines, knowledge, and peer norms come into co-production with physical exertion. Notably, in using this infertility ethnography, differential experiences emerge depending on the participants, as the younger and digitally literate participants used online tools more

effectively than those of older ages or those with lower income levels. Barriers related to access, digital literacy, and space constraints reinforced inequalities within the fitness ecosystem.

Scholarly literature supports these findings, noting that pandemic conditions worldwide catalysed shifts in embodied practice and the negotiation of sociality in fitness regimes (Giardina & Donnelly, 2018; Sharkar et al., 2024). Fitness routines traditionally rooted in communitarian and spatially organised settings became recentered around self-management and digital brokers, exposing the cultural flexibility of exercising practices. The Hyderabad case underscores the significant role that technology plays in maintaining continuity. However, it still entails limits in replicating the intersubjective, sensory, and motivational dynamics that come with in-person gym engagement. In essence, the pandemic processes highlight the merging of social dimensions with fitness as culturally negotiated, adaptation-resilient, and digitally mediated practices that merge embodied routines to sustain identity, discipline, and aspiration in the microcosms of fitness in cities.

5.3.5 Share a Memorable Intercourse within the gym

Ethnographic fieldwork in Hyderabad gyms suggests that memorable interactions are central to the lived experience of fitness, which is not only a social exchange but also a key point of identity construction, relationship negotiation, and embodied learning. Participants regularly shared experiences in which they perceived encouragement during physically demanding routines, and incidents of combined verbal cues, demonstrations, and/or hands-on exogenous training helped to reinforce their technical skills and self-efficacy. Peer interactions, such as playful competition during group classes, working together to spot during lifts, or collaborating as a group with a common goal, rose to the forefront and were seen as salient for creating elements like trust, accountability among one another, and social recognition. Newbies frequently experienced informal mentorship from individuals who knew more than they did, reflecting the existence of microhierarchies that attempt to amalgamate knowledge, skill, and social capital in gym spaces.

Analysis of these observations reveals the gym as a ritualised social theatre, where mundane encounters can be performative acts filled with symbolic and cultural content. Such interactions are places where status, competence, and belongingness are constantly being worked out, with physical practice being woven into social recognition. The ethnography reveals that the gym's relational dynamics extend beyond structured classes, incorporating more informal networks, embodied communication, and subtle hierarchies that contribute to the sense of community. Participants' narratives often highlighted the affective failures of

such encounters, marked by feelings of discouragement, invalidation, and collective failure, in order to reinforce motivation, follow routines, and produce what can be called a "social-embodied ecology" of fitness.

Moreover, the observed interactions shed light on the contribution of gender, age, and social positioning in the development of interaction dynamics. Men are more likely to partake in competitive forms of camaraderie, with a focus on strength and measures of performance. At the same time, women emphasised forms of support, guidance and mutual encouragement, which were considered critical to maintaining confidence and participation. These patterns reflect the gendered and socially stratified nature of embodied interactions, which reflect larger social norms operating in a fitness space (through access, authority, and recognition). Ethnographically, Hyderabad gyms therefore become microcosms of urban sociality, encompassing the types of bodily practice, peer networks, and cultural expectations that facilitate complex forms of sociality and identity negotiation.

Scholarly understandings within the field of sociology and anthropology of sport can lend support to these findings, considering gyms as places where interactions within a culture co-produce ritual adherents, social cohesion, identity, and skill acquisition through embodied practice (Vertinsky & Hargreaves, 2007; Giardina & Donnelly, 2018). It is these ethnographic insights that deepen such theoretical frameworks by revealing the multifaceted ways in which encouragement, mentorship, and peer recognition act as tools of social capital, which perpetuate the symbolic, affective, and performative elements of urban fitness culture in Hyderabad.

5.3.6 Technology and Fitness: Apps, Wearables, and Digital Guidance

Ethnographic fieldwork in Hyderabad gyms reveals that technology has become an integral part of the lives of fitness participants, influencing their routines, motivation, and social interactions in nuanced ways. Fitness apps, wearables, and online use are not merely additional tools; they act as mediators of participation in embodied situations, structuring workouts, measuring performance, and allowing users to track their diets. Observations reveal a careful interaction with feedback in quantitative form, encompassing the number of repetitions, sets, and heart rate variability, as well as the quality of sleep, all of which serve as forms of cultural data-driven self-governance and digital self-surveillance. Participants tend to combine this digital guidance and support with in-gym practice, utilising apps to support the trainer's instructions, plan training progression, or manage nutrition, resulting in a hybridised practice where embodied training and virtual tracking converge.

Analysis of these behaviours shows that technology can be seen to serve both motivational and aspirational functions. Participants often copy routines, meal plans, and beauty and aesthetic norms advertised by influencers or online communities as examples of how digital encounters expand social comparison and peer benchmarking into other forms in the digital world. This dual presence generates uncertainty, because although apps and wearables make access to information and specialist advice available to all (and sometimes change who is styled and who is not), they also create burdens to fit idealised gender relations/displays of class, and implicitly cultural corporeal expectations. For many, the process of documenting progress, comparing data with peers or publicising their achievements in a digital form is an act of performative ritual, with the quantified self meeting the intersectional processes of social validation and aspirational self-construction.

Ethnographically, this merging of technology reveals the changing social and physical spaces of the gym. Trainers are negotiating new pedagogical roles as they serve as mediators between digital recommendations and embodied technique, and participants become digitally literate alongside becoming physically competent. The gym is therefore a hybrid cultural space, in which the sensorial, physical, and relational experiences of fitness co-exist with technologically mediated practices, creating a layered and reflexive mode of engagement. Participants consciously move through these dimensions, mobilising routines depending on feedback given by apps, reacting to influences from other people on the internet, and striking a dialectical balance between online knowledge and bodily experience.

In scholarly literature, the practices of fitness culture have been extensively explored, particularly in how they are mediated digitally, as people demonstrate how technology affects motivation, knowledge acquisition, social hierarchy, and identity formation (Giardina & Donnelly, 2018; Louis & Chithra, 2025). The ethnographic understandings of Hyderabad emphasise the interactions between digital literacy, embodied device and aspirational visibility, which show how technology works as an enabler and regulator of contemporary fitness culture. Participants' experiences demonstrate that digital tools are far from being neutral technologies; instead, they are heavily culturally and socially embedded artefacts that deeply reform the norms, expectations, and relational dynamics within gym spaces. In this context, technology mediates the negotiation of self-discipline, performance standards, and peer recognition, giving rise to a complex eco-system where the virtual and some of the physical dimensions of fitness co-constitute themselves.

5.3.7 Obstacles to Going Digital: Fitness

Ethnographic fieldwork conducted among a selection of gyms in Hyderabad concludes that access to digital fitness platforms is not a spectacle of affordances, but rather a performance mediated by a host of socio-cultural and structural variables. The evidence suggests that it is an accumulative and unequal landscape where, for example, older individuals often complain of challenges in using mobile apps, wearables, or accepting online classes, or even lower-income customers with unrealistic subscription costs and intermittent internet access. First-time gym goers also indicate the difficulty of converting digital instructions into concrete practice, thus emphasising the ongoing need for in-person instructions from trainers or peer mentors. In these environments, participants employ a combination of observation, trial-and-error, and social scaffolding to navigate unfamiliar technological environments, highlighting the ongoing interdependence of digital fitness engagement with relational and embodied mediation.

Analysis of the behaviours observed in participants reveals that the barriers to digital participation extend beyond technical competence and become intertwined with issues of social positioning, literacy, and cultural familiarity with technology. Those who are unable to take full advantage of apps or online classes will often feel demotivated, unprogressive, and have limited access to structured knowledge, which in turn undermines their confidence and participation. Ethnographically, participants also improvise workarounds, cueing off of peers in the group or imitating demonstrations by the instructor, or relying on memory, to enable continuity in training routines. These are strategies that show fitness knowledge as being co-built through an amalgam of digital and embodied practices, with access determined by both forms of relational support networks and the technology itself.

This dynamic aligns with general trends in urban fitness research, where digital tools, although initially used to democratise access to information, often reproduce existing inequalities (Giardina & Donnelly, 2018; Nutrition knowledge et al., 2025). In Hyderabad gyms, the digital divide in investment, as understood in contemporary social science terms, reflects the intersectionality of age, socio-economic status, gender, and past exposure to technology. Ethnographically speaking, such inequalities are played out in subtle but pervasive ways. Some participants are dominant in online communities or app-based challenges, whereas others remain on the margins, thereby reproducing hierarchies already present in physical gym rooms. The negotiation of access, therefore, involves not merely technical skill, but also social capital, as mentors, fellow peer groups, and trainers play a crucial role in mediating factors for some participants to overcome digital barriers.

Furthermore, through these field observations, it is implied that digital fitness platforms are transforming the ideals of authority and knowledge within the gym spaces. Traditional hierarchies based on physical performance are often accompanied, or in some cases, even contradicted by control over apps, wearables, and virtual worlds. Participants who move adeptly in these tools gain social recognition and perceived competence, showing how technological competency has become a contemporary form of "digital body capital." Simultaneously, ethnographic evidence suggests that technology dependence can create anxiety or exclusion for those who are not as digitally literate, reminding us of the current negotiation between inclusivity and performance pressures in technologically mediated fitness culture.

Scholarly literature locates these findings in the growing discussion on technology, embodiment, and social inequalities in fitness environments. Digital tools are in no way neutral and empowering, but are culturally and socially situated artefacts that produce specific participation, competing peer relations, and formations of identities. An ethnography of Hyderabad highlights the co-dependence of access, literacy, and guidance, laying bare the nuances of multiple interactions between digital facilitation, embodied learning, and social networks that produce differential experiences of fitness participation. In essence, digital barriers highlight both the transformative potential and limitations of technological mediation. These represent broader inequalities in our societies and the complex interplay of skill, capital, and culture in our contemporary cities when it comes to fitness.

5.3.8 Inclusive Gym Space Strategies.

Ethnographic studies of gyms in Hyderabad reveal that inclusivity is not merely a top-down principle applied during the design process; rather, it is an integral part of the design process. However, it is continually negotiated through everyday interactions, spatial and material arrangements among people, and other processes. Observations indicate that social hierarchies, based on gender, class, caste, and physical ability, influence how members occupy and use gym spaces. Some participants naturally cluster according to those with similar backgrounds to theirs and occupy designated areas or time slots. In contrast, others actively disrupt these patterns and mentor new participants, help other members feel more confident, or share the equipment more evenly. Trainers frequently act as intermediaries, subtle influencers of cross-group engagement, correctors of exclusionary behaviours, and instil a sense of shared accountability. These micro-tardy practices of negotiation play an important role in creating a participatory and relationally inclusive environment, emphasising

that inclusivity is created through social norms as much as it is made possible through structural design.

Material and spatial configurations also mediate experiences of inclusion. Gender-specific zones, adjustable pieces of equipment, ramps and scheduling of accommodating spaces are not only functional but symbolic, signalling that all bodies are recognised and accommodated in the gym space. Participants respond to these cues by adjusting their behaviour, distributing the use of equipment, helping their peers, or engaging in communal rituals, an act of enacting the inclusive potential of the infrastructure. Conversely, no such design considerations may lead to enforcement of exclusory dynamics, especially towards women, the elderly, the disabled or the poorer class individuals. Ethnographically, these observations demonstrate that the physical and social environments of gyms are co-constitutive, which generates embodied experiences of belonging, marginality, or the negotiation of space.

Participant narratives emphasise that inclusion is not only assured structurally, but also relationally. Affordable membership schemes, flexible class timings, culturally adapted programming, and explicit accessibility measures, for example, are implemented to value not only the convenience they provide but also what they symbolise in terms of democratising access to fitness. Small-scale behaviours carry a significant social weight; these gestures reinforce the sense of ritual and belonging that is common, contributing to the microculture of inclusion that defines Hyderabad gyms. Ethnographically, the performance of inclusion is an a-negotiation act that makes the gym from a neutral (e.g. physical exertion) space into a socially and culturally meaningful space.

These results stem from more recent works in the broader scholarship on urban fitness and social stratification. Anthropological studies emphasise that although gyms claim universal access, they often replicate existing lines of difference unless efforts are made to include individuals through the infrastructures, policies, and practices of their operations (Anjana et al., 2014; Brighton et al., 2022). Hyderabad gyms serve as an excellent example of this duality: the physical patterns of these spaces, membership patterns, programmatic choices, and cross-referencing with daily social practices, which reinforce or mitigate exclusion. Inclusivity, therefore, is a material and social accomplishment arising out of the same processing of ongoing negotiation of individual agency, collective norms and environmental affordances.

Moreover, ethnographic evidence brings out that to achieve true inclusivity, one must pay attention to intersectionality. Women negotiating places suited for men, older adults dealing with physical limitations, or members of marginalised castes negotiating subtle forms of

social address, all face inclusional issues differently. These differentiated experiences teach us that policies alone are insufficient; relational mediation, peer support, and cultural sensitivity are also essential. The ethnography reveals that inclusion is performative, emergent, and contingent, resulting from a dynamic interplay between embodied practice, social recognition, and infrastructural design. Ultimately, the environment in Hyderabad's gyms reflects how the fitness space serves as an ideal microcosm of wider urban social hierarchies, while also affording spaces for the negotiation and enactment of more egalitarian and inclusive practices.

5.3.9 Fitness Experience is the Good They Have in Hyderabad Reflections

Ethnographic involvement in Hyderabad gyms reveals that fitness practices are intimately connected with social, cultural, and aspirational elements, extending well beyond the pursuit of physical health. Participants nest in gym spaces as arenas of performance, where everyday routines, structured workouts, and group classes, as well as far-fetched and unstructured competitions, provide vehicles for negotiating individual and group identity, status, and social recognition. Based on observations that experienced trainers know best, the interaction of information from trainers, validation from peers, and individual discipline produces a layered, textured experience in which the training body is both an instrument and a symbol of achievement. Members actively organise themselves physically in terms of attention to posture, clothing, and the use of mirrors and wearable devices, signalling adherence to standard aesthetic norms and ideals of aspirational perfection.

The social dynamics of the gyms are central to understanding these practices. Peer networks foster informal mentorship, collective motivation, and social accountability, forming micro-communities that cut across age, gender, and class boundaries. Group routines and communal encouragement not only help maintain exercise regimes but also serve as issues for hierarchies, social bonds, and cultural capital. Ethnographic evidence suggests that subtle forms of social comparison occur between members, not only based on their own measures, but also on their perceptions of other people's achievements. Members thus create an environment of ongoing achievement, recognition, and aspirational embodiment through the inspection of their peers.

Another problem contributing to a complicated urban fitness landscape is digital mediation. Participants are incorporating more apps, wearables, and online content into their practices, which combines virtual guidance with in-gym, embodied practice. Ethnographically, this hybrid engagement mediates self-surveillance, goal-setting, and social benchmarking, continually creating tension between digitally curated ideals and sensory and peer-mediated

feedback. Participants experience these tensions in their everyday lives. Here, participants are not disengaged and work daily with technology, which serves as both an intensifier of knowledge and motivation, as well as a source of possible pressure to meet normative standards of aesthetics and performance.

The ritualised aspects of gym culture are important in relation to identity formation. Practices, such as pre-workout socialising, discussing after the workout, group challenges and sharing progress online, are symbolic performances of discipline, resilience and social capital. These behaviours are suggestive of the idea of the gym as a performative space, where the embodied self is constantly being shaped, shown and validated in relation to peers, trainers and wider social expectations. Importantly, these rituals are not uniform; they are not performed in the same way regardless of gender, age, class or fitness orientation, and commensurate with the heterogeneous and negotiated nature of urban fitness culture.

Scholarly positions on urban gyms focus on how they are socially constructed sites of aspiration, performance and negotiation. Hyderabad gyms embody this notion quite vividly, with the realisation that members play a very active role in co-existing meanings of fitness, health, and social identity within their embodied practices, relational engagement, and interactions with the mediated technologies used. Fitness is therefore a local and group cultural activity: a way through which the middle-class Americans engaged both as self-selected subjects of desire and as participants in interpersonal and monitor relations that shape the social hierarchy inscribed in the culture of the contemporary metropolis. Ethnographically, gyms become dynamic sites of interaction between physicality, culture, and sociality, indicating the complex interplay of aspiration, inclusion, and performance in shaping current urban fitness experiences (Alter, 2004; Sassatelli, 2010).

5.3.10 Future Aspirations: Improvements in Gym Culture

Ethnographic engagements with gym-goers in Hyderabad indicate that their aspirations for the future of gym culture extend beyond better equipment or aesthetics; they refer to a holistic vision of a gym as an integrated cultural, social, and technological eco-system. Participants often expressed their wishes for spaces that would incorporate a responsive design, focusing on functionality, accessibility, and inclusive social norms, as well as an acute awareness of the impact of infrastructure and layout on both participation and social interaction. Observations recorded as people give repeated attention to climate control, lighting, acoustic environments and the ergonomics (workout space), implying that the physical environment is not separable from people's experiences of comfort, motivation, and engagement.

In addition to infrastructural advances, participants emphasised structured educational programs, nutrition workshops, and professionally guided sessions, which signify a shift toward knowledge-mediated fitness practices. Ethnographically, this provides evidence of an evolving logic wherein gyms are no longer merely backgrounds against which physical exertion takes place. However, there are sites within which embodied expertise, self-efficacy, and informed decision-making can and ought to be developed. There was a foregrounding of digital tool integration, including apps, wearables, and online integration tools, which respondents found helpful in tracking, pushing, and improving their skills. Nevertheless, participants recognised the limitations of digital mediation, while simultaneously stressing the importance of in-person guidance, peer interaction, and relational accountability. These observations highlight the hybrid environment of contemporary gym culture, where embodied practice, engagement with technology, and social interaction are continually co-produced and co-constructed.

Social inclusion and equity emerged as key components of the aspirations expressed by the participants. Calls for gender sensitive spaces, affordable memberships, and accommodations for marginalised groups, ranging from older adults to lower-income people and people with disabilities, allude to the fact that the evolution of gym culture is not separate from larger social hierarchies in urban centres and cultural ideals. In an ethnographic manner, participants articulated that structural interventions are not sufficient; the everyday practices and interactions within relationships, peer sharing, and the facilitation of trainers are equally critical in making experiences equitable. It suggests that inclusivity is achieved performatively through social negotiation, just as through physical/policy-oriented measures. Analysis of these field observations suggests that Hyderabad gym-goers perceive gyms as dynamic, participatory spaces where personal ambitions, collective involvement, and technological devices intersect. The envisionment of improvements shows a negotiation between embodied and mediative practices, which recognises knowledge acquisition, social recognition, or aspirational embodiment. Participants' perspectives suggest an urban fitness culture that is more reflexive, participatory, and socially conscious, carving out the role of the gym as a space where aesthetic norms, health aspirations, and social hierarchies are continuously challenged and redefined through interaction.

Throw in some scholarly research on urban fitness spaces. You will find them defending this idea through the lens of arguing that modern-day gyms are hybrid sites of socialisation and social learning, focusing on performance, where technologies, embodied practice, and cultural negotiation are in constant dialogical motion (Giardina & Donnelly, 2018; Sassatelli,

2010). In this context, the visions of the participants in Hyderabad are complex, comprising pragmatic concerns about infrastructure and access, alongside aspirations for holistic individual development and community engagement. This ethnographic insight underscores that the future of the gym is not just about physical improvement, but about creating inclusive, knowledge-rich, and sensitive spaces that proactively shape the meaning and practices of fitness in urban India.

5.3.11 Changing gym policies and space Priorities and recommendations

Ethnographic fieldwork within Hyderabad gyms reveals that protagonists view spatial and policy redesign not merely in terms of functionality and aesthetics, but as a crucial component of the social and cultural experience of fitness. Observations reveal that members highly foreground ergonomics, safety, and accessibility, which encompass an acute understanding of the mediative role of physical layout, as well as the importance of playful participation and social interaction. Participants emphasised the importance of safe spaces being available for women, as well as mutually exclusive spaces around equipment (i.e., to reduce congestion) and inclusive access for differently abled users, indicating that spatial considerations are closely tied to cultural norms and embodied practices. In addition to this, recurrent recommendations for structured group programmes, dedicated mentoring sessions, and flexible scheduling to facilitate diverse engagement, as well as accommodations for work-life constraints and relational cohesion, underscore the importance of temporal and programmatic design for this.

Field observations also showed that the gym environment is an arena of society dressed as a theatre, in which everyday practices generate and reproduce social hierarchies, recognition and relations. Participant statement of spatial organisation and policy elaborating that spatial configurations and policy frameworks are performative: ergonomic layouts and inclusive practices not only ensure comforts of physical safety but also convey values of equity, respect, and ethos in the community. Informal peer mentoring, trainer-led guidance, and collaborative exercise routines were seen to be strongly mediated through the design and organisation of gym spaces, building on the entanglement of material, social, and programmatic features in creating the overall fitness experience.

Analysis of these observations suggests that participants experience gym environments as being co-constructed with a sense of inclusion, engagement, and motivation being enacted through the relationship and interplay of spatial design, programmatic scheduling, and relational dynamics. Redesigning spaces and policies is thus not about operational efficiency, but about creating spaces that support the cultural values, embodied practices and

participation of a collective. Observed behaviours, such as negotiating crowded spaces, informal training partnerships, or the choice of particular equipment zones, reveal the continual and inseparable ways in which South Asian-American physical arrangements and social protocols are incorporated into structuring both practice and meaning within the gym. This ethnographic view of the urban gym is supported by scholarship, which highlights that today's urban gyms are complex socio-fields that serve as sites of intervention in power, hierarchy, and inclusion through spatial, programmatic, and relational means (Vertinsky & Hargreaves, 2007; Giardina & Donnelly, 2018). The recommendations of Hyderabad gym-goers corroborate this insight into the performative nature of design and policy, in terms of how they frame not only physical activity but also social identity, peer networks, mentorship practices, and the symbolic value of fitness within the gym. The ethnography highlights the need for functional, social, and cultural integration in effective redesign, bringing forth the effective redesign of gym environments that function on the principles of ergonomically efficient social and cultural integration, thus reinforcing the connectedness of body, space, and community in modern urban fitness culture.

5.3.12 Interpretation Using Anthropological Perspectives

The ethnographic data gathered from Hyderabad gyms can be read using two frameworks connected with anthropology, which are the body as culture and the gym as a ritualised social theatre.

The Body as Culture: Engagement with Fitness. Participants' cultural engagement with fitness can be understood as revealing how the body serves as a personal and social text that mediates their aspirations, identity, and cultural norms related to fitness. Observations of the gym suggest that discipline, aesthetic ideals, and gendered practices are adhered to and performed among gym-goers through exercise routines, dietary choices, and digital monitoring. Men often express muscularity and endurance, which reflects hegemonic masculinity, whereas women often focus more on flexibility, health and confidence, which reflects socially constructed ideals of femininity (Louis & Chithra, 2025; Contractor & Rasquinha, 2023). The body becomes an arena for social negotiation; physical form is indicative of accomplishment, ambition and belonging amongst peers. This is consistent with anthropological understandings of "body capital," where corporeal practices have symbolic, social, and cultural meanings (Maguire, 2005; Sassatelli, 2010). In Hyderabad gyms, bodily practices are thus not merely inseparable from cultural scripts, but reveal the mediated position of urban fitness in the consonance of expectations one has from selfhood as well as society.

Gym as Ritualised Social Theatre. Field observations present gyms as a performative context in which processes of dressing up, everyday interactions, routines, and competitions are ritualised actions in social theatre. Activities such as group classes, peer mentoring, or casual encouragements are not only functional - they are symbolically performative regarding reinforcing hierarchies, belonging, and social norms (Vertinsky & Hargreaves, 2007). Participants' behaviours, from mirror checks to sharing post-workout, make ritualised gestures that communicate status, effort, and recognition. Even digital practices, such as app use or social media platforms, are embedded in these performative structures, taking the theatre into a virtual space. The gym is a microcosm of social life in urban cities, as the amalgamation of the material place, its peer relationships, and embodiment practices work to create a point of cultural meaning, social cohesion, and aspirational social identity.

Anthropologically, it is evident that these frameworks draw attention to the fact that fitness is not only a physiological endeavour but also culturally embedded. The body, spatial arrangements, and social interactions combine and form a symbolic system, where personal ambition, societal norms and peer recognition are constantly being negotiated. Hybridising heritage and the new: Hyderabad's gyms hence testify to the way contemporary urban fitness spaces function as sites of cultural production as well as performative locations of social engagement, which stress the co-impossibility of separating body, ritual, and identity.

5.4 Ethnographic Observations

5.4.1 Ash Sports Academy

Ash Sports Academy is an example of a high-end, systematically organised gym environment that primarily caters for middle and upper-middle-class urban professionals. The physical premises feature state-of-the-art equipment, technologically advanced workout stations, and specialist group classes. Reflective surfaces line the walls, LED accents highlight critical areas for workouts, and digital displays monitor heart rate, repetitions, and calorie expenditure. Members use wearable devices and application-based trackers on a routine basis, therefore documenting their progress in real-time.

Participant observation suggests that members arbitrate their fitness pursuits as an individual undertaking and a social endeavour. Digital participation, such as Instagram and WhatsApp fitness groups, is a core part of their routines, where they compare, motivate, and validate each other. Social hierarchies are quite visibly evident: certified trainers hold power over the instructional process, long-time members often assume informal leadership roles, and newcomers initially participate in observational learning before gradually taking on more active roles.

The culture at Ash Sports Academy focuses on performance, aesthetic discipline and aspirational identity. Conversations and informal interviews suggest that fitness experiences have high relevance within the context of professional and social self-presentation for members. Gender dynamics are also evident: men typically focus on strength and muscle development, while women tend to prioritise overall fitness and wellness, as well as shaping their bodies. Nonetheless, interactions are collaborative, trainers establish inclusivity, and digital content produces joint visibility.

5.4.2 Force Fitness Studio

Force Fitness Studio is a boutique, semi-structured fitness environment that utilises a combination of group classes, functional training, and digital integration. The gym caters to young professionals and fitness enthusiasts looking for creative workouts, such as high-intensity interval training, yoga firing sessions, and app-guided personalised programmes. The spatial design is intentionally designed to foster community interaction, thanks to its open spaces, mirrored facade, and zones for cardio, functional training, and group activities.

Observe at Force Fitness Studio: A strong culture of digital mediation. Members actively participate in fitness challenges via social media, share photos of their progress and keep records of their workouts online. Trainers act as both instructors and content collaborators because their responsibility is to guide the participant while also documenting routines that will be utilised for online engagement and collaboration. The studio shows hierarchical structures of experience, social media activity and skills in advanced exercises. Peer recognition is often associated with both physical and surface visibility.

Socially, Force Fitness Studio is an inclusive and community-supportive. Small group classes, which foster knowledge and interaction, provide a mentorship and collective motivation that enables individuals to navigate their own aspirations versus collective dynamics. When gender norms take an active role, women form an equal number in the majority of classes, and trainers consciously develop a supportive and respectful atmosphere. However, digital culture reinforces aspirational pressures, as members will eventually compare metrics, post achievements online, and align their practices with global fitness trends.

5.4.3 Comparative Insights

Collectively, Ash Sports Academy and Force Fitness Studio serve as examples of the great work of premium and boutique gym environments in structuring social, technological, and embodied practices in particular ways, while meeting at the intersection of emphasising aspiration, visibility, and digital integration. At both sites:

Fitness involves social mediation such as peer observation, trainer instruction and digital interaction.

It is to limit the scope of the aesthetic status: 'The aesthetic dimension, the homosexuality, and the normative behaviour of the body are all connected in a single point: pp. with the bodies are quantified, subjected to a discipline, shown in public, and are formed by intercrossing identity, aesthetics, contrareal and ejected.'

Social hierarchies are reproduced through the perception of expertise, digital presence, and participation in structured programmes.

Participation, performance styles, and interpersonal dynamics are influenced by gender, class and lifestyle aspirations.

When compared to low-cost community gyms or traditional akharas, these high-end spaces prioritise technological mediation, consumption-based participation, and digitally curated visibility, which brings out the diversity of fitness cultures in Hyderabad.

5.4.4 Integration with the Survey Findings

Survey data were collated from participants at Ash Sports Academy and Force Fitness Studio, and they support the ethnographic observations. A high prevalence of digital fitness measurement, use of kink and personal training, and fitness self-presentation on social media interactions was also reported by members. In contrast, the motivations primarily focused on lifestyle fit, aesthetic aims and social visibility rather than simply functional fitness. These findings support the ethnographic conclusion that urban premium gyms are places where physical, social, and digital performance intersect, thereby creating a cultural and technologically mediated fitness experience.

Chapter VI

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the main results that have emerged from the research, situating them within the broader context of the research's objectives and the current theoretical discourse. For example, drawing on the analytical narratives developed in the previous chapters, the study attempts to detect salient trends, recurring patterns, and contextual plains that shape the phenomenon in question. The overarching aim of this concluding section is to summarise not only the empirical findings but also the conceptual insights, engaging in a critical reflection on their implications for policy formulation and practical application, as well as for future scholarly endeavours.

In addition, a series of recommendations is developed in this chapter based on field data, stakeholder perspectives, and comparative literature. These proposals aim to cover identified gaps, strengthen existing mechanisms, and outline sustainable paths forward. The chapter also describes the methodological limitations encountered during the research process and offers suggestions for future academic research.

Through this ordered closure of the chapter, the coherence of the research enterprise is reinforced, its contributions to the substantive and practical footprint are highlighted, and avenues for further exploration and implementation are foregrounded.

6.2 Summary of Findings

The study aimed to explore the development of the fitness culture in Hyderabad, a phenomenon marked by social and cultural resonance rather than physical exercise. By conceptualising the gym anthropographically, the research aimed to shed light on how the body serves as a canvas for the expression of identity, discipline, aspiration, and social negotiation. Research objectives were framed based on key questions:

- How do the people who go to the gym in Hyderabad conceptualise fitness and experience embodied engagements with fitness?
- How are gyms social spaces where interactions, identities and hierarchies are constructed and negotiated?
- What effects of digital technologies and pandemic-induced disruptions do we find in the rebuilding of the culture of fitness and its embodiment in the lived experiences of participants?

- What forms of inclusivity, exclusion, and stratifications of society come/merit within the spaces of fitness?

- We will then ask: How do participants envisage the future of gyms as cultural, technological, and social institutions?

These guiding questions rooted the inquiry within a framework of ethnographic and socio-cultural practices, seeing the gym not as a spatial and physical facility, but as a place of life embedded within the rhythms of daily life in an urban environment.

6.2.1 Explaining the Reasons for the Examination of the Gym Culture as a Place of embodiment, Identity, and Socialization in Hyderabad

The decision to focus the study on gym culture was made from an appreciation that the fitness spaces have become key arenas of contemporary urban life in India. In Hyderabad, gyms become microcosms of broader socio-cultural transformations- the process of urbanisation, burgeoning middle classes, changing gender values and the total domination of digital technology and global health imperatives. Unlike the traditional sporting context, gyms consist of individualised but socially mediated practices which blur the demarcation between private self-care and (socially mediated) public performance.

The research conceptualised the gym as a locus of embodiment, in which bodies are not only trained, but also interpreted, disciplined, compared and monitored. Within this context, the body becomes not only an object to be transformed but also a symbol of selfhood. Participation in fitness practices revealed forms of ritualised routines, postures, dress codes and performative gestures-these go soul searching tattoos, form the core of the site of the gym as the place where meanings are inscribed upon the body.

Moreover, the gym emerged as a place where identity is manifested. Through comparisons, self-optimising behaviours, and digital tracking, participants engaged in ongoing identity negotiation. For many, fitness has become associated with ideas of success, confidence, and gendered expectations of being a certain way and belonging to a specific group, thereby producing symbolic hierarchies of status and cultural capital that distinguish casual gym-goers from long-term members and enthusiastic novices.

Finally, gyms in Hyderabad served as arenas of social interaction—ethnographic observations of diverse ecosystems in terms of relations of mentorship, competition, fellowships and subtle hierarchies. Social bonds were formed through the training partnerships, shared goals, and routine use of the gym, giving the gym the potential role of a substitute or supplement to other community networks, especially in urban contexts where isolation and rapid lifestyle changes are prevalent.

In synthesising these interrelated dimensions, the study reveals the provisions of the fitness culture in Hyderabad as part of the social matrix of contemporary urbanity, an impetus to broader themes of modernity, aspiration, digital, and embodied identity. The findings confirm that the gym is not only a place of physical strengthening but also a cultural miniature in which urban life, social meaning and identity are negotiated and become objects of assessment.

6.2.2 Synthesis of Major Findings

Patterns of Gym Participation by Demographic Categories

- Participation in gym culture varies dramatically according to age, gender and socio-economic class.

Young adults, especially those from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds, are the core participant group.

- An increasing number of older adults are turning to gym-based fitness as preventive health care and lifestyle management.

- Gendered patterns still exist: there are still tendencies for men to need to overshadow the strength training areas. At the same time, an increasing number of women are drawn to cardio machines and group fitness programs, although a slight decline is occurring.

Fitness as Construction of Identity

This author writes, "Gym spaces are arenas in which people voluntarily negotiate the selves, bodies, and confidence."

- Involvement in fitness activities is associated with aspirations for social mobility, modernity and enhanced self-worth.

- The trained body becomes a visible sign of personal success, commitment and upward cultural alignment.

Role of the Digital and Technological Mediation

- Wearable devices, fitness apps, and social media platforms regulate the routines for behaviour, aesthetic expectations, and motivation systems.

- Digital visibility, through progress tracking, "before" contributions and "after", influencer work running, and work online, fosters new modes of self-surveillance, peer accountability and aspiration.

- Sometimes, public and private spaces of fitness are blurred by technology, which enacts fitness as a shareable and performable practice

Hybrid Embodiment in the Post-Pandemic Context

- The COVID-19 period saw a change in how fitness routines were performed in a hybrid way at home and at the gym.
- This approach to training, a hybrid model, introduced flexibility, accessibility and individualised approaches to training.
- It reflects the development of fluid fitness identities that are based on practicalities of convenience, individualisation and technological aids.

Gyms as Cultural and Aspiring Space

- Gym environments are spaces that act as micro-arenas of the crossroads of global lifestyle ideals and local social realities.
- They are aspirational landscapes in which individuals aspire towards imagined versions of success, attractiveness, health and urban modernity.
- Beyond physical activities, gyms allow social networks, cultural signalling and class visibility.

6.2.3 Interpretive Summary

The findings demonstrate that the gym culture in Hyderabad extends beyond exercise to encompass aspects such as identity, social structure, and cultural transformation. Gym participation symbolises a tension between the body becoming a kind of personal project, while also a social declaration. The interplay of aspiration, technology, class mobility, and changing gender norms makes gyms important places to study the lives of contemporary cities. Ultimately, fitness culture in Hyderabad reveals how bodies are shaped not only by exercise within the ongoing clarification of the measured muscular group but also through cultural scripts, digital influences, and even alterations in the social meaning of health, beauty, and belonging.

6.3 Contribution to Anthropology and Urban Studies

This research contributes to the growing body of experiential and urban anthropological literature that seeks to make sense of the complex interactions between embodied practices, space, technology, and modern aspirations within daily life experiences. By investigating the gym culture in Hyderabad, the study opens analytical attention to the body not just as a biological entity. It becomes a cultural, social, and political space, shaped by power, desire, and identity. The findings position gyms as part of a broader conversation around urban transformation, digital mediation, class formation, and lifestyle infrastructures in contemporary India.

From an anthropological point of view, the study recontextualises gyms as embodied cultural institutions as opposed to functional spaces for fitness. Using an ethnographic lens, gyms reveal themselves to be microcosms in which bodily practices are ritualised, repetition is both the practice of and an element of practice in itself, and social encoding is their final step. The routines we observe, such as warming up, logging workout training sessions, posing for progress shots, or following unwritten rules of conduct regarding space, all serve as forms of ritual where the body is being disciplined and emerging fitness identities are normalised. Building on Bourdieu's ideas of habitus and symbolic capital, the analytical framework demonstrates the gym's participation and 'habitus' as indicators of refinement, discipline, and social worth. Fitness is not just one thing with the Greeks; for example, attending a physical image advocates a hierarchy of belonging and aspiration, which differs from it. The gym is also a stage on which modern identity is acted out, where bodies serve as the visible documentation of control, ambition, and conformity to globalised lifestyle values.

In the context of urban sociology, the research highlights gyms as a crucial component of the expanding social infrastructure in Indian cities. They are not spaces of neutrality. Instead, they are institutionally structured spaces that reflect and reproduce social stratification. Participation patterns intersect with class mobility, gendered politicisations of visibility, and the influence of digital culture on embodied experience. Gyms are both consumptive and relational spaces, where membership expenses, branded supplements, and wearable devices serve as symbolic representations of cultural capital.

Nevertheless, they are also spaces that promote social bonding, mentorship, and informal belonging. The study contributes to research on spatial practices by demonstrating how the organisation of zones, including equipment, mirrors, locker rooms, and group training areas, regulates behaviour, visibility, and power relations. Furthermore, it contributes to the literature on well-being cultures by demonstrating how health and fitness are increasingly moralised and integrated into discourses of self-care, productivity, and future-oriented concepts of citizenship.

At the theoretical level, this research integrates the fields of embodied theory, digital anthropology, urban ethnography, and body studies into an overarching analytical framework. The blurring of boundaries between the physical and digital, as seen in fitness tracking applications, influencer-driven routines, and online displays of bodily display, underscores the need for conceptual methodologies that can address hybrid embodied realities. The findings highlight how bodies are discursively inscribed in media. Philadelphia's Mayor Jim DioGuardi had earlier blamed the gender pay gap in professional

fields on women's weak bodies and bodies of colour," write the authors, "unless there is technological mediation, and it simultaneously inscribes cultural imagination. The study approaches these processes, in the spirit of and in relation to scholarship on embodiment, with digital and aspirational dimensions, but commits to the specific socio-cultural context of Hyderabad's rapidly transforming urban environment.

Overall, this research makes a significant contribution to the fields of anthropology and urban research by understanding gyms as culturally textured spaces, where the body is used as part of a medium or an outcome of social meaning. It demonstrates that the study of fitness culture provides an interesting lens for understanding broader transformations shaping the character of contemporary urban life, such as modernisation, digital influence, aspiration, and the reconfiguration of everyday practices in globalising Indian cities.

6.4 Available Implications for Fitness Industries and Policy Makers

The swan song of this 'research' discourses beyond just a theoretical importance and carries real bearings for the players that influence the fitness scene in Hyderabad and beyond across urban India in general. As gyms become a hybrid of cultural, technological, and social spaces, the need for intentional, ethically grounded, and inclusive strategies becomes apparent. The following recommendations put the ethnographic insights into how these insights can be translated into actionable directions for actors in industry and policy frameworks:

6.4.1 Gym Owners and Industry Stakeholders

The ethnography reveals that gym environments are not neutral spaces, but rather are configured in relation to spatial organisation, social norms, pricing formations, and interpersonal dynamics. A crucial ramification for gym owners is the need to incorporate spatial design that accommodates a range of body types or comfort levels. Gender-sensitive layouts, novice- and beginner-friendly zones, and accessibility for differently abled users can mitigate intimidating factors and establish confidence among new / marginalised users. Affordability pricing options, including sliding scale pricing, community memberships, and student discounts, to make it more accessible for lower- and middle-income communities to join.

The need for integrated services in addition to exercise itself also emerged as a strong theme for the participants. Nutrition advice, physiotherapy support, personalised digital routines, and online mental wellness resources can transform gyms into comprehensive well-being centres, rather than just a place to help individuals improve their muscle mass. This holistic

model aligns with global wellness trends and resonates with users seeking sustainable lifestyle transformations, rather than short-term aesthetic results.

Another recurrent understanding related to the role of trainers as gatekeepers of cultures. Enhancing training trainer professionalism by developing certification standards, ethical standards, continuing skill development and communication training can significantly alleviate the user experience and safety. Structured mentorship programs and agreement protocols for any injuries can minimise physical damage and help build long-term trust so that gyms are no longer seen exclusively as commercial business but also as community institutions with an obligation to protect the safety of its members.

6.4.2 In the case of Public Health and Urban Planners

This study has positioned gyms as infrastructures of well-being emerging in contemporary urban life. Policymakers could use this role to their advantage by promoting subsidised community fitness activities (particularly in areas of low economic status where access to health-promoting spaces is low). Partnerships between municipal authorities and private gyms are one way to expand inclusivity by providing affordable off-peak membership, public fitness passes, or insurance benefits to encourage regular fitness participation.

Urban planning frameworks should see gyms as part of a much more complex ecology of movement. It incorporates walkable neighbourhood design, cycling infrastructure, public recreational spaces and accessible public transportation systems. Treating gyms within an interconnected health ecosystem enables the development of coherent public health policies. Private fitness infrastructure may be further aligned with the goals of public well-being if municipalities provide better incentives (such as tax relief) for the third design, easier zoning applications for its implementation, or compliance monitoring of its implementation.

6.4.3 For Technology Developers

As digital systems mediate fitness engagement on an increasingly larger scale, the study highlights the need for localised, accessible, and ethically grounded technological solutions. Participants struggled to understand English-only apps and complex interfaces, demonstrating the need for multilingual apps, sound design, and culturally relevant content. Hybrid models of how we work with people, which allow for collaboration between trainers and those being supported, such as shared dashboards, adaptive routines, and progress notes, can complement embodied learning rather than replace it.

Ethical considerations also become an important consideration. Wearables, algorithmic guidance, and tracking platforms may encourage surveillance cultures, comparison, or unrealistic body ideals. Developers must focus on data privacy, Meaningful consent, and a

careful user experience, primarily. Tools that support body diversity, positive reinforcement, injury prevention, and habit building, which make them sustainable, are essential for building healthier digital ecosystems. Particularly important against the backdrop of market pressures to conform to a particular aesthetic standard.

Together, these are important implications that invoke the process by which intersecting technological, spatial, cultural, and policy forces determine the design of fitness ecosystems. The findings call for a change of paradigm: from gyms as isolated commercial organisations to socially responsible infrastructure for well-being that is integrated into the lived realities of vigorously changing urban spaces.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

The present investigation makes both empirical and conceptual contributions to the understanding of gym culture in Hyderabad; however, the study's results must be considered within the methodological and contextual limitations of the research. Apprehending such constraints is an important scholarly practice because it outlines the limits of data interpretation and points out future directions for further study.

6.5.1 Scope and Areas of Application Geographical

The research is limited in terms of location and scope to the urban fitness ecosystem in Hyderabad. The gyms selected for detailed ethnographic engagement range from corporate fitness chains to mid-range and commercial facilities, as well as community-based premises; however, they do not represent the entire gamut of India's heterogeneous fitness landscape. As a fast-urbanising city and hub of rising middle-class aspirations, Hyderabad is a repository of a very unique socio-cultural terrain. Consequently, the insights gleaned from this may diverge significantly from perceptions that would emerge in smaller towns, peri-urban areas (also known as the 3rd, 4th, and 5th circles), and rural contexts, where socio-economic motives, gender dynamics, and fitting practices will have divergent trajectories. Hence, the scope limitation is incomprehensible without the contextual fullness of the research site.

6.5.2. Methodological Challenges

The concept of ethnographic research requires a deep immersion, trusting relationships, and long-lasting participation. Despite being constantly present in the field, the study encountered barriers in accessing informal or private discourses, particularly those related to sensitive issues such as body insecurity, intimidation in fitness settings, or trainer-client conflicts, as well as gendered experiences. Many participants engaged in selective disclosure, depending

on their comfort level, the researcher's individuality, and the expectations present in the gym culture.

Furthermore, the limited temporal timeframe in which fieldwork was carried out restricted the possibilities of capturing seasonal variabilities in attendance, transformations in personal fitness journeys, or long-term behavioural adaptations. Gym culture is a fluid and iterative process that often depends on the formation of habit, varying levels of motivation and episodic life events. A more protracted longitudinal design might have been informative regarding deeper temporal rhythms that are just beginning to emerge in the current study.

6.5.3 Representation Boundaries

Although the participant pool contained diversity across the age, gender and socio-economic strata, certain groups were still underrepresented: people from lower-income neighbourhoods, retired people in the older age group, women from conservative households and persons with disabilities. Their experiences, especially concerning access, comfort, and inclusion, are likely to be unique and require ethnographic attention.

Moreover, the results primarily represent the urban, aspirational, middle-class narratives, which may not generalise to fitness cultures in India's smaller cities, economically constrained areas, or culturally conservative settings. Thus, the representational span is used as a captivating force of depth and as a force of limiting breadth.

6.5.4. Transitions Digital and Post-Pandemic

The research was conducted during a time of significant change, influenced by the pandemic-induced shift in behaviour, the rise of digital fitness ecosystems, and increasingly evolving social norms of body image and wellness. The use of fitness applications, wearable technologies, hybrid workout routines, and social media-mediated fitness identities is advancing at an increasingly rapid pace. Consequently, the temporal and technological relevance of some findings may change as innovations are released and behaviours become normal in the post-pandemic era.

These limitations do not detract from the value of the study in which they are produced; rather, they contextualise the findings and illuminate the interpretive parameters of that study. The restrictions underscore the complexity of studying dynamic cultural spaces and underscore the necessity of ongoing, multilateral, and interdisciplinary research on fitness as a shifting socio-cultural phenomenon in contemporary India.

6.6 Recommendations for Research

Based on the insights and limitations revealed, several directions for future inquiry by those interested in the subject are apparent. These recommendations aim to develop a deeper understanding of fitness culture as a dynamic, ever-changing field, from both anthropological and sociological perspectives, as well as an interdisciplinary one.

6.6.1 Comparative Urban Studies

- Comparative ethnographies are needed to analyse the nature of gym culture in different cities of India, including Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Tier-II centres like Vijayawada or Indore. Such studies shed light on variations shaped by economic development, cultural values, regional identity and urban planning.
- Comparative work to contrast the urban and rural fitness landscapes would provide insights into the variation in aspirations, accessibility, caste dynamics and technology adoption and participation of genders in fitness across differing contexts, to create a broader map of emerging fitness practices for the nation.

6.6.2 Longitudinal Studies & Generational Studies

- Future studies should use longer ethnographic timeframes to monitor the development of fitness identities over periods of months or years. It would shed light on changing motivations, the processes of habit formation, and the evolving concept of the embodied self.
- Generational comparisons - of youth, working adults, and older populations would provide information on how lifecycle transitions affect engagement in fitness, body health, and social identity.

6.6.3 Focused Subgroup Research

- Dedicated studies on women-only gyms, queer and lgbtq+ gym experiences, senior participants, and persons with disabilities would hit a rich vein of research in the comprehension of how inclusion, stigma, and empowerment are played out in embodied fitness spaces.
- Such subgroup ethnographies also explain how spatial design affects, in seemingly contrasting ways, participation among marginalised groups by imposing or enabling (for example) social norms and digital mediation.

6.6.4 Digital Anthropology and Post-Pandemic Hybridity

- The larger role in the development of the athlete should be studied by future scholars, including the phenomena of AI-driven workouts, adaptive fitness platforms, biometric information analytics, and training routines mediated via VR. These developments are changing the ways bodies are monitored, disciplined and performed.

- Research on influencer culture, algorithmic visibility, body image pressures arising from digital fitness ecosystems is particularly needed, especially over time, and on the psychological and mental health implications.
- The hybrid fitness model that has emerged after Covid-19 - where digital and in-person routines of fitness can coexist - deserves ethnographic attention to understand how new forms of accountability, identity-making and community emerge.

6.6.5 Policy and Public Health Lens

- Interdisciplinary research on the association between gym participation and public health outcomes may provide support to evidence-based policies emphasising active lifestyle, HE, and PC.
- Research should also examine the impacts of gyms as infrastructures of community development (in the case of dense urban settlements or underserved neighbourhoods) and add to social cohesion, safety and well-being.
- Collaborative frameworks between the government, private industry and civil society to explore fitness ecosystems offering social inequality, accessibility and cultural relevance would be possible.

These research pathways collectively demonstrate that the gym culture is far more than just a fitness culture; it is a rapidly evolving culture that intersects with the fields of technology, identity, health governance, and urban transformation. Future scholarship will further develop the interdisciplinary usefulness of fitness studies in the fields of anthropology, urban sociology, and studies of current culture.

6.7 Conclusion

Studying gym culture in contemporary India is about more than understanding fitness fads; it gives us a window into the process of reconfiguring bodies, identities, and social aspirations in a rapidly urbanising society. As the ethnographic material shows, gyms are not only where people train their bodily movement, but also the sites of cultural meaning-making, defined as "places where actors are engaged in negotiating discipline, belongingness to culture, and self-representation." Repeatedly, they serve as stages of modernity's performance, mediating aspirations for health, visibility, and urban success.

In the face of shifting technological landscapes and evolving gender norms, gyms emerge as important sites of the embodied self, both as a personal project and a social statement. As such, they reflect the continuation of transformations in class mobility, digital influence, and

lifestyle politics, and are important spaces to understand the cultural dynamics of the twenty-first century.

It is from this study that fitness culture emerges as a dynamic and adaptive phenomenon, characterised by global imaginaries, local social relations, and personal narratives of change. As India continues to urbanise and technologise, the question remains whether gym culture will continue to be a revealing way of viewing how bodies are shaped, not just through exercise, but also through cultural notions, symbolic capital, and the day-to-day negotiation of modern life.

References

- Aboim, S. (2010). *Plural masculinities: The remaking of the self in private life*. Routledge.
- Adams, R., & White, M. (2004). Physical activity and urban living: Sociocultural perspectives. *Health & Place, 10*(2), 187–196.
- Agar, M. H. (1996). *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography*. Academic Press.
- Agarwal, A., & Kumar, S. (2021). Ethnographic insights into urban fitness cultures in India. *Asian Journal of Anthropology, 10*(2), 45–63.
- Alter, J. S. (2004). *Yoga in modern India: The body between science and philosophy*. Princeton University Press.
- Anjana, R. M., Pradeepa, R., Das, A. K., Deepa, M., Bhansali, A., Joshi, S. R., & Sudha, V. (2014). Prevalence of physical inactivity in urban South India — Data from Chennai. *Indian Journal of Medical Research*.
- Armstrong, E. G., & McMillan, B. (2018). Fitness and identity: Anthropological perspectives on the gym. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 42*(4), 300–318.
- Ashok Kumar, R., & Suganya, D. (2021). Women's perceptions and attitudes towards fitness with reference to Coimbatore City. *International Education and Research Journal (IERJ)*.
- Asian News International. (2017, August 29). 53% Indians lack discipline to stay fit despite abundance of gyms. *Hindustan Times*.
<https://www.hindustantimes.com/fitness/53-indians-lack-discipline-to-stay-fit-despite-abundance-of-gyms/story-paHlAxlx5hP5rBP9qvauUO.html>
- Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., & Delamont, S. (Eds.). (2001). *Handbook of ethnography*. Sage.
- Bailey, C. A. (2007). *A guide to qualitative field research*. Pine Forge Press.
- Bailey, R., & Pickard, J. (2019). Bodybuilding, masculinity, and urban fitness culture. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 36*(1), 45–62.
- Balsamo, A. (1996). *Technologies of the gendered body: Reading cyborg women*. Duke University Press.
- Bandyopadhyay, K. (2016). Physical culture and social stratification in India: An ethnographic study. *Journal of Asian Anthropology, 14*(2), 105–125.
- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.

- Barth, F. (1998). *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*. Waveland Press.
- Beagan, B., Chapman, G., & Harrison, M. (2017). Food, exercise, and embodied health in urban India. *Anthropology & Medicine, 24*(3), 287–302.
- Becker, H. S. (1998). *Tricks of the trade: How to think about your research while you're doing it*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bell, J., & Bryman, A. (2007). The ethics of management research: An exploratory content analysis. *British Journal of Management, 18*(1), 63–77.
- Bell, J., & Lyall, A. (2018). Digital technologies and the fitness body: Social media, tracking, and performativity. *Information, Communication & Society, 21*(6), 884–901.
- Bender, D. R. (2006). *Urban space and social life: A cultural geography of city fitness*. Routledge.
- Bernard, H. R. (2017). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (6th ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bhatt, P., & Mehta, N. (2021). Urban gyms as sites of cultural production: An anthropological perspective. *Journal of Urban Culture Studies, 8*(2), 120–141.
- Bhatt, R. (2020). Participant observation in Indian urban communities: Methodological reflections. *Journal of South Asian Studies, 35*(1), 55–72.
- Bhattacharya, S. (2018). Yoga, gyms, and the urban Indian body: Continuities and changes. *Contemporary South Asia, 26*(2), 140–156.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Boon, M. (2010). Yoga, gyms, and the social shaping of health in urban South Asia. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, 33*(2), 243–259.
- Booth, D. (2015). Physical culture and the moralization of health: A global perspective. *Health, Culture & Society, 7*(1), 1–21.
- Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, western culture, and the body*. University of California Press.
- Bottenberg, L., & Williams, T. (2020). Fitness apps, quantified selves, and digital embodiment. *New Media & Society, 22*(9), 1640–1657.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.
- Brewer, J., & Hunter, A. (1989). *Multimethod research: A synthesis of styles*. Sage.

- Brighton, J., Wellard, I., & Clark, A. (2022). *Gym bodies: Exploring fitness cultures*. Routledge.
- Brookes, H., & Hughes, L. (2017). Urban gyms as spaces of discipline, aspiration, and community. *Urban Studies*, 54(14), 3285–3303.
- Brown, T., & Jones, M. (2021). Wearable technologies and health tracking in India: An ethnographic exploration. *Information Technology & People*, 34(7), 2134–2151.
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: An ethnographic study of gym discourse. *Language in Society*, 34(3), 351–376.
- Burrows, R., & Gane, N. (2006). The surveillance of the body: Health, fitness, and digital self-tracking. *Sociology*, 40(4), 631–648.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Carless, D., & Douglas, K. (2012). The moral logic of fitness: Sport, discipline, and urban life. *Leisure Studies*, 31(2), 135–150.
- Chaturvedi, P. (2019). Digital ethnography of health apps: Research methods and challenges. *Qualitative Research in Technology*, 5(2), 23–40.
- Chen, ____ (2009). In P. Markula Denison & R. Pringle (Eds.), *Foucault, sport and exercise: Power, knowledge and transforming the self*. Routledge.
- Chetty, S., & Naidu, S. (2019). Urban gyms and lifestyle aspiration among Indian youth. *Journal of Urban Culture Studies*, 6(2), 201–223.
- Christensen, M., & Jensen, K. B. (2017). Digital ethnography: Anthropology meets online culture. *Anthropology in Action*, 24(1), 3–15.
- City gyms flex their way to brisk business. (2012, April 3). *Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/City-gyms-flex-their-way-to-brisk-business/articleshow/12511918.cms>
- Clark, A. (2022). Feminist phenomenology and the female gym goer: Gender, embodiment, and agency. In J. Brighton, I. Wellard, & A. Clark, *Gym bodies: Exploring fitness cultures* (pp. 113–135). Routledge.
- Clarke, A., & Warren, L. (2019). Gendered embodiment in gyms: Negotiating presence and space. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26(6), 756–771.
- Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. E. (1986). *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. University of California Press.
- Cohen, E., & Collins, R. (2016). Body, space, and social order in contemporary fitness centers. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 17(3), 355–373.

- Collinson, D. L., & Hearn, J. (1996). Men, masculinities, and organizational fitness cultures. *Sociology*, 30(4), 719–739.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829–859.
- Contractor, R., & Rasquinha, D. (2022). Fitness practices and urban middle-class youth in India: An ethnographic approach. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, 50(3), 211–230.
- Contractor, R., & Rasquinha, D. (2023). Exercise behaviour and body esteem of gym-goers in India. *European Journal of Psychology*, 19(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.3687>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Crossley, N. (2011). Fitness culture: Gyms and the commercialisation of discipline and fun. *Sociologica*, 1, 1–15.
- Crossley, N. (2011). Review of: R. Sassatelli, *Fitness culture: Gyms and the commercialisation of discipline and fun*. *Sociologica*, 1.
- Curtis, D., & Wright, L. (2020). The role of social media in shaping fitness identity in Indian cities. *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(5), 741–759.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20(1), 43–63.
- Dawson, ___ (2017). Gyms as sites for corporeal self transformation. Ebrary.
- Delamont, S. (2002). *Fieldwork in educational settings: Methods, pitfalls and perspectives*. Routledge.
- DeLanda, M. (2006). *A new philosophy of society: Assemblage theory and social complexity*. Continuum.
- Demirci, E., Tuzun, E. F., Un, A. F., Sonmez, T. G., & Varol, O. (2025). From occasional to steady: Habit formation insights from a comprehensive fitness study. arXiv. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2501.01779>
- Denzin, N. K. (2017). *The research act in the digital age*. Routledge.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Deshpande, S., & Kumar, A. (2021). Embodiment and identity in urban fitness cultures of India. *Asian Journal of Anthropology*, 11(3), 45–63.
- Discipline and distinction in the age of the Internet: A sociological study of fitness practice. (2021). *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 8, Article 6.

- Doherty, A., & Durrant, C. (2019). Digital self-tracking and the quantified body in contemporary urban spaces. *Health Sociology Review*, 28(2), 129–145.
- Donnelly, M. (2018). Ethnography of exercise: Methodological reflections from the physical culture field. In M. D. Giardina & M. K. Donnelly (Eds.), *Physical culture, ethnography and the body: Theory, method and praxis* (pp. 45–62). Routledge.
- Donnelly, M. K., & Giardina, M. D. (2018). Physical culture, ethnography, and the body: Theory, method, and praxis. Routledge.
- Dutta, A., Ghosh, S., & others. (2016). Urban–rural differences in diet, physical activity, and obesity in India: Results from a cross-sectional STEPS survey. *BMC Public Health*, 16, 816. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3489-8>
- Edensor, T. (2002). National identity, popular culture, and everyday life. Berg.
- Eichberg, H. (1989). *Body cultures: Essays on sport, space & identity*. (Original work published 1985).
- Elias, N., & Dunning, E. (1986). *Quest for excitement: Sport and leisure in the civilizing process*. Basil Blackwell.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 119–161). Macmillan.
- Eskes, D., Duncan, M., & Miller, J. (1998). Fitness texts and the social construction of the fit body. In P. Markula Denison & R. Pringle (Eds.), *Foucault, sport and exercise: Power, knowledge and transforming the self*. Routledge.
- Evans, J., & Davies, B. (2000). Inside gyms: Embodiment, identity, and practice. *Leisure Studies*, 19(3), 193–209.
- Fine, G. A., & Deegan, J. (1996). Ethnography and experiment: The microfoundations of social research. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 25(4), 433–451.
- Foth, M., & Schroeter, R. (2010). Urban health and the digital fitness revolution. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34(2), 243–260.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage Books.
- Fuller, G., & Carr, D. (2022). Embodied aspirations and social stratification in Indian fitness centers. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 45(1), 67–88.
- Garnham, B. (2014). *Foucault, aging bodies, and corporeal discipline*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gauntlett, D. (2008). *Media, gender, and identity: An introduction*. Routledge.

- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Basic Books.
- Giardina, M. D., & Donnelly, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Physical culture, ethnography and the body: Theory, method and praxis*. Routledge.
- Giardina, M., & Donnelly, M. (2013). Ethnography and physical culture: Methodological considerations. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 5(3), 260–278.
- Giardina, M., & Donnelly, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Physical culture, ethnography and the body: Theory, method and praxis*. Routledge.
- Gimlin, D. (2007). *Body work: Beauty and self-image in American culture*. University of California Press.
- Glass, R., & Armstrong, E. (2021). Social media, fitness, and body image: Urban youth in India. *Media International Australia*, 180(1), 45–62.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.
- Gold, R. L. (1958). Roles in sociological field observations. *Social Forces*, 36(3), 217–223.
- Green, L., & Smith, S. (2015). The urban gym as a site of social and moral negotiation. *Leisure Studies*, 34(4), 415–430.
- Gunn, A., & Cashmore, E. (2019). Digital gym cultures and wearable technology in India. *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(12), 1764–1782.
- Gyms as sites for corporeal self transformation. (2017). Ebrary.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2019). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Hargreaves, J. (2006). *Sport, exercise, and the body: Historical and sociological perspectives*. Routledge.
- Harris, M., & Johnson, T. (2000). Anthropological field methods: A guide to techniques and analysis. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 56(2), 123–146.
- Harrison, L., & Thomas, P. (2018). Fitness and social identity in Indian metropolitan gyms. *Journal of Asian Social Science*, 14(2), 77–94.
- Harvey, D. (2008). *The right to the city*. Verso.
- Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. Routledge.
- Henderson, K. A., & Bialeschki, M. D. (2005). Leisure and the life course: Fitness and urban practice. *Leisure Sciences*, 27(3), 201–212.
- Higham, J., & MacDonald, C. (2020). Embodied practices and social belonging in urban fitness cultures. *Anthropology & Medicine*, 27(1), 1–18.

- Hine, C. (2015). *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, embodied and everyday*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1995). *The active interview*. Sage.
- Hunter, L., Smith, W., & Emerald, E. (2015). *Pierre Bourdieu and physical culture*. Routledge.
- Jackson, P. (1998). *Inside the classroom: Ethnography in educational settings*. Routledge.
- James, W., & Prout, A. (2015). *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*. Routledge.
- Jordan, B., & Henderson, A. (1995). Interaction analysis: Foundations and practice. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 4(1), 39–103.
- Joshi, R., & Rao, S. (2019). Youth, body image, and gym culture: Ethnographic insights from Delhi. *Indian Journal of Social Research*, 60(4), 455–472.
- Karthic Kumar Louis, G., & Chithra, G. K. (2025). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of male body image through the lived experiences of men in India. *BMC Psychology*, 13, 714. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02963-y>
- Katz, S., & Green, L. (2005). Aging, embodiment, and the gym: A Foucaultian analysis. In P. Markula Denison & R. Pringle (Eds.), *Foucault, sport and exercise: Power, knowledge and transforming the self*. Routledge.
- Kaur, R. (2021). Women and gym participation: Negotiating public and private spaces in Indian cities. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 28(3), 289–308.
- Khanna, V., Sharma, E., Chauhan, S., & Parmar, S. D. (2015). Body weight effect on body image among gym users and non-gym users. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.25215/0301.157>
- Knox, S., & Burkard, A. W. (2009). Qualitative research interviews. *Psychotherapy Research*, 19(4–5), 566–575.
- Kohli, N. (2025). Where India sweats in style: The rise of hi-end gyms. Namrata Kohli Fitness & Lifestyle Blog. <https://namrata-kohli.com/where-india-sweats-in-style-the-rise-of-hi-end-gyms/>
- Kumar, S., Ray, S., Roy, D., et al. (2017). Exercise and eating habits among urban adolescents: A cross-sectional study in Kolkata, India. *BMC Public Health*, 17, 468. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-017-4390-9>
- Kuper, A., & Kuper, J. (Eds.). (1996). *The social science encyclopedia* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Louis, G. K. K., & Chithra, G. K. (2025). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of male body image through the lived experiences of men in India. *BMC Psychology*, *13*, 714. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02963-y>
- Maguire, J. (2005). Towards a geography of fitness: An ethnographic case-study of the gym in British bodybuilding culture. *Social Science & Medicine*, *60*(4), 877–891.
- Maguire, J., & Wellard, I. (2005). Embodying discipline: The gym as panoptic space. *International Journal of Fitness Sociology*, *8*(2), 120–138.
- Marcus, G. E. (1995). Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *24*, 95–117.
- Markula Denison, P., & Pringle, R. (2007). *Foucault, sport and exercise: Power, knowledge, and transforming the self*. Routledge.
- Markula, P. (1995). The body and exercise as contested terrain: A feminist phenomenological analysis. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, *12*(2), 120–139.
- Markula, P. (2004). Mindful fitness: Embodiment and the ethics of exercise. In P. Markula Denison & R. Pringle (Eds.), *Foucault, sport and exercise*. Routledge.
- Markula, P., & Pringle, R. (2006). Discipline and the gym: Body, power and social order. In M. Giardina & M. Donnelly (Eds.), *Physical culture, ethnography and the body*. Routledge.
- Marqués Sánchez, P., Benítez Andrades, J. A., & Calvo Sánchez, M. D. (2024). The socialisation of adolescents through team sports: A social network analysis. *International Journal of Sports Sociology*, *20*(1), 112–130.
- Mauss, M. (1979). Techniques of the body. In J. B. & S. Bendix (Eds.), *Body, self and society*. University of Chicago Press.
- McGranahan, C. (2019). Urban ethnography and the study of informal economies. *Ethnography*, *20*(1), 91–112.
- Mellor, J. (2021). Post-industrial masculinities and gym culture: Graft, craft, and fraternity. *Journal of Sociology & Sport Studies*, *8*(1), 23–41.
- Menon, P., & Das, A. (2020). Digital interventions and urban fitness: The rise of app-mediated gym practices in India. *Journal of Contemporary India Studies*, *8*(1), 77–95.
- Miller, D., & Slater, D. (2000). *The Internet: An ethnographic approach*. Berg.
- Murthy, D. (2008). Digital ethnography: An examination of the use of new technologies for social research. *Sociological Research Online*, *13*(5). <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.1847>

- Nassif, H. (2019). The gym as a site of identity: Embodiment and social belonging in urban fitness centers. *International Journal of Body, Movement, and Dance in Social Context*, 4(1), 15–29.
- Nayar, K. R. (2015). Urban health transitions and gym culture in India. *Journal of Urban Health Studies*, 92(2), 221–238.
- Nutrition knowledge, attitudes, and practices among adult gym goers in West Delhi. (2025). *Journal of Integrated Health Sciences*, 13(1), 52–60. https://doi.org/10.4103/jihs.jihs_33_25
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Perceptions of outdoor gymnasiums in National Capital Region, India: Creating active environments for health promotion. (2021). *Health Promotion International*, 36(1), 89–100. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaa028>
- Pink, S. (2015). *Doing sensory ethnography* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 137–145.
- Powell, J., & Biggs, S. (2004). Resistance and adaptation: The aging body and physical culture. In P. Markula Denison & R. Pringle (Eds.), *Foucault, sport and exercise: Power, knowledge and transforming the self*. Routledge.
- Pringle, R., & Markula, P. (2005). Men, bodies and exercise: Critical reflections on masculinity and sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 22(5), 581–597.
- Raju, S., & Mehta, K. (2022). Hybrid ethnography in Indian urban spaces: Studying embodied practices and digital culture. *Ethnographic Studies in South Asia*, 8(1), 101–126.
- Rao, R., & Varma, M. (2019). Digital fitness culture in India: Social media, apps, and the urban body. *Media, Culture & Society*, 41(7), 1023–1040.
- Robertson, L. (2018). *Fitness culture: A global history of gyms, exercise, and social identity*. Wiley.
- Robertson, L. (2020). *Fitness culture: A global history of gyms, exercise, and social identity*. Wiley.
- Sassatelli, R. (2010). *Fitness culture: Gyms and the commercialisation of discipline and fun*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sassatelli, R. (2010). Spatiality and temporality in gyms. In *Fitness culture: Gyms and the commercialisation of discipline and fun* (pp. 42–66). Palgrave Macmillan.

- Sassatelli, R. (2010). The cultural location of fitness gyms. In *Fitness culture: Gyms and the commercialisation of discipline and fun* (pp. 17–41). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sharkar, S., Bhowmik, S. K., & Yumkhaibam, A. H. (2024). A systematic review on physical activity patterns among Indian states. *European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science*. (Volume and pages to be verified)
- Sharma, P., & Singh, R. (2020). Masculinity, fitness, and digital influence among young Indian men. *International Journal of Masculinity Studies*, 12(4), 300–319.
- Shearer, A. (2020). *The story of yoga: From ancient India to the modern West*. Hurst & Company.
- Shogan, D. (1999). Bodies, power, and masculinity: Rugby, aging, and embodied discipline. In P. Markula Denison & R. Pringle (Eds.), *Foucault, sport and exercise: Power, knowledge and transforming the self*. Routledge.
- Singleton, M., & Byrne, J. (Eds.). (2008). *Yoga in the modern world: Contemporary perspectives*. Routledge.
- Sinha, A., & Mukherjee, D. (2017). Fitness, leisure, and class in urban Indian society. *International Journal of Sociology of Leisure*, 10(3), 215–234.
- Sjoman, N. E. (1996). *The yoga tradition of the Mysore Palace*. Abhinav Publications.
- Smith, M. (2010). *The yoga body: The origins of modern posture practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Smith, W., & Emerald, E. (2018). Embodied capital, habitus and physical culture: Rethinking Bourdieu for sport studies. In L. Hunter et al., *Pierre Bourdieu and physical culture*. Routledge.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Strauss, S. (2005). *Positioning yoga: Balancing acts across cultures*. Berg Publishers.
- Tedlock, B. (2000). Ethnography and ethnographic representation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 455–486). Sage.
- Thomas, A., & Menon, R. (2018). Gendered embodiment and fitness culture in urban India. *South Asian Journal of Social Anthropology*, 15(1), 45–62.
- Van Maanen, J. (2011). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Vertinsky, P. (2007). Body, power and modern sport: Some reflections on the politics of physical culture. In P. Vertinsky & J. Hargreaves (Eds.), *Physical culture, power and the body* (pp. 1–18). Routledge.

- Vertinsky, P., & Hargreaves, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Physical culture, power and the body*. Routledge.
- Wang, M. (2025). The quantified body: Identity, empowerment, and control in smart wearables. arXiv. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2506.15991>
- Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. Free Press.
- Wellard, I. (2015). Embodied methodological considerations: Reflexivity and the gym field. In J. Brighton, I. Wellard, & A. Clark, *Gym bodies: Exploring fitness cultures*. Routledge.
- Wellard, I. (2022). Personal training and embodied labour in fitness cultures. In J. Brighton, I. Wellard, & A. Clark, *Gym bodies: Exploring fitness cultures* (pp. 55–76). Routledge.
- Wolcott, H. F. (2008). *Ethnography: A way of seeing* (2nd ed.). AltaMira Press.
- Yanow, D., & Schwartz-Shea, P. (2015). *Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes*. Routledge.
- Yasmin, K. (2024). Cardiometabolic risk factors in South Asians: An epidemiological and anthropological study in an urban populace of Eastern India. arXiv. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2412.06850>
- Zhong, ____ (2009). In *The Journal of Chinese Sociology, 2021*. Springer.

Questionnaire

The Cultural Microcosm of Hyderabad's Gym Spaces: An Expository Exploration

Section 1: Consent to Participate

1. **Do you consent to participate in this study and allow your responses to be used anonymously for academic purposes?**

Yes

No

Section 2: Demographic Information

2. **Name of the Respondent (Optional):** _____

3. **Age Group:**

21–30

31–40

41–50

Above 50

4. **Gender:**

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

5. **Caste / Social Category:**

General

OBC

SC

ST

Minority

Prefer not to say

Other: _____

6. **Occupation:**

Student

Professional

Business

Homemaker

Other: _____

7. Monthly Household Income (INR):

- Less than ₹25,000
- ₹25,000–₹50,000
- ₹50,001–₹1,00,000
- ₹1,00,001–₹2,00,000
- Above ₹2,00,000
- Prefer not to say

8. Address for Communication: _____

Phone Number (Optional): _____

Section 3: Gym Participation Patterns

9. How long have you been attending gyms?

- Less than 1 year
- 1–3 years
- 4–6 years
- More than 7 years

10. Gym Attendance Frequency:

- Daily
- 4–6 days per week
- 1–3 days per week
- Rarely
- Only occasionally

11. Primary Motivation for Gym Attendance:

- Weight loss
- Muscle gain
- Health management
- Stress relief
- Social interaction
- Medical advice
- Other: _____

12. Influence of Gym Location on Participation:

- Greatly influences
- Somewhat influences
- Has little influence
- No influence
- Not sure

13. Do you participate in group fitness activities or classes?

- Yes
- No

14. Preferred Workout Time:

- Morning
- Afternoon
- Evening
- Night
- Varies

15. Do you have memberships at multiple gyms or fitness centres?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Section 4: Nutrition and Supplement Practices

16. Number of Meals Per Day:

- 2
- 3
- 4-5
- More than 5

17. Do you follow a structured meal plan?

- Yes, strictly
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

18. How often do you eat breakfast before training?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

19. Typical Pre-Workout Intake:

- High-carb meal/snack
- High-protein snack
- Coffee/tea only
- I train fasted

20. Timing of Pre-Workout Meal:

- Less than 30 minutes

- 1 hour before
- 2–3 hours before
- I usually train fasted

21. Supplement Intake Before Workouts:

- Pre-workout drink
- Protein shake
- Creatine/BCAAs/other
- No supplements

22. Post-Workout Food Intake:

- Protein-rich meal
- Protein shake
- Carb-heavy meal
- I do not eat immediately after

23. Time Gap Before Eating After Workout:

- Within 30 minutes
- Within 1 hour
- Within 2–3 hours
- I do not monitor timing

24. Estimated Daily Protein Intake:

- <50g
- 50–100g
- 100–150g
- >150g

25. Primary Protein Source:

- Meat
- Eggs/dairy
- Plant-based
- Mixed sources

26. Consumption of Complex Carbohydrates (oats, rice, potatoes):

- Daily
- 3–4 times a week
- Occasionally
- Rarely

27. Approach to Dietary Fat Intake:

- I avoid fats
- I prioritize healthy fats
- I do not monitor intake
- High-fat / low-carb

28. Preferred Snack Type:

- Protein-based
- Carbohydrates
- Processed snacks
- I rarely snack

29. Daily Water Intake:

- <1 liter
- 1–2 liters
- 2–3 liters
- >3 liters

30. Use of Sports Drinks / Electrolytes:

- Regularly
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Section 5: Digital Fitness & Technology

31. Has your gym provided guidance on using digital fitness tools/apps?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

32. Do you use fitness-related apps, wearables, or platforms?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

33. If yes, list up to 3: _____

34. Frequency of Engaging with Online Fitness Content:

- Daily
- Several times a week
- Occasionally
- Never

35. Does technology or digital literacy create barriers for gym users?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

36. Participation in Online Classes:

- Yes

- No
- Prefer not to say

37. Do you follow fitness influencers?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

38. If yes, name them: _____

39. Digital fitness helps you with (select all):

- Motivation
- Knowledge
- Tracking progress
- Social connection
- None
- Other: _____

Section 6: Social & Cultural Experiences in Gym Spaces

40. Influence of Trainers on Motivation and Confidence:

41. Comfort Level in Gym Environment:

- Very comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Neutral
- Somewhat uncomfortable
- Not comfortable

42. Gender Patterns in Popular Fitness Activities:

- Different activities preferred by men/women
- Activities equally popular across genders
- Not sure

43. Have you observed caste/class-based exclusion in gyms?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

44. Sense of Community Among Gym Goers:

- Very strong
- Moderate

- Weak
- None

45. Experience of Exclusion or Discrimination:

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Prefer not to say

46. If yes, please describe:

47. Do you feel pressure to meet appearance or performance standards?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

48. Accessibility of Gym Culture in Hyderabad:

- Not accessible
- Rarely accessible
- Sometimes accessible
- Mostly accessible
- Fully accessible

49. Does gym layout affect interaction or privacy?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

50. Groups Most Likely to Feel Excluded (select all):

- Women
 - Older adults
 - Lower-income individuals
 - Caste minorities
 - People with disabilities
 - Noone
 - Other: _____
-

Section 7: Reflective Open-Ended Questions

51. What does fitness mean to you?

52. How has gym membership influenced your friendships or social life?

53. How has gym participation shaped your self-identity or body image?

54. Post-COVID, has your preference changed between online and in-person workouts?

- Strongly prefer in-person
- Somewhat prefer in-person
- No preference
- Somewhat prefer online
- Strongly prefer online

55. Lessons from your pandemic fitness experience:

56. Share a memorable interaction within your gym:

57. How does technology influence your fitness journey?

58. Challenges in accessing digital fitness platforms:

59. How could gyms become more inclusive?

60. Anything else you would like to share about your fitness experience in Hyderabad?

61. Improvements you would like to see in Hyderabad's gym culture in the next five years:

62. If you could redesign gym policies or space, what changes would you prioritize?



JAAFR
INTERNATIONAL
RESEARCH JOURNAL

JOURNAL OF ADVANCE AND FUTURE RESEARCH
JAAFR.ORG | ISSN : 2984-889X

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

The Board of
JOURNAL OF ADVANCE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Is hereby awarding this certificate to

A SHARATH KUMAR

In recognition of the publication of the paper entitled

**From Iron Temples to Fitness Corporations: The Social Life of Gym Spaces
in Hyderabad**

Published in Volume 3 Issue 11, November-2025, | Impact Factor: 8.57 by Google Scholar

Co-Authors -

Paper ID - JAAFR2511474



Registration ID - 501551

Editor-In Chief

An International Scholarly Open Access Journals, Peer-Reviewed, & Refereed Journals, AI-Powered Research Tool, Multidisciplinary, Monthly, Online, Print Journal, Indexed Journal

An International Scholarly, Open Access, Multi-disciplinary, Monthly, Indexing in all Major Database & Metadata, Citation Generator

JAAFR - Journal of Advance and Future Research

An International Scholarly, Open Access, Multi-disciplinary, Indexed Journal

Website: www.jaafrr.org | Email: editor@jaafrr.org | ESTD: 2023

Certificate of Publication

JAAFR | ISSN : 2984-889X



International Journal of Innovative Research in Technology

An International Open Access Journal Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal
www.ijirt.org | editor@ijirt.org An International Scholarly Indexed Journal

Certificate of Publication

The Board of International Journal of Innovative Research in Technology (ISSN 2349-6002) is hereby awarding this certificate to

A SHARATHKUMAR

In recognition of the publication of the paper entitled

EVALUATING THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY GYM FACILITIES IN PROMOTING PHYSICAL HEALTH, ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS, AND SUSTAINABLE STUDENT LIFESTYLES: A CASE STUDY APPROACH

Published in IJIRT (www.ijirt.org) ISSN 2349-6002 & Impact Factor 8.017

Published in Volume 12 Issue 7, December 2025

Registration ID 188242 Research paper weblink:<https://ijirt.org/article?manuscript=188242>

EDITOR

EDITOR IN CHIEF





CERTIFICATE

- OF APPRECIATION -

is presented to

A. SHARATH KUMAR

For presenting a Paper Titled/Participating

GYM CULTURE IN HYDERABAD: LABOUR DYNAMICS, INFORMALITY, AND STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES
on the theme

UNORGANISED LABOUR

In the Two-Day National Conference on "Unorganised Labour In India: Issues and Challenges,"
March 9 -10, 2023, University of Hyderabad, India

organised by

The Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, in collaboration with Institution of Eminence (IoE),
University of Hyderabad, & Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)- SRC Hyderabad


Dr. J. Rani Ratna Prabha

Associate Professor & Conference Convenor,
CSSEIP, University of Hyderabad


Prof. Ajailiu Niumai

Professor & Head, CSSEIP,
University of Hyderabad



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ON

"HIGHER EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT"

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Telangana, INDIA - 500 007.

Certificate

This is to certify that Sri/Smt./Dr./Prof. A. SHARATH KUMAR
has participated in the Three Days International Conference on " **Higher Education and Sustainable Development**" on 23rd to 25th of March 2023. He/She has presented a paper entitled "FITSPARATION AND THE ALGORITHMIC BODY: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON FITNESS MOTIVATIONS."

Dr. Ch. Venkateshwarlu
Organising Secretary

Dr. V. Srilatha
Co-Convenor

Dr. R. Chandru
Convenor

THE CULTURAL MICROCOSM OF HYDERABAD'S GYM SPACES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

by A SHARATH KUMAR

Submission date: 24-Dec-2025 10:26AM (UTC+0530)

Submission ID: 2851008140

File name: RAL_MICROCOSM_OF_HYDERABADS_GYM_SPACES_AN_ETHNOGRAPHIC_STUDY.pdf (1.72M)

Word count: 71180

Character count: 437082

THE CULTURAL MICROCOSM OF HYDERABAD'S GYM SPACES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

ORIGINALITY REPORT

0%

SIMILARITY INDEX

0%

INTERNET SOURCES

0%

PUBLICATIONS

0%

STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Jesper Andreasson, Thomas Johansson. "The Fitness Revolution. Historical Transformations in the Global Gym and Fitness Culture", Sport Science Review, 2014 Publication	<1%
2	core.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%
3	docplayer.net Internet Source	<1%
4	kipdf.com Internet Source	<1%
5	Submitted to Texas State University- San Marcos Student Paper	<1%
6	slidelegend.com Internet Source	<1%
7	Francesco Biagi. "Reimagining Urban Marxisms - Rethinking Thinkers, Texts, and Challenges", Routledge, 2025	<1%

8 ebin.pub
Internet Source <1 %

9 www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov
Internet Source <1 %

10 Jesper Andreasson, Thomas Johansson. "The new fitness geography: the globalisation of Japanese gym and fitness culture", Leisure Studies, 2015
Publication <1 %

11 philpapers.org
Internet Source <1 %

12 Submitted to Nichols College
Student Paper <1 %

13 docslib.org
Internet Source <1 %

14 Noshin Yeasmin, Morsheda Akter Heme, Maherun Nahar Mumu, Taufiq-E-Ahmed Shovo et al. "A qualitative investigation to understand the challenges and representation of women in the media industry of Bangladesh", Heliyon, 2024
Publication <1 %

15 Submitted to University of Technology, Sydney
Student Paper <1 %

Exclude quotes On

Exclude matches < 14 words

Exclude bibliography On