



## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

**B. P. Ed. 3<sup>rd</sup> Year**

**PAPER NO. : Practical (III)**

**TOPIC NO. 1**  
**Indigenous Games**

**Lecture – 206**  
**Introduction to Thang-ta**  
**(The Armed Martial Art)**

### **Introduction:**

Thang-ta is an age old combative martial art of the Meiteis of Manipur. It falls within the category of armed martial art while other forms of martial arts like Mukna and Sarit-Sarak belong to the category of unarmed martial art. Both armed and unarmed forms of combative arts constitute the Martial Arts of Manipur, and it belongs to the broader category of the Meitei concept of Huiyen Lalong which is the art of war and weaponry.

Apart from engaging the enemy in the battlefield the Meitei concept of war entails many ethics, principles, codes, and disciplines which a warrior should follow before, during and after the war. When to attack the enemy, how to attack, who is to be killed or not to be killed, how to deal with women and children, how to minimize collateral damage, healing practices, disciplinary measures, myths accompanied with war, weaponry, fatigue, endurance, what could be eaten or not, how to deal with fatigue, how to achieve endurance, etc. constitute the entire art of Huiyen Lalong.

Thang-ta falls within the fold of armed martial art because its principal function is the use of thang which means sword and ta which means spear. Therefore, the term is a combination of the two words, thang (sword) and ta (spear). It is the art of thang-ta which made Manipur survive through many events of war fought with its neighbours, the Burmese in particular who were known as Kabow in Manipuri.

### **Mythological origin:**

There are numbers of mythological lores explaining the origin of the weapons of thang and ta. Ancient manuscripts like Pudín, Thanglon Thangchat Puya, and Karthong Lamlen explain how different kinds of thang and ta came to be born.

Pudín tells us how different thang and ta came into existence out of the limbs and bones of Tin Sidaba, another name of the lord Pakhanga of the Meiteis. The manuscript called Thanglon Thangchat is another variation of the same tale type. Here, Naitongamba, the

grandson of Tin Sidaba is caught in a fish trap called sora een and died in it. As he died many types of swords and spears came to be born out of his bones.

Karthong Lamlen, another revered puya or old manuscript also tells the story of how the lord Pakhangba came down from Yimchao, an abode in the sky, to Hamchin, the abode inside the earth shaking all living creatures and holding two deadly swords in his left and right hands.

### **Thang-Ta weapons associated with ancestor deities:**

Deities who are revered ancestors of Meiteis have thang or ta closely associated with each of them

1. Lord Marjing is associated with a sword known as cheisu thang
2. Lord Koubru is associated with a sword known as Thang-koiremba
3. Lord Aseeba is associated with Thang-kairemba and Lukak-thang
4. Lord Atiya is associated with Chap-thang
5. Lord Poireiton is associated with Khansu-ta

These are only few examples, and more research is yet to be done in this regard.

### **Thang-Ta weapons associated with each Salai or clan:**

Meiteis are constituted of seven clans or salais. Each of the salais or clans has a distinctive kind of sword traditional assigned. These swords are of different shapes and sizes with specific names characteristic of each clan. The swords are still compulsorily included as an inevitable item in ritualistic functions related with ancestor worship. Each sword has different names like

1. Mangang salai's thang called Chak – thang
2. Luwang salai called Thang Tondumba
3. Khuman salai called Thang Tonkakpa
4. Angom salai called Pukak Thang
5. Moirang called Yenba Matok Saba Thang
6. Kha Nganba called Laithang Chinnaiba
7. Sarang Leishangthem called Khumthong Thang

Thus, thang-ta apart from being a weapon of war, it also has indelible relationship with the religious and spiritual life of the Meiteis.

### **Coronation swords of each Meitei kings of Manipur:**

Most of the ancient Meitei kings of Manipur used to have their own respective swords which were used as a ritual item during his coronation ceremony. It was also a status symbol made and designed according to choices of the kings. The shapes and forms of these weapons were inspired either by religious beliefs or by the natural objects like leaves of trees, of bamboos and other plants. Such a chosen sword is compulsory ritual item in the coronation ceremony of the king. Favourite names were given to these swords and they were kept as their personal possessions. These swords were not handed down to their descendants. They were either buried or left behind at particular places by the kings themselves during their lifetime. The ancient manuscript called Ningthourolgi Thang exclusively deals with this area of traditional knowledge. It lists a number of kings and number of swords each king possessed.

Some kings of Manipur used to have more than one sword perhaps because it was their pride. These swords were considered to have possessed some spiritual powers charged with positive energy. These swords were buried at specific locations and recorded in manuscripts.

Among the kings, Meidingu Irengba (984-1074 A.D.) and Meidingu Ningthoukhomba (1432-1436 A.D.) had 10 and 6 swords respectively and each sword were given their favourite names.

### **Ta: The Spear**

Ta is the Manipuri word for the spear. In archaic Manipuri it is also known as Timen. The elongated shield which always accompanies the warrior holding ta is called Chung. The feathers decorated on the top of the shield are called Ingen Leithet. Ta is a weapon having a long shaft of hard wood or bamboo, tipped with different shapes of iron points on both ends. The front tip is called tamang and the rear tip is called taning.

There are different forms of ta:

**Lambu-ta:** It is the biggest and longest type of spear used mainly for hunting tigers.

**Lang-soi-ta:** It is another type of spear with a small iron tip fitted to a small but long handle. It was used in hunting elephants.

**Sagol-ta:** It is medium sized and was mainly used the cavalry.

**Thougal-ta:** It has the same shape and size with sagol-ta. It was mainly used by the attendants of the king to guard him. The tip of Thougal Ta is customarily never exposed. It is always covered by a cloth as a mark of respect and discipline. However, it is shown here for the sake of educational purposes. We tender apology to the custodians of the weapon for this.

**Khangning-ta:** It is fitted with pointed iron hooks like that of arrow loosely fitted to the handle. A rope fastened to the iron hook is coiled along the handle and tied just above the middle of the handle so that the wounded victim can be caught after it has fled. This was used in hunting bear and other animals.

**Tapak:** The iron tip is broad and about three feet long and the edges are sharp as sword. The tip can be removed and used effectively as sword in many ways.

**Hakthang-ta:** It is considerably short spear compulsorily carried by a cavalryman on his back along with two quivers of arambai, a form of dart, hanging down on both sides of the saddle.

**Taron-ta:** It is smaller than hakthang-ta, also known as hunna-ta as it could be used for throwing purposes.

### **Conclusion:**

The secret that made Manipur survive through many events of external aggressions which chequered its history was its martial tradition of Thang-ta. Frequent wars with Burma and neighbouring kingdoms often brought Manipur almost to the brink of devastation. However, the desire of the people to remain independent in the face of

these odds was simply unstoppable and here the glorious martial tradition became a blessing which worked miracle in their struggle for survival. Noted Meitei scholar and thang-ta expert R. K. Sanahal said, 'Foreign aggressors cannot be sent away by pious talks or sweet and reasonable words but by physical force only.' Thus, the hostile environment gave birth to a classic and skilfully woven texture of Thang-ta and they improved the art from time to time and polished it to a higher level of perfection for application in direct combative situations. After the defeat of Manipur in 1891 the British banned practice of Thang-ta, which was so common for everyone in Manipur, was totally banned and no one was allowed to walk on the street with even a stick in hand. Thang-ta was revived gradually after the British left Manipur. But, it is no longer for field application. It is now for performance shows and academic studies. Researchers and practitioners have come up with scientific explanations of the art, and are gradually finding openings in the fields of physical education and other forms of art like actor's training.