

Summary:

Thang-ta is a very old combative art of the Meiteis of Manipur which was regularly compulsorily practiced by everybody who was physically and mentally fit in order to defend Manipur in any eventuality of war or for any necessity of invading other countries. Meiteis had a very wide concept of its art of war or war and weaponry which born out of a long historical experience of frequent practices and field applications in many events of war.

Meiteis firmly situate the origin of the weapons of thang and ta in their myths and lore and they revere these weapons as having supernatural powers gifted by their ancestors. Ancient manuscripts like *Pudin*, *Thanglon Thangchat Puya*, *Karthong Lamlen* etc. which are written in archaic Meitei language stand eloquent testimonies to the mythological origin of Thang-ta. Many ancestor deities have different kinds of swords of different designs associated with each of them.

The seven Meitei clans known as *salai* have different representative swords having different ritually significant designs with different names for each sword. These swords are still compulsorily used as inevitable ritual items for ritual functions associated with ancestor worship.

Each of the Meitei kings also had their own respective swords used as a ritual item during their coronation ceremony. The sword was also considered as status symbol made and designed according to the choice of the kings. Favourite names were given to these swords and they were kept as their personal possessions. The ancient manuscript *Ningthourolgi Thang* exclusively deals with this area of traditional knowledge system. These swords were considered to have possessed spiritual powers charged with positive energy. When the kings died their respective sword were ceremonially buried at specific and designated sites and recorded in writing.

In archaic Meitei language ta or the spear is also known as timen and the long and broad shield which always accompany the warrior along with ta is called chuung. There are different varieties of ta for different purposes of use. They are – lambu-ta, lang-soi-ta, sagol-ta, thougal-ta, khagning-ta, tapak, hakthang-ta, taron-ta, etc.

Tradition of thang-ta practice came to be diminished by the end of the nineteenth century, more seriously since it was officially banned by the imperial British who conquered and occupied Manipur in the brutal war at Khongjom. Thang-ta came to be resurfaced after the British left but with the changes in the mode of war it slowly came to flourish as a sports and also more as a cultural performance.