

The art of *sword and spear*

Weapon-based ancient martial art of Thang-ta uses sword and spears as tools to fight opponents

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The practice of Thang-ta not just helps in self-defence, it adds to our rich cultural heritage



The heroic tradition of Manipur mentions the use of various weapons like swords, spears and daggers. It was during medieval times when constant life and death struggles led to the inception of a martial art form named Thang-ta involving breathing methods, meditation and rituals. Also known as Huyen Lallong, it is more than just the training of fighting skills.

Thang-ta has both internal (meditation, self-cultivation and awareness of spirit and mind) and external (physical and health) components.

Origin

The origin of this martial art lies in the origin of the history of Kangleipak and the Meetei race. Thang-ta was performed by the Meeteis to fight the evil and protect their kingdom from foreign invaders.

Due to its geographical proximity, this art contributed to the martial art forms of Burma (now Myanmar) and Thailand. However, it was in 1930 when the British government imposed a ban on Thang-ta that led to its downfall. It was only after India gained Independence that its revival started. Since then, this martial art form has been a part of almost every celebration, festival and cultural

event in Manipur with death-defying and excellent demonstrative skills.

Training

Thang-ta has several moral values imbibed in it for which a learner needs to maintain strict discipline, proper food habits and a good moral

Thang-ta has been a part of almost every celebration in Manipur with excellent demonstrations





To learn Thang-ta, it is mandatory for the disciple to have the knowledge of age-old Manipuri culture

character. According to tradition, a disciple needs to go to the guru's house and request him to teach Thang-ta. If accepted, the disciple has to undergo *Guru Boribha* (honouring the teacher) by offering him *dakshina* (fee), *kwa maru mana* (betel nut and leaf) and bananas. *Thang* or the art of sword includes lowering one's body close to the ground for a strong grip, expansion and attack. *Ta* or the art of playing with the spear is all about opening out of the body with two forms: *nongphan* to stimulate the expanse of the sky and *leiphah* to emulate the expanse of the earth at ground level to reach out in all directions. The use of spear takes about 75 per cent of the lower body motions while the sword normally takes about 75 per cent of the upper body

movements. The sword protects the body from attacks from all sides, whereby the figure of eight is extensively used to cover all vulnerable parts of the body.

Once the student attains competence in fighting with the arms, he is taught unarmed techniques like *sarit sarak* or *sharit sharak* which includes, kicks, hand strikes and grappling. This martial art also involves breathing exercise, meditation and sacred dancing.

However, due to lack of exposure, this martial art form has limited acceptance. With a rich cultural heritage, this martial art form, till date, has kept the integrity of Manipur intact, including the era of subjugation by foreign forces.

