INTRODUCTION

Manipur is situated in the extreme corner of the North Eastern part of the Indian Union between latitude 24.50(E) and 25.40(N) and longitude 93.10(E) at an average altitude of 800 ft., above the sea level in the hills and 2500 ft., in the valley area. Manipur borders with Nagaland in the north, Burma (Myanmar) in the east and south, Mizoram in the south-west and Assam in the west. Although the State was bigger in size in the historical past, its existing area of 22327 sq.km., has remained more or less the same since the controversial transfer of Kabaw Valley to Burma in 1834. Geographically bowl-shaped with a fertile valley area of the 700 sq. mile in the middle there are columns of lofty hills surrounding the valley. This small valley area of 700 sq. miles is the home of Meiteis, the bearers of the martial tradition of Thang-Ta.

The rise and growth of the Meiteis which had many events of war has generally been explained in terms of its martial tradition of Thang-Ta. It is a combination of two words Thang means sword and Ta means spear. In ancient times there were many principalities like Meiteis, Moirangs, Khumans, Heirem Khunjas, Khende, Chairen, etc. They followed a strong tradition of mutual fight using weapons like bow and arrow or spear to assert their socio-political status. It was through a long drawn out processes of armed conflicts
that the Meities had subordinated other groups and ruled over the Imphal plain. In the early time Meitei did not have any reserved groups of soldiers like the army, instead there was a customary system called Lallup. Lallup is derived from two words i.e., Lal means war and Lup means group and Lallup proved to be the crucial back bone in the rise of the Meiteis in Manipur.

The present thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter while discussing the contribution of unarmed combative arts such as Sarit-Sarat and Mukna towards the emergence of armed combative performance art of Thang-Ta chronologically traces the role of Thang-Ta in Manipuri history. The second chapter discusses the philosophy of the origin of the implements of Thang-Ta in Pakhangba himself. The Meiteis used to worship him as a Lolang Pakhangba when he was in the sky, whereas while he was in the earth they worshiped him as Leinung Lonja Pakhangba. It also discusses the different categories of swords and their various shapes and sizes as possessed by the different deities of Meiteis. Similarly the successive king of Manipur had different types of swords of their choice. The techniques and various forms of Thang-Ta performance are discussed minutely in the third and fourth chapter. The technique of delivering hits, cuts or thrust by the swordsman to the vital limbs of his adversary along with the use of foot work is known as Thangbi. The perfect co-ordination of the Khutlon and Khonglon is the complementary method of practice to be a perfect martial artist. The specialties of Manipuri swordsmanship is the use of the back of sword and even the back edge of the
tip portion of the sword to hit or cut or thrust with minimum use of the arms. There are different forms of *Ta* in Manipur. Their uses are also different according to their shape and size. One of the most important features of the spear use is in *Ta-Khousaba* (Spear-dance) which is an exercise to develop endurance, control, agility and all forms of muscular movement involving all part of the body. *Thang-Ta* was not only used at the time of war and catching animals to defend oneself from the enemy but also a kind of somatic exercise which has an indelible relationship with the culture of Meitei. In the fifth chapter, the traditional code of conduct and culture of *Thang-Ta* and its philosophy is discussed. A world of moral codes of conduct all bound to belief system was also involved as the part the warrior and the warrior had to strictly follow the laws laid down by tradition. The sixth chapter investigates the circumstances which led to the transformation of *Thang-Ta* which was meant strictly for field application during war time into a different context of performing way as we find it today.

It is not an easy task to collect the materials for the reconstruction of the history of *Thang-Ta* as the documents and records are lying in the personal custody of Gurus. It has also been after a lot of difficulties that one could have personal interviews with old *Thang-Ta* experts from Phayeng, Awang Sekmai, Ukhrul, Andro, Kakching, etc., and collected information in connection with the theme of the research proposal. Questionnaires were also prepared and distributed to all the *Thang-Ta* institution of Manipur. All together responses
from only 11 (eleven) institutions were received. It has also became necessary not only to visit the various Thang-Ta institutions, but also witness many of the State Martial Art Competition organised by the Meitei Huyel Lallong Academy and First State Level Cheibi Championship organised by All Manipur Cheibi Association to have a proper reconstruction of the history of Thang-Ta.