CHAPTER I

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The term martial art refers to those combative skills of attack and defence applied with or without weapons. It is a discipline, which advocates the development of agility, flexibility, and a strong body as well as alertness of the mind by a constant search for perfection of the self, both physical and spiritual. It leads the martial artist towards fully realising the hidden dimensions of his or her body and spiritual self.

The indigenous combative art of Thang-Ta would fall within the category of armed martial art because its principal function is the use of Thang (sword) and Ta (spear). But there are also different types of unarmed forms of combative art in this region which have been practised since time immemorial. These forms of unarmed combative art cannot be ignored while discussing the Thang-Ta. Historically these forms of unarmed combative art and some other forms of games and sports seemed to have functioned as a preliminary to Thang-Ta. We may now take up some examples.
Mukna¹ and Sarit-Sarat² are the most popular of the indigenous forms of unarmed combative arts of the Meiteis. Mukna could be referred to as a kind of wrestling although it has distinctive local features different from the international form commonly known as wrestling. In a bout of Mukna both the competitors fall on the ground. But the one who is able to throw the other on the ground and top over him is the victor. There is no second chance for the loser and nothing is there like the best of three. Once a man is thrown over the ground, he is supported by the victor in getting up and the two hug each other. The loser simply walks away from the arena. Right before the beginning of the bout the competitors bow to each other affirming that the ensuing bout is simply a game or a play and a trust that they should not harm each other is established prior to the bout. This clearly exemplifies the sporting spirit inherent in this discipline.

The origin of Mukna is as old as the mythological origin of the earth according to the belief of Meiteis. Old manuscripts such as 'Leithak Leikharol' and Pudin³ which are revered as 'Puyas' account for the fact that this art of Mukna has its origin in mythological events. After creation of the earth the Lord Sidaba the supreme being, made his son Apanba (Pakhangba) the king. Dissatisfied with his father's decision the eldest son Ashiba (Sanamahi) took his abode to the moon. Seeing the creative activities of Kong
Louton Louthiba (Phakhangba), in gardening and plantation of other crops and the subsequent abundance it brought on the earth, Ashiba (Sanamahi) in order to take vengeance created a horse from the dust of his foot and sent it to Earth to destroy the things Pakhangba had created. On seeing the horse destroying the vegetation with its hooves Kong Louton Louthiba (Pakhangba) overpowered and captured the horse by using a special technique of Mukna known as 'Hao Mukna Langphaichan Mongba Tajin Yet!' It means that Pakhangba held the horse by its neck and twisted its foreleg with his own leg. From this instance onwards Meiteis came to believe that Mukna was first introduced by Pakhangba.

Another puya or manuscript called Poireiton Ningshat carries another story of a Mukna believed to have taken place in the mythological past and is closely associated with the geographical location of the heart of Imphal. The event is believed to have taken place around the area of the temple where the idol of Sanamahi is installed inside the cantonment area of the First Battalion Manipur Rifles (which was known as Tolong Lampak). The bout was held between Poireiton and Sanamahi and it was a betting for the throne of Kangla. Then he became the king of Kangla, the Palace of the Meiteis.

There are many more stories associated with many other events of Mukna. The legendary epic of Khamba and Thoibi of Moirang, a place 40 kms. away in the west of Imphal, tells the heroic exploits of the folk hero
**Khamba** in his pursuit to possess **Thoibi**, a princess, as his wife. In a sequence charged with a high dramatic fervour the hero **Khamba** defeats **Nongban**, the antagonist and a former champion of **Mukna** at the festival of **Thangjing Lai Haraoba**. These rich traditions of **Mukna** and other unarmed forms of combative art show that the ancient people of this small region had an innate and gifted knowledge of self-defence even when they were unarmed. They used a number of techniques to overcome their opponents. These techniques are popularly known as 'Lou', a shortened form of the Manipuri word 'Loushing' which means wisdom.

In a bout of **Mukna**, after taking of the starting position of holding the waist belt (in Manipuri **Phibai**) between the two **Mukna** competitors, they use or apply various techniques to get upper hand of the opponent. As mentioned earlier, the techniques they apply in this combat of **Mukna** are known as 'Lou' in Manipuri. It is very difficult to apply any 'Lou' when the two players are holding each other's waist belts, standing shoulder to shoulder and bending down their torso parallel to the ground. So, in order to execute the 'Lou' from this position, the players should first try to make their opponents off their balance, the act of which is known as **Leng-Louba** in Manipuri. After this act of **Leng-Louba**, a player of **Mukna** can apply any sort of technique according to his convenience. The following are some common techniques/Loos used by **Mukna** competitors in Manipur.
Firstly, the most common technique used by a *Mukna Loi* (Mukna player) is by blocking the calf of the opponent's leg and throwing him off balance backwards. This technique is known as 'Kaplak Kotpi'. The technique can be used comfortably either by the left or right leg. In the second technique, a *Mukna Loi* is to advance his leg to block the opponent's knee and whirl throw him. This technique is called 'Khu Theibi' and the player can apply it either by the right or left leg according to his convenience. The third common technique is 'Ningong Langha'. In this technique the player who moves first from beginning position puts his right or left hip against the opponents' crotch and whirl throws him backwards. The fourth most common and easy 'Lou' is 'Khongchep Haibi' in which the *Mukna Loi* applies a sweeping side-way throw by blocking the opponent's ankle. It can be applied both to the right or left ankles. The fifth and sixth techniques are known as 'Longkhrou Thak Inn' and 'Longkhrou Leiba'. In the first case the opponent is trapped in a twisting leg lock and pushed him for a fall and in the second, from the position of twisting leg lock the opponent is pulled forward and thrown down in a clockwise direction. A very aerobatic technique in which the opponent is lifted high by holding tight his waist belt and pulling him up to throw him down is called 'Khudong Pukhatpa'. It is used mainly by experienced *Mukna* player. 'Chaokot or Anikanbi' is also a very common 'Mukna Lou' in which the player applies a swift side hip throw by advancing his right or left leg and pushing him backward off balance. Thus, many of the
traditional *Mukna* techniques are similar to the Japanese martial art form of Judo like Hip throw (*Ogoshi*), leg lock throw (*Ouchigari*), ankle block throw (*Tiotoshi*), etc.

Each of the above mentioned techniques (*Lous*) also have their defensive counter techniques which are termed as *Lou-Ok*. Many principles of Bio-mechanics and Kinesiology are involved in every *Lou*. A mere learning of these *Lous* does not make one a good player if these principles are not properly understood and imbibed. Biomechanics is an area of study within physical education dealing with the applicational aspects of the scientific principles of mechanics and physics in movements and actions of human body. Kinesiology is another sub-discipline dealing with body motion. Speaking in terms of Biomechanics and Kinesiology we can safely say that the fundamental principles underlying the art of *Mukna* is based on balance, leverage, spring-action, momentum and gravitation. To execute these principles three parts of our body, viz. *Ning* (hip), *Leng* (shoulder) and *Thaa* (chest) are skillfully used by a *Mukna* player. The initial position in which the two *Mukna* players stand with their hands interlocked and each other's loin belts held by their hands is exemplary of the use of these principles. While holding each other's loin belt both of them will stand keeping their bodies bent downward and maintaining considerable distance between them. Their torsos are positioned in such a way that they go in parallel with the ground. In this position the above three parts of the body are scientifically used keeping the
body firmly situated in their position. Once the players are in this correct position both of them find it very difficult to initiate any of the *Lous* mentioned earlier. So before the application of *Lou* one has to try to force the other to go off his balance. This initial aggression is called *Leng Louba*. Soon after *Leng Louba* is done the player has to apply any one of the *Lous* according to his choice.

Some scholars prefer to call *Mukna* a 'Manipuri Wrestling' in English. This is a casual and misleading observation as *Mukna* has many local features different from wrestling. Muscle power or strength hardly matters here although it is highly accountable. Technique and a skilful implementation of it is what matters here. A *Mukna* expert could easily defeat a man who is stronger and bigger than him. There was a popular event of *Mukna* which is still not forgotten and continues to be narrated among the people. It was an event when one *Mukna* player called *Leishang Jatra* who was young, very healthy and strong fell defeated at the hands of an eighty year old *Mukna Jatra*\(^8\) called *Khuman Jatra* of Wangjing. So this could be the reason why during the medieval days everybody practised *Mukna* as military art along with *Thang-Ta*.

Apart from being a game in its true sense *Mukna* is also closely associated with the great ritualistic festival of the Meiteis like *Lai Haraoba*\(^9\). This relationship between *Mukna* and ritual clearly tells the fact that it is a
game firmly rooted in the local cultural world of the Meitei society. A Lai Haraoba festival can never come to its end until a game of Mukna performance is done as a ritual item on the final day of the festival.

*Sarit Sarat* is another unarmed combative form of martial art. It was and still is a necessity for a Thang-Ta player to master this art of Sarit Sarat to perfect his skill in Thang-Ta. One unique characteristic of Sarit Sarat is that the evasive and offensive moves could be as effective as any form of attack with or without weapon. An expert of this art could tackle a number of assailants single handedly. Even a girl in spite of her physical weakness and other bodily constraints can easily defend herself from an attacker if she is experienced in the art of Sarit Sarat.

*Sarit* literally means evading or defending from an armed or unarmed attacker. Sarat means counter offensive move to hurt the attacker. Defence itself works as effectively as offence. So in short we may say that offence in defence is the basic principle of this art. One cannot master this art prior to his training in Thang-Ta or Mukna because the fundamental techniques of Sarit-Sarat were derived from the basic movements of Thang-Ta and throwing techniques of Mukna. In this art, movement, force, weight, clothing and even the opponents hair could be effectively used to cause disadvantage to him. Sarit-Sarat is neither a sport nor it is a competition of strength, and it has no rules and regulations as a game of sport does or should
have. The principal motto of this unarmed combat is to control and subdue an attacker.

Although practised by the *Thang-Ta* artist as a necessary item of their training system no one can say when this art was originated or how it came to be evolved in the present form of refinement. There are hardly any *Puyas* or books which give an authentic account of its origin or evolution. However, some *Puyas* like *Nongban Pombi Luwaoba*\(^\text{10}\) make mention of this art as a passing reference. In this *Puya*, *Nongban Pombi Luwaoba* challenged *Leimung Thongaren* over the dead of his spouse *Kouparol Namoinu*. *Thongaren* deputed his two younger brother *Chinkhong Namoinu* and *Thongak Lakaba* to meet the challenge in a mortal combat of spear. However, to avoid unnecessary bloodshed *Nongban Pombi Luwaoba* engaged the two brother in an unarmed combat one after another and vanquished both of them with the art of *Sarit-Sarat*.

Another instance of self-defence with the use of *Sarit Sarat* is recorded in the royal chronicle *Cheitharol Kumbaba*\(^\text{11}\). As recorded in this chronicle the true dramatic incident took place on the 27\(^{th}\) January, 1844 when one prince *Nabin Singh* in conspiracy with *Maharani Kumudini Devi* and mother of the reigning child king Chandrakiriti with a band of fifty-two men secretly entered the residence of regent *Nara Singh* and attacked him. When the later was in his prayer prostrating in front of the image of the Brindaban
Chandra, taking advantage of the unguarded moment, Nabin Singh rushed towards Nara Singh and swung his sabre to cut his neck. But Nara Singh was an expert in swordsmanship and Sarit Sarat. With the art of Sarit Sarat he could not only defend himself but also cripple the assailant with a fatal kick to the groin.

The training process of Sarit Sarat normally begins with some basic exercises commonly known as Tuba-Taba-Onba (Fall & Roll). This consists of techniques of falling on the ground and rolling. A beginner is trained in these techniques to avoid any kind of injury he may encounter during the course of his training. The primary aim of Sarit Sarat is to break the body balance of an opponent and throwing him or felling him down on the ground. In short Tuba-Taba-Onba are the basic techniques of defence and also to soften the shock one encounters when one falls on the ground as a result of the loss of one's body balance. It consists of Mangda Tuba (front fall), Tungda Tuba (back fall), Nakanda Tuba (side fall) and Hangmei Kokthong Onba (forward somersault).

There are some similarities between Sarit Sarat and the popular combative art called Judo which has recently been included as one of the items in the Olympic Games. The technique of throwing an opponent in Judo largely depended upon how far the Judo player concerned could gain maximum advantage while he is gripping his opponent and moving together.
Advantage could be successfully gained as and when the opponent loses his balance or when he is forced to lose his balance. Application of power should centre on a fulcrum applied to the opponent's weak side as applied by a *Mukna Loi* in the technique of *Mukna*. In such a combative art the primary aim is always to hurt the opponent's attacking moves. To achieve this the player has to try to gain a partial control of the opponents body. In the next move he should be able to have a total control over the opponents body. The premise of controlling the opponent's body are in the holding techniques, joined techniques and choking techniques.

**(II)**

The secret that had made the Meitei survive through many events of war which had chequered its history, however, had been its martial tradition of *Thang-Ta*. *Thang-Ta* is a combination of two words *Thang* and *Ta*. Literally, *Thang* means sword and *Ta* means spear. In old Meitei language *Thang* is also known as *Kajeng* and *Ta* is *Timen*. Another term closely associated with *Thang-Ta* is *Huyen Lallong* in old Meitei language. *Huyen* literally means a war or battle and *Lallong* means strategy of war. So in a general sense the term connotes a definitive idea of the art of war and weaponry.
The long and incessant power struggle among the feudal clans and frequent wars with Burma and other neighbouring kingdoms quite often brought Manipur almost to the brink of devastation. However, the desire of the people to remain independent in the face of all these odds was simply unstoppable and here the glorious martial tradition became a blessing that could work miracle in the struggle for survival. So, Rajkumar Sanahal Singh is right when he said that, "Foreign aggressors cannot be sent away by pious talks or sweet and reasonable words but by physical force only". They had to be fought out then and there in the battle. The hostile environment was a blessing in disguise which gave rise to a classic and skillfully woven texture of Thang-Ta. Because the Meiteis had to be an army in themselves, well-trained in Thang-Ta and even remained alert to repel the aggressors however powerful they might be.

Successive kings institutionalized an educational practice of training its officers and citizens who could show merit in war, in catching elephants, tigers, etc. They were rewarded with some high official positions in the King's Court and further the kings quite often betrothed their daughters to those heroes irrespective of caste or creed. Record has it that during the reign of Maharaja Garibniwaj (1709-1748) one Thangjaba Chekes Chakrapani who showed tremendous merits in the war against Tripura was married to the King's daughter Sana Tampha in spite of his being a lower caste by birth. Thus, knowledge and skill possessed in the field of martial arts was not only a
crucial factor in the historical evolution but also considered to be of highest social and cultural importance during the feudal time of Manipur society. Ancient meiteis did not have an official system of having a reserved group of soldiers like regular army to fight the invaders. But, it was customary for every male person above the age of 16 years to serve the country as and when they are demanded by the State. They had to discharge their duties for 10 days out of forty days according to the decision of the authority. The system to decide these complexities of allotting duties was called Lallup. An etymological meaning of the term should be useful. Lallup is a combination of two words i.e. Lai and Lup. 'Lai' means war and 'Lup' means group. During wartime or during critical period of national importance, the people had to be grouped into batches to proceed to the battlefield or face the challenges created by some urgencies of national importance.

There were three divisions in the historic Kangla, the Royal Palace of Manipur, dealing with the traditional forms of learning, i.e. (i) Kangla Royal Chambers, (ii) Kangla Office Court and (iii) Kangla Lallup. These sections in the administrative centre of the king dealt with many areas of traditional education. Teaching was almost residential with teachers and students staying within the vicinity of Kangla and under the immediate supervision of the King and their ratio was 1:20. Under a system of Guru and Sisya relationship, the students had to be present by the side of the teacher all the time paying attention to the teachers' household works and even to the
extent of helping the menial duties of the teacher concerned. A student had to go to bed after the teacher and had to wake up before him. These were some of the norms a student had to follow apart from learning. Teaching was based on the traditional method of teaching through oral means and repeated practice. So, hearing, contemplation and practice were naturally important features of the method.

In the historical past, when the state was still under the division of many principalities like Meiteis, Moirangs, Khumans, Heirem Khunjas, Khends, Chairens, etc. there was a regular and a strong practice of bouts of mutual fight among individuals and chiefs to ascertain either the defeat or victory of a particular principality in the time of conflict for social and political dominances. Bouts of mutual fights were also used for ascertaining 'truths' as and when situation arose. In such events of bout, rules were strictly followed and any violation of such rules was considered to be a sin. Before each bout the combatants used to take vow in the name of sky-father and earth-mother and they had the faith that their ancestral forefathers would endow them with justice. Weapons like bow and arrow or spear were used in the bout and any one of the two could be slain in the fight. This kind of fight is called 'Chainaba' in Manipuri (and the lore is called 'Chainarol'). 'Chainarol', one of the oldest chronicles or Puyas in Manipuri records many such eventful occasions of the ancient history of Manipur. According to this chronicle Haotak Laiba, the king of Khende had made an allegation against
his friend Yaiphurakpa, the king of Chairen, that he had an illicit relationship with his wife Shadou Toucham Hoi Hoibi and asked him to pay bride price. The King of Chairen denied the charge by taking oath. When the King of Khende did not believe him the king of Chairen proposed a Chainaba with bow and arrow to ascertain the truth. In the mutual fight that ensued the king of Khende shot the arrow first to the king of Chairen but missed to hit him. But, when the king of Chairen shot the arrow the Khende king was hit. The victory of the king of Chairen was taken to be the attestation of the truth that he did not have an illicit relationship with the former's wife. Thus, the differences were amicably settled and the friendship was re-established.

The same source carried another interesting story. Kangbisu of Heiren and Chakha Moiremba of Khuman were rivals. They measured out a distance acceptable to both of them with the length of their spear handle and took their respective position. In the fight Moiremba threw his spear first and it could make a slight scratch with blood oozing on the body of Heiren Kangbisu. As per rules it was enough to claim victory for Moiremba. However, Kangbisu mischievously claimed that the injury was not caused by Moiremba's spear but caused by the bite of a leech while he was ploughing in the morning. When his turn come Kangbisu threw his spear and killed Moiremba. Leima Namul Khambi, the widow of Moiremba knew that her husband had been killed by a means most foul. So the widow was in search of a man who could avenge her husband's death and ultimately she landed upon
Shikhong Ningthouba, younger brother of her husband who finally decided to kill the wicked Kangbisu. For, sometimes the two rivals used to wine and dine together in a very sporting spirit before the head of the vanquished was cut off. The victor normally cremated the body of the looser if he had requested to do so. But he could take home the head severed from the body as a trophy.

Since the Meitei State was formed in the fifteenth century the state was administratively divided into four Panas or territorial divisions and these divisions had intense competition amongst themselves through native games and warlike forms of exercises. Each pana presented specific forms of sword and spear performance during the ritual celebration of Kwak Tanba.

During the period when king Khagemba (1597-1652) ruled over the kingdom there were spectacular developments in the art of Thang-Ta and warfare. Khagemba fought against a horde of 'Mayang' invaders led by his own younger brother Shanongba in 1582, won the battle and arrested 100 Pangals (Muslims), 80 elephants, and 1000 guns. He made some reformation in polo as well as in the forms and techniques of the martial art particularly in the use of sword and spear. Indeed, the combative art of Thang-Ta reached its perfection during the reign of Khagemba. The intricacies of the art was also fully used during the numerous war fought against the Burmese. The real test of strength, skill and courage of the Meitei warriors again come up in the wake of the expansion of Burmese kingdom when Manipur and its neighbouring...
states faced the brunt of Burmese invasion. It was all because of Thang-Ta and intricacies of war that Meiteis could launch counter offensive attacks by raiding deep into the interiors of the Burmese Kingdom by cavalry. Professor Gangmumei Kamei has rightly observed that in the early days of the 18th Century successive kings of Manipur i.e., Charairongba, Garibaniwaj and Bhagyachandra could bring about a revolutionary change in social, cultural and religious life of the people of the erstwhile kingdom of Manipur. This was perhaps because Thang-Ta and the art and intricacies of war was fully developed during their period.

Charairongba successfully subdued the aggressive Marams and Tushoks the most powerful among the groups of tribals during his reign in 1697 A.D. Cheitharol Kumbaba mentions the fact that Garibniwaj ascended the throne in August, 1709 and three years later in 1712 he overpowered the aggressive Anal Tribes of Tokpa and Nungphou. Although Anals mounted a stiff resistance, the Meiteis won the battle at the end. Ningthourol Lambuba also recorded an event in which Senkuplen, the Chief of Sachung hill village was speared to death and the head was severed from the body. In 1718 the Burmese king Taningawe sent his army to invade Manipur. Led by king Garibniwaj himself the Meiteis confronted the invading Burmese at Wangjing and in the battle the Meiteis showed the highest skill of using such weapons like Arambai and Thapa Lalchal Meikappi on horseback in repelling the
invaders. He invaded Burma deep into its territory and rampaged towns and villages and finally left a mark of victory with his sword on the classic wooden frame of the door of the well known Kaungmudae pagoda near Mandalay. The ferocity of his army, their lightening attacks left unforgettable imprints in the mind of his adversaries. Mostly because of his mastery in Thang-Ta and in the art of warfare king Garibniwaj could successfully expand the territory of Manipur far beyond the area it had before and established Manipur as a strong and formidable state. Captain E.W. Dunn in his The Gazetteer of Manipur noted many historic conquests of Garibniwaj. It tells the story of Garibniwaj defeating a strong contingent of Burmese army at the mouth of the Manglang river in 1725. In the following year he repulsed a 30,000 strong Burmese army which penetrated into the valley of Manipur and in the event he captured three divisions of Burmese army as captives.

Because of the crucial role played by Arambai and Manipuri cavalry during the numerous Manipuri-Burmese war a few more observations on the two forms of war and weaponry may be made. The Arambai was an important and much dreaded weapon used by the Manipuris both in aggression and defence of their territory. It was a kind of dart made of peacock feathers fastened with a piece of pointed iron which was already dipped and tempered in poison. The Arambai was used to be thrown from horse-back by the Manipuris cavalry. An expert equestrian could throw this weapon very
effectively to the desired target or direction i.e. forward, backward and sideways and even from beneath the belly of the mount to inflict a fatal injury to the enemies.

Describing the *Arambai* Dr. Brown Writes:

It consist of two parts — one, the outer, is formed of ten or twelve long quills of peacock feathers, which are bound together so as to form a narrow hollow cylinder. At one end is fastened a heavy pointed piece of iron, into the sheath thus formed a bamboo rod is placed, projecting outwards about five inches, and forming a handle; to this handle, to give a better hole, a piece of cord is attached; each horsemen had two quivers full of these *Arambai* fixed on either side of his saddle behind, in using them, the handle of the rod, which fitted the sheath with moderate firmness, was grasped firmly and the sheath flung, leaving the bamboo core in the hand, the heavy iron on the point made the *Arambai* fly true. In pursuing, the *Arambai* was thrown in front and in retreating was useful in throwing behind and impeding the enemy.

About the Manipuri cavalry and their weapon, T.C. Hudson wrote:

'The cavalry of Manipur, better known as the 'Cassay Horse', fought both for and against. Their weapon was the *rambai* (*Arambai*) or dart, the use of which was due no doubt to the fact that shock tactics could not successfully carried out with such light cavalry in any country in which they were called on to operate.'
Major General Sir James Johnstone K.C.S.I. also wrote:

'Manipur in old days possessed a famous breed of Ponies, larger and better breed that the so called Burmese Ponies that come from the Shan States. On these ponies were mounted the formidable cavalry that in the century made Manipur feared throughout upper Burma, and enabled her rulers on more than one occasion, to carry their victorious arms within sight of Ava, where their Rajah Pamheiba erected a stone pillar to commemorate the event. The cavalry used the regular Manipuri Saddle protecting the legs, and were armed with spears and two quivers of darts. These darts in a retreat were grasped by a loop and swing around in a peculiar way, when the shaft formed of peacock feathers with an iron head suddenly become detached and flying with great force inflicted a fatal wound wherever it struck. A skillful man could throw them with great precision'.

Thus such a massive success of the Meitei King to repulse huge Burmese army and penetrate deep into the territory of a giant kingdom, during the 18th century was due to the efficiency of horsemanship and skillfulness in using the Arambai and other weaponry by the Manipuri cavalry. According to some writers the Manipuri horsemen were even described as centaur i.e., half man and half animal. They were courageous and fearless by dint of their talents.
During the period of 7 years devastation of Manipur (1819-1826), a big Burmese army overran Manipur, oppressed and killed the Manipuris including small children, women and aged persons. One hero, named Herachandra, son of the deceased King Labeina Chandra, (1798-1800) came out to the rescue of the down trodden Manipuris. Emerging from his hiding stockade in the hills with a small band of followers and 50 ponies, and 12 musket, guns and other indigenous weapons like the Arambai, swords and spear he and his men ambushed the stray enemy troops, which used to come out in search of their rations for their garrison, from over the tree and the hills. Once, they had seen the enemy approaching they showered Arambais from over the tree tops etc., and pounced upon them by alighting from the trees, killed them instantly on the spot. At a single assault, the handful band of Herachandra could even manage to kill 200 Burmese soldiers within a very short time.

In the Cheitharol Kumbaba it is written;

'In the month of May, 1820 Herachandra attacked the Burmese troops and the Burmese having short of their rations removed their fort to Moirang. From thence, a force of 500 troops came to Imphal but Herachandra, Angom Ningthou, Akoijam Khomba, Ellangba Amu, Mayangbam Shyam, Moirang Labanga, and others fought hard with them and gained the battle, and killed 200 Burmese troops on the spot'.
The Burmese were so much scared of Herachandra's attack that it was even said that, they always used to walk looking upwards, which was known in Manipuri as 'Ava mityeng' i.e. the way of Burmese looking. The Burmese named him 'Taku Ningthou' meaning 'Bandit King' in sheer terror. In 1835 he crossed the Ningthee river, attacked and destroyed the town of Myedu, on the banks of the Mu river and brought back numerous Burmese captives. For two successive years he devastated Burma from the banks of Khedoung Choung to Debayan leading to the killing of 7000 foot soldiers, 700 horses and 20 elephants. The Burmese were so infuriated that they mounted a large scale war against Manipur and occupied Manipur for seven year from 1819-1826. This briefly is the cause which led to what is popularly known as Chahi Taret Khuntakpa or Seven Years of Devastation.

Another important historical event, which is crucial in tracing the martial tradition historically is that of the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891. On the 24th March, 1891 under the order of Mr. J.W. Quinton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam two columns of British army made an abortive attempt to capture Jubraj Bir Tikendrajit Singh before day-break from his residence at Kangla. A severe fighting broke out during the whole day-time and both sides suffered many casualties. At 8 p.m. in the evening the Britishers sounded a ceasefire and assured that they would surrender and lay down their arms and ammunitions. The language they used was Bangali and it said 'Jadi Astra Shastra Phelia Deba'. The Britishers were insistent on holding a Durbar
with Jubraj Tikendrajit in the session. On seeing the Chief Commissioner and four British officers insisting for holding Durbar in the palace, General Thangal shouted at them in both Hindustani and Manipuri that they would better leave the palace. There were also many extremely angry people as their near and dear ones had been killed in the previous conflict. Although the Durbar was forcibly held, on their way back a mob of angry people speared Mr. Grimwood to death and the others including the Chief Commissioner were imprisoned. Mr. J.W. Quinton, Chief Commissioner of Assam, Lieutenant Colonel Skine of the 42nd Gurkha Regiment, Mr. Cossins, Assistant Secretary, Lieutenant Simpson, of 43rd Gurkha Regiment were subsequently handed over to the executioners to execute them that very night in front of the two huge lion-like figures of Lai Nongshaba (dragons as the British called them). The incident became a turning point which ignited the Anglo-Manipur War leading to Manipur's loss of independence in the morning of the 27th April, 1891.

A significant aspect which prominently featured in the history of Anglo-Manipuri War are the details of heroic exploits of Paona Brajabashi in the field of Thang-Ta and the art of warfare. In an earlier instance in 1778 (Saka year) of 1891 A.D. in the Manipuri month of Poinu, the king of Manipur, Chandrakriti accompanied by Paona and some soldiers set out for a mission of suppressing an uprising of Akam Nagas. In the battle, when the king was hemmed in by the Nagas, Paona Brajabashi successfully maneuvered
a strategy which defeated the *Nagas* and ultimately saved the life of the king. For this success Paona was awarded 7.50 acres of revenue-free-land along with a royal robe considered to be the most precious prize awarded by the king. More than this he was also promoted to the rank of Subedar. In another occasion which took place in 1803 (Saka year) 1876 A.D. in the Manipuri month of *Kalen* (May) Thangal General and Paona Brajabasi with one Britisher went upto *Thibomei* (Kohima) to suppress an uprising of *Nagas*. In this expedition also Paona saved the life of the Britisher when he was surrounded by the *Nagas*. The British officer offered Paona a humble present of 2.50 acres of land in recognition of his great service in saving his life. Another award of 2.50 acres of land was also given to Paona when he, along with Sougaijamba major defeated a column of Brumese army at Kendal. In all expeditions led by Thangal and Sougaijamba Major, Paona Brajabasi always fought in the fore front.

In the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891 according to *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the most fierce and decisive battle was fought at *Khongjom*, a small village, some 35 Kms. in the South of Imphal. The report of field operation in Manipur sent by Major General *W.Galbraith*, Adjutant General to Major General EHH. Cotter CIE. Secretary to the Government of India Military Department dated the 12th June, Simla 1891 No.375-M vividly mentioned the bloodiest hand to hand fighting which took place near *Sapam village*,
Khongjom. Paona Brajabasi left Imphal on Monday, the 20th April, 1891 for Khongjom with 400 Manipuri soldiers under his command as directed by Kulachandra and Jubaraj Tikendrajit. Wangkhei poila Meiraba who was already at the warfront at Khongjom received him and discussed the situation. Manipuri soldiers were confronted with two columns of the enemy having the support of big 20 powder mountain guns. Manipuri soldiers had to bear the brunt of constant shelling of the big guns and this gave the Britishers an advantage of coming closure to the place where the Manipuri soldiers were camping. Finally the Manipuri soldiers and British soldiers were locked in a close hand to hand combat and Paona fell fighting. Record has it that Paonam Tonsana, the son of Paona Brajabasi, received the message of his father's death at around 9 p.m. on the 23rd April, 1891.

While giving a report narrating the historic battles the Gurkha Rifles fought General Manekshaw made mention of the Anglo-Manipuri War. In his report General Manekshaw stated that among all the battles the Gurkha Rifles fought in its history like the First and Second World Wars, the Chinese invasion, the battle fought in Kashmir and the battle fought at Thoubal Athokpam in 1891 was the most 'dreadful and fierce battle.' He further mentioned that the largest number of Gurkha soldiers were killed in the battle at Thoubal. Captain FM Tundull of the 4th Gurkha Regiment mentions in his letter that soldiers who had fought in the Anglo-Manipuri War had reported to
him that they had never experienced such a 'determined and stubborn resistance'.

Soon after Manipur was defeated the British Government in Manipur issued orders banning possession of fire arms and swords. If any person was found guilty of breaking the standing order he had to be penalised with death or deportation. So strictly was the order enforced that no one was allowed to move with even a stick in his hand on the road, and henceforth, practice or teaching of Thang-Ta which was a regular traditional feature at home of the Meiteis came to an abrupt ending. The order was published in the Gazette released by the British Government in Manipur.

There were many masters of Thang-Ta who were more or less contemporary to Paona Brajabasi (Paonam Naol Singh). Shri Thongam Chaoba Singh of Singjamei Thongam Leikai, an old Pundit gave a long list of Manipuri swordsmen who were famous during the reign of Chandrakirti Maharaja. They are:

1. Ningthoukhongjam Silottaba.
2. Loukrakpam Shamu.
3. Laishram Haobi.
4. Yenkhoiba Major.
5. Leitan Major.
6. Chongtha Miya.
Today the art practice of martial like Thang-Ta which was meant strictly for field-application during war time has came to be transformed into a different context of performing art. Thang-Ta in its decorative form, as a performing art began to attract the national and international attention since the decade of 1970s. It has become customary to include an item of Thang-Ta performance in most of the State-sponsored programme held within the country or abroad. Some pioneer organisations of Thang-Ta have had the golden opportunity to perform or demonstrate Thang-Ta in various national and international forums, seminars and festivals. Theatre practitioners also have been trying their efforts to chalk out the possible aspects of Thang-Ta that could help in formulating forms of exercises for actor training programmes. Apart from staging Thang-Ta performances there had been a spurt of energy in showing certain feats like splitting of cucumber on the belly of a man lying prostrate by a Thang-Ta player who is blind-folded. These feats were performed by the players of Thang-Ta. In these performances they creatively applied the principle of Thang-Ta.

Talents are galore and also there is no dearth of official and public patronage for Thang-Ta. Eventhough Thang-Ta has lost its historical
habitat since the mode of war and weaponry have altogether changed. There was a time when people worried that this art although beautifully structured and cultured through ages could become dead and forgotten in these days of modernity. However, the strong sense of love and passion the Meiteis have for this art along with the policies of the government for preserving this rare forms of art have given a new life to this art not only in preserving but also in continuing it with creativity. Reputed institutes of national standing like the Sangeet Natak Academy, New Delhi and the government of India are encouraging the growth and preservation of this art by giving prestigious awards. Mention may be made of such respected names like Lai relakpam Damu Singh, S. Devabarta Singh, G. Gourakishwor Sharma and who have been honoured with Padma Shree and Sangeet Natak Academy Awards. Efforts are being made to include it as part of the discipline of Physical Education. The Government has taken a laudable step by including Thang-Ta in the school syllabi for Classes - IX and X in Physical Education. The time is ripe for scholars and artistes as well to unearth the structures and principles underlying this art and make the findings helpful in different fields of art and Physical Education.
Foot Notes

1. (a) **Mukna**: In **Mukna** two male competitors holding the loin cloths of each other, try to throw down the opponent by using their strength, the dexterity of hands and legs.


   Biomechanics is an area of study within physical education that utilizes the application of the scientific principles of mechanics and physics to understand the movement and actions of human bodies and sports implements. Kinesiology is another sub-discipline of physical education that deals with the scientific study of human motion.


8. **Mukna Jatra** A champion of **Mukna**.

   (*Mukna Jatra* is a champion of **Mukna**, the event involving Khuman Jatra is popular folk story among the Meitei.)

The Laiharaoba festival is probably the most authentically Meitei of all the religious rituals of the Manipuri people and the one which most closely preserves the ancient culture.


12. Toyosaburo Fujiwara *Judo For High School*, p.32.

In Judo, when throw or taking a fall, the impact should be widely distributed over the entire body to reduce the shock. The falling techniques are unique to Judo and repeated practice increases personal safety, both in the practice hall and in daily life.


'Foreign aggressors cannot be sent away be pious talks or sweet and reasonable words'. Satjat pt. (1)


At a time, the teacher had some 20 pupils and only so much was taught at a time, as the pupils could easily learn.


20. N. Khelchandra, Chainarol op. cit. p.32.


23. N. Khelchandra Singh & L. Ibungohal Singh: Cheitharol Kumbaba, p.110

*Kwak Tanba*.

*Kwak Tanba*: The tenth day of the Manipuri month of Mera (October) is called *Kwak Tanba Numit* or *Kwak Jatra*. The Hindu called this day *Vijaya Dashmi*. Food is laid over a particular open space for the crows to eat, seven or eight days ahead of the festival on the particular day of the festival. While the crows are picking up their food they are driven away. Which the crows take off and the direction they fly away are minutely observed. In accordance with the direction of crows' flight, the good or evil omen of the coming year is determined.


Extract from Snodgrass's Narrative of the First Burmese War, pp.85,86: 'Numbers of these unfortunate beings (captives of war) from Cassay, Arracan, and Assam are to be found in AVA; and even villages are to
be met with on Irrawaddy inhabited by mechanics, iron smiths, and particular trades whose features plainly indicate a foreign origin. The munniporeans or people of Cassay, in particular, abound in great numbers, and they are much prized a cleaver workmen. Owing to their superior skill in the management of the horse, the Burmese cavalry is almost exclusively composed of them; and they are distinguished by the national appellation of 'The Cassay Horse'.


28. ibid p.20.


32. Dr. L. Chandramani Singh, *Manipur Itihas*, Imphal, and also see *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, op. cit. p.217.

In December, 1819 during the region of King Marjit Singh, King Bagidao of Burma sent a big Burmese army under the command of General Mahabamdua to arrest Marjit, the King of Manipur, for his breach of promise he had made to the Burmese King. While the disintegrated Manipuri Prince brothers including the reigning king himself fled to Cachar, a district of Assam, and took their abode their. After defeating the Burmese even carried away 30,000 Manipuris as captives. Kene woon a Commander of the Burmese army with his 2000 troops remained in Manipur from (1819-1826) be erecting their stockade at Kangeibung (Polo ground) first and them at Moirang. This period of Burmese rule was known as 'Chahi Taret
Khuntakpa, i.e. 7 years devastation Manipur, since all the Manipuries, except a few, ran away to the neighbouring states like Assam, Tripura and even at Bengal, for fear of the merciless tortures of the Burmese army. Even the Idol of Shri Govindajee was shifted at Cacher.


34. ibid p. 26.


36. op. cit. p. 10.

37. op. cit. p. 12.

38. op. cit. p. 21.

39. British prohibition of this practice after Anglo-Manipuri War (1891)

   The General Officer Commanding the Manipur field force hereby given orders to the subjects of the late Regent of Manipur that until further order no person in the State of Manipur is permitted to possess firearms and sword, which must be produced before the Chief Political Officer at Manipur Fort within firearms or swords, without permission, with the issue of this order will be liable to punishment with death or transportation.

   General Colleth at Imphal*

40. Correspondence Relating to Manipur (London,1891) p.54.

   Correspondence Relating to Manipur (London, 1891) p.54: April 13,1891. This is due to the fact that no person is permitted to possess firearms and swords in Manipur. Fifth: When Manipur is in year possessions you should disarm troops and city people and disperse all armed gathering, and issue a proclamation notifying that all persons thereafter found bearing arms
without license in Manipur or within such limit as you may think proper to
prescribe, will be punishable with death.

41. At a report read by General Manekshaw on the occasion of an annual
conference of the Gurkha Rifles on 6th April, 1965 says 'Amongst the battle fought
by the Gurkha Rifles, the Wars, the Chinese invasion and the battle fought in
Kashmir etc. amongst those battles the most dreadful and fierce battle was the battle
fought at Thoubal Athokpam in 1891. The greatest number of Gurkha soldiers killed
in the battle was also at this field.

Translation from DENIK BISHAMITRA (April 14, 1956)
Military progress: 1891-92 (page 27)

In conclusion I would like to say that many of the old soldiers who
have seen much fighting in previous campaigns told me, they have never
either seen or taken part in a fight where such determined and stubborn
resistance was shown.

Manipur 29th April, 1891
F.M. Rundull, Captain,
4th Gurkha Regiment.

No. 189 M
Forwarded in continuation of my letter No. 18/-M, dated 29th April, 1891.

T. Graham, Brigadier
General Commanding Tamu Column,
Manipur field force.