CHAPTER II
ORIGIN AND ESSENTIAL PRELIMINARIES OF THANG-TA
CHAPTER II

ORIGIN AND ESSENTIAL PRELIMINARIES OF THANG-TA

(I)

A number of ancient manuscripts like Leithak-Leikharol, Pudin and Thanglon-Thangchat mentioned use of swords, shields and spears from the mythical time of creation of the Earth. This may sound absurd because most people consider myth as a fiction in a sense that it is unreliable. This is so because, in their perception, myths are timeless. But this timelessness of myth is the important character which makes myth a reality which is undeniable for the people who carry it. The cosmic world, the myth creates determines the reality of the living people who are the bearers of the myth. Thang and Ta, although invented by man, had to be firmly situated in the mythological world because Meiteis attribute all their creations to the heroes of their primordial time who are revered as their progenitors.

There is a number of mythical lore explaining the circumstances leading to the origin of Thang and Ta. Pudin tells us
how the *Thang* (sword) and *Ta* (spear) came into existence out of the limbs and bones of *Tin Sidaba* (*Pakhangba 33 A.D.*). The lore tells us how parts of the body turned into long blades (*Thangsang Kabak Thang*) and how his sides turned into *Thang-Nayiba*. The lore further elaborates that *Tin Sidaba's* tail is like a *Tem* (a wooden implement having the shape of a sword but used for weaving loin clothes). The right shoulder turned into *Tarung-Thang* (an ancient form of sword). His ribs turned into another sword — *Thang Kairempa Khutphangton*. His hands and fingers turned into smaller blades known as *Singtup Sangai*. *Naklu Maiphangton Apik*, a particular bone turned *Heijrang* (kitchen knife). *Tin Sidaba's* *Mayangkum* turned into *Phentin* and *Mayungpam* into *Nahun* (used in making boat like chisel). The teeth of *Tin Sidaba* became the iron axe. From his two fingers, arrows were formed. The right arm of *Tin Sidaba* was forged into a sword called 'TarungThang' etc.

*Thanglon Thangchat Puya* also narrates the same story of *Tin Sidaba* with a slight difference. Here the grandson of *Tin Sidaba* called *Ngaitongamba* figures prominently. *Ngaitongamba* was caught in a fish trap (*so-ra-lu*) of the *Thongnang Mayang* (Tripuris). As he died in the trap, many forms of swords and other weapons were born out of his dead body. The bones on his right-side
turned into the long sword called *Kabak-Thang*, and its name was *Hai-Kuplen PhirakThang*. *PhirakThang* was so termed because the sword enabled opening the dense clouds which covered the earth and the sky.

Another ancient manuscript *Karthong Lamlen* tells that *Pakhangba* lived both in the sky and inside the Earth. When he is in the sky we worship him as *Lallong Pakhangba* and we worship him as *Leinung Longja Pakhangba* when he is inside the Earth. All living creatures on earth tremble when he comes down from *Yimchao* (abode in the sky) to *Hamchin* (abode of inside the earth) holding two deadly swords in his left and right hands. The swords being held by his right hand is called *Mapa Thang Kong-U-Pa* and the sword in his left hand is called *Chiranglen Kingnaipa* or *MapuThang*.

In this way the reliable ancient manuscript *Karthong Lamlen* exemplifies that from the mythical times *Pakhangba* had the use of swords. Another ancient manuscript called *Thengourol* supports the lore of *Pakhangba* as the originator of *Thang-Ta*. The manuscript tells that the sword being held by *Pakhangba* while performing *Thengou* is called *Tubi Cheirong-Hainaba Thang-Kaklen Yashaba* which is also considered as one of the many names of
Pakhangba. So the sword itself has been treated as Pakhangba by the Meitei community.

According to the ancient manuscript Thanglong Thangchat, further stated that Tin Sidaba too was caught in the fish trap of Thongnang. But the body and its different limbs turned into different swords. Part of his body turned into a long blade called Thangshang KabakThang or Haikuplen PhirokThang. Sides of his body (Nakhul Moiphangton) turned into a big sword known as Thangshang Nayiba or MapaThang Kongjipa.

Reference are given in the Thanglon Thangchat Puya that Tin Sidaba's tail looked like Tem, an implement made of wood and used in the weaving of loin cloths. It also mentions that the tem ends with a beautiful form of taper resembling Kaboleiteng. His right shoulder turned into a sharp blade known as Tarung Thang. His ribs turned into a broad sword called Thangjou. Another part of his body known as Senghun in ancient Meitei language turned into Thang Kairemba Changnou Khutphangton (minor limbs, hands and fingers) turned into Singtem,Sangai. Another part of his body known as Naklu Maiphangton Apika turned into Heijrang (kitchen knife).

It is not only swords and knives, Tin Sidaba's body part called Mayangkan also gave birth to another implement called
Phetin used in making boats. Mayengpong, another part of his body gave birth to Nahun (paija) a concave bladed long chisel used for boring the wooden frame of Poong (drum). Ancient Meiteis also linked the origin of spear (Ta) to the mythological lores. One significant section found in the Thanglon Thangchat puya is that one of the limbs of Tin Sidaba known as Yupang in archaic Meitei language gave birth to what is now called Ta. It was called Khangsu-Ta (spear). So ancient Meiteis linked the origin of Ta (spear) to the mythological lores and considered it as a sacred object or a gift given to them by their ancestors who were now deified. Thanglong Thangchat Puya also mentions that this particular spear i.e. Khangsu-Ta was also used by Poireiton, the ancient Manipuri rulers who migrated from the Shan country.

(II)

Before considering the different types of swords of Meitei clans, it is worthwhile to discuss the origin of the Meitei Yek-Salai or clans. There are various references about the origin of Meitei clans. In his book 'A critical study of the religious philosophy of Meitei before the advent of Vaisnavism in Manipur' L. Bheigyaachandra expressed that Pakhangba married seven divine girls (Lai Nurah Taret) and by them had seven sons who become the
ancestors of the seven yeks of Meitei. Where as Atombapu Sharma argued that Ashiba's (Guru Shidaba) seven children, Konchin Tingthokpa, (Pakhangba), Ingouraba, Ashanba, Imuirangba, Khemanba, Asham Memanba and Muwaoba formed the seven clans of Meitei like Konchin Tingthokpa = Mangang clan; Ingouraba = Angom clan; Ashamba = Nganba clan; Imuirangba = Luwang clan; Khemanba = Khuman clan; Ashan Memanba = Khaba clan and Muwaoba = Moirang clan.

Further, there were two popular myths. One myth is that Guru Sidaba assuming the form of a dead bull floated down a river to test the intelligence of his sons. The youngest son could successfully recognise that it was his father Guru Sidaba. In recognition of his intelligence Guru Sidaba gave his youngest son the name Pakhangba meaning one who understood his father. The dead bull was then divided into seven groups of people and this seven groups of people came to be the origin of seven Yek or Salais (clans). Another myth was that the seven clans were created out of seven days of the week. The chiefs had to protect the territories of the clans. These myths were invented to mystify the origin of the clans of Meitei but still the names of the clans are same. They are:
(a) **Mangang.**
(b) **Luwang.**
(c) **Khuman.**
(d) **Angom.**
(e) **Moirang.**
(f) **Kha-Nganba.**
(g) **Sarang Leishangthem.**

The above *Salai* or clan had different swords. These swords are even now compulsorily included as a ritual item during functions related with ancestor worship. Thus *Thang-Ta* besides being weapons of war, have also indelible relationship with the spiritual life of Meiteis. The swords are of different shapes and sizes with specific names of characteristic each clan.

The following are the respective swords of different clans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of clan</th>
<th>Name of swords</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Angom</td>
<td>Pukak-Thang.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Ningthouja</td>
<td>Chak-Thang.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Nganba</td>
<td>LaiThang Chinnaiha.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Luwang</td>
<td>Tondumba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Khuman</td>
<td>Tonkakpa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Moirang</td>
<td>Yenba Matok Saba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) Sarang Leishangthem</td>
<td>Khumthong Thang.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There was a time when the valley of Meitrabak was full of water. The flood water was drained out by the ancient Meitei ruler Nongpok through a hole in the southern hills. Then he called all the divine and human beings to resettle in the valley. Nongpok was made king of the land by the divine forces as well as the mortal and human beings. He then assigned the divine personalities to be the tutelar deity of their choice in the eight different directions. Each of these tutelar deities were associated with different swords. The eight directions along with their tutelar deities and their associations are as follows. Swords of some titular duties could not be found out while investigation was made.

(i) Lord Marjing, the reigning deity of the North-Eastern corner used one sword in the form of walking stick. The name of the sword is Cheisu Thang.

(ii) Lord Koubru, the reigning deity in the North-Western corner used one sword. The name of the sword is Thang-Koiremba.

(iii) Lord Asheeba used two swords. The names of the swords are (a) Thang-Kairemba and (b) Lukap-Thang.
(iv) Lord Atiya, father of sky, used one sword only. The name of the sword is ChapThang.

(v) Lord Poireiton used one spear. The name of the spear is Khangsu-Ta.

(vi) The titular deity of North is Marjing and their associations are Maos and Maramse ethnic group. In Manipuri North is known as Awang.

(vii) The titular deity of North-East is Chingkhei-Ningthou. North-East is known as Chingkhei in Manipuri language. Tangkhul ethnos are associated in this region.

(viii) The direction of East is called Nongpok in Manipuri. Tangkhuls and Marings settle in this region. The deity of this region is Nongpok Ningthou.

(ix) The reigning deity of South East direction is Irum Ningthou. In Manipuri South East direction is known as Meiram. Marings and Taraos are settled in this region.

(x) Wangbren is the tutelar deity of South. In Manipuri the South is known as Makha Maikei. The settlers are the Anals, the Moyon and the Monsangs.
Most of the ancient Meitei kings who ruled successively at Kangla also used to decorate themselves with swords of their choice. Such a chosen sword is a compulsory ritual item in the coronation ceremony of the king. Favourite names were given to these swords and they were kept for their personal use. We can assume that these swords were not handed down to the descendants because old records show that most of them were either buried or left behind in particular places by the kings themselves during their life-time. An ancient manuscript titled 'Ningthourolgee-Thang' deals with the names as well as the numbers of swords possessed by various Meitei kings although some kings did not possess such special swords. Further we learn from this book that while making the swords and spears, the shapes and forms of these weapons were inspired either by religious beliefs or by natural objects like leaves of trees, bamboos and plants. The names of successive rulers and swords they possessed as provided by the manuscript are listed below.

Meitei kings who used the coronation swords at the time of their ascending to the throne are:- Meidingu Keirencha, Meidingu Yaraba, Meidingu Ayangba, Meidingu Ningthoucheng, Meidingu Chenglei Ipam Lanthaba, Meidingu Yanglou Keiphaba (all
belonging to the period between 784-984 A.D.), Meidingu Loiyumba, Meidingu Loilongba, Meidingu Alom Yoiremba (all belonging to the period between 1074-1163 A.D.), Meidingu Puranthaba, Meidingu Khumomba and Meidingu Moiremba (all belonging to the period between 1247-1302 A.D.), Meidingu Kongyamba (1324-1335 A.D.), Meidingu Lairemba and Meidingu Punshiba (all belonging to the period between 1394-1427 A.D.), Meidingu Koiremba, Meidingu Lamkyamba, Meidingu Nonginphaba, Meidingu Kabomba, Meidingu Tangjengba and Meidingu Chalamba (all belonging to the period between 1509-1562 A.D.). All the above kings ruled between 784-1562 A.D.

Of the above kings Meidingu Naophengba (428-518 A.D.), Meidingu Ura Konthouba (568-658 A.D.), Meidingu Thawanthaba (1195-1231 A.D.), Meidingu ChingThang Lanthaba (1231-1242 A.D.), Meidingu Telheiba (1335-1355A.D.), Meidingu Kiyamba (1467-1491A.D.), Meidingu Mungyamba (1582-1597 A.D.) and Meidingu Khunjaoba (1653-1666 A.D.) used only one sword each. The names of the swords are Kapsuleng, Epuphaba, Meerumkup/Meelutup, Nongpokngamba, Tong-Ting Somba, Lairenbung and Lairengtup respectively. But the sword of Meidingu Khunjaoba did not have a name. The swords Kapsulen and Nongpokngamba were supposedly buried 7 cubits deep under a
mound in the premises of Pong Ingkhol and in Pungsaikhong while the swords Meerunkup/Meelutup and Lairongtup were 4 cubits in the vicinity of the Shrine/Temple of Lairemma and at Taobungkhencha Yumpham. The remaining sword namely Lairenbung was supposedly 3 cubits deep at Lamphel Maru.

The kings who were adorned with two swords are Meidingu Sameirang (518-568 A.D.), Meidingu Urakonthouba (568-658), Meidingu Khongtekcha (763-773 A.D.), Meidingu Thangbi Lanthaba (1302-1324 A.D.), Meidingu Tabunba (1359-1394 A.D.), Meidingu Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.) and Meidingu Charairongba (1697-1709 A.D.). They gave favourite names to their respective swords like Khomlen Tonba and Mitong Tup. It is also found from the record that Meidingu Sameirang ascended the throne when he was presented the sword, Khomlen Tomba by Leimaren. He hid it in secret and made a replica of it which was called 'Mitong Tup' and its shape was like 'Tem'. Meidingu Urakonthouba had two swords namely Soiren and Leirukhomba. The two swords, Nuraphaba and Sampungngamba of Meidingu Khongtekcha were buried 5 cubits deep in Sorin Lok. Okti HaoThang, the first sword of Meidingu Thangbi Lanthaba was buried at Mongsangei while the second sword, Sumba Meirongba was buried at Thaoreijam. Meidingu Charairongba also had two swords namely Khembumba and
Pukomba but nothing was mentioned as to where and how these two were buried.

Among all the Meitei kings, Meidingu Irengba (984-1074 A.D.) and Meidingu Ningthoukhomba (1432-1467 A.D.) had the maximum number of swords. Meidingu Irengba had 10 (ten) swords out of which 6 swords were given favourite names. They were - Nungmatrengphaba, Khongpomba, Chiraiba, Tenjalaiba, Sinlen Thang and Kanlen. The name of the remaining four swords are not known. It is said that Irengba took with him all the ten swords when he went for Loi-kumba (going for adventure at places). They were buried 4 cubits deep at Khoidong-pung. Meidingu Ningthoukhomba had 9 (nine) swords but we could not find the names of the swords in the record. Records tell it that two of them were left at Mutum and the remaining seven swords were buried 3 cubits deep at Nungkaibi.

Meiteis, thus attribute the origin of Thang and Ta to their ancient heroes who reigned supreme during primordial time. They consider Thang and Ta to have been invented by their progenitors and gifted to them to ensure their living safe all through the tiresome journey of life. The myth they weave regarding the origin of Thang and Ta clearly situates these two weapons in a spiritual context. This undoubtedly is the reason why the Meiteis
consider both *Thang* and *Ta* as an embodiment of a spiritual power given by their forefathers.

(III)

There are various forms of *Ta* in Manipur. Like sword *Ta* is a universal weapon used by the people of Manipur since antiquity. Ancient Manipuri people called it 'Timen' while 'Chung' an elongated shield associated with this *Ta* is called 'Marung'. The feathers decorated on the top of the shield are known as 'Ingen-Leithet'. The *Ta* may roughly be featured as a weapon having a long shaft of hard wood or bamboo, tipped with different shapes of iron points on both the ends of the handle. In short it is a weapon which can advantageously be used in thrusting man and animal alike with either end. The front tip is called 'Tamang' and the other tip is called 'Taning'.

The following are the different forms of *Ta* which are named according to their uses:

1. *Lambu-Ta*.
2. *Lang-soi-Ta*.  
3. *Sagol-Ta*.
4. *Thougal-Ta*.
5. *Khang-ning Ta*.  


*Lambu-Ta:* It is the biggest and the longest type of spear. This type of spear was mainly used for capturing and killing tigers.

![Fig. Lambu-Ta](image1)

*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.

![Fig. Lang-soi-Ta](image2)

*Sagol-Ta:* It was mainly used by the cavalry of Manipur. Its size is medium.

![Fig. Sagol-Ta](image3)

*Thougal-Ta:* It has the same shape and size with the *Sagol-Ta.* It was used by the personal attendants of the king to guard him.
**Fig. Thougal-Ta**

*Khang-ning-Ta*: It is a spear fitted with pointed iron hooks, like that of an arrow, which are rather 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, even after running away with the iron hook in its body may easily be traced by the hunter when the long loosely handle entangled in the bush. This type of spear is specially used in hunting or capturing the wild bear and other animals.

**Fig. Khang-ning-Ta**

**Tapak**: This is a peculiar type of spear, the tip of which is broad and about three feet long. But the edges of this type of spear are sharpened as a sword. By removing from its handle, it can effectively be used as a sword for cutting shrubs and small trees as well as the enemy. It can be used in killing both man and animal.

**Fig. Tapak-Ta**
Long: The multi pronged spear is termed as Long. It is used for fishing, killing reptiles and also fighting.

Both swords and spears are used in the battle field but in killing or capturing animals, the spear is more advantageous than the sword. In the battle field the Meitei cavalary were armed with two types of spears, HakThang-Ta and Taron-Ta, the former for instant use and the later is carried as a spare along with two quivers of Arambai on both sides of the saddle. HakThang-Ta, a bit bigger and longer in size than the Taron-Ta which is always carried and held by the right hand. Taron-Ta also termed as 'Hunna-Ta' a bit smaller and shorter, is carried on the back of the horseman. It can easily be thrown to the enemy to kill. HakThang-Ta should never be thrown to the enemy and it is mainly used for an instant use by thrusting to the enemy.

(IV)

In early times the Meiteis had a tradition of grooming a young child into a martial citizen. As soon as a child reaches three or four months of age he is used to be given elementary lesson on
wrist exercise popularly known as *Ta-ding-ding, Ta-ding-ding*, a basic wrist movement which is very helpful in dancing and playing swords. Mother or grand-mothers usually sing a song soon after a baby is given a bath. This is a folk songs accompanying a wishful thinking. The song runs,

*Ting Ting Chaoro*

*Shabina Karingei Kahouro*

*Numitna Wanglingei Wanghouro*

*Ting Ting Chaoro*

*Ipa Machum Taro*

*Ipu Machum Taro*

*Numitna Karingei Kahouro*

*Thabina Wanglingei Wanghouro*

*Ting Ting Chaoro*

(This folk song underlines the wishes of the parents for the child to grow healthy and strong so as to follow the foot steps of his valiant forefathers.)

The first feeding rite of a child in a Meitei family is called *Cha-umba*. This is the occasion when the child is initiated into eating rice. During this feeding rite the child is placed on a mattress and various items like paddy, clay, gold, silver, coins, book and weapons are placed in front of the child. The first item the child touches is read as a sign telling the future of the child. If the child
happens to touch the sword or any other weapon it is believed that the child could turn out to be a master in weaponry. There is a saying that Bir Tikendrajit\textsuperscript{12} the prince of Manipur touched sword and shield when his \textit{Cha-umba} was performed at the royal palace.

In early days there was a customary ritual to initiate a student training in the arts of \textit{Thang-Ta}. For this an auspicious day was chosen. It should be a day when a healthy and unbridled star known among the people as \textit{Thawan Michak Achangba} was located in the clear sky by the astrologer. A child between the age of five and seven was normally considered to be the most appropriate period to begin training in \textit{Thang-Ta} and the training was done at the home of the master. The auspicious day normally preferred by the people \textit{Thangja} (Saturday); because people believed that it is a day closely associated with weaponry as the name of the day \textit{Thangja} itself suggests. On this auspicious day the customary ritual for initiating a student into the realm of weaponry is observed. This ritual is called \textit{'Ojah Boriba'}. For this event the student has to prepare the following items for the ritual.

1. \textit{Laphoi Laphang Chang Thokpa Ama}  
   (a bunch of banana having odd numbers).

2. \textit{Yubi Mapum Ama} (a coconut).
3. Betal nut and Betal leaf.
5. A dhoti or a towel.
6. An oil lamp and dhoop.
7. *Tairen Mana* (Cedrela toona leaf).
8. *Pumphaï* (Dactyl etenium acgyptecum).

These items are offered to a traditional local deity known as *Huyen Lalleima* or Goddess of War. After offering the ritual, the master will purify the beginner by chanting a specific hymn known as *Naheirol*.

(V)

**Discipline and Exercises**

The history of 'Physical Culture'\(^{13}\) in early Manipur is somewhat identical with the 'History of Rome'.\(^{14}\) Every child was brought up by the healthy environment as well as its natural vegetation. There were no scarcity of food grains due to the tremendous fertility of soil and relatively less population. The people were conscious of health since their main 'recreational activities'\(^{15}\) were playing of various games and sports like *Mukna* (Manipuri style wrestling), *Sagol Kangjei* (polo), *Chenjong* (broad
jump), Mangjong (standing jump), Shuklangba (a form of Javelin throw) etc. The art of Thang-Ta encouraged everyone to maintain good health in order that they could keep fit to face eventualities. Thang-Ta being a system of physical and spiritual exercise, not only helped to promote a healthy nervous and muscular system but also enabled a perfect co-ordination of body and mind. Physical exercises stimulated the entire body, increased and purified the blood supply and produced an abundance of energy, vigour and vitality.

The various forms of Thang-Ta exercises, in addition to cleansing the waste matter of the muscles, removed the poison that gets into the blood supply. These exercises, while developing and strengthening the muscles, tone up the growth of bones and the functions of respiratory systems. The value of these exercises is further emphasised as a unique system of promoting radiant health, by giving a medicinal toning effect to cure constipation, obesity and nervous disorder. Thus lessons in Thang-Ta, the ancient Manipuri Martial Art system, are a splendid course of exercises which promote all round physical development. The exercise system also helps to develop agility, flexibility, balance and co-ordination in our bodies.
Before one proceeds to discuss the required exercises there were certain norms and disciplines which were to be followed by every martial artistes. After completion of ritual ceremony of initiating the Training\textsuperscript{17} of Thang-Ta known as Oja Boriba the Teacher/Guru/Instructor ask the trainee to observe the following 'disciplines during the period of training'.\textsuperscript{18} They are as follows:

1. The trainee should enter bare foot very politely in the Sindamsang (school) or home of the Guru/Teacher when he came for training.

2. He must bow down in respect of the Guru and the elders who are already seated in the School.

3. The training floor must be (well groomed) neat and clean and sprinkled with water before and after each session/class of training.

4. It is customary that pregnant woman or woman in her periodic cycle is not allowed to enter into the training floor.
5. Before he starts practice he must bow to the divine deity *Pakhangba*, the originator of the art of *Thang-Ta* with reverence.

6. Before he starts practice he must bow to his partner and also salute with the respective weapon which he wields.

7. Before he picks up his swords, spear, shield etc. he must touch the weapon with his fingers and touch his forehead as acknowledgement of sanctity of the weapons.

8. His feet must never touch his own weapons nor the weapon of his partner.

9. If any person happens to trespass in between practicing partner practice for the day must be compulsorily stopped.

10. Each and every student should stand while the instructions are made by the teacher.

11. Any short of intoxicating things such as smoking, drinking, chewing of pans etc. are strictly prohibited in the *Sindamsang*.

12. Students must also bow again to the teacher before they leaves.
All the trainees of *Thang-Ta* should observe the above disciplines strictly.

**A. BASIC TRAINING OF THANG-TA:**

So far as exercises are concerned, it may be stated that there were no prescribe chart or books for learning and teaching the art of *Thang-Ta*. But the basic movements in *Thang-Ta* is learnt in general class instruction and regular individual lessons from a competent teacher or Guru. Indeed practical lessons on *Thang-Ta* must be continued throughout a Swordsman's career to maintain his standard and continuous improvements on earlier practice.

1. Thengou:

   *Thengou* is a pattern of movement considered sacred by the Meiteis. In a way it is ritualistic and inviolable. This is perhaps because the movement pattern of *thengou* strictly follows the pattern of serpent coil of *Lord Pakhangba*, and the Meiteis has it in their belief system that this movement was the first step which led to the creation of the universe. So, the performer of *thengou* always takes extra care not to commit any breach of the rituals laws involved in the performance and the movement itself. Because any breach of the ritual laws and movement pattern, they believe, could bring calamity and other misfortunes to the country specially to the
state's dignitaries and royalty. For this reason Meiteis do not perform *thengou* for any ordinary and cheap occasion anywhere and at any time. It is not for any ordinary martial artiste's business to perform *thengou*. One who performs a *thengou* should be master selectively chosen for this occasion. The day should be auspicious and the place where he performs should be a sacred spot or sanctified for the event.

The myth of creation of the Meiteis details that *Guru Sidaba* used seven steps and three posture of movement while performing *thengou*. These seven steps and three posture of movement have their respective equations in the network of the Meitei's world of symbols. The seven steps are symbolically equated with the seven days of a week. The three postures of movement have their equations with *Mangang, Luwang* and *Khuman* which respectively stands for morning; for evening and for night. Every performance of *thengou* either with spear or sword must be accompanied by incantation of specific *mantras*.

A performer of *thengou* uses a particular kind of *Chung* (shield) and *Ta* (spear). The shape of the *Chung* is *Yangkok-shaba* (circular) and the motif of the serpent coil of *Pakhangba* should be painted on it. The costume of a performer of *thengou* puts on during
performance is also specific. He should put on the royal attire awarded to him by the king in previous occasions. He also puts on a kind of headgear called **ningkham samji** and others known as **Khudang yai** and **Khubom yai**. He also sings the particular song known as **Thengou Ishei**\(^2\) i.e.,

\[
\begin{align*}
Hoi & Hoi Hoi Ha Ha Ha \\
Herila & Herila Se Se Se \\
Sayam & Sade Nakka Thengute \\
Leite & Haiko Se Se Sra Lanthok O \\
Houdong & Yumda Leibani \\
Sharen & Makok Machai \\
Talio & Yumda Leibane \\
Lalpha & Ishei Mashak-ae \\
Hoi & Hoi Hoi Ha Ha Ha \\
Herila & Herile.
\end{align*}
\]

A liberal translation of the song given below with an aim at reaching nearest to the meaning.

\[
\begin{align*}
Hoi & Hoi Hoi Ha Ha Ha \\
Herila & Herila Se Se Se \\
[These are sounds produced rhythmically from the inner recess of the sound producing system in the body. Primitive man believed in communicating the supernatural forces with such sounds rather than the common language human beings use.]
\]
Sayam Sade / Nakka Thengute
Living Beings / are begged
Leite Haiko / Se Se Sra Lanthok O
Don’t say you /give us our blessings
do not have
[ We beg you to show the living beings (who would populate the newly created earth). Don’t say you do not have. Favour us with your blessings.]

Houdong / Yumda / Leibani
Cat / at home / reared
Sharen / Makok / Machai
Shareng* / head / eaten
Cat reared at home eats the head of the shareng fish.

Talio / Yumda / Leibane
Spouse / at home / stays
Lalha / Ishei / Mashak-ae
Prisoners of war / Song sung in / sung
brought as trophy / celebration in victory
[Spouse at home sings lalha Ishei in celebration of the victory and the horde of prisoners brought as trophy.]

Hoi Hoi Hoi Ha Ha Ha
Herila Herila Se Se Se

* An indigenous fish popular among the Meeteis.

There are nine forms of Thengou. They are the following:—

(i) Leinet Thengou:

This kind of Thengou is performed with the performer stamping his feet on the earth and by turning round and round. It is because of this movement that it is called Leinet Thengou. Leinet means stamping on the ground. It is performed on Sunday and begins with a prayer to the God Ura Konthouba. He begins the performance by facing the Northeast.
(ii) Leishit Thengou:

The main feature of the movement of this thengou is that the performer wipes the earth extensively with feet. So the name of this thengou is called Leishit. Leishit literally carries an idea of wiping or touching the earth extensively. This is performed on Monday with a prayer to the God Koubru. It is performed with the artiste facing the Northwest.

(iii) Leiphal Thengou:

Important feature of this thengou is that the performer uses jumps which are followed by a movement of stamping the earth. This is performed on Thursday by invoking the guardian deity Khamlongba and facing the Southeast.

(iv) Akao Thengou:

The main feature of this thengou is that the performer performs vigorous kicks which are followed by vigorous stamping of the earth. If performed without any breach of the ritual laws and rules of the performance it is believed that it could bring about abundance of rice, fish and crops.

(v) Akham Thengou:

It is a special kind of thengou performed by successive number of kings. It is believed that it could bring peace and
prosperity to the land. History records it that this *thengou* was performed by one *Akam Mayon* during the reign of *king Khagemba* (1597-1652 A.D.). The same *thengou* was performed by one *Agong Gopiram* and one *Thonglen Wangkheirakpa* during the reign of the king Garibnewaj (1709-48 A.D.). One *Wangkhei Pandit Gopiram* also performed the same *thengou* during the reign of the king Bhagyachandra (1763-1798 A.D.).

**(vi) Leichai Thengou**

Important characteristic feature of this *thengou* is that the performer stamps the earth by jumping in and out. It is generally performed on Wednesday with a prayer to the God *Wangbren* and facing South.

**(vii) Nongphal Thengou**

In this *thengou* also the performer jumps and stamps the earth. But here he steps the earth by turns.

**(viii) Leiphal Thengou**

Here also the performer stamps the earth by jumping.

**(ix) Lankak Thengou**

Shaking of the body and touching of the earth is the highlight of the performance. When properly performed it is
believed that it can bring about hazards of war, destruction in opposite camp and also a turmoil in the internal affairs of the enemy. It is performed on Saturday with a prayer to the God Thangjing and facing Southwest. It may however be noted that in addition to the above nine forms of principal Thengous, there are a few other known Thengou viz., Nonga Thengou, Akhem Thengou, Ashum Then, Thel Mari Saba Thengou, Leibak Kainaba Thengou, Lembal Thengou, Palandabi Thengou, Ashumbi Thengou, Chupsha Nonga Thengou, Pachi Loikhom and Kishi Thengo. Figures of eleven Thengouroli Paphals namely 1. Nonga Thengou 2. Akhem Thengou 3. Ashum Then 4. Thel Mari Saba Thengou 5. Leibak Kainaba Thengou 6. Lembal Thengou 7. Palandabi Thengou 8. Ashumbi Thengou 9. Chupsha Nonga Thengou 10. Pachi Loikhom 11. Kishi Thengou are shown in the subsequent pages.
THENGOUROL PAPHAL

Nonga Thengou
THENGOUROL PAPHAL

Akhem Thengou
THENGOUROL PAPHAL

Ashum Then
THENGOUROL PAPHAL

Thel Mari Saba Thengou
THENGOUROL PAPHAL

Leibak Kainaba Thengou
THENGOUROL PAPHAL
THENGOUROL PAPHAL

Palandabi Thengou
THENGOUROL PAPHAL

Ashumbi Thengou
THENGOUROL PAPHAL

Chupsha Nonga Thengou
THENGOUROL PAPHAL

Pachi Thengou
THENGOUROL PAPHAL

Kishi Thengou
2. Other exercises of Manipuri Martial Art (*Thang-Ta*):

For getting proficiency in *Thang-Ta* the Manipuries also practice some kind of modern somatic exercises. Exercises which are commonly used by the majority of *Thang-Ta* institutions in Manipur\(^1\) are: *Chingkhei Khurumba, Khongrai Mapum Leiba, Khuu Leitabi, Thongkhong Leitabi, Tagi Sajel, Ningsa Kanglon, Tingthokpi Sajel, Sevoti, Tingli Yangli Sajel* etc.

(i) **Chingkhei Khurumba**

(prayer to the deity of North-East):

This form of exercises is very much identical with the *Suryanamaskar* of Indian system of Yogic exercise. It is a traditional prayer to the deity of North-East, who would bless the devotee with long life and freedom from sickness and other ailments. Generally it is performed early in the morning. The deity of the dawn presides over the fresh environment, ensures good health and peace of mind to the trainee of this exercise. *Chingkhei Khurumba* is the only exercise with the help of which initial inertia can be shaken off in very short time, and the body can be made fit for all works.

With the regular practice of *Chingkhei Khurumba* exercise the trainee can developed his respiratory system and tonup the muscles of arms, shoulder, spinal nerves and lungs. It also
strengthens the abdominal muscles and removed excess of fat. In performing stage the trainee should stand with feet together, toes slightly apart and facing the east. Then he should raised both arms vertically upward with rhythmical inhalation. After this position he should bend his trunk forward by keeping his both legs straight and at the same time take deep rhythmical exhalation. This has to be repeated as desired by the Guru in such a way that his forehead should touch his knees alternately while bending forward.

(Fig. - 1 illustrates the Chingkhei Khurumba)

(ii) **Khonggrai Mapum Leiba** (Sitting by cross leg):

This exercise helps the trainee to develop agility, strength and flexibility to all the parts of the body. In the performing stage the trainee should start from the normal standing position by acts of running on the spot. After two-three minutes he should come to the normal standing position and then turn his trunk and knees to the left at 180° and sit down in quick action in such a way that the buttock rests on the right heel and left thigh crosses upon the right thigh. Simultaneously he should clench his right hand near the forehead while the left brought backward and clenched at
Fig. – 1 illustration of the *Chingkhei Khurumba*
the waist line. Thus the exercise has to be performed alternately on the both sides.

(Fig. - 2 illustrates the *Khongai Mapum Leiba*)

(iii) **Khuu Leitabi**
(Sitting position with knee touching the ground):

This is an exercise for stretching the back muscles and strengthening and toning the legs and abdomen. In this exercise the trainee from standing position should squat by placing left leg forward and right knee touching the ground with both palms placing on the respective thighs and repeat the process on alternate legs.

(Fig. - 3 illustrates the Khuu Leitabi)

(iv) **Thongkhong Leitabi**
(Squatting with one knee touching the ground):

This is a particular exercise for *Thang-Ta* which will help the trainee to strengthen the legs, improve balance and tone up the abdominal organs. It also improves the muscles of shoulders, spine, neck and arms. For this exercise the trainee should take a full squat in such a way that his right knee should touch the ground while the folded left knee will be slightly inclined towards the right knee. Simultaneously he should bring his left clenched fist forward near the forehead while the right clenched fist brought backward at
Fig. – 2 illustration of the Khongai Mapum Leiba
Fig. – 3 illustration of the Khoo Leitabi
the waist line. The trainee has to perform repeatedly with alternate extremities with a spring jump action.

(Fig. - 4 illustrates *Thongkhong Leitabi*)

(v) **Tagi Sajel** (exercise for spear):

This is a particular exercise for spear. This exercise strengthen the muscles of calf, waist, thighs, hips and trunk. It also improves agility and body balance. In order to start this exercise the trainee should stand erect at first, then bend left elbow clenched and place right hand clenched near the left chest. In the second step he should take a jump with left heel click to left buttock, change instantly to right, swing right leg and toes forward obliquely and simultaneously fling right hand clenched parallel to the right thigh, left knee half bent shaping like scissors at knee. This exercise has to be performed repeatedly at least eight times or as desired by the Guru.

(Fig. - 5 illustrates the *Tagi Sajel*)

(vi) **Ningsa Kanglon** (Breathing exercise):

Breathing exercise helps the trainee in developing the lungs, balance and concentration. In this exercise the trainee should rise his right leg upward to chest level from the attention position and simultaneously lift right hand vertically upward, left hand
Fig. – 4 illustration of the *Thongkhong Leitabi*
Fig. – 5 illustration of the Tagi Sajel
straight down close to left thigh, inhale deeply with simultaneously lifting of limbs and exhale rhythmically along with the lowering of the hand and foot. This will be performed in the reverse action.

(Fig. - 6 illustrates Ningsa Kanglon)

(vii) Tingthokpi Sajel (Stretching exercise):

This exercise strengthens the muscles at the sides of the waist removes superfluous fat from waist line and tones up the abdomen and spinal nerves. In this exercise the trainee extend his left leg backward as far as practicable from the normal standing position and simultaneously swing left arm forward straight along the line of extended leg. Then the right arm is brought straight simultaneously backward parallel to the trunk. This exercise has to be performed on the alternate sides of the body repeatedly at least 20 (twenty) times or as desired by the instructor.

(Fig. - 7 illustrates Tingthokpi Sajel)

(viii) Sevoti (Sideward stretching exercise):

This exercise strengthen the leg muscles as well as hand muscles. It also improves agility and endurance. The trainee should perform this exercise in such a way that the left knee is half bent and simultaneously stretch the right leg and hand to the right side. At the same time left hand clenched and bent at elbow to the waist
Fig. – 6 illustration of the *Ningsa Kanglon*
Fig. - 7 illustration of the *Tingthokpi Sajel*
line. Rise left heel and trunk straight. The trainee should perform this exercise alternately 10 (ten) times or as desired by the instructor.

(Fig. – 8 Illustration of Sevoti)

(ix) Tingli Yangli Sajel
(Balancing and stretching exercise):

This is a peculiar form of exercise for maintaining the body balance which is the immediate need in all the performing stages of Thang-Ta. This exercise strengthens the ankles, knees, hips, shoulders and firms and tones the legs, hips, chest, back and neck. For this exercise the trainee should rise his right leg up, thigh parallel to the ground, toes pointing towards the surface at the same time bring both hands forward and folded in front of the chest. Then stretch the lifting right leg backward slowly and extend both arms side ways parallel to the ground by bending the trunk forward. Right leg and trunk should be straight. The entire body weight should be born by the left leg and balance should be maintained.

(Fig. - 9 illustrates Tingli Yangli Sajel)
Fig. 8 illustration of the Sevoti
Fig. - 9 illustration of the *Tingli Yangli Sajel*
As pointed out the above free hand system of exercises are some of the important basic movements of *Thang-Ta* which are commonly conducted by the various institutions. The beginners have to undergo at least six months of hard practice on these items.
Foot Notes


The manuscript *Thanglon-Thangchat* deals with the origin, nomenclatures and shape and sizes of the various swords of the Meiteis. This book also gave ornamentation and comparisons of the swords turned from the body of *Tin Sidaba* and *Ngatongamba* with various natural objects. Some other instruments, swords and others used by ancient deities are also noted down in this book. Another allusion to the book is of the guardianship and governance of kingdoms through the swords, which were effected by the ancestral deity *Pakhangba*, being given to his sons and successors.


4. The manuscript *Karthong Lamlens* deals with the origin and settlement of Sylvan deities. This manuscript also deals with various ritual associations with the worship of deities. Clashes between the culture heroes *Pakhangba* and *Poireiton*, the ancestors of the Meiteis. An important reference of *Pakhangba*, the originator of Ningthouja Salai, as the possessor two swords both left and right *Yet-Thang* and *Oi-Thang*, reflect the magnitude of his powers and energy. The sword on the right is termed *MapaThang* and that of the left is termed *MapuThang*.