

## Mapping the Research Gaps and Future Direction in Thang-Ta Sports: A Critical Review

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### Abstract:

Thang-Ta is a traditional martial art, originated from Manipur, India. Since the end of 20th century, it has been increasing academic, cultural and sporting attention in all over India. However, despite a growing body of literature addressing its historical, cultural, and ritual related aspects, a few significant research gaps are there in understanding its transformation, institutionalization, commercialization and within the present status of modern Thang-Ta sport. **Methodology:** The present study critically reviews the existing literature on Thang-Ta to identify the conceptual, methodological, and thematic gaps. The present study adopted a qualitative review methodology based on the published research article, thesis and reports. **Findings:** The findings shown that while descriptive and empirical studies exist, there is a lack of comprehensive historical analysis, sportification frameworks, policy-oriented research, interdisciplinary approaches, and study on commercialization process.

**Keywords:** Thang-Ta, Research Gaps, Traditional Martial Art, Sportification, Sports Marketing

### Introduction:

Traditional martial arts represent a vital component of cultural heritage, physical, and martial tradition across the world. Indian history reveals that this tradition functioned as a method of warfare, self-defense, physical training, and spiritual development. Thang-Ta is one of these, which originated in Manipur, a north-eastern state of India, known for its unique martial art techniques, ritual practices, and philosophical dimensions.

Over time, Thang-Ta has become popular in India through various cultural demonstration, by integrating in dance and drama etc. It is also transitioned from a traditional martial art to a modern sport, since 1980s. After the formation of the Thang-Ta Federation of India in 1993, every year the federation has been conducting national championship in different states of India. As a result of its growing interest among the athletes, its constant upgradation as a modern sport, and as a growing Indian martial art, it is now included in National School Games of India, Khelo India Youth Games, and in the Association of Indian University sports meet. However, only few academic research on Thang-Ta has conducted with its practical development. While number of studies have explored its cultural aspects, historical background on its origin, mythological background, philosophical aspects and performance aspects etc., but still there is lack of exploration on comprehensive analysis of its evolution as a modern sport and its possibility areas for business and marketing.

When we looking back at Asian history, there were number of traditional sports, and martial arts that converted from indigenous form to modern sports, such as Sagol Kangjei (Manipuri style polo) to modern Polo, indigenous form of Japanese Karate to organized modern competitive combative sports, indigenous Chinese martial art

Wushu to modern combative sports, traditional Korean martial art to Taekwondo. These indigenous form of games and sports, martial arts are not only converted into globally recognized modern sports, but also it is successfully commercialized in terms of sports tourism, sports marketing on equipment, branding and also in broadcasting media.

The study on “Indigenous Sports in Asia: Tradition and Modernity” highlighted that the Asian indigenous sports are important cultural expression, preserving national identity, ethnicity, and cultural heritage. However, these sports are significantly transforming due to globalization, modernization, commercialization, and the growing influence of western sports. Despite these challenges, indigenous sports are maintaining their core cultural characteristics. As a part of globalization and modernization, these sports are adopting new rules, formats, and methods of presentation. Many of the Asian nations recognizing their indigenous sports as a valuable cultural heritage. Governments, scholars, and cultural organizations of these Asian nations preserving, documenting, and promoting their cultural heritage. To commercialize, these sports are linked with tourism and cultural industries. Commercialization of indigenous sports may provide wider opportunities for recognition and economic sustainability. However, over commercialization also can lead the loss of its authenticity and traditional meaning (Hong & Li, 2018).

The aim of the present study is to critically review the existing literature on Thang-Ta and identify the majors research gaps that hinder the overall understanding of this indigenous martial art.

#### **Methodology:**

In the present study, to ensure the rigorous, transparent, and formative assessment of the literature on Thang-Ta, this study transitioned from narrative overview to systematic qualitative review framework. The methodology is structured around distinct stages: literature identification, screening, eligibility, and thematic synthesis.

#### **Sources of Data and Search Strategy**

For this study, a comprehensive academic search was conducted in multiple digital databases and indexing platforms, including Google Scholar, Shodhganga, Cross-Ref. To search the literature on traditional and modern Thang-Ta Sports, the combination of Boolean operators (AND, OR) with specific keywords were used.

“Thang-Ta” OR “Huyen Langlon” OR “Manipuri Martial Art”)

AND

“Sportification” OR “Modernization” OR “Institutionalization” OR “History” OR “Sports Marketing” OR “Commercialization”)

#### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The related literatures were retrieved from peer-reviewed journal articles, doctoral dissertations, and published books. The studies focusing on cultural, socio-economic, physiological, sportification, sports marketing dimensions of Thang-Ta were included.

In this study, non-academic blog posts, event reports in newspapers, and the article where Thang-Ta was mentioned without analytical context were excluded.

#### **Thematic Review of Existing Literature:**

The existing literature on Thang-Ta can be synthesized in following major thematic domains. Reviewing the literature through these thematic domains reveals the current scenario of academic research on this martial art.

#### **Socio-Cultural, Mythological and Ritualistic Domains**

Early and foundational research on Thang-Ta specially focused on its cultural anthropology, linking the practice to the heritage of Meitei community of Manipur.

The study on traditional sports and martial arts of north-east India, focusing on its roots in tribal culture, warfare techniques and ritualistic traditions. The study focused partially on Thang-Ta. The chronological evolution of Thang-Ta and transition process from martial art to modern sports is not clearly traced. In the study, the researcher

classifies this martial art into two main categories: with weapons and without weapons. This structural classification helps place Thang-Ta within a comparative cultural framework. The study highlights the deep connection Thang-Ta with Meitei cosmology, ritual performances and warrior ethics. However, the study remains on surface level cultural analysis, but there is a lack of anthropological analysis. (Singh, 1994)

A historical study of the traditional Manipuri Thang-Ta martial art, highlighted about the historical background of Thang-Ta martial art. The study tried to explore a comprehensive martial system, historical, cultural, and technical knowledge about Thang-Ta. It is also tried to highlight the role of this martial art in holistic development. It is providing a rich, authentic, and structural account of Thang-Ta, and successfully highlighting this martial art as a living tradition rooted in history, culture, and combat practice. However, in the study lack of scientific validation, modern pedagogical adaptation, and lack of historical documentation on modern sports movement can be observed. (Singh, 2000)

The study on Manipuri Thang-Ta and its inherent behavioural attributes, focused more on elaboration of literatures on Thang-Ta, covering the origin of Thang-Ta on the basis of mythological stories, and ritual aspects of Thang-Ta. The study tried to explore about sword and spear used by the kings of ancient Manipur kingdom, and also highlighted the various weapons used by the peoples of Manipur in their daily life. In this study, lack of methodological, systematic analysis, and lack of authentication of historical evidence can be observed. (Devi, 2018)

The available literature on the art of blacksmith of Kakching with special reference to Thang-Ta mainly focusing on the historical background, cultural identity, traditional iron making process of Kakching, Manipur, and various weapon making culture of this region. The study was conducted on the basis of oral history, and indigenous text of this region. The study contributing valuable sources for understanding the cultural aspects and traditional beliefs, but many of these lacking, systematic empirical research and systematic documentation. (Singh, 2018)

These works have primarily focused on the philosophical aspect of Thang-Ta, origin of this martial art, and cultural value of Thang-Ta. The studies explored its background, traditional code of conduct, used of multiple types of weapons, and its value in the ritual practices. The studies established the Thang-Ta as an integral part of Meitei community of Manipur. However, the lack of descriptive and analytical depth study regarding the transformational and modernization aspects of Thang-Ta sports are still remain.

### **Quantitative, Physiological, and Psychological Domains**

Research on nutrition, physical fitness, and performance has contributed the knowledge about physiological aspects of Thang-Ta athletes. However, the study focusing narrowly and broader area of socio-cultural and historical background of the Thang-Ta are not covered (Anel, 2016).

The article “exploring motivations and prospects of Thang Ta, ancient Manipuri martial arts among the students of Manipur” highlights the cultural, educational, and motivational significance of Thang-Ta in Manipur. It contributes the basic understanding about Thang-Ta as a form of sports, culture, performing arts, and self-defense. The study successfully identifies key factors of motivation among the students such as personal interest, self-defense, physical fitness, and cultural pride. The study also highlights partially about the modern Thang-Ta sports. However, in the study some weakness also can be observed like, the sample size is small and restricted only to valley districts of Manipur, which limits the generalization of the findings. The study also found lack of strong theoretical framework. It has limited critical depth analysis in the literature review and discussion. It is representing only the positive aspects of this martial art, does not critically analyzed about challenges. (Meitei et al., 2020)

Some other empirical researches have conducted on socio-economic status, educational status, motivation, and participating level among the Thang-Ta players. The study provides valuable quantitative information into the demographic and psychological aspects of the players. While this study provides the sports science literature, they treat as a contemporary sport without providing the its historical development of modern Thang-Ta sports and institutional development. (Devi, 2021)

A survey conducted on Thang-Ta players, to examine their attitudes towards Thang-Ta in Manipur. The author tried to examine, whether attitudes towards Thang-Ta differ according to age, gender, and educational qualification. The study was conducted on 47 Thang-Ta players of 7 affiliated institution of Huyel Langlon Thang-Ta Association, Manipur, age ranging from 15-30 years. The result showed an insignificant difference. The study contributes valuable information about the attitudes towards this traditional martial art. However, the small sample size, limited variables, and data collection from few numbers of selected institution, create opportunities for future research scope on other various dimensions. (Singh & Singh, 2022)

### **Sports Marketing**

In Thang-Ta several unique characteristics are there, that makes this martial art highly marketable. The existing literature on “Entrepreneurship potential indigenous martial arts, sports and games of Manipur” focuses on the struggles faced by the indigenous martial arts, games and sports for their existence. The author specially highlighted on Mukna (Manipuri style wrestling), Mukna Kangjei (indigenous form of Manipuri field hockey with wrestling), Thang-Ta martial art, Sagol Kangjei (indigenous form of Polo), Kang, and Ten Kappa (archery). The literature highlighted the possible areas of business and entrepreneurial opportunities within this area. It is mentioned that the manufacturing of standardized equipment can save these indigenous games and sports, encourage entrepreneurship, and can create a market for standardize safety gears, equipment, and garments (Dhiren, 2021).

The article does a nice work of documenting distinct indigenous games and sports, which are globally unique but locally endangered. The author, instead of treating these games and sport as static cultural artifact, he perfectly identifies that commercialization and standardization of the sports equipment are the key points for survival of indigenous games. The author gives a suitable example, that how a low-cost entrepreneurial innovation like traditional bamboo made bow can bridge the gap between indigenous and Olympic level sport. However, in the study lack of empirical data about market size, cost benefits, demands of the customer can be observed.

### **Mapping Matrix of Reviewed Literature**

| <b>Author &amp; Year</b> | <b>Focused Area</b>                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Methodology</b>                                   | <b>Identified Research Gaps &amp; Limitations</b>                                                                                         |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Singh, 1994              | Traditional sports and martial arts of north-east India, focusing on its roots in tribal culture, warfare techniques and ritualistic traditions                                         | Qualitative and Historical                           | Lack of deep anthropological analysis, chronological evolution                                                                            |
| Singh, 2000              | Historical background of Thang-Ta martial art                                                                                                                                           | Qualitative and Structural living traditional review | Lack of scientific validation, modern pedagogical adaptation, Lack of historical documentation on modern sports movement can be observed. |
| Devi, 2018               | Manipuri Thang-Ta and its Behavioral attributes, mythological roots, ritualistic weapons                                                                                                | Qualitative narrative analysis                       | Lack of systematic, methodological analysis and verification of historical data.                                                          |
| Singh, 2018              | art of blacksmith of Kakching with special reference to Thang-Ta mainly focusing on the historical background, cultural identity, traditional iron making process of Kakching, Manipur, | Oral history and localized indigenous texts          | Lack of systematic empirical research and rigorous archival documentation.                                                                |

|                     |                                                                                                           |                                                                               |                                                                                                          |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                     | and various weapon making culture                                                                         |                                                                               |                                                                                                          |
| Anel, 2016          | Interventions on nutritional status, physical fitness, and performance of Thang-Ta athlete.               | Quantitative physiological intervention.                                      | Narrowly focused, lack of documentation on historical evaluation of Thang-Ta to a modern combative sport |
| Meitei et al., 2020 | Cultural, educational, and motivational significance of Thang-Ta in Manipur                               | Localized survey with Manipur                                                 | Small sample size restricted to valley districts, weak theoretical framework.                            |
| Devi, 2021          | Socio-economic status, educational status, motivation, and participating level among the Thang-Ta players | Quantitative demographic survey.                                              | Treat as a contemporary sport. Tracing institutional history is missing.                                 |
| Dhiren, 2021        | Entrepreneurship potential indigenous martial arts, sports and games of Manipur                           | Combine method of descriptive, observation and spot visit, persona interview. | lack of empirical data about market size, cost benefits, demands of the customer                         |
| Singh & Singh, 2022 | Players attitudes based on age, gender, and education.                                                    | Quantitative survey, across 7 local institutions                              | Limited sample size and minimal variables, restricting generalization.                                   |

#### Identification of Research Gaps:

Based on the critical review, the following major research gaps can be drawn:

- i. Lack of Sportification Framework: Most of the studies focused on culture, ritualistic, mythological, and philosophical aspect of Thang-Ta. In the studies, clear absence of analytical research on modern Thang-Ta sports movement can be observed.
- ii. Lack of Comprehensive Historical Timeline: In the previous study, there is an absence of systematic historical chronological documentation on formation of governing bodies, development of standardized rules and regulations, and inclusions in national and international sporting events. Thus, it creates a major gap in understanding the modernization process of Thang-Ta as sport.
- iii. Limited Organizational and Policy Based Research: The existing literature does not examine adequately on role of Thang-Ta federations, Government support and policies, organizational promotion of Thang-Ta. As a result, the development of organizational goal of Thang-Ta remains unexplored.
- iv. Lack of methodological approach: In previous studies, lack of methodological approaches can be observed like, small sample size, limited geographical coverage, lack of theoretical framework, and most of the studies are descriptive rather than analytical approach. Thus, it limits the reliability and generalization of findings.
- v. Research Gap on Promotion and Globalization: Limited studies have been conducted on promotional activities outside the Manipur, adoption of Thang-Ta in other states and present status.
- vi. Gap in Pedagogy and Training Research: There are very few research on coaching methods, training methods, modern teaching technique of Thang-Ta, talent identification system.
- vii. Gap in Commercialization: Thang-Ta is a growing sport, included in the mega events like National School Games, Khelo India Youth Games and All India Inter University Sports Competitions. Therefore, constantly increasing its popularity and demands. But there is lack of sports industry who manufacturing Thang-Ta Sports equipment like 'Phunachei' (fighting stick), 'Chungoi' (Shield), protective full body guards, and other uniforms. In the existing literature, there are lack of research can be observed on commercialization process of Thang-Ta sport like; market size of this sport, demands and supply of the sports equipment.

The identified gaps reveal that, limited research has conducted in the field of Thang-Ta, it is still in a developmental stage. While the foundational studies have documented the cultural, ritual, philosophical and historical aspects of Thang-Ta, there is a need to shift towards analytical, interdisciplinary research, modernization, and commercialization process of Thang-Ta sport.

Hence, for the development of this martial art following areas can be recommended for further studies:

- i. Further, a historical study can be conducted focusing on the sportification of Thang-Ta.
- ii. Comparative study can be conduct on frameworks with other standardized and organized combative sports.
- iii. Can be focus on interdisciplinary research approach.
- iv. In-depth study can be conduct to explore policies and institutional aspects.
- v. Investigation on promotional drives and present status of this combative sport in different states of India and other country.
- vi. In-depth analysis can be conduct on commercialization process of this martial art, such as promoting Pro Thang-Ta competitions, business models on sports tourism, manufacturing and marketing strategies of standardized Thang-Ta sports equipment, which will approved by Thang-Ta Federation of India like, fighting sticks (phunachei), shield (chungoi), protective full body guard, swords, spear and garments.
- vii. Further, a study can be conduct on the role of broadcasting media in the promotion and commercialization of Thang-Ta sports.

## **Conclusion**

The present study concludes that, even though there are several literatures on Thang-Ta, number of significant research gaps remain in the previous studies. The lack of literatures on systematic analysis on sportification, institutional development, and policy frameworks limiting the understanding of this martial art as a combative modern sports. Addressing these gaps is essential for both academic advancement and practical development of Thang-Ta. This study can provide a brief idea to the scholars for further research area in this field.

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