

Traditional Martial Art Thang-Ta in Transition: From Indigenous Knowledge System to Global Practice

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Abstract:

This paper examines the historical evolution, contemporary transformation, and future prospects of Thang-Ta, a traditional martial art of Manipur, in the context of modernization and globalization. Rooted in Meitei mythology which is indigenous belief system of Sanamahism religion, Thang-Ta originally functioned as a holistic knowledge system integrating martial training with ethical, spiritual, and sociocultural values. Prior to colonial intervention, it operated as both a military and pedagogical institution, fostering discipline, social responsibility, and collective identity. However, the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891 and subsequent British policies disrupted its transmission. In the post-independence period, Thang-Ta has undergone diversification into domains such as sports, cultural performance, and academic study. While these developments have ensured its survival and institutional recognition, they have also contributed to the fragmentation of its traditional pedagogical depth, particularly the marginalization of philosophical and ethical instruction. Drawing comparative insights from global martial arts such as Wushu, Judo, and Taekwondo, this paper argues for a balanced model of modernization that integrates technological innovation, systematic pedagogy, and cultural preservation. It concludes that the sustainable future of Thang-Ta lies in negotiating continuity and change, enabling it to function as both a living heritage and a globally relevant martial art.

Keywords:

Thang-Ta, Indigenous Knowledge System, Modernization, Cultural Transformation, Globalization, Martial Arts, Cultural Sustainability.