

The Relations Between Manipuri Pung Cholom and Thang-Ta

Dr. Thounaojam Lalitkanta Singh

Faculty, Dept. of Dance, Manipur University of Culture, Imphal

ABSTRACT:

The kind of acrobatic art form performed by an artiste of Pung while he is striking or playing the Pung as he himself has worn or adorned with particular decorated apparels or costumes in proper physical positions, movement of the feet and the hands, glances of the eyes and body curvatures is called as the Pung Cholom. As overview regarding the Thang-Ta and the Pung Cholom, the Thang-Ta has been existing since pre-historic period in human history. On the other hand, the Pung Cholom is an art form developed during the later period covered by history. It is to be noted that the native elements have always been the parts and parcels in developing an art form. So, it will not be an exaggeration to say that some elements of Thang-Ta have been borrowed in the composition of Pung Cholom of the Nata Sankritan. To observe realistically, the actions of a child at the time of its birth out of the womb of its mother-such as crying Hanga Hanga, Kicking its feet, quivering its hands, etc. are the art forms of the Thang-Ta. Further, we gather food to appease hunger, to promote health and to live long lives. The modes of obtaining food are also modes of Thang-Ta. Afterwards we enjoy systematically ourselves by performing various art forms like of dances, etc., the modes of which are mainly borrowed from the fine techniques of Thang-Ta, the sword and the spear. Literally speaking, Shajat-Shanom, Phirep-Phibam, Khonglon-Khutlon, Mityeng-Nayeng, etc. of the Pung Cholom are the prototypical imitations from Thang-Ta.

Keywords: Pung, Cholom, Thang-Ta, Konglon, Khutlon, Manipuri, Meitei.

INTRODUCTION:

During the early Settlement in the soil of Manipur, the Seven Clans of the Meitei were the dominant communities having their own lands or territories or principalities ruled independently by their respective Kings. These clans are: Angom, Luwang, Ningthouja, Khuman, Moirang, Khaba Nganba and Sharang Leishangthem. They were all war-like ancestrally and fought among themselves with rivalry feelings for supremacy. Also they had fighting contests in which they fought systematically to decide a dispute or so. Fighting means chainaba in Manipuri literally. The ancient book, Chainarol incorporates the rules to be followed in the fight among the individual fighters, etc. Thang-Ta were the weapons used in such fighting contest.¹

And one of the most important reasons for using Thang-Ta is that as most of the regions in Manipur are hills and forest areas where there are ferocious wild animals like tigers, bears, leopards, among others, so plentifully, the people of the olden time had to protect their women,

Published: 11 February 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/IJSSR.2026.v3.i1.30772>

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

children and domestic animals. From these fierce wild animals. For these unavoidable reasons, the early people had to compulsorily learn the skill and art of the sword and the spear, though for war or fight was the most predominant reason.

It is also to be reminded that the kings of Manipur could rule Kangleipak Manipur from time immemorial in terms of thousands of years consolidating the Kingdom was by means of the art of warfare known as popularly as the Huiyen-Lallong and Sharit-Shara, both for tactics and techniques for fighting with or without weapons. Just as we read book, those people trained themselves in the arts of Thang-Ta which involves potentialities. The trainees or students sincerely dedicated for learning the art from the famous trainers or Gurus by paying Guru Dakshina in kind or in cash. The kings also much encouraged those Gurus by giving them agricultural lands, etc.

There are close affinities and relationships between the Pung Cholom of the Nata Sankirtan and the Thang-Ta of the Meiteis. There are various Khonglon-art of the feet, Khutlon-art of the hands, modes and postures in Thang-Ta and Mukna-wrestling. Thus, as there are external affinities, there are also implicit affinities in respect of austere implications and significances. That is to say, as the Meiteis were brave and determined fighters to defeat the enemies in the battle fields, they have full concentration in worshipping of and praying to gods and goddesses in religious concerns by performing Pung Cholom in the solemnization of the Sankirtan. So, Mukna, Thang-Ta and Pung Cholom have practically same modes and features implicitly and explicitly though their names are different according to their specific involvements. We have generally seen resemblances, as for example, in the postures of feet of Mukna, Langkak Thengou and Pung Cholom as borrowed and imitated from Thang-Ta.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this paper is mainly to develop and promote the Pung Cholom progressively up to a standard by incorporating or borrowing the positions, postures, paces, steps, glances, etc. from Thang-Ta undergoing research to highlight the relevant backgrounds.

METHODOLOGY:

Different methods have been adopted for achieving the objective and the main purpose of the paper. Detailed discussion is made with the collection of the Primary Data and the Secondary Data from reliable sources and backgrounds. As for the Secondary Data, relevant books, publications, etc. are collected from the libraries of the Manipur University and the Manipur University of Culture. And further, for the Primary Data or source, the eminent Gurus of the Nata Sankirtan and the Thang-Ta have been consulted and they also have extended invaluable help and co-operation.

THE FEATURE OF THANG-TA BORROWED BY PUNG-CHOLOM:

Rajarshi Maharaj Bhagyachandra solemnized the Jagoi Ras and the Nata Sankirtan for five days for the first time at the Ras Mandal in Canchipur on the 11th day of the month of Hiyangei according to Meitei Calendar in 1779 A.D. and in 1701 Sakabda after the Solemnization of Nirupan of Shree Govindaji had been conducted.² Thus, the Jagoi Ras and the Nata Sankirtan have constantly been shining far and wide across the world in course of the ever changing time

with their unique glories. The increasing recognition of the Jagoi and its occupation a wide berth of Manipuri Culture all over the world was exactly through the dedicated contribution and patronage of Maharaj Bhagyachandra who composed the Jagoi intermingling and assimilating the two sources-one the Thengourol of the Meiteis which had already been existed in the ancient Meitrabak and the other, the Meitei Jagoi naming the new composition as the Jagoi Ras.

And thus, with special focus on “Cholom, different scholars and critics have expressed their viewpoints that the Khongthang-Khutthang cultivated in the Kartal Cholom and the Pung Cholom in the Nata Sankirtan have been borrowed from the Khonglon-Khutlons of the Thang-Ta. R.K. Achoubisana expresses his opinion in this regard, as:

Cholom has been taken from the Thang-Ta used for the administration of the land, for fighting and waging wars and for killing purposes. Maharaj Bhagyachandra introduced the Jagoi Ras and the Nata Sankirtan after the advent of Vaisnavism and solemnization of Govinda Nirupan. The Thang-Ta mainly used in hunting and fighting had been added to amusement programmes and other arts forms. So, the techniques used in the Jagoi Ras and the Nata Sankirtan are taken from the Thang-Ta. Of course, the movement is kept separately for the strong and the weak. The hand gesture of the Chali in the Jagoi Ras has been taken from the movement of the sword-fight.³

And thus, the Thang-Ta and the Cholom are so closely related learnings in art forms originated almost from the same source, and the rare gifts were composed by the celebrated departed Gurus.

RELATION BETWEEN MEITEI JAGOI AND THANG-TA:

The Jagoi and the Thang-Ta has a close and inalienable relation. We have found a plenty of resemblances in the jagois of the Lai-Haraoba and the jagois of the Jagoi Ras with the positions of the foot and the hand in the Thang-Ta. The Jagoi, i.e. the dance, danced by the concerned dancer has been concluded by the dancer at the time of his or her bowing down to the concerned deities dancing Khujengleiba dance, the dance danced with the twisting around of the wrists of hands at the end of a sequence of Lai-Haraoba. Similarly, the Gopis dance this Khujengleibi dance bowing down to Ibungo-Ibemma to conclude the dance in a sequence of the Jagoi Ras. Khujeng Leiba, clockwise and anti-clockwise flexible twisting of the wrist, employed in Lai Haraoba is absolutely same with the Khujeng Leiba employed in the Jagoi Ras. For Thang-Ta, steadily and softly regulated Khujeng Leiba is very charmingly beautiful to look at. Moreover, more advantage and chance have been taken by the fighter whose wrist is soft, tender and flexible than the other fighter in a rivalry contest of a duo. So, twisting of the hand has compulsorily been practised from time immemorial in learning of the art of Thang-Ta. Therefore, this art of twisting of the hand-wrist has been employed in wavering of the sword and in teaching the dances of the Lai Haraoba and the Jagoi Ras. But the Khujeng Leiba Ahanbi has not been employed in wavering the Sword. There are many types of Khonglon-Khongthang associated with the Khujeng Leibi for wavering the sword. They cannot be missed out. For foot, when the right hand is above, the right foot will be raised up and with the moving down of the right hand from the above, the right foot will be landed on the ground. The same process

will be done as for the left foot. As for the step or pace, it may be moved forward and backward for two steps. And the Khujeng Leiba can be employed in the crescent form of three steps of the sword and the three steps forming the (Phunga Nungdum) three iron rods of a grate or fire-place as well.

Not only for the dances, but there are many resemblances of Thang-Ta in the Cholom of the Pala, the singer and the Cholom of the Pung of the pungyeiba also. And Thongkhong Shaba, Ghat Taba and Bak Leiba of the Pung resemble with those of the Thang-Ta.⁴

THE FEATURES RESEMBLING BETWEEN

NATA CHOLOM AND THANG-TA:

In turning the pose of the Cholom, the two heels of the two feet will be at the span of three fingers between them and the tips of the two feet will be at the distance of one foot's length between the two tips. The body will be erected as an arrow straight. The right hand palm will be put on the navel and both the elbows of the two hands will be stretched out. Eyes will look on the top of the nose as done in meditation.

At the start of the Cholom, the pulling up of the right foot and the raising up of the right hand will be at the same time, and when the pulled up foot is settled on the ground, the hand will also be raised down at a balance, and then the cymbal, i.e., the Kartal will be clattered at the same time. The same process will be done at the pulling up of the left foot. When the foot's lifted up, it will be lifted up at the height of half of the ankle of the opposite foot. When the Cholom has been started, the feet will be stood in the posture of feet of the bridge. The eyes will follow the Kartal. The lowering down hand cannot reach out below the ankle, and also the height of the raising up hand cannot reach out up to the lips.⁵

There are resemblances between the mode of the Cholom and the mode of the Thang-Ta in the version mentioned above. We have seen many resemblances between the posture of the first Cholom and the posture of the sword about to be wavered. The mode of putting of the hand and the mode of glance are just equal with the mode putting the sword when it is about to be wavered. The mode of raising the foot and the hand at the start of the Cholom are of the same equal manner. And for the mode of the hand, the hand follows the Kartan (Cymbal) as the eyes follow the sword at the glance.⁶

Thus not only as for the dance but there are also resemblances between the Pung Cholom and Thang-Ta. The Thongkhong Shaba, Ghat Taba and Bak Leiba of Pung are quite equal in their respective modes with that of the Thang-Ta.⁷

Most of our reputed Gurus have been observing that the Cholom of the Duhar, the Cholom of the Pung, the Khongpham of Jagoi Ras are unequivocally similar and equal in all respects. It is because of the fact that there are similar features of footings of the Thang-Ta in the footings and curvatures of the Pung-Cholom and the Jagoi. So, it happens to be very easy to learn the Manipuri Jagoi, Pala Cholom, Pung Cholom, inter alia, if the martial arts of the Thang-Ta has already been well-versed and proficient.⁹

With these perspectives mentioned above, it is clearly observed that the Manipuri Nata Sankirtan is a unique living art form composed and developed in the Manipuri Soil. It shows that it includes the substantia and essentia of the original indigenous art forms like Lai Haraoba, Thang-Ta, Thengou, so forth and so on.

In this regard, Guru Ningthoujam Shyamchand Singh expressed, as:

Phivam, i.e., mode or posture has already been existed in Meitei Leipak. In the endeavour to make the proper shape of the mode of the Cholom, the teachers kept it by making a broad mode of it. It is said that the standing posture in the form of the feet or pillars of the bridge in the contest of Mukna, i.e. wrestling, the minute arts of the Thang-Ta, Khousaba, i.e. showing the techniques of Thang-Ta have been formulated.⁸

From this above account, it can be realized that the Cholom has become an exceptional art form taking the requisites from the Thang-Ta.

DETAILED DISCUSSION OF THE FEATURES OF

THANG-TA BORROWED BY PUNG-CHOLOM:

We require the related requisites and practice of the art or occupation for which we have to undergo a study or training beforehand. We do not learn it easily. Regular study, practice and imitation have been involved. Thus we have to practise and train ourselves in the art of related physical pre-requisites like the modes of positions, posture, curvatures, glances, etc. prior to we are going to study the art of the Pung-Cholom of the Nata Sankirtan. And the modes and features of the Thang-Ta in many respects have been the required elements in learning and practising the Pung-Cholom.

The resembling features between the Pung-Cholom and the Thang-Ta have been furnished as hereunder:

1. **Raising of the feet up to Ankle:** This step is the posture about to be striking of the foot, and has been known as the Nongkhong Nikpa in old Manipuri/Meiteilon. Taking from this posture or step, it is used in the Cholom Khongthang of Abahan containing in the Raga Achouba of the Pung Cholom.
2. **Raising from Ankle to Knee:** This posture or step is used during the performance of Chungkhong Koiba, Chakrabak and Lairen Mathek of the Thang and it is used in the postures of Ta also. Imitating this posture, this is used in the Akeba and the Atappa Cholom of the Pung Cholom.
3. **Ordinary Step:** The simple step of the right leg and the left leg stepping forward has been known as the ordinary step. This step has been employed in the Khousarol of Ta, the art of technique of the spear and in the Thangbi Yanba Khongthang of the Thang, the art of the sword during a big cutting.
4. **Stepping Obliquely:** When the right leg and the left leg are in ordinary stable position, the mode of stepping obliquely occurs, and the body also remains obliquely. The Phunga Nungdum Shaba Khongthang of the Thang-Ta is included in this mode of stepping, and this mode has been borrowed by the Pung Cholom.

5. **Stepping Sideways:** Footing one foot sideways in front of the toe of the another foot and then moving forward in sideways stepping has known as the stepping sideways. It is said that the sideways stepping of the foot is 900. It has been seen in Pung Cholom and in the Thangchep Kaba of Thang-Ta.
6. **Cross-Stepping:** Crossing of one foot, whether the right foot or the left foot, in front of the another foot has been known as Cross Stepping. This mode of stepping can be seen during the Parei Hanba, etc. of the Ta-Khousharol, and this mode of stepping has been employed in the Pung Cholom imitating the mode.
7. **Stepping Sweepingly:** Sweep up of one foot once at the same time near the another foot which has been stepped up already. This mode can be seen during the thwarting of the hunted animal in the Ta-Khousharol. Imitating it, it has been employed in the Pung Cholom.
8. **Stepping Turning and Turning:** This mode of gait or stepping has been employed in both the Thang-Ta and the Pung Cholom. Stepping by both the right leg and the left leg turning and turning together with the body has been known as the Stepping Turning and Turning, in short-the Turning Step.
9. **Jumping Stepping:** The mode of stepping in jumping gait both by the right and the left leg has been known as the Jumping Stepping. The mode may be the jumping up of both the legs, and jumping stepping alternately one leg after the another leg and stop stepping once at a moment. This mode can be seen in the Shou Kaiba of the Ta-Khousharol and also it has been cultivated in the Pung-Cholom. The Resemblance between the Thang-Ta and the Pung Cholom in the Modes of Stepping and Stamping by the Foot, the Slanting Foot, the Toes of the Foot and the Heals of the Foot:
10. **Stamp with the Foot:** Stamping on the ground at the same time by both the toes and the heels of the foot has been known as Stamp with the Foot.
11. **Oblique Footing:** Stamping obliquely reaching out the ground in the side of the pinky toe has been known as the Oblique Footing.
12. **Stamp With the Toe:** Stamp raising the heel and reaching out the ground with the toe has been known as the Stamp with the Toe. It has been used in Maram Achouba of the Ta-Khousharol. Imitating this, it is used in the luxurious step of the Pung Cholom.

There are same glances in the Thang-Ta with the glances as used in the Pung Cholom. They are: Humble Glance, Moderate Glance and Distance Glance. These three glances have been employed in the Cholom of the Nata Sankirtan as on date.

And therefore, we can see that the Pung Cholom has ever been imitating the Thang-Ta not only in respect of postures but also in respect of glances. Only the Pung Cholom has been focussing on the Bhakti.

The three modes of the Glances have been furnished hereunder:

1. **Humble Glance:** Both the Pung Cholom and the Thang-Ta employ this glance. It is a glance employed at the commencement of the Nata Sankirtan and it is a glance praying to God. The Thang-Ta originally prevalent, also employs this during the Khousharol when the noblemen were bowed down and bowing down during the war, Leiteng Haiba, prayer to the God, Lankoiba of Khousaron etc.

2. **Moderate Glance:** This Glance has been employed accomplishing both in the Thang-Ta and the Pung Cholom. It has been employed as the glance at the foot of the Yatra of Kalpabriksha in the Nata Sankirtan, and during Shou Kaiba, Leitei-Nongdai in the Ta-Khonsharon.
3. **Distance Glance:** This glance has been employed in both the Thang-Ta and the Pung Cholom. It is a glance used when the identity of the person concerned cannot be confirmed but the colour of his apparel can be known.

The portion of head/neck employed in the Pung Cholom is also employed in the Thang-Ta.

It has been discussed in the following:

1. **Shaking and Oscillating:** Both used the head and the neck for something of serious concern and urgency that have come about in the sequence.
2. **Shaking Laterally:** The lateral shaking of the head and the neck has been known.
3. **Turning Round:** The turning of the head and the neck in all the directions has been known.
4. **Stroking:** Stroking of the head and the neck on the right side and on the left side has been known.
5. **Obliquely Sloping:** Obliquely sloping on the right side and on the left side has been known.

DISCUSSION ON THE RESEMBLANCES OF

PUNG CHOLOM WITH THOSE OF THE THANG-TA:

1. The first Posture Employed in the Pung Cholom and Thang-Ta:

Will be stood on the two heels in the width of the length or the breadth of two fingers between them. This posture will approximately be 450. The tip of the posture will be about the length of foot, but the Raga will be commenced in the Pung Cholom as bit inclining of the chest. As told by the teachers, this posture has been known as the Sagol Phirep, the posture of a horse. As for the Ta Khousharol in the Thang-Ta, as the weapon is to be held in the clutches of the hand, the weapon, i.e., the Sword is to be held at the level of the Pukchep nearly straight to the navel.

2. Second Posture: It will be the width of the length of a foot between the heels. And it also will be the width of a foot between the toes. This posture has been known as the Nongsha Phirep, the posture of a lion. The Pung Cholom and the Ta-Khousharol will be performed in this posture. Both arts will be performed in sync with the arts of the foot, the hand, the posture, curvatures, glances, head, neck and mobility and movement of the body.

3. Third Posture: In this posture, the width between the heels will be the length of two feet, and the width between the toes will be the length of the three feet, and some more or some less are also acceptable. This posture of the Cholom has been known as the Shamu Phirep, the posture of an elephant. The distance will be the span of the length of the hand up to elbow. In this posture of the Pung Cholom and the Thang-Ta, all the arts of foot, hand, posture, glance, head, neck, body, etc. will be involved. The above three postures have unavoidably been applied in the practice and performance of the Pung Cholom and the Thang-Ta.

Thus it would not be an exaggeration to say that as the art of Thang-Ta is much more preceded to the art of the Pung Cholom and all the requisites of the art have been borrowed and imitated as far as practicable from the art of the Thang-Ta.

CONCLUSION:

With the detailed study and discussion about the indivisible close relation between the Pung Cholom of the Nata Sankirtan and the Thang-Ta, we realistically comprehend that the Pung Cholom has, no doubt, borrowed and imitated the intrinsic features and modes of the Thang-Ta and achieved the present status of national and international recognition and popularity. If a plant from a particular place is grown as planted in a different place, the plant will grow luxuriantly in the soil of the place with proper supervision of the planter. So is the Pung Cholom of the Nata Sankirtan. And thus, the Pung Cholom is a very rare composition of our art-loving forefathers who fought fierce battles to protect the land and people by dint of Thang-Ta with dedicated patriotic zeal and sacrifice. On the whole, when the Pung Cholom has been founded and introduced as a new art form assimilating with the Thengouron and Khousharon of the Thang-Ta, not only the rare qualities of our art-loving ancestors but also our unique identity and origin will be introduced across the world.

References:

1. Sinam Devbrata, "Souvenire", Golden Jubilee Celebration 2008. Huyen-Lallong Manipur Thang-Ta Cultural Association, Irilbung, Imphal East, Manipur.
2. Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh, Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh (Edit:) *Cheitharol Kumbaba* (Imphal: Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, 1967). P. 133.
3. Informant: R.K. Achoubisana, retd. Pradhan Guru, J.N.M.D.A. Imphal, Age-75, Address: Moirangkhom Loklaobung, Imphal, Date 10-1-2017.
4. Elangbam Nilakanta Singh (Edit:) *Manipuri Jagoi Seminargi Neinakhiba Mashak* (Imphal: Manipur State Kala Akademi 1971), P. 29.
5. Surchand Sharma, "Meitei Jagoi" Journal Wareng Wakhal, Imphal: 1973, P.185.
6. Aheibam Rishikesh Singh, "Manipuri Sangskritida Meiteigi Thang-Tagi Mapham", Ph.D. Thesis, Manipur University, 2005, P. 205.
7. Elangbam Nilakanta Singh (Edit:) *Manipuri Jagoi Seminargi Neinakhiba Mashak* (Imphal: Manipur State Kala Akademi 1971), P. 23, 24.
8. Ningthoukhongjam Shyamchand Singh, "Cholomda Matamna Pirakpa Shaphu" (Seminar Paper), Imphal: Guru Gulapi Nata Sankirtan Akademy, October, 5th, 6th and 7th 2006.