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## ANCIENT MARTIAL ART OF INDIA: GATKA

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### Abstract

There are several forms of ancient Indian martial arts namely, [Pehlwani](#), [Kalarippayattu](#), [Malla-yuddha](#), [Vajra Mushti](#), [Chakram](#), [Gatka](#) and [Others](#). The “Gatka” is an ancient martial art practiced mainly by Sikhs. This research paper explains the history of Gatka which had a significant approach in Indian Traditional Martial Arts especially in Punjab.

**Kew-Words:** Gatka Dahl., Katar. Talwar., Chakar.

### Introduction:

#### HISTORY OF GATKA

Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of the Sikh religion, was born into a kshatriya (warrior clan) family, as were many of his first disciples. His successor, Guru Angad Dev Ji, encouraged followers to train the body physically, mentally and spiritually. Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji propagated the theory of the warrior saint and emphasised the need for his followers to practice fighting for self-defence. After the martyrdom of his father and fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji took up arms in order to protect the future generation of Sikhs and to stand against tyranny and oppression. When fifty-two Rajput princes were captured by the Muslim conquerors, the Guru assembled an army to free them. This led to further exchanges in the martial cultures of the Sikhs and Rajputs. Both the Rajputs and Punjabis favoured the sword as their main weapon. Although Sikhism was founded as a peace-loving religion it has never taken the pacifist approach.. Gatka has been a well practised martial art by followers of the Sikh faith for hundreds of years.

**Gatka** is an ancient martial art which has been thoroughly battle-tested and has existed in northern India for many thousands of years. It is considered to be a spiritual as well as a physical exercise. Both these aspects of the person are developed to a high level during the learning phase in this ancient art. Although it uses the sword as its primary weapon, many other weapons are available to the Gatka master. Today, this art exists exclusively amongst the Sikhs who have passed down the flamboyant techniques through generations.

Gatka is a complete martial system which uses spiritual, mental and physical skills in equal portions to help one fully competent in defending themselves and others. It is a system that can only be used in defence as per: "**When all other means have failed, it is proper to take the sword in one's hand**",

The techniques involved are extremely effective for defence and attack as well as visually spectacular. The Sikhs mastered Gatka and perfected its use in battle. The art of Gatka involves a series of integral combat training systems that include several systems of duels armed - unarmed and the use of weapons of defense and offence. It aims at the coordination of mind & body through the meditation of spiritual verses of [Gurbani](#), a holistic system by which the character and moral attitude of a student is shaped.

When learning the art, you go from bare handed combat to using various [shastars](#) (weapons) such as [kirpans](#), sticks, lathis, marotis, nun chucks, axes and a lot more.

The first shastar that a student will use is a stick normally made out of bamboo, sometimes called a Marati. With the stick you are taught all of the basic physical movements and the mental attitude required. Once these techniques have been learnt then these can be applied with other [shastars](#) as you gain more experience.

### Meaning of Word ' Gatka'

According to 'Mahan Kosh' edited by Kahan Singh Nabha, 'Gatka - a three-hand span stick, used to teach the first part of club fighting. It has a leather covering. In the right hand holding a Gatka and in left hand a 'Phari', two men play with each other. Persian - Khutka. This can be compared to 'Khanda' and 'Talvaar'. Both words have been used for sword. At the same time, the word 'Khanda' is used for a particular kind of double-edged sword also. In the same way, 'Saif' is a sword, but of a different kind.

The word **Gatka** actually refers to the wooden stick used in training called **soti**, which is equipped with a basket hilt. The entire martial art is based on the correct use of a vast array of melee (hand-to-hand) weapons. The foundation of the art is the **Panthra** which refers to the form, coordination and method for moving the feet, body, arms and weapons correctly, in unison. Gatka technique starts with a simple four-step movement called the Panthra. This is a balance and co-ordination exercise and is to be practised repeatedly. The movement requires equal and simultaneous use of both hands and makes one ambidextrous. This basic movement is followed when using all weapons and imparts impeccable balance to the practitioner.

Gatka is normally taught with rhythmic accompaniment, and the object is to achieve fluid, natural and flowing movement, without hesitation, doubt or anxiety. All the movements including attacking and blocking methods are all based upon the positions of the hands, feet and weapon(s) during the **Panthra** dexterity exercises. Many weapons are taught with special methodologies, in addition to the Panthra exercises.

The most common weapon used by Gatka exponents today is the lathi (a stick of varying length), but all of the other traditional weapons are still taught. Probably the most common combination of weapons in the hands of Gatka practitioners of today and in the past is the sword and shield. As one advances in their experience, they learn about the special "chambers" and other techniques, which are unique to certain weapons, such as the khanda (two-edged sword), the tabar (axe) and the barcha (spear).

The panthra exercise is a flowing, non-stop movement, and there are no specific preset "moves" similar to say, karate in Gatka. Rather, the methods of moving, turning, stopping, attacking and defending are learnt and the application depends on the circumstances at the time. The panthra exercise is practised at the same time as the [Jaap Sahib Bani](#) prayer is being sung. Also, a three-beat-per-cycle is played by a drummer at the same time. This assists in developing natural and flowing co-ordination. Just like the various "beats cycles" in [Jaap Sahib](#), advance Gatka

### The Shastars

- **Barcha** — The spear
- **Chakram** - The chakram is a flat steel ring, five to 12 inches in diameter, from half an inch to an inch and a half wide, and with a sharp outer edge.
- **Dahl** or Shield. It is nearly always round and varies in diameter from about eight inches to about twenty-four.
- **Gurj** or Mace: Indian maces have great variations in their shape.
- **Katar** - The Katar is a double-edged and straight bladed dagger used to pierce armour. The handle has two sidebars to provide protection and a better grip.
- **Khanda** - This is a typical Indian sword and has a broad, straight blade, usually widening towards the point, which is blunt.
- **Kirpan** - The Kirpan is a short curved dagger and all Sikhs are required to carry it by tradition.
- **Lathi** - The lathi or quarterstaff is a wooden stick as tall as the warrior and made of oak.
- **Marati** - Trainig device: The Marati is a bamboo stick with wooden or cloth balls on its ends.
- **Soti** - This is made from fire hardened bamboo or ratan, 1m long and usually has a hand guard.

- **Tapar** - The battle-axe is very distinct from the normal axe and sometimes has a dagger concealed in the handle.
- **Talwar** - The sword is usually curved with a thin and sharp blade. The Talwar is greatly respected and treated with care.
- **Tir Kaman** - The bow and arrow is a potent weapon.
- **Chakar** - The Chakar looks like a wagon wheel with weights at the end of each spoke. The chakar is wielded by grasping the centre and spinning it around, causing damage upon anyone coming too close to the spinning weights.

### Training:

Most gatka groups train in a religious or semi-religious situation, such as in a gurdwara (a Sikh place of worship) or in a Sikh cultural centre or school. However, in recent years a number of "Akhara" (regiment or gymnasium) organisations have been founded, with the express purpose of teaching and disseminating the skill of gatka.

Gatka students always train with "both hands full", as this is both an excellent exercise for matching the two halves of the body and is emphasised as ideal for combat. Gatka emphasises the superiority of having something in both hands, whether it's two sticks, or a stick and a sword, or a sword and a shield or any other combination.

### Competition:

Gatka was never originally intended as a competitive sport. However, recently a number of modern gatka organisations have introduced competition. Normally, these are based on a "best of two" or a "best of Five" hits contest between two practitioners.

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