



Gauntlet hilt / Pata/ Dandpatta - Marathas / Deccan, 18th century

This Pata, also known as the dandpatta in Marathi, is one of the most distinctive weapons in the history of Indian arms and armour. It is especially associated with the Maratha warriors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a time when regional powers in India were shaping their own political and cultural identities. Unlike a normal sword, this Pata is designed in a way that the blade becomes an extension of the warrior's arm. That's because of its strange hilt, which is more than just a handle: it's a full metal covering for the forearm. The warrior puts their arm inside this gauntlet, and grabs a cross bar inside. This is so they can control the long straight blade. This design makes the Pata both an offensive weapon and a defensive shield for the arm, like a sword and a shield combined. This makes the hilt not only a powerful tool in combat but also a potent emblem of military might and identity in Marathas¹.

¹ E. Jaiwant Paul, *Arms and Armour: Traditional Weapons of India* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2005), pg no.- 88-89

This Pata hilt is more significant for its rich ornamentation and sculptural quality. It's more than just functionality; it becomes an aspect of art form. This Pata hilt has three main parts and each is carefully designed and fitted to the others. The first part is the forearm guard which is cylindrical. It's a tube-like construction that covers the arm and protects it during battle. It is slightly tapered so one end is narrower than the other, helping it to fit more securely. But this cylindrical guard is not plain upon the surface, it is embellished with engraved figures of lion and fish, surrounded by delicate floral borders. These decorative features indicate that the object was made not only for function, but also for visual impact².



The most striking part is the tiger-head terminal on top. This is the most striking feature of this Pata hilt, and is the focal point. The tiger head is carved in high relief, which has mighty eyes and a powerful nose and has curvy whiskers³. It looks very energetic and lively. The features are not intended to be entirely realistic, but are exaggerated to give a bold and dramatic effect. The blade come out from gaping mouth of the tiger, transforming the weapon into a visceral extension of the tiger's strength and ferocity. The blade has a leafy motif with three holes, which were made using punchwork, through which the flexible sword is attached. Due to its flexible handling and extended reach, the dandpatta was a highly dangerous weapon in combat.

² "Traditional Maratha Weapons." Godaji Jagtap Museum. Accessed April 27, 2026.
<https://godajijagtapmuseum.com/history.html>

³ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Hilt of a Gauntlet Sword (Pata)," 17th–18th century,
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/827648>

Its design allowed the warrior to strike from a distance, reducing the need to come close to the enemy. This made it especially effective in battle, as it could inflict significant damage on multiple opponents.

Dandpatta reflects not only practical warfare needs but also the martial culture of the Marathas, where weapons were designed to combine efficiency, protection, and symbolic power. The dandpatta was not a weapon that everyone could use easily; it required long training, control, and physical strength to handle effectively. Its unique gauntlet design demanded practice to coordinate the arm and blade as one unit. Because of this, it was often used by skilled and experienced warriors, and mastering it became a mark of discipline and martial excellence.

This Pata hilt is made of brass. This material is perfect for creating fine details and complex designs. The tiger head was made by using a technique called repousse. In this method, the metal is hammered from the behind so that the design rises outward.

After making the basic shape the surface is refined by chasing. This involves working on the front and putting sharp details like eyes, snout and whiskers. Repousse and chasing combined produce a strong three-dimensional effect on the tiger head⁴. In Indian culture, the tiger has long been a symbol of shakti (power), Virata (bravery) and royal authority. It is often associated with divine power and strength. The tiger had a special significance as a symbol of resistance and

independence for the Marathas. At the time of Shivaji Maharaj, the Maratha state was fighting bigger empires and strong animal symbols like the tiger helped convey courage and self-rule.

The cylindrical forearm guard is decorated with engraving. In this technique, designs are carved directly into the metal surface.

⁴ Azumi Shoto, "Pata Sword: Unveiling the History and Significance of India's Unique Gauntlet Sword," *Mini Katana*, January 29, 2024, <https://minikatana.com/en-de/blogs/main/pata-sword-unveiling-the-history-and-significance-of-indias-unique-gauntlet-sword>

The artisans have engraved lion figures and floral designs on the hilt resemble stylized lotus forms and bring a sense of balance and rhythm to the overall composition, making the object visually lively and richly detailed⁵. These lion figures have some influence of makara design and vyala figures, which is prominent mostly used in temple art.

The lion also symbolises power and strength. Its front part emphasises raw power, while the two raised legs suggest alertness and awareness of surroundings and enemies — much like the Maratha warriors who remained ready to fight while staying attentive and vigilant.

This dandpatta hilt was probably meant for ceremonial purposes, as a display in the court, or as a sign of high rank and authority. In processions, court settings and ritual contexts, richly decorated patas were often carried as a display of the owner's power and status. It also is a beautiful synthesis of different traditions. The bold tiger image and expressive style are indicating Deccan art, and the floral patterns indicate Mughal influence. The Deccan region was known for this fusion of local and imperial styles, which reflect the artistic creativity and cultural exchange of the time.

This Maratha dandpatta hilt stands as a powerful weapon and also depicts how art and warfare were closely connected in early modern India. It shows that weapons were not only tools of battle but also carriers of ideas, beliefs, and identity⁶. Through its design and symbolism, this hilt expresses themes of strength, bravery, and sovereignty. It reminds us that even objects of war can be deeply artistic and meaningful, reflecting the creativity and cultural richness of the society that produced them.

Today, the Pata remains the official state weapon of Maharashtra. It is still showcased in traditional Indian martial arts like Mardani Khel and Gatka.

⁵ Pata Gauntlet Sword – Ethnographic Arms & Armour,” *Ethnographic Arms & Armour*, accessed April 27, 2026, <https://share.google/mglHM3Eof5v7hvcrl>

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