

Design Resource

## Naga Cane basket - Khophi

Basket Making

by

Prof. Ravi Mokashi Punekar, Menuolhoulie Kire  
DoD, IIT Guwahati

Source:

<http://dsource.in/resource/naga-cane-basket-khophi>

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## Introduction

Basket making has been one of the most intrinsic aspects of Naga culture throughout the ages. From being valued as a dowry basket to being used in the day to day activities like carrying water, firewood and the harvests from fields and gardens, the handicrafts of Nagaland speak in volumes about the way cane and bamboo have been molded in the hands of skilled craftsmen.

In this section we look at cane and basketry produced by a master craftsman from Khonoma village in Nagaland. This section will trace the entire process of weaving of a particular type of cane basket called 'Khophi'; from processing the raw material to the final product and subsequently the various uses to which it is put.



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## The Green Village

The phrase 'Small is beautiful' suits the small picturesque village of Khonoma, located 20kms from the capital Kohima. The village derives its name from 'Khwuno' a small plant found in plenty around the village while 'Mia' translates as dwellers.

Nestling among green hills, Khonoma is a basket weaver's haven. Known for its conservational ventures the village has been rightfully awarded the honour of being the first green village of the country. The village besides being a part of the green crusade can also boast of a pool of highly skilled craftsmen who can weave magic with cane and bamboo. Symmetry and discipline are evident in the very placement of the village gate, the precise manner in which the terrace cultivation is undertaken and the location of the major landmarks of the village. But despite the old world feel of the village it is very well connected with the outside world with modern communication facilities.

Interestingly, Khonoma also stands out amongst all Naga villages because of the tales of brave deeds that are associated with it. As hunting was an inseparable part of the Naga culture, Khonoma is famous for its past heritage of fighting and warfare. With the advent of the missionaries, however, the practice of head hunting became obsolete and in recent times the preservation and protection of wildlife has been of utmost importance. The village has set a very unique example by protecting a large part of its community forests. Every year, hundreds of tourists flock this quaint little village to go back in time and experience nature.



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## Basket Making

The sight of creamish or pale brown baskets made of cane and bamboo locally named by the Angami tribe as 'Mekho' never fails to catch the attention of the onlookers. Womenfolk carry them either to fetch water or collect harvest such as rice and vegetables from the paddy fields and gardens in Nagaland.

As these baskets have a conical shape with a wide mouth, the easiest way to carry them in the uneven terrain of Nagaland, is to wear a strap around one's head that is attached to the basket. While carrying the basket in this manner the body is often inclined following the gradient of the hill.

The 'Mekho' can be found in various shapes and sizes and is even made out of other materials depending upon the purpose for which it is made. Interestingly, the designs of this utility cane basket vary from tribe to tribe across the state.

Despite slight differences in the design, these conical baskets are often based on the common geometric principle: "the subtle transition from a small square base to a wide circular mouth, the transition being achieved through different curves on the sides".



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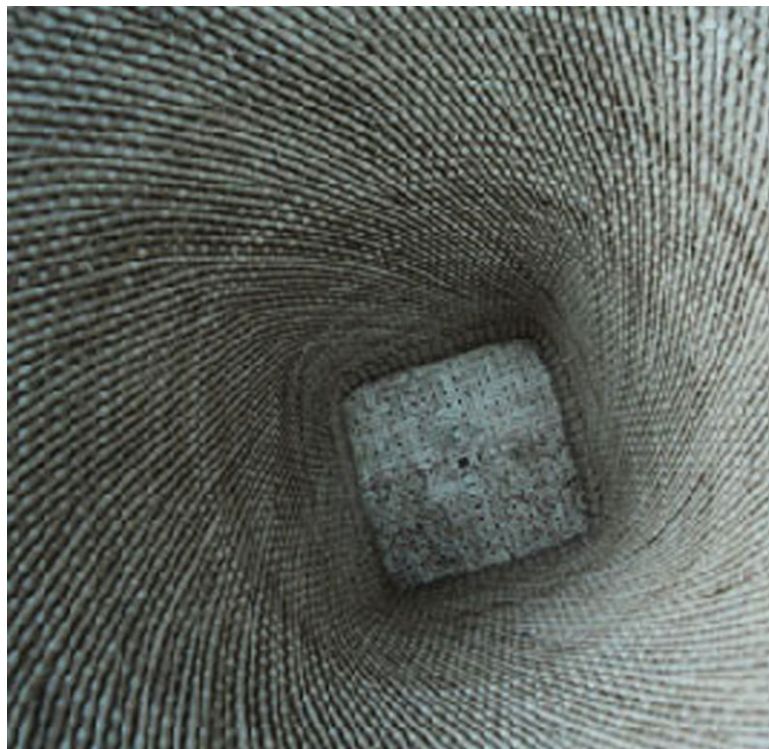
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## Weaving Process

Often crafted by men folk, the basic raw material required for basket weaving is cane and bamboo.

- . Tools Used
- . Collection and seasoning of raw material
- . Splitting the Cane
- . Making the base
- . Providing the additional base
- . Binding the rim
- . Attaching the bamboo legs
- . The Strap

### Tools used

Despite the complexity of the craft of basket making, the tools used are surprisingly simple. For splitting the cane a knife with a long flat blade called the 'Dao' is used. Interestingly for reducing the width of the cane strips into uniform sizes, a metal plate punched with holes is used, as a Die.

As the art of basket making goes back by ages, the horn of the deer is still used by some to separate the strips while the weaving process takes place. Though it is being replaced with a sharp metal rod at present, but yet it remains an indispensable tool. Other common tools are a knife and sharp edgy blades which are used for the process of splitting as well as removing the unwanted fibers from the cane.



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### Collection and seasoning of Raw Material:

Raw material is available in abundance in the forests at some distance from the village. It takes 3-4 days for the craftsmen to collect the raw material from the dense cover. These trips are generally undertaken during the dry season. The raw material is then kept on racks which are usually found above the fireplace in every household. The smoke from the fireplace then dries the moisture.

Some craftsmen have begun cultivating cane in the adjoining forest areas in order to minimize depletion of the source and have an easy access to it.



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### Splitting the cane:

Cane is split with the Dao. The waxy top layer of the cane is first removed revealing its inner layer which is fibrous and rougher than the outer layer. As the splitting is done vertically, the circumference of the strip is divided neatly into several equal parts. The strip is then thinned down to the required thickness and width. as the cane is then driven into the die to make uniform cane strips.



Reducing the Width



Splitting of the Cane

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Use of Tools



Use of Metal Die

### Making the Base:

These splits are then woven together to form a square in the centre by regularly interlacing cane strips in a plain weave. After the formation of the square base, the woven pattern is placed on a mould from which the warp strips are then turned up and a continuous weft is woven into them.



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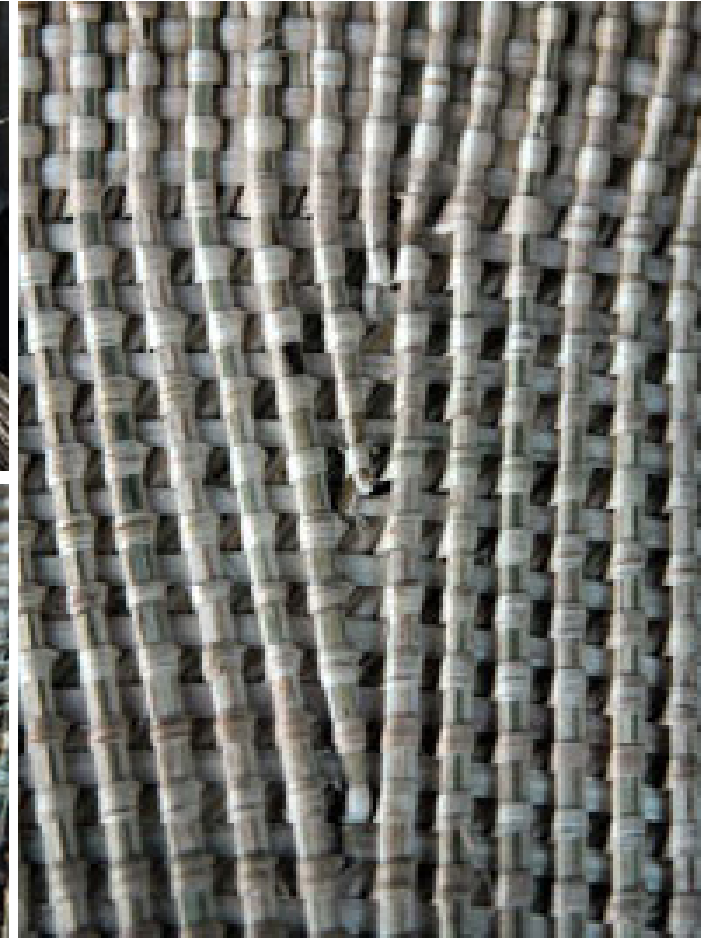
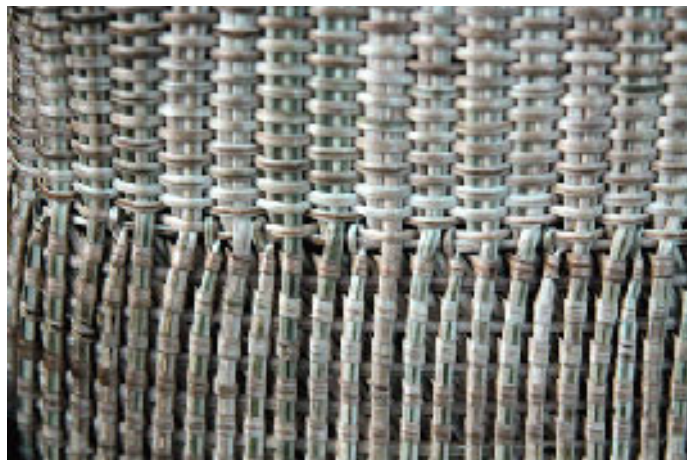
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### Providing the additional warps:

The conical basket has a circular mouth which is wider than the square base. Additional warp strips are added ensuring uniform distance between adjacent vertical warps. A continuous weft arising from the base then overlaps the warps securing them.



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### Binding the Rim:

The rim of the mouth in a khophi is reinforced by attaching a ring made of cane on the outer circumference. Fine strips of cane are then wound around the ring securing it to the vertical warps. As the rim is secured, the loose ends of the vertical warps are folded inwards binding the rim firmly. The loose ends are then trimmed and the basket is removed from the mould.



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### Attaching the bamboo legs:

At the corners of the square base, vertical bamboo sticks are attached to the sides of the basket. These sticks are then stitched with cane strips reinforcing the basket to form its legs. It is these legs which give the basket its name 'khophi' meaning 'baskets with legs'.



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### The Strap:

Rings for inserting the strap (kephou) are then woven into the sides of the basket. This strap is made by interlacing strips of cane to form a rectangular patch; the remaining strips from either end of the patch are then entwined to form a flexible and sturdy strap.



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**In a Nutshell:**

From processing the raw material to splitting, segmenting, weaving, binding and then giving the final touches before the cane strips take the shape of the khophi, almost every step is performed with minute detail.



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## Video



Naga Cane Basket Weaving Process - Khophi Part 2



Naga Cane Basket Base Making Process Khophi Part 1



Naga basket for collecting harvest



Naga Cane Basket Leg Making Process - Khophi Part 3

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Naga Cane Basket Rim Making Process -  
Khophi Part 4

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## Contact Details

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