

Design Resource

## Sustainable Craft Practices

Amongst the War Tribe of South Meghalaya

by

Prof. Ravi Mokashi Punekar

DoD, IIT Guwahati

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/sustainable-craft-practices>



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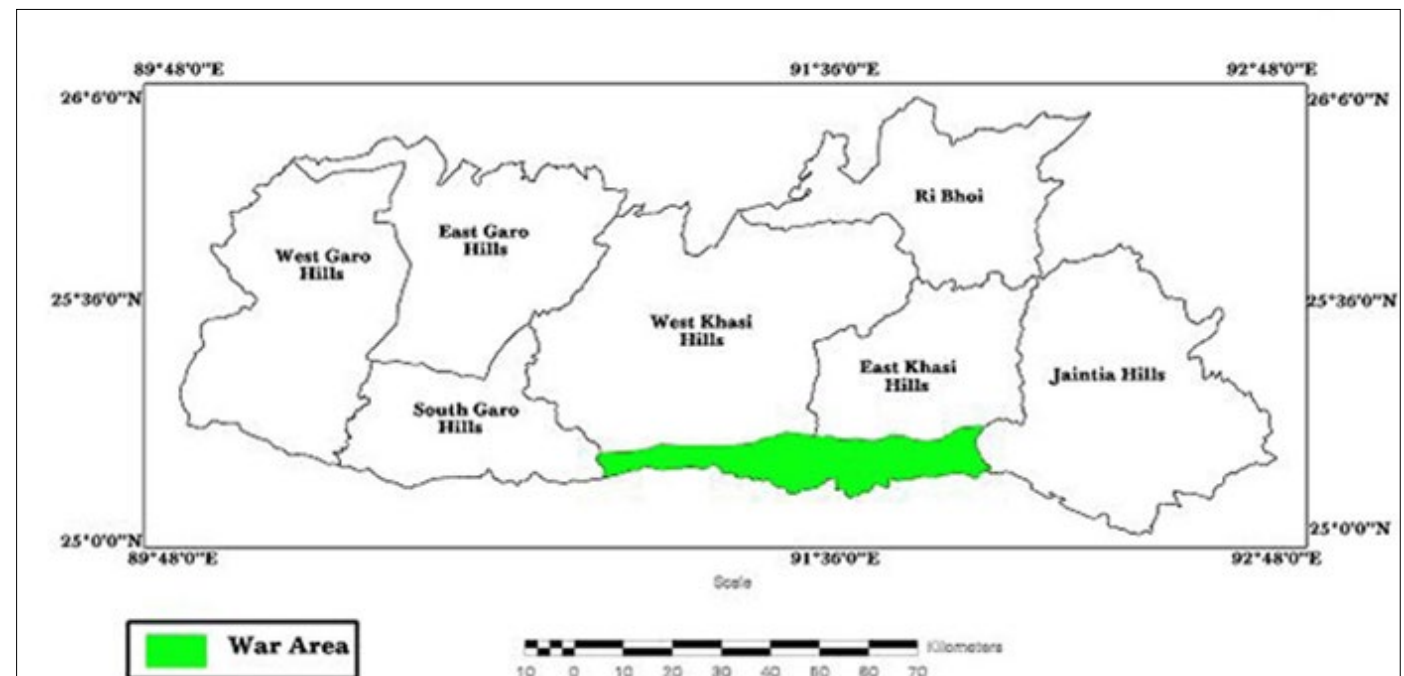
<https://dsource.in/resource/sustainable-craft-practices/introduction>

## Introduction

The E-kalpa Team at IIT Guwahati visited the villages of Tangmang and Rangphlang in South Meghalaya to interact with craft persons of the War tribe.

The War area is located in south Meghalaya, stretching between 25° 6'25"-25° 18'29" N latitude and 91° 57'38"-92° 1'26" E longitudes (Fig 1). The mean annual temperature in this mountainous region is in the range of 23 °C and 13 °C respectively while the mean annual rainfall is 11565 mm. The steep slopes of the mountains are breathtaking, with the angle of the slope ranging between 100 and 400. We stopped intermittently to view a number of waterfalls. These would drop down to form a large number of rivers and rivulets that drain into the plains below. Our guide informed us about the various village clusters that we could see located separating one hill range from the other.

These tribal communities set aside patches of village forests that are considered sacred forests and called as Law Kyntang and Law Lyngdoh. The access to the forest produce is governed by norms set by the community and usually administered by the village headman. These forests are models of environmental sustainability and are used for religious purposes under the traditional land tenure system.



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<https://dsource.in/resource/sustainable-craft-practices/introduction>

Presented here is the study of the community and documentation of the craft practices of Basket Making and Mat Making amongst the War tribe of South Meghalaya, known for the community practice of maintaining sacred forests that reflect and teach environment and nature-friendly traditions of harmoniously living with nature.



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### Tangmang Village



About Village



Mat Weaving

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/sustainable-craft-practices/tangmang-village>



Black Smith

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/sustainable-craft-practices/tangmang-village/about-village>

## About Village

Tangmang Village is located nearly 75 km from Shillong in South Meghalaya. It constitutes the Khasi hills, which are the foothills of the Himalayas in South Meghalaya. The drive to Tangmang took us nearly 3 hours interrupted from to time for a stopover to take in the scenic sights of the mountain ranges and at least four majestic waterfalls appearing milky white against a green covering of forests in the background. The inhabitants of this village belong to the Khasi tribe. The population of the village is 1600. The region experiences heavy rainfall of nearly 8000 mm per annum with temperatures varying between 15-30 deg. centigrade.

Mr. Pariat Mendon of Shillong was kind enough to take us to Tangmang and help us interact with the local community in Tangmang. The village appeared well organized and had a well-established NGO, which is operated under the Pynursla Community Development Block. Bamboo mat making and basket making were household activities in every home in the village. It was predominantly an activity pursued by women of the village. The headman was the President of the NGO. They had a community room where all the craftswomen met. They had also organized Dinner for the team cooked in the kitchen of their community room. The Khasi food is comprised typically of sausages, rice, chicken and some freshly plucked greens popularly used by the locals. Onions, green chillies and sesame seeds ground together in a coarse mix added spice to the hot meal.

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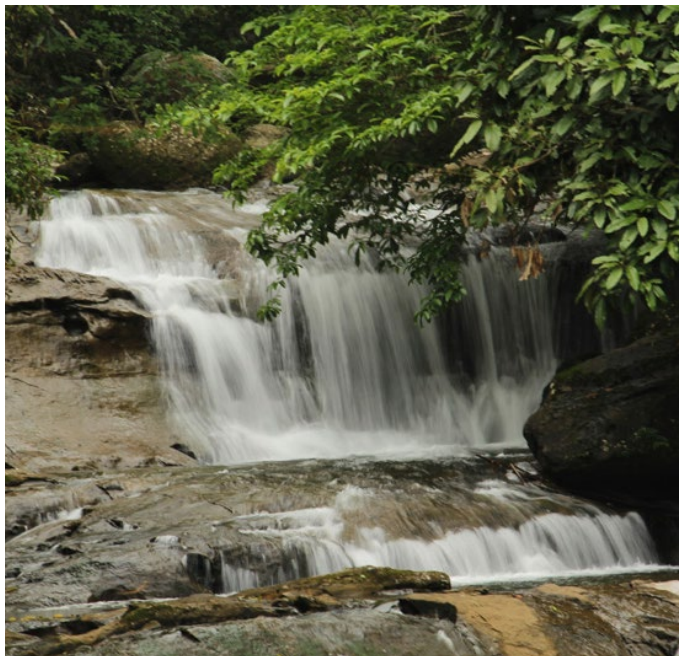
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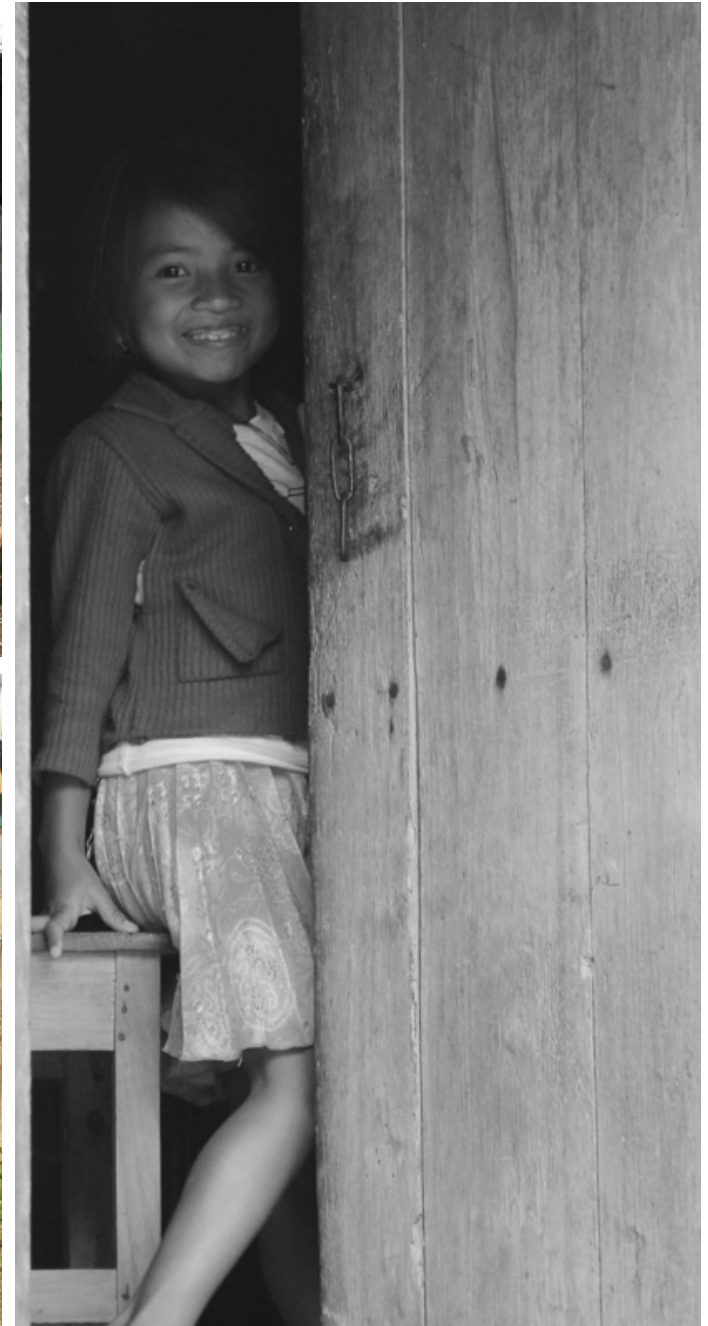
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## Mat Weaving

The village Tangmang was quite well organized and had a well-established NGO, which is operated under the Pynurrla Community Development Block. Bamboo mat making and basket making were household activities in every home in the village. It was predominantly an activity pursued by women of the village.

The bamboo species used by the villagers in Tangmang are locally called Shken (*Bambusa Pallida*) and Rangai (*Bambusa Tudla*). These are usually cultivated. However, bamboo from the forest cannot be cut or collected as per community norms amongst the War tribes. Bamboo is locally harvested usually in the months of December and used locally for the construction of houses, fencing, flooring, animal cages; and for making a number of utilitarian craft items such as mats, baskets, caskets and other household articles. These are usually sold to middlemen on market day in the nearest town Pynurrla.

The outer sheath of Shken (*Bambusa Pallida*) is usually used by the womenfolk for mat weaving. This activity is usually undertaken during the rainy season months of May to September. Simple hand tools are used for cutting, splitting, slicing and weaving the bamboo strips.

Video documentation about the details of the Mat weaving process was made. This weaving was undertaken by a group of nearly 15 craftswomen of the village. Deft hands split, cut and wove the mats with great finesse. Stained teeth, the result of being habituated to chewing beetle leaves was an impression left between us as we heard their Khasi chatter, as they worked along.

**Mat Weaving Process:**





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## Black Smith

On way to Tangmang, we stopped over at a village to interact with one of the local metalsmiths who was reputed for being very innovative with crafting hand tools at his smithy workshop. His range of hand tools found a good market amongst the locals of the region.



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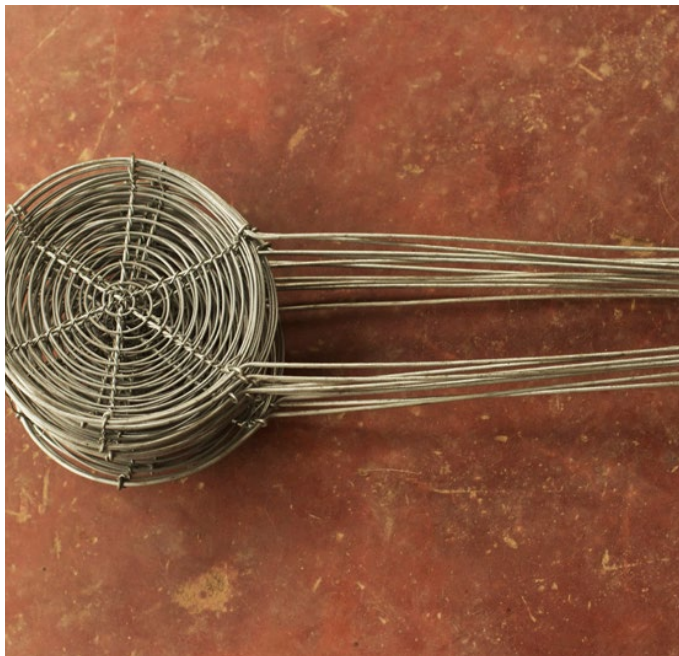
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## Rangphlang Village

There is a nip in the air as one left Shillong heading towards the town of Smit some 20 km along the Longksha Mawkyntse road and heads further climbing uphill to reach Thangsnang. The drive up the mountain leads to an abrupt narrow dead-end road with nothing but the skyline of the mountain range and the horizon beyond. We were asked to leave the car and ready ourselves for the adventurous trek ahead.

Three and a half kilometers of a stretch of pathway along rock-cut steps down the mountain trail winding itself around the spiralling mountain track leaving us breathless with the most dramatic sights of drifting clouds caressing landscapes against the horizon beyond. All this as we trudged along, caught between steps taken cautiously one at a time, tiring bones and sweaty t-shirts, steadily heading to the village of Rangphlang. There was a lesson to be learnt from the few locals who went past us – while in the mountains, harmonize your approach to be one with nature.



About Village



Basket Making



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## About Village

Entry to the village appeared as an Ariel view against the sparkle of tin-top roofs dotted at a distance, appearing as mirrored reflections on a sunny day. A stream of ice cool water emanating from a naked pipe appearing from nowhere seemed to welcome the homecoming guest to the village. The stream of water seems to carry with it the faint musical sound of the children in the village school below.

The last 200 steps leading down to the village seemed like a mile long for tired feet. We had finally reached Rangphlang village.

Rangphlang village is nested in Khasi Hills in South Meghalaya, which forms the foothills of the Himalayas. It comprises 80 households with a population of 500 people. People of this village belong to the War Tribe and follow Christianity. Some of the youth were busy with the construction of a church for their community. We gathered from literature, that traditionally the people of the War tribe are known for possessing rich traditional knowledge in the domain of healthcare, fisheries, forest management, pest management, etc. (Tynsong and Tiwari 2008) that have been passed on from many generations.

The population density seemed very sparse and life really tough. We were informed that horticulture, forestry and fisheries were the principal occupations of the people. Most villages would have one or more herbal practitioners and the locals usually use some form of folk medicine for their health care. Most of the herbs are collected from the natural forests or village forests or home gardens indicating the wealth of traditional knowledge the locals possess. Most villages were dependent for health care on local help and these included housewives and elders, traditional birth attendants, herbal healers and bonesetters. Arcenut, orange, betel leaf, jack fruit, bananas, bay leaf, honey and broom grass are the important products of the region.

We were strangers who had come to visit their village and the village head-man felt it an honour to host us. Food comprised of the staple diet of the local rice, fish and meat served with their homemade brew.

The locals tread the long distance up the mountain on foot once a week on market day at Thangsning. Here they collect process and market a large variety of non-timber forest products and medicinal and aromatic plants such as *Cinnamomum tamala*, bamboo, honey, banana, mushrooms, nuts, tubers, edible worms, insects and leafy vegetables from the forests.

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## Sustainable Craft Practices

Amongst the War Tribe of South Meghalaya  
by

Prof. Ravi Mokashi Punekar  
DoD, IIT Guwahati

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/sustainable-craft-practices/rangphlang-village/basket-making>

## Basket Making

A group of craft persons were eager to show their skills in bamboo basket making that were woven into conical shapes, large in size. These were used by them to transport most of their requirements, usually carried on their back held by a head strap.

We spent the time talking to them and documenting the process of bamboo basket making as practiced by the skilled locals of Rangphlang village. By mid-afternoon we could feel the sudden change in the weather, the wind was getting stronger, and the clouds were amongst us, making us feel the momentary experience of the changing moods of the weather as the sun made its movements towards sunset.

The team hastily had to wind up recording and think of the long trek back. It took us over three hours – a slow step by step walk back up the mountain slopes this time, with all our recording equipment on our backs feeling the chill as the whiff of clouds went past the valley across. Reconfirming in some way that it was Meghalaya that we were in.

### Basket Making Process:



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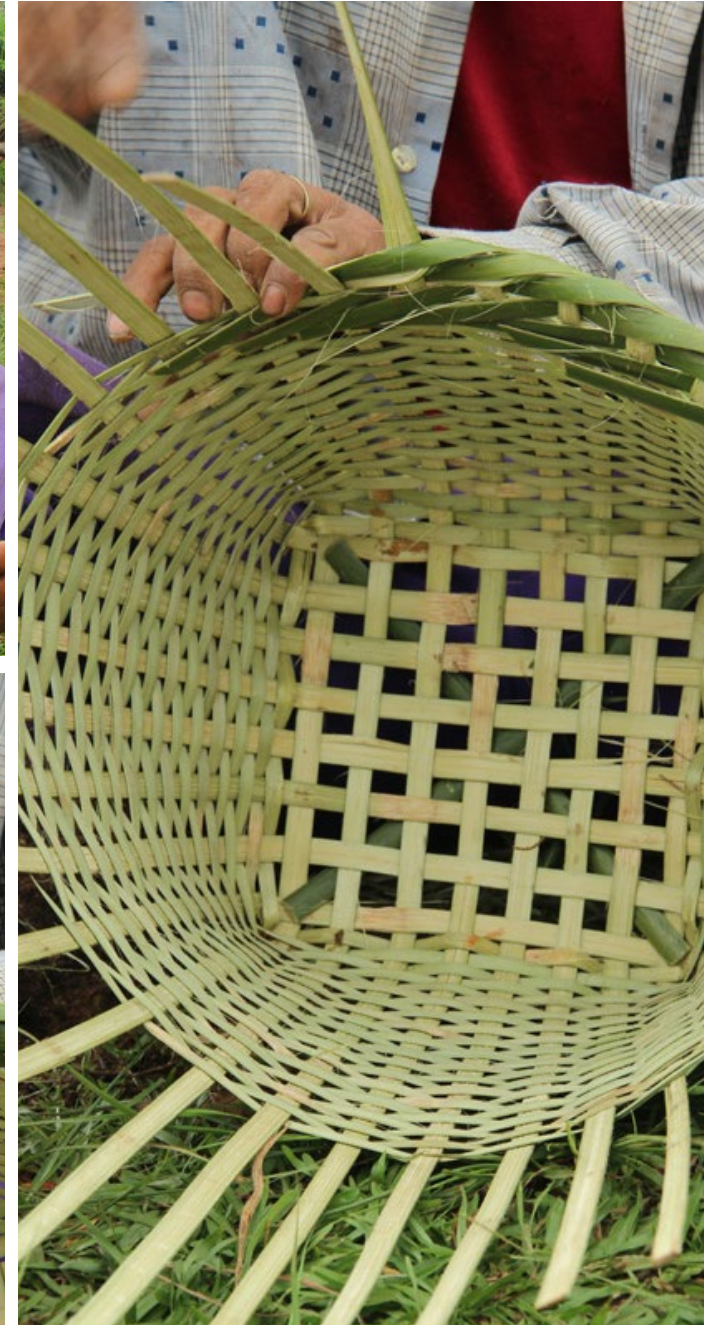
Prof. Ravi Mokashi Punekar

DoD, IIT Guwahati

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/sustainable-craft-practices/video>

## Video



Shillae Oddoh



Spring Making

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<https://dsource.in/resource/sustainable-craft-practices/references>

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/sustainable-craft-practices/contact-details>

## Contact Details

This documentation was done by Prof. Ravi Mokashi Punekar at **DoD, IIT Guwahati**.

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You can write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

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