

Design Resource

## Traditional Bamboo Basket - Agartala

Tripura's Handicrafts

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/traditional-bamboo-basket-agartala>



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## Introduction

A container that is traditionally constructed from stiff fibers is known as a basket. It can be made from a variety of materials, including wood splints, runners, and cane. Baskets are generally hand woven. Special patterns of baskets were evolved according to tradition and culture. The making style of basket differs from country to country and culture to culture and also within the regions in which they are created. The style of the basket depends upon the craftsman and the available material in the nearby area. Due to the tropical savanna climate, Tripura has heavy rain. Therefore, it is the highest bamboo and cane growing state. The state is known as the bowl for bamboo and cane handicrafts in India. Bamboo is used all over in Indian craft and culture. Apart from Tripura, places like Nagaland, Meghalaya, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh are famous for Bamboo crafts. Most of the time, tribal communities use bamboo products for their basic needs as abundantly grown on the earth's surface. Debbarma, Jamatia, Reang, Tripura, Noatia are the major tribal groups in Tripura. Tripura's native people use the material for various purposes extending from fencing to housing, fans to furniture, baskets to bridges, food to medicine. Basketry is important craftsmanship of Tripura. The different baskets woven out of bamboo stripes in most rural Tripura households include Jamatia firewood basket, Riang carrying baskets, Karawala Tukri, Laii, Sempa Khari, Date basket, Grain storage basket, Dull and Sudha - the traditional fish trap and fish basket.

The Jamatia tribe of Tripura uses Jamatia baskets for carrying firewood. The Riang carrying basket, a closed-weave basket used by the Riang tribe. Both men and women use this basket to carry grains and daily required products. The Tukri is a shallow basket used by the Bengalis of Tripura. The karawala Tukri is a Tripura Bengali product, which is identical in its structure to the Tukri of Agartala with the exception that four strong handles are attached to this basket. The Laii is a small bamboo basket used by Tripura Bengalis for washing rice. The Sempa Khari is a small basket shaped like a square-based prism and utilized by the Tripura Bengalis to store small objects. This basket is used to store dates and is carried suspended from the waistband. It is woven using the diagonal weaving method. It is shaped like a deep rectangular pouch open at the top. Tripura's grain storage basket has a large square base with the sides tapering out to a large circular rim. These baskets are made by professional craftsmen and sold at weekly bazaars. They are plastered with a mixture of cow dung, clay, and rice husk before storing grain.

Mr. Sunil Chandra Nama belongs to a family of traditional cane & bamboo craft from Agartala. He possesses excellent skills in making all types of cane and bamboo products. He is a master of all the techniques involved in the preparation of delicate designs. Mr. Sunil is a very famous artisan in West Tripura. In 1982, he received the Tripura State Award and the National Award in bamboo crafts. In Agartala, Sunil Nama's major production is bamboo basketry, miniature bamboo products like chains, bracelets, earrings, toys, etc., and tableware products consisting of cups, bowls, plates, and containers. It's all made up of natural bamboo found in this region. Over the years in Agartala, people in cities slowly reduced the usage of basketry products for regular use because of the arrival of plastic carry bags and containers. Even though in Agartala, people still use these bamboo products as traditional

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followers.



National award received by Sunil Nama in the year 1982, in Bamboo Crafts for his excellent skills.



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Shri. Sunil Chandra Nama, craftsman who belongs to a family of traditional cane and bamboo craft from Agartala.



Hand fan made out of bamboo.



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Artisan working on making basketry.



A girl is carrying the bamboo basket made by artisan.



Bamboo container is used for storing pebbles.



Artisan trims the excess of bamboo strips in making the basket.



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## Tools and Raw Materials

- **Bamboo:** It is used as a basic raw material for basketry products.
- **Hacksaw:** A saw with a narrow fine-toothed blade set in a frame used for cut the bamboo from a bamboo tree.
- **Billhook:** It is a traditional cutting tool used to cut the bamboo stem and make strips from it.
- **Customized Needle Tool:** It is used for weaving Bamboo strips.
- **Adhesive:** It is used for Gluing.



Bamboo strips are used as a basic raw material in making basketry.

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Customized needle tool is used for weaving bamboo strips on products.



Colored strips are used as a decorative and also for contrast look on the products.



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The adhesive is used for sticking stripes.



Bill Hook is used for cutting bamboo stems and for making strips from it.



Hacksaw is used for cutting the bamboo from the bamboo tree.

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## Making Process

The process starts with arranging raw materials. For this, a bamboo stem is acquired from a bamboo tree. The bamboo can be found in all the regions in and around Agartala, Tripura. More than 200 species of bamboo are found in India. The bamboo stem is cut down from the Bamboo tree by using a hacksaw. Mostly middle-aged non-flowered bamboo tree stem is preferred. Once the branch is cut from a bamboo tree, the splitting process is done. Splitting is a process of dividing an object or item equally. The Billhook is kept on the top edge of the bamboo stem, and the pole is tapped against the ground to insert the blade into it. The Billhook is pushed straight across to the other end of the stem, and tapping is continued. Once the pole starts to split, the hand is used to push the blade straight down. The thickness of the Billhook helps to break the bamboo stem into two halves. After splitting into two parts, the inner nodes are knocked off using Knives. The following process is making rough strips. According to the width requirement of the artisan, the width of the strip is decided. The split-half is again split into two parts and then each half into thirds. According to the required thickness, the strips' outer layer and inner layer are separated using a knife once the strips are made. Excess fibers are removed from the strips to reduce their thickness and increase the bamboo strips' flexibility. Next is the dyeing process. Dyeing is a process of adding color to a material or product. Here, the strips are dipped into a bowl with hot water boiling in it. Required Color powders and chemicals are added to the boiling water. The strips are soaked in that color mixed with boiling water for few minutes to obtain the color on the strips. The water is poured out, and the strips are taken out and kept for drying. Finally, colored strips are made.

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The process of shaping begins. Shaping is a process of weaving the strips to form a shape or formation. A basket is built from the bottom to upwards. The initial process starts with making base formations for basketry. The base is formed by weaving the bamboo strips in a crisscross pattern. Bamboo strips with green skin are used at the edge of the base corners for solid sustainability. Weft strips are used to form the base sides of the basketry. Strips are woven in a tightly enclosed manner to make the basket stiff. The initial stage of basketry is completed until creating sidewalls. After this, design patterns are created.

Here, designing the pattern is a process of adding colour strips into the baskets to create a design. Colour strips are woven along with the initially completed basket to obtain a design. These designs may be of symbols, shapes, or any form depending on the basket weaver. Sometimes, the entire basket is made using colour strips to gain attraction. Next is the final shaping. Final shaping is the process of weaving the basket according to the width and height dimensions fixed by the basket weaver. An aluminum pot is placed inside the semi-finished basket, and it is tied along with the basket using a thread. Then, the artisan continues weaving the basketry surrounding with the help of an aluminum pot using strips. Weaving is done by circling the pot up to a certain height. Once the pot is removed from the basket, an increase in width dimension can be found.

The next is trimming. It is a process of removing the extra or unwanted strips from the basket. Excess strips are cut down with the help of a Billhook. The basket's top edge borders are woven following a Zigzag pattern with the customized needle tool. The next process is fusing. It is a process of adding an extra part to the basket. A long thick, bendable bamboo strip is taken and is inserted in between the weaved strips of the basket, forming a handle for carrying. As the entire basket is intertwined tightly, it obtains more grip when the long bamboo strip is inserted in between interwoven strips. The final process is gluing. Gluing is a process of applying an intermediate substance to connect or fix different materials. Glue is applied to the intersection points where the long strip and the basket collide. The adhesive is used on the top edge borders of the basket to make it firmer. Finally, the last step in making the process ends with drying the basket.

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A bamboo stem is obtained from a bamboo tree.



The thickness of the bamboo strip is reduced.



Artisan cuts the bamboo into two halves using Billhook as a cutter.



Artisan splits the bamboo into equally divided strips.

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Excess fibers are removed by an artisan using Billhook.



The outer skin of bamboo is removed from the strip.



Artisan is making sure that the strips have an equal width.



Artisan starts making the base formation for basketry.

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Bamboo strips are woven in a crisscross pattern.



Bamboo strips with green skin are used at the edge of the base corners for strong sustainability.



Weft strips are used to form the base sides of the basket.



Strips are woven tightly to make the sides stiff.

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The initial stage of basket making process.



Bamboo strips dipped into the colour mixed boiling water to colour the strips.



Dipped strips are kept outside for drying.



Artisan using coloured strips to create an attractive pattern on the basket.

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Artisan starts weaving using coloured strips to obtain a design pattern.



Artisan pulling the attached strips to make it tight.



An aluminum pot is placed inside the basket to increase the width dimension.



Thread is used to tie the pot along with the basket.

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Artisan starts weaving surrounding the pot.



The aluminum pot is removed, and the top edge border is made.



Excess strips are cut down using Billhook.



Artisan using customized needle tool in the top border to create gaps between weaved rows and columns.

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Strips are attached in a zigzag manner as a final design in the top border.



The long strip is inserted between weaved patterns for more grip.



The long, strip is inserted between weaved patterns for more grip.



Artisan applies glue on the top edges of the basket.

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Glue is added on the intersection points where the long strip and basket collide.



Final Product.



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## Products

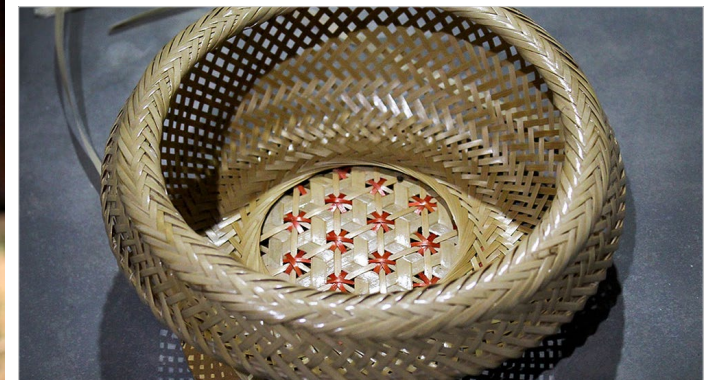
Shri. Sunil Nama sells his Basketry products in his own home, also in the local markets and shops, in and around Agartala district, Tripura. He sells products like Bamboo Basketry items, miniature bamboo products like chains, bracelets, earrings, toys, etc., and also tableware basketry products, which consist of cups, bowls, plates, and containers. All the products sold here are made out of bamboo. He sells his products from 200 INR to 2000 INR, and the size of the miniature products starts from 0.5mm to 1.5 feet, and the basketry product size starts from 3.5 inches to 4 feet. A standard price list is kept for making a particular basket as per individual basket weaver based on a specific region. The price is fixed depending on the basket quality, size, weaving styles and techniques, designs, and artistry.



Blue colour saree with red and white colour stripes.



Half stripe and half plain designed traditional saree.



Phoolbodi designed saree.



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## Video



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This documentation was done by Prof. Bibhudutta Baral at [NID, Bengaluru](#).

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