

## Interweaving Craft Traditions with/and Ecological Sustainability: A Case Study of Basketry and Material Culture in Manipur

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### Abstract

*Basketry is an essential component of craft traditions in every society. People in the Eastern Himalayan range use bamboo, cane, and reeds as the primary source of materials for weaving baskets. However, the communities in the lesser Himalayan ranges or Pir Panjal ranges in Jammu and Kashmir mainly use willow, bamboo, and cane or metal items for making baskets. Such differences result from intertwining environmental conditions, locally available resources, and culture.*

*The use of bamboo and reeds as raw materials in basketry by the people of Manipur has its own history and everyday significance. The paper identifies objects and their utility in three broad categories: everyday purposes, occasions or rituals and ceremonies, and decorative or ornamental objects. An extended ethnographic study was conducted from 2011-12, 2018, and 2021. The use of each and every basket in relation to its social significance is discussed. The technology used to make baskets and the vocabulary used to identify and classify the baskets locally with a focus on size, function, and design are described. An interesting aspect of this study is the idea of making local resources marketable and sustainable.*

**Key Words:** Craft traditions, Material culture, Basketry, Bamboo, Cane, Reeds, Kauna, Sustainability, Motifs, Manipur

### Introduction

The knowledge of any community about material culture and artifacts generally transmitted through oral history contains both tangible and intangible heritage; such a body of knowledge makes the objects speak for culture (Svesson, 2008). The art of

weaving as an essential component of craft traditions has been traced to the early period of the ancient human historical period. The Indigenous and marginal communities are known for their traditional crafts and aesthetics. It has also been found that indigenous people connect with their ancestors and family members through the traditional craft of basketweaving (Kallenbach, 2009). Textiles are the central area of study and discussion in weaving, while basketry is least emphasized by many. However, the raw materials used in this craft, basketry, are still locally based natural resources, unlike today's textiles. Many communities use the bark of trees, leaves, and roots to make baskets. In India, the Himalayas' Purvanchal or Eastern mountain ranges are geographically distinctive from the lesser Himalayan or Pir Panjal range in Jammu and Kashmir with varying climatic conditions and thus differences in the availability and use of natural resources. The plants/trees used for basket making differ slightly based on geographical location and culture. Willow, bamboo, cane and metal items are used in basketry in Jammu and Kashmir.

In the eastern mountain areas, particularly in Manipur, bamboos (*waa*) are the primary source of material used for basket making, followed by the reeds (*Kauna*) commonly available in water bodies/swampy regions. Making baskets and mats is solely undertaken by the craftsmanship of rural artisans who can easily procure the required raw materials in and around the habitation site. In Manipur, basketry in bamboo is mainly an occupational arena of menfolk while both men and women handle reed products. The products are appreciated for their different forms, sizes, styles, patterns, and utility.

## Literature Review

Basketry is an arena of womenfolk in Coast Salish (Fortney, 2001), North-West America (Turner, 1996), Central Anatolia in Turkey (Ertug, 2003), Yokuts or Yokoch, Mono, and Sierra Miwok in Central California (Bissonnette, 2003), Orang Ulu in Belaga, Malaysia (Sahari, 2013) and Nagaland, north-eastern India (Shimray, 2004). In Manipur, basketry using bamboo and cane (*lee*) as raw materials is mainly considered as an occupation of men, while men and women undertake *Kauna* crafts. Basketry products are found to be used in different events and practices; some uses are present in everyday practices of agriculture and domestic and personal spaces, while some are mainly used in rituals and ceremonies (Peters, 2000, as cited in Fortney, 2001; Sahari, 2013). Similarly, the people of Manipur use bamboo and its products in the form of baskets in different ways. Studies explained the basket's design, utility, and functional aspect in relation to environment, culture and preferences.

In Manipur, since the early 1960s, bamboo (*waa*) has been grown as boundary fencing of a house or markers of boundary for individual houses or groups of houses related to each other as part of extended or joint families. The pattern of houses and bamboo arrays demarcate as borders, and this quickly helps any stranger identify lineage or clan group-based close members settled in a locality. Bamboo was considered the primary source for making huts and traditional houses. People from the hills of *Thanga* in the *Loktak* Lake region would, in particular, come out to the nearby mainland localities to buy bamboo or collect it from their relatives who stay closer to them. The availability of bamboo in the *Thanga* locality is lower than in the nearby villages on the mainland. The uses of bamboo by the people of *Thanga* fisher folk are noteworthy as its utility is observed in their everyday practices and basic survival needs. They use bamboo in making floating huts in the *Loktak* Lake, keeping the photos (thick grassy mass present in the lake) at dedicated fishing sites, and creating fishing traps and implements. The bamboo is also a significant constituent of the walls of a *kaccha* house in Manipur. Almost all the houses in Manipur in rural areas are made of *kaccha* walls prepared with vertically placed interwoven bamboo pieces plastered with a mixture of straw and mud. Unlike contemporary times, bamboo was used in urban areas for making fences and was readily available at lower prices.

However, in the last few years, bamboo as a multipurpose resource has been dwindling day by day due to changing livelihood activities and lifestyles. Nowadays, bamboo is clustered as remnants as the land use pattern has changed a lot; new fencing materials have been adopted instead of the bamboo used in the old days. Bamboos are no longer the fences or signposts for boundaries of homestead areas. Bamboo is now mainly used for commercial activities only. One of the reasons for its reduction is related to the increasing market for bamboo shoots and its associated food products that have started being produced commercially (Basumatary 2015). Among the variety of other craft traditions like wooden textiles, cotton weavers, woolen textiles, and potters, basket making in the community of San Juan Guelavia in southwestern Mexico has also been reported to be on decline owing to various reasons like decline in local use and rise in the costs of production; besides other factors (Cohen & Browning, 2007).

In Manipur, different types of bamboo are commonly found and used by the local people to make different baskets. Some of them are *Saneibi* (*Bambusa tulda* Roxb.), *Utang* (*Bambusa natans* Wall), *Moubeewaa* (*Melocanna bambusoides* Trins) and *Khokwaa* (*Bambusa nana* Roxb). Some of the edible bamboo species are *Bambusa balcooa*, *Chimonobambusa callosa*, *Bambusa bambos*, *B. cacharensis*, *B. nutans* etc. Traditionally,

agricultural farmers have a good knowledge of plants and their processing techniques; however, it has been reducing faster, and there is a worry of completely losing it for the coming generations. Ertug (2003) mentions that villagers from Central Anatolian Turkey now rarely use reed-made mats and containers due to modernization. Reeds used to be a good handicraft resource for the womenfolk of the region, while the menfolk sold the end products. In contrast to this resource scarcity, Manipur, a state in northeastern India, has recently increasingly produced products due to increasing market demand. Reeds (*kauna*) crafts are produced on a larger scale with designs and products that were not made before.

Considering the above information, this paper intends to focus on the following objectives:

1. The history and use of bamboo, cane, and reed in basketry
2. To look at objects of material culture focusing on basketry and their significant purposes in the lives of the people in Manipur.
3. To understand the art and technique of making basketry and the vocabulary for its identification and naming.
4. To examine the aspect of ecology and sustainability regarding resource use and basketry making.

## Methodology

This study used an ethnographic method of data collection. Some of the data are drawn from a survey conducted in 2011-12 as part of a material culture project sponsored by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi. A detailed account of basketry making was collected during two later visits in Manipur in 2018 and 2021. This study was a product of observation and interviews with the neighbors and family friends as they were easily accessible and involved in the craft of basketry. Family members and local shopkeepers shared some of the photographs used in this paper for which their consent was sought. A total of ten (10) interviews were conducted with seven (7) female and three (3) male informants. Some of the data on the use of basketry comes from an auto-ethnographic account experienced during the stages of growing up by one of the authors. The particular use of baskets during the religious rituals and traditional customary practices and their specific significance were collected from the two key informants. Cross-checking all the information mentioned in the paper has been done at the best possible level. In the cross-checking process, shopkeepers played an essential role as they knew the uses of items in different situations.

## Observations and interpretations

### Materials/Objects, Motifs and Meanings

Basketry with bamboo (*waa*), reeds (*kauna*), and cane (*lee*) works are commonly used by all the communities in Manipur. The products are used for various purposes such as storing food grains, vegetables, and groceries; drying paddy and vegetables; washing rice and vegetables during cooking; fishing; rituals and ceremonies; fencing; housing, etc. Bamboo is the most abundant raw material for artisans in basketry. The bamboos are abundant in every locality and rural area in Manipur. The reeds are comparatively lesser than the bamboos as it is available in wetland areas or community water bodies. The cane is the rarest among the three naturally available raw materials in basketry as it is collected from the selected forest region.

Baskets mainly store and carry goods and items such as groceries, vegetables, and grains. Basketry is also used to construct household furniture (Kipgen, 2021). However, it can be inferred that basketry has changed over time. There are products recently introduced such as tote bags, wall hangings, table lamps, flower bases, furniture such as chairs and tables in the form of sofa sets, cushions, baskets and trays, table mats, murals, chairs, ornaments, umbrellas, etc. These items are mainly meant for decoration and aesthetic purposes. The barks/leaves of the bamboo trees were used as the best material for making agricultural hats that a farmer can use during rainy and sunny days together.

The basketry products can be categorized into three broad types depending on the use:

#### 1. Everyday purposes:

Traditionally, a family among the *Meiteis* in Manipur begins a day by offering prayers in the morning to Gods and Goddesses particularly the Sun and household deity. For this, flowers and plantain leaves are plucked and collected from the nearby areas of the homestead using a basket with handles or simply a small basket known as *pollang* (Figure 1). There is another *pollang* (Figure 2) which is used for carrying mud/soil and stone during the construction of a house. *Pollangs* (Figure 3) are also used to dry washed-off utensils. A woman uses baskets made of bamboo in multiple ways while preparing a meal. For cooking rice, the rice grains are measured using a basket called, *miruk* (measuring basket, Figure 4) and then *chengchammuk* (cheng=rice grains, cham=wash, muk=container; a thickly woven basket literally meaning container for washing uncooked

rice, Figure 5) is used for washing the rice grains. The liquid of the soaked/cleaned rice is used in cooking or in the preparation of chenghi (rice based shampoo). A lady would prefer plucking spices and vegetables using a pollang in rural areas and villages. For some of the seasonal vegetables, such as mustard leaves, cabbage, and other leafy vegetables, lots of water is needed to wash them. Therefore, womenfolk prefer using a *pollang* (Figure 1) to quickly sieve water and then wash the vegetables in a *pukhri* (pond). When cleaning the vegetables with water, one uses *thongra* (steps or extended platform in the pond made of bamboo), and for other everyday purposes of accessing the water such as bathing, collection for household use and gardening, cleaning vegetables etc. **Ngarubak** is a container with a cover meant for keeping dried fish of various kinds. In earlier days, every household used to have a fireplace and above it, a buccan of about 5 feet high, and then on top of the buccan, the *ngarubak* was kept to increase the shelf life of fish storage and also to protect the basket, *ngarubak* from the reach of cats and rodents. *Ngarubak* is found in three different forms depending on the parts of bamboo (*waa*) plants used and the size. *Kanam Ngarubak* (Figure 6) is made by using the outer layer of a bamboo. *Kanam Ngarubak* is used to keep the clothes of the household deity, the Sanamahi, for the *Meiteis* of Manipur. *Ngarubak* woven using *payas* (thin strips of bamboo, Figure 7) is used mainly to keep fish items and to gift seven varieties of fish during the marriage ceremony.

The third type of *ngarubak* is comparatively smaller in size than the rest of the two types. There is also a bigger *ngarubak*, usually used by the fisherwomen as the carrier of dried fish for selling it in the market or at the doorstep of every household as individual sellers. The small size *ngarubak* is used for keeping the clothes of female household deity, the *Leimarel Ema*. The small size has now been found to be used by today's youngsters, particularly teenagers, as containers for gift giving. **Phei** (Figure 8) is used as a hot pot stand for keeping hot dishes in the kitchen. **Chakupthumok** (Figure 9) is another product of basketry used to cover cooked food items; however, it has been replaced by a modern-day plastic-made version. **Bangkok** (Figure 10) is used for winnowing and cleaning/removing dirt and husk or paddy grain before cooking the rice. **Phoura** (Figure 11) is a circular basket used for drying paddy, and it is nowadays replaced by foldable mats/thick nylon clothes. *Phoura* used to be the best bamboo item for drying up paddy, vegetables, and other food grains; it could be easily lifted from one place to another towards the direction of the availability of sunlight in a day. **Kharai** (Figure 12) is used for drying fish and vegetables. A *kharai* is a circular mesh broadly knitted using uniformly splintered bamboo called *payas*, it is smaller than the size of a *phoura*. **Phaklong** (Figure 13) is thinly interwoven bamboo strips in the form of mats that can be used in making fences, walls, ceilings, drying vegetables, etc. **Lukmai** is used by the Ema (Mother) market

vendors in Imphal to display goods and items. **Yempak** (umbrella, Figure 14) is an everyday item for a farmer working day and night in the field or lake. According to Devi (2005), **Uning** is a bamboo container used by the Meiteis to keep salt.

## 2. Occasions or Rituals and Ceremonies

The community members perform the rites and rituals at different stages of life, from birth to death and after death as well. Van Gennep's (2013) differentiation into sacred and profane spaces in societies relates to magico-religious foundations and their requirement for ceremonies. The *Meiteis* in Manipur perform various rites and rituals ceremonially, separating the sacred and profane. All the ingredients and constituent items in a ritual have their own desirable symbolic values and meanings. In the instance of childbirth and its related ceremonies, the use of *lukmai*, *yangkok* and *pumnam khatai* may be mentioned. **Lukmai** in appearance is round and oval with a circular leg. It is an essential bamboo product that every *Meitei* family uses in almost all the rituals from birth to death. It is used in Swasti Puja (birth ritual) for keeping sweets, betel nuts and leaves (*kwa-manna*), and fruits arranged in different decorative designs and patterns as decided by the planner (*Arangbham*, a position given to the person who manages all the preparation related stuffs of an event). It is also used in a marriage ceremony starting from finalization of the wedding (*Waroipot*: fruits, sweets, betel leaves, and nuts, other presents brought by the groom's family to the bride's family to announce the wedding) to *Heijingpot* (pre-wedding ceremony to mark the onset of new life with exchange of sweets and fruits) to *Luhongba* (marriage) to *Mangaani Chakouba* (feasting at the bride's place on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the marriage by both the parties). During the death rituals such as *Asthi*, *Shradha*, and *Phiroy*, *leukemias* are used for the distribution of betel nuts and leaves (*kwa-manna/kwa-tangas*). **Thumok** (Figure 15) is used in many instances; during childbirth, a small-sized *thumok* is filled with *phou* (paddy), and offerings are made to the Sun using other ingredients. During marriage, a medium-sized *thumok* is used to pour uncooked rice over a *chengfu* (container for storing rice), which the bride's mother and father would together hold and pour till the *chengfu* is full. It is symbolically meant for prosperity for the newly going to be married daughter and her husband's family. It is also used on some occasions involving traditional beliefs associated with rain that keeping a *thumok* on top of the roof of a house will either change the direction or stop the rain. **Yangkok** (Figure 10) is an almost an oval shape shallow basket used for winnowing rice in particular, however, it is one of the significant ritual items. It is also used in the ritual ceremony of childbirth called *epan thaba*, generally performed on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of a child's birth. The *yangkok* in this ritual signifies Mother Earth. *AMaibi* (mid-wife/old lady) prepares *singju* (a mixture of green vegetables) on a *yangkok* and then pronounces "ku-

ku-ku” to symbolically mark the feeding of the child with worldly matter. Here, the *yangkok* is the mother earth which provides all the resources for feeding and growing the child. Further, the *Maibi* involved in the birth ceremony of *epan thaba* asks the child's mother to select *yangkok* or the child. The mother of the child will choose the child. *Yangkok* is also used in a ritual ceremony called *Saroi khangba*, performed by the *Meiteis* every year on the first and last Saturday of *Lamta* (March). Every locality has a dedicated site to prepare and offer *singju* (vegetable salad) to different spirits. The family members of each of the houses contribute available vegetables and other kitchen items for the preparation of *singju*. The ingredients are not necessarily supposed to be sacred or one can use already bought vegetables from the kitchen as the *singju* is going to be offered to the evil spirits in particular. The *singju* should be prepared and offered using *yangkok* as the container. The ritual of *saroi khangba* using *yangkok* is also part of the *Lai Haraoba* festival, which is usually performed in May-June. During the *Lai Haraoba* festival, the Shamans (*Maibas* and *Maibis*) prepare and offer. *Yangkok* is also again used as one of the compulsory item in the death rituals, particularly during the cremation. **Phiruk or Phingairuk** is the terminology used interchangeably. It is a basket with cover, mainly significant during the marriage ceremony. Sweets, fruits, and other eatables are put inside the *phiruk* during the pre-marriage ceremonies; those used on the day of marriage have its different sanctity, particularly the one which is unique and specially called as *Jatra Phiruk*. Some specific items are kept on the first *phiruk*, it is opened and checked on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the marriage at the bride's house in front of the household deity to predict the fate of the newly wedded husband and wife. The lady who carries the first and unique *phiruk* is called *Jatra pubi* (the carrier of new life/journey). During the marriage, to mark the entry of the groom and his family/relatives/friends, a procession of all the items carrying eatables follows the lady carrying the *Jatra phiruk*. Three specific *phiruks* are placed in front of the household deity of the bride's family and the rest is kept on the courtyard for distribution to the participants in the ceremony. For the distribution of such eatables from the *phiruks*, *lukmais* are used. **Magico-religious practices** are also found to be commonly performed using basketry products as one of the components. *Yangkok* is used by the Shaman (*Maiba*) to propitiate different deities, to ward off malevolent spirits when treating different illnesses and diseases. They believe that some items, particularly fishing implements, are used in trapping souls/spirits, including human beings. Fishing implements like plunge basket, *tongon* of smaller sizes are used in creating harmful implications to others in the form of black magic. *Kaboru* is used for the collection of wealth and good health in a house. **Pumnam Kharai** (Figure 16) is used in worshipping Gods and Goddesses. *Long* (a fishing trap womenfolk use) is also used in rituals. **Phaak** (mat, Figure 17) made of bamboo is used during the ear piercing or hair cutting ceremonies of a child at the age of 3-5 years, The mat is used as a sitting item for the



parents who would be sitting in front of a worshipping space with all the ingredients required for the ceremony. The mat is also used during the initiation ceremony of a boy/girl.

### 3. Decorative or Ornamental Objects

There is a limited list of decorative items made of bamboo; some of the bamboo made items may include *phaak* (majorly used during the rituals), *kaboru* (for good fortune and prosperity), *shum* (conical back basket as wall hanging), table lamp etc. The majority of the decorative items are made up of reeds or cane. Unlike bamboo basketry, weaving with reeds is usually performed by both men and women together. Recently, some of the products made from reeds in particular have drawn the attention of the market and its users. Following are some of the items listed for reeds and cane products:

**Table 1: List of items made of *kouna* (reeds) and cane**

Sl.No.	Name of the Product
1	Sofa set (chair and table)
2	Stool
3	Slippers
4	Table lamp
5	Wall clocks
6	Carry bags
7	Hamper bags
8	Tray
9	Storage containers with lid
10	Murrah
11	Purse (Sengao)
12	Handbags, Sling bags
13	Tissue Box
14	<i>Chakupthumok</i>
15	Hat (Topi)
16	<i>Chakliphan</i> (dining table with one and half feet height)
17	<i>Phaak</i> (mat)Figure 17
18	Bottle holder , Water Bottle carrying bag

The Motifs used in basketry are present in geometric and pictorial designs. Geometric designs are rarely found in some baskets such as *phiruk* and *liphan*. The most common motifs are pictorial and these are present on *kauna*/reed products or cane products. Some *kauna* products have applique-based motifs that are easy and manageable for short-duration production. The pictorial appliques and designs used in different *kauna* products are connected to natural objects such as flowers, birds, and mountains. However, in general simple designs of weaving techniques are mainly present. Therefore, in basketry, there is less emphasis given on the motifs instead focus is given on the production of a different kind in terms of its utility. Generally, items are produced more based on demand and utility.

### Weaving Technology:

Basket bottom designs are different from the top /body woven by the craftsman. The handles and *makhum* (lid), if any, are made using various techniques that are usually different from the bottom and the body. Different techniques are required to have an end product in basketry. The methods used in basketry are determined by their utility, which can further be related to the naming of a basket. For example, *pollang* is a crisscross plaiting method used for washing vegetables, carrying stone/earthen mud that can quickly sieve water/aerate.

The following table shows different types of techniques of weaving (adopted from Basu and Basu 1975) in Manipur:

**Table 2: Weaving techniques used in basketry**

Sl. No	Raw Material	Name of the product	Techniques of weaving	Uses
1	Bamboo	<i>Pollang</i> (Figure 1-3)	Plaiting/Criss crossing	Food Storage, collection of flowers and vegetables, Washing vegetables as sieving, and Carrying heavy items such as stone or earthen mud during the construction of houses/roadways
2	Bamboo	<i>Thumok</i> (Figure 15, 18)	Wicker	Measuring and storage containers, rituals and

Sl. No	Raw Material	Name of the product	Techniques of weaving	Uses
				ceremonies,
3	Bamboo	Miruk (Figure 4)	Wicker	Measuring rice
4	Bamboo	Nagrubak (Figure 6 &7)	Plaiting	Storage: Food, clothes and jewelry
5	Bamboo	<i>Chakupthumok</i> (Figure 9)	Plaiting	Food covering lid
6	Bamboo	<i>Yangkok</i> (Figure 10)	Plaiting	Winnowing rice to remove dirt and contaminants; Rituals
7	Bamboo	<i>Kharai</i> (Figure 12)	Crisscrossing	Drying Food items, ceremonies
8	Bamboo	<i>Lukmai</i>	Crisscrossing and twining	Keeping items as containers at home and local shops; rituals and ceremonies
9	Bamboo	<i>Phei</i> (Figure 8)	Plaiting	Hot pot stand
10	Bamboo strips and leaves/bark s	<i>Yempak</i> (Figure 14)	Hexagonal weaving	Farmer's umbrella
11	Bamboo	<i>Phiruk</i>	Crisscrossing and twining	Ceremonial container
12	Bamboo	<i>Kaboru, long, longup, lu,</i>	Twining	Fishing traps
13	Bamboo	<i>Pumnam kharai</i> (Figure 16)	Hexagonal weaving	Worshipping/Rituals
14	Kauna	<i>Phaak</i> , sofa set, hand bags, boxes, wall hangings, dustbin, murreh, water bottle carrier,	Twining	Domestic and personal use
15	Bamboo& Cane	<i>Murrah; liphan</i>	Twining; hexagonal weaving	Murrah for sitting; Liphan for dining or display of eatables

### Vocabulary(ies)/Terminology(ies)

Baskets are called by different terminology(ies) based on their weaving techniques and uses. The utility aspect has a strong influence on its technology or design. Further, it is interesting to know that the utility aspect decides the size of the basket, though its technique and design remain the same for a basket. Some items like *ngarubakor pollang* are identified with similar terminology, though different materials are used depending on their utilization. For example, *ngarubak* made of *kanam waa* (outer layer of bamboo), is meant to keep clothes of the household deity, the *Sanamahi*. *Ngarubak*, made of bamboo strips called *payas* (the vertical strips of bamboo after roughly scrapping the outer layer and removing the innermost layer), are used to store fish and keep fish and salt during a marriage ceremony. Smaller size *ngarubak* are used for keeping jewelry or gift-giving containers in present times. The fish sellers use the largest size of around 1 and ½ feet in length. Thus, the same terminology for a particular product also suggests different meanings and purposes due to the materials used and sizes produced. Size and shape as criteria are essential in identifying a basket product name-wise and its utility in bamboo and *kauna* products. So, name, size, and pattern are entangled and reflected in the vocabularies present. For example, let's take the example of *thumok*. It is an all-encompassing generalized terminology for measuring paddy. There are three specific types for measuring paddy based on the size differences. The three *thumok* types are *Laitang*, *Likhai*, and *Sangbai*. The *laitang* is the smallest, *likhai* is double the *laitang* and *sangbai* (Figure 18) is double the *likhai*. Two *sangbais* make a *bora* (one jute gunny bag of standard size used in measuring the paddy which is equivalent to the term *potma*). So, the vocabularies used are linked to its function or size. Function or size is, therefore, one of the determining factors for identification with a name and categorization or classification of baskets. Size and function is, thus, important in naming a product. Specific techniques are also required to produce different functions/purposes baskets with different names.

### Gender and Basketry

The knowledge and art of basketry are shared among community members and relatives. Some of the weavers learn this art as a compulsory livelihood opportunity. Traditionally, every house, particularly in villages, has one older person acquainted with making bamboo baskets. This was mainly due to bamboo's abundance and easy availability as a raw material. Women in the village usually are not involved in basket making. However, it is found to be practiced in some rare cases. Regarding the basketry using *kauna* (reeds), womenfolk are mainly engaged than the men. Both groups help each other in completing

a piece of work or product. Youngsters, in their leisure time, help their parents prepare *kauna* crafts. Nowadays, because of market demand, some of the weaving centers of Kuana are successfully employing a good number of people for the production process. Cane products are also prepared, though their rate of production is lesser and costlier.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Basketry as an art is quite a significant part of the craft traditions in people's everyday lives in Manipur. It is one of the most commonly used material cultures. In many societies, it is the domain of womenfolk. In contemporary times, both men and women pursue weaving as an art. Both actively participate in meeting the requirements and demands of the products. This art has the potential to become a good source of income. If it is discussed in terms of utility and availability, it is used in multiple ways. It has different styles and is found in all activities, from daily activities to ceremonial rituals. Understanding everyday practices shows that baskets are used for all purposes, and every household must have at least ten (10) items listed above. The frequency of use may vary from family to family as there are many alternatives in the form of similar utility with different materials such as plastic or synthetic materials. However, some items, such as *thumok*, *ngarubak*, *yangkok*, *kharai*, *lukmai*, *phaak*, *murrah* are always important material for every *Meitei* house. The utility of such baskets of both bamboo and reeds (*kauna*) is exemplified in various life situations, and it is confirmed that other alternative items or materials cannot easily replace the values of such items. There are differences in the types of raw materials used, particularly in the case of the *Meiteis* in Manipur. However, it is also known that the raw materials used to produce such baskets have been reduced daily. It is interesting to add here that there are entrepreneurial efforts of crop plantation of such raw materials. Identifying other natural resources for the extraction of fibers is also increasing. Mention may be made of lotus plant stalk for fiber, use of kitchen refuse for herbal dye, plantation of Roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*). Such efforts may take time to replenish the dwindling resource demand though it is also undeniable that changes may take place in the future. Regarding motifs, it can be considered as the least significant component of the bamboo basket products used by the *Meitei* community in Manipur. The designs of weaving or techniques involved in the creation of a product are much more significant than the motifs. Weaving designs are the identifying criteria for deciding a basket in terms of its utility. Therefore, technology of weaving is much important in creating different designs. It is also imperative to know that terminologies used for different baskets can be significant to their associated meanings. The present study has

shown some of its associated meanings though a deeper engagement with the vocabularies is necessary.

Basket making as a product of local cultural specialty of material culture and a cultural tourism product can improve the livelihoods of people in rural economy, as has been argued by Mbaiwa (2004). The local economic and livelihood-boosting role of basketry craft in the context of Manipur, specifically the northeastern region as a whole, has immense potential, and sustained efforts by the government can produce economic prosperity for the rural people. The use of local raw materials reflects the inherent strength of the local material culture nurtured through eco-friendly and ecologically sustainable practices by the people of Manipur. Sun and Liu (2022) also argue that the sustainability problem of intangible cultural heritage products, including bamboo basketry craft, is linked with the industry's sustainability with a focus on design and production technology. In the case of Manipur, the knowledge of craft traditions remains an essential and central part of the culture, and preservation of such ecologically sustainable practices is part of everyday life.

In brief, it can be argued that using bamboo, cane, and reeds in basketry remains the primary source of material for people in Manipur. The genesis of it can be traced to its surrounding environment that favors the production of certain raw materials. In our study, bamboo and reeds are much more environmentally favorable products for their large-scale production and use in basketry. The entanglement of raw materials and human requirements for survival and continuity is translated through creative works, resulting in different appliances and products for different purposes. The products are influenced and shaped by the people's life situations, whether daily-based items or rituals/ceremonial. The vocabularies used have a linkage with the function of the baskets identified. There is a strong sense of using eco-friendly and sustainable materials among most people, including today's younger generation. Considering this consciousness, it is high time people use all the products judiciously in today's consumerist culture.

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List of Illustrations:



Figure 1: *Pollang* for keeping/washing vegetables



Figure 2: *Pollang* for carrying earthen materials/stone during house construction



Figure 3: *Kon Pollang* (basket for drying utensils)



Figure 4: *Miruk* (small measuring basket)





Figure 5: *Chengjamluk*(for washing rice)



Figure 6: *Kanam Ngarubak* (basket for keeping ritual clothes)



Figure 7: *Ngarubak* (basket for keeping fish)

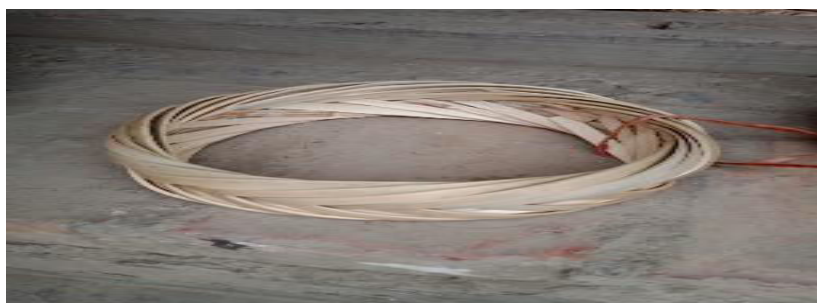


Figure 8: *Phei* (hot pot stand)



Figure 9: *Chakupthumok* (for covering food)



Figure 10: *Yangkok* (winnowing basket)



Figure 11: *Phoura* (basket for drying paddy /vegetables)



Figure 12: *Kharai* (basket for drying vegetables)



Figure 13: *Phaklong* (mat during rituals; wall/ceiling materials)



Figure 14: *Yempak* (umbrella)



Figure 15: *Thumok* (storage/carrying basket)



Figure 16: *Pumnam Kharai* (basket used in rituals)



Figure 17: *Kauna Phaak* (mat, most commonly used as a sitting mat)



Figure 18: *Sangbai* (Large measuring basket)