

MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS ON MAT WEAVING IN THE PHILIPPINES

Mat Industry in Apalit, Province of Pampanga, Luzon

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There are two principal causes for the development of mat industry in Apalit: first is the supply of labor, and second, the proximity of material. This industry is appropriately called home industry of the Apalit mothers and women. In general, their girls learn the job at a very early age. It has been the custom there, especially among the poor and middle classes, with the exception of the very few rich families, that a woman who does not know how to make mats is very lazy and is not one whom the Apalit young men regard with much respect. Thus the women who work primarily to increase their family income and those who learn the industry to gain the respect of the people, form the aggregate labor for the development of the industry. The increased demand for mats has recently encouraged the mat weavers.

The material used is the leaves of the *huri* palm. The plant grows abundantly in Arayat; but the facility of transportation is such that, though the plant does not thrive well in Apalit, the weavers can get their materials easily. The Pampanga River serves as the easy means for taking the *huri* leaves to Apalit with but very slight expense in comparison with what the weavers get for their finished mats. The green leaves sink, but they can easily be made to float by using a banca (boat) of considerable size across which are fastened bamboo poles to which in turn are attached the heavy *huri* leaves. Then they float and are carried along the river by the current from Arayat down to Apalit where they are distributed to the industrious women and girls.

In this industry, there is also a division of labor. The women cannot leave the homes and go to Arayat to get the material, so the men who can save time from their blacksmithing or farming have to go and get it. Nowadays there are some men who usually go to buy the *huri* leaves and sell them when they go to Apalit, getting thus some profit for their enterprise. The boys or husbands of the weavers take the leaves in bulk to their homes, strip them from their stems and remove the ribs. The women and children then do the rest of the work until mats ready for market are made. The

buri is left in the sunshine until it is dry. As soon as it is dry, it is rolled up so that the curled parts will become straight or flat. Now it is ready to be cut into narrow long strips to be woven into mats. The mats thus made are called *diawa*. Oftentimes, they first boil the *buri* with water mixed with vinegar before they dry, roll, and strip it. The mats thus made with this boiled *buri* is called *linaga*, distinguished from *diawa* in that the former is very white while the latter is greyish.

As I have said, before the *buri* is ready to be woven, it is to be striped into long narrow pieces with the help of a very sharp knife. These strips are called *binule*. In the process of weaving two differently colored *binule* are used. This process consists simply of interlacing or interposing one *binule* within another. This same process of weaving is continued until the mat of the desired length and width is finished. Together with this process goes the making of some designs such as those of stars, squares, flowers, animals, and leaves of different shapes, birds and some letters. These designs are accomplished by altering the regular method of weaving and by interweaving differently colored *binule*.

The *buri* is colored red, blue, yellow, purple, according to the desired taint, by merely putting it for some minutes in the boiling water containing the color. It is then dried, rolled up, and cut into stripes as the other.

We may say that mats are generally classified into *diawa* and *linaga*, as mentioned above. The *diawa* is ordinarily woven with uniform coarseness. The *linaga* is more costly than the *diawa*. It may be subdivided into coarse and fine. The coarse *linaga* mat has *binule* as wide as that of *diawa* and it takes the same length of time, generally two days, for a weaver to finish one that is for the use of one person only. The fine *linaga* has *binule* finer than that of the coarse, usually one half the width of that of the latter and it takes about a week to finish the same sized mat, i.e. 8 feet long and 5 feet wide, which is for the use of one person. Mats, however, can be woven to any desired length and width.

The finished mats reach their consumers usually through one middleman who goes and buys them from house to house and sells them as a peddler, charging his customers a little higher than what he has paid for it, and the difference between this price and his capital invested is his reward or profit. Oftentimes, however, the weavers themselves go to Calumpit, which has its market day on every Tuesday of the week, and dispose of their mats there to the consumers. The ordinary *diawa* mat for a single person usually costs only 80 centavos. Since the materials used for producing it cost about ten centavos, and it takes two days for her to finish it, then the earning of the ordinary weaver is only about thirty five centavos a day. But this is a fair earning for the women of the people of Apalit, because they at the same time do not neglect their household duties.

Beyer Collection of Original Sources in Philippine Ethnography, Pampanga.
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