
Mat Weaving in Apalit and Vicinity, Province of Pampanga, Luzon

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Although mat-weaving is not considered to be one of the most important industries in the Philippines, yet in some towns of the provinces it is the chief occupation of the women. In Apalit, a town in Pampanga, mat-weaving is the chief occupation of the women. It is widely spread in every barrio (village) of that town.

The material used in this industry is the young leaves or shoots of the *huri* palm. It is not available in that town but it is obtained from the neighboring provinces. The vendors load their bancas with *huri* shoots and visit the town every Saturday. The ordinary price of one hundred shoots of *huri* is 1.25 peso (1917).

There are two processes in preparing the material for weaving. One process is the ordinary preparation of the material, i.e. the leaves are separated from one another and are dried in the sun for about four or five days. We know that the leaf of *huri* is a compound leaf, i.e. it is composed of little leaves. Each of these little leaves is torn from its midrib by a knife. These leaves are rolled up in order to make each leaf smooth. Then they are placed in one corner till the cutting process takes place.

The other process of preparation is by boiling the leaves in a can of water containing vinegar and alum in order to whiten the leaves. Before the leaves are boiled they are torn from their midribs. The boiling process takes place for about two hours. Then the boiled leaves are taken out of the water and are placed in another can containing clear water. After a few minutes the boiled leaves are taken out of the water and are exposed to the sun the same length of time as in the ordinary process. When the leaves are dry they are perfectly white.

Then the cutting process will take place. The rolled leaves are unrolled and straightened out. The worker cuts the leaves lengthwise to the desired width. The usual width is about one fourth of an inch. The worker has a knife made for the purpose, and a piece of rattan, split and smooth, about six inches long and one half of an inch wide. It is bent and used as a measure in cutting. An expert cutter can finish a big bundle of *huri* leaves in a few hours. The cut leaves are tied in bundles. Before the worker begins to weave or to plait she exposes her material to the dew at night to make it tough.

Then the weaver begins her weaving. She uses a split bamboo called "bastag" to make the edge of the mat straight. An expert weaver can finish a mat seven feet square in one day. The finished mat is decorated with dyed leaves of *buri* having different colors such as red, green and yellow. She can make any design she likes in every corner of the mat. Sometimes the design and stripes are woven into the mat. Most of the work is done in the evening though there are some who weave in the day time. The "turnu-ban" system is used in this industry. A number of weavers will help others at night, and then receive help from them. They do this alternately. In this way they finish many mats in one week. While they are weaving, they are singing so their worry of the work is removed. The finished mats are usually sent to the market in Calumpit every Tuesday. Some are sent to Manila also. This is the way the primitive industry in my town is carried on. Up to the present time, they have not yet found a means by which the cutting process is facilitated. Those expert cutters are paid fifty centavos a day. The cost of an ordinary mat is about 80 centavos. The fine ones will cost from 15.00 peso to 30.00 peso. It takes the worker about a month to finish a fine mat. Threads and other shining materials are also used in decorating a fine mat.

In mat-weaving much of the material is wasted. But this waste can be called by-products of mats, for it can be used in other articles such as brooms and ropes. The midribs of *buri* are dried and are made into brooms. Mat weaving is not a profitable industry, because it consumes lots of time before a worker can finish one mat. But as there is no other industry so widely spread in that town for the women, they are contented with it in order to earn their living. Perhaps this is the reason why mat-weaving did not reach such development in other towns. In hat and sack weaving, the same material as in mat-weaving is used.

Beyer Collection of Original Sources in Philippine Ethnography, Pampanga, Paper No. 69. Manila 1917.