

Design Resource

Palm Fiber Craft - Ernakulam, Kerala

Palm Fabric Work

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S. and

Rohit R. C.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/palm-fiber-craft-ernakulam-kerala>

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2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
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Introduction

Palms are an important part of everyday life for most of the southern region of India. Palm fiber is one of the natural fibers extracted from the leaf of Palmyra trees. Leaves are being used from pre-historic times as food, shelter, clothing, and various craft forms. Palmyra trees are cultivated majorly in coastal areas as they support the growth of them, and they grow on their own, not requiring any attention or any special needs of farming. These leaves were also used as manuscripts to preserve the story from mythological events.

A large range of products are made out of different parts and varieties of palm leaves, from baskets, hand fans, mats, caps to accessories. Each and every part of the tree is usable. The trunk is made of fiber strands and can be used as a natural fiber. The leaf and fruit, roots, all of them in one form or the other can be used.

Here in Kaccheripadi town of Ernakulam district, a society which trains women of different age groups which belongs to a financially weak background and recovered from various mental and physical sickness, this kind of good work is going on here from past five to six decades. Embroidery, banana fiber craft, tailoring, and of course palm craft is being taught to the women. The center is open to all in need, irrespective of age, caste, or religion.

This project is important because it enables the women to help themselves. Money for orders is sent up-front, so wages are assured, covering the cost of production, no matter how low the market goes. The women are taught skills tailored to their ability. Each skill is a valuable part of the final product, and as such, each member of the center is valued.

The palm is brought from Idakky town of Kerala, where its fibers are extracted in traditional and a long painstaking method, which has become extinct from almost a majority of parts of India. The products done here range from that of a simple mobile pouch to a large table mat. Pricing starts from Rupees fifty to anywhere between two to three thousand. The loom named "Vimala" which is being discovered locally and customized to suit the need for weaving in this particular craft, frame loom is also used for the production, where the mats can be of limited length.

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An open view of utility box made of weaved palm fiber strands.

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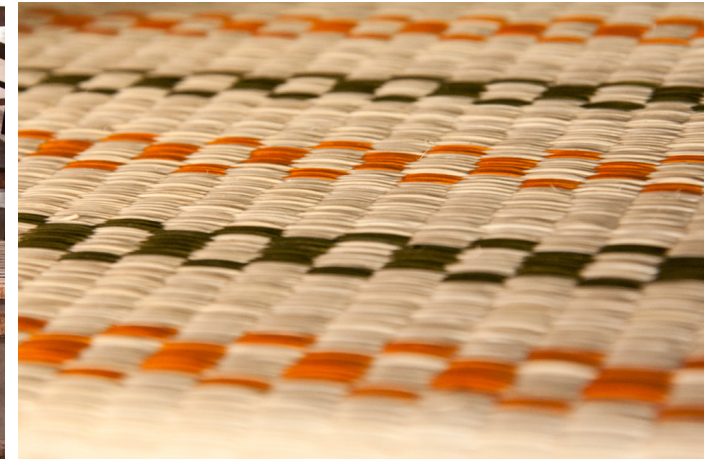
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An artisan working with intricate details for weaving the fiber together.



A close up view of weaved palm fiber mat.



An image showing workplace of artisan, where almost everything is done, from extraction of fiber to the final product.



A women stitching cloth lining to the fiber mat.

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Tools and Raw Materials



Cotton Cloth piece used as lining material for the mat.



Cup, containing water, used to water the strands for better flexibility.



Measuring tape - used in accurately measuring the designs while weaving the mat.

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A handloom weaving machine either a “vimala Loom” or “Frame Loom” used in weaving the palm fiber strands together.



Palm fiber strands - used in dyed or natural form.

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Reels of threads used for stitching the mat.



Scissors of different sizes used in cutting mat and cloth piece.

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Making Process

The process of extracting, usage and making products out of palm fiber varies throughout the various regions in India, in few areas, the whole leaf is used as shelter and making a natural raincoat, in few places it is used as an inscription, more like a substitute for paper by drying it, to depict mythological scenes and written inscriptions, in few places leaf to leaf weaving is used to make baskets and mats.

The palm leaves are exported here from various regions of Kerala and Tamil nadu, where these are extracted traditionally keeping them in running water for around thirty to forty days continuously. These are tied in bundle, so that it does not fall loose and flows into the running water. In this process, the thin and degradable leaf flesh is washed off giving out just the fiber strand, which is then extracted back and is beaten on rocks, to get rid of remaining leaf flesh, once the fiber is extracted the bundle is opened and damaged strands are separated, the worker also makes sure to segregate the one which will be fit for dyeing and pieces which requires dyeing. Once this is done, these are packed in bundles and are sent to the artisan's group, where they further process it. Artisan selects the bundle which are to be dyed, and further it is put into a big steel or aluminum container which is heated on a wood fire water, palm fiber, salt and chemical dye is added to the container, and is heated till a specific temperature, till the fiber strand absorbs the dye color. Once the fiber strands attain a particular tone, it is taken out from the water and is kept to dry naturally under the sun. When the fiber strand are ready to be weaved the combination of dyed and natural tones are mixed matched to each other, to create intrinsic patterns and to give an earthy feel to overall composition of the product. There are two types of looms which are used here to weave together these fiber strands, one being the basic handloom, which is developed here to suit the fiber weaving, hence the locals named the loom as "Vimala Loom" the other one started very recently, to ease the artisan to work on much smaller length of mat, and is known as "Frame loom". Regardless of the making process, the mats in the end of production looks perfectly beautiful and one of its kind.

In weaving, the vertical cotton threads are tied to the frame loom and weaving is started by inserting one end of the fiber strand to a wooden needle, which is inserted into alternate cotton threads and is pulled out from another end, the fiber strand takes the place of wooden needle, this process is repeated through the end of frame. Artisan also makes sure to make a pattern by alternating colors to give a rich and vivid contrast and appeal to the overall mat. Once the mat is completed, it is taken out from the loom and both the ends of mats are tied with thread, to make sure the fiber strand does not fall loose. Once this is done, artisan then cuts it into required dimensions to make products such hand bags, sling purse, wallet, pencil pouch, utility box etc., when artisan makes these products, he/she gives a cloth lining to the interior of it, such that it is flexible and unites the whole structure together.

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Artisan inserts a strand of palm leaf fiber into a wooden needle.



He / She then pulls it out and the fiber strands takes its place, she repeats this process multiple times.



Artisan then measure the size of designs and motifs and completes the mat accordingly.

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Image showing a completed piece of mat.



Image showing artisan marking with a pencil.



Artisan then marks the mat with a template of required dimensions.

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Artisan then cuts along the marked lines.



Artisan then stitches along its borders, such that the fiber strands won't fall loose.



Image showing artisan working on a mat with sewing machine.



Artisan then stitches the mat with a cotton cloth lining.

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Finishing is done by giving it a cloth lining.

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Products



A sitting mat, made out of palm fiber strands, weaved together.



A palm fiber utility box, used in storing usually small products.



A palm fiber hand held wallet for women's made with lining of cloth for its interiors.



A palm fiber mat weaved together in a checked pattern.

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Video



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You can get in touch with

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

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