

Threads of Identity:

*Weaving and Beadwork as
Expressions of Bagobo-
Tagabawa Culture*

Madig' & Pagdunggo

**BAGOBO-TAGABAWA
CULTURAL VILLAGE**

Tibolo, Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur

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Bagobo-Tagabawa Community

The Bagobo Tagabawa Community is an indigenous group located primarily in the mountainous regions of Mindanao, Philippines, specifically around the slopes of Mount Apo, which is known as the highest peak in the country. Recognized for their rich cultural heritage and distinct traditions, the Bagobo people engage in agriculture, with rice being their staple crop, alongside practices of hunting and fishing (The Museum Journal | The Bagobo, 2024). Historically, they have faced challenges from external influences and conflicts, which have shaped their social structure and way of life. The Bagobo live in close-knit communities, maintaining their ancestral traditions while adapting to changing social dynamics (Joshua Project, 2024). Their complex belief system is intertwined with their agricultural practices, revealing a strong connection to their spiritual and cultural identity (The Museum Journal | The Bagobo, 2024).

One of the most remarkable aspects of Bagobo culture is their exceptional weaving skills, particularly in crafting textiles from the abaca plant. The group exhibits a rich tradition of textile production that reflects their identity, artistry, and centuries-old history. Utilizing the intricate warp ikat method, they produce intricately designed fabrics that are not merely functional items, but cultural treasures symbolizing wealth, status, and spiritual significance. The mastery involved in their weaving techniques and the incorporation of meaningful patterns make Bagobo textiles particularly remarkable and sought after, both within their community and beyond.



The Binuboy (Traditional Dressmaking)

The Bagobos have been distinguished from the other native groups as the “most fastidious dressers.” The Spaniards describe them as always elegantly dressed from head to foot. Men and women are adorned with earrings, necklaces, bracelets, armbands and anklets of beads, shells or precious metals such as gold. They match their ornaments with a serious and regal air about them.



The men confine their long hair in bead handkerchiefs, the edges of which are decorated with beads and tassels. A close-fitting undershirt is worn, and over this is an elaborately embroidered or beaded coat. The lower garment consists of a pair of breeches whose seams are decorated with embroidered or beaded bands. Two belts are worn: one to hold the short trousers, and the other, to support the knives which they always carry. In lieu of pockets, each one carries an elaborately beaded bag which is likewise bordered with tassels and small bells of native castings.



The dress of the woman is not any less artistic. She also wears an upper garment, which is close-fitting around the neck and reaches to the skirt so that no portion of the upper part of the body is exposed. The blouse is embroidered along the shoulders and arms while at the neck and waist are designs in shell disks or beads. The skirt is made like a sack with both ends open, and is held at the waist by a strip of cloth or beaded belt. Men and women are fond of bedecking their arms and legs with ornaments of all kinds.

Binuboy is a Bagobo dress. It is as old as the existence of the tribe. All the members of the Bagobo community before were mandated to wear Binuboy as it forms part of their tradition. As time passes by and influenced by civilization, the use of Binuboy became minimal. It started to become just a costume during special occasions like weddings, community celebrations, rituals among others.



The Bagobo's weaves are known as *Inabel*, a traditional textile made from abaca using a special weave. This textile is made into either patterns of *Kinatkat* or *Ine* worn by women. Vegetable and natural dyes are used to color the Ikat-styled textiles that are customarily used as clothing by their royalty.

Inabel: The Weaving Heritage of the Bagobo

The Bagobo people of the Philippines, particularly the Tagabawa subgroup, have a rich tradition of weaving that showcases the intricate artistry of their culture through the production of *Inabel* textiles. *Inabel*, often referred to as a traditional fabric, is primarily made from abaca, a plant native to the Philippines known for its strong and durable fibers (Ellen, 2024). *Inabel* weaving features distinctive patterns called *Kinatkat* and *Ine*, each with its own cultural meaning and visual appeal (Ana J. Gloria, 2018). The *Kinatkat* pattern is known for its bold, dynamic designs, often incorporating geometric shapes that carry cultural narratives and symbolize the natural world, whereas the *Ine* pattern focuses on a central panel that may showcase elaborate motifs, drawing attention to the wearer's significance and status within the community. The choice of patterns reflect the Bagobo's traditions and beliefs, connecting the weaver and wearer through shared heritage.

The enchanting colors of *Inabel* textiles arise from the use of vegetable and natural dyes. These dyes are sourced from local flora, such as the roots of the sikalig tree for red dye and the leaves of the knalom tree for black dye. In addition to its aesthetic value, this dye extraction method reflects the Bagobo's connection to their environment and the sustainable practices passed down through generations. Additionally, the colors often signify various qualities or attributes pertinent to the wearer, embedding social narratives within the textile's fibers (Kathleen Dinah Trocino, 2020).

Traditionally, *Inabel* textiles have held great significance within Bagobo culture, particularly in the context of royalty (Gerald Bastasa, n.d.). The intricate craftsmanship involved in creating these textiles is elevating; it takes several months for a skilled master weaver to finish an *Inabel* garment, with remarkable pieces often woven into elaborate ceremonial attire reserved for significant cultural rituals (Ellen, 2024). The ceremonial garments transcend clothing, serving as symbols of wealth, status, and identity in Bagobo society. Worn with pride on significant occasions, they represent the connection to lineage and the importance of honoring ancestors through traditional practices.

Innovations and Contemporary Practices

In recent years, there has been a resurgence in the interest and demand for *Inabel* textiles. Initiatives like the GREAT Women Project, which focus on empowering women weavers, have played a key role in revitalizing the craft by promoting modern adaptations of *Inabel* products for broader markets, ensuring the sustainability of these traditions for future generations (Ana J. Gloria, 2018). This fusion of tradition and innovation enables the Bagobo's rich weaving heritage to thrive while meeting contemporary needs and aesthetics.

Inabel Weaving Tools and Equipment



Langgane

Describe appearance: Green and Yellow Material



Baro-o

Describe appearance: Thread



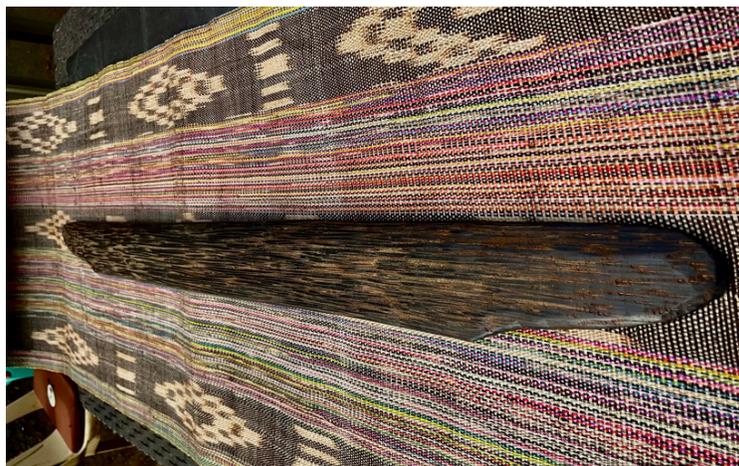
Torongan

Describe appearance: Twork double sided



Bangbang

Describe appearance: Long wood with saw



Barera

Describe appearance: Paddle type long wood

Inabel Weaving Tools and Equipment



Pananaran

Describe appearance: Two bamboos



Baloan

Describe appearance: Cut Bamboo



Ebol

Describe appearance:



Bibitan

Describe appearance: Two long dark wood spear-like



Awit

Describe appearance: Duyan



THE PROCESS OF INABEL WEAVING

Abaca, also known as Manila Hemp with the scientific name *Musa textilis*, is a natural leaf fiber species of banana grown as a commercial crop native in the country. Its leaf stems are harvested for its natural fiber that possesses valuable properties such as buoyancy, high porosity, high tensile and folding strength, and resistance to saltwater damage.

The plant is normally grown in well-drained loamy soil, using rhizomes planted at the start of the rainy season. In addition, new plants can be started by seeds. Growers harvest abacá fields every three to eight months after an initial growth period of 12–25 months. Harvesting is done by removing the leaf-stems after flowering but before fruit appears. The plant loses productivity between 15 and 40 years. The slopes of volcanoes provide a preferred growing environment. Harvesting generally includes several operations involving the leaf sheaths: tuxying (separation of primary and secondary sheath) stripping (getting the fibers) drying (usually following the tradition of sun-drying).

Tanggungun

Abaca selection (matured)



Abaca Skinning

Abaca skinning refers to the process of removing the outer layers or skin from the abaca plant, a species of banana native to the Philippines.



Laknis

Slicing: the abaca fibers are sliced into manageable strips, prepared for further processing.



Hag-ot

The abaca plant's outer layers are peeled off using a stripping tool called *li'al* or *lamisa* exposing the strong fibers inside.



Handstripping. This method is very simple, fully manual but is very strenuous on the part of the stripper. The tuxy is inserted between a block and serrated (or non-serrated) stripping knife. The tuxy is pulled with force from the tip end of the tuxy. It is here where the fiber separates from the wastes.

Binutok

Cutting the unstripped part of the abaca.



Bayo or Lubok

Pounding of the Abaca fiber using a mortar and pestle to soften the fiber until ready for dyeing.



ONSE WITH BYA-O

This is a gradual combing to uncurl the fibers.



SUD'ONG

A tedious process of connecting both ends of the fiber until it reaches a desired length and have it formed into balls called **Baro-o**.



Sa-e

The Baro-o will then be framed into Sa-e, a stand where fibers are placed prior to actual weaving.



Bidbid

Tying abaca (a type of natural fiber derived from the banana plant) together to form or create patterns and design



Tina

There are two methods of dyeing Inabel.

The first method uses assorted dye colors (usually red, yellow and brown), then the fibers are soaked in a boiling pot and air dried prior to the succeeding process. The second method uses the Kinarem fruit, a traditional plant found in the community, which is applied to the dry fibers.



*Photos of the dyeing process, including the use of the Kinarem fruit and colorful dye baths.

Tuging

The abaca is positioned to achieve the desired design.



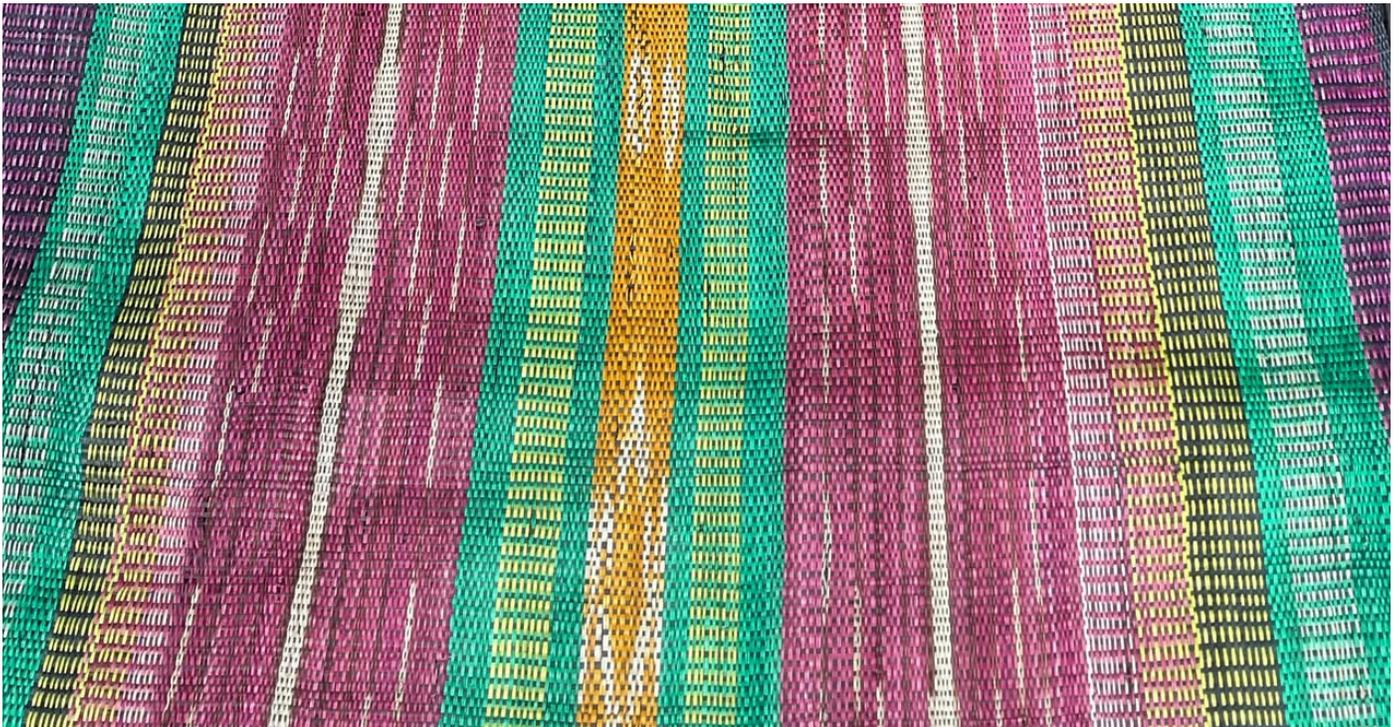


ABEL. The actual weaving process of Inabel.

Inabel Weaving Sample Designs and Patterns



BLACK, BROWN AND YELLOW DESIGN - INE PATTERN (INAHAN)



PURPLE, GREEN, BLACK, YELLOW, PINK, ORANGE - BINANDERA DESIGN (RAINBOW)

Inabel Weaving Sample Designs and Patterns



BLACK, LIGHT BROWN, DARK BROWN - PANGGATUDAN DESIGN (PANGLALAKI)



BROWN, MAROON, BLUE, PINK, GREEN (BINANDERA DESIGN) WITH DIAMOND PATTERN

Beadworks



Within the Bagobo society, beadworks serve as vital markers of social status and identity. Traditionally, the complexity and richness of an individual's beadwork can convey their rank within the community. For instance, higher status individuals often wear more elaborate designs, which distinguishes them from lower-ranking members. The use of specific types of beads, such as those made from rare materials, further emphasizes this social stratification (Beadworks of the Bagobo Tribe, 2024).



The bead patterns seen in Bagobo attire are influenced by the elements found in nature.



For instance, motifs representing mountains evoke feelings of strength and stability whilst designs inspired by trees could symbolize life and growth.



The sun depicted through vibrant bead arrangements represents warmth, life, and the passage of time in Bagobo sociocultural narratives.

Lolen

A headdress (Women)

Galagbat

A necklace (Women)



Sun'od

The tubulak skirt, a traditional textile made from abaca with a special weave, either in patterns of kinatkat or ine, worn only by women.

