

KAINGÁNG BASKETRY

Gloria Kindell

I -- INTRODUCTION

The role of basketry in Kaingáng culture has changed somewhat through contact with civilization and progressive acculturation. Many basketry items once in general household use have now been replaced by cloth bags and metal pots and cans. On the other hand, straw hats and various types of baskets are in constant demand by the local farmers and settlers, and miniature hats and baskets are a popular tourist item. The ready market for these woven products provides, for the Indians, a certain sense of economic security.

The current basket types reflect the changing role of basketry. Changes include: a) borrowing and adaptation of Guarani designs e.g. kre-to-jagně-tÿ-fy, b) reproduction of Brazilian designs e.g. the peneira, and c) simplification of some designs e.g. substitution of the easily woven kre for the once common ěgyja and substitution of the diagonal weave for the more difficult vertical-horizontal weave in the manufacture of the kěj-něr-jurÿr.

This paper describes in detail the products and techniques of Kaingáng basketry. Certain linguistic data--the technical terminology used by the Kaingáng for their handcraft--are also introduced as an integral part of the description.

The various methods employed in an effort to obtain accurate, detailed data included watching Indian craftsmen at work, photographing and sketching the various phases of manufacture, conversing in the Kaingáng language regarding all of the processes employed, and finally, learning the trade. This last was by far the most interesting, revealing many details which had not been observed and which were impossible to elicit by questioning (1).

II — BASKET TYPES

The Kaingáng divide their products into the following three classes:

1. kěj which are taller than they are wide (see figures 1-10),
2. pěněra which are wide and flat (see figures 11-14),
3. kre which are as wide or wider than they are tall (see figures 15-20).

This classification reflects a basic pattern of the language, since all material objects are referred to in relation to shape and position.

Objects which are tall, tèj, including the kěj class of baskets, are referred to as standing, jě:

Īn kākā ti jě, kějti.	The basket is in the house, (house in it stands, basket-it)
Fěnja kǎn jě, ijogti.	My father stands in the shade, (shade in-he stands, my-father-he)
Rěrĭr kǎ ti jě, ĩnti.	The house is in the sun. (sun in it stands, house-it)

Objects which are long, tèj, including the pěněra class of baskets, are referred to as lying, nǎ:

Pěněra hěkǎ nǎ?	Where is the peneira? (peneira where lie)
Gĭr-sĭ hěkǎ nǎ?	Where is the baby? (child-small where lie)
Tǎpèr hěkǎ nǎ?	Where is the hoe? (hoe where lie)

Objects which are round, ror, including the kre class of baskets, are referred to as sitting, nĭ:

Kre ĩn kākā nĭ.	The basket is in the house. (basket house in sit)
Fimèn ĩn kākā nĭ.	Her husband sits in the house. (her-husband house in sit)
Pèho ga kri nĭ.	The squash is on the ground. (squash ground on sit)

In the following paragraphs, typical examples of each of the three classes, kěj, pěněra and kre, are described:.

A. Kěj.

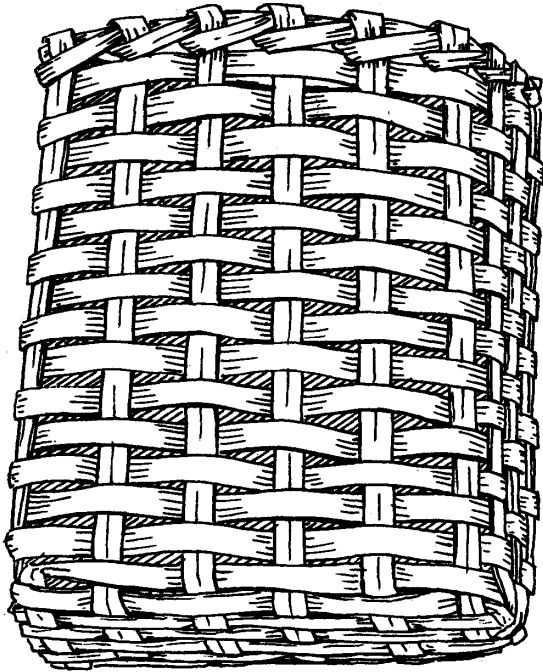


Figure 1

1. The most common kěj (Fig. 1) is a large carrying basket, 60-80 cm high, loosely woven in a checkerboard twill of wide, stiff strips of taquara. A carrying strap of vine or taquara is attached to the top or is woven into the basket to support it from underneath. This kěj, easily made and readily discarded, is used to transport any and all large objects. Miniature kěj, 10-15 cm high, are often attached to a shoulder strap and used by small boys to carry stones for their slingshots.

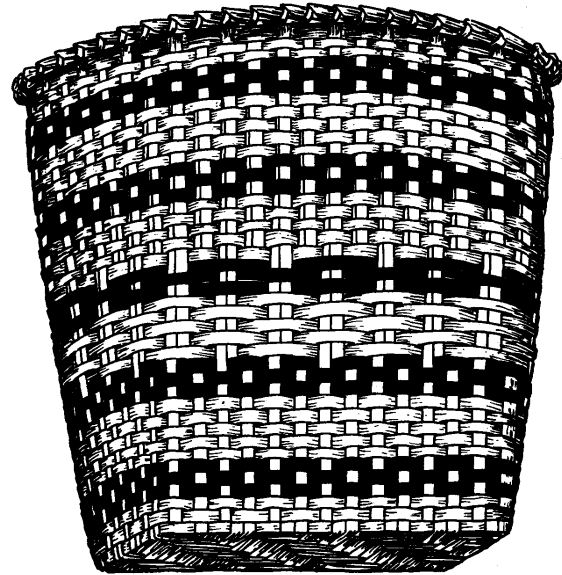


Figure 2

2. The kěj-pě (Fig. 2) are generally smaller than the kěj, with a tightly woven diagonal twill and tightly bound mouth. They frequently have a colored design or special weave. Their carrying straps are generally of superior construction, sometimes braided vine or taquara-do-sul. Kěj-pě are used by Kaingáng women, both for transport and storage of, clothing, food items, and current sewing or weaving projects.

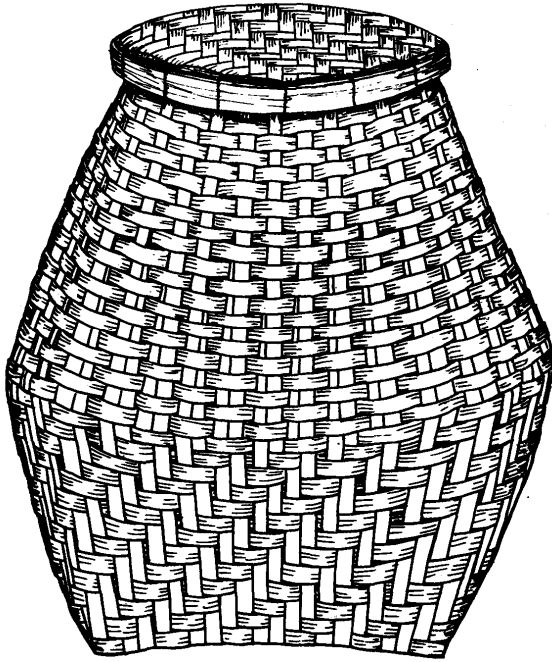


Figure 3

3. kěj-gu (Fig. 3) appear in various styles, frequently with a colored design. They vary from 10 to 50 cm high, are square bottomed and tightly woven, with a mouth which is slightly smaller than the sides. They often have lids, and are used for storage of items which need to be kept clean, such as farinha and erva.

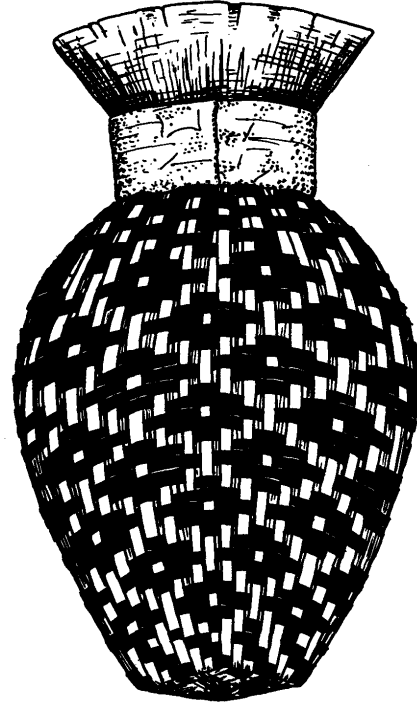


Figure 4

Imitating the Guarani, the Kaingáng at times weave covers for bottles and cuias. This perfectly fitted cuia cover, kujá-to-fy (Fig. 4), is woven as a kěj-gu and bound around the top with cloth.

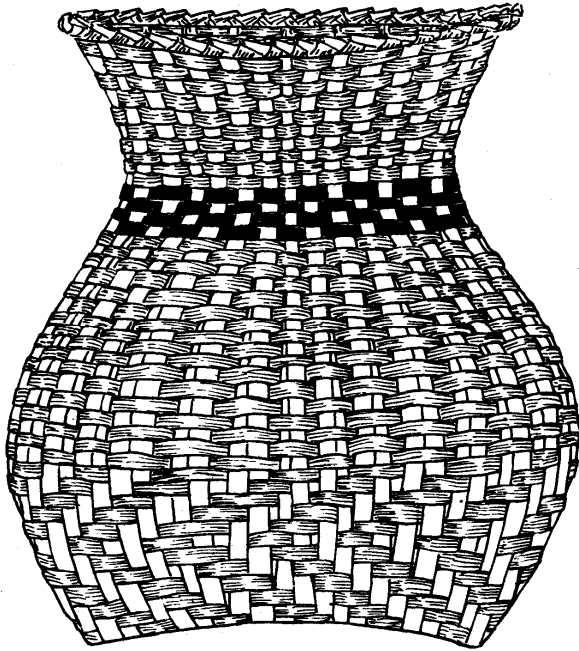


Figure 5

4. Kěj-nhè (Fig. 5) vary considerably in size and proportions, but all are taller than their width, with a mouth that is wider than the neck, and about the same width as the square bottom. Kěj-nhè are rarely found in use now; most of those produced are quite small and are made to sell to tourists.

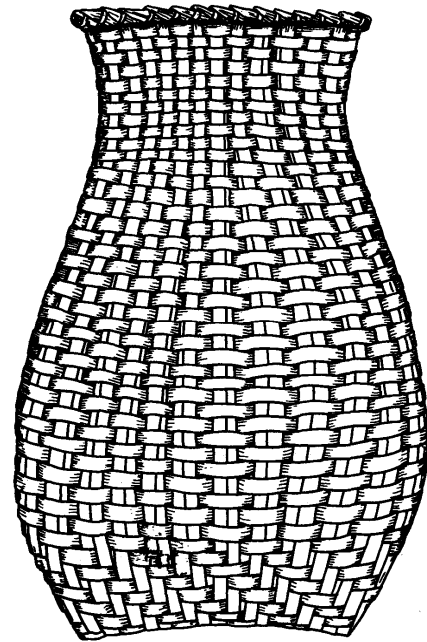


Figure 6

5. The ěgyja (Fig. 6), a large sturdy basket, was formerly in common use. It was often made of very green taquara and used for a popcorn popper. A few hot coals and a handful of popcorn put inside and shaken frequently, soon resulted in a whole basket full of clean, popped corn. These baskets are seldom used today in Kaingáng homes.

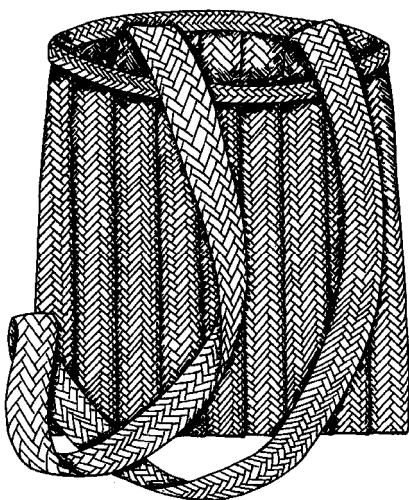


Figure 7



Figure 8

6. This vāfy-tÿ-kěj (Fig. 7), made of braided trança, vāfy, and sewn together with thread, is used for carrying seed when planting corn or beans in a field. Frequently it serves as a pasta in which children carry their books and pencils to school.

7. Kěj-tāpèr (Fig. 8), beautifully woven of taquara or taquara-do-sul, are sold for purses and shopping bags. These are of several styles, sizes and patterns. Many have attached covers and some type of clasp.

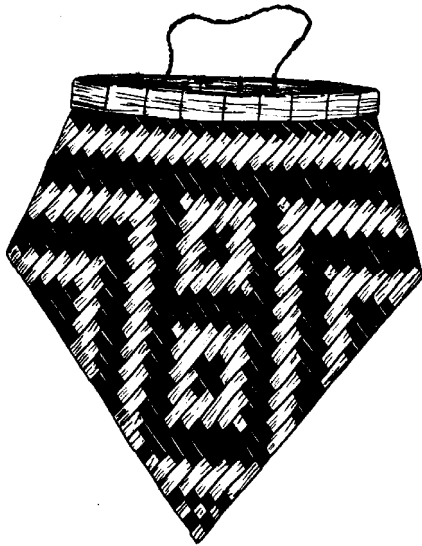


Figure 9

8. There are two types of kěj-nèr-jurÿr, one with a vertical-horizontal weave, the other (Fig. 9) with a diagonal weave. Both are used for storage of small, valuable articles, such as thread, needles and scissors. Frequently they serve to hold the cuia and bomba for chimarrão. Generally the basket has a thread or vine string attached, by which it is hung on the wall.

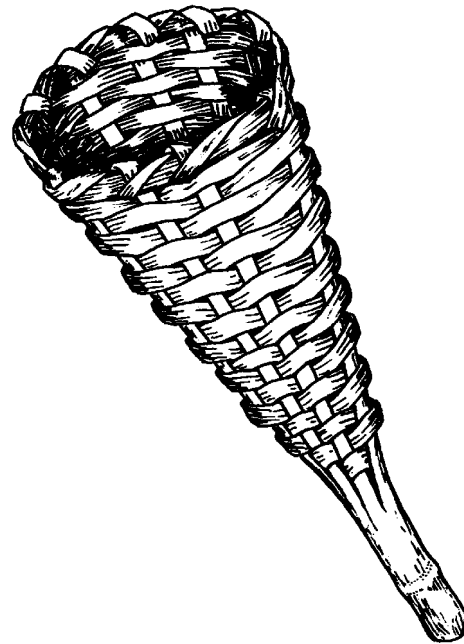


Figure 10

9. The kāgtÿ (Fig. 10) are very simple little baskets, with one partially split length of taquara for the warp, and a long strip of taquara to form the spiral weft. These are quickly made, often by children, and are hung on the wall to provide storage space for scissors, knives, cuias, etc.

B. Pẽnēra.

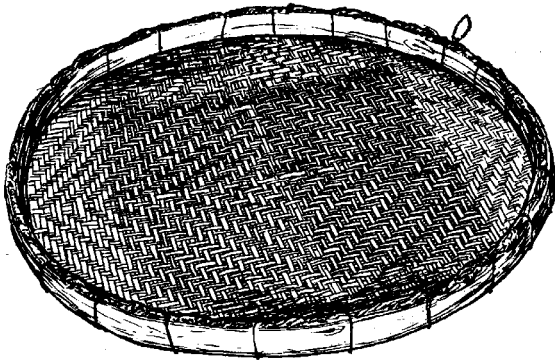


Figure 11

1. The most common peneira, pẽnēra, and that with the greatest commercial value, is one with an open twilled weave, used for sorting and cleaning beans. Its edges are bound with two strips of soft wood about 5 cm wide (Fig. 11).

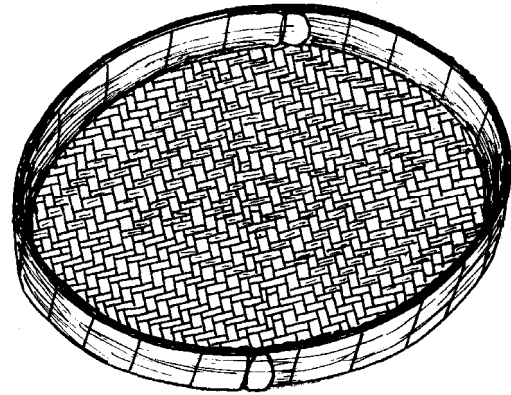


Figure 12

2. The pẽnēra-kyty (Fig. 12) is a tightly woven apa of considerable value. It is most frequently used for sorting and cleaning rice and for holding wet massa.

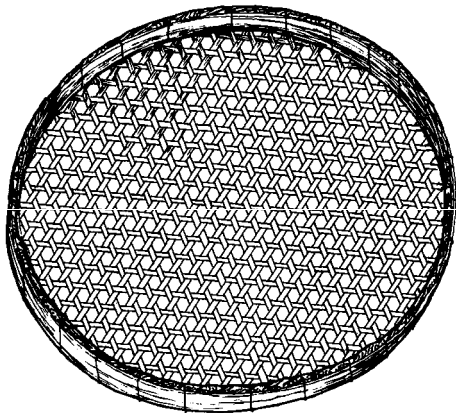


Figure 13

3. The pẽnēra-kavà (Fig. 13), a suruca with a very open three-strand twill, is often made for sale but is rarely used in Kaingáng homes.

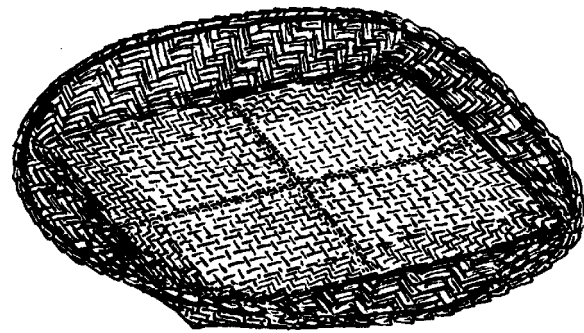


Figure 14

4. Least common among the pẽnēra is the type used by the Kaingáng before their contact with and adoption of Brazilian customs. It is an open-weave peneira (Fig. 14) with a woven binding rather than the usual smooth wooden binding.

C. Kre.

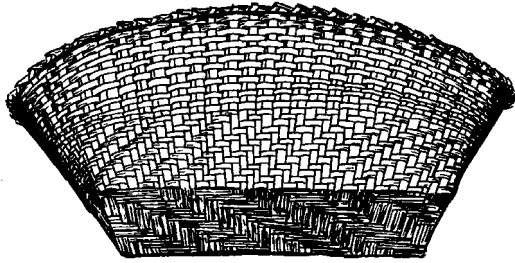


Figure 15

1. The standard square-bottomed kre (Fig. 15), 40-50 cm wide at the bottom and 15-25 cm high, is a primary sale item. A large kre is woven in a tight diagonal twill from plain, split taquara and rarely has any ornamentation such as a colored design or intricate weaving pattern. The Kaingáng use the basket for soaking corn and storage of food and household items.

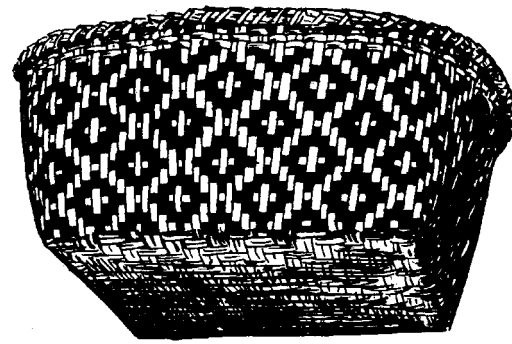


Figure 16

2. The kre-sĩ, small kre, or kre-rà, patterned kre, is a miniature of the standard kre. It generally has a design in color (Fig. 16), combining black, blue or red with the pale "white" taquara. The bottom, and vertical warp strands are white and the horizontal weft strands are colored. The width of the bottom edge of the basket varies from 6 to 25 cm. The kre-sĩ is used to store small items, to clean or prepare dry food, and to carry gifts or food.

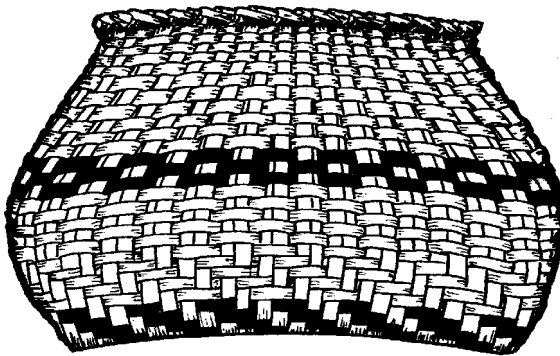


Figure 17

3. The mouth of the kre-gu (Fig. 17) is smaller than the side. Often a kre-gu has a lid, a small closed peneira, and it is then used for storage of items which need to be kept clean or which should not be spilled.

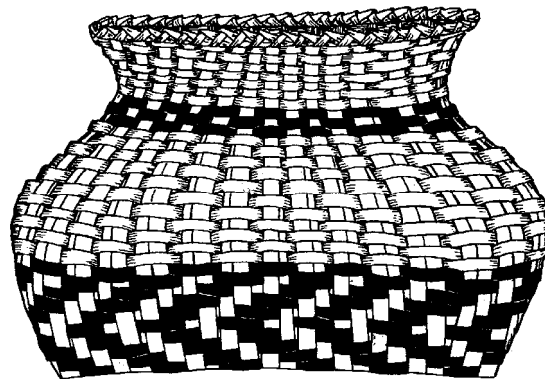


Figure 18

4. The kre-nhè (Fig. 18) has a wide base, smaller neck, and a wide mouth. It often has a lid, and is used for the same purposes as the kre-gu. These baskets, comparatively difficult to weave, are rarely made except for personal use, although miniature kre-nhè with designs of two and three colors are made for sale to tourists.

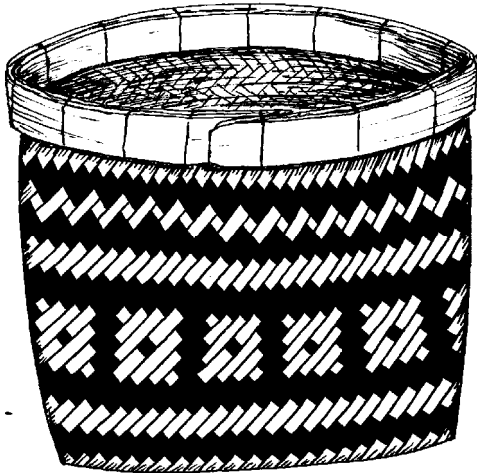


Figure 19

5. The kre-to-jagně-tỹ-fy (Fig. 19) is an adaptation of a Guarani basket, which is now considered by the Kaingáng to be their own and is classed as just another kre. Its basic construction is quite different from that of the other kre in that the weaving pattern is on the diagonal. These baskets vary in size from 4 to 30 cm wide. They generally, but not always, have a colored design woven into the pattern.

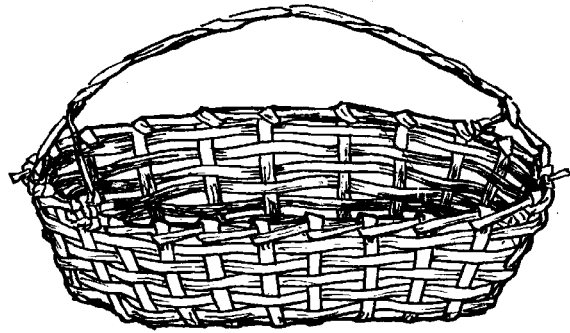


Figure 20

6. In a few instances, Kaingáng women have adopted the idea of cradles for their babies. These cradles (Fig. 20) are about 30 cm wide, 75 cm long and 20 cm high. They are loosely woven of wide, stiff strips of taquara.

III -- BASKET MANUFACTURE

In the manufacture of Kaingáng baskets, there is some division of labor. While material for baskets can be cut, carried home, and prepared, by either men or women, large baskets are woven only by men; and small baskets, though often woven by women, are more frequently also produced by the men.

A. Basket Anatomy.

Names given to specific basket parts are, in many instances, the same as those used for parts of the human body. A kre (Fig. 21) and a kěj-nèr-jurỹr (Fig. 22) are illustrated with basic parts named.

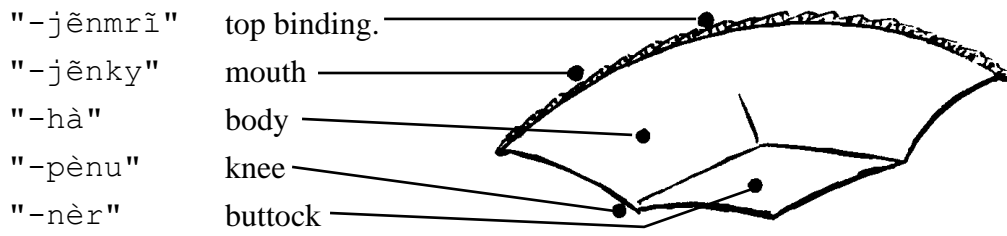


Figure 21

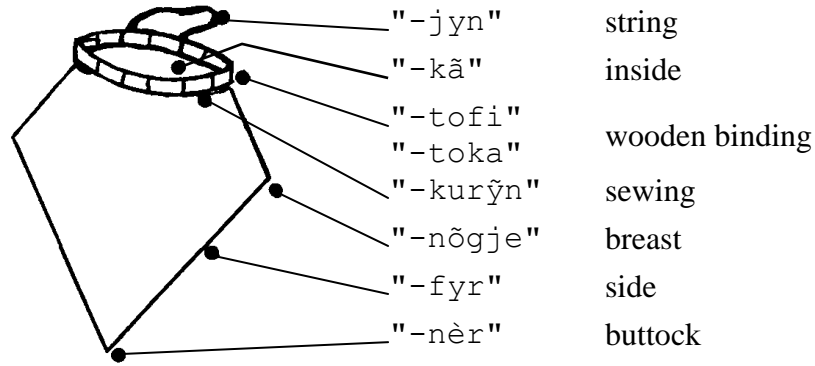


Figure 22

B. Preparation of Materials.

Most of the Kaingáng baskets are made from vān, taquara; some of the smaller ones from vāgvā, taquara-do-sul (2). Rarely, very small, special baskets are made from kÿnÿ, cane.

Following are steps for the preparation of materials for all types of baskets.

1. Green taquara is cut down, kym.
2. If desired, the unsplit, round length is partially or wholly dyed, vēnhpràg (Fig. 23).
3. It is then split, kènh (Fig. 24).

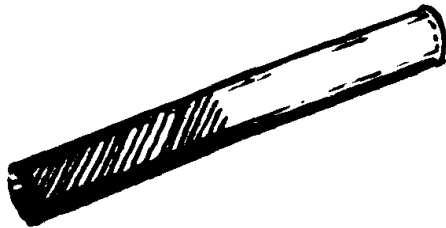


Figure 23

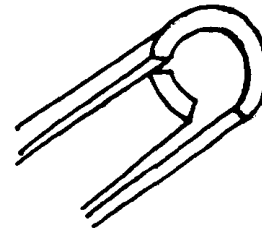


Figure 24

4. It is then out in the sun. rērīr ki vin, to soften kògun.
5. Next the outside is stripped, jugjān, from the pulpy inside (Fig. 25).
6. Before weaving the strips are trimmed, rāgrunh (Fig. 26), to the exact width desired for the weaving strand, krē.

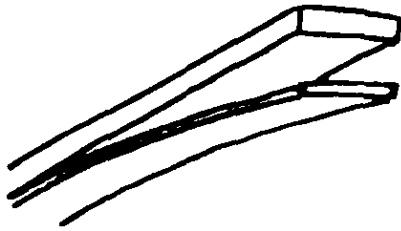


Figure 25

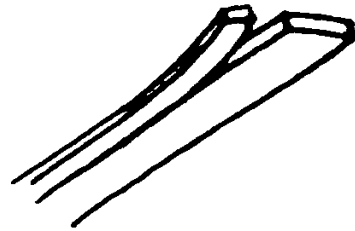


Figure 26

C. Weaving Techniques.

1) Vertical-Horizontal Twill

The weaving techniques described below are those used in the majority of the Kaingáng baskets, those with tightly woven bottoms, vertical-horizontal weave, and woven bindings of the basket mouth.

Basket bottoms are generally woven with units of two strands. Each unit passes over 3 (units) and under 3 (units), with a step down of one unit per line, forming a diagonal twill (Fig. 27). When the square bottom is finished, the strands extending beyond the square (Fig. 28) are turned up to form the vertical warp strands of the basket sides.

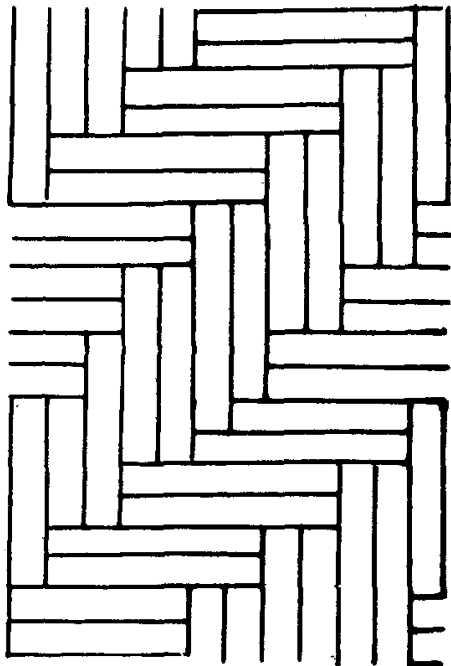


Figure 27

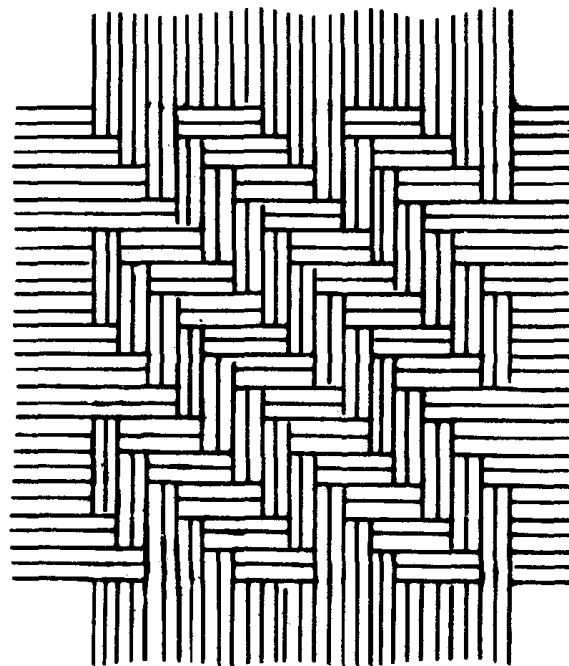


Figure 28

Basket sides begin with a diagonal twill, the weft passing over 2 under 2, counter clockwise (Fig. 29). New weaving strips for the weft are spliced in as needed, with an overlap of 4 to 8 cm. At approximately 1/2 to 1/3 the height of the finished basket, the weave changes. The vertical warp strands cease to be treated individually, and form units of 2 each. The horizontal weft strand is then woven over 1 (unit) under 1 (unit) forming a checker-board twill (Fig. 30). Toward the top of the basket the strands within each warp unit merge, forming units which are each one strand wide and two strands thick.

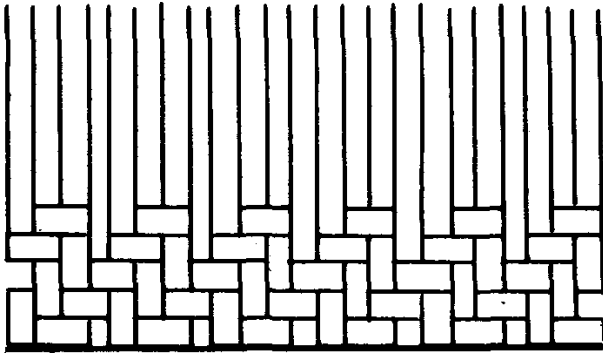


Figure 29

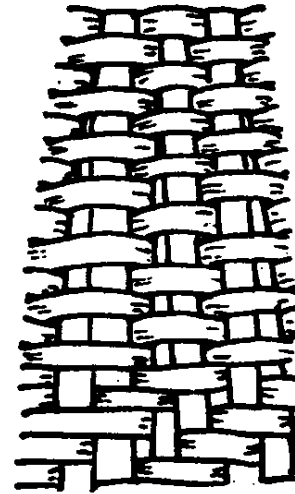


Figure 30

As the first step in binding the basket mouth, the warp strands are trimmed to about 15 cm above the weaving. Then the inside strand of one unit is bent down to horizontal on the inside and bound with a binding strand, jěnmrĩ. The outside strand of the same unit is then bent down on the outside and bound with a 2nd binding strand. Proceeding in a counter clockwise direction (Fig. 31), each succeeding pair is bent down and bound with the two long binding strands. To finish off, the binding strands are wrapped around the edge several times and tucked in.



Figure 31

2) Diagonal Interwoven Twill.

Weaving techniques for the kre-to-jagně-tỹ-fy and one type of kěj-něr-jurỹr are quite different from the preceding in that the weaving strands from the bottom are folded up and interwoven on the diagonal to form the sides. Generally, each strip for these

baskets is half white and half colored. The kre basket bottom is begun by weaving a square on the diagonal (Fig. 32), and the continuing pattern, generally over 3 under 3, repeats the pattern of alternate white and colored squares.

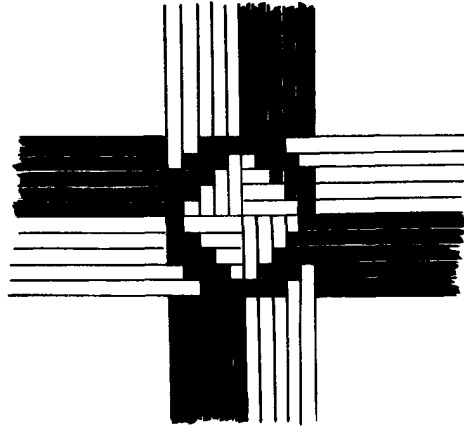


Figure 32

The bottom strands are folded up along the square woven design and interwoven to form the sides (Fig. 33). When the pattern is completed all strands are trimmed to equal lengths. To lock the weave, each outside strand is bent down to 90 degrees around the next one (Fig. 34), moving counter clockwise, the last one tucked in, and all strands trimmed.

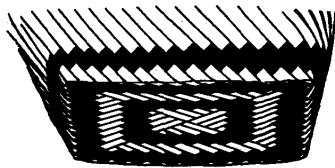


Figure 33

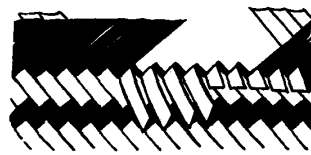


Figure 34

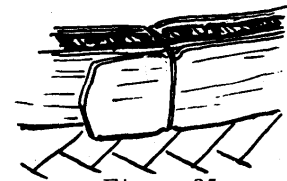


Figure 35

Soft, wooden binding strips, toka or tofi, are fitted around the basket mouth, one on the inside and one on the outside, and sewn, kurŷn, using several strands of waxed thread or other spun fiber (Fig. 35).

D. Weaving Designs.

There are several basic colored patterns (Fig. 36 and 37) woven into Kaingáng baskets, though there may be innumerable personal variations.

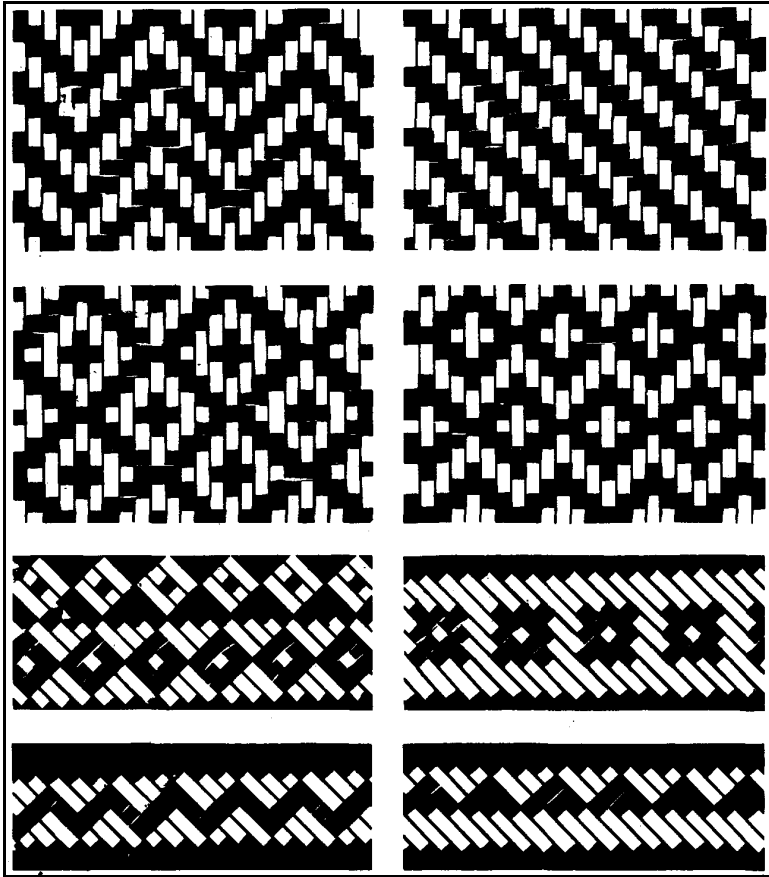


Figure 36

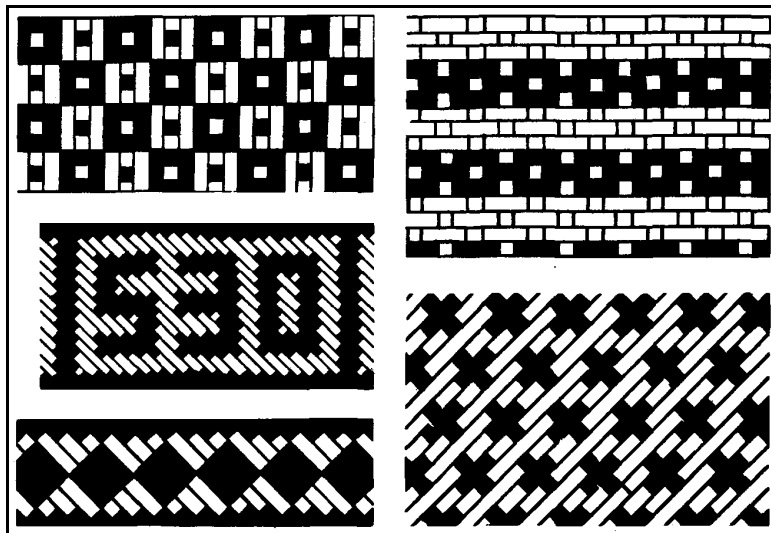


Figure 37

FOOTNOTES

(1) The field work on which this paper is based was carried out during 1959 - 1963 on the Serviço de Proteção aos Índios post Interventor Manuel Ribas, near Laranjeiras do Sul, Paraná.

(2) Specific differences in the preparation of taquara-do-sul is described in detail in a forth-coming paper on Kaingáng hats.