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by Mrs. Kitty Pride, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Mexican Branch.

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There are many remote areas of Mexico where as yet there are no roads - not even those which a Jeep could negotiate - but just foot-paths, often only wide enough for one person or animal to pass at a time. One is reminded of the term "Indian file" as one sees a family of local Indians pass by one by one. With over 70 distinct languages and dialects in Mexico many different tribes are represented having widely varying languages, customs and dress. A number of these are scattered throughout the mountainous state of Oaxaca, situated to the south-west of Mexico City. It is our privilege to live among the Chatino Indians, in the town of Yaitepec, which is high enough up for one to be glad of a warm cardigan inside the house most of the day, though a brilliant sun is usually shining outside.

Chatino belongs to the Zapotecan language family and there are about 20,000 Chatinos who speak the Yaitepec dialect of this language, and many of them speak no Spanish at all. Their language is tonal so that the four words 'stone', 'flower', 'head' and the abbreviated form of the name 'Michael', for instance, are all spelt 'eye' in Yaitepec Chatino, but are easily differentiated by speakers of the language as they are spoken on different tones. To a Chatino this makes them separate words just as much as if they were spelt differently, as they are in English. The intricate Chatino grammar makes the language a fascinating one to learn and analyse.

The Chatinos love colour, and their clothes reflect this love, the womens' skirts being the brightest shades available, and likewise the mens' shirts. The womens' costume involves one of

two distinct types of skirt, an apron, an exquisitely embroidered blouse and the usual provincial Mexican ²stole of black with a small white pattern and long fringes. The men wear a waist-length shirt of a distinctive pattern, a black felt hat with gay hatstring and toggle, the usual provincial Mexican trousers of coarse, unbleached cotton which wrap over in the front and tie at the back with strings, and a small, gaily checked and fringed blanket with a slit in the middle for the head, usually carried on one shoulder but worn in cooler weather. These blankets are bought in the nearest Mexican town but are very much part of the "uniform". Both men and women carry small bags striped red and white, or red purple and white - for the men these take the place of trouser pockets.

The Chatino people of Yaitepec, particularly in comparison to other Mexican Indian tribes, are not poor people, and many families also own land down in the "hot country" of the Pacific coastal area, about a day's journey away with a mule. From there they bring back raw cotton which the women spin into thread and use for weaving the small handbags in some cases, also small cloths about a yard square and long, wide girdles which are wrapped tightly around the waists of both men and women. The small cloths are used for wrapping the local "staff of life", the flat, pancake-like maize bread called tortillas. Not all the women are able to make these tortilla cloths, but many do and embroider them with special geometric motifs usually in red, green, mauve and orange, and arranged in rows with a red zig-zag pattern dividing these rows.

Material for clothes is bought from a nearby Mexican town, and then may be made up by hand, or more usually is taken to one of the women with treadle sewing machines who act as the town dress-makers. The men's shirts are often without fastening, but the sleeves

are rolled up to the elbows and the front two corners tied together. The shirts may be white, green, orange, yellow, maroon, brilliant pink or mauve, sky blue, lime green, salmon pink, bright turquoise, etc. Together with the white trousers, black hats and check blanket-s this makes a gathering of Chatino men a colourful sight. However, their wives are not outshone. The one type of skirt worn by all the "grannies" and many younger women is ankle length and made of material of a plain colour, which may be mauve, yellow, pink, rose, turquoise, sky blue, orange or pale green. This skirt is in three full tiers with a frill at the bottom, and a number of tucks at the bottom of each tier. The apron covers the whole of the front of the skirt, matching it in style, but usually made of check material of a contrasting colour. The other type of skirt is calf-length and may be of figured material, though more often of a plain colour. It is also full and decorated with braid of a contrasting colour, some of the combinations being yellow with maroon braid or vice versa, turquoise with yellow or red braid, rose of salmon pink with green or purple braid, green with maroon braid or pink with blue braid. This braid is put on according to a particular pattern and the inevitable tucks appear just above it. The underskirts are of the same material as the mens' trousers and made in the same general pattern as the skirts, but around the hem are a marvel of little tucks and points.

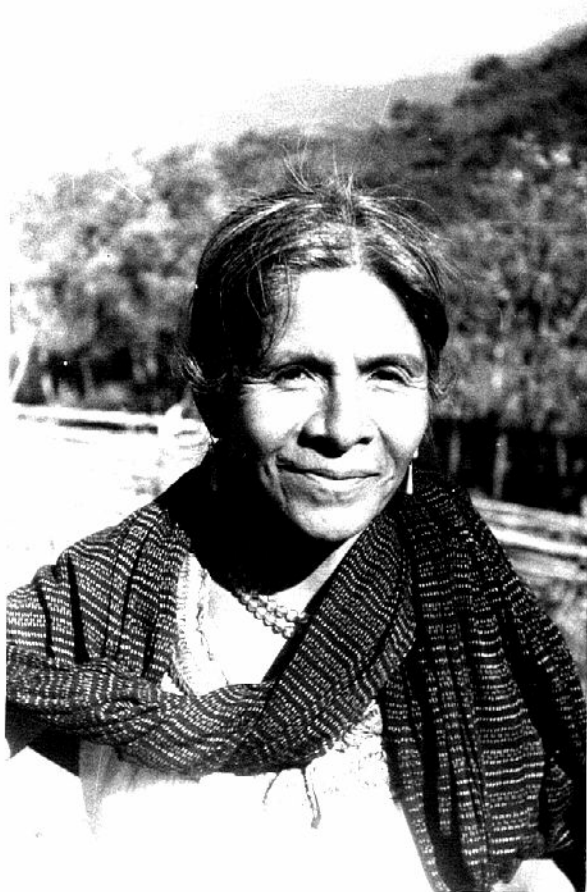
In all this riot of colour however, on closer inspection it is perhaps the womens' blouses which exert the greatest attraction. The yokes of these are embroidered in a great variety of patterns, two types of embroidery stitch being used. The counted thread work is often one colour throughout (usually red, green, blue or mauve) with just a contrasting colour used for the crocheted edging or the bands little ~~bands~~ ~~XXXX~~ dividing one main motif from another. Actually the

embroidery on the tortilla cloth-s is also counted thread work, but these motifs never seem to be used on blouses or vice versa. These are ~~geometric~~^{geometric}, usually symmetrical patterns often involving flowers and sometimes birds. On other blouses cross-stitch is used and although these may be of just one colour it is far more common to see each petal of a flower a different colour, with orange taking a prominent place. The cross-stitch patterns are often much larger and may be flowers or birds, and even rabbits or deer. Flowers of all kinds are just called "flowers" and birds just "birds" except for the macaw which figures prominently in blouse patterns. This bird is a great enemy to the Chatinos, eating the maize right off the cobs in the cornfields at harvest-time, and is endowed by them with some kind of supernatural power. The colours used most in these cross-stitch patterns are orange, red, mauve, purple, blue, green, yellow, and sometimes pink. Brown and black seem never to be used in embroidery. There are also little "fill-in" designs which are used to fill any tiny space between the motifs where the material may show through.

When visiting a Chatino home in the late afternoon, the women are often to be found sitting in the doorway embroidering these beautiful blouses, or weaving tortilla cloths. These patterns appear to constitute the main expression of indigenous Chatino art, and colour could perhaps be called the keynote of Chatino life. Their embroidery is colourful, their clothes are colourful, and the richness of expression in their speech makes that varied and colourful too.

Fig. 1 This picture shows one of the women of the village as she appears when away from home. Notice her reboso, beads, and the embroidery work on the blouse.

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Fig. 2 This shows one of the young girls, happy to have her picture taken. This picture shows the embroidery work on the blouse as well as the ear rings and beads.

