

Vernacular furniture of Rajasthan

A cultural and contextual interpretation of the vernacular furniture of Rajasthan at the South Asian Decorative Arts and Craft Collection (SADACC) Trust, Norwich, UK.



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Content

1. Reflections from the UK Visit
2. About the project
3. Premise for the research
4. Vernacular furniture from Rajasthan
 - a. Seating
 - i. *Pidhi*
 - ii. *Pidha*
 - iii. *Takaht/Paata*
 - b. Sleeping
 - i. *Palna*
 - c. Storage
 - i. *Majju*
 - ii. *Peti/Sandook*
 - iii. *Kathatara*
 - d. Surfaces
 - i. *Chowki/Bajot*
 - e. Objects
5. Conclusion



Talk, Tales from the Road organised on the 28th June 2017



Exhibition at the SADACC gallery on Vernacular Furniture of Rajasthan

Reflections from the UK Visit

I arrived in London on June 7th 2017 from Ahmedabad. I rode a taxi from Heathrow to London Liverpool Street Station to catch my train to Norwich the same day. Having arrived in Norwich, Philip and Jeannie took great care of me throughout my stay. The visit to Norwich was mainly to facilitate access to the vernacular furniture pieces from the South Asian collection at the SADACC Trust. The research had two main objectives:

- i. To study the pieces of furniture, for their craftsmanship, to feed into the ongoing research on the vernacular furniture of North-West India at DICRC, CEPT University.
- ii. To use the field research information to develop object specific content for the furniture pieces at the SADACC collection.

Apart from the research project, we also organised a combination of diverse activities to make the research more widely accessible to an equally diverse audience.

1. The SADACC Trust hosted an evening talk titled, 'Tales from the Road', on the 28th June 2017. Dr. Ben Cartwright and I presented our experiences from conducting field research in Rajasthan for the project. While Ben presented his perspectives of the field work from his position as a collection curator, my role was to present the narratives of the furniture found on field along with the methodology and challenges of a project like this.

2. During my visit, we also worked towards producing an exhibition on the vernacular furniture of Rajasthan to be displayed at the gallery space at the SADACC Trust. This involved producing text panels for the exhibition, identifying the items from the collection to be displayed and designing the display cabinet. During my stay, we worked towards the curation and production of the exhibition content and the team at SADACC carefully assembled it shortly after my departure. The exhibition will be on display at the gallery until the end of 2018.

3. We met with academicians; Daniel Raycroft at the University of East Anglia and Stephen Larcombe at the Norwich University of Arts and curators; Mark Elliot at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge to discuss the project and potential ways to develop collaborations for effective cultural exchange between students in India and the UK.

Apart from the professional commitments, Philip, Jeannie and the team at SADACC ensured that I had a great time in the UK by introducing me to social and cultural aspects of life in the UK. They arranged for me to travel to parts of Norfolk, try local food and drinks, and accompanied me to various art shows and exhibitions.

My visit to the UK ended with a brief stay in London. The visit was truly enriching and it shall remain a memorable one also because, it is while being here that I learnt about receiving a Chevening scholarship to pursue a Masters program in the UK. I return to Ahmedabad not with a heavy heart, but with the hope of returning to the UK soon, to be part of the diverse learning environment that the country offers.

About the project

The short research was intended towards making a key contribution to the ongoing collaborative project 'Vernacular Furniture of North-West India'. The project is an international collaborative research project between Design Innovation and Craft Resource Centre (DICRC), CEPT University, Ahmedabad, India and South Asian Decorative Arts and Craft Collection (SADACC) Trust, Norwich, UK. Initiated in December 2015, the project aims at identifying, mapping, documenting and studying vernacular furniture that has traditionally been, and continues to be an inherent part of the everyday life in an Indian household. Simple yet elegantly crafted furniture like a machi (a low stool), a paat (a swing) or a paniyaaru (a water pitcher stand) and many others, continue to be an integral component of everyday living in India. Skilfully crafted by the native artisans, using locally available materials, such furniture transpired as a result of day-to-day needs of the people of the region. However, these furniture types are increasingly under threat which makes the need to record and document them, important and timely. The methodology for the short research at Norwich draws from both quantitative and qualitative aspects of research.

Quantitative research

The initial step of the research was to identify the number of furniture pieces in the collection that belong to Rajasthan. These furniture elements were catalogued using object specific information. The identification of furniture was done with the help of the cataloguing system used at SADACC and information was generated through a mapping tool developed by Design Innovation and Craft Resource Centre (DICRC), CEPT University.

Qualitative research

The catalogued furniture was each studied in detail with respect to their form, function, size, scale, style, material, craft technique, social and cultural significance, and so on. A detailed object specific research was generated to provide a historical, cultural and contextual bearing to the furniture pieces in the collection.

The premise for the research

i. The context

Rajasthan, with an area of 342,274 km² is the second largest state of India. The topography of the place presents great contrasts, thus having variations in climatic conditions. This, combined with the political scenario and social construct has an evident impact on the lifestyle and material culture of the region. Physically, Rajasthan is divided into four zones. It is also divided into nine regions defined by ecological features, dialects and history of ruling clans; Dundhar, Godwad, Hadoti, Marwar, Merwara, Mewar, Mewat-Brij, Shekhawati and Vagad. These nine regions along with the 33 districts provide a base to locate the furniture in contextual base to study vernacular furniture of Rajasthan in the SADACC Collection.

ii. The primary research data

More than fifty types of vernacular furniture and objects have been identified from varied types of places like traditional and vernacular dwellings, royal palaces, furniture warehouses, as well as museum and private collections. These furniture types have variations that occur in the form of regional variants, local terminologies, scale, materials, craft techniques and specific functions associated with particular furniture pieces. Along with mapping, other on-field data collection sources include photographs, measured drawings of the furniture pieces as well as oral stories gathered on interaction with the locals. The data recorded on field visits in Rajasthan forms a base for studying the furniture at SADACC.

iii. The furniture categories

A diverse range of vernacular furniture that cater to activities of seating, sleeping, storage along with surfaces and objects have been identified during the course of research in Gujarat and Rajasthan. As part of the study, vernacular furniture has been categorised into four types; Aasan: seating; Manch: sleeping; Manjush: storage; and Sapaat: surfaces. The fifth category, Vastu: objects, features miscellaneous objects and accessories that are an integral part of the vernacular lifestyle of people. The same categories are used to group the vernacular furniture and objects from Rajasthan in the collection at SADACC for this research project.

Seating

Pidhi

A *pidhi* is a low-stool comprising of a webbed seat woven within a square frame that rests on four turned wood legs. The seat of a *pidhi* is made of coir or cotton rope, often webbed in different patterns. In some cases, the seat is cushioned with a layer of cotton and textile to avoid the woven seat from getting dirty. *Pidhi* are used by women but in the carrying out of everyday activities. The *pidhi* is one of the most commonly found vernacular furniture across the region; varying in its design and craftsmanship based on availability of material and on societal class in which it is used. The elite mercantile communities in the Shekhawati region use *pidhi* that are ornate with brightly coloured lacquered legs, whereas the ones found in less privileged parts of Rajasthan are made of minimally turned or carved legs. The *pidhi* are also called machi in the Vagad region, perhaps borrowing from the bordering regions of Gujarat where the low-stool is referred by the name machi too. Rudimentary variations of the *pidhi* are lower in height and are called basni in Sirohi district.

The two *pidhi* in the SADACC collection are unique with their lacquered legs and the intricate weaving patterns of the seat, owing to which one can say these are from the Shekhawati region.

Pidhi at SADACC



Object no : IN 405
Object name : *Pidhi*
English equivalent : Low chair
Dimensions: 54 cm x 54 cm x 24 cm
Place: Shekhawati region
Dated: 21st Century
Materials: Wood, textile
Techniques: turning, joinery, lacquering, webbing



Object no :
Object name : Low chair
Local name: *Pidhi*
Dimensions: 45 cm x 45 cm x 23 cm
Place: Shekhawati region
Dated: 21st Century
Materials: Wood, textile
Techniques: turning, joinery, lacquering, webbing

Similar *pidhi* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Low stool
Local name: *Pidhi*
Place: Shekhawati region
Materials: wood, metal, textile
Techniques: turning, joinery, webbing



Object name : Low stool
Local name: *Pidhi*
Place: Shekhawati region
Materials: wood, metal, textile
Techniques: turning, joinery, lacquering, webbing



Object name : Low stool
Local name: *Pidhi*
Place: Shekhawati region
Materials: wood, metal, textile
Techniques: turning, joinery, webbing

Pidha



Object no : IN 175
Object name : *Pidha*
English equivalent : Low chair
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Shekhawati region
Dated: 21st Century
Materials: Wood, Metal, Textile
Techniques: turning, joinery, carving, webbing

A *pidha* is an elaborate variant of the *pidhi*, which includes a backrest. It is a low chair with a webbed seat and a carved wooden back raised by carved wooden legs. Oral accounts from the field suggest that a *pidha* is customarily reserved as a seat for the eldest woman in the house placing the eldest woman in a position of authority. It has also been observed that in a situation of the *pidha* being used, the younger women will be seated on the floor and the men will be seated on a khaat (charpoy). This is an indication of the furniture height denoting social hierarchy within communities. *Pidha* are also known to be a furniture of ceremonial use, particularly during weddings. We have encountered a number of *pidha* during field work that are similar to the one specific *pidha* in the SADACC collection.

This particular *pidha* has an elaborately carved backrest with a pair of horses flanking the top slat of the backrest. The carvings are a combination of representations of everyday life with animals and floral carvings combined with a panel of geometric carving. The seat is webbed with jute rope around a frame that rests on carved wooden legs. This type of *pidha* is mostly found in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan.

Similar *pidha* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Low chair
Local name: *Pidha*
Place: Shekhawati
Materials: wood, metal, textile
Techniques: carving, joinery, webbing

Takaht

Prominently found in the region of Shekhawati and diverse in its usage, a *takaht* is similar to a wooden bench. The seat is a wooden platform raised on turned wood legs with iron reinforcing brackets at the corners. The surface of the seat is devoid of ornamentation, but the apron and legs are often ornamented with carvings. Typically used to sit on by multiple people for recreational activities, these strong benches are located outside the entrance porch of havelis, in market squares or even in temples. Some *takaht* are used as sleeping furniture for people to catch siestas in public squares. They also serve as multipurpose surfaces for display of goods by shopkeepers in markets.

A similar vernacular furniture type is found in Bikaner, where they are called *paata*. The word *Paata* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Paat* meaning a plank, denoting a surface. *Paata* are generally located in large open ground/plazas, crossroads, outside or within residential havelis of all communities. The *paata* occupies a social position, where it becomes a point for people in the community to congregate and carry out everyday activities such as seating, sleeping, dining, reading a newspaper, catching a siesta, playing a game of cards or just exchange pleasantries. It has its position as part of social events like street theatre and is linked with activities of law, where it is used for panchayat hearings. It occupies a cultural position in ritual uses like festivals, marriages, ceremonies associated with birth and death. In its physical form, it is also a marker of economic capital of the owner. In cases, where the *paata* is owned by a societal organisation like the panchayat or a group of individuals, it becomes a marker of the collective social capital of the group.

One can see several of these furniture pieces spread across the gallery space of the SADACC Trust. It is noteworthy to point out the importance of the visit in the understanding of this specific furniture piece. Initially, the pieces in collection were deduced to be *paata* from Bikaner, owing to the lack of ornate detailing. Spending more time at the collection made me realise that these perhaps are *takaht* from the Shekhawati region mainly because; while *takaht* are individually owned, most *paata* are owned by social groups or institutions, making them more difficult to penetrate the trade market that has allowed their migration from their source into the collection. A closer look at the field data also revealed similarities with the *takaht* in the collection. Therefore, one can deduce that most of the pieces in the SADACC collection are *takaht* from the Shekhawati region.

Takaht at SADACC



Object no : IN 196
Object name : Bench
Local name: *Takaht*
Dimensions: 175 x 98 x 62 cm
Place: Shekhawati
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting



Object no : IN 197
Object name : Bench
Local name: *Takaht*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Shekhawati
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting



Object no : IN 326
Object name : Bench
Local name: *Takaht*
Dimensions: 177 x 128 x 82 cm
Place: Shekhawati
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting



Object no : IN 327
Object name : Bench
Local name: *Takaht*
Dimensions: 219 x 144 x 66 cm
Place: Shekhawati
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting



Object no : IN 73
 Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Dimensions: 175 x 98 x 62 cm
 Place: Shekhawati
 Dated: Late 19th/20th Century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting



Object no : IN 77
 Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Dimensions: 175 x 98 x 62 cm
 Place: Shekhawati
 Dated: Late 19th/20th Century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting



Object no : IN
 Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Dimensions: 175 x 98 x 62 cm
 Place: Shekhawati
 Dated: Late 19th/20th Century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting



Object no : IN 210
 Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Dimensions: 190 x 114 x 80 cm
 Place: Shekhawati
 Dated: Early 20th Century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting

Similar *takaht* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Place: Bagar, Jhunjhunu (Shekhawati)
 Materials: Wood, Iron
 Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting



Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Place: Bagar, Jhunjhunu (Shekhawati)
 Materials: Wood, Iron
 Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting



Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Place: Dundlod, Jhunjhunu (Shekhawati)
 Materials: Wood, Iron
 Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting



Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Place: Jhunjhunu (Shekhawati)
 Materials: Wood, Iron
 Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, Bending, Riveting

There are three unique items within the larger group of *takaht* in the collection. Two of them are similar to ones found in the old palace at Dungarpur. The design of these (in terms of form, scale and proportion) are similar to the paat in Gujarat, therefore leading us to believe that the two pieces in the SADACC collection are indeed from the Dungarpur or the Vagad region used by a socially affluent community and for a ceremonial purpose.

Takaht at SADACC



Object no : IN 175
 Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Dimensions: 173 x 67 x 69 cm (l x b x h)
 Place: Vagad region
 Dated: Mid or late 19th century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: turning, joinery, carving, riveting



Object no : IN 245
 Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Vagad region
 Dated: Mid or late 19th century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: turning, joinery, carving, riveting

Similar *takaht* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Place: Dungarpur, Vagad region
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: turning, joinery, carving, riveting

The third unique piece in the collection is a *takaht*, which is perhaps used as offering tables in front of deities or during ceremonial occasions. Painted in traditional colours of red, green and yellow, the *takaht* is devoid of any carving or ornamentation. It has a rendering of floral motifs similar to the Bikaner school of painting. While, a *takaht* of this type has not been encountered during field work, there are representations in miniature paintings that indicate the use of such *takaht* as offering tables.



Object no : IN 480
 Object name : Bench
 Local name: *Takaht*
 Dimensions: 70.5 x 31.5 x 24.5 cm
 Place: Bikaner (speculative)
 Dated: Mid or late 19th century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: turning, joinery, carving, riveting, lacquering

Sleeping

Palna

Palna is a cradle used for an infant to sleep in. As part of fieldwork in Rajasthan, we have recorded cradles across diverse social groups. The simplest form of a cradle is a piece of fabric (often a saree) the two ends of which are tied to the ceiling with a thread or supported on two legs connected with a horizontal support member. The same form is further developed using bamboo, which is predominantly seen in the Vagad region. A more evolved design of a *palna* includes a cot like structure supported on a horizontal member that connects two legs. The cot is lined with mattresses on which the infant/child would be put to sleep. These have been found to be made using wood. Some are ornamented with lacquer colours and carvings, while others are left plain or painted. The cradles in royal collections are heavily ornamented and sometimes made of precious metals like silver.

There are two *palna* in the SADACC collection that are from Rajasthan. One is a simple wooden *palna* with minimal ornamentation. The top of each leg has horse head carvings (this is a feature that has been found in cradles in Gujarat too). The cot is made of wood and the bottom is a solid wooden plank. The second one is a *palna*, which is perhaps from the Shekhawati region. This is unique in the way that it is not a swinging cradle but one that rests on the floor and has wheels attached to turned wood legs. The cot has a head end, which has elaborate carving. The edges of the cot are decorated with lacquered wooden spindles and pictures of various deities. The bottom of the cot is made using the technique of webbing, which are common in the making of charpoys as well.

Palna at SADACC



Object no : IN 632
Object name : Cradle
Local name: *Palna*
Dimensions: 106 x 69 x 52 cm
Place: Shekhawati
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal, Textile, Paint
Techniques: turning, joinery, lacquering, riveting, weaving, painting



Object no : IN 626
Object name : Cradle
Local name: *Palna*
Dimensions: 129 x 93 x 102 cm
Place: Not known
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: turning, joinery, riveting

Similar *palna* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Cradle
Local name: *Palna*
Place: Barmer
Materials: Wood, Metal, Textile
Techniques: turning, joinery, riveting, weaving, painting

Storage

Majju

Chests, cabinets and caskets are the most common pieces of vernacular storage furniture found in Rajasthan. They are crafted to be of varying forms and sizes; the big cabinets, called *majju* are used for storing clothes and valuables such as money, fine clothes and jewellery. They are often used also to stack mattresses and quilts on its top surface. Wood is the principal material used to construct the *majju* and it is often intricately carved and ornamented. It is believed to be an heirloom furniture. A *majju* has a strong personal association with its user; the opening mechanism is at any point known only to the owner and the suthar who made it. The research indicates that traditionally, every family had their own suthar (carpenter), to whom the making of the *majju* would be commissioned. Although there were design guidelines for a *majju*, the process was a collaborative one where, the owner would sometimes specify the nature of carvings or ornamentation. The *majju* would most often be painted in various bright colours and this would be repeated annually during Diwali. A *majju* is often painted in the same colour as the doors, windows and other wooden furniture in the house.

There are mainly two types of *majju* that have been found both as part of fieldwork and within the SADACC collection. While their social associations are similar as described above, the distinction arises from their physical construct. The first type is predominantly found in the Dungarpur region. They are cuboidal in shape, elevated from the ground on two vertical end supports that most often rest on wheels. The front façade is ornamented with shallow carvings and fret work. A typical façade would contain a front rail which has floral motifs and creepers carved on it. The central panel is made up of multiple vertical arched panels, of which the two end ones act as the access doors to the *majju*. The bottom rail is vertically divided into three parts. The central part has a concealed secret compartment behind that can only be opened from the inside. This is often carved to appear as a continuous panel. The sides and back of the *majju* are almost always plain with just the structural members and panels being visible. The second type of *majju* is presumably from the Banswara region. While it is similar structurally to the ones from Dungarpur, the front surface is unique with iconic human figures carved in between the arched panels.

There are five *majju* in the SADACC collection, of which three are of the first type from the Dungarpur region and two are from Banswara region. All of them have the paint removed off which may have been a feature while they were in their original contexts.

Majju at SADACC



Object no : IN 107
Object name : Cabinet
Local name: *Majju*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Dungarpur, Vagad region
Dated: Late 19th or early 20th century
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, turning, joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 241
Object name : Cabinet
Local name: *Majju*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Dungarpur, Vagad region
Dated: Late 19th or early 20th century
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, turning, joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 81
Object name : Cabinet
Local name: *Majju*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Dungarpur, Vagad region
Dated: Late 19th or early 20th century
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, turning, joinery, riveting, casting, beating

Similar *majju* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Cabinet
 Local name: *Majju*
 Place: Khadagada, Dugarpur (Vagad region)
 Materials: Wood, Metal (Iron)
 Techniques: Bending, Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, bending



Object name : Cabinet
 Local name: *Majju*
 Place: Gowari, Dugarpur (Vagad region)
 Materials: Wood, Metal (Iron)
 Techniques: Bending, Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, bending



Object name : Cabinet
 Local name: *Majju*
 Place: Gowari, Dugarpur (Vagad region)
 Materials: Wood, Metal (Iron)
 Techniques: Bending, Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, bending



Object name : Cabinet
 Local name: *Majju*
 Place: Gowari, Dugarpur (Vagad region)
 Materials: Wood, Metal (Iron)
 Techniques: Bending, Carving, Joinery, Turning, Beating, bending

Majju at SADACC



Object no : IN 071
 Object name : Cabinet
 Local name: *Majju*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Banswara, Vagad region
 Dated: Late 19th century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Riveting, Casting, Beating



Object no : IN 231
 Object name : Cabinet
 Local name: *Majju*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Dugarpur, Vagad region
 Dated: Late 19th or early 20th century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: carving, turning, joinery, riveting, casting, beating

Similar *majju* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Cabinet
 Local name: *Majju*
 Place: Dugarpur, Vagad region
 Materials: Wood, Metal (Iron)
 Techniques: Bending, Carving, Joinery, Beating, bending

Similar references

Most vernacular furniture derive influences from the architectural style in their specific contexts. Similarly, the features on the *majju* are similar to woodwork in buildings in the Vagad region. In the specific example of the *majju* with human figures carved on it, the records at the SADACC collection indicate that such figures are also believed to be carved onto door and window panels of houses in Banswara. A number of such window panels are part of the collection, which have been presented below.



Object no : IN 228.1
Object name : Window frame
Local name: Not known
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Banswara, Vagad region (speculative)
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 228.2
Object name : Window frame
Local name: Not known
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Banswara, Vagad region (speculative)
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 228.3
Object name : Window frame
Local name: Not known
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Banswara, Vagad region (speculative)
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating

Majju/Peti

The second type of storage furniture commonly found across Rajasthan are chests and caskets of different sizes. The chests are called *majju* or in some cases Sandook and the caskets are called *peti*. The term *majju* should not be confused for the cabinet which is also called by the same local name. While *majju* in the form of chests are used to store clothes and valuables, the *peti* as smaller caskets are used for storing valuables, money or ornaments. Most *majju* are shaped like a cuboid with the top surface hinged on one edge to form a lid. They are most often made of wood with variations in the ornamentation, depending on the regions they are made and used in.

Majju/Peti at SADACC



Object no : IN 371
Object name : Chest
Local name: *Majju*
Dimensions: 121 x 80 x 57 cm
Place: Not known
Dated: Late 19th Century
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, turning, joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 242
Object name : Chest
Local name: *Majju*
Dimensions: 101 x 67.5 x 71 cm
Place: Barmer, Marwar region
Dated: Late 19th Century
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, turning, joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 194
Object name : Chest
Local name: *Majju*
Dimensions: 108 x 60 x 74 cm
Place: Jalore, Marwar region
Dated: Late 19th or early 20th Century
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, turning, joinery, riveting, casting, beating

Similar *majju/peti* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Chest
Local name: *Majju*
Place: Jaisalmer
Materials: Wood, Iron
Techniques: Joinery, Beating, Bending



Object name : Chest
Local name: *Majju*
Place: Jaisalmer
Materials: Wood, Iron
Techniques: Joinery, Beating, Bending



Object name : Chest
Local name: *Majju*
Place: Jaisalmer
Materials: Wood, Iron
Techniques: Joinery, Beating, Bending



Object name : Chest
Local name: *Majju*
Place: Barmer
Materials: Wood, Iron
Techniques: Joinery, Beating, Bending

While a flat top surface is most common, there are also *peti* which have their top surfaces shaped like a gable roof of vernacular dwellings in the region. Owing to this visual architectural reference, they are sometimes locally called *jhopdi peti* (hut casket). These have been frequently found in the Marwar and Vagad regions of Rajasthan, while also being present in the collection. The *jhopdi peti* is made of locally available wood. The walls are made of wooden panels and small wooden strips are used to brace the panels, forming a grid-like surface. Metal is used in the form of rivets or forged nails to hold the wooden panels and bracing members in place. Sometimes, metal strips are combined with the wooden strips to provide extra strength to the bracing members. The chest or casket is raised on four turned wooden legs that support the weight of the contents. The sloped roofs of the *peti* have hipped ends similar to the architectural roof forms. It is constructed similar to the walls of the *peti* with wooden panels and bracing members. In the grid surface that is formed, a single panel or a combination of two or four panels is used to incorporate the lid to access the *peti*. The lid is provided with a metal latch to lock the *peti*. The wood used to make these *peti* is a type of local hardwood which does not allow for it to be carved. This results in simple designs without any carving or ornamentation. Although, this cannot be generalized. Though fewer in number, we have found *jhopdi peti* made of a type of soft wood with simple representational and geometric carvings on them. The carvings and ornamentation are also perceived as a material translation of value, associated with the storage contents. It is believed that the chests and caskets used to store clothes and other everyday belongings were plain and the ones used to store valuables and jewellery may have been ornamented. The few carved caskets found on the field visits are believed to be from the Shekhawati region.



Object no : IN 94
 Object name : Chest
 Local name: *Majju/Peti*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Jaisalmer
 Dated: Late 19th or early 20th Century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 243
 Object name : Chest
 Local name: *Majju/Peti*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Not known
 Dated: Late 19th or early 20th Century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: joinery, riveting, casting, beating

Similar *majju/peti* recorded in Rajasthan



Object no : IN 97
 Object name : Chest
 Local name: *Majju/Peti*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Jaisalmer
 Dated: Late 19th or early 20th Century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object name : Chest
 Local name: *Majju/Peti*
 Place: Jaisalmer
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 243
 Object name : Casket
 Local name: *Majju/Peti*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Barmer
 Dated: Late 19th Century
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: joinery, riveting, casting, beating

Peti at SADACC



Object no : IN 259.1
 Object name : Casket
 Local name: *Peti*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Shekhawati region
 Dated: Not known
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 259.2
 Object name : Casket
 Local name: *Peti*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Shekhawati region
 Dated: Not known
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 163
 Object name : Casket
 Local name: *Peti*
 Dimensions: 47 x 36 x 28 cm
 Place: Shekhawati region
 Dated: Not known
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating

Similar *peti* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Casket
 Local name: *Peti*
 Place: Churu
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object name : Casket
 Local name: *Peti*
 Place: Udaipur
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating



Object name : Casket
 Local name: *Peti*
 Place: Udaipur
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating

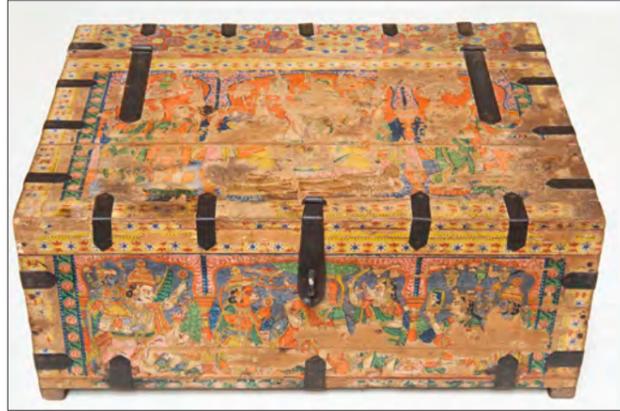
We have found *peti* that are painted upon in parts of the Marwar region. A diverse range of *peti* are found in the Shekhawati region; some are carved, some are clad with elaborately carved metal sheets and some are covered with applique work textiles. There are examples of each of these types in the SADACC collection, that have been indicated in the images that follow.

The *peti* were pieces of furniture that were not stationary and used to carry clothes and other belongings while travelling or moving places. Like their owners, they may have moved places over time, region and space. Hence, one may find similar chests and caskets in parts of Rajasthan other than where they have been found during fieldwork. The association of the jhopdi *peti* with the region of Marwar, Vagad and Shekhawati regions has been made based on the pieces found during the field research, the availability of local resources, the everyday life of people in these regions and other such factors.

Peti at SADACC



Object no : IN 420
Object name : Casket
Local name: *Peti*
Dimensions: 55.5 x 42 x 31 cm
Place: Shekhawati region
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating, fretwork



Object no : IN 377
Object name : Casket
Local name: *Peti*
Dimensions: 61 x 46 x 25 cm
Place: Shekhawati
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal, Paper, Paint
Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating, painting



Object no : IN 434
Object name : Casket
Local name: *Peti*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Not known
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal, Paper, Paint
Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating, painting



Object no : IN 433
Object name : Chest
Local name: *Peti*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Not known
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal, Paper, Paint
Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating, painting

Similar *peti* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Casket
Local name: *Peti*
Place: Churu (Shekhawati)
Materials: Wood, Metal, Textile
Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating, fretwork



Object name : Casket
Local name: *Peti*
Place: Bikaner
Materials: Wood, Metal, Paper, Paint
Techniques: carving, joinery, riveting, casting, beating, painting

Kathatara

Kathatara are larders that are unique to the arid desert parts, mostly the Godwad and Marwar regions of Rajasthan. The *kathatara* act as thermal insulating cabinets and are used for storing fresh food. They are made of clay and have similar techniques of construction as the vernacular architecture in the region. They are built up with clay and plastered with a layer of lipan (a mixture of clay and dung). These are provided with an opening with a wooden shutter, on the front surface. Occasionally, they have openings at the top covered with a lid. In some cases, the *kathatara* have been found to be made from papier mache in some cases. Commonly decorated with lac and mirror work, they vary in size and decorative style from region to region. The *kathatara* are made by the women when they marry into the family. A bride is expected to set up her own kitchen, as part of which, she makes the *kathatara* with the help of her mother-in-law.

The *kathatara* are an integral part of the architecture and often in-built with the features of the building. Very rarely, small sized and portable versions are made to perhaps be used as food larders in times of travel. There are two such small *kathatara* in the collection at Norwich. Both are made of papier mache and clay with geometric patterns impressed on the surface along with mirror embellishments. They, each have an opening at the top that can be covered using a hipped lid.

Kathatara at SADACC



Object no : IN 261.1
Object name : Larder
Local name: *Kathatara*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Jaisalmer, Marwar region
Dated: 20th Century
Materials: Mud, Paper mache
Techniques: lipan kaam, relief work



Object no : IN 261.2
Object name : Larder
Local name: *Kathatara*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Jaisalmer, Marwar region
Dated: 20th Century
Materials: Mud, Paper mache
Techniques: lipan kaam, relief work

Similar *kathatara* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Larder
Local name: *Kathatara*
Place: Barmer
Materials: Mud, Paper mache
Techniques: lipan kaam, relief work

Surfaces

Chowki/Bajot

A *chowki* is a low table that is used by a group of people to dine on, together from a single plate. This piece of vernacular furniture is mostly common in the Shekhawati region. The *chowki* is made with wood and in a variety of shapes and sizes. The surfaces are often square, though, octagonal, hexagonal, and star shaped are also popular. The legs are made of turned wood. The top surface can be plain, painted or sometimes clad with stamped brass or silver sheets. The nature of ornamentation is based on the use of the *chowki*. The more ornate ones tend to be used during specific occasions such as festivals or weddings. The *chowki* also find use in wedding rituals for the groom to stand on. These ones are less ornate than the ones used to dine on.

Low tables like the *chowki* are found in other parts of Rajasthan, where they are also referred by the names *bajot* or *paata*. They are made with stone, sometimes to place water pots or for a range of activities in domestic spaces. They are frequently used in temples to place lamps and offering plates for deities.

The low tables in the collection at SADACC are *chowki* from the Shekhawati region. There is one unique painted *chowki* (unlike anything recorded on field) is perhaps from Bikaner, owing to the style of painting which uses colours and patterns common to the Bikaner school of painting.



Object no : IN 432
Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Dimensions: 75 x 75 x 22
Place: Shekhawati
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Brass, Iron
Techniques: turning, joinery, lacquering, riveting, casting, beating, embossing, etching



Object no : IN 658
Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Shekhawati
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Brass
Techniques: turning, joinery, lacquering, beating, riveting

Chowki at SADACC



Object no : IN 623
Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Dimensions: 98.5 x 98.5 x 22 cm(l x b x h)
Place: Not known
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: turning, joinery, lacquering, riveting, casting, beating



Object no : IN 93
Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Dimensions: 88 x 88 x 21.5 cm (l x b x h)
Place: Bikaner
Dated: Mid 19th century
Materials: Wood, Metal, Textile, Paint
Techniques: turning, joinery, lacquering, riveting, beating, painting



Object no : IN 62
Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Dimensions: 73 x 73 x 18 cm(l x b x h)
Place: Shekhawati
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Brass, Iron
Techniques: turning, joinery, lacquering, riveting, casting, beating, embossing, etching



Object no : IN
Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Dimensions: 88 x 88 x 21.5 cm (l x b x h)
Place: Bikaner
Dated: Mid 19th century
Materials: Wood, Metal, Textile, Paint
Techniques: turning, joinery, lacquering, riveting, beating, painting

Similar *chowki* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Place: Churu (Shekhawati)
Materials: Wood, metal
Techniques: turning, carving, joinery, beating, bending, riveting



Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Place: Mandawa, Jhunjhunu (Shekhawati)
Materials: Stone
Techniques: Carving, Dressing



Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Place: Churu (Shekhawati)
Materials: Wood, metal
Techniques: turning, carving, joinery, lacquering, beating, bending, riveting, embossing, etching



Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Place: Dundlod, Jhunjhunu (Shekhawati)
Materials: Stone
Techniques: Carving, Dressing



Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Place: Ramgarh, Sikar (Shekhawati)
Materials: Wood, metal
Techniques: turning, carving, joinery, beating, bending, riveting, embossing, lacquering



Object name : Low table
Local name: *Chowki*
Place: Churu (Shekhawati)
Materials: Wood, metal
Techniques: turning, carving, joinery, lacquering, beating, bending, riveting, embossing, etching

Objects

Objects

One can find several objects used for everyday activities that in some ways are used together with vernacular furniture in the region. The SADACC collection includes a range of vernacular objects from Rajasthan.

One of the most common objects is the ghatti (hand-mill grinder). They are used to grind grain (mostly wheat) across the region. The material and construction vary depending on the geographical region and vernacular lifestyles in these regions. The hand mill is always made from stone. In the arid parts, where the architecture is that of earth construction, the base of the ghatti are made from clay. A few ghatti in Barmer were made of wooden bases, some with stone and a few recently made ones used metal bases on which the stone mill rests. The ghatti is also referred to as a chakki in some regions.

The jhula is a swing used for placing deities and used in religious ceremonies. The SADACC collection has a unique jhula with elaborate ornamentation that resembles one that is in the Bikaner Palace.

The collection has a few tambaccu daan (tobacco boxes) that are sometimes colloquially called gattaji. There are also a range of opium containers called *kharal*.

Ghatti at SADACC



Object no : IN 113
Object name : Handmill grinder
Local name: *Ghatti*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Not known
Dated: Late 1980s
Materials: Stone
Techniques: Dressing

Similar *ghatti* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Handmill grinder
Local name: *Ghatti*
Place: Dungarpur (Vagad)
Materials: Mud, Stone, Wood
Techniques: Joinery, Dressing

Tambaccu daan at SADACC



Object no : IN 111
Object name : Tobacco box
Local name: *Tambaccu daan/Gattaji*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Not known
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, lacquering, turning



Object no : IN 218
Object name : Tobacco box
Local name: *Tambaccu daan/Gattaji*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Not known
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal
Techniques: carving, lacquering, turning



Object no : IN 292
Object name : Tobacco box
Local name: *Tambaccu daan/Gattaji*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Bikaner (speculative)
Dated: Not known
Materials: Metal
Techniques: beating, riveting

Similar *tambaccu daan* recorded in Rajasthan



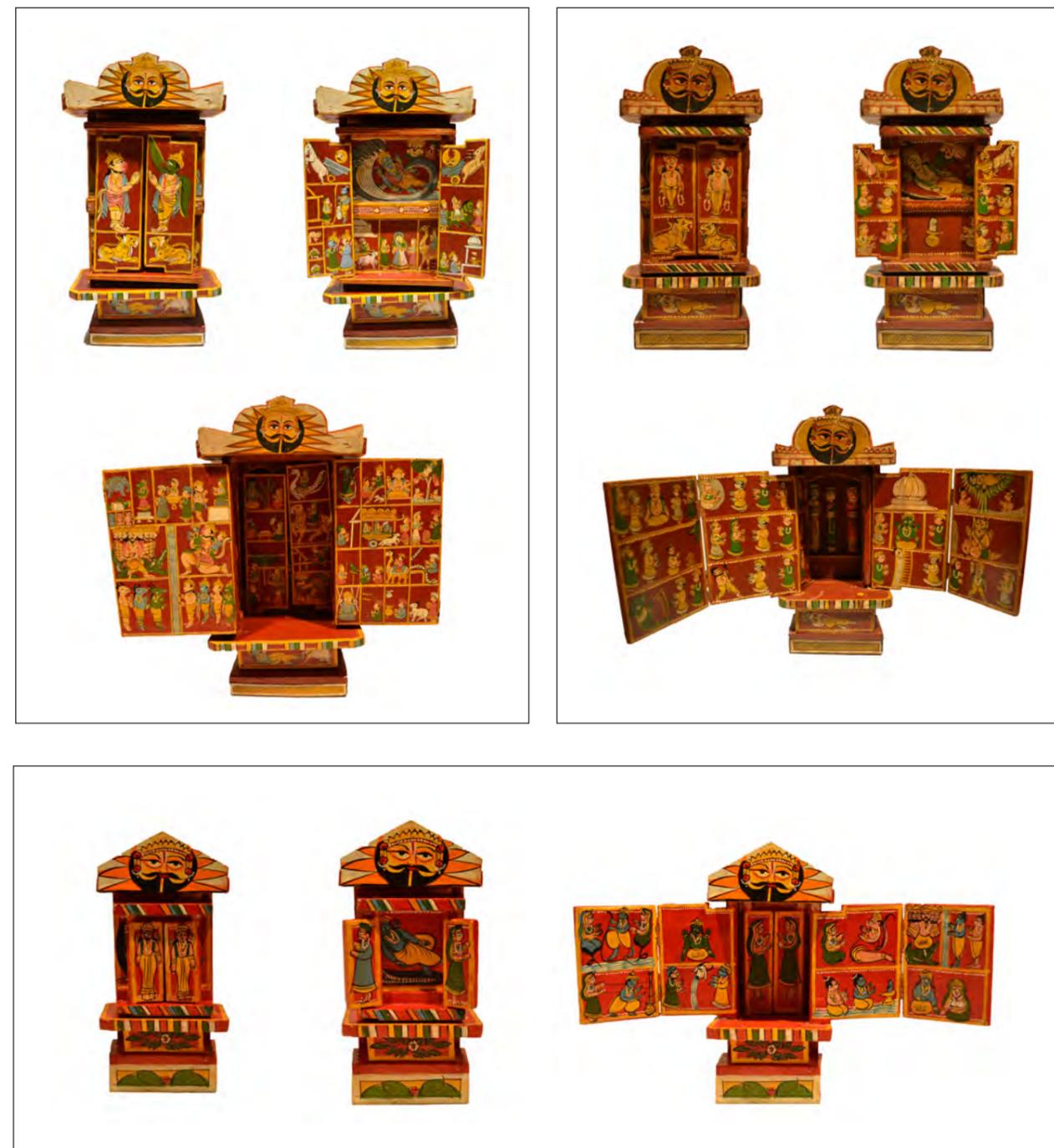
Object name : Tobacco box
Local name: *Tambaccu daan/Gattaji*
Place: Churu (Shekhawati)
Materials: Wood, metal
Techniques: Carving, turning, joinery

Kharaal



Object no : IN 514.1, 514.2, 514.3, 514.4, 514.5, 515.6
 Object name : Opium grinders/containers
 Local name: *Kharaal*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Not known
 Dated: Not known
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: Carving

Kaavad



Object no : IN 514.1, 514.2, 514.3, 514.4, 514.5, 515.6
 Object name : Shrine
 Local name: *Kaavad*
 Dimensions: Not known
 Place: Not known
 Dated: Not known
 Materials: Wood, Metal
 Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Painting

Jhula



Object no : IN 630
Object name : Cradle/Swing
Local name: *Jhula*
Dimensions: 107.5 x 84.5 x 127 cm
Place: Not known
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal, Glass
Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Casting, Embossing



Object no : IN 306
Object name : Cradle/Swing
Local name: *Jhula*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Bikaner
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal, Glass
Techniques: Carving, Fret Work, Joinery, Turning, Embossing



Object no : IN
Object name : Cradle/Swing
Local name: *Jhula*
Dimensions: Not known
Place: Bikaner
Dated: Not known
Materials: Wood, Metal, Glass
Techniques: Carving, Fret Work, Joinery, Turning, Embossing

Similar *jhula* recorded in Rajasthan



Object name : Cradle
Local name: *Jhula*
Place: Jaisalmer
Materials: Wood, Metal, Textile
Techniques: Carving, Joinery, Lacquering, Turning, Beating, Weaving



Object name : Cradle/ Swing
Local name: *Jhula*
Place: Bikaner
Materials: Wood, Mirror, Textile
Techniques: Carving, Fret Work, Joinery, Turning, Embossing

As part of this report, I have included some of the furniture and objects in the SADACC collection that are presumed to be from Rajasthan. These are included separately since their provenance as being from Rajasthan is only a speculation and at we have not been able to establish for certain at this stage of the research.



Object no : IN 654
Object name : Painted cabinet
A cabinet of this design has not been recorded during fieldwork. However, the painting style on it is in the Nathdwara style, based on which one can speculate that the piece of furniture is from Rajasthan.



Object no : IN 293
Object name : Water pot stand
While similar fabric-covered water pots have been seen in Rajasthan, a stand like this has not been recorded during fieldwork. One can speculate that this is from Rajasthan.

Conclusion

The short research project at SADACC was carried out within the broader context of the ongoing research project, 'Vernacular furniture of North-West India'. The project has helped with achieving the following:

i. The visit to SADACC has helped with analysing the furniture and objects from Rajasthan in the collection. The furniture and objects are catalogued using the IN numbers already in use as part of the collection records. The information existing in the SADACC records is supported with an analysis of materials and craft techniques used to make the piece of furniture. Further, each piece was compared with similar pieces found during fieldwork, thereby helping in developing the object-based data at the collection.

ii. The pieces recorded at SADACC will be then used in the catalogue of vernacular furniture of Rajasthan, (being developed as) an output of the fieldwork data.

This short research has been an opportunity to work with museum collections and fieldwork research; two entities that can inform one another within the broader context of the project.

