

Tales from the road

searching for the vernacular furniture of Rajasthan

By
Mansi Sathyanarayan
Research Associate
Design Innovation and Craft Resource Centre
CEPT University, India

&

Ben Cartwright
Collection Curator
South Asian Decorative Arts and Crafts Collection Trust
Norwich, UK





WHY?

searching for the vernacular furniture of Rajasthan



Vernacular furniture at SADACC

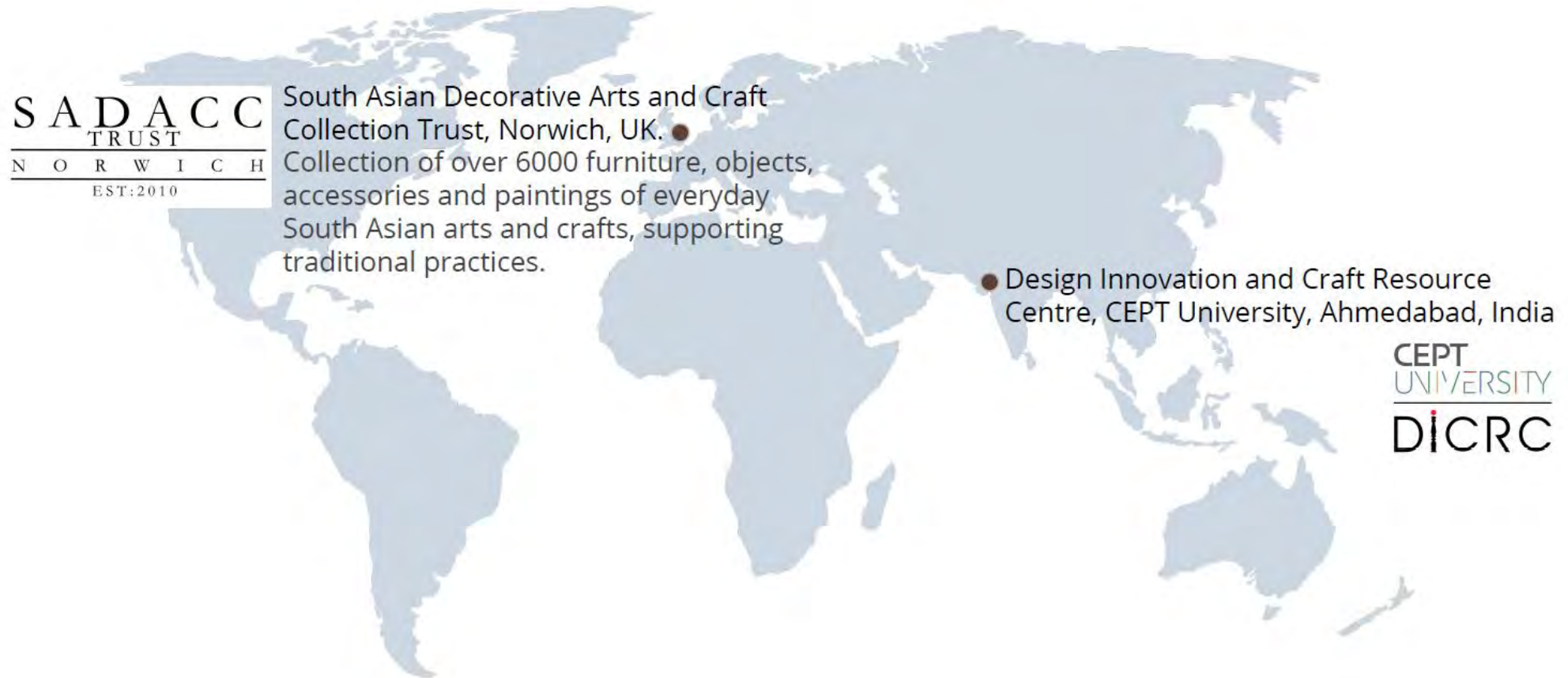


Damachiyo or Majus?



Vernacular furniture of North West India

a collaborative research project



Vernacular furniture of North West India

a collaborative research project

The team

DICRC team :

Jay Thakkar, Mansi Sathyanarayan, Samrudha Dixit, Mitraja Vyas, Rishav Jain, Rajdeep Routh, Piyush Shah, Radha Devpura, Abhishek Ruikar, Jay Shah, Namita Parmar, Pankaj Soni, Aatish G, Chinmay Gheware & Gaurav Mewara.

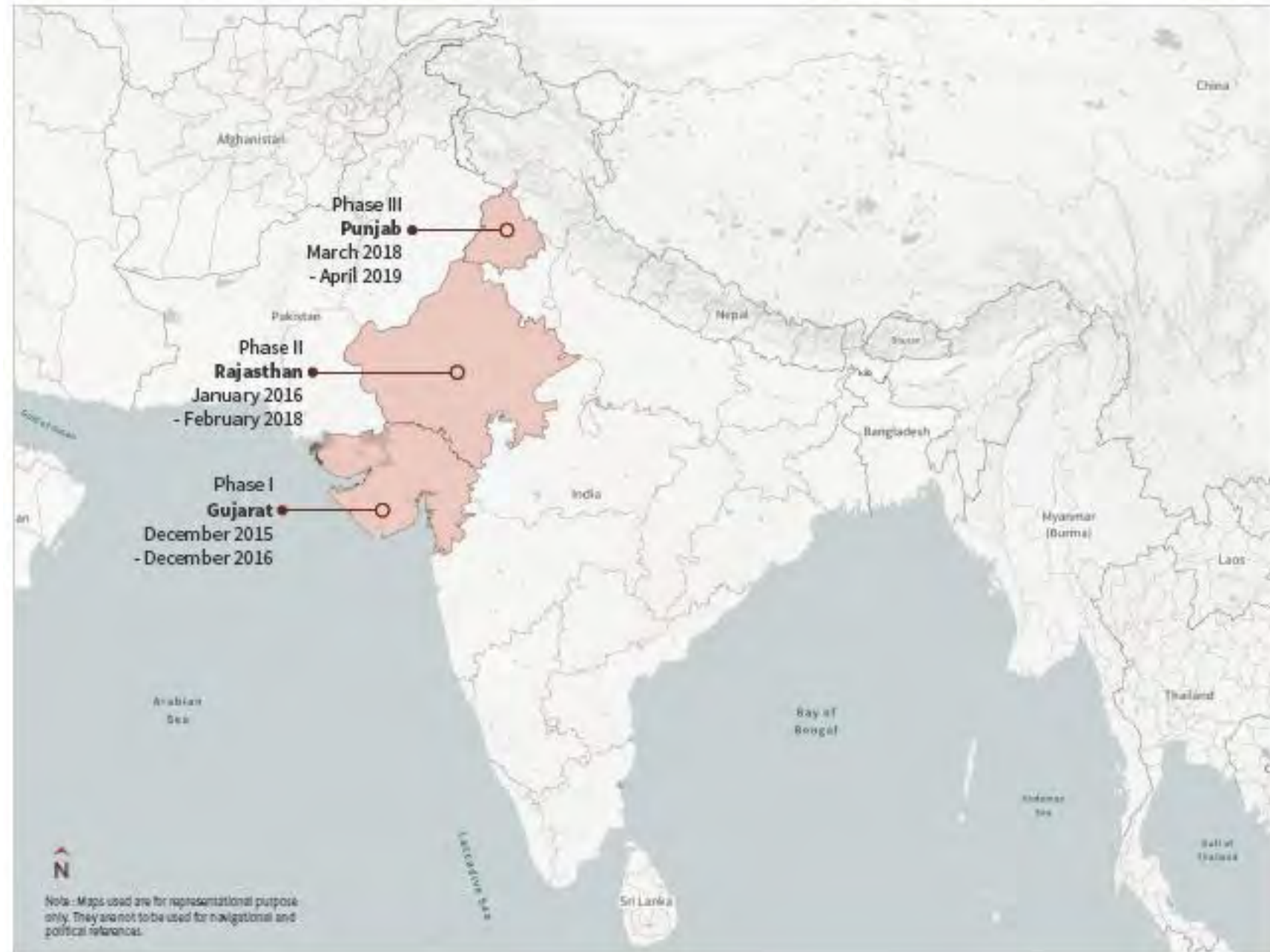
SADACC Team :

Philip Millward, Jeannie Millward, Ben Cartwright, Hannah Bentley, Jake Mann, Zac Massey & Charlotte Reeve.

North-West India

an overview

Phase 1 – Gujarat
Phase 2 – Rajasthan
Phase 3 – Punjab & Haryana



Phase 1

Vernacular furniture of Gujarat

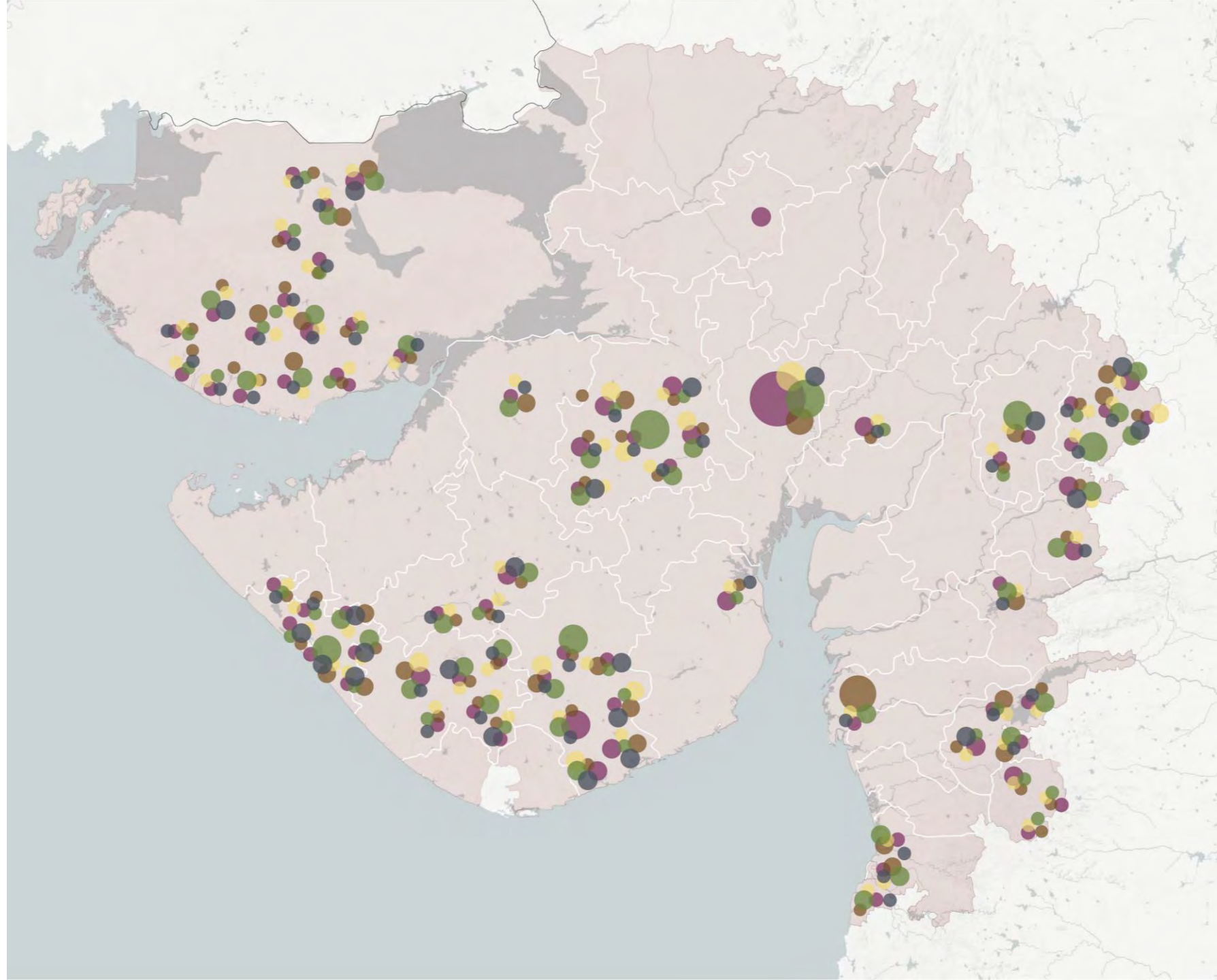
Places visited: 70

Distance travelled: 8520 km

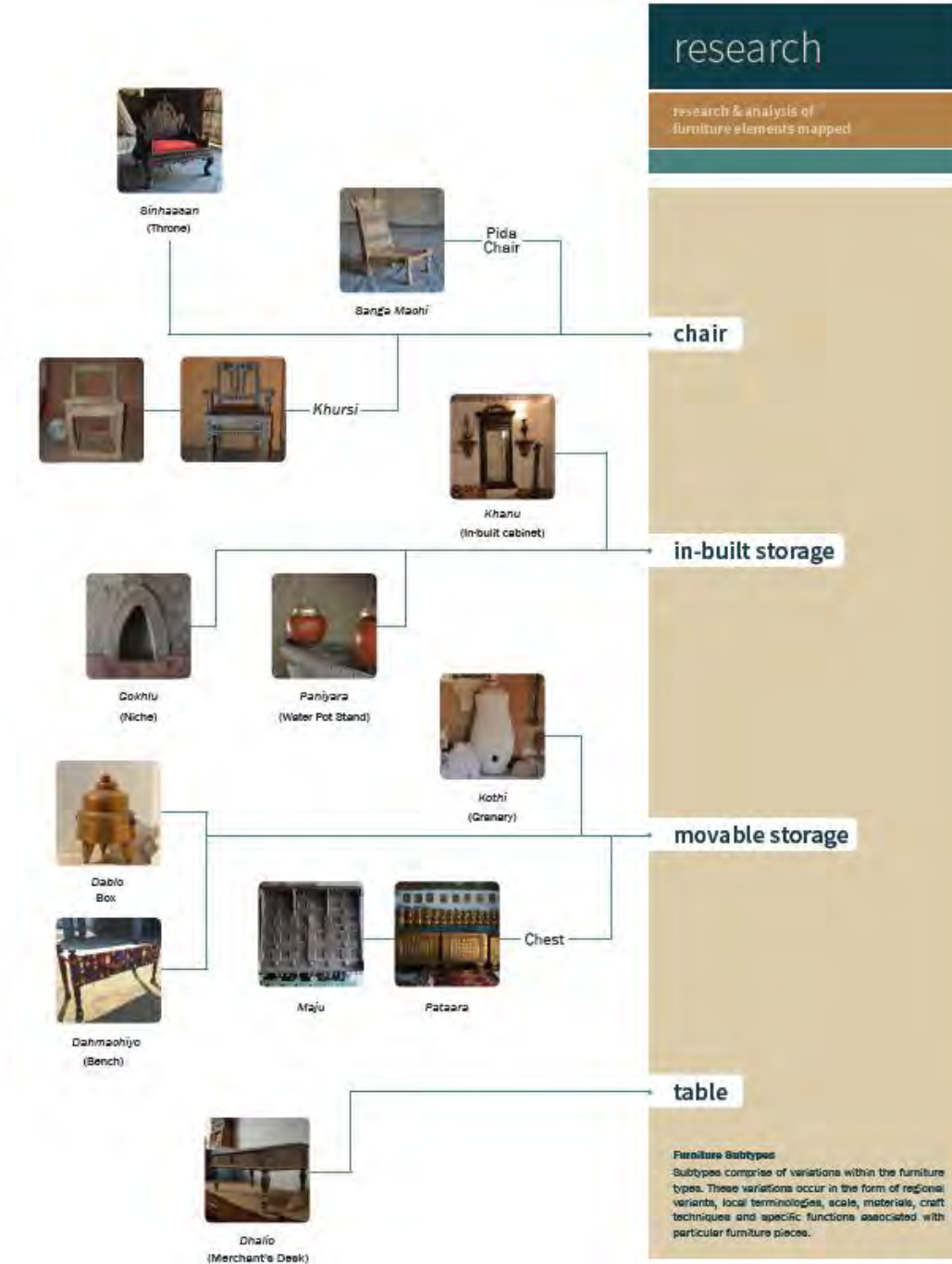
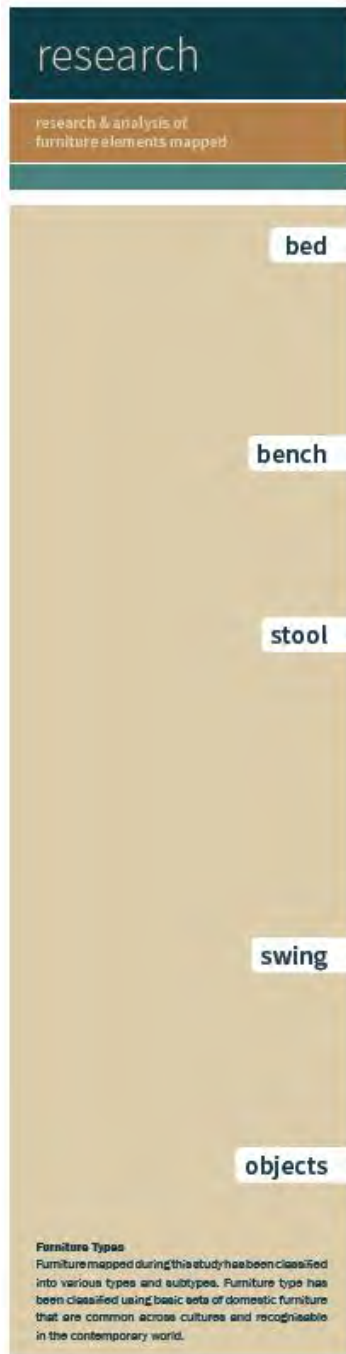
Elements mapped: 1032

Scholars approached: 52

Craftspeople approached: 21



Vernacular furniture of Gujarat



Vernacular furniture of Gujarat

Vernacular Furniture of Gujarat: Catalogue

CEPT
UNIVERSITY
CEPT University Press





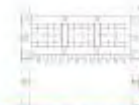
Sanjeriyu Cabinet

Place
Gandhi nu gam,
Kutch

Materials & Techniques

Wood
Carving & Joinery
Earth
Lipan Kaam & Mud
mirror work
Metal

The practice of making Sanjeriyu is still prevalent in many villages of Kutch, where it is made by the women. They meticulously decorate it using clay relief patterns and mirror work.



Sanjeriyu Cabinet

Place
Mota Khandagra,
Kutch

Materials & Techniques

Wood
Carving & Joinery
Metal
Beating
Glass

This wooden sanjeriyu bears motifs similar to the ones in mud sanjeriyu. Despite change of material, there is a conscious effort by the craftsman, to retain the furniture's character through ornamentation.





Majus

Unique storage cabinets called Majus are used to store valuables such as money, fine clothes, jewellery, etc., across the state. They are referred to as Majus, Majju or Manjusha, which are phonological variants of the Sanskrit term Manjusha, that represents a receptacle, a box, basket, casket, and chest. Although the function of a Majus is constant, there are different variants of this furniture based on its physical and cultural characteristics, that attribute it to a particular region or society. Wood is the principle material used to construct a majus, and although the different types differ in their physical attributes, their shape and proportions surprisingly match the description of a manjusha explained in the Manasara - "Its height should be equal to the breadth, or greater by one-fourth, one-half or three-fourths; it should be quadrangular, circular or rectangular, and it should be made of iron or brass. It when made of wood should be one-half or one-fourth (angula) in measure (of width), and the rule about the height is that it should be one-third or one-fourth (of the width). There should be made one, two, or three chambers. It should be discreetly bound with iron so that it may be sufficiently strong (and beautiful)". Most majus recorded through this study, fit the Manasara description of a Manjusha. This furniture is frequently fitted with secret compartments

that are used to store gold, silver or precious ornaments.

Manjush (Kutch)

Manjush, as it is known in Kutch, is a rectangular cabinet elevated on four supports. The rear supports of the manjusha are unadorned, whereas the front ones are turned or carved, and exhibit finials depicting a horse-head. The front façade of the cabinet comprises of three panels set in a frame, of which the central panel houses its shutter. The manjush, is made entirely of wood, using techniques such as joinery, chip-carving, fretwork, and turning, and is embellished with mirrors set in metal frame. The mirrors and geometrical carvings on the manjush compliment the clay-relief interiors and furniture of the Bhunga dwellings. The coherence in patterns and ornaments observed in the architecture, interior, furniture and embroidery conjures a distinctiveness that can be attributed to the communities residing in the Banni region of Kutch.

Majju (Porbandar)

Majju, a rectangular cabinet on wheels, is characteristic to Mer community of Gujarat. The Mer are an agricultural community predominant in several villages in and around Porbandar district. Mer dwellings are made of mud plastered stone walls and a sloping roof supported by wooden structural members. The dwellings, though humble in nature, display fine examples of woodworking in the architectural elements such as the columns, mezzanine, lintel beam of the

it was used to house a bride's belongings to be taken to her husband's home. The tradition of containing a bride's belongings in a new storage furniture continues till date, however, the design of majju has transformed over the years. Among these, the majju made entirely of wood, belonging to early twentieth century, are most painstakingly designed. Basic structure of this majju is a rectangular carcass made of wood, the structural members of which, are essentially the top rail, accompanied by four beams, and the bottom rail attended by two beams. The carcass is braced with wooden strips on its façade and sides; whereas on the back, it is braced by iron strips. Both the wooden and iron strips are held in position with the help of rivets. Its exquisitely ornate façade is a specimen of the craftsman's woodworking skills and aesthetic sensibility. The horizontal and vertical wooden strips used to brace its façade are adorned with intricate incise-carved geometric motifs; and placed such that they form a uniform grid on the surface. Negative spaces created by this grid are fitted with intricately carved panels depicting figures of lord Ganesh, a woman carrying pots, birds and animals like peacock, parrot, elephant and horse, and numerous intricate geometric motifs. Every majju displays either one, or a combination of these motifs. Strips of turned and lacquered wood are riveted on the edges of these decorative panels, thereby, creating a frame around them. At several junctions where the horizontal and vertical sections appear to intersect, a hemispherical ornament, made of turned wood and lacquer is riveted. A series of tiny, bell-shaped, turned wood ornaments dangle along the opulently carved top and bottom rail of the majju. Collectively, these turned and lacquered wooden ornaments add colour and character to the majju.

Four carved horse-heads jut out of the top rail, and two, out of the bottom rail of majju. In fact,



these are ends of the structural beams, that run perpendicular to the aforesaid rails. Each horse-head on the top rail is paired with a stylized peacock or parrot carved in wood, placed beneath it. It is hard to miss the similarity between these horse-heads and the ones that adorn the lintel beams on the entrance door of a Mer house. Although the community is largely into farming, and rear cattle in present times, their oral history and folklore lauds the Mer as a warrior clan distinguished for its valour and sacrifices. The community identifies itself with the symbol of a horseman with a shield and sword. It is the community's affinity towards horses that reflects in these small, but significant details that adorn their material culture. A shutter to access this majju, is located in the central part of its façade. This winged shutter camouflages strikingly within the ornate grid except for its latch and hinges, that give away its identity. Just above this shutter is a flap door through which, secret compartments within the majju, can be accessed.

Kothla Majus (Central Gujarat)

Dummy text (500 words): The majju is of cultural significance to the Mer because, customarily, it was used to house a bride's belongings to be taken to her husband's home. The tradition of containing a bride's belongings in a new storage furniture continues till date, however, the design of majju has transformed over the years. Among these, the majju made entirely of wood, belonging to early twentieth century, are most painstakingly designed. Basic structure of this majju is a rectangular carcass made of wood, the structural members of which, are essentially the top rail, accompanied by four beams, and the bottom rail

3.9: An earlier example of a baithak can be observed in this image of a Peshwa durbar, who ruled Gujarat for a short but significant time, used this arrangement to be seated while



Pidha
Low seat





Takaht
bench





Majus
chest



A day in the life of a field researcher

Majus (chest)
Khadagda



A day in the life of a field researcher

Hindolo (swing)
Khadagda





A day in the life of a field researcher

Majus (chest)
Khadagda



A day in the life of a field researcher

Majus (chest)
Khadagda



A day in the life of a field researcher



A day in the life of a field researcher

Majus (chest)
Khadagda



A day in the life of a field researcher



A day in the life of a field researcher

Jagdish Suthar
Khadagda



A day in the life of a field researcher



Sri Adinath Digambar
Bhataivara Jain
Mandir, Khadagda

Rajasthan

an overview

- An area of 342, 239 sq. km (212657.4 sq.miles)
- Two and a half times the size of England
- A population of 68.89 million



Rajasthan

an overview



Diverse landscape

Rajasthan

an overview

Diverse landscape



Rajasthan

an overview

Diverse landscape



Rajasthan

an overview

Architectural
splendour



Rajasthan

an overview

**Traditional
craft practices**



Rajasthan

an overview

**Traditional
craft practices**



Rajasthan

an overview

Agrarian
villages



Rajasthan

an overview

Adivasi homes



Rajasthan

an overview

**Diverse
communities**



Rajasthan

an overview



Layered social
construct

Rajasthan

field work

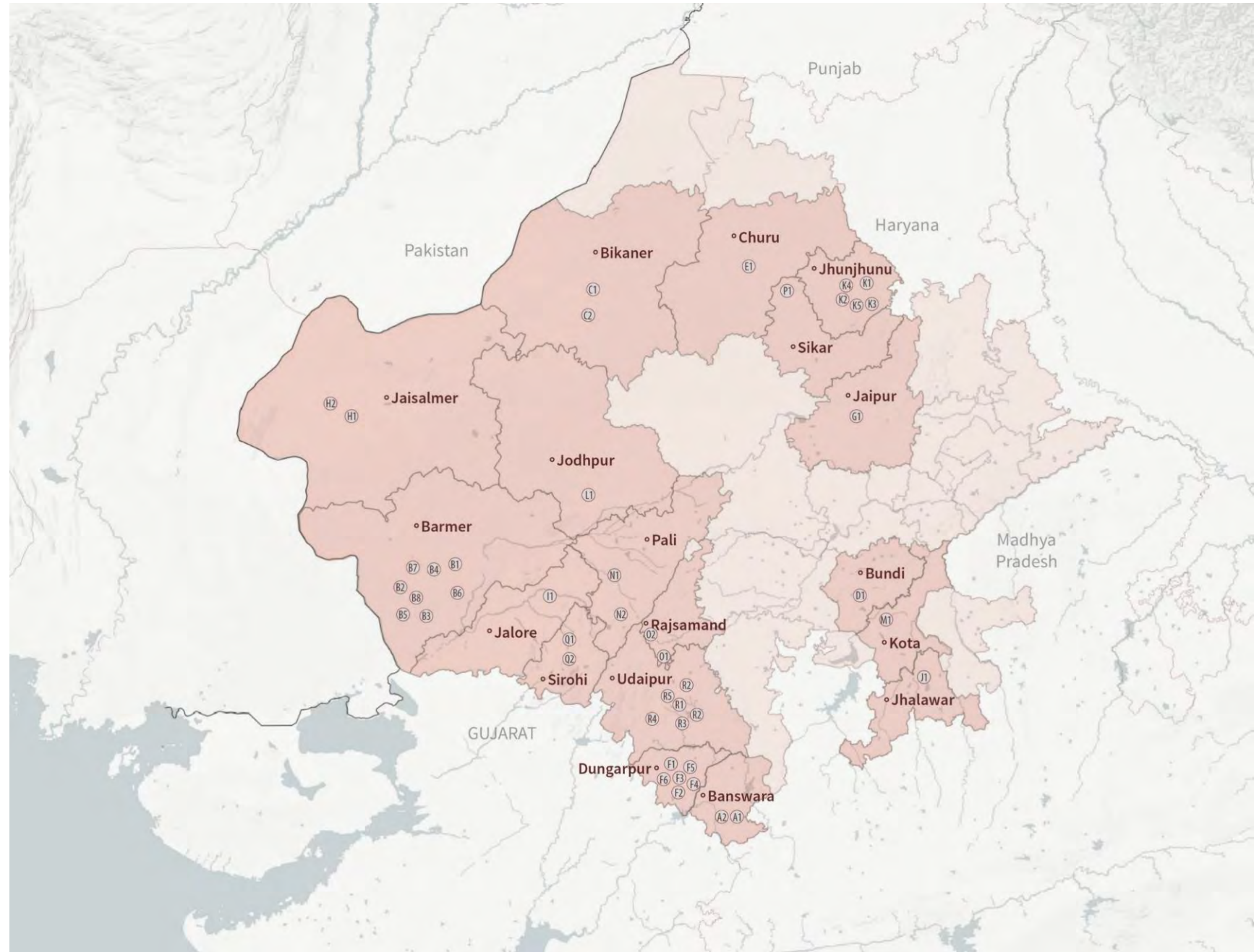
Places visited: 37

Distance travelled: 6974 km

Furniture mapped: 966

Scholars approached: 44

Craftspeople approached: 19





WHAT?

searching for the vernacular furniture of Rajasthan

Types of vernacular furniture

50 types of furniture identified

966 furniture pieces documented

500 more furniture anticipated

aasan (seating)

Baithak
Floor seat



Basni/Kuto/
Tarvaiya
Low Seat



Hindolo/
Jhula
Swing



Modha
Stool



Paata/Paat
Low seat



Pida/Pida
Low seat



Takath/
Paata
Bench



Sihaasan
Throne



manch (sleeping)

Dholiya
Charpoy



Khaatli/
Machli
Charpoy



Mausa/
Macha/
Khaat
Charpoy



Palang
Bedstead



Palna/
Ghodiya/
Hindo
Cradle



Palna
Crib



manjush (storage)

Aliya/Todla
Wall niches



Almari
Cabinet



Bhandariya/
Teenkuni
In-Built
cabinet



Damachiya/
Deliya/
Denchi
Mattress
stand



Ghaduchi/
Ghanuchi/
Panderi
Water
pitcher
stand



Janeri
In-Built
shelf



Kathothra/
Kathathra/
Kothari/
Kothar
Larder



Kotha/Kothi
Granary



Maata
Granary



Majjus
Cabinet



Parinda/
Parindo/
Pendo/
Paneri
Water
storage



Pataara/
Baksa/
Sandook
Chest



Peti/
Baksa
Coffer



Takhi/
Aada
In-Built
cabinet



Vadi/Tani/
Latan
Hangers

sapaat (surface)



Charan
chowki
Foot stool



Chowki/
Bajot
Low table



Kanari
chowki
Embroidery
table



Peyi/
Munim desk
Writing box



Billoda/
Valona
Buttermilk
churner



Chakki/
Ghatti/
Gharti
Handmill
grinder



Habelu-
Ukhla
Mortar and
pestle



Katordaen
Container



Kharal
Opium
crusher



Khunti
Hanger



Pankha
Fan

aasan seating



Basni (low seat)



Pidhi (low seat)



Pidha (low chair)



Baithak (floor seating)



Takaht (bench)

manch sleeping



Machli (small charpoy)



Khaat(charpoy)



Palang (bed)



Palna (cradle)



Ghodiya (cradle)

manjush storage



Aada (inbuilt niche)



Sandook(chest)



Jhopad Peti (chest)



Majus (chest)



*Ghaduchi (water
pitcher stand)*



Kathatara(larder)



Kothi (granary)

sapaat
surface



Bajot (low table)



Chowki (low table)



Kanari chowki (embroidery table)



peyi (merchant's desk)

vastu objects



Ghatti (handmill grinder)



Kharal (opium crusher)



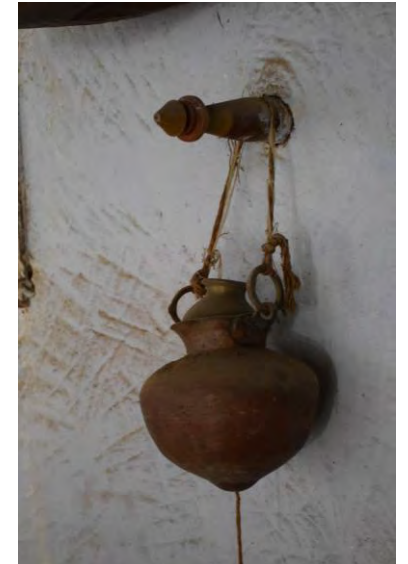
Katordaan (container)



Sigdi (hearth)



Billona (butter churner)



Khunti (hanger)



THE TALES

searching for the vernacular furniture of Rajasthan

**Vernacular furniture -
a response to the
context**

Hot and dry!



Vernacular furniture -
a response to the
context

Long walks!



Vernacular furniture -
a response to the
context

aala
wall niche



Vernacular furniture -
a response to the
context

pyaavu
a public water room



Vernacular furniture -
a response to the
context

ghaduchi
water pitcher stand



Vernacular furniture -
a response to the
context



pendo
water pitcher shelf

Vernacular furniture -
a response to the
context

Indigenous
innovation



Vernacular furniture – the versatility

Kothi/kablo/kabli
granary



Vernacular furniture – the versatility

kotho
an inbuilt granary



Vernacular furniture and the makers

Taridevi
Mahabar, Barmer

“In earlier times it was not necessary that the bride was given everything in dowry. Few things like chulho(hearth), bel(inbuilt shelves), kothlio(larder) required to run the house were made by us under supervision of our mother-in-law. It is easily noticeable if a helping hand was involved in the making of these as patches would differ with poor finish and unsatisfactory results.”



Vernacular furniture and the makers

**Taridevi 's house
Barmer**



Vernacular furniture and the makers

Taridevi 's kitchen
and her *kathatara*



Vernacular furniture and the makers

Taridevi 's
kathatara



Vernacular furniture and the makers

Prembai
Roopsi village, Jaisalmer

“To live in mud houses, one also needs to repair and maintain it by plastering the wall surfaces every year after the rain. The same mixture of clay and water is also applied as a coating on the Kathatara (larder).”



Vernacular furniture and the makers

Prembai's house
Roopsi village,
Jaisalmer



Vernacular furniture and the makers

Prembai 's kitchen
and her *kathatara*



Vernacular furniture and the makers

Prembai 's
kitchen with the
kathatara and *bel*



Vernacular furniture and the makers

Prembai 's *bel*
(inbuilt shelf)



Vernacular furniture for the community

Paata at the
Dassaniyo ka
chowk



Vernacular furniture
for the community

Paata at the
Daga Sethiya
Parak guwad



Vernacular furniture for the community

Paata at the
Sonaro ka guwad



Vernacular furniture
for the community



“Commissioned in
memory of Late
Sri Jaganathji
Sonar, by his
beloved wife
Shantidevi.”

Vernacular furniture for the community



Paata at the
Kocharo ka chowk

Vernacular furniture for the community

Paata at the
Kocharo ka chowk



Vernacular furniture for the community

Paata at the
Kocharo ka chowk



Vernacular furniture for the community

Paata at the
Kocharo ka chowk



Vernacular furniture
for the community

Takaht outside a
shop, Mandawa



Vernacular furniture for the community

Takaht in a
temple, Nawalgarh



Vernacular furniture for the community

Takaht in a
temple, Bagar



Vernacular furniture for the community



Takaht in a
temple, Bagar

Vernacular furniture for everyone

Furniture in a rural household



Pidha
Chota Dungra, Banswara



Palna
Dungarpur



Khaat
Dungarpur

Vernacular furniture for everyone

Furniture from the urban houses



Pidha
Jaipur



Ghodiya
Barmer



Charpai
Shekhawati

Vernacular furniture for everyone

Furniture from royal palaces



Pidha
City Palace, Udaipur



Palna
Palace, Jodhpur



Palang
Bikaner



What have we taken back from the journey?

The beauty of the
context



Inbuilt furniture
pendo in Dungarpur

The beauty of the
context



The hospitality
Baithak in
Shekhawati

The privilege of
collections



The craftsmanship
Chowki in SADACC
collection

The privilege of
collections



The uniqueness
Takaht in SADACC
collection



A continuing journey!