

VERNACULAR FURNITURE OF GUJARAT

Focus On : South Gujarat
(Surat & Valsad Districts, & Daman U.T.)

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Overview

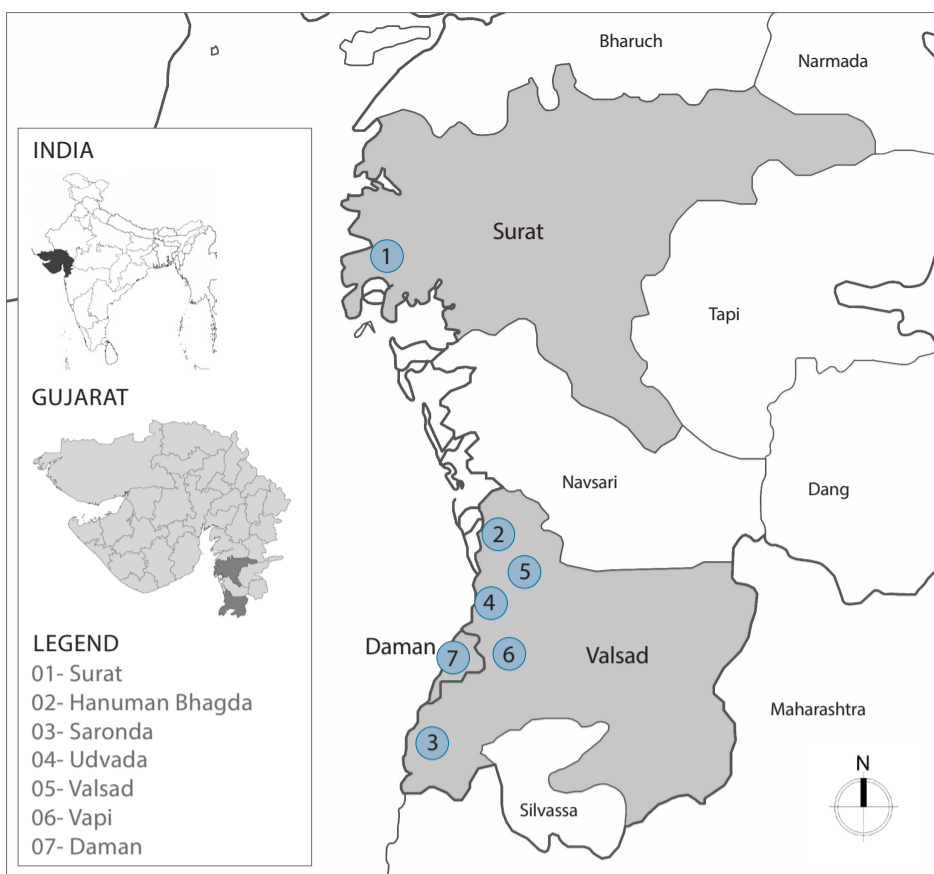
Places Visited: 07

Distance travelled: 920 km

Elements Mapped: 38

Scholars approached: 8

Craftspeople approached: 1



Hanuman Bhagda



Saronda



Udvada

Surat and Valsad district is located in south-west Gujarat on the western coast. Field visits for the month of August were spread across seven places in these districts – Surat city, Hanuman Bhagda, Saronda, Udvada, Valsad city, Vapi and Daman (Union Territory). Being a coastal belt the historical development of Surat dates back to 300 B.C. Surat was colonised by King Brigus from Sauvira on the bank of River Tapi. It had been a trader's paradise amongst Portuguese, French, Dutch and English sailors and continues to be a major trade hub. Amongst other communities, this region is dominated by the merchant and trader communities (Hindu and Muslim alike). It is also home to Zoroastrian community of India, and has their highest order religious temple in Udvada. With such inflow of cultures most of the furniture found in this region is amalgamated with variety of visual and functional rendering. In Gujarat, as in rest of India, it was the arrival of the Europeans that led to the need for elevated furniture from the West. Western prototypes were imported and given to the local craftspeople to copy. The skill of the craftspeople and their expertise in understanding of the material, led to production of European and Indo-European furniture in Surat. During British times, it was one of the few places where furniture could be bought ready-made.

Chairs, benches, tables with apron front, and partition screens are a common sight across houses in the region. The **Bannk** (bench) is one of the most common furniture pieces, and is

generally located in the front porch where the residents sit in their idle time and interact with friends and acquaintances passing by. The *bannk* bears a strong resemblance to the benches found in Basilica of Bom Jesus Church, in Daman which is one of the initial Portuguese churches of India.

Many furniture pieces have been adapted or reinvented to fit the local usage, one example would be the chest on stand and the chest on wheels locally known as **Petarro**. The function and making of the piece remains the same but the motifs are refined to fit global techniques. Even the **ghanti ane machi** (hand mill and stand) displayed thoughtful details and joinery - like a wooden lid and metal wedges - compared to the vernacular ones. Geometric frescos are used to decorate The **Gokhlu** (in-built niche) in one of the houses. The **khatlo** and **bajoth** are some of the few vernacular forms found in the region.

Various household objects such as lamps and hangers often make for unique vernacular creations. A simple wooden lamp-stand resting on four legs with a cup on top to place mud oil lamp, has a feature to adjust its height for decorative and lighting purposes. Numerous toys and miniature furniture were found that are used as votive offerings at shrines or temples in several regions of Gujarat. For example, a miniature **ghodiyu** (swing with cradle) is offered to pray for a new born child in the family.



Gokhlu (In-built shelf)



Oil Lamp Stand (Adjustable)



1. Partition Screen, 2. Bannk (Bench), 3. Khatlo (Charpoy), 4 & 5. Petaaro (Chest), 6. Petaaro (Chest on stand), 7. Bajoth (Stool) & 8. Ghanti ane machi (Hand mill and stand).

A monthly report of field visits conducted as a part of a Project: **Study of Vernacular Furniture of North West India**

A collaborative research project by: Design Innovation and Craft Resource Centre (DICRC), CEPT University, India (www.dicrc.in) & South Asian Decorative Arts and Craft Collection Trust (SADACC), UK (www.southasiandecorativeartsandcrafts.co.uk)