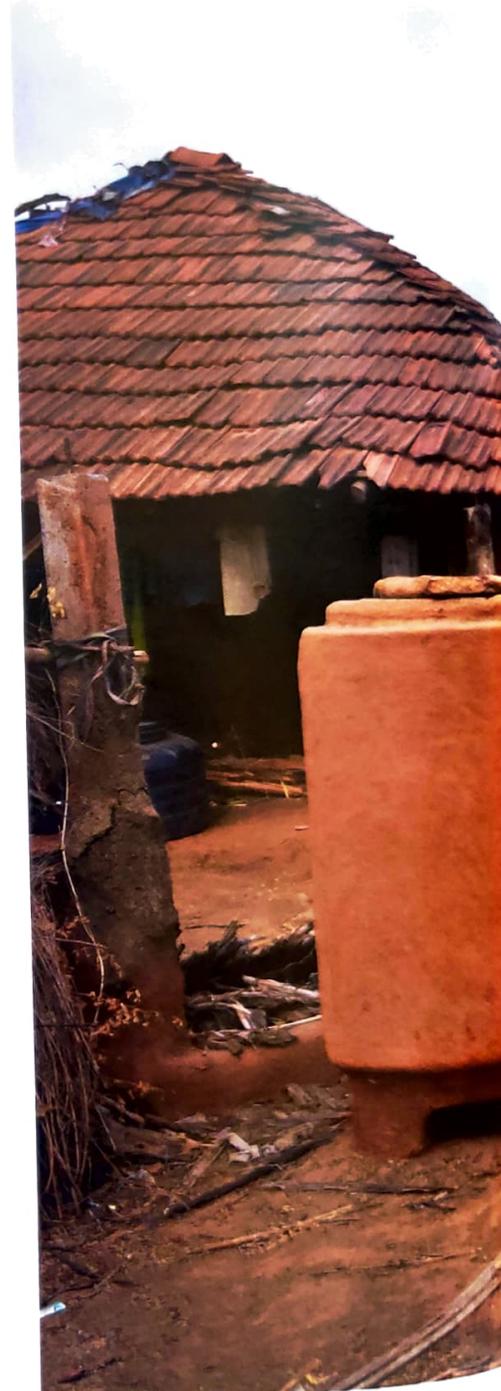


REVISITING VERNACULAR FURNITURE TRADITIONS OF GUJARAT

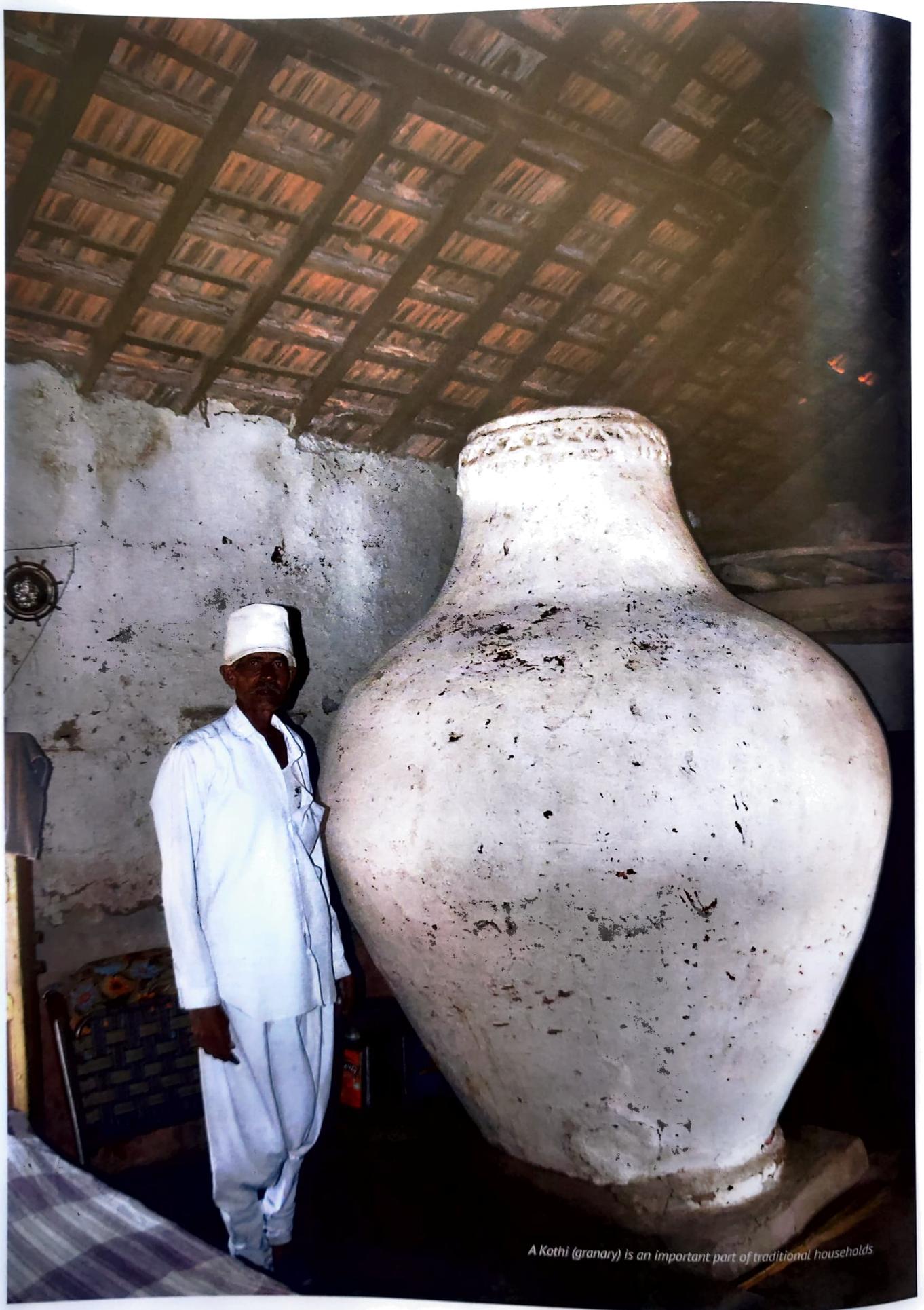
Text : Ar. Mitraja Bais / Photos : DICRC, CEPT University

Sahaj: Vernacular Furniture of Gujarat, co-authored by Mitraja Bais, Jay Thakkar, Samrudha Dixit and Ben Cartwright, probes into folk narratives and design details of traditional furniture and objects that are intrinsic to everyday life of people across the state. This book marks the first ever survey and accompanying research of vernacular furniture in Gujarat. It is the result of Phase I: Gujarat of the Vernacular Furniture of North-West India project, a collaboration between Design Innovation and Craft Resource Centre (DICRC), CEPT University and the South Asian Decorative Arts and Crafts Collection Trust (SADACC), UK. *Sahaj* is published by the CEPT University Press and supported by Gujarat Tourism, Government of Gujarat.

Vernacular furniture can be described as traditional furniture belonging to a particular region or community. It is the furniture of the people made by specialized craftspeople (often embedded in the community) or by the householders themselves. Vernacular furniture helps in the storage of valuables, clothing, water and food. During worship, it provides a platform to religious images and figures. It can support revered books. It helps the acts of eating, socialising and sleep. Vernacular furniture of Gujarat ranges from a rudimentary paatlo (low seat) to an extravagant pataaro (hope chest). Amidst these two extremes it encompasses an array of furniture items and objects such as the trademark hichko (swing); the different types of majus (chest), kothiyo (granaries), paniyaro (water pitcher storage) and charpoys (khatlo, khatli, dholio and dholni); dhichaniyu (knee rest); sev ni paat (noodle plank) and so on. The diverse communities in Gujarat make and use specific types of furniture to suit their lifestyles and the environments they live in: whether using locally available materials (mud, bamboo, regionally specific wood sources or stone) or countering local climatic conditions (keeping food cool and pest free, or creating an airy sleeping surface). Although it was widely used in the past it continues to play a vital role in the everyday life of people of Gujarat.







A Kothi (granary) is an important part of traditional households



Extravagant Pataara (hope_chest) and other traditional utensils



The indoor wooden swing known as Hichko

Vernacular furniture featured in Sahaj ranges from c.1900 to present. The book addresses previous research on vernacular furniture in the Indian context, but it is largely based on first-hand data collected during multiple field visits across the state over a period of eight months. Nearly 2,000 furniture pieces and associated objects were recorded during the course of this research. This was realised by using a unique app based mapping software - Real Time Visual Mapping (RTVM) - that was specifically developed by DICRC researchers for the survey of furniture. Vernacular furniture features in Sahaj is classified based on local names and presented in sections divided into uses - Aasan: seat; Manch: bed; Manjush: storage; Sapaat: surface; and Vastu: objects; they include the various types and sub-types of vernacular furniture items. Each object is presented with a wealth of information, including physical description of the furniture, 2D and 3D

DICRC, CEPT UNIVERSITY

Design Innovation and Craft Resource Centre (DICRC), CEPT University, India, functions as a research centre for the development and understanding of the traditional and vernacular building and craft practices of India. At DICRC, crafts are studied under two primary categories: SMC (Space Making Crafts) and SNC (Surface Narrative Crafts).

DICRC's prime goal is to promote the significance of, and encourage the study of, the traditional and vernacular building and craft practices of India by means of dedicated research and innovation. In order to do so, we rely on five major focus areas: Research and Documentation (which includes mapping, documentation, research and analysis), Innovation and Development (through workshops, internship and fellowship programs), Education and Training (by means

of conducting lectures, seminars and forums to establish the role of craft in Interior Architecture at national and International level), Application and Collaboration (taking up national and international collaborative research projects), and lastly, Resource Building and Dissemination (sharing the process and results of all our activities on our open source platform the Building Craft Lab [BCL]).

DICRC is a conducive platform where design thinking engages with a range of crafts and traditional knowledge. It also provides consultancy services to creative persons, artisans and the interior architecture industry for the implementation of innovative ideas in the field of crafts within current interior architecture education as well as practice.



Paat (swing) with Pataaras in the background

construction drawings, location where it was recorded and narratives emphasising local social customs, traditions and beliefs associated with the use of the furniture, in contemporary times and the past. The factors that have affected vernacular furniture construction, use, adaption and discard, both in contemporary Gujarat and from c.1900 onwards, are addressed in the Epilogue: considering change followed by conclusion which sums up this research and opens up discussion on the continuing work in other states of India.

The result of Phase I: Gujarat is a twofold output - Vernacular Furniture of Gujarat: Catalogue is the accompanying publication to Sahaj: Vernacular Furniture of Gujarat. The catalogue presents, in detail, over 400 vernacular furniture pieces and objects from Gujarat. The items in the catalogue are classified under the same five broad categories as used in Sahaj. The subsequent phases for Vernacular Furniture of North-West India project, each involving fieldwork, documentation and research, are Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana. 