The Tribal population in Gujarat is mainly concentrated in the eight districts along the eastern border of the state. 96% live in The Dangs, Valsad, Surat, Bharuch, Vadodara, Panchmahals, Sabarkantha and Banaskantha. The tribal region extends from Sabarkantha district through Panchmahals down to Surat, Valsad and The Dangs. About 92% of the scheduled tribes are from the rural areas.

The Kotwalias tribe of South Gujarat is generally landless people who primarily depend on bamboo basket making for their livelihood. Their products include split bamboo mats (Palas), threshing trays (Topla) and baskets (Supra). Some Kotwalia communities still reside within forest areas while others have shifted to agricultural villages but maintain their traditional cottage industry. In the past, Kotwalia communities received low prices from contractors and middle men for their products. Efforts have been made to break this exploitative relationship by harvesting and supplying bamboo quotas to basket making communities and guaranteeing a market by buying back their products. The paper describes the traditional uses of bamboo by the Kotwalias tribe.

Keywords: Traditional, Gujarat, Kotwalia tribe, Vansfodia tribe, Ethnobotany, Traditional medicine, Ethnomedicine

In India, tribal peoples constitute nearly 68 million people (roughly 8% of the nation's total population). The Kathodi, Kotwalia, Padhars, Siddis and Kolghas tribes of Gujarat have been recognized as primitive tribes. The population of primitive groups is spreaded over 12 districts, viz. Surat, Valsad, Dangs, Bharuch, Sabarkantha, Ahmedabad, Surendranagar, Junagadh, Bhavnagar, Rajkot, Amreli and Jamnagar. Primitive tribes are the tribes who are very backward and get more assistance from the state for their development. Scheduled Tribes population of 61.62 lakhs accounts for 14.92% of the total population in Gujarat state against 8.01% scheduled tribes' population of the country.

Among the schedule tribes of Gujarat state, the ‘Kotwallia’ tribe is known as ‘Vitlolia’ or ‘Vansfodia’ (Vans-Bamboo, fodia those who break the bamboos), which means the tribal, who break the bamboos. Traditionally, they have been occupationally engaged in making big Tokras (baskets), containers, etc. from bamboo. Usually, they prefer to stay near the forest region on the bank of the river or water streams where the bamboos are available in plenty. Kotwalia tribes are solely dependent on the bamboo industry. They have been engaged in making several items such as baskets, bags, containers, brooms, Supadas and other useful items of household use. All the members of the family jointly work in preparing the bamboo items and are a family occupation for them. Educationally, the Kotwallias are very backward. They do not have their own language or dialects; but follow the language or dialects of the people residing around them. Kotwallia tribes are illiterate. Their literary rate is about 26%. Almost all of them are landless since ages. The art of cultivation is yet to be imbibed in some of the members of the groups. The tribes are entirely dependent on their occupation of bamboo works and basket making. To supplement their livelihood, they gather a number of minor forest produces such as Timru leaves, Mohua flowers, Doli, edible roots, etc.

The tribes are generally vegetarian but also supplement their food by hunting. Their economic condition is extremely poor. The hamlets of Kotwallias are generally located near the forest areas. They are classified into two groups, forest village Kotwallias and non-forest village Kotwallias. They use bamboos to make different types of products and earn their livelihood.

Bamboo plays a significant role in providing employment to the Kotwallia tribe. The bamboo work provides employment to the entire family with the minimum of investment and an industry is running in the Dangs District of Gujarat.

The Bamboo industry is useful in tribal areas because it needs minimum amount of investment and provides comparatively maximum amount of return. However, there are some limitations and practical
Life Style
Tribals move here and there in search of bamboos. They collect 5 to 7 number of bamboos after cutting and bring them at their destination usually on a bank of a river. A team of 4 to 5 people during the daylong hunting collects 100 to 125 numbers of bamboos. The bundle of 100-125 bamboos is tied with a chip of bamboo only. The whole bundle is then put in the river water and the bundle is carefully driven in the flow of water up to their place of work.

Difficulties also. Sometimes, dry and ripe bamboos are supplied to the Kotwalia, which are not fit for preparing the bamboo items. Due to careless cutting, the full length chips cannot be obtained from it. This results in wastage of both time and bamboos. Green bamboos of Turi type are useful for preparing Supadas. While the bamboos of Bhood type are useful for preparing Tokras, baskets, bags, containers, etc. An arrangement has been made to market the bamboo products through the Bamboo work co-operative societies; so that proper benefits can be availed by the tribal members. Never the less, due to ignorance some members are tempted to make direct sale in open market. The tribes need to be properly educated enabling them to imbibe co-operative values in their transactions of sale and purchase.

In South Gujarat (Fig. 1) the tribals go in the forest region and bring the headload of bamboos keeping a bundle on their heads. However, some go to far off in the forest to bring the bamboos in a team of 4 or 5 persons. On an average, one person can cut around 30 to 35 of bamboos daily. When the bamboo is cut from a bamboo plant, the six feet top length of bamboo is cut down; so that they get around net 4.5 m long bamboo for their work. The width of around 10 to 13 cm is useful in making bamboo products.

Work Process
Before making a bamboo article from a raw bamboo, they break the bamboo on the top and make small four-fold opening. This is done by a specialised knife. The broader chip of bamboo is called Pat, the thin chip is called, Silly and the coarse/rough chip is known as, Kanado. After unfolding the upper portion of the bamboo in four-fold parts, they finish the chip for its deployment in making a bamboo article. In a day, the finished chips can be prepared from about two bamboos. Time taken for preparing various bamboo items has been shown in Table 1.

After breaking the top of the bamboo in four fold parts, it is placed in the sun for softening, for making the process of bamboo Patties making easier. Though
Table 1—Time taken for preparing various bamboo items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Bamboo Article(s)</th>
<th>Number of Articles prepared/pers/day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Big Tokra</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Small Tokri</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Basket (to keep chapatti)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fan (square)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Supada (Double Patti used to air out the dust from food grains)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Supada (Single Patti)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Containers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mats</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the soft Patties do not break easily pouring water on them further softens them. Usually the entire work of cutting and finishing of the chips is done by males, the knitting is done by women folk. Thus, there is a good division of labour.

Another important tribes known as Dhor Koli, Kolacha, Kolgha or Tokre Koli are also engaged in preparing Tokra from Bamboos. The Kathodi tribe also prepares Tokra and the fishing equipments from the bamboos and sells the same in the weekly market, Hat Bajar. Other tribals such as Konkana, Varli, Nayaka, Bhil, Ganit, Ghodia, Chaudhari, etc. prepare useful household items from bamboos.

Bamboo Craft Industry

In the district of Dangs at Vaghai, Ahwa, Saputara and some other villages, several bamboo-based cottage industries, co-operative societies, and bamboo products’ selling co-operative societies exist. The Forest Department provides the Bamboos to these units. The members/artisans of bamboo working in these units prepare and sell various bamboo items.

Bamboo items used or produced in tribal areas and inter-woven with tribal life are as follows:

1 **Ghunghadi** (Bamboo cover)
   This is used particularly during monsoon to cover head while working in open. Since it is to be placed on the head, it does not have any handle like an umbrella. It is prepared by knitting the small thin strips of bamboo held against each other properly locked. It is like a hat externally covered by the Khakhara leaves to provide protection against water. Bark or Asatri covers the borders. Ghunghadi is used as an umbrella.

2 **Sitting Mat**
   Both big and small mats and long mattresses in various designs are knitted from the very thin, narrow bamboo chips (Fig. 2). They are used for sitting and for sleeping purposes. It is also used as screen to prevent the sunlight and heat entering the room.

3 **Khapedo**
   Khapedo is a kind of partition wall. It is prepared from bamboo chips woven like a cross knitting and thereafter some clay and/or cow-dung is pasted on it. This provides both strength and non-transparency. It is also used to make a cattle shed separating it from their living area.

4 **House roofing** (Chhaj)
   In the eastern tribal strip of Gujarat State, the houses/hutments/roofs are made up of either Manglory tiles or the indigenous tiles (Nalia). In South Gujarat, particularly Surat district and beyond, mostly Manglory tiles are used, but in northeast strip, mostly indigenous tiles are used on the roof of a house. Whenever the indigenous tiles are used on the roof of a house, invariably the bamboo is used alongwith these tiles (Fig. 3).

5 **Fencing** (Vans Vad)
   For putting the fencing around their houses strong and thorny bamboos are preferred by the tribals. Making of bamboo fencing is typical tribal traditional craftwork.

6 **Cart caging** (Tatu)
   Putting a roof of bamboo strips supported by four or six bamboo sticks provides caging of the bullock
light items such as grass/tree leaves, etc. Most of the tribals use Dalu to keep the birds safe during night. It is an airy, ventilated shelter for the birds. The birds are transported safely and comfortably from one place to other through Dalu.

10 Protective Basket

Hanging basket prepared with bamboo strips used to keep the utensils is known as Shiku.

11 Kolaju

Kolaju, a traditional device made up of bamboo strips is used to provide protection to the eggs. It is prepared from the piece of a bamboo. One end of such bamboo is kept on the ground while the other end is cut and opened. On that end, some basket type bamboo bowl is provided. In a bamboo bowl, the eggs of hen are kept covered and safe.

12 Mali

Mali an instrument made from bamboo chips is used for fishing. It is prepared with bamboo chips weaving against each other. Bamboo Mali traps the fish and does not allow them to escape. In a flowing stream the water is temporarily blocked while fishing with Mali.

13 Sato

Sato is also prepared by knitting the thin and broad chips of bamboo. While fishing Sato is used to narrow down the water flow allowing flow of water directly into Mali and fishes get trapped. This is a supplementary instrument used to slow down the force and flow of water so as to catch the fish easily through Mali.

14 Hunting Instruments

In order to catch the birds the tribals prepare cage like instruments with the help of thin strip of bamboo and knitting them in a cage shape. Besides, the hairs of the horse are tied to the thin chip to prepare a ‘catch in’ (Fando).

Arrows and bows used for hunting are also prepared from bamboos. The bow is prepared after cutting the bamboo from the top. Instead of cotton string, very thin chip is used which is not only flexible as cotton string but is also stronger and tighter. If the arrow is prepared from bamboo, and the hunting part is affixed and is made up of steel it is known as Bilkhi. When the arrow is prepared from thin bamboo stick the softened part of knot on the bamboo is affixed which gives a strong blow but not bleeding.
Fig. 4- Kotwalla woman weaving bamboo basket

Fig. 5- Pag-thanio, the bamboo staircase for palm tree

Fig. 6- Pag-thanio, the bamboo staircase for Mediwala House
injury. This is called *Bitlo*. *Bitlo* is of very simple type but sometimes contain small wings like fan. In all agriculture instruments and equipments, the long handle portion is made from bamboo sticks.

15 Musical Instruments
Music, dance and symphony are integral part of tribal life. Tribals play flute, *Pawa*, *Pilhooda* or such other musical instruments made from bamboo.

16 Bhatho
The *Bhatho* is a container to keep or storing the spare of arrows. It is also prepared from the hollow bamboo and it can be kept safely on the wall.

17 Pag-thanio
Tribals usually use the bamboo with a number of knot/Pilas for tree climbing purpose (Fig. 5). Bamboo is used as a staircase by tribals, helps to climb over a place or tree very easily.

Where there is a risk of wild animals entering a house they construct the houses with specialized design. In the single storied houses known as Mediwala houses (*Medi* means a storey, a *Mala* animals are kept on the ground floor, while they live on the first floor. In such single storied houses, where there are no staircases knotted bamboos are used to climb up the floor (Fig. 6).

18 Churner (*Valoni/Ravaiya*)
To make butter milk from the curd it is churned with an instrument known as *Valoni* or *Ravaiya* or Churner invariably made from bamboo.

19 Marriage Pandal (*Chowri*)
It is customary among tribals to prepare the marriage pandal (*Chowri*) from brand new bamboos. Bamboos are cut and brought for a marriage function. In Panchmahal district such bamboos are brought directly by the persons whereas in Surat district (South Gujarat region) a bundle of five bamboos are brought through bullocks. The new bamboos brought for the purpose of marriage ceremony are worshipped and then marriage pandal (*Chowri*) is installed.

20 Food Items
Bamboos seeds are used as food grains. They are ground, flour prepared out of it and is used to prepare *Rotil Chapati*. They are mostly used during scanty rainfall or famine. The soft bamboo’s sprout/sucker is cut in to pieces and delicious vegetable is cooked. Sour pickle and sweet murabba (*jam*) are also prepared from the pieces of soft suckers of bamboo.

21 Traditional Medicines
The traditional way of curing the diseases is more prominent among tribals. They usually depend on natural herbal medicines including bamboo. Some of the common recipes are as follows:

- Bamboo leaves (green or dry) boiled with water are very useful in providing relief in diseases related to urinary system particularly frequent urination.
- A powder like substance found in the knots of a bamboo is very light in weight and white in colour. The powder dropped in the ears in case of deafness, gives quick relief.
- Cough can be cured by taking the ashes of bamboo leaves along with honey or jaggery.
- Bamboo leaves are given to animals during their delivery time to expel the placenta.

22 Social Life
The *Feng-Shui* (*Vastu Vidya*) popular these days, considers a bamboo plant to be a very strong and sure symbol of long life. Bamboo Tree has a long life, can survive even during most difficult circumstances and in odd conditions too. Having capacity to stand strong and steady, it is considered as a symbol of strength and stamina.

Bamboo being useful and symbol of good luck, tribals live amidst the forest of bamboo. Their hutment roof, walls, compound fencing, and the household items are prepared from bamboos. Tribal life and tribal culture is closely associated with bamboo world.

References