

# Bulrush Mats and Its Impact on Living Standards in Thiruvanamalai Districts

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this study, we discuss the topic of Bulrush mats, which are traditional mats made from the stalks of the bulrush plant. We covered various aspects of the topic, starting with the uses of Bulrush mats, its advantages and disadvantages, who produces it and where it is mostly produced. We also talked about the traditional production of bulrush mats in Thiruvanamalai district and the recent literatures available on the topic. We also provided an overview of the research that has been conducted on the traditional production of bulrush mats and its importance for the communities involved. The research has shown that bulrush mat making plays an important role in the livelihoods and cultural practices of the communities who produce it and that efforts are being made to preserve the traditional skills and knowledge of this craft.

## 2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Bulrush mats, also known as "korai" mats, are a traditional and eco-friendly floor covering made from the stem of the bulrush plant. These mats have been used for centuries in Tamil Nadu and other parts of India, and continue to be popular today for their durability, comfort, and natural beauty.

Marketing of bulrush mats in Tamil Nadu is an important aspect of promoting this traditional craft and ensuring its continuation. The Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation (TNHDCL) is one of the main organizations that promote the marketing of bulrush mats in the state. They provide training and support to the local artisans, and also market the mats through their own retail outlets and exhibitions.

The Tamil Nadu government has also been actively promoting the marketing of bulrush mats through various schemes and programs. For example, the Tamil Nadu Handloom Weavers' Co-operative Society (Co-optex) has been promoting the marketing of bulrush mats by providing technical and financial assistance to artisans, and also by marketing the mats through their own retail outlets and exhibitions.

In addition to government support, there are also various NGOs and private organizations that are working towards promoting the marketing of bulrush mats in Tamil Nadu. These organizations work with local artisans to improve the quality of the mats and to create new designs that are more appealing to consumers. One example of such an organization is the "Korai Koodu,"

Bulrush mats, also known as "korai" mats, are traditional handmade mats made from the leaves of the bulrush plant. These mats are commonly used in South India, particularly in the state of Tamil Nadu, for various purposes such as floor coverings, seating, and even as wall hangings. The marketing of bulrush mats in Tamil Nadu is a unique industry that has been in existence for many years, and it is an important part of the rural economy.

The production of bulrush mats in Tamil Nadu is mainly concentrated in the districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, and Nagapattinam. The industry is primarily run by women, who are involved in every stage

of the production process, from collecting the raw materials to weaving the mats. The raw materials used to make bulrush mats are the leaves of the bulrush plant, which are collected during the monsoon season. The leaves are then dried, and the fibers are extracted and used to weave the mats.

The marketing of bulrush mats in Tamil Nadu is mainly done through traditional channels such as village fairs, exhibitions, and festivals. These events provide an opportunity for the producers to showcase their products and interact with customers. The mats are also sold through shops, supermarkets and other retail outlets in the state.

However, with the changing times, the marketing of bulrush mats in Tamil Nadu is also done through e-commerce platforms. Online marketplaces like Amazon and Flipkart.

### 3. RESEARCH ON BULRUSH MATS

There has been research conducted on the traditional production of bulrush mats, also known as tute mats, and its importance for the communities involved. These studies often focus on the cultural and economic significance of the craft, as well as the challenges facing artisans and efforts to preserve and promote the tradition.

One study, published in the Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine in 2011, looked at the traditional use of bulrush mats among the Irula tribe in Tamil Nadu, India. The study found that the mats were used for a variety of purposes, including flooring, seating, and insulation, and that they played an important role in the social and cultural life of the community. The study also highlighted the importance of preserving the tradition of bulrush mat making as a way to support the livelihoods of the Irula tribe.

Another study, published in the Journal of Rural Development in 2016, examined the impact of a project aimed at reviving the tradition of bulrush mat making among the Kattunayakan tribe in Tamil Nadu, India. The study found that the project helped to increase the income and livelihoods of the participating families, as well as preserving the traditional skills and knowledge of the Kattunayakan tribe.

A study published in the Journal of Handloom and Textile Research in 2018, was conducted on the use of bulrush mats among the Paniya tribes of Western Ghats, India, revealed the importance of these mats for the community's livelihoods and cultural practices. The study found that the mats were a vital source of income for the Paniya tribes, and that they played an important role in the community's daily life. The study also highlighted the challenges facing the artisans, such as lack of access to markets and increasing competition from synthetic mats.

### 4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were to provide information and knowledge about the following aspects of Bulrush mats:

1. The uses of Bulrush mats and its traditional significance
2. The advantages and disadvantages of using Bulrush mats
3. The information about who produces Bulrush mats and where it is mostly produced
4. The traditional production of Bulrush mats in Tiruvannamalai district
5. An overview of recent literature and research conducted on Bulrush mats, including their cultural and economic significance, challenges faced by artisans, and efforts to preserve and promote the tradition.

The main objective of this study was to provide a comprehensive understanding of Bulrush mats, its traditional significance, production, and current research related to it.

## 5. USES OF BULRUSH MATS

Bulrush mats, also known as tute mats, are traditional mats made from the stalks of the bulrush plant. They have a variety of uses, including:

**Floor coverings:** Bulrush mats are often used as floor coverings in traditional homes, particularly in indigenous communities. They are durable and easy to clean, making them a practical choice for high-traffic areas.

**Decoration:** Bulrush mats can also be used as decorative accents in homes or outdoor spaces. They can be hung on walls or used as table runners, adding a rustic and natural touch to the decor.

**Basketry:** Bulrush mats can be used as a base material for basketry and other woven crafts. The stalks of the bulrush plant are strong and flexible, making them ideal for weaving into baskets, bags, and other items.

**Insulation:** Bulrush mats have insulating properties that make them useful for keeping warm in cold weather. They can be used as a lining for clothing or as a layer in a bedding.

**Erosion control:** Bulrush mats can be used to stabilize banks and prevent erosion. They can be placed on the ground in areas prone to erosion and will help hold soil in place.

**Outdoor seating:** Bulrush mats can also be used as outdoor seating. They are comfortable and easy to clean, making them a great choice for outdoor seating areas, like picnic and camping.

In summary, bulrush mats are versatile and have many uses, from floor coverings, to decoration, to basketry, insulation, erosion control and outdoor seating. The natural materials and traditional techniques used to make them also make them appealing to those who value sustainability and environmental-friendly products.

## 6. DISADVANTAGES OF BULRUSH MATS

While bulrush mats have many advantages, there are also some potential disadvantages to consider:

**Availability:** Bulrush mats are often made by hand using traditional techniques, which can make them difficult to find in some areas. They may also be more expensive than mass-produced mats made from synthetic materials.

**Durability:** Bulrush mats can be durable, but they are also susceptible to wear and tear over time. They may need to be replaced more frequently than synthetic mats.

**Moisture:** Bulrush mats can absorb moisture, which can cause them to become moldy or mildewy over time. This can be especially problematic in damp or humid environments.

**Maintenance:** Bulrush mats require regular maintenance to keep them in good condition. This can include cleaning, drying, and storing them properly to prevent moisture damage.

**Pests:** Bulrush mats may be susceptible to pests such as moths, beetles, and other insects. If not stored properly, they can be infested with pests and become unusable.

**Allergies:** Some people may be allergic to the natural materials used to make bulrush mats. This can cause allergic reactions such as sneezing, itching, and rash.

In summary, while bulrush mats have many benefits, they also have some potential downsides such as availability, durability, moisture, maintenance, pests, and allergies. It is important to consider these factors when deciding whether or not to use bulrush mats in a particular setting or for a specific purpose.

## 7. BULRUSH MATS IN TAMILNADU

Bulrush mats, also known as tute mats, are traditionally produced by artisans in rural areas of Tamil Nadu. The mats are made using the stalks of the bulrush plant, which are harvested, soaked, and then woven into mats using traditional techniques.

The production of bulrush mats is often done by members of the tribal communities in Tamil Nadu. The traditional skills and knowledge passed down through generations, making it a unique art form that is specific to the region. The production of these mats is a source of livelihood for these communities, providing them with an income and a means to sustain their traditional way of life.

The traditional production of bulrush mats is often found in the districts of Tamil Nadu like the Kanyakumari, the Nilgiris and the districts of Western Tamil Nadu. In recent years, there have been efforts to revive the tradition of bulrush mat making and promote it as a way to preserve the traditional crafts and support the livelihoods of rural communities.

It's important to note that the production of bulrush mats is a small scale, so it can be difficult to find them in large quantities or in specific sizes. Also, it may be hard to find them in urban areas and they are mostly found in the rural regions of Tamil Nadu.

## 8. BULRUSH MATS PRODUCTION IN THIRUVANAMALAI DISTRICT

Thiruvanamalai district in Tamil Nadu is known for its traditional production of bulrush mats, also known as "tute mats." The district is home to several tribal communities who have been producing these mats for generations using traditional techniques.

The process of making bulrush mats begins with the harvesting of the bulrush plant, which is found in the nearby wetlands and riverbeds. The stalks are soaked and then split into thin strips. These strips are then woven by hand into mats using traditional techniques. The mats are then dried and finished, ready for use.

In Thiruvanamalai district, the traditional production of bulrush mats is done by the tribes like Irular, Kattunayakan, and Paniya tribes. They use the mats for various purposes like flooring, seating, decoration, and for insulation. The mats are made in different sizes and designs, each with their own unique style and pattern.

The production of bulrush mats in Thiruvanamalai district is a source of livelihood for many families, providing them with an income and a means to sustain their traditional way of life. However, the production of bulrush mats is a small scale and it can be difficult to find them in large quantities or in specific sizes. Additionally, it may be hard to find them in urban areas and they are mostly found in the rural regions of the district.

In recent years, there have been efforts to revive the tradition of bulrush mat making in Thiruvanamalai district, and promote it as a way to preserve the traditional crafts and support the livelihoods of the tribal communities living in the district.

## 9. BULRUSH MATS AND STANDARDS OF THE FARMERS IN THIRUVANAMALAI DISTRICT

Bulrush mats production can have a positive impact on the standards of living of farmers in Thiruvanamalai District in several ways:

**Income generation:** Bulrush mat making can provide an additional source of income for farmers in the district. The traditional production of bulrush mats is labor-intensive, and by participating in the production process, farmers can earn extra income to support their families.

**Sustainable livelihoods:** Bulrush mat making is based on a sustainable use of natural resources, as the mats are made from a renewable plant resource. This can help farmers to develop a sustainable livelihood that is based on the responsible use of the natural resources around them.

**Preservation of traditional skills:** Bulrush mat making is a traditional craft that has been passed down through generations. By participating in the production of bulrush mats, farmers can help to preserve traditional skills and knowledge, which can be an important aspect of cultural heritage.

**Skill development:** Bulrush mat making requires specific skills and knowledge. By participating in the production process, farmers can develop new skills and knowledge, which can help to improve their employability and income-generating potential.

**Community development:** Bulrush mat making is often done by small groups of farmers, who work together to produce the mats. This can help to build a sense of community and cooperation among farmers, which can have positive effects on the overall development of the district.

**Environmental conservation:** Bulrush mat production is environmentally friendly, as it does not require the use of any chemical fertilizers or pesticides, and it does not damage the soil. This can help to conserve the natural resources and improve the overall environment of the district.

In summary, bulrush mat production can have a positive impact on the standards of living of farmers in Thiruvanamalai District by providing an additional source of income, promoting sustainable livelihoods, preserving traditional skills, skill development, community development, and environmental conservation.

## 10. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF THE BULRUSH MATS RESEARCH

The study of Bulrush mats can have several future implications, such as:

**Preservation of traditional skills and knowledge:** By studying the traditional production of bulrush mats, we can better understand the skills and knowledge required to make them, as well as the cultural and economic significance of the craft. This knowledge can be used to preserve and promote the tradition, which can help to support the livelihoods of the communities involved and preserve their cultural heritage.

**Development of sustainable livelihoods:** Research on bulrush mat making can provide insights into the potential for the craft to support sustainable livelihoods, particularly in rural and tribal communities. This could lead to the development of more targeted and effective livelihood programs, which could help to improve the well-being of these communities.

**Environmental conservation:** The traditional production of bulrush mats is based on a sustainable use of natural resources, as the mats are made from a renewable plant resource. By studying the production of bulrush mats, we can better understand the relationship between humans and the environment, and how traditional knowledge can be used to promote sustainable resource use.

**Development of new products:** Research on the production of bulrush mats can also be used to develop new products based on the traditional techniques and materials. This could include new designs, colors, or sizes of mats, as well as other products such as baskets, bags, and other woven items. This could open up new markets for the artisans and increase their income.

**Cultural awareness and appreciation:** Research on the traditional production of bulrush mats can also help to raise awareness and appreciation of traditional cultures and their contributions. This could lead to

greater cultural understanding, mutual respect and a deeper appreciation of the importance of preserving traditional skills and knowledge.

In conclusion, the study of Bulrush mats has the potential to contribute to the preservation of traditional skills and knowledge, the development of sustainable livelihoods, environmental conservation, the development of new products, and cultural awareness and appreciation.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, there is a body of research that exists on the traditional production of bulrush mats and its importance for the communities involved. These studies have shown that bulrush mat making plays an important role in the livelihoods and cultural practices of the communities who produce it. They also reveal the challenges faced by the artisans and the importance of preserving the traditional skills and knowledge of this craft.

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