

Dhokra

Ancient art of metal casting

Mayurbhanj | Odisha





Art is the queen of all sciences communicating knowledge to all the generations of the world.

— Leonardo Da Vinci

Roots to Prosperity



‘Roots to Prosperity’ is a transformative journey led by Contact Base and supported by Axis Bank Foundation. The initiative aspires to empower traditional cultural practitioners as confident cultural entrepreneurs, while strengthening the ecosystem of heritage-based tourism. It works across the districts of Koraput and Mayurbhanj in Odisha, and Seraikela–Kharsawan in Jharkhand—regions endowed with natural beauty and deep reservoirs of indigenous artistry and living traditions.

Across these culturally rich landscapes, the project walks alongside more than 5,500 rural creative practitioners. It supports them to refine skills, access markets directly, build strong community-led enterprises, and shape vibrant cultural tourism experiences. At its core, the initiative recognises that culture is more than memory—it is identity, dignity, and possibility.

By strengthening grassroots creative economies, Roots to Prosperity fosters inclusive growth, sustainable livelihoods, and resilient communities. The initiative seeks to affirm culture as a pathway to empowerment – where inherited wisdom nurtures confidence, resilience, and a more secure future for communities.

This brochure presents Dhokra craft—an ancient metal-casting tradition—highlighting the exquisite craftsmanship of the artists of Mayurbhanj.



About the craft

Dhokra or Dokra is an ancient non-ferrous metal casting tradition, using the lost-wax technique. Dating back more than 4,000 years to the Indus Valley Civilisation, Dhokra is best illustrated by the iconic 'dancing girl' of Mohenjodaro, among the earliest lost-wax castings. This art form produces intricate brass artefacts with a rustic, folk-inspired aesthetic, characterised by primitive simplicity and enchanting motifs. Dhokra creations span a wide spectrum—from stylised animal forms to devotional icons, functional objects, and ornamental jewellery.

The craft holds religious significance in the region of Mayurbhanj, particularly in the making of Laxminarayan riding an elephant, an idol worshipped in Odisha during the month of Margashira (mid-November to mid-December) and purchased by local people.

Location

Artists are found across the central Indian states of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh; the eastern states of West Bengal, Odisha, and Jharkhand; and the southern states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Kuria khunta village of Mayurbhanj district is home to about 60 families and around 120 active artisans. There are other villages too such as Siyalia, Chhurini, Bankisole, and Dimdodia are smaller clusters.

Block: Gopabandhunagar

District: Mayurbhanj



Village: Kuria Khunta



How To Reach

Baripada is well connected by rail, road, and air. The nearest major railway station is Balasore, located about 60 km away. From Balasore, Baripada can be reached by local train or bus. Alternatively, direct trains are available from Bhubaneswar to Baripada. By road, Baripada has a bus stand with regular bus services from Bhubaneswar, Kolkata, and other major towns. The nearest airport is Biju Pattnaik International Airport, Bhubaneswar, from where Baripada can be reached by road or rail.

The Makers

The makers are predominantly from indigenous communities, where both men and women engage in creating these finely crafted forms. As several artists explain, “Dhokra is to us what farming is to others.” The Dhokra tradition of Mayurbhanj reflects the deep-rooted cultural heritage of these communities as it holds immense occupational and cultural significance, serving as a primary livelihood for many. Dhokra-making has been passed down through generations, with almost every family member involved in some stage of the craft. For them, Dhokra is not just an occupation—it is a way of life, a skill and knowledge inherited and practiced over time.



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Process



Mould preparations 1

Artisans prepare a dough of clay, sand, and rice husk, mold it into shape, and sun-dry it to set. Wax, resin, and mustard oil are boiled for ten minutes, strained, and the filtered wax is cooled in water.



Making of wax wire 2

Two wooden sticks and a brass or aluminum socket with varied holes are used to press softened wax, forming threads of different thicknesses that create the intricate patterns of the final design.



Coiling of wax thread 3

The softened wax string is coiled over the basic mold, enabling artisans to craft intricate, raised designs that capture the traditional motifs and detailed patterns characteristic of Dokra metalwork.



Clay coating 4

After covering the wax threads, a white clay and cow dung coat is applied. Small items have one channel, larger ones several. The form is sun-dried, then coated with soil, sand, and jute, and a clay channel is added for molten brass.



Melting of metal 5

Brass, new or recycled from old items, is broken into scrap for casting. Clay molds are filled, placed metal-side down, and heated; the wax melts away, leaving a hollow cavity ready for molten brass.

Products

Dhokra artists have focused on creating religious idols and figurines of deities such as Lakshmi, Narayan, and Durga. They also craft a variety of utility and decorative items, including lamps, ornaments, animal figures, and motifs inspired by indigenous culture.



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Traditional Products



religious figurines



bell



measuring bowl



religious toy



Decorative Products



Functional Products






Roots to Prosperity


Contact Base has partnered with Axis Bank Foundation on the "Roots to Prosperity" project to enhance culture-based livelihoods of artists in Mayurbhanj.




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