

# Sabai

Rooted in sustainability

Mayurbhanj | Odisha



“ The artist is the lover of nature; therefore  
he is her slave and her master.

— Rabindranath Tagore

# 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 highlights Sabai, a sustainable grass craft tradition shaped by the skilled hands and collective strength of women artisans in Mayurbhanj.



# About the craft

Sabai grass craft is a distinctive form of eco-friendly artistry that transforms a locally grown, resilient grass—locally known as Babui or Bobai ghasa—into beautifully handwoven creations. Abundantly available in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, Sabai grass is valued for its natural strength, flexibility, and sustainability. Skilled artisans shape this versatile raw material into a diverse range of products, including baskets, trays, table mats, wall hangings, and contemporary home décor. The craft is celebrated for its earthy appeal, elegant simplicity, and vibrant use of natural and dyed colors, making it both functional and aesthetically pleasing. With growing demand for sustainable lifestyles, Sabai products are gaining attention for their timeless design, eco-conscious appeal, and cultural significance rooted in traditional craftsmanship.

# Location

The Sabai craft has evolved into a vibrant cottage industry in the Suliapada and Baripada blocks. Well-developed, women-led hubs in Rangamatia and Guhaldihi offer a steady range of Sabai products. Other active clusters include Badsole, Kujidih, Salasahi, and Baddhenkia, each contributing to the growing ecosystem of Sabai-based production.

Block: Baripada, Suliapada

District: Mayurbhanj



Village: Guhaldihi, Rangamatia, Badsole, Kujidih, Gopiabandho, Baddhenkia, Salasahi

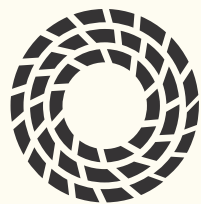
## How To Reach

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

More than 300 women artisans are engaged in Sabai craft across the Baripada and Suliapada blocks. Organised into strong producer groups, they ensure consistent production, quality, and livelihood security through collective leadership. Their work not only sustains a traditional craft but also advances a model of women-led, community-based entrepreneurship. Today, these groups collaborate with markets and organisations across India, strengthening the visibility of Sabai as a sustainable, contemporary craft while empowering the women at its heart.



Guhaldihi Sabai Producer Group(Guhaldihi)  
 Sindurgoura Sabai Producer Group(Rangamatia)  
 Maa Annapurna Sabai Producer Group(Kujidih)  
 Maa Andharibudhi Sabai Producer Group(Salusahi)  
 Mugdha Chinabadam Sabai Producer Group(Baddhankia)  
 OLM Sabai Producer Group(Badsole)

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# Making Process



## **Making ropes from the grass**

The grass is reaped, dried, and made into bundles. It is then sorted according to its length and quality. After sorting, the grass is twisted manually into ropes or, alternatively, passed through a twisting machine. The rough edges of the ropes are removed by rubbing them on tree trunks. Finally, the finished ropes are arranged neatly in bundles.



## **Developing the braids**

The grass is twisted for braiding. Rough edges are cut and hampered to make them smooth. The smoothened braids are then ready for use.



## **Coiling method stitched with date or palm leaves**

In this method, sabai grass bundles or braided bundles are coiled and stitched with palm or date leaf strips using a large needle. After shaping, the edges are finely trimmed for making finished products.



## **Dyeing grass for making colourful products**

For making colourful products, the grass, ropes, and braids are dyed as required. Water is boiled, and the dye is mixed thoroughly with it. The grass, ropes, or braids are then soaked in the dye solution for about 15–20 minutes to allow the colour to absorb evenly. After soaking, the dyed materials are washed thoroughly to remove excess dye. Finally, the coloured fibre is laid out to dry before being used in the creation of finished products.

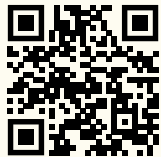


## **Weaving method**

In loom-based products, the process starts with drying and sorting the grass, slicing small bundles into sticks for weft material. These are inserted into frame looms with four healds and cotton yarn warp, creating geometric designs. After weaving to the desired length, the piece is removed and edges are bound with coloured cloth, ribbon, or fabric for durability.

# Products

Sabai craft of Mayurbhanj blends natural materials with modern design sensibilities. The women make a wide range of sustainable home décor and lifestyle accessories—including ranging from lampshades, furniture accents, and organisers to stylish storage solutions that add a warm, earthy aesthetic to contemporary interiors. Artisans also create a wide range of functional and decorative items, including baskets, trays, planters, wall décor, coasters, mats, bags, and storage boxes. Crafted using finely twisted Sabai rope and often combined with date and palm leaves, these products are valued for their durability, texture, and refined craftsmanship.



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Sabai | Mayurbhanj

Storage containers & trays





01

02

05



03



04



06

- 01 Hand Bag
- 02 Sling Bag
- 03 Coaster set of 6
- 04 Storage organiser
- 05 Table lamp
- 06 Lampshade
- 07 Wall decor




07



# 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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