

# 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 Laxmi-Narayan idol riding an elephant, a form worshipped in Odisha during the month of Margashira (mid-November to mid-December).



# 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.

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

Block: Gopabandhunagar  
District: Mayurbhanj



Village: Kudia Khunta



## How To Reach

Baripada town is nearest to the Dhokra village hubs. 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 (275 km), 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.



Kunal Rana	6372597875
Rabi Rana	6371964179
Susil Rana	9348068508
Subodh Rana	6370085663
Ashok Rana	9348475389
Ranjan Rana	7735237312
Ranjit Rana	7894399773





# Process



## Mould preparations

Artists prepare a dough of clay, sand, and rice husk, mold it into shape, and sun-dry it to set.



## Preparation of Wax Threads

Wax is boiled with resin and mustard oil, strained, and cooled. The softened wax is then pressed through wooden sticks fitted with metal sockets to produce threads of varying thickness.



## Wax Modelling

These wax threads are carefully coiled over the dried mould, forming intricate raised patterns and traditional Dokra motifs.



## Clay and Sand Coating

The wax model is first coated with white clay and dried. A second layer of clay mixed with cow dung is applied and dried. Finally, termite mound soil mixed with sand is added in two layers to strengthen the mould and withstand high temperatures. A pouring channel, known as the chungu, is then formed.



## Metal Casting and Dewaxing

Brass, new or recycled, is placed into the chungu. The mould is sealed and fired in a coal- and wood-fired kiln (bhatti), where the wax melts away and molten metal fills the cavity.



## Finishing

Once cooled, the mould is broken and the metal form is cleaned of residual clay. The surface is then polished using buffing tools to complete the artwork.

# 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





Peacock Figurine



Deer Figurine



Tribal Dancer Figurine



Palanquin Bearers



Candle Holders



Bull-shaped decorative box



Diya Holder



Jewellery Box









# 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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