

Terracotta & Pottery

Hand sculpted stories

Koraput | Odisha



Roots to Prosperity



“

Beautiful in form and feature, lovely as the day, can there be so fair a creature formed of common clay?

— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(American Poet and educator)

‘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.

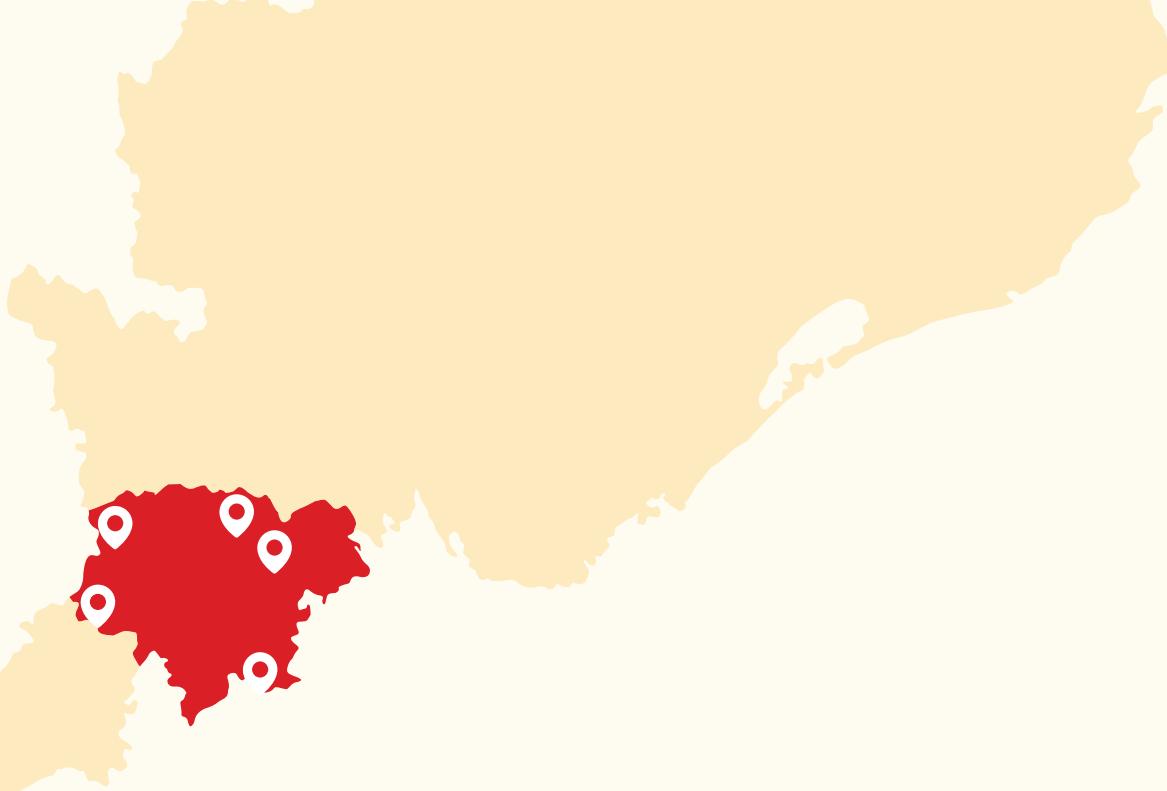
This brochure showcases Koraput’s terracotta and pottery tradition, where exquisite craftsmanship is shaped by skilled hands, living landscapes, ritual practices, and ancestral memory.



About the craft

Terracotta, which literally means “baked earth”, is an ancient tradition of shaping natural clay into objects that are hardened through firing at high temperatures. The process yields a distinctive reddish-brown material that has been used for centuries to create pots, idols, tiles, toys, decorative objects, and architectural elements.

Terracotta holds a special place in Indian art and culture. It is deeply rooted in local lifeways, where artisans use simple tools and locally available clay to express their creativity. Beyond its functional role, the craft carries cultural and religious significance through figurines of deities, animals, and folk motifs. Often paired with pottery, terracotta offers a harmonious blend of utility and visual appeal—beautifully integrating functionality, artistry, and sustainability.



Location

The terracotta and pottery clusters of Koraput district, nestled in the southern part of Odisha, are a reflection of craft practices rooted in nature. The main craft villages include Kumarguda in Kotpad Block, Gaudaguda in Laxmipur Block, Santeiput in Baipariguda Block, Dumbaguda in Dasmantpur Block, and Pottangi in Pottangi Block.

Block: Kotpad, Laxmipur, Baipariguda, Dasmantpur, Pottangi

District: Koraput



Village: Kumarguda, Gaudaguda, Santeiput, Dumbaguda, Pottangi

How To Reach

Koraput is well connected by road, rail, and air. The nearest airports are at Jeypore (around 20 km from Koraput), Jagdalpur (98 km from Koraput) and Visakhapatnam (about 200 km from Koraput), offering convenient access from major cities. Regular buses and taxis connect Koraput with nearby towns like Rayagada, Nabarangpur, and Jagdalpur. The Koraput Railway Station lies on the East Coast line, making the journey scenic and comfortable.



The Makers

Mostly Odia and Desia-speaking Kumhar artisans are the custodians of Koraput's terracotta traditions, carrying forward the legacy of clay across generations. The community is a rich blend of experience and skill. While men traditionally work the potter's wheel, shaping vessels and forms, women play a vital and highly skilled role—preparing the clay, refining its texture, polishing surfaces, and ensuring quality. Their expertise is central to the craft's continuity and refinement.

As terracotta continues to hold deep cultural and economic significance, many artisans remain fully devoted to the craft, relying primarily on earthenware production and local markets for their livelihoods. This enduring commitment binds the community closely to its heritage.



Dinabandhu Kumbhar: 8260628122
Harihar Kumbhar: 8018821252
Parsuram Kumbhar: 9861187114
Dhananjaya Kumbhar: 7855882511
Gaura Kumbhar: 6371078894



Process



Clay sourcing

1

Preparation

The process begins with collecting fine quality red soil composed of iron oxide which is porous and often sourced from riverbeds or local deposits. Black soil, found in low-lying regions, that contributes durability after firing.

2

Shaping

The raw red and black soil with sand is typically mixed with water, filtered through a mesh to remove impurities, and then left to dehydrate and settle into a usable clay body.

3

A ball of prepared clay is placed at the center of the spinning wheel, where the potter shapes it to achieve the desired shape and thickness, once formed a thin wire is employed to cut the finished piece from the wheel. Hand building methods like coiling and moulding can also be used for making intricate designs.

Drying

4

The newly shaped pottery is set aside to dry completely—often for several days, sometimes under the sun—a crucial step that removes moisture and prevents cracking during firing.

5

Firing

Once the piece is fully dried, it is fired in an open furnace using locally available fuel such as wood or dry leaves. The intense heat then induces a permanent transformation in the clay, hardening it and giving it its characteristic brick-red hue.

6

After firing, some terracotta products are polished, painted, or coated with natural dyes to enhance their aesthetic appeal while maintaining their rustic charm.

Products

Pottery in Koraput serves both practical and spiritual purposes. Clay vessels are essential for daily activities such as storing water and preserving grains. Artisans traditionally craft utility items including cups, bowls of various sizes, diffusers, flower vases, and diyas.

In contemporary contexts, terracotta and pottery have evolved from humble household-ware into refined expressions of sustainable living. From planters, lamps, and wall art to handcrafted tableware and eco-friendly architectural elements, these creations seamlessly blend tradition with modern design sensibilities.



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Decorative items



Tableware



Terracotta & Pottery | Koraput



Painted pottery



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



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