

Mayurbhanj, Odisha

Heritage, Livelihoods
and Culture-Led Development



Mayurbhanj

A Kaleidoscope of Nature & Culture

Mayurbhanj, the crown jewel of northern Odisha, is renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty, characterised by dense forests, majestic waterfalls, and rich biodiversity. Alongside this remarkable landscape, the district sustains a vibrant heritage of traditional arts, crafts, and performance practices that continue to shape community identity, livelihoods, and local economies. From the UNESCO-recognised Mayurbhanj Chhau dance to Sabai grass craft, Dhokra metal casting, Kashi grass weaving, and bamboo craft, Mayurbhanj demonstrates how traditional knowledge systems can generate sustainable livelihoods while safeguarding cultural heritage.

The Rairangpur Festival, held from 13–15 March 2026, celebrated the rich cultural heritage of the region. The Baripada Festival is scheduled to take place from 27–29 November 2026, while the next edition of the Rairangpur Festival is planned for February 2027.



Roots to Prosperity

Roots to Prosperity, implemented by Contact Base (www.banglanatak.com) with support from Axis Bank Foundation, works with 5500 cultural practitioners across Mayurbhanj, Koraput and Seraikela-Kharsawan to strengthen heritage-based livelihoods and experiential rural tourism. The initiative supports artists and artisans through:

- Skill enhancement and design development
- Entrepreneurship and enterprise development
- Market access and direct sales opportunities
- Heritage-based tourism experiences
- Youth engagement and transmission of traditional knowledge
- Community-led cultural institutions and museums

Why it Matters

The programme demonstrates how culture can contribute to rural development by:

- Creating sustainable livelihood opportunities
- Supporting women-led enterprises
- Encouraging youth participation in heritage practices
- Promoting environmentally sustainable production
- Strengthening cultural identity and community pride
- Developing responsible cultural tourism destinations



Mayurbhanj Chhau

Mayurbhanj Chhau, nurtured under royal patronage, is a maskless form rooted in the martial art of Pharikhanda (combat techniques of foot soldiers). With painted faces and agile, acrobatic movements, dancers narrate stories from mythology, nature, and daily life. Today, it remains a vibrant expression of Odisha's living heritage.

- 800+ artists supported across Rairangpur and Baripada regions
- 38 Chhau groups engaged
- Capacity building, performance opportunities and festival promotion
- Mayurbhanj Chhau Festival 2026 attracted more than 3,000 visitors

Villages

Rairangpur & around :

Mohishkudor, Tarana, Jampani, Uperbeda, Rangamatta, Talapati, Rengalbeda, Kandsore, Talgaon, Belposi, Tedra, Sagajodi, Tentoposi, Baledih, Kendrai, Deogan, Bholbeda, Podadiha, Tikhia, Kuchaipal, Edelbeda

Baripada & around :

Bara Jamboni, Dantia Mohan, Bhurkundi, Sarda, Rautara, Nichuapada, Sunahaja, Karatapata, Begunadiha, Kadakatha, Pandupal, Salasahi, Badabaincha, Kani Mahuli



Natural Fibre Craft

Sabai and Kashi grass crafts are important eco-friendly traditions of Mayurbhanj, rooted in the sustainable use of locally available natural resources. Sabai grass (Babui/Bobai ghasa) is woven into baskets, trays, mats, wall hangings and contemporary home décor, providing livelihoods for rural artisans. Kashi grass (*Saccharum spontaneum*), a fast-growing and renewable grass collected mainly by women, is transformed into sustainable craft products after cleaning and drying. Together, these traditions preserve traditional knowledge, support women-led livelihoods, promote environmentally responsible production, and contribute to local economic development.

- 300+ Sabai and Kashi Grass artisans trained in design development and entrepreneurship
- Market linkages through exhibitions and festivals across India
- 93 artisans linked with DC (Handicrafts) artisan card scheme
- Promotion of sustainable, eco-friendly products based on locally available natural resources

Villages

Sabai villages (around Baripada): Rangamatia, Goaldihi, Baddhenkia, Mahabila, Kujidihi, Salasahi, Badsole

Kashi grass villages: Talgaon near Rairangpur



Dhokra Metal Craft

Dhokra is an ancient brass casting tradition that uses the lost-wax technique and traces its origins to the Indus Valley Civilisation over 4,000 years ago. Known for its distinctive handcrafted aesthetic and intricate motifs, Dhokra artisans create animal figures, devotional icons, jewellery, and utility objects. In Mayurbhanj, the craft also holds religious significance through the making of the Laxmi-Narayan idol riding an elephant, worshipped during the month of Margashira.

- 56 artisans supported through process improvement and entrepreneurship development
- Exposure visits to leading Dhokra clusters
- Community museum under development at Kuriakhunta village

Villages

Village : Kudiakhunta



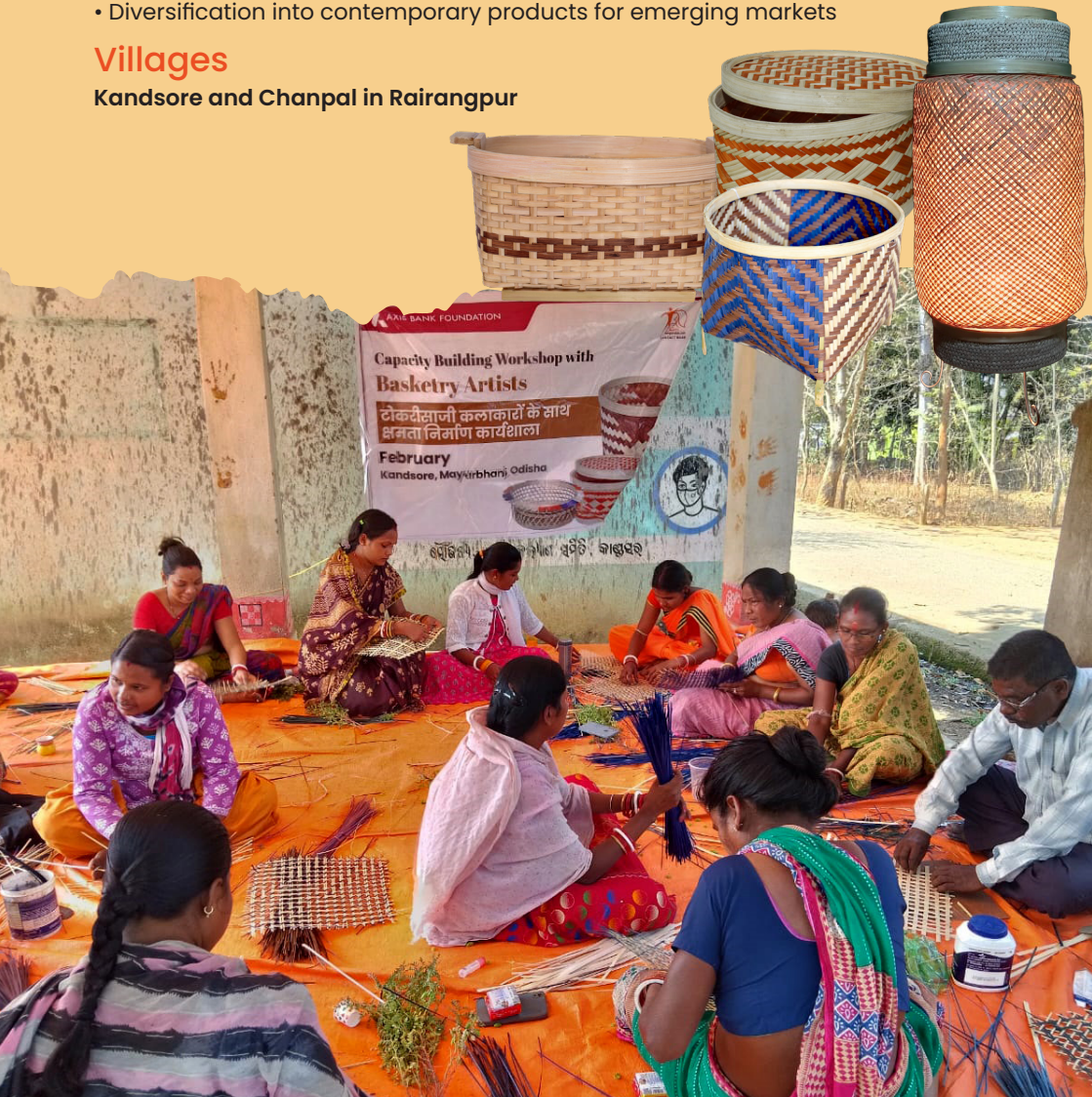
Bamboo Craft

Bamboo craft is central to everyday life reflecting a close relationship between people, material, and environment. Guided by knowledge passed down through generations, communities use bamboo for domestic, agricultural, and ceremonial purposes since time immemorial. Artists possess a deep understanding of bamboo, its strength, flexibility, and seasonal qualities, creating objects that are functional and durable. Now, they are also adapting to contemporary markets by diversifying into home décor, lifestyle items, and modern designs. Locally sourced, selected bamboo sustains eco-friendly practices and continues as a living tradition balancing utility, culture, and ecology.

- 83 artisans trained in skill transmission and design development
- Diversification into contemporary products for emerging markets

Villages

Kandsore and Chanpal in Rairangpur



About Us

Contact Base (banglanatak dot com) is a not-for-profit organisation working on inclusive and sustainable development through culture-based approaches. With advisory status to UNESCO's 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee and recognition from national and international institutions, the organisation works across India to safeguard living heritage while supporting community-led development.



Our work has been published as case studies in UN Tourism publications and Harvard Business Review



Awards & Recognition

- Best Practice in Osaka Expo 2025
- Outlook Responsible Tourism Award 2023
- Jeonju International Award for promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage 2019
- Bihar Innovation Forum II award for Good Practice in Non Farm Sector 2014

Art For Life (AFL)

Our flagship initiative, AFL, is a culture based development model focusing on holistic development of marginalised cultural practitioners by making their traditional cultural practices the premise for inclusion and poverty alleviation. AFL promotes Village, Artist & Art together. This tripartite focus makes AFL a catalytic methodology in paving the path for developing community based tourism. Development of grassroot entrepreneurship of tradition bearers of skills in art and culture has resulted in significant return on investment. We also work to protect the rights of the artists through Intellectual Property Rights.



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