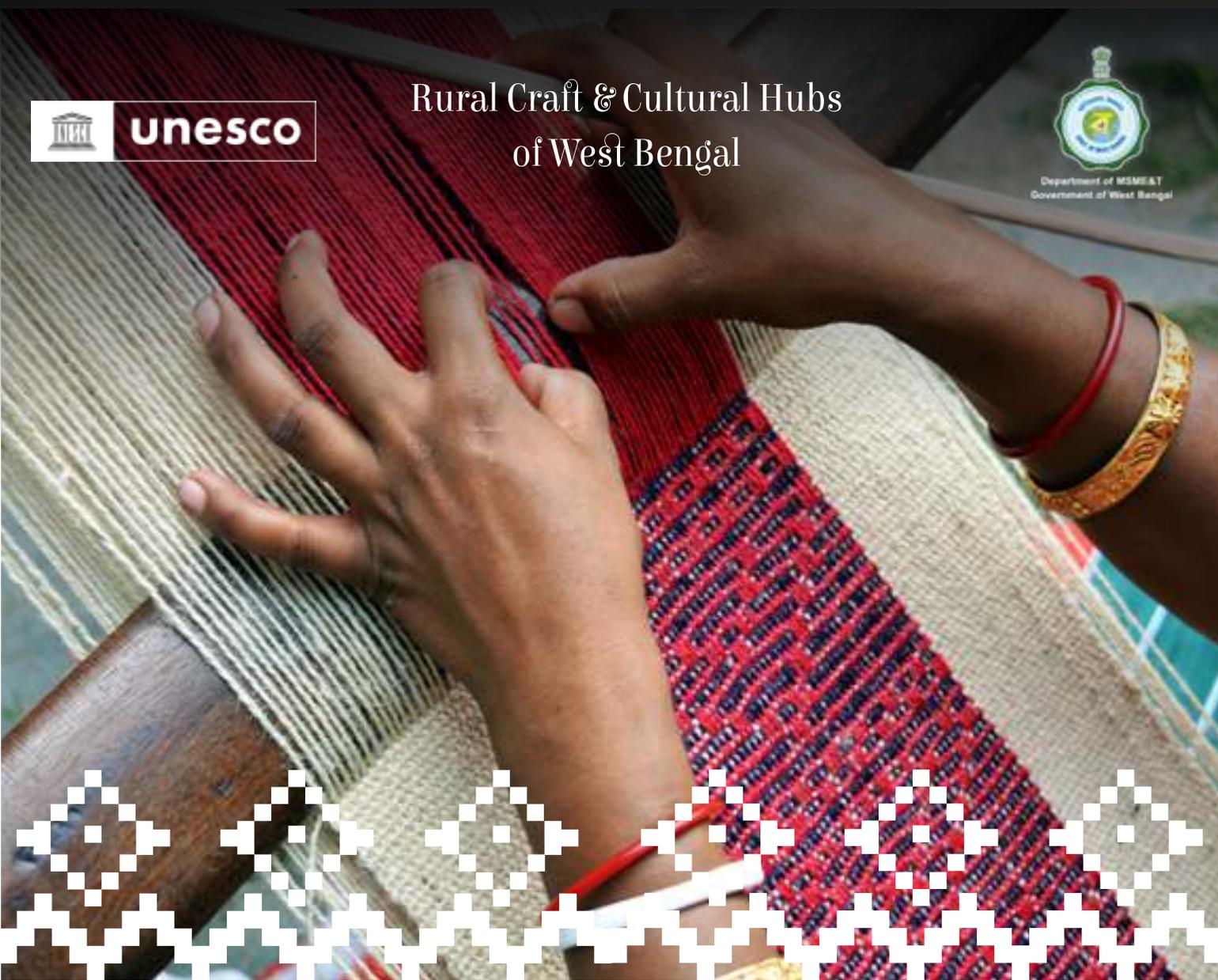




# Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal



Department of MSME&T  
Government of West Bengal



 Dhokra 

Golden Fibres



If we are to preserve culture, we must continue to create it

Johan Huizinga  
Dutch historian

## Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal



West Bengal is a treasure trove of natural and cultural heritage. The intangible cultural heritage of Bengal is an exemplary instance of the aesthetic lineage of Bengal. Utilitarian lifestyle items like basketry made with date palm leaves and Sabai grass, hand spun and hand woven jute rugs (Dhokra), mats made with cane slips (Sitalpati) or Madurkathi (Madur), pottery, Kantha-spreads, decorative and ritualistic items made out of Shola and others, reflect a curious fusion of indigenous craftsmanship and utility. Bengal's art and craft reflect cultural history, ethnic roots, and lifestyle in-tune with nature. Variety of masks, Dokra and metal work, range of indigenous weaves and embroideries, dolls, masks and figurines curved out of wood are examples of Bengal's artistry. Culture of Bengal is enriched by the mellifluous tunes of the Baul, Bhawaiya, Bhatiyali singers, rapturous dances of Chau, Raibenshe and Jhumur, storytelling traditions like puppetry and Patachitra, and folk theatres like Gambhira, Banbibir Pala among other folk forms.

The Rural Craft and Cultural Hub (RCCH) Project is an initiative of the Department of Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T) and UNESCO aiming to rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage of West Bengal and strengthen rural creative enterprise. The journey started in 2013 and the RCCH project currently covers 50,000 handicraft and folk artists across the state. It has strengthened the ecosystem supporting the transmission of traditional skills in art and craft, fostered direct market linkage, engaged youth in pursuing their traditions, and promoted cultural tourism to the villages of the artists. The project is indeed a testimonial to the contribution of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to sustainable development, social inclusion and also to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





## Dhokra

### Golden Fibres

Dhokra is a tradition of loom weaving of jute mats in the rural areas of Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur districts. Jute, the 'Golden Fibre,' is available locally and has been traditionally used by women in the community to make Dhokra mats for their day-to-day use. Women in every household are skilled in Dhokra weaving.

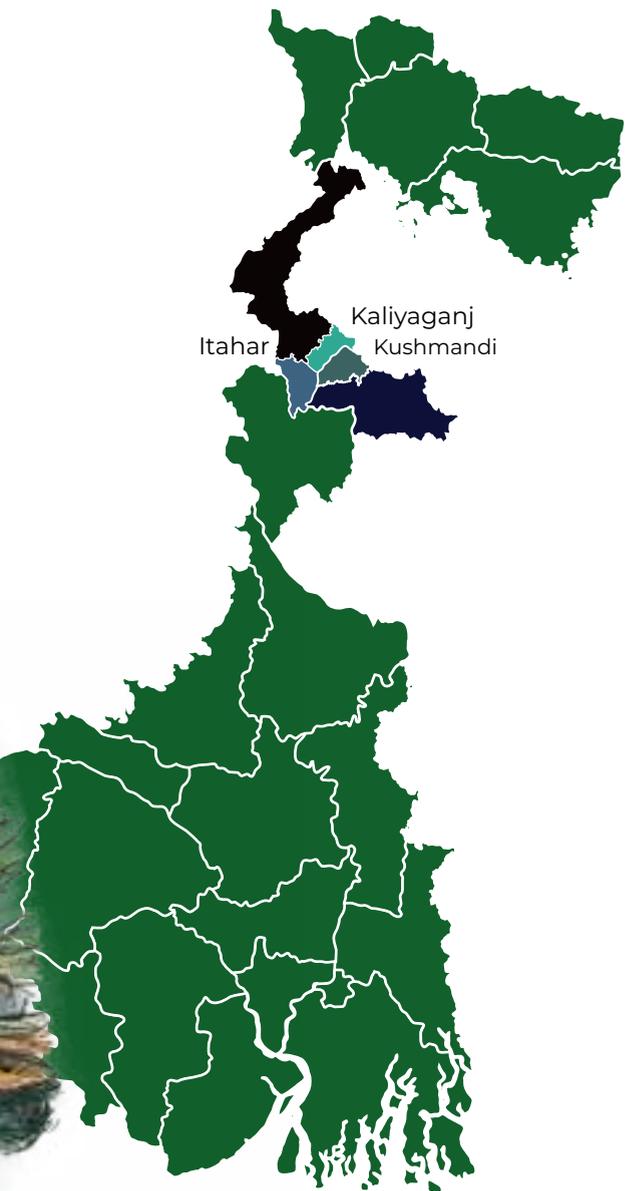


# Craft Hubs

Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur.



Blocks: Kushmandi,  
Kaliyaganj, Itahar.





# Process

Dhokra is made by extracting jute locally. The process of production is lengthy and requires long time to complete. The process of making a Dhokra product can be categorised into the following:

- Fibre Extraction:
- Dyeing and Hand-Rolling
- Parts of Looms
- Weaving on Back Strap Looms



## Fibre Extraction

Home-grown jute plants are harvested, and the plants are cut to extract the fibres. The extracted fibres are soaked in water to soften them. The fibres are then left to soak, allowing them to mature and develop desirable qualities. After the soaking process, the jute fibres are sun-dried.

## Dyeing and Hand-Rolling

The rolled jute strands are dyed using suitable colours. After dyeing, the strands are sun-dried to set the colours and ensure they are ready for weaving. The dyed jute fibres are then hand-rolled to the required dimensions. This process involves rolling the fibres into long strands, ready for the weaving process.



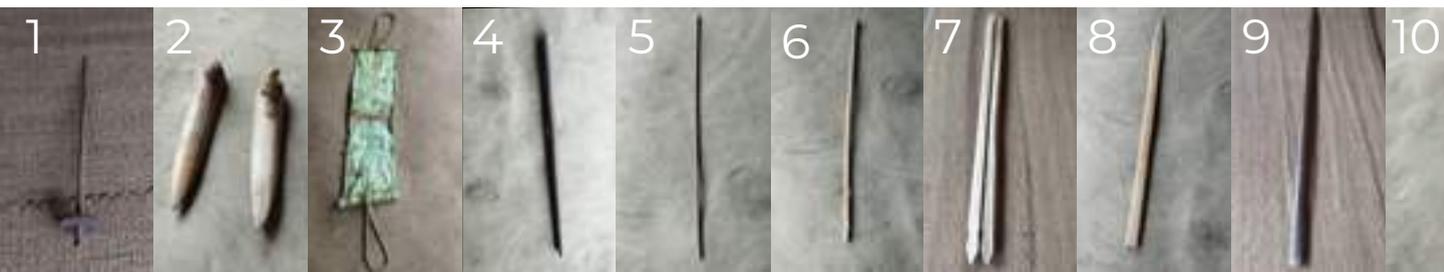
## Weaving on Back Strap Looms:

Back strap looms made with bamboo and wood are used for weaving. The unique feature of these loom looms is that the weaver straps a rope around their waist, attaching themselves to the loom.

The process of weaving mats begins with the arrangement of soft reeds of cotton or jute threads on a bamboo frame loom, where they are interwoven as weft and warp by a single operator. As the weaving progresses and the weaver arranges different coloured threads as per the design, a mat of desired length is produced, after which it is given the finishing touches and washed.

## Parts of Looms

1. 'Takur' is a tool which is used to make jute threads from the jute fibre.
2. 'Khuti' refers to two bamboo poles, which are buried on the ground and serves to be the major structure of the loom. Two wooden pins, also known as Khuti, are used to arrange wooden threads on a bamboo frame.
3. 'Nethun' is a heavy cloth that is wrapped around the weaver's waist which makes them a part of the loom.
4. 'Dedlong' is a thick wooden rod which is placed between the jute threads, helping them to move in and up-and-down direction.
5. 'Jaal Kathi' is a spindle-shaped wood used to separate one thread from another.
6. 'Chokh Porano' is a type of loom, which supports larger number of threads. 'Dondor Kathi' is used to divide the threads that will be used to make patterns or designs. Weaves woven in Chokh Porano loom are reversible in pattern.
7. 'Kupni' is the bamboo structure which is used to wrap around the woven mat.
8. Big 'Beong' is used to make the weaving strong and firm.
9. Small 'Beong' is used to make patterns and designs on the mat and is also used when the weave comes to an end to make it strong and firm. It is also known as 'Olongi.'
10. 'Katani' is used to keep the structure and width of the mat intact. The size may differ depending on the mat.



Weaves and Patterns



Fish Rat Flower Geometrical Patterns



Kit Patanga Pyramid Bird Shades



House Diamond Check Flower



Star Tree Zig Zag Stitch Patterns

# Products

Traditionally, the mats were woven for households and used for sitting and sleeping purposes, wherein no colours were used, and surface was rough. Other than standard-sized mats (5 ft x 6ft), some weavers are now making diversified products like bed sheets, shawls, door mats, and floor mats. Weavers also make bags that are stitched by local tailors. They also dye the fibres and weave bright coloured mats. Some enterprising ones are developing mats and other products using natural fibres like banana, cotton and wool which are more market-worthy. Some of the artists also possess the knowledge of weaving on looms and making products like jackets, different types of bags and pouches.





Cushion Cover

Container





Table Mat



Wall Hanging



Bag



Pouch





Jacket





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