

Design Resource

Shola Pith Topor - Kolkata

Wedding Headgear

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/shola-pith-topor-kolkata>



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2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
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<https://www.dsource.in/resource/shola-pith-topor-kolkata/introduction>

Introduction

West Bengal, a northern state of India, houses a culturally rich capital city, Kolkata which was previously known as Calcutta. This city is situated at the river Hoogly banks comprising three villages Kalikat, Gobindapur, and Sutanuti. Kolkata is well known for its history, ranging from the Indian freedom struggle, leftist Naxalite movements, and trade union formations. From the celebratory culture of the city, it is evident that the place is rooted in traditions and rituals valued by the people of Bengal. One such tradition is the wearing of Topor and Mukut by the bride and groom during a Bengali wedding. According to a folktale, the origin of Topor is connected to the Hindu god Shiva, who, for his wedding ceremony, demanded a special crown finished by artist Vishwakarma. Vishwakarma, skilled only in hard metalworks, handed over the task to young Malakar, who finished a headgear using shola. Since then, the Topor is used extensively in Bengali weddings, and the cult of people who create shola pith Topor is called Malakars, meaning “makers of garlands”. Hence Topors made of shola still have significant importance, as they are believed to bring good luck.

Shola pith, also known as ‘Sholar Kaj’ is a dried milky-white spongy plant matter derived from a tall perennial plant that can be pressed and shaped into delicate objects of art. It is harvested from waterlogged marshy areas, hence easily available for production. Households use this as a symbol of sanctity at religious events and also as decorative items. There are two types of shola, Kath shola, a harder version, and Bhatua shola, which is soft and light. A premium quality pith comes in pure white color that doesn't possess nodes and has soft barks while coming to the pith. This plant which grows up to 7 to 8 feet in height and 2 to 3 inches in diameter, basically grown in states like Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. Mr. Ramapada Neogi and Mr. Koushik Neogi from Uluberia village of Howrah district from West Bengal have been making Topors and Mukut for decades, which are used during Bengali weddings.

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Mr. Ramapada and Mrs. Ishan Neogi, artisans with their family.



A wide variety of design motifs, from paisley designs, flower motifs to geometric forms, are used in the craft, evident from the displayed finished piece.



Artisan dedicatedly working on shola pith crown.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The Tools and Raw Materials that are used for Shola Pith Topor are as follows:

- **Shola Pith Plant Root:** It is the main raw material used to make the Topar
- **Glue:** It is used to stick the shola wood to cardboard
- **Knife:** It is used to cut the shola wood into thin wood wafers
- **Cardboard:** It is used as a supporting base on which the shola Topar is built
- **Pencil:** It is used for illustrating designs
- **Color Threads and Glitters:** These are used to decorate the Topars
- **Scissor:** It is used to cut the shola wood and materials into the intended size.

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Shola pith wood.



The knife is made of iron called Kath in Bengali language.



Scissors used for cutting the paper.

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Making Process

The Topar is a headgear made of shola wood, used exclusively in Bengali weddings. The following steps are involved in the making of a Topar. Firstly, the artisan draws a cone shape using a template over a cardboard sheet. Then with the help of a scissor, the layout is cut appropriately. This shape is rolled into a cone, and its ends are pasted using an adhesive. Now it is ready to bear decorations of shola wood over them. But before that, the raw shola wood is perfected by shaving away its dark outer skin, thus exposing white-colored shola wood inside. This portion is then used to decorate the Topar with different kinds of designs.

Generally, the traditional designs incorporated into a Topar are circular or semi-circular in shape taking into consideration the pliability of the natural raw materials used. The craft is completely hand-carved as the soft nature of the wood prevents it from being attached to any holding devices. The small carvings here are cut in half and turned into thin slices for easy gluing to the cardboard cone. The circular shola wood is also shaped into rectangular blocks, and the edges turned to a jagged form. These thin shavings are then applied with a thin layer of glue and pasted on the cone's outer portion. The strips then bear a layer of shola wood motifs at their circumference placed equidistantly. Once the shapes are rightly stuck, decorative glasses, stones, lurex yarns are fixed to embellish the piece further. And the gaps between the strips are filled with semi-circular carvings. Towards the finishing stage, various types of motifs attached to the Topar are decorated with glitter beads to add extra beauty to the craft. Thus completed Topar is then left to dry for some minutes and packed in a plastic cover for storage and supply.

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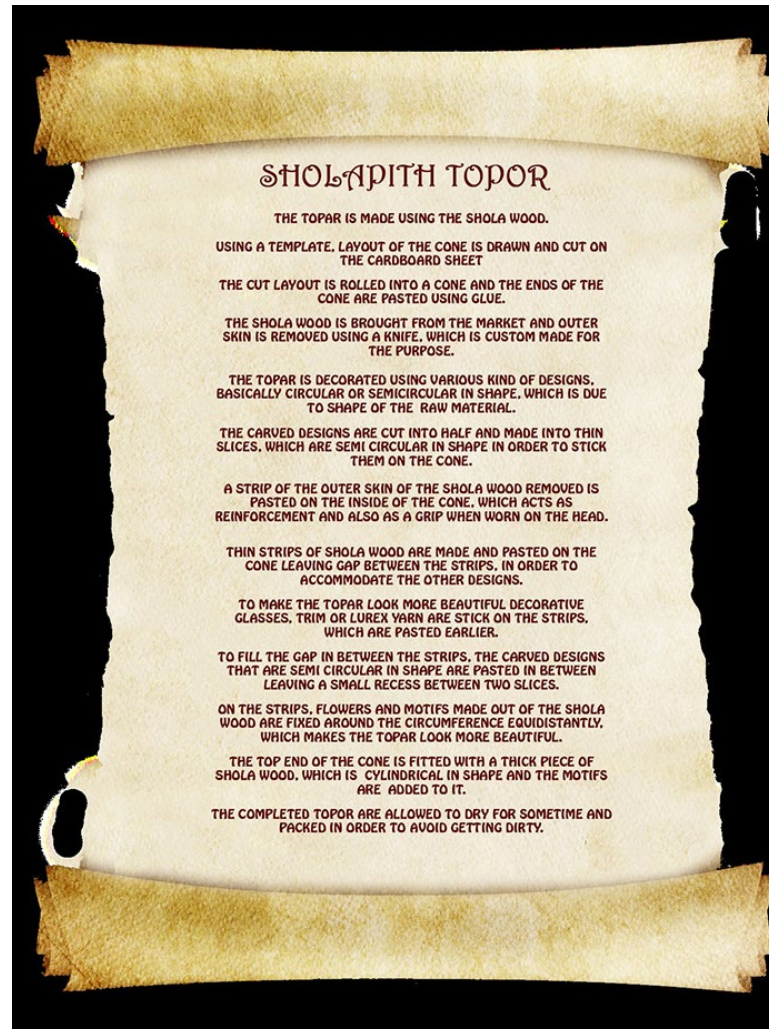
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Flowchart:



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The thick outer skin of the shola wood is removed using a Kath (knife).



Artisan using shaving tools to turn shola plants into thin sheets.



Artisan cutting the inner cortex of the plant for making a flower shape.

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Artisan making a cone shape out of paper and trimming the edges. Artisans applying adhesive over the shola strip.



The strip is pasted around the cone.

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Colorful ribbon threads are pasted on the design.



Patterns over the shapes are drawn using color markers.



The crown is decorated with different shapes and designs.

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The upper fragile area is designed and glued to a conical shape.



Asymmetrically perfect set of Topors on display.

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Products

The Topor and Mukut are traditional Bengali wedding essentials. These products made out of shola wood cost from around INR 300 to INR 500 depending upon the designs and details given on the Topor.



An aesthetically appealing building made out of shola pith wood.



Magnificent crowns were manufactured at Mr. Ramapada and Mrs. Ishan Neogi's workshop.

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Video



Shola Pith Topor - Part 1



Shola Pith Topor - Part 2

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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B. at [NID, Bengaluru](#).

You can get in touch with Prof. Bibhudutta Baral at [bibhudutta\[at\]nid.edu](mailto:bibhudutta[at]nid.edu)

You can write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

Key Contacts:

Mr. Ramapada Neagi

Tanama Bhandan,

Jadurneria, Uluberia,

Howrah-711316.

Cell phone: 9231825755/8622977974

Helpdesk Details:

Co-ordinator

Project e-kalpa

R & D Campus

National Institute of Design

#12 HMT Link Road, Off Tumkur Road

Bengaluru 560 022

India

Phone: +91 80 2357 9054

Fax: +91 80 23373086

Email: [dsource.in\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:dsource.in[at]gmail.com)

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