Kite-flying has been an integral part of Indian culture. In India, kites are flown on various occasions with the two most popular holidays. One is the religious Hindu festival called Uttarayana/Makar Sankranti which celebrates harvest and nature by thanking Surya (the Sun God) and Indra (the Rain God) for the onset of spring which has longer warmer days. This festival is celebrated in mid-January. The other holiday has a historical significance and is flown during the nation's Independence day which falls in mid-August. This symbolically marks the freedom struggle in 1927 when Indian freedom fighters protested against the Simon Commission by flying kites with slogans of freedom on them.

People of all ages crowd onto rooftops and terraces and engage in kite flying and kite fighting. The sky glitters with thousands of kites forming what is known as "kite clouds".

Below: People gather on rooftops to fly kites in Gujarat, India



KITE FACTS PERTAINING TO INDIA

WOMEN IN THE KITE INDUSTRY

The Indian kite industry is heavily dependent on women workers. Tens of thousands of them, often accompanied by their children and other family members, work from their homes around the country, cutting, crafting, and designing kites.

KITES AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

The Indian kite-making sector is said to be worth $85m in 2018. Gujarat has a 40 percent stake in the Kite industry in the country and it employs about 1.28K people.

INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL

Gujarat, a State in India's northwest, celebrates the International Kite Festival every January. Residents prepare for months, making kites in bright colors, using elaborate designs that have been passed down for generations.

KITE MAKING, A HINDU-MUSLIM COLLABORATION

Kite making is mostly dominated by Muslim artisans with Hindu retailers and shopkeepers coming into the picture only after the kites have actually been produced.

Reference
A Diferent Freedom: Kite Flying In Western India by Nikita Desai



AKṢARĀ

kite making workshop



For 2022 Akṣarā is organizing in-person and online kite-making workshops in celebration of India's 75th year of Independence. All in-person workshops in Manhattan are made possible by public funds from Creative Engagement, a regrant program supported by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and administered by LMCC. The Creative Engagement grant is for projects of tremendous artistry that help connects Manhattan's diverse communities through the arts.

Akṣarā's mission is to bring to the forefront traditional and contemporary ideas and thoughts about Indian culture in creative and meaningful ways. Its carefully curated events and education programs are designed to create deep cultural learning. This creative initiative was founded in 2021 in the heart of the pandemic where it felt important to delve into one's cultural knowledge to stay grounded.

Join our mailing list to stay connected with all our upcoming educational programs. If you want to partner with us to bring Indian cultural learning to your organization, school, or community please get in touch with us.

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PATANG: THE INDIAN DIAMOND KITE

Patang is a word used to denote a diamond-shaped kite with a central spine and a single bow. Traditionally kites in India are made out of paper and smooth, tapered bamboo sticks. These make the kites flexible, and lightweight, and they very much dive like a bird.

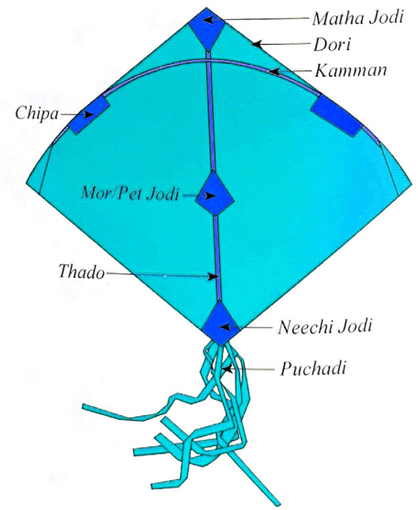


IMAGE REFERENCE: A DIFFERENT FREEDOM BY NIKITA DESAI





KITE LINES & KITE SPOOLS

Kite lines used in India are of two types, *Manjha*; the abrasive glass-coated line meant for kite tangle and kite fighting, and *Saddhi*; the non-abrasive starch-coated cotton lines meant for kite flying. Kite spools or reels in India known as *Firki* or *Chakri* are made of expensive hardwoods like rosewood, teak, and walnut and are inlaid with brass. The less expensive ones are made of softwood.