

Kites, Kite Flying and Kite Fighting in Punjab: Culture, Tradition and Basant

Amjad Parvez

University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

The art of kite-making and the associated festivity Basant, are the cultural benchmarks of the visual culture of the Punjab since centuries. The kites, not only are shaped, according to strongly evolved design patterns but also to the aerodynamics rules of aviation. This paper describes the history, culture and tradition of kites, kite-making and kite flying, emphasizing especially on Punjab and ultimately on Lahore. The kite making and related accessories have also been discussed promptly. The study also refers to the literary, poetic and visual evidence related to the kites throughout the past years of this part of the globe. The research also focuses on the kite flying and kite fighting association and the teams, along with a special study of the traditional contributions of masters (Ustad and Khalifa) of this art. This paper also investigates the modern-day culture of Basant concerning kite flying and associated festivity.

Key Words: Kite, Kite Flying, Kite Fighting, Design Pattern of Kite, Basant, Culture, Tradition



Figure 1. “Flying a kite on a hill near Walton Castle” (1788)

By Samuel Hiesonymous Grimm

Ink wash on paper

Image Courtesy: British Library Online

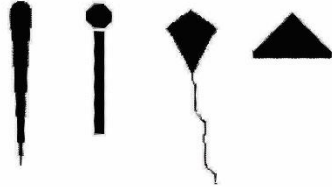


Introduction

All around the world, kites could be seen flying through the air as connotation of festivity and celebration. Different colours and design patterns of kites suggest the colourfulness and diversity of the emotions of the kite flyers who control its flight with the help of an attached string.

Ancient Greek culture, as the strongest historical evidence from the west, advocates the practice of kite flying as a ritual to please gods and goddesses and to avoid their anger and wrath. On the other hand, the archaic culture of China and Japan in Asia suggests that kites were designed and shaped after the popular mythological image of a Dragon. These kites have been flown on the coastal and air-bound areas of these countries since centuries. In Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Malaysia and many other South Asian and South East Asian countries, kites and kite-flying have been a popular sport among individuals of all ages, especially the children and the youth. However, the indigenous visual culture, aesthetics and colour combinations, according to the socio-environmental requirements, have influenced the shapes, designs and colour patterns of the kites subsequently.

Other than Punjab Pakistan, there are various styles and designs used in kite-making. The anatomy and design patterns of these kites are quite different from those used in Punjab. However, the aerodynamics is the same, as all the kites are made to fly.

The following diagram shows a variety of shapes and designs of kites found in various parts of the world, including India and Pakistan.

Kite Style	Examples	
<i>Flat</i>		<i>Snake, Hexagonal, Diamond, Delta</i>
<i>Bowed</i>		<i>Eddy, Edo, Rokkaku</i>
<i>Cellular</i>		<i>Star, Box Kite</i>

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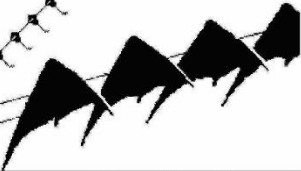
Multi-line		Dual-line Stunt Kite, Quad-line Stunt Kite
Fighters & Flexible		Hata, Indian Fighter, Korean Fighter
Figure		Bird, Bat
Soft		Soft Airfoil, Parafoil, Flowform
Stacks and Trains		Single-line train of Kites, Dual-line stack of kites
Others	Many other styles and variations exist!	

Figure 2. Various styles and designs of Kites of the world
Image taken from www.aka.kite.org

Generally, in the Subcontinent and especially in Punjab, the Rhombus shaped kites are more popular. Most of the kites, known as *Gudda* or *Guddi*, are crafted following the Rhombus pattern. It is rather easy to construct, with less technical effort to make, this type of kites. Therefore, even a common person or a school going boy can make this simple kite using two sticks and a piece of paper. (Fig. 3)

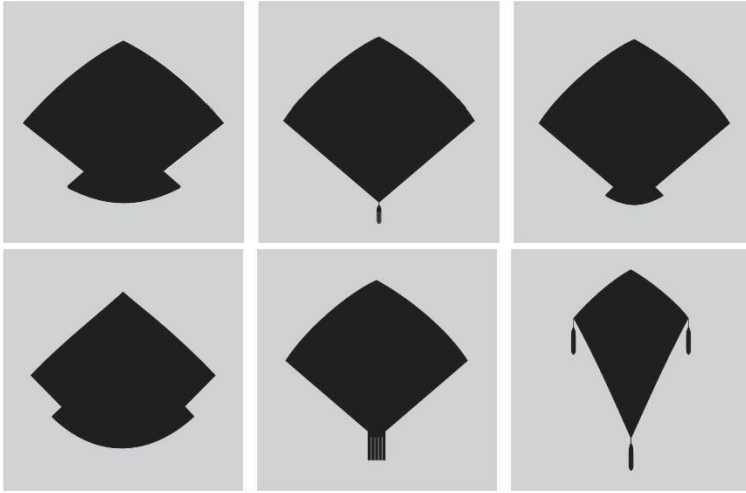


Figure 3. Rhombus shape kites of Punjab (2015)

By Amjad Pervez Design made using Photoshop following original traditional Rhombus shaped kite design

In Punjab, along with Rhombus shaped kites (*Gudda or Guddi*), there are popular curvilinear shapes of kites as well which are called *Patang* and *Kup*, (Fig. 4). Furthermore, there are some very unique designs also found, such as *Banda* and *Star-kite*, the *Star-kite* is known as *Pari*¹. (Fig. 5) Moreover, *Dowli* and *Tifli Kup* are some other modifications of the special design kites, which have been more popular among the kids, especially *Tifli Kup*, which means a child's kite, (Fig. 6)

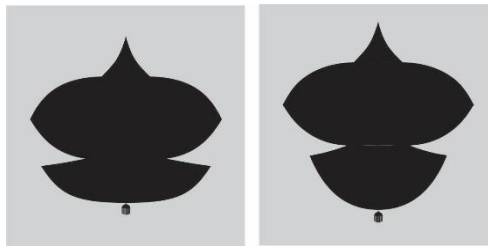


Figure 4. Patang and Kup of Punjab (2015)

By Amjad Pervez

Design made using Photoshop following original traditional design of Patang and Kup

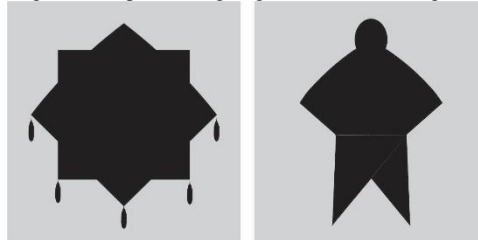


Figure 5. Pari and Banda Design (2015)

¹ *Pari* is an Urdu word used for Fairy

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By Amjad Pervez Design made using Photoshop following original traditional design of Pari and Banda

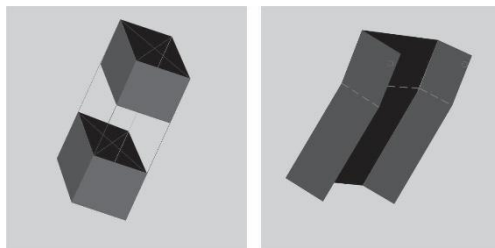


Figure 6. *Dowli and Tifli Kup Design (2015)*

By Amjad Pervez

Design made using Photoshop following original traditional design of *Dowli and Tifli Kup*

Famous Italian painter of 16th century Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci, along with his curious approach in visual arts, also experimented with kites and tried to measure the width of rivers and ditches. This practice has also been used by many scientists to size up the height of mountains and the speed of air. Scientists like Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) and Michael Faraday (1791-1867), used kite-flying in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to examine lightening in clouds and related electricity.

It is a historical fact that the South Asian culture, as recorded in the ancient Vedic period, has been inclined and enriched with the festivity and celebrations. Music and lyrical approach, being an attractive forte, ultimately was absorbed in the collective psychology of the South Asian populace and kite flying has also been found within this region as early as in 206 BCE. Whereas, the exact years are hard to find, because of the non-deciphered text and other aspects of missing information due to improper documentation. However, the word *Patang* (Kite), has been used in various cultural and social circumstances.

Etymology and Background

In *Farhang-e Asfia*; the most valuable and authentic Urdu Dictionary/Thesaurus (*Lughat*), *Patang* has been defined and described in the following words:

- a. *Patanga* or *Parwana*, are the names of an insect which, when starts flying, often dies while getting closed to a burning flame. It is said to be in immortal love with the flame.

پروانہ اک تینگا جب گنوبھی اک تینگا
وہ روشنی کا طالب یہ روشنی سراپا

The moth and the firefly through air both take wing.

One seeks for light: one in light's all arrayed.

- b. It also means a big *Kankawa*²
- c. The same word also advocates the Sun in *Sanskrit* language.

Being blessed with the agricultural lands and rivers, Punjab and its people have been deeply associated with rich agrarian culture and harvesting as their instinctive profession. Therefore, the most celebrated festival in the harvesting season is known as a major cultural event; *Vesakh* or *Vesakhi*. In *Bikrami*³ Calendar, *Vesakh* or *Besakh* is the second lunar month of this calendar covering the months of April and May of the Solar Christian Calendar.

“Punjab being a predominantly agricultural state that prides itself on its food grain production, it is little wonder that its most significant festival is Baisakhi, which marks the arrival of the harvesting season. For the Sikhs, Baisakhi has a special significance because on this day in 1699, their tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh organized the Order of the Khalsa. Baisakhi is New Year's Day in Punjab. It falls on the month of Vaisakh.” (Grover and Grewal 35)

The celebrations of the *Vesakhi*, later were assimilated with the festivities of kite flying, which was separately known as *Vasant* or *Basant*. The etymology of *Basant* or *Vasant* goes back to its origin in Sanskrit language where *Vasant* means spring season. Owing to its popularity and social involvement, the *Basant* itself raised as a notable cultural event of Punjab, specifically to mark the end of winter season and to welcome the spring.

Kite flying is the pivotal and integral aspect of the celebrations of *Basant* since centuries. Until the first half of the twentieth century in undivided Punjab, this even was a popular festival among all the inhabitants, even having diverse religious doctrines. As a valuable visual evidence, miniature paintings are found with kite flying as the main subject. One such Mughal period miniature painting (Fig. 7), shows a royal female flying a kite, suggests that this activity was also popular among women.



Figure 7. A woman flying a kite (1700-1800)
By Anonymous Mughal Artist
Opaque watercolor on paper, 57.3x42.1 cm

² *Kankawa* is another word used for *Patang*

³ One of the ancient calendars of India corrected and adopted by Raja Bikramajeet more than 2000 years ago in 57 BCE.

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Other miniature paintings, which suggest that various kinds of kites were in fashion among the elite or royal life styles in India. Few Rajput or Gujarati miniatures with a Raja flying a kite similar to the *Banda* design kite.

(Fig 8)

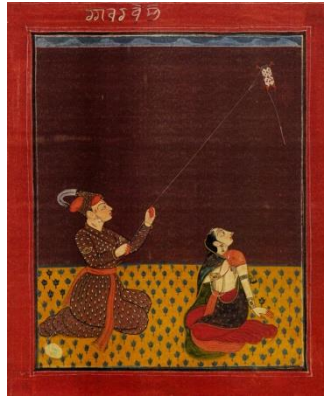


Figure 8. A Raja Flying a Kite (Era. Unknown)

By Anonymous Rajput School Artist Watercolor on paper, Dimensions Unknown

Lahore; the Main Center

Today, Lahore is considered as the main hub of celebrations associated with *Basant*. Historians are not sure that from which point in history; the city of Lahore started becoming the *Basant* center. However, the spring season has traditionally been welcomed by the advent of *Basant* in Lahore.

“It is difficult to say exactly when and how Lahore emerged as the principal centre of kite flying in the world. The very mention of kites awakens in me memories of my childhood, transporting me to those distant yet familiar surroundings of the walled city of Lahore. *Basant* marked the end of the kite-flying season, which began after Diwali in November with the onset of the cold weather.” (Nevile 28)

Apart from the historical facts, there are some myths also associated with the commencement of *Basant*, especially in Lahore as a proper festivity. The fable is related to a Hindu boy named Haqeeqat Rai Dharmi, who was, while playing with his Muslim friends, accused of blasphemy when he said few unsuitable words against the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The case was heard by a Qazi in Lahore in 1734, who sentenced Dharmi death penalty. Surinder Singh Kohli, in his book ‘*Strange but True in Sikhism*’ called him ‘the virtuous’ as a reference for a Sikh boy who refused to convert to Islam.

“The boy was a student in a Muhammedan school under a Qazi. The Qazi wished to convert the boy to Islam, but the boy refused. Then a charge was cooked up against him like Haqiqat Rai Dharmi (the

virtuous), who suffered martyrdom earlier in 1734.”
(Kohli 69)

As a religious reaction, Dharmi’s grave emerged as a center of attraction for the Hindus who believed that the boy sacrificed his life for the honour of Hinduism.

Gradually, the gathering grew in number and as a mark of distinction, the Hindu male visitors used to wear yellow turbans while the women were clad in yellow *Saris*. Increasingly, the visitors started to be more engaged in the festive activities and as a result, kite flying also became part of the celebrations at the so-called shrine of Haqeeqat Rai. It is largely believed, that *Basant* in Lahore started to be celebrated from that point by the Hindus. This could be one of the reasons that the *Basant*, by many orthodox Muslims, is titled and criticized as an anti-Islam festival.

Along with the Hindu culture, much evidence is found for kite-flying activities at the *Sufi* shrine culture of South Asia, especially during the Mughal Period:

“Muslims were living in India and this festival was introduced by Sufis in Mughal era BASANT was a popular festival in Sufi shrines of Nizam Auliya, Khwaja Bakhtiar Kaki, Khusrau set BASANT festival in the region of shrines.”
(Sabir et al 458)

The Indian cities, Vadodara, Surat and Ahmadabad are the main cities where kite-flying is considered and celebrated as a festival.

In Indian Gujarat, the kite-flying day is called *Makar Sankranti*, which marks the beginning of spring and welcomes the sun after long winters. The celebration is titled as *Makara* or *Uttarayan Sankranti* as it is believed in Hindu astronomy that at this juncture of time, the sun enters the zodiac of *Makara*; a Sanskrit version for Capricorn. Nowadays, kites are flown with strong strings, made by adding glass powder on the thread, to create a cutting edge while being entangled with other kites. In Punjab and especially in Lahore, the same kind of thread, covered with glass powder is called *Manjha* which, has become a vital part of the kite-flying activities associated with the *Basant*.

Basant was a popular cultural event in Lahore before the partition. Though, it was considered more as a Hindu festival, but the people of Lahore were largely indulged in celebrating it regardless of religious dogmas. After the partition in 1947, the newly established state of Pakistan was not very responsive towards the centuries old Hindu traditions and festivities due to the ‘Two Nation Theory’. However, the *Basant* revived in Lahore after few decades, and then it was overwhelmingly celebrated.

“Over the years Basant has emerged as the greatest and the most colourful festival of Lahore. Basant, originating in a Hindu custom is observed on the second or third Sunday of the month of February.”
(Tikekar 80)

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The *Basant* became more popular in Lahore, due to the festive and food loving attitude of the Lahori people, comparatively to any other city of Punjab. Over the span of last two decades or so, the *Basant* festival in Lahore surfaced as a major tourist attraction for the foreigners; enticing them to fly kites and enjoy traditional Lahori cuisine. Furthermore, music, dance and yellow attire added more value to the *Basant* and kite-flying as an internationally acclaimed occasion and activity in Lahore. Eventually, the popular culture of Lahore, inspired other cities of Punjab as well and the event of *Basant* started to be announced formally during various days in the mid of February.

“Basant is celebrated towards the close of winter in the month of January-February. The weather circle seems to be changing otherwise. Basant used to bring a message of softness in the weather in place of the hard cold season. Basant is the time when mustard fields arc yellow with it the spring is ushered in. Punjabis welcome the change and celebrate the day by wearing yellow clothes, holding feasts and by organising kite flying.”

(Grover and Grewal 35)

In the Walled-city Lahore, kite-flying and kite-fighting are not confined only to an individual level. Specifically, after the creation of Pakistan and during and after 1980, the teams of kite-fighters emerged under the mentorship of masters who were called *Ustad*⁴. Initially, there were only two such mentors and their two representing teams in Lahore; one of *Ustad* Jalal's team and the other was of *Khalifa*⁵ Hazura.

The team of *Ustad* Jalal had some notable kite-fighters of those times including *Ustad* Jalal himself. The others were *Ustad* Afzal Khan with *Ustad* Bodi, and *Ustad* Mehar Kala. then *Ustad* Siddique and *Ustad* Mir Deen with *Ustad* Altaf Khan and *Ustad* Ashraf (more renowned as *Piddi Ustad*).

Ustad Wajid Ali Shah, named after the Nawab of Awadh, *Ustad* Fayyaz and *Ustad* Abdul Waheed who was more popular as Weedi Sayein. *Ustad* Javed nicknamed as *Chhanga* and *Ustad* Parvaiz popular as Billu Pehalwan were other few good players. Moreover, *Ustad* Haji Khalil and *Ustad* Mir with *Ustad* Nannha and *Ustad* Badshah were also known players in the company of *Ustad* Allah Bakhsh.

⁴ *Ustad* is used for Master in Urdu and Punjabi Language

⁵ *Khalifa* is the most respectable senior player of the Kite flying who also serves as a judge in competitions



Figure 9. Names of *Ustads* who set foundations of *Gharana* of kite flying in Lahore, Punjab (1984-5) Photograph by Amjad Pervez, Photograph of original poster of the Kite Flying Association Lahore

The other team of *Khalifa Hazura* was also a strong opponent with *Ustad Bhola Pehalwan* and *Ustad Naseer* with their skillful art, and *Ustad Jani* and *Ustad Nikka* with the vigorous attitude of *Ustad Alah Din*.

Another *Ustad Mullah Rafique* was an interesting figure with religious and kite-flying attitude amalgamated in him whereas, *Ustad Parvaiz Butt* along with a veteran *Ustad Chacha Nazir* were impeccable. On the other hand, *Ustad Suleman Piya* coupled with *Ustad Sultan* (known as *Boorey Wala*), along with *Ustad Hafiz Shahid* and *Ustad Chhima Pehalwan* were good enough to add diversity and balance to this team.

These two groups are the earliest found teams of kite-fighters in Lahore who inspired many to follow and there could be found many new teams under proper associations and clubs in modern Lahore.

The founder members of these two earliest found teams, either have deceased or become inactive and fragile due to old age that they are not alert enough to contribute in any kite-flying or fighting. Even so, their contribution towards modern-day passion for this traditional support is monumental and unparalleled, especially in Lahore. In recent times, multinational companies like *Coke* and *Pepsi* have started sponsoring kite fighting tournaments, and these events are properly advertised through posters and banners; particularly when they are associated with *Basant* celebrations. The indulgence of electronic and social media has made

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Basant and associated kite-flying and fighting activities as the identity of Lahore culture.

On the other hand, the kite-fighting remained lively throughout all favourable months with slogans, drum beating and music, in grounds and upon rooftops of the city, before the government ban was imposed.

Along with all the celebrations of dance, music and cuisine, the *Basant* is pivotally connected with one main object; the kite or *Patang* which has further variations in design as *Gudda* or *Guddi*. In its simple structure, the kite is made up of light weight paper stretched and mounted on a delicate bamboo stick structure. Interestingly, this uncomplicated object follows basic mechanism of aerodynamics.

Kite Making; Aerodynamics and Romance

The making of colourful kites is not mere pasting and stretching of paper across bamboo stick structure. The structure as well as the pasting of the paper needs precise and expert hands of kite-makers who, have been skilled from one generation to another over a span of centuries. These kite makers are adept enough to enable these paper machines to fly at high altitudes with the help of a mere string, following the delicate controls of the kite-flyer at the other end. This is also a fact that the kite is a heavy object in comparison with the area it covers in the air, so, it needs aerodynamic rules to be observed.

“Kites are heavier-than-air flying structures controlled by three main forces: lift, gravity and drag.”

(Eden 22)

Aerodynamics of a kite is similar to the aerodynamics of an aero plan; depending heavily on lift and drag to cope with the gravitational force downwards. The proper consideration of aerodynamics in kite design enables kites to fly high against the breeze or strong wind when attached with a string, or can float to long distances when detached from it.

This aspect adds a romantic and surrealistic association of the kite-flyer with the kite. When he or she flies the kite high, it creates a sense of achievement within and on the contrary, when the kite-fighter loses his kite, the detachment and helplessness create a gloomy feeling while looking at the floating kite that is no more associated with the owner now and soon be snatched or looted by someone. The concept of lost kite has been used as a very well narrated symbol in poetry, and even few films⁶ have been named after this concept.

A kite should have proper control of the kite-flyer or fighter upon it. For this purpose, the professional expertise in kite-making, and even in thread making (*Dor* making), is an aspect of scientific excellence. Both these objects, the kite and the

⁶ Famous Bollywood film *Kati Patang* (Cut-lost Kite) featuring Asha Parekh as the main leading role

thread, facilitate the individuals who either fly kites individually for pleasure, or in teams as a professional in competitions and at *Basant-related* activities.

The whole festivity of the *Basant*, revolves around one basic factor; the kite-flying. Therefore, the kites have to be made to fly high. For this, kites are made in specified parts, not only in design but also in structure.

Different types and styles of popular kites could be categorized as:

- i- *Patang and Kup*
- ii- *Gudda and Guddi*
- iii- *Lakhnaw Kat or Nakhlow Cut*
- iv- *Machhar*
- v- *Tifli Kup*
- vi- *Dowli or Box Kite*
- vii- *Banda*

There are many other types and shapes as well. Each one of these kites has been named according to the ability and characteristics regarding various atmospheric and fighting circumstances.

“Made of coloured paper and fine bamboo, our kites were as attractive as huge butterflies and almost as light. There was a large variety of colours, shapes and designs, with its own appellation. We had guddis, peris, guddas, Lucknow kats, patangs, teerahs, kups, etc. The guddis had a small paper tassel at the bottom while the male version, the gudda, had a patta, a triangle cut out of paper in place of the tassel. Even now kites with pattas or tassels are flown all over India. It is said that they were invented in Lucknow.”
(Nevile 29)

Kite Design

The kite design is based on a cross which is made up by two bamboo sticks placed, and tied up with thread, over each other. The straight baton or stick is called *Shehtir*⁷ where as another stick, *Kaman*⁸, is curved over the *Shehtir*, horizontally at the top one fourth height. This is the basic structure which helps the kite to bear surface pressure and move upwards against the wind.

A special kind of thin paper, locally known as *Guddi*⁹ paper, is stretched and pasted upon the baton structure of the kite. This paper should either be in one colour only, or it might have two; three or even four coloured vertical or horizontal design patterns. These patterns are created by pasting two, three or four panels of different colour papers. These design patterns have evolved by the generations of

⁷ Shehtir means grand arrow but in local slang, it refers to a beam that supports a wooden roof

⁸ *Kaman* is a Persian or Urdu alternative for a bow

⁹ Kite is called as *Guddi* in Punjabi

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kite makers and interestingly enough could challenge the world's best surface designs.

Some of the kite designs are the flags of many countries, regardless of any particular continent. Even many patent and renowned design patterns of multinational companies of the modern-day corporate world, could be found in famous kite designs.

The process of kite making is an intelligent combination of art and science. The simple bamboo sticks are tied up together in a technically correct formation that can help the kite fly according to the aerodynamics. Pran Nevile has discussed this talent in these words:

“Making a good kite is an art. The secret lies in perfect scraping and softening of its fine bamboo rods. One batten is fixed to the centre of the frame and another batten is curved like a bow, linking the two corners on the right and left. In those days a large variety of coloured paper of different thicknesses and qualities was imported from England. The construction of patang and its male version kup is a complicated task.” (Nevile 29)

The colours and designs of kites are very carefully thought out keeping in view the backdrop of the sky behind a flying kite. Large patterns and loud or flamboyant colours are intentionally selected in consideration of the daytime kite-flying whereas diffused and white colour kites are thought to be suitable for night time kite-flying. These factors have lemmatized the colour spectrum for the kite designs; as all colours are not suitable for both daytime and night-time activity. Therefore, after a natural evolution of years, there is a specific range of colour-schemes that has been accepted not only by the kite makers but also by the kite-flyers or fighters.

Same is the case with the material of kites. The paper used to make kites has to be light weight and strong enough to bear a certain level of air pressure at the same time. The *Guddi* paper is a good option being light in weight and delicate in its surface, which can bear wind pressure up to a favourable extent that can provide lift and drag to the kite. This paper also creates a shattering sound when it flatters in the air. The batons or bamboo sticks need to be straight, unvarying in thickness, light weight, flexible and dry to serve the structure with aerodynamic requirements.

Kite making seems technically very scientific, keeping all the mentioned qualities in view. However, dealing with the mechanism of the kites, the kite-maker in Lahore or in Punjab, uses the basic apparatuses or tools and craftsmanship to shape a handmade kite. He follows the same manner and technique that his forefathers were comfortable with a hundred or hundred and fifty years ago. Lord Baden Powel mentioned this process in the *Handbook of the Manufacturers and Arts of the Punjab* as:

“He [Kite-maker] requires only knife, scissors, a board [Adda], a pestle and mortar [Lavi], a ‘dullu,’ a round earthen vessel to hold water and a big shell to polish the paper. The kites are made of thin bamboo and polished paper”
(Powell 302)

Kite Fighting

Aside from the conventional kites, the fighter kites are manufactured specifically for kite battle; they are different from the mainstream traditional ones. These kites need to have special features like strong structure and swift movement.

The Mughal Emperor Akbar, during his stay in Lahore during 1584 to 1598, erected a wall around the city with twelve gates and a narrow opening. One of these gates, *Mochi Darwaza*¹⁰, is the best known for kite selling and buying along with all the accessories. The popular fighter kites such as *Kup*, *Patang*, *Guda*, *Nakhlaw*, *Pan*, *Tukal*, *Muchhar* etc., are available in different sizes and weight, for various requirements of speed and balance in the air.

To cater the growing market, Lahore has produced many skilled kite makers who were matchless in their craftsmanship. “There were master craftsmen in Lahore who specialized in making different varieties of kites.” (Nevile 29)

Accessories

The handmade thread, locally called as *Dor*, is an essential part of kite flying. This string is prepared specifically, not only for mere kite flying but also for kite fighting. For this purpose, glass powder mixed with gum or other sticking materials such as very refined flour, are applied to the thread to provide it a cutting-edge quality and sharpness.

During kite-fighting or *Paicha*¹¹, the strings got entangled with each other, and only the strong and sharp-edged string survives. In recent years, many string makers of Lahore introduced the metallic line for more strength during the kite-fighting. These metallic strings triggered many accidents for bikers, specifically, which led this festive activity to a bloody sport causing casualties and even loss of many valuable lives. The chaos created by the metallic string resulted into a ban on *Basant* and kite-flying, generally in Punjab and significantly in Lahore, leaving many artisans, manufacturers and distributors unemployed.

The kite pressure, sharpness of string, angle of entanglement and most importantly the skill of the kite-fighter, all play a vital role in this battle of threads; followed by chanted slogans of ‘*Bow Kaata*¹²’ (cut and lost).

¹⁰ *Mochi Darwaza* is one of the twelve gates of the Walled-city Lahore. It is believed that the name was misconceived from *Moti* which means pearl.

¹¹ A term used to denote entanglement of flying kites of two rivals

¹² A slang slogan chanted after cutting rival's kite

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The related material and objects for kite making or kite-fighting include:

- i- *Chaipi*; a types of paper tape
- ii- *Dhanga*; a long leafless branch of tree
- iii- Needles and Spools with Thread
- iv- *Takhta*; a wooden platform of 4 x 6 ft.

The platform is used as a stage by the kite-flyers and kite-fighters.

Romance of Kite-flying and *Basant*

During the childhood, kite-flying has been a dreamlike hobby for many who recalled it as a romance in their older age. Snatching a free flowing cut-off kite with efforts is like winning a trophy which forced many to become professional or armature kite-fighters or kite-flyers, who participate in formal competitions; officially or casually organized in grounds or at the rooftops. Daytime and nighttime kite-flying and kite fighting, both are popular in public according to their unique taste and leisure time.

However, daytime kite flying is more popular among all and sundry owing to pleasant weather, appropriate wind-blow and proper light. Particularly children prefer to fly kites during the daytime. The dark colour kited against the blue vast sky create a very decorative and enhancing ambiance in the soft sunlight of February and March. Many artists of Pakistan have captured this panorama in their paintings with Ajaz Anwar leading as the established *Basant* artist. (Fig. 10)

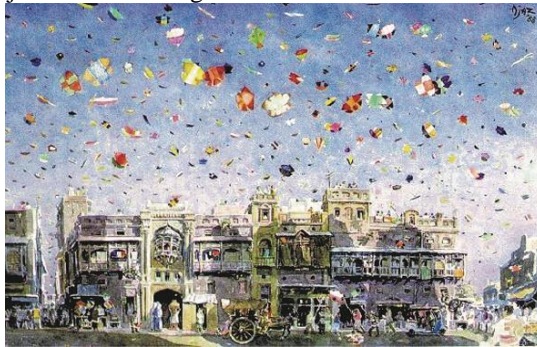


Figure 10. *Basant II* (1988)

By Ajaz Anwar Watercolor on Paper, 11x15.5 cm

It is also believed that when the women started an active participation in *Basant*, the nighttime kite-flying emerged as more popular and suitable activity. Even the veiled women of traditional and conservative families find it convenient to participate in the night-time kite-flying.

Furthermore, when the families started to get more involved in the festivity of *Basant*, the kite-flying at night earned more popularity, specifically among women. This fact has inspired the design and colour of the kites as well, and light coloured or white kites have become more common for nighttime kite-flying due to their visibility.

Over the past two decades or so, the celebrations of *Basant* in Lahore have seen many contemporary trends, including colourful dresses, popular music and mouthwatering cuisine. Young boys tend to shoot fires in the air and girls like to sing, dance and scream loudly. Yellow shirts, scarfs, *duopattas*¹³ and matching bangles are very popular among the females, and even men wear yellow shirts or *Kurta*¹⁴.

Food is also a special part of the *Basant* celebrations. Indigenous food items, especially sweets add to the taste as well. *Gajrella*¹⁵, *Pathurey*¹⁶ and Bar BQ are all time favourites, and the Kashmiri tea or popular soft drinks are simply unavoidable.

At this occasion, music played a vital role in triggering the enthusiasm of the people. Popular film music is a general choice; however, in recent years *Bhangra*¹⁷ and *Dhol* have established their eternal place in this festival of *Basant*.

Traditionally, local Punjabi music is played on this occasion with the drumbeat (*Dhol*)¹⁸. The Indian Film music is also seemed to be played at this occasion.

Kite Flying as a Sport

Generally, in Punjab and significantly in Lahore, the hobby of kite-flying in the past two to three decades, has emerged as a well-organized sport with defined rules and regulations. Amateur Kite flying is an old tradition in Punjab, which has attracted all sort of social groups to adopt this hobby at a professional level. The kite-flying teams developed in the 1980s in Lahore at a proper level with organized competitions under appropriate rules and regulations. Interestingly, the professional kite-fighters do not participate in *Basant*-related kite-flying, which is a more fun seeking activity than a specialized sport.

Kite-flying competitions are arranged by a well reputed and systematized organization, known as the *Kite Flying Association* that was founded in 1982. This association developed many rules and regulations to convert this pastime into a proper sport.

The Kite-flying competitions arranged under the association are invigilated by a referee or a judge.

As explained earlier, *Paicha*¹⁹ is the main game in the kite-flying competitions. During a *Paicha*, the opponents try their best to cut each other's kite. It needs technique and precision by the kite-fighter in his skillfulness; where at

¹³ A scarf like piece of cloth but large in size wore by girls and women

¹⁴ A loosely stitched shirt normally having length up to knees

¹⁵ A sweet pudding made up of carrots and condensed milk

¹⁶ A kind of deep fried loaf served with gram-curry

¹⁷ The famous traditional Punjabi Dance performed on the fast beat of *Dhol* (Drum)

¹⁸ *Dhol* is a centuries old drum-like musical object used for creating beats

¹⁹ The cross-cutting of opponent's kites by entangling one's own kite in the air

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times, he pulls the string or *Dor*, and occasionally loosens it and stretches again, to beat his opponent by cutting his kite off.

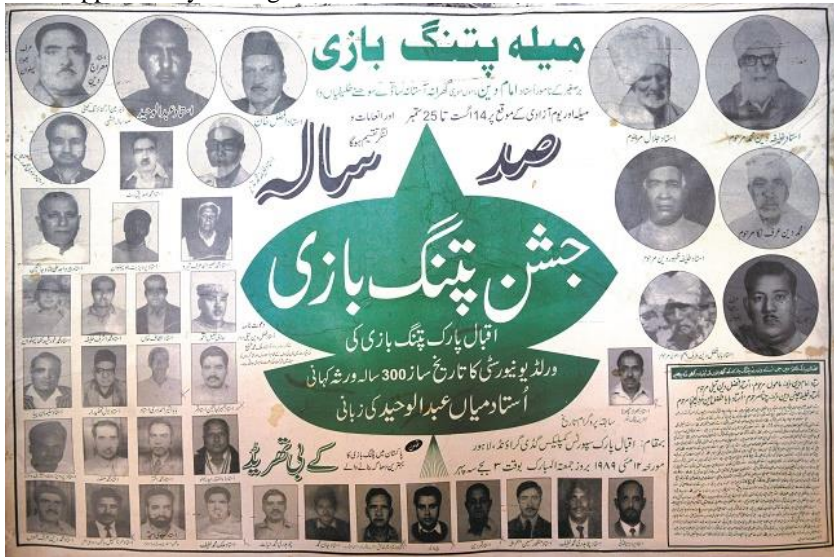


Figure 11. A festival of Professional Kite Fighters (1989)

Photograph by Amjad Pervez, Photograph of original poster of Kite Flying Association Lahore

From kite making to kite-flying and fighting, there is a well coined terminology in the local Punjabi language which covers almost all the aspects related to styles, patterns, flying and battling of kites.

Traditionally, there evolved few rules for kite-flying and kite-fighting. However, after the establishment of the *Kite Flying Association* in 1982 at Lahore, bylaws were formed for competitions. Furthermore, Mr. Naqi Butt who was a member of the *Pakistan Olympic Board*, strived well for kite-fighting to be included the Pakistan Olympic Games. Legal statutes and laws were also constituted for this cause which, unfortunately could not be fulfilled.

The traditional teams of kite-fighters are called *Dhara* in Punjabi. Every *Dhara* or team has to accept and follow the rules during the competition; noncompliance of which can disqualify a player or the whole team. Every team tries their best to cut as many kites of the opponent team as possible. The score decides the winning team keeping in consideration the cut and lost kites of the opponents. Every competition or match is supervised by a referee who is known as *Khalifa* in the local jargon. A *Khalifa*, is a master of the art of kite-flying or kite-fighting whom, all and sundry admit as unparalleled. A *Khalifa* has the status of a mentor and revered by all the young kite-flyers.

Conclusion

Conclusively speaking, the art of kite making and kite-flying or fighting has deep rooted cultural and anthropological impact on the lives of the people of Punjab and

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specifically of Lahore. Over the years, this tradition has surfaced as a multimillion dollar kite making industry in the Walled-city.

Kites have a history all around the world. However, in Punjab, the kite history is associated with myths, festivity and celebration. After the creation of Pakistan, though the *Basant* was criticized as a non-Islamic festival, but kite-flying and kite-fighting could never lose its popularity among general populace of Punjab, and very significantly of Lahore.

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Biographical Note

Amjad Parvez is Assistnat Professor at College of Arts and Design and additional In-charge, Director Press and Publications, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
