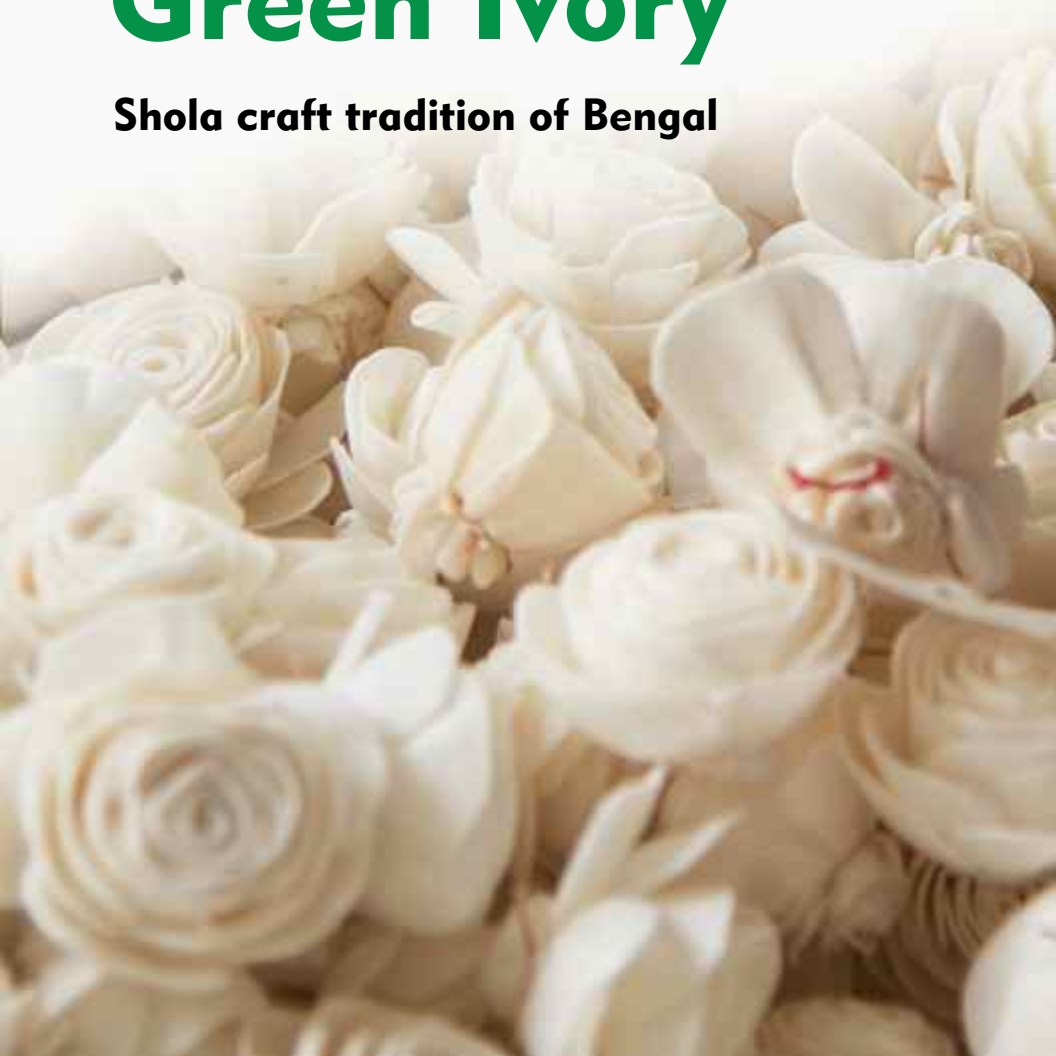




শোলা

Green Ivory

Shola craft tradition of Bengal



What is Shola?

Shola, or Sholapith, is a milky-white spongy plant matter which is shaped into objects of art and utility by the indigenous community of craftspeople. The scientific name of the Shola plant is *aeschynomene aspera*. Shola is an eco-friendly, biodegradable, durable, and renewable resource.

The exquisite tradition of Shola craft of Bengal faces the threat of extinction. Very few surviving expert artisans remain. There is a lack of interest among the younger generation in this fine craftsmanship. The market for typical Shola crafts is either stagnant or seasonal, and the largely of low value.



Shola cultivation takes place under 4-5ft water during the monsoons.





Process

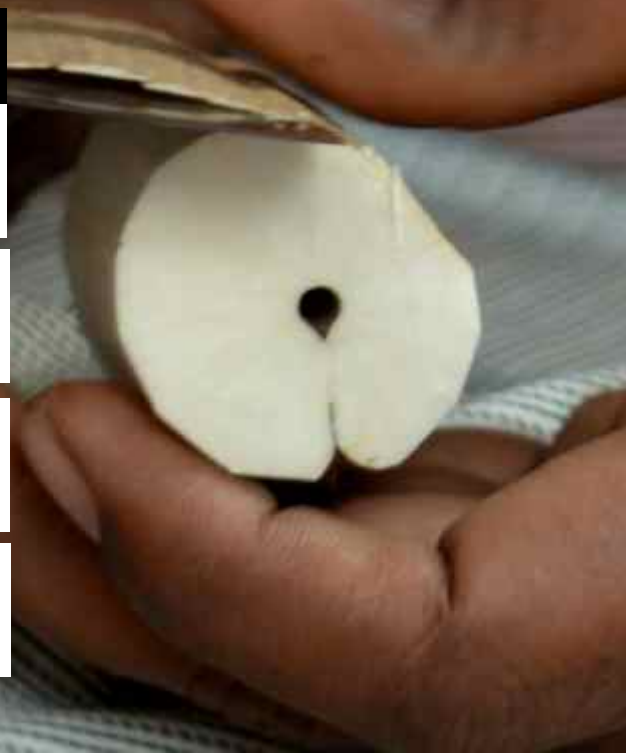


1. First, the brownish layer is peeled off using a knife which is locally called 'Kath'.

2. In case of the crafts made from sheets of Shola, the fine white layers are gently peeled away while moving the stick in a circular motion. The length of the Shola sheets depends on the width of the stick.

3. The Shola sheet is cut according to requirement for a particular product.

Tools



Story of Shola

Legend has it that the Shola plant was the invention of Lord Shiva. Shiva decided to wear a pure white crown and garland at his wedding with Parvati. When Viswakarma, the god of creativity, found himself at a loss to create these items, Shiva flung a lock of hair from his own head into the pond. This instantly bloomed into the squidgy water plant – Shola. Still, Viswakarma couldn't think of how he would work with this curiously soft new material. Then the Lord Shiva plucked a hair from his arm and flung it into the water, and out of the pond, emerged a young man. This young man created the wedding crown, garland, and ornaments of Shiva. Shiva named him “Malakar” – the garland maker. His descendants, the Malakars, are a small community of artists who work on Shola crafts till date.



The Craft

Shola products are utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.

Shola in Tradition:

Traditional ornamentation of idols is made using Shola. Clusters of Shola ornament makers are found throughout Bengal. Shola items are essential in the hallmark Durga Puja festival. Shola is highly significant in all the customs and traditions of Bengal.

Indigenous communities use Shola in different rituals. The objects have associated myths based on the religious beliefs of the community. Rajbangshis of Coochbehar worship Mashan, a spirit, who they believe is the protector of the whole region. The "Saitol" for instance, which is omnipresent in weddings, funerals, and the first ceremonial meal of a child is created in the Rangpur tradition. The "Manasar Chali", or the fan of snake hoods around the head of the goddess Manasa, is made with Shola in entire North Bengal.



Ivory Legacy

Murshidabad has a grand legacy of craftsmanship. The ivory legacy has been carried forward to the present day with a bit of replacement in the material. The products found in Murshidabad are mostly models which are products of intricate details and fine workmanship. Howdah Hati (elephant with a howdah), Mayurpankhi Nouka (peacock boat), and models of gods and goddesses form the main part of the market.





Shola in Contemporary Use

Toys, mementoes, and decorative items made of Shola are both eco-friendly and aesthetic. Intricately carved objects like miniature landmarks and figurines are valuable keepsakes. Not only are they visually splendid showcases of skilled craftsmanship, they are hallmarks of glorious indigenous cultural tradition.

Muragacha in Nadia is famous for puppets. The base of the puppets is made out of Shola.





Revival of Shola Craft Tradition of Bengal aims at

- Safeguarding the knowledge of Shola craft through documentation of craft techniques and facilitating online platform for knowledge and skill transmission
- Revitalizing of skills, improving, innovating and diversifying the range of Shola products for sustainability and global market prospects.

The outcome will be cultural continuity through sustained heritage education, strengthened skills, improved awareness, production methods and market potential.



The initiative is being designed and implemented by Contact Base (www.banglanatak.com), with the support of the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany Kolkata.



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