

Indian Fighting Kites

(#45K17.41)

Fighting Kites

In many parts of the world the kite is more than a child's toy. Kites have a colorful history of use in warfare, love and sporting contests. These fighting kites are of the latter sort, being very popular in India and Japan, where contests with intense rivalry are fought with kites.

Fighting kites, known as Patangs in Hindi, are comprised of three main components: the kite, a special abrasive thread, and line spool or reel. A fighting kite differs in several ways from other kites. It is slightly more difficult to fly. Without a significant tail, it is less stable, but much more maneuverable. The kites (made from thin paper tensioned under bamboo cross members and edged with a balancing string) are bridled and strung with a special abrasive thread called Manjha. Manually prepared, the thread is first dressed with a special tacky gum and then coated with an abrasive powdered rice and glass mixture. The result is a strong and sharp thread specifically formulated for dueling. The thread is wound onto a wooden spool known as a Charka, which, when spun between the fingers, allows the user to quickly dispense or wind the Manjha with the dexterity required for successful duels.

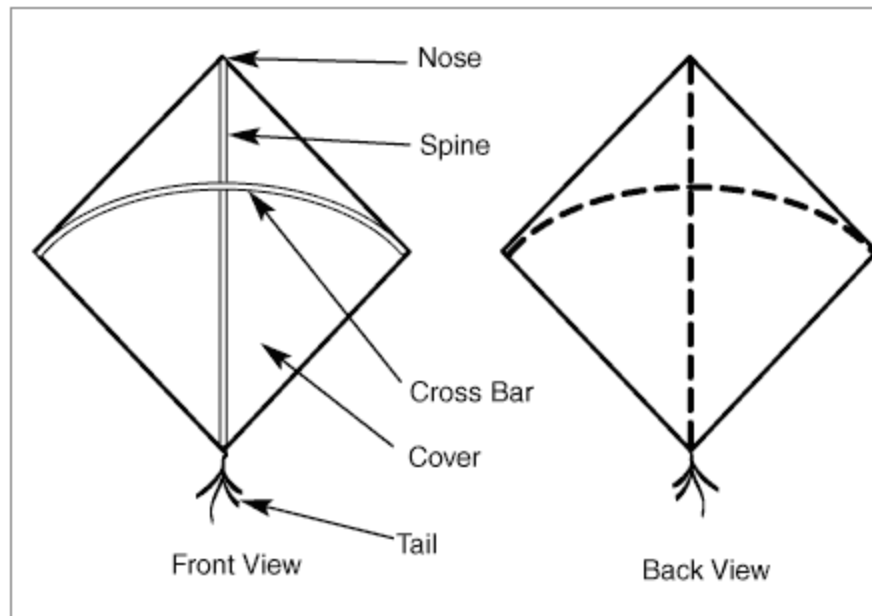


Fig. 1: *Parts of the kite*

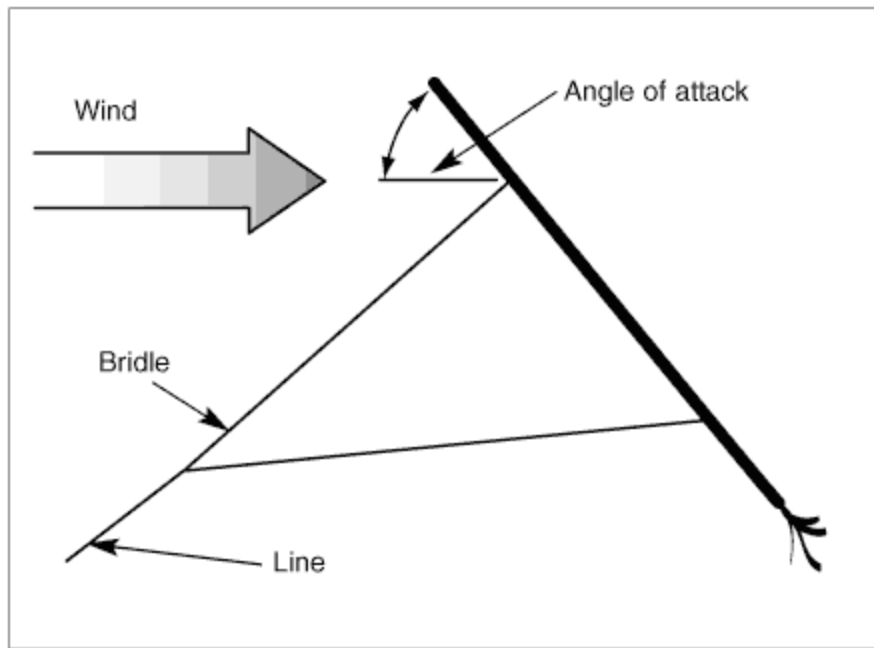


Fig 2: *Line and bridle (side view)*

Parts

The parts of your kite (Figures 1 and 2) are:

- Spine
- Cross bar
- Bridle
- Cover
- Nose and tail Line (Manjha)
- Line spool or reel (Charka)

Adjustments

As with any of life's endeavors, attitude is important. In this case, by attitude we mean the angle that the kite's spine makes with the wind. Attitude is set by adjusting the bridle; it's the most important and most sensitive of the adjustments. If the nose is too far back, the kite will fail to rise; too far forward and, though it may fly, it will not attain its best height. Start with an angle about as shown in the diagram, and adjust the angle of attack according to its behavior and changing wind conditions (Figure 2).

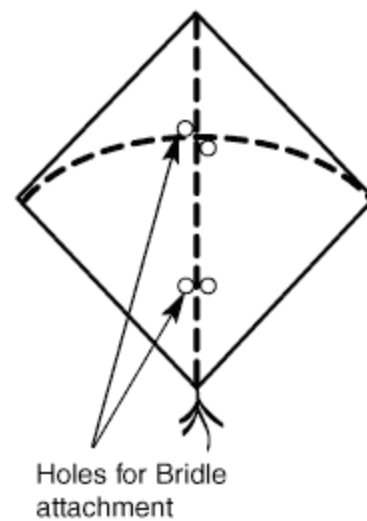


Fig. 3: *Bridle attachment*

Attaching the Bridle

For this kite, a simple two-point attachment is used (Figure 3). Carefully punch two tiny holes in the cover as close as you can to the junction of the spine and cross bar. Thread the bridle cord (about 30 inches long) around the crossed bamboo pieces and knot it at the back side. A bowline is a good knot to use here (Figure 4).

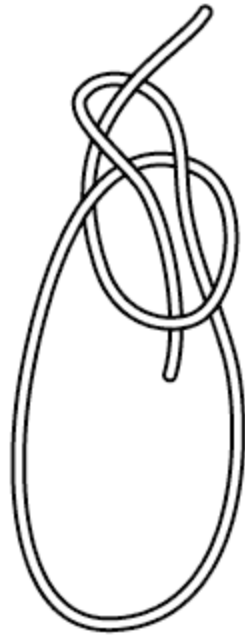


Fig. 4: *Bowline*

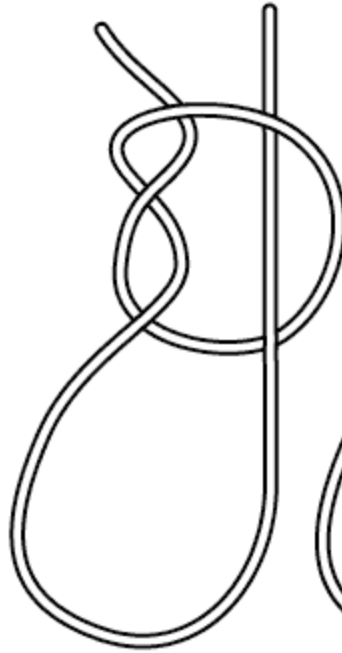


Fig. 5a: *Slip Knot*



Fig. 5b: *Half Hitch Added*

At a point 3 or 4 inches above the tail (or about one-fifth of the spine length), again make two tiny holes, as close as possible to the spine. Thread the cord around the spine and tie a slip knot with an extra half-hitch or two (Figures 5a, 5b). You do not want this knot to slide up the spine and tear the cover, so make it tight.

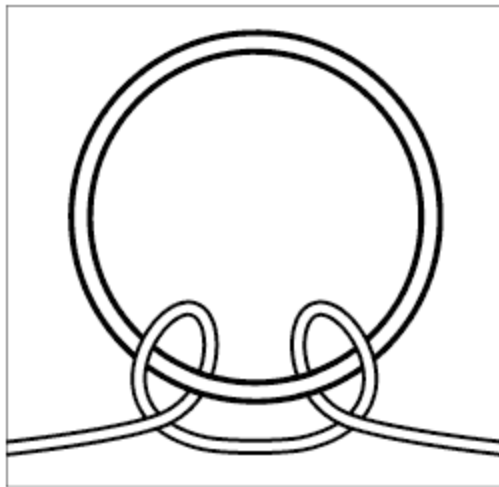


Fig. 6: *Lark's head knot on ring*



Fig. 7: *Paper Clip Trimmed for lightness*

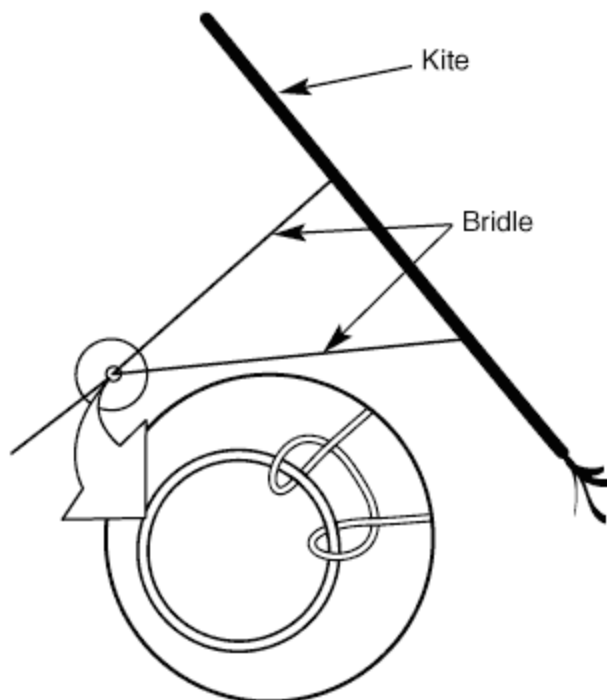


Fig. 8: *Ring attached to bridle with lark's head knot*

To set up an attachment point for the line to the bridle, take a tiny wire ring

back around it. This knot will allow you to make adjustments easily, as it will not slide on the bridle cord when tightened, but may easily be loosened to adjust the attitude. Attach the line to the ring with another bowline.

The section of bridle above the ring must be shorter than the section below. The difference determines the angle of attack (Figure 2). How much this difference should be depends on kite design and wind conditions. It will require some experimentation.

Launching

Although launching is easier with the help of a friend, you can do it yourself if wind conditions are favorable. Unless you need the exercise, running with a kite should be unnecessary and the resulting inadvertent dragging may cause damage.

When you arrive at the launch site, take a few minutes to check out the bridle adjustment. Let out a few feet of line and see if the kite appears stable. If not, make the necessary adjustments. If you have help, ask the friend to carry the kite a hundred feet or so down wind as you let out line and, on your signal, hold it skyward and release it as you briskly take in a bit of line. If you are alone, lay out some line, raise the kite high and when the wind catches it, walk briskly backward a few steps, line in hand, releasing or tightening as needed.

Landing the Kite

Landing the kite without damage is another important skill. If you have a helper, ask them to walk along the line, pulling it down as they go. If you are alone, walk toward the kite as you take in line. When it gets close to the ground, quickly release the line. Without support, the kite should drop gently to earth.

Flying the Kite

Kite flying is more than passive watching. There are several techniques to use for controlling the kite's action.

Gaining Altitude

A swift tug on the line will cause the kite to rise. Repeating the action will help it attain its maximum altitude for the length of line used.

Adding Stability

A fighting kite is inherently unstable. If you want it to be easier to fly, at the expense of maneuverability, you can add a tail, or attach small paper tassels to the tips of the cross bar.

Direction Control

A pull on the line will cause the kite to go in the direction the nose is pointing. Here's where the unstable nature of the fighting kite is an advantage. As it wobbles and flutters, sooner or later it will point in the direction you want it to go. This allows you to send it into directed motion by a swift and steady pull. When you want it to change direction again, relax the line, watch the kite's nose, and pull sharply again when it points where you want it to go. You can also help it along by releasing tension on the line and walking in the desired direction. With practice, you can make it turn, dart and slide. To do all this properly and skillfully takes some dedication. Don't be discouraged if the kite seems to have a mind of its own. The best kite fighters took years of practice to master the skill.

Kite Fighting

There are two main techniques involved with successfully removing your opponent's kite from the sky. Both techniques involve maneuvering your kite such that the treated part of the line crosses your opponent's kite line. If your line is above the opponent's, a slow release will cause your line to saw across it. If yours is below, a tug on your line will do the trick. In each case, the Manjha's abrasive glass particles cut the opponent's line and you win the contest. Where possible (and safe to do so) the severed kite should be captured as a trophy.

Safety Considerations

Kite flying is a social pastime, so keep it fun. Unless you are engaged in actual kite fighting, stay clear of others and be aware of the damage that a kite can do to bystanders in a wind-powered dive to the ground. As added precaution, do not fly over or near electrical power lines, trees, buildings, radio-TV antennas, or any other high obstruction. Avoid flying near traffic, within 5 miles (8 km) of an airport, or over 400 ft (122 m) high. Never fly a kite with wire, wet twine, metallic string or cord containing conductive or metallic materials whatsoever. Do not try to recover a kite from electric power lines or other high or dangerous places. Never fly a kite in extremely high winds, in rain or thunderstorms. Finally, because the Manjha is abrasive by nature, the use of protective gloves to prevent string burns or cuts is recommended.

The kites are fashioned from non-conductive paper, string, adhesive and wood. The Manjha (thread) and Charka (spool) are not conductive.

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