

Up, Up and Away



Words Madhushala Senaratne Photographs Mahesh Prasantha

As we rounded the corner leading towards the house of the kite maker, we came across an open paddy field. My eyes darted over to the two young boys, battling with the wind to lift their kite up into the air. They failed a few times, yet, succeeded in the end, and as their kite flew up, up and away, I, along with them, craned my neck to map its route...

There is a distinct joy that flying a kite brings. Whether it is simply watching it drift freely in the air miles above you, running with it as it is gently raised over the ground or holding strongly enough to that string, you never seem too young or old to fly a kite.

Yet, ever tried making your own kite? Or, remember the times when you did make those shapes and designs and proudly watched them hover above you?

There was a tinge of excitement as we headed towards Ananda Ratnayake's home and watched him at work. He reminded us that making a kite is quite a simple activity, however, a little practice is always needed to hone your skills and create the perfect kite. There are a few tips to keep in mind, he says. The frame needs to be sturdy, yet flexible, and the spar and the spine need to be well-balanced. For measuring, a bamboo stick can be used.

The essentials are placed on the floor. Among them are a bundle of coconut eakle (thinly split bamboo sticks can also be used), some thread, a type of homemade paste using flour and water, a pair of scissors and tissue papers of different colours. Ananda explains that cotton twine or glue can be used instead of thread and homemade paste. Taking hold of the bundle of sticks and cutting off the edges, Ananda promptly begins working on a bird-shaped kite as he takes us step by step through the process of making it.

1.The spar: The support stick that is placed sideways across the spine of the frame, in this, two thin bamboo sticks are joined with thread or twine. The two

sides need to be of equal length, in order to maintain balance and this can be ensured by peeling off the skin of the stick, using a scissor, to the required level.

2.The spine: In making the spine of the frame, two longer sticks of bamboo are cut. Thread is rolled around them to connect the two sticks

3.The frame: The support sticks are placed horizontally across the spine and tied with a thread to make the frame.

4.To complete the frame, the ends of the sticks are connected with a piece of twine. The spar is kept slightly curved to obtain the desired shape.

The parallel sides need to be equal in length or distance, thus maintaining balance.

5.Cover: The cover is usually done with the use of tissue paper. Lay out the tissue paper and place the frame of the kite on top of it. Trace the outline, cutting-off excess paper while leaving ample room for the edges to be folded over the kite.

Once the outline is made, care- fully fold the edges over the strings of the frame and glue it to the inner side of the paper.

Turn over the frame and create your own design. Add a tail by attaching pieces of paper to the ends of the frame.

6.Ready to fly: With the frame and cover done, we are left only to add the bridle - the strings which are usually attached to the spine or the spars to help maintain control of the kite when in the air. The completed kite is now ready to be flown.

Why wait? Head out to an open area, free of trees and power lines. Be alert to any sudden changes in the wind and keep an eye on your kite, as you gently toss it into the air.