



SHOLA CRAFT

The endangered art form we must preserve

Within a few days, I will head out to search for “shola”. The shola plant thrives in areas with abundant water like marshes, ponds, and riverbanks. But if there are not enough wetlands, there won’t be any shola. I’ve seen many beels and canals disappear. Yet, in some parts, like Jashore and Faridpur, you may still find them. I fear that within five or six years, we won’t find enough shola plants to continue this craft.

— Gopendra Nath Chakraborty, shola artisan.

For over half a century, Gopendra Nath Chakraborty, a 75-year-old craftsperson, has been shaping the delicate beauty of shola. His hands, aged with the wisdom of years, have crafted thousands of pieces, each an example of his patience, skill, and love for an art that is slowly dying.

As Chakraborty searches for the plant that has shaped his livelihood, he knows that his craft is at risk, not because of his age, but because the very material he uses is becoming harder to find.

What is shola?

Soft and spongy, shola comes from the stem of the *Aeschynomene aspera* plant, often referred to as “Indian cork.” It thrives in waterlogged regions like Bangladesh, Assam and Odisha of India — particularly in marshes, riverbanks, and ponds.

When peeled and dried, the inner pith of the shola plant reveals a pristine white surface, perfect for crafting. Artisans shape this into everything from life-like flowers to intricate religious ornaments.

Shola crafts are an integral part of some of life’s biggest moments – whether it’s the headpieces worn during Hindu weddings or the ornaments that adorn the idols during Durga Puja. Yet, despite its beauty and significance, this age-old craft is slowly slipping away.

Legacy of the craft

Artisan Mintu Ray started his career in Old Dhaka and he shares how deeply personal this craft is to him.

“I lost my parents when I was very young, so unlike other artisans, I didn’t inherit the skills of shola craftsmanship.