

Design Resource

Rangoli

Floor Art

by

Madhuri Menon

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli>



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About

Introduction

Rangoli is a traditional decorative folk art of India. Rangoli, one of the most beautiful art forms of India, is comprised of two words, 'rang' meaning 'colour' and 'aavalli' meaning coloured creepers' or 'row of colours'. Rangoli is a Sanskrit word which means "a creative expression of art through the use of colour".



Women creating a colourful rangoli (Image source)

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Rangoli basically comprises of the art of making designs or patterns on the walls or the floor of the house, using finely ground white powder along with different colours. Apart from the visual and aesthetic appeal there is a religious significance too for this ancient Hindu floor art. It is a form of a Yantra that is meant to welcome positive energy into the house and also to welcome guests.



A typical rangoli in a courtyard of a home ([Image source](#))

Origin

There are a number of legends associated with the origin of the Rangoli art in India. The earliest mention in regard to this art form is found in Chitrakalpa, the earliest Indian treatise on painting. It is believed that the death of a high priest's son in a particular kingdom led to widespread despair. The people of that particular kingdom prayed to Lord Brahma, asking Him to bring the boy back to life. Moved by their prayers, Lord Brahma asked the king to paint a portrait of the boy on the floor. Thereafter, He breathed life into the portrait and the boy became alive again. This is the most widely believed story on how the first Rangoli got made.

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Another legend has it that one day, God, in one of His artistic spells, extracted juice from a mango from a mango tree to be used as paint. He then used it to paint the figure of a beautiful woman. It is said that the painting of the woman was so magnificent that it put the heavenly maidens to shame. Thereafter, Rangoli became a popular form of expression with women. Even Chola rulers have been known to make extensive use of Rangoli as floor paintings in their palaces.

It is also believed that since powder or sand is used for making Rangolis, (like the Hindu and the Buddhist mandalas) it creates a fragile art form that can be washed off easily and is a metaphor that gently reminds humanity of the impermanence of life and maya or the illusion that life is.

History

The Rangoli tradition dates back to the Indus Valley Civilisation. In Mahabharata, the gopis or milkmaids drew rangolis to forget the pain that they experienced when their beloved Krishna was away. At a much later date rangoli – drawing was listed as one of the 64 forms of art in Vatsyayana's Kamasutra. It is said that Gautam Buddha himself was an expert in this art.

Significance

In a typical traditional household, the lady of the house starts her daily household tasks by first cleaning the main entrance of the home and decorating it with rangolis and then the pooja room. Her regular routine begins after this ritual which infuses in her a good feeling as well as a sense of cleanliness in the household.

These decorative designs are made in the courtyards of homes during Hindu festivals, walls, pooja rooms or mandirs, entrance to rooms, main entrance or threshold of a home, places where food is served and are meant to make these places sacred for welcoming and pleasing the Gods.

The practice of decorating various parts of the home with these auspicious symbols reaches a high especially during major festivals like Diwali, Pongal or Sankranti, celebratory family events like a marriage, thread ceremony, or other religious events. The Rangolis portrayed at these times are much more elaborate than the regular ones and are created to appease the Gods and bring in good luck.

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A rangoli drawn at threshold of a home.

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Types of Rangolis

Rangoli, is present in different forms all over India; but is known by different names in different parts of the country. Rangoli art is known by the following names:

- Alpana (West Bengal)
- Aripa (Bihar)
- Aipan (Uttarakhand)
- Jhoti or Chita (Orissa)
- Kolam (Tamil Nadu)
- Muggu (Andhra Pradesh)
- Madana (Rajasthan)
- Rangoli (Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra)
- Chowkpurana (Uttar Pradesh)

In fact each state of India has its own style of rangoli. Design depictions also vary as they reflect traditions, folklore and practices that are unique to each area. Rangoli is traditionally created by women in almost all Hindu households. No formal training is really necessary for learning this art. This art is typically transferred from generation to generation and from friend to friend, thus keeping the tradition alive.

Over the years, tradition has made room for modern variations that have added some flair to this beautiful art. Rangoli thus is rooted in tradition and yet thrives in this present era in a modern form.

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Alpana



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Alpana



(Image source)

Alpana, is a form of Rangoli that is practiced in Bengal. It is a representation of the artistic sensibility of the people of that state of India. It is usually practiced by women and this art form represents an amalgamation of the past experiences as well as contemporary designs. The basic designs are more or less the same, only new forms and new colours are being experimented with along with a larger scale of design.

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The changing moods of the seasons are reflected very well in the Alpana designs.

Origin

The word 'Alpana' has two different versions. As per one version, it originated from a Sanskrit word 'Alimpana', meaning 'to plaster with' or 'to coat with'. The other version traces its roots to the word 'Alipana', meaning the art of making ails or embankments.

The art form of Alpana has been used since ages for religious and ceremonial purposes and is usually done on the floor. The Alpana patterns are a part of the sacred rituals and are made during the days when vratas (fasts) are kept by the Hindu women of Bengal during which the whole house and the floor are painted with Alpana art.

The circular Alpana is very important and is drawn as a holy pedestal while worshipping a deity, especially during Lakshmi Puja.



Lakshmi puja Alpana rangoli pattern (Image source)

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Alpana at a door step. (Image source)

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Alpana at a door step (Image source)

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Drawing of an Alpana pattern. (Image source)

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Some believe that the vratas with which Alpana is associated with can be traced to pre-Aryan times. The ascetics living in the country before the Aryans are said to have passed on this art form to the future generations. A detailed mention of Alpana paintings can be found in the later works like Kajalrekha. Alpana, is also believed to have been used by the agricultural communities of the region of Bengal for driving out evil spirits.

Making of Alpana

Alpana designs use rice-powder, diluted rice paste, powdered colours (produced from dried leaves), charcoal, burnt earth, etc. Materials like coloured chalk, vermilion, flower petals, grains, etc, are also used to decorate these designs. The motifs usually comprise of sun, ladder, goddess Lakshmi, owl, fish, betel, rice stem, lotus, plough, sindur box, etc. Presently, the influence of Santiniketan style of art can also be seen in the Alpana patterns.

This rangoli is made with the help of a small piece of cloth that is soaked in a paste of powdered rice and water.

These designs are passed on from one generation to the other even to this day.

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Aripan

Aripan is a variation of Rangoli, practiced in Bihar. The Aripan floor painting is derived from the Sanskrit word Alepan (meaning - to smear). It refers to smearing the ground with cow dung and clay for the purpose of purification.



Aripan made for a pooja (Image source)

Initially, Aripan designs were made as an offering to appease the Gods to make the cultivable land fertile and fruitful. However, in the present day it has become a part of the numerous day to day ceremonies and rituals. Aripan is drawn, both for adornment and purification.

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Origin of Aripa:

Aripa is a type of Mithila art that originated in the Mithila region of Bihar, particularly in the village of Madhubani. The origin of the art is shrouded in mystery. It is generally believed that it was created during the epic period when King Janak of Mithila ordered the marriage hall to be decorated for his daughter Sita's marriage to Lord Rama. Some vivid descriptions of these wall and floor paintings are present in Tulsidas's Ramcharitamanas.

Mithila art is also known as Madhubani art. Originally this art was created only on freshly plastered mud walls and floors of huts. But now they are done on cloth, hand-made paper and canvas too.

While creating the Aripa, brushes are not used but, nimble fingers are used to make these delicate designs.



A traditional Aripa

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Creating an Aripan:

To create an Aripan a paste of powdered rice and water, known as “pithar” is prepared. The women dip two fingers into the pithar, and by graceful and deft movements produce beautiful, geometrical patterns on the mud floor of their homes and courtyards. These patterns also include different design elements integrated into them.

This art is a thanksgiving to the mother goddess Earth. In order to adorn the creations more, the women also smear red powder at certain places; this enhances the created Aripan.

Along with the pithar locally available raw materials are used specially for generating colours.

Vermillion and local red clay for red; turmeric and flower petals for yellow; leaves for green; soot for black and crushed berries for blue, are used to adorn the Aripans.



Aripan being created with pithar (Image source)

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Aripans usually comprise of line drawings, illustrated on the floor of the house. Aripan patterns are a part of each and every auspicious ceremony in Bihar, be it a puja, a vrata (fast) or a samskara (mundan-tonsuring ceremony, vivah-marriage, yajnopavita-thread ceremony, etc).

On the eve of a ceremony, the courtyard is decorated with the Aripan designs at the front entrance or threshold to the home, and a number of other places inside the home. Any ceremony or ritual is considered incomplete without this traditional art form adorning the ground.

Both old and young women practise this particular art form.

Types of Aripans:

There are many kinds of Aripan, which are drawn for various occasions.

One kind of Aripan is drawn on the auspicious occasion of Tusari Pooja which occurs between between Makar Sankranti and Falgun Sankranti, by young, unmarried Maithili girls get good husbands. In this Aripan are drawn a temple, the moon, sun, and navagrah (nine planets).

Sanjha Aripan, is depicted in honor of Sandhya Devi (goddess of the evening) .

Sasthi-pooja-Aripan is painted when young girls attain puberty.

The Gatra-Sankrant Aripan is the symbol of birth and death, whereas the Kojagara Aripan is drawn on the leaf of Makhan on the full moon-day of Aswin (September).

Diwali Aripan, which is known in the Mithila region as Sukha-ratri Aripan, is depicted to welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. And Swastik Aripan is drawn for blessing the younger generation.



Lotus Aripan (Image source)

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Designs Used in Aripa:

The designs or the motifs used in Aripa fall into the following five categories:

- Images of human beings, birds and animals.
- Images of flower (lotus), leaves, trees and fruits.
- Tantrik symbols, like yantras, bindu (dots), etc.
- Forms of Gods and Goddesses.
- Forms of objects like lamp, swastika, mountain, rivers, etc.



Lotus Aripa (Image source)

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Aipan

Aipan is one of the traditional forms of Rangoli of Kumaon, and is practiced in the state of Uttarakhand. It is a decorative art form used extensively to decorate floors and walls at the places of worship and entrances of homes.

This art is associated with a great degree of social, cultural as well as religious significance. Also the art of Aipan is passed on from generation to generation, by passing on the patterns to the daughters and daughters-in-law in the family.

Some Aipans are drawn mainly before the performance of rituals while others are for appeasing a particular God or Goddess and a few are drawn purely for aesthetic purposes. Aipan designs are mainly drawn at places of worship, main entrance to a home and the front courtyard of a home. Some of the patterns are significant from a religious point of view and are made especially at the time of ceremonies like marriages, thread ceremony, naming ceremony, etc.

Aipan patterns and motifs are typical to the region of Kumaon. For the Kumaonis, each deity in the Hindu pantheon has a special symbol and every occasion demands an Aipan of a different kind. Every Aipan design has a particular meaning attached to it.



A traditional Aipan being drawn (Image source)

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Aipan, drawn in the puja room of a home. (Image source)

Types of Aipan :

Some of the most popular Aipan designs are briefly explained below:

(All the images presented in this topic where not credited have been sourced from the website www.uttaranchal.org.uk.)

1. Traditional Aipan: Constituents of traditional Aipan designs are, geometrical designs, flowers and imprints drawn linearly, purely for ornamental purposes. These are depicted below:

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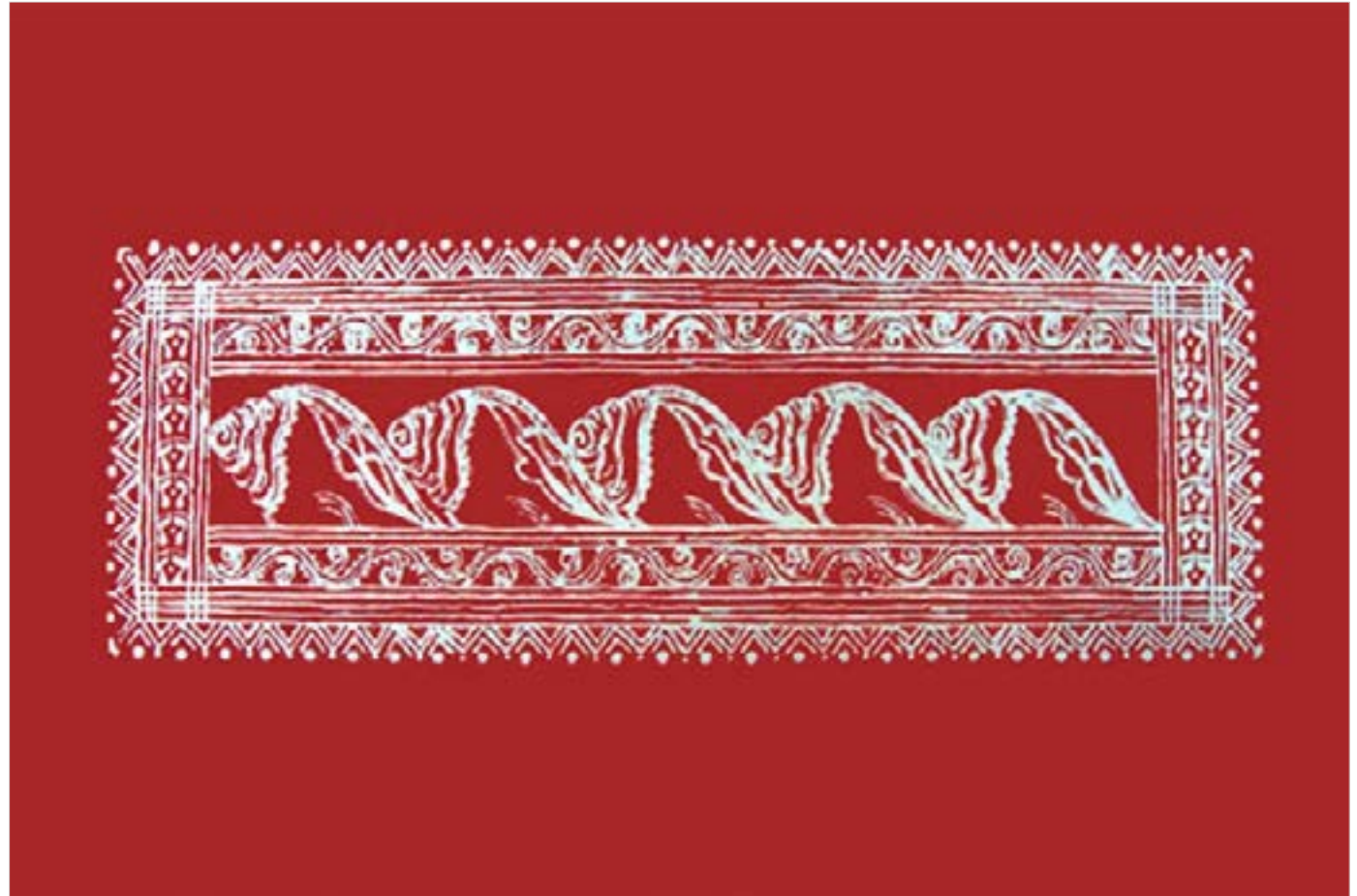
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(Image source)

2. Vasudhara: Vasudhara is made around the Pooja Vedika (pooja altar), places of worship, steps leading to the entrance door of a home, and around the Tulsi plant like a decorative border. The place, that is to be decorated, is painted with Geru (a red coloured soil is made to a paste with water and applied with nimble hands) and then, vertical lines, are made in odd numbers like 5, 7, 9 or 11, with the help of Bishwar. (Soaked rice when ground gives a white powder called Bishwar.) Without drawing the Vasudhara, the Aipan is considered incomplete. This are depicted below.



(Image source)

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3. Swastik: The Swastik symbol has a great significance in Aipan.

It is drawn in some form or other during most of the religious rituals. The Swastik in the Hindu mythology represents all Gods and Goddesses, known or unknown. If one does not have the knowledge of the occasion specific Aipan, a Swastik is the religiously accepted substitute.

Swastik represents creation and progress. The four arms of a Swastik inspire one to move forward. Thus the Swastik is the symbol that encourages people to search and march towards success and is thus drawn daily.

The four arms originating from the central rectangle represent different religions. The central rectangle contains the 'Omkar'. The lines which form the four arms are surrounded by dots, which too have a special significance.

Any Aipan without dots are considered incomplete and inauspicious. During drawing the Aipan, one has to take care that the group or block of lines drawn should end with the dots.

Aipan without dots are drawn only on the 12th day of a person's death (known as Peepal Pani or Shanti Path). Then these Aipan without dots are removed and fresh Aipan with dots are drawn showing end of the mourning period. This are depicted below.



(Image source)

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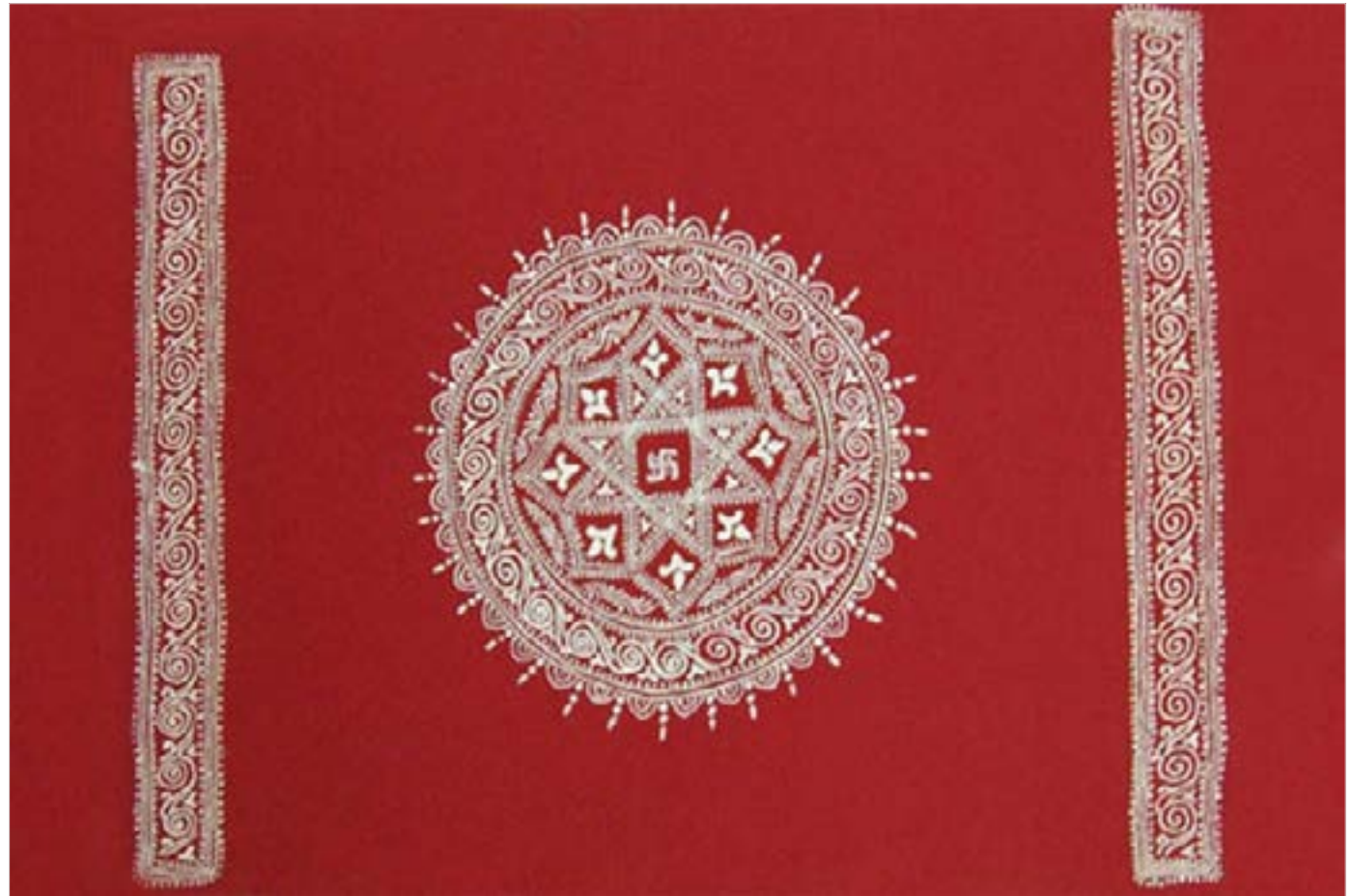
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Source:

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4. Astadal Kamal: Astadal Kamal is the Aipan that is drawn at the place of a Havan (sacred fire). Its design includes an octagonal figure with lotus petals, and a Swastika in the middle. This is depicted below.



(Image source)

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/aipan>

5. Lakshmi Padchinha: Lakshmi Padchinha, comprises of the footprints of Goddess Lakshmi, and is drawn on the occasion of Diwali, right from main entrance of a home to the place of worship or the puja room. This are depicted below.



(Image source)

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/aipan>

6. Lakshmi Peeth: Lakshmi Peeth too is drawn on the occasion of Diwali in the puja room. This are depicted below.



(Image source)

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<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/aipan>

7. Dhuliarghya Var Chauka: Dhuliarghya Var Chauka is drawn on the occasion of marriage. In earlier days the bridegroom's entourage usually walked to the bride's home and everyone had dusty feet by the time they arrived. As the groom represented "Narayan" or God himself, he was greeted with devotion and his dust covered feet were washed before the welcoming puja was performed. He was made to stand on a chauka or a small stool on which was painted a tree like figure, which is a special form of Aipan for this occasion. The top resembles Shiva's Trishul or the trident. The base represents Bramha the creator and in the mid region represents Vishnu, the creator. On either side of this tree, are present two parrots and a Swastik in the centre. All these symbols indicate good luck for the wedding that came after this ceremony. This are depicted below.



(Image source)

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Source:

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8. Acharya Chauka: Acharya Chauka is also an Aipan made for the occasion of a marriage ceremony, especially for the kulaguru or the priest to stand on it while performing the marriage rituals from bridegroom's side, at the time of dhuliarghya. This indicated a special prominence given to the priest. This chauka has a Swastik made on it that is red in colour. Other auspicious symbols such as the lotus, a bell, a conch shell, or 2 parrots are painted around the Swastik.

9. Janeo: Janeo Aipan is drawn on the occasion of 'Janeo' or the thread ceremony, of a boy. The pattern has 15 dots in the centre. Seven stars within a hexagon the six sided geometric figure, forms the main symbol of this occasion specific Aipan. The seven stars represent the Sapt Rishis. Around this floral designs with dots are drawn. This are depicted below.



(Image source)

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Source:

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10. Bhadra: The Bhadra form of Aipan is drawn in the puja room and also at the time of a yajna. The bhadra with 12 dots is known as bindu bhadra. The number of dots can vary and with it, the patterns too differ, like 19 bindu bhadra, 24 bindu bhadra and 36 bindu bhadra etc. This are depicted below.



(Image source)

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/aipan>

11. Jyuti: For the trouble free execution of any task or ceremony that one undertakes, sixteen mother goddesses are worshiped after worshipping Lord Ganesha. These are known as 'matrika' or 'Jeev Matrika' or 'Jyuti' in kumaoni. This are depicted below.



(Image source)

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12. Namkarna Chauki: Namkarna Chauki is the naming ceremony of a newborn, held on the eleventh day of the birth. Namkarna Chauki Aipan is drawn in the courtyard, where the surya darshan (a baby's first exposure to the sun) is performed. Sometimes this is also known as Surya Darshan Chauki. This is depicted below.



(Image source)

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13. Aipan at the main entrance: The Aipan drawn at the main entrance of a home is usually very beautiful. At times, the Vasudhara may also be combined with this design to give it a more elegant look. This are depicted below.



(Image source)

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14. Lakshmi Yantra: In the hills of Kumaon as in other parts of India, the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, is worshipped during the festival of Diwali. Before the idol of Goddess Lakshmi is placed on the spot where the Puja is to take place, the Lakshmi Yantra is drawn on the floor with ochre colour (Geru) and rice paste (Biswar). This represents a seat for the goddess. The center point of this Yantra is marked by a dot or a flower, which symbolizes the Universe. It is enclosed by two triangles, which form a star with six points. The upper triangle represents Shiva and the lower one, Shakti. The triangle is surrounded by six or eight lotuses. The outer circle can contain sixteen lotuses. The lotuses represent the moon, stars, the home and wealth. There are usually other circular designs around the central design. The circles are surrounded by lines on the four sides signifying doors known as “Bhupur”. They symbolize the Earth. The entire Aipan is adorned at various points with Lakshmi’s footprints.

Below the Yantra are depicted two puja “asanas” or seats for the couple who perform the Laxmi puja. Alternatively, these seats could be meant for the head of the household and the priest who conducts the ceremony. In most Kumaoni households instead of a clay or metal statue of Lakshmi, sugarcane is cut and placed crosswise. Traditional attire like a lehenga (long skirt) and Odhni (stole/shawl) adorn the sugarcane to make it represent the feminine form.

15. Bhuiyan: This is drawn on outer side of a ‘soop’ or a bamboo winnow. This is generally a sketch of a bad, or a very ugly looking demon. On the inner side of the ‘soop’ sketches of Lakshmi-Narayan are drawn.

Bhuiyan refers to the negative and harmful powers or a bad omen. On a particular day, this ‘soop’ is beaten with a sugarcane stick in every room and corner of the home. This ritual is performed to oust and chase away any bad omens or negative powers that might have collected in the home and to welcome Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi, the God and Goddess of happiness and prosperity into the home. This are depicted below.



An ugly demon on the backside of a ‘soop’ (Image source)

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Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi drawn on the inner side of the 'soop'. (Image source)

Modern day usage:

Though Aipan is a traditional decorative art form used extensively to decorate floors and walls at the places of worship and entrances of home they are temporarily used in souvenirs, coasters, vases, greeting cards, jewellery boxes, key rings, bookmarks, and wall tiles and as decoration on terracotta products. These attractive patterns and motifs are also found in textile products like shawls, tablecloths and bed sheets.

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Jhoti or Chita

Jhoti or Chita is the traditional Oriya art on the floor and walls, very popular in the rural areas. Jhoti is quite different from rangoli. While rangolis are made using coloured powders, jhoti involves line art using the traditional white coloured, semi liquid paste of rice or pithau. The fingers are used as brushes in this art form.

Intricate and beautiful floral designs, the lotus, elephants, symbols used in patta chitra find place in this form of free hand drawing. Small footmarks of goddess Lakshmi are a must in any jhoti.

Significance:

The jhoti or chita are drawn not merely with the intention of decorating the house, but also to establish a relationship between the mystical and the material, thus are highly symbolic and meaningful. Throughout the year, the village women perform several rituals for the fulfilment of their desires. For each occasion a specific motif is drawn on the floor or on the wall. For instance, during Lakshmi puja a stack of paddy or rice sheaves is drawn on the walls structured like a pyramid. During Durga Puja, white dots superimposed with red are painted on the walls. This combination of red and white signifies the worship of Shiva and Shakti.

Homes in Orissa have become canvasses for creating these traditional jhotis which involve intricate line art. Despite urbanisation this agrarian tradition continues among the families of Orissa. Jhoti is considered as a means to attract goddess Lakshmi, hence prosperity into homes.



A jhoti being drawn outside a home (Image source)

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Occasions:

Women all over India decorate their homes with traditional patterns during festive occasions. The floors, courtyards, the inner and/or outer walls of the home, entrance to the home, are the areas that lend themselves to these elaborate decorations. These folk decorations broadly known as rangolis are believed to bring glory to the festivals, and are indicative of prosperity and happiness. Usually these art forms are practiced by rural women, though a few urban women do the same to maintain the religious and ritual heritage associated with it.

Jhoti, the rangoli of Orissa too is practised with the same sentiments. Jhotis are drawn on special occasions and are a must at festivals like, Basanti, Manabashaa Gurubaara, Kaartika, Dola, Jhulana, DhanaLakshmi puja, Gaja Lakshmi puja, etc. The festivals turn into occasions of great merriment when they include these decorations along with the preparation of traditional cuisines for the people of Orissa.

The Hindu month of Margashira (November –December) is considered very auspicious when Goddess Lakshmi is invoked in every house on Thursdays. This is an important festival as it is the harvest season when the grain is thrashed and stored. The harvest of the kharif season is worshipped as goddess Lakshmi on these Thursdays. This is a traditional festival followed by the married women in every household. During this auspicious month, the women folk decorate their houses, entrances, with aesthetically designed motifs using the ground semi liquid rice paste or pithau. The white jhoti or chita is created on a smearing of red earth. The decorations are done on Wednesdays and the Lakshmi puja is performed on Thursdays.

This is also the time when women vie each other in exhibiting their artistic skills in creating wonderful, symmetrical designs of lotus flowers, conch shell, the 'kumbh', peacocks, elephant, fish, and other floral and geometrical designs. The feet of Lakshmi entering their house and other large circular designs etched on the floor are a must and are a feast for the eyes.

Story:

There is a famous story about Goddess Lakshmi, which is sung in a prayerful manner by the women while performing the Lakshmi puja in the month of Marghashira. The story is all about how Goddess Lakshmi got impressed by the cleanliness, sense of devotion of a sweeper woman and blessed her with abundant wealth.

Manabasa Gurubar

In Orissa, it is believed that Goddess Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity, visits homes in the month of Margashira. Hence the Manabasa Gurubar- a festival where Goddess Lakshmi is worshipped on every Thursday is celebrated in this month. Like most bratas, this particular Lakshmi brata, called Manabasa Gurubara brata, with which Lakshmi Purana is associated, is woman-centric.

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Legend

The Legend of Manabasa Gurubar is based on the ancient scripture “Lakshmi Puran”. The untouchables were not allowed to pray, worship and perform rituals to the gods and goddesses in the ancient ages. It was in this era that Sriya, a woman from the lower caste dares to pray and worship Goddess Lakshmi. Eventually she wins over the goddess of wealth and gains her support. Though Goddess Lakshmi ends discrimination amongst people on earth based on their caste and encourages the untouchables to conduct rituals and worship to gods/ goddesses she is forced to move away from her home and her consort Lord Jagannath, by his brother Lord Balabhadra. As Goddess Lakshmi moves out of Lord Jagannath’s home, both Lord Jagannath and Lord Balabhadra undergo immense suffering including starvation without water and food. The curse of Goddess Lakshmi had a severe impact on both the brothers for 12 years and they had a tough time. This is when they realised the importance of Goddess Lakshmi and were keen to bring her back to their home. Goddess Lakshmi agreed to return to Lord Jagannath’s house on one condition, that there no longer will be any caste based discrimination on earth. It is only in the end through the divine sage, Narad Muni it is revealed that Lord Jagannath to end discrimination based on caste from this earth, set up these series of events which highlighted the social message, along with the strength of true spirituality.

This story gives message to the society that women should be respected, given proper attention and care. A house becomes home only due to a woman. This is the reason why women are considered as the Lakshmi of a home. When a woman is disrespected all the glory and happiness vanishes from the house. It reflected the reforms and progressive stance of Gods from the ancient times.

The other message is of social equality, that everyone has the right to become wealthy and gain fortunes by their hard work and diligence and that social structure based on caste and discrimination of people is an unfortunate manmade procedure. This unique story highlights the fact that in the eyes of the creator, everyone is equal.

The story not only draws ones attention towards discrimination but also gives a message of Women Empowerment.

Rituals

According to Oriya scripture, Goddess Lakshmi is worshipped on every Thursday during the Oriya month of Margasira. During this period the houses are kept neat and clean by the Oriya women. Special pujas are offered to Goddess Lakshmi, with utmost devotion. The women wake up very early in the morning on Wednesday and clean the homes, doorsteps as well as the entrance and decorate them with Jhoti or Chita to welcome the Goddess Lakshmi. It is believed that Goddess Lakshmi never visits a house if it is untidy and dirty.

The decoration also includes placing the measuring equipment - a jar made of bamboo/ cane used in the earlier days for measuring paddy (known as Mana) in the centre of the large circular jhoti that is madenear the puja altar. It is filled up to the brink with newly harvested paddy. This mana is a symbolic representation of the bountiful and generous Goddess Lakshmi. It is believed that Goddess Lakshmi visits every house during this period.

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This puja is performed on all the 4/5 Thursdays of that month. The celebrations conclude with the preparation of the tasty Oriya cuisine like Manda Pitha, Khiri, Kakara, Chitau, etc., that are prepared and distributed to neighbours. On this day all Oriya women read or sing the Lakhmi Purana with utmost devotion. This marks the end of this auspicious occasion.

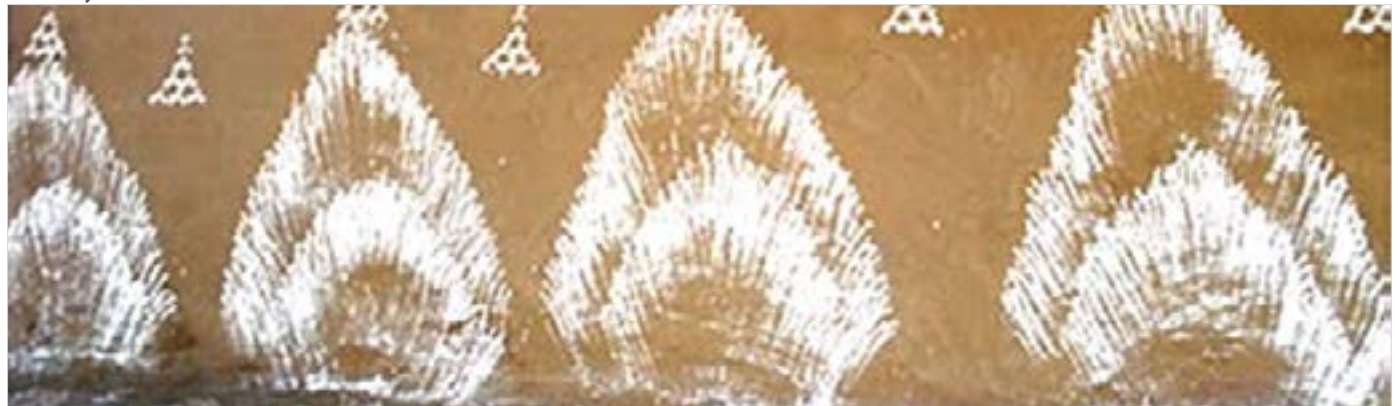
Lakshmi Purana has two parts; the first part is the poor, low-caste woman Shriya's story and the second, goddess Lakshmi's and her consort Jagannath's. The first part contains an ethical code, and the second, a corrective to it. Lakshmi Purana is a narrative based on a domestic conflict and the housewife is the heroine here. She is shown to be central to the family; she can break her family or bring it happiness and prosperity. There are do's and don'ts mentioned in this purana which relate to what would please goddess Lakshmi, but most of these are statements about living in accordance with dharma.

Creation:

It is a common practice for the rural women in Orissa to draw several figures and flower patterns on the mud walls of their thatched homes. They are very beautiful to look at. An earthy red colour called "dhau" is smeared on the walls and then the jhotis are created which provide a wonderful contrast. "Dhau" is also used by few people while drawing Jhotis on the floor as the background colour.

To draw a jhoti or chita, the fingers are dipped into the semi liquid rice paste and made to trace out intricate patterns on the floor or walls. Sometimes a kind of brush is prepared from a twig with a small piece of cloth attached at one end. This is dipped into the white, semi liquid rice paste to draw patterns on the wall. At times, the paste is sprinkled on the walls with delicate swirls of the wrist and a pattern resembling bunches of paddy emerges on the wall. An example of this is shown below.

A wall jhoti or chita



(Image source)

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Source:

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A jhoti created on the outer wall of a hut. It has a number of Dhana shishaas (the heaps of paddy after it is winnowed) in a triangular form. The Dhana shishaas are drawn by sprinkling the semi liquid rice paste through finger nails by gently swirling the wrist to create long lines and the dots at the top are made using fingertips.



(Image source)

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A wall jhoti or chita drawn around a door having two peacocks as strong design elements.



(Image source)

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The wall jhoti or chita shown below is based on the concept of four adornments of Lord Vishnu or Lord Jagannath namely Sankha (the conch shell), Chakra (the wheel), Gadaa (the mace) and Padma (the lotus) and also there is the symbol of prosperity (Dhaana Shisaa) depicting the presence of Goddess Lakshmi on both the sides of the conch.



(Image source)

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The wall jhoti or chita shown below has a triangular element that is created by dots that are created using the finger tips. Also there are two Dhaana Shisaas created on either side of the central element, which indicate prosperity.



(Image source)

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A wall jhoti seen below has two elephants along with the other design elements.



(Image source)

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Laxmi Paada Chita: The jhoti shown below is called Lakshmipaada Chita or the “feet of Lakshmi” as tiny representations of the feet of goddess Lakshmi are drawn inside the body of the Jhoti.



(Image source)

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Pidhaa marei: Pidhaa means a small piece of wood that is used for the purpose of sitting. Mahalaxmi would be seated on a Pidhaa which would be again decorated with Jhoti, muruja and flowers.

In the Jhoti shown below there is a decorated pidhaa marei on which Goddess Mahalakshmi is seated. Flowers, sheaves of paddy and lighted lamps are offered to the goddess during the puja.



(Image source)

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Design Resource

Rangoli

Floor Art

by

Madhuri Menon

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/jhoti-or-chita>

Swapna Padma Chita- This type of jhoti or chita is circular and very large as well as elaborate in design. It requires a lot of concentration and time to execute it.



(Image source)

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The jhotis may also be drawn on grain bins, on “manna”- measuring equipment made out of bamboo/cane used in the kitchens, at or around the “dhana kotti”-storage area for the grains, on small pavilions for household deities, on the threshold of homes and on earthen pots used during marriage and on other auspicious occasions. Once these jhotis are created one walks around them and does not walk over them as they are offerings to the goddess Lakshmi. Also after the completion of the festival or the special occasion, these are not swept away with a broom, but are wiped clean with a wet cloth.

Muruja: Along with jhotis another format of rangoli known as “Muruja” is also used in Orissa. Muruja is generally used during rituals in the forms of ‘Mandalas’. In the holy month of ‘Kartik’ (November) women observe penance and draw Muruja designs near the ‘tulsi’ plant. Drawing of the muruja designs needs a lot of skill and practice.

Muruja or rangoli is drawn on the floor with powders of different hues, with the help of fingers .Rice powder or fine sand is used in these creations. The powder is held between the tips of the thumb and the forefinger, and allowed to fall delicately through them to form lines and patterns. Colourful powders are obtained from natural sources. White powder is obtained from the grinding of stones, green powder is obtained from dry leaves, black from burnt coconut shells, yellow from the petals of marigold flowers or turmeric, and red from red clay or bricks.

Some women make the muruja with just flowers.

The art of creating Jhotis is passed on down the generations, with the older generations being more proficient at making them as they were practised more regularly by them. The modern day sees a diminishing knowledge and practise of this art form.

Ms. Manisha Ray from Orissa, is a talented artist who believes in the art of Jhoti , Chita and creates them during the Lakshmi puja days and special occasions at her home with ardent devotion. She has been observing her grandmother, her mother, and her two older sisters create these jhotis all her life and has been inspired by them to learn and practise this floor art. She has participated in a number of rangoli competitions and won several prizes for her excellent jhoti renderings.

A few such jhotis created by her at her home are presented below. The precision and the accuracy in terms of proportion and the rendition of minute details can be seen in her jhoti presentations.

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Documentation of a jhoti's creation:

In a documentation exercise at IDC, IIT Bombay, Ms. Manisha Ray created a large circular jhoti that is specifically drawn during the Lakshmi puja days. At the centre of this jhoti is the "Lakshmi pada" which represents goddess Lakshmi entering a home and being revered. This can be drawn in the verandah, the courtyard, or at the puja place of a home. The symbol of the lotus is frequently used in this jhoti to associate it with the goddess of prosperity who is usually adorned by them and is also seated in one. No colour other than the white of the semi liquid rice paste is used here as this is a sacred jhoti. It can be made on a plain surface or on a surface over which the red coloured earth or dhau is smeared.

Depending on the size, intricacy of the jhoti and skill of the creator, the creation of these jhotis can take an hour or several hours. Manisha first created a rough outline of the jhoti using white chalk and then used the semi liquid rice paste deftly with her fingers to create this beautiful jhoti or chita.

The following images show the various steps that led to the creation of one such jhoti by Ms. Manisha Ray, at IDC to demonstrate the beauty of this floor art.



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A video documentation of the creation of this jhoti by Ms. Manisha Ray is presented below, which captures the creative process more deeply.



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Modern day presentations:

Though they once adorned houses or the tulasi choura (holy tulsi/basil plant) on a daily basis, the adornment by jhoti and chita, also known as rangoli, are today seen only during festive occasions.

In this modern day these are practiced more by rural women on a regular basis compared to a few urban women, who do so on festivals or during rangoli competitions. Also in urban areas, geometric patterns on wooden grids are being used to draw jhotis and the rice paste has been replaced by white chalk powder.

In order to preserve and promote this folk art, cultural organisations like the Orissa state chapter of Sanskar Bharati, a prominent cultural body of the nation frequently conducts rangoli festivals in Bhubaneswar, the Orissa state capital. In one such festival, there were workshops and discussions on the various trends and traditions of rangoli across the country. The experts demonstrated the salient features of rangoli as being practised in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Chhatisgarh, Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Orissa. The discussions revealed how rangoli is not merely a folk art but that it carries a cultural legacy that is deeply woven around the life and times of the people.

Women from different states of India create rangolis, jhotis to promote the Indian culture and tradition.



(Image source)

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Sometimes a particular street is decorated end to end by the workshop participants with a wide variety of rangoli designs that enlighten and delight the passersby about this art.

The objective of such festivals is to make the masses aware of India's ancient art tradition of rangoli that is being marginalised with the onslaught of the so-called modernism. Such events remind us of the fact that our art traditions are deep rooted in our culture.

The Bhubaneswar Development Authority too, has participated in one such encouraging exercise. They painted the associated walls of roads in Bhubaneswar with the traditional wall Jhotis or Chitas, as a result of which the looks of Bhubaneswar are enriched. In Cuttack too, a bank and another marine company have taken similar steps to paint the walls of a ring road, which has brought glory to the Cuttack city. Since the jhotis are usually created to welcome the goddess of prosperity - Lakshmi, it seems as if Bhubaneswar and Cuttack too have a similar agenda.

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Source:

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Muggu

Rangoli in Andhra Pradesh is called as Muggu.



A muggu being created at an entrance to a home (Image source)

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Source:

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Like in most parts of the country, every morning before sunrise, the women folk clean the entrance to a home and/or the courtyard with water, considered the universal purifier, and the muddy floor is swept well to prepare an even surface.

Cow dung is then mixed with water and this slurry is expertly sprayed on the requisite area and spread evenly with a broom. This is done on a regular basis in rural areas, and on festive occasions in certain urban areas, where there is availability of sufficient cow dung, and space to draw the muggu. This procedure is performed as it is believed that cow dung has antiseptic properties and hence provides a literal threshold of protection for a home. The muggu is then drawn on this prepared surface. The dark colour of the cow dung slurry also provides a good contrast for the white powder of the muggu.

Muggupindi is a mixture of calcium and /or chalk powder which is used for creating these exquisite and unique muggu patterns. It's a slightly heavy powder that falls thickly across the wet earth and stays in form while being used. As the index finger and thumb clasp a tiny bit of it and start dropping it from half an inch above the wet floor, the white powder falls gently leaving a white trail behind. There is a knack of letting this powder flow smooth and even, as one draws lines and curves of the muggu designs.

During festivals rice flour is used to create the muggu, instead of the muggupindi as it is considered as an offering to the ants, insects and sparrows that tend to feed on them.

One characteristic of muggu is that it is drawn by commoners. On festive occasions it is drawn in every home. No formal training is required to acquire this art. The art of muggu creation is typically transferred from generation to generation and from friend to friend.

Significance of muggu during festivals

Sankranti: Every month the Sun moves from one zodiac constellation to another and the day on which the Sun changes the constellation is called Sankranti. Makara Sankranti (usually falls on January 14), the Sun's movement into Capricorn (Makara) constellation is considered very important, and as it is the beginning of a six-month period of the auspicious time of Sun's northern course called Uttarayana Punya Kaalamu. Bhogi is the day preceding Sankranti and Kanumu is the day after Sankranti which are also celebrated on the same scale as Sankranti.

The one month preceding Makara Sankranti is known as Dhanurmasam. With the advent of the Telugu Dhanurmasam, the thresholds of every house in Andhra Pradesh - towns and villages are adorned with white and coloured geometrical patterns of muggu. During the entire Dhanurmasam girls decorate the mungili or vaakili (the entrance to the house) with huge muggulu (designs with sand of lime stone or rice flour, turmeric and kumkuma) with Gobbemmalu (globes made of cow dung and decorated with flowers, turmeric and kumkuma, and incense) in the center, and worship Gobbemma (Goddess) while singing and dancing around the muggu (design).

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Source:

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Muggu examples with colours and gobbemmalu:



(Image source)

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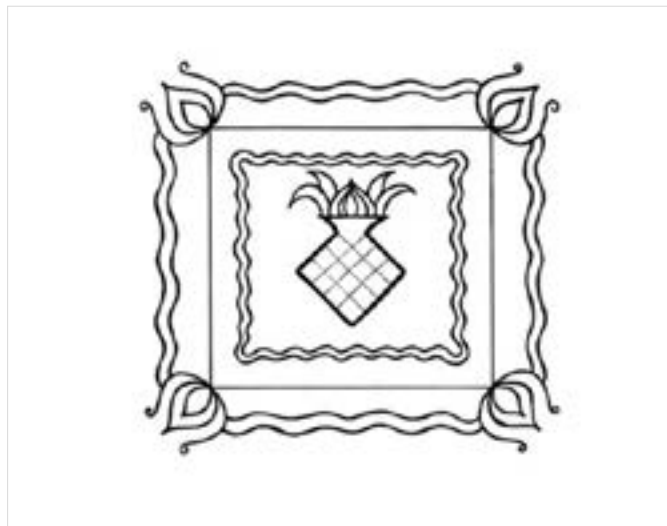
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The common belief is that this month is said to be devoted to spiritual thinking. Since cleanliness is considered next to godliness, it is believed that God enters only those households that are clean. It has therefore become a custom to clean the front yard of one's home and lay a decorative muggu as if inviting God to take the first step into the house and bless the dwelling and the dwellers.

During the harvest season of Sankranti, muggu is a whole month exercise for the women of the house as they put in the extra effort to draw different beautiful patterns in front of their homes, at sunrise. This month prescribes white rice flour to be used instead of the chalk powder for muggu. To this white flour is added a dash of colour in the form of red kumkum and yellow turmeric (pasupu). It is believed that the white colour denotes purity and peace; red represents devotion and love and yellow stands for prosperity.

Some of the popular designs drawn during Sankranti are the ratham muggulu. The designs are in the form of lines and take the shape of a chariot (ratham). In some homes the size of the ratham / chariot muggu occupies the entire front yard on the first and second Sankranti days (Bhogi and Sankranti).

The chariot represents the Sun God - giver of light and energy to the earth and its inhabitants. Also, this represents the journey of the sun is from south to north (the onset of Uttarayanam) according to our geography. Since the festival celebrates the harvesting, all the symbols and figures in the muggu indicate and represent the same like the sun, the crescent moon, the sugarcane branch, coiled serpent and a pot with mango leaves placed in a specific pattern at the mouth of the pot, called the kalasham (a symbol of wealth and health) around the four corners of chariot muggu.



Kalasham muggu

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Ratham muggu with the harvest symbols around it
(Image source)

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Sankranti muggu

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Sankranti muggu

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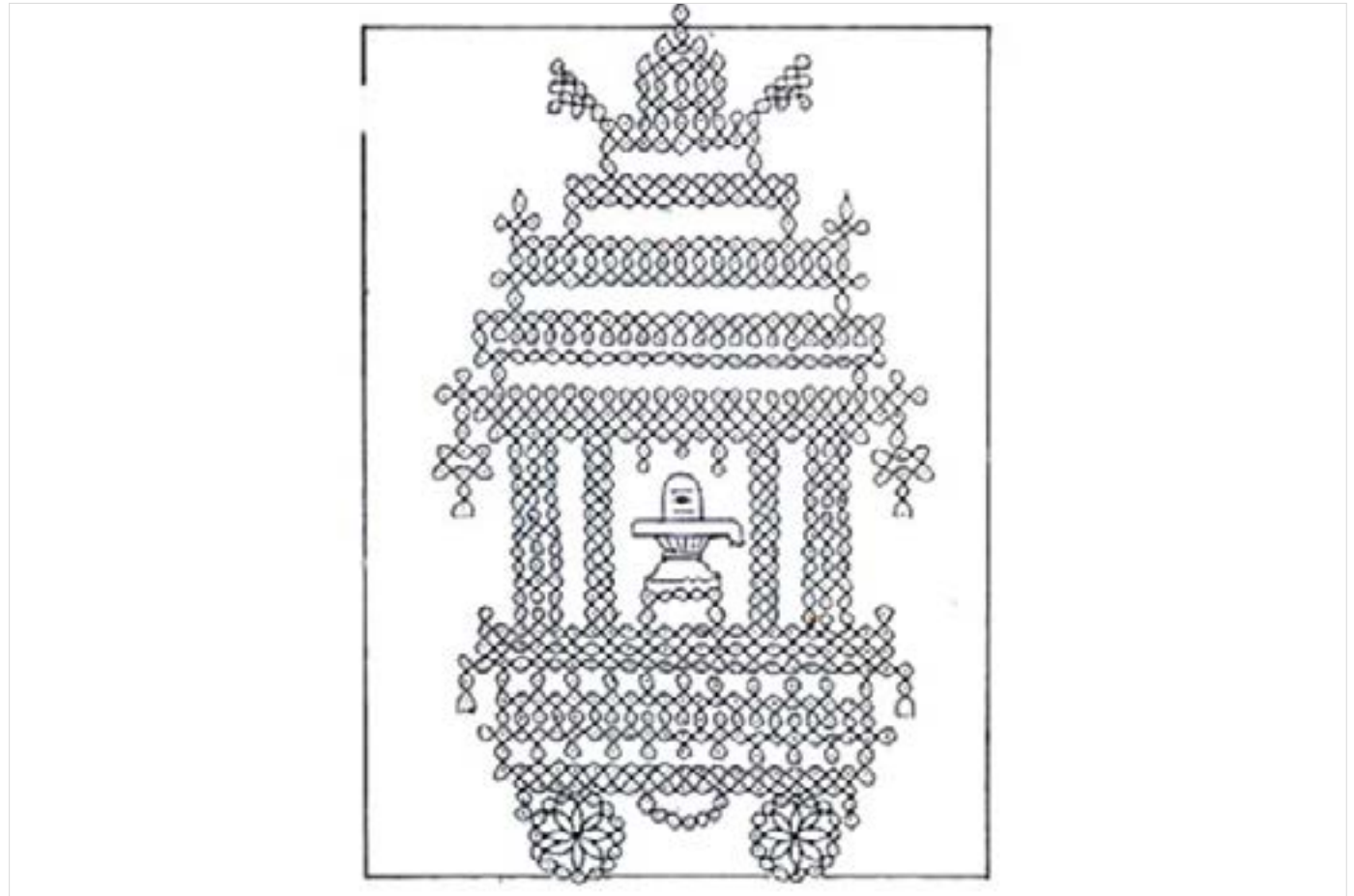
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Different representations of the chariot (ratham) muggu drawn during Sankranthi



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(Image source)

On important festival days such as Deepavali, Navaratri, Ganesh Puja, Varalakshmi Vratam day, or Ugadi, the muggu drawn has occasion specific designs and more effort is put in by the women of the house hold in creating them like in creating Sankranthi muggulu.

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Deepavali specific muggulu



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The patterns of muggu are very complicated and huge during festival months. The temples too are decorated with these patterns and are considered as painted prayers. The temples usually have complex patterns that cover thousands of square feet and several women together create these, thus bringing in the spirit of team work and speed.

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Examples of group muggu execution



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Types of Muggu

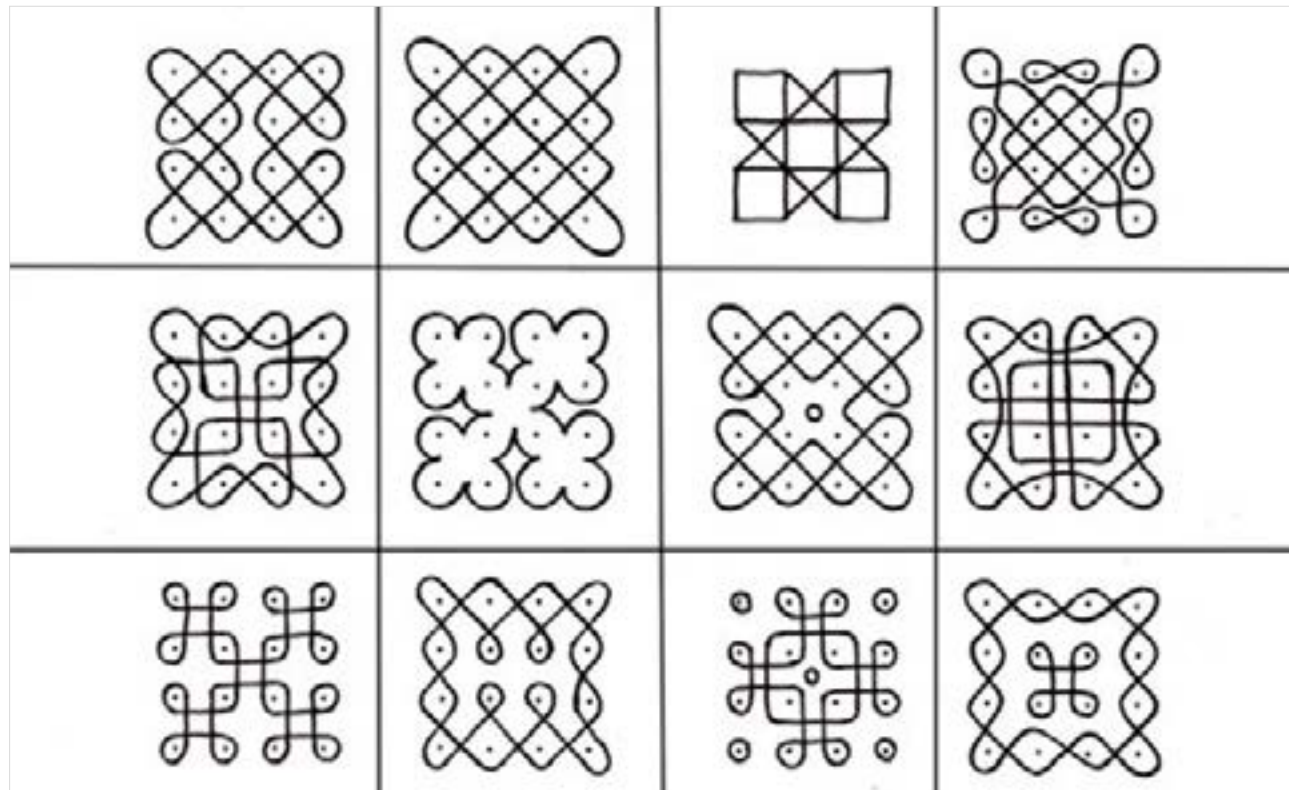
The muggu consists of geometrical patterns or dots, which are joined by lines or curves that have a mathematical calculation. By this one understands and infers that ancient Indian women had artistic traits combined with a sense of arithmetic, which they showed in the drawing patterns of the muggu.

Types of Muggu are:

1. Chukkala Muggulu (Dot Designs):

Dots are arranged in a specific sequence, in a matrix form equidistant from each other and these dots are joined either by lines or curves to create different muggu designs.

Some examples of the chukkala muggulu:



Some hand sketched examples of the chukkala muggus on paper.

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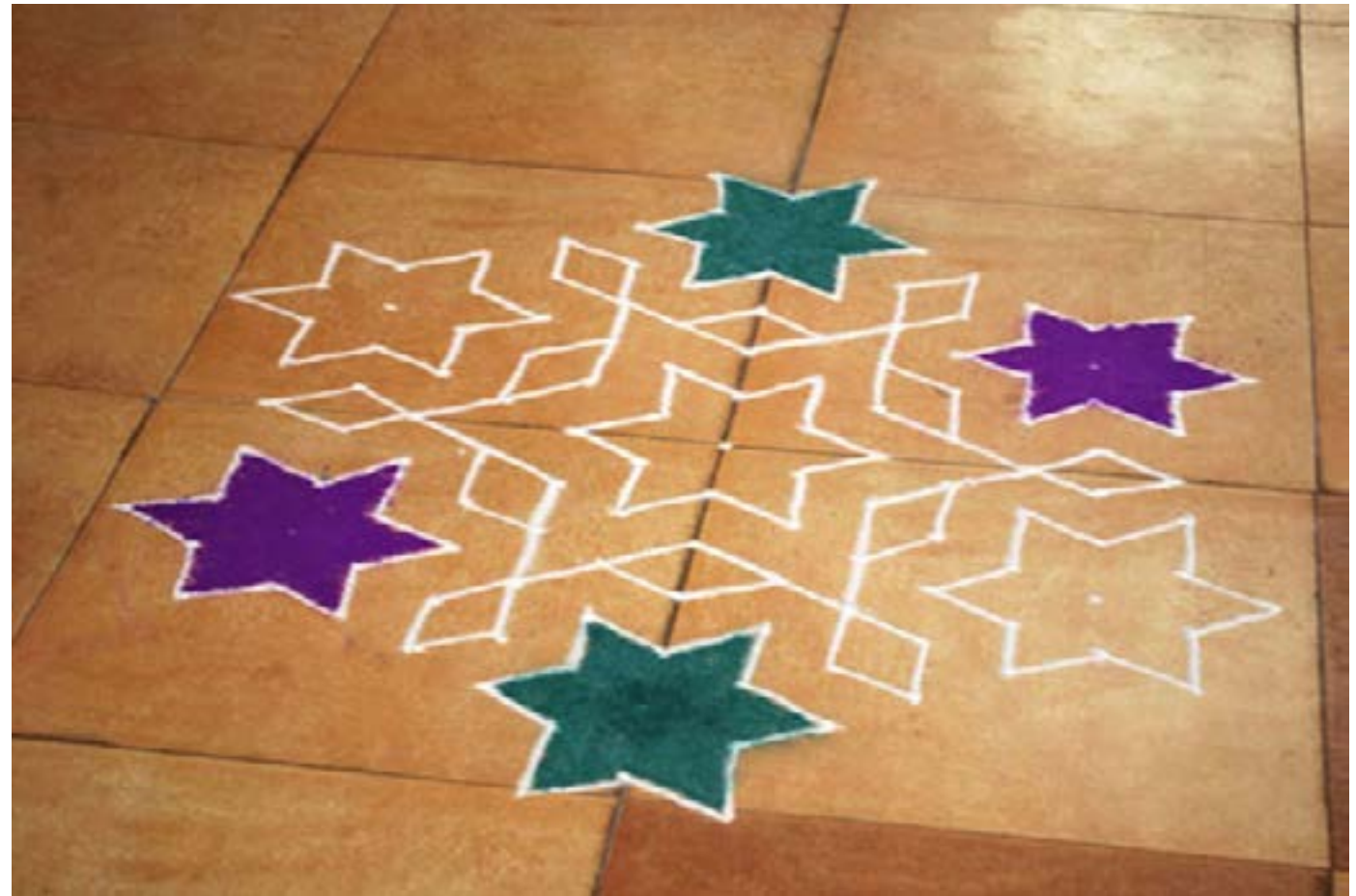
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Stars are created with white muggu powder in a matrix of dots, which are filled with coloured rangoli powder, later.

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The completed chukkala muggu.

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A chukkala muggu in plain white muggu pindi (white rangoli powder) created in the courtyard of a home.

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The following video shows the creation of one such chukkala muggu.



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Sometimes after the creation of the basic muggu in white muggu pindi (white rangoli powder), various coloured rangoli powders are used to fill in the pattern to create a decorative look for special occasions.



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The following video shows the creation of one such coloured chukkala muggu.



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2. Chukkalu leni Muggulu (Designs without dots):

These designs are made without dots. They are similar to free hand drawings of lines and curves, but use occasion specific elements to make different muggu patterns.

Some examples of chukkaluleni muggulu:



(Image source)

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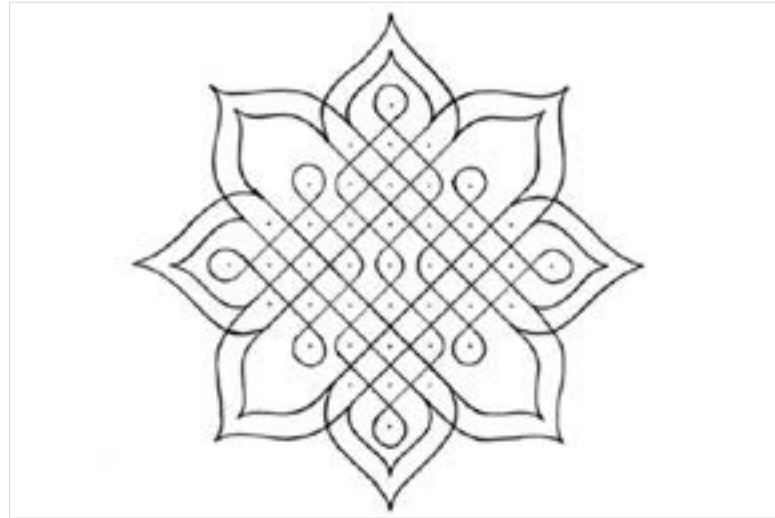
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3. Tippudu Muggulu (Curved Designs):

A basic matrix of dots, equidistant from each other is created first. Then twisted chains are created around the dots in an expert fashion to create exquisite, symmetrical muggu patterns.

Some examples of tippudu muggulu:



(Image source)

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Simple versions of any of the above types are created daily in households. A creative combination of all these types is used during festive occasions.

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Kolam

Kolam is the name given to the art of Rangoli in the southern parts of India, mainly in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The Hindus residing here use of this art form daily and on festive occasions. Kolam is regarded as a sort of painted prayer in South India. The design usually comprises of a symmetric line drawing, which comprises of curved loops, drawn around a crisscross pattern of dots.

A few Kolam examples are shown below.



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Everyday Kolam Ritual

In South India, making Kolam designs is an everyday ritual. Since the one drawn on the previous day gets walked on or rained out or blown away, new ones are made on a daily basis. The womenfolk of the household get up every morning before sunrise and clean the entrance to the home with water. Thereafter, the kolam is drawn on the damp surface, (where it adheres better) with the help of rice flour. Limestone powder and red brick powder (which gives a bright maroon colour- kaavi) are also used on special occasions. Though the design is usually drawn with the help of dry rice flour, diluted rice paste is also made use of, especially when one intends to keep the kolam for a longer duration. At times, paints and chinks are also used to enhance the kolam along with the usual ingredients. On special occasions, such as marriages, pujas, festivals, kolam patterns can stretch all the way from the courtyard of a home to the street.

It is believed that kolams drawn at the entrance of a home bestow prosperity and success to its residents. It is said that in a kolam design, the lines must be completed as unbroken lines prevent evil spirits from entering inside the design, and along with it, inside the home. The kolam, and the bright red border or 'kaavi' enclosing it are also believed to prevent evil and undesirable elements from entering the homes.

The early morning kolam ritual



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Kolams with 'kaavi'



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The kolam patterns are often passed on from generation to generation, like from a mother to her daughter. Kolam art of Tamil Nadu and Kerala are less ostentatious than other forms of Rangoli, but have a unique beauty of their own.

Women are so skilled that these patterns are drawn by bare fingers, deftly without making any mistakes and also in the right size and proportion as per the space available in front of a home or in a large courtyard or a festival hall.

Traditional Significance of Kolam

Kolam, apart from being used for decoration, also serves other purposes, and has important spiritual aspects to it. One of the uses of Kolam is to provide food to ants, insects, and small birds like sparrows, since the designs are made with the help of rice flour by woman of the house who is considered as Annapoorneshwari or the nourisher of the family, the first thing in the morning; they act as a source of food. Hence, the kolam represents man's concern for all living creatures or Annadana (giving food to others-indicates generosity). Thus, kolam - the design is a sort of invitation to all, especially Goddess Lakshmi - the Goddess of prosperity, into one's home and life. A Puranic story highlights this. While the Devas and the Asuras were churning Parkatal (Ocean of Milk) for amirtam (nectar), many things started coming out of the ocean. Goddess Lakshmi too came out of that ocean and requested Lord Vishnu for an abode for her to reside. The Lord said that she could stay in houses where the entrances to them were sprinkled with cow dung water and decorated with kolams. Next came Moodevi -the Goddess of misfortune. She too asked for a place to reside. Lord Vishnu directed that she could stay in dirty houses where they would not draw kolams at the entrances. From then on, people began to draw kolams not only to invite Lakshmi into their houses, but also to keep Moodevi away from their houses!

Kolam is a kind of Mandala, (to borrow from the Tantric terminology of the Hindu Tantra). It is the residence of the deity one is praying to or invoking. That is perhaps one reason why drawing certain kinds of kolams acquire a ritualistic mode. The movement of the hands in a particular direction are based on the Tantra. In some cases the creation of the kolam follows the rigors of the Indian architectural definitions i.e is the Stapathya kala where one follows the defined parameters.

Kolam creation is a repetitive act which is performed every day in the morning preferably at break of dawn at one's threshold. This repetition is crucial as practising this art brings order to one's life. Since the designs are usually symmetrical the symmetry of the inner cosmos connects to the outer order. It is believed that if one is in a disturbed state of mind one cannot create a kolam, so a sense of serenity is very essential during kolam execution. Some of the kolams begin with a dot (Bindu) which is defined as the centre of the universe and the kolam creation around it is likened to the journey of self expression or creativity. There is also the aspect of impermanence that each day the kolam of the previous day is cleaned away and a new one takes its place akin to the belief that Hindus have about the impermanence of the human body.

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Apart from the spiritual aspects, there are health benefits of kolam making too. Since one has to bend down to make the pattern, it serves as an overall stretching exercise for the body and also helps in improving the functioning of the digestive system and reproductive system. The ability to draw large complicated patterns without lifting the hand off the floor for long periods of time is believed to be a matter of pride for the South Indians.

Types of kolam: Kolams too have many themes which keep changing according to the seasons and occasions. A flower with leaves and vines running around it would conform to the natural theme, while fluttering butterflies would belong to the insects theme. There are nautical kolams, and chariot kolams, for different religious festivals like, Pongal (a very important festival in Tamilnadu) Deepavali, Pookolam for Onam, and bells and bows with Santa for Christmas. Kolam elements are derived from the specific festival or occasion for which they are drawn.

There are kolams for every week done in front of the home entrance or in the open courtyard inside the house. These are done with the help of chalk or rice powder with respect to the worship of the different planets on that particular day. So there are seven different types of kolam for each day of the week, which also use different colours indicating the colour of the significant planet of that day. There are also different icons used in the kolam, unique to each day of the week.

Colourful peacocks in a kolam



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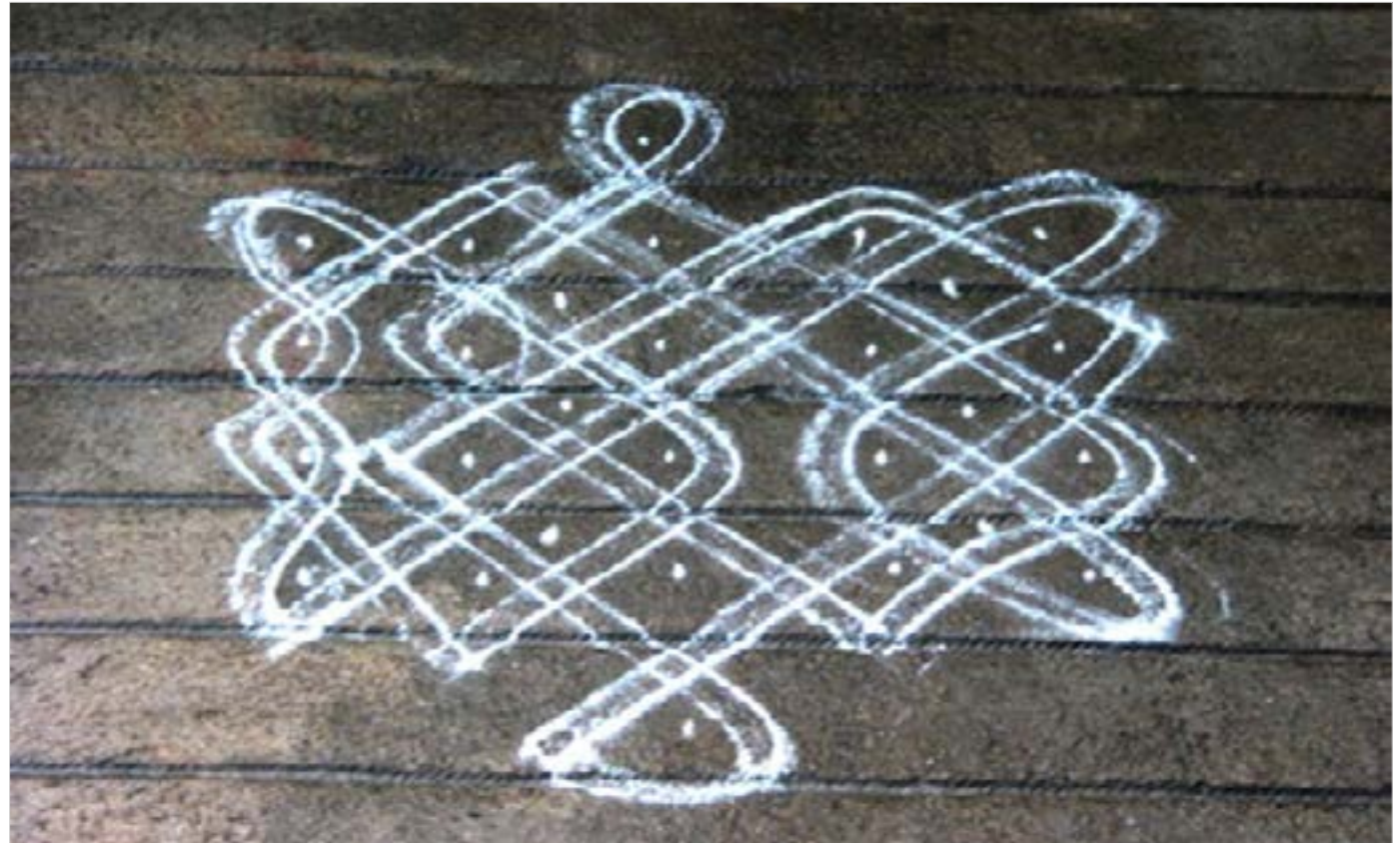
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Symmetrical kolam



(Image source)

All these different types of kolams are explained in a more elaborate manner in the next topic.

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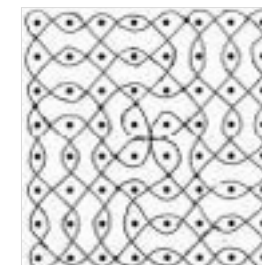
6. Acknowledgements

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Kolam Analysis



Interpretations

Design Resource

Rangoli

Floor Art

by

Madhuri Menon

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis>

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Kolam Analysis

Painted Prayers

Women have drawn kolams as a silent prayer at the entrances to their homes for centuries in Tamil Nadu.

The kolam is an ancient Dravidian geometrical motif that combines form, movement and colour to announce each new day. The word “kolam” in Tamil implies beauty, form and play; it is a quiet ritual full of grace to make the home a sacred space. The kolam is a symbol of an open heart and an auspicious welcoming. It creates a colourful, devotional presence in all the places that it graces.

With kolams adorning the entrances, crossing a threshold of a home, (or vayipati in Tamil), links the private realm to communal life, hospitality to guests and passersby, the personal and familial to the divine. In this way, kolams are more than a transient art, they are a conscious science. They are a subtle bridge between the intimate home and the vast and challenging world beyond.

In ancient times, wandering sadhus would enter a village with kolams gracing the thresholds of village homes and know something of the lives of the inhabitants of each house. Abundance, hardship, aspirations were written on the earth with a few lines and dots or the absence of them.

Kolams may be linked to the earth, the stars or special festivities, but more than that, they are an offering to the Mother Earth. They are prayers for prosperity, joy, wisdom, and good health. Their visually alluring patterns make villages and towns more festive, joyful, and devotional!

Design Resource

Rangoli

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by

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis>



Type - 1



Type - 2



Type - 3



Type - 4



Kolam Practice

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-1>

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Type - 1

In Tamil Nadu, a kolam is a must to start anything auspicious whether it is big or small. The kolam can be seen even in the kitchen and on the cooking counter of some homes, which is ornamented daily with a few lines of kolam. A marriage venue, the temple precincts are areas of community gatherings and these are also decorated with kolams.

There are various types of kolams drawn during different occasions. Also there are infinite varieties in kolam designs. The kolams of each occasion vary from each other and are drawn with a different and a specific purpose. A few of the types are described below.

Documentation of a few of the different types of kolams:

Mrs. Raji Ramanan from New Delhi (an educator, a Sanskrit scholar with a deep interest in Indian culture) has created a Nalvaravu kolam, a Hridayakamalam kolam and a daily Pulli kolam to demonstrate the making of a few of the types of kolam.

Through her growing years in Chennai, she mastered the art of creating kolams by observing her elders at various occasions and regular practice has honed her creative skills. She has a deep understanding of the importance of these kolams and their cultural significance. The acquired expertise in the sense of ratio, proportion, choice of design elements, and deftness of the fingers, the speed and precision of execution become evident as the kolam is being meticulously created.

The process of creation of a kolam also clearly indicates the deep belief one has in following these traditions and the way in which one has integrated them into the modern way of life and yet maintained their significance and importance. This is how these traditional practices of floor art get nurtured and get passed on from generation to generation.

The process of creating the above mentioned three types of kolams has been captured on video and also as stop animation films. Also at the end of each of the kolam creations, Mrs. Raji Ramanan, briefly explains the significance of each kolam, in a short video. The links to these are provided at the end of relevant kolam.

Significance of the documentation:

These videos and the stop animation films, capture the intricate process of the kolam creation exceedingly well. Each step, each nuance of the hand, deftness and the speed of execution, precision and accuracy at each stage are clearly visible while the kolam is being rendered during this documentation process.

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Floor Art

by

Madhuri Menon

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-1>

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It is this kind of a documentation that instils an accurate and in depth understanding of this floor art. Usually it is only those who practise this art or the persons witnessing this art being created on a daily basis or persons interested in learning this art are the ones who have a complete knowledge of the process. Kolam journals, new kolam design concepts in websites or blogs of the internet, magazines which have a section devoted to it usually are able to depict only images of the stage wise development of a kolam, but these do not do justice to the process of its creation.

With people moving away from villages and towns, in the city homes especially apartments, it becomes difficult to practise this art. In the name of modernisation, the rootedness which such a practice would bring is lost.

* Nalvaravu, (or welcoming kolams), indicates that a home is open to visitors and friends. They are especially used to welcome guests to a home or venues where celebrations are being held. This kolam uses the element lotus on the fringe ends of the kolam, which is a symbol of the sacred. Elements like the conch which has its genesis in water are also used. The lamp as an element is also used here. The lamp is dispeller of the darkness – propagates the belief of ASATOMA SADGAMAYA.

After the kolam is drawn it is bound by the red coloured kaavi. This defines the sacred place that has been prepared with all pure intention. The colour red of the kaavi is the colour of prosperity and aesthetically speaking it heightens the contrast of the kolam./

The following pictures show a Nalvaravu kolam being created by Mrs. Raji Ramanan.



1. A basic grid is drawn at the venue before the kolam is created.

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Floor Art

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-1>



2. After the central square the side squares are decorated.



3. The squares in the grid are filled with horizontal and vertical lines.

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4. The squares are connected with curved lines.



5. The central square also gets connected to the side squares with a short set of lines.

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6. More curved lines are built around the central pattern to develop the kolam.



7. More elements are added beyond the curved lines and to the periphery of the kolam.

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-1>



8. The red kaavi is used to create a bold outline along the kolam exterior.



9. The red kaavi instantly heightens the look of the white kolam.

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10. The completed kolam that waits to greet the guests at the venue.

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-1>

The stop animation film and the videos of the above Nalvaravu kolam can be viewed from the links below:



Making of Nalvaravu kolam

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The Stop Animation film of Nalvaravu kolam

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Significance of Nalvaravu kolam

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Rangoli

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-2>

1. About

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Type - 2

* **Janmashtami kolams:** During the festival of Krishna Jayanthi (Krishna's birthday) or Janmashtami, the kolams are drawn showing little feet going from the entrance of the home to the puja room. These denote that young Krishna has walked into the puja room of that home to bless the dwellers that day. A large kolam is also drawn at the puja altar.

* **Pookolams:** In Kerala, Pookalam, the floral kolam is made on the occasion of Onam. Pookalam is an intricate and colourful arrangement of flowers created on the floor at the entrance or veranda of a home.

Onam is a harvest festival celebrated in Kerala. It marks the homecoming of the legendary King Mahabali and lasts for about ten days. It is said that the soul of King Mahabali visits the homes in the state in these ten days of Onam; and is happy to see beautiful pookolams greet him at the entrance of each home. Being satisfied thus, he ensures that prosperity and happiness fill the people in that home. Onam usually falls during the first month of the Malayalam calendar (August-September). This festival is linked to many elements of Kerala's culture – like the visually stunning, intricate flower carpets (Pookolam), elaborate lunch (Onasadhya), snake boat races and traditional dances.

'Pookolam' consists of two words; 'poo' meaning flower and 'kalam' means colour sketches on the ground. It is considered auspicious to decorate a home with a pookolam, (also known as 'Aththa-Poo') during the ten day festival of Onam. The design of the Pookolam can be simple or intricate depending upon the creative abilities of the team creating them.

Making of a Pookolam: For making a pookalam, first the entire floor is cleaned. Then, cow dung is spread over the entire area where the pookalam is to be made. Once the cow dung is evenly spread, motifs on it are made using bamboo sticks. The making of a pookolam involves creating a circular shaped and multi-tiered colourful arrangement of flowers, petals and leaves. The use of powder colours, desiccated coconut or artificial flowers is prohibited. Pookalams are usually created in the court yard of a home. The diameter of a pookolam normally ranges from four to five meters. Generally, the pookalam is made in ten rings, each representing a 'God'.

Making a pookalam every day is like a ritual in every home during the ten-day-long (Atham to Thiruvonam) celebrations. Flowers are used on each day, as a particular flower is dedicated to each day of Onam. The first day – Atham is when the design starts to take shape and is completed by the tenth day -Thiruvonam day. The size of a pookalam is increased daily by adding a ring or a step on the outside to it; hence a really large pookolam gets ready for the main day of Onam.

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Source:

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It is a popular belief that the ten rings or steps of the pookalam represent ten deities in the Hindu pantheon. The first step represents Ganesha, second represents Shiva and Shakti, third represents Shiva, fourth represents Brahma, fifth represents Pancha Boothangal, sixth represents Shanmughan or Muruga, seventh step represents Guru, eighth step is for Ashta digpalakar, ninth represents Indra and tenth represents Lord Vishnu.

Various flowers are used on each day as a specific flower is dedicated to each day of Onam. Commonly used flowers to make a pookalam are: Thumba (Lucas Aspera), Kakka Poovu, Thechipoovu, Mukkutti (little tree plant), Chemparathy (shoe flower), Aripoo or Konginipoo (Lantana), Hanuman Kireedom (Red pagoda plant) and Chethi (Ixora). Of all these flowers, Thumba flowers are given more importance in pookalam as they are small in size and glitter in the soft rays of the sun. The 'Thumba Poo' is also considered to be the favourite flower of Lord Shiva and King Mahabali was a devout worshipper of Lord Shiva. Idols of Mahabali and Vishnu are placed in the centre of the pookalam and worshiped.

On the next day of Onam, again the Thumba flowers are used to decorate the Onapookolam. The arrangement is not touched for the next 15 days. On the 15th day, called 'Ayilyam', pookalam is decorated again. On the next day, called Magam, the pookalam is cut at four corners with a knife. This marks the end of the pookalom decorations for the year. Some also follow the tradition of erecting a small pandaal(a protective shelter) over the completed flower carpet and decorate it with colourful festoons.

The making of a Pookolam is itself a colourful and joyous event. This is possible only by team effort and along with the huge quantities of flowers (usually in kilos), dedication, creativity and technique; the occasion also generates a feeling of togetherness and goodwill amongst the people.

Changing Trends: In the earlier times, people used to make efforts to collect flowers for creating a pookalam. Children used to get up early in the morning and gather flowers in their small 'Pookuda' (basket) from village gardens. But the trend has changed presently; people use the option of buying flowers from the market in the shape and colour of their choice.

Pookolam creation competitions are organised by various societies and groups all over the state on the day of Onam. They have become extremely popular and witness huge public participation. Also a large number of people visit such venues to have a look at the innovative and meticulously created floral art. It is only through such efforts that this art continues to be alive in the urban regions.

Pookolam is no longer limited to the festive occasion of Onam – it is being adopted to grace venues, public places for celebratory occasions with creative and innovative twists.

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangoli/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-2>

Making of a pookolam at IDC:

The following pictures show the team spirit and creativity displayed by the students of IDC, IIT Bombay in creating a unique pookolam in the foyer of IDC on the occasion of Onam. A basic template of the kolam is drawn on the ground at first using a light coloured chalk. Then different coloured flower petals and green leaves are painstakingly arranged inside this design to create an elaborate floral carpet.



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Rangoli

Floor Art

by

Madhuri Menon

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangoli/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-2>



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Source:

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangoli/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-2>



The final completed, beautifully rendered pookalam with Onam greetings etched by flower petals.

Another such pookalam was created for the inaugural ceremony of the Typography Day at IDC. This too was created by students, incorporating the theme - by using alphabets of different Indian languages or the typefaces into this floral floor art. This was done through the use of flower petals of different colours and leaves as can be seen in the following pictures.

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-2>



1. A basic grid being created for the rendition of the pookolam.



2. The petals from large flowers like marigold being separated. These floral shreds not only add colour but also add texture to the pookolam.

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3. Once the flowers are prepared and the colour scheme worked out, the process of filling into the design is begun, starting from the centre.



4. Since an even texture and thickness are essential the floral shreds, leaves, are meticulously placed.

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5. Pure team effort is what makes this floor art possible.



6. Once completed, the surroundings are cleaned up and the area is geared up for the inaugural ceremony.

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7. The pookolam adds to the festive spirit while the symbolic lamp lighting ceremony is conducted, to start the Typography Day activities.

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Source:

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The entire pookolam creation shown above has been captured on a stop animation film which can be viewed from the link below:



Making of a pookolam at IDC

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Design Resource

Rangoli

Floor Art

by

Madhuri Menon

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-3>

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Type - 3

* Thottil Kolams, or cradle kolams, are created for the naming ceremony of a newborn child. The cradle kolam is drawn and paddy is spread in the middle of the kolam. A song is then sung praying for the health and long life of the child.

* Hridaya Kamalam kolam: On Fridays and sacred occasions, the `Hridaya Kamalam` (lotus of the heart) and the `Sri Chakram` (the auspicious circle) are drawn in the kolams to ensure success and wealth.

In the Hridaya Kamalam kolam dots are set in a radial arrangement and a lotus shaped kolam is what emerges from this matrix. In this kolam the heart is represented by a lotus, hence the name. The kolam is based on dots drawn in 8 lines radiating from the centre in 8 directions with 45 degrees between the adjacent lines. Several variations can be created from the same matrix of dots in this type of kolam.

This kolam is drawn with a single line or kambi that goes through all the dots to form a representation of the lotus flower. Hindus believe that drawing this kolam in one go without removing the hand from the ground has spiritual benefits.

The Hridaya Kamalam kolam is usually drawn at the place of worship to invoke Goddess Lakshmi. It is believed that spirituality unfolds as the lotus blossoms. The centre is drawn first indicating the necessity of being rooted as an individual. Then the radii with dots are drawn in 8 directions which indicate the energy being generated from the centre into all the directions. One starts at one point with a kambi or a thread and then after going through a fixed path comes back to the starting- this is akin to life -a journey that begins from a point and goes back to it in the end.

The Hridaya Kamalam kolam is like a Tantra, with the Yantra and a beeja mantra in the centre. This type of kolam is sacred and one has to take care that it is never trampled on. The following pictures show a Hridaya Kamalam kolam being created by Mrs. Raji Ramanan from New Delhi.

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1. The initial grid of dots being created.



2. The radial arrangement of dots completed.

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3. The initial lines being created.



4. The lines further being connected to the appropriate dots.

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5. Near completion of the kolam.



6. The Hridaya kamalam kolam complete, its periphery being adorned by other design elements.

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7. A border being created all around the kolam.



8. Elaborate elements being added to the border corners.

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9. Red kaavi border being created around the kolam.



10. The completed resplendent Hridaya kamalam kolam.

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The stop animation film and the videos of the above Hridaya kamalam kolam can be viewed from the links below:



Making of Hridaya Kamalam kolam

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The Stop Animation film of Hridaya Kamalam kolam

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Significance of Hridaya Kamalam kolam

* **Circle kolams** originally signified water and were often associated with the abode of gods. Today they represent a recipient for the favourite goddess Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, to manifest her abundance and bring health and prosperity to the family.

* **Snake kolams** originally evoked the spiralling of life forces and the aspiration for an evolution in consciousness. Today they are often used to protect the home from thieves, evil spirits or unwanted visitors, as is the spiral in the Sumerian and Egyptian cultures. These kolams are a kind of curse catcher, or an emotions screen, to keep the household safe, pure and serene. Negative spirits are not necessarily wandering outside the house. The ill feelings in ourselves itself can bring in negative energy. These kolams are drawn as a wakeup call so one is be purified in mind and thought when one is in their presence.

* **Weekday kolams:** There are also kolams for each day of the week and for propitiating the planets.

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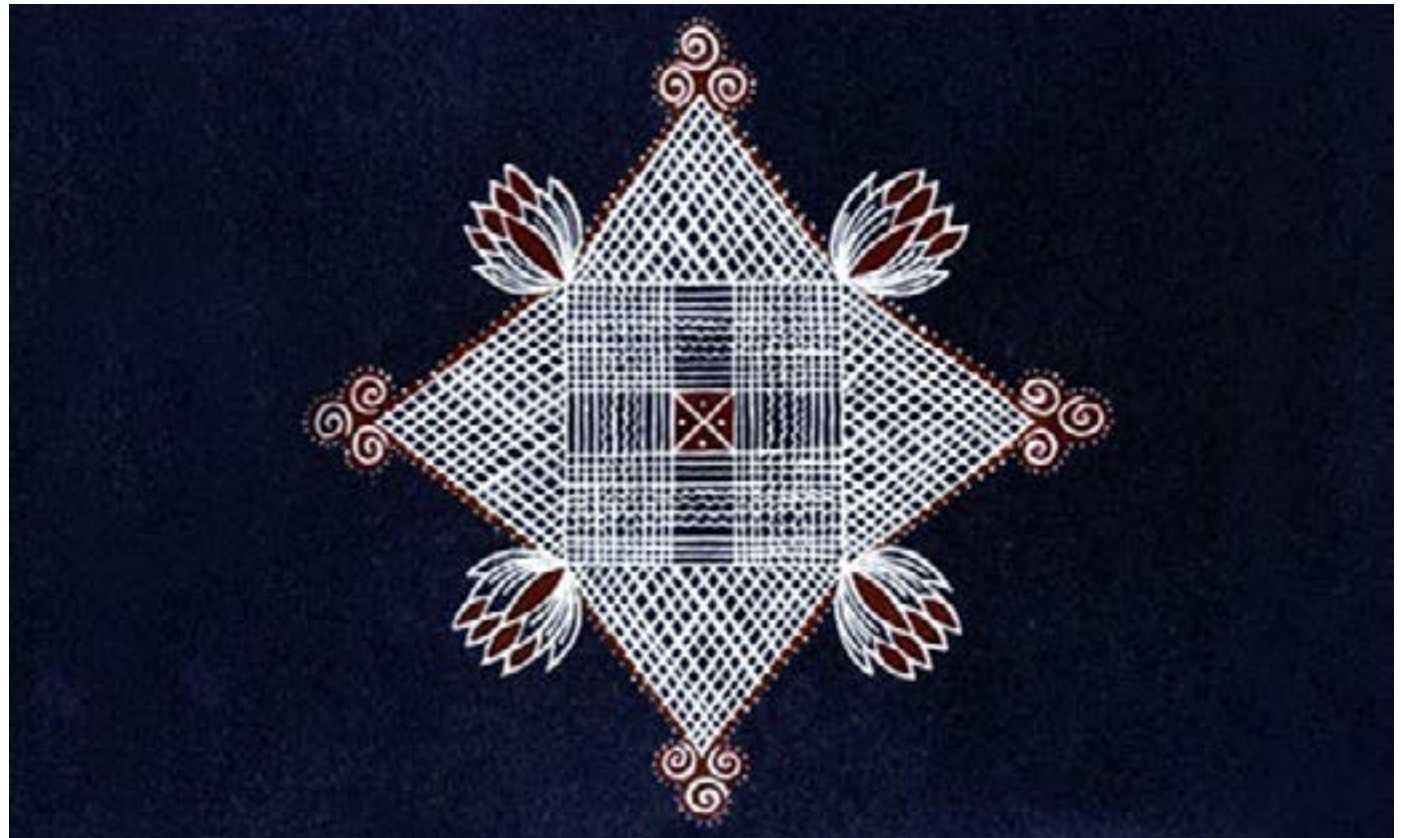
Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-3>

* There are the **tantrik kolam** designs with syllables of mantras for prayers to specific deities.

* **Manai Kolam:** These are kolams drawn in different areas in a wedding house. At the time of weddings and other auspicious events at the homes, temples, etc., a central motif is drawn in front of the manai, which is called the 'manai' or the 'padi kolam'. (The 'manai' is a wooden plank used for seating individuals, specially the couple, and the priest who is performing the marriage.) The manai is also decorated with parallel lines at both edges to indicate its sacredness. These mani kolams are drawn with the help of the raw rice powder, Manjal (Turmeric), and Semman (Kavi).

As per the Hindu tradition the raw rice powder used to make the kolams is partaken by many ants, insects and birds, and they bless the people in that house. This is considered as an act of daanam/dharman – charity as per the Hindu philosophy.



An example of a Manai kolam.

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* **Pongal kolams:** Pongal kolams are drawn at a home in the courtyard, at entrances to celebrate Makara Sankranti or Pongal. Courtyards are the venues where the savoury pongal is made in a clay pot to mark the Pongal celebrations. So in some homes kolams are drawn around the stove that is specially set up in the courtyard. This area is also decorated with sugarcane and flowers.

There are several types of Pongal Kolams, and a few examples are shown below:



Pongal kolam around the stove. (Image source)

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Pongal kolam at the entrance of a home. (Image source)

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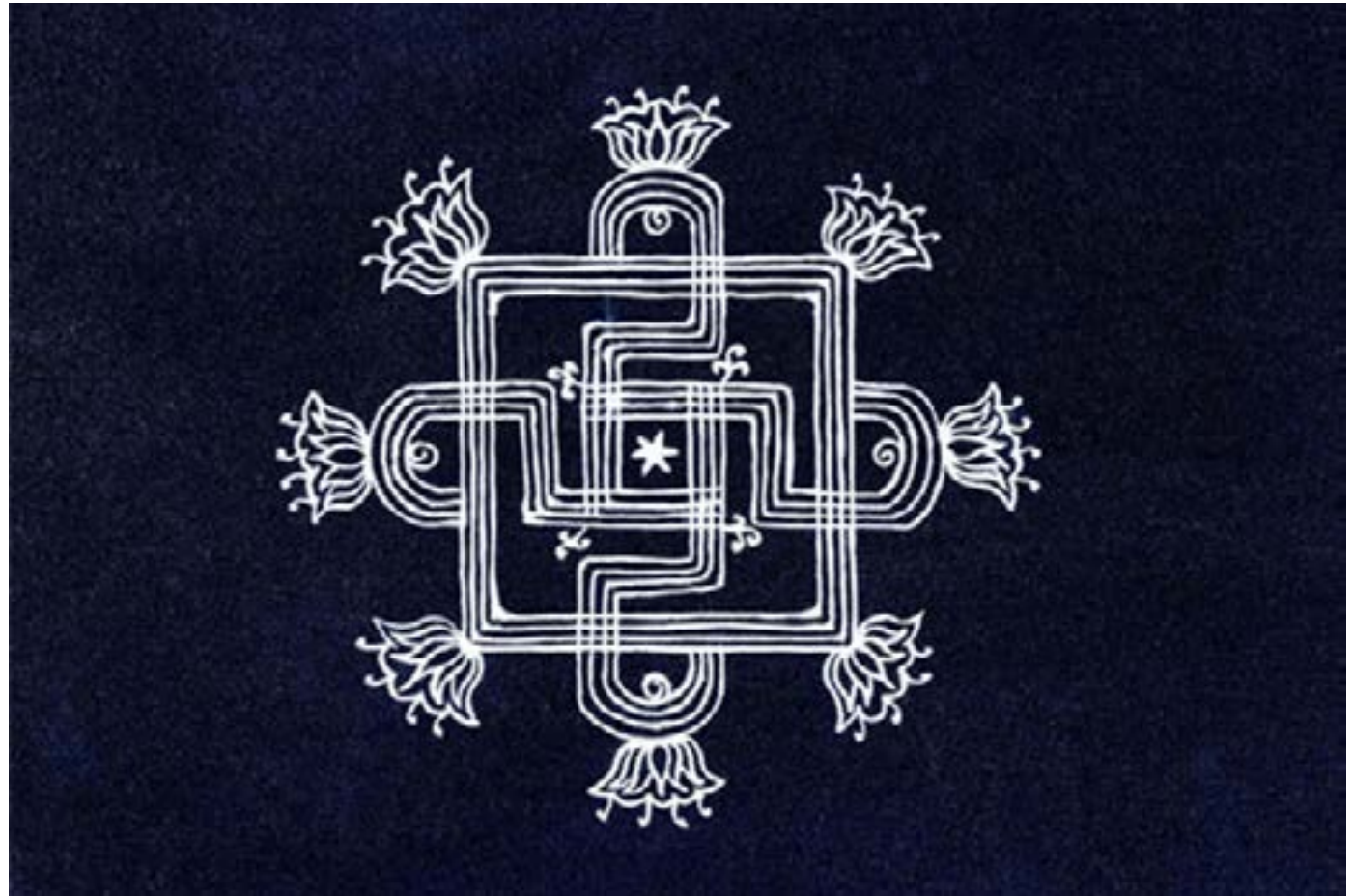
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* **Line kolams or Kambi kolams:** These are based on the basic element - the line or kambi that is used to draw the kolams. In these kolams, free hand lines are drawn by hand to make a geometrical pattern.



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***Pulli Kolam:** Pulli (in Tamil means dots) are arranged in a specific sequence and order & these pullis are joined to make pictorial designs. These are kolams which are commonly drawn daily, at entrances to homes. These kolams are drawn by using dots and by connecting these dots the women create birds, animals, butterflies, deer and various designs.



A pulli kolam involving deer, and flowers. (Image source)

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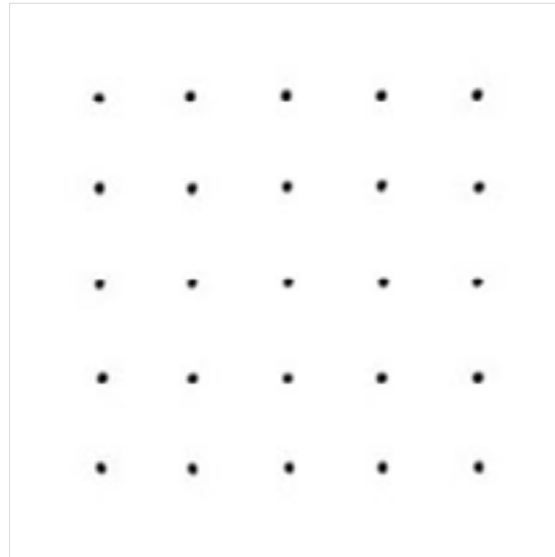
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Source:

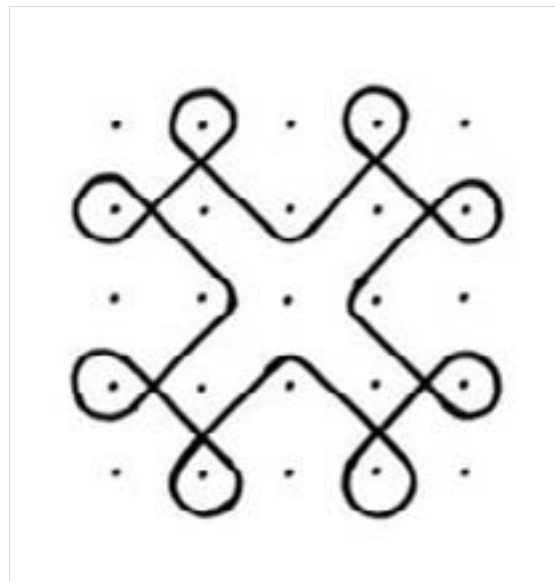
<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-3>

The kolam shown below is drawn with the base of a 5 x 5 matrix of dots.

Step 1: A 5 x 5 matrix of equidistant dots is created first.



Step 2: The initial pattern is created; it involves a line that goes around a sequence of dots as shown.



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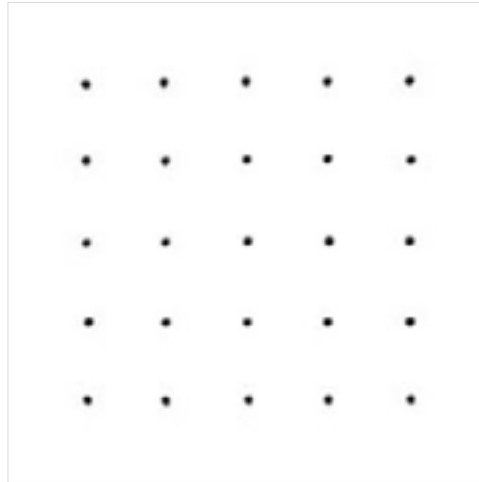
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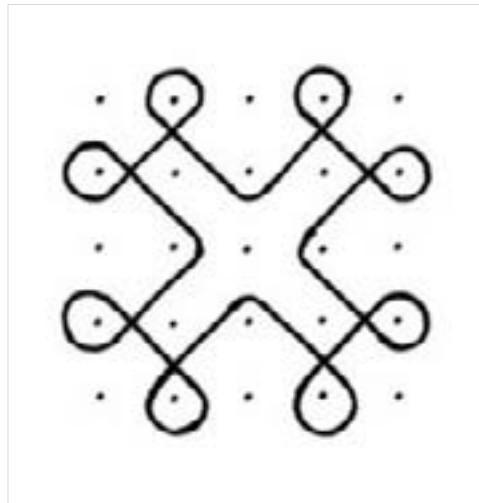
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Step 3: The next pattern which overlaps the first one is created in a similar manner involving another sequence of dots.



Step 4: The final finished kolam



The steps explained above are only one way to generate this pattern as each person has their own style of functioning. In the initial learning stages a woman creates these dots –to--kolam patterns on a paper before creating them on ground. Once one becomes familiar with the process of creating simple kolams, the other ones- simple or complicated may be created according a personal style. Thus there exist multitudes of kolam designs that can be generated from a simple matrix of dots.

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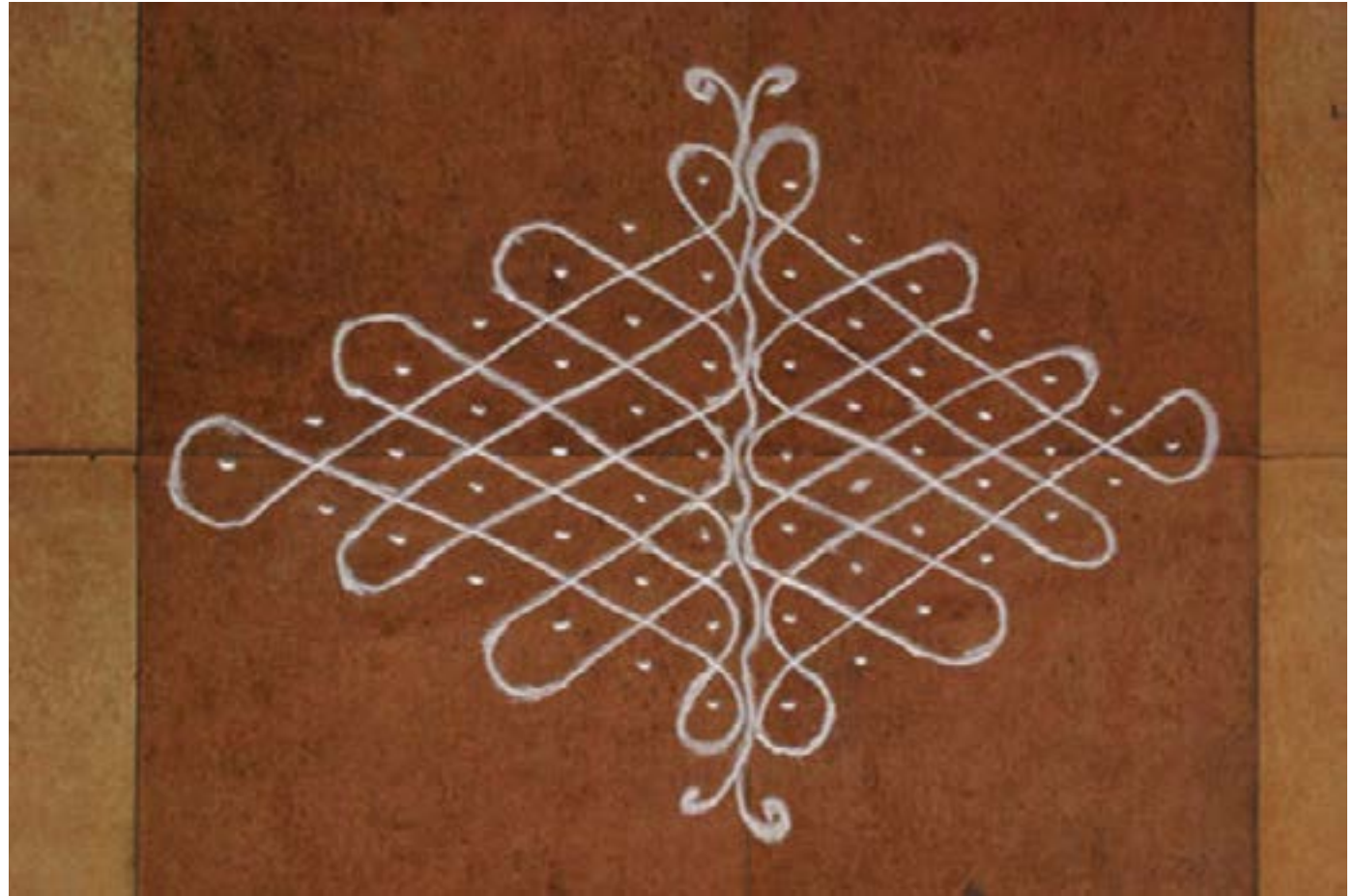
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The pulli kolams look intricate and beautiful and are drawn according to one's creativity.



A pulli kolam

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Type - 4

Daily Pulli kolam:

A pulli kolam drawn daily at a threshold is created by Mrs. Raji Ramanan from New Delhi in the following pictures.

This is an example of a simple kolam that is drawn everyday at the threshold of a home after cleaning the space. The designs of such kolams are usually very simple, and do not take too long in creating. Dots are created first and these form the matrix around which the kolam is developed. Also based on the mood or the artistic ability of a person extra elements are added on.

In rural areas, the presence of such a kolam outside the home daily meant that all was well in the household.



1. The steps being decorated first by beautiful borders at the ends.

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2. A tiny and a simple kolam created in the centre of the step to unify the borders.



3. Straight lines and zigzag lines are used to decorate as borders.

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4. A tiny star shaped kolam is created on the second step.



5. The completed borders and tiny kolams on the steps at the threshold of a home.

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6. A simple pulli kolam being made with the help of dots.



7. A nearly complete simple pulli kolam.

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8. Simple elements being added to the completed kolam.



9. A simple and elegant daily kolam.

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10. A clearer view of the simple kolam.

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The stop animation film and the videos of the above daily pulli kolam can be viewed from the links below:



Making of Daily Pulli kolam

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The Stop Animation film of Daily Pulli kolam

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Significance of Daily Pulli kolam

*Chikku/Sikku Kolam: As the name indicates a curved line moves around the dots to form a design. These types of kolams are very mesmerising when people see them, as they cannot find the starting or the end point of the kolam! And so they are called as Chikku/Sikku kolam.

Some examples of a few Chikku Kolams:



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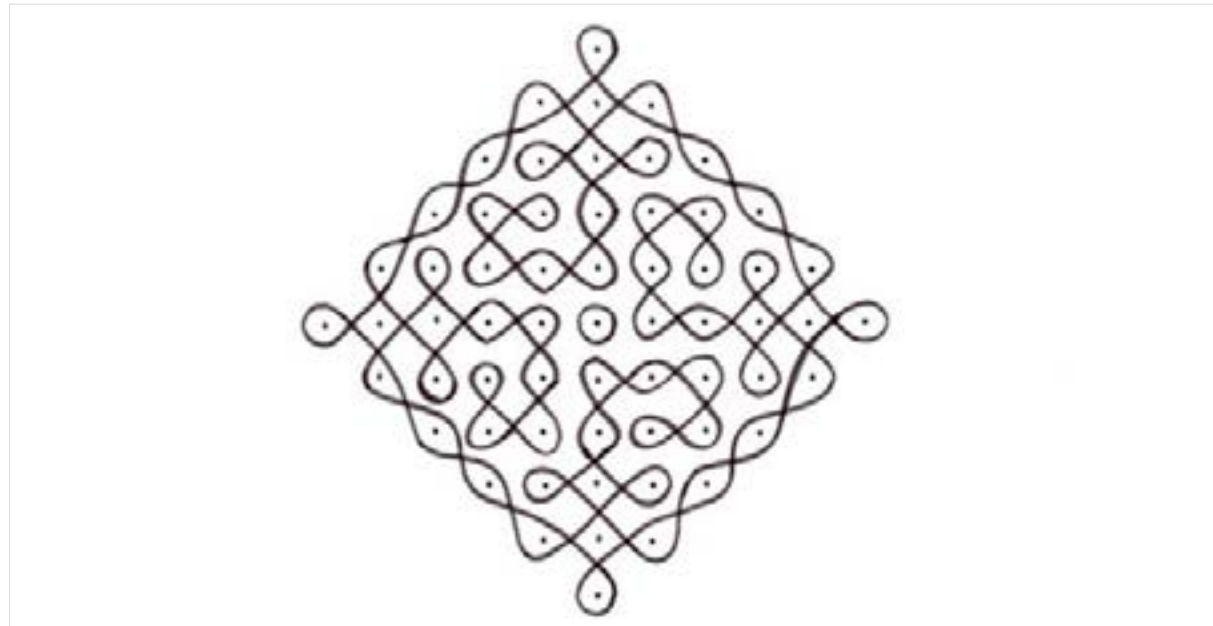
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Madhuri Menon

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/kolam/kolam-analysis/type-4>



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Kolam Practice

Margazhi Masam

Margazhi is a Tamil month and it comes after Karthikai and before Thai which is the harvest season. All the seasons are very dull in Chennai and the brightness starts right from the paratasi Masam which is considered auspicious for Lord Venkateshwara, then starts the Karthigai considered auspicious for Lord Ayyappa, after which is the Margazhi season where almost each and every Hindu family becomes active, singing bhajans along the streets in the cool mornings, temples open up early in the morning, women busy drawing rangolis in front of their houses, like Agal kolam, Kumba kolam, Bharama Mudi kolam, Surya Chakra kolam, etc. Also there is a weekly kolam drawing practice and for each of 7 days Kolams have their significances as mentioned below:

Monday: On Monday the kolam is drawn to honour Soma (Moon). The moon is said to bring feminine grace and beauty as well as mental clarity. It also adorns Lord Shiva's hair.

Tuesday: On Tuesday the kolam is drawn to honour the Navagraha (planet) Chavai (Mars). One is supposed to free from debts, poverty, illness, and breaks the bonds of attachment.

Wednesday: On Wednesday the kolam is drawn to honour the Navagraha (planet) Budhan (Mercury). The kolam endorse prosperity and intelligence. It brings the blessings of balanced communication.

Thursday: On Thursday the kolam is drawn to honour the Navagraha (planet) Guru (Jupiter). It builds constructive energies to bring wisdom, intelligence, and longevity to all who see it.

Friday: On Friday the kolam is drawn to honour the Navagraha (planet) Sukran(Venus). It integrates energies to bring wealth, prosperity and abundance in all aspects of one's life.

Saturday: On Saturday the kolam is drawn to honour the Navagraha (planet) Shani (Saturn). This planet can create hardships such as delays, sorrows, restrictions and adversity which get lighten by this kolam.

Sunday: On Sunday the kolam is drawn to honour Surya (Sun). It balance the energies for the entire week.

Kolams are usually drawn with coarsely ground rice flour and with swift deft strokes. As legend goes, the rice flour is also food for ants and other insects. Red brick powder and coloured rangoli powder are used to enhance these kolams. During the Tamil month of Margazhi and on special occasions, the kolams take on a festive note too. Kolams during the festival Pongal are generously dotted with images of the overflowing pongal pot signifying prosperity and plenty. Some of the special kolams are Navagraha kolam and Iswarya kolam.

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The month of “Marghazi” is eagerly awaited by young women; to showcase their skills by covering the entire width of the road with one big kolam. It is also a matter of pride to be able to draw large complicated patterns without lifting the hand off the floor. It is also a test of mastery as one cannot repeat a pattern for 30 days!

Pongal Festival in Tamilnadu

Pongal in Tamil Nadu is what Durga Puja is in West Bengal, Baisakhi is in Punjab, Bihu is in Assam, Ugadi is in Andhra Pradesh, Makar Sankranti in Karnataka and Onam in Kerala.

The first day of Pongal is known as Bhogi Pandigai, the first day is an ode to Lord Indra, the bestower of the much needed rain. Because of his penchant for worldly pleasures, Lord Indra has been nicknamed Bhogi, or one who enjoys the good things of life. Indeed a description of this day is incomplete without the delightful and intriguing mythological legend accompanying it.

According to the story, an irate Lord Krishna (the blue coloured God and an incarnation of Vishnu, the Preserver) directed the earthlings to worship Lord Narayan (another incarnation of Vishnu) instead of Lord Indra, for the latter lead a decadent life. The insulted and humiliated Indra gave vent to his fury by lashing the earth with torrential rain. But Indra’s prowess provoked to be unequal to that of Lord Krishna, for the latter nonchalantly picked up the mighty Govardhan mountain on his little finger to protect the people from the deluge. After a heartfelt plea for pardon, a deeply repentant Indra was finally reinstated as a God worthy of reverence.

The celebrations of Makar Sankranti in other parts of India coincides with the second day of Pongal, which is also the first day of the new month of Thai or Magh (10th month of the Hindu lunar calendar). Each Tamil home has enchanting greens made of mango leaves decorating the doorways and pillars. Banana and sugarcane plants along with coconut fronds are strategically placed at the gateways, forming a leafy archway. Strings of marigold add a dash of colour, enhancing the freshness of the lush foliage. Women, young and old, decorate the floors with kolam (patterns made by coloured powders). Countless masterpieces are created in the form of kolams, with sugarcane and overflowing pots and complex geometric patterns, and the craftsmanship would probably put even the most accomplished artist to shame.

Shown below are some of the different examples of the Pongal kolams created for celebrating the Pongal festival.

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(Image source)



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Kolam competitions :

Sometimes kolam competitions are held during the Margazhi (Pongal) season. The test of skills on kolam designing and creating is the basis of these competitions. The winner is chosen based on the best kolam design created and also the skill and speed that have been used to achieve this.

Shown below is one such scenario in Mylapore , Chennai. A whole road is blocked and the traffic is rerouted during such a kolam festival.



(Image source)

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Thai Pongal

This is a harvest festival- the Tamil equivalent of Thanks giving. It is held to honour the Sun, for a bountiful harvest. Families gather to rejoice and share their joy and their harvests with others. The Sun is offered a “Pongal” of rice and milk.

Rice flour (plain and coloured) is used to draw the kolam. Parellel straight lines can be drawn using a cylindrical rod (Ulakai) as a guide kolam. A kolam can be a plain one or can be artistically drawn with symbols of cosmic interest. The kolam defines a sacred area where the pongal is prepared.

Within the perimeters of the kolam, typically, firewood is used to cook the rice. The Pongal is set up in the direct view of the Sun (East).Traditionally, the kolam is laid in the front or side of the house, but in cold climate where cooking indoors with firewood is hazardous, the pongal can be prepared in the kitchen and brought to the location where the kolam is setup.

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Interpretations

Mathematical analysis of the kolam patterns

The kolam patterns used in India are not new.... they have been there for eons, have ancient origins and were made with a purpose of propitiating Gods, and Goddesses and were celebratory in nature. They were a form of floor art or paintings, made with devotion. Many of these were derived from purely secular motifs; the abstract designs, philosophic and religious motifs mingled together and these symbols expressed the feelings of people and were highly aesthetic too. Their presence during all the various festive occasions reinforced the importance and the spirit of the occasion.

These forms of painted prayers were not only handed down the generations with their core wisdom intact but have been enhanced by each generation, be it in terms of the materials or patterns used, but also by the technology present in that era. The traditionalists still follow the age old methods of using rice powder or creating the patterns with dots, at the thresholds of homes and court yards but in this day one sees the presence of plastic rangoli or kolam stickers, plastic rangoli templates, plastic rangoli rollers, plastic grid sheets which help to create an instant and accurate rangoli grid as an aid to creating the rangolis.

As rangolis are more predominant in rural areas than in urban areas, it is necessary to appreciate the ease with which these designs are passed down from one generation to the other, by mere daily practice and retention in the memory. Though in the past few years, there have been dedicated rangoli pattern books; a few publications have a section which prints the rangoli explorations of the enthusiasts of this art form.

All the different types of rangolis, across the country exhibit a sense of geometry, and follow some basic rules. Rangolis are not random patterns; they all follow an underlying structure and the vast collection of designs of all types indicates that a certain discipline governs either the simplicity or the complexity of the pattern.

Different sets of rules have to be followed for generating a particular type of rangoli. Also the patterns range between geometric and mathematical line drawings around a matrix of dots to free form art work and closed shapes.

Generally to generate the kolams , dots are drawn first on the floor and then depending on the type of kolam, lines are drawn either connecting the dots or going around the dots and complete as closed curves. The patterns where the lines are drawn around the dots are called as kambi kolams as they look like wire decoration (kambi means “wire” in Tamil). There are many interesting and complicated designs made-up of a single or many closed curves.

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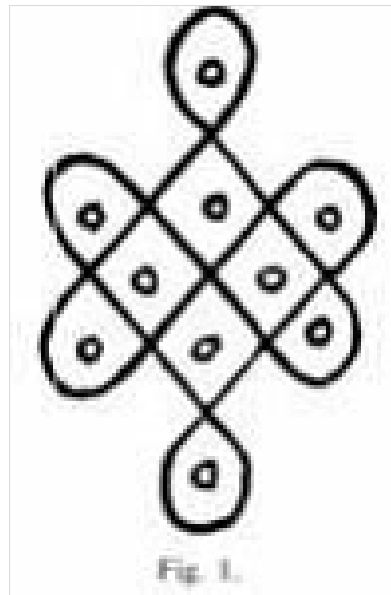
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Constrained only by some very broad rules, kolam designs offer scope for intricacy, complexity and creativity of high order. These traditional designs also seem to imbibe mathematical properties such as symmetry, permutation etc Rangoli patterns have evoked a sense of awe in all.....as they are visual symbolic expressions. The presence of geometry and sometimes symmetry has led some of the thinkers, mathematicians to study them. They are a cultural and artistic expression of a whole array of mathematical ideas and concepts.

In the past few years a few mathematicians, physicists have explored these patterns, to see if any standard theories apply to the generation of rangolis. Because of the basic grid structure of dots used in the kolam type of rangoli, computational analysis was explored. Kolams come in a variety of styles (which the computer scientists have taken to calling “kolam families”). Since many begin with a grid of dots, this serves as the skeletal structure for the kolam. Lines are drawn, connecting the dots or around them, very often in a single, continuous curve. (This continuous curve is supposedly symbolic of the never-ending cycle of birth, fertility, death, continuity and eternity). The finished product is a symmetrical kolam.

Kolams come in a variety of symmetries – horizontal, vertical and rotational.



(Image source)

The fascination the humble kolams have generated is seen in the technical explorations using the computers and algorithms, to arrive at a new scientific understanding. Trying to generate them on a computer, creation of new models has brought in an entirely new dimension in the otherwise non-technical floor art.

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Theories like the Fibonacci numbers, has been applied by retired Dr. Naranan to kolams to arrive at interesting conclusions. (Fibonacci numbers are pervasive in all areas of science. In geometry they are related to pentagons, decagons and 3-dimensional Platonic solids. Rectangles of consecutive Fibonacci numbers as sides (e.g. 2 x 3, 3 x 5, 5 x 8, 8 x 13...) are known as Golden rectangles. The ratio of the sides approaches a limiting value denoted by $D = (1+\sqrt{5})/2 = 1.61803\dots$ is called the Golden Ratio. This ratio is everywhere in nature: in the branching of trees, arrangement of flower petals, seeds and leaves, spiral patterns of florets in sun flowers, spiral shapes of sea-shells etc. It appears to be closely related to growth processes in nature. The Golden Ratio is also believed to figure prominently in Western art: in architecture (pyramids, Parthenon), paintings (Leonardo da Vinci), sculpture, poetry (Virgil) and music. There is a vast literature on this subject and many claims are controversial.

Fibonacci series first appeared in the book Liber Abaci (1202) by the Italian mathematician Leonardo of Pisa also known as Fibonacci. (It is claimed that these numbers appeared in the analysis of Sanskrit poetry by Acharya Hemachandra in 1150 A.D, 50 years before Liber Abaci.) Dr. Naranan has explained how kolam designs, square and rectangular, can be constructed using a modular approach. Bigger kolams are built from smaller ones using some properties of Fibonacci numbers.

The modular approach is ideally suited for generating kolams on a computer and exploring interesting mathematical properties of kolams in general. He has incorporated Fibonacci numbers in a class of artistic designs he calls Fibonacci kolams (FKs). He has also developed a recursive scheme to generate Fibonacci rectangles and squares using algorithms that can be used to draw FKs on a computer with suitable software.

He believes that computer-aided kolam design will elevate the art to a new level of creativity. A computer program becomes indispensable if one has to explore the different possible combinations of rectangular and square modules that constitute the kolam.

He has presented his study and analysis in two parts. Part I consists of a scheme for creating a class of kolams based on Fibonacci numbers. In Part II, the scheme is generalized to arbitrary sizes of kolams using Generalized Fibonacci numbers. The problem of enumeration – the number of possible Fibonacci kolams of a given size – is discussed. This scheme is further extended beyond square grids to cover diamond-shaped grids too.

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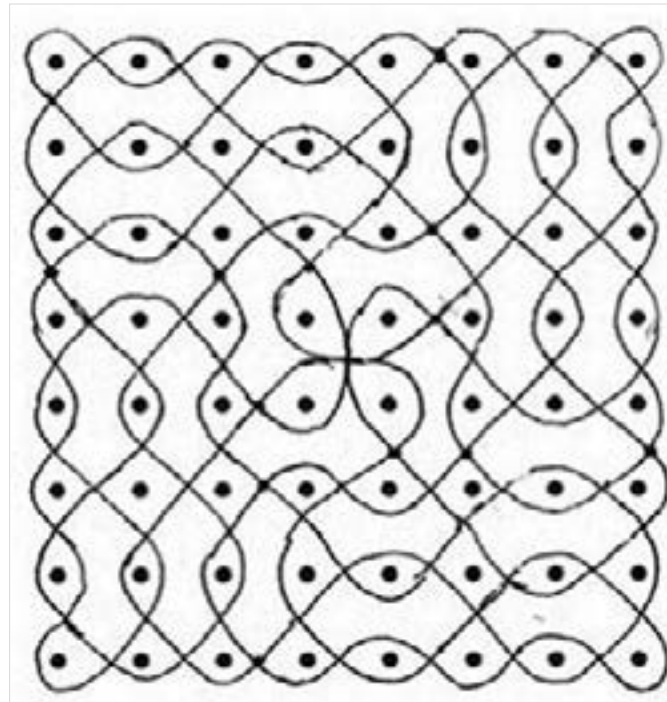
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(Image source)

The ethno-mathematical view and the corresponding study of kolam patterns have been done extensively by others like Ascher (1991) and Gerdes (1989). T. Robinson's studies have produced computer programs for mechanical or interactive generation of kolam patterns. Studies also have been conducted by Nagata and Yanagisawa (2004) by the use of other underlying syntax rules and a digital expression for representing kambi kolam patterns. Nagata and Robinson (2006) have extended the applicability of kolam designs as tangible pictures for the people with disability. These are a few studies to indicate the explorations done on kolams.

Kolams have symmetry, patterned repetition, closed continuous curves and curve families, all of which have applications and meaning in mathematics and computer science. With their impeccably logical building up of patterns – their algorithmic nature - they have attracted the attention of computer scientists who have used kolams to study picture languages. Dr. Gift Siromoney of Madras Christian College, who was a leader in the study of the mathematical properties of kolams along with his team, has done some fascinating work on these kolams.

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He was a pioneer in the study of kolam designs as part of the analysis and understanding of picture languages. The study of picture languages is closely related to formal language theory, which has been used by computer scientists in the study and development of programming languages. Picture languages use sets of basic units, and study the syntactic rules for combining these units. Using the rules of syntax for a specific kolam family, a computer can mechanically generate new kolam patterns. Kambi kolam patterns, fractals provided interesting examples of cycle languages. Kolam designs as examples of two-dimensional picture languages with formally definable syntactic rules, the formal properties of such languages have been studied by Dr. Gift Siromoney in 1972 and his group of scientists and mathematicians. They used these picture languages to describe and create kolam families. They created a language that produced strings of symbols, which could then be translated into pictures or kolams.

Array languages are another technique used for the mathematical and computational study of kolams, particularly those using dots. Motivated by the kolam designs, Dr.Siromoney and his team in 1974 have introduced different types of array grammars generating array languages and also have given specific instructions for drawing certain kinds of kolam patterns using Turtle motions with chain-code interpretation and kolam motions with cycle rewriting rules. These include Siromoney Matrix Grammars and Kolam Array Grammars. These arrays can be used to describe and create kolams of various shapes.

The studies done by Dr. Siromoney and Dr. Naranan in kolams educate one tremendously. They reinforce the spirit of exploration in man. They drive home the importance of one's culture, and one is motivated to study it, understand it and innovate it thus preserving it for the future generations. The complete technical details of their work and the work by some others in the area of kolams can be accessed through the following links.

1. <http://vindhiya.com/Naranan/Fibonacci-Kolams/>
2. <http://www.cmi.ac.in/gift/Kolam.htm>

These studies reinforce the idea that there is so much to learn about and from kolams. They also mean a lot more than just pretty patterns. They reflect the depth in our culture, connect us to our roots, urge us to see them in new light, and derive new meanings and understandings.

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Elements used in Rangolis

The art of floor decoration commonly known as rangoli, in India is known by different names across India, alpna in Bengal and Assam, aripana in Bihar, mandana in Rajasthan, rangoli in Maharashtra, chowkpurana or sona rakhna in Uttar Pradesh, kolam in Tamil Nadu, and muggu in Andhra Pradesh. Some of these words are rooted in vernacular languages whereas some have their origin before the Aryan era.



Welcoming rangolis outside a home (Image source)

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Rangolis are not mere decorations for beautifying homes. They are welcoming signs; expressions of gratitude, because of the belief that these decorative paintings keep a home, city or village safe and prosperous and the cultivated land fertile and fruitful.

The rangolis were not only adoration and ornamentation of the earth which sustains us, but equally a ritual invocation of the Gods for acquiring their blessings, thus making these floor designs a visual prayer created on the earth. Drawn with rice powder, lime or chalk, the process of creation is as important as the finished form. The designs drawn thus on the floor have a magical power and presence. They were used as welcoming signs at the entrance of the house, for a guest must be welcomed with grace and elegance. Beauty being equated with godliness, it was also the symbol of good omen and therefore is associated with every phase of life. These universal patterns and symbols were created and revered during rituals.

The floor paintings have also been used as protection against evil spirits. While drawing these rangolis special attention is paid to the fact that the entire design must be unbroken and must not have any gaps for an evil spirit to enter.

Visual styles and motifs used in rangolis:

Examining the visual styles of the rangolis and some of the commonly used motifs across the country gives one insights to their existence and context.

The rangoli designs can be divided into two main categories based on appearance and regional application i.e. the ones drawn in the mountain terrains and the others in the plains and the fertile regions of the country.

Akrriti Pradhan (geometry based) rangolis are practised in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra while in Bengal and Bihar Vallari Pradhan (floral based) rangolis are practised. Akriti Pradhan designs are found predominantly in mountain terrains where as Vallari Pradhan designs were predominantly found in the Gangetic plains respectively. Distinct from these two major categories, there is another group of rangoli designs in the South, which is 'floral – geometrical'. The floral designs are usually connected with the socio—religious practices, while the geometric designs are connected to a central motif concerning a particular deity.

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Geometry based rangolis (Image source)

The white paintings on the mud walls and the courtyard are done by the Meena Tribe who reside in the Aravalli Hills of India. This is the Mandana tradition of painting practiced all over Rajasthan.

This is a tradition passed on from generation to generation, handed down from mother to daughter in the women of the tribe. This is done on the mud walls and floors of their homes, keeping time with recurring festivals and the changing seasons.

Mandana when created on the mud walls is like a form of storytelling through illustrations.

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Mandana rangolis of Rajasthan on walls as well as the floor of a dwelling.

(Image source)

It is believed that the practice of these floor paintings existed before the Vedic age and was fundamental to life. The symbols used conveyed the complex philosophical concepts and the rituals they were used in enriched the fabric of daily life. With the spread of the beliefs and practices of the Indus Valley culture the geometric designs became absorbed into the contemporary rituals, not as mere decorations but as profound expressions of devotion.

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It is believed that the first visual traces of rangolis were found in one of the seals of Mohenjo-Daro in a geometric form that resembled a mandala. The word mandala comes from a Sanskrit word that means - circle and mandalas can be recognized by their concentric circles and other geometrical figures. Mandalas are far more than sacred geometrical figures; they are rich with symbolism and sacred meaning like the container of the universal essence. A mandala when created becomes a sacred area that serves as a receptacle for the Gods and Goddesses and a collection point of universal forces. It is believed that a person by mentally entering a mandala and proceeding to its centre is symbolically guided through the cosmos to the essence of reality.



Mandala (Image source)

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At the core of a mandala is the circle. (Image source)



A Sri Yantra mandala (Image source)

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In the rangoli elements, the bindu or the point, symbolizes the origin from which everything emanates, and into which everything merges. The trikona, a triangle, represents the male and female principles operating in the universe. The catuskona, a square, represents stability. The pancakona, the pentagon, is the symbol of the five elements, earth, air, fire, water and ether. The satkona, the six-pointed star or hexagram, is the male and female triangle symbols interposed, and is often used to worship the goddess Lakshmi. The astakona, octagon, is the symbol of protection, assigned to the god Vishnu. The chakra, or circle, symbolizes life and growth.



Rangoli with triangles, tridents, and petals.

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Rangoli with the celestial symbols-sun, moon, conch, Lord Ganesh. (Images source)



A traditional square shaped aipan form of rangoli with multitude of swastikas in the centre. (Images source)

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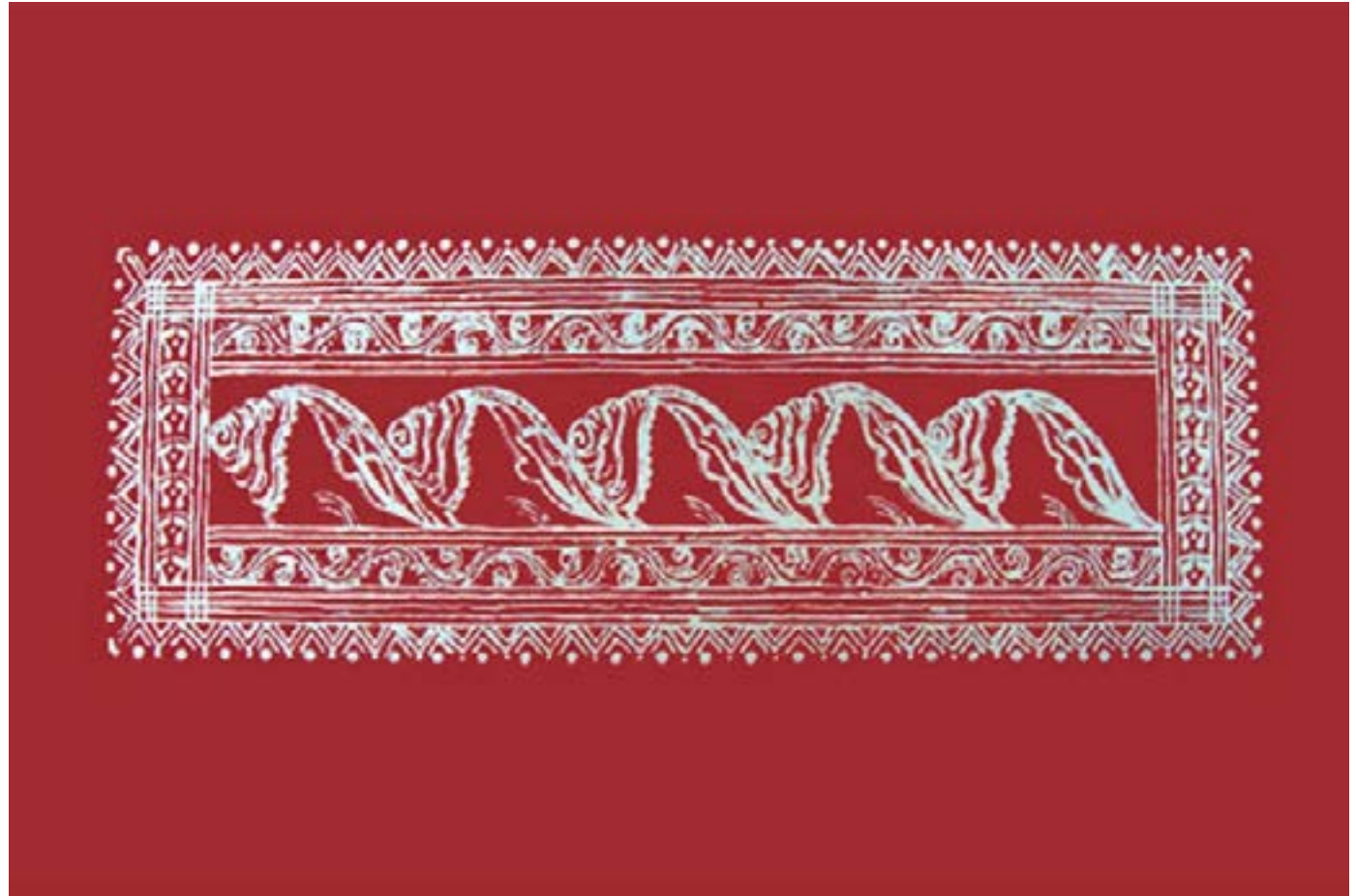
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Source:

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The mandana designs of Rajasthan have close similarities with the geometrical motifs, like triangles, squares, circles, swastikas, chess board patterns, multiple horizontal bands and wavy lines such as those appearing on the chalcolithic pottery type of the Indus Valley (circa 3000 BC). In fact, fish with wings, conch, scorpion and navagraha etc are motifs in alpana of Bengal that dates back to Indus Valley Civilization.



A rectangular aipan form of rangoli used as a border with the conch and footprints.
([Images source](#))

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A rangoli with a conch as a central element.

In Hindu theology the earth is revered as the most sacred - as a nourisher, giver, sustainer and a protector. It is also adoringly referred to as mother earth and venerated in many different ways; hence the rangolis are made on the floor. Also of all the creatures that live underground, the snakes known as Nagas are of great significance to the Hindus. A universal symbol, the snake is a complex symbol, simultaneously linked with life and death, light and darkness, good and evil, venom and cure, preservation and destruction. A Vedic lore says that Nagas once rolled on grass on which Amrit, the nectar of immortality was once kept. Hence they have the ability like the earth to renew their fertility by replacing old skin with new. So they are revered as symbols of change, renewal and regeneration and are worshiped for progeny, prosperity and health. One of the most significant symbols used in Hindu religious rituals and adopted in some rangoli forms – the Swastika has its origin in the snake. The swastik, or swastika, is the symbol of four cardinal points, or the cycle of the sun, symbol of Brahma, symbol of Buddha, and good luck, and is frequently depicted in floor decorations.

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A tree shaped aipan form of rangoli with the auspicious swastika, footprints and other elements. (Images source)



A rangoli with a swastika as the main element.

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A decorated swastika in the aipan format of rangoli. (Images source)

Floral representations became popular with the spread of the Vaishnavite cults along the Gangetic plains. Among the deities who are worshiped, Lakshmi is considered all over India as the goddess of abundance, fertility, and prosperity. Most of the household rangolis by Indian women are dedicated to her. Vishnu and Lakshmi are worshiped using motifs which symbolise the attributes of preservation, love, abundance, fertility and prosperity. Thus, plants, creepers, flowers etc. as motifs have predominance in floor paintings dedicated to these two deities. Lotus – the flower associated with both these deities, symbolises all the best things that can emerge from the mire of life. This is used with four, five, eight, nine, ten, sixteen or thirty-two petals as per the design requirement. All these numbers also have some occult significance.

Another most frequently used motif in rangolis is the footprint or the paglya. This indicates the arrival and the presence of a compassionate deity into the dwelling. Rangolis are specifically drawn to create a location within temporal space to accommodate the presence of a deity, and the footprints indicate a “landing spot”. It is for this reason that the foot prints figure in most of the types of rangolis all across India. They are most commonly used to invite Goddess Lakshmi during Diwali or Lord Krishna during Janmashtami. Some rangolis have a series of footprints, indicating the path a deity should take to come into the sacred space.

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In Bengal, foot-prints are drawn on the ground as an integral part of alpona designs and usually these are attributed to Lakshmi. In Bihar foot prints appear on a long chain of lotus flowers drawn on the ground during ritual performance. The paglya or footprint designs are very popular amongst the womenfolk in Rajasthan that they are attracted more to the paglyas of Lakshmi than to the charanas (foot-prints) of Vishnu. During Diwali, the most elaborate rangoli decorations incorporate the paglya designs. The belief that Goddess Lakshmi dwells only bright and well decorated areas and not in the dark, is what makes the women take pains to decorate their homes during Diwali with superb rangolis that surpass those found during other festivals. In south India the tradition is to draw the footprints of Goddess Lakshmi and then harmoniously juxtapose it by Lord Vishnu's.



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Foot prints are the key elements in these aipan format of rangolis. ([Images source](#))

The pot, representing the container of personal wealth is also a popular motif. A pot represents wealth that is contained within the confines of civilization. It is not free wealth that exists in nature, but that which has been claimed. Purna Kumbha as it is also known is an ancient Hindu symbol that represents the pregnant mother goddess, a deity worshipped as harbinger of good—fortune and fertility and is regarded as an auspicious symbol.

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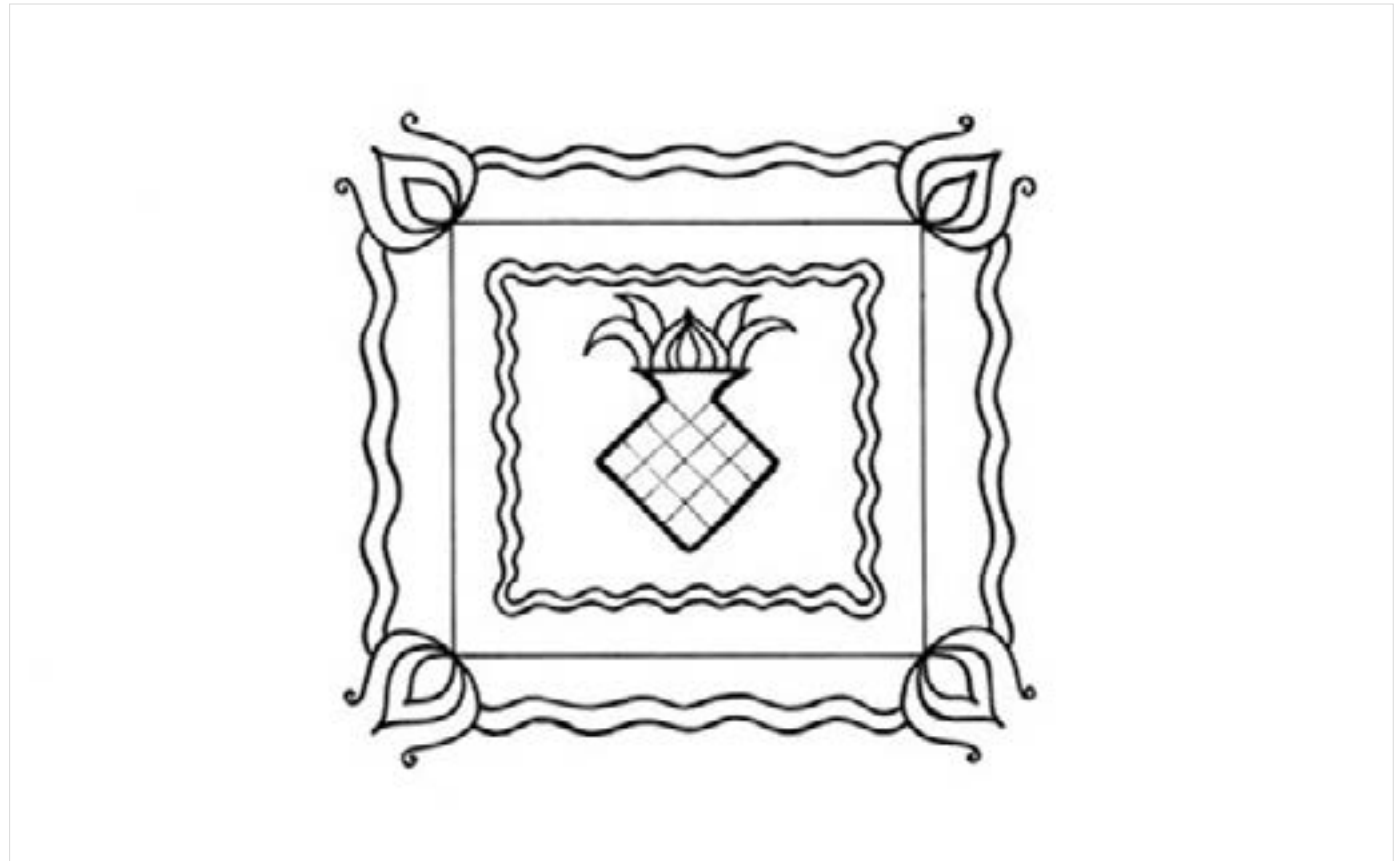
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Kalash/ Purna kumbha in a rangoli.

The designs used in rangolis are symbolic and common to the entire country, and can include along with the geometrical patterns of lines, dots, squares, circles, triangles also the swastika, lotus, trident, fish, conch shell, motifs from nature- peacocks, swans, mango shapes, creepers, leaves, trees, flowers, animals and anthropomorphic figures, celestial symbols such as the rising sun, moon, stars, zodiac signs, holy symbols like Om, mangal kalash, chakra, a lighted Deepak, trident, "shree", etc. These motifs are often modified to fit in with the local images, symbology and rhythms.

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Peacock as a central element in rangolis:



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(Image source)

The rangolis in different parts of India differ not only in forms and colours but also vary in frequency and occasions. In Bengal and Rajasthan, it is not necessary to draw an alpana design every day. The rangolis are mainly drawn on Purnima, Ekadashi, Amavasya, Pradosh days and on some festival days. Like in Bengal, in Rajasthan too, the floor paintings are drawn on occasions related to marriage, naming ceremony, first rice eating ceremony or the sacred thread ceremony. On festivals or auspicious occasions like Diwali, Holi, Makar Sankranti, Sripanchami (Saraswati Puja), Laxmi Puja, Prabhodhni Ekadashi, Maha Ashtami Puja, Raksha Bandhan, Pongal etc such floor paintings are drawn. On these occasions the cow dung is spread on the floor where the pujas are to be performed and then decorated with suitable rangoli designs.

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Unlike Bengal and Rajasthan, in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Southern Peninsula rangoli making is practiced daily. Early in the morning, every day the women in these regions clean a little space on the outer side of the entrance gate, or the threshold to their homes and make the rangolis. Usually a swastika is created in Gujarat, whereas in South India kolams or muggulu are drawn. In Maharashtra the rangoli is drawn in the area around the Tulsi plant and also around the place where the food is served.



Pongal/Makar Sankranti rangoli with all the elements related to the festival- kalash, sun, the decorated bull's head, sugarcane etc.

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A Diwali rangoli with swastika, kalash and other auspicious symbols.



Janmashtami rangoli with a stretch of decorated footprints leading to the pooja altar. (Image source)

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These decorations are transient and ephemeral in nature lasting only a few hours at the most before being worn off by the activity of people or weather. This is similar to the Hindu belief that the body is transient and the atma or the soul, which lies within is what is permanent, and is the real self of man. One way to acknowledge this transience is by celebrating transience itself- by creating the transient art of rangoli. This ephemeral art also echoes the beautiful but ever changing nature around us.

This ritual art form has been passed down from generation to generation and is a common thread that unites the innumerable cultures of India, people who are otherwise divided by race, language, caste, religion, and occupation. In a society dominated by men, rangoli is the inheritance and artistic expression of the woman through their own techniques and symbols – prayers painted or ‘written’ from the heart.

The floor paintings employed many symbols, which represented a way of seeing, a different perception of life. But with advancement in technology, mechanized living, and changing social structures this formal ritual is slowly losing its original meaning. The concept of viewing the cosmic forces with awe or reverence and drawing rangolis with a prayer in the heart are slowly going away at least in urban India, except on certain religious functions or festivals.

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Materials used for Rangolis

DESIGN EVOLUTION IN RANGOLIS



(Image source)

Rangoli is very much an 'art of the moment', much like sand sculptures or street paintings. Its transient nature means it is dynamic, much like life, and culture.

Generally, traditional rangoli designs tend to be geometric and proportioned, though this has changed over time and newer themes and variations are being explored. Rangolis can be of any size, from the size of a doormat, to the size of an entire room.

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Rangoli was originally done in small patterns like, 2 feet square. Nowadays, entrance to homes, wedding halls, large areas of floor in hotel foyers, are covered in intricate and detailed rangoli designs. Traditionally, such floor decorations were done only on auspicious occasions or festivals. But today, they grace many occasions such as - weddings, birthday parties, opening ceremonies, corporate functions etc.

The one important point that all rangoli artists follow implicitly is to see that the entire pattern is created by an unbroken line, with no gaps to be left anywhere so there is no opening for evil spirits to enter. This is a strong belief in the Indian culture. This is important as rangolis are mostly drawn as an auspicious expression of hospitality to invite Gods/Goddesses and also guests to bless one's home.

Women have traditionally been creating the rangoli patterns from memory while watching their mothers and grandmothers draw them all their lives. Girls on their way home from school would look at neighbour's patterns and attempt to reproduce them when they got home. These days, girls copy from rangoli pattern books available from Indian publishing companies such as Navneet, or from weekly magazines and websites that feature "new" rangoli patterns, non-traditional patterns, some even include depictions of Santa Claus.

Materials Used

The materials that are used to make a rangoli are easily found everywhere – therefore there is no income divide – it is found at homes rich and poor. A variety of ingredients are used to create a Rangoli.

The day to day rangolis - the line drawings, in geometric and symmetrical shapes are drawn with dry rice powder or with rice paste. Rice powder is used because it is white in colour and readily available. Also, it serves to feed ants/insects and small birds. This shows that one must take care of other forms of life too, to create a natural balance.

The dry, coarsely ground rice powder is placed between the thumb and forefinger and rubbed together and moved along a predetermined design by the artist. On festive occasions, large designs, depicting the occasion are drawn in front of the entrance to the house, and smaller ones inside the house. These are then outlined in red with 'kavi' a red brick paste, to make it look grander and more beautiful.

All over India, floor paintings are essentially white in colour. White is a symbol of peace, purity and tranquillity. The material used is rice flour or rice paste, because rice to all Indians is a sign of prosperity. Finely ground white stone powder or chalk is used these days, as this is easier to apply and makes the rangolis brighter and well finished. (A better preparation is obtained by using a combination of white stone powder and rice flour.)

Yet another symbol of prosperity is the colour yellow. Turmeric which is yellow or ochre in colour is also often used to fill in the white outlines. Sometimes, vermilion or kumkum is also used. Vermilion, is considered auspicious.

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Initially, colours were traditionally derived from natural dyes - from barks of trees, leaves, indigo, etc. However, today, synthetic dyes are used in a range of bright colours.

When coloured powder such as rice, chilli, turmeric, etc. are used to enhance the white powder creations the rangoli takes on a flat 2-D like appearance. Whereas a 3-D effect in rangolis is achieved when cereals, pulses either in their natural colouring or tinted with natural dyes are used to decorate and elevate the look. Some artists use the 3-D effect for borders alone while others create beautiful designs using grains and beads entirely. Grains, pulses, beads, or flowers are also used to achieve the desired effects.

Modern day materials used in rangoli

Coloured powders like indigo used for cloth staining, spices like turmeric, rawa, rice flour, flour of wheat etc are traditionally used in the rangoli patterns.



Rangoli powders sold in markets (Image source)

Coloured powders like indigo used for cloth staining, spices like turmeric, chili, rawa, rice flour, flour of wheat etc are traditionally used in the rangoli patterns.

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But in the present day, coloured powder is usually used directly for fancy decorations, but for detailed work, generally the material is a coarse grained powder base into which colours are mixed. The base is chosen to be coarse so that it can be gripped well and sprinkled with good control. The base can be sand, marble dust, saw dust, brick dust or other materials. The colours generally are very fine pigment powders like gulal/aabir available for the Holi festival or colours (mentioned above) specially sold for rangoli in South India. Powder colours can be simply mixed into the base.

If the base is light like saw dust, it can be used to make floating rangolis on the surface of still water. Sometimes saw-dust or sand is soaked into water based colours and dried to give various tints. If a rangoli is to be made on water, the colour should preferably be insoluble in water.

A large variety of materials are used to make the rangoli designs in the present day.

People across the country have learnt to experiment and mix and match materials as the creative minds that make these rangolis are looking for innovative and modern answers. These materials are also coloured as per the need.

A rangoli using these modern materials was created by students of IDC for the inaugural ceremony of TYPOGRAPHY DAY at IITB. This is a perfect example of the combination of learned rangoli skills, usage of modern materials and innovation and adaptation of the design to suit the occasion. The following pictures indicate the same. One can observe from this rangoli the usage of certain alphabets from some of the Indian languages as repetitive design elements.



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A link to the video of the making of this rangoli is also given. The video captures not only the skilled rendering but also showcases the dexterity of the person creating it. This kind of an excellence comes only with long practise and a sense of scale, proportion and a keen sense of colour sensitivity. Most ardent rangoli creators possess these skill sets.

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Pulses and coloured powders in a rangoli



Pulses used for making Rangoli (Image source)

Coloured powders in a rangoli



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Floating rangolis created on water



(Image source)

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(Image source)

People across the country have learnt to experiment and mix and match materials as the creative minds that make these rangolis are looking for innovative and modern answers. These materials are also coloured as per the need.

A brief list of the rangoli materials used in the modern day is as follows:

- **Rangoli colours:** These are readily available in the market.
- **Marble dust:** This gives a good result, but becomes very heavy to carry in bulk.
- **Saw dust:** Sawdust is easier to handle and spread. It even floats on water.
- **Rice:** This is used as it is or ground for fine texture. Grains of rice can be used by themselves or they can be coloured using food colours.
- **Coloured Suzi/rawa:** These grains are harder than saw dust and easy to spread, but they do not mix too well with colours.
- **Petals:** Rose petals, marigold petals, small purple flowers, finely cut grass, leaves like methi leaves etc can be used to fill up large designs. Strings of marigold, strings of kanakambara (orange coloured slim delicate flowers available in South India), jasmine etc also are used to outline the rangolis.

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- **Pulses:** Different shaped and coloured pulses are used to fill up large rangoli designs. They lend a texture to the patterns.

- **Fabric or poster colour mixed with chalk powder:** Small quantity of colour is mixed with chalk powder and applied with a brush on the floor. This looks like a painting on the floornot a traditional form of rangoli, but it has an advantage over the traditional format as it is very easy to create and lasts relatively longer.

- **Coloured stones:** These are used only for big and abstract rangolis as finesse is not possible with such materials. Also, they are neatly arranged in the patterns rather than spread by hand.

Materials used during special occasions in rangolis:

Rangoli also has a religious significance, enhancing the beauty of the surroundings and spreading joy and happiness all around. In Indian cultures, all guests and visitors occupy a very special place, and a rangoli is an expression of this warm hospitality. In particular, the Diwali festival is widely celebrated with rangoli, since at this time people visit each other's homes to exchange greetings and sweets. Festivals like the Onam and Diwali are Indian religious events where the Rangoli designs are used profusely.

Onam

In the south Indian state of Kerala, flowers like marigolds and chrysanthemums and leaves are used to create Rangoli-the floor art is also known as pookalam. This is specially done on Onam Day (the most important festival in Kerala) or during the whole Onam Week, when designs are changed every day.

Traditional pookolams on the occasion of Onam festival



(Image source)

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(Image source)

These rangoli designs may be created directly on to washed, wet floors or on a layer of wet mud. The designs start in a small way but as the days go by, more and more rangoli artists join and the designs get bigger and more beautiful. Not all flowers are suitable as some may fade and dry very quickly. For example, the bougainvillea which comes in beautiful shades of red, pink and white cannot be used because they wither very soon. Petals of various flowers, such as oleanders, cosmos, zinnia, chrysanthemums, daisies, roses, jasmine, and green leaves are arranged into lines and filled shapes. Sometimes the petals of large flowers, such as dahlias, are separated from the flower and these are used to fill the designs. Whole flowers may be used as borders to outline a design. Again, it is entirely up to the artist to use his or her imagination. Flowers being products of nature and being beautiful add a wonderful dimension of their own to the floor art. The combination of colours and flowers reflect the creativity of the artist. The THUMBA flower is a special flower that is small and light coloured and in the shape of a heel and sole of a foot, nicknamed, the VISHNU foot; it is necessary to use this in all flower kolams during ONAM.

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These pookolams being offerings to God are never cleared away with a broom when they need to be removed and are cleared only by hand.

Diwali

Diwali is the most lavish Hindu festival, occurring in October or November at the close of the rainy season, observed to propitiate the Lakshmi, goddess of plenty, luck and prosperity. Women create rangoli patterns that invoke Lakshmi to manifest in their domestic space, securing her blessings and abundance in all walks of life. During Diwali, women create rangoli in every corner of the dwelling space, with multiple auspicious designs. Hexagons and six pointed stars, and six petaled lotuses are particularly used for Diwali to honour Goddess Lakshmi.

Lakshmi footprints in a rangoli for Lakshmi puja during Diwali.



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Rangoli

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(Image source)

During Diwali, Goddess Lakshmi is believed to visit homes that are well decorated and well lit, so families decorate their homes. People wear their best clothes or buy new ones, children are given presents and New Year greetings are exchanged through visits or Diwali cards.

Adorning the entrances of individual homes with Diwali rangolis to welcome everyone is a common practice during this festival. Since the entire objective of making rangoli in Diwali is to welcome Goddess Laxmi small footprints coming into the home, representing the footprints of the Goddess, are made at the main entrance of the home or near the place of worship, which indicates the entry of prosperity into the home. It is considered very auspicious as it signifies showering of good luck and prosperity on the family residing in such a well decorated home.

During Diwali some of the rangoli designs that are made are circular exuding a sense of endlessness of time. A central rangoli design is the symbolic one denoting the deity or the theme. Motifs that are generally used are lotus, fish, birds, snakes etc. which reflect the unity of man and beast. Layered with symbolism, Goddess Lakshmi in the lotus is represented in the rangolis, which indicates renewed life or the unfolding of life. Sometimes an elaborate rangoli usually has the look of a painting.

Traditional Diwali rangolis

Also during this festival, two interfaced triangles are created that indicates the deity of learning, Sarswati. Encircling this is a 24-petal lotus flower border, the outer circle being decorated with Lakshmi's footprints repeated in four corners. Sometimes the lotus petals are made in a triangular shape for variety. In north Bihar, Lakshmi's feet are drawn at the door, the toes pointing inwards to indicate her entrance.

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Traditional Diwali rangoli -alpana



(Image source)

Goddess Lakshmi in a rangoli for Diwali



(Image source)

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Some Diwali rangolis from across the country



(Image source)



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In Andhra Pradesh during Diwali an eight-petal lotus (ashtadal kamal) and many geometric patterns forming the lotus are created. In Tamil Nadu the hridaya kamalam an eight-pointed star meaning lotus of the heart is drawn. In Maharashtra too, the lotus is a basic motif during Diwali and designs like shankh kamal - shell lotus and thabak (which means salver) is in the shape of an eight-petal lotus with straight lines elaborated with curving lines to give it the appearance of a salver. In Gujarat there are said to be 1001 variations of the lotus which are drawn during Diwali, the festival when Goddess Lakshmi is worshiped.

The Diwali festival is marked by gaiety and prosperity all over the southern part of India. The rangolis drawn are basically geometric patterns formed with dots and lines to make squares, circles, swastikas, lotus, trident, fish, conch shell, footprints, creepers, trees and bear testimony both to individual genius and community participation as, many women work for days together on creating a single design.

Oil lamps or diyas are lit in these rangolis towards the evenings, creating a festive atmosphere.

Modern day innovations in rangoli

The rangoli provides an object for “fascination” or attention in a sacred space, in an atmosphere filled with festivity and devotion and the eye follows the orderly pattern of the rangoli with directed attention. A rangoli is filled with culturally recognizable symbols for comfort, protection, and wish fulfilment, and is a visual encounter with an aesthetically pleasing, moderately complex pattern.

But now with changing housing construction and social structures in India these are affecting the presence and requirement of rangoli. People are moving to urban apartment blocks where there is no area that can be set apart for pooja. Floor surfaces, such as tiled, carpeted and linoleum are poorly suited for the creation of rangolis. Also many families have emigrated to other countries where the practice of this floor art becomes almost non-existent. But all this has not deterred the rangoli enthusiasts. They practice them on paper, on the computer, or conduct competitions, or network to form clubs so as to find avenues to conserve this creative art.

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Dassera rangolis:



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Modern day rangoli designs

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Rangoli competitions



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In India, over the years different cultures have merged into its soul so the rangoli design is now seen more as a creative form of decoration during festivals and events than only a religious element. These influences are sometimes seen at Christmas time with elements like bells, reindeer, Santa Claus and different Holly wreaths used as a repetitive design element woven into geometrical rangoli designs.

Christmas related Santa rangolis



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(Image source)

Further, artists hold exhibitions on Rangoli and other floor art where various modifications of the traditional art can be seen. Thus, in one variation, artists use even water as their medium! For this, a tank or tub of water is taken and kept in an area where the water will not be disturbed by breeze or movement of air. A fine layer of charcoal powder (which is light and floats on the surface) is sprinkled on the surface and the artist creates his/her designs using the rangoli powders on this water panel. The effect is magnificent, to say the least.

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Unique , abstract rangolis



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(Image source)

Not all rangoli enthusiasts or practitioners are born artists. So to help them draw geometric designs, guides such as dots are placed strategically in the required shape of the design and then the artist connects these dots or goes around them in curves, lines and circles to create the design. In the present day market, there are several gadgets and design books to help the novice achieve near perfect rangolis - there are rollers - hollow tin rollers with handles and designs drilled on the surface, to be filled with rice powder and dragged effortlessly along the floor or across steps in diagonal lines to produce intricately designed rangolis. There are also plastic and metal trays, stencils or templates, sieve like trays with different rangoli designs on them to create instant rangolis; these have tiny holes along the pattern outline, so that when the rangoli powder is spread over the pattern, only the rangoli pattern gets transferred on to the floor instantly and neatly. There are also the kolam/rangoli stickers which can be stuck on the floor, in front of the altar or on the front doorstep. When these rangoli templates with various designs are used in combination with the rangoli rollers, new rangoli designs get created.

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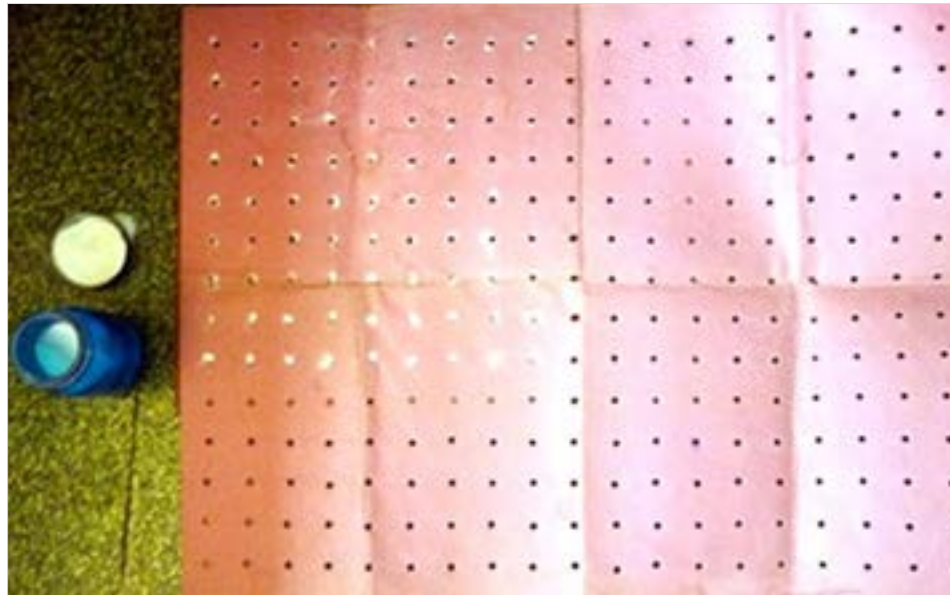
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Rangoli chaaps or grid sheet



(Image source)

Rangoli stickers



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(Image source)

Stencils for rangoli

There are also plastic and metal trays, stencils or templates, sieve like trays with different rangoli designs on them to create instant rangolis; these have tiny holes along the pattern outline, so that when the rangoli powder is spread over the pattern, only the rangoli pattern gets transferred on to the floor instantly and neatly.



Plastic stencil trays and pattern sieves

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The plastic stencil trays come in different sizes; small ones with a single simple pattern, or a border pattern and large ones with a bigger complex pattern.

The plastic stencil tray is placed on the floor. The coloured rangoli powder is put into the stencil tray, and then spread with the fingers over the pattern with holes, while holding down the tray firmly. Then the tray is gently lifted up taking care not to smudge, leaving the dotted rangoli pattern on the floor.



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Plastic pattern sieves

Circular pattern sieves come in small and large sizes with simple patterns and complex designs.

Similar to the plastic stencil tray, the plastic sieve is placed on the floor and the coloured rangoli powder is sprayed over it and gently dabbed down with the fingers. The sieve is then carefully lifted up without smudging, leaving behind the rangoli pattern on the floor.

In this way a fast and instant rangoli gets created even by a novice rangoli maker.

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These rangoli templates with various designs when used in combination with the rangoli rollers, and with some creative planning new rangoli designs get created!

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Further Links

- <http://www.cmi.ac.in/gift/Kolam.htm>
- http://www.manadhi.com/Indian_Culture/Muggulu_Kolam_Designs.aspx
- <http://www.culturalindia.net/indian-art/rangoli/alpana.html>
- <http://vindhiya.com/Naranan/Fibonacci-Kolams/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20%20fokolampart2a-081108.pdf>
- <http://www.mendeley.com/research/solving-infinite-kolam-in-knot-theory/#page-1>
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Video



Making of Jhoti or Chita



Making of Nalvaravu kolam



Stop Animation film of Nalvaravu kolam



Significance of Nalvaravu kolam

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Making of a pookolam at IDC



Making of Hridaya Kamalam kolam



Stop Animation Hridaya Kamalam kolam



Significance of Hridaya Kamalam kolam

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Making of Daily Pulli kolam



Stop Animation film of Daily Pulli kolam



Significance of Daily Pulli kolam



Chukkala Muggu

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Coloured Chukkala Muggu



Sanskarbharti

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