3.1 Basic Research Concepts

The study used multimethod as research design. The emergence of multimethod approach in research area was to improve the research process and finding. The main advantages of multimethod are (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003):

1. Triangulation – seeking to validate data and results by combining a range of data sources, methods, or observers
2. Creativity – discovering fresh or paradoxical factors that stimulate further work
3. Expansion – widening the scope of the study to take in contextual aspects of the situation.

Collecting different kinds of data by different methods from different sources provides a wider range of coverage that may result in a fuller picture of the unit under study than would have been achieved otherwise (Pastor & Esteves, 2004).

3.1.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was started in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss. It is an approach in order to generate and discover theory that is grounded in data systematically obtained from social research. The grounded theory uses different methods for the data collection; in-depth interviews, observational methods, focus group, collection of artefacts and texts.

The grounded theory has been made used widely in this research study. Majority of data and information were collected using the grounded theory methods.

Grounded theory involves constant comparative analysis/method where the researcher moves in and out of the data collection and analysis process, known as ‘iteration’. This process helps in first stage of generation of questions; that leads to theoretical sampling and finally the saturation point. The grounded theory approach used three levels of
coding as part of the process; open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

### 3.1.2 Phenomenology

Contributed by Edmund Husserl, research phenomenology, as a method aims at ‘…how people experience a particular phenomenon’ (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Researchers look at the experiences of individuals and their construction of meaning. Experience, in a phenomenological sense, includes not only the passive experiences of sensory perception but also internal aspects like imagination, thought, emotion, desire, volition and action (Mastin, 2008). It usually involves long, in-depth, interviews with subjects and sometimes researchers will interview the same subject several times to get a full picture of their experience with the phenomenon. The ultimate goal of the phenomenological method, in research, is to formulate a better understanding of the phenomenon by going through the interpretations of those who have experienced it. The final outcome of the phenomenological study is a description of the essence or essential common structure of an experience (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

In the process of research, there was a complete suspension of biased judgments from the part of the researcher on what is real. It tries to maintain the experience of individual as well as the community by getting into the experience of the participants and look at it as they see it. As part of the phenomenological method, many stories, narrations and descriptions were collected from individuals and communities.

In the process of a phenomenological approach, there were limitations and challenges in terms of reaching too many participants to have the same kind of experiences. Another reason was due to the diverse nature of the Kolam practice in different spaces.
3.1.3 Content Analysis

Content analysis is one of the methods for the purpose of analysing qualitative data and to interpret its meaning (Elo, et al., 2014). As a research method it represents a systematic and objective means of describing and qualifying phenomena (Schreier, 2012). The method of content analysis can be used either in inductive content analysis or deductive content analysis. Both the ways have mandatory three phases which is preparation, organisation and reporting of the result.

3.1.4 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis proves to take an important step in identifying and interpreting a set of verbal or non-verbal signs which is found in many things such as books, clothing, architecture in our regular day to day surroundings. As Peirce (1998) states the significance of a sign i.e. it compels you to think about something other than itself.
According to Vanderstoep & Johnston (2009), the researcher is the interpreter of the selected text or texts. In textual analysis, there are an infinite number of possible interpretations of any given text and each interpretation is equally valid. The researcher’s interpretation is, therefore, only one of many possible valid interpretations of a given text.

In the process of textual analysis, meaning can be analyzed from the intention of the speaker, the reaction of the audience, the historical or cultural context in which the text was produced or the contemporary historical and cultural context in which the text is experienced these days.

In this study, the researcher has taken this approach to decode meanings carried in Kolam designs. Different kinds and forms of Kolam drawings are taken as texts to interpret meanings and representations. These texts are considered as performances in Kolam preparation. Interviews with Kolam makers and experts also form as texts for analysis.

3.1.5 Semiotic Analysis

Semiotics, the science of symbols, points out that humans do not only communicate directly. Further this science as a tool can be used in understanding how we communicate through symbols. We sometimes use an object represent something else. Here the terms signifier and signified are used; a symbol represents something else, it is a signifier for something and that ‘something’ is the signified²

According to semiotics (semiology), signs are everywhere and everything is a sign -- words, images, sounds, and the absence of any. Other words, anything from which some meanings may be generated falls under the category. The Semiotics-Machine is constantly working in our brains. We compulsorily need to have a "meaning" and we give our "reading" to everything we see.

The roots of semiotics trail back at least as far as the pre-Socratic era, where Hippocrates identified bodily manifested symptoms (signs) as conveyors of messages.

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² Ellen Särngren & Anna Åberg. *The Importance of Appearance*. Göteborgs universitet
about physical and mental states. Though Plato, Aristotle, Poinsot, Locke, Leibniz, and Vico all discussed signs, symbols, and communication, it was not until the turn of the 20th century that semiotics achieved its identity through the independently developed works of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce.

Anything and everything can be analysed semiotically. In that sense it can be called as the queen of the interpretive sciences, the key that unlocks the meaning of all things great and small.

3.1.6 Mythology

“Myth” is derived from the Greek word *mythos*, which can mean tale, or story, and that is essentially what a myth is: a story. Myths are the different stories existing in a particular culture which explains the belief system and history of that society. These story lines include various aspects of the society like traditions of society, functioning of human and natural worlds, narrations on god and goddesses, supernatural ideas and emotions. Myth is a word used interchangeably with the terms such as; legends, folklore and fables (Campbell, 2016) (Monford & Lenardon, 1999).

Classical Mythology (Monford & Lenardon, 1999), draws a close connection of myths with various subjects like religion, psychology, society, social characters, structuralism, feminism, and a variety of other subjects. Mythology has an important role in a culture because it provides a continuity and stability to the society through its perspectives, values and history. It also provides certain guidelines and attitudes for a better living. Different customs, rituals, laws religious tenets, social structure, power hierarchy, territorial claims, arts, crafts, festivals and events are rooted in myths existing in a culture. Myths give meaning to life by transcending oneself from the level of pains and struggles. Sometimes myths play the role of providing role models to the people, in order, to give strength, courage, and persistence. Therefore, these unexplainable realities have been made into simple explainable form (Campbell, 2016).

According to Joseph (Campbell, 2016) the myths are of different kinds:

1. Primitive myths
2. Pagan myths
3. Sacred myths
4. Scientific myths
5. Cosmic myths
6. Theistic myths
7. Hero myths
8. Place and object myths

Kolam is also a process of telling a story, a myth. It is closely connected and associated with culture, life, history, festivals, religious rituals and art. The study has made use of looking into such myths and understanding Kolam tradition from the perspective of mythology. Many stories existing among the people who follow Kolam tradition were documented orally.

3.1.7 Exploratory Research

Exploratory Research is apt for the study as it aims to gain familiarity with unknown situations, problems or even a community. It helps in discovering able insights and ideas that formulate a problem for the study with the elaborate investigation. It is a highly structured study design that helps in clarification of concepts and priorities for further research. It also helps in gathering information about practical possibilities for carrying out research in a real life setting.

It is a flexible research design, permitting the consideration of different aspects of a phenomenon. Exploratory research normally ends up with the development of specific systematic research project.

3.1.8 Constructivist Epistemology

Constructivist Epistemology is an epistemological perspective in Philosophy about the nature of scientific knowledge. This perspective claims that scientific knowledge is constructed by scientists and not discovered from the world. It opposes positivism where knowledge is based on real sense experience. Auerswald defines epistemology as “a set of imminent rules used in thought by large groups of people to define reality” or, “thinking about thinking” and goes on to say that it is “the study or theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge” (Auerswald, 1985). Constructivists believe that
representations of the physical reality is socially constructed. In other sense, people construct their reality with those belonging to their society and nature (Ültan, 2012). Ültan states that, construction of one’s understanding has the base on the learner’s past experience and background knowledge. In the same manner, whatever is newly created and constructed by an individual’s understanding and knowledge is only through the existing believes, ideas, and activities with which one has come into contact (Ültan, 2012).

3.2 Ethical Consideration

3.2.1 Privacy and anonymity

Participants in the research, especially the women folk of the village, were not comfortable to reveal their names and personal details. Hence the researcher maintained these conditions.

3.2.2 Confidentiality

The information given was for the purpose of research and was solely used for this. Moreover, it has not been shared with any organization, group or individual.

3.2.3 Informed consent

It was important to tell the participants regarding the nature of the study. They were also requested for certain needs and the research process and the purpose of the things carried out by them were told to them. This helped in conducting the interview in the right direction as they were already informed about things carried out by the researcher.

3.2.4 Rapport

Before carrying out the discussion and interview, it was essential to develop good rapport and friendship with the people of the village. So, the researcher disclosed his identity and told the purpose and importance to carry out the research and gradually made some friends who could help out in proceeding with the methods.
3.2.5 Intrusiveness

The researcher ensured that he would not intrude too much, respecting participants or interviewees to have their personal space. Since the rapport was to be developed more with women, it was necessary to approach them with sincerity.

3.2.6 Data interpretation

The data that was gathered was not misinterpreted and manipulated in any manner. The language was translated only, if needed, in certain cases.

3.2.7 Data ownership and rewards

The researcher has credited the participants of the study for their information. Works have been cited and sourced according to their information. Permission was taken orally through word of mouth.

3.3 Participants

The participants for this study were women who make Kolam as part of their traditional custom or ritual regularly. These women are from rural villages and urban cities of both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. They belong to traditional Tamil Hindu families settled in various parts of these states mentioned. The study has also explored among some Tamil Christian women during the field visits to their natives in Tamil Nadu. Majority of the participants were women who are married, both young and aged with experience. The remaining participants belonged to teenage groups. Apart from these women folk as participants, some of the men belonging to those families were also interviewed as part of data collection.

Individual interviews were conducted at their respective homes. Around thirty interviews were conducted in those villages as part of the field study. The animators and mediators were of great help in connecting with those participants. However, in cities, language was not a barrier to interact with the interviewees.

Eight focus group interviews were conducted in respective villages and cities. Each group consisted of five to fifteen members in focus group interviews. It was a difficult
task of managing the attention of interviewees due to language problems, but the interpreter managed to control their conversations, bringing about required specific details that associated with the study.

![Figure 3 Field visits](image_url)

### 3.4 Groundwork for Data Collection

#### 3.4.1 Identifying locations

The primary task of the entire process is the identification of locations for information gathering. This is carried out by randomly interacting with people known by the researcher, then following up on noting down locations and seeing the possibilities of reaching out via google maps. It was essential to identify the right location to gather the right information.
3.4.2 Preparation of Maps

Maps of each place had been prepared, well in advance, for familiarization of place and location. Google maps helped in the preparation of those maps. Screenshots of these maps have been taken from computer and printed. Detailed description of the location has been marked with a pen for reference. Maps were useful for identifying location, direction, roads, houses, institutions and other details of each place.

It was difficult to get the detailed (zoomed) information of certain places because they were not visible in Google maps. In order to overcome the situation, separate maps were prepared by hand and marked with information.

![Google map as an assistance to field study](image)

Figure 4 Google map as an assistance to field study

3.4.3 Coordination with Animators

There were animators from different areas who coordinated with the researcher to visit villages. This was necessary because there were some experts from these villages who facilitated interactions with the womenfolk of different communities. The animators were contacted over phone followed by series of discussions that took place in order to visit the villages. With required permissions, the researcher approached these villages to identify varieties of Kolam designs and makers.
3.4.4 Planning for Field work

The entire process for field visits took place in this way – firstly, the dates for field visits were confirmed with the animators. Secondly, necessary equipment that included camera, recorder, and stationery for information gathering was packed. Thirdly, a travel plan was devised which included accommodation and mode of transport in different villages.

3.4.5 Understanding People and Culture

It is important to develop an inclination towards the understanding of people and culture, before visiting the villages. There were varied differences observed in the course of the research with regards to the approach and relationship that was to be maintained during the field visit. This was also helpful to get easy accessibility and develop good rapport with the village folk. Prior to the visit, more details were gathered from the animator regarding individuals or groups of people who were ready to be interviewed.

3.5 Techniques of Data Collection

3.5.1 Use of Multiple Sources of Data

Different sources of data are used in order to avoid any kind of bias or influence the meaning and understanding developed by the research. Different participants may have diverse views and opinions on the topic. Main sources of data collection techniques adopted are observations and interviews. Photographs, pictures, illustrations, video, paintings, personal narrations, are also important forms of data collections (Willis, 2007).

3.5.2 Observation

3.5.2.1 Participant Observation

The hallmark of participatory observation is interaction among the researcher and the participants (Willis, 2007). Participant observation has been used in certain situations where the researcher was familiar with the members of the community or family.
Certain places, for example Pollachi were much easier to interact with the people. They accepted the researcher as one of their family member. Three days of stay with the family and interaction with their closely associated members eased the process. They allowed and involved the researcher to try in making the Kolam on their courtyard. Most difficult barrier of the language was overcome by means of active involvement.

Some of the participant-observations were as follows:

1. Researcher had an opportunity to touch and experience the traditional powder used for Kolam making. These powders were specially prepared by the family members only out of pure rice.
2. This method helped in witnessing closely and watching the whole process of Kolam preparation. Floor preparation, marking the floor with dots, holding of powder in hands, controlling of rice powder let fall in same flow, connecting of lines and curves with each other, movement and stretching of hands and body parts, all these were learning steps for the researcher.
3. Being in their own culture helped to understand the dynamism of day to day life of community especially the women folk.
4. This process of being with them benefited to understand the language and conversations of the community that is spoken during the preparation of Kolam. The content of their conversations were mostly about different types of Kolam they have made during various occasions. Some of them were discussing about new and innovative Kolam they have created or inspired by their friends.
5. Some new thoughts were brought out during the discussion. Those insights paved the way to create eagerness and interest to search further in the field of the topic. Some of the topics like feeding the Shani Gruha, through drawing the Kolam in order to avoid any kind of negative actions to any human being is one such finding.
6. The members of the community were very participative in sharing their ideas and thoughts about Kolam and related issues. There were differences in their expression and sharing according to the age. People belonging to the older generation were interested to talk more about their experiences, traditional methods, rituals and so on. Whereas young women and girls were interested to
talk on their skills, creativity and newer types of Kolam, which they had learned from books available in the markets.

7. Behavioural understanding of the people was another learning during this research method. The behavior varies according to the age and situations. Most of the people belonging to the older generation were very patient and fast in preparing the Kolam. They spoke with a spiritual touch and feeling. Comparatively the young ones did not show that interest and enthusiasm in the preparation and process. They were doing it with a competitive spirit than a ceremony and lacked patience.

3.5.2.2 Non-Participant Observation

The researcher has followed the non-participant observation technique to gather information for the study. Reasons for using this technique was based on the need and situation. Major part of the research involved this method. It was also decided by the researcher that in certain situations the researcher used covert approach so that the women of the community are comfortable. The researcher also tried to maintain anonymity by not disclosing personal identity and intention.

The reasons for non-participant observation was the following:

1. Creation of Kolam was usually done by women. It was not easy to approach them during their process of drawing the Kolam.
2. Women in general were also not comfortable with the presence of any visitor or passer-by, especially of the opposite gender, observing them during the process.
3. It was not easy to commute early mornings and due to time constraints, there was no opportunity to see the live performance. In some places, it was difficult to travel and reach the destination on time.

3.5.3 Case Study

A few case studies were conducted as part of the data collection. The purpose was to emphasize on the practice of Kolam during specific occasions such as various festivals, competitions decided on parameters like space, time and purpose. Case studies were taken during occasions like Pongal – one of the most important festivals, where Kolam drawings are given importance. During Pongal, a large area of complex drawings are
drawn with emphasis on minute details of essentials required for drawing and maintenance of the space. This is an all-inclusive form of practising Kolam using mandatory forms of performances. This case study was conducted during the festival of Pongal in a small locality called Vettaikaranpudur near Pollachi. Apart from festivals, some of the events like Kolam competitions conducted in Teachers colony Bengaluru, a locality dominated by Tamil families was also captured in this study.

The next case study focused on body posture and hand movements, during the performance of Kolam preparations. In most of the places where the researcher was present, this case study was conducted to understand body posture and hand movements.

3.5.4 Interview

Interviewing is one of most widely used research technique in systematic inquiry by sociologist, psychologist, anthropologists, clinicians, administers, politicians, and pollsters as their “window on the word” (David S., 2004). Interviews were conducted individually and in groups in different places, according to the plan. All the interviews were recorded thorough audio or video mode. In some cases, photography was used for recording the interview for documentation purpose. Most of the interviews were personal, the reason being the difficulty to receive proper information because of the nature of topic. Group interviews were useful to a certain extent only.

3.5.4.1 Personal Interview

More than forty personal interviews were conducted in different places in the state of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Some of them were experts in the art of Kolam, in terms of skill, theoretical knowledge or both. Some of them were experts in demonstrating the art, while others expressed the deeper meaning of the art.

3.5.4.2 Focus Group Interviews

Eight focus group interviews were conducted in different places in Bangalore and Tamil Nadu such as Kalkkere, Banashankari, Rajendra Nagar (Bangalore region), Onnalvadi, Pollachi, and Kulithalai (Tamil Nadu region). The researcher visited these places and
conducted focus group discussions with women folk, especially the Kolam makers and experienced persons in this field.

The participants at Banashankari constituted the urban lot. While Rajendra Nagar was a Tamilian dominated locality in Bangalore urban, Kalkerre belonged to rural sector. Onnalvadi, Pollachi and Kulithalai belonged to the rural sector of Tamil Nadu. The interviewees had a rural background.

These participants who migrated to Bangalore many years back had a link with the Tamil tradition. The groups were identified and formed with the support of an animator or local person. The number of members for each focus group interview varied from five to twelve. The discussion ranged from half an hour to one hour depending upon the depth and content of the conversation.

### 3.5.5 Triangulation

Triangulation, a method usually used in quantitative research has been adopted and fitted in this research with a special purpose. Patton states that “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods; this can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (Patton, 2002). This method has helped in validating information gathered from various sources. Some of the methods used for triangulation were:

1. **Member checks**: The emerging conclusions of data collected are cross checked with the participants. Some of the statements made by individuals are cross checked with other members of the same group or members of other community.

2. **Participatory research**: As part of the research process, similar studies were conducted with the help of independent researchers interested in the same domain. They also contributed by clarifying the required and missed information, in the area of the topic.

3. **Peer review**: Certain topics and information were given for review by interested researchers in and around the place. Those information were distributed either through softcopy or hardcopy. Online sharing was also very effective to get feedback and reviews from many readers.
4. **Consultation with Experts**: During the research, the researcher came across professionals and experts in theoretical and practical areas of floor arts, traditional arts, cultural studies and folk arts. Most of the women in certain areas where the research had been conducted, could help the study to clarify the thoughts, ideas and information.

5. **Audit trails**: The researcher has chosen a methodical manner of progressive steps in this study that can be maintained from the inception of the research to the development, reports and findings. The record is maintained in the form of field notes and observations seen, heard and thought regarding the study.

### 3.5.6 Trustworthiness of the study

The basic criteria for a qualitative research study has been followed and maintained throughout the process of this research. Those criteria are:

1. **Credibility**: also known as the accuracy of findings. Both the conduct of the enquiry and findings are accurately described in this research study. Long engagements with the topic, persistent observation and triangulation are maintained during the research. Cross check and consultation with stakeholders and peer was done in order to enhance the credibility of the work.

2. **Transferability**, stands for generalizing abilities of the findings and the output of the study to other settings, situations, populations, circumstances etc (Pastor & Esteves, 2004). This research study can be applied in a similar situation and context where the methods are applicable.

3. **Dependability** is all about the stability of data at any point of time and anywhere. Even though, the change in the culture, society and practice, the enquiry can be conducted without major variations in the phenomenon of study, design or methodology.

4. **Conformability** or objectivity refers that the data, interpretations and results are rooted in the contexts and persons, not the imagination of the researcher. Every step in this research work has been gone through systematically and scientifically.
3.6 Nvivo: a qualitative data analysis

Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software has been utilised for managing different types of data collected as part of field visit. It was a tedious procedure to manage large data that are in the form of books/magazines, text, audio, video, photographs, PDF documents, and website. Nvivo has the option for integrating information from multiple types of data as well as the large size of data.

The data was imported and classified according to the type and nature in Nvivo. It is then coded (Node) based on the theme. This made the analysis easy in terms of organising information.
ANALYSIS
The analyses has been made into three different phases comprising of illustration, narration, and metaphor. Analysis based on illustration refers to the physical aspect of Kolam. It involves analysis by deconstructing Kolam from the perspective of elements and principles of design. Narration involves the preparation of Kolam from the beginning to the end. Both material and non-material constructs comprise preparation of the art form to the thematic representation through the use of symbolic illustrations. Metaphor plays a central role in understanding and comprehending the essence of signs, representations, subjects, characters, objects and the significance of religion and community based existence.

4.1 Analysis of Kolam through Illustration

4.1.1 Design Elements used in Kolam

Language is a necessity in communication for any social interaction. It is composed of two important elements. These are symbols/words and grammar. Symbols/words create meaningful sentences under prescribed rules and regulations (known as grammar) of the language. Kolam drawings are also mediums for interaction which is made out of different elements and principles (Ragans, 2005).

Symbols stand or represent something else. Visual symbols belong to an art. Lines, shapes and forms, spaces, colours, values and textures are visual symbols. These elements as constituents in any art work are the visual building blocks that the artists put together.

4.1.1.1 Dot/ point

The dot/point is considered as the mother of all arts. In Kolam design, Dot (Pulli) is the basic element to start the work on. Both imaginary and physically visible dots are used to construct in the preliminary process of the Kolam. The nomenclature pullikolam
refers to a Kolam design which is drawn through dots. Mathematical formulas and patterns are followed in the drawing process of the design. The number of dots used determine the size and complexity of a Kolam. Dots function as reference points as well basic elements in Kolam. The dots that make up the entire design is equivalent to the bindi on a women’s forehead.

4.1.1.1.1 Basic dot combinations

4.1.1.1.2 Image of Kolam at the front of the house and bindi

A bindi on a women’s forehead is important as the space between the joining of the eyebrows is the prime point of the human face. In the same way, the labyrinth is an important space of the house. Kolam takes that important space of the house just as the bindi occupies the space between the eyebrows on the forehead.
Figure 6 Kolam in front of a house is equated with the bindi on the forehead of a woman

4.1.1.2 Line

The line act as an element of design that moves from one point through space (Ragans, 2005). The line, which functions as the contour of the Kolam design, is the most important element of Kolam. The line passes from one dot to another, connecting the dots or moving around them. Implied lines are play an important role in identification. The lines are used in different ways, depending upon the design. Types of line observed in the Kolam designs samples are:

1. Straight lines
2. Curved lines
3. Open-ended lines
4. Close-ended lines
5. Vertical lines
6. Horizontal lines
7. Zigzag lines
8. Wavy lines
9. Short and long lines

Based on the thickness and size, while preparing the Kolam, the artists use various lines of different thickness. It is observed in the field study that line thickness vary from thin,
thick, single, double, triple or multiple lines to dotted, dashed and thick-thin lines, which are lines with different frequencies.

People use single and multiple lines of drawings in Kolam designs. The importance and splendour of a particular celebration are depicted through the number of lines used in Kolam. People use two lines in ordinary days, whereas on special days the number of lines increases to multiples. There are Kolams drawn with just 8 lines. There were differences of opinion among the people on subject regarding the use of a number of lines. Certain communities of Hindu tradition do not follow or use odd numbered lines in preparing Kolam. They believe that odd numbers are inauspicious (Raghavan S., 2012). If someone draws a Kolam with single line, it signifies that a certain inauspicious incident has happened in that house. (Raghavan, 2012)

![Figure 7 Multiple lines used to make Kolam design](image1)

*Figure 7* Multiple lines used to make Kolam design

![Figure 8 A simple instrument to draw multiple lines](image2)

*Figure 8* A simple instrument to draw multiple lines
4.1.1.3 Shape

A shape is understood as a two-dimensional constructed through basic shapes such as circle, square and triangle. Shapes like oval, rectangle, parallelogram, trapezoid, pentagon, pentagram, hexagon, and octagon are variations of the basic shapes mentioned. Shapes in a Kolam can be created as outlines or can be drawn and filled with rice powder as texture. There are two well defined approaches to Kolam designs – these are mathematically defined geometric shapes and freehand, irregular and uneven shapes.

*Figure 9* Different shapes formed in a Kolam design

*Figure 10* Formation of the image of God Ganesha in Kolam
4.1.1.4 Form

Shape and form are interchangeably used sometimes. Form is considered as an extension given to a shape which creates a third dimension to it. Illusion is regarded as the technique of the third dimension. It may use either lines or shapes to generate the third dimension. (Muthikrishnan, 2008). By overlapping, varying the sizes, converging lines and placing, expert designers create the depth which forms the third dimension called illusion.

4.1.1.5 Space

Space is regarded as emptiness. It comes in between, around, above, below, or within an object, catching place of the space (Ragans, 2005). Space holds the responsibility of creating or enhancing shapes and forms created in a Kolam. The idea of choosing a place to design a Kolam is space bound. Akam (the inside space) and Puram (the outside space) make sense of understanding the home as one world and another one that is created beyond the Kolam. The inside world is spiritual, safe and secure as a sign of protection to the household members. The outside world (existing beyond the Kolam) is polluted, unsafe and regarded as unknown. This is a significant formation of a spiritual boundary that encloses safety and goodness.

*Figure 11* Illusion of the third dimension created in between the lines
4.1.1.6 Colour

The original and traditional colour of Kolam is always white because of the use of rice flour. The Kolam design on the foreground forms a high contrast with the dark background that is cleaned and coated with cow dung. Red is used sometimes as a second colour to the design.

4.1.1.7 Texture

Texture plays an important role in visualizing Kolam. The visual on the ground ignites the minds of viewers to understand the feel of Kolam. The variety in design determines the look and feel of the pattern. This is done by incorporating different textures for a feasting visual appeal. Dots and lines which are the basis of Kolam designs create the texture.

4.1.2 Designing Principles in Kolam

4.1.2.1 Rhythm

Art and design use the principle of rhythm to create an impression and illusion of movement. Rhythm uses the technique of repetition of different elements and objects in varying orders. Rhythm determines the creation of Kolam by imparting shape, line
or point that is used. A dynamic sensation of the visual appeal is created through the usage of the principle of rhythm.

![Replication of Elements shown in different parts of a Kolam design](image)

*Figure 13 Repetition of Elements shown in different parts of a Kolam design*

### 4.1.2.2 Pattern

Pattern is the designing principle dominating the Kolam drawing. It is formed out of the existence of single or multiple elements. Each unit made in the pattern is repeated in order to create the design. This is called as a motif which repeats itself to form the pattern. The types of rhythms followed by a motif are random, progressive, flowing, and alternating, thus creating a complex order of aesthetic sensibility.

### 4.1.2.3 Movement

Movement as a principle in design is shown to give an appeal and feel of action. The viewers’ eye movement can be controlled in and around the design. The spectator enjoys the Kolam in its completeness. It has the power to captivate and guide the eyes of the viewer.
4.1.2.4 Balance

Visual balance is the principle of equalizing visual elements, themes and other forces in a design. It supports the viewers and the artists to have a feeling of well-organized art. Perfect togetherness is achieved through the application of different principles of balances in a Kolam. Symmetrical and radial balance are generally found in them. There are other Kolams that follow the asymmetrical balance.

Figure 14 A design which carries patterns in each segment of design

Figure 15 Different types of balances
4.1.2.5 Proportion

Proportion refers to the measure of elements used in an art. In any Kolam, elements are to be used in the right quantity and quality. The determinants of the proportion of a perfect kolam depends upon various elements like dots, patterns, texture, size, shapes, curves, lines and its various properties.

4.1.2.6 Variety

Variety breaks the monotony in art. It is the principle concerned with adding visual interest and differences to art. This is an essential principle in Kolam design. It plays a significant role in grabbing visual attention of the viewers and spectators. It also adds to the creativity shown by the artist. Variety is created in a Kolam by integrating variety of themes, designing elements such as shapes, size, themes, and styles, along with principles.

Figure 16 Kolam sketches prepared on book

4.1.2.7 Harmony

Harmony emphasizes the assimilation of various separate parts that are designed in a sequential order which is clearly defined in many Kolams. The rice powder that is white in colour is used to create lines, shapes, space and texture in Kolam. The colour white is harmonious throughout the artwork of Kolam.
4.1.2.8 Emphasis

When one part of art work dominates over the other parts, emphasis is created. There are two approaches in creating Kolam using emphasis. It is in terms of physical appearance such as kinds of lines, designs, which are used to decorate or it is with reference to the theme used in making Kolam. The principle of emphasis is created in every Kolam depending upon the occasion, celebration or festival that is of importance. There are certain styles and elements emphasized in order to create a distinctive nature of visual appeal.

4.1.2.9 Unity

Unity is the principle that signifies the quality of wholeness or oneness. It is achieved through the effective usage and application of various designing elements and principles. One cannot identify the difference of each element and principle made use in Kolam. Unity is a qualitative designing principle which can be experienced through the lens of looking at art as one.

4.2 Understanding Kolam through Narration

4.2.1 Preparation of Kolam

The preparation of Kolam is done in the early morning according to the Hindu tradition. This system is followed in all Kolam traditions. According to the Hindu system and the age-old tradition, Kolam is prepared in the early morning, before sunrise (Rao R., Indian Temple Traditions, 1997). It begins with the cleansing of the floor with water. Cow dung is used to create a coating over the clean floor. Cow-dung is considered as a purifying element in the day to day human life. According to Raghavan, cow-dung has medicinal value and also has the power to flee evil spirits (Raghavan, 2012). It has the power to kill germs and small insects that are harmful (Raniamma, 2012)

4.2.1.1 Preparation of Rice Flour

On the day before the preparation of Kolam, rice is soaked in water and once it gets moist it is rinsed and cleaned thoroughly from the water. The next process can be done in two ways, the moist rice can either be used for ground to make a paste or be pounded.
The grounded rice is used immediately as it cannot be preserved for a long period of time since it gets spoilt. The powdered rice is preserved for a long period of time and can be used many times to make different Kolams. Rice paste is usually used for grand occasions where large Kolams are prepared since they want it permanently on the ground; the rice paste helps the Kolams to stay for a longer period (Mohita, 2012).

Figure 17 Traditional process of the preparation of rice flour for Kolam
4.2.1.2 Preparation of Floor

The place for Kolam preparation is usually outside the main door on the immaculate floors (O'Flaherty & Doniger, 1995) and courtyard of the house. The mud floor is cleaned with a broom, then water is sprinkled to moist the floor and settle the dust, which is compulsory for the drawing of the Kolam. Cow-dung is smeared and a neat coating is done to make the space clean and levelled. Women use hands to do this preparation, or in rare cases, the broom is used. Hands are usually used if the performer is healthy enough to do the entire Kolam within the entire space. Brooms are used if more space is used (Malar, 2012).

The size of space depends upon how much the Kolam is spread across. There is no fixed boundary kept for the Kolam, sometimes the entire courtyard is cleaned and smeared with cow-dung.
Figure 19 Clearing the dust and cleaning the floor with broomstick

Figure 20 Cow dung is kept for smearing the floor
4.2.1.3 Body Posture

Women preparing Kolam do it with utmost respect. Firstly, it is observed that they stand barefooted towards space, then bend forward in a yogic posture. Depending on the size of the Kolam, they need to stretch their right hand. They manage to balance the body, even if the size of the Kolam is large and complex. If the Kolam is large in size and complex in the drawing, the body posture needs to be maintained throughout the completion of the performance. It is observed that older women are comfortable standing or using the body posture for a longer time, since they are experienced drawing Kolams for many years. But the younger generation of women is not able to follow the body postures for a longer time. They either squat and stand or rest on knees or kneel down (Malar, 2012). The performers are not supposed to stamp on the pattern or touch them until they complete the drawing.
4.2.1.4 Palm posture of the performer

Women carry bowls of rice powder with their left hand, then with their thumb and index finger of the right hand take a pinch of it to make a small pattern or even take a handful of it to draw large patterns that spread across the space within the boundary. The flow of rice powder is controlled so that it is put evenly on the overall pattern. The thumb and index figure play a significant role. It is with the use of these two fingers that the rice powder is held and the entire pattern is drawn.

Figure 22 Body posture followed during the Kolam making

Figure 23 Palm posture and hand movement during the performance
4.2.1.5 Hand Movement

The hand movement to draw the pattern is very quick yet graceful and natural. Expert performers display their professional skill in drawing the Kolam without any hesitation. The entire pattern is complete in minutes even without having a thought process about it (Mohita, 2012). At times, performers move their hands faster than their minds to complete the pattern without any time consumption and mistake.

*Figure 24 Ready to use Kolam Stickers*

The making of the pattern starts with the dots. Depending upon the size and the complexity of the drawing, dots are made in rows and columns and natural curves are
drawn. The thumb and index finger are used to make dots. While each dot is made, the thumb that holds the powder is released and held until all the dots are made. The hand movement also needs a careful watch because the positioning of the dots depends upon the frequency of the thumb in and out each time. When the lines are drawn i.e. straight or curve, the speed is maintained throughout the process. The space between the thumb and index finger decides the thickness of the amount of powder that falls on the particular spot of the pattern. The hand is carefully stretched towards the centre of the pattern without interrupting the design in any manner. This shows how much effort is required to retain the pattern without mishandling the flow of it.

These days the trend is to use ready to use Kolams. People generally go for design masks. Different masks are available depending on the need of the design (Chandrashekhar, 2011). Sheets are available readily from the market or designs are created by themselves.

![Figure 26 Brush made out of twig to draw the Kolam](image)

**Figure 26 Brush made out of twig to draw the Kolam**

4.2.2 Materials used for Diverse Kolams

4.2.2.1 Cow-Dung

Cow-dung is a common material used to smear floors in Indian culture, especially in Hindu religious practices. Cow-dung is smeared on the floor after cleaning and sprinkling the floor with water. It is believed and practiced in Indian tradition that it has a lot of medicinal values as an antiseptic medium and purifier (Raghavan, 2012) (Good
use of cow-dung, 2004). The places where the women who were menstruating occupied is to be washed with cow dung and water. In many of the South Indian customs, the whole house is cleaned with water and smeared with cow-dung twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays that are considered as the most auspicious days. On all other auspicious days, the floor is re-mopped with the mixture of cow-dung and water. They do it using their bare hands or a piece of cloth (Ayyar, 1985). After the floor becomes dry, women prepare Kolam on the cleaned surface.

There are exceptions where people do not decorate the space with any Kolam design. When the annual ceremony for the departed soul (Sradha) is performed or someone has died in the recent time from the family are some of the occasions when the Kolam decoration is avoided.

![Floor is smeared with cow-dung](image)

**Figure 27** Floor is smeared with cow-dung

### 4.2.2.2 Rice Flour

Rice is the staple food of the south Indian region. It has been the staple food for generations. Villages embrace the abundance of rice in their region due to the age old practice of cultivation of rice in the villages. Its availability in the house denotes abundance and absence of wants. When a pinch of it is used to draw the Kolam, it becomes an offering to the ancestors. It also refers to the generosity of the people in the villages, where little creatures like insects, squirrels, and birds come and gratify their hunger.
The process of grinding the rice is rather very easy as the villages use traditional flour mill practices. Traditional flour mills and grinding mills of stone are carved out from rock which have a small hole at the centre to hold one to two kilograms of raw rice.

4.2.2.3 Water

Water is known for its quality to purify or clean things. It is a universal need for humankind. People use water for bathing, washing utensils, cleaning floors, washing clothes, quenching thirst and so on. Thus water serves multiple needs of humans.

In the case of Kolam, the threshold needs sufficient water to clean the remaining of the previous Kolam. Secondly, water blends with the cow-dung to settle on the flooring in an even manner. This refreshes the space and makes it ready for an all new creative piece of Kolam for the day. Thirdly, one part of the dry land is washed with water and cleansed. This prepares the piece of land to absorb the rice powder and it settles without disturbance from the winds that make the flooring dry.

4.2.3 Functions of Kolam

The intention and use of Kolam vary according to its need and significance. They are prepared differently for various occasions. Some are for religious intentions while others are prepared as a piece of art for admiration during festivals.

4.2.3.1 Religious Function

Kolam has a traditional existence in Tamil religious culture. Generally among Hindus, but also followed by Christians in Tamil Nadu, this religiously significant performance adds an aura to the celebration of their religious festivals and observances (Sekar, Narratives behind the Kolam Practice in Tamil Nadu, 2014). It enriches religious celebrations through the depiction of particular gods and goddesses connected with Kolam. The complexity of Kolam varies according to the importance of religious festivities for e.g. The largeness, complexity and variety of the Kolams drawn during Pongal symbolizes the greatness and significance of this festival.
4.2.3.2 Social Communication

It is a common understanding among the people that Kolam is a signification of happiness. It is a connecting link between the home and the society. A positive message is conveyed to the society through the patterns drawn on the space. The presence of Kolam and the graceful patterns indicates the happy life of the members of the family at home. It acts as a welcoming symbol to the near and dear and the needy people. The absence of it indicates inauspiciousness of a family member in the home. This is indirectly communicated to the people passing by the house. Women dominate in deciding the Kolam that is drawn outside the house, hence this creates a bond among the womenfolk in a village, creating a sense of community. The qualities of the woman drawing, shine forth through the Kolam, and she is judged on her skills of performing the Kolam (Selvi, 2012).

4.2.3.3 Beautification

Kolam beautifies and adorns a house. Studies have observed that Kolam is similar to ‘bindi’ on the forehead of a woman that beautifies her face (Nagarajan V. R., 2007). Kolam adorning a threshold is an added charm to the home that shelters the family members. People pay attention to the Kolam that is shown on the threshold of the house and they appreciate the effort put into it. It is also a way to protect the space in front of the house so that it is kept clean and observed as a sacred space (Challam, 2011).

4.2.3.4 Creativity

Though Kolam is a routine in the house, women make sure that they do not repeat the pattern of the Kolam. There is always innovation in themes and designs used for everyday Kolam (Mohita, 2012). A Kolam pattern can signify any positive mark or communication, hence, patterns differ and the message through the pattern becomes a memoir for passers-by. The womenfolk develop the art of Kolam-making at a very young age. Most of them maintain books on Kolam – a collection maintained by them or adopted from the elder women of the family and friends (Raniamma, 2012).
4.2.4 Components of Kolam

Kolam is composed of material and non-material things. The material things are the finely powdered rice flour and the drawing elements and the images in the Kolam. The non-material things include the themes – the idea/subject that the drawing deals with.

![Figure 28 Classification of Kolam based on its components](image)

4.2.4.1 Material components

The material components are those physical things involved in the making of Kolam. Those components can be divided into three types:

4.2.4.1.1 Drawing material

The basic material that is used for making of a Kolam is rice paste made out of rice.

4.2.4.1.2 Drawing components

There are two types of components behind any design in Kolam elements and principles.

1. **Designing elements**: The designing elements are the building blocks in any art such as dots, lines, shapes, forms, spaces, colours, values, and textures.
2. **Designing Principles**: Principles are the grammar which helps to organise the elements in an art. The basic principles in a Kolam are rhythm, pattern, movement, balance, proportion, variety, harmony, emphasis, and unity.

### 4.2.4.1.3 Natural themes

A Kolam design consists of different representations from the nature that are visually possible to experience. Such nature related components observed in a Kolam are classified as given:

1. **Plants**: Trees, leaves, flowers, creepers, buds, fruits, vegetables, sugarcane,
2. **Animals**: Elephant, rabbit, deer, cat, rat, cow
3. **Birds and insects**: Parrot, dove, peacock, sparrow, duck, butterfly, fish
4. **Elements of nature**: Sun, stars, moon, rainbow, water, mountain, rain, clouds, earth,
5. **Food**: Milk, ice-cream, ladoo (Indian sweet), jaggery (sweetener)
6. **Human**: Eye, Face, Hands, Fingers, feet, Dress
7. **Miscellaneous**: Oil lamp, candles, pots, bow, and arrow, heart

### 4.2.4.2 Non material components

Non material components are the things that are not visible in the physical form, but can be experienced as ideas, thoughts, values, morals, beliefs and ethics. Such type of nonmaterial components are experienced in Kolam design being classified into three: religious themes, social and secular themes, and life events.


3. **Life events**: Birth, Naming Ceremony, Upanayana, Womanhood, Marriage, Birthday, Anniversaries.

### 4.2.5 Commonly used themes in Kolam designs

#### 4.2.5.1 Snakes

Snake (*naga*) is worshiped as a deity in Hindu religions. Image of snake cobra is widely found in many Hindu religious depictions. It is a common snake found in farms, lands, paddy, jungle, and forest. Snakes are associated with the underneath of earth, roots of trees and waters of the earth. It also symbolizes fertility in a certain culture. That way it is closely connected with farmers and agrarian community of southern India. People worship snakes with a double dimension- fear and respect. Thus, the sacred and dangerous elements are intertwined in common people’s religious faith (Reck & David, 1981).

Images of snakes are represented in many ways through Kolam. A number of heads, length of the body and complex curves and twists of the body are some of the common variations found in the art. There are depictions of snakes with many heads like three, seven, ten and thousands. A Thousand headed (multiple heads) snake symbolizes as protector of the universe. The multiple hoods act like an umbrella underneath the sleeping Vishnu, the great god serpent (Araujo, 2009)

The length of the snake represented in the images of Kolam vary according to size and complexity. Some of them are very long in size. The massive length of the snake is another symbolism for the long rope wrapped around the mountain Mandara in churning the Ocean of Milk in order to get Amrit, the juice of immortality (Reck & David, 1981). Thinking from this angle, Naga Kolam denotes that it can save people from difficulties and bring immortality (Amartya) to everyone.
In certain depictions of Kolam, snakes are drawn in a circular form by making them bite their own tail with the mouth (Araujo, 2009). This circular or spiral shape is a symbolism for reincarnation (never-ending recurring cycle), especially the life of living beings such as humans and animals.
There are chances of snakebite during work in their agricultural land. Some of them may face death due to snakebite. Preparing naga Kolam by women (wife) folk, she is trying to please snake god, and praying for further protection from such deaths (Balamaniyamma, 2012). She also prays for the aspect of fertility and thus for good children in her family.

It is also believed that snake Kolams are used in order to protect a house from evil spirits, thieves and unwanted visitors. Snake Kolam has the power to function as curse catcher, or emotion screen and to keep a house pure and serene. The negative spirits wandering around the house are protected by the snake. It helps in awakening the mind and purify the mind and heart affected by the evil thoughts and feelings (Claus, Diamond, & Mills, 2003) (Dutta, The Mystery of Indian Floor Paintings, 2011).

Snake Kolams, in human consciousness, evoke aspiration for an evolution and spiralling of life forces. Preparation of naga kolam is used as a tradition in houses and communities as symbol of protection to the house from evil spirits, strangers, thieves and dangerous situations. These Kolams are a kind of curse catcher, or emotions screen to keep the household pure and serene. Negative spirits are not necessarily wandering outside the house. They may be seen as ill feelings in ourselves. Thus, there is a call to wake up and be purified in mind and thought.

4.2.5.2 Bird Kolam

Peacock, Swan, duck are the major bird symbols used in Kolam design. Birds are symbolisms for simplicity and innocence. They are also connected with the power to communicate with gods because they can fly.

4.2.5.3 Elephant

It is one of the most popular themes of Kolam. Sometimes, a piece of cow dung is shaped in a linga shape, representing Ganeśa, the elephant-headed god, who is considered to be the remover of obstacles. This piece of cow dung is placed in the center of the kōlam, along with a marigold flower inserted into it, giving it a three-dimensional air. This is done especially during the sacred time of the month of mārkalī (Dec–Jan) during which there is a focus on intense adoration of the divine in various forms: music, dance, festivals, chanting sacred scriptures, and so forth. Ganeśa is also then a key god
who is honored through the kōlam. During this month, one of the ritual highlights is the abundance of kōlam competitions, which contributes to a sense of ritual play. Most neighbourhoods, streets, towns, and cities throughout Tamil Nadu host their own version of the kōlam competition.

![Figure 31 Depiction of elephant as one of the patterns in Kolam](image)

4.2.5.4 Peacock Kolangal

Peacock (Mayil) is lord Murugan's mount, swift and beautiful like Kartikeya Himself. The proud display of dancing peacock symbolizes religion in full, unfolded glory. His shrill cry warns of approaching harm. The peacock is a possessor of some of the most admired human characteristics and is a symbol of integrity and beauty. In history, myths, legends and lores, the Peacock symbolism carries portents of nobility, holiness, guidance, protection, and watchfulness.

4.2.5.5 Swan Kolam

The vehicle of Brahma is the swan (more accurately, the wild goose Aser indicus). It is a noble symbol for the soul, Paramahamsa, winging high above the mundane and diving straight to the goal.
4.2.5.6 Fish Kolam

According to Hindu concept of *Avathara* (Incarnation), fish is considered as the first incarnation of Vishnu. It symbolises protection, fertility, eternity, woman-ness, freedom, depth of knowledge and mysteries (Rao S. R., 2005).

4.2.5.7 Tulasi Madam Kolam

The Tulasi Madam, as it is called, is a sacred spot in the house where the Tulsi plant is kept in a rectangular pot like structure. The plant is considered sacred and is worshiped with pujas and rituals performed. Semmann (Red Sand) can be used for adding charm to the Kolam. During auspicious occasions, Tulasi madam Kolam is drawn in houses.

![Figure 32 Kolam prepared with the theme fish](image)

4.2.5.8 Vilakku (Lamp) Kolams

Kuthu vilakku Kolams are considered auspicious to adorn puja rooms and different designs in varied complexities can be drawn. Each festival has a special Kolam dedicated to it. And for New Year or *Varsha pirappu*, the most preferred Kolam is the Vilakku Kolam. ‘Vilaku’ means lamp and in the Kolam design lamps of various shapes play a prominent part.
4.2.5.9 Welcome Kolam

*Nalvaravu*, known as the welcoming kolam, symbolizes the sign of welcoming visitors and friends to the home. These Kolams are also used during celebrations as a sign to welcome all invited visitors taking part in the rituals and festivals. The thematic representations used in these kolams are images of lotuses, conch and lamps which highlight the aspect of sacredness. The significance of the lamp in this kolam is the removal of darkness by giving light and propagating the belief of *Asatoma Sadgamaya*. Generally, a red or kaavi coloured parallel line or curve is drawn along with the white lines or curves of the kolam. This colour is a sign of prosperity and heightened contrast of the design. It also defines the sacredness of the spot while enhancing the aesthetic feel of the kolam.

4.2.5.10 Pulli/Dot Kolam

*Pulli* or dots are arranged in a specific sequence and order and these pullis are joined to make pictorial designs. In the pulli Kolam type, there is another type of forming wonderful designs with the basic pattern. This is called *Chuzhi Kolam* (Phyu, 2002). The dot arrays also loom large in the responses of these experts when asked which Kolams are alike. It is the first (and often only) reason given for saying that two Kolams are not alike. The converse does not hold: it is not enough for two Kolams to have the
same dot array to be considered alike. In such a case, often she will say “the pulli are the same, but the models are different” (Vatuk).

4.2.5.11 Diwali Kolams

The tradition of Kolam for Diwali goes back to around 5000 years as a decorative folk art in India. Not only is it a beautiful way to decorate courtyards, floors, and entrances of houses, but it also has religious and cultural meanings. Kolam art mainly serves the purpose to welcome the Hindu deities such as Lakshmi, to bring good luck, but it is also said to control the ants in people's houses. Traditionally done by women, the typical Kolam designs have a round shape, but can be square or rectangular as well. First, the outer Kolam pattern is drawn on a flat, smooth surface (i.e. using sidewalk chalk). Later this line drawing can be filled with various powders of different colours. These powders can consist of coloured rice grains, dry flour or fine sands. Instead of coloured powders or sands, flowers or petals can be used as well (Flower Kolam). Oil lamps are often placed inside the Kolams. Some also believe that the Kolam stops evil from entering the home. Although the Deepavali festival lasts five days, some keep the Kolam designs drawn for 10 days.

4.2.5.12 Karthigai deepam kolam- Deepam kolam

Karthigai Deepam is celebrated in Tamil Nadu widely on the full moon day of karthigai tamil calendar (15 of Nov - 15 of Dec). Houses are lightened up with Deepam (lights) and Kolam. The designs are so made that the lights can be placed strategically on the key points after the entire design is completed.

4.2.5.13 Margazhi Kolam

Margazhi month (From Dec 16 to Jan 14) is a special month in Tamil calendar. Specially dedicated to God. Daytime is short and night time is long. In Tamil tradition, all women wake up before sunrise and draw different kolangal in front of the house. Kolangal full of colours in front of the house is a symbol of welcoming God to home. Margazhi month is also known for music and dance for God. The music concert is the famous event at Margazhi month in Thiruvaiyaru.
4.2.5.14 New Year Kolam

Kolam is an integral part of any Tamil festival. Each festival has a special Kolam dedicated to it. And for New Year or Varsha Pirappu, the most preferred Kolam is the Vilakku kolam. ‘Vilaku’ means lamp and in the Kolam design lamps of various shapes play a prominent part. In ancient Tamil Hindu culture, the New Year is born on the first day of the month of Chittirai (the first month of the Tamil solar calendar in April). Women adorn their thresholds every morning with designs drawn from rice powder after cleaning the floor with water mixed with cow dung.

4.2.5.15 Patriotic Kolangal

On national holidays and days that mark special significance for India, many women show their patriotism to their country by drawing Kolam designs of nationalistic themes. A few draw the Ashoka chakra, the Indian flag, simple designs in saffron, white and green etc. Others show their patriotism by depicting the India map, images of Mahatma Gandhi etc. Although most Kolam designs are religious in nature, this new form of Kolam is becoming very popular in some households.

4.2.5.16 Pongal Paanai Kolam

During Pongal and many of the roads, lanes, and by-lanes of South India present a riot of colours, with elaborate Kolam drawn using white and coloured powders in front of houses, shops and offices. Pongal is an important religious and cultural festival celebrated with grandeur across Tamil Nadu. This is an occasion to express and acknowledge god who is the protector, provider and sustainer for giving a good harvest. People thank the Sun God who is the source of energy and nourishment. While the Kolam is drawn throughout the year in most homes in South India, it is more significant during Pongal. On the day of Pongal, family members jointly draw the Kolam with rice flour that can be plain as well as coloured. Parallel straight lines can be drawn using a cylindrical rod (Ulakai) as a guide. A Kolam can be a plain one or can be artistically drawn with symbols having cosmic themes and meanings. The Kolam defines the sacred area where the Pongal is prepared.

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

4.2.5.17 Lotus Kolam

Lotus Kolam is also known as the `Hridaya Kamalam Kolam (lotus of the heart). It is named because of the lotuses’ shape as that of a human heart. It is generally prepared on sacred occasions and Fridays as a significance of bringing in wealth, success and well-being to the home and its family members. It is usually drawn with a single line, without any break and goes through all the dots to form a representation of the lotus flower. The belief among Hindus is that, on drawing the Kolam in one go without lifting and breaking the flow of the hand, has a lot of spiritual benefits.

Since the lotus kolam is connected with Goddess Lakshmi, it is used to prepare in worship places to invoke the goddess.

The opening of the lotus is the symbolism of unfolding the spiritual facets in a human life. As the drawing begins at the base of the lotus, taking a long journey to complete the entire outline, it returns to the starting point again. This system is akin to the life cycle of a human being.

4.2.5.18 Banyan tree leaf

Figure 34 Shape of Banyan tree leaf in Kolam art
The image shows the Kolam of Ganesha made with the leaves of the banyan tree. The leaves are arranged in a fashion that gives the shape of the deity. The banyan tree, known as *Kalpavriksha* in Hindu mythology (Rig Veda 1.75; 17.26), is known to provide satisfaction of material wealth and wishes. This tree can live for centuries and grow wider and wider. It is the symbol of eternity. The parts of the tree symbolize the existence of three gods: Lord Vishnu (the bark), Brahma (roots) and Shiva (branches) (Network, 2011).

### 4.2.5.19 Sikku Kolam

The Sikku Kolam is made up of dots and lines. They are also known as Sikku or Chikku Kolam. The lines never touch or cross the dots, rather goes around each point and forms the design. These Kolams mesmerize the visual impact of the viewers because of never identifiable point of beginning and ending of the line.

### 4.2.5.20 Line Kolam

The line Kolam is drawn using parallel lines which cross over at right angle or diagonal shape. They may start from a dot or a square and form basic structures such a square, a circle, a cross with diagonals, a swastika or two superimposed triangles. To enlarge a *padi* kolam, we add a series of parallels lines from which new lines join the preceding ones. The design of lotuses, conches or other ornamental motives are added in order to complete the Kolam.

*Figure 35 Preparation of Padi Kolam*
4.2.5.21 Padi Kolam

These patterns are more abstract and celebrate the upstrokes and down strokes of Hindu philosophical speculations. Undeniably, the outlines organized around the center draw the eyes towards the heart of the drawing. Like a yantra or a mandala, negative powers are prevented from entering by the very presence of four stylized gates facing the cardinal directions. The center of a padi Kolam is never left blank and we find one or several dots, diagonal lines, the sun and the moon, a pentagon or a star hexagon.

4.2.5.22 Temple Kolam

These are Kolam designs which delineate each temple threshold from the preceding one and the world outside. Approaching a South Indian temple, one observes that a Kolam marks each threshold for the advancing worshipper, from the outer entrance to the innermost “womb chamber” of the divinities. This sequence of Kolams marks the passage of worshippers as they travel to the interior shrine to the visit the gods and goddesses and to receive darshan, or blessing. At the edge of the village community, the temple may be conceptualization as a giant, three-dimensional Kolam marking the threshold where the village ends and the outside world begins. Here again, the Kolam maps the journey from a ritually polluted space to a ritually pure space.

4.2.5.23 Wedding Kolam

Wedding Kolam is also known as Manai Kolam, which is drawn during the weddings. It is prepared in different parts of the house or temple in which the wedding has to take place. The manai or the padi kolam (referring to the wooden plank on which the bride and bridegroom are seated) is prepared in front of the couples and the priest (or poojari). The designs of manai kolam follow parallel lines made out of rice powder, turmeric (manjal) and kaavi (semman). The rice powder used to design manai kolam also invites ants and insects to bless the couples and the family. This is a practice of dhanam, dharmam or charity as a philosophy in Kolam tradition (Menon, n.d.).
4.2.6 Common Symbols used in Kolam patterns/ drawings

4.2.6.1 Swastika

The Swastika is a common symbol used in many religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. It is a universal religious symbol representing the aspect of luck and auspiciousness in life. The shape of swastika symbol has an equilateral cross along with arms attached at the end at right angles. In Indian culture swastika signifies the source of light on earth and the four seasons that sustain the earth. The Hindu version of the symbol has a dot in each quadrant (Symbols, 2012). The significance of this use in Kolam is such that it adds to the meaning of prosperity. The Swastika symbol is used in other floor art designs of cultural importance. The symbol on Kolam representations shows life’s cycle as a journey as the wheel rotates in a clockwise manner showing how life proceeds to different phases.
4.2.6.2 Triple Spiral: Triskele

Some of these symbols date back to 3000 BC and can still be seen today on stone carvings in Ireland. The triskele is an ancient Celtic symbol related to the sun. Triple centered spirals were also used by the early Christian monks. The single spiral is the oldest of all and it has symbolized the concept of growth, expansion, and cosmic energy. Designs that start from the centre and extend further on all sides embrace the use of this symbol. This spiral pattern is used a lot in Kolams and rangolis.

4.2.6.3 Hexagram

The Hexagram also known as the Shatkona is the six-pointed star. The symbol is made up of two triangles, one facing upwards symbolizing the male energy, and the other facing down symbolizing the female energy. Together it is known as the union of male and female (Pattnaik, 2003).

This symbol also signifies the union of Shiva - a Hindu god and his wife Shakthi. They are two essential aspects of the One: the abiding aspect of God and the Energy which acts in the manifested world (The Divine Couple Shiva, 2015).
4.2.6.4 Lotus

The lotus is one of the symbols used predominantly in the Hindu culture as well as in Buddhism. It stands for purity of both mind and body. Though it usually grows in the water surrounded by mud and dirt, the irony lies in the fact with its beauty and purity it still remains without being affected by dirt, mud or any impure particles. It is a symbol of not being affected by negative forces or inhuman nature of this world. Lotus designs are widely used in Kolam. One can find different forms of lotus designs on Kolam patterns. The lotus is also directly connected to Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and wealth.
4.2.6.5 Conch

The right-coiled white conch is one of the "eight auspicious signs" in Buddhism. The conch is also the symbol of Lord Vishnu and is revered by his devotees as a sacred symbol. Also known as the ‘…battle horn’, in the Mahabharata, it is also mentioned that the sound of Arjuna’s conch terrorized his enemies. The conch symbols are also drawn at the deity's altar in the Hindu culture. This symbol is known as "Shankh" in India. (Eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism, 2015)

4.2.6.6 Knot of Eternity

Figure 41 Knot of eternity symbol
In India, people recognize this symbol in a Kolam form. In other parts of the world this symbol is called the endless knot or the knot or eternity. *Pavitram* (rings) Kolams and *Brahma mudi* (Brahma’s Knots) Kolams are examples of endless Kolams (Conty, 2002).

The endless knot: This symbol is one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism. It signifies unity and purity (Eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism, 2015). The endless knot has also been referred to as the mystic dragon. Fans of this symbol like to wear it as pendants, rings, and charms. The lines used in Kolam with reference to this pattern are endless or closed lines. Majority of the Kolams follow this pattern.

### 4.2.6.7 Celtic Knots

![Figure 42 Use of Celtic knots in Kolam](image)

These Celtic knots are expressed as knots, with lines going over and under, in a crisscross pattern. They don't have dots used as grids.
4.2.6.8 Shield Knot

![Shield Knot](image)

*Figure 43* Kolam made use of shield knots

The shield knot is believed to be a universal symbol of protection which originated thousands of years ago. This symbol is believed to be an ancient Celtic symbol (Celtic people were considered to be ancient people of Europe). It was used to ward off evil spirits (*Symbols and their meaning, n.d.*). Celtic symbols were extensively used in jewellery and art and such patterns were not derived from nature. It is also known as the anklets of *Krishna* (*Mandelbrot & Novak, 2004*).

4.2.6.9 OM

![OM](image)

*Figure 44* OM the symbol of absolute in Kolam art
Om - or the aum is the symbol of the essence of Hinduism (Sampath, 2015). It means oneness with the Supreme, the merging of the physical being with the spiritual. The most sacred syllable, the first sound of the Almighty, the sound from which emerges each and every other sound, whether of music or of language. Meditation on Om satisfies every need and ultimately leads to liberation. Nearly all the prayers and recitals of sacred passages are prefixed by the utterance of Om. The symbol represents the three aspects of God: the Brahma (A), the Vishnu (U) and the Shiva (M) (Hindu Symbols, 2014).

4.2.7 Depiction of Gods and Goddesses in Kolam

Kolam symbolises auspiciousness. It is a Hindu belief that geometrical patterns and designs applied with rice flour at the entrance a home, invites goddess Lakshmi into the household, and drives away the evil spirits (Kapoor, 2002). Puja rooms are decorated with Kolam, especially near the lamps, in front of the images of gods and goddesses. There are specific Kolams attributed to individual deities and those Kolams carry the symbolism of a particular deity. It varies according to the importance of the day or festival dedicated to a particular deity. According to the Hindu tradition, each home follows a particular deity (family god). Usually, along with the main Kolam, there is a small Kolam for the family god/ goddess (Raniamma, 2012). It has been a practice though not applied as mandatory for the house (Raghavan S. , 2012). Some of the depictions of gods and goddesses found in Kolam are Lakshmi, Saraswathi, the sun god, Ganesha and Krishna.

During Krishna Jayanthi, a series of tiny feet are drawn using the rice paste from the entrance of the house leading up to the pooja room, where the sweets made for the occasion are placed. It is assumed that child Lord Krishna walks into each house and partakes of the meal.
Figure 45 Feet leading to pooja room

Figure 46 Kolam depicting The Chariot or The Ratham, which is God’s vehicle
In this Kolam, there are designs of the ‘Kalash’, Coconut and the lamps. The Kalash is always considered as auspicious during any festivities or prayers. Coconut is also considered to be associated with all prayers festivals. The lamps or *diyas* are burnt to bring light and happiness during festivals. They are also burnt in front of Gods and Goddesses.

![Figure 47 Kalas Kolam](image)

*Figure 47 Kalas Kolam*

This Kolam depicts the ‘*chanku*’ or shell, which represents the auspicious occasions and especially big prayers, etc. ([www.dollsofinida.com](http://www.dollsofinida.com), n.d.). It is a sacred emblem.

![Figure 48 Shell (chanku) Kolam have different associations with Vishnu, Lakshmi and female fertility](image)

*Figure 48 Shell (chanku) Kolam have different associations with Vishnu, Lakshmi and female fertility*
associated with Vishnu, the God of preserver. It has the other symbolic meanings such as prosperity, longevity and cleanser of sins. It is considered as the abode of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth/prosperity. Since the shell is connected with water and similarities to the shape of Yoni, it has an association with female fertility (Dragonsong, 2006).

Figure 49 Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva with God Ganesha

This is a very simple Kolam designs showing one side the ‘Om’ and attached to is ‘Ganesh” idol. OM symbolically represents three gods – Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, This is a simple yet meaningful Kolam which truly shows the use of Kolam in depicting gods and goddesses.
This is a Kolam design taken from ikolam.com. In this Kolam, there is a ‘satya’ in the centre to show that God is at the center of everything. There are also lotus designs on the outer end which is a symbol of Goddess Saraswati.

In this Kolam, there is the representation of the ‘Shivlinga’ or the idol of Lord Shiva. It is very auspicious to worship Lord Shiva.
This Kolam was drawn to mark *Pongal*, there are lotus flowers drawn on all sides of the Kolam. It is the symbol of Goddess *Saraswati* and there are also laddoos on the four sides of the Kolam. Laddoos represent or associated with Ganesh (also known as *Ganapati, Vinayaka, and Pillaiyar*) a god of fortune, who provides prosperity, fortune and success. He is also the remover of obstacles of both material and spiritual nature in the world (Heaphy, 2008).

The lotus in the Kolam is also found in one of the four hands of *Visnu* (*Padmanabha* or the one with the lotus navel), the protector of the universe and restorer of the moral order or Dharma in the world. He is also depicted as peaceful, merciful and compassionate. The lotus is also the feminine force that activates the creative power of Lord Vishnu (Kumar, 2004). Lotus in his hand denotes his companion and wife Lakshmi, the source of all his powers (Heaphy, 2008).
This Kolam has the feet of Goddess *Lakshmi*, which most of the Hindus have on their entrances during Diwali. It is considered auspicious and they say that Goddess finds her way to your home if you keep the feet at your entrance.

Hanuman is a Hindu god and a central character in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. He is closely associated with Rama, Sita and Lakshman and is known to be the helper and saviour in need. He is the son of *Vayu*, the god of wind. He is quick in action. He is always available as a dependable helper, hence known as Anjanear in Tamil. Devotees consider him as a saviour and helper especially when in emergency needs.
The very meaning of Shiva is ‘the auspicious one’. It is regarded as ‘…limitless, transcendent, unchanging and formless’. He is a positive destroyer who destroys all negative and turns them into positive. Generally, Shiva is never used in Kolam.
representations. However, the image shown above is a rare depiction. Symbols like *linga*, snake, *trishul* (trident) along with drums are also seen in Siva kolam.

![Image of a kolam pattern](image)

*Figure 56 Elephants in Kolam represents Ganesha*

Kolam, with the depiction of Lord Ganesha, is very popular in Tamil tradition. After Lakshmi, Ganesha’s Kolams are observed with importance. The implication of knowledge and removal of obstacles are usually the positive ideas depicted in these Kolams. The Lord is also known as Vinayak, meaning knowledgeable or *Vigneshwer*, the remover of obstacles. He is remembered especially during the inauguration of any ceremonial event. This could be one of the reasons for using Kolam at every event venue with the intention to remove obstacles that disturb the function. The image below depicts the traditional Pillayar Kolam. The term Pillayar stands for Lord Ganapathi. The particular Kolam uses cow dung which is shaped in the form of Lord Ganesha and is placed at the centre of the Kolam (Swathi, 2011).
Peacock is connected with God Murugan (Kartikeya). He is known as the God of war and Goddess Saraswathi who is connected to wisdom. This Kolam is directly represented with Peacocks drawn or with colourful shapes as shown below.
Fish (Matsya) represents the incarnation of God Vishnu. Matsya is the first avatar in the list of ten incarnations of Vishnu.

4.2.8 Depiction of Secular themes as subjects in Kolam

It is always believed that Kolam uses religious themes and symbols. But during the study, it has been observed in certain places that the younger generation prepares Kolams by integrating secular themes into the designs. While discussing with the previous generation of women, it transpired that they were not comfortable with these innovations. Their arguments focus on the sacredness of Kolam that one should not deviate from the traditional method or systems and themes followed by their ancestors (Selvi, 2012). While discussing with youngsters in the villages or community they showed an open approach to try out different depictions of their experiences and imaginations, which is the outcome of their day-to-day life. Most of the illustrations in their collection of Kolam drawings are highlight all the secular themes. Some examples like ice-cream, ladoos, arrows, heart, books, grapes, birds with nests, baby apparel, and human faces.
4.2.9 Latest Versions

4.2.9.1 Ice-cream

Besides regular Kolams, there are creative themes adopted to enhance ones a visual treat. According to the interest of the performer and occasions, different themes like ice-creams, happy faces, chocolates, lollipops are also drawn. The reason for such themes to be used is purely based on the interest of the Kolam makers. If there are questions arising as to whether such ideas can be implemented or not, it is done casually to entertain children or youth; but such ideas seem to be ignored by Kolam makers and it also highlights the generation gap between the then and present Kolam makers.

4.2.9.2 National festivals of India

National flags are drawn to add an aura to national festivals of India. During Independence and Republic day celebrations, they are drawn to symbolize the feeling of patriotism. For state festivals, similar trends are continued.
4.2.9.3 Valentine’s Day

There are Kolams drawn for Valentine’s day as well. This shows the diversity of thought and approach taken to appreciate different cultures of the world. Shapes of hearts, roses that symbolize and celebrate love among the youth of today. Even words are used to express feelings. The bow and arrow drawn show the creativity of the artists to decorate the space using diversified views.

4.2.9.4 Animation characters

There are Kolams prepared with interesting themes taken from world famous animation movies such as Mickey Mouse and Tom and Jerry. These characters are drawn to capture the attention of younger children to these themes. Children can easily relate to these characters and it makes them appreciate the artwork done.

4.2.9.5 Human face

During field work at Pollachi, it was found that certain Kolams had patterns of human faces. Such patterns were drawn in general by young adults and teenagers.

4.2.9.6 Human Hand

At Kalkare, performers had a different approach towards patterns. It was observed that Kolams depicted patterns of human palms in a circular arrangement. The positioning and gesture of the human palm signifies the human nature of caring and togetherness, as a close knit community.
4.2.9.7 Dress Kolam

The thematic representation of children’s frocks arranged as a parallelogram signifies the creative involvement and uniqueness in showing variety of patterns.

4.2.9.8 House Kolam

At Pollachi, Kolams depicting houses were found (Nandhini, 2012). These patterns have a representational significance of homeliness and a nuclear world that embodies parents and children. There are many houses in that representation, symbolizing the nature of a village settlement with a community of families living within a neighbourhood.

Human face

Human Palm

Children’s Frock

Houses

Figure 62 Latest versions of Kolam
4.2.10 Act of Kolam

4.2.10.1 Kolam is like cooking food

During the interactions with Kolam makers, some respondents mentioned that Kolam making is like preparing food. It takes a long time to make the Kolam from the point of planning to the final stage of creation (Nagarajan V. R., 1998). There are special ways and means in the preparation of Kolam just as the preparation of food. At the final stage of the preparation, a Kolam is “Consumed” by the family members, neighbours, people passing by and the minor creatures who eat the rice powder. So it also functions as a “food” for others in a different sense (Nagarajan V. R., 1998)

4.2.10.2 Gender Equality in Kolam

There are various ways to understand gender equality. Through Kolam, as a representation of creative ideas, males and females are equally represented as subjects or characters so that there is no distinction created between the two.

Performers of Kolam are usually women. However, through this art and representation, women gain equal responsibility for the home. In the Indian context of understanding men as bread winners and women as care takers of the home, women take equal share in maintaining security of life, material wealth and happiness. The presence of a Kolam in the house, signifies these necessities as invoking the presence of a supernatural being and the blessings on the household. The idea of inviting goddess Lakshmi into the house is a signification for the presence of Kolam which is an initiative by the womenfolk of the household which is an equal share of responsibility to bring prosperity.

Women express their needs, intentions and aspirations through the presence of Kolam. Its presence in the household surpasses the Indian social norm of understanding women as silent and compromising to all situations in the house and the public.

Kolam is universally acknowledged and appreciated by men and women. Men of the household as well as those walking past appreciate the nature of performing and presenting the Kolam. The appreciation is directed towards the woman’s role in bringing prosperity to the home through the art form.
4.2.10.3 Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

The whole world is one family. Kolam constitutes a world of indiscrimination with all living creatures. The concept originates from the Upanishads Chapter 6, Verse 72. This is an appropriate, yet meaningful term in Kolam. According to this concept, the entire earth consists of the minor and major animal kingdoms, plant kingdoms and humanity. The idea is to spread universality, unity and oneness among all living creatures. When the Kolam is being prepared, tiny creatures like ants, lizards, house flies, birds such as crows, and pigeons surround the Kolam to enjoy the treat offered by the ingredients used in decorating the Kolam. The beauty of this view is adorned by passers-by who also enjoy the visual treat. One can experience Vasudhaiva Kutubakam around the Kolam.

4.2.11 Navgraha Kolam and Impact on Human Life

The nine deities of Hindu religion are represented through different symbolisms of Navagraha, the nine planets exist the celestial world. They are Surya (Sun), Chandra (Moon), Khuja, Budha, Guru, Sukra, Sani, Rahu and Kedhu. Each of the deities of Navagraha Devata is pleased by making their own Kolam on the floor (Challam, 2011). It is also found in practice among many traditions to recite Moola mantra along with the performance of Kolam in the order of at least 9, 11, 21, 51, or 108 times (Nitya, 2013). During the Vedic period, the time intervals of sunset and sunrise were calculated by Saints by observing shadows. And during the nights, it was the position of the stars that was used to understand the trajectory of time. This has been accurate and has never failed in its applications. It provides us an idea about the connection between the earth and the other planets. The Rishis identified the influence that the planets had on earth and its particles way too precisely that each planet has some kind of scientific and relative element in existence. This implication was not only just applicable to astrology, but also to Kolams (Challam, 2011).
It is considered that the sun is the principle of light, life and love, or true will and the emotion of perception. The word “hrim” in this mantra is for the Sun as understood to
be its power. It denotes Harana Shakti, which is the power to hold, attract, energize, attract and fascinate. Moola mantra connected with this Kolam is: “Om hram hreem hroum sah suryaya namah”.

4.2.11.2 Monday- Moon God- Chandiran

The moon is the next planet, which is considered to be a spiritual planet. It delivers faith, devotion, peace and other serene elements of emotions. Here, from the above mantra, the term ‘shreem’ refers to the power of refuge, surrender, peace, and delight. Moola Mantra: “Om shram sreem shraum sah chandraya namah”

4.2.11.3 Tuesday- Mars God- Chevvai

Mars is considered to be the planet of strength, courage and aggression. Without this source of influence, it is believed that one cannot project force in life or in anything that he does. Here the term ‘Kreem’ denotes the Karana Shakti, which is the power of action or any work that is done. Moola Mantra: “Om kram kream kroum sah bhaumaya namah”

4.2.11.4 Wednesday- Mercury God- Budhan

The planet Mercury is believed to be the Messenger of the gods. This planet is considered to represent speech and communication. Another mantra related to this is “Om Aim Bum Budhaya Namah”, in which the term ‘Aim’ means Vachana shakti, which is the power of speech and articulation. Moola Mantra for the Kolam is: “Om bram breem broum sah budhaya namah”

4.2.11.5 Thursday- Jupiter God- Brihaspati/Guru

Planet Jupiter is considered to be the greatest in the divine grace and is believed to be powerful enough to fulfill all our needs. Here, the alternative mantra to the above mantra is, “Om Strim Brahm Brihaspataye Namah”, where the term “Strim” means the power of expanding or blossoming. Moola Mantra used is: “Om jhram jhreem jroum sah gurave namah”
4.2.11.6 Friday- Venus God- Shukran

This is the idea of a feminine planet, where there is an inclusion of the feminine spirit. The planet Venus is well known as the Goddess of Beauty and Love. The term “Klim”, which comes from another mantra “Om Klim Shum Shukraya Namah”, explains the power of love, and the emotions related to it. Moola Mantra is: “Om dram dreeum droum sah shukraya namah”

4.2.11.7 Saturday- Saturn God- Shri Saneeswaran

Saturn is a very slow moving planet and it takes roughly two and half years to cross one sign of 30 degrees. Unless it is a new moon or full moon day, generally during all Saturdays, the atmospheric pressure is very minimal. This low pressure in the atmosphere causes lethargic attitude in most of the people. Here the mantra that is associated signifies the power to delay or stop or hold things in a position which results in termination. Moola Mantra is: “Om pram preem proum sah shanaischaraya namah”

4.2.11.8 Tuesday - Raghu

People in India are generally scared of the Shadow planet called Rahu which is known as "Dragon's Head" or Ascendant Node. Though this is called a shadow planet and it takes anti clockwise move, its influence in one's horoscope is very high. The mantra signifies the power of obscuring or hiding which can also be interpreted as protecting and covering. Moola Mantra is: “Om bhram bhreem bhroum sah rahave namah”

4.2.11.9 Saturday - Kethu

Kethu Kolam is prepared on the early mornings on Saturday. The Kethu Bhagavan who is responsible for good impact on humanity is respected through the Kethu Kolam. The moola mantra for this Kolam is “Om bhram bhreem bhroum sah rahave namah”. The significance of this mantra is the essence of sacrifice, destruction or any kind of transformation.

4.2.11.10 Tuesday - Angarga

Angarakan stands for planet Mars. Drawn on Tuesdays in the poojaroom, this kokam will bring beneficial energy from Mars.
4.2.12 Rituals

According to the Hindu tradition, an individual passes through a series of stages in life (samskaras) from birth, to death. There are special Kolams designated to be drawn for these occasions (except death). Themes, sizes, and complexities of the drawings vary according to these rituals. Among these, the most magnificent and splendid Kolam drawings are drawn for marriages to add to the aura of the ceremony.

During the marriage ceremony, the surroundings and the inside of the house are decorated with special designs of Kolam that adorn and add to the spirit of the ceremony. During the cradling ceremony of the child, Kolams are drawn in the shape of cradles, beautifully decorated with flower designs and colours. During the ritual of death, one is not allowed to draw Kolams as it signifies sadness and due respect for the individual dead.

![Thottil Kolam (Birth)](image1) ![Upayana Kolam (Education)](image2)

![Thirumana Kolam (Marriage)](image3) ![Sashtipoorthi Kolam (60 years)](image4)

*Figure 64 Kolam pertaining to stages of life*
4.2.13  Religions Celebrations

4.2.13.1 Pongal

Celebrated in the month of January, connected with the festival of harvest, they draw extraordinary Kolams with themes of harvest such as overflowing pots and the symbol of sugar cane with a written message saying ‘Happy Pongal’. Even the chariot or the sankranthi ruth is drawn which represents the cosmic cycle of consistency.

4.2.13.2 Krishna Jayanthi

The feet of Krishna is symbolically depicted or drawn during the festival of Krishna Jayanthi. There are two ways to depict this, one is drawing just two foot prints and the other way is by drawing a series of foot prints. The direction of the footprints is always shown in a way that Krishna is entering the home through the main door towards the prayer room.

4.2.13.3 Vinayak Chathurthi

During the festival of Vinayaka - the elephant god (also known as Ganesha), the image of the same is drawn on the floor. This Kolam is widely known as Pillayar Kolam. This is one of the rarest among the Kolams depicted in simple to complex drawings. In these drawings, one can even find sweets like laddoo, which is known to be the favourite sweet of Ganesha.

4.2.13.4 Navarathri

Tamil Nadu embraces another festival with the display of dolls, known as kolu or golu. Nav refers to nine and rathri means night therefore called as Navrathri. Before the kolu (or doll), it is customary to draw a rangoli. The festival which runs through nine days witnesses different coloured rangolis for each day.

Different colours and patterns are used each day according to the importance of the day. Three goddesses are remembered during this season, Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati.
4.2.13.5 Deepavali

During Deepavali, Kolam with many dots are in great demand. The central portion of the pattern is usually a star design with flowers and lamps.

4.2.14 Family Welfare

Family bond and support is very much strong in Indian culture. Traditionally Indian families belief and follow the system of service rendered by woman of the house. Mother is considered as the one who protects the health and wishes the wellbeing of family members. Preparing beautiful Kolam is a way of expressing their reverence and well wishes towards the husband. It is believed in some communities that Kolam is to be prepared in the early morning itself. The husband and children of the house can see beautiful Kolam prepared in front of their house early morning. It is believed that by seeing a beautiful Kolam as they come out of the main door can bring good thoughts and positive vibrations in the minds (Raniamma, 2012).

4.2.15 Imagery of Kolam as sublime existence

4.2.15.1 Kolam is the Pottu of House

A pottu is a spot on the forehead of woman which adds the grace to her physical body. The presence of the forehead states the auspiciousness of the persona. In the same manner a Kolam placed on the front door of a house adds grace and auspiciousness to a home (Nagarajan V. R., 2007).

4.2.15.2 Kolam as River Ganges

Stepping on Kolam is similar to a sacred bath in the river Ganges. It is an act that purifies the body and spirit. However, it is seen that no one usually steps on a Kolam and smudges it because it deceives the energetic and powerful existence of itself. Therefore household shrines and doorways, kitchens and even temple shrines embrace the existence of Kolam that is characterized by ‘…ritual hospitality and auspiciousness’ (Nagarajan V. R., 2007).
4.2.15.3 Kolam as the divider

Kolam divides auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. The significance of the kitchen inside a house is such that food is prepared for the self and the family. That is regarded as the important place of the house. Secondly, the house is separated from the exterior world and makes itself a home to shelter the family. The temple is a sacred place separated from unspiritual places existing within the world (Nagarajan V. R., 2007).

4.2.15.4 Kolam as a painted prayer

Kolam performance is an act of prayer as it is undertaken at wee hours invoking the name of god and dedicating the elements of Kolam to Bhumidevi after elaborate preparations like cleaning, sprinkling and purifying the surroundings. The laying of the dots and lines are done in a most meditative mood involving blessings. Challam who is from a Tamil tradition says, “I used to pray while making the Kolam in the mornings and most of the performers sing or recite prayers during the preparation of Kolam” (Challam, 2011).

4.2.15.5 Kolam as complementary to husband-wife relationship

According to Vijayalakshmi, dots in a Kolam represent men and lines represent women, who always weave their lives around their men folk (Kavita, 2006). The dots are put in such a way that they are not left isolated from each other. There is no existence for either dot or line by themselves. They coexist and complement in harmony. It brings meaning as well as purpose to their individual existence.
4.2.16 Benefits of Kolam

People have different responses while discussing about the benefits of Kolam preparation on a daily basis (Benefits of Drawing Kolam, 2015). Some of the responses are as given below:

4.2.16.1 Enhances Creativity

Kolam is prepared on a daily basis. Every morning we find a new work at the front yard of the house. Most of the newly drawn Kolams are prepared with a new content. The maker changes the design, style, theme and size according to the day and the context. There are no restrictions with regard to the creativity that is integrated in the work. Some of the Kolam makers expressed that there is always a tendency to look for newness in the drawing. This aspect of creativity gives dynamism for Kolam drawings. For many people the creativity comes from within. This spontaneity is well projected during the preparation of the Kolam. People also get new ideas from different sources like friends, relatives, Kolam sketch books, printed books, magazines, newspapers and online sources.
4.2.16.2 Relaxes the Mind

Any activity directly or indirectly connected with Kolam gives lots of relaxation to the mind. The very act of creating Kolam on the floor itself gives relaxation to the person who is involved in it. It is observed that the expert does the drawing at a high speed and in a relaxed manner. People engaged in the preparation on sketch books use pencil or pen for drawing samples. They do the drawing with a free mind.

4.2.16.3 Releases the Stress in Human Body and Mind

Making Kolam is not just an act or performance. Performers feel gratified and there is a sense of releasing stress out of the body. It is an act that keeps one relieved from routine chores of the household. Once the entire Kolam is prepared for the day, it makes the performers happy to see their work of art as an added décor to the household. The twisting and turning of the fist and the stretching of the arms is a good way to keep the performer fit and agile. Early morning stretching of the hands, shoulders, back and neck, is a good way to keep the body healthy with increased flow of blood through the veins. As the blood flows through the veins, creative thoughts flow into the mind simultaneously to beautify the piece of art.

4.2.16.4 Kolam drawing is a process of meditation

Kolam making is the first act of the day in every morning in the traditional Hindu families of Tamil Nadu. The drawing done by the women in the surrounding of perfect silence in the dawn. Meditation requires certain criteria like perfect silence in mind and environment, body posture and position, body movements and relaxed disposition (Amy, 2015). Women involved in the preparation of the Kolam take bended body posture, clutch the fingers in a particular fashion with rice powder in it and moves around the hands according to the rhythm of the design. Most of the actions are repeated as in meditations. They do the entire performance with perfect concentration, silence or chanting mantras in the mind. They will be completing a perfect meditation by end of the of the Kolam plotting.
4.2.16.5 Part of Yoga as Exercise

Ardha Uttanasana (ardha = half; uttana = intense stretch) is a yoga posture where the person stands forward and bends down in position. He/she takes deep breath during this posture. It is almost the same posture that is taken during the preparation of Kolam. Women stand and bend forward towards the floor and perform the drawing of Kolam. She has to stand for a longer period of time without changing the body posture until the performance is over. Duration of the posture depends on the size and the complexity of the Kolam design. Keeping this yoga posture for the period of time in the early morning will give the women more stability and strength to the body.

4.2.16.6 Increase concentration

Making of an ordinary Kolam takes on an average fifteen to twenty minutes. The performer needs to spend certain time and focus on the act of drawing in details without any interruption. Focusing the eye and mind on various elements like dots, lines, and drawings in Kolam for a period of time will increase the power of mind. Focusing on the Kolam making is a simple act but has great effect on quieting thoughts and clearing your mind.

4.2.16.7 Enhances art and aesthetics

Almost all the Kolam makers came across during the study have shown interest in art and drawing. Many women have shown keen interest in creating new designs and learning from other Kolam designs. Young girls are instructed and taught to learn the art of Kolam from young age itself from mother, elderly women and neighbouring friends. It is found very interesting that all the women folk and girls in the villages have the practice of maintaining a copy of notebook which is used to collect new Kolam designs. When they gather together they teach and share each other the new designs they have come up (Laine, 2009).

4.2.17 Kolam for Social Development

As a part of social awareness, Kolam has made a place in the lives of people by conveying to them social messages. Many competitions are conducted using social awareness themes such as religious unity and harmony, education and awareness,
awareness on health and hygiene, unity and diversity and protection of environment (Vijayanand, 2012).

Kulithalai is a place near Salem in Tamil Nadu. The village consists of thirty five thousand in population. This village is famous for its cleanliness. Courtyard, roads and city premises are always kept clean and tidy by the people themselves. ExNoRa, an NGO based in Chennai had taken the initiative of creating awareness among people. Local representatives and Panchayath with the support of ExNoRa took first step of creating social behavioural change among the mass. People of the place believe and follow the system of decorating the courtyard and premises with Kolam as part of their daily ritual. Kolam is very much part of their culture. Kolam is special for everyone in that city. They respect and consider it as part of their religious practice. The place where the Kolam is made is considered as God’s dwelling place, especially the Goddess Lakshmi, who is the cause of wealth and cause of all blessing.

The habit of people was that they used to throw garbage accumulated in their house in public places leaving the place untidy. There were eighty eight such places where people used to keep them untidy. One day a team of members formed by women of that area decided to clean those public places. They removed the huge garbage pile and cleaned the placed with water as people prepare the place for Kolam. People were looking at them and passed many comments on the very act of cleaning. Then they spread cow-dung water on the floor. Then they silently started preparing Kolam on the floor. There was a positive response to the very act. No one has dared to throw garbage or any kind of waste material in public places thereafter. Out of eighty eight places, in more than eighty places people could change the behavior of dirtying public places (Ilamayil, 2012). They have become more conscious of cleanliness in public and private spaces.

4.2.18 Influence on other religious communities

Even though one can contend that the practice of Kolam is Hindu in its origin, the contemporary society irrespective of religious boundaries has adapted the practice of Kolam. The filed work has shown very clearly how the Christian community has embraced this practice of Kolam and has given its own flavour and colour.
Hindus draw Kolams at the threshold of their houses all through the year but the month of Margazhi (December - January) is very special because it is considered to be an auspicious month by the Hindus. Hence even the families which do not decorate their entrances other days, do so in the month of Margazhi. The same month is also important for the Christians because Christmas falls in the month of Margazhi. Hence Christians have also taken to the practice of Kolams. This practice is common to all Christian homes but it is predominantly found in the regions of Madurai, Trichy and Tanjore (Sekar, Kolam Practice among Christians, 2014).

![Figure 66 Christian themes and symbols used in a Kolam](image)

In a typical village, Christians and Hindus coexist together. It is quite common to see the houses of Hindus next to the houses of Christians. While the structure of house is the same, what distinguishes the Christian homes from the other homes is also their practice of Kolams. The Christian homes are decked with Christmas symbols of stars, candles, Christmas trees, Christmas bells, Cross and so on. It is a practice among all Christians to hang a star atop of the houses in the season of advent signifying the coming of Jesus. The Christian homes in Tamil Nadu deck the ground in front of their houses with the stars signifying the same.
4.3 Understanding Kolam through Metaphor

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (Sakadolskis, 2003). Berger defines metaphor as a form of analogy (Berger, 2012). A metaphor has two or more referents such as: the tenor, (the literal topic or idea) and the vehicle, (the figurative or image). Metaphor is widely used in the field of literature. Lisa an author says that it can suggest and do more with image than in mere text (Janos, 2014). As Sullivan states that image can be equated with twenty words (O'Sullivan, 1994). But it demands active as well as imaginative decoding of the cultural myths from the images in order to find the characteristics and meaning encoded (O'Sullivan, 1994). Kolam is an art form encoded with cultural myths.

The images drawn in the form of Kolam on the floor carries lots of meanings. These meanings are not just limited to the physical form as it appears to the spectators. When the members of the cultural community see these tiny images drawn on the Kolam, their imaginations go beyond the physical conventional meanings. These conventional images are acquired largely by the metaphorical meanings in the mind of the people unconsciously and automatically (Lakoff, 1987). It is found during the field visit that there are different stories existing in connection with the Kolam where it is practiced. According to (Coulson & Oakley, 2005) the image vary its interpretations according to the context. These stories differ in meanings and interpretations according to the contextual usage, local understanding and belief system of the people.

4.3.1 Personal Beliefs

4.3.1.1 Protection and good wish for family members

Kolam is a sign of protection and good wish towards the family members especially the husband who is the breadwinner of the family (Smit, The Art of Longing and Belonging: Kolam as a Reflection of Women's Complex Relations with Identity and Power in Contemporary India, 2013). One of the women from the village called Kalkere in Bengaluru mentioned during the interview that, “it is the responsibility of a good wife to work to safeguard the good health and mind of the husband by making a Kolam in the early mornings” (Selvi, 2012). She prepares the Kolam in the early morning
before the sunrise and before everyone wakes up in the family. According to her, everyone in the family should see the Kolam as they leave the home and cross the main door to the outer word. She says, “As the husband leaves the home, seeing the Kolam at the threshold will give him a positive energy and power which helps him to sustain throughout the day. It helps him to be successful in whatever he does that day and to comeback with good health” (Selvi, 2012).

4.3.1.2 Community responsibility

Every family of the community members are supposed to prepare Kolam on an everyday basis. The presence of Kolam in front of every house symbolically says that each house is equally responsible to bring happiness and prosperity in their community (Chitra, 2013) (Pintchman, 2007). Sometimes there will be empty labyrinth without any Kolam drawings. In such cases members of the community especially from the neighbourhood family, will enquire about the reason for the failure to make a Kolam (Mohita, 2012). The reasons may be simple or serious, individual or family the members will come to know the issue through the presence and absence of Kolam. Thus through the Kolam preparation in a community two way community responsibilities are practiced: one is individual or family responsible towards the community; secondly the responsibility from the community towards individual family and the members of the house.

4.3.1.3 Feeling of “This is my home”

An interview with a couple of women in a village highlights what Kolam expresses in connection to a home. They had the feeling of owning the house, for which they gave a deep insight emphasizing their possession of having their own home. Kolam captures its importance in connection with a home. The existence of a Kolam within the house shows many attributes related to the homely nature of living within a family. The basic needs of safety and security are reflected through the existence of Kolam. It is a micro cosmic world that represents the attributes of a home (Raghavan S., 2012). When a child is born in a home, it passes the various stages of life. Attributes of comfort, cleanliness, submission to the household needs, sacredness, belongingness, love, interaction and dutifulness towards daily activities such as cooking, serving, caring,
studying, learning, pampering, caressing, praying and talking among household
members are experienced and practiced in a home (Malar, 2012).

4.3.1.4 Panchabhutha Kolam

There was another depiction of Kolam drawing found in the village at Hoskote which
consisted of five dots. Dots were placed at the top, bottom, left and right along with the
one at the centre. This was also part of Kolam even though it was drawn separately on
the vertical wall near the main door.

People of the family described the Kolam as the representation of five senses of human
body – Sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. All the sensory organs are important to
human existence and life through which we are connected to the universe (Balaji, 2012).
The mother of the family had different versions followed by the son. She had a spiritual
interpretation that the five dots represent the five senses of god/deity. God has the power
and capacity to know everything through his/her powerful senses. We all, including the
universe are not hidden from the Divine (Kamalamma, 2012).

The same image had a third interpretation when the photograph was shown to another
Hindu family. It represents the panchabhutha – the five elements through which the
whole world is created. These elements are as follows Earth or Bhumi; Water or Jalam
; Fire or Agni; Air or Vayu and then Ether or Akasham (Kamalamma, 2012)

Figure 67 The five dots represent the Panchabhutha - five elements
4.3.2 Different stories existing in the Kolam practicing culture

4.3.2.1 Invoking the Presence of Bhumadevi

Kolam Narratives revolve for the most part around four Goddesses: Bhumadevi, the earth goddess; Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, good fortune, prosperity and rice; Mudevi, the goddess of laziness, sleepiness and poverty and Thulsi Devi, the Goddess of Indian basil. The reason why the women draw Kolam as the first thing in the morning is to remember that they owe a debt to the earth Goddess, who bears all beings upon her. Whenever a woman makes a Kolam, she is supposed to think of Bhumadevi. The earth Goddess is seen both as the physical earth, as a living being in possession of soul as well as the specific soil wherein a woman stands. Bhumadevi is considered as the mother, source of existence and sustenance. The practice of Kolam is an offering of thanksgiving to the earth Goddess. The practice of Kolam thus brings to more conscious level the relationship and dependence that the humanity has on the earth. The Kolam is thus considered to be a painted prayer as women recognize the earth goddess and invoker her divine presence in that particular space where the Kolam is drawn. This is indeed a request from the womenfolk to Bhumadevi to forgive the transgressions of mankind. The presence however is temporal as far as the Kolam exists (Alaine M. Low, 2001).

4.3.2.2 Invoking the Presence of Lakshmi

Kolams essentially represent spirituality. Kolam is drawn using the rice flour precisely for the reason that insects, ants and birds like sparrows may feed on them. In this sense the woman of the house becomes Annapoornaeshwari herself. Kolams thus become the source of living. Kolam represents the man’s concern for the creation and through Kolam one performs the act of annadana. Kolams are also drawn in order to welcome Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity to one’s house. There is a Puranic story which refers to this. Devas and the Asuras were at work making nectar from the ocean of milk and at that time there emerged many things from the ocean. Goddess Lakshmi also emerged from the ocean and asked Lord Vishnu for a home to live. The Lord told her to find her home in houses where the entrances are made clean with cow dung water and adorned with Kolams.
4.3.2.3 Keeping the Evil Away

There emerged from the ocean also Moodevi – the Goddess of misfortune who also asked for a residence. Lord Vishnu told her that she could find her home in those houses whose entrance are not clean and not decked with Kolams. Hence people believe that while Kolam is invoking the presence of Lakshmi to their houses, it is also at the same time warding off Moodevi from their houses (Saroja, 2013). Tulsi Devi is another wife of Vishnu who is also the goddess of goodness and who ensures the protection from evil. Kolams are drawn invoking her presence too.

There is yet another description on the same. Kolam drawn at the threshold has also to do with the Tamil concept of evil eye. The Kolam is there drawn with a purpose to ward off the ill effect of the evil eye for the one who makes the Kolam as well as everyone who crosses the threshold. It is believed that an evil eye cast upon a family member as an individual or as a family, wreaks chaos in the family just as a sickness devastates the health (Conty, 2002). When someone casts his evil eye on a desired object, that eye has the power to destroy the well being of the object. It is here that Kolam functions as a net, a catcher of that evil eye and a protected screen for the negative emotions and thus protects the members of the family.

4.3.2.4 Kuchela and Kannan

Kuchela and his family were suffering from extreme poverty. Even though Kuchela’s wife had no rice to cook, she saw to it that she drew Kolam with rice flour. Seeing this, the villagers made fun of her. Kuchela’s wife however continued to draw Kolam so that the insects and ant might feed on it and thus invoked the presence of Lakshmi. The Lord Krishna saw that his friend Kuchela and his wife continued to draw Kolam despite their poverty. Kuchela’s wife sent him to Lord Krishana with a handful of beaten rice. Even before Kuchela could ask Lord Krishna to eat the beaten rice and bless his family in return, Krishna began to eat the beaten rice and Kuchela is blessed with immense riches (Sakthivel, 2004).

4.3.2.5 Saradha Devi

Saradha Devi, wife of Ganapalam, the King of Parvathipuram was childless for years. They carried out penance and prayed to Sivan incessantly. Sivan appeared and said,
“You should build five houses for five families. You need to observe the regulations of the puja as per the instructions of the lady of the house where Lakshmi makes her home and then you shall beget a child.” It was Akkammal, the resident of the last of the five houses, who used to clean the entrance of her house with cow dung water, draw Kolams and light a lamp in front of the house because of which Lakshmi came and resided in her house. Saradha Devi heard of this, learned from Akkamma, the art of Kolam and performed it along with the puja. First year she drew Kolam to have a baby and had puranakalasham over the Kolam; in the following year, she made Kolams to become rich and she set up a stole of sandal paste over the Kolam. In the third year, she drew Kolam for prosperity and set up palkalasham over the Kolam. In the fourth year, she made Kolam for long life and set up betel leaves and performed Puja. She received all the benefits and comforts and lived long happily (Saroja, 2013)

4.3.2.6 Red Sand Kolam

Ravanan comes as Veedanan and deceives Hanuman and takes the Ram and his brothers as prisoners and to sacrifice them as an offering to goddess Kali. However, the daughter of Ravanan falls in love with Ram. Hanuman takes her help and finds out the place where Ram and his brothers are imprisoned and Hanuman gets them released. This causes war. Every drop that falls from the body of Ravan, rises as another Ravan and fights against Ram and His brothers. Hanuman then rushes to the daughter of Ravan seeking her help. Hanuman finds out the place where his heartbeat resides from her. He crosses seven mountains and kills a bee. As the blood of the bee is frozen on the ground, Ravanan dies on the battlefield. In order to commemorate this event, Red sand Kolam is drawn. This story is orally passed on (Sakthivel, 2004).

4.3.2.7 An old woman drawing Kolams becomes young

Tirumallicai Alvar is an ardent devotee of Tirumal-vishnu who was residing at Kanchipuram. There was a devadasi who used to clean the temple and draw Kolams everyday. As she became old, she could not anymore do the service that she had been doing all along. Kanikkannan who is one of the disciples of Alvar changed here to a virgin young girl. When the King of Kanchipuram learned this, he wished to remain young as well and so he asked Kanikannan to restore his youth which Kanikannan refused because the King had his own motives to remain young. The king became
furious and banished Kanikannan away. As Kanikannan and his guru Tirumallicai Alvar and Tirumal left Kanchipuram, the entire town found itself in pitch darkness. The king then apologized and the three came back. This is a story which has no direct link to Kolam but the woman’s ardent desire to serve the lord by means of drawing Kolams brings her youth back (Saroja, 2013).

4.3.2.8 Drawing Kolams around the Oven

After having smeared the sides of the oven with the cow-dung, a woman was about to lit it but then she heard a loud crying sound aloud. When she looked at the direction where it came from, the woman saw the Goddess Lakshmi with a baby in her hands. The woman was taken aback and was in at great wonder. Goddess Lakshmi said that she wanted to let the baby down to which the woman did agree. Lakshmi said that she could not leave the child on a floor that is not decked with Kolams around the oven. From then on the woman began to draw Kolams around the oven which in turn brought to family all prosperity and wealth. The purpose behind the above narrative is that the Kolam has to be drawn around the oven too only then the home will have the privilege of being an abode of Lakshmi (Saroja, 2013).

4.3.2.9 Cow dung as the place where Lakshmi Resides

Cow is considered to be mother by the Hindus and hence it is called as Komata and Kamatenu. Kamatenu came out of parkatal which means milk ocean even before Goddess Lakshmi rose from there. The thirty three crores of gods could not find a place on earth and therefore they asked Kamatenu to give them places to reside. She protected them all and gave them places over all her body, in each part of her. In the end, Lakshmi arrived and asked for a place too. But only the back of her body was available for Lakshmi and she agreed to say there. Since the back of Kamatenu has become the abode of Lakshmi, the cow-dung has been considered as auspicious and sacred. It is for this reason of auspiciousness that people sprinkle cow-dung in front of their houses. The use of cow-dung before drawing Kolam is to invite the Goddess lakshmi to come and reside. The presence of cow-dung at the entrance of the house removes all evil powers and inauspiciousness. This story is found in Mahabharata where we find that Kamatenu gave a place for Lakshmi to stay (Saroja, 2013).
4.3.2.10 Lotus Kolams

Raman neared the place of king Janaka of Mitilai with Vishwamitra and Latuchmanan. Raman saw Janaki standing on the balcony and was enchanted by her beauty. She saw him too. However Raman had all the admiration and love and care for Sita and when he looked down he saw the Lotus Kolam. Vishwamitra immediately asked a question to Raman: Which is beautiful – the Lotus in the balcony or the Lotus on the ground? Raman was very ashamed as his mind went wandering (Saroja, 2013).

4.4 Interplay of three elements

The crux of the study is visually represented in the image. There is a mutual relationship among the three constructs - illustration, narration and metaphor, which forms the main title of the study. Illustration, being in the outer layer, refers to the physical structure of the art form, which is synonymous with the structure of a human body. It is the visible phase of the art form. It exists as a visual aspect or structure just in sight and visual pleasure. Narration evolves from the basic aspect of illustration which equals to the life in a human being. Narration is formed out of various factors like culture, context and society.

![Interplay among three components in Kolam art](image)

*Figure 68 Interplay among three components in Kolam art*
Metaphor develops in the process, forming the core of knowledge about the representation. It is similar to the soul that resides in a human body. The interplay among illustration, narration and metaphor are well-knit like the interplay of body – life – soul in human beings. In order to embrace the perfect understanding of Kolam, one needs to experience these three layers of illustration, narration and metaphor.