**Conclusion**

Summarizing the discussions in the previous chapters, to begin with, it is certain that besides India, the ephemeral floor art was/is practised in various parts of the world. This art does not belong to any particular age or place. Nor is it the monopoly of any race or culture, rather it reveals working of a creative human mind, through the ages. Today it is recognized as an Indian art due to its presence in the living traditions of the country. An attempt to define and correlate identical or similar beliefs and traditions in other cultural groups helps in deriving certain conclusions. The most basic conclusion one can arrive at is that the floor art has developed on two fundamental considerations vital for living; one is the protection against the incomprehensible entities and the other, the innate urge for the well-being.

With respect to the existence of the floor art in India, the indirect evidences like the presence of some common symbols in the archaic Indian rock paintings and on the remains of the IVC and also on the ancient coins, sculptures, temple decorations, collectively point to the existence of this art on the Indian soil since very ancient times. This is further substantiated by the literary sources which effectively show the existence of this art for more than two thousand years.

The floor art is known by different names in different parts of the country and also shows regional peculiarities in style. In spite of this, the diffusion of the art throughout India and the fact that these arts share certain motifs and symbols and some common beliefs, points to a common origin. Furthermore, all these regional variations, known by a common synonym – *rangoli*, are related by the following factors: they are almost exclusively practised by women; they are intimately linked with agricultural life and village tradition; they are connected with folk rituals and archaic beliefs in magic, the material used for the designs was originally in most regions rice or rather rice flour or any other flour like wheat, jowar etc. which was easily available. It is further evident that the ritualistic symbols essentially derive from the processes of fertility, death and rebirth and the main intent of these ritualistic symbols and images is to ward off evil influences and ensure sanctification and protection.
Considering the development of this art, it is seen that with the development of human mind and the changes in the way it perceived things, the art too kept evolving and acquired different meanings. Thus it has clearly evolved from being a symbol of protection and well being to being the symbol of fertility and of fulfilling desires. Parallel to this, the symbols acquired some religious status and were employed in religious rituals. The art was practised by the women at the folk level and by the priests, tantrics and the like at the religious or devotional cult level. This practice is also prevalent currently.

The coalition of field work with literary studies has uncovered the various hidden meanings related to the art. Thereby it becomes clear that the rangoli art originally and up to some extend even today represents more than a mere aesthetically pleasing decoration. It has a fundamentally ritualistic character and it touches almost all spheres of life, from the social, philosophical, psychological, didactic, hygienic aspects to the highly developed aesthetic and ethical perceptions. It functions as part of a religious system which encompasses beliefs like magic, exorcism as well as devotion and worship to a deity, besides also being aesthetically appealing.

Considering the development of Indian culture from pre-Aryan period to the present and mainly its impact on the traditions, customs and rituals in general and rangoli art in particular, it is seen that this art has come a long way, absorbing many influences and assimilating them.

We see that the archaic people’s culture based on the primacy of the female principle, was caused to survive in women’s rites and fertility rituals, under the Aryan influence. Thus began the tradition of vrata rites which brought into operation song, dance, visual arts of picture and image-making and magical formulae of incantation and gesture. The vrata rites maintained their integrity independent and parallel to the Brahmin-dominated Shastriya culture, thus leading to the development of two parallel
movements - *Margi* and *Desi* or *Shastriya* and *Ashastriya*. Both these movements in their vernacular form found expression in the rural tradition.

Next came the domain of *tantra* where the act of union became the focal point. In tantric art the body of the goddess was represented in geometric abstraction as well as colour. The floor art was also influenced by *tantrism* leading to the development of the *yantras* and *mandalas*. These *yantras* and *mandalas* became a part of the Buddhist and the Jain ritual practices as well.

Currently we see that the art is broadly practised at three levels – by the women at folk level, by the priests at religious level and by the *tantrics* and like at the mystic or super-natural level. With respect to symbols it is observed that though there is no rigid compartmentalization as to its use at all the three levels, some symbols are still used mainly at the respective levels. Thus we see that the authentic native symbols like the animal and vegetative motifs along with the materialistic objects are the ones drawn by women during the *vrata* rites. The *Brahmanical magic-* diagrams like the *Sarvatobhadra Mandala, Navagraha Mandala, Tilak Mandala* and so on, even today remains the sacred privilege of the priestly class only. Whereas the tantric symbols like the interlocked triangles, the *beej-aksharas* and such others are mainly used by the practitioners of this cult. However, it seen that the *Ashastriya, Shastiya* and *tantric* have been influenced by each others beliefs and practices, thus leading to the mingling of symbols. Having thus emerged afresh from the elements assimilated from different backgrounds, the *rangoli* art today has developed into an independent media of aesthetic expression.

Contrary to the popular belief that *rangoli* is drawn only on happier occasions, it is seen that it is also drawn at funerary ceremonies, thus indicating that the practice is not only for auspicious ceremonies and the purpose not always decorative.
In the modern civilized world of today, sometimes this art is looked down upon as the work of some household traditional women only. Change in beliefs and perception is bound to happen with modernization and development. Nevertheless, in general it appears that this art has surpassed the test of time, in the sense, it has neither grown sluggish nor outmoded, nor has it been completely discarded by the masses in spite of mounting pressure of the modern age. There is no doubt that it has been tempered with to such an extent that it is certainly not what it must have been in the beginning and its emotional qualities too have suffered. But this has not reduced it to nothingness nor has it impaired the creative faculties of the women-folk.

It is said that, whatever of the past that enriches the present will find a place inside it. Casual forms with no significance beyond their decorative values do not endure, nor do they have the strength to survive and flourish in a new artistic environment. The fact that the rangoli symbols have survived for so long, suggests that there is a very strong association of beliefs and magical aspects attached to it. The survival of these symbols through space and time and their facility for absorption in new environments can be attributed to their simplicity, flexibility and elemental appeal and also to the beliefs of the people.

Another practical reason for the survival of this art is paradoxically, the impermanence of the materials the women use. In rural India, the mud walls or floors need to be renovated and decorated constantly. Mothers instruct daughters in doing so because only in this way can the continuance of knowledge of subject-matter and technique be ensured. Thus the survival of this art today can be attributed to continuity which is achieved solely by means of constant repetition and reproduction. Hence a current work of this art may also be regarded to an extent as an indirect source of information on the work of earlier periods, thanks to the continuity resulting from perpetual reproduction.

Many arts have lost due to lack of patronage but the rangoli art by women have continued independent of economic changes.
Rangoli in a sense carries the connotation of anonymity, collective wisdom, spontaneity and simplicity. It reflects the larger philosophy of life through patterns of memory and an extensive visual and geometric vocabulary.

In his work *Feudal Society*, Marc Bloch, the spokesman of Annales School has written a chapter on Folk Memory in the part entitled as ‘Growth of ties of Dependence’. He has tried to give a historiography of the use of Folk Memory for the understanding of history. He aims at the reconstruction of several aspects such as religious history and the socio-cultural conditions. His methodology can be applied to explore the tradition of rangoli, this being a folk art. The art has remained in the public memory and its everyday manifestation has preserved its continuity.

**Aesthetic Evaluation:**

If rangoli diagrams are to be explained in two words, they would be: emotions outlined. The whole structure of rangoli patterns is based on line. The modes may differ, mediums may change and materials may vary, but the significance of line will remain unsubordinated by any other element of art, undominated by any other aesthetic consideration.

In classic Sanskrit literature, like the *Chitra sutra* of the Vishnudharmottara P. and Vatsyayana’s *Kamasutra* importance of line has been much emphasized. William Blake, while stressing the significance of line says, ‘The great golden rule of art, as well as of life is this: that the more distinct, sharp and wiry the bounding lines, the more perfect the work of art, and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imagination, plagiarism and bungling.

Though the women artists are unaware of such intellectual conclusions about line, they are endowed with an intuitive sensibility to comprehend the infinite values of line in revealing inner vision- their
emotion being. Executed under the blissful undulation of eternal ecstasy, the drawings are rhythmic, fluent and impulsive enough to communicate the joy of the artist to the onlooker and to make him move with child-like keenness along the rapturous course traced by these lines.

The thrifty use of lines is one of the essential characteristics of rangoli art. This tendency is one of the psychic reasons tending to the evolution of geometrical symbols, motifs and such non-naturalistic forms that possess only a characteristic identity with the objects which these forms represent.

For drawing non-ritualistic diagrams, the artist is at liberty to express herself through the personal choice of forms. The artist while drawing is not pre-occupied with any specific idea but it is all just a spontaneous projection of her emotional comprehension of the external world – the revelation of an inner vision about the phenomenal world.

On the contrary, the drawing of the ritualistic diagrams is an act of contemplation where the artist is required to stick to certain rules and interpretation as ordained by tradition, with respect to the theme suitable for the respective ritual. Deviation from it would render the drawing unfit for the ritual. Though there is staleness of theme in such work, the aesthetic rendering of the whole composition according to one’s distinguished aesthetic sensibility imparts vitality, freshness and identity to it. This element of ‘aesthetic rendering’ of composition is the scheme of arrangement and combination of different forms and colours – the pattern.

The women in the villages have to work extremely hard even for mere subsistence. This has tied them so tightly to their daily chores that very little time is left for them to participate in activities outside their daily grind. Obviously, in whatsoever little time they can snatch, they try to produce something comforting to their feelings, something beautiful to make their living happier and their dwellings pleasant. This cathartic situation to express feelings in a little possible time imparts directness, spontaneity and formal brevity.
The lady artist does not depend upon any technical principles of drawing but acts spontaneously to give expression to her emotions through the forms which have been transformed to their vital essentials or rendered ‘abstract’ during the psychical process, and preserved deep down in the dossier of her subconscious being. This tendency of introversive exploration for ‘modes’ gives rise to the symbolism in folk art. Obviously, these ‘symbolic modes’ do not possess any visual likeness to the original objects, but emphasise their characteristics with some degree of verisimilitude. The women artist is endowed with an intuitive sensibility selective enough to single out the latent values of the objects depicted and to cast them into symbolic moulds, while rejecting realistic visual forms. Thus different objects are represented by the manipulation of ‘elementary essentials’ of the objects and discarding all overburdening superfluous organic details.

The *Tulsi Vrindavan, Paglya motifs, Baingan ka binta, Singhada ka chowk* and many more are good examples of such symbolism in *rangoli*. The evolution of these symbols in the minds of the artists may not be attributed to any intellectual perception of functional convenience of the artist; but they seem to have got evolved in the folk consciousness in a very effortless manner under the spontaneous thrust of emotions.

Authorized by canon, sanctified by tradition and stabilized by usage, these symbols have assumed universal significance in unfolding the cosmic mysteries and expressing worldly affairs. They are as valid today as they were when formulated centuries ago. These remain an aesthetic expression of the deeply set religious aspirations of the people, and that too with a keen sense of beauty and harmony, heralding spiritual uplift. These are ‘sacred’.

Colour adds further meaning to the linear forms of *rangoli* and renders them more abstract. As discussed in Chp.1, colours are more than just an aesthetic choice; they convey concepts as well as feelings.
On observing this art we come to know the existence through ages, of a highly developed aesthetic sense among our people.

**Conservation and preservation of this art form:**

Culture is a living thing. It is formed of the symbols, meanings and behaviour of people, but can live beyond the lives of those individual humans who carry it. It is like a living organism, although it is not biological. It transcends the biological. However, the preservation of culture also becomes necessary. Rather, in today’s context not only preservation but empowerment of culture has become absolute.

The art of rangoli is one of the important parts of our cultural wealth.

Currently it is observed that though the same traditional symbols are employed, they are slowly losing their specific reference and significance with the changing context. The efficacy of the symbol is gradually dissolving into formalized forms which only remotely evoke their primitive nature. The art today has blossomed into a delightful visual art with secular aesthetic appeal. It expresses symbols and motifs of both ancient and recent origin as well as of different cultural levels and epochs. Its subject matter has also widened with changing times and ranges from the traditional, religious to contemporary. However, it is seen that one movement does not obliterate, overtake or destroy another preceding it in time, only a further layer is added.

Considering the survival of this art over such a long period of time in spite of different challenges and influences, one can conclude that the art is here to stay. Despite time and space constraints in urban areas, slowly making it a feature of rural pockets, the tradition of rangoli has transcended time and continued. However, with the spread of new social structures, environmental mutations, technological advances and disintegration of the system of values in which the rangolis flourished, the rangolis are
slowly losing their original meaning. At their most sublime, the *rangolis* survive as a decorative visual art form. Even as a ritualistic practice it is not motivated by the original compulsions. These changes are inevitable and are bound to occur. It thus becomes necessary to study innovations and experimentations as new developments rather than ignore them as distortions in tradition.

With the changing circumstances, many traditional symbols are getting lost forever. Before the symbols disappear altogether, it is important to carefully record them.

Few recommendations are made for preservation and conservation of the *rangoli* symbols and motifs and for promotion of the art:

- As suggested in Chp.6, it is necessary to create newer contexts where *rangoli* motifs can emerge as an independent form.

- An exhaustive digital data bank of various designs, patterns and motifs of the fading art form is urgently required. This work can be boosted by regular interactions between folk – artists and artists from various art institutes, in the form of field trips and workshops. Exchange of knowledge in this way can evolve a successful network to enter into business partnerships. This will not only widen the aesthetic horizons of both the partners but also offer opportunity to develop skill and entrepreneurship. This will eventually lead to empowerment of culture.

- Exhibitions should be organized with support from government bodies and NGO’s in order to bring this folk art at par with the modern art. These can be made into travelling exhibitions. This will not only aid in wider outreach and dissemination of the tradition to wider public but also help enhance the understanding of this art form and get it the recognition it highly deserves.