Chapter 3: Regional classification of Floor Art –

Western and Southern parts of India

This chapter throws light on the unique aspects of ephemeral floor art in the western states of Gujarat and Maharashtra and the Southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, and Kerala. Rangoli, as the floor art is known in Maharashtra, is referred to as satiyya in Gujarat, kolam in Tamilnadu, muggulu or muggu in Andhra Pradesh and rangavali in Karnataka. Besides these, poovidal in Kerala is a floor decoration made using fresh colourful flowers.

As mentioned in the above chapter, some peculiar characteristics as per the topography and geography, corresponding flora and fauna, faith and customs are visible in each region of India. This is more so true in case of the Dravidian culture of Southern India which is unique and different from the rest of India. The main characteristic of the region is the adaptability and continuity of an ancient, conservative and traditionally-minded culture which is retained up to a great extent as compared to the Northern region which has always been more vulnerable and exposed to outside influences.

The major cultural difference observed with respect to the art of rangoli in this region as compared to the North and the East is that, it is only in the Southern parts of India and Maharashtra that the art is practised as a daily ritual, thus providing a rich field for study and investigation. Any one traveling through rural parts of these regions will be richly rewarded by the sight of a variety of patterns decorating the threshold of even the humblest of homes. Drawing of rangoli still forms an essential part of the daily work routine of women in this region.

The floor patterns in this part of the country are mainly based on an infrastructure of dots, which are then linked together either in a linear manner or are circumvented, or both. Sometimes the drawings have double or triple continuous lines, or even two or three main lines that cross each other.
It is observed that as we move southwards from Maharashtra to Tamilnadu, the *rangoli* patterns become curvilinear. Though the basic grid of dots is used all over the region, the dots which remain invisible in Maharashtra become visible in the Southern states, as lines pass around the dots to form a pattern. Thus in Maharashtra traditionally the linear style exists, in the *muggu* of Andhra Pradesh and *rangavali* of Karnataka both the styles, linear and circumvented are visible where as only the circumvented style exists in Tamilnadu.

**Gujarat & Maharashtra:**

Gujarat is home to many traditional art and craft. The *Lippan kam* (mud-mirror work) done inside the mud huts in villages of Kutch, Kutchi embroidery and the Pithora paintings of the Rathwa tribals are world famous. The Kathi women of Kathiawar region are known to make spontaneous patterns with the finger-tips on the cow dung smeared ground, while it is still wet. On drying, these impromptu creations create beautiful effect on the ground.

As far as the ephemeral art is concerned, not much information is available from this region. The survey conducted in the region does not reveal any style or speciality peculiar to the region. *Rangoli* is drawn only on festive occasions here and the motifs are more of decorative nature consisting of flowers, birds and animals and ornamental designs. The decorative aspect is more focused upon than the ritualistic. However, on religious rituals, the *Swastika* motif is very popular. In fact, *rangoli* in Gujarat is called *Sathiya* which itself means *Swastika*. The white stone powder used for *rangoli* is called *chirodi* or *chiroti*.

H.A. Rose, in her studies about superstitions and ceremonies notes, "In Gujarat, the *kota* (storage) meant for treasures or grains is invariably marked with the aid of which some protecting power is
invoked. A chain of 3 and 5 lines & sometimes trident like figures is continued around the kota and swastika with dots is drawn".  

The study of the rangolis of the Parsis reveals that the Parsis probably adopted the practice of making rangoli from the Gujarati banias. This suggests that rangoli was commonly drawn in Gujarat in earlier days. However, not much evidence is available regarding the type of symbols drawn then.

An unusual trend of making three-dimensional illusionary rangolis by individual rangoli artists is seen in modern Gujarat, especially Baroda (discussed in Chp.5).

**Rangoli of the Parsis:**

Rangolis are also made by the Parsi community in India. They have a long tradition of making rangolis which they call as chalk. They trace the patterns not only in front of their home and hearth but also in the fire temples and on certain occasions in front of water bodies like wells, rivers and seas. The ritual of putting the chalks is followed very religiously. A Parsi home is easily distinguishable because of the torana which hangs on the entrance door and the distinguishable chalk which decorates the threshold. The Parsis believe that putting a chalk is a shagun, a forbearer of all things good and pure.

According to the Parsi ladies interviewed, the term chalk adopted by them for rangoli is in relation to the material used for making it. Chalk is soft, porous, pure white limestone unlike the course rangoli powder used otherwise. The act of making rangoli is referred to as chalk puravna by them which remind us of the chowk-purana of U.P. Thus chalk may also be a derivation of the term chowk which is commonly used for rangoli all over India.

The Parsis have their typical and specialized chalk boxes, much unlike any other community, with their own traditional designs etched in dot forms. The chalk powder is put inside this

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metallic box and stamped onto the damp floor creating artistic patterns. Sometimes the patterns are made on the threshold of every doorway inside the house.

It is indeed difficult to say when exactly the Parsis started making chalks and whether it was purely a Hindu custom adapted by them or they already knew and practised this art before coming to India. Before making any assumptions regarding this, the history of the Parsis in India needs to be studied.

It is known that the Parsis in order to escape religious persecution, and for the sake of their faith, left their own country Persia and landed on the shores of India somewhere around 7th to 10th Century. The Parsis through force of circumstances had to merge themselves into the country of their adoption and though cherishing the Faith, for which they underwent such hardships, had perforce to introduce some of the Hindu rituals into their original Zoroastrian form of worship obviously to placate the Hindu Rulers who had given them shelter and allowed them other privileges.211

These Hindu rituals are still evident in their ceremonies and customs, especially the placing of the kumkum on the foreheads of the bride and bridegroom at the time of marriage and also the concerned persons on various auspicious occasions. The chanting of some of their prayers in Sanskrit and the drawing of chalks are believed to be some of the Hindu influences on their customs.

Iran is the ancient motherland of the ancestors of Indian Parsis. It is believed that the Iranians and Hindus were not two different people but one Aryan race and that they lived together, followed the same religion and spoke the same language. They followed the Indo-Iranian religion and stayed long in Iran, where it is believed, some of the ancient hymns of the Rigveda were actually composed.212 If this is to be believed, then one can assume that the Parsis probably knew about the practice of drawing rangoli as the Rigveda mentions the drawing of mandalas for worshipping the Sun and for other Vedic rituals like yadnyas.

Studies by scholars have revealed great affinity between the Veda and the Avesta. Dr. Sindhu Dange in one of her articles concludes that the traditions of Avesta and Rigveda have emerged from a single common source.\(^{213}\) Though there is no mention of drawing the mandalas in the Avesta, the tradition must have nevertheless continued.

Going back to history, it is believed that the followers of Indo-Iranian religion had difference of opinion on certain questions like Polytheism, consumption of the Soma juice and the sacrifice of the animals in worship and thus a large number of them left Iran for India where they were known as Hindus.\(^{214}\) Those of them who stayed back were subsequently called Parsis, after the Iranian province of Pars.

These Parsis, later arrived in India via sea route and landed on the coasts of Gujarat. The King Jaadi Rana, before allowing the Parsis to settle in his land wanted them to accept few conditions which included adapting the language and dressing of the land. The Parsi refugees having left with no choice had to accept the conditions thus beginning the mingling of Hindu and Parsi cultures. The customs and rituals which they saw around them were absorbed in their daily rituals and practice of worship. Associated closely with the Banias, they, ostensibly at least, adopted all their customs.\(^{215}\) If the Parsis have adopted the Hindu ritual of drawing rangolis then, it also highlights the fact that drawing of rangoli was a common practice in Gujarat in those days.


\(^{214}\) F.C. Davar, loc.cit.

The Parsis began migrating to Bombay in the early 17th century for the purpose of trade. Today majority of the Parsis live in Maharashtra mainly in the city of Mumbai.

The earliest literary evidence mentioning this art as practised by the Parsis is of the year 1884, in which the Agharni ceremony, i.e. the seventh month ceremony for a mother-to-be is thus described, “in the afternoon the ground floor of a room facing the east is ornamented with chunam (lime) and various coloured powders with the devices of fish, peacocks and other birds or animals and variegated flowers. The young lady is made to stand on a flat stool, two to three inches high and placed on the ground, ornamented in the way described”. 216

This throws light on three facts: one is the material used in those days which is lime. Lime acted as disinfectant when the roads were not finished with tar, and thus served the scientific as well as the decorative purpose. Secondly, though the Parsis have adopted this Hindu custom, they have not copied it blindly as far as the motifs are concerned. They have brought into use their own motifs thus maintaining their distinct style. In a photograph of early 20th century showing the drawing of a chalk design on the threshold of a new home by a Parsi lady, a white rooster is drawn in the centre.217

The drawing of white rooster in rangoli is very unusual and drawn only by the Parsis. The third point to be noted is the use of some device to make the chalk. Exactly when such devices (tin dabbas) came into use is difficult to say. The Hindus probably adopted the concept of making devices like ‘thase’ to stamp out the rangolis, from the Parsis.

Records from the Bombay Gazetteers mention the “lucky marks” of chalks made by the Parsi women on different occasions. Apart from marking the chalks on and in front of the threshold in the morning, they are also recorded to be made on auspicious occasions like the Agharni


217 Seen in Pheroza J.Godrej & Firoza Punthakey Mistree (ed.), op.cit., p.391, pic-8d.
ceremony or the Besna ceremony of a child who enters its seventh month. One such interesting ritual takes place during the wedding. On the third day before the wedding, the bride and bridegroom are seated in front of their respective houses and given a bath. They are then made to sit on a wooden stool and lifted into the house by four married and unwidowed girls and carried seven times round the lucky chalk-marks in the centre of the hall. If the bride and bridegroom are grown up, the bridegroom’s turban or the bride’s sari is laid on the wooden stool and carried round the chalk.218 Chalks are also made on the sixth night after child-birth at the head of the mother’s bed. A tray containing coconut, rice, betel and a blank paper, an inkstand and a reed pen for the Goddess Sasthi to write the child’s destiny is placed on the chalk.219

M.M. Murzban in his book The Parsis writes—“true to her ancient faith, the house wife in Udwada, as in Naosari, is out before the break of dawn, after having preformed her devotions and her ablutions, opening the front door to let in fresh air, and then proceeds to the particular ceremony of perfuming the house with fumes of sandalwood and loban (resin of Boswellia Serrata). She sweeps the floor, scours the door front, chalking it for good-luck, that is sprinkling in various figures, through small-sized sieved trays-powdered chalk and lime by way of disinfection. Thus she sets in all readiness to begin work with the rise of the sun”.220

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219 Ibid, p.47.
220 M.M. Murzban, op.cit, p.349.
Like the Hindus, the Jains too have a very ancient tradition of making *rangoli*. The main difference being that the Jains draw it in the temples or any place where religious rituals are carried out. This practice is
followed by the Jains all over India. The Jain literary sources highlight the existence of this art since very ancient times.

*Pauma-Chariu* (1\textsuperscript{st} to 3\textsuperscript{rd} century A.D.) of Vimalasuri seems to be the earliest Jain text furnishing important evidence to *rangavali* in worship of the *Chaitya*.

\begin{verbatim}
Etto chchiya ashadhe, raya dhavalatthamiye bhuiye
Jinacheiyana mahimam, kauna tao samadhatto
Samajjiavalitta, jinaharabhumi karinta keyetha
Rangavaliniogam, chunnenam panchavannenam
Virayanti ya bhattio, vichittadhaturasena tu
\end{verbatim}

Which means -

On the eighth day of the bright half of the *Ashadha*, king begins the worship of *Jina Chaitya* with great pomp. The floor of the *Chaitya* was cleansed and washed and was duly decorated with *rangavalli* in five coloured-powders. Several others made paintings with unique *dhaturas* (some sort of liquid colours).

*Pauma-Chariu* also refers to *rangavali* in five coloured-powders to welcome Rama at Ramagiri - *rangavali viraiya, dasaddhavannena chunnena*

\textsuperscript{221} As per 2001 census report majority of Jains reside in Maharashtra.


\textsuperscript{223} *Ibid.*, Ramagiri Upakhyana, 40/5, p.301.
Varanga-Charita a seventh century Sanskrit text by Jatasimhanandi, in its 23\textsuperscript{rd} sarga describes the installation of Jina image in chaitya-griha (…..pratima Jinasya samsthapite chaitya-grihe….verse2) wherein on the occasion of ratrabali (night oblations), numerous shapes (verse8, nanakritim) were drawn on the ground by experts with the help of powders, flowers, rice-grains in five colours and all these powders etc. were worth offering (to Jina) –

\begin{verbatim}
churnais-cha pushpair-api tandulais-cha dasarddhavarnair-bali karmayogyaih
non-akritimstatra balin-vidhijna bhumi-pradese rachayam babhu-vuh\textsuperscript{224}
\end{verbatim}

Thus Varanga-Charita refers to the drawing of Rangavalli although without mentioning the name. The second significant thing appearing in this context is the use of rangavalis as offerings.

Digambar Jain scholar, Somadevasuri’s work Yasastilaka-Champu (959 A.D.) has got several references to rangavali-

\begin{verbatim}
Paryanta padapaih sampadita kusum-opaharah pradatta rangavalir-iva guha-parisareshu\textsuperscript{225}
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
Akalakshepm dakshasva rangavallipradaneshu\textsuperscript{226}
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
Analpakarpura paragaparikalpitarangavalividhanam\textsuperscript{227} - a description of the court-hall where the white Karpura (camphor) powder is used for the drawings.
\end{verbatim}


\textsuperscript{226} \textit{Ibid}, p.350.
Rangavalishu parbhagkalpanam\textsuperscript{228} - a reference to devising a ground for setting the design.

Charannakhshphutitena rangavalimanin iva asahma\textsuperscript{229} - a reference to rangavalli designs worked permanently by fixing colour stones on the floor, in the queen’s apartment.

A commentary on Yasatilaka Campu by Srutasagarasuri explains the rangavali-vidhana as chatushka-purana\textsuperscript{230} (which may also be translated as chowk-purana)

Tilakmanjiri by Dhanapala mentions the drawing of rangoli patterns in the courtyard.\textsuperscript{231}

Hemachandra Suri in his Deshinamamala (1088-1172 A.D.) annotates the term aipana derived from the Sanskrit word alimpan. To Hemachandra it meant the use of white-wash to beautify the house on festivities –

\textit{aipanam pishtam-utsave grihmandan-artham sudha-chchhata cha}\textsuperscript{232}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{227} \textit{Ibid.}, p.369.
\item\textsuperscript{228} \textit{Ibid.}, Part II, p.247.
\item\textsuperscript{229} V. Raghavan, “Gleanings from Somadevasuri’s Yasatilaka Campu “, Prof. R.D. Ranade, Dr. A. Siddiqi & Dr. U. Mishra (ed.), \textit{Journal of Ganganath Jha Research Institute}, Vol.1, Part-2, Ganganath Jha Research Institute, Ahmedabad, 1944, p.256.
\item\textsuperscript{230} Pandit Shivadatta, (ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.369.
\item\textsuperscript{231} C.Sivaramamurti, \textit{Sanskrit Literature and Art- Mirrors of Indian Culture}, Lakshmi Book Store, New Delhi, Reprint: 1970, p.93.
\end{itemize}
He also records a different meaning of *aipana* as to beautify the house with rice-paste

\[\text{tandulapishta kshiram grihamandana-aipanam ity-anye}^{233}\]

There are numerous other references in Jain religious literature and writings of early Jain *Munis* and scholars which speak of *rangavali*.

The use of *rangavali* in *Jina* worship by households has been pointed out by Arhaddasa in *Muni-Suvrata-Kavya* (mid 13\(^{th}\) Century A.D.) -

\[Praty-anganam kalpitapancharatna rangalayas-chakru-anekabhanga\]

\[Jinendrajanm-avasarapranasyat-payodhararastadhanur-visankam^{234}\]

- “In every (home), courtyards were decorated with *Rangalaya* in five jewel (like) colours and in variegated designs which (caused) the illusion of a rainbow (that had come down from) the clouds to celebrate the nativity of *Jinendra*”.

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The early Jain text refers to the purpose and medium of drawing the *rangoli* but does not mention the figures or symbols drawn. However, the study of the sculptures in ancient Jain architecture and the *rangolis* drawn currently throw some light on this aspect.

Symbols:

The *Ashta-mangal* or the eight auspicious symbols are drawn on special occasions in the Jain temples. These symbols are familiar to both the Jain sects, i.e. *Digambara* and *Shvetambara* and form a part of the Jain worship from ancient times. They are – the *Swastika*, *Shri-vatsa*, *Nandyavarta*, *Varddhamanaka* (powder flask), *Bhadrarasa* (throne, a particular type of seat), *Kalasha* (the full-vase), *Darpana* (mirror) and *Matsya-yugma* (pair of fish). As discussed above, the earliest surviving depiction of these symbols is in the *ayagapatas* of Mathura. It also finds mention in some of the *Anga* texts, like the *Aupapatika Sutra*, which mentions that the *Ashta-mangal* are to be shown on the Ashoka tree.235

In the later period these symbols are seen depicted in the miniature paintings of the *Kalpasutra* text and other manuscripts, the paintings on canvas of different *patas* and scroll paintings of the *Vidnyaptipatras* and the *kshamapanapatra*. According to the scriptures every Jain has to draw them with pure un-broken rice-grains before the icon of the *Tirthankara*.

They are often represented as decorative motifs, either separately or in groups, on different parts of a temple, especially on architraves or door lintels. These are also painted on walls and represented on the *Bali-pattas* or offering stands. The offering-stand is a platter with low legs, made of wood or metal, used to hold offering in temple worships. It has the eight auspicious signs carved or made in high relief. Such stools, often made of wood with silver plate studded all over it, or of silver or brass, and with reliefs of the eight auspicious marks are even today used for placing offerings in Jain shrines.

According to the Jain text Acaradinkara of Vardhamana Suri, the Kalasha or the full vase is worshipped as a symbol for the Jina, who is the fulfiller of all wants in the three worlds.

the Darpana is for seeing one’s true self;

the Bhadrasana, king’s asana since ancient times is worshipped as it is sanctified by the feet of the Blessed Lord,

the Vardhamanaka is suggestive of increase of wealth, fame, merit etc. due to the grace of the Lord.

The highest knowledge has manifested itself from the heart of the Jina, in the form of the Shrivatsa mark on his chest. This symbol has its origin in the IVC. Swastika signifies Swasti, that is, Shanti or peace. It is the lanchana or attribute of Suparshvanath, the seventh Tirthankara.

Nandyavarta with its nine points stands for the nine sacred nidhis (treasures).

The Matsya-yugma is the symbol of cupid’s banners who comes to worship the Jina after the defeat of the god of Love.

One point to be noted here is that the Swastika, Nadyavarta and Vardhamanaka are described as types of houses of rich men in the ancient treatises like the Brihatsamhita, thus pointing to the architectural connection.

Rangavali in Early Jain Art:

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236 Ibid., pp. 21-25.

The symbols drawn in *rangoli* by the Jains are also seen in the early Jain art. Literary and epigraphical sources point to the existence of a *devanirmita* (created by the gods) Jain stupa at Kankalitila (Mathura) as early as 3rd century B.C. Early excavations on the site have revealed the successive elaborations of the stupa. From this Jain stupa area a number of *ayagapatap* (tablets of homage) have been excavated and explored. The presence of *rangavali* symbols on these *patas* is note-worthy. The *ayagapatap* labelled in Saka-Kushana script, were put up by the devotees for the worship of *arhatas*. From the sculptural depictions, it is evident that they were fixed around the stupa on the vertical face of its basal platform.

V.S. Agrawala identified these *patas* with *pupphadhana or pushpagrahni vedika*, i.e.
‘flower offering platforms’. He further observes- “The strong belief in the significance of symbols and powerful influence which the symbols exercised on religious worship are made manifest on these ayagapatas as nowhere else. They belong to a transitional period when symbols were as much meaningful as the tirthankara image and the two were equally balanced in harmony with each other.\(^{239}\)

The pertinent question about these patas is their prototype or source inspiration. It is quite unlikely that the bulk of the symbols used in these early arts were in the minds of the people, waiting to be carved in stone. Hence, it is very likely that during the preceding period the practise was of drawing these symbols in temporary media. The literary evidences support this suggestion. They do not necessarily derive from or depict the contemporary practises. Rather they draw from earlier existing traditions.

It is already seen that rangavalli was made in Jina Chaityas and objects worth offering to the Jina were decreed to be painted in rangavali. This point highlights the magical aspect of rangoli. The offerings when drawn using the magical medium of rangoli were considered to have reached the deity. Besides this the execution of rangavali by a person who was well versed in the art of oblations (balinvidhijna) highlights the fact that it was a significant ritual to be followed only by the initiated.

Ramagiri Upakhyana of Pauma-chariu informs us of the construction of Jina Chaitya on the very same site where the rangavali was drawn to welcome Rama. Dasharatha and Rama in this text are Jina worshippers. The Jains in this early period, as today used rangavali as a worshipping symbol. The ayagapata has the same function. Besides the auspicious symbols and a tirthankara image in the centre (or a symbol to represent him), two pillars are shown on either side of the patas, suggesting an architectural complex.


Considering the symbols and functions of the *ayagapatas* and their similarity with those of *rangavalis*, one can assume that the latter served as model for the former.

(The current status of the practise of making *chalk* by the Parsis and the *rangoli* of the Jains is discussed in Chp.5).

**Maharashtra**

Being the Financial Capital of India, Maharashtra attracts the people from various regions, religions and cultural backgrounds. It is thus a region of mixed culture-contact which gives a peculiar character to the culture of this land and its people. Virtually every major culture is represented in the state. Although Maharashtra has a distinctive Hindu flavour, it has always had a tradition of secularism. Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Jains, Buddhists and Jews, all together cover the region. Their customs, traditions, ways of celebrating the festivals also show their unique specialties. In spite of these outward influences Maharashtra has successfully retained its own distinct identity. It has assimilated the essence of other cultures into its own without sacrificing its own tradition and culture.

The traditional Maharashtrian *rangoli* is linear in style with straight lines joining dots and forming designs. The art exists in the rural areas and up to some extent in the urban areas. The cities in Maharashtra, being particularly cosmopolitan in nature, all the types of *rangolis* are seen here. However, as seen above, some communities like the Parsis, the Jains and also the Pathare Prabhus of Maharashtra have maintained their own cultural motifs as far as the art of *rangoli* is concerned.

In Maharashtra, it was and still is a custom to draw a symbolic *rangoli* in front of the house in the mornings. In olden days, besides attaining the skills of cooking and stitching, acquiring the skill of making *rangoli* was a pre-requisite for
young girls before getting married. Today, in the villages of Maharashtra the female member of the house gets up early in the morning and religiously draws a white rangoli in front of her house. Besides the entrance, rangoli is also drawn in pooja rooms and around the holy plant of tulsi and sometimes eating places as well. Sometimes haldi and kumkum dots are marked in the white rangoli to make it attractive and auspicious. In cities like Mumbai and Pune, due to constraint of space and time many ladies draw the symbolic figures in the place of worship everyday and make an elaborate rangoli on special occasions at the entrance of the house.

The traditional style of rangoli designs in Maharashtra is geometrical. Designs are drawn by first making the dots and then joining them to make figures. These are then filled in uniformly with colours.

Material for rangoli:

In the Konkan region of Maharashtra, where rice grows in plenty, rangoli is made out of rice husk. Rice husk when burnt slowly, converts into a fine crystalline white material which is used as rangoli. This powder is very popular as it is made out of waste material- rice husk and therefore easily available and cheap. It is also used for brushing teeth and cleaning utensils. The powder obtained from stones (shirgole or gote) found near the river is also used for rangoli.

In the Ghats and Desh region quartz (kachmani) or silica sand and lime-stone powder (chunkhadi) is used for rangoli. Mixture of fine and coarse silica sand was used earlier but in recent years the white silica sand is filtered through sieves and cloth to obtain a fine mesh of spreadable sand.

Rangolis for different occasions:

In Maharashtra, rangoli can be broadly classified into four types: one drawn on the threshold (umbartha), in front of the Tulsi plant, in front of the Gods and the one drawn at the entrance.

As in south India, symbols like Paool, Swastika, Chakra, Shankha, Gopadma, Kamal along with three or five slanting lines in between, are drawn regularly on the threshold. Five and three are auspicious odd numbers as they represent the Panchamahabhutas, Panchadnyanendriya,
Panchagavya and Tridosh, Trishakti, Trigunas and so on respectively. These symbols are also made in front of the Tulsi plant.

*Rangoli* is also drawn around the plate on feasts and festive occasions. This *Rangoli* is called as ‘Mahirap’.

*Rangolis* drawn in front of Gods are a sort of picture-writing including many auspicious symbols. It begins with the name of the respective God like “Shree Ram Prasanna” or “Shree Ganesh Prasanna” or the name of Kuldevta, below which the symbols are drawn.

*Caitrangyan:*

This *Rangoli* is called as *Tees teen Chaitrangyan*. There are two reasons for this: one is that it has to be drawn for thirty-three days- thirty of
the month of *Chaitra* and three of *Vaishakh*. The third day of *Vaishakh* is *Akshaytritiya*, one of the auspicious days in Hindu calendar. The second reason is that thirty-three symbols are to be drawn in it. The symbols may vary from day to day and artist to artist but the basic theme of drawing Vaishnavite and Shaivite symbols along with the objects for Gauri’s comfortable stay in her parental home is maintained.

The common symbols are cradle, sun, moon, star, *Swastika*, five figures of girls (*kumarika*), weapons and attributes of Vishnu and Shiva like *Trishul*, *Damru*, *Shankha*, *Gadaa*, *Chakra*, *Garuda*, *Padma* etc., *hatti*, *ghoda*, *gopadma*, Goddess Lakshmi’s *paool*, a house like structure in the centre with swing for the two Goddesses *Jyeshtha Gauri* and *Kanishtha Gauri*, *Tulsi Vrindavan*, *Kasav*, *Sarpa*, *Kalash* and other accessories like fan, comb, mirror, container of *kumkum* and *halad*, ornaments, saree, etc.

Unlike the other *rangolis* of Maharashtra, the *Chaitrangan* is drawn free-hand without the use of dots. It is similar to the *vrata alpanas* of Bengal drawn by women and young girls. The *Chaitrangan* depicting the stay of the goddess *Chaitra Gauri* in her parental home is usually square or rectangular in shape with the religious symbols as well as other motifs arranged in it. The arrangement of motifs in the *Chaitrangana rangoli* are a sort of picture-writing and reflect the desire of the women who draws them for the general well-being and prosperity of her house-hold and herself.

![Ram Navami](image)

*Ram Navami – On this day a rangoli depicting the palna (cradle) of Rama is drawn.*

*Bhondla or Hadga*: Starting with first day of the month of *Ashwin*, the nine days and night festival immediately preceding the most important festival *Dasara* is celebrated in *Maharashtra* as in other parts of India. On the very first day idols of Goddess *Durga* are installed at many homes. This installation of the Goddess is popularly known as *Ghatsthapana*. During this period, little girls celebrate 'Bhondla/Hadga' as the Sun moves to the thirteenth constellation of the zodiac called "*Hasta*" (Elephant). During the nine days, *Bhondla* (also known as 'Bhulabai' in Vidharbha region of Maharashtra)
is celebrated in the garden or on the terrace during evening hours by inviting female friends of the daughter in the house. An elephant is drawn everyday either with rangoli on the ground or with a chalk on a slate and kept in the middle. The girls go around it in a circle, holding each other's hands and singing the Bhondla songs. A special dish or 'Khirapat' is often made by the mother of the host girl. The food is served only after the rest of the girls have guessed the covered Khirapat correctly.

Vasu-baras: On this day a typical rangoli with a cow and its calf with the many auspicious symbols is drawn. The interesting aspect is the x-ray like depiction of the calf in the cow's womb. The Stone Age rock paintings found all over the world and the paintings of the tribals display this x-ray like feature.

Diwali: On this festival of lights a rangoli similar to Chaitrangan is drawn. It consists of various auspicious symbols.

Bali-pratipada or Padva:

On this day Bali is worshipped. Traditionally, a rangoli depicting the figures of Bali and his wife, with the chanting of mantra was made. Nowadays Swastika is drawn commonly.
Bhau-beej: On this day sisters seek blessings for their brothers. A mythological theme depicting Yama, the lord of death and his sister Yamuna are drawn along with some auspicious symbols.

Bodan: It is a religious ritual followed by the Chitpavans or Koknastha Brahmans in Maharashtra. It is performed by the ladies on various occasions like birth in a family, Upananayana, marriage, shifting to a new house and even after fulfillment of certain wishes (navas). In some family it is an annual ritual to be performed to please the family Goddess and seek her blessings. There are few restrictions with regard to the months in a year when this ritual is to be performed. The month of Chaitra, Ashadha (beginning of Chaturmas) Shravana, Bhadrapada and Kartika (end of Chaturmas) and Pousha are not suitable for Bodan. Margashirsha is considered to be the best suited month for this ritual. Bodan is to be ideally performed on Tuesday or Friday as these are the days of the Goddess. Three married ladies whose husbands are alive (suvasini) and a young girl in the age group three to ten (kumarika) are invited by the lady who is performing the Bodan in her house. They are given a warm welcome as they represent the Goddesses. After cleaning their feet with warm water and milk, a Swastika is marked on their feet. A typical rangoli is drawn in the centre on which the paat (low stool) is placed. The puja of the Devi is performed on this paat. Interestingly this rangoli is drawn only by the Chitpavans at the time of Bodan. This symbol is found on the Ganesh-patti on top of the entrance doors of some houses in Konkan.

Ratha Saptami, the 7th day of Magh (January-February), is considered to be the principal day for special worship and festivities in honour of the Sun-God. On this day, on a low wooden stool, is drawn, in red sandal paste, a figure of the sun in human shape seated in a chariot drawn by seven horses, or by a horse with seven faces. This figure is then placed in the sunshine, and worshipped by offering it spoonfuls of water, red powder, red flowers mixed with red sandal paste, camphor, incense and fruits.
Vaikuntha Chaturdashi: It is also known as Kartik Shuddha Chaturdashi. This day is considered to be the meeting day of Hari and Hara, i.e. Vishnu and Shiva. The rangoli drawn symbolizes the union of both the sects.

**Rangoli of the Pathare Prabhus:**

The Prabhus refer to rangoli as kana. These kanas are different from the rangolis of other Maharashtrian communities. Some peculiar kanas are drawn by them even today during Diwali. Half of the Diwali festival starts on the Kojagiri pournima. In the evening of Kojagiri pournima, Prabhu ladies draw dotted rangolis depicting aartis etc. In earlier days, special ground or angan was prepared in front of the house by making a raised platform using wet soil. Some houses used to have a small angan made especially for small girls of the family to draw rangoli.

Amongst the Prabhus, the actual celebrations of Diwali start from Ashwin Vadya Ashtmi or Kalashthami. It is also called as Athwinda meaning the week before Diwali. On this day the ladies of the Prabhu household start preparing sweetmeats for the festival. Also, they begin drawing rangoli daily from this day till kartiki-Tripuri-Pournima.

From the first day of Kalashtthmi to the last day of Diwali, i.e. Bhaubij, all the Prabhu households had a peculiar type of Rangoli designs signifying the importance of that day. The design and the motifs traditionally drawn on that particular day are still the same. From Bhaubij to Kartiki Ekadashi the ladies draw the designs of their choice and again from Kartiki Ekadashi to Tripuri Pournima particular designs and motifs are drawn which are common to all.
The rangolis drawn are:

Asanya - asana or seat of God is depicted.

Bondlya - means a vessel or a pot or a vessel.

Tendlya - a vegetable which grows in this season.

Amblya- means pillar.

Paach Devlya- five temples are drawn.

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Nangrya- means plough.

Dhanteras or Dhantrayodashi- ‘Pokhran’

Narak Chaturdashi- ‘Ravli’ or a tray for serving sweets.

Diwali Amavasya- ‘Dyutapat’ in the morning and Dhanadive or Lakshmi’s aarti in the evening.

Padva or Balipratipada – Swastika

Bhaubij- Aarti

Tulshiche lagna (marriage of Tulsi)
Gauri pujan- The picture of the house is drawn on the wall behind the place where Gauri is to be placed. A Swastika is drawn on the chaurang (low wooden stool) with chandan. The route to be followed by Goddess Gauri from the entrance of the house to the place where she is installed is indicated by marking foot-prints.

Rangoli in the regional literature:

The references to rangoli in the regional literary work enable us to get some idea as to the significance of this art in the life of the people in that particular period.

Meaningful data is available by the literary traditions of the Yadava times, namely, the Mahanubhav and Varkari devotional expressions. The literary sources of this period comprise of the first work in Marathi, namely Leelacharitra, which was written in a small temple in Ridhpur. It was written around 1278 by Mahimbhatt (though the rewritten version that has come down is dated 1310).

This work mentions sadasammarjan and chowk-rangmalika while describing the manner in which a devotee welcomes Chakradhar Swami by drawing rangoli on cow dung smeared ground. It also mentions the word rangpooja for which drawing of yantra-aasan was necessary, indicating the use of rangoli for worship.241

In *Shree Govind Prabhu Charitra*, another Mahanubhav literature, a devotee named Ausa performs *rang-pooja* for which she draws a *chowk* with black, yellow, green and red colours, for welcoming *Govind Prabhu* and worshipping him.\(^{242}\)

A Brahmin named Kolthoba too welcomes Govind Prabhu in the same manner.\(^{243}\)

A Mahanubhav poem “Shishupalavadha’ composed by Bhaskarbhat Borikar (C. A.D. 1273) in the same period refers to *rangoli* as *raangvali*.\(^{244}\) This poem also mentions about the welcome to Shri Krishna at Indraprastha when *nagriks* (citizens) drew *rangolis* from powder made of pearls on the *raj-marg*.

The literature of the saints of the same period also has references to *rangoli* such as-

Sant Namdev (1270-1350 A.D.) mentions drawing of *Ashtadal* (8-petalled lotus) in the court-yard in one of his *abhanga*s.\(^{245}\)

Later on during the Maratha period, Sant Ramdas (1608-1681) in his literature refers to the practice of smearing the ground near *Tulsi Vrindavan* and drawing of *rangoli* as one of the pious deeds indicating *Satvaguna*. He uses the words *sada sammarjan* and *rangamala*.\(^{246}\)

\(^{242}\) Dr. V.B. Kolte, (ed.), *Shree Govind Prabhu Charitra*, Arun Prakashan, Malkapur (Buldhana), IInd ed. May 1960, verse- 187, p.63 (in the glossary, *rangpooja* is explained as *pooja* done by drawing *rangoli* and *chowk* is explained as a square diagram made using grains like wheat, rice etc. on a low stool placed on a *rangoli*).


Marathi poet Moropant who flourished between A.D. 1729-1794, in his work ‘Viratparva’ uses the term *rangoli hone* which means to be completely destroyed.\(^{247}\) The term reflects the ephemeral nature of this art. Once the *rangoli* is wiped out, the ground is clear or plain. Thus one’s life, as if, becomes a clean slate!

The literary sources seen chronologically also highlight the evolution of the term used for *rangoli* such as –

C. A.D. 1270 to 1280 – *rangmolika* and *raangvali*

C. A.D. 1650 – *rangmala*

C. A.D. 1750 – *rangoli*

References to *rangoli* drawn around the plates in the place of eating during the Peshwa period are found. Ladies used to observe various *vratas* and in *Chaturmas* they used to draw *rangoli* for Lord Shiva.\(^{248}\)

Terms like *rang-pooja* and *rangoliche Udyapan*\(^{249}\) found in some literary sources are evident of the fact that *rangoli* formed one of the main components of the worshipping ritual in Maharashtra.

In the *Bhupali* or *Kakad aartis*, that is *aartis* sung early in the morning, reference to *sada sammarjan* and *rangoli* is found. Old folk songs which have come down to us through oral traditions make references to drawing of *rangoli* with the sun and the moon motifs at the time of Diwali festival and drawing of

\(^{247}\) Y.R.Date & C.G.Karve, *op.cit.*, *loc.cit.*


mahirap around the meal plates on feasts and festive occasions with motifs like peacocks, parrot and maina.

Another important literary reference is a poem written in 1896 by Shri Krishnaji Keshav Damle, popularly known as ‘Keshavsut’. The title of the poem is – *Rangoli Ghałtana Pahun*\(^\text{250}\)

This poem was written on 18 Dec’1896. The poet is awe-struck on observing a young girl drawing *rangoli* in the courtyard of her house. He says that a fascinating meeting of Heaven and the Earth has taken place in a small place due to her *rangoli*. While describing the symbols, the poet also mentions its significance as understood by him, like, *Swastika* stands for – *Dharma, Artha* and *Kama, Gopadma* for purity, *Chakra* for presence of God (*Hari*) and *Sudarshan Chakra* for destroying the evil eye which may fall on the house.

Records by the British officers:

R.E. Enthoven in his work ‘The Folklore of Bombay’ writes about the worship of the sun on Sundays. Persons wishing to secure wealth, good wealth, happy progeny, people suffering from diseases of the eyes, barren women, men anxious for victory in the battle-field, observe vows in honour of the Sun on Sunday. An *ashtadal* or eight-cornered figure is drawn in red powder, frankincense, red ointment and red flowers and offered to the Sun. Sometimes a hexagonal figure is drawn instead of the *ashtadal*, on which a copper disk is placed and the sun is worshipped.\(^\text{251}\)


Enthoven further states that in the Bombay Presidency, Hindus make special geometric drawings like a triangle, square, circle, pentagon, a Padmasana, or a Swastika, in red or white powder as seats for the deities, when they are to be installed and invoked. To protect cooked food from being spirited away by witches, people in the Deccan draw a circle round the cooking-place and put a grain measure bottom upwards in front of the food.

He describes various ceremonies performed by cultivators at the time of ploughing the soil, sowing, reaping and harvesting. On the day when ploughing is to be commenced the front court-yard of the house is cow-dunged and a Swastika is drawn on it with grain (Sorghum vulgare). The farmer holds the plough over the Swastika, touching it with the end, eats a morsel of molasses, and bows to the Swastika before starting.

To prevent a tiger from attacking cattle, a circle of the flour is drawn round them by an exorcist reciting incantations. If a tiger tries to enter this protected area its mouth at once becomes swollen. Enthoven has also observed that one of the remedies to cure fever was drawing the spell or the yantra of Mrityunjaya (literally meaning - Death conquering, an epithet of Shiva) on the ground.

During the Diwali of 1925, Gladstone Solomon, the Principal of Sir JJ School of Art, along with artist Rao Bahadur Dhourandhar visited the colony of the Pathare Prabhus in Mumbai. He was so fascinated on seeing the rangolis drawn by the Prabhu ladies on their doorways that he wrote a book, the ‘Charm of Indian Art’ in which he wrote about the art of the Prabhu ladies. While praising their art in the said book,

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252 Ibid., p.41.
253 Ibid., p.239.
254 Ibid., pp.303-304.
255 Ibid., p.11.
256 Ibid., p.266.
he says – “Most celebrated of all these picture mysteries is the Feast of lamps. This lasts for some twenty days from the fifteenth day of Ashwin, known as the Diwali Holidays. During the whole period of these holidays the Prabhu dwellings bloom with an ever-changing series of their wonderful sand-pictures. It is an annual exhibition of decorative art. At this time it is a fascinating spectacle to see scores of young Prabhu girls busy decorating with pictures the space in front of the verandahs of their homes, in the Prabhu localities, such as the Navi Vadi Lane and the Thakurdwar Road in Bombay. Every morning the design of the night before, is removed with cow-dung and water, and the surface prepared for the fresh drawing of the afternoon. “Wonderful wasteful Indian Art! Yet, who shall say that these pictures, although more evanescent than the flower like beauty of the artists, are altogether lost?”

Early in the morning - immediately after her bath- the Prabhu girl begins that delightful use of art as the indispensable adjunct of her devotions by drawing round the pedestal of the Sacred Tulsi plant before which she performs her pooja, a rangoli or sand-picture. This decoration in vivid colours consists of a running border with the symbol of the Swastika at its four corners. The design is drawn upon the floor without any kind of guiding lines except dots put in without measurements to mark the points, and without pencil or brush. The charming artist takes some white marble dust in her hand and by holding it between finger and thumb in a certain way executes a fine outline and sometimes a double line, which she then fills in with different colours, often in most elaborate patterns.

He describes the occasions when rangoli is drawn by the Prabhu ladies -the birth of a child, or at the Thread and the Marriage ceremonies, Gudi Padwa, Vat-Savitri puja, Nag-Panchami, Matru-din or the Pithori Amavasya, Ganpati and Gauri Puja.

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259 Gladstone mentions very few symbols drawn on these occasions. Fortunately, Mrs. Vandana Navalkar has documented the rangoli symbols drawn by the Pathare Parbhu ladies in her book “Pathare Prabhu: San aani Utsava”. I am grateful to her for gifting this book to me.
Gladstone gives a vivid description of the *rangoli* made for Goddess Gauri as witnessed by him - “The *rangoli* itself was a representation of a flowering creeper with a doorway in the centre. It was surrounded by actual flowers and green leaves laid out on the floor in patterns. The most charming things I saw on this occasion were the footprints of Gauri. These marks in sandal-paste, on the stone floor led from the verandah up the staircase and through all the rooms and quarters of the house”. He further explains the technique of making the footprints by young girls - “She dips the edge of her clenched hands in a tray of sandal paste and makes a single dab with both together on the floor, one hand a little behind the other. These marks look like those of the soles of a foot. Then she makes with her ten fingers the marks of the toes. One imagines the child goddess pattering about the house - an invisible, beautiful Presence!”

Fortunately much information is available about the Pathare Prabhu’s art as the Prabhu community was a very influential community in the British period, next only to the Parsis. The Prabhus held many important administrative positions and hence had good contacts with the British administrators. This in turn led to the good documentation of their lifestyles by the British officers who came in closer contact with the Prabhus. Although the above note is an observation of the art of *rangoli* as practised by the Prabhu women, it is a reflection of the art of all the Maharashtrian women of the period.

The literary evidence shows conclusively the history of this art for at least 800 years in this region. This art has inspired and aroused curiosity of people from different walks of life, from poets, academicians to administrators.

**The Southern states:**

The southern Indian region consists of four large Indian states- Kerala, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Until the colonial period, the political history of South India, where the repercussions of the invasions from the north-west scarcely made themselves felt, evolved to a great extent quite

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independently of that of the north. Despite this fact, and despite the language barrier dividing the two parts of the subcontinent, southern India is nevertheless representative of the general course of Indian history and culture. Traces of Indian civilization of the earliest periods are apparent everywhere in this region. The main characteristic of the region is the adaptability and continuity of an ancient, conservative and traditionally-minded culture which, being less vulnerable and less exposed, was therefore more persistent and vigorous than were the cultures in the northern parts of the country. The art of rangoli is very much a living tradition in this region and is practised religiously.

It is observed that lot of mingling of culture has taken place within the Southern states and also Maharashtra and therefore many rangoli motifs are commonly drawn in all these states.

Everyday rangolis are made in the place where gods are worshipped.

The yantras employed in tantric practices are given in a well known tantric work called Soundaryalahari attributed to Shankara. Some of the designs derived from that work are used as Navagraha rangoli meant for the different days of the week. These kolams have the ‘Beej Aksharas’ or ‘Beej Mantras’ meant for that particular day of the week written in a corresponding symbolic figure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the week</th>
<th>Beej Mantra</th>
<th>Purpose/Belief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Hrim" /></td>
<td>For successful completion of all work and worship of the Sun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Mantra</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Klim" /></td>
<td>Klim</td>
<td>For removing hurdles, accelerating progress and worship of the Moon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Hrim" /></td>
<td>Hrim</td>
<td>For destruction of enemies, worship of the planet Mars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Ain" /></td>
<td>Ain</td>
<td>For gaining knowledge of all the sciences, worship of planet Mercury.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Shrim" /></td>
<td>Shrim</td>
<td>For fertility, having children, attaining knowledge, worship of planet Jupiter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Shrim" /></td>
<td>Shrim</td>
<td>For marriage, finding suitable partner, having children, worship of planet Venus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Saturday

Stram

For healing diseases, promoting good health, protection against ghosts and evil powers, worship of planet Saturn.

These types of *kolams* are made as offerings to the deity in the *pooja* area, in which case they are not to be stepped upon and are usually done in front of the deity and at times considered as manifestations of the deity. These are made in the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and more recently in Maharashtra too.

Certain *Navagraha mandalas* are drawn on all auspicious occasions such as *vratas, samskaras* etc., for propitiating the planets. On this *mandala*, the grain associated with the particular planet is placed and the *mandala* itself, as the form the planet is worshipped. Similarly the *Rashipoora mandala* is drawn when the *Rashipoora* is performed for the propitiation the twelve constellations. These two *mandalas* consist of the lotus in the centre representing the sun, surrounded by the nine planets or the twelve constellations respectively.

A popular *vrata* named *Varalakshmi vrata* is celebrated by the women in the South. It is observed on a Friday in the month of *Shravana* (July-August). *Rangolis* depicting the lotus in its myriad forms are drawn for the occasion. The lotus symbolizes Lakshmi, the patroness of rice-growing agriculturists. *Hridaya kamal, Aishwarya kamal, Sahasradala Padma* or the thousand petalled lotus are few of the lotus *kolams* drawn on this occasion. These are also sometimes made on Fridays, the day for goddess *Lakshmi*. 
A rangoli drawn on Vaikuntha Chaturdashi or Kartika Shuddha Chaturdashi depicts the sun, moon and Krishna’s tuft at the top. Below is the Vrindavan, Lord’s feet, sandal paste marks, conch, Shiva Parvati, Swastika, flowers, bilwa-patra, deepa and padma peetha. Below the square is the gate of heaven with dwarapals on its sides. To the right is the gate of hell with dwarapals.

During Diwali rangolis mainly depict the traditional lighted lamps. On the Bali Pratipada day, as per the legend, Bali Chakravarti visits the earth every year. A special rangoli is drawn on that day consisting of - Bali’s fort on which small balls of clay or cow dung decorated with flowers are placed as army and soldiers. A seat for King Bali is placed at the side of this rangoli. Cow hoofs are drawn in the front of it and worshipped.

*Ratha Saptami* also known as Surya Jayanti (the Sun-god’s birthday) that falls on the seventh day (Saptami) in the bright half (Shukla Paksha) of the Hindu month Maagha. It marks the seventh day following the Sun’s northerly movement (Uttarayana) of vernal equinox starting from Capricorn (Makara). On this day, in Maharashtra and South India, *rangoli* is drawn with coloured rice powder depicting Sun’s chariot drawn by seven horses. Cowdung cake is burnt at the centre of this depiction and milk or *payasam* is boiled on the fire. The milk or *payasam* which is allowed to overflow on this day is offered to the Sun God. *Ratha Saptami* is symbolic of the change of season to spring and the start of the harvesting season. Sometimes the *rangoli* depicts the sun chariot flanked by grocery shops on both the sides. The squares indicating grocery shops are filled with salt, mustard, pepper, and other condiments. These are worshipped along with the sun for health and prosperity. These food items are also said to represent the navagrahas surrounding the sun.
On the occasion of Mahashivratri, *rangolis* depicting the *Shivalingas*, the three-eyes of the god Shiva, his tresses and the *rangoli of bilwa-patra* or the *bel* leaves is drawn.

According to the *Puranas*, god Indra has a thousand eyes. Indra represented in this form of the decorative eyes is drawn in *rangoli*.

A rangoli named Sita’s braid is also commonly drawn in this region as well as Rajasthan.

*Rangoli of pulipaddam* (tiger’s foot) is drawn out of fear and reverence. It is believed to be especially powerful in scaring away the evil spirits and is found in tattoo as well as embroidery designs in the South.

In earlier days, in the villages of South and the Konkan region of Maharashtra, some peculiar symbols were drawn after the ground was smeared with cow-dung. Few of these symbols are simple loop motifs
without dots. One such symbol is the *Manganamalaku* drawn on the newly-plastered floor of a house so that it may not crack. It actually represents an eye.

**Rangoli** is also drawn on the ceilings of the houses in the villages in south India and Maharashtra. The method followed is first the design with *rangoli* powder is drawn on the pillow. The part of the ceiling where the decoration is desired is made wet with water or sometimes covered with natural adhesive material like *goond* or gum. Then the design on the pillow is transferred onto the ceiling by sticking or holding the pillow on the gum treated part, applying equal pressure on all the sides. Thus, the *rangoli* powder on the pillow gets transferred onto the ceiling. Wooden ceiling is best suited for this practise. Though this practice is slowly dying out, few traces are still visible in the villages of Karnataka.

**Karnataka**

*Rangoli* is known as *Rangavali* or *Hase* in Karnataka. As mentioned above, both types of *rangoli* the linear as well as circumvented is drawn in this state. The linear or the angular versions of *rangoli* are also used as tattoo designs and the motifs are also employed in the traditional *kashida* embroidery of the region. In Karnataka, traditionally, the drawings in the morning were made vertical to the
door-front as an invitation to Lakshmi to enter. In the evening they were drawn horizontally in order to prevent Lakshmi from departing.

In the villages of Karnataka, a mixture of clay, cowdung and straw is spread. A final coat of clay and lime mixed with mica is then applied. When the ground dries, the mica pieces shimmer in the sunlight. In south Kanara even the kitchens and farms are decorated with *rangoli* designs.

Shri Jagannatha Dasa (1728-1809 C.E.) was a famous saint poet of Karnataka and an accomplished Sanskrit scholar who wrote the *Harikathamritasara*. He was said to be a great rangoli artist who would draw different deities in *rangoli* and for this reason, he was also known as *rangavali dasa*. His followers Shri Pranesha Vithal and other leaders of the *Dasakoota* (one of two divisions of *Haridasas*, a group within the *Bhakti movement*) were said to have expressed their sublime feelings through *rangavalli*, thus giving visual forms to their thoughts. This must have surely influenced the *rangavalli* art of the region along with the southern parts of Maharashtra but the exact nature of the influence is not known.

Some peculiar *rangolis* of the region are mentioned below:

* *Nagamandalas:*

Snake worship in Karnataka bears a close resemblance to that in Kerala. All along coastal Karnataka, each village has a number of *nagavanas* (thick grove of trees where snakes dwell). These trees are held in great reverence and are not supposed to be cut in normal circumstances. Under the trees, there are installed a number of *nagabandhas* carved on stone which are worshipped once or twice a year. Snakes are either locked in amorous embrace or knotted and coiled in various forms.
Similar to the *Kalam-ezhuthu* of Kerala, a snake ritual dance still continues to be performed which involves the drawing of the *nagamandala* on the ground in the *pancha varna*. *Nagamandala* is an elaborate and spectacular ritual of serpent worship at present found in Tulunadu, especially in Mangalore and Udupi districts. This ritual is also called *hudiseve*, *mandlabhoga* or *mandlaseve* but *nagamandala* is a term generally used by all to denote this form of worship.

The term *nagamandala* is a compound of two words: *naga* and *mandala*. *Naga* means serpent and *mandala* implies decorative pictorial drawings on the floor. The decorative drawing in this context means the drawing of the figure of serpent god in a prescribed form. *Nagamandala* depicts the divine union of male and female snakes. It is a highly intricate and complex motif formed out of knots (*pavitra*), depicted by the entwining snake. A full *mandala* is made up of sixteen knots. Twelve knots make three-quarters of a mandala, eight knots comprise a mandala and four knots form the quarter mandala.

These *nagamandalas* are drawn by rural artists on the occasion of *nagapuja* in South Canara. Ganesha is worshipped at the beginning of the ritual. While making these diagrams of entwined snakes, the artist continuously invokes the deity by chanting certain mantras to impart his mystical power into the pictorial representation. Sixty-four types of *naga* ancestors are appeased with *panda*, a rice preparation offered by placing it on the 64 squared *yantra*, to ward off evil.

The ritual dance is conducted by the priest-artists- *nagapatri* and *nagakanika*, who gets possessed by the snake spirit and begin acting as male and female *nagas*. Two musicians (*vaidyas*) arouse the spirit through narrations and provocations in the style of the narrative ballet. The snake coiled in the *panchavarna rangoli*, daylong *homas* and night long dance of the *nagapatri* and *nagakanika*, whose dance movement depict courtship are symbols of fertility and prosperity. The leg movements of the
dancers are imitative of the excited snake. The *rangoli* is obliterated by the dancers in the act of dancing. After the ritual the *rangoli* powder and the betelnut flowers become the *prasadam* for the gathering witnessing the ritual. Often the ritual terminates in oracular consultation.

*Chakravyuha* motif is drawn by certain communities of Karnataka in memory of Bali Chakravarti whose banishment to the underworld is believed to coincide with Diwali.

The new moon day in the month of *Jyesthha* is celebrated as the festival of *Basava*. *Rangoli* of twin bulls is drawn on the floor and worshipped.

The depiction of eagle and the mythical bird *Gandabherunda* is also seen in the *rangoli* of Karnataka.

On auspicious functions like welcoming the new born child or during marriage, *hase* is drawn beneath the seat where the baby & mother or the bridal pair will sit. A special *rangoli* called *hase-mane* is drawn
beneath the seat of the bridal pair. In marriages ḍase is also drawn in front of the banana leaves spread for the lunch offered to the guests.

_Gopardma vrata_ is performed by women to ensure salvation. Vishnu is said to leave _Vaikuntha_ and reside with _Tulsi_. The eastern side of the _rangoli_ represents the door of _Vaikuntha_, which is shut with a line drawn on that day. The _Vaikuntha_ door being shut, the possibility of being guided to hell is to be avoided.

Rao Bahadur Tirmalrav Venkatesh’s note in the Bombay Gazetteer\(^{262}\), describing the practice and beliefs related to _rangoli_ in the Dharwar district is very informative.

He writes, “_Rangoli_, the word used for the quartz lines and pictures which prudent housewives sprinkle in front of their house-doors is said to mean the brilliant line from the Sanskrit _rang_, colour and _avali_, a row. The orthodox explanation of the sprinkling of these lines and figures, as well of white-washing, cow-dunging and tying strings of mango leaves in houses, is that it is for beauty, because god dwells in the house. The best _rangoli_ is made by pounding white quartz into powder. In the absence of quartz-powder rice-flour may be used. In addition to the white lines, dots or figures of yellow, red, black, green and blue powder are also occasionally used. The yellow powder is made from turmeric, the red is the ordinary _gulal_ of rice or ragi flour dyed with red sanders, the green is from the ground dried leaves of the _Aeschynomene Grandiflora_, the black charcoal and the blue indigo”.

He further elaborates upon the motifs employed for _rangoli_ and says that dots, lines, cross lines, circle with dots in the centre and elaborate figures are drawn everyday in Brahman household. On great

occasions elaborate tracery and figures of men, animals and trees are also drawn. On *Nagar-chaut* or the Cobra’s fourth, that is the bright fourth of *Shravan* or August-September, Brahmins in addition to making the usual figures, draw and worship single, double and twisted forms of snakes sprinkled in quartz powder. On the marriage day of *Vishnu* and the *Tulsi* plant that is the evening of the bright twelfth of *Kartik* or November-December, and when goddess *Gauri* comes in *Shravan* or August-September, besides the usual quartz figures, *gopad* or cow’s foot-prints are sprinkled with *Rangoli* powder all along the ground from the outer threshold of the house to the shrine which has been made ready for god.

During *Diwali*, he mentions the making of *Pandus*, i.e. five cow-dung cones, three or four inches high and about the same round the foot. These are placed outside to the right and left of the threshold, and on the top of the outer house-door. Around each cow-dung cone, double or treble white and red lines are drawn and a flower of the *kumbal*, *cucurbita hispida* gourd is set on each of the cones and marked with turmeric and red powder.

He refers to the drawing of lines and arches in front of and on each side of the board on which each guest sits at the time of feasts and also mentions elaborate traceries made on birth, marriage and other festive occasions. On occasions of deaths, funeral ceremonies and yearly rites of *Shraddha*, no quartz lines, dots or figures are drawn, except that at dinners in honour of saints a little quartz powder is occasionally used. No special quartz figures are drawn on no-moon or full-moon days. The cow-dunging of the ground and the drawing of fearful quartz powder figures is an important part in most exorcisms.

Throwing further light on the practice, Tirmalrv Venkatesh states, “The great tracers of quartz-powder figures forming them simply by letting the powder drop from between the thumb and fingers are Brahman women. No Brahman woman during her monthly sickness, for three months after child-birth,
or when in mourning may draw quartz lines. Jains use Rangoli like Brahmans and Marathas use it on special occasions. Some, but not all Lingayats draw a few lines every day in their houses. On moon-light nights and on great occasions Lingayats draw long double lines of dots, alternately of lime and water and red earth and dine and play close by these lines. Lingayats also draw one or two lines of quartz-powder along the edge of the grave before burning the body. Parsis, like Hindus, decorate their house front by stamping them with quartz-powder plates. Musalmans and native converts to Christianity are the only persons who do not use quartz decorations. Formerly the traceries were all made by letting the powder slip between the thumb and fingers. Of late years tubes and plates with upturned edges pierced with designs have been filled with powder and either rolled or stamped over the place to be decorated”.

The above note throws light on this art as followed in Dharwar, which was part of the Bombay Presidency. In today’s context one gets an idea of how the art of rangoli was practised in the state of Karnataka as well as the neighbouring region of Maharashtra, especially in the Maharashtra-Karnataka border area. The important information that this note provides is about the natural colours used forrangoli in earlier days, the practice which is lost today. Another fact mentioned is the drawing of few lines of rangoli by the Lingayats at the funeral ceremony. The Lingayat women also make five dots in a row with lime, turmeric or red earth on the thresholds or on top and sides of the door frame. Similar marks are also made on the wheels of carts, iron safes, granaries etc.

Andhra Pradesh

Rangolis are known as muggu in A.P., the plural form of which is muggulu.

It is seen that the people residing in the region between Vindhyas and Kaveri rivers, i.e., in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra, follow the South Indian lunar calendar. Thus their festivals like the New Year too fall on the same day. This similarity is reflected in their rangolis too, which on many occasions employ same or similar motifs.
Everyday rangoli consists of shankha, chakra, gopadma and such symbols along with Shree or Aum (akshara) drawn in front of god.

Ugadi marks the first day of the New Year in the month of Chaitra (March–April) in A.P. Special muggus consisting mainly of designs of lamps, Swastikas, jaggery, sugar-cane, neem leaves etc., are drawn. These symbols signify the sweetness and bitterness of life.

In rural areas, rangolis are sometimes also drawn on outer walls of the houses.

Sankranti is one of the main festivals in A.P. The major feature of Makara Sankranti in Andhra is ‘Gobbi Poolu’ or ‘Sandi Gobbamma’. Cowdung balls decorated with marigold and mango leaves sticking out in all directions are placed on a decorated peetha (seat) muggus. Traditionally, young girls used to go around the peetha singing from early morning. The content of the song varied from general prosperity to good husbands, parents-in-law and progeny. The cowdung used for Gobbamma was preserved to be used as fuel on the Ratha Saptami day.
A large variety of the *muggus* on Sankranti are inspired by the change in the course of the sun and the moon. The *Haridwara muggu* has the motif of the sun and moon in the centre and the four ends shown as broken lines are kept open during the Sankranti month signifying the doors of heaven. On the day after Sankranti, i.e. Kanumu day, the ends are closed to make Kanumu the most inauspicious day to die. The *Sankranti Nela* (month) muggu depicts the sun and moon in the centre with crops drawn on all sides. The *Vankan Nela* (curved month) muggu with the *Swastika* – like form, appears to set the cosmic cycle in motion, the symbolizing the change and pause in the cosmic cycle.

The *Sankranti ratha* is a typical Andhra *muggu*. The ropes for pulling the chariot are kept open till the day of Sankranti, as an indication of drawing the chariot upto the street. This symbolizes the driving away of ill-health and misfortune into a state of exile by means of the chariot. On Kanumu day, the ropes of the *rathas* are joined from house to house, the act being a revival of the collective unconscious desire for a perfect cosmic cycle. This act, as mentioned above, is also believed to avert death.

The clay motifs of snake and the dots made on the pots are common representations of the Mother Goddess in Andhra. Snake is a popular motif in *rangoli*.

*Pitha muggus* are auspicious patterns drawn as seat to the deity.
Tamil Nadu

*Rangoli* is referred to as *kolam* in Tamil. In fact the word *kolam* is a general term for all kinds of decorations. It has several meanings, chief of which are line, current, watercourse, snake, ornament, figure, mask, display, bird, arecanut, loofah and the planet Saturn. According to Prof. John Layard, it also includes certain patterns that are traced on the body, on exterior walls of houses and wavy patterns found on mortuary pots.

*Kolam* is very much a living folk art of Tamil Nadu. Even today, the drawing of a *kolam* forms an essential part of the daily work routine of women. Normally, *kolam* is drawn twice here, once at sunrise and again before sunset. The work is carried out, not only by older women, but also by young girls. In higher middle-class homes it is more often the servant woman who executes the patterns on the threshold.

This art is very widely practised here than elsewhere in India. It is aesthetically pleasing, while at the same time bearing witness to a form of religiosity that is magical and propitiatory and at the same time charitable. *Kolam* here is not only an auspicious sign, welcoming the deity but also serves as *bhutayajna* i.e. offering of rice flour to tiny creatures like ants and other insects. These threshold designs are usually drawn with rice powder, conforming to the obligatory rites prescribed by Dharmashastras to feed

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266 It is also drawn by the *Petiyar*, a small group of Hermaphrodites, who besides possessing many other skills are masters of the *kolam* art. Moving from one village to another, they instruct young maidens in various arts, including *kolam* and are in return tolerated in the village for a few days.
insects and ants, among other living creatures. At times a wet paste of rice flour is used to trace the design on the floor. These are called makolam which are sometimes outlined in red with kavi, a red brick paste, to make it look grander and more beautiful. The auspicious combination of white and red ensures fertility and warding off of evil. Sometimes, powdered quartz or slaked lime is also used.

Though the practice of decorating the houses and streets on festive occasions is recorded in early Tamil Sangam poetry as well as in later ritual texts, the word kolam does not appear in them. There is no reference to the word kolam in Tamil word-lists called Nigandus either. Prof. Gift Siromoney, in his article on ‘South Indian Kolam Patterns’ points out that the word kolam for drawing patterns on the floor is first mentioned in the Kuravanji called Madurai Meenatchiammai Kuram of the sixteenth century and Kutrala Kuravanji of the seventeenth century. In both these works the references are to the preparation of the floor and the drawing of the kolams as a prelude to the worship of Ganesha, the Lord of Obstacles.

The uniqueness of the kolam diagrams is that the line goes round the dots forming loops, making the preliminary dots visible. The patterns are made carefully such that the entire pattern must be an unbroken line, with no gaps to be left anywhere for evil spirits to enter, which in turn prevents it from entering the home. For the small kolams, the woman starts from one point, then circumvents and links the dotted infrastructure, raising her hand only when the pattern is finished. The centre of the design is also never left vacant, as it is supposed to be the very source of being.

The front threshold called the vayirpati in Tamil is a place for both, as anywhere else, the strangers and friends, the invited and the uninvited, the private familiar realm encountering the community realm. When the front of the house is cleaned at dawn and decorated with kolam, it is assured that the entire day would be good.

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267 Raw rice is soaked in water for about fifteen minutes and then dried in the open air in the shade. Then it is heated on fire and finally ground with a pestle or nowadays in mixer.

Inside the house the *kolam* is made in the *pooja* room where the images of gods are kept or pictures of gods are hung. *Kolams* are also made on the ovens or place of cooking in the kitchen. This practice is followed in the villages even today. Small designs in lines are made on the mud plastered ovens. It is also drawn in front of *tulsi* plant, when the house has one. When the *kolam* is drawn outside the house, it is protection against evil spirits. When drawn in the *pooja* room, it is to invoke positive energy for the house. In the kitchen, ladies make *kolam* on the cooking platform and place a lamp there and from light the cooking fire. Here it is a symbol of auspiciousness and purity.

On auspicious occasions such as temple festivals and marriages, *Kolams* with suitable symbols and motifs are not only desired but as good omens and a sign of ritual purity they are indispensable.

Generally, for thirteen days after a death in the family and during the annual rites to the ancestors, the *kolams* are not drawn because the spirit of the dead is invoked and offered food.

Abbe J.A. Dubois (1765–1848), a French Catholic missionary in India, recorded the Hindu manners, customs and ceremonies in his book of the same title. This work is based on his personal observations of the Hindus in the Southern parts of India, where he was stationed. The significance of *kolam* in the life of a south Indian woman in olden days is evident in the observation made by Dubois. He notes that among the laments a woman makes on being widowed, there is the cry of having fulfilled her wifely...
duties, including having swept the floor and decorated it with traceries, so why has he (the husband) thus left her.\footnote{Abbe J.A. Dubois and H.K Beauchamp (ed.), \textit{Hindu Manners Customs and Ceremonies}, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, lllrd ed. 1906, p. 346.}

**Technique:**

The \textit{kolam} at first glance appears as a very complex geometrical design. These designs however are made up of simple basic patterns and symbol motifs which are harmonized with similar or different simple patterns. A framework of dots (\textit{pulli}) around which a diagram is made, act as a guideline for the diagram. The lines go round the dots forming loops. Here the preliminary dots are visible. This typical \textit{kolam} pattern in its loop form can be defined as a pattern consisting of one continuous strand (single \textit{kambi}) or multiple strands (multi \textit{kambi}) of artistically interlaced or combined forms which most often are enclosed by a frame. The encircling continuous line represents the unbroken, perfect whole. Multiplication of the basic or core-pattern is the simplest and most popular means by which the visual effect is enhanced and by which even very simple form elements and motifs are endowed with a highly decorative value. This multiplication or the extension of the \textit{kolam}'s ornamentation is only limited by the available space.

For drawing the \textit{pulli kolams}, one has to be good at spatial adjustment and symmetry. Usually a grid of \textit{pullis} numbering from 4 to 108 is used for drawing the \textit{kolam}. \textit{Pulli} is a clever device for assisting the artist to draw the design easily. The \textit{pulli} pattern is used as a skeletal framework by which women are able to memorize the design. Late Prof. Gift Siromoney, head of the Department of Statistics at the Madras Christian College and his team has established some simple mathematical properties of
common kolam designs. Their observations reveal that the number of pullis in kolam designs is always equal to the number of crossings plus one. If the number of pullis is five then the number of crossings is always four even though more than one kind of kolam can be drawn for a given number of pullis. The number of edges likewise confers to mathematical orders. The number of edges is always an even number. In fact it is equal to twice the number of crossings. If the number of crossings is four, then the number of edges is eight.²⁷⁰

They have also made use of kolam designs in formulating two-dimensional formal grammars/languages. This new model is known as “kolam array grammars” or sometimes as “Siromoney array grammars”.²⁷¹

Sometimes for the daily kolam patterns, the framework of pullis is dispensed with as skillful women are able to place even intricate kolams without dots. Some women draw two or three parallel lines simultaneously by gently allowing the powder held in their fist to drop through the gaps between the fingers.

Festival day kolams –

It is observed that in the Southern states, except Kerala, the best patterns are made during Sankranti. The sun as it starts its course in the northern hemisphere is held to be very auspicious. In Tamilnadu, the month of Margazhi, the month from mid-December to mid-January, when the sun is farthest to the south, is considered the month of the dying sun, presaging an end to all unlucky days of disease and epidemics. To guard against evil and in preparation for the revival of the sun god, the houses are adorned with toranams and decorated with kolams all through the month of Margazhi. Traditionally, a

²⁷⁰ Siromoney, op.cit., p.11.
pumpkin flower on a cow dung pellet representing Ganesha was placed in the centre of the kolam. The five-petal flower was considered especially efficacious for warding off evil.\textsuperscript{272}

In the words of Dubois, the *Pongal (Sankranti)* ceremony is described as -

“During the inauspicious month which preceded the *Pongal*, *sanyasis* or mendicants go from door to door about four o'clock in the morning, waking all sleepers by beating their gongs, warning them to be on guard and to take every precaution against the evil influences of this unlucky period, by appeasing, by means of prayers and sacrifices, the god Shiva, who presides over it. With this purpose in view, the women of the house every morning prepare a small patch about a yard square outside the door, smearing it with cowdung, and tracing several white lines upon it with rice flour. They then place within this square several pellets of cowdung, each adorned with a pumpkin flower.

Every evening these little balls of cowdung, together with their flowers, are carefully collected, to be kept till the last day of the month. When this day arrives the women, who alone are charged with this ceremony, put them into a new basket, and accompanied by musical instruments and clapping of hands, they solemnly carry them away beyond the precincts of their dwellings and throw them into a tank or some other retired but clean spot”. \textsuperscript{273}

The sun, having reached its winter solstice, is said to die bringing to an end the unhealthy and unlucky period preceding the dying sun. *Pongal* in Tamilnadu, rejoices at this new lease of life. It marks the commencement of the Tamil month of *Thai* and is dedicated to the worship of the sun god. It falls invariably around the second week of January and the celebration is spread over four days. From *Adi* to *Margazhi* (June to January) is a period of immense toil and strain in the field. It is only towards the end

\textsuperscript{272} A popular legend is that the great war of the Mahabharata was fought in the month of *Margazhi*. While the war was on, the pumpkin flowers were placed on the kolams of those houses where no death had occurred.

\textsuperscript{273} Dubois, *op.cit.*, p.571.
of Margazhi and the succeeding month of Thai that the grains are brought home. The crop just harvested is offered to the sun god.

A day before Pongal, the last day of Margazhi called Bhogi, all old things and rubbish accumulated in the house are consigned to flames.

The second day is the Perum Pongal, the great pongal or the Surya Pongal. Pongal is an offering of rice, boiled until thick white foam spills over the top of the pot, which represents an overabundance or "more than enough". The Pongal is worshipped by the entire agricultural community, which gradually offers the first harvest reaped after five months of the arduous struggle of sowing and irrigation. Paddy and sugarcane which are abundant in South India form the main offerings.

Beautiful kolams are drawn in and outside the house on this day. Kolams along with other ritual offerings are made to propitiate the sun god. Pots and ovens are placed at an auspicious moment over these kolams. Traditionally, the cow dung pellets, which are placed on the kolams throughout the month of Margazhi, were either preserved and used as fuel for cooking pongal or immersed in water on the day of Bhogi.

After the pooja, Pongal is offered to the sun god, a portion of it to the cattle and the rest shared by the members of the household. Visits are exchanged and enquiries made as to whether rice has been boiled.

The celebrations differ from the rural to the urban areas. Normally, in the rural areas, the cooking of the rice is done in the open and the are placed over ovens dug into the earth or ready-made ovens and lit with cowdung cakes. In urban areas the kolams are drawn supposedly on place where sunlight reaches. The Pongal is
normally cooked in the kitchen and the pooja place is ostentatiously decorated.

The third day of Pongal, known as Mattu Pongal, is especially for the worship of cattle, cows and bullocks. The cattle which form the backbone of the agricultural economy are treated with reverence and affection. They are washed clean and decorated till mid-afternoon and taken to the temples where they are sumptuously fed and worshipped. The fourth day of the festival is Kaanum Pongal. During this day people visit their relatives, friends to enjoy the festive season.

The kolams drawn during the month of Margazhi and for Pongal are of innumerable variety, encompassing almost every aspect of rural life – plants, animals, fish, birds, pine-apple, coconut, naga, shankha, chakra, samayi, diva etc. However, certain characteristic kolams do employ the specific symbols suited for the occasion. The ratha motif, or the chariot, as the vahana of the God Surya is widely employed. The offerings of sugarcane and the pots of boiling Pongal are also rendered in visual forms. As this is the most important festival of the Tamil year, the artists are very careful in choosing motifs which suit the occasion and they execute the drawings with particular care and imagination. There is an unstated competition between women to make the best patterns with intricate designs and vivid colours. Traditionally, women sang kolam-pattu (songs) while drawing kolam. These kolams, in conjunction with other Pongal rituals act as a catalyst in the renewal of life forces in the house accompanied by a removal of all that is bad and unwanted.

The day Shiva showed compassion towards Parvati is known as Arudra and celebrated with much festivity in various important shrines of Shiva such as Chidambaram, Perur, Courtallam, Madurai etc. The festival commences nine days in advance before the Arudra day. On the ninth day Lord Nataraja and his
consort Sivakamasundari are taken out in a chariot procession. All over the town, the houses are adorned with kolams depicting Shiva enshrined in various forms of rathas.

Traditionally, on the occasion of the great processions, when the images of deities were paraded in the temple cars, it was necessary for the women, even in the larger cities, to decorate the leveled ground outside their houses with kolam paintings, some of which would cover an area of no less than ten square metres.

Certain rangolis like those of swings and cradles, representing Krishna as a child sleeping in the cradle and playing on the swing, are drawn on the auspicious day of Krishna Janmashtami. Also, small footprints are traced with rice flour paste, from the altar of the house to the kitchen suggesting that baby Krishna after taking birth has entered their kitchen to steal butter. Sometimes baby Krishna’s anklets, his tuft or crown and the Panchajanya conch of Vishnu are also depicted.

Saraswati chowk is drawn when children are initiated into learning (Vidyarambha), mainly on the Vijayadashmi day.

In Chettinad all kolams are bordered by double rows of dots. The dots are considered as couples and hence are representative of the dual aspect of a whole. Only on inauspicious occasions a single row of dots adorns the kolam.

Mada kolam or Kalyan kolam: There are some motifs drawn on the occasions of marriage or
thread ceremony. These *kolams* which are tantric in nature consist of circles, squares and triangles.

*Kolams of Homakundam* and marriage platform are also drawn.

![Homakundam and Marriage Platform Kolams](image)

*Isai kolam* or *Sangeet rangavalli* or musical *kolam* is one type of *kolam*. *Isai* means ‘music’ in Tamil, thus *isai kolam* is a *kolam* drawn to the accompaniment of music. The doting and lining of *kolam* are done to the accompaniment of rhythmic music. Compositions with attractive music and pronounced rhythm and starting on same *graha* are chosen for the purpose. The total number of the component dots and lines of a *kolam* should be equal to the total number of counts of the *tala-avartas* of the composition.²⁷⁴

*Rangoli* is drawn on the steps of the house. These are called *padi kolam*, where *padi* means steps.

Sometimes the dots are manipulated to assume any shape or size and to imitate any desired contour like nose-rings, arm-lets, crowns etc.

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In a *kolam* called *asanapalakai*, the design is similar to the weave of a palm-leaf mat used for sitting on. The presence of *Swastika* is significant here.

Assumptions regarding origin of *kolam*:

Archana Sastri in her work *Language of symbols* relates the origin of *kolams* to the two most potent symbols of fertility and regeneration – the dot and the snake. She says that the preoccupation of these symbols with the processes of fertility and revival are almost interchangeable and synonymous.\(^{275}\) In the Indian context, and particularly in south India, this association with the snake seems natural but, similar concept from different parts of the world reveals something else.

Prof. John Layard in his article “Labyrinth Ritual in South India: Threshold and Tattoo Designs”\(^{276}\) connects the *kolam* with prehistoric megalithic cultures. He claims that the practice of *kolam* originated

\(^{275}\) Sastri & Narayanan (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.85.

\(^{276}\) Layard, *op.cit.*, pp. 115-182.
in the ritual of the labyrinth. He bases the ritual on an early conception of the labyrinth as an important accessory to the attainment of future life and consequently, of success in this world. He narrates C.N. Deedes’ introduction to the labyrinths connected with the royal tombs of Egypt, where the labyrinth served a purpose of creating a baffling defense: 1. to exclude the uninitiated from participating in the life after death and 2. to prevent inauspicious and unlucky influences from entering.

He further states that, in the Melanesian island of Malekula, the labyrinth ritual serves the same purpose. The ritual here evolves around the concept of life after death. Only males can participate in this ritual as only they can attain future life. The mortuary labyrinth is reduced to a geometric design drawn in the sand by a female ghost. As the ghost of the dead man approaches, the female ghost seeks out half the design. The dead man must complete the design and walk over it before entering the land of the dead.

Here it is important to note that rangoli is drawn at the threshold which is the point of entry and departure and that one of the important purposes for drawing it is to prevent inauspicious and unlucky influences from entering. Secondly, the labyrinthine ritual of excluding the uninitiated from participating in the life after death reminds of the role of the mandala in the rite of the initiation (diksha) of the shishya by the guru, as per the Hindu traditions. In the initiation ritual, the guru leads the shishya towards the mandala, teaches him the rules to be observed and makes him enter the mandala. In the centre of the mandala, the shishya is told the necessary mantras and the initiation is completed.

Layard lays down two by-rules that characterize these drawings:

1. One consisting of a single continuous line, having a definite beginning and end, crossing and recrossing itself on a previously drawn framework made of straight lines set at right angles to each

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other. The framework represents the structure of the labyrinth and the continuous line, the path traced by the initiate.

2. consisting of a single never-ending line enclosing a space based on a framework of small dots. The dots represent the eyes, nostrils and breasts of the guardian ghost and the never-ending line the outline of her body.\textsuperscript{279}

Layard relates this framework to the pulli kolams and tattoo designs found in South India.

The other two points that led Layard to deduce a labyrinthine motive, behind the kolam are the drawings called pavitram and Brahma mudi and the recurrence, in numerous threshold drawings, of the snake symbol.

\textit{Brahma mudi} (Brahma’s knot) is the knot that is tied at the end of the threads of the Yagnopavita in such a way that the loose ends are not visible thus making it a continuous single thread. The \textit{Brahma mudi} is a frequent traditional motif drawn in kolam. Similarly, the knots of the intricately coiled nagabandhas are referred to as pavitra mudi.

Dubois describes pavitram as – “The object of the pavitram is to scare away giants, evil spirits, or devils, whose mission it is to bring disasters upon men and mar the ceremonies of the Brahmins. The very sight of the pavitram makes them tremble and take to flight. This powerful amulet consists of three, five, or seven stalks of \textit{darbha} grass plaited together in the form of a ring. The Brahmins can do nothing without it. It is the basis of all those pious and meritorious acts which lead to everlasting felicity.”\textsuperscript{280}

\textsuperscript{279} Similar belief is observed with respect to kolam too. The basic forms of the sapta swaras of the isai kolam (musical kolam) are based on formations of around six dots arranged in rows of two dots each. There is a belief that Lord Muruga in his six-faced form is represented by the six dots and the line encircling the dots represents the body.

\textsuperscript{280} Dubois and Beauchamp (ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, pp.152-153.
The pavitram is an amulet consisting of three, five or seven stalks of darbha grass plaited in the form of a ring. It is worn as a mark of sanctification and consecration on the ring finger of the right hand. It scares away evil spirits. The importance of darbha grass in purificatory rite and its association with kolam is described by Dubois as –“Before the performance of the ceremony the place where it is to take place must be previously purified. This is usually the duty of the women, and the principal ingredients required are cow-dung and darbha grass. They dilute the cow-dung with water and make a sort of plaster with it, which they spread over the floor with their hands, making zigzags and other patterns with lime or chalk as they go on. They then draw wide lines of alternate red or white over this and sprinkle the whole with darbha grass, after which the place is perfectly pure. This is the way in which Hindus purify their houses day by day from the defilements caused by promiscuous goers and comers. It is the rule amongst the upper classes to have their houses rubbed over once a day with cow-dung, but in any class it would be considered an unpardonable and gross breach of good manners to omit this ceremony when they expected friends to call or were going to receive company. This custom appears odd at first sight, but it brings this inestimable benefit in its train, that it cleanses the house where it is in use from all the insects and vermin which would otherwise infest them” 281

281 Ibid., pp.153-4.
The patterns named as *pavitram* in *kolam* are symbolic and do not resemble a ring. It appears that these patterns are named in accordance to the knots employed in the *pavitram* with the strands of the *darbha* grass.

The knotting of a thread to ward off evil is very common in Indian rituals. The efficacy of the knot is also revealed in the *Vastu pooja*, when the four corners of the house are symbolically encircled with threads so as to keep all evil influences from entering. The knot signifies integration of the good and protector from the evil. Similar protective threads are also tied around the wrist during ritualistic ceremonies and marriages. The efficacy of knots to ward off evil is visible in various cultures around the world.

M. M. Banks’ article “Tangled Thread Mazes” is very illuminating in this regard.282 He writes about the tangled thread designs drawn by women on the threshold of houses in Scotland.283 The illustrations given in the article are very much similar to *kolam* designs. He quotes an old lady in Galloway who said her granny explained the purpose of the patterns by the couplet –

“Tangled thread and rowan seed
Gar the witches lose (or lowse) their speed”.284

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283 The word thread used by him symbolizes the entanglements depicted in the patterns made by powder on the ground.
Thus the intent of the tracings becomes very clear that of keeping the evil away. He further adds that, it is always the women who know these patterns and who trace them.

Another reference in this regard is an old *rangoli* book published in Mumbai in 1867, consisting of *rangoli* designs with the names and description of each design. In this book, the writer Godavaribai Panditin refers to a *kolam* pattern as *Telangi bhool* which means ‘a maze or a mysterious diagram’ from Telangana.

The above references throw sufficient light on the intention of the tangled magical diagrams that is, to confuse the evil forces or to trap them. It is very likely that the same ideas gave birth to the drawing of these diagrams all over the world, including India. Probably, the tangled forms evolved over the years and gained new meaning in different places with respect to the geographical, environmental and cultural setting of the place. Thus, in India it is easily related to the snake motif. It should be noted that in the snake patterns of south India, more emphasis is placed on the intertwining complicated knots, forming the body of the snakes. Also, many snake patterns and patterns with multiple lines are made without using dots. Thus, it appears that initially the dots were employed as an aid to memorize the complicated patterns, thus making them easier to draw. It must have gained its symbolic significance gradually, with the development of religious ideas of the mankind. A good example of this is a *kolam* named ‘spider’s web’ (with complicated interlacements) drawn in Tamilnadu. This same diagram is drawn for a ritual named *Boden*, related to the family goddess of the *Kokanastha* Brahmin community of Maharashtra.

**Kerala**

Kerala persevere in a very significant manner many aspects of Indian traditions, where many layers of time co-exist.

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In Kerala, due to rains almost for the whole year, it is not common to draw *rangoli* on the floor. However, at the time of festivals like *Onam*, there is a tradition of making flower arrangement on the floor called as *poovidal* or *pookalam*.

*Onam* is a ten-day festival celebrated in the month of *Shravana* (August-September) which coincides with the Malayalam month of *Chingam*, which is the harvesting season in Kerala. The festival commemorates the grand rule of Mahabali, who is said to have reigned over Kerala.

The story of King Mahabali, which is also the story of the Vamana avatar of Lord Vishnu, is told to children at *Onam*. King Bali, was a grandson of Prahlad, the great devotee of Lord Vishnu. He ruled his kingdom with such wisdom that his property began to attract the attention of the *Devas* who felt that he was getting too powerful for their good. They sent their representative Vishnu, in the form of the dwarf or Vamana. Vishnu who came to the court of Bali acting as a poor Brahmin asked the extremely generous king for alms. He asked Bali for “merely three paces of land” and was promptly granted his wish. Just as he was to take the first step the dwarf grew to enormous proportions. At the first step he covered the entire earth and the second place the sky. At this point Bali, realizing his error, offered his own head for the third place and was pushed into *patala* (underworld) by Vamana. However, Vamana granted him one concession – that once a year Bali could revisit his people. It is believed that every *Onam* this popular king returns to his coastal kingdom, where the people greet him with elaborate flower carpets, beautiful oil lamps and grand feasts.
Poovidal or pookalam done in front of the house on all ten days of the festival of Onam, is an important part of the celebration. *Poov* means flower, *idal* means arrangement and *kalam* means drawing. Making patterns starts from the day of Atham (first day of Onam) and continues till Thiruvonam day (tenth day of Onam). Basic design is prepared on the first day, the size of which increases every passing day, hence a huge pookalam gets ready for the main day of the occasion.\(^{286}\) Being a team effort it helps to generate feeling of togetherness and goodwill amongst the people. In olden days, women sang traditional songs as they prepared pookalam.

Flowers are laid out variously, in patterns ranging from geometrical decorations to mythological narrations of the myths of Mahabali and Parashurama.\(^{287}\)

First, the shapes are drawn by finger or chalk and then flowers and leaves are arranged accordingly. Traditionally, the outer shape of the poovidal is circular with a lotus in the centre, which gives it a form of a yantra. Sometimes, interlocked triangles, creating a six-pointed star, are also present in the centre.

In certain parts of Kerala, particularly in South Malabar (Central Kerala), conical blocks of mud called materu are also displayed in front of the house, generally in the center of the poovidal and worshipped for the ten days of the festival. Materu is also called Thrikkakara Appan or Onathappan and is believed to represent Mahabali. It is a terracotta piece about nine inches high made by local potters. It is smeared with rice flour prepared from the fresh harvest.\(^{288}\)

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\(^{286}\) Similar flower arrangements are made in some towns of Italy on the day of Infiorata, a festival of "flower carpets" usually associated with Corpus Domini, a Catholic celebration held in May-June. Early in the morning the residents begin to fill the streets with carpets of flowers in home-grown designs, which later provide the path for a procession after the evening mass.

\(^{287}\) According to a popular belief, Parshurama reclaimed the region of Kerala and Konkan in Maharashtra by saving it from destruction and brought back life to normalcy. Kerala is therefore also known as Parashurama Kshetra.

\(^{288}\) Ten kilometres from Ernakulam was the capital of the kingdom of Mahabali and it was here that Vamana is believed to have pushed him down to Patalaloka. Thrikkakara is believed to have derived its name from Thrikkal
The Onam festival being the harbinger of harvest is also referred to as ‘illam Nira’ (illam is house and nira means full). As per traditional practises, ten days before the main celebration the male in the family, after various purificatory rites of sexual abstinence and diet restrictions observed over a period, goes to the paddy fields. From there he carries a plantain leaf in which are kept a few ears of ripe paddy, leaves of a few creepers and shrubs, considered sacred, like mango leaves, bamboo leaves etc. to his house chanting loudly: ‘nira nirayo, nira illam nira, kathayam nira’ (fill the home, fill the granary, fill the basket) meanwhile the women folk of the house smear the door-front with cow dung on which certain circular and horizontal figures are drawn with rice paste. The leaf is then placed on the spot and the puja performed with other sacred items such as coconut, plantains, rice flour cakes and lighted lamp. The bunch of paddy thus sanctified is tied to the threshing post.\textsuperscript{289}

The tradition of Kamadev-puja continues in Kerala and upto some extent in Karnataka.

Kama (desire) armed with a bow of sugarcane strung with a row of bees was reduced to ashes when he tried to arouse the passion of Shiva who was deep in meditation. He was restored to life by the entreaties of his wife, goddess Rati (pleasure). The revival of Kama, who is symbolic of the cosmic desire, is related to the fertility of women and thereby the earth. The Tiruvadira festival of Kerala re-enacts the myth of Kamadeva. The women of Malabar simultaneously lament the death and rejoice at the revival of Kama, for it is the season of productivity, sowing and germination of seeds. Kama is the cause of desire, fertility and procreation and hence revived. Effigy of Kama moulded in clay is made on the ground and worshipped.

This reminds of the Tandulkusumavallivikara, one of the 64 arts mentioned in the Kamasutra, which enjoins making designs for the worship of Sarasvati and Kamadeva.

\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., pp. 47-48.
Kalam-ezhuthu:

*Kalam-ezhuthu* means making of images on the ground where *kalam* stands for image/picture or drawing and *ezhuthu* for writing. This art is more popular in North and Central Kerala. The *kalam-ezhuthu* is the visual manifestations of the deity, usually of fearsome nature. The making of the *kalam-ezhuthu* is invariably accompanied by *kalam-pattu* (*pattu* meaning song) the songs dedicated to the deities. Various dance forms have also evolved around this ritual. The *kalam-ezhuthu* is always rendered in the characteristic *panchavarna* made of natural materials.

Earlier 40 types of different figures were drawn but today only 19 of them survive. The large pictorial representations of Gods and Spirits and conventional diagrams of *tantra* and *mandala* are drawn on the sacrificial altar of the shrine, by the priests or the rural male artist or the specialist and not the women. For the artist, the creation of artistic representations of the gods on the floor of the temple is an act of votive offering. The *kalam-ezhuthu* accompanied by the *kalam-pattu* and the special dances are essentially ritualistic and never performed for purely decorative or secular purposes.

The ceremony has deep religious significance and an atmosphere of sanctity is ensured and maintained. The participants in the ceremony abstain from non-vegetarian food for a certain period and no woman with her period is allowed anywhere near the chosen sacred place. All present must bathe and enter the place barefooted. The men must not wear shirts. The ceremony of making the image begins with the purification and preparation of the ground upon which the drawing and attendant rites are to be performed. Usually the selected arena is a *mandapa* or other large room that is part of the temple or homes of the members desiring to conduct the ceremony. The designated area, if on a ground, is smeared with *chanakam*, the ritually purified cow dung and traditionally covered by a canopy constructed of four logs wrapped in new unbleached cloth or red cloth supported by four wooden pillars, which form the boundaries of the sacred drawing. The perimeter of the roof of the pavilion is decorated with a hanging fringe of leaves, usually coconut; at intervals garlands of fresh flowers are suspended vertically. Ceremonial objects, brassware, flowers, platters of rice, water, coconuts, oil lamps,
and so on, are arranged. The onset of evening heralds the real start of the ceremony which begins with Ganesh pooja. The persons to draw the kalam take bath and wear new clothes and starts to draw.

Cited below are few examples of the kalam-ezhuthu:

_Naga-kalam:_

The snakes are easily identifiable with the lush, natural surroundings of Kerala. Parashuram, the legendary founder of Kerala, is said to have ordained that the places allotted to the nagas were to be left untouched by knife or spade to enable luxurious growth of vegetation around. The propitiation of snakes, even today, is deemed essential for the well-being and prosperity of the household, to avoid major illness and to avert skin diseases. The name of the capital city Thiruvananthapuram, literally means ‘city of the sacred serpent Anantha’.

There are four main naga temples in Kerala – the Mannarasala, Pambumekkatu, Amedamanagalam and Pathirikunnathu. Besides these four temples, almost every house in Kerala, has a grove of trees under which is a snake shrine. At times a conical stone smeared with red, representing the Mother Goddess, accompanies the snake. The snake is represented either by stone hoods sticking out of the ground or squarish structures in stone called chitrakoodams. The snake shrine is called Pambu Kaavu.

_Sarpa kopam_ or the anger of the serpents is an ever present threat in the life of the people here. No naga has a gentle nature and thus they must be approached with extreme respect and propitiated. It is believed that the overall prosperity and wealth of the family and more importantly, the continuation of the family lineage is controlled by the nagas. Naga pooja should be performed atleast once in three years by families to avert sarpa kopam. The drawing of large naga-kalams made with the ‘pancha podi’ (five powders), accompanied by ‘sarpam pattu’ (snake songs) and the ‘sarpam thullal’ (snake dance) are an indispensable part of this pooja ritual.
The *naga-kalam* is an evening ceremony performed by members of the relatively low Pulluvan caste (traditionally responsible to conduct the ceremony) usually in the homes of the relatively high land-owning, warrior, Nayar, or Nair, caste and occasionally in the home of a Nambudiri Brahmin who desire to perform the ceremony.

The Pulluvans of Malabar are "astrologers, medicine-men, priests and singers in snake groves. A Pulluvan, whose caste is said to be descended from the snake deity, acts as the *poojari* or officiating minister." The artist, who may be a Pullavan priest or a rural artisan and his assistants, carefully built up their drawing by sifting the colored powder between their fingers with much dexterity. Floral and abstract borders are made around a central twirling design representing intertwined snakes. The making of the painting takes several hours. When the painting is complete, it is ‘handed over’ to the priest to perform *pooja* and sanctify it. Various offerings like the heaps of paddy, plantain leaves, coconuts and bananas are placed around the edge of the *kalam*. The traditional metal lamps are lit around the *pandal* and the ceremony begins.

![Serpent drawing executed by the Pullavan to cast out devils. Source: E. Thurston and K. Rangachari, 1909.](image)

![Naga-kalam](image)

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music with their traditional instruments and begin singing. Two women holding small whisks of grain sit on either side on the painting. Sometimes the priest sits above the painting in the centre. Members of the family sponsoring the ceremony and their relatives and friends cluster on the periphery. The ceremony begins with an invocation and a series of songs sometimes alternating with and at other times coinciding with the various ceremonial activities of the priest are sung. The two women sit immobile holding their whisks as if in meditation. After about an hour the main part of the ceremony is reached when the text of the *naga pattu*, then deal with the origin myth of the *nagas*—how they were the 1000 children born to Kadru, a wife of sage Kasyapa (who with his other wives was the father of all creatures)—and their later history. The song continues for as long as necessary for the two women sitting on the painting to begin to achieve a state of trance, that is, to be possessed by the spirits of the *nagas* themselves. At a certain point the musicians switch to *tula pattu*, a song which signals the *nagas*’ presence in the room through their possession of the two women who begin to sway, much as a cobra sways back and forth before a snake charmer. Gradually they begin to sweep the *kalam* in front of them with their grain whisks. As the trance goes deeper their movements became more and more active, eradicating portions of the *naga kalam*, first with their whisks, hands, and forearms then with broad sweeping movements of their long flowing hair. The possession culminates with a violent snake-like writhing over the entire surface of the painting, totally erasing the design and its bright colors into a neutral grey mass of powder. The two women then collapse into unconsciousness, the musicians sing a brief closing passage, and the ceremony gets over past mid-night.

Sometimes, it is said, it may be considered necessary to rub away the figure as many as 101 times, in which case the ceremony is prolonged over several weeks.²⁹¹ In more recent times, it is seen that the ceremony may last for a week or more, till the *nagas* confirm satisfaction through the female mediums. Till then, the same procedure is followed every night, except for the increase in the complexity of the *naga-kalams*. The *kalam* which may begin with four elaborately intertwined snake on the first night, goes on increasing in number and complexity and may reach up to twenty to thirty numbers of snakes on the last night. Sometimes a huge and fierce figure of a *bhootam* or demon, which is believed to guard the vast underground treasuries of the *nagas* is also drawn and appeased.

The music and songs which brings the power of the *naga* deity into the room through the possessed females and the mystical power of the *kalam* which provides a visual bridge to the super-natural world through its design and the dance that follows bring the auspicious ceremonial visitation of the *nagas* into the real everyday world of the household. The ceremony assures both, the positive aspects associated with the *nagas* (especially fertility) and the assuaging of the possible negative aspects (infertility, snake bite, skin diseases etc.) Life becomes, if only temporarily, a little safer and a little more predictable for the household, in a world that is neither.

The snake is almost universally associated with pregnancy. The *Mannarshala Kaavu* is one of the most important snake shrines in Kerala. As the local legend has it, one of the male members of Mannarshala *illam* married a girl of Vettikkottu *illam* (where snakes are held in great reverence). The girl’s parents, unable to give anything by way of dowry, presented her one of the snake idols considered as most valuable by them. The girl worshipped it regularly. In a short time the girl conceived and gave birth to a male child and a five-hooded snake. The snake-child was fostered in an underground cellar. The *illam* prospered from that day and this change of fortune was attributed to the snake.

Another legend that gave Mannarshal its name relates to the outbreak of fire in the Gandharva forest. When the fire occurred all the snakes panicked and took refuge in a shrine supposedly erected by Parashuram. At that time only a childless couple was present there. The woman was endowed with superhuman powers, having performed strict penance and observed a rigid vow of chastity for many years. She prayed to the God of Fire to save the place. The couple in their boundless zeal poured water to cool it. Mannarshala means- the place cooled after the fire. Having saved the entire reptile community from extinction they were granted a boon. In the Malayalam month of *Kumbham* on *Alilyam* day, she gave birth to a five-hooded snake.

To this day, the eldest female member presides over the worship of the deity there and observes celibacy to continue the unbroken tradition of childless couple. Every year *nurum phalam* a mixture of rice flour, milk, arecanut flowers, *appam*, *havis* and *kadli* plantains etc., are offered at the snake shrine
and other snake groves which house innumerable *chitrakoodams*. The priestess is called ‘*Valliyamma*’ (elder woman or mother) and the temple has one of the rarest distinctions of having a woman priestess.

Once in every forty years, in the snake shrine at Mannarshala, a ritual called ‘*sarpam thullal*’ (snake dance) is performed, accompanied by ‘*sarpam pattu*’ (snake songs). The ritual begins with the drawing of large *naga-kalams* made with the ‘*pancha podi*’ (five powders). The two virgins- the *Valliyamma* and the *Cheriyamma* (*Cheriya* means younger) of the Mannarshala *illam* participate in the *thullal* (dance) impersonating ‘*Nagaraja*’ and ‘*Sarpa Yakshi*’. The participants have to abstain from certain items of food and adhere to other prescribed acts of penance.

Besides the drawing of the *nagamandalas* various deities- main or subordinate ones, benevolent or fearful ones are drawn and propitiated.

**Drawing of the human deities:**

The process of drawing begins in a subdued atmosphere of quiet concentration. The drawing is formally begun with a small outline of a lotus drawn in rice flour in the southeast corner of the rectangular area. This is an invocation to the god Ganesha, who is the remover of obstacles, the propitiation of whom is necessary for the completion of the image of a deity that is destined to become the receptacle of that deity’s presence during the span of the ceremony. Then the artist establishes the *Brahmasutra*, or center line of the drawing, with white powder on an east to west axis. The finished drawing is aligned with the auspicious direction of the east (the head of the image in the east and the feet in the west). All other spatial arrangements are oriented from this axis. The length of the figure is measured by repetition of the basic measurement of the vertical dimension of the head.\(^{292}\) From the reference of the central axis the subsidiary measurements and extensions are indicated by dots or dry white powder by the skilled artist. The technical act of drawing becomes a disciplined ritual in itself, mounting in concentration and tension as the articulated form of the deity emerges from the two-dimensional

\(^{292}\) This reminds of the *Vastupurusha mandala* prescribed to be drawn in the various *Shilpashastra*.
ground. The shaping of the eyes with a ritual bronze mirror and the filling of the irises and pupils is preparatory to the later ritual of jiva pratishtha or establishment of ‘life force’ which is the point at which the painting is transformed into a receptacle of the deity’s shakti or power. From that moment of consecration to the ceremonial obliteration of the painting, the deity is ritually ‘alive’ or present in the image drawn on the floor.

_Kalam of goddess Bhagavati_

One such important deity represented in the tradition of the Kurup ritual specialist in Kerala, is the great goddess Bhagavati, represented in different forms, like the eight-armed form of Ashteshvari. The weapons she holds also differ as per the forms. The legend of the goddess is re-enacted on a dark no-moon night. In the light of flickering oil lamps, an image of Bhagavati Kali is drawn on the earth with coloured powder. The artist use dark green for the body of the goddess. The figure represents all the traditional expressions of the _ugra_, violent or fearsome forms of the goddess in her several manifestations. In this ritual form, the goddess is worshipped most traditionally as the patroness of fever and disease, particularly smallpox, and as a power that protects from diseases. Her fearsome aspects are offset by her other ample attributes as a fertility figure. This feature of the goddesses’ nature is accentuated by raising the breasts with two mounds of unhusked rice, covered with red powder. The aspects of the goddess as the sustainer and protector of her devotees are implicit in the many songs sung in connection with the rituals and festival occasions associated with this goddess. These songs offered by traditionally lower ranked segments of society are mostly erotic in nature. In one hand she holds a flame. To the thunder of chanting and drum-beats, the magician-priest dances the destruction of the goddess. With his feet he wipes away her limbs, her breasts, her belly, her face, her eyes till only the fire held in one hand remains. When the form of the goddess finally disappears in the dust from which she had emerged, in the distant darkness, an oil lamp is lit and her victory over the demon is re-enacted through the dance performance.\(^\text{293}\)

\(^{293}\) Pulpul Jayakar also describes the ceremony in _The Earth Mother_, pp.177-178.
Kerala has a rich tradition of wall paintings. These paintings usually of divinities trace its roots to the ancient art of *kalam-ezhuttu*. Just like the floor drawings, five colours are used in the murals, only difference being that the blue replaces white of the *kalam-ezhuttu*. The dark green body of goddess Bhadrakali is also found in the murals. It is imagined that the goddess in both the *kalam* and the mural paintings wears a special and rare silk cloth called ‘*Veeralipattu*’ which is red in colour imposed with designs of yellow and small figures of white colour.

Other deities which find a place in the *kalams* are the three Goddesses Bhuvaneshwari, Raktheshwari and Vellambhagavati, generally drawn together, the *panch-murti* (five deities) – Kuttichethan, Gandharva, Bhairav, Bhadrakali and Chamundi, and also gods like Ayyapan and Vishnu. Few *kalams* are drawn to free the women possessed by evil spirits, like the *Gandharva kalam* and *Kurundini kalam*. Women are made to sit on these *kalams* and the songs of possession (*Badha-pottu*) are sung, followed by the usual procedures.
Few geometric kalam are also made like the Mudiyatt kalam made of squares, for pleasing the dead souls and the Kethimaaltal kalam in which the goddess Kali is represented symbolically using triangles arranged in circular manner. Figures of sickles protruding outwards are drawn at the edge of the circular kalam, indicating its association with black magic.

The powder remaining after the obliteration of the diagrams is mixed with the paddy and offered to the devotees who have participated in the ritual. In the case of exorcisms the ill-charged powders are thrown away in the river.

**Similarities in the rituals:**

All the rituals mentioned above have few things in common. The drawing of the kalam always begins with the propitiation of Ganesha. The use of five prescribed colours and its symbolism is also common, the green being generally used for the body parts of the deity. These five colours are combined in the drawing, both in their pure flat state and in shades to create tonal variations and to indicate three-dimensional form.

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I am grateful to Prof. K.K. Radhakrishnan of Trichur for providing the regional literature on the subject and to Mrs. Rosily Thomas for translating the Malayalam literature into English for me.
One important aspect in the kalam ritual is the experience of different rasas as the painting progresses – the highly stylized expressions of the eyes corresponds to the sentiment of vira or valour. The whites of the eyes showing above the irises indicate the raudra rasa or fury. The final figure which emerges from the ground in an eerie atmosphere induces the rasa of abhut or wonder. These are the common expressions for deities of the ugra or potentially violent and destructive character drawn in these diagrams.

Besides these aspects, the percussions orchestra and elaborate tantric rites of consecration by the priest, the ornamental paraphernalia of floral decorations and the formal offering of lamps, incense, holy water and foods, build up to the theatrical effect of climax, the last movements of which are a choreographic ritual performed by a consecrated medium who becomes possessed by the spirit of the deity. The over all experience is visual, aural, olfactory and tactile, a compelling combination of the ephemeral arts in performance and communal participation. Finally, the painting is ritually destroyed by the medium. The mixed powder of the diagram, the divine corpus, is distributed with consecrated flowers as a sacrament to the gathered devotees, who are the participating audience of this ritual event.

The rangoli drawn by women in their household and the kalam-ezhuthu are both ephemeral but the basic difference in the nature of their ephemerality is the ‘intentional’ obliteration of the kalam at the end of the ritual.

The Bhavishyottara P. provides a description of ceremonies of this type, as follows- The king should at night draw the figure of Bali having two arms, in a circle made on the ground with five coloured powders; the image should have all ornaments and should have Vindhyavali (Bali’s queen) near him; it should be surrounded by asuras like Kusmanda, Bana, Mura and others; (the image of Bali) should wear a crown and ear ornaments; the king should offer worship in the midst of his palace together with his brothers and ministers with several kinds of lotuses and offer sandalwood paste, incense and naivedya of food, including wine and meat and employ the following mantra: ‘Salutation to you, O king Bali, son of Virocana, enemy of gods and the future Indra, accept this worship.” Having thus worshipped, he
should keep awake at night by arranging for dramatic spectacles presented by actors, based on stories about Kshatriyas.²⁹⁵

This description, when compared to the rituals performed today, implies a continuity of the archaic art of making the ritual diagrams into the contemporary world. The ceremony appears to be dedicated to the potentially destructive forms of the deities. Here, Bali, the enemy of gods is offered meat and wine which indicates its impure or non-Brahmanical nature. The worship of such deities was most often meant for the purpose of destroying one’s enemies by magical means, called abhicara or black magic, which is a feature of tantric and agamic texts describing violent forms of deity and their purpose.

Though the current form of ritual is essentially an expression of more popular forms of the pure or shuddha devotional cults, the fundamental elements employed in the ritual, including the tantric or magical elements are strikingly similar.