



A reflection on Tamil traditions

As the jubilant rituals of *Thai Pongal* are gaining momentum, the art of creating *kolam* is an integral part of the Hindu festival. *Thai Pongal* is a harvest celebration, popular among all Tamil communities, predominantly in the Hindu religion. The *kolam* as it is known in India is a trademark of many Hindu homes. Its concept can be traced back to many centuries, as it began as a humble housewife's task to adorn the main entrance of the house with vibrant expression.

Kolam, is a floor drawing made from coloured flour, and is used for ornamental or ceremonial design during traditional Indian festivities. In Gujarat and Maharashtra in Northern India, it is known as *rangoli*.

Kolams or *muggulu* are thought to bring prosperity to homes. In millions of households in Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, women draw *kolams* in front of their home entrance every day at the break of dawn.

Kolam can be found in some parts of India in Goa and Maharashtra. Since Tamil people live in worldwide, the practice of *kolam* is found around the world, including in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and a few other Asian countries.

Kolam is an integral part of the morning ritual of the womenfolk of Tamil Nadu, the *Kolam* is also the state's cultural identity. The *Kolam* is a sign of auspiciousness and is considered to bring prosperity to the homes.



A *Kolam* is a geometrical line drawing composed of straight lines, curves and loops, drawn around a grid pattern of dots.

Traditionally *kolams* are drawn on the flat surface of the ground using coloured rice, dry flour, flower petals, turmeric, vermillion and coloured sand which is dyed and dried in advance. The patterns include the face of Hindu deities, peacock motifs and floral designs.

In Tamil culture the family and home take centre place. *Kolam* designs are laid out early in the morning almost coinciding with sunrise, as the radiant sun plays a pivotal role in yielding a good harvest. Using grains of rice and other pulses the *kolam* also serves to feed ants and birds, who are enticed to the garden, and whose presence is enjoyed by children.

In the *kolam* patterns, many designs are derived from magical motifs and abstract designs blended with philosophical and religious motifs which have been mingled together. Motifs may include fish, birds, and other animal images to symbolise the unity of man and beast. The sun, moon and other zodiac symbols are also used.

The ritual *kolam* patterns created for special occasions such as weddings often stretch down the street. Many of these patterns have been passed on from generation to generation, from mothers to daughters.

Kolam design motifs are traditional and are handed down by generations. *Kolam* designs are considered a sign of prosperity. *Thai Pongal* is a time for all Sri Lankans to embrace their cultural diversity and enjoy the celebration of a bountiful harvest.

Source: Wikipedia.org Graphic: Mahil Wijesinghe

Kolam tradition of Sri Lanka

Kolam is another 'low-country' tradition from Sri Lanka's southern coast.



Although it includes elements of ritual and even trance, it may be classified, however, as a form of folk theatre. A loose plot binds several stock characters and scenes together. The actual play is usually based on a Buddhist *Jataka* story.

