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23.1 INTRODUCTION

Floor art and wall art occupy a special place in the cultural landscape of India. Indian floor/wall art can be traced back to the Stone Age. The cave paintings discovered in many states of India depict animals, birds, trees, flowers, humans, their weapons, dancers, and so on. The earliest use of floor art can be traced back to the seals found at the excavation sites from Mohenjo-Daro (26th to 25th BCE). These seals carried designs like floor decorations that would have prevailed in that era.

Indian floor/wall art started as a ritual. In the Vedic era i.e., between 1500 BCE and 600 BCE, ritual arts developed further. There was integration of earlier art practices into a strict design paradigm. Some of the ritual arts are practised even today. In various parts of India, they are recognized by different names. For instance, floor art in Western India is known as 'Rangoli', whereas in Rajasthan 'Mandana' is the art form used for floor and wall decoration.

Traditional art was passed from one generation to the other by way of demonstration and practice. Later, a variety of books were available for self-learning. Now, even coaching is offered for these forms of art. With technological advancement, innumerable videos and images are accessible online to learn the ancient arts.

Conventionally, these forms of art are either made with dry powders or some kind of paste. The art forms made with dry powders like Rangoli are very delicate and can get disturbed even by a strong breeze or someone accidentally stepping on them. The designs are expected to stay from a few hours to a day or two. To remove rangoli one can easily sweep it away. On the other hand, designs like Alpana are made with paste and after getting dry they become semi-permanent. Thus, they are convenient to manage for 4-5 days without any deterioration. To remove the design, it needs to be scraped off. Conventionally, the floor art was made by hand. The skill and creativity of an individual determined the fineness and quality of the floor art. Today a variety of tools, designs, moulds, stencils, etc. are easily available to create floor decorations. Photographs of floor art in sticker form are also quite popular due to their convenience in use and their durability.

Numerous competitions held at various levels have triggered the contemporizing of floor decorations. A variety of modifications are seen in the material, process, and presentation of these art forms. Adaptations of floor decoration for textile design are also not uncommon. Mega events have persuaded the artists to make huge floor decorations on streets and open grounds. Exceptional talents required for such a presentation of this art. A different style of rangoli known as 'SanskarBharatiRangoli' has emerged as the technique to create very big floor decorations quickly. Here, instead of the fine lines as in the traditional rangoli, very thick lines are used to create large designs.

23.2 RELEVANCE OF FLOOR DECORATIONS IN INDIA

The relevance and importance of traditional Indian floor art are multifaceted:

- i. **Cultural Significance:** Rangoli and Kolam making are deeply ingrained in Indian culture and traditions. They are considered auspicious and are believed to bring prosperity, good luck, and positive energy to homes.
- ii. **Symbolic Representations:** The designs often incorporate symbols, geometric shapes, or religious motifs that hold symbolic meanings, expressing themes of spirituality, unity, and well-being.
- iii. **Social Bonding:** Creating floor art is a communal activity, especially among women, where they come together to create intricate designs. It fosters social bonding and strengthens community ties.
- iv. **Festival Celebrations:** During festivals like Diwali, Pongal, Onam, and other regional celebrations, Rangoli and Kolam adorn entrances as a welcoming gesture for guests and deities.

23.3 VARIOUS FLOOR DECORATIONS IN INDIA

The various floor decorations are:

•	Andhra Pradesh	-	Muggulu
•	Assam	-	Alpana
•	Bengal	-	Alpana
•	Bihar	-	Aripana
•	Gujarat	-	Sathiya
•	Karnataka	-	HaseChittara
•	Kerala	-	Aniyal

• Kerala	- Pookalam
• Maharashtra	- Rangoli
• Odisha	- Jhoti / Chita
• Rajasthan	- Mandana
• Tamil Nadu	- Kolam
• Uttarakhand	- Aipan
• Uttar Pradesh	- Chowkpurana

23.4 TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS USED

Several elements - techniques, and materials contribute to the creation of these intricate designs:

i. Powders and Natural Materials:

- **Coloured Powders:** Finely ground rice flour, coloured chalk, or vibrant powdered pigments serve as the primary medium for creating rangoli designs. These powders allow for vivid and bright colours in the artwork.
- **Rice, Flour, and Grains:** White rice flour or raw rice, mixed with water to form a paste, is often used to create outlines and intricate details within the designs.
- **Flowers and Petals:** Fresh flower petals, particularly marigolds, roses, or jasmine, are employed to add natural colour and fragrance to the designs.

ii. Tools for Application:

- **Fingers and Hands:** The primary tools for creating rangoli designs are the hands and fingers. Artisans skillfully use their hands to create freehand designs, shapes, and patterns.
- **Stencils and Templates:** In some instances, stencils or templates are used to outline specific shapes or motifs, ensuring symmetry and precision in the design.

iii. Application Techniques:

- **Freehand Drawing:** Many artists prefer to create designs freehand without any aids, drawing intricate patterns directly onto the floor surface.
- **Dotting or Dotted Patterns:** Using dots as guidelines, artists create complex designs by connecting and embellishing these dots to form intricate patterns.
- **Layering and Shading:** Skilled artisans often use layering techniques and shading to add depth and dimension to the designs, creating visually appealing effects.

iv. Materials' Significance:

- **Symbolism:** The choice of materials often holds symbolic significance. For instance, rice flour symbolizes fertility and prosperity, while certain colors and flowers are associated with various religious or cultural beliefs.

v. Seasonal and Regional Variations:

- **Region-specific Materials:** Different regions may utilize locally available materials. For instance, coastal regions might incorporate sand or seashells in their designs, while hilly areas may use leaves or earth tones.

Understanding these techniques and materials sheds light on the intricate process of creating traditional floor decorations. Each element, from the materials used to the application techniques, contributes to the unique and vibrant designs that form an essential part of Indian cultural heritage.

23.5 DESIGN, PATTERNS, AND SYMBOLS

Design patterns and symbolism in Indian traditional floor art, known as Rangoli or Kolam, carry deep cultural significance and symbolic meanings. These intricate designs are not merely decorative; they reflect a profound connection to beliefs, rituals, and traditions.

A few design patterns and symbolism are listed below:

i. Geometric Patterns and Motifs:

- **Circular and Mandala Designs:** Circular or concentric designs symbolize unity, completeness, and harmony. Mandala patterns represent cosmic balance and spirituality.
- **Symmetry and Repetition:** Geometric precision and symmetrical arrangements in the designs signify order, balance, and auspiciousness.

ii. Religious and Auspicious Symbols:

- **Lotus:** The lotus flower symbolizes purity, enlightenment, and spiritual awakening. Its depiction in Rangoli represents auspicious beginnings.
- **Diya or Oil Lamp:** Depicting diyas or oil lamps signifies enlightenment, hope, and the victory of light over darkness.
- **Swastik:** An ancient symbol representing well-being, prosperity, and good fortune. It's a symbol of positivity and blessings.

iii. Regional and Seasonal Symbolism:

- **Nature-inspired Patterns:** Floral motifs, leaves, birds, animals, and other natural elements reflect the connection to nature and the changing seasons.

- **Harvest and Fertility:** Some designs incorporate elements like rice grains, sugarcane, or other symbols of abundance and agricultural prosperity.
- iv. **Festival-Specific Symbols:** Designs during festivals like Diwali or Pongal include specific motifs that represent the essence and significance of the occasion.
- v. **Cultural Beliefs and Superstitions:**
 - **Protective Symbols:** Certain patterns are believed to ward off evil spirits or negativity. These designs act as protective barriers when drawn at the entrances of homes.
 - **Ritualistic Significance:** Creating intricate patterns symbolizes welcoming guests, invoking blessings, and celebrating cultural occasions.
- vi. **Colour Symbolism:** Vibrant Colours: Colours used in Rangoli designs hold meaning. Red symbolizes strength, yellow signifies happiness, white represents purity, and green denotes fertility.
- vii. **Spiritual Significance:** Creating these designs is considered a form of meditation, promoting focus, concentration, and mindfulness.

Knowledge of the design patterns and symbolism in Indian traditional floor art unveils the rich cultural heritage and spiritual depth embedded in these intricate and visually stunning creations. These designs are not just decorations but convey many beliefs, traditions, and auspicious meanings passed down through generations.

23.6 FLOOR DECORATIONS WITH RICE PASTE

There are many Indian states where decorative designs are painted on the floor with a white paste usually made of rice flour. Alpana / Alpanais from West Bengal and Aripanais practiced in Bihar. Jhota Chita belongs to Odisha whereas Aipanais seen in Uttarakhand. Māndanā are wall and floor paintings of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. A south Indian state Karnataka also has a tribal art called 'Hase Chittara' where similar floor and wall decoration is done with rice paste.

The Sanskrit word for floor art is 'Alimpan' which means to coat something. The terms Alpana, Aripana, and Aipan have their roots in the Sanskrit word 'Alimpan'.

It is believed that **Aipan** originated in a place known as Almora in Uttarakhand, between the 16th and 18th centuries during the Chand dynasty. **Jhota Chita** is the traditional floor art form of Odisha. It is believed that the term 'Chita' is derived from the word 'Chitra' meaning an image or painting. Arts and crafts in Odisha are influenced by the long heritage of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religions. In Odisha floor decorations like rangoli done with rice powder of white stone powder are known as 'Muruja'. Along with white other colours such as red, green, yellow, and black are also used in Muruja.

All of these floor decorations are ritualistic folk paintings depicting natural elements like flowers, leaves, trees, animals, birds, and humans along with religious symbols such as Goddess Laxmi's feet, Trishul, conch, etc.

Thresholds, courtyards, and walls are decorated before any ritual or festival, bringing the surfaces to life with interesting designs. These traditional arts were practiced mainly by women and passed from one generation to the other.

Conventionally, all of these designs are painted on the floor with rice paste or rice flour paste applied with fingers or with a small piece of cloth or cotton soaked with rice paste. Decorative patterns are created on the floor and occasionally on the wall. The lines drawn with this technique are usually around one centimeter thick. Thus, the patterns are not expected to be made with fine lines and are not very intricate.

These floor decorations are made with lines and dots and are predominantly white in colour. The shapes usually are not filled with colours or white paste. Occasional use of red dots and lines in Alpana enhances the beauty of the designs. One has to be careful to use red colour only after the white lines are dry to avoid mixing the two pastes disturbing the design. Striking Aipan designs are seen made on a rust colour base of Geri mitti.

Depending on the event, ritualistic patterns such as 'mandalas' and 'yantras' are seen in **Aripana** designs guided by tradition. The lotus is a favourite motif in Aripana. Nowadays, not only the rice paste is replaced by poster/oil colors but even the surface is changed. These days, Aipan designs are also made on room decoration accessories made of clay, wood, and metal.

Women with their artistic skills draw geometric patterns to enhance the **Alpana** design. Some of the traditional symbols used in Alpana are sunflower, Tulsi plant, boat, fish, conch, Goddess Laxmi's feet, Trishul, etc. The decorative borders include decorative nails, waves, paicha, etc. These are arranged to create artistic designs. Today a variety of stylized forms are also seen in the modern form of Alpana.

In very few households from the Konkan region of Maharashtra state floor decoration called Kana (कणा) or Kano (कणो) can be found. It is a traditional floor art made with thin rice paste. The technique and designs are quite different than those from other states of India where floor decorations are made with rice paste. For Kana rangoli the paste is held in the hand. Then making very brief contact of the back of three fingers with the floor a set of three short lines or strokes are drawn. As per the design, the artist changes the direction of these triple strokes. Using the tip of three fingers set of three dots is made to complete and beautify the design. Check this video https://youtube.com/shorts/Chug5PaKZWQ?si=L6bi5pWW8_Gp3bhd. There are no continuous lines in these designs. The Kana rangoli designs are simple and mostly symbolic.

The new approach to Alpana was brought about by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. During the early part of the 20th century, while traveling through villages of Bengal, the beautiful Alpana designs drew his attention and then he introduced Alpana in Shantiniketan. Senior teachers like Nandalal Bose and many students developed Alpana as an artistic language, introducing brush strokes and colours to traditional art. Alpana as the ritualistic and decorative form, flourished well in Bengal. In the modern form, Alpana is drawn with paint brushes and even earbuds. Chalk powder has replaced the rice paste. Watercolours or poster colours are added to this paste to get any desired colour and shades.

23.6.1 Māndanā

Māndanā are wall and floor paintings of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in India. It is believed that the Mandana designs protect the home and hearth, welcome gods into the house, and also serve as a mark of celebrations on festive occasions. Despite the lack of records, the origin of Māndanā is believed to be from the Vedic age i.e. 1500 BCE to 500 BCE. Derived from the word 'Māndan' meaning 'to decorate', the term Māndanā implies 'drawing a picture'.

Māndanā is a tribal art used for the ornamentation of walls and flooring of earthen or kuchcha rural houses. As other floor arts mentioned earlier, traditional Māndanā designs are large while accentuated by the use of red colour. The Māndanā artists say that the art is best presented on mud floors but it is losing relevance because of the advent of pucca (concrete) houses and the popularity of the ready-made design stickers.

Making the floor designs with rice flour paste: Water is added to rice flour to make a smooth paste as thick as the pancake batter. A small piece of cloth or cotton is soaked with the rice paste and pressed between the thumb and the ring / middle finger. The hand is held in a supine position meaning the palm facing upwards. The consistency of the paste is checked first and water or flour is added as required. The paste dripping from the tip of the finger is used to create patterns on the floor. The skill is not to touch the fingertip on the surface and let the dripping paste form a continuous line for creating designs. Learners should first practice the technique of making the paste continuously drip from the tip of the finger. Then they can try making dots and short straight lines. After getting the hang of it they may attempt making curved and wavy lines. Later they will be able to draw small simple shapes. After mastering the skill and with practice they will be able to effortlessly make big and elaborate designs.

For beginners steps to draw Māndanā designs:

- i. Draw big geometric shapes close to each other leaving a 2 mm distance. Arrange them to create an interesting composition. Here, one may try to create a design in the shape of a house, fort, lamp, etc.
- ii. To create a design, apart from rectangles and triangles, one should also use shapes such as rhombus, diamond, pentagon, hexagon, parallelogram, and so on. The shapes should be arranged so that a straight line of one shape comes next to the straight line of another shape. A semicircle can be used as the outermost shape as no other geometric shape can be placed next to the curved line.
- iii. Using two or more pairs of lines join these shapes to indicate that all shapes are part of one design.
- iv. Double line each shape drawing lines inside the shape. The distance between two lines can be 0.5 to 1 mm.
- v. Using straight lines makes unequal and unique divisions of each shape. Occasionally curved lines can also be used to divide the shapes. Some of the small shapes need not be divided.
- vi. Fill each shape created within the big shapes with different types of thick and thin lines. The options are straight, oblique, curved, wavy, zigzag, and so on. Small shapes and dots can also be used. Stylization is to be used at a minimum as Mandana are geometric designs.
- vii. Very small areas within the design can be filled with the base colour. In the case of paper and pencil exercise use the pencil. (White rice paste is used to create traditional Manadana).

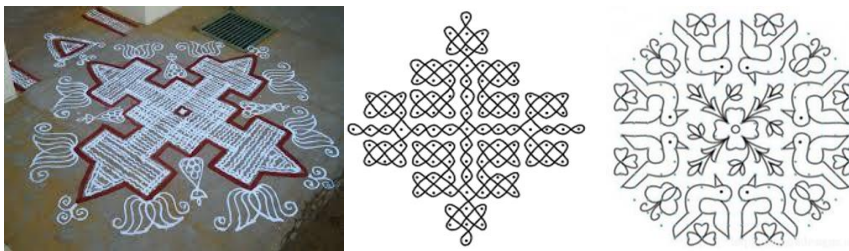
- viii. Add decorative borders to all outer sides of the shapes. Here, some stylization can be used to beautify the designs. Use different designs for the borders of different shapes within the design.
- ix. Such Mandana designs can be adapted for Mandala art, Lippan art, wall hangings, greeting cards, bookmarks, etc.

23.6.2 Floor Decorations with Dry Rice Flour and Rangoli Powder

Kolam and Rangoli are the floor decorations that are created using dry powders. Traditionally, Rangoli and Kolam designs are made with very fine lines and dots. A powder is held in the pinch formed by the index finger and the thumb. Then it is allowed to trickle in precise delicate lines and dots to create skillful patterns on the floor.

Kolam is seen in the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. Kolam is made using rice powder. These ritualistic floor designs are created daily and also during festivals in residential areas, and religious and public places. Raw Rice Kolam Powder, (Pacharisi Kola Podi) has a special significance in traditional rituals and customs in southern India. It is widely used in households for creating intricate Kolam designs at the entrance of homes as a symbol of auspiciousness and welcome. Every day, early morning, women clean the threshold and the floor around to create Kolam designs on the wet surface so that they stay for a longer time. In Kerala, brass lamps are also lit at the threshold along with the Kolam designs. As per Hindu mythology, a beautiful threshold is to seek the blessings of Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth.

Traditional Kolam designs can be best described as web-like patterns created with lines and dots. The Kolam designs could be small and simple to elaborate and intricate depending on the festival and the skill of the artist.



(Image Source: Wikipedia and Pinterest)

The name is **Rangoli** has been coined from the Sanskrit word 'Rang' meaning colour. 'Rangavali' in Sanskrit means a collection of colours. Rangoli can be termed the most popular form of Indian floor decoration, traditionally practiced mainly in Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat, and also in many Northern states. Rangoli is known by art and culture enthusiasts in many countries because of the Indian migrants spread all across the world, and the popularity of Bollywood among the population overseas.

Traditional Rangoli is created by using powdered limestone which has a texture like fine sand. Conventionally rangoli comprised of freehand designs in white accentuated with dots of red Sindoor / Kumkum. Even now, the basic designs are usually made with white rangoli powder and then the various shapes within are filled with bright rangoli colours. In the 20th century, Rangoli designs were based on geometric patterns. In modern times rangoli designs have

become progressively stylized. Festival-specific motifs are also used like Lord Ganesh and the Indian oil lamp / diya. Some Rangoli artists are skillful and create very naturalistic designs such as scenery, animals, birds, and portraits.

Rangoli designs with flower petals are popular as well. Rangoli is also created with a variety of materials such as various grains, fruits and vegetables, and even colourful pebbles. Sometimes a combination of Alpana and Rangoli is also seen especially in institutions and public places. Rangoli made with rangoli powders and colours is sometimes further decorated with earthen lamps / diyas, flowers, beads, sequins, glitters, etc.

Traditionally rangoli designs are made near the entrance of the house and the tulsi plant (Vrindavan) in the courtyard. Inside the house, rangoli is drawn near the worship room (Devghar). On special occasions, rangoli designs are made near the traditional setup for having meals. Here very low-height wooden seats are used and plates are arranged in the front. Rangoli designs in the arch form are made along these meal plates (as shown in the photograph) and sometimes near the row of seats rangoli borders are drawn.

Commercial rangoli artist is a profession now. They are engaged by event organizers to create medium to large-size rangoli designs which could be even based on the theme of the events. Portraits of celebrities and wedding couples are some of the examples. There are artists everywhere in Maharashtra but Juchandra village near Mumbai is famous for having at least one rangoli artist in every family.

A variety of techniques are used to make creative rangoli designs by professionals as well as amateurs. Some of them are mentioned below:

i. **Floating rangoli:** Sawdust or charcoal powder is used which floats on water. Dry rangoli colours are used over the layer of sawdust to create designs on the surface of water filled in shallow containers.



Image Source: Pinterest

ii. **Underwater Rangoli:** This is submerged in water. Here, oil is applied on the base of a shallow container and rangoli designs are made on it. The dry powders stick to the oil. Later, water is carefully filled in the container without disturbing the design.



Image Source: Pinterest

iii. **3D rangoli:** Traditional rangoli designs are flat and two-dimensional. Using more amount of rangoli to depict objects that are closer or objects of more height the artists create a third dimension in the rangoli designs.



Image Source: Pinterest

- iv. **Reverse technique Rangoli:** Here instead of drawing the design with lines, a white or colourful base is created and then lines and shapes are drawn using a finger, pen, comb, stick, etc.

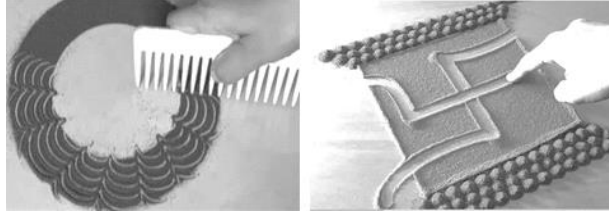


Image Source: <https://www.youtube.com>

- v. **2-way rangoli:** In one design artists create two completely different images or designs. When the design is viewed from 2 different angles the two different images are seen.

The illustration shows an agamograph with paper. The folded paper has two images. When viewed from one side it shows the Sun and from the other side Moon.

Using this technique an artist has created a portrait. If one walks while looking at it, the baby in the portrait seems to blink its eyes.



Image Source:

<https://www.easypeasyandfun.com/night-and-day-agamograph-template/>

- vi. **Rangoli reflection on convex mirror/glass:** Abstract designs are created by the artists which when reflected in a convex mirror show the actual image or design. For example, in the illustration here, the image of Lord Ganesha is visible only in the reflection. The actual rangoli appears to be an abstract design.



Source: <https://9gag.com/gag/aDDw7QB>

Sanskar Bharati Rangoli: It is a different technique of Rangoli mainly for decoration. Large designs are created on streets or open spaces like playgrounds. These huge designs are made with bold, thick lines and prominent dots. Dark and bright colours are used. A special technique is used where all five fingers are used to hold a fistful of Rangoli powder. Then it is allowed to flow through the hand smoothly. A person has to stand in a bending position and move his hands quickly to create the strokes required. He keeps moving to complete the design. It requires patience and practice to master this skill. Strainers and sieves are used for the even spread of colours to create attractive designs. Usually, stylized designs are created. There is also the use of a few traditional symbols such as 'go-padma' (cow feet), 'shankh' (conch), and 'chakra' (wheel) etc.



SanskarBharati Demonstration



Huge SanskarBharatiRangoli

Image Source: <https://www.youtube.com> <https://styleatlife.com/articles/sanskar-bharti-rangoli-designs/>

End of Chapter Exercises

1. What is the significance of floor art in India?
2. Mention any four different traditional Indian floor arts and the state of their origin.
3. Describe any modern technique for creating rangoli designs.
4. Draw a simple Alpana design using the technique mentioned in the chapter.
5. Draw rangoli design using any three techniques mentioned in the chapter.
6. Prepare a scrapbook with pictures of floor decorations.

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