

Cultural Calendar - January 2020

9

Thursday
5.30 pm

Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas Celebrations

Venue: SVCC Auditorium

10

Friday
3.00 pm

Vishwa Hindi Diwas (World Hindi Day) - 2020

Venue: SVCC Auditorium

17

Friday
6.00 pm

Bharatha Natyam Recital

by Krishalini Manimuthu disciple of Smt. Usha Raghavan

Venue: SVCC Auditorium

25

Saturday
6.45 pm

Celebrating 71st Republic Day of India
Divine Quartet – A musical evening
by Grammy Winner Pt. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt,
Grammy Nominated Pt. Subhen Chatterjee,
Maestro Sri Salil Bhatt & Maestro Sri Sambit Chatterjee

Venue: Bandaranaike Memorial International
Conference Hall, BauddhalokaMw., Colombo 07.
(Admission by invitation)

31

Friday
6.00 pm

Hindustani Vocal Recital

by Visharad Prasadika Medhavini Ediriweera, Bhatkhande
Sangit Vidyapith

Venue: SVCC Auditorium

Programmes subject to change

Admission to all programmes are on first-come-first-serve basis, except 25th

Entry Free. All are cordially invited

UNIE ARTS, 011 2330195



Sanskarika

Newsletter of the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre Jan 2020

2020
HAPPY NEW YEAR

On the occasion of
71st Republic Day of India
High Commission of India, Colombo
presents

Divine Quartet

a musical evening
by
Grammy winner Pt. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt
Grammy nominated Pt. Subhen Chatterjee
Maestro Sri Salil Bhatt
Maestro Sri Sambit Chatterjee

**JANUARY
25**

at 6.45 pm at
BMICH
Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07

Admission by invitation only
Invites can be collected from 14th January onwards at Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre,
16/2 Gregory's Road, Colombo 07 | Tel: 2684698 | E-mail: iccrcolombo2@gmail.com

BETWEEN THE LINES

The drawing of kolams in Tamil Nadu is not simply an aesthetic tradition, but also an important symbol of the state's cultural heritage

Source: by Supriya Aggarwal | India Perspectives | Vol 32 | Issue 3 | 2018



A street in Mylapore, Chennai is decorated with kolams by local residents during a festival

From a distance, a *kolam*, drawn by hand outside the entrance of most households in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, might look like a simple, traditional design. Look a little more carefully, however, and artistic complexities begin to emerge. Beyond the design, *kolams* are intrinsic to the region's culture: making a *kolam* is a daily ritual carried out by women in many households across the state. The

threshold of a home is believed to hold immense significance as the meeting point between the internal and the external, and a *kolam* drawn immediately beyond it is a symbol of this meeting. My first tryst with this aspect of Tamil Nadu's cultural identity occurred during a visit to Swamimalai, a quaint town in the Thanjavur district of the state, and I was instantly intrigued by the various patterns as well as the ease with which the women drew them using powdered rice.

Traditionally created before dawn or dusk, *kolams* are a symbol of well-being and also serve as a welcome sign. Synthetic colours are rarely, if ever, added to the rice. The latter is meant to double as food for insects, and the idea is to let it stay edible and safe for their consumption. Another popular belief is that a *kolam* can banish evil: the story goes that Mudevi, the Hindu goddess of misfortune, is a bringer of illness, poverty, sloth, sleep and bad luck, and that a *kolam* outside a house can keep her at bay. The

absence of a *kolam* outside a Hindu household is sometimes indicative of the occurrence of a misfortune. In this sense, a *kolam* serves as a kind of visual mapping of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness within a community.

Before a *kolam* is begun, the area where it is to be drawn is thoroughly washed. Drawing begins while the surface is still damp, so that the lines hold their shape better. Every *kolam* design begins with a grid of dots, using which the pattern is elaborated. Essentially, a *kolam* is a geometrical line drawing comprising curved loops. It is believed that the lines and curves must be completed in a *kolam*, preventing evil spirits from entering the space contained within the outline. Symbolically, these lines

Over the years, *kolams* have become a crucial part of South India's contemporary art scene



Clockwise from top left: Traditionally, the design of a *kolam* begins with a grid of dots; Women in a Chennai locality draw *kolams* on the street; The drawing of *kolams* is a daily ritual carried out by the women in Tamil households

and curves also prevent evil spirits from entering the house.

As beautiful as they are, decoration is far from being a *kolam's* primary purpose. Besides insects, the coarse rice powder used also invites other small creatures and birds to eat it. This is considered a way of welcoming other beings into one's home and letting them become a part of one's everyday life. The drawing of a *kolam*, in this context, becomes a daily tribute to harmonious co-existence in nature as well as to ecological balance.

In terms of patterns, the design of a *kolam* can include an array of motifs and abstract symbols. Motifs such as birds, fish and other animal images are said to signify the unity between man and animals. The sun, the moon and other zodiac symbols are also used at times. In general, a downward-pointing triangle represents a woman



A group of women draws a colourful *kolam* at the Sangamam Festival in the township of Auroville

Residents of Kuilapalayam draw *kolams* outside their homes during the festival of Pongal

while an upward-pointing triangle represents a man; a circle represents nature while a square represents culture; a lotus represents a womb and a pentagram represents the five elements. All of these are drawn with swift, expert movements of the hand – indeed, watching a *kolam* being made is one of the most fascinating experiences you can have in Tamil Nadu. Tiny little dots can transform within minutes into an ornate, spectacular pattern. It is no wonder, therefore, that a *kolam* is also a matter of pride for a household.

The drawing of a *kolam* is a daily tribute to harmonious co-existence in nature

There are numerous interpretations of the ritual, and the symbolic and cultural significance of *kolams* has been the subject of much discussion among historians and sociologists for years. Lakshmi, a resident of

Swamimalai, tells me, "We draw a *kolam* to honour, invite, welcome, host and express our gratitude towards particular gods and goddesses, including Bhudevi (representing the Earth), Lakshmi (the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity), Surya (the sun god, representing good health and wisdom) and Ganesha (the elephant-headed god, known as the remover of obstacles)." The *kolam* also acts as a visual device to remember and ask for forgiveness for stepping on, walking and burdening the Earth.

Over the years, *kolams* have become a crucial part of South India's contemporary art scene too, with many artists drawing upon their patterns and motifs for various art and craft forms. From ancient tradition to modern aesthetic, *kolams* remain as relevant today as they were hundreds of years ago, and are a cherished part of Tamil Nadu's cultural and artistic heritage.