



**TRADITIONAL *KOLAM* CHALLENGES IN THE INDIAN COMMUNITY IN
THE KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA**

By

ILANGESWARY A/P MURUGAN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science**

August 2022

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
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August 2022

Chairman : Ts.Velu a/I Perumal, PhD
Faculty : Design and Architecture

Indian folk art, which reflects their artistic ability, is closely related to sculptures, pottery, cloth weaving, wood carving, and *Kolam*. *Kolam* is a type of folk art practised by Indians in Malaysia that reveals their cultural identity and aesthetic values. This floor drawing, which is a part of Indian traditions, is an important part of Indian cultural heritage. *Kolam* designs represent symbols of happiness, good fortune, wealth, and happiness, and are primarily performed by Indian women. The purpose of this research is to uncover the different types of *Kolams*, the challenges that its practitioners face, and ways to improve *Kolam* practise. The study focused on the Indian community in Malaysia's Klang Valley. Data was gathered using a purposive sampling technique, and an online questionnaire was made available for three weeks. Only 410 of the 416 questionnaires received were analysed, with the rest being invalid. According to the findings of this study, respondents were aware of the various types of *Kolams* that were commonly used in the community. Despite the small sample size, the results provide insight into the various challenges faced by practitioners in preserving the drawing of *Kolam*. There were numerous suggestions made to improve *Kolam* practise among community members. Traditional *Kolam* practise has been influenced by changes in Indian culture. If efforts are not made to preserve this form of traditional practise, it may be gradually eroded by the ever-increasing influences of globalisation and urbanisation. As a result, these challenges must be taken seriously, and every effort must be made to keep this art form alive as a cultural heritage for future generations.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

CABARAN *KOLAM* TRADISIONAL DALAM KOMUNITI INDIA DI LEMBAH KLANG, MALAYSIA

Oleh

ILANGESWARY A/P MURUGAN

Ogos 2022

Pengerusi : Ts.Velu a/l Perumal, PhD
Fakulti : Rekabentuk dan Senibina

Seni rakyat India, yang mencerminkan keupayaan seni mereka, berkait rapat dengan arca, tembikar, tenunan kain, ukiran kayu, dan *Kolam*. *Kolam* merupakan sejenis kesenian rakyat yang diamalkan oleh kaum India di Malaysia yang mendedahkan identiti budaya dan nilai estetika mereka. Lukisan lantai ini, yang merupakan sebahagian daripada tradisi India, merupakan bahagian penting warisan budaya India. Reka bentuk *Kolam* mewakili simbol kebahagiaan, nasib baik, kekayaan dan terutamanya dilakukan oleh wanita India. Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mendedahkan pelbagai jenis *Kolam*, cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pengamalnya, dan cara untuk menambah baik amalan *Kolam*. Kajian ini tertumpu kepada masyarakat India di Lembah Klang Malaysia. Data dikumpul menggunakan teknik persampelan bertujuan, dan soal selidik dalam talian disediakan selama tiga minggu. Hanya 410 daripada 416 soal selidik yang diterima telah dianalisis, dengan selebihnya tidak sah. Mengikut dapatan kajian ini, responden sedar tentang pelbagai jenis *Kolam* yang biasa digunakan dalam masyarakat. Walaupun saiz sampel yang kecil, hasilnya memberikan gambaran tentang pelbagai cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pengamal dalam memelihara lukisan *Kolam*. Terdapat banyak cadangan telah dikemukakan untuk menambah baik amalan *Kolam* di kalangan ahli komuniti. Amalan *Kolam* tradisional telah dipengaruhi oleh perubahan dalam budaya India. Jika usaha tidak dilakukan untuk mengekalkan bentuk amalan tradisional ini, ia mungkin beransur-ansur terhakis oleh pengaruh globalisasi dan pambandaran yang semakin meningkat. Akibatnya, cabaran-cabaran ini mesti dipandang serius, dan segala usaha mesti dilakukan untuk mengekalkan bentuk seni ini sebagai warisan budaya untuk generasi akan datang.

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Velu a/I Perumal, PhD

Senior Lecturer, Ts.
Faculty of Design and Architecture
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Khairul Manami binti Kamarudin, PhD

Senior Lecturer, Ts.
Faculty of Design and Architecture
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

ZALILAH MOHD SHARIFF, PhD

Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 12 January 2023

Declaration by Members of the Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:

- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
- supervision responsibilities as stated in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Graduate Studies) Rules 2003 (Revision 2012-2013) are adhered to.

Signature: _____
Name of Chairman
of Supervisory
Committee: Dr. Velu a/l Perumal

Signature: _____
Name of Member
of Supervisory
Committee: Dr. Khairul Manami binti Kamarudin

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
MCO	Malaysian Movement Control Order



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Folk art has become an important part of people's daily lives in most cultures around the world (Sharma, 2015). According to Deka and Laad (2018), all communities have their own artistic styles and patterns, which are known as folk art. Folk art expresses cultural identity by communicating shared aesthetics and values (Sharma, 2015). Haratyk & Czerwinska-Gorz (2017) define folk art as a reflection of artistic activity in rural communities. Folk art is typically taught to families, companions, neighbours, and co-workers through performance or oral tradition (Haratyk & Czerwinska-Gorz, 2017). Folk art exists as a cultural heritage (Yang et al., 2018). According to Sharma (2015), folk art provides aesthetic feelings through its drawings and reminds us of native life. Folk art also includes a variety of useful practical and ornamental media, such as floor decoration, cloth, carved wood, paper, clay, metal, and basket work (Deka & Laad, 2018; Sharma, 2015). *Kolam*, sculpture, pottery, silk weaving, and other forms of Indian folk art are included (Rahbarnia & Chadha, 2015).

Kolam is an important part of Indian cultural heritage as well as Indian traditions (Chacko, 2016; Lakshmi pathy, 2016; Chauhan et al., 2014). Women drew the *Kolam* on the floor in front of houses with rice flour (Jagadisan, 2018; Rahbarnia & Chadha, 2015). According to Tiwary (2017), and Chattopadhyaya (2016) *Kolam* drawing is a traditional practice that has evolved from the cave age to the present. The practices of *Kolam* drawings are very famous among Hindus in Malaysia, Singapore, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal (Govindaraj & Mahendran, 2018; Jagadisan, 2018; Tiwary, 2017; Rahbarnia & Chadha, 2015). *Kolams* are a breath-taking art form that can be seen in some parts of the world, most notably in Indian states such as Tamil Nadu, as well as countries such as Malaysia and Sri Lanka (Jagadisan, 2018; Tiwary, 2017; Rahbarnia & Chadha, 2015). *Kolams* are geometrical lines and curved loops drawn around a grid of dots. They are drawn using rice flour, chalk powder, and synthetic-coloured powders (Chacko, 2016). *Kolams* come in a variety of designs and have a wide range of spiritual significance. The *Nalvaravu*, for instance, indicates that a home is welcoming its guests. *Thottil Kolams* (also known as cradle *Kolams*) are intended for the naming ceremony of newborns. Snake *Kolams* are believed to protect dwellings from burglars and evil spirits (Tadvalkar, 2015).

However, recent changes in Indian lifestyles have had an impact on traditional *Kolam* practise. With western ramifications, technological trends, numerous commitments, and urbanisation, this type of traditional practise may be lost gradually if efforts are not made to preserve it. This chapter's goal is to provide lively research objectives, define the research questions, and explain the significance of the study. Initially, the research focused on determining the type of *Kolam* and the motif meaning. As the research progressed, more research

was conducted to highlight the difficulties that Indian women faced while practising traditional Kolam. Aside from that, the purpose of this research is to improve the sustainability and conservation of traditional *Kolam* practises. By preserving the traditional *Kolam*, future generations will be able to expand their knowledge of traditional *Kolam* drawing.

1.2 Definition of Terms

A few terms used in this study are defined below:

a) *Kolam*

Kolam is a drawing style that has been described as “traditional Indian floor art” (Brunda, 2015; Krithivasan, 2016; Letchumanan, 2013). *Kolam* is an important cultural heritage practise for the Indian community (Periaswamy, 2018; Satpathy, 2015).

b) Traditional

A tradition is a practise or behaviour that is passed down from one generation to the next within a group or society (Hamzah et al., 2015; Satpathy, 2015).

c) Culture

Culture is the key to all of our activities, including people and their way of life (Satpathy, 2015). It includes values, beliefs, arts, habits, traditions, and heritage (Chawla & Mohapatra, 2017; Ramiah, 2014).

d) Cultural Heritage

Heritage is a blending of tradition, and history that has brought generations forward. Our culture is inherited from our forefathers and is known as cultural heritage (Omonov & Karimov, 2020). It encompasses both tangible and intangible elements (Brancoveanu, 2018; Hussin, 2018).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Kolam folk art is a type of drawing that is defined as the Indian community's traditional floor drawings (Jagadisan, 2018; Rahbarnia & Chadha, 2015; Tadvalkar, 2011). *Kolam*'s come from cave art to contemporary art (Tiwary, 2017). In ancient times our ancestors lived in a cave and shelter. Ancestors use cave lines drawing as a language to express their messages (Chadha 2015; Tiwary, 2017). People still practice lines drawing on the floor and wall in the form

of *Kolam* by the creation of thematic patterns and designs on thresholds, walls, and prayer halls (Tiwary, 2017; Laine, 2012; Waring, 2012). According to Jagadisan (2018) and Lakshmiathy (2016), the *Kolam* designs that appear every day at the thresholds of houses pique people's interest from a variety of perspectives, including visual communication, symbolism, way of life, creativity, celebration, mathematics, and exercise. *Kolams* are drawn during cultural or religious festivals such as Deepavali, Pongal, and *Kartigai*, as well as social ceremonies such as marriages, baby namings, and engagements (Krithivasan, 2016; Thannimalai, 2016; Waring, 2012). *Kolams* are not drawn during death or on sad occasions (Tapaswi, 2019). Several studies on *Kolam* have been conducted over the years in Malaysia and India, by researchers who have investigated the various aspects of *Kolam*. The following is a concise chronological review of these studies, in Malaysia and India as shown in Table 1.1 & 1.2. As evidenced by the review of research conducted in Malaysia and India, researchers have approached *Kolam* from a variety of perspectives.

Table 1.1 : Researchers Conducted Kolam Study in Malaysia

No.	Researcher(s)	Area of research related to <i>Kolam</i>	Location
1	(Letchumanan, 2019)	This research comprehend and explain the continuity of informal education of <i>Kolam</i> art in the social-institutional changes of the Indian community.	Malaysia
2	(Joseph, 2018)	This study describes the development of therapeutics in the Indian tradition of <i>Kolam</i> and the incorporation of pragmatism in contemporary art.	Malaysia
3	(Periaswamy, 2018)	The study revealed five significant unknown <i>Kolam</i> factors related to religious, cultural, social, economic, and educational factors	Malaysia
4	(Thannimalai, 2016)	This study examines the significance of <i>Kolam</i> as a fine art form and its impact on the Indian community.	Malaysia
5	(Letchumanan, 2013)	This study looks at the social and cultural changes in <i>Kolam</i> art.	Malaysia
6	(Tamboo, 2014)	The study describes the evolution of the <i>Kolam</i> as part of Deepavali celebrations.	Malaysia

Table 1.2 : Researchers Conducted *Kolam* Study in India

No.	Researcher(s)	Area of research related to <i>Kolam</i>	Location
1	(Jagadisan, 2018)	This article investigated the significance of preserving <i>Kolam</i> art as a form of living culture.	India
2	(Gosai, 2018)	Rangoli and <i>Kolam</i> of Indian Tradition and Cultural Values were the subject of the research.	India
3	(Mahendran & Govindaraj, 2018)	The researchers demonstrated how to create various <i>Kolam</i> patterns with new <i>Kolam</i> .	India
4	(Abraham & Chacko, 2017)	This paper discusses <i>Kolam</i> as a pictorial medium that combines designs to assist individuals and organisations in communicating messages to a wide audience.	India
5	(Lakshmipathy, 2016)	This study examined <i>Kolam</i> as a form of visual ethnography.	India
6	(Chacko, 2016)	The researchers uncovered the interplay between narrative and metaphor in <i>Kolam</i> by referencing south Indian customs.	India
7	(Krithivasan, 2016)	The researcher examined <i>Kolam</i> patterns as an expression of Indian thought.	India

In today's era of globalization, many expressions and manifestations of cultural practices are being threatened, along with a western cultural influences, technological developments and lifestyle. If the art of *Kolam* is not being continuously nurtured and it is at a risk of disappearing forever. This research is therefore vital for the preservation of the conventional *Kolam* so that future generations can understand, practice and learn this traditional form of art.

1.3.1 Western Cultural Influences

According Jagadisan (2018) and Laine (2009) as the western impacts on Indian culture have increased, there is now a lack of understanding of cultural values and a decline in *Kolam* tradition of establishing cultural homogenization. As a result of the western cultural influences, the *Kolam* has changed in its function, motif and has been interpreted differently. The younger generation shows less appreciation for the traditional *Kolam* and tends to draw pictures on the ground with coloured powder instead of the rice flour. These do not conform to be the traditional *Kolam* concepts (Tapaswi, 2019).

1.3.2 Technological Developments

As stated by Chacko, (2016) and Roy, (2013) in the era of busy life, the traditional method of preparing material be learned by the Indian women in a skilled manner because of their busy schedule. This gradually replace the practices of the traditional *Kolam* by the adoption of new method such as artificial *Kolam* that uses of sticker *Kolams* (Letchumanan, 2013). These stickers *Kolams* have currently become a prevalent practice and are displayed prominently at the entrance of Indian homes (Ranade, 2016).

1.3.3 Lifestyle

The practice of *Kolam* has been seriously challenged by the numerous changes in the life styles of the Indian community (Balamani, 2015). Presently, women have begun to occupy new professional roles and family arrangements have been modified and reconceptualised (Jagadisan, 2018). In this transformed situation, as Bauma (2004) has mentioned, the traditional and cultural practices that many women have relied on have changed.

1.4 Research Gaps and Research Questions

In this section will discussed about research gaps and research questions as shown in Figure 1.1.

Research Gaps	Research Questions
<p>RG1: The <i>Kolam</i>'s function, motif, and interpretation have all changed. The traditional <i>Kolam</i> has evolved into a modern form by including English words such as "welcome" and using coloured powder instead of rice flour in the <i>Kolam</i> design (Tapaswi, 2019). According to Chacko (2016), the younger generation draws <i>Kolams</i> by incorporating secular themes into the designs. <i>Kolams</i> derived from traditional themes followed by their ancestors will be lost (Chacko, 2016, Jagadisan, 2018). Recognise types of <i>Kolams</i> and comprehend the meaning behind the <i>Kolam</i> motif.</p>	<p>RQ1: What are the types of traditional <i>Kolam</i>?</p>
<p>RG2: <i>Kolam</i> is mostly practised by women (Jagadisan, 2018; Rahbarnia & Chadha, 2015; Chauhan et al., 2014). Women have recently begun to take on new professional roles, and family structures have been modified and reconceptualised (Jagadisan, 2018). The practise of <i>Kolam</i> has been seriously challenged by numerous changes in the Indian community's life styles (Gosai, 2018). Highlight the difficulties that Indian women face when performing the traditional <i>Kolam</i> in Malaysia's Klang Valley.</p>	<p>RQ2: What are the challenges of drawing traditional <i>Kolam</i> among the Indian community?</p>
<p>RG3: Indian society is now turning to artificial <i>Kolam</i> or plastic stickers with <i>Kolam</i> images (Letchumanan 2013; Brunda, 2015; Jagadisan, 2018). The disappearance of traditional <i>Kolam</i> performance may resize cultural practises in general, having a negative impact on the Indian community (Jagadisan, 2018; Brunda, 2015; Letchumanan 2013). It is critical to preserve and improve the practise of traditional <i>Kolam</i>, and it provides an opportunity for future generations to learn how to keep the practise of traditional <i>Kolam</i> alive.</p>	<p>RQ3: How to enhance the practice of traditional <i>Kolam</i> among the Indian community?</p>

Figure 1.1 : Research Gaps and Research Questions

1.5 Research Questions

- i. What are the types of traditional *Kolam*?
- ii. What are the challenges of drawing traditional *Kolam* among the Indian community?
- iii. How do to enhance the practice of traditional *Kolams* among the Indian community?

1.6 Research Objectives

- i. To identify types of *Kolam*.
- ii. To study the challenges of drawing the traditional *Kolam* among the Indian community.
- iii. To enhance the practice of traditional *Kolam* among the Indian community.

1.7 Scope of Research

The purpose of this research is to identify the different types of *Kolams*, the challenges that its practitioners face, and ways to improve *Kolam* practise. The first stage of the research is to identify different types of *Kolam*. Following that, the second phase investigates the difficulties associated with drawing the traditional *Kolam* among the Indian community. Third, interview experts to improve and recommend a solution. As a result, the participants in this study are Indians who live in the Klang Valley area and have more than five years of experience drawing the selected *Kolam*. The Klang Valley was chosen as the sample would be representative of Malaysia's Indian population, and the results could be generalised to other regions of the nation. The data gathered can be used to conduct additional research.

1.8 Research Contributions

The study's contributions are as follows:

- a) The outcomes can provide the Indian community with knowledge and comprehension of the various *Kolam* types.
- b) Based on the findings, there could be a greater awareness of the numerous challenges in the practise of *Kolam*.
- c) Measures can be used to simplify the drawing of *Kolam*.
- d) Based on the challenges, new methods that are less time consuming should be introduced.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

This research was carried out during the COVID -19 pandemic. The online method of uploading the questionnaire was unsuitable because it did not reach a larger population. Respondents with limited computer knowledge were unable to participate, despite the fact that the questionnaire was designed in a simple manner.

1.10 Outline of Thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction – The chapter presents an overview of the research background, statement of problem, research objectives, scope of the study and research contributions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – This chapter discusses the history of the Indian community, an overview of *Kolam*, the role of women in floor art, motifs and types of *Kolam*, and the functions of *Kolam*.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology – This chapter discusses the research design, research site, data collection, Instrument, and development of instrument, sample, sampling method and sample size, validity and reliability, data collection, and pilot study.

Chapter 4: Result Findings – This chapter focuses on the findings of the research objectives, primarily on the types of *Kolam* and the challenges in the practise of *Kolam*, as well as recommended solutions to the identified challenges.

Chapter 5: Discussion – This chapter addresses the discussion and explanation provided in response to the research questions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion – This chapter provides a summary and conclusion of the research and contributions. This chapter concludes with suggestions for additional research.

1.11 Summary of Chapter

This chapter's summary includes essential elements such as the problem statement, research objectives, research questions, scope of the study, research contributions, definitions of key terms, and an outline of the subsequent chapters of this research.

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