



Kolam Tradition and Activities

Indian women often begin their day and sometimes also end it by drawing Kolams on the ground just outside the front door of their house. These repeating patterns, a type of Tantric Art passed down from generation to generation for centuries, symbolize scientific and philosophical patterns throughout the cosmos. Like Native American sand paintings or Buddhist mandalas, the Kolams are part of the cycle of creation and destruction.

Kolam is an everyday ritual among Tamil women. But on festive days like Pongal, Deepavali or the month of Margazhi (December-January), elaborate Kolams are drawn on the thresholds with special attention. The ground is swept with a broom made from coconut leaf stalks, sprinkled with water and dabbed with cow dung. The Kolam is drawn on this prepared ground using rice flour. Women draw very complicated Kolams during these celebrations, and it is an opportunity to showcase their talents. These days there are competitions held as part of the festivities.

Women draw Kolams, a tradition that is handed down from generation to generation. One of the philosophies behind Kolam drawing is that the dots represent the obstacles in life and if a woman can weave her way through these dots with lines, she will be able to successfully deal with the various situations in her life. The Kolams also symbolize impermanence; they are walked over during the day. They reinforce the concept of the cycle of creation and dissolution. They are created on the ground using natural materials like rice flour and rock powder, making it a very eco-friendly art form. According to the Indian philosophy, feeding a thousand souls is good karma. The use of rice flour to make kolams is a way to feed birds and insects. And when this is done just outside the house, it is a very practical way to keep insects from entering the house.

Apart from all the philosophy attached to this art form, it is also an artistic approach to mathematics. Mathematicians are working on the various math concepts involved in Kolam drawing. The concepts range from symmetry at different levels to permutations and combinations to fractals.

Another fascinating aspect of Kolam is that it is one of the many line drawing traditions from around the world. Some Celtic drawings and Chinese knots are very similar to the Kolams. Similar dot – line drawings are found in the different continents. The Sona drawings from Africa are very similar to the Kolams with a slightly different set of rules. The lines of the sand drawings from Vanuatu resemble the Kolams except they don't have the dots.

Kolam is also known by other names in India like Rangoli, Alpona and Muggulu.

Kolams have been my steady companion all my life. Growing up in the state of Tamil Nadu in India, Kolam was a part of our daily life and nothing special. I learned to draw them from my mother and grandmother. At that time, it seemed like there were too many dos and don'ts, and I rebelled. I wanted to create my own patterns and not just follow the traditional techniques. It was only when I left the country that I started missing Kolams and realized how much I had taken them for granted. So, I started incorporating them in my artwork and learning the significance of the philosophy behind Kolams drawing that I had not paid too much attention to growing up. Kolams have helped me cope with the various ups and downs in life, and I hope this meditative art form will in some way help others too.

Links

<https://www.shanthic.com/kolam>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cliIVm9pVSY>

KOLAM LESSONS 1, 2, 3

Kolams have been my friend all along, through happy and not-so-happy times - they have always been a constant source of support. During this time where everyone seems to need a little extra support, I wanted to share a kolam practice series, starting from the basics and going as far as we can. We can do it together and I would love that even more.

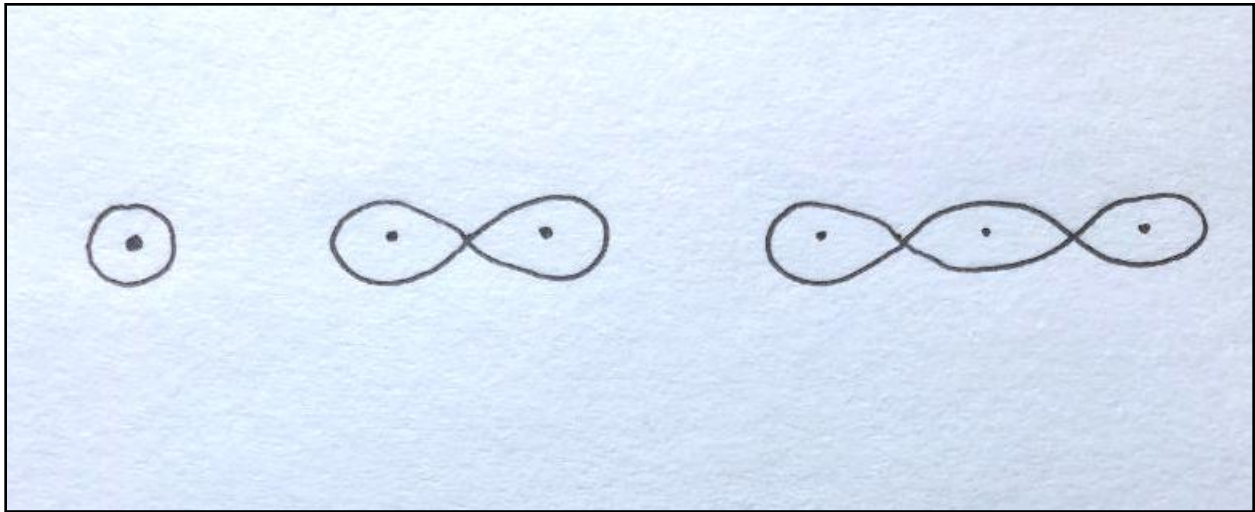
Let us start with three small simple kolams.

Exercise #1: Draw a dot and the shortest line around it, which is a circle. Practice it until you are comfortable with it. Make sure to overlap the lines when you are completing the circle so that the circle is closed.

Exercise #2: Draw two dots next to each other with about a centimeter between them. Now draw the shortest line that can enclose both the dots. It is not two circles but an "8" shape.

Exercise #3: Now make three dots that are evenly spaced and in a straight line. Draw the shortest line to enclose the three dots.

You can try drawing the lines in one shot by not lifting your pencil or by breaking it into simple short strokes. Try drawing them till you are comfortable with them. Then you can try increasing the number of dots and keep going. Have fun!

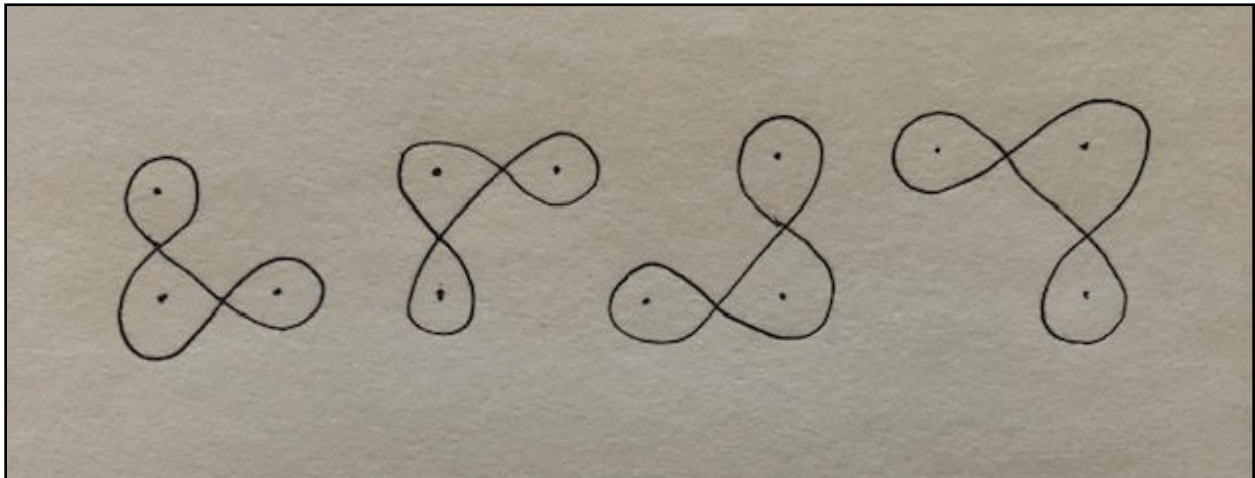


KOLAM LESSON 4

Hope you had fun trying out the previous exercises and exploring other possibilities. Now let us move to the next step by including an angle.

Exercise #4: Draw two dots next to each other with about a centimeter between them. Then draw a third dot such that it is at right angle to the lower dot creating an L shape. Now draw the shortest line that goes around all the three dots.

You can try drawing the lines in one shot by not lifting your pencil or by breaking it into simple short strokes. Try drawing them till you are comfortable with them. Then you can try increasing the number of dots and keep going. Have fun!

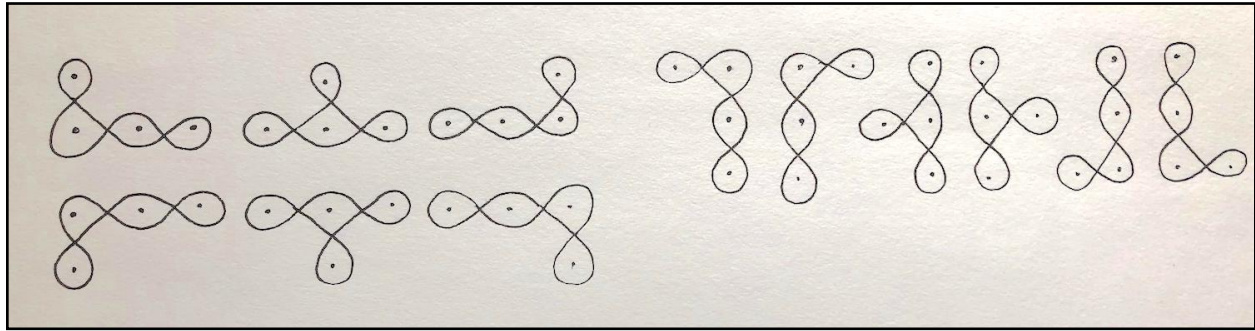


KOLAM LESSON 5

Let us now use four dots and see some of the possibilities:

Draw three dots next to each other with about a centimeter between them. Then draw a fourth dot above the first dot such that it is at right angle. Now draw the shortest line that goes around all the four dots. It is similar to the L shape in exercise 4, but longer. Next, change the position of the fourth dot by moving it above the second dot and draw the line again. Now try placing the fourth dot in the various positions and the closed line around them as shown in the image.

Try drawing them a number of times till you feel comfortable with the dots and the lines.



KOLAM LESSON 6

Let us continue to use four dots and see some more of the possibilities:

Draw two dots next to each other with about a centimeter between them. Then draw a third dot above the first dot such that it is at right angle and the fourth dot below the second dot at right angles. Now draw the shortest line that goes around all the four dots. You get a step like pattern. You can try placing the dots in the other positions as shown in the image.

Draw them a number of times till you feel comfortable with the dots and the lines.

