

The Ancient Painting Style of Kerala-Kalamezuthu

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Kalamezuthu is unique form of this art found only in Kerala. It is typically Indian as it is a harmonic blend of Arian, Dravidian and Tribal tradition. The study of this art-Kalamezhuthu will help to know more about the nature of Kerala preservance of its tradition.

This ritualistic art form is unique and hence distinct from modern painting systems and style drawing is made on floors and naturally made colours are used. The kalams are drawn based upon the 'head to toe description' given "Dhyanaslokas" and mythical contexts. This art is mentioned and nominated as "Dhoolichitra" in ancient Sanskrit texts. It is called by name like "Alpana" in Bengal, "Kolam" in Tamilnadu and "Rangoli" in north India are forms/figures on floor using monocolour powders. They are similar to "Kalamezhuthu" in their drawing styles. Kerala murals have absorbed much inspiration from Kalamezhuthu. "Kalamezhuthu" is conducted on festivals related to mother goddesses shrines during some months of special devotion. It is conducted in "Sarpakkavu" and "Ayyappankavu" also. On some days of special importance this is done in some elite upper class homes and homes of laymen as part of special offerings to snake gods.

Usually Kalamezhuthu is conducted as part of the general festivities in the temples. Masters (Artists) begin Kalamezhuthu after praying to their deities in front of the traditional lamp. Floor selected to draw kalam will be near naalambalam (a building surrounding Sanctum Sanctorium). The ground for this art kalam in temple on ho be prepared by applying dung. This space decorated with new flowers, garlands and coconuts. Kalam begins in afternoon.



Figure 1 Basic stage of Kalamezhuthu

A Kalam will be of the size of approximately 7 feet breadth and 9 feet length. The person to draw the Kalam take bath and wear new clothes before they start drawing. 5 colour powders used for kalamezhuthu are naturally made rice powder for white, turmeric powder for yellow, green is made from the dried leaves of Nenmeni Vaka, red is made by mixing wet turmeric powder with lime. Burnt paddy husk is used for black colour. Kalamezhuthu is a two and three dimensional design. This



Figure 2 Kalamezhuthu in progress

art form is multi-dimensional in that it bears religious, aesthetic and social aspects. This is a Dravidian art which is fully developed art with religious rituals. Through this art reflects the tradition of Kerala.



Figure 3 Complete design of
Kalamezuthu

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