



Study of Ephemeral Floor Art in Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

This research paper delves into the challenges and preservation efforts surrounding ephemeral floor art, a traditional practice rooted in cultural and religious contexts. Urbanization, changing lifestyles, and limited access to traditional materials pose threats to this art form's continuation. The study explores how innovation, technology, awareness, and intergenerational transmission play roles in safeguarding ephemeral floor art. Case studies illustrate how communities are adapting the practice to modern contexts, emphasizing the need for collaboration among cultural stakeholders, practitioners, and communities to ensure its preservation.

Keywords: Urbanization, Ephemeral Floor Art

INTRODUCTION

Rajasthan, known as the "Land of the Kings," has remained true to its colorful traditions and opulent structures from its imperial past. The Sutlej-Indus river basin and the Pakistani border run almost parallel to the Thar Desert, which covers the vast part of the area. In terms of total land area, it surpasses all other states in the Republic of India. The state of Rajasthan seems to never run out of festivals and fairs to celebrate. They are among the most colorful and beautiful in India. The state's artistic and cultural traditions are reflective of the traditional Indian way of life, and the state itself has a rich cultural legacy. The folklore of rural communities is renowned for its depth and variety. Songs, dances, dramas, puppets, handicrafts, and paintings all play an important role in the folk arts. The religious significance of mehendi and mandana is similar to those of these well-known forms of female expression. Mandanas, unlike mehendi, which is used to beautify women's hands and feet, are drawn on the floor of kaccha homes to improve their appearance. Ephemeral floor art, a form of decorative design made using colored powders, flowers, and other natural materials, has been an integral part of Rajasthan's cultural landscape. The intricate and vibrant patterns are traditionally created by women, primarily as a form of daily ritual or during special occasions and festivals.

The mud walls of their homes feature elaborate murals painted by women, which Thapa refers to. The thapas, or wall decorations, are sometimes misidentified as mandana due to the technical similarities between the two, but the themes used are what set them apart. The mandanas' designs are highly symbolic and emotive, in contrast to the wall themes which portray local animals and plants. The floor patterns have remained essentially symbolic and unaffected by the outside world, whereas the wall decorations have included the villagers' everyday goods like bicycles, motorbikes, buses, trains, and airplanes. The states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are the ones responsible for drawing up the Mandanas. The Gond and Bhil tribes are known for their paintings and body art, known as "Gudna," which is widely practiced in Madhya Pradesh. Mandanas, which are typically painted on the floor, are also an important aspect of the traditional art of the area.

Every household in towns and villages may practice some form of shamanism, with the ritual taking on slightly different forms in different areas. The floors of the veranda and other rooms are also decorated with mandanas, along with the steps, parapets, water-stands, and stoves. Mango leaves are used to make bandanvar (torana) and white powder (gajamukta) that looks like pearl beads are used to embellish the chowk (square mandanas) in various Rajasthani folk tunes.

For Instance-

**“Mharai angana mein chandan lipavo ji
Gaja motiyan ke chowk puravo**



Mharai kumbha kalasa le avo ji
Mharai bandarval bandhavoji
“Bandarvar bandhavo hariye gobara gili dya vo
Motiyan chowk puravo”.

This song discusses the Hindu custom of wearing white against a green background on joyous occasions, known as mandana.

The ring finger is typically used to make mandana lines on the floor. White clay or lime pigment is applied to the skin using a soft swab made of cloth or hair after it has been well mixed with water. Liquid colorant runs down the ring finger and pools at the tip, where it eventually drips to the floor. Because it would be seen as a sign of being unoriginal, women rarely repeat patterns.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ephemeral floor art, often referred to as "rangoli" or "kolam," has a deeply ingrained history in Rajasthan, dating back to ancient times. This art form, characterized by intricate and colorful designs made using powders, flowers, and other natural materials, has been a consistent presence in the cultural landscape of the region. Its evolution over the centuries reflects not only the artistic sensibilities of the people but also the socio-cultural influences that have shaped Rajasthan's history.

Ancient Origins: The origins of ephemeral floor art in Rajasthan can be traced to the Indus Valley Civilization, one of the world's oldest urban civilizations. Archaeological findings suggest that early inhabitants of the region created decorative motifs on the ground using colored powders and natural materials. These early forms of floor art laid the foundation for the more complex designs that emerged in later centuries.

Cultural Fabric and Historical Texts: Historical texts and scriptures provide glimpses into the practice of ephemeral floor art in Rajasthan's past. Ancient texts, such as the Vedas and Puranas, make references to auspicious symbols and patterns drawn on the ground to invite positive energies and blessings. These texts highlight the ritualistic significance of floor art, showcasing its role in everyday life and sacred ceremonies.

Folklore and Local Influences: Rajasthan's folklore, myths, and local traditions have played a significant role in shaping the motifs and symbols used in ephemeral floor art. Stories of deities, heroes, and epic tales have been incorporated into the designs, infusing them with narratives that hold cultural importance. For instance, depictions of peacocks, lotus flowers, and geometric patterns often evoke local legends and natural beauty.

Architectural Motifs: The region's diverse architectural heritage, including forts, palaces, temples, and havelis, has left an indelible mark on ephemeral floor art. Architectural elements such as arches, domes, and intricate lattice work have been translated into intricate patterns on the ground. This integration of architectural motifs reflects the seamless connection between Rajasthan's built environment and its artistic expressions.

Religious Iconography: Religion has always been a cornerstone of life in Rajasthan, and ephemeral floor art has been used to express devotion and spirituality. Mandalas, lotus motifs, and representations of gods and goddesses are common themes in floor designs. These symbols serve as a way to honor and invoke the divine presence, particularly during festivals and religious ceremonies.

Evolution and Adaptation: As Rajasthan's society evolved through different historical periods, so did its ephemeral floor art. The influences of Mughal, Rajput, and colonial periods have added layers of complexity to the art form. Intricate Persian motifs, Rajput courtly aesthetics, and British-era designs have all left their mark on the evolving patterns and styles of rangoli and kolam.



Mandala designs:

Mandanas, a type of art, typically include abstract geometric patterns. The red-ochre central motif is surrounded by laddus filled with bharat or bharana, and the smaller patterns, referred to as the "chhota-mota mandana," surround the main mandana. These lines (called dora) are ringed by an oval or a sequence of dora and drawn parallel to the lines and angles that make up the original pattern. Each major concept is identified by name. It is surrounded by "bharan or bharavana themes," which can take different shapes depending on the location and the artist.

Chhota-Mota Mandanas : The primary function of chhota-mota mandanas is to decorate for the occasion for which the mandana pattern was designed. However, they can also be utilized to fill in gaps and make the design more visually appealing. Tiny motifs around a design can define the shape of an object on its own.

Mandanas associated with significant events:

The complex floor patterns represent seven different holidays. Among the many holidays observed by Hindus include Diwali, Makar Sankranti, Pongal, Gangaur, Bar Pujani Amavasya (also known as Jyeshtha Krishna Amavasya), Teej (observed on the third day of Shravana Shukla Paksha), and Rakshabandhan (observed on the Poornima of the month of Shravana).

Deepawali: In all of India, people celebrate Deepawali, a festival dedicated to Lakshmi. On this special occasion, mandanas are being used to decorate the primary entrance. The principal motifs (designs built on dotted grids) are six-pointed triangular forms, hexagons, ashtadal kamal, chhah phoolya (six-petalled lotus), Swastika, bijani, bavari, Jalis, or Tapaki-ka-mandana.



Fig. 1: Deepawali mandana

Seasonal harvests, rituals, and celebrations all feature prominently in the chota-mota mandanas composed for this event.

The paglya (goddess footprint) is an integral feature of these supplementary motifs. The ceremony itself is represented by the ear of millet (bharadi) and the torch (deepak), while papri, a sweet and salty circular wheat and gram flour mixture, is given out to friends and family as a sign of the impending winter crop. Hatri (an earthen toy), baat (weights), and tarazu (a pair of scales) are common motifs in commercial accessories and Lakshmi-pooja. The pooja also requires the use of a kalamdaan (a stand for pens and ink) and a divata (a lamp stand). In the evening after the Diwali pooja, two unbaked clay lamps called hir and santha are given as a sign of the hir-giving ceremony. Godhan pooja, celebrated the day following Diwali, also features symbols associated with bullocks and calves, including mori (the bullocks' heads) and khura (the bullocks' hooves).

Observance of Makar Sankranti:





A special mandana, Sankranti-ka-kunda, is made on this day. The word "kunda" refers to a large, circular, ceramic bowl with a flat base. This mandana's circular kunda represents the spherical disk of the sun. It is a geometric pattern with an odd number of circles (3, 5, 7, or 9). Therefore, the pattern's size can be modified to fit various requirements.



Fig. 2: Teen Kunda

Holi: Mandana decorations from the Holi festival represent a wide variety of rites and traditions practiced by its participants. Holika danda, Changa, Daphas, Kheeras, and Khandas were all huge hits during this event. The Bhogi night of the Holi celebration is marked with the lighting of the Holi-ka-danda, a spectacular firework show comprised of a tree stump coated in cow dung cakes and other abandoned goods.

Two pieces make up Holi-ka-danda: The danda and lalya are the two halves of Holi-ka-danda that are buried together. According to legend, the demon king Hiranyakashipu was the biological father of Prahlada and his sister Holika. In the Holi bonfire, the danda (representing evil) is destroyed but the lalya (representing good) is spared. This mandana, like the Holi festival it celebrates, symbolizes the triumph of good over evil.

The day after the festival of colors and joy, Holi, is known as Dhulendi.

Singing and dancing are activities shared by people of both sexes. The festivities of the day wouldn't be complete without the changa and dapha. There are special songs for this day that can only be sung with a changa and dapha. Holi kachanga and Holi kadapha make for a pleasant mandana drawing topic for Holi.

Gangour : Gangour is a well-known festival celebrated by the women of Rajasthan. Married women worship Gangour (Goddess Gauri) to ensure their health, wealth, and happiness, while single women do so in the hopes of finding a suitable life partner. Guna, a meal composed of wheat and gram flour, is traditionally prepared on this day. Therefore, the mandana for today is commonly referred to as "Gangour-ka-guna." Several mandanas were made in addition to the paglyas and Singhasan-Battisi-ka-chowk.

The Jyeshtha Krishna Amavasya is also known as Bar Pujani Amavasya. Women in Rajasthan, as in the rest of India, worship a bar (banyan) tree. The mandana made on this day depicts a grove of banyan trees in their native setting, complete with a human figure standing at the tree's base.

Tija and Rakshabandhan: On Rakshabandhan, a coconut design is built to honor Tija and Rakhi-ka-Nariyal, which may be a reference to the wet season.

Some life-cycle ritual mandalas:

Janmotsava: On Athavansa, the first day of the eighth month of pregnancy, the woman is anointed with scented water and Mehendi is administered to her hands and feet. She is placed on a chowki (wooden seat) while other women shower her with sweets, dried and fresh fruits, and a



coconut on her god (lap). The practice of filling one's lap with holy water is called god bharana. An Athvansa-ka-chowk mandana is traditionally drawn on the freshly finished cow dung ground on this day.

On the tenth day after birth, mom and baby take their first walk together to greet the sun and pray for its favor. Namakaran Samskar Divas, the day of the naming ritual, is also known as Suraj poojan. At Suraj-ka-chowk, a mandana is painted in the shape of a sun on this day.

Yajnyopavitotsava: The holy thread ceremony in Rajasthan typically lasts for three to four days, during which time multiple mandanas are drawn for separate rituals. Before beginning any ceremony, it is customary to seek Bandyaka's (also known as Vinayak or Ganapati) blessings to ensure success. On this occasion, the kunhiyan-ko-chowk is sketched. The kuhani, or elbow, depicted in this mandana has no clear meaning. The following day is Mandal day, therefore Mandal-ko-chowk is drawn. Bijani-ko-chowk is evoked when barana and tel occur together. In contrast to the Panchachowk-ko-jora, which is drawn on the big day known as the mandap day, the Sinhasan-ko-chowk is drawn on the day of pahavani or bhata.

Vivahotsava: The ritual is nearly identical to Yajnyopavitotsava, but for the Bahu agaman, in which the bride enters the home of her husband-to-be. The celebration for the bride features an extravagant décor known as Pasarana (meaning prostration).

At the outset of the wedding ceremony, the Bandyaka is summoned and placed in this room; it is here that the bride and groom are first ushered in and presented with the Pasarana. Pasarana (seven plates) is primarily characterized by the kapara (six-pointed star) and other chowks on its mandanas. The smallest dish, the katora (bowl), is placed at Ganapati's feet, while the largest dish, the thali, is placed at the end of the row.

Paglya Motif: The footprints, or paglyas, are an essential part of every large mandana. It is impossible to have a complete mandana without the paglya motif. In contrast to the more realistic depictions of Pagalya found in other parts of India, those found in Rajasthan tend to be more symbolic in nature. Paglya designs often feature geometric shapes like triangles, squares, and rectangles. The solah bijani ka paglya (paglya of sixteen fans) is a well-known design, although there are many others. Some examples are the Sankal ka paglya (pattern of chains) and the Kali ka paglya (pattern of six-petaled flowers).

The usage of these motifs is crucial and pertinent because Rajasthan is well-known for its hot temperatures. Every single rural home still speaks Bijani now. Traditional folktales of the area center on the bara and bavari that may be found there.

The hero of a story typically plans his next move once he arrives at a bavari or after a long and tiring journey. These themes are developed using a wide variety of methods.

You can either create a single motif or connect multiple motifs into chains that are then woven together. Examples of patterns used as building plans include the Khera and the Bavari. Symbols used in mandanas, like those used in other forms of Indian floor art, each have their own meaning and purpose. They have been altered so much that modern women have no idea of their historical significance. Thankfully, the names of the motifs usually survive, giving us a glimpse into their significance and meaning.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Ephemeral floor art is not merely a decorative practice; it carries a profound cultural and spiritual importance in Rajasthan's society. It is a visual expression of hospitality, creativity, and reverence for the divine. This art form is an integral part of various festivals, ceremonies, and daily rituals, contributing to the sense of identity and belonging of the community.

Spiritual and Symbolic Meanings:



Ephemeral floor art is often created in front of homes, temples, and other important spaces. The intricate patterns and symbols are believed to have spiritual significance and to attract positive energies. Different symbols and patterns are used to represent various aspects of life, such as:

1. Welcome and Hospitality: One of the primary purposes of creating these art forms is to welcome guests and visitors. The vibrant colors and intricate designs serve as a warm invitation, creating a sense of inclusivity and community.
2. Blessings and Auspiciousness: The designs often incorporate symbols that are considered auspicious, such as lotus flowers, peacocks, elephants, and the sun. These symbols are believed to bring blessings and good fortune to the household.
3. Sacred Geometry: Many of the patterns used in ephemeral floor art are based on intricate geometric shapes. These shapes hold deep spiritual meanings and are believed to represent cosmic order and harmony.
4. Connection with Nature: The use of natural materials like colored powders and flowers reflects a deep connection with nature. This connection is not only artistic but also symbolic of the harmony between human life and the natural world.

Dynamic and Expressive Art Form: One of the remarkable aspects of ephemeral floor art is its dynamic and ever-changing nature. The choice of colors, patterns, and symbols varies based on the occasion, the specific festival, and the cultural context. For example:

- Festivals: Different festivals call for specific designs. For Diwali, the festival of lights, intricate and colorful rangoli patterns are created to celebrate the victory of light over darkness. During Holi, the festival of colors, vibrant and playful designs are made.
- Rituals: Ephemeral floor art is an integral part of daily rituals in many households. It is often created as a form of devotional offering to deities, inviting them into the space and establishing a sacred atmosphere.
- Seasons and Celebrations: The choice of colors and motifs can also be influenced by the changing seasons and regional celebrations. This reflects the adaptability and creativity of the artists.

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

In the realm of art, tradition often intertwines with innovation, leading to the evolution and revitalization of various art forms. Ephemeral floor art, which has its roots in the cultural heritage of Rajasthan, India, has witnessed a remarkable resurgence of interest in recent years. This resurgence is driven by a fusion of traditional techniques, modern materials, and innovative approaches, as well as its successful integration into urban spaces and galleries. Ephemeral floor art, often referred to as "rangoli" or "kolam," has been an integral part of Indian culture for centuries. Rooted in religious and cultural rituals, these intricate and vibrant designs are traditionally created using colored powders, rice flour, or flower petals. The art form is celebrated during festivals, weddings, and other auspicious occasions as a way to welcome guests, honor deities, and bring good luck.

In recent times, contemporary artists have embraced the ephemeral nature of floor art while pushing the boundaries of creativity. One of the defining characteristics of this resurgence is the use of new materials and techniques that depart from the traditional powders and flowers. Artists are now experimenting with a diverse range of materials such as colored sands, crushed glass, acrylic paints, and even unconventional mediums like coffee grounds, spices, and recycled materials. This experimentation has led to a richer visual texture and a broader color palette, enabling artists to depict intricate details and create mesmerizing visual experiences. The incorporation of technology has also played a significant role in redefining ephemeral floor art. Digital projections and augmented reality have been integrated into the practice, allowing artists



to create dynamic and interactive installations that transform ordinary spaces into immersive works of art. This fusion of technology and tradition not only engages audiences in novel ways but also adds a layer of storytelling to the art form. Traditionally, ephemeral floor art was confined to domestic spaces and religious settings. However, the resurgence of interest has led to a new dimension: the art form's presence in urban spaces and galleries. This transition from temporary and transitory designs to permanent or semi-permanent installations has enabled artists to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity.

Urban spaces, such as public plazas, parks, and city squares, have become the canvas for large-scale ephemeral art installations. These artworks transform mundane landscapes into vibrant expressions of culture and creativity, engaging a diverse audience that might not have otherwise encountered this traditional art form. Galleries, on the other hand, provide a platform for artists to showcase their ephemeral floor art as contemporary art pieces, blurring the lines between conventional art forms and the ephemeral nature of this traditional practice. Paradoxically, the transitory nature of ephemeral floor art becomes part of its charm. The impermanence of these creations evokes a sense of mindfulness and presence, reminding us of the fleeting beauty of life itself. The documentation of these artworks through photography, videos, and digital platforms has become a crucial way of preserving their existence beyond their short-lived physical presence.

In conclusion, the contemporary resurgence of ephemeral floor art illustrates how tradition and innovation can harmoniously coexist. By experimenting with new materials, techniques, and incorporating modern contexts, artists are breathing new life into this age-old practice. The integration of ephemeral floor art into urban spaces and galleries further enriches its cultural significance, offering a bridge between the past and the present, the traditional and the modern. This resurgence not only rejuvenates an ancient art form but also demonstrates its timeless relevance in a rapidly evolving world.

CHALLENGES AND PRESERVATION

Ephemeral floor art, often created using materials like colored powders, flower petals, rice, sand, or other organic elements, holds deep cultural and religious significance in various communities around the world. It is an artistic practice that involves intricate and elaborate designs crafted directly onto the ground, often during festivals, ceremonies, or other special occasions. However, this art form faces a range of challenges related to its sustainability and preservation, stemming from changes in modern society, urbanization, and the availability of traditional materials.

- *Lifestyle Changes and Modernization*
- *Availability of Traditional Materials*
- *Preservation of Cultural Heritage*
- *Technological Advancements*
- *Lack of Recognition and Support*

As societies become more urbanized and people's lifestyles change, the traditional practices and rituals that are closely tied to ephemeral floor art may be lost or altered. In urban environments, the space and time required for creating these intricate artworks might not be readily available. Additionally, as people shift to more fast-paced and technologically driven lives, there might be a decrease in interest and participation in such labor-intensive and time-consuming artistic practices.

Ephemeral floor art relies heavily on natural materials like colored powders, flower petals, and rice. However, the availability of these materials might be impacted by factors such as climate change, environmental degradation, and shifts in agricultural practices. The loss of access to



these traditional materials can make it challenging to continue creating these artworks in their authentic form.

Many ephemeral floor art traditions are deeply rooted in cultural and religious practices. However, as younger generations become more disconnected from their cultural heritage, there's a risk of these practices being forgotten or not being passed down to future generations. This can lead to a loss of cultural diversity and identity. While technology can play a role in documenting and sharing ephemeral floor art, it can also contribute to its challenges. The ease of capturing images and videos might lead to a perception that simply documenting the art is sufficient, rather than actively participating in its creation and understanding its cultural significance. Ephemeral floor art is often created for temporary events and ceremonies, which might not receive the same level of recognition and support as more permanent forms of art. This can lead to a lack of funding, resources, and institutional support for artisans and practitioners of this art form.

Efforts to Address Challenges and Preserve Ephemeral Floor Art

- Cultural organizations, researchers, and enthusiasts are working to document the various forms of ephemeral floor art, capturing their designs, techniques, and cultural contexts. This documentation helps preserve the knowledge and history associated with these traditions.
- Efforts are being made to raise awareness about the cultural significance of ephemeral floor art through exhibitions, workshops, and educational programs. This helps people understand the value of these traditions and encourages their continuation.
- Artisans and practitioners are finding innovative ways to adapt ephemeral floor art to modern contexts. This might involve experimenting with new materials, incorporating contemporary designs, and collaborating with other artists to keep the tradition alive.
- Some communities are actively working to revive and promote their traditional practices by integrating ephemeral floor art into modern events and celebrations, ensuring that the art form remains relevant and meaningful.
- To address the challenge of dwindling traditional materials, efforts are being made to promote sustainable sourcing and responsible harvesting of natural elements used in ephemeral floor art.
- Engaging younger generations in the creation of ephemeral floor art and explaining its cultural significance helps ensure its transmission to future generations.
- Collaborative efforts between cultural organizations, artisans, and local communities can lead to a stronger support network for the preservation of ephemeral floor art.

CONCLUSION

Finally, ephemeral floor art preservation and sustainability are important issues that involve culture, tradition, modernization, and the environment. To preserve this art form for future generations, these issues must be addressed due to its exquisite beauty and cultural value. Documentation, education, innovation, and engagement are essential to preserving ephemeral floor art. Cultural enthusiasts and groups are preserving ephemeral floor art's history and culture by recording its many forms and techniques. Exhibitions, workshops, and educational programs introduce its relevance and encourage active engagement and enjoyment. Adapting old approaches to current situations and materials revitalizes art and keeps it relevant in changing civilizations.

Younger generations creating transitory floor art connects heritage and new lifestyles, supporting continuity. Artists, communities, and cultural organizations working together strengthens this artistic heritage. Despite lifestyle changes, material availability, and technology influences, transitory floor art is preserved because of its cultural and artistic worth. We may preserve the



beautiful patterns and symbolic significance of ephemeral floor painting for future generations by reviving this ancient technique with new methods and a revitalized enthusiasm.

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