

SACHI, Society for Art & Cultural Heritage of India

Invites You to Celebrate

An Exploration of Kolam Painting

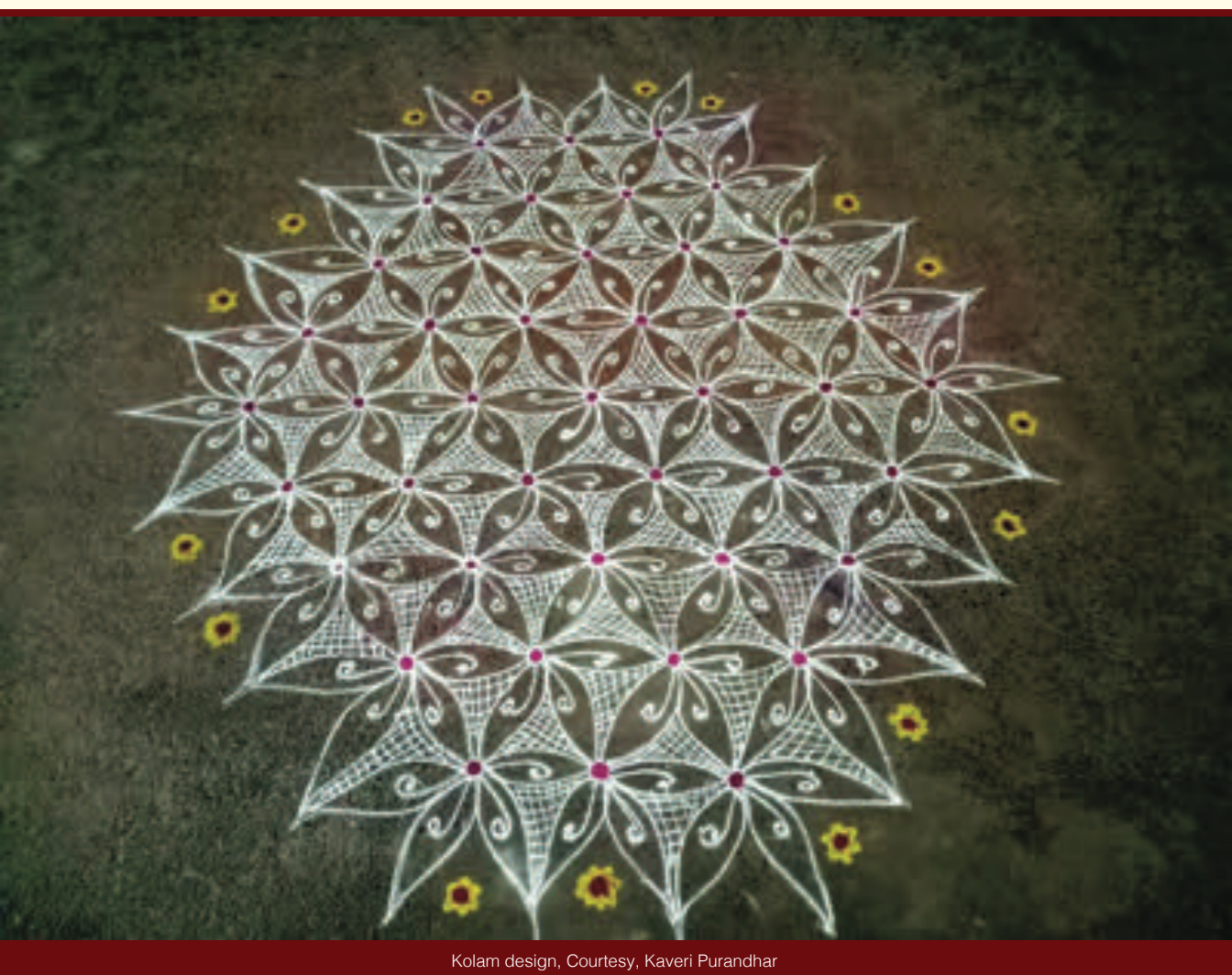
with

Dr. Vijaya Nagarajan

Professor of Theology, Religious Studies, and Environmental Studies,
University of San Francisco, and Author of a pioneering book

Feeding A Thousand Souls:

Women, Ritual and Ecology in India: An Exploration of the Kolam



Kolam design, Courtesy, Kaveri Purandhar

Kolam Painting

Kolam patterns honor the goddess, who envelops the home with auspiciousness. It is said, in the symbolic use of rice flour as an artistic medium, the kolam is the “feeder of a thousand souls” providing nourishment to birds, worms, ants, and the smallest of insects through the day. Nagarajan, scholar and kolam researcher expresses, “the kolam is a ritual of generosity, of gratitude, of auspiciousness”. The concept of feeding a thousand souls “to honor those strangers we expect no gifts from”, is also the title of her book. The spirit of kolam, and the crafting of a kolam – the joining of dots and wavy lines in repetitive rhythms, akin to meditation – connects over 20 million women of Tamil Nadu every morning in a daily renewal act. What is striking about the kolam is that “it is ephemeral, transitory, impermanent”.

Scholar Vijaya Nagarajan explains how everyday millions of Tamil women in southeast India wake up before dawn to create the kolam, a ritual design made of rice flour, on the thresholds of homes. This thousand-year-old ritual welcomes and honors the goddesses Lakshmi and Bhudevi. Propelled by a lifelong wonder and fuelled by deeply informed research, Vijaya Nagarajan provides a poetic and surprising entryway into the layered complexities of Hindu culture. Braiding Tamil women's voices and the author's own stories, *Feeding A Thousand Souls* brings into conversation different knowledge traditions – ritual art, beauty, history, gender, literature, religion, anthropology, mathematics, and ecology.

**Sunday
November 22, 2020**

11:00 AM

*A Webinar
Zoom Presentation*

[Please Register here](#)

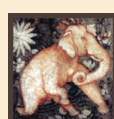


Dr. Vijaya Nagarajan is an Associate Professor in the Department of Theology/Religious Studies and Environmental Studies at the University of San Francisco. She has also taught at the University of California, Berkeley and at Harvard University. Her book, *Feeding A Thousand Souls: Women, Ritual and Ecology in India, An Exploration of the Kolam* (Oxford University Press, 2018) is a deep investigation of women's popular ritual art form, the 'Kolam', and the multiple ways in which beauty embodies ethics.

Nagarajan has been active in the American Academy of Religion and in the environmental movements in the United States. She was born in a South Indian village and raised bi-culturally in New Delhi and in Washington D.C. Vijaya Nagarajan received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in the fields of South Asian Studies/Anthropology/Art History/Tamil Language and Literature.

“The kolam is the most beautiful and evanescent artistic form of the goddess in South India, created ritually each and every day by millions of women. This beautiful book is a treasure, bringing to life for the first time the wealth of meanings of this form of women's religious practice.”

—Diana Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies, Harvard Divinity School



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