

**6****ALPANA**

Dear learner, in the previous lesson you have learnt about the Rangoli art. In this lesson, we will learn about the Alpana folk art. Alpana is one of the most expressive folk art forms of the floor painting and decorations in Bengal. The use of floor decoration is found in every part of India. These are done in different types of colours and on different kinds of the surface of the floor. The houses or huts in rural Bengal have clay or mud floors. Even the courtyard is also given a layer of thin clay. The floors of clay show a tint of grey, on the white colour of motifs, which is a liquid paste of rice, brings a wonderful effect. Alpana is exclusively a ritualistic form of folk art. Alpana is probably **derived** from Alipona, an art practised because of the belief that these decorative paintings keep the **dwelling** place or house safe and prosperous, land fertile and fruitful by magic. The study of Alpana is a very important part of folk art. It expresses the artistic life of the people, their customs, religious faith and social behaviour. It is mainly through studying of the traditional arts, dance music and literature. There have been a lot of changes in the style and material of Alpana in recent times. The change in the floor surface material and availability of readymade paints make the artist replace old materials.

**OBJECTIVES**

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain Alpana as an art form;
- point out the background of Alpana;
- find out the method and materials used in Alpana;
- learn about different motifs connected with religious **rituals** and **rites**;
- practice Alpana painting.



Notes

6.1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Alpanas are ritual decorations of floor paintings executed by women in Bengal. On the occasion of various pujas and bratas (fasts) and social ceremonies like marriage, child’s first rice eating (Annaprasana), Yagyopavit (Upanayana) Sanskar etc. Alpanas are painted on the floors and courtyards of the house. The material used is rice paste mixed with water. It is therefore, generally white. On special occasions, many other colours and materials are used. Alpanas are created by hand, mainly by the womenfolks. Some motifs are fixed for particular festivals and celebrations, which the painters repeatedly use. The most popular motifs are Lotus Petal, Shankha (conch shell), Banana Leaf and Wavy Lines. The stylish footprints of Lakshmi Devi are a must in the Alpana design during the Lakshmi Puja.

6.2 TRADITIONAL MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

Dear learner, first, you need to know the traditional motifs and symbols used in Alpana painting. Alpana designs vary from place to place, **occasion** to occasion, and person to person. Various patterns are used for a single ceremony, and different patterns are used for the same ceremony in different villages. The artist seems to enjoy a great deal of freedom; despite the necessity of representing certain symbols in every Alpanas.



Fig. 6.1

The common motif is the lotus associated with Lakshmi, Vishnu and Brahma. The lotus also signifies the universal life force. The footprint of Lakshmi always points towards the inside of the house, which signify the entrance of the goddess of prosperity.

The Sun-god (Surya) is represented either in form of a man or a circle.

For Alpana designing a student should follow and copy the motifs and symbols so that she/he will be able to create his/her new Alpana design. These motifs are as under.

1. Lotus : This flower is a symbol of beauty and universal force. It is a part of images of Lakshmi, Bramha, Vishnu and Saraswati.
2. Fish : Symbolises the prosperity and well being of the family.
3. Conch shell : It is one of the attributes of Vishnu. Symbolises a good omen.
4. Peacock : Symbolises beauty, romance, rebirth and rhythm as it dances to the tune of raindrops.

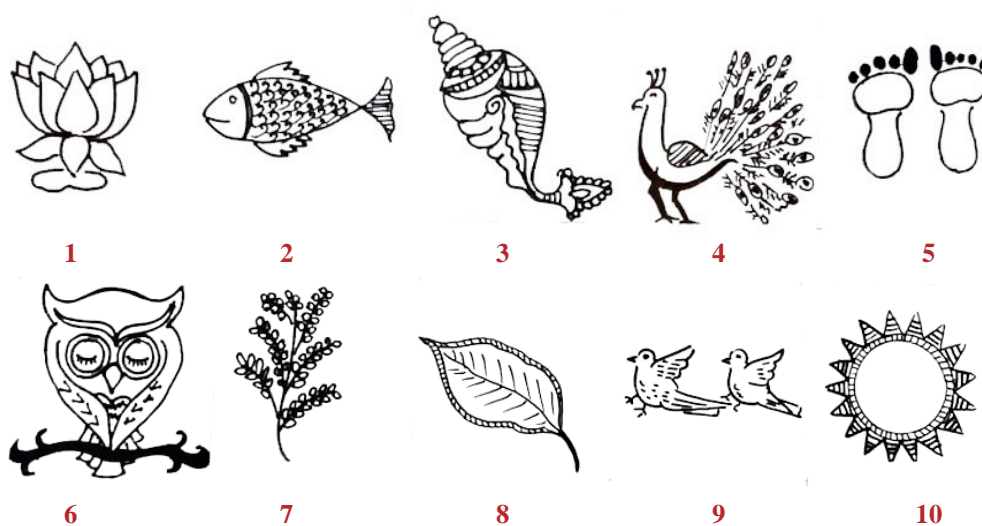


Fig. 6.2

5. Footsteps of Lakshmi Devi : Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and fortune. The footsteps symbolise the entrance of Lakshmi into the household.
6. Owl : Symbolises the presence of Lakshmi as it is her vehicle.
7. Rice Stick : The motif is drawn with two parallel lines hanked on two sides with small diagonal lines. It is a symbol of prosperity.
8. Leaves : Artists exploit the various shapes of the leaves as decorative design. It is also a symbol of youthfulness.
9. Birds : Apart from their beauty, birds are used to symbolise freedom.
10. Sun : Symbolises life force and source of all kinds of energy.



Notes



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6.3 MATERIAL REQUIRED FOR ALPANA

1. Drawing board or hardboard
2. Drawing paper (for designing the Alpana and different **motif**)
3. Drawing pins
4. Pencil
5. Eraser
6. Colour (Earth colour such as burnt sienna (Geru) yellow ochre (Peli Mati) white etc.
7. Colour paper/handmade paper
8. Clothes and rice paste for practising on floor.
9. Colour mixing bowl

Many earth colours are used to decorate the Alpana like red soil (Lal Mati or Geru), yellow soil (Peli Mati), and emerald green chemical powder is also used.

Composition is the most essential element of Alpana design. Alpana is a traditional art, and its elements come from generation to generation. The quality depends on the skill of the Alpana painters.

Therefore, students must be able to compose a beautiful Alpana design.

6.4 TRADITIONAL METHOD OF ALPANA

In this part, you should understand the traditional method of Alpana art. The materials for Alpana are simple and very few. A handful of rice and a small piece of cloth are the basic requirements for painting an Alpana. The rice is put in the water and made into a thick paste. Enough water is added to obtain a paste which would help drawlines. The paste is put on the piece of cloth. The cloth is held in the lower part of the palm (or at the root of the fingers). The paste is released and allowed to flow down the ring finger, which moves along to make the design.

Alpana is painted on the floor. However, without any drawing or layout, it is impossible to create a beautiful design on a floor. The student must know the size of the Alpana on the floor so that she may compose the motifs and symbols accordingly on the paper. To find the actual effect of Alpana on the floor, students should first paint the floor's background. Spray burnt sienna with white and yellow ochre with the help of an old toothbrush to give an effect of mud floor. It should resemble a mud floor on the paper. The motifs and symbols should be drawn on this background with a brush. See figure no.4 Alpana decoration is made for different occasions. Different motifs and symbols are used according to the festivals.

We have already discussed the main earth colours and their **pigments**. Now we will prepare the earth colours easily available in the local market. For example, yellow ochre (Peli Mati), burnt siena or Indian red (Geru) blue (Neal), white (lime), black (charcoal). The above powder colours are mixed with water and some amount of binder, like gum, Fevicol, or sarace (Arabic gum). Now, we are ready to use these colours on paper or on floor.



Notes

PRACTICAL EXERCISE 1

Now let us illustrate an Alpana design. The theme is Alpana for Lakshmi Puja.

In this Alpana, we have painted the full-bloomed lotus flower in big size on the altar of Lakshmi. Two rows of lotus leaves in a rhythmic line are also drawn. It depicts the footprint (paglya) of Lakshmi between the two rows. These footprints depict the direction from outside to inside the house.

Step 1: Draw the basic motif on the floor with a pencil. Use motifs like, foot prints circle, etc.

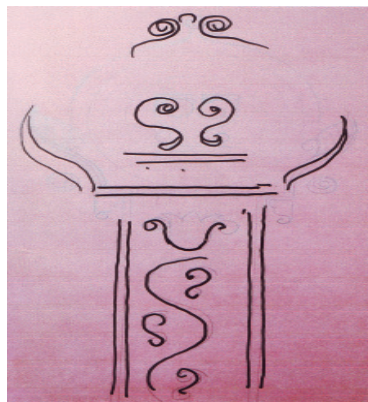


Fig. 6.3

Step 2: Soak rice overnight and grind to make a paste. Then, use your finger to draw the design on the floor. Another alternative is to use poster white colour and brush.



Fig. 6.4



Notes

Step 3: Finish the design with details to give it an ornamental look.



Fig. 6.5

PRACTICAL EXERCISE 2

This is your next Alpana exercise. Let us know the method of the Alpana design, used in a marriage ceremony. The theme is Alpana for Marriage Ceremony.

The marriage ritual is the one most important ceremonies in human life. It is assured that all grooms are Vishnu and all brides are Lakshmi, and newlyweds will live a happy married life. So here, we represent the symbols of lotus and conch shell (Shanka).

Step 1: Draw the design with motifs like Lotus, Conch shell, Footprint etc.



Fig. 6.6

Step 2: Paint the small part of the design with white rice paste or poster colour.



Fig. 6.7

Step 3: Paint the second half of the lower part in the same way. Thus lower half of the design is complete.



Fig. 6.8

Step 4: Now move to the upper side of the Alpana and complete the design.



Fig. 6.9



Notes

PRACTICAL EXERCISE 3

Now let us learn one more Alpana design. That is Alpana for floor design.

Alpana is a kind of floor decoration done during festivals and celebrations like wedding, rituals etc. It is considered very auspicious. Different motifs are used for Alpana, which are inspired by the images of birds, animals, flowers and folk art.

A method of Alpana painting with floral design is given below:

1. Draw a circle and add a petal shape form around the circle.



Fig. 6.10

2. Draw a small circle in the middle of the circle and draw slim petal forms to cover the space.



Fig. 6.11

3. Add petal form in reducing sizes inside the outer petals.



Fig. 6.12



Notes

- 4. The gaps between the outer petals could be filled with leaf forms to give the whole Alpana a round shape as shown in the illustration.



Fig. 6.13

- 5. Now beautify the design with dot lines and floral motifs as shown in the picture.



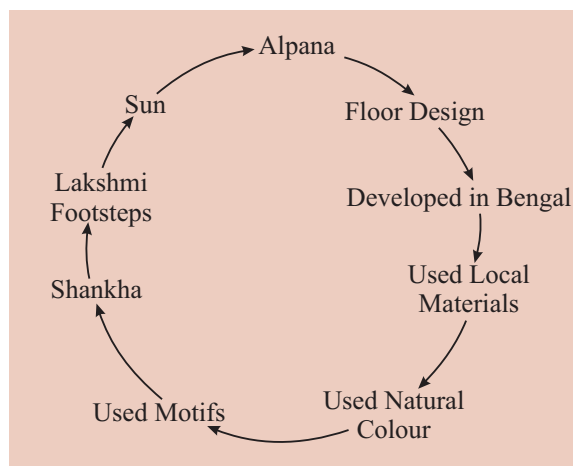
Fig. 6.14



Notes



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT



**Notes****TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. List the different name of Alpana in different states and drawn their motifs.
2. Draw and paint the motif used on the occasion of Lakshmi Puja.
3. Create and paint a decorative Alpana at the door step.
4. Draw and paint a decorative Alpana with the help of lines.
5. Paint a decorative Alpana on the floor in traditional style and submit a photograph of it.
6. Motivate nearby residents to paint Alpana outside their house.

GLOSSARY

Alpana	– a type of floor painting in Bengal
Derived	– obtain something from a source
Dwelling	– live in
Reveals	– secret information known
Aspirations	– a hope, ambition
Belief	– feeling that something exists or is true
Ingredient	– component part or element
Pictographs	– a small image, picture representing a word or phrase
Occasion	– a special event or celebration
Rituals	– a ceremony that involves a series of action performed in
Rites	– religious ceremony, other solemn procedure
Motifs	– a pattern or design
Pigment	– coloured powder mixed with a liquid to make paints