

TAPAN MOHAN CHATTERJI

ALPONA



with Notes by
Jarak Chandra Das

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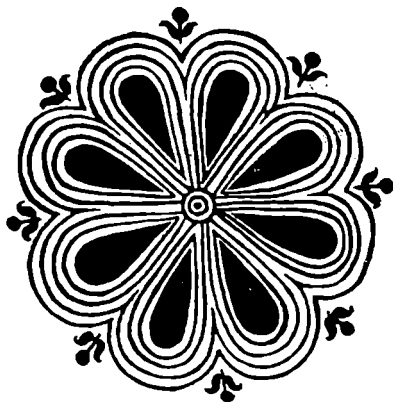


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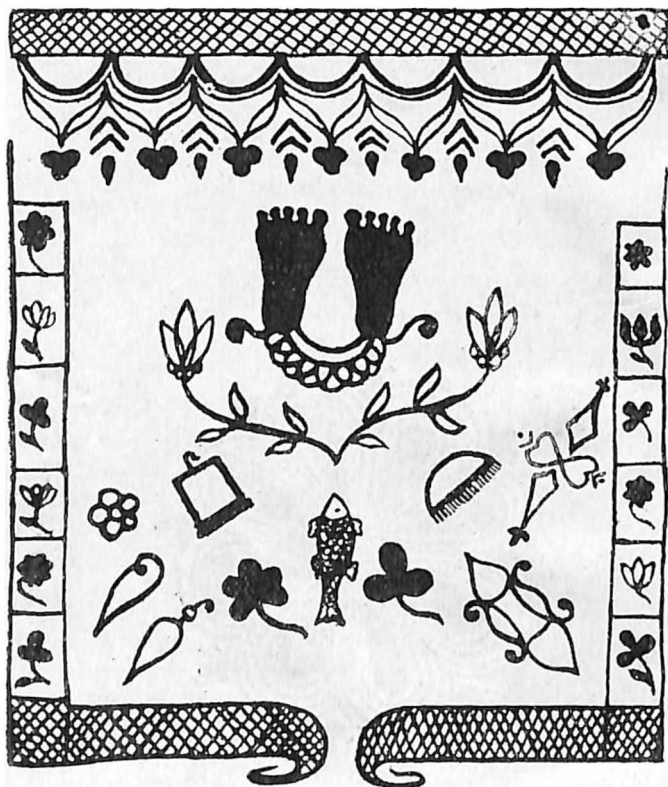
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(No. 1)



(No. 2)

ALPONA

The aspirations of the human heart have no limits. The popular semi-religious usages and different cults are only an expression of these infinite aspirations. *Alpona* is the living symbol of these usages and ceremonies.

First of all, semi-religious ceremonies were instituted to celebrate the changing of the seasons and their influence on human nature; these cults, once established, developed gradually and were handed down from generation to generation. And now, although the celebrant is not always conscious of it, the influence of the seasons still plays a great part in the festivities.

In Bengal these semi-religious cults, or *Vratas* as they are called in Bengali, are celebrated by women; men take no part in them. The art of *Alpona*, therefore, became and remained a domestic art. It is not taught in any school*—the mother teaches it to her daughter in the home, and the daughter passes it on to the granddaughter; and thus the art has lived and grown from one age to another. It is essentially a

* As a notable exception the teaching of *Alpona* now forms part of the curriculum of art education at the Visva-Bharati Kalabhavana, Santiniketan. The late Sukumari Devi not only taught it to her students in Kalabhavana but considerably enriched it by introducing a large variety of new motifs and designs. The tradition has been ably maintained by Gouri Devi and her students. *Alpona* decoration is an important feature in the celebration of festivals and receptions at Santiniketan.

feminine art; men have not contributed anything to it.

At each popular or family festival of a sacred nature the women set themselves joyfully to decorate with figures and different patterns the floor of the room where the offerings of flowers and fruits will be placed—or the very low seats on which the bridegroom and the bride squat like little gods to be united in love—or even the little wooden throne on which the child waits to receive the name by which it will be known to the world. There is always great rivalry among the women and the girls of the house as to who shall excel in the art.

All these designs had their birth in woman's imagination: there have never been models or implements to help in tracing or painting them. A handful of rice ground up and mixed with water and some vegetable dye are the only materials required, and for a brush simply the dainty tip of a little finger; and it is in this manner that quite naturally and very easily little girls of five years old draw these *Alponas*. With one twist of the hand they will draw creepers, flowers and varied patterns and will even add to them what their whimsical imagination suggests.

In general, these women's ceremonies are not consecrated to a special divinity: they are rather a mixture of popular festivals and ritual ceremonies. They paint the human heart in the small space of a little decorative picture, in the action of a drama and in a few songs and hymns,

and these contribute to the celebration of the *Vrata*. But we do not find their description in any text. These cults live in the secret depth of a woman's soul and from it they emanate in rhythmic forms ever increasing in beauty.

It is difficult to say what has inspired these ritual decorations. Is it the religious sentiment or the artistic feeling innate in human nature? We are inclined to think that it is the artistic feeling which torments the human heart until it has found its means of expression, although there is always the religious feeling working in the background.

No moral teaching is intended to be conveyed in the celebration of the *Vrata*; it is only meant to give vent to the aspirations of the heart towards beauty and to express them afterwards by *Alpona*.

Unlike other arts pursued by women, in *Alpona* a real power of artistic creation can be discovered: for example, in the different interpretations of the lotus flower and in the many different patterns of flowers and designs. One feels the strong desire of the artist to idealize the subjects chosen for decoration and to introduce into them what is not strictly necessary to a faithful representation. The lotuses are not the real lotuses we see with the every-day eye—and each one appears different from the other—for it is in the secret depths of the artist's heart that these lotuses of the vision have had their birth, and it is there that they bloom ever fresh.

These *Vratas*, although they are being celebrated from far-off ages onwards, come down to us only in fragments. We do not find them in the authoritative scriptures, but only see them being performed by young ladies and girls in villages and towns. They naturally differ in minor detail in the various provinces of Bengal. But the main theme always remains the same.

As the art of *Alpona* is inspired by the popular religious festivals—and indeed it is the essential part of them—a brief description of some of the more important of the *Vratas* may be of interest.

We see in these *Vratas* a true picture of the woman's heart—her desires, fancies and imaginations—a great worship of life unlike the dead ceremonial worship alleged to be based on the scriptures. One is almost tempted to imagine that the famous Hymn of Life in the Upanishad forms the motive power of all these *Vrata* celebrations.

1. Life burns even as a fire. Life is the Sun, Life is the Clouds, Life is the Rain, Life is the Wind. The earth is life, the shining moon is life. Life is the manifest and the unmanifest too. Life is eternal.

2. All things are based on life—as the spokes are set in the hub of a chariot wheel. The scriptures, holy rites, power and wisdom all rest on it.

3. O Life! Thou as the Spirit of Creation movest in every womb and art born ever anew.

To Thee, these thy creatures bring offerings:
To Thee who with the senses dwellest in all."

LAKSHMI VRATA. The celebration of this important cult is in honour of Lakshmi who is the goddess of beauty and prosperity. It takes place on a night in autumn when the moon is full and the harvest of new rice has been brought in.

The rooms have been decorated from the morning onwards with *Alpona*. Lotuses and creepers twine round the feet of the Lakshmi. The pillars supporting the ceiling of the big room where rice and other crops are kept, are ornamented with *Alpona* representing the pedestal of the goddess. In these decorations we also find the crown of Lakshmi and various other jewels belonging to her.

The rice-corn and lotuses are the two main objects of decoration in connection with the celebration of this cult, and we invariably find them represented in the *Alpona* of this *Vrata*.

The cult of Lakshmi has its origin in the following legend. Once upon a time, there was



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a very just king who had made a law to encourage the arts and crafts. He had ordered that anything pertaining to that nature, which had not been sold at the market, should be bought by his treasurer.

Now it so happened one day that the treasurer bought an iron statue which nobody had wanted, for it represented Alakshmi—the goddess of evil and poverty and the enemy of Lakshmi.

When Lakshmi saw the newly acquired statue, she was very angry, and wished to leave the palace. The king explained to her that he had but kept his vow and obeyed the law which he had made. It was, he remonstrated, wrong of her to wish to desert his home. But the goddess would not be softened, and she fled far from the image of her enemy.

One after the other all the auspicious deities left the palace; first the goddess of Glory; then Fate, and finally even Justice was making ready to go away, when the king, now a poor and miserable man, said to him: "Oh, God, I bought Alakshmi in order to remain faithful to thy laws. Through thee I have lost Lakshmi. Thou shouldst not leave me."

The God of Justice understood and remained with him.

One day the queen said to the king: "How is it that Lakshmi has abandoned us?"

The king did not wish to reply, but the queen insisted so much that he yielded and told her what had happened.

The queen then began to worship Lakshmi, and the goddess now reappeared and returned to the palace. From that day the women of Bengal worship the goddess, so as to drive out Alakshmi—the goddess of ill omen.

TOSHLA VRATA is the cult of the corn. This is celebrated so that the fields and meadows may become fertilized and yield more corn.

When the first attacks of winter are beginning to be felt and a pale mist covers the horizon and the fields are covered with little yellow mustard flowers, the matrons of the village go off to the fields bearing little trays of vegetables, fruits and flowers.

The ceremony begins with an invocation to the god of cultivated fields.

“Who art thou, O God! All those who worship thee are for ever happy. Their home prospers from day to day. They have rice in plenty, cows, and means of life.”



Their dark hair unbound, waving over their pale yellow garments, and yellow flowers in their hands, they thus express their desire:

Grant me cows to fill my stable,
 Grant me a son to shine at the court of the king.
 Grant me a son-in-law to shine among men,
 Grant me a daughter to shine among girls.
 Grant me a basketful of vermilion
 To shine on my forehead.*
 Grant me a home in a fine city,
 Grant me to die close to the sea:
 Thus we beseech Thee, O God,
 To grant that we may live happily
 Ourselves, our children and our husbands—all.

This goes on for a whole month, and on the last day the ceremony comes to an end. Before sunrise the celebrants go to the river carrying little earthen trays on which shines the pale and trembling light of a little clay lamp.

They float the little trays in the river. The flames go down the current and vanish, one after another. There follows a little interlude of water-sport amongst the girls in the river. The sun rises and smiles over the beaming faces of the devotees fresh from their bath, their cheeks burning with red vermilion and they themselves draped in copper-red robes. And then standing on the river bank they end their worship by singing the praises of the Sun God; and their voices quivering with emotion are lost in the luminous atmosphere of the early morning.

* Married women in India always use vermilion paint between the parting of the hair, and it is thus the symbol of married life.

MAGHMANDAL VRATA, the cult of the Sun God, is celebrated at the height of winter. The songs and actions in performance of the ceremonies pertaining to this cult take the form of a drama depicting the triumph of the sun dispelling the gloom of the winter months.

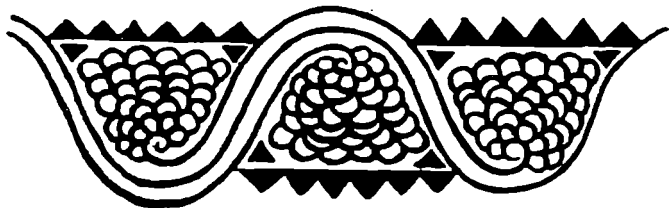
Scene 1. The last hours of the winter night. A thick fog covers all nature; the flowers hang their heads heavy with dew; the wind blows the grass shoots that caress the surface of the water. On the other side of the lake is the misty silhouette of a ruined temple. In the garden little flower-girls who perform these rites play on the banks of the lake; and the young women of the village sing:

What flowers shall be plucked
To sprinkle our eyes and our cheeks with water?

The flowers reply:

You must have two slender flowers
Ital and *Beetal*.*

* Imaginary flowers.



From the other side of the lake the temple gardener calls:

What flowers do you wish
To bedeck your eyes and cheeks?

The Flowers:

You must have two pale flowers
Ital and *Beetal*.

The Gardener:

With what drink
Must I quench the thirst of the flowers?

The Flowers:

With the silver dew hidden
In our slender stems.

The flower-girls reclining on the dew-covered grass sing:

The ravens and the crows
Have not yet fouled this water.
We wish to touch this pure water
Before the flowers and the greenery.

They bathe their faces in the clear lake water.
The gardener's wife comes up and laughs as she sees them.

The young girls:

Do not laugh, O gardener's wife!
You are friend.
We are here
To do honour to *Magh Vrata*.
But where are you going on this festive day
With a basket in your hands?

The gardener's wife:

The branches of the trees are heavy
With all the flowers that have blossomed.

The flower girls:

Do not pick the flowers at the top of the tree,
They are still only buds.
Do not pluck the flowers at the base of the tree,
They are full of dust.

The gardener's wife says to her husband:

O Gardener, pluck only the flowers
Which grow in the middle of the tree.

Then, as if comparing each plant to a kind of house, she adds:

On what stalk did you cook your food?
On which stalk did you eat it?
On which stalk did you spend the night?

The gardener replies:

I cooked my meal
On the jasmine stalk.
I ate my meal
On the *Atasi* stalk.
I spent all night
On the stalk of the marigold.

Then they all sing together:

Let us pull down the jasmine branch,
The Sun God wishes for these flowers.
Let us fill the baskets with jasmine,
The Sun God loves these flowers.

Scene 2. This begins in front of a flowering tree, still all covered with mist. The young girls, with seeds in their hands, sing:

Rise, O Sun God, rise,
With thy sparkling rays!

The Sun:

I cannot rise,
For I fear the dew.

The gardener's wife:

Rise then yonder,
Near the stable.

Several spots are proposed to him in the same way, but the Sun refuses to rise. At last he comes out, piercing the mist, beside the gardener's house, not far from the lake where the sweet flowers float in the stream scenting the air.

A minstrel sings before the grove of the Sun:

The Young Moon, daughter of Spring,
Of the Spring sweet as honey,
Has unbound her stresses,
And the Sun God goes seeking her
Through many lands.
The Young Moon, daughter of Spring,
Of the Spring sweet as honey,
Has unwound her Sari
And the Sun God goes seeking her
From house to house.
The Young Moon, daughter of Spring,
Of the Spring sweet as honey,
Has bells on her ankles,
Silver bells that shine,
And the Sun God
Wishes to wed her.

The girls now begin to narrate the story of the marriage of the Sun God with the Young Moon. They are both in a bower of flowers—their nuptial chamber.

The Moon:

The crows croak,
 And cuckoos sing.
 I am going to thy house
 But who will be my mother?

The Sun:

My mother will be a mother unto thee,
 My father will be a father unto thee,
 My sister will be a sister unto thee.

The Moon:

The crows croak,
 And cuckoos sing.
 And I set out for the home of the Sun God.

Out of the union of the Sun God and the Moon the little Spring God is born, and the celebrants go home happy to see the triumph of the rising Sun.

ASATHPATA VRATA of the cult of the leaves of the Asath tree (*Ficus Religiosus*).

The happy birth of the young shoots at the close of the winter, and the sad end of the dead leaves which fall from the tree are symbols of the eternal drama of the new born and the old. The dried leaves of the passing winter fall on the ground, swept away by the spring breeze. A single Asath tree rises at the edge of the river surrounded by different trees with leaves of varying colours: there are copper-red ones, others of a yellowish fresh green and also of a golden yellow; then others of a deep sombre green standing close to trees with dry and faded

leaves. Such is the imaginary scene in which the celebration takes place; and the story that forms the basis of the scenes is told as follows:

The daughter of Sham Pundit has come to the banks of the river to celebrate the cult of the *Asath* tree. She has seven sons and seven daughters-in-law.

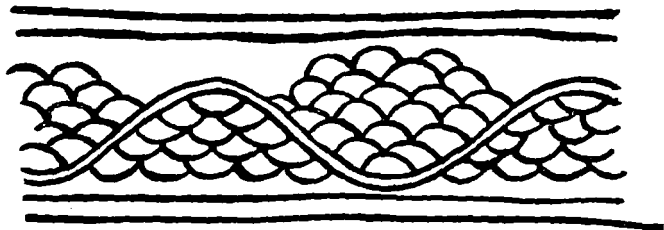
Sham Pundit and his wife have also come—he on the back of an elephant, she carried on a golden throne. The seven sons have ridden on horses, the seven daughters-in-law in palanquins. The household deities follow them, carried on richly decorated seats. At the rear the village boys and girls come to see the celebration.

The God of the hearth says to the goddess: "What are these human beings doing on the banks of the river?"

The goddess answers:—"They are celebrating the worship of the *Asath* tree."

The god asks again: "What do they expect from the ceremony?"

The goddess replies: "Happiness, peace and power."



BASUDHARA VRATA. (The Invocation to the Rains).

The leaves and the flowers wither, the dried-up ground cracks in the heat, water is scarce, and the whole world seems plunged in gloom. Then the young girls celebrate the Basudhara Vrata, to bring down the rain.

O Fire of devouring heat,
Thou dost invade the burning earth.
The Ganges, gone dry, has no more water.
The sky is ashen grey.

There is no enthusiasm or joy in this worship—one only hears sighs of grief.

The girls bring small trays and small fruits and sprinkle water on them, praying that the god of rains may be propitiated and shower rains.

BHADULI VRATA. (The cult of the goddess of the rains).

This worship of the goddess of the rains also takes the form of a little drama.

The ceremony begins in July. The rivers are on the point of overflowing; a young girl and a little veiled bride, followed by their companions, go towards the river; they carry their jars for water on their hips, and the rhythm of their songs goes with the swing of their steps.

O Rivers, O Rivers,
That will meet here,
The goddess of the rain
Will put an end to unhappiness.

A fugitive ray of sunlight lights up the little sandy island that rises above the water like a shining star; and the little girl sings:

Sandy isle, listen to me,
 Look well around you.
 If you see my father and my brothers
 Smile at them from me.

Then a little boat without a rudder goes drifting down, carried away by the quick current of the river, and the little girl cries:

O Boat, O hastening Boat, stay close to the sea
 Remember my father,
 Remember my brothers.

We now come to the heart of the ceremony, and another scene begins.

The night is dark, the landscape is surrounded by mountains and jungles full of thorns. One can hear the distant moaning of the sea and the cries of wild animals.

The little girl, terrified, implores:

O Tiger of the Forest,
 O Buffalo of the Forest,
 Pass by my father and my brother,
 Forget all their sins.



And they all repeat weeping:

O, to what far-off land
 Have my father and my brothers gone?
 O, to what far-off land
 Have my father-in-law and my husband gone?

Then the goddess of the forest reassures them:

They went by this road,
 They will return by another.

The sun at last rises. They offer him flowers
 and sing:

O Mountain made golden by the rising Sun,
 O Goddess of good omen, thou whom we adore,
 Grant that our father and our brothers
 May soon return home.

Then addressing the goddess of the forest:

We wish for thee a Golden Throne.

The goddess of the rains appears, her head
 crowned with a double diadem; she rises above
 the sea, one foot planted on day, and the other
 on night.

The sea sings:

The breezes of the seven seas
 Make my waves stormy.

The goddess of the forest replies:

Sea, O Sea, I greet thee.

The little girl says to the sea:

Sea, grow calm—truce with thee.

Then all in chorus:

My father and my brothers have gone far off,
My husband too has gone with them.

Then a voice which comes from the sky, cries:

They will all come back today,
They will all come back today.

And all bow before the goddess of the rains, protector of travellers, who has her feet set on two boats, with two golden umbrellas stretched over her head.

The third scene is played in a village, at the end of September. The autumn has cast its veil over the sleeping village. The pond behind the house is full to the brim; a ray of sunshine dances on the water. . . Two birds sing on two palm trees:

Little girls, wake up, O little girls!
Thanks to the goddess Bhaduli,
Seven big boats
Have been sighted today.

A door opens, the little girls and the daughters-in-law appear, each bearing a tray of offerings. They come out of the house, while an old neighbour cries:

O neighbours, little neighbours,
Life is long.

Two birds are seen on the palm trees.

Hark, who is sounding a trumpet
On the river bank?

The young girls reply:

They are our people,
People from our house.

The trumpet goes on sounding in the distance, a flight of birds crosses the sky, and all the girls cry:

Little birds, little birds
Come down to the water with us,
To greet the boats.
Come with us, little birds.

The ceremony ends one morning on the banks of the Ganges. The white sails of several boats can be seen in the distance. They approach, one after the other, and draw up alongside. Then travellers come and go and their voices mingle. Men leave the ship carrying their wares.

The young girls sing:

We offer sandal-wood paste
To the planks of wood of the ship.
Our father and our brothers have come back.
We offer vermilion
To the wooden planks of the ship.
We are happy to see our father and our brothers.

The daughter-in-law throws flowers into the river together with a little branch of the banana tree. She is dressed as a bride, and she sings:

We have offered all these gifts to the Ganges,
Now let us go and prepare the meal.

Then the travellers and the sailors come out of the boat and they say:—

After having crossed the seas
We at last return to our home.
One of the ships foundered on a sand bank,
And we abandoned it.
We are returning from far-off lands.
With our merchandise and other wares.

The young girls sing:

We are surrounded on all sides by priests.
The gods will protect you
In far-off lands.

The head priest approaches with offerings, singing:

We greet thee, O Goddess of rain.
Protect the land of thy worshippers.

There are certain other *Vratias* which are of minor importance and are not directly connected with the seasons. But they play an important part in the daily life of little girls by whom these cults are chiefly celebrated.

SEJUTI VRATA. This is the worship of the goddess of the evening. The thin quivering flame of the lamp, the penetrating perfume of the jasmine flower, the timid coming of the twilight—these jointly symbolize this goddess. The celebration takes place in the evening.

This is the most celebrated cult and involves forty different *Alponas* of various objects, before each of which a flower and a song are offered and a rhyme is recited.

Unfortunately we have here only a few fragments of these rhymes, in which the worshipper expresses her desires:

O Goddess of Evening!
In sixteen houses
Sixteen young girls
Adore thee at twilight.
I am one of them,
I am one of thy worshippers.

I ask thee a boon:
 May my parents' home
 Be prosperous and full of children.

Then offering a flower to the *Alpona* of the palanquin, she says:

The decorated palanquin
 Leaves my parents' house
 For my husband's home.
 As it goes on its way
 We exchange the drop of honey.*

Before the *Alpona* of aubergine she sings the following wish:

The petals of the aubergine
 Are faded and drooping.
 May my mother hold on her knees
 A bar of sparkling gold.

Then putting a flower in front of each of the different *Alponas*, she sings in turn:

Spider, O little image
 Of the brown spider,
 May my mother have good children
 As handsome as the moon.
 O Betel tree, O Kakowri tree,
 I clasp you round the middle of your trunk.
 My father is the king of kings,
 And my brother is a king.
 Reed, O Reed,
 My brother is the handsomest
 Of the husbands of the village.
 Bamboo, O Bamboo.
 My brother is a part of the moon.
 O seat cut from a mango tree,
 You are soft and shiny.

* An allusion to the ceremony when the newly-wed bridegroom and bride exchange honey so that their words may be gentle.

Only my dear brothers
 May sit on you.
 O young bamboo shoot,
 O young date-palm shoot.
 I pour butter over you,
 So that I may be a king's daughter.
 I pour honey on you,
 That I may be the daughter-in-law of a king.
 I pour water on you,
 That I may be the queen of a king.
 O Tree with red berries,
 May I have no rival in the love of my love.
 Sparrow, O Sparrow, the river is about to overflow.
 I shall build my house on a height
 Whence I shall see all the rice-fields grow ripe.
 They will bring me bags full of gold.
 And I shall spend a whole day counting it.
 Then I shall spend a whole day measuring it.
 O my little boy, you are back so late!
 You dropped your umbrella on the road.
 Ah, that is why you are back so late.
 Come here and sit on the couch.
 I will wipe the dust from your feet.
 I will give you a golden ball,
 And you may play in the streets.
 Joined together like the Ganges and the Jumna,
 I am the sister of seven brothers
 I am faithful as Savitri.*
 I eat my food out of a golden plate.
 I worship the Ganges and the Jumna.
 Sun and Moon, I worship you.
 I have brothers as many as
 There are stars in the heavens.
 I worship the stars, and go home in peace.
 The ground is strewn with flowers
 Red as the young Sun God.

* The proverbial faithful wife, who through her constancy brought back her husband from the hands of Death.

O Goddess, grant me leave
 That I may go home in peace.
 O Goddess, I adore thee,
 Let my heart be firm in faith."

HARICHARAN VRATA. (The worship of the feet of Hari.) Little girls perform this ceremony during the whole of the month of Baisākh (middle March) starting from the first day of the first month of the Bengali year. On a plate of copper the feet of Hari are drawn with sandal wood paste; and the girls offer flowers and prayers to the deity repeating what their elders have taught them.

ADAR SINGHASAN VRATA. (The cult of the throne of love.) For this worship a beautiful woman is sought whose faith and love have not been broken, and who is reputed to be all the more fortunate in not having a rival in love. She has to sit on a wooden throne decorated with *Alpona*, and flowers and fruits are offered her by those desirous of being happy in love.

Alpona is also freely used in connection with family festivals, notably in connection with the ceremonies attendant on a wedding.



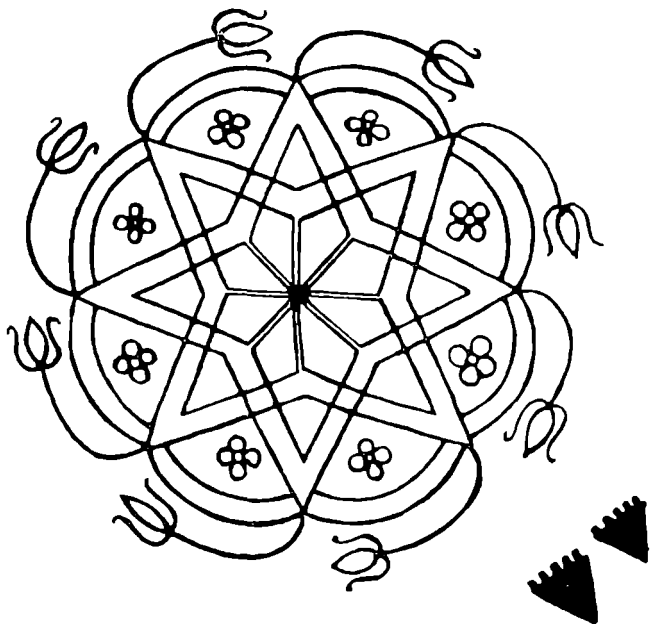
These ceremonies are performed in two parts, one at the house of the bride and another at the bridegroom's.

In India marriages are always celebrated in the evening. The young man has to go to the house of his bride, where the giving away ceremony takes place. It begins by the welcoming of the bridegroom, who has to stand on a small wooden seat decorated with the *Alponas* whilst the young matrons of the bride's family throw objects of good omen such as flowers, grains, betel-nuts, etc., at him. Only the married women are chosen to perform these ceremonies, no widows or maidens take part in them.

Some small matted trays containing, in little earthen pots decorated with *Alponas*, grain, milk, money and other small objects considered auspicious in India and also lighted clay lamps are brought in, and these are waved seven times from the foot to the head of the young man who has to stand motionless on the seat. The graceful rhythm of the woman's hand and the dim flickering light of the clay lamp together with the solemn incantations wafted by gentle breezes make the heart of the bridegroom quiver with emotion.



This ended, the young man is conducted to a big reception room where the guests have assembled. The floor and the walls of the room



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are decorated with *Alponas* of creepers and lotuses. And here, in the presence of the guests, the father or the nearest male relative gives away the girl to her husband. The last words uttered by the bridegroom complete the ceremonies:

Let our hearts be united
 In love and in faith.
 Let the heart that is mine
 Be thine.
 Let the heart that is thine
 Be mine.

On the following morning the bride accompanies her husband to her new home.

In the inner courtyard of the house a shallow hole has been dug to imitate a pond. It is filled with fresh milk. The space round it has been decorated with *Alponas*, and a wooden seat placed in the middle of four small banana trees. The usual ceremonies of welcome are gone through, accompanied by offerings of flowers and prayers. At last the hearth-fire is lit and offering made to it, so that all evils may disappear.

The ceremonies end with the bridegroom and the bride taking seven steps leading to the bridal chamber. At each step the bridegroom utters a verse of the Scriptures:

In the name of God take the first step
 to find Him and to follow me.
 In the name of God take the second step
 to find strength and to follow me.
 In the name of God take the third step
 for steadfast love and to follow me.
 In the name of God take the fourth step
 for everlasting joy and to follow me.
 In the name of God take the fifth step
 to find the sustenance of life and to follow me.
 In the name of God take the sixth step
 to find wealth and to follow me.
 For mutual love take the seventh step
 in the name of God and to follow me.

At the seventh step, the husband offers blessings to his wife:

Be my loving mate—may I always have your love.
 Let not any other woman ever cut the knot of our love.
 Let the happy woman bind the knot of our love strong.

In the bridal chamber the bridegroom and the bride exchange sweets, honey and betel, so that their words may be gentle and that they may not stir up discord in the hearts of each other.

Another domestic festival with which *Alpona* is connected is a sort of christening ceremony. When the child is six months old it is given solid food for the first time, and also its name. This event forms the occasion for a festival. The child, with its head shaved, and dressed in red garb, is placed on a wooden seat decorated with *Alpona*, and the child's name is traced on it with decorative Bengali letters. The eldest maternal uncle sits beside the child surrounded by dishes especially prepared for the occasion. He dips his little finger into the various dishes, and lightly touches the baby's lips. Prayers are offered, deities invoked, and the ceremonies end with the guests being sumptuously entertained.

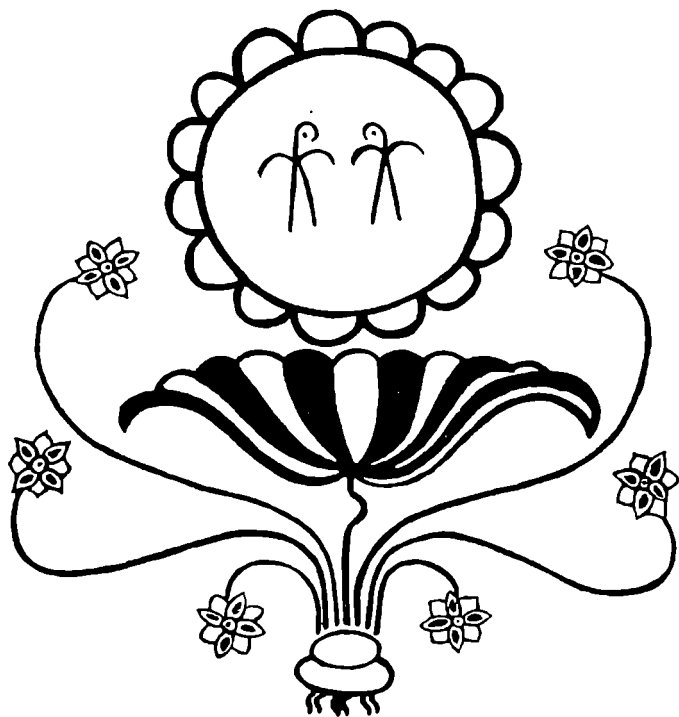
Alpona is also used for the reception of a distinguished guest. The places where the guest



sits and dines, and the seats used by him, are all decorated with *Alpona* of lotuses and creepers.

In far-off villages of Bengal, remote from modern civilization, these *Alponas* live and glow anew in the heart of Bengali girls.

The celebrations of the *Vratas* show how faith can be expressed in beauty when it comes out from the depths of the heart.



(No. 13)

NOTES ON ILLUSTRATIONS

GENERAL

The word *Alpona* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Alimpanā* which points to the basic technique of this kind of artistic activities. The root 'lip' here means 'to plaster' (with fingers) and not to paint (with a brush).

Alpona is found practically throughout the whole of India but it predominates along a coastal belt extending from Bengal to Sind. The elements which compose this trait-complex gradually decrease in number and variety as we proceed towards the interior of the country from any point on this coastal belt. *Alpona* holds an important position in the socio-religious life of the Hindus of India. The followers of other religions of India such as Islam, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism, do not employ these artistic embellishments in any of their social or religious rites. Even among the different groups of aboriginal population we do not find its occurrence except at places where they have been deeply influenced by Hindu culture.

Alpona has attained its highest development in Bengal. It is used in this province on all occasions of religious and social ceremonies. It is, in fact, an auspicious object which often has magical import too. Whenever a Hindu deity is worshipped in Bengal a *Mangal-ghat* (auspicious pot) is placed before the idol. It is either made of earth or copper and is filled with water. A mango twig (*āmra-pallav*) with five leaves is placed on the top of this pot. Occasionally this pot serves the purpose of the idol itself. The *Mangal-ghat* is invariably placed in the centre of an *Alpona*. But *Alpona* is more in evidence in the folk-rites; it is an integral part of them. *Chhadā* (ballads) and *Alpona* are the two halves of each folk-rite. Social

occasions like marriage, first rice-eating, investiture with the sacred thread, and offerings to ancestors are also marked with the execution of *Alpona* as an essential part of the ceremony.

Alpona is essentially adapted to a plane surface. It is generally executed on the courtyard or on the floor of a house. It is also found on low wooden seats or on the upper surface of winnowing fans which usually consist of basketry-work. It may also be depicted on the outer surface of earthen pots used in socio-religious rites. But on the rounded body of the pot *Alpona* loses its natural flourish and often degenerates into mere geometrical designs.

Generally *Alpona* is executed with rice-paste mixed with water. A quantity of sunned rice (*ātap chāul*) is kept immersed for an hour or two in water and then ground into a paste. It is next mixed with water in a small cup. The girl-artist holds a little piece of cloth (about 10 to 12 square inches) with the tips of the first four fingers of her right hand and dips it in the mixture of rice-paste already prepared. The piece of cloth soaks a little of this mixture. She then draws the different designs of the *Alpona* with the middle finger of her right hand which slightly protrudes beyond the other fingers holding the piece of cloth and which is fed with the mixture from the cloth. The design is never traced on the ground before the mixture is applied. The artist always starts her work from the centre of the *Alpona* and goes on building it up, step by step, with different decorative designs. Each piece of *Alpona*, as a general rule, consists of two classes of designs, viz. ceremonial and decorative. The artist is required to put the ceremonial designs in their proper shape and place and has no option regarding these factors. But she is free to give play to her imagination in respect of the decorative designs.

Alponas are invariably executed by the women-folk though there is no taboo on men. In practice it is

never done by the men-folk. The girls start learning it at a very young age—between six and seven. By thirteen or fourteen they become experts.

Most of the *Alponas*, as already stated, are executed on the courtyard or floor of a house, which in ordinary Bengali homes is always of earth. The rice-paste mixture is easily soaked by the ground and dries within a short time leaving a bright white colour against the grey background of the earth. Though white is the prevailing colour of the *Alponas* yet in some of the more ambitious ones (e.g. *Tārā-Vrata*) other colours are also introduced. These colours are generally obtained by pressing the leaves and flowers available at the time in the locality, e.g. green colour is obtained from the leaves of beans.

Alponas, as a general rule, are executed with liquid colours. But on certain occasions, such as *Māgh-mandal-Vrata*, they are made with powders of different materials. Thus, charcoal supplies them with black colour, brick with brown colour, dried leaves with dirty green, etc. The artist holds a quantity of this powder with the tips of the first three fingers of her right hand and slowly drops it on the ground, thereby executing the designs of the *Alpona*. In this kind of *Alpona* too the designs are never previously traced on the ground.

The motifs of *Alpona*, included in this book, may be classified into the following seven groups:

- (1) Lotuses, (2) Creepers, (3) Animal and anthropomorphic figures, (4) Trees and plants, (5) Heavenly bodies, (6) Material objects desired by the devotees and (7) Foot-prints.

These motifs occur in the *Alponas* singly (as in Nos. 1, 3, etc.) or in groups (as in Nos. 2, 16, 21, etc.). We shall now deal with them individually and try to indicate the occasions when they are used and their magico-religious import.

No. 1 (On page iii)

This is a lotus of the eight-petalled variety (*Astadal-padma*) which is an auspicious design. Generally this motif is used at the time of marriage both in the house of the bride and of the bridegroom. It is drawn on the courtyard and is often very elaborately decorated with creeper-motifs all around. Hindu marriage is a gift of the bride to the bridegroom. The bride and the groom sit on low wooden seats (*Pidis*) similarly decorated and placed on this *Alpona* when the gift is made. On the next day, when the bride arrives at the house of the groom she is made to stand on a *Pidi* (low wooden seat) placed on an *Alpona* with similar motif. This motif is also used to place the *Mangal-ghat* in the worship of different deities. On the outer margin of the lotus there are eight buds which are mere decorative elements.

No. 2 (Facing page 1)

This *Alpona* is executed on a *Pidi* (low wooden seat) on which the *Lakshmi-sharā* is placed at the worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune of the Hindu Pantheon. The *Lakshmi-sharā* is a concavo-convex earthen plate on the convex side of which the figures of Lakshmi, her attendants and carrier, are painted in different colours. The four borders of the *Pidi* illustrated here are decorated with floral or geometrical designs. Within the borders, at the top, are two foot-marks, which are of ceremonial importance. The goddess of fortune is fondly believed to enter into the house on this day and she leaves her foot-marks on the courtyard, on the plinths of the houses and on the floors. Below the foot-marks is a necklace, beneath which again is a pair of creepers with flowers at the top. This is followed by a looking-glass on the left and a comb on the right. Beneath these two, and between two flowers, is a fish which is an auspicious object in the popular beliefs of Bengal. At the left hand corner is a conch-shell and a *Kājal-latā* (a metallic spoon for preparing stibium for the eyes), and on the right hand corner a vermilion pot.

Looking-glass, comb, vermilion pot, *Kājal-latā*, fish and conch-shell are objects used by married women and as such are auspicious ones. These articles are tabooed to widows. The conch-shell here stands for the bangles made from it which married women invariably wear as ceremonial objects. The conch-shell is also an essential object of the seat of Lakshmi.

No. 3 (On page 5)

This variety of creeper-motif along with seven others (Nos. 4—10) are used singly or in association for decorative purpose only. These have no religious or magical import. The constituent elements of these motifs often occur in nature but their conversion into creepers is the product of pure imagination of the girl-artists. These motifs are not essentially associated with any particular worship or ceremonial but are used whenever the young artist is free to show her skill in ornamentation.

This particular variety of creeper-motif is composed of bunches of plantain hanging from the loops of a creeper. There is nothing like this in nature.

No. 4 (On page 7)

Another creeper-motif composed of *Khuntis* spreading out of the two ends of a loop. *Khunti* is a spud of iron or brass which is constantly used by women in moving objects on the frying pan.

No. 5 (On page 9)

A creeper-motif consisting of a number of loops filled with *Khai* or fried paddy and bordered on the top or bottom, as the case may be, with the teeth of a comb. Fried paddy is an auspicious thing of the Hindus from the Vedic days. It is, however, doubtful whether this idea plays any part in this decorative motif.

No. 6 (On page 14)

The same motif without the teeth of the comb.

No. 7 (On page 15)

Creeper-motif composed of plantains.

No. 8 (On page 18)

Creeper-motif composed of bunches of plantains.

No. 9 (On page 25)

Creeper-motif made with heaps of fried paddy inside loops.

No. 10 (On page 26)

This motif, known as *Chāltā-latā*, consists of a number of loops inside each of which is depicted the inner part of the acid fruit of a *Chāltā* (*Dillenia speciosa*). The loops are connected above and below with lines, on the top of which are shown the petals of the flower of this tree.

No. 11 (On page 27)

A lotus motif mainly geometrical in composition. In between the petals are small flowers. On the periphery there are eight lotus buds each of which projects from the head of a petal. At the bottom right-hand corner there is a pair of foot-marks of Lakshmi which indicates the use of this *Alpona* in the worship of the Goddess of Fortune.

No. 12 (On page 29)

It is a motif borrowed from an ornament worn by the women of Bengal. *Paichhā*, the name of the ornament, is made of gold or silver and is worn on the upper arm, a little above the elbow. This motif is used alone for decoration as a border when it is not essentially associated with any ceremonial. But it is also depicted as an object of desire in *Tārā-vrata* (worship of the planets) and *Lakshmi-pujā*.

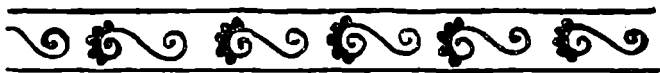
No. 13 (On page 30)

This *Alpona* is connected with the worship of Prithivi, the Earth-Goddess, who is depicted at the top with her husband in the midst of a circle which perhaps

represents the earth. The other essential element of this *Alpona* is the lotus-leaf which has been placed immediately beneath this circle. The stem of the leaf goes down deep into the earth where the roots are shown. Six *Astadal Padmas* (eight-petalled lotuses) with stalks of different size rise from the same spot and are placed at different positions as decorative elements. The connection between lotus-leaf and the Earth-Goddess is not explained in the *Kathā* (story) associated with this worship. Possibly the circular lotus-leaf has a semblance with the earth as it appears to the unsophisticated devotees. In the ballad of this worship it is said, 'We worship the earth in the lotus leaf'.

No. 14 (below)

Charan or the foot-marks of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune of the Hindus, is a very important motif in *Alpona*. In the present case a series of these foot-marks, placed between two lines, has been turned into a creeper-motif which is both ceremonial and decorative.



(No. 14)

No. 15 (next page)

This *Alpona* is executed on the floor of the main house on the occasion of the worship of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune. It consists of two parts—the lotus and the creepers. The creepers begin at the main entrance to the house and continue up to the middle post (*Madhum* or *Madhyam Khām*) on the opposite side of the wall where the lotus is executed.

The upper part of this *Alpona* consists of an eight petalled lotus in the centre around which is a creeper taken from nature, surrounding which is a number of foot-marks of Lakshmi. At the periphery we meet with



(No. 15)

a series of what is technically called *Yātrā-kalas*. *Yātrā-kalas* is the conventional sign of a pot filled with water and having on the top a mango twig with five leaves. This pot is an auspicious object and forms an essential feature of all religious worships as well as ceremonial occasions. Its conventional design is also equally auspicious and important.

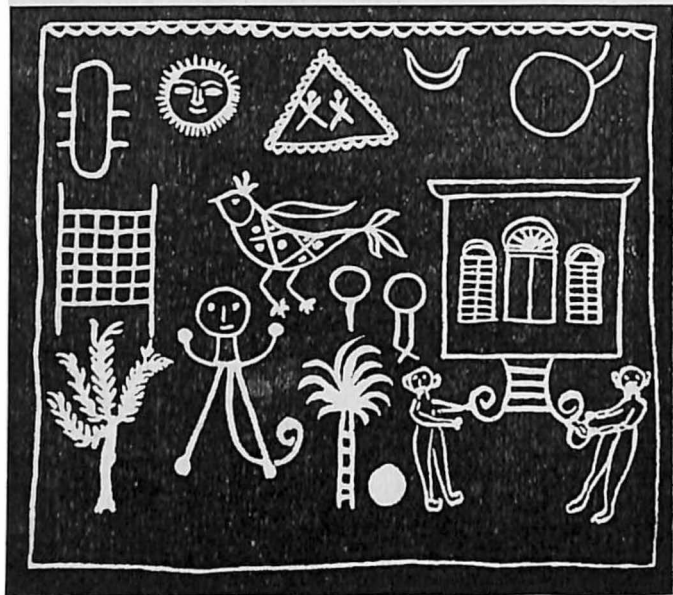
The lower part of the *Alpona* consists of three elements. On the left is a creeper made out of balsam flowers and leaves (*Dopāti-latā*). Next to it, in the middle, we find a *Dhān-chhadā* or paddy plant, interspersed with foot-marks of Lakshmi. On the extreme right is an aquatic creeper known as *Kalmi-latā*.

Paddy is regarded as the chief wealth of Bengal and Lakshmi is held to be the presiding deity of paddy. She is worshipped on three different occasions in the year but the festival which takes place in her honour in the month of Aswin (September-October) on the full-moon night is the most important one. This goddess is worshipped all over the province in every Hindu home, high or low, rich or poor. Sweets of different varieties are made on this occasion and freely distributed among friends, relatives and dependants. The worship of Lakshmi in Aswin is connected with the ripening of the early winter paddy.

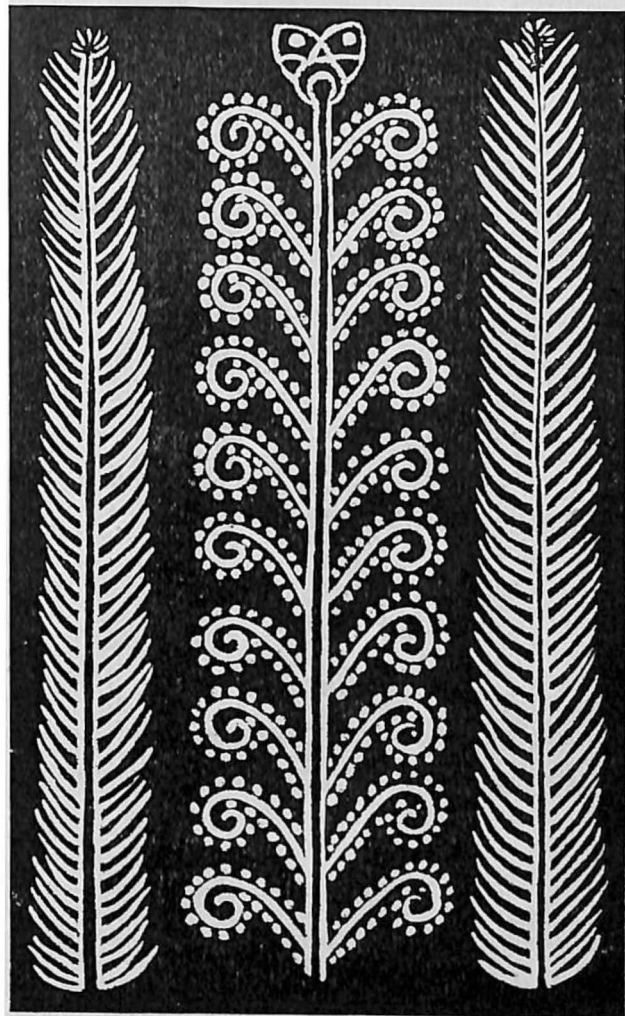
No. 16 (next page)

This is the *Alpona* of Sejuti-vrata. This rite is generally performed daily by young girls from the last day of the month of Kārtick (October-November) to the last day of Agrahāyana (November-December). It is practised for the good of the devotee's brothers, for the destruction of her co-wives and for the increase of wealth.

At the top of the *Alpona* the conventional figures of the sun and the moon (the latter in the shape of a crescent) are portrayed. Between them, on a triangular seat, are the anthropomorphic figures of Ganga and



(No. 16)



Jamuna—the presiding deities of the two sacred rivers of the Hindus *viz.*, the Ganges and the Jumna. By the side of the crescent moon occurs the figure of a hearth, indicative of the kitchen-shed, and at the opposite corner, that of a husking machine. In the middle row, on the extreme left, is a *Dolā* or palanquin. After this is a bird followed by a spoon for preparing stibium (*Kājal-latā*) and a pincer. At the extreme right of this row is depicted a brick-built house, with two guards standing outside the door, which marks the opulent condition of lower garment sweeping the ground. This is a well-known pose of the old and middle-aged men among the well-to-do people of Bengal. The devotee invokes this condition for her brothers and other male relatives.

The figures of the deities Ganga, Jamuna, Suryya, and Chandra are objects of worship in this rite. The hearth, husking machine, palanquin, brick-built house with guards, gardens of betel-nut and cocoanut trees and *Kājal-latā* are objects which the performer desires to have by this rite. The bird and the pincer are associated with the ballads (*Chhadā*) recited on the occasion.

No. 17 (On page 41)

This *Alpona* is used in the worship of Lakshmi. On two sides are depicted two paddy plants with leaves growing out of the stem at regular intervals. In the middle is a stalk of paddy showing the grains.

No. 18 (Opposite)

This *Alpona* is also connected with the worship of Lakshmi and is executed on a low wooden seat which is placed near the middle post (*Madhum Khām*). With the exception of the conventional anthropomorphic figures of Lakshmi and her husband Narayana on a

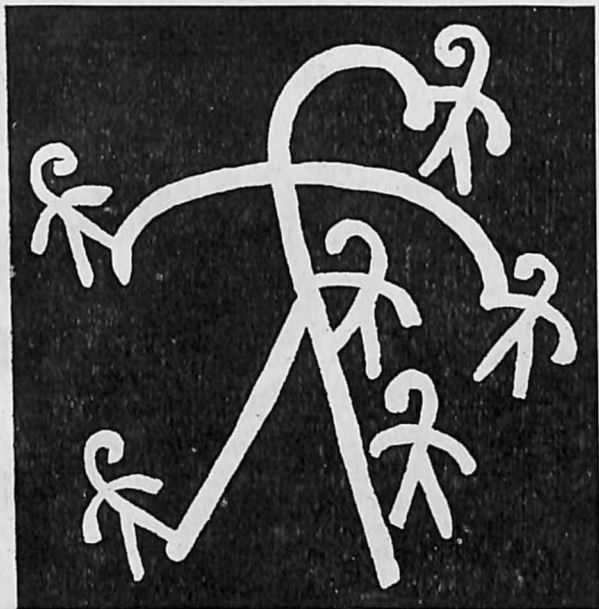
throne, at the top, attended by the two bird-carriers of the two deities (Gadura and Lakshmi-penchā), and foot-marks and a creeper at the bottom, all other objects portrayed here are articles which the female devotees desire to have by performing this worship.

The creeper, at the bottom, with fruits, flowers and leaves, leads to the steps of the house-floor depicted on a low wooden seat which is placed on a lotus (see No. 15). Lakshmi leaves her foot-marks on her way as she enters into the house. In the two corners, at the bottom, are two vermilion pots—the most eagerly desired object of a Bengalee woman. Vermilion paint on the forehead and parting of the hair of a woman indicates her married state. An unmarried girl may paint her forehead with vermilion but not the parting of the hair. A widow cannot use this paint on any part of her body—it is strictly tabooed to her. Vermilion is a sacred object of married women who lose it with the death of their husbands.

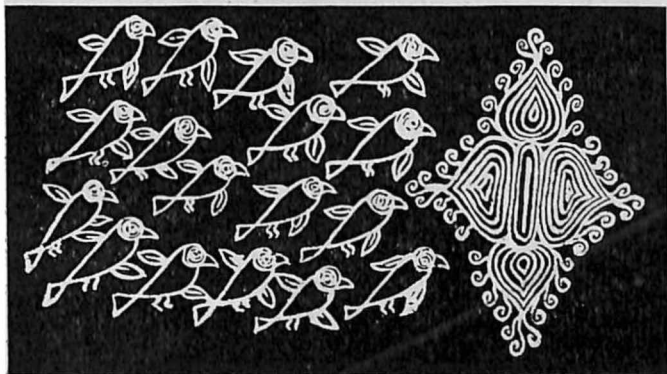
On the left, above the vermilion pot, is a *Bāju*—an ornament of the upper arm. Above it are three pairs of bangles of different types. On the top of these is a necklace. On the right, near the vermilion pot, are four *Naths* i.e. rings for the nasal septum. Above this vermilion pot is a *Sāri* (embroidered cloth worn by married and unmarried women). At the bottom there is a pair of foot-marks of Lakshmi above which is a dinner plate of bell-metal with incised floral ornamentation at the border and spiral marks of the turner's chisel on the rest of its body. On the right of this plate is a drinking glass. Above the plate are a pair of armllets known as *Kālshi* and a pair of bangles. On two sides of Lakshmi-Narayana are two car-tops. Besides these there are some other ornaments.

No. 19 (Opposite)

This *Alpona* as well as Nos. 23 and 32 are connected with *Tārā-vrata*. Young girls usually perform this worship. The objects of worship are *Suryya* (Sun),



(No. 19)



(No. 20)

Chandra (Moon), and Tārā (Stars). In some parts, Indra the thunder-god is also worshipped. The stars worshipped on this occasion are sometimes identified with the Pleiades.

This *Alpona* (No. 19) depicts the conventional figure of a woman with a superfluity of children who are found on the mother's arms, waist and near her legs. The worshipper hereby expresses her desire to have a large progeny.

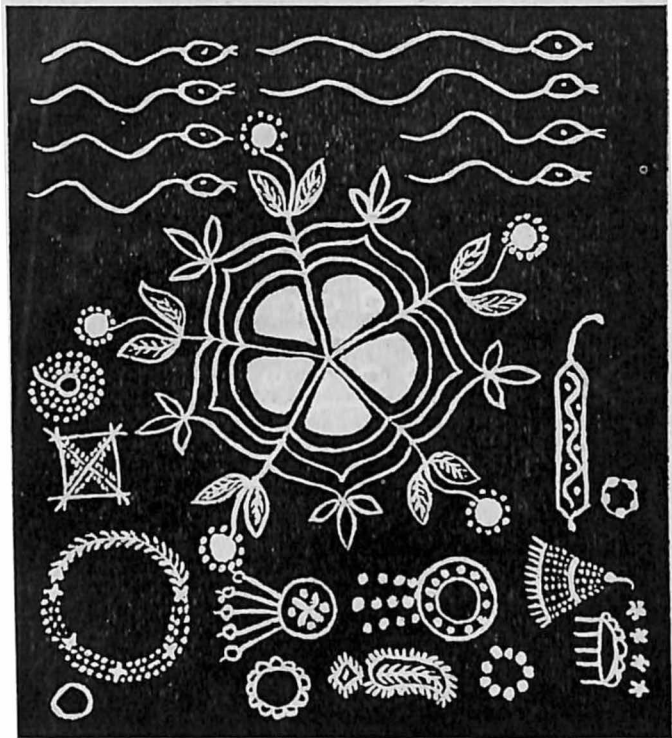
No. 20 (On page 45)

This *Alpona* is depicted on the occasion of Subachani-vrata. It shows a number of ducks moving about in a tank and the seat of the goddess Subachani.

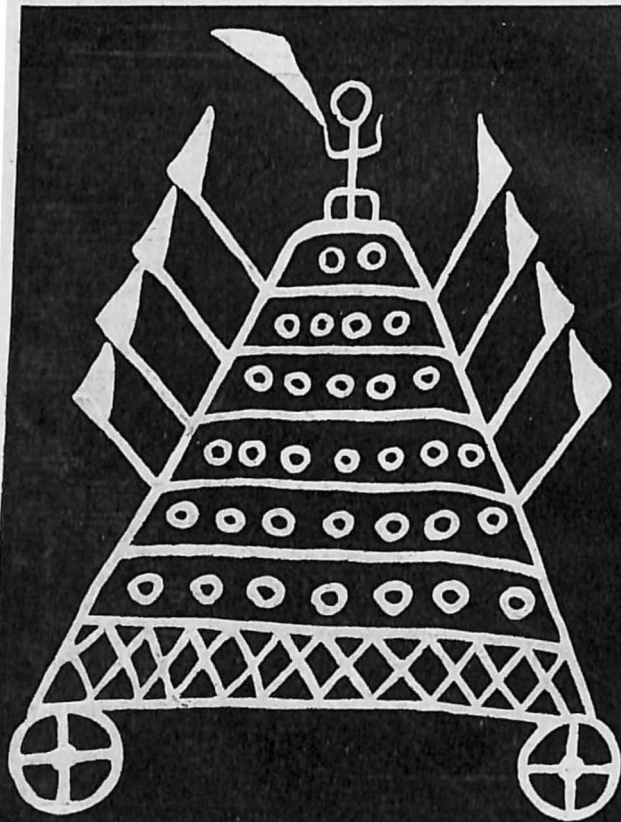
A king had a large number of ducks one of which was killed and eaten by a Brahmin lad who was traced and imprisoned for this offence. The mother of the lad worshipped Subachani for his release. The goddess was pleased and restored the duck to life. She then ordered the king, in a dream, to release the lad and give his daughter in marriage with him which was immediately done. The *Alpona* depicts and commemorates this event.

No. 21 (Opposite)

This is an *Alpona* used in the worship of Manasā, the goddess who presides over the snakes. It is not really a folk-rite of the women but is a Pauranik Pujā which can be traced back even to the Vedic times. Manasā is conceived as a beautiful woman clad in fine clothes and decked with various kinds of ornaments. She is worshipped in this form in the houses of rich men. But among common people she is worshipped in a cruder form (which is the earlier one). The image, in such cases, consists of either eight or forty-two snakes. Even where Manasā is worshipped in her anthropomorphic form the images of the Nāgas (snakes) are invariably included.



(No. 21)



(No. 22)

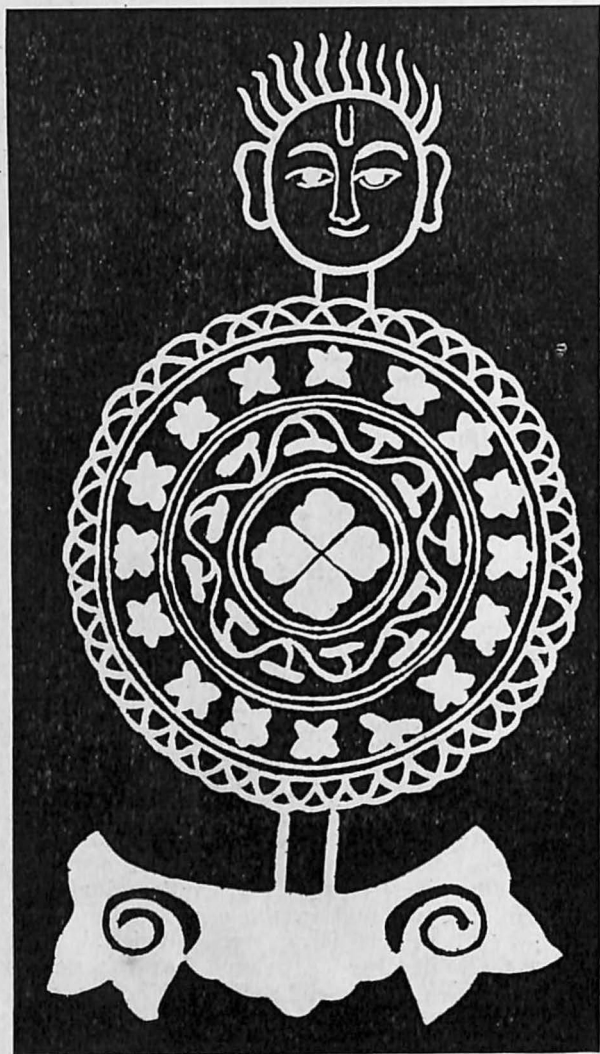
On the top of the *Alpona* we find the figures of eight snakes (*Asta-Nāgas*.) Besides them the *Alpona* includes an incorrectly executed lotus and the objects which the devotees desire to have by this Puja (worship). These objects are different kinds of ornaments such as *Kān-pāshā* (ear-ornament), ear-pendant, comb, *Bāju* (armlet), *Pāya-jor* (foot-ornament), etc.

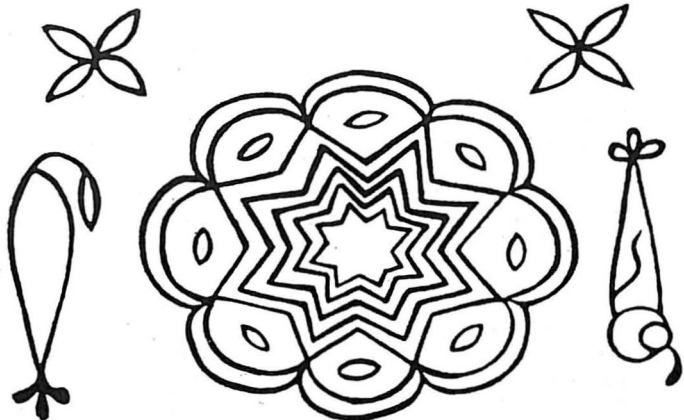
No. 22 (Opposite)

This is the mythological carriage of the gods and goddesses and of ancient heroes. It is nowadays especially associated with Jagannath (a form of Vishnu) who, according to popular belief, goes to the house of his father-in-law on the second day of the bright half of the month of Ashādh (June-July). On this occasion he is worshipped all over Bengal. This *Alpona* is connected with this rite. It may, as well, be included as an object of desire in other rites.

No. 23 (On next page)

This *Alpona* is also connected with *Tārā-vrata* (see Nos. 19 and 32). This is known as the *Bhū-mandal* or the Universe. In the mind of unlettered Bengalee girls the Universe consists of the sun, the moon, the stars and the earth. Here the sun is represented at the top by a human head with wavy lines indicative of the rays emanating from it. The moon is placed at the bottom in the form of a crescent. The spiral ends of the crescent are decorated with leaf motifs which have no ceremonial significance. Between the sun and the moon is the earth. It is always shown in *Alponas* as a flat circle and within this limitation the girl-artists are allowed to give free play to their imagination. In the present case we find in the centre a four-petalled flower around which is a creeper-design. This is encircled by a number of flowers. At the periphery is a design borrowed from hedging. These decorative designs within the circle have no ceremonial significance and they differ on different occasions.





(No. 24)



(No. 25)

No. 24 (On page 51)

In the centre is a lotus, on two sides of which are two cowrie shells. Two flowers are seen above the lotus but they cannot be identified. Cowrie shells are regarded as fertility emblems and they also served as currency in ancient Bengal. This *Alpona* is not associated with any particular *Pujā* or rite.

No. 25 (On page 51)

This lotus motif is associated with marriage (see No. 1) and is generally depicted on the courtyard of the house of the bridegroom. The bridegroom sits on a low wooden seat (*Pidi*) on this motif before he starts for the house of the bride and receives the blessings of his superiors. Other magico-religious rites are also performed at this time by the women-folk.

In the centre is the conventional eight-petalled lotus around which is a creeper-motif called *Khai-latā* and *Chiruni-dānt* (comb-teeth). (see No. 5)

No. 26 (Opposite)

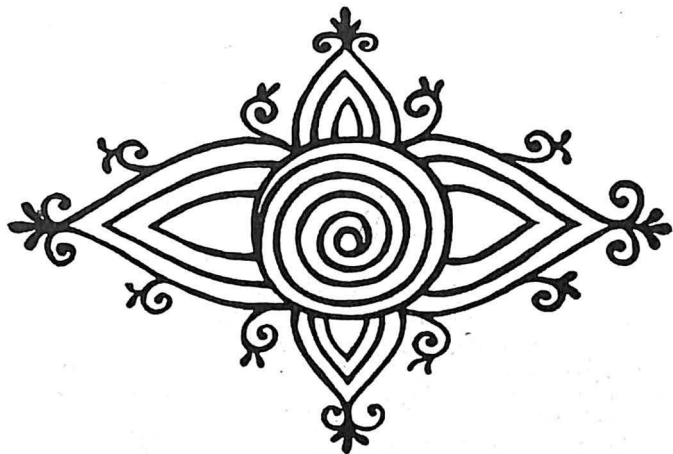
This is an auspicious motif consisting of a conch-shell, shown in the form of a spiral in the centre, and four *Yātrā-kalas* on four sides. (For explanation of the latter see No. 15).

No. 27 (Opposite)

This is also a conventional lotus. In the centre are eight petals in the form of conch-shells decorated with flower-buds. At the circumference is a creeper-motif known as *Sankha-latā* (conch-shell creeper). This is a very popular and wide-spread motif among the Bengalee girls. This lotus-motif is not associated with any particular rite but may be used on any occasion where a lotus-motif is required.

No. 28 (On page 54)

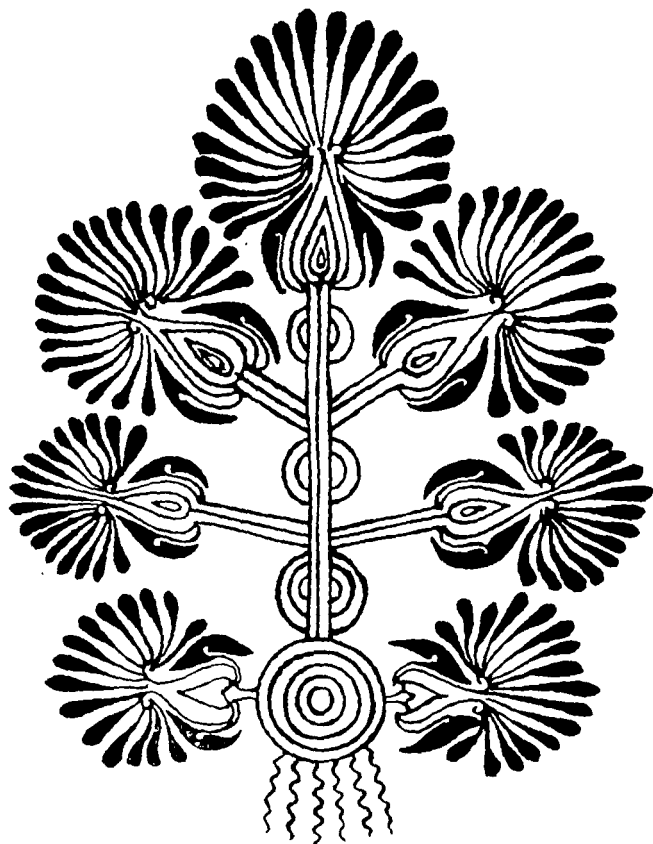
This is a palmyra tree showing the fronds and roots. It is associated with *Bhāduli-ṽrata*. (see No. 34)



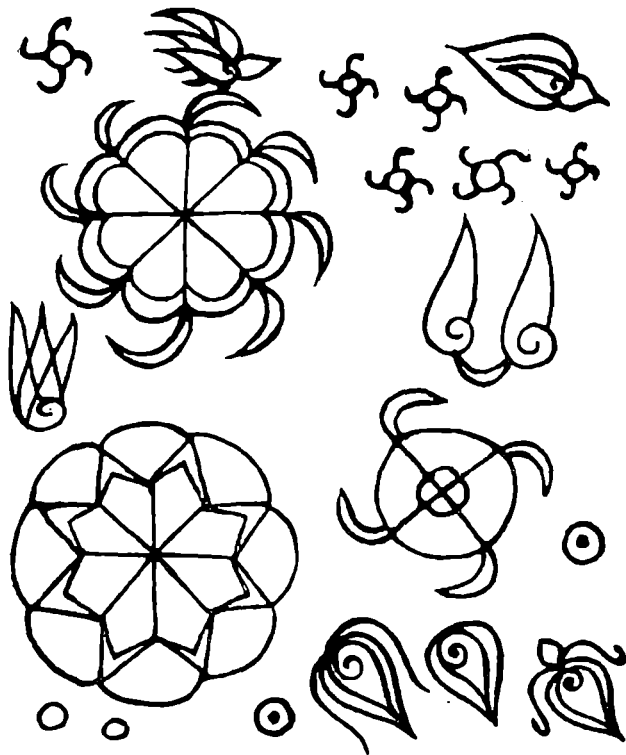
(No. 26)



(No. 27)



(No. 28)



(No. 29)

No. 29 (On page 55)

This *Alpona* consists of three lotuses, a number of butterflies (some of which are shown as flying towards them), a number of crabs, a few stars and a pair of conch-shells joined by a loop. It is not associated with any rite.

No. 30 (Opposite)

This *Alpona* is associated with the popular worship of the thunder-god Indra. This rite is locally called *Shaspātā* or *Bhānjo*. Indra is the king of the gods in Hindu pantheon and is in charge of the rains which cause the crops to grow. His chief weapon is the thunderbolt (*Vajra*) which is the central object of this *Alpona*. The *Vajra* is executed on the wooden seat of the god and it often represents the god himself. It is shown here in the form of a cross with heads looking like buds of lotus. Each bud has a butterfly at its head and a crab and a conch-shell on both sides. In between the buds are figures of fish. On the left side, below the fish, is an incense-burner. The crabs, conch-shells and fishes are suggestive of water which increases by rainfall. There is an element of sympathetic magic in this *Alpona*.

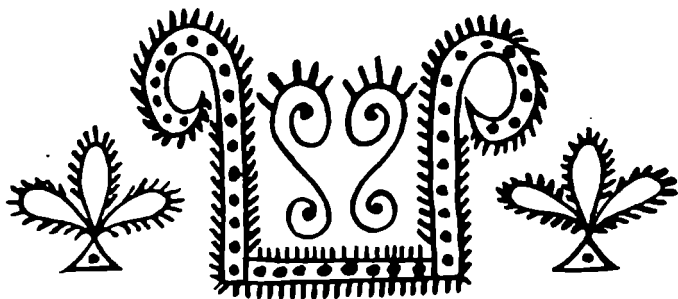
The popular worship of Indra is performed by the women-folk on the twelfth day of the bright half of the the month of Bhādra (August-September). The image of Indra is placed on this *Alpona* executed on a raised place or on a wooden seat. The girls, aged 6 to 20 or so, dance and sing round this image throughout the night. Men are not allowed to look upon this performance of the girls.

No. 31 (On page 58)

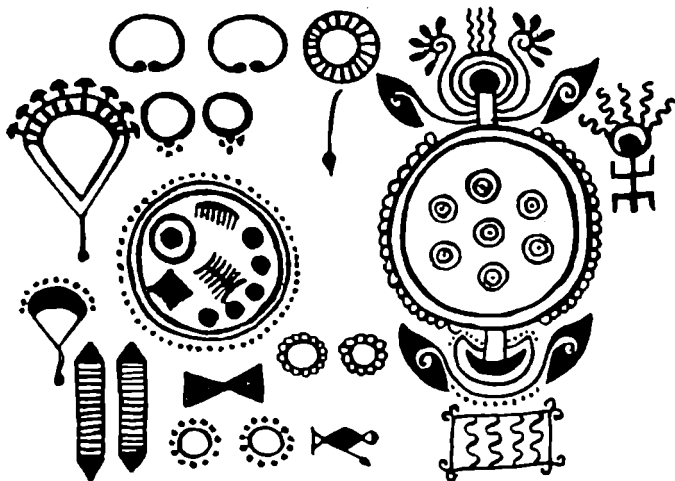
This *Alpona* is executed on the occasion of Hari-charan-vrata or the worship of the foot-marks of Hari, the Supreme God. This rite is performed by young unmarried girls for a month from the first day of Baisākh (April-May) and is continued for three or four



(No. 30)



(No. 31)



(No. 32)

years. Every day in the morning the girl-devotee bathes and plasters the upper surface of a brass plate with sandal-wood paste. She next draws two foot-marks of Hari with her finger on this surface. This is the most important part of the *Alpona*—the other objects are mere decorations.

No. 32 (Opposite)

This is another *Alpona* for Tārā-vrata (see Nos. 19 and 23). On the right we have the *Bhū-mandal* including the sun, the moon and the earth. Seven stars, perhaps the Pleiades, are depicted in the middle of the circle representing the earth. On the extreme right top is found an anthropomorphic figure of Indra, the thunder-god, with wavy hair. A threshold has been drawn below the crescent on which the devotee stands at the time of worship when she recites the ballads (*Chhadā*) and places the flowers on different objects of the *Alpona*. Besides these the other objects shown in the *Alpona* are the things desired by the devotee. They consist of different kinds of ornaments such as *Tabiz* (worn on the upper arms), *Mal* (anklets), bangles, necklets, armlets, etc., water-jug, wooden vermilion pot, and a vermilion basket containing comb, looking-glass, etc.

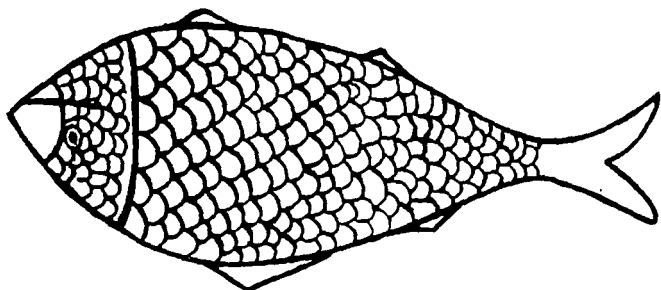
No. 33 (On page 60)

This is the figure of a fish which is regarded as an auspicious object by the Hindus of Bengal. This motif appears in almost all cases where water is shown or where the different kinds of animals are depicted.

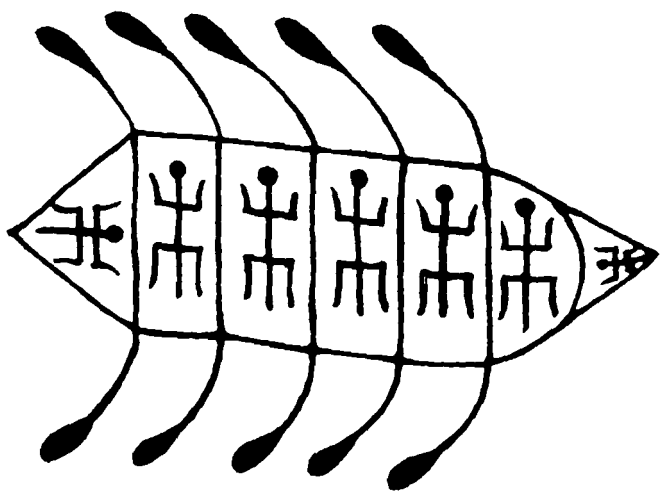
No. 34 (On page 60)

This is a boat with its crew and oars. There are seven conventional human figures, one at each end and five in the middle, each of the latter being in charge of a pair of oars.

This *Alpona* is connected with Bhāduli-vrata which is performed in the month of Bhādra (August-



(No. 33)

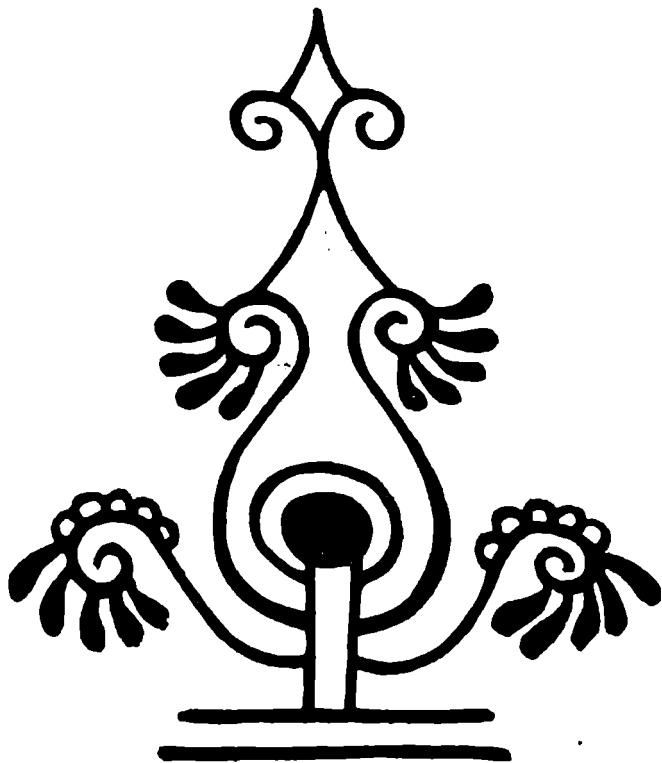


(No. 34)

September) when there is water on every side. The young girls perform this rite for the safe return of their relatives from far-off lands where they have gone on business. Bengal is a land of rivers and in the past it depended mainly on boats for its trade and transport. This fact finds expression in Bhāduli-vrata. The boat in the *Alpona* represents the arrival of the relatives of the performer from distant places. The ballads (*Chhadā*) connected with this rite describe the arrival of the party and its ceremonial welcome by the ladies of the house.

No. 35 (On page 62)

This is a conventional figure of Suryya, the Sun-God, with his head, hands and a crown. This motif is used in Tārā-vrata (see Nos. 19, 23, and 32) and may also be found in Toshlā-vrata and Māgh-mandal-vrata. Toshlā-vrata is an agricultural rite which reminds the people of the necessity of manuring their fields with farm-yard manure. Prayers are made to Suryya (Sun-God) on this occasion. Māgh-mandal-vrata dramatizes in ballads and represents the defeat of fog by Suryya and his marriage with Chandra-kalā (Moon), which is followed by the birth of their son, the spring season, whose union with the earth forms the last act of the drama.



(No. 35)

