

# Honoring The Arts of Homemaking

An Artist's Portrayal of the Hindu  
Wife's Traditional Domestic Duties



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## An Artist's Portrayal of the Hindu Wife's Traditional Domestic Duties

TODAY, COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLES ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE RE-evaluating how we live. As a global community, we are seeking more sustainable ways of life, seeking solutions to the myriad problems that our modern ways have caused since the Industrial Revolution—global warming, pollution of our air and waterways, concretization of our lands, deforestation, and the social ills of crime, poverty, abuse and broken homes. Peoples are evaluating old, traditional system to learn or relearn how we got along in the old days, without so many conveniences, when life was simpler, less competitive, less stressful and frantic. In this chapter, we bring you a collection of painting by S. Rajam, a gifted artist and musician born in a South Indian village in the old days of 1918, that depict the daily rituals commonly performed by Hindu wives and homemakers all over India, during his time and for centuries before. The same rituals can still be found today in villages and urban centers. The scenes in his 14 pieces follows the sequence of a day, from morning to dusk.

Then, as now, the wife and mother carries a momentous responsibility—the creation of a stable home and the raising of a fully functioning family. Her role, apart from the competitive, breadwinner world of men, is every bit as essential as her husband's. Rightly performed, each part of her daily ritual is done with a mindfulness based on knowledge of the workings of subtle energies, and of unseen angelic beings—the guardian *devas* of family members—and the aid they give. For example: the home's doorways and windows are seen as portals through which either helpful or antagonistic beings can enter. So daily decorating of entryways entreats guardian *devas* to allow access only to those who will strengthen and support the family. Similarly, she knows the womanly energy she imbues into a meal during its preparation can increase the health of all who partake of it, or, if negative, contribute to illness and distress. She also understands that clothing and other possessions respond to care or neglect just as people do, and that cleanliness and love bring forth a refined spiritual vibration. All her efforts serve to make the home a holy place. Indeed, each of the duties depicted in Rajam's art has esoteric and mystical aspects to be discovered and developed by the intuitive woman.

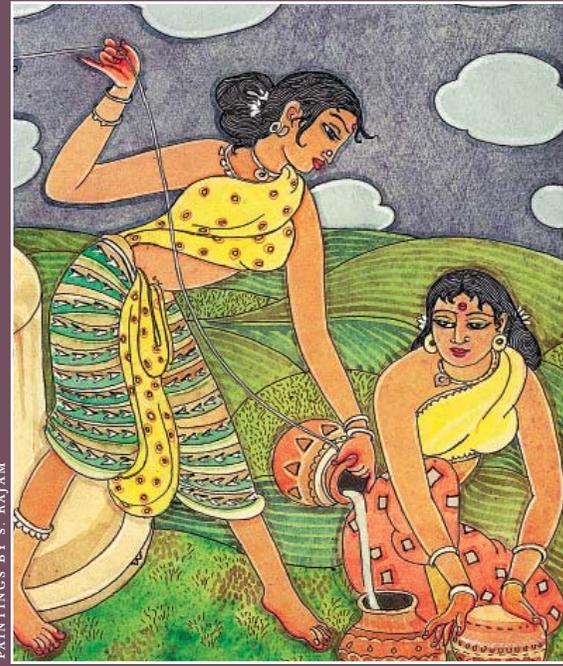
To urban wives and those living abroad, some of the tasks may seem irrelevant and the methods outdated, even demeaning. Rajam hopes modern Hindu individuals will discover how each duty relates to the current household environment. This woman's rustic tools may be replaced with electric utensils and food processors. Even the modern refrigerator door can be transformed into a place of blessing by daily posting a freshly ink-jetted *kolam* design upon it. With applied intuition and ingenuity, similar modernization of each of these principles will move them meaningfully into the future. And some of the simplicity may be revived in our efforts to find sustainable ways to survive on into the future.



Family life, however full, remains empty if  
the wife lacks the lofty culture of the home.  
Tirukural, verse 52  
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### Storytelling

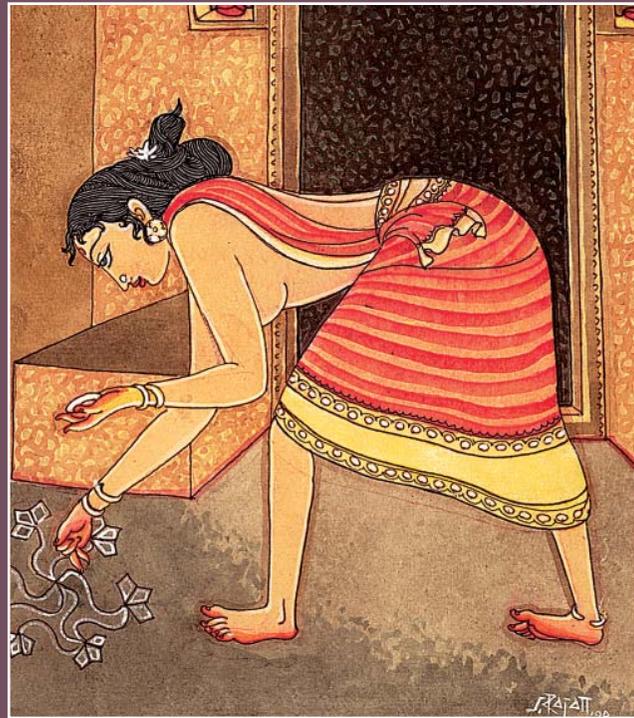
Before going to bed, children are fed  
light foods out in the open air. When the  
moonlight is seen, mother tells stories to  
inspire the child to linger and eat more.  
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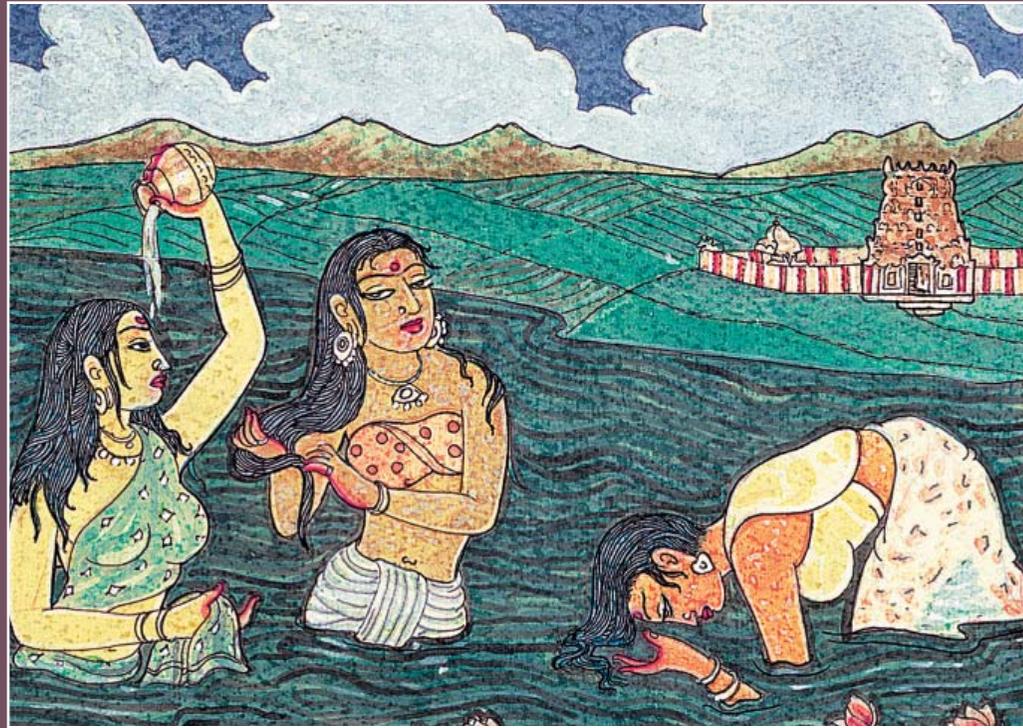
### Collecting Water

In the morning, women meet at the well to gather water for the day and to clean cooking utensils.



### Decorating the Entry

As the day begins, kolams are painted at the home entrance. First, water is mixed with cow dung and sprinkled on the ground. Then geometric designs are applied with powdered rice in many colors, guided by a trained thumb and index finger.

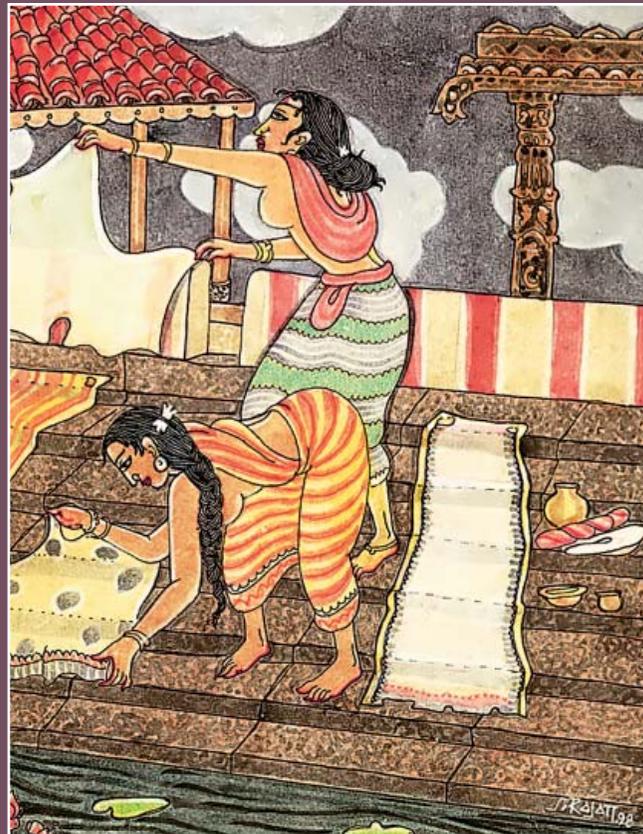
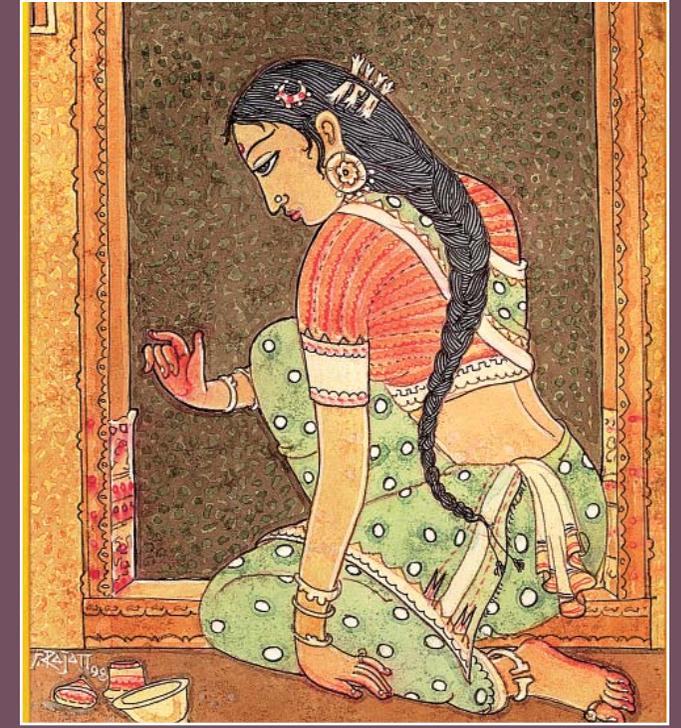


### Bathing

The women bathe in the river at hidden places specially reserved for them. They apply fresh turmeric root to the skin as a toner, skin color enhancer and anti-bacterial. Early European visitors were so impressed with the daily bathing ritual of Indian women that upon returning home they slowly convinced the rest of Europe of the merits of bathing more than once a week or month.

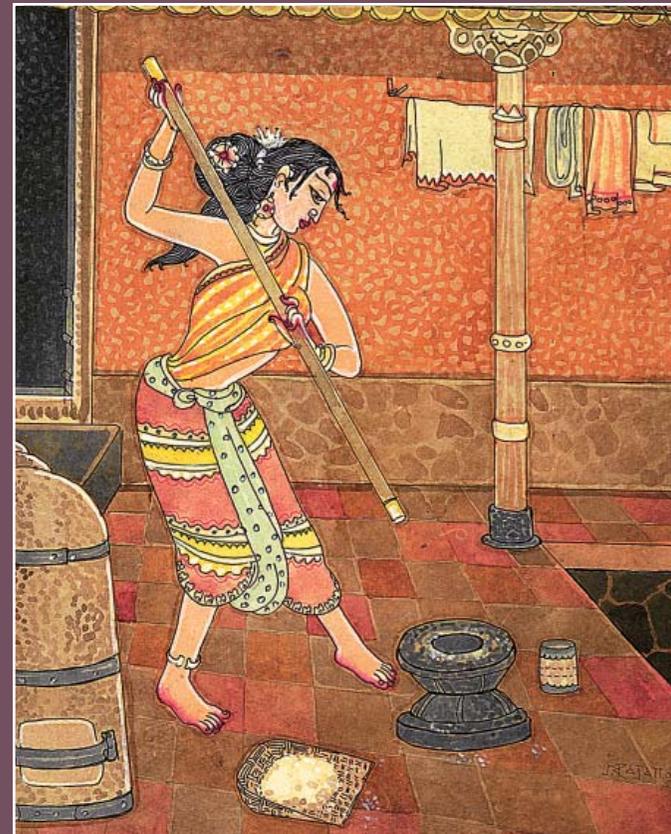
### Sanctifying the Doorway

Here, the home's entryway is adorned with turmeric paste and red kumkuma powder. The daily morning decoration is a blessing intended to beseech guardian devas to allow entry only to beings, both physical and subtle, who will benefit the family and home environment, rather than causing discord.



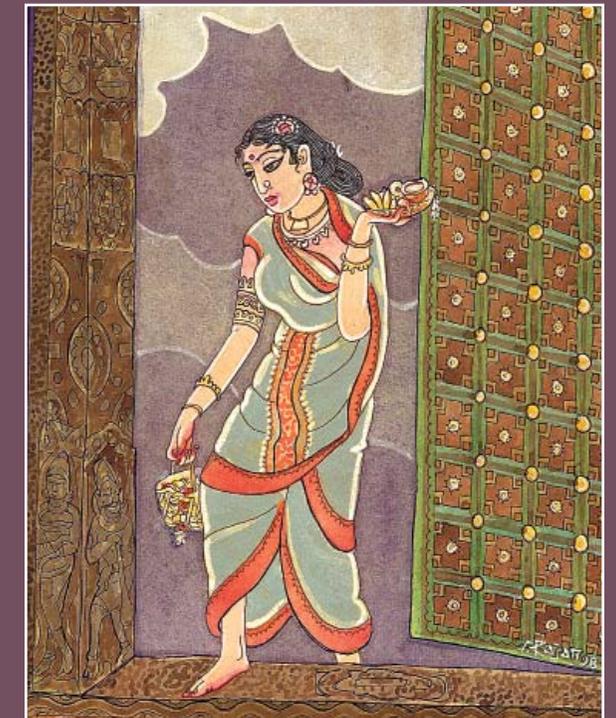
### Caring for Clothing

Some women bathe in the temple tank. Before the bath, they wash their saris and other garments and spread them on the steps, later to find them fully dried in the hot Indian sun upon returning from their bath.



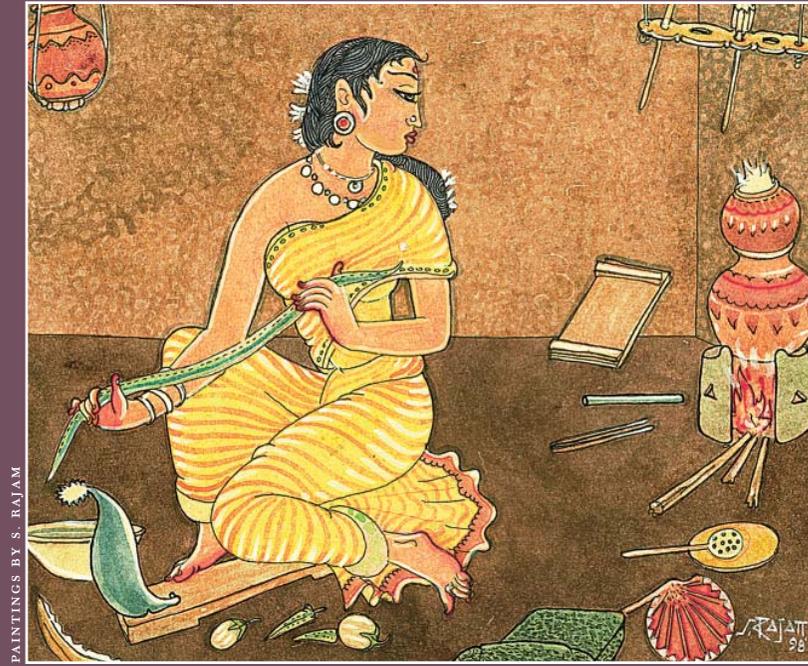
### Preparing Rice

Each day a small quantity of rice paddy is taken from the reservoir and pounded to separate the husk to provide grain for the day's meals. Pure and religious thoughts are pounded into the paddy as well.



### Temple Worship

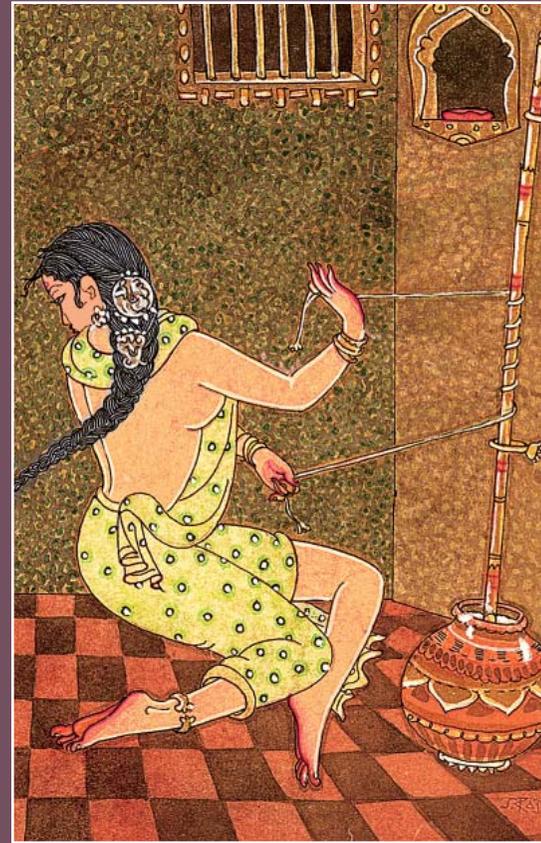
Before the noon meal, wives visit the temple, bringing an offering basket of coconut, ghee for the temple lamps, betel leaves, flower garlands and fruits.



### Preparing Meals

In this scene, vegetables are washed and cut with the aid of a knife-like blade affixed to a wooden platform. The platform includes a seat for the woman, which makes for effortless cutting and minimal fatigue—the original “Cuisinart.” (Right) Once yesterday’s milk cures and becomes curd, it is stirred into butter and boiled into ghee. The woman vigorously churns the frothing liquid in big pots with a ladle of wood turned with a cord.

PAINTINGS BY S. RAJAM



### Making Garlands

She collects fragrant flowers and with deft fingers assembles them on fine string according to color. Garlands are used in the shrines and to decorate the pictures of the Gods throughout the home.

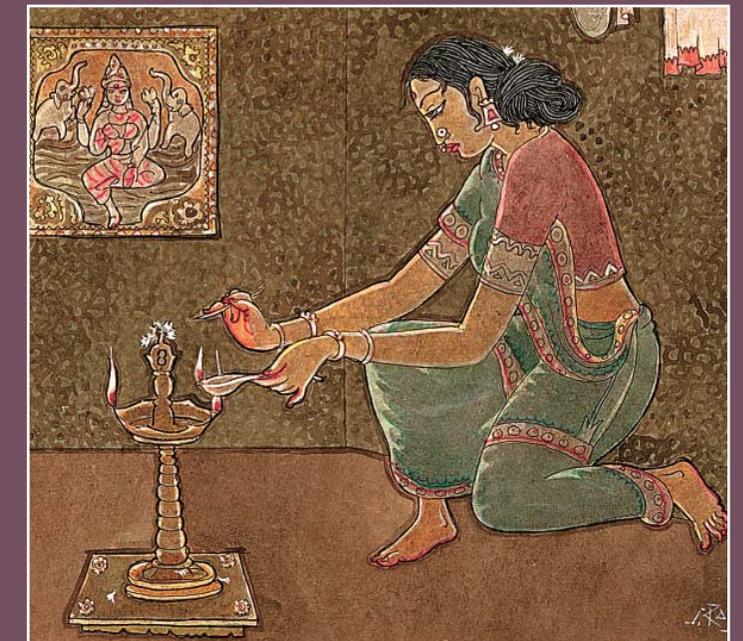
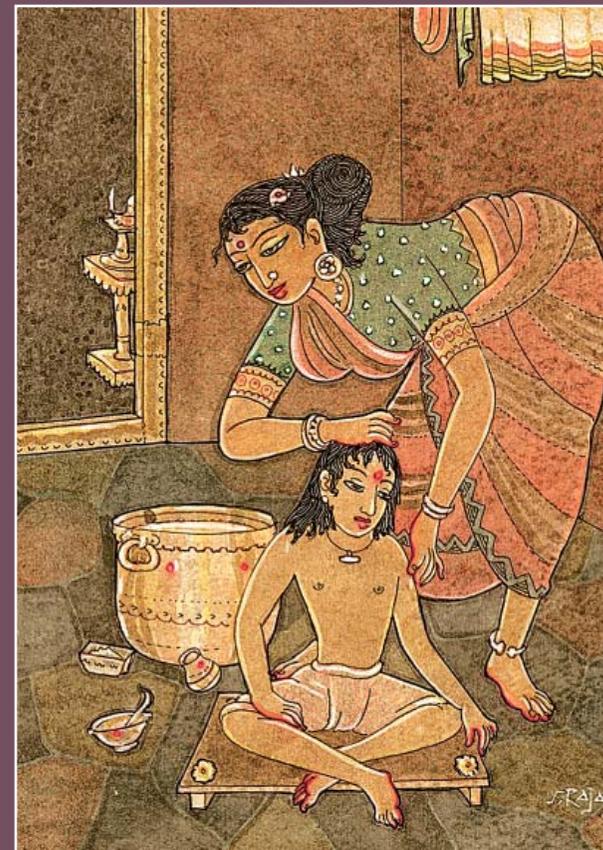


### Grooming

(Left) In the evening the wife dons casual or formal dress, combs and braids the hair, marks the forehead with kumkuma and applies jewelry.

### Care of Children

(Right) During the Dipavali festival a healthful ayurvedic oil bath is given to all. Children are attended to first, in the hour before sunrise. Oil is applied to skin and hair, then rinsed off.



### Caring for the Home Shrine

Evening is time for cleaning the home’s oil lamps, adding fresh ghee or oil and lighting them in the shrines. The woman prostrates to receive blessings from the Deities and devas who guide her family’s life of dharma. Devotional songs are sung as the day winds down.