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MANTRA AND YANTRA IN TANTRA

Introduction

Tantra is generally regarded as a system of black magic. It is the most neglected branch of Indian thought. Though *tantra* has a rich spiritual heritage and a sublime philosophy, the *sādhana* of *pañchamakāra* (five M's)¹ has given a good deal of misunderstanding about the *tāntric* spirituality. *Tantra* is full of symbolism and its *mantras* and *yantras* will simply appear as nonsensical syllables and diagrams to a layman. But for the initiated *mantra* and *yantra* become sources of mystic power capable of liberating one from the bondage of this world. As Dr. Karan Singh says: "In the present age, when theoretical philosophy is rapidly losing such appeal it had over the minds of men, *tantra* represents a vigorous and virile approach to suprarational experience which should evoke widespread interest in India and abroad...*tantra* lays special emphasis upon a system of carefully disciplined and deeply meaningful practice directed towards arousing the *kundalini*, the mysterious serpent power in man."²

The *kundalini*, *mantra* and *yantra* are the three mystic principles of *tantra sādhana*. Only through mystic experience can one open the shutters of Reality. And this mystic experience, according to *tantra*, is quite vivid, direct, and integral in which the *sādhaka* can feel the impact of Reality. When the Vedas give only a negative account (*neti, neti*) of the Reality, *tantra* emerges as an intuitional science for the realization of God. By rousing *kundalini*, it leads one to the path of inner spiritual transformation, so as to achieve the supreme end of life, called '*parā-samvit*' becoming one with *Param Siva*.³

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1. *Pañchamakāras* are the five M's i.e. *Madya*, (wine), *Māmsa* (meat), *Matsya* (fish), *Mudra* (parched rice), and *Maithuna* (copulation).
 2. Karan Singh, Foreword to *The Tantra* by L.P. Singh, (Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1976).
 3. Lalprasad, Singh, *Tantra*, (Delhi: Concept publishing Company, 1976.) p. x.

Many of the world religions devote themselves only to the problem of salvation called *moksaprāpti* or attainment of heaven. They suggest all the possible ways, which are quite complicated, for the attainment of this goal of *moksa*. Unlike these religions, which concentrate on salvation, *tantra* lays great stress on the attainment of all the fourfold objectives of life, namely, *artha*, *kāma*, *dharma* and *moksa*, since human life is multidimensional. These fourfold objectives of life succeed one another in one's spiritual progress and perfection. The *sādhana* (worship) which does not fulfil these fourfold objectives life remains a futile pursuit, according to *tāntric* spirituality. Thus *tāntric* spirituality has a realistic approach to life.

Tāntra—its Origin and Development

The word "*tāntra*" has various meanings and definitions in Sanskrit usage. Without entering into these intricacies of the word "*tāntra*", we shall proceed on the basis of a commonly-accepted explanation appropriate to our context. *Tāntra* is derived from the root "*tan*" meaning to "expand". Accordingly, *tāntra* means expansion of knowledge or comprehensive knowledge which will bring about full development and God-realization. In other words, *tāntra* is that which secures emancipation from the bondage of *māya*. It is a study concerning the Absolute, and a spiritual cult which brings about the realization of the Absolute, with the help of *mantra* and *yantra*. Thus *Tāntra* stands for the application of the esoteric science for the attainment of spiritual ascendancy.⁴

Tracing the origin of the practice of *tāntra* it becomes abundantly clear that it is a *pre-Aryan* spirituality. The excavation report of the Harappan culture confirms this fact beyond any doubt. Sir John Marshal commenting on the Indus Vally religion and civilization says: "*Sakti* worship was of great antiquity in India. It originated after the mother Goddess; and it was closely connected with the cult of *Siva*."⁵ Prof. S. Dasgupta holds that *tantra* is as old as the *Upanisads* if not older.⁶ Some others state that it is as old as the Vedas themselves which are regarded as eternal. However, it is common knowledge that all these scriptures embody the intuitive vision of our ancient seers. Saivism and

4. *Ibid.*, P. 1

5. John Marshal, *Mohanjo-daro and Indus civilization* London: 1931, P. 57.

6. S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* Vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1963) P. 8

Saktism are its two aspects of *tantra*. Saktism represents the beginning of *tantra sādhana* whereas Saivism is the culmination of its spiritual march. *Siva* and *Sakti* are the dual deities of the non-Aryans, but in essence *Siva* is the goal.

Sex is very predominant in *tantra* as in all primitive religions. Among the aniconic objects of worship, *linga* and *yoni* occupied a very important place. Dr. Wall observes: "All religions are based on sex; some may be more coarsely so and others may be a little more obscure."⁷ This was because of the need for war and cultivation. Sex worship, therefore, really stood for procreation and not for sexual indulgence. In fact, *tantra* has laid down very strict rules of discipline forbidding indulgence in sex even for family men.⁸ Unlike other religions, it contains a fully developed science on which the "linga and yoni worship is based".

Swastika is another symbol of worship used right from the beginning of *tantra* system. The vertical line stands for the causal-*Brahman* (*Kāraṇa Brahman*) and the horizontal line represents the effect-*Brahman* (*Kārya Brahman*). The "ka" of tantric *varṇamāla* is the *bija-mantra* of the manifest world. Briefly then, *Swastika* stands for the spiritual victory over the mundane things.⁹ Both these symbols have great significance in the acts of worship.

Lord Siva—the Founder of Tantra

There are various opinions regarding the founder of *tantra* system. Some hold that it is of eternal existence. The commonly held opinion is that Lord *Siva* is the founder of *tantra*. He is known to be the *ādi-Guru*. He is a great ascetic and a great *tāntrika* and He is one with the Supreme God. He is conceived to be *gunātita* and *nirguna Purusa*. He has been worshipped from time immemorial, he is eternal bliss and hence he is called *Sadāśiva* (one who is always in bliss). Later on *Siva* was regarded as the Supreme God. The great *Sankarāchārya* (8th cent. A.D.) and *Lakṣmana Deśika* (10th cent. A.D.) have both made references to Lord *Siva* as the Supreme God.¹⁰

7. Wall, *Sex and sex worship*, P. 2 (as referred to in *Tantra* of L.P. Singh).

8. L.P. Singh. *op. cit.* P. 4.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.* P. 9.

The account of *Siva's* lineage reads like an interesting story. *Siva* was considered originally as non-vedic and non-Aryan God. The Pre-vedic lineage of *Siva* can be found established by *Saundaryalahari*.¹¹ According to this, *Devi*, who has been anthropomorphically portrayed as the spouse of *Siva*, is an ocean of the milk of poesy. This Child of hers became the laureate of master poets after sucking her milk of poesy and the embodiment of spiritual wisdom and asceticism. He is the living symbol of truth and *dharma* in the Indian culture.

Though *Siva* is the god of non-Aryans and he has supernatural powers, still he is a man. It is *Siva* who systematized the whole *tantra-sāstra* and transformed it into an intuitional science. He proved by his own *sādhana* that man can become one with God. Nay, He showed us that man is God.

The *tantra* religion founded by *Siva* is accepted as the oldest spirituality of India. Many claim today that it is the most scientific religion of the world. It is indeed the best religion for householders as it does not insist on external renunciation (*Sanyāsa*) and accepts for initiation into *tantra sādhana* only those who have achieved inner renunciation. Here we find the best expression of a healthy social order.¹² Indeed renunciation in spirit is more important and meaningful than mere external *sanyāsa*. Many in the past believed that *Siva* founded this path of spirituality specially to make it possible and easy for the ordinary householders to realize God.

Tantra Philosophy

The *tantra* philosophical system is known as the *Sivādvaitā* school. Underlying the theocratic culture of *tantra*, it has a consistent system of philosophic thought. According to this *Sivādvaita* school, the supreme Reality is of the nature of pure consciousness, self-luminous and all pervading. This supreme Reality is called *Param Siva*. He is both transcendent and immanent and endowed with *Sakti* which is believed to be identical with Himself and by virtue of this he is described as the *Pūrṇahanta*.

In their attitude to the world, unlike the *vedantins* the *tantrists* hold that it is fully real, in the sense that it is an aspect of the supreme Reality. The tantric theory of the world-evolution is

11. *Saundarya Lahari*, Cambridge, Massachussets, Harward, 1958. P. 78.

12. L.P. Singh. *op. cit.*, P. 13.

known as *Abbāsavāda* according to which the world is the expression of the freewill of the Lord and is really spiritual in essence like the Lord Himself.¹³ The very supreme Reality is split spontaneously into subject and object. Yet, he always remains pure, undivided and inspite of absolute suffering there is no change.

As to the self, it is real and it is meant for unification with *param* Siva. The purpose and the quintessence of tantra philosophy is to help the self attain this supreme harmony. This state of self-realization is one of exhilaration and liberation. With a gradual ascent to the God-path, one experiences Him both in animate and inanimate objects. This realization of divine presence puts an end to all kinds of sufferings and inspires one to live up to the ideal and the glory of man. In short, *tantra* always lays stress on spiritual realization without in any way ignoring the material aspect of life. This is the beauty of *tantra*, and on account of this, *tantra* makes a fundamental departure from all the existing philosophical systems by its novelty and originality.

Kundalini Yoga

Tantra Yoga stands for the realization of *Pram Siva*. This objective is achieved through the awakening of *Kundalini*, namely, the serpent-power in man. *Mantra* and *yantra* are the two effective means to reach this goal. *Kundalini mantra* and *yantra* are the three cardinal principles of tantric culture. *Mantra* and *yantra* are regarded as the very warp and woof of the tantric cult. Through these, *tantrism* brings about a spiritual renaissance and a psychic revolution.

All of us realise that reason alone cannot exhaustively understand the Absolute, and that there is something which transcends reason and it is called intuition. Reason has to be subordinate to intuition. According to *tantra*, morality is the base, intuition the way, and life divine, the goal. Again as L.P. Singh says, "*mantra* is life, *Kundalini* is the soul and *yantra* is the body of *tantra śāstra*. *Mantra sādhanā* makes man pure and prepares an esoteric background for the arousal of *kundalini* and *kundalini sādhanā* leads to the mystic oneness of *Siva* and *Sakti*".¹⁴

13. Govind, Kaviraj. *Tripura Rahasyam*, (Varanasi: Sarasvati Bhavan Grantha mala, Vol. 15, 1965) Pp. 11-12.

14. I.P. Singh, *op. cit.*, P. 64.

“*Kundalini* is the greatest discovery of tantrism. It is the backbone of tantric cult. The whole esoteric science of *tantra* veers round this mystic spiritual force. The awakening of *kundalini* is the sole objective of *tantra sādhanā*. It ushers in a new era of spiritual experience and brings about a total transformation in an individual. It deepens his consciousness and sublimates intellect with intuition. It brings the realization of *Param Siva*, the Supreme God-Head.¹⁵ *Kundalini* is the dormant divinity in animality. It is a spiritual force residing in every being, but invisible. Without arousing this spiritual force, there cannot be any progress in the divine voyage. Every man is divine. Every *Jiva* is *Siva*. “*Jiva* is *Siva*, and *Siva* is *Jiva*; the only difference is that one is in bondage and the other is free”,¹⁶ says *Kulārnavā Tantra*. This difference is removed by awakening *kundalini*. By the constant incarnation of *istamantra* and by the concentrated meditation on *yantra kundalini* can be roused. When *kundalini* becomes conscious of its divine nature, the *sādhaka* begins to lose the feeling of I-ness and it burns away the very seed of selfishness and individuality. It cuts asunder the bondage of nescience and becomes one with *Siva*.

Unfortunately, most people have not even heard of *kundalini yoga* and even some of those who have heard of it, have wrongly understood it. It is a spiritual force. It is not universal in character. It differs from one individual to another. It is neither a biological nor a psychic principle. There is no objective proof for its existence. It can only be *experienced and seen intuitively*. It is generally believed that it has the brilliance of millions of suns. It is eternal, infinite, non-causal and the creative principle of the world.¹⁷

Mantra Sadhana

Mantras, āsanās, mudrās, yantras, namjap, bhajans and similar things are important techniques of worship in the tantric tradition. Our Indian sages from time immemorial have laid great stress on physical and external elements that lead to the spiritual discipline. Control over our senses is absolutely necessary for mental concentration. Needless to say that no prayer and worship can be effective without proper concentration of the mind.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Jīva Sivaḥ Sivo Jīvaḥ sa Jivah kevalah Sivaḥ Pāśabandhah smṛto Jīvaḥ pāśamutkah sadāśiva. Kulārnavā Tantra, P. 241.*

17. L.P. Singh, *op. cit.*, P. 68.

The mystic techniques are meant to enhance this mental concentration. *Mantras* and *yantras* are the main mystic techniques in the *tantric* spirituality.¹⁸

Mantra is considered to be the most powerful weapon which can cut asunder the trammels of *māya* and nescience. Many have wrongly identified *mantra-sādhana* with *japa-sādhana*. *Japa-sādhana* is an intellectual process of recitation of Vedic Hymns. Vedic hymns are not mantras, but only sublime poems. They can create a psychological climate for *mantra sādhana* which can awake *kundalini*. The incantation of mantras is called *pranidhāna* which means taking shelter in divinity in union with it. Through this union one loses one's individuality and is united with, *Param Siva*. This realization of the non-dualistic existence is the main aim of *mantra-sādhana*. Sārada Tīlaka defines *mantra* as follows:

*Mananam viśwaviññānam trānam samsārabandhanāt Yatah
karoti samsiddho mantra ityucyate tatah.*

Mantra is that the incantation of which brings the realization of cosmic consciousness and frees one from the bondage of worldliness.¹⁹

Dr. Lal Prasad Singh in explaining the *mantra sādhana* writes:

A *sādhaka* attains the Supreme when he succeeds in establishing a parallelism between the rhythms of incantation, the rhythms of ideation and rhythms of pulsation. With the help of constant ideation of the Supreme and incantation of *mantra*, mind becomes pure and impeccable. *Mantra sādhana* is a constant mystic effort to restore equilibrium. In that, a man goes beyond himself. He gives up the consideration of both virtue and vice. He has no frivolity of sex and hunger, nor the self-gratifying sense of sublimity. Losing his own individuality, he becomes one with *Param Siva*.²⁰

Mantras are the life-force of *tantric* cult. They are scientific formulae. They are to be practised on strict spiritual discipline to attain the desired goal, be it heavenly or earthly. Each and every letter of the *mantra varnamāla* is a living energy. These are fifty in number, corresponding to the fifty basic vibrations of the

18. D.N. Bose *Tantras: Their Philosophy and the occult secrets* (Oriental Publishing Co., Calcutta), P. 147.

19. *Sārada Tīlaka*, P. 216.

20. L.P. Singh. *op. cit.*, P. 80.

cosmos. Each letter is a *bijamantra* relating to human instincts. Here *bijamantra* means the accoustic root of the different psychic expressions. For a fuller understanding of *mantra*, one must have the basic knowledge of the science of sound. *Tantra* has developed an appealing and elaborate theological science of *śabda* (sound).

Basing on the *Sārada Tilaka*, Dr. L.P. Singh has given a fine account of the significance of sound. He writes:

Sound is the first manifestation of *Param Siva*. This is why the effect—Brahman is known as "*Sabda Brahman*". *Sabda* in its primary stage is a psychic wave. The very existence of *śabda* entails the presence of *spanda* (movement). There cannot be *śabda* without *spanda*. *Spanda* is the property of *Saguna Brahman*. That is why *Nirguna Brahman*, where *Sakti* is dormant, is called *aśabda* (non-sounding) and *nispanda* (non-moving).

Explaining the hidden meanings of *śabda* Dr. Singh continues,

The whole universe is a mass of different waves and vibrations. Where there is action, there is vibration. The relative transposition of any object is called action and the nature of any action is judged by the waves it creates. These waves are known as vibrations. Action is of many varieties, so is vibration. The vibrations of two actions are not the same. No two vibrations are alike. Every vibration has sound and colour. The world is the thought—projection of *Saguna Siva*. The creative ideation has vibration. Every vibration is associated with sound. Man cannot catch the supra-mental vibration due to his lack of spiritual development. The first and the subtlest vibration is *śabda*.²¹

Sabda Brahman is the cause of all beings. *Sabda* is the first manifestation of cosmic creation. It is a part of the very Supreme *Bindu* (Primordial point). *Sabda Brahman* was God Himself. This tantric theology of *Sabda Brahman* has a close affinity with the Johanine theology of the Logos, according to which the Word was the first expression of God. The Word was in God and the Word was God. Everything created was created through this Word.²² In brief, *Sabda Brahman* is the cause of the manifest sound, its meaning and it becomes also the Supreme *Mantra*.

21. *Ibid.*

22. The Gospel of Saint John, 1, 1-3.

This *Sabda Brahman* is identified with *Om̐kāra*. *Om̐kāra* is the Primordial-Sound of *Param Siva*. That is why *Om̐kāra* is identified with *Sabda Brahman*. It is the seed of all sounds and is the collective form of all sonoric expressions. It is the primordial sound (*Parā-Vāk*).

Pranava is a synonym of *Om̐kāra*. It is the life of all lives. It is the substratum of all existence and beings.²³ *Pranava* has been derived from *Pra-nu-al* which means the proper form of devotion. *Om̐kāra* controls and regulates all the twelve *kālas*²⁴ and it illumines everything from the crudest matter to *Siva*.

OM is a composite of three letters A-U-M. A is the *bija-mantra* of creation and it represents Brahman; U is the *bija-mantra* of preservation or maintenance and represents Visnu; M is the *bija-mantra* of destruction and represents Rudra. These—creation, preservation, and destruction—are the three functional forms of *Param Siva*. The Trinity of Hindu religion also has a similar explanation of the three functional forms of *Param-Brahman*. Christianity too has a Trinitarian God to whom they attribute creation, redemption and sanctification. These three functional activities do not mean that they are different entities. These functions belong to one God just as one man can combine different functions and be a professor, husband and father at one and the same time. OM comprises all these ideas and hence this is the best of all sounds and mantras. *Om̐kāra* is the unified form of all sounds. It is the sum total of all cosmic vibrations. All other sounds are the different manifestations of this cosmic sound. Therefore *Om̐kāra* is chanted and recited with great devotion. However, it is to be listened to in deep meditation so as to grasp its great significance.

Dr. Philip Rawson makes the following very apt comment on *Om̐kāra*:

Om̐ is the whole world... past, present and future... all is Om̐... whatever else transcends time... is Om̐. And so by joining the breath to Om̐ one may go aloft up the *Susumna*... two Brahmanas may be meditated on, the sounding and the soundless. The soundless only revealed by sound... the sound-Brahman is OM. Ascending by it one reaches an end in

23. *Netra Tantra*, Verse 129.

24. *Svaccanda Tantra*, Patiala.

the soundless, passing beyond sound, men vanish in the supreme soundlessness, the unmanifest Brahman. There they lose all qualities, becoming indistinguishable like juices blended into honey... the sound-Brahman is 'OM'. Its peak is tranquil, soundless, fearless, beyond sorrow, blissful, immovable... at the apex of the crystal column of the *Susumna*. The point at which consciousness touches the ultimate through sound comes at the end of the long-drawn, skull-penetrating vocalization of this *seed-mantra* of the cosmos, the sharpest vibration of the nasal hum with which OM is concluded, written in the Sanskrit alphabet as a dot. Here merge the points of sound and light, indescribably fine and small, but also comprehending the whole world of manifested things in cosmic history.²⁵

There are innumerable other mantras. *Svaccanda Tantra* believes that there are as many as seven crores of mantras.²⁶ But all do not bring about the desired result and do not have equal power. According to *Kulārṇava Tantra*, *siddha mantras* are the most powerful. They alone have the power to produce the desired result.²⁷ *Siddha mantra* when received from a *Guru* is sure to bear the spiritual fruit. It is pregnant with divine consciousness and force. It comes from a perfect being i.e., the *Guru*. It is a perfect *mantra*. The practice of this *mantra* without proper initiation (i.e., heard by chance, seen by deceit or taken from some books) will bring upon oneself inevitable disasters.²⁸ The success of *mantra sādhanā* depends upon the purity and dedication of the *sādhaka*, the inner potency of the *mantra*, and the grace of the *Guru*.

Sārada Tilaka gives a detailed account of mantra. It has divided mantras into three kinds: (1) *Masculine mantras*—those which end with "hum" and "phut" and those presiding deities are made gods. (2) *Feminine mantras*—those which end with double "tha" and whose presiding deities are female gods. (3) *Neuter mantras*—those which end with *namah*.²⁹

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25. Philip Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*. (Delhi: Vikas Publ. House, 1973), p. 196.
 26. *Saptakodisthu mantranām sṛjatē jñānakariyātmika: Svaccanda Tantra*. Vol. VI. P. 40
 27. *Kulārṇava Tantra*, P. 15.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. *Sri Mygendra Tantra*, (Srinagar: Kashmir Series of Texts and studies, No: L. 1930. Ch. II), P. 46.

Sārada Tilaka further says: "there are ten kinds of *mantric samskāras*. They are *Janan, Jivan, Taram, Bodhan, Abhisheka. Vimalikarana, Apyathan, Tarpana, Dipan* and *Gupti*.³⁰ We cannot go into the details of the long and elaborate treatise of *Sārada Tilaka*. All the same, a very important element of *mantra sādhana* deserves mention here. It is consciousness. In the absence of conscious-force, mantras become mere meaningless sounds and letters; even millions of incantations of such lifeless mantras will not yield any fruit.³¹

Yantra Sādhana

After *mantra*, *yantra* is the second cardinal principle of tantric cult. Nay, *mantra* and *yantra* are the soul and body of *tantra* and so both are equally important. *Yantra* worship is a special feature of *tantra sādhana*. *Yantra sādhana* is a higher form of spiritual life. It is an esoteric method to fix the mind on the supreme Reality. *Yantra* is a mystic diagram and symbolizes higher mystic powers.³²

Yantra is a geometrical diagram of great symbolical value. It is a piece of psychological apparatus to call up one or the other aspect of divinity. It is considered to be the best form of concentration by the tantrikas. The practice of visualization is identical in worship and in art. When a worshipper recites the *dhyaṇa-mantra*, he describes the deity and thus forms a corresponding mental picture. It is in order to visualise this imagined form that his prayers are addressed and the offerings are made. The artist also follows an identical prescription, but he proceeds to give to a mental picture a visible and objective form by his drawing or modelling.³³

A true artist is indeed a *sādhaka (yogin)*. After a proper initiation and purification he has to proceed to secluded place and perform the sevenfold offices starting with invocation, and try to realize the four infinite modes of friendliness, compassion, sympathy and impartiality. His ego-consciousness has to be destroyed and burned beyond recovery. Only then should he invoke the

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Mantracai tanyarahitah sarvasiddhākārah smṛtah Caintanyarahita mantrah Prōkta varnastu kevalam Phalam navia prayacchanti laksakodijapādapi. Kularanava tantra, Ch. 15, 60-61.*

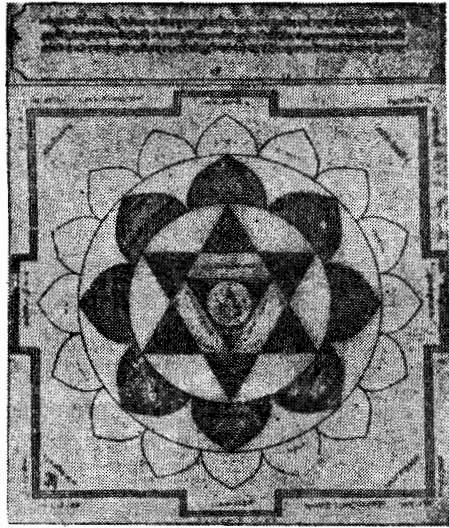
32. L.P. Singh, *op. cit.* P. 110.

33. Ajit Mookerjee, *Tantra Art*, New Delhi: 1971, P. 14.

desired deity by *bija-mantra* and identify himself completely with the deity to be represented. Finally, on pronouncing the *dhyāna-mantra* in which the attributes are defined, the divinity appears in visible form, like a reflection or as in dream. It is this brilliant image that becomes the model of the artist. Art is not a profession but a path toward truth and self-realization, both for the maker and the spectator.³⁴

There are various kinds of yantras available, depending on the mode of worship. Different deities have different yantras as they have different mantras. Only an appropriate *mantra* and its corresponding *yantra* can bring *siddhi* (success) in *sādhana* (worship). The selection of *mantra* and *yantra* is a very difficult problem. Only the right and proper kind of Guru can help in this intricate problem of mysticism.³⁵ For the symbolism of *yantra* is so pregnant with mysticism.

As *mantra* is the nucleus of sound by means of which cosmic and bodily forces are concentrated into ritual, so *yantra* is the nucleus of the visible and knowable, a linked diagram of lines by means of which visualized energies are concentrated. *Mantra*

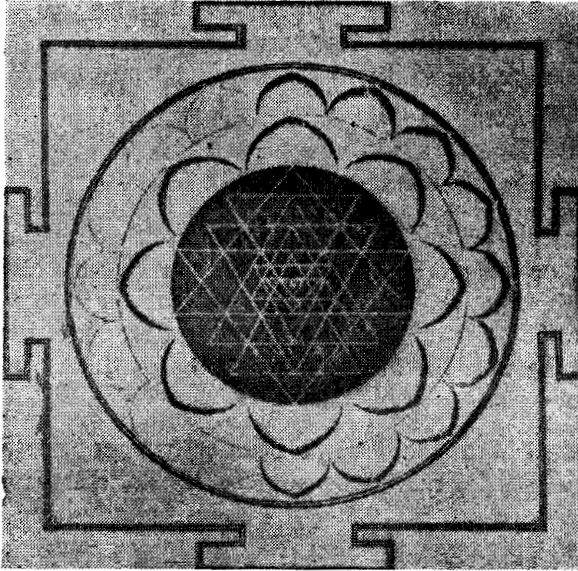


Bhuvanesvari Yantra

34. *Ibid.* P. 15.

35. L.P. Singh, *op. cit.* P. 110

and *yantra* complement each other, and are used in conjunction. A *yantra* may appear at first sight, like an abstract design. But what we might describe as its "abstraction" is the effect of its concentrated energy and condensed force. It provides the focal framework for the acts of meditative visualization.³⁶



Śri Yantra

There are many yantras and they can be made of different materials. In fact, the human body itself is a *yantra*, described by some as the best of all yantras. *Sri yantra*, *Kāli yantra*, *Rāma yantra*, *Krisna yantra*, *Bhuvaneśwari yantra* etc. are some of the most common yantras. *Mandala yantras* too are often meditated on in series to produce a special condition of consciousness. It would have been interesting if we could go deep into the significance of all these yantras. However, we shall attempt to explain at least one each as samples so as to give some idea of the great significance of yantras and images.

From the point of view of Genesis, *Sri yantra* is the best one for our analysis. In meditation it is used in the reverse direction, serving to focus our mind from the outer rim into the central one.

36. Philip Rawson, *op. cit.* P. 70-72

This great *yantra* is the very image of the process of creation. It is metaphysically sexual and to penetrate it is to pierce the whole underlying tantric metaphysical ideal. The description which follows, is based on the *Kāmakalāvīlāsa*.

The dot at the centre represents the invisible First Principle. From the point of view of man, it is the point of final dissolution. Viewed from the angle of creation its first act of projection consists in splitting itself into male and female (*Siva* and *Sakti*). These are the visible dot and the smallest enclosing downward triangle.

As *Bṛhadāranyka Upanisad* says:

He was alone; he did not enjoy; himself one alone does not enjoy; he desired a second and become like man and woman in close embrace. He made this self of his into two. There from came husband and wife. Later he desired, let my wife be; may I be born as many; may I possess things; may I perform acts; this was his desire.³⁷

The past tense here signifies not priority in time, but ontological or existential priority. According to *tantra*, creation is a continuous act. So the form the desire takes is the shape of his female moving identity, making the world for him to enjoy as Bliss and Consciousness. The dot as its first act of motion traces the triangle which is the original form of the generative *yoni* (vulva) of the Goddess, the first expansion of the space and time in act.³⁸ There is thus "in existence" act the first stage of creative evolution a dot inside a downward-pointing triangle. The next stages consist in the generation by this couple of four pairs of triangle, each pair having one pointing up, the male, the other down female. The innermost pair themselves appear sometimes with an encircled dot inside as the *yantra* of *Bhuvaneshwari*, the second of Hindu *Mahāvidyas*. All represent the "going forth" or expansion of the nuclear light-energy from within the first triangle, the "flash" and its "developed reflection" (in Sanskrit called *Prakāśa* and *Vimarśa*). The interlacing of the five original female and four male triangles generates the circuits of other triangles in which the range of varied forms of consciousness and creation

37. *Bṛhadāranyaka Up.* as quoted by Rawson, P. 74

38. *Ibid.*

jointly emerge to shape the whole of the moving world and its history in time.³⁹

Using Kāmikagama as his basis, Dr. L.P. Singh says:

The *Sakti* triangles denote the five *dhatus*, namely skin (*tvac*), blood (*āsri*), flesh (*māmsa*), fat (*mēdas*) and bone (*asthi*), and *Siva* triangles stand for bone-marrow (*majja*) vital fluid (*śukra*), life-force (*prāna*) and *jiva*. This division has been made from the microcosmic point of view. From the macrocosmic point of view, the *Sakti* triangles stand for the five vital functions, the five senses of knowledge, the five senses of action, the five, subtle and five gross forms of matter and the mind. The *Siva* triangles represent the four higher *tattvas*, viz., *Māya*, *Sudha vidya*, *Mahēśvara* and *Sadāśiva*.⁴⁰

Sri Yantra is called the mansion of God. In its centre resides *Siva* (*Kamēśvara*) and *Sakti* (*Lalita*) in an undifferentiated union. Enclosing the bindu is an inverted triangle which symbolizes will (*iccha*), action (*kriya*) and knowledge (*jñāna*) aspects of *sakti*. There is more complicated and subtle explanation which follows this. (Those interested may please consult *Kāmakalāvīlāsa*, and *Saundarya Lahari*).

Mantra and *Yantra* are only some forms of worship and these may be found in any religion, under some other names. They are just means for worship with mental concentration. *Tantra* requires an extensive use of such mystic techniques. Unfortunately, these mystic symbols are very often liable to be misunderstood. We call them mystic because they help the devotees to be in the communion with the deity, which is the true significance of mysticism. Whether they do help or not can be tested only by practice. No amount of theoretical discussion can prove or disprove their truth. Again there are many practices which are so much filled with details that their significance, if there is any, seem to have been lost.

According to the *tantric* conception there are many gods having many hands, in some cases, as many, as a thousand. Often these hands are placed in different positions with different weapons and auspicious objects. These images are painted in different colours according to the strict rules laid down in details by *tan-*

39. Cf. *Ibid.*

40. L.P. Singh, *op. cit.* P. 110

tra. Let us take the famous figure of Kāli of tantra. *Kali* of tantra is the Brahma of the brahmanic cult. Brahma is inscrutable, without attribute and beyond the reach of mind and words. Therefore, Kāli has been painted naked and dark which hides within herself the power to create and sustain and destroy the universe.⁴¹ We know from our study of modern science that a mixture of various colours produces the dark effect. Another important point in the image of *Kali* is that she takes her stand on the breast of *Siva* planting one leg on the breast and the other a little above the thigh. The two legs stand for forces of manifestation and unmanifestation, *Kāli's* standing over *Siva*, means that without *Siva*, *Kāli* cannot proceed a step. All her feet are on the breast of *Siva*, who is represented as *Mahākāla*—comprising past, present and future. By the pressing of her leg on *Mahākāla*, the present issues out from the past and by her other leg she withdraws the present within herself to come out again in the future. In this way every details of the image enshrines a high spiritual idea, meditation of which illumines the heart of the *Sādhaka*.

Some may not accept the above interpretation. That is not our chief concern here. What we are interested in, is to know whether *tantra* is a scientific system and whether it has an acceptable explanation about its mystic techniques. To this one has to respond with an emphatic YES. The extraordinary and superhuman conception of deities shows us only that gods are much more powerful than human beings and that it is impossible for man to comprehend them with his limited intellect. This idea of incomprehensiveness of God is explained in one way or other in every religion. Almost all religions make use of art and myth to impart this idea, which some intellectuals may dismiss as sheer "monstrosity" and "absurdity". In fact, these monstrous and absurd myths manifest themselves only in the mystery dimension of religions. *Tantra* is not an exception to this common religious phenomenon.

Tantra and Pañcamakāras

The practice of *pancamakara* has created great misunderstanding and it has devalued the tantra system. Of the various charges levelled against *tantra sādhana*, perhaps the gravest one is that it enjoys religious sanction for the wanton use of wine and

41. D.N. Bose, *op. cit.* Pp. 127-128

women. According to some, *tantra sādhanā* is full of obscenities and superstitions and it allows free use of sex and wine for the satisfaction of senses and impulses. In other words, it accords permission to sin religiously. This is a misconception and has arisen because of *pañcamākāra* or the five M's *madya* (wine), *māmsa* (meat) *matsya* (fish), *mudra* (parched rice) and *maithuna* (copulation); these five M's have an esoteric meaning. Explaining these concepts of *Pañcamākāra*.

Dr. L.P. Singh writes:

Wine stands for the pineal nectar contained in *Amā Kāla*. *Madya sādhanā* means the drinking of that pineal nectar in the mystic process of the unification of the *Kundalini Sakti* with *Param Siva*... The spiritual oneness of the male (*Siva*) and the female principle (*Sakti*) is called *maithuna sādhanā*. It is called *yoga* or union. However, *tantra* does not believe in false asceticism. Copulation with one's own wife under strict spiritual discipline is a part of *tāntric sādhanā*. Tantra recognizes that sex and hunger are inherent in man, but they can be sublimated.⁴²

According to *tantra*, hunger and sex are innate biological urges. They cannot be ignored. However, inordinate indulgence in them will lead him to degeneration. But when these are satisfied under spiritual discipline and guidance they become his allies, helpers and ultimately, liberators. The principle, behind the *pañcamākāra sādhanā* is that man must rise with the aid of that *śakti* which if misused will cause his fall. The philosophy behind it is that the poison which kills becomes the elixir of life when suitably treated and tested by a wise physician. Man has to work out his own salvation, not by negation of his desire and suppressing evil tendencies, but by so channelizing them so that they are sublimated into the higher forms of spiritual life.⁴³

Tantra— A practical spiritual Discipline

Tantra is not simply an abstract philosophy, but a practical spiritual discipline. Like other philosophical systems of India, the quintessence of *tāntric* Philosophy too is the attainment of supreme unification of the self with *Param Siva*. This state of self-

42. L.P. Singh, *op. cit.* P. 173

43. *Ibid.* P. 174.

realization is both an exhilaration and a liberation. As on *moksa*, *tantra* underlines also the other three objectives of life, namely *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma*. This is the speciality of tantric spirituality. Precisely because of this, tantric spirituality is known as a practical spirituality and a spirituality of the householders. The chief means it advocates are *mantra* and *yantra*.⁴⁴

Yantra and *mantra* are the means (*sādhana*) known as concentrated meditation and worship. Worship is inseparable from religion. Though forms of worship may differ, there is no religion without worship. Without worship religion remains an ideal belief. For want of worship, religion often becomes an idle drapery of the mind to many. Absence of worship and laxity in worship undermine the religious belief which we profess to hold. In fact, worship and religion are conjoined like mass and energy. They are co-related and co-existent. Indeed, worship is the prime expression of religious belief which is inseparable from dogmas. These dogmas, in turn, express the mystery dimension of religions. They may be mythical to some and mythological to others.

Mythical is different from mythological.⁴⁵ Myth always presupposes belief in it whereas mythology is only a study of myths without having any belief in them. Myth is always connected with mystery and it is operative and dynamic in the lives of the believers. It keeps the religion lively through worship and a life of discipline. It ennobles the mind, enriches the heart with spiritual wealth and beautifies life with its tender graces. The value of religious myth is great; it enhances concentration and helps us to realize the glory of God thereby contributing to the perfection of the soul.

Tantra is not an exception to this "myth and Mystery" complementarity of religion. Though it has a consistent philosophy, which can be called a "philosophy of renaissance", it is more a cult and a science of creative intuition. It is a spiritual discipline which can retard the degeneration of humanity. Institutionalised religion cannot save the world of today. Theoretical philosophy too has lost its appeal. In this precarious situation, the practical and spiritual discipline of *tantra* can play a significant role in the attainment of the four noble objectives of life, i.e. *artha*, *kāma*, *dharma* and, finally, *moksa*. And this need is greater today than ever before.

44. Philip Rawson, *op. cit.* P. 69-76

45. Raymond Panikkar, *The Law of Karma*, Philosophy East and West. Vol. 22. No. 1, Jan. 72. Pp. 32-33.