

Subject: Fusing Fine Art and Psychology

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Thesis Statement

The focal point of the research paper titled 'Fusing Fine Art and Psychology' by Isha Majithia is to probe the integration of areas of visual aesthetics and modern-day science -- psychology. The scope of the paper is to document that practitioners of visual arts have made significant contribution in the field of psychology by developing various methods of art therapies that help the patients of chronic stress and depression. These therapies are prevalently prescribed by psychiatrists and psychologists for its proven efficacy. The paper microscopically analyses practice of visual artists following Tantric approaches and illuminates how the fields of theology, visual arts and psychology are intertwined. It documents that by fusing of the elements from varied disciplines of psychology, theology and visual aesthetics, the modern-day practitioners have created an effective antidote to tackle depressive disorders.

The Main Essay

Painting, sculpting or process of creation boosts emotional well-being and healing. It enhances concentration and sharpens communication skills. Often psychologists have prescribed art therapy for its proven efficacy as an anti-depressant.

According to World Health Organization's (WHO) latest research stress and depression are the most pronounced wellbeing risks in today's times. Simultaneously, the latest discoveries in the field of psychology, now accepted as a finer science, that can treat and tackle stress and depression, have established that art indulgence is cathartic and restorative.

Some clairvoyant fine art practitioners in India believed in and did experience the magic of visual art and developed distinct approaches which gave birth to various types of analytic art psychotherapies. The practice includes offering multi-sensory mix-media art experience to the client and delving deeper into inner recesses of the client's mind. This therapeutic art experience aims to help the client improve cognitive and sensory functions, self-esteem, self-awareness and emotional resilience.

To make the analytic art psychotherapy socially, culturally and spiritually more relevant, some Indian visual artists pioneered focus on Hindu theology, Vedic principles and began employing Tantric imagery in their artworks that inspire clarity of thought and boost healing. These artists believed that human body is a miraculous microscopic piece of the entire universe. They worked on basic Vedic principles and employed cosmic metaphors including Bindu, Triangle, Straight Line, Lotus, Chakra etc. in their artworks to boost concentration and emotional well-being.

1 I What is 'Tantra'

Tantra is a unique spiritual discipline that can resolve the mystery of being and its relationship with the world. The term Tantra is trapped in the cobwebs of misconceptions and misled beliefs and is often misinterpreted as primitive, unscientific beliefs, which promote blind faith and exploit the less privileged.

However, in fact Tantra is the simple truth. It is beyond the religions and the "moral". The Western theory of 'sin' has no place in the domain of Tantra. It does not deal with models, social or individual. Not 'what should be', the primary concern of Tantra is -- 'what it is'. It is an honest acceptance of oneself and one's surroundings. It is rather a spiritual science that examines experiences of 'self' with the surroundings and explores the human being's inherent elements, spiritual and physical, methods to expand them, and his/her place and relevance in the cosmos.

According to The Tantra, the human body is a 'yantra' – an instrument, which when in absolute command of elements within, helps command elements of the entire cosmos.

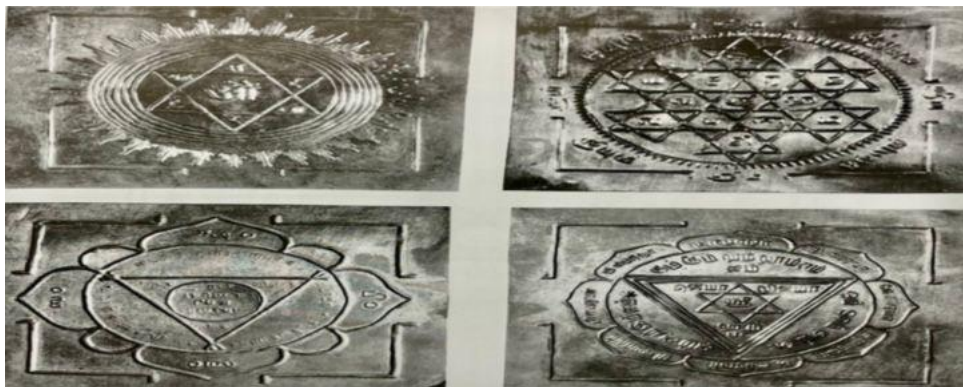
2 I What is Yantra

The Sanskrit word 'yantra' derives from the root 'yam' meaning to sustain or support the energy inherent in a particular element, object or concept. In its primary meaning, yantra may refer to any kind of mechanical device which is used to aid an enterprise. A yantra in these contexts, is a sort of device which is used in architecture, astronomy, alchemy, chemistry, warfare or recreation. The meaning of the term yantra later expanded to refer to religious enterprises, and concurrently acquired a special theological significance. Mystic yantras then were known as the chief instruments of meditative practices.

Basically, a yantra used in this context and for meditative purpose is an abstract geometrical design intended as a 'tool' for meditation and expansion of awareness. Yantra is essentially a geometrical composition. It also represents a particular configuration whose power increases in proportion to the abstraction and precision of the diagram. Yantras vary according to their use. The selection of the yantra with its appropriate mantra is a highly complex process, and the spiritual guide alone can help the aspirant to do it. It arouses the inner life-force to its fullest, and its dedication to the yantra's chief deity. Its action can be seen as a physical, psychological and spiritual awareness and a deeper understanding of the self and cosmic mystery.

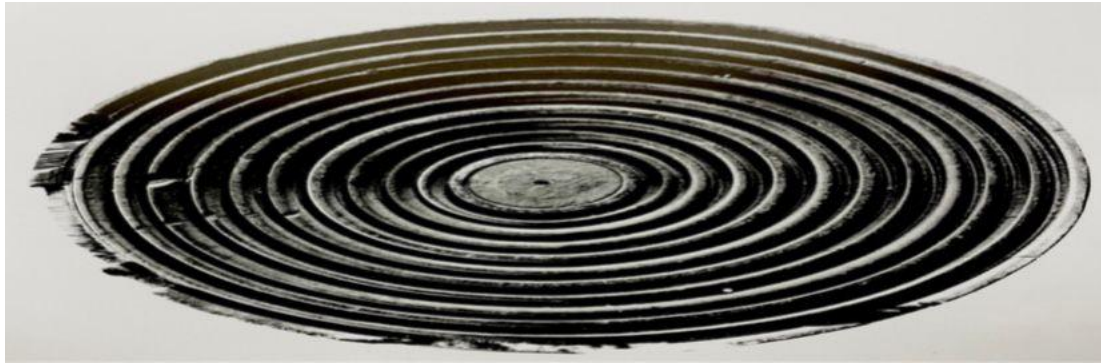
The study of Hindu yantras or power diagrams shows how each elementary geometrical form can generate a series of linear and multi-dimensional figures of the same shape, regardless of its original size. Common to such permutations are certain recurring linearities: the bindu or dot, the triangle, the square, and the circle. In the yantra, these forms function as 'thought-forms' that are so constructed that the seeker understands by them particular patterns of divine force.

To identify completely with the configuration is to 'realize' or to release the inherent forces that each form represents. Each yantra makes visible the patterns of force that can be heard in the mantra sound-syllable, and each yantra reciprocally encloses its own unique power-pattern. Together, yantra-mantra are said to build unique vibrations and form – firstly, by the act of configuration; secondly, the configuration itself and finally, dissolving the form created via that configuration. And in doing so, the seeker comprehends its inner meaning and rises beyond it.



Types of Yantras: Yantras are often embossed on small copper plates, when it is to be used in ritual worship. There are various forms including - Sudarshana Yantra, symbolizing Vishnu's power and radiance. Vishnu and Lakshmi Yantra symbolizing the unity of the male and female principles; yantra of Vishnu, the preserver of the cosmos; and Kala Bhairava Chakra, an auspicious yantra of one of the epithets of Lord Shiva. Contemporary images are based on traditional forms found in Tamil Nadu.

3 I A# The Bindu or Dot as Tantric symbol



The bindu, sacred point of origin and return. with concentric circles symbolizing the eternal cycles of cosmic evolution and involution. The goal of the adept is her own involution to the center. The ultimate point of psycho-cosmic integration, where s/he discovers her link with the whole. Found in Andra Pradesh, c. 19th century. Medium is Wood

Bindu (point or dot) is sometimes similar to a pearl. This is not just a poetic choice of words or philosophy. There literally comes a stage while doing yoga meditation in which all experiences collapse. They dissolve into a point from which all experiences arose in the first place. The Bindu is near the end of the subtlest aspect of mind itself, after which one travels beyond or transcends the mind and its matter. It is near the end of time, space, and is the doorway to the Absolute.

To understand this principle is extremely useful, if not essential to advanced meditation. Bindu is beyond the senses and thoughts. It is important to understand that the actual Bindu is far beyond the senses and thoughts in the usual sense of thinking processes involving strings of words and images or to use a psychology jargon coined by William James; 'stream of consciousness'. This means transcending not only the senses as they operate through the body, but also the inner or mental experience of sensation. For example, one not only closes the eyes, but also goes beyond all manner of inner visualization. When attention on all of the gross and subtle objects and processes collapses and moves inward towards the Bindu, there is a convergence on one point, which is the real meaning of the phrase - 'one-pointedness of the mind'. There may be an extremely intense awareness of the nature of pure sound and light, but this is very different from what we experience by mental visualization or imagination. The journey to the Bindu starts to become the experience of the source of light and the source of sound, as well as being the source out of which other sensation, mental processes emerge.

A1 # Analysis of the Bindu

The point of divergence and convergence is called Bindu, which means point or dot, and is also linked to a seed. The Sanskrit root of Bindu is to break through or to burst through.

The Bindu or dot symbol has been used in a variety of ways, including the following:

Sri Yantra: The highest, most advanced symbol of Tantra has a dot or bindu in the center, which also symbolizes this point of divergence and convergence.

The dot as a symbol: The point or dot has been often used as a symbol in which both the worlds, the physical and the metaphysical coexist at all times.

Yin-Yang: The Dot shows two fundamental forces of static and active, with the seed of one lying within the other, manifesting as other the thousandsof things, while ever remaining one.

Dot and crescent: The Point is an ancient symbol of the un-manifest matter and the manifest reality both, while crescent is seen as a five-pointed star which stands only for visible matter.

Light and a tunnel: People having near-death experiences may report seeing light at the end of a tunnel. The Tunnel is the subtle channel called *Brahma Nadi* and the light emerges from *Bindu*.

A2 #The Bindu Experience

The culmination of yantra meditation is reached when the seeker begins to internalize the bindu in the yantra as an inner, still center. S/he may then contemplate an imaginary point in the subtle body. The spiritual experience of the bindu marks the end of spiritual involution.

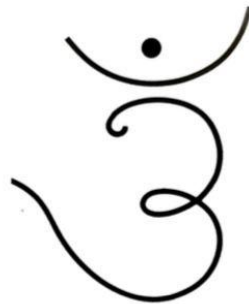
The 'bindu-state' experience is unique. Psychically, it implies the seeker's awareness of her wholeness, which is spontaneously discovered through inward illumination. All the outward directed energies of the phenomenal ego are brought together to an inward state of rest and unity by the ultimate realization of Atman. Neutrality of the senses has superseded the creative play of Maya Shakti, and s/he is now the silent seer, no longer attached to the world of phenomena. S/he neither laughs nor weeps, loves nor hates, because/he has transcended all the dualities. The adept attains precisely the state, mentally and spiritually, that the symbol of the bindu denotes, an ideal mid-point, the balancing of all the polarities. But this is not the end, the aspirant is still to soar beyond the bindu-state to merge with the oneness of the Lord Shiva (static energy) and MaaShakti (kinetic energy).

This highest stage of spiritual absorption (samadhi) is achieved through yantra ritual worship. At this stage, the meditation is not susceptible to any verbal analysis. It is contemplated in absolute silence, which is absence of any sound or thought.

When the seeker is able to totally re-establish herself in primordial equilibrium by retracing her steps to her original source, absorbing and reintegrating all the fragmentations and multiplicity of existence into unity, there is nothing left for her to seek. Quoting from the Hindu scriptures:

"When there is duality, one sees another, one smells another, one tastes another, one speaks to another, one hears another, one touches another, one understands another. But where everything has become just one's own self, then who can be seen by whom? Who can be smelt by what? Who can be tasted by what? Who can speak to whom? Who can think of what? Who can touch what?"

A3# OM Mantra



The dot at the top of the OM symbolizes the Absolute Reality, or Pure Consciousness. As noted in Yoga Sutras and Vedanta, the bindu, is sacred point of origin and return as discussed above. The goal of the adept is her own involution to the center, the ultimate point of psycho-cosmic integration, where one discovers one's link with the whole cosmos.

When a particular letter functions as a yantra it is given an abstract geometrical figuration. A characteristic graphic representation of the sacred monosyllable Om in its yantra form appears in the Orissa manuscript of SayantraShunya-Samhita, where it is split into five constituent parts, starting from the bindu and proceeding to curves having an element of the spiral. These five graphic forms correspond to the complete unfolding of the basic principles of the universe in its fivefold aspects, such as the five elements, five subtle essences, five deities, five seed mantras, etc.

In addition to the seed mantras, there are a number of complex mantras composed of several seed-syllables. Their number, mode and purpose, with their yantras, are mentioned in several tantric texts. The structure of certain mantras is based on the esoteric symbolism of numbers. The mantra devoted to Shiva, for instance, is composed of five letters (panchakshara)- Na/mah Shi/va/ya. In religious practice and mythology Shiva combines in himself five aspects of the universe. His eternal energies are evident in five activities: he enfolds the whole of creation, he preserves, he reabsorbs or dissolves it. He conceals the world of phenomena in his Tatpuruasha aspect; and finally, as Ishana, he grants boons and bestows grace which leads towards final liberation. These five aspects are correlated with important and fundamental sets of five psycho-cosmic principles. This is one of the reasons why the pentagon is associated with Shiva. The five syllables of the Shiva mantra are an attempt to illustrate his immanence in his five aspects, and when his mantra is inscribed in

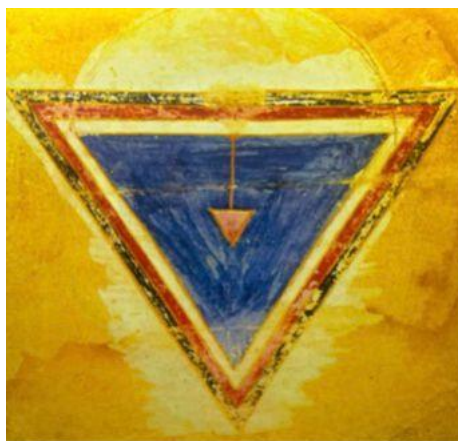
theyantra, it symbolically recapitulates the five-fold Shaivite tenets. Similarly, the mantra devoted to another god of the Hindu trinity, Vishnu, has twelve syllables. And Vishnu mantra is Om Namobhagvate Vasudevaya.

B #The Lotus as Tantric symbol

In tantric art the lotus is a symbol of the expanding consciousness, which ultimately elevates the aspirant from the dark depths of ignorance to the radiance of inner awakening. Because of its greasy surface, the lotus is not affected by the soiled water in which it grows. Hence just as the lotus plant grows in the dirty mud and gradually blossoms out to the surface of water, unsullied by the mud, similarly the inner-self transcends beyond its own material limits, unaffected by illusion and ignorance. The lotus blossom is one of the principal archetypal symbols used in yantras. Generally, centered on the axis with its petals unfolding towards the circumference, it is the appropriate image to illustrate the unfolding of power of the divine essence. In ancient cosmology, the lotus is also associated with creation myths. It is, for example, often depicted as springing from Vishnu's navel, supporting and giving birth to Brahma, the creator. Once Brahma creates the universe, Vishnu comes to the world in one of his ten forms or incarnations, to preserve order and ensure justice. This is one of the cycles of creation. Brahma falls asleep, and the lotus closes and goes back into Vishnu's navel. Vishnu then sleeps on the serpent's coils. The process eventually begins all over again. The lotus hence here represents the unfolding of a new age; similarly, in a yantra it signifies the awakening of the inner self.

In the Hindu theology, the lotus is taken a symbol of the center of the heart. Yogis believe that there are actual spiritual centers within us whose essential nature and luminosity can be experienced during meditation. These spiritual centers are symbolically named as lotuses, and their 'blooming' implies the state of complete repose when the purpose of yogic meditation is attained. In the final analysis, though a yantra is made up of different elements, the fundamental aim of ritual and meditation is to fuse all these dimensions, and to facilitate the adept's spiritual journey. As the journey progresses, the adept encounters the various aspects of manifestation inherent in nature, symbolized by the male and female principles. These are bounded within a circle. This symbolizes that all reality is confined within these concepts.

C #The Triangle as Tantric symbol



The Goddess Sakti taking the form of a triangle brings forth the three worlds. The three sides of the yoni, the primordial triangle, creative matrix of the cosmos, stand for the three qualities composing material nature sattva, the ascending quality, seen as golden-white; rajas, the kinetic quality, seen as red; and tamas, the descending quality or inertia, seen as bluish black. Image: Found in Rajasthan, 17th century. Medium: Gouache on paper

The triangle is the archetype symbol of a sacred enclosure, since space cannot be bounded by fewer than three lines. The triangle is conceived as the first closed figure to emerge when creation emerged from chaos. In this aspect it is known as the root of all manifested nature. The rhythm of creation is crystallized in this primal form. Tantra calls the triangle the cone of fire, a reference to its shape. This is the fire of aspiration which is ever burning in the heart of the spiritual seeker.

The threefold structure of the triangle is interpreted over multiple levels. Some of these visualizations are:

- 1) Creation, Preservation, and Destruction:
Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

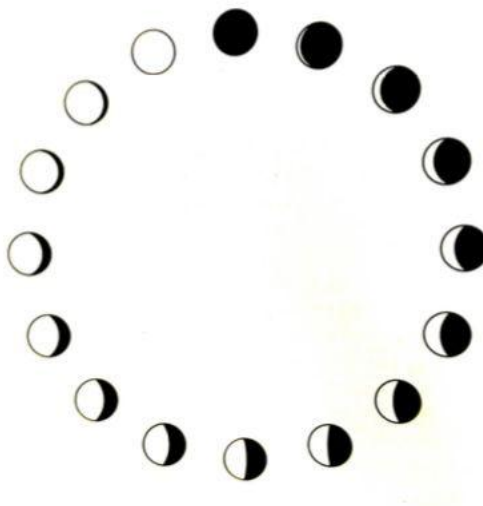
- 2) The three tendencies:
the neutral (Sattva), the positive (Rajas) and
the negative (Tamas)
- 3) The three Vedas:
Rig, Yaju, and Sam
- 4) The three measures of time:
Past, Present, and Future
- 5) The three seasons:
Spring, Summer, and Winter
- 6) The three main pilgrimages:
Prayag, Gaya, and Kashi

When used in a yantra, a triangle is either inverted or upright. The inverted triangle is a symbol of feminine power, the creative impulse of the universe, known as Shakti. It is the dynamism of this Shakti that gives rise to the creative impulse in nature.

This inverted triangle is generally the first enclosure surrounding the infinitesimal nucleus of most yantras. The triangle pointing upwards is symbolic of the male principle (Purusha). When the two triangles penetrate each other forming a hexagon, it symbolizes the fusion of polarities, the union of Shiva and Shakti, male and female. This union is the cause of the manifested universe. When the triangles part at the apex, time and space cease to exist, and all creative activity comes to a standstill.

The Goddess Shakti taking the form of a triangle brings forth the three aspects. The three sides of the yoni, the primordial triangle, creative matrix of the cosmos, stand for the three qualities composing material nature sattva, the ascending quality, seen as white; rajas, the kinetic quality, seen as red; tamas, the descending quality or inertia, seen as black.

D #The Circle as Tantric symbol



Moon phase representing the Shakti-cluster of Nitya Shaktis

The circle occurs frequently in yantras and is derived principally from the motion of the revolution of planets. It symbolizes wholeness or totality and represents the principle which has no beginning, and no end. A perfectly symmetrical entity, equidistant from the center at all points; it indicates the realm of radiation that proceeds from the one center. In other words, a circumscribed field of action.

The circle of the Nitya Shaktis is a reservoir of delight, for they embody all those aspects of life that make existence a celebration of the spirit. They combine the all-beneficent aspects of the divine. As partial manifestations of transcendent completeness, they are representative of life-affirming qualities and the primal founts of power to bestow worldly joys. Thus, worship of their yantras grants boons, dispels fear and brings enjoyment to the worshipper. Esoterically, their yantras maybe used for higher meditation, but esoterically they are employed as wish-fulfillment charts.

Though it is true that, since the female principle gained popularity in the tantric pantheon, an immense number of yantras have been assigned to the various aspects of Shakti (Isha), nevertheless within the goddess's kinetic and pulsating nature is a point of stillness which can only be fulfilled by a counter-principle, her exact opposite represented by Shiva(Ishaan).

E #The Square as Tantric symbol

The square is the fundamental format of most yantras. There is a significant, well thought logic behind it. The phenomenal world extends into four directions. These four directions represent the totality of space, and they bind the earth in order.

The square too is the simplest and perfect manifestation of the number four, by virtue of the four perfect, equal lines bounding its form. Hence it is visualized as the perfect symbol to denote the terrestrial world. This mundane, physical world is the one which must be transcended by spiritual practice.

The square pattern has four gates, one in each of the cardinal directions. They are known as cosmic doors because it is through them that the aspirant symbolically enters the yantra. They represent the passage from the earthly realm to the 'inner', sacred space of the yantra. These gates are an initiatory threshold which simultaneously opposes the phenomenal and embraces the noumenal. It is further believed that these gateways themselves are guarded by divine forces which protect the sacred precinct within, from negative and disintegrating forces.

4 I Indian Visual Aesthetics and Yantra

Traditional Indian art, which includes the yantra, is never considered a means to individual self-expression but serves as a primary focus of the spirit. The work of art reflects the divine archetype and is a bridge between the finite and infinite over which the beholder or devotee 'travels' into another realm of being. Such an art form has its subject matter and its treatment of form from inner sources. An artist who seeks to plumb the mystery of creation within such a tradition acts as an exponent of a doctrine, a messenger who translates universal spiritual intuitions into visual terms.

These intuitions strive for revelation, to transcend the accidental aspects of form and to relate themselves to archetypal analogues. This process of emergence may involve the transfiguration of phenomenal entities, so that their ultimate form, the expression of their essential qualities, bears no likeness to their outward or real appearances. According to the Indian theology, the produced form never exists as it appears to the physical eye but it is as an object corresponding to its mental prototype.

Hence form is never valued for its own sake, but is valued for the experience of religious or metaphysical truth it offers. What is sought in form is an indwelling presence, the soul imprisoned in the material. All Indian images are 'symbols' of the Supreme Principle and vary only in degree of abstraction. Consequently, the outer form of an image should always be perceived in relation to its symbol-value. The material 'reality' of a yantra's form depends on the spiritual reality of its content; or, to put it another way, the metaphysics of yantra coincides with its aesthetics, in that form and content are inextricably related by an internal logic.

In certain instances, form-value and symbol-value are closely congruent; parallelism exists between the intrinsic nature of the shapes and their transcendental correspondents. Thus, for instance, in geometry the point is the primary principle of all figures. In the yantra, the geometry of the point is amplified into a metaphysical 'truth' in the symbolism of the bindu. The bindu, as we have seen earlier, is a natural symbol of the Supreme Principle just as the point is a fundamental principle of all shapes. Similarly, just as the point in geometry represents indivisible unity and the beginning of all dimension and concrete shape, the Supreme Principle represented by the bindu cannot be qualified in dimension because it is conceived of as uncovered, and therefore cannot be circumscribed by any measure or dimension, yet remains the basis of all spiritual dimension and empirical being.

According to tantra imagery, the triangle is the simplest planar expression of cosmic location after the point. It is thus the first sacred enclosure of the Shiva-Sakti principle.

The three points of the triangle are related to certain triads of cosmic principles: sattva; rajas and tamas; creation, preservation and dissolution. Content determines form with the nine circuits of the Sri Yantra that are related to the nine-fold division of cosmic principles; to the nine apertures of the body; to the nine psychic

centers; to the nine names of the Shakti (Tripurā, Tripuresi, Tripurā-Sundari, Tripuravasini, Tripurasri, Tripuramalini, Tripurasiddha, Tripuramba, Mahātripurasundam); and to the nine planets.

The cosmic concepts relating to five principles- the five elements, for example, or the five aspects of Shiva - are associated with the pentagon; and the sixteen lotus petals which recur in several yantras are made the dwelling of sixteen divinities and, as in the Sri Yantra, are associated with the sixteen vowels of the Sanskrit language.

Similarly, the application of colour in the yantra is purely symbolic. Colour is never used arbitrarily to enhance the decorative quality of a diagram, but refers to philosophical ideas and expresses inner states of consciousness. One of the most important colour-schemes is white, red and black, which stands for the three qualities of material nature (Prakṛiti): sattva, rajas and tamas. The sattva or ascending quality has been given the colour of purity, white; rajas, which denotes the dynamic or creative principle, is red; tamas, which is inertia or the descending force, is black. The eight regions of space also have symbolic colours. Similarly, with the five elements: in ascending order, from gross to most subtle, earth is yellow; water is white; fire is red; air is grey; ether is misty-smoky. In a grid-square yantra, each square may be painted with a flat tone to denote one of the five elements.

The aspects of the Goddess are represented by colours in accordance with her qualities; conferring liberation she is contemplated as white; as preserver of all, she is seen as red; as destroyer she is tawny; conferring bliss she is rose-coloured; as bestower of wealth and good fortunes she is saffron-yellow. Coloured black, she withdraws the entire world into herself. Black is seen as containing all the colours, hence Kali is represented as dark-hued, as 'white and other colours disappear into black in the same way as all beings disappear in Kali.'

Traditionally, the particular goal of the yantra worship may decide the colouring used for the yantra, though not all texts prescribe the same color symbolism. Yellow (pita) and vermilion (rakta) are the two-basic auspicious colours. For temporary worship, yantras are drawn with saffron, a red powder (kumkum) or sandalwood paste. Brown, tawny colours or dark blue may be used for 'negative' yantras.

Yantras are often made of rock crystal, since within its translucent brilliance are latent all the colours of the spectrum. Gold, a vibration between saturated yellow and brilliant light, represents transcendence, and is used in some yantras for the bindu to indicate the experience of light, or spiritual bliss.

Generally speaking, then, the aesthetics of yantra would be meaningless if content and expression were separated. The yantra for meditation, both in its structure and use of colour, is not a haphazard conglomeration of percept and concept. It is directed by a philosophical content which expands and multiplies its forms. Whether the figures of the yantra appear singularly or as parts of a more complexstructure they never lose their intrinsic meanings or their symbol-value.

5I The Construction of Power-Diagram

The symmetry is a norm to the construction of the yantra. Leaves of plants grow in tune with the nature's laws, and the yantra similarly evolves in accordance with traditional rules and in harmonious mathematical progression. The three principal modes of evolution are - straight and symmetrical (riju); the curved and asymmetrical (susama); and the quasi-symmetrical or eccentric (visama). The rootprinciple of this mathematical descent from the bindu to the unified and orderly periphery is called ardhamatra (from the Sanskrit root, rdh=to grow, matrā = measure), or the measure that is not static but grows and evolves in accordance with the laws of harmony and rhythm.

From the source, the bindu, derives the expanding line, seen as the continuum (nada); from nada originate magnitude and dimension (parimeya); from parimeya arise the symbiotic opposites (plus-minus, male-female), centrifugal and centripetal polarities and the order of numbers (samkhya). Number provides harmony and stability, integration and unity. Thus, the number 3 gives specific location to magnitude and becomes a triangle, 4 a square, 5 a pentagon, 6 a hexagon, etc. As we have seen, these numbers are not simply summingup of integers, but have specific symbolic relationships with philosophical ideas.

The yantra-siddhais (sages to whom the powers of the yantra have been revealed) declare that if a yantra fails to become 'active' the fault lies with the person using the yantra and never with the yantra itself, for the power-diagram is never tentative or arbitrary, but is based on laws of space, vibration, number and dynamics.

In traditional Indian art, the process of creation falls into a pattern similar to worship. The ground-breaking metaphysician Ananda Coomaraswamy, quoting several Sanskrit sources, describes the various disciplines which an artist has to undergo. As the first step in the ritual which precedes creation of a sculpted image, for example, s/he goes to a solitary place. There s/he must discipline her impulses, control her physical and mental processes and suppress the chaotic world of the subconscious through penetrating concentration. Sometimes, to reach the inner depths of her consciousness, 'the imager, on the night before beginning his work and after ceremonial purification, is instructed to pray: O thou Lord, teach me in dreams how to carry out the work I have in mind.' After the artist has reached an 'inner poise and moral grace, and integrated herself emotionally and spiritually, s/he evokes the deity by the means of dhyana (trance) mantras, which provide her with a sort of mental blueprint for the execution of the image. After the work is completed a priest consecrates the image in a rite called the 'opening of the eye' which endows it with sacred power. This procedure emphasizes how far such artistic expression is from being an 'aesthetic' exercise. At no point in the whole discipline is the 'artist' separated from her art; and in the activity of creation, s/he annihilates all trace of her individuality and selfhood. The shapes and forms she creates reveal to her the macro cosmos in the same fashion that exists within herself. In this sense the created object 'prepares' its maker for a spiritual return to her primordial source.

Similarly, the construction of a yantra is a complete rite to be followed meticulously. Care is taken to choose the most propitious place and time of the day. The surface to which it is applied must bear auspicious signs and be smooth. The drawing, however, may be perfect in its proportions, correct in its brushwork, and faultless in its colourings; it may be scrupulously drawn according to all the rules of linear formation set out in the shastras (texts), and yet may fail to reflect the true significance of the yantra, unless the maker can transmit to the figure her inner life-tie with cosmic forces. Until s/he can '*feel*' the nature and substance of the cosmic bond in the deeper layers of her psyche, until s/he is able to impart the reality which s/he has intuited and is herself apart of, the yantra s/he draws will fail to reflect its participation in the transcendent. The maker pours forth an 'intensity for which there is no word'. S/he must feel the very nature of the energy to be transmitted to the yantra, affecting all who view it.

This type of creation has obviously no room for 'art for art's sake'. Indeed, this 'metaphysical aesthetics' holds that someone who views a yantra in its original environment, whether a temple or a humble house, can know it and comprehend its inner meaning better than the person who views it in the artificial setting of a museum or gallery. The yantra exteriorizes a universal intuition, and is experienced through stages, beginning with worship and ending in reintegration.

6 IDeity's Icon and yantra

The inseparability of form and content is only one aspect of the aesthetics of the yantra. Another concerns the radical abstraction of its symbolic forms, in contrast to the 'realism' of iconographic art. An example is the iconographic image of the tantric goddess Durga, as described in the 'Devi-Mahatmya' of the Markandeya Purana, as opposed to her yantra form prescribed in the tantric texts, an extremely bold contrast in expression.

In her iconographic form, Durga is described as having emerged from the energies of Vishnu, Shiva and all the gods who sent forth their power in the form of streams of flames, combining themselves into a mass of cloud which grew and grew until it condensed into the shape of the goddess. The verses of the Devi-Mahatmya describe the formation of her physical body and her iconographical attributes as follows:

"Born out of the bodies of all the Gods, that unique effulgence, combined into a mass of light, took the form of a woman, pervading the triple worlds with its luster. In that effulgence, the light of Shiva formed the face. The tresses were formed from the light of Yama and the arms from the light of Vishnu. The two breasts were formed from the moon's light, the waist from the light of Indra, the legs and thighs from the light of Varuna and the hips from the light of the earth. The feet from the light of Brahma and the toes from the sun's light. The fingers of the hand from the light of the Vasus and the nose from the light of Kuvera. The teeth were formed from the light of Prajapati, the lord of beings; likewise, the triad of her eyes was born from the light of fire. The eyebrows from the two Sandhyas; the ears from the light of the wind. From the light of other gods as well, the auspicious goddess was formed."

Projecting an overwhelming omnipotence, the three-eyed goddess adorned with the crescent moon emerged with her eighteen arms each holding auspicious weapons and emblems, jewels and ornaments, garments and utensils, garlands and rosaries of beads, all offered by individual gods. With her pulsating body of golden colour, shining with the splendor of a thousand suns, standing erect on her lion-vehicle (vahana) and displaying

her triumph over the dark forces, she is one of the most spectacular of all iconic personifications of cosmic energy.

In contrast, Durga's yantra form is described in the Shree BrihatTantrasara as a composition of three triangles forming nine angles surrounded by three circles, with an eight-petalled lotus enclosed by a square with four gates, and the Goddess's seed mantra in the centre. The yantra forms a linear field of energy, without any likeness to the concrete image (murti) of Durga. The magnificent conception of Durga, with all her complex iconographic attributes, has been resolved into a simple geometrical equation retaining the vitality and life-force of all her auspicious personifications. The overwhelming appearances and arousal of emotions of fear or reassurance characteristic of the icon are not the purpose of the yantra, whose abstraction and serene equilibrium take the viewer beyond the partial aspects of the deity to the universal.

Further, the yantra, unlike the icon, is universal in the sense that it is not subject to geographical or historical variations of style, but has maintained a common tradition throughout India. Visually, the yantra has more in common with Indian temple architecture than with icons of the deity.

The icon is the grossest manifestation of the devata; the yantra is the geometrical counterpart of the icon; and the mantra condenses the aesthetic potentiality of form as sound. In this sequence from gross to subtle, the yantra forms a link between form and formlessness, visible and invisible energy. The abstraction of the yantra is a first major step towards the resolution of dense materiality into its subtlest transformation, the monosyllabic mantra. Hence the aesthetics of yantra should never be considered as divorced from its sound dynamics.

Concrete and abstract images offer alternatives to the worshipper according to her devotional needs and temperament. The cult-bound devotee may concentrate on the divinity in concrete form, where a highly advanced adept may use only mantra and yantra. Yet icon and yantra should not be seen as separate entities; they are two ways of apprehending the Supreme Principle, two sparks of the same fire.

7 ITantra and Traditional abstract Indian visual art

Abstraction and simplicity as compared with representational and decorative art styles are believed by some to be alien to Indian art, yet the most significant characteristic of the yantra is its geometrical elegance and purity of archetypal form. The art of yantra is akin to the art of the Zen painters who seek to convey the whole mystery of creation in a few brush strokes, eliminating all detail and condensing form to its root essence. Geometrical abstraction of forms has a long history in India. It can be traced back as far as Vedic times (second millennium BC) to a variety of carefully constructed fire altars whose symbolic form parallels that of yantras. Literary evidence shows that art, in the Vedic period, had reached a high level of symbolic expression. As Vedic religion was one of non-anthropomorphic nature worship, icons and temples were absent. Consequently, the place where the sacred rites were held was marked only by a sacred enclosure, the container of the ever-burning ritual fire, symbolically the point where heaven and earth met.

The Vedic altars were given simple shapes. Their plans range from circular and square to combined geometrical figures, and were purely abstract in their genesis as well as in their final form. Of celestial significance, the square is the fundamental shape of Vedic altars, as with the Ahvaniya fire, the Uttara Vedi, the Ukha; all the other shapes are either based on or derived from it. The altar represented the material elements of the cosmic being (Purusha). Its bricks were laid pointing towards the cardinal directions to symbolize the vast extension of the universe; its heart was the place where the ritual fires were kindled. The altar combined the symbolic features of the deity, i.e. fire, and the sacrificial rites, linked together by the sacred plinth. Fire was the axis mundi that united the heavens and earth, and the altar symbolically represented the pillar that held the four regions (E W N S) together: 'Upon the back of Aditi I lay thee [altar], the sky's supporter, Pillar of the Quarters. Fire ruled over the three zones of the cosmos (earth, air, sky), and the altar's construction embodied this principle: three of its five layers were arranged to represent the three levels of the Vedic cosmos.

Many yantras used for ritual worship have retained archaic characteristics of these Vedic altars, though wide variation in detail was introduced as they came under the influence of tantrism. Altar-plan and yantra equally have strong cosmic affinities and are executed according to mathematical principles without any vestige of ornamentation.

8 I'Centrality' in Tantra Philosophy and 'Wholeness' As An Abstract Art Concept

Despite its varieties the yantra's form retains its mathematical perfection. The extension of the bindu into line suggesting direction, motion and energy, continuing with regular expansion of linear shapes creates geometric patterns of increasing complexity. The yantra emerges as a perfect 'hologram', a figure of inner coherence and unity. A line can be divided to give smaller units without assuming wholeness or organic unity of composition. But when a point is placed in the centre of a given composition (as in a yantra), its spatial values begin to relate to the centre and all its parts are transfigured into a whole. Though all the concentric figures in the yantra are 'closed' shapes and form integral units in themselves, their inner balance is maintained, even where strongly contrasting shapes are related. No matter how it is arranged, a yantra's centre integrates all linear flow. The cosmos is conceived as 'holon' (a perfect whole) or a 'closed universe' in which all elements of life are constantly recomposed at the end of cosmic cycles. Thus, all manifestation within this closed universe is balanced by an eternal immutable reality, the indivisible centre. A yantra is thus a geometrical paradigm of a perfect whole, and a mystical construct of the universe in which all polarities are harmoniously united.

9 ITantra Art for Inner Peace

The art which has evolved out of tantra reveals an abundant variety of forms, tone, colour, symbols and graphic patterns with personal and universal significance. It is especially intended to convey a knowledge evoking a higher level of perception and tapping dormant sources of our awareness. This form of expression is not pursued like detached speculation to achieve mere aesthetic delight, but has a deeper greater meaning. Apart from aesthetic value, this art styles' real significance lies in its content, the meaning it conveys, and the psychological effect it has on a person.

10 I Tantra Art and Psychology

To demonstrate how Tantra Art has deep psychological effect on us, let us refer to the theory of consciousness constructed by **William James** born in 1842 to an influential family in New York. James became a qualified physician in 1869 from Harvard Medical School but never practiced medicine. Later, in 1873 after conducting an in-depth research on the workings of human mind, he returned to Harvard and became professor of both philosophy and psychology. He set up the first experimental psychology courses in the USA and played a prominent role in establishing psychology as a scientific discipline. In his treatise *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) he has discussed his **theory of consciousness**. "Consciousness does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. There are no joints either. But it flows. Consciousness is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations. Most importantly, consciousness is not a thing but a process. It is what the brain does to steer a nervous system grown too complex to regulate itself. It allows us to reflect upon the past, present and future to plan to adapt to circumstances and sustain...The simplest way to understand how the thoughts within the stream of consciousness work is to see that they stay combined." To explain further, James shows the work of dots by the French Post-Impressionist painter Georges Seurat. There are separate dots of pure colours, but the brain combines these separate dots and concurrently sees a human figure and not the dots.

(Page 43 – Big Ideas : The Psychology Book)

James says that emotions and your perception play crucial role. He extends his theory of consciousness to envelop thoughts of his colleague Carl Lange. According to James-Lange Theory of Emotion, the emotions that govern the entire mind, body, actions and reactions of the humans arise from the conscious mind's perceptions of the surroundings and occurrences. According to James's theory, you feel happy because you are conscious to the fact that you are smiling. It is not only that you are smile because you are happy but it is vice versa. His approach is that truth emerges from the series of facts...but the facts themselves meanwhile are not true. Truth is the function of beliefs that starts inside the human brain.

Applying this theory to Tantra philosophy, we can lucidly grasp how homogenously multiplying geometrical patterns of Yantra combine into one whole and the image than becomes an archetypal symbol. How that symbol efficiently fuses the physical and metaphysical planes in the human mind, and allows the mind to transcend the matter to merge with the Bindu – the centre of the multiverses. Simply put, the Tantra philosophy when applied into art helps to develop a pragmatic outlook. It helps you rise above the tentative situations, grasp the bigger picture and lead the life in a mature way.

Similarly, applying the **Humanistic psychoanalysis** approach developed by **Erich Fromm**, a leading 20th century German Jew socio-psychologist. Fromm known for his notable ideas including; Being and Having...as modes of existence, social character and character orientation, believed that people assimilate themselves in the world (society) by acquiring, using things or skills. He believed that the man's main task is to give birth to himself. Fromm suggests that our separation from nature originates with the growth of intellect. It

is man's ability to reason that lends him intellectual superiority over other living beings. But it also makes him aware that he is alone. His reason also makes him aware of his mortality and that of his loved ones. This understanding and awareness creates a chronic state of tension, anxiety, hopelessness and loneliness. Togetherness of all these negative emotions often causes stress and depression. But still there is hope. Fromm insists that man can overcome sense of alienation, separation and hopelessness through finding his purpose. It is imperative, asserts Fromm, to discover one's own independent sense of self, one's personal views and value system rather than adhering to societal, conventional and authoritarian norms. The purpose of life is to define ourselves through embracing our personal uniqueness, discovering our own ideas, abilities and skills. In sharpening your skills and honing your abilities – through such creative and constructive pursuits, the man can free himself from the chronic fear, loneliness and confusion. Paradoxically, Fromm believes that the only way we can feel complete is through discovery of our passion, creativity, uniqueness and individuality. Creative urge gives courage to let go of certainties. Creative urge gives birth to love; love is nothing else but interpersonal creative capacity. Love is respecting autonomy of the other's personality. Love is having integrity of your own self; when one has strong sense of self, one can understand the world in a better way.

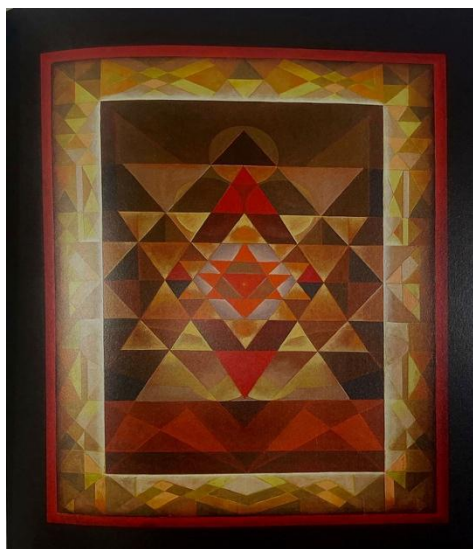
Fromm's Humanistic psychoanalysis approach goes hand in hand with philosophy of Tantra or Tantra Art which asks the seeker to turn within to feel complete and comprehend the cosmos. Tantra art can sooth the mind and prepares it to develop interpersonal creative capacity. The Tantra Experience through visual aesthetics can potently liberalise one's mind and expand the inner horizons. It can become an efficacious panacea to treat stress, depression or emotional imbalances.

11 I Indian Artists Practising Tantra Art

The East and the west, as we know, are inseparably linked and greatly influence each other via lifestyles, philosophies, art practices, literatures, cultures and countercultures. Notwithstanding the Victorian, colonial or Western art influences, a small group of Indian artists during 1960s wholeheartedly embraced Tantric etymology including its motifs, concepts, forms, shapes, shades and have perceptibly scripted a pathbreaking and fresh Tantra art vocabulary.

The pioneering art experiments, conducted by these clairvoyant practitioners of Indian art in the 20th century, have inspired the western clinical psychologists to develop unique and personalised Art Therapy Modules as antidotes to tackle and treat depressive disorders. In order to understand their influence on psychological practices, let us primarily examine the creation of sixteen prominent artists who have worked under the single thematic rubric of Tantra Art. These modern icons of Tantra Art are G R Santosh, K C S Paniker, Biren De, SohanQadri, J Swaminathan, Prabhakar Barwe, S H Raza, Manu Parekh, V Viswanadhan, Shobha Broota, Gogi Saroj Pal, Satish Gujral, P T Reddy, Sunil Das, R B Bhaskaran and Jyoti Bhatt.

Born in 1929 in at Srinagar G R Santosh, one of the most prominent Tantric visual artist, followed philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. In 1960s he studied mystical Tantric art and created some paintings infused with spiritual energy which have today become the best examples to explain this style.



Born in 1922 in Madhya Pradesh, renowned Indian painter S H Raza though lived in France followed austere theories of Hindu mysticism. His paintings depict the inner journey that the seekers may experience while trying to attain one-pointedness of the mind. Bindu, one of the most prominent Tantric symbol, has recurrently featured in his works.



Born in Gujarat in 1939, iconic artist Manu Parekh is known for his spiritual landscapes. His abstract paintings are rooted in tantra philosophy. He has often employed the potent tantric symbols including square, circle, bindu and lotus in his works.



Conclusion

The art which has evolved out of tantra philosophy has abundant richness of forms, tone, colour and symbols. It is especially intended to evoke pure sensibilities and higher self-awareness. Besides the aesthetic pleasure, the prime significance is in the content of these paintings and the meaning they convey. Experience of viewing the tantric art calms one's mind because the paintings perhaps embody the peace that the painter has felt in the process of creation.

This research paper is supported by a series of methodological evidences gathered during practical sessions conducted by myself at various NGOs and old-age homes working towards mental wellness of the patients of chronic illnesses like arthritis, cancer, depression, etc. The practical module of this research theory concludes that understanding and frequent exposure to tantric art soothes the minds of the beholders, elevates their mood and prepares them to tackle their psychological issues.

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