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From Yantra to Contemporary Composition: Reinterpreting Sacred Geometry in Modern Art and Design Practices

Dr. Mukesh Singh^a, Dr. Om Singh^b

^a School of Design, Bennett University, Greater Noida, UP - 201310, India

^b School of Design, Bennett University, Greater Noida, UP - 201310, India

^amukesh.art81@gmail.com, ^bdesign.omsingh@gmail.com

^a9910550411, ^b9873423638

Abstract

Sacred geometry has played a considerable role in the training of Indian visual culture, where geometric forms are classified not merely as decorative factors but as carriers of ethical, and spiritual meaning. Among these civilizations, the yantra indicates a highly structured visual system compiled of the bindu (dot), Trikon (triangle), circle (Gola), square, Indian lotus, symmetry, and repetition. These components found connections between the centre and the periphery, the separate and the cosmos, and the material and the spiritual. This paper examines the importance of yantra-based sacred geometry in modern art and design, with specific prominence on its contribution to visual arrangement, spatial organisation, representation, and design pedagogy.

Using a qualitative and pictorial-fact-finding approach, the study deal with selected yantric forms and links their compositional principles with present practices in painting, sculpture, graphic design, architecture, installation, and digital media. The paper explores that sacred geometry continues to offer valued frameworks for balance, rhythm, proportion, hierarchy, unity, and transformation. However, its growing use in current visual culture regularly reduces these forms to surface decoration, disconnected from their cultural and reflective foundations.

The study therefore suggests a relative and academic approach to sacred geometry in art and design education. Rather than immediately copying traditional yantras, beginners may explore their structural logic and re-explain their underlying principles through contemporary media



and inspired processes. In this way, sacred geometry can work as a meaningful bridge between Indian Knowledge Systems and modern visual practices, supporting culturally informed, theoretically grounded, and modern approaches to art and design.

Keywords: Yantra, Sacred Geometry, Contemporary Composition, contemporary media, Geometric Abstraction.

1. Introduction

Geometry uses a significant position in Indian visual culture. Points, lines, grids, radial circles, triangles, squares planning, and stabilized patterns appear across ritual diagrams, temple architecture, sculpture, textiles, painting, and other cultural forms. In these contexts, geometry often functions as more than a device for visual order, it becomes a means of speaking relations among centre and boundary, fragment and complete, material and immaterial, and human and cosmic space (Kramrisch, 1946; Vatsyayan, 1983; Zimmer, 1946).

The yantra is one of the clearest demonstrations of this relationship between geometry and meaning. Khanna (1979) describes the yantra as a ritual and thoughtful diagram whose geometric alignment directs attention toward a primitive centre and the relationship between being awareness and cosmic unity. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts similarly portrays yantra as a geometrical device whose evenness provides a structured visual field for conceptualising heavenly existence. This positions yantra as both an image and an organising system.

From the perspective of visual art and design, the bindu creates a centre, triangles introduce orientation and polarity; circles establish enclosure and continuity; squares define boundaries; repetition generates rhythm; and layered zones create hierarchy. These concerns correspond with fundamental principles of visual observation and design such as balance, grouping, direction, scale, rhythm, contrast, hierarchy, and spatial organisation (Arnheim, 1974; Kandinsky, 1979; Lupton & Phillips, 2015; Wong, 1993). Tantra itself resulted through diverse spiritual, theoretical, and ceremonious civilizations rather than as a single ornamental style (British Museum, 2020; Padoux, 2017; White, 2000). This difference is important because modern visual art often branch out sacred forms from their previous contexts.

This paper therefore manages yantra as a visual knowledge system rather than as a catalogue of motifs. It examines how it's geometry establishes symbolic and spatial relationships, how these theories can be compared with current art and design, and how selected modern Indian artists have transformed related ideas into new forms of construct. The argument is that meaningful reinterpretation begins with fundamental and related knowledge rather than direct replication.

2. Research Objectives

1. To analyse the representational and spatial significance of important geometric forms used in yantras.
2. To identify relationships between yantric compositional values and modern art and design practices.
3. To investigate how modern Indian artists have reinterpreted geometric and tantric graphic concepts.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and graphic-logical methodology. It does not treat sacred geometry exclusively as a calculated structure; instead, geometry is considered as a interactive visual system in which symbolic meaning, spatial organisation, and cultural context organise together.

Introductory knowledge on yantra and Tantra includes Khanna (1979), Rawson (1973), Mookerjee (1966), White (2000), Brooks (1990), and Padoux (2017). Clarifications of Indian art and symbolic form are informed by Coomaraswamy (1956), Zimmer (1946), and Vatsyayan (1983), while architectural associations among geometry, mandala, measure, and temple planning are considered through Kramrisch (1946), Michell (1977), Meister (1983), Harle (1994), Kak (2009a, 2009b), and Trivedi (1989).

Three analytical methods are used. First, formal exploration identifies the principal geometric forms and examines their symbolic and spatial functions. Second, relative analysis links yantric principles to contemporary practices in painting, graphic design, sculpture, architecture, installation, and cardinal media. Third, case-based interpretation considers S. H. Raza and G. R. Santosh as examples of modern Indian artists who connected with geometric, metaphysical, and tantric concepts through modern visual languages

4. Understanding Yantra as a Visual System

The Sanskrit term yantra can generally signify an instrument, device, or controlled configuration. In visual and ritual traditions, the yantra functions as a organized arrangement in which abstract ideas are explained into symmetrical relationships (Khanna, 1979; Rawson, 1973). It's visual economy is striking, a limited terminology of points, triangles, circles, squares, and lotus-like structures can create considerable complexity through intersection, repetition, scale, and enclosure.

The yantra therefore demonstrates an important principle of visual organisation: meaning is produced through relationships rather than isolated shapes. A point becomes a centre because other elements are controlled around it. A triangle learns directional force through it's inclination. A circle becomes an surrounding or expanding zone through it's relation to a

centre. A square shows an outer frame and recognizes interior from exterior space. This relational logic is consistent with broader theories of visual observation in which balance, grouping, directional tension, and figure-ground relationships shape how a structure is experienced (Arnheim, 1974).

Vatsyayan (1983) highlights the recurring importance of the square and circle in Indian arts and their relation to ritual, architecture, sculpture, and performance. Kramrisch (1946) similarly shows that geometric arrangement in temple architecture is devoted from models of sacred order. Such knowledge supports an understanding of geometry as a knowledge-bearing structure rather than neutral form.

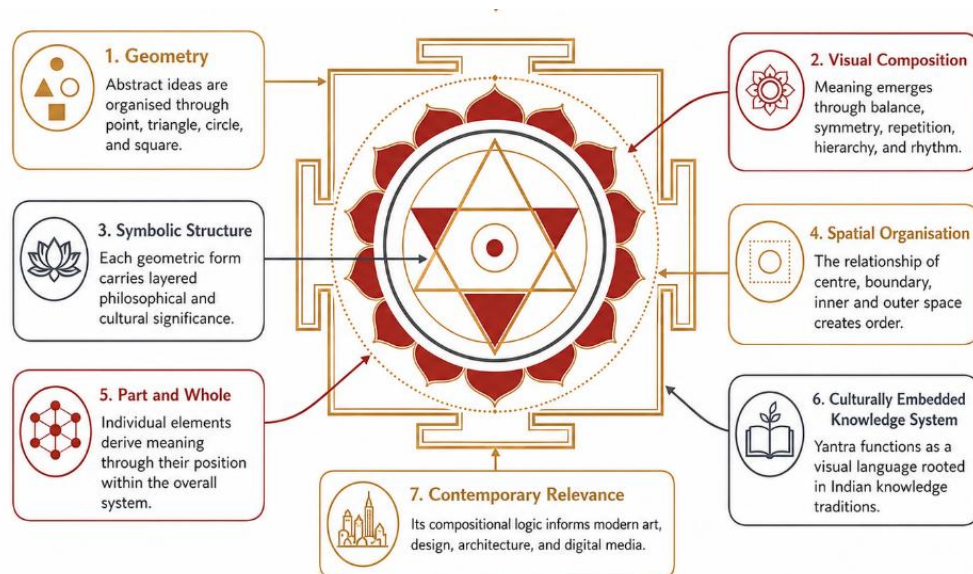


Figure 1: Yantra as a Visual System: Interrelationship of Geometry, Symbolism, Spatial Organisation, and Contemporary Relevance.

5. Elementary Geometric Shapes in Yantric Composition

5.1 Bindu: The Centre

The bindu is among the most basic elements in yantric composition. Although visually smallest, it can govern the organization of an entire field. Khanna (1979) links the bindu with focus and return to the centre, while the larger tantric tradition links the point with origin, capability, and reduction of energy (Mookerjee, 1966; Rawson, 1973). From a compositional perception, the bindu shows centrality. Once a centre exists, other elements can be identified as near or distant, inner or outer, determined or dispersed. This parallels modern design concepts of focal point and order, in which one element anchors a visual field and organizes the viewer's interest (Lupton & Phillips, 2015; Wong, 1993).

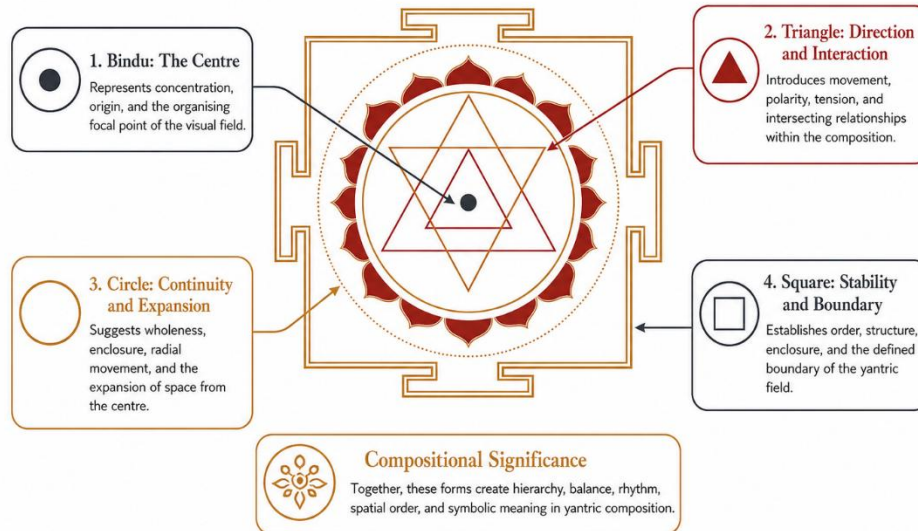


Figure 2: Fundamental Geometric Forms and their Symbolic-Spatial Functions in Yantric Composition

5.2 Triangle: Direction and Relations

The triangle informs indicator movement and polarity. It's head produces orientation, while reverse alters the observed direction of force. Penetrating triangles in yantric systems create relationships of opponent, complementarity, and dynamic equilibrium (Khanna, 1979; Mookerjee, 1966). Such contacts are especially visible in the Sri Yantra, where multiple intersectant triangles generate a highly complex field around the central point.

In modern picture theory, diagonal and angular forms are frequently connected with energy and conflict. Kandinsky (1979) treated point, line, and plane as functional visual forces rather than passive geometry. The triangle's value in contemporary composition therefore lies not only in it's symbolic associations but also in it's role to direct the eye, shape negative space, and create energetic relationships.

5.3 Circle: Stability and Development

The circle has no evident beginning or end and consequently lends it's elf to ideas of stability, enclosure, spin, and wholeness. In yantric creation, circles often function as average fields surrounding a centre and separating inside zones from outer zones (Khanna, 1979).

The circle also remains a effective organising form in modern design. Radial arrangements, circular individualities, spatial installations, and interface systems use the circle to deliberate thought or distribute elements around a nucleus. Arnheim (1974) notes the perceptual permanence of central and balanced arrangements, while Wong (1993) discusses repetition and energy as coordination capable of constructing highly ordered visual arrangements.

5.4 Square: Strength and Border line

The square establishes a different kind of spatial situation. It's parallel and upright axes provide stability, adjustment, and enclosure. In ritual and architectural contexts, the square is closely associated with systematic space and field planning (Kramrisch, 1946; Meister, 1983; Michell, 1977). Temple investigates that geometric grids were not simply attractive overlays but reasonable and abstract planning systems. Meister (1983) recognizes the importance of geometric calculate and square-based planning in North Indian temple design, while Trivedi (1989) examines recursive and self-similar arrangement in Hindu temple creation. Such studies reinforce the idea that the square can operate all together as frame, measure, module, and figurative boundary.

Form	Symbolic / Yantric Significance	Spatial Function	Contemporary Relevance
Bindu	Origin, unity, concentration	Establishes a visual centre	Focal point, hierarchy, spatial nucleus
Triangle	Direction, polarity, interaction	Creates tension and orientation	Dynamic layouts, structural planes, abstraction
Circle	Continuity, wholeness, expansion	Creates enclosure and radial movement	Identity systems, radial graphics, installations
Square	Stability, order, boundary	Defines the structured field	Grids, modules, architecture, layout systems
Repetition	Continuity and progression	Creates rhythm and coherence	Patterns, serial systems, digital repetition
Symmetry	Equilibrium and unity	Balances the visual field	Architecture, branding, products, interfaces

Table 1: *Elementary Geometric Shapes in Yantric Composition*

Analyzed: from Arnheim (1974), Khanna (1979), Kramrisch (1946), Lupton and Phillips (2015), Vatsyayan (1983), and Wong (1993).

6. Yantric Principles and Contemporary Composition

6.1 Centrality

Centrality gives a structure alignment and hierarchy. In many yantras, the visible movement can be read both inward toward the bindu and outward toward straight enclosures. This



produces a dual understanding of concentration and expansion (Khanna, 1979). Modern painting, poster design, exhibition space, and digital interfaces similarly use centrality to establish leading areas and organize secondary information.

6.2 Symmetry

Symmetry contributes to visual balance and structural unity. Yantric structures frequently depend on bilateral, rotational, or radial equilibrium, but equilibrium is not merely ornamental, it creates consistency and strengthens the observation of order. Arnheim (1974) identifies balance as an important condition, while Wong (1993) treats symmetry and radiation as repeatable systems of form organization.

6.3 Repetition

Repeated triangles, petals, circles, and boundary configurations generate rhythm and continuity. Repetition allows a limited terminology to produce progressively complex visual systems. This logic is relevant to textiles, modular construction, identity systems, digital pattern, and propagative composition (Lupton & Phillips, 2015; Manovich, 2001).

6.4 Layering

Yantric procedures frequently check forms within forms, manufacturing continuous zones rather than a single flat field. Layering makes depth abstractly even when the diagram remains physically two-dimensional. In modern media, related strategies appear through transparency, draw close information, meeting grids, spatial systems, and multiple interface layers (Manovich, 2001).

6.5 Hierarchy

Not every zone of a yantra has identical visual weight. The centre, intermediate geometric fields, lotus rings, and outer edge create degrees of emphasis. Modern interaction design relies on comparable classified structures to guide attention, sequence information, and establish visual priority (Lupton & Phillips, 2015).

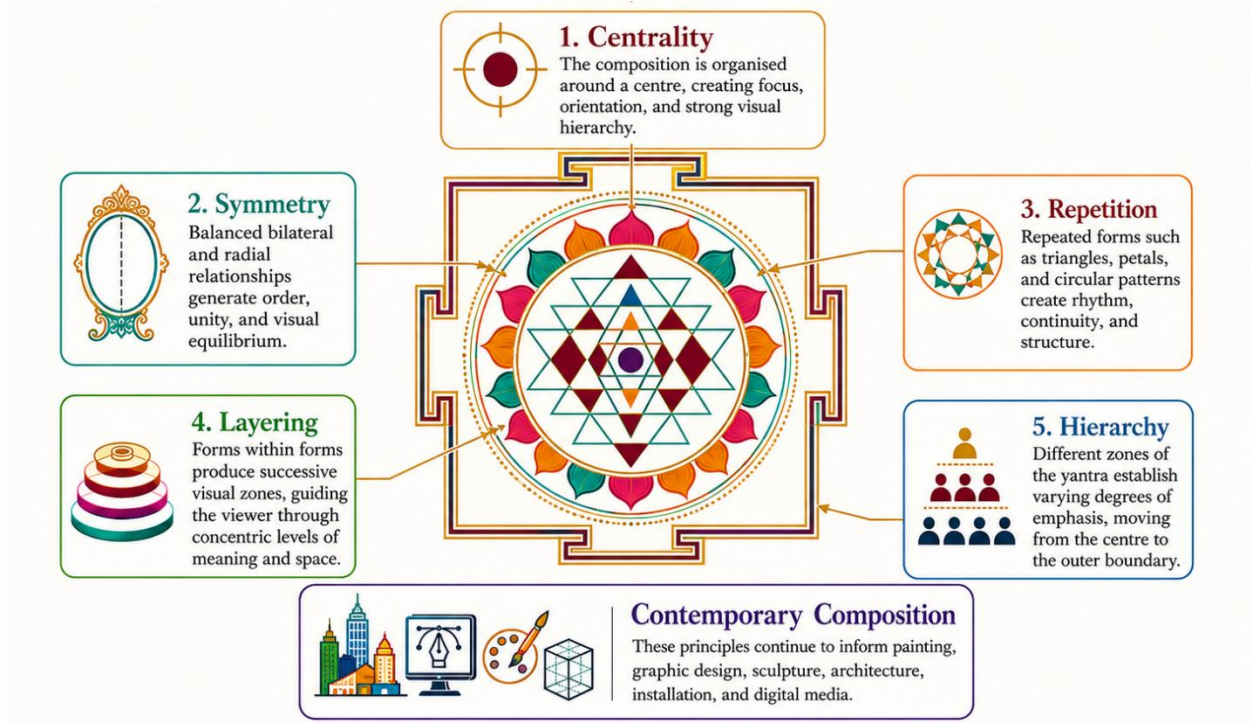


Figure 3: Yantric Principles and Their Translation into Contemporary Art and Design Composition

Parameter	Traditional Yantric Composition	Contemporary Art and Design
Context	Ritual, philosophical, contemplative	Artistic, social, functional, commercial, experimental
Geometry	Symbolically structured	Formal, conceptual, functional, computational
Centre	Metaphysical and compositional focus	Focal, structural, or conceptual device
Symmetry	Strong organising principle	Used, modified, or intentionally disrupted
Repetition	Symbolic and structural continuity	Pattern, rhythm, seriality, modularity
Hierarchy	Centre-to-boundary organisation	Directs attention and information
Viewer experience	Contemplative and ritual	Aesthetic, interpretive, interactive, functional

Parameter	Traditional Yantric Composition	Contemporary Art and Design
Media	Diagram, ritual surface, architectural planning	Painting, graphics, sculpture, architecture, installation, digital media

Table 2: *Traditional Yantric Composition and Contemporary Composition.*

Analyzed: From British Museum (2020), Khanna (1979), Padoux (2017), and White (2000).

7. Sacred Geometry in Modern Indian Art

The enhancement of modern Indian art generated encountered debate around improvement, cultural memory, abstraction, and indigenous visual sources. Geometric abstraction provided one important field through which artists could encounter global modernist languages while drawing upon Indian restrained and symbolic traditions. The existence of long-standing non-natural systems such as yantras, mandalas, ritual diagrams, and architectural grids complicate any hypothesis that idea entered India only through European modernism (Harle, 1994; Vatsyayan, 1983; Zimmer, 1946).

Two artists are particularly relevant to the present analysis: S. H. Raza and G. R. Santosh. Their attempts differ significantly, but both explain how geometric and metaphysical concepts could be changed within modern painting rather than simply copied from conventional diagrams.

7.1 S. H. Raza: Bindu and Geometric Order

S. H. Raza's mature work is greatly connected with the bindu and with symmetrical organizations linking circles, triangles, squares, grids, colour fields, and fundamental relationships. Christie's documentation of Raza's work notes that by the early 1980s he increasingly turned toward sacred geometries and Indian cosmological ideas, using elementary forms such as the point, circle, line, triangle, and square as primary components of painting.

In works such as *Prakriti*, the bindu becomes a crucial principle around which multiple geometric patterns are organized. Christie's describes the bindu in Raza's practice as a collected point linked to genesis, meditation, and the association of the visual field. The importance of Raza for this study lies in his ability to transform a traditional concept into an individual modern language. His paintings are not ritual yantras; rather, they use the idea of centre, elemental geometry, colour, and cosmic order to idea modern abstract compositions.

Raza therefore exhibit's reinterpretation rather than replica. The bindu becomes a learned reference and a compositional device. This double function echoes the broader argument of the paper, traditional geometric concepts retain modern consequence when their structural logic is changed rather than merely relocated.

7.2 G. R. Santosh: Tantra, Symmetry, and Visual Energy

Ghulam Rasool Santosh create a more direct encounter with tantric viewpoint, specifically through his study of Kashmir Shaivism. His mature paintings are characterized by highly controlled symmetry, axial organization, luminous colour, geometric-organic forms, and references to enthusiastic and speculative relationships. DAG's exposition material identifies tantra and Kashmir Shaivism as fundamental to Santosh's later visual language (DAG, 2017).

Santosh's practice also formed part of the broader neo-tantric movement in Indian modern art, in which artists drew from tantric diagrams and metaphysical ideas while developing modern painterly expressions (DAG, 2017). His structures often appear geometrically trained yet bodily and organic at the same time. Shapely forms, triangular shapes, central axes, and chromatic brilliance create a optical experience in which geometry appears motivated rather than mechanical. Santosh therefore represents another replica of reinterpretation. Whereas Raza foregrounds the bindu and elemental geometry, Santosh works through symmetry, energy, polarization, and tantric metaphysics. Both artists exhibit that original ideas can become generative sources for modern concepts without remaining confined to ancient formats.

Aspect	Traditional Yantra	S. H. Raza	G. R. Santosh
Organizing principle	Structured sacred geometry	Bindu and geometric field	Symmetrical tantric abstraction
Centre	Contemplative/metaphysical focus	Philosophical and compositional origin	Energetic and spiritual axis
Geometry	Codified triangles, circles, squares	Circle, triangle, square, grid	Geometric-organic structures
Symmetry	Highly structured	Balanced but individually transformed	Strong axial and bilateral organization
Colour	Often symbolically coded	Elemental and expressive	Luminous and meditative
Context	Ritual / philosophical	Modern Indian abstraction	Neo-tantric modernism
Method	Established symbolic system	Conceptual reinterpretation	Philosophical and visual reinterpretation

Table 3: *Relative Study of Traditional Yantra, S. H. Raza, and G. R. Santosh*

Analyzed: from Khanna (1979), DAG (2017, n.d.), and Padoux (2017).

8. Reinterpretation over Reproduction



The modern use of sacred geometry raises a critical difference between reproduction and reinterpretation. Reproduction assigns the visible appearance of an accepted image. Reinterpretation explores underlying principles and transforms them through a new artistic, material, or technical context. This difference is particularly valuable in a visual culture where digital movement makes sacred images easy to copy and detach from their antiquities. Tantric practices are previously complex and cannot be reduced to a single set of ornamental motifs (British Museum, 2020; Padoux, 2017; White, 2000). Treating the yantra only as an exotic pattern risk destruction of its theoretical and ritual dimensions. A more informed contemporary approach begins with context and then asks what compositional knowledge may be learned from the structure. For example, copying the Sri Yantra exactly onto a product mainly transfers a motif. By contrast, studying the relationships among centre, directional forces, draw close zones, replication, and boundary may inspire a new creation that does not resemble the original diagram at all. The deeper connection lies in the principle rather than the surface image. This is consistent with broader principles of design in which rules, grids, sections, and associations create form (Lupton & Phillips, 2015; Wong, 1993).

9. Associations With Modern Art and Design Practices

9.1 Painting and Graphic Design

Painting provides an immediate field for exploring geometric reinterpretation. Centralized creation, colour fields, grids, radial movement, replication, and symmetry can all be transformed into abstract pictorial configurations. Raza's work offers a significant Indian example, while the conventional theories of Kandinsky (1979) demonstrate how points, lines, and planes can be understood as active compositional forces.

Graphic design similarly depends deeply on systems of association, hierarchy, repetition, grid, scale, and figure-ground relationship. Lupton and Phillips (2015) identify these principles as introductory to visual communication. Yantric arrangement provides a conventionally specific acceptable model because it also organizes multiple sections within an ordered whole, although the purposes of tradition geometry and consultation design remain distinct.

9.2 Sculpture, Installation, and Architecture

In sculpture, yantric principles can be explained from two-dimensional figures into relationships among mass, space, centre, axis, repetition, and movement. A bindu can become a central object or void; a triangle can become a guiding plane; nested enclosures can become spatial systems. Installation covers this possibility by allowing the spectator to enter the geometry physically rather than comment it only as an image.

Architecture offers one of the convincing historical contexts for comparing geometric organization and space. Kramrisch (1946) and Michell (1977) both emphasise that Hindu

temple structural design embodies astrophysical and ritual meanings through dimension, orientation, axuality, and organized spatial relationships. Meister (1983) provides more specific indication for the role of symmetrical quantity in temple plans, while Trivedi (1989) highlights recursive fundamental relations. Such knowledge supports the view that geometry can operate as both a practical and theoretical framework.

9.3 Digital and Contemporary Media

Digital media leads new opportunities for repetition, revolution, collaboration, and practical agreement. Manovich (2001) describes digital media as integrated, irregular, and capable of recombination, conditions that make rule-based visual systems particularly important. While digital multiplicative systems should not be linked with sacred geometry, the comparison is beneficial in both cases, moderately simple rules can produce complex visual outcomes.

This allows modern artists and inventors to explore yantric principles through animation, responsive boundaries, propagative graphics, immersive estimates, and interactive installations. The challenge is to ensure that scientific novelty does not substitute for traditional understanding. The relevant question is not merely how to digitize a yantra, but how ideas of centre, repetition, layering, polarisation, and spatial order can inform a genuinely modern visual experience.

Principle	Painting / Graphics	Sculpture / Installation	Architecture	Digital Media
Bindu / centre	Focal point	Central mass or void	Spatial nucleus	Interaction origin
Triangle	Direction and tension	Structural plane	Angular organisation	Dynamic transformation
Circle	Radial composition	Circular spatial field	Centralised planning	Circular navigation / interface
Square / grid	Layout structure	Modular system	Planning matrix	Screen / data grid
Symmetry	Visual equilibrium	Mirrored or rotational form	Axial organisation	Procedural symmetry
Repetition	Pattern and rhythm	Modular units	Repeated structural elements	Algorithmic repetition
Layering	Overlapping fields	Nested spaces	Sequential zones	Layered information
Transformation	Geometric abstraction	Material reinterpretation	Spatial variation	Generative variation

Table 4: Translation of Yantric Principles Across Contemporary Media

Synthesised from Arnheim (1974), Kandinsky (1979), Kramrisch (1946), Lupton and Phillips (2015), Manovich (2001), Meister (1983), and Wong (1993).



Conversation

The first research objective involved the representative and spatial significance of original yantric forms. The analysis shows that bindu, triangle, circle, and square function as more than separated shapes. Their significance emerges through relations of centre, guidance, enclosure, hierarchy, and boundary. Classical studies of yantra and Indian visual thought repeatedly emphasise this relational and representative character (Khanna, 1979; Mookerjee, 1966; Rawson, 1973; Vatsyayan, 1983).

The second objective graded associations between yantric work of art and contemporary art and design. Important parallels can be identified in centrality, symmetry, repetition, layering, grid, grading, and modular organization. Existing theories of perception and design confirm the permanent formal application of these principles (Arnheim, 1974; Lupton & Phillips, 2015; Wong, 1993). At the same time, the paper denies the idea that formal similarity makes two systems equivalent. Sacred geometry carries antique, religious, and philosophical contexts that modern design may not share (British Museum, 2020; Padoux, 2017; White, 2000).

The third objective examined reinterpretation by modern Indian artists. Raza and Santosh offer distinctive models. Raza uses the bindu and elemental geometry to organize colour, space, and philosophical reflection, whereas Santosh engages more obviously with tantric metaphysics, proportion, energy, and Kashmir Shaivism (DAG, 2017). Their works show that engagement with convention can be propagative rather than sentimental.

A broader implication is that Indian concept should not be understood absolutely through imported modernist categories. Long-standing Indian civilizations already contain highly developed systems of non-realistic representation, geometric ordering, symbolism, and spatial extraction (Coomaraswamy, 1956; Harle, 1994; Vatsyayan, 1983; Zimmer, 1946). Modern Indian artists could therefore cooperate multiple histories concurrently international modernism, personal experience, regional civilizations, and Indian philosophical systems.

The comparison with temple construction further strengthens this claim. Geometric planning, measure, axis, grid, and recursive organization demonstrate that Indian visual culture developed efficient relationships between conceptual order and physical form (Kak, 2009a, 2009b; Kramrisch, 1946; Meister, 1983; Michell, 1977; Trivedi, 1989). The yantra belongs within this broader field of visual-spatial knowledge.

Conclusion

The yantra represents a modern intersection of geometry, symbolism, visual organization, and Indian philosophical thought. It's primary elements are deceptively simple: a point, triangle, circle, square, repeated unit, or regular axis. Yet when these elements are organized through



hierarchy, proportion, repetition, enclosure, and layering, they generate complex visual and conceptual systems.

The first objective started that fundamental yantric forms possess both symbolic and spatial consequence. The bindu creates concentration and centre, the triangle introduces direction and polarity, the circle generates continuity and expansion, and the square creates stability and boundary. Their meaning is relational rather than purely formal.

The second objective confirmed meaningful connections between yantric compositional principles and modern art and design. Centrality, symmetry, repetition, hierarchy, grids, modularity, and layering remain central to painting, graphic design, sculpture, architecture, installation, and digital media. However, these parallels are most useful when understood as proportional essential relationships rather than evidence of direct equivalence.

The third objective determined how modern Indian artists have converted geometric and tantric ideas within existing visual languages. Raza's bindu-based paintings and Santosh's tantric belief reveal different tactics for involving tradition without simply replicating historical diagrams. Their procedures suggest that reinterpretation involves recognizing abstract principles and allowing them to produce new forms.

The association from yantra to modern structure should therefore not be understood as a linear shift from tradition to modernity. It is better understood as an ongoing dialogue in which historical learning, modern construct, design systems, material investigation, and digital expertise intersect. Sacred geometry remains related not because it's forms should be endlessly copied, but because the visual aptitude implanted in those forms remains to provoke questions about centre and border, order and energy, part and whole, duplication and variation, and the relationship between geometry and meaning.

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