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Ray Sumner: *The Yantra*, Munich, Ost-West Verlag, 1975.

The yantra is one of those unique creations of the Indian mind. It may be possible to find parallels to the yantra in other cultures but only by forcing the analogy somewhat. Equally it is possible by accepting Jung to see in the yantra the expression of a collective unconscious as much within the western psyche as in eastern man. But regardless of the validity of Jung's perceptions, in India, and in those surrounding areas which have been influenced by the subcontinent, the yantra and its far less sophisticated mandala form are not part of a collective unconscious which must be sought through the haze of perception. On the contrary. It is a highly conscious, highly organized, highly formalized patterning of lines. Its various shapes, squares, triangles, circles, are the product of careful consideration as equally they are the expression of a long intellectual tradition. The shapes have precise symbolisms, definite meanings, albeit metaphysical and cosmological. When by extension and expansion, the meanings of the yantra become amorphous and discrete, this is not because of the reflection of any Jungian unconscious but rather because there are no verbal equivalents for the ideas which the yantra in its higher reaches has schematised. The shape is a microcosm of the macrocosm; in some cases, it is the macrocosm; in others, it is a guide to the macrocosm. Words, according to this approach, are not suited to defining such reality which is to be perceived and realised. In so doing, the process set in train is one of mysticism, of the attainment of understanding through non-rational awareness. Herein lies the paradox of the yantra: at one level, it is a heavily intellectualised, abstracted series of ideas represented in diagrammatic form but at another level it is the very idea itself which is to be perceived and understood in a non-verbal and even, ultimately, a non-schematic form. It is both the symbol and that which is symbolised.

Clearly the yantra is a highly complex phenomenon and clearly also it raises an enormous number of conceptual issues, semantic, philosophical, metaphysical to say nothing of the artistic and aesthetic. The latter is especially interesting: what aesthetic criteria can be applied to a religious "art" whose objective is to describe a cosmology? Within its own terms the only criterion applicable is that of the perfect recreation of the form: if the lines are produced accurately then no other judgment can be made of it. To apply any Western aesthetic, any assessment of the "beauty" or shapes or the success of internal rhythms for example, is irrelevant and superfluous and has no relationship with what is being assessed.

Ray Sumner's book provides a good introduction to the yantra in its

own terms. In its introduction, it traces the semantic origin of the word from an original simple meaning of "any tool or man-made object of a functional nature" to the more developed meanings suggested in the preceding paragraphs. The author points out that the yantra embraces "a large body of teachings" and stimulates "inner visualisation, meditation and experience". This leads her to a discussion of the great Sri-yantra and of the associated but much simpler, pictorial and figurative, mandala forms. There follows an analysis of the yantra and architecture, the manner in which the floor plan and the elevation of the Hindu temple were based on yantra forms and the influence of the yantra upon the planning of Hindu towns and cities. As far as they go these sections are interesting but are relatively brief: an interested reader will want to look elsewhere for elaboration of the ideas introduced here.

The great bulk of the book is in fact devoted to an examination of the relationship between the yantra and astronomy (in all, three of five chapters). This view of the yantra is as an instrument or a tool and, specifically, as an instrument for celestial observation. What follows is a long, elaborate and explicit discussion of the various observatories built by the Maharaja of Jaipur, Jai Singh II, in the eighteenth century at Jaipur, Delhi, Benares, Ujjain and Mathura. Of these, the most familiar to Western readers may be the Jantar Mantar (Yantra Mantra) in New Delhi, that strange assortment of futuristic structures which is on the itinerary of every tourist in that city. However the function of these structures is not usually made clear to the visitor whose absorption with their dramatic shapes usually denies understanding of their specific scientific, astronomical role. This Ray Sumner examines in great detail but she also points to the wider significance of the structures, in Delhi as elsewhere, to the fact that they were "three-dimensional psychograms" highlighting the "bond between astrology, astronomy and religion".

The detailed discussion of the observatories represents the main achievement of the book. It fills a gap in the literature that needed filling and it does so with considerable professional skill and competence. For anyone interested in the subject it is essential — and interesting — reading.

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