Yantra – Maps for the prevention and treatment of illness, conflict and violence

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A yantra is a diagram drawn on cloth or engraved on metal or tattooed on the skin by the monk or healer, and worn or carried as defence or protection against illness. Although the Yantra have been well described in Hindu and Buddhist societies, including Cambodia, the way they work in healing remains a mystery. In this paper, the use of Yantra for prevention and treatment of illness and social conflict is considered. Through participant observation with healers and their patients, and analysis of the magical letters drawn and the geometric arrangement of each design, we have classified the Yantra according to their healing power, mode of action, and clinical use.

One group of Yantra draw on Buddhist sources such as the Jina-Siri Buddha, who moved far from violence. The acrostics that stand for the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (Pali: *satta bojjhaṅgā*) relieve the victim's suffering. Some Yantra feature the *Karaṇīyamettā Sutta*, the protective Paritta verses that urge malevolent beings to do no harm and champion non-violence.

The Yantra that reorganise the body elements restores the mind of those suffering post-traumatic stress as a result of violence. The Yantra of the four Great Elements, Yantra *pkum tʰiet*, corrects the imbalance between the earth, water, fire and air elements arising from stress. *Na* = 'water', element derived from mother – soft attributes e.g. love, mercy. *Ma* = 'earth', derived from father – 'hard' attributes e.g. shielding skin against being broken. *Ba* = 'fire', to chase out and incinerate evil spirits which emerge from the wild forest. *Da* = 'wind', to render invisible from predations of Three Vast Plains. Another, the 'Yantra Prachum Thiet', re-assembles the 32 body elements and is also known as 'Yantra of Gatha Girimananda', named for the severely ill monk. The healer, in an echo of the meditation system, recites sections of the letters drawn on the Yantra forward and reversed.

A heterodox group of Yantra draws on Brahmanic sources, especially on the Siva linga. The Āthabbaṇa Yantra derive their effectiveness from the Ayurvedic legendary healer who can defeat the enemy, and may be tattooed to empower the skin to resist attack or deflect bullets. The Āthabbaṇa Yantra Baŋʔap entices with a sex lure to cloud the perpetrator's mind. The Yantra 'to enable to delivery of the Royal baby (from Sanskrit *prasūta putra*), is drawn with a giant straddling a small figure and helps the victim to evade the clutches of the aggressor, who cannot bind the victim because the knot magically slips off. In the Yantra of Great Induced Abortion (*Yantra moha rumluut*), person evading attack becames as slippery as a foetus. The Angulimala Yantra, also named 'Pursuing But Never Catching Up With Yantra' (*dəɲ pum toan*) depicts the story of how the mass murderer could not kill the Buddha and instead became converted to non-violence.

The Dharaṇī Yantra, known as Yantra Earth Maiden Goddess (*kʊəŋhiiŋ tʰɔɔreaʔni*) acts on behalf of downtrodden victims of injustice. The Yantra to Short-Cut Across the Three Vast Plains remoralises those facing the threat of conflict and war, hunger, or illness. A group of medicinal Yantra, rather than being lists of ingredients, are instrumental in magically activating the power of the medicine.

The 'Zero System' is an algebraic device that uses the 'Nine and Five Sāṃkhya Enumerations' and magically annihilates the perpetrator, making him zero. The Yantras, rather than being inaminate drawings, were alive. Clinical examples included the healer magically under attack and pounding on himself to awaken his tattooed Āthabbaṇa.

The salience of the Yantra in modern Cambodia is undiminished. During Millenarian crises, people circulated *Buddh Damnaay* yantra to ward off helplessness in the face of civil and political violence. Nowadays, mass produced Yantra can be ordered on the internet by people around the world.