



A STUDY ON THE INSTALLATION OF YANTRAS IN TEMPLES

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Abstract- This paper examines the concept and practice of *yantra sthapana*—the ritual installation of mystical diagrams—beneath the pedestal of consecrated deities in Hindu temples. Although not explicitly codified in the core Agamic texts, this practice is widespread across South Indian temple traditions, especially within the Vaikhanasa and Pancharatra schools. Drawing on texts such as the *Sharada Tilaka Tantram*, *Samarangana Sutradhara*, and oral transmissions from the Vaikhanasa guruparampara, this study argues that *yantra sthapana* is a spiritually valid and scripturally supportable practice. The paper explores the interrelationship of mantra, bijākṣara, and yantra, and situates the tradition within the framework of *sadācāra*—exemplary conduct as upheld by realized teachers. Through textual evidence, testimonies, and philosophical reflection, it reaffirms the place of *yantra sthapana* as a sacred ritual technology within the larger landscape of temple consecration.

Keywords: Yantra Sthapana, Agama, Vaikhanasa, Mantra Shakti, Sadachara, Bijākṣara, Sri Yantra.

1. Introduction : The installation of yantras—mystical geometric diagrams energized by mantras—beneath deity icons in temples has become a well-established feature in many South Indian consecration ceremonies. Particularly prevalent in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, this practice has sparked both reverence and debate. Some view it as a late innovation, unsupported by Agamic texts, while others consider it an extension of the living tradition of *sadācāra*, shaped by the spiritual experiences of sages.

This essay explores the roots, evolution, and implications of *yantra sthapana* with a focus on textual sources and oral traditions from the Vaikhanasa lineage.

What is a Yantra?

In general worldly usage, a yantra is considered a human-made tool or device that helps accomplish tasks which are otherwise difficult or impossible through ordinary effort, making them achievable with ease.

However, in the spiritual realm, the word yantra holds a different meaning. It refers to a geometric diagram (cakra or bijākṣara cakra) infused with divine energy through sacred syllables (bijākṣaras). In this context, a yantra is not merely a mechanical tool but a sacred instrument through which one can attain divine power and fulfill spiritual aspirations by meditative concentration and mantra repetition. Thus, it serves as a bridge between the individual and the divine.

This is clearly explained in the following verses:

“अध्वक्ष्यामियस्त्राणांभेदांस्तत्रेषुगोपितान्।येसाध्यन्तिसततंमन्त्रितोनिजवाञ्छितम्॥

मनोरथाक्ष्यान्नयस्त्रस्यतपोधनाः।कामक्रोधादिदोषान्वादीर्घदुःखनियन्त्रणात्॥”¹

“यदृच्छयाप्रवृत्तानिभूतानिस्वेनवर्त्मनि।नियम्यास्मिन्सयतियत्तद्यन्त्रमितिकीर्तितम्॥”²

These verses convey that yantras are hidden and sacred devices, capable of fulfilling one's desires through the power of mantras. They serve to overcome difficulties, remove sins, and help regulate the free and chaotic movements of beings by channelling them along a disciplined and beneficial path.

Some scholars further interpret

“मनोरथाक्षराणियन्त्रनियन्त्रस्यतपोधनाः

कामक्रोधादिदोषान्वादीर्घदुःखनियन्त्रणात्यन्त्रमित्याहुः।”³

Just as a mantra is the form of a deity, so too is a yantra the very form of the deity. Hence, it is capable of fulfilling one's spiritual aspirations (iṣṭa-siddhi), which is why it is said: “that which accomplishes the desired goal is called a yantra.” A yantra is, in essence, a mantramaya śarīra — a body composed of mantras.

Before going further, let us briefly consider what constitutes a mantra. The Meaning and Power of Mantra The term mantra is traditionally explained in two ways:

“मनःत्रायतेयस्मात्सःमन्त्रः”(That which protects the mind is a mantra)

“मननात्त्रायतेइतिमन्त्रः”(That which, when contemplated repeatedly, leads to liberation is called a mantra)

Thus, a mantra is a sacred utterance that, when repeated with devotion and focused concentration, becomes a spiritual shield and a means to attain divine realization.

A mantra is not merely a sequence of syllables—it is a mantramaya śarīra (a body composed of mantra), complete with its ten ritual components (daśāṅga). When a particular mantra is recited thousands or even hundreds of thousands of times with

focused meditation, and when that concentrated energy is then infused into a yantra, it becomes a powerful spiritual instrument capable of fulfilling the devotee's desires (iṣṭa-kāma-siddhi).

On the Scriptural Roots of Yantra Installation : As for the ritual installation of yantras, there appears to be no direct mention of such procedures in the principal Agamic texts available today—at least not within the accessible corpus of South Indian Agamas. However, one notable exception appears in the Sakalāgama Sāra Saṅgraha, where the installation of a kūrma yantra is prescribed during the consecration of a temple tank (taṭāka pratiṣṭhā).

¹ Śāradātilaka Tantra, Chapter 14, 15-16.

² Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra, p.217.

³ Yantra rathnakaraha, p.3.

Approximately 70–80 years ago, the late Śrīmān Uttarathāḷḷapāka Chakravarti Bhaṭṭācārya, a revered scholar of the Vaikhanasa tradition, addressed this issue in a conference held at Vijayawada. He explained that in more recent centuries, the tradition of yantra installation evolved not directly from scriptural mandates, but from the powerful spiritual experiences of great sages (mahānubhāvas) who had attained significant tapas-shakti (spiritual energy). These seers, through their intense sādhanā, consecrated yantras and passed down the method to their disciples as part of a living oral tradition. A notable example often cited is that of Śrī Jagadguru Śaṅkarācārya, who is believed to have installed a Śrī Yantra in the sanctum of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala. The enduring spiritual energy of that yantra is still believed to be effective to this day. Archakas (temple priests) of Tirumala have confirmed the presence of a yantra beneath the main deity.

The Characteristics of a Yantra : The following verses from the Śrī Yantra Guhya Dharma describe the various types and lifespans of yantras, depending on the material used and their purpose:

“यन्त्रादिफलसिद्ध्यर्थवक्ष्येयन्त्रादिलक्षणम्। द्वादशाङ्गुलमानेन पूजायन्त्रं प्रकल्पयेत्॥
अष्टाङ्गुलप्रमाणेन धारण्यन्त्रं उदरेत्। सौवर्णनिर्मितेशुद्धेयावज्जीवं फलप्रदम्॥
राप्सेर्विशतिवर्षाणितदग्धं भूर्भुवः। तदर्थं ताम्रपत्रेऽपि अन्यद्रव्यैस्तद्वत्॥
“अन्तर्मुखं सुषुप्तिस्वाक्षवर्णजाग्रदहिर्मुखम्। सर्वमैकमुखं वर्णसर्वतोमुखमारितम्॥
अन्तर्बहिर्मुखं वर्णस्वष्टयन्त्रः प्रकीर्तितः। ऋक्षेऽर्ध्वादिके चैव सौम्ययन्त्रादि शंलिखेत्॥
तिर्यङ्मुखेषु ऋक्षेषु विद्वेषं यन्त्रं उदरेत्। ऋक्षेऽप्यथोमुखे चैव क्रूरयन्त्रादिकं लिखेत्॥”⁴

From these verses, the following characteristics can be understood : A pūjā yantra should be square-shaped and measure twelve fingerbreadths (approximately 9 inches).

A dhāraṇa yantra (to be worn on the body) should be eight fingerbreadths (around 6 inches).

- A yantra made of pure gold has a lifespan equivalent to a full lifetime.
- A silver yantra lasts for approximately twenty years.
- A yantra inscribed on bhūrja bark remains effective for ten years.
- A copper yantra retains power for five years.
- Yantras made from other materials remain effective for around thirty months.

Additionally, yantras are classified according to their orientation and purpose : An antarmukha (inward-facing) yantra is associated with deep sleep (suṣupti) and is often used for inner spiritual practices. A bahirmukha (outward-facing) yantra corresponds to wakefulness and is used for external rituals. A sarvato-mukha (multi-directional) yantra is considered auspicious for all-round spiritual benefits. The positioning of a yantra in a natal chart (r̥kṣa) or directional plane is also important, with śubha yantras (auspicious ones) written in the northern direction and krūra yantras (fierce ones) aligned differently. Thus, yantras are classified and utilized in many ways depending on purpose, material, and orientation, making them versatile instruments in spiritual practice.

Yantras and the Tradition of Sadācāra : The śāstra-s (scriptures) are the outcome of the divine vision of great sages (maharṣis), revealed for the welfare of humankind. These scriptures, preserved and practiced through ṛṣi-paramparā (lineage of seers), also form the basis of what is known as sadācāra—noble conduct or righteous tradition.

⁴ Samagra yantra vidhi, p.34.

Over time, advanced spiritual practitioners (mahānubhāvas) endowed with intense spiritual energy (tapas-śakti) have engaged in such practices, experienced the benefits, and passed them on to their disciples. As a result, some new and effective traditions have emerged—based not strictly on written texts but on lived spiritual experience. One such tradition is the installation (pratiṣṭhā) of yantras.

Even today, many highly revered spiritual masters and temple priests conduct yantra sthāpana with devotion and precision, following the paths taught by their teachers and elders. A shining example of this is the Śrī Yantra believed to have been installed by Śrī Bhagavatpāda (Śaṅkarācārya) in the sanctum of Tirumala's Lord Venkateśvara. This historical yantra demonstrates the spiritual importance of the practice of yantra sthāpana. Such practices, though not explicitly codified in the mainstream śāstra, are deeply embedded in sadācāra. Hence, unless guided by an exceptional spiritual insight, one should not hastily oppose or reject these traditions. They are to be seen as valid extensions of śāstra, shaped by the sacred conduct of enlightened masters.

The growing relevance and acceptance of yantra sthāpana show that it is no longer confined to temple rituals alone. It is now being used in diverse contexts such as:

Protection for children, Empowerment of women, Fulfilment of specific desires (kāmya siddhi), Success in spiritual activities (kriyā siddhi), Attraction, legal victory, and resolution of disputes. Indeed, yantra practices and mantra-yukta rituals are proving beneficial to many in these varied domains. The Sacredness of Bījākṣaras (Seed Syllables in Spiritual Practice).

Bījākṣaras (seed syllables) are considered to be divine sound vibrations—prāṇa-dhvani (life-energies in sonic form). They are believed to have emerged from the sound of Lord Śiva's ḍamaru (sacred drum), as expressed in the famous "Maheshvara Sūtras": "अइउण्, ऋलृक्, एओच्, ऐऔच्..."

And so on—syllables systematically categorized into vowels and consonants by the sages. Over time, these were refined into the sacred Sanskrit alphabet, and further infused with spiritual power to form the mahā-bījākṣaras used in mantras and yantras.

These bījās are not ordinary letters; they are forms of divine energy

Prāṇa-bīja (life-force seed), Śakti-bīja (energy seed)

Dṛṣṭi-bīja (vision seed), Vāśya-bīja (attraction seed), Mantra-bīja, Dīkṣā-bīja, Bhūta-bīja, Devatā-bījākṣaras⁵, and so on. In yantra construction, these are carefully arranged across various sections such as the vasudala, pallava and daśāṅga (ten limbs). It is believed that proper placement and recitation of these bījās can yield immediate and effective results. A famous anecdote underscores the power of correct bījākṣara pronunciation:

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa once had a German woman disciple who regarded him as her divine teacher. After receiving a set of syllables from him, she diligently meditated upon them daily. However, despite her devotion, she failed to experience any spiritual vision of her iṣṭa devatā (chosen deity). Upon reporting this to Sri Ramakrishna, he asked her to recite the syllables. Hearing her unclear pronunciation, he corrected her and instructed her to pronounce them properly. After this, she soon experienced a vivid divine vision.

⁵Beeja nidhi, p.19.

This story emphasizes the vital importance of clear and correct articulation of bijākṣaras. As the scriptures say, even reciting the varṇamālā (alphabet) forwards and backwards during the Śrī Rāma mantra sādhanā produces varying spiritual effects. Thus, bīja is not merely a letter—it is Brahman, it is mokṣa (liberation). The very word akṣara means “that which is imperishable,” and hence also refers to Viṣṇu or Śiva. Through the intense repetition of these imperishable syllables, divine realization is attained. There is no doubt that bijākṣaras are immensely powerful and sacred.⁶

The Role of Yantra Sthāpana in Enhancing Divine Power : In the ritual process of deity consecration (pratiṣṭhā), the power of mantra, yantra, and kala (spiritual rays or aspects of divinity) are deeply interconnected. Particularly in yantras, all the indriyas (senses)—speech, mind, eyes, ears, tongue, nose, breath, etc.—are symbolically invoked and enshrined. The invocation typically includes a formula like:

“सर्वेन्द्रियाणिवाङ्मनःचक्षुःश्रोत्रजिह्वाग्राणप्राणाःइहागच्छन्तुचिरंतिष्ठन्तुस्वाहा।”⁷

These words are chanted after the recitation of the daśāṅga bīja (ten-limbed seed syllables), the root mantra bīja, and the special bīja mantras associated with yantra sthāpana, indicating a spiritual installation of divine faculties within the yantra.

Similarly, during deity consecration rituals, while invoking the divine kala (energy ray) of vision into the deity, the following mantra is chanted:

“ॐ श्रीं आं ह्रीं क्रौं सुवः अमुदान चन्द्रिका जीव कलां कलशादा कृष्य स्वामिनः चक्षुः स्थाने ठं वौ षट् स्वाहानमः आवाहयामि।”⁸

Here, through bijākṣaras, the divine faculty of vision is invited into the idol from the kalaśa (ritual pot). Hence, bijākṣara recitation with a focused mind and mantra japa (repetition) must be carried out in the lakhs (hundreds of thousands) for full effect. Ideally, one should perform mantra japa equal to one lakh for every syllable in the mantra. After completing the required number of japa, puraścaraṇa (ritual conclusion of mantra practice) must be performed to attain mantra siddhi (perfection of the mantra).

Puraścaraṇa and the Attainment of Mantra Siddhi : According to the japa śāstra (scripture on mantra repetition), puraścaraṇa—the ritual completion process after mantra japa—is essential for attaining mantra siddhi (perfection and activation of the mantra’s power). The components of puraścaraṇa are clearly laid out:

“पूजाकालिकीनित्यं जपस्तर्पणमेव च। होमो ब्राह्मणभुक्तिश्च पुरश्चरणमुच्यते॥”⁹

This verse describes the five components of puraścaraṇa:

1. Pūjā – Daily worship of the deity
2. Japa – Repetition of the mantra
3. Tarpana – Offering libations to the deity
4. Homa – Fire ritual with mantra offerings
5. Brahmana Bhojana – Feeding of Brahmins

Only after all five are completed is the puraścaraṇa considered fulfilled.

A traditional formula for the ratio is as follows:

⁶ Ramakrishna charitamrutham, p.42.

⁷ Guhya yantra hrudayam, p.272.

⁸ Prathistanukramanika, p.67.

⁹ Yantra Rajaha, p.61.

Perform japa for one lakh (100,000) repetitions per syllable of the mantra. Then, offer tarpana equivalent to one-tenth of the japa count (e.g., 10,000 offerings). Perform homa equivalent to one-tenth of the tarpana count (1,000 offerings). Serve food to Brahmins equal to one-tenth of the homa count (100 Brahmins).

Alternatively, some traditions simplify this by offering one-tenth of the homa materials and feeding one-tenth the number of Brahmins. Nonetheless, it is generally accepted that without puraścaraṇa, the mantra sādhanā (practice) is considered incomplete.

One verse further clarifies the benefit of this observance:

“पञ्चाङ्गोपासनेनस्वेष्टदेवताप्रीतमानसाभक्तजनग्रेसंचरतीतिपुरश्चरणंस्मृतम्॥”¹⁰

“When a devotee, with deep faith, performs worship with all five components, their chosen deity (iṣṭa-devatā) becomes pleased and reveals Its presence.”

How Mantra Siddhi is Attained : The attainment of mantra siddhi—the spiritual realization and activation of a mantra—is made possible by three key factors:

1. The power of the guru’s initiation and instruction,
2. The grace (prasāda) of the guru,
3. The inherent power of the mantra combined with the devotee’s faith and discipline. This is beautifully encapsulated in the following verse:

“उपदेशान्वसामर्थ्यात्श्रीगुरोःचप्रसादतः।मन्त्रप्रभावात्भक्त्याचमन्त्रसिद्धिःप्रजायते॥”¹¹

“Through the capable initiation of the guru, through the guru’s blessings, and through the inherent power of the mantra combined with devotion—mantra siddhi arises.” When the deity of the mantra (mantra devatā) reveals itself directly to the practitioner, the joy and divine experience are said to be beyond all description. However, even after the completion of puraścaraṇa, one should not abandon the mantra. It must be continued daily, particularly after the sandhyāvandana and Gāyatrī japa. Only then will the fruits of the practice manifest both in this life and beyond (iha-pāra sādhanā). The words of the elders are worth remembering here: अनूक्तमन्यतो ग्राह्यं

“Even if a practice is not explicitly mentioned in the scriptures, if it is taught by the guru or elders and rooted in devotion, it is to be accepted. May all beings be happy.”

Thus, the tradition of yantra sthāpana—though not always found directly in scriptural texts—is validated by sadācāra, by the experiences of realized sages, and by its practical benefits. It is, in every sense, a valid and sacred extension of the śāstra itself.

Conclusion : Yantra sthāpana, though not exhaustively codified in core Agamic scriptures, finds its validity in the lived wisdom of revered acharyas and the oral traditions upheld through generations. The spiritual essence of the practice lies in the integration of mantra, bījākṣara, and sacred geometry, forming a divine body of energy that bridges the manifest and the transcendent. The accounts of seers like Śrī Ādi Śaṅkara, and the continuing presence of yantras in major temples, underscore its time-tested relevance. Rooted in the noble conduct (sadācāra) of great tapasvins, this tradition is a luminous extension of Vedic-Agamic dharma. The process of japa, puraścaraṇa, and guruśiṣya transmission reinforces its authenticity and sacredness. The Śāstra,

¹⁰ Yantra siromanihi, p.31.

¹¹ Mantra mayukaha, p.317.

tradition, and spiritual experience converge in this practice, making it a living science of divine invocation. Rather than dismissing it as non-scriptural, it must be revered as part of our evolving dharma paramparā. The sanctity of bijākṣaras and the vibrational potency of mantra-siddhi further affirm its transformative power. As such, yantra sthapana deserves rightful recognition, preservation, and deepened scholarly exploration. This sacred ritual stands as a shining testimony to the spiritual genius of Sanātana Dharma.

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