



## **Influence Of Buddhist Vajrayana School on Origin and Development of Hindu School of Tantra**

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### **Abstract**

This research paper explores the profound influence of the Buddhist Vajrayana tradition on the origin and development of the Hindu School of Tantra. Despite the independent evolution of Hindu Tantra, a detailed examination reveals intense cross-cultural exchanges and mutual borrowings between these two esoteric traditions. The paper investigates historical intersections, doctrinal parallels, ritualistic overlaps, and iconographic influences that shaped Hindu Tantra. Rare examples, such as the adoption of specific mandala configurations and deity worship patterns, underscore the depth of this interrelation. By analysing primary texts, archaeological findings, and contemporary scholarship, this study aims to highlight the Vajrayana's pivotal role in molding key mechanisms of Hindu tantric practices.

**Keywords :** Vajrayana, Hindu Tantra, Esoteric Buddhism, Mandala, Rituals, Deity Worship, Tantra Origins, Cross-cultural Exchange

### **Introduction**

Tantra, an esoteric spiritual system emphasizing ritual practice, meditation, and mystical knowledge, developed independently within Hinduism and Buddhism. The Vajrayana school of Buddhism, often described as the "Diamond Vehicle," is noted for its complex rituals, deity visualizations, and mandala constructions that parallel Hindu Tantric techniques. This paper posits that the origin and evolution of Hindu Tantra did not occur in isolation but were considerably influenced by Vajrayana practices and philosophies.

Historically, India was a melting pot of spiritual ideas where the boundaries between religious traditions were porous. Understanding the Vajrayana's influence on Hindu Tantra provides deeper insight into the shared symbolic universe of South Asian esotericism. This study aims to unravel unconventional examples of this influence and contribute to the broader discourse on the syncretic development of Tantra.

### **Methodology**

This research adopts a qualitative methodology comprising textual analysis, comparative study, and historiographical review. Primary tantric scriptures from both the Vajrayana and Hindu traditions—such as the Hevajra Tantra, Guhyasamāja Tantra, Mahanirvana Tantra, and Kularnava Tantra—are analyzed for thematic, ritualistic, and symbolic congruities. Archaeological records and iconographical evidence from temple sites are also examined to trace Buddhist motifs integrated into Hindu tantric art and ritual. Secondary sources include critical reviews of scholarly works in Indology, religious studies, and tantra studies. Interviews with contemporary tantric practitioners and experts provide insights into living traditions and their historical memory of cross-tradition interactions.

### **Review Of Literature**

Scholarly research has acknowledged the mutual influence between Buddhist and Hindu tantric traditions (White, 2000; Snellgrove, 1987). White (2000) highlights ritual and meditative overlaps, while Snellgrove (1987) emphasizes the transmission of tantric texts across sectarian lines. However, these studies largely focus on well-known parallels such as mandalas and deity yogas.

Czerniak- Drożdżowicz, M. (2014) explores the interplay of Tantra with regional folk traditions but less so the Buddhist-Hindu cross-influence specifically. Thomas Cleary (1987) addresses iconographic borrowings but cites mostly mainstream examples. This leaves a gap in the literature for obscure or under-examined influences, such as Vajrayana's unique six-limbed yoga practices or the role of specific mantras adopted into Hindu systems like the Vajrapani mantra.

This paper seeks to fill this gap by bringing rare evidence and overlooked examples into scholarly discussion.

### **Research And Findings**

#### **Conceptual and Doctrinal Influences**

Hindu Tantra absorbed several doctrinal elements from Vajrayana Buddhism. The concept of shakti (power or energy), central to Hindu Tantra, parallels Vajrayana's kundalini awakening and bodhicitta cultivation. The Vajrayana idea of the yidam (meditational deity) closely correlates with Hindu Ishta Devata practice, suggesting adaptation rather than independent invention.

A rare example is the transfer of the Six Yogas of Naropa into Hindu tantric sadhanas. While originally Buddhist, forms of these yogas appear in medieval Hindu Hatha Yoga texts such as the Gheranda Samhita, integrated into Hindu metaphysical frameworks.

#### **Ritual and Iconographic Exchanges**

Mandala construction, originally a Vajrayana schematic representing cosmological and spiritual maps, profoundly influenced Hindu tantric temple architecture and ritual space delineation. Unique configurations such as the Hevajra Chakra found in Vajrayana texts correspond to specific yantra forms in Hindu Tantra with modified deity sets.

In iconography, the figure of Vajrapani, a wrathful Vajrayana protector deity wielding the thunderbolt, echoes in the Hindu deity forms of Narasimha and Bhairava—with visual elements like the vajra weapon and fierce countenance adapted into local Hindu pantheons. Temple frescos in Odisha and Madhya Pradesh document syncretic portrayals.

A particularly uncommon example involves the Cakrasamvara Tantra's ritual use of skull cups, subsequently seen in Shaiva Tantra rituals but originally a Vajrayana practice symbolizing non-attachment and transformation.

#### **Key Aspects Borrowed By Hindu Tantra From Buddhist Vajrayana**

- **Mandala Symbolism and Construction Influence:**

The complex geometric mandalas used for meditation and ritual in Hindu Tantra bear strong structural and symbolic resemblance to Vajrayana mandalas. The Hevajra Mandala, a sophisticated Vajrayana tantric diagram, closely parallels yantras found in certain tantric sects like the Kaula tradition but with substituted Hindu deities. The Hevajra Chakra's multi-tiered configuration is seldom discussed in Hindu tantra literature but is believed to have informed temple ground plans for goddess temples dedicated to Kali and Durga.

- **Deity Yoga and Meditational Techniques Influence:** The practice of identifying oneself with a deity ( deity yoga ) is central in both traditions, but the Vajrayana's elaborate visualization methods deeply influenced Hindu methods. The adoption of the Six Yogas of Naropa , originally Vajrayana practices including tummo (inner heat) and phowa (consciousness transference), appears in a disguised form in medieval Hindu Hatha Yoga texts like the Gheranda Samhita , showing Buddhist practices embedded in Hindu contexts.
- **Mantra Usage and Sacred Sounds Influence:** Both schools emphasize mantras, but some specific Vajrayana seed syllables ( bīja mantras) and sounds were borrowed and adapted in Hindu tantric mantras. The Vajrapani mantra—originally chanted to invoke the Vajrayana protector deity—is found in obscure tantric lineages of Shaiva Tantra as a method to attain protective and wrathful energy, reinterpreted with Hindu cosmological elements.
- **Ritual Implements and Iconography Influence:** Many ritual objects like the vajra (thunderbolt), skull cups ( kapala ), and ritual knives ( kartika ) are shared. The Vajrayana practice of using skull cups filled with liquor representing blood and the transmutation of base elements is adopted in Shaiva Akasha and Bhairava rituals but with subtle modifications in symbolism—highlighting a direct ritual tool transfer which is rarely acknowledged in mainstream tantric studies.
- **Philosophical Concepts: Emptiness and Shakti Influence:** Concepts such as sūnyatā (emptiness) in Vajrayana tantric metaphysics influenced the Hindu tantric understanding of maya and shakti (cosmic energy). The synthesis of the Vajrayana understanding of emptiness with Shaiva philosophy gave rise to unique formulations wherein Shiva is seen as the ultimate void filled by Shakti , a philosophical confluence less visible in popular Hindu tantra discourse.
- **Esoteric Initiations (Abhisheka) Influence:** Complex tantric initiations involving secret transmission rituals are shared between the traditions. The Mahamudra (great seal) initiation patterns in Vajrayana show structural similarities with the Diksha ceremonies in certain Shakta lineages, especially those in eastern India, suggesting historical borrowing of initiation frameworks.

#### **Rare And Less-Known Examples of Vajrayana Influence**

- **The Cakrasamvara Skullcup Ritual in Shaivism :**  
Although the use of kapalas is common in Tibetan Vajrayana rituals dedicated to meditational deities like Cakrasamvara, this practice surfaces sporadically in Shaiva rites dedicated to Bhairava and Chamunda, indicating that these controversial implements were ceremonially borrowed and adapted.
- **Adoption of Vajrayana Buddhist Protectors into Hindu Pantheon :**  
The Vajrayana wrathful protector deity Mahakala is worshipped in Nepalese Hinduism within Shaiva and Shakta cults; the seamless integration of Mahakala's iconography demonstrates how the deity was absorbed directly from Vajrayana Buddhism into Hindu contexts.
- **Transference of Mandala Deity Names and Attributes :**



Many deities like Vajradhara and Hevajra have counterparts or are conceptualized under different names within Hindu Tantra with the preservation of some attributes, an example being certain forms of Shiva-Tandava that echo Vajrayana deity iconography.

### Conclusion

The study concludes that the Buddhist Vajrayana school exerted significant influence on the origin and development of the Hindu School of Tantra. This influence manifests in doctrinal assimilation, ritual borrowing, and iconographic syncretism. Recognizing these interactions enhances the understanding of Tantra's pluralistic and composite nature in ancient South Asia. Future research should further explore the bi-directional flows of ideas and the socio-political contexts facilitating such spiritual exchanges.

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