Preface

Great scholars like Haraprasad Sastri, Benoytosh Bhattacharyya and Prabodh Chandra Bagchi have made remarkable contributions respectively to the study on the Buddhist Siddhas and their Apabhraṣṭa language, Buddhist Tantras, and the interrelation of the Kaulatantras and the Tantras mentioned in the Kambuja inscriptions. It is due to their pioneering works in the field of Buddhist Studies that many misconceptions about Tantra has been removed. The works of scholars western scholars like Jeffrey Hopkins, Robert Thurman, Alex Wayman, Snell Grove have brought out the profound philosophy inherent in Buddhist Tantra. Buddhist tantra is actively practiced by the Tibetans. The original Tantric texts had been faithfully translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan by the sincere Tibetan followers of Indian masters. In Tibet, these works have not remained as mere scholastic exercise, till date they are actively practiced and propagated by Tibetan masters as a path that leads one to the ultimate state of enlightenment—Buddhahood.

On the face of it Tantra appears to be associated with rituals and mysticism. It is true that in Tantric texts (both Buddhist and Hindu) practices like pañcamakāra (ritual—elements containing madya or wine, māṃsa or meat, matsya or the fish, mudrā or cereals and maithuna or sexual intercourse, collectively known as the five Ms worshipping of wrathful and fierce deities with various hand gestures or mudrā) and ritual instruments like vajra and bell is mentioned. But in reality there exists a profound philosophy under the facade of ‘obscure’ rituals and customs.

The philosophy of the Buddhist Tantra path is based on the doctrine of emptiness or Śūnyatā that was expounded by the scholar and master par excellence—Nāgārjuna. It also advocates the Mahāyāna precepts of Karuṇā or Compassion and Bodhicitta that is the generation of the altruistic mind to remove the sufferings of all sentient beings. These
features are strongly advocated in almost all Buddhist tantric texts especially in ¹Hevajra Tantraj. Therefore Tantric masters both Indian and Tibetan consider Tantra to be a sub-division of Mahāyāna Buddhism and not a separate third vehicle. The salient feature of Buddhist Tantra also called Vajrayana is that it has skilfully conjoined the profound philosophical concepts like emptiness with the practice of Deity yoga (devatā yoga), that involves mantra or incantations and intricate rituals to help the eligible adepts to attain Buddhahood. Besides achieving the ultimate state of an enlightened being, tantra is also a way to attain special worldly feats or siddhis. But Tantric texts like the ¹Hevajra Tantraj advises its followers to refrain from using the powerful Tantric rites and rituals for personal gain.

In ¹Hevajra Tantraj the Mahāyāna precepts of attaining Buddhahood for removing the sufferings of all sentient beings is advocated. It includes other Mahāyāna precepts as well.

The foundation of the Mahāyāna path is based on the realization of Śūnyatā, the ultimate truth that is not perceived by the ignorant mind and the generation of Bodhicitta, that is altruistic mind which aspires to attain Buddhahood to eradicate the suffering of all sentient beings. The path to Buddhahood has two aspects Wisdom aspect and Merit aspect. The wisdom aspect is the direct realization of Emptiness (śūnyatā). The merit aspect involves the accumulation of Merit by sincerely following the Six Pāramītās or perfections. They are not practiced in isolation, they are indivisible aspects of the path. The emphasis on the Six Pāramītās has resulted in the Mahāyāna School being called Pāramitāyāna.

The method adopted by the Bodhisattvas of the Pāramitā vehicle to attain liberation from cyclic existence and to become a Buddha is the conjoining of an altruistic motivation or an altruistic mind of enlightenment (bodhicitta) with a mind cognizing emptiness (śūnyatā).

Bodhicitta is the Method and śūnyatā the wisdom. Indivisibility of Method and wisdom means the necessity to progress with an inseparable method to attain the fruit of definite goodness that is liberation from
cyclic existence and attainment of omniscience. In the Mahāyāna vehicle, the inseparability of Method and Wisdom means to cultivate a mind cognizing emptiness and then while dwelling within the force of such reflection that all phenomena are illusions, one must also train in ethics, patience and other virtues. Similarly while one generates the altruistic aspiration to help and benefit all sentient beings, one must cognize the emptiness of all phenomena.

All these Mahayana precepts have been upheld in Vajrayana, where along with these the special technique of Deity Yoga, a unique upāya leading to Buddha state is contained. It uses the technique of deity yoga [upāya] in conjunction with Emptiness yoga [prajñā] to purify the mental and physical aggregates or the pañcā skandhas, that comprise the ordinary body and to manifest the illusory body that with meditative practice ultimately evolves into the Form body of the Buddha with all the major and minor marks. At the same time the yogi attains the subtle most consciousness of Clear Light. Mind to directly cognize emptiness, this leads to the attainment of the Truth Body. Though various rites and rituals like pañcamakāra, maṇḍala construction etc. are recommended as intrinsic part of Tantric practice, none of these rituals are of any benefit to the practitioner, if the profound doctrine of Śūnyata is not realized and meditated upon.

With regard to rites and customs of Tantra it is prudent to mention that many of them are common to both Buddhist and Hindu schools of Tantra. Even in Hevajra Tantra, many customs and rituals are mentioned which are similar to Hindu Tantric practices. Since the focus of this thesis is to analyse Hevajra Tantra and the practices recommended in it from the Mahāyāna perspective, its similarity with Hindu Tantra shall not be examined.

This thesis attempts an analysis of the tantric text Hevajra Tantra in order to bring to light the Mahāyāna precepts like Bodhicitta, Buddhakāya etc. on which the work is structured; and also to reveal the various features, including Buddhist Tantric rituals, that have been presented in
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