

The Banner Festival of Indra

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Ancient Indian theatre had deep roots in religion and ritual, like its compeers in other ancient cultures. It developed an elaborate convention of ritual worship called *pūrvaraṅgavidhi* which prefaced the performance of a play. An important part of this *vidhi* consisted of worshipping a wooden staff called *jarjara* to ward off evil and obstructive forces and to propitiate the gods. The *jarjara pūjā* originated on the mythical occasion of the presentation of the very first play in Jambūdvīpa, which was arranged as part of an ancient festival called *Indradhvajotsava*. As long as two thousand years ago both the *Jarjara puja* and *Indradhvajotsava* had acquired a legendary dimension.

Bharatamuni records the origin of the *Jarjarapūjā* and mentions the *Indradhvajotsava* in the very first chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstram*. The festival has a long history and a pan-Indian prevalence while the *jarjara daṇḍa* continued to receive worship in theatrical practice till quite recently. Both have, over the centuries, acquired many extra-aesthetic and mythic overtones which have buttressed the theatre concept. Bharata gives an account of the *jarjara* but not of the Banner Festival of Indra. Therefore a brief comparative study of the Festival, based on some of the more important sources, is undertaken in these pages to provide a cultural environment for the *jarjara* of Bharata.

During the reign of Vaivasvata Manu, says Bharata, (*Nāṭyaśāstram* 1.8-95), people fell prey to lust and greed and were infatuated with jealousy and anger in the Tretāyuga. Hence their pleasures became admixed with sorrow, their happiness with misery. A delegation, led by Indra, was formed in Jambūdvīpa to represent *devas, dānavas, gandharvas, yakṣas, rākṣasas, uragas* and human beings who inhabited it, to seek a remedy. The delegation felt that a universal, diverting entertainment within the authorisation or conformity of the Veda was the answer, and approached the creator god Brahmā to create for them such an audiovisual art mode. Accordingly, Brahmā created the art of the theatre, *nāṭya*, from the four Vedas eclectically and gave it to them.

Indra pleaded that the *devas* were incapable of the hard work involved in the practice, production and performance of a play. The task was then delegated by Brahma to the sage Bharata who, with his 'sons' (disciples?) playing the different roles, produced a play on the theme of *Amṛtamanthana* (churning of the milk ocean for obtaining the immortalising elixir) highlighting the triumph of gods over demons. Brahmā improved this version, introducing the *kaiśiki vṛtti* (graceful style) by adding elements of music and dancing which were performed by the celestial nymphs (*apsarās*). Bharata asked Brahmā to fix a date for production of the play. Brahmā said, 'Now is the appropriate time to perform the play, for the Banner Festival of Indra has just commenced. Produce your play on this occasion!'

So Bharata and his troupe went to the Banner Festival which was being held in honour of Indra to celebrate the victory of gods over *dānavas* and *daityas*. He dramatised a theme in which the gods vanquished the demons and tore them limb to limb. The play was performed; Brahmā and the other gods were delighted. So were *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas* and *pannagaṣ*.

However, when it came to the part when the *dānavas* and *daityas* were massacred, they (who had gatecrashed) could not stomach the humiliation. They instigated and let loose on the stage obstructive, malevolent spirits which with witchcraft paralysed all activity on the stage and struck the actors and even the director dumb. Indra discovered the reason for this thespian calamity, seized the banner staff itself and beat to a pulp (make *jarjara*) the invisible obstructive forces (*vighñas*) and their leader Virūpākṣa as well as the *daityas* and *dānavas* who had aided and abetted. Then the play went on smoothly. The gods were pleased, offered gifts to the performers and the director and granted Bharata a boon: 'Let this staff be henceforth called *jarjara*. Let it be worshipped before commencing any play. This divine weapon will destroy to a pulp all obstructive, malevolent forces which assail a play.' Indra confirmed it with pleasure.

This, incidentally, marked the origin of a playhouse also; for at the next performance, the remaining *Vighñas* again terrorised the dramatis personae and brought the play to a stop. Hence Brahmā ordered Viśvakarman to build a playhouse, strong and skilful in design, so that it would afford protection to the performance and spectators and also keep out undesirable elements. Various gods were assigned the task of safeguarding the players as also various parts of the stage when the theatre was built. Brahmā himself took over the protection of the stage: 'It is for this reason that flowers are scattered on the stage (*puṣpāñjali*) at the beginning of a performance.'

It is clear from the foregoing that the Banner Festival of Indra was well known and widely celebrated during Bharata's time; so well known in fact that the sage does not consider it necessary to describe it except to state that it commemorated a battle between *devas* on the one hand and the *dānavas* and *daityas* on the other and celebrated the victory of the former and the humiliating defeat of the latter (ibid 1.55, 64, 65, 102-104). It is interesting that his foremost commentator, Abhinavagupta, makes no comment on the passage except to say that 'maha' in 'dhvaja maha' (ibid 1.54) means worship. Probably it is a Prakritisation of the Sanskrit word 'makha' (sacrifice).

It is not as if this festival was unknown or rare in Abhinavagupta's time (10th cent. A.D.). One of the most ancient of Hindu festivals, traces of it may be found in the *Ṛgveda* and it persists in ritual practices even today in South India. Copious descriptions of the festival are available from diverse ancient sources—Āryan and Dravidian, Sanskrit and vernacular. It is mentioned in numerous works over the centuries including the following: *Vājaraneyī samhitā* (17.80-85), *Śatapatha brāhmaṇa* (4.5 *passim*), *Pāraskara grhyasūtra* (2.15), *Kauśika sūtra* (140), *Yājñavalkya smṛti* (1.147), *Mahābhārata* (*Ādiparvan*, 64) *Bṛhat samhitā* of Varāhamihira (ch. 43), *Mañimekhalai* (1.24-28 *passim*), *Śilappadhikaram* (ch. 5) *Viṣṇudharmottara purānam* (*passim*), *Kālikāpurānam* (ch.90), *Bhaviṣyamahāpurānam* (ch. 139), *Rājamārtāṇḍa* of Bhoja of Dhārā (*passim*), *Kālaviveka* of Jimūta Vāhana (294-299), *Caturvargacintāmani* of Hemādri (*Vratakhanda* 2. 401-

419), *Kṛtyaratnākara* of Caṇḍeśvara (292-293), *Tithitattva* of Raghunandana (115-117), and *Varṣakriyā* (-kṛtya?) of Govindananda (322-323).

Indra-dhvaja-maha or *Indra-dhvaja-Utthānotsava* is mentioned, among others, in the following works: *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghosa (SBE. 49. pt. 1. 113), *Tantra-vārtika* of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (p. 205), *Raghuvaṁśa* of Kalidāsa (4.3), *Mṛcchakatikam* of Śūdraka (10.7), *Nāgānanda* of Śrīharṣa (Act.1), *Lalitavistara* (*passim*), *Kṛtyakalpataru* of Lakṣmīdhara (on *Rājadharmā*, pp. 184-190), *Rājanītiprakāśa* of Caṇḍeśvara (pp. 421-423, 430-433), *Epigraphia Indica* (12.320) and *Viramitrodaya* of Mitramiśra (pp. 421-423). *Indradhvajotsava* places *pūrvaraṅgavidhi* items such as *jarjarapūjā* and *puṣpāñjali* in a proper religio-cultural perspective.

At least two festivals relating to Indra worship, viz. *Indrayajña* and *Indrayaṣṭi*, are known since very early times. The latter is also called *Indramaha*, *dhvaja maha*, *Indra dhvajothānotsava* etc. *Indrayajna* is a regular *srauta* sacrificial ritual. It is described in *Pāraskara grhyasūtra*. Both are performed together in the lunar month of Bhādrapada.

Indrayajña is conducted as follows: On the full moon day (*pūrnimā*), *pāyasa* (rice cooked in milk) and cakes are prepared. Oblation of ghee is first offered to Indra in the sacrificial fire and then *pāyasa*. A cake is placed at each quarter point, *purva* etc., around the sacrificial fire. Two portions of *ājya* (ghee) are obliterated to Indra, followed by *pāyasa*. This is followed up with further ghee oblations to Indra, *Indrāṅī*, *Ajā Ekapāt*, *Ahīrbudhnya* and to the presiding deities of Bhādrapada viz. *proṣṭhapadas*. *Pāyasa homa* is next offered to Indra. Then the sacrificer eats a little of the remaining *pāyasa*. The remaining unobliterated *pāyasa* is placed on leaves of *aśvattha* and offered as *bali* to the Maruts while chanting the *mantras* from *Vājaraneyi saṁhitā*. Finally *sviṣṭakṛt homa* is performed with the remaining *pāyasa*.

Indrayajna is purely ritual-oriented and strictly Vedic in scope and content. *Indrayaṣṭi* combines both Vedic and Tantrik ritual; it is a socio-religious and socio-cultural festival with tribal and totemic overtones. It is an ethnic admixture drawing equally from Aryan and Dravidian practices of religion and magic. Its main objective is the attainment of peace, plenty, health and communal harmony. It is primarily a royal festival, promising its performer victory over enemies and freedom from evil, obstructive, occult and malevolent spirits. It was widely performed all over India and is therefore found with some variation in its descriptive sources, i.e. in regional recensions.

Thus, there are at least two versions of the origin of the Banner Festival. The first is Āryan, Vedic; it is described in the *Mahābhārata* which is a treasure-house of myths and legends of semi-historical origin from the *Vedas* and *Brāhmanas*. In both versions the festival marks an imitation or importation on earth of a celestial celebration of an actual victory of the gods over the *daityas* and *dānavas* in a battle.

Uparicara was a monarch of the Cedi kingdom. He belonged to the clan of *vasus* and was the son of *Paurava*. He was pure, pious and fond of hunting. He performed a long and arduous meditation (*tapas*). Pleased with this, Indra made friends with him, persuaded him not to become a hermit and gave him a boon viz. that the land of Cedi may, during his rule, prosper in every way. He also gifted Uparicara with an aerial vehicle and the *Vaijayanī* garland of never-fading lotuses (which always ensured victory over enemies without the least hurt to himself). More importantly, Uparicara also received from Indra

the gift of a tall bamboo pole with the power of destroying foes and of protecting good people. Then the king returned to his capital and inaugurated a Banner Festival of this pole and made it an annual feature to serve as worship of Indra (*Mahābhārata*, *Ādiparvan*, 64, 1-20).

Bhaviṣyamahāpurāna closely agrees with this account. Long ago, during a battle between the gods and the demons, Brahmā and other gods established atop the Meru mountain Indra's flagstaff to ensure victory. This symbolised the Goddess of Power (Śakti) and was worshipped by *siddhas*, *vidyādhara*s and *uragas* (it is only in this detail that this *Purāna* differs from other sources according to which the banner staff symbolises Indra). The banner staff was adorned with a white umbrella (a royal insignia), bell, balloonlike ornaments to which dance (ankle) bells were attached as well as baskets. Many demons fled to the netherworlds and many died on the battlefield even on beholding it. Thenceforth the divine banner staff came to be worshipped regularly by all gods and *gaṇas* in heaven.

Once the king Vasu (his name is not mentioned as Uparicara) accumulated great virtue and consequently went to Indra's world and was admired and worshipped by gods. Indra gifted him with the banner staff, designating it as *Vasu-yaṣṭi*, for worshipping it so that all *daityas* would be destroyed. Vasu returned to Earth during the rainy season and worshipped this *Indramaha* together with all the kings. Indra was pleased and granted a boon to Vasu that all men who worshipped with devotion the banner staff gifted by him would be happy, healthy, pious, vigorous and rich. They would possess good dresses and ornaments and good speech. Vasu celebrated the festival every year (*Bhaviṣyamahāpurānam*, 139, 1-12).

The *Mahābhārata* then goes on to describe in detail how Uparicara celebrated the *Indramaha*. Indra saw it from his celestial chariot along with his consort Śaci and the *apsarās* (nymphs). He was pleased with the worship and so declared that whosoever worshipped the *maha* (note that this word is used here synonymously with the banner staff itself), such kings would be blessed with wealth, victory and empire. Their subjects would flourish and prosper, the land would teem with healthy and plentiful crops; *rākṣaṣas* and *piśācas* would flee the country. Vasu then continued to rule Cedi country for long with *dharma* (righteously). He performed the *Indramaha* every year to propitiate Indra. His five sons Bṛhadratha, Manivāhana, Matsilla, Yadu and Aparājita ruled different kingdoms and propagated the Banner Festival of Indra. Their progeny continued to celebrate it as an annual festival (loc. cit. 51. 34-46).

The second version of the origin of *Indramaha* is Dravidian, specifically, Tamilian. It is said to have been propagated by a Cola king, Tunkaiyilerinda Tolillot-sempian, from his capital, Pūmpahār, more commonly known as Kāveripattanam. This version is found in *Maṇimekhalai* (cantos 24-26). According to this legend, Indra had delegated one of his retinue viz. Caṭukkā-bhūtam to dwell in Pūmpahār, repel sin and sinners and to protect virtue and the virtuous as long as the *Indramaha* was celebrated; this *bhūta* resided in the banner staff and Indra was worshipped by propitiating it. The *bhūta* would desert the capital city of Pūmpahār if the celebration was discontinued, whence desolation and ruin would overtake it (ibid canto 1). So the *Indramaha* was celebrated (for details, *vide infra*) by succeeding generations of monarchs in Pūmpahār.

In course of time, Nedumudikilli became a monarch in this dynasty. He saw a beautiful maiden in his royal park, fell in love with her and married her. She disappeared suddenly after some time. Through assiduous enquiry the lovelorn king learnt that she was none other than Pilivalai, daughter of the Nāganādu king Valaivanan. She would not come back but would send their son. But the son was shipwrecked during the journey, and died. The grief-stricken king failed to perform the *Indramaha* that year. Maṇimekhalai, the presiding deity of Pūmpahār, became wrathful at this and cursed that the city be swallowed by the sea. The curse was fulfilled and Pūmpahār was destroyed.

This version is similar to the Aryan in that the Banner Festival was to be preformed by kings for the warding off of evil, protecting the virtuous, for peace, prosperity and plentitude in the country as well as for victory over enemies. It is different in that the banner was worshipped as a *bhūta* and not Indra himself. It is similar again in that the celebration became annual and that its discontinuance resulted in calamity. The difference is that a wrath or curse is incurred at discontinuance here but not in the Aryan version. Such wrath here accrues not from the *bhūta* or Indra but from the presiding deity of the Capital. The worship of the banner staff as Indra in the Aryan version has totemic overtones whereas its worship as *bhūta* in the Dravidian version has a tribal and/or Tantrik dimension.

The version of *Indramaha* in Vārāhamihira's *Brhatsaṃhitā* (60.1-60) closely resembles the one in the *Mahābhārata*. According to this, the banner staff did not originate from Indra but was gifted to him by Viṣṇu to frighten away the *asuras*. It is to be noted that the banner staff is imbued with magical power in every version. It is in effect a repulsive instrument both in the physical and the occult senses: a staff is used to threaten or frighten an animal or adversary into fleeing. It is also employed as a sacrament in Tāntrik practices for one of the six magical spells (*ṣatkarma*) viz. *uccāṭana*. Its employment in the *Kauśika sūtras* of the *Atharvaveda* and as *bhūta* in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala signifies the use of both Āryan and Dravidian forms of *tantra*.

Vārāhamihira states (*loc. cit.* śl. 8) that king Uparicara Vasu inaugurated the Banner Festival on earth. He further prescribes auspicious stellar and planetary conjunctions on which the king should send an astrologer and a carpenter to a forest for selection of a tree, preferably the *arjuna* (*terminalia arjuna* i.e. *biḷimatti* in Kannada, *vare maddi* in Telugu and *vellai maruda* in Tamil).

Available textual sources are not agreed as to when the *Indramaha* should be celebrated. Broadly speaking, the date falls around the lunar month of Bhādrapada in the Āryan tradition and in the lunar month of Caitra in the Dravidian tradition. It may be noted *en passant* that in ancient India the Āryan year commenced from Bhādrapada.

Thus the *Kauśika sūtra* prescribes that the *Indramaha* should commence on the eighth day (*aṣṭamī*) of the bright half (*śukla pakṣa*) of Bhādrapada or Āśvayuja in the *śravaṇa nakṣatra*. According to the *Mahābhārata*, the banner staff should be erected in the lunar month of Mārgasira in the *śukla pakṣa* when the *mahāmakha nakṣatra* is enduring. The banner is lowered on the next day itself. In his *Yājñavalkya-dharma-śāstrā-nibandha*, commentary on *Yājñavalkya smṛti* (1.147), Aparārka quotes Garga to prescribe that the *Indradhvaja* should be raised by the king on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of Bhādrapada when the moon is in conjunction with *uttarāṣāḍha*, *śravaṇa* or *dhaniṣṭhā*

nakṣatra. The festival is concluded after the full moon on a *tithi* when the moon is in conjunction with the *bharaṇi nakṣatra* in the dark fortnight of the same month. Thus the celebration lasts from five to eight days. The *Kṛtyaratnakara* of Caṇḍeśvara lays down that the *dhvaja* should not be raised on a Tuesday or Saturday or in ominous portents like earthquake, appearance of a comet etc., nor when the king is passing through a period of impurity (*sūta*) due to birth or death. As already stated, according to *Bṛhatsamhitā*, an astrologer and carpenter should be sent to a forest by royal command on any one of specified auspicious days to select the tree to make the banner staff. The tree is felled the next day. It is brought to the capital for erection on the eighth day of the bright half of Bhādrapada. On *ekādaśī* (eleventh day) of the same fortnight, that is three days later, the stem is pared and chiselled into shape. A vigil is kept on that day so that no impurity of any kind accrues to it. It is raised by the king on the next day i.e. *dvādaśī* with (or even without) lunar conjunction with *śravaṇa nakṣatra*. The celebration concludes on the first day of the dark half of the same month when the *dhvaja* is lowered. Thus the *Indramaha* is an eight-day festival (excluding the days of selection and preparation). *Devīpurāṇam* prescribes the month of Aśvina for the *Śatakratu (Indradhvaja) mahotsava* (ibid. 12.22,24). *Kālikāpurāṇam* (90.2,43) gives *dvādaśī* with *śravaṇa nakṣatra* in the solar month of Leo (Bhādrapada) for the erection of the *dhvaja* and last quarter of the *bharaṇi nakṣatra* for *visarjana* (throwing into water as the concluding rite of a festival).

According to *Mañimekhalai*, the *Indramaha* commenced on the full moon day of the first lunar month, *Caitra*, and lasted for 28 days, i.e. almost one full lunar month. *Śilappadhikāram* closely agrees with this source. *Bhaviṣyamahāpurāṇam*, as told by Kṛṣṇa to Yudhiṣṭira, simply prescribes that the *Indrayaṣṭi* should be established while the *śravaṇa (nakṣatra)* is current and should be dismissed on a night when the next *bharaṇi nakṣatra* is current (cp. *Kālikāpurāṇam*). The festival is thus celebrated from seven to nine days.

Indradhvaja utthānotsava is described thus in the *Mahābhārata*. The banner staff is 32 *kiṣkus* (a length unit of 18-22 inches) long. It is decorated with ornaments, garlands of fragrant flowers and baskets suspended from projections. The basket (*piṭaka*), at the height of 12 *kiṣkus*, is covered with deeply coloured clothes. The festival commences with *puṇyāna* ceremony, in which brāhmaṇas worshipped with food, drinks and clothes recite Vedic mantras invoking auspiciousness. The banner is then raised to the accompaniment of sounds of *mṛdanga*, *bherī* and *śankha*. Indra is now worshipped in the form of the banner staff by the king. *Yakṣas* such as Manibhadra and gods are next worshipped. Gifts of many kinds are made. People in cities and villages dress in colourful clothes and flower-garlands and engage in the sport of squirting water (coloured?) from leather sacks by royal decree, after honouring the king and after the latter leaves the venue of the *Indramaha* in the capital. Panegyrists and bards proclaim the valorous deeds of the king. Dramas and dances are performed. The king also enjoys the festival, dressed colourfully and suitably ornamented, along with his womenfolk of the gynaeceum, queens and ministers, all besmeared with pure vermilion (ibid. *Ādiparvan*, 64. 23-33).

Yājñavalkya smṛti declares that the day of raising the banner and the day of taking it down should be declared as public holidays. *Kṛtyaratnākara* prescribes that the *Indramaha* should include worship of not only Indra but of his consort Śaci and their son Jayanta as well. Their figures are made from pieces of sugarcane stalks. As indicated above,

Bṛhatsamhitā lays down that the king should send an astrologer and a carpenter to the forest on a day divined to be auspicious for selecting the tree from which the banner staff is to be made. The tree is felled the next day. The king should go to the forest with a retinue of subjects, ministers and brāhmaṇas and bring the felled tree to the capital on Bhādrapada Śukla aṣṭamī. The capital city is decorated with banners, buntings and arches to mark the festive occasion. On the following *ekādaśī tithi*, the banner tree is carefully guarded against possibilities and sources of impurity; it is pared and chiselled by skilled carpenters into the shape determined by tradition. It is next placed on a mechanical contrivance (e.g. crane, *yantra*) to raise it. *Homa* is now offered to the banner staff. This is probably the Indrayajña described above. Then the banner staff is raised erect on the following *dvādaśī tithi*, preferably with *śravaṇa nakṣatra* in conjunction. Five female deities, called *Indrakumārīs* (Indra's daughters), are made of wood and placed near the foot of the banner staff. This is said to potentiate the magical or occult power of the *maha*. Two other auxiliary staffs are also made from the the same wood, three fourths and half the length of the banner staff, and called Nanda and Upananda respectively. A third banner staff is also erected to symbolise Indra's mother. Thus the whole family of Indra is worshipped on the occasion (except his son Jayanta). The main banner staff is decorated with differently coloured clothes and ornaments. Baskets are hung from projections all round the staff such that the successive higher ones are smaller. On the full moon day, *mantras* and prayers are recited in propitiation of these deities from both the *Veda* and the *Purāṇas*. The banner (and its auxiliaries) are taken down on the *pratīpat* (first) day of the dark half of Bhādrapada, after a farewell ceremony (ibid. ch.43).

Bhaviṣyamāhāpurāṇam gives more details of the *Indradhvaja* and of the celebration, vigil etc. Thus, the banner staff is 20 cubits long, and is made of good, hard wood. It is bathed and clothed. It is then erected on a platform called *Indramāṭṛkā* (cf. a separate banner for Indra's mother is prescribed in *Bṛhatsamhitā*) by the king himself when there is *śravaṇa nakṣatra* (presumably in Bhādrapada). The *Indramāṭṛkā* site would be carefully determined and prepared. The banner staff should be hung with baskets and decorated with varicoloured clothes. The first basket is called *Lokapāla*; it is square in shape and has a pericarp. It contains (sacraments symbolising) Yama, Indra, Kubera and Varuṇa on the four sides and derives its name from these (*Dikpālakas*). The second is circular and swathed in red cloth. The third is octagonal in shape and covered in white cloth. The fourth basket is circular and is covered with firefly coloured cloth. It carries the sacraments of the seven Mother Goddesses, Brāhmī etc. around it. The fifth again is octagonal, swathed in white and skilfully designed in layers. The sixth basket is a black pericarp, circular and festooned with bubble-like balloons. The seventh is octagonal, white-clothed, and carries the Vidyādharaśas as deities. The eighth is circular and is covered with leather thongs. The ninth basket carries the symbols for the nine planets and for Caṇḍī. It is covered with red arsenic-hued cloth (or exposed to the sun i.e. left bare). The tenth has for its deities, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Íśvara. The eleventh is circular and has Yama for its deity. The twelfth basket carries the white umbrella (as royal insignia) and is covered with white cloth. The thirteenth (last and topmost) basket is hung from the tip of the banner staff, covered with *kuśa* grass, flower garlands, bell and flywhisk. White guyropes are attached to the banner staff and with their help it is slowly and gradually raised erect. Brāhmaṇas,

treated to *dakṣiṇā*, *pāyasa* and cakes, perform a *homa*. The king proclaims a festival of seven to nine days.

During the festival, gift ceremonies, histrionics, dancing, story-acting, wrestling, giant wheels with cradles and such other entertainments are arranged. A careful and ceaseless vigil should be organised during the nights to guard the banner staff etc. and to ensure that it is not rendered impure by the touching of crows, owls and pigeons, for a crow touching it portends famine; on owl, the king's death; contact with a pigeon, mass destruction of people. Again, if due to faulty and loose erection the banner staff tumbles down, it should never again be raised in that country. If the *Indrayaṣṭi* has had to be transferred unavoidably from its original (capital) city to another and cannot be (ceremoniously) raised in the latter within the same year, the festival may be held only in the twelfth year thence and not before. Various calamities will befall if different parts of the banner are damaged, even unwittingly. If its umbrella is broken, the king's (white) umbrella will be broken (i.e. he will lose his kingdom); if its head is damaged, his secret counsels will be out, resulting in administrative failure. If the face is faulted, the country's reserve forces will break down. If its arms (projections) are broken, catastrophe will overtake the kingdom. If its belly (or middle) is damaged, the king or people will have belly disease. If the leather thongs are cut, friends will be destroyed. If the main bottom-stem is damaged, the infantry will be ruined. Therefore the king should ensure that the *Indrayasti* is guarded well with every possible effort. If it falls and breaks into two, he will have to get it made fully of silver or gold and raise it again. He shall also perform conciliatory and propitiatory ceremonial ritual and feed the twice-born (brāhmanas, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas) in atonement. He shall offer the banner staff propitiatory foods, coconuts, oranges, *kapiṭṭha* (*Feronica Elephantum*), *karkati* (*Cucumis Utilissimus*), *trāpusa* (cucumber) and *bījapūra* (*Citrus Medica*) accompanied by *mantra* recitation. At the time of taking it down (during the *bharani nakṣatra*), a slight food offering should be made and farewell should be bid to *Indra*. In whatsoever country such *Indramaha* is performed, it is assured of rains, freedom from untimely death and freedom from calamities such as plague, drought, floods, swarms of rats, locusts etc. as also victory over enemies (loc. cit).

It has been mentioned above that the *Indramaha* was celebrated in Pūmpahār commencing from the full-moon day in the month of *Caitra*, according to *Śilappadhikāram*. *Indra* had gifted to king *Mucukunda* a guardian spirit called *Bhūta Caṭukkam* to protect the good and virtuous and to destroy evil and sin in his kingdom. The *bhūta* was installed and consecrated in the form of a banner staff in a temple built at the meeting place of four roads, and formed an important division (*manram*) called *bhūta caṭukkam* in the capital city. On the above festival day, *homa* was performed in all the divisions of Puhār viz. *maṅṭapam*, *villidai manram*, *ilarci manram*, *nedunkalininra manram*, *bhūta caṭukkam* and *pavai manram*, consisting of oblations of boiled grains, sweetened sesame balls, mixture of meat and rice, flowers and incense. Mature maidens dressed in colourful and attractive clothes offered toddy as oblation at the altar of the *bhūta* in uninhibited dances. They performed these dances with hands resting on hips. They followed it with group dance by joining hands with each other. This was called *kuravai dance*. Finally they left, singing a benediction for the king and the country for peace, plenty and prosperity. Both civilians and soldiers went to the *bhūta* and offered prayers to ward off evil and to confer

auspiciousness on the king. Many people even cut off their own heads and offered them in pursuance of a vow to the *bhūta* to ensure victory to the king over his enemies (this is an ancient *ex voto* custom of South India; such a person was known as 'garuḍa' in Karnataka).

Besides temples for Indra, Subrahmaṇya, Maṇimekhalai and other deities, Puhār had temples for Vajra, Kalpataru etc. The one consecrated to the Vajra weapon was called Vajrakoṣṭha. It used to house a sacred drum. On this day it was placed on a decorated elephant and taken to the Airāvata temple at the beginning of the festival and was returned to the Vajrakoṣṭha at its close. The banner on the Indra staff carried the ensign of Airāvata and was erected in the temple of Kalpavṛkṣa. It was raised high when the drum arrived at the Airāvata temple. This was the highlight of the festival. There was a procession in the beautiful roads of Puhār in which five groups of the king's councillors, eight battalions of the king's retinue, princes of royal blood, sons of aristocrats and merchants, cavalry, elephants, chariots and artists (musicians, dancers, actors, acrobats etc.) participated.

Special worship was offered at the temples of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Subrahmaṇya, Baladeva and Indra on the day of the Banner Festival. Vedic sacrifices were performed to propitiate the Vasus, Ādityas and Rudras. Festivals were held in honour of the 18 *gaṇas*, *apsarās*, *nāgas*, *siddhas*, *gandharvas*, *vidyādharas*, *kimpuruṣas*, *piśācas*, *senas*, *asuras*, *bhūtas*, *munis*, *devas*, *garudas*, *rākṣasas*, *yakṣas*, *cāranas* etc. Special offerings were made in the Jaina and Dharma temples as also for Śrīdevi. There was vocal and instrumental music everywhere in the city.

Kālikāpurānam (90.1.58) gives details of the Indradhvaja Festival not found in many other sources, and attributes its origin to Uparicara *alias* Vasu, and calls it a *yajña*. The king's priest, accompanied by the astrologer and carpenter and by strains of instrumental music, worships an appropriate tree, after a purifying bath on a night of the bright fortnight of the rainy season. A tree grown in a park, temple, cemetery, mid-road, overgrown with creepers, very horny, dwarf, full of birds, hollows, partially burnt, broken branches, thin and carrying feminine names should be avoided. One of the following trees viz. *arjuna* (*Terminalia Arjuna*), *aśvakarna* (*Vatica Robusta*), *priyakośa* (*Nauclea Cadamba*), *sarja* (*Ferminalia Alata Tomentosa*) and *audumbara* (*Ficus Religiosa*) or *deodār* or *sāl* is fit for making the banner staff (90.4-9). The tree is worshipped for permission and is cut down next day four inches each from bottom and top. It is soaked in water. It is then transported to the eastern gate (of the capital), crafted into the staff and brought on Bhādrapada *śukla aṣṭami* to the dais, specially built for it. It is excellent, good, middling or inferior if its length is 52 or more, 42, 32 or 22 cubits respectively (90.10-17). Images of the five daughters of Indra (each a quarter in size of the banner) and of the five mothers of Indra (each half in size of the banner) are carved, each with two hands mechanically attached. All ten images are immersed in water (*adhivāsa*), along with the banner staff (*yaṣṭi*) on the Bhādrapada *śukla ekādaśī* (90. 18-20), reciting the *mantras* '*gandhadvārām*' etc.

On the next day, a large Indra *maṇḍala* (mystic diagram) is written, into which Viṣṇu and then Indra are invoked. An image of Indra, made of gold or any other metal or wood, is placed at the centre of the *maṇḍala* and a special kind of worship is offered. The banner staff is then raised at an auspicious moment with the incantation of *mantras*, '*dahana*'.

'*plavana*' etc. from the Uttaratantra, offering food consisting of *modaka*, *pāyasa*, *pānaka*, *guḍa*, etc. for affluence and prosperity. The ten *dikpālakas*, nine planets, *sādhyas* etc., and the seven *mātrkā* goddesses are then involved into *kalaśas* and worshipped. Now the king, accompanied by brāhmanas, the carpenter, priest and auspicious materials, proceeds to the banner staff and establishes it on the western part of the sacrificial altar (of the *Indrayajña*), with the help of five guy ropes and crane etc. As mentioned above, it contains the carvings of the *Indrakumāris* and *Indramātrkās* and *dikpālakas*. It is decorated with varicoloured clothes, ankle bells, large bells, flywhisks, perfumes, mirrors, garlands of flowers and gemstones and four buntings (90.21-34).

Next, the *Indradhvaja* is slowly raised from the maṇḍala by an officer. The images of Indra, Śaci, Mātali (Indra's charioteer), Jayanta (Indra's son), Vajra and Airāvata, nine planets, *dikpālakas*, other *gaṇa* deities are now propitiated with food offerings. A *homa* is then performed and *bali* is offered to Indra with sesame, ghee, flowers, *dūrvā* grass and *akṣata* (unbroken holy rice or barley), at the end of which *bali* is offered to Indra; brāhmanas are fed. The king should worship the Indra Banner like this for seven days with the aid of brāhmanas learned in the *Vedas* and *vedāṅgas*, using the *mantra* '*trātaram indram*' which is dear to Indra (90.31-42).

Indra, invoked into the banner staff, is discharged (*visarjana*) in the night during the last quarter of the *bharani naksatra*, unseen by the king and with the traditional *mantra* '*Sārdham surāsuraṅganih. . . . gamyatam*'. If the king witnesses the *visarjana* he will die within six months. The discharge should not be held in impure states (of death or birth in the family), Tuesday or Wednesday or during public calamities such as earthquakes. It may be held on an auspicious day, in such cases, after the seventh day, other than on a Tuesday or Saturday and in a *naksatra* other than *bharani*. Every care should be taken to see that the banner staff is not touched by birds during the seven (or more) days of worship. It should be slowly lowered in *visarjana*. If it breaks, it portends the king's death. Then reciting the '*mantra tiṣṭha keto. . . . jale*' the banner staff is consigned to deep water along with all the decorations for one year (till the next annual festival). It should be noted that the raising and installation of the *Indradhvaja* are held publicly to the sounds of musical instruments but its discarding takes place at night, unseen by anyone. This is the peculiarity of the festival. A king who worships Indra like this during the autumn, rules long prosperously and finally attains to the *Indraloka* after death. His kingdom is free from drought, disease, mental anguish and other mishaps. His subjects will live long. Such worship is tantamount to worship of all the pantheon, destroys all sin, gives every auspiciousness, happiness and wealth (90.43-58).

Shorn of the recensional differences surveyed above, the *Indramaha* may be reduced to the following essentials. It commemorated the triumph of gods over the *asuras* and *daityas* and was brought to the earth by Uparicara in the Cedi country. Its central deity was Indra, consecrated into a banner staff which was a totem, imbued with magical and occult powers, capable of protection against evil and obstructive forces and of bestowing health, wealth, prosperity and auspiciousness on the king and his subjects. It was celebrated annually throughout India with minor provincial variations, as a State Festival, well stylised into a settled format, for a week or more, in a socio-religious and socio-cultural atmosphere by both the king and his subjects.

The *Indramaha* was thus a sacrament into which a referential concept of self-protection or self-defence against actual physical threat and aggression was transferred, and then further transferred into a formal, collective or representative authority against invisible, intangible or imagined threat and aggression. Thus the concept underwent a semantic transference from the individual to the community. Engendered in collective consciousness and racial memory, it acquired the dimensions of magic and sacrament and soon developed into a myth or legend.

Bharatamuni's mention of *Indramaha* should be viewed in such a context. This festival was already held by celestial beings and was rich in potential for the presentation of entertainment. When Brahmā created the *Nāṭyaveda* and Bharata produced a play at his command, this was a new and composite art-form—the total theatre—even for *devas*, *asuras* and *daityas*. It was the time for *Indramaha* and it was natural for Brahmā to think of it as an appropriate occasion for Bharata's production. (Incidentally, the play *Amṛtamanthana* must have been staged for the first time in the week following Bhādrapada *śukla aṣṭami* or *ekādāśī*). It was also natural for Bharata to select a theme which would please the gods. The ire, humiliation and protest of the *asuras* and *daityas* are equally natural as also their attempts to obstruct its further presentation with the use of magic and witchcraft. The banner staff was, after all, intended for just such an occasion and was so used by Indra to drive away (what were for the *devas*) evil and obstructive forces and to restore peace and security to both performers and spectators.

Thus the Muni has skilfully interwoven the legend/myth of the origin of *Indradhvajotsava* into his narration of the origin of the *Nāṭyaveda* and has linked them both to explain the origin and contemporary practice of the *jarjara pūjā* and the construction of the playhouse. □