

THE LEGEND OF INDRAMAHA

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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 *purvarangavidhi* 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 *jarjarapuja* originated on the mythical occasion of the presentation of the very first play in *Jambudvipa* which was arranged as part of an ancient festival called *Indradhwajotsava* as long as two thousand years ago both the *Jarjara puja* and *Indradhwajotsava* had acquired a legendary dimension.

Bharatamuni records the origin of the *Jarjara puja* and mentions the *Indradhwajotsava* in the very first chapter of the *Natyashastram*. The festival has a long history and a pan-Indian prevalence while the *jarjara danda* 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 *Indramaha*. 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, (*Natyashastram* 1.8-95), people fell prey to lust and greed and were infatuated with jealousy and anger in the Tretayuga. Hence their pleasures became admixed with sorrow, their happiness with misery. A delegation, led by Indra, was formed in Jambudvipa to represent Devas, Danavas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Rakshasas, Urugas and human beings who inhabited it to seek a remedy. The delegation felt that a universal, diverting entertainment within the authorization or conformity of the Veda was the answer, and approached the creator god Brahma to create for them such an audiovisual art mode. Accordingly, Brahma created the art of the theatre, *Natya* 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 Amritamanthana (churning of the milk ocean for obtaining the immortalizing elixir) highlighting the triumph of gods over demons. Brahma improved this version by introducing the Kaishiki Vritti (graceful style) by adding elements of music and dancing which were performed by the celestial nymphs (apsara). Bharata asked Brahma to fix a date for production of the play. Brahma said, 'Now is the appropriate time to perform the play for the *Indramaha* has just commenced. Produce your play on this occasion!'

So, Bharata and his troupe went to the Indramaha which was being held in honor of Indra to celebrate the victory of gods over danavas and daityas. He dramatized a theme in which the gods vanquished the demons and tore them limb to limb. The play was performed; Brahma and the other gods were delighted. So were Gandharvas, Yakshas, Rakshasas and Pannagas. However, when it came to the part when the danavas and daityas were massacred, they (who had gate-crashed) could not stomach the humiliation. They instigated and let loose on the stage obstructive, malevolent spirits which with witchcraft paralyzed 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 (vighnas) and their leader Virupaksha as well as the daityas and danavas 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 Vighnas again terrorized the dramatis personae and brought the play to a stop. Hence Brahma ordered Visvakarman 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. Brahma himself took over the protection of the stage: 'It is for this reason that flowers are scattered on the stage (pushpanjali) 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 one hand and the danavas 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, Ahhinavagupta makes no comment on the passage except to say that 'maha' in 'dhwajamaha' (ibid 1.54) means worship. Probably it is a prakritisiation 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.). It is one of the most ancient of Hindu festivals and traces of it may be found in the Rgveda and it persists in ritual practices even today in South India. Copious descriptions of the festival are available from diverse ancient sources Aryan and Dravidian, Sanskrit and vernacular.

It is mentioned in numerous works over the centuries including the following:

Vajaraneyee Samhita(17.80-85), Satapata Brahmana (4.5 passim), Paraskara Grihya Sutra (2.15), Kaushika Sutra (140), Yagnyavalkya Smirti (1.147). Mahabharata (Adiparvan, 64), Brihat Samhita of Varahamihira (ch. 43). Manimekhalai (1.24-28 passim), Shiappadikaram (ch. 5) Vishnudharmottara Puranam, Kalikapuranam(ch.90), Bhavishya Mahapuranam (Chap.139).

Rajamartanda of Bhoja of Dhara (passim), Kalaviveka of Jimuta Vahana (294-299). Chaturvarga Chintamani of Hemadri (Vratkananda 2.401 – 419), Krtiyaratnakara of Kandeshwara (292-293), Tithitattva of Raghunandana (115 – 117), and Varshakriya (kriya) of Govindananda (322-323).

Indra-dhvaja-maha or Indra Dhvaja Utthatnotsava is mentioned, among others, in the following works: Buddhacarila of Asvaghosha (SBE. 49. pt. 1. 113), Tantra-vrartika of Kumarila Bhatta (p. 205). Raghuvamsha of Kalidisa (4.3). Mrcchakatikam of Sudraka (10.7), Nagananda of Sriharsha (Act. I), Lalitavistara (passim), Krtiyakalpataru of Lakshmidhara (on Rajadharma, pp. 184-190). Rajanitiprakasha of Chandeshwara (pp. 421-423, 430-433). Epigraphica Indica (12.320) and Viramitrodaya of Mitramishra (pp. 421-423). *Indradhwajotsava* places *purvarangavidhi* items such as *Jarjara puja* and *pushpanjali* in a proper religio-cultural perspective.

At least two festivals relating to Indra worship, viz. Indra yagna and Indrayashthi are known since very early times. The latter is also called Indramaha, Dhvajamaha, Indradhwajothanotsava etc. Indrayajna is a regular *shrauta* sacrificial ritual. It is described in Paraskara Grihyasutra. Both are performed together in the lunar month of Bhadrapada. Indrayajna is conducted as follows: On the full moon day (Purnima), paayasa (rice cooked in milk) and cakes are prepared. Oblation of ghee is first offered to Indra in the sacrificial fire and then paayasa. A cake is placed at each quarter point, purwa etc., around the sacrificial fire. Two portions of aajya (ghee) are obliterated to Indra, followed by paayasa.

This is followed up with further ghee oblations to Indra, Indrani, Aja Ekapat.

Ahimbudhnya and to the presiding deities of Bhadrapada viz. prosthapadas. Paayasa homa is next offered to Indra. Then the sacrificer eats a little of the remaining paayasa. The remaining unobliterated paayasa is placed on leaves of ashwattha and offered as bali to the Maruts while chanting the mantras from Vajaruneyi samhita. Finally savistakrit homa is performed with the remaining paayasa.

Indrayajna is purely ritual-oriented and strictly Vedic in scope and content. Indrayashthi 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 Indradhwaja. The first is Aryan, Vedic ; it is described in the Mahabharata which is a treasure-house of myths and legends of semi-historical origin from the Vedas and Brahmanas. 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 danavas in a battle. Uparichara was a monarch of the Chedi 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 (tapasya). 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 Chedi may, during his rule, prosper in every way. He also gifted Uparichara with an aerial vehicle and the Vaijayanti 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 (indrathwaja) Banner Festival of this pole and made it an annual feature to serve as worship of Indra (Mahabharata. Adiparvam. 64. 1-20). Bhavishyamanapurana closely agrees with this account. Long ago, during a battle between the gods and the demons, Brahma and other gods established atop the Meru mountain Indra's flagstaff to ensure victory. This symbolized the Goddess of Power (Sakti) and was worshipped by siddhas, vidyadharas and uragas (it is only in this detail that this purana differs from other sources according to which the banner staff symbolizes Indra). The banner staff was adorned with a white umbrella (a royal insignia), bell, balloon-like 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 ganas in heaven.

Once the king Vasu (his name is not mentioned as Uparichara) 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 Vasuyashthi 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 (Bhavishyamahapuranam, 1.39. 1-12). The Mahabharata then goes on to describe in detail how Uparichara celebrated the Indramaha. Indra saw it from his celestial chariot along with his consort Shachi and the apsaras (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: rakshasas and pishachas would flee the country. Vasu then continued to rule Chedi country for long with dharma (righteously). He performed the Indramaha every year to propitiate Indra. His five sons Brhadhratha, Manivahana, Matsilla, Yadu and Aparijita 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 Chola king, Tunkaiyilerinda Tolillot-sempian. From his capital, Pumpahar, more commonly known as Kaveripattanam. This version is found in Manimekhalai (cantos 24-26). According to this legend, Indra had delegated one of his retinue viz. Catukka-bhutam to dwell in Pumpahar, repel sin and sinners and to protect virtue and the virtuous as long as the *Indramaha* was celebrated; this bhuta resided in the banner staff and Indra was worshipped by propitiating it. The bhuta would desert the capital city of Pumpahar 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 Pumpahar.

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 Naganadu king Valaivanan. She would not comeback 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. Manimekhalai, the presiding deity of Pumpahar, became wrathful at this and cursed that the city be swallowed by the sea. The curse was fulfilled and Pumpahar 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 bhuta 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 bhuta 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 bhuta in the Dravidian version has a tribal and or Tantrik dimension.

The version of *Indramaha* in Varahimihira's Brihatsamhita (60.1-60) closely resembles the one in the Mahabharata. According to this, the banner staff did not originate from Indra but was gifted to him by Visnu to frighten away the asurus. 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 Tantrik practices for one of the six magical spells (satkarma) viz ucchatana. Its employment in the Kaushika sutras of the Atharvaveda and as

bhuta in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala signifies the use of both Aryan and Dravidian forms of tantra.

Varahamihira states (loc.cit. SL. 8) that king Uparichara 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, Bilimatti 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 Bhadrapada in the Aryan tradition and in the lunar month of Chaitra in the Dravidian tradition. It may be noted en passant that in ancient India the Aryan year commenced from Bhadrapada. Thus the Kaushika sutra prescribes that the *Indramaha* should commence on the eighth day (ashthami the bright half (Suklapaksa) of Bhadrapada or ashwayuja in the Shravana Nakshatra nakshatra. According to the Mahabharata, the banner staff should be erected in the lunar month of Margasira in the Shukla paksa when the Mahamakha Nakshatra is enduring. The banner is lowered on the next day itself. In his Yajnyavalkya dharma shastra nibandha commentary on Yajnyavalkya smriti (1.147), Apararka quotes Garga to prescribe that the Indradhwaja should be raised by the king on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of Bhadrapada when the moon is in conjunction with uttarashadha, shravana or dhanistha nakshatra. The festival is concluded after the full moon on a tithi when the moon is in conjunction with the bharani nakshatra in the dark fortnight of the same month. Thus the celebration lasts from five to eight days. The Krtiyaratnakara of Chandeshvara lays down that the dhawaja 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 (sutaka due to birth or death. As already stated, according to Brihatsamhita, 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 Bhadrapada. On ekadashi (eleventh day) of the same fortnight, that is three days later, the stem is pared and chiseled 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. dwadashi with (or even without) lunar conjunction with shravana nakshatra. The celebration concludes on the first day of the dark-half of the same month when the dhawaja is lowered. Thus the *Indramaha* is an eight-day festival (excluding the days of selection and preparation). Devipurana prescribes the month of Ashvina for the Shatakrtu (Indradhuwaja)mahotsava (ibid. 12.22, 24). Kalikupuranam (90.2, 43) gives dwadashi with shravana nakshatra in the solar month of Leo (Bhadrapada) for the erection of the dhawaja and last quarter of the bharani nakshatra for visarjana (throwing into water as the concluding rite of a festival).

According to Manimekhalai, the Indramaha commenced on the full moon day of the first lunar month, chaitra and lasted for 28 days, i.e. almost one full lunar month. Shilappadikaram closely agrees with this source. Bhavishyamahapurāṇam, as told by Kṛṣṇa to Yudhishtira, simply prescribes that the Indrayashti should be established while the Shravana (nakshatra) is current and should be dismissed on a night when the next bharani nakshatra is current (cp. Kalikapurāṇam). The festival is thus celebrated from seven to nine days. Indradhwaja uttanotsava is described thus in the Mahabharata. The banner staff is 32 kiskus (a length unit of 18-22 inches) long. It is decorated with ornaments, garlands of fragrant flowers and baskets suspended from projections. The basket (pitaka), at the height of 12 kiskus, is covered with deeply colored clothes. The festival commences with punya ceremony, in which Brahmanas worshipped with food, drinks and clothes, recite Vedic mantras invoking auspiciousness. The banner is then raised to the accompaniment of sounds of Mrdanga, bheri and shankha. Indra is now worshipped in the form of the banner-staff by the king. Yakshas such as Manibhadra and gods are next worshipped. Gifts of many kinds are made. People in cities and villages dress in colorful clothes and flower-garlands and engage in the sport of squirting water (colored?) from leather sacks by royal decree, after honoring 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 colorfully and suitably ornamented, along with his womenfolk of the gynaeceum, queens and ministers, all be-smeared with pure vermilion (ibid adiparvan, 64. 23-33). Yajñavalkya smṛiti declares that the day of raising the banner and the day of taking it down should be declared as public holidays. Kṛtyaratnakara describes that the *Indramaha* should include worship of not only Indra but of his consort Shachi and their son Jayanta as well. Their figures are made from pieces of sugarcane stalks. As indicated above, Brhatsamhita 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 brahmanas and bring the felled tree to the capital on Bhādrapada shuklashthami. The capital city is decorated with banners, buntings and arches to mark the festive occasion. On the following ekadashi tithi, the banner tree is carefully guarded against possibilities and sources of impurity: it is pared and chiseled 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 Indrayagnya described above. Then the banner staff is raised erect on the following dwadashi tithi, preferably with shravana nakshatra in conjunction. Five female deities called Indrakumaris (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 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 symbolize 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 colored 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 Puranas. The banner (and its auxiliaries) are taken down on the pratipat (first) day of the dark half of Bhadrapada, after a farewell ceremony (ibid. ch.43). Bhavishyamahapurāṇam gives more details of the Indradhwaja 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 Indramantraka (cf. a separate banner for Indra's mother is prescribed in Brhatsamhita) by the king himself when there is Shravana nakshatra (presumably in Bhadrapada). The Indramantrika 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 Lokapala; it is square in shape and has a pericarp. It contains (sacraments symbolizing) Yama, Indra, Kubera and Varuna on the four sides and derives its name from these (Dikpralakas). 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 colored cloth. It carries the sacraments of the seven Mother Goddesses, Brahmi etc. around it. The fifth again is octagonal, swathed in white and skillfully 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 Vidyadharas as deities. The eighth is circular and is covered with leather thongs. The ninth basket carries the symbols for the nine planets and for Chandi. It is covered with red arsenic-hued cloth (or exposed to the sun i.e. left bare). The tenth has for its deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Ishvara. 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 kusa 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. Brahmanas, treated to dakshina, paayasa 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 organized 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 Indrayashthi 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 it 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 Indrayasthi 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 (brahmanas, kshatriyas and vaishyas) in atonement. He shall offer the banner staff propitiatory foods, coconuts, oranges, kapittha (*Feronica Elephantum*), karkati (*Cucumis Utilissimus*), trapusa (cucumber) and bijapura (*Citrus Medica*) accompanied by mantra recitation. At the time of taking it down (during the bharani nakshatra), 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 Pumpahar commencing from the full-moon day in the month of Chaitra, according to Shilappadikaram. Indra had gifted to king Muchukunda a guardian spirit called Bhuta Chatukkam to protect the good and virtuous and to destroy evil and sin in his kingdom. The bhuta 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 (mandram) called bhuta chatukam in the capital city. On the above festival day, homa was performed in all the divisions of Puhar viz. mantapam, villidai manram, ilarchi manram, neidunkalininra manram, bhuta chatukam and pavai manram consisting of oblations of boiled grains, sweetened sesame balls, mixture of meat and rice, flowers and incense. Mature maidens dressed in colorful and attractive clothes offered toddy as oblation at the altar of the bhuta in uninhibited dances. They performed those 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 bhuta 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 bhuta 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 'garuda' in Karnataka).

Besides temples for Indra, Subrahmanya, Manimekhalai and other deities, Puhar had temples for Vajra, Kalpataru etc. The one consecrated to the Vajra weapon was called Vajrakostha. It used to house a sacred drum. On this day it was placed on a decorated elephant and taken to the Airavata temple at the beginning of the festival and was returned to the Vajrakostha at its close. The banner on the Indra staff carried the ensign of Airavata and was erected in the temple of Kalpavriksha. It was raised high when the drum arrived at the Airavata temple. This was the highlight of the festival. There was a procession in the beautiful roads of Puhar in which five groups of the king's councilors, 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 shiva, Vishnu, Subrahmanya, Baladeva and Indra on the day of the Banner Festival. Vedic sacrifices were performed to propitiate the Vasus, Adityas and Rudras. Festivals were held in honor of the 18 ganas, apsaras, nagas, siddhas, gandharvas, vidyadharas, kimpurushas, pishachas, senas, asurus, bhutas, munis, devas, garudas, rakshasas, yakshas, charanas etc. Special offerings were made in the Jaina and Dharma temples as also for Sridevi. There was vocal and instrumental music everywhere in the city.

Kalikapuranam (90.1.58) gives details of the Indradhwaja Festival not found in many other sources, and attributes its origin to Uparichara alias Vasu, and calls it a yajnya. 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*), ashwakarna (*Vatica Robusta*), priyakosha (*Nauclea Cadamba*), sarja (*Fermentalia Alata Tomentosa*) and audumbara (*Ficus Religiosa*) or deodar or sal 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 Bhadrapada shukla ashtami 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 (adhivasa), along with the banner staff (yashthi) on the Bhadrapada Shukla ekadashi (90. 18-20), reciting the mantras(gandhadvaram. Etc). On the next day, a large Indra mandala (mystic diagram) is written, into which Visnu 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 mandala 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, paayasa, paanaka, guda, etc. for affluence and prosperity. The ten dikpaalakas, nine planets, sadhyas etc., and the seven maatrika goddesses are then involved into kalashas and worshipped. Now the king, accompanied by brahmanas, the carpenter, priest and auspicious materials, proceed to the banner staff and establishes it on the western part of the sacrificial altar (of the Indrayajnya), with the help of five guyropes and crane etc. As mentioned above, it contains the carvings of the Indrakumaris and Indramatrikas and dikpalakas. 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 Indradhwaja is slowly raised from the mandala by an officer. The images of Indra, Shachi, Matali (Indra's charioteer), Jayanta (Indra's son), Vajra and Airivata, nine planets, dikpalakas, other gana deities

are now propitiated with food offerings. A homa is then performed and bali is offered to Indra with sesame, ghee, flowers, durva grass and aksata (unbroken holy rice or barley), at the end of which bali is offered to Indra; brahmanas are fed. The king should worship the Indra Banner like this for seven days with the aid of brahmanas learned in the Vedas and vedangas, using the mantra 'trataram 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 nakshatra, unseen by the king and with the traditional mantra 'Sardham surasuragaaih. . . . 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 nakshastra 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 'tishtha keto. . . .jale' the banner staff is consigned to deep waters along with all the decorations for one year (till the next annual festival). It should be noted that the raising and installation of the Indradhawaja 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 the entire pantheon, destroys all sins, 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 Uparichara in the Chedi 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 stylized 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-defense 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 Brahma created the Natyaveda 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 Brahma to think of it as an appropriate occasion for Bharata's production. (Incidentally, the play *Amritamanthana* must have been staged for the first time in the week following Bhadrapada Shukla ashtami or ekadashi). 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 also 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 skillfully interwoven the legend/myth of the origin of *Indradhwajotsava* in to his narration of the origin of the Natyaveda and has linked them both to explain the origin and contemporary practice of the *Jarjara puja* and the construction of the playhouse.