HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INDRA WORSHIP.
CHAPTER VI

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INDRA WORSHIP

Indra was the most powerful god of the Vedic Aryans and he became popular long before the Buddhist period, and his icons were regularly worshipped even by the ordinary people. The historical development of Indra-worship has been ascertained and analysed on the basis of the following sources.

The Vedic and the subsequent literature; the various inscriptions related to Indra and the various coins related to Indra. Iconography in relation to Indra would be dealt in a separate chapter.

The Samhitās or the early Vedic literature usually dealt with the hymns and the sacrifices to Indra. But clear cut references regarding Indra worship are not found in this early texts of the Vedic Aryans. But in the Brāhmaṇas pointed references of Indra-worship are mentioned which clearly indicates that the worship of Indra developed as early as from the times of the Brāhmaṇas. It is said in the Brāhmaṇas that the ritual has Indra as its deity. Indra is the soul and the deity of the ritual. The Yajña belongs to Indra.

The Tait. B. 1.7.3. also lays down that a cake of eleven Kapālas is to be offered to Indra as an Oblation. Tandya Brāhmaṇa also repeats the same. Indra is offered a pap of red rice in the ceremony of initiation (Dikṣa). For Indra Jyestha (the most excellent) is prepared a pap of red rice-grain (hayana). The Tait. S. prescribes a cake prepared
of big rice, Mahāvṛūhi, 'thereby Indra the most excellent, leads to excellence or lordship.

The reason is also given 'as to its being prepared of red rice; outstanding doubtless, are those red rice plants and outstanding is Indra, therefore it is prepared of red rice.\(^5\) In the Brahmānic rites the oblation offered to Indra is poured in the southern direction says the Brahmāna. 'There is either a cake on eleven potshreds for Indra or a rice pāpa for Soma; this he places on the southern part.\(^6\) At the full moon sacrifice, Indra is offered an additional cake because he is the dispeller of the scorners.\(^7\) At the new moon ceremony Indra is offered an oblation made of clotted curds.\(^8\) In Śatapatha Brahmāna, Indra is offered butter sacrifices and addressed as 'here Indra performed his heroic deed.\(^9\) At other places two numerous sacrifices are offered to Indra as Indra said 'when I had hurled the thunderbolt at Vṛtra, I was terrified and (in consequence of this fight), I am much emancipated.' This (cake) does not satiate me; prepare for me what shall satiate me. 'The gods replied' So be it!'. Subsequently, gods offered him Soma, milk, curd etc. An offering to Vṛtra slayer in full moon sacrifice.\(^10\)

Indra was also worshipped at the Ṛṣamanḍha sacrifice. In this grand sacrifice organised by the kings, oblations of drops are offered to Indra along with Vāyu, Viṣṇu, Brhaspati,
Mitra, Varuna. It is said "when Satrasaha, the Panchala King was sacrificing, wearing beautiful garlands, Indra ravelled in Soma and the Brahmanas became satisfied with wealth. Numerous references of Indra worship at Sutrāmanī are also found.

In Vedānta or Upanisad, the offerings are made to Indra, the rule.

In Grāhya-Sūtras also, oblation are offered to Indra.

The cooked milkrice is offered to Indra on the full-moon day of the Prausthapada. Mention of sacrifices of Indra are made in other Grāhya Sūtras. A Bali is sacrificed to Indra with adoration in the intermediate direction. On the full-moon day of Avayuga, a milk rice oblation is given to Indra. Cooked milkrice, curds, honey are offered to Indra. At the sacrifice to Indra, first fruits, milk, rice sacred to Indra is offered to him alongwith Agni. At the time of ploughing sacrifices are also offered to Indra.

Also in Manu's, Laws of Manu, Chapter on Penance for Minor offence, the worship and oblations to Indra form the part of the daily rites. So the development of worship of India Originated in Brahmanas and continued then onwards.

In the Mahākāvya, the Mahābhārata, the worship of Indra took the form of a festival when the Cedi King Vasu
Uparicara, on being advised and given a stick by Indra, started propitiating him. Then onwards the worship of Indra was observed by the kings and the royal classes for their victory and the prosperity of their kingdom. Indra-worship started gaining full form and shape from epic age only.

Interesting references of Indra worship named Indra-yajña, which also assumed the full shape of a festival, are found in numbers of Purāṇas. Here Vasudeva Kṛṣṇa attempted to make a stop to this Indra-Yajña but could not succeed to the fullest extent. Another interesting feature develops here. The worship of Indra usually belonged to the kings and the royal classes in Mahābhārata. But in the Purāṇas ordinary people such as Gopas of Vṛindāvana, started taking part in it because they considered Indra as a rain-god, and the rain being essential for the benefit of the mankind. So, in the Puranic age worship of Indra became an affair of the masses, as well as the royal classes.

The Buddhist canonical writers have also mentioned the worship of Indra which usually took the form of festivals. The Jaina's too, in their canonical works have not forgotten to mention about the worship of Indra. In the Brhaspātihita too, mention of Indra-worship is also found. Kalidāsa, one of the classical writers of the Sanskrit literature mentions about worship of Indra in his Raghuvamsa. Other
Sanskrit authors have also mentioned about Indra-worship in their works.

The study on historical development of Indra-worship would remain incomplete unless the account of Al-Biruni and Kalhana are mentioned.

Al-Biruni, a Muslim of Iranian origin, visited Indra in 1037 A.D. He made an attempt to trace the origin of idol-worship in ancient India which also relates Indra. In his works Al-Biruni mentions a story which goes as follows:

The king Ambarisha who after completion of successful reign, was deeply absorbed in meditation and worship. Indra appeared to him and instructed him that if he was ever overpowered by human forgetfulness, he should make for himself an image like that in which Indra had appeared before him and offer to it perfumes and flowers. Thus Indra would always remember him. Since then, according to Al-Biruni, Hindus started making idols, some four handed ones, resembling the image of Indra, the form in which he appeared before Ambarisha.

Now, we would consider the account of Kalhana stated in his Rajatarangini. Where he states that Indra, one of the heroes of the nature poetry of the Vedas, is the god of the thundering sky whom the ancient Aryans in India
worshipped like their cousin, the people of Iran. He clips the wings of the mountain and destroys Ahi and Vṛtra, ravishers of the clouds and demons of the draught. In later time, he becomes "King Indra" and the idea of Indian kingship is derived from epic Indra (with the Sabha or assembly of the Suras or the gods and of Apsaras or celestial nymphs) who is for ever in conflict with the Asuras, The Titans. Hence the Kṣatriya ruler was compared to Indra. In the verse there is a pun on Surendra which is the king's name and it also means Indra. Sata-Manyu" and Gotrabhid "he who was the breaker of mountains" refer to Indra. 'Sata-Manyu' who performed a hundred sacrifices' and Gotrabhid "he who was the breaker of mountains" refer to Indra. 'Sata-Manyu' means "he who has extinguished anger" and Gotra-rakṣin, "the protector of the mountains" refer to the king. So this work clearly indicates that Indra was worshipped from ancient times and in extreme northern state like Kashmir also. Kalhana has also referred festivals of Indra in his work.

Apart from literary sources, if we consider the vast number of names of Indra, we can easily realise his popularity with both the elite and the masses. We are giving in alphabetical order the available names of Indra, found both in literature and other sources.

1. Daśaśataksha
2. Daśaśatanayana
3. Daśaśtekshana
4. Daityanibhārana
38. Parjanya
39. Purandara
40. Puruhuta
41. Pushānūja
42. Pushkarakshana
43. Sahasradra
44. Sahasraksha
45. Sahasralochana
46. Sahasranayana
47. Sahasranetra
48. Sarvādanaśādana
49. Saśicipati
50. Sakra
51. Sambarāhan
52. Sambara-Pākahan
53. Satokratu
54. Satamanyu
55. Sarvadevōsa
56. Sarvalokamana
57. Surāśreshtha
58. Suradhīpa
59. Suraganasvara
60. Surānām Patih
61. Surapati
62. Surapungavā
63. Surarāja
64. Surarīhan
65. Surarshabha
66. Surasattama
67. Sureśa
68. Sureśvara
69. Surendra
70. Surettama
71. Trailokyapati
72. Trailokyarakaja
73. Tribhuvanesavara
74. Tridasadhipa
75. Tridesesa
76. Tridasandra
77. Tridesavara
78. Trilokaraja
79. Trilokasa
80. Vajrabhüt
81. Vajradhara
82. Vajradharini
83. Vajradhurk
84. Vajrahasta
85. Vajrapani
86. Vajrayudha
87. Vajraśri
88. Varaha
89. Vāsava
90. Vibudhasrīthṣa
91. Vibudhadhipa
92. Vibhadhipati
93. Vibudheśvara
94. Viśvabhuj
95. Vṛshākapi
96. Vṛtraśaṭru
97. Vṛtrahan
98. Vṛtrahaṁtr
99. Vṛtranishudana

A few other names of Indra, as we have noticed, in the Introduction, occur in the Amarkosha, and another popular name of this god, namely "Madhava" occurs in the Panchatantra (if the expression girau varahati madhavaḥ).
It is evident from these vast number of names that Indra was never forgotten by his devotees, although gradually he became more famous as a god of rains.

A number of *tirthas*, associated with this god, are known from various works. We have already come across the name of Indrapura, sacred to Indra, according to the *Mahanayuri*, which according to J.N. Banerjea, is in S.W. India, but D.C. Sircar locates it in Bulandshar district of U.P. From the latter place, the famous Indor copper plate of Skandagupta's time, was discovered. A few scholars think that Indrapura should be identified with the present Indore in Madhya Pradesh. Another *tirtha*, sacred to Indra, has been mentioned in the *Brahmapurana*. It was according to that work, situated on the river *Godavari*. Another place, sacred to that god, was on the river *Sabhamati*, modern Sabarmati. This was known as *Indragonmatirtha* and it is mentioned in the *Bodhapurana*. A *tirtha*, sacred Indra's spouse *Indrani*, is referred to in the *Naradiya Purana*. A place called *Sakravatara*, obviously a *tirtha*, sacred to *Sakra* or *Indra*, situated near *Ayodhya* has been mentioned in the *Abhijnana-Sakuntalam* of *Kalidasa* and also in the *Tilakamajari* of *Dhanapala*. Even the name of the old city of *Indraprastha* is connected with the god Indra. In the far off *Kamboja* country in East Indies, there was an *Indrapura*, the capital of Jayavarman II of the 13th century.
The name Indra was quite popular among the Rashtra-kuta kings of ancient India and we have references to four emperors, bearing the name Indra. A place called Indrapura, which was in Rajasthan, afterwards became sacred to Tirthankara Santinatha. According to Yuan Chwang, tank near Bodh Gaya was known as Indra-tank, as it was created by Indra to enable Lord Buddha to wash his clothes.

Thus we find that even in the historical period, Indra retained his popularity, but he was chiefly worshipped during the Indra-festival, and in the next chapter we will try to throw some new light on this Utsava.

Historical development of Indra-worship found from various available inscriptions are now discussed. Among all the inscriptions, related to Indra, have been discovered so far, the Boghoz-Koi tablet is the most important one. A tribe named Mitani established a kingdom at North Syria in Asia Minor most probably in 1500 century B.C. They belonged to the same class as that of the Vedic Aryans of India and probably their language was also same. Mattiyuajye, the son of Dasaratha, the king of Mitani, made a treaty with Subbiliuma, the king of Hitatait, the neighbouring kingdom of Mitani, and the treaty was inscribed in a clay tablet. Most probably, the treaty was signed in 1380 B.C. This tablet is known as Boghoz-Koi tablet. Interestingly the names of Indra, Varuna, Mitra and Nasatya were inscribed in it. The discovery of the Boghoz-Koi
tablet has led us to certain important revelation. On the
basis of this tablet Piggot could ascertain the timings of
the Rg. Veda i.e. around middle of two thousand century B.C. 
Moreover, in Zend Avesta, the mythological literature of the
Vedic Iranians, the god Indra is known as a devil. But
discovery of Boghoz Koi tablet proves that Indra was known
to them as a powerful god because his name was inscribed
along with other important gods of the Vedas in a burnt clay
tablet belonging to the people of Asia minor. So certainly,
Indra was invoked and worshipped by not only the Vedic
Aryans but the people of middle east too, to whom Zend
Avesta belongs.

References of Indra are also found in Bhitārī Pillar
Inscription. This is incised on a red sandstone column, which
stands on the south of village Bhitārī, about five miles
north-east of saidpur in Ghazipur district (U.P.). The
column was discovered by TREGEAR in 1834, but the inscription
was observed a little later when Cunningham removed the earth
from the lower part of the column. Princep announced the
discovery in 1836, in 1837 Mill (Rev. M.H.) published his
reading of the text and its translation. Cunningham in 1871,
Dhan Daji in 1875 and Bhagwanlal Indraji in 1885 published
their readings of the text with translation. Finally fleet
edited it. The introductory portion of the inscription goes
as below. The son of the Maharājādhiraja, the glorious
Samudra Gupta, who was the exterminator of all kings; who had no antagonist (of equal power) in the world; whose fame was tasted by the waters of the four oceans; who was equal to (the gods) Dhanada and Varuna and Indra and Antaka. "

The inscription continues and Indra's name along with the gods Dhanada, Varuna and Antaka are found in the inscription of Gupta dynasty which was assigned to 4th century A.D.

The name of Indra is also mentioned in Allahabad Pillar Inscription. This is inscribed on a round monolith, i.e., sandstone column, thirty-five feet in height, on which an earlier inscription of the Mauryan emperor Asoka is also inscribed. It is believed that the column was originally erected at Kausambi and was removed to its present site inside the fort on the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna at Allahabad by some early Muslim ruler of Delhi. A short edict of Asoka on the column is addressed to the administrators at Kausambi, which lends support to this belief. Moreover, the Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang makes no reference of this column in his accounts of Po-lu-yi-kia i.e., Prayag.

This inscription was first published by Troyer in 1834 and subsequently Mill and Bhaudaji worked on it and lastly it was edited by Fleet. This is an inscription of Samudra Gupta inscribed in his life time. The line 26 of the
inscription reads as below:

"Whose mind is engaged on being initiated to the counsel of relieving (the distress of) the feeble, the poor, the orphan, the helpless and the afflicted; who is equal to (the gods) Dhanada, Varuna, Indra and Antaka; whose officers are always employed in restoring the wealth of the various kings, who had been conquered by the strength of his arms." 

Samudragupta was the most powerful and the famous king of the Gupta Dynasty. He was honored by Vincent Smith as Napoleon of the East. These inscription of Samudragupta clearly reveals that the Vedic god Indra was known to them and the most powerful king of the Gupta dynasty was compared with him.

In Sanchi Stupa Railing Inscription, Devarāja, the most popular epithet of Indra, was also the other name of Chandra Gupta II.

Two names of Indra i.e., Sakra and Mahendra were also associated with Kumara-Gupta I and Skanda Gupta respectively as found in Malanda inscriptions.

In Nirmad inscription too, an interesting feature appeared that not only the great kings but also the feudatory rulers like Mahāśaṅkanta Mahārāja Varunasona were compared with Indra.

So the study of inscription reveals certain important aspects of Indra-worship and its historical base is
strengthened.

In the coins of Euphrates, Antialkidas and some other Indo-Greek rulers we find the figure of an enthroned deity with the figure of an elephant or the rear part of an elephant with its trunk upraised in front of it. Again on a particular coin type of Antialkidas, we find the same deity walking by the side of the elephant striding to right with its trunk upraised. On some coins of Nauas the same god seated on throne is shown to place his hand on the head of the personified vajra (thunderbolt). These have been interpreted by J.N. Banerjea that these coin devices are nothing but the variant representations of Indra (very easily identified by the Greeks with their Zeus) who was the late tutelary deity of Svetavacalaya of Indrapura, a locality in the neighbourhood of ancient Kapisa, on the basis of certain observation of Hiuen Tsang and an explicit statement in the Mahamayuri. Coonarswamy has rightly said that those symbol from 600 B.C. to the beginning of Kushan period, represent a definite early Indian style, amounting to an explicit iconography.

Indra and Agni appears on the reverse sides of the coins of Indramitra and Agnimitra respectively in the Pancala series. Jyagupta also shows god Indra on the reverse side of his coins. On Indramitra's coins, Indra is crudely represented
in two different ways: first as standing, facing, on a pedestal, and holding an uncertain object in his right hand and secondly he is shown inside a doomed shrine (arch way - Allan) where other details are absolutely lacking as the coins being very small and absolutely corroded. Jayas entitled coins show the latter device on their reverse, marked by the same indistinctness.

We have mentioned earlier that Indra appears in the grab of the Greek Zeus on the coins of Eukratides, Antialkidas and few other Indo-Greek rulers and on those of Maues. On the Kavisiva nagara devata coins of coins of Eukratides, the god is seated on the left on throne holding wreath in the right hand and palm branch in the left, the forepart of the elephant rarely the whole animal, appears on the right and a conical object in the left field. On the reverse of a unique silver coin of Antialkidas, in the collection of the British Museum, appears the same deity (Indra) standing or advancing to left with a long sceptre in his left hand and the right hand hanging down, and the elephant, with its trunk at the salute, Nike on its head and bell round its neck, also striding to the left. White head remarked "apparently this quaint design shows the elephant deity and his elephant indulging in a victorious march past".52
On certain square copper coins of Maues, we find on the obverse of the coins numbered 12 - 13, in the British Museum the enthroned Indra appears with a long sceptre in his left hand, while his right hand is placed on the shoulder of human figure. Gardner described the latter as a small winged female figure, but the wings and the female character are not clear from the plate. According to him, the wings appear to be prongs of Vajra and the figure itself is the embodiment of thunderbolt.

So, in analysing the historical development of Indra-worship based on various texts and works, inscriptions and the coins, it is evident that Indra-worship had his historical background and was a very popular phenomenon in this sub-continent from a very early period.
NOTES & REFERENCES ON HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INDRA-SORSHIP

1. Ait.B, 5.34; 6.9. SB 2.1.2.11.
2. S.B.5.5.1.33.
5. S.B.5.3.3.6.
6. Ibid 5.5.1.1.
7. Ibid 11.1.3.1-2.4
8. S.B.11.14.3
9. S.B.1.4.3.4.
10. S.B.1.6.4.21
11. Sacred Books of the East, Max Muller, vol.44 p.281,300,400
13. V.S. 3.3.43.
15. Paraskara G.S. 11.15.
17. Ibid p.4 k.7.
19. Paraskara Grīhya Sūtra 11.17
22. Mb. Ādi P. Ch. 63.
23. Viṣṇu P.5.10 and Bhāgavat p. 10.24, 8-11.
24. *SBE*. Max Müller Vol. 49(1), 11, 11n, 89
27. *Raghuvamsa* Canto iv.3.
30. Ibid VIII. 170, 182, 495.
31. Most of these occur in Great Epic; See Sorensen, Index etc) pp. 335 ff.
34. See *Sel. Ins.* I p.318.
35. See Brahmanpurana 96.1.
36. Padma p. 6,144.1
37. Naradiya p. II. 40.93,
38. Kalidasa *Sakuntala* Act VI.
40. The age of Imperial Kanauj pp. 417, 425, 427.
41. Chatterjee *op. cit.* II. p. 308
42. See Watters, *On Yuan Chwang etc.* III p. 127
43. Stuart Piggott, Pre-historic India, Chap VII.
44. P.L. Gupta, The Imperial Guptas pp. 39-40
45. Ibid, pp.5-6, 10
46. Ibid p.17
47. Ibid pp. 187-88
48. Ibid p. 310
50. Commerswamy, History of Indian and Indonesian Art p.45.
51. Allan's Plate XXIX, 1 and 2 a club seems to hang down from the left.
52. Whitehead, notes on 'Indo Greek Numismatics in Numismatic Chronicle, 1923, pp. 325-6 PlXV fig.4.
53. Gardener, Pl.XVI fig.9.