HISTORY OF INDROTSAVA IN ANCIENT INDIA.
CHAPTER VII
INDRA FESTIVALS OR INDROTSAVA

With the development and advent of religions since ancient times, the festivals have been playing important role in the group life of mankind all over the world. The term festival generally means institutionalised religious observances. They are occasions for social groups, large and small, to assemble for public worship. In many parts of the world, traditional festivals have given way under the impact of changes in religious institutionalised customs and beliefs. The festivals find a pre-dominant place in the life of the Hindus as an important cultural element containing the traditional character of the Hindus to a great extent. The Hindu festivals are generally religious in their character, but still they have their social and psychological ends. They allow the people to gather indicating increase in social bindings, make the people free from tensions, anxieties from daily routine work on the festival days. Festivals also retain the standard of moral values among people.

Rituals and prayers followed by offerings are the most salient features of the Hindu festivals. Festivals may be public, individual, seasonal or Vratas. There are also national, state, district or village level festivals. The festivals centre round different divinities. The spread and popularity of a particular festival indicates the pre-dominance of the deity connected with that festival among the minds of the people at that particular time.
Indra, our subject god, had been the supreme god of the Vedic Aryans. In the study of the Vedas, no clear cut evidence about Indra festival is found. As Vedic age had been the personification of different elements and hymns celebrated to satiate them, so they were more concerned to celebrate hymns honouring and praising Indra. They used to offer sacrifices to Indra for bestowing rains for the benefit of the mankind and his assistance for destruction of the non-Aryan people. Traces of fire-altars of Vedic origin have already been discovered which implies that at that time too, people used to gather together to recite hymns and offer oblations and sacrifices to Indra for their benefit. Certainly, Indra was propitiated by the Aryan masses clearly indicating some sprt of worship in relation to Indra.

The Vedic Aryan people also offered sacrifices to Indra most probably in the fire altars.

'Offer Ye the sacrifice with the word svaha to Indra in the sacrifiser's house. There to I invoke the gods.'

Again in Rg. Veda, we find 'sacifice, O man to Indra who sits on the Barhis.' They definitely used to offer oblations to Indra as is evident from Rg. Vedic hymns.

'I saw him the gold toothed, brilliant-coloured preparing his weapons far from his dwelling place. I have offered to him the ambroisa cleared (free from all impure mixture) what may the Indraless, hymnless do to me!'
This is a unique attribution to Indra regarding oblations offered to him. When oblation is offered to Indra, he is invoked with the worshippers and simultaneously his enemy becomes Indraless.

So, although it is certain that the Vedic Aryans used to propitiate their supreme god for their benefit but no clear evidence about Indra festival is found in the Vedas.

The clear cut reference of Indra festival is found in the Grihya Sūtras i.e. in the later Vedic period. The Caitra festival connected with the three major gods - Indra, Rudra and Agni was observed. The Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra states about spring festival connected with Indra.5

Truely speaking, clear cut reference of Indra festival is found in the Mahākāvyya, the Mahābhārata. A very religious king named Uparicara of Puru dynasty was always engaged in huntins. The other name of the king was Vasu, so he was popularly known as Vasu Uparicara; He occupied the Cedi Kingdom at the instance of Indra. Afterwards he gave up arms and started observing devout penance in a hermitage. But as usual Indra was alarmed at the intensity of the King's tapas and afraid of losing his seat of Indra to him. So Indra said to the king 'O King' your duty is to ensure religious discipline in the earth. Since, you are following religions, so people are
also doing the same. You please return to your own place and perform religious sacrifices to uphold the banner of religions on earth. You will be known as a great friend of mine. You, please, go to the Kingdom of Cedi because this country is very sacred and fertile (on account of Indra's releasing rains) and also the subjects of the Kingdom are very honest and religious, they followed the caste system properly and honour the cattle. You would also be made aware of all the incidents of the three worlds by me. You would have the unique power to move in the sky on celestial Vimāna. I am offering you this evergreen and ever-fragrant garland named Vaijayanti to you which would protect you at the time of war and this Indramalā would be a pride to you. Simultaneously, Indra offered the King a Venuyasthi (a bamboo stick). At the end of every year the king used to plant that stick on the earth in order to propitiate Indra. Next day, he used to take it out and adorned it with fragrant garlands, clothes and ornaments and then worshipped it as Indra. Other kings also followed the worship of Indra in the same manner. Indra used to appear before the king in the form of swan and accepted the propitiation and said "I am fully satiated at your mode of worship. Now onwards, the kings who would perform this festival of mine or influence others to do so, will have prosperity and victory and there will not be any unrest in their kingdoms."
In this way Vasu Uparicara used to perform Indrotsava by giving away lands and precious stones. Also the king used to rule his subjects very religiously by giving boons and listening to the advices of Sakrotsava.

So in epics, Indra himself desired his worship in the form and festivals and since this festival used to satisfy Indra to such a great extent that he used to give boons of unexpected magnitude and quality, so this Indra-festival became very popular within a very short time. But one important point should be considered here that Indra was worshipped in the form of a stick and he used to appear in the form of a swan and as such question of idols of Indra did not arise at that time.

The pointed references of Indra-festival that is to propitiate Indra in a befitting manner are found in many Puranas and Upapuranas. In one occasion, the controversy over the observance of Indra-Yajña led to a confrontation between Indra and Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. This is mentioned both in Visnu Purana and Bhāgavata Purana. According to the account of Visnu Purana, this festival was celebrated after the rains in the autumn season. In this festival of Indra, the cowherds were busily engaged in preparing for a sacrifice to be offered to Indra. In reply to Kṛṣṇa's question about Indra Yajña, Nanda replied: "Satakratu or Indra is the sovereign of the clouds and of the waters sent by him, the former bestow moisture upon the earth, when springs the grain, by which we and all embodied being subsist; with which also,
water, we please the gods; hence too these cows bear calves, and yield milk, and are happy, and well nourished. So when the clouds are seen distended with rain, the earth is neither barren of corn, nor bare of verdure, nor is man distressed by hunger. Indra, the giver of water, having drunk the milk of earth by the solar ray, sheds it again upon the earth for sustenance of all the world. On this account all sovereign princes offer with pleasure sacrifices to Indra at the end of rains and so also do we, and so do other people."

So Indra festival was primarily observed for rains because Indra, although lost number of his superior qualities in subsequent times, could maintain his rain god status, and was propitiated as such. Vasudeva Krsna's attempt to make a stop to Indra was resuluted in Indra's tremendous wrath and anger on the inhabitants of the Vraja. Seeing Gopas not offering sacrifices to him in the Yajna, he poured heavy rains on the Vraja that is he used his mightiest weapon to receive back propitation and festival that he used to receive earlier. His defeat at the hands of Krsna is a different allegory. But it is evident that Indra desired to be worshipped in a festival. Matsyas Purana refers to a vow known as Indravrata to be observed by the kings to attain prosperity in the Kingdom."

That Indra-festival was very popular at the Puranic age is evident from the images of Indra and Indrani. In the images Indra is shown as one thousand eyed seated on a
maddened elephant. He holds the thunderbolt in his hand and on left side of Indra is seated Indrani with a lotus in her hand.10

In various Upa-Purāṇas too, we find numerous mentions of Indra festival or the festival 6 propitiating his banner. These also clearly indicate that Indra-festival was quite popular in Puranas.

The Devi-Purāna gives a detail description of hoisting the banner of Indra.

Method of preparing Indra's banner (Indradvaja) and of hoisting it in Bhādra or Asvina during the Satakratu-mahotsav (i.e. Indra-dhavja Mahatsava), selection of trees (viz. dhava, arjuna, priyangu, uñumbaara, asvakama, candana, āmra, śala or saka) for the preparation of the pole of the banner lengths of the main pole and of those representing to the daughters of Indra; rites to be performed before cutting down the selected tree; auspicious and inauspicious dreams; method of cutting down the trees; the Kings good or evil as indicated by the direction in which the tree falls; preparation of the pole out of the tree; bringing of the pole to the place of worship in a procession attended with songs of public women and beat of drums; the covering of the pole with pieces of cloth of different hues and furnishing it with a flat, erection of the pole by means of machines, with the citation of mantras of visnu, Siva and Indra, worship of the banner, Performance of this ceremony of flag hoisting by kings and their subjects in towns, cities and khetas
On Sadacara certain religious rites have been mentioned, one of them is Sakra-Puja on Bhadrasukladvadasi.\textsuperscript{12} Another Indra-festival named Mahendra-dhvaja, Mahatsava is also mentioned in 'The Bhavisyottam'.\textsuperscript{13}

The Nrirajanaavidhi festival or religious rites in military activities also refer Indra. A temple with three doors is required to be constructed at the North East. Then Indra along with other gods are to be worshipped in that temple from the day the sun goes from the Citra star to the Svāti star still the sun stays there. The priest will offer to these gods oblation made of sacred wood (samidh), sesame and siddharthaka.\textsuperscript{14}

The Brhatsamhitā also refers to the same rites. According to this samhitā an ornamental arch of some holy tree was to be erected 10 cubits wide and 16 high in the north-east corner of the Capital and round the necks of the horses threads smeared with saffron paste and nut, with rice grains and white mustard and Kustha plants tied on them to be suspended. For seven days, for seven days mantras to be addressed to the gods including Indra.\textsuperscript{15}

So from Vedic to Puranic, the festival of Indra was much more popular in Purāṇas as compared to other ages because it could find new dimensions and importance on account of beginning of propitiation of the idols of Indra. But here too, in
in respect of worship of Indra, Indra stands inferior to Visnu even when His banner, the symbol of Indra, comes into reckoning, because a story in Devi Purana reveals that this banner was given to Indra by Viṣṇu when Indra was defeated by a demon named Subala in the Bhautya Manavantara.  

Indra festivals are clearly mentioned in the Harivamsa. Indra is the lord of the clouds, so he is a favourite god of the farmers and Sephards. Harivamsa deals in details about the festival that still considers Indra as rain god. The festival was usually celebrated in the month of Bhadra.  

The Brhat Samhita by Varahmihira also gives detailed description about Indra-festival. According to his account this festival commenced on the eight day of the bright fortnight of the month of Bhadra and continued up to the full moon day of the same month i.e. for seven days. On the first day i.e. Suklaṣṭami) the King accompanied by well dressed citizens, astronomers, ministers and other Brāhmaṇas used to enter the town carrying the Yasti or danda of Indra which was covered with white cloth. The musicians with Sankha and tūrya also used to accompany them.

On the Ekādaśī night the King remained awake along with others. The Yasti, in the meantime, was pared and fashioned in the right manner and was placed on a yantra. The priest, in his turn, covered his head with a white turban and made sacrifices
to Indra. After worshipping the Brāhmaṇas with guḍa, pūpa, payasa and giving them proper dākṣiṇā the King himself raised the stuff of Indra. Five or seven Sakrakumaris (i.e. flag-staff) also were raised alongwith the main yasti. These Sakrakumaris were known by the following names - Nandā, Upanandā, Jayā, Vijayā, Vasundharā and Sakrajanitri, the last named being the largest flag-staff and the first the smallest. On the pratipada day the King accompanied by his subjects sacrificed the yasti in the water.

Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa appeared as an opponent to the observance of Indra-festival.18

In Buddhist and Jaina Canonical texts, references regarding Indra-festival are mentioned which were popularly known as Sakramaha. In Jaina Sūtra it is clearly mentioned that a monk or a nun on a begging tour should not accept food and other things in the festival of Indra.19 In the Jain Āṅgavijjā, this festival finds a place.20 The Seventh century Jain author of the Nisitha-Curni namely Jīvaśāstra informs us that the Indra worship was held in Gujarat(Lāta) on the full moon day of the month of Śrāvana.21 Indra festival was held in Pratiṣṭhana in Bhādra.22

In Budhāyana texts, cooked food as ablation to Indra is mentioned.23 In Buddhist Mahāyana texts, we find a reference to Indra's banner being set up probably in allusion to a festival in parts of India.24
In the same text, a reference is made to Indra's banner and also festivals. 25

Festivals of Indra were quite popular at the time of the classic Sanskrit literature as references to Indra-festival, Indrayājña and the banner of Indra occurred in the contemporary Sanskrit literature.

In his comment on Mahābhāṣya of Pāṇini, Patañjali has referred to festivals related to Indra. These festivals were termed as Mahas. The articles used on the Indra-mahas were called Aindramahika. These mahas were also termed as Kṛtyas. 26

Asvaghosa referred to Indradvaja or the banner of Indra in his Buddhacarita. The ancient kings used to hoist the banner of Indra on bamboo pole in the month of Bhādra during 12th day (Dvādāśī) of full moon. They propitiated Indra for better rains. The festival was known as Sakrathan or Sakrautsav. 27 Also in his Saundaranandakāvya, the festival of Indra is referred. 28

In Madhyamkāvya of Bhāsa, the hoisting of the banner of Indra is Sukladvādāśi in the month of Bhādra for better rain and harvest on bamboo pole is mentioned. The festival was known as Sakradvaja.

In Bhāsa's Bālakarita too, Indrayājña and the banner of Indra is mentioned. In ancient India, the Indrayājña and the hoisting of the banner of Indra was done after the rains in order to propitiate Indra for better harvest. 29
In Bhave Jhuti's Mahavircharita, the festival or Yajña of Indra is clearly referred. A king named Nimi desired to perform a Yajña and invited Vasistha to be the priest. But since Vasistha was busy elsewhere in Indrayajña, so he could not come and perform the king's Yajña. The dramatists Sudraka and Śriharṣa in their plays Mrccchakatika and Nāgānanda specially refer to Indra-festival. The Kathāsaritsāgara of Somdeva also mentioned this festival.

Kalhana's Rajatarangini thrice refers to Indra festival, which narrated as below on the days of the monthly levee, during Indra pageants, and other festive occasions he gave richly to mail clad warriors engaged in jousting.

Indra festival, the bright twelfth of pilgrimage to the sacred site of Varāhakṣetrā Bhāḍrapada is still observed in Kashmir as a day.

Seeing his striking valour during the tourney on the twelfth day of the Indra-festival even Gaggacandra supported as he was by strong forces melted away like a craven.

The festival of Indradvādaśī, when he bestowed large numbers of costly dresses, was celebrated by this king with splendour such as was not displayed by any other.

Indra Festival at South India

It is seen that Indra was the supreme god of the Vedic period but subsequently deteriorated to the position of chief of the minor gods. Inspite of Vasudeva Kṛṣṇa's attempt to stop
Indra-festival, his worship still continues in the 7th to 14th Centuries A.D. The *Silapaddigaram*, that remarkable gem of dramatic epic of the Tamil language, has a chapter describing how the annual festival of Indra was celebrated in Kāviriṇga-pattīnām, the metropolis of Chōlas; it states that the festival began on the Pūrṇīma of the Solar month Vaiśākha and was continued for 28 days. The date of this work is assigned to 8th Century A.D. In an inscription belonging the reign of Parāntaka, Chōla I to be found in Tondār-menārur near Kalahasti, mention is made of the details of the arrangements made for celebrating the festival for Indra. The custom of offering Puja to Indra does not obtain at the present day.

Now a festival related to Indra would be discussed which is still celebrated in Bihar. In the month of Āśādhā, the peasants of Bihar celebrate Āśādhī pujā. It is a combination of mythological and folk beliefs. The ceremony at the folk level is connected with transplantation of paddy and is probably magical. Since, Indra in the Hindu religions, is the god of the rains, he is propitiated on this day. A folk custom has been endowed with Puranic authenticity. This festival has survived in Bihar purely on account of Indra's power to bestow rain for better cultivation. The state of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh also celebrate Indra festival in form of Āśādhī Puja.
Festival of Indra continues to be celebrated in Nepal. Hindu Kingdom believing in Hindu Mythological beliefs. The salient feature of Indra festival in Nepal are described as:

1. Janai Purni or Raksha Bandhan, The sacred Thread Festival.

   The festival falls on the full moon day of August. The festivities begin on the preceding day and continues through the day and lasting far into night. Jana purni or Raksha Bandhan is a basically a festival celebrated for the Raksha of the people and primarily the festival centres around gods Siva and Vishnu. But we find an interesting feature of this festival regarding Indra worship. Here Indra is symbolically worshipped. Janai Purni is also a day which honours the common frog in a ceremony Byancha, Janake, feeding the frogs, observed mostly those from farming communities. Food is left in the fields and ditches, especially quati, a dish linked by tradition with Janai Purni. People believe the frogs being the life-giving rains, since their croaking is heard by lord Indra, the King of heaven. The Nepalese dish quati is mandatory on Janai Purni day. It is a wholesome, tasty gruel, made from boiling nine varieties of dried beans after they have sprouted by soaking in water. The Janai Purni festival enhance the welfare of the living beings, bring comfort eventually to the souls of the dead and sustenance to the frogs in the field thereby attracting the
Indra Jatra and Kumari Jatra Festival - King of the Gods and a Living Goddess:

In the month of September an eight day long Indra-Jatra and Kumari Jatra Festival is held in Nepal. There is a legend relating to this festival in Nepal, Indra was very fond of White Parijat flowers which was not found in heaven. Once on the request of her mother for Parijat flowers for her Tij fasting rites, Indra in the disguise of an ordinary mortal descended to the valley and was caught by the people at this time of his stealing the flowers. His hands and feet were tied with ropes and was held as a prisoner, in the locality of Maru Hiti in Old Kathmandu. Afterwards his mother came down to the earth to investigate the disappearance of Indra. Then the people came to know all about Indra and they fell down before them with profuse offering foods and flowers. The Lord of heaven and his goddess mother were feted and carried in processions through the streets for a week while the ruler of Kathmandu held lavish feasts and receptions in their honour.

It is also said that Indra's mother in compensation of his sons release promised the farmers that their field would be bestowed with a vital fog called milk in winter and autumn season for harvest of their crops. Moreover, she also promised to take back all the souls of dead to the heaven but on the way
the souls fell into Indra-daha, a lake on the hill top eight miles of Kathmandu. The mourning for the souls so becomes a part of Indra Jatra.

Some scholars relate the legend to some historical backgrounds i.e. Indra as the warrior leader of the ancient Aryan people who over ran thousands of years ago attacked Nepal but was ultimately defeated and taken as a prisoner by the Nepali King Yalambar and was ultimately released by some agreements. Some scholars mention other stories also.

The Festival: Indra Jatra officially open on the twelfth day of the waxing moon in September with the raising of the flag of Indra before the old palace at Hanuman Dhoka at Kathmandu. This flag signifies that Lord Indra has come to the Valley and when it flies, peace, prosperity and unity are assured in the land. Mythology says such a flag pole was presented by Lord Vaisu to Indra which unified his forces and gave him divine strength to overcome the demons. Today it is worshipped, just as Indra worshipped it in ages part, as a symbol of unity, victory and power. Sometime before Indra Jatra a fifty foot pine tree is sanctified with blood sacrifices and certain rites, then the tree is felled, cleared of its branches and dragged in a solemn procession into Bhadgaon town. People from number of villages ultimately take the pole to Hanuman Dhoka Square. On the morning of the twelfth day in presence of hundreds of spectators, royal King and Royal family including his army
clad in ancient uniforms and outdated weapons, the priests arrive and the court astrologers announce the auspicious moment. Music blares, gunas road in salute and a thrill of excitement runs through the crowds as the heavy pole, tugged and pulled with bamboos and thick ropes, is slowly raised when the long banner of Indra's flag, displaying the moon as a symbol of 'intelligent planning' and the sun for courage and valour, is unfurled, the crowd surges uncontrollably forward to leave offerings of sweets and flowers. At the foot of the pole is placed a small prison like cage, containing an image of Indra, along with a golden elephant, the mythical steed of the king of the Gods. Now the festival begins.

Idols of Indra, with his outstretched arms bound like those of a thick are brought from the temples and placed in high scaffolds around the town. Images of Bhairav and other deities are also present. At dusk on this day hundreds of people, in whose family a death has occurred in the year, proceed in long lines through the streets where homes have been cleaned, decorated and illuminated with butter lamps. All carry burning incense in the name of the deceased, some after lighted oil wicks in small clay dishes and others chant hymns. Each night of Indra-Jatra the shrines and ancient palace building crowding Hanuman Dhoka Square along with oil wicks, and on each night an ancient tableau is enacted telling ten earthly incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Nepalese folk dramas are presented each night. Dancing also forms an important part of the festival. The
Saw O Bhaku demon dance is dedicated to Bhairab. Prior to 1940, a bull fight was to be staged. The bull was intoxica­ted by liquor and then killed and the blood of the bull was drunk by the dances. But this practice has since been discontinued. Also Lakhe dance is performed. Very popular is the elephant dance, depicting Indra's steed in search of imprisoned master. This dance is also very interesting one. Simultaneously with Indra Jatra Kumari Worship is also performed in the evening before the full moon, hundreds of woman make a pilgrimage to Indra lake.

On the last evening the great lingam pole bearing Indra's flag is lowered amid religious ceremonies, blood sacrifices and gun salutes. Worshippers touch it with their forehead. Now it is immersed in Bagmati river and later is returned and hacked into small pieces to feed the sacred flame which burns perpetually at Pachati Bhairav's place.

They say that late on the final night of Indra Jatra, after the last reveller has departed, singing loudly to the darkness, and before the idols of the gods have been returned to their homes and temples, a mysterious ceremony takes place. A small wooden puppet is brought from the confines of Hanuman Dhoka and used as a weapon to strike similar puppets placed beside the images of Indra. It may be possible that people of the valley harbour some dim memory of one of their Kings beheaded in ancient time, or
this may be an anger to Indra who attacked their country and was subsequently imprisoned, or may be possible that it is resentment to Indra's mother for departing the souls on her abode to heaven.

Another account of Indra Festival still observed by the tribal people has come to our notice. This festival is popularly known as 'Ind Puja' or 'Briksha' Puja and it is popular among this tribes of Midnapore, Bankura, parts of Birbhum and Burdwan. This festival is observed in mass scale in Jhargram of Midnapore and Visnupur of Bankura where lacs of people participated in it. The local kings and the landlords of these areas initially started observing this festival. Even few decades back, they used to take active part in it. But now 'Ind Puja' exclusively belongs to the tribes.

Ind Puja commences on the Sukla Dwadasi tithi of the month Bhadra. Before the Puja, on the day of Radha Asthami or on the first day of Bhadra, the king or king's representatives set out to search the banner because one to three sal tree are identified as the stick or banner and no images but only these banners are worshipped. These banners are known as 'Indradvaj or the banner of Indra. One to three sal trees are identified and felled. Then these trees are brought to the ground of festival popularly known as 'Ind Kudi'. The trees are properly cleaned and all the branches
are removed excepting the top ones. The trees are planted on
the 'Ind Kudi' ground. The tallest tree is fully covered
with cloths and the top portion with branch looks like an
Umbrella. The priests say that the largest tree represents
Indra and the smaller ones his aunt. Small altars are construc-
ted at the bottom of the trees now representing banners and
sacrifices and Yajñas are observed according to Vedic norms. Fine
grained rice fruits, sweets, curds are offered as oblations
to Indra. At times Ind Puja is observed in the middle of the
night according to the tithi and in number of years, it is
celebrated in the Ashadha month when month of Bhadra does not
remain suitable for this festival according to the religious
rules. Usually, the royal priest conduct and perform the Puja
and they recite mantras celebrated to Indra as below:

'Oṃ Sukraḥ Suṣapaṭiśchaiva Vajraḥasta Mahabalalah
Śacipaṭiśchaḥ Dhyatobyō Nānābherenobhusitah Om
Mahendrah Namoh'.

The Purohits preach that this Ind is Indradvaja and so this
worship is performed to propitiate Indra only. Usually this
Puja was performed by the kings either after the victories
or for the prosperity of this Kingdoms. The priests attribute
two reasons for the origin of this Puja which have their basis
in the Purānas. These are:

Once the gods were enjoying amidst festivity. The
Asuras became jealous and attacked them. Then Indra injured and
drove them out from the heaven with the help of a giant stick.
This stick was preserved in Devasabhā as a symbol of victory for
Indra.
Once Indra and the other gods were defeated by the Asuras and then Viṣṇu gave Indra a giant stick, with the help of which Indra won against the Asuras. Then onwards the stick is propitiated as a symbol of victory.

Previously another stage was constructed beside the Indradraja. The kings used to give a dārsan to the subjects from this stage. The landlords and the others used to offer gifts to the king as a mark of respect and honour. Moreover, the prices of the essential food grains were announced for the entire year by the king on this auspicious day.

On the day of the Ind Puja certain important rituals and festivals were also observed such as Rajyabhisek of the kings.

Few scholars are of the opinion that this is purely a tribal festival not related to Indra. But we have the firm conviction that this festival is observed in order to propitiate Indra only because of number of reasons. From the time of epics, the banner of Indra is hoisted and worshipped and here the banner represents Indra. The mantras recited in this Puja also clearly mentions the various epithets of Indra and as well as Śacī. Though Indra festival is not celebrated by the section of the people to whom Indra originally belonged i.e., the Aryans but the tribals perform this festival because when the Aryans conquered the non Aryans, Indra was the primary god of the Aryans who destroyed the forts of the
black coloured non-aryans and brought them under their control. So the non aryans were charmed and feared by the might of Indra and compelled to worship him for fear of him and the aryan rulers. Subsequently this formed a tradition among the tribals or non aryans which still continues. 45 (GopendradKrishna- Basu, Banglar-Loukik-Devata, 1966, pp. 160-163).

So it is evident that Indra-festival originated in somewhat later vedic period, develops fully in epic and Puranic ages, at the time of Buddha and Mahavira and also during the period of classical sanskrit texts but subsequently declined. However, there may be some point of contention that whether this festival was in vogue in Vedic period or not because Vedas do not clearly mention about this festival. From the study of life style of the vedic aryan and also their socio-economic and religious position, it can safely be interpreted that aryan civilisation developed at their time only and they were a group of gay and juvenile people strictly believing in everything that concerned with their life. They at that time did not undertake their journey to the path of spiritual development and renunciation. They were just concerned about themselves and in their worldly affairs only. Their supreme national god was Indra because Indra released rain for their benefit, destroyed the forts of their enemies and was involved in all other worldly activities. Consequently Vedic poets celebrated about 250 hymn in honour of Indra. But the Vedic Aryans also were accustomed with
sacrifices and offerings to Indra and usually they believed in clustre approach that is they used to do lot of things together. So certainly their religious rites, may not be an exception to this and they might have propitiated Indra together in the form of a festival although those festivals do not resemble with those of in subsequent ages because the Vedic people were not idol worshippers while others at later ages were image worshippers. Moreover, the existence of Fire-altars substantiate this point. What for fire altars were there? Because people used to offer sacrifices in a large scale before the fire altars taking the shape of a festival.

Subsequently Indra festival developed and declined because the position of this got itself changed and deteriorated. However, study of Indra festival offers interesting revelation in regard to the mass beliefs and respect that was propitiated to this god. Starting right from the vedic period, the festivals related to Indra continued through the ages of epics, Puranas, Buddhist and Jains periods and also subsequent periods, too. The worship which was confined to prayers, sacrifices and blations to this god during vedic and later vedic period took a new dimension in Puranic and epic periods. Though solely a pre-dominant divinity of the kshatriyas and as such his festivals were celebrated amidst much pomp and grandeur by the kings and the Royal classes, but evidences substantiates that common peasantry also invoked this god in festivities for their benefits because whatever deterioration
may have taken place in his position and character, he could remain as a rain god. It is also proved beyond doubt that in India people from all parts of the country, from Tamil Nadu in the South to Uttar Pradesh in the North and from Gujarat in the West to West Bengal in the east, used to organise and celebrate the festivals of Indra. Once Indra was the centre of attraction throughout the length and breath of this country, but to-day he, no longer, remains so although people still performs his festivals in local level. But in Nepal still Indra festival is celebrated as like other famous festivals and as such this god is remembered and honoured in a festive occasion by the people of the lone Hindu Rashtra of the world. Also our account on Indra Festival reveals another important feature that is the black coloured people who were the arch enemies of Indra, still propitiates him in a massive festival of their own.
Notes on Indra Festival

1. Rg. V. 1.13.12
2. Rg. V. 2.3.3.
3. Rg. V. 5.2.3.
4. iv. 16.1.
5. i. 3.20.
8. Visnu P. 5.10.
9. Matsya P. 225.10
10. Ibid. 260.65-69.
11. Devi. P. Ch. 12.
12. K.P. Ch. 88.
13. Bhavisyottam Ch. 139.
14. Agni P. Ch. 268.15-30
16. Devi P. Ch. 11,15.
18. Brhatasamhita, Varahmihira Ch. 43, 23.51
19. G.S. I.1.2.
25. Ibid VIII. 75.
27. Buddha Carita by Asvaghosa 1.58.
28. Sk. 4.46

29. Bāla Carita Bhāsa Cantos 1.8.

30. Mahāvīrcharit by Bhāya Bhūṭi 1.11

31. Mṛccha katika, Śūdraka Act X

32. Nāgānanda, Śūdraka Act 1.


34. Kathā Sarit Sāgara, Somadeva 1.4.3.

35. Kalhan, Rājtarangini VIII. 170, 182, 495

36. Ibid VIII, 170.

37. Ibid

38. Ibid VIII, 182.

39. Ibid VIII, 495


41. Festivals of India, K. Gnanambal.

42. Ibid.


44. Ibid pp. 127-37.