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Tracing the Relationship of Indra with Dance through various Literary Sources

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Abstract

The present article aims to explore the divine genesis of Indian Dance through a study of the relationship between the celestial God INDRA and the Indian classical dance. It also talks about the role of *Apsarasa* (Nymphs), Indra's *Vajrayudha* (Weapon), and *Airavath* (Vehicle of Indra) in creating and sustaining the dance. This study treasures - (1) Indra is associated with the human senses that are *Indriya*; (2) Indras are many, not just one; (3) Indra played a major role in creating and constructing the Indian Dance; (4) Indra is associated with Agriculture and Dance; (5) Indra protects the performance and Guards the Theatre; (6) Indra is treated as a Dancer in Hindu, Buddhist and Jainism scriptures. Many Buddhist sculptural depictions reveal Indra as a Dancer; (7) Indra is worshipped in the preliminaries of all Indian classical Dance performance. Indra is offered food and clothes by the director of the Drama during the consecration ceremony of a newly built theatre.

Keywords: *Natya Sastra, Apsarasa, Vedas, Abhinaya Darpana, Jharjara, Indra's festival.*

Introduction

Born to the sage *Kashyapa* and the primordial goddess *Aditi*, **Lord Indra's** roots are firmly planted in the Vedic scriptures, especially the *Rigveda*. Beyond Vedic literature, Lord Indra's role in the Hindu pantheon is multifaceted. Lord Indra is often depicted with regal splendour. Indra's symbolism extends to his mighty weapon, the *Vajra*, a thunderbolt representing destructive force, and his mount, *Airavata*, the celestial white elephant, which symbolises majesty and purity. Lord Indra is portrayed in various artistic representations. Paintings, sculptures, and temple carvings capture his dynamic presence, often surrounded by celestial elements and mythic symbolism. Indra's worship is intertwined with specific festivals.

The most significant is *Indra Puja*, celebrated fervently in regions like *Odisha*.

According to traditional Indian thinking, the *Devas* are called *Sura*, derived from the root word *Sur* means, Bright. The Demons are called *Asura* which means not bright (dark) (*Jiwan Pani, 2000*). The *Suras* are always considered devoid of ego whereas the *Asuras* are egoistic *in toto* ⁽¹⁾. Indian Mythology is comprised of many wars between the *Suras* and *Asuras*. And the winners rule the Heaven or *Swarga Loka*. The ruler of the *Swarga Loka* is called *Indra*. Hence, *Indra* could be seen as the name of a position, not an individual. However, the *Indra* is also regarded as a person in Indian mythology. According to thinking, there is more than one *Indra* in the pantheon of Hindu

Gods. Many great thinkers and philosophers have shaped the Indian Arts including Music and Dance. They form parts of a large canopy known as Sanatana Dharma. Through Yogic meditation, they have envisaged the arts and through their rich experiences, they have codified the arts. They laid tenets to these art forms like Music, Dance, Drama, Literature, Architecture etc. Vedas, Upanishads, and many Sastras have recorded the rich principles of these art forms. Surprisingly, the characteristics of these art forms vary from time to time. The Rigveda (RV) hymns provide us with a vivid picture of the Vedic society in terms of Arts.

मर्तीश्चिद्धो नृतवो रुक्मवक्षस उषं भ्रातृत्वमायति
। अधि नो गात मरुतः सदा हि वं
आपित्वमस्ति निधुवि (RV 8-20-22),

तव त्यन्नर्यं नृतोऽपं इन्द्र प्रथमं पूर्वं द्विवि
प्रवाच्यं कृतम्। यद्वेवस्य शवसा प्रारिणा असुं
रिणन्नपः। भुवद्विश्वमभ्यादैवमोजसा विदादूर्जं
शतक्रतुर्विदादिषम्॥ (RV 2-22-4),

इन्द्र यथा ह्यस्ति तेऽपरीतं नृतो शवः ।
अमृक्ता रातिः पुरुहूत दाशुषे ॥
इन्द्र यथा ह्यस्ति तेऽपरीतं नृतो शवः । अमृक्ता
रातिः पुरुहूत दाशुषे ॥ (RV 8-24-9) (also see
the last reference).

The various hymns from Rigveda suggest the time of the dance performance. for e.g: 1) To celebrate happy moments like a child's birth 2) Seeking new supply or new sources of water 3) A ritual to be observed when a person is deceased 4) To devoid the lust, greed, anger and jealousy of the mankind and (5) for the spiritual enlightenment of an

individual. This gives us the details about the various occasions celebrated with dance in the Vedic society. Also, this is the prelude for any proper textual work on Dance. Nandikeswara, in his *Abhinaya Darpana*, also mentions the above-mentioned occasions when discussing the appropriate times for performances.

Although dance existed during the Vedic period, its purpose was not explicitly defined in the Vedas. In the earlier times, dance and music primarily served as forms of entertainment. The spiritual dimension of dance was introduced later. The story of Natyothpathi, or the origin of Natya from Bharata's *Natya Sastra*, provides insight into the characteristics and purpose of Natya, shedding light on its evolving significance.

According to Bharata's *Natya-Sastra*, Indra, the ruler of Heaven requested Lord Brahma to create such a tool which can help Humans in getting rid of jealousy, greed, lust and other common feelings. क्रीडनीयकमिच्छामो दृश्यं श्रव्यं च यद्भवेत्
(Bharata, tr. Apparao, 1982, p.4)

On Indra's request, Lord Brahma created Natya taking the elements like Pathya (text) from Rigveda, (Music) from Sama Veda, Abhinaya (histrionic expressions) from Yajurveda and Rasa (sentiments) from Atharva Veda ⁽²⁾. (Bharata, tr. Apparao, 1982, p.4).

Indian heritage has deeply influenced the arts through its rich spiritual traditions, religious texts, diverse cultural practices, and historical continuity, shaping the music, dance, sculpture, and literature.

The Sanatana Dharma has penetrated deep into Indian Music and Dance. Indian Arts like Literature, Music, Dance, Sculpture, and Painting include many episodes from Vedic

and Epic lore. The depiction of Chaturvidha Purushardhas (four attainments of life) viz. Dharma (righteousness), Artha (acquiring means or resources for living such as wealth), Kama (fulfilment of desire) and Moksha (striving for salvation) are advocated through these art forms.

Indra played a major role in not only the creation of the Indian dance but also in protecting the performers from the evil spirits, who tried to destroy the performance. In the Rigveda, he is described as a warrior. His war skills were praised in many epithets. In Rigveda, it is said that he is a Dancer and also makes others Dance. On many occasions, Indra along with many Apsarasas, the celestial damsels, danced with joy. The dialogues of Indra and Urvashi are said to be the root of the Samaveda dialogues that appeared in the classic literature of the later period ⁽⁴⁾ (Kapila Vatsyayan, 2001, 34).

Objectives of the research

The researcher has identified the objectives as follows:

- 1) Lord Indra from Rigveda has played a major role in the creation and protection of the Indian Classical Dance also known as Marga Dance.
- 2) Indra was instrumental in building a proper theatre for Drama presentations.
- 3) According to Bharata's *Natya Sastra*, Indra initiated the creation of Natya. He protected the dancers from evil spirits. He gave his weapon, the Ayudha, to Bharata for the protection of artists and performances. As gratitude, all the dancers in the preliminaries of the performance should pay their obeisance to lord Indra and the festival of Indra

Dhwaja or the flagstaff of Indra should be observed by the performers.

- 4) To establish the relationship between Indra and Marga Dance of India.
- 5) Understand that Indra is related to agriculture and dance is related to agriculture.

Research Methodology

Tracing the relationship between Indra and Dance through various literary sources" is a study that combines creative research, Qualitative methods and literary review methods from the multi-disciplinary study from Sanatana Dharma, classic literature, Dance, Music and other applied arts.

This includes:

- 1) Study of relevant Vedic literature along with critical appreciation,
- 2) Interviews with eminent spiritual Gurus and Vedic scholars
- 3) Study of Dances performed in Northeast parts of India
- 4) Apply the information gathered from 1 to 3 to create tools or criteria to conduct creative research.

Literary review includes: Data collection from various textbooks, Books on Vedic literature, Treatises on Dance like Bharata's *Natya Sastra*, Nandikeswara's *Abhinay Darpana*, previous research papers etc.

Results

By complying with the research methodology to meet the objectives of the research, the paper can be divided into two parts. The first one is to know who Indra is and the second is to know the relationship between Indra and Dance. From the epithets of Rig Veda, and stories from *Natya Sastra* and

Abhinaya Darpana, the role of Indra in creating and developing the Natya is evident.

Who is INDRA?

- According to Rigveda (10.1.2) he is the most powerful God of the Rigvedic pantheon of Gods.⁽⁵⁾
- Indra is the lord of Swarga loka (Heaven), the Hindu paradise. In the Rigvedic period, he was the almighty. In the later period, he is considered as the secondary deity.⁽⁵⁾
- According to Nilamata Purana, he is the deity worshipped in Kashmira Desa. He is also honoured by the Gods⁽¹⁴⁾ and serves as their guardian.
- He is the thunder god.
- According to Siva Purana (2.2.2), he is Vāsava, one of the guardians of the Eight directions⁽⁵⁾.
- In Udayasundari Katha of Soddala, Indra is described as a warrior and he cut the wings of Mount Meru with his weapon Vajrayudha⁽¹⁴⁾.
- In the Chandassastra (Grammar) of Pingala, Indra is an ancient authority of prosody and is mentioned as Duschyavana⁽⁵⁾.
- According to Brihatkālōthara, a treatise on Indian Architecture², in a chapter on Vāsthū Yāga-Patala (112), Indra is one of the deities to be installed in one of the Grid in the construction of a house⁽³⁾.
- In many spiritual thoughts, Indra is depicted as an emotion and his consort Indrani is said to be the process by which the emotion is expressed in its myriad forms. Hence, the Indriyas or the senses are regarded as Indra⁽¹⁴⁾.
- He is worshipped as a food giver in many states of India.

The Etymological Meaning of Indra

According to Yaska's Nirukta (trans. K. Neelakanta, 2023, 171) Indra means

*INDRA _ Indati Paramaiswaryavān Bhavati = he is the wealthiest person.

*Idi+rā = He is the King of all the Devatas.

*Indhe Pradēpayati = He who gives energy to the Senses. He is Jēvathma and Paramātma (Rigveda 5.32.1)

*Indhe Prānān, Idhi+rā = he who stimulates the life, (5.32.1)

*Irām Jalam Dhadhāti -= Irā+Rā +Dak = that which bursts the cloud and gives water

*Indē Jalam Ramathe = Indu+ram = that which plays with water (in the clouds) (Electric power/ Thunder/ Lightning)

*Indhe prakāsayati Bhūtāni = Indh +rak = he who brightens the lives of all the Species (*Sarva Bhutani*).

The above etymological meaning of Indra gives a broad spectrum of his nature, position in Heaven, duties and role.

Indra, the Dancer

The tenth Mandala of Rigveda comprises many epithets describing Indra as a Dancer. In canto 1.130, his valor and skill in wars were also attributed to that of a dancer. When Indra destroyed ninety cities in the war, his skilled combat was described as a movement of dance and the term Nrutho was employed in the narration. In Rigveda 8.24, 9th and 12th Mandalas, Indra was addressed as he who causes dance (Kapila Vatsyayan). For Indra, who is the God of rain, who is a giver of plenty food and riches, Dance is an accomplishment⁽⁴⁾.

छन्दःस्तुभः कुभ्न्यव उत्सुमा कीरिणो नृतुः।

ते मे के चिन्न तायव ऊमा आसन्द्वशि त्विषे ॥

Indra in Buddhism and Jain literature

Lord Indra's influence extends beyond religious worship and permeates various cultural expressions. Artists, writers, and musicians drew inspiration from his mythology, depicting his stories in paintings, composing hymns, and incorporating his tales into literary works

In many Buddhist texts and literature, Indra is often depicted as a lute player. One story describes Indra approaching Buddha during a period of intense fasting and meditation, undertaken in his quest for enlightenment. Despite the urging of his followers to eat and sustain himself, Buddha remained steadfast in his fast. Then, Indra appeared with a three-stringed lute and began to play. When Indra struck the first string, it produced a very loud noise, as it was too tightly strung. The second string, being too loose, produced no sound at all. Finally, Indra plucked the third string, which produced a beautiful, harmonious sound. The Buddha remarked, "The sound is beautiful. The string is neither too taut nor too loose." Indra then respectfully raised his clasped hands and encouraged the future Buddha to break his fast and resume eating. This story is narrated in the book, "Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand" by Donald K. Swearer. Many Buddhist paintings can be seen with Indra playing the Lute. Indra is depicted with Green coloured body in all the paintings⁽¹⁴⁾.

Indra appears in Buddhist literature, in which he, along with Brahma, is a witness to Buddha's enlightenment. He encourages Buddha to share his wisdom with the world. Indra here is the ruler of heaven, comprising 33 Gods, located above Mount Meru.

The continuation of Indra's dancing and dramatic role can be seen in Jain culture. In Jain mythology, the Indra of the first heaven, Saudharmendra, plays an active role in the lives of Tīrthānkaras. He dances with joy on two significant occasions: after the first ablution ceremony of a newborn Tīrthānkara and when the Tīrthānkara attains omniscience. Some Jain texts mention a festive theatre and drama program, consisting of 32 acts, performed in front of the baby Tīrthānkara. According to the Jain text Rāyapaseṇiyasuttam⁽⁶⁾, these 32 nāṭyavidhi were part of a ceremony held by the king of gods, Sūryabhādeva, for Jina Mahāvīra. Scholars, upon analysing the names and descriptions of these acts, concluded that only the final one was a complete drama, while the rest were purely dances. This mythological narrative likely mirrors a real practice within Jain communities that had faded by the time the text was written. (Tripathi, 1936) The dance of Saudharmendra in front of the Tīrthānkaras is depicted in the ceiling paintings of the Indra Sabha Temple in Ellora, the Vardhamāna (Trailokyanātha) Temple in Tiruparuttikundram near Kanchipuram, and the facade reliefs of the Chhota Kailasa Temple in Ellora.

According to Jain traditions, Indra is said to have performed the Tandava in honour of Rishabha (Jain Tirthankara) when he was born⁽⁹⁾.

Indra's and Apsarasa's Dance in Jain Puranas

Pampa⁽¹⁰⁾, the eighth-century poet and the first in Kannada literature, mentions Indra's dance in his epic, Adipurana. He describes the jubilant dance of Indra and his 32 celestial dancers celebrating the birth of

Vrishabhadeva. Pampa's narration is exceptionally vivid, detailing how each of the 32 nymphs danced gracefully, holding flowers and arranging petals into intricate, beautiful designs, a style known as Citra Patra. Indra then entered the dance arena, performing with joy and showcasing various poses such as Karanas and Sthanakas. Pampa further elaborates that the Devanganas (celestial nymphs) joined Indra in a group sequence, expressing emotions and rhythmic patterns reminiscent of Indra's eternal dance. Pampa also in his *Adi Purana*, mentioned that the dance of Indra is the key for the evolution of dance system. "Verse 7-121 from chapter two states that the dance of Indra was performed with such happiness that it seemed like his stamping feet were causing the mountains to tremble. His long shoulders touching the stars made them drop down like flowers. The breeze created by his Rāchakas caused disturbance in the oceans, and the sound of celestial drums reached the horizons ⁽¹⁵⁾." The Stamping of Indra's feet indicates a step similar to the first basic Adavu in Bharatha Natyam called the 'Tattu Adavu', which is done by hitting the leg hard on the floor. "Long shoulders touching the stars" indicates his doing Adavus evolved from *Plavana* and *Desi Utpluti-Plavana* (involving jumping high). The Rechakas are four in number and involve the turning, drawing up, or movement of any kind separately of the Greeva (neck), Kati (waist), Pāda (leg), and Hasta (hand) according to *Natyasastra*. Here a hyperbole is used to say the breeze created by Rechakas done by Indra caused disturbance in the ocean, and the drums accompanying his dance were powerfully played to match his forceful stamping that their sound reached the sky. Stamping or

hitting the leg hard can be done in various postures: āyata Stānaka (the posture in which turning the knees and toes of the feet to the sides, half sitting with the knees bending in the shape of a square), Samapada Sthānaka (standing straight with the knees straight and the toes and ankles joined at the sides of the feet), and also in many of the Desi Sthānakas (postures influenced by and done in regional dances)" (Anupama Jayasimha and Dr. Shobha Shashikumar).

Ponna⁽¹²⁾, another prominent Kannada Jain poet, offers a slightly different account of Indra's dance in his *Śāntipurāṇa* (950 A.D.). Ponna vividly describes the Apsaras and Devendra's dance. The Apsaras performed the delicate Sukumāra Nāṭya (lāsya) using appropriate Karaṇas and Aṅgahāras. In the tenth chapter, Ponna details a sequence where 32 dancers, directed by Indra, formed a semicircle resembling a pearl necklace. They created colorful designs with their feet using flowers, similar to Pampa's description of CitraPatra Nāṭya. This dance pattern, involving 32 members creating vibrant designs while lightly stamping on flowers, was popular in the courts of the Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas. Over time, this tradition became known as 'Citra Nāṭya'. Ponna describes Indra's ecstatic dance as Tandava and the celestial nymphs' delicate performance as Lasya Nritya, especially during the Pushpanjali offering (Anupama Jayasimha and Dr. Shobha Shashikumar).

Ranna⁽¹³⁾, a ninth century poet, wrote *Ajitapurana* (Jain Literature). Ranna has dedicated 37 verses for describing the dance of Indra.

Ānanda
Tāṇḍava with 108 Karaṇas, 32 Aṅgahāras, suitable *Recakas* (hand and bodily movements)

are among the dances of Indra and *Cāris* (the specific limb movements). His dance was based on the fourfold Abhinayas or expression. The orchestra included Vina *Vamśivādana* or flute, *talapranada*, an instrument for rhythm (*Tatāvanaddha ghana Suśira Vādyā bhēda taraṅgal*).

Ranna ⁽¹³⁾ has also mentioned the *Vicitra Nartana*, variegated dances of *Vilāsinis* (the courtesans). Indra and the beautiful maidens were completely absorbed in the dance from head to toe. In verse 21, *Citra Nartana*, the dance of drawing pictures is described in a vivid manner.

Indra - Dance and Dance treatises

While the several epithets from Rigveda accolade Indra as a dancer makes others dance and entitled him “Nriṭho” ⁽⁴⁾, the story of the origin of dance from Natya Sastra of Bharata Muni (2nd B.C) is quite interesting.

In the very first chapter of Natya Sastra sage Bharata ⁽²⁾ on the request of Atreya and other sages narrates the Natyothpathi or the origin of Natya.

According to him, Indra, being the Lokapala (protector of the world), was very worried about the people who became slaves to sensual pleasures and got afflicted by the Arishadvargas like Jealousy, anger, greed etc. Looking at the sufferings of the People in Jambudweepa, Indra along with the other Loka Palakās approached Lord Brahma and requested him to create a Kreedā (sport) which helps the people to get rid of the sufferings (Krēdaniyakamichamo Drusyamsravyancha yadbhaveth- Bharata, p.2). On Indra’s request, Lord Brahma meditated upon the four Vedas and created ‘Natyaveda’.

Indra in Abhinaya Darpana

Abhinaya Darpana⁽³⁾, written by Nandikeswara in the third century B.C., is a notable treatise on Indian Dance. Legend says Indra, the celestial dancer, asked Nandikeswara to teach him the Natya Sastra. Indra needed this knowledge to defeat Nata Sekhara, a demon dancer. The full text, Bharatarnava, had almost four thousand Sanskrit verses. Due to time constraints, Indra requested a shorter, yet comprehensive version. Nandikeswara then provided him with the condensed and authentic version, known as Abhinaya Darpana.

Rasarnava Sudhakaram

Rasarnava Sudhakaram⁽⁷⁾ is a treatise on Indian aesthetics by King Singabhupala of the Recharla Dynasty, who ruled the Andhra region from 1435 to 1465 A.D. Singabhupala follows Bharata’s account of the origin of Natya. According to the text, Indra and other celestial beings requested Lord Brahma to create an entertainment form that could be both seen and heard, to help people overcome the Arishadvargas (desires, anger, lust, greed, jealousy, etc.). Brahma created Natya and entrusted it to Sage Bharata, asking him to present a ballad in Indra’s court called Swadharmā. The book also includes information about Indra’s court.

The Indra and Apsarasas

The word "Apsara" originates from the Sanskrit "Apsaras". In general, it is defined as "the one going in the waters or between the waters of the clouds". (Samskruta-Telugu Vyuthpathi padakosah, 2023, Samskrita Academy, Hyderabad)

Apsaras are celestial nymphs who dance in the court of Indra, the King of the Devas. They are numerous and renowned for

their extraordinary beauty, charm, and seductive allure. Additionally, they are highly skilled in both music and dance.

In the Rigveda, the concept of the apsaras is closely intertwined with the divine figures of dancing Indra, the Maruts, and the Asvins. Apsaras are celestial beings who are considered the consorts of the Gandharvas, and they are known for their captivating smiles even in the highest heavens (10.123.5)⁽⁵⁾. In the Atharvaveda, these celestial beings play a more prominent role, assuming the role of divine courtesans for celestial deities.

The dialogues between Indra and Marut and Urvasi and Pururava from Rigveda (1.165) are the precursors of proper drama and drama literature ⁽⁴⁾, says Mrs. Kapila Vatsyayan.

Apsarasas in Natya sastra

According to the legend, upon receiving the Natya Veda, Bharata trained his hundred sons and informed Brahma of his progress. Observing the various Vritthis such as Bharathi, Arabhati, and Satwathi, Brahma instructed Bharata to incorporate the Graceful (Kaisiki) style into dance. Bharata responded that he needed materials to express the erotic sentiment, including beautiful costumes and gentle Angaharas, which are driven by sentiments (rasa) and feelings (bhavas). He also mentioned that men alone were not sufficient to project the erotic sentiment effectively. In response, Brahma created 24 nymphs from his mind, who were skilled in enhancing drama, and entrusted them to Bharata to assist in the performance.

In many Sanskrit and Telugu poetic works, Apsaras in Indra's royal court are portrayed as his favoured dancers and musicians. They excel in music and dance,

becoming symbols of joy and pleasure in heaven, and serving as instruments of supernatural fate. Apsaras often entice, tempt, and test human sages.

Apsaras as enticing dancing Nymphs

In many Hindu, Buddhist and Jain literature, the Apsarasas or the celestial damsels, on Indra's order, disturb or distract the sages, with their beautiful enchanting Music and Dance, who are into deep penance. Many such instances can be found in Sanskrit, Kannada, and Telugu literature. . Rambha has distracted Ravana in Ramayana. In Mahabharata, Menaka enticed sage Viswamitra Urvasi tried to distract and curse Arjuna.

In Pampa's Adipurana ⁽¹⁰⁾, he not only mentioned Nilanjana who tried to distract Rishabhanatha, but explained in detail her dance movements existed in his times. He said Nilanjana, the Ganikatilaka's dance started with Pushpanjali in a vilambalaya and as the Tata (stringed) instruments started playing. Her movements were increased in rhythm as the Avanaddha instruments also joined to increase the rhythm from Vilamba to Madhya and to Dhrita. He further narrated; she employed four Vritthis - Bharati, Sathwati, Arabhati and Kaisiki - and portrayed all the Nava Rasas with grace.

Indra Sabha

In Jain architecture

Like Buddhists, Jains have contributed to Indian rock-cut architecture from very early on. Remnants of ancient Jain temples and monasteries are scattered across India, often featuring early Jain sculpture in the form of reliefs. Notable examples include the Ellora Caves in Maharashtra and the Jain temples at

Dilwara near Mount Abu, Rajasthan. The Jain tower in Chittor, Rajasthan, also exemplifies Jain architectural style.

The Ellora Caves are located in Maharashtra, about 29 kilometers (18 miles) northwest of the city of Aurangabad. Cave 30, known as Chotta Kailasa, includes the Indra Sabha. This cave features a larger-than-life rock-cut image of Indra. It boasts two colossal reliefs of dancing Indra, one with eight arms and another with twelve, both adorned with ornaments and a crown. Indra's arms are depicted in various mudras, reminiscent of dancing Shiva art works found in nearby Hindu caves. However, the iconography includes distinct differences indicating this cave portrays a dancing Indra. The Indra panels at the entrance also feature other deities, celestials, musicians, and dancers.

Indra Jatra/ Festival

A legend from Bharata's Natya Shastra tells that after comprehending the dramatic art (nāṭya), which emerged from the Vedas and their various limbs, Sage Bharata, along with his sons, as well as Svāti and Nārada, had approached Brahmā to express that they had mastered the dramatic art and to seek his guidance.

In response, Brahma told Bharata to perform in the Banner festival of Indra, which has just begun. Subsequently, Bharata made his debut at the festival celebrating Indra's victory, which took place after the defeat of the Dānavas. At this festival, where jubilant gods gathered in great numbers, Bharata began his performance with a recitation of the holy Benediction (nāṇḁī), followed by a dramatic presentation.

After the first performance, the pleased Indra (Śakra) gifted his auspicious banner to Bharata Putras.

Worship of Indra: Indra's worship is intertwined with specific festivals. The most significant is Indra Puja, celebrated fervently in regions like Odisha. Devotees engage in elaborate rituals, processions, and cultural events to honour and seek the blessings of Lord Indra.

Indra Jatra in Nepal

The vibrant Indra Jatra festival is celebrated for eight consecutive days in the Kathmandu region every September, marking the beginning of autumn. The festival starts with the erection of a pine wooden pole in front of the Hanuman Palace.

Hundreds of spectators gather at the Palace Square for the pole-raising ceremony, surrounding the temple. According to legend, the festival dates back to when Indra descended from heaven in search of a herb. Dancers wearing beautiful masks, known as Lakhay, they parade through the streets with loud drumbeats. During these eight days, the temple and surrounding areas are illuminated with oil lamps, creating a spectacular glow. Each night, a raised platform in front of the temple hosts an enactment depicting the Dasavatara of Lord Vishnu.

The festival concludes with the lowering of the pole bearing Indra's flag amidst religious ceremonies. (Nepal Tourism Blog).

Worship of Indra as per Natya sastra

While explaining the preliminaries to be observed, Bharata in detail mentioned the deities to be worshipped along with the list of offerings. In the middle of the Ranga Peetam,

the stage the Sutradhara must draw a Mandala in the prescribed manner, dividing it into sixteen squares. In the centre, Brahma is installed and to the east side, Indra is offered a seat. Sutradhara after inviting all the celestial beings would request Indra and Goddess Saraswati to take the Hero and the heroine of the play into their custody and protect them from the evils through out the performance. Sutradhara should offer sweet porridge (Payasam) to Saraswati and sweetmeat to Indra⁽²⁾.

Jahrjara and Mathavaarani

Along with Indra, his weapon Vajrayudha, his vehicle Airavata are also made part in protecting the dance and the theatre.

When Bharata was instructed in Natya, he first choreographed and presented a captivating drama called *Asura Parajayam*. The central theme depicted the dramatic defeat of demons in a fierce war between the Devas and the Danavas. The Asuras, or demons, who were present to witness the dance performance at Indra's court, could not tolerate the ridicule. Enraged, they cast a magical spell to immobilize the artists, rendering them speechless and motionless.

Observing the paralyzed performers, Indra meditated and discerned the cause of the disruption, realizing it was the doing of the evil spirits surrounding the artists. Infuriated, Indra brandished his powerful weapon, the Vajrayudha, and obliterated the Asuras and the Vighnas who sought to ruin the performance. With the malevolent forces vanquished, the performance resumed uninterrupted.

All the gods and deities witnessing these events praised Bharata for obtaining a

divine weapon capable of "Jharjara"—beating to pulp—all evil spirits that dared to disrupt any performance. From that day forward, the weapon was named "Jharjara"⁽²⁾. Even today, the tradition of erecting a Jharjara at the centre of the stage as part of the preliminaries remains in practice.

For the protection of the theatre, as discussed earlier, Sutradhara of the production requests invokes and erects many Gods to take the respective positions to protect the different parts of the theatre.

Niyati and Yama (*mṛtyu*) were made two doorkeepers, and the great Indra himself stayed by the side of the stage. The **Mattavāraṇī** (Airavat) is placed to the sides of the proper stage, capable of killing Daityas, and for protecting the theatre. Indra himself took charge and a row of Elephants were drawn on either side of the stage resembling the Airavat, the vehicle of Indra.

Findings

- Indra is a celebrated dancer in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.
- Indra is made guardian of the theatre.
- Delving into the symbols associated with Lord Indra reveals layers of meaning. The Vajra, representing thunderbolt and diamond, Airavata, an elephant, symbolizes his destructive and indestructible nature. Understanding these symbols adds depth to the appreciation of Indra's divine attributes in protecting the artists and the theatre as a whole.
- After understanding the origin and sustenance of Natya, the role of Indra is greatly appreciated as instrumental in the creation of this art form. His valor and heroic deeds allowed the performance to resume by defeating the evil spirits.

- Many critics have questioned the divine origin of dance. To address this, we can appreciate the entire concept of Indra requesting Brahma to create dance by understanding the roles of Indra and Indrani.
- In spiritual traditions, every human quality is visualized as a duality: the quality itself and its expressive element (or creative force). The quality is depicted as a male form, while its expressive element is depicted as a female form. Indra represents emotion, and Indrani represents the process by which emotion is expressed in its myriad forms. Indriyam is the senses that trigger this expressive element, allowing one to perceive temporal reality. Thus, both Indra and Indrani are present in every human being, and arts were created to please our senses. The stories of Indra like trying to assault Ahalya, Leelavati and engaging Apsarasas to distract the sages, all these episodes tell us that Indra is endowed with evils (Arishadvargas) like Kaama, Mathsarya, and Krodha etc. Hence Indra is only our senses. After a hectic day long schedule, our senses – eyes and ears do want an entertainment for rest and recuperation.
- Lord Indra is the God of Rain and Thunder, Rain is the primary source of Agriculture. From the ancient times, in every season, before farming, all the farmers do worship Indra, which is Indra Jatra, Indra Puja. The sociocultural and anthropological evolution of humankind, including early farming communities and farmers, suggests at audiovisual entertainment such as dance has been a

fundamental part of human lifestyle and isure activities throughout history

- From the story of the origin of Natya, we can infer that the person creating dance should be as capable as Brahma. The artists should possess qualities akin to the Bharata Putras, excelling in absorption (Grahana), retention (Dharana), knowledge (Gnyana), and performance (Prayoga). The theatre should be as magnificent as Indra Sabha, and the occasion of the performance should be as grand as Indra's flag festival.

Conclusion

In Hindu, Buddhist and Jain mythology, Lord Indra's association with dance is a significant aspect of his divine persona. As the king of gods, Indra is not only known for his role in battles and as the god of rain and thunderstorms, but also for his proficiency in cosmic dance. This aspect of Indra's character symbolizes rhythm, dynamism, and the interconnectedness of the universe. The celestial dance of Lord Indra is said to bring about cosmic harmony and energy, reflecting his role as a leader and harmonizer in the celestial realms. Indra's dance is often depicted in artistic representations through various mediums such as paintings, sculptures, and temple carvings. These depictions capture his dynamic presence while surrounded by celestial elements, conveying the essence of his divine dance and its significance in Hindu mythology. Furthermore, Indra's dance represents the cyclical rhythms of nature, emphasizing his connection to the cosmic order and the flow of life. Devotees may also express their reverence

for Lord Indra's dance aspect through prayers, rituals, and cultural events that honour the celestial dance and its cosmic significance.

Foot Notes

1. Chandas refers to Sanskrit prosody and represents one of the six Vedangas (auxiliary disciplines belonging to the study of the Vedas). The science of prosody (chandas-shastra) focusses on the study of the poetic meters such as the commonly known twenty-six metres mentioned by Pingalas.
2. Vāstushāstra refers to the ancient Indian science (shastra) of architecture (vastu), dealing with topics such as architecture, sculpture, town-building, fort building and various other constructions. Vastu also deals with the philosophy of the architectural relation with the cosmic universe.
3. The plan for the construction is always in the form of a square. That square is divided into a grid of cells (*padas*). [...] Once these *padas* have been laid out, deities [e.g., Indra] are installed in them. In the most common pattern, 45 deities are installed.
4. There are two types of Apsaras: Laukika (worldly) and Daivika (divine). Thirty-four nymphs belong to the laukika type and ten to the daivika type. These celestial beings are also known as vidyadhari or tep apsar in Khmer, acchara in Pali, bo sa la tu in Vietnam, bidadari in Indonesia and Malaysia, widadari in Java, and aapson in Thailand. Apsaras are often associated with Gandharvas, the celestial musicians. Some Apsaras are paired with Gandharvas, such as Tumburu with Rambha, and Menaka with Vishvasu. However, these relationships are usually temporary and do not culminate in marriage.
5. Names of the Apsaras: Mañjukesī, Sukeśī, Miśrakeśī, Sulocanā, Saudāminī, Devadattā, Devasenā, Manoramā, Sudatī, Sundarī, Vidagdhā, Sumālā, Santati, Sunandā, Sumukhī, Māgadhi, Arjunī, Saralā, Keralā, Dhṛti, Nandā, Supuṣkalā and Kalabhā.

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धर्ममर्थ्यं यशस्यं च सोपदेश्यं ससङ्ग्रहम् ।

भविष्यतश्च लोकस्य सर्वकर्मानुदर्शकम् ॥

"It will contain good counsel for people in their pursuits of **dharmā**, material needs, and fame. It will guide the world in the future too in all their endeavors."

सर्वशास्त्रार्थसंपन्नं सर्वशिल्पप्रवर्तकम् ।

नाट्याख्यं पञ्चमवेदं सेतिहासं करोम्यहम् ॥

"It will contain the essence of all the śāstra-s and will be the foundation for all arts. I shall create **Nāṭyaveda**, the fifth Veda along with the **itihāsas**."

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Veda Samskruti Samiti

13-1-62 & 13-1-47/1

Veenapani Nagar, Malkajgiri

HYDERABAD Telangana



Veda Samskruti is an inherent intellectual property of Bhaarata dEsham. It is the basic duty and right of every citizen in Bhaarata dEsham to protect this Intellectual property. Indian Constitution and Law provides provision for protection and preservation of its culture, its monuments, architecture etc.

The Chaturvedas said to have 1131 shaakhaas right up to the time of Aadi Shankaraachaarya and thereafter during last more than ten centuries, many shaakhaas are out of practice due to various reasons and presently only seven shaakaas are in the practice of Guru shiShya parampara.

There is a need to continuously preserve these available shaakhaas which may likely to disappear in future due to various external forces acting in the country vigorously with the power of money and global politics. It is time for the intellectuals of Bharata dEsham to wake-up and work collectively to protect and preserve Veda Samskruti of Bharata dEsham, by empowering the Youth of Bharat dEsham, the future care takers of this great Indian Heritage , with suitable education of our correct history and culture.

The above background lead to formation of this Veda Samskruti Samiti which is registered under Societies acts of Government of Telangana, with Regd. No. 961/2016 by Sri A.H. Prabhakara Rao, who is the Founder and President of the Samiti.

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