THE NAGAS IN INDIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

(Sir Subrahmanya Ayyar Endowment Lectures,
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PREFACE

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I

The subject of The Nagas in Indian History is of absorbing interest from different points of view. Rarely will one meet with a student of Indian history and culture who has not heard something of the Nagas and their association with the early history, religions and culture of the country. The subject, however, is as difficult as it is interesting as is shown by the fact that distinguished oriental scholars like Fergusson, H. Oldenberg, Kern, E. W. Hopkins, M. Winternitz, Prazyluski, Monier Williams, James Hastings, J. Ph. Vogel and K. P. Jayaswal have worked on a few of its varied aspects. But it is too vast, and each one of the scholars mentioned above has approached it from one or other specific points of view only. For instance, Fergusson in his Tree and Serpent Worship in Ancient India deals only with some of the religious aspects of the Naga problem, while Jayaswal deals with their political history in the early centuries of the Christian era. Vogel's Indian Serpent Lore just brings into one compass some of the traditions existing about the Nagas. The numerous repeated references to them in literature and epigraphy, however, make one think that the Naga problem is of more than ordinary importance and significance in Indian history and deserves a more serious, comprehensive and thorough investigation than it has received at the hands of oriental scholars so far. An attempt is made here to bring together in chronological order the available references to the Naga tribes and dynasties in India and also examine the place of the Nagas in Indian mythology, legends, religions, art, etc.

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The Sanskrit word 'Nāga' means snake. In post-Vedic early Sanskrit literature the Nāgas are referred to as a class of semi-divine beings with their bodies half-man and half-snake and classed along with other semi-divine beings like the Kinnaras, Gandharvas, Yakṣas etc. They are described as possessing immense wealth, living in luxurious and magnificent cities in the nether regions enjoying eternal happiness and bliss, and leading sensual lives with their women noted for their enrapturing beauty and charm. They are also described as a class of gaṇas in heaven attending on the gods. Side by side with such descriptions we find them described also as human beings living in different parts of the country.

The word means also an elephant; but there does not appear to have been any close connection between that animal and men as between snakes and men to justify the latter to be named after it. Etymologically the word Nāga may be derived from the word naga (mountain). Since early men lived in natural caverns and caves in the hills it may probably be presumed that those that lived in such places came to be called Nāgas. The word has also been tried to be derived from the word Nagna which means naked, for the primitive tribes did not use clothes and remained naked. Though many such conjectural explanations may thus be offered for the origin of the word, the fact seems to be that the Nāgas from very early times were in some way associated with the serpent, and that must have been responsible for the name the people got.

In fact, the Nāgas appear to have been a totemistic people with the serpent as their totem. The word 'totem' belongs to the language of the Ojibwas, a tribe of the Algonkin stock living near Lake Superior in North America. It serves as a symbol or device of a gens or tribal division by which it is distinguished from other such divisions. The totemistic devices belong to the animal kingdom such as for instance, the wolf, the bear, the fish and the snake, birds, vegetables like corn, potato, the tobacco plant, natural objects like the sun, earth, sand, salt, sea, snow, ice, water, rain etc.

Describing the nature of the totem Sir J. G. Frazer says: "A totem is a class of natural phenomena or material object—most commonly a species of animals or plants—between which and himself the savage believes that a certain intimate relation exists. The exact nature of the relation is not easy to ascertain; various explanations of it have been suggested, but none has yet won general acceptance. Whatever it may be, it generally leads the savage to abstain from killing or eating his totem if his totem happens to be a species of animals or plants. Further the group of persons who are knit to any particular totem by this mysterious tie commonly bear the name of the totem, believe themselves to be of one blood, and strictly refuse to sanction the marriage or cohabitation of members of the group with each other. This prohibition to marry within the group is generally called by the name of exogamy. Thus totemism has commonly been treated as a primitive system, both of religion and of society. As a system of religion, it embraces the mystic union of the savage with his totem; as a system of society it comprises the relations in which men and women of the same totem stand to each other and to members of other totemistic groups.... Whether the two sides, the religious and social, have always co-existed, or are essentially independent is a question which has been variously answered. Some writers—for example, Sir John Lubbock and Mr. Herbert Spencer, have held that totemism began as a system of society only, and that the superstitious regard for the totem developed later, through a simple process of misunderstanding. Others, including J. F. McLennan and Robertson Smith, were of opinion that the religious reverence for the totem is original and must at least have preceded the introduction of exogamy."3 Primitive society was a network of totemistic groups and each of them had an emblem like an animal or a plant. In course of time the totemistic groups themselves came to be called by the name of their totem. Thus one finds, for instance, totemistic groups in India being called Vānaras (the monkey tribe), the Ajas (the goat tribe), the Vṛśnīs (the ram tribe), the Carudās (the kite tribe), the Matsyas (the fish tribe) and the Nāgas (the serpent tribe).4 Thus the Nāgas

4. Several totemistic tribes with the names of animals are mentioned in the Rg Veda. Hopkins, however, expresses a doubt whether the names of animals point to totemism in the Rg Veda. (FAOS, 1894, p. cliv.)
can be considered to be a people associated with the serpent, at times tracing their descent from it, offering worship to it, bearing it on their crest, banners etc.

The Nāgas were a powerful and wide-spread people of more than usual importance, who appear to have been in the occupation of different parts of India from very early times. It is not known by what name they were known before they came to be called Nāgas in Sanskrit. The Dravidian equivalent for the word Nāga is pāmbu or pāvu. It is possible that at one time pāvā, the mountainous country of the Mallas was their stronghold and continued to retain its name in later times. However, the ‘snake men’ came to be called Nāgas in course of time by the Sanskritists. A few finds that have been unearthed at Harappa are of much interest in as much as they throw light on the place of the serpent in the religious life of the people. Among them is a faience tablet where a seated deity is worshipped by a kneeling man on either side of it. Behind each worshipper is seen a cobra with head raised and hood expanded, evidently showing that it was also joining in the adoration of the god. Besides that, have been found painted pottery with the reptile occasionally painted on it, the carved figure of a snake and a clay amulet figuring a reptile before a low stool, on which appears to be an offering, probably milk. There has also been found an amulet at Harappa displaying the figure of Garuḍa flanked by two Nāgas. The above finds point to the fact that the serpent was associated with worship among the ‘Indus valley’ people and there must have been a serpent in that region people with the Nāga totem. From the account contained in the Mahābhārata that the Nāgas, who were the children of Kāśyapa and Kadrū, reached after encountering much heat, storm and rain, the land of Ramanīyaka which lay across the sea, it is considered that the Nāgas migrated to that country, which has been sought to be identified with Egypt. They are said to have been led by a

5. See Sutta Nipāta, Pāḍyanavagga (SBE, X, p. 180); Keny, "The Nagas in Magadha", JBOCS, xxviii, p. 161, n. 2; Also Indian Culture, iii, pp. 708-15.
6. See Figure I.
Garuḍa chief. Whether this theory is acceptable or not, it is interesting to note that the Pharaohs of Egypt were in some way associated with the hawk or Garuḍa and the serpent.

In ancient days it was very common among people to represent a war between two peoples as war between their gods; and much history may be deduced from such mythological accounts. To handle them is very difficult, for, as Frazer says, "the subject of ancient mythology is involved in dense mists which it is not always possible to penetrate and illumine even with the lamp of comparative method. Demonstration in such a matter is rarely, if ever, attainable; the utmost that a candid enquirer can claim for his conclusions is a reasonable degree of probability." Mythological stories are mostly allegories intended to convey under a more or less fantastic veil the great truths gathered on the same field of pre-historic tradition. In fact, no mythological story, no traditional event in the folklore of a people has ever been pure fiction but everyone of such narratives has an actual historical backing to it. One has necessarily to depend upon myths and legends, folk-tales and folk-songs for knowing the early history and culture of a people; and it is fortunate that we have fair fabrics of myths which could carefully be analysed and moulded into useful data for rational history and ethnology.

One of the mythological accounts contained in the Rg Veda relates to the war between Indra and Vṛtra and the slaughter of the latter. Accompanied by the Maruts and exhilarated by Soma, Indra is said to have attacked Vṛtra who is conceived of as having the form of ahi (serpent). The demon Vṛtra is at times described as a cloud and at times as lying on the waters and encompassing them. The fight is said to have been for the release of the waters, and so Indra is called āpśujit. The clouds containing the waters are figured as fortresses (pura) of the aerial demon and numbering 90, 99 or 100. This Vedic myth about the conflict between Indra and Vṛtra has been interpreted in various ways as a solar myth, as a myth about the change of seasons etc. To consider it merely as a solar myth is to ignore the historical significance of it, and to consider it as one connected with the change of seasons or monsoons is not admissible because the myths are found to exist

in different parts of the ancient world like India, Babylon, Persia, Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece etc., where there exist even now great differences in climate. It is of more than ordinary significance to note in this connection that similar stories are found in the mythologies of various peoples of South-West Asia. In Sumer-Babylonia we have the myth of Bel Marduk vs. Tilammat, the Dragon; in Egypt of Ra vs. Apop;¹⁰ among the Jews is the myth of Jahovah vs. the Dragon (called Leviathan, Behemoth or Rahab) while among the Hittites is the myth of Inaras, the son of Teshalaf vs. Tlu Yankas.¹¹ In Greece the myth relates to the struggle of Apollo vs. the Python and also Per Ecus vs. Gorgon-Medusa while in Persia it relates to that of Feridum i.e. Asi-Dehak etc. The dragon or the worm is thus ubiquitous in all such mythologies, especially in the Germanic and Scandinavian ones, and its prototype in India was the snake. In all the accounts relating to this, it is seen that the gods are represented as the champions of civilization and light while the dragons or snakes which are associated with water or ocean are represented as embodiments of evil and darkness, and impersonation of chaos and lawlessness. In all of them the results of the fight are the same i.e., the victory of light over darkness or of civilization over chaos. From the oneness of the theme and the similarity of its treatment, it may be presumed that the Vedic myth is not particularly Indian but one common to various countries of the ancient world where serpent worship was popular. It is essentially pre-Vedic and pre-Aryan and betrays characteristics of an allegorical representation of a conflict between the worshippers of the serpent symbolised by Vṛtra and those that were not its worshippers symbolised by Indra. The Indian myth preserves the memory of a people who were obviously worshippers of the serpent. Their defeat however did not mean the extinction of the conquered; but their intermingling with the conquerors led to the evolution of a synthetic or syncretic culture. This is borne out, for instance, by the mention in later Rg Vedic literature of a God named Ahi Budhna, which name has been explained by Sāyaṇa as “the God Ahi who lives in antarikṣa”.¹²

¹⁰ Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, xi, p. 403.
¹¹ JRAS., 1922, pp. 177-90.
¹² Ragozin, Vedic India, pp. 195, 292-4; Vedic Mythology, pp. 60-1; 152, 158-9; Fausball, Indian Mythology, pp. 90-1; R. G. Bhandarkar Commemo-
When one passes on from the Vedic age to the next period, one has to draw largely on the Purāṇas and Epics for the reconstruction of the history of the country. About their historical value opinion is divided among scholars, some showing excessive scepticism about them and some others taking everything said in them as wholly historical. But the truth lies midway between the two diametrically opposite views. Though it is true that the Purāṇas and the Epics contain much which may be difficult of acceptance as historical "it is absurd to suppose that fiction completely ousted the truth". Some of the statements contained in them are now being confirmed by archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic evidence.

The term Nāga is also known by a few other synonymous expressions like Pannaga, Sarpa, Uraga, Bhujanga, and Ajagara. Their habitat is said to have been Nāgaloka in the bowels of the earth which was endless (aparyanta), crowned with hundreds of different kinds of palaces, houses, towers and pinnacles (aneka-vidhaprāśāda harmyavala bhīneryāha) and strewn with wonderful pleasure-grounds large and small. (uccāvacakrīḍāścarya sthānāvakīrṇa). It was also called pāṭāla which was one of the seven regions of the Netherland extending over thousands of yojanas. The Pāṭāla, also called Rasātala or Nirāya, was an abode of happiness and attraction. According to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, sage Nārada, who visited it felt that it was more delightful than Indra's heaven. He is said to have exclaimed: "what can be compared to Pāṭāla where the Nāgas are decorated with brilliant and beautiful and pleasure shedding jewels; who will not delight in Pāṭāla where the lovely daughters of the Daityas and Dānavas wander about fascinating even the most austere; where the rays of the sun diffuse light, and not heat by day; and where the moon shines by night for illumination, not for cold; where the sons of Danu, happy in the enjoyment of delicious viands and strong wines, know not how time passes? There are beautiful groves and streams and lakes where the lotus blows; and the skies are resonant with the kōil's song.

ration Volume, pp. 38-9; A. C. Das, Rig Vedic India, pp. 224-228; Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, xxvii, pp. 55-64; see also Annals of the Bhandarkar Research Institute, 1945, pp. 1-48 for an interesting paper on 'Vṛtraha-Indra' by R. N. Dandekar. See Figure II.
Splendid ornaments, fragrant perfumes, rich unguents, the blended music of the lute and pipe and tabor; these and many other enjoyments are the common portion of the Dānavas, Daityas and snake-gods who inhabit the region of Pātāla.\textsuperscript{13} The capital of Pātāla was Bhogavati, so called probably because it was a place of perpetual enjoyment. The word, it may be mentioned in passing, means also 'snake's coil.' According to the Mahābhārata it was a subterranean realm and Takṣaka, who had seized the jewel left on the ground by Uttanka glided into Pātāla through a fissure.\textsuperscript{14} The region was not easily accessible, though there were a few entrances into it. One of them in Kashmir, the Kathāsaritsāgara informs us, was made by Maya.\textsuperscript{15} Another was the cave of Namuci which Raṇāditya, an ancient king of Kashmir was believed to have entered "after passing through the waters of the Candrabhāgā. He is said to have gained sovereignty over the underworld (pātālaīśvarya), the realm of the Daityas and the Dānavas." The location of the Pātāla in the lower portions of the Panjab and Sindh is supported by a few other pieces of evidence. The Greek historian Arrian mentions a maritime city, Pātāla, which was visited by the Macedonian general Alexander.\textsuperscript{16} The different branches of the family of the Sindas who ruled over parts of the Deccan claim in a number of inscriptions to have descended from an eponymous founder of the family called Sinda who flourished in the region of the Sindh.

\textsuperscript{13} Wilson, Viṣṇu Purāṇa, p. 204; also Pātālakhaṇḍa in the Padma Purāṇa.

\textsuperscript{14} Ādiyavan, iii.

\textsuperscript{15} Op.cit., xxiii, 107-112; Tawny's Trans., Vol. II, p. 197; also Rājatarangini, (Stein's Trans.,) Vol. ii, p. 446. The work says: "There are on this earth many openings leading to the lower regions, but there is a great and famous one in Kashmir made by Maya by which Usā, the daughter of Bāna, introduced her lover Aniruddha into the secret pleasure grounds of the Dānavas and made him happy there. And Pradyumna in order to deliver his son, laid it open, making a door in one place with the peak of a mountain and he placed Durgā there, under the name of Sarika to guard that door, after propitiating her with hundreds of praises. Consequently, even now the place is called by the two names of Peak of Pradyumna and Hill of Sarika. It may be noted that the Hill of Sarika is the Hari Parbat near Srinagar in Kashmir".

\textsuperscript{16} Mc Crindle, Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian; also, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, Age of the Nanda's and Mauryas, pp. 75-76.
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But some other accounts make one think if the Pātāla was not located in some other part of the country. According to the Mahābhārata,17 young Bhima who had been administered poison along with food by Duryodhana and dropped into the Ganges entwined by creepers went deep into the waters and glided into Pātāla where he was bitten by Nāgas (snakes) and thus cured of the effects of the poison administered to him. Again while in the course of the tīrthayātra Arjuna was one evening performing his ablutions in the Gangādvāra he is said to have been taken away by the Nāga nymph Ulūpi to Pātāla, where, after the performance of his evening rites he succumbed to the charms of the Nāgi and married her.18 From these mythological stories it appears that Pātāla, referred to above lay to the east of the Ganges and on the other side of Hastināpura, and was the country of the Nāga people. While describing the descent of the Ganges from Heaven as a result of Bhagiratha’s penance the Pātāla is located at the mouth of the sacred river.19 From these references to Pātāla it appears that the country of the Nāgas lay in the upper and lower reaches of the Gangetic area, regions lying close to water courses. The Nāgas seem to have been spread over the Assam country also, as may be seen from some references to them in medieval inscriptions as also the existence of Nāga tribes in the region even now.

But according to a few other accounts Pātāla can be tried to be located somewhere else also. The descriptions contained in a few Purāṇas and the Mahābhārata show that among the nine divisions of India one was that of the Nāgas, and it was in the western part of the country, with Virūpākṣa, the Nāga demi-god as its guardian.20 Jimūtavāhana, who was the deliverer of the Nāgas from Garuḍa and who was living in the Malaya mountain is said

17. Mahābhārata, Adiparvan.

18. Ibid. Some scholars think that the Nāga country of Ulūpi was Assam. But the identification does not seem easy of acceptance for Ulūpi is said to have appeared before Arjuna in the R. Ganges only and that does not pass through Assam. Further Assam was really too far away from Arjuna’s route and it could not have been reached by him in the course of his pilgrimage.


20. See Majumdar, Cunningham’s Ancient Geography of India, App. I; Alberuni however thinks that it was in the south-western portion of the country.

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to have offered himself on behalf of Sankhacūḍa as prey to him when he had gone to Gokarna, the abode of Śiva for his last prayers. Gokarna is a well known religious centre in Kanara.21 The Rāma-yāna would have us believe that the Rasātala lay in the midst of the ocean and Rāvana, the lord of Lankā, had won a victory over the Nāgas by taking their city Bhogavati.22 From another reference to Bhogavati in the same epic it seems to be associated with the abode of Agastyā. Sugrīva while sending an army of Vānaras under Hanumān to the south in search of Sītā says: "There is the mountain named Kuṇjara, lovely to the eyes and to the heart where the dwelling of Agastyā has been fashioned by Viśvakarman. There is his divine house (śarīṇa) of gold adorned with various gems, a yojana wide and ten yojanas high. There is the town Bhogavati, the abode of snakes, with large roads, invincible, guarded on all sides by terrible serpents sharp-fanged and great of poison, wherein dwelleth Vāsuki, the very dreadful king of snakes."23 It is traditionally believed that the abode of Agastyā was the Pōdiyil hill in the southern extremity of the Western Ghats. According to the Mahābhārata also Bhogavati was situated in the southern region and was ruled by Vāsuki, Takṣaka and Airāvata.24 Perplexingly enough Bhogavati is also mentioned as the name of a river and is sought to be identified with the R. Sarasvatī near Kurukṣetra. Thus the word would indicate probably a city (the city of enjoyment — bhoga) as also a winding river (bhoga meaning also snake’s coil). If it meant a river is it not possible that the name could have been applied to the mythical city of the winding ones, i.e., the snakes?25

22. Āraṇyakāṇḍa, xxxii, 13-14; Yuddhakāṇḍa, vii, 3-9; Uttarakāṇḍa, xxiii, 4, 5.
24. Udyogaparva, cix, 19. Hiralal identifies Bhogavati with Ramīllī in the Nagpur district, and says with great cocksureness that “with this location, the legend of the city being situated in Pātāla quite fits in as this tract of country lies just below the high table of the Satpuras”. (Maharaja’s College Magazine, Vizianagaram, V, pp. 5-6). But the problem is too difficult and complicated to be so sure as Hiralal.
During this period, the Nāgas appear to have been so widespread that they had their kingdoms in different parts of North India. Numerous traditions relating to the early history of Kashmir show that they were in the occupation of the valley even in very early times. After the cataclysm of the Mahābhārata war political conditions in North-western India appear to have become very much disorganised leading to the rise of the Nāgas in the region. The Paurava king Parikṣit, the grandson of the Pāṇḍava Arjuna, is said to have been ruling over the Kuru kingdom (extending over the region between the R. Sarasvati and the Ganga). According to the Mahābhārata, on account of a curse he was killed by Takṣaka, the king of snakes, in spite of elaborate precautions. His son Janamejaya therefore performed the sarpa-śatra (snake sacrifice) in which, through the spell of mantras, many snakes fell as oblations into the sacred fire and perished. After all, this is obviously a mythological account of the rise of the Nāgas of Gandhāra and their successful attack of Hastināpura under Parikṣit, who probably died in the course of the resistance he offered. Later his son Janamejaya who appears to have been a strong ruler fought against the Nāgas and conquered the capital of Takṣaka, the king of the Nāgas. However, as a result of the intercession of an Āstika, Janamejaya stopped the slaughter of all the Nāgas and their complete extinction. The conquest of the capital of Takṣaka by Janamejaya may be taken as a historical fact for the story of the Mahābhārata was recited to him by Vaiśampāyana at that place. To the east of their country lay that of the Pāṇcālas, who are believed originally to have been known as the Krivis. In the epic period it was divided into the northern and southern parts. Uttara Pāṇcāla, which according to the Mahābhārata was wrested from Drupada by Droṇa with the help of the Kuruś, had Ahichchhatra for its capital. It was also called Ahikṣetra; but in view of the local legend of Ādi-Rāja who was protected before his elevation to kingship by a hooded cobra while asleep, Ahichchhatra is probably the correct form, meaning 'Serpent Umbrella'. In Ptolemy the place is called Ādisadra. The place has been identified with Ramnagar in the Bareilly

28. See Cunningham, Ancient Geography of India, p. 360; McCrindle, Ancient India as described by Ptolemy, p. 133; B.C. Law, Tribes in Ancient India, p. 34.
district.27 The country of Abichchhatra according to Huien-Tsang was about 3000 li in circuit and the capital itself about 17 or 18 li. The Buddha is said to have preached there and converted its Nāga king.28

Farther east also there were Nāga dynasties. Yayāti, the father of Puru was the son of Nāga Nahuṣa and the maternal grandfather of Aṣṭaka.29 The Pāṇḍavas were the grandsons of the grandson of Nāga Aṟyaka.30 The Yādavas too were of Nāga origin. Kṛṣṇa was also a Nāga, as may be seen from the fact that his father Vasudeva is said to have been the great-grandson of Nāga Aṟyaka mentioned above.31 His elder brother Baladeva was considered to be a portion of Nāga Seṣa.32

The Nāgas appear to have connected with the Magadha country also. According to the Mahābhārata it was the country of Jarāsandha of the Brahadratha dynasty, who was the father-in-law of Kamsa.33 The country and its city Rājagṛha had Nāga associations. The Śiśunāgas who ruled over Magadha in still later times appear to have been members of a Nāga dynasty and were so called apparently to distinguish them from the Nāga Brahadrathas to which Jarāsandha belonged. The Buddha and Vardhamāna Mahāvīra were popular religious leaders during their period and the Nāga people of the region appear to have joined the new faiths in large numbers. Among the Nāga followers of the Buddha in Magadha mention may be made of Mucilinda, the Nāgarāja who sheltered the Buddha under the Bodhi tree and Nāgarāja Kāla who predicted the enlightenment of the Buddha.34 The Nāga of Ērvila was converted after the first sermon.35 The Nāgas are said to have constructed a bridge across the Ganges between Rājagṛha and Śrāvasti.36

27. See V. Rangacharya, Pre-Musolman India, Vol. II, p. 238.
29. Mahābhārata, Adiparvan, lxxvii, 42-43; Udyoga, xvii, 17, 23.
30. Ibid., Adi, lxxviii, 34-35.
31. Ibid., Adi, cxxviii, 34-5; see also Banerjee Sastri, Asura India, p. 95.
32. Mahābhārata, Adi, lxviii, 152.
33. Ibid., Sabhā, xiv, 31-32, 49.
35. Ibid., p. 107 ff.
The Nāgas had spread in the Malwa region and the adjoining area. Māndnātr of the Haihaya dynasty destroyed the Mauneya Gandharvas at the instance of the Nāgas, for the latter had been despoiled by them. But later, the Haihayas overthrew the Kārkotaka Nāgas whose habitat appears to have been somewhere in the Narmadā region, and captured Māhiṣmati from them. The enmity between the Haihayas and the Nāgas appears to have continued long.

Besides occupying parts of western Deccan it seems that the Nāgas were in the occupation of its eastern half also. In the Rāmāyaṇa the serpent Śeṣa is said to have had his seat in the East. While deputing his monkey hosts to different directions in search of Sitā, Sugriva says that in the East they would see such wonders as the Milk Ocean, the white mountain Rṣabha standing in the midst of it, the terrible “mouth of the Mare”, and on the north of it the “Golden Mountain.” “There Oh! monkeys, ye will behold the earth-carrying serpent white like the moon and having eyes wide as lotus leaves, seated on the top of the mountain and worshipped by all gods—the thousand headed god Ananta, clad in a dark blue garment. A three-headed golden palm-tree, the banner of the great being, placed on the top of the mountain, shineth together with its pedestal.” 37a It is mentioned in the Buddhist stories that Nāgarājas, Krṣṇa and Gautamka came from their islands in the western ocean to hear the Buddha in Suppātaka. The Jātakaś mention a Nāga island near Broach (Elephanta) and another Kāradvipa near it. Besides, the Nāgas are said in the epics and Purāṇas to have been in many islands across the seas.

Even in later times in the centuries immediately before and after the dawn of the Christian era there were a number of tribes and dynasties with Nāga associations in different parts of

37. Pargiter: Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, 262, 266, 268, 269. According to the Harivamśa Yadu had four sons by Nāga wives and they founded respectively the four kingdoms of Māhiṣmati (Narmada region) Sāhyādri tableland (in the middle of the Western Ghats), Banavasi and Ratnapura (in Mādhya Pradesh).
39. Jātaka, lii, 124; iv, 150.
the country. In the north-west were the two large tribes of the Takkhas and the Vāhlas or the Bāhlikas. The former are considered to have been of the race of Takṣaka.\(^{40}\) According to the Purāṇas the Bāhlikas ruled as independent kings for thirty years.\(^{41}\) Nāga rule over considerable parts of northern and central India after the decline of the Kuṣāṇ power is amply attested to by epigraphic and numismatic evidence, besides literary references. Nāga dynasties ruled from Vidiśa, Kāntipura, Mathurā, Padmāvatī, Taxila, Ayodhyā and a number of other places.\(^{42}\) Among the powerful Nāga rulers of Vidiśa were Seśa, Bhoga and Sadācandra or Candrāmśa. The last of them is described as Nakhaḥavat or Nahapāna. Obviously their power came to an end with the expansion of the Vākātakas. The Purāṇas mention the Naiśadhas, Yadukas, Śaśītakas and Kālatoyakas born from Manidhanya or Manidhara, to the south of the territory of the Guptas.\(^{43}\) A Lahore copper seal inscription of the fourth century A.D. refers to a prince Mahēśvara Nāga, son of Māharāja Nāhabatī. It is not, however, known where he ruled. The Purāṇas mention nine Nāga kings ruling at Padmāvatī. In some of the Vākātaka records mention is made of a Mahārāja Bhavanāga, the maternal grandfather of Rudrasena I, whose grandson was a contemporary of Chandragupta II (380-414 A.D.). He may therefore be assigned to the period before the rise of the Guptas to power. He is described as of the family of the Bhāraśivas “whose royal line owed its origin to the great satisfaction of Śiva that was caused by their carrying a Śiva linga placed as a load upon their shoulders” and “who were besprinkled on the forehead with the pure water of the Bhāgirati that had been obtained by their valour.” They are credited with the performance of ten horse sacrifices. Thus they were an important dynasty of Nāgas who flourished on the ruins of the Kuṣāṇa empire. Some coins bearing the name of Bhavanāga have been discovered at Padam Pawāyā, the ancient Padmāvatī near Narwar in the old Gwalior State.\(^{44}\) If this Bhavanāga was the same as the Bhavanāga mentioned above, then it becomes

\(^{40}\) C. V. Vaidya, Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, I, p. 702.

\(^{41}\) Pargiter, Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, p. 73.

\(^{42}\) JRAS., 1905, p. 233.


\(^{44}\) JNSI., V, pp. 21 ff.
clear that Padmāvatī was their capital and a great Nāga centre. The city itself which was situated on the Sindhu has been immortalised by Bhavabhūti in his Mālāmādhava.45

Among the rulers of Āryāvarta claimed to have been extirpated by Samudragupta according to his Allahabad Pillar inscription were Gaṇapatināgā and Nāgasena.46 At Padmāvatī, Vidiša and Mathurā have been found coins of a mahārāja Gaṇendra or Gaṇapa. Probably he was the same as Gaṇapati Nāga. No coins of Nāgasena have been discovered; but a tradition, recorded in the Harṣacarita, was current that the secret deliberations of Nāgasena of Nāgakula having been divulged by a śīrīka bird led to his destruction at Padmāvatī. Probably after the extermination of Gaṇapati Nāga, Nāgasena was made governor of the area; he was deposed later, obviously for insubordination. But the Nāgas do not appear to have been exterminated. On the other hand friendly relations existed among them. Candragupta II, the son of Samudragupta, married Kubera Nāga, a Nāga princess. Under Skanda Gupta in 466 a Nāga chief called Sarvanāgā was appointed a viśayapati (provincial governor) over the Antarvedi district between the Gangā and the Yamunā and between Prayaṅga and Haridwār.47 Among the other Nāga kings of Padmāvatī who are known from coins discovered in its neighbourhood are Mahārāja Bhīmanāgā, Mahārāja Skandānāgā, Mahārāja Brhaspatīnāgā, Mahārāja Devanāgā, Mahārāja Vibhunāgā and Mahārāja Vyāghranāgā.48

According to the Purāṇas seven Nāga kings ruled at Mathurā, probably after the Kuśāṇas. Some coins have been attributed to the rulers of Mathurā; but the names found on them do not end with the suffix nāga. Among those that issued coins from Mathurā were Gomitra, Brahmanitra, Drḍhamitra, Suryamitra and Vīṣṇumitra. They do not bear any royal title. Among a few others who also issued coins were Purusadatta (without any royal title), Uttamadatta (sometimes called Rājā), Rāmadatta (sometimes called Rājā), Rājā Kāmadatta, Rājā Śeṣadatta, Rājā Bhavadatta

46. Fleet, Gupta Inscriptions, No. 1.
47. Ibid., No. 18, p. 71.
and Rājā Balabhūti. All of them appear to have ruled from the first century B.C. to the second century A.D. An important and powerful ruler who ruled with Mathurā as his capital after the Kusāṇas was a Vīrasena who appears to have been a Nāga. A few of his coins are available. One of them has a serpent rising over the throne on which is seated a female figure holding a jar in her up-raised right hand, the figure being evidently that of Gangā. 49 Another has a nāga standing by the side of a male figure. 50 One of his successors seems to have been overthrown by the Guptas.

A dynasty with Nāga associations appears to have been ruling over the Ayōdhya area between 150 B.C. and 100 A.D. In the coins of three kings of this dynasty, Viśākhadeva, Dhanadeva and Kumudasena, are found among others figures of the snake as a symbol. 51 Again king Pariyataka of Kosam who flourished during the second century B.C. has also a snake on his coin. 52 In three coins from Taxila assigned to the fourth or the third century B.C. 53 and two of the Mālavas who ruled in the first four centuries of the Christian era, 54 are again found the figures of snakes. Besides a Yaudheya coin of almost the same age contains a symbol composed of two snakes. 55 In six of the cases mentioned above, along with the snake appears the figure of the bull, while in the remaining two it appears with the figure of the caitya. It is of interest to note in this connection that only the coins of individual rulers contain the figure of the snake. Can it be presumed that only those kings whose coins bear the figure of the snake were worshippers of the Nāgas? Probably it is too difficult to hazard a conjecture in the absence of a full set of coins issued by the different members of this dynasty.

49. JRAS., 1900, pp. 97, 115.
50. Cunningham, Coins of Medieval India, pl. ii, Figs. 13, 14.
52. Ibid., p. 155.
53. Ibid., p. 156, Nos. 4, 5 and 7.
54. Ibid., p. 170, No. 4; p. 174, No. 69.
55. Ibid., p. 183, No. 31.
Till a few years ago it was considered that “the period between the extinction of the Kuśāṇa and Andhra dynasties about 220 or 230 A.D. and the rise of the imperial Gupta dynasty, nearly a century later, was one of the darkest in the whole range of Indian history”. The view has, however, been proved to be wrong. We have now a fair knowledge of the history of North India from the period of the fall of the Kuśāṇas to the rise of the Guptas. But the work of K. P. Jayaswal in stringing together the scattered references to the Nāgas into a brilliant account of Nāga Imperial period is probably over-drawn and not quite convincing. On the basis of the available evidence it cannot be established that the Nāgas ever assumed the imperial role which he has assigned to them.

As said earlier Ceylon, South India and the Deccan are rich with Nāga associations from very early times. It was mentioned above that Pāṭala or the nether region said to have been occupied by the Nāgas in the Purāṇas, has been tried to be located in South India and Ceylon, probably on account of their distance from Āryāvarta. The land of Ramanīyaka to which the Nāgas migrated according to the Mahābhārata has been sought to be identified with Malabar, not only on account of its distance and charm, but also on account of the existence in it of people associated with the Nāgas. According to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the original home of Kāliya was Ramaṇaka.

If the Rāmāyana mentions that Ceylon and South India were peopled by the Rāksasas, the Mahāvamśa says that Ceylon was the home of the Nāgas and Yakṣas. It is said that Vijaya was met by them when he landed in Ceylon on his conquering expedition. Buddhist tradition has it that Nāgadīpa (North Ceylon) had a number of Nāga kingdoms even in the life-time of the Buddha. In one of his earlier births, when the Buddha was born as Akkitti, he is said to have gone to Aḥidīpa, perhaps the same as Nāgadīpa, near the island of Tambapanni (Ceylon) where he reached omniscience. It is recorded that the Buddha visited Nāgadīpa three times in

56. V. A. Smith, Early History of India, p. 292.
the ninth month, fifth and eighth years respectively after he attained Buddhahood. The story is told that on the second of the three occasions when he visited the island, its king Mahodara, and his nephew Culodara who was ruling over Kannavadhamāna (Gandha-mādhavanam near Ramesvaram) were quarrelling among themselves for the possession of a gem-set throne. The Buddha appeared on the scene, settled the dispute, seated himself on the throne and preached to the rivals the sermon of reconciliation, and converted them along with a number of Nāgas to Buddhism. This story is told in the Tamil epic Maṇimekalai also, where the scene of the episode is laid in Maṇipallavam, identified with Jaffna, the Nāgadipa of the Mahāvamsa.

The Nāgas are mentioned in some of the early Tamil works. The Pattuppāṭtu contains interesting details about a prince called Tiraiyan who was washed to the Indian shore by the waves of the sea. The commentator explains this by referring to a legend. According to it a Cōla chief of Nāgapāṭṭinam went to Pāṭāla and fell in love with a Nāga lady in it. Later she sent him the child of their union floating on the waves (tirai) of the sea. In the Maṇimekalai is told the story of the Cōla king Neḷumkilli, the ruler of Kāvērippūmpāṭṭinam, who fell in love with a Nāga lady whom he by chance met in a grove near his capital. She disappeared after a month. Sometime later she sent to the king in a ship the son born to them. But the ship was wrecked near the coast. When the Cōla king heard of it he was so much worried and absorbed in searching for the child that he forgot to perform the annual Indra feast. This roused the anger of the gods and the city was destroyed by the waves. Another story in the work reads that a Tamilian Ceṭṭi named Sāduvan who wanted to trade with Vanga was driven to the shore of the naked nomads, the Nāgas, but he was able to make good his escape because he had mastery over their language. Whether there can be much truth

58. Mahāvamsa, 1.
60. Perumbāṇāṭṭappadai, 11, 30-31.
63. Ibid., xvi, 11. 60-61.
in these stories or not, one thing is clear: the northern part of Ceylon was the land of the Nāgas in the centuries preceding and succeeding the dawn of the Christian era, and there was communication by sea between the east coast of South India and the Nāga land of Ceylon.

From the evidence of early Tamil literary works it appears that Kāverippūmpattinam, the Cōla capital at the mouth of the R. Kāvēri was in more ancient times the capital of the Nāgas and the Nāganādu. It is believed that Tontōnādu, to the north of the Cōla country was the land of the Kurumbar, Aruvavar or Aruvālar (Tamil Arivāḻ = Bill-hook) according to early Tamil literature and a Mackenzie manuscript. The region seems to have been divided into two halves, Aruvānādu, and the Aruvāvaḷatalai- nādu. The former of the two extended between Bāhū near Pondicherry in the south and Kānci in the north and the latter between the region about Kānci in the south and the R. North Pennār in the north. Beyond that was the country of the Vaḍugas who spoke a language different from Tamil. The Vaḍugas called the Tamil-speaking people Aruvar. The word means Nāgas in Tamil. The region appears to have been known also as Oymānādu. From later inscriptions one finds that the Oymānādu lay in the region of the present Tindivanam taluk. According to the Sirupāṉarṟuppadai among the chief towns in it were Amūr, Eyilpatṭanam and Mālangai. The chiefs ruling over the region are said to have belonged to the Oliya Nāga family. One of the members of the family was known as Nalliyā Kōdan (Kārkōta?).

Considering the paucity of reliable information about the geography and peoples of South India in the early centuries of the Christian era, the notices contained in the Periplus Maris Erythraei and the writing of the geographer Ptolemy are of much interest and value. Among the list of countries, cities and im-

64. Siḻappadikāram, canto I, 11. 19-20.
65. E.I., xviii, p. 8 n. 3; also S.I.I., ii, p. 27.
66. 353 of 1900; 246, 247 of 1901; 279 of 1909; 303 of 1910; 253 and 256 of 1913 etc.
important places mentioned in the geography of Ptolemy the follow-
ing are of interest to us:

(a) Coast of Soringoi (Cōlas) with its capital at Orthoura
130° 15° 20° ruled by Sornagos.

(b) Arouarnoi with its capital at Malanga 130° 13° and ruled
by Basaronagos and

(c) District of Moisooloi (Masolia—Masalia in the Periplus)
with its metropolis at Pitundra. 68

It is not difficult to identify Moisooloi with Masulipatnam. To its
south was Arouarnoi, the Aruvāvaḍatalai of early Tamil literature,
the country in which Kāṇci grew into a great city in later times.
According to Ptolemy the capital of this country was Malanga.
Opinion is divided among scholars as to its exact location. Cun-
ningham thought that it was the same as Masulipatnam. But thè
place lay in the Tamil country only, and may probably be identified
with Kīlmāvilangai in the Tindivanam taluk. 69 Another Mālanga
mentioned by Ptolemy as an emporium of trade has been sought
to be identified with Mallai, 70 the future Māmallapuram or
Mylapore in the city of Madras. These attempted identifications
apart, it is of interest to note that the region according to Ptolemy
was ruled by a Basaronaga. Cunningham thought this Basaronaga
was the same as Pāli Mājērika Nāga of Amarāvati, according to
the Mahāvamsa. But since we are identifying Arouarnoi with
Aruvāvaḍatalai, Basaronaga must have ruled only in the Tamil
country. Though it is not easy to find out the Indian equivalent
to the word Basaro (it may be Vajra or Varṣa) the fact that it
ends with the suffix Nāga shows that the Nāgas were in the occu-
pation of the country during the time of Ptolemy.

According to the same geographer farther south in the coast
of Soringoi ruled Sornagos with Orthoura as his capital.
Apparently Orthoura is the same as Uraiyūr or Uragapura of the
early Cōlas. The region lay to the south of Aruvānāḍu, and dur-
ing the time of the Greek geographer it was ruled by a king named

68. Cunningham, Ancient Geography of India, p. 539; Caldwell, Compa-
rative Grammar, p. 93.


70. S. K. Aiyangar, Intrn. to Gopalan's Pallavas of Kanchi, pp. xi-xii.
Sornago (Sūrya nāga or Suranāga?) or something like that. Uragapura appears to have also been known as Argaru. Thus the region seems to have been dominated by the Nāgas in the early centuries of the Christian era.

The Pallavas who had an important place in the early history of India are not mentioned in the lists of the kings of the Tamil country in the Sangam age; from the provenance of their early inscriptions it may be presumed that they were mainly in the occupation of the Telugu country south of the R. Kṛṣṇa till they established themselves at Kāñcī. The Vēlūrpālaiyam plates (ninth century) say that Vīrakūrca, the first well-known Pallava king obtained a kingdom by marrying a Nāga princess.71 The Nāgas and Pallavas had become so much united by that time that myths tracing the origin of the Pallavas themselves to their ancestor Aśvatthāman by a Nāga princess had grown. Whatever may be the basis for the myth, it was a historical fact that like the Gupta of North India who gained political position and influence by Candragupta's marriage with Kumāradevi, the Licchāvi princess, the Pallava Vīrakūrca had to seek the hand of a Nāga princess for gaining political position in the country round about Kāñcī, where, as seen above, the Nāgas appear to have been flour-ishing. Rasanayagam is at great pains to work out the theory of the Cōla-Nāga origin of the Pallava, and make Tonḍaimān Ilam-tiraiyan, the son of a Cōla king by a Nāga princess of Manipallavam, the founder of the line. But it is not supported by epigraphy. The Nāga princess married by Vīrakūrca, probably belonged to the family of the Oliya Nāgas which ruled over the Oyāmjādu, Aruvā and Aruvāvaḍatalainādu etc.71a The Pallavas who became matrimonially connected with the Nāgas came to be considered a mixed caste or group of people and were known as Kayavar, Nisar (low caste) etc.

It may be mentioned in passing that some scholars who are inclined to think that there was close connection between the present Nayars of Malabar and the Nāgas of ancient times, say that it is suggested among other things by the way in which the Nayars

71. S.I.I., II, p. 50.
71a. This question has been discussed by me in detail in my forthcoming book, Kāñcipuram in Early South Indian History.
of old combed their hair and made a knot of it over their head and thereby made their face look like the expanded hood of a cobra. The hypothesis however looks more fictitious and fanciful than real and tenable, for the Nayars of Malabar appear to have risen as a military class and were something like the Nayakas and Nayudas of the Tamil and Andhra areas.

Sufficient evidence is available to show that there was a Nāga population in the Deccan also. The Cūṭus or Nāgas were feudatories under the Sātavāhanas, and they declared their independence on the latter's fall. A Cūṭukulānanda Śatakarnī, the king of Vaijayanti is recorded to have established the sway of the Nāgas farther south.72 The Kanheri inscription of Nāga Mūlanikā, wife of a mahārathī, daughter of a great king and mother of Skanda Nāga, takes the Cūṭu realm to Aparānta north of modern Bombay.73 The early Nānāghat inscriptions mention the Andhra queen Nāganikā and a Nāga general Nākāyīro.74 Karli has an iron pillar of an Agnimitra Nāga.75 His niece, the Nāganikā is mentioned in an inscription from Kuda.76 A careful reading of the inscriptions in the Deccan found in Luder's List of Brāhmi inscriptions gives many similar names. The inscriptions at Amarāvati and Jaggayapaṭa also contain a large number of Nāga names. Though it is true that no definite conclusion can be reached merely from the find of such place and personal names, it must be recognised that the numerous names with nāga either as a suffix or prefix make the surmise irresistible that there was a large Nāga element in the population of the Deccan.

Some Buddhist stories mention a Nāga king called Kāla (a name which resembles the name Kālabharī Pallava) ruling in Majerika. Some Buddhist traditions of Ceylon and Siam refer to a Nāga country on the coast near the "Diamond sands" between the mouth of the Ganges and Ceylon and to the south of Dantapura.77 The country is called Majerika. The region appears to have been in the lower valley of the R. Kṛṣṇā. Majer and Pātha

72. E.I., x, Luder's List, No. 1195.
73. Ibid., Nos. 985, 1021, 1186 etc.
74. Ibid., Nos. 1114, 1116.
75. Ibid., vii, p. 49.
76. Ibid., x, Luder's List, No. 1078.
77. Cunningham, Ancient Geography of India, pp. 534-5.
Majer are two ancient places in the Divi taluk, Krishna district. It is not known if the country came to be called after the names of those two places, or after the name of the R. Manjhirā, a branch of the R. Godāvari or probably it was the same as Masulika or Masulipatam. Whatever may be the exact identification of the Majerika, it seems pretty certain that in the region about the Krishna district there was a Nāga population. But with regard to the period to which the Ceylonese and Siamese traditions relate there is some difference. The Ceylonese tradition gives the date as 157 B.C. while the Siamese tradition gives 310-13 A.D. But if there is any basis for the tradition preserved in both the countries probably the Ceylonese tradition is more dependable. This kingdom of Kāla was also called Pallava Bogga. When Duttgāmini of Ceylon performed his coronation a number of people from Pallava Bogga seem to have attended it. There were maritime and cultural relations between Pallava Bogga and Ceylon from early times.

It is generally believed that the Sātavāhanas were Brahmans with an admixture of Nāga blood. The Dvātrapatputtalikā represents Sālivāhana (or Sātavāhana) as of mixed Brāhmaṇa and Nāga origin. The Nāga connection is suggested by names like Nāga-nika and Skanda Nāga-Sātaka. The Brahman origin of the Sātavāhanas or their support to the Brahmans is suggested by the Nasik prasasti of Gautamiputra Satakarni, where he is called Eka Bhamhana. Dynasties of rulers who claimed to belong to the Nāgavamsa ruled over parts of the Deccan in later times also.

78. See JASB., vi. p. 856; xvii, pt. ii; JRAS, 1906, p. 685; 1907, pp. 341-6; I.A., xvi, p. 4.
79. Raychaudhuri, Political History of Ancient India, p. 280.
80. See Ep. Ind., viii, No. 2.
81. A dynasty of rulers who styled themselves Alupas, Ajuvas, Ājvas, or Ālus ruled over parts of the Deccan from about the sixth century. It has been suggested by Fleet that the cognomen is derived from the word Aluka an epithet of Adisesa, the chief of the serpent race, and so they were a branch of the Nāgas. (Bom. Gaz., I, ii, p. 309). But the word seems to be derived from the root ālu which means to govern, and so it appears to be a technical expression to indicate subordinate government. This is indicated by such expressions as Kongālvas and Cangālvas, rulers respectively of the Kongānād and Canganād in the Kannada country and nāḷ-āḷvan (ruler of a small territory in the Tamil country.
Though the Nāgas were kept under check under the Guptas they lingered on then and in subsequent periods. During the days of Skandagupta one Sarvanāga is mentioned as the governor of Antarvedi. In the neighbourhood of Surāṣṭra and Bharukacca they appear to have been influential in the sixth century. From the Junagadh inscription of Skandagupta one may infer that a Nāga rebellion was suppressed by him. About 570 A.D. Daśa I Gūrjara uprooted the Nāgas who have been sought to be identified by Fleet with the forest tribes ruled over by Nirihullaka of Broach.

Later Mahārāja Tivara deva of Śrīpura in Kosala appears to have defeated a Nāga tribe. In Bengal the Ramganj record of Mahāmaṇḍalika Īśvara Ghoṣa mentions a Ghoṣa Nāga family of Dhekkari assignable to c. 11th century A.D. The Bhuvaneśvara prasasti of Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva, the minister of Harivarmadeva (c. 12th century A.D.) also mentions the destruction of Nāga kings by him. The Rāmacarita refers to the conquest of Utkala, the kingdom of Bhava-Bhūṣaṇa Santati by Rāmapāla. It is not clear whether the conquered kingdom was that of the Nāgas or the Candras; probably it was that of the former, for they were better known.

In central India the Nāgas were powerful in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The Nāgattaras of Begūr are mentioned in an inscription of the tenth century as having fought against Viṣṇuhendra on behalf of the Western Ganga king Ereyappa. Then according to the Navasāhāsāṅka carita, the Nāga king, whose daughter Saśī Prabhā was married to Sindurāja Paramāra must have been ruling in Ratnāvatī on the Narmādā about this period.

Farther north Nāga association was claimed by a number of new dynasties. It is said that there was an invasion of the Tak or the Takṣa, a Scythic tribe, which worshipped serpents and most

82. Fleet, Gupta Inscriptions, p. 68.
83. Ibid., p. 59.
85. Gupta Inscriptions, Rajnur grant, p. 298.
86. Ep. Ind., Bhandarkar’s List, No. 2100.
87. Ins. of Bengal, iii, pp. 30 ff.
88. E.I., vi, p. 45.
probably laid the foundation of the Nāgavamśi element of the Rajput clan. It is difficult to say how far the account can be historically true. But there cannot be any doubt about Kashmir having been a great centre of the Nāgas from very early times. The Rājatarangini preserves a legendary account of a conflict between the followers of the Nāga cult and the Buddhists immediately after the Kuṣāṇas. The same source contains details of the revival of the ancient rituals in accordance with the Nīlamata-purāṇa (Nila, one of the important mythical Nāgas) by Govinda III. It was in 625 A.D. that the Kārkotaka or Nāga dynasty was founded by Durbalavardhana and it lasted down to 854 A.D. It was a remarkable period in the history of Kashmir.

In the Deccan also the Nāgas regained much of their influence and power in the seventh century. Even in the medieval period there were a few dynasties in the Deccan that claimed to be of Nāga descent.

The Sēndrakas:

An important Nāga dynasty that appears to have ruled over contiguous parts of the present Bombay and Mysore states was that of the Sēndrakas. The Sēndrakas flourished in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries and were feudatories first of the Kadambas and then of the Western Cālukyas of Vātāpi. Some of the rulers of the dynasty claim to have been of the lineage of the Bhujagendrās (Bhujagendrānvayaḥ). The country over which they ruled is mentioned as Sēndrakaviṣaya in an inscription of the Kadamba king Kṛṣṇavarmā.

According to an inscription of the fifth year of the Kadamba king Śrī Harivarmā one Bhānu Śakti was a chieftain of the Sēndraka family. Subsequently, the Sēndrakas appear to have become the feudatories of the Cālukyas of Vātāpi. A Sēndrakarāja

90. E.C., V. Bl. 245. The Mercara grant of Avanita Kongani mentions a Sēndrika as a witness to a grant (Rice, Coorg Inscriptions, No. I, 152). It has been suggested that the term refers to a Sēndraka chieftain. But that is very doubtful, because the word used in the inscription is Sēndrika and not Sēndraka. (See Fleet, Bombay Gazetteer, I, ii, pp. 232-3 n. 10).
91. I.A., VI, p. 31.
Sri Vallabha Sēnānandarāja is said to have been the maternal uncle of king Pulakeśina II.\textsuperscript{92} Probably there were different branches of the Sēndraka family, as may be seen, for instance, from an inscription of Pulakeśina II which mentions a Śāmiyara of the Rudranila Saindraka family who was a feudatory ruling over the Kuhundi District.\textsuperscript{93} The Bagumra (Nausari district) copper plate grant dated 406 probably of the Kālacūri or Cēdi era (655 A.D.) gives the genealogy of the Sēndraka kings and furnishes the names of a Bhānu Sakti (different from the one mentioned above), his son Aditya Sakti and his son Prthvī-vallabha Nikumbhalla Sakti.\textsuperscript{94} From this inscription it appears certain that the Sēndrakas who were settled exclusively in the Karnāṭaka country held later a portion of southern Gujarat. In the south one Durga Sakti, son of a Kunda Sakti, who was himself the son of a Vijaya Sakti of the Sēndraka family, is said to have been a contemporary of a Satyāśraya who was possibly Pulakeśina II himself.\textsuperscript{95} In 664 A.D. there was a Rāja Deva Sakti in the Sēndraka family at whose request the Western Cālukya king Vikramādiyta I made a grant of the village of Raṭṭagiri.\textsuperscript{96} Again under the Western Cālukya king Vinayādidya a Sēndraka chieftain called Mahārāja Pogili is mentioned as a feudatory ruling over the Nāyarkhaṇḍa district (i.e.,) the Nāgara khāṇḍa division of the Banavāsē province.\textsuperscript{97} The Sēndrakas, however, appear to have declined as a political power after the seventh century, though their name was associated with a small territory in Mysore in much later times.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{92} E.I., III, pp. 50 ff.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., VII, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., XVIII, pp. 266-7.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., VII, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{96} JBRAS., XVI, p. 228.
\textsuperscript{97} I.A., p. 142. The term Nāyarakhaṇḍa is the Prākrit form of Nāgara-khaṇḍa and denoted the territorial division of the Nāgas. (See Fleet, Bombay Gazetteer, I, ii, p. 281 n. 3). It is strange that while the inscriptions of the Nāgas bear among others the emblem of the Nāga or serpent this particular inscription bears the emblem of an elephant. It is hard to explain it, though Fleet thinks that it may be due to the fact that “however authentic may be the contents of it, (the inscription) this Lakshmeshwer inscription was not engraved till after A.D. 967 (ibid., p. 292 n. 9).
\textsuperscript{98} The country to the south of Basavapataṇa was called the Sēndraka country so late as the seventeenth century.
The Śēnāvāras:

Another Nāga dynasty about whom some information is available is that of the Śēnāvāras, who were a Jain family of rulers ruling over parts of the Kadur and Shimoga districts in Mysore. The first mention of a Śēnāvāra is in about 690 A.D. during the time of the Aluva king Citravāhana\(^99\) and of the Western Cāḷukya king Vinayāditya.\(^100\) For nearly three centuries thereafter, there is, however, no mention of them. But from the beginning of the eleventh century we get some account of them again. They were of the Khacara vamā, had the phāṇidhvaja (serpent flag), and the mṛgēndralāṁchana (lion crest).\(^101\) The first known member of the dynasty was Jīvitavāra. His son was Jimūtavāhana, and his son was Māra or Mārasimha. The last of them ruled about 1058 A.D. He is said to have received homage from all the kings of the Vidyādharaloka and been master of Hemakūṭapura.\(^102\) Sūrya and Ādiyā, the sons of a Śēnāvāra were ministers in the court of the Western Cāḷukya Vikramāditya in 1128 A.D.\(^103\)

The Sindas:

The Sindas were an important dynasty of Nāga chieftains who ruled over certain parts of the Deccan in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. It appears that there were at least four branches among them, namely those of Bagadage (Bhagalkot in the Bijapur District), Erembarega or Erambirage (identified with modern Yelburga in the old Hyderabad State and lying about twenty-five miles in a south-easterly direction from Pattadakal), Bastar, Halavūr and Bellary. These branches were distinguished from one another by some variations in their crests (lāṁchanas) and banners (dhwajas, patākas or ketanas). The common crest for all the branches was the vyāghra lāṁchana or a tiger with a calf or child, thus indicating probably their origin in a clearer way. However, their banner is not mentioned. The other which belonged to Bhramarkotya maṇḍala had the lāṁchana of a dhanur-

\(^99\) E.C., VI, KP. 38.

\(^100\) Ibid., VII, SK. 278.

\(^101\) Usually the rulers in Mysore who claimed Nāga lineage had the tiger crest only.

\(^102\) E.C., VI, Cn. 61, 62, 75, 94, 95.

\(^103\) Ibid., XI, Dg. 90.
vyāghra (bow and tiger) and the dhvaja of kamalakadali or lotus flower and plantain leaf. The Halavūr branch of Banavāsi had the vyāgramṛgabalāṇchana (the crest of a tiger and a deer) and the niladhvaja (blue banner). 104

The Sindas of Bhagalkot:

Of the above different branches of the Sindas that of Bagadaga (Bhagalkot-Bijapur District) may be taken up first. The legendary origin and history of this branch are contained in an interesting stone inscription at Bhairamatti in the Bagalkot taluk. 105 According to it the Sindas belonged to the Nāgavamśa or the race of hooded serpents and the eponymous founder of the family was a certain “long armed” Sinda, a human son of the serpent-king Dharanendra, born at Abichchhatra in the region of the river Sindh (i.e.,) the Indus. Perplexed at the birth of a son in human shape he bade a tiger nourish the child. The tiger transferred the child to the care of the lord of the snakes. In due course the child grew of age and become the king of the Sinda country. He married a daughter of the lord of the Kadambas and had by her three sons. From them sprang the Sindavamśa or the race of the Sindas. It seems there were thirty-one rulers in the dynasty without any break after which there was born a prince named Sinda. In this lineage of the Sindas of Bagadaga there was a chieftain called Kammara. His wife was Sangarabbarasi. Their son was a Pulikāla who is described as “an ornament” of the family of the serpents (i.e., the family of those who have poison in their glances—dṛṣṭiviṣakula-l. 6.) He married a Revakabbe and to them was born Nāgāditya. He was a feudatory of the Western Cālukya king Jayasimha II and ruled about 6.955 1033-4 A.D.): To him and his wife Polayyabbarasi was born Polisinda, an ornament to the Sinda race. His wife was a Bijjaladevi, daughter of the Khāṇḍava Maṇḍaleśvara and their son was Mahāmaṇḍaleśvara Sūvya or Sēvyaraśa. He was a feudatory of Bhuvanaikamalla Somēśvara II, the Western Cālukya king.

The Nāga lineage of the family is further borne out by the fact that Pulikāla is described in the inscription as having had a
nāgadhvajā or phāṇipataṅka (hooded serpent banner) which bore representations of the Nāga kings, Ananta, Vāsug (k)ī and Takṣaka, Vyāghra laṅchana (tiger crest) and the hereditary title of Bhoga-vatīpura-Paramēśvara or “Supreme Lord of the Town of Bhoga-vatī”, which place in Hindu mythology was the capital of the Nāga king Vāsuki in Rasātala, one of the seven divisions of Pātāla or the subterranean regions.

The exact relationship between this family and the family of Sindas of Yelburga, whose history we shall trace presently is not known. But the Sindas of Bhagalkot appear to have been slightly earlier than those of Yelburga.

The Sindas of Yelburga:

Another branch of the Sindas was that of Yelburga, who in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries ruled over the region covered in ancient times by the political divisions of Kīṣukāḍ seventy and “several other towns” as feudalatories of the Western Cālukya King Vikramāditya VI. Hence some members of the dynasty were called Tribhuvanamalladēva Kesarin or “the lion of Tribhuvanamalladēva”.106 Some of the later inscriptions of the dynasty credit them with a number of achievements. One of the members of the dynasty, Sinda Acugideva, is said to have been “a very hand-mill for grinding the wheat which was an enemy named Jaggu and plundered the country of a person named Hallakavādikeya-singa,107 to have at the command of Vikramāditya VI, pursued and prevailed against the Hoysalas, taken Goa, put Lakṣmana to flight in war, caused the Pāṇḍyas to retreat, dispersed the Mālapas or people of the Western Ghats and seized upon the Konkan,108 and put to flames Goa and Uppinakaṭṭe and repulsed a Bhoja who invaded his territory.109 Though it is difficult to identify many of the names mentioned above, it seems that Bhoja was the same as Bhoja I of the family of Silahāras of Karad.

107. Ibid., p. 243.
108. Ibid., p. 244.
109. Ibid., p. 269.
The next ruler of the dynasty was Acugi's son Mahāmaṇḍa-leśvara Permāḍi I, also called Perma, Pemma, Paramarṇī and Hemmaṇḍi. One of his inscriptions dated Rākṣasa, Ś. 1067 = 1144 A.D. seventh year of the Western Cāḷukya king Jagadēkamalla II gives him the title Jagadēkamalla Permāḍi and shows thereby that he was his (Jagadēkamalla's) feudatory. According to it he vanquished one Kulaśekharāṅka, besieged and decapitated Caṭṭa, pursued a certain Jayakēśin (probably of the family of the Kadambas of Goa), seized the royal power of the Hoysalas, penetrated to the mountain passes of "the marander Biṭṭiya (Viṣṇuvardhana) besieged his city of Dvārasamudra, pursued him as far as the town of Belapura which he took and followed him beyond that place as far as the mountain pass of Vāhadi.\textsuperscript{110}

His successor was his brother Mahāmaṇḍaleśvara Cāvuṇḍa or Cāvuṇḍa II. Of him we have one record from Paṭṭadakal dated Subhānu Śaka 1084(5) = A.D. 1163. It mentions that he was (or rather had been) a feudatory of the Western Cāḷukya king Taila III, and was then ruling over Kiṣukāḍ Seventy, the Bagadage Seventy the Kēlavāḍi Three Hundred and "several other districts", and records that his senior wife Dāmaladhēvi and his son Acidēva (Anegi III) were governing as regents at Kisuvolal or Paṭṭada Kisuvolal (Paṭṭadakal), the chief town in the Kiṣukāḍ district.\textsuperscript{111} He had another son by her, named Permāḍi (Permāḍi II).

It seems that Cāvuṇḍa II had another wife called Siriyadēvi, daughter of the Kālacūrya king Bījjala and Vikrama or Vikkayya. They are said to have been ruling over their country in 1169-70 A.D. in the ninety-fourth year of the era founded by Vikramāditya VI,\textsuperscript{112} while in a record of Ś. 1102 (A.D. 1179) Vikrama alone is mentioned as ruling over the Kiṣukāḍ Seventy as a feudatory of the Kālacūrya king Śankama.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{110} J.B.B.R.A.S., (old Series) XI, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 259.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 274; I.A., IX, p. 96.
The Nagpur museum inscription of Someśvara dated S. 1129 (1131?) = 1210 A.D. refers to a Someśvara Cakravartin who claimed to be a descendant of the Nāga of thousand hoods i.e. of the serpent Śeṣa, to be the lord of the city of Bhogavati, to have for his crest a tiger with a calf, (savatsavaghratalāñchana) to belong to the Kāśyapa gotra and to be worshipper of the god Mahēśvara.

and of the goddess Māṇikyadēvī.¹¹⁵ Though these two chieftains belonged to the Sinda family their mutual relationship or their relationship with the other branches of the Sinda family are not known.

The Sindas of Belagavartti or Belagavatti:

Another branch of the Sindas ruled over parts of the Shimoga and Chitaldurg districts of Mysore, which along with parts of the Dharwar, Bijapur and Bellary districts formed part of the Sinda-vāḍi province, and their inscriptions are largely found in the Honnali taluk of the Shimoga district and the Davanagere taluk of the Chitaldurg district. A few inscriptions contain interesting information about the origin and early history of a branch of the Sindas. According to them from the union of Śiva and Sindhu¹¹⁶ (the R. Indus) was born a son to whom Bhava (Śiva) with affection gave the name Saindhava saying, “be a king in the earth” and appointed the king of the serpents as his guardian. Saying that unless his son drank tigress’s milk he would not become brave, Śiva created a tigress the milk of which the child drank and grew of age. Moreover, Paramēśvara directed the Goddess Mālāti to help his son in war and gave him a second name of Nidudol (long armed) Sinda. Being told that Karahaṭa (modern Karad in the Satara District) was to be his residence he went there, drove out the king of the place and acquired the earth and began to rule over many districts in the Karahaṭa Four Thousand. He and his successors were known by the titles of Mahāmāṇḍalaśvara, lord of Karanāṭa-pura and obtainer of a boon from Mālāti. They claimed descent from the Phaniṛājavamśa (the race of the king of serpents) were distinguished by the nīladvaja (blue flag) and had the vṛghra-mrga lāṃchana (tiger and deer crest). They were further entitled to the sounds of the musical instruments of the mallai and tūrya. The Sindas had also the titles of Sindha Govinda and Pāṭāla Cakravarti.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵. E.I., III, pp. 314 ff. The Chhinda Nāgas of Bastar were also worshippers of Goddess Māṇikyadēvī.
¹¹⁶. In E.C., VII, Hl. 20-Sindu is referred to as Sura Sindu (the river of the gods, the Ganges).
¹¹⁷. Ibid., Hl, 20, 50; xi, Dg. 43; also Bombay Gazetteer, I, ii, pp. 577-8 and E.I., III, pp. 231-2.
An early member of the dynasty, Kērasinga Nanniya Sinda is mentioned in an inscription of the time of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Akālavārṣa dated in 968 A.D. When the Western Cālukya power was established, the Sindas appear to have accepted their overlordship as may be seen from an inscription of a Mulgunḍa Sinda dated 992 A.D., during the time of the Western Cālukya king Ahavamalla. Towards the close of the eleventh century there was a Piriya Caṭṭarasa in the dynasty. His grandson, called also Caṭṭarasa, ruled about 1117 A.D. Between 1164 A.D. and 1180 ruled an important ruler of the dynasty named Iśvaradeva. His Nāga lineage is well borne out by an inscription of his, which says that at his coronation the sound of the drums and conches roused up Uragēndra, the king of serpents, who, saying "this is a glorification of my line; Oh. I must see this" came there with haste, the jewels in his head appearing like a great illumination. Saranadi (Gangā) Rudrāṇi (Pārvati), Sambhu and Heramba (Gaṇapati) are said to have blessed him on the occasion.

Among the territories included in his kingdom were the Edevetty Seventy, Bellave Seventy, Muduvalla Thirty and Nari-valige Forty.

While till the days of Iśvaradeva the royal residence was at Hallavur (Huuloor in the Rani-Bennur taluk in Dharwar on the Tungabhadra) from about his time the capital seems to have been Bellagavartti or Belagavatti now called Belagutti in the Honnali taluk in the Chitalkedrag district, Mysore. The Sindas appear to have been attacked frequently by Umā Dēvi, the queen of the Hoyasala king Ballāla II. But they were able to maintain their position, though the invader gained a lot of booty. By 1198 A.D. the Hoyasalas were, however, in the ascendancy. From about 1215 A.D. the Sinda country appears to have come under the control of the Yādavas of Devagiri. In 1245 A.D. and 1247 the Sinda chieftains fought severe battles at Kudali and Nematti

118. E.C., VII, Hk. 23.
119. Ibid., XI, Dg. 43.
120. Ibid., XI, Hl. 26, 27 and 28.
121. Ibid., XI, Hl. 37, 38, 40 and 28.
122. Ibid., VII, Sk. 315.
(Nyamti) against the Seuṇa general Śrīdhara whom they appear to have driven away in confusion.\textsuperscript{123}

The Nāgas of Bastar:

From some inscriptions discovered in the old Bastar State now merged with Madhya Pradesh, we learn of the existence of another line of Nāga rulers. They claim that they belonged to the Kāśyapa gotra and Chhindaka family, had the tiger with a cub for their crest, and a snake banner. Their capital appears to have been Bārasūru, identified with the modern Barsur, the chief town of Bastar and situated about fifty-five miles from Jagadalpur. The region over which they ruled was Cakrakōṭa. The known rulers of this dynasty who are nine are stated to have enjoyed the title of “the lord of Bhoga (ga)vatīpura, the best of cities”.\textsuperscript{124} From the above details it is evident that the Nāgas of Bastar were of the same stock as the Sindas of Bhagalkot and Yelburga in the Bijapur region and of Holavur and Balagutti in the Mysore area about whom an account has been given above.

Some fifteen lithic records belonging to the rulers of this branch of the Sindas have been found, and of them eight are in Telugu and the remaining seven in Nāgari. From the dates available for some of the rulers of the dynasty, it appears that they were powerful in the eleventh, twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Almost all the inscriptions of the dynasty have been studied in some detail, and a number of them have been published.

From the available inscriptions of its rulers one is able to form some idea of their dynastic history. It is from the Kuruspal stone inscription of Someśvaraṇadeva, a later and probably the most distinguished member of the dynasty, that we come to know something of its early members.\textsuperscript{125} The first among them was a certain Dhārāvaraṇa. He was succeeded by his grandson, a Kanharadēva. The next ruler was a Nāgatidēva, who was a contemporary and a feudatory of the Western Cāḷukya king.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., XI, III. 54 and 55.
\textsuperscript{124} See Hiralal, Inscriptions of the Central Provinces and Berar, pp. 160, 161 and 165; also E.I., IX, 166. Nāgavamśodbhava Bhogavatīpura varēśvara. savatva vydhra lanīchhara Kāśyapa gotra.
\textsuperscript{125} E.I., X, pp. 25 ff.
Jayasimha II (1015-42) and was ruling over the Bagadige country in S. 955 (1033-4 A.D.). It cannot be said with any amount of certainty if this ruler was the same as the Mahāsāmanīa Nāgāditya or Nāgatyā or Nāgatirāsa of the Mairanmati inscription. The earliest of the inscriptions of this branch of Nāgas which is a fragmentary stone inscription in Telugu from Errakot about ten miles from Jagadalpur probably belongs to him. It is dated S. 945 (1023 A.D.) and refers itself to a Nāgavamśa king, part of whose name is, however, lost. From the remaining portion of his name which reads tibhūṣaṇa it may be taken that his name was Nṛpatibhūṣaṇa or Kṣitibhūṣaṇa from the analogy of the name Rājabhūṣaṇa, the surname of a later member of the dynasty, Somesvara I. It was probably during his reign that the Cōla emperor, Rājendra, the son and successor of Rājarāja the Great, over-ran the country in the course of his digvijaya of the northern quarter in demonstration of his strength and power. The Tamil praśasti of the Tirukkalalar plates contains the following details about the invasion. “He (Rājendra) seized Sakkarakkottam whose warriors were brave; Madurai-maṇḍala destroyed in a trice; the prosperous city of Nāmaṇaik-Kōnam with its dense groves; Paṅcappalli whose warriors (bore) cruel bows; Māśunideśa with its green fields.” It appears that Sakkarakkottom, Madurai-maṇḍalam and Paṅcappalli were different places in the Māśunideśa which were conquered one after another before the conquest of the whole area was completed. Māśunideśa literally means ‘country of the snakes’, and this points to the fact that the Nāga dynasty was ruling over the area during the time of its conquest by Rājendra Cōla. It appears that the Cōla invader was helped by a member of another rival branch of the Nāga family in his conquest of the region as a reward for which he was himself made the ruler of the conquered country. This is borne out by the Rājapura copper plates (S. 987 = 1065 A.D.) of a Madhurāntakadēva who claims to belong to the Nāgavamśa and calls himself the ruler of Bhramara maṇḍala, identified with Cakra-kōṭṭa. The name Madhurāntaka means the conqueror of Madural

manḍalam, and the ruler possibly took that name to commemorate his conquest of the Madurai manḍalam along with Rājendra Gangaikonda in 1022-23 A.D. That he belonged to another branch of the family is indicated by the fact that his crest was a bow and a tiger (dhanurvyaghra) and his banner was a lotus flower and plantain leaf (kamalakadali). He made a grant, according to that inscription, of the village of Rājapura situated in the Bhramarakotya manḍala, apparently as compensation for supplying victims for human sacrifices.130

The next ruler we come across in the main Nāga line of Cakrakota was Mahārāja Jagadēkabhuṣaṇa. Some inscriptions referring to him are available. Two of them are dated Ś. 983. Sārvarin (1060-1 A.D.) and a third dated, Ś. 984 (1061-62 A.D.).131 From an inscription of his grandson Kannaradeva (1060 A.D.) which mentions the former’s queen Gunḍa Mahādēvi we learn that Jagadēkabhuṣaṇa called in the inscription Rājabhūṣaṇa bore the name Dhārāvarṣa also.132 The inscription records that a Telugu Cōḷa feudatory of his, Mahāmanḍalāśvara Candraditya Mahārājā, who was the lord of Ammagama excavated a tank called Candradityasamudra at the capital Barasūru and constructed a Śiva temple on its bank and called it Candradityeśvāsa, both after himself. The Telugu Cōḷa feudatory claims descent from the family of Cōḷa Karikāla who held sway over the Kāvvairi (Kāvēri) and was lord of Oraiyyuru (Uraiyyūr) the best of cities. The chieftain had the lion for his crest. It is not clear how the Telugu Cōḷa chieftain who was ruling over the Cuddapah region went so far north as Barasūr where he made a grant. It is possible, as Hiralal suggests, that when Kulöttunga I in his youth attacked Baster, Candraditya could have followed him in his campaign and settled down in the newly conquered country as a subordinate of Dhārāvarṣa. An inscription of Ś. 984 (1061 A.D.) from Dantewada records that a king purchased a village from a cultivator and presented it to the God Bhairava to meet the expenses of offerings to him.133 Unfortunately some lines of the

130. Ibid., pp. 12-14; also E.J., IX, pp. 176-8; also Hiralal, op.cit., p. 163.
131. 231, 234 and 243 of 1908.
133. Hiralal, op.cit., p. 165.
record are effaced and the King's name cannot be read. But
from the date of the inscription it may be presumed that the
ruler referred to in it was Dhārāvarṣa himself.

The next ruler of the dynasty was Someśvara I, son of
Dhārāvarṣa Jagadekabhūṣaṇa. He is known from several inscrip-
tions; and the most important among them is the Kuruspal
record. It records the military achievements of the king.
Someśvara I claims to have acquired sovereignty of Cakrakūṭa
through the favour of the Goddess Vindhyavāsini and to have
killed in battle the powerful king Madhurāntakādeva. Evidently
this Madhurāntaka was the same as the Nāga ruler who was
ruling over the Cakrakūṭa country and issued the Rājapura plates
referred to earlier. He further claims to have burnt Venki like
the great "Arjuna who fired the Khāṇḍava forest" and subjugated
Bhadrapaṭṭaṇa and Vajra and taken six lakhs and ninety-six vil-
lages of the Kosala country. Perhaps the last part of the eulogy
may be after all a hyperbole for the Kosala or Mahā Kosala could
not have contained so many villages. It must be noted in this
connection that one Yasorāja, the father of Candrāditya, the
Telugu Cōḍa feudatory of the Chintaka Nāga Dhārāvarṣa II
(father of Someśvara I) is known to have carved out a kingdom
in Kosala. From the scanty material available it is difficult, how-
ever, to determine which Telugu Cōḍa ruler invaded the Kosala
country as a lieutenant of Someśvara I. It is not known who
the adversaries in the Kosala country were, the Kalacūris or the
Somavamśis. It is, however, possible that the antagonists of
Someśvara I and the Telugu Cōḍa ruler were both the Kalacūris
and the Somavamśis; and there is evidence to show that the
Telugu Cōḍas had established themselves in the former Somavamśi
dominions about the middle of the twelfth century.  

134. 257 of 1908; E.I., X, pp. 25 ff.
135. It is not known how long Someśvara held sway over Kosala. An
inscription of A.D. 1114 belonging to Jājalladēva the king of Dakṣiṇa Kosala
ruling from Ratnapura records that he "seized in battle Sōmeśvara having
slain an immense army". (E.I., I, p. 39). It is difficult to determine from
the inscription who the Sōmeśvara was. Hiralal thinks that he was the
same as the Chindaka Nāga ruler Sōmeśvara I. (op.cit., p. 162.)
The Kuruspal inscription of Nāga Someśvaradēva I further shows that among his other rivals were the kings of Udra (Orissa), Laṇji (in the Balaghat District), Ratnapura, Lempa (probably Lavana the eastern tract of the Raipur district), Vēngi, Vajra (Vairagarnam or Wairagah adjoining the Bastar State) and Bhadrāpaṭṭana (Bhandak) about seventy miles from Wairagh.

Someśvara I had two wives, Sāsanamahādevi and Dharaṇa Mahādēvi,136 of whom the latter appears as a donor in two inscriptions.137 Māsakadēvi was probably his younger sister.138

From Nārāyaṇapāl inscription139 of Guṇḍa Mahādēvi, wife of Dhārāvarṣa recording grant of some land in favour of the Gods Nārāyaṇa and Lokēsvara made in the reign of her grandson Kannaradēvi in Ś. 1033 Khara (A.D. 1111) it becomes apparent that Someśvara had died by that time, and his son Kannaradēva had succeeded to the throne. Two damaged inscriptions which bear no date mention a certain Kannara or Kannaradeva.140 Probably they refer to this ruler. The next known member of the dynasty was a Someśvaradeva whose chief queen Ganga Mahādēvi made in Ś. 1131 (1209 A.D.) according to the Barsūr inscription the grant of a village to two temples of Śiva built by her.141 Obviously he bore the surname Rājabhūṣana Mahārājā mentioned in an inscription from Gadia.142

136. 254 of 1908.
137. 260 and 261 of 1908.
138. 242 of 1908.
140. 230 and 233 of 1908.
141. E.I., iii, p. 164: ix, p. 162; Hirakal, op.cit., 159-60. Hirakal suggests that, the date of this Barsür inscription is a mistake for Ś. 1030 (A.D. 1108) and that the Someśvara mentioned in the inscription was the son of Dhārāvarṣa Jagadekabhūṣana. He bases his conclusion on the ground that according to him the astronomical details for Ś. 1130 as given in the record work out more correctly for the date Ś. 1030. But the Someśvara of the of the Barsūr record appears to have been different from Someśvara I for the following reasons. Firstly Someśvara the son of Dhārāvarṣa was surnamed Rājabhūṣana while, the Someśvara of the Barsūr record had the surname Jagadekabhūṣana. Secondly while Someśvara I's queens were Sāsana Mahādevi and Dharaṇamahādevi, the queen of Someśvara II was Gangamahādevi or Gangādēvi.
142. Hiralal, op.cit., p. 170, No. 293.
The next member of the dynasty of whom we learn from inscriptions was Jagadekabhūṣaṇa alias Narasihyadeva Mahārāja or Mahārāja Narasingadēva. The inscriptions referring to them are dated respectively S. 1140 and 1147 (1213 and 1224 A.D.). One Mahārāja Jagadekabhūṣaṇa mentioned in the Bai-raggarh inscription as the worshipper of the feet of Mānikyadevi (Goddess Dantēsvārī at Dantēsvara) may be identified with this Narasimha. Another member of the dynasty was one Jayasimha-dēva mentioned as bearing titles like Jājaṅhiraṇa Mahārāja. Since the Sunarpal stone inscription which mentions him bears no date, his relationship with Narasimha, the previous ruler is not known. The Temara Satī stone inscription of Saka 1246 (1324 A.D.) mentions king Hariscandra of Cakrāṭarāṣṭra. He was probably a later member of the Chindaka Nāga family of Bastar. If that may be granted, it may be presumed that the Nāgavamśi rule in Bastar continued even in the early half of the fourteenth century.

The Nāgas of Bellary:

Another branch of Nāga rulers appears to have flourished in the region of the Bellary district and enjoyed some political power during certain periods. The earliest reference we have to them is in the Veḷurpālaiyam copper plates of Pallava Vijaya Nandivarman where it is said that the Pallava king, Nandivarman a predecessor of Simhavarma, the father of Simhaviṣṇu, “with the favour of the God Pinākāpāṇi (Śiva) caused to dance the powerful snake (phaṇindrāḥ) whose poison was in (its) eyes (Dṛṣṭivīṣaḥ). The term has to be interpreted here as a Nāga king rather than as “lord of snakes” while the term Dṛṣṭivīṣa may be taken to be the name of a person rather than “a snake whose poison was in (its) eyes.” This becomes apparent from the reference to a Dṛṣṭivīṣa in whose family a Sinda chieftain ruling over parts of the Bellary district in the eleventh century A.D. is said to have been born.
From about the close of the first half of the twelfth century two Nāga chieftains ruled over the area and were probably feudatories of the Western Cālukyas. An inscription at Sindigeri in the Bellary district belonging to the (Dumati) fourth year of the Western Cālukya king Jagadēkamalla II mentions a Sinda chief Mahāmaṇḍaleśvara Ballarāya Rācamalladevarāsa during whose time a subordinate of his made a grant to the Śaiva teacher Nirvanidēva of the E(l)koṭi Cakravarti-maṭha at Sindagere. 148 Another inscription of the tenth year of the Western Cālukya king Jagadēkamalla mentions that Rācamalla was the younger brother of an Irumaḍi Bhima and both of them were ruling the Ballakundanāḍu when a certain individual built in a village temples for Śiva, Viṣṇu, Aditya (sun) Vighneśvara and Bhairava. 149 A feudatory of his was Lākkeya Nāyaka who called himself the supporter of the kingdom of Irumaḍi Rācamalla. 150 This chieftain appears to have had a long rule, and become a feudatory of the Kalacūrya king Rāyamurāri Sōvīdeva (1168-78), elder brother of Śankama. 151 When the Kalacūri power was put an end to and Western Cālukya power was restored under Vira Sōmeśvara (Sōmeśvara IV), Rācamalla who was also called Sinda Gōvinda transferred his allegiance to him. 152 But of his successors no information is available.

There were some Nāga chieftains even in the late Vijayanagar period, as for example the Haratti chiefs who ruled over Nidugal under the Vijayanagar Emperors.

Thus our survey of the history of the Nāgas in India shows that in historical times they were powerful and influential in different parts of the country during certain periods, say from the second century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. and from the seventh century to the twelfth century A.D. It is difficult to view their political history in isolation, for these periods were marked by Śaiva religious activity also. Is it not possible that their political upheaval was closely connected with such religious activity? It seems possible.

148. 211 of 1913.
149. 69 of 1904.
150. 69 of 1904.
151. 56 and 58 of 1904.
NAGAS IN INDIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

II

NAGA CULT

Ophiolatry or the worship of the serpent is one of the oldest and most remarkable and widespread forms of religion the world has ever known. Probably its universality and antiquity are only next to the worship of the phallus. There is practically no country of the ancient world where serpent worship did not prevail “pervading every known system of mythology and leaving proofs of its existence and extent in the shape of monuments, temples, and earthworks of the most elaborate and curious character”. Among the countries of the ancient world where abundant testimony to the existence of serpent worship is available, mention may be made of Persia, Arabia, Syria, Asia-Minor, Egypt, Ethiopia, Greece, Italy, Northern and Western Europe, Mexico, Peru, America, China, Japan and Ceylon. In Chaldean mythology the serpent occupies a prominent position. It was one of the most important divine symbols among the Phoenicians and the Egyptians. In Egypt the figure of a serpent named Thermuthis was made use of as royal tiara with which the statues of Isis were ornamented. In Greece Hercules is said “to have been the progenitor of the whole race of serpent-worshipping Scythians through his intercourse with the serpent Echidna”. When Minerva planted the sacred olive on the Acropolis of Athens she is said to have placed it under the care of the serpent deity Erechthonios. Thus in Greece serpents were considered guardians of graves, sanctuaries and dwellings and were therefore kept there or represented in symbols. Some divine beings were conceived of and represented as partly snake in form, as for example Typhon, Boreas, Hecate etc. In Rome also snakes were kept in large numbers in temples. An interesting and important aspect of the serpent cult relates to the serpent-cave at Lanuvium, to which place virgins were taken yearly to prove their chastity. It was common belief that if the serpent accepted the offerings brought by them their chastity was proven and a fertile season was ensured. In Western Africa the serpent was not only considered sacred but also worshipped as divine. Among the aboriginal tribes of America serpent worship in one form or other was popular; the serpent was a religious symbol and became a subject of many interesting myths. The serpent’s figure was sculptured on the temples of Mexico and Peru. Among the
symbolic earth-works of North America, the great mound of Adam's country, Ohio, the convolutions of which extend to a length of 1,000 feet, deserves mention. Among the Celts there are a number of serpent myths. In China serpents have temples dedicated to them and in Japan they are worshipped as embodiments of the spirit of God.¹

Though the serpent cult and serpent worship are thus so universal and popular, the cult of the serpent in India is of particular importance and interest. "Perhaps in no other part of the world is it (the serpent cult) more widely distributed or developed in more varied and interesting forms". It may not be an exaggeration to say that more than any other animal or member of the reptile species, the serpent and its cult in its varied aspects has had something to do with almost every branch of human thought, knowledge and practice. Probably that may largely be on account of the wide distribution of reptiles in the country and their strikingly unique qualities. India is the only country in the world that is inhabited by almost all the known species of snakes. While most of the generic types of snakes are seen in India, nearly 450 species of them, which is nearly one third of the total number of species in the world, exist in the country, from the worm-like subterranean typhlops to the largest pythons and boas; and the cobra with its hood marked or unmarked is perhaps the most venomous. Further the importance of the serpent in the country may be on account of the fact that a percentage of deaths in it is caused by snake bite. For instance, it was officially reported in 1919 that in India 20,000 men died of snake bite. It is not improbable that annually more men and cattle die on account of it. Fear of death on account of the snake must have been responsible for the great attention it received from the people. The Indian proverb, namely, "Even a great man is not worshipped as long as he has not caused some calamity: men worship the nāgas, but not garuḍa, the slayer of the nāgas" is pregnant with meaning.

¹ In the museum tropics at Amsterdam there are a number of Indo-Javanese antiquities in charge of Jaap Kunst authority on Javanese music who has during his recent tour of Yugoslavia for recording the music of some hill folk there found that these people worship the serpent which they refer to as Nāga in their esoteric circles. (V. Raghavan, Sanskrit and Allied Indological Studies in Europe, p. 28.)
Though fear of the serpent must have been largely responsible for the respect and reverence shown to it, various ideas have been associated with the serpent by different peoples. Fergusson says that "the characteristic of the serpents throughout the East in all ages seems to have been their power over the wind and rain". The nāga is one of the divinities in the Deccan to whom worship is offered at spring time and harvest for rain or fine weather. In China the dragon is believed to be the giver of rain and offerings are made to it during periods of drought. This Chinese belief reminds one of the Vedic myth of Vṛtra, the throttling three headed snake, the enemy that hid away the rain clouds and was slain by Indra, to which reference has been made earlier. Many lakes and tanks in North India are considered sacred to serpents. The Nāga Mahāpadma is the tutelary guardian deity of the Vālunar lake, the largest one in Kashmir. On account of its sinuous and winding motion it is believed to be connected with rivers.\(^1\) Though such an idea may be considered something of a poetical vision, the appearance of the snake in large numbers at the commencement of the rainy season suggests a connection between the two.

Another leading idea associated with the serpent is health. As Fergusson again says, "when we first meet with serpent-worship, either in the wilderness of Sinai, the groves of Epidaurus, or in the Sarmatian huts, the serpent is always the Agatho-daemon, the bringer of health and good fortune." It is well known that Agatho-daemon in Egypt was the Asp of Ranno, the snake-headed goddess, and was considered the guardian spirit who presided over the affairs of men.\(^2\) All over India the serpent is invoked and propitiated for healing diseases of all kinds, particularly loathsome ones like leprosy, sores etc. Parts of its body are considered important as useful remedies for curing diseases. "Eating a serpent's flesh or anointing with its fat or applying part of its body to the wound was a remedy against snake-bite among Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Jews, American Indians, Abipnes, Thonga, and other races and is also found in folk medicine in many lands still—an example of the principle that like cures like".\(^3\) The serpent is also considered

\(^{1a}\) ERE, xi, p. 415.
\(^2\) Wake, Serpent-Worship, and other Essays, p. 87.
\(^3\) ERE, xi, p. 406.
as a symbol of life, and its worship is resorted to for the welfare of children.

Another important attribute of the serpent is wisdom. From the earliest times it has been connected with the gods of wisdom. It was the symbol of Thoth or Taaut, a deity of Syro-Egyptian mythology, of Hea or Hea of the Chaldean triad and Hindu Siva, a god possessing high intellectual attributes, as is shown by his being represented as three-eyed.

The serpent is also intimately connected with ancestor worship. "The noiseless movement and the activity of the serpent, combined with its peculiar gaze and marvellous power of fascination led to its being viewed as a spirit-embodiment". The belief was that the spirit of an ancestor which took shape as a snake was re-embodied in one of the successors. "The snake living in the crevices of the earth is often identified with deceased ancestors and is regarded as chthonic". The idea of ancestor worship and immortality were probably indicated by sculptural representations of the snake. In one such are found the following interesting details. At the centre are two feet (pāda) encircled by a coiling serpent with its tail twisted in its mouth. On both sides of it are seen two headless men, each holding in his upraised hands his head cut off from his body. The hands hold a knife also. Above the serpent is a figure, apparently of a God. This piece obviously represents two garudas, the vēlaikāras of the medieval Tamil country, who committed suicide on the death of their master as was the general practice. The representation of the coiled snake surrounding the two feet is of great significance. Obviously it shows that the two persons who committed suicide reached the feet of God and attained immortality.

The serpent is considered 'son of the earth' or even the life of the Earth. According to Aelion the earth is the mother of the dragons. In India, Kadrū, the mother of the thousand nāgas is a personification of the Earth. The conception is closely connected with the idea that the serpent is the guardian of buried treasures.

5. See the author's South Indian Polity, pp. 258-61.
6. See Plate II.
There are many stories in Indian folklore which emphasise this aspect of the serpent. As Crooke observes, "it is a common Indian belief that when a rich man dies without an heir he cannot take away his thoughts from his treasure, and returns to guard it in the form of a monstrous serpent. But after a time he becomes tired of his serpent life, and either in a dream or assuming the human voice, he asks the persons living near the treasure to take it and offer him one of his dearest relatives in return. When some avaricious person complies with the serpent's wishes he gets possession of the wealth, and the serpent then enters into some other state of existence."  

In Indian folklore the serpent has always been associated with the ant-hill where, it is believed, it is guarding the treasure in it. Hence it is known as ahinilaya and ahisamśraya. It is on account of this close association between the two that the ant-hill itself has attained much significance in popular worship. It is considered to be not only the abode of the nāga or the snake deity but also as the entrance to the mysterious snake world far below the world of men. The ant-hill is also believed to be indicative of water-springs under it. Thus the ant-hill is considered so sacred that "the snake-worshippers search for the holes where they (the snakes) are likely to be found and which more often than not, are in the little mounds raised by the karīkas or white ants. When they have found one they visit it from time to time, placing before it milk, bananas and other food which the snake is likely to fancy."  

The Pañcatantra and the Buddhist Jātakas contain interesting stories about the bounty granted by the nāgas to the good and virtuous. The snake in India has always been considered as carrying a priceless jewel in its hood. Varāhamihira says: "The snakes of the lineage of Takṣaka and Vāsuki and the snakes roaming at will (loāmaya) have bright blue tinged pearls in their hoods."  

The poets of the classical period mention that the jewels on the  

8. Brhatasamhitā, lv.  
thousand heads of Śeṣa illumine the nether world by their effulgence.\textsuperscript{11} "This jewel is thought by the natives (of Ceylon) to be formed in the throat of the nāya (nāga). It emits a light more brilliant than the purest diamond, and when the serpent wishes to discover anything in the dark, it disgorges the substance, swallowing it again when its work is done. It is thought to be possible to obtain the jewel by throwing dust upon it when out of the serpent's mouth; but if the reptile were to be killed to obtain it, misfortune would certainly follow."\textsuperscript{12} From the synonym viṣadṛṣṭhi for a serpent it may be believed that it has poisoned eyes.\textsuperscript{13}

Serpents are considered to be capable of identifying and protecting heroes. According to one suggestion the basis for this belief is that as representing the deceased rulers they protect their successors. Stories are told how cowherd boys while asleep in the sun were protected from heat by serpents with their expanded hoods and they became the founders of kingdoms. The manner in which the infant Buddha is said to have been protected by the serpent Mucilinda from rain and storm and Kṛṣṇa by serpent Śeṣa are too well known.

C. F. Oldham in his thought-provoking book *The Sun and the Serpent* offers an interesting explanation of Nāga worship. He thinks that the Nāgas were ordinarily people who claimed descent from the sun and had the hooded serpent for their totem. He thinks that the human Nāga chiefs were deified in due course and came to be worshipped and goes to the extent of arguing that members of the solar dynasty were really Nāgas in origin.\textsuperscript{14} But the enmity between the sun and the serpent is well known and hence the suggestion of Oldham is difficult of acceptance.

**Development of the Nāga cult.**

The Nāga on account of its manifold characteristics for good and for evil was an object of veneration and worship from very

\textsuperscript{11} Raghuvamśa, x, 7; 59; xiii, 12 etc.
\textsuperscript{12} Spence Hardy, *Eastern Monachism*, p. 316; Vogel, op.cit., p. 25.
\textsuperscript{13} But Bhārtṛhari would have us believe that it is less dangerous to be struck by the eye of a serpent than by that of a woman, for in the former case physicians and herbs are available, but in the latter case there is none. (Sṛṇḍraśataka, 86).
early times in India. With regard to the origin of its worship opinion is divided among scholars. In his stimulating book *Tree and Serpent Worship* James Fergusson expresses the view that the Nāgas were not serpents originally, but serpent worshippers, an aboriginal race of Turanian stock inhabiting Northern India who were conquered by the war-like Aryans. He declares that neither the Aryans nor the Dravidians were serpent worshippers and thinks that "any traces of serpent worship that may be found in the Vedas or earlier (sic) writings of the Aryans must either be interpolations of a later date or concessions to the superstitions of the subject races." Vogel characterises these theories "as strange and useless" and asserts that his views "will hardly find any adherents among really competent scholars of the present generation". Probably the Dutch scholar need not have been so strong in his condemnation of the views of Fergusson expressed nearly a century ago (1868).

Reference has been made earlier to the association of the serpent in worship in the Indus Valley period. They were objects of worship among people who were in many respects different from the Aryans, though the later Rg Vedic literature shows that serpent worship was in its embryo stage in that period among the Rg Vedic people themselves. A belief in the serpents was not unknown to the Rg Vedic people; but to them they were of the dark night or the black clouds, the enemies of the solar deities represented by Vṛtra who is referred to as ahi. They are also mentioned as Yātu-dhānas. But at the end of the Rg Vedic period the snake god had become a member of the Vedic pantheon, in the form of Ahi-Budhnya, the serpent of the deep. Though he was associated with water, he was coming to be considered as an atmospheric god. During the period of the Yajurveda the serpent became a regular object of worship among the Vedic people, and it came to be propitiated with sacrificial offerings. In the Atharvaveda are found numerous charms and incantations against serpents as also a rite of propitiation on the full moon day of Margasīrṣa. The serpents were considered gods and called euphemistically 'biting ropes'. The Atharvaveda contains for instance, the fol-

lowing: “Let not the snake, Oh! Gods, slay us with our offspring, with our men; what is shut together, may it not unclose; what is open may it not shut us together; homage to the God-people. Homage be to Asita, homage to Tirasćirāji; homage to Svājā (and) Bahhru, homage to the God-people”.18 The four terms asita (black), tiraścirāji (cross-lined), svājā (adder) and bahhru (brown) are commonly explained as denoting certain extant species of snakes. The serpents had found such a good place among the Vedic and post-Vedic deities that the Gṛhya sūtras contain an account of sarpabali which was an annual rite for two specific purposes, namely honouring of the serpents and warding off any evil from them.19


19. Sarpabali: It is a rite that is performed on the full moon day in the month of Śrāvana. It consists of the performance of homa with the rice cooked in a small vessel on the āupānāgni and the offering of the flowers of the purokha in the fire with the three following mantras:

   Jagdho Maśakō jagdho Vitiśhir jagdho vyadhavarasvāhā ||
   Jagdho Vyadhvaro jagdhā Maśakō Jagdho vitriṣṭhisvāhā ||
   Jagdhā vitriṣṭhir jagdho vyadhvaro jagdho maśakasvāhā ||

praying that the three snakes Maśaka, Vitiṣṭhi and Vyadhvara may be destroyed and thereby may not come to me. Then sticks of the Aragvadha tree are put into the fire with the following mantras requesting Indra and Agni to prevent the snakes from giving trouble:

   Indra jahi Dantasūkam pakṣinam yas-sarispāh
   Damksyantam ca Daśantam ca sarvānūndinā Jambhaya svāhā |
   Apsu jāt sarēṛṛdha dēvānāmapi hastya
   evamagha Indrapreṣitassano māhin aśsvāhā ||
   trànāmāsī paritrāṅnamāsī paridhirasi
   annēna manusyānstrāyāse triñahī paśungartena
   sarpān yajñēna dēvān svadhayaḥ pitṛn svāhā ||
   This is to be followed by the performance of homa with ghee when the following mantras are to be uttered:

   namo astu sarpebhya yē kē ca prthivī manu
   yē antarkē yē divi tēbhya sarpebya namaḥ ||
   yē ado rocane dīvo yē vā sūryasya raśmiṣa ||
   yēśāmpasu sadaḥ kṛtam tēbhya sarpebhya namaḥ ||
   yē īkāvo yātūdhānānam yē vā vanas pātīmranaṃ
   ye vāsvaṭeṣu śērāṇī tēbhya sarpebhya namaḥ ||

Then bali is to be offered to all serpents on all cāndrāyaṇa paurṇamāsī days upto the month of Mārgalī (December-January). It is to be done on a
Plate I

Vṛtra lying in the waters and encompassing the earth

Plate II

The snake as symbolising immortality
[By Courtesy of the Archaeological Survey of India]
Plate III

Buddha (whose presence is indicated by the empty seat) in company with Nāgarāja Mucilinda [Panel from Sanchi]
The victory of the Buddha over the Nāga in the fire hut of Kaśyapa of Urvilva (Bas-relief on the Eastern Gateway of the Great Stūpa at Sanchi)
The worship of the Stūpa by the Nāgas
[on the middle architrave of the Southern Gateway of the Great Stūpa at Sanchi]

Gomatesvara, with the snake to his right
[Panel from Tirumalai, Polūr Taluk, North Arcot Dt.]
Still later many interesting traditions and legends grew round the serpent. It is said, for instance, that Nahuṣa was turned into a serpent because he insulted sage Agastya. In the epic age stories regarding the origin of the serpents grew. According to them sage Kaśyapa had two wives, Kadrū and Vināṭa, the daughters of Prajāpati. In accordance with their request he granted to each of them a boon, that Kadrū might become the mother of a thousand nāgas, all of equal splendour, and Vināṭa the mother of two sons of greater power than those of her sister. In due course Kadrū brought forth one thousand eggs, and Vināṭa two. Out of the thousand eggs came forth thousand Nāgas at the end of five hundred years. Vināṭa’s eggs did not open, and so she became impatient and jealous. She broke one of her two eggs, but found to her consternation and dismay that it contained only the upper half of the body of a child, the lower part not having formed, for only half the period of the child’s formation had passed by. He was called Aruṇa and became charioteer of the sun god. He got so wild with his mother for her responsibility for his deformity that he cursed her to become the slave of her sister for five hundred years, and said that she would be freed from her curse by the other son if she would patiently wait for the period. At the end of another five hundred years Garuḍa, the preyer of snakes was born to her.

The epics, the purāṇas and other works of the kind give varying catalogues of divine serpents. According to one account in the Mahābhārata there were seventy-eight principal ones among them, while according to another there were sixty-eight. The Harivamśa contains two lists; one consisting of twenty-six names and the other eighteen, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, one list consisting of fifteen names and the Vāyu purāṇa one of forty-

platform erected to the east or north of the hōma. The bali (offerings) would consist of lājā (fried corn), aṇjana (collyrium), oil and unguents. Water is poured over the bali and prayers are offered to the Balidevatas with mantras beseeching them not to molest them and requesting them to move away to a distant place.

20. SBE, xlii, pp. 151 ff.
22. Adiparva, xxxv, 5-16; Udyōgoparva, ciii, 9-16.

J. 7
one names. The Nilamata Purâṇa contains the names of five hundred Nāgas. Some Buddhist works mention the names of a few Nāgas. The Saddharma Puṇḍarîka mentions eight great Nāga chiefs, Nanda, Upananda, Sāgara, Vāsuki, Takṣaka, Manasvin, Anavatapta and Utpala, while the Mahāyutpatti, a Buddhist Sanskrit Dictionary, mentions among others Nāgas like Śankhapāla, Anavatapta, Elāpatra, Nandopananda, Kāla, Kālika, Girika, Vidyujjvala, Apalāla, Amratîrtha, Cāmpeya, Panḍara and Maṇi-kaṇṭha. Varuṇa and Śagara are included here as Nāgarājas.

According to the Brahmanical lists the principal Nāgas were Šeṣa, the world-serpent, Vāsuki, Takṣaka, Dṛtarāṣṭra, Airāvata (Elāpatra), Kārkōṭaka, Śankha or Śankhapāla, Mahāpadma, Kužika and Maṇi. The Amśumadbhedāgama gives a description of the iconographic features of Nāgadeva, the chief of the Nāgas. According to it, the image is to have three eyes, four arms, a beautiful countenance and be of red colour. It should be adorned with a karanda-makuṭa on its head and all other ornaments on its person and should be standing upon a padma-pīthha. The hands of the front arms should be kept in the varaṇa and abhaya poses, while the back hands should be keeping each a snake in it. Over the head of Nāgarāja should be a hood of a five-headed cobra and he must be draped in white clothes. The Silparatna adds a few more details. "The Nāgas should be half human and half serpentine in shape, the lower part below the navel being that of a snake and the upper part that of a human being. Their heads must be covered with hoods having one, three, five or seven hoods, and they should have split tongues and two hands, one holding a shield, and the other a sword." The Maya-Silpa gives a good description of each of the seven principal Nāgas, namely Vāsuki, Takṣaka, Kārkōṭaka, Padma, Mahāpadma, Śankhapāla and Kužika. The description is as follows: "The colour of Vāsuki is pearl-white; that of Takṣaka glistening red and he must have on his hood the mark of the svastika. The colour of Kārkōṭaka is black and on

27. Ch. XXV, vv. 130 and 131.
his hood there should be three white stripes; Padma is of the rosy hue of the lotus flower, with a white streak and adorned with coral ornaments. The colour of Mahāpadma is white with the mark of trisūla on his hood; whereas that of Śankhapāla is yellow with a white streak on his hood; the colour of Kuhika is also red and his hood bears the mark of the crescent moon. These seven great serpents should each have two tongues and two arms and a hood with seven heads held over their human heads bearing on them gems. They must all be clad in one or three coats and carry in their hands an aksamālā and kamandalū." 28

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Among the Nāgarājas, Śeṣa or Ananta (the endless one) figures first, and is mentioned in the Bhagavadgītā as the chief of the Nāgas, though Vāsuki holds an equally important place among them. Like "Midgarsorme" of Norse mythology he is considered to be the great world serpent lying in the sea and encircling the earth. It is conceived that in between periodical creations and recreations of the world Lord Viṣṇu is reposing on the coils of Śeṣa in mid-ocean. This Śeṣāśayin or Anantasāyin aspect of Viṣṇu is a favourite theme of sculpture and plastic art, an early example of which in South India is found in one of the cave temples of Māmallapuram. The head of Viṣṇu is covered by a conical mitre, a peculiar feature of Pallava art and around it is Ananta's hood consisting of five snake heads. In the Gupta temple of Deogah is a relief of the Śeṣāśayana aspect of Viṣṇu. Here he is reclining with his usual four arms, and over his head is seen the hood of Śeṣa with seven heads, each with its legendary jewel. Viṣṇu is also depicted as sitting in the lalitāsana pose on the top of the coiled-up snake with seven or five hoods spread over his head. A similar representation of Śeṣa, associated with Viṣṇu, is seen in the Śiva temple of Prambanan, where Viṣṇu is depicted as seated on a Nāga in mid-ocean full of aquatic animals, and surrounded by Garuda and many others. The whole scene probably is a sculptural representation of the well-known passage in Kālidāsa's Rāghuvamśa 29 which describes how Viṣṇu just awakened from his cosmic sleep was approached by the gods.

Śeṣa or Ādiśeṣa is associated with the Varāha or Ādivarāha incarnation of Viṣṇu also. In the sculptural representations of this aspect we find Ādiśeṣa supporting one of the feet of the boar while rising from the waters.30 Such a representation of this aspect of Viṣṇu is a very familiar one in Indian art. Among the more important places where we find this Varāha avatāra represented in plastic art are Udayagiri (Madhya Pradesh), Bādāmi and Māmallapuram in India.31 The Varāha from Baragaon, now in the Calcutta Museum is accompanied by a Nāgi, presumably his consort, as at Bādāmi.32

One of the popular beliefs is that Balarāma, the brother of Kṛṣṇa was an amśa of Nāga. It is said in the Anuśāsanaparvam of the Mahābhārata that by worshipping the serpent Baladēva one acquires the strength of the Varāha (Boar) incarnation of Viṣṇu.33 In the Mahābhārata again is an interesting account of the death of Balarāma. According to it while he was seated alone engaged in yoga “from his mouth there issued forth a large white Nāga, thousand-headed, redmouthed, in size unto the girth of a mountain, who leaving his body, sped towards the great ocean. There Sāgara received him and so did the divine Nāgas and the pure and holy rivers.”34 We have a truly graphic Mughal painting of this scene. There is a description of Baladēva in the Harivamsa where the super-man and the super-snake are blended together. He is said to be thousand-headed with two long hands holding a plough and a mace, wearing a dark-coloured garment, a single ear-ring and a gold crested diadem.35 With this may be compared the specification in the Viṣṇudharmottara, namely the figure of Ādiśeṣa should have four hands, two in the añjali pose and the other two holding respectively the plough and the mace.36 It may be of interest to note in this connection

30. See Gopinatha Rao, Elements of Hindu Iconography, I, i, pp. 128 ff.
31. ASR., X, pp. 48 ff; pl. xviii; 1910-11, p. 57, pl. xxix, c.
32. See Vogel, op.cit., pl. xxi.
33. XIII, 132, 8-11 (Poona Edn. 1933).
34. Mausola, p. iv, 13-17.
35. Hari, Ixxxiii, 4388-4400.
that many statues with snake-hood over them found near Mathurā have been identified with those of Balarāma.  

Vāsuki was next only to Śeṣa among the Nāgas and he was their leader; and as their leader he made a pact with Garuḍa that he would send him a Nāga everyday for his food. To save the Nāgas from annihilation in Janamejaya’s serpent sacrifice he gave his sister Jaratkāru in marriage to a sage of the same name. In the churning of the nectar with mount Mandara as the churning stick he was used as the rope that was pulled by the Devas on one side and the Asuras on the other, and when unable to bear the force of the churning, Vāsuki emitted fire-like poison (kākākāla) from his mouth which threatened to burn up the whole world, and when the gods sought the protection of Śiva against the danger he swallowed the terrible poison as if it was nectar. This subject is a favourite one in Indian art, as may be seen from the representations of it at Udayagiri (near Gwalior), Garhwa (Allahabad dt.) and a number of other places. But as Havell says the subject “was never treated on so magnificent a scale or with so splendid an effect as in the bas-reliefs which adorn the colonnades of the great temple of Aṅkor Wat in Cambodia built about the twelfth century by Sūryavarman II, one of the last of the Hindu kings who ruled over the Indian colony in the Further East.” In the same way as Śeṣa is associated with Viṣṇu, Vāsuki is associated with Śiva and is represented as hanging freely round his neck. In regions like Gujarat, the Delhi area and in the valleys of the Western Himalayas this cult is very popular. The Iron pillar near Delhi is believed to rest on the head of Vāsuki. It is said that when a king tried to dig the pillar, its base was found wet with the blood of Vāsuki. The pillar could not be fixed again properly. The result was the Hindu kingdom of Delhi fell into the hands of the Muslims. The cult of Vāsuki is popular in the Far Eastern countries also. In Java and Bali he is considered to be one of the attendants of Varuṇa the Sea God.

37. ASR., 1908-9, pp. 161 ff.
39. The Ideals of Indian Art, pp. 64 ff.
40. ASR., I, pp. 177 ff.; XX, pp. 171 ff.
Takṣaka is mentioned in the Atharvaveda as also in the epic and purānic literature. He is the chief hero in Janamejaya’s sacrifice. According to the Pāuṣya parvan his places were Kurukṣetra and the Khāṇḍava forest; and it was during his absence at Kurukṣetra that the Khāṇḍava forest was burnt down by the Fire god. Though the idea of connecting Taxila with Takṣaka is tempting, the excavations at Taxila conducted by Sir John Marshall do not throw out any evidence of the existence of snake-worship in the area. It is surprising that this most terrible one among the snakes has a shrine dedicated to him under the name of Takṣa-keśvara or Tākhā-ji near Naoli in Madhya Pradesh and he is worshipped along with Dhanvantari, the tutelary deity of Hindu medicine.

Another Nāgarāja was Dhṛtarāṣṭra Airāvata who was called Elāpatra in Buddhist literature. Probably Airāvata is his matronymic derived from the Irāvati, the modern Rāvi. He was possibly the best and wisest among the Nāgas, whose advice was listened to at times of great danger to the Nāgas themselves, as for instance, when Janamejaya performed the serpent sacrifice. He was also aged, and many Nāgas and Nāginis like Ulūpi traced their decent from him. His place in Buddhism we shall examine later.

Kārkōṭaka, who is referred to along with the others mentioned above, and was the head of a group of Nāgas is closely associated with Baladeva-Śeṣa. It may be noted that a dynasty of kings who ruled over Kashmir for about two centuries (7th to 9th) and among whom was the great Lalitāditya Muktāpiḍa, the founder of the Martand temple, traced its descent from Nāga Kārkōṭaka. The worship of Kārkōṭaka is popular in Nepal, Kashmir and parts of Uttar Pradesh.

Sankha bore many other names like Mahāśankha, Śankhāmukha, Śankhapiṇḍa, Śankaśiras, Śankhaśirṣa, Sankharōman, Śankhapāla, Sankhacūḍa etc. It was to his race that Sankhacamūḍa of the melancholy tale of Jīmūtavāhana belonged. His worship is popular in Banaras.

Mani also called Mani-Nāga, Manimant, Manikanṭha, Mani-cūḍa, Manibhadraka and Maniakkhika appears to have had his abode near Rājagrha, the capital of Magadhā. The Mahābhārata refers to the temples of two pannagas or Nāgas, namely Manināga
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and Svastika in Girivraja. In the early years of the present century the Manjarnath or the temple of Marknaga mentioned in the epic was exposed to view by archaeological excavations. The temple which is circular in shape contains the figures of a Linga, Bānāsura, six Nāgas, Gānesea and Siva, besides a stone-sculpture presenting on one side standing figures of eight Vāsukis, each with a cobra hood, and on the other side standing human figures with an early Brāhmī inscription. Bloch says: “the temple was some kind of pantheon of Rājagrhaha, and the various figures of Nāgas and Nāgis represent certain serpent deities whom popular religion worshipped at distinct places on the surrounding hills”.41

Serpent worship is one of the most widely distributed ones in India and snakes are worshipped and propitiated in various ways in the country. The Greek writers Strabo, Aelian and others refer to the worship in the Panjab of live snakes kept for the purpose.42 Even now in some parts of Malabar, and particularly in the snake temple at Calicut are kept live cobras which are fed, worshipped and venerated as representing the spirits of ancestors. The same practice is seen to exist in some places in Andhra Pradesh.42a In the ancient temple of Bilaspur in Chhattisgarh and in Nagercoil in the Kanyakumari district, snake deities are worshipped. In the south-west corner of the gardens of all respectable Malayali Hindus there are clumps of wild jungle trees considered very sacred and called nāgakēṭṭa (snake shrine). A granite stone carved after the fashion of a cobra's hood is set up and consecrated there. If there is a Nāga shrine in the garden, sacrifices and ceremonies are performed for it. If there is none one is formed

41. ASR., 1905-06, pp. 103-4; B. C. Law, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. 58, Rajagriha in Ancient Literature, pp. 33-4.

42. McCrindle, Ancient India as described in Classical Literature, pp. 51 ff. When census was taken in 1891, an attempt was made to collect statistics of the followers of different serpent cults, because of its having mixed up with various forms of animism prevailing in the country.

42a. According to an account “at some places miracles are still seen when the yellow cobra the ancient and sacred symbol of the Nāgas, makes his appearance and moves about freely being fondly handled and caressed by thousands of devout Hindus. At Lalgun in Satara district this miracle can be seen. The colour of the cobra is sometimes different and whenever it changes, it is said to denote evil 'portents for the future'”
and worship offered to it. Mention has been made earlier of belief in the sacredness of the ant-hills which are considered to be the home of serpents. "The worship of the ant-hills at marriages and the custom of bringing the lucky earth from them are possibly connected with the fertility cult of snakes or of ants because they multiply in great numbers." 

Snakes are propitiated in different ways in different parts of the country. In South India the twice-born classes perform the rites of nāgapratishtha (the carving of the cobra on a granite stone, consecrating it under a pipal tree and offering worship to it) and nāgabali, (the performance of the obsequies of a dead cobra as in an ordinary funeral rite before the harvest season to ward off evil from serpents and to propitiate them). The Sarpaśanti is performed for progeny. The Nāga pañcamī in North India or the Nāgara pañcamī in South India is something of a snake festival performed every year on the fifth day of the light half of Śrāvaṇa by young women of certain communities. The details of the festival differ from place to place. In South India the women particularly the barren women who perform it fast throughout the nāga pañcamī day, offer flowers and incense at snake-holes, pour milk into them, visit with great veneration and religious fervour stone images of snakes, wash them with milk and curd and offer flowers and worship to them. In North India, especially in Bengal, during the

43. MAR., 1914-15, p. 35.
44. ERE., xi, p. 413.
45. There is a ritual dance called Nāgamanḍala which is offered to the snake god. "A Brāhmaṇ priest personifying the Nāga or snake god stands out, the worshipper being the Vaidya dressing himself as half-man and half-woman i.e., as an ardhanārī holding a ḍamaru in his hand. Behind him he has his chorus of a musician who sings the ballad in Kannāda beating another ḍamaru. Another person plays the cymbals giving proper beats or keeping up the tāla. This dance is set to the accompaniment of music and takes place round about a huge manḍala which is a design drawn on floor in coloured rangavalli depicting an enormous snake coiled and entwined, according to śāstras, having a radius of ten to fifteen feet. At the commencement of the worship the vaidya begins to taunt the snake god and sets him to fury. The snake then coils its body and shows all its terror. The latter half of the dance occupies coaxing, praising and wooing of the snake god. The possessor who is called the pātri always faces this dance worshipper. Both of them go round and round the manḍala. During the course of nearly two to three
period of this festival Goddess Manasā is worshipped with offerings of milk etc., by persons whose parents or close relations had died by snake bite. For this purpose a milk hedge plant is planted on a raised earthen mound in the courtyard of the house; and it is deified as Goddess Manasā, who is considered to be Jaratkāru, the sister of Vāsuki, and the mother of Āstika who saved the Nāgas from destruction in Janamejaya’s sacrifice.46

The serpent is worshipped not only in its individual and independent capacity, but also in association with some of the gods of the Hindu pantheon like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Subrahmanya, Gaṇeśa and Śakti. We have seen above how it is closely connected with the worship of Viṣṇu in his aspect of Anantaśayana. But it seems as though it has a more important place in Śaivism. Śiva cannot be conceived of without being connected with the serpent, one way or another. “As emblems of immortality serpents are common ornaments with many deities. But Mahadeo seems most abundantly bedecked with them; bound in his hair, round his neck, wrist, waist, arms and legs as well as for rings, snakes are his constant attendants.”46a It is not easy, however, to explain how the serpent came to be so inextricably connected with Śiva. One of the forms of the worship of Śiva is the phallic one. The worship of the phallus “came to be clothed with a mystic and

hours the conception of rousing the snake god and then wooing him back to sobriety and finally winning from him his blessings are most artistically portrayed in fantastic rituals which can rarely be found in other parts. Let us now turn to the symbolic significance of this ritual. The dancer wearing half-man and half-woman’s costume and the damaru gives us the concept of puṣpa and prakṛt being one. Their unity is blessing while their disharmony is curse. Though the idea underlying it is rich and very finely worked out in terms of dance the literary content of the songs is of the ordinary type. To arrange for a Nāgamanḍala is a very costly affair, often times involving the feeding of nearly 40,000 people for it is a belief that all who attend or visit this festival should not return unfed or displeased. Hence a very costly affair. But in the two Subrahmanya temples in the northern part of Kanara annual Nāgamanḍala takes place during the Kiriya ṣṛṣṭi day.” From The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society, Vol. XLVIII, 1957-58, pp. 88 and 89).

46. See B.A. Gupte, Hindu Holidays and Ceremonies, pp. 146-48; also Vogel, op.cit., p. 278.

philosophical meaning and recognised as an inseparable part of neo-Brahmanic society."\(^{47}\) In fact apart from his being worshipped in his anthropomorphic forms, Śiva is largely worshipped in the symbol of a Linga and scholars recognise in the Vedic Skambha and Vetasa its worship. This Skambha gave rise in later times to the Purānic story of the fiery Linga of Mahādeva (Lingodbhavamūrti) which sprang before Viṣṇu and Brahmā while they were quarrelling among themselves for supremacy. The Linga and its pedestal came to be viewed by some as the representation of the arānis "the two pieces of wood which were rubbed together by the Vedic Indian in making fire", the upper stick being considered male, and the lower female, by the co-operation of both of which fire was produced. Thus the Linga and the Yoni are said to represent the generative principles of the Universe. The Linga and Yoni standing for Universal Father and Mother are linked with Dyāvāprthvī, Father Heaven and Mother Earth. Thus the Linga stood for the creation of the universe and its perpetuation. Ahi-Budhna was coupled with Agni "who was a raging Ahi in space" and then with Rudra who was one of the seven deities identified with Agni. As seen earlier the serpent is believed to be the symbol or the embodiment of the spirit of the ancestors, and is therefore closely associated with life, past, present and future, and hence eternity. From that point of view the Linga and serpent symbolise the same idea or principle, and hence there is no difference between them. This is strengthened by the fact that Rāvana, for instance, always carried with him a Linga while his son carried a golden serpent in his banner.\(^{48}\) Hence there is no wonder that the serpent is closely connected with the Linga and many Śiva images have many coils of snakes over them.

Mention has been made earlier of the connection of the ant-hill with the snake, and its sanctity. In many places, particularly in South India, there is believed to be some connection between the ant-hill and the Linga. For example Vanmīkanātha (Lord of the ant-hill) is the oldest god at Tiruvārūr while Nāganātha of Nāgapattinam has an ant-hill by his side; at the shrine of Tirup-

47. JBRs, xl, ii, p. 7.
pārrurai a Cōla king found a Linga in an ant-hill. 49 Śiva in almost all his aspects has snakes about him. In this connection particular mention may be made of Bhairava and Naṭarāja. The serpents represented as coiling round the body of Naṭarāja and decorating his braid may be regarded as symbols of his energy.

Virūpākṣa also known as Nāganātha and Nāgabhūṣaṇa, one of the Nāga rulers, was the ruler of the Western quarter, and hence probably nāgakkals and snake-shrines are usually set up on the western side of a temple or garden. The cult of Virūpākṣa is very popular in the west coast area and hence the veneration for the serpent is strong there. Virūpākṣa was the tutelary deity of the Vijayanagar royal house, and the temple dedicated to him at Vijayanagar known also as the Pampāpati temple is the oldest there. Though it is not possible to say to what extent the Vijayanagar kings regarded Virūpākṣa in his original form as Lord of serpents, the monuments in and around Vijayanagar show that their women-folk were largely followers of the Nāga cult. 50

Kumāra, Muruga or Subrahmanya has close associations with the snake. In the Andhra area he is called Subbarāyuḍu; in parts of the Karnāṭaka country he is called Subbarāya and in the Tamil country he is called Subbarāma. A serpent temple in South Canara is itself called Subrahmanya. 51 Śakti, which is the impersonation of female energy is also associated with the serpent. Besides, trees are closely connected with serpent worship. In fact one finds that in most cases nāgakkals are installed under the shade of trees, particularly the pipal trees. In South India snake stones, some of them representing the Linga coiled round by snakes with their hoods spread over it, are seen in large numbers at the foot of pipal trees almost in every village.

The Nāgas in Buddhism

The Nāgas are closely associated with Buddhism and Jainism also. A study of the Buddhist literature shows that they played a large part in the life of the Buddha. There seems, however,

49. MAR, 1903-4, p. 82.
to be some difference between the treatment which the Nāgas receive in Buddhism and the treatment which they receive in Hinduism. While in the latter the Nāgas are given an important place, in the former they are represented as devout worshippers of the Buddha, though in the initial stages they might have been unwilling to accept their subordination to him. In Buddhist sculptures and iconography the Nāgas are usually represented as having many hoods indicative of their demonical nature. They are, however, treated generally as inferior beings. Another point that deserves to be noted regarding their treatment in Buddhism is that they are not considered or treated as associated with or controlling water. However, the Chinese pilgrims, Fahien and Hiuen-Tsang, who visited India respectively between 399 and 413 and 629 and 645 A.D. treat of them as “dragons”. In their accounts the Nāgas figure as water-spirits dwelling in rivers, lakes and ponds. Many scenes from the Buddha’s relations with the Nāgas are represented in art in Bhārhubhūt, Sānci, Mathurā, Amarāvati and other places.

According to the Lalitavistara immediately after queen Māyā gave birth in the Lumbini garden to the child which later became the Buddha, there appeared two Nāgarājas, Nanda and Upananda, who standing in the air “half-bodied”, bathed the Bodhisattva with two streams of water, cold and warm, which they produced. The same story in a modified way is recorded by Hiuen-Tsang in his writings. He says that he visited “a stūpa built by king Aśoka on the spot where the two dragons bathed the body of the prince” and adds that “to the east of the stūpa were two fountains of pure water by the side of which had been built two stūpas, the place from which two dragons appeared from the Earth. When the Bodhisattva was born the attendants and others hastened to find water for the use of the child, when two springs, one cold and the other warm gurgled forth from the Earth before the queen. The water was used for bathing the child”. This scene is represented in the bas-reliefs in Amarāvati. It is divided into four compartments, one of which re-

52. Lalitavistara, (Lefmann ed., p. 83).
presents the birth of the Buddha. But clearer still is the treatment of it in the Mathurā school of sculpture. Here the Nāgas, Nanda and Upananda, who may be recognised by the halo of their serpent heads, appear from two masonry wells in which the lower portion of their body is concealed. They raise their joined hands towards a small nude figure, which doubtless represents the Bodhisattva standing on a pedestal in the centre. Some musical instruments are seen floating in the air, obviously intended to indicate heavenly music which was heard at the auspicious moment of the future the Buddha's birth.

The other form of the legend has found plastic expression in the sculptures at Sārnāth of the Gupta period, where we find the two "half-bodied" Nāgas suspended in the air and pouring from their jars water over the head of the Buddha standing on a lotus. It is interesting to find that the Chinese artists paid great attention to this scene of the Buddha's birth as may be seen from its being represented on one of the silk banners recovered by Sir Aurel Stein from the treasure cave of The Thousand Buddhas at Tun Huang.54

Around the spiritual birth or the attainment of 'enlightenment' by the Buddha under the Bodhi tree in Buddha Gayā numerous legends have grown; and they have served as good themes for treatment in literature and art. The Lālitavistara gives the following account of the many things that happened on the eve of his enlightenment: After his long fast the Bōdhisattva was given a golden vessel of milk-rice by Sujātā, the daughter of the village headman of Urvilā. He went to the Nairaṇjana, 'the river of Nāgas' to have a refreshing bath. After that when he wished to sit on a sand bank in the river the Nāga daughter inhabiting the Nairaṇjana brought him a jewelled throne. After partaking the food seated on the golden throne, he threw away the golden bowl into the water. Sāgara, the Nāgarāja took it immediately and wanted to take it to his abode. But Indra, who assumed the form of garuḍa and held the vajra in his beak tried to rob the Nāga of the bowl. Failing to secure it by force, he

54. Aurel Stein, The Thousand Buddhas, pp. 52 ff., pl. xxxvii; also Fa-Hien (Legge), pl. ii where nine dragons are seen spitting water from the clouds.
reassumed his original form and begged for the vessel from the Nāga; and on obtaining it he took it to heaven and instituted an annual ‘festival of the bowl’. The precious throne on which the Bōdhisattva sat was preserved by the Nāga daughter as an object of worship. This legend in the life of the Buddha is illustrated in five panels in a series of one hundred and twenty sculptured tableaux on the Borobudur monument.\(^55\)

The Bōdhisattva’s progress from the R. Nairaṅjana towards the Sacred Tree was something of a triumphal march when he was followed by a body of heavenly beings among whom was Kāla or Kālika Nāgarāja who foretold the approaching enlightenment of the Buddha. This finds good description in the Lalitavistara, Mahāvastu, Buddhacarita and Nidānakatha, though there are some minor differences among them regarding some details. This portion in the life of the Buddha is rendered into plastic art in the sculptured railing pillar at Amarāvati. “In the centre a flight of Hamsas or sacred geese are winging their way across a sheet of water between two trees. A hand issues from the right hand tree, with two circular objects in it, and the geese under it look as if falling dead on the shore, but it may be they are only flying downwards. On the sand are five impressions of the sacred feet. There were probably originally eight, and the two birds, apparently peacocks, are somewhat indistinctly seen strutting flowers in pots, and on the right hand the Nāgarāja is seen with his seven-headed snakehood and behind him his three wives, over each of whose heads may be seen the single-headed snake which always makes them.\(^56\)

The sheet of water seems to be the R. Niraṅjana; the footprints obviously symbolise the Buddha crossing the river. The geese in the upper part are but “birds fluttering in the sky” in a reverential attitude towards the Buddha, and making pradakṣiṇa of him. This is well indicated by two of the birds appearing to fall down. The single foot print in the middle of the river just above the two peacocks stands for the Buddha in


\(^56\) Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, p. 190; also pl. lviii.
the act of crossing the river. The hand projecting from a tree at the right hand top shows that he "was supported as by hand by the trees on the other side of the river," as the Buddhacarita says. On reaching the opposite shore he was greeted by Nāgarāja Kāla who predicted of the Buddha's approaching enlightenment. The three women by his side are certainly his wives. It is not so easy to identify the figures on the left. Apparently they are Nāgakanyās with offerings of lotus flowers to the Bodhisattva. This identification is supported by the scene depicted in the central medallion lower down. It shows a group of women paying reverence to the invisible Bodhisattva symbolised by the Bodhi tree. Two of them carry a bowl; and that shows that they represent the village girls of Urvila headed by Sujātā. This episode was one of the themes for the Graeco-Buddhist art of Gāndhāra.

According to the Vinaya-Piṭaka the Buddha after his enlightenment spent some weeks in meditation at various places near the Bodhi-tree. Of the last two weeks, one was passed by the Buddha in company with Mucilinda, the king of serpents, who sheltered him from a great storm with his hoods. This incident is combined with the episode of the Buddha passing the last week under a nyagrodha tree in one of the sculptured panels from Sānci. During that week there were heavy rains attended by cold winds. Therefore the serpent king Mucilinda issued from his abode and enveloping the Buddha's body seven times within coils, spread his outspread hoods over the Master's head with the prayer that the Blessed One might be saved from cold, heat, wind, gnats, flies, creeping things etc. After a week, when the rains and storm had ceased the Nāgarāja changed his form into that of a Brahman youth and stood in reverence before the Buddha, raising his joined hands. This incident is found told with some variations in the Nidānakatha, Lalitavistara and the Mahāvastu.

This interesting incident in the life of the Buddha has lent itself admirably for plastic rendering, though the examples of such art in India are only few. One of the earliest such examples is a panel from Sānci, preserved now in the local museum. The

panel shows the nyagrodha tree decorated with garlands. On either of its sides is seen a garland-carrying kinnara hovering in the air. The Buddha’s presence is indicated by an empty seat in front of the tree. In the fore-ground the Nāgarāja in the shape of a human being wearing a five-fold snake hood is seated on what appears to be a cluster of rocks. On both sides of him two of his queens are shown sitting on wicker stools and behind them are female attendants holding cauries. The Nāgis, as usual, have each only a single snake hood.57a

The subject is treated in an entirely different fashion in the art of Amarāvati. The Buddha is portrayed here as seated cross-legged on the folds of the serpent whose many-headed hood is seen in the halo around it. A very good representation of this motif is from Cambodia where it could have been introduced from Amarāvati.

It is interesting to find that the Buddha sheltered by the Nāga Muculinda has its counterpart in Brahmanical and Jaina art. In the former we notice not only Viṣṇu reclining on Adi Śeṣa but also in some cave temples seated on his folded coils, and having for his canopy his extended hoods. With regard to the Nāga’s place in Jainism we shall have occasion to see it later.

After delivering his first sermon in the Deer Park at Banaras the Buddha returned to Ūrvilva, where there lived three Brahman ascetics, the Kaśyapa brothers. He requested Urvilva Kaśyapa to permit him to stay for a night in the room in which his sacred fire was kept. The permission was given to him, but he was informed that there was a serpent king of great magical power there. When the Buddha was in deep contemplation in it the serpent emitted a cloud of smoke by his fire, but his fire was subdued by the Buddha by his own fire ‘leaving in tact the skin and flesh and bones’ alone of the snake. On account of this, as also of a number of other miracles of his, Kaśyapa of Urvilva accepted the spiritual superiority of the Buddha. The victory of the Buddha over the Nāga in the fire hut is Sāṇci.58 In the panel the fire indicative of the Buddha’s tejas is seen gushing

57a. See Plate III.
58. See Plate IV.
forth from the roof. The five headed snake is visible on the seat, while the three Kaśyapas are seen with their matted hair, jata and garments of bark (valkala). The other details in the panel show that it was an Indian hermitage. This episode in the life of the Buddha is represented in art in a few other places also. In Amarāvati the Buddha is represented in the fire-hut by his two foot-prints over which appears the five-hooded Nāga. The hut is surrounded by a group of six hermits seated with hands raised in adoration. The Peshawar and Lahore museums contain many sculptures of the Graeco-Buddhist school representing this episode.\(^{58a}\)

The Buddha performed a great miracle at Śrāvasti, where his spiritual superiority was challenged by six heads of heretical sects. In the presence of Prasēnajit and a large crowd of spectators he first rose into the air and caused flames of fire and streams of water gush forth alternately from the upper and lower parts of his body. Then with Brahmā and Śakra on both his sides, he sat on a big golden lotus of one thousand leaves created by Nanda and Upananda, Other lotuses on all his sides, each with a Buddha seated in it, were also created. By such magical multiplication of his own form he made it appear that the sky was peopled by a multitude of Buddhas who seemed to walk, sit down etc. They talked among themselves, and emitted flames, flashes of lightning and streams of water. Thus the Buddha exhibited his superiority to the other teachers who became confounded.

This episode in the life of the Buddha is represented sculpturally and pictorially in the art of Bhārhūt, Gāndhāra, Ṛṣiṣṭhī, Sārnath etc. The motif of the padmāsana (lotus throne) being supported by a pair of Nāgas became in due course only a conventional and decorative device, even in bas-reliefs depicting scenes having nothing to do with the Buddha’s miracle at Śrāvasti. The central panel in the outer wall of the Chandi Mēndut, the Buddhist temple near Borobudur is an instance in point. In it is found a four-armed deity with two attendants, each seated on a conventional lotus flower. The stalk of the lotus supporting the central

\(^{58a}\) ASR., 1909-10, pp. 57 ff. pl. xx, fig. a, b and c.

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figure is clasped by two Nāgas with triple snake-hood whose lower limbs are hidden by the waves from which the lotuses seem to rise. The position of these two Nāgas resembles that of Nanda and Upananda in Indian sculptures illustrating the miracle of Śrāvasti. In Chandi Mēndut the central figure appears to be a goddess possibly Cūndā or Tārā. 59

A particular individual Gangi was born as a serpent (Apalāla) and gave immense trouble to the people in the area in which he lived. Taking pity on them the Buddha along with his companion Vajrapāni came there. When Vajrapāni threatened the dragon by smiting the mountain side near the water where the serpent was, he became frightened, and agreed to the advice of the Buddha that he should not injure the people. This local legend near Swat has been a favourite theme in the Graeco-Bacterian art of Gāndhāra. The Buddha exceeding the other figures in size occupies the centre of the panel. He is turned towards a group formed by the frightened Apalāla accompanied by a few Nāgis. The Nāgarāja is shown either standing at the Buddha's side or from the waters of the source of which he is the presiding deity. He and his followers raise their joined hands in token of reverence for the Buddha. Over the group of Apalāla and his followers we see Vajrapāni smiting the rock with his thunderbolt. He is also represented on the Buddha's left side standing as his companion.

When the Buddha died in the country of the Mallas and his body was cremated there arose a quarrel over the division of his holy relics. At the intervention of a certain Brahman Drona they were divided into eight parts and distributed among various clans and countries, and over each of them a stūpa was erected. Though not mentioned in the earlier accounts of this story, in later ones, the Nāgas are mentioned as one of the recipients. A medallion from Amarāvati supports this account. In the centre of it is seen a richly decorated throne on which is placed a relic casket. Behind it stands a Nāgarāja between two cauri bearers, each with a snake hood over his head. Above these three personages is an elaborate canopy. The rest of the medallion contains a number of figures, obviously belonging to the serpent king's court.

Rāmagrāma was a place where a šārīra stūpa was erected over a few of the bodily relics of the Buddha. That was guarded by the Nāgas; and when Aśoka wanted to open it and use the relics for the construction of several stūpas he was dissuaded from doing so by the leader of this Nāgas. The subject of the worship of the stūpa by the Nāgas (serpents) is a favourite one in the art of Sanchi as may be seen from its copious rendering on a middle architrave of the Southern Gateway of the Great Stūpa at Sāanchi. 59a. The scene depicts the worship of the stūpa by four Nāgas with their family. The Nāgas, human in appearance, are distinguished by their five-headed hoods whereas their wives and servants are shown each with a single hood. All of them pay reverence to the relic shrine. This theme is also found in the sculptures of Amarāvati in a slightly modified form.

The many incidents in the life of the Buddha as also the accounts that we have about the preservation of his relics show that the Nāgas were closely connected with Buddhism. It is generally believed that the Buddha in his life time was able to convert a large number of Nāgas to his new religion and he received much support from them.

THE NĀGAS AND JAINISM

As said earlier the Nāga cult is closely connected with Jainism also. Among the gods in Pātāla, according to Jaina cosmogony, there are two main classes, Bhavanapati and Vyantara. The first group is divided into ten minor divisions. Among them Nāga Kumāra is one. The body of its members is white. Their favourite garments are green and on their crown is a serpent’s hood: a symbol. The Vyantara group consists of demons, again of various groups. Of them the black bodied Mahoraga (the seventh) has the snake tree as his symbol. 60 The Pārvanāthacarita says that while Pārvanātha, the 23rd Tirthankara was engaged in his devotion his enemy caused a great rain to fall upon him. But the serpent Dhavanidhara came and as Seva-Nāgari overshotowed his head as with a chhata. In the Satruṇjayaṁabhāṁya Dharaṇa, the Nāga king, is represented as approaching Pārvā while engaged

59a. See Plate V.
60. Mrs. Stevenson, Heart of Jainism, pp 268-9.
in his second kāyotsarga or profound meditation at Śivapuri in the Kausamoaka forest, and holding his out-spread hood (phāṇa) over him as an umbrella. It is said that from this the town obtained the name of Ahicchatra. In Jaina icons, sculptures and paintings Parśvanatna is usually represented as one with nine hands, a serpent on the seat and snake hoods over his head and attended by the Yakṣa Dharaṇēndra and the Yakṣīṇī Padmāvati.

The colossal statue of Gomaṭēśvara at Śravaṇa Belgola, the greatest monuments of the Western Ganga period, which is about 57 feet high is represented as surrounded by ant-hills from which emerge serpents; and a climbing plant twines itself round both the legs and arms of the statue. With this may be compared two other statues, one a Ėnūr and the other at Karkala both in the South Canara district. The one at Ėnūr which is about 35 feet high is represented as having each hand resting on the hood of a fully-formed cobra. A creeper twines round the thighs and arms while the cobra with its hood forms a support for each hand. The one at Karkala which is 41 feet 5 inches in height is similar to the one at Śravaṇa Belgola with regard to its representation. In all these cases the existence of the ant-hill with which the Nāga is closely associated deserves to be noticed.

According to some legends relating to ancient Madura the Śramaṇas (Buddhists and Jains) who were envious of the prevalence and popularity of the Śaiva religion in the Pāṇḍya capital created by their incantations and sent out on three occasions three super-natural emissaries in the form of an elephant, a Nāga and a cow for the destruction of Madurai. Lord Sundarēśvara of Madurai is said to have petrified these monsters into their present forms of hill called Anaimalai, Nāgamalai and Paśumalai. Here the Nāga associated with the Jains and the Buddhists deserves notice.

63. See Plate, VI.
64. MER., 1926-7, pt. ii, para, 8.
Not only has the Nāga played such a large part in the different religions, religious traditions and practices in the country but also has served as a great source of inspiration for folk-art. Largely due to its elastic body and graceful movement it is a very convenient object for artistic adoption. It has been the general Hindu practice to adorn, for instance, with rice flour the front of the house with the drawings of different shapes and designs among others of the hooded snake. Some of them are really good from the points of view of technique, artistic skill, execution and variety. The figure at times resembles a geometrical quadrilateral with the tail and the head of the serpent beautifully adjusted at the top. The serpent is adopted in the sphere of folk painting in different parts of the country. Earthen pitchers meant for serpent worship are beautified with the paintings of the serpent. Again the serpent is adopted as the popular design for making ornaments for women, such as what we call here nāgarī for the head and vangi and nāgaottu (coiled armlets). They are however becoming less popular now among young women and girls. Designs of the serpents are also used as mugappu for bangles, rings etc.

A complete investigation of the political fortunes of the Nāgas and the gradual evolution of the Nāga cult and Nāga deities will help a great deal in the reconstruction of the cultural and religious history of our country. The subject is vast; the material is very dispersed and difficult to handle. Much sustained and patient work is needed to have a full view of the role of the Nāgas in Indian History.