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Art. VII.—Serpent-Worship in India

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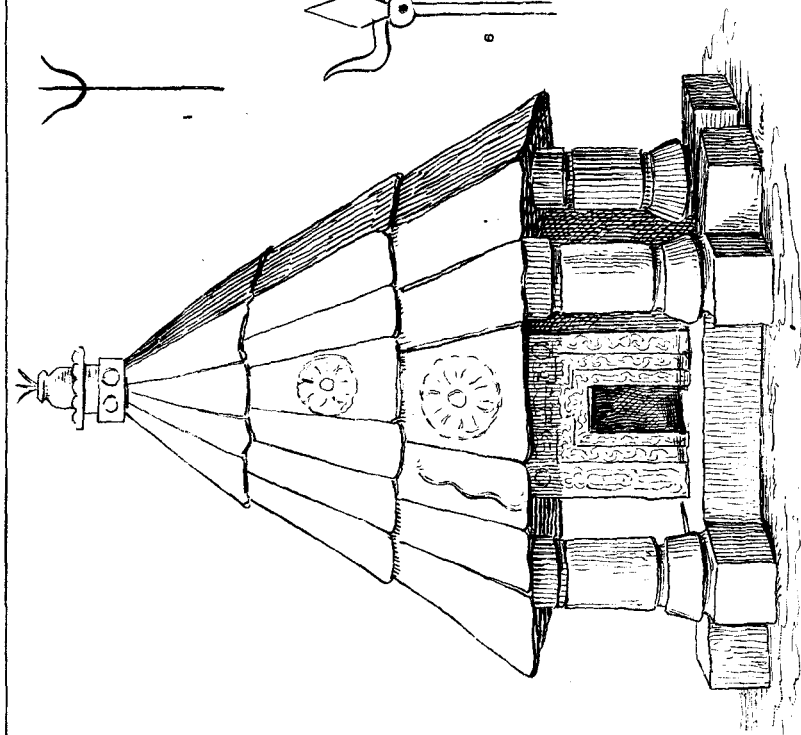
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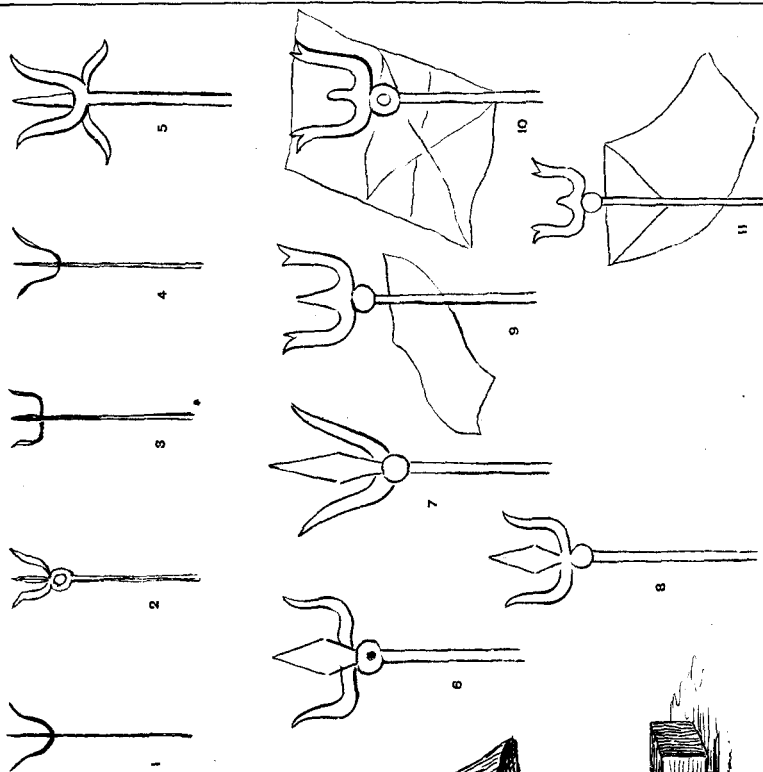
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TEMPLE OF BASDEO (VÁSUKI) AT LOHANGA, CHATUR-DHAR PASS.



1, 2, 3, 4, NAGA TEMPLES--VOTIVE OFFERINGS. 5, 6, 7, MUNDI--MONUMENTS.
8, JOWALA MUNHI TEMPLE. 9, 10, BHILSA TOPE. 11, SANCHI TOPE.

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OF

THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY.

ART. VII.—*Serpent-Worship in India.* By Surgeon-Major
C. F. OLDHAM.

FROM the Rājatarāṅginī we learn that, when Kāśyapa raised Kāshmir above the waters, Nīla, whose royal canopy was the hood of the serpent, reigned there over the Nāgas.¹

There has been much speculation as to who or what these Nāgas were. They hold a very prominent position in Indian folk-lore, where they generally appear in human shape; and ancient writings abound with allusions to them, as a people. But, in the allegorical descriptions of later writers, they become supernatural beings, or actual serpents; and are consigned to subterranean regions.

In the mountainous country bordering upon Kashmir, however, and especially in the tract lying between the Chenab and Ravi rivers, a remnant of the Nāgas still survives, in human form.

These people have remained under more or less independent chiefs, of their own race, until comparatively recent times. They have escaped conversion to Islām. And they have saved their temples, and their idols, from the destructive zeal of Mahomedan iconoclasts; as well as from the almost equally destructive bigotry of the orthodox Brahman.

¹ Rājatarāṅginī, Calc. ed. i. 4.

Here, the serpent-gods Seshā; Vāsuki, Bāsdev, or Bāsak Nāg; Takshaka, or Takht Nāg; and other Nāgas less known to fame; are still worshipped with their ancient rites. And, here, the Takshaka-jattrā, or festival of Takshaka, is still held; as it was in the time of Nāra Rāja, who reigned some two or three centuries before the Christian era.¹

The forms of worship, and the architecture of the temples, have probably undergone but little change since those days. And the serpent-gods were doubtless worshipped then, as they are now, not as dangerous reptiles, nor as symbols; but as the deified rulers of a powerful people, whose tribal emblem was the Nāga.

The Nāga, or hooded serpent, the Cobra-di-Capello of the present day, was held sacred; and tradition says that the killing one of these, even by accident, involved the heaviest penalties. I have heard old men regret that snakes are now killed in the country of Bāsdev.

The temples, however, are not dedicated to the serpent; but to the Nāga rajas, the ancient rulers of the race.

Sesh Nāg, Takht Nāg, Bāsak Nāg, and many others, are all worshipped in human form. But each has the hoods, of five, seven, or nine, serpents, forming a canopy over his head; as shown in the illustrations to Fergusson's "Tree and Serpent Worship."²

In some cases, other Nāgas of less note are represented as men, attended by snakes, but without the serpent-canopy. There are also shrines dedicated to Nāginis, or female Nāgas; who are said to have been the wives of Nāga chiefs; and who, in many cases, are becoming identified with Devi or Dūrga.

In these primitive temples, there are none of the monstrosities, which are so common in other parts of India; such as Nāgas with seven heads, or men and women with serpents' tails.

Almost everywhere else, in India, the Nāga is now worshipped in the form of a serpent; and holds a sub-

¹ Rājatarangini, Calc. ed. p. 15 and note.

² Tree and Serpent Worship, Plates xxiv. xlv. lxx. lxxx.

ordinate position compared with other Hindu divinities. Here, however, the serpent gods are the chief deities of the people. No others hold an equal position, not even Siva himself.

Outside some of the temples, are to be seen the linga and bull of Mahādeo; but they are treated with little reverence. In one case, I saw them used, as seats, by the headman of the village and his friends; and even by the low-caste village chokidar. I was told, too, that one of their chiefs had tried his sword upon one of the lingas, which had a piece chipped off it. This was not done, however, to show any disrespect for Siva; but from dislike to the images themselves, which had been set up by one of the Kashmir rajas, and were looked upon as a sort of badge of conquest.

In only one place did I find the linga allowed inside the temple of a Nāga raja; and it was said to have been put there, only a few years before, by the previous headman of the village.

In these temples I could discover no trace of any connexion between the Nāga and the phallus.

The form of worship differs little from that at the shrines of other deotas in the Himālaya. Goats and sheep are sacrificed; votive offerings are made; lights and incense are burned; and the deity is consulted, through his inspired prophet.

The different serpent-gods, represented by their insignia, priests, and office-bearers, visit each other's festivals. These are held at all the principal temples; in front of each of which is an open grassy space surrounded by seats arranged somewhat in the form of an amphitheatre. Each caste and family has its allotted position, to which it is strictly kept, according to ancient custom.

Musicians are attached to the temples. These are, as usual in the hills, of aboriginal descent, and therefore of low caste. They are not allowed to approach within a certain distance of the shrine.

Most of the temples appear to be very ancient. They are built of massive logs of timber, and are ornamented by carved

representations of the sun, serpent, and other objects. They are sheltered in groves of fine old deodar trees, many of which are now, sad to say, being cut up into railway sleepers.

Within each temple is the image of the Nāga raja; and usually a number of iron trisūlas, placed there by worshippers, as votive offerings.

The representation of the sun occupies a prominent position at all these shrines. It is generally carved upon the roof, and is repeated in other parts of the building.

In the hill country bordering upon the Ravi are many temples or sthānas dedicated to Indra Nāg.

The legend connected with these is that a Nāga chief, whose name appears to have been lost, became Indra; and that, after reigning over the gods for a long period, he returned to earth and again became a Nāga.

There can be little doubt that this must have been Nahush, whose story is told in the Mahābhārata;¹ and who is mentioned in the lists of the sons of Kāsyapa and Kadru in that epic,² as well as in the Vayu Purana³ and Harivansa.⁴

Indra Nāg is represented in human form, with a crown upon his head. He is armed with a bow, and attended by snakes.

Several Asura chiefs appear to have assumed divine honours. Amongst others who did so was Rāji brother of Nahush, who, although he must have been a Nāga, was recognized as Indra by the Devas.⁵

Vāsuki, or Bāsdev, as he is commonly called, is said to have been engaged in wars with Garuda.

According to the local legend, the serpent chief was on one occasion surprised by his enemy; and only escaped by taking refuge in the Kailās Kūṇḍ. This is a mountain

¹ Mahābhārata, Udyoga, Sainyodyoga Parva, x. 26; Adi, Sambhava Parva, lxxv. 230.

² *Ib.* Adi Parva, Astika Parva, xxxv. 113. (All references to the Mahābhārata are to P. C. Roy's Calcutta ed.)

³ Vishnu Purana, Ed. Hall, I. xxi. 74, note.

⁴ Harivansa, Langlois, I. xxii.

⁵ Vishnu Purana, Wilson, 411.

lake, between the Chenab and Ravi rivers, at a height of some 13,000 feet above the sea.

On the occasion referred to, Vāsuki was saved by the devotion of his wazir, who is said to have given his own flesh to Garuda. By this is probably meant that the wazir lost his life in an attempt to rescue the raja. In the meantime, however, an army was raised, by which Garuda was defeated and killed. At least, so says the legend.

Upon this, Bāsdev ordered that the wazir, Jibbutbāhan (Jimūtavāhana), should thenceforth be worshipped in the same temple with himself. And, to this day, the figures of the raja and his wazir are placed side by side.

All this would seem to point to warfare between rival tribes, rather than to any supernatural or symbolic conflict. Be this as it may, however, the flight of Bāsdev to the Kailās Kūnd is still commemorated by a great festival, which is held at the Kūnd in the month of September; and which is attended by all the Hindu population of the surrounding country. The event, therefore, has probably a foundation in fact.

The lake itself is considered so sacred, that only the two highest castes are allowed to approach it. The others look on, from a respectful distance.

It seems possible that this legend may have suggested the story of Jimūtavāhana, in the *Kathā Sarit Sāgara*;¹ as well as the plot of the *Nāga-nanda*, which is in fact the same story dramatized.

In the *Nāga-nanda* the scene is laid near Gokārna, on the Malabar coast; but the hero comes from the Himālaya. In each case the events occur in the reign of Vāsuki; in each case the hero's name is Jimūtavāhana; and in each case he gives himself up to Garūda, to save the life of another. Here, however, the resemblance ceases. In the drama, and the story, Vāsuki is represented as having been obliged to provide one of his subjects daily to be eaten by Garūda. The place of one of these victims is taken by Jimūtavāhana,

¹ *Kathā Sarit Sāgara*, I. 175; *Nāgananda*, Boyd's trans.

who is partially devoured; Garūda then, finding out his mistake, releases him; promises to give up the destruction of living beings; and restores to life the Nāgas he had previously consumed.

These serpent-worshipping people no longer call themselves Nāgas. Probably they never did so. The name may have been applied to them by others. As, however, the religion of the country still retains its ancient form, we may suppose that the population can have changed but little. It consists of Tākhas or Takhas, who form the principal land-holding class; some Brahmans, most of whom are cultivators; Mēghs, Chināls, and other tribes, included under the general term of Kolis; and a few Musselman immigrants from the valley of Kashmir.

The Tākhas say that they are of the race of Takht Nāg and Bāsdeo. They hold the place of honour at the festivals held at the Nāga temples, to which they in many cases act as priests; and, with the exception of Brahmans, they are the only people allowed to approach the sacred Kailās Kūnd. In fact there can be no doubt that they are a remnant of the Nāgas, and of the once-powerful Tākha tribe, which held nearly the whole Panjāb, including this mountain tract, still sacred to the serpent gods.

These descendants of Takshaka are fine-looking men. Many of them serve in our native regiments; and the Kashmir army has always been largely recruited from them.

Both in speech and physiognomy they resemble the neighbouring tribes of Rājputs. They claim Solar descent, and are included by the bard Chand amongst the thirty-six royal races.¹

In Chumba and Kangra, however, most of the Takhas, having taken to agriculture, are now classed as rāthis, or rājputs who cultivate the land, and who consequently rank below those who do only military service.

In these peaceful times there is but little employment for fighting men, so that rājputs have to follow the plough in constantly increasing numbers.

¹ Annals of Rajasthan, i. 75.

The ancient Tākari character, which is still used throughout the hill country of the Panjāb, derives its name from this people.

Having thus far described the present representatives of the Nāgas, I will now bring forward such details, bearing upon their ancient history, as I have been able to gather from different sources. Of some of these I shall venture to suggest explanations, which have not I think been hitherto put forward.

From the vast extent of country over which the Nāga people have left their mark, some idea may be formed of their numbers and power in ancient India.

From Kashmir to the Narbada, and even further south, the names of Bāsak Nag (Vāsuki) and Takshaka are household words.

Nāga rajas ruled throughout the Himālaya as well as over a great part of Northern and Central India, the valley of the Indus, and the country near the mouth of that river. Besides this, from Pātala and other ports, colonies were established on the coasts of India, in Ceylon, and probably even in more distant lands.

The allegorical stories of the Puranas and epic poems confirm this wide-spread influence of the Nāga people; as also do the early Buddhist writings.

The legend of the churning of the ocean by means of the serpent Vāsuki no doubt refers to the commerce carried on by this chief, or his subjects, with distant lands.¹

The reposing of Vishṇu upon the serpent points to an early connexion between that deity and the Nāga race.

The fabled subterranean Pātala of the Purāṇas was evidently the valley of the Indus; and, as we shall presently see, its different regions were but the territories of different chiefs.

Here, amongst other cities of the Asuras, was Pātala, one of the early settlements of the Solar race; the capital of the Nāga rajas; and the port in which Nearchus fitted

¹ Mahābhārata, Astika Parva, xviii. 79.

out his fleet. Here also was Hiranyapura,¹—the city of the great Asura Hiranyakāshipu, and the scene of the Man-lion avatar,—which was, according to local tradition, the present Multan.

This tradition is not merely local; for, at Mhow or Māo in Bhawalpur, I heard the people recite a couplet, to the effect that Māo, Matēla, and Multān, were built by this Asura chief.

The naval power of the serpent race is confirmed by frequent allusions to its chiefs, as ruling countries in, or beneath, the sea. Thus, Yadu, the ancestor of Krishna, was taken prisoner by, and married the five daughters of, the Nāga raja Dhūmavarna.

The realm of this chieftain was beneath the sea, and was called Rutnadwīpa (Ceylon?). In the centre of his capital was a banner, upon which “shone a swastika equalling the moon in beauty.”²

Harita, one of the sons of Yadu, succeeded his grandfather in this kingdom; the inhabitants of which were Nishādas, who fished for pearls, and had ships and trade.³

The Nāga raja's subjects being Nishādas, shows this to have been a colony, or a conquest.

The rishi Nārada, in describing the audience hall of Varuṇa, mentions, as amongst the company present, “the Ādityas, and Vāsuki, Takshaka, and the Nāga Airāvata; and Krishna and Lohita, Padma and Chitra; and the Nāgas called Kambala and Aśwatara; and Dhritarāshṭra and Valabhaka; and Matimat and the mighty Kandaka; and Prahlāda, Mushikada, and Janamejaya; all having auspicious marks, and maṇḍalas, and extended hoods.”⁴

Pātala appears to have included the whole Indus valley, and possibly also much of the adjacent country. Moreover, it was occupied by Daityas and Dānavas, as well as by Nāgas.

¹ Mahābhārata, Udyoga, Bhagavatyaṇa Parva, xcix. 306.

² Harivansa, Langlois, I. 399.

³ *Ib.* I. 401.

⁴ Mahābhārata, Sabhā Parva, Lokapala-Sabhākhyana Parva, ix. 29.

In the Vishṇu Purāṇa the seven regions of Pātala are said to be embellished with magnificent palaces, in which dwell numerous Dānavas, Daityas, Yakshas, and great serpent-gods.¹

The Vāya Purāṇa mentions the names of some of the Daityas and Nāgas in Pātala, as Naimichi, Kāliya, Haya-griva, Takshaka, Prahlāda, Hemaka, Kālanemi, Vainatya (Garuḍa), Hiranyaksha, Kirmira, Pulomat, Vāsuki, and Bali.²

In this list, besides the great Nāga chiefs, the principal Asura leaders are included; and even Garuḍa, the enemy of the Nāgas.

Here it may be asked, who was Garuḍa? And why should he have been the deadly enemy of the serpent race.

No mere symbolism would seem to explain this enmity; nor even the story, told in the Mahābhārata, of the wager on the colour of the horse's tail.

The solution of both questions is, that the eagle and the serpent were totems of different tribes. These tribes, too, were neighbours, and unrelenting enemies. Both were dwellers in Pātala.³

According to the Mahābhārata⁴ both Garuḍa and the Nāgas were sons of Kāśyapa, by daughters of Daksha. They were therefore of Solar descent, and very closely related. Indeed Sesha says: "Vinatā's son, capable of ranging through the skies, is another brother of ours."⁵

Both Garuḍa and the Nāgas, or rather the tribes represented by them, were, on their arrival in India, engaged in hostilities with the aboriginal races. Garuḍa is described as tearing the bodies of the Yakshas, and devouring the Nishādas.⁶

At first, Garuḍa appears to have been in some degree dependent upon the Nāgas; but afterwards he threw off

¹ Vishṇu Purāṇa, Hall's ed. II. vol. v. p. 208.

² Vishṇu Purāṇa, ed. Hall. II. vol. v. p. 210.

³ Mahābhārata, Udyoga, Bhagavatyaṇa Parva, c. 308.

⁴ Mahābhārata, Adi, Astika Parva, xxxi. 106.

⁵ Mahābhārata, Adi Parva, Astika Parva, xxxvi. 114.

⁶ Ib. Adi, Astika Parva xxxii. 108; xxix. 98.

their yoke, and obtained from Indra the promise that they should be his food.¹ He was engaged, too, in warfare with other tribes of Solar race; for we are told that he devoured the elephant and the tortoise.² He also made an attack upon Indra, and carried off the amrita.³

Krishna, when he assumed the rôle of Vishnu, appears to have adopted Garuḍa as his ensign, and Sēsha as his couch. Or, rather, probably, the Garuḍa tribe, and some of the Nāgas, became supporters of Krishna, in his struggles with rival chiefs, and with the more orthodox deities.

In the Mahābhārata, the Garuḍas are mentioned as a people or tribe. Thus Nārada says to Mātali: "This race, O Charioteer, hath multiplied from the six sons of Gadura." "I will now enumerate the chiefs by their names, listen to me, O Mātali! This race is much regarded in consequence of the favour shown to it by Vishnu."⁴ The rishi then gives a list of forty-eight names; and adds: "These sons of Gadura, that I name, dwell in only a single province of this region (Pātala). I have mentioned those only that have won distinction by might, fame, and achievements."⁵

Garuḍa therefore, like the Nāga, was the emblem or totem of one of the tribes of the Solar race.

Pātala, as we have seen, is said to have been occupied by Daityas and Dānavas, as well as by Nāgas and Garuḍas.

It is evident that the tribes inhabiting the Indus valley, and the neighbouring country, were sometimes called Asurās, Daityas, or Dānavas; and sometimes distinguished by their tribal names. Thus the Asura Maya reminds the Madra King of Sākala that he and the other Madras are Dānavas.⁶

The Asuras, therefore, were all of the same race; they all, as we shall presently see, spoke the same language; and they all worshipped the sun. They were divided, however, into

¹ Mahābhārata, Adi, Astika Parva xxxiv. 111.

² *Ib.* xxx. 102.

³ *Ib.* xxxiii. 109.

⁴ Mahābhārata, Udyoga, Bhagavatya Parva, c. 308.

⁵ *Ib.* c. 309.

⁶ Kathā Sarit Sāgara, i. 416.

various tribes. These were known by different names ; and were distinguished by different emblems, as Nāga, Garuḍa, Aṣwa, etc. They were also sometimes called by the names of these totems.

Thus the Nāgas were one of the tribes of Asuras.

Not only, however, were the Daityas and Dānavas sons of Kāśyapa ; but the Suras or Devas, who are generally supposed to represent the Brahmanical tribes, were also descended from the same ancestor. They too were sons of Kāśyapa by a daughter of Daksha.

Indeed it seems certain that the Suras or Devas, and the Asuras or Daityas and Dānavas, were of the same race.

Vaisampāyana says : "The son of Mārīchi is Kāśyapa ; and Kāśyapa's offspring are the Devas and Asuras."¹

In another place, Mātali says to the rishi Nārada : "The Devas and Dānavas, though brothers, are ever hostile to each other."²

Again, we learn from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa that the Devas and Asuras, both sons of Prajāpati, obtained their father's inheritance.³

Thus we see that all these tribes, whether called Suras, Devas, Asuras, Daityās, Dānavas, or Nāgas, traced their descent from a common ancestor. They were, however, frequently engaged in wars with each other, and these wars were sometimes owing to religious disputes. The same tribes do not, however, appear to have been always engaged on the same side ; as the Asuras sometimes fought for, and sometimes against, Indra and the Devas.

Thus in the battle between Bali and Indra, Hayagriva, one of the chief Asura warriors, on the side of Bali, had upon his banner the device of a Nāga with seven heads.⁴ Yet in this same battle other Nāgas fought on the side of Indra. This shows that the strife was inter-tribal, and not a war of races.

¹ Mahābhārata, Adi Parvi, Sambhava Parvi, lxvi. 190.

² *Ib.* Udyoga Parvi, Bhagavatya Parvi, xcix. 308.

³ Muir. S. Texts, iv. 59.

⁴ Harivansa, ii. 410.

It appears, further, that all the descendants of Kāśyapa spoke the same language. At all events, the first language of which we have any trace in the Indus Valley and Panjāb is Sanskrit.

The names of the Asura chiefs, of their cities and provinces, and even the name Sindhu itself, are of Sanskrit origin. The Pali was derived from Śanskrit, and so are the dialects now spoken in the Indus valley, Rajputāna, and the Panjāb, including that used by the remnant of the Takhas. Moreover, we have the authority of Pāṇini that Sanskrit was used amongst the Vāhikas, or Bāhikas,¹ who, as we shall presently see, were Nāgas.

All these people, too, worshipped the Sun, as became the descendants of Kāśyapa. Their chief cities long remained the great centres of Sun-worship, and were the capitals of the great chieftains of the Solar race.

In addition to all this we find that the Asuras had Brahman priests.

From the Mahābhārata we learn that Sakra, the son of a rishi, was the chief priest of the Asuras. And that he had four sons, Tāshtadhāra, Atri, Raudra, and Kūrmi, who were also priests of the Asūras. They were like the sun himself in energy, and devoted to Brahma and the welfare of the world.²

We are also told that "the learned Sakra, of great intelligence and wisdom, of rigid vows, and leading the life of a Bramachāri, divided himself in twain by the power of asceticism; and became the spiritual guide both of the Daityas and of the Devas."³

Even when the Devas and Asūras quarrelled, we find Brahmans on both sides. Sakra, son of Brighu, and other Brahmans, lighted fires, said mantras, and recited the Atharva Veda and Vedic hymns, for the success of Prahlāda against Indra.⁴

¹ Muir. S. Texts, ii. 354.

² Mahābhārata Adi Parva, Sambhava Parva, lxv. 137.

³ *Ibid.* lxvi. 19.

⁴ Harivansa, Langlois, ii. 452.

Then, the wandering ascetics passed backwards and forwards between the Suras and the Asuras; and were equally well received by both.

The rishi Nārada is said to have known all the residents of Pātala.¹ And on his return from a visit to the country of the Asūras, he exclaimed: "What can be compared to Pātala, where the Nāgas are decorated with brilliant and pleasure-bestowing jewels? Who will not delight in Pātala, where the lovely daughters of the Daityas and Dānavas wander about, fascinating even the most austere?"²

Here, the Nāgas, Daityas, and Dānavas, are evidently the same people.

Besides all this, however, we find Nāgas in Swarga, with the Adityas, Vāsus, and Rajarshis.³ And Takshaka himself was with Indra, in Swarga, at the time of Janamejaya's sacrifice.⁴

Thus we see that these tribes, whether called Asuras, Daityas, Dānavas, Suras, Devas, or Aryans, were all descended from a common ancestor; all spoke the same language; all worshipped the Sun; all had Brahman priests; and all went, when they died, to the heaven of Indra. They must therefore have been of the same race.

It seems, in fact, that the difference between Devas and Asuras was one of orthodoxy only. This appears to be admitted in the Chandogya Upanishad, where it is said: "Therefore they call, even now, a man who does not give alms here, who has no faith, and offers no sacrifices, an Asura, for this is the doctrine of the Asuras."⁵

And it is even more strongly stated in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, where we find that the Devas and Asuras were both sons of Prajāpati, and "speaking alike they were alike;" but that the Devas, abandoning falsehood, adopted truth; while the Asuras, abandoning truth, adopted falsehood.⁶

¹ Mahābhārata Udyoga Parva, Bhagavatyaṇa Parva, xcvii. 303.

² Vishnu Purāṇa, Hall, ed. II. v. 210.

³ Harivansa, ii. 16.

⁴ Mahābhārata, Adi Parva, Astika Parva, liii. 150.

⁵ Sacred Books of East, vol. i. p. 137.

⁶ Origl. Sansk. Texts, vol. iv. pp. 59, 60.

There can be little doubt that this distinction between Devas and Asuras was brought about mainly by the development of orthodox institutions, after the advance of the Aryan tribes into the plains of India.

Several eminent authorities seem to consider that the development of these institutions commenced in the country to the eastward of the Saraswati, which thus became the holy land of the Brahmanical writers.¹

The Devas and Asuras being but different tribes of the same race, they were, on their first arrival in India, opposed only by the Dāsyus, or aborigines. They were thus able to overrun the country, and reduce the barbarous inhabitants to slavery, with comparative ease. But, when they began to quarrel amongst themselves, their difficulties increased.

This appears to have occurred at an early period, as, in the Rig Veda, Indra and Varuṇa are besought to slay both the Dāsa enemies and the Ārya.² And, again, Indra is asked to "remove far away the weapon of our enemy, be he Dāsa or Ārya."³

These tribes are first met with in the north and west of India. But Kāśyapa, their common ancestor, is said to have lived in Sakadwipa;⁴ or, in the Western region.⁵ The limits of either of these have not been very exactly defined. But the cradle of the Aryan race seems generally considered to have been in the country bordering upon the Kaspian Sea. And it was probably from thence, that the Nāgas and the rest of the family of Kāśyapa, set out for the invasion of India and other countries.

The possibility even of a connexion between the names Kāśyapa and Kaspian seems scarcely too bold a suggestion.

There appears, moreover, little reason to doubt, that the various birds, beasts, reptiles, and other objects, assigned as progeny to this ancestor of the Solar race, were really the

¹ Origl. Sansk. Texts, vol. ii. pp. 336, 338, 340.

² Muir, Sanskrit Texts, vol. ii. p. 361.

³ *Ib.* vol. ii. p. 362.

⁴ Harivansa, Langlois, ii. 28.

⁵ Mahābhārata, Udyoga, Bhagavatyaṇa Parva, cix. 329.

totems of the different tribes, into which his descendants became divided.

It is not improbable that the serpent-canopy, distinctive of the Nāga rajas, may have given rise to the legends of serpents with many heads, which are to be found in the ancient records of so many Asiatic peoples. And it seems possible that, amongst others, the three-headed Azi Dahāka of the Zend Avesta may have been a Nāga raja.

This serpent-chief, although he destroyed Yima and seized his kingdom, seems to have been of Aryan race. He sacrificed to Vāyu, an Aryan deity,¹ who was one of the Vedic gods, and was, in the Rigveda, associated with Indra.²

Possibly the legend may have had its origin in some remembrance of former intertribal warfare.

I have already said that the serpent-gods Sesha, Vāsuki, Takshaka, and others, were deified chiefs of the people whose tribal emblem was the Nāg.

Of these Sesha appears to have been earlier than the others. According to the Mahābhārata, they were all sons of Kāśyapa and Kadru; but we are told that Sesha was born first, and then Vāsuki.³

Sesha appears to have been on friendly terms with Garuḍa.⁴ This may account for the connexion between Krishna and the serpent chief, and for the position of the latter in the Brahmanical Pantheon.

This eldest of the serpent gods is represented as having been eminently religious and devoted to asceticism. And he is said to have gone under the earth, in order to support it, by desire of Brahma.⁵ He had evidently left this world before the troublous times referred to in the Mahābhārata; and the legend of his going under the earth may have arisen from his having been buried as an ascetic.

We are told that Gārga, the sage, having propitiated Sesha, acquired from him a knowledge of the principles of

¹ Zendavesta, S. B. E. ii. 253.

² Muir, Sansk. Texts, v. 144.

³ Mahābhārata, Adi, Astika Parva, xxxv. 113.

⁴ *Ib.* xxxvi. 114.

⁵ Mahābhārata, Adi Parva, Astika Parva, xxxvi. 115.

astronomical science, of the planets, and of the good and evil denoted by the aspects of the heavens.¹ And it may be observed that the use of magic and a control over the elements are frequently ascribed to the Nāgas and other Asuras.

Hiouen Thsang relates how, in his time, the people of Takhasila, when rain was wanted, visited the shrine of Elapatra Nāga.² And to this day, as is well known in the Panjāb, the Nāg is propitiated before any other deity when rain or fine weather is desired.

After Sesha came Vāsuki, or Bāsak Nāg, as he is often called in the vernacular; and he appears to have been succeeded by Takshaka.

These are the three great Nāga demigods, but there are many others of less note.

There can be little doubt that the names both of Vāsuki and Takshaka were used to represent their descendants long after they themselves had ceased to exist. This will account for the supernatural length of life assigned to them. It may be observed that the name of Vāsuki is more frequently mentioned in connection with Pātala, or Dhāt-
mandala as it is sometimes called; while that of Takshaka is often associated with the northern capital of Takhasila. The festival at the Kailās Kūnd, however, is certainly in honour of Vāsuki; although the district in which it is held must have been dependent upon Takhasilā. It is probable, therefore, that these two chiefs were not contemporaries, but successive rulers of the Nāga tribe.

Indeed, this seems to be confirmed by a passage in the Mahābhārata, in which it is said that the gods, having come to the banks of the Saraswati, there installed the excellent Nāga Vāsuki as king of all the snakes.³

This convocation of the deities is not unlikely to have been a real gathering, such as those already described; at which, on important occasions, the people assemble

¹ Vishṇu Purāṇa, Hall's ed. II. v. 213.

² Hiouen Thsang (Memoires), i. 152.

³ Mahābhārata, Salya, Gudāyuddhya Parva, xxvii. 149.

at some temple to meet and consult the gods, who are represented by their priests and insignia.

According to the Vishṇu and Vāyu Purāṇas, the brothers Takshaka and Pushkara, sons of Bharata of the Solar race, became rulers of Gandhāra; and their capitals were Takhasilā and Pushkaravati.¹ This confirms the statement in the Buddhist records that Takhasilā was one of the Solar capitals; as well as what has been said of the Solar origin of the Nāga chiefs.

At the time of the war of the Mahābhārata, the dominions of Takshaka appear to have included nearly the whole of the country between the Indus and the Jumna.

The Brahman Utanka, who is said to have afterwards instigated Janamejaya's serpent-sacrifice, thus addresses the Nāga raja: "O Takshaka, who formerly dwelt in Kurukshetra, and the forest of Khāndava."² So that the territory of this chieftain must have included the holy land of the Brahmans, as well as the site of Indraprastha or Delhi. This city indeed appears to have been originally called Khāndava.³

The Khāndava forest was burned by Krishṇa and Arjuna, in defiance of Indra, who was the friend of Takshaka.⁴

We learn also from the Mahābhārata, as well as from local tradition, that the Pāṇḍu Raja Parikshīt, grandson of Arjuna, was killed by Takshaka. According to legends still current in the Panjāb, this was in revenge for the abduction of a daughter of Bāsak Nāg, although the lady did all she could to save her husband.⁵

The same tradition says that Janamejaya, son of Parikshīt, on growing up, resolved to revenge his father's death; and so carried on an exterminating war with the Nāgas.

The story, as told in the Mahābhārata, is much more sensational; and has perhaps been embellished, in order to show the supernatural power of the Brahmans. According

¹ Vishṇu Purāṇa, Hall's ed. IV. iv. 319.

² Mahābhārata, Adi Parva, Pausya Parva, iii. 56.

³ *Ib.* Sabha, Rajasuyika Parva, xxxiii. 96.

⁴ *Ib.* Adi, Khāndava-daha Parva, cccxx. 632.

⁵ Panjāb Legends, 459.

to this version, Parikshīt, when hunting in the forest, met a Brahman devotee, who was under a vow of silence; and spoke to him, but received no reply. Irritated at this, the Raja took up a dead snake and threw it round the neck of the ascetic. The son of the latter, then coming up, cursed the Raja; and said that within seven days he would be killed by Takshaka. This prediction was fulfilled.¹

The story goes on to say that, on Janamejaya growing up, he called the Brahmans together, and requested them to perform a sacrifice for the extermination of the serpents. This was done; and, as the priests reciting mantras poured butter into the fire, the snakes came in crowds, and fell into the flames.²

Some great massacre of prisoners may have given rise to the story of the sacrifice.

The popular legends agree with the Mahābhārata, that the Nāgas were defeated by Janamejaya, and that neither Vāsuki nor Takshaka were present. Tradition, however, adds that the victory was obtained by treachery.

Takshaka is said to have taken refuge with Indra,³ which no doubt refers to his having died before these events. His son "the mighty Aswasena" is not again heard of.

Of the end of Vāsuki nothing is known. There are traditions, in which his name is mentioned, at a much later period; but these no doubt refer to his descendants.

The Panjāb abounds with legends of the Nāga rajas. According to one of these Sālivāhana, the conqueror of Vikramāditya, was a son of Bāsak Nāg.⁴ Sālivāhana lived long after the time of Vāsuki, but may have been one of his descendants. Indeed Colonel Tod says that he was of the race of Takshak.⁵

I have said that the Takhas no longer call themselves Nāgas, and that it is very doubtful whether they ever did so.

¹ Mahābhārata, Adi, Aṣṭika Parva, xli. 124.

² *Ib.* lii. 148.

³ Mahābhārata, Adi Parva, Aṣṭika Parva, liii. 150.

⁴ Panjāb Gazetteer (Sealkot), p. 14.

⁵ Annals of Rājasthan, i. 82.

We find also that this name is not applied to any of the tribes engaged in the great war of the Mahābhārata. The Bāhlikas or Bāhikas, however, with the Madras and other associated tribes, are frequently mentioned, and held a very prominent position amongst the allies of the Kauravas.¹

These people were, according to Hemachandra, also called Takhas,² and they held the country watered by the Indus and the five rivers of the Panjāb.³ This is the tract assigned to the great Nāga chiefs Vāsuki and Takshak, and it was occupied by the Takhas down to comparatively recent times.

The Madras and the Bāhlikas, or Bāhikas, were evidently the same people. In fact the Madras, Arattas, and Jarttikas, all appear to have been included under the name Bāhikas.⁴ Thus Sākala is described as a city of the Madras,⁵ and also as a city of the Bāhikas.⁶ Salya too, chief of the Madras, was also Raja of the Bāhikas.⁷ But the Madras were Dānavas,⁸ and we have just seen that they and the Bāhikas were Takhas. All these therefore were Nāga tribes, and descendants of the Asuras.

At the time of the Mahābhārata Takhasilā was a city of the Takhas, and, as just shown, Sākala was another.

Janamejaya had just returned victorious from Takhasilā, when he ordered the serpent sacrifice.⁹ And the victims were probably the prisoners he had taken.

This city, one of the ancient capitals of the Solar race, and founded, as already mentioned, by Takshaka, son of Bharata,¹⁰ was the Taxila of the Greeks.

Sākala, on the Apaga or Aik River, was the Sangala of the Kāthias, which was taken by Alexander.¹¹

¹ Mahābhārata, Karna Parva, xliv. 153.

² Lassen, Pentap. Ind. 21.

³ Mahābhārata, Karna Parva, xliv. 154.

⁴ Mahābhārata, Karna Parva, xlv. 155.

⁵ *Ib.* Sabha, Digvijaya Parva, xxxii. 94.

⁶ *Ib.* Karna Parva, xlv. 153.

⁷ *Ib.* Karna Parva, xlv. 154; Adi, Sambhava Parva, cxiii. 333.

⁸ Kathā Sarit Sāgara, i. 416.

⁹ Mahābhārata, Adi, Pausya Parva, iii. 59.

¹⁰ Vishnu Purāṇa, Halhed, iv. 319.

¹¹ Ancient Geog. Ind. i. 180.

The Kāthias, who retain the fine physique by which the Greeks were so much impressed, still inhabit the neighbouring country. They are now Mahomedans; but they claim to be Rajputs of Solar race, and despise those who follow the plough.¹ Their relatives in Kāthiawar, who have escaped conversion to Islām, also claim to be of Solar descent, and to have been allies of the Kauravas in the great war.² The religion of this branch of the Kāthias is Brahmanism, tempered with reverence for the Sun and the Serpent. Shrines to Vāsuki and other Nāga demigods abound amongst them, and Col. Todd says they are of the race of Takshak.³

The Bāhlikas or Tākhas, as they fought against the Pāṇḍavas, are represented in the Mahābhārata as examples of every kind of wickedness. And Karna in his altercation with Salya, who was one of their chiefs, abuses the female relations of his opponent in a truly Oriental manner.⁴ In spite of all this, however, these tribes are admitted to be Kshatriyas. Salya was brother-in-law to Pāṇḍu; and "many foremost Kshatriyas were leaders of his troops."⁵

One of the greatest crimes of these people was that they had Kshatriyas for their priests.⁶ That is, the royal caste maintained their right to perform religious ceremonies, without the intervention of the Brahmans.

This right, the assertion of which was perhaps one of chief distinctions between Devas and Asuras, was one of the privileges conceded by Krishna to the Asura Bali.⁷ And it is maintained by the Takhas to this day; for in many of their temples, the priestly offices are performed by Kshatriyas.

The Takhas were evidently a powerful people at the time of Alexander's invasion. After the departure of the Greeks,

¹ Panjāb Gazetteer (Montgomery Dist.), 64.

² Ind. Antiquary, iv. 321.

³ Annals of Rājasthan, i. 702.

⁴ Mahābhārata, Karna Parva, xlv. 153.

⁵ *Ibid.* Udyoga Parva, Sainyodyoga Parva, vii. 14.

⁶ *Ibid.* Karna Parva, xlv. 158.

⁷ Harivansa (Langlois), ii. 490.

however, the whole of Upper India seems to have come under the dominion of the Maurya Rajas of Magadha. Asoka was sent by his father Bindusara to take possession of Takhasilā; and he appears to have remained there for some time, as ruler of the neighbouring country, including Kashmir.¹

When Asoka succeeded to the throne, he sent his son Kunāla to govern Takhasilā, which was still a very wealthy and important city.²

After this the Panjāb was overrun by the Bactrian Greeks, who were followed by different Scythian invaders; and the Takha power was completely broken, both on the five rivers and on the Indus.

Appollonius of Tyana visited Takhasilā in the first century A.D.; and he mentions the temple of the Sun there.³

About 400 A.D., the city was visited by the Chinese pilgrim Fah Hian.⁴ It was then a celebrated place amongst the Buddhists; and seems to have been subject to Kashmir, as it was in 630 A.D. when Hiouen Tshang passed that way.⁵

This pilgrim also visited Sākala, which was partly in ruins; having been supplanted by a new capital.⁶ He passed, too, through Multan, which was then a part of the Takha kingdom; and he describes the temple of the Sun there, as of great magnificence.⁷

After this came the Musselman invasions; and the whole-sale conversion to Islām of the population of the Indus Valley and Panjāb.

El Masūdi, writing about 915 A.D., describes the King of El Tāki as being on friendly terms with the Moslems; but as having no great military strength. He also says that the women of the country were the most beautiful in India.⁸

¹ Divya Avadana, Burnouf, *Introd. Hist. Bud. Ind.* 362.

² *Ib.* 405.

³ Cunningham, *Ancient Geog. Ind.* i. 108.

⁴ Fah Hian, xi. 32.

⁵ Hiouen Tshang (*Vie et Voyages*), 89.

⁶ Hiouen Tshang (*Vie et Voyages*), 97.

⁷ Hiouen Tshang (*Memoires*), ii. 173.

⁸ El Masūdi, Sprenger, 390.

El Masūdi's information was perhaps not very recent, as about the end of the ninth century Shankaravarmā of Kashmir had defeated Alakhana, King of Gurjāra, and compelled him to cede Takha, which was then subject to him. And the Takha Raja, it is said, took service with the King of Kashmir.¹

After this we hear no more of Takha as an independent state.

It seems probable that the Takhari Rajas of Nepāl were an offshoot from the great Takha tribe.

It is mentioned, too, by Colonel Tod, that the ancient inscriptions of the Puar or Pramara Rajputs describe them as of the race of Takshaka.²

This tribe, of which the Kāthias of the Panjāb claim to be an offshoot,³ held in very early times the lands of Dhātman-dala, on the banks of the Indus, a great part of the desert of Māru, and the sacred Arbuda mountain, with the country around it.⁴

These territories were ruled by Vāsuki, Takshaka, and other Nāga rajas, the traces of whose dominion still remain. We find that the ancient name of the town of Tank was Takhtpur;⁵ and Bāsakgurh Takho was, in later times, one of the strongholds of the lord of the desert, Lakha Phulani.⁶

Both of these places must have been founded by Nāga chiefs.

There can indeed be little doubt that the Bāhlikas or Takhas, the Kāthias, and the Pramāras were all of the same stock, and that they were descendants of the Asura tribes.

Colonel Tod mentions a tribe of Bālīka Rajputs of Solar race and related to the Kathis, who were once lords of Arore, the great city upon the Indus; and he says that their chiefs were addressed by the bards as "Tattha Multan ka Rai."⁷

¹ Rājatarangini (Calc. ed.), 390.

² Annals of Rajasthan, i. 84.

³ Panjāb Gazetteer (Montgomery), 64.

⁴ Annals of Rajasthan, i. 83.

⁵ *Ib.* i. 84.

⁶ Annals of Rajasthan, i. 632.

⁷ *Ib.* i. 102.

The inscription engraved upon the iron pillar at Delhi states that this ancient monument was erected to celebrate a victory over the Vāhlikas, or Bāhlikas, of Sindhu, and a well-known legend asserts that when driven into the ground, it pierced the head of Sesh Nāg.

Besides Pātala, Takhasilā, and Sākala, and the countries dependent upon them, Magadha and Mathura were very early Nāga settlements.

When Krishna went to Magadha with Bhima and Arjuna, to kill Jarāsandha, he pointed out the place where dwelt of old the Nāgas Arbuda and Shakravāpin, Swastika and Mani.¹

The tirtha of Mani Nāga is one of the holy places mentioned in the Mahābhārata.² Krishna's conflict with Kāliya shows that the neighbourhood of Mathura was occupied by the Nāgas at a very early period.

This chief is said to have been driven by Garuḍa from the land of Ramanaka;³ and Krishna is said to have compelled him to return to the sea-coast. We learn, however, that Nāga rajas still ruled at Mathura, as contemporaries of the Guptas of Magadha, in the seventh century.⁴ And Sir A. Cunningham considers that their kingdom included nearly the whole country between the Jumna and the Upper Narbada.⁵

The island of Ceylon was very early occupied by Nāga colonies, which are said to have been visited by Buddha himself, when he acted as mediator between two rival chiefs. These were about to fight a battle, but Buddha stood between them and caused a "terrifying darkness." The Nāgas, then, were reconciled to each other; and "bowed down at the feet of the divine teacher."⁶ Another Nāga chief, the king of Kalyānī, was converted at the same time.

Majerika, the country on the banks of the Kistna River, in which was built the celebrated Amarāvati stupa, was a Nāga

¹ Mahābhārata, Sabha Parva, Jarāsandha-badha Parva, xxi. 63.

² *Ib.* Vana Parva, Tirthayatra Parva, xxxiv. 272.

³ Vishnu Purāṇa (Hall) V. vii. 287.

⁴ Vishnu Purāṇa (Hall), IV. xxiv. 215.

⁵ J.A.S.B. xxxiv. 117, 118.

⁶ Mahāwanso (Turnour), i. 5.

state, and the raja was a staunch Buddhist with a great reverence for relics.¹

In Burma and the neighbouring countries, and the islands of the Indian Archipelago, traces of serpent-worship abound. And it is probable that Nāga colonies were established there, before the arrival of the Buddhist missionaries sent by Asoka. It is possible, also, that it was to these colonies the missionaries were sent, rather than to the barbarous aboriginal tribes.

Very ancient legends exist in these countries of the rule of Nāga rajas; also traditions relating to an early connexion with Takhasilā, Gandhāra, and other places in Northern and Western India.² The name, too, of the country of Kamboja, and of several ancient cities in Burma and Siam, are of Indian derivation; and Nākhonvat looks very like a corruption of Nāgavati.

It is not likely that any large proportion of the population of these colonies, or mandalas, was of Nāga race. Possibly the colonists were limited to the chief, and sufficient followers to keep the aboriginal people in subjection. So that the population shows little trace of Aryan admixture.

In Friederich's account of the island of Bali, we find the principal streams named after Indian rivers, and amongst them is the Sindhu in the district of Bāsuki.³

In this island, too, at the funeral ceremonies of a man of the Kshatriya caste, a representation of a serpent is carried in the procession, and is burned with the corpse.⁴

In these countries, as in India, it was the Nāga or hooded serpent that was held sacred, and this under its Indian name, thus showing whence it was derived.

The Nāga rajas were great supporters of the Buddhist and Jaina religions.

According to Colonel Tod, who derived his information from Jaina sources, that faith was established on the Arbuda mountain by Sesha himself.⁵ Proof of this is wanting, but

¹ Mahawanso (Turnour), 185; J.A.S.B. XVII. ii. 87.

² Tree and Serpent Worship, 52.

³ J.R.A.S. Vol. IX. p. 69.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 95.

⁵ Annals of Rājasthan, i. 44.

we know that this Nāga chief ended his days as a religious ascetic;¹ and it is not improbable that he may have retired to this sacred mountain.

The country around Mount Abu was, and still is, the great centre of the Jaina religion. It was also a stronghold of the Nāgas; and it was very near to Pātala.

We are told in the Sāṅkhāyana Sūtras, that the people of Arbuda were the Serpas.²

We know, too, that there was a very intimate connexion between the Jainas and the serpent. Fergusson tells us that he found Nāgas represented in all the Jaina temples at Abu.³

We learn also that Yati, son of Nahush, the great Nāga chief who supplanted Indra, declined the kingdom and became a Muni like unto Brahma.⁴ It may not be certain that Yati became a Jaina, but it seems probable; as, according to the Matsya Purāṇa, the sons of his uncle Rāji adopted the Jina dharma.⁵ The title of Yati is still borne by the Jaina monks.

All the Tirthakaras of the Jainas were Kshatriyas; and most of them were of Solar race. Of these, Parswa is represented with the serpent-canopy of a Nāga raja over his head; and Mahavira, his successor, was the son of one of the serpent-worshipping Lichavi rajas of Vaisālī.

The colossal Jaina statues at Yannur in Southern India have Nāgas in attendance.⁶ And in the Chumba state is an old sthāna sacred to Digambar Nāg.

We learn moreover from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, that there was once warfare between the Devas and the Daityas under Hrada (son of Hiranyakasipu). And that the discomfited deities fled to the northern shore of the sea of milk. There, "engaged in religious penances, they prayed to Viṣṇu, who sent a great delusion, in the form of a naked mendicant,

¹ Mahābhārata, *Adi Parva*, *Astika Parva*, xxxvi. 115.

² *Hist. Anct. Sansk. Lit.* 38.

³ *Tree and Serpent Worship*, 78.

⁴ Mahābhārata, *Adi Parva*, *Sambhava Parva*, lxxv. 230.

⁵ Viṣṇu Purāṇa (Wilson), 412, note.

⁶ Fergusson, *Hist. Ind. and E. Architecture*, 269.

to lead the Daityas from the path of the Vedas." And we are told that "the Asuras, being seduced from the religion of the Vedas, were called Arhatas."¹

It is amongst the Asuras, therefore, that we must look for the naked mendicants, who were called Arhatas. And it was amongst them, and especially amongst the Nāga tribes, that the Jainas found their strongest supporters.

Buddha, if not himself of Nāga descent, was very intimately connected with the serpent race, and found amongst that people his most devoted followers.

According to Buddhist records, the Sākyaas were descendants of Ikshvāku, the Solar raja of Pātala.² One of them married the daughter of the Nāga raja of Udayana; and succeeded to his father-in-law's kingdom.³

In the list of Buddha's ancestors, given in the Dipavansa, occur the names of Nāgadeva of Mithilanagara, and Nāgasena of Kapila. And in the Mahābhārata we find, amongst the holy places, the tirtha of Kapila, king of the Nāgas, at Kapilavata,⁴ which was the city of the Sakyas.

In the sculptures of the Amarāvati stupa, Buddha is more than once represented with the serpent-canopy over his head, which was the distinctive mark of a Nāga raja.⁵

In other sculptures from the same stupa, the serpent is shown as the principal object of adoration, and as worshipped even by sramānas.⁶

In Nepāl the Buddha Amogha Siddha is always shown as sheltered by the hoods of a seven-headed Nāga.⁷

The Buddhist writings contain many allusions to the good offices of the Nāgas, and a stupa was built to mark the spot where Buddha was sheltered by the Nāga raja⁸ Muchalinda.

Long after the death of Sākya the Nāgas of Rāmagrāma

¹ Vishnu Purāṇa (Hall), III. xviii. 215.

² Rockhill, Life of Buddha, 12; Turnour, Mahawanso, Introd. xxxv; Lalita Vistara, ii. 149.

³ Hiouen T'sang, ii. 141.

⁴ Mahābhārata, Vana Parva Tirthayatra Parva, lxxxiv. 267.

⁵ Tree and Serpent Worship, plate xcvi. Ind. and E. Architect. pl. 17.

⁶ Tree and Serpent Worship, pl. lxx.

⁷ Oldfield, ii. 169.

⁸ Mahāvagga, i. 3. 2, S.B.E. xiii.; Fah Hian, 125.

were so devoted to his relics that, when Asoka wished to remove them to a new stupa, these devout Buddhists refused to allow it, and the raja, powerful as he was, had to give way.¹

Asoka himself is represented as worshipping the serpent, even after his conversion to Buddhism.

We learn from the *Mahāwanso* that he sent for Mahākālo, the Nāga raja, and "placed him under the white canopy of dominion, seated on the royal throne." Then, "making to him many flower offerings," Asoka requested the Nāga to show him the appearance of Buddha, which he did.²

A similar ceremony to this is mentioned by Fergusson as still occurring at Manipur, where a snake, representing the raja's ancestor, is placed upon a cushion and worshipped with the ceremonies just described.³

The narratives of the Chinese pilgrims contain many incidents showing that a close relationship existed between the Nāgas and Buddhism at a later period.

Fah Hian mentions that at Sankisa, in his time, was a Nāga temple, the worship of which was conducted by Buddhist priests.⁴ And we learn from Hiouen Thsang that, when the people of Takhasilā went to pray for rain at the shrine of Elāpatra Nāga, sramānas officiated.⁵

According to Wassilief, Nāgārjuna, who founded a new school of Buddhism in the early centuries of the Christian era, gave out that he had received the sacred writings from the Nāgas, by whom they had been preserved.⁶ Whether this was the case or not, it shows that the Nāgas were looked upon as the great supporters of Buddhism. So late as the seventh century the physician of Raja Lalitaditya of Kashmir, "having gained wealth by the favour of Takshaka, built a vihara."⁷

¹ *Divyāvadāna* in Burnouf, *Introd.* 332.

² *Mahāwanso* (Turnour), v. 27.

³ T. and S. *Worship*, 64.

⁴ Fah Hian, 67.

⁵ Hiouen Thsang (*Memoires*), i. 152.

⁶ *Ind. Antiquary*, May, 1875.

⁷ *Rajatarangini*, Calc. ed. 73.

Takhasila and Sākala, the Takha capitals, were very important centres of the Buddhist religion. The people of Takhasilā applied for such a quantity of the relics of Buddha, that Asoka was unable to supply them.¹ And it was to Sākala that Pushpamitra marched with an army to destroy the religion of Sākya. It was there, too, that he offered a reward of one hundred dinaras for every head of any sramāna that was brought to him.²

In this act of barbarity, Pushpamitra seems to have followed the example of Asoka, who, as a zealous Buddhist, had offered a reward of one dinara for every head of a Tirthaka, with the result that the head of his own brother was brought to him.³

Buddha's devoted followers, the Licchavis, were serpent-worshippers. The tutelary deity of their chief city, Vaiśālī, was a Nāga.⁴

These Licchavis, who also ruled in Nepāl, Lahoul, and Thibet,⁵ were Kshatriyas of Solar race;⁶ and abundant traces of Nāga-worship remain in the countries over which they held dominion. They seem to have held the hill country up to the eastern borders of the Takha kingdom; so that all the Himālaya, from Kashmir to Nepāl, must have been under Nāga rule.

In Kamāon and Garhwāl there are still over eighty temples in which the Nāga is worshipped.⁷ In the Panjāb Himālaya, the number is unknown, but it is very great.

Amongst the emblems adopted by the Buddhists, and always represented in their sculptures, two, besides the serpent, are prominent objects at the Nāga temples. These are the Sun, or Chakra, and the Trisūla. The Swastika and other symbols also occur, but much less frequently.

That the Chakra, or discus, known to the later Buddhists

¹ Divyā Avadāna, Burnouf, 373.

² *Ib.* 431.

³ Divyā Avadāna, Burnouf, 424.

⁴ Mahawanso Tikā (Turnour), Introd. xxxvii.

⁵ Ancient Geog. Ind. i. 451.

⁶ Corp. Insc. Ind. iii. 185.

⁷ Kumāon Gazetteer, p. 835.

as the "Wheel of the Law," originally represented the Sun, cannot I think be doubted. It is shown in the Buddhist sculptures for the same reason that it is carved upon the Nāga temples. That is, because Buddha and his chief supporters were, like the Nāgas, of Solar race.

The trisūla, whatever mystic signification may have been applied to it, appears to have been originally a warlike weapon. As such, it is presented, by way of votive offering, to the Nāga demigods. It is frequently mentioned as a favourite weapon of the Asura warriors. Thus we find that Hiranyakasipu was armed with a trident, when he attacked Nara Sinha.¹ Bana too used the same weapon.²

The Nivāta Kavachas, in their fight with Arjuna, used clubs, darts, swords, tomaras, and tridents.³ And, in the army of the Pāṇḍavas, one of the fighting men attached to each elephant, was armed with this weapon.⁴

Again Devī, or Durgā, is represented as using a trisūla to slay the Mahesh Asur; and the same weapon is always assigned to Siva.

The trisūla is now set up in connexion with the worship of several deities; but it appears to be connected, more especially, with Sun-worship, or with the Solar race.

We are told that when Sejuk Gohil set out to seek his fortune in foreign lands, the image of his god (Krishna) and the trident of his family were carried before him.⁵

On a hill near Būd, in the Bussowlie district of Kashmir, stands a huge trisūl sacred to Chāond Devi, who is said to have been a Nāgini.

At the fire temple of Jawāla Mūkhi, near Kangra, is a trisūla some thirty feet high, the shaft of which is of wood sheathed with iron plates.

At the temple of Kailang Nāg, in the Kukti pass, and in many other places, are large iron trisūlas. These, in some

¹ Mahābhārata, Vana, Draupadi-harana Parva, cclxxi. 802.

² Harivansa, Langlois, ii. 253.

³ Mahābhārata, Vana, Nivāta Kavacha Yuddha Parva, clxx. 506.

⁴ Mahābhārata, Udyoga, Samyaniryāna Parva, xlv. 452.

⁵ Ras Māla, 238.

instances, are set up at the entrance to the temple, which may be a survival of the ancient custom of planting the warrior's spear at the door of his tent.

It is noticeable that the trisūla is usually made entirely of iron. At Jawāla Mūkhi, however, no doubt on account of its great size, the shaft is of wood cased with that metal. In the Mahābhārata, weapons made wholly of iron are frequently mentioned.

The trisūla, as seen at the Nāga temples, is generally a formidable three-pronged pike, from three to six feet long. As a votive offering, however, it is frequently represented by a small model, a few inches in length.

Upon the ancient monumental stones of the Chohān rajas of Mundi, the trisūla is represented in nearly the same form as that now seen in the Nāga temples.

When one Nāga demigod on festal occasions visits the temple of another, the deity is represented by a trisūla, which is carried by one of the priests.

In the same way Devi or Durga is sometimes represented by a sword. Wooden swords, with a snake carved upon them, are sometimes also presented as votive offerings to the Nāga demigods.

In the Buddhist sculptures the trisūla loses its warlike form; and even when shown as the staff of a royal banner, no longer resembles a lethal weapon. It remains, however, an object of veneration, and Fergusson gives an illustration from the Amaravati stupa of Nāga rajas worshipping it.¹

When we see the sun converted into a wheel, it is scarcely a matter of surprise that the trisūla should also assume a modified form.

Serpent-worship no doubt prevails, in many parts of India, amongst the descendants of the aboriginal tribes. I believe, however, that this has everywhere been derived from the Nāga invaders.

So far as Northern India is concerned, the Nāg seems to be the only description of snake held sacred.

¹ Ind. and E. Architect. p. 46.

The sculptured serpents, at the smaller temples, are often so rudely executed that it is not easy to recognize them as intended for representations of the cobra. They are however invariably called "Nāg."

The only instance, that I am aware of, in which any other serpent is held sacred is at Rālla near the foot of the Rotang Pass. Here, under an overhanging rock, some small harmless snakes are worshipped. They are, however, considered as representatives of the Nāga; and are called "Nāg Khire" (Nāga snake). They are not held sacred elsewhere; and I have seen a snake of the same species killed by the villagers, within a few hundred yards of the sacred spot. Upon my expressing surprise that they should kill a deota, they explained that the deota lived only at the Nāga rock.

As regards Southern India, I have not the same personal knowledge; but the ancient sculptures show clearly that there, too, the sacred serpent was the Nāga. The same observation applies to the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, and to the neighbouring islands.

The conclusions which I would submit to the judgment of scholars are :

1. That the Nāgas were a Sun-worshipping, Sanskrit-speaking people; whose totem was the Nāg, or hooded serpent.

2. That they became known as Nāgas from the emblem of their tribe, with which, in process of time, they became confounded.

3. That they can be traced back to the earliest period of Indian history, and formed a portion of the great Solar race.

4. That they, with other divisions of this race, at first occupied the north and west of India, but afterwards spread towards the east and south.

5. That some of these tribes, and amongst them the Nāgas, retaining their ancient customs, and not readily admitting the ascendancy of the Brahmans, were stigmatized by the more orthodox as Asuras.

6. That amongst a portion of the descendants of this people, Nāga-worship in its primitive form still survives. And that it consists in the adoration, as Devas or demigods, of ancient chieftains of the tribe.

7. That the connexion between the serpent and the Buddhist and Jaina religions can be thus explained.

8. That in all Asiatic countries, at all events, in which so-called serpent-worship prevailed, it was the Nāga or hooded serpent only which was held sacred.

In the *Pioneer Mail* of 7th May last is a letter from a correspondent, dated Manipur, 29th April, describing the recent sad events there. In this it is stated that at the entrance to the Raja's palace were two huge dragons built of masonry, and behind these a Nāga temple. It is also mentioned, that the British officers were dragged before these dragons, and there decapitated.