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# Iconography of the Recently Discovered Naga Sculptures from Pamba River Basin, Pathanamthitta District, South Kerala

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**Abstract:** Recent exploration by the first author brought to light interesting Naga sculptures from the middle ranges of Pamba River basin. All the sculptures are made out of granite and can be classified into Nagarajas and Nagayakshis except one which is a female naga devotee. This paper tries to briefly discuss the iconography, chronology and significance of the sculptures.

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**Keywords:** Exploration, Pamba River Basin, Kerala, Nagarajas, Nagayakshis, Iconography, Chronology

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## Introduction

Pamba is one of the important and third longest rivers in Kerala. It is apparently the river Baris/Bans mentioned in records of Pliny (Menon 1967-62). It originates from Pulachimalai hill in Peermade plateau at an altitude of 1650 MSL and has a length of 176km. It flows through Idukki, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha districts and finally empties into the Vembanadu Lake. During medieval period Pamba basin harbored prosperous settlement like Kaviyur, Thiruvanmandoor, Perunnayil and Thiruvalla. Naga and yakshi images have earlier been reported from Nirannam-Tiruvalla area (Mathew 2006). The present discoveries add to the list of known images. While the earlier discovered images from the lower reaches of Pamba, four of these discovered sites are from the higher hilly and forested tracts of Pathanamthitta district in Pamba basin. Stylistically these images divulge early features and indicate that these forested tracts were inhabited at least from the 12<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Ten female and six male *naga* sculptures were discovered from the exploration (Fig. 1). These are found in localities of Kurichy, Allumkal-Kattathippara, Appoppankavu,

Kakkara and Pandalam. All images are made out of granitic stone and found in the upper-middle ranges of Pamba river basin in Pathanamthitta district.

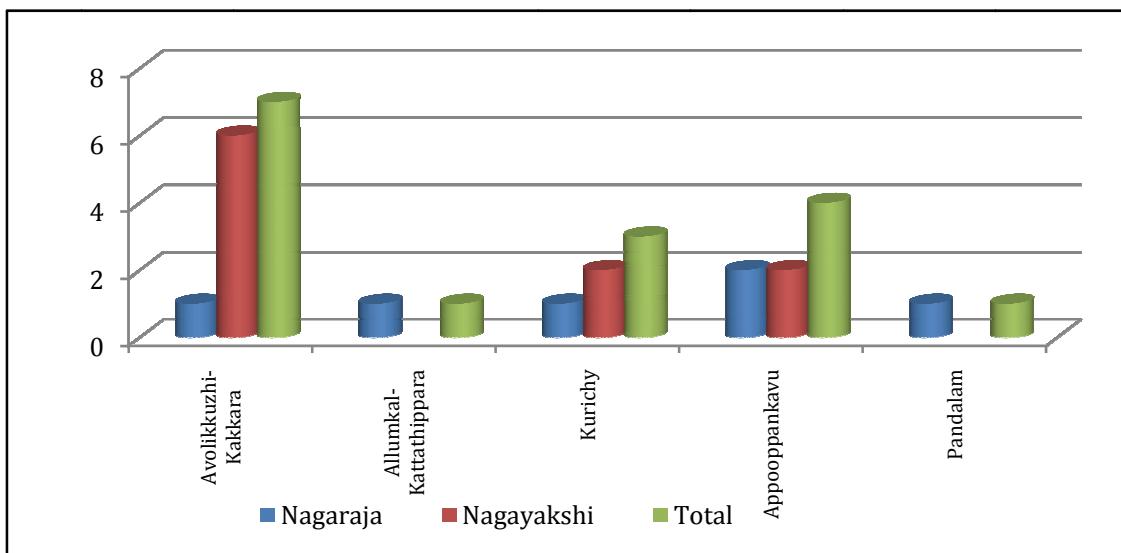


Figure 1: Number of Nagarajas and Nagayakshis Discovered in Exploration

## Iconography of the Sculptures

### Locality 1

#### Kurichy Area 1 - Nagaraja (09°09'300''N; 077°01'617''E)

The *Nagaraja* image and related images are carved on the four faces of an almost rectangular block measuring 74cm in height and its breadth varying from 21 to 27cm. This block possibly had a finial and is now found placed on an undressed stone pedestal and is on the way to the Kurichy temple. The site is situated at an altitude of 514 m MSL. Kurichy temple is situated 4 km east of Kokkathode SNDP *mandiram*. Main focus of the depiction is *Nagaraja* (Fig. 2.1). The *naga* images have five hoods of which the main and large one is depicted above his head and two each occurs to either sides. Due to the corroded nature only the main hood is clearly visible. The seated *Naga raja* is carried by a dwarf *gana*. *Nagaraja* is adorned with a *kirita*, *patra kundalas*, *kanta mala*, and *udarabhanda* are clearly visible and possibly he also wears a *yajnopivita*. The right hand of the deity is in *abhaya* and left hand is in *varada mudra*. The face left of the sculpture, is carved with two intertwined serpents and a female figurine to its bottom (Fig. 2.2). The head of one serpent is shown above and other below, near the standing dwarf female in *namaskara mudra*. She too is adorned with a *kirita*, *kundalas* etc, While her upper half is nude she wears a lower garment, the folds of which can be seen above her feet. To the back of the *Nagaraja* sculpture are two pairs of entwined serpents and seated female figurine in *namaskara mudra* (Fig. 2.3). The pair on the left have their heads placed to opposite ends while the pair on the right their head oriented upwards (Figure 2.2). The female figurine is adorned in style similar to the one discussed above. The right side of the sculpture is quite eroded and depicts a pair of entwined *nagas* as discussed above and has a standing female figure below (Fig. 2.4).



**Figures 2.1 – 2.4: Nagaraja from Locality 1, Kurichy Area 1**

**Kurichy Area 2 - Nagayakshi (09°12'016''N; 077°00'966''E)**

The image from Kurichy 2 is that of a *Nagayakshi* (Fig. 3.1). This sculpture is found placed under a tree on the way to Kurichy temple. The site is 1 km north of Kurichy temple and is located 540 m above MSL. The total height of the sculpture is 46 cm and breadth is 15 cm. The *Nagayakshi* image is shown standing holding a serpent in her pendent hands the hood of which can be seen below her knee. She has a single hood crowning her. She is nude in the upper half and wears a lower garment. She wears usual ornaments. To the back, the body of the snake whose hood canopies the image runs downwards, though this feature is rather obliterated in this image this is observed clearly elsewhere (Fig. 3.2).



**Figures 3.1 and 3.2: Nagayakshi from Locality 1, Kurichy Area 2**

### Kurichy Area 3 - Nagayakshi

The Nagayakshi sculpture in Kurichy 3 is found placed on a stone pedestal under a tree in a jungle 3 km from Kurichy temple and is at an elevation of about 519 m above MSL (Fig. 4.1). Total height of the sculpture is 42 cm and breadth is 17 cm. This image is stylistically almost similar to the one discussed above. The major difference only being in the location of the head of the serpent held in her hands. In the one discussed above it was towards her knee and in this one the hood raises towards her right shoulder (Fig. 4.2).



4.1



4.2

Figures 4.1 and 4.2: Nagayakshi from Locality 1, Kurichy Area 3

### Locality 2

#### Allumkal (Kattathippara) - Nagaraja (09°10'939"N; 076°57'373"E)

Allumkal is located on the Konni -Niramakkulam road. Here close to the Allumkal check post is the Allumkal Sree Mahadeva temple. Allumkal Sree Mahadeva temple is relatively new and was constructed by locals. However in the vicinity of the site are scattered with remains of an old temple. To the right of the entrance to the temple is a rectangular block found placed on a *Yonipeeta*. The four faces of this block has been carved with a *Nagaraja* and related images. The pillared block has a total height of 1.34 m and breadth varies from 29 to 31 cm and the basal stone measures 62 cm in length and 51 cm in width.

The block has a finial which is square and rounded to the top and emulates the feel of a Shivlinga. The main deity is depicted on the front side of the sculpture (Fig. 5.1). *Nagaraja* is shown seated in *padmasana* on a *peetha* uplifted by a *gana*. He wears a *kirita* or crown and the treatment of *kundalas*, *griva* and *kirita* is slightly different when compared to other sculptures in this area. His right hand is in *abhaya mudra* and left

hand is in *varada mudra*. A five hood serpent canopies his head. The body of this five hooded *naga* is seen descending from the top and it coils around the block and raises its hood above the *Nagaraja*. The *gana* is shown in *dwibhangha* posture and uplifting the deity with his two hands. He wears a lower garment and a headgear. Compared to the *Nagaraja* image the body of the *gana* is obese and not well in proportion. A knot is observed towards the tail potion of the big snake. A pair of entwining smaller snakes flanks the body of the larger snake. The body of the entwining large snake and a pair of coiled and entwining snakes are seen to either side. The same scheme is adopted on two further sides (Fig. 5.2 & 5.4). The lower portion of the scheme has two standing female forms towards the bottom one in *namaskara mudra* and the other with hands outstretched to either side. On the reverse side of the block is a pair of entwined snakes are shown to either sides, to the center a pair of smaller snakes form a two circular coils and below it can be seen the head to two snakes. Below there is depiction is a male seated in *padmasana* holding his hands in *namaskara mudra*. Below is again a coiled snake as though guarding her eggs and with newly hatched snakes around (Fig. 5.3).



Figures 5.1 - 5.4: *Nagaraja* from Locality 2, Allumkal (Kattathippara)

### Locality 3

*Appoppankavu* (09°12'908"N; 076°58'002"E)

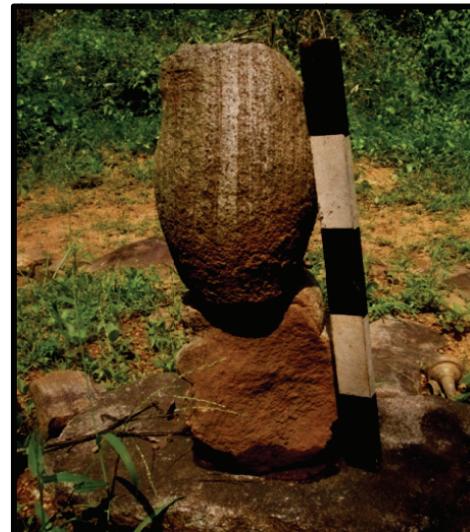
*Appoppankavu* is situated 3km north west of Konni SNDP *mandiram* deep in the forest tracts at an altitude of 485m above MSL. *Appoppankavu* temple is built in granite and has *Nagarajas* and *Nagayakshis* carved in stone and placed on the stone basements in the temple. The temple is today in ruins. Two *Nagaraja*, one *Nagayakshi* and a Female devotee sculpture is found here.

### Female Devotee

The sculpture is found placed on a stone pedestal to the right end of the temple. Total height of the sculpture is 50cm and width is 18 cm. The image appears to be female devotee (Fig. 6.1). She is in standing posture and her hands are in *Namaskara mudra*. The features of the figurine are not clear due to the eroded nature. However, partly the headdress, breast, stomach and lower garments are visible. Coiling the pedestal is a snake which raises its hood above the standing female. The body of this snake is depicted to the back (Fig. 6.2).



6.1



6.2

Figures 6.1 & 6.2: Female Devotee from Locality 3, Appoppankavu

### Nagaraja

A *Nagaraja* image is placed next to the female devotee (Figs. 7.1 - 7.4). The sculpture is carved on rectangular block it is broken and partly eroded. Total height of the sculpture is 77cm and width is 18 cm. The main depiction is of a seated *naga raja* being carried by a *gana*. The seated *Nagaraja* has his right hand held in *abhaya* and left in *varada*. There was apparently a large hooded snake canopying his head. Though the hood is broken the body of the coiling snake can be seen on all sides of the shaft. The *naga raja* wears a decorative *kirita*, *hara*, *udarabhanda*, *kundalas* and a lower garment. The *gana* is showing supporting the *Nagaraja* with his left hand and the right hand held at the waist. The upper portion of the image is broken. On the reverse towards the bottom is a standing female. To the left is a seated female figure in *namaskara mudra*. To the right side is a female seated on a coiled snake with hands held in *namaskara mudra*. The overall features of the coiled snake and its young ones seem to indicate protective nature of snake to its young ones.

### Nagayakshi

The sculpture of *Nagayakshi* (Figs. 8.1 and 8.2) found placed next to the earlier mentioned sculpture. Total height of the sculpture is 71cm and width is 21 cm. *Nagayakshi* is shown standing with a snake hood over her head and holding a snake

with her two hands. The tail portion is seen to her left hand and the hood to her right. She is in a standing posture and holding a snake with her two hands (Fig. 8.1). To the back adjoining the body of the large snake are two smaller snakes. The coiffure and costumes are not largely deviant from earlier discusses images.



7.1

7.2

7.3

7.4

Figures 7.1 – 7.4: Nagaraja from Locality 3, Appoppankavu



8.1

8.2

Figures 8.1 & 8.2: Nagayakshi from Locality 3, Appoppankavu

### *Nagaraja*

*Nagaraja* is placed next to the previously mentioned *Nagayakshi* sculpture and located to the extreme left of the temple (Figure 9.1). Total height of the rectangular block where the sculpture is carved is 72 cm and breadth is 21cm. The main theme depicts

*nagaraja* being carried by a *gana* figure. *Nagaraja* wears a decorative *kirita*, *patra* *kundalas*, *udharabandha* etc., and a lower garment. He has a smiling face and a single hood above his head. He holds his left hand in *abhaya* and right hand in *varada* mudra. The *gana* is depicted in a sitting posture and looks like he is attempting to stand up. He too wears the usual ornaments and garments. To the right side of the post is depicted two entwined serpents, the body of the coiling large serpent too is visible (Fig. 9.2). Depicted below is a standing holding the tails of two serpents that mentioned above. Even though her features are faded, her headdress, *keyura*, lower garment, eyes and breast are noticeable. Depiction similar to the right side is depicted on the backside also (Fig. 9.3). The differences from the above is that the standing female figure is depicted is relatively more slender. Left side of the sculpture has more or less similar depictions like other sides with a standing female (Fig. 9.4).



Figure 9.1 – 9.4: Nagaraja from Locality 3, Appoppankavu

#### Locality 4

*Avolikkuzhi - Kakkara* (09°14'520"N; 076°54'066"E)

The site is situated in between 09°14'520"N; 076°54'066"E, at an altitude of 382 m above MSL. The site is situated 15 km north west of Konni main town. It was difficult to reach and work at the site due to the disturbance of wild elephants. The site is under the Konni forest division. Six *Naga* sculptures were found in the government teak plantation and one of it is placed in a newly constructed temple. Among the other five images, two female sculptures are found placed on a stone pedestals 50 m west of the local temple shrine and one male sculpture and three female sculptures are found under a big pipal tree. A pillar from a ruined temple also occurs along with these sculptures.

#### *Nagayakshi*

The *Nagayakshi* sculpture (Figs. 10.1 & 10.2) is placed on a rectangular stone pedestal found in the teak plantation has three serpent hoods which are seems conjoined. Total height of the sculpture is 60 cm and width varies from 32 to 37 cm. She wears a coiffure and a scarf flowing backwards and wears simple *griva*, *kankana*, *keyura* and *kundalas*. She has elongated earlobes and big earrings adorn them. Broad eyebrows, eyes, broken nose and lips are clearly visible. Body of the deity is well proportionate. She is holding

a big snake with her two hands. Her right hand holds the tail portion of the snake and left hand holds the mid coil of the snake. The hood of the snake is shown on the lower middle part of the sculpture i.e. in between her two hands. Her upper hand is nude but the lower garment is clearly visible. Two baby snakes are also depicted which are seems to be issuing from beneath her armpits. Back portion of the sculpture is depicted with a complete snake which appears like hanging down from her head. There is a marking on the hood (Fig. 10.2).



Figures 10.1 & 10.2: Nagayakshi from Locality 4, Avolikkuzhi - Kakkara

### ***Nagayakshi***

The sculpture of *Nagayakshi* is placed on a stone pedestal found along with the previous sculpture, however it is badly eroded and its features are obliterated. Total height of the sculpture is 54cm and breadth varies from 17 to 20 cm. She is in standing posture and wears a banded headdress, *keyura*, *griva* and *kankanas*. (Fig. 11.1) her upper half is nude and wears a lower garment is also visible. She has a single hood and holding a big snake with her two hands. A small snake found depicted on the lower middle of her chest. Back portion of the deity is decorated with the back of a snake which is hanging down from her head (Fig. 11.2). Compared to the previously mentioned *Nagayakshi* sculpture this one is relatively slender.

### ***Nagayakshi***

This *Nagayakshi* sculpture (Figs. 12.1 & 12.2) is found placed on a platform made of baked bricks within the newly constructed temple shrine at Avolikkuzhi. Total height of the sculpture is 46 cm and width varies from 14 to 16 cm. During our visit it was covered with a yellow cloth hence it was not possible to see the features of the sculpture completely. However it is also similar to the previously mentioned *Nagayakshi* sculptures.

### ***Nagayakshi***

This *Nagayakshi* sculpture is found along with other male and female *Naga* sculpture placed under the Pipal tree nearly 50 m south west of the newly constructed shrine and

60 m south east of the two *Nagayakshis* mentioned above. Total height of the sculpture is 58 cm and width is 30 cm (Fig. 13). The standing *Nagayakshi* figure is eroded and placed on a pedestal. Her coiffure and costumes are not much different from the ones discussed above.



11.1



11.2

Figures 11.1 & 11.2: Nagayakshi from Locality 4, Avolikkuzhi - Kakkara



12.1



12.2

Figures 12.1 & 12.2: Nagayakshi from Locality 4, Avolikkuzhi - Kakkara



**Figure 13: Nagayakshi from Locality 4, Avolikkuzhi – Kakkara**

#### *Nagayakshi*

This broken standing *Nagayakshi* sculpture (Figs. 14.1 & 14.2) is found along with the previous one. Head portion of the image is missing and in its broken state it measures 40 cm in maximum height and 26 cm in breadth. Body of the figurine is well proportionate and her ornaments and costumes are not much different from the ones discussed above.

#### *Nagayakshi*

The standing but partly buried *Nagayakshi* sculpture is also placed along with previously mentioned sculptures and it has a total height of 42 cm and width of 24 cm (Figs. 15.1 & 15.2). Above her head is a hood of three conjoined serpent hoods. Her coiffure depicts a *jata* or matted hair which is interesting and rather uncommon depiction. The ornaments and other features draw similarity to rest found in the region.



14.1

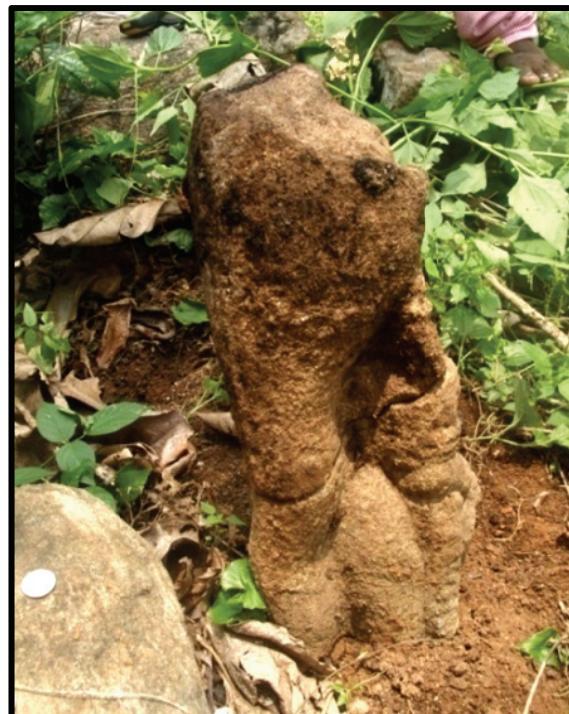


14.2

Figure 14.1 & 14.2: Nagayakshi from Locality 4, Avolikkuzhi – Kakkara



15.1



15.2

Figure 15.1 & 15.2: Nagayakshi from Locality 4, Avolikkuzhi – Kakkara

### *Nagaraja*

This *Nagaraja* sculpture is found along with other three *Nagayakshi* sculptures mentioned above. The sculpture is carved on a rectangular block and total height of the sculpture is 90 cm and maximum breadth is 20 cm (Figs. 16.1-16.4). The iconographical

character of the image is not much different from the *Nagaraja* imaged found from Allumkal and Appopankavu discussed above. But little difference noticed in the stylistic representation.



16.1

16.2

16.3

16.4

Figure 16.1 - 16.4: *Nagaraja* from Locality 4, Avolikkuzhi – Kakkara

### Locality 5

#### *Cherikkal- Nagaraja (Pandalam)*

This *Nagaraja* sculpture (Figs. 17.1 – 17.4) has been found placed on a platform newly constructed by the locals. Local say that this image was found in a nearby forest area during the time of forest clearing. The total height of the *Nagaraja* is 79cm and width 19cm. Stylistical and iconographic features divulged in the sculpture has a common strain with sculptures discussed above.



17.1

17.2

17.3

17.4

Figures 17.1 – 17.4: *Nagaraja* from Locality 5, Cherikkal (Pandalam)

### Discussion and Conclusion

The word *naga* derived from the Sanskrit which means serpent believed to live in the palaces (pathala) in the underground city of Bhagavati. *Nagas* are considered as the

protectors of springs, rivers and wells. The *naga* represents cosmic power and considered as the manifestation of Vedic god *Agni* or fire and as such becomes the fierce spirit, who is the guardian. *Nagas* are considered as the guardian deities of all the major religions in India. There are various opinions about the origin of serpent worship. Turnenian peoples are believed to be the earliest worshippers of serpent. But some others had an opinion that Egyptians are responsible for this cult. Countries like Japan, China and Mexico etc. also gave greater importance to the serpent worship. In India it was one among the common forms of worship in the whole land. *Naga* cult spread everywhere and mainly concentrated in Nalanda, Mathura, Assam, Bengal, Kashmir, Kerala etc.

In India the earliest evidence of *naga* has been reported from the *chirand* a Neolithic site in Bihar (Vikrama Bhuvan et.al.2003.103). Terracotta figurines of coiled and hooded snakes have been reported from the excavation conducted by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums in Bihar in the early 1960s, however their significance is not known. The representation of *Nagas* can be seen on the seal of Mohenjo-Daro. It is represented as half human and half animal form as suppliants to deity. Here *naga* appears possibly as a devotee.

In *Rig-Veda* *naga* is mentioned as *Aivritah* and *Ahibudhnya* and appears sometimes as a demonical and sometimes as a divine being. In later Vedic text like *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda* *nagas* are mentioned in association with *Gandharvas*, *Apsaras*, *Yakshas* etc. It becomes a part of Aryan religion during the Sutra period (600-400 BC) the *Grihya sutras* prescribe rites like *Sarpabali*, *Asvalayanasutra*, *Paraskara Grihasutra* for serpents. During the epic period the dread full nature and the divine origin of the *Nagas* are emphasized. The murder of king *Parikshit* by the *naga* *Takshila*, the hostility between *Nagas* and Pandavas etc. find mention in the epics. In *Ramayana* the Sinhalese are referred to as *rakshas* and *nagas* as they opposed Aryan invaders (Schöff.1911.250). Descriptions of *nagas* are found in the texts like *Amsumadbhedagama*, *Silparatna* and *Maya-Silpa*. *Amsumadbhedagama* states that the image of Nagadeva should have three eyes, four arms a beautiful countenance and be of red colour. *Silparatna* adds that the image should be half human and half serpentine and must carry a sword and shield in his hand and *Maya-mata* gives a description of seven great *nagas*, *Vasuki*, *Takshaka*, *Karkotaka*, *Padma*, *Mahapadma*, *Sankhapala* and *kulika* with their colour, hoodmarks and attributes (Rao.1997.554-557) Apart from these, indigenous literary sources also refer to the worship of serpents during the invasion of Alexander in 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Terracotta figurine with *naga* hoods has been reported from Mauryan period. Snake as a device also occurs on punch marked coins. Several *naga* inscriptions and sculptures are reported from Chharagaon, Mathura etc dated 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. In south India 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> CE witnessed a considerable influence of *naga* cult. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala etc. came under the influence of serpent cult. It had a close association with Jainism and Buddhism. *Nagas* plays a prominent role in Jainism. The important are the snake emblems of Parswanatha and of Suprasva. Buddhist considered *naga* as semi divine spirits or real human beings who bow ultimately to the supreme power of Lord

Buddha (Kumar.2003). Fa-Hien, the Budhist pilgrim states that Sinhala country was occupied by spirit and *nagas* and they are treated as the tutelary guardians of precious articles in trade (Schoff.1911. 281).

During megalithic period or Iron Age, Kerala region apparently witnessed demographic buildup. This was apparently due to favorable climatic factors and people gaining adequate knowledge of iron metallurgy and technological knowhow to create durable and effective tool kits for personal safety and exploitation of natural resources. The creation of utilitarian kits in Iron apparently gave people courage to venture into hinterland in search of produces, agriculture and habitation. In the process of exodus, people were approaching and encroaching into the habitats believed to be inhabited by spirits and *nagas*. To live in their territory their appeasement was deemed mandatory and this belief possibly gave way for *naga* or serpent worship and images.

The initial *naga* worship was apparently centered on ant hills which were considered as a passage to the underworld and a safe aboard of the *nagas*. With the revival of Brahmanical faith around 8<sup>th</sup> cent CE, the popular local or indigenous cult apparently came to be amalgamated or assimilated into it. In the process, *nagas* came to be imbibed into the Hindu fold and were assigned alliance subsidiary to Vishnu and Shiva. Despite this amalgamation the *naga* cult's entry into Brahmanical temples premises seemed restrained and apparently continue to retain hold and status of a folk cult, which it used to be. Essential due to its non-Brahmanical and folk character many agrarian households in Kerala came to demarcate a separate area in the family estate for *nagas* and spirits known as *kavu*. Here, natural wild vegetation was allowed to grow freely and in the absence of natural water source an artificial source was added. This area was a miniature version of the pristine wild habitat that once existed. The fruits and berries of the area were prerogative to the birds and animals around. Lamps were lit in defined areas during twilight hours and offerings were made on special days. With images of stone gaining popularity around 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century CE *naga* images apparently came to be crafted in stone. Some *naga* images came to be installed in such *kavus* after which they came to be designated as *sarpa-kavu*. Some *naga* images in due course of time came to be installed in the open or outside the temple premises. Later, some of the images came to be installed within the walled enclosures of temples and in such temples they were kept in the open or under trees either to the south west or north east corners. Generally all the *naga* images found in Kerala maintain their hypethral character and are never installed as a main deity in any major temples. Even in major temples associated with *nagas* in Kerala like Ameda temple, near Tripunithura in district Ernakulam or Pundarikapuram temple, near Thalayolaparmbu, district Kottayam the main deity installed in the temple is not *naga*. Some temples like Mannarshala which today has an independent status associated with *naga*, have their roots as family images. Assigning the *nagas* the regal and protective spirit associated with the yakshi-yakshi cult, they also sometimes come to be referred as *Nagaraja* and

*Nagayakshi*, in popular parlance. Over the recent years their popularity has increased and they are perpetuated to gain prosperity, children and remove obstacles.

In the forest tracts of Pamba river basin in Pathanamthitta district, total of sixteen stone naga sculptures were found. All of them were found placed in the open or under some tree close to the precincts of a temple. The *nagaraja* images have a larger and more dignified presentation. The *Nagaraja* and *Nagayakshi* images do not occur in same size, on the same stone block. The *Nagayakshi* image, even if they are found, on the same stone depicting the *nagaraja*, they are always regaled to the base of the stone and are diminutive in size when compared to the *nagaraja*. While the *nagaraja* is bestowed with the privilege of being carried by a *gana*, the *nagayakshi* is shown standing without a carrier. The association of entwined *nagas* in many of the *nagaraja* and *nagayakshi* depiction is interesting and possibly reflects of an indigenous belief and style prevalent in the region. There are also some snakes depicted coiled around each other and possibly denotes their mating or copulation. Some *nagas* are noticed coiled, possibly around eggs and surrounded newly hatched young ones and this too is a novel theme adopted in the representation here, and possibly has a connotation with fertility cult.

Stylistically these *nagaraja* and *nagayakshi* figures seem to divulge a style which is assignable to middle phase (1001-1300CE) and late phase (1301-1800CE) of sculptural and temple activity in Kerala (Sarkar.1978. 97-99). The middle phase also coincides with the decline of the Ay dynasty and the rise of Venad. The later phase coincided with the fall of the Kulasekara Empire and the rise of smaller chieftains and the advent of European traders in Kerala (Menon.1967).

Temple construction and images of stone became popular during these phases. The foreign maritime trade and inland trade escalated during these phases and were reflected also in socio-religious aspects especially in temple building activity in Kerala. Land exploitation and use became vibrant to meet the rising demands of trade. This also apparently instigated and necessitated people to move to upper reaches of the eastern hill ranges of Pathanamthitta district to collect forest products and also systematically cultivate them (especially pepper for regular yield and export. Pamba River was part of an excellent waterway to transport hill produces by boats from upper regions in the east Porakkad in the west and to Muzaris in north and finds mention in Periplus (Schoff.1911.233-234). During medieval period the towns of Kollam-Kayamkulam- Thiruvalla- Chengannur-Niranam-Porakkad etc, which were trade centers from ancient times were all connected to each other by water ways for trade and travel.

To achieve and sustain tangible results in exchange and agriculture, appeasement of the intangible spirits and *naga* dwelling in the area also seemed mandatory to the migrants. This possibly resulted in creation of the *nagaraja* and *nagayakshi* images. They were assigned the responsibility of protecting their produce and bestowing prosperity and wellbeing to the kin and kith of its appeasers. Since the *nagaraja* and

*nagayakshi* cult was essentially based on folk conceptions any individual wanting to have them installed could do so either, in gratitude for benefactions received on wanting them. It is for the first time the phenomenon of having large number of *naga* and *Nagayakshi* images from a limited area, come to notice. This now meagerly populated area yielding such large number of *nagaraja* and *nagayakshi* images but no major temples dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu or Devi is definitely interesting. Further probe and researches will have to be initiated to see if this phenomenon has parallels elsewhere in Kerala and to understand if the images found in the Pathnamthitta region have further ramifications than now deemed.

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