



Bharatha Samskruthi Prakashana
 No.37/8, G4, Leesa Apartment, 4th Cross,
 Lalbagh Road, Bangalore 560 027
 Phone : 080-22278231, 26765381, Mobile : 9448078231
 URL : www.bharathasamskruthi.com,
 Email : bspllg@gmail.com



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We Dedicate this Sacred Treasure at the holy lotus feet of

Sriranga Mahaguru and SriMata

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Email : bspllg@gmail.com

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अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ	ॡ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ	अं	अः
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	ḹ	e	ai	o	au	am	ah
क	ख	ख	ग	ङ											
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa											
च	छ	ज	झ	ञ											
ca	cha	ja	jha	ña											
ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण											
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa											
त	थ	द	ध	न											
ta	tha	da	dha	na											
प	फ	ब	भ	म											
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma											
य	र	ल	व	श											ष
ya	ra	la	va	śa	sha	sa	ha								

Example:

क	का	कि	की	कु	कू	कृ	कृ	क्लृ	के	कै	को	कौ	कं	कः
ka	kā	ki	kī	ku	kū	kṛ	kṛ	klṛ	ke	kai	ko	kau	kam	kah



Nāgapūjā- Nāgarapañcamī **(Serpent Worship)**

The *Nāgarapañcamī* occupies an important place in the traditions brought forth by the *sanātana Āryabhāratīya Maharshis*, This is even considered by some as one of the supreme *parvas*, in place of *Akshaya tṛtīyā*. This *parva* is observed in all parts of this country by people belonging to all sects, creeds and philosophical systems. Though there are differences in the modalities of observance, all of them observe this with great devotion, faith and religious fervor. We see that this *vrata* is being observed by all, except by those who have a vow not to observe *kāmya vratas* and those who are devoted to only one deity like *Śiva*, *Vishṇu* etc. Even such *Ekadevopāsakas* (devoted to a single god) sometimes observe this as a *kāmyavrata*. People observe this *vrata* with the desires such as – "Let

not serpents bite us, Let the peril from poison be averted. Let us have progeny. Let us be bestowed with wealth. Let us be free from skin diseases. Let us attain heaven", Etc.,. This *vrata* is also observed with the objective of awakening *Kuṇḍalini* i.e. *Prāṇasakti* for the early *phalasiddhi* (results) in *yogābhyāsa*. As the name of the *vrata* itself clearly states, the deity that is specially worshipped on this day is *Nāgadevatā*.

i) When should this *vrata* be observed?

By and large this *Vrata* is observed on the *pañcamī* of *śrāvaṇa śuklapaksha*.

श्रावणे मासि पञ्चम्यां शुक्लपक्षे तु पार्वति ।

द्वारस्योभयतो लेख्या गोमयेन विषोल्बणाः ॥

सा तु पुण्यतमा प्रोक्ता देवानामपि दुर्लभा ।

कुर्याद्द्वादशवर्षाणि पञ्चम्यां स वरानने ॥ (भविष्योत्तर पुराण. अध्याय 36)

In *Saurāshṭra* (Gujarat) this *vrata* is observed on the *pañcamī* of *śrāvaṇa kṛshṇapaksha*. The same practice prevails in Bengal also, where they worship *sarpadevi manasādevi*, who is the *mānasaputri* (born from the mind) of sage *Kaśyapā*.

सुप्ते जनार्दने कृष्णपञ्चम्यां भवनाङ्गणे ।

पूजयेन्मनसादेवीं स्तुहीवितपसंस्थिताम् ॥

(तिथितत्त्व, तीर्थतत्त्व)

It is considered very auspicious if star *hasta* occurs on *jyeshṭhaśukla daśamī*. We also see the precept that *Nāgadevatā Manasādevi* (serpent goddess) should be worshipped on that day.

ज्येष्ठशुक्लदशम्यां तु हस्तर्क्षे ब्रह्मरूपिणी ।
कश्यपान्मनसादेवी जातेति मनसा स्मृता ।
तस्मात्तां पूजयेत्तत्र वर्षे वर्षे विधानतः ॥

According to *āśvalāyana* and *pāraskara gr̥hyasūtras*, the *śrāvaṇa Pūrṇima* is the day on which the ritual of *Nāgapūjā* called ‘*sarpabali*’ should be observed.

And, even though precepts state that serpent deities are to be worshipped on *daśamī* and *pūrṇimā tithi*, we find that this *vrata* is specially observed on *pañcamī tithi*, as suggested by the name *Nāgarapañcamī*. "Which day has to be chosen for worship if *Pañcami* has the *vedha* of either *caturthī* or *shasṭhī*?" It shall be the day on which there is *vedha* of *Shasṭhī*. It is because *Shasṭhī tithi* is very dear to *Nāgadevatās*. (Actually speaking, *pañcamī tithi* is very dear to *Garuḍadevatā*, and *śrāvaṇa śuddha pañcamī* was called ‘*Garuḍapañcamī*’; and in course of time the *Garuḍapañcamī* got transformed into *Nāgarapañcamī* for the worship of *Nāgadevatās* for some reason." – This opinion is also prevalent.)

ii) *Vrataniyamas* and modalities

Though there are some differences in the modalities in the observance of this *Vrata*, the rule that the *Nāgadevatās* have to be specially

worshipped on that day is commonly stated in all the precepts.

In some parts of South India, this *vrata* is observed as follows: A cradle or a cup is first made of rice flour. Two idols, one big and one small of *nāgadevatā* made of rice flour, are placed in that. Milk is sprinkled on those idols and worship is offered. (This is called *thani ereyuvudu* in Kannada.) Then, worshipping by offering flowers, especially with screw pine flowers, worshipping the anthill mud and grass blades also along with them, offering of milk, rice flour, puffed rice, groundnuts, *chigaLitambittu*, sweet *kadubu*, black gram *kadubu* etc., *kshirābhisheka* (bathing with milk) to the idol of the serpent along with the worship of family deity, special offerings, feast at homes and feeding of Brahmins etc., are done on that day.

On that day, brothers and sisters should join at a place and greet each other. Screw pine flowers (dipped in milk) should be used to sprinkle milk on the centers of the body like the navel, back etc., wishing coolness to those parts. And mutually salutations and blessings should be exchanged.

In some parts of the country *Nāgadevatās* are worshipped in special places outside homes also, in addition to worship at home.

We come across the following modality also. i.e. Bathing the stone images of serpents with milk at places where *nāgara kallus* (Religiously established stone deities of *Nāgas*) are there, sprinkling them with milk, offering of puffed rice, *pāyasa* and saltless *dosās* (*pancakes*).

Another modality i.e. performing of *Kshirābhisheka* to *Nāga* idols made of gold, silver or clay. Offering worship with *Karavīra* (oleander) flowers, *Jāji* (jasmine) and offering of *Dhūpa* and *dīpa*, feeding of Brahmins with dinner which includes ghee and *pāyasa* is also in vogue.

The *Bhavishyottara purāṇa* states that, on that day, both sides of the door should be adorned with pictures of *Nāgas* drawn with cow dung, and, worship should be offered to those deities with curds, soft blades of *dūrva* (panic grass), *darbhas*, sandal paste and flowers.

द्वारस्योभयतो लेख्या गोमयेन विषोल्बणाः (हेमाद्रि, प्रभासखण्ड)

One more modality is also there. It is as follows:

Those who worship *Manasādevi* should do a *saṅkalpa* with the words "I am worshipping *Manasādevi* to get over the fear of snakes", and should invoke that deity and other *Nāgadevatās* in a *kshīrāvṛksha* by name 'snuhī'. If that (tree) is not available, they should be invoked either in a pot filled with water or in mere water, and both (deities)

should be worshipped. Neem leaves should be placed inside the house, and they should be offered to the deities. And then they should be served as *prasāda* to Brahmins, and the devotee also should take them."

"The idols of serpents should be worshipped on a wooden plank, with red sandal paste, Or, yellow or black coloured idol of a serpent should be bought and milk should be sprinkled on them, and *naivedya* should be offered. If snake charmers happen to come with serpents near the house, the serpents should be offered milk and the snake charmers should be gifted with cash. Later, food items in the *prasāda* (which include preparations) that are bitter, pungent, astringent and sweet in taste, should be taken in the same order."

"Figures of five headed serpents should be drawn (or should be gotten drawn) from a pen made of gold, silver, wood or mud. They (the serpents) should then be worshiped with *Hāluḥhīru* (A sweet liquid prepared from milk) *pañcāmṛta*, (a preparation made from mixing cow milk, curds, ghee, honey and sugar), *karavīra* flowers and lotus flowers, *gandha*, *dhūpa* and *dīpa*. Afterwards brahmins should be fed with *laddu* and *Hāluḥhīru*. The priest who performs the worship should be gifted with a cow and a golden idol of *nāga*."

"The eight *Nāga devatās* that should be worshipped on that day as stated in the *Bhavishyattora Purāṇa* are:

वासुकिः¹ तक्षकश्चैव², कालियो³ मणिभद्रकः । ऐरावतो⁵ धृतराष्ट्रः⁶
कार्कोटक⁷ धनञ्जयौ⁸,

(एतेऽभयं प्रयच्छन्ति प्राणिनां प्राणजीविनाम्) (भविष्योत्तर पुराण 32-2-7)

Another precept says-

The main *nāgadevatas* are twelve in number. They are *ananta*, *Vāsuki*, *Śankha*, *Padma*, *Kambala*, *Kārkotaka*, *Dhṛtarāshṭra*, *Śankhaka*, *Kāliya*, *Takshaka*, *Piṅga* and *Maṇibhadhraka*. There is also a custom of worshipping each of these in the twelve months of a year, i.e. worshipping one deity every month."

"Those who observe these *Vratas* should exercise extraordinary restraints (on themselves). Food should be taken only once on *Caturthī*. On *pañcami* fasting should be observed during day time, and food should be had only in the night."

Nāgarapañcami is a festival in which the *Nāgadevata* is worshipped. Why did this custom of worshipping a serpent as *devata* came to be practiced in India? Modern scholars have their own conjectures. "It is utter foolishness to worship *Nāgas*. It is the ultimate in blind belief. It is ludicrous and also nauseating" is the remark of many.

These conjectures and objections can be compiled as follows:

1) This practice is found not only in India but also in China, Africa and in some places such as the forest areas of South America, as a tradition. All should indeed worship God who is beyond cosmos and the controller of the universe and who is the embodiment of supreme bliss and divine knowledge and the one who grants all our desires. It is indeed stupidity to worship anything else other than Him and especially, attributing Godliness to animals and living beings that are very inferior to human beings in HIS creation, and which are fit to be slain by him. Is it not further foolishness to worship a cruel creature that kills by injecting venom?

2) There are religions which state that this is a wicked creature which kills innocent people for no reason, by biting and injecting venom, and so should be killed at sight. Christianity and Islam consider Satan and his followers viz the wicked devils as the ones who possess the form of serpents. So, whenever possible they kill them thinking that it is a meritorious act to kill the serpents. The serpent is a cold blooded animal and a despicable creature. It is their custom to use the words "You cold blooded worm!", to abuse some one. Anyway, it is the meanest thing to worship (the serpents) and let there be no doubt about it, they say.

But why at all did the custom of worshipping serpents come into practice in any country or race? And especially why has this tradition come to be practiced by the *Sanātana Bhāratīyas*?

1. "Serpents are of help to man. A mouse is a troublesome animal which steals and eats our food grains. Serpents help us greatly by devouring these mice and other creatures such as worms, which cause us problems. So the practice of worshipping it, gratefully respecting it as God came into vogue."—This is the opinion of some people.

2. There are people who argue that the snake is a creature with terrifying and poisonous teeth and people who live in villages and forest areas are always afraid of them. So with the fearful superstition that they do not bite if they are worshipped, the practice came into vogue. There are some who actually offer milk to real snakes. Others afraid to do so, offer worship to idols of serpents made of stone, metal, and mud. There are some devout people who advise and also object with the words - "Why don't you worship *Nāgadevas*. Will not *Nāgappa* hiss at you (If you don't worship)?" (But they seem to have forgotten the direct experience that *Nāgappa* hisses even at people who offer milk to him).

3. "Not All snakes are poisonous. True. But who can make out which one is poisonous and which is not?"—With this thinking, some consider all serpents as worshipful.

4. There are some who pity the practice of believers, say- "These people, not only worship snakes but also ridiculously create the comfort of the association of snakes to other gods whom they worship!" For example, we come across the praise of the *Nāgas* as follows: "O *Śeshanāga*! You are a seat to *Nārāyaṇa* while sitting and moving, a pair of sandals while walking, a sacred piece of silk to wear, an umbrella and a jewel lamp while walking, and a bed to sleep. You are offering your service to the Lord in every way. Salutations to you!" Lord *Śiva* is a *Nāgābharāṇa* (bedecked with serpents), *Gaṇesa* has it as his abdominal belt, and Lord *Subrahmaṇya* is the form of *Nāga* himself. The bracelets, waist band, armlets ear ornaments and the holy thread of Lord *Garuḍa* are all nothing but great serpents like *Vāsuki*, *Takshaka* *Kārkoṭaka* etc. There is a feeling that they do not bite gods, even though they are known to bite people. The practice of wearing *Nāgābharāṇa* (ornaments in the shape of serpents,) and sporting a plait resembling a snake is prevalent in the *Sanātana Ārya Bhārtīyas*, even though they fear the serpents.

Some put forth a clever historical theory with a loud bang as follows: "This worship of *Nāgas* was not prevalent in the *Āryans*. It was in vogue in *Dravidians*, especially in the forest dwellers called *Nāgas* among them. In the later period, the Aryans included this Dravidian custom in their tradition." Their argument continues- "Aryans who came from outside, defeated the native Dravidians in various battles and suppressed them. People belonging to the *Nāga* race were also in that group of suppressed people. The Aryans exhibit their pride of crushing 'Nāga' people, through the story of *Śrīkr̥ṣṇa* trampling the heads of *Kāliṅga Nāga*. But what happened? Note the pages in history. Romans defeated Greeks by their brute force, but in the fields of culture and civilization, Greeks had the upper hand. So the Romans had to incorporate the important features of Greek culture in theirs. In this way the vanquished race defeated the victors from the point of view of culture. The same thing happened in India also. Even though *Āryans* triumphed over the ancient native Dravidians using their brute force and cunning tactics, they adopted the superior culture and religion (of the Dravidians) in their own culture and religion. One of such features adopted is *nāgapūjā*."

A certain category of *Dravidians* who lived among the serpents in the forest, who worshipped

serpents, whose flags bore the insignia of serpents and who wore ornaments shaped like serpents, came to be called '*nāgas*'. In course of time some Aryans established marital relationship with *nāgas*. In the *Mahābhārata*, *Arjuna* marrying *ulūpi*, a *nāga* girl, and *Bhīmasena* treated respectfully as a kin by *Nāgarāja* himself when he went to the *Nāgaloka*, are examples for this.

In ancient days people lacked the knowledge of science. Their life was based only on beliefs. Now the situation has changed. A lot of scientific research has been done on different kinds of snakes. We extract venom from the poisonous teeth of snakes and use it for medicinal purposes. We skin the snakes and use their skin. There is a big increase in the number of "great" science teachers and their disciples, who remove the poisonous parts from the body of the snakes and use their flesh as food to fatten their own bodies! There are people who remove the poisonous teeth from the snakes and make them (the snakes) perform stunts of various kinds, and make a living out of it. When such is the case, it amounts to insulting modern science, if the meaningless tradition of the worship of *nāgas* is continued even now, which is like a person hanging himself to a banyan tree, obsessed with the sentiment that the tree was planted by his father!

"Not just this. The snake is an ungrateful cruel creature and a mean animal. If a dog is fed it not only wags its tail in gratitude but also serves with loyalty. But this snake is a vicious and a ferocious creature that bites and kills even the man who feeds it with milk. The wise can imagine the level of the culture of the people who worship them" This is the argument they advance.

Now we need to discern whether worshipping *Nāgas* on *Nāgarapañcamī* and other days is scientific or just a blind belief, by discussing these opinions without any preconceived notions.

1. The tradition of worshipping *Nāgadevatas* was introduced in our country by the *Āryabhārata Maharshis*. Generally all are aware that the cobra is a cruel, ungrateful, vicious and a ferocious creature. If it is fed with milk, it will only increase the poison in that creature. If such a wicked creature is killed, even saints would feel happy and relieved. When such is the case, even to think that this fact has not come to the notice of the sages and therefore they preached *Nāgapūjā* would be wrong. *Jnānis* in several contexts have clearly proclaimed.

“पयःपानं भुजङ्गानां केवलं विषवर्धनम्”

(If snakes are fed with milk it results only in the increase of poison.)

मोदेत साधुरपि वृश्चिकसर्पहत्या” भागवत 7-9-14

(If scorpions and snakes are killed, even pious people would feel happy)

2. It is also not correct to guess that the custom of worshipping snakes came into vogue because they eat mice, frogs, insects and worms and help (the farmers). The snake eats these insects and worms as food and not to benefit us. The enlightened ones have not advised the worship of cat, eagle and crows which devour mice.

3. The argument that the ancients brought forth the practice of worshipping them out of the fear of people getting bitten by them, is also not correct. Because they have not advised the worship of ferocious animals like tigers and other creatures which are more ferocious and poisonous than snakes.

4. In our *Śāstras*, *Nāgas*, *Yakshas*, *Gandharvas* and others are considered to be of divine origin. (*Bhāgavata* 7-8) . So it is not in conformity with scriptures to consider them as the present day clan of ‘*Nāgas*’ who dwell in the forests in our country. There is no authentic evidence whatsoever for this.

"Aryans considered themselves superior to the people of the *nāga* race. They subdued these forest dwellers. The trampling of *Kāṭya* by *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* is a symbol of the suppression of *Nāga* race by Aryans"—is an argument of some, which is nothing

but a figment of blind imagination. This is because the very same *Āryamaharshis* have referred to themselves as humans and the *nāgas* as deities. They have not stated anywhere that they are superior to the *nāgas* and that they have suppressed the *Nāgas* who are inferior. And, *Śrīkṛṣṇa* did not trample all *Nāgas*.

5) The criticism that it is ludicrous to imagine serpents as beds and ornaments etc for Gods *Vishṇu*, *Śiva* and others is not a remark borne out of proper judgment. Only when the real form of *Nāgasarpas* which are described by *jnānis* as the bed and ornament etc of Gods is understood in the real sense, the habit of making such baseless criticisms ends.

Then which is the *Nāgasarpa* that our *Arya Maharshis* instructed us to worship?

At the outset, they appear to be the same serpents which we see around. But we come across descriptions in the works of sages which state that *Nāgarāja Ādiśeṣha* has five, seven or a thousand hoods, and he is a form having the features of both human beings and serpents. The serpents we see around us do not have these features. Whatever may be it, the origin of the *Nāgasarpas* which the sages have asked us to worship, has to be found out in the *jnāna bhūmi* only. The actual picture of that

(origin) cannot be found in this material world. Only when one enters the spiritual world, the *prāmaṇikasvarūpa* (real form) of that can be known.

Also the *śāstras* which tell about the experience of the spiritual world, happen to be guiding lamps for us in the beginning. According to those *śāstras*, the *Nāgasarpa* is the *kunḍalinī* or the *prāṇic* force which is visualized by the *yogis*. The flow of this *kunḍalinī* force resembles the movements of a serpent. This *kunḍalinī* which is present in our *mūladhārācakra* area resembles a sleeping coiled cobra and it helps people to digest their food. It exists in equal proportion in men and eunuchs but in a larger proportion among women, and it helps them in procreation. But in *yogasādhakas* it acts like a serpent awakened from sleep, opens its hood, raises up to the '*sahasrāra*', and makes them drink the nectar of the divine bliss and returns to its abode in *mūladhāra*. This science of awakening *kunḍalinī* which helps in attaining the ultimate accomplishment is called '*kunḍalinī yoga*' in *yogaśāstras*. In all the methods that lead to self realization, this *kunḍalinī* awakening has to take place. It is also possible to visualise this in its real form. The effects of this can be seen in one's nature. It can also be experienced in *samādhi yoga* according to *jnānis*.

मूलोन्निद्रभुजङ्गराजमहिषीं यान्तीं सुषुम्नाध्वना । (शारदातिलक)
 उत्थापिताधार हुताशनोल्कैः।
 उन्निद्रितायां भुजगाङ्गनायाम् ।
 सन्तापितात् चन्द्रमसः पतन्तीम्
 पीयूषधारां पिबतीह धन्यः ॥ (शङ्कराचार्य योगतारावली)

This *Kundalini* which is the *prāṇasakti* has been referred to by the *Purāṇas* and *Itihāsas* as *ananta*, *Ādhiśeṣha*, *saṅkarshaṇa* etc.

That very *Kundalini* is the one which keeps beaming as the divine umbrella over the heads of supreme deities such as Lord *Nārāyaṇa*, *śambhu*, *Sarasvatī* etc who are rich in yogic wealth and are beyond the natural state of the mind, intellect and senses.

Though the pranic power is one and the same, it functions differently at different parts of the body such as the heart, anus, throat, navel and other parts:

प्राणापानव्यानोदानसमाना मे शुद्ध्यन्तां ज्योतिरहम् । (महानारायण)
 हृदि प्राणो गुदेऽपानः समानो नाभिसंस्थितः ।
 उदानः कण्ठदेशस्थः व्यानः सर्वशरीरगः
 सप्त प्राणाः प्रभवन्ति (याज्ञिकी उपनिषत्)

"Śāstras say that these function are five, seven or infinite. Though they remain in different parts (of the body) and keep doing different functions in ordinary people, all of them

by coming together rise up and ascend unidirectionally to the *sahasrāra* in the *Brāhmī* state. The pranic forces which in the state of unison reach the top, are the hoods of the divine *Ādiśeṣha* which are seen as five, seven or a thousand hoods. In this way, as all them focus all their functions in the Lord, and become one with the lord. Therefore they do not have any hostility with their natural enemy the *garutmān*. *Garutmān* too is immersed in the meditation of the lord indeed! "Both of them, in the presence of the Lord, are immersed in looking at the Lord only, without looking at each other. Therefore there is no scope for any enmity" was the remark of *Śrī Raṅgamahāguru*, which we remember here with reverence.

“मुक्तशेषविरोधेन कुलिशव्रणलक्ष्मणा ।

उपस्थितं प्राञ्जलिना विनीतेन गरुत्मता ॥”

(रघुवंश -10)

Mahākavi Kālidāsa describes thus Lord *Garuḍa*, who happens to be in such a state.

The complexion of *śeshadeva*, who is one with the supreme lord who is purest, is also pure white. "*sitavimalatanuh*" say the *yogaśāstras*. This totally divine *kundalini* which is immensely enjoyed by the Lord, which is most obedient and which is a *śeshabhūta* (a remainder) of Lord *Nārāyaṇa* is called 'śeṣha'. The very same '*kundaliniśeshanāga*'

is a dear ornament of *Mahādeva* who is the Lord of *Prāṇa*.

This *Kunḍalinī* force, at certain times, can be hostile and can also cause a hindrance in the path (of realization) of god. In that state it is called *Kāliṅganāga*. *ŚrīKṛṣṇa* the supreme god and the great master of *Yoga* trampled on the hoods of that *Kāliṅganāga* and played the marvellous '*Yogatāṇḍava*' on it. Because of that trampling, all its demonical temperaments vanished and it became obedient to him. The Lord's foot marks on its hoods became an adornment. In remembrance of this only, the custom of calling the mark on the hood of a cobra as '*Vishṇupāda*' has come into vogue.

The snakes which adorn several parts of the *divyamaṅgalavīgraha* (divine auspicious form) of *Garuḍadeva* are also such impediments. But, they can cause no trouble to him as he is a *Mahāyogi*, and thus remaining under his control, they adorn him as ornaments. He has the capacity to devour them immediately. If they ever venture to cause him any trouble. Also, they do not attack pure hearted souls who are bestowed with the grace of god.

This *Kunḍalinī* force not only helps one to attain the *brahmī* state but also in their functions, facilitates the *upāsakas* to obtain progeny and cure

the diseases etc. The ritual of *Nāgapratishṭhā* (installation of *nāga* idols) belongs to this kind of *upāsana* *vidhi*. The form of *Kunḍalini* such as *Vāsuki* and other devatas happen to be the reigning deities for the *Kaṅkaṇas* (bracelets of Cords) worn in the hand (or wrist) during auspicious ceremonies.

The *nāgadevatās* also figure among the *Navatantudevatās* (the nine deities) of the *Yajnopavīta*. The lower order of *Nāgadevatās* attain their (accomplishments) by even the small powers of the *kunḍalinī* deity. Thus, when discerned in the philosophical real sense, (it becomes known) that *Nāgas* are not (at all) a human race. They are distinct powers of the inner world, visible only to the *yogis*.

Thus, in order to help ordinary people to ascend to the divine *Bhāva* of the *Nāgadevatās* who can be experienced only in the suprasensory inner world, the *Maharshis* brought forth in the tradition of worshipping the idols of *Nāgadevatās* in the physical world also. So it is hardly any wisdom to assign a period, in terms of B.C., A.D. etc., to the *Śaktiviśeshas* (distinct powers) which are being experienced by the enlightened ones from time immemorial.

It is no discretion to state that (divine phenomena such as) the union of god and the soul,

the movement of the *praṇaśaktis* etc started on such and such a day.

In the cobras we see around, this *kunḍalini śakti* will be present at least in small measures. If they are killed, the tranquility of the *Kunḍalini* inside (us) gets hurt. Therefore, the scriptures state a general rule forbidding the killing of cobras. Though all the cobras naturally have the features such as hood, poisonous teeth etc, we can see that they (the cobras) vary in aspects like the place of their dwelling, attributes and complexion such as white, red, yellow, black etc. It is totally prohibited to kill the pure white complexioned *Nāgasarpas* among them. They are symbols of pure *kunḍalini* power.

It becomes indeed inevitable to kill a cobra in self defence, when it attacks a person. In such cases, atonement of that sin has to be done by *Prāyascitta*.

दानेन च धनेनैकः सर्पादीनामशक्नुवन् ।

एकैकं स चरेत् कृच्छ्रं द्विजः पापापनुत्तये'' (मत्स्यपुराण 227-341)

It is sinful to hunt and kill serpents for no reason. By doing so one will be incurring the displeasure of the *kunḍalini devatā*.

It is natural for people to get scared when they happen to encounter a cobra. It is also true that it may even attack the very people who feed it with milk. Several stories are narrated in this regard in

our country. One such story runs as follows: A cobra was suffering, as a thorn was struck in its mouth. A pious man who happened to pass by, saw it, fearlessly went near it and removed the thorn from its mouth and provided relief to it. But this type of fearlessness, kind disposition (of that *Sādhu*), and gratitude of the serpents etc., are not to be taken as a general rule. But no one need to fear the worshipping of the idols of serpents.

Does not one get frightened when he visualises snakes with five hoods, seven hoods etc in deep meditation? No. Because there wont be any entanglements such as shyness, fear etc. in the *Samādhi yoga*. We would like to humbly remember an explanation provided by *ŚrīRaṅgamahāguru* in this regard.

Goddess *Sarasvati* is splendidly described in a poem in the beginning of *Jaimini Bhārata* of the Great kannada poet *Lakshmiśa*. A modern critic commenting on that poem remarked—"Upto this point the descriptions are fine. But the poet, all of a sudden, brings in an awful comparison. By the word *Phaṇiveni* (i.e. a lady with her plait resembling a serpent), dreadfulness makes an ingress in a beautiful depiction here."—When this was brought to the kind notice of *Śrī Gurudeva*, he said - "The critic might have experienced a fear here. But

Lakshmīśa, the devotee poet had no such fear because, at that point of time he was in a *yogasamādhi* (deep meditation) which is beyond fear, sorrow, bitterness and delusion".

"The poet is enjoying the experience of '*Ādiśeṣha*' who fills the (heart of the) devotees who are visualizing delightfully the blissful *Jaganmāta* (the mother of the universe) and (*Ādiśeṣha*) who is serving her. The poet seeing the similarity of *Ādiśeṣha* in the plait of the goddess experiences the (same) bliss. People who do not have the required aesthetic sense are not fully qualified to experience the poetic sentiment of that poem".

This explanation brought happiness and peace to our minds also.

The *Nāgas* worshipped during this festival are distinct *devatās*. The vision of *devatās* can be possible only in the supersensory realm. However great may be a person in other fields, his opinions pertaining to "*Nāgara*" (the deity) relevant to this *parva* cannot be honoured, if he does not possess a first hand knowledge of the supra sensory realm. "How many books he has studied! How knowledgeable are his words"—One may say with awe. But, (just because of these feats alone), their words may not stand up to authority. The

determining intellect (based on true experience) is only one. They can only serve as examples to the words of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* who said -

“बहुशाखा ह्यनन्ताश्च बुद्धयोऽव्यवसायिनाम्”

The intellect of the undecided (i.e. ignorant ones) has millions of branches (opinions).

And, it should not be concluded that this *atīndriyajñāna* became possible to only some people at some point of time in the past. It is a universal phenomenon that can be experienced at all times and places by the fortunate ones who have purified their senses, mind and intellect by *tapas* (penance), *dhyāna* and *Samādhi*.

If so, what exposition is put forth by such persons who have the supra sensory experience pertaining to the *nāgas* who are adored in this *parva*?

"These *nāgas* are not the cobras which we see around in the external world. They are not of human race also. They have a divine origin and they are *siddhas* (accomplished with supernatural powers). They possess the capacity to appear and disappear in any place at their will.

ते चान्तर्दधिरे नागाः पाण्डवस्यैव पश्यतः (महाभा. आदिपर्व 39-30)

They have the capability to grant boons or to chastise. By nature they are prone to anger generally. But when pleased by the worship of the

deovtees, they bestow upon them with progeny, prosperity etc. All of them are various forms of *Kunḍalinī* or *Prāṇaśakti*. Among them some are dispositioned favourably towards *Paramātmabhāva* and some are hostile. Those who are hostile should be overcome by the grace of *Garuḍa* the *vedapurusha* (the *Vedas* personified), or his master Lord *Vishṇu*, and then one can proceed further in the *Yogamārga*. And among them (i.e. the *Nāgas*) *Ādiśeṣha* is the *Mahātma* who is *Śuddhasattvamaya* (wholly of pure nature) who has completely abated the *triguṇas*. He possesses an effulgent form of pure white complexion and is totally a *śeshabhūta* to the Lord. Those who belong to his category are indeed *Anurūpas* (the ones who conform to the Lord). It is possible to visualize these diverse *Nāgadevatās* with their forms and attributes in the inner world. To facilitate this inner vision and the accomplishment of desires, the custom of worshipping the idols of *Nāgadevatās* has come into practice. And, the *Kunḍalinīśakti* does exist in the cobras which are seen around, at least to a small extent.

Some doubts and questions

A few important doubts pertaining to *nāgapañcamī*.

Which is the actual name of this *parva*? Is it '*Garuḍa pañcamī*' or '*Nāgapañcamī*', or, are both the names authentic? Why is it that the term *Nāgapañcamī* has gained special currency? This is the first question.

This *pañcamī tithi* is dear to *Garutmān*, who is divine knowledge incarnate. He may be specially worshipped on that day. But there is a special reason to call this festival as *Nāgapañcamī* in our custom, during which *Nāgas* are worshipped on the day of worship of *Garuḍa*, who happens to be the enemy of *Nāgas*.

Long ago *Garutmān* used to kill all kinds of *Nāgas* indiscriminately, be they pious or wicked. When he indulged in attacking *Nāgas* who were devotees of God also, the Lord broke his arrogance. In memory of that, *Garutmān* declared. "Let the *nāgas* who are devotees of God be worshipped on the day (earmarked) for my worship. I myself shall be pleased by the worship." This is the story on which the above custom is based. (This is not the story of *Jīmūtavāhana* of the *Bauddha Jātaka* tales). Among the *Nāgadevatās*, there are many who are very dear (and helpful) to God. They are respected by *Garutman* also. There is not much of a difference between such *nāgas* who are intensely devoted to God and *Garutmān* himself, the supreme devotee. Both indeed are forms of pure *prāṇaśakti*. As

kundalinī is called ‘sacred pranic force’, God *Garuḍa* is also called ‘*prāṇasya prāṇah anyah*’. Worshipping either one of them who dwell in the *Brāhmī* state will result in the worship of the divine *prāṇaśakti* itself. *Garuḍa* too considers the worship of *śeṣha* as his own worship. Here, we see the principle that, the worship of either of them culminates in the (worship of the) *prāṇaśakti* of God only.

2) What should be our attitude towards cobras we see around? This is the second question.

Let us agree that the *Nāgas* that should be worshipped on *Nāgarapañcamī* are *Nāgadevatās* which are beyond the realm of senses. It may also be true that the worship of the idols of *Nāgadevatas* is helpful in earning their favour. But all generally know the nature of cobras that are seen around. They bite and kill people out of fear or anger. Their terrible vengeance is well known. There are examples of snakes biting and killing even those who came to offer them milk. So, is it a sin to kill this wicked creature which kills innocent people?

It is but natural that people also beat them to death out of fear just as they kill humans out of fear and anger. Sometimes it becomes unavoidable to beat them to death, indeed!

All this is true. But, killing of cobras belonging to the superior category for any reason, leads to the

harm of the *kundalinī śakti*. Because *kundalinī śakti* will be present in them at least to a small extent. So, they should not be killed unnecessarily. It is best to keep away from killing serpents (of any kind). If they are inevitably killed, appropriate atonement should be observed and the sin accrued has to be expiated.

Normally cobras do not bite people who do not disturb them. They bite only those who are seized by *kālasarpa* (serpent of time). It is not right to kill any or every serpent that one comes across, merely out of fear or the illusion caused by the impression that snakes kill people.

We come across the story of ‘*Ruru-pramadvarā*’ in the *Ādiparva* of *Mahābhārata*. In that story a cobra bites to death a girl by the name *Pramadvarā* who was engaged to the son of a sage by name *Ruru*. Enraged by this *Ruru* goes on killing every snake he comes across. Then one of the snakes by name ‘*duṇḍubha*’ tells him and enlightens him thus: “We do not belong to the category of snakes who bite and kill humans. You are not justified in killing all the snakes under the impression that snakes of our category (also) bite and kill humans. *Ahimsā* (Non-violence) is the *paramadharma* (supreme righteousness). ‘अन्ये ते भुजगा ब्रह्मन् ये दशन्तीह मानवान् । दुण्डुभानहिगन्धेन न त्वं हिसितुमर्हसि... अहिंसा परमो धर्मः सर्वप्राण भृतां वर’” (*Mahābhārata* *Ādiparva* chapter-10 *śloka*.3-130)

This advice should be kept in mind by all.

We would like to conclude this chapter on *Nāgapañcamī parva* by discussing one or two important questions.

1. When and for what reason has this custom of *nāgapūjā* come into vogue in India? This is the first question. For this some modern critics give the following answer:

"There is no reference to *nāgapūjā* in the *R̥gveda*. Instead only the subject matter of 'nāgasamhāra' (destruction of serpents) is found. It is said that *Indra* killed *vṛtrāsura* when he had assumed the form of a serpent. (*R̥gveda samhita* 2-30)

But in the *taittirīya* and *vājasaneyā samhitas* there is a recitation in salutation to *nāgasarpas*.

“नमोऽस्तु सर्पेभ्यो ये केचन पृथिव्यामनु,
ये अन्तरिक्षे तेभ्यः सर्पेभ्यो नमः”

“इदं सर्पेभ्यो हविरस्तु जुष्टम्
आश्रेषे येषामनुयन्तिचितं तेभ्यः सर्पेभ्यो मधुमज्जुहोमि”

A *mantra* in the *nakshatrasūkta* wishes a 'svāhākāra' (utterance of the exclamation 'svāhā') to *sarpas* who are the reigning deities of the star *Āśleshā*. The *Atharvaveda* mentions the names of *mahāsarpas* such as *takshaka*, *Dhṛtarāshṭra*, *pārāvata* etc. *Kāṭhaka* considers *sarpas* among the 'pañcajanas' (gods with the appearance of the

human form). So, in the later periods of times, *sarpas* came to be considered as a separate class like the *devas*, *gandharvas*, *pitṛs* and others. In the *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas* also, *sarpas* came to be considered as a separate class.

"Why did the worship of the serpents begin? It is because of the fear of serpents. (Even today around ten thousand people die of snake bites in this country every year)'. Thus, the practice of observing (rituals like) *Sarpabali*, *Nāgapūjā* etc. came into vogue with the objective of praying them not to bite human beings.

It is indeed commendable that information relating to this custom which is stated in our religious texts has been compiled chronologically. But it is not correct to conclude that the concept of worshipping *nāgas* in our country is of a later origin. Because, nowhere it is stated with avouchment in the *R̥gveda* that only a specific number of deities are to worshipped and gods other than these do not exist at all. Nor can it be proved that all the *R̥gveda mantras* handed over by the *Maharshis* in the tradition are available with us. As soul, god and nature are *Anādi* (of incomprehensible origin) the tradition of worshipping them must also be *Anādi*. And, the *nāgadevatās* prescribed by the *jñānis* for worship, are none other than the forms of *Prāṇaśakti*, say the enlightened personages.

If the practice of the worship of *Nāgadevatas* were to exist in the R̥gvedic times, why does indeed the *R̥gveda Samhitāmantra* state that *Indra* killed a demonic serpent? It is because, there are some varieties of *Kunḍalinī* form of serpent *śakti* which cause obstacles to the *Devamārga* (path of the gods). Those need to be chastised, by *devatas* say the *yogis*. The story of *Śrīkr̥ṣṇa* crushing *Kāḷiṅganāga* is well known in the *Purāṇas*. The argument that *Bhāratīyas* began to worship *nāgadevatās* with the wish that poisonous snakes shall not bite them is also not correct. Because the *mantras* which are recited to pray the *Nāgadevatās* are not restricted just to wish that the serpents shall not bite or kill people. We come across *stotramantras* (*mantras* of praise) which pray those *Nāgadevatās* for progeny, warding off diseases, and attainment of *yoga*.

In addition to this, it should be remembered that the *Maharshis* have not prescribed the worship of cobras we see around, but the worship only of some distinct deities. They have the forms of both the serpents and deities. They are described as adorned with divine embellishments and divine weapons. These (descriptions) are not mere poetic imaginations. In the *Pūjakalpas* it is stated that *upacāras* such as *Arghya*, *pādyā*, *Acamanīyā*, *snāna*, *vastra*, *yajnopavīta*, *comb*, *collyrium*, *perfumes*, *mirror* etc have to offered to them. All

know well that these are not the *upacāras* that are received by the cobras seen around.

"The month *śrāvaṇa* comes in the rainy season. During that time, the snakes happen to enter the households either to devour mice, frogs etc or to escape from the rain waters. At times they bite people also to death. This is the reason for prescribing *sarpabali* on the *pūrṇima* of *śrāvaṇa* and *Nāgapūjā* on *Pañcamī*" – This is the commentary of some people. Even this cannot be a satisfactory explanation . Because, there is a custom of performing *nāga* worship in the month of *pushya* and on *Subbarāyana Shashṭhī* (The sixth day of *Margaśira* prescribed for the worship of *Subrahmaṇya*) also. There is a religious custom of invoking *nāgadevata* in the *yajnopavīta* also that is worn from time to time. “तृतीयो नागदैवत्यः चतुर्थः सोमदैवत्यः” (*devalasmṛti*, *smṛticandrikā*, *samskāra kānda*). We invoke *Nāgadevatās* in the *pratisara* (*kaṅkana*) which is tied around the wrist during auspicious occasions and worship them with the utterance “वासुकिदेवताभ्यो नमः”. We come across a ritual called *Nāgabali* observed in weddings. These rituals which involve *Nāgapūjā* are being observed in seasons other than the rainy season also.

So, the reason for performing *Nāgadevata pūjā* on *Pañcamī* and *pūrṇima* is not the (helpfulness of the) rainy season but (that it is) a distinct time

which facilitates both the internal and external situations to earn the grace of the *Nāgadevatās*.

“The *Gr̥hyasūtras* state that the ritual of *Nāgabali* should be performed on *pūrṇima*. But, the *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas* enjoin *Pañcamī* and *Shasṭī* for *Sarpadevatā* worship. Why is this? This is the other question.

Actually speaking all these three *tithis* are excellent for the worship of the *sarpadevatās*. Among them, the *pañcamī tithi* is dear to the deity *garuḍa* also. In all these *tithis* it is *kunḍalini* or *prāṇaśakti* that is being worshipped. There are many types in the *Prāṇaśaktis* ie the *Nāgadevatās*. Even the benefits the devotees pray them for are diverse. For this reason different *tithis* have been prescribed for the worship of *nāgadevatas*. All the three conform to the *śāstras*.

(3) Another question is whether worship is to be offered to mere *Nāgasarpas* or even to the ones with no hoods, and whether there is any difference between *nāgas* and *sarpas*.

Lord *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* in the *Bhagavad gītā*-“I am *vāsuki* among *sarpas* and *ananta* among *Nāgas*”. (सर्पाणां वासुकिश्चास्मि” “अनन्तश्चास्मि नागानाम्”)

Therefore *sarpas* and *Nāgas* belong to two different categories. Just as there are common features in both of them, it is clear that there are

differences also. Scholars give many opinions regarding the differences!!

“The serpents with hood are called cobras. Whereas all the serpents are called ‘*Sarpa*’s. Even the scriptures say that the word ‘*sarpa*’ refers to all reptiles But the word ‘*nāga*’ refers to snakes with a hood and a mark of lotus on the hood.” – This is one opinion.

वस्तुतस्तु सर्पसंज्ञा सर्वेषामपि गोनसाजगरादीनामपि सामान्या, यथा चतुष्पदां पशुसंज्ञा, नागसंज्ञा च सटादिमतां सिंहसंज्ञेव सफणानां पद्माद्यङ्कितानां च विशिष्टा” (अविगीता)

2. *Vāsuki* and the like are *nāgas*. Those which belong to a lower category of snakes like *alagarda* and others are *sarpas*. (*kullūka. Manusmṛti.tika* - 137)

3. Serpents with a single hood are *sarpas*, and multi-hooded ones are *Nāgas*.

“नागा बहुफणास्सर्पाः” (*Śrī Rāmānujācārya* in the *Gītābhāṣya* and *Śrī Vidyādhirāja* and *Śrī Tīrtha* in their commentary on the *Rāmāyaṇa*.)

4) The ones in the form of human beings possessing hood and tails are *Nāgas* and the rest are *Sarpas* (optional meaning stated by *Śrī Tīrtha* in the *Rāmāyaṇa*)

5) Those which are not poisonous are *Nāgas* and the poisonous ones are *sarpas* (*Śrīdhariya*).

6) *Takshaka* and others who live in *mahātala* are *sarpas*, *vāsuki* and others who dwell in *pātāla* are *nāgas*.

अधस्तान्महातले काद्रवेयाणां सर्पाणां नैकशिरसां क्रोधवशो नाम गणः,
कुहकतक्षककालीयसुषेणादिप्रधाना महाभोगवन्तः ।

अधस्तात्पाताले नागलोकपतयः वासुकिप्रमुखाः शङ्ख, कुलिक, महाशङ्ख,
श्वेत, धनञ्जय, धृतराष्ट्र, शङ्खचूड, कम्बलाश्रितर, देवदत्तादयो महाभोगिनः (भाग
5-24-28, 30)

7) Among the great *Nāgas*, *Ananta* is preeminent and among *sarpas* it is *Vāsuki* (*Śrī Śankarācārya*)

8) Snakes with a white complexion are *nāgas*. Snakes with red and other complexions are *sarpas*.
“फणिनो धवलाङ्गा ये ते नागा इति कीर्तिताः । अन्ये रक्तादिवर्णाद्वैः
बोद्ध्याः सर्पादिनामभिः”

9) Sons of *surasā* are *nāgas* and *kadru*'s sons are *sarpas*.

“सुरसाञ्जनयन्नागान् राम कद्रुश्च पन्नगान्” (रामायण III-14-30)

10) There are some *śāstravākyas* also which have an opposite view of the above categorization, and which have used the words *Nāga* and *sarpa* synonymously.

सर्पाणां सुरसा जज्ञे शतं नैकशिरोभृताम्
स च घोरविषो नागः तक्षकश्चोपलक्षकः
नागानां वासुकिं चक्रे सर्पाणामथ तक्षकम्

नागाधिपं वासुकिमुग्रवीर्यं सर्पाधिपं तक्षकमादिदेश ॥

(लिङ्ग. महापपुराण 1-18-1)

After examining the above opinions and the *Yogaśāstras*, we would like to state that all the *sarpas* and *nāgas* which are enjoined for worship in the *Śruti*, *Smṛti*, *Purāṇas* and *Itihāsas* are exclusive distinct deities. They are not the serpents seen around.

Distinguished *Nāgas* are also distinguished deities. They have forms of both the humans and *nāga sarpas*. They are *kāmarūpis* (can assume any form at their will) Among them, those who dwell in *pātālāsthāna* (nether worlds) with a brilliant white complexion are *nāgas* like *ananta*, *Vāsuki* and others. They have *Sattvaguna* predominant in them and are friends of *garutmān*. The ones which dwell in the *mahātālāsthāna* effulgently such as *Takshaka*, *kuhaka* etc are of reddish complexion. They have *rajoguna* and *tamoguna* predominant in them and are afraid of *garutmān*. They can cause no harm to those who are blessed by *garutmān*. They create hurdles in the path of *yoga*. They are prayed not to cause any such hurdles.

Distinguished *nāgas* like *Ananta* and others bless the worshippers with health, wealth and upward progress in *Yoga*. They protect their devotees.

Thus, different categories of *Nāgas* are worshipped on *Nāgapañcamī*, *śrāvaṇa Pūrṇimā* and *Śukla Shashṭhī* of the month of *Pushya* and other special *parvas*. On the occasions of wearing (*yajnopavīta*) and *pratisāra* etc also, *Nāgas* belonging to these diverse categories are worshipped.

