Art in general is the conscious expression of a people's culture in significant aesthetic forms. All great artistic work proceeds from an act of intuition, imagination, emotion and vision. But the whole basis of the Indian artistic creation is directly spiritual. It is strongly suffused with the stress of the Indian mind on the soul, the Godhead, the spiritual and the Infinite. As such its noblest aim and achievement has been to disclose something of the self, the Infinite, the Divine, to the regard of the soul, the self through its expressions, the Infinite through its living finite symbols, to the regard of the soul, the Self Divine through his powers. Indian architecture, painting and sculpture are thus not only intimately one in inspiration with the central things in Indian philosophy, religion, yoga and culture, but also an intense expression of their significance. Thus, its appeal is to the spirit through the eye. For this, the spirit needs all the possible help of the material body to interpret itself to itself. Inspite of it, form does not exist for the Indian mind except as a creation of the spirit. The ancient Indian art embodies in visible form that the Upanisads threw out into
inspired thought. The gods of the Indian sculpture are cosmic beings, embodiments of some great spiritual power. The divine self in us is its theme, the body made a form of the soul is its idea and its secret. On the whole, the whole art in ancient India is a profound interpretation of the spiritual realisation in stone or bronze. Any Indian temple, in its in most reality, is an altar raised to the divine self, a house of the Cosmic spirit, an appeal and inspiration to the Infinite. ¹

Independent temples devoted to snakes:

Snake worship has been the most widely distributed cult in our country as has been said above. The snakes have been worshipped and propitiated so much that several independent shrines were erected for them at different times and at different places in the country. Various nāga-rājas like Vāsuki, Taksaka, Śankha, Mamānāga etc. have been enshrined for the purpose of worship.

The Maya silpa offers a detailed description of seven nāga chiefs Vāsuki, Taksaka, Karkotaka, Padma, Mahapadma, Sānkhapāla and Kulika, whose description is as follows:

¹. Aurobindo, op. cit., p. 149-238
The complexion of Vasuki is pearl-white; Taksaka is of shining red with a swastik on his hood; Karkotaka is black all over but for three white stripes on his hood; Padma has the light rosy hue of the lotus, with a white streak and adorned with coral ornaments; Mahapadma is white with the mark of a trident or trisula on his hood; Sankapala is of light yellowish tinge with a white streak on his hood; Kulika is also red but bears the crescent mark on his hood.

In sculpture these seven principal nāgas should be carved with two tongues and two arms with a seven-hooded head studded with gems held over their human heads. They should also be provided with a rosary or aksamāla and Kamandala. Of course, these are all iconographic principles, which have no relationship with nāga-worship, but yet interesting to note.

The worship of Karkotaka is popular in Nepal, Kashmir¹ and in some part of the Uttar Pradesh state. The nāga Mahapadma is the tutelary guardian deity of the Vulur lake in Kashmir.

In Qamamba and Kangra valley² (and Kashmir valley also) temples are dedicated to various nāgas like Śesa.

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¹ Mahalingam, op.cit., p.54
² Deoras, op.cit., p.14
nāga, Sabir nāga, Taksak nāga, Prittam nāga, Basak nāga, Karkotaka nāga, Karmāṅga, Indru nāga, Santan nāga and many others who are worshipped in human form. In the valley of Chenab, temples of Vasuki have a wazir who is called Jeemut Vahan.

At the nāg Kuan or the serpent-well, in the city of Benares, ¹ "says Mr. Sherring, "the nāga-or serpent" is worshipped."

The worship of Sankacuda is popular in Benares, ² Sankacuda was described by Mahalingam as one of the synonyms given to Sanka, the others being Mahāsanka and Sankapala. The author is sure that Sanka, Sankacuda, Sankapala and Mahāsanka are not one and the same as recorded by the learned Doctor.³

Vasuki, the nāgaraja, has a shrine dedicated to him in Prayāga.

Many statues with snake-hood over them were found near Mathura.⁴ They are found identical with Balarama.

at Bhandak, in the Madhya Pradesh, there is a snake temple.

The account of Taksaka would be incomplete without noting the curious fact that down to the present

¹ Fergusson, op.cit., p.74.
² Mahalingam, op.cit., p.54.
³ Bhaviyapuraga, 326-30-1
⁴ Mahalingam, op.cit., p.52
day the serpent-king of the Panshya Parvan possesses a shrine in Central India where he is worshipped under the name of Takshakesvara or Taktra-ji; and curiously enough he shares the worship of the country folk with Dhanvantari, the Indian Aesculpins. The shrine in question stands on a most romantic spot not far from the village of Navali or Naoli; which is situated on the table-land at the foot of which Bhanpura lies. It now forms part of the territory of Indore and in ancient times must have belonged to the Malava country.  

1. Vogel, op.cit., p.206  
2. Mahalingam, op. cit., p.54
In Kachh there is a snake temple in a fort, which was named after the nāga, Shujfort. Especially, the jeda Jajputs go there in a procession. In Saurastra many villages have a Sermalia (serpent temple).

A nāga temple is also in south Canara.  

The nāga tabernacles of the sixth century at Deogarh are proof of the prevalence of the nāga-cult then. The nāga tabernacles may be taken for the independent nāga temples.

In Andhra Pradesh we find a few independent nāga temples and those that appear rarely may be called the nāga tabernacles as at Guraja, Krishna district.

At Nagercoil, in Travancore is a nāga temple where several stone images of the nāgas are seen worshipped. Snake-bite does no harm within a radius of one mile to it.

In the great temple at Madurai, the three principal images in the Tosak Khan between Hanuman and Garuda stands an image of the seven-headed nāga, richly jewelled and under a splendid canopy.

In the great temple at Srirangam also the principal images are two golden statues of the seven-headed

3. Ibid. p.51.
nāga richly jewelled.¹ Nāganath of Nāgapattinam is another shrine in South.

In south India snake stones are seen in large numbers in almost all the villages, consecrated at the foot of pipal trees.

**Temples for the worship of live nāgas:**

Besides the worship of the sculptured nāga images, we find the worship of live nāgas in many parts of the country. Many legends available from some sources point to this fact.

The Greek writers Aelian and Strabo, and a host of others refer to the worship of live snakes kept for the purpose in the Punjab.²

At Bhandak,³ in the Central provinces, a cobra appears in the snake temple on all public occasions.

Manipur and Sambalpur too are places where live cobras appear to crowds of votaries on certain days.

At Mopidevi, Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh it is reported that a wonderful nāga used to appear before the votaries once in a day regularly, usually at noon, which was considered as Lord Subrahmanyeswara.

1. Ferguson, op.cit., p.71
2. Mahalingam, op.cit., p.55
Of course, it is not seen now-a-days. The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics mentions a like case taking place at Rajahmundry.

At Mannarsala there is a sacred enclosure containing several living cobras which are worshipped by pilgrims. Next at Vaisarpadi, near Madras, snakes are preserved in the temple grounds which are revered by votaries.

A snake temple is at Calicut where several live cobras are carefully protected and venerated by worshippers.

The worship of live cobras eventually led to the worship of ant-hills and to the practice of rearing them in temples and even in individual residence.

Vannikunatha, lord of the ant-hill, is the oldest god at Tiruvarur, in Tamilnadu.

At the Sankaran Koil in the Tirunelveli district, there is a temple dedicated to Lord Siva. This is commonly called by the locals and Pambu-koil or the snake-temple. Ant-hills are reared inside the temple.

1. Crooke, op.cit., p.418
2. Mahalingam, op.cit., p.58
3. G.Subrahmania Pillai, Tree am worship and Ophiidatory, (Annamalai University, 1948) p.96
where cobras are inhabiting. They are worshipped daily and votaries offer them milk. Pouring of milk on ant-hills is believed by certain tribes in Madras as equivalent to worshipping a snake.

At Nāgappattinam, the Nāganath (name of the shrine) has an ant-hill by his side.

Respectable Malayali Hindus are reported growing wild jungle trees in the South-West corner of their residences, which they call nāgakotta or snake-shrine, where they regularly worship a stone image of the nāga-hood, consecrated for that purpose.

All the above information is proof of the prevalence of the nāga-worship which in its turn speaks for the divinity of the nāgas and their ability to bless mankind.

Snakes in association with Śiva and Śaiva group of deities:

Many a cult like Śaiva, Śaktya, Pañcaratra, Varuna and nāga were flourished during the times

1. Mahalingam, op.cit., p.55
2. Varuna addressed Sagara as nāgaraja, in 'Vidurajataka Katha' (No.545) and Mahavyutpati of Boudhic literature. The folk-lore of Nepali reveals the Varuna was described as
of Mohan Jodardb and Harappa in our country. The

"Mahānāga" (S.P. Varma, Madhyapradesh me nāgāmat ka Vikas; University of Sagar, 1961— p.116).

This legend gives an account of Varuna in white colour, with seven hoods having a lotus, conch, adorned with ornaments of diamonds. The Varuna worship was mentioned in 'Neeumata Purāṇa' that on the fifth bright day of Bhadrapada, Varuna was worshipped instead of nāga and the custom drew us to believe that Varuna worship was nothing but that of nāga. Further, both Varuna and nāga have coherence with water and water elements. Hence, the both were worshipped by the agriculturists as water gods. Further, the brāhmaṇas and atharva Veda (Varma, op.cit., p.118) also adds to strengthen the opinion that Varuna was connumerated with nāga as both have connected with waters and lakes and the both were stated as protectors embodying the dikpalakas and loke-palakas and were worshipped as watergods. Vogel also observes no difference between Varuna and nāga and opines that both are one and the same. (Vogel, op.cit. p.225). According to Manmohan Ghosh in a description of a lake in 'Atharva Veda' the Varuna was worshipped in the shape of nāga. (Manmohan Ghosh, Indian Historical quarterly, December, 1959, p.289). It was also considered by Iranians that the origin of Varuna was nāga. According to Hindu-Iranian culture, the worship was celebrated as "ahuramadzh" (J.P. Varma, op.cit., p.117). A section of Iranians who were later called 'parsis', along with
excavations establish the same. It is also evident

Hindu businessmen used to worship the ocean as Varuna on full-moon day of śrāvāna with coconuts and flowers. The same custom and practice is continued in some form or other. The Varuna cult was in its full blossom from Vedic to Sūtāvahana times. (Varma, op. cit., p.117). Taking the above said historical facts and legends, into account we may conclude that the Varuna and nāga have unventilated connection in occupying the important place of worship.

sun-cult in association with nāga:

There is ample evidence to find the Sun-cult having association with the nāga. The snakes of the intermediary space (antariksa) were termed as Sun in the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas (Tandya Brāhmaṇa - 25-15-4: "sarpam va adityam"). Further, it is said that the sun rays contain the snakes. (Ṛg Veda 10-75-11 "suparṇa upasenurindram") The Sun and the nāga are worshipped in the temples spread over the world dedicated to them. (H.P. Blavatski, The Secret Divine, Part III, p.377). It is also considered that the nāga and the sun are the blessers of wealth, fame, progeny, bounties, water, rain and prosperity. The crown of the Sun is said to be as seven-hooded snake (Julia - Races of North-west Provinces, London, 1867, p.75). It is said to be pointed out that the temples of the Sun and the nāga are situated on the banks of lakes and rivers since they both are associated with water and watery
that all the above said cults are inter-related in worship.

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In this connection, mention may be made of many lakes are named as "surajkund" (ponds of the sun). The nāga is also believed to be the representative or the symbol of the Sun. The principal deities of mountains were considered to be the embodiments of the nāgas in Japan (Mihinage, I, 208/298). Parāskara Ugrya Sūtra mentions that an offering (bali) was sacrificed to the nāgas related to the sun. (II-149). Viṣṇu Purāṇa reveals that nāgas were drawing the chariot of the sun (II-70). The nāga-worshippers and the people of nāga-race considered themselves as the descendants of the Sun. (Oldham, op.cit., p.183)

The above account draws us to believe that the sun cult was closely associated with the nāga-cult in a wider range.

Tree worship and nāga-cult:

Tree worship is a common phenomenon as well as nāga worship. According to Tattārīya Samhitā the Yaksas, nāgas, Gandharvas and apsarasas live of Banyan, mango, peppai trees, etc. (3-4-8-4). It is said that the nāga was regarded as tree-god in atharva Veda (11-9-24). The sculpture on Barhut stupa makes us to understand that the nāgraja was worshipping Bodhi tree (Ferguson, op.cit., p.15). The Jātaka kathās mention nāgas as tree-gods and their living on banyan trees. (Mahavanita Katha-No.493). The installation of nāga idols under the trees is very common in our
Of all the religious cults existing in our country at present apart from the independent worshipful rank of the nāga, the Śaiva cult shows deeper

country particularly in South India (Varma, op.cit, p.149). It is no strange to find that trees and nāgas have occupied an important place of worship.

Pitr-puja (worship of fore-fathers) in association with nāga-cult:

The worship of fore-fathers (pitr-puja) is closely connected with the nāga-worship in our philosophy. A section of people in Mathura believe that their ancestors would be protecting them in the shape of nāgas. The worship of 'ritvāna' would be performed by them immediate after they are blessed with a male child. The fore-fathers are worshipped during the said ritual in the form of nāgas and the custom is also popular in Madhya Pradesh. The Ātharva Veda spells that the nāgas were remembered as Gandharvas, Yaksas, the sanctified souls (punyatmanas) along with their ancestors. In the spells of Taksaka of Ātharva Veda a discussion was made on ancestors, trees, gandharvas and nāgas (8-8-15). The quotes from the above said scriptures make us to conclude that the worship of the ancestors (pitr-puja) was also connected with the nāga cult (Varma, op.cit., p.15).

Yaksas cult in association with nāga-cult:

Yaksas, it is felt have no different place but with the nāgas. Ātharva Veda quotes that the living places of Yaksas and the nāgas are one and the same, i.e. the trees, ponds and mountains (8-8-15). Both
connection with the nāga as we see hereunder. Sāiva temples and sāiva literature of our country show an intimate association of the nāga. Almost in

have a very close relation with watery elements. and hence, the places of worship for the both were situated naturally on the banks of tanks and rivers. Though we find the stupas at Barhut and Sanchi the nāgas and yaksas were given a secondary place to Buddha as worshippers and guards; the yaksas and the nāgas are worshipped there on par with the Buddha. Teerthankar Mahavir was camping in yaks temple where he felt it convenient to propagate his cult amongst the worshippers of yaksas and the nāgas gathered in large numbers. (P. Umakanth Shah, Studies in Jair Art, p.40) Vogel says that the Yaksas and the nāgas were the guardians of hidden wealth, and that they would bless their devotees with riches (Vogel, op.cit., p.218). Kumaraśwamy states that the Buddhists and Jains have taken the practice of meditating under the trees from the Yaksa and the nāga cults (Varma, op.cit., p.170). According to Motichand, the Yaksa and the nāga cults were very popular among the folk-lore to which Benares was the central point, prior to the Gupta period. (Motichand, Ghura felicitation volume.1954, p.254) The different places like Mathura, Rajgrah, Padmavati, Vidisa, Barhut, Sāndi etc., were prominent centres for Yaksa cult along with the nāga-cult. (Venma, op.cit., p.171). It is clearly evident
every village, however small it is, we find a temple dedicated to Lord Siva. At every place one can notice Siva being surrounded by snake-coils, with its expanded hood erect over the phallic form. In literature, He was described as "nāgabhushanam" one having snakes for ornaments all over the body. The head of the nāga may contain the hoods all over the body such as five or seven or nine. In Saivism one can notice different sects like Śakteyam, Granapatyam etc. Not only Siva, but almost all the deities of the Śaiva group show some association with the nāga.

The association of the nāga with Śiva is very intimate. Nature herself proclaims it, even if it were denied by the entire human race, in the form of a flower. The flower of Coropita guanensis exhibits the close connection between the nāga and the Linga by its very form and appearance with its protruded gynoecium in the form of the phallus or Linga and the cluster of androecium in the form of a countess-hooded snake shading the Linga. The flower as a whole resembles the picture of the lotus-seated Linga umbrella'd by a nāga of innumerable hoods. For the same reason, it is also called the 'nāga-linga' flower.

thus, that the yaksa cult is very closely conum-merated with naga-cult in ancient India as wealth-gods, dikpalakas (supporters of the eight corners of the Earth), blessors of progeny and water-deities.
In striking assonance to what has been said above regarding the description of Śiva, we find at 'sahasradhara' near Dehradun a rock-cut countless-hooded snake shading lord Śiva in His splendour. During the time of Buddha the Śiva Linga with serpent hood spread over the same was worshipped along with Bodhi tree at the temple of Buddha-Gaya. and the same was confirmed by Huen-Tsang of China in the 7th century A.D. 1

The "Sankarankoil" of the temple of Śiva in Tirunelveli district, Tamilnadu, is generally called the 'pambu-koil' or the snake-temple. The story behind it is that king Ugra Pandiya discovered there the holy phallus by the presence of a cobra and it was he who got the temple constructed there.

Śakti, impersonation of the female energy, has also the nāga-association. Śakti devi at Chitrari in the Chamba state (present Madhyā Pradesh) bears a bell and a snake in her right hand. 2

At Jaipur and in Orissa state Kāli is represented with her hair brushed back under a snake fillet and

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1. T.P.Bhattacharyya, The cult of Brahma, p.150
2. archaeological survey department 1902-03 (quoted by Cooke, op.cit., p.412)
surmounted by a distended head of a cobra, while in South India Bhadrakāli's image, with two wings, is covered with serpents. There was a very close association of nāga with Śakti cult. From the ancient times the Śakti cult was popular for its creation and its power of blessing with good crops. Nāga was also worshipped as the bestower of bounties, boons and progeny; grantor of good crops and as an embodiment of knowledge and wisdom. Since both Śakti and the nāga were attributed for the same cause, the people of those times, it is understood, worshipped the both.

Ganesh, a chief deity of the Śaiva group, is also described and represented as 'nāga yagnopavitinah' i.e. having a nāga for his sacred-thread, after his great father, Lord Śiva.

Subrahmanya or Sanmukha or Kumara or Murugan, as he is called in the South, is also the son of Lord Śiva and a deity of the Śaiva order. He has so close an association with the nāga that more often than not the nāga himself is called Subrahmanya or Subrahmanyeswara. The Andhras of the Andhra region chiefly call the nāga as 'Subbarayudu'. In Karnataka and in Tamilnadu he is called Subbaraya and Subbarama respectively. A serpent

1. Varma, op.cit., p.142
2. Ganesh pictures, paintings and sculpture throughout our country, and also in Ganesa astakam.
temple in South Canara is itself called Subrahmanya.  

Further, from the ancient times, no difference was felt between the nāga, Murugan or Skanda appearance. The idols of Skanda are found in some form or the other in every Śaiva and nāga temple of South India. Skanda is considered to be the incarnation of Śesanāga. The sculpture at Beogarh in Bundelkhand of Gupta period were carved as Viṣṇu on Śesanāga; Śiva, and Parvati on Nandi (bull); Indra on Iravata (elephant); and Skanda on peacock. The above referred sculptures confirm that nāga-cult and Skanda-cult were in practice along with Vaiṣṇava cult and Śaiva cults. The famous Skanda Subrahmanya temple of Palani in South India is considered to the Śesanāga temple. In the Himalayas, Bhairava, one of the śaiva group of deities, is represented by a coloured stick in the form of a hooded snake. Among the various practices top priority should be given to Bhujangāsana in view of its more practical

value than that of others. This āsana is meant to improve the suppleness of the spine and thereby added strength and sound health to its practiser. Our ancient yogis discovered this truth on close observation of the serpent. After a snake enters into the hole by half, even ten people fail to pull it out by tugging at its tail. The yogis found out that strength does not lie in muscular development but in the nervous system born out of supple spine.

This āsana consists of anterior stretching and posterior contraction, not only of the spine but also of the remaining parts of the body on the model of a snake.

From the above evidences, it is clear that not only Śiva but also all gods and goddesses belonging to the Śaivaite group show their intimate association with the nāga which culminates in the identification with Śubrahmanya in the southern part of our country as we have noticed above.

_Snake in association with Viṣṇu:_

In Viṣṇuvism too, the association of the nāga can be seen, though not to the same degree as we noticed.
In the case of Śiva and other Śaivaite deities. Especially, Lord Viṣṇu is seen in association with Śesnāg in one form or the other even in some of his incarnations as we see here.

Viṣṇu, as Śeṣasāyana— one who has Śeṣa for his sayan or bed — is the most favourite subject of sculpture and other arts throughout our country. Generally, he is represented with four hands holding Abhayamudrā with the down right hand, the two upper hands containing ankhā (conch) and sudārsana (the discus), the down left hand free, with Lakṣmī, His consort, at His feet and Himself reclining on the coils of Śeṣa who is represented as sitting or standing, but usually shaded by Śeṣa.

Śeṣa or Śiśeṣa is also associated with the Varāha adi Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu. In the sculptural representation of this aspect Śiśeṣa is represented as supporting one of the feet of the Varāha or the boar, while rising from the Flood of the world. This typical representation of the Varāha incarnation in stone can be seen at Udayagiri, Badami and at Māmallapuram. Besides all these things, coiled snakes are constantly represented on all Indian temples.  

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1. Mahalingam, op.cit., p.52  
2. Crooke, op.cit., p.417
Almost every town and village in our country contains the temples dedicated to Siva and Visnu as well. Thus, we notice an intimate connection of the nāga with the deities of our orthodox religion, including all the sects that sprang up in later times. And hence the nāga appears to be the only unifying principle amongst of the diverse sects, inspite of being given a subordinate rank.

Snake cult in Buddhist and Jain Art:

Buddhist art and snake-worship:

Snakes do also appear in the Buddhist art and architecture. On an observation of the stupas at Sānci and Amaravati it is felt that there is a strong possibility that the nāga might be a totem of sun-worship and the interpretation given by Boch might have some meaning that the five headed nāga is a hand raised with fingers as a benediction. The central arch of the eastern torana of Sānci stupa has a well known relief representing the worship of the Bodhi tree by the animals of the forest. Amongst them there is a five-headed nāga side by side with Garuda. On the same gate-way, we have another scene of the Buddha subduing the venomous dragon in the hut of the Kāśyap brothers. Here too the cobra has five-headed hood. There are two more reliefs which probably represent nāgarāja sheltering
Buddha. In another stupa at Sanqi a complete circle indicating the Sun is shown in which a coiled hooded cobra is depicted. This is on the south-eastern torana of the stupa. On the north-western side of the stupa, there is again a hooded snake inside a round disc. Here two nāgins are holding garlands for the nāga. This five headed snake shows bifurcated tongues. In Sanqi there is also a life size statue of a nāga king with not only a snake-hood but the snake coils running down his legs.

In the cave paintings of Ajanta, nāga kings have been depicted with an odd-headed nāga. In cave No. 19 at Ajanta, the nāga king is seen with a seven-headed hood and attended by his consort. Among the several representations of nāga kings there, two of them are of outstanding merit from an artistic point of view. In a panel was carved at the extreme end of the left wall of Cave VI as a subject representing a nāga king and nāgini seated on a throne. Another nāgini is shown as an attendant, standing by the throne with a fly-whisk in her right hand. The stone being soft and porous, the sculpture has deteriorated considerably.

1. G.Yazdani, The Early history of the Deccan, Part I to VI, Plate No.XXIII (Govt. of andhra Pradesh) p.75 (Hyderabad, 1960)
but the pose of the two nāgins and the expression of the faces of all the three figures be taken such internal calm that the subject is ranked for its spiritual effect amongst the best sculptures of the Buddhist art.

Among the sculptures of Aurangabad caves, cave I is a vihara of the seventh century. On the west of the verandah of the cave is the buddha on a lotus seat, supported by nāgas with their snake-hoods. Nāgas, demi-gods who brought rain, were depicted in the Buddhist art with a crown encircled by snake heads.

Cave 3 of Ellora is not like the preceding one and had a chappel at the portico's end. The lotus on which the Buddha is seated is supported by the nāga figures with snake-heads.¹

As far as the Buddhist sculpture—stupas, monasteries and cave paintings is concerned, none finds any evidence for the existence of the nāga-worship in Buddhism. So, too the case with all the Buddhist literature of the indigenous origin. But from the account of the foreigners, we get a fine account of the nāga-worship by the Buddhists.

1. Aurangabad — Ellora — Ajanta (Issued on behalf of dept. of Tourism, Ministry of Transport, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1965) p.26
The records of the Chinese pilgrims speak of the Buddhist sramanas worshipping the nāga with certain rites at nāga shrines. They also record the incident of the people following their Sramana to pray to the nāgarāja, Śalaputra, for obtaining rain or fine weather.

We also come to know that during the Buddhist times, "the śvara tree-dieties were called nāgas. They were also described as capable of assuming the human form, like the original nāgas." as if to show this identity between the tree-deities and the nāgas, we notice in the sculpture of the sarpa cave, excavated at the time of Asoka, a tree-headed serpent. This may be the reason for making no specific mention of the tree gods in the Mahasayana list of deities. But the Jain account of Mahoraga, who is said to have the snake-tree for his symbol, goes against this and puts the readers in a dilemma as to whether the tree-headed serpent of the 'sarpa cave' supports Buddhism or Jainism. It is hard to decide the issue in the absence of stronger evidence. anyhow, it is beyond doubt that Buddhism followed the nāga-worship, though it was reluctant to express it. Further, the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics mentions that the Saiva Buddhist converts of the western India 'preserved their original snake-worship'.

2. Ibid., p.417.
Jain art and snake-worship:

Jainism also, like Buddhism, shows some obscure connection with the nāga-worship. The symbol of the 23rd Tirthankara Parsvanath is a serpent. The Jain gods classified under the two heads — Bhavanapati and Vyantara — contain the nāga in each group. To the former group belongs the Nāgakumara, the body of whose members is white. They like very much to be clad in green and wear a crown containing the nāga-hood, their symbol. Mahoraga, who belongs to the Vyantara group of black-bodied demons, has the snake tree for his symbol.

The place given for the nāgas and uragas in the Jain cosmogony is a proof of the existence of not only the nāga-worship, but also of their worship of other snakes too.

From the above account, it is quite clear that no cult in our country is free from the nāga association.¹ Whether it was concealed or open is a

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¹ One of the prominent cults in India, viz. muslim cult has also associated with nāga-cult. The snake cult not only influenced the orthodox and the heterodox creeds of the Hindus, but it also had its furtherance among some sections of the muslims. This is proved by the worship of the nāga in a mosque near Mannarhat at the foot of the Nilgiri Hills in South India where an annual festival is held. (Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Part 9, Page 418)
different matter. We have noted above that the snake cult was adopted by the several Indian cults and creeds and made it a part of their religious milieu. As the depiction of religion on art is a very important form of expression of the religious sentiments, so the portrait of the snake on art in Hindu cults, Buddhism and Jainism became quite strong. This shows that the beliefs of the snake-cult were shared by other people. Therefore, they made this snake-cult as part and parcel of their religious symbolism expressed through art.