INTRODUCTION

Snake worship is a primeval custom that prevailed almost all over the India since the ancient time (Vogel 1926; Oldham 1988; Eliade 1987; Martin 1972; Nāgar 1988; Sarma 1956). It is not only a part and parcel of particular religion but also believed to be a part of both good and bad omens. It mostly revolves around Nāga, the hooded cobra. The origin of the word Nāga is Indo – Germanic (Vogel 1926) which means snake in English. Nāga has been both a subject of fear and wonder. Its capacity to move fast without legs, to live in water and on land, and its keen sense of hearing (Eliode 1987) have provoked human imagination and gave rise to vast serpent lore. The hood, the marks on the hood, and different colour makes the snake quite distinctive from other reptiles. Snakes are described in literature as well as in folk traditions both as creature and anthropoid. Man and animal are the part of the same eco-system living together from time immemorial. Worship of the Snake God / Nāga, which has found expressions in literature, art, architecture, sculpture, folklore and traditional paintings have been continuing in various forms. This custom has dominated the religious beliefs of the common people without any particular religious or caste barriers throughout the ages. Evidences from literature suggest that the antiquity of the cult goes back to the Vedic period (Eliode 1987; William 1983). The evidence of Naga worship can even be seen in the rock arts of prehistoric times (Wakankar 2005). The excavations conducted at various archaeological sites have also thrown light on several antiquities related to the snake worship. The details regarding their finding and relevance will be dealt in the succeeding chapters.
Naga Worship in the World

*Nāga* worship was very much common in almost all of the ancient civilizations and cultures throughout the world. Almost everywhere the snakes were treated as a part of socio-cultural and religious belief of the people. The evidence of snake worship has been brought to light in many ancient civilizations like Mayan (South America), Egypt, Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Greece, and Europe. In addition, the presence of snake worship can also be seen in countries like China, Japan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Malaysia and some Central Asia countries.

Snake worship also existed in most of the countries where it played an important role in ritualistic aspects of common people. There are several festivals associated with *Nāga/snake* in almost all over the world. Among this, the most important festival, related to snakes, takes place in the *Cocullo* village in Italy during the first Thursday of May (Kaul 2008). This festival is even associated with Christian religion. *Nāga* icons and different types of religious marks were found near the water bodies in temples at Mayan civilization of South America too (Kaul 2008).

In Greek mythology, the Goddess of wisdom and the Goddess of victory hold a shield painted with a snake form. The hairs of the Goddess of reprisal are also in the shape of snakes. The Greeks regarded certain non-venomous snakes as sacred to Asclepius; the Greek god of healing, who was depicted carrying a wand with a serpent coiled around it. Certain Greek myths explain the snakes as a symbol of fertility. Snakes/*Nāgas* were used to consecrate inside the temples to show or force to remember as a symbol of virginity. In Greece, there are many temples which are dedicated to *Nāgas*. It is believed that the snakes are the providers of Rains. There are also some Gods and Goddesses which completely resemble like snakes. Here it is clearly mentioned that the snakes were worshipped by offering different kinds of
sacrifices by Phonecians and Arab people believed that ‘Jinn’ embodied in the snakes (Barthell 1971; Clarke 1887).

Likewise the existence of Nāga worship can be seen in art and literature of Far East countries, China and Japan. Particularly in China, the anthropomorphic figures of Nāgas were very common in their costumes displaying the dragon hood placing behind man. The stories of the snakes are very much popular in China. Here the people consider Pan Ku is as an ancient ancestor and the creator of the world. It is believed that he looks like a combination of dragon's head and a snake's body. Chinese Classic *Shan Hai Ching* mentions stories related to snakes and gives several names of the snakes. Archaeological excavations at Yuan province yielded several artifacts which looks quite similar to the serpent. The symbols of snakes were so popular that these were used in depicting they are depicted in various weapons, pillars and various other artistic productions (Chao 1979; Noss 1990; Parrinder 1983).

Serpents were believed as a God for prosperity and fertility in Egypt. Among this, God Rannut is believed to be a God of fertility and harvest, and the rituals and customs of this particular deity is very much similar to the Nāga worship in several parts of India in general and Central Kerala in particular. Hih or Hoh is another snake-headed Egyptian goddess and is associated with Apollo and Athene, the Grecian deities of wisdom. Interesting notes can be seen in Hastings’ *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. According to it, Nāga or Serpent was considered as a guardian of tombs, dwellings and sanctuaries (Therring 2008; Wake 2013).

Australia pays respect to the mythical totem, Wollum Que, a snake totem during the times. Serpents were also worshipped for getting Rain and prosperity in some other countries like West Africa, Polynesia, Fizi and Cristoval Boraneo (Kaul 2008).
Altogether the above mentioned aspects of snake/Nāga worship in the world throw light on various aspects of the Nāga worship. An interesting observation is that such manifestations are available altogether in Indian snake worship generally and in Central Kerala particularly.

**Antiquity of Nāga Worship: India**

The ancient texts i.e. literature of late Vedic period, the epics (*Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*), the Puranas, Buddhist text and Jain cannons, gives ample evidence regarding the Nāgas. In *Rig Veda*, snake is mentioned as *Ahi-vrita* and in *Atharvaveda* snake was considered as the protectors of quarters (Chand 1999). Then *Sūtra* texts explain about the process of animal sacrifices in relation to Nāga worship. Epics also show different types of stories regarding Nāga. Epics explain the stories like mythical birth, Murder of King *Parikshit*, being the e rope in *Samudramadhana*, hostility between the Nāga and Pāndava, story of *Kāliyamardana*, story of *Nāga padmanābha etc.* regarding Nāga (Vitsaxis 1977). Archaeological evidence also suggests that the cult was probably existed during pre-Vedic period (Callewart 1995). One of the earliest representations of snake was found in rock art at Mesolithic Rock Shelter of Lakhma in Maukalan Village of Uttar Pradesh (Tiwari 2000) and many more other prehistoric rock paintings in northern India (Wakankar 2005). Representations of snakes are also found on Harappan seals and potteries (Hertel 1979; Panda 1986; Kaul 2008). The representation of Nāga in art is common during the historical period. One of the earliest Nāga figurines on terracotta has been found at Buxār, which can be dated 2nd century B.C., suggests the importance of the snake or the cult (Sharma 2006). Independent Nāga sculptures or as subordinate in sculptural panels are found
from *Mauryan* and Post *Mauryan* period mainly in *Mathura* and *Gāndhāra* School of art (Suresh 2000).

Such earliest representation of snake in rock art, seals and pottery suggests that snake was probably one of the animals, which was subject of reverence in the earlier period. Later on, probably it was incorporated into the various religious activities and representations.

*Nāga* are portrayed as a divine snake in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain religious iconography having often human face with expanding hoods and bodies of Cobras (Vogel 1926). Images, sculptures and narratives in literature represents the *Nāga* mainly in three forms i.e. Theriomorphic, Anthropomorphic, Therio-anthropomorphic (Elio de 1987: 56-61). *Nāga* is depicted with the iconography of ‘twenty-third *Pārśvanātha*’ and the seventh ‘*Tirthankara Supārasvanātha*’. Iconography of *Śiva* and *Balarāma* represented the presence of *Nāga* elements like five hooded *Nāga* covering *lingams* as well as placed behind the head of *Balarāma*. Among the famous fresco of Ajanta, there are several representations of *Nāgas* shown as seven hooded *Nāgarāja* sitting in an easy pose with his consort. Similarly in the huge rocks of *Māmallapuram* a couple of serpent demons wearing with a snake hood have been shown (Singh 1983). This cult remained very popular cult in the ancient time as well in the medieval period. Theriomorphic *Nāga* figures were a favorite subject of mediaeval art. Thus, it can be said that the cult associated with snakes continued in the mediaeval period. It is still a prominent cult practiced by the people in different parts of India (Smitha 2003).
Nāga worship in Kerala

It is difficult to trace when and how Naga worship began in Kerala. There are no direct and conclusive evidences found so far regarding the origin of Naga worship in Kerala. However, the antiquity of Nāga worship in Kerala could be traced from the Megalithic period. The evidence is found in the form of pictorial representation of a snake in the rock shelter of Nelsinathittu at Marayoor, Idukki district. More recently, excavations at the Megalithic site in Kerala have yielded one of the artifacts made of iron having similarities to the Nāga icon (Personal communication with Dr. P. Rajendran).

Kēralōlpathi, a legendary history of Kerala says Brahmin settlers in Kerala were compelled to go back to their native places due to the fear of snakes when they settled there for the first time. Nevertheless, later on, Paraśurāma asked them to provide separate place for the Nāgas to eliminate the troubles by them (Achyuthamenon 2008; Kurup 1977). Thus, the origin of sacred groves or Sarppakkāvūs where the Nāga images are usually consecrated emerged. Snake deities in Central Kerala appear in the form of Theriomorphic, Anthropomorphic and symbolic. Therio-anthropomorphic figures are seen only in the mural paintings of several temples. For instance, such mural paintings can be seen in the outer portion of garbha-griha in Guruvāyūr temple (Vaishnavite Sect) and the doors and walls of the Amedamangalam temple (Mother goddesses’ sect). There are quite a few ancient temples like Thiruvanchikkulam Śiva temple, Bhagavati temple in Trissur district having the theriomorphic representation on the walls of gōpuram and these temples were dated to medieval period. The worship of Nāga can also be seen in Kallil Jain temple at Perumbavur, 24 km from Ernakulam. Nāga worships are more common in Śaivite temples than Vaishnavite temples in Central Kerala. There are many Nāga
icons and scared groves (*Sarppakkāvu*) found in Central Kerala during the field exploration. There are families who are devotees of the snake god and have monument around there settlement and even in their houses. It is one of the most important cults in Kerala.

**INTRODUCTION TO SNAKES:**

Snakes are an object of admiration and imagination in almost whole world. Common people hate snake because of its slippery nature, creeping, locomotion and its ability to dispatch man from their life within seconds. Snake are found all over the world except New Zealand and Ireland (Stutesman 2005). It can live everywhere expect in extreme cold conditions. However, the origin of the snakes is still an issue of debate. It is commonly accepted that they belong to the squamates order of a scaled reptile (Ewart 1878).

They are widely seen in the humid regions of the world. The tongue is forked into two at the end. Snakes can identify the vibration getting through the earth made by others. The size of snakes varies from 5 inches (burrowing snakes) to the 30 feet of an Asian Python over 300 pounds in weight. Life span of the snake is usually from 10 to 50 years. There are about 2,700 species of snakes in the world. Among this, 240 species are seen in India and 52 species are poisonous (Murthy 1992). Snakes come under the category of reptiles. The movements of snakes are both quick and slow. Some snakes can strike at 35 km an hour and can inject venom. They move their bellies deftly and can reach speeds of up to 14 km an hour (Tarakeswara 2013).

Snakes get smells not through the nose but through their Jacob’s organ, a tiny fluid-filled chamber. Snake has lidless eyes. Eye balls in the snakes are immovable and also have no keen sight. This biological factor made snake as a dancing animal.
Because, when the snake charmer plays music, snake used to move on the basis of the movement made by the particular instrument. Most of the snakes are oviparous or egg laying whereas some snakes give birth to the young ones (viviparous). The movable arrangements of bones in the jaw portion can work independently. The two parts of the lower jaw in snakes are connected only by ligaments and can work independently of each other. Apart from the jaw bones, the tooth bearing bones and some skull bones are loosely arranged and can move freely. A ligament is the main component to split or expand the mouth as it wants (Deoras 1965; Fitzsimons 1912; Villa 2004).

The next important feature is a snake’s genitals and it is hidden in the body. It will activate when it smells out a mate. Snakes can mate in groups of up to fifty. This is one of the important aspects which can be seen in almost all the depiction on the walls of the temples. Intertwined depictions of two Nāgas are common in Nāga cult. The presence of such an act can be seen either in Kalamezhuthu or in murals paintings and the sculptural depiction on the walls of the temples. This resembles to a combat dance seen.

The above mentioned features are the common characters of almost all of the snakes found in India. These surprising characters are the main factors to distinguish snakes from other reptiles. Such distinguishable character gives a separate identity for snakes in scientific as well as divine aspects. So it can be said that, these characters and features of the snakes helped to make a number of mythical stories and symbolism on this creature and which lead to the worship of snakes by different names. The religious aspects of the snakes will be explained in the following chapters.

The poisonous and non-poisonous snake can be distinguished by analyzing the physical features and bite marks. The bites of the non-poisonous snakes evinced two series of equal-sized tooth-marks on the wounded area. In the case of
poisonous snakes, the bit marks are large and deeper on each side. Each of them will be followed by tiny marks of the solid teeth (Whitaker 1978).

These snakes are usually found in tropical and sub-tropical areas. Cobras, Kraits, Vipers, Coral snakes and Sea are the common poisonous snakes which were found in India generally and Central Kerala particularly. Poisonous snakes can be distinguished from non-poisonous snakes based on the following external features.

Cobras:

Cobras are the deadly poisonous snakes of India. Two species of them are found in South India and they are common Indian cobra and King cobra. Both species are very common in the Central part of Kerala particularly the lowland and highland regions. Among this King Cobra is usually found in reserved forest and the valleys’ of Idukki.

Common Indian Cobra: (Pl.3.1)

Regional Names: Malayalam: Mörkhan

The common Indian cobra is a diurnal snake and found in black, buff or brown colour and it is commonly seen in agricultural fields. It is also used to live in granaries, termitaria, earthen dams and rock piles. Identifying feature of Indian Cobra is following:

Length:

- Generally varies 5.5ft to 7ft.

Dorsal body:

- Body is slim in nature
- Smooth oval shaped scales.
• Yellow, dark, light brown, reddish, black, black mixed with blue, purple and red and it is depends on geographical distribution.

• Distributions of the yellow and brown coloured cobras are common in central part of Kerala.

• Dark brown or black coloured cobras are commonly seen only in the northern part of Indian.

**Ventral body:**

• Belly colour changes to milky white, yellowish, white mixed with purple, red, brown, grey etc.

• It depends on the colours of the dorsal body.

**Head:**

• Head is triangular with rounded edge.

• Hood marks also have dozens of colours and designs.

• Hood mark becomes faint completely in the adult stage (dark coloured cobra).

• Eyes have rounded pupil.

**Tail:**

• Tail ends with a sharp pointed tip.

Cobra venom is neurotoxic in action. It can kill a human being about 2 to 6 hours after bite and the death will happen due to respiratory paralysis. The symptoms of cobra bites appear within 10 minutes to 2 hours after the bite. The symptoms include immediate stinging and burning pain, numbness, inflammation, tissue around the punctures became bluish or pinkish. Other symptoms include rapidly advancing
paralysis. Then the victims became weak and unable to speak, move or swallow after the bite. His head and eye-lids droop and saliva dribbles from mouth. Nausea, vomiting and bleeding from some parts follow. Breathing became low, difficult and laboured and finally resulted death (Malleappah 2013; Alton 2007).

King Cobra:
Regional Names: Malayalam : Rājavembāla

It is a large-sized deadly venomous snake comes under the common Indian cobra species. It inhabits the plains and valleys of dense forests. It is not widely seen in India. It is found profusely in the Western Ghats, Himalayan foothills and the forest of Kerala, West-Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the Andamans. It normally requires heavy rainfall and thick surface vegetation. The length of the body grows up to 5 m and looks in yellow, olive green, brown and black colour. The maximum length of the particular snake (21ft) has been identified from the valleys of Idukki particularly Malayattoor forest division during the field work. It eats mainly smaller snakes and occasionally lizards too. It is the only snake in the world known to build nests; though Pythons are some other snakes may coil around and even incubate the eggs. Female lays eggs at the bottom of the nest and then remains coiled above them. The venom of the King Cobra is slightly less toxic than that of the common cobra. However, the venom glands are massive and it may contain enough venom to kill an elephant. Bite of King Cobra is usually severe and the person may die in a few hours because count of ejecting venom is much more other than common cobra. King Cobra species in India is a vanishing species in the dwindling forest range. So it has to be considered as a threatened species (Ewart 1878; Fayrer 2013; Vallenta 2008).
The foundation and development of snake worship in central part of Kerala depended on Viṣachikilsa. There were so many Viṣahār known to all skillful Viṣavaidyars. The most important text related to remedies of snake bite is Pullayārpadalam. It is a Tamil text which mentioned lots of mantras and details of medicinal plants and leaves for curing the problems of snake bite. It was basically practiced by a particular lower caste community in Kerala called as Pulluvar. Such community has a well cleared participation in the Nāga worship in central part of Kerala. Some of the people of Pulluva community are still keeping the details of Viṣachikilsa in Tāliyōla or manuscripts. They kept it as a secretory religious text (Gopi 2006).

There are several people in Kerala known as Viṣachikilsa and are known as Vishahārīs. There is recently developed rural medicinal discipline which can make medicines against snake bites. In the earlier time, these were known as Nāttuvaidyam (village based medicinal discipline) and those who knew such kind of medicines were called as Nāttuvaidyan (doctor for traditional medicine). In the earlier times, Nāttuvaidyam or Viṣachikilsa went along with religion. Several kinds of mantras were associated with Viṣachikilsa. The occurrence of numerous medicinal plants related to the snake bite can be seen in snake sacred grove or Sarppakkāvu. Sarppagandhi, a local variety of plant is used against snake bite along with other natural medicines. The Ernakulam district is famous for the cultivation of Sarppagandhi (Rauwolfia serpentine), the wonder plant, whose roots are used in the preparation of Serpasil, a very effective drug in the treatment of high blood pressure. The plant is known as Chuvanna Avilporiyam in Malayalam and Nāgagandhi in Sanskrit (Menon 1965). There are some other medicinal plants which are used as a medicine for snake bite. Such plants are commonly seen not only in sacred groves of
coastal planes but also in the sacred groves of lowland particularly in Idukki regions. There are different tribal communities like *Malapulaya, Malapantāram, Muthavāns* and *Kānis* resides over forest regions of Marayoor at Idukki district who have very good knowledge of these plants and there use.

**AREA OF THE STUDY:**

The present research is confined to the central part of Kerala. This comprises of five districts Idukki, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Trissur, Palakkad and some portions of Alappuzha. This region was chosen due to a number of factor:

- The evidence of varied nature is available in this part and could be analyzed to find out very nature of the cult in the background of the environment.
- Again the major part of central Kerala comes under lowland. Hence the human activities of this area are completely influenced by different ecological patterns.
- This region is very significant for ethnographical point of view. Many of the indigenous communities inhabit in this area, who still are associated with snake worship.
- The diversity in environment had played an important role in shaping up of settlement pattern and hence the diversity of the ritual process. It may reflect in their religious custom and practices.
- The concentrations of temples dedicated to *Nāgas* are more in this region than the rest part of the state.
- Moreover, no such works has been done on archaeological and ethnographical aspects of *Nāga* worship in this area. This research is focused on the diverse
communities who still practice *Nāga* worship irrespective of the caste and socio economic conditions.

However, while documenting and analyzing other parts of Kerala have also been taken into consideration for the comparative study and to investigate the regional variations in the demonstration of the *Nāga* worship.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:**

1. To understand the importance of *Nāga* cult in central Kerala

2. To trace archaeological and ethnographical evidences on *Nāga* cult in central Kerala.

3. To understand the relationship of landscape of *Nāga* Worship to that of *Nāga* worshipers.

4. To study the *Nāga* cult with emphasis on the ethnographical evidence for understanding the communities that practices the cult.

5. Study of *Sarppakkāvu* or Sacred groves for Snakes with relation to the *Nāga worship* to understand the landscape and creation of ritual space in central Kerala

6. To document the *Nāga* tradition in Folk Art like Theyyam, Thira and other alike.

7. To document the belief system of the different communities since the archaic to the present regarding the *Nāga* worship in central Kerala.

8. To explain the method of household and temple based *Nāga* worship in
9. The research will explain and translate the authentic meaning of Serpent songs like Sarppampāttu, Nāgapattu and Pulluvanpattu.

10. To expound, the symbolic stories behind the origin of Nāga worship in central Kerala.

11. Try to get an exemplifying factor; whether Nāga cult had appeared as a part of Animism or totemic symbol in central Kerala.

12. To study the various art, architecture, paintings and Iconographic representations of Nāga as Therio-morphic, Anthropomorphic, Therio-anthropomorphic and other possible forms in central Kerala.

13. The proposed work will make a comparative study about the regional traditional and its variations in the system of Nāga worship in Kerala.

14. The research topic will study its influence on the religious as well as the cultural life of Kerala.

15. To examine, the contemporary condition of Nāga cult in Kerala.

**PREVIOUS WORKS:**

There are attempts made by various scholars to understand the Nāga worship of India in general and Kerala in particular. All these scholars have tried to explain the presence of Nāga in literature, art and architecture (Vogel 1926). However, some authors have attempted to write about Nāga as a deity and its worship only in a religious perspective (Fawcett 1990). There are some scholars who have studied
serpent worship with reference to its representation on art, architecture, ancient literature and regional serpent lore of Kashmir (Vogel 1926, Fergusson 1979). Some researches tell about Nāga worshipping community like Nāyar, Pulluvan and their system of Nāga worship (Fawcett 1990, Vishnunambooltiri 1997, Gopalapanikkar 1900, Nāgamiha 1911). Malayalam work entitled Sarppāradhanayum Prakriti Samrakshanavum by M. Suresh discussed how serpent worship has brought about the protection of the environment and different varieties of snakes in Kerala. However, he does not focus on Nāga worship in ethnographical and archaeological aspects. In 1817, Dubois published a book on Character, Manners and Customs of the People of India. In this book, he provides information about Serpent worship as an animal worship and has given a frame work about the word Nāga as a Hindu name for the Serpent. In Kerala there are some valuable study done by several scholars over Tribes and Castes in Kerala (Krishna Iyyar 1937, 1939, 1941, Kumar 1984, Singh 1993, Mandal 2002, Sankaran Namboottiripad 1965). These works have concentrated more on collecting the information about their origin, population, religious, social, economic and cultural life of the Tribes and Caste in Travancore princely state. Among this, the tribe called Nāyādi has been worshiping Nāga in prominent places. Iyyer says, “the Nāyādi habitat in Karunāgappilly (Kollam district) is not significant by the existence of large number of Dolmens, as is Malabar, but is an area containing many isolated serpent groves, where image of Nāgaraja and Nāgayakshi are found” (Iyyer 1941). As far as the available information is concerned it says about the popularity of serpent worship in almost all areas of Kerala. Likewise, there are also a number of other general works which have given particular information concerning this cult (Ayyar 1997; Achyuthavaryar 2008; Harshananda 2002; Logan 1951; Menon 1962, 1965, 1975; Kareem 1976).
Above mentioned works deals with several aspects of Nāga worship like worshiping community, ritual spaces, literary evidences and art forms, which will be helpful for study of this cult. However, there is ample scope to study the nature of the cult by adopting ethnographical and archaeological approach and trying to understand why Kerala is so famous for snake worship. The ethnographic study will focus on the Nāga worshipping communities in Central Kerala. These will further provides the knowledge on the nature of Nāga worship, its influence on folk songs, folk stories, art depiction and other aspects associated to the cult. The snake and man relationship in Kerala have a large number of poisonous snake. There is no comprehensive work, which deals all aspects of Nāga worship in archaeological background in Central Kerala. The available archaeological evidence from Central Kerala in relation to Nāga cult has its own potentiality. There are only a few work carried out on Nāga iconography in Kerala in general and Central Kerala particularly. This research will take the work to fill the vacuum in Nāga iconography in various forms of Central Kerala and their community affiliation. Different nāga images like theriomorphic, anthropomorphic and symbolic representation can be seen both in worship and disdain nature throughout Central Kerala. Therefore, with all these existing primary and secondary information an attempt is made to bring out the relevance of Nāga worship in Kerala.

**METHODOLOGY:**

1. Review of available literature and documents relevant to the proposed research work in India in general and Kerala in particular. All the literatures available are basically narrative. They lack the socio-culture and economic background which has given the cult as well as the rituals
associated that has developed.

2. Extensive survey and documentation of Nāga icons, traditional ancient paintings, cult objects and temples throughout Nāga related Sarppakkāvūs or temples in Kerala.

3. Study of Nāga related sacred groves or Sarppakkāvus and choice of their location and placement.

4. Survey among the Nāga worshipping community to document all Nāga related customs and beliefs.

5. Preparation of sketches of the selected Nāga icons and photography.

6. Record (video and audio) the various rituals associated with the cult.

7. Record (video and audio) the process of worship and the nature of people association.

8. Investigate the socio-cultural and economic background of the community who are involved in Nāga worship.

9. Consult believers (interview) of the cult and take opinion of scholars, common people and temple priest for collecting relevant information to understand the relevance of Nāga worship in the background of recent changes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The research stands for understanding the characteristics of Nāga worship by studying judiciously the information from archaeological and ethnographical sources
of Central Kerala. However, the focus of research will be on understanding the factors behind the development of Nāga worship in Central Kerala since the past to the present time. The work also incorporates the evidences of Nāga worship from the regional, cultural, traditional and ecological aspects. The study also looks into the particular subject, tries to evaluate different ideas of the changing attitude of the systems and believes of worshippers in Central Kerala.

The omnipresence of Nāga worship has remained in Hinduism, Jainism, and among some indigenous and even Christian and Muslim communities in Central Kerala. The existence of such a primitive cult is completely depended on the environment, as its worship believed to provide care and protection to the devotees. Hence, it has a strong ecological significance. Among the educated, Nāga worshipers at present, it is more or less conventional without much change. However, it can be conclude that Nāga worship is passing through its diminishing phase as a form of religious worship. In spite of the religious, cultural and social changes in the life of people in Kerala, the tradition of Nāga cult also has some changes and adaptation in its characteristics. Questioning against such an age-old relationship of snakes with humans through strong religious believes has not yet started. The following chapters have approached this topic, different aspects and tried to situate the continuity of such a tradition in the changing cultural atmosphere.
Plate 1.1 Common Indian Cobra

Plate 1.2 Marks on Cobra Hood
Plate 1.3 South Indian King Cobra

Plate 1.4 King Cobra (Rājavembāla)