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Tree and serpent worship

Fergusson, James

London, 1868

Rise Of Buddhism

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If we knew more of the local ethnology of India, all this narrative might probably be authenticated to an extent which it is now impossible to attempt. It is curious to observe that in Manipur, the scene of Arjuna's marriage with Chitrāngadā, and his slaughter by her son, that at the present day the peculiar god of the Royal family is a species of snake, called Pa-kung-ba, from which the family claims descent. When it appears, it is coaxed on to a cushion by the priestess in attendance, who then performs certain ceremonies to please it. This snake appears sometimes, they say, of great size; when he does so, it is indicative of his being displeased with something. So long as he remains of a diminutive form, it is a sign he is in good humour.*

In the immediate neighbourhood of Manipur there are numerous tribes of aboriginal people, still called Nagas. From their name and locality it might be supposed they must be serpent worshippers; but no one has yet observed that form of faith among them. The subject must, therefore, be remitted for further inquiries.

The locality of Janamejaya's sacrifice is said in the Mahābhārata to have been the Kurukshetra, the famous battle-field of the Pāṇḍus and Kurus, north-west of Delhi, but another and more probable site is still pointed out at Agrahaut, in Orissa.† There, within the precincts of a very old and remote, but now ruined, temple, may be seen numerous small models of temples, said to have been there placed by Janamejaya, to represent those princes who could not be present on the occasion. They are probably not so old; but it is strange to find the traditions of the Mahābhārata still clinging to these spots, and Serpent Worship still prevailing there. At least, not far from this—at Sumbulpore—in 1766, Mr. Motte and another‡ went to visit a great snake that had been worshipped there since the world began! They saw him emerge from his cave, which he does every seventh day,§ and accept the offering of a goat which his worshippers had provided. After devouring it, he took a bath in a canal that surrounded his dwelling place; and from the mark he left in the mud at the edge, Mr. Motte estimated his diameter to have been about two feet. He does not even guess his length, but it must have been considerable. When Major Kittoe visited Sumbulpore in 1836 he was still alive,|| and probably is so still; and I have no doubt but that numerous other deities of the same sort could easily be found if only looked for; but attention has never hitherto been directed to the subject.

RISE OF BUDDHISM.

As has been frequently suggested in other works,¶ the great characteristic of the ancient as well as of the modern history of India is the constant recurrence of one typical phenomenon which controlled the destiny of the nation in all ages to which our knowledge extends. From the earliest dawn of tradition to the present

* Account of the Valley of Munipur, by Major Maculloch: Records of Government of India, No. XXVII. 1859.

† Asiatic Researches, XV. 257.

‡ Asiatic Register, vol. I. p. 82.

§ Vide ante, note, p. 51. Is it possible that the

period of creation in Genesis being limited to seven days is a part of the primeval Ophite faith?

|| J. A. S. B. vol. VIII. p. 478.

¶ History of Architecture, by the Author, vol. II., p. 446, et seqq. &c.

day the great underlying stratum of the population of India seems to have been of Turanian race, very unwarlike, and incapable of any rise in civilization, except through admixture of blood. These consequently easily fell a prey to the hardier and more warlike races bred in the countries now known as Bokhara and Afghanistan, and the result has been that at periods of from five to ten centuries horde after horde has crossed the Indus; and settled in the fertile plains of India. For awhile these retained their freshness and vigour, but by degrees, partly from the enervating effects of the climate, but more from intermixture with the aboriginal races, they sunk to the lower level of the indigenous inhabitants, and in their turn became a prey to the next horde that followed the steps of their forefathers across the Indus.

For our present purpose it is not necessary to inquire when the first great immigration of the Aryans or Dravidians took place, or when they first settled in the north and south of India respectively. It is sufficient that we are able to state that the less pure horde of the Aryans known as the Lunar race probably reached the Ganges about the thirteenth or fourteenth century B.C. From that time till the third or fourth century, or for more than one thousand years, no horde of any race, so far as we know, crossed the Indus. This may, in a great measure, be owing to the existence of the powerful empires of Assyria and Persia on the other side of the river, which may have kept the barbarians in check, or to local causes we cannot now detect. Be that as it may, the fact that interests us here is, that during this long period the blood of the Aryans had become so mixed and so impure that the Veda was no longer possible as a rule of faith, and when Śākya-muni attempted to revive the religion of the aboriginal Turanians his call was responded to in a manner which led to the most important consequences, in a religious point of view, not only in India, but to all the Turanian families of mankind.

So far as we can now see, Buddhism was little more than a revival of the coarser superstitions of the aboriginal races, purified and refined by the application of Aryan morality, and elevated by doctrines borrowed from the intellectual superiority of the Aryan races. Buddha himself was undoubtedly of purely Aryan race, being the descendant of a junior branch of the Solar kings of Ayodhyā. Burmese traditions represent his son Rahula as assuming the garb of a priest;* but the Hindus, with more probability, record his succeeding to the throne of his grandfather, and we gather from them, that the dynasty retained its Brahminical faith till its extinction shortly afterwards.† The dissemination of the Buddhist religion is wholly due to the accident of its having been adopted by the low caste kings of Magadhā, and to its having been elevated by one of them to the rank of the religion of the State.

As a part of the reform which he introduced, ancestral worship was abolished, and the sepulchral tumulus became the depository of relics of saints, Serpent Worship was repressed, and its sister faith of Tree Worship elevated to the first rank.‡ Absolute negation of sensual enjoyment, which to the Turanian in all ages

* Bigandet, *Life and Legend of Guadama*, p. 229.

† Wilson's *Vishnu Purana*, p. 463.

‡ When in 1866 I wrote the second volume of my *History of Architecture*, I, after hazarding the assertion "that before the Aryans reached India, the inhabitants of the valley of the Ganges seem to have been Tree and Serpent Worshippers," then added, in speaking of the Buddhist reform (p. 448): "Serpent Worship was utterly rejected, but Tree Worship was adopted as an important part of the new faith." When in the following

is as the breath of life, was elevated into a crucial test of faith, and asceticism became ultimately the one path to salvation. There is every reason to believe that human sacrifices were common in ancient India. War was the normal state of its kingdoms, and persecution is too essentially a characteristic of the Aryan races not to have flourished there. On the other hand, the Buddhist expanded the Jewish commandment "Thou shalt do no murder" into "Thou shalt not kill," and extended it to the meanest of created beings. No war was ever waged by Buddhists, as such, and toleration of the faith of others was one of the most marked characteristics of the new religion. No faith was ever so essentially propagated by persuasion as that of Buddha, and though the Buddhists were too frequently persecuted even to destruction, there is no instance on record of any attempt to spread their faith by force in any quarter of the globe.

The Turanian of course had no caste, so that institution was put aside only to be revived when a second upheaval of local superstition under Aryan influence on the decay of Buddhism brought Śivaism and Vishnuism to the surface, together with all the monstrosities of the modern Hindu pantheon.

Although doubts have been expressed as to the exact date of Buddha's birth to the extent of about 60 years, the usual chronology,* which is that adopted throughout this work, represents him as born at Kapilavastu, a small principality on the north of the Ganges, in the year 623 B.C., and he died at Kuśinagara, not far from the place of his birth, 543 B.C., in the eighth or eighteenth year† of the reign of Ajātasatru, the sixth king of the Naga dynasty of Magadha, who was then the lord paramount of Northern India.

The name of Śīśunāga is applied by the Brahmins to the first king of this dynasty; the Buddhists give it to the tenth, and add the following legend:—On a certain occasion one of the chief of the courtezans bore a child to one of the Licchhawi Rajas, but the child proving an abortion was put into a basket, and at night thrown on a dungheap. A certain Nāgarāja, the tutelary of the city, observing it, encircled it with its folds, and sheltered it with its hood. The people who congregated there made a noise, "Śu, Śu," to frighten the snake, and on examining the basket found the abortion matured into a male child with every mark of greatness on it. In consequence of this incident he received the name Śīśunāga, and in time ascended the throne of Magadha.‡ The second convocation was held 100 years after the death of Buddha, during the reign of his son Kāśāpaka, and we gather, though somewhat indistinctly, that his successors, including the nine Nandas, till

spring I discovered* the Amravati sculptures in the coach house at Fife House, I hastened to add as an erratum on the last page a recantation or at least modification of this assertion. Further investigations now incline me to go back to my old faith. The serpent, I believe, was rejected by Buddha and his earlier followers, but cropped up again among other mediæval corruptions, and, as we shall presently see, became an important element in Buddhist mythology.

* I have myself no doubts as to the correctness of the usually received date, and propose as soon as this work is published to submit my reasons for this belief to the Royal Asiatic Society. Meanwhile the conclusions I have arrived at in my chronological researches will be found in the table at the end of this volume. The reasoning on which they are founded must be reserved for the journal of that society, but the results have meanwhile been adopted as data throughout this work.

† Turnour, *Mahawanso*, XLVII, LII.

‡ Turnour's Introduction to the *Mahawanso*, XXXVII. See also Bigandet, *Life of Gaudama*, p. 362, et seq.

the accession of the celebrated Chandragupta (B.C. 325), were Nagas or serpent worshippers pure and simple.* They certainly were considered as of very low caste and hated by the Brahmans, and were not loved by the Buddhists.

With the Mauryan kings Buddhism seems to have entered on a new phase; at least in Aśoka's inscriptions we have no trace of the worship of either Buddha himself, nor of Trees nor Serpents. Pure abstract morality seems to have been the form it then took or was intended to take.† But in the Mahāwanso, one of the great events of Aśoka's reign, is the despatch of a branch of the Bo Tree of Buddha Gyā to Ceylon,‡ showing that form of faith to be then prevalent; and in the Caves of Orissa, which probably are anterior to the Christian era, we find both Tree and Serpent Worship prevailing. There are, however, few periods of Indian history during which such scanty materials exist for settling any point, either historical or mythological, as during the two centuries and a half before the Christian era. We know nothing that happened during that period, and we hardly see where light is to come from to illumine those dark ages.

Immediately preceding the Christian era a great revolution took place in Buddhism under the influence of Nāgārjuna,§ one of the most important names connected with the history of the religion. Although we cannot fix the date of this patriarch with absolute certainty, we can within very narrow limits. The quotation from the Thibetan Tāranātha in Vassilief's work|| places him between 14 years B.C. and 28 A.D., both dates reconcileable with a not very long life. But we have another means of ascertaining it even more satisfactorily. Nāgārjuna was the ruling spirit in the great council or convocation held under Kanishka, the Tartar king of Cashmere and Northern India. In a tope erected by this king at Manikyāla a number of Roman consular coins were found around the principal deposit. These date from 73 to 33 B.C.,¶ and as we cannot suppose they were deposited there till some time after the year in which they were coined, the building of the tope by Kanishka must be placed within the thirty years that preceded the Christian era.

At that time the Buddhists were divided into eighteen sects, grouped into four great divisions,** a circumstance from which we may infer that Buddhism was torn by internal dissensions, and might have perished without the impulse given by this fresh importation of Tartar blood from the north. At the same time also we learn that Milinda, king of Eastern Panjāb, had silenced the Buddhist priests in argument, and driven them from the country across the Himalaya to Rakshita Tal and Manasarovara.†† At this critical juncture the youthful Nāgārjuna appeared. He was then a monk in the celebrated monastery of Nālanda in Behar‡‡—the Monte

* Mahā Padma and Nanda, the only two of their names we know with certainty, are both names of serpents. Their coins I believe to be those depicted, J. A. S. B., vol. VII., pl. LX., No. 1 to 9. On all these the serpent is the principal symbol.

† J. A. S. B., VII. p. 219; J. R. A. S., XII. 153.

‡ Vide ante, p. 56.

§ His name is singularly suggestive, being compounded of "Nāga," a serpent, and a tree, "Arjuna," under which he was born. Vassilief, &c. *Bouddhisme*, 213.

|| *Le Bouddhisme*, 201.

¶ Cunningham, *Bhilsa Topes*, 130.

** *Asiatic Researches*, XX. 92, 297.

†† Cunningham, *Bhilsa Topes*, 130.

‡‡ This monastery took its name and probably owed its original sanctity to a dragon or Nāga called Nālanda, who resided in a pool close by. General Cunningham saw in 1861-62 the tank in which he resided. Report to Government for those years, p. 12.

Cassino of India,—and proclaimed himself the restorer of the old faith. According to this prophet the words uttered by Śākya Muni during his life-time had been heard and noted down by the Nagas, who had kept them to themselves in their own abode, till such time as mankind should become worthy to receive them. Nāgārjuna gave out that he had received these documents from the Nagas and was commissioned to proclaim them to the world.* This gave rise to an entirely new school of Buddhism known as Mahāyāna, or as M. Julien translates it†, the “Grand Véhicule,” as opposed to Hinayāna or the “Petit Véhicule;” the distinction between the two being in almost every respect identical with that which exists between Evangelical and Mediæval Christianity.

This is another of those curious historical coincidences that exist between Christianity and Buddhism, and there are few so startling. In the first three centuries after the death of its founder, Buddhism was a struggling sect, sometimes petted, sometimes persecuted, but in spite of all we are told, in subsequent legends, never spread to any great extent among the people. Three hundred years after Buddha, Aśoka did for Buddhism exactly what Constantine did for Christianity. He adopted it, made it the religion of the state, and with all the zeal of a convert, used every exertion to assist in its propagation. Six hundred years after Buddha, Nāgārjuna and Kamishka did for the eastern faith what St. Benedict and Gregory the Great did for the western, they created a church with a Hierarchy and Doctrine. We must go on further still for four centuries more, to Buddhaghosa (A.D. 410) and to Hildebrand, before we find our Mediæval churches quite complete, and the priesthood quite segregated from the laity, and the system perfected in all its parts. In the sixteenth century after Christ came the reformation, and with it the restoration of Evangelical Christianity. In the sixteenth century after Buddha came a reformation, but it was one of extermination of the faith, in so far as India was concerned. Śankara Āchārya was the Indian Luther, but his aim was widely different. Whatever may have been the abuses and corruptions that had crept into Buddhism in the eighth and tenth centuries of our era, they were replaced by a faith much less pure, and far fuller of idolatrous absurdities than that which it superseded. What the western reformers aimed at, was to restore the Christian Hinayāna. In the east this was not thought of, hence the different fate of the two faiths. In Europe Christianity was invigorated by the struggle, in India Buddhism perished altogether.

The consequence of all this is, that we are now very much in the position of a foreign investigator who might have entered some great conventual establishment in Europe in the fourteenth or fifteenth century to study Christianity. Worse than even this; it is as if the monasteries of the middle ages had lasted for four or five centuries longer without any reform or light from without, and that then an attempt should have been made to ascertain within their walls what primitive Christianity originally may have been. The explorer would have found lives and legends of saints in abundance; miracles and divine communications without end; ponderous tomes of scholastic divinity, and a marvellously falsified history. Instead of the Bible, he would have been referred to that mass of beautiful but purely legendary fictions which, in the course of centuries, had attached themselves to the name of the Virgin

* Vassilief, *Bouddhisme*, 119.
(4799.)

† *Voyages de Hiouen-Thsang, passim.*
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Mary, and to all the members of the Holy family. All this, too, he would have found mixed up with stories from the Old Testament, and from the lives of Mediæval saints in most marvellous confusion. If among all these works he chanced to light on the Bible, it certainly would not be pointed out to him as the one true Life of Christ, or as the basis of the Christian faith. We would, no doubt, appreciate the Gospels of Buddhism if we found them; but all that has yet been disinterred from the monasteries of Thibet, or the libraries of China or Ceylon, is subsequent to Buddhaghosa; more than one thousand years after the death of the founder of the religion, and long after the Naga revelation had superseded the original faith. We are thus precisely in the position of the student of Christianity who had only the library of some Mediæval monastery at his command. In so far as books are concerned, we depend almost wholly for our knowledge of the Life of Buddha on the *Lalita Vistara*,* and other works of the same age and class. The *Lalita Vistara*, however, was reduced to its present form in the fourteenth century of Buddha, and is the exact counterpart in purpose and authenticity to the *Legenda Aurea*, and similar works of the Christian middle ages. It is true all these Buddhist books profess to be founded on earlier works, and no doubt this to some extent is true; but as these earlier works have not yet been discovered, we are left very much to our own powers of critical discrimination to say what is original and what may have been added to suit the tastes and feelings of an age long subsequent to the events.†

Looking at what has been done within the last twenty years, it is not impossible that we may recover even the original *Sûtras*, the *Vinaya* and the *Abhidharma*, as they are said to have been compiled by *Upâli*, *Ânanda*, and *Kâśyapa* immediately on the death of *Śākya Muni*,‡ or at all events we may hope that the keen criticism of modern scholars may be able, at least to some extent, to separate the wheat from the chaff, and restore to us a tolerably correct picture of primitive Buddhism as it existed before the Christian era. Notwithstanding all the difficulties of the task, considerable progress has already been achieved in this direction. *Burnouf's* contributions are invaluable,§ while the works of *Barthélemy St. Hilaire*,|| of *Bigandet*,¶ and *Vassilief*,** are most useful *résumés* of what is known. The Germans also and our own scholars have collected a mass of materials, and discussed and dissected a number of problems which will clear the way for a correct understanding of many questions whenever a serious attempt is made to combine the whole into a consecutive history.

In the meanwhile it is of the utmost importance that everything should be gathered together and published that can throw any light on Buddhism anterior to the time when the books we now possess were reduced to their present form. The

* Translated from the Thibetan by Foucaux. Paris, 4to., 1847.

† If anyone would wish perfectly to realize the position of Buddhist scholars at the present day, let him read carefully any one of the many versions of "*L'histoire du Noble et Vaillant roy Alexandre le Grand*," as compiled in the middle ages, and compare it with the narrative of the life of the same monarch as related by classical authors. Having done this, he will appreciate the difficulty in which Oriental scholars are now placed as regards the early history of Buddhism in the life of the founder of that religion.

‡ *J. A. S. B.*, vol. I. p. 6; *Asiatic Researches*, XX. 42, &c.

§ *Introduction à l'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*. Lotus de la bonne loi, &c.

|| *Le Bouddha et sa Religion*. Paris, 1860.

¶ *The Life or Legend of Gaudama*. Rangoon, 1866.

** *Le Bouddhisme, ses Dogmes, son Histoire, et sa Littérature*, traduit du Russe par La Comme. Paris, 1865.

only written documents which certainly belong to the earlier epoch are the edicts of Aśoka, engraved on the *lāts* at Delhi, Allahabad, and elsewhere; and on rocks at five or six places in India, extending from the shores of the Bay of Bengal to Guzerat, and to the Himalayas and Peshawar on the north. Except that at Bhabra,* these are neither doctrinal nor historical. They are dry moral precepts, and so unlike the Buddhism "quæ nunc est," that, but for collateral secondary evidence, it might very well be doubted whether they belonged to that religion at all, or it might be disputed, as was done by the late Professor Wilson, whether they were written by Aśoka. The Bhabra inscription and further investigations have set these questions at rest. But the picture these inscriptions afford us of Buddhism 250 B.C. is a wonderful contrast to what we find in the *Lalita Vistara* of Thibet,† as compiled in the eighth or ninth century of our era, or any other written records of the religion which we possess.

Next in importance to these inscriptions are the sculptures of the two Topes, illustrated in this work. The gateways at Sanchi were erected, as nearly as can be ascertained, in the first half of the first century of our era, and, therefore, nearly contemporary with Nāgārjuna. They are not pure, but they are purer than anything else of their kind now known to exist. Buddha never appears in them as an object of worship. The Dagoba, the Chakra or wheel, the Tree, and other such emblems are revered. The Serpent does appear but rarely, and we have very little of the absurd supernatural fables which afterwards form the stock of the legends. At Amravati, three centuries afterwards, we find a state of affairs much more in accordance with modern notions. Buddha is worshipped, but the Naga is his co-equal. The Dagoba, the Tree, the Chakra, are all revered; and almost all the legends of modern times may probably be traced in its sculptures, though in a purer form than in the books. The first may be taken as the nearest approach we possess to an illustrated Bible of the Hīnayāna period, five hundred years before the oldest Buddhist book we possess; and Amravati as a pictorial illustration of the Mahāyāna three centuries after its promulgation, and just before Fa-Hian‡ visited the country and gave us the earliest description we have of the faith by any outsider, since at least the very meagre and unsatisfactory accounts of the Greeks.

In the frescoes that cover the walls of the Caves at Ajanta is found a third picture, three centuries later than the sculptures at Amravati, this time representing the state of Buddhist belief just before its decline. Owing to the unfortunate fire at the Crystal Palace these are not now available for purposes of illustration, but they may become so hereafter. Even, however, if we possessed drawings or photographs of them, they could never be so important for the history of the faith as the sculptures of the two Topes of Sanchi and Amravati, which represent it before the existence, in their present form, of any of the books we now possess. Our regret, however, at the loss of these copies, is very much lessened, in so far as our present purposes are concerned, by the knowledge that there were no traces of Serpent Worship in the paintings. The only representations of the Naga found at Ajanta are among

* J. R. A. S., XVI. p. 367.

† These inscriptions will be found reprinted, in so far as it is necessary for present purposes, in Appendix B.

‡ *Foë-Kouë-Ki*, translated by Rémusat, &c., 4to., Paris, 1836.

the sculptured decorations of the doorways or in detached bas-reliefs outside the caves,* where they may be considered as accessory or subordinate to the principal form of worship. For a history of Buddhism, the paintings are of great interest; as illustrating either Tree or Serpent Worship, they are comparatively unimportant.

The same remark applies to the frescoes in the Caves at Baugh, and generally to the western Caves. The tendency of the migration from Takshasilâ seems to have been southward, and towards the East, and never to have descended the Ghauts or penetrated into the Concan. On the other hand, the most recent example I am acquainted with of any great Naga sculptures belonging to the classical age of Indian art, is the well-known bas-relief at Mahavellipore,† on the eastern shore, about forty miles south of Madras, and executed apparently in the thirteenth century. This is carved on two great masses of granite rock, and extends about 90 feet north and south, by 30 or 35 feet in height. On the northern or right-hand portion, a group of elephants, beautifully executed, is advancing towards the centre, and above them some thirty figures, interspersed with lions and other animals, are all turning in the same direction. On the left-hand rock the lower part was evidently intended to contain the representations of the rest of the animal kingdom, but is only commenced. The upper portion has a number of human figures, equal to that of the other half of the bas-reliefs, and all equally turning towards the centre. The artist has utilized the edge of the northern rock, so as to give his principal figures a higher relief than could be obtained in the flat portions, and also to heighten their effect by having a shadow behind them. But unfortunately from this cause they were so exposed that the upper portion has been broken away. When Mr. Babington drew them, in 1827, only the lower part of the great Naga was remaining, but his wife below him was quite perfect, and presents us with a form not found either at Sanchi, Amravati, or Ajanta. The Nagas here, both male and female, are represented as Serpents at full length, but human from the waist upwards. They still, however, generally have the Snake hood of three or five heads canopying their own; in the same manner as in the Chinese woodcut, No. 3, introduced on page 53, where this more modern form of the Naga has been adopted.

This form is found among the sculptures at Hullabeed and in the Caves at Iwullee, both certainly of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century, and the form continues down to modern times; but this example at Mahavellipore is, so far as I



SIVA WITH NAGAS FROM HULLABEED,
ABOUT 1300 A.D.
[From a Photograph.]

* I possess some hundreds of *sculptured* representations of the Naga. I never saw or heard of a *painted* Naga anywhere.

† This bas-relief was described by Bishop Heber and Mrs. Graham. A notice of it by Mr. Goldingham appeared in the *Asiatic Researches*, vol. v. A view of it was published by Daniell; but the best is that by Messrs. Babington and Hulston, in the *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. ii. plates I. and II. I have two photographs of it by Dr. Hunter, of Madras, lying before me.

know, among the earliest examples of the form.* In other respects the grouping there of the figures around the Naga is so similar to what we find at Sanchi, that it is at first sight difficult to believe that twelve or thirteen centuries had elapsed between the execution of the two sets of sculptures. Such, however, appears undoubtedly to have been the case; and this great southern bas-relief worthily closes a series of Takshac sculptures, which for the present we must be content to commence with Sanchi, though there is little doubt but that earlier examples will hereafter be found;† but whether that is the case or not, many intermediate illustrations will certainly be discovered when looked for, and so enable us to complete as curious a picture as anywhere exists of the latest form of the primæval worship of the world.

HINDU RELIGION.

It might have sufficed for our present purposes to have stopped when we had brought the history of Serpent Worship in India to the point when the Buddhist scriptures were rescued from the keeping of the Nagas and revealed to mankind. As this happens to be also the time when the Gateways were added to the tope at Sanchi, we might have left the sculptures to tell their own tale, and continue the history of Naga worship from that point. It will add, however, very much to the clearness of what follows if we anticipate still further, and describe briefly what took place afterwards.

Speaking broadly, the modern religions of India may be divided into two great groups or classes, that of Śiva and that of Viṣṇu. It is extremely difficult to offer even a plausible conjecture as to the origin of the former, or to guess when it first came into vogue. It has been attempted to identify Śiva with the Rudra of the Vedas, and it may be so, but it is certainly a local, not an Aryan form of faith, and seems originally to belong rather to the south than to the north of India. It may have existed there as a native local superstition for any length of time, but it only rose to eminence on the decline of Buddhism. Its principal teacher if not its founder, in its present form, seems to have been Śankara Āchārya, who may have lived in the eighth or ninth century.‡

There does not seem to be a trace of Tree Worship mixed up with it, nor any real connexion with Serpent Worship. It is true Śiva is occasionally represented holding a cobra or other venomous snake in his hand; serpents are also sometimes twisted round his neck or entwined with his hair; but in all these instances the serpent is a weapon, an implement of terror, not an object of worship. As the

* When I published, in 1845, my description of the Rock Temples of India, I fixed the date of the excavation of Mahavellipore within the limits of the thirteenth century (pp. 58, 59). I have since seen no reason to alter this description.

† There are, I believe, older Naga sculptures in Cuttack, but whether this is so or not, it is interesting to find the three principal seats of Naga worship at three nearly equidistant points on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, Cuttack, Amravati, and Mahavellipore; exactly opposite to Cambodia, which as above explained was its principal seat in modern times. Sanchi seems to have been a sort of half-way house between these places and the North, for all their traditions point to Takshasilā as the original seat whence this form of faith was disseminated, and the Yavanas as the people by whom it was propagated.

‡ Asiatic Researches, XVII. 139.