

RELIGIOUS LIFE OF NAGAS: A CASE STUDY OF *NILAMATA PURANA*

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Abstract

The *Nilamata Puraṇa* presents the Nagas as central figures in the spiritual, cultural, and ecological identity of early Kashmir. Far beyond their mythical serpent form, the Nagas are portrayed as sacred beings deeply connected to the land's geography, morality, and cosmic order. Their abodes—rivers, lakes, mountains, and tirthas—are described not merely as physical spaces but as spiritually potent sites where divine and human realms intersect. Through mythological episodes, the text traces their divine ancestry, enduring conflict with Garuḍa, and eventual divine protection, reinforcing their sacred legitimacy. Nagas emerge as protectors of dharma, moral guides for society, and participants in ritual and seasonal worship closely aligned with nature and cosmological rhythms. The text prescribes detailed observances, pilgrimage festivals, and sacred rites centered around Naga deities, integrating them into a broader religious universe alongside Vedic and local traditions. Philosophically, the Nagas serve as spiritual intermediaries, linking subterranean and celestial realms, and facilitating karmic purification and liberation. Through this complex portrayal, the *Nilamata Puraṇa* elevates the Nagas to the status of cosmic agents, deeply woven into Kashmir's sacred landscape and its religious consciousness.

Keywords :-*Nilamata Puraṇa*, worship, Naga ,Religion, Sacred, Kashmir

INTRODUCTION

The religious life of the Nagas occupies a central place in the cultural imagination of early Kasmira as depicted in the *Nilamata Puraṇa*. Far from being mere mythical beings, the Nagas are presented as sacred figures whose origins, struggles, and worship are deeply woven into the region's cosmological and ritual traditions. The *Nilamata Puraṇa* constructs a sacred narrative in which the Nagas are not only divine descendants but also protectors and integral participants in the maintenance of cosmic and terrestrial order.

Their divine genealogy—tracing descent from Prajapati Kasyapa and Kadru, the daughter of Dakṣa—imbues them with an inherent sanctity. The text records their long-standing conflict with Garuḍa, a rivalry that underscores their cosmic significance. Their ultimate rescue by Viṣṇu, who grants them safety within the Satisara Lake and appoints Nila as their king, is not merely an act of compassion but a reaffirmation of their sacred role as guardians of Kasmira's spiritual geography.

The religious symbolism is further enriched by the episode of Kasyapa's curse, which required the Nagas to alternately share the valley with the Piśācas and humans. This arrangement signifies more than mere punishment—it represents a divinely guided plan for coexistence and eventual integration. After countless ages, when the curse is lifted, the establishment of a permanent shared habitation between Nagas and humans symbolizes the return to a state of natural and spiritual equilibrium.

The significance of Naga worship is emphasized through the detailed enumeration of 603 Naga names within the *Nilamata Puraṇa*, each name carrying mythological, symbolic, or cultural resonance. This extensive list suggests not only the depth of veneration but also the widespread integration of Naga cults within the religious life of the valley. Moreover, King Nila's prescription for the worship of the Pisaca-chief Nikumbha alongside the Nagas reveals a richly layered ritual world, where diverse supernatural forces were acknowledged and honored.

Through these religious practices, the Nagas are elevated beyond myth into vital components of ritual performance, sacred space, and spiritual identity. Their presence is not marginal but foundational, shaping both the sacred landscape and the ritual rhythms of early Kasmira. Thus, the *Nilamata Puraṇa* portrays Naga worship not as a peripheral cult but as a core element of religious life, reflecting a harmonious intertwining of myth, cosmology, and community devotion.

The following references from the *Nilamata Puraṇa* are arranged across five thematic categories — Sacred Geography and Abodes of the Nagas, Mythic Origins and Divine Conflicts, Ritual Practices and Naga Worship, Nagas as Upholders of Dharma and Social Order, and their Cosmic, Philosophical, and Spiritual Roles — to explore the diverse dimensions of Naga religious life in early Kashmir.

1. Sacred Geography and Abodes of the Nagas

In the *Nilamata Puraṇa*, the sacred geography of Kasmira is intricately connected to the religious life and abodes of the Nagas, portraying the landscape as not merely physical but deeply spiritual. The land is described as saturated with holiness, encompassing sacred lakes, rivers, mountains, temples, and hermitages.¹ Among these sacred elements, the Nagas occupy a prominent place, with their abodes explicitly mentioned as being central to the sanctity of the region. Their divine presence is not confined to myth but is firmly rooted in the geography itself, reflecting a cosmology where land, divinity, and society were intertwined.

The text narrates how the Nagas, led by their chief Vasuki, were granted sanctuary in the land of Sati by divine instruction. The god tells Vasuki, who was distressed and fearful, that he and the pious Nagas may dwell peacefully in the sky-like lake of holy water within the country of Sati². This divine permission not only legitimizes the Nagas' sacred right to the land but also provides them protection, especially from their traditional enemy Garuḍa, who is instructed not to harm those Nagas who have taken residence in that designated lake.³ The divine decree is reiterated again, ensuring safety for all Nagas inhabiting the country of Sati⁴. Further, the god commands the coronation of Nila as the sovereign of the strong Naga community, formally institutionalizing their social and territorial authority in the region.⁵ Obedient to this divine command, Vasuki proceeds to establish Naga rule in the region, leading to a period free of fear from Garuḍa's attacks⁶. This moment marks a critical turning point, where the Nagas, previously vulnerable, are transformed into protected custodians of a sacred land. The sanctity of the region is further emphasized through an episode involving the god Indra, who is described as sporting along the banks of this very lake accompanied by his consort, Paulomi.⁷ This divine leisure is disrupted by the arrival of a powerful Daitya chief named Sangraha, who, overtaken by lust upon seeing Sati (Indra's consort), discharges his semen into the lake.⁸ The ensuing battle between Indra and Sangraha lasts an entire year⁹ and Indra's eventual victory symbolizes the reaffirmation of divine order and sanctity of the Naga-inhabited space.¹⁰

Together, these verses construct a vision of Kasmira as a divinely ordained land, with the Nagas occupying a central position in its sacred geography. Their abodes are more than places of residence—they are spiritual zones of protection, divine interaction, and mythic memory. The fusion of natural landscapes with celestial narratives in the *Nilamata Puraṇa* elevates the Nagas to the status of divine custodians of the land, embedding them permanently within the religious consciousness of early Kasmira. While the sacred geography affirms the Nagas' physical and spiritual anchoring in the land, their mythological ancestry and divine conflicts further illuminate the cosmic tensions that shaped their destiny.

2. Mythic Origins and Divine Conflicts

The *Nilamata Puraṇa* situates the religious identity of the Nagas within a complex mythological framework rooted in divine lineage and ancestral conflict. According to the text, the Nagas are described as the sons of Kadru, while Garuḍa and Aruṇa—famed for their valor—are the offspring of Vinata.¹¹ Both Kadru and Vinata are consorts of Prajapati Kasyapa, and their mutual jealousy is emphasized as an ancient and fated enmity.¹² This familial discord becomes the basis of a cosmic rivalry that deeply influences the early narratives surrounding the Nagas.

A turning point in this divine conflict occurs during a dispute over the color of Uccaisravas, the celestial horse that emerged during the churning of the ocean. While Vinata declared the horse to be white, Kadru mischievously insisted it was black-haired. The disagreement escalated into a wager wherein the loser would become the slave of the other.¹³ Kadru, determined to win, influenced her sons—the Nagas—to manipulate the outcome, thus deceitfully ensuring her victory and enslaving Vinata.¹⁴ This myth not only explains the origin of the Naga-Garuḍa hostility but also illustrates how divine beings, driven by rivalry, shaped the destinies of their offspring.

In response to his mother's unjust servitude, Garuḍa displayed exceptional strength and devotion. He obtained Soma—the divine nectar—from Indra and used it as a ransom to liberate Vinata from her slavery.¹⁵ As a reward for this service and to avenge the deception faced by his mother, Indra granted Garuḍa the boon of consuming the Nagas.¹⁶ This divine sanction legitimized Garuḍa's enmity and the subsequent persecution of the Nagas, symbolizing a broader cosmological struggle between divine bird and serpent beings. The mythological violence reaches a climactic moment when Vasuki, the chief of the Nagas, turns to Janardana (Viṣṇu) for protection, marking a shift in divine allegiances and the eventual safeguarding of Naga identity within the larger religious order.¹⁷

These mythic episodes encapsulate the deeper spiritual tensions and reconciliations that define the religious life of the Nagas in early Kashmir. Through divine conflicts, betrayals, and eventual protection by supreme deities, the Nagas emerge as not only victims of celestial rivalry but also as beings ultimately integrated into the divine cosmos under divine protection. The *Nilamata Puraṇa* uses these stories to convey the sacred legitimacy of Naga presence in the region and their spiritual evolution from persecuted beings to protected sacred entities. These divine struggles not only secured the Nagas' place in the cosmic order but also gave rise to the elaborate ritual practices that sustained their worship in early Kashmir.

3. Ritual Practices and Naga Worship

The *Nilamata Puraṇa* presents a deeply ritualized vision of Naga worship, situating it within both cosmic devotion and local religious customs of early Kashmir. The text reveals that Naga worship is not a marginal cultic practice, but an integral aspect of the broader ritual fabric, interwoven with Vedic deities, planetary observances, seasonal festivals, and sacred geography. Central to this tradition is the reverence shown by Naga chiefs themselves toward supreme divinity, notably Viṣṇu. In a heartfelt plea, Vasuki offers a series of salutations to the supreme god—described as the destroyer of Danavas and the upholder of righteousness—reflecting the devotional humility of the Nagas in the face of cosmic threats.¹⁸ This invocation continues with vivid imagery of the god's lotus-colored body, golden garments, and divine presence resting upon Seṣa's jeweled hood, symbolizing a cosmic relationship between the divine and the serpent race.¹⁹ Vasuki, while facing the destructive force of Garuḍa, pleads for divine protection against Tarkṣya (another name for Garuḍa), highlighting the ritual dependence of the Nagas on divine grace.²⁰

Beyond the mythic and symbolic invocations, the *Nilamata Puraṇa* prescribes elaborate ritual practices tied to specific times and natural elements. On the day marking the first snowfall, worship of the Himalaya and the two winter seasons—Hemanta and Sisira—is enjoined,²¹ followed by the worship of the presiding deity (Viṣṇu) and

the local Naga of the area.²² Such rituals integrate Naga devotion into the natural and seasonal rhythms of Kashmir, connecting cosmology to landscape. The celebration of Kasyapa, the progenitor of the Nagas and many other beings, on this day further reinforces the ritual continuity of ancestral worship.²³

Moreover, the worship of Nagas is extended to a universal scale with instructions to honor a wide range of sacred entities—including Vedas, Vedangas, Nagas, Yakṣas, Pisacas, and celestial beings such as Garuḍa and Aruṇa—demonstrating the all-encompassing spiritual worldview of the text.²⁴ Worship is also prescribed for the nine regions (dvīpas) of Bharata, the four oceans, and the seven netherworlds, including Nagadvīpa, directly tying Naga worship to broader cosmological beliefs.²⁵ The significance of time is underscored with precise ritual practices centered around planetary alignments, months, days, and the specific day of the Naga-year—all of which must be determined by astronomers and celebrated with offerings such as food and flowers.²⁶

The ritual calendar of the *Nilamata Puraṇa* continues with monthly observances during the bright fortnight of Pṛauṣṭha,²⁷ where gods such as Mahendra and his consort Sati (likely Saci) are worshipped. Notably, on the bright fifth day of Indra's fortnight, the text prescribes an elaborate celebration involving incense, grains, clothing, dramatic performances, and especially the worship of local Nagas.²⁸ This merging of pan-Indian deities with localized Naga rituals illustrates the inclusive nature of early Kashmiri religious practice. Furthermore, devotion towards Nagas is mandated alongside reverence for Brahmanas and Gods, firmly situating Nagas within the divine hierarchy of the land.²⁹ Finally, the text explicitly recommends that every temple in Kashmir must celebrate a pilgrimage festival at least once a year, emphasizing a collective and periodic reaffirmation of divine presence through ritual.³⁰

Thus, the *Nilamata Puraṇa* portrays Naga worship as richly layered—embracing personal devotion, seasonal and astronomical cycles, and the integration of local and cosmic elements. The Nagas are not passive objects of reverence but active participants in a ritual system that blends fear, respect, and devotion, reflecting their centrality in the spiritual and religious life of early Kashmir. Beyond their veneration in seasonal and cosmic rituals, the Nagas also assumed an ethical role, guiding human society toward dharma and regulating social conduct.

4. Nagas as Upholders of Dharma and Social Order

In the *Nilamata Puraṇa*, the Nagas are presented not only as mythic serpent deities but as active guardians and upholders of dharma (righteous order) and social harmony in the sacred land of Kashmir. Their presence is intricately tied to both divine authority and human settlement, as they act as intermediaries between cosmic will and terrestrial organization. The foundation of this role is illustrated when Viṣṇu installs a divine image combining both himself and Siva atop the head of the demon Jalodbhava. This sacred act attracts a host of celestial beings—gods, sages, Gandharvas, and Nagas—signifying a divine convergence at the site of cosmic significance.³¹ During this gathering, Kasyapa pleads with Viṣṇu to allow Kashmir to be inhabited by human beings, at which point the Nagas join in agreement, recognizing the necessity of a dharmic human society.³²

The Naga chief Nila is then shown to take up the responsibility of instructing humans in the moral and social practices required for peaceful living in Kashmir. The Puraṇa states that from the time of settlement, humans lived happily by adhering to the words of Nila,³³ building homes, temples, and sacred places as instructed.³⁴ Even the climate seemed to favor the righteous order upheld under Naga influence, as very little snow fell thereafter, reinforcing the belief in their harmonious stewardship.³⁵ When King Gonanda, curious about the practices instituted by Nila, asks for a detailed account, Brhadāsya recounts how Nila, after bowing to Hṛṣikesa, explained the sacred way of life to be followed in Kashmir.³⁶ This moral framework indicates the Naga's position not just as spiritual beings but as lawgivers and moral exemplars.

The narrative further highlights the Nagas' role in upholding justice through the tale of Sadangula. Nila banished this Naga for morally unacceptable behavior—namely, abducting the wives of human men.³⁷

However, even in punishment, Nila assigns him a guardian role in Darva, thereby ensuring both societal protection and reintegration.³⁸ Before this, Gonanda questions the reason behind Sadangula's exile and the transformation of Visvagasva's territory into a lake, requesting clarification from the narrator on these significant developments.³⁹ The region left vacant by Sadangula becomes the new home for Mahapadma Naga, who had sought refuge from Garuḍa's aggression after the decimation of his family and dependents.⁴⁰ When Mahapadma approaches Nila to request a place to dwell,⁴¹ Nila explains that all the regions of Kashmir have already been occupied by various Nagas.⁴² Acknowledging Mahapadma's large family and urgent need, he identifies that the region of Sadangula is presently uninhabited.⁴³ Nila then offers him the city of Candrapura, formerly ruled by King Visvagasva, and instructs him to transform it into a sacred lake.⁴⁴ He further discloses a hidden prophecy that adds spiritual legitimacy to this transformation—Durvasa, once disguised as a madman, had not been properly received at Sadangula's abode and, in anger, cursed the place to become a lake.⁴⁵ This curse, though unknown to others, was revealed to Nila alone through the sage's favor, prompting him to urge Mahapadma to act swiftly and settle there without hesitation.⁴⁶ Following Nila's advice, Mahapadma approaches King Visvagasva in the guise of a Brahmana to acquire the land through peaceful means, reflecting the Naga's commitment to *dharma* and non-violence.⁴⁷

The ensuing encounter between Mahapadma (in disguise) and the compassionate king results in the grant of the city of Candrapura. After formally receiving the gift through Vedic ritual, Mahapadma reveals his identity and asks the king to vacate the city, as it is about to be transformed into a sacred lake.⁴⁸ The king graciously complies and establishes a new town, Visvagasvapura, thus maintaining peace and dignity for both parties.⁴⁹ Mahapadma then floods the old city, creating a vast and sacred body of water—Mahapadma Lake—described as holy, beautiful, and devoid of malevolent creatures.⁵⁰ The creation of this lake becomes a symbol of divine justice, ecological transformation, and Naga benevolence.

This entire episode reinforces the role of Nagas as custodians of sacred space, enforcers of moral conduct, and protectors of both divine and human domains. Their judgments, actions, and resolutions serve to uphold not only the physical sanctity of Kashmir but also its social and ethical fabric. This entire episode reinforces the role of Nagas as custodians of sacred space, enforcers of moral conduct, and protectors of both divine and human domains. Their judgments, actions, and resolutions serve to uphold not only the physical sanctity of Kashmir but also its social and ethical fabric. Nila's teachings and the sacred transformations associated with the Nagas underscore the enduring spiritual merit of Kashmir, where the upholding of *dharma* remains central to the land's religious and cultural identity.⁵¹

Rooted in ethical and social order, the religious presence of the Nagas ultimately transcends into a philosophical realm where they emerge as cosmic beings linked to higher consciousness, sacred purification, and spiritual liberation.

5. Cosmic, Philosophical and Spiritual Roles of Nagas

The *Nilamata Puraṇa* presents the Nagas not only as geographical guardians or social regulators but also as beings with profound cosmic, philosophical, and spiritual significance. Their presence is deeply embedded in the sacred cosmology of early Kashmir, where they act as spiritual intermediaries between the human, divine, and subterranean worlds. Their roles extend beyond physical protection or ritual guardianship and are associated with metaphysical truths, sacred energy centers, divine knowledge, and the karmic economy of sin and merit.

The mythological origins of Kashmir are closely tied to the cosmic actions of divine beings, among whom the Nagas are prominent. The name "Kasmira" itself is etymologically linked to the divine extraction of water—*Ka*—by Balarama,⁵² associating the very land with purificatory waters. Furthermore, Kashmir is identified with the goddess Uma, who in the form of Visoka resides at Vṛddhatirtha, reinforcing the land's feminine spiritual character and aligning it with divine grace.⁵³ The Nagas serve as guardians and anchors of this sacred space.

One of the most compelling metaphysical episodes involves the descent of the divine river from the Nether World. The goddess Sati, responding to Hara's request, emerges from the subterranean realm through a breach near the abode of Nila, thereby linking the Naga's earthly domain to higher cosmic realms.⁵⁴ This intersection of the nether and terrestrial worlds at the Nāga abode transforms their role into that of spiritual conduits, enabling the flow of divine essence between realms.

Philosophically, the Nagas are associated with higher faculties of consciousness and elements of the subtle body. The *Nilamata Purāṇa* prescribes worship of the Mind (*Manas*), Intellect (*Buddhi*), the Soul (*Atman*), and the unmanifested Cosmic Person (*Avyakṛta Puruṣa*), along with mountains such as Nila—thus equating the Naga domain with loci of spiritual ascent.⁵⁵ Furthermore, sacred rivers, plants, and tirthas (pilgrimage sites) are often described in conjunction with Naga worship, implying that access to their abodes brings not only merit but also spiritual purification. A symbolic illustration of the Nagas' mystical relationships is found in the episode of Ira, a nymph employed by Visvvasu. Cursed by Sakra and exiled from the divine assembly,⁵⁶ she is transformed into a sacred plant in the Himavat mountains,⁵⁷ later becoming the beloved of the Nagas.⁵⁸ This transformation reflects the Nagas' deep association with nature's hidden spiritual essence—plant life, mountains, and divine beings entwined in cosmic reformation.

A particularly striking narrative involves the sage Vasiṣṭha and the linga of Jyeṣṭhesa, which is perpetually bathed in celestial waters drawn from Uttaramanasa—the abode of the Naga Sodara.⁵⁹ Here, the Naga is not only a resident of a spiritual realm but also a facilitator of divine rituals. The presence of the river Hiraṇyini and the mention of celestial beings such as Bhūtas and sages further elevate the spiritual status of the Naga's abode. The divine assurance given to Nandi, that his and Vasiṣṭha's images would be established on earth⁶⁰ affirms the transmission of divine presence through Naga-mediated sacred locales.

In another sacred narrative, King Gonanda seeks the origin of the holy abode of Suli (Siva), known as Kapatesvara,⁶¹ demonstrating the king's quest for divine geography and its spiritual significance. Upon hearing a divine dream, the sages decide to travel together to Kasmira,⁶² where they seek the darsana of god Sambhu. The vision and pilgrimage further stress the metaphysical magnetism of Kashmir as a Naga-associated sacred geography.

The *Nilamata Purāṇa* also emphasizes that Kashmir is home to immaculate Naga dwellings where the divine appears in disguise, as in the dream of sages in Kurukṣetra who are directed by Rudra to visit a Naga abode in Kashmir to obtain his darsana.⁶³ Upon reaching the sacred site, the sages find the Naga's waters mystically covered with wood, symbolizing esoteric knowledge concealed from the ordinary seeker.⁶⁴ These metaphysical encounters establish the Nagas as custodians of sacred power and mystical insight. Numerous lakes and rivers across Kashmir are intimately linked with Naga traditions and spiritual rewards. Places like Kauṇḍinyasara⁶⁵ and Nilakuṇḍa are not merely geographical sites but sacred zones that promise transformative merit. The river goddess Saṃdhya is extolled as a purifier, whose waters wash away sins and lead one to heaven.⁶⁶ Another highly revered site, Saṃdhya Puṣkarīṇi, is said to grant equal merit, and Brahmanakuṇḍikā is mentioned alongside a tri-named sacred place—Nilakuṇḍa, Vitastakhya, and Sulaghata—where immersion ensures honor in heaven.⁶⁷ These spaces are further elevated in religious significance through rituals of charity and penance, and bathing at Vitastanmajjana is considered equal in merit to donating a thousand cows.⁶⁸ The geography of Naga sacredness stretches even further. During certain auspicious times, all holy places are believed to gather in the hermitage of Narasiṃha, while the region from the confluence of the Vitasta and Dhyanaḍhariṇi to the abode of Naga Kalpasodasa is considered as spiritually potent as Prayaga itself.⁶⁹ Bathing at Narayaṇasthana on the Vitasta river leads the devotee to the world of Viṣṇu,⁷⁰ while immersion at the confluence of Gotranadi and the Vitasta yields the merit of donating a thousand cows.⁷¹ These sites function as karmic accelerators—bridging the realms of the human and the divine, the material and the spiritual.

At Anantatirtha, another Naga-linked pilgrimage site, one is promised a place of honor among the Nagas themselves.⁷² The *Nilamata Purāṇa* further declares that daily ablution in these sacred rivers ensures *mokṣa*, or

ultimate spiritual liberation.⁷³ In a deeply symbolic conclusion, the text portrays a cosmic gathering where Nagas, deities, sages, Yakṣas, and Rakṣasas all converge before the sacred river goddess, reinforcing the Nagas' participation in divine communion and their anchoring role in preserving the universe's spiritual balance.⁷⁴ In essence, the *Nilamata Puraṇa* portrays the Nagas not just as mythic beings or natural guardians, but as vital agents in the cosmic order—presiding over sites of sacred water, regulating karmic processes, and facilitating spiritual ascent. Their abodes serve as thresholds between realms, where nature, divinity, and human striving coalesce in pursuit of liberation and cosmic harmony.

In sum, the *Nilamata Puraṇa* presents the Nagas as profound cosmic agents, linked to rivers, mountains, sacred rituals, divine visions, and ultimate liberation. Their abodes are not only physical spaces but are saturated with spiritual meaning, acting as sites of revelation, karmic cleansing, and transcendental experience. Through these narratives, the Nagas emerge as essential to the philosophical and spiritual vision of Kashmir, embodying the unity of nature, divinity, and cosmic order.

6. Conclusion

The *Nilamata Puraṇa* offers a uniquely rich and multilayered portrayal of the Nagas, presenting them not merely as mythical serpent beings but as pivotal spiritual agents embedded within the sacred landscape, ritual practices, and cosmological imagination of early Kashmir. Across its verses, the text constructs a sacred geography where the Nagas inhabit divine lakes, rivers, and mountains—not as passive residents but as active custodians and intermediaries between the earthly and the divine.

Through mythic narratives of divine conflict, ancestral lineage, and cosmic justice, the Nagas are shown to evolve from victims of celestial rivalry to dignified and protected beings integrated into the divine order. Their association with Viṣṇu, Siva, and other deities elevates them beyond local cultic figures to participants in universal processes of dharma, justice, and metaphysical transformation. Their abodes become symbolic thresholds between realms, hosting spiritual encounters and divine manifestations that shape Kashmir's religious character.

The ritual practices prescribed in the *Nilamata Puraṇa* further reflect the depth and scope of Naga worship, encompassing seasonal rhythms, planetary alignments, pilgrimage rites, and moral prescriptions. These rituals not only honor the Nagas but also reaffirm the sanctity of nature, the authority of local deities, and the spiritual obligations of the people. Whether it is Vasuki's supplication to Viṣṇu, the observance of Naga festivals, or the cosmic bathings in sacred rivers, the Nagas are central to maintaining the karmic, ethical, and spiritual equilibrium of the land.

Moreover, the philosophical role of the Nagas—connected to sacred knowledge, higher consciousness, and spiritual liberation—highlights their enduring relevance beyond mythology. The abodes of Nagas become centers of esoteric wisdom, purity, and transcendence, drawing sages, gods, and pilgrims alike. Through narratives of penance, transformation, and cosmic communion, the *Nilamata Puraṇa* binds the Nagas firmly into Kashmir's religious worldview, portraying them as guardians of dharma, facilitators of mokṣa, and protectors of divine truth.

In conclusion, the religious life of the Nagas, as reflected in the *Nilamata Puraṇa*, is not confined to serpent lore or isolated worship. It represents a profound spiritual framework where geography, mythology, ritual, and philosophy converge. The Nagas are integral to the sacred identity of Kashmir—embodying continuity between the natural and the divine, the temporal and the eternal. Their legacy, inscribed in rivers, lakes, and lore, endures as a testament to their foundational role in the religious consciousness of early Kashmir.

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