

SACRED GROVES OF INDIA

a compendium



compiled & edited by
Nanditha Krishna & M. Amirthalingam

Silver Jubilee Year Publication



**C.P.R. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRE
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KERALA: FORMS OF WORSHIP

Biju Kumar*

The cult of snake worship in Kerala is closely interwoven with the life of the people of the State and is a component of its rich cultural heritage. Both within the sacred groves and outside snakes are still revered and worshiped with much piety in this State. The stillness within the deep shade of the groves, the feeling of the wilderness provided by the forest-like vegetation, the unique rituals, practices and taboos still associated with snakes, the mystery associated with treatment of snake bite victims, the fascinating folklores associated with the 'kavus' and snake worship are all part of the rich culture of the land. One may feel the presence of some primeval powers in the Sarpa Kavus (serpent groves) in Kerala. Perhaps nowhere else in India is the cult of snake worship so intricately linked with the daily lives of people as in Kerala. This is despite the fact that snakes are killed in large numbers all the time on the mistaken notion that all of them are venomous.

The tradition of snake worship in Kerala is often traced back to the myth of Parasurama (incarnation of Lord Vishnu) reclaiming Kerala from the sea. *Keralolpathi*, an old text on the legendary origin of Kerala, states that Parasurama wanted to constitute 64 gramas or villages of Namboothiri Brahmins in Kerala after its reclamation from the sea, in order to expiate the sin of his exterminating the Kshathriya race. However, the Brahmins were attacked and not allowed to settle in Kerala by Nagas or serpents very abundant at that time in Kerala. The serpents were believed to be the inhabitants of the subterranean world, locally known as Paathalam or Naagalokam. The dejected Parasurama went to Mount Kailash and prayed to Lord Parameswara for help. The Lord advised Parasurama to go back to Kerala and pray to the Serpent King Vasuki. An agreement was then reached between King Vasuki and Parasurama. Vasuki ordered the serpents to move away from human habitations and occupy anthills and holes. The human inhabitants were asked to set aside an area in every homestead for the serpents and to regularly worship them. As a result every Brahmin house (*mana* or *illom* or *tharavaadu*) in Kerala had set apart an area in their compound for serpents. As this area was kept undisturbed, they turned into a forest-like overgrown patch or a grove, often referred to as the sarpa kaavu.

Keralolpathi also reveals that Lord Parasurama appointed a member of Pampumekkattu mana, located in Vadama near Mala in Thrissur District of Kerala, as the high priest of snake worship. Some other manas in Kerala are also considered as high authorities in Naga worship. These include the Attipatta or Pathirakunnath mana near Vallapuzha in Ottapalam Taluk; the Aameda illom and Kolappuram illom near Udayamperoor, Kanayannur Taluk; the Naaganpozhi mana near Udayanapuram in

Vaikom Taluk; the Parambur mana near Nattassery in Kottayam; the Mannaarssala illom, Harippad in Karthikappally Taluk and the Mappallil Illom, Vettikkode in Mavelikkara Taluk.

The serpent groves were initially circular in form and were often surrounded by a low wall to prevent cattle and other creatures from entering (Jayashanker, 1999). A stone basement called Chithra-kootam is built in the middle of the sarpa kaavu. Several granite idols of snake Gods are placed on the Chithra-kootam. According to Padmanabha Menon (1926), a passage is opened to the seat of these images from the outside and great care is taken that the grove is not dishonoured by the touch or even the approach of non-pious persons.

Apart from sacred groves, the serpent idols are also installed inside the regular temples of Kerala; Nagaraja is installed either as a principal deity in a separate Sreekovil or as a subsidiary deity outside the naalambalam on a separate platform, positioned either at the east, west, southwest or south side (Jayashanker, 1999). The prathistas include Nagaraja and other important attendant Nagas, Sarpayakshi, Naagayakshi or Naagakanyaka or a combination of these. The ashta nagas are represented by Ananta, Vasuki, Takshaka, Kaarkkotaka, Sankhan, Gulikan, Padman and Mahapadman. Among these Ananta and Vasuki are installed as deities in most of the temples in Kerala; the former is given importance in Vaishnavite shrines, the latter in Shaivite shrines. In several temples of Kerala idols of serpents can be found under a large banyan tree. There are innumerable serpent groves all over Kerala, now represented by a single banyan tree and idols of snake deities. Poojas are performed for serpent deities also before the main pooja in the sanctum sanctorum, and devotees go around the altar of snake deities and offer special pooja. Many temples have provisions for special poojas for serpent deities, particularly on the 'aslesha' (star) day (Aayilya pooja).

According to Hughes and Subhas chandran (1997) the history of sacred groves in Kerala may be traced back to the hunting-gathering societies which attributed sacredness to patches of forest within their territories, similar to the way they treated several other topographic or landscape features such as mountain peaks, rocks, caves, springs, and rivers. Some schools of thought point out the relation of snake worship with Buddhism. Serpent worship might have reached India from Egypt or West Asia. But some time later, Aryans donning the mantle of priests took over the right to worship snakes, thus displacing the original Dravidian priests.

Panikkar (1991) opines that "the genesis of conceptualization of gods and goddesses and of the nature of their abodes and domains may be traced as far back as Aryan times. The pre-Aryan culture must have come, in succession, under the Aryan, Jain, Buddhist and Hindu influences. These influences brought out significant modifications in Kerala's cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices. For instance, there existed the belief in Kerala

during the pre-Aryan period that gods and goddesses had their abodes at the feet of trees in open groves". The worship of snakes is closely associated with the veneration of trees. Snakes are considered as gentle spirits if propitiated, but highly malicious if irritated or disrespected. The traditional belief in serpent groves in Kerala is that anyone accidentally or willfully killing a cobra will be punished in this life and also in the next by suffering childlessness, leprosy or ophthalmia. Even now there is a custom in south Kerala wherein childless couples propitiate the serpent deity by performing the ceremony called Naaga Prathishta or consecration of a Naaga or stone idol representing the serpent God, generally near the asvathha (sacred fig or pipal) tree in the hope of getting the desired boon.

Snakes are believed to contribute to fertility of the soil and snake worship is believed to enhance prosperity and protection from evil spells (Ravindran Nair, 1993). They were considered as custodians of the treasure-troves buried in the entrails of the earth. They are also believed to be attached to the soil in which they are born refusing to move away. There is also a belief in Kerala that the serpents are the protectors of the landed properties, and that one should get the permission of serpents to cut down the trees. The permission was secured only by rehabilitating the serpent population to another appropriate place through rites and ceremonies, as suggested by the eminent astrologers.

The Sarpa Kaavus in Kerala

Sacred groves are present throughout Kerala. In Kannur and Kasargod districts their distribution extends from coast to the foothills of the Western Ghats. The first documented study of sacred groves in North Kerala is by Unnikrishnan in 1990 who recorded 62 sacred groves in Kasargod and 57 in Kannur district. Ramachandran and Mohanan (1991) provided a data of about 600 sacred groves in Kerala. In a comprehensive study Jayarajan (2004) recorded 578 sacred groves in Kasargod and Kannur districts of Kerala; the total area of these sacred groves in these districts was 3,3710 sq. km. This was after excluding sacred places which had only a single tree. These were 50 in number and the number of groves having size of 5 cents and more was 481.

There may be about 2,000 sacred groves in Kerala and serpents form the main deity in at least half of them. Mannaarssala and Pampumekkattu Mana are the sacred groves in Kerala famous for snake worship.

- ❖ Mannaarssala, located near Harippad, about 32 km south of Alappuzha town, is a shrine where snake worship has been sanctified for centuries. It is an ecological paradise of bamboo thickets, lianas and creepers and huge banyan trees that provide a perfect habitat for the reptiles. Snakes are present in the dense vegetation that surrounds the shrine and the prevalent belief is that nobody here has ever died from snakebite. This area is believed to be a part of the Khandva forest which was set ablaze by the Pandava warrior Arjuna. While the devastating fire killed many serpents, those that escaped the fire found their abode in a cooler part of the

forest unaffected by the fire. Soon the fire burnt out and the area cooled. The word Mannaarssala is claimed to have its origin from 'mannari', which in Malayalam means 'the land has cooled'. Mannaarssala thus became the haven of snakes, whose patronage came to rest in the hands of the Namboothiri illom.

The peculiarity of Mannaarssala is that the rituals are conducted by a Priestess, often referred to as Mannaarssala amma. Traditionally, the wife of the eldest male in the illom becomes the Priestess. Only she is endowed with the hereditary mandate to perform the crucial propitiatory ritual called nurum palum at the nilavara or basement of the illom where the serpent idol is installed. Only she can orchestrate the surreal dreamlike strains of the sarpam paattu (serpent songs), a ceremony held once in 41 years.

The legend is that in the past a childless Namboothiri couple lived exactly where the Illom stands today. A fire broke out in a bamboo forest nearby and the couple ended up providing refuge to a serpent population on the run. With fans made of scented grass and herbal ointments, they cooled the overheated bodies of the snakes and nursed them back to health. As a boon, Nagaraja incarnated himself as a five-hooded serpent-child which the Namboodiri woman delivered. This legend still draws score of childless couples to the temple from every part of the country. The offering of uruli (a circular bell metal vessel) to the temple is considered auspicious, particularly by childless women. The offering is known as uruli kamalthuka in Malayalam, which means the act of dedicating the vessel by placing it upside down at the sanctum sanctorum. Couples whose prayers are answered must visit the shrine with their infants six months after they are born. Offerings are also accepted at Mannaarssala for the cure of skin diseases and leprosy.

The special days for worship in the temple are aslesha (aayilyam) day in the Malayalam months of Kanni and Thulam (September and October). During this season the idols of Naagaraja and Naagayakshi are taken in procession and offered milk and a mixture of turmeric and rice powder. Sarpabali, sarpam thullal and pulluvan pattu are the rituals associated with this snake grove.

- ❖ Pampumekkattu mana is located at central Kerala in Vadama, near Mala in Thrissur District. The Namboothiris of this mana enjoy the prerogative of removing the sarpa kaavu from one place to another and the head of the Namboothiri family is recognized as the high pontiff of snake worship in Kerala (Ravindran Nair, 1993). There are five sarpa kaavus in this mana. The sanctum sanctorum of Nagaraja and Nagayakshi is in the kizhakuni (eastern court) of a nalukettu building. There is no idol in the sanctum sanctorum. In its place there is an oil-lamp burning all the time. The prasadam given to the devotees is the oil from the lamp. The oil prasadam is believed to have the power to cure the diseases caused by the curse of snakes. Special offerings are made here by devotees to counter the curse of sterility and cure skin diseases.

There is a legend behind how Mekkatt mana became Pampumekkattu mana. Long ago, the Mekkatt mana was facing acute poverty. To get some relief, the head of the family started praying at Thiruvanchikulam temple. He stayed there and continued his prayer. On the completion of 12 years of prayer one day he went to the temple pond to fetch some water where he saw a person of unusual appearance emanating divine power, standing near the pond. The Namboothiri asked him who he was. The stranger replied in a vague manner. The Namboothiri however realised that he had some divine power and requested him to give him the precious stone ring he was wearing to show his friend and guide, Kodungallur Thampuran. The ring so given to the Namboothiri was returned and immediately on receiving it back, the man disappeared. As the identity of the man was still a mystery, the Namboothiri's mind was in turmoil.

The next day, as usual, Namboothiri went for his early morning bath in the temple pond when he saw the mysterious man again. He bowed down at his feet and requested him to divulge his identity. The man said, "I am Vasuki". Namboothiri thereupon requested him to prove it. Vasuki squeezed himself to a ring similar to the one Lord Parameswaran wore on his finger. Seeing this, Namboothiri fainted. When he regained his senses, Vasuki asked him what sort of blessing he wanted. Namboothiri requested Vasuki to bless him with his presence in his illom (mana) to bring his family eternal prosperity. Vasuki agreed and disappeared. Soon after, the relieved Namboothiri returned to his illom. He placed his palm-leaf umbrella in the eastern court of the naalukettu and went for a bath. When he came back to take the umbrella a snake was on the umbrella to greet him. The snake came down and took the form of a divine man and said that he was Vasuki and added that a Nagayakshi will soon be present in the illom. At this moment, the eldest antharjanam (Brahmin lady) of the mana came in. She put her palm-leaf umbrella in the portico before stepping into the home. Soon a snake appeared on this umbrella and moved to the eastern court of the naalukettu. On reaching the eastern court the snake changed into a beautiful lady and took position near Vasuki. Both of them ordered the Namboothiri to install idols at the place where they stood and consider them as their family deities. Saying this, they disappeared. The Namboothiri followed their commands sincerely and continued daily rituals to appease them. After this incident Mekkatt mana came to be known as Pampumekkattu mana. Poverty vanished and mana became prosperous.

Pampumekkattu Mana is in the forefront of snake related thantric rituals and they do the rituals in many serpent temples, including the famous Nagarcoil temple in Tamil Nadu. Besides nurum palum, the other main offering to the serpent gods is kadali pazham (Kadali plantain). The first day of Malayalam month, Vrischikam (November) is a specially auspicious day here. Sarpam paattu, songs in praise of the snake God, are also rendered during the festival by the Namboothiri women of the priestly order.

Rituals

The sarpa kaavus in Kerala function or at least functioned till recently as cultural centres of the village folk. The rich and diverse traditions, rituals and the lore of the people

of Kerala only reflect the richness of the natural surroundings. The rituals offered at kaavus vary from place to place, according to the type of important deity presiding over the grove. The discussion here is limited to the rituals associated with the sarpa kaavus in Kerala.

According to folklore, serpents are among the most powerful and highly benevolent divine spirits. A few Namboothiri families, as in the case of Mannaarssala and Pampumekkattu, are the chosen priests for these serpent Gods and Goddesses. The belief in Kerala is that the serpent Gods are displeased by even slight lapses in the performance of rituals and poojas to propitiate them and by activities such as neglect, trespass, and pollution. Once annoyed they cause serious problems to the people, both physical and mental. Expiation ceremonies may become necessary to appease the serpents. The consent of the serpents will be required when a household desires to move shift the serpent deity from its original home. Similarly, as a custom, the trees in the sarpa kaavus cannot be cut down without permission. As described earlier, the members of the Pampumekkattu mana, who are considered the highest authority in snake worship in Kerala, hold the rights to perform specific rituals to appease the serpent Gods and Goddesses. A member of this family coaxes and cajoles the serpents dwelling in the grove and gets their consent for moving out of the particular piece of land and shift to the Namboodiri's custody. The owner of the sarpa kaavu has to make provision for land elsewhere to settle the serpents thus moved and for the consecration rituals connected with it (Panikkar, 1991).

Nurum paalum is one of the most common items of worship in the sarpa kaavus of Kerala. It is the offering of rice powder and turmeric powder mixed with cow's milk using tender inflorescence of coconut or areca nut. The offering is done on special occasions, particularly during the asterism aslesha in the month of Ashwina, which is supposed to be the birth month of Nagaraja.

Pulluvan paattu or sarpam paattu is performed to please the Serpent God. The Pulluvans are sought after by families frequently to perform rituals and services for the serpent deities. In the villages, the Pulluvan and his wife Pulluvati visit houses on auspicious days like the first of every Malayalam month or the aslesha day in the month, which is the birthday of the serpent. Pulluvans sing songs in honour of the more powerful serpent Gods, who are believed to be the protectors and guardian angels of the land. The songs are known as Pulluvan paattu or Sarpam paattu. They sing this song to exorcise the evil eye cast on the children. While singing, the Pulluvan strums on a small violin-like instrument called 'Naga Veena' or 'Veenakkunju' (one stringed violin-like instrument) and the Pulluvati sings along with him providing the rhythm by playing the kutam (an instrument made by covering an earthen pot with the skin of a calf and fixing a string to it; also known as Pulluvakkudam). By pulling the string and plucking with a piece of wood or stone, a rhythm with tonal variations is created. They also conduct the ceremony of Pampin tullal to propitiate the serpent gods and obtain their blessings.

The Pulluvans have been described by early anthropologists as astrologers, medicine-men, priests and singers in serpent groves. The Pulluvans belong to a community of village minstrels. They are known to be snake worshipers and act as priests when performing rituals for the snake gods and goddesses. Earlier, the Pulluvans had a relatively high social status. Serpents were widely worshipped in Kerala at this time, and it was believed that each house was supposed to set aside a piece of land as a snake grove. However, with the arrival and dominance of the Brahmins and the evolution of the rigid caste system, their status was reduced to that of a low caste. According to local caste tradition the Pulluvan is ranked below the lowest level of the Ambalavasi (temple servants), and below the Nayars (traditionally warriors), both of whom they normally serve.

Pampin thullal or serpent dance is a ritual art performed in Kerala in relation with serpent worship. This ceremony takes place during the Malayalam months of Kanni, Thulam, Kumbham and Medam, which corresponds to September-October, October-November, February-March and April May. The aslesha asterism is considered to be the auspicious day for this function. The monsoon months are not selected for this ceremony because it is believed that the serpents would refuse to come out of their subterranean abode during this season. There is also a belief that monsoons bring with them thunder that might shake up and break the serpents' eggs (Panikkar, 1991). This also shows the synchronization of rituals with the cycles of seasons.

Pampin thullal is performed in a specially decorated pandal or thatched shed close to the serpent grove or in the courtyard in front of the house. The floor of the shed is plastered with cow dung and decorated with flowers. Kalams of serpent Gods (sarpakalam) are drawn on the floor using powders of different colours. Bronze oil lamps are lit in the Kalam with offerings of coconuts and rice. The Pampin thullal is performed to propitiate all the five varieties of serpent gods – Nagaraja (the king serpent), Naagayakshi (the queen serpent), Karinaagam (black serpent), Paranaagam (flying serpent) and the Anchilamaninaagam (five-hooded and jewel-carrying serpent). Generally Pampin thullal lasts for five days, with one of the varieties propitiated on each day (Panikkar, 1991).

The members of the Pulluvan caste are specialists in this art and will be the chief priests in the ceremony. The whole village takes part in the activities, with Mannan plucking the flower bunches from the areca and the Veluthedan bringing the washed clothes (mattu). The ceremony begins in the morning with songs in praise of Ganapathy. The representative of the family on whom the effects of the rituals are sought is known as piniyal. The music begins when piniyal sits in front of the kalam with an inflorescence of areca. The piniyal(s) dance holding the flowers and enters the kalam with the music of the Pulluvans and rubs the figure of the nagas with the flower. If the piniyal does not get possessed or tries to destroy the decorations, the devotees come to the conclusion that the rituals are not successful and the whole ceremony will have to be repeated.

Although not specifically related to the sarpa kaavus, theyyam is a unique ritual related to kaavus of north Kerala. Theyyam rituals are fascinating and beautiful. Theyyam rituals are dances performed with costumes of gorgeous colours and *mudi* (headgear) or crown of varying size (and shape) worn on the head. The ritual comprises ancestral worship, hero-worship, demonolatry, virgin cult, cure deities, zoolatry, and blood cult. A ritual is performed in order to please the deity. At present, hunting and slaughtering of animals have been prohibited by law. Hence they are performed symbolically (Jayarajan, 2004).

There are folk stories explaining the power of each deity, which have evolved into myths which compel the society to worship and perform rituals. Strong taboos prevented society from over-exploiting the resources of the sacred groves. Each kaavu is a subject in the folklore. Thottam, the ritual song recited at the beginning of Theyyam, is a poetic narration of the legend of the deity(ies) in the sacred groves. The songs narrate the emergence, life and power acquired by the deities. Folklore recollects and spreads the fame of the deity of each kaavu.

All these rituals and folklores in Kerala indicate the deep rooted image of serpents in the minds of Keralites since long. Even though the more sophisticated teachings of Hinduism condemn the magical and superstitious attributes, and modern science considers these rituals substanceless, the mystical philosophical arguments in favour of age-old myths and customs cannot be disregarded. According to Panikkar (1991), "the serpent is a symbol of infinite power lying coiled within him, an embryonic force that, if properly searched for and liberated, could bring out his true capabilities. The serpent, more than anything else constitutes the human power that resides at the lowest point in the spinal column called *mooladhara*. It lies in a coiled form—the *kundalinisakti*—the life force lying latent in man, ready to be awakened by the concentration of one's mind and inner faculties and pass upward through different nerve centres to keep the body and mind fit as an effective instrument. In case of a devout ascetic, the serpent power reaches, by meditation and through *stages*, the uppermost regions of his physical existence, the 'Sahsrara Padma', the lotus of thousand petals, a yogic achievement of the highest order".

In Kalari, the martial art of Kerala, awakening the kundalini or serpent power is considered necessary. The exercises in the Kalari system are designed in such a way as to give strength to the lowermost region of the vertebral column. The serpent goddess also finds a place in kalari. Kalari propagates the high philosophy of serpent power in a more scientific manner.

Visha Chikitsa (Remedy for poisons)

The traditional knowledge associated with treating snake bite victims is also well developed and regularly practised in Kerala. The ancient texts in Kerala specify many miraculous treatment methods by psychic processes. These texts also describe vividly the

medicines, mantras and tantras involved in curing snake poison. Mantras and tantras are practiced only when medicines are found ineffective. The concept of 'dhoota lakshanam' – the ability to foresee the condition of the victim from the behaviour of the messenger who reports to the vaidya or physician about the nature of the snake bite – is also detailed in ancient texts. It is. The intelligence and scientific knowledge coupled with experience equip the vaidya to predict whether the victim is already dead or will survive.

According to Unnikrishnan (2004), the visha chikitsa tradition has two distinct branches in Kerala: one Dravidian and the other Aryan. The Dravidian tradition is believed to have originated from two legendary healers – Cherullippattar and Nanjunda Nathar. Kaaraad Namboothiri (Kurumbranaad, North Malabar), an expert in the field of snake venom treatment, introduced the Aryan legacy of visha chikitsa to the public by making available the text *Jyotsnika*. The Kerala texts of visha chikitsa were much popular among our practitioners at that time rather than the classical ayurveda texts in the field such as *Agathanthra*. For higher studies, Brahmins used the text *Prayoga Samuchayam* of the renowned Kochunny Thampuram of the Kochi royal family.

The practitioners of visha chikitsa are famous for treating snake poison. They distinguish poisons of animal and plant origin as jamgama visham and sthavara visham and deal with all subcategories in detail. There are two distinct streams in the visha chikitsa - visha vaidyam and visha vidya: the first one is natural and the latter is supernatural. Until the first half of the 20th century it was the supernatural stream that had prominence (Unnikrishnan, 2004). Some practitioners also use their age-old traditional practice of detoxification by getting the victim to vomit the poison. The services of traditional healers were necessary in remote localities in Kerala where modern antivenin treatments were not available. The visha vaidyans in Kerala also enjoyed a high social status. The number of traditional visha vaidyas, however, has declined drastically in Kerala, and in many places their role is taken up by those with poor knowledge both in traditional and modern methods of treatment. The visha chikitsa methods adopted in Kerala, including those practiced by tribal healers, remain an enigma and warrant detailed research. Notwithstanding the miracles reported in treating snakebite and the credibility of the stories associated, the numbers of practitioners who carry out this profession are coming down in Kerala. The risks involved in treating snake bites in the traditional way in an educated modern society coupled with absence of knowledgeable persons have contributed to this situation.

Parassinikadavu Vishachikilsa Kendram, Kannur, is famous for treating snake bites. Here, a holistic approach is adopted, where modern antivenin based treatment and the practices of traditional visha chikitsa are combined. Recognized by the Indian Council of Medical Research, this centre has maintained a mortality rate of below one per cent. The success of this method of holistic treatment should come as an eye-opener and enable us to think in terms of integrating different knowledge bases in a scientific manner.

Conclusion

In Kerala, from time immemorial, the concept of conservation and nature has been carefully woven into the various religious beliefs and customs. Serpent groves are a prime example of this approach. Despite this the sarpa kaavus in Kerala are under severe threat due to the disappearance of the joint family system, grazing, anthropogenic interventions, loss of faith in religious rituals and taboos and changes in socio-economic scenario. The eco-centric tradition of India gave importance to every living creature in the ecosystem and recognized the intricate interconnections between the living and nonliving, which ensure free flow of matter and energy. In the modern world, however, the Gods are alienated from nature and remain locked within the premises of temples, where importance is given to rituals rather than traditions. Most centres of worship thus became commercial centres as well. This drift from nature and tradition coupled with 'provisions' given by the humans to 'shift' the serpent deities to other locations in order to satisfy their own interests have also proved fatal to the sarpa kaavus.

Not to speak of the pivotal ecological role played by snakes in controlling the increasing population of rodents and snakes themselves, conservation of existing sarpa kaavus would help ensure ecological sustainability and livelihood security of the local communities. Above all, the cult of serpents as an ecological and cultural symbol cannot be simply disregarded by any person in Kerala.

A part of the song from *Kundalinippaattu*, or the Song of Serpent Power by the great social reformer and sage of Kerala Shri Narayana Guru (translated by Panikkar, 1991) comes to mind:

"Dance O, Serpent,
Seek your abode and dance in ecstasy...
A crore of mantras commencing from OM...
Knowest thou, the crux of which that we are
And dance and dance...
The crux of the mantra 'Namassivaya'
That emanates from the sound,
Dance, that is the Primordial One...
Drink the name of the destroyer of Time,
Who adorn the eye that burned away the Cupid...
And dance and dance...O, Serpent.

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