Abstract

The ancient Indian gāthā – a proverbial, succinct type of single-stanza poetry, often collected in thematic sets – became a favoured form of expression among groups of ascetics from the middle to the end of the 1st millennium BCE. This poetry – contrasting with the magico-ritual chant or mantra of the priest and the artistic poem of the aesthete – functions as (self-)instruction for the ascetic/renouncer. Examples include gāthās that exhort him to be as untiring as the Sun in its daily course, or to “wander alone like the rhinoceros”. This chapter delineates the figure of the solitary, wandering renouncer in a selection of Brahmanic, Jaina, and Buddhist ascetic gāthā- verses from that period. Particular attention is given to the use of solar and heroic imagery for describing the ideal renouncer, and how this relates to the real-life conditions of wandering renouncers.

I. The Song of the Wanderer

The legend of Rohita and Śunahśepa is a narrative in mixed prose and verse (a genre known as ṛkhyāna) found in a late

78 This chapter has benefitted from comments by Erik af Edholm and participants in the Indian Text Seminar at the Department of History of Religions, Stockholm University.

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Vedic ritual text, the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* (ch. 7), which is meant for recitation during the royal consecration (*rājasūya*). Versions of the legend can also be found in other texts.79 The section of the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* in which this narrative is found appears to have been composed in Videha during the mid 1st millennium BCE – an area and a period connected to the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. The legend of Rohita and Śunahšeṣpa includes a set of five aphoristic verses – *gāthās* – composed in the classical *anusṭubh-śloka*-metre. Together they form a kind of song, which, although it is untitled in Sanskrit, I will refer to as the “Song of the Wanderer”; it is rather unique in Vedic ritual literature. Before we look at how the Song of the Wanderer is best understood in context of similar thematic sets of *gāthā*-verses in early Buddhist and Jaina literature, a brief summary of the narrative of Indra and Rohita is necessary.

The story goes that there was once a king, Hariścandra, who had promised to sacrifice his only son, Rohita, to the deity (*deva*) Varuṇa. When Rohita was ‘fit to bear arms’ (*sāmnābhuka*), *id est* upon reaching manhood, the father decided to perform the sacrifice. Having heard the terrible news, Rohita grabbed his bow and arrows and escaped into the jungle, where he roamed about for a whole year. Meanwhile Hariścandra got sick and Rohita, hearing about his father’s misfortune, decided to return home. As he came near the village, however, he was confronted by a *brāhmaṇa* – the *deva* Indra in disguise – who presented his message to Rohita in the form of a *gāthā*:

Great is the splendour of him who has exerted himself [*śrānta-*],
so we have heard, o Rohita!
Wicked is he who stays among men.
Indra is the friend of the wandering man [*carant-*].80

Therefore, the *brāhmaṇa* exhorted Rohita to wander (*cara*). Putting his trust in him, Rohita continued his roaming for another year in

79 Such as Śāṅkhayaṇaśrutasūtra 15.17–27.
80 *nānā śrāntāya śrīr astīti rohita śuśrūna | pāpo nyādvaro jana indra ic carataḥ sakhi || (Aitareyabrāhmaṇa 7.15.1, translation based on Olivelle 2007:175 (cf. Horsch 1966:87f.). Translations are mine, unless stated otherwise. Instead of *nyādvaro* the Śāṅkhayaṇaśrutasūtra has *niṣadvaro* ‘he who sits’. Each verse is followed by the exhortation to wander (*caraiveti*).
the wilderness, away from other men. As he again approached the village, Indra appeared and told him:

   Endowed with flowers are the shanks of the wanderer;
his self grows and bears fruit.
All his sins are lying down,
slain by exertion [śrāma-] on the road.\(^{81}\)

Rohita went on toiling, wandering for a third year, until Indra approached him with a new stanza:

   The fortune of the sitting man sits,
that of the standing man stands,
that of the man who lies down lies down,
the fortune of the wanderer [carata-] wanders.\(^{82}\)

A fourth year went by and Indra sang to him again, this time using the imagery of the four outcomes in the royal dice-game – Kṛṭa being the best outcome and Kali the worst:

   Kali he becomes who is lying down,
Dvāpara he who is rising,
Tretā he who is standing erect,
Kṛṭa he attains who is wandering [caran].\(^{83}\)

Rohita roamed for a fifth year, until Indra recited to him the final stanza, which presents the Sun as an ideal of endurance:

   Wandering [caran], verily, he finds honey,
wandering he finds the sweet fruit of the cluster-fig tree.
Behold the pre-eminence of the Sun,
who never weary of wandering!\(^{84}\)

\(^{81}\) puṣpīnyau carato jaṅhe bhūṣṇur ātmā phalagrabhiḥ \| śere ‘syā sarve pāpmānāḥ śrāmeṇa prapathe hatāś || (7.15.2) Ātmā ‘self’ can also mean ‘body’, pra-patha- means ‘on the (long) journey, on the wide path’.

\(^{82}\) āste bhaga āśīnasyordhvas tiṣṭhati tiṣṭhataḥ \| śete nipadyāmānasya carāti carato bhagas \| (7.15.3)

\(^{83}\) kaliḥ sāyāno bhavati samjihānas tu dvāparah \| uttiṣṭhams tretā bhavati kṛtam sampadyate caramś \| (7.15.4)

\(^{84}\) caran vai madhu vindati caran svādum udumbraram \| sūryasya paśya śremānāṃ yo na tandrayate caramś \| 7.15.5. The Śāṅkhāyanaśrautasūtra has śramaṇa- ‘toiling, exerting oneself’ instead of śreman-.
With this gāthā, and the completion of the six years of wandering, the first section of the legend comes to an end. Soon thereafter, we are told, Rohita found a substitute victim for himself, Śunaḥśepa, the son of a sylvan sage, whom he exchanged for a hundred cows. Rohita returned to his father with the new sacrificial victim, which was accepted by Varuṇa. How Śunaḥśepa escaped death by means of his poetic skill is another story.

II. What is ascetic gāthā-poetry?

Before analyzing the Song of the Wanderer, a basic understanding of the nature of gāthā-poetry is a prerequisite. In his seminal work Die vedische Gāthā- und Śloka-Literatur (1966), Paul Horsch argues that gāthā-literature plays an important part in the transformation from Vedic to the early non-Vedic ascetic-renunciant (śramaṇa) traditions during the middle to the end of the 1st millennium BCE. The gāthā-genre can be seen as an “alternative” literature, existing parallel to the strictly priestly one. In the earliest known Indo-Aryan poetry, the Rgvedasamhitā, the term gāthā – which originally simply meant ‘verse’ or ‘song’ – designates a liturgical composition; the same is true of its Avestan counterpart gādā. In Vedic India, however, gāthā soon came to refer solely to non-liturgical poetry, since the term mantra – a formula from the Vedic hymn-collections (Samhitās) – became synonymous with liturgical verse. It is only during the late Vedic period that one can speak of gāthās as constituting a separate, non-priestly literature, which is not represented in the hymn-collections yet recognized by theologians as common lore and sparsely quoted in their

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85 Śāṅkhāyanaśrautasūtra 15.19 adds a seventh year and a sixth verse, in the same style as the previous ones; the first half-line is taken from the fifth verse.

86 It is not said how Rohita managed to acquire a hundred cows; he may have captured them in a raid, as befitting a young warrior (Weller 1956:86; Falk 1984).

87 Horsch 1966:482.

88 Horsch 1966:214–215.

89 In Young Avestan the term is used mainly for referring to the five Old Avestan Gādās, the 17 hymns or Yasna-chapters attributed to Zaraϑuštra. The metrical characteristic of the Gādās, in contrast to the early Vedic gāthā, is their strophic form, each with a fixed number of verse-lines and syllables.
prosaic texts,⁹⁰ such as the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa*’s legend of Rohita and Śunahṣepa. Closely associated with gāthā is the term śloka,⁹¹ which in the post-Vedic period came to designate a specific metric form – the much loved anuṣṭubh – regardless of its content.

From the late Vedic period onwards, gāthā designates a verse of the proverbial, aphoristic type, in which the focus is on content, rather than on composition. When used within a narrative or didactic text, the function of the gāthā is to strengthen or summarize a statement in the prose text. The gāthā is a single-stanza poem; a verse is complete in itself, but it often appears in the texts together with other verses on the same subject, forming thematic sets or “songs”, such as the “Song of the Wanderer” or the “Rhinoceros-sutta” (below).

Gāthās in Brahmanic,⁹² Buddhist, and Jaina texts should be seen in context of the broader Indian proverbial-gnomic and didactic literature: sayings, aphorisms, maxims, and precepts originating in oral tradition. One of the subgenres of gāthā-literature, ascetic gāthās, became a favoured form of expression among groups of renouncers during the late Vedic and early post-Vedic periods. During this time, there was considerable cultural and intellectual exchange between various ascetic groups. They all seem to have made use of some sort of un-edited, pre-Aśokan, non-sectarian, floating corpus of sayings, similes, ideals, poetic and narrative material, which would explain the numerous shared expressions found in post-Vedic Brahmanic, early Jaina, and Buddhist ascetic

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⁹⁰ *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* 11.5.7.10 even mentions gāthā as Vedic subject of study.
⁹¹ śloka ‘verse of praise’, literally ‘that which is heard’. See Horsch 1966:1, 219, 223–229, 306; Gonda 1975:405–407.
⁹² In the term “Brahmanic” I include both the “Vedic Brahmanic” tradition (texts from the Vedic period, *circa* 1500–500 BCE) and the “neo-Brahmanic” tradition (texts from the post-Vedic period); both (in contrast to Jainism and Buddhism) regard the Vedas as authoritative and brāhman (the transcendent force that animates the ritual word and action; the Absolute) as an important concept. Thus, by “Brahmanic” I do not refer to the title brāhmaṇa (‘relating to brāhman’), since this title is used to describe oneself both in Brahmanic texts (often in the sense of ‘priest’ or as member of a hereditary class) and in early Jaina and Buddhist texts (often in the sense of ‘ascetic’). Cf. McGovern 2019.
poetry. The gāthās in the Song of the Wanderer are uniform, although they neither give the impression of being the work of a single poet, nor of being invented for the legend of Rohita and Śunaḥśepa. Rather, they have sprung from the “well-spring” of ancient Indian ascetic poetry. This poetry is decidedly un-scholarly, concerning itself not with complex metaphysical theory, but with the ideal renouncer’s way of life and his attitude to the world.

III. Solar and royal themes

The theme of kingship runs through much of the legend of Rohita and Śunaḥśepa and its gāthās. The first gāthā in the Song of the Wanderer promises śrī – the ‘splendour’ associated with the prospering householder and with the righteous ruler – to the man who ‘exerts’ himself (√SRAM), isolated from other men. And in the final stanza we have the word śreman ‘pre-eminence, distinction’, which is etymologically and semantically related to śrī. There is also the fourth stanza’s use of imagery derived from the dice-game (which is played in the royal consecration, during which the legend of Rohita and Śunaḥśepa is recited), promising the winning throw (Kṛta) to the wanderer.

The theme of kingship is, moreover, seen in that Rohita himself is a prince or ksatriya (member of the warrior aristocracy, ruler) and his guide none other than the ksatriya-deity Indra, disguised as a brāhmaṇa. The latter term may in this case signify one who observes celibacy, since it was common among śramaṇas to identify the ascetic as a brāhmaṇa. The statement “Indra is the friend of the wanderer” (indra ic carataḥ sakhā) in the first gāthās recalls Indra as “the friend of munis” (muni ‘mute, ascetic sage’) in a much earlier text: Rgvedasamhitā 8.17.14. The name Rohita (‘ruddy’) is itself closely connected to kingship: in the 13th book

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93 See Charpentier 1921:43; Rau 1963; Horsch 1966:453–454; Bollée 1980; Nakamura 1983; Norman 1983:58–59, 63f., 78, 82. In the Dhammapada “small groups of verses, linked together by refrain, structure, or metre, clearly make small poems whose pre-existence is shown by the fact that they occur in the same form in other traditions as well.” (Norman 1983:59)

94 Horsch 1966:292.

95 See McGovern 2019.
of the Śaunakīyasāṃhitā the title Rohita appears to designate a ruler ascending to power, as well as the ruddy, rising Sun, personified by the king. Verse 13.4.1 alludes to the movement of an unnamed subject, who goes to the heavenly light as Savitṛ, perhaps referring to the progression of the Sun, the king, and/or the itinerant ascetic.96

A common idea in Vedic, epic, and later literature, is that both the ascetic and the king possess the solar characteristics of heat (tapas), fiery lustre (varcas, tejas), and splendour (śrī). The connections between Indra, the Sun, and itinerant ascetics (brahmacārin, keśin, muni, vrātya) have been explored by Moreno Dore (2015), in addition to whose observations I wish to point to the image of the solitary wandering Sun in two more passages. First, the episode from the “Book of the Forest” in the Mahābhārata, in which the deva Dharma, in disguise of a yakṣa (“nature spirit”), presents riddles to the illustrious king Yudhiṣṭhira, who has gone into exile, in order to test the king’s wisdom. One of the riddles goes: “What is it that travels alone, who is reborn, what is the remedy against cold, and what is the great sowing(-ground)?” Yudhiṣṭhira answers correctly:

The Sun wanders alone [eka vicarati],
the Moon is reborn,
fire is the remedy against cold,
Earth is the great sowing(-ground).97

The dialogue continues to praise the kind of ideals found in ascetic texts.98 Note that, as in the legend of Rohita and Śunaḥśepa, we are dealing with a royal personage in forest exile (a recurring motif in ancient Indian literature): Yudhiṣṭhira. The royal context of the yakṣa’s riddle is even more obvious when we understand that its origin is to be sought in the Vedic royal horse-sacrifice (aśvamedha). In the riddle-contest (brahmodya) of this grand

96 Dore 2015:49.
97 sūrya eko vicarati candramā jāyate punah | agnir himasya bhaiṣajyaṃ bhūmīr āvapanaṃ mahat || (Mahābhārata 3.297.47) Throughout this chapter references to the Mahābhārata is to the Critical edition (Pune), if not stated otherwise.
98 Mahābhārata 3.297.53, 55, 57.
ritual the brahmán-priest puts his question to the hotr-priest, who provides the same answer as Yudhiṣṭhira does in the epic.  

The message of the Song of the Wanderer, as we have seen, is that one should seek the fortune, essence, and fruit that come from a roaming lifestyle. Rohita lives as a wanderer temporarily, and does this within a sacrificial context, which is typical of the Vedic ritual texts, whereas the later Brahmanic and non-Vedic gāthās, discussed below, express the ideal of the permanent wandering. Patrick Olivelle suggests that the Song of the Wanderer echoes the earlier (semi-)nomadism of Indo-Aryan tribes, who would alternate between life on the move (yoga ‘the yoke, harnessing’, war and raiding) and the peaceful, settled life (kṣema).  

Roaming outside human settlement – as hunter, warrior, raider, or ascetic wanderer – was attributed greater spiritual, social, and economic value than living among men. Both Olivelle and Horsch have suggested that the Song of the Wanderer points forward to the ideal of wandering mendicants or ascetics. The terms used by Indra to urge Rohita to exert himself (śṛṇta, śrama, śramāṇa) derive from the verbal root (√)  ŚRAM ‘to toil, exert oneself’, which is used for the disciplined life of a Vedic sacrificer during his ritual of initiation, and is found in the terms śramāṇa ‘ascetic, mendicant’ and āśrama ‘hermitage, way of life’.  

Thus, in the mentioned passages, the Sun is characterized by its solitary procession: (vi)carati from  √CAR, which is used both in the sense ‘to wander, go’, and ‘to live (in a certain way), follow a discipline’. The same root is used in the Song of the Wanderer

99 śūrya ekākī carati candrāmā jāyate pūnāḥ | agnir dhimāsyā bhēṣajāṃ bhūmir āvāpanaṁ mahāt || (Vājasaneyisaṁhitā 23.9–10, 45–46) Similarly, but in prose, in Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa 3.9.5: asau vā ādityā ekākī carati téja evā ‘varundhe “It is yonder Sun, indeed, that moves alone [ekākī  √CAR]. (Consequently) it is fiery energy he (= the sacrificer) thus obtains.” (translation by Dumont 1948:481) And Śatapathaabrāhmaṇa 13.2.6.10: asau vā ādityā ekākī caraty esā brahmavarcasām brahmavarcasām evāṁsims tād dhattah “It is the Sun that walks alone [ekākī  √CAR]. This is brahman-lustre; the two (priests) bestow brahman-lustre on him (= the sacrificer).” Indra, identified with the Sun, is wide-striding in Ṛgvedasaṁhitā 10.29.4 (Śaunakīyasāṁhitā 20.76.4).

100 Olivelle 2007:176–177.
101 Olivelle 2007:175–176, 185.
102 Horsch 1966:88.
A wandering lifestyle is attributed to various ascetic figures already in early and middle Vedic texts, but in contrast to the later ascetic gāthā-literature, asceticism in early Vedic texts is not connected to a specific genre of (proverbial) poetry. Instead, earlier Vedic songs about ascetics typically take the form of laudatory texts full of cryptic references and expressions. One such hymn is that of the celibate student or brahmacārin in the Śaunakīyasamhitā:

The brahmacārin wanders [√CAR], stirring both worlds; in him the devas are one-minded. He has firmly established earth and heaven; he satisfies his teacher with the heat of asceticism [tāpas-].

Interestingly, in context of the link between Rohita and Indra in the later legend, the brahmacārin is associated, or even identified, with Indra. This is because of the brahmacārin’s heroic qualities, but also because Indra roams alone: in Rigvedasamhitā 3.30.4 we learn that Indra goes about alone (eka + [√CAR]), smashing obstacles. Indra is also designated as eka in passages which stress his heroism and strength: ekavīra ‘lone hero’ is an epithet given to him. In Rigvedasamhitā 1.165.3 the Maruts, who always appear as a group, ask Indra why he travels alone. In the Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa, in the chapter on the agnihotra, the epithet ekavīra is attributed to the Sun, which in turn is identified with Indra: “He [= the Sun] is the lone hero [eka- vīra-], who burns/shines [tapati] here; he is Indra...”

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103 brahmacārīṣṇam ś carati rōdasī ubbhe tāsmin devāh sāmmanaso bhavanti lā dādhrā prthivīṃ dīvaṃ ca sā ācāryam tāpasā piparti || (Śaunakīyasamhitā 11.5.1, translation based on Griffith 1896:68; cf. verse 6, Dore 2015:47–48; Rigvedasamhitā 10.109.5).
104 The brahmacārin is Indra’s disciple (Śatapathabrāhmaṇa 11.5.4.2; Pāraskaragṛhyasūtra 2.2.7). The brahmacārin, who is Indra, has shattered the demons (Śaunakīyasamhitā 11.5.7, 16; cf. Rigvedasamhitā 4.12.2).
105 Rigvedasamhitā 1.176.2; 8.15.3; 8.16.8; 8.90.5.
106 Rigvedasamhitā 10.103.1.
107 sa eṣa vā eko vīra ya eṣa tapaty eṣa indra... (Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa 1.8, cf. Bodewitz’s translation 1973:36–37). On Indra as the Sun see Śatapathabrāhmaṇa 1.6.4.18, 2.3.4.12, 3.4.2.15, 4.5.5.7, 4.5.9.4, 4.6.7.11, 8.5.3.2.
Scholars have argued that the Vedic brahmacārin ‘he who wanders/lives with brahman’ is a forerunner of the later renouncer. 

Two common terms for ‘renouncer’, parivrājaka and pravrajita, literally mean ‘he who wanders about’ and ‘he who goes forth (into homelessness)’. Originally, renouncers would wander about constantly, except during the monsoon, as the heavy rains made travelling too difficult. The ideal in Brahmanic renunciant traditions was to travel alone, though it is questionable if this was actually common practise (we will return to this below). This ideal is expressed in an anuṣṭubh-śloka from the Manusmṛti, a version of which also appears in the Mahābhārata:

Verily, he should always wander alone [eka √CAR], without any companion, in order to achieve success. Recognizing that success is for the solitary, he will not forsake (anyone) and he will not be forsaken (by anyone).

Another stanza from the Mahābhārata comes very close:

Verily, he should wander alone [eka √CAR] according to dharma, for in dharma there is no companionship. If he confirms to this rule absolutely, what can a companion do?

The same ideal is found in the Saṃnyāsopaniṣads, a collection of later Brahmanic texts on renunciation. The Nāradapurvājakopaniṣad,

108 Oberlies 1997.
109 Olivelle 1974:1.
110 eka eva caren nityaṃ siddhyartham asahāyavān | siddhim ekasya sampāsyām na jahāti na bīyate || (Manusmṛti 6.42, translation based on Olivelle 2005:150; cf. Shiraishi 1996:103–104, 125–126). Identical to Mahābhārata 12.237.4cd-5b except 5a which has ekaś carati yah paśyan “he wanders alone, who is seeing (that success comes to the solitary)” (cf. 12.237.7, 22). Similarly Mahābhārata 12.308.28 when Janaka says: “Free from passion, I wander/live alone, standing on the highest path” (muktarāgaś carāmy ekah pade paramake sthitah). According to 12.234.9 one should “wander alone in the forest” (arānye vicaraikākē). See also 1.86.5 below, which is almost identical with the Jaina Uttarajjhayaṇa 15.16.
111 eka eva cared dharmam nāsti dharmera sahāyatāḥ | kevalam vidhim āsādyā sahāyaḥ kim kariṣyati || (Mahābhārata 12.186.31)
for example, proclaims that “alone, indeed, shall a mendicant wander”.

And according to the Pañcamāśramavidhi, a man who decides to become a skyclad ascetic must abandon absolutely everything and be prepared to be regarded as a madman by society:

> Let him wander alone [ekākī sam-√CAR] on the Earth, as if he were a fool, a lunatic, or a goblin.

One can also mention a quote in the 11th century “Collection of Ascetic Laws” (Yatidharmasamuccaya) by Yādava, just to illustrate the consistency of this ideal in Brahmanic ascetic traditions from different periods in time. A verse quoted from Medhātithi, in which the ascetic is compared with the constant and unhindered movement of the Sun, echoes the ideal found in ancient texts:

> (The wandering ascetic) is seen in one place in the morning, in another place at noon, and in yet another at sunset. Like the Sun, he should remain without a home and free from attachment.

The same text, quoting Yama:

> Totally unfettered, let him always wander alone [ekākī vi-√CAR], without a companion; for when a man wanders alone his path becomes smooth, but it thwarts him when he does not.

To sum up: the notion of the Sun as a prototypical solitary wanderer, which we find in the Song of the Wanderer, goes back

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112 eka eva ... caret ... ekaḥ cared bhikṣuḥ (Nāradaparivrājakopanisad ch. 7, Olivelle 1992:215).
113 ekākī samcared bhūmau bālonmattapiśācavat || (Pañcamāśramavidhi verse 37cd, translation by Olivelle 2012:261)
114 ādite 'nyatra madhyāhne anyatrāstamite ravau | dṛṣyate tv aniketah syāt sūryavatsangarvijitah || (Yatidharmasamuccaya 9.2, translation based on Olivelle 1995:150)
115 ekākī vicaren nityāṃ muktātmā tvasahāyakah | ekasya hi samaḥ panthā jāyate 'nyatra jīyate || (Yatidharmasamuccaya 9.19, translation based on Olivelle 1995:151)
116 The singleness of the Sun is implicit in Indra’s gāthā; Rohita wanders about alone, and the first stanza speaks about the fault of staying with other men (pāpo nṛṣadvaro).
to the earlier Vedic tradition and is continued in the *Mahābhārata*. It makes its appearance in a royal context (the legend of Rohita and Śunahśepa told in the *rājasūya*, the riddle-contest in the *aśvamedha*, and the trial of king Yudhisthira), which is understandable when we know that the Sun is also a prototypical lone hero (*ekavīra*) and ruler. The combination of *eka* + √CAR ‘to wander alone’, which is used for the Sun in the riddle-verse, also applies to the early Vedic Indra and to the Brahmanic renouncer.

### IV. The solitary Jaina hero

As we turn to the Jaina material, we find that *gāhā* (the Prakrit equivalent of *gāthā*) is typically used to designate popular verses with religious content, more seldom for the ascetic poetry found in Śvetāmbara canonical texts.\(^{117}\) Although the term *gāhā* (*gāthā*) in general has been superseded by the term *sutta* (Sanskrit *sūtra*), the type of Jaina literature dealt with below is, with regard to both content and style, fully in line with the definition of ascetic *gāthā*-poetry given above.

An important text for our understanding of the early Jaina mendicant ideal is the 15th chapter of the *Uttarajjhayana*, which Jarl Charpentier refers to as a “Schatzkammer altjainistischer Spruch- und Legendenpoesie”\.\(^{118}\) It consists of sixteen stanzas on the perfect mendicant (*bhikkhu*).\(^{119}\) His life is one of simplicity and harshness: he must endure heat and cold, gadflies and mosquitoes;\(^{120}\) he must accept any kind of tasty or tasteless food, even from the household of a low-status donor.\(^{121}\) The forest, through which the mendicant fares, is filled with dangerous beasts and fearful sounds, but he shall pay no attention to any of that.\(^{122}\) The 7th and 8th stanzas, listing practises that are forbidden to the Jaina

\(^{117}\) Horsch 1966:218. In *Uttarajjhayana* 31.13 the first book of the *Sūyagada* is known as “The Sixteen Gāthās”, since they form sixteen chapters of verses (except the last chapter).

\(^{118}\) Charpentier 1910:62.

\(^{119}\) Alsdorf 1963:115f.

\(^{120}\) *Uttarajjhayana* 15.4, cf. 21.18. This is very similar to verse 52 of *Khaggavisānasutta* (see below). Cf. *Sūyagada* [1.]2.2.14–16 and *Āyāra* 6.(3.)61, 7.(7.)111, 8.(3.)1f.

\(^{121}\) *Uttarajjhayana* 15.12–13.

\(^{122}\) *Uttarajjhayana* 15.14.
mendicant, are illustrative of some of the professions associated with various types of vagabonds, perhaps practised by some (fake) ascetics: healing, divination, and so on.\textsuperscript{123} Another “profession” which a Jaina mendicant shall not engage in is that of ‘one who prais-es with verses’,\textsuperscript{124} meaning a laudatory poet or bard, who travels from one patron or town to another (like the Buddhist convert Vaṅgīsa below). The final verse, praising solitary (Prakrit $ega$-) itinerant mendicancy,\textsuperscript{125} is characteristic of the sentiment of this sutta:

He who does not make his living from a craft, who is without home and friends, having conquered his senses, free from everything, with minimal defilement, eating little, having forsaken (his) home, wandering alone [$ega\-\sqrt{CAR}$] – he is a mendicant.\textsuperscript{126}

That verse is almost identical with Mahābhārata 1.86.5.\textsuperscript{127}

The following two anuṣṭubh-verses, from other chapters in the Uttarajjhayana, are in the same vein:

Verily, he should wander about alone [$ega\ eva \sqrt{CAR}$], living on allowed food, overcoming all troubles, in a village, town, market-place, or capital.\textsuperscript{128}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{123} Uttarajjhayana 15.7, 20.45; Zysk 1998:27f.; McGovern 2019:153–155. Similar passages are found in Suttanipāta 927 and Manusmṛti 6.50.

\textsuperscript{124} Uttarajjhayana 15.9. Cf. Mahābhārata 12.234.9 which says that the solitary ascetic should not praise anyone (niḥstutir).

\textsuperscript{125} See also Uttarajjhayana 1.16.5 and Sūyagada [1.]4.2.1.

\textsuperscript{126} asippa-jūvī āgihe amitte | ji’indie savvao vippanukke | ānu-kkasāi lahur-appa-bhakkhe | ceccā gibhaṃ egacare sa bhikkhū || (Uttarajjhayana 15.16, text from Alsdorf 1963:119; cf. Tatia & Kumar 1981:90)

\textsuperscript{127} asilpajūvī nagṛhaś ca nityam jitendriyaḥ sarvato vipramuktah | anokasārī laghur alpacāraś caran deśāṃ ekacaraḥ sa bhikṣuḥ || “He who lives off no craft, is always homeless, has conquered his senses, is entirely liberated, does not frequent houses, travels lightly on short journeys, and wanders alone [ekacaraḥ] through the countries – he is a mendicant [bhikṣu-].” (Mahābhārata 1.86.5)

\textsuperscript{128} ega eva care lāṅhe abhibhūya parīsabhe | gāme vā nagare vāvi nigame vā rāyahānie || (Uttarajjhayana 2.9, translation based on Jacobi 1895:12). The formula eka eva $\sqrt{CAR}$ in this verse is found also in the verses from Manusmṛti and Nāradaparivrājakopanīsad quoted above.
\end{footnotesize}
He should sit down, alone, in a burial place,
a deserted home, or at the root of a tree,
without moving, and he should not drive away anyone.\textsuperscript{129}

Besides the theme of solitary wandering, there is use of royal imagery in Jaina ascetic texts, akin to the that of the Vedic tradition. The bhikkhu is compared with royal beings like the elephant, the lion, the Sun, Sakka (Indra), and so on.\textsuperscript{130} Like a war-elephant at the frontline crushes the enemy, so does the heroic ascetic in self-control conquer his inner foe.\textsuperscript{131} The renouncer’s solitary lifestyle (\textit{egacariyā})\textsuperscript{132} is known as \textit{jinakalpa} ‘the practise of the conqueror’,\textsuperscript{133} and has its \textit{exemplum} in the ‘conqueror’ (Sanskrit \textit{jina}) Mahāvīra Vardhamāna – the title mahāvīra means ‘great hero’ – who was the most recent tīrthaṅkara (‘ford-maker’, one who re-establishes the Jaina path of liberation by crossing the river/ocean of \textit{saṃsāra}). We read in the \textit{Āyāra} and the \textit{Sūyagadā} that when Mahāvīra ‘went forth’ (\textit{pavvae}) as a renouncer he lived alone (\textit{ega-\text{\textasciicircum}CAR}).\textsuperscript{134} It was only after years of solitary wandering, and after attaining supreme enlightenment in meditation, that Mahāvīra began to surround himself with disciples, though the \textit{Sūyagadā} is keen to point out that his \textit{inner} solitude was always kept intact.\textsuperscript{135}

A passage in a later text, the \textit{Jiṇacarittra} or ‘Biography of the Heroes’, based on older material, describes Mahāvīra as being, among other things, “alone like the rhinoceros” (\textit{khaggiviseṇaṃ va ega-\text{\textasciicircum}jae} – see the Buddhist \textit{gathās} below), “effulgent like the Sun” (\textit{sūro iva ditta-\text{\textasciicircum}tee}), free as the bird in the air, valorous like the male elephant, and his senses drawn in like the turtle’s limbs – all of them common similes in ascetic literature. This is first

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Susāṇe sunmagāre vā rukkhamāle va egao | akukku no misējī na ya vittāsae param ||} (\textit{Uttarajjhayaṇa} 2.10, translation based on Jacobi 1895:12). Cf. 29.39.

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Uttarajjhayaṇa} 11.16f.; cf. \textit{Jiṇacarittra} 118 below.

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Uttarajjhayaṇa} 2.6–10.

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Āyāra} 6.(2.)52; cf. \textit{Sūyagada} [1.]2.2.12, 1.9.30, 1.10.23.

\textsuperscript{133} Tatia & Kumar 1981:59–69, 78–79; Caillat 2003:37.

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Āyāra} 9.(2.)11, cf. 9.(1.)6, 5.(1.)17.

\textsuperscript{135} According to Jacobi 1895, \textit{Sūyagada} [2.]6.3 relates that the ascetic Makkhali Gōśāla criticized Mahāvīra for this, but was corrected by the Jaina Ārdraka: Mahāvīra is really always single and alone (though surrounded by followers).
stated in prose and then, in some manuscripts, summarized in two gāhā-verses. The extreme brevity of the two gāhās make them, unlike most gāthās, difficult to understand without prior knowledge of what each object represents (given by the oral tradition that is reflected, we must assume, in the prose):

Vessel, shell, soul, sky, wind, and autumnal water; lotus-leaf, turtle, bird, rhinoceros, and bhārunḍa-bird.

Elephant, bull, lion, king of mountains, and unshaken ocean; Moon, Sun, gold, Earth, and well-kindled fire.

A corresponding enumeration in prose is found in the Ovavāiya, but here it refers to the mendicants at the time of Mahāvīra: they were “solitary like the rhinoceros” (khaggi-visāṇaṃ va egajāyā), “effulgent like the Sun” (sūro iva ditta-teyā), and so on. In the Sūyagāda, likewise, Mahāvīra is likened to the Sun and to fire:

Omniscient, wandering about [√CAR] without a home, crossing the river (of samsāra), wise, and of unlimited perception, the highest one (= Mahāvīra) glows [/becomes heated] like the Sun, and he illuminates the darkness like a brilliant fire.

The image of the ascetic as glowing or becoming heated through asceticism (√TAP), like the Sun, can be compared with the solar qualities of the Vedic wandering ascetics.
V. Pali verses on wandering alone like the rhinoceros

Finally, as we come to the early Buddhist literature, it becomes clear that gāthā-poetry was important to the saṅgha founded by Buddha Śākyamuni. The Dhammapada and many verses in the Suttanipāta, Itivuttaka, Udāna, Theragāthā, and the Jātakastanzas, are gāthā-literature. Among these, the Suttanipāta’s Khaggavisāṇasutta, Uragasutta, and Munisutta (possibly identical with the Munigāthā referred to in the Aśoka inscription) are of particular interest, since they outline the ideal renouncer. According to Upali Sramon (2011), Pali literature makes a basic distinction between gāthā as authoritative verse-composition, and kāveyya (Sanskrit kāvyā) as mere artistic poetry, the making of poems or poetry as business. The latter is a forbidden art for the monk (similar to the arts forbidden for a Jaina mendicant, as we saw above), whereas the former (gāthās) need not have any poetic qualities, as they are only versified for memorisation. In this context one can mention the verses attributed to Vaṅgīsa, who, prior to becoming a wandering ascetic of Śākyamuni’s order, was a wandering artistic poet:

Intoxicated with skill in the poetic art,
former we wandered from village to village, from town to town.
Then we saw the Awakened One,
gone to the far shore beyond all (worldly conditioned) phenomena.

The prevalent metre of the Pali canon is the anuṣṭubha (Sanskrit anuṣṭubh) or siloka (śloka), “which has a great deal of flexibility, and seems to be equally well adapted to aphorism, question

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141 Some verses in the Theragāthās and Therīgāthās are rather artistic and lyrical – the authors took over imagery and conventions of contemporary kāvyā and secular poetry – and therefore cannot be considered ascetic gāthā-literature (cf. Norman 1983:75–76; Lienhard 1984a:76–77).

142 Calcutta-Bhairat inscription (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum 1925:173); Jayawickrama 1977:31f.

143 Dīghanikāya 1.125, et cetera.

144 Upali Sramon 2011:21.

145 kāveyyamattā vicarimha pubbe gāmā gāmam purā purāṃ ath’ addasāmi sambuddhaṃ sabbadhammāna pāragum || (Theragāthā 1253, translation by Ireland 1997; cf. Upali Sramon 2012:25, 27).
and answer, narrative, and epic.” It has been argued that the anthology *Suttanipāta* is as close to the teachings of Śākyamuni himself as we can get. The following points suggest that the text is “archaic”, according to Nāgapriya (2014) – and, I would add, belongs to ascetic poetry: Relative absence of formulas; (re)definition of terms from the existing socio-religious discourse, such as *brāhmaṇa*; emphasis is on behaviour, rather than metaphysics (virtues and qualities of the renouncer, rather than doctrine); and relative absence of systematized teachings. Some Pali *suttas* use refrain as “organizing principle”, mainly for mnemonic reasons, but are free from repetition of systematized doctrines and enumerations typical of later texts.

The ideal of solitary wandering or a solitary lifestyle (*ekacariyā*) is best expressed in the *Khaggavisānasutta* or “Rhinoceros-sutta” (*Suttanipāta* i.3 or verses 35–75), also found in Gandhari and Buddhist Hybrid-Sanskrit (the *Khagvisanāgāthā* in the *Mahāvastu*). It has been suggested that the *Khaggavisānasutta* was originally an independent, and perhaps not specifically Buddhist, text. The refrain encourages the renouncer to “wander alone like the rhinoceros” (*eko care khaggavisāṇakappo*), a simile also taken up by the Jainas, as we saw. This agrees with other animal *exempla*: the lion wandering alone (*sīham ... eka-√CAR*), or

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146 Ānandajoti 2013:17. As mentioned earlier, the *sloka* _/anuśṭubh_ is closely connected to _gāthā_-literature.

147 McGovern 2019 argues that this should not be seen as a re-definition, since ascetics in the age of Śākyamuni had as much, or even greater, right to the title *brāhmaṇa* as priest had, for it appears that it was originally not birth but celibacy (*brahmacarya*) which could make a person a *brāhmaṇa*; the neo-Brahmanic concept of *brāhmaṇa* is not earlier than the Buddhist or Jaina concept of *brāhmaṇa*.

148 Nāgapriya 2004; Nakamura 1987:57f. Cf. Shulman 2012:385f.

149 *Suttanipāta* 816, 820–821.

150 Salomon 2000:38f. It diverges from the Pali version from verse 6 onwards.

151 Jayawickrama 1977:31; Salomon 2000:14–19.

152 *khaggavisānakappo* can also be translated ‘following the habit/manner (Sanskrit *kalpa*) of the rhinoceros’ (Caillat 2003:38). It is debated among scholars how one should translate the refrain (see Jayawickrama 1977:22–23; Wright 2001:3; Jones 2014; differently Norman 1996).

153 *Suttanipāta* 72, 166, 416.
the solitary (senior male) elephant who has left the herd.¹⁵⁴ The lion and the elephant are connected to royal and heroic imagery, as in this stanza from the *Dhammapada*: if one does not find a worthy companion,

one should wander alone [eka- √CAR],
like a king who has renounced the conquered realm,
or like an elephant in the elephant-forest.¹⁵⁵

The same goes for the *Khaggavisānasutta*: the renouncer should roam alone, fearless like the lion ‘the king of beasts’ (*rājā migānam*), elephant, or rhinoceros:¹⁵⁶

Like an elephant, with a massive back, spotted, noble,
who has left the herd, in order to dwell according to his will in the forest,
one should wander alone [eka- √CAR] like the rhinoceros.¹⁵⁷

Friends, family, and women must be forsaken,¹⁵⁸ for it is impossible to attain emancipation while enjoying company.¹⁵⁹ Yet, Richard Salomon argues, the “overall message of the *sutta* is not that one must have no companions at all, but rather that one should choose one’s companions very carefully for their moral and spiritual merits.”¹⁶⁰ Toward the end of the *sutta*, friendship (*metta*) is actually praised, but it is the friendliness toward all beings, the virtues of equanimity and non-violence, which comes

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¹⁵⁴ *Mahābhārata* 12.105.51. The senior male elephant typically lives apart from the herd of female and young elephants.

¹⁵⁵ ... *rājā va raṭṭhaṃ vijitam pahāya | eko care mātaṅgaraṇe va nāgo || (Dhammapada 329); similarly 61, 305, 330, 395; *Udāna* 4.5; *Suttanipāta* 46, 53. *Gāthā* 239 in *Pali Jātaka* 525 deals with a king who has renounced (*pabbajito*) and goes away like a solitary elephant (*nāgo va ekako caraṭi*). Cf. Āryaśūra’s *Jātakamālā* 30.1–4 about an elephant who is roaming alone in the forest, (peaceful) like an ascetic (*nāgavane ... ekacaro hastī ... tapasvīva*).

¹⁵⁶ *Khaggavisānasutta* 71–72.

¹⁵⁷ *nāgo va yūthāni vivajjayitvā | saṅjātakahando padumī ulārō | yathābhirantarāṃ vibhare arāṇe | eko care khaggavisānakappo || (Khaggavisānasutta 53) ‘Spotted’ (*padumin-*) probably refers to the partial loss of pigmentation on senior elephants. Cf. Shulman 2012:390.

¹⁵⁸ *Khaggavisānasutta* 35–38, 41, 43, 49, 60.

¹⁵⁹ *samanikāra-, Khaggavisānasutta* 54.

¹⁶⁰ Salomon 2000:7; *Khaggavisānasutta* 45; cf. 47, 57.
from *detachment*, not the friendship that means attachment to another person. If it is not possible to find an exceptionally noble companion one should roam about in solitude, like a king who has renounced his kingdom,\(^1\) which reflects a recurrent motif in ancient Indian literature: the king who gives up his throne in order to seek *mokṣa*. Royal imagery may also hide behind verse 42: ‘he who is in the four directions’ (*cātuddisa*) refers to one who advances in all directions of space – the renouncer who is free to roam as he pleases, like the rhinoceros – but it could also reflect the Vedic ideal of the king as a conqueror of the four directions of space (*digvijaya*):

(At home in) all directions [of space], unhindered anywhere, being satisfied with one thing or another, a bearer of dangers, fearless, one should wander alone [*eka- sqrt]* like the rhinoceros.\(^2\)

Gāthā 48 of the *Khaggavisānasutta* uses the delicate simile of two bracelets, clashing against each other:\(^3\) when a girl wears more than one bracelet they clash and make noise as she moves her arm, whereas the single bracelet remains quiet. This signifies that company should be avoided, as it leads to unnecessary talk and disturbances. The gāthā belongs to a set of verses known from the Pali *Jātaka* 408, which deals with four royal, pre-Śākyamuni *paccekabuddhas*, who realise the impermanence of everything in the world and renounce it.\(^4\) According to Dhivan Jones, the existence of the *Khaggavisānasutta* in Pali, Gandhari, and Buddhist Hybrid-Sanskrit indicates its popularity among *bhikkhus*, but “the attribution from early times of the rhinoceros stanzas to the

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\(^1\) *Khaggavisānasutta* 46, as in *Dhammapada* 329 above.

\(^2\) *cātuddiso appātigbo ca heti* santussamāno itaritarena | parissayānām sabhī achambhī | eko care khaggavisānakappo || (*Khaggavisānasutta* 42, translation by Salomon 2000:174–175)

\(^3\) *disvā suvannassa pabhassarāṇī* kammārputtena sunitīhitāni | saṃgaḥaṭṭamānāni duve bhujasmin | eko care khaggavisānakappo || “Having seen the two golden (bracelets), brilliant, well-made by the smith’s son, clashing against each other on the arm, one should wander alone like the rhinoceros.” (*Khaggavisānasutta* 48)

\(^4\) Norman 1983:82; Salomon 2000:8–9; cf. *Mahāvastu* 1.301. On the debated term and concept of *paccekabuddha* see, for example, Anālayo 2010.
paccekabuddhas [who lived long ago], evident in the Mahāvastu as well as in the Apadāna and Cūlaniddesa [Pali commentary], suggests that the solitary lifestyle recommended by the stanzas seemed to the early Buddhists not to be an ideal to which they could practically aspire.”

Finally, one can mention the Munisutta (Suttapiṭaka 207–221), which characterises the muni as a solitary wanderer and emphasises the necessity of leaving domestic life, echoing the sentiment of the Vedic Song of the Wanderer.

There are similar passages in the Moneyyasutta (Suttapiṭaka 699–723), the Arindamajātaka of the Mahāvastu, Āryaśūra’s Jātakamālā, and the Theragāthās. The latter include, for example, a stanza attributed to Sītavaniya praising the solitary forest mendicant, as well as verses attributed to Tissakumāra Ekavīhāriya ‘lone-dweller’. The latter describe the eremitical, sylvan life as nothing but pleasant and peaceful – bear in mind the lyrical element in some Theragāthās – not harsh and physically painful as in the more realistic Uttarajjhayāna (15.4) and Khaggavisānasutta (52).

Many of the verses in the Pali texts mentioned here are not distinctly Buddhist. They present an archaic type of pre-monastic, pre-sectarian ascetic poetry, reminiscent of the Song of the Wanderer.

165 Jones 2014:176.
166 Suttapiṭaka 207–208, 213; cf. 821, Udāna 3.9; Mahābhūrata 12.237.22 (munim .... ekacaram), 12.316.23–24 (ekacaryārataḥ ... eko rame muniḥ); Shulman 2012:392f.
167 When asked by king Arindama about the ascetic life, the pacceka-buddha Sronaka replied: “O king, what is a kingdom to a man who fares all alone [ekasya carato]? This is the first blessing of the poor, homeless monk [adhanasya anāgārasya bhiksuno].” (Mahāvastu 3.452, translation by Jones 1943) The story is based on the Pali Sonakajātaka (number 529).
168 Jātakamālā 21.11–12: “In cremation-grounds, deserted areas, mountains, or forests teeming with fierce wild animals, abandoning their houses, ascetics dwell wherever they are at sunset. Intent on meditation and constantly wandering alone [ekacarāś], they withdraw from the sight of women...” (translation based on Meiland 2009)
169 Theragāthā 6; cf. 95 and 245.
170 Theragāthā 537–540 and 543–544.
VI. How much of this reflects the historical reality?

Now, the reader may wonder how much of all this high talk of living in solitude and walking constantly reflects historical reality? This is not easy to determine. We know that there were no monasteries in India when the Buddhist and Jaina ascetic orders were formed, and the texts describe how Śākyamuni, Mahāvīra, and their disciples visited and taught in various parks and similar localities.\textsuperscript{171} When we acknowledge the similarities between the Pali/Prakrit gāthās/gāhās and the Song of the Wanderer, it seems probable that by the mid 1\textsuperscript{st} millennium BCE the ideal of the solitary wandering ascetic was already firmly established. From this time, especially towards the end of the 1\textsuperscript{st} millennium BCE, various ascetic groups (Buddhist, Jaina, Brahmanic) shared this ideal.

Both Śākyamuni and Mahāvīra organized their disciples in orders – perhaps because, as Stanley Tambiah writes, the personal quest of the renouncer was thought to be best undertaken in a community of like-minded.\textsuperscript{172} In a monastic environment it becomes necessary to find a space where one can be alone – if not physically then at least mentally and spiritually. Viveka ‘seclusion’ is highly esteemed in early Buddhist texts.\textsuperscript{173} Śākyamuni differentiated between physical/outer and spiritual/inner solitude, the latter being more important, whereas the former could be realized temporarily.\textsuperscript{174} “Canonical texts describe monks who had not reached the stage of Arahant, as well as great disciples and the Buddha himself, living alone at times, or with one, two or a few companions”.\textsuperscript{175}

The solitary wandering mendicant clearly contrasts with the bhikkhu who stays permanently at a monastery. The contrast is

\textsuperscript{171} Shiraishi 1996:150–158; Pieruccini 2018.
\textsuperscript{172} Tambiah 1981.
\textsuperscript{173} Anālayo 2009. Cf. Dhammapada 205, Suttanipāta 257.
\textsuperscript{174} Wijayaratna 1990:111–117. Physical seclusion forms the basis for mental seclusion (citta-viveka), but the highest is seclusion from defilements, which is reached in final liberation (Anālayo 2009; cf. Hudson 1976).
\textsuperscript{175} Wijayaratna 1990:111; cf. Mahāvagga 1.12 (Śākyamuni in solitary secluded meditation, rahogata- paṭisallīna-); Dutt 1924:110f.; Shiraishi 1996:158–159, 162, 166, 191–192 (eka, ekavibhārī, vijanavātā, vivitta). Śākyamuni is said to have regularly gone into seclusion, for as long as up to 3 months (Anālayo 2009).
also stark between ascetic gāthā-poetry and Buddhist monastic literature, which presents the monk as “caught in a web of social and ritual obligations”.\textsuperscript{176} The domestication of monks is partly related to the influence of Buddhist lay people, who seek the merit that comes from supporting monks; for it is in the laity’s interest that monks are easily accessible in permanently settled communities.\textsuperscript{177} Daniel Boucher describes domestication and ascetic reform as a recurring pattern in monastic culture; the solitary or “eremitical” ideal never loses its attractiveness for new generations of ascetics:

Buddhist reclusion has long struggled between two poles: the untamed renunciant on the outermost fringes of human civilization, an ascetic who earned his reputation from years of austerity; and the domesticated monk, sedentary and respectable, perhaps scholarly, but more often a ritual specialist attuned to the needs of the laity. These two poles, of course, are essentially coterminous with Weber’s charismatic and bureaucratic modes of leadership. ... [I]t was the very success of wilderness-dwelling monks in acquiring patronage that eventually compromised this ascetic thrust. This dialectic – reform, domestication, and renewed reform – is a recurring pattern in monastic culture everywhere.\textsuperscript{178}

It seems highly likely that the mendicant ideal, expressed in the gāthās I have presented, reflects the real-life conditions of many ascetics around the mid 1\textsuperscript{st} millennium BCE: they were wandering about alone or in small groups, from place to place, except during the rainy season. The earliest Buddhist order has been described as “a dispersed body of wandering hermits”.\textsuperscript{179} We should bear in mind that the ascetic poetry, although expressing high ideals,\textsuperscript{180} discards poetic refinery and imagination; the gāthās

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{176} Lopez 2007:33.
\textsuperscript{177} Bailey & Mabbett 2003:10.
\textsuperscript{178} Boucher 2011:218–219. See Carrithers 1983 (on Singhalese monks); Prebish 1995 (on the sylvan renunciates ideal); Bailey & Mabbett 2003:87, 178–179 (on Thai monks).
\textsuperscript{179} Dutt 1924:183; similarly Nakamura 1987:59; Bronkhorst 1993:99–100; Shiraiishi 1996:160; Bailey & Mabbett 2003:165–168.
\textsuperscript{180} Shulman sees the Khaggavisāṇasutta not as “an historical statement, but an idealized picture” of what “the author(s) felt the life of a recluse could be like.” (2012:391)
\end{flushleft}
are not intended to be mere words, but to function as guidance and self-instruction for one seeking the highest goal. Moreover, realistic botanical and faunal references in the verses, as well as references to vagabond professions, suggest direct experience of life on road and trail. It is not difficult to imagine the easily memorized verses of the Song of the Wanderer, or the Khaggavisānasutta, being recited by ascetics while on the move.

As time went by, the ideal of solitary wandering became increasingly distanced from the real-life of Buddhist monks, as monasteries were built, and was viewed with nostalgia or projected onto a pre-Śākyamuni age of pacekabuddhas. Yet, from time to time, there appeared reformers who reacted against the domestication of the ascetic order and sought a more eremitical or mobile way of life. To some extent, the Brahmanic and Jaina renouncer-traditions were more successful than the Buddhist one in keeping alive itinerancy.181 Even today, Indian śādhus spend much of their life on the road; they tend to spend their first period as śādhus traveling, then settle down at some pilgrimage-site and form congregations, rather than live as solitary wanderers.182 Within Jainism, a more settled lifestyle developed around temple-complexes, while sylvan mendicants (vanavāsīs) continued to be wanderers. Today, although Mahāvīra’s solitary lifestyle is seen as ideal, bhikkhus usually live in groups (gaṇas). Except during the rainy season, when they stay at shelters, Jaina mendicants walk tirelessly from one locality to another.183

VII. Final words

One can conclude that there are profound similarities between late Vedic, neo-Brahmanic, early Jaina, and early Buddhist gāthā-poetry on the benefits of wandering alone (eka + √CAR). Not only would Indra’s “Song of the Wanderer” fit fairly well among the gāthās of the Suttanipāta or the Uttarajjhayāna, but

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181 Olivelle states that in the medieval period the ideal of ceaseless wandering was maintained, even when most ascetics resided in monasteries (1995:18; 2007:177–178).
182 Hausner 2007:95–107.
183 Caillat 1989:101.
the role of Indra, too, brings to mind the Buddhist and Jaina Indra (Śakra, Sakka, sometimes in the disguise of a brāhmaṇa), as tester, friend, even worshipper, of ascetics. Since Rohita is a kṣatriya on the threshold of adulthood, it is only fitting that the prototypical kṣatriya Indra establishes a relationship with him, but in addition to that we should recognize the common traits of warrior and ascetic – for, as we have seen, already in the early Vedic period Indra is associated with the lone hero and the ascetic. The common traits here are heroic conquest (exertion on the battlefield and in self-overcoming) and solar attributes.

The Sun functions as prototype of both the solitary wanderer/ascetic and the hero/ruler. The spatial movement of the Sun signifies conquest and tireless exertion. The attributes of king and hero are projected on the renouncer as having unlimited spatial freedom and as spiritual conqueror (jīna, vīra). The concept of digvijaya or ‘conquest of the quarters of space’ derives from the Vedic royal ritual, in which a tour in the corners of the land is undertaken by the victorious kṣatriya. In traditional hagiographies of Ādi-Śaṅkarācārya, this term is applied to his metaphysical conquest of India’s four corners, as renouncer and scholar, which demonstrates the “complementarity of royal and ascetic paradigms in traditional India.”

The physical solitude of the ideal renouncer, and his detachment from society – though dependent on it for his bodily sustenance – mirrors his ultimate goal: nirvāṇa, mokṣa, also known as kaivalya, which translates as ‘absolute isolation’. This goal can only be attained individually, not collectively. Paradoxical though it may seem, the homeless, wandering renouncer, engaged in nearly constant movement in the spatial world, is precisely the person who is supposed to have attained a state of

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184 Olivelle 2007:186. There is a śloka attributed to Bhartṛhari which compares a solitary hero, who conquers all land touched by his feet, with the Sun, whose rays reach the entire Earth (Nītiśataka 108 in Kāle & Gurjar; Miscellaneous 15 in Gopalachariaj).

185 Bader 2000:xii, 139, 169; cf. Burghart 1983:376–378. On similar Jaina views see Dundas 1991. The celibate is attributed freedom of movement in all worlds in Chāndogypaṇiṣad 8.4.3, 8.5.4.

186 Compare Latin absolutus ‘absolute, complete, freed, independent’.

187 Sūyagaḍa (1.)2.3.16–17, (1.)10.12, (1.)13.18; Schneider 1960.
true rest. His course is “trackless”. The opposite of the sagely renouncer is the ignorant man who feels at home in this world; he too ‘wanders about’ (√BHRAM), but in circles – “bound, revolving like a wheel (in movement)” in “the circular path of birth and death” – unable, the texts assert, to make the trans-samsāric leap.

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188 The ascetic’s course (gati-, pada-) is trackless, invisible (na drṣyeta), like that of birds in the air and fish in the sea (Mahābhārata 12.154.28, 12.174.19, 12.231.24). Olivelle notes that the term gati can refer to the final goal, liberation, but also to “the way an ascetic is expected to go about in the world. He leaves no trail. He travels unnoticed and without a destination.” (2012:98)

189 bhogī bhamai samsāre | abhogī vippamuccai || “The voluptuary/enjoyer wanders about in samsāra; the non-enjoyer is liberated.” (Uttarajhājayaṇa 25.41).

190 baddho bhramati cakravat (Mahābhārata 12.287.19; similarly 12.316.57: paribhramati samsāram cakravad), referring to one who is ignorant of mokṣadharma. Vairāgyaśataka of Bhartṛhari, verse 70 (Gopalachariar): You roam (bhramasi), from the lowest region to the highest, but is still ignorant of brāhmaṇ which leads to nirvṛtti (‘cessation, rest, abstaining from worldly acts’). In verse 39 the ordinary man is said to wander around (paribhramati) in samsāra. The use of √BHRAM in these verses can mean ‘to wander about’, but also ‘to circulate’, and ‘to move unsteadily, err, confuse’ (cf. Āryaśūra’s Jātakamālā 6.34–38).

191 jāi-maraṇassa vadumagaṃ (Āyāra 5.[6.]122), which the muni transcends.
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