La *Collana Kykéion Studi e Testi* è frutto della collaborazione fra l’Associazione Culturale *Kykéion* e la Firenze University Press. Si propone di pubblicare opere scientifiche coniugando il rigore della ricerca accademica con l’attenzione per temi e campi del sapere che si impongono come nuovi soggetti del dibattito culturale.

**COORDINAMENTO E DIREZIONE DELLA COLLANA DI STUDI E TESTI**

Federico Squarcini, Fulvio Guatelli

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Ascetics and Brahmins
Studies in Ideologies and Institutions
(Kykéion Studi e Testi. Scienze delle Religioni, I.6)  
http://digital.casalini.it/8884535271  
Stampa a richiesta disponibile su http://epress.unifi.it/  

ISBN-10: 88-8453-527-1 (online)  
ISBN-10: 88-8453-528-X (print)  

294.5 (ed. 20)  
Induismo
6.

The Beast and the Ascetic
The Wild in the Indian Religious Imagination

Moving about with wild beasts,
And dwelling with them alone,
Living a life just theirs –
Clearly that’s the way to heaven.

This extraordinary verse concludes Baudhāyana’s description of both the holy householders (BDh 3.2.19) and the forest hermits (BDh 3.3.22). In many religions the pursuit of holiness has been associated with renunciation and fleeing from society. Living austere and often solitary lives in the wilderness, forest, or desert is viewed in many traditions as a sign of holiness. An extreme expression of this attitude is the practice of imitating the life style and behavior of wild animals.

The Desert Fathers of early Christianity are depicted as living like animals. According to a contemporary description, the monks in the Syrian desert “had one garment, went barefoot, mortified themselves, ate grass, legumes and roots, wandered about on the mountains like wild animals. . . .”1 “I looked,” says a monk describing his encounter with a Desert Father, “I saw a man afar off, who was very fearful. His hair was spread over his body like a leopard. . . . When he approached me, I was afraid. I climbed on a mountain peak, lest perhaps he was a mountain ass. . . . He said to me: ‘Onnophrius is my name and,

1 Vööbus 1960, 25. See Devin DeWeese, Wilderness and Barbarian: Favourable Evaluations of the Wilderness and the Wilderness Peoples in Medieval Christian and Islamic Literature. MA Thesis, Department of Religious Studies, Indiana University, Bloominton. Lord Chalmers in the introduction to his translation of the Majjhima Nikåya (I.xvi) observes that the Indian ascetics who acted like bovines “anticipated by a thousand years those Christian anchorites who ‘derived their name from their humble practice of grazing in the fields of Mesopotamia with the common herd’.”
behold, for sixty years I have been in the desert, walking in the mountains like the animals." 2 "Behold," says Ephrem, "they graze like animals for roots upon the mountains, and behold like birds they pick up dry vegetables from the heights." 3

It may well be that some of these descriptions contain metaphor and hyperbole; it is unclear whether the Christian ascetics consciously imitated animal behavior. In India, however, the imitation of animals is systematically developed within a well articulated ascetic ideology, even though the historical reality behind that ideology—whether there were ascetics who behaved like animals—remains uncertain. This paper will focus on the ideology rather than on the historical realities of Indian asceticism.

In the Indian ascetic ideologies, moreover, life in the wilderness and the imitation of wild animals carry a deeper meaning. They are expressions of the belief that an ascetic’s life style is the antithesis of all that civilization stands for. The first and the most obvious feature of the ascetic anti-civilization is the ideal-typical habitat of ascetics. From the time of the Upaniṣads, all ascetic traditions, both Brahanical and heterodox, enjoin the wilderness or the forest as the place where ascetics should live their lives. 4 Renouncers are allowed to enter a village only to beg, 5 while forest hermits are forbidden even to step on plowed land. 6 A forest hermit is expected to avoid everything connected with the village (grāmya), be it food or clothing. 7 He is not allowed to eat cultivated food; his food is only what grows naturally on uncultivated land:

\[
na \text{ phālakṛṣṭaṁ aśnīyād utṛṣṭaṁ api kaṇacit} \\
na \text{ grāmajātāny ārto 'pi puṣpāni ca phalāni ca}
\]

He must never eat anything grown on plowed land, even if it has been thrown away by someone; or flowers and fruits grown in a village, even if he is in dire straits. (MDh 6.16)

This ideology, therefore, reduces the hermit to the level of a food gatherer. His clothes are made of tree bark (cīra, valkala) or animal skins. 8 Renouncers, the wandering mendicants, are expected to go

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2 MacDermot 1971, 278.
4 See, for example, DN II.77, 242, 284; III. 49; MN I.323, 333, 425, 440; III.3. 35, 82, 115–16; SuNi 958–59; VaDh 10.15–17; BDh 2.11.15, 17; GDh 3.26; MDh 6.4.
5 “Living always in the wilderness, let him never walk within sight of village animals” – aranyaniyam | na grāmyapāśūnāṃ saṃdarsāme vicaret | VaDh 10.15–16. See also GDh 3.14; MDh 6.43; MBh 12.237.5.
6 “He should not step on plowed land or enter a village” – na phālakṛṣṭaṁ adhiśthet | grāmaṁ ca na pravīśet | GDh 3.32–33. See also BDh 2.11.15; VaDh 9.3; VkhDh 3.5; Rām 4.25.9.
7 Uncultivated food is referred to as “sage’s food” (munyanna): MDh 3.257, 272; 5.54; 6.5, 11; YDh 1.260. “Giving up village food and all his belongings, he should go to the forest.” MDh 6.3. See also MBh 12.185.2; Kūrma Purāṇa 2.27.13; VaDh 9.4; VkhDh 2.4; ĀpDh 2.22.1; YDh 3.46; Aṭhībuddhaya Saṁhitā 15.56; Āśvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita 7.14.
8 See BDh 2.3.18; 3.3.19; VaDh 9.1; MDh 6.6; ViDh 94.8; MBh 3.145.29; 13.129.40; 13.130.12.
The Beast and the Ascetic

Naked or to use rags. Naked, he is like an animal or a baby, both symbols of a non-civilized state. Jātarūpadhara (“bearing the form one had at birth”), a common term for the renouncer’s naked condition, indicates his return to the infant state.

Civilizations, especially the economic aspects of civilizations, are built on anticipation and foresight. Planning for the future and the storage of goods are basic to an economy. They create surpluses and security, free many people from the daily grind, and facilitate leisure and the creative activities that we associate with civilization. Ascetics on the contrary are expected to live from day to day. Not possessing stores, not hoarding is a hallmark of Indian asceticism. Renouncers are expected to beg their daily food and not to keep any leftovers for the morrow. Hermits and even holy householders are often classified according to how much each is allowed to store. The highest category of ascetic collects only what can be consume that very day. This practice is called aśvastanaavidhāna, the method of not providing for tomorrow. All hermits, in any case, are expected to throw away all their stores during the month of Āśvina (September-October). Ascetics are thus reduced to the level of animals, who forage daily for their sustenance. Significantly, the major portion of most ascetic codes of ascetic rules deals with the gathering and the eating of food.

Purity and cleanliness, furthermore, are central features of civilized living. This is especially true in ancient India, where ritual purity is a central element of societal religion. Ascetics, however, are often depicted as dirty and loathsome. The greater the dirt, the better the ascetic. Hermits are not allowed to cut their nails and hair. The Buddha himself, describing his former austerities, claims that he let dirt gather on his body for so long that it peeled off by itself. Never once did he clean it (MN I.78). There is also the fascinating story about the great ascetic, Vyāsa, the author of the epic Mahābhārata. He was called upon to father children for his dead brother, Vicitravīrya (MBh 1.99–100). While accepting this role, Vyāsa remarks that his brother’s wife, Ambikā, should “bear with my ugliness. If she bears with my smell, my looks, my garb, and my body, Kauśalyā shall straightway conceive a superior child” (MBh 1.99.42–43). His odor and sight are so overwhelming, however, that Ambikā is unable to bear them. She closes her eyes when he comes to bed. So her son,

9 See GDh 3.18–19; ĀpDh 2.21.11–12.
10 See JāhU 70.3; NpuU 153.5; 155.3; 168.11, etc. See Sroockhoff 1976, 207, note 33.
11 See BDh 3.2.11–18; MDh 4.7; 6.18; Vdh 94.11–12; Ydh 1.124–28; MBh 12.236.8–9; Kṛurma Purāṇa 2.27.21–22. For the food of ascetics, see Olivelle 1991 (see above, pp. 71–89).
12 See BDh 3.3.21; 4.5.28; ĀpDh 2.23.1; MDh 4.7; 6.18; MBh 12.159.11.
13 See MDh 6.15; Vadh 3.5; Ydh 3.47. Other texts forbid the eating of anything that has been hoarded for more than one year: BDh 2.11.15; GDh 3.35.
14 See MBh 1.110.8; 1.201.17; 3.119.19; 3.123.7; 5.187.18–20; 12.9.13; 12.253.3; 15.33.17; Rām 3.6.4; MN I.181.
15 MBh 3.186.41; 13.144.12.
Dhṛtarāṣṭra, is born blind. When Vyāsa approaches Ambikā’s co—
wife, Ambālikā, she turns pale and as a consequence bears Påñḍu, the
pale one. When Ambikā’s turn comes again, she loses courage and
sends her slave-girl in her stead!

The use of fire separates man from beast. In the Vedic society fire
was the central symbol of both civilization and religion. It played a
central role in the Vedic sacrifice. At his marriage the Brahmanical
householder lights a sacred fire; it will serve him for the rest of his life.
The abandonment of fire by renouncers, therefore, which indicated
their rejection of ritual and society, can also be seen as a symbol of
their return to the non-civilized state. They did not use fire for cook-
ing (they begged cooked food) or for ritual purposes. Even at death
they were not cremated; lacking a fire, they were buried.

It is within the context of this anti-civilizational ideology that the
animal symbolism in Indian ascetic literature needs to be understood.
Acting contrary to the norms of civilized behavior, an ascetic imitates
animals, the inhabitants of the wild.

The animal most commonly associated with the ascetic life style is
the deer. The term mṛga used in ascetic texts, however, can mean
either a deer in particular or a wild animal in general. Either inter-
pretation is adequate, because the purpose of the texts is to show that
ascetics should roam in the wilderness and flee human company. I
think that most texts, however, refer to the deer in particular. Mṛga—
cārin (wandering with/like deer) is the name of a class of asce-
tics living in a hermitage visited by Krṣṇa (MBh 13.14.39). Likewise, in
Kālidāsa’s Vikramorva†œya (4.36—37) and in Aśvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita
(7.5) certain hermits are identified as mṛga—
cārin. In the VkhDh (1.8)
also mṛga—
cārikā is considered a class of forest hermits. It is not totally
clear what special mode of life the mṛga—
cārin ascetics followed. Some
information is contained in the episode of Mādhava, the daughter of
Yayāti, contained in the Mahābhārata. At her svaya∫vara (the cere-
mony at which she chose her husband) Mādhavi spurns all her suitor
and enters the forest:

Yayāti’s daughter descended from the chariot, bowed to her relatives,
went to the holy forest, and practiced austerity. By means of various
fasts, observances, and restraints, she made herself light and lived like
a deer (bābhūva mṛga—
cārini). She grazed soft green sprouts of the color
of beryl, fine grasses pungent and sweet; she drank the choice waters,
tasty and pure, cool and unmuddied, of holy streams; she roamed in
forests deserted by lions, where deer were king, empty and dense and
left alone by fires, alongside antelopes, like a deer roaming the woods
(carantœ hariñai∆ sårdha∫ mṛgova vanacārini); and practiced the dharma
thoroughly, decked with chastity. (MBh 5.118.6—11; van Buitenen’s
translation modified)

Elsewhere the comparison with deer is more general. I cited at
the outset the text of Baudhāyana (3.2.19) which declares that the
way to heaven consists of imitating the life of a *mṛga*—deer or wild beast. The goddess death, *mṛtyu*, practising penance “roamed with the deer” for a billion years (*MBh 12.250.19*). The Buddha, describing his past austerities, says:

> The mere glimpse of a cowherd or neatherd or grasscutter, or of a man gathering firewood or edible roots in the forest, was enough to make me dart from wood to wood, from thicket to thicket, from dale to dale, and from hill to hill—in order that they might not see me or I them. As a deer at the sight of man darts away over hills and dale, even so did I dart away. (*MN 1.79*)

The *Lomahamsa Jātaka* says that the Bodhisattva, living as an Ājīvaka, fled from the sight of men like a deer. The *Suttanipāta* (39) also admonishes an ascetic to be unfettered like a deer and to wander wherever he wants. The *Milindapañho* (IV.5.2) agrees:

> For just as a deer in the forest, O King, wandering in the woods, sleeps wherever he desires, having no home and no dwelling place, so also should the recluse.

In the legend of the hermit Kāndama and King Pāndu (*MBh 1.109*), the imitation of the deer is taken to the extreme. During a hunting trip, Pāndu shot a buck and a doe while they were copulating. “The buck,” the story goes, “was a powerful ascetic, … the son of a seer, who had been consorting with his wife in the form of a deer” (*MBh 1.109.7*). Struck by the arrow, the hermit-buck curses the king himself to die in the act of sexual intercourse. “What did it profit you, best of men,” says Kāndama, “to kill me, an innocent? Me, a hermit who lives on roots and fruits, wearing the guise of a deer, who always dwells in the forest, seeking serenity? … I am Kāndama, a hermit of unequaled austerities. I mated with a doe because I shy away from humans, and as a deer I live with deer in the depths of the forest” (*MBh 1.109.24, 26*; van Buitenen’s tr.). In verse 7 the doe is depicted as the transformed wife of the hermit, whereas verse 26 seems to indicate that Kāndama was copulating with a real doe after assuming the guise of a buck.

It appears from these texts that the imitation of the deer consisted of three things: 1. A life of unfettered wandering in the forest; 2. The diet of a deer (possibly also gathering food like a deer); and 3. Fleeing the company of human beings.

Forest hermitages, moreover, are depicted as places where deer roam freely. A fascinating episode is described in Āśvaghoṣa’s *Buddhacarita* (6.59–62). The Bodhisattva, in need of an ascetic’s dress (*kāśāyavastra*), encounters a hunter who happened to have one. The hunter gives the dress to the Bodhisattva and remarks that he had used it to get closer to the deer, because in an ascetic’s garb the deer trusted him and did not flee.
The imitation of the cow resembles that of the deer. Gocārin or govratin, like the mṛgaśārin, is a class of ascetics.\textsuperscript{16} In an episode of the Mahābhārata, Nārada points out to Mātali, Indra’s charioteer, the govratin living in Pātāla. He gives a definition of such an ascetic:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
yatratarasāyō nityāṃ yenakenacid āśītāṃ
yenakenacid ācchannāṃ sa govratā śhocayate
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

He is said to observe the vow of a cow who lies down anywhere, feeds on anything, and covers himself with anything whatsoever. \textit{MBh} 5.97.14 (tr. van Buitenen)

In the Śaṃnīṣa Upaniṣads the imitation of the cow is associated with the Turiyāṭita class of renouncers. This life style is called gomukha (“cow-mouth”),\textsuperscript{17} gomukhavṛtti (“behaving in the manner of a cow-mouth”),\textsuperscript{18} govṛtti (“bhaving like a cow”),\textsuperscript{19} and gocaryā (“imitating/following a cow”).\textsuperscript{20} Within this context the imitation consists primarily in the way an ascetic obtains and eats his food. This kind of an ascetic does not use a begging bowl but uses his mouth as a receptacle. He probably ate his food without using his hands, picking the food up directly from the ground using his mouth, just like a cow. An oft-cited verse points to this custom:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
āṣyena tu yadāhāraṃ govan mṛgayate muniḥ
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

When, like a cow, a sage forages for his food with his mouth.\textsuperscript{21}

The \textit{YPra} 57.56–57 remarks that this verse refers to the kind of ascetics who are called udarapātrin, that is, those who use their stomachs as begging bowls. They do not use external begging bowls or even use their cupped hands to receive the food.

This close association with the cow may have been influenced also by the growing belief in the sacredness of the cow. The Buddha, for example, says that, while he was practising austerities, he walked on all fours (cātukuṇḍiko) like an animal. When the cow-herds left for the night, he used to eat the dung of young milch-cows (\textit{MN} I.79). A similar practice may have been the basis for a class of ascetics known as phenapa (“froth drinkers”).\textsuperscript{22} It is possible that \textit{phena} here refers to the foam of water. These ascetics would then resemble those who are

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{NpvU} 177.1–2; 204.4.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{BSaU} 255.4.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{TurU} 243.5–6; \textit{PhpU} 284.9.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{NpvU} 184.13.
\textsuperscript{21} See \textit{MBh} 1.86.17; \textit{BDh} 3.3.12; \textit{Matsya Purāṇa} 40.17; \textit{NpvU} 182.6; \textit{BSaU} 268.1; \textit{YDhS} p. 77.
\textsuperscript{22} See \textit{VkbDh} 1.7; \textit{MBh} 12.325.4 (100); 12.336.14; 13.129.36–38. Some ascetics are also called kṣiraspa (“milk drinkers”: \textit{MBh} 13.14.38–39), and others \textit{payobbhakṣya} (“milk consumers”).
said to subsist solely on water.\textsuperscript{23} One passage of the \textit{MBh} (5.100.5–6), however, locates the Phenapas around the mythical milk ocean created by the stream of milk issuing from the udder of Surabhi, the divine mother of cows. These ascetics are said to subsist on the foam of that milk ocean. There is, furthermore, an interesting custom of some ascetics that resembles the practice of “froth drinkers”. The \textit{Mahåbhårata} records the episode of King Parikṣit’s encounter with a hermit who “was sitting in a cow pasture, where he fed on the plentiful froth that trickled from the mouths of suckling calves.”\textsuperscript{24} The same ascetic has a son called Śrīgīna, who was born from a cow (\textit{MBh} 1.46.2).

A life style closely associated with \textit{goviṣṭti} is called \textit{ajagaravṛṭti}, acting like a python or boa constrictor. Here too the imitation is in the method by which food is obtained. A python lies in wait for its prey and eats animals who happen to cross its path. The noteworthy characteristic of a python’s method is that it does not hunt its prey actively; it does not search for food. It lets the food come to it. Similarly, an \textit{ajagaravṛṭti} ascetic does not actively search for food; he does not go from house to house begging. He eats what he obtains without asking (\textit{ayācita}), food that someone may give him without being asked. Such an ascetic minimizes his food effort.

The \textit{Mahåbhårata} (12.172.19–34) records a conversation between Prahlāda, the pious king of the demons, and the ascetic Ajagara, whose name is derived from the fact that he followed the \textit{ajagaravṛṭti}.

The ascetic says that he has given up striving. He uses whatever is at hand without discriminating between the good and the bad, the proper and the improper. He eats whatever he gets, good or bad; and if he gets nothing, he goes without food. He sleeps wherever he is, sometimes in costly beds, sometimes on the bare ground. He dresses in tree barks or costly garments, whatever is at hand. In the classification of renouncers, \textit{ajagaravṛṭti} is associated with the Avadhūta.\textsuperscript{26} They are the highest class of ascetics, superior to even the Turiyātītas, who follow the \textit{goviṣṭti}.

In the Buddhist literature the \textit{govratins} are closely associated with ascetics bearing the name \textit{kukkuravratin}, those who behave like dogs.\textsuperscript{27} The \textit{Dīgha Nikāya} (III.6–7) describes such an ascetic as naked, walking on all fours, and picking up with his mouth food that has been thrown on the ground. The latter practice may also imply scavenging. The \textit{Majjhima Nikāya} (1.387) records the meeting

\textsuperscript{23} See \textit{ĀpDh} 2.23.2.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{gavāṃ pracaerve āśinaṃ vatsānāṃ mukhāṇiṣṭyam bhūyjaśham uṣṭvānāṃ phenam āpibatāṃ payaṃ MBh 1.36.15. See also \textit{MBh} 1.3.48–49; \textit{BDḥ} 3.3.13; \textit{MDḥ} 6.31.
\textsuperscript{25} Ascetics often have animal names. The \textit{Bṛhaddevatā} (8.67–68) records an ascetic named Kapota (pigeon), while in the \textit{MBh} (13.95.2, 4 etc.) an ascetic is called Śūnaḥsakha (dog’s friend).
\textsuperscript{26} See \textit{NpuU} 175.6; 204.4–5; \textit{BSaU} 255.6–7. See also Sprockhoff 1976, 127.
\textsuperscript{27} See the similar classification in Vasubandhu, \textit{Abhidharmakośa}, tr. L. M. Pruden (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), p. 418
between the Buddha and two ascetics. The one was named Puñño Koliyaputto, who followed the vow of the cow (govratika). The other was named Seniyo. He was naked and followed the dog vow (kukkura-ravatika), lying on the ground like a dog and eating what was thrown on the ground.

An ascetic’s life is also compared to that of birds and fish. This verse occurs in numerous sources:

śakunināṁ ivākāśe jale vāricarasya ca
yathā gatir na dyāyate tathā tasya na saṁśayaḥ

As the course of birds in the air and of fish in the water is not seen, so also, without doubt, is his course.\(^{28}\)

The term gati here can mean the final state, namely liberation, that an ascetic is expected to attain. It can also be a reference to the way an ascetic is expected to go about in the world. He leaves no trail. He travels unnoticed and without a destination.\(^{29}\) The Buddha compares the life of a renouncer to that of a bird, because a renouncer is content with sufficient food and clothing, and “withersoever he may go forth, these he takes with him as he goes – just as a bird with his wings, O King, withersoever he may fly, carries his wings with him as he flies” (DN I.71). Clearly, these images are mostly metaphorical.

The imitation of birds, however, can move beyond the metaphorical. It is often said to consist of gleaning (uṅcha).\(^{30}\) As birds pick up seeds here and there, so ascetics glean grain and other edibles. These are either what grows in the wild or what is left in the fields after the crops have been harvested. This life style is in a special way associated with pigeons.\(^{31}\) One class of hermits and of holy householders is named kāpotē or kāpotavṛtti, behaving like pigeons. Baudhāyana provides a description of this life style:

kāpoteti | avāritsthāneṣu ṃathisu vā kṣetresu vāpratihatavakāseṣu vā yatra yatruṣadhayo vidyante tatra tatrāṅgulibhyām ekaikām oṣadhim uṅchayitvā saṁdaṁśanāti kapotavat iti kāpotā |

With respect to Kapotā – in whatever unfenced area he finds cereal plants, either along roads or in fields or in other places with unrestricted access, he gleans with just two fingers those cereals one by one and eats like a pigeon (kapota); from which is derived the name “Kapotā”. (BDh 3.2.15)


\(^{29}\) See MBh 12.19.15; 14.46.49.

\(^{30}\) See BDh 3.2.14; VkhDh 1.8; MN II.6–8; MBh 1.81.13; 3.246.3; 12.174.18; 12.231.23–24; 12.262.2; 12.264.2–3; 12.341–353; 13.27.19; 13.129.39; 14.92.7; 14.93.2.

\(^{31}\) See MBh 3.246.4; 13.32.19; 14.93.2; BDh 4.5.27–28; VkhDh 1.8; ViDh 95.11; Kūrma Purāṇa 2.27.23. An interesting inversion of the metaphor occurs in the Mahābhārata (12.142.34–35) episode where a pigeon tells a fowler that pigeons live like ascetics, because they do not store food.
The imitation of fish would seem a rather difficult enterprise. There is, nevertheless, one practice that comes close to living like a fish. It is called udavāsa, dwelling in water.\textsuperscript{32} The Mahābhārata (13.50) states that Cyavana lived in water for twelve years. He lay there like a stick without moving. Aquatic animals loved him and fish kissed him with joy. One day fishermen came and cast their nets. When they pulled their nets ashore they saw to their utter amazement Cyavana surrounded by fish. He was covered with moss. His beard and hair had turned green and shell-fish were attached to his body.

Imitation of wild animals is the basis for the classification of ascetics found in Aśvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita (7.15–17):

\begin{verbatim}
usunchena jivanti khañā āvāni ke eîr mygavañ cāranti\
ke cīb bhujāngaih saha vartaîanti valmikībhūtā vanāmārutaena\
asnaprayatnārja varttayai 'nye ke eîr svadantāpahatānabhañē\
ktvā parārtham śraṇaṇam tathānke kurvanti kāryam yadi śeṣam asti\
ke cīj jalaññajñātākaḷāpā dvīh pāvakaṇ jhuvati mantrapūrvaṇ\
mīnañ ānuñ ānuñ cīj aîo vigāhīya vasanti kūrmollēkhiñi śārīraṇ\
\end{verbatim}

Some live like the birds by what they can pick up from the ground, others graze on grass like the deer, and others pass their time with the snakes, turned into anthills by the forest wind.

Some gain their subsistence by laborious pounding with stones, others eat only what has been husked by their own teeth, and some again cook for others and meet their needs on anything that may be left over.

Some with their coils of matted hair soaked with water twice offer oblations to Agni with sacred texts; others plunge into the water and dwell with the fishes, their bodies scored by turtles. (Tr. Johnston)

Indian folklore is full of stories with talking animals where the conduct of animals becomes the model for human action exemplified in the Pañcatantra (Olivelle 1997). In the Buddhist Jātaka tales the future Buddha is often born as an animal and in that condition becomes the model of courage and virtue. It is, therefore, not surprising that in the Indian ascetic literature animal motifs play an important role.

The principle underlying the imitation of animals, however, is rooted in the deeply anti-civilizational ideology of Indian asceticism. I have written elsewhere about the opposition between village and wilderness presented in the early ascetic writings.\textsuperscript{33} If “village” is a metonym for civilization and society, then “wilderness” represents the ascetic ideology of rejecting civilized and social living. If civilized humans are the inhabitants of the village, then animals are the ideal-typical denizens of the wilderness. Just like living in the wilderness

\textsuperscript{32} See MBh 13.57.18. See also the Buddhacarita (7.17) passage cited below.

\textsuperscript{33} Olivelle 1990; above pp. 43–62.
and the prohibition from entering a village underscore the anti-civilizational direction of the ascetic ideology, so the imitation of animals (whether real or imagined) signals that the ascetic has left human culture, society, and civilized living behind. He has freed himself from the ties that bind him to society and to repeated births, a freedom symbolized by his return to the wild state of animals.