

Ascetic Teachings for Householder Kings in the *Mahābhārata*

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Abstract

This thesis traces the development of the idea that householder kings can be liberated or can benefit in some other way from the ascetic teachings that are usually associated with wandering mendicants. This research objective is pursued by examining the narrative contexts in which ascetic teachings are delivered to householder kings as well as by analysing the key debates about kingship, asceticism, and liberation in the *Mahābhārata*. The first part of this thesis introduces ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata* and discusses the role of ascetic ideals in the *Mahābhārata* narrative with special reference to the character of Yudhiṣṭhira. The second part of the thesis argues that ascetic teachings are commonly offered to kings as a means to overcome a crisis and/or counter grief in the *Mahābhārata* as well as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and early Buddhist literature. Usually these are general or stoic ascetic teachings on such topics as impermanence and the inevitability of death and separation. The third part of the thesis analyses those *Mahābhārata* passages that engage directly with the question of whether a king can be liberated while remaining a householder. It argues that the *Mahābhārata* offers some models of the liberated householder king that are different from the better-known *karmayoga* of the *Bhagavadgītā*. The main textual passages discussed in this thesis are placed in a tentative chronological framework, arguing for a gradual development of the ideal of the liberated householder king.

Introduction

The Sanskrit epic *Mahābhārata* tells a bloody tale about an intra-family conflict. Yet it also tells about how various kings listened to or preached ascetic teachings. Such ascetic teachings are comparable to the teachings found in, for example, early Buddhist literature, but in the *Mahābhārata* they are often associated with householders rather than monks or wandering mendicants. This thesis traces the development of the idea that householder kings can be liberated or benefit in some other way from the ascetic teachings that are usually associated with wandering mendicants. This research objective is pursued by examining the narrative contexts in which ascetic teachings are delivered to householder kings as well as by analysing the key debates about kingship, asceticism, and liberation in the *Mahābhārata*.

The word “ascetic” is used in the title of this thesis only as a convenient label to give a general idea of its topic. There is no English term that designates precisely the phenomena in Ancient India that I would like to refer to. Moreover, there are many Sanskrit terms that could be translated as “an ascetic”. For example, *tapasvīn*, *parivrajaka*, *vanaprastha*, *saṃnyāsin*, *muni*, *ṛṣi*, *śramaṇa*, *yati*, *bhikṣu*. Some of these are synonyms, while others would normally designate different lifestyles, and each of these words has its own etymology and specific connotations different from the word “ascetic”. The “ascetic” that I am primarily concerned with in this thesis is the *bhikṣu*, “mendicant”. The term *bhikṣu* is commonly used in Buddhist, Jaina, as well as in early Brahmanical literature, to refer to wandering mendicants. Many of the words listed above are often used interchangeably with *bhikṣu*, while some, notably *vanaprastha*, are usually differentiated from *bhikṣu*. In Classical Hinduism the term *bhikṣu* is replaced by the now better-known term *saṃnyāsin*. One suspects that this rebranding must have been at least partially motivated by a desire to distance Hinduism from

Buddhism, with which the term *bhikṣu* came to be primarily associated, and to obscure the shared heritage of these religious traditions in Ancient India.

Such *bhikṣus* are distinguished from ordinary beggars by their aspirations for ultimate freedom from suffering. Early textual sources associate these mendicants with a fluid body of ideas. These are designated as “ascetic teachings” in the title of the thesis. Such general ascetic teachings are frequently labelled as “yogic” in secondary literature. An earlier working title of this thesis also mentioned “yogic teachings”, but the initial title was given up because the majority of the textual passages discussed in this thesis do not use this label themselves.

The word “householder” in the title of this thesis is used in a non-technical sense simply as the opposite of “renouncer” or “mendicant” (*bhikṣu*). Not all of *Mahābhārata*’s “householders” who benefit from ascetic teachings without becoming mendicants are necessarily the elite religious practitioners whose highly regulated lifestyle is discussed in the Brahmanical *dharma* literature and who are there designated by the term “*grhastha*”.

I first conceived of this research project after preliminary observations about the association between ascetic and yogic teachings and kings or *kṣatriyas*, which is found especially in the *Mahābhārata*. An important text within a *Mahābhārata* that offers a specifically *kṣatriya* and householder-friendly type of yoga is the *Bhagavadgītā*¹, but it is also the most famous and thoroughly studied episode in the *Mahābhārata* if not in the entire Sanskrit literature². This *kṣatriya* yoga contrasts with the depictions of solitary meditating *yogins*³ and wandering mendicants that

¹ It should be noted that the concept of the householder (*grhastha*) as a special mode of life is absent in the *Bhagavadgītā*. I will return to this issue in chapter 8.

² See especially Malinar’s monograph (2007b) for a recent major contribution to the *Bhagavadgītā* research and a bibliography of earlier studies.

³ One such depiction is preserved in the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* itself.

are normally associated with liberation-seeking practices in the early ascetic literature of Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina traditions. This indicates that at some point during the history of ascetic ideas in Ancient India it became possible to think that householders too can reap the same fruit as full-time renunciators.

The *Mahābhārata* contains several other passages, some or most of which are likely earlier than the *Bhagavadgītā*, that present ascetic teachings as relevant to householder kings or claim more explicitly that householder kings can be liberated. These do not simply repeat the doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā*. I will argue in this thesis that in such passages we can see an apparently gradual shift from the hard-core ideal of renunciation to the notion that householder kings can reap similar benefits without giving up their power and duties. Such textual passages from the *Mahābhārata* and other contemporary texts illuminate the development of ideas that lead to the formulation of the influential doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā* or testify to alternative developments⁴. While the *Bhagavadgītā* is renowned for its doctrine of the *karmayoga*, according to which one should give hope or attachment to the results of one's actions rather than action itself, other *Mahābhārata* passages studied in this thesis make no mention of this specific notion of *karmayoga* and offer different accounts of how kings might or should take advantage of ascetic ideas⁵. Such passages have usually been neglected in scholarly literature.

⁴ This has already been observed by Fitzgerald who claims that '[p]arts of the *karmayoga* theme appear in various stages of development in many different texts of the *MBh*, most, if not all, of which are probably earlier than the *Gītā*' (2004:642), but has not published a systematic study of them. It should be emphasised that by *karmayoga* Fitzgerald means simply 'a theme synthesizing the opposed ethical stances of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*' (2004:641-642) rather than the specific *karmayoga* doctrine of the *Bhagavadgītā* which is rarely found in a similar formulation elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*.

⁵ This does not mean that doctrines resembling the *karmayoga* of the *Bhagavadgītā* are found nowhere else at all in the *Mahābhārata*.

One of the central aims of this thesis is to trace the development of this notion that householders can become liberated. Needless to say, tracing this idea can only be preliminary and is limited by the scarcity and fragmentary nature of the textual sources, as well as by the uncertainties of dating of individual textual passages, and, above all, by the suspicion that the available sources are just a fraction of the relevant legends and philosophical dialogues, often called *itihāsa purātana* (“ancient lore”) in the *Mahābhārata*, that were known around two thousand years ago.

The vast majority of the relevant surviving textual passages are concerned with kings, which is the reason for mentioning “householder kings” rather than simply “householders” in the title of this thesis. There are, however, a few exceptions, and we also see such characters as a courtesan⁶ or a merchant⁷ as positive examples of ascetic attainment.

Narrative depictions of householder kings receiving ascetic teachings are also found outside the *Mahābhārata*, and such materials will also be considered in order to situate the developments found in the *Mahābhārata* as belonging to wider cultural trends in Ancient India. Some relevant passages from the *Rāmāyaṇa* will be considered, but not many, since the *Rāmāyaṇa* is in important respects rather remote from the *Mahābhārata*. The *Rāmāyaṇa* shows little awareness of the ascetic traditions examined in this thesis or even such fundamental Brahmanical notions as the *āśrama* system⁸.

In addition to the observation that ascetic teachings are imparted to kings in such works as the *Bhagavadgītā*, there was another impression that prompted this study, namely, that there is a

⁶ See *Mahābhārata* 12.168 and 171, which will be discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁷ See the Tulādhāra story (*Mahābhārata* 12.252-256) studied by Proudfoot (1987).

⁸ On the absence of *āśrama* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* see Sherraden 2019 and Olivelle 1993.

more fundamental legendary link between yogic or ascetic teachings and kings. As is well-known, the early *Upaniṣads* present certain metaphysical doctrines about the identity of the individual *ātman* (“the self”) and the universal *brahman* and the law of *karman* as originally known only to *kṣatriyas* and being taught to Brahmins for the first time. This claim is corroborated by the lack of any clear expression of such ideas in earlier Vedic literature. These doctrines underpin much of the earliest Brahmanical yoga practice as expressed in such texts as the *Mahābhārata* and the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. There are several legends about renouncer kings preserved in the ascetic literatures of the Buddhist, Jaina, and Brahmanical traditions. Moreover, the founders of both Buddhism and Jainism are traditionally believed to have been *kṣatriyas*. The *Bhagavadgītā* presents a purely royal “early” transmission of yoga, which follows a lineage of royal sages (*rājarṣis*) (4.1-2). Moreover, it claims that a *yogin* who fails to reach his goal in a single lifetime will be reborn in a family of kings or *yogins* to finish the path to liberation (6.41-42)⁹. A somewhat similar claim is found in the *Lalitavistara* – bodhisattvas ‘are born into only two families: brāhmaṇa families and kṣatriya families’ depending on whether brahmins or *kṣatriyas* are the ruling class at that time (translation by Silk in 2020:135). Thus, some sources see a *kṣatriya* birth as particularly favourable to liberation.

Some scholars have taken such evidence quite literally and argued that yogic practices or renunciation were in the first instance associated with *kṣatriyas*. Thus, White has argued that the earliest yoga paradigm was that of the dying warrior in the *Mahābhārata*, who controls the process of his own death to attain liberation¹⁰. Wiltshire has argued that the tradition of world renunciation

⁹ The verses 6.41-42 claim that a *yogin* who fails to reach liberation may be reborn in a family of the royals (*śrīmats*) or *yogīs* respectively. Van Buitenen translates *śrīmat* here as “prosperous”, but in a royal context *Śrī* usually designates not general “prosperity” but royal splendour and power personified as a goddess.

¹⁰ White argues that ‘the image of the dying warrior who is “hitched to his rig [i.e. *yogayukta*],” or “ready to hitch up” in order to advance upward to the highest path, formed the basis for the earliest yoga paradigm’ (White 2009:73). I do not believe that White provides sufficient evidence for this assertion in his monograph. His study is limited to a

should be traced back to the renouncing royals of Videha, after analysing legends about Videhan kings that are shared by the Buddhist, Jaina, and Brahmanical traditions¹¹ (1990). Similar emphasis on the *kṣatriya* input in the development of the ascetic traditions of Ancient India was common in earlier scholarship¹². Such speculations about the link between *kṣatriyas* and ascetic ideas in Ancient India have become less prominent in recent scholarship. For example, the *kṣatriya* authorship of key spiritual ideas in the early *Upaniṣads* are seen as ‘a literary fiction’ (Black 2007). A similar position is taken by Olivelle (1996:xxxv). Elsewhere Olivelle takes a similar stance and alludes to ‘the employment of royal symbols and vocabulary by early ascetic leaders and institutions to lay claim to a new and different type of royal authority. Buddhism and Jainism offer good examples’ (2011b:122).

A more subtle link between ideals of kingship and ascetic ideas is offered by Proferes who argues that the popularisation of royal ritual lead to popularisation of royal ideals. He argues that while the Agnicayana ‘began as an exclusive royal rite [...] by the time of the formation of the extant Vedic corpus it is open to a broader range of individuals’ and that

[i]t was the king who embodied the aspirations of others who longed for the power and freedom he enjoyed. [...] This “popularization” of the ideals of sovereignty led to the development of a new vision of the spiritual possibilities of humanity, as the figure of the king served as the paradigm for human spiritual achievement and complete liberation. This vision is reflected in the early *Upaniṣads*, in which sovereignty is a standard metaphor for spiritual autonomy and freedom (2007:3).

handful of passages in which *kṣatriyas* voluntarily leave their bodies, and, above all, it remains uncertain why these should be seen as earlier than many other accounts of yoga practice elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* that do not describe such a yogic technique.

¹¹ The same evidence is discussed in Appleton 2016, but she draws more modest conclusions.

¹² See, for example, Garbe 1903.

Thus, several explanations can be offered to explain the abundance of royal vocabulary and imagery in the ascetic traditions of Ancient India as well as their legendary association with *kṣatriyas*. These include speculations about a general inspiration from ideals of sovereignty, attempts to imbue ascetic teachings with royal prestige or authority, and a more direct connection with members of the *kṣatriya* class.

This thesis will aim to examine those textual passages from the *Mahābhārata* in which ascetic teachings are attributed to kings or in which householder kings are portrayed as recipients of such ideas. It will not be possible on this basis to present radically new arguments to settle the debate on the link between *kṣatriyas* and the *origins* of ascetic teachings. Nevertheless, the number of relevant passages, their apparent antiquity, and their neglect of key features of Brahmanical ideology lends support to a more literal reading of the *Upaniṣadic* association of certain ascetic doctrines with *kṣatriyas* and suggest, further, that ascetic and yogic ideas might have indeed entered royal discourse before they became a part of orthodox Brahmanism.

This thesis is divided into three parts. Each part is further divided into chapters, and chapters are divided into sections and subsections where necessary.

The first part of the thesis, “*Mahābhārata*, renunciation, Yudhiṣṭhira”, provides an introduction to ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata* and discusses the role of ascetic ideals in the main *Mahābhārata* narrative with special reference to the character of Yudhiṣṭhira.

The first part consists of three chapters. The first chapter, “The *Mahābhārata*: Ideology, Growth, Asceticism” reviews previous scholarship regarding the dating, growth, and overarching ideological aims of the *Mahābhārata* as well as previous scholarship about the ascetic literature included in the *Mahābhārata*. This chapter sets forth my working assumptions regarding the

Mahābhārata. The second chapter, “Renouncer in the *Mahābhārata*”, provides an overview of renunciatory ideals in the *Mahābhārata*. This chapter provides a point of reference for a subsequent analysis of other *Mahābhārata* passages, where similar ideals are associated with householder kings. The third chapter, “Yudhiṣṭhira: Renouncer or Householder?” focuses on Yudhiṣṭhira who is, arguably, the main protagonist of the *Mahābhārata* and the recipient of the vast majority of the ascetic teachings included in the *Mahābhārata*. It mostly deals with the so-called “persuasion” of Yudhiṣṭhira, which is found at the beginning of *Mahābhārata*’s *Śāntiparvan* and narrates how other characters try to persuade Yudhiṣṭhira not to renounce the kingdom after the war. The “persuasion” presents some of the key debates about renunciation and kingship and the *Mahābhārata*. The chapter argues that the “persuasion” fails to address Yudhiṣṭhira’s interest in *mokṣa*, leaving the door open for other compromises between royal duties and the pursuit of *mokṣa*.

The second part of the thesis examines the ascetic teachings that are delivered to householder kings without an expectation that they will become renouncers to benefit from such teachings. It argues that ascetic teachings become relevant to kings or other householder during a crisis. Teachings on such topics as impermanence or inevitability of death are offered as a stoic advice that is meant to console the grieving person.

The second part of the thesis consists of two chapters – chapter 4 and chapter 5. Chapter 4 offers a detailed study of two thematically linked episodes from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* – the *Senajidgītā* (12.168) and the *Maṅkigītā* (12.171). Chapter 5 provides an overview of other textual passages where ascetic teachings are delivered to help somebody overcome a crisis. It provides a thorough overview of relevant passages from the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* and points out some similar passages in the Buddhist literature. This chapter also argues that general

ascetic advice against grief (*śoka*) often triggers a further discourse on liberation, even if the pursuit of liberation is not immediately relevant to the narrative context.

The third section of the thesis explores three *Mokṣadharmā* passages that directly address the issue of whether a householder king can be liberated. It treats each of these as providing a unique model for householder liberation.

The third section consists of three chapters (6-8), each of which focuses on one *Mahābhārata* dialogue. Chapter 6 discusses the *Sagarāriṣṭhanemiśaṃvāda* (12.277). It argues that the *Sagarāriṣṭhanemiśaṃvāda* does not present a very sophisticated statement regarding householder liberation and simply recites some ascetic teachings that identify liberation (*mokṣa*) with certain mental states or attitudes. Chapter 7 discusses the *Sulabhājanakasaṃvāda* (12.308). It observes that in this dialogue king Janaka offers the most detailed statement about householder liberation in the *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. Some of Janaka's arguments about liberation are reconstructed using textual emendation with the help of a comparison with the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*. This chapter also speculates about the reasons why Janaka's model of householder liberation was not received favourably. Chapter 8 analyses Janaka's speech in the *Janakaśukasamvāda* (12.313). It argues that Janaka provides a unique multi-life model of liberation that does not link liberation with any particular *āśrama*, but still manages to retain the value of renunciation and therefore of the *āśrama* system as a whole. It also argues that a very similar argument is made in the post canonical Buddhist *Milindapañha*.

In addition to tracing a development in the history of ideas about asceticism and liberation, this thesis suggests new ways of looking at the *Mahābhārata*. It uses the concept of "ascetic literature" to forge a new topic in the *Mahābhārata* studies (see chapter 1). Previous studies have

usually focused on a single episode or a single sub-*parvan* of the *Mahābhārata* where ascetic materials are found¹³ or, for example, just on those teachings that are labelled as “yoga” or “Sāṃkhya”.¹⁴ The ascetic literature found in the *Mahābhārata*, however, is more diverse and scattered over various parts of the *Mahābhārata*. Moreover, “ascetic literature” is not limited to the *Mahābhārata* and also includes early Buddhist and Jaina literatures. Many of the hermeneutical insights of this thesis were obtained by comparing different textual passages from the *Mahābhārata* and the Buddhist literature in particular. In several instances I have argued for textual emendation, usually on the basis of the variant readings recorded in the Pune Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*. I hope that this thesis illustrates the value of considering the *Mahābhārata* in a comparative perspective and engaging closely with the Sanskrit text to make sense of difficult passages.

Finally, this thesis suggests a historical development and tentative internal chronology of the main passages discussed. This internal chronology is supported by comparing the *Mahābhārata* with other texts and by paying attention to how certain institutions are portrayed in a given *Mahābhārata* passage. In particular, I use the presence or absence of certain versions of the *āśrama* system for relative dating. Thus, I argue that most of the *Mahābhārata* passages discussed in chapters 4 or 5 belong to the earliest layer of ascetic teachings in the *Mahābhārata*, with many legends (*itihāsa purātana*) most probably being in existence prior to their inclusion in the *Mahābhārata*. These passages do not seem to be aware of the *āśrama* system in any of its formulations, and have textual and thematic parallels with Buddhist and Jaina canonical literatures. It is not possible to date these passages with any degree of certainty, but I argue in chapter 1 that

¹³ See, for example, Fitzgerald 1980 on the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* and Bowles 2007 on the *Āpaddharmaparvan*.

¹⁴ See, for example, Brockington 2003 on yoga in the *Mahābhārata*.

there are no *a priori* reasons why such ascetic legends could not be as early as the rise of Buddhism and Jainism in the middle of the first millennium BCE. This is considerably earlier than the usual dating of *Mahābhārata*'s didactic materials to the c. 1st century BCE in the post-Mauryan period (see chapter 1). The “persuasion” of Yudhiṣṭhira, discussed in chapter 3, in its present form was probably composed at a slightly later date, since it is aware of the *āśrama* system, but not in its classical formulation of four sequential *āśramas*. The passages discussed in chapters 7, and especially 8, take the classical *āśrama* system for granted and therefore are likely to have been composed at a later date, which is also supported by their appearance towards the end of the *Śāntiparvan*. Furthermore, I will show that the understanding of these last two passages benefit from a comparison with later works that can be dated to the common era, such as Aśvaghoṣas *Buddhacarita* (1st or 2nd century CE), the *Milindapañha* (5th century CE in its current form), and *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (4th century CE).

According to this tentative internal chronology, the *Mahābhārata* starts out with some ascetic teachings given to householder kings mainly as a means of consolation. At this time, there is no discussion of a possible conflict between royal duty and implementing these ascetic teachings. Over time, probably with the rise of the Maurya empire, the renunciate movements increase in popularity, and the same ascetic teachings on topics like impermanence and inevitability of death are rebranded as *mokṣadharmā*. The original formulation of the *āśrama* system creates a problem – one can be either a householder or a *bhikṣu*. We learn about the original *āśrama* system almost exclusively from groups that place the householder and Vedic/Brahmanical values at the centre of their ideological project, effectively dismissing renunciation and not displaying an interest in the pursuit of *mokṣa*. Subsequently, perhaps already in the common era, there appear several attempts of negotiating social duties with the pursuit of *mokṣa*. In the classical *āśrama* system, being a

householder and pursuing *mokṣa* as a *saṃnyāsin* takes place in different periods of one's life, so that there is presumably no *mokṣa* for the householder. The *Bhagavadgītā* abandons the notion of the *āśrama* system altogether, and presents its well-known *karmayoga* doctrine. Chapters 7 and 8 of this thesis examine two other models of how a householder king can be liberated. Chapter 7 argues that in one of his *Mahābhārata* appearances king Janaka presents an ideal of liberation, which allows a king to continue acting in the realm of the sense objects (*viṣaya*) without incurring any new karma after his internal impurities (*kleśas*) have been burned. Chapter 8 analyses a multi-life path to *mokṣa*, presented by king Janaka on another occasion. This allows him to claim that following the sequence of the four *āśramas* is essential for liberation, while also claiming that it is possible to attain *mokṣa* by liberating insight in any *āśrama* if one has been purified in previous lifetimes.

Part 1. The *Mahābhārata*, ascetic teachings, Yudhiṣṭhira

1. The *Mahābhārata*

1.1. The time of the *Mahābhārata* and the rise of the ascetic movements

This thesis will discuss textual sources that generally date between 500BCE to 200CE.

The earlier date of around 500 BCE corresponds to the time when Siddhārtha Gautama and Mahāvīra, the founders of Buddhism and Jainism, must have been active. Much has been written on the dating of the historical Buddha, but 400 BCE has been accepted by some as a reasonable estimate for the time of his death (Cousins 1996). Mahāvīra is understood to have been an older contemporary of the Buddha. The canonical literatures of both religions suggest a background of earlier ascetic movements that influenced early Buddhism and Jainism and served as opponents in

doctrinal disputes. Among these other *śramaṇa* ascetic movements Ājīvikism managed to attract significant patronage (Basham 1951, Balcerowicz 2018), but eventually vanished like the others.

Thus, by around 500BCE there flourished an “ascetic culture” which gave rise to or heavily influenced Buddhism, Jainism, yogic traditions, and eventually Classical Hinduism. At that date, the existence of such a culture can be postulated at least for what Bronkhorst has called the “Greater Magadha” region in which the Buddha and Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, are believed to have been active. This refers, for Bronkhorst, vaguely to the region to the east of the Ganges-Yamunā confluence (2007). This region boasted several city-states and early urban centres, including, notably, Kosala-Videha, associated with the legendary renouncer king Janaka who figures in several of key passages discussed in this thesis.

Different scholars emphasise different aspects as central or common to these ascetic ideologies. Some emphasise the interrelated beliefs in rebirth, karmic retribution and the possibility of an escape from rebirth (Bronkhorst 2007). Others might prefer to favour other aspects such as an emphasis on non-violence (Winternitz 1923). It may be impossible to single out just one or two features as defining this ascetic culture. We will see, for example, that there are many ascetic passages in the *Mahābhārata* that mention neither the doctrine of karma nor belief in rebirth, nor even non-violence but nevertheless belong to ascetic literature.

We can only learn about early Buddhism and Jainism, and thus about the early ascetic movements, from texts that were written down considerably later. The available evidence suggests that the Pali canon, which is the only fully surviving Buddhist canon, was written down as late as the first century BCE, although Collins assumes that the process of writing down individual texts began already during the Mauryan period (2013). This lateness of the written Buddhist canon has

led to various degrees of scepticism regarding the extent to which this canon can be seen as representing the doctrines and social realities at the time of historical Buddha. The situation is even more problematic with Jaina canonical literature. Bronkhorst notes that

our most important sources of information regarding early Jainism are found in the canon preserved by the Śvetāmbara Jains. Unfortunately, this canon was given its definitive form at a late date, some 980 years after Mahāvīra according to a Jain tradition, that is, 454 or 514 CE. This does not mean that all the texts that are included in the canon are as recent as this; quite the contrary, it would appear that a number of them are centuries older. However, it is rarely possible to determine how much older any particular text (or portion of text) really is. Mainly on linguistic grounds, it has been argued that the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga Sūtra*, and the *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* are among the oldest texts in the canon (Bronkhorst 2020:167).

The later date, namely 200 CE, roughly corresponds to the time by which all or most the textual passages discussed in this thesis are likely to have been composed, although some passages may well be later by a couple of centuries. The dating of the *Mahābhārata* will be discussed below.

1.2. A period of change

The time period between 500 BCE and 200 CE was characterised by immense cultural change in Ancient India, which in turn was most likely motivated by the societal, economic and political changes brought about by the urbanisation from the middle of the first millennium BCE and by the political unification of Northern India in the Maurya empire c. 322-185 BCE.

The economic wealth associated with urbanisation was instrumental in the growth of the renouncer movements, in so far as the surplus allowed for the maintenance of mendicants. It is also most plausible that the societal changes associated with urbanisation created a need for new ideologies more relevant for the new situation than, for example, Vedic ritualism, which flourished in a pastoralist society. I do not wish to speculate, however, about how urbanisation and social

change might have contributed to the emergence of the specific doctrines and beliefs of the ascetic movements.

I now turn to a survey of recent scholarship about the cultural and social change in Ancient India during this time period, focusing on debates that are relevant for the understanding the *Mahābhārata*¹⁵.

1.2.1. The new Brahmanism

Above all, many scholars have emphasised the importance of the unification of Northern India under the Mauryas and the policies of emperor Aśoka (268–232 BCE) in particular as catalysts for cultural change within the Brahmanical tradition. Aśokan edicts are the only historical documents from this period that are dateable with certainty. Moreover, since they were issued by an emperor, it must be the case that the elites everywhere in the empire would have been familiar with Aśoka's vision of *dharma* and might have felt a need to respond to it. It is therefore natural that scholars have used what we know about Aśoka's views and policies as a key point of departure to assess other Ancient Indian texts.

While Aśoka's edicts are famous for their call for religious tolerance, they are usually understood to rather favour non-Brahmanical groups, such as Buddhists and Jinas. Moreover, it is believed that Aśoka was himself a lay Buddhist. It is therefore assumed that Aśoka's policies robbed Brahmins of a certain monopoly of cultural capital and royal support that they presumably had during the Vedic period.

¹⁵ A detailed analysis of secondary literature relevant to the emergence of ascetic traditions in Ancient India is found in Samuel (2008). A careful consideration of the social and historical context of the doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā* is provided in Malinar (2007b), and much of what Malinar discusses is relevant also to contextualising other religio-philosophical parts of the *Mahābhārata*.

As Patrick Olivelle puts it,

Yet, something had changed radically from the viewpoint of the Brahmanical theology relating to the special relationship between king and Brahmin. This special relationship is well articulated in the vedic texts: the royal power (*kṣatra*) and the Brahman power (*brahma*) can thrive only when they are united. Royal power and legitimacy were sustained and enhanced by Brahmanical intervention through ritual and sacrifice, especially the imperial horse-sacrifice. Aśokan reforms clearly displaced the Brahmin from the unique position within society which he is accorded in vedic theology; now there were two models of religious authority and power, the Brahmin and the ascetic (2011b:131).

Olivelle notes a further issue at stake here:

Another, and perhaps a more severe, blow to Brahmanical theology and privilege was the Aśokan insistence on not killing. This referred in a special way to sacrificial killing: no living being should be killed for sacrificial purposes (2011b:131).

It has been proposed that the Brahmanical tradition responded to these challenges by reinventing itself as a theory of society. Usually, the systems of *varṇa* and *āśrama* are identified as the two main pillars of this new ideological establishment. The *varṇa* theory divides the society in four groups – Brahmins (priests), *kṣatriyas* (kings and warriors), *vaiśyas* (agricultural labourers and in later times merchants), and *śūdras* (servants). Brahmanical texts place Brahmins at the top of the four *varṇas* hierarchically ordered. The *āśrama* theory divides the ideal life of a member of the three upper classes of the society into four stages or, as Olivelle translates *āśrama*, “life patterns” (1993). The persons pertaining to the four *āśramas* are the *brahmacārin* (Vedic student), *gṛhastha* (householder), *vanaprastha* (forest dweller), and *bhikṣu* or *parivrājaka* (renouncer, known in later tradition mainly as *saṃnyāsin*). Olivelle has demonstrated that this “theological construct” allowed Brahmanical thinkers to creatively incorporate several different lifestyles and value systems in a single model (1993). The Brahmanical ideology constituted of these key elements is accordingly known as the *varṇāśramadharmā*.

Another essential element to Classical Brahmanical ideology is the relationship between the king and the Brahmin. As Fitzgerald puts it, the ideology of the *Mahābhārata* has the ‘*kṣatriya*’ operating under Brahminic supervision to guarantee the preservation and welfare of brahmins’ (Fitzgerald 2004:122). This new ideology, articulated perhaps for the first time in the Dharmasūtras, is sometimes called “Neo-Brahmanism” (e.g. McGovern 2018). Seeing “Neo-Brahmanism” as a post-Aśokan development contrasts with earlier scholarship which often presumed a more timeless Brahmanism as the backdrop for the rise of Buddhism and Jainism and other developments in Ancient India.

Central to this rethinking of the religious and ideological history of Ancient India is the observation that several of the foundational terms of the Brahmanical tradition are either not attested in earlier literature, are weakly attested, or have a substantially different meaning there.

Most strikingly, this is the case with the term *dharma*. Olivelle notes:

Given the centrality of *dharma* in later religious literature of India, both Brahmanical and Buddhist, one would expect that the term gradually began to assume a central role in the religious vocabulary of the middle and late vedic periods represented by the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, the Upaniṣads, and the Śrauta- and Gṛhya-sūtras, which together constitute a vast body of literature both in extent and in the variety of their topics and concerns.

A close study of the use of *dharma* in these texts, however, demonstrates the opposite: *dharma* was at best a marginal term and concept within the vocabulary of these texts, and it did not play a central role in the religious world depicted in them (Olivelle 2004:491).

Olivelle then notes that although the term *dharma* was probably central to the Buddhist tradition even before the time of Aśoka, it must be Aśoka’s usage of this term as ‘the central concept in defining a new imperial ideology, the ethical ideology of the Maurya empire’ that ‘could not be ignored even by the scholastic Brahmins working within the vedic *śākhās*’ (2004:505).

Olivelle then argues:

My hypothesis is that the emergence of the Dharmaśāstric literature, first in the form of prose *sūtras* and then in metrical treatises beginning with Manu, was a direct consequence of Buddhist and Aśokan reforms. That a *śāstra*, an expert tradition of knowledge, be devoted to *dharma* would seem improbable from its marginal use within the theologies expressed in the middle and late vedic texts (2004:505).

To this early *dharma* literature one should add the *Mahābhārata*. I assume that Olivelle does not single out the *Mahābhārata* because he believes the *Mahābhārata* to be later than the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, known also simply as “The Laws of Manu” or just “Manu”¹⁶. I find such relative dating to be implausible and will return to it when discussing the fourth *āśrama* in chapter 2, because looking at the descriptions of renunciation will provide a useful tool for thinking about the relative chronology of these two texts.

The situation is rather similar with the term *grhastha*, “householder”. Stephanie Jamison finds no references to this term in the Vedic literature, and points out that the earliest occurrences of the equivalents of this term are in the Middle-Indic, most notably in the Aśokan inscriptions. In these inscriptions, the Middle-Indic equivalents of *grhastha* are not contrasted with other *āśramas*, but rather with people who have gone forth from the household life (Sanskrit: *pravrajita*). Jamison concludes:

The implications of this word history are quite striking, at least to me. It indicates that the *grhastha*-, so thoroughly embedded verbally in the orthodox Brahmanical dharma texts and so explicitly the foundation of the social system depicted therein, is actually a coinage of and a borrowing from śramaṇic discourse, which discourse, at this period, was conducted in various forms of Middle Indo-Aryan (2019:18).

¹⁶ See Olivelle 2006.

Similar observations about the primacy of Aśokan inscriptions in the history of the term *gr̥hasṭha* are taken up by Lubin who argues:

Whatever Aśoka may have meant, Brahmanical theorists appear to have taken a maximalist approach, formalizing a ritual and disciplinary (*vrata*-based) program to define *gr̥hasṭha* status as an *āśrama* alongside the celibate and homeless professions. (...)

The point of the reclassification, then, is to emphasize that being a Brahmanical *gr̥hamedhin* could itself be a religious vocation demanding discipline and imbuing one with charisma (in the Weberian sense), with the aim of making the *gr̥hasṭha* equally worthy of public admiration. This is the idea behind the precepts that pious laymen should “feed Brahmins” on many occasions and perform *arḡha* for guests (including *sn̥ātakas* and exemplary *gr̥hasṭhas*): it justifies a Brahmanical practice of venerating and feeding Brahmin virtuosi in a manner parallel to laymen giving alms to Buddhist, Jainist, or Ājīvika mendicants. The land-grants to Brahmins (*brahmadeyas*) so well documented from the first millennium CE in copper-plate grants is another institutionalization of this practice (2019:105).

In other words, Lubin argues that the householder was constructed as an ascetic in his own right in response to the rise of the movements that required a more radical change of lifestyle, calling for the abandonment of family. We will see in chapter 3 that such redefinitions of asceticism in terms of householder’s duties and practices are important for some discussions of the king’s relationship to renunciation in the *Mahābhārata*.

I now turn to the *Mahābhārata* to discuss some key debates about the dating and composition of this text and a more detailed examination of how it fits into the post-Aśokan project of redefining Brahmanism.

1.3. Narrative and didactic elements in the *Mahābhārata*

The history of the *Mahābhārata* has been the subject of much debate. According to John Brockington,

[a]lthough the two extant epics are based on (...) traditional bardic material, in the course of time more religious and didactic material was included in them, to such an extent that the *Mahābhārata* in particular has rather lost the character of an epic, since so much of its volume is didactic material (Brockington 1998:20).

The separation into narrative and didactic materials go back to earlier scholars such as Hopkins (1901).

Brockington also provides an overview of the theories that argue that the *Mahābhārata* underwent one or several revisions in the hands of Brahmin editors. The so-called didactic portions of the *Mahābhārata* are labelled by some scholars as “Brahmanical”. Thus, in his overview work *The Sanskrit Epics* John Brockington notes that ‘[t]o the extent that the transmission of both epics came to be dominated by brāhman groups, any study of them is inevitably to quite an extent a study of the propagation of brāhmanical ideals and brāhmanical culture ’(1998:159). In the same book Brockington discusses the theories of Brahmanical revision of a presumed earlier warrior epic that have been advanced by other scholars. In particular, he mentions the possible revision by Bhārgava Brahmins, which was first offered by Sukthankar (Brockington 1998:155ff.). Brockington further discusses the work of Hein, who makes a further contribution to the discussion of the groups involved in the editing of the *Mahābhārata* by studying the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*, “intent on the welfare of all beings”, which is often applied to kings in the *Mahābhārata*. As summed up by Brockington,

Hein deduces that, since “the brutal Bhārgava attitude in human relations accords ill with the spirit of delighting in the welfare of all beings”, the phrase must be characteristic of a group of redactors independent of the Bhārgava editors identified by Sukthankar, whom he provisionally designates “the brahmana irenicists” from their more conciliatory attitudes (Brockington 1998:157).

Thus, Brockington notes that several previous scholars have suggested that there were at least two layers of Brahmanical editors to the *Mahābhārata* or at least two different communities

of Brahmanical editors. It should be mentioned that not all scholars accept the view that the *Mahābhārata* must have developed over time. The most vocal opponent of this view has been Alf Hiltebeitel who finds it more plausible that the *Mahābhārata* was composed by a single author or a committee of authors over a short period of time (2001 and 2004). I am doubtful that this might have been the case and will discuss below certain criteria that suggest that the *Mahābhārata* includes materials from various dates.

My own assumption in this thesis is that the *Mahābhārata* has been expanded over time, and that it is impossible to find a single ideological concern that regulates the whole epic. I will also argue that there are no particular reasons to associate some of the “didactic” materials in the *Mahābhārata* with Brahmins in particular.

I will now provide a look at how the notion of Brahmanical dominance over the ideology of the *Mahābhārata* has been developed in recent scholarship.

1.4. Brahmanical ideology in the *Mahābhārata*

Several scholars have argued that the *Mahābhārata* should be read as a key text in the ideological project of (Neo)Brahmanism. For example, Bronkhorst has argued that the *Mahābhārata* should be read as a response to the challenges to Brahmanism presented by the Maurya empire, claiming that the *Mahābhārata* ‘stands at the beginning of a long process in which Brahmanism had to confront, or accommodate, a large number of cultural alternatives’ (2017:583).

This is, for Bronkhorst, how the *Mahābhārata* should be viewed:

Far from being a mere collection of stories and general good advice, it was an instrument in the hands of a group of people who were determined to change the world in a way that suited them, and who succeeded to a considerable extent in doing so during the centuries that lay ahead (2017:577).

Much of the *Mahābhārata*'s didactic materials are found in the *Śāntiparvan*, “The Book of Peace”, which is its 12th book. The bulk of the *Śāntiparvan* is taken up by post-war instructions that Yudhiṣṭhira receives from his grandfather Bhīṣma. These instructions are divided in three parts. First comes the *Rājadharmaparvan* (“The Book on the Dharma of Kings”), then the *Āpaddharmaparvan* (“The Book on the Dharma at the Times of Calamities”), and finally the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* (“The Book on the Dharma of Liberation”). The *Śāntiparvan*, and especially the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, is the source of many of the key passages discussed in this thesis. The other main collection of didactic materials in the *Mahābhārata* is its 13th book, the *Anuśāsanaparvan*. Since none of the main textual passages discussed in the thesis comes from the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, I will say not say anything else about it at this point.

1.4.1. Fitzgerald on the ideology, dating, and growth of the *Śāntiparvan*

The *Śāntiparvan* has been studied extensively by James Fitzgerald. He has published a translation of the *Rājadharmā* and *Āpaddharma* sections (2004), and promised to publish a translation of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* on which he wrote his PhD thesis (1980). Fitzgerald has also published several key research articles dealing with important themes, concepts or individual passages of the *Śāntiparvan*. It will, therefore, be worthwhile to summarise some of his published key findings.

Fitzgerald also believes that the *Mahābhārata* is driven by a ‘larger ideological enterprise’. More specifically, he says this of what he calls the “main Mahābhārata” and which ‘was fashioned and promulgated sometime in the second or first centuries BCE as a reaction against the cosmopolitan “marginalization” of brahmins under the Mauryans, under Aśoka in particular’ (2006:269). This post-Aśokan redaction of the *Mahābhārata* was an ‘ideological transformation of

(...) a preexisting heroic narrative '(2006:270). The particular response offered by the *Mahābhārata* is a complex one since it partially embraces the Aśokan ethics of non-violence, which is included in what he calls the 'newer values of *dharma*':

The *Mahābhārata* had two fundamental agendas: to assert its narrative of a purge and restoration, and to find ways to resolve the conflicts between the grotesque, sanctioned violence of this narrative and the newer values of *dharma* that were well established among Brahmins and becoming prevalent throughout much of North Indian society in the latter third of the first millennium B.C. (2004:123).

Fitzgerald envisions a continuous expansion of the *Mahābhārata* in the centuries to come during which new materials were added to the "main *Mahābhārata*":

What I believe was probably added sometime between 50 CE and 350 CE, in one or more waves of deliberate expansion and augmentation, would be much of the material in Bhīṣma's instructions, the essential portions of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, all episodes that elaborate some theme of devotion to Viṣṇu, Śiva, or Kṛṣṇa (such as, for example, the Śiśupālavadha in *Sabhāparvan*; Arjuna's and Duryodhana's attending upon Kṛṣṇa and choosing, respectively, for aid in the war, Kṛṣṇa and his Nārāyaṇa warriors at *Udyogaparvan* 7; and several highly polished expressions of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* in the narrative wake of Yudhiṣṭhira's *abhiṣeka* in 12.40 up through the initiation of Bhīṣma's instruction of Yudhiṣṭhira in 12.56) (2006:271-272)

The resulting version of the *Mahābhārata* at the end of this period (c.350 CE) would then presumably be close to the text constituted in the Pune Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*.

Regarding the presence of the *Śāntiparvan* in the earlier post-Aśokan "Main *Mahābhārata*" Fitzgerald says: 'Some kernel of Bhīṣma's instruction of Yudhiṣṭhira was certainly present' (2006:271). Elsewhere Fitzgerald expresses that he has 'no doubt that some substantial part of the *nīti* advice of *Laws for Kings* [= *Rājadharmaparvan*] and *Law in Times of Distress* [= *Āpaddharmaparvan*] comes from earlier times, perhaps some of it even from the late Vedic era' (2004: footnote 200 on page 129). Note that he does not attribute the same antiquity to any of the materials in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*.

1.4.2. Fitzgerald on the individual collections

Let's now turn to Fitzgerald's understanding of the reasons behind the creation of the textual collections included in the *Śāntiparvan*. He finds that the *Mahābhārata* as a whole is a story about the

establishing of proper, *brāhmaṇya* kingship: that is, kingship amenable to the desires and principles—*dharma*s, principally the idea of *varṇadharma*—defined by the carriers of the brahman, the holy Veda (i.e., *brāhmaṇa* men, “brahmins”) (2006:272).

Fitzgerald argues that all of the subsections of the *Śāntiparvan* contribute to this overarching ideological concern. *Rājadharmaparvan*, the first section of the *Śāntiparvan*, is most immediately concerned with the fundamentals of the emerging *Śāntiparvan*:

The instructions of the *RDhP* espouse the basic charter of *brāhmaṇya rājya*. One of its major themes is an emphasis on the king's maintenance of the brahmanic hierarchy (*varṇadharma*) and the interdependence of rulers and brahmins (of the *kṣatra* and the *brahman*) (2006:278).

The remaining two collections also contribute in their own ways:

The *Āpaddharmaparvan* (*ĀDhP*) and the *MDhP* play critically important auxiliary roles in establishing and clarifying the proper relationships among brahmins, their royal clients, and the larger society in which both the *brahman* and the *kṣatra* must exist and survive (2006:258).

Since the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* is of most interest here, it will be worthwhile to quote at length what Fitzgerald has to say more specifically about that collection:

As all three of the other didactic anthologies of Bhīṣma's *anuśāsana* are directly concerned with the cultural and political-economic dialectic between kings and brahmins, it seems likely that the *MDhP* would be as well. I suggest that the presence of the *MDhP* collection in this setting implicitly makes a new kind of argument for the support of brahmins, one that complements the older reasons for princes' supporting them while borrowing the basic stance of their *nāstika* rivals. I am suggesting that the *MDhP* collection developed partly in

response to the new circumstances of the post-*nāstika*, post-Mauryan, post-Aśokan world, in which brahmins could no longer make an argument of their importance *exclusively* upon the presumed value of their *mantras* and their rites. The *MDhP* demonstrates to kings and their subjects in the post-Mauryan world that in addition to all the esoteric rites and Veda-based wisdom brahmins had cultivated in the past, brahmins had as much of the newer nonesoteric wisdom to teach as did the *nāstika* favorites of Candragupta and Aśoka (2006:282).

A lot of the contents of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* can indeed be explained within such a framework. Many passages present Brahmins as the transmitters of “the newer nonesoteric” knowledge, as described by Fitzgerald. Notably, some of them present important Brahmanical sages such as Vyāsa or Yājñavalkya as foremost experts of yogic practices or Sāṃkhya philosophy. On the other hand, other passages that were included in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* bear no visible trace of any such attempts to present ascetic ideas as a part of the Brahmanical tradition or as a sphere of knowledge specifically associated with Brahmins. Anticipating this later discussion, I will just note here that my current hypothesis is that some units of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* represent relatively ancient, perhaps even pre-Aśokan, ascetic teachings that were formulated without any regard, or even without any knowledge, of the fundamental elements of the Brahmanical ideology, such as the *āśrama* system.

It should be emphasised that Fitzgerald notes a few limits to this reasoning so that I understand my observation to be fully compatible with Fitzgerald’s views:

(...) I do not think that the main *MBh* was regulated exclusively and entirely by the ideological program I see operating in it. The text we have seems actually to be polyphonic by virtue of the sophisticated fascination for multiple meanings of some of its likely authors and also because of its complicated history (2006:270).

A rather similar remark is made about the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* in particular:

I am certainly not saying that the collected texts themselves arose simply in response to these provocations or for the cultural political motive I suggest to be

behind the *MDhP* collection, qua collection, of Bhīṣma's *anuśāsana* of the MBh (2006:note 38).

My concern in this thesis will be with the individual texts themselves, or rather with what they reveal about the history of ideas about asceticism and in particular about the imagined relevance of ascetic teachings for kings. Yet, the nature of some of these texts is such that it is not entirely clear why Brahmin editors would have included them in a collection motivated by the ideological observations described by Fitzgerald.

1.4.3. Fitzgerald on the layers of the *Śāntiparvan*

Fitzgerald also speculates in more detail about the order in which different layers of the *Śāntiparvan* would have been added. His discussion of layering seems to be largely impressionistic, and there is generally no detailed reasoning to support the stratification apart from a convincing discussion of the layering of the *Rājadharmā* section and a few other remarks. On the most general level, this layering seems to be governed by the assumption that what comes later in the *Śāntiparvan* was also added later, although for the *Rājadharmaparvan* Fitzgerald presupposes an outward expansion from an earlier core.

I will note a few things about the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* in particular. The chapters situated in the beginning of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* (12.168-247) are suggested to be the earliest layer of that sub-*parvan*, whereas what follows is divided in five different later layers. There are good reasons to accept Fitzgerald's stratification of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* in general terms. If one looks at the first few texts of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, there are almost no signs of the post-Aśokan Brahmanical ideology as described above, and several of them have significant textual parallels with Buddhist and Jaina literatures (see chapter 4). By contrast, when the texts towards the end of the collection, such as the "Story of Śuka" (see chapter 8) or the "Dialogue between Sulabhā and King

Janaka" (see chapter 7), include very similar ascetic teachings and hint at links with Buddhist or Jaina traditions, they place such ideas within a Brahmanical framework, which can be recognised by references to the *āśrama* and *varṇa* as generally accepted principles, or to Vedic sages. Thus, there appears to be some general movement in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* from simpler, shorter and seemingly more ancient texts to more complex and more thoroughly Brahmanicised ones.

Another useful example to support the model of the growth of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* is the *Nārāyaṇīya*, which is the penultimate unit of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. It attempts to integrate the *bhakti* of the Nārāyaṇa cult with Sāṃkhya, yoga, and its own vision of Vedic orthodoxy devoid of animal sacrifice. Moreover, it explicitly addresses some of the key tensions that emerge earlier in the *Śāntiparvan*, such as the opposition between *pravṛtti* (active life, performance of ritual) and *nivṛtti* (renunciation), and seems to be aware of the *Bhagavadgītā*. This suggests that the *Nārāyaṇīya* must be a comparatively late work which synthesises various threads found elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*.

When it comes to detail, however, some qualifications can be made to the linear growth model which assumes that later materials were placed after earlier passages that might have already been present in a hypothetical earlier *Mokṣadharma* collection. For example, Fitzgerald includes Vyāsa's instructions to Śuka (12.224-247) in the earliest layer of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. This text is not particularly similar to other units within the same proposed layer, and, moreover, it seems highly plausible that this rather long text itself is a loosely integrated collection of materials of various dates.

I have already proposed that the presence or absence of certain Brahmanical institutions is a useful tool to be taken into consideration when judging the relative dating of different textual

units from the *Mahābhārata* or its *Mokṣadharmā* section in particular. A further clue to internal stratification of the *Mahābhārata* is provided by the specific formulation of the *āśrama* system. Olivelle has demonstrated that originally upon the completion of Vedic studies a *brahmacārin* could choose to live in any of the four life-patterns for his entire life. This original model was superseded by the classical model, which gives the four *āśramas* as strictly sequential (1993).

The Vyāsa-Śuka episode in question makes a very clear exposition of the original optional system:

When permitted by the teacher, he should follow out, according to the rules, a single *āśrama* among the four [possible ones] until he is released from the body.

ācāryeṇābhyanujñātaś caturṇām ekam āśramam
ā vimokṣāc charīrasya so 'nutiṣṭhed yathāvidhi (12.226.4)

Several *adhyāyas* later Vyāsa advocates the standard sequential model, claiming that ‘a householder should spend the second part of this life living at home’ (*dvitīyam āyuso bhāgaṃ grhamedhī grhe vaset*; 12.235.1).

This feature indicates that the Vyāsa-Śuka dialogue itself consists of at two textual layers that may be considerably removed in time.

To sum up, I propose that Fitzgerald’s stratification of the *Mahābhārata* should be treated as a useful preliminary sketch that can be subject to further clarification and further division. Another reason for providing these details is to illustrate but one consideration which makes me doubt that the *Mahābhārata* could have been composed during a short period of time, as argued by Hiltebeitel (2001).

A more problematic assumption in Fitzgerald’s model is that even the earliest units of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* postdate the entire *Rājadharmaparvan* and most of the *Āpaddharmaparvan*.

We will see in chapter 4 that the earliest units of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* do not contain any marks that would suggest that they were composed or edited to serve a Brahmanical agenda along the lines discussed above. I note, for now, that not all passages in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* should necessarily be seen as late. I will return to the dating of some of the individual units discussed in this thesis when introducing ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata*.

In this section (1.4) I have reviewed some key ideas about the composition and dating of *Mahābhārata* and especially the *Śāntiparvan* that have been put forward by Fitzgerald. He sees the creation of the collections of instruction in the *Śāntiparvan* as tools to propagate Brahmanical ideology in a post-Aśokan or post-Maurya world, but admits that this assumption does not explain the nature of all the individual texts in that collection.

I hope that thesis will complement Fitzgerald's research in several ways. Fitzgerald's work has been very much focused on just the *Śāntiparvan*, aiming to understand the *Śāntiparvan* and its individual collections as a part of the *Mahābhārata*.

My approach is more thematic, and I believe that new insights can be gained by focusing on ascetic literature generally rather than in any single text, textual collection or tradition. I will discuss select passages from the *Śāntiparvan* alongside other ascetic passages from the *Mahābhārata* or Buddhist and Jaina literatures.

1.5. Ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata*

The previous sections of this chapter provided a review of key research on the composition of the *Mahābhārata*. It made two key observations. First, the majority of leading epic scholars, such as Brockington and Fitzgerald, have seen the composition of the *Mahābhārata* as a process spanning a considerable period of time during which especially the didactic materials were added

by Brahmin editors. Second, scholars such as Fitzgerald and Bronkhorst have argued that the composition and inclusion of didactic materials into the Sanskrit epic should be read as contributions to a rethinking of Brahmanism in response to the Mauryan empire in which Brahmins presumably did not have the same privileged status that they claim in the *Mahābhārata*.

This section will continue to focus on the *Mahābhārata* and will turn specifically to ascetic literature contained in the *Mahābhārata*. By “ascetic literature” I will here designate texts and textual passages that advocate “ascetic” virtues: values and practices in line with the above discussion of “asceticism” and “ascetic teachings”. While the early *śramaṇa* and Brahmanical renouncer movements of Ancient India present a considerable variety of beliefs and practices, they share a common interest in the overcoming of suffering and the attainment of permanent happiness as well as a shared assumption that these are acquired by the self-cultivation and personal effort of the individual. Moreover, as will be illustrated below (see especially chapter 4), parts of early Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanical literature, especially the *Mahābhārata*, share verses, stories, concepts and legendary characters. Therefore, I believe that it is useful to group relevant *Mahābhārata* passages under the label “ascetic literature” even if this does not have a direct equivalent in Indic languages.

This chapter will begin with a review of Winternitz’s paper on ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata*. The remaining part of the chapter will build on the work of Winternitz, providing a more detailed introduction to ascetic texts included in the *Mahābhārata*, many of which will be analysed in later chapters.

1.5.1. A review of Winternitz's "Ascetic Literature in Ancient India"

The only overview work which focuses more or less on the type of material to be discussed in this thesis is Winternitz's "Ascetic Literature in Ancient India". Despite its title, it deals mostly with the *Mahābhārata*. Since the work is both extremely useful and virtually unknown in modern scholarship, I will quote from it extensively.

Right from the opening paragraph, Winternitz engages with a key categorisation that has shaped much of the thinking about the *Mahābhārata* as well as Ancient Indian literature and culture more generally. He claims that:

It has become an almost general habit, to speak of the whole of Indian literature and culture, as far as it is pre-Buddhist, as 'Brāhmaṇical' and generally to designate as 'Brāhmaṇical' everything that is not either Buddhist or Jain just as if in ancient India all literary production and intellectual work had been confined to the priests.

Only a few scholars, such as Garbe and Rhys Davids have protested against this fashion of labelling everything as 'Brāhmaṇical' and have shown, that the Kṣatriyas also had a great share in the intellectual life and work of ancient India. And years ago E. Lenmann¹⁷ [sic] has pointed out, that there existed in ancient India also a 'Parivrājaka literature' in which not only Brāhmaṇical but also non-Brāhmaṇical ascetics (Parivrājakas) took part and that this literature has not been entirely lost but could be gathered together from different works of literature.

Now, I believe that this Parivrājaka or Śramaṇa or ascetic literature has been preserved to us to a much greater extent, than Lenmann thought. It is to be found chiefly in the didactic parts of the *Mahābhārata* and occasionally also in the *Purāṇas* (1923:1).

Winternitz appears to be making two separate claims regarding the categorisation of Ancient Indian literature and culture.

¹⁷ Read: Lehmann.

First, in addition to literatures of the three great religious traditions of ancient India there is a separate category – *parivrājaka* literature, which does not belong exclusively to any of these religious traditions. Although this *parivrājaka* or *śramaṇa* literature is closely related to portions of early Buddhist and Jaina literatures, significant portions of this lore survive in works that are normally labelled as Brahmanical – predominantly in the *Mahābhārata*, but also in some of the Purāṇas. It follows from this observation that to read, for example, certain passages of the *Mahābhārata* together with early Buddhist and Jaina literatures can bring additional insights about the meaning and compositional history about these passages.

Second, Winternitz introduces into the picture the figure of the *kṣatriya*, which is of interest to this thesis. He does so in an ambiguous way, jumping from a mention of *kṣatriyas* to *parivrājaka* literature without much clarification. Unfortunately, this thread is not picked up later in his paper. The reasons for thinking that the ascetic tradition might be associated with *kṣatriyas* has already been mentioned above.

To reiterate, Winternitz's claim about the relationship between ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata* and non-Brahmanical traditions is that

[t]he *Mahābhārata*, and more specially the Mokṣadharmā of the Śāntiparvan, is full of legends and moral maxims which have all the appearance of being Jain or Buddhist in their origin, but which at any rate cannot be called Brāhmaṇical (1923:16).

This is how Winternitz clarifies his understanding of the differences between two separate strands in the didactic literature of the *Mahābhārata*:

When we examine more closely the literature of legends and poetical maxims, included in the *Mahābhārata* and in the Purāṇas, we shall clearly distinguish not only two different ethical systems, two different views of life, but also two distinctly different streams of literature. We shall find on the one hand

Brāhmaṇical ethics, the priestly view of life, Brāhmaṇical literature, and on the other hand, ascetic morality, the ascetic view of life and ascetic literature.

And what is the difference? Brāhmaṇical legendary poetry starts from Vedic mythology. Its heroes are the Ṛṣis of old, the ancestors of the Brāhmaṇas, the founders of the great priestly families and schools. (...) As the ancestors of the Brāhmaṇical families they naturally were the heroes of Brāhmaṇical poetry.

The ethics of the legendary poetry and still more of the Brāhmaṇical gnomic poetry is entirely a priestly code of morals. It requires knowledge of the Veda, sacrifice, and honouring of the Brāhmaṇas, who are even placed above the gods. It strictly adheres to the system of castes. By “charity” these Brāhmaṇical legends and maxims invariably mean liberality towards the Brāhmaṇas, ample gifts to the priests. (...)

Quite different is the ethical ideal of the ascetic poetry. Its legends are not based on the mythology of the Veda, but rather on the folk-lore of popular tales and ballads. The heroes of this legendary poetry are not the half-divine Ṛṣis, but the world-renouncing Yogins and ascetics. It is true, we read a great deal about Tapas, austerities, also in the Brāhmaṇical legends of the ancient Ṛṣis. But this Tapas in Brāhmaṇical literature is rather magical power (...) but not a moral factor. By Tapas the Ṛṣi becomes a “Superman” who inspires fear, and may become dangerous by his curse. (...) On the other hand, in the ascetic poetry, asceticism is a moral factor and the hero of its legends is the saint who has renounced the world and looks upon asceticism as a means for obtaining emancipation, Mokṣa (...) [T]his ascetic morality culminates in Ahimsā, abstaining from hurting any being, and in Maitrī, love of all that lives (...) Not priests are the poets of these legends and maxims but sages of all castes and ranks (1923:2-4).

Thus Winternitz finds it useful to separate two strains of tradition within the *Mahābhārata*.

Surely, all such generalising dichotomisations tend to involve oversimplification, but I believe that Winternitz offers a valid insight into the *Mahābhārata*, even if it would benefit from further qualification. As for the opposition between the Vedic ṛṣi and ‘the ethical ideal of the ascetic poetry’, it is not difficult to find textual evidence that supports this, even if Winternitz himself does not care to provide references at this point. A reader of the *Ādiparvan*, the first book of the *Mahābhārata*, soon encounters several stories about just such legendary fear-inspiring Vedic ṛṣis. Central to all these stories are the curses that the sages inflict on others, often for seemingly trivial matters or because of an oversight on the part of the “offender”. The rash anger of these ṛṣis is rather different

from the “ascetic morality”, for which self-control and avoidance of anger are paramount. A similar portrayal of Brahmins as dangerous and capable of inflicting curses for minor offenses are found repeatedly in the *Dānadharmaparvan* subsection of the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, the 13th book of the *Mahābhārata*. The *Dānadharmaparvan*, “The book on the *dharma* of giving (*dāna*)”, repeatedly invites kings to give generously to Brahmins, thus incorporating a particular understanding of a Vedic sage into what several scholars have identified as Brahmanical ideology.

In the second and third parts of the thesis I will seek to qualify some of Winternitz’s more specific claims in the quotes provided above. As already quoted, he claims that ‘the hero of its legends is the saint who has renounced the world and looks upon asceticism as a means for obtaining emancipation, Mokṣa’, but we will see in the second part that several of the *Mahābhārata* passages that have the *śramaṇa* affinities Winternitz notes do not make an explicit mention of *mokṣa* and rather present their teachings to householder kings without asking them to renounce or seek final liberation. While Winternitz finds that ‘ascetic morality culminates in *Ahiṃsā*’, it should be highlighted that many of the same passages that offer ascetic teachings to householder kings do not really mention *ahiṃsā*. Therefore, these ascetic teachings do not come in conflict with their violent duties of ruling and punishing.

To further highlight the supposedly non-Brahmanical nature of some ascetic teachings in *Mahābhārata*, Winternitz notes that ‘[i]t cannot be a mere accident that in the *Mahābhārata* the persons who teach this ascetic morality are as a rule not Brāhmaṇas ’(1923:8) and points out that ‘it is Vidura who is very often made the mouth-piece for maxims and legends of ascetic poetry ’(1923:8). Vidura is low-born, being the son of a *śūdra* woman. As one example of this ascetic literature,

Winternitz mentions the *Vidurāhitavākya* from the *Udyogaparvan*, which he characterises in the following way:

Though the majority of the verses in the section contain general rules on morality and wisdom, it also contains a great number which teach what I call ascetic morality – verses which sound quite Buddhistic and some of which have actually been traced in the Pāli canon (1923:8).

The typical attribution of such ascetic utterances to non-Brahmin characters such as Vidura stands in sharp contrast with attitudes expressed elsewhere in the epic. Before the *Sanatsujātīya*, which is one of the major philosophical texts outside the *Śāntiparvan*, we learn that Vidura is not fit to deliver its teachings because he is born of a *śūdra* mother. Thus, there appear to be two different attitudes recorded in the epic as to who qualifies to be an authority on *dharma*. One of these is more liberal, and is associated with textual units that “sound quite Buddhistic”, as Winternitz puts it, whereas the other is more adamant about the superiority and special status of Brahmins.

Winternitz does not attempt to provide a full catalogue of the relevant passages in the *Mahābhārata*, but he points out several ascetic episodes, such as the Jājāli and Tulādhara story, which has now been studied in detail by Proudfoot (1987). Winternitz also discusses the dialogue between the father and son (*Mahābhārata* 12.169), as an example of a text that negotiates householder-oriented and renouncer ideologies. Winternitz notes that variations of this conversation also appear in Buddhist and Jaina sources, concluding that it is not sectarian but rather ‘belongs to general ascetic literature’ (1923:5). Regarding another passage, the parable of the man and the well from the *Strīparvan*, Winternitz is careful to note that ‘[i]t has sometimes been called a Buddhist parable, but it is no more in accordance with the Buddhist view of life than that of the Jains or any other ascetic sect of India’ (1923:10). This is an important observation, and the same can

be said of many passages that will be discussed in this thesis. Despite the presence of parallel ideas, verses and even stories, it is difficult to find any clearly sectarian Buddhist or Jaina terminology in the *Mahābhārata*. In some instances, however, I will argue that certain passages are very likely to have been introduced specifically by the Buddhist or Jaina tradition.

Winternitz's article makes yet another valuable observation:

Very often the teachings of ascetic morality are mixed up with those of Brāhmaṇical ethics and it is not always easy to decide, whether we have to see in such passages an attempt at a compromise between the two different views of life or rather the retouching of an old piece of ascetic poetry at the hands of some Brāhmaṇical editor (1923:11).

Thus, in addition to what Winternitz believes to be remnants of *parivrājaka* literature and passages that focus on promoting Brahmanical ideology, there are many texts in the *Mahābhārata* that combine both ideologies. Such passages are valuable for studying a formative period of the emerging Classical Hinduism during which ascetic ideals were integrated in the Brahmanical tradition.

Such synthesis of ascetic and Brahmanical ideologies put any clear cut divisions between the “Brahmanical” and the “non-Brahmanical” in doubt. When Winternitz writes that *Mahābhārata*'s ascetic legends ‘cannot have been Brahmanical in origin’, what does this mean exactly? According to my own understanding, it is safe to say that such legends were not created to promote the particular Brahmin-centred vision of society that is advocated in numerous other *Mahābhārata* passages. Some of these legends might in fact pre-date the supposedly post-Aśokan rise of (Neo)Brahmanism. This does not mean, however, that these passages were certainly composed by persons who were not Brahmins by birth or who were not familiar with Vedic

literature or rituals¹⁸. It is certainly true that these ascetic ideas were embraced by many Brahmins. Some of them perceived the ascetic ideals to be either superior or even incompatible with the ritual tradition of the Vedas, as seen in texts such as the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. Others saw no such incompatibility, and the *Mahābhārata* includes many passages that aim to reconcile the two ideologies that are sometimes called *pravṛtti* (“active”) and *nivṛtti* (“renunciate”)¹⁹. It is therefore certain that many Brahmins embraced ascetic ideology, even if its key ideas are absent in extant early Vedic literature.

1.5.2. Winternitz’s insights neglected

Winternitz’s ground-breaking paper has left very little if any impact on *Mahābhārata* scholarship. It is almost never cited in secondary works on the *Mahābhārata*, including those that engage with the textual passages discussed by Winternitz. Most unfortunately, a reader of key reference works and modern publications is not informed about the presence of a general ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata* or about the relationship between ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata* and early Buddhist and Jaina literatures. It was only after I had independently reached rather similar conclusions that I noticed the title of Winternitz’s paper in a footnote of a recent publication.

Winternitz concludes his paper by claiming that ‘[a] wide field of research opens here to students of the *Mahābhārata*, and of Jain and Buddhist literature. This research is not only necessary

¹⁸ For a criticism of a simple dichotomy between Vedic and non-Vedic religious and cultural traditions see Olivelle 1995.

¹⁹ Such materials on *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* from the *Mahābhārata* and other texts have been collected in Bailey 1985.

for the history of Indian literature, but will also throw considerable light on the history of Indian ethics '(1932:21).

The research envisioned by Winternitz has never been carried out. A key reason for the neglect of ascetic materials in the *Mahābhārata* appears to have been the institutional compartmentalisation of *Mahābhārata*/Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina studies as separated fields of study. Moreover, scholars working on early Hinduism have focused on the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, following the emphasis on these texts in Vedānta philosophy, thus neglecting a plethora of materials that in all likelihood represent the earliest philosophical layers of the *Mahābhārata*.

Carrying out the work suggested by Winternitz would require a separate research project. Nevertheless, the remaining part of this chapter will aim to offer a somewhat more detailed account of some of the ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata* than that afforded in Winternitz's paper. The subsequent chapters of this thesis will deal with only those ascetic passages in the *Mahābhārata* that are relevant for its research question. A more thorough examination of ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata* and its relationship to early Buddhist and Jaina literatures remains to be carried out in the future.

1.5.3. A *kṣatriya* philosophy?

The previously discussed model of the development of the *Mahābhārata*, according to which (presumably all) the didactic parts of the *Mahābhārata* are additions by Brahmin redactors intent on promoting a post-Aśokan Brahmanical vision of society, does not account for the presence of such general ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata*. A major reason for this lack of explanation is

that the presence of such passages in the *Mahābhārata*, as opposed to specifically Brahmanical teachings, is not acknowledged in the first place.

We saw earlier in this chapter that recent scholarship tends to see the development of the *Mahābhārata*, and especially the inclusion of didactic materials into the epic, as a direct response to the reign of Aśoka and to the growing influence of the Buddhist and Jaina traditions. As Fitzgerald puts it in his, as of now, latest publication '[o]ne of the goals of the *MBh* was to argue the world should have an honorable and secure place for brahmins' (2021:24). He also speaks in the same publication about 'the *MBh* as a story based on Brahmin ideology and advancing the claims of brahmins to be the sole determiners of right and wrong in the polity and the society – claims that were certainly not generally accepted at this time' (2021:24).

What this model of the growth of the *Mahābhārata* does not explain is the inclusion of general ascetic passages in the *Mahābhārata*. In many of these ascetic passages there is no attempt whatsoever to promote the role of Brahmins as preeminent; nor do they promote the *varṇāśramadharma*, Vedic sacrifice, or any other key aspect of the Brahmanical tradition. It appears that these ascetic teachings were formulated without any regard, or possibly even without any knowledge, of the fundamental elements of the Brahmanical ideology, such as the *āśrama* system. It is especially in these ascetic passages that similarities with Buddhist and Jaina materials are found. Winternitz speculates, very plausibly, that 'many of these must have existed independently before being incorporated in the *Mahābhārata*' (1923:19) and more boldly that 'some have to be borrowed from Buddhist and Jaina texts' (1923:20). What is striking is that such texts have been included in the *Mahābhārata* without any visible mark of the supposed Brahmin editors.

It is doubtful that the same Brahmin editors of the *Mahābhārata*, who elsewhere take care to expound a Brahmanical ideology, would select such material for inclusion in the *Mahābhārata* without leaving any visible mark on them. This seems especially unlikely because such adaptation of ascetic materials for Brahmanical purposes did take place.

These general ascetic episodes stand in contrast to the surrounding material in the *Śāntiparvan* and elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* that promotes Brahmanical ideology as discussed above and elevates Brahmanical sages (*ṛṣis*). There are several texts in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* in which ascetic ideas are associated with Vedic sages. For example, Vyāsa is claimed to be ‘the best among those who know yoga’ (*vyāso yogavidāṃ varāḥ*) in 12.26.4, and in 12.316-317 Nārada expounds ascetic teachings of a general kind, some of which have been identified as possible references to Jainism (Sandesara 1959). Such instances of associating ascetic ideologies with some of the most eminent Brahmin sages only highlight the absence of a similar effort in numerous general ascetic passages.

My hypothesis is that this general ascetic literature belongs to a comparatively early strata of the *Mahābhārata*. In so far as it does not display any elements of the supposed post-Aśokan revival of Brahmanism, I do not see any reason to believe that it is necessarily post-Aśokan. Assuming that the ascetic passages are earlier than the formation or widespread adoption of the values of classical Brahmanism allows to explain why such values are not promoted or even mentioned in the ascetic passages. Furthermore, given their parallels with early Buddhist and Jaina literatures, it seems reasonable to assume a shared, and therefore ancient, origin of the ascetic elements of the *Mahābhārata*.

The models of Brahmanical revision of the *Mahābhārata*, such as those discussed by Fitzgerald and Brockington, assume that sometime before that revision an earlier version of the epic was transmitted mainly by *sūtas*, “bards”. It seems perfectly plausible that this earlier epic tradition included some philosophical, religious or ethical lore independent of the Brahmanical *varṇāśramadharma* view of the society which eventually dominates the epic. I would suggest that at least some of the ascetic literature found in the *Mahābhārata* dates to a time period before the major Brahmanical redaction, representing intellectual speculations largely in line with *kṣatriya* interests.

This suggestion is not entirely original and resonates with Van Buitenen’s study of *Mahābhārata*’s *Uttarayāyāta* in which he links ascetic speculation with the *kṣatriyas*. Incidentally, the *Uttarayāyāta* is another “ascetic” passage mentioned by Winternitz, regarding which he mentions the opinion of Windisch, who finds that it ‘has a Buddhist character’ and even manages to find one of its *pādas* in the *Mārasamyukta* of the Buddhist *Divyāvadāna* (Winternitz 1923:16). Van Buitenen does not explore such parallels and considers the *Uttarayāyāta* purely in terms of hypothetical *kṣatriya* or bardic authorship and transmission. This is how Van Buitenen conceptualises the place of the *Uttarayāyāta* in the landscape of Ancient Indian literary production and especially in relation to the Upaniṣads:

it can be safely assumed that there existed a thriving oral literature which raised the same questions and provided the same answers, but to a different audience and in a different style. We can look upon them as a kind of bardic counterpart to the Brahmanic Upaniṣad-s. It is a text like the *Uttarayāyāta* which gives us an insight into its contents and forms (1968:633-4).

Van Buitenen does not, however, cite any further examples of such “bardic” philosophical literature and leaves the identification and examination of any surviving specimens to further

studies. Without referencing similar passages, the existence of this philosophical bardic literature remains a conjecture:

While it would be rash to extrapolate from this instance - though on closer reading of the epic more may appear - we find good reason to accept that side by side with the Upaniṣad-s there existed a bardic literature seized with similar concerns (1968:635).

It is quite certain, however, that van Buitenen is thinking exactly about what Winternitz calls “ascetic poetry”.

Van Buitenen also does not fail to note that ‘the transmigration account (...) is by the Upaniṣad-s themselves declared to be baronial in origin ’(1968:631). Moreover, he also notes that in this episode a king is speaking to other kings and no Brahmins are involved in the conversation. Similar observations will be made below about other ascetic passages in the *Mahābhārata*. This does not necessarily mean that ascetic ideas were developed by *kṣatriyas* in the first place, but simply that ascetic ideas are associated with *kṣatriyas* not just in the Upaniṣads but also in the *Mahābhārata*. There is therefore no reason to label these teachings as “Brahmanical”. I would suggest that they probably date prior to the post-Aśokan Brahmin revival.

Another and a more recent reappraisal of the *kṣatriya* is found in the work of McClish, who argues that the *Arthaśāstra* is based on an earlier treatise, which he hypothetically calls *Daṇḍanīti* (2019). The remnants of the *Daṇḍanīti*, which form the earliest layers of the *Arthaśāstra*, hold sovereign power of the king to be independent of any higher authority or constraint. According to McClish, this original work was revised to put it in line with Brahmanical *varṇāśramadharma* ideology, which subordinates royal power to *dharma*, whereas *dharma*, in turn, rests upon the final authority of Brahmins (2019). As discussed above, Fitzgerald finds a rather similar ideology

operating in many passages of the *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. These *Mahābhārata* passages are also believed by Fitzgerald to be additions to an earlier *kṣatriya* lore.

Thus, it appears that an earlier version of the *Arthaśāstra* was a non-Brahmanical text in this sense that it was not permeated by the Brahmanical ideology that became influential in the centuries preceding the beginning of the common era. Again, it does not preclude the possibility that this earlier version was written by a Brahmin, nor does it mean that its original royal audience did not practice Vedic rituals²⁰. What the existence of such an earlier version of the text shows, and what I would like to suggest for the *Mahābhārata*, is that there was an intellectual tradition in Ancient India which was closely linked to the *kṣatriyas* and which was independent of the particular Brahmanical ideology that scholars usually locate in the post-Aśokan era.

In the case of the *Arthaśāstra*, it is unclear whether this intellectual tradition was in any way linked to ascetic ideals and traditions. The *Arthaśāstra* includes a section on the king's "conquest of the senses" (*indriyajaya*) in 1.6-7, which reminds one of the renouncer's conquest of the senses. The framework, however, is entirely different. In the *Arthaśāstra* there appears to be no moral element or an implication that the king is to achieve liberation or a better rebirth. The exercises of self-control are essential for the king's ability to rule the kingdom. There is no obvious reason, therefore, to assume that this passage is a part of a later revision that introduces Brahmanical ethics with the aim of subordinating the freedom of the king to *dharma*.

²⁰ There is a legend, however, that Kauṭilya, the author of the *Arthaśāstra*, was linked to Candragupta of the Maurya dynasty. As is well-known, at least his grandson Aśoka opposed animal sacrifice in Vedic rituals.

2. The image of the renouncer in the *Mahābhārata*

The discourse on the *āśrama* of renunciation provides an important backdrop against which other ascetic passages should be understood, including those that are aimed at householder kings. This chapter will therefore examine descriptions of renouncers in what eventually became the fourth *āśrama*, mainly drawing from the *Mahābhārata*. Their analysis will set the scene for the following chapters. We will see that the *āśrama* of the renouncer (*bhikṣu*) is associated in the *Mahābhārata* with the cultivation of certain mental states such as equanimity (*upekṣā*) and holding certain pairs of opposites to be equal (*sama*). This attitude will be referred to by the abstract Sanskrit noun *samatva*²¹. We will see in two later chapters (7 and 8) that this state of *samatva* will be singled out as essential for liberation, for example, by king Janaka. The present chapter demonstrates that the same mental states that are elsewhere implicitly or explicitly said to be available to householder kings are associated with adopting a certain lifestyle – that of a wandering mendicant. This will allow us to appreciate how unusual the presentation of similar ascetic teachings to or by householder kings should be understood to be.

This chapter will have six parts. The first part will introduce early Brahmanical literature on renunciation. The second part will show that similar regulations of ascetic lifestyle are known in the Buddhist tradition. The third part will argue that equanimity and *samatva* are portrayed as the defining characteristics of the renouncer in the *Mahābhārata*. The fourth part will show that there are other equanimous sages in the *Mahābhārata* who are not said to engage in any ascetic practices aside from having certain mental attitudes. The fifth part will speculate that the *samatva* ideal can be understood as an attempt to imitate the qualities of the undifferentiated and unchanging

²¹ *Samatva* is used, for example, in 12.313.37. The alternative *samatā* is also used in some passages.

brahman. The sixth chapter will observe that there are two separate discourses in the *Mahābhārata* and other early textual sources – one on an *āśrama* of renunciation and another one on yoga. This suggests that the practice of yogic meditation might not necessarily have been a part of the *śamatva*-centred image of a sage.

2.1. Regulations for renunciators in the Brahmanical tradition

The introduction explained that in this thesis the phrase “ascetic teachings” primarily refers to ideas, practices, and aspirations that are associated with wandering mendicants, known variously as *bhikṣus*, *parivrājakas*, *munis*, and so on. The lifestyle of these renunciators came to be classified in the Brahmanical tradition as one among four *āśramas*, or “life patterns” (Olivelle 1993). As noted above, Olivelle has demonstrated that this system underwent a change from an original model of a free choice of any of the four *āśramas* to the classical system of four *āśramas* to be followed in a sequence (1993). The third *āśrama*, that of the forest dweller (*vanaprastha*), is also often called “ascetic”, but it is usually preoccupied with physical asceticism (*tapas*) and sacrifice, neither of which makes a strong mark, if any, on the more mentally-oriented ascetic teachings discussed in this thesis²². This chapter will explore the main trends in the early Brahmanical discourse on the mendicants who belong to the fourth *āśrama*. This will provide a point of reference for the subsequent chapters which will explore the contexts in which similar teachings are presented to householder kings.

²² On the differences and possibly different origins of these two lifestyles see Bronkhorst 1993. For an overview of these two modes of life in the Brahmanical *dharma* literature see the chapter *Ascetics: vānaprastha, pravrajita* in Olivelle 2017. After reviewing the available evidence about the hermit, Olivelle concludes that ‘[a]ll this indicates a set of complex institutions and lifestyles that are placed within the category of hermit in the Dharmaśāstras’ (2017:238). The same could probably be said also about the *bhikṣu*.

The earliest Brahmanical sources that provide ascetic regulations for renunciators are the *Mahābhārata* and the Dharmasūtras – *Āpastamba*, *Gautama*, *Baudhāyana*²³, and *Vasiṣṭha*²⁴. To this list could be added the *Mānavadharmasāstra*. It is later than the Dharmasūtras, but its dating in relation to the *Mahābhārata* has been the subject of much controversy. I am not convinced by the view that the *Mānavadharmasāstra* predates all of the *Mahābhārata*²⁵. It seems more plausible that

²³ It should be noted that *Baudhāyana* has two passages on the renouncer (2.11.16-26 and 2.17.1-18.27), the second of which is clearly later and will therefore be ignored here. Olivelle suggests that it is 'probably not earlier than the 3rd to 4th centuries CE' (1999:xxx).

²⁴ The early Upaniṣads, especially *Chāndogya* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, are usually identified as the first Brahmanical texts to provide evidence for a liberation-oriented ascetic ideology. Unfortunately, the early Upaniṣads do not supply many specifics about renunciators and renunciation. Given the early date usually ascribed to the early Upaniṣads, some readers might still expect to find a more detailed discussion of these texts in a study of early Brahmanical asceticism. Such an expectation might be based upon problematic assumptions about the widespread availability and authority of these and other early Upaniṣads, even if they are indeed earlier than all or most of the *Mahābhārata*'s ascetic passages (see Bronkhorst 2007 for an alternative dating of the early Upaniṣads, placing them after the Buddha). As a starting point, it is possible to refer to Olivelle's study of the term *ānanda*, "bliss", which is an important theological concept in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Taittirīya* Upaniṣads and in the later Vedānta tradition. In this study Olivelle concludes that 'after the composition of the BU and the TU *ānanda* as an attribute of *brahman* and as signifying the final state of bliss remained a technical usage confined to a somewhat narrow circle' (1997:173). To arrive at this conclusion, Olivelle observes that despite its prominence in these two Upaniṣads, the term *ānanda* only becomes prominent later, 'at least from around the 5th century C.E.' (1997:153). Meanwhile, '[a]n examination of the non-Vedāntic literature shows that *sukha* was, in fact, the most common term for both ordinary and ultimate happiness. Besides the *Gītā* and the Buddhist and Jain literature, *sukha* is the preferred term for the bliss of the liberated state in Sāṃkhya-Yoga theology' (1997:172). Thus, Olivelle finds a terminological rupture between the early Upaniṣads and virtually all other extant early discourses on liberation in Ancient India, including those found in Brahmanical texts. The issue of *ānanda* vs. *sukha*, however, is just one example of the terminological and ideological proximity of *Mahābhārata*'s ascetic teachings and early Buddhism and Jainism. It is on this matter, too, that Winternitz provided an early insight almost a century ago writing that '[i]t is true, we find, the karman doctrine in two of the oldest Upaniṣads, the *Chāndogya* and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* where characteristically enough it is taught by a king to the Brāhmaṇa. But it is only in one of the latest Upaniṣads the *Maitrāyaṇīya* (...), in which we meet with all those pessimistic ideas which are so characteristic of ascetic poetry' (1923:5).

²⁵ Such a view has been expressed, most notably, by Olivelle. In 1993 he wrote that the *Mānavadharmasāstra* was 'certainly the earliest text to present the classical system' (p. 137). This would make all the *Mahābhārata* passages that mention the classical system later than the *Mānavadharmasāstra*. Olivelle expresses a similar opinion regarding the relative dating of these two texts in the more recent introduction to his critical edition and translation of the *Mānavadharmasāstra*: 'The references and citations collected by Hopkins, I think, make a compelling case that the author(s) of the epic knew of and drew upon material from the *MDh*. It is more likely, I think, that a narrative epic would draw on expert *sāstras* for its discussions of legal matters than the other way round' (2005:23). Yet such an opposition between an expert *sāstra* and the didactic materials contained in the *Śāntiparvan* does not seem very convincing. Moreover, dating all of the *Mahābhārata* as later than *Mānavadharmasāstra* seems to contradict Olivelle's own work on the development of the *āśrama* system. As he himself records (1993), several *Mahābhārata* passages present the original system. It would be reasonable to conclude that such *Mahābhārata* passages must be earlier than the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, which puts forth the classical system. The *Mahābhārata*'s ascetic passages that do not mention the *āśrama* system could be even earlier. Another issue with Olivelle's dating has already been noted by Bronkhorst. He observes that Olivelle accepts Hiltebeitel's dating of the *Mahābhārata* 'between the mid-second century BCE and the

these texts developed in parallel, with some of *Mahābhārata*'s didactic materials being earlier than *Mānavadharmaśāstra* but others being later (Bronkhorst 2012). I will argue below that the view of the fourth *āśrama* in particular appears to be more advanced in the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* than in the *Mahābhārata*.

The early Dharmasūtras are generally considered the oldest sources concerning Brahmanical renunciation, although some passages of the *Mahābhārata* may be as old – especially parts of 12.185 which has been identified as ‘a remnant of an old Dharmasūtra’ (Olivelle 1993:154).

This section will present the main features of the ideal descriptions of the mendicant in the *Mahābhārata*, quoting some passages at length. The Dharmasūtras and the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* will be discussed only briefly because they have received much more attention than the *Mahābhārata* passages on renunciation²⁶.

year zero’, but, at the same time ‘[t]he reference in some passages of the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* to gold coins, combined with the scholarly consensus that the minting of gold currency did not take place until the Kushanas, leads Olivelle to pushing forward the date of his text to the 2nd–3rd centuries CE’ (2012:136). Thus, ‘Olivelle’s proposals create a dilemma, which he does not further discuss’ (2012:136). Bronkhorst then proposes a different relationship between the *Mahābhārata* and *Mānavadharmaśāstra*, which is based on Fitzgerald’s understanding of the composition of the *Mahābhārata* in several stages rather than on Hildebrandt’s dating. This is what Bronkhorst writes: ‘Unfortunately Olivelle does not discuss in any detail the “references and citations collected by Hopkins”, and indeed, he draws a different conclusion from them than Hopkins himself. Hopkins (...) put the composition (he speaks rather of collation) of the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* “between the time when the bulk of the epic was composed and its final completion”. In terms of Fitzgerald’s understanding, this can be interpreted to mean “between the first written version (the ‘main *Mahābhārata*’), and the ‘Gupta version’” (Bronkhorst 2012:141). I find that this model of the relationship between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* is the most plausible one to have been articulated so far.

²⁶ The Dharmasūtras have received a critical translation by Olivelle and their sections on renunciation have been discussed, for example, by Bronkhorst (1998). The *Mānavadharmaśāstra* has also been edited and translated by Olivelle. Olivelle has also written a number of papers on renunciation in the Brahmanical tradition, several of which are collected in Olivelle 2011a, whereas some of Olivelle’s more recent writing on Brahmanical renunciation can be found in Olivelle 2017 and 2020. Nevertheless, as far as I am aware, Olivelle’s impressive list of publications on early Brahmanical renunciation usually draw on the Dharmasūtras and the Dharmaśāstras, without substantial engagement with the *Mahābhārata*. The same could be said of earlier studies of renunciation, such as Kane (1941). In one essay Olivelle even claims that ‘[w]ithin the Brahmanical tradition, nevertheless, the only surviving literature dealing with renunciation is embedded within the Dharmaśāstras’ (2011a:21). This, however, seems to contradict his reference to Winternitz’s work on the same page: ‘The epic *Mahābhārata*, likewise, contains similar fragments of ascetic literature’ (Winternitz 1923). For a phenomenological analysis of the renouncer’s experience in the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* see Ganeri 2017. Other studies deal with important later literature on renunciation. The *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads* have been

Each of the Dharmasūtras has a few *sūtras* on the renouncer, sometimes accompanied by a few verses, but the information they provide is rather scarce. The *Mahābhārata* provides more details, and it is therefore surprising that it has not really been used to gain a better understanding of the earliest ideal of renunciation in the Brahmanical tradition²⁷. The *Mānavadharmaśāstra* provides an account of renunciation that is longer than any of the *Mahābhārata* passages on its own and, as we will see, mentions practices and ideas that are not associated with renunciation in the *Mahābhārata*. This suggests that the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* provides a more developed understanding of renunciation, although it is possible that it is simply more comprehensive.

Some of the *Mahābhārata* passages selected for this overview of renunciation appear in a context enumerating several *āśramas*, and some follow the classical sequence of the four consecutive *āśramas*, placing the discussion of renunciation after a discussion of the *vanaprastha*. Others are independent discussions of the mendicant that still identify the topic as the *āśrama* of renunciation (e.g. *mokṣāśrama*, *kaivalyāśrama*, *brahmāśrama* or *kṣemāśrama*). Still other passages use one of the common terms for the mendicant (e.g. *bhikṣu*) without specifying that they are talking about an *āśrama*. Eventually, the *āśrama* of the mendicant became the last item in a system of four sequential *āśramas* (Olivelle 1993). This *āśrama* is now most commonly known as

studied by Sprockhoff (1976) and translated and introduced by Olivelle (1992). In their present form they appear to be later than the *Mahābhārata*. This is what Olivelle says about the dating of the earliest texts within that group of *Upaniṣads*: ‘The earliest date to which these texts in their present form can be assigned is the first few centuries of, rather than before, the common era. It is possible, of course, that sections of these composite documents belong to an earlier period’ (1992:10). For a study of renunciation in medieval times see Olivelle 1986-7. Thus, none of the major studies of renunciation has substantially engaged with the *Mahābhārata*.

²⁷ For example, the *Mahābhārata* is not even mentioned in a section called “Texts on Renunciation” in the recently published book chapter “The Early History of Renunciation” (Olivelle 2020) and, apart from a brief discussion of the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Mahābhārata* plays little role in other parts of that essay. See also the previous footnote.

*saṃnyāsa*²⁸ but a range of other terms are more commonly used in the Dharmasūtras and the *Mahābhārata*. For example, the *Āpastamba* uses the term *mauna*, “pertaining to *muni* (sage)”.

To initiate the discussion, I quote below a description of the fourth *āśrama* from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. It is introduced as ‘conduct of renouncers’ (*parivrājakānāṃ ācāra*; 12.185.3A) and called *mokṣāśrama* in a verse quoted at the end of the description. This description comes from a prose passage, mentioned above as a possible remnant of an ancient Dharmasūtra:

Having released the bonds to fire, wealth, wife, and servants²⁹ (*paribarha*) and having shaken off their own bonds of love they wander about. They perceive a lump of earth, a stone, and gold to be the same, their mind is not attached to the three undertakings [of *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma*]; they treat equally their enemies, friends, and neutrals. With their speech, mind, and action they do not hurt beings that are eternal [i.e., unborn], born from a womb, born from eggs, born from sweat, or beings that arise by germination³⁰. Being without a house they frequent mountains, riverbanks (*pulina*), roots of trees, and temples of deities. If they go to stay in a town or a village they [are allowed to] stay [up to] five nights in a town and a single night in a village.

*vimucyāgnidhanakalatraparibarhasaṅgān ātmanaḥ snehapāśān
avadhūya parivrajanti samaloṣṭāśmakāñcanās trivargapravṛtteṣv ārambheṣv
asaktabuddhayo 'rimitrodāsīneṣu tulyavṛttayaḥ
sthāvarajarāyujāṇḍajasvedajodbhijjānāṃ bhūtānāṃ vāṇmanaḥkarmabhir
anabhidrohiṇo 'niketāḥ parvatapulīnavṛkṣamūladevatāyatanāny anucaranto
vāsārtham upeyur nagaram grāmaṃ vā nagare pañcarātrikā grāmaikarātrikāḥ
(12.185.3B)*

This passage touches upon several key features that are recurring throughout descriptions of the mendicant.

²⁸ On the semantic history of this term see Olivelle 1981.

²⁹ The term *paribarha* occurs just a handful of times in the *Mahābhārata*, so its exact meaning and connotations are not entirely clear to me. In 3.248.7 *paribarha* apparently refers to the retinue of the king, and is accordingly translated by Van Buitenen as “retinue”. In a more general context, *paribarha* could refer to the attendants, i.e. servants, of the householder.

³⁰ A similar albeit more detailed classification of beings depending on their means of coming into being is found at the beginning of the sixth unit of the Jaina *Āyaraṅga*. Jacobi, no doubt relying on the commentaries, translates the Prakrit *ubbhiyā* as ‘from sprouts (as butterflies, wagtails, &c.)’ (1895). It is more likely that both Sanskrit *udbhija* and Prakrit *ubbhiyā* refer to plants, as they would otherwise be left out of both schemes.

First, it claims that the renouncer cultivates radical indifference (*samatva*). The specific compound used, *samaloṣṭāśmakāñcana*, and its variant *samaloṣṭakāñcana*, will be encountered in subsequent chapters, and its Middle-Indic variants are known in the Buddhist and Jaina traditions, although not in the texts that are commonly considered to be the earliest³¹. Another common way of introducing the indifference of the sage is to list the pairs of opposites that he is indifferent towards.

Second, this passage introduces an ethical dimension by advocating equanimity towards all and abstaining from hurting anyone.

Third, it lists the possible abodes of a renouncer. The same themes, with some variation, appear in other descriptions of the fourth *āśrama* in the *Mahābhārata*.

Other prescriptions for renunciation normally regulate not just the dwelling place of the renouncer, but also his or her³² eating and clothing. For example, according to *Āpastamba*, the

³¹ For example, the *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* records that *samaloṣṭakāñcana* is a stock epithet of *arhats* (liberated sages) in the entry on *vāśicandanakalpa*. This usage, however, seems to be common only in such Sanskrit(ised) works as the *Divyāvadāna* and the *Avadānaśataka*, for I was able to find just one occurrence of this compound in the *Mahāvastu* (3.328, where it is spelled as *samaleṣṭukāñcana*) and none in the Pali canon. The compound *samaleṣṭhukancaṇa* is found in the Jaina *Aupapātika* (§29), but I could not find it in the works that are conventionally believed to be the earliest Jaina scriptures such as the *Āyāraṅga* and the *Uttarajhāyā*. (Incidentally, the same paragraph of the *Aupapātika* is the only other passage known to me that mentions the specific practice or rule of staying ‘five nights in a town and a single night in a village’). See also Norman 1993 who mentions *samaloṣṭakāñcana* among other terms shared by the Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jaina traditions.

³² It is unclear to what extent renunciation was available for women. The available evidence has been helpfully summarised by Olivelle (2020). He first notes that ‘[w]e know from Buddhist and Jain texts and from archaeological and inscriptional sources the existence of orders of Buddhist and Jain nuns’ (2020:117). Turning to the Brahmanical tradition he says that ‘[t]he issue is less clear in the case of the Brahmanical tradition. Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra* (1.12.4), although from a later date (around the first century CE), provides clear evidence of Brāhmaṇa women who have become wandering ascetics (*parivrājikā*) and have been recruited into the secret service. The *Mahābhārata* contains several references to both female renunciators and female hermits (...). The most celebrated of such female renunciators is Sulabhā’ (2020:117). Sulabhā, whose conversation with king Janaka will be discussed in chapter 7, might in fact be the only proper female renouncer in the *Mahābhārata*, whereas all the other references supplied by Olivelle are to female forest hermits. As far as Brahmanical theology is concerned, ‘[i]n the original *āśrama* system where Vedic initiation is the prerequisite for choosing an *āśrama*, including renunciation, the inability of women to undergo initiation would implicitly bar them from any ascetic mode of life, including renunciation. Yet there are theological voices offering different opinions’ (Olivelle 2020:118).

renouncer wears discarded clothes or no clothes at all (2.21.11-12). Sometimes the hairstyle of the renouncer is regulated (e.g. *Gautama* 3.24.22, *Baudhāyana* 2.11.18). All the Dharmasūtras listed above have something to say about clothing although various opinions are expressed. The *Mahābhārata* 12.237.7, which is a longer verse description of the fourth *āśrama*, specifies that the garments of a *bhikṣu* has to be “bad” (*kucela*).

All the descriptions of the mendicant agree that he obtains food by begging, as the literal meaning of the term *bhikṣu* (“desiring a share”) suggests. Some further regulation of eating is introduced, for example, in *Mahābhārata* 12.237.6 which states that a sage (*muni*) ‘eats lightly, regulating his food intake, and eating only once a day’ (*laghvāśi niyatāhāraḥ sakṛd annaniṣevitā* 12.237.6).

It appears that the lodgings appropriate to the renouncer were an especially important topic. The lodgings are often mentioned even in the shortest descriptions of the renouncer in one or two verses. The practice of *ṛkṣamūla*, sleeping at a “root” of a tree, appears in the majority of the *Mahābhārata* passages that describe the renouncer. This suggests that *ṛkṣamūla*, which is absent in the descriptions of the renouncer in all the Dharmasūtras but *Vasiṣṭha*³³, became central to the image of the renouncer during the time of composition of the *Mahābhārata*³⁴.

³³ To be more precise, this term also appears in the *Baudhāyana* section on renunciation which appears to be from a much later date. There is, however, a notable occurrence of *ṛkṣamūla* in the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* in a passage which prescribes wandering mendicancy as atonement for performing an abortion (1.29). This illustrates that adopting such a lifestyle was used in the Brahmanical tradition not just for soteriological purposes.

³⁴ It should be noted that in a few *Mahābhārata* passages *ṛkṣamūla* appears in connection with the other type of ascetic – the *vanaprastha/tapasvin* (1.101.1-3; 2.16.23; 3.38.31; 15.33.37).

2.2. Ascetic regulations in the Buddhist tradition

Before discussing other *Mahābhārata* passages in more detail, it will be worthwhile to briefly consider ascetic regulations known in the Buddhist tradition. This will situate the Brahmanical regulations in a broader context by demonstrating that the Buddhist regulations are equally interested in the dwelling place, clothing, and abode of the renouncer.

There are a few lists of ascetic regulations in the Indian Buddhist literature.

One of these is the four *niśrayas* (“supports”) ‘which a Buddhist monk needs and is allowed’ (*Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* on *niśraya*). These are: (1) sleeping at the root of a tree (*vrkṣamūla*); (2) begging for food (*piṇḍapāta*); (3) wearing refuse-rags (*pāṃsukūla*), and (4) using only cows urine for medicine (*pūtimuktabhaiṣajya*³⁵) (see *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* on *niśraya* which also observes that ‘the same four [are found] in Pali (*nissaya*)’).

The Buddhist traditions knows of a parallel list of the four *āryavaṃśas* (*ariyavaṃsas* in Pali). The first three are being content with (1) almsfood (*piṇḍapāta*), (2) monk’s robe (*cīvara*), and (3) lodgings (*śayanāśana*). The fourth item varies by text and is either ‘contentment with any medicine’ (Nattier 2003:129) or ‘delighting in cutting off and cultivation’ (Nattier 2003:129; see also Ray 1994:294; cf. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* entry on *āryavaṃśa*).

There is a third list of ascetic regulations which is more prominent in Mahāyāna texts and in post-canonical Pali literature – the 12 (Mahāyāna) or 13 (Pali) *dhūtaguṇas* (also spelled as *dhutaguṇa*; Pali *dhūtaṅga*). These are largely an expansion of the four-member lists just discussed

³⁵ The precise interpretation of the last item is controversial. According to the *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, the understanding of *pūtimutta* in Pali *Vinaya* as parallel to Sanskrit *mūtra* (urine) ‘is prob. a late and secondary interpretation’, and the term rather means ‘a medicinal decoction’ (entry on *pūtimukta*). What is clear is that the last item of the list regulates the permitted forms of medicine (*bhaiṣajya*) but this regulation finds no counterpart in the *Mahābhārata*.

– they also regulate the dwelling place, clothing, and eating of the ascetic, and include such items as *vr̥kṣamūla*. The *dhūtaguṇas* have been studied by Ray (1994:Chapter 9) and Dantinne (1991).

There is significant overlap between the Buddhist and Brahmanical ascetic codes discussed in this chapter. They share the same concern with regulating food, clothing, and sleeping place, to which the Buddhist tradition adds an interest in medicine. Some of the specific terms and practices are also recurrent, most notably the *vr̥kṣamūla*. The image of the Brahmanical ascetic in the fourth *āśrama* is therefore not very different from the image of a Buddhist sage. I have been unable to find in the *Mahābhārata* any major differences or any clear sectarian marks that would distinguish between Brahmanical and Buddhist or other *bhikṣus*. Quite another question is the extent to which early Buddhist communities actually engaged in the practices codified in the lists mentioned above. Although they appear in various sources ranging from the *Suttanipāta* and early Mahāyāna *sūtras* to later compendiums (such as the *Visuddhimagga*) their presence in early Buddhist literature is rather sporadic. Ray has argued that the four *nīśrayas* and similar regulations pertain to the lifestyle of ‘early forest renunciants’ who were presumably the earliest Buddhist communities and who were preoccupied mainly with the practice of meditation in contrast to the more scholastic monastic establishment (Ray 1994:294). According to this thesis, such ascetic regulations as *vr̥kṣamūla* preserve the earliest, pre-monastic Buddhist ideal of a homeless wanderer that has been downplayed by the monastic establishment.

2.3. The essential features of the renouncer in the *Mahābhārata*

Returning to the *Mahābhārata*, I am now going to quote some of the shortest accounts of the renouncer in the *Mahābhārata* in order to discern which aspects of renunciation were considered to be the most essential or emblematic.

Here is a short description of the renouncer in just two verses:

A disciplined sage whose senses have been conquered should lie down wherever he happens to be after sunset, live without fire or house, and subsist just on what he gets. A sage should be without expectation (*nirāśis*)³⁶, perceive everything in the same way, being without enjoyment and imperturbable (*nirvikāravān*)³⁷. Arrived in the life pattern of peace (*kṣemāśrama*)³⁸ he obtains the same nature as the imperishable.

yatrāstamitaśāyī syān niragnir aniketanaḥ
yathopalabdhajīvī syān munir dānto jitendriyaḥ (12.61.8)
nirāśiḥ syāt sarvasamo nirbhogo nirvikāravān
vipraḥ kṣemāśramaṃ prāpto gacchaty akṣarasātmatām (12.61.9)

Here is one of the shortest descriptions of the fourth āśrama in the *Mahābhārata*, which consists of just a single line: ‘He should live in the āśrama of *brahman*, being free from dualities and from passion’ (*nirdvaṃdvo vītarāgātmā brahmāśramapade vaset* 12.313.19cd).

Here is a summary of the essential marks (*lakṣaṇa*) of a *bhikṣu* in a single verse:

A begging bowl, [sleeping at] the roots of trees, bad garment, being without companions, equanimity to all beings – these are the marks of a mendicant.

kapālaṃ vṛkṣamūlāni kucelam asahāyatā
upekṣā sarvabhūtānām etāvad bhikṣulakṣaṇam³⁹ (12.237.7)

³⁶ Olivelle translates this term as “without benediction” in his translation of *Gautama* 3.24.16 (1999:83). While it seems a plausible translation in the description of begging in *Gautama* and is certainly reasonable here, I believe that in this string of adjectives “being without expectation” is even more appropriate. Elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* we find statements such as ‘being without expectation is the supreme bliss’ (*nairāśyaṃ paramaṃ sukham* 12.168.52). I believe that “being without expectation” would be the best translation of this term in some other *Mahābhārata* passages. See, for example, 12.316.14: *sarvārambhaphalatyāgī nirāśīr niṣparigrahaḥ/ yena sarvaṃ parityaktaṃ sa vidvān sa ca paṇḍitaḥ*/. It, therefore, appears that *nirāśis* has two common meanings in the early Brahmanical ascetic literature.

³⁷ *Nirvikāravān* literally means “not having transformation”. I believe that in this context describing the sage as ‘*nirvikāravān*’ is just another way of expressing his imperturbability. This is supported by the phrase *siddhyasiddhyor nirvikāraḥ* in *Bhagavadgītā* 18.26, where *nirvikāra* is used with a pair of opposites like the words *sama* or *tulya* elsewhere. Cf. *Mahābhārata* 13.20.52 where the adjective *nirvikāra* is applied to a sage (*rṣi*) who is like a wall of wood (*kāṣṭhakudyopama*). There *nirvikāra* seems to mean physically immobile. Yet such forms of physical asceticism would usually be associated with the *vanaprastha* rather than the mendicant.

³⁸ Although “bliss” is not the standard translation of *kṣema*, I believe that Olivelle may be right when he translates *kṣema* as bliss in *Āpastamba* 2.22.14, where it apparently describes the result of renunciation (1999:65). Therefore, an alternative translation of *kṣemāśrama* would be the “āśrama of bliss”.

³⁹ Cf. *Mānavadharmaśāstra* 6.44: *kapālaṃ vṛkṣamūlāni kucelam asahāyatā/ samatā caiva sarvasmīn etan muktasya lakṣaṇam*/.

The same *adhyāya* ends with another definition⁴⁰ of a beggar, here termed *bhikṣuka*:

He is a *bhikṣuka* who wanders as it were indifferent, without anger or delusion, perceiving a lump of earth and gold as equal, his grief removed, without alliance or enmity (*gatasamdhivigraha*)⁴¹, free from praise or blame and free from the [concepts of] agreeable and disagreeable.

*aroṣamohaḥ samaloṣṭakāñcanaḥ; prahīṇaśoko gatasamdhivigrahaḥ
apetanindāstutir apriyāpriyaś; carann udāsīnavad eṣa bhikṣukaḥ* (12.237.36)

The repeated mention of radical equanimity (*sarvasama*, *upekṣā sarvabhūtānām*, *samaloṣṭāśmakāñcana*, etc.), even in the shortest descriptions of the renouncer suggests that this attitude was seen as essential to the renouncer as described in the *Mahābhārata*. This attitude of equanimity is often expressed in relation to pairs of opposites. We have seen the term *nirdvaṃdva*, “free from duality”, but numerous other passages from the *Mahābhārata* list specific pairs of opposites that should leave the sage unaffected, such as pleasure and pain (*sukha* and *duḥkha*), gain and loss (*lābha* and *alābha*), agreeable and disagreeable (*priya* and *apriya*), life and death (*jīvita* and *maraṇa*), and praise and blame (*stuti* and *nindā*)⁴².

We also learn from the passages quoted above that the cultivation of the mental attitudes of equanimity and freedom from duality is usually associated with adopting a particular lifestyle in which the dwelling place, clothing, and eating are regulated. In the third part of the thesis we will see that there are several passages in the *Śāntiparvan* where a similar equanimity-focused

⁴⁰ It is not surprising to find two different definitions of *bhikṣu* in the same *adhyāya*. *Mahābhārata* 12.237 has parallels with other *Mahābhārata* passages and the description of the fourth *āśrama* in the *Mānavadharmaśāstra*. This and other features, such as the change of meter and the use of the refrain *taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ* in some verses, suggest to me that it is a loose collection of some widely-circulated verses about renunciation.

⁴¹ In the *Mahābhārata* the equanimity of the renouncer is sometimes expressed using political terminology. Here we have a reference to *samdhivigraha*, “alliance and enmity”, which appears several times in the royal instructions of the *Śāntiparvan*. In 12.185.3A, quoted above, we saw that the sage should treat equally enemies, allies, and neutrals (*arimitrodāsina*). These categories also seem to stem from political vocabulary, and the same compound with a different order of its members is used in the *rājadharmā* section of the *Śāntiparvan* (see *udāsīnārimitra* in, for example, 12.87.21).

⁴² See e.g. 12.152.31.; 12.215.5.; 12.237.36; 12.269.3; 12.277.37.

understanding of liberation is preached to or by householder kings. For example, king Janaka will himself claim to be *samaloṣṭāśmakāñcana* even while being a householder (chapter 7). Thus, this particular understanding of *samatva* as central to liberation not only underlies the dharmasāstric descriptions of the renouncer but also informs different kinds of discourse in which theological ideas are explored in a narrative setting.

The consistency with which the renouncer is described with reference to *samatva* in the *Mahābhārata* suggests that this might have been the earliest renunciatory ideal to gain prominence in Brahmanical literature. The prominence of *samatva* as central to an early ideal of renunciation has not been pointed out in previous studies of Brahmanical renunciation. The ideal of *samatva* is only briefly mentioned by Kane as characteristic of the *paramahansa* renouncer. *Paramahansa* is the highest type of renouncer in a fourfold classification of renouncers which becomes prominent by the medieval period. Such classification is altogether absent in the *Śāntiparvan* but appears once in the most likely later *Anuśāsanaparvan* (13.129.29). *Mahābhārata*'s image of the renouncer is indeed very close to the description of the *paramahansa* renouncer in the *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads* such as in the *Paramahansa Upaniṣad* and *Jābāla Upaniṣad*. There are only a few differences – some, but not all, passages in the *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads* say that the *paramahansa* is naked. This is not typical of the renouncer in the *Mahābhārata*, who was in one passage said to be *kucela*, “using bad clothes”. A more notable difference is found in the claim that the *paramahansa* acts like a madman, which is also not typical of the *Mahābhārata*, although this practice is prescribed by the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra*. In terms of that fourfold classification of renouncers, all of *Mahābhārata*'s renouncers discussed in this chapter would be *paramahansas*, keeping in mind the minor differences mentioned above.

An important difference between the *paramahāṃsas* and the other three types of renunciators is that the latter wear the sacred thread, thus displaying their affiliation to the Vedic tradition. It seems plausible that the fourfold classification of renunciators is partly related to the gradual integration of renunciation in the Vedic tradition⁴³. A complete rejection of Vedic practices and insignia, which is characteristic of the early ideal of renunciation, becomes relegated to the highest type of renouncer, now termed *paramahāṃsa*. It is said about '*paramahāṃsa* yogins' that '[t]he way of Paramahāṃsas is extremely rare in the world and not at all common' (Olivelle's translation from the *Paramahāṃsa Upaniṣad*, 1992:137; the translated section is marked with the number 45).

A similar language is also found in several passages of the *Bhagavadgītā*. For example, in 6.8 the meditating yogin is said to be *samaloṣṭāśmakāñcana*. Although the *Bhagavadgītā* does not mention the *āśrama* system at any point, this passage suggests that such a yogin leads a lifestyle not very different from attributed to the *āśrama* of renunciation. He is a solitary renouncer - alone (*ekākin*) and without property (*aparigraha*; 6.10). Another good example of terms elsewhere related to the renouncer's *āśrama* is found in the rather short 12th chapter, which presents a string of verses ending in a refrain in the fourth *pāda*. The refrain allows for some variation, but usually ends with the words 'he is dear to me' (*sa me priyaḥ*). The usage of the refrain as well as the content of these verses remind one of other such collections of ascetic verses that define the true *brāhmaṇa*, the true *śramaṇa*, the true *bhikṣu*, and so on. This *Bhagavadgītā* passage from its 12th chapter repeats most of the terms and ideas associated with the mental outlook of the renouncer seen in the passages

⁴³ Cf. Olivelle 1992:100: 'These different and sometimes conflicting classifications of renunciators point to the original variety of ascetic life-styles that, as I have already observed, were conflated into the single institution of *saṃnyāsa* by Brāhmaṇical theology.'

quoted above – he is equanimous (*udāsīna*), equal towards friend and foe (*samaḥ śatrau ca mitre*), holds praise and blame as equal (*tulyanindāstuti*), and so on. Surprisingly, however, he is also homeless (*aniketa*). Thus, although the *Bhagavadgītā* is famous for its supposedly householder-oriented teachings of carrying out one’s own duty (*svadharma*) while not longing for the results of one’s actions, we find that it does hint at a renunciate lifestyle in some passages that show an especially close terminological affinity to descriptions of the *āśrama* of the renouncer.⁴⁴ Having surveyed other ascetic passages from the *Mahābhārata*, it becomes possible to identify the image of the equanimous homeless sage as one of the currents that contributes to this complex and multifaceted text.

2.4. What does a renouncer do?

In the passages quoted above the renouncer is not described as *practicing* anything. He always already has the mental states of equanimity and being beyond the pairs of opposites. Thus, the *Mahābhārata* does not here present any substantial distinction between the path and the goal.

There are some other passages that can be considered for a better understanding of the ideal of the indifferent sage. The *Śāntiparvan* records a number of conversations between a sage who is

⁴⁴ Another example is the 14th chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, which also repeats the stock epithets that exemplify the *samatva* of the renouncer, such as *samaloṣṭāśmakāñcana* (14.24). Here, too, we find an indication of a renunciate lifestyle, since the same accomplished person is also *sarvārambhaparityāgin*, that is, ‘he gives up all undertakings’ (14.25). This is in apparent contradiction to *Bhagavadgītā*’s *karmayoga* doctrine, which urges Arjuna to give up the results of his actions rather than actions themselves. This ascetic tendency of the *Bhagavadgītā* has not been properly examined in recent scholarship. The most significant recent major study of the *Bhagavadgītā* is Malinar’s detailed chapter-by-chapter commentary of the *Bhagavadgītā*. While the commentary covers every chapter, it deals with individual verses and statements of the *Bhagavadgītā* selectively and avoids commenting on the statements that appear to be promoting an ascetic lifestyle. For example, Malinar offers no comment on the difficult verse 6.3., which claims that ‘[f]or a sage who is desirous to ascend [to yoga], action is said to be the means. When he has ascended to yoga, the cessation of that very [action] is said to be the means’ (*āruṇakṣor muner yogaṃ karma kāraṇam ucyate/ yogārūḍhasya tasyaiva śamaḥ kāraṇam ucyate* // 6.3). Noticing the renunciate vocabulary of chapter 12, however, Malinar notes that ‘[d]ifferent ascetic life-styles and virtues are turned into elements of devotion to Kṛṣṇa’ (2007b:191).

characterised by equanimity and a person curious about reaching a similar state. Some of these will be discussed in more detail below, but it will be helpful to sketch some of the main themes here.

The imperturbable sages of the *Śāntiparvan* do not claim to be in pursuit of any further goal, nor do they usually recommend their interlocutors to practice any meditative techniques (*dhyāna*) or physical asceticism (*tapas*). Rather, they already experience *sukha*, “bliss”⁴⁵, in this life, here and now⁴⁶. A significant feature of this ascetic *sukha* is that it is attained here and now. This is demonstrated by the frequent usage of the present tense when describing this or that accomplished person. The ascetic poetry of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* is full of statements such as ‘she sleeps blissfully’ (*sukhaṃ svapiti*; 12.168.52), ‘I am happy’ (*ahaṃ sukhī*; 12.171.52), and so forth. Such language about *sukha* is characteristic of passages about sages that share the states of *śamatva* and equanimity with the renouncer belonging to the fourth *āśrama*, although the term *sukha* does not

⁴⁵ It is sometimes said that there is a difference between *ānanda* and *sukha*, so that only *ānanda* means “bliss” whereas *sukha* has a more mundane meaning such as “happiness”. I have already referred to Olivelle’s study of the term *ānanda*, which concludes that the term *ānanda* was initially limited to a few Upaniṣads (2011a). Although the word *sukha* sometimes means simply “happiness” or “wellbeing”, in the *Mahābhārata* and the Buddhist and Jaina literatures it is also used similarly to *ānanda* to refer to the bliss experienced by people who have reached *nirvāṇa*, *mokṣa*, or unity with *brahman*. As a footnote, it may be added that the Vedānta thinker Śaṅkara quotes a *Mahābhārata* verse about *sukha* when commenting upon the word *ānanda* in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* Upaniṣad 4.3.33. The particular verse will be translated and discussed in chapter 4. The verse talks about *trṣṇākṣayasukha*, “the bliss which [results] from the destruction of craving” (*trṣṇākṣaya* being a stock Buddhist epithet for *nirvāṇa*). Śaṅkara uses this verse to claim that reaching the highest *ānanda* is linked to being without craving (*vitṛṣṇa*). Thus, rather than there being a clear distinction between *ānanda* and *sukha*, the *sukha* of the early ascetic traditions informs the understanding of *ānanda* in at least some of the Vedānta tradition, which is the main source for the theology of *ānanda*.

⁴⁶ This is in contrast to a prevalent belief that in the Brahmanical tradition liberation takes place at death. For example, in a recent publication Jason Birch defines *jīvanmukti*, “liberation while living”, as an unorthodox position in the Brahmanical tradition: “That is to say, the yogin remains alive after liberation, as opposed to being liberated at death, which was the default position, as it were, of Vedic Brahmanical religions” (Birch 2020). See also Wynne’s gloss of *mokṣa* at the end of his partial translation of the Vulgate text of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*: “Liberation,” i.e. release or spiritual salvation. The basic concept of liberation in the *Mokṣadharma* is that a person escapes from reincarnation through realising his true nature (the *ātman*). The liberated condition that such a person achieves after death is the unmanifest state of *brahman*’ (Wynne 2009:568). While it is certainly possible to find passages that correspond to Wynne’s “basic concept of liberation”, there are many passages in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* that do not explicitly link liberation with death. See especially chapter 7 of this thesis for one particular ideal of *jīvanmukti* in the *Mahābhārata*.

characterise the latter in any of the passages quoted above. I will return to the concept of *sukha* in chapter 4.

When somebody asks them how they reached such a state of imperturbability⁴⁷, the sages often respond by mentioning their understanding of certain facts about the world. This understanding is sometimes called *buddhi*. In the subsequent chapters we will see several examples of the ascetic usage of this term⁴⁸. In Sāṃkhya philosophy *buddhi*, usually translated as “intellect”, denotes one of the mental organs of a person. The general ascetic passages of the *Mahābhārata* do not appear to be closely related to Sāṃkhya philosophy and, accordingly, *buddhi* does not there have the Sāṃkhya-specific technical meaning⁴⁹. Some sages of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* use the term *buddhi* to refer to understanding certain truths about how the world works. Typically, having such an “ascetic” *buddhi* means being aware about the impermanence of everything that exists, inevitability of death, and the helplessness of a man in regard to the vicissitudes of fate⁵⁰. A wise person should accept such truths as beyond his or her control and not spend any time worrying

⁴⁷ See, for example, the dialogue between Nārada and Samaṅga (12.275). Nārada observes that Samaṅga seems ‘as it were constantly with a delighted mind and without sadness’ (*saṃprahr̥ṣṭamanā nityaṃ viśoka iva*) and claims that he does not detect even the slightest agitation on the part of Samaṅga (*udvegaṃ neha te kiṃ cit susūkṣmam api lakṣaye*; 12.275.3-4). Rather similar is the opening of the dialogue between demon king Prahrāda and the sage Ājagara (12.172). Prahrāda, too, observes that Ājagara is ‘as it were always satisfied’ (*nityatṛpta iva*), and so on. In chapter 5 we will see that Prahrāda imparts somewhat similar wisdom to Indra when Indra wonders how Prahrāda manages not to grieve about losing sovereignty (12.215.11). This, in turn, is very similar to Indra’s dialogue with two other demons, Namuci and Bali who lose their sovereignty to Indra (12.219 for Namuci and both 12.216 and 12.220 for Bali), but do not grieve. What is common to all these “*itihāsa purātana*” is that a sage is approached based on his imperturbability and freedom from grief and that the sage does not really refer to any specific practices that were necessary to develop his wisdom.

⁴⁸ The specific term *buddhi*, however, is not necessarily prominent in all of the passages mentioned in the previous footnote. For example, in 12.215.33 Indra wonders by what means Prahrāda obtained that *prajñā* “wisdom”, which in turn leads to *śānti*, “peace”.

⁴⁹ For a study of the semantics of the term *buddhi* see Fitzgerald 2017. See also Fitzgerald 2015.

⁵⁰ All the passages mentioned in the previous footnote (i.e. 12.172; 12.215; 12.219; 12.220; 12.275) present some variation of this theme. For example, in 12.275.6 the sage Samaṅga says: ‘There are various outcomes in this world, therefore I do not despair’ (*loke phalāni citrāṇi tato na vimanā hy aham*).

about them. Some *Mahābhārata* passages that preach such a stoic form of *buddhi* will be discussed in the second part of this thesis.

Much of the language used in these *Mahābhārata* passages is paralleled in the Buddhist and Jaina literature. The latter know of a similar ideal of a sage who sleeps happily, etc. The theme of equanimity in regard to pairs of opposites or towards all beings is also known in the Buddhist and Jaina literatures⁵¹, although there it is considerably less prominent and at least in the earliest literature does not seem to be presented as the central attitude that characterises a sage.

Thus, despite, an abundance of shared terminology and imagery, ascetic teachings in the *Mahābhārata* complement the Buddhist and Jaina literatures by emphasising and developing certain themes to a greater extent. Besides adding a greater focus on *samatva*, the *Mahābhārata* also includes several passages that dwell on the topic of determinism. In chapter 4 we will see that such quasi-Stoic doctrines are found side by side with very Buddhistic verses in the *Senajidgītā*. While the ascetic literature in the *Mahābhārata* draws on a shared pool of terms, values, practices and verses, it would not be fair to say that it simply repeats what it is already familiar from the Buddhist and Jaina texts. The *Mahābhārata* and especially its *Mokṣadharmaparvan* contributes further details to the study of ascetic traditions of Ancient India.

⁵¹ Compare, for example, the phrase ‘equal towards all beings’ (*samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu*) from the *Mahābhārata* with its Prakrit paraphrase ‘*samo [...] savvabhūesu*’ from the Jaina *Uttarajhāyā* 19.89. The *Uttarajhāyā* also presents the phrase ‘he should wander around being equanimous [and] endure everything, be it pleasant or unpleasant’ (*uvehamāṇo u parivvaḍḍhā piyaṃ appiyaṃ savva titikkhaḍḍhā; Uttara 21.15*), which, however, has a particularly Jaina twist of portraying the sage as a hero (*vīra*) who endures (Sanskrit *titikṣ*) the opposites rather than being *sama* towards them. For a usage of *titikṣ* with a pair of opposites cf. *Bhagavadgītā* 2.14. For a similar theme in the Buddhist literature, see, for example, *Sutta Nipāta* 213, which claims that ‘the wise teach that a sage (*muni*) is not agitated by blame or praise’ (*nindāpasamāsasu avedhamānaṃ (...) dhīrā muniṇ vedayanti*).

2.5. The renouncer and *brahman*

In some instances the renouncer is said to reach the state or world of *brahman* (*brahmaloka*⁵², *brahmaṇaḥ padam*⁵³) or to become of the same nature as the imperishable (*akṣarasātmata*⁵⁴). In one instance the *āśrama* of the renouncer is called *brahmāśrama* (12.313.19). *Brahman* is conceived in several passages of the *mokṣadharmaparvan* as a beginningless, permanent, and unchanging principle. As such, it contrasts with the impermanence of the world as we experience it. One of the basic ideas underlying renunciation in the *Mahābhārata* and beyond therefore appears to be a search for an unchanging principle which would be a source of permanent happiness or bliss (*sukha*) in contrast to the ups and downs of ordinary human life⁵⁵. Although this is not really made explicit in the *Mahābhārata*, I understand that by adopting the attitude of *śamatva*, giving up violence, transcending the pairs of opposites, and aiming for a state of complete stability the renouncer approaches the state of *brahman* (*brahmaṇaḥ padam*) in this life. In one passage *brahman* is stated to be ‘free from duality’ (*nirdvaṇḍva*; 12.199.19), so that it seems fair to say that the renouncer, who also claims to be *nirdvaṇḍva*, approximates the state of *brahman*. The same could be said about the sage who is described as *nirvikāravant*. The imperturbability of the sage is similar to the unchanging state of *brahman*, and therefore the sage cannot be touched by any sorrow.

⁵² E.g. 12.185.6.

⁵³ E.g. 12.232.12.

⁵⁴ E.g. 12.61.9.

⁵⁵ For example, the Buddhist *Theragāthā* speaks about sages who “touch” the ‘imperishable state’ (*accutaṃ padam*; 212). Verse 725 of the same text speaks about “touching” ‘the unconditioned state of *nibbāna* (= Sanskrit *nirvāṇa*)’ (*nibbānapadaṃ asaṅkhatam*), whereas verse 525 informs us that those who reach the unconditioned state (*asaṅkhatam padam*) experience the highest bliss (*rati*, here used just like *sukha* in other passages).

2.6. The problem of the renouncer and yoga

All of the themes and a lot of the terminology discussed in the previous sections are also found in the *Mānavadharmasāstra*. Its treatment of the fourth *āśrama* recognises a similar ideal of renunciation and draws on a similar pool of concepts, phrases and even verses⁵⁶.

The *Mānavadharmasāstra* also introduces several topics that are absent from the discussions of the fourth *āśrama* in the *Mahābhārata* such as the prescription of *prāṇāyāma* (breath control) in 6.69-72. Most notably, in the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, the practice of yogic meditation becomes an essential part of the fourth *āśrama*⁵⁷. Not only does it prescribe *dhyānayoga* for the renouncer. Towards the end of the section on renunciation it claims that ‘everything that has been mentioned here is *dhyānika*’ (6.82; *dhyānikaṃ sarvaṃ evaitad yad etad abhiśabditam*). This could mean that all the ascetic regulations and practices depend on meditation or that they are conducive to meditation (*dhyāna*)⁵⁸.

In this light, the absence of terms like *dhyāna* or *yoga* in virtually all of the *Mahābhārata* passages dealing with renunciation is somewhat striking. The interpretation of this silence on the topic of meditation has implications for this thesis. In the following sections we will observe that many textual passages directed at householder kings do not mention meditation. When I started

⁵⁶ Some of the parallels are recorded in the critical apparatus of the *Mahābhārata*, but the apparatus of the critical edition of the *Mānavadharmasāstra* does not indicate its parallels with the *Mahābhārata*. I am not aware of any publication in which the parallels between the two texts would be laid down in an easily accessible manner. Looking at ten consecutive verses from the beginning of the description of the fourth *āśrama* (6.40-49) I was able to discover that all but one had at least one parallel in the *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. For *Mānavadharmasāstra* 6.40. cf. *Mahābhārata* 12.154.26; for 6.41. cf. 12.269.3.; for 6.42-3 cf. 12.237.4-5; for 6.44 cf. 12.237.7.; for 6.45 cf. 12.237.15; 6.46 – no parallel in the *Śāntiparvan*; for 6.47-8 cf. 12.269.6; for 6.49 cf. 12.317.30. In most instances the parallel consists of a shared *pāda* or two or three *pādas*, while the remaining *pādas* usually express a similar sentiment.

⁵⁷ The mental attitudes of the renouncer become preparatory to yogic meditation in some later texts. For example, the *Parākhyantra* specifies that yoga is practiced in a solitary location by a person who is free from dualities (*nīrdvandva*) and free from desires (*niḥsprha*) (14.3.).

⁵⁸ Cf. Olivelle’s translation: ‘Everything prescribed here is contingent on meditation’ (2005:152).

working on these passages, I assumed that this is a deliberate omission that should be understood as an attempt at making ascetic ideals more compatible with the busy schedule of the king or any other householder. If the absence of *dhyāna* in many descriptions of renunciation is taken at face value, it might have simply been the case that meditation was not initially understood to be a central practice for wandering mendicants who figure in the *Mahābhārata*.

To be sure, there are several discussions of yogic meditation in the *Mahābhārata*. Yet, for their part, none of the major discussions of yogic meditation in the *Śāntiparvan* explicitly situates this practice in relation to the fourth *āśrama*⁵⁹. A similar observation could be made about other early textual passages on yoga⁶⁰. Thus, there are still two different textual strands in the *Mahābhārata* and beyond – a discourse on yoga and a discourse on an *āśrama*, “a life pattern”, that is related to liberation. This situation has not been noted or explained in previous scholarship although Bronkhorst has already observed that ‘[t]he *Dharmasūtras* never use the word *yoga* in

⁵⁹ The main texts that focus on a practice that they themselves call *yoga* or *dhyānayoga* are 12.188, 12.289, 12.304; 12.232. The last two texts are related, as already noted by Brockington (2000:79). To these could be added the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, which expounds a similar technique of yogic meditation for perceiving the self (*ātman*). As noted above this part of the *Bhagavadgītā* does describe the yogin using terminology elsewhere associated with the 4th *āśrama* (e.g. *samaloṣṭāśmakāñcana*).

⁶⁰ The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, which provides what is possibly the earliest definition of yoga as a meditative discipline, does not link the practice of yoga with adopting the lifestyle of a renouncer. The *Āpastamba*, which has been identified as the earliest among the extant *Dharmasūtras* (Olivelle 1999), also includes a short discussion of yoga (1.22-23), which does not explicitly link this practice with any particular *āśrama*. It rather appears to do the opposite, as it proceeds to include yoga in a list of virtues and practices that ‘are agreed to be common to all *āśramas*’ (*sarvāśramāṇām samayapadāni tāni*; 1.23.6). In both *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* (4.2.22) and *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* (25.7 ff) the practice of yoga is prescribed under the topic of expiation (*prāyaścitta*), although in these passages yoga is understood to mean primarily retention of breath (*prāṇāyāma*) rather than *dhyāna*. Nevertheless, *Vasiṣṭha* does possibly hint at meditative yogic practices in its description of the renouncer, quoting a verse which mentions the ideal renouncer being *adhyātmacintāgatamānasa* – ‘with his mind devoted to reflecting on *adhyātma*’. On the meaning of *adhyātma* see note no. 3 in Fitzgerald 2017. He notes that it can mean “‘concerning, the self of person’” or ‘additionally, the word *adhyātma* is also used at time to refer to a superior (*adhi-*) or transcendent form of the *ātman*-principle’. Thus, the verse from the *Vasiṣṭha* may or may not be referring to yogic meditation on the *ātman*. Even if it does associate the renouncer with yogic meditation, this would not invalidate my argument that such an association is absent in the earliest literature, because of the late date ascribed to *Vasiṣṭha*. Olivelle finds that it must be the youngest of the *Dharmasūtras* (1999:xxxi) and says that he is ‘inclined to place *Vasiṣṭha* closer to the beginning of the common era, or even in the first century CE close to the beginning of the *Smṛti* era’ (1999:xxxiii).

connection with this *āśrama*, the *āśrama* of the wanderer (*parivrāja*)’ (Bronkhorst 2011:22). The evidence considered in this chapter shows that the same applies to the *Mahābhārata*.

A somewhat different interpretation of the evidence is offered by Olivelle:

The centrality of liberation also connects the institution [of renunciation] to the pursuit of knowledge, especially mystical knowledge associated with meditation and yoga. This is evident in the earliest Dharmasūtras. Āpastamba (2.21.13–2.21.14), for example, gives the opinion of some: “Abandoning truth and falsehood, pleasure and pain, the Vedas, this world and the next, he should seek the Self. When he gains insight (*buddhe*), he attains bliss.” (Olivelle 2017:241).

Although Āpastamba does not use the word “yoga” or any established term for meditation, Olivelle suggests that Āpastamba’s wording implies both. Unfortunately, this passage from Āpastamba, the earliest of Dharmasūtras, is rather cryptic. It is surely possible that *ātmānam anvicchet*, the underlying Sanskrit phrase for “should seek the Self”, refers to a meditative quest. And yet in the *Mahābhārata* this meditative quest is rather consistently designated by using some form of *paś*, “to see”, with *ātman* as an object. Moreover, neither of the *Mahābhārata* passages that are close to Āpastamba’s wording are any more explicit about a yogic or meditative path than Āpastamba itself⁶¹.

⁶¹ “*Ātmānam anvicchati*” appears in 12.212.44, and a later verse from the same passage mentions giving up pleasure and pain (*sukhaduḥkhe*; 12.212.49), which we also saw in Āpastamba. This is a very difficult passage, which has been claimed to reflect Buddhist (Motegi 1999), Sāṃkhya (Malinar 2017), and even materialist philosophies (Bronkhorst 2007:309–328), to name just the more recent publications. In either case, *Mahābhārata* 12.211–212, which forms a textual unit, does not use terms like *dhyāna* or yoga, or talk about a direct perception of the self. The injunction ‘seek your self’ (*ātmānam anviccha*) is also found in a verse which is given twice (with minor variation) in the *Mahābhārata* – 12.309.71 and 12.169.36 – but, again, neither of these discourses explores the topic of yogic meditation. There is some further similarity between 12.169 and the Āpastamba *Dharmasūtra*. Both refer to *kṣema*, both mention the pair *sukhaduḥkha*, and both call for a rejection of the Vedas. *Mahābhārata* 12.169 is known to have several parallels with Buddhist and Jaina texts (Winternitz 1923; Tokunaga 2001), and a part of the *Mahābhārata* verse which contains the phrase “*ātmānam anviccha*” occurs in the 14th chapter of the Jaina *Uttarajhāyā*. This chapter, too, calls for a rejection of the Vedas, or more specifically the Vedic injunction to obtain male offspring. This is probably what is meant by rejecting the Vedas in the Āpastamba as well, because it subscribes to the original formulation of the *āśrama* system in which renunciation proceeds straight from studentship, thereby avoiding becoming a householder and fulfilling Vedic injunctions. Just like Āpastamba, the discourse from the *Uttarajhāyā* uses the word *mauna* (Prakrit *mona*) to refer to renunciation and it does not mention yoga or meditation, at least not clearly. Its image of the sage is rather linked to the ideal of *samatva*:

The presence of these two discourses – on the fourth *āśrama* and on meditative yoga – leads to a methodological problem. One approach would be to seek a unified picture of early Brahmanical yoga by using some passages to fill in the gaps in other passages. Alternatively, one could adopt an analytical approach, which does not assume that there was a single early Brahmanical yoga, but rather that the *Śāntiparvan* records various approaches to liberation that are discussed separately in some cases and combined in other cases. I would favour the latter approach. Since the *Śāntiparvan* records radically different views on other topics, there is no reason to assume that it presents a single unified understanding of renunciation of liberation which just happens to be approached from different angles.

What I am suggesting then, is that the *Mahābhārata* records two separate ideas of reaching *brahman* or the highest good otherwise conceived. The first is concerned with attaining a state of equanimity and in particular holding the pairs of opposites to be the same, in what appears to be an attempt to approximate the ontological qualities of *brahman*. The second is labelled as yoga, and is concerned with using the technique of *dhyāna* (meditation) to still one's mind so that the *ātman* or *brahman* can shine forth in a moment of complete stillness. The reason for believing that these two ideals might have originally been separate is that they are mostly discussed in separate textual passages in the *Mahābhārata*. These two paradigms are combined in the presumably later account of the renouncer in the *Mānavadharmasāstra*. Although such an observation proves nothing about

'looking with indifference on gain and loss, on happiness and suffering, I shall lead the life of a monk' (*Uttarajhāyā* 14.32, trans. by Jacobi 1895). Such terminological and ideological affinities does not suggest that the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* or *Mahābhārata* 12.169 present a Jaina ideal of renunciation. The 14th chapter of the *Uttarajhāyā* is clearly a specimen of what Winternitz would call "general ascetic literature". What a close look at such passages reveals, is that these general and most probably early ascetic passages present an image of a sage that is based on *samatva* and overcoming desire rather than meditative insight into the true nature of the self. The notion of "seeking the self" or rather "desiring (*anu+iṣ*) the self" might also be understood as simply the opposite of desiring anything external and thereby a component of the ideal of the imperturbable sage who does not depend on external circumstances for his happiness.

the textual history of the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, it may still be valuable to point out that the “new ideas” are introduced only in the second part of *Mānavadharmasāstra*’s discourse on the renouncer, whereas the first part of that discourse shares many verses with the *Mahābhārata*. It is only in the *Mānavadharmasāstra* that the renouncer becomes explicitly associated with *prāṇāyāma* and yogic meditation, as well as with reciting the Vedas (see 6.83). The recitation of the Vedas is not a practice associated with the renouncer in the *Mahābhārata*, and, for example, the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* explicitly states that the renouncer gives up the Vedas (2.21.13)⁶².

Conclusion

The first sections of this chapter examined the ideal of renunciation in the *Mahābhārata*. The verses on the renouncer discuss aspects of his lifestyle that pertain to the dwelling place, eating, and clothing or visual appearance more generally. Central to his ideal of renunciation are certain mental states that are cultivated or possessed by the renouncer. These include equanimity (being *udāsīna* or *upekṣaka*) and holding certain pairs of opposites to be equal (*sama*). This latter attitude of *samatva* is often expressed in the *Mahābhārata* and beyond by the stock epithet *samaloṣṭāśmakāñcana*“ – one for whom a piece of earth, a stone, and gold are the same”. Observing the consistency with which the renouncer is described using such language, this chapter argued that *samatva* must have been the central attitude of early Brahmanical renunciators, at least according to the *Mahābhārata*. I further suggested that for some renunciators the attainment of these mental attitudes and state might have been understood to be a realisation of a state similar to

⁶² *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* claims, however, that a renouncer should only give up ritual activity, but not the Veda itself. As noted in the previous footnote, *Vasiṣṭha* is probably rather late. Its view on the renouncer and the Vedas is another feature which would bring it closer to the *Mānavadharmasāstra* rather than the earlier *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*.

brahman in this world. There is a close resemblance between the ideal of the imperturbable sage and *brahman* as the unchanging principle.

The same ideal of *samatva* and equanimity will appear in several of the textual passages that will be discussed in the following chapters. This chapter demonstrates that the cultivation or attainment of such states is associated with adopting the lifestyle of a wandering mendicant, which makes the association of such teachings with householder kings remarkable.

The evidence examined in this chapter suggests some trends in the development of the ideal of renunciation in the Brahmanical tradition. The main trend appears to be a gradual integration of renunciation in the Vedic tradition. The earliest Dharmasūtras as well as some notable passages from the *Mahābhārata* express serious doubts about the validity of renunciation as a dharmically sanctioned lifestyle or at least consider the householder to be the best *āśrama*⁶³. While the original *āśrama* system may be presented as the opinion of “some” and effectively a *pūrvapakṣa* to be rejected by Dharmasūtra authors (Olivelle 1993:83), the classical *āśrama* system is presented in texts such as *Mānavadharmaśāstra* as well-established, making renunciation at least theoretically incumbent upon virtuous twice-born. This is paralleled by a development in the image of the renouncer. The renouncer in the earliest sources does not seem to be very different from other *śramaṇas*, and seems to bear no special relationship to the ritual tradition of the Vedas. In later sources, we find that there are renouncers who recite the Vedas, perform the twilight worship (*saṃdhyā*), wear the sacred thread, and so on. The renouncer is rebranded from a *bhikṣu* to a *saṃnyāsin*, downplaying the similarities between the ideal descriptions of *bhikṣus* in the *Mahābhārata* and Buddhist literature. In one scheme of classification of renouncers, the typical

⁶³ See Olivelle 1993 on the debate about the scriptural validity of the *āśrama* system. Some of the key *Mahābhārata* passages that argue against the validity of renunciation will be discussed in chapter 3.

renouncer of the *Mahābhārata* becomes the *paramahansa*, the highest and most exalted kind of renouncer.

The sage in the fourth *āśrama* is not typically described as practicing anything. This agrees with the portrayal of imperturbable sages from other dialogues in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, though it should be noted these dialogues do not say anything about these sages belonging to a specific *āśrama*. Such sages experience *sukha*, “happiness” or “bliss”, in this life and describe their imperturbability with reference to their understanding (*buddhi*) of how the world works rather than as a result of any specific ascetic practice such as meditation.

The earliest accounts of a meditative practice called “yoga”, found in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* and the *Mahābhārata*, including the *Bhagavadgītā*, do not link the practice of yoga with an *āśrama* of renunciation. Meanwhile, the discussions of the fourth *āśrama* in the *Dharmasūtras* and the *Mahābhārata* do not mention meditation (*dhyāna*) as a chief preoccupation of the renouncer, nor do they conceptualise his practice as yoga. When yoga is mentioned in the earliest *Dharmasūtras*, it is not related to renunciation. It is only in the *Mānavadharmasāstra* that we find for the first time a clear statement that yoga of meditation (*dhyānayoga*) is *a* (or even *the*) central practice of the renouncer in the fourth *āśrama*. This raises some questions about the development of the ideal or ideals of the renouncer and yogin in early Brahmanical literature, but these cannot be fully tackled here. What matters for the present purposes is that there is a reason to believe that meditation was not necessarily believed to be an essential part of the path to liberation or sagehood. Therefore it is possible that the ascetic teachings for householder kings that will be discussed in parts 2 and 3 of this thesis fail to mention meditation not because they present a watered-down version of such teachings but because they are based on a different image of the sage. Such a sage is characterised

primarily by an attitude of *samatva* and overcoming of desire rather than a direct perception of his own real nature (*ātman*) by means of meditation.

3. Yudhiṣṭhira: Renouncer or householder?

This chapter seeks to understand where, how, and why the pursuit of *mokṣa* enters the plot of the *Mahābhārata*. It focuses on Yudhiṣṭhira who is, arguably, the main protagonist of the *Mahābhārata* and the recipient of the vast majority of the ascetic teachings included in the *Mahābhārata*.

The main part of this chapter (section 3.4.) deals with the opening of the *Śāntiparvan* (up to 12.38), which explores several arguments that pertain to kingship and asceticism and sets the scene for the ascetic teachings found in later parts of the *Śāntiparvan*. The early chapters of the *Śāntiparvan* have been recognised as a thematic unit by previous scholars, and Fitzgerald aptly calls this passage “the persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira” (Fitzgerald 2004:92). In a nutshell, the “persuasion” depicts how Yudhiṣṭhira’s brothers, sages, Kṛṣṇa, and Draupadī convince him to accept the kingdom he has won despite his grief and sense of guilt at the slaughter of his relatives and *gurus*. This is a particularly difficult episode because of the variety of positions expressed by Yudhiṣṭhira and his interlocutors. It is often difficult to understand what exactly is being argued for and, remarkably, what is being argued against. This conversation is important for the study of the history of ascetic ideas and practices for several reasons. First, one of the suggestions for Yudhiṣṭhira is that he should adopt the lifestyle of a mendicant, which is described in very similar terms to the descriptions of renunciation discussed above. Second, the characters that respond to him make several arguments about the suitability and legitimacy of renunciation generally as well as for a king in particular. Third, Yudhiṣṭhira’s grief is alleviated by citing a couple of ascetic discourses that are marked as

“*itihāsa purātana*” and belong to what was in the previous chapters called “ascetic literature”, following the terminology of Winternitz. A study of the pertinent parts of the “persuasion” will therefore provide a context for the study of ascetic teachings presented in the “persuasion” itself as well as later in the *Śāntiparvan*.

Before dealing with the “persuasion” itself, it will be necessary to discuss three other topics in the first three sections of this chapter. The first section discusses the practices of retreating to the forest and mendicancy. The second section discusses the ideal of controlling one’s passions in the *Mahābhārata*. The third section discusses the character of Yudhiṣṭhira and argues that he is hardly associated with ascetic values in the books that precede the *Śāntiparvan*. These three sections together will allow to appreciate that Yudhiṣṭhira’s interest in renunciation in *mokṣa* in the “persuasion” is unique within the larger framework of the *Mahābhārata*. Section four of this chapter will turn to a discussion of the “persuasion” itself. Sections five and six will discuss the terms *śrama*, *āśrama*, and *śramaṇa* in relation to the householder-centred ideology put forth in the “persuasion”. The sections four to six will argue that the “persuasion” is a relatively early document in the Brahmanical thinking about renunciation that raises the problem of the possible conflict between the *dharma*s of the king and the renouncer, but fails to give a satisfactory solution to this conflict.

3.1. Kings in the forest and as mendicants

The practices of kings retiring to the forest or becoming mendicants are depicted or contemplated as possibilities at several points in the narrative of the *Mahābhārata*. Nevertheless, in the books preceding the *Śāntiparvan* it is hardly possible to find any textual evidence that associates these practices with ascetic ideologies of the kind that have been introduced in the previous chapters of this thesis. A notable exception is a speech that king Pāṇḍu delivers in 1.110.

Pāṇḍu's speech, however, partly overlaps with one of Yudhiṣṭhira's speeches in the "persuasion" and therefore does not require a separate discussion (see 12.9, which is discussed in section 3.4. below).

Retirement to a forest or begging (*bhaukṣacarya*) have several functions throughout the *Mahābhārata*.

The most common reason for adopting a life in a forest or wilderness is to practice *tapas* – physical asceticism. While it is not impossible to cite *Mahābhārata* passages that attribute soteriological efficacy to *tapas*⁶⁴, in the vast majority of cases *tapas* is practiced in order to obtain a certain worldly benefit⁶⁵. Most commonly the result of *tapas* is a boon granted by a deity that is either impressed by the intensity of practice or concerned that the heat (*tapas*) produced by physical asceticism (*tapas*) might burn up the world. Additionally, *tapas* is included among such Brahmanical practices as sacrifice (*yajña*), and staying true to one's word (*satya*) that constitute (one version of) Brahmanical *dharma* and are believed to secure an afterlife in heaven⁶⁶. These three practices are typically associated with sages (*ṛṣis*). While for royal sages (*rājarṣis*⁶⁷) they secure an afterlife in heaven, for some Brahmanical sages, such as Nārada, they may also provide a freedom of movement between heaven and earth. As is well-known, the proponents of the ascetic traditions of Ancient India believe that the merit accumulated by such practices that collectively make (one

⁶⁴ *Tapas* also plays a major role in Jaina soteriology, where its role is to burn up the practitioner's old karma so that liberation becomes possible.

⁶⁵ As for the practice of *tapas* in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Brockington finds that 'throughout there is a noteworthy absence of *mokṣa* as a goal' (2000:49 and 2020:86). On *tapas* in the narrative parts of the *Mahābhārata* see Shee (1986).

⁶⁶ There are many listing of these and other Brahmanical virtues in the *Śāntiparvan*. See, for example, 12.12.16; 12.23.8; 12.98.5; 12.192.67.

⁶⁷ I am not aware of any studies of the term *rājarṣi*. My understanding of this term is that it refers to kings, mostly ancient but sometimes contemporary, who secure an afterlife in heaven by performing certain Brahmanical practices such as *yajña* (sacrifice), *dāna* (giving gifts to worthy recipients such as Brahmins), *tapas* (physical austerity), and *satya* (the vow of only speaking the truth). It is unfortunately not feasible to illustrate this characterisation with illustrations and references from the Sanskrit epics.

version of) specifically Brahmanical *dharma* is subject to exhaustion. Once one's merit is exhausted, one necessarily falls from heaven to a lower realm of existence. Thus both *tapas* and merit gained through good actions (*śubha karman*) are presented as a kind of currency that can "buy" certain benefits⁶⁸. While *tapas* is usually oriented towards boons or afterlife in heaven, it can also be expended, for example, by uttering a curse. Such temporary transactions contrast with the goals presented in what is in this thesis called "ascetic literature". As discussed in the previous chapter, renunciators usually claim to seek or obtain a permanent *sukha*, and this goal is often explicitly contrasted with the transitoriness of even the best afterlife.

A practice that appears to be more specifically associated with kings is that of retreating to the forest as a form of retirement. This practice is mentioned numerous times in the Sanskrit epics and it is also known to the Buddhist tradition⁶⁹. There is no reason to believe that this retirement was understood to lead to liberation from *saṃsāra*. It is more plausible that the ideological motivation of such retirement to the forest was to give an opportunity to secure a place in heaven to those kings who had not been killed in a battle, instead by practicing *tapas* and obtaining extra merit.

Another important rationale for adopting the ascetic lifestyles of a forest dweller or a mendicant is atonement for evil acts. We will see below that this is one of the rationales for renunciation mentioned by Yudhiṣṭhira.

⁶⁸ This comparison is not original. As Brockington notes, '[i]ndeed, the accumulation of *tapas* has often been compared by various scholars to a kind of spiritual bank balance or the energy stored in a battery, with the latter image suiting rather well its sudden and violent discharge by an ascetic through uttering a curse' (2020:84).

⁶⁹ See Olivelle 1993:114-117.

Finally, in several passages both forest dwelling and *bhaikṣacarya* (“the practice of begging”) appear to be a form of political exile. Most prominently, living in a forest is the form of political exile taken by the main protagonists of both Sanskrit epics. As for *bhaikṣacarya*, which usually refers to the lifestyle of wandering ascetics, I will argue below that in a political context it means simply being financially dependent on an ally while in a political exile.

All of this should be kept in mind when trying to understand any given epic episode that involves a king who wishes to start living in a forest or adopt *bhaikṣacarya*. We should be careful not to confuse *bhaikṣacarya* as the lifestyle of liberation-seeking ascetics with *bhaikṣacarya* as political exile or means of expiation. Nor should we confuse the *bhaikṣacarya* of the liberation-seeking mendicants with practicing *tapas* in a forest to secure an afterlife in heaven or a boon from one of the gods.

3.2. On self-control

Before going into further details about Yudhiṣṭhira’s interest in renunciation, I would like to situate it within broader trends of virtuous kingship seen in the *Mahābhārata* and elsewhere. We will see below that Yudhiṣṭhira blames his own *tṛṣṇā* for the evil of the *Mahābhārata* war. This is a major turn in the presentation of the events of the *Mahābhārata*. Prior to the *Śāntiparvan* there has been plenty of talk of how the uncontrolled greed and anger of Duryodhana is to blame for the misfortunes experienced by the protagonists⁷⁰. The same logic is not usually applied to Yudhiṣṭhira’s own motivation.

⁷⁰ Such portrayals of Duryodhana are too numerous to be listed here. It may suffice to note that Duryodhana’s greed for power is said to be his motivation already when he decides for the very first time to kill Bhīma and capture the other Pāṇḍavas (1.119).

One of the didactic messages of the *Mahābhārata* is to demonstrate that lack of self-control on the part of kings leads to a disaster⁷¹. Prior to the opening of the *Śāntiparvan*, however, there has been little suggestion that desire should be radically eliminated in a search for release from *saṃsāra*. Instead, according to many passages within and without the *Mahābhārata*, the ideal king continues his normal royal activities while being *jitendriya*, “having his passions under control”. The *bahuvrīhi* adjective *jitendriya* is often translated literally as “he whose sense are conquered”, following the standard meaning of *indriyas* as the five senses. A different rendering is found in Lefebvre’s translation of the fourth book of the *Rāmāyaṇa* where *indriyas* are usually rendered as “passions”. I was unable to find any discussion of this translation choice in Lefebvre’s notes and therefore provide my own reasons for understanding *jitendriya* as “having his passions under control”.

The “conquest of senses”, or perhaps rather “passions” (*indriyajaya*), is one of the topics treated by the *Arthaśāstra* which even says about itself that ‘[i]ndeed, this entire *śāstra* is conquest of passions’ (*kṛtsnaṃ hi śāstram idam indriyajayaḥ*; 1.6.3). It also provides a definition of *indriyajaya* which I cite in Olivelle’s translation: ‘Mastery over the senses consists of the senses— ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose—not wandering inappropriately among sounds, touches, visible forms, tastes, and smells; or rather, putting into practice what the treatise prescribes’ (*karnatvagakṣijihvāghrāṇendriyāṇāṃ śabdasparsarūparasagandheṣv avipratipattir indriyajayaḥ śāstrānuṣṭhānaṃ vā*; 1.6.2). In addition to saying that *indriyajaya* is simply the application of what

⁷¹ The *Mahābhārata* includes several threads that seek to explain the reasons behind the conflict and destruction of the war. Duryodhana’s (and sometimes Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s) greed and anger is one of the reasons repeatedly identified. In addition to this, we hear very often that the slaughter was caused by fate (*daiva*). In 9.58 Yudhiṣṭhira mentions both fate and Duryodhana’s greed and folly as the reasons of war. Another idea is introduced in 11.16, where it is said that evil done in past lives must be the reason for the present destruction. Finally, it is well-known that the *Mahābhārata* war is portrayed in some passages as a war between gods and demons who have taken on human form on earth. While this final trend has perhaps been the most influential in Hindu theology, the majority of *Mahābhārata*’s discussions about war are silent about this cosmic aspect and present the characters as humans facing real *dharmic* dilemmas.

is taught in the *Arthaśāstra*, this *sūtra* admittedly defines *indriyajaya* with reference to the interaction between the five senses (*indriyas*) and their objects⁷². The exact sense of *avipratipatti* is not entirely clear, and we see that Olivelle avoids committing to any particular interpretation by translating this word rather vaguely.

Despite this definition, the rest of the *indriyajaya* section makes it clear that *indriyajaya* is really all about controlling passions, and there is no further discussion of the five senses. *Arthaśāstra* offers a list of six such passions or “internal enemies”. In the translation of Olivelle: ‘Mastery over the senses results from training in the knowledge systems and is to be accomplished by giving up passion, anger, greed, pride, conceit, and excitement’ (*vidyāvinayahetur indriyajayaḥ kāmakrodhalobhamānamadaharṣatyāgāt kāryaḥ*; 1.6.1). These six internal enemies are central to the remainder of the section which provides examples of legendary kings who perished by indulging in one of these passions. The second part of the *indriyajaya* section begins by stating ‘[t]herefore, he should gain mastery over the senses by abandoning the set of six enemies’ (*tasmād ariṣaḍvargatyāgenendriyajayaṃ kurvīta*; 1.7.1; trans. Olivelle). Thus, what the king is really asked to do, is to overcome the passions, and there is no discussion of any more specific forms of controlling the activity of the senses themselves.

The same concern with passions dominates a speech on self-mastery and *indriyajaya* that Gāndhārī delivers to Duryodhana in *Mahābhārata* 5.127. Duryodhana is in need of such an instruction because ‘out of greed for sovereignty he will be deprived of sovereignty as well as life’ (*aiśvarya-lobhād aiśvaryaṃ jīvitaṃ ca prahāsyati*; 5.127.7). He is ‘seized by desire and anger and has resorted to delusion’ (*kāmamanyubhyāṃ pralabdho moham āsthitaḥ*; 5.127.12). This typical triad of

⁷² Vyāsa’s commentary on *Yogasūtra* 2.55 cites several definitions of *indriyajaya*.

desire, anger, and delusion are among of the most commonly mentioned negative mental states that the ascetic traditions aim to overcome. There are numerous references to this triad in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* where they or their synonyms⁷³ appear in various combinations with each other as well as in longer lists of passions or vices. The royal interest in the subjugation of such passions, however, is different than that of the ascetic traditions. Neither the *Arthaśāstra* nor Gāndhārī's speech mentions any moral or soteriological motivation, nor do they appear to be influenced by any ethical concerns typical of the ascetic traditions. Rather, such self-control is simply the prerequisite for the difficult task of obtaining and maintaining royal power:

One whose senses/passions (*indriya*) are not under control would not enjoy kingship for a long time whereas the wise person, who has conquered himself, would protect the kingdom.

*na hy avaśyendriyo⁷⁴ rājyam aśnīyād dīrgham antaram
vijitātmā tu medhāvī sa rājyam abhīpālayet* (5.127.22)

Here we have a conquest of five⁷⁵ vices connected with *indriyajaya*:

He who knows how to properly conquer desire, anger, greed, deceit, and pride is fit to properly conquer the earth. A king should constantly be engaged in the restraint of his senses/passions, desiring *artha* and *dharma*, as well as the conquest of his enemies.

*kāmaṃ krodhaṃ ca lobhaṃ ca dambhaṃ darpaṃ ca bhūmipah
samyag vijetuṃ yo veda sa mahīm abhijāyate
satataṃ nigrahe yukta indriyāṇāṃ bhaven nīpaḥ
īpsann arthaṃ ca dharmaṃ ca dviṣatāṃ ca parābhavam* (5.127.32-33)

The *Mahābhārata* and *Arthaśāstra* passages quoted above reveal that the ideal king's "conquest" of his *indriyas* is primarily concerned with the subjugation of passions, such as greed

⁷³ *Manyu*, *krodha*, and *roṣa* are all commonly used for anger in such lists found in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. For "desire" we may find we may find *lobha* or rarely *tṛṣṇā* instead of *kāma*. To provide just one example of their pairing, see the compound *apagatabhayamanyulobhamohaḥ* from an ascetic discourse in *Mahābhārata* 12.172.37.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Arthaśāstra* 1.6.04: *tad[=Arthaśāstra]viruddhavyṁttir avaśyendriyaś cāturanto 'pi rājā sadyo vinaśyati*.

⁷⁵ It may be no coincidence that the number of vices here is the same as the number of senses.

and anger, in service of a rational and calculating execution of royal power. I have been unable, however, to determine how the compounds *jitendriya* and *indriyajaya* come to convey this sense since they mention *indriyas* (senses) rather than passions.

Thus we see that there is a wider discourse on subjugation of passions and vices in Ancient India, but there are no clear signs that the self-control of the skilful king is inspired by the self-control of the renouncer even if it mirrors it.

3.2.1. *Indriyas* in ascetic discourse

The requirement for the king to be *jitendriya* finds a counterpart in the ascetic ideals related to wandering mendicants. The *Arthaśāstra* lists *jitendriyatva* as one of the *svadharmas*, peculiar “duties”, of the *parivrājaka*, the ascetic of the fourth *āśrama* (1.3.12).

There is a fair amount of discussion of senses in the ascetic literature of Ancient India. The compound *jitendriya* is almost non-existent in the early Buddhist literature, while it appears a fair number of times in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. More common overall is the talk about not “conquering” but rather restraining or withdrawing the senses, which most probably represents a different form of ascetic exercise.

Withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*) of the senses (*indriyas*) from their objects is very common in yogic discourse⁷⁶. Such a restraint of the senses is supposed to lead to the realisation of that which is beyond them (*atīndriya*), namely, the *ātman* or *brahman*. In the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* the vast majority of the occurrences of the word *indriya* are in the context of Sāṃkhya analysis of reality

⁷⁶ *Pratyāhāra* is the most well-known term for such a withdrawal of senses from their objects because of its usage in later texts such as the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*. The term *pratyāhāra* is already used in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (e.g., *pratyāhāreṇa vā śakyam avyaktaṁ brahma veditum*; 12.209.20), although more numerous are the passages that describe the same practice without using this term.

and/or within such a soteriology aimed at perceiving the inner *ātman/brahman*. The stock epithet “*jīteन्द्रिया*”, however, seems to be used as a permanent characteristic of certain virtuous people who are not constantly absorbed in the log-like state of *samādhi* without perceiving any external world. The *indriyajaya* expected of the king (and the renouncer) therefore does not seem to be equal to the meditative techniques of the yogins, but rather mirrors them, and is furthermore expressed in the more typically *kṣatriya* terms of a “conquest” of internal enemies.

It may be mentioned that in the later *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* the theme of the control of *indriyas*, there clearly meaning “senses”, is developed in a manner that is most probably intended for householder audiences:

He who is neither repelled nor gladdened even when grasping objects with the senses, perceiving this [world] to be the illusion of Viṣṇu, he is indeed the best follower of the Bhagavān.

grhītvāpīndriyair arthān yo na dveṣṭi na hr̥ṣyati
viṣṇor māyām idaṃ paśyan sa vai bhāgavatottamaḥ (11.2.48)

This occurs in a discourse which shares formal features with several of the discourses from the *Mahābhārata* that will be discussed in the following chapters. This verse is addressed to Nimi, king of Videha, and consists of a group of verses that end in a refrain *sa vai bhāgavatottamaḥ* and praise certain virtues and attitudes that do not necessarily require the virtuous person to be a renouncer. While *Purāṇic* literature presents further materials for the study of ascetic teachings for householder kings, a study of such discourses must be left for future publications. The above quote illustrates that the ascetic modes of controlling the interaction between the senses and their objects was developed in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, I do not believe that it should be used as a key for understanding what *indriyajaya* means in the *Mahābhārata*.

3.3. The personality of Yudhiṣṭhira: A pacifist?

To appreciate how ascetic teachings are integrated into the *Mahābhārata*, it will be useful to look first at the character of Yudhiṣṭhira, who is in one way or another the audience of a large portion of the ascetic teachings delivered in the *Mahābhārata*. Not just being an audience to ascetic teachings, Yudhiṣṭhira himself is commonly understood to be particularly associated with ascetic values and ideologies. According to Smith, '[i]n brief, one can say that Yudhiṣṭhira favours and embodies the way of disengagement (Sanskrit *nivṛtti*)' (2009:xxxi)⁷⁷. Yudhiṣṭhira is portrayed in similar terms by both Fitzgerald and Sutton, both of whom also argue plausibly that the character of Yudhiṣṭhira is a counterpart or response to the emperor Aśoka. Thus, Sutton writes that 'Yudhiṣṭhira (...) is depicted throughout as a *kṣatriya* who despises violence and advocates a form of *dharma* that transcends the warrior ethos' (1997:333). For Fitzgerald, Yudhiṣṭhira represents what he calls the 'never sense of *dharma*' which has a goal of 'completely eliminating desire upon which the older sense of *dharma* was based, a goal of central importance in the yoga discourses' (2004:104). Fitzgerald describes the "older sense of *dharma*" as 'something one does which then unfailingly connects one to an important good, or goods, that do not lie completely within the reach of normal human effort, such as victory, glory, future prosperity, or a good afterlife' (2004:104). What Fitzgerald calls "older" and "newer" senses of *dharma* seems to correspond with what in some *Mahābhārata* passages are called *pravṛtti*, "active", and *nivṛtti*, "renunciate", *dharma* respectively. If Yudhiṣṭhira is indeed constantly associated with *nivṛttidharma*, a study of his personality in the *Mahābhārata* should prove to be useful for this thesis.

⁷⁷ To support this Smith mentions, among other things, that Yudhiṣṭhira passes a part of his life in the forest and 'even proposes to renounce the kingship and become a forest ascetic (12.7)' (2009:xxxi). As noted above, such a mode of forest-dwelling should not be associated with *nivṛtti*.

Nevertheless, in the books preceding the *Śāntiparvan*, the evidence for such a “renunciate” or “ascetic” or “yogic” or “*nivṛtti*” orientation of Yudhiṣṭhira is inconclusive at best. It is only in the beginning of the *Śāntiparvan* that Yudhiṣṭhira finally expresses a clear interest in a radical eradication of desire and in a pursuit of *mokṣa*. He repeats that intention later in the *Mokṣadharmā* subsection of the *Śāntiparvan*, but this interest in *mokṣa* disappears in the final books, and Yudhiṣṭhira ultimately retreats to the forest and enters heaven rather than becoming a mendicant and reaching *mokṣa*. It will be useful to consider the character of Yudhiṣṭhira to better understand the complex opening of the *Śāntiparvan*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

A close look at the *Mahābhārata* narrative reveals that the most important value for Yudhiṣṭhira, the embodiment of *dharma* and the *dharmarāja* (“Dharma-king”), is *satya*, “truth”, which amounts to never saying anything false and includes always keeping his promises. Yudhiṣṭhira’s adherence to *satya* is central for the plot of the *Mahābhārata* and emerges at several important episodes⁷⁸. Most notably, when Yudhiṣṭhira accepts the forest exile rather than regaining his kingdom by military force, he does so because he promised to go into exile during the second dicing match and must remain true to his word. If this involves a temporary renunciation of violence, it is only accidental. *Satya*, however, can hardly be said to be a non-Brahmanical value or to belong to what Fitzgerald calls the “newer sense of *dharma*”. As noted above, *satya* is typically listed with such values as *tapas* and *yajña* as a key source of power and a good afterlife in the Brahmanical tradition. *Satya* is as important as *tapas* to the numerous legends about Brahmanical sages (*ṛṣis*) in the Sanskrit epics. The religious observance of staying true to one’s word is also central

⁷⁸ See, for example, the killing of Droṇa, which is predicated upon the assumption on the part of Droṇa that Yudhiṣṭhira will never utter untruth. Another example emerges in the aftermath of the first dicing match during which he loses his wife Draupadī. The Kauravas offer to set Draupadī free, but this would involve Yudhiṣṭhira breaking his vow of *satya*, as he had previously announced her as a wager.

to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where it takes precedence over all other considerations and leads to a similar forest exile on the part of Rāma. Seen from this angle, Yudhiṣṭhira is no more a renunciate king than is Rāma in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Of course, Rāma is also sometimes said to be a “renouncer” king. For example, Goldman titles a section of his introduction to the *Rāmāyaṇa* “Rāma: The hero as renouncer” (1984:49)⁷⁹. Goldman later qualifies this characterization, however, saying that ‘the principal heroes of the epic’ *Rāmāyaṇa* are invariably governed, even to their great disadvantage, by the promptings of a higher morality whose principal strictures derive from deference to one’s elders and adherence to the loosely codified principles of one’s collective elders, or *dharma* (1984:53). While there is a notable element of self-control and self-denial on the part of Rāma, which somewhat resonates with ascetic moralities, they are not motivated by a more general adherence to or interest in ascetic values and ideologies. In other words, the bulk of the *Rāmāyaṇa* provides little reason to believe that its *dharma* is the ascetic or *nivṛtti-dharma*.

I am aware of just one episode in which Yudhiṣṭhira displays mercy to a foe without any ambiguity or further consideration⁸⁰. In 3.256 Yudhiṣṭhira shows compassion to Jayadratha and releases him after Jayadratha’s attempt to abduct Draupadī.

⁷⁹ For another example, see Brodbeck 2007: ‘If Rāma is to be seen in allegorical terms, like Yudhiṣṭhira and Nala, as a *mokṣa* seeker, a would-be renouncer, then Sītā and the kingdom are his *prakṛti*, his body – Sītā is replete with telluric symbolism’ (p. 157). While it is possible to find such allegorical meanings in the Sanskrit epics, I do not believe that they are very helpful for thinking about the history of ascetic ideas in Ancient India, especially insofar as they ignore the dharmic considerations explicitly mentioned by the epic characters and rely on the assumption that a temporary forest exile should be seen as a manifestation of a *mokṣa*-seeking ideology.

⁸⁰ Consider also 4.63 where Yudhiṣṭhira forgives king Virāṭa for striking him in the face. The fact is, though, that Yudhiṣṭhira himself provoked Virāṭa and was warned before being hit. Note that here, too, Yudhiṣṭhira seems to be impelled by speaking *satya* as he praises the disguised Arjuna as a greater warrior than Virāṭa’s son.

Let us consider some other episodes that at a first glance may seem to associate Yudhiṣṭhira with non-violence or other ascetic inclinations.

In 3.232-7 Yudhiṣṭhira seemingly shows kindness to Duryodhana who had come to the forest to attack the Pāṇḍavas but was captured by *gandharvas*. It should be noted that Yudhiṣṭhira's rescue of his cousin Duryodhana is said to be motivated by considerations of family *dharma*. Yudhiṣṭhira also mentions his concern that the wives of the Kauravas might be violated by the *gandharvas* had he not intervened.

In 3.30.50 Yudhiṣṭhira claims that he practices both patience/forgiveness (*kṣamā*) and non-cruelty (*ānṛśaṃsya*). This claim should be understood in the context of what he says earlier in the same speech. Yudhiṣṭhira says in the same *adhyāya* that he believes that Duryodhana will succumb to the advice of the Kuru elders, who argue for peace (*śamaṇ prati*), and return the kingdom to Yudhiṣṭhira. 'If not, Duryodhana will perish because of his greed' (*na cel lobhān naśiṣyati*; 3.30.47). This is a clear threat to Duryodhana. Given this threat and the wider context of the *Mahābhārata* I understand Yudhiṣṭhira's earlier statement to mean that he is ready to forgive (*kṣam*) Duryodhana in order to avoid the great sin and evil of intra-family warfare.

There are many other episodes and details that must have contributed to Yudhiṣṭhira's image of a *nivṛtti*-oriented king, but a closer inspection usually reveals a more complicated picture. For example, in 3.173 Yudhiṣṭhira says that he wants to return to a particular mountain to practice *tapas*. Yet, this has no obvious relation to an aspiration for *mokṣa* or *nivṛtti* (see the discussion of *tapas* in 3.1. of this thesis).

There are a few episodes that might be interpreted as portraying Yudhiṣṭhira as a pacifist. I will argue that this is not necessarily the case and that other factors than the ideal of non-violence are usually at play.

In 2.15 Yudhiṣṭhira argues against a military conflict with Jarāsaṃdha. His stated motivation is not some general pacifism, however, but simply an evaluation of the greater strength of the opponent. Kṛṣṇa admits that Jarāsaṃdha may be impossible to defeat in a military campaign and suggests to kill Jarāsaṃdha by entering his palace in disguise, to which Yudhiṣṭhira assents.

The *Āraṇyakaparvan* (book 3) includes several discussions of the possibility of an immediate war with the Kauravas. Perhaps the most striking of these is Yudhiṣṭhira's discussion with Draupadī in which he praises patience (*kṣamā*) over anger (*manyu*).⁸¹ Surely, *kṣamā* is a virtue important to the ascetic traditions, such as Buddhism, and at some points during their complicated debate Yudhiṣṭhira might be seen to argue for *kṣamā* as a value in its own right. Yet it should also be noted that he mentions more political considerations – the time is not right to attack the Kauravas, and attacking at the wrong time is likely to result in losing⁸². Thus, his insistence on *kṣamā* may also be understood to be consistent with cold political calculation in the spirit of the *Arthaśāstra* – patience is a prerequisite of acting in the right manner and the right time whereas anger undermines clear thinking and easily leads to mistakes. We have already seen above, in section 3.2, that the control of anger is advocated in the *Arthaśāstra* and in related teachings in the *Mahābhārata*.

In another discussion from the same book, Yudhiṣṭhira cites a simple pragmatic reason for not going to war immediately. Yudhiṣṭhira believes that they would be unable to beat Duryodhana

⁸¹ Some aspects of this dialogue have been studied by Malinar (2007a).

⁸² Compare this to Vidura's praise of patience in 3.6.19 which is similarly presented simply as a means to steadily arrive at victory.

without allies and is especially worried about Karṇa. His interlocutor Bhīma seems to accept the validity of Yudhiṣṭhira's assessment and has nothing to reply (3.37). It may not be irrelevant for the interpretation of this episode to remember that at this point in the story Karṇa has not yet been deprived of the invincible armour and earrings that he had since birth.

The assessment of the relative forces of the two factions is different in some other episodes. In 3.49 Bhīma insists that Duryodhana has to be killed before he gets too strong. In this case Yudhiṣṭhira simply objects that he cannot tell a lie and will not attack before the thirteen years have passed. The virtue at play here is *satya*. Rather than expounding any pacifist ideology he positively states that Arjuna and Bhīma will kill Duryodhana when the thirteen years have passed.

In another instance, Yudhiṣṭhira declines an offer from his allies to kill Duryodhana and install Arjuna's son Abhimanyu as king for thirteen years until Yudhiṣṭhira returns from his exile (3.120). This offer already assumes that Yudhiṣṭhira will uphold his *satya* by staying in the forest (and one year incognito in a populated place) for the appointed term. Yudhiṣṭhira's refusal is here motivated by the most *kṣatriya* of concerns as he claims that the earth must be won by his own arms⁸³.

Another major source for deliberations on whether to go to war or not is the *Udyogaparvan* (book 5). The exile has been completed, or at least the Pāṇḍavas believe that they were not discovered before their year in incognito ended, and therefore Yudhiṣṭhira's adherence to *satya* is no longer an obstacle to war. If Yudhiṣṭhira is a pacifist or inclined to renunciation, this would be

⁸³ Here again we see a similar logic to that of the *Rāmāyaṇa* where Hanumān refuses to rescue Sītā from Rāvaṇa on his own so that Rāma can perform the rescue himself and Rāma's glory thereby remains undiminished.

the most appropriate moment to display such inclinations. Yet here again we find a more complicated picture.

Admittedly, Sutton provides us with some relevant quotations from one *adhyāya* of the *Udyogaparvan* (5.70) that support his argument that ‘[o]n numerous occasions when the Pāṇḍava faction assembles to consider how they should respond to the aggressions and insults of the Kauravas, Yudhiṣṭhira speaks out against any recourse to violence even to the extent of outright condemnation of traditional *kṣatriya-dharma*’ (1997:336). Sutton notes that, according to Yudhiṣṭhira, ‘even a peace which is attained through submission to one’s enemy is superior to war—*atra yā prañipātena śāntiḥ saiva garīyasī* (v68)’ (1997:336, referring to *Mahābhārata* 5.70.68). Yudhiṣṭhira’s speech mentioned by Sutton is rather complex and would deserve a detailed analysis⁸⁴. His conclusion is certainly in agreement with the non-violent orientation of the ascetic traditions because he claims that surrender is better than violence. Yet his reasoning is rather “secular” since as he does not advocate non-violence as an absolute value. Yudhiṣṭhira’s speech is really a prediction of what will happen – even a victory in war will lead to a further vendetta, which will ultimately result in the killing of his relatives, which, in turn, will result in a state of utter misery and even disinterest (*nirveda*) in life itself⁸⁵. Yudhiṣṭhira’s concern that he will seem miserable once his teachers and relatives have been killed seems perfectly understandable without claiming that he represents some version of “yogic” or “non-violent” *dharma*.

⁸⁴ In its first part Yudhiṣṭhira speaks in support of war, complaining about the wrongdoings of Duryodhana and delivering a speech on the importance of *artha* for the proper pursuit of *dharma*. These pro-war concerns are then opposed by other concerns in the second part of his speech.

⁸⁵ The phrase used by Yudhiṣṭhira, *nirvedo jīvite upajāyate* (“[for such a person] there arises indifference to/disgust with life”; 5.70.55), predicts his own *nirveda* in the *Śāntiparvan* (12.6.12).

3.3.1. Yudhiṣṭhira and Saṃjaya on war and desire

With the passage just discussed we could contrast others where Yudhiṣṭhira advocates war. Most strikingly, he does so in his discussion with Saṃjaya in 5.26-28. This conversation is of interest also because of the particular position expressed by Saṃjaya, who makes an original use of some ascetic themes in his argument.

Yudhiṣṭhira opens his first speech to Saṃjaya by saying that not having a war is surely better than having a war (*ayuddham vai tāta yuddhād garīyaḥ* 5.26.1). Indeed, as Yudhiṣṭhira rhetorically asks, ‘who, cursed by fate, would prefer war?’ (*ko daivaśapto 'bhivṛṇīta yuddham;* 5.26.3). Yes, Yudhiṣṭhira offers peace, but he emphasises that there can be no peace unless Indraprastha, the capital of his share of the kingdom, is returned to him (5.26.28). Moreover, he issues a threat, demanding that Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Duryodhana change their minds and submit to Yudhiṣṭhira’s terms ‘so that the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra do not perish in battle burned up by the anger of the Pāṇḍavas’ (*raṇe pāṇḍavakopadagdhā na naśyeyuḥ saṃjaya dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ;* 5.26.26). Thus, a closer look at his full speech makes it impossible to see Yudhiṣṭhira simply as an advocate of peace and non-violence generally.

Incidentally, during this speech Yudhiṣṭhira makes reference to an idea which is very common in ascetic literature. In verse 5 he claims that the power of desire only increases when its object (*artha*) has been obtained, just as fire is not satisfied by oblations⁸⁶. Nevertheless, Yudhiṣṭhira

⁸⁶ I opt for a paraphrase rather than a full translation here because the verse is somewhat problematic: *yathedhyamānasya samiddhatejaso bhūyo balaṃ vardhate pāvakasya/ kāmārthalābhena tathaiva bhūyo na tṛpyate sarpiṣevāgnir iddhaḥ||* (5.26.5a-d). The subject in *pāda* c is not expressed but it must be “desire” (*kāma* or something similar). Reading *kāmo* ‘rthalābhena for *kāmārthalābhena* would solve the problem, but this reading is only found in a few Southern manuscripts: G1-3 and M 3,4.

applies this observation about the insatiability of desire exclusively to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who refuses to return half the kingdom to Yudhiṣṭhira.

The response of Saṃjaya occupies the next *adhyāya* (5.27), which receives the following comment by Van Buitenen: ‘How difficult the following discourse by Saṃjaya was considered to be is shown by the very large number of variants to virtually every verse’ (1978:542). It would be useful to conduct a deeper analysis of the conversation between Yudhiṣṭhira and Saṃjaya, taking into account the manuscript evidence, but this must be postponed to further research⁸⁷.

At least Saṃjaya’s opening statement seems to be rather clear in its argument for the superiority of peace:

Ajātaśatru [Yudhiṣṭhira], if the Kauravas do not yield you your portion [of the kingdom] without a fight, I believe that a life of begging in the kingdom of Andhakas and Vṛṣṇis would be better than [obtaining your own] kingdom by means of war.

*na ced bhāgaṃ kuravo 'nyatra yuddhāt; prayacchante tubhyam ajātaśatro
bhaikṣacaryām andhakavṛṣṇirājye; śreyo manye na tu yuddhena rājyam* (5.27.2)

The term *bhaikṣacaryā* here must signify simply a form of political exile. Most probably in this context *bhaikṣacaryā* does not even mean a mode of life similar to that of a *bhikṣu*, but is simply an idiomatic way of saying that by giving up their own wealth (*artha*), the Pāṇḍavas would be materially dependent on their allies. Note that Saṃjaya does not envision Yudhiṣṭhira wandering around, as religious mendicants do, but as staying in the realm of his allies, where he would presumably be protected from assassination by Duryodhana.

⁸⁷ Van Buitenen already provides unusually extensive notes on Saṃjaya’s speech, explaining his own understanding of the meaning of each individual verse, which is based entirely on the text adopted in the critical edition.

Samjaya follows this by expressing some ideas that bear resemblance to ascetic discourses. He lectures Yudhiṣṭhira on the working of karma, and describes human life as short, painful, and fragile. One verse from Samjaya's speech especially stands out as suggesting an ascetic influence:

Craving for wealth is a fetter. The *dharma* of the person who pursues it is oppressed. He is a *buddha* who chooses *dharma*. A person who desires sense pleasures perishes because of being fond (*anurodhāt*) of wealth (*artha*).

*nibandhanī hy arthatrṣṇeha pārtha; tām eṣato bādhyate dharma eva
dharmaṃ tu yaḥ pravṛṇīte sa buddhaḥ; kāmē gṛddho hīyate 'rthānurodhāt* (5.27.5)

This peculiar verse poses some problems of interpretation. At a first glance it suggest some Buddhist influence, not just by its referring to the ideal person as a *buddha*, but also by referring to desire with the term *trṣṇā*. The noun *nibandhana* is attested in early Buddhist literature referring to the workings of karma (see e.g. *Suttanipāta* 654). The first *pāda* would therefore fit a Buddhist soteriological context very well – saying that *trṣṇā* is that which binds (*nibandhanī*) a person to *saṃsāra* would be very typical. The rest of the verse and Samjaya's discourse, however, suggests a different orientation. The contrast here is between *dharma*, as something positive, and both *artha* and *kāma* as something potentially related to *adharma*. This is what Van Buitenen makes of the interplay of these values in the present verse: 'Here *dharma*, *artha* and *kama* [sic] are contradistinguished: *kama* [sic], in order to be gratified, needs *artha* at the expense of *dharma* ' (542-543). This is a viable interpretation of the verse⁸⁸. I would add that *artha* can also be the object of *kāma* if *kāma* is understood as "desire" rather than "pleasure". In other words, *trṣṇā* ("craving, desire") in the first *pāda* could be understood as a synonym of *kāma*.

⁸⁸ If *kāma* and *artha* are taken as the *puruṣārthas*, the fourth *pāda* may better be translated as "desiring pleasure (*kāma*) one is deprived from that which is conducive to wealth (*artha*)".

The meaning of the verse also depends on how the term *dharma* is understood. Despite the soteriological overtone of the first *pāda* of this verse, Saṃjaya seems to intend a distinctively householder and Brahmanical⁸⁹ version of *dharma* which, if carried out correctly, leads to a rebirth in a blissful heaven⁹⁰ rather than liberation. Verse 9 again confirms Saṃjaya's message – a person who foolishly does not believe in an afterlife and is attached to the pursuit of *artha* (*arthacaryāprasakta*) may perform *adharma*, and as a result this 'fool is tormented after death' (*tapyate pretya mandaḥ*; 5.27.9).

Saṃjaya's speech contains some other ideas that in ascetic literature would typically be followed by a recommendation to seek *mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*. For example, in verse 3 he describes life as short (*alpakāla*), constantly painful (*nityaduḥkha*) and fragile (*cala*), but this is followed simply by a call not to perform evil (*tasmāt pāpaṃ pāṇḍava mā prasārṣiḥ*; 5.27.3). Another example of ascetic ideas comes near the end of Saṃjaya's speech:

Even if you obtain the entire earth up to the very oceans, you will not be able to get rid of old age and death, nor will you be able to get rid of things you like and dislike or happiness and sorrow. With this understanding, do not make battle!

*labdhvāpīmāṇ pṛthivīṃ sāgarāntāṃ; jarāmṛtyū naiva hi tvaṃ prajahyāḥ
priyāpriye sukhaduḥkhe ca rājann; evaṃ vidvān naiva yuddhaṃ kuruṣva* (5.27.26)

In his speech Saṃjaya urges Yudhiṣṭhira to reflect on his life in terms that remind one of the ascetic traditions. Life is to be seen as short and painful, inevitably leading to old age and death. Desire (*tṛṣṇā*) is singled out as the cause of *adharma*. The law of karmic retribution is described. Nevertheless, Saṃjaya does not envision a complete abandonment of action or the adoption of any other form of radical ascetic lifestyle which supposedly leads to eradication of rebirth. If Saṃjaya's

⁸⁹ In verse 7 Saṃjaya observes that Yudhiṣṭhira has studied the Veda, carried out *brahmacarya*, offered Vedic sacrifices and given to Brahmins (*vedo 'dhītaś caritaṃ brahmacaryaṃ; yajñair iṣṭaṃ brāhmaṇebhyaś ca dattam*; 5.27.7).

⁹⁰ The heavenly benefits of following *dharma* are described in verse 13, discussed below.

words are taken at face value, it appears that he believes that performing *dharma* will lead to a permanent existence in some form of a paradise:

There he abandons death, old age, and danger. There is neither hunger nor thirst, nor anything displeasing to the mind. There is nothing to do there other than [for the sake of] pleasing one's senses⁹¹.

*jahāti mṛtyuṃ ca jarāṃ bhayaṃ ca; na kṣutpipāse manasaś cāpriyāṇi
na kartavyaṃ vidyate tatra kiṃ cid; anyatra vai indriyapṛīṇanārthāt* (5.27.13)

Thus Saṃjaya offers a unique vision of being a “*buddha*” by choosing the *dharma* which leads to a blissful afterlife. This *dharma* involves taming one's desire while continuing to carry out such *dharmic* practices as sacrifice or giving to Brahmins. At one point Saṃjaya mentions performing action ‘in the practice of yoga’ (*yogābhyāse*; 5.27.8). Such a control of desire while performing meritorious activity reminds one of the doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā*, and van Buitenen believes that yoga in 5.27.8 means ‘the *karmayoga* of acting without hope of reward’ (1978:543). And yet, Saṃjaya seems to present a unique position which should not simply be equated with the *karmayoga* of the *Bhagavadgītā*. While *karmayoga* is presented as a means of acting in such a way as to bypass karmic results, including especially the potentially undesirable results of killing one's teachers and relatives in war, Saṃjaya's teaching is just the opposite: it is impossible to escape one's karma in the afterlife: ‘There is no disappearance of one's deeds (*karman*) in the afterlife – neither the good ones nor the bad ones’ (*na karmaṇāṃ vipraṇāśo 'sty amutra; puṇyānāṃ vāpy atha vā pāpakānāṃ*; 5.27.10). The practical conclusion here is just the opposite of Kṛṣṇa's bellicose advice to Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Keeping in mind the imperishable nature of karma, Yudhiṣṭhira should rather give up his ambition for wealth and power (*artha*) if he wishes to end up in paradise

⁹¹ My translation does not quite account for the word *artha* in the compound *indriyapṛīṇanārthāt*. One possibility is to understand *artha* in the sense of a *puruṣārtha*, and *indriyapṛīṇana* as signifying *kāma*. The meaning would be that of all the *puruṣārthas* only *kāma* remains in the paradise.

rather than hell. Death and old age are inescapable, and therefore it is foolish to wage war for the sake of temporary kingship if obtaining kingship means incurring *adharma* and thereby losing the possibility of a heavenly afterlife. Saṁjaya's speech offers an idiosyncratic synthesis of some ideas associated with the ascetic traditions and a Brahmanical ideal of virtuous kingship which is rewarded with a heavenly afterlife.

Given the usual characterisation of Yudhiṣṭhira, we could expect him to enthusiastically embrace Saṁjaya's arguments. And yet, he rejects this advice, although it displays clear ideological and terminological links with the *nivṛtti*-oriented traditions. Yudhiṣṭhira claims that Saṁjaya has misunderstood *dharma*, invokes the notion of *āpaddharma*, and finally says that he will follow the advice of Kṛṣṇa (this is a summary of Yudhiṣṭhira's speech in 5.28). This is followed by Kṛṣṇa's speech in 5.29 which is equally difficult and worthy of attention. It touches upon the importance of action and the problem of a king's *svadharma*, in anticipation of the treatment of these themes in the *Bhagavadgītā*, but without any theistic or soteriological framework. It seems quite plausible that in this conversation from the *Udyogaparvan* we see some of the debates about action, war, *kṣatriya* duty, karmic retribution, the role of desire, and securing a good afterlife that led to the formulation of the doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā*.

3.3.2. More on war and peace

We have seen above that Yudhiṣṭhira's supposed inclination towards peace is more complicated than it is sometimes said to be. Nor is Yudhiṣṭhira alone in his dislike of war. Bhīma, too, favours peace in 5.74. In a moving respite during the *Mahābhārata* war even Duryodhana stops fighting and curses anger, greed, delusion, impatience, *kṣatriya* conduct and "the strength of the

chest”⁹². This happens when Duryodhana encounters Sātyaki on the battlefield and they both recall their childhood friendship (7.164.21). Duryodhana says to Sātyaki: ‘You are dearer to me than my own life as I have always been dear to you ’(*tvam hi prāṇaiḥ priyataro mamāhaṃ ca sadā tava*; 7.164.24). Duryodhana then admits: ‘For what reason other than anger and greed am I fighting you today, Sātвата? ’(*kim anyat krodhalobhābhyāṃ yudhyāmi tvādya sātвата*; 7.164.25). In the same *adhyāya* Yudhiṣṭhira gives a speech in his own camp in defence of *kṣatradharma*, promising heavenly afterlife to his associates:

If you win, you shall sacrifice with many sacrifices of magnificent sacrificial fees.
If you are killed you shall obtain excellent worlds having become the companions
of the gods.

*jītvā ca bahubhir yajñair yakṣyadhvaṃ bhūridakṣiṇaiḥ
hatā vā devasād bhūtvā lokān prāpsyatha puṣkalān* (7.164.52)

As for Duryodhana, he also despairs at one point during the war and wishes to surrender and retreat to the forest (9.30). Such examples make it difficult to single out Yudhiṣṭhira as an opponent of *kṣatriya dharma* and war in general.

It is true that Yudhiṣṭhira does not do much fighting in the war, although he kills Śalya, the last general of Duryodhana’s army. Yet his absence from the battlefield is not as remarkable if we consider that the situation is not very different on the opposing side where the battle is mostly led by the appointed generals and Duryodhana himself appears only occasionally. The same mode of war is depicted in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where Rāma and especially Rāvaṇa hardly participate in the war until the final duel between the two. A similar duel between Yudhiṣṭhira and Duryodhana does not

⁹² *dhik krodhaṃ dhik sakhe lobhaṃ dhiṃ mohaṃ dhig amarṣitam/ dhig astu kṣātram ācāraṃ dhig astu balam aurasam* (7.164.23)

take place because Duryodhana chooses to fight the better warrior, Bhīṣma, rather than the eldest Pāṇḍava, Yudhiṣṭhira, as might have been expected⁹³.

Surely, a lot more could be said about the character of Yudhiṣṭhira, and several of the passages mentioned above deserve a more nuanced discussion. Although the association of Yudhiṣṭhira with the ideologies of *nivṛtti* and non-violence is not entirely unfounded, a closer look at those passages where he considers peace, war, and violence reveal a more complex picture, which hardly includes a non-qualified subscription to ascetic values. It is well-known that the *Mahābhārata* involves many controversies on the exact meaning and nature of *dharma*, and some of these may be reflected in the character of Yudhiṣṭhira. Nevertheless, the overall picture which emerges from the passages discussed above is of a Yudhiṣṭhira who follows a Brahmanical *dharma*, central to which are such vows as *satya*. The framework of this *dharma* is the pursuit of an afterlife in heaven and the avoidance of an afterlife in hell.

These observations will help to understand the opening chapters of the *Śāntiparvan* where Yudhiṣṭhira follows the same heaven-oriented *dharma* while also displaying interest in *mokṣa* for the first time.

My observations about Yudhiṣṭhira by no means invalidate the valuable suggestions by Fitzgerald and Sutton that Yudhiṣṭhira should be seen as a counterpart to Aśoka. On the contrary, they support it. The edicts of Aśoka do not talk about *mokṣa* but rather about the obtainment of *svarga* ("heaven"). Both Yudhiṣṭhira and Aśoka promote certain values such as respect and

⁹³ Tieken offers an original interpretation of these and other features of the *Mahābhārata* (2009). He sees these events as an extension of the gambling match where both sides in turn give up their advantage - Duryodhana opts for war, although he is unable to win, and, when victory is at hand, Yudhiṣṭhira stakes his victory by offering a duel, to which Duryodhana appropriately responds by choosing to fight Bhīma, the most formidable opponent.

obedience towards *gurus* and parents that do not seem to have any specific link with the ascetic traditions. Apart from his promotion of non-violence towards animals, the *dharma* of Aśoka's edicts, too, is hardly a *nivṛttidharma*.

3.4. Yudhiṣṭhira, kingship, and renunciation in the *Śāntiparvan*

In this section I turn to the “persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira” (12.1-38), in which Yudhiṣṭhira expresses an intention to renounce kingship. The “persuasion” takes place shortly after the *Mahābhārata* war and occupies a key place in the structure of the *Mahābhārata*. It reflects upon the war, and sets forth a certain understanding of the world, while being much more closely integrated in the *Mahābhārata* plot than the philosophical and didactic materials found later in the *Śāntiparvan* and the *Anuśāsanaparvan*.

The “persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira” has already received some scholarly attention. It has been translated by Fitzgerald (2004), who also provides some helpful notes, although there are many passages that remain obscure and require further study. A partial summary of the “persuasion” is provided by Woods, who focuses on its contribution to the discussions about fate and human initiative that run through the *Mahābhārata* (2001:92-101). Bronkhorst has discussed some difficult passages from the “persuasion”, arguing that they display an incomplete understanding or even a misunderstanding of the ascetic ideologies of what he calls Greater Magadha (2007:94-111). Adam Bowles also discusses some features of the “persuasion” as providing a frame also for the *Āpaddharmaparvan*, the middle section of the *Śāntiparvan* (2007). Most recently, Greg Bailey has discussed parts of the “persuasion” in his paper “Yudhiṣṭhira's Dilemmas: On Two Texts of Debate in the *Mahābhārata*” (2022). None of the main arguments made in the present chapter overlaps with those made by these scholars.

In the first subsection I will take note of the reasons for Yudhiṣṭhira's distress after the war. In the second subsection I will argue that Yudhiṣṭhira operates with two different understandings of *dharma* in the "persuasion". On the one hand, he continues to be concerned with a *dharma* that leads to heaven, and is worried that the sin committed during the war will cause him to end up in hell instead. A related concern with retiring to the forest to expiate his sins is also found in the later books of the *Mahābhārata*, and therefore Yudhiṣṭhira's goal of reaching heaven is the more important one for the *Mahābhārata* plot as a whole. On the other hand, Yudhiṣṭhira is interested in becoming a *bhikṣu* and seeking *mokṣa*. I argue that this interest is unique to the *Śāntiparvan*, and that it might be a later addition to a hypothetical earlier version of the "persuasion" episode that had nothing to do with the pursuit of *mokṣa*. In subsections 3 and 4 I discuss in more detail some passages where Yudhiṣṭhira expresses an interest in renunciation and *mokṣa*. In subsection 5 I discuss the dialogue between king Janaka and his wife (12.18), which is the only discourse included in the "persuasion" that actually says anything about remaining a householder and being liberated (*mukta*), although I argue that it does not offer a very elaborate or convincing understanding depiction of the liberated householder king. In subsection 6 I argue that the "persuasion" portrays the householder as the best if not the only truly meritorious lifestyle. Since the "persuasion" claims that the householder excels in the qualities that are normally attributed to the *vānaprastha* than the *bhikṣu*, it fails to address Yudhiṣṭhira's interest in *mokṣa*.

3.4.1. The troubled Yudhiṣṭhira

It is useful to register Yudhiṣṭhira's first post-war reactions to get a better idea of the variety of concerns that are packed into the debate of "persuasion" and to understand how ascetic ideas and values are introduced into the debate.

The *Śāntiparvan* opens with Yudhiṣṭhira expressing a feeling of utter grief as he says:

I have this constant great pain in my heart – having caused this great destruction of relatives, which was motivated by greed, having caused the death of Saubhadra [Abhimanyu] and the dear sons of Draupadī [that were fathered by the five Pāṇḍavas] – this victory seems to me like defeat, oh blessed [Nārada]

*idaṃ tu me mahad duḥkhaṃ vartate hṛdi nityadā
kṛtvā jñātikṣayam imaṃ mahāntaṃ lobhakāritam
saubhadraṃ draupadeyāṃś ca ghātayitvā priyān sutān
jayo 'yam ajayākāro bhagavan pratibhāti me (12.1.14-15)*

We will see in chapters 4 and 5 that Yudhiṣṭhira's grief is alleviated by some ascetic teachings towards the end of the “persuasion”. For now, Yudhiṣṭhira's initial expression of grief prompts Nārada to relate several details about the biography of Karna, who was secretly the eldest brother of the Pāṇḍavas. Yudhiṣṭhira, who is crushed by sorrow (*śokaparītātman*), then develops *nirveda* (12.6.12). This feeling typically precedes renunciation and usually amounts to either indifference towards worldly objects or disgust towards them. We saw in the previous part of this chapter that Yudhiṣṭhira already predicted such a development of *nirveda* before the war, and there was nothing in that chapter to make one think that *nirveda* should be understood in its technical sense in relation to *mokṣa* rather than simply losing the purpose to live.

3.4.2. Expiation of Yudhiṣṭhira's sin: The original concern of the “persuasion”?

After developing *nirveda*, Yudhiṣṭhira delivers a complex speech in *adhyāya* 7, where he first expresses serious dissatisfaction with the war and an interest in giving up his kingship. I will argue that the speech reflects two different concerns and ideologies that might reflect two textual layers. Only the second part of the speech really makes a reference to the pursuit of *mokṣa*.

Yudhiṣṭhira begins that speech by saying:

Had we “practiced begging” in the city of Vṛṣṇis and Andhakas, we would not have made our kinsmen bereft of male offspring, and would not have obtained this bad destiny.

*yad bhaikṣam ācariṣyāma vṛṣṇyandhakapure vayam
jñātīn niṣpuruṣān kṛtvā nemāṃ prāpsyāma durgatim (12.7.3)*

We have seen above that avoiding war at all costs and accepting political exile in the realm of their allies was advised by Saṃjaya in the *Udyogaparvan*, but this advice was refused by Yudhiṣṭhira. We might assume that the war has brought about a fundamental change in Yudhiṣṭhira, and that this change is important for the message of the *Mahābhārata*. It turns out that the change of heart we see in this passage is introduced only to be rejected.

Although Yudhiṣṭhira uses two phrases that have technical meanings in the ascetic vocabulary of Ancient India, *nirveda* and *bhaikṣam ā+car*, he does not appear to use them with such ascetic meanings. I would suggest that the usage of such vocabulary might have prompted the introduction of ascetic ideas later in the “persuasion”, such as in Yudhiṣṭhira’s next speech in 12.9 where he becomes interested in becoming a *bhikṣu* in the sense of a “liberation-seeking wandering mendicant”.

At this point of his speech Yudhiṣṭhira is not concerned with liberation, but rather with the reward or punishment he can expect in the afterlife, as he then asks ‘what result of dharma are we going to obtain?’ (*kiṃ dharmaphalam āpnumaḥ*; 12.7.4). More specifically, Yudhiṣṭhira’s concern is that ‘through our own actions we shall obtain the lowest of the worlds’ (*te vayaṃ tv adhamāṃl lokān prapadyema svakarmabhiḥ*; 12.7.20). Yudhiṣṭhira wishes to avoid going to hell and presumably to obtain the reward of the *dharma* he has been trying to follow throughout the *Mahābhārata*. This reward is probably an afterlife in heaven (*svarga*), which is indeed Yudhiṣṭhira’s destiny at the end of the *Mahābhārata*. Nullifying the consequences of his evil actions is a major theme throughout

the persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira as well as in the later books of the *Mahābhārata*. In some passages Yudhiṣṭhira appears to believe that this can be achieved by retiring to the forest and practicing *tapas*. Such a retirement to the forest to practice fierce *tapas* should not be confused with becoming a mendicant to seek liberation.

Bracketing some passages that mention liberation, it is possible to read the debate in “persuasion” as between a Yudhiṣṭhira, who believes that he should nullify his sin and obtain merit by adopting the lifestyle of a *vānaprastha*,⁹⁴ and his peers, who argue that the same and even greater benefit can be obtained by a householder king. In particular, it is argued by Arjuna, at the very beginning of the “persuasion”, and by Vyāsa at the very end, that performing a horse sacrifice will purge Yudhiṣṭhira of all the sin he has committed during the war. Looking at the debate from this angle, Yudhiṣṭhira is not really interested in non-violence or *mokṣa* as such. Yudhiṣṭhira explains at length that he is above all concerned with the destruction brought upon his own family. This same concern with killing one’s own family members (and *gurus*) runs through other key debates in the *Mahābhārata* as well, and it is therefore plausible that it is fundamental to the plot of the *Mahābhārata*. See also, for example, Vyāsa’s speech in 3.9. Of interest is also Vidura’s speech in 5.62, where he argues that kinsmen must be united.

Yudhiṣṭhira’s post-war regrets are mirrored in Arjuna’s pre-war concerns about the sin he will incur by killing his *gurus*. Arjuna’s misgivings about the war are recorded in the first chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*. A further parallel between both episodes is that neither Yudhiṣṭhira nor Arjuna initially expresses any interest in *mokṣa*. The internal chronology of the *Bhagavadgītā* has been a

⁹⁴ Similar reasoning is found, for example, in 12.174.18, which states: ‘Desires succeed for those who have shaken off their sin by means of *dharma* [that is,] by means of *tapas* that has been carried out for a long time in the forest of austerities’ (*dirghakālena tapasā seviteṇa tapovane | dharmanirdhūtapāpānāṃ saṃsidhyante manorathāḥ*).

much-debated topic. As discussed by Malinar, ‘for quite a few scholars the “original”, “epic” BhG ends in 2.38, the rest being regarded as a later interpolation’ (2007b:69). Indeed, the first part of Kṛṣṇa’s answer to Arjuna only contains ideas that are attested elsewhere in the Sanskrit epics and does not discuss the topic of *mokṣa*. Like Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna is interested in avoiding the bad consequences (*pāpa*) of intra-family warfare, and Kṛṣṇa’s first answer addresses precisely this concern, whereas in the second part of the second chapter (after 2.38) Kṛṣṇa begins to deliver teachings on how to avoid any karmic consequences whatsoever. It is quite probable that a shorter version of both the *Bhagavadgītā* and the “persuasion” were expanded to address the question of *mokṣa*. Curiously, both Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna mention *bhaikṣacarya* as a form of political exile in their opening speeches, which might have motivated the expansion of both passages to include the religious goals and values of those *bhikṣus* who are religious mendicants – in both cases arguing that it is better not to become a *bhikṣu*. The answer to the dharmic dilemma faced by the epic heroes is different in these two passages – while the “persuasion” ultimately settles the debate by claiming that a householder king can purify his sins by horse sacrifice, the *Bhagavadgītā* argues that it is possible not to incur any sin (*pāpa*) in the first place. Such a comparison with the structure of the *Bhagavadgītā* supports a hypothesis that the “persuasion” has several layers.

Purging the guilt of being responsible for the death of relatives is also associated with retiring to the forest in earlier and later books. For example, Yudhiṣṭhira makes the following statement during the war, when he feels guilty about the death of Arjuna’s son, Abhimanyu, whom he ordered to attack in battle:

I have acted badly, o Pārtha, which has brought a terrible calamity upon you. Therefore, cut down today (*adya*) this head of mine, I who am a destroyer of my own family and the worst man.

*kṛtaṃ mayā pārtha yathā na sādhu; yena prāptaṃ vyasanaṃ vaḥ sughoram
tasmāc chiraś chinddhi mamedam adya; kulāntakasyādhamapūruṣasya* (8.49.102)

This is shortly followed by this curt statement: ‘I, a bad person, will depart for the forest on this very day ’(*gacchāmy ahaṃ vanam evāḍya pāpaḥ*; 8.49.104). There seems to be no suggestion, however, that Yudhiṣṭhira is motivated by a commitment to non-violence or that he expects to obtain *mokṣa* in the forest. Rather, he seems to desire expiation of the evil he believes he has caused. The same reasoning appears in some parts of the “persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira”. In one speech Yudhiṣṭhira again says:

Killing our friends we have performed endless sin and will fall down into hell with our heads first. We shall abandon our bodies by fierce asceticism, oh good man. Show me the best hermitages, oh grandfather.

*te vayaṃ suhr̥do hatvā kṛtvā pāpam anantakam
narake nipatiṣyāmo hy adhaḥśirasa eva ca
śarīrāṇi vimokṣyāmas tapasogreṇa sattama
āśramāṃś ca viśeṣāṃś tvaṃ mamācakṣva pitāmaha* (12.33.11-12)

Here again we see that Yudhiṣṭhira is concerned about the consequences of his actions for the afterlife. Given how *tapas* and life in hermitages (*āśramas*) are depicted elsewhere in the epics, I take this to mean that Yudhiṣṭhira wants to expiate his sin by *tapas* rather than permanently avoid any karmic consequences whatsoever.

The same theme appears again after the *Śāntiparvan*. In 13.57 Yudhiṣṭhira again announces that he burns with grief and intends to renounce and follow a life of fierce asceticism. The same ideas initiate book 14, where Yudhiṣṭhira announces that he sees no peace (*śānti*) ‘having caused the death of grandfather [Bhīṣma] and Karṇa ’(*ghātayitvā pitāmaham karṇam ca*; 14.2.12) and asks ‘by what action can I be released from this cruelty ’(*karmanā yena mucyeyam asmāt krūrād*; 14.2.13). In this case Yudhiṣṭhira does not mention that he has any particular action in mind, but Vyāsa reprimands him for this attitude and recommends expiation without giving up his kingship.

Yudhiṣṭhira now accepts that ‘there is no doubt that horse sacrifice could purify even the earth itself’ (*asaṃśayaṃ vājimedhaḥ pāvayet pṛthivīm api*; 14.3.11).

Returning to Yudhiṣṭhira’s speech in 12.7, I would argue that at least its first part may have little to do with the goal of *mokṣa*. Early in his speech Yudhiṣṭhira makes a reference, as it were in passing, to certain non-householder groups, claiming that ‘for the forest dwellers there is constant [observance of] non-violence and speaking only the truth’ (*ahiṃsā satyavacanam nityāni vanacāriṇām*; 12.7.6). While it is clear that he takes such “forest dwellers” as the standard of dharmic behaviour, this short phrase does not inspire much confidence in identifying them with any specific group. It seems most plausible, however, that this phrase was intended to refer to groups that most closely resemble the *vānaprasthas*. Yudhiṣṭhira has not yet left the Vedic worldview for a renunciate one, since he continues by claiming that offspring bring happiness (12.7.15) and lists sacrifice (*ijyā*) among a number of methods for securing offspring (12.7.14). This is intended to highlight the Pāṇḍavas’ loss of their offspring.

At the end of his lament Yudhiṣṭhira refers to some unidentified “scripture” (*śruti*): ‘it is not possible to obtain the entire *dharma* by somebody who has possessions, thus says the scripture’ (*na hi kṛtsnatamo dharmah śakyaḥ prāptum iti śrutiḥ parigrahavatā*; 12.7.37). There are no firm clues regarding the *śruti* that Yudhiṣṭhira refers to, but I would suggest two possibilities. Yudhiṣṭhira’s ideas and terminology here have some resemblance the Jaina tradition which distinguishes between lay and monastic *dharma* as well as giving central importance to *ahiṃsā*, mentioned by Yudhiṣṭhira in verse 7 of the same speech. Note that *parigraha* is a key term in Jainism, where freedom from possessions (*aparigraha*) is one of the five *mahāvratas* (religious observances) that distinguish renouncers from lay people. Elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, the preferred term for

wealth is “*artha*”, although other terms such as *dhana* are also common. For example, Yudhiṣṭhira’s present interest in giving up *parigraha* is followed by a speech on the importance of *artha* by Arjuna (12.8), which echoes Yudhiṣṭhira’s own praise of *artha* before the war in 5.70.

Alternatively, and even more likely, Yudhiṣṭhira might again be referring to the views of *vānaprastha*-like ascetics. It seems reasonable to assume that the *vānaprastha* lifestyle is informed by precisely such a belief that accumulating possessions is an obstacle to obtaining the full *dharma*, although I am unable to point out a *śruti* passage that might have been cited to support this view. A possible clue for the understanding of Yudhiṣṭhira’s present speech is found later in the “persuasion”. The sage Devasthāna will refer to, and criticise, certain views ascribed to *vaikhānasas*, clearly assuming that Yudhiṣṭhira is informed by such views (12.20.6-7). Although separated by more than ten *adhyāyas*, it seems reasonable to assume that Devasthāna intends to refer back to Yudhiṣṭhira’s speech in *adhyāya* 7, since these are precisely the two moments in which external authority is referred to. Moreover, Devasthāna continues the same conversation about the relative value of wealth and poverty by arguing that ‘there is nothing better than wealth’ (*na jyāyo ’sti dhanād iti*; 12.20.2). The opinion ascribed to the *vaikhānasas* is precisely that not striving for wealth is better than striving for it⁹⁵. They also say that a person desirous for wealth would in their absentmindedness overlook even an abortion⁹⁶, which is one of the greatest sins according to the

⁹⁵ I do not attempt to provide a translation because the grammar of the underlying Sanskrit verse is unclear, and quite a few manuscript variants are recorded for it: *ihate dhanahetor yas tasyānīhā garīyasī/ bhūyān doṣaḥ pravardheta yas taṁ dhanam apāśrayet* (12.20.7). Here is Fitzgerald’s translation: ‘He who does not strive for riches is better than he who does. Any fault attached to wealth can only grow greater.’

⁹⁶ Here again I hesitate to cite and translate the verse in the main texts because the version reconstructed in the Critical Edition seems problematic in terms of grammar and because a plethora of variant readings are recorded for it, some of which have a strong presence in both Northern and Southern recensions: *kṛcchrāc ca dravyasaṁhāraṁ kurvanti dhanakāraṇāt/ dhanena tṛṣṭito ’buddhyā bhrūṇahatyāṁ na budhyate* (12.20.8). Fitzgerald’s translation reads: ‘People accumulate wealth only by producing riches with painstaking labors. One who craves riches overlooks even abortion without giving it a thought.’ While it would be possible to discuss the edition and translation of these two verses, both verses as well as

Dharmaśāstra tradition. I was unable to find such claims in the *Vaikhānasa Dharmasūtra* which in any case is usually dated to a considerably later period. In the early Dharmasūtras and in the *Mahābhārata*, however, we see that *vaikhānasa* is often used as a synonym of *vānaprastha*. It is therefore highly likely that a considerable part of the “persuasion” should be understood as arguing against the undoubtedly Vedic ideal of *vānaprastha* rather than other ascetic traditions such as Buddhism and Jainism.

3.4.3. Yudhiṣṭhira becomes interested in asceticism

Towards the end of the same speech from *adhyāya* 7 Yudhiṣṭhira also expresses an inclination towards what I in this thesis call “ascetic” ideas and the pursuit of *mokṣa*. This ascetic interest runs through most of his remaining speeches of the “persuasion” episode and is marked by the usage of typically ascetic terminology. In the previous subsection we have seen that Yudhiṣṭhira refers to a conflict between having possessions and a full realisation of *dharma*. In the same speech Yudhiṣṭhira relates the problem of having possessions to the evil he believes to have committed: ‘I committed evil as I was striving for possessions’ (*mayā nisṛṣṭaṃ pāpaṃ hi parigrahaṃ abhīpsatā;* 12.7.38). He therefore says that he will give up his possessions (*parigraha*) as well as the entire kingdom and ‘go released, free from grief and anguish’ (*gamiṣyāmi vinirmukto viśoko vijvaras;* 12.7.39). In his next speech in the “persuasion” Yudhiṣṭhira admits that ‘craving made me unwittingly⁹⁷ commit a great evil’ (*tṛṣṇayā hi mahat pāpaṃ ajñānād asmi kāritaḥ* 12.9.29). While elsewhere the discussion revolves around the issues of whether Yudhiṣṭhira has really committed evil and how to forgo its karmic consequences, in such moments Yudhiṣṭhira seeks to identify the

their citing as a *pūrvapakṣa* suggests strongly that the *vaikhānasas* are credited with a belief that it is better not to strive for wealth.

⁹⁷ This must refer to the killing of Karna, whose identity as Yudhiṣṭhira’s eldest brother was revealed to him only after the war.

deeper cause of his actions that led to the killing of his brother, teachers, cousins, son, nephews, and allies. This cause is identified as *tṛṣṇā* and especially craving for *parigraha*. While Yudhiṣṭhira's speeches in the "persuasion" have some features that may as well be associated with the *vānaprastha* ideal, this mode of analysis reminds one of that seen in such traditions as Buddhism, and it is in this specific context of appreciating the role of *tṛṣṇā* in his actions that Yudhiṣṭhira becomes interested in *mokṣa*.

In light of the general *arthaśāstric* requirement of the king to control his passions while being a skilful ruler (discussed in 3.2.), it is possible to appreciate Yudhiṣṭhira's interest in *mokṣa* as rather unique. There are many passages in different books of the *Mahābhārata* that advocate the restraint of one's desires, but in the "persuasion" Yudhiṣṭhira goes further and calls for a complete eradication of desire.

An analysis of Yudhiṣṭhira speech in 12.7 allows us to see precisely at which point in the epic Yudhiṣṭhira becomes interested in ascetic ideas. In the previous section of this chapter I argued that up to this point Yudhiṣṭhira has been operating within a framework of Vedic *dharma*, not really shunning violence as such, and expecting an afterlife in heaven as his reward. His present observation that desire to obtain wealth was the fundamental cause of war, which even in victory has turned out badly for the Pāṇḍavas⁹⁸, makes Yudhiṣṭhira interested in lifestyles that do not involve having any possessions. At least two such lifestyles were known in Ancient India. The first is that of *vānaprastha*, which operates in a Vedic framework of *dharma*. Not desiring possessions,

⁹⁸ Just to sum up, the Pāṇḍavas have killed their *gurus* and cousins as well as their elder brother Karna; their own offspring has been wiped out; and Yudhiṣṭhira has broken his vow of *satya*. Virtually all of their allies were slaughtered in their sleep during the massacre at night, as depicted in book 9, so that they will not be able to obtain the heaven of warriors who die in battle. As seen above, Yudhiṣṭhira has serious concerns about the afterlife that the Pāṇḍavas themselves can expect after all this. It should be noted that at this point Kṛṣṇa has not brought Arjuna's grandson Parikṣit back to life, so that Yudhiṣṭhira is entitled to believe that the war has brought about the destruction of the royal lineage for both Kurus and Pāṇḍavas.

the *vānaprastha* can avoid the *pāpa* associated with the accumulation and preservation of property. The second lifestyle is that of the *bhikṣu* who, even if seeking to form an intimate relationship with *brahman*, gives up ritual activity and *tapas* in order to go beyond good and bad karma and avoid any afterlife whatsoever. Yudhiṣṭhira's speech in *adhyāya* 7, discussed in this section, opens with statements and terminology that suggest that he is interested in becoming a *vānaprastha*, whereas other details suggest that he wants to seek liberation as a *bhikṣu*. The same dual interest is found in subsequent speeches of Yudhiṣṭhira; we will see below that in *adhyāya* 9 he claims that he wants to adopt the lifestyles of both *bhikṣu* and *vānaprastha*.

It is not impossible that in an earlier version of this episode Yudhiṣṭhira was interested in just one of these lifestyles, and I have emphasised in this section some details that suggest that the “persuasion” might have originally intended to refute the lifestyle of *vānaprastha*. It is also possible that the “persuasion” was composed from the very beginning with the intent of rejecting both lifestyles that presuppose giving up one's possessions. Be that as it may, it is clear that the “persuasion” is not simply an argument against non-Vedic ascetic groups, such as the Buddhists and Jainas, but also an intra-Brahmanical argument about the suitability of the lifestyle of *vānaprastha* for Yudhiṣṭhira.

3.4.4. Yudhiṣṭhira on renunciation

3.4.4.1 Two different lifestyles

I turn now to Yudhiṣṭhira's second major speech in the “persuasion”, which is found in *adhyāya* 9 of the *Śāntiparvan*. In this speech Yudhiṣṭhira describes in more detail two different lifestyles that he is about to adopt. First, he describes the lifestyle and practices that are usually associated with the *vānaprastha*. This lifestyle is characterised by great austerity (*mahat tapaḥ*;

12.9.4), sacrificing in the fire at the appointed times (*juhvāno 'gnim yathākālam*; 12.9.5), and living in the forest and subsisting on fruits and roots (*araṇye phalamūlāśī*; 12.9.4). Second, he describes another lifestyle in 12.9.12-29. This second lifestyle agrees in many details with the *Mahābhārata*'s descriptions of *bhikṣus*, discussed in chapter 2.

Yudhiṣṭhira's speech partly overlaps with the speech king Pāṇḍu delivers in 1.110 when he describes his intention to adopt the same two lifestyles after being cursed by a Brahmin⁹⁹. It is therefore natural to consider both episodes together. Yudhiṣṭhira's speech is the longer of the two, changes some of the *pādas* of the shared verses, and inserts several additional verses between the shared ones. Nevertheless, there are no clear signs that one of the speeches is derived from the other.

The mention of the two lifestyles side by side in the speeches of Yudhiṣṭhira and Pāṇḍu is curious because they are substantially different and normally associated with different goals¹⁰⁰. As discussed above, the practice of *tapas* and the *vānaprastha* mode of life are commonly depicted as a means of obtaining merit within *saṃsāra*¹⁰¹ whereas the goal of the *bhikṣu* is usually to obtain a permanent good beyond *saṃsāra*.

It is hard to say with certainty why these two modes of life are listed together in these two *Mahābhārata* episodes. I have already suggested in the previous section that "persuasion" might consist of several layers. Given that elsewhere in the *Śāntiparvan*, as well as before and after it,

⁹⁹ In contrast to Yudhiṣṭhira, Pāṇḍu eventually sets for the *vānaprastha* lifestyle because that way he can be accompanied by his wives.

¹⁰⁰ As Tsuchida noted in 1991: 'Until now the essential difference between *jaṭilā* [ascetics who perform Vedic rituals in forest *āśramas*] and *paribbājakā* [wandering mendicants] does not seem to have been sufficiently recognised by modern scholars, who tend to class them both indiscriminately under the rubric of "ascetics" which is too general (Tsuchida 1991:83-84)'. A comparative discussion of these two modes of "ascetic" life has since been published by Bronkhorst in 1993.

¹⁰¹ To be more precise, many of the passages that praise *tapas* do not necessarily presuppose a belief in *saṃsāra* and probably represent a world-view that predates the widespread adoption of the belief in karma, *saṃsāra*, and liberation from *saṃsāra* in Northern India. On the importance of *tapas* already in Vedic mythology see Kaelber 1989.

Yudhiṣṭhira is interested in retiring to the forest to expiate his sin, it is plausible that an earlier version of “persuasion” was concerned with the same lifestyle. In that case, the discussion of the lifestyle of *bhikṣu*, as well as the goal of *mokṣa*, would be a later addition.

It is also possible that the composers or editors of the “persuasion” were simply not particularly interested in the different rationales of the *vānaprastha* and *bhikṣu* lifestyles and simply took the opportunity to simultaneously reject all lifestyles that require giving up wealth and kingship. As will be discussed below, the “persuasion” aims to present the life of the householder as the only really viable way of life.

Alternatively, it is possible that the juxtaposition of the two different lifestyles of *bhikṣu* and *vānaprastha* might be due to a real confusion of the two *āśramas*. Such a misunderstanding is highlighted, for example, in the *Buddhacarita*. When the young prince mentions his resolve to give up kingship to pursue *mokṣa* to other people, they always believe that he wants to go to the forest to practice *tapas*. This happens several times, and he has to patiently explain that he does not want to practice *tapas* as a *vānaprastha* to gain heaven or other such temporary benefits. To be completely sure, he visits an *āśrama* of *tapasvins* and concludes that their practices are indeed not aimed at liberation. Meanwhile, the ascetic figure who inspires him in the fifth canto is called a *śramaṇa* and is described in terms that are very similar to the descriptions of the *bhikṣus* in the *Mahābhārata* (5.17). It is well-known that the *Buddhacarita* continues many of the *dharmic* conversations started in the *Mahābhārata* (Hiltebeitel 2006a). There are obvious similarities between buddha-to-be’s and Yudhiṣṭhira’s interest in *mokṣa*, and it does not seem unlikely that Aśvaghoṣa might be addressing what he perceived to be a confusion of the third and fourth *āśramas* in the “persuasion”.

3.4.4.2. Kings Yudhiṣṭhira and Pāṇḍu on renunciation

In this subsection I will discuss some of the details from the second lifestyle that Yudhiṣṭhira intends to adopt. As noted above, Yudhiṣṭhira's description of a *bhikṣu* partly overlaps with a similar description that Pāṇḍu makes in the *Ādiparvan*.

Both kings claim that they will practice begging (*bhāikṣaṃ car*), living alone, being shaven(-headed) (*muṇḍaḥ*), sheltering in abandoned buildings or having a root of a tree as their house (*śūnyāgārapratiśrayaḥ vṛkṣamūlaniketo vā*), having abandoned all the [distinction between what] is pleasant and unpleasant (*tyaktasārvapriyāpriyaḥ*; *Mahābhārata* 12.9.12-13 and 1.110.7-8). Such characteristics should be familiar from the earlier study of *Mahābhārata*'s descriptions of mendicants in chapter 2.

Of interest is the claim in the same verses that they will be covered with *pāṃsu* (*pāṃsunā samavacchannaḥ* in 1.110.8 but *pāṃsubhiḥ samavacchannaḥ* in 12.9.13). Both Fitzgerald and Van Buitenen translate this as 'covered with dust'. It must be noted, however, that the word *pāṃsu* has a more specific meaning in the Buddhist literature where *pāṃsukūla*/*pāṃśukūla* (Pali *paṃsukūla*) refers to the ascetic practice of wearing rags that are found in a heap (*kūla*) of garbage (*pāṃsu*). This is one of the ascetic observances called *dhutāṅgas* that were mentioned in chapter 2. Considering that both Pāṇḍu and Yudhiṣṭhira use other terms that are common in the shared ascetic literature such as *vṛkṣamūla*, which is another *dhutāṅga* practice, it is most probable that the practice of wearing "refuse-rags" is meant here. I am not aware that liberation-seeking *bhikṣus* are elsewhere

portrayed as covered with dust or dirt in the *Mahābhārata* or Buddhist literature. We should therefore be cautious not to read into such descriptions the later tradition of radical *śaiva* ascetics¹⁰².

Another source of possible misunderstanding is the usage of terms like *kapāla* and *kāpālika* in the *Mahābhārata*. While the word *kapāla* also means a skull, the same word is commonly used to refer simply to the begging bowl of the *bhikṣus* in the Buddhist literature and even in Brahmanical texts like the *Mahābhārata* or *Manu*. Therefore, the phrase “*kāpālīṃ [...] pāpiṣṭhāṃ vṛttim āsthāya*”¹⁰³ (12.8.7), which Arjuna uses to characterise the mode of life supposedly advocated by Yudhiṣṭhira, should rather be understood as ‘resorting to begging, the most miserable means of sustenance’¹⁰⁴. The rest of Arjuna’s speech makes it clear that begging is the worst (*pāpiṣṭha*) means of sustenance because lack of wealth (*artha*) makes it impossible to obtain merit by performing rituals as well as because of the superiority of the giver over the recipient of charity. These are some of the arguments aimed at Yudhiṣṭhira to delegitimise mendicancy as a lifestyle that potentially leads to a greater good.

Another notable detail of Pāṇḍu’s and Yudhiṣṭhira’s descriptions of renunciation is found in the following verse:

If one person were to cut my arm with a hatchet and another person to adorn it with sandalwood, I would think neither good nor bad of either of them.

¹⁰² For example, Kauṇḍinya’s commentary on the *Pāśupatasūtra* mentions the practice of being *maladigdhāṅga*, “having one’s body smeared with dirt” (3.11.5).

¹⁰³ Almost the same phrase “*kāpālīṃ vṛttim āsthāya*” is used later in their conversation to refer to king Janaka becoming a mendicant (12.18.7). The important debate regarding king Janaka will be discussed below. There, too, it is highly implausible that Janaka becomes a skull-bearing ascetic.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Fitzgerald’s translation: ‘by the most wicked way of life, the ‘way of the skull’” (2004). Fitzgerald makes the following note to the translation of this phrase: ‘*the way of the skull: kāpālīm . . . vṛttim*. A reference to the fact that some kinds of renunciators used a skull as their bowl for begging alms’.

vāśyaikam takṣato bāhuṃ candanenaikam ukṣataḥ
nākalyāṇam na kalyāṇam cintayann ubhayos tayoh.¹⁰⁵ (12.9.25)

This is a particularly vivid indication of radical *samatva*, which is here placed at the centre of renunciation, as it is in other similar passages in the *Mahābhārata*. This verse may be emphasised for the present purposes because the same image is used to illustrate king Janaka's radical *samatva* in 12.308.36, an episode that will be discussed in chapter 7. This is helpful for understanding that *Mahābhārata* 12.308 draws for inspiration on such ideals of *samatva* rather than, for example, the technical discussion of Sāṃkhya and yoga that are also found elsewhere in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*.

The same verse is also notable because, as Norman notes, it is a versified expansion of the compound

vāśī-candana-kalpa which occurs in Buddhist Sanskrit in a list of epithets of the Buddha. Its meaning was unclear and caused much discussion, but the problem of its interpretation was solved when it was observed that there was a Jain parallel *vāsīcamḍanakappa* which occurs in a list of comparable epithets in a Jain canonical text. The explanation given by the Jain commentators enables us to understand its meaning (Norman 1993:268).

Unfortunately, Norman does not mention in the same publication what exactly this meaning is. Some of the debate about the meaning of this compound is recorded by Edgerton, who also helpfully mentions that the Jaina commentators understand *kappa/kalpa* here to uniquely mean "indifferent to".¹⁰⁶ The three occurrences of this image in the *Mahābhārata* confirm the insight of the Jaina commentators. The *Mahābhārata* also introduce a hand into the picture, explaining that the hatchet and sandalwood are applied to the indifferent person's arms.

¹⁰⁵ Pāṇḍu's verse is identical except for reading the synonymous *pradhyāyan* for *cintayan* (1.110.14).

¹⁰⁶ See the entry on *vāsīcamḍanakalpa* in Edgerton's *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*.

As for his goal, Yudhiṣṭhira claims that, just like other *bhikṣu*'s, he 'will seek the permanent, eternal and stable state' (*prārthaye sthānam avyayaṁ śāśvataṁ dhruvam*; 12.9.36).

These two examples of Pāṇḍu and Yudhiṣṭhira indicate an expectation that normally a king, just like anyone else, would be required to adopt the conduct of a mendicant in order to be able to successfully cultivate such ascetic states as indifference towards the pairs of opposites. This assumption forms an important backdrop for the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. The debate in the early *Śāntiparvan* uses various arguments to convince Yudhiṣṭhira that this is not the best path for the king to take.¹⁰⁷ As we will see below, this dissuasion is not done in a very effective manner if we take Yudhiṣṭhira's continuing interest in *mokṣa* seriously. Most speeches of the "persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira" suggest that the ascetic teachings, such as those collected in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, are irrelevant for kings.

3.4.5. Returning from renunciation: A dialogue between king Janaka and his wife

Only one of the several speeches and tales that make up the "persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira" entertains the idea that a householder king might be able to achieve *mokṣa*. Such an argument is found in the dialogue (*saṁvāda*) between king Janaka and his wife (12.18). Arjuna cites this dialogue after Yudhiṣṭhira makes a reference to king Janaka in one of his ascetically oriented speeches (12.17). Yudhiṣṭhira refers to Janaka as an exemplary renouncer king when he himself wishes to renounce kingship, but Arjuna provides an alternative version of the legend about king Janaka to draw just the opposite message from Janaka's example.

¹⁰⁷ This is in contrast to many Buddhist and Jaina narratives that depict kings who become *bhikṣus* to seek liberation.

I will examine the main anti-renunciation arguments made by the wife of Janaka, as reported by Arjuna. I will argue that her speech hardly offers a viable vision of a liberated householder king.

The “dialogue” is rather a monologue delivered by king Janaka’s wife as she tries to convince Janaka to resume kingship. Janaka’s response or reaction is not recorded, but for Arjuna the arguments of his wife are valid, and he expects that Yudhiṣṭhira will find them sound and remain a king.

The greater part of queen’s speech operates with the same non-ascetic understanding of *dharma* that dominates other parts of the “persuasion”. The queen begins by discussing the relationship between the supporter and the supported in the context of afterlife rewards. According to her analysis, king Janaka has given up his previous dharmic position of supporting guests (*atithi*), gods, sages, and ancestors (12.18.9) and has now reached the inferior position of being supported by others (12.18.11). The queen then asks: ‘What [heavenly] worlds will you [possibly] go to, oh king, given that liberation (*mokṣa*) is unlikely for those who depend on others?’ (*kāṃl lokān nu gamiṣyasi/ rājan saṃśayite mokṣe paratantreṣu dehiṣu* // 12.18.14b-d). This is a major critique of the institution of renunciation. She has already pointed out that the renouncer has given up the practices that normally secure a good afterlife and now puts the attainment of *mokṣa* in doubt by claiming that if the *bhikṣu* is constantly dependent on others in his daily life he hardly seems to be a fit candidate for the complete freedom (*mokṣa*) that he seeks. We will see in chapter 7 that the same argument is reversed in another Janaka dialogue (12.308), where the king, rather than the renouncer, will be said to be deeply dependent upon others and therefore not free even in a more worldly sense. No such response is made in the “persuasion”, and we only learn about the queen’s view that it is not rational

to become a renouncer. A related sentiment is expressed in the queen's subsequent claim that 'a twice-born who always begs does not become pacified'¹⁰⁸ (*sadaiva yācamāno vai tathā śāmyati na dvijaḥ*; 12.18.25). Such a life cannot lead to liberation, but to adopt it one must give up this life and the next, that is, one must give up the enjoyments available here and now as well as the dharmic activities that are expected to secure an afterlife in heaven (12.18.15).

The queen moves on to praise the householder in verses 26-28, arguing that those who seek liberation (*mokṣakāṅkṣiṇaḥ*) depend on food (*anna*) and the householder (*grhastha*) for their existence.

Overall, in the first part of her speech the queen is keen to explore the hierarchy between the giver and the receiver, arguing that the giver is sure to accumulate merit and be rewarded after death, whereas the receiver is in some sense subordinate to the giver and because of this dependency on the householder can hardly be said to be free (*mukta*) at all. Later in her speech, the queen offers a more materialist critique of renouncers, claiming that

they go forth bald-headed and wearing ochre robes for the sake of obtaining gifts.
They are bound by various fetters as they sinfully accumulate material goods
(*āmiṣa*).

parivrajanti dānārthaṃ muṇḍāḥ kāṣāyavāsasaḥ
sitā bahuvidhaiḥ pāśaiḥ saṃcinvanto vṛthāmiṣam (12.18.31)

The queen does not specify whether this applies to all *bhikṣus*. I believe that she is trying to say that king Janaka has been fooled by the religious appearances of renouncers who are hypocrites (*dharmadhvaṇḍya*; 12.18.33) whose real motivation is material profit. It would not make sense to accuse the king of becoming a renouncer to make an easy living, but he could be accused of not seeing

¹⁰⁸ As discussed below in subsection 6 of this chapter, the idea of pacifying oneself or one's negative mental states, expressed by the root *śam*, is central to the life of the renouncers in the *Mahābhārata* and beyond.

through the institution of renunciation that was established by others for material reasons. Another point of the queen's criticism is that these renouncers 'have not abandoned internal blemishes' (being *niṣkaṣāya*) despite wearing 'ochre robes' (*kāṣāya*; 12.18.33). The same word play is found in Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarananda*:

He who has departed [his house] but from whom desire and passion have not departed, who bears an ochre robe while not being internally purified, who carries a begging bowl but who has not become a vessel for virtues – although bearing the external marks [of a renouncer] he is neither a householder nor a monk.

*yo niṣṛtaś ca na ca niṣṛtakāmarāgaḥ kāṣāyam udvahati yo na ca niṣkaṣāyaḥ
pātraṃ bibharti ca guṇair na ca pātrabhūto līgaṃ vahann api sa naiva grhī na
bhikṣuḥ* (7.49)

The context of this verse in the *Saundarananda* highlights a problem with the queen's argument if it is indeed intended as a general criticism of renunciation. In *Saundarananda*, this verse appropriately refers to a prince who has become a renouncer by accident and longs for his wife. There is no particular reason to believe that Janaka is similarly weak in his resolve for renunciation, and, even if it be admitted that Janaka was a renouncer in external signs only, there is again no reason to attribute the same insincerity to Yudhiṣṭhira.

Given the parallel phrase of *kāṣāya/niṣkaṣāya* and the similar topic, it is possible to read *Saundarananda* as a response to Janaka's queen in the *Mahābhārata*. In *Saundarananda*, a certain *śramaṇa* appears to argue at length that it would be inappropriate both generally and especially for a king to fall back on his earlier resolution to renounce.

Quite the opposite is the position of Janaka's queen in the *Mahābhārata*, who urges Janaka to return to the more mainstream *dharma* which leads to heaven rather than *mokṣa*, while, despite her previous remarks, attributing some legitimacy to renouncers, at least as possible sources of merit:

Obtain [heavenly] worlds while controlling your senses and supporting *sādhus*,
[whether they are] ochre-robed, wearing antelope-skins, bark-dress, naked, bald,
or wearing dreadlocks.

kāṣāyair ajinaiś cīrair nagnān muṇḍāñ jaṭādhārān
bibhrat sādhuṇ¹⁰⁹ mahārāja jaya lokāñ jitendriyaḥ (12.18.34)

This suggestion pertains to the earlier giver-receiver hierarchy, and Janaka is advised to resume his natural royal place as the giver or supporter. Besides this, the virtue of “sense conquest” seems to be provided as a bridge between the virtuous householder and the renunciate lifestyles. As discussed above, being *jitendriya* is one of the virtues attributed to *bhikṣus* as well as *vānaprasthas*, but appears to be different from the more specifically yogic forms of sense deprivation, and is commonly mentioned in a *nīti* context of controlling the passions of the king.

Thus, the greater part of queen’s speech is not only critical of the lifestyle of renunciators, but also does not seem to take the possibility of attaining *mokṣa* too seriously. Furthermore, she promotes the safer option, to follow the *dharma* that offers divine heavens as its reward. The same is true of Arjuna’s concluding statement, in which he praises the royal duties of protecting the subjects and charity as means to obtaining the ‘desirable worlds’ (*iṣṭāṃl lokān*; 12.18.38).

In the queen’s speech, and indeed in the entire “persuasion”, there are just two verses in which the state of being a *bhikṣu* is redefined in a way which seems to suggest that king Janaka’s full soteriological ambitions could be fulfilled if he becomes a king again:

One should recognise a *bhikṣu* neither from giving up [of Vedic ritual, family, wealth, etc.], nor baldness nor begging. He who gives up wealth [in sacrifice] in a proper manner (*rju*) – rather know him to be a *bhikṣu*. He who goes unattached,

¹⁰⁹ This usage of the word *sādhū* as a general term to refer to a variety of “holy men” is notable: I have been unable to trace it elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, where it most often qualifies good Brahmins, nor is such a meaning recorded in the Pali dictionaries. The various sectarian marks listed in this verse are elsewhere associated with Brahmanical *vānaprasthas* (dreadlocks, antelope-skins, and bark-dress), Buddhist monks (baldness and ochre robes), as well as some Jaina and Ājīvika ascetics (being naked).

as if he was attached, without attachment, his bonds released, equal (*sama*) to friend and foe, he indeed is liberated, oh king.

*tyāgān na bhikṣukaṃ vidyān na maṇḍyān na ca yācanāt
rjus tu yo 'rthaṃ tyajati taṃ sukhaṃ viddhi bhikṣukaṃ
asaktaḥ saktavad gacchan niḥsaṅgo muktabandhanaḥ
samaḥ śatrau ca mitre ca sa vai mukto mahīpate* (12.18.29-30)

The first verse uses two meanings of the *tyāga*, a strategy that we have seen elsewhere in the “persuasion”. The first statement about *tyāga* seems to be rather rhetorical, as the giving up of wealth in sacrifice is normally associated with an afterlife in heaven rather than *mokṣa*.

The second verse makes a more solid argument about *mokṣa*, identifying it with freedom from attachment and the attitude of *samatva*, which is here exemplified just by the pair “friend and foe”. Identifying *mokṣa* with such internal states makes it possible to further claim that even a king can be liberated by cultivating those mental states. Nevertheless, this line of thought is not at all developed in the queen’s speech or anywhere else in the “persuasion”.

The second verse reminds one of other verses elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* that redefine liberation in terms of internal mental states, potentially available to householder kings. Elsewhere, such as in *Mahābhārata* 12.277 (which is discussed in chapter 6 of this thesis), we find a group of such verses that end in the refrain *mukta eva saḥ*, which bears resemblance to the *sa vai mukto* from the queen’s speech.

The two verses of the queen’s speech highlighted in this subsection are most notable for what they do not say. They do not amount to a developed and clear statement that a king can remain a householder and be liberated. This idea is not presented as the central argument in the queen’s speech. Indeed, we have seen that she is mostly concerned with different topics such as the hierarchy between the giver and the receiver as well as a materialist critique of renunciation.

The most simple explanation of this situation is that the “persuasion” was composed at a time when the idea that a householder king can be liberated had either not yet been clearly formulated or was not yet widely known or accepted. A similar argument, following Olivelle, was earlier made about the lack of the mention of sequential *āśramas*. With hindsight, it seems reasonable to expect that relegating *mokṣa* to a later stage in life or even allowing for it to be reached by a householder would have been the strongest arguments to persuade Yudhiṣṭhira that it is possible to fulfil the duties demanded by his interlocutors while realising his soteriological ambition. Yet neither of these arguments are made. The “persuasion” is an early witness to thinking about kingship and renunciation. It is not difficult to imagine that the arguments provided in the “persuasion” were not entirely convincing to those seriously interested in *mokṣa*, and that further answers to the same problem were formulated later. We will see in part three of the thesis that the possibility of liberation for householder king remains a controversial topic in later parts of the *Śāntiparvan* as well as in such Buddhist works as the *Buddhacarita* and *Milindapañha*, where more elaborate ideas about householder liberation are formulated and rebuked.

3.4.6. In defence of the householder

In this section I will mention some of the strategies that are used to convince Yudhiṣṭhira to take up kingship. They have already been summarised by other scholars, but I hope to contribute to the debate by showing that many of the arguments used in the debate compare the householder with the *vānaprastha* rather than with the *bhikṣu*. This portrayal of the householder as the real *vānaprastha* is, I will argue, why much of the “persuasion” fails to take Yudhiṣṭhira’s interest in *mokṣa* seriously.

3.4.6.1. The householder is the best

Some passages argue that Yudhiṣṭhira should be interested only in the householder's *āśrama* because it is the best (e.g. 12.12.11 and 12.23.2). As already observed by Bowles (2007), the same view on the relative value of the *āśramas* is found in the early Dharmasūtras. The Dharmasūtras laud the *āśrama* of the householder and are suspicious about the others, although all four *āśramas* are still explained. Gautama recognizes that only the householder's state is prescribed in the available Vedic texts (3.36), and the same view is expressed in *Baudhāyana* (2.11.27)¹¹⁰. *Āpastamba* argues against the superiority of the celibate *āśramas* because they contradict the rites prescribed in the Veda, which is the ultimate authority (2.24.10). Meanwhile, we do not find in the persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira references to the classical (sequential) system of the four *āśramas*. It is briefly stated once that *saṃnyāsa* can be done during a calamity (*āpatkāle*) or by somebody who has reached old age or is cheated by his enemies (*jarayābhiparītena śatrubhir vyamśitena ca*; 12.10.18), but Yudhiṣṭhira is never told that he should follow the sequence of the four *āśramas*. Since this obvious strategy is not used¹¹¹, it can be said with some certainty that the "persuasion" was composed before the classical sequence of the four consecutive *āśramas* was devised or became influential¹¹². This suggests that at least those parts of "the persuasion" that praise the householder should be dated as roughly contemporary with the Dharmasūtras or slightly later than them, probably in the centuries before the start of the common era. Thus, the "persuasion" is a relatively

¹¹⁰ A more thorough discussion of the superiority of the householder in the Dharmasūtras is found in Olivelle 1993:83-94.

¹¹¹ At least one passage later in the *Śāntiparvan* allows that a king can pursue the life of a mendicant (*bhaikṣacarya*) as a royal sage (*rājarṣitvena*) if he has completed his duties – gained victory in battle, given wealth to Brahmins, given offerings to ancestors, gods, and sages, and installed his son in kingship (12.63.18-22).

¹¹² Olivelle uses similar reasoning about the *Bhagavadgītā*: 'Based on the classical system, the author could have made a strong case against Arjuna's decision: because he was in the householder's *āśrama*, it was incumbent on Arjuna to perform the duties of that state. Renunciation was the exclusive preserve of the fourth *āśrama*' (1993:105).

early document for studying the thinking about asceticism in the Brahmanical tradition. Accordingly, I understand that the “persuasion” thinks about different potentially dharmic lifestyles as alternatives rather than as equally valid practices that are to be followed out in sequence.

Within such a framework, it is rather radical to claim that householder’s *āśrama* is the best and in fact the only really legitimate *āśrama*. Such a claim eliminates the lifestyle of *bhikṣu* and thus also the goal of *mokṣa* from the picture unless it is argued that the householder can obtain the same result as the renouncer. What we mostly find instead are numerous claims that Yudhiṣṭhira may obtain heaven (*svarga*) by being a dutiful householder king and practicing such meritorious practices as sacrifice. Meanwhile, it is claimed that ‘liberation (*nirvāṇa*) is very difficult to accomplish and has many obstacles’ (*nirvāṇaṃ tu suduṣpāraṃ bahuvighnaṃ ca*; 12.21.16).

3.4.6.2. The householder as the real *vānaprastha*

The majority of the arguments in favour of the householder’s *āśrama* that will be discussed in this chapter implicitly compare the householder with the *vānaprastha* rather than the *bhikṣu*. There is just one passage in the “persuasion” that specifically addresses the opposition before the householder and the renouncer (12.18). That passage has already been discussed in section 3.4.5. above. Overall, it seems fair to say that the “persuasion” does not do a very good job in seriously addressing Yudhiṣṭhira’s interest in *mokṣa* and *nivṛtti* values. This leaves the door open for more elaborate articulations of how it is possible to perform royal duties while still reaching *mokṣa*. Well-known solutions to this problem include the *karmayoga* of the *Bhagavadgītā* and relegating renunciation to the final part of one’s life in the classical *āśrama* system. Some other solutions will be discussed in chapters 7 and 8 of this thesis.

The most persistent argument for the superiority of the householder's *āśrama* is that it is the most difficult one. Carrying out the sacrificial duties of a householder is said to be difficult (*duṣkara*) - presumably just as difficult as performing asceticism (*tapas*) and therefore just as rewarding (12.11.19). A proverbial verse says:

He is really called "emaciated" who is emaciated through horse [sacrifice], [giving of] cows, [supporting] dependants, and [welcoming] guests. He who is emaciated in his body is not [really] emaciated.

*yaḥ kṛśāśvaḥ kṛśagavaḥ kṛśabhṛtyaḥ kṛśātithiḥ
sa vai rājan kṛśo nāma na śarīrakṛśaḥ kṛśaḥ* (12.8.24)

As indicated by the square brackets, my translation is rather interpretative. I believe, however, that it fits the context of criticising the life of an ascetic, in this case probably of the *vānaprastha* type, and praising the life of a virtuous householder king who rules his kingdom according to Brahmanical norms. It seems meaningless in the present context to translate, for example, *kṛśabhṛtya* in a more straightforward way as "he whose dependants are emaciated". I therefore assume that the compounds used in this verse are idiomatic and hard to explain using standard compound analysis.

The same emphasis on difficulty as the source of *dharma* is found in a tale told by Arjuna in 12.11, where he criticises some version of the lifestyle of the *vānaprastha*. In that *adhyāya* Arjuna tells an "*itihāsa purātana*" that depicts a conversation between Indra and certain *tāpasas*. These twice-born (*dvija*) men, who did not even have beards (*ajātaśmaśru*), went forth (*pravavrajuh*) and settled in a forest (*vanam abhyagaman*), 'thinking "this is *dharma* "' (12.11.2-3). They are rebuked by Indra as fools who criticise ritual (12.11.16). While these *tapasvins* sound very much like the *vānaprasthas* of the early Dharmasūtras, who adopt this lifestyle after the Vedic studies without

ever becoming householders, their supposed rejection of ritual is unusual, because performance of Vedic ritual is usually a central feature of the *vānaprastha* lifestyle¹¹³.

To teach them a lesson, Indra then redefines *tapas* in terms of householder practices: ‘This is the *tapas* suitable for you “ –I shall give” – that the sages have enjoined ’(*etad vo 'stu tapo yuktaṃ dadānīty ṛṣicoditam*; 12.11.18). The householder’s obligations, which involve providing their due portions to the gods, Brahmins, and ancestors, are said to be ‘difficult to do ’(*duṣkara*; 12.11.19). Indra then declares: ‘Therefore I say that carrying out householdership is difficult ’(*tasmād gārhasthyam udvoḍhuṃ duṣkaraṃ prabravāmi*; 12.11.20). The injunctions provided by the Dharmasūtras confirm that being a householder (*gārhasthya*) is indeed defined by a large number of ritual obligations. The reward promised by Indra is not *mokṣa*, but eternal life in heaven:

Reaching the triple heaven of Indra, the people who do what is difficult (*duṣkara*) and who do not cling to their wealth (*vimatsara*¹¹⁴) live in heaven for endless years.

*tridivam prāpya śakrasya svargaloke vimatsarāḥ
vasanti śāśvatīr varṣā janā duṣkarakāriṇaḥ* (12.11.26)

What we see in this and other criticisms of non-householder lifestyles is that difficulty, *tapas*, and mortification of the body are taken as a point of reference for evaluating the efficiency of a

¹¹³ Bronkhorst has argued that the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* describes two different types of *vānaprastha*. According to him, the first type of *vānaprastha* is similar to the *parivrājaka* in the sense that ‘[t]hese ascetics have nothing to do with Vedic rites’ (1998:18). The second type of *vānaprastha* marries and performs Vedic rituals. This reasoning is based on a textual emendation of *ekāgni*, “having a single fire”, to *anāgni* “having no fire”. Olivelle, however, accepts neither this emendation nor even that the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* describes two different types of *vānaprastha*. The main problem with Bronkhorst’s argument is that most, if not all, other descriptions of the *vānaprastha* in the *Mahābhārata*, the Dharmasūtras, the Pali canon and the Jaina canonical literature make it clear that the practice of Vedic rites is central to the life of the *vānaprastha*, even if he is unmarried. The *Mahābhārata* passage currently under discussion is unique in suggesting otherwise.

¹¹⁴ The dictionary meaning of the word *vimatsara* is “free from envy or jealousy, unenvious, unselfish” (Monier-Williams). It is a common term in lists of virtues, and is often translated in such contexts as “free from envy”. In addition to the present episode, where *vimatsara* is the quality of those householders who happily share their wealth in rituals, see also this self-praise of Duryodhana as the dicing match begins: *santi me maṇayaś caiva dhanāni vividhāni ca matsaraś ca na me 'rtheṣu* (2.53.24). In this sentence, too, *matsara*, which Duryodhana claims not to have, refers not to “envy” or “selfishness” but rather to unwillingness to give up (or risk in the case of a dice match) one’s wealth.

practice. All of these, however, are associated with the mode of life that comes to be designated as the *vānaprastha āśrama* where such practices are usually described within a *pravṛtti* framework. This is confirmed by the only episode of the *Rāmāyaṇa* that mentions *āśrama* as a mode of life. It, too, claims that the householder status is the best *āśrama* (2.98.56), but this is preceded by a significant statement – if Rāma desires to practice *dharma* which arises from hardship (*kleśaja dharma*) he should obtain hardship (*kleśa*) by protecting the four *varṇas* according to *dharma* (*dharmeṇa caturo varṇān pālayan kleśam āpnuhi*; 2.98.57). This is exactly the same argument as that pursued in the persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira. The context of this statement in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, however, makes clear what I believe is implicit in the *Mahābhārata* as well, namely, that the householder is compared to the *vānaprastha* who obtains merit and power by hardship endured in the forest.

We have seen in this section that the “persuasion” repeatedly ascribes to the householder terms that would normally be associated with the *vānaprastha*. Potentially closer to the fundamental orientation of the *āśrama* of the *bhikṣu* comes another interpretation of the four *āśramas* in terms of a uniting characteristic. In verses 12.12.7-10 we find that *tyāga*, “renunciation” or “giving up”, is given as a key to thinking about all the *āśramas*. Here, again, it turns out that the householder is the true “renouncer”:

That man is truly known to be a renouncer who has renounced legitimately obtained wealth for the benefit of worthy recipients in such [rites] as the *kratu* sacrifices (12.12.7).

vittāni dharmalabdhāni kratumukhyeṣv avāsrjan
kṛtātmasu mahārāja sa vai tyāgī smṛto naraḥ (12.12.7)

The three verses that follow this one list the people belonging to the non-householder *āśramas* as also being “renouncers” (*tyāgin*), but it seems clear that the emphasis is again on the

householder as at least equal to the other *āśramas*, but more probably superior, as emphasised by the word “*vai*” in the verse just quoted¹¹⁵.

The *Mahābhārata*’s trend of portraying the householder as an ascetic has already been noted by Olivelle, who observes that ‘[i]n short, following the householder’s *dharma* constitutes the greatest austerity (*tapas*, *śrama*); he is an ascetic (*tapasvin*) and a renouncer (*saṃnyāsin*)’ (2011a:58-59). Olivelle provides a list of *Mahābhārata* passages in a footnote to this claim: ‘MBh 12.23.6; 12.66.17; 12.10.25; 12.20.6—14; 12.261.10, 58-59; 12.18.19—35’. The vast majority of these operate with the same assumption that *śrama* or difficulty is at the root of religious merit. Thus, 12.66.17 associates the householder with *tapas*, 12.23.6 with difficulty (*duścara*), but in 12.20.6-14 it is said that the “*dharma* of giving” (*dānadharma*) is difficult (*duškara*). 12.261.10 argues that going forth (*pravrajyā*) constitutes a ‘cessation of *śrama*’ (*śramasyoparama*), and we may understand that without *śrama* there is no religious merit. The only passage in Olivelle’s list which directly compares

¹¹⁵ It is surprising that previous scholars have not recognised these four verses as dealing with the four *āśramas*. Of some difficulty has been the second verse which describes the *vānaprastha*: *anavekṣya sukhādānaṃ tathāivordhvaṃ pratiṣṭhitaḥ | ātmatyāgī mahārāja sa tyāgī tāmasaḥ prabho ||* (12.12.8). Here is Fitzgerald’s translation of this verse: ‘But, great king, he who is a renouncer of his own self, who disregards the taking of pleasure and is fixated upon a later Life-Pattern, is a ‘renouncer motivated by Darkness.’ It is easier to recognise this as a reference to the *vānaprastha* if the compound *ātmatyāgī* is interpreted as “performing a suicide”. While not all descriptions of *vānaprastha* include this element, some of them do, mentioning such methods as fasting. For example, the following statement from the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* probably refers to death by fasting: ‘After that he should sustain himself on water, air, and space. Among these, each subsequent pursuit is more exceptional in terms of its reward’ (2.23.2; trans. Olivelle). I believe that we would be justified in adopting the reading *tāpasa* instead of *tāmasa* in our *Mahābhārata* verse, which would make it even more clear that the *vānaprastha* is meant here. *Tāpasa* has better manuscript support, being attested by all Southern (minus G1) manuscripts and B0 of the Northern group. While *tāmasa* might at first seem a *lectio difficilior*, it is not difficult to imagine how it might have come about if some readers did not approve the *ātmatyāga* practice. Moreover, the reading *tāmasa* is most probably influenced by the 18th chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* which categorises certain practices as corresponding to the three *tattvas* of Sāṃkhya. Thus, for example, 18.35 defines the ‘*dhṛtiḥ (...)* *tāmasaḥ*’. As for the phrase *ūrdhvaṃ pratiṣṭhitaḥ*, it might also refer to an ascetic practice of “standing upright”, or, if we read *pratiṣṭhitaḥ* as “fixated” along with Fitzgerald, *ūrdhvaṃ* could refer to the upward goal of the *tāpasa*, namely, heaven. It should be noted that the general practice of the Chicago translation of the *Mahābhārata* is to follow the text reconstituted in the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*, and Fitzgerald’s interpretation is reasonable within such parameters. This example of *tāpasa/tāmasa* illustrates that a close study of difficult *Mahābhārata* passages may require an engagement with the critical apparatus of the Critical Edition.

the householder with the *saṃnyāsin* is 12.18.19-35¹¹⁶. The latter has already been discussed in section 3.4.5., and we have seen that even in the speech attributed to the wife of Janaka there is just one verse that appears to equate the householder with the *saṃnyāsin*. Thus, we see that all these passages except one compare the householder with the *tapasvin* rather than the *saṃnyāsin* or *bhikṣu*.

3.5. Śrama and the āśrama system

This conceptualisation of all four *āśramas* in terms that are closest to the *vānaprastha* may shed some additional light on what is really at stake in the “persuasion”. Olivelle has argued that ‘the more basic meaning of *āśrama*, I believe, is that of a residence for religious exertion’ (1993:17). As Olivelle notes, both Brahmanical (epic) and non-Brahmanical (e.g. Buddhist) evidence most frequently uses the word *āśrama* (Pali *assama*) to refer to the hermitages of forest-dwelling Brahmins who perform *tapas* and Vedic fire sacrifice¹¹⁷. It seems fairly clear that the sages dwelling in hermitages (*āśramas*) were seen as the elite of Brahmins during the time period reflected in the Sanskrit epics and the Pali canon. Indeed, virtually all of the notable Brahmins in the Sanskrit epics

¹¹⁶ 12.10.25 mentions *saṃnyāsa*, but does not concern the householder, therefore I assume that this reference has been included in the list by mistake.

¹¹⁷ One might object to Olivelle’s claim in the same work that ‘[o]ne point clearly emerges from the above discussion: the inhabitants of these *āśramas* are depicted as following a life style radically different from that of forest hermits (*vānaprastha*) described in later literature within the context of the *āśrama* system. The latter were celibates who often assumed this life style only in their old age’ (1993:22). The lifestyle of the “sages” living in the *āśramas* seems remarkably similar to that of a *vānaprastha*, although I fully agree with Olivelle that we should be attentive to the detail of the variety of life-styles that got lumped together in a system of only four categories. Celibacy, which is highlighted here and elsewhere in Olivelle’s book as a characteristic of the *vānaprasthas*, does not necessarily constitute a difference between the two. The *Mānavadharmasāstra*, in agreement with similar passages, provides two options for the *vānaprastha* – he can be accompanied by his wife or entrust her to his children (6.3). The same variety is found in the epic and Buddhist narratives that depict *āśrama*-dwelling Brahmins. While celibacy is a source of power for many forest-dwellers, there are many who father children. Virtually all textual sources are in agreement that the performance of Vedic sacrifices is central to the *vānaprastha* despite Olivelle’s observation that ‘[t]he presence of a wife, as we shall see (section 2.1.2) is absolutely necessary for the performance of the fire sacrifice’ (1993:24). Cf. Tsuchida 1991:78: ‘Celibacy was certainly not a required prerequisite of every hermit, although conjugal life seems to have been subject to strict restrictions and regulations’.

seem to live in forest hermitages (*āśramas*) and follow a lifestyle that most closely resembles that of a *vānaprastha*.

Olivelle further notes that the word *āśrama* is derived from the noun *śrama*, “toil, exertion”, which is a Vedic concept related to sacrifice and amounts to “religious exertion”. Thus, ‘[*ā*]*śrama*, we may conclude, refers to religious exertion’ (1993:17).

More contested is Olivelle’s argument about the invention of the *āśrama* system: ‘The purpose of this theological innovation was to create a scheme within which the pivotal category of *dharma* could be extended to include religious modes of life different from that of the Vedic householder’ (Olivelle 2017:79). While the *āśrama* system could have been used by some people for such a theological purpose, I find Lubin’s view on this matter convincing:

The reclassification of the *grhamedhin* as *grhastha* would seem to coincide with the appearance of *pravrajita*-type religious professions in the Brahmanical discourse: the *yati* and the *aranyavāsin* or *vanavāsin* as well— figures Aśoka would likely have called *pabajitas*, though the edicts do not explicitly mention them. The point of the reclassification, then, is to emphasize that being a Brahmanical *grhamedhin* could itself be a religious vocation demanding discipline and imbuing one with charisma (in the Weberian sense), with the aim of making the *grhastha* equally worthy of public admiration. This is the idea behind the precepts that pious laymen should “feed Brahmins” on many occasions and perform *argha* for guests (including *snātakas* and exemplary *grhasthas*): it justifies a Brahmanical practice of venerating and feeding Brahmin virtuosos in a manner parallel to laymen giving alms to Buddhist, Jainist, or Ājīvika mendicants. The land-grants to Brahmins (*brahmadeyas*) so well documented from the first millennium CE in copper-plate grants is another institutionalization of this practice (2019:105).

We see that Lubin argues that it is the householder who needs to be imbued with religious charisma, not the *pabajitas* who comprise for him both *vānaprasthas* and *bhikṣus*, and possibly other lifestyles that are characterised by “going forth”. There is no doubt that the Brahmin householders would be competing with ‘Buddhist, Jainist, or Ājīvika mendicants’ as Lubin argues.

Yet, the designation “*āśrama*” as a mode of life in the *āśrama* system, as well as the reasoning in support of the householder in the “persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira”, suggests that the *vānaprastha* rather than the *bhikṣu* was taken as the point of reference when thinking about the four *āśramas*. Much Indological scholarship thinks about Ancient India in terms of two main organising categories – the householder and the renouncer. The renouncer “proper”, who is really radically different from the householder, is, in my understanding, the *bhikṣu* of the fourth *āśrama*, in which the ritual duties of the householder are abandoned. The *vānaprastha* stands between the householder and the renouncer proper – he is not a householder but works with the same ideological framework as the householder, continuing sacrifice and other Vedic practices. Thinking in terms of this householder/renouncer dichotomy might obscure the dynamics of cultural change in Ancient India because it does not account for the role of the *vānaprastha* in the religious hierarchy.

Tsuchida has argued that

a brief survey of some canonical texts will suffice for us to establish the existence of at least two distinct groups within the Brahminhood of the early Buddhist period. Of these two, one group is that of wealthy Vedic masters living in villages and towns, including those who are called *brāhmaṇamahāsālā*, while the other consists of the ascetics with matted hair (*jaṭilā*), each living in his own hermitage (*assama*) (1991:53).

In most of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* it is taken for granted that the latter is the most prestigious lifestyle for Brahmins, although the *vānaprastha* mode of life is also available to *kṣatriyas*, who resort to it during exiles as well as in a meritorious retirement suitable for *rājārṣis*. Tsuchida reaches similar conclusions about the *āśrama*-dwelling sages being depicted in epic literature as standing at the top of Brahmanical hierarchy: ‘those Brahmins who, as the direct carnal and spiritual descendants of the ancient ṛṣi-s, embodied in themselves the most orthodox tradition of Vedism had adopted the life of hermits in *āśramas* ’(1991:79). Tsuchida finds that the high

standing of this group is confirmed by the Buddhist evidence as well as by the portrayal of Indian society by Megasthenes, who places “philosophers” at the top of society. Tsuchida notes that ‘[i]t seems that this class of “philosophers” roughly coincides with that of the Brahmin hermits now under discussion ’(1991:79). There has been no agreement on how to map the groups mentioned by Megasthenes on the *āśrama*’s or other groups of people mentioned in Ancient Indian literature. While Bronkhorst also seems to take these “philosophers” as a subtype of *vānaprastha* (1998), McGovern argues that they are rather *brahmacārins* (2019). Even disregarding the Greek evidence as ambiguous, there can be little doubt about the prestige of the *ṛṣis* who live in *āśramas*.

The claim that the householder is the best *āśrama* is therefore striking not so much because it might indicate an implicit competition with liberation-seeking wanderers, some of whom were non-Vedic in their disregard of ritual activity and Vedic authority, but because it no longer sees the forest-dweller as the most virtuous Brahmin. It seems fair to say that the main documents of Brahmanical *dharma* represent specifically the viewpoint of those Brahmins who remained householders. As Tsuchida notes about the *vānaprastha*, ‘[c]uriously enough, the Dharmasūtra-s and the early Dharmasmṛti-s are - except for some aphorisms in the Āpastambadharmasūtra - almost completely silent about this important Brahmanical institution ’(1991:79-80). I do not understand why the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* is singled out here because each of these *dharma* texts includes some information about the third *āśrama*. Nevertheless, Tsuchida is correct in noticing that the short and limited treatment of the *vānaprastha* in just the *āśrama* sections of these *dharma* texts contrasts sharply with the eminence of *āśrama*-dwelling sages in the narrative portions of the Sanskrit epics. I can add that within its extensive discussions about *dharma* the *Śāntiparvan* has equally little to say about forest hermits. The word *āśrama* generally refers to a mode of life, except for a few narratives in which it refers to a forest hermitage. The only major

Śāntiparvan passage in which the *āśramas* as hermitages feature prominently is the *Nārāyaṇīya*.

We may surmise that among the two Brahmanical groups discussed by Tsuchida, the authorship of the Dharmasūtras and most of the *dharmic* discussions of the early *Śāntiparvan* should be attributed to the householder Brahmins. It is usually assumed that the main competitors of these householder Brahmins were various forms of *bhikṣus*. And yet when they portray the householder as the best *āśrama* they attribute to him the perfection of virtues and practices that are associated with the *vānaprastha* rather than the *bhikṣu*.

Given the prestige of the forest sage, it is not surprising that the four different life-modes are called “*āśramas*” after the abode specific to the *vānaprastha*, whose lifestyle must have been considered by many to be the most auspicious. We have seen above that the majority of *Mahābhārata*’s arguments in favour of the superiority of the householder operate in terms that are closely related to the *vānaprastha* – *tapas*, *śrama*, *duścara*, *kṛśa*. The underlying assumption here is that religious merit is proportional to the difficulty of one’s practices.

A key difference between the householder and the *vānaprastha* is that ideally only the former possesses wealth. The *āśrama*-dwelling sages of the epics do not appear to accumulate wealth, although their *tapas* allows them to manifest riches and organise feasts if needed. The *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*, for example, says that the *vānaprastha*‘ should build a dwelling outside the village and live there either with his wife, children, and sacred fires, or alone. He should live by gleanings and from that time onwards never accept gifts ’(2.22.9-11; trans. Olivelle 1999). The Buddhist *Suttanipāta* depicts just such a Brahmin who lives on gleanings and fruit and performs a great sacrifice sponsored by a large nearby village. Soon, another Brahmin demands five hundred gold coins from him but the sacrificer explains that he has given away all the wealth he received

(*Suttanipāta* 976-982). This indicates an underlying tension – the *vānaprastha* duly receives considerable fees for his sacrificial services to the nearby communities but is not supposed to be in possession of wealth. *Mahābhārata* 12.66.12 claims that the king would attain the state of being in the forest, i.e. third, *āśrama* (*vanyāśramapada*) if he bestows extensive riches (*arthān vipulān*) on *vānaprastha* sages¹¹⁸. It is not explained, however, what exactly these forest-dwelling sages would do with such gifts.

The ideal of poverty makes *vānaprastha* unsuitable for the ideological project of the king-Brahmin relationship presented in the *Śāntiparvan*. As noted above, the ultimate solution to all Yudhiṣṭhira's problems is said to be the horse sacrifice, which is capable of purifying the sin necessarily incurred by *kṣatriyas* and even the particularly grave sins of Yudhiṣṭhira himself. The horse sacrifice's capacity to nullify a king's sin, however, correlates to the opulence of gifts given to Brahmins. Brahmins living without property would simply not be suitable for the *dharma* economy where kings purify their sins and generate religious merit (*dharma*) by giving lavish gifts to Brahmins in exchange for religious services. The king must not live without property because he gains merit by giving, but poverty is equally unavailable to ideal Brahmins because they have to accept the donations. The topic of giving to Brahmins is treated at length in the *Dānadharmaparvan* which is found in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*.

It is possible to discern a parallel between the situation faced by the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions in the centuries preceding the common era and later. The religious charisma of both traditions stems to a significant extent from (at least the narrative depictions of) elite religious practitioners who can be "holy" precisely because they do not possess property, regardless of

¹¹⁸ The verse just summarised comes from a passage which shares the ideological thrust of the "persuasion" by arguing that a householder king can get the benefits of all the *āśramas* by adopting certain virtues and practices.

whether they live as *bhikṣus* or *vānaprasthas*. The important Buddhist notion that laity can make merit by materially supporting (*dāna*) the Buddhist monks, however, requires that this *dāna* can be accepted and really presupposes institutional monasticism as a framework for accepting and accumulating wealth donated by laity. Although it is hard to be sure about demographics in Ancient India, it seems fairly certain that not long after the formation of the Buddhist tradition the majority of Buddhist monks lived in monasteries rather than practice the more ascetic lifestyle depicted in such works as the *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā*. According to Olivelle, the *vānaprastha* faced a similar decline: ‘The third *āśrama* became obsolete at an early age and came to be considered as something to be avoided in the present age (*kaliyugavarjya*)’ (Olivelle 2011a:57-58). Thus we see that in both traditions a religious practitioner living in the forest or as an itinerant mendicant is replaced by a new mode of life marked by the capacity to accept wealth from laity, allowing the latter to gain merit. Despite the success of the householder, the sage who resides in the forest *āśrama* remains a key figure in later Sanskrit literature, such as *kāvya* and the Purāṇas, where he continues to contribute to the construction of the overall religious authority of Brahmanism. A further discussion of the topics mentioned in this paragraph, namely the parallel development of Buddhist and Brahmanical institutions as well as the tension between asceticism-based religious charisma and attracting sponsorship, is found in Ray 1993.

3.6. The difficult and the easy path: On *śrama* and *śramaṇas*

It was claimed above that the assumption that religious merit is based on difficulty is closely related to the *āśrama* of the *vānaprastha* and has little to do with *bhikṣu*. This needs some comment. I will argue that the ideal of experiencing difficulty is rather contrary to the logic of being a *bhikṣu*.

Śramaṇa is the most common Indological term to refer collectively to non-Brahmanical groups of “homeless men” (*pravrajitas*) who seek liberation. The most important members of this class are understood to be the Buddhists and the Jainas, but it would also include the Ājīvikas as well as other groups. They are supposed to be distinct from Brahmins because of the compound *brāhmaṇaśramaṇa* known from Aśokan inscriptions and Buddhist literature. The Sanskrit word *śramaṇa* is clearly derived from the root *śram* “to toil, to strive” so that *śramaṇa* is commonly translated literally as a “striver”. This is the same root that produces the word *āśrama*. If the Buddhist *bhikṣus* are *śramaṇas*, and if the householder is said to be the true practitioner of *śrama*, we might understand this to mean that householder’s religious observances are more meritorious than those of *bhikṣus*.

I would argue, however, that the label *śramaṇa* might be misleading in so far as it suggests that *śrama* was a defining characteristic of religious mendicants. I have seen no evidence in the *Mahābhārata* or in the Buddhist literature that the *bhikṣus* in the fourth *āśrama* or in the Buddhist fold thought of their practice primarily or at all in terms of how difficult it was. The textual evidence suggests just the opposite. Neither *śrama* nor verbs derived from *śram* are used in the *Mahābhārata* or the early Buddhist literature to talk about the practices of *bhikṣus*. They are not normally said to practice *tapas*, a practice closely related to *śrama* (Olivelle 1993). The ascetic poetry found in these texts abound in a rhetoric of peace and bliss. Instead of *śram*, we find that the ascetic literature contains endless references to the root *śam*, “to be calm, satisfied, at peace”. The *Mahābhārata* as well as Buddhist and Jaina texts reveal that renouncers were primarily engaged in the search for ultimate peace (*śama* or *śānti*). This was achieved by following the *śāntimārga*, which in turn brought about the pacification (*śama*, *praśama* or *upaśama*) of various negative mental states such as craving (*tṛṣṇā*), anger (*krodha*), and delusion (*moha*). The self-understanding of the early

Buddhist communities is revealed by the etymological explanation of the Pali *samaṇa* as being derived from the root *śam*: ‘One is called a *samaṇa* because his vices have been pacified’ (*samitattā hi pāpānaṇ samaṇo ti pavuccati; Dhammapada* 265)¹¹⁹. This is made possible by the fact that the Pali word *samaṇa* corresponds to both Sanskrit *śramaṇa* and *śamana*¹²⁰. The *Udānavarga* goes further and claims that ‘being a *śramaṇa* is happiness’ (*sukhaṁ śrāmaṇyatā; 30.21*) which is in stark contrast to the association of *śrama* and *tapas* with *duḥkha* in Brahmanical literature¹²¹.

The supposed “easiness” or “pleasantness” of their practice is an important element of the early Buddhist polemics against the Jainas. Buddhism present itself as a path to *sukha* by means of *sukha*. This is contrasted with the Jainas who, according to the Buddhists, advocate a path to *sukha* by means of *duḥkha* (*Mahāsaccakasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*). The same idea is found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in the context of the Brahmanical *vānaprastha*-style lifestyle:

Having strenuously emaciated¹²² the body with various ascetic disciplines, merit (*dharma*) is obtained by skilful people. Happiness is not obtained through happiness.

*ātmānaṇ nīyamais tais taiḥ karṣayitvā prayatnataḥ
prāpyate nipuṇair dharmo na sukhāl labhyate sukham* (*Rāmāyaṇa* 3.8.27)

We see that the Jainas share with the Brahmanical forest-dwellers the practice of *tapas* as well as the underlying assumption that difficulty or physical suffering (*duḥkha*) is conducive to what is perceived to be the highest good available – life in heaven for the *vānaprastha* or escape from rebirth for the Jaina mendicants. This position is challenged by the Buddhist tradition. While the Jaina ascetics are described as suffering in the wilderness, the protagonists of Buddhist ascetic

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Udānavarga* 11.14: *śamitatvāt tu pāpānāṁ śramaṇo hi nirucyate*.

¹²⁰ The retroflex nasal in *samaṇa* does not necessarily mean that it should correspond exclusively to the Sanskrit *śramaṇa* given that non-etymologic retroflexion is not uncommon in Pali.

¹²¹ Karashima provides a more extensive list of Buddhist etymologies from a variety of texts that derive *śramaṇa* or its Middle-Indic equivalents from *śam* (2016:108-9).

¹²² Note the etymological link with the adjective *kṛṣa* mentioned above.

poetry experience freedom and great bliss (*sukha*) by meditating in the same wilderness. Although I am not aware of a similar criticism of *tapas* in the *Mahābhārata*, its ascetic passages do not generally mention *tapas* or difficulty and are dominated by a rhetoric of *sukha* similar to that of the Buddhist texts. As I will argue in the subsequent chapters, this emphasis on *sukha* was most probably a decisive factor in making such ascetic teachings interesting for householder kings.

Given the importance of *tapas* in the Jaina tradition, it seems reasonable that they would have been called *śramaṇas*. Nevertheless, I have not found that derivatives of the root *śram* play any role in early Jaina literature. Karashima notes that the Jaina tradition derives the word *śramaṇa* (Prakrit *samaṇa*) from the word *sama*, meaning “equal, impartial”¹²³. We have seen above that *samatā* is also central to most discussions of the renouncer in the *Mahābhārata*, including the description presented by Yudhiṣṭhira in the “persuasion”. The two explanations of *śramaṇa* that derive it or its Middle Indic equivalent from the root *śam* or the attitude of *samatā* therefore reflect the frequent usage of the same vocabulary in describing the fundamental orientation of the renouncers that are now described as *śramaṇas*.

There is virtually nothing in the *Mahābhārata* or the Buddhist literature which would explain why *śramaṇa* should be a synonym of *bhikṣu* as it is usually taken to be. Olivelle has demonstrated that both *śrama* and *śramaṇa* are Vedic terms closely related to *tapas* as well as to Vedic sacrifice (1993). There is just one occurrence of the word *śramaṇa* in the *Śāntiparvan* where it occurs right next to *tāpasa* (12.150.18). We have seen that the *Śāntiparvan*’s references to *śrama* are not found in its ascetic parts dealing with *bhikṣus* but rather in those passages that extoll the householder by appealing to the Vedic paradigm of *śrama/tapas* as a source of power. Olivelle is

¹²³ Karashima discusses the following examples: *Uttarajjhāyā* 25.32, *Aṇuogaddārrāṇi* 129-132, *Abhidhānarājendraakoṣa*. Karashima quotes from the latter without providing a more specific reference.

probably right in asserting that the word *śramaṇa* when referring to Buddhists or Jainas was borrowed from Brahmanical vocabulary (Olivelle 1993:12).

Some of the observations made above have been anticipated by Shults, who in the following quote distinguishes between two meanings of *śrama*, a “–fatigue” and b “–toil”:

But we can go further and ask the following: by whom was the Buddha recognized as a *śramaṇa*? In Pāli discourses it is frequently Brahmins, the custodians of vedic lore, who call the Buddha a *samaṇa* (the Pāli form of *śramaṇa*). This proves little but it opens up a further question: did the earliest Buddhists understand why a *śramaṇa* was called a *śramaṇa*? More investigation is necessary, but it is interesting to note in passing that the Pali-English Dictionary refers to only one instance of the word *sama* in the sense of “fatigue,” akin to *śrama* (a), and it is located in a Jātaka text. The Pali-English Dictionary does not have an entry for **sama* as the expected analogue of *śrama* (b). Moreover, creators of Buddhist texts might have mixed up ideas that in vedic texts are distinguishable as expressions of $\sqrt{sram}$ and $\sqrt{śam}$. If so, that too would be perfectly in line with the idea that usages of $\sqrt{sram}$ and its derivatives were developed in Brahmanical circles, and that the term *śramaṇa* was adopted but imperfectly understood by Buddhists – but again more research is necessary (Shults 2016:121).

It seems fair to say that the word *śramaṇa* is not a particularly helpful term for referring to non-Brahmanical renunciators generally. While some groups, notably the Jainas, do place a major emphasis on *tapas*, such difficult physical practices are absent in other “*śramaṇa*” traditions, notably Buddhism. I have been unable to determine how the term *śramaṇa*, which appears to have links with *tapas* in the Vedic tradition, came to be a synonym of *bhikṣu*. We have seen above that Shults suggests that the term might have first been used by Brahmins to designate certain ascetic groups that included the Buddhists. The rationale of such a use of the word *śramaṇa* would presumably be that the mendicants were somehow similar to the *tapasvins* in the Brahmanical tradition. I would further speculate that it seems quite plausible that the term *śramaṇa* was initially used to designate such liberation-seeking groups because they practiced *tapas*. We have seen above that the Jainas, for example, shared with Brahmanical *vānaprasthas* the belief that difficulty and

tapas are a source of merit, and it is easy to imagine that Jaina ascetics could be called *śramaṇas*. If we believe the legendary biographies of the Buddha preserved in the Pali canon, the practices of physical mortification predated the Buddhist “discovery” of the middle-path and the milder meditative methods. It is therefore not impossible that the Buddhist *bhikṣus* inherited the term *śramaṇa* from earlier ascetic groups that practiced physical asceticism.

The term *śramaṇa*, when used in reference to non-Brahmanical groups, is confusing for another reason. Understanding the *śramaṇa* to be distinct from the Brahmin obscures the many similarities between the descriptions of *bhikṣus* in the Buddhist tradition and the fourth *āśrama* in early Brahmanical sources. I have mentioned above that Aśvaghoṣa’s description of *śramaṇa* in the *Buddhacarita* is not only similar to, but most probably modelled on, descriptions of *bhikṣus* in the *Mahābhārata*. Although such *Mahābhārata*’s *bhikṣus* might have been inspired by ideas that arose outside the Vedic tradition, as indicated by their abandonment of Vedic ritual, it is nevertheless clear that they were seen by some as representing the Brahmanical tradition. This is indicated by their goal of reaching *brahman* as well as their inclusion in the *āśrama* system.

Moreover, there are some reasons to believe that the *vānaprastha* would also be called *śramaṇa*, although the *vānaprastha* represents, arguably, the most orthodox aspect of the Brahmanical tradition. Olivelle notes that ‘[i]n the epics, too, residents of *āśramas* are occasionally identified as *śramaṇa*’ (1993:19), providing the following list of passages in a footnote: ‘Rām 1.1.46; 1.13.8; 3.69.19; 3.70.7; MBh 12.150.18; 13.135.104. Cf. also MBh 1.3.136, where the reference may be to a non-Brahmanical ascetic. ’The evidence collected by Olivelle shows that, although the term *śramaṇa* is rare in the epics, it predominantly refers to *vānaprastha*-type ascetics, except for one ambiguous instance.

McGovern has observed that in the Pali canon ‘the compound *samaṇa-brāhmaṇā* can be used in such a way that, not only does the distinction between *samaṇa* and *brāhmaṇa* not matter, but only one of the two categories (when understood as distinct) appears to be present at all ’ (McGovern 2019:76).

Using the word *śramaṇa* to refer to specifically non-Brahmanical ascetics is, therefore, historically problematic. Although the compound *śramaṇabrāhmaṇa* (or *brāhmaṇaśramaṇa*) suggests that *śramaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* should refer to two distinct groups, McGovern’s study of the usage of this compound in the Pali canon concludes that in practice it does not necessarily refer to two different groups. Moreover, the term *śramaṇa* is clearly used in the epics to refer to Brahmins who live in *āśramas* rather than Buddhist or Brahmanical *bhikṣus*.

Returning to the “persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira” we might then say that the claims that the householder is the real practitioner of *śrama*, *tapas*, and so on, does not really or primarily equate the householder with the liberation-seeking *bhikṣu*. This presents several possibilities. Perhaps these arguments were intended to compare the householder with the *vānaprastha* in the first place. Or perhaps their authors knew of the usage of the word *śramaṇa* to refer to liberation-seeking groups and chose to focus on *śrama* for that very reason. If the latter is true, which seems plausible, it would be interesting to know whether they misunderstood the *śramaṇa* groups that have little to do with *śrama* or whether they deliberately play with the word *śrama* to reduce a variety of religious lifestyles to an established Vedic paradigm of associating *śrama* with power and religious merit.

In any case, the “persuasion’s” insistence on toil (*śrama*) as the quality that will ensure the householder’s attainment of heaven means that it generally fails to address the problem that it rises in some passages, namely, the problem of why a king who is interested in *mokṣa* should continue

ruling the kingdom. This problem is addressed much later in the *Śāntiparvan*, and the main relevant textual passages will be discussed in part three of this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter of the thesis aimed to understand the circumstances under which an interest in *mokṣa* becomes relevant to kings in the *Mahābhārata*, and especially to Yudhiṣṭhira, who is the audience for most of the ascetic teachings in the *Mahābhārata*. Furthermore, this section aimed to register the main concerns and assumptions that inform the debate about the possibility of kings reaching *mokṣa* while remaining householders.

Virtually all of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and most of the *Mahābhārata* is characterised by a world-view in which *mokṣa* plays no role. The religious *virtuosi* are Brahmanical sages who live in *āśramas*, performing *tapas* and Vedic rituals. This allows them to accrue immense power, which can be spent in this life by uttering curses, giving boons, and so on, or used to secure an afterlife in heaven. Some sages, such as Nārada, however, are capable of freely moving between heaven and earth. The kings of the Sanskrit epics similarly aspire to an afterlife in heaven. Such an afterlife is ensured by a range of practices that are collectively labelled as dharmic. They include being killed in a battle, protecting their subjects, sponsoring major Vedic rites, and upholding such Brahmanical values as *satya*. The latter is central to both epics where the main protagonists Yudhiṣṭhira, Rāma, and Karna all uphold their vows of *satya* when it does not seem advantageous to them in the short run. Yet, I see no reason to see in these characters renunciatory values, if by “renunciatory” we mean the *mokṣa*-related values that become known as *nivṛttidharma*. One might assume that the goal of *mokṣa* and the lifestyle of *bhikṣu* was either not known or not seen as important enough to enter the world of the epics in a major way. Of interest here is the term *trivarga*, which refers to the set of three *puruṣārthas*

- *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma* - but excludes *mokṣa*, suggesting that the latter *puruṣārtha* may be an addition to a well-established triad.

The *Mahābhārata* explores a major dharmic dilemma which arises during an intra-family conflict. The *dharma* of warriors is to fight, but killing ones relatives and *gurus* amounts to a great sin which should lead to hell rather than heaven. In the “persuasion” and elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* Yudhiṣṭhira expresses a belief that retreating to the forest to perform extreme *tapas* would be an appropriate form of expiation. I have therefore argued above that much of the “persuasion” can be read as directed against the *vānaprastha* ideal rather than the lifestyle of *bhikṣu* or the goal of *mokṣa*. The “persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira” argues that such sin can be purged by performing a horse sacrifice, and this argument is accepted by Yudhiṣṭhira who eventually performs the sacrifice and, notably, ends up in heaven. No major epic character is said to obtain *mokṣa*.

The opening of the *Śāntiparvan* suggests that the war has brought about a major transformation in Yudhiṣṭhira. Yudhiṣṭhira was in favour of war, despite his characterisation in most secondary literature, and he and other characters imbued with moral authority were critical of Duryodhana’s greed and lack of self-control. Yudhiṣṭhira now observes that the victory is no real victory and applies a similar mode of analysis to his own motivation, claiming that greed for wealth is the root cause of the evil committed during the war. This makes him interested in two different lifestyles – that of the *vānaprastha* and the *bhikṣu*. I have speculated that an earlier version of the “persuasion” might have been concerned only with the *vānaprastha*.

While in some passages Yudhiṣṭhira is interested in becoming a *vānaprastha* and states clearly that he wishes to purify his sin, elsewhere in the persuasion Yudhiṣṭhira is equally clear about his interest in *mokṣa*, the lifestyle of a *bhikṣu*, and ascetic ideologies. In particular, his interest in

such ideas and practices stems from a deeper analysis of the reasons that made him commit the evils of the *Mahābhārata* war. The reason is desire (*tṛṣṇā*), in particular, desire for *artha*.

For the most part, “persuasion” does little to engage directly with Yudhiṣṭhira’s interest in *mokṣa* and operates within the framework of the obtainment of heaven (*svarga*) being the highest goal, either arguing that Yudhiṣṭhira has not really committed evil or admitting that Yudhiṣṭhira has committed evil but arguing that such evil can be removed, most notably by performing the horse sacrifice.

The “persuasion” praises the householder and is not aware of the classical system of the four sequential *āśramas*. This is important for dating this *Mahābhārata* passage, understanding the ideological position it takes, and associating it with a particular group in Ancient India. The “persuasion” in its present form should probably be associated with the same Brahmanical community that is responsible for the early Dharmasūtras and that puts the householder at the centre of its vision of Brahmanism, in contrast with the Sanskrit epics and early Buddhist evidence, which depict the forest sage dwelling in an *āśrama* as the most celebrated type of Brahmin. The main strategy for elevating the householder is to claim that he experiences hardship, which is usually the source of merit for the *vānaprastha*, but not the *bhikṣu*, at least not according to the *Mahābhārata* and early Buddhist literature.

A key feature of the “persuasion” is a debate about wealth, which is praised repeatedly as the source of *dharma*. According to this world-view, it is foolish for a king to give up his wealth to become a *vānaprastha* or a *bhikṣu*. The lack of private property appears to be the main feature that links the two lifestyles, which are discussed and refuted simultaneously in the “persuasion”.

The “persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira” has suggestive parallels to the first couple of chapters of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Both Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira express the idea that it would be better to give up their claim for kingship and live as dependants of their allies. Arjuna, who is similarly concerned about the sin of killing his relatives and *gurus*, does not initially express an interest in *mokṣa*. While the persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira focuses on the removal of sin already committed, the central theme of the *Bhagavadgītā* is how not to commit sin in the first place. Some arguments are shared by the “persuasion” and the early *Bhagavadgītā*, such as the notion that the immortality of the soul means that there is really no killing. I have speculated that both the “persuasion” and the *Gītā*, and by extension the *Mahābhārata*, were expanded from an earlier version that was concerned more specifically with the ethical problem of killing one’s relatives.¹²⁴ to a later version that addressed the more general problem of liberation from rebirth.

Part 2. Ascetic Teachings for Kings in Trouble: Enduring Suffering and Attaining Bliss

Introduction

This part of the thesis examines ascetic teachings that are delivered to householder kings in the *Mahābhārata* and beyond without asking those kings to give up their householder status in order to take advantage of such ascetic wisdom. I will argue that such ascetic teachings are usually delivered at a time of a crisis as a means to overcome suffering or even obtain happiness (*sukha*). I will also argue that in several instances they may be best understood as “secular” or “stoic” wisdom

¹²⁴ The same problem is prominent also in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where a potential conflict between Rāma and Bharata drives the plot in the second book. Notably, the *Rāmāyaṇa* seems to give a different answer to the ethical dilemma as there is nothing to suggest that Rāma would consider fighting Bharata under any circumstances. See especially 2.18 where Rāma rejects Lakṣmaṇa’s suggestion to take the kingdom by force.

that was promulgated without any reference to the “religious” goal of liberation (*mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*). An especially prominent theme in such passages is that of impermanence and the inevitability of death. Some of the relevant *Mahābhārata* episodes are connected to each other as well as with Buddhist and Jaina literatures and the *Rāmāyaṇa* through shared ideas, phrases, verses, characters, and legends. An important and recurring concept in many of the *Mahābhārata* episodes is *buddhi*, which plays little role in the Buddhist literature, including those passages that display intertextuality with the *Mahābhārata*. Another concept that will be emphasised in this chapter is that of *sukha*, “happiness” or “bliss”, which is often promised to *Mahābhārata* kings much as the *sukha* of meditation or *nirvāṇa* is promised to renunciators in the ascetic poetry of the Buddhists and Jainas.

Each of the relevant textual passages is unique and might be studied in its own right, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to do that. The first chapter of this part of the thesis (namely, chapter 4) will discuss two episodes from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* in more detail as case studies. These are the *Senajidgītā* (12.168) and the *Maṅkigītā* (12.171). The *Senajidgītā* makes a good case study because of the large number of verses that it shares with similar *Mahābhārata* and Buddhist passages, thus providing a link with other passages discussed below. Moreover, the *Senajidgītā* is found in a second, and different, version in the *Mahābhārata* itself, has several parallels in the Buddhist tradition, and is probably referred to in the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghoṣa. This makes it possible to discuss the different variations and some of the reception history of a king whose grief is appeased by ascetic teachings. The *Maṅkigītā* is linked to the *Senajidgītā* by both thematic and textual parallels, and it is therefore helpful to consider these two texts together. I will reserve the Sanskrit title *Senajidgītā* for the *Mokṣadharma* version of this legend, whereas the English equivalent “The Song of Senajit” will be used to refer to both that and the other Senajit episode, in

12.26. Chapter 4 will be divided into subsections as it will move from the exploration of the *Senajidgītā* and *Maṅkigītā* as members of a network of ascetic teachings to a discussion of their contents.

The second chapter of this part of the thesis (namely, chapter 5) will provide a briefer discussion of other textual passages that participate in the same trend of offering ascetic teachings at a time of a crisis. This will cover all the main episodes from the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as well as some from the Buddhist literature. In particular, it will be noted how they participate in or diverge from the themes seen in the two case studies from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. This will be followed by a conclusion that will use the evidence provided in chapters 4 and 5 to argue that offering ascetic teachings as a means of consolation at time of a crisis is a prominent trend in Indian literature that can be dated to the period between the lifetime of the Buddha and the first centuries of the common era.

In a recent publication Péter-Dániel Szántó remarks that '[g]iven Buddhism's widespread interest in mortality, impermanence, and the fate of beings after death, it is surprising that there are very few instances in the surviving literature that deal with how to handle grief, either experienced by oneself or by one's flock, on a practical level' (2021:306). Szántó notes that '[o]ne such rare example is a work attributed to Āśvaghoṣa, the *Śōkavinodana*' and as a further remarkable example he provides a translation of a chapter on grief (*śōka*), which constitutes the 11th chapter from a work that he calls the **Saddharmaparikathā*, 'a Buddhist homiletician's guidebook composed probably around the 5th century CE' (2021:292). This would place it not long after the *Mahābhārata*. Szántó observes that '[w]hat is perhaps the most important feature of the text is that its sermons are addressed almost exclusively to lay people, both Brahmanical and Buddhist' (2021:304). In a

footnote Szántó refers to Kane's *History of Dharmaśāstra* which provides references to some relatively late similar passages in the Brahmanical literature: 'There are some short passages in *dharmaśāstra* literature and *purāṇas* that supply examples of how such post-mortem sermons may have sounded in the Brahmanical world; see Kane 1953:236–237 '(2021:306, n.32).

I will argue in this chapter that related householder-oriented discourses on such themes as impermanence and inevitability of death are already common in earlier textual sources, in both Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions. The **Saddharmaparikathā*'s "Chapter on Grief" itself makes a few references to discourses in the Buddhist canonical literature where teachings on impermanence are presented as a means to relieve somebody's grief. Szántó has traced several of these to Buddhist canonical literature, although it has not been possible to trace all of the supposed canonical references. The contribution of this chapter will not be to trace these other references but rather to show that those that have been traced are a part of a popular householder-oriented ascetic discourse in Ancient India which is prominent not only in the Buddhist canonical literature but also in the Sanskrit epics, especially the *Mahābhārata*. For example, one of the canonical discourses mentioned in the **Saddharmaparikathā* is the legend of how the Buddha appeased the grief of king Prasenajit. This is, I believe, related to the legend of king Senajit found in two versions in the *Mahābhārata*. The *Mokṣadharmaparvan* version of this *Mahābhārata* legend will be one of the case studies of the next chapter.

4. The *Senajidgītā* and the *Maṅkigītā*: Two texts from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*

4.1 The legends about Senajit and Prasenajit

4.1.1. Senajit and Prasenajit in the *Mahābhārata* and Buddhist literature

When introducing *Mahābhārata*'s Senajit, it is possible to begin this chapter where the previous chapter left off, namely, in the “persuasion of Yudhiṣṭhira”. I have already noted that this *Mahābhārata* episode has two main aims that are stated explicitly. The first aim is to dissuade Yudhiṣṭhira from his interest in giving up the kingdom to become a *vānaprastha* or a *bhikṣu*. Some of the main arguments against renunciation have been discussed above. The second aim of the “persuasion” is to alleviate Yudhiṣṭhira's grief. This is the main aim of a few discourses that are delivered to Yudhiṣṭhira especially in 12.26-28. These three have already been recognised as a thematic unit by Vassilkov, who finds in them an expression of a doctrine that he calls *kālavāda* (1999). These three discourses can be contrasted with the rest of the “persuasion,” where it is Yudhiṣṭhira who promotes ascetic teachings and is worried, for example, about overcoming *trṣṇā*. In these episodes, however, the roles are reversed, and it is Vyāsa who talks to Yudhiṣṭhira about such concepts as *trṣṇā* and impermanence to alleviate the suffering of Yudhiṣṭhira.

The first of the ascetic discourses delivered to Yudhiṣṭhira is the “Song of Senajit” (12.26), which partly overlaps with another “Song of Senajit” that is given as the first instruction of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* (12.168). It is the latter that will be discussed in more detail below. These “Songs of Senajit” appear to be related to similar Buddhist legends about how the Buddha appeases the grief of king Pasenadi (Sanskrit: Prasenajit) in the *Ayyikāsutta* (3.22 of the *Samyutta Nikāya*) and

in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (VOL3, p.57). A partially preserved Sanskrit version of this legend is found in Hartmann (2017¹²⁵).

4.1.2. The grieving kings

In all of these *Mahābhārata* and Buddhist episodes ascetic teachings are delivered in response to king's grief. In the Buddhist versions of the story the king grieves because of the death of the queen (*devī*) Mallikā (the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* version), his mother.¹²⁶ (in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*; see also Szántó 2021:329) or grandmother (see, for example, the Sanskrit version in Hartmann 2017). In the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* episode Senajit laments the death of his son, but in the “persuasion” the source of his *duḥkha* is not specified. In the Buddhist versions, king Pasenadi/Prasenajit is advised by the Buddha, but in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* the speaker is ‘a certain Brahmin’ (*viprah kaś cid*; 12.168.8). The episode from the “persuasion” is unique because there the *itihāsa purātana* consists of that which was sung (*gīta*) by Senajit himself.

The “Senajit” of the *Mahābhārata* appears to be a shortened form of “Prasenajit” (Middle-Indic: Pasenadi) who must have been a historical king in Kosala around the time of the Buddha. It is quite plausible that there was an ancient legend about king Pasenadi of Kosala whose grief was

¹²⁵ Other Buddhist versions of this legend exist but I was unable to consult any of them. Péter-Dániel Szántó reports that ‘[t]he Chinese parallels and an Inner Asian fragment are listed in Chung 2008:217’ (2021:329). The book by Chung is listed in Szántó’s bibliography as ‘Chung, Jin-il. 2008. *A Survey of the Sanskrit Fragments Corresponding to the Chinese Saṃyuktāgama* 雜阿含經相當 梵文斷片一覽. Tōkyō: 山喜房佛書林 Sankibō Busshorin’. Szántó further mentions that ‘[f]or another version of this *sūtra*, see *Tridaṇḍamālā* 84r5–85v1 [...]. Here, the king regains his composure after calling to mind the Buddha’s word that no being is exempt from death (*sarveṣāṃ sattvānāṃ sarveṣāṃ prāṇināṃ sarveṣāṃ bhūtānāṃ maraṇāntaṇ jīvitaṇ maraṇaparyavasānam, nāsti jātasyāmarāṇam*)’ (2021:329). The *Tridaṇḍamālā* has not yet been published, but it is discussed in “The Benefit of Cooperation: Recovering the Śokavinodana Ascribed to Āśvaghōṣa” by Jens-Uwe Hartmann, Kazunobu Matsuda, and Péter-Dániel Szántó. I thank Péter-Dániel Szántó for sharing with me a pre-print version of this forthcoming paper.

¹²⁶ The source of this confusion could be the name of the queen – Mallikā. While in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* version it is clearly stated that it is the queen Mallikā who has died (*mallikā devī kālaṅkatā hotī*), the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* refers to the deceased person with the word *mahallikā*, which means “an old woman”. Most probably, the differences in the Buddhist legends are due to confusing the words Mallikā and *mahallikā*.

appeased by a certain sage who delivered a discourse on the inevitability of death. This legend was then preserved in various versions in the Buddhist tradition and in the *Mahābhārata*. There are no specific reasons to believe that the legend was originally Buddhist since the general theme of the inevitability of death does not appear to be related to any tradition in particular. Nevertheless, we will see below that at least the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* version of the *Senajidgītā* seems to show awareness of the Buddhist tradition.

4.1.3 Intertextuality: *marañāntaṃ hi jīvitam*

There is no textual core that links every single Senajit/Prasenajit episode listed above. Many verses are shared between the two Senajit episodes in the *Mahābhārata*. The most common phrase in the different Buddhist versions is ‘life surely ends in death’ (*marañāntaṃ hi jīvitam* or its Middle-Indic equivalent). This phrase is absent from both of the *Mahābhārata*’s Senajit episodes, but it is found in a very short ascetic speech attributed to Vyāsa (12.27.29) that is found in the *adhyāya* following the “Song of Senajit” in 12.26. Given that there is no individual character that distinguishes the two speeches, it is quite plausible that the speech attributed to Senajit and the speech attributed to Vyāsa himself draw on the same ascetic materials that were separated into two parts to allow room for Yudhiṣṭhira to once more express his grief at the death of his relatives, allies and teachers.

In any case, the *Mahābhārata*’s songs of Senajit and the Buddhist legends belong to the same network of ascetic teachings in which the phrase *marañāntaṃ hi* [alternatively: *ca*] *jīvitam* was especially popular. In the Sanskrit epics it always appears in the line ‘all relations end in separation, life ends in death’ (*saṃyogā viprayogāntā marañāntaṃ ca jīvitam*). Notably this line is also found in *Mahābhārata* 11.2.3 and *Rāmāyaṇa* 2.98.16 and 7.51.10, and a variation of the same phrase is found

in *Mahābhārata* 12.105.44¹²⁷. These four episodes participate in the main trend discussed in this chapter, namely, they draw on a pool of ascetic teachings to alleviate the suffering of a king who is clearly not expected to become a renouncer after listening to such teachings. More will be said about these four episodes in chapter 5. As for the line *saṃyogā viprayogāntā maraṇāntaṃ ca jīvitam*, it is also found in other collections of ascetic verses where it is not placed in any immediate narrative context. One of these is the collection of ascetic verses attributed to the sage Nārada (12.317.20). In the Buddhist tradition, just the *marañantaṃ hi jīvitam* is found in the *Dhammapada* 148. The Sanskrit *Udānavarga* knows both the epic line *saṃyogā viprayogāntā maraṇāntaṃ ca jīvitam* (1.22) as well as the line *sarve sattvā marīṣyanti marañantaṃ hi jīvitam* (1.23) which, according to the Pali tradition, the Buddha delivered to king Pasenadi to alleviate his grief.

This survey shows there were several legends about the appeasement of the grief of king Senajit or Prasenajit that record different details as to the reasons of his grief and the person who speaks the consoling verses. It is not possible to identify any of these as more original than any of the others, nor is there any reason to claim that the Buddhist versions must somehow be the source of the *Mahābhārata* versions. What can be said is that the *Mahābhārata* records two versions of this ancient legend about king Prasenajit or Senajit, and that both are built around the same theme as the Buddhist episodes, namely, the stoic attitude that should be adopted in the face of the inevitability of death. This legendary core must have acted as a basis around which further ascetic verses were collected, especially in the case of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*'s *Senajidgītā*, which is the longest of all these episodes and contains the greatest number of parallels to other *Mahābhārata*, Buddhist, and Jaina passages. Some of these will be noted and discussed below, in so far as they are

¹²⁷ *saṃcaye ca vināśānte marañānte ca jīvite/ saṃyoge viprayogānte ko nu vipraṇāyen manaḥ* (12.105.44)

helpful for understanding how the same verses were used in different contexts by the editors of these texts.

This survey also reveals that the phrase 'life surely ends in death' and its variations was a particularly popular component of early verses of the *subhāṣita* type that often occur in a similar context of appeasing the grief of a king or other householders, while also finding their way into more general ascetic collections of *subhāṣitas* such as works belonging to the *Dharmapada* genre or the ascetic verses attributed to Nārada in *Mahābhārata* 12.317. This popular phrase is just one example of intertextuality that characterises the Senajit episodes of the *Mahābhārata*.

For now, I would like to focus on other features of *Mahābhārata*'s "Songs of Senajit", which is that they are juxtaposed with comparable ascetic episodes.

4.1.4 Other ascetic texts adjacent to "Songs of Senajit" in the *Mahābhārata*

The first "Song of Senajit" is found in a part of "persuasion" that focuses on appeasing Yudhiṣṭhira's grief by delivering ascetic teachings. In addition to the "Song of Senajit" itself (in 12.26), and the few ascetic verses in the following *adhyāya* (12.27), ascetic teachings are found in 12.28, which presents another *itihāsa purātana*. This legend is about the Brahmin Aśman who advises king Janaka. This legend shares a verse with the *Senajidgītā* from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* as well as other ascetic passages, which establishes its position in the network of ascetic teachings to which the *Senajidgītā* belongs.¹²⁸ This "ascetic" part of the "persuasion" (12.26-28) thus presents at least three separate collections of ascetic verses that all have the explicit aim of appeasing Yudhiṣṭhira's grief so that he resumes his kingly duties. What unites the three episodes is an emphasis on time

¹²⁸ *yathā kāṣṭhaṃ ca kāṣṭhaṃ ca sameyātāṃ mahodadhau/ sametya ca vyatīyātāṃ tadvad bhūtasamāgamaḥ* (12.28.36=12.168.15=*Rāmāyaṇa* 2.98.25, with minor variations). I thank John Brockington for bringing to my attention the *Rāmāyaṇa* parallel which has already been noted in Brockington (1979).

(*kāla*) as a universal principle that guarantees the inevitability of separation, old age, and death. These three episodes thereby provide a different emphasis when compared to, for example, the consolations of Prasenajit in the Buddhist tradition. While the latter also emphasises impermanence and claims that death is inevitable, it does not posit *kāla* as a central category in its worldview. The ascetic discourses in the “persuasion” are furnished with concluding comments on the part of their narrators to the effect that carrying out such royal duties as protecting the subjects and sponsoring sacrifices are a certain way to heaven.

The other Senajit episode of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Senajidgītā*, is the first unit of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*¹²⁹ (12.168). It shares many verses with the “persuasion” episode, but is longer, and has several further parallels with Buddhist and Jaina texts as well as other passages from the *Mahābhārata*, including the *Maṅkigītā* (12.171), which is the other case study to be discussed below in this part of the chapter.

The *Senajidgītā* begins a group of five relatively general *mokṣadharma* texts that do not include any of the more specific themes that set the philosophical and religious teachings of the *Mahābhārata* apart from early Buddhist and Jaina teachings. There is no discussion in these passages of theistic religion, Sāṃkhya or yoga¹³⁰, nor do they talk about such specifically Brahmanical institutions as the system of the four *āśramas*. The other case study of this chapter, the *Maṅkigītā*, which relates how a certain *Maṅki* attained indifference (*nirveda*), is also drawn from this initial group of discourses. The intervening texts in 12.169 and 12.170 present ascetic teachings

¹²⁹ As discussed in the first chapter, the units found at the very beginning of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* might be the earliest in the collection.

¹³⁰ To be more precise, it is not possible that discussion of yogic meditation as such set the *Mahābhārata* apart from early Buddhism in any way. For example, *Mahābhārata* 12.188 has been recognised as most probably influenced by the Buddhist scheme of the four *dhyānas* that are not found elsewhere in early Brahmanical literature. The difference between the main yogic episodes of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* and early Buddhist presentation of meditative practices is that the former understand yoga as a means of perceiving the *ātman* within.

that explicitly praise renunciation. Given their hard-line ascetic orientation it is not possible to say that either the opening group of discourses or the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* as a whole is householder-oriented. Nor is it possible to say that the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* neatly follows the “persuasion” for we have seen that in the “persuasion” the legitimacy of any non-householder lifestyles is seriously doubted. The *Mokṣadharmaparvan* contains rather heterogeneous material, and the passages analysed below illustrate just one of the many trends found therein¹³¹.

Both the *Senajidgītā* and the *Maṅkigītā* include further verses attributed to other legendary characters. The *Senajidgītā* includes ‘the *gāthās* sung on the same topic by Piṅgal ’ā(*atra piṅgalayā gītā gāthāḥ*; 12.168.46). Meanwhile, the *Maṅkigītā* refers to three other speakers. First, there is a reference to the words uttered by Śuka:

Indeed, it was proper what Śuka said as he was becoming completely liberated and set forth for the great forest from Janaka’s dwelling¹³².

*aho samyak śukenoktaṃ sarvataḥ parimucyatā
pratiṣṭhatā mahāranyaṃ janakasya niveśanāt* (12.171.15)

It is unclear what part of the following speech should be attributed to Śuka, but by verse 40 it is clear that the speaker is again Maṅki, the main speaker of that episode. The verse that follows immediately after the mention of Śuka claims that abandoning all desires is more excellent than fulfilling all of them (12.171.15).

Two more separate pieces of ascetic legends are attached to the end of the *Maṅkigītā*. One is another *itihāsa purātana*, which ‘was sung by Janaka, king of Videha, as he was becoming

¹³¹ The most comprehensive overview of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* is still Fitzgerald 1980; cf. also Fitzgerald 2006 and Brockington 2000.

¹³² An encounter between Śuka and Janaka will be discussed in detail in 8. I have been unable to trace any direct textual parallels between the two episodes, namely 12.171 and 12.313. It does not seem unreasonable to assume that a story about a philosophical encounter between Śuka and Janaka may have been known in different versions.

pacified '(gītaṃ videharājena janakena praśāmyatā; 12.171.55). The verse itself and the appearance of king Janaka in this episode will be discussed below. Finally, the *Maṅkigītā* is concluded with two enigmatic verses that were reportedly uttered by a certain Bodhya at the request of king Nahuṣa, who requested that Bodhya instruct him in the “instruction of peace” (*upadeśaṃ mahāprājña śamasyopadiśasva me*) and asked: ‘What is the *buddhi* that you have established so that you walk about pacified and satisfied? ’(*kāṃ buddhiṃ samanudhyāya śāntaś carasi nirvṛtaḥ*; 12.171.59). In his response, which consists in these last two enigmatic verses, Bodhya mentions Piṅgalā, whose song was related in the *Senajidgītā*.

The characters of Janaka and Piṅgalā, including their appearance in the Buddhist literature, will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The reason for providing these details here is to give some sense of what I mean by such phrases as “a network of ascetic teachings” or “collections of ascetic verses”. In such *adhyāyas* as 12.168 and 12.171 we find that a single ascetic verse or a group of verses is associated with a legendary character. The mention of one character, such as Senajit or Maṅki, triggers the reference to other legendary characters or the mentioning of other ascetic proverbs that are not associated with any particular name. The *Senajidgītā* and other such legends in the *Mahābhārata* are typically introduced as ‘ancient lore’ (*itihāsa purātana*) or as ‘songs’ (*gītās*) that were ‘sung’ by some character, and a comparison with parallel passages confirms that many verses included in the *Senajidgītā* are indeed ascetic *subhāṣitas* that were most probably not composed by the author(s) or editor(s) of the *Mahābhārata*.

If, for example, the *Senajidgītā* in 12.168 is a collection of ascetic verses, based on floating ascetic literature, the very notion of dating becomes problematic. It is perhaps possible to say that the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* records one version of an archetypal legend about how the

grief of king Senajit was appeased. What makes the episode unique, and what can made a topic of study, is the specific selection of verses as well as the context in which the collection of ascetic verses is presented in the *Mahābhārata*. The context of the *Senajidgītā* is a question addressed by king Yudhiṣṭhira to his dying grandfather Bhīṣma. This question was surely composed by the author(s) or editor(s) of the *Mahābhārata* and, therefore, reveals what relevance the legend of Senajit was given by at least one community in Ancient India. When a partly identical song is attributed to Senajit himself in the “persuasion”, the context is Yudhiṣṭhira’s grief. In both cases Senajit is made relevant to householder kings, which is generally similar to how the legends of king Prasenajit are presented in the Buddhist literature, where his grief is likewise appeased. None of these episodes say that the king should become a renouncer to overcome his grief, and the very reason for providing the “persuasion” episode is to say that it is not necessary to become a renouncer to achieve this benefit.

The *Senajidgītā* and the *Maṅkigītā* have received little scholarly attention. The same is true of the other ascetic passages that will be listed in chapter 5 after dealing with these two cases studies. Fitzgerald has analysed the usage of the term *buddhi* in 12.168 in an article which focuses exclusively on this term (2015). I will consider below a number of other issues raised by the *Senajidgītā* and the *Maṅkigītā*, such as the narrative context of their ascetic teachings and the possible Buddhist influences on their formulation. Several scholars have noted that the *Senajidgītā* shares verses with Buddhist literature, but none of them has engaged in further comparison of the respective textual units (see Law 1933; Tokunaga 2001; Wynne 2003; Söhnen-Thieme 2009). Among these, the most complete list of parallels is provided in the footnotes of Tokunaga’s annotated translation of *Mahābhārata* 12.168-171 (2001). Surprisingly, none of these publications links the Senajit of the *Mahābhārata* with the Buddhist Prasenajit.

I will argue that the *Maṅkigītā* and the *Senajidgītā* of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* are collections of ascetic verses that offer kings the same goal that is usually associated with ascetics (*śramaṇas* or *bhikṣus*). This goal is the attainment of happiness (*sukha*), which is characterised as independent of exterior circumstances. This *sukha* is attained by giving up desire (*kāma* or *tṛṣṇā*) and/or by developing a certain understanding (*buddhi*) that is characterised especially by an awareness of the inevitability of death and separation. I will argue that the presentation of such teachings to householder kings is made possible by emphasising the purely mental causes of the attainment of *sukha*, downplaying the importance of going forth from the household life or the practice of meditation.

4.2. The *Senajidgītā* and the *Maṅkigītā* – two texts on overcoming suffering and obtaining happiness

4.2.1. On the opening verses

Having introduced the two cases studies, the *Senajidgītā* from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* (12.168) and the related *Maṅkigītā* (12.171), as members of a network of ascetic teachings, I now turn to analysing them in more detail. These discourses are concerned with overcoming suffering (*duḥkha* or *śoka*) and obtaining happiness (*sukha*). This is how the teachings of those two episodes are framed by the questions asked by king Yudhiṣṭhira and by several interlocutors in the *itihāsas* that are told by Bhīṣma to answer Yudhiṣṭhira.

The episode of king Senajit, which forms the first chapter of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, is initiated with this question:

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

When one's wealth or wife is lost, or when one's son or father has died, by what awareness (*buddhi*) would one push away grief, tell me that, grandfather.

yudhiṣṭhira uvāca
naṣṭe dhane vā dāre vā putre pitari vā mṛte
yayā buddhyā nudec chokaṃ tan me brūhi pitāmaha (12.168.6)

This question puts the following teachings in a very specific context. This is not a bland philosophical statement that identifies the entire world with suffering and concludes that liberation from the world must be pursued. This question outlines concrete circumstances under which anybody, any king or any other householder who has come to experience grief due to a calamity, would find ascetic teachings relevant. The problem of dealing with sorrow can be taken as relevant to Yudhiṣṭhira's experiences in particular (Fitzgerald 2015:112), and, as noted above, a partly overlapping discourse is attributed to Senajit in the "persuasion" in response to Yudhiṣṭhira's grief. Nevertheless, the teachings of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* are somewhat removed from the plot of the *Mahābhārata*, and, as seen in the introductory verse cited above, they are presented in general terms without trying to make them relevant to Yudhiṣṭhira's situation in particular.

To answer this question Bhīṣma retells instructions given by a certain Brahmin to king Senajit who was grieving after losing his son.

The ancient lore (*itihāsa purātana*) sung by Maṅki (*maṅkinā gītaṃ*; 12.171.4) is introduced by a similarly general question which is not related to Yudhiṣṭhira's circumstances in particular.

The question is:

If a person engaged in business does not obtain wealth, what should he do to obtain happiness, being overcome by craving for wealth?

īhamānaḥ samārambhān yadi nāsādayed dhanam
dhanatṛṣṇābhibhūtaś ca kiṃ kurvan sukham āpnuyāt (12.171.1)

Although the opening question and the particular circumstances of Mañki in this text suggest one particular kind of misfortune, the solution suggested addresses loss and suffering more generally.

4.2.2. Two senses of *sukha*

The term *sukha* is used in two senses in these two discourses – everyday *sukha* and a special *sukha* related to ascetic wisdom or attitudes. It is possible to translate *sukha* variously as “happiness”, “bliss” or even “pleasure”, and I believe that all or several of these different connotations of *sukha* are used in these discourses to offer their own special type of *sukha*.

As for the ordinary or everyday happiness, we learn that it is impermanent. Thus the Brahmin who advises king Senajit claims that: ‘One obtains neither permanent suffering nor permanent happiness’ (*na nityaṃ labhate duḥkhaṃ na nityaṃ labhate sukham*; 12.168.19=12.26.23).

This is further explained:

The origin of suffering is the affliction of craving (*tṛṣṇā*). The origin of happiness is the affliction of pain. From pleasure suffering arises. Thus it [happens] again and again. Suffering is continuous with happiness and happiness is continuous with suffering.

tṛṣṇārtiprabhavaṃ duḥkhaṃ duḥkhārtiprabhavaṃ sukham
sukhāt saṃjāyate duḥkham evaṃ etat punaḥ punaḥ
sukhasyānantaraṃ duḥkhaṃ duḥkhasyānantaraṃ sukham (12.168.18).¹³³

This puts happiness and pain in an endless cycle which is moreover propelled by *tṛṣṇā*. The exact details of this verse are somewhat unclear since the first line introduces a sequence [*tṛṣṇā-duḥkha-sukha*] whereas the second line expounds a cycle [*sukha-duḥkha-sukha* and so forth]. In the Buddhist as well as Brahmanical ascetic literature such observations about the inevitability of

¹³³ The last line of this verse is identical to the first line of the second verse in the *Indriyājātaka*. The first line of 12.168.18 is identical to 12.26.22cd, but the third line is identical to 12.26.23ab, which is in the other “Song of Senajit”.

duḥkha are usually the basis for establishing the desirability of *nirvāṇa* or *mokṣa*. One would expect that this would be followed by an invitation to become a renouncer and strive for liberation from rebirth¹³⁴, but king Senajit is never asked to become a renouncer in order to overcome his suffering. The lesson to be drawn from this observation is first of all that it is pointless to be upset when something bad happens.

The rest of the *Senajidgītā*, as well as the *Maṅkigītā*, however, assumes that it is in fact possible to obtain permanent *sukha*. Although mostly it is called just *sukha*, sometimes this special type of *sukha* is referred to as *buddhisukha* (12.168.26) or *tṛṣṇākṣayasukha* (12.168.36). The function of the term *buddhi* in these discourses will be discussed in more detail below. Other passages of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* record other instances of a special *sukha* - *tyāgasukha* is mentioned in 12.262.33, and (ordinary) *sukha* is contrasted with *mokṣasukha* in 12.277.5. Similarly, the *Bhagavadgītā* talks about an “excessive” *sukha* which is beyond the senses and can be grasped with *buddhi* (*sukham ātyantikam yat tad buddhigrāhyam atīndriyam*; 6.21). Similar compounds and notions of a special *sukha* also appear outside the *Mahābhārata*. For instance, *saṃbodhisukha* is mentioned in Aśvaghoṣa’s *Saundarananda* where it is contrasted with *kāmasukha* (18:46). *Saundarananda* also mentions *dhyānasukha* reflecting the prevalent association of the first levels of *dhyāna* with *sukha* in the Buddhist literature. The rhetoric around *sukha* in the ascetic literature

¹³⁴ Cf. for example the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā Sūtra* 45-46, translated in Chinese in 270 CE (Boucher 2008:cvi). After similar statements about suffering and its origins, the prince Puṇyaraśmi argues: ‘What intelligent person, King, would dwell here among enemies? ... In the midst of a multitude of women, one cannot achieve enlightenment ... I go and seek refuge in the mountain forest’ (45-46; trans: Boucher 2008). I quote this passage because it illustrates the common theme of a king becoming a renouncer in Buddhist and Jaina literature which contrasts with at least some portrayals of ideal kings in the *Mahābhārata*. The most famous Buddhist legend about a king who renounces after reflecting on impermanence is the legend about the Buddha himself. Of course, not all kings in early Buddhist narratives renounce kingship.

of Ancient India deserves a more detailed analysis, and I am planning to present it in a separate publication.

It is likely that this rhetoric around *sukha* was seen as appealing to kings. Kingship was perceived as a source of enjoyment, as captured in the compound *rājyasukha*, ‘happiness or pleasure of kingship’ (12.76.15), although sometimes it is said that the king’s *sukha* will be experienced in the other world after the king fulfils his duty of protecting the subjects (e.g.: *pālayitvā tathā paurān paratra sukham edhate*; 12.69.70). Teachings found in texts like the *Senajidgītā* and *Maṅkigītā* suggest that should his normal aspirations to *sukha* be frustrated or should a personal disaster befall him, the king might enjoy another form of happiness in this very life. On a similar notion of alternative *sukha* offered to a failed prince see also the discussion of 12.105 in chapter 5.

A verse which is shared by the *Senajidgītā*, *Maṅkigītā*, and other texts suggests that this *sukha* was conceived as a positive state of happiness or bliss, rather than just the absence of suffering, because of its superiority over erotic bliss and divine bliss:

The erotic bliss on earth and the great divine bliss are not worth one sixteenth part of the bliss of destruction of craving.

*yac ca kāmasukhaṃ loke yac ca divyaṃ mahat sukham
tṛṣṇākṣayasukhasyaite nārhaṭaḥ śoḍaśūṇ kalām* (12.168.36=12.171.51=12.268.6)¹³⁵

A significant feature of this ascetic *sukha* is that it is attained here and now. This is demonstrated by the frequent usage of the present tense when describing this or that accomplished

¹³⁵ This appears to have been an especially popular verse. It also appears in the *Udānavarga* 30.31 with insignificant variations. It also appears in the *Rājasutta* of the *Udānapāli*, where, notably, it is associated with king Pasenadi. The narrative introduction to this verse, however, has little relation to the content of the verse. The Buddha utters the verse to monks who are gossiping about Bimbisāra of Magadha and Pasenadi of Kosala and trying to decide which of these kings is stronger. The same verse is cited in the *bhāṣya* to *Yogasūtra* 2.42, which *sūtra* is about *saṃtoṣa*, contentment. Śaṅkara cites this verse to discuss various degrees of *ānanda* in his commentary to *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.33. Finally, this verse is cited in treatises on aesthetics to theorise *śāntarasa* (see Tubb 1985).

person. We find such statements as ‘she sleeps blissfully’ (*sukhaṃ svapiti*; 12.168.52), ‘I am happy’ (*ahaṃ sukhi*; 12.171.52), and so forth. The concern with the attainment of *sukha* in such *Mahābhārata* passages should perhaps be understood in a more general sense as an enquiry into the causes of human misery and its cessation here and now, rather than necessarily contributing to the religious ideas about escape from *saṃsāra*. To conclude the *Senajidgītā*, Bhīṣma states that king Senajit enjoyed happiness (*sukha*), encouraged by the well-reasoned sayings of the Brahmin without any suggestion that he became a *bhikṣu* or a *vānaprastha*¹³⁶.

The term *mokṣa* or its cognates or synonyms are not used in our two case studies. The instructions to king Senajit in 12.168 and the ascetic song sung by Maṅki have something to say about attaining supreme *sukha*, but neither of them calls for a pursuit of *mokṣa* (nor its cognates nor synonyms).

The very notion of *saṃsāra* is not mentioned in the teachings associated with Senajit and Maṅki. There is just a single verse which indicates belief in rebirth at all by mentioning the principle of *karman*:

One experiences the kind of [results of] action (*karman*) that has been done with a previous body, whether it is good or bad, wise, foolish or heroic.

*pūrvadehakṛtaṃ karma śubhaṃ vā yadi vāśubhaṃ
prājñaṃ mūḍhaṃ tathā śūraṃ bhajate yādṛśaṃ kṛtaṃ* (12.168.37)

The function of this verse in the text, however, does not seem to be to argue that one must therefore strive for overcoming *karman* and being liberated from rebirth, because it is immediately followed by stoic advice:

¹³⁶ *etais cānyais ca viprasya hetumadbhiḥ prabhāṣitaiḥ/ paryavasthāpito rājā senajin mumude sukham//* (12.168.53)

Surely, in this very way living beings experience agreeable and adverse things, happiness and pain. Having established this very understanding (*buddhi*), a virtuous person would live happily.

evam eva kilaitāni priyāṇy evāpriyāṇi ca
jīveṣu parivartante duḥkhāni ca sukhāni ca (12.168.38)
tad evaṃ buddhim āsthāya sukhaṃ jīved guṇānvitaḥ (12.168.39)

Thus, the verse about karma primarily emphasises, like the rest of the *Senajidgītā* and *Maṅkigītā*, that our fortune is beyond our control. The law of karma takes the same function as fate (*daiva*) which is mentioned in 12.171.13 and indeed listed in 12.168.51 next to ‘previous acts’, these two being the source of what befalls us. These two, fate (*daiva*) and deeds done in previous lives (*pūrvadehakṛtaṃ karma*), are just impersonal forces that determine our present circumstances, and both should be simply accepted in a “stoic” manner, rather than eliminated altogether. The stoic understanding (*buddhi*) of the inevitability of reaping karmic results in happiness here and now, not *mokṣa*.

4.2.3. *Sukha*: From *mokṣa* to mere contentment

In other parts of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, however, *sukha* is identified with *mokṣa*. For example, I have mentioned above the compound *mokṣasukha*, which links the concepts of liberation and *sukha* (12.277.5; this discourse will be discussed in chapter 6). It is also claimed that *mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa* is supreme bliss (*mokṣaṃ sukham anuttamam*; 12.284.33; *nirvāṇaṃ paramaṃ sukham* 12.327.5; cf. The *Dhammapada*: *nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ* (15.7d = 15.8d).

One of the types of *sukha* mentioned in our two episodes is *trṣṇākṣayasukha*, ‘the bliss of the destruction of craving’. The compound *trṣṇākṣaya*, which we saw above in 12.168.36 and 12.171.51, is common in the Buddhist literature where it is a synonym of *nirvāṇa*. It is highly probable, therefore, that this verse was formulated in a Buddhist context. In the *Mahābhārata* it is removed from a soteriological context, Buddhist or otherwise, and is found in a discourse which is concerned with

overcoming suffering rather than reaching liberation. Thereby, the curbing or destruction of craving is made into a less ambitious goal that is no longer identical with *nirvāṇa*. Elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* the absence of craving becomes associated with the concept of *saṃtoṣa*, “contentment”. *Saṃtoṣa* is listed in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* as one of the *niyamas* (“disciplines” or “observances”) alongside such items as *śauca* (purity) and *tapas*. The *niyamas* are the second *aṅga* (“limb” or “auxiliary”) in the system of eight *yogāṅgas* taught in the text. This suggests that *saṃtoṣa* is but a preparatory practice in the path of yoga¹³⁷. The immediate goal of *saṃtoṣa* is said to be ‘the unsurpassed obtainment of happiness’ (*saṃtoṣād anuttamaḥ sukhālābhaḥ*; 2.42), and to explain this *sūtra* the commentary attributed to Vyāsa¹³⁸ merely cites our *trṣṇākṣaya* verse without further comment. The bliss of contentment (*saṃtoṣasukha*) appears again in the commentary to 3.18. The commentary tells a tale (*ākhyāna*) about Jaigīṣavya who claims that ‘(...) whatever I experienced being born again and again among gods and humans, I take that to be nothing but suffering’ (*devamanuṣyeṣu punaḥ punar utpadyamānena yat kiṃcid anubhūtaṃ tat sarvaṃ duḥkham eva pratyavaimi*). His interlocutor Āvaṭya then wonders about the unsurpassed bliss of satisfaction (*anuttama saṃtoṣasukha*) – should it also be classified as a form of suffering (*duḥkhapakṣe nikṣiptam*)? Jaigīṣavya answers by positing a threefold hierarchy of *sukha*: ‘The bliss of satisfaction is said to be unsurpassed only in relation to sensual bliss. Relative to the bliss of

¹³⁷ This is confirmed by the *sūtra* 3.7: *trayam antaraṅgaṃ pūrvebhyaḥ*. Supplying some background from the surrounding *sūtras* and the commentary, this claims that the final triad is proximate to the attainment of *saṃprajñāta samādha*, whereas the first five elements, including *niyama*, are by implication external or removed from this attainment.

¹³⁸ Maas has argued that the *Yogasūtra* and the commentary traditionally attributed to Vyāsa were most probably written by the same author (2013). While his arguments are plausible, they are not conclusive, and his thesis about the identity of Patañjali and Vyāsa is not accepted by all scholars. Most notably, this thesis is not accepted by Gokhale: ‘I do not accept the advocacy of complete hermeneutic unity between *Yogasūtra* and *Yogabhāṣya*. I feel there must have been a considerable gap – an ideological and hermeneutical gap at least, and perhaps a chronological gap as well—between them’ (2020:9). In this thesis I will refer to the “commentary attributed to Vyāsa” to make it clear when I refer to the commentary rather than the *sūtras* themselves.

kaivalya (liberation), [the bliss of satisfaction] is just suffering '(viṣayasukhāpekṣayaivedam anuttamaṃ saṃtoṣasukham uktam. kaivalyasukhāpekṣayā duḥkham eva). This classification of *sukha* creates a middle ground for the *saṃtoṣasukha*, the *sukha* experienced when craving is diminished. This *sukha* falls short of the ultimate bliss of liberation but apparently can be experienced in this life. While the *Mahābhārata* does not present a similar attempt to systematically classify different types of *sukha*, it assumes a similar hierarchy when it claims that there is a special *sukha*, associated with cessation of craving, which in turn is associated with contentment (*saṃtoṣa*). Thus, while in the Buddhist tradition *trṣṇākṣayasukha* would equal *nirvāṇa*, in the *Mahābhārata* the same *trṣṇākṣayasukha* is presented more humbly as a means of overcoming a crisis. The cessation of craving or desire is not labelled *saṃtoṣa* in either the *Senajidgītā* or the *Maṅkigītā*, but it is associated with *saṃtoṣa* other *Mahābhārata* passages. Notably, 3.2.44 claims that 'there is no end to thirst; contentment is the supreme bliss '(anto nāsti pipāsāyāḥ saṃtoṣaḥ paramaṃ sukham¹³⁹). This statement comes from one of the ascetic speeches to a householder king that will be discussed in chapter 5. For now, it can be noted that it is found in an ascetic speech delivered to Yudhiṣṭhira at the very beginning of his forest exile, and that the context and framing of that episode in the *Mahābhārata* does not suggest that Yudhiṣṭhira should become a renouncer to seek the eradication of desire. The more obvious purpose of delivering these ascetic teachings to Yudhiṣṭhira is to uplift his mood and to help him endure the hardships of the forest exile.

¹³⁹ =12.317.21; Cf. 3.206.20: *asaṃtoṣasya nāsty antas tuṣṭis tu paramaṃ sukham*; 12.21.2: *saṃtoṣo vai svargatamaḥ saṃtoṣaḥ paramaṃ sukham*; 12.112.25: *na tv evaṃ mama saṃtoṣād rocate 'nyan mṛgādhipa/ na kāmāye sukhān bhogān aiśvaryaṃ vā tvadāśrayam*; 12.317.19: *atṛptā yānti vidhvaṃsaṃ saṃtoṣaṃ yānti paṇḍitāḥ*.

4.2.4 How to obtain *sukha*?

The two texts considered in this chapter recommend purely mental means for achieving *sukha*. What I mean by this is that they emphasise the development of a certain mental outlook (*buddhi*), indifference (*nirveda*) and the destruction of craving (*trṣṇā*) or desire (*kāma*) in contrast to other possible means of obtaining *sukha* that would require a substantial change in one's lifestyle or a sustained spiritual practice. The means of attaining *sukha* presented to Senajit and by Mañikī can be contrasted, for example, with the *dhyānasukha*, 'the bliss of meditation', which, as noted above, is the most common type of positive *sukha* mentioned in the Buddhist literature. It seems reasonable to assume that *dhyānasukha* would be primarily associated with monks or renouncers given that the typical meditating *yogin* in the Buddhist as well as Brahmanical literature is usually a solitary practitioner in the wilderness. There is little evidence that *dhyāna* was seen as a suitable practice for householders or householder kings in particular¹⁴⁰. In any case, this potentially demanding practice is absent from the *Mahābhārata* passages under consideration here.

Another point of contrast between our two stoic texts and more ascetically oriented teachings is highlighted by an *itihāsa purātana* that is situated between them in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. This legend records what was sung by the liberated Śamyāka (*śamyākena vimuktena gītaṃ*; 12.170.2) and attributes to him the view that 'having nothing is bliss' (*ākīṃcanyam sukhaṃ*; 12.170.8) and that 'the person who has nothing sleeps and rises blissfully' (*ākīṃcanaḥ sukhaṃ śete samuttiṣṭhati caiva hi*; 12.170.7). Śamyāka has compared kingship and poverty and found that the latter is superior because 'the person who has wealth is always agitated as if he was situated

¹⁴⁰ Considering that the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* includes several discourses on yogic meditation that are ultimately delivered to Yudhiṣṭhira, one might expect that there might be some comment or hint about the possible relevance of such instructions for householder kings. Yet this is not the case, and the reader is left wondering in what sense the details about yogic practice might be relevant to a householder king.

in the jaws of death '(nityodvigno hi dhanavān mṛtyor āsyagato yathā; 12.170.11). Thus, although the verses of Śamyāka bear some thematic resemblance to the songs of Senajit and Mañki, their version of a path to happiness (*sukha*) here and now cannot be read as equally suitable to householder audiences. The message of Śamyāka to the supposed royal audience is clear: 'Wondering around without possessions you will taste bliss '(*akiṃcanaḥ paripatan sukham āsvādayiṣyasi; 12.170.7*). For Śamyāka the source of *sukha* is not just giving up desire for wealth, but rather giving up wealth itself.

Such verses on giving up wealth as well as descriptions of forest-dwelling meditators in, for example, the Buddhist *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā*, provide a background against which it is possible to appreciate that both the *Senajidgītā* and the *Mañkigītā* avoid mentioning those elements of Indian ascetic traditions that strongly or exclusively associate the attainment of the higher type of *sukha* with non-householders.

The *Senajidgītā* and the *Mañkigītā* prescribe two main mental states and attitudes for attaining *sukha* – desirelessness and a certain outlook towards life (*buddhi*) characterised by an awareness of impermanence and death as well as an awareness that one's fortunes are up to fate.¹⁴¹ (*daiva*). These recurring concepts are sometimes introduced alongside recommending this or that virtue, e.g. truthfulness (*satya*), control of the senses (being *jitendriya*) and so on. It is not clear how the two ideals of *buddhi* and overcoming desire are related. We will see below that there are a couple of episodes in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that offer related teachings to endure grief, including direct parallels to the *Senajidgītā*, but without employing a similar rhetoric against *kāma*. There is, therefore, some reason to believe that texts like the *Senajidgītā* and the *Mañkigītā* might be drawing on (at least)

¹⁴¹ This concept is prominent especially in the *Mañkigītā* where it occurs in 12.171.10, 12, and 13. Fate (*daiva*) and the related concept of Time (*kāla*), which is more prominent in the Senajit episode from the "persuasion", set the *Mahābhārata* teachings apart from otherwise textually and ideologically related passages in the Buddhist literature. Neither *daiva* nor *kāla* are common terms in Buddhist teachings.

two different streams of tradition – one which emphasises a stoic attitude and another which emphasises the eradication of desire as a source of happiness. The *Rāmāyaṇa* would provide evidence for the existence of “pure” stoic discourses that are not yet mixed with rhetoric against *kāma*. The evidence from the *Rāmāyaṇa* is too slim to state this hypothesis with any degree of confidence.

Keeping this possible historical development in mind, we can now turn to looking at what our two case studies say about *buddhi* and giving up desire.

We have already seen above that *tṛṣṇā* is said to be the root of *duḥkha* and its cessation is the ultimate bliss. Accordingly, we also hear that Maṅki ‘cut the root of *kāma* and thereby attained great bliss’ (*acchinat kāmamūlaṃ sa tena prāpa mahat sukham*; 12.171.54). The *Maṅkigītā* seems to suggest that cutting the root of *kāma* can be a relatively an easy thing to do – it can even happen in one instant!

Nevertheless, our ascetic passages mention other concepts that go beyond the bare recommendation to give up desire.

A term that recurs throughout these texts is *buddhi*. The *buddhi* here seems to refer to both the content of one’s awareness and to the proper attitude that follows such an understanding. The content of *buddhi* in the present discourses is the impermanence of happiness (see above), the inevitability of separation from the loved ones (12.168.16), the inevitability of death (12.168.11), and the dependence of one’s welfare on forces beyond the control of the individual, most importantly, for Maṅki, on fate (*daiva* 12.171.13). The mention of fate is followed by the following argument in the *Maṅkigītā*:

Therefore a person who desires happiness must reach indifference. The person who is indifferent and has no expectations regarding the success of his goals sleeps happily.

*tasmān nirveda eveha gantavyaḥ sukham īpsatā
sukhaṁ svapiti nirviṇṇo nirāśaś cārthasādhane* (12.171.14)

When the narrator Bhīṣma sums up the tale of Maṅki, he conceptualises Maṅki's achievement as establishing a certain *buddhi* (12.171.53).

The *Senajidgītā* refers to the unique¹⁴² *buddhisukha* – a state of happiness obtained through the cultivation of a certain *buddhi*. We can surmise that this *buddhi* refers primarily to the teachings on impermanence found in the surrounding verses. In its immediate context, *buddhisukha* is linked with equanimity. Thus:

The people who have attained the *buddhisukha*, who are beyond dualities and free of selfishness, are never agitated by gain or loss.

*ye tu buddhisukhaṁ prāptā dvaṁdvātītā vimatsarāḥ
tān naivārthā na cānarthā vyathayanti kadā cana* (12.168.26)

The state of being beyond dualities is elsewhere explained as abandoning bliss (*ānanda*) alongside its opposite, grief (*śoka*), and other pairs of opposites. This will lead to a state of deep peace (*ubhe satyānṛte tyaktvā śokānandau bhayābhaye/ priyāpriye parityajya praśāntātmā bhaviṣyasi*//; 12.168.43).

Another passage claims that regardless of the pleasure (*sukha*) or pain (*duḥkha*) that one experiences, one should remain 'unconquered by the heart' (*hṛdayenāparājitaḥ*; 12.168.30). This statement suggests a difference between some basic level of pain and pleasure and the "deeper" effect that they can have on the person. Similarly, sorrow does not touch a disciplined person who

¹⁴² I am not aware of any occurrences of this term in the *Mahābhārata* or any other text.

possesses *buddhi* (*buddhimantaṃ* (...)) *śoko na sprśate naram*; 12.168.32). A similar metaphor of *buddhi* as a means of guarding one's mind from sorrow is found in the following verse:

Having established this understanding the wise person would live (*caret*) with his mind guarded because grief cannot touch one who knows the rising and perishing¹⁴³.

etāṃ buddhiṃ samāsthāya guptacittaś cared budhaḥ
udayāstamayajñaṃ hi na śokaḥ spraṣṭum arhati (12.168.33)

Mañki describes his attainment as remaining a master in one's own interior citadel: 'Having reached the unassailable fortress of Brahman I would be happy like a king' (*prāpyāvadhyam brahmapuraṃ rājeva syām ahaṃ sukhī*; 12.171.52). Instead of searching for outward happiness Mañki finds happiness within (*ātmany upalabhe sukham*; 12.171.24).

The language used in the *Senajidgītā* and *Mañkigītā* points towards a search for internal happiness that is independent of external circumstances. It is the special wisdom, *buddhi*, that stands between the events in the external world and the inner fortress of the self, which remains untouched by sorrow. The ordinary happiness (*sukha*) is necessarily transient and always depends on circumstances that are beyond our control, such as the success of one's enterprises or the welfare of one's loved ones. The ascetic *sukha*, by contrast, does not depend on any such external factors.

4.2.5. Crisis as a context for ascetic teachings

A notable feature of the texts about king Senajit and Mañki is that the happiness that is independent of external circumstances becomes of interest precisely when it is impossible to obtain happiness through normal means or when one feels great sorrow. As noted above, in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* version of his legend, king Senajit receives these teachings when his son has

¹⁴³ I understand this to mean that the wise person understands that anything that comes into existence is bound to perish in time.

died. The other *Mahābhārata* version of the collection of verses associated with Senajit is delivered to Yudhiṣṭhira, along with other ascetic teachings, to alleviate his suffering after the *Mahābhārata* war.

Meanwhile, Mañki's attainment of an indifferent state of mind is brought about by a crisis in life – losing his bullocks that was all of his wealth (12.171.54).

A similar transformation takes place with the courtesan (*veśyā*) by the name of Piṅgalā (12.168.47) whose verses (*gītā gāthāḥ*) are cited by the Brahmin who advises king Senajit. Piṅgalā was transformed at the time of a crisis (*kṛcchrakāle*; 12.168.46), when she was separated from her lover (*kāntenāsīd vinākṛtā*). She managed to establish a peaceful *buddhi* (*atha kṛcchragatā śāntāṃ buddhim āsthāpayat tadā*; 12.168.47). She has now attained the attitude of being without expectation, which is the supreme happiness (*nairāśyaṃ paramaṃ sukham*), and therefore sleeps happily (*sukhaṃ svapiti piṅgalā*; 12.168.52).¹⁴⁴

The examples of Piṅgalā and Mañki highlight that the teachings on equanimity and *buddhi* are associated with a need to overcome a crisis. Similarly, such teachings become relevant for kings Yudhiṣṭhira and Senajit when they face great sorrow. These are just the examples that emerge from the materials discussed in more detail in this part of the chapter. The next part of a chapter will provide a longer list and a less detailed discussion of other textual passages that portray crisis as a context in which ascetic teachings become relevant to householders.

¹⁴⁴A similar verse about a certain Piṅgalā appears in the *Silavīmaṃsajātaka*. Piṅgalā is mentioned again in 12.171.61 as one of the six teachers (*gurus*) of a certain Bodhya, without giving any further detail. A different, longer, and most probably later version of the same legend is found in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (11.8.22-42), where she is made a devotee of Viṣṇu.

Thus the ascetic teachings presented here operate outside of any reference to the *āśrama* system or any other ordering of human life. Here the obtainment of *buddhi* is not restricted to any period in life or to a certain group of people. It should also be noted that neither of these characters is said to become a renouncer (*pravṛājaka*), although it may be implied that Mañki does not have many options left concerning his livelihood.

It is also significant that *buddhi* is obtained, as it were, in one instant. The transformations of Mañki and Piṅgalā are instantaneous. Likewise, kings Senajit (see 12.168.53), Janaka¹⁴⁵ and Yudhiṣṭhira (12.42.12¹⁴⁶) are uplifted just after hearing the teachings. This suggests that the teachings did not require an arduous path to be put into practice.

4.3. King Janaka

An important character to appear in the *Mañkigītā* is king Janaka of Videha.

To be more exact, king Janaka is not mentioned in the verses attributed to *Mañki* himself but in an additional extremely short *itihāsa purātana* that is mentioned in Bhīṣma reply to Yudhiṣṭhira's initial question. The legend of king Janaka is brought up to further illustrate Mañki's attainment of bliss (*sukha*) by getting rid of desire (*kāma*):

¹⁴⁵ This refers to the dialogue between king Janaka and Aśman, which was mentioned above as one of the ascetic episodes related to Yudhiṣṭhira in the "persuasion" (12.28). After listening to Aśman, Janaka, 'whose *buddhi* had been purified, went to his own abode, his grief appeased' (*viśuddhabuddhir yayau grhaṃ svaṃ prati śāntaśokaḥ*; 12.28.57), and Vyāsa recommends that Yudhiṣṭhira also let go of his grief and enjoy the earth that he has won (*mahījītā te tāṃ bhuñkṣva*; 12.28.58). It is not possible to provide much detail about the teachings of Aśman, which offer some original details while also echoing some of the key themes found in the *Senajidgītā* and the *Mañkigītā*. For example, Aśman notes that the good and bad that we experience are beyond our control, invoking here the notions of fate and Time (*kāla*). He likewise emphasises that death is inevitable. In this case rebirth is mentioned, but, similar to the mention of karma in the *Senajidgītā*, the main function of the notion of *saṃsāra* in Aśman's teachings is to invoke a feeling of detachment and a realisation of the temporary nature of any social and family bonds that one acquires in one's lifetime (12.28.38): 'Thousands of mothers and fathers and hundreds of sons and wives have been experienced in rebirths (*saṃsāras*). Whose are they? Whose then are we?' (*mātrpitrśahasrāṇi putradāraśatāni ca| saṃsāreṣv anubhūtāni kasya te kasya vā vāyam*// (12.28.38).

¹⁴⁶ Yudhiṣṭhira does not become calm immediately after hearing the "Song of Senajit" and other ascetic teachings in 12.26-28. This reference is to the very end of the "persuasion".

Regarding this subject they also bring up this ancient lore – [a verse] sung by Janaka, the king of Videha, as he was becoming tranquil: Endless is my wealth, I who have nothing. While [the town of] Mithilā burns, nothing of mine [really] burns.

atrāpy udāharantīmam itihāsaṃ purātanam
gītaṃ videharājena janakena praśāmyatā (12.171.55)

anantaṃ bata me vittaṃ yasya me nāsti kiṃ cana
mithilāyāṃ pradīptāyāṃ na me dahyati kiṃ cana (12.171.56)

This is a well-known verse repeated with variation elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* as well as in Buddhist and Jaina sources¹⁴⁷. Unlike Yudhiṣṭhira, Senajit, or Bhīṣma, king Janaka is not a mere listener to the ascetic teachings but has interiorised them. The verse itself is essentially ambiguous. It could be uttered by Janaka when he is just about to become a *pravrajaka*, or it could be uttered by Janaka when he obtains an equanimous state of mind without really going forth.

King Janaka is at the centre of the controversy regarding the proper relationship between kingship and renunciation. He is known both as the ideal liberated householder king and as a king notable for his renunciation of royal duties. As discussed above in chapter 3, the same verse is cited by king Yudhiṣṭhira when he wishes to renounce the kingdom¹⁴⁸. It seems safe to assume that Yudhiṣṭhira refers to a legend about king Janaka who gave up kingship. Appleton notes that such is indeed the primary context of the variations of this verse found in the Jaina literature and in the *Mahājanakajātaka* (2016:Chapter 6; see also Wiltshire 1990). Thus, Yudhiṣṭhira must have in mind a story similar to the *Mahājanakajātaka* where king Janaka utters the verse about the burning Mithilā as he is departing from the city to take up a lifestyle of a *bhikṣu*.

¹⁴⁷ *susukhaṃ bata jīvāmi yasya me nāsti kiṃ cana/ mithilāyāṃ pradīptāyāṃ na me dahyati kiṃ cana*|| (12.268.4)
Cf. *Udānavarga* 30.44: *susukhaṃ bata jīvāmo yeṣāṃ no nāsti kiṃcanam/ mithilāyāṃ dahyamānāyāṃ na no dahyati kiṃcanam*|| For parallels in the Jaina literature see Appleton 2016.

¹⁴⁸ *api gāthāṃ imāṃ gītāṃ janakena vadanty uta/ nirdvaṇḍvena vimuktena mokṣaṃ samanupaśyatā*|| (12.17.17)
anantaṃ bata me vittaṃ yasya me nāsti kiṃ cana/ mithilāyāṃ pradīptāyāṃ na me dahyati kiṃ cana|| (12.17.18)

We have also seen above that Arjuna confronts Yudhiṣṭhira by claiming that Janaka was in fact convinced to return home. This must be related to the understanding of Janaka as the liberated householder king. This householder Janaka is mentioned in several episodes, the most notable among which are 12.308 and 12.313. These two episodes will be discussed in chapters 7 and 8 respectively. Another well-known reference to Janaka as a spiritually accomplished householder king is found in the *Bhagavadgītā*¹⁴⁹.

In several instances king Janaka receives or himself proclaims general ascetic teachings within a narrative framework where it is clear that these teachings are applicable to householder kings, although there is no reason to believe that the householder king will become liberated (*mukta*) by following these teachings. An example that has already been mentioned is the *Aśmagītā* from the “persuasion” (12.28). Another example to be discussed in chapter 5 is found in *Mahābhārata* 3.2.

It is not possible to say, however, that the renouncer Janaka belongs exclusively to the Buddhist and Jaina traditions whereas the *Mahābhārata* knows just the householder Janaka, bar the reference to him by Yudhiṣṭhira. The most striking and least ambiguous example of a renouncer Janaka is found in the dialogue between Yājñavalkya and Janaka (12.298-306). Once Janaka has listened to instructions on Sāṃkhya and yoga, his renunciation is described in the following verse:

And having entrusted the kingdom of Videha to his son, the king of Mithilā dwelled practicing the *dharma* of an ascetic.

*videharājyaṃ ca tathā pratiṣṭhāpya sutasya vai
yatidharmam upāsaṃś cāpy avasan mithilādhipaḥ* (12.306.94)

¹⁴⁹ *karmaṇaiva hi saṃsiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ/ lokasaṃgraham evāpi saṃpaśyan kartum arhasi* (3.20)

Given that the king is said to have entrusted the kingdom to his son, it seems reasonable to assume that in this case the practice of *yatidharma* is understood to follow upon giving up *rājadharma*.

Janaka and Prasenajit are mentioned in the *Rājadharmaparvan* as two of the kings who obtained heaven by diminishing their greed (*lobhakṣayāt*; 12.153.13). The short chapter in which this statement appears is another example of a king receiving teachings that would normally be associated with ascetics – in this case learning that the cause of suffering is ignorance (*ajñānaprabhavaṃ hīdaṃ yad duḥkham upalabhyate*; 12.153.5) which in turn originates from greed (*lobhaprabhavam ajñānam*; 12.153.10). Therefore, if Yudhiṣṭhira gives up greed he will gain happiness (*sukha*) in this world and the next (12.153.14).

The variety of contexts in which king Janaka appears makes it impossible to say that a mere mention of his name suggests that a textual passage is householder-friendly or, just the opposite, that the listener is required to renounce as king Janaka did. King Janaka stands at the centre of a controversy about the ideal spiritually enlightened king, sometimes appearing as a householder, sometimes as a renouncer. The *Maṅkigītā*'s citing of king Janaka's verse about the burning of *Mithilā* suggests that it was understood by some to refer to a state of mind that should be cultivated by a householder king, even if elsewhere the same verse is uttered by Janaka as he leaves his city. It is therefore necessary to use further hints from the narrative framing of ascetic teachings given to or by Janaka. In our *Maṅkigītā* episode the context to Janaka's dispassionate utterance suggests that he should be seen as another example of developing *buddhi* and *nirveda* independent of becoming a *bhikṣu*.

4.4. The *śramaṇa* background of teachings on *sukha*

The two *adhyāyas* analysed in this chapter draw from a floating pool of ascetic poetry circulating in Ancient India. While it is possible to say that some of the *subhāṣitas* cited above remained popular and were cited in later literature, it is more difficult to say when they were first composed or when they were arranged in the specific collections of ascetic verses that we now have in the *Mahābhārata*. It seems reasonable to assume that these ascetic verses and legends gained prominence during the last few centuries before the Common Era, although it is not impossible that some of them date to the time of the historical Buddha or even to an earlier date, especially those that are general ascetic teachings.

Several scholars have pointed out the possible links between the story of Maṅki and Ājīvikism (e.g. Basham 1951; Brockington 2000) on the basis of the similarity of the name Maṅki to that of the alleged founder of Ājīvikism – Maṅkhali in Prakrit or Makkhali in Pali – as well as on the basis of the importance of the concept of fate (*daiva*), which is known to have been central to Ājīvikism. The concept of *daiva* in the story of Maṅki, however, is cast in the most general terms rather than expounding the more specific ‘Makkhali’s doctrine of automatic salvation in a period of 8.400,000 *mahākappas* through the power of *Niyati* (fate)’ (Basham 1951:263). Furthermore, the concept of *daiva* is not unique to the Ājīvika tradition. It permeates the whole of *Mahābhārata*, and is also prominent in the Homeric epics (Vassilkov 1999). The episode of Maṅki does not mention any of the other unique doctrines of Ājīvikism, and lacks any mention of a key defining feature of early Ājīvika practice as identified by Basham – fierce asceticism (Basham 1951; see also *Majjhimanikāya* 36:5).

A number of features suggest a connection with Buddhist doctrines, such as identifying *tṛṣṇā* with the source of suffering, or mentioning the compound *tṛṣṇākṣaya*, as has already been noted above. Some relevant parallels to the Buddhist literature have already been given in footnotes but a more complete list of such parallels is found in Tokunaga (2011), who also lists some Jaina parallels especially for the *Senajidgītā*. Nevertheless, there is nothing in the *Senajidgītā* or the *Maṅkigītā* that would identify these texts distinctly as Buddhist teachings. Significantly, the similarities often come from the margins of the Buddhist canon – the majority of similarities seem to be with verses found in the *Jātakas*, the *Udānavarga* and the largely parallel *Dhammapada*. It seems most likely that these texts themselves were partly composed using certain shared *śramaṇa* verses that do not necessarily originate from within the Buddhist tradition. Both anthologies (the *Udānavarga* and the *Dhammapada*) include a section on *sukha*, which provides a link between these traditions and ascetic teachings in the *Mahābhārata*. Besides these collections of verses on *sukha*, Anālayo notes that ‘references to the experience of happiness are a recurring theme in the verses of awakened monks and nuns collected in the *Theragāthā* and the *Therīgāthā*’ (Anālayo 2012:153). This is notable because the goal of the Buddhist path is usually described as the cessation of suffering rather than in positive terms as *sukha*. The role of *sukha* in standard descriptions of Buddhist awakening is usually limited to the first three of four *dhyānas/jhānas*.

I would argue that episodes like the *Senajidgītā* itself should be seen as collections of ascetic verses that are comparable with the Buddhist collections mentioned in the previous paragraph, such as the *Dhammapada* or the *Theragāthā* and the *Therīgāthā*. They were not composed by their author/authors but rather edited from a pool of ascetic verses. Most of these, especially in the *Dhammapada*, are standalone (*muktaka*) verses that are intelligible on their own. It may be helpful to think about texts like the *Senajidgītā* as early collections of *subhāṣita* or proverbial verses. While

the *Mankigītā* contains more of a narrative core, it also includes several such verses shared with other texts.

The term *sukha* is used in illuminating ways in two *Jātakas* that have textual parallels with *Mahābhārata* 12.168 as noted above – the *Indriyajātaka* and *Sīlavīmaṃsajātaka*.

In the *Sīlavīmaṃsajātaka* the bodhisattva notices that Piṅgalā sleeps blissfully when she gives up hope of meeting her lover that night. In contrast to *Mahābhārata* 12.168 and 12.171, in the *Jātaka* story Piṅgalā is not credited with major “spiritual” achievement and is mentioned just in passing as an inspiration to the bodhisattva. He later observes a meditating ascetic (*tāpasa*) and concludes that ‘there is no bliss superior to the bliss of meditation (*jhānasukha*) neither in this world nor in the other world’ (*iddhaloke ca paraloke ca jhānasukhato uttaritaram sukhaṃ n’ atthīti*; *Jātaka* vol.III p.101.1.24-25). Thus, while the verses directly associated with Piṅgalā point towards giving up hope or expectation as a source of bliss, they are placed in a Buddhist framework where the bliss of meditation (*jhānasukha*=Sanskrit *dhyānasukha*) is the desirable form of *sukha* that should be contrasted to the inferior *kāmasukha* that Piṅgalā must have been expecting.

In the *Indriyajātaka* the sage Nārada loses control over himself and enjoys erotic pleasure (*kāmasukha*). He is then urged to seek the best kind of *sukha* (*paṭikaṃkha varaṃ sukhanti*; verse 2). The *Indriyajātaka* never says what this higher *sukha* is. One may infer that it must be the *sukha* which is experienced in the *jhānas* because at the end of the story Nārada returns to the practice of the *jhānas*. The commentary also glosses the “superior or best (*vara*) *sukha*” as *jhānasukha*.¹⁵⁰

It can be observed that those two *Jātakas* operate with similar concepts as *Mahābhārata* 12.168. Most notably, they contain the peculiar ideas of an ascetic type of *sukha* which is different

¹⁵⁰ *tad eva varaṃ uttamaṃ jhānasukhaṃ iccha patthehi* (*Jātaka* vol.III p.465.1.9-10)

from ordinary or sensual *sukha*. The most striking difference is that in both *Jātakas* it is identified with *sukha* experienced in meditation (*jhānasukha*) while the *Mahābhārata* chapters that I have analysed above do not make any mention of meditation and substitute other kinds of *sukha* for *jhānasukha*.

The two chapters of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* that I have discussed above are based on concepts and even particular verses drawn from an ascetic (*śramaṇa*) background. Yet their reading of the *śramaṇa* traditions is selective. The two units of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* analysed in this paper are quite unique because of their non-sectarian and even secular orientation. There is no mention of deities or the attainment of supernatural powers that one would usually find in ascetic or yogic discourses. In contrast to more mediation-based versions of yoga that envision the end of suffering as a complete withdrawal of consciousness from matter resulting in the cessation of rebirth, these texts promise the attainment of happiness in this life. Only mental discipline is stressed here. There is no mention of any of the more demanding disciplines such as *tapas* or meditation (*dhyāna*), nor is there any discussion of the necessity of becoming a *bhikṣu* for attaining such states of mind. Furthermore, there is little discussion of non-violence - the ascetic value that is most incompatible with royal duties. I believe that these are deliberate omissions to make such teachings appealing and suitable for householder kings.

Söhnen-Thieme has already suggested that Piṅgalā's self-characterisation as '*saṃbuddhāsmi* in 12.168.50 'points to a Buddhist background' (2009:371). A closer look at the *Mahābhārata* 12.168 and its *Jātaka* parallels strengthens the hypothesis that it is a reworking of materials that were previously circulated as belonging to the Buddhist traditions. This leads to another plausible hypothesis – the peculiar usage of the term *buddhi* in *Mahābhārata* 12.168 and 12.171 is a "trace" left by a transformation of Buddhist ideas and practices into forms of wisdom and

mental discipline suitable for householders. *Buddhi* in the *Mahābhārata* passages is primarily a substitute for *dhyāna/jhāna* found in the corresponding Buddhist literature, and *buddhisukha* replaces *jhānasukha*¹⁵⁷.

Instead of the Buddhist *jhānasukha*, the *Senajidgītā* coins the term *buddhisukha*, which, as far as I know, is unique to it. While this may also be seen as a vague reference to the probable Buddhist origins of some of its teachings, I find it more charitable to believe that the *Senajidgītā* presents a unique and creative concept of the cultivation of *buddhi* as a means to overcoming suffering and reaching a state of constant happiness.

Conclusion

The two *adhyāyas* of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* that have been analysed above reveal an underlying concern with overcoming suffering and obtaining happiness. These texts contain a number of similar themes and concepts. It is not entirely clear whether all of these shared elements are meant to fit within a single system. One may impose a provisional order on them by saying that one has to cultivate an understanding (*buddhi*) of the impermanence of happiness, of the inevitability of death and of the fact that one's fortunes ultimately rely on causes outside one's control such as fate (*daiva*). Establishing such a *buddhi* would result in a somewhat stoic attitude of equanimity (*śamatva*) and bring about the destruction of craving (*tṛṣṇā*) which will then result in ultimate happiness or bliss (*sukha*) experienced in this very life (Cf. Fitzgerald 2015:103). This happiness is independent of any exterior circumstances and is therefore unshakable by any

¹⁵⁷ Such observations would improve the analysis of the term *buddhi* in *Mahābhārata* 12.168 as undertaken by Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald sees these unusual usages of *buddhi* in this episode as a step in the development of the term *buddhi* in Sāṃkhya philosophy, completely ignoring the Buddhist background (2015). It may be better to understand the *Senajidgītā* in the context of its *śramaṇa* or possible Buddhist background rather than link it with the development of Sāṃkhya.

misfortune. As an alternative explanation, I have suggested that a hypothetical earlier or independent discourse on *buddhi* may have been expanded by supplying the notion that one needs to give up the desire to become happy.

Our two case studies do not describe *tapas* or any of the more demanding yogic disciplines. Instead, they elaborate a purely mental discipline - developing a special outlook and attitude (*buddhi*) towards life.

A kind of purely mental renunciation is also seen in the *Bhagavadgītā*, but the passages discussed above differ substantially from the religion of the *Bhagavadgītā*. There is no mention of such key concepts as *bhakti* (devotion) or *svadharma* (duty specific to one's class, *varṇa*), or of any distinctly religious frame of ideas whatsoever. On the contrary, the world is analysed in deterministic terms – fate (*daiva* or *kāla*) determines human happiness and misery.

Thus one may even characterise the opening chapters of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* as secular. On several occasions the literary characters become interested in ascetic teachings or attain a state of indifference by themselves in a moment of crisis without any reference to the *āśrama* system that would restrict the circumstances under which one is eligible to teach, receive, or put into practice ascetic teachings.

The texts were possibly composed from the shared ascetic literature of the *śramaṇa* traditions possibly with an aim of offering some secularised teachings for householder kings. Probably it was the emphasis on mental states as the cause of the destruction of suffering and the positive revaluation of *sukha* found in early Buddhism that paved the way for such a development of ideas.

A more detailed conclusion will be provided at the end of the second part of the thesis, when other related passages from the *Mahābhārata* and beyond have been introduced in chapter 5.

5. Ascetic teachings for kings and other householders facing a crisis: A trend in the Sanskrit epics and early Buddhist literature

The previous chapter provided a case study of two *Mahābhārata* episodes that offer ascetic teachings at the time of a crisis. This chapter will provide a list and a brief discussion of all the other major episodes from the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well as some episodes from early Buddhist literature that participate in the same trend.

The first section of this chapter will deal with the *Mahābhārata*, the second section with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but the final section with early Buddhist literature. Due to constraints of space, in most instances the comments will amount to a mere summary of the teachings and a discussion of their narrative context. A more detailed discussion will be provided of those passages that provide some original detail that has not already been discussed in relation to the *Senajidgītā* and the *Maṅkigītā*. Attention will be paid to the structure and narrative framing of the ascetic teachings.

5.1. The *Mahābhārata*

5.1.1. Consolation and yoga for Yudhiṣṭhira

The first major *Mahābhārata* episode where a king is consoled by means of ascetic teachings is found at the very beginning of the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, just when the forest exile of the Pāṇḍavas has begun. The grieving Yudhiṣṭhira sits down on earth (*śocan niṣasāda mahītale*; 3.2.13), and is approached by the Brahmin Śaunaka who is said to be skilled in yoga and Sāṃkhya (3.2.14). Some aspects of this episode have been discussed by Framarin (2019) in a paper that focuses on the

concept of mental pain in the *Mahābhārata* and translates the *Mahābhārata* ideas in the terms of modern philosophy. This is how the context of Śaunaka's teachings is summarised by Framarin:

Śaunaka's advice to Yudhiṣṭhira focuses on the means to alleviate the pain that overwhelms him. Yudhiṣṭhira's pain is complex. It arises as a result of his loss of kingdom (3.2.2), his concern for his subjects (3.2.3–4, 7, 13), his failure to protect his family (3.2.89, cf. 3.144.12), the hardships of the homeless life (3.2.3–4), and so on (2019:104–5).

While all of these problems provide the background for Śaunaka's advice, the more immediate context is Yudhiṣṭhira's concern that Brahmins will suffer on his account when they will follow him into the forest where he will be unable to adequately provide for them (3.2.13). We will see that Śaunaka's advice consists of two parts, where the first part is general advice on overcoming suffering, but the second part is more closely related with the problem of how Yudhiṣṭhira can take care of his subjects.

The teachings of Śaunaka begin with an ascetic proverb that is also found in both the “Songs of Senajit” and other passages discussed in this chapter:

Every day thousands of occasions for grief and hundreds of occasions for fear enter the fool, but they do not enter the wise man.

śokasthānasahasrāṇi *bhayasthānaśatāni* *ca*
divase divase mūḍham āviśanti na paṇḍitam (3.2.15=11.2.13=12.317.2=(with *harṣa*-
 instead of *bhaya*-)12.26.20=12.168.31)

This verse sets a stoic tone similar to that seen in the two Senajit episodes. It is again claimed that a negative external stimulus does not necessarily have to cause a negative emotional response. The metaphor of “entering” reminds one of the earlier discussion of the mind which is “guarded” by wisdom and “like a citadel” where grief cannot enter (see chapter 4).

Śaunaka also makes an appeal to “people like you”:

People like you do not become downcast with bodily and mental pains in difficult matters, problems and calamities that befall their own kin.

arthakṛcchreṣu durgeṣu vyāpatsu svajanasya ca
śārīramānasair duḥkhair na sīdanti bhavadvidhāḥ (3.2.18)

The phrase “people like you” could plausibly refer to Yudhiṣṭhira being a *kṣatriya* and indicate the heroic qualities expected of such persons. Alternatively, “people like you” could mean “wise people”, who are certainly presented as an ideal in this passage, as seen in the verse about the *paṇḍitas* who manage to avoid grief.

After a short initial speech Śaunaka relates certain *ślokas* that were sung by Janaka (3.2.19). Here, too, Janaka emerges as a king associated with general ascetic wisdom that is presented as useful for Yudhiṣṭhira. The verses attributed to Janaka provide a more systematic instruction about mental and physical suffering and the means by which these can be overcome. Framarin has explored the concept of mental pain in particular and summarises the analysis of this passage in this way: ‘My thesis in this paper is that mental pains are states like dislike, dissatisfaction, disappointment, and so on’ (2019:104).

The discourse of Janaka, however, moves on to a rhetoric against the supposedly undesirable mental states of *sneha*, “love”, *rāga*, “passion”, *kāma*, “desire”, *icchā* “wish”, and *tṛṣṇā*, “thirst” in verses 31-34. While Janaka’s speech involves some almost certain references to Buddhism, the concept of *tṛṣṇā* does not seem to have a similar role as in Buddhism, and there is no call to abandon *tṛṣṇā* to stop rebirth. Instead, we hear this advice:

Tṛṣṇā is indeed the worst [thing]. It creates constant agitation for men. It is accompanied by *adharma*, it is terrible and results in evil (*pāpa*).

tṛṣṇā hi sarvapāpiṣṭhā nityodvegakarī nṛṇāṃ
adharmabahulā caiva ghorā pāpānubandhinī (3.2.34)

This verse mentions two specific reasons why *tṛṣṇā* is bad. To begin with, it is in itself a source of constant agitation. Moreover, as the second line explains, it is closely related with *adharma* and the performance of *pāpa*, evil action. We have seen the same line of reasoning above in the discourse about *tṛṣṇā* as the root of evil action that Saṃjaya delivers to Yudhiṣṭhira as well as in Yudhiṣṭhira's own post-war assessment of *tṛṣṇā* as the cause of the evil he committed during the war (see chapter 3). *Tṛṣṇā*, therefore, needs to be overcome, but to overcome *tṛṣṇā* here does not mean to escape rebirth completely by moving beyond both *dharma* and *adharma*, beyond both good and bad karma. *Tṛṣṇā* needs to be avoided in order to escape just from the *adharma* that stems from desire, and this suggests that after giving up *tṛṣṇā* Yudhiṣṭhira is to perform such dharmic action that will guarantee a good rebirth or afterlife in heaven. The exact nature of *dharma* is a contested topic in the *Mahābhārata*. The passage under discussion here and the other two above-mentioned passages that present *tṛṣṇā* as a source of *pāpa* are related to the view that Yudhiṣṭhira should perform a temporary exile in the forest or even give up kingship completely to avoid the performance of *pāpa* of intra-family warfare. This view was certainly not accepted by everyone, and we have already seen how the “persuasion” episode responds to the argument that no kingship is better than a kingship obtained by means of *pāpa*. The “persuasion” presents a vision of the dharmic householder king who pursues the accumulation of *artha*, wealth, by violent means and nullifies his evil deeds by various expiatory practices, the most potent of which is the horse sacrifice (see chapter 3).

The verse about *tṛṣṇā* as a source of evil is followed by an ascetic proverb which claims that ‘for him, who gives up *tṛṣṇā*, there is happiness’ (*tṛṣṇāṃ tyajataḥ sukham*; 3.2.55). This brings us back to the idea seen in the *Senajidgītā* that the cessation of *tṛṣṇā* is a form of a higher *sukha*, and indeed the very phrase *tṛṣṇāṃ tyajataḥ sukham* is found in the *Senajidgītā* and related episodes in

the *Mahābhārata* (12.168.45, 12.268.12, 13.7.21). Here the abandonment of desire is linked to the concept of *saṁtoṣa*, “contentment”, which is said to be ‘the supreme bliss’ (*saṁtoṣaḥ paramaṁ sukham*; 3.2.44). On *saṁtoṣa* as absence of desire see also chapter 4.

The ideal person in whom *saṁtoṣa* is established is called a *pañḍita*, a wise man, and he is contrasted to the fool rather than the householder. Nevertheless, some of the verses of this passage may be read as recommending a frugal lifestyle in so far as they make a heavy criticism of *artha*, arguing that it is always a source of suffering – accumulating, preserving, spending, and losing wealth are all said to be *duḥkha* (3.2.42). It is quite possible that some of these verses were originally composed in a more ascetic context, but here they are probably cited to console Yudhiṣṭhira during his temporary poverty rather than as a call for renunciation.

Much of what was said about the *Senajidgītā* and the *Maṅkigītā* can be applied to the first part of the discourse that Śaunaka delivers to Yudhiṣṭhira. Here, too, we find that Śaunaka cites some ascetic *subhāṣitas* that present a stoic viewpoint, mentions king Janaka, and discusses the concept of *tṛṣṇā*, portraying the absence of *tṛṣṇā* as the supreme bliss. This is the same rhetoric that in Buddhist literature is used to talk about *nirvāṇa*, and the nature of the verses attributed to king Janaka make it likely that they were initially associated with the renouncer Janaka, who is known to the Buddhist tradition in the *Mahājanakajātaka*. Here, however, there is no suggestion that Yudhiṣṭhira should become a *bhikṣu*, and neither the verses themselves nor the narrative context of these teachings even refer to the lifestyle of a *bhikṣu*.

The context of the teachings of Śaunaka and their implications for Yudhiṣṭhira are not as clear as they could be. It is safe to say that some of Śaunaka’s stoic wisdom should help Yudhiṣṭhira deal with the suffering of his present circumstances. More ambiguous are the implications of the

teachings against desire. Should Yudhiṣṭhira give up desire for wealth and kingship altogether? Should he only give up desire temporarily to avoid unnecessary suffering while in the forest? Or should he give up desire temporarily and put aside any claims to kingship during the forest exile so that he does not break his vow of *satya*? There is not enough context to choose any of these as the most plausible interpretation of Śaunaka's advice.

Śaunaka's discourse has a second part which consists of more original material but is difficult to explain coherently. It first describes *saṃsāra*, the process of rebirth, as propelled by ignorance (*avidyā*), action (karma), and desire (*tṛṣṇā*). It is said that rebirth is the path, or post-mortem destiny (*gati*), of the fools (*abudha*), whereas the path of the wise (*budha*) is different (3.2.69). It is an eightfold path of *dharma* that consists of typical Brahmanical virtues that are well-known from other parts of the *Mahābhārata*:

Sacrifice, recitation, charity, austerity, truthfulness, patience, discipline, freedom from greed – this is known to be the eightfold path of *dharma*.

ijyādhyayanadānāni tapaḥ satyaṃ kṣamā damaḥ
alobha iti mārgo 'yaṃ dharmasyāśṭavidhaḥ smṛtaḥ (3.2.71)

Then 'in this path the first tetrad is established in the path of ancestor vehicle '(*tatra pūrvaś caturvargaḥ pitṛyānapathe sthitaḥ*; 3.2.72) whereas 'the latter [tetrad] is the vehicle of gods '(*uttaro devayānas tu*; 3.2.73). This presents us with two problems of interpretation. The first problem is that this path (*mārga*) or rather two paths are contrasted to a regular rebirth in *saṃsāra*, and it would be reasonable to expect that it leads to an escape from *saṃsāra*. Yet neither the *pitṛyāna* nor the *devayāna* is an obvious reference to *mokṣa*. We might expect that a path called *devayāna* would result in becoming a god, and, as we will see below, Śaunaka indeed shortly moves on to talk about becoming a god. The second problem of interpretation is that two paths called *devayāna* and

pitryāna are well-known from earlier sources such as the early *Upaniṣads* that present a model in which the ancestors and gods are no more than steps in paths that have other destinations. As Masato Fujii summarises the two paths, '[t]he one who follows the first path passes through the bright entities and finally reaches the world of brāhman to remain there for all eternity, while the one who follows the other path passes through the dark entities and finally returns to this world to be born again' (Fujii 2011:104). The path resulting in the eternal residing in the world of *brahman* bears a similar name as our *devayāna*. It is unclear whether the author of this epic passage assumes the Upaniṣadic model. Taken at a face value and in the present context the *Mahābhārata* verse about the *pitryāna* and *devayāna* seems to be saying that both an afterlife in the world of ancestors (*pitrs*) and as one of the gods (*deva*) is a state outside of *saṃsāra* and thus presumably not subject to further rebirth. While in the *Upaniṣads* the word *yāna* refers to 'the deceased's journey through the temporal and spatial entities' (Fujii 2011:115), in our *Mahābhārata* passage *x-yāna* seems to be similar to compounds like "*mahāyāna*", referring to a set of practices or virtues that will bring about a certain result. It is also notable that while most often overcoming *saṃsāra* is associated with becoming a *bhikṣu*, even the latter tetrad is sufficiently general to be associated with various lifestyles, including that of a householder.

The peculiar absence of a clear reference to *mokṣa* and yogic practices in the eightfold path of *dharma* is highlighted by another list of eight items that are just listed by Śaunaka without any introduction¹⁵²:

From proper application of intention, from proper restraint of the senses, from proper excellence of observances, from proper service to the teacher, from proper

¹⁵² Near the beginning of his speech Śaunaka mentions an eightfold (*aṣṭāṅga*) *buddhi* (3.2.17), which he does not define.

regulation of eating, from proper tradition of recitation, from proper renunciation of action, and from proper cessation of the mind...

<i>samyak</i>	<i>saṃkalpasambandhāt</i>	<i>samyak</i>	<i>cendriyanigrahāt</i>		
<i>samyag</i>	<i>vrataviśeṣāc</i>	<i>ca</i>	<i>samyak</i>	<i>ca</i>	<i>gurusevanāt</i>
<i>samyag</i>	<i>āhārayogāc</i>	<i>ca</i>	<i>samyak</i>	<i>cādhyayanāgamāt</i>	
<i>samyak karmopasaṃnyāsāt samyak cittanirodhanāt</i> (3.2.74-5)					

These two verses are just a list of phrases in the ablative case, and it is not obvious if and how they are syntactically related to either the preceding or the following discourse. This grammatical disjunction, however, may just be a manifestation of a disjunction in meaning. This second list from the two verses just cited also has eight members, and, as noted by Van Buitenen in his notes to the translation of the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, the usage of the word *samyak* with each member of the list strongly suggests a Buddhist influence since all the members of the Buddhist eightfold path are also introduced with the word *samyak*¹⁵³. It appears that Śaunaka's discourse, in the form in which it has been transmitted, records two distinct Brahmanical alternatives to the Buddhist eightfold path. The first eightfold path of *dharma* includes both general virtues and some that are linked with the Brahmanical tradition in particular (especially sacrifice). The second is a more yogic path which culminates in *cittanirodha*¹⁵⁴, "the cessation of the mind". Such meditative practices are usually associated with *mokṣa*, and it is plausible that this alternative eight-fold path was added later because the first path culminated in becoming a god rather than the attainment of *mokṣa*.

Although one of the members of the second eightfold path was renunciation of action *karmopasaṃnyāsa*, its outline is concluded by the phrase 'this is how those who desire to conquer *saṃsāra* perform their actions' (*evaṃ karmāṇi kurvanti saṃsāravijigīṣavaḥ*; 3.2.75). The

¹⁵³ Note also that the path, or paths, that escapes from *saṃsāra* is attributed to "the *budhas*" (3.2.69).

¹⁵⁴ This reminds us of the definition of yoga in the *Yogasūtra* 1.2 where yoga is said to be the cessation of the fluctuations (*ṛttis*) of the mind: *yogaś cittavṛttinirodhaḥ*. The commentary attributed to Vyāsa, however, claims in several places that the mind itself becomes *niruddha* during the practice of yoga. See Vyāsa's commentary on 1.1. as well as on 2.54, where the compound *cittanirodha* is used.

immediately following phrase returns again to the notion of becoming a god: ‘freed from desire and aversion gods have attained sovereignty’ (*rāga dveṣavinirmuktā aiśvaryaṃ devatā gatāḥ*; 3.2.76). The two states of *rāga* and *dveṣa* are listed together in numerous ascetic texts from different traditions, and overcoming them is usually a goal appropriate to a *bhikṣu* who strives for the cessation of rebirth. In this case, however, giving up these states result not in *nirvāṇa* but in becoming a god. A similar idea is known in yogic treatises such as the *Yogasūtra*. The advanced yogin, who has already cultivated dispassion (*vairāgya*), is said to achieve omnipotence and omniscience in *sūtra* 3.49¹⁵⁵, whereas *sūtra* 3.50¹⁵⁶ further claims that *kaivalya*, final liberation in the Yoga system, occurs when the *yogin* attains dispassion even towards that attainment. I suggest that this framework from the *Yogasūtra* can be used to make sense of Śaunaka’s instructions to Yudhiṣṭhira. I understand that Śaunaka is here saying that Yudhiṣṭhira can conquer *saṃsāra* by reaching a divine state of existence. This is not final *mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa* but rather a godlike state in which the ‘yogin dwells omniscient and powerful with the bondage of the *kleśas* diminished’ (*yogī sarvajñāḥ kṣīṇakleśabandhano vaśī viharati*; from Vyāsa’s commentary on *Yogasūtra* 3.49). It seems proper to say that such a yogin has conquered *saṃsāra* because at this point the yogin is no longer subject to *kleśas*, the five undesirable mental afflictions that underpin the accumulation of karma and the experience of its results (see *Yogasūtra* 2.12¹⁵⁷). We have seen above that three of the five *kleśas* listed in the *Yogasūtra* have appeared in Śaunaka’s teachings: *avidyā*, *rāga*, and *dveṣa*. This provides a further reason to believe that both operate with similar categories.

¹⁵⁵ *sattvapuruṣānyatākhyātīmātrasya sarvabhāvādhiṣṭhātṛtvaṃ sarvajñātṛtvaṃ ca*

¹⁵⁶ *tadvairāgyād api doṣabījakṣaye kaivalyam*

¹⁵⁷ *kleśamūlaḥ karmāśayo dṛṣṭā dṛṣṭājanmavedanīyaḥ*

It is this state of yogic godlike power that is relevant to Yudhiṣṭhira's circumstances. Śaunaka claims that the gods 'support the creatures (*prajā*) by means of their yogic sovereignty' (*yogaiśvareṇa saṃyuktā dhārayanti prajā*; 3.2.76). After making this claim, Śaunaka makes a personal appeal to Yudhiṣṭhira:

So you also, oh son of Kuntī, having resorted to complete peace (*śama*), seek perfection by means of *tapas* as well as yogic perfection!

*tathā tvam api kaunteya śamam āsthāya puṣkalam
tapasā siddhim anviccha yogasiddhiṃ ca bhārata* (3.2.77)

This goes back to Yudhiṣṭhira's original problem of not being able to provide for the Brahmins who wish to follow him in the forest. With no income available in the forest, Śaunaka suggest that Yudhiṣṭhira will be able to fulfil his householder obligations using the special powers attained through yoga¹⁵⁸.

Thus, the first part of Śaunaka's discourse is another discourse about overcoming suffering at a time of crisis but the second part is a more original recommendation that Yudhiṣṭhira should use yogic meditation or *tapas* as a means to obtain the power necessary to look after his subjects. The second part of the discourse lives up to the expectations of Śaunaka's introduction as an expert in yoga. It has some parallels with the *Yogasūtra* and Buddhism. The mention of *saṃsāra* and of yoga is not related to ultimate liberation but rather a quest for power to be able to care for one's subjects.

We do not immediately find out about the effect of Śaunaka's speech on Yudhiṣṭhira because after listening to it he approaches his *purohita* and still complains that he is unable to protect his

¹⁵⁸ Although judging by his outward signs (*lakṣaṇas*) Yudhiṣṭhira must now seem to be a *vānaprastha*, he describes himself as being in the householder *āśrama* (*grhāśrame*) in 3.2.50.

subjects. His *purohita* Dhaumya replies with a speech about how the Sun took pity on the newly created creatures who were suffering from great hunger and used its *tejas* and water to make the land fertile to support the creatures with food. Dhaumya then says that kings also support their subjects by means of *tapas*, and urges Yudhiṣṭhira: ‘Having practiced *tapas*, support the Brahmins by means of *dharma* (*tapa āsthāya dharmeṇa dvijātīn bhara bhārata*; 3.3.12). This time Yudhiṣṭhira heeds the advice:

Dharmarāja [Yudhiṣṭhira] whose self was purified undertook supreme austerities having worshipped the Sun with offerings of flowers and food. Having undertaken yoga, while subsisting only on wind and keeping his senses under control, he whose very self was *dharma* remained motionless with *prāṇāyāma* after touching the water of the Gaṅgā.

dharmarājo viśuddhātmā tapa ātiṣṭhad uttamam
puṣpopahārair balibhir arcayitvā divākaram
yogam āsthāya dharmātmā vāyubhakṣo jitendriyaḥ
gāṇḍeyaṃ vāry upaspr̥ṣya prāṇāyāmena tasthivān (3.3.13cd-14)

This is one of only two *Mahābhārata* episodes where a king who has not given up his royal ambitions is said to practice yoga¹⁵⁹. The details of Yudhiṣṭhira’s yogic practice are not elaborated, but we can see from the previous quote that they are associated with rather extreme physical practices. While yoga often refers to the practice of meditation, as, for example, in Śaunaka’s speech, there is no explicit mention of meditation here. As Hopkins notes about the *Āraṇyakaparvan* in his early study of yoga in the *Mahābhārata*, ‘[m]ost of the tales here use *yoga* indiscriminately with *tapas* (1901:372). It is possible but by no means certain that here, too, yoga might mean *tapas* rather than *dhyāna*. The mention of *prāṇāyāma* is not very common in the *Mahābhārata*. It can point to

¹⁵⁹ The other instance is 3.161.12, where all the Pāṇḍavas are said to be intent on yoga and *tapas* (*tapoyogaparā babhūvuh*; 3.161.12).

either meditative yoga, where it is used to settle and control the mind, or to a form of *tapas*, given that *prāṇāyāma* is listed as a method of repentance (*prāyaścitta*) in the Dharmaśāstra literature.

I have been unable to understand *Mahābhārata* 3.2-3 as a coherent whole, and it seems likely that some textual expansion or merging of (at least) two different versions of this episode of the *Mahābhārata* has taken place here. In any case, it is possible to appreciate that when Yudhiṣṭhira's forest exile begins he is given some stoic teachings against grieving and several versions of advice on practicing *tapas* and/or yoga, where yoga can either be physical *tapas* or meditative yoga of *cittanirodha*. The practice of yoga/*tapas* is expected to provide Yudhiṣṭhira with divine power that would allow him to take care of his subjects.

5.1.2. Vyāsa's forest teachings to the Pāṇḍavas

The *Āraṇyakaparvan* contains another episode where Yudhiṣṭhira receives ascetic teachings. A didactic encounter with the sage Vyāsa takes place much later during the forest exile, and is related in 3.245-7.

This episode begins with a detailed description of the great hardships of forest life that the Pāṇḍavas have to endure (3.245). Vyāsa suddenly appears in order to uplift Yudhiṣṭhira. In Vyāsa's speech we hear some of the same ideas that we have seen in other episodes discussed in this chapter. For example, Vyāsa claims that a wise person (*prajñāvān*) who 'knows the arising and the perishing indeed neither grieves nor rejoices' (*udayāstamayajño hi na śocati na hṛṣyati*; 3.245.14). Here again the stoic person 'would enjoy pleasure when it is present [and] would endure hardship when it is present' (*sukham āpatitaṃ seved duḥkham āpatitaṃ sahet*; 3.245.15). Moreover, 'a disciplined person would also not suffer upon seeing Śrī gone to somebody else' (*na ca tapyati dāntātmā drṣṭvā paragatāṃ śriyam*; 3.245.22). The world view that emerges from these teachings is

that there is nothing wrong with enjoying *sukha* when it is available, but one should be prepared for hardship and endure it without giving in to sadness.

In addition to offering such stoic teachings, Vyāsa discourses on *tapas*, claiming that ‘those who have not performed *tapas*, oh son, do not obtain great bliss ’(*nātaptatapasah putra prāpnuvanti mahat sukham*; 3.245.12) and that ‘there is nothing that cannot be accomplished by *tapas* ’(*nāsādhyam tapasah kiṃ cid*; 3.245.16). We also learn that

The [result of] any action performed here will be experienced in the afterlife.
Therefore, one should discipline the body with *tapas* and observances.

iha yat kriyate karma tat paratropabhuḥyate
tasmāc charīraṃ yuñjīta tapasā niyamena ca (3.245.19)

Here the conclusion to be drawn from the doctrine of karma is not that karma should be escaped, but rather that one should perform *tapas* to improve one’s karma.

The first part of Vyāsa’s speech that has been discussed so far offers some stoic advice and also seems to be an attempt to provide a meaning to the forest hardships that the Pāṇḍavas experience. These hardships, conceptualised as *tapas*, will be beneficial in the afterlife as well as helpful for regaining the kingdom, although it is not explained in what way exactly the performance of *tapas* will be helpful in this task. Thus, both of the *Āraṇyakaparvan* episodes discussed in this chapter combine stoic teachings with a positive evaluation of the hardships – conceived as *tapas* - that are associated with the life in the forest.

In 3.247 Vyāsa continues his instructions by telling a tale about a Brahmin who practiced the livelihood of gleaning (*uñchavṛtti*), but rejected the reward of heaven that he had obtained through his pious life because, as the Brahmin argues, one necessarily falls (*cyavati*) from heaven to be reborn again, and this fall constitutes of extreme suffering. Therefore, the virtuous Brahmin desired

a permanent place (*sthāna*; 3.247.39-40). The sage gave up his *uñchavṛtti*, started seeing gold, a rock, and a piece of earth as equal (*samaloṣṭāśmakāñcana*), started practicing meditation (*dhyānanityo babhūva*) and, having obtained power from the yoga of meditation (*dhyānayogād balaṃ labdhvā*), reached the eternal and supreme perfection that is marked by *nirvāṇa* (*jagāma śāśvatīm siddhiṃ parāṃ nirvāṇalakṣaṇām*; 3.247.43).

In this case, these teachings about liberation are not really made relevant to Yudhiṣṭhira. After relating this tale Vyāsa makes the following remark to Yudhiṣṭhira without addressing the contents of the tale about liberation that he has just told:

Therefore, you also, son of Kuntī, should not grieve. Having fallen from splendid kingship you will regain it by means of *tapas*.

*tasmāt tvam api kaunteya na śokaṃ kartum arhasi
rājyāt sphūtāt paribhraṣṭas tapasā tad avāpsyasi* (3.247.44)

After this Vyāsa cites a line we have seen in the two “Songs of Senajit”. The line says that suffering follows happiness and vice versa. While in the “Songs of Senajit” this line was used to argue that it is impossible to obtain permanent happiness if it depends on anything external, here Vyāsa uses the same line to console Yudhiṣṭhira. Yudhiṣṭhira’s happy rule has been replaced by an equally ardent *duḥkha* in the forest, but Vyāsa promises that the present *duḥkha* will eventually be replaced by another round of *sukha*.

Vyāsa’s forest instructions combine several themes, and the framing of his instructions does not necessarily explain how all of these are relevant to the Pāṇḍavas. First, Vyāsa delivers some general ascetic or stoic ideas to relieve the suffering of the Pāṇḍavas. Second, he promises that *tapas* will help Yudhiṣṭhira in his quest of regaining the kingdom, although it is not explained how exactly *tapas* will help in his particular situation. Third, Vyāsa discusses the role of *tapas* and various virtues

in the securing of a good afterlife. Finally, he relates a tale about an *uñchavṛtti* Brahmin who gives up his heaven-oriented practice and takes up the practice of the yoga of meditation in order to reach a higher perfection. There is little effort to make this relevant to Yudhiṣṭhira, and Vyāsa mentions neither meditation nor *nirvāṇa* in his conclusion, which simply says that Yudhiṣṭhira will regain his kingdom by means of *tapas*. Nor is there any statement of how these teachings affected Yudhiṣṭhira, and the next *adhyāya* begins, paradoxically, with a description of how the Pāṇḍavas enjoy the delights of the forest life like immortals (3.248.1). My hypothesis is that the *uñchavṛtti* tale is a later addition which is not relevant to the narrative context and contradicts Vyāsa's teachings about the benefits of practicing *tapas* or at least subordinates *tapas* to a higher goal.

5.1.3. Vidura's teachings to Dhṛtarāṣṭra

Some important ascetic teachings are included in the instructions given to king Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the fifth book of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Udyogaparvan*. The context for these teachings is quite loose, as they begin as a consolation to the sleepless king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, but move on to detailed teachings on liberation without making any specific attempt to explain how such soteriological teachings are relevant to the old king.

In 5.33 Dhṛtarāṣṭra claims that he has no peace and is unable to sleep. The reason for this must be the prospect of war. In response to this, Vidura delivers detailed teachings over several *adhyāyas*. This episode is also known as *Viduranīti*. The *Viduranīti* cover a range of topics, which would require a separate study to analyse in detail. Much of this is very general practical wisdom (*nīti*). There are some stoic ideas included in the very first part of Vidura's instructions in *adhyāya* 33. One is advised not to desire what is certainly beyond one's reach as well as not to be sorry for what is lost. Then again in 5.36 we hear that grief is futile and that the wise person understands that

happiness and unhappiness just come in turns. What began as a more stoic instruction includes teachings on the afterlife in 5.40 where Vidura points out that wealth is transient and that only one's merit and demerit will be carried on into the afterlife. The implication seems to be that Dhṛtarāṣṭra should avoid the war with Pāṇḍavas by giving up a portion of his kingdom.

The *Viduranīti* is followed by the *Sanatsujātīya* (5.42-45), which is one of the main religio-philosophical texts included in the *Mahābhārata*. While it is curious that this instruction is given to a householder king, we learn nothing about the effect that the *Sanatsujātīya* had on the old king, nor is there any concluding phrase about what practical lessons Dhṛtarāṣṭra or any other the king should draw from that discourse. Since I have been unable to identify any traces of attempts to make the *Sanatsujātīya* relevant to householder kings either in its narrative framing or in the text itself, I will not discuss its contents in more detail.

5.1.4. *Śānti* for king Dhṛtarāṣṭra

Dhṛtarāṣṭra also receives ascetic teachings after the war, in an episode that is comparable to Yudhiṣṭhira's "persuasion". In *Strīparvan*, the eleventh book of the *Mahābhārata*, Dhṛtarāṣṭra laments the loss of his one hundred sons as well as allies and ministers (11.1.10). Dhṛtarāṣṭra receives three speeches of consolation – by Saṃjaya (11.1), by Vidura (11.2-7) and by Vyāsa (11.8).

Saṃjaya begins with a general discourse against *śoka*, noting that *śoka* interferes with the normal pursuits of *artha* and *sukha* (11.1.31). Thus, it is not appropriate for a king to grieve because this will hinder his duties and enjoyments.

The first part of Vidura's speech includes several of the ascetic *subhāṣitas* that have been quoted above. These observations in the spirit (and letter) of *maranāntaṃ hi jīvitam* (11.2.3) are combined with some arguments that pertain to *kṣatriyas* in particular. It is said that those who died

in the war will go to the heaven of Indra. In the end, we again hear that *buddhi* should be an antidote to mental pain. All of this is closely related to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's circumstances and amounts to a *kṣatriya* variety of a philosophy of impermanence and inevitability of death. The *kṣatriyas* receive the additional consolation that they will go to heaven if killed on a battlefield.

From *adhyāya* 3 Vidura moves into a more advanced ascetic discourse that no longer is obviously related to the circumstances of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Vidura discusses the law of karma, *saṃsāra*, liberation, and the need to eradicate desire. Vidura does not say that it is necessary to become a *bhikṣu* to become liberated, but neither does he make any explicit statement about how these soteriological teachings should be adopted by a householder king.

In *adhyāya* 8, however, it is as if there had been no previous instruction by Vidura, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra needs consolation again. This is now provided by Vyāsa who echoes some of the themes mentioned by Saṃjaya, such as the need to be aware of impermanence, the pointlessness of grief, and *kāla* as a principle that must be reckoned with. Finally, after listening to Vyāsa the old king admits that if the massacre of the war was ordained by fate he will not grieve. No mention of liberation or eradicating desire is made.

While no hard evidence can be supplied regarding the textual history of the appeasement of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, I believe that a reasonable explanation to the discrepancies noted above is to assume that the text was expanded over time. In particular, the teachings on *mokṣa* in chapters 3-7 seem to be a later addition. The trend seen in several units discussed in this chapter is that a general discourse against suffering is followed by a discussion of themes like *saṃsāra*, *mokṣa*, and dispassion. It appears that the teachings on impermanence were somehow associated with teachings on *mokṣa*, and that therefore the presence of the former was seen as a pretext for

including the latter, even if there is virtually no attempt to made soteriological teachings relevant to the narrative context.

5.1.5. Teachings to prince Kṣemadarśa in the *Rājadharmaparvan*

The *Śāntiparvan* includes several episodes where ascetic teachings are associated with kings or other householders. I have already discussed some such teachings from the “persuasion” and from the opening of *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. There are two other important episodes that are situated between the opening of the *Śāntiparvan* and its *Mokṣadharma* subsection.

One of the questions that Yudhiṣṭhira asks in the *Rājadharmaparvan* is how a king who has lost his ruling power should conduct himself if he wishes to be happy (*cyutaḥ kośāc ca daṇḍāc ca sukham icchan katham caret*; 12.105.1). In response, he hears about the prince Kṣemadarśa who was instructed by the sage (*muni*) Kālakaṇṭhīya when the prince’s power was diminished (*kṣīṇabala*; 12.105.3). The contents of the instruction generally resemble Senajit’s instruction. The prince wishes to learn about some other kind of happiness in this life (*yad anyat sukham astiḥa tad brahmann anuśādhi mām*; 12.105.10) and is instructed to first of all develop a *buddhi* (*purastād eva te buddhir iyaṁ kāryā*; 12.105.11) that ‘everything is impermanent including myself and whatever I have’ (*anityaṁ sarvam evedam ahaṁ ca mama cāsti yat* 12.105.12). In order to achieve this alternative happiness, one should develop indifference (*nirveda*) towards one’s desires as well as give up joy (*prīti*) and grief (*śoka*). Such teachings sound very much like they were originally formulated in ascetic circles, but now they are offered to a king as a wisdom that will provide an alternative happiness when his normal royal ambitions have not been satisfied. Some of the teachings, however, are quite secular “stoic” wisdom:

Always desire things that are obtainable but never things that are unobtainable.
Enjoy the things that present themselves to you but do not grieve for those that
are not present.

avāpyān kāmayasvārthān nānavāpyān kadā cana
pratyutpannān anubhavan mā śucas tvam anāgatān (12.105.28)

The teachings of Kālakavṛkṣīya span three *adhyāyas* and seem to make possibly contradictory recommendations. At one point, it is argued that it would be best for the prince to stay in the forest. He is specifically advised against becoming a *bhikṣu*, but here again I believe that this word refers not to the religious mendicant but to an ordinary beggar. The underlying argument seems to be that it would be better for the destitute prince to subsist on what is available in the forest rather than to live in a human settlement by means of the less honourable livelihood of begging. As his final word, however, Kālakavṛkṣīya recommends that the prince should still aim to regain power by, for example, becoming a minister of another king and working for his own return to power. Thus, whatever ascetic content is included in the sage's advice, it all ultimately serves as a consolation during a time of hardship that should hopefully be followed by renewed sovereignty.

5.1.6. The dialogue between the crow and the jackal in the *Āpaddharmaparvan*

One of the *itihāsa purātana* included in the *Āpaddharmaparvan* depicts ascetic teachings delivered at a time of a crisis. It is a tale about a group of people who mourn the death of a young child. They are advised by a crow, who recommends that they give up their sorrow and get back to their business, and by a jackal, who recommends that they do not give up their affection and continue mourning the child. Most probably this was intended as satirical because the teachings of the two creatures correspond to their feeding patterns, as already noted by Fitzgerald (2004). The crow, who feeds during the day, would be able to eat the remains of the boy when the people leave, whereas the jackal feeds during the night and would therefore be interested in keeping the

mourners around until nightfall. In the end, the tale turns out to be an illustration of the grace of Śiva who suddenly appears to bring the child back to life.

The advice given by the vulture consists of the same themes that are prominent in other passages discussed in this chapter. He says death should be accepted as inevitable and that grief is pointless. He mentions the doctrines of karma and rebirth in order to induce a sense of individualism where only the individual is responsible for his or her actions, and to remind the grieving party that the spirit has already been reborn elsewhere while the relatives mourn just a lifeless body.

It is notable that the vulture qualifies his own statements as *mokṣadharmāśrita*, ‘based on *mokṣadharma*’ (12.149.58), although he nowhere discusses the pursuit of *mokṣa* itself. This suggests that teachings on impermanence came to be thought of as falling under the umbrella of *mokṣadharma* when it became a separate division of *dharma*. This association of consoling teachings with *mokṣadharma* would partially explain why elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* teachings for overcoming suffering lead to further teachings that pertain to *mokṣadharma* more directly. In this chapter we have seen several examples of such a hypothetical textual expansion – Vyāsa’s teachings to the Pāṇḍavas in book 3 as well as teachings to Dhṛtarāṣṭra in books 5 and 11.

While in the final analysis this is made a tale about the divine grace of Śiva, it is still a further example of ascetic teachings delivered to householders at a time of a crisis. They are general teachings on impermanence and the inevitability of death, but are called *mokṣadharma*.

5.1.7. Demonic dialogues from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*: How to accept the loss of power

All the “ascetic”, “yogic”, or “philosophical” teachings that Bhīṣma delivers to Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* are in some sense ascetic teachings for a householder king. Yet, not all of these teachings are framed as being relevant to Yudhiṣṭhira as a householder king. For example, in several instances Yudhiṣṭhira motivates his questions by simple curiosity (*kautūhala*; 12.191.1; 12.272.6, 12.278.1; 12.309.1). In this chapter we are interested in those passages where ascetic teachings are framed in a more specific way as relevant to a householder king, but without claiming that they can lead to *mokṣa*.

We have already seen that some general ascetic teachings on overcoming suffering and attaining *sukha* are delivered at the beginning of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* in the *Senajidgītā* (12.168) and the *Maṅkigītā* (12.171). The *Mokṣadharmaparvan* includes a cluster of other relevant episodes that belong to the larger thematic unit of *adhyāyas* 215-221. All of these are concerned with the transfer of sovereignty, personified as Śrī, from an *asura* lord (Bali, Namuci or Prahrāda) to Indra. A summary of this cluster has already been provided by Fitzgerald, who has also noted its thematic link with the *Senajidgītā* and the *Maṅkigītā* (1980: 240-242). More recently this textual cluster has been studied by Ivan Andrijačić whom I thank for sending me the notes to his presentation “Demonic Dialogues in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*: a glimpse into the process of formation and development of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*” which was delivered at the Eighth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas (2017). The proceedings of the conference have not yet been published. The “demonic dialogues” have also attracted the attention of scholars interested in the concepts of fate and Time in the *Mahābhārata* (Woods 2001; Vassilkov

1999). While previous studies have already summarised the contents of these dialogues, I will offer brief summaries of my own, highlighting those elements that are relevant for the argument of this thesis.

All the demonic dialogues are introduced as providing wisdom about how to act and remain happy if one loses power. The first of the demonic dialogues in 12.215 is initially introduced with a question about agency, but the dialogue itself turns to the same question as the other conversation between Indra and a demon – Indra is always curious about the same thing, namely, how it is possible that even in the adverse circumstances of falling from power the demon does not grieve. Yudhiṣṭhira asks a new question at the beginning of 12.216: ‘With what wisdom should a king roam the earth if he loses sovereignty?’ (*yayā buddhyā mahīpālo bhraṣṭaśrīr vicaren mahīm*; 12.216.1). We are therefore to understand that the teachings to follow would be relevant to a king under certain circumstances. The *itihāsa purātana*, which is a dialogue between Indra and the *asura* lord Bali, spans 216-217, and attached to it is a story about Śrī in 218. In 12.219 Bhīṣma adds another *itihāsa purātana*, which is a rather similar dialogue between Indra and Namuci. In 12.220 Yudhiṣṭhira renews and expands his earlier question ‘—What would be best for a man who has fallen into dire adversity?’ (*magnasya vyaṣane kṛcchre kiṃ śreyah puruṣasya hi*; 12.220.1). As examples of such adversity he mentions the loss of kin (*bandhunāśa*) or the loss of kingdom (*rājyanāśa*). *Adhyāya* 221 is another episode concerning Śrī.

Thus in 12.215-17 and 12.219-20 we find stoic teachings attributed to the demons Prahrāda (215) Bali (216-17 and 220), and Namuci (219), all of whom explain to Indra how they manage to avoid grief (*śoka*) despite their circumstances. I will not discuss the two speeches of Śrī in 12.218 and 12.221 because they do not pertain to the topic of how to overcome suffering.

The fallen demon lords repeat some of the ideas we have seen before, for example, claiming that they do not grieve because they realise that everything is impermanent (12.215.28; 12.217.5; 12.220.100). More original and noteworthy is the denial of agency which is expressed in different ways. One verse claims that everything happens by chance (12.217.45), not through one's own action (karma). The demons also mention other principles that similarly limit or perhaps rather eliminate *puruṣakāra*, human initiative. These other principles include *svabhāva*, (inherent nature; 12.215), destiny, or, more specifically, what has been allotted by the Placer.¹⁶⁰ (Dhātṛ; 12.219.21), Time (*kāla*) or the related concept of *pariyāya*, which Vassiliev translates as 'vicissitude'. *Pariyāya* as the course, or literally "turning", of time is that force which inevitably brings about change. According to this principle of *pariyāya*, Indra, too, is eventually going to lose his power. There is nothing Indra can do about it, since there is no firm correlation between our actions and our luck:

Doing certain things may lead to happiness at one time. Doing the very same things may lead to suffering at another time.

*yāny eva puruṣaḥ kurvan sukhaiḥ kālena yujyate
punas tāny eva kurvāṇo duḥkhaiḥ kālena yujyate* (12.220.85)

The demonic dialogues offer a mix of philosophical arguments expressed in different terminologies, all of which converge on the point that we are not in control of our own luck and therefore should stoically accept misfortune when it comes to us. The knowledge or understanding of this law of time means that one will not grieve (12.220.86). Grieving will not remove one's misfortune and therefore is pointless (12.220.87).

¹⁶⁰ Dhātṛ literally means "Placer", and he is primarily a fate deity. On Dhātṛ and the related deity Vidhātṛ see Andrijanić 2018.

Since Indra is bound to lose sovereignty eventually, he is given prophylactic advice so that he already starts developing the mindset necessary to withstand the disaster to come:

Give up this desire for sensual enjoyments! Give up the pride that springs from sovereignty! Thus, will you be able to endure grief when you lose your own kingship.

*muñcecchāṃ kāmabhogeṣu muñcemaṃ śrībhavaṃ madam
evaṃ svarājyanāśe tvaṃ śokaṃ saṃprasahiṣyasi* (12.220.64)

Some of the advice the demons give to Indra sounds very much like the *samatva* that is presented as the defining feature of the renouncer in many *Mahābhārata* passages (see chapter 2):

Do not grieve if there is an occasion for grief and do not rejoice if there is an occasion for rejoicing. Giving up [the thoughts about] both past and future, be concerned with what is presently available.

*śokakāle śuco mā tvaṃ harṣakāle ca mā hrṣaḥ
atītānāgate hitvā pratyutpannena vartaya* (12.220.65)

One is to realise that the pairs of opposites such as *sukha* and *duḥkha*, but also 'killing, capture, and release are all obtained by the [power] of time' (*vadho bandhaḥ pramokṣaś ca sarvaṃ kālēna labhyate*; 12.220.83).

These teachings of the demonic dialogues are particularly relevant to the political situation as envisioned in the *Arthaśāstra* and some parts of the *Mahābhārata*. The *Arthaśāstra* generally assumes a multitude of small kingdoms and individual kings who all vie for power in a quest to dominate the others. Once somebody, say, the Maurya dynasty or Yudhiṣṭhira, manages to establish an empire and subjugate their competitors, the ambitions of these competitors are surely frustrated, assuming that they have survived the empire-making in the first place. In other words, the odds of eventually losing in this political game are very high. What is suggested by the demonic dialogues in particular, but also by other related *Mahābhārata* episodes, is that it might be a good

idea to prepare oneself mentally for the possibility of something going wrong in one's quest for power. This is not a call for quitting the game altogether, although the exact mental attitude recommended varies from text to text. Some passages recommend giving up desire (*kāma* or *tṛṣṇā*) or rejoicing (*harṣa*), but others say that one should enjoy good things when they are available but not be sad when they are no longer at hand.

Another instance where the king has to train himself to see things in a way that resembles the ascetic doctrines of emptiness and impermanence concerns alliance making. For instance, the *Mājāramūṣakaśaṃvāda* (12.136) talks at length about the situational nature of alliances where nobody is a friend or enemy "by nature". Here, too, we see a very dynamic political world where one would fare better by not becoming attached to any fixed ideas.

While a key theme of the demonic dialogues is a call for giving up the notion of agenthood, this is different from a seemingly similar realisation of one's truly inactive nature in Sāṃkhya, where such a realisation frees one from the karma and thus also from rebirth. The demonic dialogues do not preach a mystical realisation of a true inactive self that would bring about liberation from *saṃsāra* but rather a practical outlook, a *buddhi* that allows one to accept whatever happens.

5.2. Three speeches against grief in the *Rāmāyaṇa*

There are three speeches in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where ascetic teachings are given to a householder king at the time of a crises.

5.2.1. The consolation of Bharata and Śatrughna

In 2.71 prince Bharata laments the death of Daśaratha even after the funerary rites have been completed. His brother Śatrughna is also in utter despair. There is some resemblance of Yudhiṣṭhira's "persuasion" in so far as Bharata wants either to die or to enter a grove of asceticism

himself. The source of Bharata's and Śatrughna's suffering is both the death of the father and the unnatural exile of his elder brother Rāma. Vasiṣṭha, the *purohita* of their father, then speaks the following verse to console Bharata:

Three dualities are found in all beings without an exception. Given that these [dualities] are unavoidable, you should not react to them in such a way.

trīṇi dvandvāni bhūteṣu pravṛttāny aviśeṣataḥ
teṣu cāparihāryeṣu naivam bhavitum arhati (2.71.22¹⁶¹)

Vasiṣṭha does not explain what the three dualities are, but a comparison with similar episodes in the *Mahābhārata* suggest that they most probably include such pairs as birth (*udaya*) and death (*astamaya*) as well as happiness (*sukha*) and pain (*duḥkha*). Equally pithy is the advice given by the minister Sumantra to Śatrughna on the same occasion. Sumantra simply tells Śatrughna about 'the arising and perishing of all beings' (*sarvabhūtabhavābhavau*; 2.71.23).

5.2.2. Rāma consoles Bharata

The other two episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* are slightly more elaborate and have textual parallels with some of the *Mahābhārata* episodes discussed in this part of the thesis.

In 2.98 Bharata asks Rāma to return from the forest and resume kingship. After this speech Bharata is said to be sad (*duḥkhita*) and lamenting (*vilapant*), and he is consoled by Rāma¹⁶². Rāma

¹⁶¹ Cf. *Bhagavadgītā* 2.27.

¹⁶² Pollock finds that 'verses 15-36 are evidently non-sequitur with regard to Bharata's plea. Perhaps the verses are out of place – note that the NR removes them to a separate *sarga*. Or maybe the poet has inserted here, rather awkwardly, material from a parallel legend, that of the Wise Rāma (*rāmapanditaḥ*), partly preserved also in the Dasaratha Jātaka' (from note to 2.15ff on page 504 in Pollock 1986). Pollock is right to point out the discrepancy. Rāma's speech looks as if it is intended to console Bharata regarding the death of their father. Moreover, the portrayal of Rāma as an unshakeable wise man in this *adhyāya* indeed contradicts the earlier depictions of his own grief at the death of his father. It is therefore probable that this speech does not belong the earliest version of Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Brockington places this *adhyāya* in the second stage of the development of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in his model (1985). Whatever the textual history of Rāma's teachings to Bharata, in their current version they are a key *Rāmāyaṇa* parallel to those *Mahābhārata* episodes that offer ascetic teachings as a means of consolation and thereby a further testimony to the popularity of the literature of consolation.

has refused to accept the offer of kingship and remains steadfast in his intention to live in the wilderness for the appointed time. The themes of Rāma's consolation are the same as those encountered in several *Mahābhārata* episodes. First, everything depends on fate (*kṛtānta*; 2.98.15). Second, everything is impermanent and therefore separation is inevitable (2.98.26). As noted above, Rāma here cites the *saṃyogā viprayogāntā maraṇāntaṃ ca jīvitam* (2.98.16) line which is also known in the *Mahābhārata* and Buddhist literature. Third, it is pointless to grieve about something that is inevitable (2.98.29). Fourth, the realisation of these truths is labelled as a *buddhi* that allows one not to grieve even during a calamity (2.98.43). Fifth, there is an appeal to "people like you" who would not give in to suffering, and the ideal person is said to be both heroic and wise (2.98.35).

While the first part of Rāma's discourse is a general advice against grief, which at least partly consists of verses from floating ascetic literature, the second part of the discourse is geared more specifically to the *Rāmāyaṇa* circumstances and argues that king Daśaratha must now be in heaven due to his virtue and therefore should not be felt sorry about.

Here the practical relevance of these ascetic teachings is made very clear when Rāma says that Bharata should no longer grieve but should return to the city to rule the kingdom as he was commanded by their late father.

5.2.3. Lakṣmana consoles Rāma

A third episode of consolation occurs in the final book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Lakṣmana returns from his errand of exiling Sītā to the forest, having left her at Vālmiki's *āśrama*, and finds Rāma in tears. He delivers a short speech of consolation (7.51.8-13). It also contains the line *saṃyogā viprayogāntā maraṇāntaṃ ca jīvitam* (7.51.10) and several verses that appeal to the heroic nature and wisdom of Rāma that should prevent him from suffering. If Rāma can conquer all the worlds he

should also be able to conquer such suffering (7.51.11). The speech is successful and Rāma reports that it brought about his happiness (*nirvṛti*; 7.51.16). This reminds us of the Buddhist *nirvāṇa*, although it is unclear whether it is just a coincidence or not. While there is no real etymological link between the Sanskrit *nirvāṇa* and *nirvṛti*, these words are etymologically and semantically related for at least the Pali scholastic tradition. As the *Pali-English Dictionary* notes in its entry on *nibbāna*, ‘to the *Pali* etymologist the main reference is to the root *vr̥* (to cover), and *not* to *vā* (to blow)’. Thus, the past passive participle *nibutta* is used to describe the person who has reached *nibbāna*, and *nibutti*, the Pali equivalent to *nirvṛti*, is ‘abstr. to nibbuta’ (*Pali-English Dictionary* on *nibutti*).

What is striking about all three *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes in contrast to the *Mahābhārata* episodes that explore similar themes or even have direct verbal parallels is that in the *Rāmāyaṇa* there is no discussion of desire as being the root of evil or suffering, and, accordingly, there is no recommendation that desire should be given up in order to reach happiness. Nor is there any discussion of karma, rebirth, or liberation. This difference between the two epics is not limited to just these two episodes. While the control of one’s desire is recommended in many *Mahābhārata* passages, this theme is virtually absent in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as are references to other aspects of what could be called the “ascetic” worldview of *bhikṣus* such as a belief in *saṃsāra* and the practice of yoga. It therefore seems possible that the *Rāmāyaṇa* presents a more basic and secular discourse against grief, whereas when the same themes are found in the *Mahābhārata* they are expanded upon by including teachings on such topics as karma, *saṃsāra*, and dispassion. The scanty evidence is not sufficient to present this hypothesis about the ideological and textual development with much confidence.

5.3. Some Buddhist examples of ascetic teachings as consolation

I now turn to listing some Buddhist examples that follow a similar trend of offering ascetic teachings to householder kings or other persons at a time of a crisis. I have already mentioned above the legend of king Pasenadi/Prasenajit that is known in the Buddhist literature in various versions and that has textual parallels with several epic episodes. I have not conducted a thorough search of Buddhist canonical literature to produce a detailed overview as I have done with the Sanskrit epics. I will here list a number of relevant episodes that I am aware of without aiming for comprehensiveness. This should be sufficient to demonstrate that offering ascetic teachings at a time of a crisis is an important theme in the Buddhist literature as well and is by no means limited to just the legend of king Prasenajit.

5.3.1. *Salla Sutta*: A Buddhist discourse of consolation

Wynne has already pointed out that the *Salla Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta* (574-593) is similar to the *Senajidgītā* from the *Mahābhārata* (2009). This is another discourse on the inevitability of death which claims that ‘understanding the course of the world wise people do not grieve’ (*dhīrā na socanti viditvā lokapariyāyaṃ*; 581). There is little about this text that is specifically Buddhist, and at least one verse can be given an agnostic interpretation that is different from the belief in rebirth. Verse 582 says that ‘you lament pointlessly ... about a person whose former and future path you do not know’ (*yassa maggaṃ na jānāsi āgatassa gatassa vā ... niratthaṃ paridevasi*). This is similar to *Bhagavadgītā* 2.28, which also sees no reason for lament (*paridevanā*) when both the origin and end of beings is unknown (*avyaktādīni bhūtāni ... avyaktanidhanāny eva*). Both of these verses can be understood as expressions of an agnostic philosophical position that it is pointless to be sad about death if it is unknown whether a soul survives after death and what its destiny is if it survives.

The removal of the pointless grief is likened to a removal of a barb (*salla*), and the person who achieves this becomes free from grief (*asoka*) and “happy” (*nibutta*; 593). Here again an ambiguous word *nibutta* creates a middle-ground between a mundane cessation of suffering and a final removal of suffering, which is the *nibbāna* that the Buddhist monks seek.

There is nothing that is particularly Buddhist in this discourse, and the verses themselves do not provide any context for these teachings. The content of some of the verses suggest that they are a response to grief experienced at the death of a close person. This is confirmed in the *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary which explains that this *sutta* was spoken by the Buddha who was feeling compassion to a certain lay disciple (*upāsaka*) whose son had died.

5.3.2. Appeasing grief in the *jātakas*

No less than ten *jātakas* of the Pali collection offer consolation at a time of death. Here is a list and brief summary of their contents as relevant to the present enquiry.

Mahāsudassanajātaka (no. 95). In a previous life the bodhisatta was a king and announced his imminent death which caused great pain to his wives and courtiers. To console them he explained that ‘all composite things are impermanent’ (*aniccā vata saṃkhārā*). This is a particularly Buddhist manner of explaining impermanence. The basic message and intention of this phrase is still the same as that of the *Mahābhārata*’s claims about the inevitability of death that are discussed in this chapter.

Assakajātaka (no. 207). A king grieves for his dead wife and the bodhisattva removes his suffering by revealing that the queen has become a dung-worm and no longer loves him. This method of consolation is unique and to my knowledge is not found in the *Mahābhārata*.

Matarodanajātaka (no. 317). In the story of the present¹⁶³ it is said that a landowner grieves for the death of his brother, but it is explained that the ancient wise men (*porāṇakapaṇḍitā*) did not grieve in such a situation. We then learn that in the past the bodhisatta did not grieve about the death of his brother because he understood that all composite things are impermanent and that being sad about death is foolish.

Ananusociyājātaka (no. 328). Here a householder grieves about the death of his wife, but the Buddha observes that he is now ready to realise the first fruit of the Buddhist path, namely, stream-entry. The Buddha relates a story about an ascetic who did not weep at the death of his wife. This absence of grief was based on the same observation that ‘all composite things are impermanent’ (*sabbe saṃkhārā aniccā*). The result of hearing this discourse is that the householder indeed attains stream-entry (*saccapariyosāne kuṭumbiko sotāpattiphale patitṭhahi*). Thus, while in some Buddhist episodes teachings on impermanence are presented as helpful to householders in overcoming their immediate circumstances of grief, here and in some other *jātakas*, as we will see below, listening to the teachings on impermanence are given some, albeit limited, soteriological value.

Sujātajātaka (no. 352). Here a householder has lost his father, and the Buddha observes that he is fit to achieve stream-entry. He again refers to the ancient *paṇḍitas* who did not grieve at the death of their fathers. In the story of the past a certain householder laments the death of his father so much that he becomes neglectful of his duties. His son, the bodhisatta, teaches him a lesson by offering water and grass to a dead ox. This makes the householder realise that it is equally pointless to continue attending to his dead father who will not come back to life. He then speaks some verses

¹⁶³ The Buddhist *jātakas* begin with a “story of the present” that relates the situation from the life of the Buddha that prompted him to relate a story about one of his previous births.

about how his barb (*salla*) has been removed, using imagery that reminds one of the *Sallasutta* discussed above.

Uragajātaka (no. 354). In the tale the bodhisatta, being a Brahmin head of the household, teaches his family to live with an awareness of death. When his son dies, he and his wife do not at all grieve, being aware of the same truth that “all composite things are impermanent” and that mourning a dead person is pointless. In this case such a stoic attitude is recognised as quite extraordinary, and it makes Indra himself come down from his throne and bestow jewels upon them.

It may be noted that a reference to the recitation of *Uragajātaka* is made in the *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary to *Dhammapada* 212. This *Dhammapada* verse claims that grief and fear arise from that which is dear (*piyato*) whereas ‘for him who is released [from the attachment to or from the concept of] the dear there is no grief nor can there be fear’ (*piyato vippamuttassa natthi soko kuto bhayaṃ*). While the verse itself is different from those seen in the *Uragajātaka* and related *jātakas*, the narrative introduction provided by the *Aṭṭhakathā* is very similar – a certain householder (*kuṭumbika*) who is a lay disciple (*upāsaka*) is unable to control his grief when his son has died, and the Buddha refers to the ancient *paṇḍitas* who did not grieve in similar circumstances being aware of the inevitability of death. This is just one example of a verse from the *Dhammapada* that offers a general advice that is potentially relevant to lay disciples rather than monks. In some instances the narrative context provided by the *Aṭṭhakathā* describes how a certain *Dhammapada* verse was told to a householder king. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed survey of all relevant instances from the *Dhammapada*. Let it just be noted that there are more materials in the Buddhist canon that follow similar trends to those analysed here.

In the *Ghatajātaka* (no. 355) the bodhisatta is thrown into a prison but smiles. It is observed that others in this situation would cry and he is asked why he does not grieve. The setting and content of this conversation, where a captured prince explains his freedom from grief to a victorious king, reminds one of the demonic dialogues from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. The bodhisatta replies that ‘grief will not take away that which has already happened nor will it bring about future happiness’ (*nābbhatīta haro soko nānāgatasukhāvaho*; verse 2). Of interest is the final verse which claims that ‘even the entire earth will not bring happiness to that person ... for whom his own self is not enough’ (*yass’ attā nālam ... sabbāpi paṭhavī tassa na sukhaṃ āvahissatī*; verse 5). This reminds of *Senajidgītā*’s stoic quest for seeking happiness within oneself so that it does not depend on external circumstances. The commentary, however, claims that the bodhisatta here experiences *jhānasukha*, the bliss of meditation.

Migapotakajātaka (no. 372). This *jātaka* also provides teachings on the pointlessness of grief, and the delivering of these teachings is again likened to removing a barb (*salla*). While most of the *jātakas* listed here are concerned with householder characters, in this case the story of the present is about a Buddhist master who bemoans the death of his disciple, a novice monk.

Somadattajātaka (no. 410) is about an ascetic who grieves after losing an elephant. The pointlessness of grief is illustrated by some of the verses seen in other *jātakas* included in this survey. Here they are spoken by Indra.

Maṭṭakunḍalijātaka (no. 449). Here again a householder mourns his dead son and is consoled with some of the verses seen in other *jātakas*. A person who hankers after the soul of the deceased person is likened to a child who reaches for the moon.

Ghatajātaka (no. 454; note that it has the same name as no. 355 discussed above). This *jātaka* repeats the tropes already mentioned in relation to other *jātakas*. In the story of the present a lay follower grieves about the death of his son and is told about the ancient *paṇḍitas* who did not grieve in a similar situation. The first part of the *jātaka* tale, which is notable for sharing some characters with the *Mahābhārata*, bears no relevance to this question, but in the end a son of king Vāsudeva dies, and the king becomes so sad that he is unable to attend to any duties. Then the bodhisatta, who is the king's brother, Ghatapaṇḍita, in this birth, devises a strategy similar to that seen in the *Sujātajātaka*. Ghata pretends to be mad and tries to reach the moon, which makes the king realise that his impossible wish to bring his son back to life is equally irrational and harmful to himself. King Vāsudeva then speaks the verses about his barb (*salla*) being removed. The *jātaka* appears to be an aggregate of three separate tales, as the king's consolation is followed by an alternative version of the destruction of Kṛṣṇa's clan in book 16 of the *Mahābhārata*.

This concludes our survey of those Buddhist *jātakas* from the Pali collection where consolation is the main theme. Thus, we see that there are a number of Buddhist *jātakas* that offer teachings on such topics as impermanence as a means of consolation. Most of these teachings are addressed to householders. Here, too, the ideal person who can avoid grief even in dire circumstances is called a *paṇḍita*. In a few instances, the same teachings on impermanence are provided with soteriological value and trigger stream-entry in particular. This reminds one of the classification of similar teachings on impermanence as *mokṣadharmā* in some *Mahābhārata* passages.

Conclusion: Ancient Indian literature on overcoming grief

This part of the thesis examined textual passages in which ascetic teachings are given to householder kings to help them overcome a crisis. What unites these passages and sets them apart from the text analysed in the next part of the thesis is that they do not say that these teachings will result in the liberation (*mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*) of the householder king.

Offering advice for overcoming a crisis is an important theme in Ancient Indian literature. Examples of this trend are found throughout the *Mahābhārata*, in a number of places in the Buddhist canon, and a few places in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. I have not aimed to provide an exhaustive list from the Buddhist tradition, but there is little doubt that many more passages could be produced where an ascetic verse is put in a narrative context where it is given to a layperson. The enduring popularity of this genre of literature is evidenced by such texts from the early common era as Aśvaghoṣa's *Śōkavinodana* and **Saddharmaparikathā*'s "Chapter on Grief" (both recently studied by Szántó), passages on consolation in the later Dharmaśāstras, and by the inclusion of verses on impermanence in later collections of *subhāṣitas*.

Many of the passages presented in this section of the thesis are connected through shared themes and direct verbal parallels. Some passages also display unique features, and sometimes the same idea or verse is used in a different context.

The most common teachings for times of crises are about impermanence and especially the inevitability of death. An especially common phrase is *maranāntaṃ hi jīvitam*, "life surely ends in death". This phrase is found in several places in the *Mahābhārata* as well as Buddhist literature and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The preferred way to express a similar idea in the Buddhist *jātakas* is to say that all conditioned things (*saṃkhāra* in Pali) are impermanent. In some *Mahābhārata* passages this idea

of impermanence is linked to the so-called *kālavāda* or the doctrine or philosophy of Time. Time itself, its vicissitude (*paryāya*), fate (*daiva*), what has been ordained by the Placer (Dhātṛ), and the inherent nature of things (*svabhāva* or *dharma*), are alternatively named as the forces that guarantee the inevitability of death, loss, and separation. An awareness of these facts of life is often termed *buddhi*, and it is expected that the wise person who possesses such awareness (*buddhimant*) will not grieve when faced with any calamity. Moreover, grief is said to be pointless. It has no power to bring back what has been lost, harms one's health thereby causing physical pain, and intervenes in one's normal pursuits of *artha* and *dharma*. The terms *śoka* and *duḥkha* appear to be used interchangeably for grief, suffering or frustration.

The textual passages discussed in this part of the thesis do not raise the question of whether one needs to become a renouncer or adopt any other special lifestyle to cultivate *buddhi*. The renouncer (*bhikṣu*) is simply not mentioned, even if some passages adopt a rather harsh rhetoric against desire (*kāma*, *tṛṣṇā*) or the accumulation of wealth (*artha*). In several episodes a character is said to become happy after listening to ascetic wisdom, and characters like Maṅki and Piṅgalā even obtain *nirveda* and *sukha* of their own accord. Notably, this happens instantly, and does not require a long and arduous path of self-cultivation. The ideal person mentioned in many verses is called a *pañḍita*, “a wise or learned man”. In the *Mahābhārata* we hardly find such wise men who have an opportunity to display their equanimity. Such *pañḍitas*, however, can commonly be found in the Buddhist *jātakas*, where the bodhisatta in a previous life is often a certain *pañḍita* who gives advice on not grieving or even himself displays the capacity of avoiding grief at the death of his family members. The recommendation to limit one's attachment or even *sneha* to one's family members may sound rather radical, and it seems to be recognised as such at least in the *Uragajāta* where an imperturbable stoic attitude to death causes the throne of Indra to heat up.

Related to the concept of impermanence is the notion that we experience *sukha* and *duḥkha* in turn. This line of thought is developed in different ways. In the “demonic dialogues”, for example, the interchange between *sukha* and *duḥkha* is just a fact of life that has to be stoically accepted as a part of one’s *buddhi*. The same fact of life is mentioned in the instruction to Yudhiṣṭhira and king Kṣemadarśa with a view to uplift them during a time of hardship which should be followed by another period of happiness. In the two versions of the “Song of Senajit” the same Sanskrit line about the *sukha-duḥkha* cycle is followed by a claim that it is nevertheless possible to obtain permanent *sukha* that is termed either *buddhisukha* or *tr̥ṣṇākṣayasukha* in a verse that is also known in the Buddhist literature. We see that the same verses or phrases can be used in different texts to highlight very different messages. For example, *tr̥ṣṇākṣaya* can be a synonym of *nirvāṇa* but it can also be a more mundane achievement.

The two instructions that Yudhiṣṭhira receives during the forest exile in *Mahābhārata*’s third book assign some value to the practice of *tapas*, yoga, or meditation. The practice of yoga should provide Yudhiṣṭhira with divine power (*aiśvarya*) that would let him take care of his subjects as the gods take care of creatures. *Tapas* is presented as a means for attaining any goal, including the eventual retaking of the kingdom.

The textual passages discussed in this part of the thesis show different degrees of originality. Direct textual parallels link the two “Songs of Senajit”, the *Maṅkigītā*, the instructions to Yudhiṣṭhira in the early *Āraṇyaka* and *Śāntiparvans*, the teachings to king Dhṛtarāṣṭra in *Strīparvan*, Rāma’s advice to Bharata in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and Buddhist and Jaina literatures. These parallels point to a pool of *subhāṣita* verses in Ancient India that were presented in various combinations and put in

different narrative contexts. Some of the individual verses or groups of verses came to be associated with certain characters such as king Janaka, king Senajit/Prasenajit, or the courtesan Piṅgalā.

As a general rule, the shared and more general ascetic verses are found in the beginning parts of the *Mahābhārata*'s discourses of consolation. These general verses are often followed by additional material that may or may not be relevant to the narrative context. In several instances the general ascetic wisdom about impermanence is followed by further discourses on *saṃsāra*, *mokṣa*, the working of karma, and similar more advanced ascetic topics. These are usually not made relevant to the narrative circumstances, and in several instances the summary of the episode omits any reference to these teachings on rebirth and liberation. I have proposed that these further teachings on liberation might be later additions. Such textual expansion might be motivated by the conceptualisation of teachings on impermanence as *mokṣadharmā*. This label is used by a crow in 12.149.58 to characterise his teachings that have little to say about *mokṣa* as such. The *Senajidgītā*, the *Maṅkigītā* and the “demonic dialogues” are included in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* although they are all framed as instructions in wisdom that allow one to deal with a crisis rather than as teachings about attaining liberation from *saṃsāra*. From this perspective, Vyāsa's teachings to Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, the teachings to Dhṛtarāṣṭra in *Udyogaparvan* that include the *Sanatsujātīya*, and ascetic teachings to Dhṛtarāṣṭra in *Strīparvan* can all be thought of as mini-*mokṣadharmā* collections. Like the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, they begin with a stoic instruction against grief or distress and appear to have been expanded to include teachings on *mokṣa* without explaining how they are relevant to the householder king who listens to them.

In the Buddhist *jātakas*, there is also a recognition that ascetic teachings on impermanence may have some soteriological value. In some *jātakas* these ascetic teachings not only serve the

purpose of consolation but are also said to bring about stream-entry for persons who were already qualified for such an attainment.

There are other *Mahābhārata* passages that tackle more directly the question of whether a householder king can be liberated. These will be the subject of the third and final part of the thesis.

Part 3. Can householder kings be liberated?

We have seen in the second part of the thesis that there are a number of *Mahābhārata* passages where consoling advice delivered at a time of a crisis turns out to include some teachings on *mokṣa*, but without explaining how the *mokṣa* wisdom would be relevant to the narrative circumstances or to any householder king in general. It has also been noted that especially the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* includes several episodes where Yudhiṣṭhira is told how king Janaka received Sāṃkhya and other ascetic teachings, but without saying anything specific about whether king Janaka or Yudhiṣṭhira can remain householders to benefit from these teachings on liberation. There are also a few texts in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* that do address the question of whether a householder king can be liberated. An examination of these texts will be the task of this part of the thesis. In particular, I will be interested in exploring what rhetoric strategies and arguments are used to support the idea that a householder king can be liberated.

There are two passages in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* that are initiated by Yudhiṣṭhira's question about householder kings attaining *mokṣa*. They are the "Dialogue between Sagara and Ariṣṭanemi" (*Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda*) in *Mahābhārata* 12.277 and the "Dialogue between Sulabhā and Janaka" (*Sulabhājanakaṣaṃvāda*) in 12.308. These will be discussed in chapters 6 and 7 respectively. Chapter 8, the final chapter of the thesis, will discuss the "Dialogue between Janaka and Śuka" (*Janakaśukasāṃvāda*) in *Mahābhārata* 12.313. I will argue that the first of these does not

formulate a very elaborate model or theory of householder liberation, the second brings certain trends in the ascetic traditions to their logical conclusion to present a polemical argument that is ultimately rejected, whereas the third succeeds in formulating a theory of liberation that allows for non-renouncers to be liberated while also retaining the value of renunciate lifestyle.

6. Release for householder kings in “The Dialogue between Sagara and Ariṣṭanemi”

(*Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda*) in *Mahābhārata* 12.277

In this chapter I will examine the *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda* from the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (12.277). This passage is notable as one of just a handful of episodes in the *Mahābhārata* that explicitly claim that householder kings can obtain liberation (*mokṣa*) without giving up kingship. I am not aware of any detailed studies of the *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda*.¹⁶⁴

I will examine the structure and contents of this episode, trying to understand the reasons for its composition in its present form and the ways in which it utilises ascetic teachings to offer liberation to a householder king. I will argue that the *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda* belongs to a wider trend in the *Mahābhārata* of offering originally renouncer-oriented teachings to householder kings. To illustrate this, I will take a moment to survey the usages of the term *sneha* (“affection”) in ascetic contexts in the *Mahābhārata* and beyond.

¹⁶⁴ This episode is given a half-page summary by Adam Bowles in his helpful chapter on “The Gṛhastha in the *Mahābhārata*” (2019). It is also briefly mentioned by Nicholas Sutton who uses this passage to illustrate what he calls “non-eschatological *mokṣa*” in the *Mahābhārata* (2000:278-9). While Sutton makes the useful observation that *mokṣa* is here portrayed as experienced in this life, I cannot subscribe to his broader analysis of this passage which brings in ideas from Sāṃkhya philosophy although they are absent in the *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda* itself.

6.1. How to release the bond of affection (*snehapāśa*)? The first part of Ariṣṭanemi's teachings.

Like most units of Bhīṣma's instruction to Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Śāntiparvan*, the *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda* begins with a question by Yudhiṣṭhira:

How would a king like me walk the earth released? With what qualities is he constantly joined so that he is released from the bond of attachment?

*kathaṃ nu muktaḥ pṛthivīṃ cared asmadvidho nṛpaḥ
nityaṃ kaiś ca guṇair yuktaḥ saṅgapāśād vimucyate* (12.277.1)

As we will see shortly, the conclusion of this *adhyāya* claims that the teachings presented therein can help a householder king to become liberated (*mukta*), which suggests that the compound *asmadvidha* refers to the fact that Yudhiṣṭhira is a householder king. I will quote and discuss the conclusion of the *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda* in detail after analysing the rest of the *adhyāya*.

To address this question, Bhīṣma relates an “ancient tale” (*itihāsa purātana*) which records instructions given by the sage Tārksya Ariṣṭanemi to king Sagara¹⁶⁵. This is King Sagara's question to the sage:

O Brahmin, what is that best and highest thing that one does to enjoy happiness in this world? I would like to know – how does one not grieve and not tremble?

*kiṃ śreyaḥ paramaṃ brahman kṛtveha sukham aśnute
kathaṃ na śocen na kṣubhyed etad icchāmi veditum* (12.277.3)

While Yudhiṣṭhira inquired about *mokṣa*, Sagara's question is more flexible and reminds of other questions about overcoming suffering and obtaining *sukha* that kings ask elsewhere in the

¹⁶⁵ Although Tārksya and Ariṣṭanemi are common epithets of the mythical bird Garuda, it seems more likely that they here refer to a human sage. A sage with this name figures in two *adhyāyas* of the *Āraṇyakaparvan* (3.182 and 3.184).

Mahābhārata. Such passages include, for example, the *Senajidgītā* (12.168) and the *Maṅkigītā* (12.171) that were discussed in chapter 4. The *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda* agrees with these two texts by introducing a dichotomy of ordinary and “ascetic” *sukha*, but it goes a step further and identifies the latter specifically with *mokṣa*:

People do not understand the [ordinary] bliss and the bliss of liberation in this world [when] they are attached to sons and cattle and confused by wealth and grain¹⁶⁶.

*sukhaṃ mokṣasukhaṃ loke na ca loko 'vagacchati
prasaktaḥ putrapāśuḥ dhanadhānyasamākulaḥ* (12.277.5)

This verse also introduces one of the key themes of the first part of Ariṣṭanemi’s instructions – the binding force of attachment to one’s family. The two following verses talk about ‘bond of affection’ (*snehapāśa*; 12.277.6) and ‘bond that arise from affection’ (*snehaja pāśa*; 12.277.7). *Sneha* often refers specifically to the affection felt towards one’s family members.

After these brief remarks on *sukha* and the binding force of affection towards one’s family, verses 8-11 recommend that *mokṣa* can be pursued late in life, reminding of the classical *āśrama* system, but without mentioning the term *āśrama* itself or naming the individual *āśramas*. These verses propose some conditions that should be fulfilled before *mokṣa* can be experienced. One can do as one pleases being released (*muktaś cara yathāsukham*; this final *pāda* is shared by verses 8 and 10) after having experienced the objects of the senses and when one’s sons have grown up, are capable of living independently and of taking care of their mother.

¹⁶⁶ Although the *dvandva* compound *dhanadhānya* may sound odd when translated literally into English, the pair “wealth (*dhana*) and grain (*dhānya*)” is standard in the Sanskrit epics, and refers to the two kinds of material goods accumulated by the king.

This is possibly at odds with narrative framework of this chapter, which talks about *mokṣa* for a householder king. It is possible that these verses are a later addition because they do not really sit well with the remaining contents of this *adhyāya*. Another option would be to understand that Ariṣṭanemi describes alternative ways to *mokṣa* without explicitly saying so. In any case, it is not necessary for the present purposes to explain this contradiction

For now, Ariṣṭanemi claims that the “person who seeks *mokṣa*” (*mokṣārtha*.) has been described briefly. He then proceeds to describe the *mokṣārtha* person in detail (*vistareṇa*; 12.277.12). This longer account itself consists of two parts – verses 13-24 being the first part and verses 25-45 being the second part.

Verses 13 to 24 retain some inner consistency and continuity with the discussion of *sukha* and the family as bondage in verses 5-7. After two verses on happy people (*sukhin*) who are not attached (*sakta*), this section turns to the problem of attachment to one's family. It claims:

When you are intent on release (*mokṣa*) you should not worry about your sons thinking “How will they exist without me?”

*svajane na ca te cintā kartavyā mokṣabuddhinā
ime mayā vinābhūtā bhaviṣyanti katham tv iti* (12.277.15)

This is followed by an exposition of radical individualism:

A person is born, grows up, experiences good and bad and dies all by himself.

*svayam utpadyate jantuḥ svayam eva vivardhate
sukhaduḥkhe tathā mṛtyuṃ svayam evādhigacchati* (12.277.16)

This ideology of individualism is supported by some fatalistic and even existential arguments. Ariṣṭanemi mentions the lack of freedom and powerlessness that undermine one's position to care for someone else:

What is the purpose of nourishing or protecting one's offspring for a person whose own being is uncertain and who himself is but a piece of earth and always at the mercy of other forces?

*svayaṃ mṛtṣiṇḍabhūtasya paratantrasya sarvadā
ko hetuḥ svajānaṃ poṣṭuṇ rakṣituṇ vādṛḍhātmanaḥ* (12.277.16)

A few verses introduce the doctrine of *karma*, making it serve the individualist agenda of the passage:

One should strive for one's own benefit, understanding that people will enjoy just the [results of] their own actions whether you are dead or alive.

*mṛte vā tvayi jīve vā yadi bhokṣyati vai janaḥ
svakṛtaṃ nanu buddhvaivaṃ kartavyaṃ hitaṃ ātmanaḥ* (12.277.23; cf. verses 17-18)

The next verse (24) concludes this section urging Sagara to set his mind on *mokṣa* (*mokṣe niveśaya manaḥ*; 12.277.24c).

A coherent interpretation of Ariṣṭanemi's discourse up to this point would have to presume that these verses on individuality are aimed at the aged householder who finds it difficult to leave behind his family although it is well-provided-for.

I find it more likely, however, that these verses on individualism represent a worldview different from the compromise between *pravṛtti* (active) and *nivṛtti* (renunciate) ideologies expressed in verses 8-11. The statements just quoted undermine the ethic of care for one's family which postpones renunciation to a moment in life when all the duties towards one's family have been completed. The radical individualist ideology resonates with that of the *śramaṇa* traditions such as Buddhist or Jainism. Their literatures contain numerous narratives in which renunciation at an early age is praised. The exemplary renouncer in Buddhism is the Buddha himself who, according to the traditional biographies, left behind his family to pursue liberation. Nevertheless, these verses cannot be easily identified with specific early Jaina, or Buddhist, doctrines, and are

therefore themselves useful for the study of Indian ascetic traditions. If verses 8-11 were bracketed, Ariṣṭanemi's discourse up to this point could be read as a teaching about a path towards the bliss of *mokṣa* experienced in this life, which requires giving up one's family. The egoistic act of disregarding the family while searching for personal benefit is justified by a radically individualist ideology, supported by the notions of *karma*, determinism, and the helplessness of the human individual.

Whatever the original context of these verses, the narrative setting of this *adhyāya* puts them in a new perspective. I have already mentioned that the introduction and conclusion of the *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda* maintain that a king can be liberated as a householder. Giving up *sneha* for one's family without physically abandoning it would then be a requirement of achieving *mokṣa* as a householder. Although such a demand may seem too radical for a householder, it is presupposed by Yudhiṣṭhira's question, as quoted above. He asked about being released from *saṅgapāśa*, and got an answer about just that, although *saṅgapāśa* was replaced by *snehapāśa* in Ariṣṭanemi's discourse.

6.2. Some notes on *sneha*: How does the *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda* fit in a broader context?

6.2.1. *Sneha* teachings for renunciators

I would argue that passages such as the *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda* illuminate the process of repackaging ascetic virtues for householders. In this case, however, the repackaging seems to be achieved by simply adding a householder-oriented conclusion rather than by rewriting and watering down the ascetic content of the discourse itself.

To illustrate this trend, it may be worth taking a broader look at the compound *snehapāśa*¹⁶⁷, the related compound *snehabandha*, and other discussions of *sneha* in ascetic discourses in the *Mahābhārata* and beyond.

There are several ascetic passages in the *Mahābhārata* in which *sneha* is portrayed as a fundamental vice and a driving force behind *saṃsāra*, adopting the same function as *kāma*, *rāga*, *tṛṣṇā*, and so forth. *Sneha* is sometimes mentioned in lists of standard vices to be countered by ascetic discipline. For example, in 12.289.11 it is listed alongside *rāga*, *krodha*, *kāma*, and *moha*. Another passage identifies *sneha* as the root of mental suffering (*manaso duḥkhamūlaṃ tu sneha ity upalabhyate*; 3.2.26). Of related interest is the mention of *sneha* as something to be conquered by “(the awareness of) impermanence” (*anityatvena*; 12.266.10) in a list of other “faults” and their solutions on the path to *mokṣa*.

This negative view of *sneha* was probably developed by the renunciatory traditions of Ancient India, although in the *Mahābhārata* itself I have located just two cases where the necessity of severing “ties of affection” is clearly mentioned in the context of the fourth *āśrama*. *Snehapāśa* should be given up by persons belonging to the *āśrama* of renunciation, according to 12.185.3B, which has already been translated and discussed in chapter 2. Being free from *snehabandha* is mentioned as one of the qualities of a *bhikṣu* in 13.129.25.

Another *Mokṣadharmaparvan*’s passage on *sneha* is found in 12.206. This short *adhyāya* is a part of a longer string of teachings that a certain *guru* imparts to his pupil. This passage puts down a chain of negative mental states and activities. This chain is initiated by Viṣṇu’s *māyā* (illusion)

¹⁶⁷ It should be noted that the compound *snehapāśa* is not limited to ascetic passages and appears twice in the *Mahābhārata* to signify simply the affectionate relationship between the characters of the story (see 5.167.10 and 15.44.41).

and eventually leads to *snehabandha* and *sneha*, which in turn is the direct cause of grief (*śoka*)

(12.206.2-5). The passage later claims:

Just as one would remove from one's limbs parasites that arise from one's own body but are not recognised to be a part of the self, so also one should abandon the parasites that are known as "the sons", recognised to be one's own but, not really born from oneself. People are born from semen and "juice" (*rasa*) because of affection (*sneha*), or because of their inherent nature (*svabhāva*) or because of being yoked to [the results of] their past action. A wise person disregards them.

svadehajān asvasaṃjñān yadvad aṅgāt kṛmūṃs tyajet
svasaṃjñān asvajāṃs tadvat sutasaṃjñān kṛmūṃs tyajet (12.206.10, lines 2-3)
*śukrato rasataś caiva snehāj jāyanti*¹⁶⁸ *jantavaḥ*
svabhāvāt karmayogād vā tāt upekṣeta buddhimān (12.206.11)

The radical phrasing of this simile suggests that it may have initially been expressed in renunciate circles to promote renunciation of one's family although it is not followed by any immediate calls for adopting the lifestyle of a renouncer.

A similar negative usage of *sneha* is found in the early ascetic poetry of the Buddhists and the Jinas. The call for shaking off the bonds from the self (*ātmanaḥ snehapāśān avadhūya*) in *Mahābhārata* 12.185.3B is mirrored in *Dhammapada* 285 and Jaina *Uttarādhyayana* 10.28, both of which talk about cutting *sneha* off from oneself (*ātman*). *Suttanipāta* 36 provides more details about *sneha*:

His affections arise from contact [with other people], [whereas] this suffering follows affection (*sneha*). Perceiving that misery arises from affection (*sneha*), one should wander alone like a rhinoceros horn.

saṃsaggajātassa bhavanti snehā snehanvayaṃ dukkhamidaṃ pahoti
ādīnavaṃ snehajaṃ pekkhamāno eko care khaggavisāṇakappo

¹⁶⁸ The expected form is *jāyante*, but *jāyanti* is not unusual in Epic Sanskrit.

This verse establishes a link between *sneha* and suffering (*duḥkha*). Unsurprisingly, this *Suttanipāta* verse is followed by a call for a solitary ascetic life. The same sentiment is elaborated in the *Mahāvastu*, which also has a collection of verses about the rhinoceros horn, a number of which seem but paraphrases and variations of the verse just quoted (1.357-8). These verses in the *Mahāvastu* are concluded with rhetoric against sons, relatives and friends, which is not unlike the claims made in the *Sagarāriṣṭanemiśaṃvāda*. All of this suggests that the latter is drawing on such an ascetic discourse against *sneha*.

6.2.2. Sneha teachings for householders

We have seen that a critique of *sneha*, often accompanied by calls for giving up one's family or other companions, plays a role in the ascetic literature of the Buddhists and the Jainas as well as in the *Mahābhārata* itself.

There are also some discourses against *sneha* in the *Mahābhārata* that are not presented as being intended for renunciators, or taught to promote renunciation. Several of these have been discussed in chapters 4 and 5, although it was not highlighted that they mention the concept of *sneha*. Thus, king Senajit is advised that he should not have affection for his relatives, because separation from them is certain (*teṣu sneho na kartavyo viprayogo hi tair dhruvam*; 12.168.16). A discussion of *sneha* as the root of mental suffering in 3.2 is attributed to king Janaka and related to Yudhiṣṭhira as the Pāṇḍavas begin their forest exile (see chapter 5 of this thesis). The abandonment of *sneha* is a key theme in *Mahābhārata* 12.149, which has also been briefly discussed in chapter 5. In order to persuade the grieving relatives to abandon a dead child, a vulture argues that 'this affection as well as attachment are pointless' (*nirarthako hy ayaṃ sneho nirarthaś ca parigrahaḥ*; 12.149.56cd). He recommends the mourners to give up *sneha* and return home (12.149.11).

A survey of discussions of *sneha* in ascetic passages in the *Mahābhārata* and beyond suggests that giving up *sneha* was originally a renunciate ideal associated with *bhikṣus*, which ideal was later presented to householders as a means to endure grief at a time of an adversity. Thus, although presenting such rhetoric against *sneha* to a householder audience may at first seem rather extreme, Ariṣṭanemi's discourse to Sagara is by no means unique in this respect. Even the more radical claims about viewing sons as parasites are reminiscent of the claims found in the description of the path of the household bodhisattva in the *Ugraparipṛcchāsūtra*, an early *Mahāyāna* scripture. It depicts the householder bodhisattva in the following terms: 'He considers his wife and children to be denizens of the Avīcī hell' (6A; trans. Nattier 2003). The householder bodhisattva is advised to see his son as an enemy (14A). Nattier dates the earliest Chinese translation of this text to 'late 2nd century CE' (2003:14), but it is not possible to say whether the statements just referenced belonged to the earliest versions of this text. What can be said with more confidence is that during the centuries before the common era or in the early centuries of the common era there were attempts to present certain ascetic disciplines as suitable not just for renunciators but also for householders.

6.3. What is the liberated person like?

We have seen that the first part of Ariṣṭanemi's discourse retains certain internal continuity. Verses 25-45, by contrast, are an open-ended collection of self-contained verses that do not present the reader with any progression of meaning. Most of these verses have identical final *pādas*, a rhetorical feature often found in such ascetic collections of verses in books 3 and 12 of the *Mahābhārata* and in Buddhist and Jaina literature. The phrase "*mukta eva saḥ*" ("he is indeed liberated") concludes verses 25-26, 28-29; 32-37; 45¹⁶⁹. The phrase "*yaḥ paśyati sa mucyate*" ("who

¹⁶⁹ It is also found in the *Bhagavadgītā* 5.27 and in 14.19.3 and 5.

sees ... is liberated”) concludes the verses 30-31, 39-41, 43¹⁷⁰. Almost every verse of Ariṣṭanemi’s “detailed” exposition of *mokṣa* from verse 25 onwards ends with one of these refrains. The verses avoid the technical terminology of any specific philosophical school or religious tradition. As for their contents, the verses mention various states of mind and contents of knowledge that are characteristic of the liberated person (*mukta*). These include such items as understanding the origin and destruction of beings, being content with little, equanimity (*śamatva*), and so forth. There is no need to reproduce here the full contents of these verses.

The nature of these verses is such that it does not seem too difficult to imagine them being presented to a householder king.

What unites all of these verses is an emphasis on interior mental states as the defining features of liberation. They do not make any reference to demanding ascetic practices or lifestyles. It seems reasonable to assume that such verses were collected or composed for royal audiences who were interested in liberation, but not in the ardent path of becoming a *bhikṣu*. What seems to be assumed is that householders, too, can cultivate the mental states and virtues mentioned in these verses, although it is not really made explicit or consciously reflected upon. While the majority of these verses operate with concepts normally found in ascetic literature, there are a few that should be remarked upon given their royal audience here. Here is the most striking one:

The man who does not become intoxicated with gambling, drinking, women and hunting because of his bewilderment, he is indeed always liberated.

*dyūte pāne tathā strīṣu mṛgayāyāṇ ca yo naraḥ
na pramādyati saṁmohāt satataṁ mukta eva saḥ* (12.277.26)

¹⁷⁰ It is also found in 14.19.11.

This verse lists the four typical royal vices that are well-known in the Sanskrit epics and beyond. It would make little sense to address such a verse to renunciators, and therefore it was most probably composed specifically for royal audiences.

Besides this, there are a couple of verses that identify luxury with deprivation concerning sleeping place, food, and clothing. These are the three central aspects of the ascetic lifestyle that are regulated in the *Mahābhārata* and in the Buddhist tradition, as discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis.

The verses read:

The embodied being for whom divans and couches are the same as bare ground,
and for whom luxury rice is the same as inferior rice, he is indeed liberated.

He for whom garments made of linen, *kuśa* grass, silk, tree bark, wool, and leather
are the same, he is indeed liberated.

paryāṅkaśayyā bhūmiśca samāne yasya dehinaḥ
śālayaśca kadannaṃ ca yasya syān mukta eva saḥ (34)

kṣaumaṃ ca kuśacīraṃ ca kauśeyaṃ valkalāni ca
āvikaṃ carma ca samaṃ yasya syān mukta eva saḥ (35)

From the perspective of the renouncer movements, this may mean that the renouncer should be satisfied even with bad food and clothing. Such claims can work another way, too. If what really matters is the mental outlook of equanimity (*śamatva*) and if there is really no difference between luxury or deprivation, then there is no need for a liberation-seeking king to adopt an ascetic lifestyle. The latter line of reasoning seems to explain the inclusion of these two verses in a discourse about the liberation of householder kings.

This collection of ascetic verses is followed by only two further verses. This is how Ariṣṭanemi concludes his teachings:

Having heard my speech roam about in the householder's stage as if liberated if
you have made an unwavering resolution for *mokṣa*.

*etac chrutvā mama vaco bhavāṁś caratu muktavat
gārhashtye yadi te mokṣe kṛtā buddhir aviklavā* (12.277.46)

The immediately following verse, which is the final verse of the *adhyāya*, must be attributed to Bhīṣma:

Having properly listened to his speech, the king protected his subjects endowed with the virtues born from liberation (*mokṣaja*).

*tat tasya vacanaṁ śrutvā samyak sa pṛthivīpatiḥ
mokṣajaiś ca guṇair yuktaḥ pālayām āsa ca prajāḥ* (12.277.47)

Thus, the contents of the *Sagarāriṣṭanemiśaṃvāda* are claimed to be relevant for householder kings on two narrative levels – by Ariṣṭanemi within the *itihāsa purātana*, as well as by Bhīṣma, who relates this legend to Yudhiṣṭhira. In contrast to Yudhiṣṭhira's initial question, which was simply about being *mukta*, the concluding verses are perhaps more modest about the achievements of king Sagara. It is not clear how much significance should be attributed to their phrasing. The first verse tells king Sagara to behave “as if liberated” or “like liberated” (*muktavat*). This may be a recognition that there is still some gap between the spiritual achievements of the true renouncer and what can be achieved by a king who is still bound by his royal duties. Or, if we take the word “*mukta*” to mean a renouncer¹⁷¹, then this could mean that the king has to be like a renouncer without actually becoming one. A similarly reserved language is used by Bhīṣma. He says that king Sagara had virtues “born from *mokṣa*” rather than that he was outright liberated (*mukta*).

Conclusion

The *Sagarāriṣṭanemiśaṃvāda* differs in several respects from the *Mahābhārata* passages discussed in the previous two chapters of this thesis. The *Sagarāriṣṭanemiśaṃvāda* identifies the

¹⁷¹ Translating the term *mukta* as “a renouncer” is inspired by Olivelle, who suggests “renunciation” for *mokṣa* in his translation of the *Mānavadharmasāstra*.

special ascetic *sukha* with *mokṣa*, calling it *mokṣasukha*. It says explicitly that a king can take advantage of these teachings while remaining a householder. In this case, the ascetic teachings are presented without any mention of a crisis.

The *Sagarāriṣṭanemiśaṃvāda* is a compilation of ascetic teachings and consists of at least two parts. The first part of *Ariṣṭanemi*'s discourse extols a radically individualist ideology, condemning *sneha* as a form of bondage, and recommending one to disregard one's family members when seeking *mokṣa*. The hard-line ascetic tone of these teachings suggests that they might have been initially composed in order to promote renunciation of one's family in order to become a *bhikṣu*, although a coherent interpretation of the *adhyāya* as a whole would require that a purely mental change of attitude is intended.

A broader look at the negative usages of the term *sneha* in ascetic discourses of the *Mahābhārata* reveals that the *Sagarāriṣṭanemiśaṃvāda* is one among several passages that recommends householders to give up *sneha* without asking them to become renunciators. Nevertheless, criticism of *sneha* as one of the key binding emotions is a common feature of the renouncer-oriented discourses in the *Mahābhārata*. The *Sagarāriṣṭanemiśaṃvāda* makes ascetic teachings relevant for householders simply by adding a householder-oriented conclusion. We will see more sophisticated statements about liberation in the remaining two chapters of the thesis.

The second part of the *Sagarāriṣṭanemiśaṃvāda* (verses 25-49) consists of a collection of ascetic verses that describe the liberated person. These verses do not offer a systematic analysis of *mokṣa*. Instead, they portray a general image of the liberated person (*mukta*). They describing his mental attitude to various aspects of everyday life such as the four royal vices, clothing, food, possessions, and women. I do not find it too difficult to imagine that such verses could have

appealed to householder kings who were interested in *mokṣa* but not willing to give up their kingship.

7. Janaka the (non)liberated householder king: The external marks of renunciation (*liṅgas*) do not matter

The dialogue between the female yoga adept Sulabhā and king Janaka (*Sulabhājanakasaṃvāda*) in *Mahābhārata* 12.308 is one of the most remarkable episodes of *Mahābhārata*'s *Mokṣadharmaparvan* and has already attracted considerable scholarly attention. This is the only *Mokṣadharmaparvan* episode the translation of which James Fitzgerald has published in advance of his forthcoming translation of the entire *parvan*. He introduces it as 'one of the most interesting, important, and difficult of the sixty-three texts of the *Mokṣadharma*' (Fitzgerald 2003:641). Other scholars have discussed the episode from the perspective of gender studies (Vanita 2003; Ram Prasad 2018).

The speech that king Janaka delivers to Sulabhā includes what is arguably the most coherent and well-argued statement in the *Mahābhārata* or any Indian text of comparable antiquity in defence of the possibility of a king or any other householder attaining liberation (*mokṣa*). King Janaka is then reprimanded by Sulabhā who leaves him with nothing else to say. This has been usually understood as a sign that the author or editor of this dialogue sided with Sulabhā's position and therefore did not accept that Janaka had succeeded in attaining *mokṣa* as a householder king. Be that as it may, Janaka's speech offers valuable doxographic evidence pertaining to thinking about the spiritual attainments available to householders.

In this chapter I will focus on what is said about Janaka's supposed liberation. In particular, I will be interested in how his attainment is described, how it is said to have been attained, and how

it is defended against the apparent mainstream view that liberation can only be attained by renouncers.

7.1. Janaka's teacher Pañcaśikha and gnostic Sāṃkhya

Instrumental to Janaka's claim to liberation is his encounter with the sage Pañcaśikha. Janaka claims to be a disciple (*śiṣya*) of Pañcaśikha, who instructed him in 'in the knowledge of Sāṃkhya, as well as in yoga and the knowledge pertaining to kings' (*sāṃkhyajñāne tathā yoge mahīpālavidhau tathā*; 12.308.25). The same verse also mentions the threefold (*trividha*) *mokṣadharma*. It could be a term summing up the three items already mentioned, although it would be unusual to classify *mahīpālavidhi*, which is presumably *rājadharma*, as a type of *mokṣadharma*. Equally unusual, however, would be to read the threefold *mokṣadharma* as a fourth unit because Sāṃkhya and yoga are among the main types of teaching represented elsewhere in the *Mokṣadharma* parvan. While the details are unclear, it appears that Pañcaśikha has instructed Janaka in certain philosophical or religious doctrines and possibly practices that are expected to bring about liberation (*mokṣa*).

Pañcaśikha is famous as a Sāṃkhya teacher and instructs Janaka in two *Mokṣadharma* units that are placed earlier in the collection. As noted by other scholars, it is difficult to trace any significant continuities between the different teachings attributed to Pañcaśikha within and without the *Mahābhārata* (see especially Brockington 1999:480-481). The earlier of the two Janaka-Pañcaśikha episodes is placed immediately before the *Sulabhājanakasaṃvāda* in 12.307. There Yudhiṣṭhira enquires about the means of obtaining a long life and overcoming death. To answer this question Bhīṣma relates how Pañcaśikha replied to a similar question asked by king Janaka. Unfortunately, Pañcaśikha is not aware of any secrets for longevity and expounds a short fatalistic

teaching about the “ocean of time” (*kālasāgara*) that is thematically close to the stoic materials examined in the second part of this thesis. This speech sheds no light whatsoever on how Janaka might have become liberated, and Brockington notes that it ‘has no obvious relevance to Sāṃkhya’ (1999:481).

More noteworthy but also more difficult is the Janaka-Pañcaśikha dialogue earlier in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* in 12.211-12. The teachings of Pañcaśikha have been interpreted as a Sāṃkhya teaching (Malinar 2017) as well as a materialist teaching (Bronkhorst 2007) and some Buddhist parallels have also been noted (Motegi 1999). I have chosen not to discuss the teachings of Pañcaśikha in 12.211-12 in detail because neither the framing nor the contents of the episode contain any firm clues as to whether Janaka remained a householder after listening to these teachings. One might suppose that Janaka in 12.308 is making a reference to his encounter with Pañcaśikha in 12.211-12, but this hypothesis would depend on assumptions about the textual history and editing of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* that are beyond proof. One possible significant parallel between the two *Mokṣadharma* episodes will be noted below.

Angelika Malinar, however, argues that Pañcaśikha in 12.211-12 is ‘teaching a form of *saṃnyāsa* that does not require giving up worldly life, an idea that is also launched elsewhere in the epic in connection with Sāṃkhya’ (2017:615). In the footnote she only refers to the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Sulabhājanakasaṃvāda*, and further claims about her argument that ‘it also matches the emphasis in classical Sāṃkhya on knowledge (*jñāna*) as the only means for obtaining liberation, which is also attested amply in the epic’ (2017: footnote 20 on pages 615-16). The notion that *jñāna* should be available to householders, however, is just a possibility that is apparently present in the

Sāṃkhya tradition, but it is not made explicit by Pañcaśikha in 12.211-12 or in any other major Sāṃkhya instruction in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, apart from the *Sulabhājanakasaṃvāda*.

Whatever evidence we have in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* rather suggests that Sāṃkhya masters are wandering mendicants. In 12.307.3, 12.308.24, and 12.306.58 Pañcaśikha is said to be a *bhikṣu*, but in 12.211.6 he is said to be 'roaming the great earth' (*paridhāvan mahīm kṛtsnām*). Our Sulabhā is also called *bhikṣukī* (12.308.7). Bedekar has observed a striking similarity between the description of Sulabhā and that of a *bhikṣukī* practitioner of Sāṃkhya in Vasudeva-Hiṇḍi (1960).

While the evidence about the organisation of the early Sāṃkhya is scant, there are reasons to think that early Sāṃkhya or Sāṃkhya-Yoga was in a position comparable to Buddhism in so far as the elite practitioners of both traditions were *bhikṣus* who sought a certain internal transformation – dispassion (*vairāgya*), knowledge or insight (*jñāna*, *prajñā*), removal of craving (*tṛṣṇā*), and so on. While it may seem conceivable that such dispassion or gnostic transformation might have been available to people who did not follow the lifestyle of a *bhikṣu* or a monk, it does not mean that this possibility was necessarily pursued, as there is virtually nothing in the early Buddhist literature to allow for householder liberation.

Surprisingly, the Sulabhā-Janaka dialogue in 12.308 is the only *Mahābhārata* passage in which the idea that householders, too, can be liberated by means of *jñāna* is articulated clearly and with full awareness of the householder-renouncer opposition. If other *Mokṣadharma* teachings, such as those given by Pañcaśikha to Janaka in 12.211-12, were understood by the editor(s) of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* in a similar way, it has not been made sufficiently clear in their framing.

7.2. Action without results

Pañcaśikha is said to have done something else besides just imparting knowledge to Janaka. He is said to have “made Janaka’s knowledge seedless” (*bhikṣuṇā* (...) *jñānaṃ kṛtam abījaṃ*; 12.308.34) if we follow the text of the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*. This statement appears to explain how Janaka is capable of acting without triggering karmic retribution. This is one of the cornerstones of Janaka’s claim to liberation and requires some explication due to its importance as well as obscurity. I will use the model of *jīvanmukti* in the *Pātāñjalayogaśāstra* to interpret the part of Janaka’s speech in which this statement occurs. I will argue that in order to make sense of this statement “*jñānaṃ*” may have to be emended to “*kleśaṃ*”. To begin, I cite in full the relevant part of Janaka’s speech:

Just like a field that has become soft as well as flooded with water generates a sprout, likewise action (karma) brings about rebirth for men. And just like a seed that has been heated up in a pot although having the capacity to be a [material] cause for a sprout, does not arise [as a sprout] [when placed] anywhere, so also my affliction (*kleśa*; emended from *jñāna*, “knowledge”) has been made seedless by that venerable mendicant known as “flame” (*śikha*, i.e., Pañcaśikha). It does not arise even among sense objects¹⁷².

<i>yathā</i>	<i>kṣetraṃ</i>	<i>mṛdūbhūtam</i>	<i>adbhir</i>	<i>āplāvitaṃ</i>	<i>tathā</i>
<i>janayaty</i>	<i>aṅkuraṃ</i>	<i>karma</i>	<i>nṛṇāṃ</i>	<i>tadvat</i>	<i>punarbhavam</i>
<i>yathā</i>	<i>cottāpitaṃ</i>	<i>bījaṃ</i>	<i>kapāle</i>	<i>yatra</i>	<i>tatra vā</i>
<i>prāpyāpy</i>	<i>aṅkurahetutvam</i>	<i>abījatvān</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>jāyate</i>	
<i>tadvad</i>	<i>bhagavatā</i>	<i>tena</i>	<i>śikhāproktena</i>	<i>bhikṣuṇā</i>	
<i>jñānaṃ kṛtam abījaṃ me viśayeṣu na jāyate</i> (12.308.32-34)					

This difficult passage presents us with some problems of interpretation. Its gist seems to be that it is possible to perform action (karma) without being subject to its consequences (*phala*), and that Pañcaśikha has helped Janaka attained such a state of being able to act without thereby causing

¹⁷² Cf. Fitzgerald’s translation of the final verse: ‘so too my knowledge was sterilized by that blessed one, the mendicant named for flames of fire, and produces nothing even in the midst of these particular objects’.

his own rebirth. The metaphors of the field (*kṣetra*), the sprout (*aṅkura*), and the burnt seeds do not appear in other *Mahābhārata*'s discussions of karma¹⁷³. All of these terms, however, appear in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, and I therefore propose to use it as a hermeneutical tool for unpacking the three verses just cited¹⁷⁴. I will explain my cautiously proposed emendation from *jñāna* to *kleśa* after presenting the relevant ideas from the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*.

Janaka mentions two separate metaphors – the field and the burnt seed. The field in verse 32 is compared with karma. But it appears that two factors are needed for karma to bring results. The second element is seed (*bīja*), and there is a talk about a seed that is burnt (*uttāpita*) and therefore does not produce a sprout, but Janaka does not really explain what *bīja* refers to outside the metaphor. The only other thing mentioned by Janaka is *jñāna*, but it is implausible that he wishes to say that *jñāna* produces the ripening of karma. Nor is there any more plausibility to the literal translation that Janaka's *jñāna* no longer arises when the seed has been burnt. I am aware of no Indian text that says anything similar about *jñāna*. Not being able to make sense of Janaka's

¹⁷³ To be exact, some of this terminology appears in Pañcaśikha's speech to Janaka in 12.211.31-33. These ideas, however, are attributed to "certain persons" (*ke cid*), suggesting that Pañcaśikha disagrees with them. There, too, at least two causes of rebirth are postulated – ignorance (*avidyā*) is said to be the field (*kṣetra*), whereas action (karma) is said to be the seed (*bīja*). In addition to this, *trṣṇā* (desire) and *sneha* (affection) are mentioned. Notably, the word *dagdha* (burnt) also occurs in this speech, but I have been unable to make sense of what Pañcaśikha is trying to say in these three verses. Malinar's interpretation of this passage is not entirely convincing as she interprets *kṣetra* as 'the body' and unfortunately does not provide a full translation of the verses in question (2017). I reproduce the three verses in question for the sake of comparison without attempting to translate them: *avidyākarmaceṣṭānāṃ ke cid āhuḥ punarbhavam / kāraṇaṃ lobhamohau tu doṣāṇāṃ ca niṣevaṇam || avidyāṃ kṣetram āhur hi karma bījaṃ tathā kṛtam / trṣṇāsāṃjananaṃ sneha eṣa teṣāṃ punarbhavaḥ || tasmin vyūḍhe ca dagdhe ca citte maraṇadharmiṇi | anyo 'nyāj jāyate dehas tam āhuḥ sattvasaṃkṣayam ||* (12.211.31-33).

¹⁷⁴ Commenting on the usage of these metaphors in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, Gokhale observes that '[t]he metaphors of seed and sprout for explaining the basic defilements as the cause of bondage/transmigration and those of destruction of seed and destruction of sprout for explaining cessation of defilements and attainment of liberation are very much central to Buddhism' (Gokhale 2020:153). To illustrate this claim, Gokhale provides a quote from the Yogācāra thinker Vasubandhu. Since I have been unable to locate a single comparable usage of *aṅkura* in the Pali canon, Gokhale's observation might be qualified by adding that these metaphors are central to the Yogācāra Buddhism of the early common era. The metaphors shared between Yogācāra and the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* have also been discussed by Karen O'Brien-Kop (2021).

statement, I propose to emend *jñāna* to *kleśa*, because *kleśas* (admittedly, in plural) have exactly this function in the process of karmic retribution in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*¹⁷⁵.

The same metaphors of the field, the seed, and specifically the burnt seed are used in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* to talk about the relationship between *kleśas* (“afflictions”) and the fruition of karma. According to the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, there are five activities (*vr̥ttis*) of the mind (*citta*), and these are said to be either afflictional or non-afflictional (*vr̥ttayah pañcatayyah kliṣṭākliṣṭāḥ; sūtra 1.5*). The commentary explains that the afflictional *vr̥ttis* are those that are caused by the *kleśas* and that are the field for the accumulation of karma (*kleśahetukāḥ karmāśayapracaye kṣetrībhūtāḥ kliṣṭāḥ; commentary on 1.5*). Elsewhere the commentary states that ‘the *kleśas* bring about the fruition of karma ’ (*karmavipākam cābhinirharantīti; commentary on 2.3*) without going into more detail about this process. *Sūtra 2.12* likewise says that the accumulation of karma has *kleśas* as its root (*kleśamūlaḥ karmāśayo ...*).

The *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* uses the metaphor of the burnt seed with reference to making the *kleśas* impotent during a mental transformation that can take place in advanced stages of meditation. The result of this is that ‘for a person who has burnt the seed(s) of his affliction(s), an affliction does not arise again even if its stimulus is present. For, how can a burnt seed sprout forth? ’ (*dagdhakleśabījasya saṃmukhībhūte ’py ālambane nāsau punar asti, dagdhabījasya kutaḥ praroha iti; commentary on 2.4*). In order to interpret this statement, it should now be mentioned that the five *kleśas* are ignorance (*avidyā*), sense of personality (*asmitā*), desire (*rāga*), aversion (*dveṣa*), and

¹⁷⁵ Cf. also this statement from Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*: ‘Just like grains of rice are capable of sprouting when covered with chaff but not on their own, thus also karma is capable of causing another birth when it is covered with the chaff obtained from *kleśa*, but not alone; thus it is so that *kleśa* should be understood to be like seed, etc.’ (*yathā ca tuṣāvanaddhās taṇḍulāḥ prarohaṇasamarthā bhavanti na kevalā evaṃ kleśaprāptatuṣāvanaddham karma janmāntaravirohaṇe samartham bhavati na kevalam ity evaṃ tāvat kleśo bijādivad veditavyaḥ*; [151|03-151|06; the text and reference given as in this e-text that is based on two different printed editions: http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_vasubandhu-abhidharmakozabhASya.htm).

a will to live (*abhiniveśa*; as listed in *sūtra* 2.3). Although the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* emphasises *avidyā* as the root of the other *kleśas*, there are two others items in this list that are particularly recurring in the portrayal of sages in the *Mahābhārata*. Such sages are portrayed as being free from *rāga* and *dveṣa*, and I will argue below that Janaka also makes a reference to having overcome these two *kleśas* in particular. Now, with reference to these two *kleśas*, I interpret the above-cited extract from the commentary to 2.4 as saying that it is possible to achieve a state when a confrontation with an object (*ālambana*) does not trigger either of the natural reactions of desire (*rāga*) or aversion (*dveṣa*). This would amount to a state of living-liberation, a continued existence among sense objects in *saṃsāra*, but without accumulating any new karma, since, as we have seen above, there is no accumulation or fruition of karma without such *kleśas* as *rāga* and *dveṣa*.

That this is a state of *jīvanmukti* or living liberation is made more explicit in the commentary on 2.4, which says that ‘a skilful person whose *kleśas* have diminished is called *caramadeha*, “one who is living in the final body ”’(*kṣīṇakleśaḥ kuśalaś caramadeha ity ucyate*). In other words, such a person will not be reborn again after death. More is said about *caramadehas* in the commentary on *sūtra* 4.7, which *sūtra* claims that ‘the karma of yogins is neither black nor white [whereas] for others it is of three kinds [namely, white, black or both white and black] ’(*karmāśuklākṣṇaṃ yoginas trividham itareṣāṃ*). The commentary on this *sūtra* states that ‘[the action, i.e., karma] of renunciators whose afflictions have been diminished and who bear their final bodies is neither white nor black ’(*śuklākṣṇā saṃnyāsinaṃ kṣīṇakleśānāṃ caramadehānāṃ iti*). The use of *iti* at the end of this phrase suggests that it is an untraced quotation from an earlier source in which the *saṃnyāsin* probably simply means a renouncer. Thus, the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* puts forth a notion of *jīvanmukti* by positing that a perfected person can continue to perform certain actions, but these actions will be neither white nor black and therefore will not result in karmic retribution. This

becomes possible specifically when the *kleśas* are made like burnt seeds. The passages from the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* that have been cited so far already provide a coherent model for action without consequences.

It should be mentioned that the commentary adds to this model the doctrine of desireless action that is known from the *Bhagavadgītā*. Thus, the commentary to 4.7 goes on to give a different meaning of *saṁnyāsa* by saying: ‘There, only for the yogin, the action is not white because of the renunciation of the fruits of actions and not black because of not performing such action’ (*tatrāśuklaṁ yogina eva phalasaṁnyāsād akṛṣṇaṁ cānupādānāt*). This looks like a broader statement about a yogic practice of renouncing one’s fruits of action that does not necessarily imply that the *kleśas* of the yogin have been diminished. Surely, there is considerable convergence between these two models of action without consequences – that of *phalasaṁnyāsa* and that of existing among sense objects without the *kleśas* ever being activated. Both are predicated upon an assumption that the accumulation and ripening of karma depends upon the mental state of the person who performs the action. Nevertheless, I would prefer to appreciate these two models as two independent approaches to the same doctrinal problem of being able to act without experiencing the fruits of action. The two models also have different roots. The *Bhagavadgītā*’s model seems to be based on the paradigm of Vedic ritual (*karman*), which is performed with a certain result in mind. The other model, focusing on *rāga* and *dveṣa*, has its roots in the *śramaṇa* traditions of Buddhism and Jainism, where the terms *kleśa*, *rāga*, and *dveṣa* play a prominent role. Keeping these distinctions in mind, I would be hesitant to apply the label *karmayoga* to king Janaka in this passage (cf. Fitzgerald 2002 and Black 2022). In Janaka’s speech I find no clues to the specific *karmayoga*

doctrine of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Most notably, he does not mention the Lord (*īśvara*) who is the recipient of the renounced action in both the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*.¹⁷⁶

In the light of this discussion, Janaka's speech would make a sense in the context of early Indian models of *jīvanmukti* if the word *jñāna* was replaced by the word *kleśa*.¹⁷⁷ In that case, he would be saying that his *kleśa* has been made seedless by the fire of Pañcaśikha so that his *kleśa* no longer arises when faced with sense objects. If he lives among sense objects without *kleśa*, this means that he is effectively liberated and no longer accumulates karma or is bound to experience its fruition. Since there are no manuscripts that read "*kleśa*", this hypothetical corruption of the text would have taken place very early in the transmission of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. It might be based on a misunderstanding of Janaka's speech and informed by an assumption that Pañcaśikha should have had some effect on Janaka's *jñāna* to make him liberated. Indeed, Janaka says several times that *jñāna* is the cause of liberation, as we will see in some of his statements that will be discussed below. The reading *jñānaṃ* might also be a scribal mistake since there are several *jñānaṃ* in the vicinity of our verse 34, the closest ones being in verses 38 and 40.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ *Phalasaṃnyāsa* is first mentioned in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* in an explanation of *īśvarapraṇidhāna*, "worship of the Lord", in the commentary to 2.1.

¹⁷⁷ There is one another *Mahābhārata* verse that uses the concept of *kleśa* in a comparable way, although it does not mention the metaphors of the field and the burnt seed. It is found in a collection of ascetic verses attributed to Nārada: 'For him who has become *brahman* and has by means of knowledge surpassed the various afflictions (*kleśa*) born from delusion there is no contact with the impure' (*brahmabhūtasya saṃyogo nāśubhenopapadyate/ jñānena vividhān kleśān ativr̥ttasya mohajān ||*; 12.316.52).

¹⁷⁸ There is only one manuscript which really solves the reading *jñānaṃ kṛtam abijam*, which reading I have been unable to interpret in the context of theories of karma without an emendation. Manuscript K7 replaces the entire verse and reads: 'The action does not release a sprout, like a burnt seed [would not release a sprout], when it is performed with a mind (*buddhi*) the imprints of which have been diminished' (*kṣiṇavāsanayā buddhyā karma yat kriyate 'nagha/ tad dagdhabijavad bhūyo nāṅkuram pravimuñcati||*; 12.308.33 according to K7). I understand that this verse, too, makes a reference to the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* or a similar framework to make sense of Janaka's argument here. This verse focuses on the notion of mental imprint (*vāsanā*) which is related to the concept of *kleśa* in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*. The removal of *vāsanās/saṃskāras* is likened to the removal of *kleśas* in *sūtra* 4.28. The commentary applies the same metaphor of the burnt seed to *saṃskāras*.

The hypothesis that Janaka intends to explain his freedom from *kleśas* is strengthened by the observation that he follows up his discussion of karma with a statement about the pointlessness of *rāga* and *dveṣa* in verse 35¹⁷⁹.

While Janaka appears to say that he is now to live among sense objects (*viṣaya*), it is not entirely clear what was Pañcaśikha's involvement in this. It was said that it was the flame (*śikha*) of that mendicant that rendered Janaka's *kleśa* (emended from *jñāna*) seedless (*abīja*). In the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* we learn that it is the fire of knowledge (*jñāna*) or *prasaṃkhyāna* (understood as either insight or meditation by different commentators and translators) that burns the seeds. If Janaka's statement is taken literally, it was Pañcaśikha himself who managed to bring about a transformation of king Janaka. This might amount to a special liberating agency of the *guru*, but there are no further clues that support this interpretation. Alternatively, we might understand that Janaka expresses himself in a poetic manner, playing upon the name Pañcaśikha ("Five Flames"), and really wants to say that it was the *jñāna* imparted by the sage that brought about his transformation. Given that in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* this seed-burning transformation is achieved through advanced meditative training, it is remarkable that Janaka was able to achieve this in a matter of four months while Pañcaśikha was staying with him during the rainy season (12.308.26).

¹⁷⁹ The verse reads: *nābhīṣajjati kasmimś cin nānarthe na parigrahe/ nābhīrajyati caiteṣu vyarthatvād rāgadoṣayoḥ* (12.308.35). Given that *doṣa* is the standard middle-Indic spelling of *dveṣa*, I understand that the very common pair of *rāga* and *dveṣa* is meant here. A further possibility of Middle-Indic influence is suggested by the verb *abhiṣajjati*. Since the other verb, *abhirajyati*, is clearly related to *rāga*, one would expect that the verb *abhiṣajjati* would be the verbal counterpart to *dveṣa*. This expected meaning corresponds to the Pali verb *abhiṣajjati* which, according to the *Pali-English Dictionary*, means 'to be in ill temper, to be angry, to curse, imprecate'. A complete discussion of all the philological issues involved in *abhiṣajjati* would be far beyond the scope of this footnote. The spelling *doṣa* for the usual Sanskrit *dveṣa*, however, is found in Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita*, where the compound *rāgadoṣa* occurs three times (2.39; 3.52; 5.18). As for the pair *anartha* and *parigraha*, found in the verse attributed to Janaka, I have been unable to find it elsewhere. Tentatively, I understand Janaka as saying that a liberated person, such as himself, feels neither desire nor aversion towards neither useful/desirable (*parigraha*) or undesirable (*anartha*) things.

This ideal of *jīvanmukti* and in particular of being able to live and act in a world of sense objects is also a continuation of more ancient ideals of sagehood. Such legendary sages as the Buddha and the Mahāvīra continued to lead a bodily existence and teach others even after their awakening. There are many statements in both Buddhist and Jaina literatures that use the metaphor of a lotus that does not let in water to talk about the sage who does not get stained by the world (*loka*), certain objects, or evil (*pāpa*) while continuing to live in the world. Such a metaphor is also found several times in the *Bhagavadgītā*¹⁸⁰ and in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* where it is applied to the ideal sage or *yogin* as well as to the god Nārāyaṇa who ‘is never smeared by good or bad karma’ (*śubhāśubhaiḥ karmabhir yo na lipyati kadā cana*; 12.326.25; see also 12.339.14).

In *Suttanipāta* 392 we learn that a mendicant (*bhikkhu*) is not tainted (*anūpalitta*) among the things (*dhammesu*) that pertain to his mendicant lifestyle such as almsfood (*piṇḍa*) and lodgings (*sayanāsana*). Thus, while for the *Suttanipāta* the ideal person is a *bhikṣu* who is not tainted by the bare essentials of monastic life, Janaka applies similar logic to his royal surroundings. The equation between the accoutrements of the king and the renouncer brings us to the more polemical second part of Janaka’s speech.

7.3. A polemical turn: Renouncers also have property and power

King Janaka does not simply claim renunciation for himself. He engages in a polemic against those renouncers who follow the lifestyle of wondering mendicants. His argument is made possible by the concept of *liṅga* or *lakṣana*, an external mark, which is used in the Brahmanical *dharma* literature to talk about the external “signs” of certain types of people. In chapter 2 we have already

¹⁸⁰ E.g. 5.10 or, without mentioning the lotus, in 5.7: ‘Even though acting he is not smeared’ (*kurvann api na lipyate*).

seen the marks that are typically attributed to the renouncer in the *Mahābhārata*. In addition to certain aspects of the ascetic lifestyle, the renouncer is, above all, characterised by a radical equanimity (*samatva*), by going beyond the pairs of opposites. Janaka applies the very same language to talk about his own achievements. He claims to have attained the state of being beyond the pairs of opposites *nirdvaṃdvatā* (12.308.51), and applies to himself the epithet *samaloṣṭāśmakāñcana* (12.308.37), which commonly describes sages in the *Mahābhārata* (see chapter 2). He also explains that he would regard equally a person who would anoint his right arm with sandalwood and a person who would cut his left arm with an axe (12.308.36). As already discussed in chapter 3, the same metaphor is used by kings Yudhiṣṭhira and Pāṇḍu when they explain what state of mind they expect to attain by becoming mendicants, and an epithet based on this metaphor is commonly applied to Buddhist and Jaina saints. Thus, king Janaka is claiming for himself the equanimity (*samatva*) that is the defining mental state of renouncers or persons in the *Mahābhārata* and beyond.

At the same time Janaka distances himself from the external marks (*liṅga*) of renouncers.

He says:

Wearing the ochre robe, baldness, the tripod and the water bowl – these marks are beside the point. I believe that they are not for the sake of *mokṣa*.

kāṣāyadhāraṇaṃ mauṇḍyaṃ triviṣṭabdhah kamaṇḍaluḥ
liṅgāny atyartham etāni na mokṣāyeti me matiḥ (12.308.47)

In contrast to these external marks, Janaka repeatedly claims that the cause of liberation is *jñāna*, “knowledge or insight” (12.308.42; 46; 48). He makes the argument that

If even when one bears the marks [of a renouncer] *jñāna* alone is the cause of liberation from suffering, the mark [of a renouncer] as such would really be pointless.

*yadi saty api liṅge 'smiñ jñānam evātra kāraṇam
nirmokṣāyeha duḥkhasya liṅgamātraṃ nirarthakam* (12.308.48)

It is in this passage that Janaka articulates what must have been for some the logical conclusion of the doctrine that *jñāna* is the cause of liberation. Janaka, however, goes further in his polemics against the renunciators. He claims that there are such parallels between the king and the renouncer that the latter should not be able to claim any superiority. Conceptualising elements of the renunciate lifestyle as *liṅgas* allows Janaka to compare these to the royal paraphernalia that are the *liṅgas* of kingship. If liberation takes place by means of *jñāna* among such marks as the triple staff, why should it not take place among such royal marks as the parasol (12.308.42)? Janaka classifies all such marks or emblems of renunciators and kings as *parigraha*, “property”. We have seen above that Yudhiṣṭhira refers to the view that liberation is not possible for those with *parigraha* (see chapter 3). Janaka understands that the basic possessions of the renunciators are also *parigraha*. He argues that if such *parigraha* is not an obstacle to attaining *mokṣa* by means of *jñāna*, neither should royal possessions (*parigraha*) be an obstacle to liberation. From this perspective renunciation is pointless – a person who renounces ‘finding fault with householdership’ (*doṣadarśī tu gārhaṣṭhye*) takes on new possessions as the old ones are discarded (12.308.44). For Janaka, it is not just property, but also social ties that are retained by renunciators. He claims that power (*ādhipatyā*) is common to kings and renunciate masters (*bhikṣukācārya*). This *ādhipatyā* consists of reprimand (*nigraha*) and favour (*anugraha*) (12.308.45). In other words, the authoritative relationship between a renunciate master and his disciples is essentially the same as that between a king and his subjects.

If the arguments of Janaka were accepted, there would be little value left in the institution of renunciation. It is therefore not surprising that Janaka’s liberation is refuted by the *yoginī* Sulabhā. I have no new insights to contribute to an understanding of her complex speech. I will only

note that, as far as I am concerned, Sulabhā does not really address or refute the main points of Janaka's argument. Her apparent victory in the debate is primarily based on criticising Janaka as an individual. She claims that the way he addresses her as a woman indicates that he has not really moved beyond the pairs of opposites and attained the *nirvāṇadvatā* he claims for himself. Yet, this does not address Janaka's theoretical points about the structural similarities between being a king and being a renunciate master. From this perspective, it is really Sulabhā who is left with nothing to respond to Janaka's arguments.

7.4. *Linga* and householder liberation outside the *Mahābhārata*

The idea that householder kings can be liberated is brought up and rejected as a false *śruti* in the ninth chapter of Āśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita*. Assuming that the dating of Āśvaghoṣa is correct, this means that the notion that householder kings, too, can be liberated had been developed and accepted as belonging to authoritative Brahmanical literature by the 1st-2nd century CE. The mention of the unique term *mokṣadharma* in *Buddhacarita* 9.19 suggests that Āśvaghoṣa had access to some version of *Mahābhārata*'s *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, although it is not possible to know what version of the collection of *mokṣadharma* texts he might have had access to¹⁸¹. Āśvaghoṣa also refers to the opposition between the external marks (*liṅga*) of renunciation and the true causes of liberation, which he lists as wisdom (*buddhi*) and effort (*yatna*).

We may surmise that Āśvaghoṣa may have been familiar with the some of the arguments made by Janaka in the *Sulabhājanakasaṃvāda*, although not necessarily with the text as we have it now. In 9.20 Āśvaghoṣa provides a list of such kings who became experts in *mokṣadharma* while being householders. This list mentions some well-known kings who receive or teach ascetic

¹⁸¹ On the possible references to the *Mahābhārata* in the *Buddhacarita* see also Hildebeitel 2006a.

teachings in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, such as Janaka and Senajit (on Senajit see chapter 4 of this thesis). The same list, however, mentions other kings who are not mentioned in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* and have not been identified at all¹⁸². This suggests the intriguing possibility that Aśvaghoṣa had access to a number of legends about liberated householder kings that have not been preserved to this day.

Other than the *Buddhacarita*, a sentiment similar to that of Janaka's speech in the dialogue with Sulabhā is found in *Mānavadharmaśāstra* 6.66. This verse says that 'the mark [of renunciation] is not the cause of *dharma*' (*na liṅgaṃ dharmakāraṇam*) and that one may practice *dharma* in any of the *āśramas*, even if one is adorned (*bhūṣita*). In this verse, too, leading a luxurious lifestyle is not seen as a hindrance to *dharma*. The attributes of one's lifestyle are labelled as *liṅga* that has no direct relationship with *dharma*.

A comparable idea is also found in a *Dhammapada* verse, although it does not use the rhetoric of *liṅga*:

Even adorned one may practice peace (*sama*) if one is pacified, controlled, restrained, a *brahmacārī*. Having given up violence towards any being, he is a *brāhmaṇa*, he is a *samaṇa*, he is a *bhikkhu*.

*alaṃkato ce pi samaṇaṃ careyya santo danto niyato brahmacārī
sabbesu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍaṃ so brāhmaṇo so samaṇo sa bhikkhu
(Dhammapada 142)*

This verse also claims that even if one is adorned, that is, even if one lives in a luxury, it is possible to attain mental cultivation and self-control that are the defining features of renouncers.

Thus, we can see that the ideas articulated in the *Sulabhājanakasaṃvāda* are hinted at in other texts. While in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Buddhacarita* they are rejected, they are presented

¹⁸² See the footnote to this verse in Johnston's translation of the *Buddhacarita* (1936).

in a more positive light by Manu and in the *Dhammapada*. This, in turn, is a part of a bigger and longer thinking process about the nature of liberation and the means to attain it. Some of the arguments used by king Janaka are not very different from the arguments found, for example, in the Buddhist *Mahāsaccakasutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*. The *Mahāsaccakasutta* downplays the soteriological relevance of the practice of *tapas* attributed to other renunciate groups, some of which can tentatively be identified with early followers of Jainism. In the *Mahāsaccakasutta* the Buddha argues that the painful feeling brought about by *tapas* is not causally linked with liberation. What matters is the internal or mental transformation – the quenching of desire and insight. Janaka merely applies the same logic to what by his time are categorised as the *liṅgas* of renunciation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the speech of king Janaka in *Mahābhārata* 12.308. I have argued that Janaka's speech pushes to their apparent logical conclusion several trends that are already present in earlier ascetic movements such as Buddhism. In particular, Janaka capitalises on the notion that the cause of liberation is *jñāna*, "knowledge or insight", although he also mentions dispassion (*vairāgya*) and effort (*yatna*; 12.308.29-30). While the Pali Buddhist tradition deduces from this that the practice of physical asceticism (*tapas*) is not relevant to liberation, Janaka applies the same logic to the very lifestyle of a *bhikṣu*.

Another apparent inspiration and doctrinal foundation to Janaka's speech is found in the notion of a sage who continues to exist in a physical body after awakening. Such a sage is, for example, the Buddha. I have used the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* as a key to interpreting Janaka's speech, although the same terminology and metaphors are also found in earlier Buddhist texts such as those attributed to Vasubandhu. According to my interpretation, Janaka claims that his action (karma)

will not cause rebirth because the seeds needed for the ripening of that action have been burnt. In Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* the metaphor of the burnt seed is applied to the *kleśas*, and I have suggested a textual emendation to reflect these doctrines. Thus, I understand that Janaka claims to no longer be under the effect of the *kleśas* such as ignorance (*avidyā*), desire (*rāga*), and aversion (*dveṣa*). There is little doubt that the mainstream of the Buddhist tradition did not imagine that a person who acts without the influence of *kleśas* could be a king rather than a *bhikṣu*. From this point of view, Janaka presents an original application of the Buddhist and yogic model of *jīvanmukti*.

It is difficult to say how influential these ideas about the liberation of householder kings were. There are other *Mahābhārata* passages, especially in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, that may be operating with a similar assumption that *jñāna* should be available to householders, yet they do not spell it out. The ideal of the liberated householder king must have had some currency given that the author(s) of the *Sulabhājanakasaṃvāda* and Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* bother to refute them. The latter work suggests that there were other legends about liberated householder kings that are no longer known.

If accepted, Janaka's arguments would render the institution of renunciation redundant. This is probably the reason for the backlash against the ideal of the liberated householder king that he represents. There is, however, another *Mahābhārata* dialogue that succeeds in simultaneously admitting that one does not have to be a renouncer to be liberated and retaining the value of renunciation. It is the dialogue between king Janaka and Śuka in 12.313. This dialogue will be the subject of the next chapter.

8. Can only renunciators be liberated? The dialogue between Janaka and Śuka (*Janakaśukasamvāda*) in *Mahābhārata* 12.313

In this chapter I will discuss the encounter between Vyāsa's son Śuka and king Janaka in *Mahābhārata* 12.313, which is a part of a longer episode narrating the career of Śuka (*Mahābhārata* 12.310-320). The majority of manuscript colophons do not provide an individual title for this *adhyāya* and assign to it the title that is shared by 310-315: *Śukotpatti* ("The origins of Śuka"). For the purposes of this chapter, I will refer to 12.313 as the *Janakaśukasamvāda* ("The dialogue between Janaka and Śuka"), taking inspiration from manuscripts K7 and D5. This *adhyāya* has been summarised in Fitzgerald 1980:268-9, and discussed by Brown (1996:160-162), Dhand (2007:258-279), and most recently by Bowles (2019:191).¹⁸³

The contribution of this chapter is twofold. First, it sheds light on the composition of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* in relation to ascetic literature in Ancient India within and without the *Mahābhārata*. Second, it examines a development in the history of ideas that reconciles the importance of renunciation and ascetic practices with the notion found in Brahmanical and Buddhist scriptures.¹⁸⁴ that liberation is also available to people who are not renunciators. We have already seen the liberated householder king Janaka in the previous chapter of this thesis. In the Buddhist literature we find narratives about householders who gain insight into dharma after listening to the Buddha, although they would not remain householders after such an insight.

¹⁸³ For other studies of the story of Śuka see Bedekar 1965; Doniger 1993; Malinar 2011; Hildebeitel 2017.

¹⁸⁴ By scriptures I here mean texts that are taken as authoritative by these traditions. These "scriptures" are the *Mahābhārata* itself and the Buddhist Pali canon. The decision to limit the discussion to the Pali canon is due to my linguistic limitations and not an expression of a belief that it is the sole representative of early Buddhism.

The apparent function of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* in the larger Śuka narrative is to explain and justify why Śuka can be liberated in the first *āśrama* as a *brahmacārin*. The same arguments, however, could be used to explain king Janaka's own special relationship with *mokṣa* while being a householder king. I believe that this is exactly the reason why Janaka was selected by the author(s) of this episode to deliver these ideas to Śuka.

I will begin with a philological note about the manuscript transmission of the *Janakaśukasamvāda*. In the second section I will introduce the *Janakaśukasamvāda*. In the third section I will explore in detail the most original part of Janaka's speech, which formulates a path to *mokṣa* that retains the value of renunciation even as it allows non-renouncers to be liberated. In the fourth section I will compare the *Janakaśukasamvāda* with relevant passages from the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Dhutaṅgapañha* of the Buddhist *Milindapañha*. In the fifth section I will show that despite Buddhist influences the *Janakaśukasamvāda* also introduces characteristically Brahmanical doctrines. In the same section I will also compare the *Janakaśukasamvāda* with the *Śukānupraśna* of the *Mahābhārata* to highlight some doctrinal tensions. In the sixth section I will briefly discuss the final part of Janaka's speech in so far as it is important for understanding the meaning and composition of the *Janakaśukasamvāda*.

The story of Śuka is firmly set in the Brahmanical world which takes for granted the importance of Vedic rituals and sages, the classical (i.e., sequential) *āśrama* system, and the pair of yoga and sāmkhya. All of these are mostly absent from the ascetic discourses discussed in chapters 4-6 of this thesis. In addition, the *Janakaśukasamvāda* mentions systematic literature on liberation (*mokṣaśāstra*), which may be a reference to some earlier form of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* itself or to some materials that were used to compile the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. These features suggest that

it is a relatively late work, aware of the variety of religious worldviews expressed throughout the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*.

8.1. A note on the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*

Throughout my analysis of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* I have departed from the constituted Critical Edition (henceforth CE) text. The alternative readings adopted are often supported by these Northern manuscripts in particular: K6 V1 B0,6-9 Da3,a4 Dn1,n4 Ds D2,3,5,8. Sometimes the variant readings that I have adopted are also supported by K7 and/or some Southern manuscripts, and support from any of the manuscripts listed above may be lacking. Since this group includes the manuscripts accompanied by Nilakaṇṭha's commentary (Dn1, n4), it may seem convenient to say that I have adopted the "vulgate" version. Yet this could cause some confusion. To begin with, there is no guarantee that the manuscript readings recorded in the critical apparatus are the same as those found in the printed editions of the "vulgate". Sukthankar has noted that the Bombay edition sometimes 'contains readings which have no manuscript support at all' (Vol.1:v). Moreover, my policy has been to adopt alternative readings that are supported by the majority of the Northern recension, and I have ignored the "vulgate" Dn readings that find little or no support in other recensions.

For the purposes of this paper, I will call the readings transmitted by this loosely defined group of manuscripts the "middle recension" of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. The name "middle recension" is inspired by what the CE introduction to the *Śāntiparvan* knows as 'the middle group, consisting of V1 B0,6-9 Da3,a4 Ds D2-9' (CE Vol. 16:XLII). The introduction also talks about the 'mid-Northern group' (Vol.16:xxxv). Similarly, one encounters references to the 'central group', which covers the entire Northern recension minus the 'North-western group' which consists of Ś and K.

V1 is grouped with either of the two Northern groups in different volumes of the CE (cf. Vol.1 Part2:viii and Vol.16:xii).

I am limiting this appellation to the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* only because of its unique manuscript situation. Several of the manuscripts mentioned above (K6,7 Da3,a4 Dn4 Ds) contain only the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* while a number of manuscripts that were used for other parts of the *Śāntiparvan* do not contain the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* (K3,5 B1-5 Da1,a2 Dn2,n3 D1; and from the Southern recension: G4,5 M2-4).

For consistency, I will adopt the middle recension readings throughout this chapter even when the variation is insignificant. I will note the CE readings in square brackets, and provide manuscript evidence for the reading adopted in a footnote. Unless both readings are of equal value, I will provide further discussion of the variant readings in the footnote or in the main body of the text. I will argue that in some key verses the manuscripts that support the CE constituted text are influenced by the *karmayoga* doctrine of the *Bhagavadgītā*. I will provide some examples from other passages of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* where *karmayoga*-related ideas appear to be imposed on the middle recension text.

When the middle recension departs from the CE text it is most often opposed to the four remaining very closely related Northern manuscripts Ś1 K1,2,4 (see Vol.16:xxxiv on this tetrad) (and whatever D manuscripts remain). Often, but not always, these four Ś/K manuscripts agree with the Southern recension. It is well known that the Kashmirian/Śāradā recension, represented for the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* especially by Ś1 K1,2,4, is particularly favoured by the editors of the *Mahābhārata*: 'The high position of K seems confirmed by its being the shortest of the known versions' (Sukthankar, et al. Vol.1:vi; this introduction was written before Ś1 was obtained).

Furthermore, Sukthankar also notes an alliance between K and the Southern recension: 'I consider the agreement between these two archetypes as ... depending upon their primitive connection through the Ur-*Mahābhārata* ' (Vol.1:vi). Sukthankar further claims that '[t]he concordant readings of K and S represent as often as not a *lectio difficilior* (...) Frequently such a reading best explains the other variants ' (Vol.1:vi). Although these reflections were formulated after editing only the first two *adhyāyas* of the *Mahābhārata*, it seems that similar reasoning was applied when editing the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, where K/Ś readings are generally adopted if they have any support from the Southern manuscripts whatsoever.

I do not believe that such considerations necessarily preclude the possibility that the middle recension preserves the original readings for the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* or parts of it.

First, there is no reason to posit a correlation between the length of a version of the *Mahābhārata* and the antiquity of its version of the part of the text that is preserved in all recensions. Nor is such a correlation presupposed by Sukthankar, according to whom the Southern recension, in so far as it agrees with K/Ś, preserves the original readings even while the Southern recension is significantly expanded.

Second, I find that it is not always easy to determine the *lectio difficilior*. In the subsequent discussion I will observe that some of the CE readings in the *Janakaśukasamvāda* are very unusual. I will argue, however, that these oddities could be explained as *Bhagavadgītā*-inspired revisions.

Finally, the agreement between K/Ś and S (or parts of S) is inconclusive. This issue has been problematised by Phillips and Windram who find three main recensions of the *Sabhāparvan*: The Southern, the Western (=Ś/K), and the Eastern (=the remaining Northern recension, more or less what I call the middle recension). Using 'phylogenetic tools ' they argue that the genealogical

relationship between these three groups could be hypothesised in a number of ways and that ‘there is no particular reason to favour the interpretation of a bifurcation of the MBh[=*Mahābhārata*] tradition into a Northern and a Southern family over all other possibilities’ (2010:40). In other words, there is no *a priori* reason to believe that K/Ś preserves an earlier version of the text. It may as well be the case, for example, that the middle recension preserves the more ancient readings and that the Southern recension depends on K/Ś¹⁸⁵. Although their study is based on the *Sabhāparvan*, I believe that similar reasoning could be applied to the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*.

It should be emphasised that I am here talking about the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* only, and especially about the *Janakaśukasamvāda*. It would require significant labour to determine whether the transmission dynamics are similar for other parts of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* as well. As a preliminary observation, I would like to note that in 12.316 of the Śuka story, too, the middle group offers many variant readings, and in all cases I would judge them as equal or superior to the CE readings. In other cases, such as in the *Sagarāriṣṭanemisaṃvāda* (12.277), I have found that the middle recension readings are consistently inferior, and the distribution of manuscript readings does not as frequently follow the divide between Ś/K and the middle recension in the first place.

8.2. The Story of Śuka: The background

Before analysing Śuka’s audience with king Janaka, it may be useful to briefly sketch the events that lead up to it. Before their meeting, Vyāsa’s son Śuka learns all the Vedas and begins fierce

¹⁸⁵ Mahadevan has argued that just this is the case, namely, that the Southern recension is ultimately based on an archetype of Ś: ‘[W]hat Sukthankar isolates as the Śārada text, his archetype for the epic and basis for the CE of *Mahābhārata* epic or a text very close to it, say *Śārada version, came to the Tamil country with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins by the beginnings of the Common Era (CE): these Brahmins with their fronted tuft are well attested in the Sangam poetry, ca. 50 BCE to 250 CE, and they created from the *Śārada text what has come down to us as SR [=Southern recension] in the first four or five centuries of CE’ (2008:4). I am not putting too much emphasis on Mahadevan’s work because I cannot fully follow and evaluate his argument, nor am I aware of any published criticisms of his claims. Mahadevan’s work has been cited by Hiltebeitel (2006b) to support his own thesis, but without engaging in any critical appraisal.

tapas as a *brahmacārin* after paying the teacher's fee (12.311.24-25). This is where *mokṣa* and the *āśrama* system enter the picture:

Yet his mind took no delight in the three *āśramas* beginning with the householder's, as he was intent on teachings on liberation (*mokṣa*).

*na tv asya ramate buddhir āśrameṣu narādhipa
triṣu gārhaṣṭhyamūleṣu mokṣadharmānudarśinaḥ* (12.311.27)

Thus reflecting on *mokṣa* or setting sights on *mokṣa* (*mokṣam anucintya* 312.1), Śuka follows his father's recommendation and grasps the systems (*śāstras*) of yoga and Kapila (which is presumably Sāṃkhya) in their entirety (*jagrāha śuko (...) yogaśāstraṃ ca nikhilaṃ kāpilaṃ caiva* (...); 12.312.4).

When Vyāsa believes that his son has become 'skilled in the theories of *mokṣa*' (*mokṣavidyāviśārada*; 12.312.5) he instructs him to visit king Janaka who will tell him 'the nature of *mokṣa* in its entirety and detail' (*vakṣyati mokṣārthaṃ nikhilena viśeṣataḥ*; 12.312.6).

The narrative does not justify why Śuka needs further instruction when he is already described as a master of *mokṣa* learning. Since king Janaka is known in many passages of the *Mahābhārata* as a perfected householder king, it seems likely that he is introduced at this point because he himself has avoided following through the four *āśramas* just as Śuka desires. Thus, although the *Janakaśukasamvāda* can be read more narrowly as being just about the liberation of *brahmacārins*, I believe that the same arguments are intended to justify why such householder kings as Janaka can be liberated.

King Janaka is here portrayed as an ideal king who has mastered both spiritual and political spheres of life. He is skilled in (worldly) *dharma* as well as in treatises on *mokṣa* (*sa dharmakuśalo rājā mokṣaśāstraviśāradaḥ*; 12.312.11ab). It is promised that he will cut Śuka's doubts concerning

both active and renunciate aspects of life (*pravṛttau vā nivṛttau vā sa te chetsyati saṁśayam*; 12.313.11cd). Janaka's expertise in *mokṣa* and *nivṛtti* does not interfere with his royal duties, his country being described as teeming with wealthy people (12.312.22). Notably, Janaka is a Vedic king. He is a sacrificial client (*yājya*) of Vyāsa (12.312.10) and upholds such Brahmanical values as the *āśrama* system (see below). It is not explicitly stated that Janaka is liberated himself (*mukta*), but it is abundantly clear that he has a special relationship with *mokṣa*. I will return to Janaka's status towards the end of this chapter.

8.3. King Janaka on the path to liberation

8.3.1. The indispensable role of the teacher for attaining *mokṣa*

When Śuka secures an audience with king Janaka he asks him three questions:

What should a Brahmin do in this world? What is the seeker of *mokṣa* like? How is *mokṣa* to be attained – by insight or by austerity?

kiṁ kāryaṁ brāhmaṇeneha mokṣārthaś ca kimātmakaḥ
*kathaṁ ca mokṣaḥ prāptavyo*¹⁸⁶ [*kartavyo*] *jñānena tapasātha vā*¹⁸⁷ [*-pi vā*] (313.13)

In his initial answer Janaka focuses on the first question and in just six verses describes the classical system of four *āśramas* that is incumbent upon a Brahmin (12.313.14-19). Apparently, *mokṣa* is achieved in the final *āśrama* which is described in a single line: 'He should live in the *āśrama* of *brahman*, being free from dualities and from passion' (*nirdvaṇḍvo vītarāgātmā brahmāśramapade vaset* 12.313.19cd).

¹⁸⁶ K6 V1 B0,6-9 Da3,a4 Dn1,n4 Ds D2,3,5,8. I am not familiar with any other occurrences of *kṛ* + *mokṣa*. *Prāp* + *mokṣa*, on the other hand, is standard syntax. I will note in subsequent footnotes that there is some ground to believe that the manuscripts backing the constituted text are influenced by the *karmayoga* doctrine of the *Bhagavadgītā*. This is perhaps the first and still rather indirect manifestation of linking *mokṣa* with action in this passage.

¹⁸⁷ K6 V1 B0,6-9 Da3 Dn1,n4 Ds D2,3,8.

In the following question Śuka raises the critical point of their conversation:

Why is it necessary to dwell in the three *āśramas* if one has already realised [liberating] knowledge¹⁸⁸ and if one's mind is always free from duality?

*utpanne jñānavijñāne nirdvaṃdve [pratyakṣe] hṛdi śāśvate
kim avaśyaṃ nivastavyam āśrameṣu bhavet triṣu [vaneṣu ca]*¹⁸⁹ (12.313.20)

In his answer king Janaka not only admits that Śuka can be, and indeed is, liberated as a *brahmacārin* but also provides some explanation of the mechanisms of *mokṣa*. Janaka first formulates an answer in five verses. I will begin by discussing the first two verses of his answer and will return to the remaining three verses in the following section. Janaka first states that liberating knowledge (*jñāna*) is the cause of *mokṣa*, and that it can only be obtained from a teacher:

The is no reaching *mokṣa* without realisation of [liberating] knowledge. There is no realisation of knowledge without a relationship with a teacher (*guru*).

The teacher makes him cross [to the other side]. Knowledge is known to be the boat here. He who has realised [liberating knowledge] and done what had to be done, leaves both [teacher and knowledge] behind when he has crossed.

¹⁸⁸ There is a long tradition of reading *jñānavijñāna* as a *dvandva* compound in the Sanskrit epics. The commentators Arjunamīśra and Nīlakaṇṭha understand *jñānavijñāna* to be a *dvandva* in this verse. See also p.233 of Vol.4 of the *Rāmāyana* translation which lists the views of various commentators who all understand this as a *dvandva* compound when it appears in the *Rāmāyana* 4.15.17. When commenting on *Bhagavadgītā* 6.8., Malinar also opts for taking *jñānavijñāna* as a *dvandva* compound and refers to a list of secondary sources documenting the attempts of previous scholars to distinguish between *jñāna* and *vijñāna* (2007b:122). The Sanskrit commentarial tradition is perhaps drawing on other verses of the *Bhagavadgītā* where *jñāna* and *vijñāna* do indeed clearly appear as a pair (e.g. 7.2 and 9.1). I believe, nevertheless, that *jñānavijñāna* in the *Janakaśukasamvāda* corresponds to the Pali compound *dhammaviññāṇa* and am therefore reading it as *tatpuruṣa*: “realization of [liberating] knowledge”. This will be justified below. Cf. Bowles 2019:191 who quotes this verse and translates *jñānavijñāna* as ‘insight into knowledge’ without further notes.

¹⁸⁹ Both of the alternative readings are found in manuscripts K6, B0,6-9 Da3,a4 Dn1,n4 Ds D2,3,8. These readings avoid the clumsy pair of “*āśramas* and forests” (forest-dwelling is one of the *āśramas*), and link the verse to the immediate context of Śuka being a *brahmacārin*. Moreover, the middle recension provides an immediate link to the previous verse which mentions *nirdvaṃdve* in relation to the fourth *āśrama* in which *mokṣa* is presumably achieved. This makes quite clear what I believe to be the point here: that Śuka already possesses the attainments associated with the fourth *āśrama*. It is still possible to interpret the CE reading *pratyakṣa* in a reasonable way. As a noun it could be referring elliptically to permanent perception of an implied object, such as the *ātman*. As an adjective it could be describing the realisation of liberating knowledge which is not only permanent but also clearly visible.

*na vinā jñānavijñānān¹⁹⁰ [jñānavijñānaṃ] mokṣasyādhigamo bhavet
na vinā gurusambandhaṃ jñānasyādhigamaḥ smṛtaḥ* (12.313.22)

*guruḥ plāvayitā [ācāryaḥ plāvitā¹⁹¹] tasya jñānaṃ plava ihocyate
vijñāya kṛtakṛtyas tu tīrṇas tad ubhayaṃ tyajet¹⁹²* (12.313.23)

The theme of giving up *dharma* after using it to reach the other shore is, of course, one of the most famous parables in Buddhist literature, and I find it highly probable that the author of these verses was familiar with the Buddhist tradition¹⁹³. Further evidence for this will be provided below.

Although the *guru* is an indispensable part of modern representations of Hindu “spiritual” traditions, the importance of this figure should not be taken for granted here. As a sweeping generalisation, one could say that the ascetic literature of Ancient India provides two ideals of the renouncer. Some texts describe a communal lifestyle, and in the monastic literature of Jainas and

¹⁹⁰ K6,7 B0,6-9 Da3,a4 Dn1,n4 Ds D2,5,8 T G1,6 M1,5-7. The Nilakaṇṭha's edition that I consulted reads *jñānavijñāne*, disagreeing with all manuscripts used in the CE.

¹⁹¹ V1 B0,8 Dn1,n4 Ds D2,3,8. Curiously, Śaṅkara mixes both versions when apparently referring to this verse: *ācāryaḥ plāvayitā tasya samyagjñānaṃ plava ihocyate* (*Upadeśasāhasrī* 2.1.3).

¹⁹² This passage is reminiscent of verses from the *Bhagavadgītā* that mention teachers (*jñānin*) and liken the knowledge obtained from them to a boat: *tad viddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā/ upadekṣyanti te jñānaṃ jñāninas tattvadarśinaḥ* (4.34) (...) *api ced asi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpakṛttamaḥ/ sarvaṃ jñānaplavenaiva vṛjinaṃ saṃtariṣyasi* (4.36). The *Bhagavadgītā*, however, does not make a strong claim regarding the indispensability of the teacher, and just two verses later it claims that a person perfected by yoga can find *jñāna* in himself and by himself: *tat svayaṃ yogaśisiddhaḥ kālenātmani vindati* (4.38cd). This opposition between individual and teacher-dependent acquisition of liberating knowledge is also relevant for the *Janakaśukasamvāda* and I will return to it later. I am aware of just one other *Mahābhārata* passage that uses the metaphor of the boat while also mentioning teachers: *prajñayā nirmitair dhīrās tārayanty abudhān plavaiḥ* (12.228.2ab).

¹⁹³ The most famous occurrence of this parable is perhaps the *Alagaddūpamasutta* (*Majjhimanikāya* I 130 – 42). The present verses of Janaka should also be compared with the *Nāvāsutta* (*Suttanipāta* 316-323) which, unlike the *Alagaddūpamasutta*, focuses on the teacher whose knowledge of *dhamma* can help others to cross the ocean. The final *pāda* of this section mentions the adjective ‘*viññātadhammo* – he for whom *dhamma* has been realised’. I suggest that the compound *jñānavijñāna* in this *Mahābhārata* passage corresponds to the Pali compound *dhammaviññāṇa*, meaning “understanding of the Buddhist doctrine”. This compound is attested in *Theragāthā* 1030. The standard meaning of *viññāṇa* in the Buddhist tradition is “consciousness”. As will be argued below, in the the *Milindapañha* the more standard Buddhist compound *dhammābhisamaya* plays exactly the same role as our *jñānavijñāna*. Note that the manuscripts Ś1 K1,2 miss or remove this apparent Buddhist reference reading *tatra bhayam* for *tad ubhayaṃ* with *tyajet* in 12.313.23.

Buddhists one could easily find discussions of the proper relationship between a teacher (*guru*, *ācārya*, *kalyāṇamitra*) and a disciple. Other passages depict the renouncer as a solitary figure.

The descriptions of the fourth *āśrama* found in the *Mahābhārata* (as well as the early Brahmanical *dharma* literature) generally fall in the latter category. The renouncer is typically said to be alone. These discussions of renunciation never say, to my present knowledge, that a teacher is indispensable for reaching *mokṣa*. The word “*guru*” appears many times in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, but hardly ever in the context of *mokṣa* or renunciation¹⁹⁴. The word “*guru*” appears most often in the context of the first *āśrama* for which the relationship between Vedic teacher and student is paramount, or when making statements about the general virtue of obedience to one’s superiors such as parents and teachers.

The indispensable role of the *guru* in the *Janakaśukasamvāda*, or at least the decision to make it explicit, is then a novelty when compared with the vast majority of other ascetic teachings in the *Mahābhārata*. I would argue that the emphasis on the paramount role of the *guru* in this passage is a crucial part of its message.

The *Janakaśukasamvāda* itself does not clearly state the key problem that it is solving. A comparison with the *Janakasulabhāsamvāda* (12.308), discussed in the previous chapter, and with the *Milindapañha*, to be examined below, reveals very clearly what that problem is. If one admits that householder kings, or *brahmacārins* for that matter, can obtain liberation simply by cultivating the same mental states as the renouncer or by attaining liberating knowledge, it would follow that the institution of renunciation is pointless. At the same time, the classical *āśrama* system would

¹⁹⁴ A chief exception is the 12.203-210 episode, all of which is narrated by a person simply called “*guru*”, yet the passage does not seem to make any theoretical claims about the importance of a *guru* as such.

become pointless as well, because there would be no reason for anyone to advance through the *āśramas* to become a renouncer.

We will see shortly that the main part of *Janakaśukasamvāda*'s solution to this problem consists in relegating ascetic practices to previous lives. Such ascetic practices prepare one's mind for liberating insight. The role of the teacher on such a path to liberation is to provide a final "push" by bestowing liberating knowledge on a suitable candidate who no longer needs to adopt the lifestyle of the renouncer in his or her final life.

It is significant that the *guru* of both Śuka and Janaka here is Vyāsa, who is arguably the most important Vedic sage in the *Mahābhārata*. One of the messages of this passage is that it is not enough for kings (or others) simply to read and master treatises on liberation (*mokṣaśāstra*). Having a Brahmin advisor is indispensable for achieving the fruit described in these texts.

There may be further reasons for making Janaka in particular the disciple of Vyāsa. Elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* Janaka appears as an independent authority on *mokṣa* or as a student of wandering mendicants, such as Pañcaśikha (e.g., 12.211, 12.308), whose affiliation to the Brahmanical mainstream is somewhat dubious. King Janaka is also claimed by the Buddhist and Jaina traditions (see Appleton 2016). The *Janakaśukasamvāda*, on the other hand, brings Janaka firmly under Brahmanical authority and neutralises the threat that Janaka poses to the importance of Brahmins as royal advisors.

This may be an appropriate moment to contrast the present episode with the final part of the *Yājñavalkyajanakasamvāda* (12.298-306) in order to highlight the unique ideological position of the *Janakaśukasamvāda*. The teachings of Yājñavalkya to king Janaka, too, claim that 'the cause of liberation is *jñāna* ' (*jñānān mokṣo jāyate*; 12.306.84). Although Janaka's teacher *Yājñavalkya* is

himself a celebrated Vedic sage, he says that *jñāna* can be obtained from members of any of the four *varṇas* (*prāpya jñānaṃ brāhmaṇāt kṣatriyād vā; vaiśyāc chūdrād api nīcād (...)*; 12.306.85) because everything in this world is *brahman* (*sarvaṃ viśvaṃ brahma*; 12.306.86). After receiving these teachings, Janaka installs his son as the ruler of Videha and himself practices *dharma* of a *yati* (*yatidharma*), despising common *dharma* and *adharma*, and studying *sāṃkhyajñāna* and *yogaśāstra* (12.306.94-5). Moreover, the concluding part of the *Yājñavalkyaśāstra* claims that '*jñāna* is superior to sacrifice' (*jñānaṃ viśiṣṭaṃ na tathā hi yajñā*; 12.306.105) because 'the person who reaches heaven by sacrifice (...) falls back on earth' (*yajñais (...) divaṃ samāsādyā patanti bhūmau*; 12.306.106). The *Yājñavalkyaśāstra* thereby subscribes to a more ascetic worldview in its version of king Janaka and provides no real compromise between the pursuit of *mokṣa* and sacrificial Vedic religion. Such a comparison with the *Yājñavalkyaśāstra* highlights the unambiguously Brahmanical householder version of Janaka advocated by the *Janakaśukasaṃvāda*.

8.3.2. *Mokṣa* and activity in previous lives.

In the previous section I discussed the first two verses of Janaka's answer to Śuka's question about the possibility of reaching *mokṣa* without following through the four *āśramas*. These first two verses postulated that the cause of liberation is knowledge or insight (*jñāna*), and that this liberating knowledge is attained from a teacher (*guru*). In this section I will discuss the next two verses of his answer.

As noted above, if it is permitted that liberation can be achieved without adopting the ascetic lifestyle and practices of the final *āśrama*, renunciation becomes meaningless and so does the *āśrama* system, at least in its classical formulation. On the other hand, if it is admitted that

mokṣa is the highest human aspiration, then any worldly activity becomes a mere distraction.

Janaka attempts a solution to this problem in his speech to Śuka.

After emphasising the essential role of the *guru*, Janaka asserts the value of the *āśrama* system without yet stating that it is necessary for liberation to follow its pattern:

The ancient [sages] practiced the *dharma* of the four *āśramas* to preserve the worlds and actions/rituals.

anucchedāya lokānām anucchedāya karmaṇām
*pūrvair ācarito dharmaś cāturāśramyasaṃkāṭaḥ*¹⁹⁵ [-*kathah*] (12.313.24)

According to this verse, the existence of the worlds (*lokas*) and ritual actions (*karma*) have their own value, which is independent from *mokṣa*. The *dharma* of the four *āśramas* is practiced to uphold their existence, and not just for the sake of *mokṣa*. It may be implied, however, that the continued existence of society is a precondition for the preservation and transmission of liberating knowledge. In other words, it might be implied here that the Brahmanical society of *varṇāśramadharma* is necessary for and therefore exists for the sake of *mokṣa*. In any case, this verse suggests that even a person who desires *mokṣa* should first engage in the first three *āśramas*, in which ritual action is undertaken.

Janaka further reveals that obtaining liberating knowledge through association with a teacher (*gurusambandha*) is not a sufficient cause of *mokṣa*. Or, rather, such knowledge cannot be grasped unless other conditions have been fulfilled in previous lives. After promoting the value of ritual action, Janaka continues:

¹⁹⁵ K2,4,6 V1 B0,6-9 Da3 Dn1,n4 D2,3,5,8. A more elaborate translation of *cāturāśramyasaṃkāṭa dharma* would perhaps be “*dharma* in which is included (*saṃkāṭa*) that which belongs to [all] the four *āśramas*”.

Having abandoned both good and bad action by the application of this sequence of actions [appropriate to each of the *āśramas*] over many lives, *mokṣa* is attained here.

[Translation of CE text]: Having done both good and bad action by action over many lives by the application of this sequence [of *āśramas*], *mokṣa* is attained here.

*anena kramayogena bahujātiṣu karmaṇām [karmaṇā]¹⁹⁶
hitvā¹⁹⁷ [kṛtvā] śubhāśubhaṁ karma mokṣo nāmeha labhyate (12.313.25)*

Either this verse is very idiosyncratic, or the middle recension reading is to be preferred¹⁹⁸.

Let us discuss the CE reading first. The CE text suggests that doing both good (*śubha*) and bad (*aśubha*) actions are instrumental for attaining *mokṣa*. This is highly unusual. To begin with, one may wonder how and why doing bad (*aśubha*) action is conducive to *mokṣa*. Another reason for doubting the validity of this reading is that when the phrase “*kṛtvā śubhāśubhaṁ karma*” occurs elsewhere, the performance of such action is opposed to the pursuit of *mokṣa*. This opposition is stated most clearly in this *Mahābhārata* verse:

Having performed good and bad actions, the agent expects its result. He is helplessly yoked with that result. Therefore, how could there be liberation for [such] a person [who acts]?

*śubhāśubhaṁ puruṣaḥ karma kṛtvā; pratīkṣate tasya phalaṁ sma kartā
sa tena yujyaty avaśaḥ phalena; mokṣaḥ kathaṁ syāt puruṣasya tasmāt (3.225.22)*

The vast majority of the remaining occurrences of the compound *śubhāśubha* (“good and bad”) in the *Mahābhārata* are in discussions of *śubhāśubha* action which leads to *śubhāśubha* fruits.

¹⁹⁶ K2,4 V1 B0,6-9 Da3 Dn1,n4 Ds D2,5,7,8 T G1-3,6.

¹⁹⁷ K6,7 V1 B0,6-9 Da3,a4 Dn1,n4 D2-5,7-9 M5,6.

¹⁹⁸ Bowles avoids dealing with these problems, opting for a summary: ‘With the destruction of *karma*, both good and bad, through many lifetimes *mokṣa* is indeed possible from the first *āśrama* (313.25-26)’ (2019:191). It is not at all clear how Bowles derives this from the CE text, which reads *kṛtvā*. What Bowles then concludes concerning the story of Śuka is that ‘[t]hough this story suggests the *gr̥hastha* is unnecessary, it nevertheless appears to presuppose that the sequential system [of the *āśramas*] is normative; it is not, in other words, a reflection of the *vikalpa* system, but, rather, a modification or critique of the *samuccaya* system’ (2019:191-192). It would be more precise to say that this text provides conditions for making exceptions for the normal progression to the four *āśramas* rather than being ‘modification or critique’ of the classical system of sequential *āśramas* (*samuccaya*).

Experiencing such good and bad fruits of action is by definition the opposite of *mokṣa*. I am not aware of any other instances where performing good *and* bad action is said to be a cause of *mokṣa* (but see below for a discussion of the idea that action in general is the cause of perfection).

The middle recension, by contrast, reads *hitvā* instead of *kṛtvā*, saying that *mokṣa* is attained when good and bad action is abandoned. This is a standard understanding of *mokṣa*. Many verses could be cited from the *Mahābhārata* where the phrase “*hitvā śubhāśubhaṃ karma*”, or its paraphrase, or simply giving up *śubhāśubha*, appears when discussing the causes or requirements of *mokṣa*¹⁹⁹.

Thus, the middle recension reading subscribes to the standard understanding that renunciation and *mokṣa* involves giving up good and bad action or giving up pairs of opposites more generally, of which *śubhāśubha* is but one pair.

I would argue that the middle recension reading is not just more regular but also makes better sense in Janaka’s speech as a whole. My understanding of this verse, following the middle recension, is that the person repeatedly goes through the four *āśramas* over many lifetimes, and therefore repeatedly gives up good and bad action when entering the fourth *āśrama*. Alternatively, the verse could mean that giving up good and bad action is a very long process, which requires following the sequence of the *āśramas* over many lifetimes.

¹⁹⁹ For example, 12.180.29; 3.203.35=*Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*, V(6.34) (SM4.3) verse 4; 12.238.10; 12.339.11; 14.47.11.

8.3.3. Purification in previous lives

We have now discussed four verses of the pentad that articulates Janaka's view on *mokṣa*. The fifth verse concludes Janaka's initial explanation of why it is possible to reach *mokṣa* without going through all the *āśramas* in the present lifetime:

This purified person reaches *mokṣa* [even] in the first *āśrama* with faculties ("instruments") that have been cultivated over many births in *saṃsāra*.

*bhāvitaiḥ karaṇaiś²⁰⁰ [kāraṇaiś] cāyaṃ bahusaṃsārayoniṣu
āsādayati śuddhātmā mokṣaṃ vai prathamāśrame* (12.313.26)

We have seen above that a *guru* is indispensable for obtaining liberating knowledge (*jñāna*). This verse makes it clear that in order to attain *mokṣa* one also needs to have previously engaged in some purifying activity over many lifetimes. Such purifying activity is presumably linked to following the sequence of the four *āśramas*. This could mean that purification directly relevant to *mokṣa* happens in the final *āśrama* only, or it could mean that all *āśramas* are purificatory. Such purification entails cultivation of faculties (*karaṇas*; literally "instruments"), and I believe that Nīlakaṇṭha's understanding makes good sense in the context. He glosses: 'with purified [faculties] such as the intellect' ("bhāvitaiḥ" śodhitaiḥ" karaṇaiḥ" buddhyādibhiḥ). Thus, in order to grasp *jñāna*, one's intellectual faculties must first be purified by ascetic practices. The alternative reading *bhāvitaiḥ kāraṇaiḥ*, adopted in the Critical Edition, could be understood as indicating that one cultivates the causes (*kāraṇas*) of liberation as one follows through the sequence of the four *āśramas* over many lifetimes.

Contrary to my interpretation, one may suppose that the (ritual) action done over many lifetimes is the cause of *mokṣa*. This objection would be in line with the CE text of the previous verse

²⁰⁰ K6,7 Dn1,n4 D4,9 T G1,6 M1,5-7. The reading adopted (*karaṇa*) is only supported by a few of the middle recension manuscripts but has support from most of the Southern recension.

(*kṛtvā karma*, etc.) and the verse just cited if the CE reading *kāraṇa* is adopted and taken to mean “ritual action”. The idea that *karma* is the cause of *mokṣa* contradicts most of the ascetic teachings in the *Mahābhārata* as well as in Buddhist and Jaina traditions. Nevertheless, this idea is found in the *Bhagavadgītā* in relation to king Janaka: ‘[Kings] such as Janaka undertook perfection by action alone’ (*karmaṇaiva hi saṃsiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ* 3.20ab). It is not impossible that acquaintance with this passage of the *Bhagavadgītā* inspired the reading *kṛtvā* instead of *hitvā* in verse 25 as well as *kartavya* instead of *prāptavya* in verse 13. A similar opposition between the CE text and the middle recension is found elsewhere in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* as well²⁰¹. There are further parallels between the *Janakaśukasamvāda* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, some of which will be discussed below. It would be natural for someone familiar with the *Bhagavadgītā* to read the *Janakaśukasamvāda* as a restatement of its position.

The *Bhagavadgītā*’s claim about karma as the means by which Janaka attained perfection only makes sense in the *Bhagavadgītā* context of *karmayoga*. This is made clear in the *Bhagavadgītā* verse which immediately precedes the mention of Janaka:

Therefore, always perform the action that needs to be done with detachment.
Indeed, a man obtains the highest by performing action with detachment.

tasmād asaktaḥ satataṃ kāryaṃ karma samācara
asakto hy ācaran karma param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ (3.19)

I take *karmayoga* to mean detached activity in accordance with the duties specific to one’s own class (*svadharma*). Yet no such notion of detached action is found in the *Janakaśukasamvāda*.

²⁰¹ One such verse occurs within the ascetic teachings of the sage Nārada, who lectures Śuka soon after the latter departs from Janaka (12.316-318). These two *adhyāyas* are significant repository of a variety of ascetic verses. It is most striking that one of the verses describes the wise person as *sarvārambhaphalatyaḡī* – ‘renouncing the fruits of all undertakings’ (12.316.4). This apparent reference to the *karmayoga* doctrine of the *Bhagavadgītā* is not supported by the majority of the manuscripts: K6 V1 B0,6-9 Da3,a4 Dn1,n4 Ds D2,3,8 T2 G1-3 M1,5-7 read *pari* instead of *phala*, making this just a standard ascetic verse about renouncing all actions.

Nor does it mention *svadharma*. I therefore doubt that this passage of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* was composed to say that performance of *karma* is the cause of *mokṣa*. I have already noted that including *aśubha* action in the path to *mokṣa* seems rather strange. Furthermore, if action was the cause of *mokṣa*, there would be no need whatsoever for renunciation as institutionalised in the fourth *āśrama*, but we have seen that the author(s) of this passage held the *dharma* of the four *āśramas* in very high esteem. This emphasis on the *āśrama* system suggests a possible incompatibility between the doctrines of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* and the *Bhagavadgītā*. I will return to this point in the next section. Finally, it should be noted that when Janaka describes Śuka's liberated state at the end of this *adhyāya*, he makes no further reference to *karma*.

I believe that the following interpretation of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* is more coherent and plausible: one must repeatedly follow the sequence of the four *āśramas*, purifying oneself in the fourth *āśrama* of renunciation, until one is suitable for grasping liberating knowledge and can therefore be liberated in a single lifetime with the help of a teacher but without further recourse to renunciation. Thus, when Śuka claims to have the achievements associated with the fourth *āśrama*, such as being free from dualities (*nirdvaṃdva*), this must be because he has practiced the ascetic disciplines of the fourth *āśrama* in his previous lives and has retained his achievements.

The view that the path to liberation (*mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*) spans several lifetimes is a standard doctrine in Buddhism, but for the *Mahābhārata* it is rather unusual²⁰². The renouncer is usually described as *mukta* ("released") and/or as simply having the mental states of *nirdvaṃdvatā*, desirelessness, and so forth, without any claims that he is working towards a more distant future

²⁰² Regarding Jainism, Johnson has noted that 'what is largely absent from the earliest texts is the idea that there is any gradation or progression through a series of births to ultimate liberation' (1995:23). Cf., however, the third chapter of the *Uttarādhyāyanasūtra*.

goal (even if this may be implicitly understood). The idea that liberation is a process that requires many lifetimes is found in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Since there are further parallels between the two texts, I will devote the next section to a comparison of some relevant passages of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Afterwards, I will discuss a passage from the *Milindapañha* to show that the interpretation of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* that I have proposed is in line with ideas about liberation that are recorded not just in parts of the *Bhagavadgītā* but outside the *Mahābhārata* as well.

8.4. Parallel passages from the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Milindapañha*

8.4.1. The *Bhagavadgītā*

The *Bhagavadgītā* puts forth the idea that a practitioner of yoga who fails to reach the final goal in one lifetime will regain the same intellectual faculty (*buddhi*²⁰³) in the next life and continue striving towards perfection:

There [, having been born in a family of *yogins*,] he is again endowed with the same intellectual faculty that belonged to his previous body. Then he strives further for perfection, oh Joy of the Kurus.

*tatra taṁ buddhisamyogaṁ labhate paurvadehikam
yatate ca tato bhūyaḥ saṁsiddhau kurunandana* (6.43)

And two verses later:

The *yogin* who exerts with effort, whose faults have been purified and who has been perfected over many lifetimes then reaches the highest goal.

*prayatnād yatamānas tu yogī saṁśuddhakilbiṣaḥ
anekajanmasaṁsiddhas tato yāti parāṁ gatim* (6.45)

²⁰³ I understand that in this passage *buddhi* refers to the mental or intellectual faculty which is purified by meditation and which is capable of seeing the *ātman* and grasping the supreme bliss that is beyond the reach of the senses (see: *yatra caivātmanātmānaṁ paśyann ātmani tuṣyati|| sukham ātyantikaṁ yat tad buddhigrāhyam atīndriyam/* 6.20cd-6.21ab). This is also in line with Nīlakaṇṭha's understanding of *karaṇa* as mental faculty in the *Janakaśukasamvāda*.

The ideas about purification over many lifetimes expressed in these verses are remarkably similar to those found in the *Janakaśukasamvāda*. According to the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, the ‘highest goal’ is achieved by purifying oneself over many lifetimes. Such purification is achieved by the practice of yoga: ‘One should yoke yoga for the purification of oneself’ (*yuñjyād yogam ātmaviśuddhaye*; 6.12). It should be noted, however, that the *yogin* of the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* is not the *karmayogin* discussed above but rather a renunciate who gives up action in order to practice meditation. That such a practitioner of yogic meditation is a solitary renouncer is illustrated especially by the following verse from the same chapter:

The *yogin* should always yoke his self in a secluded place. [He should be] solitary,
of controlled mind and self, without expectations, and without property.

yogī *yuñjīta* *satatam* *ātmānaṁ* *rahasi* *sthitaḥ*
ekākīyatacittātmā nirāśīr aparigrahaḥ (6.10)

The terminology used in this verse and throughout the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* is elsewhere associated with renouncers in the fourth *āśrama*²⁰⁴. Thus, in the *Bhagavadgītā* one finds the same idea that is expressed in the *Janakaśukasamvāda*, namely, that one performs ascetic practices associated with the fourth *āśrama* over many lifetimes and achieves liberation when this process of perfection and purification is complete.

There is, nevertheless, a major difference between the two texts. The emphasis on the *āśrama* system in the *Janakaśukasamvāda* stands in sharp contrast with the *Bhagavadgītā*. In 1993, Olivelle noted that, ‘[t]he total absence of the term *āśrama* in the *Gītā*, however, remains a riddle,

²⁰⁴ To be more precise, the terminology used in this chapter is found not only elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, but also in the Buddhist and Jaina descriptions of renouncers (apart from *nirāśis* and *aparigraha* mentioned in the verse above, these terms could be highlighted: *brahmabhūta*, *nirvāṇa*, *samaloṣṭāśmakāñcana*, *kūṭastha*, and *samabuddhi*; this chapter should also be compared to the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*). These observations allow to appreciate that the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* is based on such ascetic yogic materials, to which a dialogue frame and five verses about Kṛṣṇa have been added (6.14-15, 6.30-31, and the final verse 6.47). A very similar yogic path without any *bhakti* elements is found, for example, in 12.232.

and no scholar, to my knowledge, has until now even recognized the existence of this riddle, let alone attempted to solve it ' (1993:106). Olivelle's own solution, which is put forth with due caution, is that the author of the *Bhagavadgītā* was only familiar with what he calls the "original formulation" of the *āśrama* problem, according to which the *āśramas* were alternative options, and not sequential. Presumably, this was unsuitable in the context of the *Bhagavadgītā* because it allows for choice, but '[i]t is just such choice in matters of *dharma* (...) that Kṛṣṇa is attempting to combat ' (Olivelle 1993:105). This is a brilliant solution, but I find it unlikely that the *Bhagavadgītā* as whole predates the parts of the *Śāntiparvan* in which the "classical system" of sequential *āśramas* is taken for granted. Olivelle himself notes that 'discussions of the *āśramas* in the *Mahābhārata*, especially within the *Śāntiparvan*, (...) usually follow the pattern of the classical system ' (1993:153). The *Bhagavadgītā*, however, is familiar with the majority of systems of thought and practice that are found in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, such as yoga, Sāṃkhya, and *bhakti*, and it offers an original synthesis of these religious-philosophical currents. Taking this into account, it seems unlikely that the *Bhagavadgītā* reached its present form at a time when the classical *āśrama* system had not yet been formulated. I am not aware of any other solutions to this "riddle" published since, and when Bowles mentions this issue in a freshly published book chapter he only refers to Olivelle's work of 1993 (Bowles 2019: note 50).

Perhaps the *Bhagavadgītā* does not mention the *āśrama* system because it offers a solution to the conflict between active (*pravṛtti*) and renunciatory (*nivṛtti*) values which has no room for the *āśrama* system in any of its formulations.

If the *karmayoga* doctrine is interpreted as a claim that action (karma) according to one's class duty (*svadharma*) is the cause of liberation or perfection, the *āśramas* of the forest-dweller (*vanaprastha*) and renouncer (*parivrājaka*; *bhikṣu*, etc.) become pointless²⁰⁵.

The model discussed in the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, which mentions the yogic path to liberation over several lifetimes, is more complex than just saying that desireless action offered to Kṛṣṇa will bring about liberation. Apparently, the author(s) of the *Bhagavadgītā* found it necessary to incorporate unambiguously ascetic yogic teachings in its text, perhaps with a view to aligning a competing renunciatory yoga with its own unique *karmayoga* and *bhaktiyoga*. This is what the opening of the sixth chapter says about the active and renunciatory yogas:

For a sage who is desirous to ascend [to yoga], action is said to be the means. When he has ascended to yoga, cessation of that very [action] is said to be the means.

ārurukṣor muner yogaṁ karma kāraṇam ucyate
yogārūḍhasya tasyaiva śamaḥ kāraṇam ucyate (6.3)

According to this verse, *karmayoga* is just a preliminary to a more advanced state characterised by *śama*, cessation of action. This could be called *dhyānayoga*, as indicated by the title of the 6th chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*²⁰⁶. It may be noted that this verse is in direct conflict with 5.2 which says that '*karmayoga* is superior to renunciation of action' (*karmasaṁnyāsāt karmayogo viśiṣyate*). Meanwhile, 13.24 claims that *dhyāna*, *sāṁkhya*, yoga, and *karmayoga* are all alternative means for perceiving the self (*ātman*). This certainly gives material for advancing speculations

²⁰⁵ Chapters three to five, in which the doctrine of *karmayoga* is expounded, also mention many of the ascetic themes that are found in the sixth chapter and ascetic discourses about the fourth *āśrama* such as equanimity (*śamatva*, *nirdvaṁdvatā*), finding happiness in one's own self (*ātman*), being without desire, being purified and liberated by means of *jñāna*, and so forth. As far as I can tell, these "achievements" are presented as available for a person devoted to action (*karman*) in accordance with his or her *svadharma*, which is precisely why there is no need for renunciation.

²⁰⁶ *Dhyānayoga* is the title of this chapter, although in the main text "*dhyānayoga*" appears only in 18.52. In any case, this is an appropriate label for the chapter.

about the history of the *Bhagavadgītā* but I do not want to engage here in further discussions of how the sixth chapter fits into the text of *Bhagavadgītā* as a whole.

Rather, I would like to contrast the 6th chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* with the views found in the *Janakaśukasamvāda*. According to the *Janakaśukasamvāda*, one repeatedly goes through all the *āśramas*, following the *dharma* of each *āśrama* in turn. Meanwhile, the 6th chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* assumes that one first practices *karmayoga*, in which renunciation has no place at all. Probably this is practiced over several lifetimes as well. Eventually, however, one renounces action and becomes a solitary meditating *yogin*. The *yogin* then goes through several lifetimes of ascetic yogic practice in which there is no room for being a “householder” (this term is absent in the *Bhagavadgītā* in the first place). Just like the *āśrama* system, this model places renunciation after being a householder. Yet since these two stages are not adjacent in a single lifetime, this model is incompatible with the Classical *āśrama* system.

Although they share many ideas and terms, the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Janakaśukasamvāda* offer two different models of a multi-life path to liberation. The relationship between these two parts of the *Mahābhārata* is complex. Their divergence reveals a plurality of views in the Brahmanical tradition, and it would be exciting to know of if any of these two passages was known to the author(s) of the other. The *Janakaśukasamvāda* may well be a rejection of *Bhagavadgītā*'s *karmayoga* and theistic doctrines in favour of the *āśrama* system, and *vice versa*.

8.4.2. The *Milindapañha*

In this section I will compare the *Janakaśukasamvāda* with the *Dhutaṅgapañha* (“The question about ascetic practices”) of the *Milindapañha*. I will argue that the *Janakaśukasamvāda* was most probably influenced by the ideas expressed in the *Milindapañha*, and that the

Milindapañha in turn supports my interpretation of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* by making clear what is ambiguously expressed in the latter.

The *Milindapañha* relates the conversations between king Milinda and the Buddhist master Nāgasena. *Milindapañha* is an exegetical work, familiar with other parts of the Pali canon, and aware of yoga and Sāṃkhya, which suggests a relatively late date.

The episode begins with King Milinda observing that while monks are occupied with the ascetic practices (*dhutaṅgas*), there are some householders that have obtained the fruit of non-returner (*puna passati gihī rājā anāgāmiṇaṃ* *ṭhite*; p.348 in Treckner's edition). This means that they are destined to reach the status of full *arhatship* after their present lifetime, although they may first have to undergo a rebirth in heaven. The king reflects that '[i]f householders could understand the *dhamma*, the ascetic practices would be pointless' (*bujjheyya ce gihī dhamme dhutaṅgaṃ nipphalaṃ siyā*; p.348). As noted above, I believe that exactly the same problem is addressed by the *Janakaśukasamvāda* and the *Sulabhājanakasamvāda*. Similar but unexpressed considerations may explain why the *Bhagavadgītā* ignores and thereby rejects the *āśrama* system. Note also that in both the *Janakaśukasamvāda* and the *Milindapañha* the cause of liberation is understanding or grasping knowledge (*jñāna* or *dhamma* respectively).

For the Buddhist tradition this is an exegetical problem. Nāgasena acknowledges that there is an apparent contradiction in Buddhist canonical literature and refers to a list of canonical episodes in which laymen or gods hear the Buddha teach, understand the *dhamma*, and become non-returners without becoming renunciants (*ye te mahārāja devā gihī yeva te, na te pabbajitā...*, and so forth; p.350). Such passages may suggest that becoming a monk (*bhikkhu*) is not necessary for liberation.

Nāgasena begins his exegesis by praising the 28 good qualities of the ascetic practices and the 18 good qualities that they bestow on the practitioner. It is not necessary to discuss these qualities here, especially since this praise of *dhutaṅgas* does not address the scriptural paradox. The key idea of Nāgasena's answer is expressed in the following statement:

Those householders, oh king, who enjoy the sense pleasures and [nevertheless] perceive *nibbāna*, peace, and the highest good, all of them in previous births have carried out the thirteen ascetic practices (*dhutaṅgas*) and laid foundations in respect to them. Having there purified their conduct and behaviour, they now perceive *nibbāna*, peace, and the highest good [even while] being householders²⁰⁷.

Ye te mahārāja gihī agārikā kāmabhogino santaṃ paramatthaṃ nibbānaṃ sacchikaronti, sabbe te purimāsu jātisu terasasu dhutaṅgeṣu katupāsānā katabhūmikammā; te tattha cāraṇā ca paṭipattiṃ ca sodhayitvā ajj' etarahi gihī va santā santaṃ paramatthaṃ nibbānaṃ sacchikaronti. (p.352)

This spells out very clearly what I believe to be intended by the *Janakaśukasamvāda* as well. The role of the ascetic practices of renunciation is to purify a person over many lifetimes. We have seen above that the *Bhagavadgītā* 6.45 and the *Janakaśukasamvāda*, too, talk about purification achieved over many lifetimes (see *śuddhātmā* in 12.313.26). The phrase “*nibbānaṃ sacchikaronti* (literally: seeing *nibbāna* before one's eyes)” could also be understood to mean simply that the householders described by Nāgasena experience *nibbāna*. I have opted for a more literal translation in the light of the doctrine of the four stages of liberation. As seen above, king Milinda was wondering about householders who have obtained the fruit of non-returner (*anāgāmi-phala*) which is the third step before liberation (*arahatship*). Presumably, such householders “see *nibbāna* before their eyes” because they are certain to “experience” it after they die. One may wonder whether such ideas are operating in the background for the story of Śuka from the *Mahābhārata* as well. Although

²⁰⁷ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to assess how Nāgasena's exegesis fits with other doctrinal positions expressed in the Buddhist scriptures. The idea that 'lay disciples who are householders dressed in white and who enjoy pleasures are successful' (*upāsakā gihī odātavasanā kāmabhogino ārādhakā*) is found, for example, in the *Mahāvaccasutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*.

Janaka has obtained *jñāna* from his teacher, he is never called liberated (*mukta*). Furthermore, even though Śuka is described as *mukta* in some instances, he still needs to undergo voluntary death before he is *really* liberated (see Malinar 2011 on Śuka's use of yogic powers to finally exit his body in 12.320).

Nāgasena solidifies his point by saying:

Oh great king, it is not [possible] to perceive²⁰⁸ *arahatship* in a single lifetime without previously carrying out the ascetic practices. *Arahatship* is perceived by means of the highest valour, best conduct and [with the help of] a teacher, a virtuous friend, who himself has such qualities (*tathārūpena*).

Na, mahārāja, dhutaṅṇesu pubbāsevanaṃ vinā ekissā yeva jātiyā arahattaṃ sacchikiriyaṃ hoti, uttamaṇa pana viriyena uttamāya paṭipattiyaṃ tathārūpena ācariyena kalyāṇamittena arahattaṃ sacchikiriyaṃ hoti. (p.353)

He moreover says: 'Those who have not been purified by the ascetic practices cannot gain insight in the *dhamma*' (*na mahārāja dhutaṅṇehi avisuddhānaṃ dhammābhisamayo*²⁰⁹ *hoti*).

The very close resemblance of the key ideas of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* and the *Milindapañha* should be obvious by now. In both cases (1) renunciation in previous lives is a necessary condition for liberation, (2) renunciation serves the purpose of purification, (3) the direct cause of liberation is insight into *dhamma/jñāna* (4) liberating knowledge is obtained from a teacher, and (5) there is a distinction between a kind of living liberation and final liberation only achieved after leaving the body behind.

We have furthermore seen above that the *Janakaśukasamvāda* is familiar with the simile of liberating knowledge or teaching as a boat to be given up after crossing to the other side. It seems

²⁰⁸ Alternatively for both instances of "perceive" in this verse: "experience".

²⁰⁹ Note that *dhammābhisamaya* performs the same function in Nāgasena's model as Janaka's *jñānavijñāna*. The two compounds can be taken as synonyms, with the caveat that the content of liberating knowledge (*dhamma/jñāna*) may very well be different.

most likely that the author of the part of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* discussed above was quite familiar with the Buddhist tradition. It could be, but is not necessarily the case, that *Janakaśukasamvāda* is a rewrite of the *Dhutaṅgapañha* or a similar text, substituting *jñāna* for *dhamma*, Vyāsa for the Buddha, and ascetic practices of the fourth *āśrama* for the *dhutaṅgas*. The exegetical problem raised by king Milinda seems to be quite an obvious one in the Buddhist context, and the *Milindapañha* perhaps records a solution that was formulated some time before the *Dhutaṅgapañha* was composed. My claims about the influence of Buddhist exegesis on the *Janakaśukasamvāda* are therefore independent from the relative chronology of the two passages.

In this detour from the *Janakaśukasamvāda* I have discussed two passages that put forth similar views to the *Janakaśukasamvāda* concerning ascetic practices as means of purification over many lifetimes. I have argued that its parallels with the *Bhagavadgītā* are primarily with the sixth chapter on ascetic yoga, rather than with the chapters espousing *karmayoga*. A comparison with the *Milindapañha*, when combined with further observations, leaves little doubt that the *Janakaśukasamvāda* was composed in awareness of the Buddhist tradition, and supports my interpretation of the most crucial verses of the *Janakaśukasamvāda*.

8.5. A Brahmanical liberation: Seeing the self through meditation or receiving liberating knowledge from a teacher

All the main arguments of king Janaka in the *Janakaśukasamvāda* are contained in the verses discussed above. I would, nevertheless, like to summarise the remaining part of Janaka's speech and comment on a few issues. This will serve a number of purposes. First, I would like to highlight that the remaining part of Janaka's teachings to Śuka contain nothing that points to the *karmayoga* doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Second, I will show that the *Janakaśukasamvāda* also

includes some characteristically Brahmanical doctrines. Third, I will note that the *Janakaśukasamvāda* draws on floating ascetic poetry, repeating verses, phrases, and themes found elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*. This will help to appreciate the *Janakaśukasamvāda* as a product of a longer history of ascetic traditions in Ancient India, which combines general ascetic tropes with some possibly Buddhist materials that are now integrated within a specifically Brahmanical framework. In particular, I will argue in this section that Janaka draws on two different paradigms of liberating knowledge – (1) insight into the true nature of the self (*ātman*) attained through meditation and (2) liberating insight obtained from a teacher (*guru*).

We have seen in the five verses discussed above that Janaka suggests a path to liberation over many lifetimes, which has room for both ritual practices and renunciation, and which culminates in obtaining liberating knowledge from a *guru* without requiring further ascetic practice.

This Janaka’s discourse is followed by a verse which looks like a conclusion and does not add any details that require further comment in the present context:

What would indeed be the purpose of the three *āśramas* for the person who has reached *mokṣa*²¹⁰, is liberated, has seen²¹¹ the [highest] good, is wise, and desires the highest.

*tam āsādyā tu muktasya dṛṣṭārthasya vipaścitaḥ
triṣv āśrameṣu ko nv artho bhavet param abhīpsataḥ* (12.313.27)

Janaka’s speech, however, goes on, while no effort is made to explicitly link the following verses to the previous discourse. In contrast to the preceding part of Janaka’s speech, verses 28-40

²¹⁰ I have supplied the referent of the pronoun ‘*tam*’ from verse 26, which has been discussed above.

²¹¹ In the light of the *Milindapañha*, one may wonder whether “having seen the goal” is a state not unlike the non-returner of the Buddhist tradition. Śuka will indeed be “fully” liberated only at the end of this lifetime. This may even be a paraphrase from the *Milindapañha* which, as seen above, also uses the word *attha* to describe liberation as it is seen by the non-returner.

are made of stock phrases and imagery, and some of them are also found in other parts of the *Mahābhārata*. The purpose of these verses seems to be to illustrate Janaka's understanding of liberation so that Śuka can be said to possess the characteristics of a liberated person in verses 41-51. The latter group concludes the *adhyāya* and Śuka's audience with Janaka.

The first verse that Janaka utters to illustrate his understanding of liberation is especially notable:

One should always abandon the *rajasic* and *tamasic* faults. Having embarked on the *sattvic* path one would see the self by means of the self.

*rājasāṃś tāmasāṃś caiva nityaṃ doṣān vivarjayet
sāttvikāṃ mārgam āsthāya paśyed ātmānam ātmanā* (12.313.28)

This brings the *Janakaśukasamvāda* away from a Buddhism-inspired framework and closer to themes that are more specific to Brahmanical literature. This is the first introduction of Sāṃkhya terminology and of the concept of *ātman* in the *Janakaśukasamvāda*²¹².

It is notable that the content of liberating knowledge (*jñāna*) has not been defined up to this point. The present verse implies that this liberating knowledge is not the Buddhist *dharma*, but knowledge of the self (*ātman*).

Identifying *jñāna* with seeing the *ātman* leads to possible conflict between meditation as an individual undertaking on the one hand and *jñāna* being obtained from a teacher on the other hand. We have seen above that *jñāna*, which causes liberation, can only be obtained from a teacher. We

²¹² As Bronkhorst has noted, 'the conviction that a certain kind of knowledge of the true nature of the self can bring about, or assist, liberation (...) is only weakly attested in the Buddhist and Jaina canons, and much more strongly in early Brahmanical texts' (2007:28). Naturally, this has led most scholars to assume that this idea originates in Brahmanical tradition. Bronkhorst has argued that 'there is nevertheless sufficient evidence to accept that it is a product of the spiritual culture of Greater Magadha' (2007:28). Whatever the origin of this idea, it seems that it was established as a part of the Brahmanical tradition from the time of the early *Upaniṣads*. Eventually a belief in *ātman* became a marker of identity that drew a line between a Brahmanical orthodoxy and a Buddhist orthodoxy of no-self.

have also seen that this makes perfect sense in the context of the Buddhist tradition, which cherishes many narratives in which people learn the *dhamma* from the Buddha to their great benefit. A survey of the phrase “seeing the *ātman* by means of *ātman*” (*ātmānam ātmanā √paś*) in the *Śāntiparvan*²¹³ reveals, however, that it normally appears in a context of meditation and is not normally conceptualised as knowledge (*jñāna*).

All but one²¹⁴ occurrences of the phrase “seeing the self by means of the self” (*ātmānam ātmanā √paś*) in the *Śāntiparvan* (excluding the *Janakaśukasamvāda* itself) are found in the *Śukānupraśna* (12.224-247) which relates the teachings given by Vyāsa to Śuka. As Brockington notes, it ‘has a supposed unity as a discourse given by Vyāsa to his son Śuka but it is in fact a very heterogeneous collection of passages’ (2000:76). This collection includes a few apparently independent accounts of yogic meditation.

The first occurrence of this phrase in the *Śukānupraśna* is in 12.232, which describes the practice of yoga (*yogakṛtya*; 12.232.2). The result of meditative concentration described in this *adhyāya* is that the *yogin* ‘sees the self by means of the self’ (*paśyaty ātmānam ātmanā* 12.232.18).

The second occurrence of a similar phrase in the *Śukānupraśna* is in 12.238. There the practice of meditation (*dhyāna*; 12.238.7) is mentioned as a part of a yogic path, the result of which is that the *yogin* ‘sees the self in the self’ (*paśyaty ātmānam ātmani* 12.238.12). The passage soon talks about ‘*ātmapratyayika*²¹⁵ śāstram’, which is presented as ‘the secret of all the Vedas’

²¹³ The phrase ‘seeing the self by means of the self’ (*ātmanātmānam paśyann*) also occurs in the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* (6.28), which, as discussed above, describes a solitary meditator.

²¹⁴ Illumination of the subtle self is linked with meditation (*dhyāna*) in the *Yogavidhi: dīpayanti mahātmānaḥ sūkṣmam ātmānam ātmanā/ vītarāgā mahāprājñā dhyānādhyayanasaṃpadā*// (12.289.49). See also 12.195.5.

²¹⁵ According to the Sanskrit dictionary of Monier-Williams, *ātmapratyayika* means ‘that of which everybody can convince himself. In the present context, *ātmapratyayika śāstra* seems to mean rather something like the “instruction concerning the self” or “the instruction leading to the cognition (*pratyaya*) of the self”.

(*rahasyaṃ sarvavedānām*) and which I take to refer to the meditative teachings about seeing the *ātman* given in the passage up to verse 12 (12.238.15). This same instruction is later called *jñāna* (12.238.15), and this is then presented as a secret *dharma* (*rahasyadharmā*) that can only be revealed to one's own dear son (12.238.18). Thus, we have some blurring of *jñāna* as discursive knowledge (*śāstra*) and *jñāna* as meditative and direct knowledge of the *ātman*.

The third occurrence of a similar theme in the *Śukānupraśna* has a different wording but expresses a similar idea:

When one completely retracts the rays of the senses (*teṣāṃ*), the *ātman* shines forth like a lamp blazing in a pot.

*teṣāṃ tu manasā raśmīn yadā samyañ niyacchati
tadā prakāśate hy ātmā ghaṭe dīpa iva jvalan* (12.240.15)

This follows the same pattern as before. *Ātman* is seen in meditation, but this perception itself is not called *jñāna*, nor is a *guru* mentioned.

The fourth and final occurrence of a variation of the same phrase about seeing the *ātman* in the *Śukānupraśna* occurs in *adhyāya* 12.242. It is only in this passage that the perception of the self is conceptualised as liberating knowledge. Mirroring the passages discussed above, this *adhyāya* claims that if the senses are withdrawn from their objects it will be possible to see the eternal *ātman* (12.242.6). A few verses later it is said that 'one sees the self by oneself with the lamp of "knowledge" that has been lit' (*jñānadīpena dīptena paśyaty ātmānam ātmanā*; 12.242.10ab). It would seem natural to take *jñāna* as the *faculty* that is capable of perceiving the *ātman*²¹⁶. The next verse of the *Śukānupraśna* talks about obtaining the highest *buddhi* (*parāṃ buddhim avāpya* 12.242.11). I see no

²¹⁶ In a similar line from the *Janakaśukasamvāda* the expected *buddhi* ("intellect") is found instead of *jñāna*: 'the self can be seen with the lamp of "intellect" (*tathā buddhipradīpena śakya ātmā nirikṣitum*; 12.313.40)'.

other interpretation but to take this *buddhi* to be the knowledge gained when perceiving the *ātman*. Thus, the common meanings of *jñāna* and *buddhi* are swapped in this passage. The immediately following verses in 12.242 employ the metaphor of crossing the river, which we have also seen in the *Janakaśukasamvāda*, claiming that the river can be crossed with *buddhi* (*prataraṣva nadīm buddhyā*²¹⁷; 12.242.14c).

I would argue that the *Janakaśukasamvāda* and chapter 12.242 of the *Śukānupraśna* combine two discourses about liberation that might have initially been separate²¹⁸. On the one hand, we have seen above that a number of passages in the *Mahābhārata* describe a meditative path which results in seeing the *ātman*. This is not normally conceptualised as *jñāna*. Such passages place no special emphasis on the teacher, meditation ultimately being an individual endeavour. On the other hand, one finds a number of passages that describe liberation by using the metaphor of a boat crossing the river. I have quoted passages where this boat is identified with *jñāna* and *buddhi*, but 12.227.17 also mentions boats made of *prajñā* (“wisdom”), whereas in 12.309.17 *dharma* itself is the means of crossing over²¹⁹. In several of these passages the exact nature of this liberating knowledge or wisdom is left unspecified, and it seems unlikely that all of these are to be understood as *ātmajñāna* (knowledge of the self). Śuka once asks for clarification in the *Śukānupraśna*: ‘What is that [liberating] knowledge (...)?’ (*kiṃ taj jñānam*; 12.229.2). Vyāsa’s answer is intriguing and requires

²¹⁷ *Buddhināvā* is also found in 12.316.39. See also 12.227.11: *nadīm tarati buddhimān*.

²¹⁸ This opposition is not unlike the much-discussed two paths theory in Buddhism which examines meditation (*dhyāna*) or insight as two opposed (or for some complementary) means for liberation (see, among others, Poussin 1936; Griffiths 1981; Anālayo 2016; Wynne 2018; Anālayo 2018). For treatment of similar themes in Jainism see Johnson (1995). From the *Mahābhārata*, some versions of the opposition between yoga and *sāṃkhya* may be relevant here (e.g. 12.289.7).

²¹⁹ It is tempting to speculate that this inconsistency in terminology could be explained by supposing that “*jñāna*”, “*prajñā*” and “*buddhi*” would all be reasonable translations of the Buddhist “*dharma*”, and that all the above-mentioned *Mahābhārata* passages that use the metaphor of the boat are ultimately inspired by the Buddhist tradition. This requires further investigation. The hypothesis that *ātmajñāna* is a response to Buddhist *dhamma* as liberating knowledge is further suggested by a passage from the *Śukānupraśna* which defines the acquisition of *ātmajñāna* as the cause of becoming a *buddha* (*etad buddhvā bhaved buddhaḥ*) and polemically asks: ‘What else could be the defining characteristic of a *buddha*?’ (*kim anyad buddhalakṣaṇam*; 12.241.11).

further investigation: ‘He who sees existence to be without inherent nature...’ (*yas tu paśyet svabhāvena vinā bhāvam* (...); 12.229.3). Thus, in at least one instance the knowledge that can be used for “crossing over” is explained in terms that could hardly be taken to refer to *ātmajñāna*. In contrast to the individual pursuit of meditation, liberating knowledge is said to be obtainable from a teacher in the *Janakaśukasamvāda* passage discussed above, in the *Bhagavadgītā* 4.34-36, and in the *Śukānupraśna*: ‘The wise make the ignorant cross over with boats made of knowledge (*prajñā*)’ (*prajñayā nirmitair dhīrās tārāyanty abudhān plavaiḥ*; 12.228.2ab).

The *Janakaśukasamvāda* is claiming that the *guru* can bestow upon his disciple the same knowledge of the self that is normally obtained in meditation. Such a claim could be used to promise householder kings that they can obtain the same reward as meditating yogins merely by associating themselves with a Brahmin teacher. Whether appealing to householder kings in such a way was indeed an important motivation for composing the *Janakaśukasamvāda* cannot be determined, but it seems quite likely to have been the case.

8.6. General ascetic teachings in the speech of Janaka

A notable part of Janaka’s apparent illustration of his understanding of liberation is his recitation of verses attributed to king Yayāti:

Hear the stanzas on this topic that were sung by king Yayāti. These are remembered, oh dear one, by the twice-born who are skilled in treatises on liberation.

*atra gāthāḥ purā gītāḥ śṛṇu rājñā yayātinā
dhāryante yā dvijais tāta mokṣaśāstraviśāradaḥ* (12.313.31)

A summary of Yayāti’s verses (32-40) will suffice for the present purposes. Unlike the core of the more original speech of king Janaka discussed above, Yayāti’s song is just a collection of logically unconnected verses. Four of the the *gāthās* sung by king Yayāti share the final *pāda* ‘*brahma*

sampadyate tadā ' (12.313.33, 34, 36, 38). Collections of verses with identical final *pādas* is a common feature of ascetic poetry in the *Mahābhārata*, and in Buddhist and Jaina literature. Two of these verses are shared with the *Senajidgītā* (12.168.42 and 44) and with the *Mahābhārata* 12.243.4 and 6; one with 12.254.17. Moreover, there are four other occurrences of the *pāda* ' *brahma sampadyate tadā* ' in the *Śāntiparvan* (12.7.35; 12.17.22.; 12.21.5; 12.231). Besides this recurring phrase, one of Yayāti's verses is a variation of the common ascetic simile of the turtle that withdraws its limbs (12.313.39).

Two of Yayāti's verses are about seeing the self (*ātman*) or the light of the self. Three are about equanimity (*śamatva*) and indifference towards the pairs of opposites (being *nirdvaṃdva*). Three are more generally on discipline and ethical attitude to other beings.

Tracing the usage of such general ascetic verses in teachings associated with kings in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* is one of the overarching themes of my thesis. I have explored how such teachings are employed in the *Senajidgītā* (12.168) and in the *Sagarāriṣṭanemiśaṃvāda* (12.277) in particular. In all of these instances, the implication of citing such verses describing the mental achievements of the renouncer is to suggest that similar if not the same mental states could also be attained by people who are not ascetics, such as Śuka or kings Janaka, Senajit, or Sagara. Janaka does not mention the circumstances in which Yayāti was believed to have sung such verses but a reference to a *bhikṣu* in one of them betrays their original context (12.313.39).

While the song of Yayāti is explicitly said to be describing a renouncer (*bhikṣu*), the purpose of Janaka's speech is to say that a person can have these very spiritual attainments even if he is not a *bhikṣu*. In the concluding part of this speech in the *Janakaśukasāṃvāda*, Janaka claims that Śuka too has these qualities (12.313.41).

Janaka then returns to the key role of the *guru* in Śuka's extraordinary achievement as a *brahmacārin* in the first *āśrama*, and he finally says something about himself as well:

Oh, Brahmin sage, you are known to have approached the end of the sense world by your *guru*'s grace and by your own studiousness.

Through the grace of that very *guru*, I also previously attained divine knowledge, by means of which I recognise you [to be liberated].

<i>brahmarṣe</i>		<i>viditaś</i>		<i>cāsi</i>		<i>viṣayāntam</i>		<i>upāgataḥ</i>
<i>guros</i>	<i>tava</i>	<i>prasādena</i>	<i>tava</i>			<i>caivopāśikṣayā</i>		(12.313.42)
<i>tasyaiva</i>	<i>ca</i>	<i>prasādena</i>		<i>prādurbhūtaṃ</i>			<i>mahāmune</i>	
<i>jñānaṃ divyaṃ mamāpīdaṃ tenāsi vidito mama</i> (12.313.43)								

These verses confirm that it is the *guru* who bestows knowledge through his grace (*prasāda*).

They also provide a model for the interaction of Brāhmaṇical teachers and kings because Janaka, too, is dependent on his *guru* Vyāsa for his divine knowledge. In the light of the preceding discussion the reader could assume that Janaka was eligible for such *jñāna* because he had purified himself by ascetic practices in previous lives. Nevertheless, the status of Janaka remains ambiguous. It is not explicitly discussed whether he also possesses the other qualities of the *bhikṣu* mentioned in the song of Yayāti, nor is it clarified whether his divine knowledge is the same liberating knowledge that Śuka has obtained from Vyāsa.

After this, Janaka devotes three verses to Śuka's inability to perceive his own achievements (44-46), in three further verses he once more describes Śuka as possessing the qualities of a liberated person (47-49), and in the remaining two verses Janaka again proclaims that Śuka's attainments are obvious to him and concludes their conversation (50-51). There is no need to translate these verses here, but I would like to emphasise that Janaka again attributes to Śuka qualities that are found in standard descriptions of the renouncer. According to Janaka, Śuka is without craving (*alolupa*; 12.313.47) and has no attachment to his relatives (12.313.49). For Śuka there is no difference between

pleasure and pain (*nāsti te sukhaduḥkheṣu viśeṣo*; 12.313.48), and for him a piece of rock is the same as a piece of gold (*tulyaloṣṭāśmakāñcana*; 12.313.49). We have seen in chapter 2 that this compound is commonly used to describe *bhikṣus*. Significantly for my interpretation of Janaka's earlier claims, nothing here suggests that performing *karman* is in any way instrumental to reaching *mokṣa*, nor are there any allusions to the specific doctrines of the *karmayoga* of the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have proposed a new interpretation of the dialogue between Śuka and Janaka in *Mahābhārata* 12.313, which is known as the *Janakaśukasamvāda* in some manuscripts. The key ideological contribution of the *Janakaśukasamvāda* is to reconcile the normative status of the *āśrama* system with a notion that one may be liberated while not being a renouncer. I have proposed the following interpretation of king Janaka's position:

A person is purified over many lifetimes by pursuing renunciation in the fourth *āśrama*. One goes through the four *āśramas* in each life, rather than exclusively focusing on the *dharma* of the renouncer, because ritual action done in the other *āśramas* is necessary for the world and the Vedic tradition to continue. Eventually, one is purified and qualifies for liberating knowledge. Such knowledge can only be obtained from a teacher (*guru*) and requires no further ascetic practices. This is followed by a final release at the end of life. Such a path to liberation is unique in the *Mahābhārata*.

The main achievement of formulating such a path to liberation is that it retains the normative value of the *āśrama* system, providing a rationale for the householder as well as the renunciate *āśramas*, while also allowing for the possibility of liberation for people who are not renouncers.

This could be simply a solution to an exegetical problem which might have arisen in the Brahmanical tradition when the character of king Janaka became famous as a liberated householder. The problem is that if a householder can be liberated, the *āśrama* of renunciation becomes pointless.

Additionally, however, the *Janakaśukasamvāda* bolsters the importance of Brahmins as spiritual advisors, emphasising the importance and relevance for kings of the texts that Brahmins possess, i.e. “treatises on liberation (*mokṣaśāstra*)”, and, more importantly, stating that the study of such texts is necessary but not sufficient and that *guru*’s grace (*prasāda*) is required for obtaining liberating knowledge. The *guru* of king Janaka here is no lesser figure than the Vedic sage Vyāsa himself.

The doctrinal position of the *Janakaśukasamvāda*, however, is heavily influenced by if not borrowed from the Buddhist tradition, which faces a similar exegetical problem, and which records a very similar solution in the *Milindapañha*. Besides this, the speech of king Janaka draws on the ascetic literature of Ancient India, quoting various stock descriptions of a liberated person that are found elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, and in the Buddhist and Jaina literatures. Along with other parts in my thesis, this chapter contributes to understanding how such ascetic literature was incorporated into the *Mahābhārata*. In particular, I have shown that ascetic verses describing the mental qualities of the renouncer (*bhikṣu*) or the person in the fourth *āśrama* are repeatedly used in relation to householder kings. The underlying idea in all such *Mahābhārata* passages seems to be that such mental qualities and dispositions are what truly matters on the path to bliss (*sukha*) or liberation (*mokṣa*). As noted above, the logical conclusion of such views about liberation is that ascetic practices and renunciation are unnecessary. This train of thought is explored most vividly

in the *Sulabhājanakasaṃvāda*, discussed in chapter 7. While the *Sulabhājanakasaṃvāda* ultimately rejects the possibility that king Janaka could be liberated while remaining a householder king, the *Janakaśukasasaṃvāda* finds an ideological solution to this problem and apparently celebrates Janaka as a liberated householder king.

Even as it appears to draw on the Buddhist notion of *dharma/dhamma* as the boat for crossing to the other side, the *Janakaśukasasaṃvāda* includes a couple of verses about seeing the self (*ātman*) and once mentions the Sāṃkhya doctrine of the three *guṇas*. This integrates its teachings with characteristically Brahmanical discourses about liberation. A comparison with the texts incorporated in the *Śukānupraśna* suggests that this is a synthesis of two kinds of discourse about liberation. One group of discourses employs the metaphor of liberating knowledge as a boat for crossing to the other side, and I noted that such *Mahābhārata* discourses use an imagery that is also known in the Buddhist literature. The other group of discourses describes a meditative path that results in seeing the *ātman*. These two discourses are merged when liberating knowledge is identified with the knowledge of the *ātman*. This could create some problems for the interpretation of the *Janakaśukasasaṃvāda* if the individualistic path of yogic meditation is contrasted with the claim that liberating knowledge is gained from another person, namely, the *guru*. The *Janakaśukasasaṃvāda* appears to be claiming that a *guru* can bestow the benefit of yogic meditation through his grace (but, as noted above, this can only be effective if one is purified through ascetic practices in previous lives). Such a doctrine does the double work of integrating ascetic doctrines in mainstream Brahmanical discourses while making such doctrines marketable to kings by Brahmin *gurus*. It is not possible to tell to what extent the composition and inclusion of this passage in the *Mahābhārata* was really motivated by such aspiration for royal patronage on the part of Brahmins.

Furthermore, this chapter raised some concerns about the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* that require future analysis. Throughout this chapter I have adopted the version of the text that is transmitted by the majority of the Northern manuscripts, some readings being supported by some Southern manuscripts as well. While such an approach has made me to adapt some insignificant variant readings, others provide a better Sanskrit text, and a few are quite significant for understanding the key ideas of Janaka's speech. In particular, I have argued that in the *Janakaśukasamvāda* as well as in some other *Mahābhārata* passages the manuscripts that support the text constituted in the Critical Edition have smuggled in *karmayoga* doctrines.

The *Janakaśukasamvāda*, indeed, has a number of textual and conceptual parallels with the *Bhagavadgītā*, but a careful comparison of the two texts reveals that they offer two different visions of householder liberation. I have argued that a comparison with the *Janakaśukasamvāda* highlights the incompatibility of the *āśrama* system with the *karmayoga* doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā*. This suggests a plurality of views during the time when the *Mahābhārata* was composed.

My conclusion about the relationship between the *Janakaśukasamvāda* and the Buddhist tradition is exactly in line with Fitzgerald's speculations about the ideological role of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*: 'The MDhP[=*Mokṣadharmaparvan*] demonstrates to kings and their subjects in the post-Mauryan world that in addition to all the esoteric rites and Veda-based wisdom brahmins had cultivated in the past, brahmins had as much of the newer nonesoteric wisdom to teach as did the *nāstika* favorites of Candragupta and Aśoka' (2006:282). Despite making such claims, I do not believe that the hermeneutical potential of a serious engagement with Buddhist and Jaina literature has been sufficiently employed by Fitzgerald and other scholars working on the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* and other ascetic passages in the *Mahābhārata*. It appears that one of the

main hindrances for a proper understanding of the history of ideas in Ancient India in the centuries around the beginning of the common era is the institutional compartmentalisation of Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu studies. I hope that my thesis will demonstrate the hermeneutical value of reading the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* as a collection of intertextual pieces that are parts of a larger network of discourses going beyond the *Mahābhārata*²²⁰.

²²⁰ One could, of course, list a number of studies that do compare parts of the *Mahābhārata* with relevant Buddhist and/or Jaina material, such as the work by Bailey (e.g. 2011), Bronkhorst (2007), and Appleton (2016). Such studies, however, are the exception rather than the norm. None of the previous studies citing from the *Janakaśukasāṃvāda* treat it as a part of a network of ascetic teachings.

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