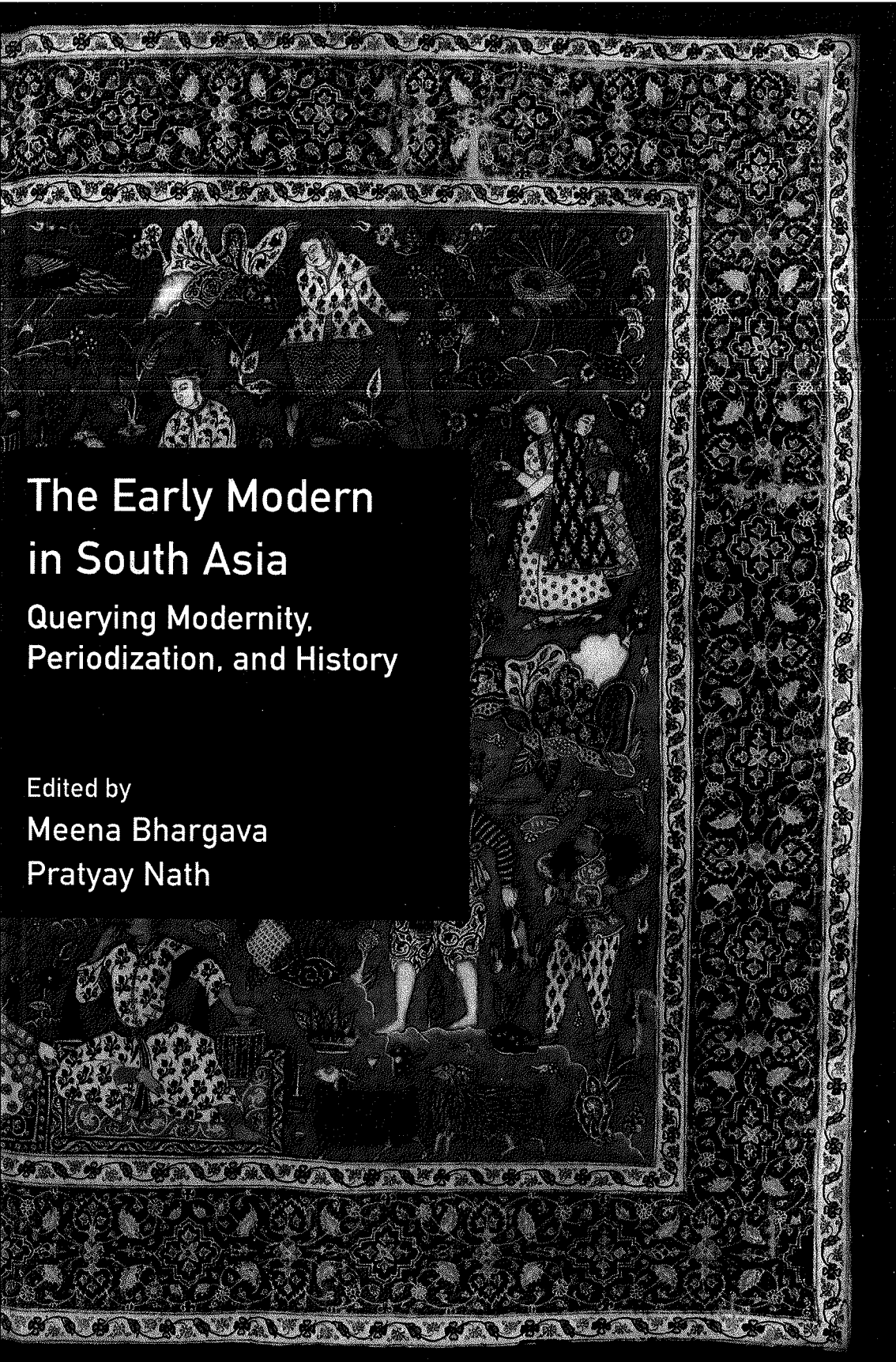

The Early Modern in South Asia

Querying Modernity, Periodization, and History

Edited by

Meena Bhargava

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Contents

4

Contestations and Negotiations

Early Modern Individualism in Jain Heterodoxy, *c.* 1470–*c.* 1770

Shalin Jain

While debating the 'early modern' in South Asian history, it is pertinent to acknowledge that the concept of 'medieval' is rooted in Orientalist discourse. Borrowed from Europe, the tripartite periodization has continued to loom large over the writing of South Asian history. In this chapter, however, I discuss the nature of early modernity in South Asia between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries in terms of some specific historical tendencies that characterized the history of Jainism. In terms of religious practices, Jainism witnessed the rise of individualistic consciousness and a new criticality during the period. In this context, I trace the formation of the individual as a category of analysis through the case study of two individuals from the Jain community. I further argue that the spirit of individualism, dialogue, debate, and dissent that characterized early modernity in Jainism in South Asia was derailed with the advent of colonial modernity.

Individualism and Early Modernity

There is a persisting uncertainty regarding the sites of differences and similarities with regard to medievalism and modernity across spaces; should one look into the material content of mundane life in order to locate patterns of common experiences, or in the world of ideas? European notions of modernity and their transplantation in the Asian context have ended up making tradition and modernity two opposite poles. However, both of these require to be seen in terms of interactions, more as overlapping circles than disconnected ones. As Franz-Josef Arlinghaus has argued, '... with respect to self-esteem, self-consciousness and (if at all) "autonomy" there are more similarities than differences between medieval and modern ways of being "individual"'.[1] Engagement with the concept of the individual as a site that generates cultural narratives offers a good point of entry for constructing connected histories of ideas, knowledge, and cultural production. In the case of Europe, the window to modernity was largely opened by individuals since the time of the Renaissance. This is what emerges from the works of scholars like Carlo

Ginzburg, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and Natalie Zemon Davis. Their 'new histories' reveal this by focusing on individual behaviour, choices, and experiences of characters like Menocchio and Martin Guerre.[2] The individual has been one of the key categories through which the advent of modernity has been explained in recent times. However, this exercise requires locating spaces of modernity, memory, interaction, and production across boundaries of space and time, as well as across periods of dynamic, often divergent, political and social developments. This creates the historiographical problem of situating both the individual and modernity within the existing overlapping, yet complex, relationship between medieval and early modern. Spaces for individual assertion, dissent, and diversity of opinions as well as levels of acceptance in such societies should be understood as parameters of their indigenous modernity.

In order to develop the premise of individualism, it becomes imperative to contextualize the issue within the larger debate. Scholarship on individualism and its functionality in South Asia has focused overwhelmingly on monotheistic contexts and the categories of community leadership – monarchs, nobles, religious preachers, and trendsetters.[3] The roles of common people and processes active on the margins of history but negotiating the formation of an individual engaged in heterodox projects and non-monotheistic religious traditions have largely been ignored. This approach has complemented the persisting hegemony of the category of the medieval in South Asian historiography, where until recently the traditional structural model did not allow scope for histories of dissent or the individual beyond the project of empires. Here, the dominant trend has been to project the common individual as an obedient, orthodox subject on the basis of official memoirs or court chronicles. Taken at face value, these textual narratives can produce the image of a society dominated entirely by the community with no space for manoeuvre by ordinary individuals. In this framework, dissent or innovations are mostly appropriated within the normative discourse, eclipsing the scope for differences, doubts, and arguments. In opposition to this, the present chapter is driven by an urge to re-define existing identities beyond normative contexts through a focus on unconventional individual attempts to embrace, surpass, and resist such definitions. In the history of South Asian Jainism, there have been instances of alternate, multiple, and vernacular modernities. They problematize the idea of European exclusivity in terms of the emergence of modernity. There are cases in South Asia too where individual identity was constructed and redefined constantly by dissenting personalities who simultaneously contested as well as negotiated asymmetrical power relations. This chapter locates diverse sites of everyday interactions, appropriations, and interpretations that made diverse

political statements and created spaces of subjectivity. I will focus on two eminent Jain individuals. The first is Lonka Shah, a fifteenth-century lay preacher of the Sthanakvasi Jain tradition from the Kathiawad region of Gujarat. The second is Banarsidas, an early seventeenth-century Shwetambar Jain from the Middle Gangetic Basin. Their lives reveal the nuances, complexities, and conflicts involved in the shaping of the rise of individualism as a marker of early modernity in South Asia.

Our existing understanding regarding the parameters of religiosity of this period needs to be nuanced in view of the textual expectations about what an individual as well as his or her conduct ought to have been. This is because conflicts arising out of individual actions became increasingly popular in heterogeneous ways during these centuries, defying both conservative and communitarian authorities. Therefore, merely reconstructing a social history through the information contained in the texts is not sufficient. The material aspect of the texts – the conditions and processes through which these texts were produced, circulated, exchanged, read, shared, and performed – also becomes vital. Another significant aspect is the issue of agency in relation with the intellectual and religious networks of Jain merchants. Here, reconciliation between worldly occupation and spiritual salvation seems to have been a problem for the merchants. One also has to address the issue of tensions between individual aspirations and collective needs in the kin and business networks as well as those of religious attitudes and institutions. The principal objective for me is to trace the nature of early modernity by analysing the relationship between the individual and the collective.

I plan to locate diverse sites of interaction and negotiation in the South Asian context rather than contrasting with the European 'others' and their religion. The fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries witnessed both the revival and the rise of intense disputations and critical engagements within the religious landscape of South Asia. Several intellectuals, regional state officials, and even lay individuals grew critical of all formal religious hierarchies. Reworking, reactivating, and revitalizing of tradition were practised generously within the Jain community. At times, such attempts were reflections of being a collective movement of a section of society to go beyond the dependence on the clergy. In many such crucial attempts, certain individuals were at the apex, acting as the central agency through which such heterodoxies found momentum. Since the fifteenth century, there were certain individual projects within South Asian Jainism which demonstrated attempts to mobilize religion into building unorthodox or individual campaigns, mostly in opposition to organized religion. Sometimes, such attempts also emerged in negotiation with organized religion or enjoyed the support of the

latter. The concept of the individual was not merely imposed from the above but grew within the communities themselves. By the seventeenth century, a new intellectual tendency increasingly facilitated the processes of individual-building at the expense of the community. The following sections will discuss some of these processes.

Prelude to Early Modern Individualism: Lonka Shah

Let us start with our analysis of the two Jain individuals who were active in different times and spaces, but who shared a common agenda of dissent and heterodoxy. The first, Lonka Shah, was a lay scribe-turned-preacher while the other, Banarasidas, remained a merchant householder throughout his life. Lonka Shah, who lived mostly in Ahmedabad in Gujarat in the fifteenth century, moved beyond the normative discourse of the existing Jain theology by rationalizing his opposition to idol worship. In his critical ways, Lonka could neither favour the dominant structure of the community and religion nor leave any personal writings; this led to his memory being repressed. The scant information available about him was either censored or reinterpreted by the organized religion and by modern stakeholders. In spite of his immense contribution to Jain sectarian and canonical tradition, our knowledge about him is somewhat obscured because of these mediators. By the time one reaches the case of Banarsidas and his friends in the seventeenth century, heterodoxy did not remain an isolated case; rather, it continued the traditions of Jain scepticism and dissent of the preceding centuries. However, Banarsidas, who remained mobile between Agra, Jaunpur, and beyond, was vocal enough to write arguably the first autobiography in the Indian tradition with distinctly modern sensibilities.[4] He used the colloquial language of the metropolitan zone of Mughal North India. Notwithstanding his provocative rational thoughts and actions, he did not challenge the Jain tradition or canonical literature like Lonka Shah. Owing to the duality of his thoughts and actions, he enjoys a respectable individual space within the Jain tradition initially as a cosmopolitan and later as an orthodox Jain.

The historical biography of Lonka Shah remains uncertain for the lack of reliable sources. There are very few references based on the textual tradition of Lonka *gaccha* – a puritanical, reformist Jain movement which is opposed to image worship and whose origin is credited to Lonka Shah.[5] Most of the texts of the Lonka *gaccha* tradition are poems or songs of a hagiographic or biographical nature. The contemporary Lonka *gaccha* tradition itself has lost all written sources and retains no cultural memory anymore on the doctrinal views of Lonka or the earlier Lonka *gaccha* teachers (*acharyas*). Hence, the notions about the

life, teachings, and sect of Lonka Shah are more of a recent construct, coming out of conflicting sectarian discussions and debates between Sthanakavasi and *murtipujak* traditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For the first group, Lonka Shah has been a great reformer embodying the true ethos of Jainism, while the second tradition sees him as an aberration and portrays him as a villain. Our analysis about him is largely based on the research conducted by Peter Flugel, who has utilized sources available from both the sides to situate Lonka Shah in his historical milieu and Jain philosophical traditions.[6] Flugel has given a well-researched argument on how no consensus exists on the nature of Lonka's influence on the formation of an iconic mendicant tradition, which emerged in the aftermath of his protest.[7]

Lonka Shah was either a Porwad or Shrimali– that is, one of the three most important castes among the Shwetambar Jains. There is no clear evidence about where he spent his early days; in all probability, he grew up in Limbdi in the Kathiawad region of Gujarat. Later on, he settled in Ahmadabad. Here, he emerged as a learned layman with powerful connections with the Muslim authorities in Ahmadabad. According to one Orientalist view about Jainism,

> ... one effect of the Mohammedan conquest [...] was to drive many of the Jaina into closer union with their fellow idol-worshippers in the face of iconoclasts. Another effect was to drive others away from idolatry altogether. No oriental could hear a fellow oriental's passionate outcry against idolatry without doubts as to the righteousness of the practice entering his mind. Naturally enough it is in Ahmadabad, the city of Gujarat that was most under Mohammedan influence, that we can first trace the stirring of these doubts.[8]

In this interpretation, the rationalization of ideas of Lonka Shah has been attributed to the influence of Islam, denying the man any agency of his own. This is an early-twentieth-century Orientalist generalization, one which did not understand the nuances of indigenous tradition of non-idolism and categorized both the milieu and the individual as medieval, thereby denying an individual the scope of the agency or articulation of selfhood in modern terms.

Due to his profession of a scribe (*lekhak*) and expertise in calligraphy, Lonka Shah could gain access to the sacred texts for the purpose of copying them. For instance, when a Jain layman gave him a Jain text titled *Dashavaikalika Sutra* for copying, he took it home and started reading it. Much impressed, he got two copies made with the help of his widowed daughter and retained one copy for himself for further study. Thereafter, he became a keen student of the Jain scriptures. Though one does not get any contemporary works by Lonka Shah or his followers, all the

Jain legends accept his profession as a scribe. This indicates his ability to read and internalize important texts. He thus cannot be rejected as an ignorant manuscript copyist. It was his readings of these texts of the Jain tradition that was the origin of the various ideas of Lonka. His study of *Acharanga Sutra* and *Dashavaikalika Sutra*, for instance, discovered that the discipline and morality required by these texts were rapidly diminishing due to the laxity and undisciplined behaviour of Jain monks. Great slackness had also crept into the contemporary mendicants, as they had come to possess not only books and clothes but also material wealth. At times, there were also quarrels among them, attracting public criticism for unethical conduct.[9]

Though the immediate milieu of Lonka Shah was marked by Islamic influence, one cannot forget that image-worship hardly found any reference in the Jain scriptures. In late-fifteenth-century Gujarat, the destruction of some temples by the officials of the regional sultanate has been attributed to the provocations of Lonka Shah.[10] However, the Islamic stand against idol worship would have actually made his job easier. He took advantage of these circumstances in propagating his doctrines. He declared his disbelief in several essential Jain rites like as *paushadha*, *pratikramana*, *pratyakhyana*, and even charity. Though the worship of images was very popular among the Jains of his time, he argued that the practice went against scriptural prescriptions. He then started preaching what according to him was the authentic Jain religion, which did not ordain image worship. He argued that the institution of the temple, with its concentrated wealth, power, and burden of rituals, was the main source of corruption; it stood in opposition to the moral path shown in the ancient scriptures. According to him, the erection of the idols in temples involved digging, quarrying, and other construction activities; all of this was harmful to minute life-forms. In this way, Lonka Shah provided a moral cover to his campaign against temple construction. By challenging temple worship, he wanted to force the Jain laity to opt for a more moral and mobile life. In addition to this, he pointed out that the practices of the temple administrator monks did not have any basis in the ancient texts. All these arguments infuriated the monks, especially since Lonka was only a layman; according to the monks, he had no right to preach.[11]

The campaign of Lonka Shah became popular once a Jain *sangha* (religious group) arrived in Ahmedabad and met him. The leader of the group was Sambhuji. His granddaughter Mohabai was a child widow. Both Sambhuji and this girl were greatly attracted by the teachings of Lonka. Other lay members of this group also joined the assembly of Lonka's preaching. This enraged the monks accompanying the *sangha*, and they left in a huff. However, about 45 lay members of the *sangha*

stayed on in Ahmedabad and became the disciples of Lonka by formally accepting *diksha* (initiation) from him on Jaishtha Sukla, 1474. Lonka did not become a monk himself but remained a lay preacher throughout his life. Many of his disciples became *munis* (monks). Among them, *muni* Sarvaj, *muni* Bhanaji, *muni* Munaji, and *muni* Jagmalji subsequently became well-known preachers. Lonka himself, though a layman, was called *muni* Dayadharma by his followers, and the sect he founded came to be popularly known as Daya *gaccha*. Lonka was followed by his disciple Rupa Rishi, whom he had ordained in Surat. The next head of this group was Jiva Rishi; however, by his time sub-groups began to emerge within the order. One *muni* Bija started another sect called Bijamata in 1513. It seems that another dominant Jain sect Tapa *gaccha* tried to take on such challenges during this period by making strict rules for Jain monks and enforcing them rigorously. This process was initiated by Anand Vimal Suri (1490–1540), who practised severe penance for 14 years to create a positive impression of Jainism on the masses. According to the Jain tradition, he was successful in regaining the influence of Jainism. Both the Lonka *gaccha* tradition, which was founded in the 1470s by one of Lonka's followers named Bhanaand, and the Sthanakavasi tradition, which was established in the early seventeenth century by different groups of dissenting *sadhus* (ascetics) of the Lonka *gaccha*, objected to the re-emergence of idol worship within the Jain tradition. Reform movements of the later period, like Bijamata, Sthanakavasi, and Terapantha, borrowed heavily from the Lonka *gaccha* tradition. These individual efforts and reasons made a case for dissent within the faith and thus gradually created alternate spaces in parallel to the mainstream. By invoking puritanical ideas of original Jainism while refashioning them to suit the fifteenth century, what the dissenting voice of Lonka Shah in effect launched was an important revivalist tendency within Jainism.

The Quest for Individual Agency: Banarasidas

My second case study concerns the seventeenth-century Jain merchant named Banarsidas, whose career spread from Agra to Jaunpur and redefined the relationship between individual, text, and society. The persona of Banarsidas reflects a contrast between orthodox religiosity and individual rationality, which could not be reconciled given the two forms of life he lived. In the public domain, he was a reformer and a translator. However, as his autobiography *Ardhakathanak* shows, his private actions spoke of contestations and concealments. In the public sphere, he wrote and translated Jain philosophical texts like *Samaysar Natak*, *Gommatsaar*, *Dhyanbattisi*, *Adhyatam ke Geet*, a hymn titled *Shivmandir*, and many other texts concerning Jain philosophy.

However, writing his autobiography, *Ardhakathanak,* two years before his demise, he acknowledged and repented what he perceived as his misdeeds, unbecoming of a Jain. This shows a constant clash between prescribed public life and its critique in the personal life by means of deviating from convention. Across these two conflicting spheres of life, reconciliation was very much there. Banarasidas and his literary circle re-explored and redefined the religious texts which communally carried a normative meaning, as if they were stagnant in the time of their writing. In writing a philosophical treatise titled *Samaysaar,* Banarsidas filtered down a tradition according to his own worldview.[12] The literary knowledge of Banarsidas evolved through his engagements with different types of texts. During his bad days in Agra, he passed his time singing Shaikh Qutban Suhravardi's *Mirigavati* and Mir Sayyid Manjhan Shattari Rajgiri's *Madhumalati* – two mystical Sufi poems composed in Hindi verse. For him, these were ballads of love. For us, however, these present cases of early sixteenth-century textual traditions re-cast for seventeenth-century audiences through the oratory skills of an educated intellectual. Thus, the moment of oratory was the moment of recreation as well, as the orator had the agency of interpolation and exposition in his relation to the original text. John E. Cort talks about vernacular culture and the practice of translation in seventeenth-century North India. However, such translation was not a form of mere transmission. In a predominantly illiterate society, the moment of translation also becomes that of creation. *Ardhakathanak* is full of instances of oratory.[13] On several occasions, Banarsidas and his intellectual circle assembled to recite various popular literary texts. I argue that such moments empowered individuals with the agency to navigate a text and its audiences across time. One should remember that *Ramcharitmanas* first became more popular through the performative acts of Ramlila and then the reading of the text.[14]

Here, individualism also becomes a signifier of choices. Contrary to the circumscribed image of medieval Indian merchants, Banarsidas exercised his individual choices whenever he could afford to do so. In this context, sexuality, pleasure, and knowledge can be taken as the attributes of individual creativity. The youthful pangs of Banarsidas were not taken positively by his community, but he did not face any punishment beyond a mild reprimand.[15] If the scope for expressing individual opinions is taken to be an indication of the nature of the times, this instance is revealing. In Italy, Mennocchio of the Inquisition records challenged the virginity of Mother Mary. In South Asia, Banarsidas of *Ardhakathanak* pondered over the existence of Lord Shiva.[16] However, as a societal response, the first was burned at the stake, while the second lived a full life. When Banarsidas started deviating from the normative course of life prescribed by the community

leaders, Jain elders reprimanded him and advised him to mend his ways.[17] However, Banarsidas refused to adhere to such suggestions and kept pursuing his passions.[18] His community allowed him that space. Given the circumstances of a parochial communitarian world of the times, individualism requires to be acknowledged as a two-way function. Not only did Banarsidas show the will to make and adhere to his own choices, but his community too seems to have been tolerant enough to let him have his ways, albeit with strong reservations. He was not subjected to either excommunication or censorship, even as he continued with his adventures with eroticism.[19]

The aforementioned deviations from the usual communitarian discipline took place in spite of the fact that Banarsidas was well-trained in Jain religious philosophy, rituals, and ceremonies. He knew the 14 precepts or *niyamas* and *ashthanikas*, that is, the eight days of Jain religious ceremony. He was also familiar with the 12 *vratas* (rituals) prescribed for the Jain householders. In all these ways, he was a typical member of his community. Yet his rebellious attitude becomes evident from his experiments with diverse religious practices and beliefs. For example, he let two Hindu monks guide him on two different occasions on following Hindu practices with the assurance of good luck. He also studied a ninth-century Digambar text, *Gommatsaar*, of Nemichandra, a Digambar monk, during the times of difficult Shwetambar–Digambar sectarian relationship. Here, one needs to appreciate the fuzziness of religious and sectarian identities too. Identity segregation in the seventeenth century was not as important in the case of Jains as it has been made out to be in the last two centuries. Thus, himself a Khartar *gaccha* Shwetambar Jain, Kharagsen, the father of Banarsidas, went on a pilgrimage along with a Digambar Jain, Rai Dhanna. When Hiranand, a Shwetambar Jain Oswal, organized a *sanghayatra* for Sammet Shikhar a few years later, Kharagsen yet again did not hesitate to accompany him. These two examples indicate that pilgrimage was often thought more as a social event than only a strictly religious one. Contrary to the rhetoric of divine legitimation that characterizes contemporary court chronicles, the author of *Ardhakathanak* humanizes human vanity. In fact, the text is a part of a new genre in Hindi literature, one where many texts were humanizing and personalizing narratives through a focus on relationships between humans or between humans and nature. It was beyond the categories of divine–human, patron–client, state–subject, or exploiter–victim relationships that formed the basis of a vast range of medieval texts.[20] This strong human element is visible throughout the text of *Ardhakathanak*, in narrating how Banarsidas was being repeatedly reprimanded by the elders of the community for his ostensible waywardness and how despite

his repeated misdeeds and misconduct, he was always accommodated and embraced.[21]

The recoverable expression of such individual emotions is a relatively recent phenomenon in human history. Usually, emotions – feelings and their expressions – are seen to be shaped by culture and learnt or acquired in social contexts. What somebody can and may feel and express in a given situation depends substantially on social norms and rules. Though the expression of emotions has not been rare in South Asian literary traditions, it has largely comprised the expression of eroticism. However, emotions also function as the individual agency contributing to larger social groups, communities, and movements. This dimension of emotions is embedded in the text of *Ardhakathanak*, where it manifests through the interplay of thoughts and feelings of the author. However, Banarsidas also introduced a sense of platonic emotions, visible in his friendships or in his lamenting for his deceased children. This serves to humanize his thought process, something that rarely found literary expression in the medieval context. Banarsidas and his friends followed virtually a secret anarchist way of life that revolted against the established norms of Jainism. In many cases, the proclamation of Banarsidas' individualism took the form of nudity and erotic acts within the circle of his close friends.[22] For him, these acts were a means to subvert public norms in his private domain.[23] Alongside this, emotions of friendship also occupy an important place in the narrative. For instance, Banarsidas writes how one Narottam befriended him in spite of the discouragement of his own father. The text also reveals how Narottam's subsequent death left Banarsidas devastated and how he wept for days.[24]

The text is an instance of a cosmopolitan, interactive, and popular literary production that emerged in South Asia around this time. The range of literature discussed by Banarsidas was predominately Jain, but his cosmopolitan vocabulary revealed the larger context of which he was a part. Here was an individual acting under various influences and responding to them through his own agency. That is why Banarsidas could freely accommodate Persian words like *mulk*, *shariyati*, *dervish*, *fakir*, and *ashiqi* within his narrative and also write about injuring himself on hearing about the demise of the Mughal emperor Akbar. This speaks of intimate yet complex connections between the imperial and popular realms. The text also mentions other details that are relevant in this context. One incident concerns Shantidas Jauhari of Ahmedabad not sending the best jewels to the Mughal court owing to his ambivalence towards the last years of the reign of Shah Jahan, leading to the protest of imperial authorities against his ways of functioning in the form of blackmail.[25] In another instance, Banarsidas, in spite of having all the sense of loyalty towards the invisible, distant monarch, loathed the dominance

of Mughal officials at the local level.[26] Through these anecdotes, the text provides an important window into these complex and constant social interactions.

This was the nature of the social milieu in which Banarsidas cultivated a value system conducive for the dominant structures of faith, community, and state. However, there are too many instances within the text that foreground the spirit of individualism vis-à-vis the structures of collectivism. In this context, the individual's defeat against the structures of dominance becomes explicit only towards the end of the text. Much of the narrative projects Banarsidas as an individual struggling all through his career, betraying and challenging his Jain identity. But the endless failures force him in the end to surrender his individualism in favour of structures of religiosity as an act of repentance. He becomes a devout Jain, lamenting his follies.[27] In fact, it is here that the fluidity that exists between individual and community unfolds fully. But for the act of repentance, the author of *Ardhakathanak* could have eulogized his life as a Jain reformer celebrating his literary and communitarian successes rather than his mercantile failures, familial ups and downs, and emotional bondings and breakdowns. The very act of innocence at the fag end of his career becomes the act of repentance, forcing the author to divulge the dark episodes of an individual self.[28] However, in the quest for locating the modern within the so-called medieval context, one cannot and should not polarize the two. The content of the change requires to be assessed in terms of the process rather than in terms of a final outcome. Thus, issues like the status of women or child mortality – as gleaned from *Ardhakathanak* – have to be discussed with an understanding that individuals were ultimately a part of the context and culture of a medieval society. Ideas and practices did not necessarily permeate each other all the time. Instead, there were fault lines that essentially merge medieval trends and modern tendencies into the grey zone of early modernity.

Situating the Early Modern in the Jain Tradition

Moving beyond the material aspects of early modernity as discussed in the beginning of this chapter, I take humanistic rationality of individual agency as one of its major attributes in South Asia. Here, the heterodoxies of Lonka Shah and Banarsidas served as a prelude to future debates and struggles for individualistic expressions. These figures act as the markers of historical continuities across the medieval and colonial modern sensibilities. The emergence of the individual in the process, in turn, helped the fostering of other fundamental qualities of the future, like criticism and interpretation. The ability to question existing norms had not yet become a vertical act in terms of social hierarchies; subordinates had not yet started questioning their superiors in explicit terms. The tendency to question

whatever was found to be illogical was more horizontal. The changing material concerns created a new environment for questioning moral premises and religious orthodoxy. However, these instances of heterodoxy were not necessarily in continuation with preceding and future traditions of Jain scepticism and dissent – neither did they constitute mainstream religious knowledge; clouds of orthodoxy continued to remain the dominant social force.

The extent of religiosity in the public life of the early modern times could be a matter of debate, but cultural practices, literary heritage, and collective memories cannot be totally detached from the contemporary milieu of prevalent religious beliefs and practices. Certainly, one cannot imagine early modernity in South Asia as an age of pure reason and unprejudiced science, but this was also the case elsewhere. However, challenging the existing universally applicable method of determining the truth content of any claim and assessing the pre-determined morality of an act could be seen as indications of a new rationality and reasoned debate. Here the dissenting views of Banarsidas, a merchant from the Gangetic Plains, and the alternate visions of Lonka Shah, a householder of Shwetambar Tapa *gaccha* from Gujarat, become important. Their disagreements signified reasoned thinking minds. In their tendency of engaging with disagreements with others through debates and writing, we find the first signage of the gradual emergence of a public sphere.[29] Here, one can see a particular type of humanism, which led these intellectuals to stay open to the evolving moral situation and not give in to the ideological rigidity of the prevalent orthodoxies. In course of their education, Lonka Shah and Banarsidas moved from being indifferent to being contemptuous towards the prevalent religious practices of their times. For them, the rationalization of thought was a process characterized by repeatedly challenging existing religious beliefs and orthodoxies. This made their views quite unique and essentially different from the rationality of earlier times. Rationality was now becoming increasingly autonomous of the realm of orthodox scholarship. Challenges to and negations of existing belief systems, even though often in subtle terms, were becoming increasingly rampant. New networks of knowledge were emerging through a complex interplay between ideas, personalities, and events. This was the essence of the early modern condition within South Asian Jainism.

However, the world of Banarsidas was lost by the early eighteenth century. In fact, the urge to discover a homogeneous monotheism as well as to create a minority selfhood started juxtaposing itself against the dominant narrative of the majoritarian 'others'. The hardening of the communal boundaries and the growth of fixed social and religious categories of caste and religion started proliferating from this time onwards. The colonial knowledge system had already identified

Christianity as a superior, Western, non-Indian religion and counterposed it against Indic religions. This compartmentalization delegitimized a whole range of pre-colonial knowledge forms. By the late nineteenth century, possibilities of continuation of the cosmopolitanism that had marked the early modern condition in South Asia were further negated by the rise of revivalist rediscoveries of the Indic religions. In a way, the experience of colonialism in its process of building binaries based on religious and sectarian identities scuttled the intellectual potential of South Asia's own early modernity. Peter Flugel has already referred to this scenario in the context of Jainology.[30] These revivalist and puritanical tendencies took the whole religious system towards a metaphysical direction, forgetting their practical implications and treating religion as something frozen in time. This approach of Indic puritanism was very much commensurable with the notions of Christianity and Western philosophy but incommensurable with the pre-colonial past and especially with the environment of scepticism and debate that was the hallmark of South Asian early modernity. Thus, religion became a category of equivalence by all means. Under the hegemony of colonial modernity, the public life of religion had to be refashioned to be necessarily distinct from the 'secular' world of the West. In the process, the various local concepts of religion were subsumed within a universal idea of religion.

One needs to appreciate the fact that an act of retrieval and translation of the texts also meant their transposition. The quest of self and the other required valid explanations for both followers and critics. This led to a great deal of tension between polemics and accord. In the colonial milieu, the chief concern of religious communities was to persuade their audiences (both the supporters and the opponents) of their superiority vis-à-vis the inferiority of the others. Evolving an appropriate universal vocabulary and literary practices to achieve this became a major concern. Whatever did not suit the agenda of a linear progress of a religion had to be either eliminated or suppressed. These urges of comparisons and equivalences led to deep transformations in the conceptualization and expression of the social and cultural project of religions. Here, Jainism was successful in positioning its relationship with Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. However, exactly like Hinduism and Islam, Jainism too gradually drifted away from the open world of indigenous beliefs and practices that marked the few centuries preceding the advent of colonialism.[31] For instance, the moment Jainism clashed with the Arya Samaj movement in colonial Punjab, the deployment of rhetorical modes became crucial for each community to counter the competing claims of the other.[32] Thus, the historical conditions and requirements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to the disinheritance of many tendencies of diversity

and dialogue in the face of religious competition and the quest of developing a refashioned religion.

The parameters of religiosity, in terms of the expectations about individual and collective conduct, remained contested throughout the period under focus. Conflicts arising out of individual actions became increasingly popular in heterogeneous ways, defying both state and religious authorities. Two distinct tendencies co-existed – an urge to define religion in normative contexts and individual attempts to embrace, surpass, and resist such definitions. The interactions between individual, religion, and politics against the backdrop of anti-orthodox campaigns as well as the tensions between religion, individuals, and the processes of de-legitimization or re-legitimization were important elements in the process. If the centuries earmarked as early modern were a time of disagreements, debates, and departures on the part of Lonka Shah and Banarsidas, they were also one of continued dominance of the religious orthodoxy over the popular psyche owing to the deeply rooted theological structures. It is for this reason that the example of these two figures does not serve as a clean break from the medieval past; rather, the overlap between the two contradictory tendencies comprises the ambivalence and overlaps that early modernity represented in the field of Jainism in South Asia.

Thus, the early modern condition in South Asia needs to be conceptualized not only in terms of changes in the material world but also in terms of those churning in the intellectual realm that led to the emergence of didactic worldviews. Early modern cosmopolitanism was characterized by tendencies that were complex, multi-layered, at times contradictory, and, most of all, human. The multi-layered complexities of the lived experiences of people like Lonka Shah and Banarsidas provide us windows into this cosmopolitanism. In many cases, religious and sectarian identities were questioned, sometimes they were erased, and in some cases they were replaced by a cosmopolitan identity. However, these tendencies were derailed by the rise of colonial modernity. Far from being further blurred, the boundaries of religious identity started hardening at the cost of the ideas of cosmopolitanism. In fact, the quest for a homogeneous monotheism got mixed into the colonial imperative of creating a comfortable echo chamber for the notions of European superiority. Thus, the early modern tendency of theological orthodoxies gradually getting diluted under the influence of debates, dialogue, and cosmopolitanism suffered a major setback and went in the reverse instead. The role of the intellectual as a public man within the wider mundane world was lost again, and religiosity reasserted itself as the central marker of individual identity.

The project of modernity as a universal promise remained unfulfilled due to its inbuilt limitations. At the same time, one needs to problematize the category of medieval as well. The medieval in South Asia, much like the modern, was neither uniform nor homogeneous. Both categories were porous, overlapping, extending, and intervening into each other. The very overlapping of scepticism, heterodoxy, and dissent across periods of history shows continuity beyond different historical periods. It is at the grey zone between the two that the early modern needs to be located.

Notes

1. Franz-Josef Arlinghaus, 'In and Out, Then and Now: The Conscious Self and Its Relation to Society in Pre- modern and Modern Times', *Medieval History Journal* 18, no. 2 (2015): 1–26.
2. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The World of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (New Jersey: John Hopkins University Press, 1992); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294–1324* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin* Guerre (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).
3. Iqtidar Alam Khan, *Akbar and His Age* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1999); Shireen Moosvi, *Episodes in the Life of Akbar: Contemporary Records and Reminiscences* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1994); Corinne Lefevre, 'The Majālis-i Jahāngīrī (1608–11): Dialogue and Asiatic Otherness at the Mughal Court', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55, nos. 2–3 (2012): 255–286; Corinne Lefevre, 'Recovering a Missing Voice from Mughal India: The Imperial Discourse of Jahāngīr (r. 1605–1627) in His Memoirs', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 4 (2007): 452–489; Charlotte Vaudville, *A Weaver Named Kabir: Selected Verses, with a Detailed Biographical and Historical Introduction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); John Stratton Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Ours* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).
4. Literary critics see the genre of autobiography as a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality; accordingly, the author, the narrator, and the protagonist must share a common identity. Linda R. Anderson, *Autobiography: New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 2–3.
5. Muni Kantisagar, 'Sri Lonkashah ki Parampara aur Uska Agyaat Sahitya', in *Muni Shri Hazarimal Smriti Granth*, ed. Sobhachandra Bharill, 214–253

(Byavar: Muni Shri Hazarimal Smriti Granth Prakashan Samiti, 1965); Alamshah Khan, 'Lonka Gaccha ki Sahitya Sewa', in *Muni Shri Hazarimal Smriti Granth*, ed. Bharill, 203–213.

6. Peter Flugel, 'The Unknown Lonka Tradition and the Cultural Unconscious', in *Jaina Studies*, ed. Colette Caillat and Nalini Balbir, 181–271 (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2008).
7. Flugel, 'Unknown Lonka Tradition'.
8. Sinclair Margaret Stevenson, *The Heart of Jainism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1915).
9. Malvania Dalsukh, 'Lonkashah aur Unki Vichar Dhara', in *Gurudev Shri Ratna Muni Smriti Granth*, ed. Vijay Muni Shastri and Harishankar Sharma, 365–438 (Agra: Gurudev Smriti Granth Prakashak Samiti, 1964).
10. Mohanlal Dali Chand Desai, *Jain Sahitya No Sankshipt Itihaas* (Bombay: Omkar Suri Gyan Mandir, 1933), 495–496.
11. Muni Gyansundar, *Shreeman Lonkashah* (Falaudi: Shree Ratna Prabhakar Gyan Pushpamala, No. 167, 1936), 110–117, 177–183, 326–336; C. B. Sheth, *Jainism in Gujrat, A.D. 1100 to 1600* (Bombay: Vijayadevsur Sangh Publication, 1953), 233–234.
12. Banarsidas, *Natak Samaysaar* (1636), commentary by Buddhilal Shravak (Bombay: Jain Garnthratnakar, 1929).
13. John E. Cort, 'Making It Vernacular in Agra: The Practice of Translation by Seventeenth-Century Jains', in *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield, 61–105 (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015).
14. Philip Lutgendorf, 'Ram's Story in Shiva's City: Public Arenas and Private Patronage', in *Culture and Power in Banaras: Community, Performance, and Environment, 1800–1980*, ed. Sandria B. Freitag, 34–61 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
15. Banarsidas, *Ardhakathanak* (1641), translated and annotated by Mukund Lath as *Ardhakathanak: Half a Tale* (Jaipur: Rajasthan Prakrit Bharati Sansthan, 1981), verse 170, 237.
16. Banarsidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verse 263, 244.
17. Banarsidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verse 200, 239.
18. Banarsidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verse 201, 239.
19. Banarsidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verse 202, 239.
20. The famous Jain biography of Shwetambar saint Hiravijay Suri, *Hirsaubhgya Kavya*, is a divine–human text; Gujarati text *Sri Rajsagar Suri Niravan Raas* too takes human relations to divine will. Surdas and Tulsidas humanized God but only to set a normative trend. Banarsidas and Lonka Shah humanized experiences of the society within temporality without looking for an external

agency. Humans thus became autonomous in their endeavours. See Devavimal Gani, *Hirasaubhagya Kavya*, ed. Pandit Shiv Dutt and K. P. Parab, *Kavya Mala* (Bombay: Tukaram Javaji, 1900), 67; Tilaksagar, *Sri Rajsagar Suri Nirvana Raas*, Gujarati, 1723 VS, MS. Accession No. 13771 (Koba: Sri Kailash Suri Gyan Mandir, Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra).

21. Banarasidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verses 199–201, 239.
22. Banarasidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verses 603, 270.
23. Banarasidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verses 601–605, 269–270.
24. Banarasidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verses 477–485, 259–260; verses 490–496, 261.
25. M. S. Commissariat, 'Imperial Mughal "Farmans" in Gujarat', *Journal of the University of Bombay* 9, no. 1 (1940): 1–56.
26. Banarasidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verses 462–464, 258.
27. Banarasidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verses 649, 652–654, 273–274.
28. Banarasidas, *Ardhakathanak*, trans. Lath, verses 652–654, 274.
29. Farhat Hasan, 'Forms of Civility and Publicness in Pre-British India', in *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogue and Perceptions*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld, 84–105 (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2005).
30. Peter Flugel, 'The Invention of Jainism: A Short History of Jaina Studies', *Journal of Jaina Studies* 1, no. 1 (2005): 1–19.
31. Such deviations within Jainism take us to the question raised by Talal Asad in another context, that is, what actually constitutes the anthropology of Islam, the universal 'discursive tradition' preserved and transmitted by learned men, or more malleable and differentiated meanings created by local or popular tradition. See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).
32. John E. Cort, 'Jain Identity and the Public Sphere in Nineteenth-Century India', in *Religious Interactions in Modern India*, ed. Martin Fuchs and Vasudha Dalmia, 99–137 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019).