Ishita Banerjee-Dube, Max Deeg, Saurabh Dube, Anne Feldhaus, Ian Henderson, Rahul Bjørn Parson, Sabine Sander

Afterword: texts and narratives

The 'texts' portion of this part of the publication has explored narratives of religious individualisation that have set in motion discourses which, to varying degrees, empower and promote religious individualisation. The authors of these narratives are, in a sense, the founders of discursivity, from whom currents of thought seem to flow which have informed modes of religious individualisation. It is, however, often the 'modes of circulation, valorisation, attribution, and appropriation' (Foucault, Faubion 1998, 220) that provide insights into the cultures and social relations of a process of individualisation. It is the production and modifications of the 'author function' that indicate the emergence of institutions that propel and valorise the 'individual' author. In this section, we have discussed how the author does not necessarily connote a specific individual; several narrators, selves, and subjects confuse and complicate the link between author and individual (historical or imaginary). The author may function as a mere 'scriptor', the composer of a text, but its ultimate use, meaning, and destiny are in the hands of the recipients of that text (Barthes, Heath 1977, 145). Some of the contributions here have engaged with the idea that the author/scriptor plays a smaller role in the emergence of conventions than the community that rallies around their texts. For it is this community that valorises the author as an exemplar to be emulated. Yet other contributors have examined the intentionality of an author's narrative strategies to initiate discursivity and to provide a model for posterity. We have discovered, in contrast to the 'Practices' section of this part of the publication, that texts intuitively tend toward collective efforts of stabilisation and conventionalisation, sometimes tangential or even at variance with the pronouncements of the author.

Processes of text composition, reception, and itinerancy, and the many ironic and quirky stances that authors, characters, and audiences take with regard to texts, suggest that previous assumptions about sequential and/or dialectical dynamics of religious institutionalisation and individualisation need to be reconsidered. Is it possible to think of individualisation and institutionalisation as intertwined processes rather than opposing or contrasting and sequential processes? In other words, can we think of a process in which the narrative creates the author? And one in which the individual author is produced when he or she is institutionalised or stabilised through the work? In such a scenario, individualisation and institutionalisation, rather than being ambiguous and ambivalent processes, can become mutual, reciprocal, and coeval, and the congealing of

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plural, multiple identities into a single one of the 'author,' subject, or individual can simultaneously set into motion his/her institutionalisation, or as we have preferred, their conventionalisation. The genres of biography and autobiography offer one prominent path for individualising a figure/person but there are also a number of other possible pathways. The contributions here accept the mutual imbrication and complementarity of individualisation and conventionalisation, which has allowed us to examine how an 'individual' or a text gains the 'authority' to become institutionalised. We have posed the question, if we accept the presence of the author and his/her text as 'real', what would the interface of individualisation and institutionalisation tell us?

Facets of the institutionalisation of individualisation occur both along with the composition and authorisation of a text and as a longer process over generations, indeed sometimes centuries. Ishita Banerjee-Dube explores an Indian, 15th-century Oriya telling of the *Mahabharata*. In this case, practices of collective 'reading' and recitation of the text, as well as its continual transcription, result in the many makings of the figure of the 'author' as well as of his composition. Endeavours to 'standardise' the text and its author from the second half of the 19th century resulted in the institutionalisation of its 'author', Sarala Dasa, as an 'individual' and an exemplary figure. It is of particular importance that he identifies himself as a Sudra-Muni, a lower-caste, ignorant person who is bestowed with the power to produce the Mahabharata by the goddess Sarala Devi. The audacious act of a Sudra rendering a vernacular telling of a Sanskrit epic was valorised and enhanced over subsequent receptions of the text that anachronistically celebrated, individualised and institutionalised him. Here we have seen an example of how the text and author are constructed by the community in order to develop an exemplar of individualisation, rather than the text holding sway over the recipients. In the case of Bhima Bhoi, a mid-nineteenth century poet-philosopher of Mahima Dharma of Odisha, India, the enduring presence of the kandha (khond) poet among the followers of a radical yet marginal religious faith is reflected in the composition of texts ascribed to him decades after his death, once again illustrating the intersection of individualisation and institutionalisation. In Max Deeg's contribution, a similar promotion and reification occurs to the Chinese monk Xuanzang (600/602–664). In this case, we see how multiple biographies of one figure can reveal the institutional functionalisation of a historical figure, repeatedly and simultaneously authorising the monk and drawing authority from him. Some examples of his functionalisation were literarisation, politicisation, aestheticisation, iconography, scientification, etc., with every instance performing this two-way authorisation. Therefore, the increasing exceptionality and individualisation of Xuanzang have a direct relationship to authority drawn from him by the authors and their institutions; the repetition of his story itself

becomes a convention. In both cases we have observed a simultaneity of authorisation, rather than a sequential authorisation that we may have assumed because of the chronologies of the author, individualised exemplar, text, and community.

What seems consistent in our texts, an aspect that counter-intuitively establishes trustworthiness, is that the central figures simultaneously transmit tradition and norms yet at the same time are made extraordinary by a deviation from them. The frequent acknowledgement of knowing the 'rules' and then exceeding them is an aspect of the texts that consistently gives them force, since it maintains a tension which refuses to be resolved. Anne Feldhaus' contribution discusses the Mahanubhav writings from 13th-century India, texts which preserve in minute detail, the doings and wanderings of avatars of the same divine being. Since Chakradar disappears in 1274, the successors must preserve the teachings over time in order to preserve the presence of Chakradar. The teachings insist that the presence of the god gives one liberation and so this presence is produced imaginatively and textually. One of the quirky avatars asks questions such as, 'do I have to know everything'? This both transmits the assumption and the self-evident truth that the divine is omniscient; yet the figure himself won't allow this to be stable. This tension, which we might even call irony, finds its way into several of the works. In Rahul Parson's study of early modern North India, we see that Banarasidas, the 17th-century Jain merchant, repeatedly calls himself a fool, like a child grasping at the moon in a reflection, and yet because of the acknowledgement of his inability to comprehend dense philosophical positions, he would have us trust his rendering of an immense treaty on the Self and the voice of the omniscient precisely because of his apparent innocence. Aside from the conventions of humility borrowed from Tulsidas and other Bhakti poets, Banarasidas' ironic and self-effacing stance anticipates trajectories of discursivity emanating from his work, propelled by both his detractors and his well-wishers. Depending on whom one asks, Banarasidas' innovations and transcreations either amount to intolerable heresy, or they are the basis of a proper institutionalisation witnessed in the rise of the Terapanth sect, who venerate him as their *Adiguru* (initial Guru) (Lath 2005, 9). The reverberation of Banarasidas' insistence on self-reliance is felt more widely than just this sect. We also find it in the subsequent works of this particular strand of Jain poetry, thereby conventionalising and institutionalising Banarasidas' audacity.

A yet more productive and complicated use of irony appears in Chapter VII of Paul's letter to the Romans, as we have seen in Ian Henderson's contribution. Paul, the historic Paul, writing this 'I' or 'Ego', functions as an ironic staging of a fictional, imaginary Paul, or 'I' 'Ego', which becomes canonical and also normative, framing how a Christian should feel (i.e., self-tortured). This imaginary Paul stages *akrasia*, the ethical problem of someone who knows what the right thing to

do is but still does the wrong thing. Paul performs this, the Ego knows the good, affirms the good, and does something else. In other words, this 'I' consents to the Torah, knows that it is doing the wrong thing but has consented to the revelation this 'I' has received from God. Chapter VII of Paul's letter to the Romans was designed to be institutional by representing personhood in some exaggerated way. The irony here functions as a positive ambiguity, with multiple meanings that are all sincerely intended, even if irreconcilable. Imagined institutionalisation is a potent mode of individualisation – and imagined individualisation is a potent mode of institutionalisation – in a text written by a real person named Paul who dictated a text to be performed elsewhere. The performed-elsewhere Paul evokes the Paul needed for the institutionalisation, one who is constructed simultaneously by Paul's words and the community's performing/hearing them.

Movement, mobility, itinerancy, and plurality are recurring motifs that shore up tales of and about the authors and narrators, contributing to a different sort of institutionalisation. At times the physical text itself gains audience and authenticity by way of travel. The mobility and legitimacy over space is part of this institutionalisation. The itinerancy of figures in the text produces a legitimisation through worldliness, the reach of its acceptability, and the dynamics of social diversity one encounters in the chronotope of the road and the urban (Bakhtin 1998). As Sabine Sander has demonstrated in her contribution, the path taken 'out of the Ghetto' (Katz 1973) by European Jews between 1750 and 1850 is closely interlinked with the emergence and development of the modern metropolis and with the processes of religious individualisation. The metropolis as a real and symbolic place (of encounter) creates an urban community made up of people from different social classes, professions, and geographical regions – as once described by Georg Simmel in his *Sociology* with his famous formula of the 'intersection of social circles' as a pre-condition for individualisation. This was the institutionalisation of a trajectory that headed towards the emergence of the enlightened and emancipated Jew, as an acknowledged citizen of the state. Sander's case study on the parallel biographies and the religious and linguistic writings of two German-Jewish scholars, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) and Moritz Lazarus (1824–1903), reveals how a variety of different processes of religious individualisation are entwined with other social and political developments. The questioning of traditional forms of belonging, coupled with particular forms of sociality, sociability, community, and collectivity, provided social and imaginative spaces which enabled the Jews of that time to choose from a variety of personal options, developments, and paths.

Finally, Saurabh Dube has shown that the autobiographical and biographical materials of convert subjects in colonial central India query persistent projections of individualisation and institutionalisation as opposed ideas and

processes, presumptions that lie at the core of dominant conceptions of conversion. These narratives were simultaneously shaped by colonial verities and formatively marked by vernacular attributes, both aspects of an evangelical modernity. Although apparently formulaic in nature, they engage and exceed the *telos* of commonplace apprehensions of conversion to Christianity, inscribing such exclusive story lines with their own notations. In such accounts, subject and author, conversion and personhood, appear within emergent practices and performances of translation involving the entangled work of the irregular labour of convert and missionary, individualisation and institutionalisation. Here, the very terms of an immaculate conversion could be acutely forged through the force of rumour and the strength of prophecy, such that distinctive entailments of myth, legend, and narrative broke upon a missionary's description of a convert's life. A distinct autobiographical narrative of a lowly Indian evangelical operative appears as a life seeking an occupation, an existence stalking a vocation – shored up by recalcitrance toward paternal authority and refusal of paternalist power – in a manner that the acute contrariness of the tale puts its particular twist to irony and *akrasia*.

Across the texts considered here, we find the conventionalisation of certain *modes or patterns of communication*. Irony and *akrasia* seem to occur most consistently and appear to have a much greater institutionalising potential than consistency or straight didacticism. Recall the 'dim-witted' master poet-philosopher Banārasīdās; or the Sudra-Muni author of the great epic, Mahabharata; or Chakradar of the Mahanubhavs who questions his own omniscience, or the necessity of it; or the many Pauls and their *akrasia*; the elite German-Jews who knew where they had belonged and aspired to exceed that by belonging somewhere new; and Xuanzang, who disobeyed the emperor and yet had his anecdote repeated and celebrated as heroic from within a frame of political power that would not have it emulated. The contributions here specifically disrupt the traditional authority ascribed to an author or text by showing that the discourses, rhizomatic narratives, and currents of thought in each case study contain a collage of voices, suggesting that the religious individualisations, and conventionalisations thereof, are dynamic and co-constitutive.

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