Chapter 4

Emancipation as Submission: Muhammad Iqbal, Storytelling and Critical Theory

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Abstract

In this chapter, I study the concept of emancipation as one of the core ideas of critical theory. I trace how, with the changing material conditions, critical theory could not articulate the conditions of possibility for emancipation. I then introduce the thought of Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the revolutionary philosopher-poet from the East and use one of his poems, as a form of storytelling, to articulate his idea of emancipation as submission, his concept of *khudi* and its three dimensions. As an empirical illustration of Iqbalian ideas, I present a short case study of *Akhuwat*, an Islamic microfinance organization in Pakistan. This case shows how Iqbal's theologically inspired idea of emancipation liberates men from oppressive conditions through psychological empowerment and creates agency when none would be thought to exist from a material perspective of critical theory.

Keywords: Iqbal; Storytelling; Critical Theory; *Khudi*; Emancipation; Akhuwat; Submission; Islam; Self-denial.

Introduction

Storytelling is an art; it is an art of expressing one's thoughts, desires and passions about life, about this universe and about the human condition as objects of

interpretation and meaning generation. However, it also involves a reflexive inquiry of Socratic "knowing thyself" which moves beyond the conceptual structures of this universe in order to creatively get in touch with the noumenal, the supernatural and the Divine. What makes a story aesthetically appealing and emotionally engaging is a narrative of this spiritual journey; sometimes expressed, sometimes only available in the complexity of meanings hidden in its shallow maxims. It is also possible that such a story is available in poetry which is another form of aesthetic storytelling. Beyond the technicalities of narrative "forms," there is a metaphorical center, like a "molten nave" (Scheub, 2002, p. 3) that is alive and burning and where the creative imagination of the poet as a storyteller is in the process of rhythmic becoming.

In this chapter, I introduce the thought of Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1878–1938) as such a creative poet and an indigenous intellectual of my land. He was one of the most influential thinkers in the Muslim world and sought to emancipate his people from British colonialism and from their own "intellectual death" through storytelling in his poetry (Khan and Koshul, 2011). In this chapter, I explain his concept of emancipation rooted in submission to the will of God and the concept of *khudi* (selfhood). This is followed by a close reading of his 1915 poem in order to show the pernicious effects of self-negation. The allegorical story of sheep and tiger in the poem offers a window into an alternative theological epistemology which has wider implications for philosophy, for critical theory and the worldview of critical theorists. Storytelling is a process which is created over time and space and is contextual in nature (Cunliffe *et al.*, 2004). The historical circumstances that led to pessimism in critical theory provide the background in which Iqbal was operating and this is the reason why I have adopted a historical approach in this chapter. I introduce Dr. Amjad Saqib and his Islamic microfinance organization, *Akhuwat*, as an empirical illustration which blends in with *khudi* and the Iqbalian conceptualization of emancipation. In the concluding section I will trace some implications of Iqbalian ideas for critical organization studies.

Human emancipation was a core value of critical theory but with some negative experiences it lost, not its appeal, but all hope of its conditions of possibility. An appreciation of the totalizing and oppressive tendencies of their empirical reality, manifested in wars, colonization, imperialism and capitalism, went too far and the emancipatory praxis got lost along the way. However, Iqbal believes that in such times of great uncertainty and social unrest it is important to look into the eye of the storm and ascertain what is active in things. His theologically inspired ideas of emancipation and *khudi* liberates man from oppressive conditions through a kind of psychological empowerment and creates agency when none would be thought to exist from a material perspective of critical theory. Hence, for Iqbal, a better world is possible and should be actively sought after.

The thrust of this chapter is exploratory, normative and provocative in nature. My embeddedness in academia as a postcolonial Muslim scholar with spiritual leanings played a definitive role in the selection of Allama Iqbal as the quintessential theorist representing the Muslim subcontinental tradition. Additionally, my own reading of critical theorists led me to choose Iqbal's work on *khudi* in order to gather the resources of critique. I also admit the guilt of not belonging to the dispassionate and "objective" intellectual space, assuming that such a space actually exists, and following Said, I take the political dimension to be an inherent part of being a researcher with a certain responsibility to make a difference (Said, 1996). With these colorful warnings, let me now delve freely into the topic of human emancipation.

Critical Theory and Emancipation

Although emancipation, freedom and liberty are used interchangeably in the extant literature, there is a subtle difference in their meanings. According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, freedom is a general term used when expressing a release from something holding back. This term is not specific to humans and can also refer to animals (*free* a mouse from the trap) and can have degrees/gradations. Every moral philosopher praise freedom like "good life" and happiness but that has inundated this term with multiple meanings. Similarly, liberty can mean either cutting a connection with someone or something without any power relation (current will decompose water, *liberating* hydrogen) or emergence from a disagreeable bondage (*liberate* all slaves). On the other hand, the word "emancipation" implies freeing of one person from subjection to another or freedom from "serious conditions of constraint" (Ware, 2019, p.11) such as emancipation of African American slaves or the emancipation of workers from capitalist wage system (Marx, 1844). This informs us that emancipation has a specific and stronger meaning than both freedom and liberty and as pointed out by German historian, Reinhart Koselleck (2002), if emancipation is used reflexively by philosophers and poets it has the revolutionary power to change the structure of one's consciousness.

This idea of human emancipation from structures of domination and repression is at the center of critical theory (see a recent review by Best, Bonefeld and O'Kane, 2018). In fact, it has achieved the status of a normative criteria by which the critical credentials of any theory are assessed. As succinctly put by a critical theorist:

"The traditional requirement to be called a critical theory has always been an explicit agenda of emancipation … Given the several different manifestations and

dimensions of repression and enslavement in the world around us, many different critical theories have developed over time, often powering social movements that seek to liberate human beings from enslaving structures" (Munir, 2019, p. 5).

However, the meaning of emancipation, the methods and the conditions required to achieve human liberation from "enslaving structures" and power relationships in consequent socioeconomic systems is a matter of debate. For example, the representative of the first generation of Frankfurt school's critical theory, Max Horkheimer, equated an emancipated individual with a rational and autonomous being and an emancipated society with a technological order encompassing rationality (Horkheimer, 1937/1972). Such a society would result from a process in which mankind brought nature under rational human control. This can be achieved through a purposeful utilization of existing forces of production in such a way that it benefits the whole community. However, since the relations of production are embedded in a capitalist framework, the possibility of this good life remain unrealized.

This early model of a social order, although beset by capitalist forces, is reflective of the appreciation of the rational content and ideals of justice, solidarity and freedom emanating from the Enlightenment project (Bohman, 2005). Indeed, the normative commitments and the conceptual frameworks of Enlightenment provided the general philosophical background within which critical theory developed. These commitments point to a *secular and radically individualistic* treatment of human nature. The "glorified individual" now takes center stage equipped with the supreme ideal of human emancipation (Zafirovski, 2011) to free himself from the shackles of authority while marching towards socio-economic progress as master of his own destiny. However, given several manifestations of domination, we need to determine the sources of these shackles; in other words, what is it that we are supposed to be emancipated from? Alvesson and Willmott believe it is anything that inhibits the flourishing of human consciousness. In their own words:

"Emancipation describes the process through which individuals and groups become freed from *repressive social and ideological conditions*, in particular those that place socially unnecessary restrictions upon the development and articulation of human consciousness" (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992, p. 432).

The Enlightenment, as a revolutionary impulse, considered these repressive conditions to emanate from authority structures upholding religion, myth and mysticism (Dupre, 2004) and endeavored to free man from these conditions by mounting a conceptual attack within the ambit of scientific rationality.

A prerequisite of progress, thus, is a release of man from the shackles of faith, revelation and magic (Israel, 2001). This liberal progressive society held out the prospects of a more central place for humans in the now "disenchanted world" (Weber, 1969) where irrational superstition is replaced by empirical and rational knowledge in service of improving the human condition. The Enlightenment philosophers were confident that this will generate a decline in religious fanaticism and will produce tolerance to the extent that wars, torture and human savagery will become a *thing of the past* (Howard, 2000). It is through these secular and radical developments that human suffering may be alleviated and happiness pursued. Ultimately the purpose of all philosophy, including critical, is to enable human flourishing (MacIntyre, 1967; Alvesson and Willmott, 1992) and the philosophers of Enlightenment were confident that an application of disciplined and scientific thought towards nature and society can create these enabling conditions (Smart, 1992). As Peter Gay points out:

"The men of the Enlightenment were united on a vastly ambitious program, a program of secularism, humanity, cosmopolitanism, and freedom, above all, freedom in its many forms — freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realize one's talents, freedom of aesthetic response, freedom, in a word, of a moral man to make his own world" (Gay, 1966, p. 3).

The Brave New World

However, the terrible events of the two World Wars showed that the new world this *free* man created hosted a "festival of cruelty" (Glover, 2000) in a span of 30 years with such barbarism that 65 to 85 million men, women and children died. The free man developed the ultimate technology of death (the atomic bomb) and used Nagasaki and Hiroshima as trailers of the movie: "the annihilation of mankind." These drastic events changed thinking of the critical theorists as they started questioning the credibility of the whole project of Enlightenment with remarks such as, "the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, p. 1). It proved to be difficult for them to explain the return of these dark evil spirits in human nature since they already relegated the Devil to the realm of fantasy and imagination (As captured in Voltaire's quip: "Never has there been a more universal empire than the Devil's. Who dethroned him? Reason"). Nevertheless, it seemed that the Devil had returned with a vengeance along with a gift of suffering, pain and sorrow for the European consciousness. It was even worse to realize that the supposedly rational and liberal European civilization had produced its own ruination (Rabinbach, 1997). This was a time of gloominess, loss

and sense of absurdity and as a result, "modern man no longer knows what he wants and no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong" (Strauss, 1975, p .81). Does emancipation actually mean something or is it a powerful enticement designed to ruin whatever man has achieved so far? Should we simply accept it as a human condition or an unfortunate aberration (Arendt, 1958)?

Some scholars answered these questions in the negative and claimed that this barbarism was not something attacking modern liberal society from the pre-modern past but are its own product emanating from the tendency to construct purity and control the instrumentalized totality of natural, human and social life (Bauman, 1989). The attempt to recast social knowledge in order to protect and dedicate intellectual resources to man's emancipation, of the type promised by the Enlightenment, continues unabated even today (Allen, 2014), as if this is the best option despite its precariousness and "the disillusioning revelation that its ramparts had crumbled under pressure" (Katznelson, 2003, p. 2).

Now that we have a fair idea of critical theory's entanglements with the ideal of human emancipation, let us turn to Iqbalian oeuvre in order to understand his concept of *khudi* and how his poetry as a form of storytelling provides a new perspective on emancipation.

Muhammad Iqbal: Philosophizing as Storytelling

Muhammad Iqbal was a leading Muslim thinker, a philosopher-poet and a decolonial visionary (Majeed, 2009). He studied in Europe just prior to the First World War and infused his poetry, in Persian and Urdu, with philosophical ideas which gave clarity of purpose and foundational strength to the voice of Indian Muslims' anti-colonial struggle for freedom from British rule in India. For Iqbal, the act of decolonization is not just discursive but an intentional, purposeful and action-oriented act. As pointed out by Mustansir Mir:

> "He [Iqbal] used poetry not only to express feelings, but also to discuss metaphysical, political, and economic issues, to comment on cultural and artistic matters, to reflect on the human existential situation and above all, to contribute to the transformation of individual and collective life in accordance with the dictates of an all-embracing ethical vision" (Mir, 2006, p. 49).

Iqbal realized the importance of stories as important vehicles for disseminating his vision for social change as part of the decolonization process. He perfected

the art of storytelling through the poetic genre as he formulated new perspectives while critically reflecting on existing human problems. He wanted to use a medium that had resonance with the hearts and minds of his people. Stories possess the power to help communicate complex and paradoxical experiences of reality and also develop an action-oriented imaginary. This power has been recently realized in the critical as well as postcolonial tradition (Beigi *et al*., 2019; Jorgensen *et al*., 2013; Boje, 2011). Iqbal wrote in an attractive and dramatic style continuously making use of the rich heritage of the Islamic mystic tradition (inspired from Rumi, Hafiz, Bedil etc.) and combined it with the European philosophical tradition (Plato, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson). Although Iqbal read, used and appreciated other thought systems, this should not lead anyone to ignore his originality and independence. Hence, a fruitful way of approaching Iqbal is to complement the history of ideas with his philosophy. In this manner, one can both situate Iqbal's ideas in its historical and philosophical context, and show how it developed in response to the philosophical and practical problems of his time.

Crossing Between Tradition and Modernity

Iqbal, during his stay in Europe before the world wars, realized the precariousness of the European condition as it veered toward imperialism and dehumanizing materialism replacing moral norms with legal and separating the church from the state. His exposure to Spengler and Nietzschean analysis of the Western civilization as well as the sordid materialism he himself experienced led him to foretell the doom of the imperial West (Hasan, 1987). On the other hand, he was also disenchanted by the East lapsing into passivity, submissiveness and ascetic mysticism (Lee, 2018). Nevertheless, his disillusionment with Western reason and Eastern ascetic mysticism brought him closer to rediscovering his own authenticity, his being, and his purpose. This journey of self-realization began with an existential understanding of his self which enabled him to assert his own cultural and religious identity as a Muslim. While living under British colonial rule in India, he realized that Muslims had largely lost a centralized political control over India. The declining Muslim intelligentsia accepted uncritically the impact of new and powerful rulers and was not able to resist the colonizer's attempts at "epistemicide": a wipe out of Muslim tradition and ways of knowing (Cohn, 1996). At a global level, the centuries old institution of Muslim Caliphate in Turkey was abolished in the early 1920s which devastated all hopes of a realpolitik pan-Islamism. The caliphal absence caused a deep and

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abiding anguish and Muslims lost self-respect and direction (Hassan, 2017). Hali, Iqbal's contemporary, reflected on these difficult times in his poem, *Musaddas* in 1879 as:

> *Behold the degradation sinking far too deep;*
>
> *Oh, the fall of Muslims, gone beyond retrieve;*
>
> *You'll deny that each ebb is followed by the flow;*
>
> *If our river, run stark dry, you once perceive (Translation by Sevea, 2012).*

Iqbal realized that it is only after the colonial masters' implanted worldview has been replaced by an indigenous knowledge system that a new self can emerge for the colonized Muslims. Nevertheless, Iqbal did not reject modernity altogether and charted a middle ground where Muslims can engage with developments in Western physical sciences and philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment while remaining within their own Islamic tradition (Hillier and Koshul, 2015). Iqbal is also credited with providing the ideological foundations of the sovereign state of Pakistan as a separate homeland for Muslims. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, lawyer and a political leader of the Muslims, was inspired by Iqbalian ideas of political freedom. Based on the Iqbalian vision, he was able to forge an anti-colonial movement which resulted in the partition of the subcontinent and the birth of Pakistan (Moore, 1983).

Iqbalian emancipation as submission

Iqbal understands the problem of pessimism and absurdity as the crisis of instrumental reason and the rising disappointment with man's rational capabilities to provide a solution to the problem of emancipation. Iqbal believed that man, as a spiritual being, has access to another mode of reason which can be called intuitional or spiritual reason (Moosa, 2015, p. 27). This is the reason of an individual who is God-conscious and has elevated his spirit to such a level which allows him to discover noumenal reality through intuitive insights. The locale of this reason is the subtle heart (*qalb*) of a human being which can lit up with fiery passion and an intense love, *ishq*, of God and the Prophet (peace be upon him). In one of his poems, *Bang-i Dara* (1924) he constructs a dialogue between reason and *qalb* where *qalb*, after listening to the virtues of intellect, responds as follows:

You (reason) penetrate the secret of existence, But I see it with my eyes

You deal with the outward aspect of things, I know what lies within

Knowledge comes from you, gnosis from me, You seek God, I reveal Him

The height of knowledge brings restlessness, But I am the cure for this disease

Iqbal was one of the most influential theorists of modernity since he explained how a notion of agency, subjectivity and selfhood can be understood in a modern sense without cutting all roots from tradition. He believes that the passionless despair of modern man can be avoided through a "know thyself" approach and realizing an essential bond of servitude to God, the creator of the universe. Man is a vicegerent/representative (*khalifa)* and a being which submits (*abd*) to the will of the ultimate Sovereign power of God out of his own free will. This elevated status is rewarded with a gift of higher consciousness and inductive reasoning and it is a cause of celebration. For Iqbal, realization of this unique prestigious position of man is also the realization of his emancipation as he breaks the bonds of social and mental structures and unjust hierarchies in order to become a co-worker with God in the project of human flourishing and beautification of the whole universe (Iqbal, 1934). The particularity of the self through development of one's consciousness enables one to understand the universe from a theological perspective and opens up possibilities for moral action. A Muslim reaches this level of understanding by virtue of the concept of *abd* and the affirmation of the unity of God as the supreme power. The submission to God then is a true realization and affirmation of one's authentic self and should not be construed as ontological indigence. In other words, *emancipation lies in submission*. Once this higher consciousness is awakened, man can:

> "… shape his own destiny as well as that of the universe, now by adjusting himself to its forces, now by putting the whole of his energy to mold its forces to his own ends and purposes. And in this process of progressive change God becomes a co-worker with him, provided man takes the initiative" (Iqbal, 1934, p. 10).

However, Iqbal does not intend to imply pantheism as he celebrates separation (*firaq*) of man from the Divine and critiques the doctrine of Oneness of Being (*wahdatul wujud)*. Although man does not have absolute or uncaused freedom, he still has a certain level of freedom which secures that he is not merely a machine, and his life and actions are not totally caused by deterministic principles.

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This creative capacity for positive action is described by Iqbal in his poem, *Zarb-e-Kaleem* (1937) as:

Write your destiny with your own hand, God's pen has written nothing in your book of fate

This bluish heaven which people call sky, is nothing if you are daring enough

It is sky if it is above your head, If it is under your wings, it becomes earth

This idea of emancipation is part of a highly original theological scheme (centered around *khudi*) which has the power to unleash hitherto undiscovered human potentialities. Let me now turn to Iqbalian idea of *khudi*.

Khudi as a Decolonizing Tool:

One of Iqbal's principal perspectives is the concept of *khudi* or creative individuated selfhood which is intimately wrapped up in his concept of consciousness. For Iqbal, consciousness is not a property of human mind but a state of being (Iqbal, 1915). It is that state of being which, at the most basic level, makes an actor's self or ego realizable for the actor. The object of realization can be material or conceptual but in a developed state of realization, it can also be the actor himself. In this state, the way of knowing all things or in other words, the referent of all knowledge would be the individuality of an actor (Chishti, 1954). This idea of "I amness" is the most fundamental a priori idea which human consciousness uses for its development. Hence, in the Socratic mode of "know thyself," one can reach a certain state of gnosis which offers the realization of man's elevated status as *abd* and a unique path to wholeness.

Iqbal believes that no experience can be perceived or given any meaning or conscious form unless its receiver or formalizer is the actor's sense of "I am-ness." In order to develop this sense, however, the subject-object dichotomy needs to collapse as consciousness attempts to become its own object. Hence, the first level of *khudi* or selfhood is the name of consciousness of consciousness and enables an actor to know himself and to say, "I am" (Iqbal, 1934). In Iqbal's own words:

The form of existence is an effect of the Self, Whatsoever thou seest is a secret of the Self

When the Self awoke to consciousness, it revealed the universe of Thought

By the Self the seed of opposition is sown in the world: It imagines itself to be other than itself

It makes from itself the forms of others, in order to multiply the pleasure of strife

Its self-deceptions are the essence of Life, like the rose, it lives by bathing itself in blood

This complex realization will translate itself into creative activity in order to benefit other selves with the result that the wellbeing of the whole community or society will be ensured and maintained. This sociality, then, becomes the second level of *khudi*, where the focus is not only on individual self-perfection but the achievement of perfection of humanity as a whole. This is an idea that reconciles the opposition between Iqbal's concept of an individual and his responsibility to society. As described by Azad,

"Indeed, the Iqbalian man is at once separate from society and inextricably bound to it. … In this way, the Iqbalian man, in his never-ending creativity — which is rooted in man's inextricable relationship to God — continually recreates himself and his society, thereby, inevitably, shedding the shackles of colonialism" (Azad, 2014, p. 19).

Iqbal's ideas are rooted in a theocentric and metaphysical epistemology (Khan and Koshul, 2011) and he believes that there is still a higher cosmic level of *khudi*; at this level, consciousness is still a state of realization but now the realized entity is *Allah* (God). At this level, the definitions needed to attain the knowledge of all things are made in the light of the idea of God already present in one's consciousness. No knowledge of any object can be attained without creating a relationship with the idea of God. In other words, at the highest level, *khudi* becomes the container of a meta-narrative; an idea which makes everything conceivable, perceivable and definable. This idea, which can now be applied to all categories of knowledge, is the idea of God which will enable an actor's mind to actively correspond to eternal facts. A person with such high intensity of *khudi* and intuitive insight can break free from Kantian space & time and experience their relativity as he develops a mental and spiritual connection with the unchanging state of Reality (Iqbal, 1934). Further, an intense love of the Real (*ishq*) would help in developing such *khudi*. In his own words:

The luminous point whose name is the Self, is the life-spark beneath our dust

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From love proceeds the radiance of its being, and the development of its unknown possibilities

There is a beloved hidden within thine heart, I will show him to thee, if thou hast eyes to see

This awareness is a liberating force which can stimulate anticolonial social activism. It is through participation in society that the self can apprehend and create a notion of purpose and authenticity.

From Tigers to Sheep: The Problems of Self-denial

In one of his poems in his book, *Asrar-i Khudi* (Secrets of the Self; 1915), Iqbal uses the allegorical story of tigers being tamed by sheep. Initially, the tigers conquer the sheep due to their bold and courageous but simple nature. However, a cunning sheep convinces them, through sweet talk, that the real honor lies in negating the self, maintaining the status quo and not visualizing adventurous possibilities. She argues that life becomes unstable through self-development and since every episode of creative action is also an exercise of power, it is inherently immoral and unnatural. The tigers unwittingly accept her soporific advice with the result that they turned weak & coward and lost the will to be independent. Here I present only some excerpts of the original poem on account of brevity:

Hast thou heard that in the time of old The sheep dwelling in a certain pasture

So increased and multiplied That they feared no enemy

At last, from the malice of fate Their breasts were smitten by a shaft of calamity

The tigers sprang forth from the jungle and rushed upon the sheepfold

Conquest and dominion are signs of strength, Victory is the manifestation of strength

Those fierce tigers beat the drum of sovereignty, They deprived the sheep of freedom

Forasmuch as tigers must have their prey, That meadow was crimsoned with the blood of the sheep

One of the sheep which was clever and acute, Old in years, cunning as a weather-beaten wolf,

Being grieved at the fate of his fellows And sorely vexed the violence of the tigers,

"Tis not possible, however much one exhorts and counsels, To create in a sheep the disposition of a wolf

But to make the furious tiger a sheep-that is possible; To make him unmindful of his nature — that is possible"

He became as a prophet inspired, And began to preach to the blood-thirsty tigers

He cried out, O ye insolent liars, Who wot not of a day of ill luck that shall continue forever!

I am possessed of spiritual power, I am an apostle sent by God for the tigers

Whoso is violent and strong is miserable: Life's solidity depends on self-denial

O thou the delightest in the slaughter of sheep Slay thy self, and thou wilt have honour!

Life is rendered unstable By violence, oppression, revenge, and exercise of power

Forget thy self, if thou art wise! If thou dost not forget thy self, thou art mad

Close thine eyes, close thine ears, close thy lips, That thy thought may reach the lofty sky!

The tiger-tribe was exhausted by hard struggles, They had set their hearts on enjoyment of luxury.

This soporific advice pleased them, In their stupidity they swallowed the charm of the sheep,

He that used to make sheep his prey Now embraced a sheep's religion

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The tigers took kindly to a diet of fodder: At length their tigerish nature was broken

The fodder blunted their teeth And put out the awful flashings of their eyes

By degrees courage ebbed from their breasts, The sheen departed from the mirror

They lost the power of ruling and the resolution to be independent, They lost reputation, prestige, and fortune

Their paws that were as iron became strengthless; Their souls died and their bodies became tombs

The wakeful tiger was lulled to slumber by the sheep's charm: He called his decline Moral Culture.

This poem is just one example of Iqbal's creative storytelling style full of vivid imagery and marked by a certain courageous, compelling and original thinking. This polysemic poem can be read at many levels. For example, at the level of philosophy, Iqbal is cautioning against those critical philosophers who view power only as repressive and advise their adherents to prefer abstract ideas over praxis (or Platonic Forms over sense-experience). The inherent pessimism of these philosophers generates sterile analytical analysis incapable of offering revolutionary alternatives. For Iqbal, power can also be a positive and constructive force if it is not divorced from religion. In other words, an emancipated man with a developed *khudi* will use his agency to improve the human condition with the help of God.

If we consider Indian Muslims to be the main audience of this poem, Iqbal is pointing out the main cause of their civilizational decline, i.e., they have been lured away from the empowering message of Islam. In other words, Muslims have embraced self-negation and have accepted the bondage of inaction and non-assertion. At another level, Iqbal is describing a manipulating device of the colonizers which is used to curb resistance and pacify indigenous peoples with false consciousness. Overall, Iqbal reflects on the process of self-negation and the denial of *khudi* as well as the pernicious effects of such denial for a nation. He believes that a reflexive self-awareness cannot be detached from the existing physical and social structures. Rather, it encourages a realistic and active recognition of existing socio-technical arrangements and if this recognition results in dissatisfaction, one ought to take action.

Amjad Saqib: Iqbalian *mard-i khuda* (Man of God)

The *mard-i khuda* (Man of God — authentic being), as an ideal type in Iqbal's poetry, is a person who has achieved the third level of *khudi* (God-consciousness) and annihilates his ego in front of God in humble submission. One empirical illustration of this ideal type is Dr. Amjad Saqib who founded Akhuwat in Pakistan in 2001 which now has more than 800 branches across Pakistan. This organization provides interest-free loans to poor families as charging and receiving interest is strictly banned in Islam (Ul-Haq *et al.*, 2020). It is a mission-driven organization galvanized by the worldview, values and priorities of Dr. Amjad rooted in Muslim indigenous traditions of universal brotherhood and serving the community (Harper and Khan, 2017). The inspiration behind naming of his organization is derived from *mouakhat* or Muslim brotherhood (Saqib and Malik, 2018). All Muslims are considered as firmly bound together with each other by the common obligation of submitting to the will of God, without any distinction of social status, color or race. The best example of this brotherhood is represented by the ties that were forged between *Ansaar* [citizens/supporters] and *Muhajirun* [the emigrants] by the prophet (peace be upon him) himself. Thereafter, the society became one entity in this single greatest act of communal altruism and betterment of everyone in society took precedence over territorial or ancestral solidarities. These brotherhood bonds resulted in an equitable distribution of wealth which led to a balanced society. Hence, far from restraining individualism, submission to the will of God liberated individual selves from fear of structural constraints and entrusted people with responsibility for their destinies.

Based on these concepts, Amjad Saqib believes that a better way to reduce poverty is to share one's wealth with others which purifies the individual from greed and attachment to worldly goods while simultaneously increasing his good deeds and spiritual wealth (Saqib and Malik, 2018). Akhuwat's model is feasible (above 90% repayment rate) and scalable as it leads the microfinance industry with a total disbursement of $700mn to three million Pakistani families with more than 800 branches.[1] It also caters to the needs of poor families in terms of business, education, healthcare and housing. Akhuwat does not restrict its services to Muslims and its services are also available to religious minorities. It has created employment opportunities for the marginalized transgender community who are otherwise dependent on alms and are vulnerable to abuse, ridicule and violence.

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[1] Vatican News, 22 May 2020. "Akhuwat — world's largest interest-free microfinance organization," https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2020-05/pakistan-akhuwat-micro-finance-interest-free-lender-saqib0.html

Akhuwat defines its core *mission* as "[t]o alleviate poverty by empowering socially and economically marginalized segments of the society through interest-free microfinance and education" (Akhuwat, 2020). While crafting their image, Akhuwat frequently uses religious symbolism and projects media talks of major religious preachers. For instance, it hosts *Sufi* events (whirling dervishes, *qawwali*-devotional singing) and organizes talks of religious personalities such as Tariq Jamil and Rafiq Akhtar etc. The crucial spiritual and moral injunctions about helping others, respecting religious discipline (such as in the holy month of fasting-*Ramadan*), and observing religious festivities (such as Eid, *Rabiulawal*) permeate much organizational activity. The use of religious places such as mosques, churches and synagogues, is considered essential to employ religious capital in loan disbursement and to imbue credibility and a sense of resolve in Akhuwat's volunteers (Harper, 2012).

The pillars of Akhuwat's philosophy include, *Iman* — "the human trust or belief in a transcendent reality that inspires a sense of responsibility and duty" (Akhuwat, 2020, p. 3), *Ikhlas* which is referred to as "sincerity of intention and action … to pursue goodness for the sake of goodness alone and thus be free from pretense, deceit or hypocrisy," and *Ihsan* which for Akhuwat means that "each individual strives for excellence in character, work, service and knowledge." Hence, *Iman, Ikhlas and Ishan* serve as guiding principles to define poverty and its causes. Against the popular understanding of poverty as lack of financial capital, Akhuwat, considers social and spiritual deprivation as the real source of poverty. Amjad Saqib often mentions in his lectures and video talks that *"poverty is the name of being left alone."* Amjad Saqib, in one of his media talks, insisted that Akhuwat's uniqueness came from its religious sources. He felt no hesitation in declaring his experiment and organization as religion inspired:

"I don't know why people leave religion out of the discussion of society. How can something diffuse in this religious society if it does not have the religious sanction? We have to get the philosophy from Islam and we are doing that. Ham to sunnat par chal rahay hain [We are following the footsteps of the Prophet (peace be upon him)]."

This spirit of compassion appeared to have diffused into the psyche of Akhuwat's volunteers who are well aware of the mainstream microfinance model but want their borrowers to experience Akhuwat's different philosophy. This spirit of changing the world of others, Amjad believes, is not limited to some individuals. It has the potential of becoming a social movement for a fundamental transformation of people's worldviews if its ideas become an integral part of the local

culture. Finally, Akhuwat runs a program called "Make a Dream" to fulfill wishes of terminally ill children who are on death bed. Here is a touching account of dream fulfillment:

> A child said, "I have never celebrated my birthday. Will you celebrate my birthday?" Akhuwat's volunteers, together with hospital staff, celebrated that child's birthday. Balloons, flags, decoration, cake, tea, and then chanting of "Happy birthday." For the next few days, the child remained mesmerized with this birthday party. Running, skipping, and laughing. And then he left in the same state of joy … The gifts he had received on his birthday were all scattered on his bed; remote control car, a mobile phone, a small camera … His mother said, "when he left this world there was an immortal smile on his face. I had never seen that smile before" (Saqib, 2014, 79).

Creating a link with Iqbal, Dr. Amjad Saqib, provides us an exemplar of how *khudi* can be translated in concrete terms such as Akhuwat's organizational practices. The validation and proof of realizing authenticity comes through true agency, creativity, and through the expressions of love and passion for God and His creation. Hence, a developed *khudi* can generate a sustainable development model as this psychological movement allows men to self-fashion themselves to an alternative personhood. Submission to God's will is the source of this agency and emancipation is the state of achievement. His view of Iqbal is reflected in one of his video interviews,[2]

> "Every society has an ideological basis and an unbroken link with past traditions which enables it to see the dreams of its future. … Iqbal's philosophy has played a big role in shaping the ideology of Pakistani society. Iqbal is not only a poet; Iqbal is also an ideologue. In Iqbal's poetry one finds history, culture and civilization. We should base our practices on Iqbalian ideas and these practices should diffuse in our society like perfume; than our society will be a beautiful society."

Iqbal and Critical Organization Studies

The decolonial theorist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007, p. xix), wrote:

> "To confront this [capitalist] paradigm in all its dimensions is the challenge facing a new critical theory and new emancipatory practices. Contrary to their predecessors, this theory and these practices must start from the premise that the

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[2] https://www.facebook.com/AllamaMIqbal/videos/823930587955146/

epistemological diversity of the world is immense, as immense as its cultural diversity and the recognition of such diversity must be at the core of the global resistance against capitalism."

This epistemological diversity of the world, also known as "ecology of knowledges" (Santos, 2004) or "pluriversality" (Mignolo, 2011) is gradually gaining traction in critical organization studies (Ibarra-Colado *et al.*, 2010; Khan and Koshul, 2011; Ul-Haq and Westwood, 2012; Wanderley and Barros, 2019; Jimenez-Luque, 2021). Despite the growing recognition of the importance of new critical organization studies embodying pluriversality, however, the dominant paradigm in academia is still Western-centric (Faria, 2013). As noted by Stewart Clegg and colleagues (2006, p. 11),

"CMS research is a relatively closed system that does not interact empathically with others — it preaches to the converted and damns the heathen others"

There are many non-Western perspectives that need to be included especially the Eastern wisdom in this era of postmodern despair. This chapter is a modest step in this direction in which I show how Muslim thought, as embodied in Iqbalian poetry, can be used to not only critique but also provide an alternative of emancipation. It is important to clarify that I am not arguing that non-Western perspectives should be considered merely because they differ from Western traditions. Rather, these perspectives need to be examined as paradigms of generating knowledge with an independent origin which might shed a new light on contemporary debates in organization studies.

To take just one example, consider the critical writings on emancipation. The concept of human liberation from structural constraints is construed in a manner which suggests that it is alien to non-Western ideas. This is because the focus of Western critical thought is on comprehending reality by being attentive to external events, attributes of objects and mental contents (Weick and Putnam, 2006). However, from an Iqbalian view, the focus should be on internal mental processes, especially consciousness, and on cultivating one's *khudi* through various forms of virtuous behavior in order to grasp reality as a whole through religious/intuitive experience. The knower needs to know himself/herself before he/she attempts to generate knowledge of an object as objects on their own don't have an independent existential reality — rather they serve as symbols or signs — pointing to an ultimate Reality.

Another area where Iqbal can enrich critical organization studies is its entanglements with postmodernism (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2013; Karataş-Ozken and

Murphy, 2010; Esade and McKelvey, 2010; Rhodes and Kornberger, 2005; Linstead, 2004). The confluence of these two bodies of literature have proved instrumental in challenging modernist assumptions embedded in organizations highlighting not only asymmetrical power relations but also the rationalization and colonization of the lifeworld (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996). However, it is also responsible for producing negativism, sightless pessimism and alienation from the world of practice (Thompson, 2016; Spicer *et al.*, 2009); turning the tiger into sheep in Iqbal's terminology. The initial thrust of critical organization studies is mostly lost and the theory is effectively empty of radical political content (Thompson, 2016) which is reflective in its lack of engagement with organizational practices. As argued by Clegg *et al.* (2006, p. 12)

> "You cannot hijack a plane by critically analyzing its route from the distant ground … CMS stays outside the game, captured in its comfort zone and niche"

However, through a constructive dialogue with Iqbalian ideas, critical organization studies can generate hope and praxis for social transformation. Iqbal in his poetry has severely criticized both philosophers and certain Eastern mystics for their passiveness, self-denial and inactivity (Azad, 1995). The Iqbalian *mard-i khuda*, through an intense psychological movement, realizes his/her place as *abd* in this world and submits to God. This submission is a true realization of one's authentic self which is emancipatory in its effects. This emancipation generates a particular confidence and hope in him which propels him to strive for positive social change. The concept of emancipation as submission generates a powerful realization; a realization that allows us to imaginatively conceive a better ordering of human society and produces an urgent desire and scope for agency to lead men towards this order.

The theologically informed notions of emancipation actually enable concrete social action including resistance (of the CMS kind) and re-existence (of the decolonial kind). Hence, an engagement with *khudi* possess the power to transpose critical theory to an extra-societal or metaphysical basis for critique with a transcendental "ought" as an achievable possibility worth striving for. The concept of emancipation as submission and *khudi* enables us to read in the present those future trends which announce radical emancipatory possibilities. It is my hope that this prefatory piece will bring the discussion of emancipation back into organization theory without remaining attached to non-transcendental theoretical structures unable to create space for human agency.

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