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1. ALLAMA MUHAMMAD IQBAL’S CONCEPT OF KHUDI AND ANTI-COLONIAL PRAXIS

INTRODUCTION

I begin with the simple notion that we must learn from our shared histories of anti-colonial struggles. For that reason I have turned to my indigenous land and its knowledge, and to the memory of my skin. This chapter introduces Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal’s concept of “Khudi” (ego/self) for anti-colonial praxis in decolonizing the research space in the academy. The following discussion presents “Khudi” (ego/self) in an effort to further enrich the space reclaimed through the Anti-colonial discursive framework (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). This discursive space is praxically tied in solidarity to other networks and forums of anti-oppression activism with allies in marginalized groups and racialized communities. With that in mind, Iqbal’s indigenous concept of “Khudi” (ego/self) is a decolonizing tool for the practice of the Anti-colonial discursive methodology. The concept of Khudi was envisioned, and mobilized by Iqbal through his poetry and anti-colonial activism against the British colonialism in India. The following discussion briefly illustrates the historical and epistemological pretext, and political articulation of “Khudi” (ego/self) as well as its contemporary advancement in reference to its purpose and scope for my research on skilled Muslim immigrants in Canada. Furthermore, it’ll offer insights on its relevance to various aspects of Muslim integration and migration.

IQBAL’S VISION AND ANTI-COLONIAL PRAXIS

As a poet-philosopher, lawyer and an anti-colonial visionary Iqbal infused his poetry, in Urdu and Persian, 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 (May, 1971). The leader of the political party All India Muslim League, Muhammad Ali Jinnah was inspired by Iqbal’s idea for freedom and a separate homeland for Indian Muslims and together they gave rise to an anti-colonial movement against the British Raj in India. Iqbal is credited with the ‘idea’ of Pakistan. Although he wasn’t alive to witness its birth, Pakistan and its ideological inception began with his thought and activism.

It is valid to ask, how did poetry mobilize the call for freedom? The answer depends on the cultural logic and location of the audience. Many indigenous
cultures encourage oral traditions and similarly Indian culture values the transfer of knowledge through orality (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 165). Poetry in India has a traditional place in the fabric of its cultural life. From casual conservations among the general public and formal poetry gatherings called “Mushaira” to political debates, poetry is a part of daily life. So it was apt for Iqbal to choose poetry as his medium to reach his community. The concept of Khudi was initially presented through Iqbal’s poem Asrar-e-Khudi (The Secrets of Self), however, it is conveyed fully in his work The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam. Afterwards, he continued to further develop this concept in his Urdu prose and poetry. His poetry carried forth his ideas of a free and just society “comprised of morally and intellectually strong individuals” (Qazi, 2013, p. 5). He foregrounded his cultural and religious identity as resistance in his anti-colonial struggle against the British.

Muslims of colonial India were living a life of servitude to their colonial masters. They were mostly uneducated, impoverished and hopeless towards their futures (Qazi, 2013, p. 23; May, 1971, p. 1). In general, most Indians accepted and approved of British rule in the Indian Subcontinent. Iqbal, through his poetry (such as in Shikwa (Complaint), Jawab-e-Shikwa (Answer to Complaint), Masjid-e-Qurtuba (Mosque of Cordoba), and Asrar-e-Khudi (Secrets of Self)) reached out to his community to decolonize their minds and hearts and to instill a sense of self-respect and collective consciousness. His poetry and activism stimulated and mobilized Indian Muslims’ anti-colonial struggle against the East Indian Company’s Rule and British Raj in the Indian subcontinent. After a long history of sovereignty in their homeland and a glorious past when philosophy, science, and art were flourishing, Indian Muslim civilization had experienced significant losses. With little progress and lack of education, as Europe modernized at the expense of its colonies, Muslims stood still. Iqbal denounced their practices and challenged them to confront their situation. He invoked “their glorious past” and conjured “the images of a sovereign homeland while spotlighting their current deprivation” (Qazi, 2013, p. 26). Iqbal’s poetry is representative of his efforts to raise them from a state of submission and rekindle hope for a free future. His concept of Khudi “cannot be understood outside of the times in which he lived, thought and wrote. A few decades before his birth, Muslims’ War of Independence swept through India. By then, the Indo-Muslim community had decayed, was impoverished and had lost all incentive” (May, 1971, p. 55). Indian Muslims had fallen to the notion that their loss of freedom and sovereignty was the will of God; a divine plan. They had given up any aspirations to freedom “thinking that, no matter what, God did not want them to be in power. So by introducing the concept of Khudi he attempted to activate his otherwise dormant nation” (Qazi, 2013, p. 90). The concept of Khudi is marked by creative activity and it is this creative reflection that propels human life to reach out towards a manifestation of its ideologies. Thus, Iqbal discards the singularity of human contemplation and instead only associates this ‘act’ with action if it serves the goals of establishing a human society based on the ideals of freedom, equality and justice.