IQBAL AND KARBALA

Re-Reading the Episteme of Martyrdom for a Poetics of Appropriation

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to illumine the trope of Karbala within the writings of Muhammad Iqbal, a 20th-century thinker, who carried forward in various forms, and through qualifications, the Sufi readings of Karbala in order to mount his socioreligious reform agenda. It also explores how the work of Iqbal has become central for the re-emplotment of Karbala across diverse intellectual traditions.

Key Words ◇ Husayn ◇ Iqbal ◇ Islam ◇ Karbala ◇ *khudi* ◇ Muharram ◇ Pakistan ◇ self ◇ Shia ◇ South Asia ◇ Sufi ◇ Sunni ◇ Urdu

Introduction

> Don't think of those who are slain in God's way as dead.
> Nay!
> They are alive and receive their sustenance from their Lord.
>
> (The Qur'an, 3:168)

> Kullū arzin Karbalā
> Kullū yūmin ʿāshūra
>
> Every land is Karbala
> Every day is ʿāshūra
>
> (Jafar as-Sadiq)

> ramz-e Qurāñ az Ḥusayn āmūḳhtīm
> z-ātish-e ū shoʿla ha añdūḳhtīm
>
> I learned the lesson of the Qur'an from Husayn
> In his fire, like a flame, I burn
>
> (Muhammad Iqbal)

In AH 61/CE 680, on the tenth day (*ʿāshūra*) of the first Islamic month (Muharram), Husayn b. Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was

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martyred on the plains of Karbala. The death of this scion of the Prophet's lineage, who was slain together with his closest family members and followers, left an indelible mark on Muslim consciousness. Husayn's religious and political struggle against the reigning political authority, or caliph, Yazid b. Muawiya, is forever etched into Islamic historical memory and the contours of this struggle have been mapped and remapped by succeeding generations of historians, poets, mystics, reformers and devotees in innumerable colors. History is actively reconstituted through the affective power of prose and poetry, oral as well as written forms, and through a galaxy of images, as the event of Karbala has been emplotted over a millennium in a multitude of traditions.[1] This article explores how the work of the writer Muhammad Iqbal, regarded by many as the father of Pakistan, has become central for the re-emplotment of Karbala across diverse intellectual traditions.

The trope of Karbala elicits a convergence of religious, reformist, and aesthetic concerns and is evoked in ever-changing idioms and contexts. For the majority of the Shia Muslim community,[2] Karbala is the cornerstone of institutionalized devotion and mourning (*ʿazā dārī*). Its tale is recounted in vivid details in the commemorative gatherings (*majālis*) during the first two months of the Islamic calendar, Muharram and Safar (also known as *ayyām-e ʿazā*, or the days of mourning), and throughout the year in various other contexts, such as when personal losses are mourned. For Shias, the event of Karbala is inextricably bound to the issue of succession to the Prophet Muhammad, the issue that caused the first major split in the larger Muslim community: The Prophet had clearly designated his successor in the form of his cousin and son-in-law, Ali b. Abi Talib, after whom the spiritual leadership of the Muslim community would be the sole providence of Ali's chosen descendants (the Alids.) However, after the Prophet's death, the position of Ali and his descendants was usurped by Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and then the Umayyad family. The Alid resistance to this usurpation manifested itself in Karbala when Ali's son, Husayn, refused to pay allegiance to the Umayyad ruler Yazid. Hence, the Shia argument implies, had it not been for the usurpation of Ali's rights, the original sin of the larger Muslim community, the tragedy of Karbala would not have happened.

The Sunni historical repertoire, in order to maintain legitimacy, projects a unified initial Islamic leadership that requires closure on the contested narrative of the Prophet's succession. Within this repertoire, altercations pertaining to the Prophet's successors are minimized if not totally erased, lest they cast aspersions on the modes of selection used by those who opposed Ali as the immediate successor to the Prophet Muhammad. Karbala's construction in the Sunni narrative is as an unfortunate, aberrant event. Remembering this event sporadically, Sunni historical authorities have often shied away from situating it in the larger discursive framework of the Prophet's succession (Abbasi, 1964; al-Tabari, 1990; Baali and Wardi,

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1981; Lindsay, 1997). One group of Sunnis that has fondly recalled Karbala—though divorcing it from the issue of succession—is that of the Sufis. Even though Sufis are often projected as transcending Islam's sectarian divides, most of them self-identify as Sunni, despite tracing their spiritual genealogy back to Ali. Sufis, through anagogical readings, have frequently remembered Ali's son Husayn and his companions as paragons of virtue and lovers of God who annihilated themselves in the divine (*fanā fi'llah*) in order to attain subsistence in God (*baqā bi'llah*) by receiving God's promised sustenance for the martyrs.

This article seeks to illumine the trope of Karbala within the writings of Muhammad Iqbal, a 20th-century thinker, who carried forward in various forms, and through qualifications, the Sufi readings of Karbala in order to mount his socioreligious reform agenda. I focus on Iqbal for he is, arguably, the most original Muslim reformer-poet hailing from modern South Asia, whose evocations of Karbala and martyrdom have become important refrains in the subsequent discourses of anticolonialism and nationalism. In the words of Ali Sardar Jafari,

> Visionaries come and go. Urdu and the subcontinent have witnessed thousands of poets and visionaries but Iqbal's stature remains unmatched. As another great poet of the subcontinent, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, would say, 'Iqbal is an umbrella under which all modern reformist concerns of our region seek shelter.' And if you pay attention to the words of Iqbal, his ideals flow from the household of the Prophet, especially from the Prophet's son-in-law, Hazrat Ali and the Prophet's grandson, Imam Husayn. Just read Iqbal's *Secrets of the Self* and *Signs of Selflessness* and you'll see that the Muslim self reaches its ideal in the Husaynian self and it is this Husaynian self which is the model for a more enlightened humanity. Urdu Progressive Literature shall forever be indebted to the Poet of the East [Muhammad Iqbal].[3]

Surprisingly, the episteme of martyrdom as it is affixed to and shapes the discourse of Iqbal has not received due attention, despite its signal importance for Iqbal's concept of *khudi*, or self. In the first section of this study, I explore how Iqbal reclaims the trope of Karbala for a pan-Islamic reformist discourse that transcends sectarian difference. In so doing, I locate Iqbal firmly within the Sufi tradition, while underscoring the poet's important breaks with this tradition as he constitutes Karbala as a political project that would unite and mobilize Muslims, especially the Muslim minorities of the South Asian subcontinent. After all, Karbala stands for the struggle between a small group of righteous Muslims determined to reform their community and the great empire of Yazid that stood in the way of reform. For Iqbal, however, it was enough to see Karbala as a battle between Yazid and Husayn, as two simultaneous tendencies within the notion of *khudi*, rather than a legacy of usurpation of the caliphate right after the Prophet. In fact, it is precisely the issue of Prophetic succession that Iqbal seeks to avoid so as to not replicate sectarian modes of Islamic historical interpretation. For this reason, Iqbal's intervention is to transcend historical time,

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through the articulation of a higher self that would result in a more unified Muslim community.

The second part of this article explores how Shias, a persecuted minority in Pakistan, in turn, valorize Iqbal, in an attempt to accrue legitimacy for their own sociopolitical ends. In spite of his Sunni heritage, Iqbal himself becomes an important invocation, and therefore a rhetorical device for validating Shia readings of Islamic history. This article concludes by pointing to the heterogeneity of engagements with Iqbal's rearticulation of Karbala in the work of progressive writers and contemporary Iranian intellectuals.

Iqbal and Karbala

> The first Muslim, the King of men, Ali
> The treasure of faith, in the world of love, Ali
> In the affection of his progeny, I live–
> Like a jewel, I sparkle [in his love]

With these words, Iqbal sings his panegyrics for Ali b. Abi Talib, in the epic poem, *Secrets of the Self*. Iqbal divulges here the ideal Muslim self through the persona of Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law. As one of the mystically inclined commentators of Iqbal put it (Chishti, 1998: 412–15), within Ali, Iqbal sees the embodiment of three of the loftiest human characteristics: knowledge, love, and action. To Iqbal, the scope of Ali's knowledge becomes evident through the Prophetic tradition: 'I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate'. As far as the relationship of this gate of knowledge to the city of knowledge is concerned, it is naught but the highest form of love: on several occasions, Ali risked his own life to save that of the Prophet. Hence these are the traits of Ali through which he becomes the fountainhead of Islamic spirituality.

Iqbal is fully immersed in this Sufi tradition and knows well that, according to many Sufis, the Prophet invested Ali with the cloak of spirituality. Although all companions of the Prophet are to be revered for beholding the countenance of the last Messenger of Allah and partaking of his company, Ali's status in the chain of Islamic spirituality is distinct. And it is upon this status Iqbal founds the concept of *khudi*, or self. This triadic self—invested with knowledge, love and action—derives from that 'first Muslim', Ali, and lies latent within all Muslims.

Ali, however, is not alone in manifesting the ideals of the true Muslim self; he is accompanied by his beloved wife Fatima. Had the Prophet not forbidden grave worship, Iqbal declares in his praise for Fatima, 'I would have circumambulated her grave and fallen into prostration on her dust.' Fatima is not only the center of the realm of love but she is also the leader of all those who are in the caravan of God's love. Husayn's traits are the inheritance from Fatima since, whatever jewels of truth and virtue the sons

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inherit, the credit goes to the mothers. And Fatima is the perfection of all mothers, nay all women, for in addition to her love for her children and husband, she connects herself to the toiling labor of the world by working the millstone in the most excruciating circumstances. Along with action and love, knowledge also is the providence of Fatima: the Word of God rests on her lips as she works her way through life (see Naqvi, 1977). Fatima, in the world of Iqbal, is Ali's complement and thus central to the propagation of Islam. It is the son of Ali and Fatima, Husayn, who traverses the paths of martyrdom with the lamp of knowledge and an abiding commitment to love so as to project onto the world the manner in which Islamic ideals can be realized.

In his poem entitled 'The Meaning of Liberation in Islam and the Secret of the Karbala Incident' (Naqvi, 1977: 55) Iqbal first situates Husayn in the context of Islam's philosophy of '*ishq*, or love, as prefigured by both Ali and Fatima: He who enters the divine covenant with the Lord must not prostrate in the presence of anyone but the Object of devotion, God. The *momin*, or true believer, emerges from love and love likewise flows from the *momin*. Love makes the impossible possible. Love is superior to intellect (*'aql*) in every imaginable way. Love captures its prey with no guises whereas intellect has to lay a snare. The treasury of intellect overflows with fear and doubt whereas love is an efflorescence of determination and certainty. Intellect partakes of construction in order to deconstruct whereas love causes desolation in order to foster prosperity. The leader of this realm of love is Husayn:

> āñ imām-e 'āshiqāñ pūr-e Batūl
> sarv-e āzāde ze būstān-e Rasūl (Naqvi, 1977: 59)
>
> That imam of lovers, that son of Batul [Fatima]
> That liberated cypress tree from the garden of the Messenger

Iqbal compares Husayn's exalted station within the Muslim community to that of the *sura-e Iḳhlāṣ* in the Holy Qur'an. This *sura* is a fundamental component of Muslim ritual prayers and concisely summarizes the Islamic creed of monotheism: 'Say, He is Allah, the One; He begets not nor is he begotten and there is none like Him.' Just as in the words of this pivotal Qur'anic *sura*, Husayn is an integral part of the Muslim community. In fact, Truth itself survives through the strength of Husayn.

Having paid this tribute to the martyred hero of Karbala as the fountainhead of the philosophy of love, Iqbal proceeds to dehistoricize Husayn's struggle, at least as far as the Shias are concerned: 'When the Caliphate severed its relationship with the Qur'an [under Yazid] and dropped poison in the mouth of liberation' (Naqvi, 1977: 60), Husayn rose as the cloud of mercy and then rained upon the land of Karbala. The implication here is that, before Yazid, the successors of the Prophet had been tied to the privileged Islamic text and Yazid strayed from this path of his predecessors. This

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is of course a Sunni implication, for as far as the Shias are concerned, the Qur'an is invariably bound to Ali and his descendants. Since Ali was deprived of his leadership position after the Prophet (except for the brief time in which Ali became the fourth Muslim caliph), the caliphate had been insulated from the Qur'an from the very first moments after the Prophet's death. But Iqbal rescripts Husayn as a more cosmic force, a cloud of mercy akin to his Prophet-grandfather, above and beyond sectarian strife. So nourishing was the tulip-generating, garden-producing rain from the cloud of mercy that the despotism of a desolated world was eradicated. According to Iqbal, the suffering that Husayn himself had to undergo to nourish the garden of Truth transformed him into the very foundation of monotheism:

> bahr-e ḥaqq dar ḳhāk o ḳhūñ ġhalṭīda ast
> pas binā'e lā illāh gardīda ast (Naqvi, 1977: 60)
>
> For the sake of Truth, he writhed in dust and blood
> Thus did he become the foundation of lā illāh

Iqbal, a devout student of mysticism and a devotee of Hazrat Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236), the Sufi luminary from Ajmer, is of course building upon the Sufi hermeneutics of Karbala. Few people who have been exposed to Sufi traditions of the subcontinent would not be familiar with these words of Muinuddin Chishti:

> Shāh ast Ḥusayn bādshāh ast Ḥusayn
> dīn ast Ḥusayn dīñpanāh ast Ḥusayn
> sar dād na dād dast dar dast-e Yazīd
> ḥaqqā ke binā'e lā illāh ast Ḥusayn (Chishti, n.d.: 196)
>
> King is Husayn, Emperor is Husayn
> Religion is Husayn, the refuge for religion is Husayn
> [He] gave up his head but did not give his hand in the hands of Yazid
> The truth is that the foundation of lā illāh is Husayn

The Khwaja's words reflect and illuminate the larger framework of Islamic mysticism and the privileged position that the martyr of Karbala, Husayn b. Ali holds in this tradition. Husayn, in the aforementioned verses, is the spiritual watershed for the legitimate authority as he is for the religion of Islam. The truth, according to this 13th-century mystic, is that Husayn is the very foundation of Islam, its essential creed of *tauḥīd*, or divine unity, *lā illāhā illalāh, Muḥammadan rasūl Allāh*, or 'there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger'.

Thus all fortunes of the religion rest with the grandson of the Prophet who posited suffering and martyrdom as the basis for Islam and negated the offenses to this religion that appeared in the form of Yazid. Such an outpouring of love and devotion to Husayn also had its precursors in other mystical works, including those of Abul-Majd Majdud b. Adam Sanai

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(d. 1131) and Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273)—both of whom had a formidable influence upon Iqbal's thoughts.

According to Sanai, Karbala is the archetype of suffering in the path of God to which the Sufi must look for guidance: 'This world is full of martyrs, but where is a martyr like Ḥusayn at Karbalā?' (see Chittick, 1986: 4). But to speak of Husayn, in Sanai's opinion, is a formidable task. For, if justice is to be done to the Martyr of Karbala, it entails that the individual self of the speaker must be annihilated. For many a mystic, life begins with the annihilation (*fanā)* of the base ego (*nafs*) and the harmonious subsistence (*baqā)* in the will of and love for the Beloved, the Sustainer, the Creator, Allah. Such a *nafs* is actually a referent to two ego selves: *an-nafs al-ḥaywāniyah* (the animal soul) and *an-nafs al-ammārah)* (the commanding egotistic soul). Spiritual happiness is thus posited by the death of the base ingredients of self and by the attainment of a life that dwells in God's desires. Worldly relations in such a life are rent asunder as the surrender of the lover (creation) to the Beloved's (Creator's) will is complete. Paving the way for this doctrine is the tradition of the Prophet: 'Die before you die' (see Elias, 1998: 3). The utility of this imperative becomes evident if one were to think of a life in which selfish, myopic desires of instant gratification (residing in *an-nafs al-ḥaywāniyah* and *an-nafs al-ammārah)* fall prey to a higher level of consciousness, the level of *khudi* as Iqbal would put it, that sprouts from creation's latent Godliness.

For this higher Sufi self, or Iqbalian *khudi*, death itself loses its sense of demise and exults in the union with the Origin. 'From Him we Come and to Him we return', proclaims the Qur'an and it is this simple eschatological affirmation that not only bespeaks of a universal consciousness but has become a common Muslim response to the news of any death. In fact, the death of many a Sufi master is referred to and celebrated as if it were the *'uvs*, the wedding day on which the lover and the Beloved are united forever. It is no wonder that the renowned Sufi martyr, Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922), another favorite of Iqbal, could accord with death so well: 'Kill me, my faithful friends! For in my slaughter is my life—my death is in my life and my life in my death.'

From Sanai, Iqbal also drew allegorical substance. Within the works of this 12th-century Persian poet, the conflict between Husayn and Yazid is an allegorical one reflecting the tension that exists between the virtuous and vicious side present in all individuals. Thus the fashioning of the perfect self entails the defeat of the Yazids of one's own vicious, egotistical self with the help of Husayn (see Chittick, 1986: 5).

In addition to Sanai, Iqbal counted upon the most majestic of Persian mystical writers, Jalaluddin Rumi, for guidance. Rumi remained the most overarching spiritual influence (*pīr-e Rūmī*) for the 'humble Indian disciple' *murīd-e Hindī*, Muhammad Iqbal. Rumi, more than anything else, is the poet of love. To him, the being of the Beloved par excellence is all encompassing:

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jumla maʿshūq ast o ʿāshiq parda-eh
ziñdah maʿshūq ast o ʿāshiq murda-eh (Anqirawi, 1970: 96)

All is the Beloved, the lover but a veil
Alive is the Beloved, the lover but dead.

For Rumi, the earthly existence in essence is the separation of the lover from the Beloved: 'It is like the reed torn from the reed bed' (Anqirawi, 1970: 1). Such a forlorn existence obviously cannot have a substantial significance in itself. It derives its significance from the loving quest for its origins. Within this loving Rumian quest are ensconced two attributes of Iqbalian *khudi*: knowledge and action. For without knowledge the object of the quest, the beloved, remains unknown and in order to attain this knowledge one has to perform the action of soul searching. This playfully circular quest, existential jouissance of sorts, is often painful. However, the more painful it is, the keener is the awareness that the lover has of his separation from the beloved. The ego of the lover, as Rumi would have it, must never be allowed to run amok lest it is deluded by its own existence. It must be combated—combated within the prison of body.

Rumi, in the same vein as Sanai, sees the Husayn–Yazid struggle as symbolic of the struggle between the higher self and the lower ego within all humans:

Night died and came to life, for there is life after death:
O heartache, kill me! For I am Husayn, you are Yazid. (Chittick, 1986: 9)

In Rumi's opinion, Husayn wages a war and refuses to pay allegiance to separation, opting instead for union with the Beloved. The consistent theme in the mystical works of Rumi as well as Sanai, insofar as it pertains to Karbala, is that of love. Husayn in these works becomes the metaphor for the ideal lover and Karbala becomes the battleground analogous to the combative inner self where the lover's love for the beloved is tested.

In opting to tie Husayn, first and foremost, to the idea of love, Iqbal utilizes the mystical threads of the past. The Husayn–Yazid dialectic (in the beginning at least) concerns more the inner human conflict than it does any outward political agenda. From this conflict, the higher self (*khudi*) emerges victorious as it is overlaid upon the base self. Through this spiritual capital of *khudi*, even the will of *khuda* (God/god) becomes subservient to the one who possesses *khudi:*

ḳhūdī ko kar balañd itnā ke har taqdīr se pehle
ḳhudā bañde se khūd pūche batā terī rizā kyā hai (Iqbal, 1992: 34)

Raise thy self to such a station,
that before any fate,
God himself shall ask his creation, 'What is thy will'!

Thus the 'will' of the creation now rests comfortably within the agency of the creation and the creator–creation dialectic is puckishly and punningly unsettled—*khudi* (self) seems to dictate the will of *khuda* (god/God)!

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Just as eternal life is promised to those killed in God's way, *khudi*, for Iqbal, is also constituted by self-affirming eternity:

> ḳẖūdī hai ziñda to hai maut ek maqām-e ḥayāt
> ke ʿishq maut se kartā hai imteḥān sabāt (Ahmad, 1971: 33)
>
> If the self lives, death is only a station in life
> for love tests its affirmation (permanence) through death

Iqbal follows through this idea elsewhere:

> ho agar ḳẖūdnagar o ḳẖūdgar o ḳẖūdgīr ḳẖūdī
> yeh bhī mumkin hai ke tū maut se bhī mar na sake (Ahmad, 1971: 39)
>
> If the self is self-reflexive, self-creating, and self-comprehending,
> It's even possible that you won't die from death

This realization of *khudi*, according to Iqbal, was passed on by Ali and Fatima to Husayn, the martyr of Karbala, who, along with his 72 companions, lived the concept of *khudi* by fighting (acting) for the principles of Islam (knowledge) and dying (loving) a martyr's death.

However, as far as the battle of Karbala is concerned, Husayn is not the sole object of Iqbal's praise. Husayn's companions also deserve to be labelled 'godly' in that aesthetically creative way:

> dushmanāañ chūñ reg-e ṣeḥrā lā taʿdad
> Dostān-e ū ba Yazdāñ ham ʿadad (Naqvi, 1977: 60)
>
> Like the grains of desert sands his [Husayn's] enemies were countless
> While the number of his friends equalled God (Yazdan)

Relying upon the numerical value that is attributed to Arabic letters in the system of *abjad*,[4] the poet transforms the 72 followers of Husayn into God or *Yazdān*—the value of the letters composing Yazdan being: y=10, z=7, d=4, a=1, n=50. It is as though the 72 companions are annihilated in the Persian equivalent of Allah, Yazdan (*fanā fī Yazān!*) in order to strengthen their *khudi* and ratify the cause of Truth (*Ḥaqq*) that was espoused by Husayn.

Continuing in this mystical vein, the 'Poet of the East' considers Husayn's struggle to be a mine of the mysterious tradition of sacrifice that was prefigured by the Prophet Abraham. In fact, one of Iqbal's most fondly remembered couplets regarding Husayn treats this theme in Urdu:

> Gharīb o sāda o rañgīñ hai dāstān-e Ḥaram
> Nehāʾet us kī Ḥusayn ibtedā hai Ismaʿīl (Ahmad, 1971: 67)
>
> The legacy of the haram is mysteriously simple, yet colorful
> Ismael is its outset and Husayn its climax

Iqbal signifies the revered House of God, the Haram, or the Kaba in Mecca, in terms of Ismail and Husayn. Ismail was the product of the constant prayers of his father, Prophet Ibrahim, who nevertheless was willing to sacrifice his son at the command of God. An important part of the annual

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Muslim pilgrimage, the *ḥajj*, is to recall Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son. Ibrahim was willing to make only one sacrifice, but Husayn made countless sacrifices in the battlefield of Karbala to save the ideals of Islam. Hence, if Ibrahim and Ismail started the tradition of martyrdom, Husayn perfected it—not only by providing an eternal example of sacrifice for the world but by awakening the slumbering Muslim self.

Iqbal is so consumed in Husayn's love that the very lessons from the Word of God, the Qur'an, are imparted to the poet through Husayn:

> ramz-e Qurāñ az Ḥusayn āmūḳhtīm
> z-ātish-e ū shoʿla ha añdūḳhtīm (Naqvi, 1977: 61)
>
> I learned the lesson of the Qur'an from Husayn
> In his fire, like a flame, I burn

These words bespeak the importance of Husayn in constituting an epistemological framework for the Qur'an. The words of the Beloved, in the form of the Qur'an, are imparted to Iqbal when he is consumed in the fire of Husayn's love. Consumed, though far from immolated, the lover–Iqbal's higher self lives on like a flame. The annihilation reaches its fruition in subsistence and it is this flame of subsistence that guides the spiritually thirsty Muslim community, even beyond the borders of the subcontinent:

> reg-e ʿIrāq munteẓar, kisht-e Ḥijāz tishna kām
> ḳhūn-e Ḥusayn bāz deh, Kūfa o Shām-e ḳhwīsh rā (Naqvi, 1977: 64)
>
> The sands of Iraq await, the desert of Hijaz is thirsty
> Once again satiate your own Kufa and Syria with the blood of Husayn.

The city of Kufa (in Iraq) and the region of Syria were Yazid's two major power bases. Husayn was murdered by the forces of Yazid before the Prophet's grandson could reach Iraq and incite others to rise up against Yazid. Yazid's fear was that if Kufa fell to Husayn, Syria would soon follow.

For Iqbal, Husayn's struggle has not completely ended with Karbala. Although Husayn himself could not go on fighting in Kufa and Syria, it became incumbent upon the Muslim community to keep this struggle alive. Each and every member of the Muslim community, regardless of his/her sectarian, gender, or class markings had the responsibility to emulate Husayn's struggle for this struggle was the struggle par excellence for justice. Karbala, for Iqbal, is a site whereupon the Qur'an and the Kaba, two of the loftiest religious artifacts for all Muslims, considered pre-eternal (*az-azal*) as well as post-eternal (*ta abad*), converge, and consequently, all differences within the community should be subsumed within the Husaynian struggle. By invoking Karbala as an intrinsic component of an overall Islamic reform blueprint, Iqbal ruptures the previously held sectarian codes of this struggle. By underscoring the degree to which Karbala is bound with the Qur'an and the Kaba, Iqbal at once limits the apparently divergent readings of this event. Karbala is thus constituted by a larger and more

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comprehensive temporal process, the duration of which renders it timeless (from pre-eternity to post-eternity). Iqbal relocates Karbala away from its originary moment (which for Shias would be the moment when Ali's rights were usurped after the Prophet) and anchors it in an extra-temporal fold of Islam. Iqbal could not have agreed more with the great-grandson of Husayn, Jafar as-Sadiq, the sixth Shia Imam and a pillar of Islamic spirituality for Sufis, who uttered the following words while imputing both timelessness and spacelessness to Karbala: 'Every day is ashura; every land is Karbala'. To the extent that Muslims conceive of Karbala as timeless, an event transcending its particularity, like the Qur'an and the Kaba, there is a possibility of forging a more united community for which Karbala is a catalyst, that enhances reform and justice.

Yet, Iqbal is aware that, despite agreeing with the pivotal importance of the Qur'an and the Kaba, the Muslim community of his time was subject to discordant impulses. In dismay, the poet-reformer writes:

> The profits of this community are one, so are the losses
> The prophet is one, so is the religion and faith
> The sacred Kaba, Allah, and the Qur'an is one
> Had Muslims also been one, would it have been such a big deal?!
> Sectarianism prevails in some places, factionalism in others
> Is this the way to prosper in the world? (Iqbal, 1992: 202)

Ironically, perhaps, the spiritual 'father of Pakistan' seems here to be arguing against the very factionalism or communalism that resulted in the creation of Pakistan as a nation state. For this reason Iqbal is concerned to locate Muslim in a larger web of multiple cultures and regions:

> China and Arabia are ours, India is ours
> We are Muslim and our homeland is the entire world. (Iqbal, 1992: 159)

Differences between Muslims can be respected but under the aegis of a unified community. The edification of this community can be through paradigmatic struggle, like that of Karbala. The ethos of such struggle is shaped by a determination to act on behalf of the self as well as the community, and by extension, for all of God's creation.

Thus in poetry that bespoke urgency, Iqbal, through finely drawn metaphors, framed his potent appeals for a call to action. This action, rooted in love and knowledge, would gather momentum from constantly conjuring up Husayn's battle and by situating Karbala within the concept of *khudi*. Karbala for Iqbal would become a political project constituted not only by the simultaneity of affirming the higher self and negating the lower one, breathing in the Husaynian spirit and breathing out the dregs of Yazidism, but also by creating and reinforcing community solidarity. Iqbal would implore those who had seen Karbala solely as the epiphany of the highest mystical struggle, now to interpret this struggle also via political activism:

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Get out of the khanqahs [Sufi residences]
and perform the ritual of Shabbir [Husayn]
For the poverty of the khanqahs is naught but
anxiety and affliction (Iqbal, 1992: 680)

The mystical fetish for poverty, according to Iqbal, vulgarized class struggle, and rigidified it into iniquitous contemporary institutions. Material poverty within Sufi lore was valorized so as to create a discourse of worldly apathy and political indifference (Imrani, n.d.: 193). Of later developments within Islamic mysticism, Iqbal would argue that there had been so much emphasis placed upon the 'other-worldly' rewards that 'this-worldly' concerns were inhibited. Hence the spirit of poverty which Husayn had advocated—the spirit of poverty which invested worldly wealth with the most loathsome of qualities and instigated the search for justice—had been sacrificed:

ek faqr hai Shabbīrī is faqr meñ hai mīrī
mīrāṡ-e Musalmānī, sarmāya'e Shabbīrī (Imrani, n.d.: 193)

There is a poverty, that of Shabbir [Husayn]
In this poverty lies Kingship
The inheritance of Islam
Is naught but the wealth of Shabbir

Husayn's poverty lay in his righteousness and spirit of sacrifice: he fought Yazid when he had the option of accepting worldly wealth as long as he tolerated the rule of Yazid in silence. Had Husayn cherished worldly wealth, he would have accepted that from Yazid rather than give up his life fighting for the greater good of the community. Had Husayn simply valued poverty, then he would have withdrawn into a *khanqah* and forsaken political activism. But Husayn rose above the epidemic dichotomies of wealth and poverty, asceticism and indulgence, to evoke *khudi*, that higher self which is predicated essentially on love, knowledge, and action. This higher self is conceived in the spirit of social and economic justice at a communal level; it functions in response to the real needs of the downtrodden. This *khudi* is then transposed to community or a social collective (*qaum*, *millat*, *ummat*), while raising a call for just and loving action:

Uṭho merī dunyā ke ġharībоñ ko jagā do
Kāḳh-e umarā ke dar o dīvār hilā do
jis khet se dahqāñ ko muyassar nahīñ rozī
us khet ke har ḳhusha-e gañdum ko jalā do (Iqbal, 1992: 402)

Rise! Awaken the poor of my world
Shake the doors and walls of the palaces of the rich
Set ablaze every stack of grain
In the field from which the farmer receives no sustenance.

These verses, appearing in Iqbal's provocative trilogy, *Firmān-e ḳhudā*, 'God's Decree', are Allah's (khuda's) call to awaken the *khudi* of the poor through the inflammatory words of Iqbal.

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The 'decree' of God itself can be seen as a willingness on the part of the divine to heed the calls for economic justice raised by both Marx and Lenin. Iqbal, in effect, articulates his ideals of socioeconomic justice by presenting them as a synthesis which emerges from what he takes to be the redeeming aspects of Marx's thought, and what he imagines to be Lenin's valid complaints to God.

Lenin, through Iqbal, questions God about the fate of the economically less fortunate. Decrying the perpetration of banks at the expense of churches, he notices gambling in the guise of trade and exploitation in the name of education. In such a world, souls are destroyed by the machine as technological tools carelessly crush humanity. Vicariously speaking for Lenin, Iqbal closes Lenin's complaint:

> Tū qādir o ʿādil hai magar tere jahāñ meñ
> haiñ talḳh bahot bañda-e mazdūr ke auqāt
> kab ḍūbegā sarmāyā parastī kā safīna
> dunyā hai terī muñteẓar-e roz-e makāfāt (Iqbal, 1992: 400)
>
> You are all-powerful and just,
> Yet in your world
> The slaves of labor suffer through bitter times
> When will the boat of capital worship sink?
> Your world awaits the day of requital.

The day of requital can dawn with the insights of new visionaries like Marx:

> He's the Moses without the light, he's the Messiah without the cross,
> He's not a prophet but yet has a book under his arms. (Rame, 1970: 103)

By invoking Marx as a prophet-like entity, by metaphorically sublimating *The Communist Manifesto* to a near-holy status, and by passionately speaking for Lenin, Iqbal interpolates Islamically inflected Marxist-Leninist ideals of social justice into the structure of Muslim self and community. The higher self learns from the new Moseses and Messiahs, not directly, but through the lens of the Qur'an and Islamic spirituality.[5] This *khudi* is not shy in embracing sources of virtue that transcend the traditional realm of Islam in order to redress the grievances of the masses. It can easily learn from other traditions of knowledge. Hence it can comfortably act as a site upon which Nietzsche's superman embraces a Kantian categorical imperative, where Bergson's social correctives shape Goethe's artistry and imagination, where Marx's calls for economic justice amplify Lenin's cries. This site, by virtue of its very essential attributes (love, knowledge and action), is always in an existential flux:

> Sukūñ muḥāl hai qudrat ke kārḳhāne meñ
> Sabāt ek taġayyur ko hai zamāne meñ (Iqbal, 1992: 148)
>
> Permanence is impossible in the factory of nature,
> Only change remains permanent in time

Change is born of inventions, alterations, and reinterpretations. Iqbal in

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The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in Islam underscores a dynamic, existential interpretation of the Qur'an: 'As in the words of a Muslim Sufi– "no understanding of the Holy Book is possible until it is actually revealed to the believer just as it was revealed to the Prophet" ' (Iqbal, 1988: 181). No great philosopher nor any distinguished mystic can unravel the knots of revelation, as Iqbal would have it, until individual 'conscience' itself becomes the site of revelation. And of course the revelation has been signified to Iqbal through Husayn. The significance of Husayn's struggle is inextricably bound to the significance of the Word of God and, like the Word of God, the struggle also shall be interpreted anew in the immediate context of each Muslim individual. Hence Iqbal becomes a medium for refashioning the trope of Karbala so as to universalize its meaning for all Muslims.

Iqbal intended his reading of Karbala to be more in accordance with the Sufi readings of Sanai, Rumi, and Muinuddin Chishti, rather than with any binary Shia reading in which the alignments for the battle of Karbala were made in the hours following the Prophet's death, almost 48 years before the actual event itself. In order for such an Iqbalian reading to have any significance within Sunni reformist discourse, the battle of Karbala had to be situated atemporally.

In the subcontinent, the dislodging of Karbala from a Shia narrative sequence occurred within a broader Sunni reformist rhetoric. For example, another prominent Sunni reformer of the first half of 20th-century South Asia, Muhammad Ali Jauhar, who was a central figure in the *Khilafat* movement, defined anew the partisans of Husayn *(Shiʿān-e Ḥusayn)*:

> ḥaqq o bāṭil kī hai paikār hameshā jārī
> jo na bātil se ḍareñ haiñ vahī Shiʿān-e Ḥusayn (Jauhar, 1983: 31)
>
> The war between truth and falsehood is eternal
> Those who are not frightened by falsehood are the partisans of Husayn

The very word Shia (denoting partisan, of Ali) is appropriated and expanded by Jauhar with an implied double-bind qualification. Those who are 'Shia' are not intimidated by falsehood; those who are intimidated by falsehood cannot be 'Shia'. This partisan group, according to Jauhar, is quite selective:

> karne ko yūñ hazār kareñ sīna kūbīyāñ
> hai chañd hī ke vāsṭe dunyā'e Karbalā (Jauhar, 1983: 79)
>
> Although a thousand might beat their chests, as they do
> The world of Karbala is limited to but a few

Thus Jauhar wrests the monopoly of Husayn's cause from those who commemorate the martyr solely by mourning his suffering in an act of ritualistic exchange. For mourning, to Jauhar, also belies Husayn's cause (a critique of the Shias) since Husayn's battle at Karbala resurrected Islam:

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qatl-e Ḥusayn aṣl meñ marg-e Yazīd hai
Islām zinda hotā hai har Karbalā ke baʿd (Jauhar, 1983:10)

In reality the murder of Husayn is the death of Yazid
Islam is resurrected after every Karbala

Within the Muslim reform discourse of the first four decades of the 20th century, as evidenced by the words of Jauhar and Iqbal, we can also identify a polemical trace that wrestles to reclaim Karbala from Shia hands. The experiences of British colonialism, as well as Hindu nationalism in secular garb, forced Muslims to conjure images that gave voice to their struggle as a minority. What could reflect a more resistant, righteous minority versus oppressive majority struggle than the battle of Karbala—a battle in which 72 of the faithful fought thousands of soldiers in order to safeguard Islam? Lest this struggle be written off as the suicidal mission of a minority, Husayn and his companions received the Quranically cherished and dynamic designation of *shuhada*, or martyrs. The Perso-Arabic word for martyrdom, *shahadat*, itself means 'bearing witness', and thus conjures up an image converse to that of death. Adducing such reformist lessons from Karbala, and juxtaposing to them the mystical and devotional values invested in this trope, Jauhar and Iqbal attribute to this event an atemporal universality.

One of the most fascinating things about the way Karbala is invoked in Iqbal as well as in Jauhar is that this struggle of Islamic history is never mediated by or filtered through the *ulema* (religious authorities). Iqbal, after all, had little faith in the way his contemporary religious leaders were fostering Islam. Just as Iqbal wrests control of the Quranic interpretation from the *ulema*, Karbala too can be liberally read and then emulated by each Muslim. In his *Mulla-yi ḥaram* (Religious leader of the House of God), Iqbal vents his dismay at those in charge of formal religious practices:

ʿajab nahīñ ke Ḳhudā tak terī rasāʾī ho
terī nigāh se hai poshīda ādmī kā maqām
terī namāz meñ bāqī jalāl hai na jamāl
terī aẓāñ meñ nahīñ hai merī ṣaḥar kā payām (Iqbal, 1992: 486)

No wonder you don't reach God
The station of man is concealed from your vision
Neither majesty nor beauty remain in your ritual prayers
The tidings of my dawn are not professed in your call to prayer.

Whereas Iqbal's address to the Muslim religious establishment rings with an accusatory tone, it is the poet's vocation, Iqbal believes, to provide society with a vision:

qaum goyā jism hai, afrād haiñ āʿẓāʾe qaum
manzil-e ṣanʿat ke rāh paimā haiñ dast o pāʾe qaum
maḥfil-e naẓm-e ḥukūmat chehraʾe zebāʾe qaum
shāʿir-e rañgīñ navā hai dīdaʾe bīnāʾe qaum
mubtelāʾe dard koʾī ʿaẓū ho to rotī hai āñkh
kis qadar hamdard sāre jism kī hotī hai āñkh (Iqbal, 1992: 61)

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The community, it can be said, is the body; the people its organs
The workers treading the path of handicraft are its hands and legs
The concert of the government's conduction is the adornment of the nation's face
And the poet who sings colorfully is the visionary eye of the nation
Whenever any organ is in pain, the eye weeps
Behold the extent to which the eye sympathizes with the entire body!

The ontological status of the poet, in the eyes of Iqbal, is hence that of a visionary who is always in tune with the rest of society's members and not like the religious authority of Iqbal's time. Iqbal's vision for the present and future was sharpened by the insights he had gained from the past. Poetry could generate the vision for a brighter future by invoking the past. The past had a privileged legitimizing position for Iqbal, as it did for an overwhelming number of socioreligious reformers. Of course, the revolutionary aspect of the past could hardly be defined by a trope more powerful than that of Karbala:

ḥaqīqat-e abadī hai maqām-e Shabbīrī
badalte rahte haiñ añdāz-e Kūfī o Shāmī (Naqvi, 1977: 63)

The station of Husayn is the eternal truth
The ways of the [hypocrites] of Kufa and Syria are ever changing.

No discussion of Muslim socioreligious reform literature of the subcontinent is possible without acknowledging Iqbal's key influence upon many reformer-poets. Iqbal, through his emplotment of Karbala, walks along an ambiguously located mystico-reformist line which teases out the rigidly binding sectarian affiliations. Although revered by prominent Shias of the subcontinent, Iqbal constantly denied any Shia orientation.

The Shia Interpellation of Iqbal

Interpellating Iqbal as a Shia voice became both a political intervention and strategy of survival for the Shia minority in the nation state of Pakistan, founded as an Islamic state for Muslims, in 1947 (nine years after Iqbal's death). The dictates of state-sponsored or religious-based nationalism have often compelled the modern nation state/religion to collapse differences (at multiple levels) in order to constitute a supposedly more united nation. In Pakistan too, the state, hoping to fulfill its integrationist mission, attempted to elide religious differences as the years passed. The Pakistani Shia minority (approximately 20 percent, or 28 million, of Pakistan's population) has continued to have grievances against the Sunni establishment. Although several prominent leaders of Pakistan (Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Iskandar Mirza, Yahya Khan, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto) were either Shia or have had strong Shia connections, the demands of the Sunni religious establishment in the 1960s to give the Sunni Hanafi law a privileged position in the country left the Shia community insecure. Apprehensive of such calls, as well as of

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rising anti-Shia rhetoric, Shia religious authorities in Pakistan have used the *majlis* as a forum to further the agenda of the Shia community, especially after General Zia ul Haqq rose to authority in 1977. Zia too advocated legal and economic policies that were more in harmony with the Sunni Hanafi school of jurisprudence than with the Shia Jafari school. Finally, sectarian violence has marred the image of Pakistan as Shias and Sunnis have opted for a 'radicalization' of their sectarian identities. In 2001, between February and April, 50 people have already been killed in Shia–Sunni violence (see McCarthy, 2001). In the Punjab province of Pakistan alone, over 600 people, mostly Shia, fell victim to sectarian violence between 1989 and 1999 (see Jawad, 1999).

Iqbal, as we have seen, strove to defactionalize the Muslim community of the subcontinent by emphasizing a notion of self whereby all Muslims could find a common ground in a shared Prophetic paradigm, regardless of language, culture, or creed. But within three decades of Pakistan's creation, the sectarian, regional, and linguistic differences shattered any pretense that the Prophet, the Qur'an, or the Kaba was enough to smooth out historical fissures within the religion. As Sunni orthodoxy became evident in the rhetoric of the state, Shias began to resist encroachment upon their historical and institutional territories through their own interpretive discourses. These discourses would undercut the telos of Sunni hegemony by selectively invoking Iqbal in order to vindicate Shia legitimacy.

At the beginning of this article I wrote that the event of Karbala is ritualistically mourned by Shias for two months and eight days every year. During these mourning *majālis*, the Shias reinforce their religious identity and historical validity by situating Karbala in the history of Islam. The *majlis* is a prime site for the articulation of Shia readings of history, which trod an alternative path to the Sunni ones. Through the rituals of mourning, Shias bridge the historical and cultural divides between themselves and the martyrs of Karbala as if to say, 'had we been in Karbala, we too would have fought with you, O Husayn!'.

The months of mourning frequently witness an eruption of Shia–Sunni violence and enmity between these communities is at its worst during this time (see Zaman, 1998: 689–716). Some Sunni religious authorities have balked at the Shia commemoration of Karbala and have contested the categorization of Shias as Muslims. Much to the dismay of the Shia community, anti-Shia polemicists, like Mahmud Ahmad Abbasi, have even gone to the extent of defending Yazid and rendering the Shia disdain for the enemies of Ali and Husayn as an anti-Islamic sentiment (see Abbasi, 1964). Lest the Shia community suffer the fate of the Ahmadis, a Muslim minority that was declared 'non-Muslim' by the Pakistani state in 1974, the Shias of Pakistan have been repeatedly forced to defend their beliefs as Muslims. For many Shias, the most strategic defense against the Sunni orthodoxy was found by citing Sunni authorities who had become iconic figures within Pakistan.

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In the official imagination of Pakistan, Iqbal is undoubtedly such a figure. Hailed as the intellectual and spiritual father of the country, Iqbal, in spite of scant historical evidence, is seen as generating the call for Pakistan. Thus, invoking Iqbal's verses in praise of cherished Shia figures has been one way in which the Shia minority, by conflating its sectarian identity with non-sectarian eulogies for Karbala, could provide powerful rejoinders to Sunni authorities like Abbasi. No person from Pakistan's Shia minority endeavored to challenge Sunni readings of Islamic history in the way that Rashid Turabi did.

Born in Hyderabad, India, Turabi studied philosophy and Islamic theology in Allahabad and Lucknow. A fervent supporter of the creation of Pakistan, he left Hyderabad after the partition and rapidly gained popularity as one of the foremost orators of Pakistan. His speeches were broadcast on Radio Pakistan, once the medium became widespread in the 1960s. The rapid growth of radio, television, and cassette recordings not only gained Turabi renown throughout the Urdu-speaking world but they have kept his memory alive 25 years after his death. His tapes are still the favorites of those Shias who have limited physical access to centers of commemoration. When members of his large following today are asked why his *majālis* are still cherished, most of them have the same response: he proves the cause of the Prophet's household not only through the verses of the Holy Qur'an but also through use of Sunni historical sources. So closely is Turabi identified with the Muharram oratory that he has been referred to as *miñbar kā dūsrā nām*, or, the pulpit's second name (see Husayn, 1975).

For Turabi, Rumi and Iqbal (both of whom were self-identified Sunnis) became instrumental in configuring Shiism as a legitimate segment of Islam. Rashid Turabi commonly cited the praises of Ali and his progeny that came from recognizably non-Shia poetic sources. Turabi also fondly quoted Rumi and Iqbal when justifying the privileged position of Ali and Husayn within Islamic history. Turabi was fully aware that both these poets were so well known and well liked in the subcontinent that anything purported to have come from their pens instantly acquired a status worthy of attention. Rumi, to echo a cliche, was the greatest of Islamic mystical poets and his *masnavi* has risen to the status of the 'Qur'an in Persian'. This mystical treatise praises all the prominent companions of the Prophet, including Muawiya, Yazid's father, who is despised by Shias. This, however, is irrelevant to Turabi, for what he wants to underscore is the privileged status of Ali. Hence in one of his orations, he wants the youth to memorize these words of Rumi:

> Tū ba tārīkī ʿAlī rā dīdaī
> zin sabab ġhair-e bar u bogzīdaī
> man ʿAlī rā roz-e raushan dīda am
> zīn sabab ġhayr-e bar ū nagzīda am[6]

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You have seen Ali in darkness
For this reason you privilege others over him
I have seen Ali in the light of day
For this reason I do not privilege anyone over him.

Through these verses of Rumi, Turabi would have us believe that Ali's status, according to the best of the Islamic mystical writers, was higher than the status of other companions of the Prophet. In fact, most students of Rumi would immediately detect the silences and the absences in Turabi's usage. Turabi manages to convey the impression that no similar words of praise were written for other companions of the Prophet, and surely not for Ali's enemy, Muawiya—whom Rumi also praised.

Similarly, Rumi's most famous Indian disciple, Muhammad Iqbal, was a favorite of Rashid Turabi. The passionate words of Iqbal for Ali, Fatima, and Husayn have endeared this poet to Shias to such an extent that Shias have even written books exclusively on Iqbal's devotion to the Prophet's household, at times giving their readers the impression that the 'Poet of the East' might actually be a Shia in disguise (see Zaidi, 1965). By invoking Iqbal, the most well-known of the Islamic reformers who drew equal support from both Shias and Sunnis, Turabi established his own authority. In short, Turabi's message to the Shias was that even knowledgeable Sunnis like Iqbal were in agreement as far as the privileged status of Ali and his household, especially his son Husayn, is concerned:

islām ke dāman meñ bas is ke sivā kyā hai
ek ẓarb-e Yadullāhī ek sajda-e Shbbīrī

The skirt of Islam contains naught
But the strike of the Hand of God ('Ali) and the prostration of
Shabbir [Husayn][7]

Hence for Turabi, Ali and Husayn are the two figures that stand out in Islam in the eyes of Iqbal. Iqbal himself had confessed his sin of being a *bū turābī* or a follower of Ali:

ādmī kām kā nahīñ rahtā, 'ishq meñ ye baṛī ḳharābī hai
pūchte kyā ho maẓhab-e Iqbāl, ye gunahgār bū Turābī hai[8]

Love's greatest flaw is that it renders a man useless
You ask, 'What would Iqbal's religion be?'
This humble sinner is a follower of Bu Turab [Ali]

Turabi vindicates the cause of Shias by invoking Iqbal's name just as he calls upon Rumi to elaborate upon the virtues of Ali and Husayn. Turabi historicizes Iqbal to make him undermine the Sunni view of history and to legitimize the privileged position accorded by Shias to Ali and Husayn. Thus, invoking Iqbal comes to constitute a discursive strategy for Turabi to unsettle the polarizing, mutually exclusive Shia–Sunni narratives of Islamic history. Just as Iqbal retroactively dislodged the battle of Karbala from the issue of succession and situated it within the wider sweep of martyrdom

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within Islam, Iqbal himself could be surreptitiously resignified through the ambivalence of his own sectarian affiliation.

Karbala, for Iqbal, is an epistemological trope for narrating the existential dilemma of gauging ideal human conduct. The relevance that Iqbal bestows upon Karbala as a model of and for struggle is also dominant within much of the subsequent socioreligious reform literature from the subcontinent, most of it circulated in the name of 'Progressive' literature. Many writers from this tradition—including those socialists of the Progressive Movement, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Kunwar Mahendra Singh Bedi Sahar, Ahmad Faraz, and Ali Sardar Jafari—following Iqbal, have interpolated the trope of Karbala into a broader call for justice and action rather than dwelling upon the sectarian underpinning of the age-old battle. In speaking with me, Ali Sardar Jafari—one of the most prominent members of the Progressive Writers Association—made a direct connection between Iqbal, the idea of a higher Muslim self, and Karbala:

> The very word Islam in Iqbal's times generated loathing on multiple fronts—the British could not forget the Muslim resistance to the crusades; some Hindus saw Muslims as uncontrollable warriors who invaded their land; the Muslims of Palestine were being crushed in the name of injustice done to the Jews of Europe. Why was this happening to Muslims? It was a natural question that any enlightened (*raushan fikr*) soul would ask. Iqbal, however, did not ask this question to indict the rest of humanity for Muslim misery. He asked the question to make Muslims aware of their plight, provide an outlet from this plight, and instill pride and confidence in them. He wanted to raise their self to a better self, to a self that drew its substance from the Prophet Muhammad, Hazrat Ali and Imam Husayn. This self is first and foremost a Muslim self—not a Shia or Sunni self. This self is inspired by Marx's calls for justice yet does not send either God, the Prophet, Hazrat Ali or Imam Husayn into exile—as some would say Marx did with historic religious persons. Iqbal, in one sense, was more progressive than Marx for he realized that religion and history could also impart virtues to the oppressed. How could anyone listen to the story of Karbala, of the oppressed (*mazlum*) Husayn's fight against the most mighty system of his time, and not be inspired to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet's grandson? Each person could follow Husayn in his own way.[9]

So Iqbal's invocation of Karbala appeals to a variety of registers and Iqbal himself, like Karbala and martyrdom, becomes a deferred signifier, not only in the subcontinent but also within revolutionary and post-revolutionary Iran.

Those tied to the Islamic revolution of Iran have not only shared with Iqbal his faith in constituting a Muslim self through the knowledge of the past, but also a penchant for eliding differences within Islam to make the revolution appealing to all Muslims. This is borne out by the repeated invocation of Iqbal by intellectuals like Ali Shariati and Abdol Karim Saroush. Shariati sees Iqbal as a Muslim existentialist who engages not only in a personal struggle but a communal one, carrying forward the standard of Ali. In essence this being is a

> . . . devotee possessing the light of knowledge who burns with love and faith, and whose penetrating eyes never allow negligence and ignorance to prevail without questioning

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> the fate of enslaved nations. It is a person who seeks reform, revolution, and a change of mental attitudes.[10]

Saroush, the most controversial and dynamic contemporary Iranian Shia thinker, credits Iqbal for inspiring others to engage in a constant reinterpretation of Islam (*Irish Times*, 1997).

These varied and many-layered invocations of Iqbal serve both to reinstigate notions of a dynamic interpretive spirit as well as to regenerate forms of pan-Islamic solidarity. Iqbal opens up a space in which the talk of pan-Islamism and Muslim self-identity can take place. By reconfiguring Karbala as a transhistoric struggle for justice, as a battle exceeding its particular moment, the sectarian issues that have historically charged this event become subordinate to the concerns of a sense of greater Muslim self and community. These temporally disjunctive appeals to Karbala, within the frame of reference of the Qur'an and the Kaba, engender multiple avenues of sectarian rapprochement, where both Muslim identity and the larger Islamic community can be reconstituted. Insofar as the minority Shia claims to these nations are concerned, Iqbal helps in affording Shias a legitimate space to position themselves vis-a-vis Sunnis in regions of the world where their survival is threatened. Iqbal himself occupies a site that is in a continual state of formation and this site, like Karbala, cannot be limited to any particular historical moment since it always outstrips history and inflects sectarian orientations. It is the site from which Iqbal inspires, accords with, and prays for the generations to come:

> May the youth have my longing sighs for dawn
> that these, the falcon's offspring, may fly again with agile wings
> O Lord, my sole desire is but this:
> That my luminous vision may belong to all! (Iqbal, 1992: 378)

NOTES

1. For an insightful discussion of the manner in which Karbala has been cast and recast in Muslim societies, see *Al-Serāt* (1986).
2. There are two main groups of Muslims: the Shias and the Sunnis. Although these two groups themselves are further divided, suffice it to say here that the issue of political and spiritual succession after the death of the Prophet Muhammad was the main factor responsible for these divisions. For Sunnis, Abu Bakr, a companion and father-in-law of the Prophet is a legitimate successor (khalifah, or caliph) whereas for the Shias, this successor should have been the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Ali b. Abi Talib. The Shia community itself is divided into various subsects and the Shia dimension of the present study deals exclusively with the 'Twelver' branch of the Shias. Although Husayn's martyrdom remains an important part of the general Shia lore, it has not been treated uniformly by all of them. For the most recent English account of the controversy surrounding the succession to the Prophet Muhammad, see Madelung (1997).

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For a Shia understanding of these events, see Jafri (1979).

3. Ali Sardar Jafari, interview by author, Mumbai, India, 17 Jan. 1999.
4. *Abjad* is the sequence of early Arabic letters in which each letter has a numerical value. It has been used throughout centuries for chronograms and other mystical as well as playful expressions wherein the artists have desired to link numbers to concepts.
5. It was under Iqbal's pervasive inspiration that other Progressive Marxist poets of the subcontinent, like Shabbir Hassan Khan 'Josh' Malihabadi, struck the reformist chord. Securing for himself the epithets of *shā'ir-e inqilāb*, 'the Poet of Revolution', and *shā'ir-e shabāb*, 'the Poet of Youth', Josh took the liberty of framing Husayn's struggle as an explicitly Marxist one. In a panegyric to Karl Marx, Josh describes him as a boon companion of Husayn:

   hamdam-e Shabbīr o bad ḳhwāh-e Yazīd
   Mūsā-e nau bahr-e Fir'āun-e jadīd

   The soul-mate of Shabbir [Husayn] and the adversary of Yazid
   The Moses of a new Red Sea controlled by the present-day Pharaoh.

6. Rashid Turabi, Majālis-e Turābī, cassette recording, Karachi, 1971.
7. Ibid. Although this couplet is repeatedly invoked in Iqbal's name, it most likely does not come from him. See Imrani (n.d.: 36–7).
8. Turabi, cassette recording.
9. Jafari, interview, Jan. 1999.
10. Shariati (n.d.: http://www.shariati.com/iqbal.html).

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