# Aristotelian Habitus and the Power of the Embodied Self: Reflections on the Insights Gained from the Fakirs in Bangladesh

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*Abstract: This article traces back classical Greek and Medieval meanings of habitus to show that Bourdieu's redefinition of habitus discarded a seminal feature of Aristotelian habitus—the power of radically transforming the self at will. I elaborate how the practices of purposefully training the embodied self remains marginalized in Pierre Bourdieu's re-conceptualization of habitus. Examining Aristotle's habitus, this paper brings back the focus on the long-neglected insight of the power of deliberately (re)training the self in constructing a heterodox but ethical way of being and socializing. As an example, I refer to the Fakirs in current Bangladesh, who cultivate antinomian life-practices. The main argument of the paper is that habitus in Bourdieu's formulations is less suitable than Aristotle's in analysing the praxis of the Fakirs. I suggest that instead of sticking to a universal conceptualization of habitus, sociologists should consider with equal importance both models of habitus articulated by Aristotle and Bourdieu. Doing that could benefit contemporary sociology in two ways: First, Aristotle's conceptualization of habitus is an important tool in identifying the sociological importance of the praxis of marginalized groups, e.g., Fakirs in Bangladesh; and second, extending the focus of a key sociological concept, i.e., habitus, addresses the apparent disconnect between the wisdom of heterodox practitioners in the Global South and dominant social theories built upon the analyses of European and American social traditions.*

## Introduction

There has been a disjuncture between Aristotle's model of training the self and later developments in social theories of the body, such as embodiment and biopolitics. The disjuncture surfaces in Bourdieu's redefinition of the term 'habitus.' Bourdieu purged the term 'habitus' of its classical meaning of 'virtuous dispositions,' which was characteristic of Aristotle's model of training the self. Aristotelian understanding of habitus remained dominant in the writings of Roman and Medieval thinkers (Nederman 1989; Sparrow and Hutchinson 2013), including Islamic philosophers (Mahmood 2005: 137). Bourdieusian habitus discards the essentially ethical nature of training the embodied self, originally laid out in the Greek conceptualization of habitus. The ripple effect of the disjuncture, orchestrated by Bourdieu, concerns the role of the embodied self. In the Aristotelian model, the self holds the power to train it to embody virtuous dispositions, in other words, to cultivate an ethical subjectivity. But later literature on embodiment by Marcel Mauss (1973), Mary Douglas (1984, 1996) and Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 1977, 1985); and biopolitics by Michel Foucault (1995, 2008) put the body under the strategic command of power through society, culture and the state. Aristotle's paradigm of training the self has been missing in social theorizations of the body, except in Foucault's later works, especially on Pagan technologies of the self (1988, 1990a, b, 2012).

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The lack of research on the power of training the embodied self in cultivating a virtuous subjectivity (or nurturing ethical dispositions of the body) was evident in the review of existing literature on the body conducted by the founding editors of *Body and Society* (Featherstone and Turner 1995). The authors identified six major study areas of sociology of the body: Symbolic aspects of the body, the body at play in everyday life, gender and sexuality, technoscience and the body, sociology of health and illness, and sociology of sports. Their review exposed the insufficient attention to the radical power of the embodied self to cultivate an alternative subjectivity and sociality (not merely to resist, subvert, transgress, or defy dominant systems, on which ample research has been conducted). However, they did not specify this lack of research. In 2010, during the re-launching of the same journal, the editors indicated a shift of scholarly attention from 'disciplining, normalizing, and regulative techniques (modification)' to 'the relational dimensions of corporeality (what bodies can do, for example)' (Blackman and Featherstone 2010: 5). Yet, they stop short of specifying the insufficient attention to the radical power of (re)training the body to (re)constitute the self, society, or culture. Aristotle's conceptualization of habitus, I argue, is an important sociological tool that has remained underappreciated but can be readily used to theorize the power of the embodied self.

This paper addresses the gap by presenting evidence collected for a study conducted in rural Bangladesh among the spiritual practitioners known as Fakirs. The study design included ethnographic fieldwork with Fakir Gurus. Several phases of fieldwork were conducted during 2014-2018. In the first phase, I stayed at Fakirs' dwelling and practicing places, known as *akhra*s, in the remote villages of Kushtia and Meherpur districts and interviewed the Gurus, their spiritual partners, and disciples during June-October 2014. Subsequently, follow-up interviews were made over the phone at different times in 2015 and 2016. Further follow-up interviews were conducted during January-July 2018. For in-depth interviews, three prominent Gurus—Nohir Fakir, Rowshan Fakir, and Fakir Doulat Shah—were selected. As a senior Guru, Nohir Fakir usually inaugurates the annual gatherings at Lalon's *dham.* In addition, I observed and participated in the ritualistic performances, such as singing Lalon's songs collectively and attended *sadhusanga*s (annual gathering of initiates). As a native Bengali speaker, I conversed with the Fakirs in Bengali language. A local journalist and documentary filmmaker, who has been working with the Fakirs for about ten years, helped me get access to the Gurus.

The paper consists of three broad sections: 1) Habitus before Bourdieu, 2) critiquing Bourdieu's habitus, and 3) reinventing classical Greek habitus. The first section traces the classical Greek and Medieval meanings of habitus; the second section points out that Bourdieu's redefinition of habitus discards a significant feature of classical habitus—the power of radically transforming the embodied self at will; and in the third section, I argue that re-inventing Aristotle's habitus contributes to social theorization of the body in two ways: First, it brings back the long-neglected insight of the power of deliberately training the embodied self in cultivating heterodox subjectivities and socialities. As an example, I show how the Fakirs—followers of Fakir Lalon Shah (1774-1890)—in current Bangladesh train their bodies to cultivate an alternative way of being and socializing. This section also shows a way how sociologist can avoid trivializing the wisdom of marginalized traditions, such as the Fakirs in Bangladesh, i.e., by initiating a much-needed dialogue between the insights of the Fakirs and established social theorists. Re-inventing

Aristotle's habitus could be an important first step in addressing the perennial problem of "oversocialization" (Wrong 1961) or "oversocialized conceptions of the embodied actor" (Shilling 2017: 216).

### Habitus before Bourdieu: Classical Greek Habitus

Habitus originated from a Greek root word '*hexis*' meaning state or condition. It was one of the most important concepts that the Romans (such as Cicero) and Medieval thinkers—including scholars of the 12th and 13th centuries, such as Thomas Aquinas, Godfrey of Fontaines, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham—inherited from Aristotle (Nederman 1989: 87; Carlisle 2013).[1] Unlike Mauss's conceptualization, habitus was not a repository of socio-cultural knowledge or wisdom (Neederman 1989). For Aristotle, habitus is not something one can have temporarily; instead, it is the quality that one must ingrain deep into one's core self that cannot be altered easily. Carlisle (2013: 33) explained by quoting from Aristotle's *Categories*, 'a hexis is constitutive of the person, insofar as it has "become through length of time part of a man's nature and irremediable or exceedingly hard to change."'

Habitus is not simply a set of virtues naturalized in one's self, but one's habituated capability of virtuous activity. Aristotle's *hexis* requires one to examine the particularities of situations and act accordingly (Lockwood 2013). Embodying the *hexis* of justice means only that one is predisposed to act justly, but one must rationally calculate what just actions are in different situations. To be able to determine what a just action is in a particular situation, one needs to go through a long-term training, e.g., 'proper' upbringing (Bowditch 2008). Habitus is, thus, called human's 'second nature,' which is equally difficult to achieve and alter (Nederman 1989: 90-91).

Humans are naturally endowed with the capability to act according to our will, and by exercising that capability one can be virtuous or immoral. Both virtues and vices are acquired dispositions, as we deliberately choose to act in a particular way towards a particular end (Aristotle 1962: 153). 'But virtue, like art, is constantly dealing with what is harder, since the harder the task the better the success' (Aristotle 1962: 83). Cultivating virtuous dispositions is difficult; the process is a lengthy, industrious one. However, humans can perform that difficult task, if they wish to. One of the strengths of Aristotle's habitus is precisely the capability of overcoming the challenges and embodying virtue. Human beings embody the willpower of transforming themselves into ethical subjects. This key power of Aristotle's habitus, as I show later, has been marginalized in dominant social theories of the body.

Medieval Christian monastics continued the Aristotelian use of the term 'habitus.' The Stoics considered habitus as 'a way of being or acting'; monastics made it synonymous with virtue (Agamben and Kotsko 2013: 13). Constituting the monks' mind and the body through communal habitation was a distinctive feature of their way of life. And, when that constitution of the body and mind became habituated and ingrained, it was called virtue—habitus. Later, Marcel Mauss (1973) revived the concept 'habitus' in explaining variations among different communities regarding routine, mundane bodily movements, such

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[1] Carlisle (2013) argued that the Greek word '*hexis*' was translated by Roman thinkers to mean 'to have' following the verb '*habere*.' Later habitus and habit were often used interchangeably.

as walking, swimming, and moving. He virtually disconnected it from Aristotle's model. Bourdieu (1990: 53, 56) revised the concept further with a double move; he added the socio-cultural and historical component and removed the pedagogy of private training of the self. In contrast, Aristotle's model of habitus claims that one can choose to radically transform oneself and embody a heterodox subjectivity.

Refocusing on Aristotelian habitus, this paper goes beyond the agency of the body, typically found in transgressive, subversive practices, such as drag shows (Butler 1990, 2004), carnivalization (Braun and Langman 2012), and body modification (Featherstone 2000; Pitts-Taylor 2003). While 'neo-tribals' or 'modern primitives' appropriate the age-old rituals of indigenous peoples in Africa or Asia in subverting the dominant systems in Western cosmopolitan cities, I highlight the antinomian traditions in the Global South. I also emphasize that, despite the geographical distance and the considerable differences in practices, the spiritual traditions in the Global North and the Global South speak to each other and are comparable.

## Bourdieusian Habitus

Although Bourdieu's habitus claimed to recover 'an acting agent', both from structuralism and methodological individualism, he failed to highlight the practices of deliberately training the embodied self in constructing heterodox subjectivities. Bourdieu used habitus to transcend the binary categories of structure and agency. 'By taking up the old Aristotelian notion of *hexis*, converted by scholasticism into *habitus*,' Bourdieu explained, 'I wish to react against structuralism and its odd philosophy of action, [--] with the agent reduced to the role of bearer-*Trager* - of the structure; [--]' (Bourdieu 1985: 13). He also added:

> I wish to put forward the <<creative>>, active and inventive capacities of habitus and of agent (which the word usually does not convey) but to do so by recalling that this generative power is not of a universal mind, nature or of human reason [--] (Bourdieu 1985: 13).

Bourdieu preferred 'habitus' to 'habit' as the conception of habit may confine an agent into the mechanistic or instinctual impulses by denying an agency any effective control on those impulses.[1] Bourdieu's habitus endows a subject with pre-reflective and reflexive dispositions. He aimed to redeem 'an active, creative' subject from the deterministic clutches of structuralism. His habitus allowed a subject to be creative within one's familiar settings; it freed one to invent ways to adjust with, accommodate, or at best slightly modify her surrounding conditions. But, Bourdieu's habitus limits the possibility of subjects to willingly participate in the process of constructing antinomian subjectivities and socialities.

Bourdieu's definition of the concept recognized the unconscious use of habitus (1990), but it failed to address the deliberate, long-term practices required to nurture non-conformist subjectivity and sociality. Habitus, for him, is 'embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past, of which it is the product' (Bourdieu 1990). He recognized the

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[1] 'One of the reasons for the use of the term habitus is the wish to set aside the common conception of habit as a mechanical assembly or preformed programme, as Hegel does when in the Phenomenology of Mind he speaks of "habit as dexterity"' (Bourdieu, 1977: 218). To know more about the difference between 'habit' and 'habitus' see Crossley (2013).

ingrained nature of habitus, but denied that it can also be an outcome of a deliberate and 'pedagogical process' (Mahmood 2005).

Bourdieu highlights the socio-cultural, historical repository of embodied dispositions, whereas Aristotle's habitus was the cultivation of the self-performed by an individual. For Bourdieu, habitus works below the level of consciousness, which is not exactly unconscious but *conscious unconscious* that human beings embody through socialization. On the contrary Aristotle's habitus requires fully conscious, deliberate training of the self. Aristotle also highlights how the body can potentially (re)define, pre-empt, protect, prevent, shape, dictate, and control. While Aristotle's habitus accords the embodied self the power to consciously re-configure itself, Bourdieu's conceptualization takes it away strategically—not always forcefully.

Bodies came under strong administration of dominant social and cultural injunctions in the writings of Mary Douglas (Douglas 1984, 1996) and arguably Foucault (1980b, a, 1977). One highly controversial argument is that Foucault considered the body 'essentially as an object' of power, and power exerts control on the 'passive physical body' (Turner 1994). Turner labelled the body in Foucauldian discourse as 'theoretical body' (Foucault 1980b). Csordas summarized Turner's appraisal of Foucault this way: 'The absence of agency and the possibility for critique in the key concepts of power, discourse, and body lead Turner to define Foucault and his followers not as theorists of the body, but as 'anti-bodies' (Csordas 1994). The theorizations of 'the body as an outcome of social processes' by Foucault and Norbert Elias were criticized for ignoring the other perspective of 'the body as social agent'—'The bodies they deal with are the bodies of individuals subjected to forces over which they have no control' (Lyon and Barbalet 1994).

The active-passive dichotomy, regarding the role of the body, is not fully convincing. Following Mauss's (1973) proposition that there can be no natural body or behaviour which is not at the same time social or cultural, Douglas (1996) claimed that what the 'natural' is necessarily cultural. And the success, strength, legitimacy of a culture or society depends on the extent to which it effaces the distinction between the social/cultural and natural. Foucault also echoed her by saying that power operates through an art of disguising—the more one hides the more successful s/he is regarding domination, control, or instituting hegemony or being recognized as legitimate authority. The same applies for the dominated subjects— the freer they seem to be the more they are subjected to power. Careful readers might take issue with the much-discussed issue of freedom/agency of an individual in Foucault's analyses of the body. I respond by quoting Foucault himself:

Power is tolerable only on the condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms (Foucault 1990a: 86).

My critique of Foucault does not point to the lack of agency of the body or an embodied subject. Instead, I underscore the insufficient attention to the power of the embodied self to willingly educate itself and cultivate alternative forms of living and socializing (Mozumder, forthcoming). In Foucault's formulation, to be able to work, power needs to make sure the actors play by the pre-set rules of the game. My

argument is precisely this: Is it possible that the body/embodied subject not only plays by the existing rules (or at times conducts routine and expected deviations from the rules) but also performs well-planned, systematic actions to constitute radical changes? As it happens in Aristotle's habitus, can the embodied self be trained in certain ways so that it refuses to play by the set rules, and instead introduces new sets of rules?

Although Bourdieu's habitus lacks the power to consciously and deliberately transform the self, it does not entirely fail to explain change (Wacquant 2016). Bourdieu's habitus adjusts, adapts, and changes to varying conditions (Aarseth, Layton, and Nielsen 2016). Silva (2016b) summarized the debates to demonstrate the potentiality of reading habitus as a non-rigid, dynamic concept. Specifically, Bourdieu's concept of clivé habitus (Bennett 2007; Friedman 2016) or split habitus is the closest in terms of explaining any disjunctures in one's habitus. When objective conditions contradict an embodied habitus, one's self becomes split, and Bourdieu called that state of 'double consciousness' a '*hysteresis*' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: 60). Yet, the possibility of fundamentally changing one's self and subjectivity as a deliberate choice seems to be beyond the scope of Bourdieu's habitus. Recognizing the fact that Bourdieu generally considered radical transformations as exceptions, Crossley (2003) explained why Bourdieu's habitus can still be a useful tool in understanding social movements and their consequent changes. Drawing on social movement research, Crossely argued that activists acquire a 'radical habitus,' which is to find themselves greatly transformed because of their active participation in protest activities. Those who participated in social movement activities, such as demonstrations, tend to develop life-long dispositions to do so, often at the cost of their personal interests. In the process of transforming the self radically, Crossley added, pre-conscious habitus cannot be unlearned entirely. Instead, in times of crises, some of the unconscious elements of habitus come under conscious examination and consequently new dispositions emerge. These new dispositions slowly and steadily turn into durable dispositions of one's habitus.

While Crossley stretched Bourdieu's formulations of habitus to explain the 'radical habitus' of activists, I argue that Aristotle's habitus is readily useful in explaining conscious attempts to change the self profoundly. I suggest that habitus in Bourdieu's formulations is less suitable than Aristotle's conceptualizations of habitus in explaining the wilful transformations of one's dispositions, sensibilities, and propensities. For example, I analyse the praxis of the followers of Fakir Lalon Shah in contemporary Bangladesh. I show how the initiates follow the instructions of their Gurus to deliberately and fundamentally transform themselves.

Recent scholars have proposed to enrich Bourdieu's habitus by connecting it to psychoanalysis (Darmon 2016; Silva 2016a) and (new)biology (Warin et al. 2015). While these developments are important, I argue that by re-examining classical Aristotelian conceptualizations, habitus can be rediscovered as an important sociological concept. To illustrate this point, I first show how the Aristotelian conceptualization of habitus remains marginalized in the analyses of Bourdieu. Subsequently, I explain how Aristotle's habitus (despite limitations) is more useful than Bourdieu's in theorizing the spiritual praxis of the Fakirs.

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### Rediscovering Aristotle's Habitus

Following Bourdieu (instead of doing 'theoretical theory'), I consider Aristotle's habitus—the power of training the embodied self—a *modus operandi* for explaining the practices of the followers of Fakir Lalon Shah (1774-1890) in contemporary Bangladesh. I find Aristotle's habitus useful in understanding the Fakirs' spiritual praxis of cultivating an alternative way of being and socializing. My analyses show how the initiates consciously choose to participate in the heterodox, antinomian training of the embodied self with the stated goal of cultivating selfless subjectivity and ethical sociality. I also avoid marginalizing the Fakirs by extending the discussions from area studies literature to broader social theorizations of the body, subjectivity, and sociality.

Saba Mahmood (2005) found Aristotle's habitus more useful than Bourdieu's in explaining the mosque based ethical-spiritual activism of Muslim women in Egypt. In explaining the practices of piety, Mahmood particularly emphasized an interesting point of Aristotle's habitus: Ethical state of mind does not precede ethical behaviour of the body; instead, ethical dispositions are the result of performing ethical acts. Following Aristotle, she claimed to invert 'the usual [Anthropological] routing from interiority to exteriority' (Mahmood 2005: 121). According to the traditional route, behaviours and actions of individuals are considered results of (un)conscious thoughts and convictions of a person. Instead of highlighting the dynamics of interiority and exteriority, I focus on inseparability. Similarly, it is not a question of precedence or posteriority, but of simultaneity. Bodily practices of the self neither precede nor follow relevant thoughts or sensibilities; they are coterminous. The mutual influence of bodily actions and the state of mind is instantaneous. In the Fakirs' praxis, interestingly, cultivation of selfless love and combating the vices of the body are always simultaneous and inseparable from one another.

Fakir Lalon Shah is known as the most influential 'mystic minstrel' in Bengal—Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. The followers of Lalon are known for their practices of inverted gender hierarchy (Knight 2011; McDaniel 1992; Cakrabarti 1989; Jha 1995, 2010; Openshaw 2002). As part of their spiritual training, Fakirs consciously choose to embark on a strictly ritualized, carefully crafted, and a lengthy training of the embodied self. One important objective of the initiate Fakirs is to learn how to submit themselves to Guru and become a "slave" of that spiritual master. Fakir Doulat Shah elaborated:

> Guru is the teacher, above all [...] both in terms of knowledge and behaviour. Following the rules and regulations, laws and prohibitions, Guru and disciples bond with a promise.

He elaborated in repose to another question:

> Disciples are sold to Guru, sold meaning [devotees must] obey, promise to comply, surrender, [need to be] kind of obedient [onugoto houa]. [--] These are done observing, if needed, by knowing, hearing, mingling, sitting, standing, eating, [or performing] other similar behaviour or act, by knowing and learning, socially.

Unconditional submission and blindly following the Guru in conducting everyday activities is essential in the spiritual training. The deliberate attempt to surrender oneself to Guru is considered a vital part of the process of combating egoistic dispositions of the self. Under the direct supervision of Guru, an initiated Fakir reportedly aims to unlearn the self-centric inclinations. Instead, the disciples are supposed to long

for embodying the dispositions of their Guru, in an effort to become a *Sadhu* or Fakir. Rowshan Fakir explained:

> A *sadhu* [Fakir] is calm, pure and slave-like. Being a slave of Guru is *sadhu bhab* [the mode of a *sadhu*]. One must cultivate that mode by oneself. No one can force you to do that. [--] One who complies with the instructions of Guru will be able to have that mode. At that stage, the *ijjat* [status] of Guru and a devotee will be the same. Guru's characteristics will be the characteristics of the disciples; Guru's features become the same of devotees.

A beginner must be initiated by Guru to begin the life-long journey of a Fakir. Gurus teach, guide, and supervise the activities of disciples. And devotees are supposed to comply with the instructions of Guru without any question. The long-term goal is to learn to serve others at the cost of the interests of the self. Doulat Shah concluded:

> Lalon Shah said my master's [probhu] opinion is the essence. Whether you come along or not, that's not the issue; [--] whatever is my Guru's opinion is my opinion. Other than that anyone who may be great, may fly in the sky or walk on the ocean, nothing matters! Guru is the religion of this community [*jat*]. My Guru's teachings, my grand Guru, my Guru, what they have been doing, I will do that [too].

When pressed about any possibility of differing opinions, he observed: "Various sages may have various opinions. Here Guru's opinion is the right one." Ali Hossain Fakir, a long-term ally and disciple of Doulat Shah concurred, "There is no reform here!" Doulat shah readily agreed by insisting, "no" [there is no reform]. Insisting on keeping no difference regarding thoughts actions or desires, Fakirs act on the promise to unify themselves as one imagined body. They aim to realize the promise of dissolving the individual self into one divine entity, the universal "Self" or the Absolute aka *param*.

The immediate goal of devotees is to prepare themselves to embody the dispositions of their Guru. Gurus in turn take the trouble of teaching disciples about the perceived sense of virtues and vices of the body, dietary restrictions, the idea of embodied divinity, and preparing the body to materialize the indivisibility of the humans and all other beings (Jha 2010; Knight 2011; Openshaw 2002).

The community of the Fakirs as a unit plays an important role in ensuring that all of its members perform the rituals properly. Fakirs usually keep an eye on fellow practitioners. They do not aim to oversee other practitioners' activities; instead, they aim to ensure that Fakirs perform the rituals properly and collectively. Rowshan Fakir clarified:

> S*adhu*s or Fakirs also keep an eye on fellow practitioners. If we see some fellows doing something that does not go with the principles of Fakirs, we ask them why they are doing or saying that; we say, that isn't right. That cannot be considered an acceptable behaviour of the Fakirs. Then they realize and confess that they are not doing the right thing. [--] We can understand by looking at them if anyone is not doing the right thing. If someone is not right internally, that person cannot be right on the outside.

Keeping an eye on fellow Fakirs' activities plays an important role in developing the sense of a community among themselves. As Fakirs believe the body is not an isolated unit, the training of the embodied self of an individual Fakir requires performing the rituals collectively. Collective performance of the rituals serves another spiritual purpose of the Fakirs: Trying to overcome the individuated sense of self in order to realize the presumed state of the indivisibility of all bodies.

As did Aristotle in his conceptualization of habitus, Fakirs developed their own understanding of the vices and virtues regarding the body. Aristotle defined virtue as the mean of two vices—excess and deficiency (Aristotle 1962: 97). The mean of confidence and cowardice is courage, which is a virtue. Fakirs, however, identify six different vices of the body: Lust, greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and envy. And their two important virtues are selfless love and devotion to all beings, especially to Guru. Fakirs refrain from eating meat to combat lust, to avoid the 'hot energy,' and to maintain 'calmness,' as Nohir Fakir explained.[1] They avoid meat to prevent the supposed transmission of animal aggression and shamelessness to human bodies. Following the instructions of their Guru, Nohir Fakir, Rowshan Fakir, and Shamsul Fakir transferred the ownership of their inherited private property to their organization of the Fakirs. They did it to combat egoism and greed. They often go for begging to collect food, which is considered as a mandatory ritual needed to unlearn the inclinations of pride. The practitioners also claim to practice humility by ritually singing devotional songs of Lalon during sunrise and sunset. The songs reportedly remind them of the difficult task of nurturing the mood of selfless love and devotion (*bhakti*).

Fakirs believe that human beings are born with the power and potentials to prepare their dispositions as they like, be it virtuous or vicious. It's the choice of actions that determines whether one will be virtuous or vicious. Lalon stated in a song that one can be in control of her actions by learning to perform the spiritual practices effectively.[2] Similarly, in Aristotle's analysis of habitus, humans can consciously choose to embody vices or virtues: '[A] man is the origin of his actions' (Aristotle 1962: 139). Humans, according to Aristotle, have considerable control over means, if not the end, of their actions. Virtue is an outcome of training the self accordingly; as is vice. Fakirs insist that with the proper guidance of Guru, initiates can realize their innate but untapped power of the universal 'Self' or God. With that spiritual power, Fakirs claim that humans can surpass the power of deities. Thus Lalon sang, 'even deities desire to be born as humans' (Rafiuddin 2009: 70).[3]

As a way of training the self, Aristotle's habitus primarily aims at constituting a virtuous subject or an ethical subjectivity, which is contrary to Bourdieu's habitus. The relegation of ethical dispositions from a mandatory to voluntary aspect of habitus in its recent reconceptualization is consistent with the Foucauldian observation that the modern world favours expertise not ethics, juridical subjectivity not an ethical one (1997: 279, 294 ). However, like Aristotle's habitus, cultivating ethical dispositions is a seminal feature of the Fakirs' praxis. Fakirs' education of the embodied self produces an unconventional meaning of life and sociality. Three features of the Fakirs' praxis are somatic divinity, 'selfless' subjectivity, and ethical sociality (Mozumder, forthcoming). Fakirs believe that the human body is divine, as it is assumed to be an embodied expression of God. Only under the supervision of Guru, can an initiate train the embodied self and realize the power of the embodied divinity. As part of their deliberate attempt to unlearn selfish dispositions, Gurus ritually go for begging, transfer the ownership of private property to the community of the Fakirs, stop reproduction, ritually kiss the feet of their own master—Guru, and avoid

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[1] As part of an ethnographic study, I conversed with them in Bengali.
[2] 'আত্মারূপে কর্তা হবি* সাধন করতে পারলে' (Rafiuddin 2009: 54)
[3] 'অনন্ত রূপ সৃষ্টি করলেন সাঁই* মানবের তুলনা কিছু নাই* দেব দেবতাগন করে আরাধন* জনম নিতে মানবে।' (Rafiuddin 2009: 70)

maintaining conventional social relationships with the broader community. They gradually solidify their identity as Fakirs, and as members of the community of initiates, cultivate a non-conventional relationship with the rest of the members of the society.

Fakirs mostly live in their *akhra*s (practicing and dwelling places of initiates), but they believe that they have the spiritual obligation to serve others, even at the cost of the self, which is the basis of their ethical sociality. Nohir Fakir reflected on his life to elaborate what Fakirs mean by ethical sociality and how they nurture that:

> Over the last forty years, I do not recall any time having a meal alone. I always look for people who are around to share meals with me. That is how I get to know people and become connected. [--] We never have any meal alone. When we [Fakirs] eat, none of us ends before others do. We start together and end together to maintain solidarity. That is the rule of Lalon Shah *ghor* [school]. [..] The most important thing for us is to obey Guru's *bidhan* [instructions]. That's how we maintain order. [--] when four *sadhu*s [practitioners] come together, there is a *sadhu samaj* [society of *sadhu*s]. To have a sadhu *samaj*, we need rules. Our rule is to let others enjoy [*bhog*], to sacrifice our own. We say *atmo sukh byabicari* [pleasure of the self] is incest. When any devotee brings something for me, I never eat that alone. I always share it with everybody around me.

Sacrificing the interests of the self is an essential step in realizing Fakirs' ultimate spiritual goal of dissolving the individuated self into the universal 'Self.' They reportedly interact and nurture relationships with the members of the broader society as part of their attempt to unlearn selfish dispositions. Nohir Fakir, for example, sold most of his inherited property to organize *Sadhusanga* (annual ritual gatherings). He has lost the property over the years of his tenure as Fakir, but gained respect from people all around Bangladesh. He is now one of the most respected and well-known Gurus in Bangladesh. Reflecting on his experiences, Nohir Fakir said, 'I am a Fakir [literally meaning a beggar] but I have disciples almost in every district in Bangladesh.' Nohir Fakir exemplifies the radical transformations that Fakirs go through in their spiritual journey. In understanding these transformations of the self, Aristotle's conceptualization of habitus becomes useful. Bourdieu's reconceptualization of habitus, conversely, marginalizes this pedagogy of the self, which is a characteristic feature of classical habitus, specifically Aristotle's habitus.

Aristotle's conceptualization of habitus also has major limitations in explaining the practices of the initiates in Bangladesh. While the soul is central in Aristotle[1], the animated body plays the supreme role in Fakirs' spiritual training. Fakirs believe that educating the body is the precondition of being able to discover God within the self, which is one of Fakirs' main goals. Whereas Aristotle's habitus celebrates the notion of an independent self, the initiates desire to "annihilate" the egoistic self, or to dissolve the individuated self into the universal Self, which is their God.[2]

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[1] 'But human goodness means in our view excellence of soul, not excellence of body' (Aristotle 1962: 61)

[2] Lalon sang, 'আপনায় আপনি ফানা হলে* দেখা দেবে সাঁই রাব্বানা* ㅏ স্বরূপে রূপ দেখ সংক্ষেপে%℈mৗ ac_qcq rm` c ৗ t gৗৗ jc gৗml c bgৗqmjt cq rf c qcjddৗ rmQcjঁ [--] scc rhe form of Self miniatured in yourself.[ (Choudhury 2009: 113)

Despite the limitations, revisiting classical Greek habitus could be useful not only for understanding the sociological significance of the Fakirs' praxis in Bangladesh but also of various antinomian traditions in India, China, and elsewhere. Broadly speaking, Yogis (Alter 2011; Samuel 2008; White 2011), Tantrics (Samuel 1989; White 2001, 2012), T/Daoists (Blofeld 1981; Kohn 2000, 2001; Oldstone-Moore 2003), Christian monastics (Asad 1987; Wiesner-Hanks 2014), among others, share important beliefs and practices with the Fakirs. Their commonalities amidst differences make them sister traditions of the Aristotelian paradigm of training the self.

In analysing the Fakirs' praxis, this paper highlights the relevance of the Aristotelian habitus in our times. However, it does not undermine the usefulness of Bourdieu's habitus. Nor do the analyses warrant reproducing the archaic conception of habitus. Instead, I argue that recognizing the importance of the seminal feature of the classical habitus, which is lost in its contemporary theorizations, can potentially strengthen the key sociological concept. One possible way of doing that is to consider that there is another dimension of habitus, which is its classical conceptualization that remained marginalized in contemporary formulations. This classical dimension of habitus is better equipped, as I have argued elsewhere (Mozumder, forthcoming), to theorizing the power of voluntarily educating the body to fundamentally transform self, society, and culture. The classical habitus highlights the practices through which agents consciously choose to construct and cultivate alternative forms of subjectivity and social relationships. In Bourdieu's habitus, subjects play active roles in finding their ways of (re)producing the social world, but individuals fail to choose the principle of their choice:

> [--] it is clear that they have not chosen the principle of their choice, that is, their habitus, the schemes of construction they apply to the world have themselves been constructed by the world. (Bourdieu 2000: 149)

In Aristotle's formulation of habitus, however, individuals retain the power to deliberately choose the principles of their choice to embody virtue, as they define it. Agents in this case may not isolate themselves entirely from dominant social systems, but they effectively defy the seminal features. Similarly, Fakirs voluntarily decide to denounce the dominant principles of social relationships; instead, they introduce heterodox rules that constitute the antinomian life-practice of the initiates.

Although the classical formulation of habitus is less suited to explaining majority cultures in our contemporary times, Aristotle's conceptualization of habitus remains useful in addressing a significant gap in Bourdieu's reconceptualization. Bourdieu hinted at the possibility of sudden ruptures in habitus, specifically when the objective conditions contradict one's habitus. But Bourdieu's habitus fails to account for the consciously planned and radical changes in life-practices that generate the heterodox habitus of the Fakirs.

When the objective conditions of fulfilment are not present, the *habitus*, continuously thwarted by the situation, may be the site of explosive forces (resentment) which may await (and even look for) the opportunity to break out and which express themselves as soon as the objective conditions for this (e.g. the power of an authoritarian foreman) are offered. (Bourdieu 1993: 87)

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Due to a mismatch between one's habitus and the surrounding situation, Bourdieu anticipated that there might be chaos, disruptions. And it is unclear what follows the 'break out'. More importantly, Bourdieu's analysis fails to account for the radical changes in beliefs, practices, dispositions, and lifestyles that the Fakirs consciously embody. Bourdieu's reconceptualization of habitus is suitable in explaining gradual and continuous changes, but it is inadequate to explain rare but fundamental changes of the self: '[--] it [habitus] constantly performs an adjustment to the world that only exceptionally takes the form of radical conversion' (Bourdieu 1993: 88). The strength of Aristotle's habitus is precisely that it shows how subjects can deliberately train themselves to engender the rare 'radical conversion' of the self.

## Conclusion

Reconsidering the old conceptions of habitus does more than highlighting the changes of the meaning of habitus. I showed that the craft of a consciously planned pedagogy of the self—the signature characteristics of Aristotelian conceptualization of habitus—is missing in the modern understanding of habitus. I explained how re-examining the classical habitus provides us with an important conceptual tool to explore the broader theoretical significance of the heterodox, spiritual praxis of the Fakirs in Bangladesh. In Aristotle's formulation, the seminal feature of habitus is the power of the self to deliberately transform itself and cultivate an ethical subjectivity. Aristotelian habitus has remained an inadequate but important conceptual tool in theorizing the power of voluntarily training the body to constitute heterodox models of subjectivity and sociality.

The radical conversion of the self that Fakirs experience in their spiritual journey may not be possible for majority population, especially for those who are non-initiates. As Fakirs must leave their previous community to become members of a heterodox group, two relevant questions arise. Does one have to leave the community in which one was born to experience radical changes in her habitus? In other words, is it possible to see oneself fundamentally changed while staying in similar socio-cultural settings? Bourdieu's answer is well-known: Fundamental changes are possible but they are rare. Aristotle's conception of habitus, on the other hand, is well-equipped to explain vital changes of the self, specifically, made possible by those who go through specialized psycho-somatic training. However, one may wonder what happens to the people who do not participate in any specialized pedagogy of the self? Can they also radically transform the self? Aristotle's formulation of habitus does not seem to have a good answer. In the same vein, how do changes come about in a heterodox culture? Neither Bourdieu nor Aristotle seems to have satisfactory answers to the questions. Sociologists also must not have a single answer to questions arising from significantly different socio-cultural perspectives. Likewise, there is no need to have one conceptual model of habitus that fits all. To ensure sufficient room to accommodate diverse viewpoints, Sociologist might consider both Aristotle's and Bourdieu's conceptualizations of habitus with equal importance. While Bourdieu's model, championed by Wacquant (2014, 2015, 2016), seems to be working well for understanding majority populations, Aristotle's model appears to be more appropriate in explaining the praxis of heterodox groups, such as Fakirs. The spiritual training of the embodied self that Fakirs voluntarily subject themselves to seems to result into a heterodox habitus. The two conceptions of habitus in their current forms remain discrete. How these two apparently incongruent

conceptions of habitus may be unified has yet to be explored; any attempt to do so will require comprehensive rethinking of the seminal sociological concept.

Paying careful attention to the power of a conscious (re)education of the embodied self in cultivating alternative subjectivities and socialities serves two other important purposes. First, it highlights that by studying the praxis of marginalized communities, such as Fakirs, scholars can enrich social theories of the body, particularly by reviving the long neglected but important insight: One can consciously train the embodied self to constitute an alternative way of being and socializing. Recognition of the potential theoretical contributions of the wisdom of the Fakirs can be considered a good reason why marginalized communities both in the East and West deserve more careful attention of social theorists.

Despite the strong roles of dominant social-cultural structure in reproducing them, individual agents, such as Fakirs, manage to play active roles in deliberately (re)shaping the configurations of the self, subjectivity, and sociality. Constituting a radically different praxis, however, does not happen regularly. Such radical transformations are likely to take place in unconventional social settings, for example, among heterodox groups and marginalized communities, who tend to enjoy more flexibility in constituting an alternative life-world (Chatman 1996; Schutz and Luckmann 1973). Bourdieu's habitus fails to take into account the possibility of such changes actively initiated by individual social agents: "The whole problem of the habitus is that it blocks any social change which Bourdieu subsequently assumes" (King 2000: 428). Arguably, Bourdieu's conception of habitus has also become irrelevant in explaining the experiences of the people living in a rapidly changing socio-cultural context (Archer 2012). Aristotle's habitus, on the other hand, remains an appropriate conceptual tool to theorize the deliberate training of the embodied self practiced by the Fakirs. The classical conceptualization of habitus, however, remains fundamentally constrained in explaining any significant changes within the heterodox community of the heterodox initiates.

The experiences of Fakirs in Bangladesh can be considered one special case in which individuals manage to play strong roles to voluntarily (re)constitute the self, subjectivity, and sociality. This is, of course, not to argue that "structure" and "agency" can be thought separately. But to argue that in some cases, the way Fakirs do in Bangladesh, one can deliberately isolate oneself from an established social-cultural structure and cultivate an alternative habitus. As dominant socio-cultural systems offer little room for radical transformations, changes of that kind are likely to happen among people of marginalized communities, e.g., Fakirs. Aristotle's habitus is more appropriate than the Bourdeiusian model in explaining the changes within an established system. Specifically, Bourdieu's habitus fails to account for individuals' practices to reflexively engage with the rapidly changing socio-cultural settings (Mellor and Shilling 2014).

Finally, it is up to the community of social theorists, which has been overwhelmingly dominated by scholars from the West, to examine whether the wisdom and praxis of the marginalized Fakirs in Bangladesh, will be considered worth taking seriously. Attempts to theorize "the alternative discourses" developed by analysing the societies in Asia, the Middle East and Africa are rare but noteworthy (Alatas

2001 a,b). Currently, it appears to be a distinct possibility that, in the near future, social scientists will make serious attempts to analyze Fakirs' praxis and develop new theorizations of the body, subjectivity and sociality.

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