

Revisiting the Philosophy of the Self (Khudi) in the Thought of Muhammad Iqbal and Its Role in Reconstructing Individual and Collective Muslim Identity

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Abstract

The philosophy of the “Self” (Khudi) in the thought of Muhammad Iqbal is one of his most central concepts, developed in response to the crises of identity, cultural decline, and colonial domination experienced by Muslims. Drawing inspiration from the Qur’an and Islamic tradition, and critically engaging with Islamic mysticism and Western philosophy, Iqbal presents the Self as a dynamic and creative force. This force achieves perfection through love, willpower, independence, patience, and moral courage, fostering both individual development and the collective revival of Muslim societies. This study, employing a descriptive-analytical approach, examines the place of the philosophy of the Self in Iqbal’s intellectual system and explores its potential as a framework for reconstructing individual and collective Muslim identity. Findings indicate that Iqbal’s philosophy of the Self extends beyond personal growth, establishing deep connections with social and political awakening. It provides an effective model for fostering self-confidence, overcoming passivity, and revitalizing the civilizational capacities of the Muslim community.

Keywords: Muhammad Iqbal, Philosophy of the Self, Islamic Identity, Religious Thought Reconstruction, Muslim Awakening

1. Introduction

Muhammad Iqbal (۱۸۷۷-۱۹۳۸) is among the most influential thinkers and reformers of the twentieth-century Islamic world. His thought emerged in direct response to the historical and political conditions faced by Muslims, particularly in colonial India under British rule. At a time when Indian Muslim society faced crises of identity, weak cultural and political structures, and intellectual alienation, Iqbal sought pathways to restore dignity, independence, and the moral and intellectual development of Muslims. This vision establishes him not only as a renowned poet but also as a committed philosopher and social reformer (Ibn Sālim, ۱۴۳۰ AH: 23).

From the outset of his intellectual career, Iqbal relied on the Qur’an and Sunnah, viewing a return to revealed texts as foundational for Muslim awakening. With a deep awareness of contemporary needs, he sought to develop a theory that was philosophically profound yet practically applicable to the cultural and political challenges of Muslims. This effort culminated in the philosophy of the Self, a concept in which self-awareness, independence, dignity, and the cultivation of individual and collective potential occupy a central role (Ahmed Khan, 1977: 79).

In Iqbal's view, the Self is a dynamic and creative force that, through love, will, patience, and moral courage, attains perfection and guides humanity toward the station of *Khalīfah Allah* (Vicegerent of God). Critiquing weakness, imitation, and dependence on foreigners, Iqbal emphasizes that the erosion of willpower and cultural and political passivity are the main factors undermining the Self and obstructing Muslim flourishing. By connecting the concept of the Self to the social and political conditions of Muslims, he elevates it from a purely individual notion to a program for awakening and reconstructing Islamic civilization.

Iqbal's intellectual experiences in Europe, his exposure to modern philosophy, and his critical engagement with Western civilization significantly shaped his thought. While drawing on Islamic mystical and philosophical heritage, he also incorporated certain Western philosophical ideas, yet with a critical approach aimed at redefining the foundations of Islamic identity. Accordingly, the philosophy of the Self in Iqbal's thought is not merely theoretical but a practical framework for reconstructing Muslim identity and empowering the community (Ahmad Dar, 1967: 80).

Therefore, the present study aims to revisit Iqbal's philosophy of the Self and elucidate its role in reconstructing both individual and collective Muslim identity. By analyzing the epistemological, ethical, and social foundations of this concept, the study demonstrates how the Self in Iqbal's intellectual system serves as a central principle for personal excellence and communal awakening.

2. Literature Review

The religious and philosophical ideas of Muhammad Iqbal have consistently attracted the attention of scholars in various fields, and numerous works have analyzed different dimensions of his thought. Among them is the article "*Islamic Awakening in the Poetry of Muhammad Iqbal*" by Mohammad Hasan Akhlaqi, published in the journal *Sokhan-e Jame'a*. This study, focusing on Iqbal's Persian and Urdu poetry, demonstrates how he presented concepts such as the pursuit of independence, Islamic unity, and a return to the Qur'an as tools for liberating Muslim societies from stagnation. Although the author pays attention to the role of the Qur'an and the Sunnah in Iqbal's thought, his main focus is on the literary and political aspects of Iqbal's poetry, while he devotes little attention to the philosophical foundations of his thought, including the concept of *Khudi* (Akhlaqi, ۲۰۱۱: ۷۰۹۵).

Another article, entitled "*Islam, Modernity, and Religious Experience: With Reference to Muhammad Iqbal's Understanding of Religious Experience*" by Qasem Pourhasan and Mojgan Khalili, was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Andishe-ye Dini* (No. 52, Autumn 2014). This study, with a philosophical approach, compares the notion of religious experience in Islam and modernity, and argues that Iqbal, by synthesizing modern and traditional concepts, offered a redefinition of the human–God relationship. The authors, however, criticize Iqbal's tendency to equate religious experience with revelation. Nevertheless, the article remains framed within the philosophy of religion and pays little attention to the social–ethical dimensions of Iqbal's thought, especially the place of the philosophy of *Khudi* (Pūrhasan, ۲۰۱۴: ۳۱–۴۸).

In the article "*The Place of the Qur'an and Hadith in the Poetry of Allama Muhammad Iqbal*" by Reza Khoshmoram and Reza Faramarznesab, published in the *Quarterly Journal of Strategic Studies in Humanities and Islamic Sciences*, the role of the Qur'an and Hadith in Iqbal's poetry is examined. The authors show how Iqbal used Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions to convey moral and social concepts in literary form. However, the main focus of this

study is on literary and mystical dimensions, and it devotes little attention to explaining Iqbal's theoretical foundations concerning *Khudi* and its place in his intellectual system (Khoshmarām, ۲۰۲۲: ۱۱۷–۱۳۸).

A review of these studies reveals that much of the previous research has concentrated on Iqbal's literary aspects, religious experience, or the influence of the Qur'an on his thought, but has paid relatively little attention to a systematic analysis of the philosophy of *Khudi* as his most significant theoretical contribution. The present study, therefore, adopts a new approach by focusing specifically on the philosophy of *Khudi*, seeking to examine its epistemological, ethical, and social dimensions. In this way, while earlier works emphasized poetry, religious experience, or Qur'anic influence, this article aims to analyze the philosophy of *Khudi* as the central axis of Iqbal's thought and the key to understanding his intellectual system, thereby filling a gap in the existing research literature.

3. Introducing Muhammad Iqbal in the Light of the Philosophy of Khudi

Muhammad Iqbal (۱۸۷۷–۱۹۳۸) is undoubtedly one of the most prominent intellectual, literary, and political figures of the Muslim world in the twentieth century. He was born in the city of Sialkot in the Punjab region of India and was raised in a devout and scholarly family. His family upbringing and the religious atmosphere of his home, along with the teachings of his father, Sheikh Noor Muhammad, and the guidance of his distinguished teacher, Syed Mir Hassan (Shams al-Ulama), played a decisive role in shaping his scientific and spiritual personality (Faqr, ۱۹۶۴: ۱/۲۳۱; Nīyāzī, ۱۹۸۱: ۹۴).

Iqbal began his university studies in philosophy and law at the University of Lahore and later traveled to Europe for further education. His time at Cambridge University and the University of Munich, Germany, marked a turning point in his academic life, as he not only became directly acquainted with Western philosophy and civilization but also recognized the depth of its scientific progress while simultaneously observing the crisis of spirituality and ethics in the modern world. His doctoral dissertation, entitled *The Development of Philosophy in Iran*, is a clear testament to his mastery of Islamic philosophical and mystical heritage and an indication of his interdisciplinary and innovative approach (Ahmad Dar, ۱۹۶۷: ۸۰–۸۴).

In addition to being a philosopher, Iqbal was a gifted poet whose works in Persian and Urdu are not only of literary value but also convey deep reformist and philosophical messages. His Persian collections, such as *Asrar-i Khudi*, *Rumuz-i Bi-Khudi*, *Payam-i Mashriq*, *Javidnama*, and *Zabur-i Ajam*, as well as his Urdu works like *Bang-i Dara*, *Bal-i Jibril*, and *Zarb-i Kalim*, are not merely beautiful poems but intellectual statements in verse form aimed primarily at awakening the conscience of the Muslim ummah and strengthening a spirit of self-confidence (Sākit, ۲۰۰۶: ۲۷۵).

Despite his widespread fame in poetry, Iqbal was also an innovative philosopher. He sought to establish an independent intellectual system by combining the philosophical heritage of Islam with the achievements of Western thought. Within this system, *Khudi* emerged as the central core of his philosophy. In Iqbal's view, *Khudi* signifies the discovery of latent individual and collective potentials and the movement toward perfection. Drawing inspiration from Islamic mysticism, he believed that if *Khudi* is properly cultivated, a person can attain the rank of *Khalifat Allah* (Abdul Wahīd, ۱۹۷۳: ۳۷).

Iqbal also played an influential role in politics, considering himself a committed thinker devoted to the fate of Muslims. His historic speech in 1930 in Allahabad, in which he first proposed the idea of an independent state for the Muslims of the subcontinent, paved the way for subsequent developments and ultimately led to the establishment of Pakistan in 1947. For this reason, he is often referred to as the “spiritual father of Pakistan” (Shāmlū, ۱۹۳۵: ۵۲).

Critique of Western civilization also forms a significant part of Iqbal’s thought. While he admired the scientific and technological achievements of the West, he believed that “the materialism and secularism prevailing there have emptied the human spirit and enslaved humanity.” In Iqbal’s view, the only way to save humanity was to return to the moral and spiritual values inherent in religion (Tapar, 2008: 2/230).

Iqbal is rightly regarded among the great religious reformers. He advocated the “reconstruction of religious thought in Islam” and saw *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) as the engine of the dynamism of religion. He believed that traditional understandings of Islam must be reinterpreted in accordance with the needs of the modern world. These ideas had a profound impact on the spread of religious modernist thought across the Muslim world.

Throughout his life, he emphasized the necessity of unity in the Muslim world and considered ethnic nationalism a serious obstacle to this goal. In Iqbal’s perspective, the Muslim ummah constitutes an integrated whole that, relying on its rich culture and civilization, can resist colonialism and regain its past grandeur (Jalālī Nāyīnī, ۱۹۹۶: ۶۶-۷۱).

Muhammad Iqbal passed away on April 21, 1938, in Lahore. His mausoleum in the same city has become a pilgrimage site for admirers of his thought and poetry. His intellectual and literary legacy has had an impact not only in the Indian subcontinent and Pakistan but also in Iran, the Arab world, and Turkey. He is rightly considered a bridge between the East and the West (Rādfar, ۱۹۸۶: ۱۴).

4. Epistemological Foundations of the Philosophy of the Self and Its Role in Reconstructing Religious Thought

The philosophy of the “Self” (Khudi) in Muhammad Iqbal’s thought forms the central axis of his intellectual system, aimed at cultivating Muslim character and reconstructing both individual and collective identity within the Islamic community. Iqbal conceives this philosophy not merely as ethical guidance but as a comprehensive epistemological, theological, and civilizational framework designed to liberate Muslims from “feelings of inferiority,” “self-deprecation,” “dependency,” and “passivity.” According to him, the Self is an inner, generative force that calls humans toward faith, willpower, courage, creativity, and constructive action. Accordingly, Iqbal invites the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent to “know themselves” and trust the divine potential inherent within them, as self-knowledge establishes a person’s connection with the cosmic order (Karavani, 1977: 56).

۴.۱. Qur’anic, Ethical, and Mystical Foundations of the Self

Iqbal traces the roots of this philosophy to the Qur’an. The verse “*O you who believe! Take care of your own selves*” (Al-Mā’idah ۵: ۱۰۵) serves, in his view, as the theoretical foundation of the Self, urging individuals to cultivate inner strength and assume responsibility. He emphasizes that all human power and flourishing depend on the “force of the Self,” which arises from will, divine love, and creative energy. Reliance on others and constant dependence on foreigners constitute the primary threat to the Self. Therefore, Iqbal highlights love, will,

independence, and self-confidence as the essential foundations for the formation of the Self (Karavani, 1977: 58).

Iqbal identifies three stages in the development of the Self:

١. Absolute adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah,
٢. Self-discipline and restraint from prohibitions and vices,
٣. Divine vicegerency (*Khalīfah Allah*), representing the attainment of the highest level of the Self.

He considers Imam Ali (peace be upon him) the ideal embodiment of the Self, in whom love, faith, power, and courage are manifest at their highest levels (Iqbal Lahori, 1970: 305, 312).

Iqbal acknowledges the significant spiritual influence of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī on the formation of his philosophy of the Self. While there are certain resemblances to the ideas of Nietzsche and Bergson, Iqbal asserts that these are coincidental, as he had conceived the theory of the Self prior to exposure to these Western thinkers (Iqbal Lāhūrī, ٢٠٠٨: ١٠٤).

4.2. The Self and the Reconstruction of Religious Thought

Iqbal regards one of the most important functions of the philosophy of the Self as its connection to the reconstruction of religious thought. Islamic theology, in his view, was never intended solely for abstract speculation; its principal aim is to cultivate scholars capable of addressing the spiritual and intellectual needs of society. These needs evolve over time, and Islamic theology must adapt accordingly. Iqbal asserts that the questions adequately addressed by classical *kalam* (theology) are no longer sufficient for the modern individual. This critique does not undermine religion; rather, it calls for the development of *ijtihād*, intellectual dynamism, and reform within Islamic theology (Iqbal Lāhūrī, ٢٠٠٨: ٤٧). Thus, the Self serves as a foundational principle for religious renewal and occupies a central role in Iqbal's reformist program.

٤,٣. Critique of Tradition and Modernity

A significant aspect of the philosophy of the Self is Iqbal's analysis of modern civilization and its relationship with Islam. Some European scholars have accused him of introducing Western humanism into Islamic thought; Iqbal rejects this claim, explaining that his aim was to combat narrow-mindedness and prejudice. He emphasizes that Western humanism is inherently individualistic and incapable of forming a cohesive global society.

Iqbal maintains that the intellectual crisis of Muslims began when Islamic philosophy abandoned systematic reasoning and rational thought, which the West later exploited. He notes that many Muslims, and even Europeans, remain unaware that much of modern scientific knowledge has direct or indirect roots in Muslim scholarship, including influences on major theories such as Einstein's theory of relativity (Iqbāl, ٢٠١٩: ٦-٩). This perspective demonstrates that the philosophy of the Self bridges Islamic heritage and the modern world, providing a framework for understanding Muslims' engagement with global developments.

٤,٤. The Self as a Force of Creativity, Independence, and Responsibility

In Iqbal's philosophy, the Self is a force that propels humans toward creativity, action, independence, and responsibility. The closer an individual comes to this inner power, the more they distance themselves from imitation, passivity, and dependency, acquiring the capacity to

confront the world. Iqbal warns that reliance on others is the greatest adversary of the Self. He expresses this in poetry:

*“If you seek life, present your Self,
Immerse all directions within yourself.”*

Some interpreters equate the Self with diligence and the force of effort, a concept comparable to the European philosophical notion of the *Ego*. Classical commentators have emphasized that God calls humans to self-knowledge: *“If you wish to know Me and perceive the secret of the universe, look within yourself and find the world therein”* (Minavi, ۱۹۴۸: ۳۸).

Iqbal criticizes the passive religiosity of his contemporaries, noting that many Muslims pursued dreams, fatalism, and laziness rather than active effort. In his view, the philosophy of the Self energizes both individuals and society, calling them to responsibility, striving, and engagement in shaping the future (Sa‘īdī, ۱۹۵۹: ۷۹).

۴.۵. Mystical Inspirations and the Role of Rumi

Iqbal frequently acknowledged Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s influence on the mystical dimension of the Self. He recounts a visionary experience in which Rūmī inspired him to strive for the revival of the Islamic community, which led him to compose *Asrār-i Khudī* in Persian—a language that, although not his mother tongue, was chosen to convey his message. Iqbal urges his audience to recognize that any linguistic imperfections serve the purpose of transmitting the message rather than literary embellishment (Iqbal Lāhūrī, ۲۰۰۸: ۱۰۶).

۵. Factors Strengthening and Weakening Khudī in Iqbal’s Thought

From Iqbal’s perspective, *Khudī* is a dynamic and evolving entity that cannot grow in isolation or seclusion. He believes that at every stage of its development, *Khudī* inevitably encounters a form of *selflessness* (*bi-Khudī*), and it is in this encounter that it achieves elevation. The primary question in this context is whether *Khudī* originates from the essence of the human being or is influenced by the surrounding environment, and whether it is inherently free or remains constrained by external factors. To answer this, Iqbal focuses on intentional and deliberate human actions. He argues that “intentional actions” demonstrate that what a person does with purpose and will is largely independent of direct external influence and arises from the inner force of *Khudī*.

To illustrate this, Iqbal notes that while a human is born into an environment that existed prior to their arrival, they possess the ability to organize their life according to their own will and desire. This capacity awakens the conscience to engage in reflection and contemplation, through which one seeks solutions to the challenges and difficulties of life. Nevertheless, the role of the environment cannot be ignored, as social and cultural contexts can either strengthen the insight and potential of *Khudī* or weaken and limit it (Sa‘īdī, ۱۹۵۹: ۷۹).

According to Iqbal, for *Khudī* to attain genuine development, it must first confront adverse conditions and external obstacles. Only under such circumstances can it create a favorable environment for its flourishing and ultimately achieve *freedom*—a freedom that is not superficial but true, deriving its meaning from connection to God. Additionally, *Khudī* must resist various hardships, including sensory and physical challenges, practical pressures, and base desires. Overcoming these difficulties leads *Khudī* to the threshold of *immortality*.

Iqbal thus distinguishes between factors that strengthen *Khudi* and those that weaken it. In his view, struggle, perseverance, self-knowledge, and will directed toward freedom and divine connection are the primary elements for the growth and fortification of *Khudi*. Conversely, surrendering to the environment, following base desires, weakness of will, and lack of resistance to difficulties lead to the deterioration and decline of *Khudi*.

۱.۱. Foundations of Strengthening and Flourishing *Khudi* in Iqbal's Thought

The concept of *Khudi* in Iqbal's thought is not merely an individual or psychological principle. Without nurturing and strengthening *Khudi*, a person becomes vulnerable, dependent, and passive in the face of the tumultuous forces of the age and the dominance of foreign ideologies. Accordingly, Iqbal identifies a set of principles and elements in his works as the foundation for the growth and flourishing of *Khudi*—principles capable of creating transformation and awakening not only at the individual level but also in society. In his view, *Khudi* is like a sapling that requires continuous care, nourishment, and protection to achieve growth and fruition. These foundations, while rooted in Islamic teachings, are also linked to the historical and cultural experiences of Muslims and are nourished by love, will, zeal, patience, creativity, and adherence to ethical principles.

a) Love

In Iqbal's perspective, *love* is not merely a fleeting emotion or a means to personal pleasure and sentiment, but a powerful force capable of transforming human life and creating a new world. Love, according to him, is a force that resolves human confusion and bewilderment and, like a profound remedy, heals human suffering. In Iqbal's thought, love has a broad and universal meaning, representing a desire to attract, embrace, and unite with truth and perfection.

The highest and purest form of love, in his view, is the ability to create values and lofty ideals and strive for their realization. Love delineates the boundary between the lover and the beloved and shapes human identity. This perspective bears a strong resemblance to that of Jalaluddin Rumi, who considered love the central axis of existence and the source of spiritual transformation.

Iqbal reflects this relationship between love and *Khudi* in his poetry:

*"The point of light that is called Khudi / Beneath our soil is the spark of life
Through love, it grows more enduring / Alive, burning, and radiating
Through love, its essence engages / Its potentialities ascend
Its nature ignites from love / The world learns illumination from love
From the perspective of love, the barren splits / The love of God ultimately becomes entirely
God."*

(Iqbāl Lāhūrī, *Javidnama*, n.d.: ۳۲)

These verses clearly show that, in Iqbal's thought, love is the force that imparts warmth, vitality, and immortality to *Khudi*, freeing it from stagnation.

b) Poverty (Fakr)

The concept of *poverty* in Iqbal's thought differs from superficial or purely economic interpretations. Poverty, in his view, does not merely signify the lack of wealth, but rather indifference to worldly and even spiritual rewards, which often spark competition, envy, and desire.

In this sense, poverty is an inner, liberating force that frees a person from enslavement to others' superiority, possessions, or status. Iqbal expresses this in a poem:

"Through poverty I learned the secret of good and evil / Through poverty I became alive and insightful

The poverty that knows the path / Sees Allah from within Khudi."

(Iqbāl Lāhūrī, *Rumuz-i Bi-Khudi*, n.d.: ۲۰۸-۲۰۹)

These lines indicate that, in Iqbal's thought, poverty represents spiritual self-sufficiency and true independence, freeing a person from worldly dependencies and leading to a deeper, divine understanding. Such an approach not only provides inner peace but also liberates one from futile worldly competition and material greed, placing them on the path toward perfection and truth (Sa'īdī, ۱۹۵۹: ۸۳).

c) Patience and Endurance

For Iqbal, *patience and endurance* constitute essential pillars of human growth and perfection. He views patience as a sign of inner strength, personal discipline, and the capacity to withstand others' opinions and actions. This trait is not only necessary for individual development but also fortifies *Khudi* and aids in attaining perfection.

Iqbal emphasizes that *Khudi* reaches its stage of elevation when a person respects the *Khudi* of others as much as their own. This approach not only fosters individual progress but also organizes human relations on the basis of understanding, empathy, and mutual respect, resulting in a stable, harmonious, and cooperative society (ibid.: 84).

He illustrates patience and independence in the following verses:

*"Service and hardship are the camel's motto / Patience and independence are its work
Its steps stir little commotion / The caravan is carried by the desert boat*

Its footprints mark every thicket / Light in consumption, sleeping little, enduring hardships

*Drunk beneath the burden, it moves / Striking the ground, heading for its destination
Happy with its mode of action / Patient on the journey beyond its own walls."*

(Iqbāl Lāhūrī, *Zabur-i Ajam*, n.d.: ۱۲۶)

Here, the camel symbolizes patience, independence, and perseverance; an animal that endures hardship to carry a heavy load to its destination. Iqbal uses this symbol to convey the philosophy of life, emphasizing that humans, like the camel, must remain patient, independent, and steadfast in the face of difficulties. According to him, success and elevation, aligned with the realization of *Khudi*, are achievable only through patience, endurance, and commitment to duty.

d) Zeal (Ghairat)

In Iqbal's view, *zeal* is a foundational element of human character; without it, no effective or lasting action is possible, either physically or morally. A person lacking zeal cannot withstand life's hardships and challenges, nor can they attain their noble ideals. Zeal represents spiritual strength and the power of will, enabling a person to confront difficulties effectively.

Iqbal explicitly asserts that "true growth and development occur in the heart of challenges and confrontation with them." Obstacles are not merely hindrances but serve to cultivate determination and strengthen the will. Those without zeal falter at the first difficulty, unable to

overcome challenges, whereas a zealous individual achieves growth and fortitude through trials.

Zeal, however, is not limited to physical challenges but manifests at higher levels in the spiritual and moral domain. Its real importance is revealed when an individual must preserve faith and ethical beliefs in the face of spiritual hardships and crises, refusing to compromise essential values. Such zeal not only protects the individual from downfall but also propels them toward human perfection and spiritual elevation (Ḥalabī, ۲۰۰۳: ۲۶۸–۲۷۰).

e) Lawful Means (Shara'i Conditions)

The concept of *lawful means* in Iqbal's thought extends beyond its conventional, literal meaning. While initially referring to earning one's livelihood through legitimate means, Iqbal interprets it in a broader sense: obtaining everything—whether wealth, knowledge, or values—through sincere effort and honest endeavor.

In this view, lawful means equate to a life founded on work, activity, and avoidance of laziness or indifference. This principle not only emphasizes lawful sustenance but also prescribes an ethical approach to life, where one must acquire all achievements through honest labor and personal diligence. Iqbal regards this principle as essential for strengthening *Khudi* and preventing its erosion, as dependence on idleness and reliance on others weakens *Khudi* and hinders its path to elevation.

He illustrates this in poetry:

*“Do not take your sustenance from the hands of the lowly / Do not sell your Yusuf cheaply
Even if you are a wingless ant / Do not seek aid from Solomon
The path is difficult, take little comfort / In the world, live free, die free.”*
(Iqbāl Lāhūrī, *Zabur-i Ajam*, n.d.: ۲۹۵)

These lines convey that one must earn sustenance through honorable means to preserve self-respect and independence. Iqbal even considers a wingless ant preferable to a person who degrades themselves before others.

f) Initiative and Honorable Activity

Another key element in strengthening *Khudi* is *initiative* and *honorable activity*. Iqbal emphasizes the importance of work and effort but warns that mere repetitive activity without innovation is insufficient. For the true growth and elevation of *Khudi*, a person must engage in authentic, creative, and innovative actions.

Iqbal believes that *creativity* is an essence placed by God within humans, enabling them to forge new ideas and follow the path of development. Thus, initiative is not merely a moral or social necessity but a fundamental principle for individual flourishing and the fortification of *Khudi*.

He emphasizes this in a poem:

*“Want to live? Be eager, be creative / Like us, grasp the horizons
Forge paths that do not conform / From your own soul, bring forth a new world.”*

۵.۲. Obstacles to the Weakening and Collapse of Khudi in Iqbal's Thought

On the path of the growth and development of *Khudi*, a human being constantly encounters obstacles that can weaken their will and prevent the flourishing of their true self. Iqbal Lahori, with deep insight, enumerates some of these factors that lead to internal weakness and fragility in humans. Although these factors may appear to have psychological, social, or ethical dimensions, their roots lie in weak faith, neglect of freedom, and deviation from authentic human values.

a) Fear

In his poetry, Iqbal uses vivid and forceful metaphors to depict fear as a chain that binds a person's feet, hindering movement toward freedom and perfection:

*"If your enemy sees you afraid / He plucks you like a flower from your path
The strike of his sword becomes stronger / Even his gaze falls like a dagger
Fear is like a chain around our feet / Otherwise, a hundred floods are in our sea
Your melody cannot rise / If soft, it is restrained by fear
Let it hasten, that it may become melodious / It summons resurrection from the heavens
Fear spies from the realm of death / Its inner part dark as the letter 'M' of death
Its eye disrupts the work of life / Its ear blocks the news of life
Every hidden evil in your heart / Its origin is fear if you see rightly
Deception, cunning, malice, and lies / All these derive their light from fear
Veil of coercion and hypocrisy is its attire / Chaos is its mother's embrace
Since it is not fortified by resolve / It becomes content with the incompatible
Whoever understands the secret of Mustafa / Sees idolatry hidden in fear."*
(Iqbāl Lāhūrī, *Rumuz-i Bi-Khudi*, n.d.: ٤٠)

Iqbal regards fear as the source of many psychological and moral disorders. Fear gives rise to emotional and mental disturbances, which not only distort the human personality but also deviate their natural disposition and innate character. In other words, fear disrupts moral and intellectual growth and prevents a person from advancing on the path of development. He posits that within every weak, timid, oppressive, or dictatorial person, there is a hidden fear that shadows behavior and temperament, causing moral and psychological imbalance.

Iqbal clearly demonstrates that negative traits such as flattery, deceit, malice, and lying are born from fear. He sees fear as the basis for hypocrisy and surrender to weaknesses and concludes that the fearful person is effectively allied with Satan, prone to treachery and weakness. According to him, "Fear of God is evidence of manifest faith, and fear of others is hidden idolatry. Whoever understands the secret of the chosen knows that idolatry is hidden in fear" (Ghanam, 2016: 15).

Accordingly, overcoming fear is indispensable for anyone seeking to develop and flourish their personality. Only by eliminating paralyzing fears can a person take the first correct steps on the path of individual and moral development and face life's challenges with strength and endurance.

b) Slavery

Iqbal regards slavery as one of the greatest obstacles to human elevation, describing it not merely as a social system but as a destructive phenomenon for the human spirit and dignity. He asserts that "None of the systems and laws devised by humans for exploitation and domination

of others are as harmful and undesirable as slavery.” Slavery diverts a person from their true identity, destroying human dignity.

According to Iqbal, slavery reduces humans to the level of animals and prevents the flourishing of their character. He emphasizes that for humanity to achieve moral and spiritual growth, “slavery must be eradicated from its roots” (Sa‘īdī, ١٩٥٩: ٨٦). Only in the absence of all forms of slavery, whether political or economic, can a person reach the pinnacle of their potential and reclaim their true status as a free and dignified being.

Iqbal illustrates this idea with the following verse:

“Man, blinded by servitude, made a man / He possessed a jewel but offered it to Qobad and Jam

Indeed, a servant is lower than a dog / I have never seen a dog bow to another dog.”
(Iqbāl Lāhūrī, *Zabur-i Ajam*, n.d.: ٢٩٨)

These lines emphasize that human dignity is far higher than to succumb to slavery, for even an animal like a dog does not enslave another of its kind; hence humans must recognize their superior value.

c) Racism and Racial Arrogance

Another factor of weakness in Iqbal’s thought is racism and racial arrogance. These manifest as pride in lineage, race, or nationality and create unjustified divisions among people. Iqbal views such attitudes as fundamentally opposed to human values, which emphasize equality, justice, and respect for differences.

He argues that racial pride and boasting are not only irrational but directly impede the development of *Khudi*. Such feelings lead individuals to focus on self-superiority rather than personal and human advancement, preventing a deep understanding of shared human values. Contemporary research also notes: “These attitudes not only hinder proper individual and societal development but are among the major obstacles to the flourishing of *Khudi*” (Muftī, 2024: 4).

Thus, achieving human perfection and the elevation of *Khudi* requires eliminating pride and boasting based on race, family, or nationality, fostering a fair and open perspective toward others. Only then can human unity and social cohesion emerge, providing the foundation for the growth of both individual and collective *Khudi*.

d) Begging

In Iqbal’s thought, *begging* is not limited to the conventional meaning of seeking alms or direct assistance from others; he uses it in a broader, deeper sense. Any success or achievement obtained without personal effort and labor constitutes begging. Iqbal maintains that the true value of life and human dignity lies in reliance on one’s own work, initiative, and effort, and that anything acquired without endeavor signifies dependence and weakness.

He provides an example with inheritance: if a person, like the son of a wealthy man, lives comfortably solely due to their father’s wealth, they are still considered a beggar, because their comfort and prosperity are not the result of personal effort and independence but of another’s labor. In this regard, he explains: “If a person collects the Red Sea through begging, it is as a flood of fire to him, but if he gathers a few drops by his own hand, those drops are blessings, more beautiful than drops of dew” (Ghanam, ٢٠١٦: ٦).

Iqbal extends this idea to the realm of thought. Those who borrow ideas and concepts from others without personal reflection, research, or creativity are like beggars who have gained nothing. They are not independent thinkers but mere consumers of others' thoughts. Consequently, Iqbal asserts that true success is achieved only when a person relies on their own efforts, and their accomplishments are the direct result of their own abilities and struggle (Sa'īdī, ۱۹۵۹: ۸۷).

In conclusion, Iqbal emphasizes that by promoting and reinforcing factors that strengthen *Khudi* while consciously avoiding those that weaken it, *Khudi* can attain greater power, gradually increasing in strength. This approach enables a person to achieve true independence, spiritual perfection, and genuine freedom.

Conclusion

The philosophy of *Khudi* in the thought of Muhammad Iqbal Lahori is not merely an ethical or mystical theory but a comprehensive epistemological, social, and political system that emerged within the historical context of twentieth-century Muslims. Drawing inspiration from the Qur'an and Islamic tradition, and benefiting from philosophical experiences of both the East and the West, Iqbal sought to respond to the crisis of Muslim identity under colonial domination, liberating them from passivity, self-abasement, and dependency. He presented *Khudi* as a dynamic and creative force that achieves perfection through love, willpower, zeal, patience, and initiative, culminating in the station of *Khalifatullah*—a rank that guides humans toward social responsibility, independence, and creativity.

Through this philosophy, Iqbal forged an inseparable link between individual development and collective awakening. In his view, self-knowledge and self-esteem form the foundation of individual character, yet an individual can only flourish within a vibrant society. Therefore, the philosophy of *Khudi* neither advocates isolation nor pure individualism, but rather provides the framework for reconstructing the collective identity of the Islamic community. His emphasis on independence, initiative, and *halal conditions* reflects an effort to cultivate a self-reliant society resilient against foreign domination. Thus, *Khudi* transcends the individual level and becomes a practical program for the revitalization of Islamic civilization.

Moreover, by critiquing stagnant and inactive religious culture, Iqbal warned Muslims against mere daydreaming and attachment to the past. He advocated a dynamic religion rooted in *ijtihad* and responsive to the demands of the modern world. This perspective places him among the great religious reformers and positions him as a significant influence on the Islamic modernist movement. In Iqbal's vision, Muslim societies can achieve genuine independence only when their members cultivate *Khudi*, channeling love and will into creativity and action.

Consequently, Iqbal's philosophy of *Khudi* can be considered a comprehensive model for rethinking Islamic identity—one that encompasses both individual and social dimensions, is rooted in Islamic tradition, and is compatible with contemporary realities. The outcome of this philosophy is the strengthening of individual character, the empowerment of society, and the creation of conditions conducive to Islamic awakening.

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