



Muhammad Iqbal's Dynamic Concept of Self: A Philosophical Study

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Sir Muhammad Iqbal's philosophy of Khudi (Self) as a dynamic, creative, and ever-evolving principle of human existence, and argues that it constitutes a systematic reconstruction of Islamic anthropology in dialogue with modern Western philosophy. Drawing on Iqbal's major works—*Asrar-i-Khudi*, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, *Javid Nama*, and *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*—the study traces the metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of Khudi, showing how Iqbal transforms the ego from a passive, illusory veil requiring annihilation (fana) into an active centre of creative freedom whose destiny is intimate participation in the ongoing creative life of God. The paper situates Iqbal's thought within a triangulated intellectual field: the Qur'anic conception of vicegerency (khilafah), the mystical tradition represented above all by Jalal al-Din Rumi, and Western vitalist and personalist philosophy, notably Kant's practical reason, Nietzsche's will to power, Bergson's duration and creative evolution, Goethe's Faustian striving, and Hegel's dialectic of spirit. Using a qualitative, hermeneutic, and comparative method, the article demonstrates how Iqbal selectively appropriates, transforms, and ultimately subordinates these influences to a theocentric and ethical framework centred on love (ishq), self-affirmation, and the ideal of the

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Perfect Man (Insan-i-Kamil). A comparative section situates Khudi against Advaita Vedanta's Atman-Brahman monism, Buddhist Anatman, and existentialist accounts of selfhood, arguing that Iqbal charts a distinctive middle path between substantialist and eliminativist theories of the self. The final sections assess the continuing relevance of Iqbal's philosophy for contemporary debates on human dignity, identity politics, globalization, and artificial intelligence, while also identifying certain philosophical tensions in his synthesis, including the coherence of finite–infinite ego relations and his optimistic philosophy of history. The article concludes that Khudi remains a philosophically serious and constructive contribution to comparative philosophy of personhood.

1. Introduction

Few thinkers in modern Islamic intellectual history have made the question of selfhood as central to their entire philosophical project as Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), poet-philosopher of the Indian subcontinent, whose Persian and Urdu poetry, together with his English prose masterpiece *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, together constitute one sustained meditation on the nature, destiny, and cultivation of the human ego. Writing at the confluence of a declining Muslim civilizational order, an assertive European modernity, and an internally contested tradition of Islamic mysticism that had, in Iqbal's judgment, drifted toward quietism and self-negation, Iqbal set himself the task of articulating a philosophy of Khudi—commonly translated as "self," "ego," or "selfhood"—capable of energizing individual and collective life alike.

The present study argues that Khudi is best understood not as a static metaphysical postulate but as a dynamic principle: an evolving, striving, and self-creating centre of experience whose reality is constituted precisely by its perpetual growth. This dynamism distinguishes Iqbal's anthropology from both the classical Ash'arite occasionalism that dissolved human agency into divine determination and the Neoplatonic-mystical schemes that treated individuality as an illusion to be dissolved back into an undifferentiated One. It likewise distinguishes Iqbal from purely naturalistic or mechanistic conceptions of the person emerging from nineteenth-century European science, which he regarded as reductive of the felt, purposive, and creative character of lived experience.



The article proceeds by first situating Iqbal's project within existing scholarship (Literature Review), stating explicit research objectives and methodology, and then developing a thematic exposition of Khudi across its philosophical foundations, its dynamic character, its metaphysical status, its epistemological grounding, its ethical and spiritual cultivation, and its social and political culmination in the ideal community and the Perfect Man. A comparative section places Iqbal's theory alongside Advaita Vedanta, Buddhist Anatman doctrine, and twentieth-century Western existentialism. The article closes with an assessment of Khudi's relevance to contemporary debates on human dignity, identity, globalization, and artificial intelligence, followed by a critical evaluation of the strengths and limitations of Iqbal's synthesis.

2. Literature Review

Scholarship on Iqbal's philosophy of Self spans nearly a century and may be organized into four broad strands. The first, and earliest, strand consists of the foundational expository works produced within a generation of Iqbal's death, most importantly Annemarie Schimmel's *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*, which remains the most comprehensive study of Iqbal's symbolic and religious vocabulary, and R. A. Nicholson's early English translation of *Asrar-i-Khudi* as *The Secrets of the Self*, which first introduced Iqbal's ego-philosophy to Western readers and provoked the enduring controversy—addressed further below—over Iqbal's relationship to Nietzsche. Complementing these, M. M. Sharif's edited *History of Muslim Philosophy* situates Khudi within the broader trajectory of Islamic philosophical anthropology, while Iqbal Academy Pakistan has, over decades, produced a substantial corpus of studies on Iqbal's Western influences, notably Qaiser's *Iqbal and the Western Philosophers*.

A second strand approaches Khudi through close literary-philosophical reading of *Asrar-i-Khudi* itself. Recent contributions in this vein include studies analyzing the concept of Khudi in Iqbal's *Secrets of the Self* through both its theoretical claims and its poetic expression, arguing that Iqbal underscores the importance of the physical world for self-growth, since unmet basic needs obstruct the maturation of spiritual potential. Related work has examined the doctrine as poetic construction, tracing how self-realization, self-awareness, and the cultivation of a distinct personality unfold across Iqbal's selected verse.

A third and increasingly prominent strand undertakes comparative analysis between Khudi and Western philosophical figures, especially Nietzsche and Bergson. A 2022 study in *The Dialogue* offers a sustained comparison of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and Iqbal's *Mard-i-Momin*, arguing that despite superficial affinities the two conceptions diverge fundamentally at the metaphysical, epistemological, religious, and methodological levels, since Nietzsche's anti-foundationalism rejects religion and conventional morality as sources of nihilism, whereas Iqbal remains a foundationalist who grounds the Self in revelation and



Prophetic example. A parallel 2024 study similarly distinguishes Nietzsche's power-and-autonomy-centred Superman from Iqbal's Perfect Man, whose excellence is attained through spiritual self-actualization, ethical integrity, and service to humanity rather than the transcendence of conventional morality as such. On the Bergsonian side, recent commentary traces how Iqbal draws on Bergson's and Whitehead's process metaphysics, and on his own Cambridge philosophical training, while reworking these categories through Quranic metaphysics and Sufi epistemology, so that the self becomes, in Iqbal's phrase, a "creative truth" whose participation in divine creativity raises the individual from passive recipient to active co-creator.

A fourth and recent strand places Khudi within global and comparative theories of selfhood. A 2026 article in *Sophia* examines Khudi as an ontological, ethical, and teleological concept, comparing it with Nietzsche's will to power, Humean skepticism, and Indian ideas of Atman and Anatman. It argues that Iqbal balances individual self-empowerment with Bekhudi (self-surrender) to transcendent values, thereby avoiding nihilism, moral relativism, authoritarian collectivism, and excessive self-negation. Studies of *Asrar-i-Khudi* and *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* further show Iqbal's shift from individual self-reliance toward the view that the Self achieves its fullest realization within the ideal Muslim community.

Despite this rich body of scholarship, existing studies tend either toward exposition of Khudi in relative isolation from systematic comparative philosophy, or toward comparison with a single interlocutor (typically Nietzsche) without integrating the full constellation of influences; Qur'anic, Rumian, Kantian, Bergsonian, Goethean, and Hegelian that Iqbal himself invokes. Nor has the specialized literature yet substantially addressed the implications of Khudi for emergent debates on artificial intelligence and digital selfhood. The present article seeks to address these gaps.

3. Research Objectives

This study pursues five interrelated objectives. First, to reconstruct the metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, and spiritual architecture of Iqbal's concept of Khudi as an integrated philosophical system rather than a loose poetic sentiment. Second, to trace with precision how Iqbal engages the Qur'an, the mystical legacy of Rumi, and the Western philosophies of Kant, Nietzsche, Bergson, Goethe, and Hegel, distinguishing points of genuine appropriation from points of critical departure. Third, to map the developmental stages of Khudi as Iqbal presents them, from the initial assertion of selfhood through discipline, love, and creative action to the culmination in the Perfect Man. Fourth, to situate Khudi comparatively against Advaita Vedanta, Buddhist Anatman, and existentialist philosophies of the subject. Fifth, to evaluate critically the philosophical coherence and continuing relevance of Iqbal's theory for contemporary discourse on human dignity, identity, globalization, and artificial intelligence.



4. Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, hermeneutic, and comparative philosophical methodology. Primary textual analysis is conducted on Iqbal's key philosophical and poetic works available in English translation, principally *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, *The Secrets of the Self (Asrar-i-Khudi)* and its sequel *The Mysteries of Selflessness (Rumuz-i-Bekhudi)*, *Javid Nama*, and Iqbal's Cambridge doctoral thesis *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*. These texts are read closely and cross-referenced to reconstruct Iqbal's arguments in his own terms before being placed into dialogue with the philosophical traditions he engages. A comparative-hermeneutic method, standard in cross-cultural philosophy, is used to identify structural analogies and disanalogies between Khudi and the selected Western and South-Asian traditions, guided by the principle of charitable but critical interpretation: influences are neither reduced to simple "borrowing" nor treated as coincidental parallels, but examined for the specific transformations Iqbal performs upon them. Secondary and tertiary literature, including recent peer-reviewed scholarship published after 2015, is incorporated to situate the analysis within, and where relevant to challenge, the current state of Iqbal studies. The study does not employ empirical or statistical methods, consistent with its nature as a work of textual and comparative philosophy.

5. Philosophical Foundations of Khudi

Iqbal's philosophy of Khudi emerges from a deliberate reinterpretation of the Qur'anic doctrine of *khilafah*, or human vicegerency. Where classical Ash'arite theology had tended to read divine omnipotence in a manner that left little room for genuine creaturely causality, and where certain strands of Sufi metaphysics, particularly some popular renderings of Ibn Arabi's *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being), appeared to Iqbal to dissolve the reality of the individual self into the sole reality of God, Iqbal insisted that the Qur'an addresses man as a responsible, morally accountable agent precisely because the ego is real and endowed with genuine, if finite, creative power. In the *Reconstruction*, Iqbal writes that the ultimate reality is a "rationally directed creative will" whose life consists in temporal explication, and that man, as the highest individuation of this creative energy, participates in that ongoing creativity rather than merely observing or submitting to it from outside.

Central to this foundation is Iqbal's rejection of what he calls the "sin" of the Muslim mystical and philosophical tradition: the identification of self-negation (*fana*) with the highest religious achievement. Iqbal did not reject *fana* outright, but relocated it: rather than the extinction of selfhood in an undifferentiated absolute, true self-negation for Iqbal consists in surrendering one's lower, egoistic impulses to a higher, God-oriented purpose, in a manner that intensifies rather than annihilates individuality. This



reorientation is captured in Iqbal's insistence, developed at length in *Asrar-i-Khudi*, that the seed of the self must not remain buried, but must break open, take root, and blossom an image that recurs across Iqbal's poetry as a governing metaphor for the entire trajectory of human life.

6. The Dynamic Nature of the Self

The defining feature of *Khudi*, and the one that most sharply distinguishes Iqbal's anthropology from static, substance-based theories of the soul inherited from both Aristotelian and certain strands of Islamic scholastic philosophy, is its essentially processual character. For Iqbal, to be a self is not to possess a fixed, unchanging metaphysical substrate underlying accidental change, but to be a continuous act of self-making, sustained moment by moment through struggle, desire, and purposive striving. Selfhood, in this sense, is achievement rather than given fact: it can be strengthened through right action, love, and discipline, or weakened and dissipated through slavery, fatalism, and the imitative conformity Iqbal associated with a decadent, unreflective traditionalism.

This dynamism draws heavily, though not uncritically, on Henri Bergson's concept of duration and creative evolution, in which reality is understood not as a sequence of discrete, spatialized instants but as an indivisible, qualitatively changing flow accessible to intuition rather than to purely analytic intellect. Iqbal adapts this vitalist metaphysics to argue that the ego is a "unity of mental states," not because mental states are its inert parts but because it is the very activity of synthesizing successive experience into a purposive whole. Where Bergson's *élan vital* remains, in Iqbal's judgment, insufficiently oriented toward a determinate teleological goal, Iqbal supplies that orientation from the Qur'anic vision of man as vicegerent, whose creative freedom is answerable to a moral order rather than exercised for its own sake.

Equally significant is the influence of Goethe, whose *Faust* Iqbal read as a profound meditation on the restless, ever-striving character of the human spirit, one that refuses static contentment and understands its own perfection as an infinite, asymptotic task rather than a terminal state. Iqbal shared Goethe's conviction that stagnation, not sin in the conventional sense, is the deepest threat to selfhood, and this conviction underlies his repeated poetic exhortations against complacency, imitation (*taqlid*), and premature satisfaction with one's spiritual attainments.

7. Metaphysical Dimensions of Self

Metaphysically, Iqbal conceives reality as a hierarchy or spectrum of egos, ranging from the relatively rudimentary, only partially individuated centres of experience found in inorganic and organic nature up to the fully self-conscious human ego, and culminating in the Ultimate Ego, or God, who is the most perfect,



most individual, and most free of all egos. This is a crucial and distinctive move: rather than opposing divine infinity to human finitude as mutually exclusive categories, Iqbal treats both as points on a single continuum of egohood, differing in degree of individuality, freedom, and creative power rather than in kind. God, for Iqbal, is not an abstract, impersonal Absolute but the most concrete, most individual reality—an eternal creative Self whose "flow" is the very ground of time and process, and who continually confronts genuinely novel possibilities in the unfolding of the universe.

On this basis Iqbal offers a qualified critique of classical pantheistic monism, including strands of *wahdat al-wujud*, on the grounds that a truly undifferentiated One-without-a-second cannot coherently ground the reality of finite selves as genuine centres of will and responsibility. At the same time, Iqbal resists any dualism that would isolate the human ego as an ontologically separate substance standing over against God; instead, finite egos are conceived as real but dependent individuations within the single, all-encompassing creative activity of the Ultimate Ego, analogous though Iqbal is careful to qualify the analogy to distinct waves within a single sea, each possessing a genuine, if bounded, individuality of its own.

This metaphysics has direct implications for Iqbal's account of immortality. Because the self is not a fixed substance but an achievement of ever-greater unity, coherence, and intensity of purpose, personal immortality is, for Iqbal, not an automatic entitlement bestowed upon all human beings equally but a possibility to be earned through the strengthening of *Khudi* in this life. A self that has failed to achieve sufficient unity and intensity risks disintegration, while a self that has cultivated itself through love, action, and prayer moves toward an ever more robust and enduring individuality, capable, in Iqbal's more speculative passages in *Javid Nama*, of a continued life and growth beyond biological death.

8. Epistemological Basis of the Self

Iqbal's epistemology of the self departs from a purely rationalist or empiricist model of knowledge in favour of a synthesis reminiscent of, though not identical with, Bergson's distinction between intellect and intuition. For Iqbal, discursive reason (*aql*), while indispensable for organizing experience of the external, spatialized world, is incapable by itself of grasping the inner, qualitative, and continuously creative life of the self; that grasp requires what Iqbal, following the Sufi and Qur'anic tradition, calls "heart-knowledge" or immediate intuitive apprehension, most fully realized in the higher stages of prayer and mystical experience. Crucially, however, Iqbal insists that such intuitive experience is not opposed to but continuous with, and ultimately corrigible by, the standards of rational and empirical inquiry; mystical experience, for Iqbal, yields genuine cognitive content that must nonetheless be tested against reason, ethical fruitfulness, and its



effects on personality and society, a criterion he elaborates at length in the Reconstruction's discussion of religious experience as a form of knowledge.

Here Iqbal's debt to, and departure from, Immanuel Kant is instructive. Kant's critical philosophy had famously restricted theoretical reason to the phenomenal realm, relegating the self, God, and freedom to postulates of practical reason inaccessible to speculative cognition. Iqbal accepts Kant's central insight that the moral and religious dimensions of selfhood cannot be secured by theoretical metaphysics alone, but he refuses Kant's corresponding agnosticism about the possibility of a direct, non-inferential contact with ultimate reality through religious experience. For Iqbal, the higher, insistent forms of mystical and prophetic consciousness furnish exactly the kind of immediate, though non-conceptual, access to reality that Kant's critical strictures seemed to foreclose, thereby allowing Iqbal to claim a form of metaphysical knowledge of the self and God that remains, in his view, empirically and rationally answerable rather than merely privately asserted.

9. Ethical and Spiritual Development of Khudi

The heart of Iqbal's philosophy of Self lies in its ethical and spiritual programme for the cultivation, or "education," of Khudi, which Iqbal presents, especially in *Asrar-i-Khudi*, as unfolding through a sequence of interrelated stages or disciplines rather than a single act. The first and most fundamental of these is obedience (*ita'at*) to the moral law, understood not as external constraint but as the necessary discipline through which the nascent self acquires the strength and coherence to resist dissolution into impulse, habit, or social conformity. The second stage is self-control (*dabt-i-nafs*), through which the disciplined self masters its own passions and directs them toward higher purposes rather than being driven by them.

The third and, for Iqbal, the decisive stage is what may be called divine vicegerency (*niyabat-i-ilahiyya*) or, in less technical terms, the attainment of a fully realized, creative personality capable of participating consciously in the moral governance of the world. It is critical to note that this entire developmental sequence is powered, for Iqbal, not primarily by intellect or willpower in a Nietzschean sense but by *ishq*—love—which Iqbal treats as the fundamental creative and unifying energy of the universe, responsible alike for the coherence of the self, the bond between the self and God, and the ethical bond between self and others. Love, in Iqbal's usage, is not sentimental affect but an ontological and ethical force: it is love that enables Khudi to risk itself in genuine encounter with the world, to accept moral responsibility, and to be recreated rather than annihilated through self-giving.



This structure of Iqbal's ethics places him in explicit and deliberate tension with Nietzsche, whose *Übermensch* Iqbal read with genuine admiration for its rejection of herd conformity and its affirmation of creative strength, but ultimately rejected as untethered from any transcendent moral order and therefore prone to an amoral, even nihilistic, glorification of power for its own sake. Where Nietzsche's revaluation of values proceeds by the death of God and the consequent self-legislation of the strong individual, Iqbal's *Mard-i-Momin*, or "Man of Faith," derives strength precisely from unwavering submission to the moral demands of revelation, from Prophetic exemplarity, and from love of God, so that power in Iqbal's scheme is always answerable to, rather than constitutive of, moral value. As one recent comparative study concludes, Nietzsche's anti-foundationalist rejection of religion and conventional morality as sources of nihilism stands opposed to Iqbal's foundationalism, which locates ultimate value in revelation and Prophetic example rather than in the self-creating will alone.

10. Self, Society, and Insan-i-Kamil

Iqbal's philosophy of *Khudi*, first elaborated with an emphasis on the solitary individual in *Asrar-i-Khudi* (1915), is deliberately extended and, in important respects, corrected in its sequel, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* (1918), which shifts attention to the necessary fulfillment of individual selfhood within the ideal community, understood by Iqbal as the historical Muslim *ummah* reconstituted around Qur'anic principles of *Tawhid*, human brotherhood, and social justice. For Iqbal, the strengthened individual ego does not stand in competition with communal life but finds its highest realization precisely through disciplined participation in a community organized around shared moral and spiritual purpose; conversely, a community composed of weak, imitative, self-negating individuals is, for Iqbal, incapable of historical creativity or civilizational renewal.

This dialectic of individual and community culminates in Iqbal's vision of the *Insan-i-Kamil*, or Perfect Man, a concept Iqbal inherits from the classical Sufi tradition, especially as elaborated by Ibn Arabi and, in poetic form, transmitted through Rumi, but substantially reworks. Where the classical Sufi Perfect Man typically achieves perfection through progressive self-annihilation and absorption into the divine Reality, Iqbal's Perfect Man achieves perfection through the maximal intensification, rather than the dissolution, of individuality: he is the fully realized vicegerent of God, uniting mystical intimacy with God, prophetic moral courage, and active, transformative engagement with history and society. As one recent study observes, the absorption of divine attributes draws the Perfect Man nearer to God, making possible a union of the temporal and the eternal in which the world is understood to exist for him even as he exists for the world.



11. The Guiding Presence of Rumi

Among Iqbal's manifold influences, none is more pervasive or more affectionately acknowledged than Jalal al-Din Rumi, who appears throughout Iqbal's poetic corpus, and above all in *Javid Nama*, as Iqbal's spiritual guide (*pir*) through the celestial spheres, in explicit echo of Virgil's role as Dante's guide through the *Divine Comedy*. From Rumi, Iqbal draws the fundamental conviction that love, rather than discursive reason, is the deepest ontological and epistemic principle of the universe, and that the human self is engaged in a continuous journey of transformation and ascent, symbolized in Rumi's own poetry by the reed torn from the reed-bed and by the moth's self-giving immolation in the flame. Yet even here Iqbal is selective: he draws on Rumi's dynamism, his emphasis on love, and his image of ceaseless spiritual becoming, while resisting readings of Rumi, and of the broader Persian Sufi tradition, that would counsel passive absorption or quietistic withdrawal from active engagement with history, ethics, and politics. Iqbal's Rumi is, in this sense, a Rumi read through the lens of *Khudi* rather than a Rumi read through the lens of classical fana-centred mysticism.

12. Hegel and the Dialectic of Spirit

Iqbal's encounter with Hegel, mediated substantially through his Cambridge philosophical training and his doctoral research later published as *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, contributes a further structural element to his philosophy of Self: the conviction that reality, including the reality of the self, is not static but develops dialectically through opposition, struggle, and progressive self-realization. Iqbal shares with Hegel the intuition that spirit (or, in Iqbal's vocabulary, *ego*) comes to know and realize itself only through encounter with what initially appears as an external, resistant "other"—for Iqbal, the material world, the *ego's* own lower impulses, and the resistance of history itself. However, Iqbal resists the more strongly monistic and impersonalist readings of Hegel's Absolute Spirit, in which finite individuality is ultimately a moment to be sublated (*aufgehoben*) within a higher, all-encompassing totality. For Iqbal, the finite *ego's* struggle culminates not in its absorption into an impersonal Absolute but in an ever more robust, ever more individual, and ultimately everlasting personality standing in loving, yet genuinely dialogical, relation to a personal God.

13. Comparative Philosophical Analysis

A rigorous philosophical assessment of *Khudi* requires situating it against major rival theories of selfhood, both South Asian and Western, several of which Iqbal explicitly addresses.



13.1 Advaita Vedanta

Advaita Vedanta, as classically systematized by Shankara, holds that the empirical, individuated self (jiva) is ultimately identical with the single, undifferentiated absolute consciousness, Brahman, and that the appearance of multiplicity and individuality is a product of ignorance (avidya) to be dissolved through liberating self-knowledge (moksha), which reveals the individual self's apparent boundaries as illusory (maya). Iqbal, who was well acquainted with Vedantic philosophy through his subcontinental context, regarded this radical non-dualism, together with certain strands of Sufi wahdat al-wujud and Hellenic-Neoplatonic thought, as philosophically and civilizationally corrosive precisely because it treats individuality as a lower, ultimately illusory stage to be transcended rather than as an achievement to be intensified; Iqbal held such doctrines significantly responsible for what he perceived as the historical passivity and civilizational decline of societies that had absorbed them too thoroughly. Where Advaita seeks the extinction of individuated selfhood in undifferentiated unity, Iqbal seeks its eternal, ever-more-differentiated perfection in loving relation to a personal God.

13.2 Buddhist Anatman

Buddhist philosophy, particularly in its classical Abhidharma and Madhyamaka articulations, denies the existence of any enduring, unified self altogether, teaching instead that what conventionally appears as a person is a continuously changing aggregate of five factors (skandhas) devoid of any permanent substrate, a doctrine known as anatta or Anatman. Iqbal's philosophy of Khudi stands in instructive contrast: while Iqbal agrees with the Buddhist analysis that the self is not a static, unchanging substance, he draws the opposite normative conclusion, holding that the processual, ever-changing character of selfhood is precisely what makes its cultivation, strengthening, and eventual immortalization both possible and imperative, rather than grounds for its dissolution or the cessation of craving associated with it. Iqbal's Self is thus process without being emptiness: a real, if evolving, centre of purposive agency rather than a conventional fiction to be seen through.

13.3 Existentialism

Iqbal's philosophy anticipates, and in certain respects parallels, themes later developed by European existentialists such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, most notably the insistence that selfhood is not a ready-made essence but a task to be achieved through free, committed choice, and that inauthentic, imitative, or conformist existence represents a genuine loss or diminishment of selfhood. Yet Iqbal diverges sharply from the more radically anti-foundationalist strands of existentialism, particularly Sartre's atheistic



insistence that existence precedes essence in a universe devoid of pre-given purpose. For Iqbal, human freedom and self-creation unfold within, rather than against, a theistic and morally ordered cosmos; the self's freedom is real and consequential, but it is freedom exercised as vicegerent within a larger creative and moral order rather than freedom exercised in defiant isolation within an indifferent universe.

14. Contemporary Relevance

Iqbal's dynamic philosophy of Self retains considerable relevance to several live contemporary debates. In discussions of human dignity, Iqbal's insistence that personhood is grounded neither in mere biological membership in the species nor in social utility, but in the capacity for continuous moral and spiritual self-creation, offers resources for resisting reductive or purely instrumental conceptions of the human person increasingly prevalent in bureaucratic, economic, and technological contexts. In debates on identity and multiculturalism under conditions of globalization, Iqbal's dialectic of individual and community in which robust individuality is achieved through, rather than against, participation in a morally purposive community offers an alternative to both atomistic liberal individualism and homogenizing collectivism, suggesting instead a model in which cultural and religious particularity and universal human solidarity might be mutually reinforcing rather than opposed.

Perhaps the most novel contemporary application concerns artificial intelligence and the philosophy of mind. Iqbal's insistence that the self is constituted by qualitative, purposive, and freely creative activity, rather than by the mere processing or storage of information provides a philosophically substantive basis for distinguishing genuine personhood from even highly sophisticated computational simulation. On an Iqbalian view, an artificial system, however capable of manipulating symbols or generating novel outputs, would lack *Khudi* in the relevant sense unless it possessed genuine, felt purposiveness, moral responsibility, and the capacity for love-motivated self-transcendence criteria that remain, at minimum, extremely difficult to specify or verify in non-biological systems, and that many philosophers of mind continue to regard as unmet by current architectures. Iqbal's framework thus offers contemporary bioethics and philosophy of technology a normatively rich, non-reductive vocabulary for articulating what, if anything, would be lost in mistaking computational sophistication for selfhood proper.

15. Critical Evaluation

Notwithstanding its considerable philosophical ambition and continuing relevance, Iqbal's synthesis is not without internal tensions that merit critical scrutiny. First, the coherence of Iqbal's central metaphysical move—treating finite and infinite egos as differing in degree along a single continuum of individuality



rather than in kind remains philosophically contestable: critics have long questioned whether an infinite, all-encompassing Ultimate Ego can coherently be said to differ merely in degree, rather than in fundamental ontological kind, from bounded, mutually external finite egos, and whether Iqbal's account adequately secures the genuine metaphysical independence of finite selves that his ethical theory of moral responsibility requires. Second, Iqbal's optimistic philosophy of history, in which the strengthening of Khudi is expected to issue in civilizational renewal, sits uneasily with the historical record of the very century in which Iqbal wrote, and raises the question of whether Iqbal's framework possesses adequate resources for theorizing radical evil, historical tragedy, or structural injustice that resist resolution through individual self-cultivation alone.

Third, Iqbal's engagement with Nietzsche, while more nuanced and more clearly differentiated than his early critics allowed, remains a site of genuine interpretive difficulty: Iqbal's own letter to Nicholson insisting that the philosophy of Asrar-i-Khudi is a direct development of classical Sufi thought has itself been challenged by recent scholarship as resting on a selective, and in places questionable, reading of the classical mystical sources Iqbal invokes. Fourth, Iqbal's comparative treatment of Advaita Vedanta and Buddhist Anatman, while philosophically productive, arguably understates the sophistication of these traditions' own internal accounts of ethical agency and liberation, treating them somewhat schematically as instances of a single "self-negating" tendency that recent comparative scholarship suggests is considerably more variegated and philosophically defensible on its own terms. These tensions do not, in the assessment of this study, undermine the overall coherence or value of Iqbal's project, but they do indicate that Khudi is best approached as a constructive, still-contestable philosophical proposal rather than a finished or unassailable system.

16. Conclusion

Muhammad Iqbal's philosophy of Khudi represents a sustained and philosophically serious attempt to reconstruct Islamic anthropology for the conditions of modernity without surrendering either the theocentric structure of Islamic metaphysics or the demands of rational and empirical scrutiny characteristic of modern philosophy. By reconceiving the self as a dynamic, ever-developing centre of creative freedom rather than a static substance or an illusory veil to be dissolved, and by situating that self within a hierarchy of egos culminating in a personal, creative God, Iqbal offers a distinctive middle path between substantialist essentialism and eliminativist or absorptive theories of selfhood found in classical Vedanta, Buddhism, and, in certain respects, Western existentialism and materialism alike. His selective, critical appropriation of Qur'anic revelation, Rumi's mysticism of love, and the philosophies of Kant, Nietzsche, Bergson, Goethe,



and Hegel exemplifies a mode of genuinely comparative philosophizing that neither simply imports Western categories nor retreats into an insular traditionalism. While certain tensions in Iqbal's synthesis particularly regarding the metaphysics of finite-infinite ego relations and the adequacy of his philosophy of history remain open to legitimate philosophical challenge, the continuing capacity of Khudi to illuminate contemporary debates on human dignity, identity, and the boundaries of personhood in an age of artificial intelligence testifies to the enduring philosophical vitality of Iqbal's dynamic concept of Self.

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