

Revisiting Iqbal's *Khudi*:

Influence, Interactions, and Future Potential

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Abstract

Although Muhammad Iqbal was a world renowned and widely loved poet and politician, his philosophical proposals, based on his concept of '*khudi*', never captivated his contemporaries in the same way, nor took hold amongst the masses of his beloved homeland. Undoubtedly, his attempts to develop a doctrine that straddled a middle ground between Islamic and Western camps meant that he was wholly embraced by neither, and the ostracisation of his philosophical concepts led to the public holding his teachings at arms length. In this paper, I will argue that with some reworking and avoidance of esoteric or obscure areas of academic debate, Iqbal's philosophical teachings can be brought out of the pages of his writings and directly into people's lives. In an age that has witnessed an astronomical explosion of both technological achievement but also individual despair, perhaps Iqbal's optimistic, energising teachings are needed more desperately than ever.

1. Introduction

Muhammad Iqbal was a poet, philosopher, and politician born in 1877 in Sialkot, India, under British colonial rule.¹ His primary intellectual concern was the effect of colonialisation on both India as a nation and her people as subjects. Iqbal identified an external as well as internal colonialism that he felt was inhibiting the growth of his countrymen and fellow co-religionists. To Iqbal, the shackled minds of India's Muslim population were unprepared to face the intellectual onslaught—at least in Iqbal's own paradigm—that colonialism brought along with it.

'Panthestic Sufism' and excessive traditionalism within Islam were seen by Iqbal to have brought with them fatalistic worldviews and disheartened devotees. This either led to submissiveness—and submissiveness led to acquiescence—or it led to indifference. In an attempt to overcome this pessimism and apathy, Iqbal worked to reconstruct the concept of selfhood within the Muslim community, hoping it would regain its dignity and freedom.

Thus, Iqbal criticised the Muslims of his time for not focusing on their selfhood and potential power, themes he felt were central to the message of the Qur'an.² In his seminal work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he began the chapter on selfhood with the statement:

“The Qur'an in its simple, forceful manner emphasises the individuality and uniqueness of man.”³

Individuality and the ability to control one's destiny and not being subject to the tides and pressures of the moment were important recurring themes in Iqbal's work, and we will explore them in more depth later. His fixation on selfhood and what it meant to his co-religionists was evident throughout his poetry, and the finesse of its delivery led to Hillier and Koshul labelling it Iqbal's “intellectual masterstroke... carefully calibrated; it was a reflexive one, caught between the security of tradition and the self-questioning impulses of modernity.”⁴

'*Khudi*' is a word of Persian origin meaning 'selfhood' or 'the state of being oneself'. It derives from '*khud*', which literally translates as 'self' or 'oneself'. The word was adopted by Urdu speakers and is employed with the same definition as its Persian predecessor. In Sufi religious literature, the word is often used synonymously with 'ego'. To Iqbal, *khudi* symbolised the self, self-realisation, individuality, and one's ability to transcend their environment.⁵

In religious and philosophical discourse, words like 'ego' and 'self' are often tarnished with negative connotations. They allude to a lower 'self' plagued with vices and limitations that need to be overcome if one is to transcend towards heaven or nirvana. Iqbal was acutely aware of this when choosing to employ the word *khudi* in his poetry, but he was unable to find a neutral alternative which had no stigma attached. In his own words:

¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Muhammad Iqbal', *Britannica*, 2024
<<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Muhammad-Iqbal>>

² Muhammed Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 10th reprint (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2008), p. 97.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ H. Chad Hillier and Basit Bilal Koshul, *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 13.

⁵ Ghodratollahi, Ehsan, 'The Doctrine of Khudi in Iqbāl's Philosophical Thought', *Philosophical-Theological Research*, 13.1 (2011), 63-88 <10.22091/jptr.2011.1480>

“As far as I know there is no such word in either Urdu or Persian... Considering the requirements of verse, I thought that the word Khudi was the most suitable, also because there is... some evidence in the Persian language of the word Khudi in the simple sense of self... Thus metaphysically the word Khudi is used in the sense of that indescribable feeling, I, which forms the basis of the uniqueness of each individual.”⁶

Iqbal's framing of *khudi* and its relationship to society is worth deconstructing if we wish to appreciate his wider intellectual project. Khamsa and Zeb provide a taxonomy of *khudi* in the thought of Iqbal, breaking it down into three aspects as follows:

- i. the self and 'I am -ness' [intrapersonal];
- ii. the self and the other [interpersonal];
- iii. the self and God [transpersonal].⁷

Astutely, Khamsa and Zeb juxtapose Iqbal's *khudi* to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in which the latter identified five tiers of human needs that stimulate action.⁸ These tiers can be broadly categorised as: basic needs (i.e. physiological and safety needs), psychological needs (i.e. love and esteem needs), and self-actualisation (i.e. self-fulfilment needs).⁹ The intrapersonal aspect of *khudi* can be interpreted to represent one's awareness of themselves and thus their basic needs. The interpersonal aspect of *khudi* represents nurturing through society, where one's need to belong and feel loved—psychological needs—are fulfilled. The transpersonal aspect of *khudi* reflects one's recognition of God, through which they hope to identify their metaphysical grounding and reason for being, reaching self-actualisation.

Iqbal was overtly Muslim in both practice and discourse, and this meant that his literary and psychosocial use of *khudi* was largely focused on its transpersonal aspect. Syed Nazeer, a friend and biographer of Iqbal, wrote that Iqbal's entire philosophy of *khudi* was based on verse 19 from chapter 59 of the Qur'an.¹⁰ The verse reads:

“And be not ye as those who forgot God, therefore He caused them to forget their souls. Such are the evil-doers.”¹¹

Forgetting God, we are told, leads to one forgetting their own *nafs* (soul). We can conclude, therefore, that one can only truly know their self if they know God. Using Khamsa and Zeb's taxonomy of *khudi*, we can further infer that for Iqbal, one must know God (transpersonal) and then their sociopolitical context (interpersonal) before they can truly know their self (intrapersonal).

Iqbal may have used the aforementioned Quranic verse as the primary inspiration for his appreciation of *khudi*, but it is clear that his sociopolitical environment also shaped his

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Khamsa, Qasim and Zeb, Aurang, 'The Concept of Khudi (The Self) in Iqbal's The Secrets of the Self', *Journal of Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6.3 (2015), 1-9 (p. 1)
<<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2188090198/fulltextPDF/9CE41A92FF8840E3PQ/1?accountid=130472>>

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Saul McCleod, 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs', *Simply Psychology*, 24 January 2024
<<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>>

¹⁰ Israr Ahmed (2020), 'Allama Iqbal ke falsafae (philosophy) 'Khudi' ka Source Kya Hai?', *Learn Quran* [video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FK_mM6do0qw>

¹¹ *The Qur'an*, 59:19.

understanding. His yearning for an Islamic revival was tempered by his belief that this would only be possible if the Muslims reconnected with God first.

In *The Secrets of the Self*, Iqbal lays out a roadmap of self-development, focusing on three stages: obedience, self-control, and divine vicegerency.¹² This framing is notably adherent to traditional Islamic understandings of self-purification. Iqbal saw the cultivation of *khudi* as part of a broader mission of developing one's relationship with God. It was not a passive task, but one that required ambition and initiative.

“The soul cares only for itself, like the camel”, wrote Iqbal, stressing that it must be reigned in and disciplined if it began to misbehave.¹³ In this metaphor, the disobedience of a camel is akin to a man giving up to life's vices and temptations. Once a man is able to wrest control of his *khudi*, he may lay claim to being God's vicegerent on Earth. In Iqbal's words, “If thou canst rule thy camel, thou wilt rule the world.”¹⁴

‘*Mardi momen*’, Urdu for ‘the believing man’, is a term heavily employed by Iqbal, who saw the believer as one who had actualised their *khudi* through their relationship with God. By doing so, the *mardi momen* could attain the pinnacle of selfhood. The *khudi* being developed is clearly a spiritual, non-physical entity in Iqbal's writings, but it requires the physical actions of *mardi momen* to help it grow.¹⁵ Obeying and worshipping God are worldly actions that have transcendent effects. Iqbal goes as far as to say that a person who develops and disciplines his *khudi* through intimacy with God will be able to have a say in their fate and shape the course of history. In his own words, “When the self is made strong by love, its power rules the whole world.”¹⁶

This empowering view of *khudi* was not unique to Iqbal, nor was he the first to have conceived of it. When perusing his works, two major influences from the Islamic Sufi tradition stand out: Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī. Through Ibn ‘Arabī, Iqbal found a paradigm of *khudi* that both made sense to him and was sufficiently optimistic to be palatable. Through Rūmī, Iqbal discovered love as a driving force of *khudi*.

Iqbal's father was a devoted follower of Ibn ‘Arabī, and he ensured that Iqbal would study his works alongside studying the Qur'an. As a result, Iqbal's own thought was perfused with that of Ibn ‘Arabī, and he held a fond opinion of him from early on. In his 1908 doctoral thesis, Iqbal exhorts students of Islamic mysticism to read the works of Ibn ‘Arabī, “whose profound teaching stands in strange contrast with the dry-as-dust Islam of his countrymen”.¹⁷ However, several years later, Iqbal's opinion of Ibn ‘Arabī notably shifted. In a letter to Shah Sulayman Phulwarwi, Iqbal prayed for Ibn ‘Arabī and acknowledged his love for him, before stating that he no longer believed Ibn ‘Arabī's teachings adhered to those of the Qur'an.¹⁸ The remainder of the letter belies a torn Iqbal who sympathises with Ibn ‘Arabī as a person but rejects his contentions as a thinker.

¹² Muhammad Iqbal, *The Secrets of the Self* (London: Forgotten Books, 2008), p. 43.

¹³ Iqbal, *Secrets*, p. 44.

¹⁴ Iqbal, *Secrets*, p. 46.

¹⁵ Chad Hillier and Bilal Koshul, p. 14.

¹⁶ Iqbal, *Secrets*, p. 30.

¹⁷ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (Project Gutenberg, 2012) <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/41707/pg41707-images.html>>

¹⁸ De Diego González, Antonio, ‘The Challenge of Muhammad Iqbal's Philosophy of Khudi to Ibn Arabi's Metaphysical Anthropology’, *Religions*, 14.5 (2023), 683 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050683>>

Ibn ‘Arabī’s work focuses on a ‘*mardi kamil*’ (a ‘complete’ or ‘perfect man’). Iqbal’s *mardi momen* was a person of action, one who returned from his intimacy with God to the physical world and sought to effect change—be that personal or political. Iqbal’s understanding of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *mardi kamil* a man seeking *fanā*’ (annihilation) of his *khudi* in God. This would lead to passivity and apoliticism that would not, in Iqbal’s view, help the subcontinental Muslim break free from his colonial shackles. As Antonio González points out, this criticism was less a direct criticism of the actual Ibn ‘Arabī, and more a criticism on the Ibn ‘Arabī-influenced branch of Sufism that pervaded the subcontinent and had mixed with Hindu mysticism over time.¹⁹

That being said, it is clear that Ibn ‘Arabī remained a major influence on Iqbal. Ibn ‘Arabī’s *mardi kamil* is a clear intellectual progenitor for Iqbal’s *mardi momen*. The similarities in self-development and the nurturing of one’s *khudi* are clear. Where the disagreement and difference lie, however, is in the end goal of this process. For Ibn ‘Arabī, the end goal was *fanā*’; for Iqbal, it was a return to the harsh realities of the world with a pure heart and a body ready for activism.²⁰ Iqbal argues for his position in his seminal work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. González comments:

“What we see in Iqbal is a rejection of an anthropology that could propose a rejection of human freedom.”²¹

Rūmī was the second major influence on Iqbal’s thought. Iqbal revered Rūmī and often praised him in his works, to the extent that Iqbal claimed Rūmī to be his spiritual guide and teacher.²² Rūmī advocated an active and vitalistic view of the self, which Iqbal himself inclined towards. Hasan Azad writes:

“As representatives of ‘old’ and ‘new’ Sufism, Iqbal commended the life affirming and active Sufism of Rūmī.”²³

Iqbal averred that this active Sufism captured the prophet consciousness and the prophetic model for humanity, in which the goal of one’s *khudi* is to journey towards God before returning to the world for its betterment. Further, Rūmī’s emphasis on divine love had a clear impact on Iqbal, who’s concept of *khudi* was dependent on love. To this effect, Iqbal wrote:

“By love it is made more lasting,
More living, more burning, more glowing.
From love proceeds the radiance of its being,
And the development of its unknown possibilities.
Its nature gathers fire from love.”²⁴

Iqbal also borrows from Rūmī’s imagery, employing many of the same metaphors that Rūmī used to describe the self. For example, Rūmī speaks of the self as a falcon, soaring high above the earth and indifferent to both the ramblings of people below and the glitz and glamour in

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Dar, Ateequllah, ‘Rumi and Iqbal’s Concept of Divine Love, a Brief Analysis’, *Litinfinite*, 1.1 (2019), 15-22 (p. 15).

²³ Azad, Hasan, ‘Reconstructing the Muslim Self: Muhammad Iqbal, Khudi, and the Modern Self’, *Pluto Journals*, 2.2 (2014), 14-28 (p. 16).

²⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, (*Asrar-e-Khudi-07*) *Dar Biyan Aynke Khudi Az Ishq Wa Mohabbat Istehkam Mee Pazeeradh*. <<https://iqbalurdu.blogspot.com/2011/04/asrar-e-khudi-07-dar-biyan-aynkah-khudi.html>>

which they reside. There are well over a hundred falcon references in Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, and on most of these occasions, the falcon is used a metaphor for a soul that returns to God.²⁵ Rūmī wrote:

“The soul is a falcon, and the body chains,
A slave that's bound of foot and broken winged.”²⁶

Iqbal mirrors this sentiment with his own mention of the falcon as a symbol of a developed *khudi*. The loftiness of falcons is also evoked, exhorting fellow co-religionists to aim high and avoid fatalism. Iqbal wrote:

“You are a falcon; flying is your job.
There are many skies that lay ahead.”²⁷

The call to action in his words is clear. To Iqbal, the *khudi* is an active entity with the potential to transcend this earthly domain and head upwards, like a falcon. Rūmī's influence is so great in Iqbal's work, that it is often difficult to distinguish the two. It could be argued that Iqbal worked to reimagine Rūmī in the context of 20th century colonial India. Of note is the fact that Rūmī is never criticised by Iqbal in his writings, unlike most other thinkers and philosophers he discusses.

There are two primary aims of this thesis. The first is to highlight the centrality of *khudi* in Iqbal's system of thought, showing how it affected his more peripheral ideas. The second is to explain why Iqbal's philosophical work had less impact than his political and literary works, even though his philosophy clearly influenced the latter two. To this end, Chapter 2 will analyse Iqbal's response to the fatalism of his fellow co-religionists, with particular attention being paid to how the concept of *khudi* shaped his arguments. Chapter 3 will analyse Iqbal's response to modern science, again, with particular attention being paid to how the concept of *khudi* shaped his arguments. Hopefully, these two chapters will emphasise just how central the idea of *khudi* was to Iqbal. Chapter 4 will focus on the second of the two aims of this thesis, studying the impact of Iqbal's philosophy and ascertaining why this was far less widely recognised than his poetry and politics. To conclude, we will propose adjustments to Iqbal's paradigm that may make his philosophy more impactful in the 21st century than it proved to be in the 20th.

²⁵ Williams, Alan, 'Rūmī's Spiritual Ornithology: Falcons in "Mathnawī", Book II', *Mawlana Rumi Review*, 5 (2014), 171-179.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Muhammad Iqbal, (*Bal-e-Jibril-060*) *Sitaron Se Agay Jahan Aur Bhi Hain*.

<<https://iqbalurdu.blogspot.com/2011/04/bal-e-jibril-060-sitaron-se-agay-jahan.html>>

2. Iqbal, *Khudi*, and Fatalism

2.1 Fatalism as a Theo-Philosophical Challenge to Iqbal's Concept of Selfhood

Fatalism as a concept was antithetical to much of Iqbal's preaching about the self and vitalism. Resignation of one's affairs to their fate, with a drop in activism and initiative was Iqbal's diagnosis of the zeitgeist of his age among his co-religionists in the subcontinent. In the context of a subdued minority population in a colonised India, the cause of this general mood was appreciable. Iqbal's privileged background, accompanied with his foreign travels and education evidently allowed him to not feel as inevitably downtrodden as many of his countrymen.

In addition to what we mentioned above, the of Iqbal's notion of a vitalistic *khudi* was influenced heavily by two factors: the colonialist reality of his world and his engagement with the works of Nietzsche.²⁸ Nietzsche's nihilistic outlook and his employment of true and apparent worlds, the former referring to the empirical world we inhabit and the latter to a world beyond (as in Christian doctrine) or behind (as in Platonic doctrine) this one.²⁹ Encountering a strictly empirical worldview with a dismissive attitude to metaphysics and a disdain for the spiritual was obviously challenging to Iqbal, especially when that worldview and disdain rose from a West that were military victors and culturally dominant over his own people in the subcontinent. In particular, it was the more fatalistic aspects of Christianity and Sufi Islam that troubled Iqbal. If religion made people abandon the world, and accept suffering as their lot within it, then was Nietzsche not correct with regard to the stunting effect of religion on worldly progress? I aver that this mental dilemma led to the centrality of an active *khudi* in Iqbal's philosophy—a *khudi* that both communes with God and engages with the world. It is, perhaps, why he distanced himself from Ibn 'Arabī's thought and from certain branches of world-renouncing Sufism he witnessed in the subcontinent.

Nietzsche's nihilism was an internal conundrum Iqbal wrestled with, but the external dilemma of colonialism was probably a more difficult one to overcome. Authorities writing on Iqbal tend to hold that freedom from colonialism was the primary driving force behind his political, poetic, and philosophical output.³⁰ His aim was clear—he wanted Muslims to struggle physically and intellectually against the colonial powers, ridding themselves of their shackles and regaining dignity. Iqbal felt this was unachievable if Muslims became overly deterministic and abandoned this world in a display of zealous renunciant pietism.

These two reasons—namely, nihilism and colonialism—led Iqbal to fixate his efforts on promoting an active *khudi*. Though not exclusive to the faithful, free will and determinism have been long discussed in theological circles. Opinions from Islamicate scholars have ranged from the hard determinism of Avicenna to the unfettered free will of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, and Iqbal would need to take a position of his own if wished to promote his philosophy across the subcontinent.³¹

²⁸ Yılmaz, Feyzullah, 'Iqbal, Nietzsche, and Nihilism: Reconstruction of Sufi Cosmology and Revaluation of Sufi Values in Asrar-i-Khudi', *Open Philosophy*, 6.1 (2023), 12-21.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Azad, p. 16.

³¹ Mohammed Hijab, 'Wrestling with Free Will: Reflections on Divine and Human Freedom', *Sapience Institute*, 23 October 2021 <<https://www.sapienceinstitute.org/wrestling-with-free-will-reflections-on-divine-and-human-freedom/>>

Iqbal's *khudi* was active, vitalistic, and effective. It had free will and could make a change, and it could change its own destiny. A need for internal coherence with his idea of *khudi* led Iqbal to reconstruct and reinterpret a number of Islamic concepts, differentiating him from many of his fellow co-religionists and countrymen. An exhaustive look at how this took place is beyond the scope of this thesis, so we will focus on Iqbal's ideas about God as a case study. The aim is to identify how Iqbal sought to overcome fatalism in his philosophical worldview through his understanding of God. This should highlight just how significant *khudi* was to Iqbal, and just how necessary he thought it was for the freedom of the subcontinent's Muslims from colonialism.

2.2 Omniscience of God

Iqbal's *khudi* required an understanding of God's omniscience that he felt had been lost among much of the religious folk of his time. His literary prowess and training in Western academies meant he was able to articulate this understanding in a manner intelligible to both commonfolk and the more affluent segments of Muslim society in India, many of whom were not insignificantly influenced by secular thought.

Iqbal saw himself as an orthodox Muslim. He was not trying to reconstruct Islam, but he was trying to get his fellow Muslims to return to what he deemed to be authentic Islam. Annemarie Schimmel notes that divine unicity and divine uniqueness are central to Iqbal's philosophy, as would be expected from an orthodox Muslim scholar.³² His provocative employment of heterodox language when discussing the Divine is reminiscent of earlier currents in Sufi poetry and is usually grounded, at least according to Iqbal himself, in terminology employed in the Qur'an itself.³³ His poetic language is, thus, never to be taken in a way that would ever nullify divine unicity or divine uniqueness.

Iqbal disagrees with the Aristotelean and Avicennan notion of a static universe that was created and then left alone. According to Iqbal, God's creative ability is not to be interpreted as "the act of creation as a specific past event [in which] the universe... has no organic relation to the life of its maker".³⁴ Reality being in a perpetual state of creation and, hence, motion means that things are constantly changing, and that the future is open to change. There is a continuous unfolding of divine will in Iqbal's paradigm, and the past need not dictate the future.

Though finding some parallels in concepts such as Asharite occasionalism and Mu'tazilite free will doctrines, Iqbal was somewhat of an outlier in how he argued for his position.³⁵ Iqbal felt that if being omniscient means that God knows at once all that has occurred, is occurring, and will occur, in both general and specific terms, then there is a "closed universe, a fixed futurity, a predetermined, unalterable order of specific events which, like a superior faith, has once for all determined the directions of God's creative activity."³⁶ Iqbal's issue with this idea is clear from the follow-up questions he asks, such as, "If God's knowledge and awareness are total and

³² Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study Into The Religious Ideas Of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*, 6 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), p. 86.

³³ Farhan A. Shah, 'Towards a Process-Humanistic Interpretation of Islam An Examination of Muhammad Iqbal's God Concept' (unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Oslo, 2016), p. 41, in Database of University of Oslo DUO Research Archive < <https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/53045>>

³⁴ Mustansir Mir, 'Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938): The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 607–28.

³⁵ Shah, p. 44.

³⁶ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, pp.62-66.

perfect, how can human beings add and contribute to the ongoing development of the human species and the cosmos?”³⁷

On this point, Farhan Shah writes:

“In other words, God does not know the future in its complete actuality. God does not fully know what the result of any specific event or encounter will be in its totality until it materialises and unfolds wholly in the future. The knowledge of the Divine evolves and “grows” in relationship to the ongoing evolution of the universe.”³⁸

This tension was not shared in quite the same way by the mainstream of Islamic scholarship in Iqbal’s time, and it made him an outlier in the discussion. Lacking traditional training in the Islamic sciences, Iqbal was prone to somewhat maverick positions such as these, even when it needn’t have been the case. For a God that is not bound by linear time, knowing the future is not equivalent to determining it. It should have been possible for Iqbal to use this workaround to avoid the tension he struggled with. Knowing what took place in the past is not akin to determining the past, and an entity independent of time can know anything that takes place within time without having determined any or all of it. Iqbal was aware of the notion of a time-independent God. In his own words:

“Thus Divine time is what the Quran describes as the ‘mother of books’ in which the whole of history, freed from the net of causal sequences, is gathered up in a single super-eternal ‘now’.”³⁹

It is unclear why Iqbal did not utilise this logic to square his ideas of divine omniscience with his ideas of free will. Perhaps he felt that assuming such a model would necessitate that all events were like past events in the ‘mind of God’. This would contradict Iqbal’s understanding of perpetual creation and God’s creative power.

The logical coherence, or lack thereof, is not our primary concern in this study. Rather, it is to highlight how Iqbal navigated theo-philosophical discourse precariously in an effort to always maintain a notion of an independent and powerful *khudi*. His ideological commitment to *khudi* meant that he would reconstruct other, quite central points of creed if and when needed, even if this amounted to stepping outside the constraints of orthodox Sunni Islam. He evidently aimed to maintain a commitment to traditionalism, but this was overpowered, at times, by his commitment to the doctrine of a truly volitional and impactful *khudi*.

2.3 Omnipotence of God

Iqbal was acutely aware of Islamic theology and the tension between free will and divine decree. He further understood that God was omnipotent, and that by ascribing himself an independent creative power—even in the context of destiny—he would be guilty of associationism.⁴⁰ In his own words, Iqbal wrote:

³⁷ Shah, p. 45.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 76.

⁴⁰ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 66.

“No doubt, the emergence of egos endowed with the power of spontaneous and hence unforeseeable action is, in a sense, a limitation on the freedom of the all-inclusive Ego.”⁴¹

Insofar as the *khudi* is afforded creative power, one risks limiting the creative power of God. To say that a thing exists which God did not create is to say that God is not the creator of everything. This poses clear theological issues, as the Qur'an teaches us that:

“Allah is the creator of all things, and He is the guardian over all things.”⁴²

To navigate this dilemma, Iqbal avers that this theoretical limitation of God's creative power “is not externally imposed”.⁴³ He was aware that his views fell out of what was considered orthodoxy by most Islamic scholars around him. In his writings, he asked how it was “possible to reconcile limitation with omnipotence”.⁴⁴ His step away from orthodoxy was inspired by his commitment to avoid any semblance of a fatalistic worldview, as that would, in his opinion, problematically limit one's *khudi*.

Wishing to avoid traditional understandings of omnipotence, Iqbal wrote, “Omnipotence, abstractly conceived, is merely a blind, capricious power without limits”.⁴⁵ Iqbal averred that God's omnipotence was linked to His other attributes, such as wisdom and goodness, and that this meant that God was able to limit His omnipotence willingly without it being considered a defect in Him. He argued that God gave free will and a creative power to humanity—the greatest gift to have been bestowed upon them.⁴⁶ This gift, Iqbal thought, should be honoured by each individual working to perfect their *khudi* and positively affect the world around them.

Regarding those actions which are unmistakably evil, Iqbal considered it problematic to believe that God was the creator of them. He felt this was at odds with God's name *al-Barr* (the Ever Doer of Good). Whilst not emphatically saying that God does not create all actions, he alludes to as much. This allusion, as well as all of Iqbal's other heterodox positions, were not novel in the Islamicate world. Rather, they are reminiscent of strands of thought from multiple sects within the religion, ranging from the Qadariyyah, Jabariyyah, Mu'tazilah, and so on. Precisely which thoughts he borrowed—and from whom—is largely irrelevant to this present discussion. What is more important for now is to emphasise how all of Iqbal's heterodox theo-philosophical choices appeared to stem from his commitment to a fully active and vitalistic *khudi*. Anything that he saw as contradicting this—regardless of whether or not the contradiction was a real one or not—was to be dismissed.

⁴¹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 80.

⁴² *Qur'an*, 39:62.

⁴³ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 80.

⁴⁴ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 80.

⁴⁵ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Shah, p. 54.

3. *Khudi* and Science

3.1 *Khudi* and empiricism

Following the efforts of John Locke in the 17th century and then George Berkeley and David Hume in the 18th, empiricism became the dominant epistemological paradigm in the Western academy. Colonialism delivered this epistemology to the subcontinent, presenting a fierce challenge to academics therein. Islamic thinkers, according to Iqbal, had long been dominated by Greek philosophy and had ignored empiricism as a result. Western empiricism made tangible, physical manifestations a condition of acceptance, including in the case of religion. This challenge needed a response, and Iqbal was one of the responders.

Iqbal's riposte was clearly linked to his concept of *khudi*. As we will show, this strengthens the argument that this concept was so central to his thinking that almost anything could be dismissed if it did not conform to his *khudi* doctrine. Iqbal saw empiricism as a direct attack on this doctrine. Empiricism holds that all knowledge is derived from our sensory faculties and that these faculties are limited to the physical world. Such an epistemology leaves no room for a spiritual realm and concepts such as *khudi*.

Exacerbating the matter was the relative weakness of the subcontinent's Muslims, who were easy prey for an inferiority complex. Such lack of confidence in one's own identity would undoubtedly increase the impressionability of any subjugated population, making them more susceptible to adopting the doctrines and epistemologies of a dominant, seemingly "superior" group.

Western empiricists were also often atheistic. Iqbal's *khudi* doctrine rested on his sincere belief in a benevolent God. Disbelief in God necessitates disbelief in *khudi*. Even if one did not disbelieve in God entirely, but simply marginalised importance of religiosity in their lives, it would mean the primary purpose of *khudi*—namely, to seek nearness to the Divine and use this proximity to spread goodness in the world—would be largely redundant. Noting the centrality of empiricism and science in Iqbal's philosophy, Muntasir Mir writes, "The motif of concord of religion and science runs through the *Reconstruction*."⁴⁷

Iqbal was not opposed to science as a discipline. Rather, he saw similarities between it and religion, opining that "the day is not far off when religion and science may discover hitherto unsuspected mutual harmonies."⁴⁸ Mir notes that "in Iqbal's view, the religious and scientific processes are complementary to each other."⁴⁹ This needs to be understood in the context of Iqbal's wider understanding of science. In the preface to *Reconstruction*, Iqbal notes that science is premised on the power of inductive reasoning, and that this makes it an ever-evolving, iterative, and somewhat fluid discipline. Science uses experimentation to further current knowledge. Iqbal writes, "Our duty is carefully to watch the progress of human thought, and to maintain an independent critical attitude toward it."⁵⁰

Explaining his approach to science so early in his book is telling of Iqbal's determination to avoid an altercation. Further, his description of science—and empiricism, if we allow ourselves to extrapolate—as a fluid discipline which is invariably inductive, portrays its findings as fallible inferences to the best explanation based on current models. Iqbal is telling his co-religionists not

⁴⁷ Mir, pp. 607–28.

⁴⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Mir, pp. 607–28.

⁵⁰ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 6.

to fear a discipline that rests on a less even grounding than their sacred disciplines. His hierarchy of epistemology places natural sciences beneath more certain beliefs, such as the belief in God and one's *kehudi*. That being said, Iqbal does allow scientific discoveries to affect the way he understands parts of the Qur'an, as we shall soon see.

3.2 Science, Intuition, and Thought

Iqbal's understanding of knowledge is one which has space for empiricism and science, philosophy and rationalism, and intuition and spirituality. According to Iqbal, these separate domains of knowledge work synergistically, and if the hierarchy of each is respected, then there should be no real clashes.⁵¹ Iqbal felt that empiricism and intuition or spirituality were closer to one another than to philosophy. Al-Ghazālī, an 11th century Muslim scholar and polymath, was seen by Iqbal as a man who eventually rejected philosophy in its entirety, focusing solely on intuition as a basis of faith. Iqbal felt that this was a "rather unsafe basis for religion".⁵²

This suggests that Iqbal did not completely disregard the Greek philosophical tradition that he thought had problematically engrossed many of his co-religionists. As mentioned above, he sought to encourage a respect for natural science, philosophy, and spirituality. Iqbal felt that al-Ghazālī had divorced spirituality from rationalism and empiricism, philosophy, and the natural sciences.⁵³ This, Iqbal felt, was a dangerous path to tread, and it risked undermining rationalism and empiricism in the eyes of Muslims. It is difficult to discern how well-versed Iqbal was on al-Ghazālī's approach to science, as he does not discuss it in depth. Al-Ghazālī deemed any study which benefits humanity a worthy pursuit and any study which does not to be either wasteful or actively problematic.⁵⁴ He did, however, afford room for both natural sciences and philosophy. Al-Ghazālī considered some areas of natural science to be communally obligated; namely, those that were necessary for the healthy functioning of society.⁵⁵ In dialectic philosophy (*kalam*), al-Ghazālī averred that enquiries could range from communally obligated to prohibited, depending on the outcome.⁵⁶ Of course, a beneficial outcome was to be sought whatever route of enquiry one took.

Why then did Iqbal not appreciate this nuance when discussing al-Ghazālī? Perhaps Iqbal's reactionary stances to the challenges of his day led him to be firm in his divergence from the thinkers he felt were complicit in the apathy of his contemporary co-religionists. Thus far, we have mentioned Ibn 'Arabī and al-Ghazālī—the former with his renunciant pietism and the latter with his hierarchy of the religious sciences—as Muslim scholars that Iqbal took issue with, and Rūmī as a Muslim scholar that Iqbal resonated with. The consistent theme in both Iqbal's criticism and adulation is that it is invariably based on how he feels certain views have affected his countrymen and their understanding of *kehudi* and its role in liberating the Muslims from colonialism. Fatalism was attacked as he felt it would lead to apathy and a lack of revolutionary zeal, whilst a dismissal of rational and empirical routes to God was challenged as he felt that it trivialised fields of study that would be necessary in overcoming colonialism.

⁵¹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 6.

⁵² Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 4.

⁵³ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Abdul Muhaya, 'Unity of Sciences According to al-Ghazali', *Walisono*, 23.2 (2015) 311-330.

⁵⁵ Al-Ghazali, *The Book of Knowledge*. <<https://www.ghazali.org/works/bk1-sec-2.htm>>

⁵⁶ Muhammad Abu Bakr Ba-Dhib, 'Was Imam Ghazali against the Science of Kalam (Islamic Theology)?', *Seekers Guidance*, June 29 2024 <<https://seekersguidance.org/answers/islamic-belief/was-imam-ghazali-against-the-science-of-kalam-islamic-theology/>>

After criticising al-Ghazālī in his *Reconstruction*, Iqbal went on to discuss the link between thought and intuition. He appears to become muddled, however, as he claims that “thought and intuition are organically related”, before going on to write about the independence of the two.⁵⁷ There is evident tension in Iqbal’s words. He was aiming to maintain a balance between the oncoming empiricist onslaught of Western thought, the rationalism and metaphysics of ancient Greek thinkers, and the spirituality and religiosity of Muslim scholars. According to Iqbal, all three sources of knowledge would be needed for the development and fulfilment of one’s *khudi*. Recall that the aim of Iqbal’s *khudi* was to ascend heavenward (spirituality) before returning to the world for its benefit (empiricism and metaphysics). Additionally, Iqbal’s view was that the Qur’an promoted an empirical attitude, at least in the appropriate contexts, and that this was an indispensable stage in the spiritual journey of man.⁵⁸ Iqbal believed that an empirical study of the natural world should lead one to acknowledging the Creator of this world and thus to faith.

To further argue for a symbiosis between Islam and science, Iqbal appealed to historical Islamic contributions to the natural sciences. He writes:

“But the point to note is the general empirical attitude of the Qur’an which engendered in its followers a feeling of reverence for the actual and ultimately made them the founders of modern science.”⁵⁹

This nominalist reading of the Qur’an and its exhortations is Iqbal’s evidence for the acceptability of a highly empiricist worldview. The truth, or lack thereof, of this claim is not particularly relevant for our present discussion. More important is Iqbal’s clear desire to connect empiricism to his wider understanding of knowledge and *khudi*. Western empiricism, to Iqbal, was not to be resisted as an alien force, but to be welcomed as a return to true Islam and a turning away from the “unsafe” paradigms of al-Ghazālī and Iqbal’s contemporaries.⁶⁰ Iqbal wished to empower and give confidence to the Muslims around them, as without this he felt they would never rise up from the physical and intellectual subjugation they were facing.

3.4 Iqbal’s epistemological hierarchy

Iqbal’s holistic notion of *khudi* provides a single goal for both science and religion: to reach God.⁶¹ He holds that science aims to grasp reality, and thus God, through the physical senses, whereas religion relies on spirituality and intuition, the latter of which reflects the Islamic concept of ‘*fitrah*’, or ‘innate predisposition’. Iqbal does appear to appreciate that the natural sciences are only concerned with the structures of things, answering the “how” and “what” but never the deeper “why”.⁶² He often admiringly quotes the prominent mathematician, philosopher, and logician Bertrand Russell, who once said:

“Science is the attempt to discover, by means of observation, and reasoning based upon it, first, particular facts about the world...”⁶³

⁵⁷ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 16.

⁵⁹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 15.

⁶⁰ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 4.

⁶¹ Mir, pp. 607–28.

⁶² Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 39.

⁶³ Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935).

Religion is evidently not the same as this, nor can their goals be considered identical. Science deals with the physical world and religion with questions of metaphysics, theology, and so forth. Iqbal may have taken solace in the fact that some findings of science coincided with the dictates of his faith, but this does not equate the two. Iqbal's desire to correlate the aims of the natural sciences and his faith are likely representative of his desire to harmonise between rationalist and empiricist streams of thought, between Eastern spirituality and Western materialism.

Natural sciences have their place in Iqbal's philosophy, and they never contradict true religion, but their occupation solely with the structure of things rather than any deeper truth means that they are never sufficient on their own to provide a complete worldview. They cannot explain things such as *khudi*, nor can they appreciate the ultimate nature of reality, which Iqbal viewed as spiritual rather than material.⁶⁴

Iqbal's discussion on Einstein and relativity, along with his preference for Einstein's more fluid and less appreciably material theories over Newton's laws of physics, is especially telling in this regard. Iqbal states:

"The philosophical value is twofold. First, it destroyed not the objectivity of nature, but the view of substance as a simple location in space—a view which led to materialism in Classical Physics."⁶⁵

The less lucid, more discreet nature of Einstein's theory, as well as those of the progenitors to other non-Newtonian fields of enquiry, such as quantum physics, appeared to Iqbal to better correlate with a more spiritual and less mechanistic worldview, opening the possibility that space and matter were not purely what they seemed at first glance.

Einstein's theory did present issues for Iqbal, however, who openly declared his concerns:

"Looking, however, at the theory from the standpoint that I have taken in these lectures, Einstein's Relativity presents one great difficulty, i.e., the unreality of time. A theory which takes time to be a kind of fourth dimension of space must, it seems, regard the future as something already given, indubitably fixed as the past. Time as a free creative movement has no meaning for the theory. It does not pass. Events do not happen; we simply meet them."⁶⁶

It seems clear that Iqbal found this theory problematic when juxtaposed against his vitalistic view of *khudi* and his understanding of free will. In this regard, I disagree with Schimmel, who argued that Iqbal identified within Einstein's theory of relativity an evolving universe which God was perpetually adding to.⁶⁷ Rather, Iqbal understood that his idea of a currently non-existent future which is both unknown and unknowable—as knowing something that does not exist is, according to Iqbal, logically fallacious—was not to be found in Einstein's theories of general and special relativity. This idea was central to Iqbal's concept of a *khudi* that creates and manifests its own doctrine, so it is understandable that he pushed back against Einstein. He proposed that Einstein, in wishing to present a simple mathematical answer to the reality of the world, overlooked much of what we personally intuit and experience of time.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 39.

⁶⁶ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 40.

⁶⁷ Schimmel, p. 116.

⁶⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 40.

Again, Iqbal's rebuttal is not watertight from a technical perspective, but it does highlight the central point of this thesis. Iqbal's *khudi* doctrine is epistemologically essential for his worldview to function coherently and so he dismisses any challenge or challenger to it, even if he otherwise agrees with the theory or individual opposing it. Iqbal was not able to pinpoint exactly where Einstein's fault lay, but he was convinced that there must be one, as he felt the theory of an active *khudi* was a higher truth that had to be upheld. This is consistently seen in Iqbal's approach to the natural sciences. These sciences are to be embraced so long as they do not challenge the vitalistic *khudi*.

If we accept this, then we accept that epistemologically, Iqbal's *khudi* doctrine ranks higher than his understanding of contemporary science. Where the two clash, the *khudi* doctrine is preserved and scientific theories are reinterpreted or rejected. Where a clash was not easily solvable, Iqbal held that scientists had more still yet to learn, or he claimed that there were non-material matters that they had overlooked. He also actively sought out scientific affirmations that supported his concept of the *khudi*. His writings, including his acceptance of those occasions in which he noticed a clash that he was unable to resolve, point towards a sincere philosopher who truly believed his central tenets, namely:

- i. that Muslims could find a way out of their predicament through developing their *khudis*;
- ii. that his understanding of *khudi* was founded on an accurate reading and understanding of the Qur'an; and
- iii. that the link between Islam and the natural sciences was an authentic one and not divergent from early tradition.

Mir writes, "It should be added that Iqbāl's views on religion and science are connected with the vitalistic aspect of his philosophy."⁶⁹ I would take this a step further and argue that Iqbal's views on religion and science are not only connected with the vitalistic aspects of his philosophy but are driven by it, especially his understanding of *khudi*.

⁶⁹ Mir, pp. 607–28.

4. Why Was Iqbal's *Khudi* Not Popular?

Thus far, we have discussed how Iqbal's *khudi* doctrine was central to his philosophy and shown how he navigated through theological and scientific fields of enquiry, often unconvincingly, in defence of this central concept. He appears to accept that he does not have all the answers to the external challenges to his philosophy, but he seems determined to maintain internal coherency. This approach is common among many philosophers who hope that the answers they do not currently possess shall soon appear, thus redeeming any shortcomings.

One wonders, then, why Iqbal's *khudi* doctrine did not proliferate anywhere near as much as his politics or poetry. It may be easy to dismiss the theory as ivory tower ramblings that were divorced from the cognitive apparatus of the commonfolk to whom Iqbal was addressing, and this would not be entirely inaccurate, especially regarding the largely illiterate, subjugated Indian population of the time.⁷⁰ However, a deeper reading of Iqbal and the course of history suggests far subtler reasons. Moreover, Iqbal's philosophy never gained traction even amongst the academic elite of society. Thus, it cannot have been purely the niche nature of philosophy as a subject that led to the dismissal of his theory.

4.1 Iqbal's Clashes with Orthodox Clerics

We discussed earlier Iqbal's commitment to preserving a vitalistic *khudi* that was, as mentioned by Mir, a free, personal, causal entity.⁷¹ This commitment stemmed in part from his desire to unshackle his fellow co-religionists from fatalism and political apathy. In doing so, Iqbal risked leaving mainstream Islam, as far as the major clerics of 20th century colonial India were concerned, and into a niche he carved himself. Though he found intellectual solace in historical figures such as Rūmī, there was a clear departure from normative Islam in some of Iqbal's polemics. These were most clearly seen in his writings on divine omniscience and omnipotence. On the former, Iqbal's views resembled some of those espoused by medieval Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā, who were deemed heretical by large swathes of later Muslim communities. Whilst their views may not have aligned completely, the similarities were clear. Regarding divine omnipotence, Iqbal seemed to lean towards the position the Mu'tazilah, a sect in Islam that was shunned by the more numerous Ḥanābilah, Ash'ā'irah, and Māturīdiyyah.

This affinity to obscure positions from the Islamic tradition whenever they aligned with his *khudi* doctrine meant that Iqbal was easily marginalised by the mainstream thinkers of his age. His willingness to risk this marginalisation, regardless of its potential effect on his political endeavours, suggests that he was sincere in his mission and saw a pressing need for his philosophical theories. Nevertheless, Iqbal faced considerable backlash from contemporary Muslim scholars who felt that he was contradicting long-established points of creed in the faith.

Moreover, whilst it is clear Iqbal aimed to root his philosophy in the Qur'an and early Islamic tradition, it is evident that his philosophy also borrowed heavily from the Western academia.⁷² Iqbal's *khudi* itself draws directly from Nietzsche's *übermensch*, or 'superman', who fully exercises his will to power.⁷³ The differences between them should not be understated. Nietzsche's hypothetical *übermensch* was god-like in its ability to create and act freely, even developing its own

⁷⁰ <https://economics.ucr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/LatikaChaudhary5-6-07.pdf>

⁷¹ Mir, pp. 607–28.

⁷² Adel, Ghulam Ali, 'The Influence of Modern Western Philosophers on Iqbal', *Religious Inquiries*, 7.14 (2018), 91–108 (p. 99) <doi:<https://doi.org/10.22034/ri.2018.81136>>

⁷³ *ibid*.

code of ethics. This boundless entity would have been seen as heretical and polytheistic by Iqbal, who one assumes would also have joined the many voices criticising the *übertensch* as being anarchistic.⁷⁴

Iqbal anchored his *khudi* in an Islamic paradigm centred around God. Whilst free in a mechanical and spiritual sense, Iqbal's *khudi* was still subservient to God and wholly dependent on Him. The *khudi* did not dictate morals or imbue meaning upon the external world. Rather, it sought guidance from God and proximity to Him, before turning benevolently to the world as a saviour of sorts. Despite this, the *khudi* mirrored some of the *übertensch*'s autonomy in a way that was uncomfortable for the Muslim clerics of Iqbal's time. The unease came from identifying in Iqbal's *khudi* doctrine the influence of Western philosophy, with its humanistic outlook and lack of theological safety nets, as well as an affinity to certain heretical views of Islamic communities of the past

Thus, one reason Iqbal's *khudi* philosophy was not widely adopted by the masses is because it was rejected by the Muslim intelligentsia. The scholastic elite held considerable sway amongst the commonfolk, who looked to them when for reliable sources of Islamic knowledge. The fact that these spiritual sages were opposed to much of Iqbal's discourse was a reason to avoid him.

There was further discord between Iqbal and the local Muslim elites, with many of the latter being opposed to the partitioning of the subcontinent, and the former being one of its foremost proponents.⁷⁵ Husain Ahmad Madani, then principal of the Darul Uloom in Deoband, was perhaps the most obvious example of a scholarly voice who argued against Iqbal's politics.⁷⁶ This discord led to the formation of the pro-partition Muslim League and the anti-partition Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (literally, 'the Party of Scholars in India'; effectively, referring to a conglomeration of the subcontinent's religious elites).

Iqbal's politics found success, and his vision of a partitioned subcontinent eventually came to pass. However, the intellectual separation between him and the traditionally trained Muslim scholars of the region was clear. His philosophy was therefore more easily dismissed as the philosophy of a maverick and outsider.

Iqbal began the fifth chapter of his *Reconstruction* with a definition of 'human'. He argued that man was created from dust and was an imperfect being, but despite this was a unique creation of God.⁷⁷ This unique creation is tasked with being God's viceregent on Earth.⁷⁸ Iqbal stresses the clear distinction between the Creator and His creation, stating that the two cannot be compared. All this context was provided by Iqbal before he forwarded his belief that God endowed man with certain creative capabilities. This context needs to also be borne in mind when reading Iqbal's statements in *Secrets*, where he writes that within this imperfect being, God has placed "the luminous point whose name is the Self."⁷⁹ The *khudi* of man is entirely dependent upon God, according to Iqbal, and is actualised through the love of God. Iqbal wrote:

"By love it is made more lasting,
More living, more burning, more glowing.

⁷⁴ Adel, p. 103.

⁷⁵ Venkat Dhulipala, 'How the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind Fought Against the Partition of India', *Caravan Magazine*, 08 March 2015 <<https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/madani-jinnah-muslim-league-partition>>

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 96.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Iqbal, *Secrets*, p. 24.

From love proceeds the radiance of its being
And the development of its unknown possibilities.
Its nature gathers fire from love.
Love instructs it to illuminate the world.”⁸⁰

Iqbal intertwined mentions of this dependent relationship to provide a theological backdrop for his more provocative passages. And whilst it may have sufficed in preventing him from being excommunicated from Muslim orthodoxy, like many others before him had been, it did not manage to rescue him from appearing as a fringe and somewhat dangerous philosopher. The context-providing passages which emphasised the separation between man and God did not excuse his other comments.

As we stressed previously, Iqbal was not as interested in theological rigour as he was in the practical implications of theologies. The implication he sought was one in which his people would be empowered to change the course of history as they saw it. For example, he wrote, “When the Self is made strong by love its power rules the whole world.”⁸¹ Perhaps he felt justified in writing this after having read from the Qur’an:

“See ye not how Allah hath made serviceable unto you whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the Earth and hath loaded you with His favours both without and within? Yet of mankind is he who disputeth concerning Allah, without knowledge or guidance or a scripture giving light.”⁸²

To use the world for good and to belong to it authentically, Iqbal felt that a person needed to obey God, keep away from God’s prohibitions, and be a viceregent of God upon the Earth. Everything was God-centred. Iqbal was not retreating from theocentricism; rather, he was reimagining what theocentricism meant on a practical level. He was by no means secular and dismissed humanistic and mechanistic worldviews as insufficient in explaining the reality of nature, writing, “Prayer in Islam is the ego’s escape from mechanism to freedom.”⁸³ Schimmel notes that despite his heterodox views, divine unicity invariably remained central to Iqbal’s philosophy,⁸⁴ and he fought hard to not deviate from the foundational tenets of Islamic monotheism.

It would be unfair to suggest, however, that Iqbal’s differences with local Muslim scholars was the primary reason for the failure of his philosophies to proliferate. There clearly was a divide, and that had obvious effects on how Iqbal was perceived by the more well-educated sectors of society, but Iqbal was not ostracised by any means.⁸⁵ As a result of his commitment to preserving divine unicity and overt Islamic overtones in his philosophical paradigms, the *khudi* doctrine itself was actually not so unpalatable to the layman, who was not concerned with theological disputes and the logical entailments of peripheral creedal matters. Why should it have been, when they did not even appreciate that these disputes and entailments existed in the first place? The commonfolk recognised Iqbal as a Muslim, committed to his religion and co-religionists, who was standing on the shoulders of thinkers who came before him, such as Rūmī and Ibn

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ Iqbal, *Secrets*, p. 30.

⁸² *Qur’an*, 31:20.

⁸³ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 110.

⁸⁴ Schimmel, p. 86.

⁸⁵ Saif, Mashal, ‘The Nadwat al-‘Ulama’s Romance with Iqbal: Narrative construction and historiography’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 53.6 (2019), 1762-1796 < <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17000956> >

‘Arabī. Calls for him to be avoided may have affected some, but definitely not for most, and it did not stop people from following his politics and poetry.

4.2 Contradictions in the *Khudi* Doctrine

We mentioned earlier how Iqbal approached the natural sciences, appropriating Western empiricism as the lost property of the Islamic world. He did this whilst working to preserve his metaphysical worldview, in particular his *khudi* doctrine. However, there were obvious tensions Iqbal was not able to overcome. Since the Enlightenment, Western academics had been wrestling with the hierarchy of sciences. Metaphysics, long considered the principle science that all others—including the natural sciences and mathematics—were anchored in, was slowly being deposed from its lofty position. This led to far-reaching angst and a number of responses by philosophers searching for meaning and reason in this new intellectual landscape.

By borrowing from the West, Iqbal also borrowed from this angst. His *khudi* aimed to straddle a tightrope between a new and old world. For example, Nietzsche and Ibn ‘Arabī, two unmistakably different thinkers, both influenced his understanding of *khudi*. This led to a number of theological contradictions, such as maintaining a doctrine of divine omnipotence whilst averring that humans are creators of their own actions. His answers to these questions were often unsatisfactory.

Perhaps even less convincing was his engagement with the natural sciences. Recall Iqbal’s statement on Einstein’s that we cited earlier:

“Looking, however, at the theory from the standpoint that I have taken in these lectures, Einstein’s Relativity presents one great difficulty, i.e., the unreality of time. A theory which takes time to be a kind of fourth dimension of space must, it seems, regard the future as something already given, indubitably fixed as the past. Time as a free creative movement has no meaning for the theory. It does not pass. Events do not happen; we simply meet them.”⁸⁶

Iqbal never resolved this issue, nor did he provide an alternative model, yet he partially relied on Einstein’s theory to give credence to his metaphysical worldview. This appeal to mutually exclusive doctrines is difficult to accept. It also meant that his philosophy was equally challenging for both Western empiricists and orthodox Muslim scholars to fully adopt.

Belonging in neither camp meant that Iqbal did not have the philosophical following other thinkers benefited from. His contradictions and clashes with orthodoxy meant that his views were unsatisfying to scholars in both worlds: the secular and the spiritual. Iqbal briefly laid out an epistemological hierarchy in his *Reconstruction*, with religious teachings sitting higher than science and philosophy.⁸⁷ Through this, he wished to justify using religion as a yardstick with which to measure the truth-value of scientific claims. In principle, this makes sense and is internally coherent within the paradigm of a theistic mind. The issue arises when we realise that Iqbal did not actually use religion as his yardstick but rather his *khudi* doctrine. The two are not equivalent. His doctrine was the product of his intellectual musings, and by treating it as a core tenet of faith, Iqbal ran into many otherwise avoidable issues. In addition, those external to Iqbal’s paradigm were not appeased with his *khudi* doctrine-preserving polemical sacrifices.

⁸⁶ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 40.

⁸⁷ Iqbal, *Secrets*, p. 2.

In my opinion, it is these contradictions, as well as his doctrine not fitting well into either the Western academy or the Eastern *madrasah*, that led to Iqbal's *khudi* failing to become as popular as his poetry or politics.

Iqbal's *Reconstruction* was not directed at a lay audience. It was written in response to the request of the Madras Muslim Association, who were known for their highly intellectual sittings.⁸⁸ The tone and language employed in the work further confirms that Iqbal was talking to an intelligentsia of sorts. These readers would quickly be able to identify flaws in Iqbal's philosophies, as well as its selective use and rejection of the natural sciences.

Iqbal's attempt to mitigate the issue appeared lacking. He may have had more success in convincing others of his *khudi* doctrine and wider philosophy if he substantiated his epistemology and methodology for selection more thoroughly. Likewise if he had confronted the contradictions his philosophy faced head on. Instead of attempting to portray Islam and post-enlightenment Western empiricism as natural bedfellows, Iqbal may have done well to show the value of each, with the natural sciences being a neutral field of enquiry. This way, he could have shown that the natural sciences and religion need not clash, without having to try to portray them as somehow being two sides of the same coin.

These issues being left unresolved is a major reason, in my view, that Iqbal's philosophy did not gain major traction. Coupling this with his heterodoxy in certain creedal matters within Islam, and with him not fully belonging to either Western or Islamic academic thought, meant that Iqbal's philosophy never really took flight.

4.3 *Khudi* in the 21st Century

The world has undergone cataclysmic shifts since Iqbal passed away in 1938. Society in general has become more daring, more integrated, and more individualistic. Ironically, large swathes of the human population, including in the Muslim world, are now facing the opposite problem of the one Iqbal sought to combat. Fatalism is less of a concern for many than it once was, and a new form of vitalism has spread as society sees new frontiers in human development consistently conquered. On an individual level, this leads to a host of new dilemmas, which in turn has led to a rise in the focus on New Age concepts of self-spirituality and self-actualisation.⁸⁹

To see how Iqbal's ideas would fare in this new world, which is a far cry from the humbler, more rural, and globally isolated population of the subcontinent to whom he was speaking all those years ago, is a challenge. It is likely that Iqbal's *khudi* doctrine, with its claim to the power of creation for anyone other than the Creator Himself, would still be viewed as heretical. This would especially be the case for the more literalist Salafi branch of Islam that has gained popularity since Iqbal's time. Neither would Iqbal find much support among the more esoteric Sufi branches of Islam, whose concepts of *nafs* (literally, 'self') and *fanā* (literally, 'annihilation') he rejected, and whose revered predecessors, such as Ibn 'Arabī, he also rejected.

Iqbal's clashes with the natural sciences have also not been resolved by him or any of his followers and so would still have remained an issue today. For a philosophical paradigm to be successfully propagated, it needs to be internally coherent and deal with the external challenges of its time. Iqbal's philosophy did not do the latter effectively, and even in the former, it was not

⁸⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 4.

⁸⁹ James R. Lewis and Inga B. Tollefsen eds., *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements: Volume II*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 470.

coherent in the wider Islamic context. Thus, it is difficult to see how Iqbal's doctrine would be any more successful in the 21st century than it was in the 20th. I believe that rather it is the shortcomings in Iqbal's thought that hampered his philosophy from gaining popularity among the elites and laity, and that they reflect inherent issues in the philosophy itself.

5. Conclusion

Muhammad Iqbal was a politician, poet, and Muslim philosopher who had a vision for a Muslim homeland in which his people would be freed from their colonial shackles. He was an adept linguist with a penchant for terse and effective poetry that reached deep into the psyche of his co-religionists. He was overtly Muslim in his discourse, writing directly to a Muslim population. For instance, Iqbal wrote:

“If it distances you from Allah, then knowledge is a trial,
Possessions also, children also, wealth also is a trial.
If it rises for falsehood, then the sword is also a trial.
What even is a sword, when pronouncing God’s greatness is a trial.”⁹⁰

One needs only to read his poetry to appreciate why it was so popular in the subcontinent. It is optimistic and beautiful, painting a picture of ambition and great potential. It is moralistic and calls towards a shunning of vice. At times provocative, it captivated many Muslim minds of his time and is regularly quoted and studied in classrooms to this day.

Similarly, Iqbal’s politics inspired hope, with its revolutionary zeal and lofty ambitions. Gone would be the days of racial subjugation by foreign invaders, and soon would come the era of a pure (or ‘*pāk*’) land (or ‘*-istān*’). A worn and weary populace jumped to such an idea, and Iqbal, despite his unorthodoxy and lack of traditional Islamic education, became a figurehead of the movement. The opposition of the British, the local Hindu population, and much of the local religious elite of his time could not stop this movement from taking hold. The crown jewel of the British Empire was to be lost and forever divided.

Iqbal also built a comprehensive philosophical model that was centred around the *khudi*, his term for the self. This *khudi* was powerful, having true autonomy and the ability to create its own actions and thus, its future. The particulars of the *khudi*’s actions were, according to Iqbal, unknown to God, as they represented a future that was as of yet non-existent. He argued that the *khudi*’s ability to create was independent of God’s power, and that this did not violate the Islamic belief of divine omnipotence. These dialectics were aimed at producing a worldview that empowered individuals to take political action and not become fatalistic.

This philosophy of Iqbal’s did not gain significant traction among the laity or the academics of his time. The reasons for this have been discussed and may be summarised by saying: [1] the local Muslim population of the subcontinent were largely a group of illiterate labourers who had been subjugated by a colonial power, meaning they had little awareness of intricate philosophical and theological discussions; [2] Iqbal sat uncomfortably between Western philosophers and Muslim clerics, belonging to neither camp and having little support as a result; [3] a number of Iqbal’s views were considered heretical by the majority of the subcontinent’s Muslim thinkers and were reminiscent of views previously considered heretical in the wider Islamic world; and [4] Iqbal aimed to harmonise between religion and the natural sciences by appropriating the latter as a subject aimed at reaching the former, something which most secularists would find difficult to accept, seeing as they view the natural sciences as a neutral field of study that is unconcerned with metaphysics and theology.

⁹⁰ Muhammed Iqbal, (*Asrar-e-Khudi-23*) *Al-Waqt-e-Saif (Waqt Talwar Hai)* - Time is a sword.
<<https://iqbalurdu.blogspot.com/2011/04/asrar-e-khudi-23-al-waqt-e-saif-waqt.html>>

5.1 Refining Iqbal for Today

Whilst Iqbal may have not found great success with his philosophical discourse, we should not dismiss his contributions entirely, especially considering the fast-changing landscape of today. A rise in the popularity of deterministic worldviews, both physical and biological (e.g., the ‘selfish gene’ theory), have led to a rise in nihilism and determinism.⁹¹ The disruptiveness of postmodernism has made it increasingly difficult for people to find meaning in life. Jean-François Lyotard writes, “Lamenting the ‘loss of meaning’ in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative.”⁹² Against this backdrop, perhaps there is utility in a philosophical episteme that anchors itself on a stable source of meaning and belonging. For Iqbal, creation is centred around the worship of God, and creation all belongs to Him. He argues that self-fulfilment is achieved through communion with God and benevolence upon the Earth. There is much in this that today’s world could benefit from.

Iqbal’s philosophy is demonstrably unserviceable in its current form, but I would contend that with some adjustments, its value may increase significantly for our times. The adjustments I propose are three: [1] adding an existential dimension to Iqbal’s *khudi* doctrine; [2] reigning in the vitalism of Iqbal’s *khudi*; and [3] refining Iqbal’s discourse on the relationship between Islam and the natural sciences.

5.1.1 Adding an Existential Dimension

Iqbal’s efforts in expounding his *khudi* doctrine were centred on its vitalistic aspects. Whilst this made some sense, given the downtrodden populace he was addressing, it makes less sense in the more modern and less subjugated reader’s mind. Fatalism has been shown to positively correlate with cultural trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.⁹³ It is understandable, then, that this state of mind was so prevalent in Iqbal’s India. We can also appreciate that this is no longer the case and that the technological advancements of the modern world, along with its more egalitarian outlook, means that fatalism is not the problem it once was.⁹⁴ This is despite the apparently more deterministic entailments of the mechanism that has replaced much of traditional spirituality. As always, academics do not dictate the zeitgeist of the era.

Thus, if Iqbal’s philosophy was galvanised with a change in emphasis, moving away from vitalism and towards providing an anchor for meaning and existence, it may prove more useful. Hidden in Iqbal’s work are his answers to some of the more fundamental questions of existence: ‘Who are we?’ ‘What are we?’ and ‘Why are we here?’ These answers are scattered throughout his discourse and never intensely or purposefully focused on in a way that is easily comprehensible to readers. Combining these scattered answers, Iqbal’s response may be summarised as follows:

⁹¹ Daniel Siegel, ‘Generation Doomer: How Nihilism on Social Media is Creating a New Generation of Extremists’, *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, 16 December 2022 <<https://gnet-research.org/2022/12/16/generation-doomer-how-nihilism-on-social-media-is-creating-a-new-generation-of-extremists/>>

⁹² Gary Aylesworth, ‘Postmodernism’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/postmodernism/>>

⁹³ Maercker, Andreas, Ben-Ezra, Menachem, Esparza, Oscar A., and Augsburg, Mareikea, ‘Fatalism as a traditional cultural belief potentially relevant to trauma sequelae: Measurement equivalence, extent and associations in six countries’, *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 10.1 (2019) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2019.1657371>>

⁹⁴ Caucasus Research Resource Center, ‘The Wave of the Future: Optimism, Pessimism and Fatalism in Georgia’, *CRRC* <<https://crrc.ge/en/the-wave-of-the-future-optimism-pessimism-and-fatalism-in-georgia/>>

we, as humans, are unique creations of God, who have been chosen to be His vicegerent upon Earth, and are composite beings, consisting of a body and a soul.⁹⁵ Each human has been given intellect and free will, as well as a duty to use these gifts for the purposes of good.⁹⁶ To achieve this, the human must seek communion with God and guidance through His revelations. Only then is a person equipped to deal with the challenges of his time.

These overtly religious answers to the ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ questions of life are useful in providing meaning and purpose for Muslims. They may also be utilised by others in dealing with issues in non-Islamic paradigms. Whatever one’s confessional commitments, meaning and purpose provide solace and guide societal efforts. A collective understanding to these broad questions may prove to be a source of greater societal cohesion.⁹⁷ Iqbal’s answers here are nothing new in the Muslim world, but they do help realign his image as that of a mainstream Muslim thinker, and coupled with the political ambitions and poetic skill evident in much of his other works, they could help convince many that Iqbal does have something to offer. There is a pragmatic benefit in leveraging certainty during a postmodern age of subjectivity. Doing so is subversive and revolutionary. To give meaning and purpose to a thing can strengthen the resolve of all those who seek it. A higher spiritual aim is a source of empowerment for a large proportion of humanity, and Iqbal’s furthering of this narrative, as opposed to his fringe vitalistic views, may have proven a more effective method of galvanizing his audience.

Regarding our purpose in life, Iqbal’s framing did not gather much traction, and a reworking may have assisted him. Iqbal’s idea of purpose revolves heavily around vitalism and the power of *khudi*. We mentioned how this caused friction with Muslim orthodoxy and was dismissed by those who reject metaphysics entirely. If we tempered this vitalism with an understanding of Islam’s emphasis on submission to God, Iqbal’s philosophy could be more palatable to his audience. We would need to do so without violating Iqbal’s central mission and core concept for it to remain authentic. His central mission was to politically empower individuals and protect them from fatalism, and his core concept was to afford the *khudi* a sense of freedom and autonomy that is not enforced upon it; that is to say, to afford it free will.

Iqbal argues that man’s duty is to be God’s vicegerent on Earth.⁹⁸ He found support for this in the Quranic verse which states:

“And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceregent in the Earth, they said: Wilt thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee? He said: Surely I know that which ye know not.”⁹⁹

Iqbal only passingly discusses worshipping God as the ultimate aim of mankind. He does not deny it—doing so would be incredibly difficult considering how explicitly it is mentioned in the Qur’an. Emphasising it, however, would give a better context for what the viceregency mentioned in the Qur’an entails. It would also provide a higher spiritual aim for a religious populace. We find God’s statement in the Qur’an:

⁹⁵ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 96.

⁹⁶ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 97.

⁹⁷ Madeleine Pennington, ‘Cohesive Societies: Faith and Belief’, *The British Academy*, 2020 <<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/cohesive-societies-faith-and-belief/>>

⁹⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 96.

⁹⁹ *Qur’an*, 2:30.

“I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me.”¹⁰⁰

If one tempered Iqbal’s talk of a powerful (though completely dependent) *khudi* with mention of the higher purpose of worshipping God, it would have put him more in-line with mainstream Muslim thinkers and made him more acceptable to traditionally trained Muslim scholars and students. Worship is a broad topic in Islam, and it has long been understood by many Muslims as referring to those actions done to attain the pleasure of God.¹⁰¹ These actions include sociopolitical ones carried out in the public interest. Iqbal could have utilised this to motivate his audience politically whilst not alienating them theologically or metaphysically.

Nevertheless, none of this solves Iqbal’s theological conundrum of describing a powerful *khudi* that can create somewhat independently of God. Discussions and debates over free will and fate have been had for millennia amongst philosophers, and Muslim philosophers are no exception to this. The Qur’an does not explicitly address the dilemma, nor does the *ḥadīth* corpus. Instead, we are told, “of knowledge ye have been vouchsafed but little.”¹⁰² Iqbal could easily have resigned this matter to God rather than insisting on producing an answer that he felt propelled his wider philosophy, even if it had to come at the cost of alienating many Muslim thinkers. His answer did not propel his philosophy—it never gained traction—and it led to further predicaments. There was neither a need nor pragmatic benefit, then, in venturing down the path Iqbal chose.

I argue that avoiding that path would have been better for Iqbal, and it would have made his philosophy more appealing to his audience. In his *Reconstruction*, the audience was primarily Muslim intellectuals, followed by the wider Muslim community and other, external academics. Some of this audience would have been familiar with arguments that try to resolve the free will and fate dilemma, such as those which focus on the concept of God being atemporal or aim to join between God’s will and the will of man. Others would have been completely unaware of these debates. However, the entire discussion is irrelevant to Iqbal’s central arguments, and so having Iqbal’s controversial answers take centre stage in his philosophy was a misstep.

5.2 Concluding Remarks

Had Iqbal’s *khudi* doctrine been adopted in today’s world, it is difficult to say what the outcome would have been. Is fatalism so much of a concern today? Would Iqbal’s empowering discourse have exacerbated the atomistic individualism so prevalent already? Or would his philosophy have empowered his future countrymen to be more politically active and socially productive? There are many unknowns.

Similarly, we are left wondering what Iqbal’s philosophical discourse could have led to had it been adapted according to the suggestions we offered above. Iqbal was a polymath and no stranger to confrontation. He achieved great political and literary success. In both fields, he was both provocative and evocative. He relished a challenge and was ideologically driven. However, in philosophy, perhaps he fought on too many fronts and took on too many challenges, some of which he was unable to overcome.

Iqbal’s pro-science and anti-classical interpretation of the Qur’an did not seem to convince many Western empiricists or traditional Muslims. His attempts to join both camps led to clashes when he seemed to selectively pick certain aspects of each school of thought whilst rejecting others.

¹⁰⁰ Qur’an, 51:56.

¹⁰¹ Amjad Rasheed, ‘What is the meaning of worship?’, *Islam QA* <<https://islamqa.org/?p=33602>>

¹⁰² Qur’an, 17:85.

Iqbal did aim to provide a hierarchy of knowledge—with divinely inspired knowledge being superior to scientific theories that are reached through human effort and subject to change when newer theories arrive—to overcome these clashes, but then did not resort to it when required. Nor did he ignore these matters when they offered little in the way of support to his central argument. Iqbal did not need to delve into Einstein's theories of relativity for his philosophy to be impactful to its target audience, and doing so led to delving into fields in which he was inexperienced. Pragmatically speaking, it was an 'own goal'.

Iqbal clashed with the theories of spiritual sages from Islamic history, and we discussed specifically his issues with al-Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabī. He found support in Rūmī, although other than some poetic license and the employment of similar themes, it is hard to see what exactly he took from him in terms of philosophy. Rūmī was very much an orthodox Muslim; Iqbal was more of a maverick. There is no compulsion for one to find an intellectual lineage they adhere to when presenting their own philosophy. However, it is somewhat helpful to do so when claiming that one is being authentic to an inherited tradition. If Iqbal was unable to find intellectual partners from the classical and post-classical periods of Islamic history, he should have sought them from the earliest period, that of the first generation of Muslims. Amongst Muslim intellectuals, this is almost compulsory if one wishes to portray themselves as anything but innovative.

Instead of this, Iqbal relied on his own interpretations of the Qur'an and on Greek and Western philosophers. This is a major challenge on its own, and it becomes even harder when one claims that this discourse is authentically Islamic. There are many obvious and some subtler clashes between post-enlightenment Western philosophers and traditional Islamic ones. Iqbal ventured into these waters without resolving the divide. Why Iqbal felt the need to do so is unclear, but to ask why is, perhaps, to ask the wrong question. Iqbal's positions and influences may simply have been the result of his reading and background. He was a South Asian Muslim who lived in colonial India before emigrating to England, where he obtained his BA from Cambridge University, and then to Germany where he obtained his PhD from Munich. His English and Germanic influences were a natural consequence of his upbringing. The awkward bedfellows he wished to bring together in his philosophies may simply be the result of his own juxtaposed background.

Taking this to the masses was perhaps ill-advised, but it was an authentic reflection of the man. When reading Iqbal's Urdu poetry, many people would have been unaware of his Western education and influences. He would have seemed, to them at least, authentically subcontinental. When promoting a homeland for the subcontinent's Muslims, he would likely have been viewed as a homegrown patriot by many of the aggrieved population. All of this would have worked in his favour. However, the same did not apply to his philosophical works. Here, he was talking to academics who noted the clashes and the uncomfortable marrying of contradictory belief systems. They noticed the dilemmas Iqbal faced and then left unresolved. For these people, a different approach may have fared better.

Making the adjustments I suggested above may have salvaged Iqbal's philosophical discourse from the history books and brought it tangibly into people's lives. Hindsight affords us a better vantage point than Iqbal was given, but this outcome cannot be guaranteed. It could be argued that Iqbal's philosophy was always doomed to be ignored during his own lifetime. Even so, perhaps with the changes suggested it could prove more potent in the 21st century. More exploration is required on how Iqbal's ideas could be utilised in future. His message is an optimistic one which puts humans at the forefront of their own stories. He was speaking to a downtrodden, subjugated, and colonised people who were lacking in self-belief and confidence.

To these people his message was clear: remain positive and use your agency to effect change, for the future may be brighter than the past. Iqbal was a unique mind with the ability to captivate. Today, this power can be harnessed to invigorate an even wider audience than he initially intended. In every era there are new challenges, and sometimes answers from the past can be renewed and re-applied. Most apt would be to end this essay with a poem by Iqbal himself, one that reflects his philosophy well:

“I have turned away from that place on Earth
Where sustenance takes the form of grain and water.
The solitude of the wilderness pleases me—
By nature I was always a hermit—
No spring breeze, no one plucking roses, no nightingale,
And no sickness of the songs of love!
One must shun the garden-dwellers—
They have such seductive charms!
The wind of the desert is what gives
The stroke of the brave youth fighting in battle its effect.
I am not hungry for pigeon or dove—
For renunciation is the mark of an eagle’s life.
To swoop, withdraw and swoop again
Is only a pretext to keep up the heat of the blood.
East and West -these belong to the world of the pheasant,
The blue sky—vast, boundless—is mine!
I am the dervish of the kingdom of birds—
The eagle does not make nests.”¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Iqbal, (*Bal-e-Jibril-060*).

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