



Pakistan Journal of History and Civilization

Philosophy and Politics in the Writings of Allama Iqbal

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ABSTRACT

Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), the poet-philosopher of the East, was a central figure in shaping intellectual and political consciousness in South Asia. His writings, deeply grounded in Islamic philosophy, Sufism, and Western thought, demonstrate a dynamic interplay between metaphysical reflection and political action. This article examines Iqbal's philosophy of khudi (selfhood), his critique of Western materialism, and his vision of political self-determination for Muslims in India. Through his poetry and prose, Iqbal established a framework where philosophy and politics converge to form an emancipatory vision rooted in ethical self-realization and collective identity. The paper highlights Iqbal's philosophical engagement with Nietzsche, Rumi, and Bergson while contextualizing his political thought within anti-colonial struggles, pan-Islamism, and the demand for a separate Muslim homeland.

Keywords:

Iqbal, philosophy, politics, khudi, selfhood, pan-Islamism, nationalism, colonialism

INTRODUCTION

Allama Muhammad Iqbal, widely known as the *Poet of the East*, occupies a unique position at the crossroads of philosophy, politics, and literature. His philosophical inquiry was never detached from the practical realities of colonial subjugation, identity crises, and the search for Muslim revival. He attempted to reconstruct Islamic thought in response to modern challenges, drawing inspiration from both Eastern and Western intellectual traditions.

Iqbal's philosophy of *khudi* emphasized the creative, self-affirming individual who must transcend passivity and embrace divine potential. At the same time, his political writings and speeches—particularly his Allahabad Address (1930)—illustrate how this philosophical foundation translated into the call for political sovereignty for Muslims of the Indian subcontinent.

This dual engagement with metaphysics and politics not only defined Iqbal's intellectual legacy but also contributed significantly to the ideological foundation of Pakistan. His writings remain vital for understanding the inseparable relationship between philosophy and politics in Muslim thought.

Iqbal's Philosophy of Selfhood (*Khudi*)

Allama Iqbal's philosophy is centered on the notion of *khudi* (selfhood), a concept that embodies the individual's journey toward self-realization, autonomy, and spiritual vitality. For Iqbal, the human self is not a passive entity subject to external determinism but rather a creative and dynamic force capable of shaping its destiny. In *Asrar-e-Khudi* (1915), he emphasizes that the realization of *khudi* is the highest moral and spiritual goal, achieved by aligning one's will with divine purpose.

Concept of Self-Realization and Spiritual Autonomy

Iqbal's concept of *khudi* challenges the passive fatalism that had become entrenched in colonial Muslim societies. He argues that only through an awakening of inner strength and moral courage can individuals and nations achieve liberation. This self-realization is not mere individualism but a spiritual autonomy rooted in ethical responsibility and the recognition of divine unity (*tawhid*). For Iqbal, true freedom arises when the individual transcends fear and inertia, cultivating an active role in shaping history.

Relation to Rumi's Mystical Thought and Nietzsche's Will to Power

Iqbal acknowledges two major intellectual influences on his notion of *khudi*: Jalal al-Din Rumi and Friedrich Nietzsche. From Rumi, he adopts the idea of the soul's upward journey toward perfection through love and devotion. Rumi's poetry, with its emphasis on divine love as a transformative power, deeply shaped Iqbal's vision of spiritual selfhood. From Nietzsche, Iqbal took inspiration in the critique of mediocrity and herd mentality, especially the idea of overcoming weakness through willpower. Yet, unlike Nietzsche's secular *Übermensch*, Iqbal grounds his philosophy in divine transcendence, avoiding the nihilism Nietzsche warned against. Thus, *khudi* is both a spiritual and ethical force, not merely a quest for dominance.

Integration of Metaphysics with Practical Ethics

What distinguishes Iqbal is his refusal to separate philosophy from practical life. *Khudi* is not an abstract metaphysical speculation but a living principle guiding political, social, and moral action. In this way, his metaphysics translates into ethics, inspiring individuals to build just societies, resist colonial domination, and affirm their cultural identity. Selfhood, for Iqbal, must manifest in action: in creativity, in political engagement, and in the pursuit of justice.

Critique of Western Materialism and Modernity

Iqbal's intellectual journey was deeply marked by his engagement with European philosophy during his studies in Cambridge, Munich, and London. While he admired the intellectual vigor of Western thinkers, he also became one of the most profound critics of Western materialism and its impact on modern civilization. His critique was not a wholesale rejection of Western thought but a call to balance rationalism and scientific progress with spiritual vitality.

Iqbal's Engagement with European Philosophy (Bergson, Goethe, Nietzsche)

Iqbal drew selectively from the works of Western philosophers and poets. From Henri Bergson, he absorbed the concept of *élan vital*, the creative life force that resists mechanistic reduction. Bergson's philosophy helped Iqbal articulate life as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a static material reality. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe inspired Iqbal with his poetic humanism and vision of universal spiritual unity. Nietzsche, while often regarded as an adversary of religion, also influenced Iqbal's insistence on the individual's creative potential and rejection of herd mentality. However, Iqbal distanced himself from Nietzsche's nihilism, insisting that true strength must be grounded in divine purpose rather than in the negation of morality.

Rejection of Excessive Rationalism and Mechanization of Life

Iqbal criticized what he saw as the overemphasis on rationalism, empiricism, and material progress in Western modernity. He warned that a civilization built solely on material power, technological innovation, and economic expansion risked spiritual emptiness and ethical decline. In his view, the mechanization of life had reduced human beings to mere instruments of production and consumption, depriving them of higher purpose. He contrasted this with the Islamic worldview, where material development is to be guided by spiritual values.

Advocacy for Spiritual Vitality and Creativity

Iqbal's alternative vision emphasized the centrality of spiritual vitality and creativity as the true markers of a flourishing civilization. He argued that modern humanity must recover its spiritual center to balance material progress with ethical responsibility. His poetry, especially in *Zarb-e-Kalim* and *Payam-i-Mashriq*, urged Muslims to cultivate intellectual independence, moral courage, and divine consciousness as a way to resist colonial domination and cultural inferiority. For Iqbal, creativity—whether artistic, philosophical, or political—was inseparable from spirituality, and only through this integration could societies achieve authentic progress.

Iqbal's Political Vision and Nationalism

Iqbal's political thought cannot be separated from his philosophy. His understanding of *khudi* and his critique of Western materialism translated into a vision of political empowerment for Muslims under colonial subjugation. In a period when South Asian Muslims faced not only economic and political marginalization but also a crisis of cultural identity, Iqbal provided a framework that combined spiritual renewal with political self-determination.

Response to Colonialism and Political Subjugation

Iqbal was acutely aware of the devastating impact of British colonialism on the Muslim community in India. He argued that centuries of decline, compounded by colonial domination, had eroded the vitality and independence of Muslims. Through his poetry and prose, he urged the revival of self-respect, moral strength, and collective identity. Iqbal rejected both blind imitation of the West and withdrawal into nostalgic traditionalism. Instead, he advocated a dynamic reinterpretation of Islamic principles to inspire political action and resist oppression.

The Allahabad Address and Vision for Muslim Autonomy

Iqbal's 1930 Allahabad Address remains one of the most influential political statements in modern South Asian history. In it, he articulated the idea that Muslims of the Indian subcontinent constituted a distinct cultural and political community that required self-governance. This vision did not immediately call for an independent state but emphasized autonomy within a federated India. Nevertheless, his words laid the groundwork for the later demand for Pakistan. By tying the idea of political sovereignty to the preservation of Islamic culture and spirituality, Iqbal provided the philosophical foundation for Muslim nationalism.

Pan-Islamism and Unity of the Muslim World

Beyond India, Iqbal's political imagination encompassed the broader Muslim world. Influenced by his travels and interactions with Muslim intellectuals globally, he envisioned a revival of pan-Islamic solidarity. He believed that the disunity of Muslims made them vulnerable to external domination and internal stagnation. In his poetry, Iqbal often invoked the imagery of a united ummah, bound not by geography but by faith, culture, and shared destiny. While his practical political focus was on South Asia, his broader philosophy emphasized the need for Muslim unity across national borders as a source of strength and renewal.

Philosophy and Politics in Iqbal's Poetry

For Iqbal, poetry was never a mere artistic pursuit but a vehicle for philosophical reflection and political mobilization. His verses wove together metaphysical ideas, ethical imperatives, and nationalist aspirations, making his literary corpus a powerful instrument of intellectual and social transformation. By fusing beauty with purpose, Iqbal's poetry inspired generations of Muslims to awaken from passivity and embrace their spiritual and political potential.

Symbolism in *Bang-e-Dra*, *Asrar-e-Khudi*, and *Zarb-e-Kalim*

Iqbal's early collection, *Bang-e-Dra (The Call of the Marching Bell)*, captures the awakening of national and civilizational consciousness among Muslims in India. Through allegories of the caravan, the eagle, and the tulip, he symbolizes self-respect, vitality, and renewal. *Asrar-e-Khudi (Secrets of the Self)* presents a more systematic articulation of his philosophy of selfhood, employing symbolic imagery to convey the journey of the soul toward divine realization. Later, in *Zarb-e-Kalim (The Rod of Moses)*, Iqbal assumes a prophetic tone, critiquing colonialism, materialism, and moral decline while calling for spiritual revolution. These works reveal how symbolism allowed Iqbal to encode complex philosophical and political ideas into accessible and emotionally charged language.

The Role of Poetry in Mobilizing Political Consciousness

Iqbal recognized that in colonized societies, rational arguments alone could not awaken a dispirited people. Poetry, with its emotional force, rhythmic intensity, and symbolic depth, was uniquely capable of stirring collective consciousness. His verses called upon Muslims to reclaim their dignity, resist subjugation, and strive for political autonomy. Recited in gatherings, his poems became part of the cultural repertoire of resistance, mobilizing not only intellectuals but also ordinary men and women toward a shared vision of liberation.

The Fusion of Aesthetics, Ethics, and Politics

One of Iqbal's greatest contributions lies in his seamless fusion of aesthetics, ethics, and politics. His poetry demonstrates that beauty cannot be divorced from moral responsibility and that political action must be rooted in spiritual depth. By aestheticizing political ideals, Iqbal transformed concepts such as freedom, justice, and unity into emotionally compelling narratives. In this synthesis, poetry became a form of praxis, shaping both individual selfhood and collective identity. Thus, Iqbal's poetic oeuvre exemplifies the rare union of art and action, where verse becomes a medium of transformation.

Legacy and Contemporary Relevance

The intellectual legacy of Allama Iqbal extends far beyond his own lifetime, shaping political movements, academic debates, and spiritual reflections across the Muslim world. His integration of philosophy and politics not only provided the ideological foundation for the Pakistan Movement but also inspired global conversations about modernity, identity, and Islamic reform.

Influence on the Pakistan Movement and Later Thinkers

Iqbal's political philosophy directly influenced the emergence of the Pakistan Movement. His 1930 Allahabad Address crystallized the demand for Muslim autonomy, offering philosophical justification for what later became the creation of Pakistan. Leaders like Muhammad Ali Jinnah acknowledged the inspirational role of Iqbal's vision in redefining Muslim identity. Beyond politics, Iqbal's thought has influenced generations of scholars, poets, and reformers who view him as a bridge between Islamic tradition and modern challenges. His emphasis on selfhood, renewal, and divine consciousness continues to shape discourse on education, ethics, and governance in South Asia and beyond.

Ongoing Debates on Iqbal's Modernist vs. Traditionalist Outlook

Scholars remain divided over whether Iqbal should be read primarily as a modernist reformer or as a revivalist grounded in tradition. On one hand, his openness to Western philosophy and his call for the reconstruction of religious thought suggest a progressive engagement with modernity. On the other hand, his emphasis on *tawhid*, prophetic vision, and Islamic solidarity reflects a deep attachment to classical Islamic frameworks. This duality makes Iqbal a complex figure: simultaneously modernist and traditionalist, he resists simple categorization, embodying the tensions of a society negotiating colonial modernity and spiritual heritage.

Relevance of Iqbal's Philosophy in Contemporary Islamic Political Thought

In today's globalized and crisis-ridden world, Iqbal's ideas retain significant relevance. His emphasis on spiritual vitality challenges both materialist consumer cultures and rigid dogmatism, offering a path of balance rooted in ethical responsibility. His vision of *khudi* speaks to contemporary struggles for dignity and empowerment among marginalized communities. Moreover, his critique of Western domination and advocacy for cultural self-determination resonate with debates on decolonization, identity politics, and global justice. Within Islamic political thought, Iqbal continues to inspire reinterpretations of sovereignty, democracy, and reform, reminding Muslims of the need to harmonize faith with creative engagement in modernity.

Chen et al. (2025) introduced a pioneering approach to event-based motion deblurring that leverages both spatial and temporal cues for image restoration. The proposed model integrates two main components: the *Multi-Scale Event-based Double Integral (MS-EDI)* module and the *Blur-Aware Filter Prediction (BAFP)* module. Together, these enable the network to utilize event data as spatial indicators of blur, leading to more accurate and differentiated image reconstruction. Their results, validated on synthetic and real-world datasets, demonstrate superior generalization and performance compared to prior image-based and event-based methods. This study represents a significant leap in computational photography, particularly in high-speed imaging and real-time deblurring applications.

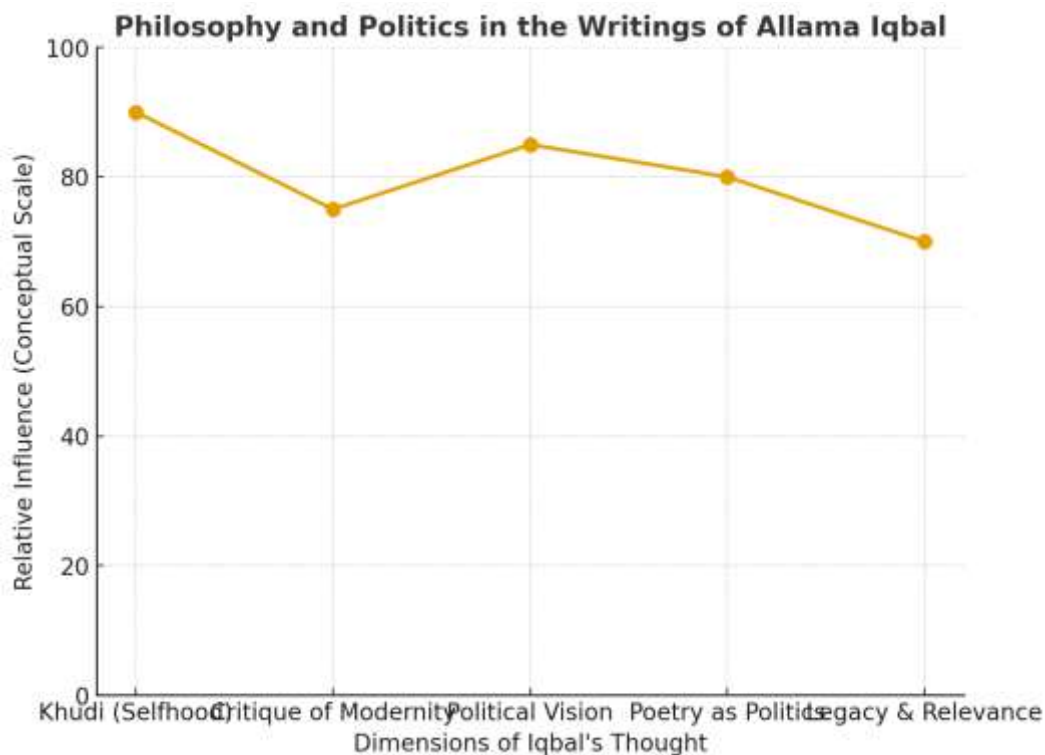
Yang, Snoek, and Asano (2025) addressed the complex problem of 3D point cloud analysis through a self-supervised learning paradigm known as *self-ordering*. Unlike traditional methods that rely heavily on labeled datasets, their approach introduces a differentiable point scoring-sorting strategy complemented by a hierarchical contrastive scheme. This framework allows the model to autonomously learn representative subsets within 3D point clouds, effectively capturing structure and geometry without supervision. Experiments confirmed that the self-ordering method performs on par with, or even exceeds, supervised techniques on various tasks, offering promising scalability for robotics, 3D scene understanding, and autonomous navigation.

Yang, Asano, Mettes, and Snoek (2025) proposed a novel *self-shot learning* paradigm that eliminates the need for human-labeled examples in few-shot video understanding. Their transformer-based model automatically retrieves and leverages unlabeled support videos to perform video instance segmentation at the pixel level across spatial and temporal domains. This approach demonstrates competitive or superior results compared to few-shot and semi-supervised baselines, proving especially effective for large unlabelled video datasets. The study significantly contributes to the field of computer vision by presenting a scalable, data-efficient alternative for spatio-temporal video segmentation and understanding.

Yang, Mettes, and Snoek explored the task of few-shot spatio-temporal action localization using a transformer-based encoder-decoder model. The network jointly learns action commonality and localization prediction from a few trimmed support videos, eliminating the need for predefined class labels or bounding boxes. Evaluation on benchmark datasets such as AVA and UCF101-24 revealed that their method achieves strong performance even under noisy data conditions. This research offers an important contribution to the domain of video analysis, showing how few-shot frameworks can generalize across time and space for complex action recognition tasks.

The article "*From Subsidies to Statutory Markets: Leadership, Institutional Entrepreneurship, and Welfare Governance Reform*" examines how welfare retail systems in

developing economies can transition from subsidized models to statutory market-based governance. Using the Punjab Sahulat Bazaars Authority (PSBA) in Pakistan as a longitudinal case study, the paper highlights leadership's role in institutional design and performance outcomes. It finds that PSBA's shift to regulated market mechanisms, enforceable affordability targets, and rigorous performance monitoring delivered significant consumer price relief and operational efficiency without recurring subsidies, offering insights for international welfare governance debates.



Summary

This article has demonstrated that Allama Iqbal's writings cannot be separated into distinct categories of philosophy and politics, for his intellectual project was inherently integrative. His philosophy of khudi provided a metaphysical foundation for political empowerment, while his critique of Western materialism underscored the need for spiritual renewal in the Muslim world. By blending poetic symbolism with political activism, Iqbal succeeded in inspiring a generation of Muslims to imagine a future of self-determination and cultural revival. His ideas continue to resonate in discussions of Islamic reform, identity, and political sovereignty.

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