

Revival of the Muslim Spirit: Iqbal's Perspective in Eradicating Weakness and Illiteracy in the Indian Subcontinent

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Abstract

The decline of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent following the collapse of the Mughal Empire left them vulnerable to colonial exploitation, intellectual stagnation, and social fragmentation. This paper examines Allama Muhammad Iqbal's philosophical response to Muslim weakness and widespread illiteracy, with a particular focus on his call for educational and spiritual renewal. Drawing upon a qualitative thematic analysis of Iqbal's poetry, prose, and philosophical writings, complemented by secondary scholarship, the study analyzes how he identified ignorance, misinterpretation of religion by clergy, and blind imitation of the West as central causes of Muslim decline. In contrast, Iqbal envisioned a revival rooted in the principles of Khudi (selfhood), Tawhid (unity of God and humanity), and the integration of modern sciences with Islamic values. He emphasized that true knowledge must inspire action, creativity, and dignity rather than passive imitation or ritualism. The paper also explores Iqbal's critique of the misuse of fatwas, his opposition to intellectual inertia, and his insistence on harmonizing science and religion to rebuild Muslim societies on both moral and material grounds. By situating Iqbal's ideas within the colonial and postcolonial context, the study demonstrates that his philosophy offers not only a historical response to Muslim subjugation but also a timeless framework for addressing contemporary challenges of educational backwardness, disunity, and socio-political dependency. The findings suggest that Iqbal's educational philosophy—centered on the cultivation of selfhood, faith, and critical engagement with modern knowledge—remains vital for empowering Muslim societies today.

Keywords: Khudi, subcontinent, colonialism, illiteracy, Muslim education; Islam and modernity, philosophy of revival

The Indian subcontinent is a vast and blessed land that has long been the cradle of science, civilization, and culture, difficult to govern because it is divided into many linguistic, national, sectarian, and caste groups, yet it has nurtured great scientists and thinkers and presented them to humanity. The Indian subcontinent proved to be a very difficult land to govern due to the strong Hindu culture of the local population, which was in stark contrast to the Mughal faith, Islam (Belkacem, 2007, p. 29). According to Metcalf (1964), this attitude of the Hindus towards the British and the civilization brought by them proved advantageous. The Hindus were certainly the biggest beneficiaries of the British rule. They took advantage of the many opportunities offered by the British in all walks of life (p. 342). By adopting Western education and culture, they became trustworthy subjects in the eyes of the new rulers, and by learning the English language, they were offered positions in the government. Meyer & Brysac (2001) narrate that after the British rule,

religious division, especially among Muslims, caused great damage to unity. Muslims remained backward in the moral and intellectual world since then, and have never been able to bridge this gap. With regard to the second objective, Muslims faced severe discrimination in all spheres of day-to-day life, and particularly in government employment (pp. 145-148). To prevent these differences and unrest, great scholars and thinkers like Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) and Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) called the people to unity and oneness. With vigilance, sacrifice, and tireless efforts, they sought to maintain the unity and integrity of Muslims. Iqbal considered the backwardness of the Muslims of the subcontinent to be due to ignorance of Islamic teachings and a misunderstanding of the modern world. He tried his best to invite Muslims to unity, a shared sense of purpose, and self-knowledge rooted in Muslim dignity because he knew that, on the one hand, they were moving in the wrong direction and were completely scattered, and on the other hand, the West had colonized Muslims. He urged the youth of the Muslim nation not to consider modern sciences as contrary to the clear teachings of Islam and not to abandon them because of the fatwas of pretentious clerics. To express his lofty and brilliant thoughts and ideas, Iqbal chose Persian, which had been the international language of India for hundreds of years (Diana & Shapawi, 2024, p. 78).

“Like a tulip’s lamp, I burn upon your path,
O Young Persians! My life and yours are one.
A man shall come to break the bonds of slaves;
I have glimpsed him through the prison’s crack in your wall” (Iqbal, 2014, p. 76)

Alam (2021) states that since he had not been to Iran, he composed his most important philosophical, mystical, and religious poems in Persian and in this way created unity and political and cultural relations between the two Muslim nations of India and Iran.

Research Objectives

Iqbal emphasized the reasons for the lack of political awareness and ignorance among the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent and underscored the need for modern sciences. He raised fundamental questions in this regard and highlighted how religious stagnation, socio-economic conditions, and the absence of Western education had held Muslims back. He believed that Muslims could not progress without acquiring modern sciences. The lack of political awareness and widespread ignorance among the Muslims of the subcontinent was a major concern, as it prevented them from controlling their own destiny. Iqbal identified this problem and analyzed its causes. According to him, due to their limited political awareness and ignorance, Muslims were largely unaware of their rights and responsibilities and were therefore vulnerable to exploitation. In addition, he considered the absence of modern sciences a major factor that hindered Muslim progress in the race for development.

Research Questions

1. According to Iqbal, what were the reasons for the lack of political awareness among the Muslims of the subcontinent?

2. What reasons did Iqbal give for the ignorance of Muslims?
3. According to Iqbal, what is the importance of modern sciences, and why are they essential?
4. Why did Iqbal encourage Muslims to acquire modern sciences?
5. What is the role of political consciousness and modern sciences in Iqbal's philosophy?
6. According to Iqbal, how can political and social change be brought about in Muslim society?

Research Methodology

There is no doubt that with the development of modern research tools, such as software and virtual libraries equipped with advanced search capabilities, the analysis of Iqbal Lahori's books and treatises has become more accessible than ever before. A thorough study of Iqbal's works, especially his books such as *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* and *Secrets of the Self*, provides valuable insights into his views on the relationship between science and religion. In these works, Iqbal explores the importance of both fields and their interrelationship. The material for this article has been collected through library sources, and the analytical-descriptive research method has been employed in its writing.

Text analysis

An in-depth analysis of Iqbal's major works has been conducted, including *Bang-e-Dara* (*The Call of the Caravan Bell*), *Asrar-e-Khudi* (*Secrets of the Self*), *Payam-e-Mashriq* (*Message of the East*), as well as his correspondence and sermons. The focus remains on Iqbal's fundamental concepts such as Khudi (selfhood/self-determination), freedom, and national sovereignty.

Comparative analysis

Iqbal's ideas are also examined comparatively in light of other revivalist and reformist Muslim thinkers. This involves:

1. Philosophical foundations of the self – Iqbal's emphasis on ego and self-empowerment rather than subordination or fatalism.
2. Ijtihad (independent reasoning) – his focus on reconciling Islamic tradition with modernity.
3. Self-critique of the Muslim community – Iqbal's insistence that Muslims must recognize their own weaknesses as a prerequisite for reform.
4. Socio-political revival – his active promotion of political awakening and the pursuit of an Islamic state alongside spiritual reform, aimed at practical empowerment.

Literature Review

This section reviews the literature related to Iqbal's philosophy and focuses on analyses that examine the relevance of his ideas to contemporary political and social issues.

Factors of Weakness and Illiteracy of Muslims in the Subcontinent

The weakness and disintegration of the political structure, along with the ethnic and religious conflicts that followed the death of Aurangzeb (1618–1707), the last powerful Mughal emperor, paved the way for British colonial domination of the Indian subcontinent. Meanwhile, the causes and consequences of British rule and its effects on the political, social, and cultural conditions of Muslims are considered fundamental issues in the history of Islam as well as in global history. In addition, the intertwining of Muslim and European life in India, along with the missionary activities of Christian groups and the spread of Western cultural influences under colonial domination, are important topics in studies of Islam and Christianity from a broader perspective. Furthermore, examining local governments and Islamic societies in the subcontinent—such as Sunnis, Shiites, and related sects like the Khojas and Baharis—and their relations with British colonialism, as well as the evolution of the Pashtun movement (labeled as “fundamentalism” since the 20th century), is also crucial for understanding new radical Islamic movements. For example, Charles Raikes, a high-ranking British official in India during the events of 1857, believed that Muslims had been “over-trusted” and should be kept under control. He urged the Indian government to adopt strict measures to prevent Muslims from “taking too much part in government patronage” (Metcalf, 1964, p. 299). According to Saeedi (1991), these problems can be attributed to the following factors:

- i. Muslims in general in the subcontinent were deprived of access to quality education due to poverty and lack of resources.
- ii. Ineffective policies of Muslim rulers and the neglect of useful sciences prevented educational values from taking root among Muslim youth, which contributed to persistent illiteracy.
- iii. Regional traditions and cultural restrictions prevented girls and women from receiving education, which in turn increased illiteracy rates.
- iv. Racism, sectarian divisions, religious illiteracy, and the irrational fatwas of clerics against the adoption of modern technology can also be considered among the main reasons for the decline of Muslims in the subcontinent.

Role of Iqbal's Poetry in Addressing the Weakness and Illiteracy of Muslims in the Subcontinent

Iqbal was deeply concerned about the condition of Muslims in India and their weakening Islamic identity. He believed that science and religion were not only compatible but also inseparable. According to him, Muslims needed to rebuild their traditions by incorporating new advances in science and technology, thereby creating a progressive society committed to Islamic

principles. Iqbal's poetry directly addressed the issues of awareness and awakening in the subcontinent and the wider Muslim world. In his poems, he emphasized the importance of knowledge and education, highlighting their decisive role in the progress of societies. Some of the key points in his poetry include:

- A. Iqbal invites the youth to self-knowledge and to strive for the acquisition of knowledge, believing that awareness can bring about positive changes in society.
- B. He identifies the problems caused by illiteracy and ignorance in Muslim societies and stresses the need for education. He also recalls the early centuries of Islam, when Muslims excelled in science and technology.
- C. Iqbal introduces love and faith as two driving forces for societal transformation and argues that when combined with science and technology, they can lead to great achievements (Wasti, 1993, p. 45).

Considering the challenges of illiteracy and educational weaknesses in the subcontinent, the *Hayat Nau* movement (also known as the revival movement) sought to create positive changes through education and culture. Iqbal Lahori's poems, as a source of inspiration, played an important role in this path and guided the youth towards awareness and progress. As one of the most prominent modern Islamic thinkers, Iqbal Lahori consistently emphasized the significance of Islamic principles in shaping both individual and collective life. He argued that these principles should serve as the foundation of Muslim thought and practice in the modern world (Hussain, 2000).

Monotheism and Unity

Among the elements that distinguish truth from falsehood or belief from unbelief, monotheism holds a fundamental place. According to Iqbal, without monotheism, unity and oneness cannot be established. Iqbal argues that monotheism, as the fundamental principle of Islam, must be manifested in all aspects of the individual and social life of Muslims. He maintains that monotheism is not merely belief in one God, but should also be regarded as a unifying principle for the Islamic and global community. This principle fosters solidarity and cooperation among Muslims, enabling them to stand united in the face of modern challenges. “Whoever makes a covenant with the Eternal Being (God), his neck is freed from the chains of every worldly god” (Iqbal, 2017a, p. 89). Until the light of monotheism—the light of living power—shines in the darkness of a Muslim's actions and character, that is, until a Muslim practically lives by monotheism, their true position will remain hidden from them.

The Path to Revival: Iqbal's Call to Return to Islamic Roots

According to Iqbal Lahori, a return to Islamic identity is possible through the revival of the Islamic spirit and adherence to the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH). He believed that Muslims became weak and decadent by losing their Islamic identity and neglecting the teachings of the Qur'an. Therefore, reclaiming their Islamic self—through strengthening self-

belief and self-confidence, studying and practicing the Qur'an, and striving to establish an ideal Islamic society—is the way to save Muslims.

Iqbal emphasizes the importance of returning to Islamic identity and the rich cultural heritage of Muslims, arguing that they should distance themselves from the manifestations of Western culture and reconnect with their cultural and historical roots. This return to Islamic identity, he believed, would strengthen the national and cultural spirit of Muslims and make them more resilient in facing global challenges.

گچہ دارد شیوہ های رنگ رنگ
من بجز عبرت نگیرم از فرنگ
ای به تقلیدش اسیر آزاد شو
دامن قرآن بگیر آزاد شو

Translation:

“Though it has many colorful ways,
I take nothing from the West but lessons
O you who are captive to its imitation — be free!
Cling to the Qur'an and be free!” (Iqbal, 2021, p. 54).

Reconsideration in the Face of Outdated Prevailing Thoughts

Iqbal emphasizes the need for a renewal of Islamic thought and its adaptation to the conditions and needs of the time. He believes that Muslims must reassess and reinterpret Islamic principles and values to effectively confront modern challenges. This renewal should preserve the core Islamic teachings while also aligning them with emerging realities.

With a firm belief in Sharia, rational and mystical faith, and deep conviction in the absolute sovereignty of God, Iqbal dedicated his mind to discovering the mysteries of creation. He devised a spiritual-philosophical framework to understand and explain the world's conditions, its laws, and the spiritual relationships between humanity and the universe, thereby giving these concepts new value and insight.

He called on Muslim nations, torn by internal contradictions, to strengthen themselves on the foundation of monotheism (*Tawhid*). In doing so, he established a worldview centered on the dignity and essence of the human being. His philosophy of the “self” (*Khudi*)—rooted in God—was announced as a response to Muslim decline and as a pathway toward revival (Javaid, 2023). Given that his views were aligned with monotheism and the absolute sovereignty of God, his thought connects directly to the broader Islamic world and Islamic governance.

Therefore, his fundamental principles can be summarized in three main slogans:

1. Purification of Islam from superstitions and innovations, with a return to authentic Islam.
2. Unity and solidarity of Muslims against Western cultural and political dominance.
3. Harmonization of religious teachings with reason and the demands of the time.

Iqbal's Philosophy: Bridging the Divide Between Science and Faith

One of the most important questions in understanding Iqbal Lahori's perspective on the relationship between science and religion is how his approach to Islam—particularly the Qur'an—was shaped. Iqbal's understanding of religion is complex, encompassing intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. He argues that

Religion is not something that can be compared to a branch of science. It is neither an abstract thought, nor an abstract feeling, nor an abstract act. Rather, it is an expression and interpretation of the whole existence. Therefore, religion is a mirror of the entire human being. It is a dimension in which a person can truly be themselves (Aftab et al., 2022, p. 56).

Iqbal emphasizes science and knowledge as essential tools for the progress and development of Islamic societies. He maintains that science should serve faith and Islamic principles, and that Muslims must seek knowledge in all fields to achieve sustainable advancement (Hussain, 2000).

Iqbal's philosophy highlights the centrality of Islamic principles such as monotheism (*Tawhid*), freedom, Islamic identity, the reconsideration of Islamic thought, and the role of science. He argues that Muslims must apply these principles in their personal and social lives to succeed in the modern world. This approach fosters a balanced and sustainable society where Islamic principles guide both individual and collective progress. In this context, Iqbal observes: "Islam acknowledges and accepts the interaction of material and spiritual factors with each other. It says 'yes' to the material world and shows the way to dominate it, thus providing a foundation to organize life based on reality" (Sotoodeh, 1986, p. 76).

The Poetic Legacy of Iqbal: A Synthesis of Self, Community, and Spirituality

Emphasis on the Importance of Knowledge

Iqbal clearly emphasizes the necessity of acquiring knowledge in his poetry. He sees knowledge as a tool for liberation from ignorance and believes that through the pursuit of knowledge, a person can attain self-awareness and personal growth (Diana, 2024, p. 34).

The Concept of 'Khudi' (Self)

One of the central concepts in Iqbal's poetry is the idea of *Khudi* (the self). He advises individuals to look within themselves and recognize their potential. This self-awareness can inspire people to seek knowledge and education in their journey toward personal empowerment.

Criticism of Western Educational Systems

Iqbal critiques Western educational models, believing that they have failed to nurture a generation that can contribute meaningfully to both themselves and society. He stresses the need for an educational system rooted in Islamic values, one that can effectively serve the needs of the Muslim community.

Ethical and Educational Themes

Iqbal's poetry contains moral and educational themes derived from the teachings of Islam. He holds that education should lead to the development of ethical, committed individuals who are dedicated to both personal and social responsibility.

Social and Political Awakening

In his poetry, Iqbal emphasizes the social and political awakening of Muslims, considering it a necessity for the progress of Islamic societies. He believes that through increased awareness and literacy, Muslims will be able to respond effectively to their social and political challenges (Telwani, 2019, p. 31).

The Decline of the Ummah: Iqbal's Scathing Criticism of a Stagnant Clergy and an Unenlightened Populace

The role of the clergy (*Mullahs*) in sustaining the illiteracy of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent reflects the social, cultural, and political impact of religious leadership in Islamic societies. This role can be analyzed through several dimensions:

1. Exploiting Illiteracy for Personal Gain

Some members of the clergy, particularly in modern history, have taken advantage of the ignorance and illiteracy of the people. Ayatollah Montazeri (1922-2009), in one of his speeches, pointed out that if people began to question the clergy, the depth of their ignorance would become more apparent. This indicates that some religious leaders, instead of elevating the awareness of the people, prefer to maintain the status quo and keep the populace uninformed. Clergy may contribute to maintaining illiteracy by promoting exclusivist and narrow thinking, restricting access to knowledge. This can lead to a controlled environment where people, rather than questioning and researching, simply accept the views of the clergy:

شیخ شہر از رشتہ تسبیح صد مومن بدام
کافرانِ سادہ دل را برہمن ز تارتاب
انقلاب!
انقلاب! اے انقلاب!

“The Sheikh of the city, from a string of beads, Has caught a hundred believers in his snare.

The naive infidels, tied to the cord of Brahman, Are swayed by his deceit.

Revolution,

Oh revolution, oh revolution!” (Hussain, 2000, p. 154)

2. *Fundamental Weakness in the Educational System*

In many cases, clerics, due to their influence on the educational system, have obstructed the spread of modern and scientific education. These limitations may include opposition to secular or modern education, which, in turn, leads to the continuation of illiteracy in society.

3. *Focus on Religious Education*

While religious education is important in some Islamic communities, if it is provided in isolation without attention to other fields of knowledge, it can lead to scientific and general illiteracy. This type of education may promote traditional, non-analytical thinking instead of fostering critical thinking (Khosrowshahi, 1992).

Iqbal's Social and Cultural Reforms: A Vision for the Muslim World

Influential people in the subcontinent during the British colonial period attempted, to some extent, to adapt to both internal and external changes, but unfortunately, this adaptation was superficial. There was little evidence of a profound intellectual reaction or a well-reasoned counter-response to Western approaches. Among them, Iqbal Lahori was the only one who, with open eyes and full awareness, confronted the West and the transformations of the modern world. At the same time, he succeeded in preserving Eastern spirituality alongside Western knowledge and arts. Iqbal's poetry is a result of this unique encounter.

قوت افرونگ از علم و فن است
از ہمیں آتش چراغش روشن است!

“The power of the West lies in science and craft;
from this very oil, its lamp is lit” (Iqbal, 2021, p. 54)

Clerics could resist social and cultural changes, preserving traditional values and old customs. This resistance could have hindered the eradication of illiteracy and ignorance in society, as Muslims in India were deeply influenced by these religious and spiritual leaders. Social changes are usually accompanied by an increase in awareness and education (Wasti, 1993). In some areas of India, clerics acted as political and social entities and might have continued to use illiteracy as a tool for social and political control. This could have led to the creation of a society where people, rather than participating actively, would simply conform to the views of the clerics. The role of religious fatwas in preventing or adopting technology in Islamic society is a complex and multidimensional issue that addresses the religious, social, and cultural impacts of modern

technologies. Fatwas, as official religious opinions from scholars, can significantly influence the community's attitudes and behaviors towards new technologies (Nodooshan, 1992, p. 62).

The Secret of the West's Progress and the Decline of Muslims

According to Iqbal (1982), the birth of modern reasoning (empirical reason) in the West was primarily the result of its willingness to follow the spirit of Muslim scholars during the Golden Age of Islam, who embraced the world of science with a positive mindset (p: 45). He believed that if Western thinkers had adhered to the scientific and philosophical traditions of their ancestors, they would have stayed frozen in the mode of thinking of the Greek philosophers, which emphasized theory, abstraction, and idealism over practice and reality (Meyer & Brysace, 2001). One of the main points Iqbal made regarding the Quran's focus on practice and reality was that, in his view, the cultures of Asia and the ancient world declined because they emphasized theory alone. However, Islamic culture survived and flourished because it emphasized experience and reality. As a critic of tradition, Iqbal emphasized the need to revise religious teachings and adapt them to the needs of the time. He believed that they should serve as a catalyst for social progress and development, not as an obstacle to innovation and change. This perspective led him to criticize some traditional interpretations of religion and to emphasize the need for religious reform (Belkacem, 2007).

Tahir & Shah (2024) noted that Iqbal also focused on the role of religion in politics and believed that religion should be a positive force for the service and development of society. He criticized religious scholars for focusing on the preservation of the status quo and ancient traditions instead of supporting positive changes. He argued that these so-called religious merchants used religion as fuel for their trade, with the less educated masses as their most vulnerable prey.

Conflict with Innovation

Often, *fatwas* conflicted with technological innovations, creating obstacles to the acceptance of new technologies. For example, *fatwa* were issued against the printing press, as well as against the use of cameras and electricity. These *fatwas* limited or even eliminated modern-day innovations and technologies that could have improved their lives. The sectors of communication, education, and health might have advanced by engaging Muslim youth, but these regressive and ill-conceived ideas set the Muslim world back by years in India.

تھے تو آبا وہ تمہارے ہی، مگر تم کیا ہو
ہاتھ پر ہاتھ دھرے منتظر فردا ہو!

“Your ancestors were truly great and exemplary, but what are you?

Sitting idle with folded hands, just waiting for tomorrow” (Iqbal, 2020, p. 32).

Differences in Interpretations

The diverse interpretations of religious teachings led to contradictory fatwas. This inconsistency created confusion within the community regarding the use of new technologies. As a result, most scholars in the Muslim world hesitated to take a clear stand, which led to disappointment among the younger generation. Over time, this disappointment turned into a habit, giving birth to ignorance. That ignorance, in turn, resulted in the division of Muslims in India into various factions and sects. This division created opportunities for the non-Muslim world to rise in influence—a trend that continues with the same intensity even today.

The Negative Role of *Fatwas* in the Adoption of Technology

According to Iqbal, negative fatwas were also among the root causes of the decline of Muslims—a fact recognized by past scholars and acknowledged by the new generation as well. Many of these fatwas were issued by scholars whose descendants, in direct contradiction to their forefathers, progressed, improved their economic conditions, aligned themselves with the ruling governments of the time, and gained worldly benefits. Meanwhile, the Muslim masses continued to sink into ignorance and economic dependency on foreigners. The revelation of this Dajjal was Iqbal's real talent, which the Muslim world could not understand (Saeedi, 1991).

سب کچھ اور ہے، تُو جس کو خود سمجھتا ہے
زوال بندہ مومن کا بے زری سے نہیں

“The reason is something else — not what you think it is;
the decline of a true believer is not due to lack of wealth” (Iqbal, 2017b)

The Role of Clerics in Maintaining Illiteracy

Clerics' influence in maintaining illiteracy in Islamic societies can be attributed to several factors, including the exploitation of ignorance, educational limitations, and resistance to social change. Metcaf (1964) states:

These elements help sustain illiteracy and ignorance, ultimately contributing to the preservation of clerical power and influence within these communities. The reluctance to embrace new educational paradigms, including technological advancements, can keep communities entrenched in traditional practices and limited in intellectual growth. (p. 32)

Iqbal's Critique of Islamic Policy in India

Allama Iqbal's critique of Islamic policy in India highlighted the challenges and issues Muslims faced in the country. As a philosopher and poet, Iqbal offered profound, critical insights into the situation of Muslims and the role of religion in politics and society. He stressed that the stagnation within the Muslim community, exacerbated by both external factors like colonialism and internal factors like religious orthodoxy, was a key barrier to progress. Iqbal called for a

renewal of intellectual, social, and spiritual engagement with both Islam and the modern world (Mangrio & Satti, 2024).

فقیر و شیخ و ملا را مدہ دست
مرو مانند مایی غافل از شست

“Do not extend your hand to the so-called jurist, sheikh, and mullahs;
don't go like a fish unaware of the fishing hook (Iqbal, 2024, p. 32)

Criticism of Muslim apathy

Iqbal strongly criticized the indifference and inertia of Muslims in the face of political and social challenges. He believed that Muslims should not passively accept the status quo but should strive to revive their Islamic identity and culture. In his poetry and writings, he emphasized the need to awaken Muslims and to build a free and self-sufficient society. He also regarded education as a vital weapon to counter both internal manipulation and external exploitation—a reality largely ignored by the majority.

Criticism of Colonial Policies

Iqbal also criticized colonial policies and their negative impact on the Muslims of India. He believed that the colonial powers exploited the internal weaknesses of the Muslim community to undermine their Islamic and cultural identity. In his works, Iqbal stressed the importance of unity among Muslims and the necessity of resisting colonialism through knowledge and intellectual renewal.

Emphasis on Religious Reforms

Iqbal argued that the birth of modern reason (empirical reasoning) was fundamentally the result of Western scholars' engagement with the Qur'an. If Western thinkers had adhered solely to the philosophical traditions of their predecessors, they would have embraced Greek philosophy, which emphasized theory, abstraction, and idealism over action and practicality. Iqbal noted that the decline of ancient cultures across Asia and the wider world occurred because they were centered solely around theory. In contrast, Islamic culture remained effective and enduring because it focused on experience and practical realities. Iqbal, as a critic of tradition, stressed the need for revisiting religious teachings and aligning them with the needs of the present time.

یہ علم و حکمت کی مہرہ بازی، یہ بحث و تکرار کی نمائش
نہیں ہے دنیا کو اب گوارا پُرانے افکار کی نمائش

“This trickery and playfulness of knowledge and wisdom, this frivolous display of debate and discussion;
the world no longer tolerates the exhibition of outdated thoughts” (Iqbal, 2017b, p. 29)

He believed that religion should be a dynamic force for social progress and development, rather than an impediment to innovation and change. This perspective led him to criticize certain traditional interpretations of religion and emphasize the necessity of religious reform.

The Role of Religion in Politics

Iqbal also paid attention to the role of religion in politics. He believed that religion should serve as a positive force for the welfare and progress of society. He criticized some religious scholars who, instead of supporting positive change, focused on preserving the old order and traditions. This approach, according to Iqbal, could weaken the power of Muslims and hinder their ability to confront new challenges.

Iqbal's Critiques of Islamic Policy in India

Iqbal's critiques of Islamic policy in India address the identity, social, and political challenges faced by Muslims in the country. By emphasizing the need for awakening, unity, and religious reform, Iqbal sought to create a strong and independent Islamic community that could stand firm against both internal and external challenges. His views and criticisms continue to be significant in contemporary discussions about religion and politics in Muslim societies.

Iqbal's Poetry and its Role in Promoting Literacy and Awareness

Iqbal's poetry serves as a source of inspiration and deep thought, playing an important role in promoting literacy and awareness in the Muslim world. Through his verses, he addressed themes such as self-awareness, the importance of knowledge and science, and the unity of Muslims—all of which can contribute to improving literacy and awareness in Islamic societies. His work remains a key tool for shaping intellectual and social movements within Muslim communities, advocating for education, enlightenment, and a progressive vision for the future.

One of the central themes in Iqbal's poetry is the concept of *khudi* (selfhood or self-awareness). He advises individuals to look inward and identify their potential. This self-awareness, Iqbal argues, can motivate people to pursue knowledge and education. He believes that by recognizing their innate abilities, individuals can be inspired to seek out learning and personal growth. For instance, in his famous lines:

خودی کو کر بلند اتنا کہ ہر تقدیر سے پہلے
خدا بندے سے خود پوچھے، بتا تیری رضا کیا ہے

“Raise your selfhood so high, that before every destiny,
God Himself will ask you, 'What is it that you desire?’” (Iqbal, 2002, p. 21)

This emphasizes the idea that one should raise themselves so high that even fate must ask, "What is your will?"—highlighting the connection between self-awareness and striving for knowledge and achievement. Iqbal explicitly stresses the importance of knowledge in his poetry,

seeing it as a tool for liberation from ignorance and illiteracy. He argues that through education, Muslims can attain independence and cultural identity and free themselves from the grasp of colonizers (Shadrwan, 1992: 87). His poetry often emphasizes that the pursuit of knowledge is essential for the revival of a strong, self-aware Muslim community. His message is clear:

خدا تجھے کسی طوفان سے آشنا کر دے
کہ تیرے بحر کی موجوں میں اضطراب نہیں
تجھے کتاب سے ممکن نہیں فراغ کہ تُو
کتاب خواں ہے مگر صاحبِ کتاب نہیں!

“May God acquaint you with a storm,
for there is no turmoil in the waves of your sea.
You cannot find peace through books alone,
because you are just a reader of book, not a doer of it” (Iqbal, 1919, p. 32)

Iqbal, as both a poet and thinker, consistently emphasized the necessity of unity among Muslims. He believed that through solidarity, Muslims could address their social and political challenges and make significant strides in scientific and cultural development. This unity, according to Iqbal, could help promote education and learning within the Muslim world. He called for a collective effort to uplift the community through education and intellectual growth. He frequently criticized the state of ignorance and illiteracy in the Muslim community, particularly under the impact of colonialism and feudal systems. He emphasized the urgent need for educational reforms to overcome these barriers. In his poetry, Iqbal urged Muslims to actively work toward improving educational conditions, reflecting his broader vision for societal advancement (Ashraf, 2019). The theme of awakening and the importance of education is pervasive in his works, urging society to reject ignorance in favour of intellectual and cultural rejuvenation.

While Iqbal's poetry served as a rallying call for literacy and awakening, he also identified specific internal and external causes that hindered the progress of Muslims. These causes explain why his call for knowledge and reform was so urgent.

Internal Factors

- 1. Lack of Proper Understanding of Religion:** Iqbal believed that one of the main causes of backwardness in the Muslim community was their lack of a proper and deep understanding of Islamic teachings. He argued that Muslims must achieve a true understanding of their religion so that they could use it as a driving force for progress and development. This emphasis on the need for intellectual engagement with the teachings of Islam resonates in many of his works (Aftab et al., 2022).

2. **Spirit of Fatalism:** Iqbal critiqued the spirit of fatalism and asceticism that prevailed among many Muslims of his time. He viewed this mindset as an obstacle to self-empowerment and growth. According to Iqbal, this mentality led Muslims to resign themselves to their fate, rather than actively working toward changing their circumstances. He advocated for a proactive approach to life and a rejection of passivity, believing that Muslims could shape their destiny through knowledge, action, and collective will (Aftab et al., 2022).
3. **Internal Tyranny:** Iqbal also criticized the internal despotism and lack of political freedom in Muslim societies. He believed that the absence of political and social liberties stifled initiative and creativity among Muslims. He urged the people to challenge these constraints in order to foster a spirit of action and innovation (Mangrio & Satti, 2024).

External Factors:

1. **Colonialism and Foreign Influence:** Iqbal was deeply critical of the effects of colonialism on Muslims. He argued that colonial powers exploited internal weaknesses within the Muslim community to undermine their Islamic and cultural identity, pushing them further into backwardness. He called for a return to the rich intellectual and spiritual heritage of Islam as a means of resisting colonial domination (Saleem et. al., 2023, p. 259).
2. **Social and Economic Disparities:** Iqbal also pointed to the social and economic problems faced by Muslims, which he believed were rooted in their limited access to education and economic opportunities. He stressed that Muslims needed to focus more on modern education and skill development to compete in the rapidly changing global world (Yasir, 2024, p. 29).

Necessity of Awakening and Reforms

Iqbal emphasized the necessity of awakening among Muslims and striving to revive their Islamic identity. He believed that Muslims needed to wake up from the slumber of negligence and, through a correct understanding of their religion and history, move towards progress and elevation. He also stressed the need for religious and social reforms so that Muslims could face new challenges and succeed in various fields (Iqbal, 1982, p. 67).

Iqbal's views on the reasons for the backwardness of Muslims in India delve deeply and critically into their social, political, and cultural situation. He emphasized the need for awakening, a correct understanding of religion, and social reforms to create a strong and independent Islamic community capable of standing up to both internal and external challenges. These views and critiques continue to hold significance in contemporary discussions regarding the status and challenges of Muslims (Telwani, 2019).

Impact of Iqbal's Ideas on the Social Movements of Muslims in the Subcontinent

The ideas of Allama Muhammad Iqbal have had a profound and widespread impact on the social movements of Muslims in India. As a poet-philosopher, Iqbal emphasized the importance of Islamic identity and the need for the awakening of Muslims. His thoughts played a significant role in shaping and strengthening social and political movements within the country. Iqbal's emphasis on the revival of Islamic identity was not just limited to individual or religious matters but was a social and political necessity for the Muslims of India. He believed that Muslims could only achieve progress and independence if they reclaimed their cultural and spiritual heritage. His poetic works and philosophical writings served as a call to action for the community to break free from social stagnation, intellectual paralysis, and political subjugation.

According to Shadrwan (1992), Iqbal, through his *Khudi* philosophy (Ego, selfhood or self-awareness philosophy), urged Muslims to regain self-confidence, unity, and a strong sense of purpose. His ideas resonated deeply with the social and political climate of British India, where Muslims were struggling to assert their political and cultural rights. Iqbal's thoughts were instrumental in the creation of Pakistan, as he inspired a movement towards a separate nation for Muslims, where they could live according to their religious and cultural values. His emphasis on unity, self-determination, and the importance of education continues to influence Islamic thought and social movements in the subcontinent today.

Thus, according to Masud (2017), Iqbal's ideas went beyond being theoretical or academic; they were a call to action that galvanized Muslims to actively engage in reforming their society, asserting their identity, and ultimately seeking independence. His legacy is still felt in the political and social discourse of the Muslim community in South Asia.

From Self-Discovery to Social Action: The Role of Islamic Identity in Community Revival

The revival of Islamic identity, according to Iqbal, was not merely an individual or religious issue but a social and political necessity for the salvation and progress of Muslims. Iqbal believed that true social awakening would occur when Muslims freed themselves from ignorance, division, and identity crisis. By returning to their Islamic roots, they could not only rebuild their society on an individual level but also on a social and political level, thereby achieving progress and excellence. Iqbal used both poetry and prose to call Muslims towards self-awareness and self-reliance. He positioned these concepts as a driving force for social and political awakening. By emphasizing the importance of education, he encouraged the formation of educational and cultural institutions among Muslims, which in turn contributed to their social awakening (Hussain, 2000)

In general, Allama Iqbal's ideas had a deep and widespread impact on the social movements of Muslims in India. Through his focus on Islamic identity, his philosophy of *Khudi* (selfhood), his critiques of tyranny and colonialism, and his call for social awakening, Iqbal helped strengthen the sense of unity and solidarity among Muslims. His thoughts played a key role in the formation

of social and political movements, contributing to the development of a cohesive Muslim identity (Fakhry, 1996).

His influence still resonates in contemporary debates about the identity and rights of Muslims in India. Iqbal's vision continues to inspire social and political activism in the region, making his ideas relevant in today's discussions about Muslim identity, education, and progress.

The Connection Between Self-Awareness and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Iqbal's Poetry

Iqbal believed that self-awareness is a prerequisite for knowledge and intellectual growth. In his poetry, he frequently emphasized that before one can acquire knowledge, one must first understand themselves (Seraj & Elahi, 2014). By recognizing one's inner potential and talents, a person can be motivated to pursue education. This self-awareness empowers individuals to set clear goals, identify their aspirations, and ultimately seek knowledge. Iqbal's insistence on self-awareness as the foundation for acquiring knowledge serves as a powerful message for personal and collective transformation. For him, self-realization was not just a personal journey but a key step in the larger process of societal progress. He believed that by fostering this awareness, individuals would be better equipped to contribute to the intellectual and spiritual revival of their communities.

Overall, Iqbal's philosophy of selfhood, coupled with his emphasis on education, laid the groundwork for a reawakening in the Muslim world, particularly in South Asia.

تو اگر طائر نہ اے ہوشمند
بر سر غار آشیان خود بند
اے کہ باشی در پے کسب علوم
با تو میگویم پیام پیر روم
”علم را بر تن زنی مارے بود
علم را بر دل زنی یارے بود“

If you are not a bird, O wise one, don't build your nest at the mouth of a cave. If you are in pursuit of knowledge, I tell you the message of the sage of Rome: 'When you wear knowledge on your body, it becomes like a serpent but when you wear it on your heart, It becomes a companion to acquire the destination (Iqbal, 1919, p. 43)

Through such verses, Iqbal illustrated that knowledge divorced from self-awareness is dangerous and deceptive, while knowledge rooted in the heart becomes transformative and life-giving. Building on this theme, Iqbal emphasized the role of knowledge in personal development.

Iqbal believed that knowledge and learning could contribute to both personal and social development. In his poetry, he emphasizes that through the acquisition of knowledge, an individual can attain a deeper self-awareness and transform into a complete human being. This growth, in turn, naturally contributed to social progress, since enlightened individuals would foster enlightened societies. As Hafez Shirazi of Iran states:

بیا تا گل برافشانیم و می در ساغر اندازیم
فلک را سقف بشکافیم و طرحی نو دراندازیم

“Come, let us scatter flowers and pour wine into the cup,
let us break the ceiling of the sky and create a new design” (Hafez, 2024, p. 374)

In these verses, Hafez, seven centuries ago, encouraged creativity, innovation, and bold imagination; qualities that are only possible through knowledge and self-awareness. He contrasted this with the stagnation produced by ignorance. Iqbal also criticizes ignorance and illiteracy in his poetry, believing that the lack of self-awareness and knowledge hinders the progress of both individuals and society. He argued that without knowledge, Muslims remained vulnerable to political domination and cultural decline. To overcome such challenges, he urged them to pursue both education and awareness as tools of empowerment. As Fakhry (1996) states:

In poetry, Iqbal emphasizes the social and political awakening of Muslims, presenting it as a necessity for the progress of Islamic societies. He believes that by increasing awareness and literacy, Muslims can address their social and political challenges and engage in the pursuit of knowledge. (p. 23)

Conclusion

From Allama Iqbal's perspective, the movement for a new life among the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent was a necessary step for the reconstruction and revival of their Islamic and social identity. Iqbal believed that the weakness and illiteracy among Muslims not only hindered their individual and social growth but also led to cultural and scientific decline. Therefore, he proposed solutions to address these issues, ultimately leading to a fundamental transformation in the Muslim community. He sought to create a new intellectual and spiritual system that would draw not only from Islamic teachings but also from the achievements and results of the West. He wanted Muslims to free themselves from the identity and intellectual crisis that had trapped them in ignorance and weakness, and to attain a new religious-scientific awareness capable of facing modern challenges.

In the end, the concept of self-awareness in Iqbal's poetry acts as a motivator for the acquisition of knowledge and learning. By emphasizing the importance of self-recognition and hidden potential, he inspires individuals to pursue knowledge and achieve personal and social growth. This profound connection between self-awareness and the pursuit of knowledge

strengthens Iqbal's message as a source of inspiration for future generations. The movement for new life, from Iqbal's perspective, signifies the revival of Islam in the modern world. To achieve this goal, Muslims of the subcontinent must prioritize education and knowledge, return to their identity, and step into a new intellectual and spiritual system, overcoming weaknesses and illiteracy. This transformation, through self-awareness, revisiting religious teachings, and utilizing scientific achievements, can guide the Muslim community from a state of weakness and stagnation toward progress and excellence.

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