

Iqbal's Philosophy and Muslim Education in the Postcolonial World

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Abstract

Allama Muhammad Iqbal was more than just a poet. He was a visionary and a philosopher; his ideology is still resonating even after 90 years after his death. His thoughts and work provide a complete framework on how we should use Quranic guidance to excel in all areas of life. One of the major areas he focuses on is education; its importance and role in shaping any society. This paper focuses on two aspects of Iqbal's educational philosophy: its conceptual breakdown and the application of this philosophy to our contemporary education system. Iqbal argues that since our entire system is derived from, and seen from the perspective of our colonizers, it is challenging for our youth to develop their own ideas and individuality. This is where Iqbal's concept of '*Khudi*' becomes relevant. The study explores the context in which Iqbal has used his philosophy of *Khudi*, and how it is relevant to our educational system and policies. As this is a qualitative study, comprehensive research and a survey were conducted of Iqbal's work through both print and online resources, primarily research articles, literary journals, and books. An analysis of the ideas presented therein concluded that Iqbal was in favor of a blended system of education, a combination of both worldly and spiritual education, rather than two isolated systems that fail in either aspect. Iqbal's vision places education as one of the major factors in our youth developing *Shaheen's* spirit and growing up to be wise and just leaders, possessing all the virtuous qualities that are preached by Islam.

Keywords: Iqbal, philosophy, contemporary education system, *Khudi*, individuality, spiritual education, *Shaheen*

As a thinker, visionary and philosopher, Allama Muhammad Iqbal's contribution in redefining the thoughts and recommending changes in our systems, keeping in line with Quran and Sunnah, cannot be ignored. There were a number of intellectuals in the 19th and 20th centuries, who worked to reform Islamic thought and beliefs, in line with the modern world. These philosophers were from the Middle East and South Asia, and their work was focused mainly on the problems of their respective regions. Unlike other poets and philosophers of his time, Iqbal focused not only on the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent but the entire Muslim Ummah as a whole (Telwani, 2019). Iqbal greatly admired the Golden Age of the Muslims, wherein Muslims made many great advancements and achievements in very diverse fields of knowledge.

Spanning over 6 centuries, the Golden Age of Islam saw a great rise in commerce, arts, and science, and laid the foundation for so many present-day inventions. However, with the Mongol invasion in the 14th century, many Muslims were brutally martyred, and a great number of ideas and books were lost forever. Hence, the economic and sociopolitical rise of western ideology began, and Muslims became more and more divided, which halted their progress in the scientific world (Bukhari & Ud-din, 2019)

Iqbal was not happy with the economic and political state of Muslims around the world. Hence, his philosophy greatly reflects his desire for Muslims to rise up as one and regain their lost glory.

پرے ہے چرخِ نیلی فام سے منزل مسلمان کی
ستارے جس کی گردِ راہ ہوں، وہ کارواں تو ہے

The goal of the Muslim lies beyond the blue sky;

You are the caravan, which the stars follow as dust on the road. (Iqbal, 1923a)

The importance of education in a person's character and personality is unmatched. It shapes a person's cognitive processes and enables one to make choices based on one's understanding. It is a means through which a people's culture spreads and is preserved. Each educational system has its own set of values, morals, and norms, which reflect the culture and thoughts of its society. Iqbal is very critical of the new generations, which have been brought up through an educational system which is against our values and culture, as Muslims. This upbringing is really detrimental to society as a whole, as the death of society is when its culture is slowly erased from the minds of the younger generation, and they start worshipping and admiring a society that is against Islamic values (Ahmad, 1961). This is one of the issues that Iqbal has addressed in his educational philosophy and his concept of *khudi*.

علم غیر آموختی اندوختی
روئے خویش از غازہ اش افروختی

You have learnt and amassed knowledge of others

and brightened your face with rouge borrowed from others (Iqbal, 1918a)

It is important to mention here the impact of colonialism on Muslim education. Due to colonization, education was divided between the elite and the lower classes. In all parts of the Muslim world, colonizers introduced schools prioritizing their language and their ideologies. These schools were then open for a very small part of the population, such that they could only be afforded by the upper class. This made Western education a status symbol, and therefore, the educational system at the time was put aside, as these schools became more popular and common (Tan, 2017). While some countries, e.g. Turkey under the leadership of Mustafa Ataturk succeeded in reforming their education system (Arnove, 2023), others were not so successful, the result of which is visible today.

The paper will be in two parts. The first part will expand on Iqbal's philosophy regarding education, and the relevance of his ideas in today's world. This will present an in-depth discussion of Iqbal's thoughts and verses on education. In addition, it will also include Iqbal's interpretation of *khudi*, and the relevance of this concept to Muslim youth today, along with its connection to Iqbal's philosophy of education. The second part will focus more on the application of Iqbal's educational philosophy in the contemporary world. It explains and analyzes the contemporary education system, detailing the areas where it fails, and does not align with our beliefs as Muslims. Furthermore, it also highlights a system which takes Iqbal's philosophy into account and focuses more on the holistic development of our youth; in both

worldly and religious areas, shaping them into young adults who can take charge of the Muslim Ummah and redefine the narrative.

Iqbal's Educational Philosophy

Education is the process of teaching, training and learning, to improve one's knowledge and skills (Oxford Dictionary, 2022). Essentially, the giving, and gaining of knowledge is said to be the spirit of education. The word comes from the Latin, *Educere*, which means to lead or draw out. Therefore, education is the process of bringing out one's inner talents and honing them to their maximum potential.

Iqbal understands the intricacies of the human mind, and the desire to discover all that is not known to it. The human mind absorbs information and knowledge from its surroundings and learns through experiences. Education is merely the process which aids in this search for knowledge. According to Iqbal, education should develop one's personality through hands-on activities and experiences, in order to awaken one's originality and creativity (Telwani, 2019).

علم	از	سامان	حفظ	زندگی	است	
علم	از	اسباب	تقویم	خودی	است	
علم	و	فن	از	پیش	خیزان	حیات
علم	و	فن	از	خانہ	زادان	حیات

Knowledge is an instrument for the preservation of life;
Knowledge is a means of establishing the self
Science and Art are servants of life.
Slaves born and bred in its house (Iqbal, 1915)

Keeping in mind Iqbal's distaste for Western ideology, and his thoughts regarding the condition of the Muslims of the 20th century, he believed that intellectual education should inspire curiosity, and make the learner question everything that he/she sees (Khanum, 1977). By extension, one should not succumb to the temptations of this world, but instead, he should learn to think for himself, and have good control over his body, mind, heart, and soul. This is directly in line with the teachings of the Quran: this world is merely an illusion, and a believer should not get lost in the apparent charm of it, but rather remember their purpose in this life, and their final goal: Jannah. (Farooqi)

Iqbal stresses the importance of education being used to develop a humanistic perspective in the youth. In order to ensure that Muslims do not get lost in our search for material comfort and worldly power, but rather seek happiness in our spiritual selves, it is necessary to stay connected to one's roots and religion. Iqbal very clearly mentioned in an address to students at a conference held at Cambridge in 1931:

The biggest blunder made by Europe was the separation of church and state. This deprived of culture, moral, soul and diverted atheistic materialism; The Western people become human machines which possess motion without sincerity, life without emotions, and heart without feelings (*Allama Iqbal - Biography - Text*, n.d.-b).

This clearly shows the importance and need for religion or spiritual connectivity in a human, and Iqbal agrees that it is necessary to have the youth realize this at a very young age. Hence, education should focus on connecting to one's roots and religion.

Iqbal's writings and speeches clearly indicate that he does not endorse adaptation of any kind from other cultures. Rather, he believes that each culture has its own set of problems, norms and aspirations, so the system of education should focus on solving those problems and inculcating those norms and behaviors in youth. Iqbal said, before leaving for Afghanistan for the educational planning of the country in 1933,

Personally, I believe that the complete secularization of education has not produced good results. Nor is there any absolute system of education. Each county has its own needs and its educational problems must be solved in the light of those needs. (Masoodi, 2007, p. 80).

Iqbal believed that the education system of a country should reflect its culture and its values. Hence, it should instil in a person the beliefs and ideologies of his society. The educational system of a nation should preserve and cultivate the culture of that nation (Telwani, 2019). He believed that in order to keep alive one's culture, it should be continuously reiterated in the community. Hence, it will decrease the chances of the traditions being contaminated and tainted by outside influences. The Muslims of the subcontinent were inspired, and influenced, by the ideologies of the West, and hence, ignored their own values and history and gave preference to that of the West (Khanum, 1977). Iqbal reasoned that if a person does not appreciate one's own roots, then they would lose their spark of individuality and creativity that sets them apart as Muslims.

بے ہنر داں نزد بے دیں ہم قلم ہم تیغ را
نبا شد دیں نبا شد کلک و آہن را شن

For the man without faith, the pen and the sword are alike worthless;
When faith has departed, wood and iron lose their value (Iqbal, 1932a)

Iqbal believed that the primary purpose of education should be to develop this sense of Self or Individuality in oneself so that a Muslim does not get trapped in the beauties of this world, but rather stands tall in the face of adversity. Iqbal emphasized the idea of education that inspired creativity and curiosity, which refined the human identity; not stamping it out (Telwani, 2019).

کوه چون از خود رود صحرا شود
شکوه سنج جوشش دریا شود
موج تا موج است در غوش بحر
می کند خود را سوار دوش بحر

When the mountain loses its self, it turns into sands
And complains that the sea surges over it;

The wave, so long as it remains a wave in the sea's bosom,
Makes itself rider on the sea's back. (1978a)

Khudi

Khudi, or Self, is the focal point of Iqbal's philosophy. In its essence, '*khudi*' is the realization of one's value and self-worth, and to be one's own person, free from external influences. Iqbal's idea of individuality or 'ego' was quite different from other philosophers before him. Previous philosophers felt that the ultimate aim of man was to become one with nature and merge his identity with the invisible forces of the world. Therefore, he may not be known by his achievements, but rather by what he represents: the whole picture (Garcia, 2021).

Iqbal rejected this view and emphasized the importance of developing *khudi*: the awareness of one's existence, purpose, and reality (Saiyidain, 1993). He presented this idea initially in his Persian *masnavi*, *Asrar-e-Khudi* in 1915. According to him, no institution should prioritize any aim over strengthening the Self, as insight into one's own personality is what leads man to do greater things.

Iqbal was very critical of the admiration that Muslims had for the West and their traditions. He condemned the idea of imitation, as it led to nothing except one's individuality being crushed. Especially in the field of education, it is necessary to learn and seek knowledge from other cultures. However, this can very easily lead to one's own culture being overshadowed and destroyed.

تقلید سے ناکارہ نہ کر اپنی خودی کو
کر اس کی حفاظت کہ یہ گوہر ہے یگانہ

Don't spoil your *khudi* through imitation of others,
Protect it, for it is of incomparable worth. (Iqbal, 1936a)

From his analysis of the downfall of the Muslims beginning in the 14th century, he reasoned that due to the immense changes in the social and political world order, Muslims had stopped their research into scientific and technological advancements. From there on, inter-sect arguments and squabbles drew them further apart and Muslims made no further notable contributions to scientific thought (Bukhari & Ud-din, 2019). Muslims began to passively follow Western traditions and lost their perspectives.

ز خاک خویش طلب آتشے کہ پیدا نیست
تجلی دگرے در خور تقاضا نیست

Look into thy own clay for the fire that is lacking
The light of another is not worth striving for (Iqbal, 1923b)

This is where Iqbal emphasizes the idea of *khudi* on both individual and societal levels. He urges the importance of each Muslim youth realizing their role in society and rising up to the task of leading the Muslim Ummah out of their dormant state.

At the same time, he was greatly concerned by the fact that present-day Muslims, although engaging in all the practices of Islam, had lost their spiritual connection with the

Creator, which in-turn resulted in their present condition. Hence, he was of the opinion that Muslims, on the whole, should relearn and adopt their own traditions and cultures, in line with Islamic teachings, and form their own perspectives on things, rather than idolize Western ideologies.

زنده فرد از ارتباط جان و تن
 زنده قوم از حفظ ناموس کهن
 مرگ فرد از خشکی رود حیات
 مرگ قوم از ترک مقصود حیات

Life of the individual depends on the relationship of the body and the soul
 The life of the nation depends on the preservation of its tradition and culture.
 Individual dies if the life-flow ceases
 The nation dies if the ideal of life is spurned. (Iqbal, 1918b)

Iqbal explains that to strengthen oneself, we must work on integrating the Divine attributes in ourselves. He gives the example of sheep: following the crowd and not following our own opinions and ideas leads to us, as the Muslim Ummah becoming docile and obedient, which is a huge weakness. It allows anyone and everyone to walk over us and keeps us chained in their ideologies. Instead, one should learn to think and make decisions for oneself, so that one can be assertive and stand up for one's rights (Garcia, 2021).

Factors that Strengthen *Khudi*

Individuality is a creative process which requires a man's conscious active participation in order to fully develop it. Iqbal has outlined several factors that strengthen the Self, and if worked upon, the individual can become a master of one's ego.

Desire:

Iqbal places great emphasis on desire as a quality that is necessary for the development of *khudi*. An individual that is lacking in desire is all but alive (Hassan, 1976). Iqbal has referred to desire by many names in his works, *suz*, *hasrat*, *justuju*, *arzu*, among others.

دل ز سوز آرزو گیرد حیات
 غیر حق میرد چو او گیرد حیات

From the flame of desire, the heart takes life,
 And when it takes life, all dies, that is not true. (Iqbal, 1978b)

He is of the opinion that desire is a creative power that keeps a man striving regardless of whether it is fulfilled or not.

Love

Iqbal's philosophy is essentially a philosophy of love. He talks about love in its purest form; *ishq e haqiqi* (divine love). Hence, his conception of love differs from that which is commonly found in Urdu and Persian poetry. It does not, in any way, endorse losing oneself to

get closer to the beloved. Iqbal presents love as a powerful elixir, an intrinsic value that leads to the fulfilment of human destiny, as well as one's purpose of creation.

Faqr

Iqbal uses '*faqr*' to refer to a sense of detachment with regard to the material world. It does not turn one away from the world as a source of evil but rather is instrumental in creating a balance between worldly institutions and Islam (Hassan, 1976).

Tolerance

Iqbal is very clear that tolerance for other people's views, opinions and mannerisms is very important for any individual in any capacity. He believes in tolerance born out of strength of character, not weakness. This idea is linked with forgiveness. When one is tolerant, one will naturally have a more forgiving attitude.

آدمیت احترام آدمی
باخبر شو از مقام آدمی

What is "*Admiyat*"? Respect for man!

Learn to appreciate the true worth of man; (Iqbal, 1932b)

Contemporary Education System

Iqbal has put great emphasis on studying religion, modern sciences and art side by side, so as to holistically develop individuals with a strong sense of *khudi*. However, in today's education system, either of them is compromised. Oftentimes, religious studies are pushed to the side, and priority is given to studying worldly subjects. Iqbal does not condemn gaining scientific knowledge; however, he believes that it is only ever useful if applied alongside religion.

Schooling System

One of the major problems with today's schooling system is that it is taken from the West. Students are given ample freedom to grow without any external influences shaping their thoughts and perceptions. This concept of 'free thinking' became wildly popular in the United States, and later spread to other parts of the world, including the Indian Subcontinent.

The ideological neutrality of education is very detrimental to cultural growth. It does not instill moral values into the youth, but rather, leaves them free to think and do as they please, making all behavior acceptable. Secondly, this kind of education results only in the superficial gaining of knowledge, which is not useful in application to everyday life. Most of what is taught in schools is irrelevant to practical life, and therefore serves no real purpose other than exhausting the students' learning capacity with formulae and theories. This results in educated individuals being unable to cope with daily life, as such things were never taught to them in the first place. In turn, this creates a generation of individuals too focused on navigating their way through everyday life, rather than working on improving their, and the nation's standards of living (Ahmad, 2022).

In addition, the system decreed by the West results in the youth being conditioned to accept themselves as inferior to those who designed the system. When the entire curriculum and syllabi are from the point of view of foreigners, then students learn through their perspective, and therefore, lose sight of their own identity and purpose in life. They start accepting their values and ideas and view their own personality as shameful and weak.

اغیار کے افکار و تخیل کی گدائی
کیا تجھ کو نہیں اپنی خودی تک بھی رسائی؟

You beg and borrow the thoughts and concerns of others
Do you not even have access to your own Self? (Iqbal, 1936b)

Most of our history and culture are taught to us from an outsider's perspective, and little to no religious education is given, leaving no space for ideas to be grounded, which is counterproductive for our culture and values as Muslims.

Iqbal believes that the current schooling system destroys the students' thought process, making them focus only on grades, rather than learning and exploration. This leaves them unable to discover the true meaning of life, and appreciate the little things.

کیا ہے تجھ کو کتابوں نے کور ذوق اتنا
صبا سے بھی نہ ملا تجھ کو بوئے گل کا سراغ!

The books have marred your taste and zest to such a great extent
The morning breeze has failed to give you the clue of rose and its scent!(Iqbal, 1936c)

Madrassah System

The madrassah system is entirely detached from the schooling system. Where one gives only worldly education, the other focuses solely on providing religious education to students. Madrassahs teach religious education, along with lessons from the Quran, beliefs and about further religious books.

While this system is efficient in making youth well-versed in matters of religion: something that is of utmost importance for today's young Muslims, it has several drawbacks. Firstly, relatively few students are enrolled in madrassahs, as compared to schools. Parents, especially in urban areas, prefer their children to go to school, as compared to madrassah (Naeem, 2022). This already shows the lack of individuality: there is no pride to be taken in learning about one's religion.

تھا جہاں مدرسہ شیری و شاہنشاہی
آج ان خانقہوں میں ہے فقط روباہی

The madrassa, once the rearing place of daring men and royal breed,
Alas! Now nothing else impart—To foxy ways they pay much heed. (Iqbal, 1935a)

Secondly, madrassah education focuses solely on religious education. Very few madrassahs teach other subjects, such as mathematics, sciences, literature, etc., side by side,

and those that do face a lack of experienced teachers in those subject areas. This results in worldly and religious education being mutually exclusive, and students benefiting from one, or the other. While both sides of the equation are important, it is necessary to ensure a balance between the two, in order to raise holistic individuals with a deep understanding of their role within this world and the next.

Proposed education system considering Iqbal's philosophy

Iqbal rejected stereotyped methods of teaching which give no space for thinking. He favoured methods of self-activity and learning by doing, methods which confront the student with new situations and problems, compelling them to work purposefully and to learn to overcome their difficulties on their own. This brings us to the first point of our proposed education system: one that is less focused on rote learning and standardized tests, but rather, showcases opportunities to develop critical thinking skills through hands-on activities (Telwani, 2019). Each child is different and unique, and the role of education should be to bring out those talents. Hence, rote learning can only do so much in developing an individual's *khudi*.

شیخ مکتب کے طریقوں سے کشادہ دل کہاں
کس طرح کبریت سے روشن ہو بجلی کا چراغ!

The conventional teaching does not expand the heart.

How can a matchstick light an electric lamp? (Iqbal, 1936d)

Secondly, Iqbal emphasizes education through observation. An individual will only learn about his surroundings if he observes and interacts with his environment. Part of the process of developing *khudi* is to become aware of what the universe holds and find one's role in this world. Iqbal says:

کھول آنکھ، زمیں دیکھ، فلک دیکھ، فضا دیکھ
مشرق سے ابھرتے ہوئے سورج کو ذرا دیکھ

Open the eyes look at the earth and sky

Look at the sun, rising gloriously in the east (Iqbal, 1935b)

A major fault of the contemporary education system is that it separates the madrassah and school teachings. To counter that, it is recommended that a single curriculum should be formed, based on the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, which merges both systems into one. This will not only not divide the students into two areas, each lacking in the other, but also allow students to learn holistically and make connections between the two areas, in order to balance the worldly and religious life. This will also enable the students to learn about themselves, and their surroundings in the light of science and religion, and hence, lead them to discover their Self: the ultimate aim of education in itself.

Furthermore, the curriculum needs to focus more on exploration and learning by experience, in order to raise scholars with good knowledge and practice in handling day-to-day affairs, rather than a bookworm, who only knows what is written in books and cannot apply it anywhere else.

بندۂ تخمین و ظن! کرم کتابی نہ بن

O slave of calculation! do not be a bookworm (Iqbal, 1936e)

Conclusion

Iqbal was greatly concerned for the state of Muslims around the world. His educational philosophy reflects the need of the hour: educate our youth in both worldly and religious matters so that they become aware of their Self and their individuality. He outlines the factors that affect the *khudi*, and the qualities that should be targeted and improved during the education process. He is highly critical of both the Western and the traditional Islamic systems, as both of them have very narrow approaches to teaching. This hinders a child's learning process and does not allow him to hone the abilities and qualities required to develop the *khudi*. A proposed system that combines both existing systems, along with allowing children to expand their creative horizons, could potentially create a sense of reflection in our youth. This self-realization and reflection are what create a strong individual and Muslim, which is invaluable in restoring the Muslim Ummah to its previous glory.

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