

## **Revisiting Iqbal's *Tawhīdic* Humanism: Overcoming Sectarianism and Intellectual Stagnation through the Revival of *Khudi* and *Tulu'-e Islam***

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### **Abstract**

The contemporary Muslim world faces a profound crisis of unity, identity, and intellectual vitality. Sectarian fragmentation, ideological polarization, and spiritual stagnation have undermined the Tawhīdic vision that once animated Islamic civilization. This article reinterprets Allama Muhammad Iqbal's Tawhīdic humanism, a philosophical synthesis rooted in the metaphysical principle of divine unity as a constructive response to these modern challenges. Through a critical textual analysis of Iqbal's seminal works, including *Asrār-i Khudi* and *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, the study argues that Iqbal's triadic vision of *Tawhīd* (unity of being), *Khudi* (creative selfhood), and *Tulu'-e-Islam* (civilizational revival) offers a coherent framework for overcoming sectarianism and epistemic paralysis. Iqbal conceives human individuality as a dynamic locus of divine creativity, one that unites metaphysical depth with moral agency. His philosophy resists both atomistic modernity and passive traditionalism, calling instead for a spiritually grounded reconstruction of thought and society. By reasserting *Tawhīd* as both an ontological and ethical principle, the paper demonstrates how Iqbal's vision can reawaken collective consciousness and restore moral coherence in a fragmented world. Ultimately, *Tawhīdic* humanism emerges as a living paradigm for intellectual and civilizational renewal in the twenty-first century.

### **Keywords:**

Iqbal, *Tawhīd*, *Khudi*, *Tulu'-e Islam*, Muslim Unity, Sectarianism, Intellectual Stagnation, *Tawhīdic* Humanism

## 1. Introduction

The global Muslim community today finds itself confronted by a multifaceted crisis of unity, meaning, and intellectual vitality. In many parts of the Muslim-majority world the promise of a dynamic civilizational future has given way to fragmentation, institutional inertia, and a sense of epistemic dependency on Western modes of knowledge. This crisis of disunity appears in many forms: politico-sectarian conflict, competition among ethno-linguistic identities, and ideological polarization between modernist and traditionalist camps. For instance, in his study of Muslim unity, Maruf observes that for the South Asian context, Muhammad Iqbal characterized the Muslim condition as one “bound to rise against the acquisitive economy the West has developed and imposed on the nations of the East,” yet he lamented that Muslims remain deeply divided along ethnic, sectarian and linguistic lines.<sup>(1)</sup> In parallel, the intellectual realm has suffered stagnation: the decline of independent *ijtihad*, over-reliance on inherited jurisprudential or theological frameworks (*taqlid*), and a hesitation to engage creatively with modern science, philosophy and culture. In a recent article, scholars note that Iqbal regarded *taqlid* as a critical factor in the decline of Islamic civilization and its marginalization in the modern world.<sup>(2)</sup> In addition, the epistemic dependency on Western thought has meant that Muslim intellectuals often operate within paradigms developed elsewhere, rather than articulating frameworks rooted in indigenous metaphysical and ethical traditions. This intellectual passivity exacerbates communal division, since without a shared moral-philosophical horizon, sectarian and ideological fissures deepen. Hence the twin problems to be addressed are (i) the fragmentation of Muslim unity political, sectarian and epistemic and (ii) the stagnation of Muslim intellectual agency in the face of modernity, colonial legacy and global knowledge regimes. The philosophical project of Allama Iqbal offers promising resources for addressing both.

### 1.1 Research Questions

This study asks: Can Iqbal’s metaphysical humanism offer a universal model for contemporary Islamic reform? By “metaphysical humanism” mean Iqbal’s integration of the doctrine of *Tawhīd* (Divine Unity) with a dynamic anthropology of self-realization (*Khudī*) and civilizational renewal (*Tulu‘-e-Islām*). Specifically, the research investigates how his thought might (a) respond to sectarian and ideological fragmentation and (b) enable renewed intellectual agency for the Muslim world.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

Accordingly, the objectives of this research are:

1. To evaluate Iqbal's response to modernity, coloniality and sectarianism, how he diagnoses the problems and proposes renewal.
2. To interpret how Iqbal's metaphysical humanism (*Tawhīd + Khudī + Tulu'-e-Islām*) functions as a philosophical-theological framework for unity and intellectual revival.
3. To assess the contemporary relevance of Iqbal's framework for Muslim intellectuals and reform movements grappling with fragmentation, epistemic dependence and stagnation.

## 1.3 Significance of the Study

This study holds significance on three levels: It bridges metaphysics and ethics in Iqbal's thought by showing how his doctrine of *Tawhīd* undergirds a humanism in which the individual self (*Khudī*) is empowered ethically and metaphysically. Recent scholarship underscores Iqbal's attempt to elevate the human ego into a site of creative engagement without severing it from Divine Reality.(3) It offers a revivalist reading of *Tawhīd* that moves beyond mere sectarian claims to unity. Rather than treating *Tawhīd* simply as creedal affirmation, Iqbal treats it as the ontological foundation for human and social renewal unity does not mean uniformity but a shared metaphysical orientation. For example, an article on "Unity of the Muslim World" emphasizes Iqbal's call for a community free of ethnic, sectarian and linguistic divisions.(4) The study frames Iqbal as a resource for unity and intellectual liberation: his critique of *taqlīd*, his encouragement of creative *ijtihād* and his synthesis of tradition and modernity are particularly relevant in Muslim societies striving for renewal in the 21st century. His call for Muslims to sink into her own deeper self as a prerequisite for collective regeneration signals an inward-outward trajectory of reform.(5)

By engaging Iqbal's metaphysical humanism in this triple-dimensional way, the present study aims to contribute both to Iqbal scholarship and to broader debates on Muslim unity, intellectual revival and reform in contemporary Islam.

## 2. Literature Review

At the very root of Islamic philosophical-theological discourse lies the doctrine of *Kalam* (Islamic theology) and the concept of *Tawhīd* (Divine Unity). *Tawhīd* is not merely a creedal formula but forms the epistemological foundation of the Islamic worldview: it asserts that reality is essentially one, stemming from

the one Creator, and therefore knowledge, ethics and ontology must reflect this unity. A recent study argues that Tawḥīd constitutes “a universal basis for appreciating all cultural streams and disciplines” because it resists the fragmentation of knowledge typical in modern Western epistemology.<sup>(6)</sup> In Qur’anic exegesis the various verses emphasise God’s exclusive lordship, creative action and final purposiveness, thereby rejecting any view of reality as autonomous from divine agency.<sup>(7)</sup> In classical Islamic philosophical discourse, this unity has been interpreted through notions such as Waḥdat al-Wujūd (unity of being) in the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters, and also through the theological-epistemic frameworks of the Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (Ash‘arite) and Abū Ma‘shar al-Māturīdī (Māturīdī) traditions. While al-Ghazālī rejected pantheistic interpretations of unity, he emphasised that the causal nexus in nature depends on divine will rather than inherent powers.<sup>(8)</sup> The Ash‘arite/Māturīdī schools developed a theology in which cause and effect are contingent upon God’s act, thereby eschewing a deterministic metaphysics of autonomous natural powers. Thus, the classical foundations present three interlinked components: (i) a metaphysical unity (Tawḥīd) which undergirds ontology; (ii) an epistemological stance that knowledge must reflect divine reality; and (iii) a theological rejection of autonomous causality, thereby preserving God’s primacy in all change and existence.

In the modern era, scholars have turned their attention to Muhammad Iqbal as a major interlocutor between classical thought and modern intellectual challenges. Key interpreters include Annemarie Schimmel, M. Saeed Sheikh, Fazlur Rahman, Charles Adams, R.A. Nicholson, Afzal Iqbal, K.G. Saiyidain, and Javed Iqbal. Their works examine Iqbal’s poetic-philosophical corpus, his re-engagement with Sufism, his critique of Western rationalism, and his call for revival in the Muslim world.<sup>(9)</sup> More recent scholarship emphasises Iqbal’s metaphysics and “reconstruction” of religious thought. For example, an article analysing Iqbal’s *Asrār-i Khudī* argues that Iqbal provides an ontological, epistemological and axiological model for Islamic education rooted in self-realisation and dynamic ijtihād.<sup>(10)</sup> Another study traces Iqbal’s vision of God-knowledge as “the highest stage of religious life”, reading him as integrating mysticism, science and metaphysics in a way that resists Kantian limits on knowledge of the noumenal.<sup>(11)</sup> A recent monograph on Iqbal’s poetic vision and metaphysics situates him in conversation with process philosophy and Islamic theology of

becoming.(12) These modern developments underscore that Iqbal's thought is not simply revivalist nostalgia, but intends a rigorous philosophical framework in which *Tawḥīd* (Divine Unity), *Khudī* (selfhood) and *Tulu'-e-Islām* (the dawn of Islam) converge. Scholars highlight his creativity in engaging both tradition (Sufi-metaphysical heritage) and modernity (science, Western philosophy) to craft a Muslim intellectual response.

### 2.1 Gaps in Research

Despite extensive scholarship on Iqbal, notable gaps persist. First, few studies integrate his doctrine of *Tawḥīd* with *Khudī* and *Tulu'-e-Islām* into a unified metaphysical-ethical framework; most treat these concepts separately or focus narrowly on poetic expression. Second, while Iqbal's critique of *taqlīd*, disunity, and intellectual stagnation is well recognized, his thought is seldom examined as a direct philosophical response to sectarianism, ideological fragmentation, and epistemic dependence on Western paradigms. Third, in the context of the digital and postmodern age, little effort has been made to reinterpret his metaphysics of becoming unity-oriented vision for issues such as digital epistemology, artificial intelligence, and social media culture. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by situating Iqbal's metaphysical humanism as a living framework for intellectual and spiritual reform in the contemporary Muslim world.

## 3. Analysis and Discussion

### 3.1 *Tawḥīd* as Metaphysical Ground of Unity

At the core of Muhammad Iqbal's thought lies the doctrine of *Tawḥīd*, not only a theological assertion of God's oneness, but a metaphysical and ethical principle with profound implications for individual, societal, and civilizational unity. Iqbal's vision treats *Tawḥīd* both cosmologically and ethically. Cosmologically, it affirms that all existence participates in a single divine Reality, which undermines dualism between Creator and creation as well as mechanistic naturalism. Ethically, *Tawḥīd* becomes the basis for human solidarity and moral agency.

In juxtaposing *Tawḥīd* to mechanistic materialism and dualistic ontology, Iqbal critiques the modern notion of nature as an autonomous system of cause and effect detached from divine will. For instance, in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* Iqbal emphasises that everything in the universe is ultimately the "subject of His (God's) calm will", rejecting the idea of natural forces as independent powers.(13) This metaphysical orientation has direct

ethical consequences: if all beings are grounded in a single divine source, then the fragmentation of society, through sectarianism, nationalism or ideological polarization, contradicts the ontological unity of existence. As noted in recent scholarship: Iqbal's political philosophy is mainly inspired by the Islamic concept of *Tawḥīd*... his reflections on the unity of life, the unity of the Islamic ummah, and the unity of humanity ... strike the root of secularism and nationalism.(14)

Iqbal stresses unity as creative dynamism rather than static conformity. He does not call for a homogenised community devoid of individual difference; rather, he envisions a community of creative selves whose unity is rooted in their shared orientation toward the Divine. This distinguishes his notion of unity from mere institutional uniformity. His philosophical anthropology of *Khudī* (selfhood) depends on this metaphysical ground: the self realises itself by recognising its participation in the divine Unity and hence acts ethically in relation to others. In this way, *Tawḥīd* becomes the metaphysical ground for unity, the foundation of ethical individualism and collective regeneration.

### **3.2 Revival through *Khudī*: The Empowered Self**

Iqbal's concept of *Khudī* occupies the central place in his philosophy of revival. He reconceives the self, not as a passive ego but as a dynamic, creative center of consciousness that realizes divine attributes within the human being.(15) *Khudī* is the spiritual axis of individuality and divine realization: "the ego that recognizes its source in the Absolute and strives for its realization in freedom and action" (paraphrase).(16)

Crucially, Iqbal distinguishes between egoism and self-affirmation. Egoism (*nafs al-ammāra*) is the self-enslaved by sensuality and external forces, whereas *Khudī* is the self-awakened to its origin and purpose. In his poetry and prose, Iqbal asserts that genuine selfhood "must rise above dependence, imitation and passivity," and become architect of one's destiny through conscious will.(17) Recent studies explicate how Iqbal's *Khudī* functions as an antidote to colonial subjectivity and epistemic dependency. For example, "Decolonization and Selfhood: Comparative Reflections on Iqbal's *Khudī* and Fanon's Revolutionary Consciousness" argues that Iqbal recovers Muslim self-agency in face of Western dominance.(18)

On the application level, *Khudī* becomes a means to rebuild Muslim intellectual confidence and moral autonomy. In contexts

where *taqlīd* (blind imitation), ritualism or intellectual passivity prevail, Iqbal's call to awaken *Khudī* challenges the inherited-only status of knowledge and invites creative *ijtihād*. Jannataini argue that Iqbal's educational paradigm in *Asrār-i Khudī* offers an ontological-epistemological framework for intellectual revival, not mere vocational training.(19) By embracing *Khudī*, Muslim thinkers and communities can re-position themselves as subjects of knowledge and agents of renewal rather than objects of Western epistemic dominance.

### 3.3 *Tulu 'e-Islām*: The Dawn of Civilisational Renewal

Iqbal's concept of *Tulu 'e-Islām* (the Rise or Dawn of Islam) functions as a poetic-prophetic call for civilizational renewal. He envisages a spiritual and ethical rebirth of the Muslim world, grounded not in political nationalism alone but in inner transformation. He famously wrote: "*Aik hon Muslim Haram ki pasbani ke liye*" ("Let Muslims be united for the guardianship of the sanctuary") symbolic of a community awakened to its mission.(20)

*Tulu 'e-Islām* is thus eschatological in metaphor: it anticipates a dawn in which Muslim societies reclaim moral and intellectual vitality, overcome colonial and materialist worldviews, and emerge as bearers of universal values. This renewal depends heavily on education and *ijtihād*. Iqbal emphasises that the "Muslim mind must return to its own self condition, must rise above imitation and docility, and must engage the world with creative reason."(21) The role of intellectual courage, willingness to reinterpret tradition, and educational reform are all part of this dawn.

Moreover, recent scholarship highlights Iqbal's integrative approach: as noted in *Bridging East and West: The Life, Philosophy, and Poetic Legacy of Mohammad Iqbal*, his framework draws on both Eastern Sufi metaphysics and Western philosophical currents, allowing *Tulu 'e-Islām* to speak to universal and particular renewal simultaneously.<sup>10</sup> In this way, civilizational renewal is realized through the empowerment of selves (*Khudī*) grounded in *Tawḥīd* and engaged in ethical action.

### 3.4 Overcoming Sectarianism and Intellectual Stagnation

A pressing problem in much of the Muslim world is sectarianism (*Sunni-Shī'a* divide; modernist-traditionalist polarities) and intellectual stagnation characterized by *taqlīd* and epistemic dependency on Western frameworks. Iqbal diagnoses the root causes as dogmatism, ritualism and simulation of Western paradigms, rather than independent engagement of Muslim intellectual tradition.(22)

He warns: “The tree of sectarianism bears the fruit of prejudice, which drives humanity away from the Garden.”(23)

Applying Iqbal’s concepts allows us to transcend institutional or sectarian unity (which often collapses into mere group identity) by focusing on unity through spiritual orientation rather than uniform conformity. Tawhīd offers the ontological ground; *Khudī* provides the empowered subject; *Tulu‘-e-Islām* gives the civilizational horizon. Unity, then, is not institutional mimicry but a shared orientation towards the Divine that enables genuine diversity within a unified spiritual community. Maruf’s recent article on “Unity of the Muslim World” emphasizes this trend: Without the fullest national autonomy it is extraordinarily difficult to create the international state ... the Muslim world should learn to rise above all ethnic, sectarian and linguistic schisms till ... the level nothing short of humanity.(24)

In the realm of intellectual revival, the self-realizing *Khudī* challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies and revives the capacity of *ijtihād*. Muslim scholars become creators of knowledge, not mere transmitters. The civilizational dawn of *Tulu‘-e-Islām*, then, is instantiated through educational reform, critical reinterpretation of tradition and active engagement with modern challenges (technology, globalization, digital culture). This framework provides a philosophical antidote to sectarian paralysis and intellectual passivity. As Asgari’s study on mysticism and unity shows, Iqbal draws on Islamic mystical tradition to deepen his critique of fragmentation and to suggest unity is rooted not in political alliances alone but in shared spiritual consciousness.(25)

#### **4. Implications for the Contemporary Muslim World**

##### **4.1 Iqbal and Modern Reformism: Engaging with Hanafi, al-Faruqi and al-Attas**

The revivalist vision of Muhammad Iqbal resonates powerfully with modern reformist thinkers such as Ḥasan Ḥanafī, Ismā‘īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, and Syed Naquib al-Attas, whose projects of “Islamization of knowledge,” unity, and civilizational renewal share a metaphysical and ethical core rooted in Tawhīd. For example, al-Faruqi’s framework of a *tawhīdic* worldview formulates a transdisciplinary critique of Western secularism and materialism and suggests a universal Islamic epistemology based on unity of God, knowledge, life and humanity.(26) Thus Iqbal’s call for self-realization (*Khudī*) and civilizational awakening (*Tulu‘-e-Islām*) can be seen as a philosophical precursor to, and indeed partner in, these reformist paradigms.

In this respect, the implication is twofold: first, by aligning Iqbal with contemporary reformist discourse, one can forge a continuity between early 20th-century Muslim intellectual awakening and late-20th/early-21st-century reform projects; secondly, it invites reinterpretation of Iqbal's metaphysics as a source for practical reform educational policy, knowledge production, civil society formation rather than merely poetic or historical reflection. The modern scholar of Tawhīd writes: "*the theocentric eschatological paradigm continues to dominate Islamic scholarship and remains insufficiently responsive to contemporary humanitarian challenges... al-Fārūqī's tawhīd-based principles ... provide a multi-sectoral Islamic worldview.*"(27) Thus, Iqbal's metaphysical humanism can be adapted into concrete reform initiatives in Muslim educational, intellectual and institutional spheres.

#### **4.2 Digital-Age Khudī: Reclaiming Selfhood amidst Algorithmic Control and Consumerist Identity**

In a world dominated by social media algorithms, surveillance capitalism and digital-consumer identities, the concept of *Khudī* acquires new relevance. Iqbal's notion of selfhood as creative agency, the individual who realizes their divine origin,(28) acts with moral autonomy, and participates in collective regeneration offers a counter-narrative to passive consumption and identity formation through external data flows. By emphasizing inner awakening and self-directed agency, *Khudī* stands as a philosophical foil to algorithmically driven identity fragmentation.(29) Moreover, the metaphor of *Khudī* encourages Muslims to situate the digital self within a metaphysical horizon rather than leaving it captive to technological determinism. Education and research into digital ethics can draw upon Iqbal's insight: the self is not simply a host of data, but a spiritual subject with responsibilities, agency and connection to the Divine. Such an orientation invites curricula, pedagogy and policy frameworks that center human dignity, self-realization and moral awareness in digital citizenship.(30)

#### **4.3 Tawhīdic Global Ethics: Toward a Moral Civilization beyond Nationalism**

Iqbal's metaphysical grounding in *Tawhīd* naturally extends toward a global ethics, one in which the unity of God becomes the metaphysical root of the unity of humanity. Reformist thinkers like al-Faruqi have argued that Tawhīd provides the basis for an integrated worldview that transcends nationalism, sectarianism and ideological division.(31) The implication for the Muslim world is a

revival of civilizational aspiration: a moral civilization where the metrics of success are not only economic or national but spiritual, ethical and universal. This suggests that Muslim reform agendas can move beyond reactive identity politics and toward proactive models of ethical leadership, global solidarity and sustainable development. For instance, a *Tawhīdic* approach to economics, governance or education would emphasize stewardship, justice, knowledge with purpose and humanity's role as vice-gerent (*khilāfah*) on earth.(32) The implication is that Iqbal's philosophy, when interpreted through a *Tawhīdic* global ethics lens, provides a normative foundation for Muslim engagement with global governance, climate justice, human rights and inter-civilizational dialogue.

#### **4.4 Educational and Intellectual Reconstruction Inspired by Iqbal's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam***

Finally, Iqbal's seminal work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, remains a blueprint for educational and intellectual renewal. He argued that Muslim knowledge systems must not simply replicate Western disciplinary models but reconstruct themselves by integrating revelation (*wahy*) and reason (*'aql*), by erecting curricula that foster creative knowledge, spiritual integrity and civilizational awareness. Recent scholarship affirms that his integrated knowledge model offers a transformative framework for reviving the Muslim Ummah's intellectual and spiritual legacy, his emphasis on the unity of knowledge, the Quranic foundation of inquiry, and the dynamic practice of *ijtihād*.(33) In practice, the implication is that Muslim universities, research institutes and curriculum designers should embrace Iqbal's holistic vision: build programs that integrate metaphysics, ethics and social responsibility; foster critical self-awareness rather than rote learning; encourage *ijtihād* rather than passive transmission; and prepare graduates to engage the digital and global age without severing their spiritual moorings.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Muhammad Iqbal's philosophy represents a living response to the crises of disunity and stagnation in the Muslim world. Through the interwoven concepts of *Tawhīd*, *Khudī*, and *Tulu'-e-Islām*, he develops a *Tawhīdic humanism*, a vision that unites metaphysics, ethics, and creativity into a single project of spiritual and civilizational renewal. At its core, Iqbal's thought affirms that divine unity is both the foundation of reality and the moral axis of human life. *Tawhīd* thus becomes more than theology; it is the metaphysical

principle that reconciles faith and reason, individuality and community, and spirituality and action. By rooting all existence in the oneness of God, Iqbal dismantles the dualisms and fragmentations that characterize modernity and proposes unity as dynamic harmony diversity integrated through a shared orientation toward the Divine. Within this metaphysical ground, *Khudī* emerges as the spiritual discipline of self-realization. Far from egoism, it signifies the awakening of moral agency and divine consciousness within the individual. The empowered self transcends imitation (*taqlīd*), embraces creative freedom, and participates in God's continuous act of creation. In the modern age of materialism and digital dependency, Iqbal's notion of *Khudī* offers a way to reclaim human dignity and intellectual autonomy from algorithmic and consumerist control. This self-realization culminates in the vision of *Tulu 'e-Islām*, the "dawn" of moral and civilizational rebirth. For Iqbal, renewal must begin with education, *ijtihād*, and the revival of the creative intellect. His call to rebuild thought on a *Tawhīdic* foundation urges Muslims to move beyond sectarian and ideological divisions toward a civilization grounded in justice, knowledge, and compassion. Together, these three principles *Tawhīd*, *Khudī*, and *Tulu 'e-Islām* form a coherent program for unity and revival. Iqbal's *Tawhīdic humanism* invites contemporary Muslims to view themselves not as passive inheritors of tradition but as active participants in divine creativity and moral history. In essence, Iqbal's philosophy remains a timeless call to action: unity through *Tawhīd*, empowerment through *Khudī*, and renewal through *Tulu 'e-Islām*. His thought continues to provide the intellectual and spiritual resources needed to rebuild the Muslim mind and reawaken the creative spirit of Islam in the twenty-first century.

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