


ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>
 Vol. 04 No. 02. Oct-Dec 2025. Page#.4202-4213
 Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)
 Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)



Iqbal Critique of Western Modernity: Examine Iqbal's Critique of Western Modernity and Its Implications for Muslim Societies

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ABSTRACT

*This essay is a detailed analysis of how Allama Muhammad Iqbal criticized Western modernity and implicated it with far-reaching consequences on the lives of Muslim societies today. Basing his analysis mainly on *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, as well as his poetry and other works, this study discusses the many-sided interaction of Iqbal with the philosophical traditions of Western modernism and his preoccupation with the spiritually sterile and materialistic aspects of that modernism. Iqbal criticized in several dimensions the materialistic bankruptcy of Western materialism, the exploitative character of capitalist imperialism, the vacuity of secular democracy, and the threats of territorial nationalism. But instead of an all-out denial, what Iqbal recommended was an elaborate dialectical strategy that valued Western scientific and intellectual accomplishments while discarding their philosophical underpinnings, grounded in secularism and materialism. This essay has stated that Iqbal's vision of Islamic modernity was an alternative epistemology, which tried to bring about spiritual ambush with material advancement and would provide Muslim societies with a way to renewal without simply copying or dismissing Western modernity. This paper will show how the modern world has remained pertinent to the intellectual philosophies of its inhabitants by showing the relevance of his ideas to the current circumstances of Muslim world to the modernization process and globalization and the issue of decolonisation of knowledge structures in a detailed textual analysis and contextual exploration of the intellectual milieu of Iqbal, who lived his life during the colonial rule in India.*

Key Words: Democracy, Economic Imperialism, Political Thought, Modernity, Human Self

Introduction

Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) is one of the most powerful intellectual figures of the 20th century, whose philosophical ideas have influenced Muslim thought in the modern age, particularly. Being a poet-philosopher and political thinker, Iqbal is a witness to the revolutionary influence of Western modernity on the lives of Muslim societies in the colonial era. The two-year stay in Europe (1905-1908), where he studied and, more importantly, was exposed to European thought and philosophy, gave Iqbal the critical perspective in a manner that would neither be dismissed nor blindly appreciated. Sumera Bibi has discussed the same idea as:

“Iqbal’s poetry was a direct response to his immediate circumstances. For Iqbal value of human life and against pacifism, materialism, and expansionism. The idealization of European culture and civilization was now a nightmare for Iqbal. Since he has been an eyewitness to Western

violence to shatter the unity of the Muslim Ummah, just to break them into smaller units, and to play with them as pawns.¹

Muhammad Iqbal, a prominent Pakistani poet, philosopher, and politician, was an outspoken critic of Western modernity. He argued that although Western modernity brought significant advancements in science and technology, it also carried various shortcomings that made it inadequate for Muslim societies. He was not only a great Eastern poet but also among the most renowned scholars of the twentieth century. Iqbal strived diligently to benefit humanity, and his literature served as an inspiration to the hopeless Muslims of the subcontinent. He can best be described as *a beacon of light in the night of the wilderness*,² A quality desperately needed by the Muslim Ummah in the age of colonial domination and intellectual crisis.

This study attempts to clarify Iqbal's position on Western modernity. He encouraged Muslims to develop a model of modernity rooted in Islamic values and principles³; one that balances material progress with spiritual growth, and individual freedom with collective responsibility.

Biographical Sketch of Iqbal and His Works

Iqbal was born in Sialkot on 9 November 1877. He hailed from a family descended from Kashmiri Brahmins of the Supra caste, who had accepted Islam in the seventeenth century⁴. His father, Shaikh Noor Muhammad, was a skilled and ambitious businessman, but also a pious Sufi and a God-loving man⁵. His mother, Imam Bibi, was generous, kind-hearted, and deeply religious.

Iqbal completed his early education in Sialkot and migrated to Lahore in 1895. Maulvi Mir Hasan (1844–1929), a renowned scholar of Islamic Studies, Persian, and Arabic, was one of Iqbal's early teachers. Recognizing Iqbal's poetic talent, Mir Hasan encouraged him to continue writing. On 5 May 1893, Iqbal was admitted to the Scotch Mission College in Sialkot and passed his intermediate examination in 1895. In the same year, he enrolled in the Bachelor's program at Government College Lahore. He completed his B.A. in 1897 and immediately began his Master's in Philosophy at the same institution. His academic performance was outstanding, earning him several gold medals.

In Lahore, Iqbal was deeply influenced by Sir Thomas Arnold, a distinguished professor of Philosophy⁶. Arnold's guidance encouraged him to study Western thought and adopt modern methods of critical inquiry. In 1899, Iqbal completed his Master's degree and was appointed as a Macleod Reader at the Oriental College, Lahore. In March 1904, he joined Government College Lahore as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy and English⁷.

At Arnold's encouragement, Iqbal travelled to Europe in 1905 for higher studies. In England, he studied at Lincoln's Inn, qualifying as a barrister, and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he worked with R. A. Nicholson, the renowned orientalist, and John M. E. McTaggart, the idealist metaphysician. Later, he moved to Germany and enrolled at the University of Munich, where

¹ Sumaira Bibi, "Transformation of Iqbal's Thoughts from Western Nationalist to Pan-Islamic Philosopher," *Iqbal Review / Iqbaliyat* 62, no. 2 (2021): 89-91.

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² DR M. A. K Khalil. "Allama Iqbal: A Beacon of Light for Muslims in the Present-day World". *Iqbal Review* 41, no.2 (April 2000):187-90.[ALLAMAH IQBAL: A BEACON OF LIGHT FOR MUSLIMS IN THE PRESENT DAY WORLD](#)

³ Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (Lahore: A H Publisher, 1930),20-21.

⁴ Mustansir Mir, *Iqbal*. (Karachi: Oxford University Press,2006)3-4.[IQBAL](#)

⁵ Innayat Ullah, *Hayat-e-Iqbal*. (Lahore: Taj Company Limited, 1982).11-15.[hayat e iqbal | Rekhta](#)

⁶ Bibi, "Transformation of Iqbal Thought",90-91

⁷ Stein, Burton. "Philosophy East and West" *JSTOR* 22, no. 4 (1972): 483–85.[Review: \[Untitled\] on JSTOR](#)

he earned his PhD on 4 November 1907 for his dissertation, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*.

Iqbal returned to Lahore in August 1908 and began his professional career as a professor, lawyer, and poet. His stay in Europe provided him with the opportunity to observe Western societies closely. He became aware of the strengths of European civilization but also noticed its flaws, particularly the disorder, spiritual emptiness, and uncertainty increasingly present in people's lives.

As a creative author in both poetry and prose, Iqbal left behind a rich intellectual legacy for future generations. He wrote 17 books in Persian, Urdu, and English. Of his approximately 12,000 verses of poetry, about 7,000 are in Persian. *Asrar-e-Khudi* (Secrets of the Self), written in 1919, was his first major Persian work, focusing on the development of human personality and individual selfhood. *Bang-e-Dara* (The Call of the Caravan Bell), published in 1924, was his first Urdu collection⁸.

Iqbal's English works include *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia and The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, the latter being a major intellectual attempt to reformulate Islamic philosophy in the modern age. In addition to these books, he wrote numerous articles, essays, and letters. According to Khuram Ali⁹ *Iqbal was in correspondence with people from all walks of life; religious leaders, journalists, politicians, and scholars with whom he exchanged views on various subjects*. William O. Douglas, Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, observed: *Iqbal belonged to all races; his concepts had universal appeal. He spoke to the conscience of men of goodwill, whatever their tongue or creed*¹⁰.

In 1930, Iqbal delivered his famous Allahabad Address, stating: *"I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sindh, and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. I therefore demand the formation of a consolidated Muslim state in the best interests of India and Islam"*¹¹.

This indicates that Iqbal envisioned a Muslim state where Muslims could nurture and develop their culture, religion, language, and literature alongside other communities. He emphasized that peace, justice, and social harmony in India historically depended on Muslim–Hindu understanding. Islamic principles of unity, equality, humanity, and justice had played a constructive role across centuries.

Iqbal argued that the spiritual, cultural, and political life of Indian Muslims needed protection from foreign domination and the rapid spread of un-Islamic influences. His health declined in early 1938 and worsened after 25 March. He passed away on 21 April 1938. Rabindranath Tagore sent a heartfelt condolence message: *"The death of Sir Muhammad Iqbal has created a void in literature which, like a deep wound, will take a long time to heal"*¹².

The Context of Iqbal's Critique: Colonial Modernity and Muslim Decline

A critique of Western modernity by Iqbal should be understood within a proper historical context in which his thought grew. Iqbal was living in the period when the Muslim world was

⁸ S.G. Abbas. *Dr Muhammad Iqbal: The Humanist*. (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1997). 35-36.

<https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/dr-muhammad-iqbal-the-humanist-sg-abbas-ebooks>

⁹ Khuram Ali Shafique, *Iqbal, his life and our Times* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan) 30-55. [Iqbal: His Life and Our Times - Allama Muhammad Iqbal](#).

¹⁰ Hafeez, Iqbal and His Legacy (Karachi: Progressive Press, 1971).

¹¹ Iqbal Singh Seva, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, (US: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 30-38. [The Political Philosophy Of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India : Iqbal Singh Sevea : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

¹² Raheela Akhtar and Mazhar Hayat, "The Poetics of Self in Iqbal and Tagore: A Comparative Study." *Mayar: Journal of English Studies*. IIUI, Islamabad. 2015. [\(PDF\) The poetics of self in Iqbal and Tagore: A comparative study](#)

subdued to the colonial rule, and large parts of the Muslim world, including the Indian subcontinent and North Africa as well as the Middle East, became subjected to the oppression of the European authorities.

This was not just political colonialism but what in scholarly circles is now referred to as colonial modernity, a hierarchical and selective modernisation of the indigenous knowledge systems, social structures, and cultural practices by colonial powers that left deep scars in the lives of the colonized. He noted that not only were the Muslims deprived of an independent political existence, but they had also become intellectually subservient people who blindly imported Western ideas and institutions without showing any knowledge of their philosophical underpinnings and how they would fit into the Islamic ideals.

In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal stated this anxiety clearly: the most striking thing that modern history has witnessed is how the world of Islam is losing its spiritual contact with the West at a wholly gigantic pace. This movement is not imperfect, since, on the intellectual side, European culture is but an extension of some of the most significant periods of Islamic culture. We are only afraid that the glitter of the exterior of the European culture will stop our motion, and we will not be able to arrive at the very inwardness of this culture¹³.

Iqbal was one of the finest modernists in the Muslim historical discourse.¹⁴ He acknowledged that European intellectual accomplishments, especially in the field of science and philosophy, are based on the previous Islamic achievements. Nevertheless, he was afraid of Muslims being enticed by the illusory appeals of Western civilisation without any understanding of the more profound philosophical assumptions or the critical analysis of the spiritual and ethical background of the latter. Thus, we can say that Iqbal was never against the West but he was against the evils of west like imperialism and the exploitation of poor people.

Iqbal's Critique of Western Materialism

The primary theme of the critique of Western modernity proposed by Iqbal was the issue of its being materialistic. Iqbal noted how Western civilisation especially after the enlightenment and the industrial revolution had turned into a materialistic one, at the cost of spiritual growth. This materialism was expressed in several aspects: philosophical materialism was the denial or marginalisation of spiritual life, economic materialism was the dehumanization of human beings, as economic forms, and a broad outlook on the world that valued the civilisational success above all in terms of technological progress and material possessions. As he said in *Zabur-e-Anjum*,

“Europe’s hordes, with flame and fire, Desolate the world entire; O architect of sacred realms, to rebuild the world arise! Out of leaden sleep, out of slumber deep, Arise! Out of slumber deep, Arise!”¹⁵

He intended to protect the Muslim Ummah from the overwhelming influence of Western thought and to encourage Muslims to preserve their cultural and intellectual heritage. According to Iqbal, *Islam believes in a universal polity, a politico-religious system based on fundamentals revealed to the Prophet*¹⁶. Iqbal in the analysis of Western philosophical development, observed that classical physics had led to some kind of materialism. Nonetheless,

¹³ Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (Lahore: A H Publisher, 1930),20-21

¹⁴ Fazlur Rehman, “Muslim Modernism in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*21, no1/3(Summer, 1958): 90-95. [*Muslim Modernism in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent](#)

¹⁵ Arthur J. Arbury, *Zabur-e- Anjum* by Iqbal(London: John Murray, 1953) 20-22,[Zabur-e 'Ajam](#)

¹⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1951.

he equally took an interest in tracking the modern trend in physics, especially of the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics as introduced by Einstein, which he thought were eroding the materialistic understanding of the world that was so prevalent in the West.

Thus, Iqbal was pluralistic in his approach towards Modernity. As discussed by Durrani: "But Iqbal is very even-handed. He is full of praise for the dynamism, creativity, and intellectual incisiveness of the Western nations. And while extolling the oriental values of spirituality, sincerity of heart, respect for high traditions, he also chastises the East for its blind obsequiousness to old ways of thought, received doctrines, slavish mentality, lack of self-respect, and a bedazzled view of all things Western¹⁷".

To Iqbal, the prioritisation of Western modernity only on the pursuit of this world without spiritual pursuits to the individual's needs was the ultimate distortion of human nature and its purpose in the world. He projected what he called the kingdom of God on earth; a paradise community of self-actualised people who had fulfilled their spiritual potential and were involved in a sensible relationship with the material world.

Iqbal felt that Western materialism had many repercussions. It developed a civilisation that was marked with moral bankruptcy, even though it was technologically sophisticated. The high value given to material accumulation resulted in exploitation, both in Western societies (class conflict) and in the international arena (imperialism). In addition, materialism created a type of worldview that took the meaning and purpose out of life as human lives became a survival of life and material satisfaction.

Iqbal was typical in his poetic work as he brought forth this criticism. He condemned the materialism of Western civilisation, which, he stated, could only be achieved through a spiritual and moral basis to achieve civilisation's greatness. Nevertheless, Iqbal did not criticize material progress or scientific development in general. He was aware of the significance and the role of scientific knowledge and technological advancement. He was concerned with the philosophical context in which this progress was taking place- a context that rejected spiritual realities and relegated human beings to material beings. Iqbal tried to express the vision of an alternative in which material development will be sought on a spiritual and moral basis based on Islamic teachings. Thus, it can be said that Iqbal was open-minded as he suggested to extract the positive features of modernity and the West and reject the negative aspects.

The Critique of Western Imperialism and Capitalism

Intimately connected with his anxieties about materialism was Iqbal's scathing attack on Western imperialism and capitalism. Iqbal had personally experienced the destruction of colonial exploitation in his native country and the entire Muslim world. He saw imperialism as not only political domination, but as a wholesome system of economic exploitation, cultural oppression, and intellectual domination. As he discussed this:

"One nation pastures on the other, one sows the grain which another harvests. Philosophy teaches that bread is to be pilfered from the hand of the weak, and his soul rent from his body. Extortion of one's fellowman is the law of the new civilisation. And it conceals itself behind the veil of commerce¹⁸".

The critique against imperialism by Iqbal was very much based on the insights he had of the functioning of capitalism in the domestic societies of the West and internationally through the

¹⁷ Saeed Ahmed Durrani, "The Bridge Between East and West", in Iqbal and Modern Era: Proceedings of International Symposium, (November 1997), ed. Muhammad Suheyf Umar (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Lahore), 61-62. [IQBAL AND MODERN ERA](#).

¹⁸ Khwajja Amjid Hussain, "Economic Policy of Allama Iqbal." *The Pakistan Development Review* 41, no.4(Winter, 2002):976-79. [Economic Philosophy of Allama Iqbal](#)

colonial acquisition process. He noted that the European democracy, irrespective of its freedom and equality rhetoric, was simply used to propagate the interests of the capitalist classes and the continuation of exploitation of the working classes and the colonised populations. His evaluation of the moral bankruptcy of Western civilisation was proven true by the First World War (1914-1918) to which Iqbal was a witness. He viewed the war as the logical outcome of the imperialist tussle that is stoked by capitalist desires and nationalistic rivalry¹⁹.

In his analysis, Iqbal made parallels between capitalism, imperialism and nationalism, considering them as products of the same flaws of Western modernity. The insatiable desire of capitalism to acquire new markets and resources led to the imperial expansion, and nationalism gave ideological support to imperial expansion. He observed that this was largely due to the ideology of nationalism followed by all the imperialist powers of Europe.

Interestingly, Iqbal took particular interest in his critique of capitalism and this was not without affinity to socialism thought although he ended up rejecting capitalism and communism both as weak solutions to human problems. He realised the Russian Revolution to be a challenge of great magnitude to the western capitalism and initially even sympathised in the Bolshevik argument of capitalist exploitation. Nevertheless, he also came to believe that communism was no better a solution, being based on materialism as well, and not being able to solve the spiritual needs of humanity.

In *Javaid Nama* Iqbal quoted the following words, as spoken by Jamal-ud-Din Afghani: Communism and Imperial Kingship are both, in a sense, attributable to a disillusionment and impatience with the state of things: Both lack a sense of God, both are engaged in a colossal deception of mankind.

The critique of the necessary workings of imperialism as a system of all-encompassing domination was also applied by Iqbal. The colonialists not only steal the economic resources of the colonised countries, but they also impose their cultural values, educational systems, and thoughts on colonised societies. Such intellectual imperialism was arguably even more insidious than political and economic imperialism since it produced a type of mental colonisation where colonised people assimilated the values and worldviews of their oppressors within them.

To Pakistan and other post-colonial Muslim societies, the critique of imperialism by Iqbal has a special meaning. He claimed that political decolonisation without intellectual and cultural decolonisation would be empty. Muslim societies had to achieve their intellectual independence, restore faith in their own civilisation's success, and engage in their own systems of facing the modern-day challenges, instead of being blindly imitators of Western stereotypes.

Western Democracy: Materialism Without Morality

Western parliamentary democracy, perhaps, was the area of Western modernity that experienced perhaps more continuous criticism than Iqbal wrote about. His attack on democracy should be viewed with caution because it is misconstrued. Iqbal did not object to the idea of democratic principles as such; in fact, he acknowledged democracy as part and parcel of the teachings of Islam about equality and consultation (*shura*). But he also strongly attacked Western democracy as it was being practised since he believed that it was not based on spiritual and moral values, and therefore was an empty system to do the will of the elite. As he said:

“The Democracy of Europe—overshadowed by socialistic agitation and anarchical fear originated mainly in the economic regeneration of European societies. Nietzsche, however, abhors this “rule of the herd” and, hopeless of the plebeian, he bases all higher culture on the

¹⁹ Bibi, “Transformation of Iqbal Thought”, 87-89.

cultivation and growth of an Aristocracy of Supermen. But is the plebeian so absolutely hopeless? The Democracy of Islam did not grow out of the extension of economic opportunity; it is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is a center of latent power, the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating a certain type of character. Out of the plebeian material, Islam has formed men of the noblest type of life and power. Is not, then, the Democracy of early Islam an experimental refutation of the ideas of Nietzsche²⁰"

The most well-known remark of Iqbal regarding Western democracy stated: "Democracy is the form of government where people are counted but not weighed, This was his main objection since Western democracy looked at its citizens as numerical values instead of spiritual beings who have various values of moral growth, knowledge, and character. The concept of one person, one vote could seem egalitarian, but Iqbal claimed that it did not take into account qualitative differences between different people in regard to their wisdom, virtue, and understanding.

Iqbal pointed out many specific issues with the practised Western democracy, as "The tyranny of imperialism struts abroad, covering its face under the masks of Democracy, Nationalism, Communism, Fascism, and heaven knows what else besides. Under these masks, in every corner of the earth, the spirit of freedom and the dignity of man are being trampled underfoot in a way to which not even the darkest period of human history presents a parallel. The so-called statesmen to whom government and leadership of men were entrusted have proved demons of bloodshed, tyranny, and oppression. The rulers whose duty it was to protect and cherish those ideals which go to form a higher humanity, to prevent man's oppression of man and to elevate the moral and intellectual level of mankind, have in their hunger for dominion and imperial possessions, shed the blood of millions and reduced millions to servitude simply to pander to the greed and avarice of their own particular groups. After subjugating and establishing their dominion over weaker peoples, they have robbed them of their possessions, their religions, their morals, their cultural traditions, and their literatures. Then they sowed divisions among them that they should shed one another's blood and go to sleep under the opiate of serfdom, so that the leech of imperialism might go on sucking their blood without interruption²¹"

Most importantly, Iqbal compared Western democracy with the one he described as the one of spiritual democracy or Muslim democracy. His outlook on Islamic democracy was based on the spiritual values and not just on political processes. He said: The Democracy of Islam was not founded on the extension of economic opportunity; it is not a spiritual principle, but it is founded on the assumption that all human beings are centres of latent force, and that the possibilities of a certain kind of character can be fulfilled by cultivating a particular kind of character.

The idea of spiritual democracy embraced a number of important aspects. It had the first, the discovery of the intrinsic dignity and possibility of all human beings, the conception of each individual as capable of spiritual growth and of the realisation of himself or herself. Secondly, it is based political organisation based on moral and spiritual ideas based on Divine revelation and not just human convention. Third, it focused on cultivating character and virtue as a

²⁰ Latif Ahmed Sherwani, comp. and ed., *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, 4th ed. (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1995) <https://ia902908.us.archive.org/17/items/Siriqbal/Sir%20%20Iqbal.pdf>

²¹ ²¹ Iqbal Singh Seva, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, (US: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 190-93. [The Political Philosophy Of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India : Iqbal Singh Seva : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

precondition to meaningful participation in democracy. Fourth, it aimed at promoting the reconciliation of individual liberty and communal unity as well as Godly direction.

The irregularities of democracy were also addressed by Iqbal who suggested reforming the institutions. Instead of mass democracy on the principle of universal franchise, he proposed the system according to which the legislative power would be held by people who, in addition to modern knowledge, had profound knowledge of the Islamic teachings- what could be called an epistemic elite. These people would apply *ijtihad* (self-governing reasoning) to solve the modern-day problems in an Islamic context by reasoning independently, regardless of the repercussions²².

It is worth mentioning that Iqbal was not a supporter of autocracy and despotism. He stuck to ideas of equality, accountability, and consultation (*shura*) that he considered to be the key to Islamic political thinking. His attack was directed not to the principles of democracy, but to the particular forms in the West that had divorced themselves, becoming disconnected from spiritual and moral traits²³.

The Alternative Vision: Islamic Modernity and Reconstruction

After discussing the various aspects of the criticism of Western modernity by Iqbal, it is now time to think of the other vision that he gave us. Iqbal was not satisfied just to criticise; he was out to lay out a positive programme of Islamic revitalization and civilizational reconstruction. His work, as discussed in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* and detailed in his poetry, was to create a uniquely Islamic modernity that would allow Muslims to approach modern issues in a productive way without losing touch with their spiritual and ethical heritage. Thus, Iqbal is the bridge between East and West as he links the two worlds opposite to each other. These similar words have been expressed in Javed Namah as:

I have enclosed two seas within a pair of vessels. I am a stream that originates from the two seas, my split is parting and, withal, a union, too.

At the core of the reconstruction mission of Iqbal was the idea of *khudi* (selfhood or ego). His philosophy of the self was elaborate, based on Islamic mystical traditions, as well as Western philosophy (especially Bergson and Nietzsche). To Iqbal, realisation and fortification of self through spiritual growth, creative action, and moral struggle were the primary activities of human lives. The powerful, self-realised person (*mard-e-momin*) would not only be deeply spiritual but also highly practical, who could change society and bring advancement to human civilisation advancement to it.

Iqbal founded his idea of Islamic modernity on some major pillars. One, he promoted the reconstitution of Islamic thought by means of *ijtihad*-independent thinking when addressing modern problems in an Islamic context. He claimed that the doors of *ijtihad*, which classical scholars had allegedly closed down, had to be opened so that Muslims would solve modern problems creatively and authoritatively.

Second, Iqbal demanded the prominence of the spiritual and moral growth in addition to material growth. He opposed the imaginary distinction between secular involvement and religious practice on the premise that true Islam demanded Muslims to be the best in both fields. The necessity of studying and knowing the natural world as taught in the Quran gave

²² Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Chapter IV. Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1951.

²³ Dr. Muhammad Shakeel Ahmed, Dr Rehanna Munawar, Syed Ahmed Mehmood Bukhari. "Allama Muhammad Iqbal's critique of Western Democracy and his vision of Spiritual Polity of Islam" *AL- Azhar*7 no.2 (, July-December,2021):11-12.

religious approval to scientific research, although Islamic ethics offered moral instruction to use such knowledge.

Third, Iqbal suggested the creation of local institutions that fit the requirements of Muslim societies and are aligned with the Islamic ideals instead of blindly imposing Western patterns. This was in connection with the political systems, law systems, education, and economic organisation. He foresaw an Islamic democracy based on spiritual values, a system of economy, neither too individualistic at the expense of social justice nor too collective at the expense of the intellectual elite, and of education which would produce intellectual as well as moral excellence.

Fourth, as a building block of the Islamic civilisation, Iqbal stressed the principle of tauhid (Divine unity). He reasoned that tauhid did not only mean theological monotheism but also social equality, moral unity, and uniting of all spheres of life under the guidance of the Divine. This gave the spiritual ground, as well as the organising principle of the Islamic society.

Fifth, Iqbal proposed the recovery of the Muslim cultural confidence and pride in the accomplishments of the Islamic civilisation. In his opinion, Muslims had internalised the feeling of inferiority compared to the West, and accepted the Orientalist discourses of the backwardness and stagnation of Islamic civilisation. The importance of reclaiming and celebrating Islamic work in philosophy, science, art, and governance was crucial to psychological decolonisation and in motivating modern renewal.

Iqbal had no reactionary or backward-looking vision. He was not a supporter of going back to some idealised past or discarding everything to do with modernity. Instead, he attempted to approach both Islamic tradition and Western modernity selectively and critically and absorb what was good in both, and abandon what was inimitable or damaging. This involved a high level of intellectual discrimination and the boldness to at least work out a different direction and not just be a follower of the traditional interpretations or even Western models. This can be found in his book, where he states that:

The only course open to us is to approach Modern Knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us.²⁴

Implications for Contemporary Muslim Societies

The criticism of Western modernity and the alternative vision Iqbal provides have far-reaching consequences to modern Muslim societies that have to deal with the intricate problems in the era of globalisation, technological revolution, and cultural shift. His thought has a number of dimensions that are particularly pertinent nowadays.

To begin with, the idea of intellectual autonomy and critical thinking as a key point that Iqbal focuses his attention on offers invaluable advice in the way Muslims should react to globalisation and cultural imperialism. Living in a world where Western (and mostly American) cultural and ideological influence spreads all over the world, via media, education, and economy, the Muslim societies are under continuous pressure to follow the Western ideals and institutions blindly. Iqbal provides an example of selective appropriation by Western success in science and technology but refuses the materialist and secularist philosophical paradigm; his perspective is a model of how one can selectively appropriate and not wholesale accept or reject the achievements of others; Iqbal gives us a model of how it can be done through selectivity rather than facing failure, through the example of appreciating Western success in

²⁴ Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (Lahore: A H Publisher, 1930),88-89.

science and technology while refusing to accept wholesale the materialist and secularist philosophical paradigm;

Second, the materialism as criticised by Iqbal tackles some basic questions regarding the development paradigms and the indicators of civilisational success. Most of the modern Muslim societies, and much of the developing world have been embracing western models of development which focus on economic growth and material consumption and overlooking the spiritual, ethical and cultural aspects of wellbeing. This is something which the vision of Iqbal questions because real development, according to him, should be based on spiritual, moral, and cultural development as well as material growth. This can be compared to the modern-day criticisms of mainstream development discourse and demands new development paradigms based on local values and priorities.

Third, the work by Iqbal about politics and governance continues to be extremely useful in the case of Muslim societies grappling with the issue of political organisation and legitimacy. A large number of the Muslim majority nations have embraced formally democratic institutions but they face corruption, elite capture, absence of substantive popular participation and tension between democratic processes and Islamic values. The notion of spiritual democracy proposed by Iqbal, which is based on moral and spiritual principles and integrates the notions of accountability and consultation, provides the materials to think creatively on the issues of political regimes that are Islamic and democratic at the same time.

Fifth, Iqbal cries out that reconstruction of Islamic thought by means of renewed *ijtihad* is a response to the pressing imperative of modern Islamic scholarship to take modern challenges seriously. Both human rights and gender equality and bioethics, environmental ethics and economic justice matters demand advanced Islamic answers based on in-depth knowledge of both Islamic sources and modern realities. Iqbal views his method as an example of how this engagement could occur, neither by strictly sticking to classical formulations nor by completely giving in to the norms of the West, but by coming up with creative reasoning within an Islamic construct.

Sixth, the focus on education and the development of character by Iqbal addresses the contemporary issues of educational systems in Muslim societies. Most of these systems have embraced Western models of education whose emphasis is more towards passing technical skills of economic productivity and not on moral and spiritual development. Iqbal promoted comprehensive education that developed not only intellectual perfection but also moral integrity, not only civilized the savvy but also inspired the soul. This vision provides valuable materials for the redefinition of the philosophy and practice of education.

Seventh, the theme by Iqbal offers materials to decolonise knowledge production in the Muslim world. The dependence on intellect that has occurred in colonial and post-colonial times has implied that Muslim scholarship has frequently been the response to Western-produced questions and the participation in Western modes of analysis. The example of Iqbal shows that intellectual self-confidence can be based on a strong interest in the Islamic and Western traditions, which can be used to produce independent analyses and frameworks instead of responding to the Western paradigms.

Lastly, the vision of Iqbal answers the basic questions revolving around the Muslim identity and place in the modern world. Muslims find it difficult to create meaningful identities that address their traditional heritage and are able to relate well to modernities in an age that is typified by swift change, cultural dislocation, and various crises of meaning. The synthesis that Iqbal develops and offers, i.e., respecting Islamic tradition but being open to modernity, spiritual

groundness, and worldly efficiency, is of significance to present-day Muslims in their attempt at building meaningful identities and meaning.

Conclusion

Allama Muhammad Iqbal's critique of Western modernity stands as one of the most profound intellectual responses to the political, moral, and cultural crises produced by European materialism and imperialism. Rooted in his deep engagement with both Western philosophy and Islamic intellectual heritage, Iqbal neither rejected Western achievements outright nor accepted them uncritically; rather, he exposed the spiritual emptiness of materialism, the exploitative essence of capitalist imperialism, the superficiality of secular democracy, and the divisive nature of territorial nationalism. His assessment ultimately highlighted that Western modernity, stripped of ethical and spiritual foundations, could never offer true human fulfilment. Yet Iqbal did not limit himself to criticism; he envisioned an Islamic modernity grounded in khudi (selfhood), spiritual democracy, and renewed ijthad, one capable of harmonising material progress with moral integrity. His thought carries enduring relevance for Muslim societies striving to craft development models, political frameworks, and educational systems that balance technological advancement with spiritual depth. Though unfinished, Iqbal's project calls for contemporary Muslims to continue the reconstruction he initiated, creatively engaging with modern challenges while remaining anchored in Islamic ethical principles. In an age increasingly disillusioned with the ecological, economic, and moral failures of modernity, Iqbal's vision offers not only guidance for Muslims but a universal reminder that civilisation must rest on spiritual purpose, moral responsibility, and human dignity. Iqbal tries to do a heart-to-heart chat rather than Platonic knowledge. His work is deeply rooted in society and is organic in nature. The concept of Ijthad is the distinct feature of his work, which made him the best thinker and philosopher. Through his work and criticism, he tries to bring the dormant soul back to life. As quoted by Dr. G.R. Sabri Tabraizi, "He wants to bring knowledge from vacuum to reality to organic life, to turn eyes from the limited life to the unlimited one, from abstraction to action. Only the marriage of heart with heart or common interests can bring change and unseat the ruling class, not Newtonia

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