

IQBAL'S POLITICAL THOUGHT AND THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC ISLAM

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Abstract: *Muhammad Iqbal, one of the most influential Muslim philosophers of the 20th century, contributed significantly to political thought and the idea of Public Islam. His vision of an Islamic polity was rooted in a dynamic understanding of religion and democracy, where Islam serves as a guiding force for social and political transformation. Iqbal advocated for the reconstruction of religious thought, emphasizing selfhood (khūdī), intellectual freedom, and the revival of Islamic civilization through ijtihād (independent reasoning). His political ideas laid the foundation for the creation of Pakistan, but they also resonate with contemporary debates on the role of Islam in public life. This paper explores Iqbal's political philosophy, his critique of colonialism, and his vision for an Islamic democracy that balances tradition and modernity. By analysing his works, particularly *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, this study highlights Iqbal's relevance in contemporary discussions on governance, democracy, and Islamic ethics.*

Keywords: *Khūdī; Tradition; Modernity; Public Islam; Islamic Democracy.*

Abstrak: *Muhammad Iqbal, salah satu filsuf Muslim paling berpengaruh di abad ke-20, memberikan kontribusi signifikan terhadap pemikiran politik dan ide tentang Islam Publik. Visi Iqbal mengenai negara Islam berakar pada pemahaman yang dinamis tentang agama dan demokrasi, di mana Islam berfungsi sebagai kekuatan pemandu untuk transformasi sosial dan politik. Iqbal mengadvokasi rekonstruksi pemikiran agama, menekankan pada kesadaran diri (khūdī), kebebasan intelektual, dan kebangkitan peradaban Islam melalui ijtihād (penalaran independen). Gagasan politiknya menjadi dasar bagi pembentukan Pakistan, namun juga memiliki relevansi dengan perdebatan kontemporer tentang peran Islam dalam kehidupan publik. Makalah ini mengeksplorasi filosofi politik Iqbal, kritiknya terhadap kolonialisme, dan visinya untuk sebuah demokrasi Islam yang menyeimbangkan tradisi dan modernitas. Dengan menganalisis karyanya, khususnya *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, studi ini menyoroti relevansi Iqbal dalam diskusi kontemporer mengenai pemerintahan, demokrasi, dan etika Islam.*

Kata Kunci: *Khūdī; Tradisi; Modernitas; Islam Publik; Demokrasi Islam.*

Introduction

In the modern period, Islamic political thought underwent significant transformation, evolving primarily as a response to European domination and the multifaceted cultural, political, and economic challenges faced by Muslims.¹ By the late 19th century, the majority of Muslim territories had fallen under European colonial rule, either directly through annexation or indirectly through political and economic influence. This widespread colonial domination drastically reshaped the political landscape of the Muslim world, triggering a complex process of intellectual and social re-evaluation. The primary driving force behind Europe's ability to dominate was the profound modernization process that had revolutionized European societies, particularly through technological advancements, political institutions, and economic structures. These developments allowed Europe to project power across the globe, creating a stark imbalance between the West and the Muslim world.²

At the heart of this period, Islamic political thought remained largely anchored in classical and medieval doctrines. These traditional frameworks aimed to provide religious legitimacy to political structures, drawing heavily from the works of early Islamic scholars and jurists. However, these doctrines were increasingly seen as outdated in light of the rapid transformations occurring in the West. The accelerated pace of modernization, with its emphasis on secular governance, scientific advancements, and nation-state structures, posed significant challenges to traditional Islamic political thought. Consequently, many modern Muslim scholars grappled with the difficult task of reconciling long-established religious principles with the emerging political realities.³

One of the central tensions faced by Muslim intellectuals was the concept of the nation-state, which had become the dominant model of political organization worldwide. While some Muslim scholars recognized the practical necessity of the nation-state, they struggled to fully embrace it from a doctrinal perspective. The classical Islamic political vision, which prioritized the unity of the Muslim ummah under a single caliphate, stood in stark contrast to the fragmented and territorial nature of the nation-state system. This tension led to a form of tacit acceptance, where Muslim scholars acknowledged the nation-state's reality without fully legitimizing it within the framework of Islamic teachings.⁴

The response to Western domination was far from uniform across the Muslim world. Instead, it varied significantly depending on local conditions, including social, cultural, and historical contexts. This regional diversity represents the third dimension of modern Islamic history, as different Muslim societies developed distinct strategies for navigating the challenges posed by European colonialism. In some regions, Islamic reform movements emerged, advocating for a return to the core principles of Islam as a means of revitalizing society. In others, Muslim intellectuals sought to adopt selective aspects of Western modernity while preserving essential elements of Islamic tradition.⁵

A particularly influential figure who emerged during this period was Muhammad Iqbal (1873–1938), a renowned Indo-Pakistani poet, philosopher, and political thinker. Iqbal played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual foundations of the idea of Pakistan, advocating for the creation of a separate Muslim state in British colonial India. His political thought can be understood within the broader framework of “public Islam”—a concept where religious beliefs actively influence public and political life.⁶ Iqbal's vision sought to harmonize Islamic principles with the demands of modern political and social realities, offering a unique synthesis of tradition and modernity.⁷

Iqbal's Political Thought: Between Tradition and Modernity

Iqbal's primary concern was to create an authentic Islamic political system that was deeply rooted in the rich cultural traditions of Muslim societies. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he resisted the wholesale adoption of Western political theories, believing that they were ill-suited to the unique needs of Muslim communities. However, Iqbal's extensive Western education and his travels in Europe exposed him to modern philosophical and scientific ideas, which inevitably influenced his thinking. Despite his profound disappointment with the materialism and spiritual

emptiness he perceived in Western societies, Iqbal admired their scientific and technological achievements. His exposure to both Islamic heritage and Western thought allowed him to bridge two intellectual worlds, fostering a dynamic synthesis between the two.

This synthesis is particularly evident in Iqbal's reinterpretation of key Islamic concepts. He sought to revive the Islamic tradition of *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning, as a means of addressing contemporary challenges. For Iqbal, the stagnation of Islamic thought was a major obstacle to the revitalization of Muslim societies. By advocating for a more flexible and dynamic approach to Islamic jurisprudence, he aimed to empower Muslims to engage with modernity without compromising their religious identity. Iqbal's thought process thus represented a significant departure from rigid traditionalism, emphasizing the need for intellectual renewal and adaptation.

Iqbal's political ideas were particularly focused on the Indian Muslim community, which faced both British colonial rule and the growing influence of Hindu nationalism. He envisioned the establishment of a separate Muslim polity where Muslims could freely practice their religion and develop their cultural and intellectual heritage. This vision laid the groundwork for the eventual creation of Pakistan, making Iqbal one of the most influential voices in the history of modern Islamic political thought.

By combining Islamic heritage with Western philosophical insights, Iqbal sought to reinterpret Islamic teachings in a way that could revitalize Muslim communities, particularly in India. His unique approach offered a powerful model for harmonizing tradition and modernity, inspiring future generations of Muslim intellectuals and political leaders. His legacy continues to resonate across the Muslim world, serving as a testament to the enduring relevance of his ideas.

Islamic political thought in the modern period emerged as a multifaceted response to European domination and the profound transformations reshaping the global order. The interaction between Western modernity and Islamic tradition gave rise to a diverse range of intellectual currents, reflecting the complex and dynamic nature of Muslim societies. Muhammad Iqbal stands out as a key figure within this broader intellectual landscape, offering a compelling vision for the renewal of Islamic political thought. His synthesis of tradition and modernity serves as a powerful example of how Muslims can navigate the challenges of the modern world while remaining true to their religious and cultural heritage.

Modernity presents several defining characteristics that significantly influence political, social, and cultural structures. Two prominent features

of modernity are the rise of sovereign nation-states as legally defined entities in the global political system and the process of secularization. Secularization is characterized by the emancipation of certain aspects of social, cultural, and political life from the dominance or control of traditional religious ideas. This phenomenon has been both a contributing factor to modernization and a result of it.⁸ The exclusion of religious considerations from politics and economics has become a dominant trend, especially in Western modernity. This trend has created significant challenges for Muslims, as reflected in modern Islamic political thought.⁹

Modernization is often accompanied by the privatization and marginalization of religion. This development has led to the perception that religion plays a diminishing role in public life. However, Iqbal's political thought stands in stark contrast to this prevailing trend. He advocates for the principle of obedience to God and the Islamic principles of solidarity as the foundation for a separate Muslim state in India. His vision challenges the dominant modern narrative that relegates religion to the private sphere. The resurgence of religious traditions, particularly Islam, in the public sphere since the 1980s has served as a counterpoint to the theories of secularization. Persistent religiosity in the United States, the Muslim world, and widespread signs of religious revival challenge the assumption that modernization inevitably leads to secularization.¹⁰

Iqbal's response to the idea of the nation-state and secularization is rooted in his quest for Islamic authenticity in the political system. His rejection of modern Western nationalism stems from his belief in the primacy of religious solidarity over territorial or ethnic affiliations. Initially, Iqbal was an Indian nationalist who expressed admiration for his homeland. However, as his thought evolved, he came to see the concept of the nation-state based on geographical boundaries as incompatible with Islamic principles. His vision of a separate Muslim state in India emerged from this realization. Although he passed away nine years before the creation of Pakistan, Iqbal articulated his vision in his 1930 address at the Allahabad session of the All-India Muslim League. He declared, "Self-government within the British Empire or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State appears to me the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India."¹¹

Iqbal's critique of nationalism was not a rejection of collective identity per se but a denunciation of narrow forms of nationalism that prioritized geography and politics over religious solidarity. He viewed such nationalism as particularly dangerous because it could undermine the unity of the Muslim community. Iqbal's vision of Islamic nationalism was rooted in

the principle of obedience to God, which he saw as the cornerstone of a just and unified society. The unity of a social group, in his view, must be based on shared beliefs and goals rather than mere territorial affiliations.¹²

Iqbal's rejection of modern Western nationalism is further reflected in his poetry and philosophical writings. Through his poetry, Iqbal sought to inspire a sense of spiritual and political awakening among Muslims. His poetic works, such as *Asrār-i-Khūdī* (Secrets of the Self) and *Rumūz-i-Bekhūdī* (Secrets of Selflessness), emphasize the importance of selfhood, self-discipline, and the pursuit of spiritual and moral excellence. These ideas are central to his vision of a revitalized Islamic community. James B. Prior, in his analysis of Iqbal's thought, highlights the poet's condemnation of "homeland worship" and the cult of patriotism, particularly in the United States, where extreme forms of nationalism often demand human sacrifice as a sacred ritual.¹³

For Iqbal, the true foundation of a nation lies in the principle of obedience to God. This principle forms the basis for the unity of the Muslim community, which transcends geographical, ethnic, and linguistic divisions. Iqbal's vision of Islamic nationalism is not merely a political program but a spiritual and moral project. He sought to create a society where individuals are bound together by their shared commitment to the values of justice, compassion, and solidarity. This vision challenges the secular foundations of modern nation-states and offers an alternative model of political organization.

Iqbal found a stronger basis for his nation in the principle of obedience to God. The cornerstone of nationalism is the unity of a social group, and this unity must first of all be an affirmation of the same beliefs and goals. Iqbal stated:

The heart dies of hatred, lives of faith
The power of faith derives from unity
When unity becomes visible, it is a nation.¹⁴

The vision of Tawhid, the Unity of God, is the second condition for unity. When Muslims stand together, their unity as a community embodies the Unity (Oneness) of God:

Do not look slightly on the oneness of vision
This is a true epiphany of the Unity
When a nation becomes drunk with the Unity
Power, yea, omnipotence lies in its grasp.¹⁵

In other words, political unity is essential to the unity of religious belief. Spiritual purity depends, it seems, on political purity. That explains, according to Prior, why Iqbal advocated a separate Muslim state in India, because an Islamic nation is an essential part of the Muslim faith. The

implication is clear: not only is the West a threat to Islam, but the large number of divisive powers in the Indian subcontinent are an inherent threat to Islam.¹⁶ Therefore, the Indian Muslims had to unite or else they would perish.¹⁷ Accordingly, Iqbal believed that a separate Muslim state in India was a solution for Muslims in the pattern of self-government (*swaraj*) that was slowly emerging in India.

His understanding of the Islamic state as a community whose membership is based on the same religious beliefs and whose aim is the realization of freedom, equality, and brotherhood in history leads very logically to the rejection of regional or local nationalism which is considered to be contrary to the universal brotherhood established by the Prophet Muhammad:

Our Master, fleeing from his fatherland,
Resolved the knot of Muslim nationhood
His wisdom founded one community
The world its parish—on the sacred charge to civilize.¹⁸

Iqbal's rejection of any concept of the nation-state as the foundation of the Islamic community also has implications for the rejection of the modern Western concept of the duality of church and state, which means rejection of the second characteristic of modernity, namely secularization and the exclusion of religious considerations from politics and economics. "In Islam," Iqbal argued, "... it is the same reality which appears as Church looked at from one point of view and State from another. It is not true to say that Church and State are two sides or facets of the same thing. Islam is a single unanalysable reality which is one or the other as your point of view varies."¹⁹ He further argued that Islamic ideas about the State should not be confused with European ideas about Church and State separation. For the former (Islam), it was only a division of functions, as is clear from the gradual formation of the offices of Shaykh al-Islam and Ministers in Muslim countries; while for the latter (European), division was based on the metaphysical dualism of spirit and matter.²⁰

In Iqbal's view, a state with an Islamic ideology provides equal opportunities for everyone to act according to the potential they have. In such a state, every member is encouraged to show what is best in themselves in the context of serving God and humanity. An Islamic state, according to Iqbal, exists to perfect the world order and to elevate humanity towards a higher and noble spiritual life, and as such must be distinguished from a narrow and secular national state.²¹ Iqbal said that:

The essence of "Tauhid" as a working idea is equality, solidarity, and freedom. The state from the Islamic standpoint is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to

realize them in a definite human organization. It is in this sense alone that the state in Islam is a theocracy, not in the sense that it is headed by a representative of God on earth who can always screen his despotic will behind his supposed infallibility. The critics of Islam have lost sight of this important consideration.²²

Iqbal rejects nationalism in its secular sense; however, he advocated Islamic nationalism, which he based first on the principle of the oneness of God and thus envisioned a vision of a World State in which all Muslim nations form an undivided community. Nationalism in this sense has a place in a country with an Islamic ideology. The inner cohesion of this community arises not from geographic or ethnic unity, but from the unity of political and religious ideals. Membership or citizenship is based on a declaration of 'same tendencies' which ends only when this condition ceases to exist.²³ Iqbal further explains this problem as follows: "Islamic political ideals include the formation of a social group originating from the free fusion of all races and nationalities. Nationality in Islam is not the highest limit of political development, because the general principles of Islamic law are based on human nature, not based on the particularities of a particular social group."²⁴

However, as an early proponent of authenticity who sought to find what was authentically Eastern about himself and his society in contrast to the forces of Western culture that he felt were oppressive, Iqbal also rejected the Islamic traditions that were being practiced and faced by ordinary people who considered themselves Muslims. For example, he called on "true Muslims" to fight mullahism, mysticism, and monarchy.²⁵ The community from which Muslims draw strength and inspiration is also the community that Iqbal accuses of being colored by these three things, which he describes as a community that criticizes God for the sake of its own destiny, but does not want to take responsibility for its own fate.²⁶ Iqbal, apart from not believing that modern science, which is obsessed with empirical data, is able to offer solutions to concrete conditions of existence, he also does not believe that mysticism in the form of escapism, which is the practice of many Muslims in India, is able to offer solutions.²⁷ He also ruled out the possibility of re-establishing the caliphate, which, over the centuries of Islamic history, became the highest Islamic political institution by referring to events that occurred during his lifetime.²⁸

Indeed, the call to authenticity as a way out of modernity should not be confused with a tendency toward traditional society or with a desire to evoke the past. Iqbal does not support either of them. In *Javid Namah*, Iqbal complains that Indians "have become alienated from themselves:

they have made a prison out of the habits of the past.” Iqbal denounced conventionalism as “self-killing” and said that those “who ignore the path of tradition” are followers of the true path of the prophets. He views contemporary Eastern traditions as passive in the face of imperialism, accommodating foreign methods and escapism; all of this was fostered by the religious and political establishment, as well as Sufi orders. He criticized mullahs (*‘ulamā*) who were not in harmony with the Islamic world. Iqbal said that a mullah would meet a boring paradise because there would be no one left with whom he would fight over trivial things. Although committed to Sufism regarding the preference of the heart and love over the mind, Iqbal objected to neo-Platonic mysticism because it renounced the world.²⁹ He also objected to monarchy because it violated Islamic principles and Islamic practice during the time of the Prophet and his early successors.³⁰

Iqbal’s political thought represents a synthesis of tradition and modernity. While he drew on Islamic traditions and the legacy of Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sinā, and Ibn Khaldūn, he also engaged with modern Western philosophy and political thought. His ideas reflect a dynamic and critical engagement with both Islamic and Western intellectual traditions. Iqbal’s philosophy of *Khūdī* (selfhood) is a prime example of this synthesis. The concept of *Khūdī* emphasizes the importance of self-affirmation, self-discipline, and self-transcendence. It is a call for Muslims to awaken their inner potential and become active participants in shaping their destiny.

Iqbal’s engagement with modernity was not uncritical. He recognized both the achievements and the limitations of Western modernity. While he admired the scientific and technological advancements of the West, he criticized its materialism, individualism, and spiritual emptiness. He believed that the West’s emphasis on material progress had come at the expense of moral and spiritual values. For Iqbal, the task of Muslims was to integrate the positive aspects of modernity with the spiritual and ethical teachings of Islam. This vision of synthesis is encapsulated in his famous verse: “Develop the self and conquer the world.”³¹

Iqbal’s political thought continues to be relevant in the contemporary world. His emphasis on religious solidarity, spiritual renewal, and the pursuit of justice offers a powerful critique of the secular, materialistic ethos of modernity. At the same time, his vision challenges Muslims to engage critically with modernity and to seek a synthesis between tradition and modernity. The resurgence of religious movements and the increasing prominence of Islam in global politics highlight the enduring significance

of Iqbal's ideas.

Iqbal's political thought occupies a unique position between tradition and modernity. His rejection of narrow nationalism, his emphasis on religious solidarity, and his vision of a separate Muslim state in India reflect his commitment to Islamic authenticity. At the same time, his engagement with Western philosophy and his call for self-affirmation demonstrate his openness to the positive aspects of modernity. Iqbal's ideas continue to inspire debates on the role of religion in public life, the relationship between tradition and modernity, and the quest for a just and unified society. His thought remains a testament to the enduring relevance of religious and spiritual values in the modern world.

Islam and the Public Religion

Iqbal views Islam and modern territorial nationalism as competing principles for organizing political groups. Nationalism unites social groups but also divides and keeps them divided. His critique of secularism highlighted its reduction of religion to a private matter, leaving morality to be dictated by state laws. Iqbal's philosophy remains a powerful critique of the exclusion of religion from public life and a call to return to a unified, spiritually driven social order.³²

However, the perceived tension between the Islamic conception of the state and contemporary secularism in recent times has been bridged by the theoretical framework of the concept of public religion promoted by Jose Casanova. He argued that religion does not necessarily retreat in the face of modernity and secularization; rather, it can transform and take on a public role in a democratic and pluralistic society. The main ways in which his ideas can reconcile these two seemingly contradictory perspectives can be realized, first, in an enactment of religion's role in the public sphere. Casanova challenges the strict privatization of religion by arguing that religion can play a constructive role in public life without necessarily imposing a theocratic order.³³ This aligns with the Islamic concept of the state, which seeks to actualize ethical and moral principles like equality, solidarity, and freedom in governance. Rather than enforcing religious laws on citizens, Islam as a public religion could influence public ethics, social justice, and policy-making while coexisting with a secular legal framework.³⁴

The second way of reconciliation of the Islamic conception of the state, as perceived by Iqbal, and contemporary secularism is differentiation, not privatization of religion. The former does not necessarily imply that religion should be excluded from public life. Many modern democracies

allow religious voices to engage in political discourse while maintaining an official separation between state institutions and religious authority. This means that Islamic values can contribute to shaping public norms without contradicting secular principles.³⁵

The third way is pluralism and religious engagement. Casanova emphasizes that religious traditions can engage in democratic discourse without seeking to dominate political power. The Islamic view of the state, which seeks to institutionalize moral and ethical values, can be realized through democratic participation, civil society engagement, and interfaith dialogue rather than coercion. In this sense, Islam's public role can align with pluralistic democracy, where different worldviews—including religious ones—contribute to a shared political space.³⁶

The fourth way is the possibility of multiple secularisms. Rather than a rigid Western model of secularism, Casanova's work acknowledges that secularism takes different forms in different historical and cultural contexts. Some societies accommodate religious influences in governance without fully merging religious and state institutions. This perspective allows for an Islamic model of governance that respects religious values while also protecting freedom of belief and diversity, thus avoiding the extremes of both rigid secularism and religious authoritarianism.³⁷

The fifth way is ethical foundations for public policy. Public religion, as conceptualized by Casanova, suggests that religious ethics can inspire social justice policies, economic fairness, and human rights advocacy without necessitating a theocratic system. Islamic principles of *maṣlaḥah* (public good), *shūrā* (consultation), and *ʿadl* (justice) can inform laws and policies in a way that is compatible with modern democratic institutions.³⁸

By adopting Casanova's public religion framework, the Islamic vision of the state does not have to be in direct opposition to secular governance. Instead, it can function as an ethical and moral force within a pluralistic, democratic public sphere. This allows for the realization of equality, solidarity, and freedom in a way that remains inclusive and adaptable to diverse societies. Iqbal's vision of the state can be justified and accommodated by the concept of public religion.

Pakistan: Iqbal's Dream as a Means of Self-Development for Indian Muslims

Iqbal envisions the state as a transformative space fostering both spiritual and material growth for Muslims. His ideal state enables individuals to develop their unique potential while serving God and humanity. More than a political entity, the Islamic state, for Iqbal, is a vehicle for

elevating humanity and realizing principles like freedom, equality, and fraternity within society. He emphasizes that the state should facilitate self-actualization and moral development, shaping a socio-political environment that nurtures ethical and spiritual progress. Unlike secular nationalist models focused on political and economic stability, Iqbal's vision prioritizes human potential and Islamic principles.³⁹

Iqbal would likely be deeply disappointed by Pakistan today, which falls far from his utopian vision. Since its inception, the country has faced persistent political, socio-economic, ethnic, and sectarian challenges, undermining unity and prosperity. Extreme inequality divides a privileged elite from a majority struggling in poverty, contradicting Iqbal's ideals of equality and social justice. Corruption, mismanagement, and political instability worsen these disparities, with wealth concentrated in urban centers while rural communities remain impoverished. Limited access to quality education and healthcare traps marginalized groups in poverty, highlighting the state's failure to fulfill its socio-economic obligations. This growing inequality fuels disillusionment with Pakistan's Islamic identity.⁴⁰

Pakistan's ethnic tensions, evident in the 1971 secession of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, continue to fracture the nation. Conflicts between Punjabis, Sindhis, Pathans, and Muhajirs deepen disunity. Despite being an Islamic state, ideological divides among traditionalists, fundamentalists, liberals, and secularists prevent a cohesive national identity. Rising sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shias threatens religious freedom, a core Islamic value Iqbal championed. Additionally, the persecution of religious minorities, including Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis, contradicts the inclusive vision of Islam that Iqbal envisioned.⁴¹ In 2018, Pakistan's Parliament passed a landmark amendment extending political and human rights reforms to the tribal areas, aiming to unify the nation and establish democracy. However, regional inequality, economic disparities, and the government's weak control over the forces hinder progress. Gender wage gaps and uneven development threaten social cohesion.⁴²

Pakistan's strategic location adds to its challenges. Tensions with India, particularly over Kashmir, fuel hostility and violence.⁴³ The military's strong political influence prioritizes defense over social and economic development, diverting resources from public services and worsening poverty and inequality.⁴⁴

Widespread disillusionment in Pakistan stems from the gap between its founding ideals and current realities. Corruption, sectarian violence, and human rights abuses contrast sharply with Iqbal's vision of justice,

equality, and fraternity. Many question whether Pakistan truly embodies its name, the “pure land.”⁴⁵

Iqbal’s dream of Pakistan as a vehicle for Muslim self-development remains largely unfulfilled. Realizing his vision requires a fundamental transformation of political, economic, and social structures, guided by justice, equality, and solidarity. Reviving Iqbal’s ideals demands renewed commitment to Islam’s ethical and spiritual values—promoting the common good, protecting human rights, and upholding human dignity.⁴⁶

To transform Pakistan, education, social welfare, and economic development must be prioritized. Policies should empower marginalized communities, promote gender equality, and ensure fair access to resources. Eradicating corruption, strengthening democratic institutions, and fostering interfaith harmony are crucial to realizing Iqbal’s vision of an Islamic state.⁴⁷

Pakistan must also cultivate intellectual freedom and critical inquiry—values Iqbal championed. Education should encourage independent thinking, creativity, and innovation. By nurturing an enlightened generation committed to knowledge and the common good, Pakistan can move closer to Iqbal’s dream.⁴⁸

Achieving this vision requires a collective effort from the government, civil society, and religious leaders. Rejecting sectarianism, extremism, and authoritarianism in favor of inclusivity and democracy is essential. Only by embracing Islam’s ethical and spiritual values can Pakistan become a model Islamic state and a source of inspiration for the Muslim world.⁴⁹

Iqbal’s vision of Pakistan as a path to self-development remains a powerful ideal. Despite challenges, his legacy provides a blueprint for a just, equitable, and enlightened society. By embracing freedom, equality, and fraternity, Pakistan can fulfill Iqbal’s dream of a “pure land” where every citizen has the opportunity to reach their full potential in service to God and humanity. Reclaiming these principles can transform the nation, ensuring it reflects the ideals Iqbal envisioned—a society rooted in justice, unity, and spiritual growth.⁵⁰

Since gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan has long been under military rule, punctuated by democratically elected civilian governments. The triangular battle between the President, Prime Minister, and the Military has been a recurring feature of the country’s political landscape. This power struggle has undermined the stability and effectiveness of democratic institutions. In 2010, a constitutional amendment was adopted, marking a significant step towards strengthening democratic governance. Among other things, it removed the power of the President

of Pakistan to unilaterally dissolve Parliament, strengthened Parliament, the position of the Prime Minister, the powers of the provinces vis-à-vis the central government, and the independence of the judiciary, and renamed North-West Frontier Province to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The right to information and the right to education were also enshrined in the constitution. However, despite these reforms, the military still holds significant influence, especially on foreign and security policy, as well as the economy.⁵¹

Democracy in Pakistan has been constantly unsteady. The country's political history is marked by periods of military dictatorship and civilian rule, with the military often acting as a power broker behind the scenes. There is a lack of democracy and accountability within political parties, which are often controlled by dynastic families rather than functioning as genuine democratic institutions. This has contributed to political instability and weakened public trust in the democratic process. For much of the past 77 years since the birth of Pakistan, the country has been plagued by crisis and instability, struggling to establish a sustainable democratic system.⁵²

Apart from political instability, Pakistan is also far from Iqbal's ideals of *faqr* (self-control), which is one of the stages of the development of human perfection. *Faqr* emphasizes self-discipline, contentment, and spiritual elevation, serving as a means of achieving individual and collective self-development. However, Pakistan is infected with various types of corruption, which are pervasive and deeply entrenched in society. Corruption affects all sectors, including politics, the judiciary, law enforcement, and public administration. The country's political sphere and administrative bodies are characterized by a lack of transparency, corruption, and players pursuing vested interests. Each state institution seems to be a supporter of itself rather than serving the state and its people. In 2023, the Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International ranked Pakistan 133 out of 180 countries, with a score of 29, indicating a high level of corruption.⁵³

The widespread corruption in Pakistan has further exacerbated socio-economic inequalities, depriving the majority of citizens of basic services and opportunities. The unequal distribution of resources has created a small elite class that enjoys immense wealth and power, while the majority of the population lives in poverty. This socio-economic divide is a stark departure from Iqbal's vision of a just and equitable society where every individual is provided with the opportunity to realize their potential.⁵⁴

The Pakistani people must be willing to reflect on Iqbal's ideals and principles of a modern state that is capable of providing an environment

that encourages the collective self-development of its leaders and citizens. Various sects, groups, classes, and ethnicities must stop considering themselves as the only legitimate inheritors of Iqbal's vision and the truest interpreters of Islam. Sectarianism, ethnic tensions, and political polarization have deeply divided Pakistani society, making it difficult to achieve national unity and cohesion. Each group should prioritize common interests over partisan interests, casting aside their greed and egocentrism. The spirit of cooperation, tolerance, and inclusivity must be revived to create a more harmonious society.⁵⁵

A crucial step towards realizing Iqbal's vision is fostering dialogue and deliberation among different segments of society. This means creating platforms for open discussions, promoting interfaith and intercultural harmony, and encouraging collaboration on shared goals. The process of nation-building must be a long and gradual one, requiring patience, perseverance, and a genuine commitment to the collective good.⁵⁶

Education and awareness play a vital role in this transformation. By investing in quality education and promoting critical thinking, Pakistan can empower its citizens to challenge corruption, demand accountability, and participate actively in the democratic process. Iqbal's philosophy emphasizes the importance of self-knowledge and self-development as the foundation for creating a just and prosperous society. Therefore, an educational system that cultivates moral values, civic responsibility, and a sense of social justice is essential for nurturing a new generation of ethical leaders.⁵⁷

Furthermore, Pakistan must strengthen its institutions and uphold the rule of law to combat corruption and ensure transparency. Independent judiciary, free media, and active civil society organizations can act as watchdogs to hold those in power accountable. Reforms in public administration, electoral processes, and law enforcement are necessary to create a more transparent and efficient governance system.⁵⁸

Iqbal's vision of Pakistan was not merely about the creation of a separate Muslim state, but about establishing a model of a modern Islamic state where the principles of freedom, equality, and fraternity are realized. Without genuine efforts to foster unity, inclusivity, and selflessness, the Pakistani nation will never be able to approach, let alone achieve, Pakistan's goal of enabling Muslims to organize their lives both individually and collectively in accordance with the teachings and demands of Islam, as Iqbal envisioned. The dream of Pakistan as a land of purity and justice remains unfulfilled, but with a collective commitment to Iqbal's ideals, it is still possible to transform the country into a beacon of hope and progress

for the Muslim world.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Iqbal's political thought remains profoundly relevant in discussions on Islam and governance. His call for the reconstruction of religious thought and the emphasis on *ijtihad* highlight his progressive vision for an Islamic polity that integrates faith with modern governance. While his ideas influenced the formation of Pakistan, they also provide a broader framework for understanding the role of Islam in contemporary public life. Iqbal's advocacy for intellectual freedom, self-development, and an ethical democracy offers an alternative to both secularism and rigid traditionalism. In today's world, where debates on political Islam continue to evolve, Iqbal's insights provide valuable perspectives on achieving a balance between tradition and progress in Muslim societies. Overall, the conflict between orthodox and heterodox groups was not only a theological issue but also a matter of politics and public safety. The state became involved in endorsing a particular model of orthodoxy and addressing heterodoxy, making it an issue of control and monitoring. This highlights the complex interplay between religion and politics and the importance of state power in shaping religious discourse and practice.

Endnotes

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2. John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 5 and 84.
3. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 64; Patrick Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective: A Guide to Islamic Society, Politics and Law* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 80.
4. Voll, *Islam*, 5 and 149; Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective*, 77.
5. John L. Esposito, Tamara Sonn, and John O. Voll, "Introduction," in *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*, eds. John L. Esposito, Tamara Sonn, and John O. Voll (Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–25.
6. By Public Islam Salvatore and Eickelman refer "to the highly diverse invocations of Islam as ideas and practices that religious scholars, self-ascribed religious authorities, secular intellectuals, Sufi orders, mothers, students, workers, engineers, and many others make to civic debate and public life. In this public capacity, 'Islam' makes a difference in configuring the politics and social life of large parts of the globe, and not just for self-ascribed religious authorities. It makes this difference not only as a template for ideas and practices but also as a way of envisioning alternative political realities and, increasingly, in acting on both global and local stages, thus reconfiguring established boundaries of civil and social life." Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman, "Preface," in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, eds. Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2004), xii. I use the term "public Islam" instead of "political Islam", since the former is more neutral in character than the later. Political Islam is the belief that Islam as a body of faith

- has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim World and to implement this idea in some fashion. See Graham E. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), xi–xii.
7. Casanova's concept of "public religions" is deprivatization of religion meaning "religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized rule which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them." Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.
 8. Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices – Vol. 2: The Contemporary Period* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 12–13. Cf. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 7–20.
 9. Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, "Some Reflections on the Separation of Religion and Politics in Modern Islam," *Islamic Studies* 3, no. 3 (September 1964): 250–251.
 10. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 6; John L. Esposito, "Introduction: Islam and Secularism in the Twenty-First Century," in *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, eds. Azzam Tamimi and John L. Esposito (London: Hurst & Company, 2002), 3; Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam*, xiii–xiv.
 11. Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Concept of an Islamic State: An Analysis of the Ideological Controversy in Pakistan* (London: Frances Pinter, 1987), 74; Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in The Indian Environment* (Oxford University Press, 1964), 273–274.
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 13. James B. Prior, "Iqbal's View of Islamic Nationalism in Javid Namah," in *Studies in Iqbal's Thought and Art: Select Articles from the Quarterly "Iqbal"*, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore: Bazm-Iqbal, 1972), 383, 412, and 421.
 14. Muhammad Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, translated from Persian with introduction and notes by Arthur J. Arberry (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1966), 129; Prior, "Iqbal's View," 428.
 15. Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, 129.
 16. Iqbal's concerns have been borne out "...the relationship between secular India and the Muslim community since independence: the increasing exclusion, marginalization and discrimination of the community at all levels—social, political, economic and cultural, reducing the community to a second-class citizen, the under-representation of the community in all structures of public opportunity, the segregation and ghettoization of the community, the victimization of institutionalized riots and pogroms, the systematic destruction of its heritage and cultural legacy..." Anwar Alam, "Secular India and Muslim India: Discourses on Secularism and Muslims in Contemporary India", <https://books.openedition.org/editionsehess/22316?lang=en>, Retrieved May 28, 2024; Zamir Akhtar Khan, "Iqbal and Quaid's Vision of Pakistan", https://qurtuba.edu.pk/thedialogue/The%20Dialogue/5_2/Dialogue_April_June2010_136-164.pdf, Accessed March 15, 2025.
 17. Prior, "Iqbal's View," 428.
 18. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Mysteries of Selflessness: A Philosophical Poem*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry, with Introduction and Notes (London: John Murray, 1953), 30; John L. Esposito,

- "Muhammad Iqbal and the Islamic State," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 182. In Iqbal's view the true meaning of the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD lies in the rejection of the concept of local patriotism. See Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964* (London, Bombay, and Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 156–157.
19. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968), 154.
 20. Syed Abdul Vahid, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), 284; Hafiz Abbaddullah Farooqi, "Iqbal's Concept of State," in *Studies in Iqbal's Thought and Art*, 373; Aziz Ahmad, *Iqbal and the Recent Exposition of Islamic Political Thought* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1977), 5–6.
 21. Esposito, "Muhammad Iqbal," 178-179.
 22. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 147.
 23. Esposito, "Muhammad Iqbal," 183; Cf. Robert D. Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 70–71.
 24. Vahid, *Thoughts and Reflections*, 60; Farooqi, "Iqbal's Concept of State," 374.
 25. Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity*, 67.
 26. Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity*, 64–65.
 27. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, v; Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity*, 67 and 77.
 28. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 157-158.
 29. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 91.
 30. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 157; Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity*, 67.
 31. Muhammad Iqbal, *Asrar-E-Khudi*, <https://www.scribd.com/document/354495342/Asrar-E-Khudi-By-Allama-Muhammad-Iqbal-pdf>, Accessed March 10, 2025.
 32. Anwar Husain Syed, *Pakistan: Islam, Politics, and National Solidarity* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 44.
 33. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 40–66.
 34. Salvatore and Eickelman, *Public Islam and the Common Good*, xii.
 35. Armando Salvatore, *The Public Sphere: Liberal Modernity, Catholicism, Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 156–162.
 36. Esposito, *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, 17–25.
 37. Mohammed Ayoob challenges the monolithic perception of political Islam and highlights its diverse manifestations across different regions. He argues that political Islam is not inherently anti-democratic but is shaped by historical, cultural, and political contexts. Ayoob emphasizes that Islamist movements can adapt to democratic frameworks when given the opportunity to participate in fair political processes. Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 157–160.
 38. Salvatore highlights how *Maslahah* served as a pragmatic tool for balancing religious ethics with social and political realities. It played a crucial role in fostering practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and guiding Islamic scholars in adapting to changing circumstances. However, with the decline of the Islamic intellectual tradition during the post-Axial era, the emphasis on *Maslahah* diminished, leading to a rigidification of legal thought and the weakening of the public sphere in Islamic societies. Salvatore, *The Public Sphere*, 155–171. For *Shūrā*, see Tamimi and Esposito (eds.), *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, 21, 24, 145, and 168. Meanwhile, Nazih N. Ayubi emphasizes that justice in Islamic thought is not merely legal or social but deeply rooted in moral and ethical principles derived from the Quran and the Sunnah. He argues that Islamist movements often invoke justice as a response to social inequality, political oppression, and economic disparity. He highlights the tension between

- the ideal of justice in Islamic tradition and its practical application in contemporary political contexts. See Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 24-25, 28, 45, 210-211, 253.
39. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 91 and 157-158; Ahmad, *Iqbal and the Recent Exposition of Islamic Political Thought*, 4; Ahmed, *The Concept of an Islamic State*, 75.
 40. Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012), passim; Khalid Bin Sayyed, *Western Dominance and Political Islam* (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 103; Stephen Cohen, "State Building in Pakistan," in *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, eds. Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 302-305; Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, *The Politics of Common Sense: State, Society and Culture in Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Ahmed, *The Concept of an Islamic State*, 195-197, passim.
 41. Anam Zakaria, *1971: A People's History from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India* (Haryana: Penguin Random House India Private Limited: 2019), passim; Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, *The Struggle for Hegemony in Pakistan: Fear, Desire and Revolutionary Horizons* (UK: Pluto Press, 2022), passim; Farahnaz Ispahani, *Purifying the Land of the Pure: A History of Pakistan's Religious Minorities* (Oxford University Press: 2017), passim; Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 147.
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