

PRAXIS OF PERENIALITY:  
EMERSON'S "SELF RELIANCE" AND  
IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF '*KHUDI*'

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## ABSTRACT

An extensive comparative study between the two seers, Emerson and Iqbal brings forth many similarities. This paper adds to the corpus of comparative study between Iqbal and western philosophy and an unexplored dimension is also studied in this paper. Drawing on their similarities, this paper traces the concept of self-reliance as proposed by the father of Transcendentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the dimensions of the self or '*Khudi*' as developed by the poet philosopher, Allama Mohammad Iqbal. The critique in this paper strengthens upon the processes of Emerson's spiritual insight coming from the readings in eastern religions, and building his vision upon the reconstruction of reliance on oneself with the convictions of selfhood, self-actualization, and self-realization; which, when considered together, are perceived as the concept of '*Khudi*', by Iqbal. While elaborating on the theory of '*Khudi*', the paper also studies the possible limitations of these terms about the self, in constituting a comprehensive meaning of '*Khudi*' as visualized by Iqbal. Self-reliance of Emerson and *Khudi* of Iqbal, are two philosophies whose relevance in today's age is growing. If Emerson's Self-Reliance with a preexisting harmony with nature, and with absolutely trustworthy seated at our heart has worked for the betterment and advancement of the people he propounded his philosophy for, then it goes without saying that Iqbal's concept of *Khudi* goes further and makes the beholder of this principled stance a personality who becomes immortal. It is only a matter of implementing, integrating, and becoming the living embodiment of *Khudi*.

## اللهم ارني حقائق الاشياء كما هي'

God! Grant me knowledge of the ultimate [understanding of] the nature of things

“To a man who is growing in the likeness of God faith begins even here to change into vision. He carries within himself a proof of a Deity, which can only be understood by experience. He more than believes, he feels the Divine presence”<sup>2</sup>

This paper is a comparison between two sages, of their own times, one in the west and the other in the east; Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82) and Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938). Roughly speaking, two generations apart, Iqbal is born precisely five years prior to Emerson’s death and there is no chance of their meeting each other. Yet, the main premises of Emerson’s essay *Self Reliance* and Iqbal’s concept of Khudi are so relevant, it seems that they may have borrowed from each other. Iqbal coming later, may be accused of borrowing from this great seer of the west but nothing in his writings and the scholarship on the two sages suggest that he may have derived his philosophy of Khudi from Emerson or any philosophies that Iqbal studied. However, there is one point of similarity between the two; they both have drawn from the well of Islam. Emerson taking his inspiration from many other eastern religions,<sup>3</sup> including Islam, while Iqbal’s sole<sup>4</sup> source of inspiration being the word of God, the Quran.<sup>5</sup>

Iqbal has been studied in comparison to many western philosophers, but he has rarely been studied in relation to Emerson. Apart from some similarities discussed in Syed Ashfaq Ali’s thesis *Emerson and Iqbal*, this paper adds to his critique by presenting a detailed comparison from the two works of Emerson and Iqbal. Ali’s thesis deals mostly with the mystical aspect common between the two seers. He explains Emerson’s concepts of ‘over soul’ and ‘emanation’ as individual human souls proceeding from the World-soul, and emanation as the force emanating forth from the human nature.<sup>6</sup> However, my analysis addresses the gaps found in this thesis in terms of coherence and conclusion and adds to what was not accounted for, namely the basic concepts of the two seers of self-reliance and khudi.

In this paper, I study how the concepts of ‘over soul’ and ‘emanation’ of Emerson, and Iqbal’s concepts of ultimate reality<sup>7</sup> and ego/self, constructed on the principals drawn from Quran transform into a synthesis which is very relevant for our present times. Studying Emerson’s essay *Self Reliance*, which is not a single essay but a series of lectures he delivered in 1840s, and thus constituting his philosophy, and Iqbal’s concept of Khudi, a concept he established at various places in his writings, especially his poetry, I intend to bring forth the striking similarities of their texts. The detailed textual references from both the poets will help to build the validity and relevance of this research in our modern times.

### **Emerson and Iqbal: Two Seers and their Source of Inspiration**

Lewis Leary writes in his essay, “The Quest for Vocation” that Emerson “inspired thousands and he angered thousands because he incited people to think, and on levels beyond those to which they were accustomed”.<sup>8</sup> This is something which can be seen as a common feature in the two sages, as Iqbal was also accused of being a heretic with the thoughts in which he questions the unmindful and blindfolded following of customs when he says in several verses of “*Saaqi Nama*”:

تہن تصوف شریعت کلام  
بتان عجم کے پجاری تمام  
حقیقت خرافات میں کھو گئی  
یہ امت روایات میں کھو گئی<sup>9</sup>

*Tamaddun, tasawwuf, shariat kalaam*

*Butaan e ajamke pujari tammam*

*Haqeeqat khurafat mein kbogai*

*Ye ummat rivayat mein kbogai*

*Trans:* That the culture and traditions, inquiries for seeking the truth about God, the jurisprudence, and the eloquence, have all become the worshippers of idols of ajam (ungodliness). The ultimate reality is lost somewhere in frivolity and this nation (of humanity) is drenched in mere nonsensical traditions’.

Such views of Iqbal made him very unpopular with clerics. But his words are still relevant today. Similarly, “Emerson continues to nag the American conscience even when its ears are filled with other voices”.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, there was a dip in the popularity of the two seers and their wisdom was lost to some subsequent generations due to such divisive strategies. There is, therefore, an imperative on

scholars, to revive their writings from the lost pages, clear taints from such phenomenal sages, and help ourselves benefit from their writings.

Inspired by “Channing’s message,”<sup>11</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, the son of a Unitarian minister, distancing himself from the traditional Evangelical spirit of his age, considered his own “transcendental springtime” as an “inevitable next step.”<sup>12</sup> This next step was to take the tenets of Unitarianism, like understanding of God as one entity to a next level of understanding. The principles of Unitarianism, as it may be known, were in sharp opposition to the concept of trinity; the concept of original sin; predestination, and intellectualism/rationalism. Emerson’s philosophy of taking Unitarian principles to the next level is what he is calling ‘transcendental springtime’; later termed as transcendentalism.

Thus this “American thinker deeply concerned with public issues” is seen to be declaring: “I am to invite men drenched in time to recover themselves & come out of time, & taste their native immortal air.” Joel Porte, an eminent scholar on Emerson, advocates that “Emerson internalized or subjectified history so as to be able to use it, to make it part of his own fiber.”<sup>13</sup> This is something that will be seen with the textual references from his essay of *Self Reliance*.<sup>14</sup>

While discussing the formative factors contributing to Iqbal’s thought, Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, in his book, *Glory of Iqbal*, talks about the “marvelous institution” which shaped Iqbal’s thought and life and that was none other than “the inner school which is born with everyone and remains with him till death. It is the ‘institution’ of the heart, the ‘seminary’ of conscience, where divine education is imparted and spiritual development takes place.”<sup>15</sup> This is also borne by Mazheruddin Siddiqui in his book, *The Image of the West in Iqbal* that “Iqbal’s primary interest lay in the ultimate verities of life and religious truth”<sup>16</sup> and it was only out of compulsion that Iqbal could not ignore philosophy. Otherwise he, quite categorically, declared once in his book, *Eminent Mussalmans*, quoted in Siddiqui’s book:

I am afraid that I have no philosophy to teach. As a matter of fact I hate systems of philosophy, nor do I trust principles and conclusions of philosophy. No man has condemned the human intellect more than I, i.e. as applied to the ultimate realities of religion. No doubt I talk of things in which philosophers are also interested. But with me these things are matters of living experience and not of philosophical reasoning.<sup>17</sup>

Thus Iqbal declares that his philosophy is nothing else than a practically implemented philosophy drawn from the word of God, only if it can be translated into a living experience.

Earlier, in his doctoral thesis too, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Iqbal concludes that the metaphysics in Persia was improved by Islam and Greek Philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Other scholars like Iqbal Singh also vouch for the same influence on Iqbal's philosophy which "was essentially a philosophy of dynamism, of action; a philosophy which he claimed was founded on the hard rock of Quranic Revelation."<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Munawwar's narration of the incident mentioned earlier,<sup>20</sup> bears out the influence of Quran on Iqbal's thought. That is why Iqbal declares:

As for the body of scholarship tracing a western influence on Iqbal,<sup>21</sup> certain works stand out. Tara Charan Rastogi, in his book, *Western Influence in Iqbal* traces the influence of western philosophers, from Kant to Shaw on Iqbal, but states, at the onset of his book that "an influence may appear in the form of assimilation, stimulation, acquiescence or revolt," and therefore, goes on to declare that "Iqbal's genius assimilates some impressions, gets stimulated by some thoughts, acquiesce in some view-points, revolts in some opinions."<sup>22</sup> While comparing Iqbal and Tagore, Rastogi concludes in Rabindarnath Tagore's words:

A sign of greatness in great geniuses is their enormous capacity for borrowing, very often without their knowing it; they have unlimited credit in the world market of cultures. Only mediocrities are ashamed and afraid of borrowing, for they do not know how to pay back the debt in their own coin.....

And Rastogi believes that "Iqbal was a genius with a considerable capacity for assimilation and borrowing and knew how to pay back the debt in his own coin."<sup>23</sup>

In *Eeqan-e-Iqbal*, a book by Professor Muhammad Munawwar, a learned scholar on Iqbal, he charts out the tenets of 'educating humanity'<sup>24</sup> and says that a human being is shorn off all attributes of humanity when he stoops to the level of an animal. For Iqbal, the real pedestal of humanity can only be achieved when one acquires the level of Khudi. For if a human being is not endowed with the faculty of choosing either good or bad and is only designed to choose well, then he is compelled to choose good and thus is created chained in this framework. However, for Iqbal this is no achievement. It is only after understanding what a human being is actually capable of, and willfully choosing a certain course of action, and putting it into practice, that he actually acquires the esteemed position for being called a human being, which is only possible by a realization of his Khudi.<sup>25</sup>

Dr Nazir Qaisar has also made a comprehensive comparison of Iqbal and the western philosophers and established that Iqbal had

studied western philosophers, but his source of inspiration was in God's words.<sup>26</sup> In his other, quite bold and daring book, Qaisar challenges all psychoanalytical theories of the west concerning the structuring and shaping of personality. While discussing ego, he establishes that for Iqbal the reality is spiritual with no duality of mind and body.<sup>27</sup> According to Qaisar, Iqbal's concept of ego/self is not bound by space and time, it is supranatural, unique, with a purposiveness, the ego/self is free, and consequently immortal.<sup>28</sup> He concludes that Iqbal's theory of personality with its five basic tenets of *Ishq* (love), *faith*, *intellect*, *action*, and *faqr*<sup>29</sup> are the things which result in a self-actualization which is beyond the self-actualization theorized by any western psychology or psychotherapy.<sup>30</sup> It is important for us to understand the concept of faqr as understood and explained by Iqbal. His understanding of the term is an explanation of Hazrat<sup>31</sup> Ali's saying that faqr is of two types: faqr<sup>32</sup> as a punishment and faqr as a reward. Faqr as a reward is not the inflicted faqr on a human being, but rather, it is an adopted faqr by a person which opens the doors to self-actualization and complements his khudi. This adopted faqr plays a pivotal role in making a human being achieve his/her higher self and becomes immortal.

The above discussion about the inspirations for the philosophical premises of the two sages help validate the ensuing textual comparison between the works of the two sages. This comparison brings out the similarities in the philosophy of the two seers and also foregrounds the source of their inspirations.

### **Philosophical Legacy Emerson and Iqbal: A Textual Analysis**

In this section, a textual analysis of selected texts of Emerson and Iqbal bring out the salient features of their philosophies, and in spite of the critique that was levied against them at one point and time, we study the reasons for their lasting influence on posterior generations. The essay of *Self Reliance* is a compilation of a series of lectures that Emerson delivered at Harvard University in the 1840s which were later compiled under a single heading of *Self Reliance*. Iqbal's philosophy of Khudi is studied with the help of his different poems selected from different books of his poetry. Both their philosophies breathed a new soul, not only in their respective nations, but also flew against any borders and became universal for anyone or any nation to make effective use of.

In the beginning of his essay *Self Reliance*, Emerson quotes a Latin phrase, "Ne te quaesiveris extra" which translates as 'do not seek outside yourselves.'<sup>33</sup> While this quote reminds us of Robert Browning's poem, "From 'Paracelsus'" which starts with the phrase

“Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise/ From outward things,....”, it also brings home Iqbal’s thought in these words:

اپنے من میں ڈوب کر پا جا سراغ زندگی  
تو اگر میرا نہیں بنتا نہ بن اپنا تو بن<sup>۳۴</sup>

*Apne Man mein doob kar paa ja suragh e zindagi*

*Tu agar mera nabin banta na ban, apna to ban*

*Trans:* ‘Delve into the inner recesses of your heart/ Do not bother to be mine if you don’t want to, but at least be true to yourself’.

Emerson then emphasizes that for a true person, who is true to his inner calling, “Nothing to him falls early or too late.”<sup>35</sup> It is because he is so in line with nature, his inner calling is so akin to nature that nothing will fall early or late but rather just on time. Iqbal expresses this as:

خودی کو کر بلند اتنا کہ ہر تقدیر سے پہلے  
خدا بندے سے خود پوچھے بتا تیری رضا کیا ہے<sup>۳۶</sup>

*Khudi ko kar buland itna ke har taqdeer se pehle*

*Khuda bande se khud pooche bata teri raza kia hai*

*Trans:* ‘Raise your self-integrity to such a level that before every decree/ God, himself, will ask the person as to his or her will before giving any decree’. For both the seers, it is only possible when a person is so in unison with nature.

Emerson says: “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, — that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost,— and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment.”<sup>37</sup> This is so because Emerson too, believes in the “spiritual quality of the self.”<sup>38</sup> For Iqbal, the latent conviction of a human being is powerful enough to lead even the workings of the cosmos:

ترا جوہر ہے نوری پاک ہے تو  
فروغ دیدہ افلاک ہے تو  
تیرے صید زبوں افرشتہ و حور  
کہ شاہین شہ لولاک ہے تو<sup>۳۹</sup>

*Tera johar hai nuri, pak hai tu*

*Farugh e deeda e aflaak hai tu*

*Tere saed e zaboos afrishta o hoor*

*Ke shabeen e shah e laulak hai tu*



*Trans:*“That, O human being your gift is made of a Divine light and you are pure. You are to propel the causes of the sky. The angels and the hooris are under your belt. Because you are made hawk of the ultimate quality by the Creator’.

There is, however, a small difference in the above two quotes. In order to illustrate further, Emerson validates his argument by stating that Moses, Plato, and Milton spoke from their own conviction, which may have been wrong but were not. What Emerson is missing out here is that none of the names that he has taken, spoke only their heart but spoke with their different beacons of guidance; Moses’ beacon was God, Plato’s was Socrates, and Milton was also justifying the ways of God to man. Though, later Emerson also talks about the “gleam of light,” that “preexisting harmony,” and exhorts to “Trust thyself: Every heart vibrates to that iron string.”<sup>40</sup> Emerson, therefore, misses this infinitesimal link of trusting oneself and relying on the divine source for guidance, initially, before he establishes it later. On the other hand, Iqbal establishes the strong link between the divine source of preexisting harmony and inner gleam of light from the divine source as one of the founding prerequisites for his self-conscious person with an integral self, a person with khudi; who, takes his source of inspiration not only from his own heart but also with a perennial source of guidance from the Divine light. Iqbal never considers ego as only a physical entity but considers it a spiritual entity, which is not allegorical but very much real and considers that it is impossible to deny reality to the ego.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, for Iqbal, that gleam of light, the preexisting harmony, and the iron string, that Emerson talks about, are not metaphorical but very much real.

Emerson totally refutes the very notion of imitation and says that “imitation is suicide,” and “Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist,” and “[n]othing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.”<sup>42</sup> Iqbal also believes that the social problems of humanity can only be dealt effectively with fresh interpretation of Islamic Jurisprudence. In fact, “[h]e had also come to believe that *taqlid* was synonymous to suicide for national life.”<sup>43</sup> Iqbal believes that this nonconformity should be the vein for gaining real knowledge of things. He believes that conformist education has killed the incentive of learning and the spirit of inquiry when he says:

گلا تو گھونٹ دیا اہل مدرسہ نے تیرا  
کہاں سے آئے صدا لا الہ الا اللہ

*Gala tu ghount diya ahl-e-madrassa ne tera  
Kahan se aaye sada la ila ha illalah.*

*Trans:*“That, an education bent on emphasizing on conformity has stifled your voice/ your urge to seek truth. From whence forth can come the call for the oneness of God Almighty? Emerson understands that in principle we do not like to imitate but says that:

Emerson understands that in principle we do not like to imitate but says that:

These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion.<sup>45</sup>

For Emerson, therefore, society is conspiring to make it a joint stock company, in which you scratch each other’s backs for all the wrong reasons. Iqbal expresses this in a very harsh admonition in his poem titled, “*Marg e Khudi*” مرگ خودی when he says:

خودی کی موت سے پیر حرم ہوا مجبور  
کہ بیچ کھائے مسلمان کا جامہ احرام<sup>46</sup>

*Khudi ki mant se peer e haram hua majboor  
Ke beich khai musalmaan ka jaama e ihraam.*

*Trans:*“That when self-actualization/ *Khudi* is compromised, even the highest cleric in the Masjid e Haram (Makkah) is compelled to sell the most sacred dress of a pilgrim’.

So therefore, the conformity to which Emerson’s self-reliance is averted is expressed by Iqbal in an epigrammatically proverbial manner:

خودی کو نہ دے سیم و زر کے عوض  
نہیں شعلہ دیتے شرر کے عوض<sup>47</sup>

*Khudi ko na de seem o zar ke ivaz  
Nabin shula dete sharer ke ivaz.*

*Trans:*“That do not give your *Khudi*/ self-realization in lieu of gold and money, because a benefitting fire (say in a cold night) is not traded off for a small splinter’.

Emerson then speaks about the ills of such conformity to dead badges and dead institutions, and says: “A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition, as if everything were titular and ephemeral but he.”<sup>48</sup> He means that a human being should carry forward the torch of self-reliance even against all odds and believes that every odd is going to pass over quickly, and is ephemeral but only his self-reliance based on preexisting harmony, with the

absolute trustworthy seated at ones heart is the everlasting thing. For Iqbal the eternal nature of a real life is expressed in these words:

موت کی دلِ دانا کو کچھ پرواہ نہیں  
شب کی خاموشی میں جز ہنگامہ فردا نہیں  
موت کو سمجھے ہیں غافل اختتامِ زندگی  
ہے یہ شامِ زندگی صبحِ دوامِ زندگی<sup>۹</sup>

*Mant ki dil e dana ko kuch Parwa nabin*

*Shab ki khamoshi mein juz hangama-e-farda nabin.*

*Mant ko samjhen hain ghafil ikhtataam e zindagi*

*Hai ye shaam e zindagi, subh dawam e zindagi*

*Trans:* 'But the intelligent heart is not at all afraid of death. There is nothing in a night's silence except for morrow's affairs (for the wise). That only the ignorant fools can think death as the end of life. While it is only the dusk of life, because you get an eternal life in the next morning (due to a truthful heart full of conviction).'

Emerson then raises a particularly important point that "[i]f malice and vanity wear the coat of philanthropy, shall that pass"? What Emerson is trying to question are the feigned "miscellaneous popular charities; the education at college of fools."<sup>50</sup> that are carried out by the men, supposedly, in higher positions. Emerson, however, emphasizes that he will only respect a person of integrity. Iqbal disapproves of a person with no integrity and expresses a similar thought in this manner:

ہر شے مسافر، ہر چیز راہی  
کیا چاند تارے، کیا مرغ و ماہی  
کچھ قدر اپنی تو نے نہ جانی  
یہ بے سواد، یہ کم نگاہی  
پیرِ حرم کو دیکھا ہے میں نے  
کردار بے سوز، گفتارِ واہی<sup>۱۰</sup>

*Har shai musaafir, har cheez raahi*

*Kia chaand tare kia murgh o maahi*

*Kuch qadr apni tu ne naa jaani*

*Ye be sawadi ye kam nigaahi*

*peer e haram ko dekha hai mein ne*

*kirdar be soz guftaar waahi*

*Trans:* 'Everything is a traveler and everyone is a sojourner; the moon, the stars, the rooster, and the fish. You really are unable to understand

your real worth. Your lack of vision and your lack of real sight are proof enough for that. What to talk about you, I have seen the myopic clerics even, whose character is so lack luster, and so is their speech good for nothing’.

Iqbal, a real nonconformist, therefore, does not spare anyone who does not uphold the highest principles of self-integrity or *Khudi*.

Emerson then emphasizes that “the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude,”<sup>52</sup> who does not conform to the rhetoric of the majority. He should be the upholder of such a self-integrity that he should not conform blindfolded to the popular or permitted rhetoric. For Iqbal a self-actualized person, an upholder of principles of *khudi* maintains the highest principles of *khudi*, both in crowd and in solitude. He says:

خودی کی جلوتوں میں مصطفائی  
 خودی کی خلوتوں میں کبریائی  
 زمین و آسمان و کرسی و عرش  
 خودی کی زد میں ہے ساری خدائی<sup>53</sup>

*Khudi ki jahwaton me mustafai*  
*Khudi ki khal waton me kibriayi*  
*zameen o aasman o kursi o arsh*  
*Khudi ki zād me hai saari khudai*

Trans: ‘If you are a bearer of *Khudi*, then you would know that when *Khudi* is in a company it bears the qualities and principles given to us by our prophet Muhammad (SAW); if this *Khudi* is in solitude, it has the qualities of godliness. The earth, the sky, Allah’s throne; everything is under the belt of this selfhood/ *Khudi*’.

In other words, *Khudi* makes a person so phenomenal that even all Godliness is under his belt. This does not mean that a human being becomes superior to God, but it entails that a person upholding the highest principles of self-integrity, i.e. *Khudi*, is the ultimate representative of all godliness as he says in his poem “*Tulu-e-Islam*”<sup>54</sup> طلوع اسلام:

تو رازِ کن فکاں ہے، اپنی آنکھوں پر عیاں ہو جا  
 خودی کا رازداں ہو جا، خدا کا ترجمان ہو جا<sup>54</sup>

*Tu Raaz-e-Kun Faqan hai, apni aankhon par ayan ho ja*  
*Khudi ka raazdan ho ja, Khuda ka tarjuman ho ja.*

Trans: You are the secret of creation (which God decreed as ‘to be and you are’), so get yourself revealed upon your eyes (of wisdom). Get

yourself acquainted with the secrets of your *Khudi*, and become the spokesman of God.

Enumerating the ills of conformity, Emerson gives a rhetorical statement: “The objection to conforming to usages that have become dead to you is, that it scatters your force. It loses your time and blurs the impression of your character. If you maintain a dead church, contribute to a dead Bible-society,.... under all these screens I have difficulty to detect the precise man you are.”<sup>55</sup> For Emerson, compromising your self-reliance will annihilate you. Iqbal also points out the same ills if not addressed:

تیری نگاہ فرمایہ ہاتھ ہیں کوتاہ  
تیرا گنہ کہ نخیل بلند کا ہے گناہ<sup>۵۶</sup>

*Teri nighab faro maya, haath hain kotah*

*Tera gunah ke nigah e buland ka hai gunah*

*Trans:* ‘If you are unable to uphold the principles of *Khudi* then your vision and your hands are chained because your wrong is a wrong of the utmost degree and will have dire consequences’.

اٹھا میں مدرسہ و خانقاہ سے غم ناک  
نہ زندگی، نہ محبت، نہ معرفت، نہ نگاہ<sup>۵۷</sup>

*Utha main madrassah o khaankah se gham naak*

*Na zindagi, na muhabbat, na maarifat na nigah*

*Trans:* ‘I came out of a madrassah and a monastery so dejected because I could not see any good in them; no life, no love, no wisdom, and no vision’.

Emerson then makes us beware of foolishly sticking to conformity even when the thing has already been proven wrong. He says that such “[a] foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.”<sup>58</sup> That if a self-reliant person comes to know that he has carried out a wrong thing or spoken something wrong, he should have the “magnanimity” to accept it and rectify it. And Iqbal exhorts us with the same message:

خودی میں گم ہے خدائی، تلاش کر غافل  
یہی ہے تیرے لیے اب صلاحِ کار کی راہ  
حدیثِ دل کسی درویشِ بے گلیم سے پوچھ  
خدا کرے تجھے تیرے مقام سے آگاہ<sup>۵۹</sup>

*Khudi me gum hai khudai talaash kar ghafil*

*yehi hai tere liye ab salah e kaar ki raah*

*hadith e dil kisi darwaish e beikaleem se pooch  
khuda kare tujhe tere maqam se aagab*

*Trans:* 'Khudi is something hidden in all Godliness, Find it O ignorant! This is the only thing that will be best for you. You cannot get the wise words of heart from a person who is tongue tied. May Allah make you aware of your real worth'.

A righteous and self-reliant person, for Emerson, is a character which "is like an acrostic or Alexandrian stanza; —read it forward, backward, or across, it still spells the same thing....Your genuine action will explain itself, and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing."<sup>60</sup> Emerson gives examples of characters of great men like Caesar and Christ; one was the founder of the Roman Empire, and Christ's genius is received with such fervor, as Emerson reminds us, that "he is confounded with virtue and the possible of man."<sup>61</sup> For Iqbal, such a self-actualized person can even unlock the doors of divine grace. He says:

خودی ہو علم سے محکم تو غیرتِ جبریل  
اگر ہو عشق سے محکم تو صورِ اسرائیل<sup>۳</sup>

*Khudi ho ilm se muhkam to ghairat e jibreel*

*Agar ho ishq se muhkum to sur e israfeel*

*Trans:* 'If this Khudi in a person is strengthened with ilm/ knowledge, he achieves the integrity of angel Gabriel. And if he strengthens it with ishq/love (love of God) then it becomes a harbinger, akin to angel Israfeel (the one who is going to blow the trumpet on the day of judgement)'.

Inner ray of light, trusting oneself with the absolutely trustworthy seated at our heart, with preexisting harmony, which we are endowed with, is something which Emerson is exhorting us to work with, in all walks of life. For Iqbal a similar thought takes the shape of these words:

یہ فیضانِ نظر تھا یا کہ مکتب کی کرامت تھی  
سکھائے کس نے اسماعیل کو آدابِ فرزندِ<sup>۳</sup>

*Ye faizān e nazār tha ke maktab ki karamat thi*

*Sikhāi kis ne Ismail ko aadab e farzandi*

*Trans:* 'That, was it the visionary glance or some school which taught Ishmael the means and manners to understand self-actualization in every deed'.

For Emerson, such self-reliance is something which should be the bases of prayers even. Because he believes that:

Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul.

It is the spirit of God pronouncing his works good. But prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft. It supposes dualism and not unity in nature and consciousness. As soon as the man is at one with God, he will not beg.<sup>64</sup>

He believes that the prayers should be asking for all encompassing goodness and should not be mendicant, which is expressed by Iqbal as:

دلِ بیٹا بھی کر خدا سے طلب  
آنکھ کا نور دل کا نور نہیں<sup>۱۵</sup>

*Dil beena bhi kar khuda se talab*

*Aankh ka noor dilka noor nabin*

*Trans:* 'Ask God for a visionary heart because the sight of eyes is not the vision of heart'.

In other words, like Emerson Iqbal is also emphasizing the need to make a real prayer devoid of any short-sighted goals.

Emerson then talks about a concept which is so close to the concept of *Faqr* as discussed above by Dr Nazir Qaisar for the development of the concept of Iqbal's Khudi. Emerson calls travelling a kind of superstition if it is considered to be an achievement in terms of getting knowledge. He says: "The soul is no traveler; the wise man stays at home, and when his necessities, his duties, on any occasion call him from his house, or into foreign lands, he is at home still, and shall make men sensible by the expression of his countenance."<sup>66</sup> He even goes on to say that "Travelling is a fool's paradise.... but this change is not amelioration."<sup>67</sup> What Emerson means is that a self-reliant person does not need the crutches of travelling to explore himself. For, he will carry his selfhood wherever he goes. In fact, he declares a person carries his self, whether good or mean, wherever he goes. Traveling does him no good. He goes further to quote Hazrat Ali and says: "Thy lot or portion of life," said the Caliph Ali, "is seeking after thee; therefore, be at rest from seeking after it."<sup>68</sup> Besides confirming the eastern influence on Emerson's thought, this quote of Emerson also points out the importance of adopted faqr as discussed earlier in the discussion of development of the concept of Khudi by Iqbal. Emerson is favoring this resigned acceptance with a self-reliant soul. It reminds one of Iqbal's concept of faqr when he says that this adopted faqr, which is also one of the main contributing factors for Khudi, is the epitome of all goodness:

اک فقر سکھاتا ہے صیاد کو نچیری  
اک فقر سے کھلتے ہیں اسرارِ جہاں گیری  
اک فقر سے قوموں میں مسکینی و دلگیری  
اک فقر سے مٹی میں خاصیتِ اکسیری  
اک فقر ہے شبیری، اس فقر میں ہے میری  
میراثِ مسلمانی، سرمایہٴ شبیری<sup>۶۹</sup>

*Ik faqr sikhaata hai Sayyad ko nakhcheeri*

*Ik faqr se khulte hain asraar e jahangeeri*

*Ik faqr se kaamon me miskeeni o dilgeeri*

*Ik faqr se mitti mein khasiat e akseeri*

*Ik faqr hai shabbiri, is faqr mein hai meeri*

*Meeras e musulmani, sarmaya e shabbiri*

*Trans:* "There is a faqr that teaches the hunter to become a prey; there is another that opens the secrets of mastery over the world. There is a faqr that causes indigence, and extreme misery, and there is a faqr which turns the dust into a liberating elixir. This is the faqr of Ali, and there is kingdom in this faqr. This faqr of Ali is the real heritage for a Muslim (one who has submitted his will to Allah)".

So, both the sages draw from the well of Ali's wisdom. Iqbal expresses this wisdom in the above lines, a wisdom, which gets translated in the valor of Hussain, Ali's son. In these lines Iqbal writes about Hussain's adopted faqr, which makes him a living embodiment and a symbol of upholding the highest principles of valor, truthfulness, and human resilience against cruelty, and hence endowed with the title of Shabir, one title among many.

Emerson concludes his essay by stating that a self-reliant person "knows that power is inborn, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of him and elsewhere, and so perceiving, throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles;" because he knows that "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles."<sup>70</sup> Emerson believes that a self-reliant person, throwing himself unhesitatingly knows how to rectify himself if he errs, because only the righteous principles can bring him true inner peace and comfort. Iqbal, in his book, *Zarb-e-Kaleem*, expresses such reliant demeanor in his poem titled "*Hayat e Abadi*" حیاتِ ابدی:



زندگانی ہے صدف، قطرہ نیساں ہے خودی  
وہ صدف کیا کہ جو قطرے کو گہر کر نہ سکے  
ہو اگر خودنگر و خودگر و خودگیر خودی  
یہ بھی ممکن ہے کہ تو موت سے بھی مر نہ سکے<sup>۱</sup>

*Zindagani hai sadaf, qatra e neesan hai Khudi  
wo sadaf kiya jo qatre ko gahar kar na sake  
ho agar khud nigar o, khud gar o khud gir Khudi  
ye bhi mumkin hai ke tu maut se bhi mar na sake*

*Trans:* 'That life is like an oyster and *Khudi* is the first drop of water that it receives. What is that oyster which cannot turn a drop of water into a pearl? If one's *Khudi* knows how to self-evaluate itself, it knows how to build itself, and it can constantly keep on mentoring itself; then in all likelihood, even death will not be able to cause it to die'.

With this simple parable of an oyster and a pearl, therefore, Iqbal has brought home the understanding of how to become an immortal being. This immortality, in other words, is the true elixir for eternal life that a human being should aspire for and strive to achieve.

### Conclusion: A Continuum

Self-reliance of Emerson and *Khudi* of Iqbal are two philosophies whose relevance in today's day and age is growing by the minute. If Emerson's Self-Reliance with a preexisting harmony with nature, and with absolutely trustworthy seated at our heart has worked for the betterment and advancement of the people he propounded his philosophy for, then it goes without saying that Iqbal's concept of *khudi* goes further and makes the beholder of this principled stance—a somebody who becomes immortal. It is only a matter of implementing, integrating, and becoming the living embodiment of *khudi*.

However, the discussion of Iqbal's *Khudi* is not complete without mentioning the cardinal principle and the inherent principle that Iqbal reminds humanity with, belonging to all ages. He has told how this *Khudi* becomes *khudnigar* خودنگر, *khudgar* خودگر, *khudgir* خودگیر so that a human being becomes immortal. And the ultimate secret to uphold and maintain this status of *Khudi*, according to Iqbal is when he says:

خودی کا سر نہاں لا الہ الا اللہ  
خودی ہے تیغ، فساں لا الہ الا اللہ  
یہ دور اپنے براہیم کی تلاش میں ہے  
صنم کدہ ہے جہاں لا الہ الا اللہ<sup>۲</sup>

*Khudi ka sirre niban laa ilaha ill allah*  
*Khudi hai tegh, fasan laa ilaha ill allah*  
*ye daur apne barahim ki talaash mei hai*  
*sanam kada hai jaban laa ilaha ill allah*

*Trans:* 'The hidden secret of acquiring this *Khudi* is to say that there is no god but Allah. If *Khudi* is a sword then its whetting stone is nothing but the internalized concept of thought and deed; that there is no god but Allah. These times are in search of an explorer and seeker of truth like Abraham because this world is enchained in its idolatry'.

Thus, Iqbal reminds us that if we want to become immortal then the only way out for today's times is to whet our swords of *Khudi* with the whetting stone of the concept of *laa ilaha illallah*. It is only by honing ourselves and our concepts with the help and guidance of the ultimate divine reality, which is Allah, Iqbal has not only elevated the concept of self-reliance to its ultimate pedestal but also given a pragmatic way to achieve it. And finally, for Iqbal, a person who has submitted his/her will to Allah and attained the zenith of self-reliant *Khudi*, is somebody whose existence is higher than any constellation of stars, as he says in his poem, *Tulu e Islam*, طوع اسلام :

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

*Pare hai charkh e neeli faam se manzil Musalmaan ki*  
*Sitare jis ki gard-e-raahoun, wo kaarwan tu hai.*

*Trans:* The ultimate destination of a Muslim lies beyond the blue sky. You are then that caravan, in whose feet lies the stars (the stars are the dust under your feet).

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam*, Oxford University Press, London, 1934, p. 3
- <sup>2</sup> Robinson, D. M., Transcendentalism and its Times, In J. P. Morris (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 15
- <sup>3</sup> See Syed Ashfaq Ali's thesis *Emerson and Iqbal* and Emerson's essay *Self Reliance* in which he gives references to Hazrat Ali's sayings in addition to Roman and Christian sources among others, 2013, p. 31.
- <sup>4</sup> Though Iqbal studied the western philosophers keenly and was influenced by their philosophy at some point and time in his life, yet his ultimate source of inspiration and culminating point of his philosophical acumen was the touchstone of Allah and His messenger's words.
- <sup>5</sup> Faqir Sayyid Wahid al-din narrates: A new visitor came to Iqbal when he was residing in Lahore. After stray conversation the visitor put a question to Dr Iqbal saying, "You have read books on religion, economics, politics, history, philosophy etc. Which one of them is the best and most profound in respect of

- wisdom? Dr Iqbal stood up from the chair, made a gesture with his hand that he would be back in no time. After two or three minutes he returned with a book. He put the book into the hands of the questioner and said, "The Quran." (qtd. In Munawwar, *Iqbal and Quranic Wisdom*, p. 56).
- <sup>6</sup> Syed Ishfaq Ali, *Emerson and Iqbal*, p. 31.
- <sup>7</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 1.
- <sup>8</sup> Leary, L., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: An Interpretive Essay*. Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1980, p. 3.
- <sup>9</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2018, p.450.
- <sup>10</sup> Porte, J., Introduction: Representing America - the Emerson Legacy. In J. P. Morris (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 2
- <sup>11</sup> Robinson, David M., "Transcendentalism and its Times", *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Ed. Joel Porte & Sandra Morris. p.13- 29.
- <sup>12</sup> Joel Porte, "Introduction: Representing America - the Emerson Legacy", *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Ed. Joel Porte & Sandra Morris, p.1-12.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Since all the quotes of this essay are well known and can be found in different downloadable versions and otherwise hard copies, the pagination may be different in different versions. All the subsequent references are from this essay which can be downloaded from any electronic source. (Emerson).
- <sup>15</sup> Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Glory of Iqbal*, Trans. Muhammad Asif Kidwai, Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, Lucknow, 1973, pp.30- 31.
- <sup>16</sup> Mazheruddin Siddiqui, *The Image of West in Iqbal*, Bazm-i-Iqbal, Lahore, 1964, p. 86.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 85.
- <sup>18</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Bazm-i-Iqbal, Lahore, 1908, 1959. p.147.
- <sup>19</sup> Iqbal Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p.73.
- <sup>20</sup> Same as end note 11.
- <sup>21</sup> Qaiser, Nazir, *Iqbal and the Western philosophers : (A Comparative Study)*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2001.
- <sup>22</sup> T. C. Rastogi, *Western Influence in Iqbal*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1987, p. vii.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 268.
- <sup>24</sup> All the citations from this book is an English translation done by myself.
- <sup>25</sup> Muhammad Munnawwar, *Eeqan-e-Iqbal*, Aiwan-e-Urdu, Karachi, 1977, p.67.
- <sup>26</sup> See the books mentioned in note 8.
- <sup>27</sup> Nazir Qaisar, *A Critique of Western Psychology and Psychotherapy and Iqbal's Approach*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 62.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.64-70.
- <sup>29</sup> The ensuing explanation of the term faqr will clarify its meaning. Suffice is to say here is that faqr in one capacity, is a mode of self-restraint which was adopted by Budha. Though he was born into riches, yet he negated all luxury and comfort of his life in order to seek truth. I give Budha's example because his example is widely known.
- <sup>30</sup> Nazir Qaisar, *A Critique of Western Psychology and Psychotherapy and Iqbal's Approach*, pp. 103-110.
- <sup>31</sup> This is a term of respect used in Urdu/ Persian language used in this part of the world, and I am using the same here.

- 32 Muhammad Munnawwar, *Eeqan-e-Iqbal*, p. 201.
- 33 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self Reliance*, 1840, <https://emersoncentral.com/ebook/Self-Reliance.pdf> p. 1.  
And since all the quotes of this essay are well known and can be found in different downloadable versions and otherwise hard copies, I am giving page numbers with the quotes as found in my downloaded version. This pagination may be different in different versions. Henceforth, it will be referenced as Emerson followed by the page numbers.
- 34 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p.371.
- 35 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p.1.
- 36 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 388.
- 37 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 2.
- 38 David M. Robinson, "Transcendentalism and its Times", *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris, 15, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp.13- 29.
- 39 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p.412.
- 40 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 2.
- 41 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam*, p.98.
- 42 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p.3.
- 43 Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Iqbal's Reconstruction of Ijtihad*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1995, p.83.
- 44 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 381.
- 45 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 3.
- 46 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 594
- 47 Ibid, p. 491.
- 48 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 4.
- 49 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 282.
- 50 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 4.
- 51 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 386
- 52 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 5.
- 53 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 410
- 54 Ibid, p. 304.
- 55 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 5.
- 56 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p.381.
- 57 Ibid, p. 382
- 58 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 6.
- 59 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 382
- 60 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 6.
- 61 Ibid, p. 7.
- 62 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 395.
- 63 Ibid, p. 353..
- 64 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 13.
- 65 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 379
- 66 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 14.
- 67 Ibid., p. 15.
- 68 Ibid., p. 17.
- 69 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 491
- 70 Emerson, *Self Reliance*, p. 17.
- 71 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat e Iqbal Urdu*, p. 543.
- 72 Ibid, p. 527.
- 73 Ibid, p. 299.