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REREADING IQBAL THROUGH WESTERN
CRITICAL THEORY: *KHUDI*, NEGATIVE
DIALECTICS, FOREGROUNDING, AND THE
PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

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Abstract

This study offers a contemporary reinterpretation of Allama Muhammad Iqbal's philosophical poetry through selected Western theories of literature and aesthetics. Moving beyond predominantly hagiographic and ideologically fixed approaches to Iqbal, it examines how modern critical frameworks can reveal the continuing relevance of his thought to the spiritual, intellectual, and civilizational crises of humanity. The study focuses on the poem *The Secrets of the Self*. "Showing that the system of the universe originates in the Self, and that the continuation of the life of all individuals depends on strengthening the Self". The analysis primarily

employs Theodor W. Adorno's negative dialectics and aesthetic theory, Jan Mukařovský's concepts of aesthetic changeability and foregrounding, and Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. The study argues that Iqbal's concept of *Khudi* represents a dynamic process of self-realization achieved through action, struggle, suffering, discipline, and moral responsibility. Through an intertextual comparison with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Bergson's *élan vital*, and George Bernard Shaw's life force, the research demonstrates that Iqbal develops a distinctive conception of human potential that integrates material activity with spiritual and metaphysical purpose. Unlike purely materialistic or radically autonomous Western models, Iqbal's *Khudi* acquires freedom and strength within the ethical limits of divine law. The analysis further identifies Iqbal as an "isolated intellectual" whose critical position remains independent of both colonial modernity and rigid religious orthodoxy. His transformation of traditional Persian and Urdu poetic symbols, particularly the moth, flame, height, lightning, and fire, illustrates Mukařovský's foregrounding by preserving classical forms while introducing unfamiliar philosophical meanings. The study concludes that Iqbal's poetry embodies a productive dialectical tension between spirit and matter, freedom and discipline, tradition and modernity, and the East and the West. This theoretical rereading establishes Iqbal as a globally relevant thinker whose philosophy of *Khudi* offers an ethical and transformative response to contemporary human suffering, passivity, oppression, and civilizational decline.

Keywords: Allama Muhammad Iqbal; *Khudi*; Negative Dialectics; Theodor W. Adorno; Jan Mukařovský; Foregrounding; Intertextuality; Life Force; Isolated Intellectual; Western Critical Theory

Introduction

Allama Muhammad Iqbal is a renowned scholar on whose scholarship numberless works, researches and research articles have been produced across the world, particularly in Pakistan.

The present research is simultaneously an extension to the body of researches on Iqbal and a distinct attempt at reinterpreting his writings through the lens of western theories in the backdrop of present challenges to humanity.

Context and Background of the Study

Rationale of the Study:

Intellectuals have already worked on multiple aspects of Iqbal's poetry and I have tried to explore the less known aspects of it. One rationale for this study is directly picked from Iqbal when he writes in his philosophical and innovative work on Islam in modern times:

It must, however, be remembered that there is no such thing as finality in philosophical thinking. As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views, and probably sounder views than those set forth in these lectures, are possible. Our duty is to carefully watch the progress of human thought, and to maintain an independent critical attitude towards it.¹

Another reason behind choosing Iqbal is that it is quite a task to categorize Iqbal in a distinct group of poets, he is a "poet of the idea",² the poet who is very difficult to classify because the subjects of his poetry are not tangible objects or everyday situations like the setting sun, shining stars, the passage of seasons or human situations like falling in love, pain, joy or suffering.³

Hagiographic Studies of Iqbal

Another reason for selecting Iqbal is his hagiographic studies.⁴ Despite the fact that Iqbal himself is keenly aware of the temporal as well as provisional nature of philosophical ideas; many Muslim scholars associate with Iqbal's ideas a trans-historical and unchangeable significance; this fixing of Iqbal in that particular moment of colonization limits and confines his thoughts.⁵ This fixation of Iqbal is an obstacle towards rereading and resurrecting Iqbal; it is the dilemma of most of the Iqbal studies that they are

hagiographic as they are directed towards one particular aspect of Iqbal's writings⁶ though he has been the center of scholarly attention in India, Pakistan and Iran for decades.

It is possible that the scholars of Iqbal have sometimes done harm to him by putting on him the ideological jackets of their own affiliative⁷ identities, and ignoring his counter opinion. Marxist, Capitalist and Islamist scholars read Iqbal in their own way and bring poetical evidences in favour of their respective viewpoints.⁸

Iqbal's Ambivalence towards the West

Iqbal's (1930/2007) attitude towards west is ambivalent; he neither accepts nor rejects it completely; he wants the Muslims to approach the western knowledge with an independent and critical attitude; this independent attitude can be developed only when the Muslims are confident of their own culture and past but are not entirely captivated by it; his Muslim subject, "must transcend the pulls of his own ancient culture while avoiding the uncritical adoption of the west".⁹ Iqbal does not focus on creating East and West as separate and opposite binaries; his approach is not of choosing between the two; rather his approach is of a sage who tries to find a middle ground where the best of both the east and the west is utilized.¹⁰ He is critical of the western systems of imperialism, fascism, capitalism, secularism, class system¹¹ because he attaches his hopes with the individual who has recognized his real self.¹² This individual is neither fascinated by the west nor enchanted by the east; rather he has created his own world by imbibing the best from both the worlds; this is very well depicted in *Javed Nama* (1932/2012):

Be not enchanted by the west
Nor on the East thou needest dote,
For both this ancient and this new
Together are not worth an oat.
Alone live thou, with all tread well.
Than radiant sun that illumines
The ancient sky thou art more bright
So live that every grain of sand
May borrow brilliance from thy light.¹³

Muslim Consciousness of Iqbal and Traditional Muslim Identity

Iqbal tries to prepare a middle ground where there is space for all; there exist Muslims without losing their traditional Muslim identity and find their place in modern world without rejecting their Muslim culture. Iqbal's hopes are attached to individuals who possess strong sense of freedom, self-will, *Khudi* and determination but spiced with constraints and limitations imposed by Islam.¹⁴ As an individual is never recklessly free in Islam; he is endowed with the responsibilities of performing best in this world and preparing himself for the life hereafter.¹⁵

Iqbal's Encounter with East and West

Iqbal considers east, the world of love (Ishq) and west, the world of intellect (Aql); within the binaries of love and intellect, body and heart, Iqbal discusses the dilemma of both parts of the world.¹⁶ For a viable civilization, it is necessary to accommodate both the east and the west; the east imparts spirit, love and heart to the west and the west imparts its focus on body and on intellect to the east; this philosophical stance gives rise to a reciprocal relationship between both the worlds.¹⁷ From this dependence on each other, Iqbal derives his worldview; because for Iqbal, the combination of both is necessary for a better human civilization. In a ghazal from *Baal-e-Jibreel* (1935), he elaborates this relation:

The world of heart is a world of feeling and passion

The world of body is a world of profit, loss and treachery

When you have the world of heart, it cannot be lost

The world of body is like a shadow, here now and then gone.¹⁸

Research Objectives

This research assumes that his message is not relevant to the Muslim world only; rather its circle of influence expands to the entire world. His poetry is spongy and porous as it absorbs, appropriates and reconceptualises ideas from all over the world and does not hesitate to acknowledge those whose influence has been imbibed by it. Therefore, the present research aims to highlight the message of Iqbal for humanity; it explores how does he offer solution to the

material as well as spiritual sufferings of people and offers solution for them.

Delimitation

The corpus for analysis includes the poem from *The Secrets of the Self* (Iqbal, 1915/2001):

Showing that the system of the universe originates in the Self, and that the continuation of the life of all individuals depends on strengthening the Self.¹⁹

Another limitation of this research paper is that I have not been able to explain this poem fully because of its deep and vast philosophical scope.

Key Terms

Khudi, Life Force, Synthesis, Foregrounding, Marginality, Existentialist Weight.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

I have tried to understand Iqbal's aesthetic and intellectual worldview by using Adorno's Negative Dialectics²⁰; in this way, relevance of Iqbal's worldview can be revealed significantly when modern techniques of reading are applied on his writings. Hence, the idea of Czech Structuralist, Mukarovsky²¹ that the texts are significant in the moment of their reception instead of production and Adorno's aesthetic distancing are serving as a combined lens for the present research; here "The active reader turns into a second writer"²² and rewrites the piece of literature according to his or her own perception in present times.

Adorno's relevance in studying Iqbal is also because of the inner coherence of his thought which persists from his early writings to the last writings; he has been engaged, throughout his career, with the fundamental questions like "relationship between power and rationality",²³ suffering and happiness, like: why pleasure of a person depends on the suffering of another person; he ponders upon this question why we are inescapably trapped in a type of life in which joy of one person is procured at the expense of grief of someone else to this level that we cannot envisage a world without this inequity.²⁴ It is a salient juncture between Adorno and Iqbal as one aspect of Iqbal's

poetry is his deep concern for the ailing and oppressed humanity whom he urges to throw away the garbs of slavery, poverty and helplessness through continuous struggle.

As a critic, Adorno paid attention to minor details of his objects of study; slightest details like syntax and punctuation in poetic works and shapes and layout of books, came under his focus not because he was conducting an encyclopedic study but because he believed that minute details of a particular text, piece of art or music unfold the whole world from which they have emerged.²⁵ It also informs the present article as it provides grounds for the study of background and context of the poetry of Iqbal.

Indispensable Relation between Style and Thought

Adorno is of the view that “style is inseparable from content in philosophical and social-critical thought”.²⁶ Hence he is highly committed to explore the link between aesthetic and cognitive content of a piece of text and it pertinently links the present research on Iqbal to both the aesthetic and the content aspects of his poetry. It provides ample grounds for the study of many layers in the metaphors, allusions and similes in the poetry of Iqbal as well. The link between form and content is a principal site of reasoning in literary circles; it is the primary debate between Kantian Idealism and Hegelian Materialism; almost the whole discourse of German Idealism is built on this leading conflict and Adorno is profoundly concerned about this conflict throughout his life because “all Adorno’s arguments have something like a systematic relationship to each other”.²⁷ His contribution towards German Idealism is his endeavour to establish links between form and content, spirit and matter, behaviour and cognition, idealism and materialism. Iqbal was also trained in German Idealism and his critique of Kant and Hegel is also reflected in terms of his integration of spirit and matter; he does not appreciate Kant fully and criticizes him in his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930/2007) for the absence of material side of his thought²⁸ and he admires Hegel for his idea of content.²⁹ Likewise, Iqbal appreciates the material side of Karl Marx but he criticizes the absence of spirit in his writings;³⁰ hence a very close link is established between our theorist and the writer; both are deeply engaged and trained in the classical German philosophy; they criticize

Kant, Hegel and Karl Marx constructively, establish links among them and give their critique but this criticism is more of an engagement than rejection.

Iqbal as an Isolated Intellectual

In the backdrop of deviation from the ideals of Marxism, Adorno³¹ introduces the notion of isolated intellectual who not only alienates himself from the bourgeoisie but also disengages himself from the proletariat that has assumed the popular culture, so isolated intellectual becomes an epitome of revolutionary consciousness. Adorno opines that the writer or the intellectual alienates himself from the popular culture; he does not become a part of what people want to see; so the burden of describing truth lies with the intellectual, not with other means of communication. Adorno is of the view that “it is not the revolutionary class (the proletariat) that articulates true, unalienated consciousness, but the isolated intellectual.”³²

I have designated Iqbal as an isolated intellectual³³ because of the intellectual position he takes; neither does he endorse fully colonial establishment nor does he embrace fully orthodox religious views.³⁴ He is isolated also because he refuses synthesis in Hegelian terms; he is isolated also because he speaks from a position of marginality.*³⁵ His isolation is not of social level as he was a highly popular figure, celebrated poet, politician and thinker during his life time; his isolation is of cognitive level; he was celebrated and is still celebrated but remained unabsorbed by the public as he says:

My heart is with yestereve, my eye is on to-morrow:

* Marginality means a position of being on the margins — outside the dominant power structures — that becomes generative rather than merely limiting. The outsider position enables a *clearer and more critical* vision of both the dominant culture and the alternative traditions, precisely because the thinker is not fully absorbed into either. For Iqbal specifically — his marginality from both colonial establishment and orthodox religious scholarship freed him to critique both simultaneously without being constrained by either. Adorno theorizes the critical advantage of the outsider position throughout this work, *Minima Moralia* (1951). Said (1994) develops the idea of the intellectual as perpetual outsider whose marginality is the source of critical insight; it is directly applicable to Iqbal's position.

Amidst the company I am alone.
“Every one fancies he is my friend,
But none ever sought the secrets within my soul.”
Oh, where in the wide world is my comrade?
I am the Bush of Sinai: where is my Moses?³⁶

Modern Aesthetic Evaluation

It takes as a rule that any work of art "itself is not a constant"³⁷ Any change in circumstances like social values, time and space puts any given piece of art in an entirely different position rather it becomes a different piece than that originally produced because the lens, the prevalent artistic tradition, through which it is evaluated, has undergone transformation: "...when a certain work in two chronologically separate periods is evaluated affirmatively and equally, the aesthetic object being evaluated is a different one in each case, and hence, in some cases, is a different work."³⁸

This stance of Mukarovsky lands my research directly into its present context as it provides space for interpreting Iqbal in twenty first century with the modern interpreting rules while considering that the artistic value of his poetry and prose has also changed in present times and it can be interpreted in terms of various crises faced by the world especially the Muslim world.

Changeability of Aesthetic Values

Aesthetic values do change, they are not constant; however eternal values also undergo change but slowly and imperceptibly. If aesthetic value changes, it does not imply that artists are unable to attain the ideals rather this changeability is rooted in the very roots of the aesthetic value which is not a state but a process. The process of aesthetic evaluation is related to the development in the society that there are many levels of poetic art and consequently, there are several levels of aesthetic value.³⁹ Consequently, aesthetic value emerges as a process which is modified under the influence of two factors: the contemporary tradition of evaluation and changes in society.

This argument provides ample space to study Iqbal in twenty first (21st) century, with a modified lens to evaluate a piece of literature

which has become different because of change in social life as the "art created by man for man cannot create value which is independent of man",⁴⁰ rather men shape the meanings of the pieces of art.

Foregrounding

Mukarovsky⁴¹ developed this concept of foregrounding from Shklovsky's⁴² defamiliarisation (*ostranenie*); he states that art makes the familiar strange and through this estrangement, the reader is able to see what the writer or artist actually wants to show; hence defamiliarisation brings forth the genuine feelings to ordinary experience by disrupting mechanized perception.

Mukařovský⁴³ maintains that foregrounding occurs when a writer deliberately deviates from the established literary norm; this deviation creates an elevated aesthetic charge which results in deep engagement. He also posits that intentional use of the literary norm produces foregrounding, which can increase the aesthetic impact of the text and motivate the reader to read more deeply. Iqbal's use of ghazal and masnavi forms is an illustration of the simultaneous functioning of the norm-preserving and norm-breaking elements in an art work which Mukařovský⁴⁴ calls "simultaneous" and "contradictory". This foregrounding in Iqbal's poetry is exactly the same as Shklovsky⁴⁵ would describe, as defamiliarization playing within the genre itself.

The Existentialist Weight

It refers to the reality that Iqbal absorbed Nietzsche's concept of self over-coming (*Übermensch*), Bergson's *élan vital* (life force as continuous creative evolution),⁴⁶ and Rumi's dynamic lovek⁴⁷ and compressed all three into classical Persian poetic forms which people were accustomed to reading in the context of the conventions of medieval sufi poetry. The form is familiar, classical and traditional, but the content is unfamiliar; the reader finds Nietzsche in Persian verse and Bergson's creative evolution in ghazal. This deviation creates something that is meaningful, as a result, there comes a difference between expectation from a form of poetry and its philosophical content; it is what Mukařovský precisely means by foregrounding; as the deviation generates such meanings that could not be created either by old form or the new content in isolation.

It is generally noted that the poets breaking norms, abandon the old forms completely. But Iqbal does something more novel – he maintains the container and changes its contents. He uses familiar form to attract traditional readers, but the readers are confronted with the unexpected philosophical content. This confrontation in itself is an aesthetic and intellectual experience. It is norm-breaking and norm-preserving at the same time in the same poem and this is Mukařovský's most advanced theoretical point that I relate with Iqbal. Mukařovský⁴⁸ states that conscious violation of accepted conventions leaves a more aesthetically charged foreground for the reader to read.

Methodology

In order to approach the corpus of my research, I shall employ Intertextuality⁴⁹ for reading and analyzing the poetry of Iqbal through the theoretical lenses of Adorno and Mukarovsky.

Intertextuality

When we read or interpret a text, we try to deduce meanings from it; this process of interpretation is seriously challenged in contemporary cultural as well as literary theory as literary works come into existence while depending on already existing systems and traditions set by the body of previous works.⁵⁰ Modern theorists claim that texts lack independent meaning rather they are intertextual (p.1). Interpreting a text puts the reader into a situation in which he interprets the relation of the given text with other texts and this is what we call intertextuality.⁵¹

Analysis of the Poem

Literary theory, implicit or explicit, exists in the history of literature; from Renaissance to Enlightenment, from Humanism to Modernism, a number of literary theories have developed and offered various insights into the given pieces of literature. Thousands of pages have been written on Iqbal and I am not posing any challenge to their authenticity; the aim of the present research is to study and interpret Iqbal's poetry in the light of western critical theorists who are almost contemporaries of Iqbal. The idea to read Iqbal from the point of view of western theories is further validated because Iqbal lived in Europe and he kept himself engaged with academic,

sociological, political, philosophical and even epistemological developments and crises unfolding at that time; it is interesting to note that Iqbal was very much part of those cataclysmic times of Europe; it was perhaps the most eventful time of European history also. Iqbal was keen to understand epistemological developments going on in the west, he often talks about cultural and civilizational rise and fall in his poetry; sitting in the heart of Europe, how did he respond to these crises; it is significant to explore. Those who are almost contemporaries of Iqbal, the research particularly focuses on them, Adorno and Mukarovsky are writing in the same period (in 1920s', 30s') when Iqbal was writing, though in different contexts, and Iqbal also visited Europe and kept himself very much engaged with the academic, scientific, and political developments going on in the west.

Representative of Iqbal's Theory of Self or *Khudi*:

Iqbal explains his doctrine of *Khudi* in this long poem (complete name of the poem given in Delimitation). He perceives *Khudi* as a powerful phenomenon which gives form to human existence; even human existence depends on self. Whatever is visible is a manifestation of self. When this *Khudi* or self rises in persons, it shows the wide universe of thoughts and ideas. A dialectical contradiction exists between self and non-self as they are not absorbed to become a higher unity and remain in a continuous tension:

“When the Self awoke to consciousness.

It revealed the universe of Thought.

A hundred words are hidden in its essence:

Self-affirmation brings not-self to light”⁵²

Through *Khudi*, non-*Khudi* also comes to surface; *Khudi* brings to surface the multiple shades and pleasures associated with struggle; it becomes aware of its strengths through the working of its own arms. The poet compares *Khudi* with a rose which bathes itself in blood; the red colour of a rose is because of its pigments but *Khudi* undergoes a tough process and its realization is possible only when it undergoes hard struggle. Here imagery of *Khudi* bathed in blood is not a mere

aesthetic image; it is the cost of non-identity (Nicht-Identität) which implies that refusal to submission to automatized and comfortable existence is accompanied by struggle as well as suffering.⁵³ But the red colour of *Khudi* is because of its struggle in self-realization; this distinction leads to the idea of culture industry which marks passive existence against a dynamic critical consciousness.⁵⁴ In the process of realization of *Khudi*, it does not hesitate to sacrifice hundred gardens for the sake of one rose; it makes countless attempts to realize itself:

For the sake of a single rose it destroys a hundred rose gardens
And makes a hundred lamentations in quest of a single melody
For one sky it produces a hundred new moons
And for one word a hundred discourses.⁵⁵

Iqbal acknowledges that the realization of *Khudi* is not an easy process; it requires intense labour just like a musician who succeeds in producing his best music after many failed or less successful attempts. In the process of perfecting *Khudi*, both cruelty and wastefulness work together and they are justified on the grounds that the spiritual beauty is to be achieved at the cost of callousness and wastage.

Apparently Iqbal conforms to the traditional pessimist view about fate, death and the justification of suffering when he sees fatalism in the death of the moth:

“Tis the fate of moths to consume in flame:
The suffering of moths is justified by the candle”⁵⁶

Seemingly he points to the passivity, lack of responsibility for one's actions and indifference of the candle toward the tragic death of moth but paradoxically he challenges the traditional way of looking at death as an end. Rather he sees in the death of the moth a regeneration, an actualization, a salvation. He doesn't see death as annihilation rather for him it is a prerequisite for the maturation of *Khudi*.

For Iqbal, action is not destructive; even apparently when he conforms to the idea that hundreds of todays are destroyed for a single tomorrow, he considers regeneration and discipline behind such apparently destructive actions. Hence, he perceives Futurist

possibilities in such destructive actions as a pre-condition for the maturation of *Khudi*.

Moth, a Historical Symbol of Love

The metaphor of moth stands as a strong symbol of intense love in traditional Urdu and Persian poetry; it burns itself to death by circling fervently around the flame; so in this very idea of death Iqbal sees countless possibilities of self-realization. In apparent annihilation, there exists possibility of a future which is yet to come into existence, Utopian Negativity;⁵⁷ here death of the moth speaks about its participation in a process which holds far reaching consequences, beyond immediate annihilation of it. This annihilation hints at the utopia which can be achieved negatively and it gets linked with the Spirit of Utopia.⁵⁸

Traditionally moth serves as a norm when it depicts death through burning; tradition takes the death of moth as *fana* (annihilation) but Iqbal reverses the norm by taking its death as regeneration, self-actualization and maturation of *Khudi*. It is foregrounding as well, as the reader familiar with the traditional symbol of moth, burning and death experiences an aesthetic jolt when Iqbal transforms its meaning in the direction of regeneration. Moth serves as a classical symbol of love (*Ishq*); it denotes passive submission to annihilation as a supreme sort of spiritual love; Iqbal inverts this dominant norm by taking love as a transformative agent; hence, he makes the dominant form recessive and vice versa.

Iqbal's Worldview

Iqbal falls in the category of that tradition of poetry which believes in art for life sake and does not afford the luxury of art of art sake. The theme of the duty of the poet is a recurrent one in Iqbal's poetry as well, from "Shair", "Shama and Shair" and "Raat aur Shair" in *Bang-e-Dara* (The Ringing of the Caravan Bell)⁵⁹ to "Shir-i-Ajam" and "Shair" and *Zarb-e-Kalim* (The Blow of Moses)⁶⁰ are concerned with the tasks of the poets. He criticizes the traditional Persian poetry because it does not inspire the already weak souls, slacked by slavery;⁶¹ therefore, Iqbal is more critical of the poetry which fails to persuade people to action; rather for him, such poetry is a message of death in a metaphorical way.⁶²

The Poet's Engagement with the Life Force, Superman

With a critique of Persian poetry, Iqbal's poetry launches a simultaneous critique on western concept of life force or driving force. He considers neither the passive acceptance of fate, a characteristic of classical Persian poetry, nor the destructive autonomy of Nietzsche's superman appropriate enough to cater to the needs of genuine human existence. Rather, for Iqbal, the legitimate life force allows freedom but under certain divine moral laws, (I am appropriating this term to mean the guiding principles of life). This attitude of passive acceptance towards fate is explicit in Omar Khayyam whose poetry depicts fate as a fixed, immutable reality of human life:

"Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days,
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays"⁶³

According to Burgel, Iqbal dismisses this version of fate; his refusal to accept this quietism is not rejection of Persian poetry, but it is because he considers fatalism a spiritual as well as civilizational liability upon an already weak Muslim world under colonial subjugation.⁶⁴

On the other hand, Iqbal equally rejects Nietzsche's (1872/1967) *Übermensch* or overman or superman who instead of following the rules created by others, declares the death of god, devises his own values, affirms the joys and sufferings of life, continuously creates and transcends himself, ignores life-denying slave morality, develops his own master morality of creativity beyond the ideas of good and evil, strength and responsibility and becomes whatever he is.⁶⁵ Though Iqbal appreciated Nietzsche's critique of European nihilism and passive morality, he fundamentally disagreed with his notion of *Übermensch* because in his will to power, the categories of good and evil become insignificant for him.⁶⁶ In contrast to it, Iqbal's *Khudi* is shaped under strict supervision of divine laws; its freedom takes it to spiritual perfection rather than personal glory and lust for power.⁶⁷ In this way, in an intertextual link, Iqbal's *Mard-e-Momin* (1915/2001)

stands in a sharp contrast to the *Übermensch*⁶⁸ whose life force rejects transcendental values.

While understanding Iqbal's views about life force, it is very significant to note that he was articulating his views about this driving force in life precisely at the same moment of history when western thinkers like G. B. Shaw were also grappling with the same question of life force. For Shaw, desire and passion are the life force⁶⁹ of life; he meant by it the vital energy that drives human beings to improve and evolve themselves. It is considered a fundamental principle which propels individuals towards their ultimate goals and desires, often unconsciously guiding them towards self-improvement and progress. Shaw⁷⁰ also takes cues from Darwin's Theory of Evolution⁷¹ and believes that evolution has not really ended; it is a continuous process; and it is not merely the physical form which evolves rather human mind also evolves and adapts itself. Another sophisticated response that offers an insight into philosophical depths of life is *Elan vital* or vital force of Bergson⁷² which is the creative impulse behind evolution, human consciousness and creativity. He argues that evolution is not a mechanical process of chance and selection; rather it is a dynamic push which organizes matter, generates new possibilities and produces free but complex unpredictable forms instead of a mechanical flow of life.⁷³

In an intertextual link, Iqbal, Nietzsche, Bergson and Shaw are not borrowing or transforming one another; rather they are responding to the question of human existence and its transforming forces. The responses of these intellectuals constitute what Kristeva⁷⁴ terms as intertextual field in which contradictory responses from different parts of the world to a common philosophical and historical crisis. So, the three intellectual positions go like this: *Übermensch*⁷⁵ gains power by declaring god as dead; life force is the product of materialist and Darwinian naturalist evolution; vital force⁷⁶ remains doubtful about its ultimate moral direction though it transcends mechanized materialism. In contrast, Iqbal's *Khudi* simultaneously operates at material and spiritual levels; it is this dialectical tension between material and spiritual that distinguishes Iqbal from his western counterparts.

This difference is explicit in his conviction about life that it is worth living only when it is guided by the principles of bravery, courage and honour:

“Build a nest on the high mountains,
A nest embosomed in lightning and thunder,
Loftier than eagle’s eyrie,
That thou mayst be fit for Life’s battle,
That thy body and soul may burn in Life’s fire!”⁷⁷

It is the principle around which Iqbal’s philosophy of life revolves; he talks about dangers, heights, elevations, virtues of solitude and struggle; the life of his hero is about throwing itself into the fire of life; it shows that the path of life is not a comfortable travel on a smooth road, rather it’s like throwing oneself into a burning fire. In terms of foregrounding,⁷⁸ philosophical arguments are depicted through the spatial metaphors of height, thundering and lightning and sensory imagery; height depicts spiritual elevation preferred to comfortable mediocre life style; lightning and thunder imply living through danger and turmoil for the realization of *Khudi*. The verses break the classical norm of comfort as the supreme goals in life—a common norm between passive mysticism and colonial subjectivity.

The verse about the burning of body as well as soul in the fire of life depicts utopian negativity; this burning does not indicate destruction; it is a prerequisite for realization of that *Khudi* which is yet to emerge from the horizon of struggle; it is a goal unachieved and a dream unrealized so far.⁷⁹ This verse also enacts Bloch’s definition of knowledge which is not a mere description of what actually exists but he gives another nuance to its explanation; he takes knowledge as an active and imaginative struggle towards achieving that is not present.⁸⁰

Conclusion

In this way, by critically engaging with Life Force, my research redefines this concept by arguing that Life force in Western Epistemology is rooted in material and biological functions⁸¹ while for Iqbal the motivating force in life is rooted in material as well as spiritual and metaphysical functions. It is this dialectical tension between material and spiritual which informs Iqbal’s poetry time and

again. My research offers a theoretically informed worldview about Iqbal through an understanding of the dialectical contradictions in his poetry. The ideas and writings of Iqbal are perhaps more relevant in the contemporary world as he himself said:

“I have no need of the ear of today,
I am the voice of the poet of ‘Tomorrow’”⁸²

As an endnote, I recollect a tribute of Schimmel (2009) to Iqbal; she quotes Abdur Rahman Bajnuri about the *The Secrets of the Self*⁸³ and *The Secrets of the Selflessness*,⁸⁴ “Asrar and Rumuz should be read and recited in all schools of Delhi, Kabul, Teheran, Cairo, Istanbul, Kazan, Mecca, and Medina, and used in sermons in the mosques.”⁸⁵ It is a tribute to larger than life ideas* which need be implemented or at least introduced vehemently as a part of compulsory training of Muslim youth especially in the backdrop of the Palestine Crisis in which the Muslim leaders could play an effective role if they were trained on the grounds of Iqbalian philosophy of *Khudi*; as Iqbal states:

O thou! Who recite la-e-laha, do you know what a millat is?
It is to have thousands eyes and yet a single sight.
The men of God always have one opinion and belief,
We dwell in different tents but our hearts beat in concord.⁸⁶

Notes and References

¹ Raja, M. A. *Democratic criticism*. Liver Press, 2023, p. 202

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* The Palestine Crisis which started with an "apparent" assault of Hamas on October 7, 2024 at Israel has resulted in one of the worst humanitarian crises faced by humanity. With an endless displacement of more than one million Muslim population of Gaza, trapped in Rafah, it is facing brutal killings, genocide, hunger and death. In this context, the message of Iqbal is pertinent to arouse the Khudi, courage and self-respect of the Muslim rulers and if it was taught to them, they would not have shown indifference towards the humanitarian crisis in Gaza as Muslims are taught to be sympathetic towards others; as Iqbal laments:

“A Moman seldom serves no one, and Treason, Dissension and poverty are not his attributes” (1932/2012, p. 159).

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