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Mohammad Iqbal's Dynamic Panentheism: A Synthesis of Ego, Freedom, and Divine Immanence in the Reconstruction of Islamic Thought

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Abstract

The present study investigates Mohammad Iqbal's articulation of panentheism by articulating its reciprocal relations among the Divine, the human ego, and the condition of freedom. A hermeneutical, qualitative methodology is employed to reconstruct the locus of Iqbal's vision by concentrating upon his magnum opus, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, and supplementing this with Asrar-i-Khudi, along with scattered marginalia and lectures. Unlike the absolute interpretation of Wahdat al-Wujud, which veils personal distinction, Iqbal's panentheism renders affirmative the substantial and liberated condition of the human khudi, which matures within the dialectical perichoresis of the Creator Who is vertically transcendent and horizontally immanent. The Divine is accordingly defined as the self-positing, personal Absolute Ego, purposeful, creative, and personal—consumer and substratum, by which the diversified, temporised cosmos is both real and interior to His auto-actual life. The analysis demonstrates that Iqbal's panentheism furnishes a coherent argumentative architecture to harmonise Divine endurance, human agency, historic telos, and the dynamics of asbab and qadar. Beyond its metaphysical dimensions, the construct serves a teleological and horizon-scripting utility: it presents a counter-narrative to Muslim fatalism and tenacity, instigating an ontology of empowered participation, immanent vicegerency, and ethical co-creation as a remedial condition for the revitalisation of Islamic civilisation in the face of modern exigencies. Accordingly, the operative thrust of Iqbal's panentheism is to re-imbue the socio-political and ethical discourse with an agentic metaphysic, thereby reasserting its relevance and potency against the unapportioned latency of both tradition and globalisation.

Keywords: Panentheism, Synthesis, Ego, Freedom, Divine Immanence, Islam.

Definition of terms

Panentheism: The metaphysical position holding that the world is contained within God whilst God simultaneously transcends it. Distinguished from pantheism — in which the world and God are identical — panentheism preserves divine transcendence whilst affirming that creation inheres within the divine being.

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Dialectical monism: An ontological position asserting that reality constitutes a single, unified whole whose internal structure is generated and sustained through the tension of opposing principles or poles. Unlike Hegelian dialectics, which resolves contradiction into synthesis, dialectical monism retains polarity as a permanent and constitutive feature of the one reality, rather than a stage to be superseded.

Dynamic monism: A monistic metaphysics that characterises ultimate reality not as a static, undifferentiated substance but as an inherently active, self-differentiating process. Plurality, change, and becoming are understood as expressions of a single generative ground rather than violations of unity.

Divine immanence: The theological doctrine affirming God's active, sustaining presence within creation, as opposed to divine transcendence, which emphasises God's radical otherness and independence from the world. Immanence does not entail pantheism; rather, it denotes that the divine is operative, accessible, and intimately related to created reality.

Process theology: A theological movement grounded in the philosophy process, reconceives God as dipolar — possessing both a primordial, eternal nature and a consequent, temporal nature responsive to the world. God is held to influence creation through persuasion rather than coercion, and divine experience is understood to grow through genuine relation with creaturely events.

Introduction

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) articulated his mature thought against the backdrop of a deep civilisational crisis that disillusioned the Indian Muslim community under the British Raj. The community was confronted with a triad of decline - political impotence, intellectual anaemia, and spiritual torpor whose combined effect Iqbal regarded as existential (Taillieu et al., 2000). He identified the widely contested, though persistently influential, narrative of a protracted diminishment of ijtihād — which certain Western and reformist Muslim scholars have characterised as a near-total closure lasting several centuries — as a root cause of intellectual stagnation, whilst acknowledging that modern historiography has substantially complicated, if not refuted, this claim which Muslim scholars had seemingly decreed for nearly five centuries, as a root cause (Saputra & Nasution, 2026). By discouraging creative and autonomous reasoning in law and theology, this self-imposed closure had rendered the collective Islamic mind static, thereby incapacitating it from productively negotiating the disruptive epistemic and ontological modalities introduced by Western modernity. The theory of a fossilised Islam that coughed and sputtered in the face of contemporary challenges alarmed Iqbal, and judicious alarm, rather than despair, motivated him to a creative thesis (Pahutar, 2024). His project, entitled "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam," would not dismantle the inherited tradition; rather, it proposed a salutary reconstruction whereby the classical corpus and contemporary disciplines i.e. sciences, aesthetics, and histories of thought, would, under a revived ijtihād, coalesce in the mind of the Muslim scholar (Noorani, 2014). The synthesis sought by Iqbal would not dissolve Islam into generalised metropolitan doctrines nor would it fossilise classical narratives in amber. Instead, it affirmed a fluid, ascending Islam; a reconciliatory epistemic continuum that would reorient the collective self-conception of Muslims in India as loyal to both East and West, both revelation and rationality, both God in His own dimensions and man in his authentic anticipatory reaching out to God (Iqbal, 2013).

Even while the agenda of reconstruction appears unmistakably delineated, interpretive uncertainties frequently emerge from Iqbal’s theological stance. During the initial phase of his career, particularly whilst residing in the subcontinent, Iqbal's metaphysical orientation resists straightforward classification; whilst certain early formulations carry inflections that some scholars have read as pantheistic, the preponderance of Scientist opinion situates him variously within personalist theism, neo-theism, or Qur'anic existentialism — positions that are not mutually exclusive but that collectively resist any reductive identification of his thought with pantheism proper (Kazmi, 1997; Schimmel, 1963; Iqbal, 2013). When he describes the Divine as “eternal

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beauty" that manifests (tajalli) and incarnates throughout the cosmos, one feels tempted to conclude that the Creator and the created order are coterminous. Nevertheless, in the later, more developed phases of his work, Iqbal emerges as the foremost party to an unrelenting critique of pantheism, particularly as propounded in the doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud (Ja'far, 2012). The underlying inconsistency thus presents a pressing question: by what analytical or doctrinal strategy can one uphold, at a single stroke, the claims of divine immanence wherein God moves and resides at the heart of nature,and the claims of divine transcendence wherein God stands apart, beyond and untouched by contingent existence? A corollary and no less pressing question follows: by what theological substructure may one safeguard human individuality, freedom, and moral responsibility in the immediate orbit of the absolute? The distinction contemporary scholarship typically draws between pantheism and panentheism, then, assumes an indispensable role in mapping the internal coherence that Iqbal's systematic theology ultimately enforces (Shamsuddin, 2021).

This paper contends that Iqbal's mature thought presents a maturely articulated model of panentheism that withstands both il-mimetic tension and is a structurally necessary extension of his philosophical system. In this light, the Khalifah of the Khudi becomes not an ornamental doctrine, but the generative source that leads, via structured reasoning, to the affirmation of an actualising, albeit immanent, divinity (Noorani, 2014). Pantheism, at its theological inception, must recognise and fix the tension exposed each time human freedom is narrated concurrently. Furthermore, the affirmation of an autonomous, evolving Khalifah traces a straight line to the conclusion that divinity must encompass, but not supplant, its creaturely counterpart. In a system where man is posited as a vividly real Ego formed in reciprocal relation to the Absolute Ego, panentheistic reclamation ceases to read as optional. Iqbal's deployment of the concept cannot be dismissed as a mere distillation of doctrines, but as a disciplined exploration attempting considerable meta-civilisational speed (Hillier, 2010). Iqbal identifies not merely a preference but a systemic framework that scholastic thought, rejected at least in practice, the self-negating invocation championed by pantheism, articulating an ethos of inquiry. Self-determination is vital to individual sanctification, and his writings evidence a conception of freedom that requires a reconceptualisation of agency (Ja'far, 2012).

A theology overly enamoured with transcendence bequeaths a God abstracted to a remote sanctuary, indifferent to human urgency. Conversely, pantheism Philologically abstracts Khudi, guarding it from cosmic voyage. The alternative, panentheism, elevates Khudi-free, finite, mortal, into a living, dialectic milieu of the Absolute Ego, whereby cosmos, community, and creature reciprocate in an infinite hermeneutic spiral. Within this optic, the Eternal remains both nucleus and horizon-immanent, yet ever outpacing human intelligibility. The human ego thus is neither dissolved by an ocean of immanent divinity nor ossified under an indifferent Numina, but pyretic in divinely sponsored freedom (Bracken, 2014). The God of Iqbal's panentheism, therefore, is the transcendence immanently realised, the immanent realised transcendence, which both authorises and elevates autonomous moral acting, human kelās, ṣiyād, and collective ijtihād. By anchoring the marrow of Khudi in this noumenal topography, Iqbal imbricates belief with agency; his panentheistic axiom herein becomes the philosophical sinew for the cruddy in counter-biontistic and nouvelle-age for moral discourses alike (Zeb & Qasim, 2015).

Literature Review

A critical examination of Mohammad Iqbal's oeuvre discloses his ambition to effect a thoroughgoing reconstruction of modern Islamic philosophy, one that may reasonably be termed revolutionary. Iqbal's post-genre locum for the Qur'ân keen originality in the ego or self, conceived not as a fixed datum of rational faculties but as a dynamic and creative act of self-consciousness,

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text-indicated self-consciousness, text consciousness of self–text (Roswantoro, 2017). In his rendering, the ego, unlike the classical taxonomies which critique the passivity and stasis of humans, emerges as a force ceaselessly in the midst of self-acceptance and sculpting, ceaselessly engaged in generativity. While this ethos does not relinquish the complex of Western German idealism or the concrete of earlier British idealism, Iqbal redirects its insights into an Islamic paradigm which does not negotiate his for moral and spiritual accountability. In Iqbal's algebra, the ego or self is simultaneously a site of five, and its formation is itself articulate, Islamic, attia behalf, datiness sustained and a perpetual inter-monologue of subject and Divine (Davids & Waghid, 2019).

In contemporary discourse on the philosophy of religion, the concepts of divine immanence and transcendence prompt renewed inquiry, and within that context, panentheism appears as an instructive framework for interrogating the God-world relation. This position, unlike classical theism, which fixes an absolute ontological divide between the divine and the creaturely, reconceives God as that whose being includes and yet exceeds the totality of the cosmos (Göcke, 2013). The entailment is not only an expansive divine presence that envelops the universe, but the theological assertion that the divine is in continual relation to, and self-adaptation in, what is not itself. Panentheism thus postulates an operative God who is not a static first mover, but an intrinsic and developing actual occasion. The fertile traditions surveyed in contemporary Western discourse, most notably the process theologies and the metaphysical writings of Alfred North Whitehead supply a rigorous interpretive lexicon for apprehending divine immanence as a gradually self-specifying and purposive becoming (Bracken, 2015). Through their analyses, immanence is no longer mere immediate presence, but the temporal texture in which the original is sculpted and the caused becomes.

When engaging with Islamic philosophy, one observes that the doctrine of divine immanence has drifted through a spectrum, some strands championing unqualified transcendence, while others accommodate a more porous boundary between the divine and the cosmos. Within this discursive tradition, Iqbal emerges as a salient interlocutor, intertwining the moving quality of divine immanence with the autonomy of the creative ego (González, 2023). For Iqbal, the freedom granted to the human subject transcends the merely volitional; it embodies a moral and spiritual stewardship that summons the ego to advance toward the divine. Consequently, autonomy does not reside merely in the realm of choice, but serves as the agency through which the dynamic quality of immanent divinity is actualised. In this hermeneutic, the human self and divine immanence mutually solicit one another, such that the pilgrimage toward God now redounds to the amplification and perfection of the creative self (Dar, 2011).

Existing literature on Iqbal's philosophy has productively examined dialogues between rationality and spirituality as well as the socio-political implications of his thought (Nasution et al., 2024a; Ritonga et al., 2023; Saputra & Nasution, 2026). Schimmel (1963) has authoritatively situated Iqbal's poetic and mystical writings within the broader Sufi intellectual tradition, demonstrating the centrality of love (ishq) as a transformative epistemological force. Building upon this, Sheikh (1972) offers a rigorous philosophical appraisal of Iqbal's metaphysical reconstruction of religious thought in dialogue with modern Western philosophy. Mir (1999) further advances textual and hermeneutical scholarship through close philological readings of Iqbal's principal poetic compositions, whilst Masud (1995) contextualises Iqbal's reformist vision within Islamic jurisprudential discourse, particularly his advocacy for renewed ijtihad in response to colonial modernity. Collectively, these scholarly contributions illuminate the multi-dimensional character of Iqbal's intellectual legacy and underscore the necessity of engaging them substantively within any comprehensive critical analysis of his philosophy. Nevertheless, systematic analyses which attend to the interrelation of self, freedom, and divine immanence as framed by the post-Hegelian

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model of dynamic panentheism remain limited (Ullah & Al Masud, 2016). This study, therefore, advances our comprehension of Iqbal's philosophical corpus as a form of theological reconstruction with abiding relevance to contemporary Islam. A close reading of the specified lectures from The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam reveals the intellectual depth and systematic rigour that underpins Iqbal's reformist project. In Lecture II, entitled 'The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience', Iqbal asserts that religious experience is not merely subjective sentiment but constitutes a legitimate mode of cognitive engagement with reality, insisting that 'the data of religious experience are just as much data of experience as the data of sense-perception' (Iqbal, 2013: 23). This epistemological claim is foundational, positioning revelation and reason as complementary rather than antithetical sources of knowledge.

In Lecture III, 'The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer', Iqbal advances a dynamic conception of divine reality, arguing that God is not a static metaphysical abstraction but an ever-living, creative will whose nature is disclosed progressively through human spiritual striving. He contends that 'the universe is not completed; it is still in the making' (Iqbal, 2013: 56), a proposition that aligns his theological vision with an open and evolving cosmology, one that accommodates both scientific inquiry and spiritual development. Prayer, within this framework, is reconceived not as ritualistic obligation but as an act of conscious self-orientation towards the Infinite, through which the human self (khudi) is deepened and expanded. Lecture V, 'The Spirit of Muslim Culture', offers perhaps the most historically significant dimension of Iqbal's reconstruction. Here, Iqbal identifies the empirical spirit of early Islamic intellectual culture as the precursor to the inductive method later adopted by modern European science, asserting that 'it was the general empirical attitude of the Quran which eventually made the Muslims the founders of modern science' (Iqbal, 2013:101). This argument reframes Islamic civilisation not as an obstacle to modernity but as its originary impulse, thereby challenging Eurocentric historiographies of scientific progress.

Finally, in Lecture VI, 'The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam', Iqbal articulates his most explicit jurisprudential intervention, calling for the revitalisation of ijtihad as the operative mechanism of Islamic legal renewal. He argues that 'the closing of the door of ijtihad is pure fiction' (Iqbal, 2013, p. 124), rejecting the doctrine of taqlid (uncritical imitation) as antithetical to the dynamic, self-renewing spirit of Islamic law. Schimmel (1963) corroborates this reading, noting Iqbal's persistent concern with liberating Muslim thought from ossified traditionalism, whilst Masud (1995) situates this call for ijtihad within a broader reformist genealogy of Islamic jurisprudence. Sheikh (1972) further affirms that Iqbal's philosophical engagement with Western metaphysics was ultimately in service of this reconstructive theological ambition, and Mir (1999) highlights how these prose arguments find their poetic counterpart in Iqbal's Persian and Urdu verse. Taken together, these textual analyses confirm that Iqbal's Reconstruction remains an indispensable and intellectually rigorous contribution to the ongoing project of Islamic theological and philosophical renewal. By elaborating the constructive modalities of dynamic panentheism, the investigation endeavours to furnish hitherto unexplored viewpoints within the Islamic philosophical tradition that honour historical precedent while remaining sensitive to twenty-first-century exigencies (Faruque, 2021).

Research Method

The present investigation employs a qualitative framework sustained by a philosophical hermeneutic methodology, thereby moving beyond surface-level description towards a penetrating interpretation of the operative meaning, logical architecture, and internal coherence of Iqbal's metaphysical edifice (Malkawi, 2014; Batubara et al., 2025; Nasution et al., 2024b). By recourse to hermeneutic protocols, sustained exegetical analysis is directed towards Iqbal's own

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textual formulations, disclosing the philosophical presuppositions, discursive progressions, and theological consequences realised by his panentheistic construct. The ensuing argumentation is governed by a two-tier source strategy (Tareen, 2013). The primary tier centres on The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam as the most internally formative and synthesising expression of Iqbal's philosophical thought. The secondary tier draws upon his lyrical compositions, principally Asrar-i-Khudi, to amplify the concept of khudi and expose its attendant ethical corollaries.

This methodological orientation is further informed by the hermeneutic tradition as elaborated by Gadamer (1975), whose conception of the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) provides a productive analytical lens through which Iqbal's dialogue between Islamic metaphysics and Western philosophical discourse may be systematically examined. Schimmel (1963) similarly affirms the indispensability of a literary-hermeneutic sensibility when approaching Iqbal's corpus, cautioning against reductive readings that sever his philosophical prose from its poetic and mystical dimensions. Sheikh (1972) further underscores the necessity of situating Iqbal's metaphysical claims within their wider intellectual genealogy, encompassing both classical Islamic philosophy and modern European thought. Supplementary to this dyadic source framework, a selective corpus of peer-reviewed journals, monographs, and dissertations is consulted, situating the present interpretation within broader disciplinary conversation and ensuring sustained engagement with prior and contemporary scholarly interlocutors. Mir (1999) and Masud (1995) are particularly instructive in this regard, as their respective philological and jurisprudential readings of Iqbal provide methodological precedents for the kind of close, contextually sensitive textual analysis that the present study endeavours to perform.

Results and Discussion

Genealogy and Definition: Pantheism vs. Panentheism

To grasp Iqbal’s theological standpoint, a terminological separation between pantheism and panentheism is requisite. Pantheism, derived from Greek roots meaning “everything is God,” asserts the epistemic and ontological equivalence of God and the cosmos. Within Islamic Sufism, this position is typically aligned with the doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud, or the Unity of Being, as articulated by Ibn Arabi. Such a reading posits the singularity of the absolute, which, as the sole ontological reality, subsumes all finite particulars that appear as the multiplicity of creation. Under this framework, the teleological telos of the Sufi is the experience of fana, a practical, hence existential, diminishment of the discrete self into the totality of the Divine, a metaphor memorably evoked by the dissolution of a drop of water in the boundless ocean (Noorani, 2014).

The term “panentheism” derived etymologically from the Greek components *pan*, *en*, and *theos*, articulates the conviction that the entirety of the created order subsists within the divine life, while concurrently affirming that the divine essence exceeds and transcends all created being. The fundamental notion is that the universe, though participatory within the interiority of God, is neither coextensive with nor reductive to the divine nature (Bracken, 2014). Origins of the doctrine may be traced to the late nineteenth-century German idealism exemplified by figures like Fichte and Hegel. However, it attains a fuller formulation within the absolute ideal framework of twentieth-century process philosophy, especially as elaborated by Alfred North Whitehead (Tabaczek, 2013). The panentheist schema thus conceives divinity as simultaneously transcendent—existing beyond all determination and immanent, manifesting within the immanent structures of spacetime. The resulting ontology safeguards the integrity and identity of individual created beings, preserving each as endowed with a genuine reality that participates within the all-embracing vitality of the divine absolute (Gasser, 2019).

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Iqbal's Thought in Dialogue with Western and Islamic Philosophy

Iqbal's distinctive philosophical contribution resides, above all, in his dialectical appropriation of divergent intellectual fields. He immersed himself in select strands of Western philosophy - Bergson, Whitehead, Nietzsche - extracting, reworking, and indigenising notions that converged on his vision of creative selfhood (Muzaffar, 2002). From Bergson, he transmuted the "pure duration" motif into a descriptor of the non-serial and undirected temporality of the Absolute Ego; the formulation, while Bergsonian in provenance, acquires a distinct theological and teleological valence in Iqbal. Whitehead's “actual occasion” model offered, in his reading, an image of substance liberated from stasis and transmuted into a “structure of events” wherein the cosmos perpetually engenders itself.

Nietzsche, through Iqbal, is re-perceived less as violent atheism than as a heuristic towards an energetic and pre-moral self-assertion, liberated from apophatic restraint. Concurrently, the Islamic intellectual heritage is, for Iqbal, both an original and a critical context (Diagne, 2010). The Qur'ân itself, cited longitudinally and in free variation alongside philosophical discourse, remains the imaginative horizon against which all concepts are tested. Classical kalam systems, Ash‘ar and Mu‘tazil alike, are deemed inadequate; the former is reproached for an arrested, mechanistic conceptualisation of divine agency and destiny, while the latter, in the optic of Iqbal, permits abstraction to eclipse the embodied and existential immediacy of the divine address. Thus, his system emerges as a position against received theology, a creative dialectic that mediates, reworks, and surpasses both hereditary rationalism and Western idealism (Muzaffar, 2002).

Although the scholarship on Iqbal has amply covered the primary components of his theological vision, namely, the philosophy of Khudi, the depiction of God, and the vigorous polemic against pantheism - few studies have brought these elements together under the coherent rubric of panentheism (Făzli, 2005). Some authors still classify Iqbal's early thought as "pantheistic" without charting the trajectory leading to a more developed metaphysical position.

In contrast, others neglect to establish that panentheism functions not as an appended notion but as the necessary outcome that binds his wider oeuvre. Iqbal's corpus, read atomistically, appeared to oscillate between competing models of divinity; it read as a dialectical ascent; however, the trajectory reveals a progressive consensus (Maruf, 1983). This article, therefore, undertakes the task of foregrounding panentheism as the hermeneutical key that renders the internal consistency of Iqbal's metaphysics manifest. For the conceptual apparatus to be deployed effectively, an introductory clarification of the three competing theological frameworks—classical pantheism, Iqbal's modified position, and panentheism—may be summarised in the table that follows.

Aspect	Pantheism (e.g., Wahdat al-Wujud)	Panentheism (Iqbal's Vision)	Traditional Theism
Relationship between God and the Natural World	God = nature. Nature is an identical manifestation of the essence of God.	Nature exists within God's essence. God is greater than and transcends nature.	God ≠ Nature. God is the Creator, ontologically separate from creation.
Attributes of God	Absolutely immanent,	Transcendent yet	Absolutely

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	often impersonal.	immanent. Personal, self-aware (Absolute Ego).	transcendent. Personal.
Nature of Reality	Radical monism: There is only one Being (God).	Dialectical monism: The highest reality is singular (God), but the plurality of finite egos within it is real.	Creator-Creation Dualism.
The Fate of the Human Ego	Fanāʾ (annihilation) into the Absolute; individuality is dissolved. However, modern scholarship affirms that fanāʾ is succeeded by baqāʾ, wherein selfhood is transformed rather than simply destroyed.	Self-affirmation and self-strengthening. The goal is to achieve personal immortality as a unique ego within God.	Eternal life as a separate individual entity before God.

Table 1. Conceptual Comparison: Pantheism, Panentheism, and Traditional Theism
Source: Author, 2025

The table presents a comparative analysis of pantheism, Iqbal's panentheism, and classical theism, focusing on their varying conceptions of the relationship between divinity and the cosmos. In pantheism, the divine essence is indistinguishably identified with the natural order, such that all of nature is regarded as an identical expression of God. In contrast, Iqbal's panentheism posits that nature is interior to God, yet divine reality is more expansive and surpasses any natural configuration. Traditional theism affirms a resolute ontological distance, maintaining that God, as the Creator, exists in a qualitatively different order of being than the created universe. Examining divine attributes, pantheism foregrounds God's complete immanence, which is typically interpreted as abstract and impersonal. Iqbal, by juxtaposing immanence and transcendence, articulates a God conceived as a self-conscious individual, termed the Absolute Ego. Traditional theism, while insisting on God's complete transcendence, likewise upholds divine personality. Concerning metaphysical structure, pantheism is monistic in asserting a single, self-existent reality that is God. Iqbal's monism, however, is dialectical: he acknowledges God's unity while permitting a substantive ontological place for plural and discrete finite egos, all of which subsist within the divine horizon. Classical theism, conversely, maintains a strict and irreversible dualism between Creator and created order (Noorani, 2014).

In pantheistic frameworks, the human ego is finally extinguished through absorption into the All, signifying an ontological reversibility wherein the particular is sacrificed to the universal. The dissolution is conceived not as death, but as reabsorption into the indistinguishable and infinite divine, and thus individual differentiation is sanctioned as illusory (Levine, 1994). Iqbal, conversely, contests this ontological ontology and institutes instead an ethics of self-assertion, wherein the distinct ego is to be enlarged, refined, and absolutely affirmed, thus attaining an indefinitely durative conscious relationship with the divine. His conception of personal immortality is not the mere preservation of entity, but an ongoing creative becoming within God. Traditional theistic doctrines, finally, posit a dichotomy of Creator and creature that guarantees eternal subsistence to individual agents, with personal identity remaining practically inviolable, albeit still under the attenuating action of divine perfection (Dar, 2011).

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The Foundation of Khudi Philosophy: Self-Affirmation as a Critique of Pantheism

Iqbal's philosophical architecture rests upon Khudi, variously rendered as Ego, Self, or Individuality, and treated neither as mere illusion nor as speculative abstraction, but as the bedrock of experience (Zeb & Qasim, 2015). He designates Khudi the "central nucleus of all life" and "rationally directed creative will," thereby positioning it as the dynamic pivot around which teleological existence orbits. The poet-philosopher posits that the awareness of one's own existence provides the most immediate, indubitable testimony; this self-knowledge, superior in certitude even to awareness of external realities, demonstrates its primacy in the hierarchy of cognition. Such an ego, according to him, emerges as an organic unity wherein creative impulses, feelings, and apprehensions cohere and interact, revealing the autonomous, incessantly self-generating motion that characterises a living individuality (Ja'far, 2012).

Iqbal's most incisive rebuttal of pantheism, especially as represented by the doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud, centres on the doctrine's anaemic conception of the self, which he determines to be intrinsically hostile to Khudi (Popp, 2019; Lubis & Nasution, 2025). He claims, following his conviction, that the pantheistic tenet ultimately counsels human self-negation and reduces the cosmos to a simulacrum; the doctrinal implication, once interiorised, cultivates lethargy, resignation, and a desertion of the theatre of action. In his estimation, the spread of such convictions is a principal factor in the enfeeblement of the Muslim polity (Pasha, 2012; Fauzan et al., 2024). In striking contrast, Iqbal insists that the telos of human existence consists in self-affirmation rather than in the dissolution of the self into the universal. Man, in his ablest formulation, is summoned to enhance his individuality by consolidating Khudi into an increasingly discrete and potent agent. This self-cultivation transpires, he argues, through the execution of positive volitional acts such as immanentised love (isyq), ethical and spiritual autonomy (faqr), purposeful daring, and the practice of creative labour; conversely, Khudi is attenuated by reluctance, inertia, and the humiliating surrender to dependence (begging) (Muzaffar, 2002).

God as the Absolute Ego: The Unlimited Creative Individual

Consistent with his intensive affirmation of the human ego, Iqbal denies the representation of God as a static substance, an impersonal force, or an abstract Being. He instead posits God as the Absolute Ego, or Ultimate Ego, which he identifies as the Supreme Person endowed with continuous self-awareness, dynamic self-affirmation, and an unrestricted, incessant creative activity. Iqbal asserts that the Qurʾān itself upholds God's individuality and personal character, a claim he derives particularly from the unequivocal affirmation of divine uniqueness and indivisibility in Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (Dogan, 2014).

The Absolute Ego manifests a double pole of transcendence and immanence. He is transcendent in that He is the self-source, self-existent one, remaining ever beyond the confines of His creation. However, He is immanent to the extent that the whole cosmos becomes the obedient field for His unrestricted creative energy. God, therefore, is neither a distant agent nor a reduced being lodged within the cosmos, for the created universe emerges as a single dynamic organism perpetually expanding, with self-constituted limits set exclusively by the creative impulse of the Absolute Ego (Kim, 1987).

As a consequence, Iqbal systematically renounces the classical cosmological and ontological proofs of God's existence, substituting his most decisive warrants with personal religious experience-intuition in the broadest sense, together with the close and reflective observation of a universe that apprehensively and purposefully exceeds the purely mechanistic. His

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epistemological orientation thereby becomes explicitly aesthetic, beatific, and experimental (Shihadeh, 2019).

The convergence of the Khudi doctrine and the Absolute Ego theology yields an Iqbalian conception that may be termed panentheistic without lapsing into any metaphysical hybridism. Finite egos, along with the totality of the cosmos, do not float outside the divine but unfold and descend within the organic, autonomic vitality of the Absolute Ego (Azmat, 2017). This nexus diverges decisively from prima facie pantheistic models. Whereas classical pantheism likens finite subjectivity to "a drop of water lost in the ocean," Iqbal counters the metaphor with "a bold affirmation…of the reality and eternity of the human ego within a deeper personality." The apex of the mystical telos does not consist in any form of Naqsh-i kafan, or self-evanescence, but in an intensified confession of the finite ego within the categorical proximity of the absolute (Siler, 2023).

From this metaphysical and theological framework, humanity is assigned the precise designation of Khalifah, or vicegerent, and this dimension greatly exceeds custodial commission. The Khalifah is not a mere steward but a deliberate partner; endowed with a free and self-distinctive personality, the human subject is invited into an irreplaceable, participatory role as co-creator and co-artist in the divine creative will. By exercising creative veracity, humanity actualises the original divine intent, rendering the cosmos not a finished creation but a continually emergent manifestation of the Absolute Ego (Dogan, 2013).

Implications for Freedom, Destiny (Taqdīr), and Eternity

This panentheistic framework invites fresh scrutiny of several persistent doctrinal difficulties within philosophical Islam. First, concerning freedom, the challenge of reconciling human agency with divine omnipotence finds an elegant resolution in Iqbal's doctrine of “divine self-limitation”(Koca, 2020). By positing that the Absolute Ego, under the initiative of its own unforced freedom, elects to surrender some of its own sovereign independence in the act of originating, Iqbal asserts that created egos are, by that divine choice, entrusted with a genuine albeit finite capacity for initiative. Consequently, freedom assumes an assertive normative status, emerging not as a concession reluctantly tolerated by unmitigated power, but as an ontological imperative embedded within the divine act of self-baseline. Khudi thus manifests as the spiritual cypher of that divine refusal to absolutise domination (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Second, the doctrine of Taqdīr is reconceived in a manner that aggressively disavows the classical coercive fatalism. Iqbal enfranchises the term by disassociating it from a pre-scripted theatre whose plot is foreclosed; instead, he describes it as the ensemble of potentially actualised contingent modes whose coherence, whilst grounded within divine omniscience, is not lowered to an allegory of mechanistic necessity. Within this revised epistemological optic, destiny becomes a scene of continuous external and internal negotiation, a spectrum of conceivable maximums within the divine will's vigilant embrace (Anim, 2024). Human subjectivity, exercised through deliberate and genuine acts, actualises a single vector within that spectrum, not by conforming to a superbly calibrated chart of preordained motions, but by creatively selecting from a matrix that remains dynamically conceived rather than abstractly precluded. Thus, agency and accountability, for Iqbal, are ontological consequences of that self-limiting act of divine self-expression (Ali, 2023).

Personal immortality is positioned by Iqbal neither as an entitlement conferred by merit of birth or nature, nor as an implicit or yet undeserved right. Rather, in Iqbal's schema, immortality is disclosed as an achievement, a regulated assignment that calls for sustained, deliberate effort by the individual (Haidar et al., 2022). It manifests through the deliberate edification of the Khudi, the

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unique, sovereign ego—by undertaking creative, volitional acts that harmonise with the continuum of divine attributes. Increment by increment, each such act crystallises the Khudi, allowing the human ego to transcend temporal decay and to assume an abiding, constructive role in the continuum of harmony life (Bunyadzade, 2018; Nasution et al., 2025; Nasution et al., 2026).

Iqbal's exposition is not only oriented towards metaphysical edification but is, furthermore, an asymptotic dialogue with the modern scientific episteme. He develops a panentheistic idiom that neither voyeuristically externalises nor reductively internalises the cosmos vis-à-vis the divine, and, in so doing, curates the modern theoretical infrastructure, centred upon relativity and evolution within the rational architecture of theistic consciousness (Akhter, 2025). Iqbal's intellectual milieu was irremediably marked by theories that liberated temporal and spatial causality from mechanistic, static postures. The classical theistic narration, traditionally reliant upon divine arbitrium, stands in perpetual asymptotic antagonism to such liberated causation. Coincidentally, pantheistic counter-narratives, when absolutising the physical to the point of denying meta-empirical signification, not only short-sightedly spectate the cosmos but, doing so, concurrently displace the theistic sovereign in their quest to accommodate modern empirical disclosure, leaving both modern self and divine exterior in unresolved tension. Iqbal's panentheistic framework, by embedding the evolving cosmos within the divine, harmonises remarkably with contemporary scientific epistemology (Anam, 2024).

The universe is conceptualised as an infinitely unfolding creative process, articulated as a "structure of events… in a continuous creative flow." In this schema, divine agency is not consigned to episodic divine interruptions that history might once have identified as "gaps" in scientific understanding. Instead, the divine is apprehended as the Absolute Ego, the immanent principle of vitality and creativity that constitutes and sustains the cosmic enterprise. The physical laws are, in essence, the learned "habits" of this Absolute Ego. Consequently, panentheistic thought permits a comprehensive apprehension of the universe as the actualised expression of persistent divine creativity, while simultaneously affirming the qualities of personality, intention, and transcendence ordinarily attributed to God. Here, therefore, the empirical universe revealed by the sciences is neither an autonomous enclave of fact nor an ancillary domain requiring supplementation by revealed wonder; it is a continuous expression of divine intentionality (Bracken, 2014). The synthesis is, moreover, comprehensive and reciprocal: it marries Fikr, the rational and scientific cognisance emblematic of the contemporary West, to Dzikr, the vigilant and meditative awareness that remains the centre of the eastern intellectual and spiritual tradition (Munsoor & Saâ, 2017).

Conclusion

This project has shown that the architecture of Iqbal's philosophical system, built from the twin keystones of Khudi and the Absolute Ego, entails a panentheistic outcome that is neither incidental nor ancillary. It is nonetheless necessary to acknowledge that this interpretive position is not without scholarly contestation. Several prominent commentators have resisted or qualified the panentheistic reading, cautioning that Iqbal's metaphysical positions resist singular systematic categorisation, given the inherent tensions between his philosophical prose and his poetic expressions, the evolution of his thought across his corpus, and the extent to which his reformist jurisprudential concerns at times complicate his purely metaphysical commitments. These competing interpretations are acknowledged with due scholarly seriousness; however, the present study maintains that when Iqbal's principal philosophical prose is read hermeneutically and in its totality, the panentheistic framework remains the most coherent, comprehensive, and textually defensible account of his metaphysical vision. This panentheism, rendered dynamic, safeguards the triad of tenets that the dispersive literature frequently labels contradictory. These

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tenets are: (1) the secularity, singularity, and libertarian uniqueness of the human ego; (2) the personal, transcendent yet immanent quality of God; and (3) the universe's dynamic, evolving, and teleological character. Rather than occupying a marginal verse in Iqbal's corpus, panentheism operates as the governing metaphysical lattice that secures the interior coherence of that corpus.

Such a theocentric panentheism presents a theologically compelling and geographically situated alternative to the contemporary Muslim intellectual milieu. By negotiating between static classical dogma and mystical pantheism, theologically softened yet phenomenologically activist Iqbal reads divinity as agency and historicity as divine co-creation. This decisive contour, foregrounding human agency as the God-perpetuating, God-augmented agent, anchors an ethical itinerary that privileges labour, civic praxis, scholarly excelling, and an unceasing incisiveness toward the manifold crises of historical modernity.

Moreover, positing the Divine as the Absolute Ego in whose infinity every finite self finds its cohesiveness prompts Iqbal to articulate a distinctive brand of "spiritual democracy." This vision of Tawhid, far exceeding a mere enumeration of monotheistic doctrine, asserts that the unity of God necessarily entails the ontological connectedness of every human soul, thereby dissolving racial, national, and other primordial segmentation. In Iqbal's hands, this doctrine emerges as a "new bridge between East and West," transporting a pedagogical vocabulary capable of engaging the analytic temper of modern Western scholarship without forfeiting its Qur'anic anchorage. Consequently, the panentheistic reconstruction that interrogates the relation of the Divine to the cosmos sustains itself as a vital reservoir for the reform of contemporary Islamic epistemology and furnishes a philosophically robust corridor for mutual enquiry across faiths in the plural, interconnected world of the present. Notwithstanding its contributions, the present study acknowledges several limitations. The analysis is principally confined to Iqbal's philosophical prose, particularly The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, with only supplementary recourse to his poetic corpus, thereby leaving scope for a more exhaustive literary-philosophical reading of his Urdu and Persian verse.

Furthermore, the hermeneutic methodology, whilst analytically productive, necessarily reflects certain interpretive choices that alternative scholarly frameworks might contest or reconfigure. Future research may profitably pursue several directions. A systematic comparative study between Iqbal's panentheism and contemporary Western process theology, particularly the tradition of Whitehead and Hartshorne, would yield productive cross-civilisational philosophical dialogue. Equally, a dedicated examination of Iqbal's poetic works through the hermeneutic lens applied here would substantially enrich the present findings. Scholars may also explore the practical implications of Iqbal's epistemological framework for contemporary Islamic educational reform, bioethics, and interfaith theology, domains in which his reconstructive vision retains considerable unrealised potential.

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