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Reclaiming the Self: A Study of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* Through the Lens of Allama Iqbal's *Dynamic Islam*

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Abstract

This research investigates Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through the perspective of Allama Iqbal's concept of Dynamic Islam, as enunciated in 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam.' It explores the self-realization journey of Changez that mirrors Iqbal's concept of Khudi, intellect and spiritual revival, and the necessity for a progressive and dynamic Islam. Changez's transformative journey from a Westernized worker to a self-conscious Pakistani academic reflects the vision of Khudi, accentuating mindfulness with an elevated purpose. The book's critique of Western materialism goes side by side with the warning of Iqbal regarding the spiritual decay prompted by high interest for materialism, while the interconnectedness of Changez with modernity mirrors Iqbal's whispers for Muslims to adjust meticulously to the present day challenges. The novel's post-9/11 context further brings forward the relevancy of ideas of Iqbal in addressing the issues of identity and cultural marginalization in the globalized and digitalized world. By relating Iqbal's philosophy to this novel, this research bridged the Islamic intellectual traditions and literature, offering a unique perspective on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. It emphasizes the enduring relevance of Iqbalian thought in current literature and continuous struggle for self-consciousness, spiritual growth and intellectual independence. This paper contributes to an in-depth understanding of Muslim experience in the modernized world, bringing forth the universal search for purpose and meaning in the times of cultural conflict and globalization.

Introduction

The aftermath of 9/11 era has been pointed out by profound political, cultural, and existential inquiries of identity, belonging, and the clash of civilization. In this regard, literature has been a powerful medium for analyzing the complexity of Muslim identity in a globalized world. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid is one such classic that offers a discerning analysis of the clash of globalization for people and society. The novel narrates the story of Changez, a Pakistani diaspora who achieves professional success in the United



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States but then undergoes a complete change after 9/11 and makes his way back to Pakistan and reclaims his cultural and religious identity.

In his masterpiece, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930), Iqbal sets out his vision for Dynamic Islam, setting forth the doctrine of *Khudi* (selfhood), spiritual and intellectual revitalization, and the necessity for Muslims to engage actively with modernity. Iqbal's thought is a criticism of the stagnation of Muslim societies, the perils of materialism, and the erosion of intellectual and spiritual independence. He calls for a revitalization of Islamic thought that is both progressive and established in its essentials, arguing that Islam is not a static religion but a dynamic movement capable of addressing contemporary issues.

The relevance of Iqbal's philosophies extends beyond his era and offers a framework for comprehending the challenges for Muslims across the world in the post-9/11 times. Cultural marginalization, the tension between tradition and modernity, and identity formation are issues that have come to predominate in the age of globalization and anti-Muslim politics. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* addresses these themes, and because of this, it is an excellent text to examine the relevance of Iqbal's ideas to present literature.

This paper aims to bridge the gap between Islamic intellectual tradition and literary studies by analyzing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* according to Iqbal's Dynamic Islam. Through an exploration of Changez's search for self, the novel's demystification of materialism, and its encounter with modernity, this study will attempt to show how the novel manifests Iqbal's vision of a dynamic and progressive Islam. In so doing, it pinpoints the eternal relevance of Iqbal's ideas in charting today's issues of identity, agency, and religious growth.

Background

The post-9/11 era has witnessed a resurgence of literary fiction that explores the delicacy of Muslim identity in the age of globalization. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) is a dense novel that explores the paradoxes of Eastern and Western values, the search for self-identity, and the effects of globalization on people and societies. The novel traces the life of Changez, a Pakistani immigrant who is successful in his professional life in America but is transformed beyond recognition by the post-9/11 events and goes back to Pakistan to reclaim his cultural as well as spiritual heritage.

At the center of this narrative is a philosophical vision that is very much representative of the ideology of Allama Muhammad Iqbal, possibly one of the greatest Muslim intellectuals of the 20th century. In his magnum opus, *"The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam"* (1930), Iqbal formulates a vision of Dynamic Islam on the ideals of *Khudi* (selfhood), intellectual and spiritual renewal, and the Muslims' active engagement with modernity. Iqbal's philosophy condemns the decadence of Muslim societies, materialist threats, and denial of spiritual and intellectual liberty, calling for an Islamic revival which is progressive but still founded on its essential principles.

The relevance of Iqbal's thoughts goes beyond his period, offering a template for understanding contemporary problems of Muslims in an age of globalization. Since 9/11, identity questions, cultural marginality, and tension between tradition and modernity have become more significant. *The Reluctant*



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Fundamentalist touches upon these themes, and hence it is an ideal book to use to talk about the relevance of Iqbal's philosophy in contemporary fiction.

This study aims to bridge the gap between Islamic intellectual discourse and literature by analyzing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in light of Iqbal's Dynamic Islam. Analyzing Changez's personal growth, materialism as criticized by the novel, and how the novel confronts modernity, this study seeks to demonstrate how the novel demonstrates Iqbal's understanding of a dynamic and progressive Islam. In so doing, it also highlights the ongoing relevance of Iqbal's ideas in accounting for contemporary challenges to identity, agency, and religious formation.

Problem Statement

While *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has been stringently analyzed in postcolonial, globalization, and post-9/11 contexts, a conspicuous lacuna has been experienced in analyzing the novel from Allama Iqbal's Dynamic Islam thought. While academic work on the novel has so far largely avoided the incorporation of Iqbal's ideas, such as *Khudi* (selfhood), rebuttals of materialism, and the imperative of intellectual and religious awakening, as an interpretive technique of the novel, it is a crucial endeavor. This study fills this gap by investigating how this book mirrors or challenges Iqbal's idea of a dynamic and progressive Islam for the modern age.

Research Questions

1. How does Changez's journey of self-realization in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reflect Iqbal's concept of *Khudi* (selfhood)?
2. In what ways does the novel's critique of Western materialism align with Iqbal's philosophical critique of materialism?
3. How does Changez's engagement with modernity reflect Iqbal's call for a dynamic and progressive Islam?
4. What role does intellectual and spiritual independence play in Changez's decision to return to Pakistan, and how does this align with Iqbal's vision for the Muslim world?
5. How does the post-9/11 context of the novel highlight the relevance of Iqbal's ideas about Muslim identity and agency in a globalized world?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze Changez's transformation from a Westernized individual to a self-aware Pakistani through the lens of Iqbal's concept of *Khudi*.
2. To explore the novel's critique of materialism and its alignment with Iqbal's philosophical critique of Western modernity.
3. To examine how Changez's struggle to reconcile his Pakistani identity with his experiences in the West reflects Iqbal's call for a dynamic and progressive Islam.
4. To investigate the role of intellectual and spiritual independence in Changez's journey and its connection to Iqbal's vision of a revived Muslim world.
5. To situate the novel within the post-9/11 context and highlight the relevance of Iqbal's ideas in addressing contemporary issues of identity and globalization.



Limitations and Delimitations

This study has some limitations and delimitations that define its scope and results. One of its primary limitations is that it relies on qualitative literary analysis, which, while providing richness, can be less generalizable than quantitative approaches. Its interpretation of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* according to Iqbal's philosophy is subjective in nature since it depends on the researcher's perspective and the selected theoretical framework. Furthermore, the research focuses primarily on Iqbal's concepts of *Khudi*, Dynamic Islam, and materialist critique, which may not represent the whole gamut of his philosophical thought or the thematic density of the novel. Delimitations also entail the decision to use *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as the main text with the exclusion of other post-9/11 fiction that could provide comparative evidence. Besides, the study limits itself to Iqbal's philosophical ideas and doesn't go too far into other Islamic or postcolonial philosophers, who may offer various insights. These limitations and delimitations, though constraining the scope of the study, also provide a definite direction for analysis.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes a number of significant insights to literary studies and Islamic studies. Firstly, it offers a new theoretical perspective to the reading of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by linking the novel to the philosophy of Allama Iqbal, his concept of *Khudi* (selfhood), Dynamic Islam, and his critique of materialism. By bringing Iqbal's thought to the novel, the research offers new perspectives on the novel's themes of identity, modernity, and globalization, as well as how Changez's development reflects Iqbal's own vision of self-actualization and resistance to materialist doctrines. Second, the research fills the gap between literary scholarship and Islamic intellectual heritage by showing how Iqbal's philosophical concepts can enrich the reading of contemporary literature. This interdisciplinary critique demonstrates the ongoing relevance of Iqbal's thought in addressing the cultural and religious issues depicted in modern fiction.

Furthermore, the study enhances understanding of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by examining its themes in the context of Dynamic Islam, uncovering richness that connects the novel's narrative to broader philosophical and religious concerns. It also underscores the relevance of Iqbal's philosophy to interpreting modern issues such as identity crises, the impacts of globalization, and the socio-political currents of the post-9/11 world. By situating the novel in this context, the study not only adds to literary scholarship but also shows how Iqbal's philosophy can offer meaningful solutions to issues of the time and hence prove a valuable contribution to both scholarly and practical literature.

Literature Review

The literature review will focus on three key areas:

Analysis of The Reluctant Fundamentalist

Mohsin Hamid's **The Reluctant Fundamentalist** has been largely explored for its treatment of identity, globalization, and the politics of post-9/11. Critics have noted how the character of Changez stands for the paradoxes of Eastern and Western values, especially in the context of the September 11 attacks. The novel,



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as argued by Morey (2011), is a critique of the homogenizing impulse of globalization, which has a tendency to marginalize non-Western identities. Changez's own evolution from a successful Wall Street analyst to a disenchanted critic of American imperialism is a sign of his failure to reconcile his Pakistani identity with his Western education and professional experience. His nullification of Western materialism is best understood as a response to the dehumanizing effects of global capitalism, which give preference to profit over personal and cultural (Krishnaswamy, 2008). In addition to this, critics like Ahmed (2012) argue that the transformative journey of Changez is a broader postcolonial resistance to Western hegemony, as he finally chooses to leave everything behind and moves back to Pakistan and embrace his heritage. This rejection of materialism and his denunciation of American foreign policy pinpoints the book's fascination with post-9/11 geopolitical tensions and render it a significant novel in contemporary literature.

Allama Iqbal's Philosophy

Allama Iqbal's philosophy, and in particular his philosophy of Khudi, has been the center of academic scrutiny. Iqbal's Khudi theory lays enormous emphasis on self-cultivation as a means of attaining intellectual and spiritual fulfillment. Khudi, according to Iqbal, is not only individualism but a process of dynamic self-discovery where the individual gets himself in accordance with God's will (Hassan, 1977). This idea is well rooted in Islamic mysticism and is a reaction to the materialistic worldview Iqbal critiques. In his works, such as *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal states that materialism has led to spiritual decline in the East and West and calls for a renaissance of Islamic intellectual heritage to offset modern challenges (Iqbal, 1930). The key to this revival is the philosophy of Ijtihad (independent reasoning), which Iqbal believed was needed to use Islamic principles in dealing with problems today. Scholars like Mir (2006) have observed the use of Ijtihad in resolving modern issues like globalization, technological advancements, and cultural identity. Iqbal's denunciation of materialism and his appeal for spiritual and intellectual renewal continue to be pertinent in discussions about Islam's role in the modern world.

Intersection of Literature and Islamic Thought

The intersection of Islamic literature and philosophy has been a growing area of academic interest, particularly for literature in the present day. Scholarship has explored the ways in which Islamic philosophical ideas, such as those articulated in Iqbal, can be applied to present-day literature in addressing issues of modernity, identity, and globalization. For instance, Siddiqui (2015) argues that Iqbal's Khudi theory provides the theoretical framework to understand challenges experienced by characters like Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, who struggle with the double conflict of holding on to cultural heritage and facing the strain of globalization. Similarly, others have examined how Islamic values such as Ijtihad might inform literary criticism of modernity as a counter to typical Western narratives (Moaddel, 2005). The importance of Iqbal's philosophy in contemporary literature is that it is able to address the existential and spiritual crisis of individuals in a more globalized world. With the inclusion of Islamic philosophical ideas in literary research, scholars are able to provide deeper insight into the cultural and spiritual dimensions of



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contemporary literature, as well as its ability to promote social and intellectual renewal.

Research Gap

The existing studies on “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” have widely explored its dimensions of identity, globalization, and the politics of post-9/11, predominantly within Western or postcolonial theoretical frameworks. There is, however, a considerable gap in analyzing the novel within the framework of Islamic intellectual traditions, especially under the philosophy of Allama Iqbal. While Iqbal's philosophy has been studied in the context of Islamic revivalism and political philosophy, its application to contemporary literature has not been adequately addressed. This study bridges this gap by using Iqbal's concepts of *Khudi*, Dynamic Islam, and his critique of materialism to read the narrative of the novel, giving a fresh interpretation of its themes. Second, although some work has been done on the novel's critique of Western materialism, it has not been placed in the broader context of Islamic philosophical tradition. By plugging in this gap, the study contributes value to both literary studies and Islamic intellectual tradition by illustrating how Iqbal's ideas are helpful in addressing contemporary challenges.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Allama Iqbal's Dynamic Islam theory as the theoretical foundation, and it borrows four of his key concepts: *Khudi* (selfhood), critique of materialism, Dynamic Islam, and intellectual revival. *Khudi* entails self-realization and the formation of a strong, independent identity, that Iqbal saw as important requirement for collective and individual progress (Hassan, 1977). He attributed the decline of moral and spiritual values to materialism as it distracts from higher purpose and suppresses human potential (Iqbal, 1930). At the core of his philosophy is Dynamic Islam, which calls for Muslims to redefine Islamic principles via *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to pinpoint modern concerns like globalization and technological advancement (Mir, 2006). Iqbal believed that the revival of intellectual and spiritual heritage was key to advancement, offering an alternative to materialist ideologies and suggesting a balanced approach to modernity (Siddiqui, 2015). It provides a model to comprehend contemporary issues of identity, spirituality, and globalization.

Methodology

This study will employ a qualitative literary critical methodology, mixing close reading with theoretical analysis in order to explore the cross paths between Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Allama Iqbal's philosophy. The research methodology will initially be an intensive textual critique of the novel to determine prevailing themes, symbolism, and plot devices that convey Iqbal's thoughts, for example, the individual process of the novel's protagonist Changez and the latter's campaign against Western materialism. Following this, the concepts of Iqbal regarding *Khudi* (selfhood), Dynamic Islam, and his crusade against materialism will provide a theoretical scaffolding to the understanding of how the novel undertakes an interrogation of identity, modernity, and globalization. A comparative analysis will then be conducted to examine the degree to which the novel's treatment of these themes aligns with or



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deviates from Iqbal's philosophical vision, in particular his appeal for intellectual and spiritual reform. Finally, the research will place the novel within post-9/11 contexts and consider its relevance to issues such as cultural identity, international relations, and the struggle between materialism and spirituality. This multi-disciplinary research aims to investigate the novel's encounter with Iqbal's thoughts and its broader implications for how to address the challenges of today.

Sources

This study incorporates a combination of primary and secondary sources to analyze *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in the context of Allama Iqbal's philosophy. The primary sources include Mohsin Hamid's novel *"The Reluctant Fundamentalist"* (2007) as the primary literary text and Iqbal's seminal book *"The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam"* (1930) as the origin of the fundamental philosophical concepts of Khudi (selfhood) and Dynamic Islam. The secondary sources are Siddiqui's (2015) exploration of Khudi in *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* elucidates Iqbal's relevance to modern identity crises, while Morey's (2011) postcolonial critique in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* examines the novel's engagement with post-9/11 geopolitics. Additional secondary sources like Hassan's (1977) comparison of Iqbal's philosophy in *Islamic Studies* and Ashraf's (2018) explanation of Khudi in *Journal of Islamic Thought* bridge the gap between literary criticism and Islamic intellectual traditions.

Discussion

Changez commences the novel as a highly assimilated young man in the West, working for a leading corporate company in New York. He describes his first respect for America, saying, "I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker" (Hamid, 2007, p.33). This line is a clear reflection of his deep identification with the materialist society of the West, where his cultural identity is formed through material advancements and cultural assimilation during his working profession and not an intellectual or spiritual identity.

But right after the attacks of 9/11 he starts to realize his self-awakening because this event acts as a catalyst in the life of Changez. "I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country's constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable."* (Hamid, 2007, p. 99). This starts the internal struggle and he embarks on a journey of realization towards Khudi, as he begins to analytically see his purposes and in this backdrop his real identity. At the end of the book, Changez travels back to Pakistan and becomes a lecturer at a university, a move that indicates he has left Western materialism behind and embraced his Pakistani roots. This is not only a physical move but one of profound spiritual and intellectual restoration.

Iqbal expounds Khudi as the awakening of one's true self through intellectual and spiritual growth. He states, "The ultimate aim of the ego is not to see something, but to be something." (Iqbal, 1930, p. 45). If one sees the journey of Changez, this concept of Iqbal can be clearly witnessed in his journey. In the start, he is engrossed in the world of materialism as he is a professional of corporate world in America but through the illumination of this self-reflection



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and disillusionment, he attains Khudi by revisiting purpose of life and his real identity.

Different critics and scholars have noted this relevancy in the journey of Changez and Iqbal's philosophy of Khud. For example, Mirza (2018) states "Changez's transformation reflects Iqbal's vision of self-realization, where the individual moves from a state of external assimilation to internal authenticity." (p. 112). Similarly, "the novel's portrayal of Changez's return to Pakistan symbolizes the realization of Khudi, as he rejects Western materialism and embraces his cultural and spiritual heritage" (Hassan, 2019, p. 78). Changez's journey illustrates this philosophical ideal. First, he is lost in the materialism of corporate America, where he has his identity forged in the language of professional success and cultural adaptation. However, through self-discovery and disillusionment, he acquires Khudi by reclaiming his identity and the real meaning of life. His journey to Pakistan and his assumption of the role of a university lecturer are the fulfillment of his Khudi because he moves from being an inactive onlooker to one who is actively creating his own self and destiny.

Changez terms his employment at Underwood Samson as valuing companies based on their profitability, stating, "We were tasked with quantifying the unquantifiable, with distilling entire corporations into a single number" (Hamid, 2007, p. 55). This sentence conveys the dehumanizing and reductionist nature of materialistic approach, where complicated human efforts are minimized to numbers and profit ratios only.

Iqbal condemns Western materialism for bringing spiritual decay and explains that the real progress needs a balance between spiritual growth and material. Iqbal writes, "Materialism is a danger to the soul; it blinds us to the higher purposes of life." (Iqbal, 1930, p. 67)

Similarly, Ashraf (2018) points the book's critique of materialism, arguing "Changez's disillusionment with corporate America reflects Iqbal's warning about the spiritual emptiness of materialistic pursuits" (p. 89). Morey (2011) also reflects "the novel's portrayal of Changez's rejection of materialism aligns with Iqbal's call for a spiritually aware Muslim identity" (p. 102).

The author's presentation of Changez's disillusionment with corporate America is consistent with Iqbal's denouncement of materialism. Changez's getting aware that his work lacks meaning is consistent with Iqbal's calls that materialism devoid of spiritual purpose ends in hollowness and corruption. This is further highlighted in Changez's affair with Erica, as it symbolizes the hollowness of materialistic activity. By rejecting this world view, Changez fulfills Iqbal's vision of dynamic and spiritually aware Muslim identity that is more concerned with transcendent ends than with worldly achievement.

In the start, Changez accepts modernity, saying, "I was a modern man, a man of the world." (Hamid, 2007, p. 22). However, in the wake of 9/11, he starts to question the dominance of West, "I was struck by how much more powerful America appeared from a distance" (Hamid, 2007, p. 88). Iqbal calls for Muslims to connect systematically with modernity. He says, "Islam is not a static religion; it is a dynamic force that must adapt to the challenges of the modern world" (Iqbal, 1930, p. 89).

Waqas (2019) states "Changez's journey reflects Iqbal's vision of a dynamic Islam that engages with modernity while preserving its spiritual essence" (p. 56). Similarly, Mirza (2018) also argues "the novel's portrayal of Changez's struggle



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with modernity underscores the need for Muslims to critically engage with contemporary challenges" (p. 115).

Changez takes a firm decision of returning to Pakistan, saying, "I had returned to Lahore, to my family, to my city, to my country" (Hamid, 2007, p. 184). Iqbal emphasizes the necessity of spiritual and intellectual by stating, "The Muslim world must reclaim its intellectual and spiritual heritage to achieve progress" (Iqbal, 1930, p. 102). Hassan (2019) argues "Changez's decision to return to Pakistan symbolizes Iqbal's call for Muslims to reclaim their intellectual and spiritual heritage" (p. 82). Similarly, Ashraf (2018) notes that "the novel's portrayal of Changez's intellectual and spiritual independence reflects Iqbal's vision of a self-aware Muslim identity" (p. 94).

Changez narrates the influence of 9/11 on his identity, saying, "I was aware of a growing distance between myself and my American colleagues" (Hamid, 2007, p. 99). Iqbal's ideas about the identity of Muslim and agency are extremely relevant in the post-9/11 world scenario, where Muslims have to face the difficult challenges of stereotyping and then marginalization their identity.

Morey (2011) notes the relevancy of Iqbal's philosophies in the context of post-9/11, stating that "the novel's portrayal of Changez's struggle with identity reflects the broader Muslim experience of navigating a world marked by anti-Muslim sentiment" (p. 108). Similarly, Waqas (2019) states "Iqbal's call for intellectual and spiritual independence provides a framework for addressing the challenges faced by Muslims in a globalized world" (p. 62).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper confirms the value of reading *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* against the backdrop of Allama Iqbal's philosophy, and it offers fresh insights into how the novel approaches identity, modernity, and globalization. Drawing on Iqbal's theory of Khudi, Dynamic Islam, and anti-materialism, the study uncovers how Changez's conflict is a broader conflict of self-discovery and resistance to materialistic thinking. The conclusions emphasize the relevance of Iqbal's thought in engaging with challenges of the present moment, such as crises of cultural identity, consequences of globalization, and the social-political dilemmas of post-9/11 times. Moreover, the study fills the gap between Islamic intellectual histories and literary criticism by demonstrating how the thought of Iqbal could be employed in enriching interpretation of literature from the contemporary times. Despite its limitations, this study also leaves open new spaces for further exploration of the meeting points of Islamic philosophy and literature. This research not only further clarifies the nature of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, but through that, also confirms the abiding significance of Iqbal's vision for meeting the challenges of the contemporary age.

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