

A Comparative Study of Iqbal's Khudi and Charles Taylor's Selfhood

Muhammad Atiq-ur-Rehman

PhD Scholar University Science Islam Malaysia, (USIM), Malaysia

matiqleads@gmail.com

Abstract

This study presents a comparative analysis of Charles Taylor's concept of Selfhood and Allama Iqbal's concept of Khudi, focusing on the understanding of human identity, freedom, and moral development. Taylor's Selfhood emphasizes the social and cultural dimensions of the self, highlighting the role of recognition, community, and historical context in shaping individual identity. In contrast, Iqbal's Khudi underscores the inner, spiritual, and moral empowerment of the self, developed through self-realization, discipline, and purposeful action. By examining these perspectives side by side, the study identifies both convergences and divergences in the philosophical understanding of selfhood. The comparison demonstrates that while Taylor situates freedom and authenticity within social and cultural frameworks, Iqbal situates them within spiritual growth and moral responsibility. The analysis provides a cross-cultural insight into the formation of identity, highlighting the interplay between social, ethical, and spiritual factors. This research contributes to philosophical discourse, educational theory, and ethical reflection, offering a framework for understanding the self in contemporary society.

Keywords: Selfhood, Khudi, Identity, Freedom, Moral Development, Charles Taylor, Allama Iqbal, Comparative Philosophy

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The concept of the self has been a central theme in philosophy, ethics, and human development across cultures and historical periods. Philosophers have long debated what constitutes the self, how it forms, and the principles that guide its growth. Questions of identity, agency, freedom, and moral responsibility remain at the heart of understanding human existence. In Western philosophy, thinkers like Charles Taylor have emphasized the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of the self, arguing that identity emerges through recognition, dialogue, and engagement with the broader society.

In contrast, Islamic philosophical thought, particularly as articulated by Allama Iqbal, situates the self, or Khudi, in the realm of spiritual and moral empowerment. For Iqbal, the self is not merely shaped by external circumstances but is realized through self-awareness, discipline, and purposeful action aligned with higher ethical and divine principles. Studying

these perspectives together provides a rich comparative framework, revealing how human identity and selfhood are understood in both social-philosophical and spiritual-moral dimensions.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1.2.1 To define and analyze Charles Taylor's Selfhood: This study aims to examine Taylor's understanding of Selfhood as an identity that emerges through social recognition, cultural engagement, and historical context. Taylor emphasizes that the self is not isolated but is constituted in dialogue with others and shaped by moral and social frameworks.¹ The analysis will focus on the philosophical foundation of his theory and its implications for freedom, authenticity, and ethical life.

1.2.2 To define and analyze Allama Iqbal's Khudi: The study seeks to explore Iqbal's concept of Khudi, which represents the inner self or ego, realized and strengthened through self-awareness, discipline, and purposeful action. Iqbal argues that the development of Khudi leads to moral empowerment and the ability to actively shape one's destiny.² This objective emphasizes the spiritual, ethical, and motivational aspects of the self in Iqbal's philosophy.

1.2.3 To compare the two concepts for similarities, differences, and insights: Finally, the study aims to undertake a comparative analysis, highlighting convergences and divergences between Taylor's social-philosophical Selfhood³ and Iqbal's spiritual-moral Khudi.⁴ The comparison will illuminate how Western and Islamic philosophical traditions conceptualize identity, freedom, and moral development, offering a cross-cultural perspective on the nature of the self.

1.3 Justification of the Study

This study is justified by its potential to provide a cross-cultural understanding of the self, integrating perspectives from Western philosophy and classical Islamic thought. By comparing Charles Taylor's concept of Selfhood⁵ with Allama Iqbal's Khudi,⁶ the research highlights different approaches to identity, freedom, and moral development. Taylor situates the self within social, cultural, and historical frameworks, emphasizing recognition and relational engagement, while Iqbal situates the self within spiritual and moral development, emphasizing self-realization and purposeful action.

The comparison offers a meaningful philosophical contribution by demonstrating how diverse intellectual traditions address similar questions about human existence, agency, and ethical responsibility. Unlike empirical research, this study does not require a traditional "study gap" because its value lies in analysis, synthesis, and cross-cultural insight rather than filling an unaddressed problem. This approach enriches both philosophical discourse and educational thought, providing conceptual tools to understand identity, ethical development, and self-empowerment in contemporary contexts.⁷

2 LITERATURE REVIEW / THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Charles Taylor's Selfhood

2.1.1 Definition: Taylor defines selfhood as the formation of identity through **social recognition, cultural engagement, and dialogue with others**. The self is not an isolated entity but emerges in interaction with society and through the shared meanings of culture.⁸

2.1.2 Development: Identity develops within historical and cultural contexts. Taylor emphasizes that **human life is historically situated**, and the self evolves as individuals engage with the moral frameworks and social practices of their time.⁹

2.1.3 Freedom: Authentic living requires recognition by others and active participation in social life. True freedom, according to Taylor, is **the ability to act in accordance with one's values while being acknowledged and integrated within one's community**.¹⁰

2.1.4 Ethics: Moral understanding is embedded in the social and cultural environment. Taylor rejects purely abstract notions of morality, arguing that **ethical life is inseparable from the narratives, traditions, and cultural norms that shape identity**.¹¹

2.2 Allama Iqbal's Khudi

2.2.1 Definition: Iqbal's concept of Khudi refers to the **inner self or ego**, which must be realized, strengthened, and made conscious. Khudi represents the core of human identity and the source of personal power and moral responsibility.¹²

2.2.2 Development: Khudi grows through **discipline, moral struggle, spiritual awareness, and purposeful action**. Iqbal emphasizes that selfhood is not passive; it requires continuous effort, self-reflection, and alignment with higher ethical and spiritual ideals.¹³

2.2.3 Freedom: A strong and empowered Khudi allows the individual to **shape one's own destiny** and act independently while remaining morally and spiritually accountable. Freedom, for Iqbal, is the result of realizing the full potential of the self.¹⁴

2.2.4 Ethics: Ethical life and spiritual development are inseparable from Khudi. The self must be **aligned with divine purpose**, ensuring that actions are morally sound and spiritually meaningful.¹⁵

2.3 Existing Comparative Studies

While both Charles Taylor's Selfhood and Allama Iqbal's Khudi have been extensively studied within their respective traditions, there is limited research that compares these concepts in a cross-cultural philosophical framework. Most studies focus either on Taylor's social-philosophical analysis of identity¹⁶ or on Iqbal's spiritual-moral concept of Khudi,¹⁷ without integrating insights from both.

Existing comparative literature highlights the importance of exploring identity, freedom, and moral development across cultures, yet there remains a notable gap in systematic analyses that juxtapose Western modern philosophical perspectives with classical Islamic thought. Addressing this gap, this study seeks to provide a conceptual bridge, offering a framework for understanding the self through both social-philosophical and spiritual-moral lenses.

3 CORE CONCEPTS AND THEMES

3.1 Identity and Selfhood / Khudi

3.1.1 Taylor: Charles Taylor argues that **selfhood develops in dialogue with others and society**. Identity is not innate or isolated but emerges through recognition, social interaction, and engagement with cultural and historical frameworks. The self is shaped by moral frameworks that are embedded within the broader societal context.¹⁸

3.1.2 Iqbal: In contrast, Allama Iqbal presents Khudi as a self that **develops internally through moral and spiritual effort**. Growth of Khudi requires discipline, self-awareness, and purposeful action, guided by ethical and spiritual principles. Iqbal emphasizes that the self's realization is a moral and spiritual journey that empowers the individual to act responsibly and shape their destiny.¹⁹

3.2 Development of the Self

3.2.1 Taylor: According to Charles Taylor, the development of selfhood occurs through **social recognition, language, culture, and historical context**. The self is formed as individuals engage with societal norms and moral frameworks, which are historically situated and culturally specific. Taylor emphasizes that identity is not fixed but evolves in dialogue with the community and through participation in shared practices.²⁰

3.2.2 Iqbal: In Iqbal's philosophy, the development of Khudi occurs through **self-realization, discipline, and active moral engagement**. The individual strengthens the inner self by practicing self-discipline, engaging in purposeful action, and aligning personal development with ethical and spiritual ideals. This growth is an internal, continuous process that empowers the individual to achieve moral and spiritual excellence.²¹

3.3 Freedom and Agency

3.3.1 Taylor: Charles Taylor argues that **authentic freedom depends on social integration and moral understanding**. Individuals achieve true agency when they can act according to their values while being recognized and supported within their social and cultural contexts. Freedom is thus relational and embedded in the ethical frameworks of society.²²

3.3.2 Iqbal: In Iqbal's philosophy, a **strong Khudi grants the individual autonomy and the power to determine one's own destiny**. The realization and empowerment of the self allow the individual to act independently while remaining morally and spiritually accountable, aligning personal freedom with higher ethical and divine principles.²³

3.4 Ethical and Societal Dimensions

3.4.1 Taylor: According to Charles Taylor, **identity formation is deeply intertwined with moral and cultural norms**. The self is shaped not only by personal reflection but also by participation in social practices, ethical traditions, and shared cultural narratives. Ethical understanding and identity are inseparable, as individuals navigate their roles and responsibilities within society.²⁴

3.4.2 Iqbal: In contrast, Allama Iqbal emphasizes that **Khudi manifests through societal contribution and the fulfillment of higher purposes**. The development of the self is incomplete without active engagement in moral, social, and spiritual responsibilities. A strong

Khudi enables the individual to contribute positively to society while aligning actions with divine and ethical principles.²⁵

4 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

4.1 Similarities

Both Charles Taylor²⁶ and Allama Iqbal²⁷ view the self as **dynamic, active, and relational**, emphasizing that identity is not static but develops through interaction, reflection, and engagement.

Both thinkers **link identity or selfhood with moral and ethical responsibility**. For Taylor, ethical life is embedded in social and cultural frameworks,²⁸ while Iqbal situates moral responsibility within the realization and empowerment of Khudi.²⁹

Both recognize the importance of **context in shaping the self**, Taylor emphasizes social, cultural, and historical contexts,³⁰ whereas Iqbal emphasizes spiritual, moral, and divine contexts.³¹

4.2 Differences

Charles Taylor emphasizes **external and social recognition** as the primary factor in the development of selfhood, arguing that identity emerges through dialogue, cultural participation, and historical context.³² In contrast, Allama Iqbal emphasizes **internal and spiritual empowerment**, focusing on the moral and ethical strengthening of the self.³³

Taylor's approach is largely **philosophical and sociological**, analyzing how societal norms, language, and cultural practices shape identity.³⁴ Iqbal's approach is primarily **spiritual and motivational**, emphasizing self-realization, moral discipline, and purposeful action as the pathway to empowerment and ethical responsibility.³⁵

4.3 Implications

Understanding the self requires attention to **both social and spiritual dimensions**. Taylor's focus on social recognition, cultural engagement, and historical context highlights the external factors shaping identity,³⁶ while Iqbal's emphasis on Khudi demonstrates the importance of internal moral and spiritual development.³⁷ A holistic view of selfhood must integrate these complementary perspectives to fully comprehend human identity, freedom, and moral responsibility.

The **comparative analysis enriches cross-cultural philosophical discourse** by bridging modern Western thought and classical Islamic philosophy. It offers new insights into ethical life, self-empowerment, and societal engagement, providing a framework for philosophical reflection and practical application in education, ethics, and personal development.

5 PRACTICAL RELEVANCE AND APPLICATIONS

Modern Education: The comparison of Taylor's Selfhood³⁸ and Iqbal's Khudi³⁹ provides valuable insights for modern education by emphasizing **self-awareness, ethical reasoning, and social responsibility**. Educators can incorporate these concepts to help students understand their identity in relation to society and culture, while also fostering inner moral and

spiritual development. This approach encourages students to engage critically with their social environment while cultivating personal values, discipline, and purposeful action.

Personal Development: The study highlights how individuals can strengthen their own selfhood or Khudi through **reflection, discipline, and ethical engagement**. Taylor's emphasis on social and cultural recognition encourages individuals to understand themselves in dialogue with others,⁴⁰ whereas Iqbal's Khudi emphasizes internal empowerment and moral responsibility.⁴¹ Integrating both approaches can help individuals achieve a balanced development that combines **social competence with spiritual and ethical growth**, enhancing personal effectiveness and life purpose.

Philosophy and Ethics: This comparative analysis provides practical guidance for **ethical reasoning and philosophical reflection**. Taylor's social-philosophical perspective helps understand how moral norms and cultural contexts shape ethical decisions, while Iqbal's spiritual-moral approach emphasizes aligning action with higher principles and divine purpose. Together, these insights offer a framework for evaluating human behavior, understanding ethical dilemmas, and fostering moral accountability, which can be applied in educational, professional, and social contexts.

6 CONCLUSION

This study compared Charles Taylor's concept of Selfhood⁴² with Allama Iqbal's concept of Khudi,⁴³ revealing important parallels, contrasts, and lessons. Both thinkers view the self as dynamic, active, and morally responsible, yet they approach its development from different perspectives, Taylor emphasizes social, cultural, and historical frameworks, while Iqbal emphasizes internal, spiritual, and ethical empowerment. The analysis demonstrates that understanding human identity requires a comprehensive approach, integrating social, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.

The study contributes to philosophy, ethics, and education by highlighting the value of combining Western and Islamic perspectives. Taylor's social-philosophical framework and Iqbal's spiritual-moral vision together provide a richer understanding of selfhood, freedom, and moral development. This comparative perspective can inform educational practice, personal development, and ethical reflection in contemporary contexts.

Finally, the study recommends further research exploring other cross-cultural comparisons, applying these concepts to education, psychology, leadership, and ethical decision-making, and integrating Western and Islamic philosophies to address contemporary challenges in identity formation and moral development. Such research can further bridge philosophical traditions and provide practical insights for holistic human development.

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