THE ISLAMIC STATE IN MUHAMMAD IQBAL'S THOUGHT: INTEGRATING MONOTHEISM, ISLAMIC ETHICS, AND MODERNITY

Nurfazillah
Univesitas Islam Negeri Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin, Jambi, Indonesia
Email: nur.fazillah@uinjambi.ac.id

Abstract

The idea of establishing an Islamic state has long attracted the attention of Muslim intellectuals, including Muhammad Iqbal. His proposal for the creation of a separate state for Indian Muslims was inseparable from the socio-political conditions of the time, in which Muslims lived under the dominant influence of Hindu nationalism. This article aims to describe and analyze the concept of the Islamic state from Muhammad Iqbal's perspective. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study is based on literature review and historical analysis. The findings indicate that Iqbal's vision of an Islamic state is not theocratic in nature, but rather grounded in Islamic spiritual and ethical values. Such a state, according to Iqbal, must be guided by the Qur'an and Sunnah, with divine law as the highest source of authority and the head of state serving as its executor. Iqbal advocates for a republican form of government, in which the state functions as a vehicle to realize the ideals of tawhid (monotheism), social justice, and individual freedom. His concept seeks to harmonize religion with modernity, and to integrate democracy with Islamic ethical foundations. The article concludes that Iqbal's political thought contributed significantly to the founding of Pakistan, and offers a relevant model for other Muslim-majority nations striving to implement Islamic principles in state governance, with the ultimate aim of building a just society rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Keywords: *Islamic State, Muhammad Iqbal, Monotheism (Tawhid), Modernity*

***

A. Introduction

An Islamic state is characterized by governance led by Muslims, the application of Islamic law, control of defense by the Muslim community, the vibrant presence of Islamic symbols and practices, and a social environment in which citizens particularly Muslims feel secure under the protection of fellow believers (Mardani, 2023). Within the broader contexts of modernity and colonialism, numerous Muslim thinkers such as Al-Farabi, Al-Mawardi, Al-Maududi, and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani have sought to redefine the Islamic state in ways that respond to contemporary challenges, including Western political dominance, identity crises within the Muslim world, and the broader decline of Islamic civilization. Among these figures, Muhammad Iqbal stands out for his unique contribution to enriching Islamic political thought.

Iqbal was not only a devout Muslim, but also a celebrated poet, philosopher, and political thinker. His contributions to the discourse on the Islamic state were marked by

a vision that was both dynamic and sovereign. For Iqbal, Islam was not merely a private faith but a moral and political force capable of shaping a just and ethical social order. He firmly rejected Western secularism, which separates religion from the state, asserting instead that religion and politics must remain integrally connected. In this context, Iqbal's concept of the Islamic state is not merely theological but also deeply philosophical and historical.

Although a considerable body of scholarship has explored Iqbal's intellectual contributions, there remains a lack of clarity concerning his specific interpretation of the Islamic state as both a political and spiritual entity. Previous studies have largely focused on Iqbal's views on law, education, political engagement, and his role in the formation of Pakistan. However, few have directly addressed how Iqbal conceptualized the Islamic state within a framework of modernity. This article seeks to fill that gap by highlighting Iqbal's perspective on the Islamic state not as a rigid legalistic construct, but as a dynamic and evolving model rooted in the principles of *tawhid* (monotheism), *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), and communal solidarity. To gain a comprehensive understanding of Iqbal's political thought, this article aims to explore his vision of the Islamic state, including his reflections on the relationship between religion and state, and his formulation of a political system aligned with the spirit of modern times. In doing so, the article aspires to offer a fresh contribution to the discourse on Islamic political theory that is both open-ended and contextually grounded.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach through a combination of literature review and historical analysis. The primary sources consist of Muhammad Iqbal's own works, most notably *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. To support and enrich the analysis, secondary sources such as scholarly books and journal articles discussing Iqbal's conception of the Islamic state are also utilized. All data collected through various documentation techniques are processed using a descriptive-analytical method, which involves first presenting the data in a structured manner, followed by critical interpretation and analysis.

C. Results and Discussion
1. Muhammad Iqbal: A Biographical Sketch

Muhammad Iqbal born on 9 November 1877 as Muhammad Iqbal bin Muhammad Nur bin Muhammad Rafiq came from a Kashmiri Brahmin family that had settled in Sialkot, Punjab, after converting to Islam (Sevea, 2012, p. 16). His father, Muhammad Nur, and mother, Imam Bībī, raised him in a devout milieu; his grandfather, Muhammad Rafiq, was a well-known Ṣūfī (Indrajaya, 2013). Family tradition traces their Islamic lineage to Baba Laleh, an ancestor who embraced Islam under the guidance of a revered saint and gained renown in Srinagar for his piety (Sevea, 2012, p. 16).

Iqbal's early education was supervised by his father, after which he was enrolled in a *maktab* to master Qur'anic recitation. He continued at the Scottish Mission School

in Sialkot before entering Government College, Lahore, where he studied under Sir Thomas Arnold. He earned a B.A. in Arabic (1897) and Philosophy (1899). In 1905 Iqbal proceeded to Trinity College, Cambridge, studying philosophy with J. M. E. McTaggart and James Ward, and attended law courses. He then moved to Germany, completing his Ph.D. on 4 November 1907 (Iqbal, 2015).

Exposure to European intellectual and social life its dynamism and respect for human dignity profoundly shaped Iqbal's outlook and later activism on behalf of India's oppressed Muslim community (Usman, 2023). Returning to India in 1908, he practised law in Lahore but remained primarily devoted to poetry and philosophy (Ahmad, 1967). Politically, he campaigned vigorously for Muslim self-determination. Convinced that Hindu–Muslim harmony was unattainable under British rule, he stood for the Punjab Legislative Council and became a leading figure in the All-India Muslim League. At the League's Allahabad session, he famously called for the partition of India into two nations, a view he reiterated in correspondence with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, arguing that peace required political separation along lines of religion, race, and language (Iqbal, 2015).

Iqbal was knighted in London, an honor that enhanced his intellectual prestige and strengthened Muslim bargaining power vis-à-vis the Raj. He is commemorated in Pakistan as the nation's spiritual founder; *Iqbal Day* is observed annually (Reni et al., 2022). Iqbal died on 21 April 1938 at the age of sixty. Although he did not witness the creation of a Muslim state, his vision inspired Jinnah and culminated in the establishment of Pakistan on 15 August 1947 (Iqbal, 2015). He left an extensive oeuvre *Asrār-i Khudī* (Secrets of the Self), *Rumūz-i Bekhudī* (Secrets of Selflessness), *Jāvid-Nāmā* (The Book of Eternity), *Pas Cheh Bayad Kard* (What Should Then Be Done, O Nations of the East?), *Musāfir-Nāmā* (The Book of the Traveller), and *Bāl-i Jibrīl* (Gabriel's Wing), among others (Choriyah, 2016). Written in Urdu and Persian, these works earned him lasting recognition as a modernist Muslim nationalist; many celebrate Islamic solidarity while others advocate Hindu–Muslim concord (Dewan Redaksi, 1997).

2. The Concept of the Islamic State in Muhammad Iqbal's Thought

Muhammad Iqbal articulated his vision for an Islamic state as early as 1930, when he was appointed President of the All-India Muslim League. He believed it was impossible for Indian Muslims to coexist politically with a Hindu majority under a unified national framework. Consequently, he persistently advocated for a separate Muslim state in every available forum within the League (Choiriyah, 2016).

For Iqbal, the formation of an Islamic state was not merely a political necessity, but also a spiritual imperative. The state, in his view, provides a context in which the Muslim individual's full moral and social potential can be actualized. A state is essential not to restrict individual power, but to channel it in a way that strengthens the individual and society as a whole, grounded in the spirit of *tawhid* (divine unity). Iqbal regarded *tawhid* as the foundational principle that binds society generating equality, solidarity, and freedom. It is the soul and structure of the Muslim community (Iqbal, 1934). His desire

to establish an Islamic state was shaped by deep-rooted theological discord between Hindus and Muslims and the enduring pressure of British colonialism (Khuza'i, 2003).

Iqbal understood the state as a means through which Islamic ethical and spiritual principles could be institutionalized in the political domain. It should serve as a platform for justice, equality, and individual freedom. The state, for Iqbal, is not an end in itself but a vehicle to enable the moral realization of Islamic ideals. He emphasized that the Islamic state must be dynamic and responsive to social evolution, functioning as a foundation for the spiritual development of the Muslim *ummah*. Central to this model is the principle of *ijtihad* independent reasoning as a method for interpreting Islamic norms in light of contemporary realities. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal argues that Muslims must create a political system grounded in Islamic values while remaining adaptive and responsive to modern socio-political change (Wahidah et al., 2025).

a. System of Governance

Iqbal's interpretation of equality and brotherhood led him to conclude that democracy is Islam's highest political ideal. Democracy allows individuals the freedom to actualize their innate potential while placing necessary limits in service of the collective good. Its success, however, depends on the willingness of its members to submit to divine law. To achieve this ideal, strong ethical leadership is required (Khuza'i, 2003).

Bilgrami (as cited in Muthhar, 2025) identifies five core principles that frame Iqbal's notion of Islamic democracy: First, *Tawhid* as the foundational principle, with the head of state serving only as executor of God's will, Second, Full compliance with divine law as revealed to the prophets, Third, Mutual tolerance among citizens, Fourth, Universality of Islam, transcending geographic, racial, or linguistic boundaries, Fifth, Legal interpretation through continuous *ijtihad*. Iqbal proposed additional elements necessary for an authentic Islamic democracy (*shura*), including:

1) Elections as expressions of the people's will;
2) De facto political sovereignty belonging to the people;
3) Absolute equality among all members of the Muslim community;
4) The head of state being subject to divine law, without any claim to infallibility or divine authority;
5) Legal accountability of the head of state before a court;
6) The right of the people to reject or revoke a nominated successor;
7) The people's right to impeach a ruler who violates the public trust (Iqbal, 2015).

Iqbal's model of democracy diverged sharply from its Western counterpart. He criticized Western democracy for perpetuating structural injustice in economic, cultural, and political realms. In his view, such democracy served as a tool of imperialism and capitalism, eroding human dignity. Rather than embracing the slogan "government of the people, by the people, for the people," Iqbal insisted that true sovereignty belongs to God, with the head of state acting as a *khalifah* (God's trustee). Under Islamic democracy, the ruler remains a fallible human being with no immunity and must be accountable to both divine law and the people. Authority is a trust (*amanah*), and political participation both

as voter and candidate is a universal right (Donohue & Esposito, 1994). Iqbal emphasized that a return to Islamic social democracy is not revolutionary, but a return to the authentic spirit of Islam (Black, 2006).

His democratic vision also shaped his rejection of nationalism. Iqbal denounced European nationalism as inherently materialistic and atheistic (Iqbal, 1973). He similarly rejected Indian nationalism as a façade, dominated by Hindu interests. He feared it would ultimately marginalize Muslims, suspecting it concealed a neo-Hinduist agenda incompatible with Islamic teachings (Iqbal, 2015).

b. Criteria for Leadership

Iqbal proposed that a legitimate ruler must possess moral integrity, be physically and mentally sound, demonstrate intellectual competence, and have deep knowledge of Islamic law. Above all, the ruler must be *amanah* (trustworthy) and *adil* (just) (Donohue & Esposito, 1994). His criteria align closely with classical Islamic political thinkers like Al-Mawardi, who emphasized physical and mental fitness, wisdom, courage, and religious knowledge (Pangesti et al., 2023).

However, Iqbal diverged from traditionalists regarding the process of selecting leaders. While Al-Mawardi upheld appointment by *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd* or designation by a predecessor (Rahmawati, 2018), Iqbal remained less explicit about mechanisms of power transfer. He expressed ambivalence about democracy: skeptical of its proceduralism, yet supportive of its potential to open new ethical possibilities. He feared that overreliance on legal frameworks could undermine moral insight, conflating legality with moral truth (Fauzi & Agustina, 1992).

c. Territorial Vision

Iqbal envisioned a global Islamic polity, wherein Muslims could live in justice and prosperity under the banner of *ukhuwwah Islamiyyah* (Islamic brotherhood), unbounded by race, tribe, or nation-state borders (Saifuddin et al., 2024). Although earlier Pan-Islamic efforts failed, Iqbal saw such a vision as both desirable and attainable (Khuza'i, 2003). Grounded in the principles of *tawhid* and Prophethood, Iqbal asserted that Islamic society must transcend geographical constraints. Membership in the Muslim community derives not from birthplace or nationality but from shared faith. He viewed terms like "Indian Muslim" as contradictory, since Islam, at its core, transcends time, space, and ethnic boundaries (Iqbal, 2015).

d. Religion and State

Iqbal firmly rejected the separation of religion and state. In his framework, religion provides the moral compass that ensures state power aligns with divine will. The state, in turn, operationalizes the spiritual ideals of *tawhid*, promoting equality, solidarity, and liberty. It is a mechanism for transforming religious principles into historical and social realities (Sulaeman, 2022). This view echoes Ibn Khaldun's assertion that religion is a powerful unifying force. Combined with social solidarity (*'asabiyyah*), it becomes a

foundational element of legitimate political authority. Without harmony between religion and community, a state is vulnerable to collapse (Iqbal, 2015).

In his article *Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal*, Iqbal outlines two ethical-political principles for an Islamic state: First, The law of God is absolutely supreme the ruler is merely the executor of divine law and enjoys no legal immunity. Second, Absolute equality of all members of the community Islam rejects aristocracy and social hierarchy. Human dignity is measured by piety, not social status (Donohue & Esposito, 1994).

Accordingly, any political structure that privileges one group over another is fundamentally unjust. The Islamic state is built upon the doctrine of *tawhid* and the prophetic mission of Muhammad. Its purpose is to preserve the religio-political unity of the *ummah*, enabling believers to actualize divine principles in both thought and emotion. *Tawhid* demands exclusive submission to God, not to kings or rulers; thus, the Islamic state is a means—not an end—to embody that monotheistic commitment (Sulaeman, 2022).

3. Analysis of Muhammad Iqbal's Concept of the Islamic State

Muhammad Iqbal stands as a prominent figure whose influence has deeply shaped the contours of modern Islamic thought. His courage in articulating the necessity for a separate state for Muslims is commendable and marks a pivotal moment in the intellectual and political history of the Muslim world. As a devout Muslim, Iqbal proposed a concept of an Islamic state that eschews theocratic tendencies in favor of an ethical, spiritual, and dynamic framework. His vision integrated core Islamic values with modern ideals such as democracy, liberty, and rationality. The principle of *tawhid* (monotheism), as envisioned by Iqbal, transcends mere theological assertion; it serves as the philosophical foundation of a state committed to social justice, equality, and freedoms including freedom of expression, education, and thought.

From the author's perspective, Iqbal did not regard the Islamic state merely as a mechanism for political power. Rather, he envisioned it as an ethical community aimed at cultivating a harmonious and civilized society. In such a polity, no individual including the head of state is above the law. The state recognizes no privileged class or caste, affirming the equality of all citizens before the law.

Iqbal proposed several criteria for political leadership, which remain highly relevant and practical as guiding principles for selecting ideal leaders. First, a leader must possess exemplary ethics, moral integrity, and noble character. Second, physical and psychological soundness is essential, as a healthy and whole body is presumed to contribute positively to the efficacy of leadership. The concern, however, is that any form of physical impairment might hinder a leader's capacity to fulfill his responsibilities effectively. Third, intellectual competence is vital a leader should have a sound understanding not only of legal matters but also of political and administrative sciences. Such knowledge enables the leader to engage with the complexities of governance and to respond to national issues with wisdom and prudence. Finally, justice is deemed indispensable. A leader must uphold justice as a fundamental pillar of governance, for

justice fosters societal welfare and serves as a bulwark against social discord and state-society tensions.

Nevertheless, one critical aspect appears to be absent from Iqbal's criteria for leadership: he does not explicitly stipulate that the head of an Islamic state must be a Muslim. Given that his framework is rooted in the ideal of an Islamic state, a clearer articulation on this matter would have been expected. Furthermore, Iqbal does not provide a definitive model for the selection or election of a head of state. This omission renders his political model somewhat incomplete. While Iqbal expressed a preference for a republican system of governance, he did not categorically reject monarchical structures, leaving his vision open to multiple interpretations. On the relationship between religion and state, the author concurs with Iqbal's assertion that the two should not be divorced. The separation of religion from state affairs paves the way for secularism, a model in which the state abstains from involvement in religious matters and vice versa. In Iqbal's framework, religion furnishes the moral compass of society, while the state acts as an instrument to materialize the ethical ideals of Islam within the realm of social and political life.

D. Conclusion

In Muhammad Iqbal's view, the establishment of an Islamic state is a necessity structured as a republic guided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah. For Iqbal, the state must rest upon the foundational principles of *tawhid* (the oneness of God), social justice, and popular participation through *shura* (consultative deliberation). He firmly rejected the separation of religion and state, yet was equally critical of any form of theocracy that curtails individual liberty under the pretext of religious authority. What Iqbal envisioned was a political order that harmoniously integrates religious values with the imperatives of modernity a state where Islamic law evolves through collective *ijtihad* (interpretive reasoning), allowing it to remain responsive to the changing needs of society.

Iqbal's conception of the Islamic state does not seek to impose a rigid, formalistic religious authority. Rather, he advocates for a modern state grounded in Islamic values an ethical and democratic order that prioritizes freedom, justice, and moral responsibility. This vision underscores a dynamic interplay between tradition and progress, where faith serves as a moral compass and the mechanisms of governance are rooted in deliberation and collective reasoning. For future research, it is recommended to further explore the practical application of Iqbal's political philosophy and to engage in comparative analysis with other contemporary Muslim thinkers, such as Fazlur Rahman. This study is limited in scope, particularly in its emphasis on theoretical and normative dimensions. Therefore, more comprehensive and empirically grounded research is necessary to attain a fuller and more nuanced understanding of Iqbal's vision within the broader discourse of Islamic political thought.

References

Ahmad, A. (1967). *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan; 1857-1964*. Oxford University Press.

Black, Antony. (2006). *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present.* Terj. Abdullah Ali dan Mariana Ariestyawati. Pemikiran Politik Islam: dari Masa Nabi hingga Masa Kini. Jakarta: Serambi Ilmu Semesta.

Choiriyah. (2016). Muhammad Iqbal; pemikiran Politik dan Sumber Hukum Islam. *Jurnal Mizan; Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 4(1).

Dewan redaksi. (1997). Ensiklopedia Islam. Cet. IV. Jakarta: Ichtiar Baru Van Hoeve.

Donohue, John J., dan Esposito, John L. (1994). *Islam dan Pembaharuan; Ensiklopedi Masalah-masalah*. Jakarta: Raja Grapindo Persada.

Fauzi, Ali Ihsan, dan Agustina, Nurul. (1992). *Sisi Manusiawi Iqbal*. Bandung: Mizan.

Indrajaya, Darmawan Tia. (2013). Kontribusi Pemikiran Muhammad Iqbal dalam Pembaharuah Hukum Islam. *Jurnal Hukum Islam*, 13(1).

Iqbal, Mohammad. (1934). *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. London: Oxford University Press.

Iqbal, Mohammad (1973). *Thought and Reflections*. Diedit oleh S.A. Vahid. Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf.

Iqbal, Muhammad. (2015). *Pemikiran Politik Islam; dari Masa Klasik hingga Indonesia Kontemporer*. Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group.

Khuza'i, Rodliyah. (2003). Pemikiran Politik Mohammad Iqbal. *Ejournal Unisba*, 19(2).

Muthhar, Moh Asy'ari. (2025). *Konsep Negara Ideal Al-Farabi*. Yogyakarta: Diva Press.

Mardani. (2023). *Hukum Internasional Islam*. Jakarta: Kencana.

Pangesti, Hestyana Widya., Muthiullah, dan Rahmat Hidayat. (2023). Konsep Pemimpin Ideal dalam Pemikiran Al-Farabi dan Al-Mawardi. *Jurnal Refleksi,* 23(2).

Rahmawati. (2018). Sistem Pemerintahan Islam menurut Al-Mawardi dan Aplikasinya di Indonesia. *Jurnal Diktum: Jurnal Syari'ah dan Hukum,* 16(2).

Reni, Santalia, Indo., dan Wahyuddin. 2022. Muhammad Iqbal serta Ide Pembentukan Negara Pakistan. *Jurnal Al Urwatul Wutsqa: Kajian Pendidikan Islam.* 2(2).

Saifuddin, Hasaruddin, dan Malik, Abdul. (2024). Transformasi Pemikiran Muhammad Iqbal dan Kontribusinya terhadap Pembentukan Pakistan. *Journal Peqguruang: Converence Series.* 6(2).

Sevea, Iqbal Singh. (2012). *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India*. New York: Cambride University Press.

Sulaeman, Eman. (2022). *Politik Identitas dalam Perspektif Alquran dan Teori Modern.* Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar.

Usman, Muh. Ilham. (2023). Paham Neo-Paltonis dan Negara Kesejahteraan: Kritik Muhammad Iqbal terhadap Kesadaran Umat Islam. *Jurnal Pappasang: Jurnal Studi Alqur'an-Hadis dan Pemikiran Islam.* 5(1)

Wahidah, Romlatul., Istibsyaroh., Muhlis., Hadi, Sulhan. (2025). *Refleksi Sejarah Peradaban dan Pemikiran Islam; Daulah Umayyah, Abbasiyah, dan Era Kebangkitan Islam.* Jogjakarta: KBM Indonesia.