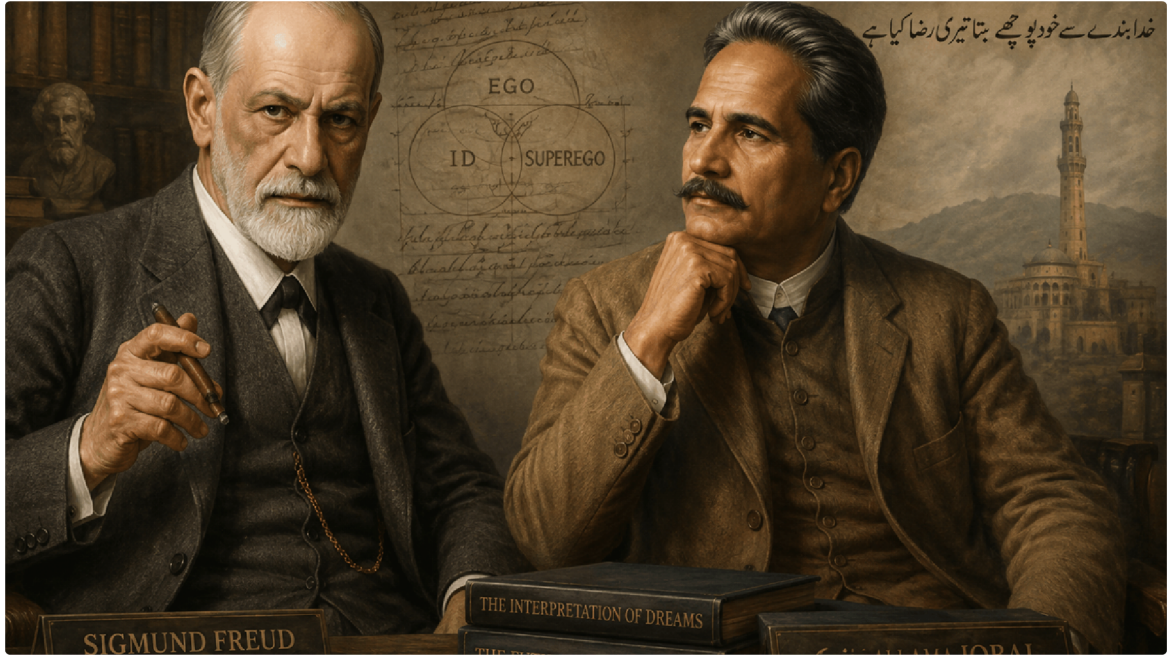


LIFE & SOCIETY

Freud and Iqbal: Two Perspectives on the Human Ego

By: Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak August 12, 2026



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Talk



I was first introduced to the ideas of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) when I was doing my Bachelor of Education, specialising in Islamic Education. At that time, it was merely textbook information without any analysis. By the time I was completing my undergraduate program, I was getting familiarized with Muhammad Iqbal's (1877-1938) ideas on man and personality.

As I embarked on my postgraduate programme at the International Islamic University Malaysia, especially when I started taking courses with Prof. Hassan Langgulung, a research idea began to take shape in my mind. I should pursue a research

world by Freud and Iqbal.

When I took this idea to Prof. Hassan for discussion, not only did he feel happy, but he also reminded me to search the Internet to make sure that no one before me had undertaken such research. The reason for this was that a PhD research project should be something new that contributes to the existing corpus of knowledge, in my case, to the fields of psychology and philosophy.

Upon receiving his approval, I immediately set about writing a research proposal, and within a week or two, I was able to submit it to the Faculty of Education at IIUM. Since it was a purely qualitative study, I took considerable time to gather information on these two iconic figures: Freud, who hailed from the West, and Iqbal from the East.

Although Freud was a psychologist and Iqbal a philosopher, my reading has enlightened me to the fact that there are areas of common interest between the two fields, particularly in their discussions of man and his nature. Psychology is mainly concerned with investigating human behaviour and mental processes empirically. In contrast, philosophy ventures deeper into questions concerning the nature, meaning, and purpose of human existence in this mundane world.

Freud's Pessimistic Views

The outcome of the study indicated that the intellectual, social, and political milieus of the time influenced Freud and Iqbal in conceptualising their theories. Besides that, their upbringing, education, and travels contributed, in one way or another, to their perceptions of the psychology of man, history, civilisation, and humanity.

Freud, who was initially a medical doctor, later took on the role of

day of his life, he held a negative view of man and human nature. To him, man is an intellectual beast who is doomed to fail in life. Moreover, he believed that every individual is driven by the life and death instincts. Freud's theory of personality is centred around human sexuality. To make his theory even more controversial, he maintained that the sexuality of an individual begins from the day of his or her birth and remains until the very end of one's life.

My criticism of Freud to this day is that he smeared the innocence of childhood with ideas on sexuality. To me, childhood is a stage of life characterised by a great deal of innocence and naivety. A child learns by exploring the surrounding environment and by making mistakes. After all, that is what childhood is all about. Regardless of whether a child is born in the East or the West, a child is a child.

The interesting part of his theory, particularly for any student of psychology, is his comparison of the human mind to a steam engine that is constantly increasing in pressure. Just as there is a need to release the accumulating steam in an engine, the human mind also needs to release the psychological tension that keeps increasing within it. Failing to do so, an individual may have to face stress, anxiety, depression, or other forms of mental illness.

At the initial stage of his investigation into the human psyche, Freud presented the topographical model of the mind by explaining that the human mind is like an iceberg. All that can be seen is merely the tip of it, while what lies beneath is like a mountain submerged in the waters. Similarly, what we see in an individual is only a glimpse of who he is, while what he goes through is buried, hidden, and well-protected in the deep recesses of his mind. He explains his theory of the mind by using terms such as the unconscious, subconscious, and conscious.

structural model of the mind using terms such as the id, ego, and Superego. To Freud, human mental illness is caused by the ongoing psychological war that takes place within the human psyche. The psychic components that struggle for dominance within the human mind are the Id, Ego, and Superego.

Born into a Jewish family, Freud, in the later stages of his intellectual development, began to embrace science and positivism. As a result, he gradually distanced himself from Judaism, became an atheist, and proudly described himself as a 'Godless Jew'. As someone who did not believe in God, he was critical of religion and regarded it, along with civilisation, as an obstacle to human freedom of thought and sexuality.

Iqbal's Positive Views

Unlike Freud, Iqbal, coming from a strong Islamic upbringing, remained a devout Muslim throughout his life. He made it his life mission to promote Islamic ideas wherever he travelled, whether in the East or the West. Iqbal was a man well-read in the Islamic sciences, philosophy, mysticism, history, law, politics, literature, and poetry.

In looking into the poor conditions of the Muslim world at that time, particularly in the Indian Subcontinent and the Arab world, Iqbal thought it was his duty to restore the spirit of Jihad in the Muslim Ummah. To him, the word 'Jihad' stood for hard work, diligence, and striving for excellence.

In analysing the problems of the Ummah of his time, Iqbal was challenged to formulate a new recipe to revive its spirit. As such, he came up with his philosophy of *Khudi*. Through this new philosophy, he explained to Muslims the importance of strengthening their personalities in order not to be bullied, oppressed, and subjugated by others. Like Goethe (1749-1823), the

East by the West.

His views on human nature resonate with the ideas of the Qur'an and Sunnah, which say man is born into this world without any baggage of the concept of 'Original Sin'. In addition, man is the honoured creation of God who is given the creative intelligence to administer the world. Being given the position of Allah's *Khalifah*, man has to be upright and practice fairness and justice, avoiding injustice, tyranny and corruption.

Contrary to Freud's conception of the human psyche, Iqbal does not divide it into three components (the Id, Ego and Superego) that struggle for dominance. In Iqbal's theory, the term ego appears in his philosophical prose work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, while in his poetry, he uses the term *Khudi*. Interestingly, *Khudi*, a Persian word, refers to a spiritual entity that originates from God and, upon fulfilling its mission in this world, returns to God to be judged. It will either be rewarded with a state of immortality or face damnation.

In contrast to Freud's rather negative view of the human psyche, *Khudi* possesses immense potential, limitless energy, creativity, and God-consciousness. Furthermore, *Khudi* experiences earthly life only once. Upon completing its mission in this world, it proceeds to the other realms of existence, such as the *Barzakh* and the Resurrection. Thus, in Islam and Iqbal's theory, there is no concept of rebirth or *Samsara*.

In his theory, Iqbal further divides the ego into two: the efficient ego and the appreciative ego. According to him, while the efficient ego is actively engaged in the affairs of the temporal world, pursuing fame, glory, and other worldly amenities, it may create a barrier between itself and the appreciative ego. Although the efficient ego may become carried away by the excitement and

or deep meditation.

According to Iqbal, the human personality does not develop in isolation; rather, it grows through interaction with other human egos, nature, and God. A dynamic personality takes shape when an individual develops a closer relationship with God. Conversely, the further one moves away from God, the weaker the personality becomes.

Freud's ideas on man and personality are pessimistic and deterministic, and he applies them universally to human beings. In contrast, Iqbal's theory of personality is dynamic and motivates individuals to delve deep into their psyche and bring forth the latent positive energy and God-consciousness within them. Iqbal believed that by actualising the latent potential hidden within individuals, people could transform the world into a better place for humanity.

*(The views expressed are those of **Dr. Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak**, from the Department of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies, AHAS KIRKHS, IIUM, and do not necessarily reflect the views of IslamiCity.)*

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