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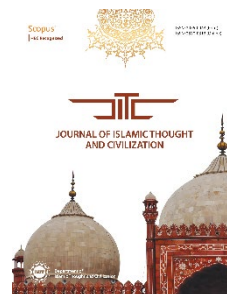
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Iqbal's Spiritual Democracy and Habermas's Deliberative Democracy: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The current study is written in the context of the civilizational dialogue between the West and the Muslim world with reference to Jürgen Habermas and Muhammad Iqbal's political views. It explores the congruence and contrasts between Habermas's discourse theory of democracy or deliberative democracy and Iqbal's theory of spiritual democracy. This research strives to find out the extent to which the core values of Habermas's theory and that of Iqbal's are compatible. For Habermas, the core values of social order are liberty and equality, whereas Iqbal upholds liberty, equality, and solidarity. It has been investigated whether they both mean the same phenomena by the same terms or not. For Habermas and Iqbal, democracy is the best form of government but neither one is satisfied with the existing democratic practices. In principle, they accept democracy as the best political system. The research paper also sheds light on the historical and cultural influences that have shaped the political ideologies of both Habermas and Iqbal, considering the impact of Western Enlightenment ideals on Habermas and the role of Islamic jurisprudence and spirituality in shaping Iqbal's democratic theory. Through critical analysis, this study aims to deepen the understanding of complexities inherent in the dialogue between Western and Muslim civilizations and offers insights into potential avenues for collaboration in political theory and practice.

Keywords: civilizational dialogue, deliberative democracy, Habermas, Iqbal, non-western democracy

Introduction

This research first offers the significance of Iqbal's thought in the understanding of Islam in some of the major countries in today's Muslim world. It then analyzes Iqbal's theory of spiritual democracy, and compares and contrasts it with Habermas's deliberative democracy. It attempts to find out similarities and disjunctures between Iqbal's conception of Islamic principles of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) and *ijma* (consensus of juristic opinion), on the one hand, and Habermas's consensus theory of truth, on the other. It finally explores Iqbal and the understanding of Habermas (1929-) regarding the values of equality and liberty.

2. Significance of Iqbal's Thought in Modern Islam

Iqbal is one of the most relevant modern Muslim thinkers in the present world. His thought has implications on paradigms such as modernism, vitalism, essentialism, creative evolutionism, existentialism, Muslim history, theology, and philosophy. Upon engaging with Iqbal, Charles Taylor comes to the assertion that we encounter a convergence of shared rationales, blending Western,

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Muslim, and Eastern perspectives, thus underscoring the universality of his significance.¹ One crucial motivation stem from the recognition that our “dialogues are marred by profound and mutual distrust.”² Movement and change intertwined with permanence and spiritualism form the crux of Iqbal's philosophy. Attempting to encapsulate his thought “within any single *ism*... would prove challenging and perhaps unjust. However, one could categorize him more definitively as a creative evolutionist... Considering his belief that all existence is composed of egos or selves, one could align him with notable figures such as Rumi and Bergson as a proponent of monadology.”³

Iqbal sees conservatism (*mullahism*) as sterile and resistant towards change. The sterility and stagnation of this class of religious clerics, according to Iqbal, is most revealed in its refusal to allow *ijtihad*⁴ (independent interpretation), which is the principle of movement in the structure of Islam. Iqbal, in his thorough exploration of traditionalism and modernism, came to the realization that a fixed adherence to religious dogma is incapable of nurturing the mindset essential for individuals and communities to attain self-realization.⁵ Iqbal is satisfied neither with capitalist democracy nor with socialism. The uniqueness of Iqbal lies in his blending of Eastern and Western thought as Nicholson points out, “Iqbal has drunk deep of European literature...yet he thinks and feels as a Moslem, and just for this reason, his influence may be great.”⁶ Iqbal, to Nicholson (1868-1945), thinks and feels like a Muslim, but “he does not treat philosophy as the handmaid of religion.”⁷ In his discourse, Iqbal identified connections and similarities between Muslim and Western philosophies that led him to envision a constructive engagement of Islamic and Western ideas. Thus, he endeavored to reconcile religious faith with philosophical reasoning by fostering compatibility between them.⁸ Iqbal was a philosopher ahead of his time. His synthetic grasp of the past and present solidified his relevance posthumously. It became evident through his readings that Iqbal possessed a visionary insight into matters of significant practical importance for both Muslim cultures and societies.⁹

In many Muslim countries, for example, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and in the case of millions of Muslims living in India, it is generally granted that Iqbal is both one of the most significant and one of the most influential Muslim writers and thinkers of modern times. His thought appears to have some closeness with the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution as well. He challenges theocracy, monarchy, a great deal of customs and traditions, mysticism, and *mullahism* (conservatism) as traditional authority was challenged by the Enlightenment thinkers. Iqbal necessitates the principles of freedom, equality, and solidarity for an Islamic state.

Iqbal seems to regard rational inquiry as a highly important facet of modern Western culture, viewing it as a continuation of Islamic culture. He expresses concern that the “captivating surface of European culture might impede our progress, preventing us from delving into its deeper essence.”¹⁰ He maintains the opinion that the Western and the Islamic civilizations, far from being alien to each

¹Charles Taylor, “preface,” in Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Islam and Open Society Fidelity and Movement in the Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal* (Senegal: Codesria, 2010), xi.

²Ibid.

³Mian Muhammad Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Germany: Allgaur Heimatverlag, 1996), 96.

⁴The principle of *ijtihad* contrasts with and is complementary to the principle of *taqlid*.

⁵Mian Muhammad Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 1619.

⁶Muhammad Iqbal, *The Secrets of the Self (Asrār-i Khudī) a Philosophical Poem*, trans., Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (London: Macmillan, 1920), xi.

⁷Muhammad Iqbal, *The Secrets of the Self (Asrār-i Khudī) a Philosophical Poem*, xiv.

⁸Diané Collinson, *Fifty Eastern Thinkers* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 56.

⁹Ibid., 60.

¹⁰G. R. Malik, *The Western Horizon: A Study of Iqbal's Response to the West*, 1st ed. (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2009), 6.

other, are rooted in the same core, that is, the element of rational inquiry and the validity of sense perception.

3. Iqbal's Theory of Polity: State as a Spiritual Democracy

Iqbal favors the republican state, but his republican form of government is not secular in the sense of mainstream Western liberal thought that creates a dichotomy between sacred and profane. Iqbal's republican state is grounded on what he calls spiritual democracy. According to Iqbal, the optimal governmental structure for the Muslim community would be democracy. This democracy, he believed, enables individuals to fully realize their potential by granting them as much freedom as practically feasible.¹¹ It implies that in spite of advocating the maximization of freedom, Iqbal does not consider it as an end in itself but rather a means for developing all the possibilities of human nature. In a letter addressed to Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), Iqbal contends that “embracing social democracy in a manner compatible with Islamic legal principles does not constitute a revolutionary act but rather a restoration of Islam's original purity.”¹² Iqbal's spiritual democracy accentuates the Islamic ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.¹³

Iqbal's spiritual democracy is deeply rooted in the Islamic concept of *Tauhid* (unicity of God), which inherently embodies principles of equality, solidarity, and freedom. He argues that a state characterized by spiritual democracy represents an “effort to translate these ideal principles into tangible societal forces, aiming to actualize them within a specific human framework.”¹⁴ As Iqbal embraces the concept of spiritual democracy, he explicitly rejects the theocratic perspective of the state. In this view, the “state is led by a representative claiming divine authority of God, who attempts to justify any despotic actions by invoking their supposed infallibility.”¹⁵ Anticipating the progression of spiritual democracy, Iqbal urges contemporary Muslims to recognize their standing and to restructure their societal framework based on fundamental principles. He advocates for the emergence of a spiritual democracy, which he identifies as the ultimate objective of Islam, derived from its hitherto partially revealed purpose.¹⁶

According to Iqbal, the principle of election and the democratic essentials of informal and formal deliberations may be the new inventions for Europe,¹⁷ but for the Muslims they are only the forgotten principles that the early Muslims strictly practiced during the rise of Islam. It may be noted here that Habermas holds that “the nation-state and democracy are twins born of the French Revolution.”¹⁸ Validating the principle of election (or the Islamic version of self-legislation) from the original tradition of Islam, Iqbal asks attention toward Caliph Omar's statement that an election lacking full expression of the people's will is invalid, therefore, underscoring the early recognition

¹¹Muhammad Iqbal, *Discourses of Iqbal*, ed. Shahid Hussain Razzaqi (Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2003), 43.

¹²Mohammad Iqbal, *Muslim Political Thought: A Reconstruction*, ed. Fateh Mohammad Malik (Islamabad: Alhamra, 2002), 225.

¹³Shagufta Begum, “Iqbal's Concept of Spiritual Democracy,” *Al-Hikmat* 21 (2001): 30.

¹⁴G. R. Malik, *The Western Horizon: A Study of Iqbal's Response to the West*, 1st ed. (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2009), 122.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁷Habermas holds that “the nation-state and democracy are twins born of the French Revolution” in *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*.

¹⁸Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 493.

that Political Sovereignty¹⁹ *de facto*²⁰ rests with the people."²¹ Thus, Iqbal's idea that political sovereignty rests with the people finds him closer to Habermas's conception of popular sovereignty, which is one of the essential elements²² of Habermas's constitutional patriotism. Moreover, in the above-mentioned quote, Iqbal used the term *de facto* because, according to the Islamic belief, sovereignty belongs to God and human beings are trustees of that authority. Through the above-mentioned quote, Iqbal contends that in early Islam, will-formation was made possible by formal and informal deliberations among the members of the state and the book of God would be interpreted rationally. In addition to everyday talk or deliberation, the mosques were also considered as an open platform for public deliberations other than being the places for performing religious rituals. This too is an indication of the staunch belief in the oneness of the sacred and the notions of profane in Islam.

Iqbal further underscores the legitimacy of the republican model of governance by citing a historical precedent that is the election of the second rightly-guided caliph, Omar. He argues that "following the demise of Abu Bakr, Omar, who previously served as Chief Judge during his predecessor's caliphate, was chosen universally by the people through an electoral process."²³ Thus, Iqbal argues that the republican form of government is an integral part of Islamic discourse. Iqbal holds that the caliph Omar was *universally*²⁴ elected. Iqbal's emphasis on universal election appears to mirror Habermas's democratic principle, which states that "laws can only be considered legitimate if they receive the assent (*Zustimmung*) of all citizens through a discursive process of legislation."²⁵

Recognizing the intellectual liberty embraced in Kemalist Turkey, Iqbal remarks that among contemporary Muslim nations, Turkey stands out as the sole entity that has broken free from dogmatic slumber (*Kantian phrase*; italics mine) and achieved self-awareness. It is the only nation that has asserted its entitlement to intellectual freedom and transitioned from theoretical aspirations to tangible realities.²⁶ Iqbal contends that the Qur'ānic doctrine, asserting life as an ongoing process of continuous creation, implies that each succeeding generation, while benefiting from the guidance of its predecessors should be free to address its own challenges without undue interference.²⁷ Thus, fresh interpretations demand independence of mind though he also warns that "no people can afford to reject their past entirely, for it is their past that has made their personal identity."²⁸ Simultaneously,

¹⁹Iqbal's idea that political sovereignty resides in the people brings him close to Habermas's conception of popular sovereignty which is one of the two essential elements of his constitutional patriotism.

²⁰Iqbal used the terms *de facto* because sovereignty in Islam, by dogma, resides in God, and men are trustees of that authority.

²¹Mohammad Iqbal, *Muslim Political Thought: A Reconstruction*, ed. Fateh Mohammad Malik (Islamabad: Alhamra, 2002), 115.

²²The two elements of Habermas's idea of constitutional patriotism are popular sovereignty and the idea of deliberative democracy.

²³*Ibid.*, 115-116.

²⁴Under the *Rashidūn Caliphate* (632-661), a unanimous decision was made by the Muslim community (mainly associates and family members of Prophet Muhammad) to elect the Caliph who would represent the entire Muslim majority and its interests.

²⁵Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 110.

²⁶G. R. Malik, *The Western Horizon: A Study of Iqbal's Response to the West*, 1st ed. (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2009), 128.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 134.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 132.

Iqbal asserts that “merely holding a misguided reverence for past history and artificially resurrecting it does not provide a solution for the decline of a society.”²⁹

The birth of democracy, Iqbal argues, in Europe and Islam has different motivations and goals. He holds that the modern Western conception of democracy (whether capitalist or socialist) is inextricably intertwined with economic interest. Democracy worked without capitalism in ancient Greece, but Iqbal is concerned here with modern democracy. Iqbal is of the opinion that modern European democracy is essentially the liberation (the attainment of negative liberty) of people for maximizing, expanding, and protecting the economic interest, whereas his proposed spiritual democracy is primarily concerned with endeavoring to cultivate the noblest type of character. Iqbal observes that the democracy in Europe, despite occasionally being overshadowed by the fears of social unrest and anarchy, fundamentally originated from the economic revitalization of European societies.³⁰ Iqbal asserts that the “democracy within Islam did not arise from the expansion of economic opportunities. Instead, his concept of spiritual democracy seeks to cultivate individuals who embody the highest ideals of life and strength.”³¹

As stated by Iqbal, Western civilization represents a “predominantly political civilization that views individuals as commodities to be exploited rather than as personalities to be nurtured and enriched through cultural means alone. He predicts that the peoples of Asia will eventually revolt against the materialistic economy that the West has constructed and enforced upon Eastern nations.”³² Habermas distinguishes between instrumental rationality and communicative rationality.³³ He agreed that it is the instrumental rationality that in the words of Iqbal, “has looked upon man as a thing to be exploited.”³⁴

4. Iqbal's Spiritual Democracy vs Habermas's Deliberative Democracy

Iqbal sees the material and the spiritual believes as organically integrated and argues that the grounding of the material in the spiritual has been endorsed by modern physics. His reference is to Einstein's proposition that matter and energy are interconvertible. According to Iqbal, as per the Qur'ān, the “Ultimate Reality is spiritual, and its existence is manifested through temporal engagement. The spirit flourishes within the natural, material, and secular realms. Thus, everything secular holds sacred significance at its core. In this vast expanse of material existence lies the opportunity for the spirit to actualize itself.”³⁵

Iqbal admires the European scientific advancement and the spirit of rational inquiry, as mentioned before, but he is not satisfied with the ethical, political, and economic frameworks of the West. He endorses the use of reason in the construction of law and ethical code but finds serious flaws in the Western social sciences. Habermas in his *Dialectics of Secularization*, wrestles with the problem of mutual treatment of believing and unbelieving citizens. Thinking beyond secularism, he gives the vision of a post-secular society. Habermas notes that within the post-secular society, “there is a growing agreement that aspects of the evolution of public consciousness involve both the

²⁹Ibid., 120.

³⁰Muhammad Iqbal, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, ed. Syed Abdul Wahid (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), 83.

³¹Ibid.

³²Mohammad Iqbal, *Muslim Political Thought: A Reconstruction*, 215.

³³Michael Schaefer et al., “Communicative versus Strategic Rationality: Habermas Theory of Communicative Action and the Social Brain,” ed. Ben J. Harrison, *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 5 (May 29, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0065111>, 1.

³⁴Muhammad Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal*, 1st ed. (Lahore: Sh. Ghulam Ali, 1973), 33-55.

³⁵G. R. Malik, *The Western Horizon: A Study of Iqbal's Response to the West*, 123.

integration and reflective adaptation of religious and secular mindsets."³⁶ Therefore, in both Iqbal and Habermas, we see indications of the potential reconciliation between secularism and religion. Habermas argues that the "ongoing disagreement between faith and knowledge can only be considered "rational" if secular understanding also acknowledges that religious beliefs possess an epistemological validity that is not inherently irrational."³⁷ What Habermas appears to reject is the epistemological monopoly of religion and Iqbal is an inexhaustible apostle of the greatness of human potential, including the abilities of cognition and rationalization.

However, Iqbal's spiritual democracy is partially liberal such that he recognizes the need for independence of thought. This implies that, to Iqbal, the demand for a fresh interpretation of Islam is not only legitimate but necessary. Iqbal contends that the legal interpretations offered by the four major systems of law existing in the Muslim world should not be viewed as definitive. He argues that "despite their breadth, these systems ultimately represent individual interpretations and therefore cannot lay claim to absolute finality."³⁸ In support of the Muslim liberals of his era, Iqbal asserts that their demand to reinterpret foundational legal principles in accordance with their own experiences and the changing conditions of modern life is entirely warranted.³⁹ While he embraces the modern Islamic liberal movement, Iqbal "cautions against the inherent tendency of liberalism to potentially fragment societies. Moreover, he warns that in their enthusiasm for liberalism, religious, and political reformers may exceed the appropriate bounds of reform, lacking restraint due to their youthful fervor."⁴⁰

It is Iqbal's contention that three forces, in particular, tend to lead to decadence and stagnation in the Muslim world. These decaying forces are *Mullahism* (conservatism), mysticism, and monarchical rule (authoritarianism). In his discussion of what he terms *Mullahism* (conservatism), Iqbal comments that the *ulema* (the learned ones), "particularly after the fall of Baghdad, became highly conservative and opposed any freedom of *ijtihad*, which refers to the ability to form independent judgment in legal matters."⁴¹ Thus, conservatism denies freedom of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) or the right to reinterpret religious commandments, whereas such freedom, as explained by Iqbal, is an integral part of the essence of spiritual democracy. Iqbal demands "a fresh orientation of the faith and a freedom to reinterpret the law in the light of advancing experience."⁴² Iqbal argues that mysticism in the Muslim world has degenerated from a purifying force to a deadening power. Iqbal's examination of Muslim mysticism uncovers that "it had regressed from its elevated role as a source of spiritual enlightenment to merely a tool for exploiting the ignorance and credulity of the masses."⁴³ And so, the Muslim kings, according to Iqbal, in general, exhibit such selfishness and lack of nobility that their gaze remains "solely on their own dynastic interests. As long as these interests are safeguarded, they do not hesitate to sell their countries to the highest bidder."⁴⁴

Challenging the materialistic economy of the West and speaking to Muslims, Iqbal emphasizes that "the faith embodied represents the value of each individual and teaches to devote entirely to the

³⁶Jürgen Habermas, and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 47.

³⁷Ibid., 51.

³⁸G. R. Malik, *The Western Horizon: A Study of Iqbal's Response to the West*, 133.

³⁹Ibid., 134.

⁴⁰Ibid., 129.

⁴¹Muhammad Iqbal, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, 278.

⁴²Ibid., 279.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

service of God and humanity."⁴⁵ Thus, Iqbal disapproves of the self-interested pursuit of wealth and exhorts people to sacrifice self-interest for the welfare of others. In analyzing the potential of the Islamic faith, he contends that "it still holds the power to establish a new world where a person's social status is not dictated by their caste, color, or financial earnings, but rather by the quality of life they lead."⁴⁶ If the social rank is determined by the kind of life one lives, then Iqbal is not a thorough liberal in the Western sense of the term.

Another aspect in which Iqbal differs from the conservative Islamic stance is his view of aggressive war. Iqbal argues that democracy in the Islamic world "endured for only three decades before vanishing along with their political expansion."⁴⁷ This posits as one of the reasons why Iqbal opposes political expansion, rejects the doctrine of aggressive war, and advocates only for defensive war. He asserts that, "while defensive war is sanctioned by the Qur'an, the concept of waging aggressive war against unbelievers finds no authorization in the Holy Book of Islam."⁴⁸ He is also of the view that "all the wars undertaken during the lifetime of the Prophet were defensive."⁴⁹ Nonetheless, Iqbal asserts that Islam as a proselytizing religion, "indeed seeks absorption. However, this absorption is not intended through territorial conquest but rather through the simplicity of its teachings, its appeal to the common sense of humanity, and its aversion to intricate metaphysical dogma."⁵⁰

Habermas's discourse principle posits that only the norms that all potentially impacted individuals could agree upon in rational discussions hold validity.⁵¹ Habermas distinguishes between legality and legitimacy. In the context of law, his principle stipulates that only "statutes with the assent (*Zustimmung*)⁵² of all citizens in a legally established discursive legislative process can be deemed legitimate."⁵³ If we apply the Habermasian position of discourse and democratic principles on the three forces that, according to Iqbal, are the forces of decadence in the Muslim world, namely *mullahism* (conservatism), mysticism, and despotism, we would observe that *ulama* (the learned ones), mystics, and despots are unwilling to endorse these Habermasian principles. What prevails in their practices and their approach to religion and society is not rational intersubjective deliberation but unenlightened self-interest and strategic (teleological) action. Their practices and actions, as described above in the Iqbalian framework, appear to reject Habermas's intersubjective communicative action and seem to be grounded in what Habermas calls teleological speech action.

Habermas is also not satisfied with the existing form of liberal democracy. He expresses his critique of capitalism in his colonization thesis titled as, "Colonization of the lifeworld by the system (1987)." To Habermas, one of the pathologies of existing capitalism is that the system tends to colonize the lifeworld which leads to the tarnishing of the quality of the public sphere, thus transforming the lifeworld into the system and leaving no space for intersubjective communicative action. Money and administration, to Habermas, are the two essentials of the system that tend to encroach upon the lifeworld. It is the intersubjective communicative action alone which gives

⁴⁵Ibid., 215-216.

⁴⁶Mohammad Iqbal, *Muslim Political Thought: A Reconstruction*, 216.

⁴⁷Muhammad Iqbal, *Discourses of Iqbal*, ed. Shahid Hussain Razzaqi (Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2003), 44.

⁴⁸Ibid., 39.

⁴⁹Ibid., 40.

⁵⁰Mohammad Iqbal, *Muslim Political Thought: A Reconstruction*, 188.

⁵¹Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, 107.

⁵²German word for "to agree."

⁵³Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, 110.

emancipation to the individuals. Habermas holds that some individuals assume the role of the subjects (scientists, industrialists, and so on) and treat nature and other humans as mere objects. Habermas argues for the limitation of instrumental rationality and suggests the strengthening of intersubjective communicative rationality. Acquisitive corporate leaders with an inordinate desire for the accumulation even at the cost of welfare and self-interested politicians, as well as strategic scientists and scholars⁵⁴ whose actions lead to the colonization of the lifeworld, may be compared with Iqbal's sterile *mullahs* (title of honor for a Muslim clergy), exploitative mystics, and oppressive despots.

While Iqbal opposes an acquisitive economy, Habermas, for the just distribution of wealth recommends the welfare state which is often hindered by the unbridled businesses, especially the multinational companies. Habermas highlights that in the contemporary landscape, it is the states themselves that are intertwined within markets as opposed to national economies being contained within the confines of states.⁵⁵ And the significant employment challenges in the developed countries primarily arise from the interconnected global production relations, rather than the traditional international trade dynamics. Sovereign states can only derive benefits from their economic systems as long as they operate within the framework of "national economies" targeted by their interventionist policies. However, the ongoing trend towards economic denationalization diminishes the influence of national politics over the production conditions that generate taxable income and profits.⁵⁶ Thus, Habermas proposes deliberative democracy and regulation of political governance to eliminate the pathologies of capitalist democracy.

5. Comparison of *Ijtihād* and *Ijma* with the Consensus Theory of Truth

Iqbal attempts to fuse the Islamic juristic principles of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) and *ijma* (consensus of juristic opinion) with his spiritual democracy. Iqbal seeks the social and political institutionalization of these principles. According to Iqbal, *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) is the principle of movement in the structure of Islam. It is only through the activation of this principle that Muslims can adapt with the modern world and will be able to discover the drawbacks of modernism. Iqbal invites Muslims to resuscitate this inherent but neglected principle and "rediscover the original varieties of freedom, equality, and solidarity with a view to rebuild our moral, social, and political ideals."⁵⁷

Iqbal criticizes both the stagnant conservatism within Muslim societies and the Western fixation on change that disregards eternal guiding principles. He advocates for an ideal society that reconciles the "categories of permanence and change," while recognizing the importance of both in shaping a balanced and progressive civilization. The importance of having eternal principles lies in the fact that they provide us with a "foundation in a world characterized by constant change."⁵⁸ One of the primary causes of "the failure of Europe in political and social sciences" is the lack of "eternal principles to govern collective life." Conversely, the "stagnation experienced by Islam over the past five centuries" stems from the Muslims' general interpretation of eternal principles as precluding any "potential for change," resulting in the "immobilization of what is inherently dynamic in nature."⁵⁹ To bring the

⁵⁴The approach toward these three characters is not intersubjective but subject-object oriented. Habermas emphasizes that all humans should treat each other as subjects so that intersubjective rationality prevails.

⁵⁵Pablo De Greiff, and Ciaran Cronin, eds., *Global Justice and Transnational Politics: Essays on the Moral and Political Challenges of Globalization* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 219.

⁵⁶Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, ed. Ciaran P. Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 122.

⁵⁷G. R. Malik, *The Western Horizon: A Study of Iqbal's Response to the West*, 124.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

Muslims out of relative intellectual stagnation and to revive in them the spirit and passion for intellectual curiosity and inquiry, Iqbal seeks the reactivation of the principle of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation). Iqbal mentions three major types of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation).⁶⁰ In the first type, the jurist exercises complete legislative authority and is confined to the pioneers of the schools of thought. The second type approves of the relative authority of legislation which is exercised within the confines of a specific school. The third type is a special authority of legislation applied only to the cases left undecided or unaddressed by the founders of the schools.

Iqbal concerns himself with the first type of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) that is the complete authority in legislation, which "is admitted by the Sunnis, but in practice it has always been denied ever since the establishment of the schools."⁶¹ This implies that Iqbal is not satisfied with the practice of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) within the boundaries of any of the established schools of law. Also, he suggests that apart from the four main schools of religious thought in *Sunnis*, namely *Hanafi*, *Shafi'i*, *Maliki*, and *Hanbali*,⁶² there is a great need to establish new schools of thought in response to the changing circumstances, new needs, and modern social infrastructure.

Iqbal's commitment to intellectual freedom makes him take an unorthodox stance regarding the interpretation of the Qur'an, the sayings of the Prophet, and the principles of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) and *ijma* (consensus of juristic opinion). Moreover, regarding the decisions made by the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, Iqbal says, "I venture to think, on the authority of Karkhi,⁶³ that latter generations are not bound by the decisions of the companions."⁶⁴ In relation to the sayings of the Prophet, Iqbal's unorthodox stance is revealed by classifying the sayings into two categories, namely traditions of legal nature and those of moral character. He emphasizes that "we must distinguish traditions of a purely legal import from those which are of a non-legal character."⁶⁵ The conclusion is that we should not make the grave mistake of making the latter type of tradition legally mandatory. It is worth pointing out that Iqbal maintains his position on the utilization of traditions aligned with the perspective of Abu-Hanifah, the esteemed Imam of Sunni Muslims. According to Iqbal, "Abu-Hanifah's approach towards traditions solely concerned with legal matters is, in his view, entirely sound."⁶⁶

We know from the history of the subcontinent that the Islamic *hudud* (boundaries or limits) punishments were enforced in India even during the nearly 50 years regime of the unorthodox Mughal emperor Akbar the Great (1542-1605), who, to John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), was an enlightened monarch, whereas Iqbal's use of the principle of movement, at least, regarding *hudud* punishments presents him to be more enlightened (in a Millian sense) than Akbar. Iqbal, while extending the point of view of Shah Wali Ullah, argues that "the law revealed by a prophet takes special notice of the habits, ways, and peculiarities of the people to whom he is specifically sent."⁶⁷ For this reason, Iqbal maintains that the *hudud* (boundaries or limits) punishments⁶⁸ declared in the

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., 118.

⁶²Fatima Tariq, "Four Schools of Sunni Law," accessed February 5, 2024, https://www.academia.edu/39727001/FOUR_SCHOOLS_OF_SUNNI_LAW.

⁶³Here, Karkhi refers to Imam al-Karkhi, the author of the first existing book on Islamic legal maxims.

⁶⁴Ibid., 139.

⁶⁵Ibid., 136.

⁶⁶Ibid., 137.

⁶⁷Ibid., 136.

⁶⁸Lexically, *hudud* means limitations. Thus, *hudud*, here implies punishment inflicted for overstepping the prescribed limitations. *Hudud* punishments consist of chopping off hand for theft,

Holy Qur'ān and *hadīth* literature were meant to be enforced on the Arabs of that time and they should not be implemented in the modern societies. Iqbal asserts that "the *Sharī'ah* values derived from such applications (e.g. rules governing penalties for crimes), are somewhat particular to that specific society. Given that their adherence isn't an end goal in itself, they shouldn't be rigorously enforced for future generations."⁶⁹ Contemporary sources indicate that Iqbal's perspective is not directly corroborated by the writing of Shah Wali Ullah (1703-1762). Instead, his interpretation seems to stem from an indirect reading of one of Shah Wali Ullah's texts which he obtained from one of the Shibli's books.⁷⁰

For the construction of Islamic modernism and spiritual democracy, he proposes that the power of *ijtihād* (independent interpretation) should be invested within the parliament, which would lead to *ijma* (consensus of juristic opinion) of the members of the parliament. Iqbal also suggests constitutional recognition for the assembly of religious scholars, including Muslim lawyers with expertise in modern jurisprudence. The proposed assembly "aims to safeguard, broaden, and, when required, reevaluate Islamic law in accordance with contemporary circumstances, all while staying faithful to the spirit encapsulated in its fundamental principles."⁷¹ Iqbalian practice of *ijma* (consensus of juristic opinion) in the Habermasian framework is similar to formal rational deliberations that are meant to reach the consensus in an ideal speech situation where not the force but the unforced force of the better argument prevails.

The idea of universal agreement that has reached through *ijma* (consensus of juristic opinion), as per Iqbal, is the fundamental principle of Islamic "constitutional theory." To further show the legitimacy of the republican form of government, Iqbal quotes a saying of the Prophet of Islam which declares that "what the Muslim community considers good, God also considers good."⁷² Iqbal suggests that his perspective is rooted in the original teachings of Islam by pointing out that Al-Ash'ari (873-936) likely derived his political doctrine, which posits that "error is inconceivable in the collective deliberations of the entire community," based on this saying learned from the Prophet Muhammad.⁷³ Iqbal's endorsement of the principle of consensus on the basis of united deliberations brings him close to Habermas's consensus theory of truth. However, it is also noteworthy that the community referred to is the Muslim community. "The united deliberations of the whole community" that Iqbal necessitates for reaching truth and making law is advocated in the both forms of public deliberations and formal deliberations in the parliament; otherwise, it cannot be united deliberations of the whole community. The difference, however, between Iqbal and Habermas's approaches to consensus is that Iqbal's conception of universal deliberations is dependent on the principle of *Tauhid* (unicity of God) and the Qur'ān as the supreme source of knowledge.

For Habermas, truth is what is approached in an ideal speech situation through a consensus in the framework of communicative intersubjective speech action. To Habermas, the ideal speech situation is characterized by four features, namely inclusion, equal opportunity, congruence between expression and intention, and non-coercion.

whipping with 100 lashes for fornication, whipping with 80 lashes for slandering, and stoning to death for adultery.

⁶⁹G. R. Malik, *The Western Horizon: A Study of Iqbal's Response to the West*, 136-137.

⁷⁰Ayyub Sabir and Mohammad Sohail Umar, *Iqbal's Concept of Ijtihād* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2011).

⁷¹Mohammad Iqbal, *Muslim Political Thought: A Reconstruction*, ed. Fateh Mohammad Malik (Islamabad: Alhamra, 2002), 222.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 115.

⁷³*Ibid.*

The first feature suggests that individuals capable of providing valuable input should not be sidelined, while the second feature guarantees that every participant receives an equitable chance to contribute, the third emphasizes that participants must genuinely intend their statements and the fourth dictates that communication should be devoid of both external and internal pressures.⁷⁴ It appears that Iqbal would agree with all the four features of Habermas's ideal speech situation but he would support such a speech situation only within the framework of revealed knowledge for the resolution of social, political, ethical, and economic problems. Iqbal gives great significance to the consensus of juristic opinion, but for him the Qur'ān is the ultimate source of truth that even the consensus of all jurists cannot falsify. However, it can certainly be said that Iqbal endorses neither the promulgation of pre-deliberative interpretation of the Qur'ān nor the pre-deliberative resolution of other significant issues whether political, social, or economic.

6. Iqbal and Habermas on Liberty and Equality

6.1. On Liberty

Iqbal is seen to partially appreciate what Isaiah Berlin called the negative liberty as it attempts to eliminate superstition, mechanical customs, monarchy, and stagnated religious dogmatism however, Iqbal argues that true freedom is not consummated without inner spiritual freedom. In Iqbal's sense, freedom increases with the increase in inner growth and expansion. Freedom, for example, in many cases, is not attained by indulging in pleasures but it is attained by overcoming the temptations. Iqbal approves of the metaphysical conception of free will and also seeks the promotion of freedom in the political sense. He takes issues with fatalism or determinism and argues in favor of a combination of them both with comparatively greater emphasis on free will. In discussing the concepts of free will and determinism, Iqbal argues that the doctrine of determinism is not only employed by purportedly religious politicians to rationalize their wrongdoings, but also that "contemporary philosophers have provided intellectual support for maintaining the current capitalist framework of society."⁷⁵ Francis Fukuyama (1952-) may be considered as a contemporary example in this regard.

Iqbal's idea of freedom is related to his conception of religious life. He divides religious life into three stages, namely 'Faith,' 'Thought,' and 'Discovery.' The complete spiritual freedom is attained at the third stage. The stage of Faith is characterized by obedience to an unconditional command without rational understanding, while at the stage of Thought "religious life seeks its foundation in a metaphysics of a kind"⁷⁶ and it is at this stage that the individual achieves some inner growth. It is at the third stage of the religious life that spiritual freedom is attained and it is a stage of great inner growth and expansion. In Iqbal's third stage of Discovery, "religion progresses to a phase where it involves the individual's internalization of life and empowerment. Here, achieving genuine freedom of personality doesn't entail escaping the confines of law, but rather entails discovering the ultimate origin of law within one's own inner consciousness."⁷⁷ The law essentially is the Divine Law revealed by God to his Prophet however, interpreted through reason.

For Habermas, public autonomy and private autonomy are two necessary conditions for the institutionalization of self-legislation and popular sovereignty. He emphasizes the co-originality of these two types of liberties. Habermas contends that the concept of citizens' legal autonomy necessitates that those subject to the law can also comprehend themselves as its authors."⁷⁸ Habermas

⁷⁴Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, 43-44.

⁷⁵G. R. Malik, *The Western Horizon: A Study of Iqbal's Response to the West*, 88.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 143.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

⁷⁸Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, 260.

holds that rights must not be accepted as preexisting natural moral facts or a part of natural law as, for example, John Locke (1632-1704) does.

Habermas argues that there has been, in both Kant (1724-1804) and Rousseau (1712-1778), "an unacknowledged *competition* between morally grounded *human rights* and the *principle of popular sovereignty*."⁷⁹ To put it in a different and effective manner, "liberalism posits that the law holds the highest authority within the state, with its primary purpose being the safeguarding of individual liberties. Conversely, within what Habermas terms the republican tradition, supreme authority originates from the collective will of the people, who govern themselves."⁸⁰ Thus, private autonomy means the exercise of individual liberties protected by the law. Originality of private autonomy lies in the phenomenon that "there is no law without the private autonomy of legal persons in general."⁸¹ Public autonomy means the autonomy to change the law so that liberty which is hampered because of some flaw in the existing law may be maximized by eliminating the hindrance(s) through reforming the existing law through the formal and informal deliberative participation of the people. Thus, law in this way is reformed by the sovereign will of the people, who by reforming the law for maximizing liberty rule themselves, which is the attainment or exercise of public liberty. And it is the same people who exercise private autonomy that live by the law that protect individual liberties.

Analysis of Habermas's private autonomy and public autonomy from the Iqbalian perspective suggests that it is Iqbal's spiritual revisionism that strongly advocates liberty to reinterpret the Qur'ān, liberty to differ with the Great Imams and the companions of the Prophet of Islam, and to be selective even regarding the sayings of the Prophet in connection with the traditions of the legal character and that of non-legal character. This appears to imply that Iqbal's greater emphasis is not on Habermasian private liberty but on public liberty.

6.2. On Equality

Both liberal and republican democracies emphasize the fundamental equality of human beings. For Iqbal, all human beings are spiritually equal regardless of caste, color, language, class, and geography. Iqbal is an admirer of "the equality of spirits" and he dreams of a social order "where an untouchable can marry the daughter of a king."⁸² He holds the belief that the "Kingdom of God on earth is intended for all humanity, not solely for Muslims, as long as individuals abandon their fixation on race and nationality and instead regard each other as personalities"⁸³ When examining the institution of slavery, Iqbal suggests that the Prophet of Islam "acquiesced to the prevailing social conditions by retaining the term slavery, but he effectively nullified the essence of this institution."⁸⁴ To illustrate the tangible change in the social standing of slaves, Iqbal contends that "slaves were afforded equal opportunities alongside other Muslims, as evidenced by the notable presence of former slaves among the ranks of esteemed Muslim warriors, monarchs, statesmen, scholars, and jurists."⁸⁵ The modern capitalist state hardly offers any examples of paupers or individuals from the periphery of the society turned into premiers of the state.

⁷⁹Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, 94.

⁸⁰Stefan Rummens, "Debate: The Co-Originality of Private and Public Autonomy in Deliberative Democracy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 14, no. 4 (2006): 469, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2006.00255.x>.

⁸¹Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, 260-261.

⁸²Mohammad Iqbal, *Muslim Political Thought: A Reconstruction*, 216.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 187.

⁸⁴Muhammad Iqbal, *Discourses of Iqbal*, 34.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

Iqbal's spiritual democracy stipulates the principle of "absolute equality of all the members of the community"⁸⁶ before the law. Iqbal holds the opinion that "the principle of equality of all believers made by early Muslims the greatest political power in the world; it elevated those who were socially low."⁸⁷ No one is superior to the law that is made through the principles of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) and *ijma* (consensus of juristic opinion) grounded in Islamic rationality. Iqbal points out that even "the Caliph of Islam is not an infallible being; like other Muslims, he is subject to the same law."⁸⁸ Moreover, the Caliph of Islam does not assume his office through some sort of coup or dynastic succession but "is elected by the people and is deposed by them if he goes contrary to the law."⁸⁹ Thus, primarily, Iqbal rejects the rule of some humans over other humans and supports nomocracy or the rule of law for all.

Iqbal also appears to contemplate the creation of such conditions in society with the help of the state that would aid in the development of a particular type of character either the spiritual character or the Muslim character. However, it does not mean that he rejects all the non-Muslims as being contrary to the ideal spiritual character as, for example, the philosophical spirits of Goethe, Bartari Hari (570-651), and Nietzsche (1844-1900) find place in Heaven in Iqbal's poem *Javaid Nama* that is composed on the model of the *Divine Comedy* by Dante (1265-1321).

With reference to his position on equality concerning the ownership of property, Iqbal accepts neither the capitalist stance that any person is free to own as much property as he can within the framework of the law of the land nor does he accept the socialist position that no one can own private property. According to Iqbal, the socialist stance is essentially "the equality of stomachs."⁹⁰ He argues that any person can own property, but his ownership is not absolute in the sense that "private ownership is a trust and capital cannot be allowed to accumulate so as to dominate the real producer of wealth."⁹¹ This domination of capital results in eliminating the probability of or in the undermining of social welfare. For Iqbal, the ownership of private property is not absolute in the sense that it is a trust with God, which implies that one should neither be given higher social status for owning property nor should he be allowed by the government and society to carry on any business that he finds suitable for the maximization of profits regardless of the Injunction of God with Whom property is a trust. Thus, in essence, the owner is not a possessor but a trustee. In rejecting the equality of stomachs, Iqbal tends to reject socialism. And in specifying private property as a trust, he differs from the capitalist concept of the right to property, according to which property is not a trust but a possession that one is free to use as one pleases.

Both Iqbal and Habermas seem to agree with the principle of absolute equality that stipulates the like treatment for like cases by the law. They both appear to be supporting an egalitarian distribution of wealth and income enhancing opportunities for the social welfare of the common man, though Iqbal is also interested in spiritual welfare that is attained by assimilating divine attributes. Iqbal appears to reject capitalism, whereas Habermas seeks to reform it. Unlike Habermas, Iqbal seems to reject the liberal conception of equality according to which all human beings regardless of their character are absolutely equal. For Iqbal, individuals with nobler characters are relatively superior to those with base characters.⁹²

⁸⁶Ibid., 45.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid., 43.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Mohammad Iqbal, *Muslim Political Thought: A Reconstruction*, 216.

⁹¹Ibid., 216.

⁹²While Iqbal admires, "the equality of spirits" and envisions a social order where individuals are spiritually equal, his later mention of characters being relatively superior in the course of this

7. Conclusion

Iqbal's rejection of Islamic conservatism, mysticism, and authoritarianism along with the stipulation of the rational interpretations of the Qur'ān and rational deliberations bring him close to Habermas. Both Iqbal and Habermas approve of democracy but both find prevailing democratic regimes and practices hampering freedom and equality. Both are admirers and advocates of liberty and equality, though Iqbal seems to restrain liberty in accordance with the Qur'ānic injunctions essentially through rational interpretations of revealed knowledge, whereas Habermas is interested in the maintenance and enhancement of private autonomy and public autonomy and in the establishment of a deliberative welfare state. In the case of Habermas, equality is expressed in terms of welfare and autonomy, whereas for Iqbal the individuals are essentially equal but may be unequal on the basis of their characters.

Iqbal and Habermas both endorse sense-perception and reason to be the sources of knowledge but the fundamental difference in their epistemological approaches lies in Iqbal's emphasis on revealed knowledge and religious experience. Habermas attempts to narrow this gap by envisioning a post-secular society. Iqbal appears to endorse intersubjective communicative action but he does not agree with the idea that there is no pre-rational and pre-deliberative truth. Thus, dialogue between the West and the Muslim world in the Iqbal-Habermas framework appears to have hopeful prospects for the future at least in a limited sense.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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article suggests a more nuanced stance. His idea of relative superiority based on character imply that, while all individuals share spiritual equality, the development of noble or base characters can lead to distinctions in their relative worth or merit. This doesn't necessarily undermine the fundamental spiritual equality he emphasizes. Instead, it introduces the concept that personal virtues and qualities may influence an individual's standing within the community.

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