

Permissibility Of Music In Islam: A Confused State Of Halal And Haram Among Pakistani Youth

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Abstract

This study intends to analyze the religious perspective of Pakistani youth about music and its theoretical and practical implications in their lives. It is significant to study that Pakistan has a big music industry consisting of a large number of musicians and listeners with diversified and contradictory approaches about religious legitimacy of music and their practical approach towards it. The researcher intends to investigate the youth's understanding of music's existence in their religion (what is their knowledge about it?), their apprehension (what they interpret?) about it and the conclusive stance (what they practice?) they take upon it. The research conducted focus group discussions of undergraduate university students who were asked about their personal and social perception about music, knowledge about its Islamic perspective and their practical approach towards music. The study found substantial respondents acknowledging it forbidden in religion but doing it for fun and can leave music later for good. The result also highlights a segment of audience who prove it legal in religion with respective religious references but feel scared to openly express it. The study concludes that the music industry is flourishing in Pakistan even though the musicians and public as listeners, hesitate to talk about its socio-cultural and religious permission and thus it remains a confused state of understanding among youth.

Keywords: music, religion, permissibility, Pakistan, youth

Introduction

The status of music, including its all forms, in Islam is a matter about which there are difference of opinions among scholars and followers regarding its permissibility of listening and practicing. While, there are different school of thoughts who keep their respective approaches about its legality in an Islamic society. On the contrary, there are those who consider no place for music in Islamic theology.

Qur'an and hadiths (historical and evident reports about Muhammad and his companions) are the primary sources of Islamic teachings from where all the Muslims deduce

the final verdict related to any matter of personal or social aspect. Besides these two major sources of Islamic teachings, Muslims rely on other sources for the interpretation of any matter, which are a consensus of the Companions (of Prophet Muhammad), Taabi'een (followers or successors of Companions) and other Fuqahaa (experts in Islamic jurisprudence).

There are no direct mentions about the status of music in Qur'an but only few verses which later interpreted by Muslim scholars. A verse in the chapter Luqmaan of the Qur'an says, "And of mankind is he who purchases idle talks (i.e. music, singing) to mislead (men) from the path of Allaah..."(Luqmaan 31:6). While

Muslim scholars Ibn Abbas, Mujaahid, Al-Hasan Al-Basri and Ibn al-Qayyim attributed 'idle talks' with singing and playing musical instruments. In another verse of Qur'an says, "(Allah said to Iblees) And befool them gradually those whom you can among them with your voice" (al-Israa' 17:64). According to Muslim scholars, the mentioning of 'voice' in the verse hints about singing, music, and any such disobedience or religious teachings. In Qur'an's chapter al-Najm, Allah says, "Do you then wonder at this recitation (the Qur'an)? And you laugh at it and weep not, Wasting your (precious) lifetime in pastime and amusements (singing)" (al-Najm 53:59-61). The part of amusement, in this verse, is interpreted by Muslim scholars as 'singing' and is associated with wastage of time.

Whereas, there are several Hadiths which describe music as haram activity and is prohibited for all the Muslims. A hadith says, "The Messenger of Allaah (peace be upon him) said: "Among my ummah there will certainly be people who permit zinaa, silk, alcohol and musical instruments..." (Bukhaari 5590). A Muslim scholar, Ibn al-Qayyim, explained that this hadith by al-Bukhaari is an evidence for Muslims about restriction from alcohol and music. Another hadith of Ibn Maajah in Kitabul Fitan (*72) states that messenger of Allah (Prophet Muhammad) stated, "There will be people of my ummah who will drink wine, calling it by other than its real name. Merriment will be made for them through the playing of musical instruments and the singing of lady singers. Allah will cleave the earth under them and turn others into apes and swine." (al-Kanadi, 2005). There are other mentions in hadiths of "blackened faces of the musicians (Mustadarak al-Wasail), place in hell if music is played for forty days (Mustanad al-Taraq), and effects on nervous system

On the other contrary, there are scholars and theologians who connect music with the blessing of God to prophets who were bestowed with "beautiful voices" and debate on

justification of music as festivity for human beings (Farmer 1942; Shiloah 1995).

Thus, with this background, the study intends to explore youths' personal and general perception about music, their religious knowledge about the status of music in Islam and their practice of listening and doing music. It is pertinent to know about their religious beliefs and their normal practice in society and factors which determine how much religious teachings are conformed while practicing an act which is not accepted with pure conviction but relies merely on interpretations by those who allow it.

Literature review

Music is a popular cultural entity in Pakistani society where a huge population is involved in making it a progressive industry. Rana et al. (2011) studied the utility of local and western music in Pakistani public and found out that the international music is getting more popular among Pakistani youth. People give more than one and half hour to listening and practicing music instruments daily. Moreover, western music and instruments have abundantly integrated pop music in Pakistan. Whereas, Siddiqui and Sibghatullah (2014) highlighted public preferences to listening different types of music among Pakistani population and deducted that people in Pakistan listen all forms of modern and classic music. The researchers studied different factors which denoted how the larger population listen to various genres of music while the young generation is becoming addicted to modern music. With such expansion in music listening audience, there are studies which elaborate how religiosity intervenes in doing music in different conditions. As Kuckertz, (1998) compared Hindu and Islamic faiths with regards to music and stated that music is the main power of life. He attributed Islamic teachings as antagonistic towards music's presence in Islam by justifying this matter that musical sounds betray people and cause to lead a sinful life and will ultimately

deviate them from the path of God. He further mentioned that conventional Islam allows only the recitation of the Qur'an, prayer call azan and few mystical initiatives by contemporary Islamic scholars. Furthermore, Harris (2006) did an extensive field research in few Islamic countries to know about music studies and perception of music among students and their parents. She not only analyzed various scenarios in which general public and music students study music but she also suggested different methods to be applied by music teachers in their classes. She concluded that Muslims need to know more about Islam to understand the real status of music in their religion instead relying on stereotypical approaches to understand the phenomenon of music.

In a setup where students of different ages are brought to study a collective knowledge and they have to keep intact their religious ideology as well as the their ability to capitalize their instinctive potentials, it becomes a challenge for the researcher to diagnose the real thinking of the students about certain approaches. Harris (2000) underwent the same situation while investigating the acceptability of performing arts among school children with Muslim majority. He concluded that children, at the age of high school, adapt to their family's religious stance and hesitate to deviate from their religious grounds. Thus, a predominant ideology about certain concepts can't be altered but levels of acceptance and rejection varies among the audience. As Otterbeck (2021) discussed that there are even differences of approaches among Muslims biggest sects, Sunnis and Shias, who consider music in relatively differing implications. Each sect does music in shape of religious festivity and avoid its commercial prospects. Akbar et. al. (2013) also studied the ethical values attributed by Muslims in adopting music as their practice by keeping ethical boundaries in mind. They consider music as a natural and humanly trait but studied its regulatory parameters of religion and culture.

Methodology

This research included undergrad Muslim students, Sunni and Shia both, from five private universities (The University of Lahore, University of Management and Technology, University of Central Punjab, Forman Christian College University and Beaconhouse National University) of Lahore on random sample bases. These universities have students from all over Pakistan with different socio-economic backgrounds and these universities arrange frequent musical festivals, gigs, concerts and activities throughout the year. Due to their liberal approaches towards music, students in these universities are more prone towards listening and doing music at the same time. Moreover, 6 students from each university (3 musicians and 3 music listeners), both males and females, for the purpose of focus group discussion, were engaged by applying purposive sampling technique. The selected students were musicians who play music instruments, sing in different university or local musical activities and concerts and those who liked listening to the music. whereas, no such respondent in focus group was selected who categorically believed that music is prohibited in Islam instead only those young students were selected who do music and listen to it despite their contradiction with what they believe about music and what they do with music.

The focus group discussion comprised the questions based on the objectives of the study; what is music for them, how personally and generally on social grounds they associate the existence of music, their religious understanding and their choice of accepting or denouncing music on themselves.

Among all the focus group members, musicians and listeners, expressed about music as the strongest emotion of their lives which helps in minimizing their mental depression and help in transforming the feelings of worriedness into a feeling of ecstasy in which they find mental peace. "for me, music is a way to run away from all my worries and to feel happy",

The FG members also referred it their only remedial activity to escape from a distressful condition. They felt uplifted and most of the time, music is a medicine for them to cure their thoughts which are lagging them behind. "I usually listen to music when I am having some kind of stress. Music is usually helpful towards me in releasing the maximum stress out of me. So it's kind of a sweet medicine for me." Musicians in the FG groups were found associating their interpretation about music as their expression of emotional personality. "Music is a hobby to me. It's a way of expression to me. Everyone out there express themselves by different ways. So for me music is a way of expression." "It was a hobby for which turned out to be a passion now and my identity." Moreover, they reckon music as their characteristic which allows them to get out of their introvert personalities into a person who expresses his/her feelings through music. "Since my childhood, I have always found myself to be an introvert, Music allows me express myself, my emotions, my narrative without having to use words." Most of the music listeners find music as their way of entertainment, to gratify their need by attaching their personal experiences and a therapy which helps them feel good in bad episodes of life.

Individual perception about music

The musicians in the FG members mentioned their seriousness towards writing songs, singing melodies and connecting with their audiences. They consider their professional duty of being innovative and creating a content for their listeners. "I'm making original content and trying to be more unique so that my audience can connect with me and doing projects for different brands..." Listeners in the FG related their personal approach with more spiritual and contextual perspective. They felt connected with their peculiar thoughts about religion, reality of life, philosophy and ideologies. "it's teaching me about the reality of life or how different instruments shape the genre of the music and eventually impacts the vibe it gives

to the listener." "Music is a language which have no barrier, it's like love that one can feel in his heart even without saying a single word." "I perceive it as a connection. At times, with reality and sometimes with the most fictional stuff" "it is the most beautiful form of expression that is quite universal and in fact connects man to God in a subtle yet, pure way."

Social cognition about music

According to FG members, the people around them, especially family members are never hesitant of enjoying music and dancing in gatherings and it is considered as a 'normal' act without considering it any proscriptive thing to do when in gathering. "it is not considered religiously good to play it randomly around the house specially in loud volume, weddings are the only exception." The FG members argued that it becomes acceptable for everyone if it is happening in a gathering and there is no one to judge it on religious grounds. So, as long as, everyone is enjoying a gathering with music, it becomes a socially normal act for all. "if there is a party going on, there will be loud music and it will have heavy beats and people will dance to it" and "I post my music videos so that people can listen to me and also in family gatherings and functions and I also try to be a part of every event in my university" The FG members mentioned about their personalized groups of friends and family members with whom they spend most of their time. And according to them, they find people with similar ideology and almost all of their near ones like music and no one ever asked them to restrict themselves from music for any certain reason. "I am a music lover so my company my friends all are music lover too.. actually music is a base of our friendship" Some FG members believed that music is a universal phenomenon which ought to be opted as a profession which not only bring individual fame but it brings societies together. "...bringing good vibes to those who are listening. Our cultural music such as Qawali is making our country getting famous." Some musicians in FG members described the social

hate for those who specifically choose music as their profession. They mentioned about certain name calling, cursing and abusive use of language for those who publically do music for fun or as a professional musician. But they were found to have normality with those people who, with cultural context, use bad words for musicians and try to justify their abusive language with religious backgrounds which they perhaps do not know. "some of them take it as it is a really bad thing like 'kanjar khana (place of vulgar doings)'. But mostly people enjoy listening to music. In our society everyone has their own opinion and perspective regarding music"

Religious cognition

Few FG members believed that music is allowed in certain situations with certain conditions. Their prime religious understanding of music in Islam is dependent on the right practice of it and at the same time, avoiding any such element in music which betray Muslims or is vulgar in any social sense. "Music which has positive impact, which is used for preaching or to rise the feelings of humanity and is not blasphemous in anyway is completely allowed in Islam." There were FG members who openly admitted that music is strictly prohibited in Islam and the Islamic teachings, they knew of, suggest that music leads to the path of destruction. "No, never because our religion prohibits Music and being a Muslim what I think of it, that choosing it as a profession is like choosing hell for yourself . That's what Islam tells us." For some members, music leads to an uncontrolled behavioral change in personality and result in vulgar motives. "I think that music is prohibited in Islam as it is seductive in some cases and anything that starts controlling you, is prohibited (in Islam).""there is no clear point of music being forbidden in Islam but illegitimate audio art that tends to take people away from faith and can provoke for any wrong doing should be avoided." Some FG members related music with their teachings from family, teachers and religious scholars that music is

now allowed in Islam but they did not expressed about their personal religious views about music. "All i know is that it is told to be refrained from in our religion". Some justify the permission of music by filtering those elements and practices which go against basic Islamic principles of human behavior and interactions. "I believe that it is not the music that is haram, it is the melody that provokes you to do wrong, that is haram."

Pragmatic approaches about music

The FG members mentioned that they sing and listen to music whenever they are surrounded by any feelings but they were reluctant to select the music profession as their career. Their responses varied from low prospects of music as a career, social disgrace to religious prohibition. "I do like to sing sometimes it makes me feel like I'm pouring my feelings out without even clearly stating them to someone. But I won't ever opt music as a profession." Some respondents presented the religious context for not opting music for their future career but they still showed their interest of keep listening the music of their choice. "Due to religious prohibition, I won't (choose to be musician) but Listening to my favorite songs give me immense pleasure" The musicians in the FG members were quite passionate about their future career in music and they showed their interest in becoming professional musicians one day. "yes I want to be a musician and proceed it as a profession may Allah help me and may I found proper opportunities" and "Yes, I wish to be a rock star one day". Female members of the focus group were found to have social pressure as they fear being highlighted in society and their family and society, on the whole, will not consider it normal. "I am not really comfortable singing in front of the camera or in front of strangers. I would love to sing as a professional singer but I can't"

Discussion

The participants of focus groups were asked about their personal and general perception

about music, their religious knowledge about its permissibility in Islam and their practical approach towards music.

About their understanding of “what is music?”, the focus group members did not describe music as a forbidding concept but instead almost all of them stated their personal attribution with it. No one was found to have a religious association with the question and directly responded in a way that denoted their daily practice of listening and doing music as it was their natural routine.

While addressing to the question of “their personal understanding about music”, the FG members had varying interpretations depending on their individual practice of doing and listening music. They were found to link their personal associations and spiritual believes with music with context to their professional aims.

“Social perspective” of the FG members was more inclined towards their family setup and the company of their friends they live with. Most of them said that their families never discussed about prohibiting music in families, their parents and relatives enjoy music in gatherings. So, it is a normal fact for their personal as well as social understanding.

While addressing to the question of “religious knowledge about music status in Islamic society”, the FG members were divided in three ideologies. One ideology followers said that Music is allowed in Islam as long as there is no vulgar element attached with it and it is preaching positivity and goodness among the society.

The focus group members had varying responses to the question of their “current practice and future plans about music”. The element of dissociation from music at later stage of life is considered as a blessing from God as many FG members expressed that they wish to find the path of virtuousness at some point of life and then they will leave all such

things which they believe are haram in Islam, including music. Moreover, there were those members who deliberately wanted to become professional singers to earn fame and create innovative music genres. While the female musicians who, though wanted to join this profession, cannot continue music to become professional musicians, due to social stigmas and cultural attributions attached to women in their societies. Some of the members just wanted to keep it as their hobby and a recreational activity to practice in their gatherings of friends and families.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, music is enjoyed and prohibited at the same time. The young generation, due to modern understanding of social concepts, has started to interpret social, cultural and religious values with different perspectives. Despite the fact, the early family life and religious education to Pakistani youth do no indicate any kind of encouragement to do music. Nevertheless, there are religious school of thoughts who denounce and totally reject permissibility of music in Islam yet it is still a very common practice in Pakistani society. At the same time, the youth has modified their priorities and preferences to consider music over their social, cultural and religious believes. They have adopted a blend approach about music in which they religiously think of music as haram in any way. They also think to quit listening or doing music at later stage of their lives when they, according to them, will be a path towards salvation. But until then, they wish to keep enjoying the music for which they say that it gives expressions to their feelings and emotions. It also give them pleasure of soul and help in diverting their attention from depression to pleasing moods.

The situation of dual approach towards music in Islam, especially in Pakistani society, is dependent on multiple factors. The accumulation of modern Western culture in Pakistani society is changing the common perception towards all those phenomenon,

particularly social and religious taboos, has changed. The conservative and indigenous element of family and religious teaching has been replaced due to internationalization and new media; social media platforms etc. The element of fear from the teachings of religion has lessen to a level which suits youths' new lifestyles and eventually the prospect of music in Islamic republic of Pakistan is more of a cultural phenomenon than religious.

The research in this direction can answer multiple uncertainties and people's interpretation about music. It can identify school of thoughts with different religious interpretations about music, highlight music industry which is economically developed and it can also investigate youth's approach towards music in Islam and their practical approach.

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