

# In acceptable form

With the advent of Ramzan in media in Pakistan focuses more on forms like the *qawwali*, *humd* and *naat*. The rationale behind this switch is the proximity of these forms to religion.

The only difference is that of text. If the text is granted primacy rather than the note for its legitimacy and acceptance, it may appear ironical that an extra musical category is being used in granting legitimacy to music.

There is historical evidence to support these criteria of criticism. In certain societies like Afghanistan, the text even determines the form of expression. If the text is based on some religious document then the recitation of it does not fall in the category of music at all.

Other than the text, the aspect that troubles religious scholars is that of instruments. Music for them is synonymous with musical instruments and any piece of rendition unaccompanied by musical instruments is still acceptable or tolerated com-

pared to the one which has an accompaniment of instruments. Recitation of the most sacred text is appreciated and eulogised and considered very much a part of the practice of religion. But if accompanied by instruments it would fall within the category of the forbidden.

The natural urge to express in music eschews the conventional definition of music. The note resides in the human voice and not in the frets of the sitar or the mechanical reeds of a harmonium. These instruments are only required to emulate the human voice and add their own hue with their peculiarities of timbre.

In Pakistan, arts have been dogged by a continuous controversy in regards to religion. Certain section of the intellectuals, who have called for the entire set up in the country — be it political, social, economic or cultural — to be fashioned in line with the principle dictates of religion focus their attack on music and the other performing arts for this reason alone. For them, in the case of arts and literature there is scope for correctness and reformation as well as in music. The content and absence of musical instruments can be redeeming features that may

ensure the continuation of music as part of living culture.

But there is more than one point of view as far as religion is concerned. It would be much more correct to say that even the lobbies that propagate the enforcement of a theocratic setup have a variety of opinion about what should be done to arts in general and performing arts in particular. To many a hardliner the entire debate about the accommodation of arts is irrelevant because there is no place for arts and performing arts within the ambit of religion. In their interpretation of Islam, all arts are *lehw o laab*, promoting distraction, a love for material aspects of life and taking the mind away from an austere obedience of the Almighty — and so subject to severest condemnation.

For others, arts are not rejected outright. There is place for some forms while others do not express the quintessence of our faith. The two forms which are acceptable are architecture and calligraphy. — first because its origins lie in building a place of worship and second because it venerates the writing of scripture. All the other forms are not essential to religious prac-

tices and can be done away with. When they look back at the history of the practice of their faith they point to the state patronage granted to these two forms in principle. Also its subsequent development over centuries has been much more uniform than in the other art forms.

The other forms have greatly depended for its patronage on the liking, disliking and whims of individ-

the ruling classes, the hard reality of tradition has always reinforced itself. Certain areas and territories that became part of the Empire had their own strong local traditions which could not be totally obliterated in the name of fashioning a society on the strict principles of faith or an order derived from that faith.

The question obviously revolves round interpretation

totally run contradictory to each other.

The extremists may quote some example. Very recently one has seen a stringent application of hardline interpretation in the shape of Taliban edicts in Afghanistan. Television and video films were publicly destroyed, there were no cinemas and hence hardly any scope of cultural activity in that society. Whatever existed must

have been in defiance of the ruthless application of the edicts glorified in the medieval fashion by Taliban. But other than a few examples such ruthless application and such extreme interpretation is a little difficult to find. There have been instances in history when

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When we look at the history of arts in various Muslim societies, it appears theatre and drama has had very little reason to bloom while the pictorial arts/visual arts have really thrived. Similarly music too has been one of the most important expressions in many a society and it has creatively been nurtured and nourished by the ruling classes and the state. It is said that the ruling classes tend to indulge when in power. But the real question lies in the approach to music and arts. If it is a serious concern and a means of genuine communication and discovery of the self then arts should be above reproach. But it is often seen and experienced that arts become a source of mere entertainment. This state of affairs itself is distasteful to any committed practitioner of music.

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ual rulers. There has been no uniform policy regarding forms of arts except architecture and calligraphy. The initiative of individual rulers have seen great spurts of creative activity in various parts of the Empire. But other than the individual whims and preferences of the rulers and

of the text, and these have been so varied in a world not dictated from one central authority. Every society or polity is free to add its own interpretation to a list which in any case is quite long and unending. These interpretations at times elaborate on one another and at times

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