

You can no longer be Fair and Lovely

Lahore
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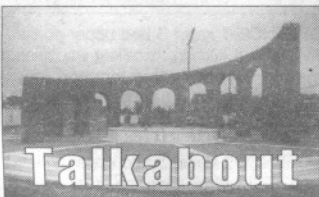
EVERYBODY is riding a wave of patriotism. The anti-India emotions are running high, starting with disavowing the 'made in India' products. You know the kind of products people use, the Dabur Amla Hair Oil, the Fair and Lovely skin whitening cream, the incense sticks, the paans and the betel nuts.

I was told by a local paan dealer, in Old Anarkali, that the ban on the paan and betel nut business was affecting both countries to the tune of Rs400 million. But the worst hit victims are the devotees of the Fair and Lovely moisturizers. Just when the Pakistani women were becoming fairer and lovelier, the two governments, had to clamp a ban on a product which is considered by many to be the second most important invention in the sub-continent after electricity. Anyway, we, the denizens of this city, have solemnly pledged to lead our lives without the aforementioned articles, however necessary they might be. Everything from 'that country' to 'this country' is contraband.

For my part, I try not to stand in the direction of the wind if it is blowing from the neighbouring country. I try not to drink the water if it flows from 'that country', in any case I use bottled water. I even force myself to watch our own TV channels. And that's when my patriotism starts fraying. I try desperately to find humour in the over comic programmes, suffering heavily from a weak script, weakened further by bad acting. The more serious plays are infused with violence, coming close to a replication of our movies on television. And yes, how can I fail to mention a bout of video songs

shown on the channels, produced, sung and enacted by amateurs celebrating their independence? Come to think of it, do we viewers have an option?

Obviously, some of us do. The ban on Indian channels has many people tuning in to Anjuman and Lashkara, both are Punjabi channels showing glimpses of Indian songs. Such is the hopelessness of our programmes that many women prefer to watch the Punjabi bhangras and other folk dances than their own PTV. All the fancy names, like the ARY, the Prime Entertainment and the PTV World, entering the entertainment industry, are old themes in new packets. "There's nothing new! Come on let's face it. Our media is lame and crip-



pled. It cannot compete with the demands of the cable network," says the owner of a boutique. I know exactly what she means. The paans, the betel nuts and the Fair and Lovely's can be substituted, but do we have a good substitute for the Indian channels? I don't think so because not everybody can grasp or remain glued to the BBC, the CNN and the Movie Magic channel.

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THE Lahore Chitrakar is one of the few places here to have taken on the much valued task of promoting classical music. It has arranged a series of

concerts called Raag Ratan which usually take place on a Saturday evening. Two weeks ago, the captivating performance by Muneer Khatoon, a classical vocalist from India was the first in the programmes on the Lahore Chitrakar's list. Following that, this Saturday, was the concert by Ustad Nazir Butt, whose ill health prevented him from performing for the entire evening. Nonetheless, he moved the audience with his Desi Todi and a thumri in Raag Talang. Ustad Nazir Butt belongs to the Kirana gharana of singing and received his training from GA Farooq. He has been a classical vocalist for over fifty years and now teaches music at the Lahore Chitrakar.

Shafqat Husain, a gold medal recipient in classical vocal (amateur) at the All Pakistan Music Conference, was also among the performers. His flawless rendition of Raags Malkaus, and Kajri was followed by a performance by Lubna Inam. She, too, had won a gold medal in the geet and gazal category at the All Pakistan Music Conference held in November last. The evening came to a conclusion with a performance by Ayesha Ali, a student of Ustad Nazir Butt. The intricacies of Raag Jaunpuri were effortlessly picked and beautifully sung. Ms Ali teaches mathematics at the Lahore University of Management Sciences and is the patron of the LUMS Music Society. It is indeed heartening to know that not all entertainment is confined to the whims of politicians. And if a PTV victim feels like recuperating, a Saturday evening at the Lahore Chitrakar can speed up the healing process. —Shehar Bano Khan