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*IN A TAWHIEED-BASED MODERN SOCIETY*

# *THE HORIZON OF CULTURAL PRACTICE*

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The practice of art and culture is a natural human inclination. The religion of Allah, Islam, has never denied or forbidden this inclination. Before Islam, obscenity was predominant in the poetry and songs of Arabia. But the Messenger (peace be upon him) did not forbid the practice of these arts; he merely instructed people to avoid obscenity.

Allah has clearly mentioned the forbidden matters in the Quran and has also declared the principles of permissible (Halal) and impermissible (Haram). He has forbidden three things. Firstly, all forms of obscenity, both apparent and hidden. Secondly, disobedience to Allah and injustice/oppression. Thirdly, associating partners (Shirk) with Allah and attributing fabricated words to Him (Surah Al-A'raf 7:33).

In light of this principle, art and culture are not Haram, but their practice must be free from obscenity, falsehood, deception, and disobedience to Allah. During the time of the Messenger (PBUH), songs were sung and musical instruments were played at the marriage ceremonies of the companions. The Messenger (PBUH) was the busiest man and the greatest revolutionary in human history, who conducted more than a hundred military expeditions in just nine years and provided practical guidance in every sphere of human life. Therefore, he did not have the leisure to be engrossed in music. Nevertheless, it is seen that upon returning from battle or during leisure time at home, songs were performed in front of him, and he listened to them and did not forbid them.

Therefore, from the perspective of Islam, every door of culture is open. Poetry, songs, drama, acting, dance, painting, literature, handicrafts, photography, and cinema—all are important components of art and culture. If they are free from obscenity and violation of Allah's commands, they are permissible and beneficial. Islam encourages their practice. However, it must be remembered that although entertainment is a part of life, it is not the main task of humans. The principal responsibility of mankind is to uphold the Caliphate (representation) of Allah, and the practice of culture should be a healthy form of recreation and an aid in establishing humanity.

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“In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.”

## **The Horizon of Cultural Practice in a Tawheed-based Modern Society.**

Culture is an indispensable part of any civilization. In human history there has never been a civilization that developed without the practice of arts and culture. Because these are natural tendencies or demands of human beings. Therefore, Allah’s religion does not ask to abandon these; rather, it gives them their rightful place. According to social scientists’ accepted definition, culture means all those methods by which the human race, through its inherent tendencies and instincts, shapes itself, brings about human development, and becomes fully human. The expressions that are manifested through a region’s people’s language, customs and usages, ways of livelihood, music, dance, literature, dramatic art, social relations, religious rites and rules, education and training, etc. - that is culture. Song, theatre, cinema, acting, visual arts, literature - these are means to present culture.

Today across the world the strong are oppressing the weak, violating human rights. Powerful states seize weaker states; conflict continues at borders. Nothing seems able to stop this injustice, unrest and bloodshed. Especially the indescribable atrocity being committed against Muslim communities meets with no resistance. In Palestine there are repeated violations of human rights. Contemporary people are being driven into desperation and slaughtered, women and children are being massacred, and houses are bulldozed and buried with the

earth. Most heart-rending is that ordinary women and children who have nowhere to go for shelter or medical care are being bombed and killed like birds. Yet the whole world remains silent about these massacres. In our own region, horrifying atrocities are being perpetrated against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Two million Muslims have been uprooted from their birthplaces. They are now refugees in our countries seeking shelter and trying to survive as human beings.

On the other hand, the internal situation of our country is not at all encouraging. A year has passed since the fall of the Awami government, yet in state administration, the economy, and the social system the expectations and aspirations of the people have not been fulfilled. Movements of students against injustice began, which later spread among people of various classes and eventually took the form of a national movement. In that movement people shed blood, sacrificed their lives, and some were maimed for life. Yet after so many sacrifices intolerance, oppression, mob-violence, terrorism, extortion and corruption have not ended. Every day, clashes and bloodshed occur somewhere, and the law-enforcement agencies are always struggling to keep the situation under control. In such a reality the existing government has taken very few reform initiatives. They claim that through these reforms change will come and the ongoing crisis can be resolved. But on the other hand political parties are demanding rapid elections. Their claim is that only a government elected by the people's vote can overcome this deadlock and provide a lasting solution for the country.

Here our point is clear: keeping the present human-made system as it is, making a few cuts or reforms, or replacing the government through elections to establish justice, good governance and peace in society is never possible. Because in the past governments have been changed many times through elections. The constitution has also been amended several times. Yet corruption, false cases, oppression, injustice, extortion, fraud, rape, bribery, murder, torture - these crimes do not stop even for a single day. Therefore it is clear that the human-made system cannot free people from turmoil. Now the necessity is to adopt the divinely revealed system of life and establish it firmly.

But when we speak of adopting Allah's divinely revealed system of life in this modern age, naturally various kinds of questions arise. Some ask: "Islam forbids interest (usury), yet the whole world economy runs on interest. In this complicated modern economic era, as an alternative to an interest-based system, what kind of economic system are you proposing?" Others ask: "Our society is not only Muslim; people of different religions live here. Will they accept an Islamic system?" Yet others ask: "How will people in the modern age accept laws like cutting off the hand or stoning to death?" In the fields of arts, literature and culture many have doubts regarding Islam's viewpoint.

These questions usually arise from among the educated, conscious, intellectuals, artists, litterateurs, and journalists. The complete answers to these questions have been given by the Honourable Imam of Hezbut Tawheed,

Mr. Hossain Mohammad Salim, in his book “*Tawheed-based Modern State System*.” It can be expected that by reading this book, one will find proper answers to all these questions. However, here we will particularly shed light on - what will be the situation in the field of art, literature, and cultural practice in a Tawheed-based state.

Those who practice various mediums of art and culture such as dance, music, recitation, acting, painting, and literature - when they hear about a Tawheed-based state, they express deep concern and anxiety. They think that if a Tawheed-based state is established, fatwas of halal and haram will be issued, and the practice of these refined professions will be banned - as is being done by the Taliban and ISIS. In our country too, a class of so-called *Alem society* in *waaz-mahfils* (religious gatherings) issues fatwas declaring various art practices haram. To implement those fatwas, their blind followers attack different music practice centers, fairs, and cultural programs. Sometimes even incidents of bomb attacks on cinema halls have occurred. In these attacks, the banner of *Tawheed people* or some religious organization is used.

People across the world are becoming confused seeing different versions of Islam. Especially the extremely conservative attitudes of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Taliban regarding art and culture are making people generally hostile and prejudiced against Islam. Observing the blind bigotry and extremist practices in the name of Islam today, it is not at all unreasonable that Islamophobia is being created.

Artists, litterateurs, journalists, and the educated and thoughtful sections of society observe that after the Renaissance in Europe, because of the artistic revolution and the French Revolution, a revolutionary change took place. Due to liberalism and democracy, the door to cultural practice has become completely open in various European states such as France, Britain, and Germany. There are no unreasonable restrictions there, no coercion in the name of religion. As a result, a scientist can freely research, an artist can express his creativity, a writer or intellectual can freely express knowledge. Seeing this personal freedom, diverse culture, and display of liberalism in Europe, many have become blindly fascinated by Western society.

On the other hand, the situation in Muslim-majority countries is different. When our educated society comes in contact with the liberal culture of Europe, they observe that in the name of Islam, art, culture, and creativity are often hindered. Many develop the notion that Islam or the Qur'an itself is the cause of this limitation - though that notion is baseless. More alarming is that the madrasa-educated and the so-called *Alem society* present interpretations of certain verses of the Qur'an and create a kind of narrative which is causing doubt and apprehension about Islam among artists, litterateurs, and culturally minded people. They imagine that if Islam comes to state power, then the free practice of art, literature, and culture will not be possible. Because of the rise of extremism, obstacles in artistic practice, lack of opportunities for work, and an unsafe environment in the country, many artists have left the country in the past year.

and permanently settled abroad (2 October 2025 – *Kalrekhanṭa*). Keeping this context in mind, this book has been written - to clearly show that the problem is not Islam itself, but the wrong interpretation of Islam and the traditional coercion are the main obstacles.

Here we will present - what Islam is and what culture is; what the relationship between Islam and culture is; and whether there is any contradiction between them at all. We will show - whether Islam is blocking the way of culture, or encouraging it, or in fact wants to block only the path of obscenity in the name of culture. In this regard, we are presenting our viewpoint and opinion. We have submitted a complete proposal in book form to the Government of Bangladesh and are conveying this message to the intellectuals, scholars, and respectable members of society through meetings and seminars. We hope that they will express their opinions on this matter, and by taking everyone's thoughtful opinions into account, we want to move forward together.

## **What is called culture?**

In Bengali, the word “*Samskriti*” (সংস্কৃতি) is used as the equivalent of the English word “Culture.” The use of this word in Bengali began in 1922. One of the foremost researchers of Bengali language and literature, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, proposed the word “*Samskriti*” in Bengali as the meaning of “Culture,” and Rabindranath approved it. Before this, in Bengali, the word “*Kṛṣṭi*” (কৃষ্টি) was used in the sense of “Culture.” Rabindranath thought that the word *Kṛṣṭi* was related to agriculture;

therefore, Samskriti is more appropriate for the meaning of “Culture.” The etymological meaning of the word Samskriti is “refinement” or “elevation.” That is, by culture is meant all those human practices which make life refined and developed.

In terminological meaning, culture is the overall form of human lifestyle, way of living, and mode of life. Our manners or social behavior, customs, ceremonies, language and literature, fine arts and architecture, religion, beliefs, morality, relationships, clothing, food habits, and purpose of life - all these together constitute our lifestyle, but these themselves are not our culture. Culture includes those aspects of life which distinguish one society or community from another. It flows from one generation to another.

## **What is art or fine art?**

Fine art is - the process by which we express our everyday life in various ways, that is, the process of expressing the abstract in concrete form - that itself is fine art. Fine art is such an expression of human creative work or thought which presents ideals, consciousness, beauty, emotion, or some special message. It is a medium by which the imagination within human beings is given form in reality. Simply put, when a person expresses his thoughts, feelings, or sense of beauty through some form, color, sound, or gesture that is called fine art.

Fine art is a part of culture. It is a medium to give culture a tangible form or to express it symbolically. There are various kinds of fine arts - such as: painting, sculpture, music, dance, literature, architecture, etc.

Let the matter of fine art and culture be clarified a little more. In our subcontinent, most people in the past were followers of the Sanatan religion. They believed that the goddess Durga has ten hands. Her ten hands represent her ten different powers and abilities. These hands are not merely physical limbs, but symbols of her various qualities. Each weapon she holds in her hands also has its own special significance. This belief existed for ages in the hearts of the followers of the Sanatan religion as an abstract image or as an idea (conceptual form). That is a part of their culture. But one day a person, in order to express this belief in a tangible form or to make it visible, made an idol of goddess Durga with clay or stone. This act of making a belief visible, making an abstract idea concrete, giving a thought color, form, language, beauty, and presenting it artificially before all - this medium itself is fine art.

Basically, human beings wish to present their beliefs, thoughts, and ideas before others. Some may do this through painting, some through music, some through literature, some through sculpture - all these are examples of different kinds of fine art.

Let another example be given. Suppose a man is standing on the road, his mouth covered with black tape. On his chest is a paper that reads - "Give back my freedom of

speech.” Seeing this, you immediately understand - this is a silent protest against fascism. This protest - in a different form, in a different language, in a different expression - this itself is art, this itself is fine art.

Here one point is - according to the fundamental belief of Islam, Allah has no image (representation), imitation, idol, or statue, and worship, adoration, or veneration of anyone other than Him is forbidden. Allah is not like anyone, there is nothing comparable to Him; He is One and Unique (Ahad) (Surah Ikhlas 1). Based on this belief, in the Muslim society a culture and behavior have developed of experiencing Allah as a formless Being (non-visual). Muslims always express their obedience and reverence to the unseen Being, Allah, through *sajdah* (prostration).

### **How liberal is Islam about art, literature, and culture?**

The Great Allah has created the entire universe; He has also created mankind. Since the creation of the first human Adam (A.), millions of years have passed. Because of natural disasters, adverse weather and climate, the struggle for livelihood, conflicts and clashes, the descendants of Adam have spread over different parts of the world. As a result, diversity has been created in their languages, skin colors, manners and behaviors, beliefs, and cultures.

The main reasons for the creation of thousands of types of cultures all over the world are the differences in weather, climate, and geographical environment.

The last heavenly book, Al-Qur'an, is the final guidance for the entire human race. Therefore, if you notice, you will see that Allah Ta'ala has not in any way prohibited any regional culture in the Qur'an. He has prohibited only obscene activities, unjust contradictions, meaningless talks, disobedience to Allah, and such activities that give birth to division, hatred, and conflict among people.

Most of the prohibitions are spiritual guidance for those who believe (have faith), which, if violated, the state will not give any punishment; only the harms of it will be described and people will be warned. These prohibitions are not for the non-Muslims. For example, eating the flesh of swine, blood, dead animals, or animals sacrificed in the name of anyone other than Allah is *haram* for the believers. But if someone becomes helpless, then they can eat these things without crossing the limits. And those who do not believe in Islam - that is, the followers of other religions or atheists - if they live in an Islamic state, they can eat pork, they can even run pig farms; there is no opportunity in Islam to stop them.

There is no obligation in Islam regarding the type or style (*form of expression*) of dress. There is no such rule in Islam as "you cannot wear dhoti," "you cannot wear coat-tie."

Just by wearing *jubba* and *turban*, one does not become a Muslim, and if someone does not wear them, their Muslim identity does not vanish - there is no such matter either.

Allah has given only one standard regarding dress - that is: *obscene dress is prohibited*.

For both men and women, the instruction is the same: they must protect their private parts and keep reproductive organs covered. For believing women, there is an additional instruction - they must also cover their bosoms; they cannot keep their chests uncovered. This order is for the preservation of human dignity, because if the private parts are not covered, humans fall to the level of animals. Allah has given this instruction for elevating humans from animality to humanity.

Therefore, this can in no way be an obstacle to our cultural practice.

The limit has been defined by Islamic scholars and jurists as: for men, from the navel to the knees. If this much is done, the obligatory requirement is fulfilled. The rest depends on your taste and choice - you may decorate or dress as you wish. No one has been forbidden to do that. You may wear pants, shirts, ties, coats, dhoti, panjabi, sherwani, jubba, turban - all of these are allowed. Therefore, the kind of dress culture that Islam approves of - Islam does not impose any restriction in this regard.

Regarding women's dress, the Qur'an says: *Guard your private parts and draw your veil (cover) over your bosoms* - **“wal-yadribna bi khumurihinna ‘ala juyubihinna”** (Surah An-Nur, 31).

This instruction is given for those women who have faith in Islam, who are believers. On one hand, it is a matter of social discipline, and on the other hand, it is a spiritual guidance. If someone violates this rule, then they can be reminded and advised about Allah's instruction.

However, just as in other areas of life, based on the circumstances, legal restrictions or permissions are imposed - in the same way, regarding clothing and attire, the Imam of the nation or the *Amir* may impose such restrictions or permissions in the interest of maintaining social order.

## **Are Music and Musical Instruments Haram?**

In all civilizations, one of the main elements of art and culture is song. There is no prohibition in the Qur'an regarding songs, not even a single negative word is found in the Qur'an. In the Holy Qur'an, there are more than six and a half thousand verses where Allah has given instructions even on the smallest matters of life etiquette. For example - not to give pain with reproach while giving charity (Surah Baqarah 2:264), not to waste time after eating at another's house and not to cause inconvenience to the host (Surah Ahzab 33:53), helping others with small things like bone or needle (Surah Ma'un 107:7) etc.

If truly music and musical instruments were haram, then Allah would surely have mentioned that in some verse of the Qur'an. But He has not said anything of that kind anywhere. However, some people try to stand against music by misinterpreting verse 6 of Surah Luqman.

The only basis of the anti-art and anti-culture group is the interpretation of this verse of the Qur'an; apart from that, what exists is some misinterpreted and fabricated fatwas from weak or false Hadith. In Surah Luqman verse 6, it is said: "There are some people who, without knowledge, collect *Lahwal Hadith* (meaningless, irrelevant, futile, unnecessary tales or speech) with the intention of misleading people from the path of Allah and make a mockery of the path of Allah - for them is a humiliating punishment." Here Allah has not said the word *music*, He said *futile talk*. But while interpreting the word *Lahwal Hadith*, they say - this indicates song, music, and poetry. By such misinterpretation and over-interpretation, song and music have been made haram. However, one of Bangladesh's prominent Islamic researchers, author of many books, and former Director General of the Islamic Foundation, A. J. M. Shamsul Alam, in his book "*Muslim Song Culture: A Golden History*", has discussed this issue. He has written: "The word *Lahwa* mentioned in this verse has a broad meaning.

Its meaning is amusement, jest, futile talk, unnecessary speech, unproductive work, etc., which keeps people away or distracted from necessary deeds. For music, there are separate words in the Arabic language.

If in the above verse the prohibition of music was intended, then Arabic words meaning music such as *ghina*, *sama'*, *naghma*, etc., would have been used."

Through music also, messages of social awareness, humanity, and brotherhood can be expressed.

If music or melody were something bad, then why is the *Azan* delivered in tune? Why is the Qur'an recited melodiously? Why are sermons (*waaz*) delivered with melody? Moreover, one of the four main messengers who were bearers of heavenly books, Dawud (A.), his miracle was his melodious voice. He used to play the harp (Hebrew: lyre), whose image was even engraved on the coins of that time. He said, *Sing to the Lord with the harp and the sound of melody* (Psalm 43:4).

In the era of the Messenger (SAW), some musical instruments were used. When those were played in his presence, he did not prohibit them but listened. The distinguished companion Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari (RA) was among those with the most beautiful voice. Abu Usman Nahdi said - I have not heard any lute, guitar, or flute sound sweeter than the voice of Abu Musa (RA). The Messenger of Allah said, "He has been given one of the musical instruments from the family of Dawud." (Al-Bidaya wan Nihaya, Vol. 8 – Ibn Kathir).

In the presence of the Messenger (SAW), during weddings or other celebrations in Madinah, *duff* was played and songs were sung. The Messenger of Allah said, "Announce this marriage publicly, perform it in the mosque, and play the duff on the occasion of marriage." (Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah). In another hadith, it is even said, "The distinction between halal and haram marriage is the public announcement and playing of the duff at the

wedding.” (Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah). Therefore, performing marriage in the mosque and playing the duff on the occasion of marriage is the command of the Messenger of Allah.

When the Messenger of Allah (SAW) migrated and arrived in Madinah, to welcome him, men, women, and children of the Ansar played duff and sang *Tala 'al Badru 'Alayna* - “The full moon has risen over us from the valley of Wada.”

That song is still sung in *Milad* celebrations today.

When the Messenger of Allah (SAW) came to Madinah, during the construction of Masjid an-Nabawi, he himself sang, and his companions sang along. That song was called *Rajas* (work song). Anas (RA) said, the Messenger of Allah (SAW) and his companions, during the construction of the mosque, placed palm trees toward the Qiblah, set stones on the sides of the doorposts.

Then the Messenger of Allah (SAW) and his companions sang *Rajas* - that is, the work song.

They were saying, “O Allah! The real goodness is the goodness of the Hereafter; so help the Ansar and the Muhajirun.” (Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, Nasai). Therefore, to call singing for inspiration toward good deeds a Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (SAW) would not be exaggeration.

In our religious circles, the practice of intellect and reasoning has fallen so low that a group of *muftis* even say that all musical instruments are haram, only duff is halal, because the companions used to play duff. The actual matter is - in that era, there were not as many musical instruments as today; there were only duff, tambura, etc. - those they used to play.

Therefore, just as Allah did not declare music haram, the Messenger (SAW) also did not prohibit the practice of music. However, he was the busiest man in human history - who in only nine years organized 107 small and large military expeditions, who led a great revolution to bring total transformation in human life. Such a great revolutionary had no time to sit and sing songs. Yet in leisure, in his home, or upon returning from battle, he was seen listening to songs with his companions.

Similarly, cinema, drama, and acting are not haram. Allah has prohibited obscenity. Allah said, "Say: My Lord has only forbidden obscene acts, both open and secret, forbidden disobedience to Allah, oppression, associating partners with Allah for which He has sent no authority, and saying about Allah what you do not know." (Surah A'raf 33).

Here three things have been made haram: First - obscenity; Second - disobedience to Allah, that is, violation of clear divine commands; Third - associating partners with Allah. Keeping this standard in mind, any action - whether it is artistic practice

or any daily affair - cannot be considered anti-Islamic or unlawful.

Cinema, drama, music, literature, or any medium - when they become the means of spreading obscenity - then they awaken the animal instincts of man. As a result, moral degradation, indiscipline, unrest, violence, and conflict inevitably increase in society. At present, we are witnessing the tragic and destructive consequences of the spread of obscenity in our society - adultery, divorce, domestic discord, rape, fornication, and immoral relationships have widely increased. To save mankind from these civilization-destroying corruptions, the Qur'an has strictly prohibited obscenity. Allah says in the Qur'an, "Do not go near obscenity - whether it is open or hidden." (Surah An'am 151).

## **The Connection between Islamic Philosophy and Cultural Practice**

The foundation of Islamic philosophy is that at the beginning of human creation, there was a challenge between Allah and Iblis. Iblis is a being who urges humans toward injustice, while Allah urges them toward justice and truth. Iblis challenged Allah, saying that he would tempt humans and cause within them disobedience, disorder, injustice, oppression, tyranny, war, conflict, murder, bloodshed, etc., and Allah would, to save humans from these, send prophets and messengers, guides (had) from time to time. Those who follow the guidance and correct direction sent by Allah will no longer be involved in such injustice, oppression, unrest, or bloodshed, and

they will enter Paradise in the Hereafter. For creating unrest in society, obscenity is one of Iblis' tools.

Therefore, in songs, plays, cinema, etc., if there is no obscenity, no injustice, no meaningless content, but rather meaningful words, words about humanity, words about unity, words inspiring the establishment of Allah's true religion, words about the land and humans, and words about uniting all humankind despite communal differences, there is no reason for these to be considered forbidden; rather, they will be commendable acts.

In Arabia, people used to sing, and the Messenger of Allah (SAW) also listened to and recited songs, as has been previously mentioned. Regarding musical instruments, a hadith mentions that once he was walking along a road. Suddenly, he heard the sound of a flute and walked on with his fingers in his ears. Then he asked Naf, "Do you hear anything?" Naf said, "No." Then he removed his fingers from his ears. (Reported by Abdullah ibn Umar in Ibn Majah 3650 and Abu Dawud 4930). History tells us that at that time the Messenger of Allah (SAW) was the head of state and the social ruler of Madinah. Yet he did not search for the flutist, punish him, or break the flute. Perhaps the sound of the flute caused him some discomfort. Also, in hadith collections, there are false and weak narrations. However, even if we consider this hadith not fully authentic, it cannot be proven from this incident that music is forbidden.

We ourselves do not like all types of music or all types of tunes. A musical sound at a certain pitch may not be

pleasing to adults, while a child may like it. Similarly, a specific flute melody might have caused discomfort to the Messenger of Allah, but that does not make music forbidden. If it were forbidden, he would have issued a decree, broken the flute, or punished the musician. None of these happened.

Many ask whether, if the proposed Tawheed-based modern state by Hizb ut-Tawheed is established, there will be cinema halls. We would answer that currently, there are hardly any cinema halls. Even the existing ones in big cities are of very low standard. We will establish high-quality cinema halls so that people do not have to go abroad and spend dollars in multiplex theaters to watch movies or concerts. Currently, Hollywood produces such advanced cinema that we gape like fish when we watch it. They produce cinema not as a long-term plan, but to display their national pride, dignity, and power, although in many cases obscenity is also present. However, our cinema is still limited to mere entertainment. It is so low-quality and the hall environments are so poor that educated and cultured people cannot go there. Our culture has been intentionally destroyed. We wish to bring about a complete revival of lost culture. When unhealthy competitions are conducted in the name of culture under the guise of rescuing it, it can never be called healthy culture.

During the medieval period (600 CE–1700 CE), under Muslim rule, culture and education flourished extensively in Africa, the Middle East, Persia, Central Asia, and India. The famous musical treatise by Al-Farabi, the founder of

Islamic philosophy, *Kitab al-Musiqi al-Kabir* (The Great Book of Music), remains a source of inspiration for music enthusiasts and a significant reference for musicological research. Umayyad, Abbasid, Seljuk, Ottoman, and Mughal rulers were particularly interested in arts, literature, and education. At that time, madrasas, universities, libraries, courts, and palaces were used not only as centers of administration but also for the development of education and artistic fields.

During this period, music and literature flourished greatly. Under Mughal rule, music was practiced under royal patronage. At that time, the fusion of Hindu and Muslim cultures led to the creation of new ragas and musical styles. Among Emperor Akbar's Navaratnas, Tansen created new ragas such as Miyan ki Malhar, Darbari Kanada, and Miyan ki Todi, which are considered important ragas of that period.

Great Sufi saints like Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (RA) and Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya (RA) used *Sama* or *Qawwali* music in their Khanqahs as a means to cultivate spirituality, love for Allah, humanity, and self-purification.

Many people claim that ghazals are permissible but songs are not. What can one say! There is no limit to ignorance. They claim ghazal means only religious music like *Hamd* and *Na'at* without instruments. However, in Arabic, the word *ghazal* literally means “conversation with the beloved,” “romantic discourse,” or “dialogue with a beloved.” Until the 8th century, Arabic literary works

used ghazal in this sense. But from the 9th century, Sufi poets began to use ghazal in new meanings and forms. They composed ghazals as a means to express the intimate relationship between the *Masuk* (Creator) and the *Ashiq* (servant) and to convey sincere love for the Creator. This style gained prominence among poets such as Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, Hafiz Shirazi, and Al-Imran. In their ghazals, human emotions like love were infused with spiritual devotion to God.

In the medieval period, Muslim civilization also made significant contributions to musical instruments. Among the main instruments developed and refined during this time were the *Oud* (lute), *Qanun* (zither), *Rabāb* (string instrument), *Nafiri* (horn), and *Tambura/Tanpura* (long-necked stringed instrument). These instruments were part of entertainment, religious ceremonies, and spiritual practices in Muslim society. Later, these instruments spread to Europe and played an important role in the development of modern musical instruments—for example, the *Oud* gave rise to the lute and guitar, and the *Nafiri* influenced the creation of the trumpet.

In summary, during the medieval period, Muslim rulers were patrons of culture, education, and the arts. Due to their contributions, Africa, the Middle East, Persia, Central Asia, and India experienced great richness in music, literature, architecture, and musical instruments. This cultural influence continues to be reflected in our traditions and educational heritage today.

When our country's farmers worked together in the fields, they would sing traditional *Bhatiali* or *Bhawaiya* songs of rural Bengal. These songs inspired them to work. Under the hot sun, when farmers harvested rice in groups, they needed motivation. These songs removed their fatigue and gave them new energy for their labor. Allah created the human mind in this way. Melody and music nourish the human mind. Music removes pain, relieves fatigue, and brings peace to the mind.

Again, we emphasize: music that incites immorality, obscenity, or extremely loud sounds that harm humans' minds or souls is completely prohibited according to Islam.

It is reported in authentic hadith that on the Day of Judgment, Allah will say to the people of Paradise: "Recite." They will recite, and Allah will beautify their voices like the voice of Dawud (AS). (Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim) From this, it is understood that Allah appreciates melody. Allah granted Dawud (AS) such a beautiful voice that mountains, hills, and birds would join him in glorifying Allah. Even today, we are captivated by the tone of the *Adhan* when recited melodiously by a *Muazzin*. Allah made melody so enchanting for humans that scholars even deliver speeches with melody in gatherings. Listeners are enthralled for hours listening to these melodic speeches. Allah created melody as attractive for humans. Then how can melody be considered haram? No one likes the harsh sound of crows, but the song of the nightingale delights the heart.

This is why Imam Ghazali (RA) said that the melody created by nightingales or the human voice or musical instruments is not haram. (*Ihya Ulum al-Din, Kitab Adab al-Sama wal Wazd*).

We believe that in Allah's Tawheed-based system of life, there must be a regulatory body in the field of culture. The work of this body will be to examine whether songs, dramas, cinema, or any form of creative work contain harmful or unjust elements such as promotion of hatred, communal animosity, obscenity, disobedience to Allah, etc. If no such elements are present, then the state will encourage and support these songs, dramas, cinema, or arts. And if such elements are present, the regulatory body will instruct the artist or producer to correct the relevant parts.

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) did exactly this; he acted as a regulator. He did not prohibit songs. Rubai bint Muawwidh ibn Afra (RA) reported, “One night, the Prophet (SAW) came and sat on my bed. I was beating the daf (tambourine) and reciting elegies for my father and uncles who had been martyred in the Battle of Badr. One of the elegies mentioned that there is a Prophet among us who knows the future. The Prophet (SAW) said: ‘Leave this sentence, continue singing what you were singing before.’” (Sahih Bukhari, Hadith no. 5147) Notice that the Prophet (SAW) did not forbid singing, but corrected a mistaken notion.

We want to follow this principle. We are not in favor of banning anyone's creative work or artistic activity. We

only ask that art and culture remain free from obscenity, shirk, and kufr. Our statement is clear: you can research, practice music, produce cinema, create dramas, pursue arts and literature, dance, painting, and various forms of performance—but there is one condition: they must be free of obscenity, shirk, and kufr. Without this limit, human society and civilization will collapse.

We will encourage our own culture and strive to present it publicly, but we will not disrespect the culture of others. People of the Sanatan (Hindu) faith have their own culture, different ethnic groups have their own distinct cultures, and Buddhists and Christians have their own cultural heritage. We will respect and honor this diversity. No one's cultural practice will be obstructed. However, if any part of a culture, according to the fundamental laws of the state, spreads hatred toward another group, incites conflict, promotes obscenity, gambling, or unhealthy competition—that is, harms society or a community—then the state's legally mandated corrective measures will be applied.

In Bangladesh, most of us grew up in an Islamic cultural environment. From birth, we have been exposed to this culture. According to tradition, we first heard the melodious sound of the Adhan, not any Hindi song or other music. Allah's name is called in our ears first. This is our culture. After seven days, our name is given. What kind of names are these? Names reflecting the attributes of Allah, such as Abdul Khaliq, Abdul Malik, Abdul Jabbar, Abdur Razzak, etc. Others are names from the Prophet's family and companions or beautiful,

meaningful words from the Qur'an. This is the heritage and culture of us Muslims.

Similarly, during the first Boishakh (Bengali New Year), there were fairs in our villages and towns. Hindus and Muslims alike opened shops and sold items. Food stalls were set up, and various dishes were prepared and shared. Ledgers (*halkhata*) were updated, debts were cleared, and new entries were made. The streets and neighborhoods were filled with festive joy. These are characteristic of Bengali culture. People of all religions participated in this cultural practice. Nowadays, new trends are emerging, and some try to misrepresent it. Questions arise about whether the first Boishakh is permissible. The main concern is that the essence of Boishakh is being misrepresented in modern portrayals. True joy is lost; the farmers' happiness diminishes.

Again, our culture includes practices during Shab-e-Barat and Shab-e-Qadr. On these nights, mothers and aunts prepare sweets like halwa and rice flour cakes, cook meat, and distribute it to neighbors, the poor, and the needy. People spend the night in mosques praying. During Eid, everyone wears new clothes, goes to the Eidgah, eats together, greets each other, rejoices, and performs the Qurbani (sacrifice). All of these are part of our Muslim culture.

Now, some people say Qurbani should be stopped, while another group says the first Boishakh is haram and Hindu. This mindset must be corrected. We must remember: I have the right to respect, practice, and present my culture;

you have the right to believe in, respect, and present your culture.

Islam never encourages the idea that because Allah has given you a cap on your head, you should be humiliated in the street; similarly, Islam never says that because I am wearing a cap on my head, I should be humiliated as a cleric or extremist. These are exaggerations and intolerance. Let us engage in a pure and healthy cultural practice. Islam does not block the path of cultural development. Islam is a broad-minded system of life. Islam seeks peace in human life. Islam wants the human potential within us to be expressed. Islam wants us to advance in knowledge, science, and technology. Likewise, remember that we are Allah's Khalifah, Allah's representative. We must not forget Allah's limits.

On one hand, some people will die of hunger, while on the other, some will waste millions of money on cultural activities that are harmful and extravagant. Islam does not approve of this.

If you go to France or other European countries, you will see that they have made statues of scientists, philosophers, historical figures, and mythological characters in various places. Many of these statues are nude. Each statue expresses a particular meaning. In their culture, this may be natural; however, such forms of display are not compatible with our culture.

People in our rural society grow up in such an environment that even a small child becomes conscious if

their clothing rises above the knees. Even when sleeping, they adjust the lungi (wraparound) so that it does not rise above the knees. This is our culture. If, in the name of modern cultural practice, a nude statue is placed in the middle of a road, it will not be consistent with our culture. We must understand the flow of our culture and respect it. We are simply not accustomed to the idea that our mothers or grandmothers walk around naked, displaying their bodies.

Our mothers and grandmothers wear sarees, or kurtasalwar, and there are variations in clothing and coverage depending on urban or rural settings, agricultural families, rich or poor. However, in all cases, women did not walk around naked, nor were they fully packaged or rigidly confined. They maintained a balanced sense of modesty.

Today, this balance is being lost. On one side, under the influence of Western culture, freedom in clothing and exposure in artistic domains is increasing; on the other side, under the guise of religion, the tendency to confine women to the home is also increasing. Our position is clear: these extremes must be stopped. Islam rejects extremism and radicalism. Islam is a balanced religion (*Deen al-Wasat*), and therefore, women's clothing and behavior must also be restored to a proper balance.

European and American societies are considered highly tolerant and liberal. Yet I would say Islam is even more liberal and tolerant than that. On the other hand, regarding the protection of national interests, just as Western nations enforce laws strictly and uncompromisingly, Islam too

enforces laws concerning national interests strictly and without leniency.

## **What happens if the path of arts, literature, and culture is blocked?**

Today, across the world, Western culture is being glorified. The young generation watches Hollywood and Bollywood movies, imitates their stars, and listens to English and Hindi songs. This situation proves that the Muslim nation, in general, currently has no good films, no worthy role models in arts, and no exemplary cultural products. The reason is that we have turned away from our arts, literature, and culture. Due to the persistent neglect of cultural practices, our young generation is becoming victims of the aggression of foreign culture.

Once, Muslim writers composed literary works of the highest standard. Through such literature, Islamic values, justice, ethics, and culture were expressed, and people derived aesthetic pleasure from it. However, today, no literature of that quality is being created among Muslims. Although Bengali Muslim poets and writers such as Kazi Nazrul Islam, Farrukh Ahmad, Pallavi Jasimuddin, and Golam Mostafa produced extraordinary literary works, today where are the literary figures? There is no good literature, no good drama, no good cinema, no good art. As a result, now we are turning to foreign cultures for everything. From all directions, we are subjugated.

The main reason is: turning away from arts, literature, and culture. Due to stubbornness and exaggeration, this is our

present situation. Scholars issue blanket fatwas declaring everything haram, discouraging the nation, and blocking the path of arts, literature, and culture. The consequence of this is what we are now experiencing.

Recognizing this reality, in the proposal for a modern state based on Tawheed, we emphasize this issue. The time has come to change our understanding about Islam and about ourselves. What religious entrepreneurs say is not necessarily Islam; only what Allah says is true Islam. Within Islam, many factions, extremist groups, and false doctrines have emerged. Should we accept all these as Islam? No. Only the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), according to the Qur'an, represent true Islam. We, Hezb ut-Tawheed, are striving to present true Islam and, based on this ideal, are committed to creating a renaissance.

Finally, consider the inspiration behind one of Bhupen Hazarika's timeless songs. When he went to America for higher studies (1949–1952), he was inspired by the African-American singer Paul Robeson and his struggle-oriented music. Robeson sang liberation songs for African-Americans oppressed along the Mississippi River. Inspired by Robeson's famous song "Ol' Man River," Hazarika composed "O Ganga, Tumi Bhiye Keno?" in the context of India, using the river Ganga as a symbol of reality.

During a scorching afternoon, countless people were  
crying,  
Silently weeping, O Ganga, why do you flow?

Witnessing injustice, seeing humanity's decline,  
Why do you flow lazily, without protest?

This song reminds us of intellectuals and scholars who, observing a collapsing society, remain silent. Despite having extraordinary knowledge and abilities, they allow society and humanity to be destroyed. They are responsible for this destruction. They enjoy luxury and comfort by compromising with the powerful and supporting the corrupt, yet fail to inspire revolutionary consciousness or create strong leadership to establish a just society from a decayed and exploitative one. Hazarika's song calls attention to this, asking:

Without enlightened guidance, without food,  
In silence, will the citizens perish?  
Through the mantra of millennia of madness,  
Will you not awaken the strong, the revolutionary, the  
progressive?

In such a reality, once again, Hezbut Tawheed works to awaken a consciousness that establishes truth and justice in a stagnant society, dedicating life and resources to this mission. Join us. Through our collective effort, let the path of arts, literature, and pure culture guide the awaited renaissance.

