

Globethics Repository

The logo for Globethics, featuring the word "Globethics" in white, lowercase, sans-serif font centered within a solid blue rectangular background.

IS MUSIC PROHIBITED IN ISLAM

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Preprint
Authors	Ali Engineer, Asghar
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-07-09 19:19:16
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/182655

IS MUSIC PROHIBITED IN ISLAM

Asghar Ali Engineer

The other day I read an article in Friday edition of an Urdu paper which quoted few ahadith (Prophet's sayings) that music is strictly prohibited in Islam and that those Muslims who burn musical instruments Allah will send them to paradise. Many non-Muslims also ask this questions frequently why Islam is opposed to music? Aurangzeb is also said to have strictly prohibited music.

Is music really prohibited? My studies show it is not prohibited *per se*. The Qur'an denounces what it calls *lahw wa la'b* (i.e. fun and play and there was background to it. They Arabs in pre-Islamic times had no serious religious faith and used to indulge in drinking and singing and dancing as we often witness in our societies also. Islam, wanted to engage people in serious activities of reforming social evils and make them obedient to Allah thereby becoming good, just and compassionate human beings undertaking fight against all prevailing social evils. For such way of life naturally *lahw wa la'b* was serious obstacle and hence the Qur'an warned people against that.

However, many Muslims could not distinguish between the two and declared music prohibited whatever its form or context. While Ulama denounced music the Sufi saints generally approved of it and distinguishing between *lahw wa la'b* and sheer fun they allowed music as a tool to God-realization as music could induce a sort of ecstasy which in turn helped God-realization. Thus *sama'* which literally means listening of music was practiced by sufi saints.

It was for *sama'* that qawwali was invented, as far as my knowledge goes, by Khusro, the celebrated disciple of Nizamuddin Awliya who used to have *sama' mehfil* (i.e. congregation for devotional music). The Ulama who were jealous of Nizamuddin Awliya's popularity, issued a fatwa (religious edict) against him for attending *sama' mehfil* and the Sultan asked him to come to his court and defend himself. He went to the Sultan's court (otherwise he never paid court to any sultan) and defended himself by reciting certain *ahadith* and came away. Maulana Rum had gone a step further and even resorted to dancing to induce such divine ecstasy and his followers regularly resort to dancing and are known as whirling dervishes.

It was because of such controversies created by the Ulama that an eminent sufi and scholar like Ghazzali wrote an epistle on *Status of Music in Islam – Discipline and Rules of Music and Ecstasy*. It is worth reading for all those who want to understand whether Islam prohibits music or not or if prohibits, what kind of music it prohibits.

Al-Ghazzali begins his *Risala* on music with these words, "Know this my dear about the fact and situation of man that there is a secret of God which is hidden in the human heart, which is similar to the one that is b between iron and stone. Just as fire emits when iron strikes stone and sets forest on fire, a movement occurs in the human heart when it hears good and rhythmical sounds. And unconsciously a new situation comes into existence in the heart."

He further says "The upper world of beauty and grace and the fundamental of beauty and grace and the fundamental of beauty and grace is due proportion. And, whatever is proportionate is the

manifestation of the beauty of that upper world. The beauty and proportion that we see in this world is the product of the beauty and grace of the upper world. Therefore, good, rhythmical and proportionate sound has a similarity with some of the wonders of the upper world. And it provides new informations in the heart in the form of a movement and eagerness.”

And further on Ghazzali says, “Whoever’s heart is filled with the fire of the eagerness of God, music becomes necessary for him, so that the fire may be brighter. The same music becomes *haram* (prohibited) and poisonous for a man, whose heart is full of the love of wrongful matters.”

What is this wrongful matter, Ghazzali refers to? It is lust, fun and music meant for worldly pleasure like the ones youngsters indulge in after drinking in clubs and such other institutions. Of course the Indian Classical music for not fall in this category and it is great art and discipline. Even qawwali and ghazal singing is based on Indian classical music or for that matter western classical symphonies are well cultivated art representing best in human beauty and grace.

Of course Ghazzali does not base his epistle only on such arguments but also on *ahadith* which tell us how the Prophet (PBUH) himself used to listen to music along with A’isha, his beloved wife. However, for want of space we cannot dwell on this. We will discuss that in other article insha Allah.

Institute of Islamic Studies
Mumbai.