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In Between Music Concerts, Jobs and Economics: Case of Youth Empowerment in Pakistan

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Abstract

The case study discusses the dynamics of youth participation in cultural activities in Pakistan not only as an outcome of entertainment but it is also related to household economics that in return is related with their global and local identity.

Keywords: Economics of Culture

1. Household Economics of Rock n Roll

By mid 1990s, Pakistan music industry made international news with many popular local music bands doing road shows inside and outside of the country. It was the era of live music in Pakistan where popular bands like Junoon (Passion), Vital Signs, Awaz (the Voice) and Strings attracted huge crowds from the youth to the concerts in the major cities of Pakistan. The music they made was the Pakistani version of Rock n Roll era while the message to the youth was of patriotism, Sufi philosophy and fusion of the East and the West (read cultural integration and globalization; see Ahmed, 2010). The music was all about enlightened moderation as a fact of every day life in Pakistan for the country's youth.

Came 14th August every year, these bands released new songs and music videos on digital media that were followed by millions of youth in Pakistan singing these new tunes on the streets of the country in subsequent days. In between this singing and dancing, certain economic forces were at work too.

For example, the author was a teen ager in the mid 1990s and he religiously followed the music of these Rock bands like his millions of other peers. However, he could attend only a couple of their live concerts simply because the average ticket price used to be 10-15 dollars whereas his pocket money for the whole month amounted to 5 dollars. So like most of his peers, he could only enjoy the music on digital box.

This is despite the fact that the author tried to supplement his pocket money with some additional income by offering home tuitions. The part time job did fetch him additional 20-30 dollars but his consumption basket also expanded to include membership of a health club or occasional visit to high end brand shopping available to more affluent peers of his in those times in Pakistan.

1990s are associated with democratic precedence in the country with sluggish economic performance; multiplying of billions of dollars worth loans from International Financial Institutions; severe charges of corruption and economic mismanagement on elected governments and Sanctions over country's nuclear ambitions. As a result, budget deficits widened and inflation rate swelled. The purchasing power for an average Pakistani stumbled steeply.

So it was not a surprise that live music was more of an elitist feat despite its generic appeal and demand in Pakistan. The audience in the Road Shows declined with each passing day and bands were mostly doing them when they were sponsored by some commercial entity with the likes of Pepsi or Coca Cola. Because of poor economic management the fans (demand side economics) and the music bands (supply side economics) suffered financially.

And with passage of time, if anything the billions of dollars of loans multiplied and poor debt management continues to this day with most of the loans finding its way to the coffers of the corrupt. Most of the youth who find work in Pakistan do so in order to supplement the income within their house hold and not to economically empower themselves. Live music is nearly rolled back in Pakistan and music industry that is especially the voice of youth is only surviving at the fringes due to some level of commercial support.

References:

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