

Indo-Pak Strategic Interests and Radio Propaganda

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Abstract

This research paper touches upon the importance of Radio Broadcasting as a powerful medium in safeguarding national, cultural and strategic interests of the nations. While discussing worldwide the importance of radio broadcasts in times of peace and war, the paper specially refers to India-Pakistan media war on Jammu and Kashmir. The paper lists certain instances when Radio Kashmir, a part of All India Radio, played a vital role in negating Pakistani media propaganda unleashed by her over and underground radio stations. It further suggests the need to strengthen media units owned by Governments across the globe for meeting their strategic interests in an era where low intensity wars are fought through media.

Keywords: Radio Broadcasting, propaganda, India, Pakistan, America, Radio Kashmir.

Media has always remained a powerful tool in shaping the strategic interests of the nations across the globe. Whether in Europe, America or Asia, media has attributed a considerable power to shape opinion of the belief, change habits of life, actively mould behavior and impose a political system. The assumptions of guarding the strategic interests have equally been used by the governments, advertisers and promoters of business and even by subversive elements and terrorists.

The mass media, be that newspapers, Radio or Television, have an important consequences for individuals, for institutions and for society and culture, especially in a democratic set-up where it requires that the media perform and provide a number of functions and services for the political system.

However, it has been found and researched upon that for a nation-building, a very few media organisations have been able to guard the strategic interests of the nation through their broadcasts or write-ups.

Most media agenda-setting is inadvertent. Journalists are normally more interested in producing the stories that commercially suit and attract their target audiences than in shaping the public opinion. They seem to have ignored the public journalism which definitely helps in guarding the interests of the nations. The Indian media is one such typical example which in relation to coverage, discussion and analysis of India's security matters has a number of times displayed deplorable insensitivity to both strategic national interests and national security interests. In this respect the private electronic media is more to blame with their attempts to encapsulate complex national security issues into thirty second sound "bites", so says Michael J O'Neill, former President of the American Association of Newspapers Editors. This equally holds good for a section of print media operating in sensitive States like Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

However, the public broadcasters, mostly functioning with the support of the government across the globe, including India, have every time tried its level to bring to people the policies and plans of their respective governments while at the same time carried forward the principle of educating, entertaining and informing the audience at large.

Media has also been used as a psychological warfare and a propaganda tool, particularly during the times of wars and acts of insurgency. It has been used as a tool while fighting the wars and boosting the morale of the security forces across the nations. Propaganda, although it has existed almost indefinitely, has grown immensely during the past few centuries as a most strategic tool to guard the strategic interests of the nations. Although evidence of intentional propaganda can be traced back as far as ancient Greece, the advent of communication media on a larger scale has exponentially increased its usageⁱ.

After the invention of the printing press, it became possible to quickly and easily produce posters and books. Prior to this development, however, the majority of propaganda was spread by word of mouth. The printing press enabled the propagandist to quickly produce mass amounts of posters with one intended effect, a form of propaganda much less risky and difficult than oral communicationⁱⁱ.

The propaganda was bolstered by the invention of the radio. The ability to communicate orally with large amount of people in a very small amount of time also helped the development of propaganda. Even as in recent years, the invention of television and introduction of the Internet and long-distance communication have enabled further increases in propaganda, the Radio as a mass media, however, continues to have an edge for different reasons. This form of mass media has been used as the most effective tool with the government agencies to put forth their news and views. Radio has strategically suited governments across the globe to fight psychological wars by airing propaganda into the territories of the neighbouring countries which incidentally share the same cultural lineage. Since Radio is affordable and speaks in a local language and customs to a very common man, it has definitely an edge over other formats of communication when it comes to the question of guarding the strategic interests of a nationⁱⁱⁱ. Its role is mostly noticed in countries which were once one entity

but later became different nations. Pakistan-India-Bangladesh is one such typical example where people share the same cultural roots and are continuously linked with Radio broadcasts, irrespective of the fact wherefrom they originate.

It is this very reason that makes radio broadcasts strategically important in the sub-continent. But then Radio's role has never remained confined to the East only. The United States has predominantly used Radio in pre and post cold war era as well, as a strategic tool to keep an eye on the happenings in those countries where it felt American command was not acceptable or democratic values were at risk. Even after the breaking of the Soviet Union, the United States, through her scores of external service broadcasting units, used Radio as a medium to watch interests in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan where America and Americans have been facing hostile conditions. Some Radio stations set up in the vicinity of these nations and reportedly funded by United States, have been trying to make people aware of democratic values and their rights.

During the world war, German stations broadcast not only war propaganda and entertainment for German forces dispersed through Europe and the Atlantic, but also provided air raid alerts. In Germany, before the Nazi assumption of power in 1933, radio in Germany was supervised by the Post Office. The German Radio Station's shortwave broadcasting played an important part of fighting the cold war with Voice of America (VOA) and the BBC World Service augmented with Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL). Radio Moscow and others were broadcasting back, as well as jamming (transmitting to cause intentional interference) of the western voices was a common feature those days.

Yet another important Radio Station across the world with a distinguished history of propaganda and war reporting has been Radio Ceylon, which has also the distinction of being the oldest radio station in South Asia and was founded as Columbo Radio in 1925. This Radio Station enjoyed the status of King of the Airwaves from 1940s to 1960s as millions of listeners tuned to its broadcasts. Radio Ceylon had a very lucrative arm - the Hindi Service of the station launched in early 1950s. Millions of rupees in terms of advertising revenue came from India. What captured the Indian listeners those days were the film songs. The golden age of the Hindi film music was in 1950s and 1960s and Radio Ceylon was at the right place and at the appropriate time to reach out to the target market of millions of listeners. Through this Hindi music, the authorities at Radio Station were serving their strategic interest. This was a brilliant move by Radio Ceylon as Hindi film music was banned by All India Radio at the time. This led to increased listenership for radio programmes.

Radio Ceylon's big push had earlier come when it was directly linked to the Second World War. The decision to shift Radio SEAC (South-East Asia Command) to Ceylon was to set the stage for a handful of revolutions in broadcasting. These included a great leap in geographical coverage; practically the entire length and breadth of the South Asian region was served by one station. Geographically, Sri Lanka was the ideal location because the transmission reach could be all over the region. It was with the powerful backing of Radio SEAC and supported by the war-time radio servicing British troops that the Radio Ceylon was catapulted to glory^{iv}.

In India, it has been All India Radio, the largest public broadcaster, with a privilege to guard the strategic and cultural interests of the Union^v. Since Independence, India has always found hostile nations in its neighbourhood, who, through their official media, have been playing with the regional and religious sentiments of the people, particularly those living in border areas. To thwart their designs, AIR has been a useful and effective medium to carry forward the battle against elements that have been inimical to secular and democratic institutions flourishing in India. Propaganda apart, AIR has also served as the biggest means of information, entertainment and education in the country where 80 percent of the population resides in villages. Public journalism in India has as such its own glorious history. And it has been All India Radio (AIR) that has acted as the largest public broadcaster to guard the strategic interests of the Union of India that has always faced hostile propaganda from Pakistan.^{vi}

The most important challenge the Government of India faced at independence was that of forging a nation out of the diverse political, religious, geographic and lingual entities that composed independent India. In addition to the territories ruled directly by the British, over 500 "independent" princely states had joined the new nation, some quite reluctantly. The country immediately found itself at war with Pakistan over one of those states—Jammu and Kashmir. The trauma of the partition of the country into India and Pakistan and the violence between Hindus and Muslims had further weekend the political stability of the country.

Even when India was engaged in pushing back Pakistani tribal raiders from 1947 and trying to restore peace in Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan had intensified its propaganda campaign to spread rumours against the Government of India and people and leadership of Jammu and Kashmir. Such rumours stuffed with malicious anti-India propaganda was carried out by Pakistan through its various over and underground radio stations, some set up in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). It was in the backdrop of this fact that the then state administration, with the active support of the Union of India, had to establish its own radio station, the Radio Kashmir, as a strategic tool to counter the Pakistani propaganda unleashed from across the border.

Radio Kashmir in 1947 basically started functioning as a State Department and was later taken over by the All India Radio (AIR). The station continued to serve as a strategic tool both in the times of peace and war. Its two wings---- Radio Kashmir Srinagar and Radio Kashmir Jammu are presently important constituents of the Prasar Bharati Broadcasting Corporation of India (PBBCI) and continue to hold an important position in guarding the strategic interests of India. Since its creation in December 1947, Radio Kashmir as an institution has been undertaking multi-faceted work including countering the enemy propoganda, while simultaneously promoting local culture, talent and national integration in the region.

The situation persists till date as Radio Pakistan and Pakistan Television have been sparing good chunk of time on anti-India programmes. Pakistani media does not now only target Jammu and Kashmir, but cities like New Delhi, Jaipur, Kanpur, Bikaner, Ambala, Saharanpur, Meerut, Aligarh, Farrukhabad and parts of Nepal. The Pakistani radio has been mostly choosing Muslim majority areas of India and broadcasts programmes in Urdu and English with News, talks, discussions, documentaries and interviews as their programme formats.

Radio Pakistan has 100 daily news bulletins which are loaded with news from Kashmir and India. Radio Pakistan also broadcasts news bulletins in languages like Kashmiri, Balti, Shina, Pahari and Urdu. Incidentally, all these languages are spoken in Jammu and Kashmir. It has further developed Mirpuri and Muzzafarabad channels to exclusively target Poonch, Rajouri and Doda districts of Jammu province where Gujjars and Paharis live in majority. Both these channels broadcast programmes in Gojri, Kashmiri, Pahari and Urdu and spit venom against India.

The so-called Azad Kashmir Radio Trarkhal/ Taraarkheil which operates via Islamabad on 3975 KHz and via Rawalpindi on 4790 kHz, has remained a strategic radio station for Pakistan for the last six decades. It is through this radio station that Pakistani authorities resorted to all cheap tactics in guiding militants during the proxy war and also at times when the country was engaged with wars of 1965 and 1971 with India. Similarly, Radio Pakistan has eight stations operating in its Punjab province and most of these stations have been found involved in beaming anti-India and anti-Punjabi propoganda. These stations are located at Islamabad, Multan, Bhawalapur and Faislaabad and two each at Lahore and Rawalpindi^{vii}.

A number of Government and private owned FM stations also operate in these cities with high frequency. Similarly, the Stations in NWF at Peshawar, Abbottabad and Chitral have also been assigned the task to raise the religious sentiments of the people living in India. In the Pakistan's Northern Area, Gilgit and Skardu Radio Stations have been beaming anti-India propoganda aimed at trying to influence the minds of Muslims living in Kargil belt of Jammu and Kashmir^{viii}.

The major impact of Pakistani radio Stations has been found in Uri, Rajouri and Poonch areas of Jammu and Kashmir, as these sectors are very close to the Line of Control (LoC) dividing J&K into two parts and people living in these districts mostly depend on radio due to social, cultural and geographical factors. The signal of AIR stations and Radio Kashmir in some areas is not so strong while as Pakistani Government owned stations located at Muzzafarabad and two at Mirpur in PoK, are beamed trough high power transmitters with a penetration deep into Indian states. While Muzzafarabad station runs on 150 kws with a medium wave frequency of 792 KHz, the two Mirpur Stations have a frequency of 936 KHz and operate with a transmitter power of 10 and 100 KWs respectively.

On monitoring Radio Pakistan, one finds that the punch line of Pakistani radio broadcasts have often been that `` people of Kashmir are mentally and physically with us and need our support as they are very simple minded people and cannot fight like Punjabis and Afghanis against the foreign rule. They have to be prepared for the revolt against India''. Radio Pakistan has also been harping over anti-India propoganda by trying to malign the image of Indian Army and security forces.

Pakistan had in fact fed Kashmiris and her own citizens with horrific stories about India and the alleged 'atrocities' committed in Kashmir. Not only the Pakistani media, especially the Urdu press, even school textbooks too have contributed handsomely in injecting anti-India poison into successive generations of Pakistanis. The Pakistani propoganda machine has concentrated on showing India as the 'oppressor' of the Kashmiri Muslims while it predictably ignores the subjugation of people in living in PoK. It also underlines the differences between the Hindus and the Muslims to justify the Pakistani belief that co-existence between the two communities was impossible^{ix}.

If Pakistani media has been harping over exploiting the religious sentiments of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, the themes which are mostly being covered in counter-propoganda programmes over Radio Kashmir are:

- Pakistan continues to reel under sectarian violence.
- Muhajirs in Pakistan continue to face discrimination and atrocities at the hands of Punjabi Muslims who are actively assisted by the Pakistani Army.
- Democratic Institutions are not functioning in Pakistan. Leading opposition leaders have time and again been exiled due to the apprehension of political vendetta by military regime.

- Pakistan is continued to be isolated in the international community due to its support to international terrorism.
- Minorities in Pakistan are forced to live a miserable life with no educational facilities and job opportunities . Their lands have been usurped by the wealthy upper class.
- A handful wealthy families control the socio political scene in Pakistan . The Government is a tool in their hands.
- Democracy yet to dawn in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.
- Pakistan continues with atrocities on civilians in Waziristan and Baluchistan.
- Pakistan has turned PoK as its colony.

Countering Pakistani propaganda and rebuffing militant claims, which is the important aspect of broadcasting in Jammu and Kashmir, is not, however, the sole duty of Radio Kashmir or AIR. There are in fact six major factors which have made radio listening strategically important and highly popular in Jammu and Kashmir. They are categorized as:

- a. National Interest (Guarding the interests of the nation)
- b. Religious diversity (Highlighting teachings and philosophies of different faiths)
- c. Cultural factor (Promoting local culture, language, art etc)
- d. Geographical factor (Instant reach in hilly and far-flung areas)
- e. Disaster Management and Radio (Efficient medium during natural calamities)
- f. Radio's fast and vast reach (Radio listening is instant and across the borders)

With Pakistan continuing with her anti-India tirade, over the years, there has been a strong debate on formulating a National Media Policy to suit all sections of media operating in India. Although there are certain broad guidelines and codes framed by the Government for Radio and TV, however, such guidelines are silent while dealing with those nations who misuse their media against India and her interests.^x Further, All India Radio and Doordarshan have a three pronged strategy while meeting the broadcasting needs of the people across the country. The Institution works on the principle of 'Educating, Informing and Entertaining' the listeners. It misses the very important ingredient of 'Propagating' the national and strategic interests, which has been felt the need of an hour. There is a strong need to add fourth dimension of 'Propagating' national and strategic interests through official media across the nation . Even private radio and TV channels, who are being given licenses to operate in India, should be made accountable while 'propagating' the interests of India through their broadcasts/telecasts.

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