

THE ROLE OF FM RADIO IN THE TALIBAN INSURGENCY IN SWAT

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ABSTRACT

It is said that if a lie is repeated over and over again, it will appear as reality. Fazlullah and other belligerent orators were used to give emotive communications. Repeatedly misapprehending the "Holy Quran" to impresses ordinary people. When emotions are shining, reason and wisdom disappear, and when there is no reason and thinking, every mistake and wrong philosophy becomes reasonable and correct. The approach was adopted in such a way to win people's hearts and encourages young people, women, illiterate and semi-illiterate. The people of Swat very easily fell into the trap of this obedient group because of their ignorance of true Islam. FM radio has played a very important role in the rise of militants in Swat. FM radio was first launched by Fazlullah in 2004. Initially, the main purpose of FM radio was to educate people about the problems associated with Islam and Sharia, but later FM sermons spread terror and scarcity among the Swat residents. Taliban in Swat got the support of mostly illiterate people, especially women in this area. Martyrdom was the main subject of those lectures. Through FM, people were motivated by the fact that the direct path to heaven is jihad, so all other methods of worship and doctrines adopted by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) were completely ignored and put aside.

Keywords: FM radio, Insurgency, Sharia, Talibanization, Media, Wahhabism

INTRODUCTION

The media play a huge role in shaping people's perceptions. With its growing effect, more and more people were turning to electronic and print media every day to receive regular updates on current events, news and entertainment. Radio, being the oldest forms of media, has been at the front of broadcasting the latest news and reports during the wars and uprisings. In the psychological warfare and the victory over the enemy, radio has also become an unparalleled propaganda tool for the government (Malik, 2013, p. 7 8).

During and even after World War II, radio played a key role in military psychological operations. This covert broadcast was often disguised to convince enemy audiences that the radio was run by annoyed elements from their own side (Carruthers, 2005, p. 5). According to Sussan L. Carruthers (2005, p.6) " Such a radio station is a classic form of so-called 'black

propaganda', which deliberately confused its origins. "During the first Gulf War, modern insurgents demonstrated extraordinary skills in using radio as a tool to achieve their goals.

Radio played a very important role in the 1965 India-Pakistan War. The songs were aired on the radio, and it injected great enthusiasm into our army and other fighting forces. The Pakistanis were also informed of the progress of our troops. In the end, Pakistan defeated India, and radio performed a key role. Pakistani militants, including the Taliban, used the latest media to report on their activities. Although various forms of print and electronic media are used radically, it turns out that FM (Frequency Modulation) technology is very convenient for its hidden activities because it was easily fixed and activated (Malik, 2013, p. 79). The advantage of using the FM broadcast band for such lethal activities has never been considered suspicious. Illegal and unregulated radio activities were aired very publicly on the FM band because of the excellent coverage, the small size and very little cost of the equipment (Khalik, 2009. p.12).

In the mid-90s, FM radio began to be broadcast in Pakistan, as did the FM 100 music station. Gradually, their numbers in the private and public sectors have increased. FM radio is used only for entertainment, news, current affairs, and educational purposes. FM broadcasting is controlled by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). Pirate FM radio activities became widely known after September 11, 2001 when the United States attacked Afghanistan and drove the Taliban into the Tora Bora Mountains and the border areas of Pakistan. The U.S offensive measures united the Taliban. Consequently some FM channels progressed in tribal areas, and the settled part of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province, including Swat and Malakand (Mir, 2008, p. 34).

THE BEGINNING OF FM RADIO

The residents of Swat are known for their profound love of Islam. It is because of their attachment to Islam that people can see Islamic madaris and mosques near the valley on every street in Swat (Mir, 2008: 33). In December 2003, Tanzem Amr Bil Maruf WaNahi Anil Munkir (Fighting Immorality and Promoting Virtue) leader Haji Namdar first started using FM radio in the Swat Valley. He hired the services of the Deobandi Sunni, Mufti Munir Shakir. He preached his violent Islam, which angered Muslims belonging to the Barelvi Sufi order, and they created an opposite FM channel led by Pir Saifur Rahman (Majeed, 2016, p. 16).

MULLAH FAZLULLAH

It turns out that FM radio was very effective for Mullah Fazlullah (formerly known as Fazal Hayat). He was born at Mamedrai*, in Swat. He obtained a high school certificate from a local school in the village and entered the Government Post Graduate Jehanzeb College Saidu Sharif Swat. After passing the intermediate examination, he moved to Maidan in Lower Dir to receive religious education. He was recognized in the Islamic school supervised by Maulana Sufi Muhammad. Fazlullah soon established good relations with his teacher,

who not only allowed his daughter to marry him, but also gave him a new name, Fazlullah*. After completing his religious education, he returned to Swat and returned to his birthplace Imamdherai. He leads his madrassa there. Fazlullah was not a well versed religious scholar, nor does he have an actual *Sanad* (Degree) from an Islamic renowned madrassa. He had only received some initial religious knowledge from his father-in-law. He was not well versed in Islamic education (Majid, 2016, p. 12).

As a former participant in the war through Afghan intermediaries, Fazlullah led a "jihad" against Pakistan. When he experienced blind support from the public, he realized that he could effectively use the power of FM radio to advance his scheme. Khadim Hussain "observed that the method adopted by Mullah Fazlullah was based on the "Salafi Jihadist Ideology", which means" to change the social, political and economic structure of the Swat Valley". Fazlullah's sermons were based on Wahhabism and revolve around jihad, bigotry, anti-modern, anti-state, and anti-women (Hussein, 2013, p. 14).

The easiest and most attractive way was to use FM technology, so he started his own pirate radio station to spread his views. Common people also insist on installing FM radios. According to the famous Swat analyst Fazal Khalik, "FM broadcasting in the Swat Valley began in 2004." Fazlullah opened the mainstream thinking of the innocent people in Swat by discussing his daily complications. Fazlullah was very confident in speaking and rapidly gained a high number of following. The followers of Sufi Muhammad also received the movement zealously (Khaliq, 2009, p. 29).

FM RADIO AND THE TALIBAN INSURGENCE IN SWAT

The original site of FM radio was mamdherai [later it was renamed Imamdherai by Mullah Fazlullah]. When Militancy spreads and the risk of rampage was high, therefore FM station was then activated in different villages, such as Mamdherai, Koza Bandai, Aligrama, Dadaahara, Deolai and Taaranoo * where the FM radio performed smoothly (Shah, April 4, 2009). [At the beginning of the campaign, the sermons of Mullah Fazlullah were aired from morning to noon]. [As the days passed, the movement received more attention from the local people and the media; he then added another shift of the religious cum terrorized sermons]. After *Namz -e- Esha*, people eagerly listened to Fazlullah's speech on FM radio. The FM broadcast became a part of the daily life of the people of Swat. Most people felt anxious, listen to the sermon and ask nearby neighbors if they missed the broadcast. First, broadcasting was used to apply for funds to build Fazlullah madrasa, but then the nature of the activities changed from religious to political and hostile (Hussein, 2013, p. 20).

The main purpose of the radio show was to scare people and attract devotees. Through his FM radio, Fazlullah warned his enemies of dire consequences and harsh punishments were proclaimed for deviants. Fazlullah's private army --- *Shaheen Commando Force*-- literally created a parallel administration in Swat and spilled justice, regulating movements and patrolling villages and towns. Among the inhabitants of Swat, a so-called atmosphere of

competition was created. Each one said in his personal meetings with passion and honored that they had donated as much to Fazlullah. The women congratulated each other when their names were called on the radio and proudly discussed the value of their donations. Mostly donation was presented to Fazlullah in the form of money and jewelry. He succeeded in creating an atmosphere of fear and awe, and the time came when the local people asked each other, "Who gets flogged or beheaded next? Who was forgiven today and who was punished? All day long such things would discuss. Therefore the people of Swat were living under huge psychological pressure (discussion in groups, December 12, 2015).

Fazlullah's radio and radio programs start with the recitation of the Quran, followed by its translation and interpretation, full of personal biases. The radio also provided an interactive session during which people could ask questions and Fazlullah answered on the spot. Many women ask questions to seek guidance on religious and worldly issues, such as their share of inheritance, dowry, and livelihood. After the opening of Islamic debates, the speech of Fazlullah turned to more important political and social issues. But in real, jihad was the main theme of his so-called sermons (Dawn, July 14, 2009).

Fazlullah had always targeted the United States and its forces in Afghanistan when speaking about politics, while condemning and insulting national institutions such as Pakistan's security forces, criticizing their support for the United States. Police and Frontier Police officers were also targeted by Fazlullah. Through the speeches, the so-called Mullah fully exploited the popular sentiment against the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and used it to encourage youth to join their ranks for the holy jihad (Majid, 2016, p. 36). The militant groups of Fazlullah were not ready to accept the authority and local system of tribal elders, like Khans and Maliks. The Taliban in the tribal belt destroyed the whole system and they also killed many Maliks and prominent figures. They criticized Sufi traditions that are hundreds of years old and accused them of deviating from the true teachings of Islam. When the Swat Taliban occupied Buner, they prevented their followers from visiting the temple of Pir Baba (famous saint). In addition, FM Mullah opposed democracy and electoral politics as a pagan system, and demands the establishment of a true Islamic system and the promulgation of Islamic Sharia law (Rahi, 2011, p. 44).

Maulana Shah Dawran, the deputy of Fazlullah, became even more visible he was stricter and methodical in the implementation of Sharia law. Shah Dawran was known for his harsh and derogatory condemnations of Pakistani politicians, the United States and a coalition of countries involved in the war on terrorism. Shah Dawran was good at speaking like his mentor Fazlullah, and he also puts more emphasis on jihad and radical activities. Shah Dawran was also very keen in character assassination (Appeared on Fazlullah radio, 2008, 2009).

The radio broadcasts led by Mullahs was also very skeptical of minorities and require them to pay a security tax called *Jazya*. This was a very tough move against ethnic minorities who have lived peacefully with Muslims and served the country for centuries (Shah Dawran,

Radio Speeches, 2008, 2009). The Taliban in Swat had a very negative approach towards the local and international non-governmental organizations (NGO's). They were also the target of Fazlullah's FM radio. Taliban viewed them with doubt and agent of Israel, India and United States. The NGO's were also blamed for spreading modernity and leading away women and educated youth from the genuine path of Islam. Local musicians and other artists became special targets of the Taliban's odium. They were warned time and again in sizzling speeches to leave their un-Islamic professions (Frontier Post, April 16, 2009).

The radio sermons were also life-threatening of shopkeepers selling musical instruments and compact discs (CDs). They were not only warned but also attacked to force them closed the businesses, with the plea that they were also indulging in un-Islamic activities. Local committees of village based Taliban were organized in every village, where they were given a task to close or burnt down the CDs and music shops. The barbers were ordered to paste a banner on the front door of the shop that "Shave is sun-Islamic and no facility of shave is available here ". Fazlullah also had ordered his followers not to administer polio drops to their children. Fazlullah was very vocal against polio drops and he considered it is a conspiracy of America against Muslims. He was also of the opinion that early treatment before disease is not allowed in Islam (Mashriq, May 15, 2008).

Fazlullah had targeted each and every segment of the society. Women were targeted because they were usually cut off from the rest of the world in characteristically conservative Pashtun society and hence more fit to Fazlullah's miscreant propaganda. Another targeted group was youth who were ready to become cannon powder in the fight for so-called Islamization and Talibanization. He excited the youth by narrating the incident of Battle of *Ohad* and *Badr* and insisted upon them to stand for the cause of Islam and fight (Khaliq, 2009, p.28).

The deprived segments like daily wagers, *Gujjars*, *Kharkars* and others were also trapped by the militants. They were told by the Taliban that if they would join them in the fight for the cause of Islam, the land of their landlord would be given free of cost to them, after implementation of Islam. Therefore most of the people from poor families joined them for the sake of loot and booty. A large number of people joined the Taliban for vested interests. Given the colossal appeal of the FM radio, Fazlullah was of the opinion that the Taliban and his mouthpiece radio was the only representative of the people, and the listeners and the government should consider FM sermons as the single and final authority on fundamental issues (Majeed, 2016, p.39).

REGULAR RADIO PREACHERS

Fazlullah was not the only broadcasting missionary, although he was the most outstanding among them, people trusted and admired him. There were many speakers who often preach on the radio. Prominent among them were Fazlullah, Shah Dawran, Mullana Khalel, Mullana Muhammad Alam, Mullah Nadar, Mullana Ishak and Muslim Khan. Among them, Fazlullah and Shah Dawran were the outspoken and famous speakers (different speeches, 2008, 2009).

THE DOMINANT THEME OF THE RADIO SHOW

After various interviews and in-depth analysis, the author arrived at the dominant theme of FM show, which has been discussed in the following lines.

- Appeal for the financial support of so-called fighters.
- Sermons about joining the Taliban in jihad.
- Incite the people to resist the army.
- Try to convince people that their real goal should be to support only the real Taliban.
- Promote jihad, belligerence, and extremism to young people.
- Directed women to stay at homes, stop going to the market, stop going to school.
- Threatened female doctors and nurses.
- Ordered government officials and soldiers to leave government positions and join the movement.
- Translation of the Holy Quran, with biased approach.
- Strict instruction to men to grow beard.
- Asked women to cover their bodies and to adopt basic principles of Islam.
- Ask people to stop listening to music.
- Order the barber to stop shaving the client's beard.
- Commit to the establishment of a true justice system based on Islam.

The local Taliban also forced people to play their jihadist poems, which was a source of entertainment and a substitute for music, earlier people were forced to abandon TV and music. When musical objects were founded in cars and vehicles, Peoples were beaten and humiliate by the local Taliban (Speech 2007, 2008 and 2009).

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Initially, FM radio was initiated by Fazlullah. He was recognized as the highest religious leader and therefore considered a very famous Islamic intellectual. Fazlullah's FM radio was very responsive, and many people were affected by the fact that they either carry weapons for his radical movement or support him in fighting for Sharia law. In that picture, the government had to understand this and set up a radio station in the area to combat jihadist publicity. The FM radio installed by the army in the area after the collapse of the Taliban should be fixed earlier.

The militant's radio was operating illegally without authorization from the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority. It was the prime duty of state to prevent pirated broadcasts, because it was not even a secret, everyone knows where it was transmitted from. The government could simply try to use jammers (a type of transmitter used to transmit radio and electronic interference) to stop or interfere with Fazlullah's broadcasting, but no major

efforts were made. Fazlullah gradually prepared the audience for armed struggle, but unfortunately, no one in the government tried to mitigate the impact of FM sermons through anti-narratives. Fazlullah was targeting the unjust and un-Islamic policies of the state. He suddenly preached violence to bring about change. The government should intervene to counter the fierce and cruel arguments of the rebels and address some of the people's legitimate concerns. At least, the government should take some active measures to combat the unfair fraud system.

Fazlullah announced that television opposed the teachings of Islam and banned music and CD shops, leaving people with no other sources of entertainment. FM radio was the only source of information and entertainment. This could have been prevented by the participation of local police and other security forces. If the responsible authorities question some of these illegal actions, the situation could be controlled without the atrocities observed later. Finally, militants gradually introduced a powerful parallel control system, while law enforcement agencies remained silent onlookers.

FINDINGS

Research shows that Fazlullah was well aware of the importance of FM broadcasting in Swat. Fazlullah used his FM radio, an easy-to-use tool to convey his belligerent voice to everyone living in Swat and Malakand. Installing an FM radio is very easy and cheap. It can be operated by a small handheld device and can be controlled anywhere. You don't need any specific education to manage it. There were many in Fazlullah's troops who could easily run FM broadcasting, even on the top of the mountain. FM radio requires a transistor, a used cell phone, and a small battery. The cost is also very low, ranging from only seven to eleven thousand. For residents of Swat, FM radio could be easily accessed via mobile devices and radios. Swat residents used to listen to Fazlullah's FM radio. It was the only source of entertainment and information, because in the past, Swat residents burned down equipment such as TVs, CDs, and VCRs. A movie theater and other music centers were also burned down or closed by Taliban militants. During the warlike period, the FM radio was the most important tool for sending and receiving information. In Swat FM radio was also a threat to those who were not ready to accept Fazlullah's account of Islam.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, most of the Muslims do not care about receiving education in Islam, understanding the true meaning of Islam, and studying the way of life of Muhammad (peace and blessings to the Lord). It is this ignorance that has become their weakness, and the militants use this as a basis to control them with emotional and hostile communications.

Through Fazlullah's FM radio, residents of the area were incited to mutiny. Law and order were challenged by diligence and pride. One of the most obvious and immediate consequences of Fazlullah FM radio was the looting of public schools, police stations, hospitals, banks, and the destruction of suspension bridges across the river. Therefore, the

militants also destroyed most of the infrastructure as part of their strategy to win the country and take any necessary means. Through FM broadcasting, the mentality of destruction was shaped into the fact that no one could dare to the illegal behavior of the intruder. In short, what needs to be noted is that the government should educate and allow ordinary people to resist the militant and extremist forces; otherwise the people will be deceived with false slogans. Social and economic development, religious school reform, mosque reform, strong police force, supervision of Afghan refugee camps, rapid justice and better governance are the needs of today.

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