Strategic Importance of Radio Kashmir in Countering Pakistan’s War of Words against India

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Like any other government-owned media institution, Radio Kashmir has historically been entrusted with a mission to safeguard the territorial integrity of India and help in guarding its vital strategic interests. It acts as an agency that bridges the gap between the government and the people and creates a favourable opinion of India as a strong, modern and secular democracy in a region where fundamentalism and military ambitions have created rogue states.

European countries used the radio as a psychological weapon and a propaganda tool, particularly during World War II. Pakistan has been abusing its own medium of sound since 1947, allegedly with a motive to weaken India, and to win over the people of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) by exploiting their religious sentiments. An analysis of militants’ activities in J&K over the last two decades will reveal that Pakistan has been trying to woo the youth of J&K to act as an illegitimate army to bleed India ‘through thousand cuts’. Although the infiltration process may be slow at the moment, the danger continues to lurk. Trade relations between India and Pakistan have improved and the two neighbours may arrive at an agreement regarding Kashmir in the days to come. However, Pakistan will continue to foment trouble in the state that it sees as an ‘unfinished agenda of Partition’. The institution of Radio Kashmir will again have its tasks clearly cut out in such a changed geostrategic scenario.

The importance of Radio Kashmir is reflected in the fact that the two premier broadcasting facilities were purposefully set up in 1947 and 1948, both at Jammu and Srinagar, with a mandate to safeguard the strategic interests of the country. Both have successfully justified their existence and completed their mission so far. The need was felt later to extend the same first at Leh and then at Kargil which faced Pakistani aggression in 1999.

Even in these times of Facebook and Twitter, the All India Radio Leh, Drass, Padam, Zanskar and Kargil and similarly Poonch, Rajouri, Nowshera, Kupwara and Bhaderwah (which are remote areas of J&K) continue to act as beacon lights to present India’s viewpoint, strengthen cultural and national integration and at the same time counter propaganda unleashed by enemy agents within and outside the country. The events of July 2012 in Assam reveal that social media networks can be misused at any time to disrupt peace, create insecurity and throw normal life out of gear. While the government is aware of this grave issue, it does not seem to appreciate the power of
Radio Kashmir, with a special title, earned a unique status in the Indian broadcasting arena following the rabid propaganda exercised by Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK)-based radio stations and Radio Pakistan since 1947. Despite an agreement between India and Pakistan signed in 1948 stating that the two nations would not interfere in each other’s internal affairs by indulging in media war, Pakistan has been resorting to anti-India propaganda through its so-called Radio Azad Kashmir and giving the impression that Radio Azad Kashmir was the ‘real’ radio station of Kashmir and ‘represented’ the sentiments of the people of Kashmir and parts of the Jammu region. In order to dispel this belief, India launched radio stations in Jammu and Srinagar and purposely called it Radio Kashmir, which worked under the aegis of the then state government. Even after the merger of Radio Kashmir with All India Radio (AIR) on 13 April 1954, the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting carried on with the same nomenclature.

In over six decades of its existence, the story of Radio Kashmir is an interesting saga of growth. The institution spreads the all-embracing broadcasting culture in Jammu and Kashmir, says Shyam Kaul, a veteran journalist. Kaul, a frequent participant in various current event-based programmes, is of the opinion that Radio Kashmir has stood out as the only rallying point where diverse opinions have been integrated to provide a platform. It has helped in thwarting threats arising out of propaganda. This great institution has helped in the task of nation building as well. ‘From Jawabi Hamla of 1947 to Wotul Bujhe of 1965 Indo-Pak war and Wadi Ki Awaz since the 1971 war and also in later stages, it was a centre of excellence all the way’, recalls Kaul.

Eminent Dogri writer and former secretary of the J&K Cultural Academy, Professor Nilamber Dev Sharma recalls that people who were associated with Radio Kashmir Jammu in 1947–1948 had a cause before them, ‘to expose the evil machinations of Pakistan and to prepare the people to fight the tribal army and Pakistani soldiers, to boost the morale of the security forces and to expose the enemy within who wanted to create division and dissensions on communal lines’.

Countering Pakistani propaganda has been a major duty of Radio Kashmir during these years of turmoil. The importance of Radio Kashmir as a strategic medium has been realised during the militancy launched by Pakistan. Radio Kashmir has acted as an able spokesman in rebuffing militants’ claims and exaggerated stories against the army that have found enough footage in vernacular newspapers and national and local private television channels. It has also successfully involved the people of Jammu and Kashmir in its radio bridge programmes to find solutions for governance-related issues.

**Radio Pakistan’s propagandist programmes**

Studies undertaken in some parts of Kashmir show that, from 1947, Radio Pakistan’s programmes were invariably anti-Indian. Such programmes were broadcast for hours together, whenever there was any political development in Jammu and Kashmir, such as the holding of State Assembly or Lok Sabha elections. This was primarily done to paint India as an ‘undemocratic’ country having ‘forcibly’ occupied Jammu and Kashmir. By airing such anti-India propaganda programmes, most of the Pakistani military regimes tried to convince their people that the democratic exercise in India, particularly in J&K, was a ‘big fraud’. A military regime was a better option, according
communication channel between the infiltrators and their masters across the border and has transmitted several ‘motivational messages’ to the infiltrators. Today, Pakistan is also using the internet as a destabilising tool, thereby continuing to highlight its importance as a rogue state bordering India.

Radio Kashmir Srinagar and Jammu countered the anti-India tirade of Radio Pakistan by offering popular pro-people programmes such as Sheherbeen, ‘Haqeeqat Yeh Hai’ and Waqt Ki Baat.11

Between 1948 and 1953, Pakistan’s infamous Radio Trakhal aired an anti-India programme called Dol Ka Pol,12 beamed every day at 8 pm (IST). Such was the impact of this anti-India programme that Jammu and Kashmir’s Information Department, which was also looking after Radio Kashmir in those days, had to set up a separate cell to monitor this programme and accordingly devise strategies to counter it. A reference to this programme is well documented in the archival department of the J&K government: ‘Dol Ka Pol, a serial programme based on anti-India propaganda and weaved around Pakistani patriotic songs and Akwal-e-Zareen (Quotable Quotes)’.13

Zarb-e-Kaleem was another anti-India broadcast from Radio Pakistan, which started in 1948.14 Garoor Ki Khudai was the brainchild of Radio Pakistan to launch malicious propaganda against the Indian security forces. Another 10-minute anti-India programme was being broadcast daily by Radio Azad Kashmir Trarkhal at 10.20 pm (IST).15

A detailed study of these propagandist programmes and some transcribed scripts, between 1948 and 1953, revealed that Radio Pakistan frequently addressed India as a ‘country of Hindu fundamentalists where Kashmiri Muslims and their religion was unsafe’.16 Its modus operandi has remained unchanged. Rather it has raised the context to such an ugly level that rabid internal elements seem to use it as a tonic for reviving militancy in its mission of ‘Alamgir Jehad’. Even now, Radio Pakistan’s Kashmir Diary is one such platform where the anti-India tirade continues.17

If Pakistan was broadcasting a highly motivational Zarb-e-Kaleem against India and its security forces, Radio Kashmir was countering the same with Jawabi Hamla. This was produced in the Srinagar studios of Radio Kashmir and its production was mainly assigned to the highly acclaimed Kashmiri broadcaster, Ghulam Rasool Nazki. Jawabi Hamla was effectively countering the venomous propaganda from Radio Pakistan by highlighting the humane face of the Indian army and the rich cultural values of the Kashmiris, who believed in the philosophies of Sufis and Rishis. Similar programmes like Zalim Khan, Waadi Ki Awaz, Sada-e-Jaras and Haqeeqat Yeh Hai acted as able antidotes to the poison that was being injected by Radio Pakistan.18

The News Unit of Radio Kashmir has also played a vital role in countering the Pakistani propaganda through a number of news bulletins broadcast from both Jammu and Srinagar stations. The need was even felt to broadcast news bulletins in languages like Pushto and Purgi, commonly spoken in PoK.19

**Pakistan’s underground radio stations**

During the proxy war, Pakistan established a number of underground radio stations whose only job was to spread canards against India. One such underground radio station, Sadai-Hurriyat (Voice of Freedom), operating from Muzzafarabad in the PoK, was set up in 1990 and aired anti-India and anti-security forces programmes. Its programmes were heard in the Balakote, Mendhar, Rajdhani, Khari Karmara, Sabjian,
the Jammu division and parts of Kupwara, Bandipora and Baramulla districts of the Kashmir region as well. Programmes launched by this underground radio station after 1990 also reached the upper regions of Kashmir Valley and Doda district. Its malicious content surpassed all limits of decency and was becoming extremely beneficial for militants moving in these higher and far-flung sectors. 20

Since Pakistan’s inception, the military ambition of its generals has forced it to feed the Kashmiris horrific stories about India and the alleged ‘atrocities’ committed in Kashmir. The Pakistani artillery during the Kargil intrusion of 1999 had targeted Doordarshan’s Low Power Transmitter (LPT) in Kargil to prevent the local population from watching its telecast. Ironically, the Pakistani government has augmented its broadcast facilities with state of the art technology in these border areas on an unprecedented scale. The motive for such an exercise could only be to launch a psychological war against India. 21

**Countering propaganda during the 1965 and 1971 wars**

Radio Kashmir again functioned as a sentinel in guarding Indian interests during the India–Pakistan wars in September 1965 and December 1971. A series of programmes with counter-propaganda, such as *Radio Jhootisthan*, were introduced. In *Radio Jhootisthan* the AIR addressed Radio Pakistan as *Radio Jhootisthan* and at the same time provided the Indian public with the latest and correct updates on the war.

Apart from programmes like *Radio Jhootisthan*, the All India Radio carried Melville De’Mello’s *Silvery Tones*. Reporting from the war front, the anchor would raise the morale of the security forces. This was supported by a number of broadcasts with patriotic songs. Programmes such as *Fauji Bhayon Ke Liye*, exclusively for the Indian soldiers, continue to be popular. The Voice of America, incidentally, used this strategy of propaganda successfully in its Iraq and Afghan Wars. 22

In 1965, Indian content creators justifiably coined the name *Radio Guppistan* for Radio Pakistan as it was believed to specialise only in loose talk and rumour mongering. Radio Pakistan’s claims, such as ‘Our fighters today shot down two enemy super-connies near Agra’, ‘Our forces have entered Jammu and are about to move in Gumat [a bazaar of Jammu] area’, were ridiculed by Indian media agencies. Since such news in those days had the potential to create anarchy, Radio Kashmir was asked to rise to the occasion and to blow off the lid of Pakistani propaganda. 23

During the 1971 war (3 December to 16 December), ‘Spotlight’, an AIR News Services Division programme relayed from Radio Kashmir, would broadcast information regarding the war and give the opinions of Indian military experts. These legends of military experts included Lt. Gen. L.P. Sen (Retd), Lt. Gen. Harbaksh Singh (Retd), Lt. Gen. P.O. Dunn (Retd), Mr. K Subrahmanyam, former director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Col. R. Rama Rao (Retd), Maj. Gen. D.K. Palit (Retd) and Admiral A.K. Chatterjee (Retd). 24

An international seminar on security was organised by Jammu University in May 2003. Those who participated in the seminar included Prof. Matin Zuberi, Prof. S.D. Muni, Prof. Bharat Karnad and former national security advisor J.N. Dixit. Among the issues they stressed was the strengthening of the twin institutions of All India Radio and Doordarshan. The participants in the seminar observed that ‘nation building’, which was a priority for AIR and Doordarshan, appeared to be an ‘unglamorous activity’ for
Thus there was a strong need to strengthen the government’s channel for projecting its viewpoint.

Radio Kashmir in Indo-Pak ties

In addition to vigorously pursuing the objective of countering anti-India propaganda, Radio Kashmir is aware of its responsibility towards promoting friendly ties between the people of two nations who trace their lineage to a common ancestry. This is in tune with India’s role as a credible South Asian protector and emerging global power. An example of a goodwill gesture by Radio Kashmir was its daily flood messages broadcast during the rainy season. The radio would inform listeners of the slightest rise in the water levels of the Tawi, Ravi and Chenab rivers flowing towards Pakistan. These news inputs were appreciated by people living across the border.

Radio dramas, music and other software broadcast over Radio Kashmir Jammu have also played a significant role in promoting people-to-people contact between the citizens of the two nations. This is evident from the fact that the station receives a number of letters every week from Pakistani listeners. Most of these letters are written by those Pakistanis who have their roots in India. They request chaste Dogri, Punjabi, Gojrri and Urdu radio dramas, skits and folk music, which make them feel nostalgic for their past.

Gojrri music and its singers from this region continue to be popular on the other side of the border. Since 40 per cent of Gojrri speaking people live on the other side of the border, they have most things in common, including marriage songs and folk music. When the government of India declared the Gujjars a Scheduled Tribe, it received appreciative messages for its action from Pakistan. This sentiment can be exploited by the Indian government while presenting its case in promoting cultural and other linguistic roots and commonality.

This cultural bondage can also be extended to the northern areas of the state, where the same family of languages is spoken. Like Radio Kashmir Jammu, the Kargil and Leh stations of the AIR receive hundreds of such letters from the other side of the dividing line, wherein people enquire about their counterparts here. This fact was corroborated by former director of All India Radio Leh, T. Angmo, who headed AIR Kargil during ‘Operation Vijay’. This commonality in culture finds an echo in the hearts of those in Jammu and Kashmir whose relatives, by travesty of fate, were forced to settle in PoK.

Tackling militancy through Radio Kashmir

In militancy-affected areas and environments, it is imperative that both security forces and non-state actors try to use tools that are intended to modify the behaviour of the target society. The inherent dangers in the latter category can be successfully eliminated by accepting the help of the credible institution of Radio Kashmir throughout its territory. While programme content based on ‘tit for tat’ should continue, the other software directed at the more urbane constituencies should be presented in a more analytical manner where the messages ought to be self-explanatory without stressing the need for undue propaganda. This can be done by presenting the facts clearly and boldly.
tion, India’s undisputed strength lies in projecting its strong democracy, free press and an intensely independent judiciary. This unique selling point to India’s credit is an affront even to China, which is seen to be a nation where human rights are frequently abused.

In an area like Jammu and Kashmir where security forces have been engaged in fighting militancy for the past two decades and more, it is extremely important for the security agencies to rely on a medium like Radio Kashmir, which has a wide public acceptability and is an effective tool for undertaking psychological operations. The medium has proved through its series of broadcasts that it can help people in distress and the authorities concerned in tackling terrorism as well as clearing the air on many contentious issues. Programme like Awaz De Kahan Hain, broadcast over Radio Kashmir Jammu during peak militancy, was one such step to win over misguided youth and to help them in their return to the mainstream.

Security forces of all hues are often employed for anti-terrorist operations. Whether they are officers of the army, the Rashtriya Rifles, the Assam Rifles, the Border Security Force, the Central Reserve Police Force or the State Police, they have to understand the nuances of the functioning of media agencies. There is no running away from this monolithic force in the world. Psychological orientation of officers and fighting men in the torrid environment of terrorism is also formed by the presence of activist and competing media agencies.29

However, this comes with a catch. Those who are supposed to generate such pro-India content should not only be experts in their respective fields, but should also be highly sensitive to the situation on the ground prevailing in such militancy-affected environments. A threadbare discussion and freedom to create such content is necessary and should not be subjected to warped and compartmentalised traditional positions and thinking.

Radio Kashmir can surely create an impression that the government and the security forces and the people of the state share common concerns and are in tune with each other to chalk out their destiny and pursue a clear road-map for future success.

Notes
12. ‘Propaganda Wars’, File No. 1765, Basta No. 69, J&K Department of Archaeology and Museums.
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