

Impact of Islamization on Ptv During Zia Era

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Abstract

Media plays an important role in strengthening the ideological foundations of any system, because it directly influences the minds of masses. It helps in forming the public opinion. Media can play an important role in the Islamization in the country. However no positive role has yet been played by the media in this regard. Zia-ul-Haq made attempts for the islamization of Pakistan. In this connexion some steps were taken but not concrete results were achieved.

Some standred works on Islamization of Pakistan during Zia era are available, but no systematic study has yet been appeared on impact of Islamization on PTV. In the present article an attempt has been made to analysis the impact of Islamization on PTV during Zia era.

Pakistan Television Corporation Limited (PTV) is a public limited company. All of its shares are owned by Government of Pakistan. The decision to establish a television service with the participation of private capital and under the general supervision of the Government of Pakistan (GOP) was taken in October 1963.

Subsequently, the GOP signed an agreement with Nippon electronic Company of Japan, allowing it to operate two pilot stations in Pakistan. The first of these stations went on air in Lahore on 26 November 1964. On the completion of the experimental phase, a private limited company, called Television Promoters Limited, was set up in 1965, which was converted into a public¹ limited company in 1967. Television centers were established in Karachi and Rawalpindi/Islamabad in 1967 and in Peshawar and Quetta in 1974. In PTV satellite transmission is round the clock. The transmission includes ETV and PTV world transmission.¹

Initially, entertainment and News were broadcasted for 5 to 6 hours per day. But later, the Current Affairs and the Sports Divisions were established to expand the transmission segments. The News and the Current Affairs Divisions remained under strict censorship because of their basic objective was to promote and discuss the government policies to make the layman cognizant about government

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policies. The PTV drama was the best example of performing arts in the sub-continent.

In the 1970s, the PTV had established a wide terrestrial network throughout the country which made a large number of people regular TV viewers. This embarked on a new era of media, which influenced not only public opinion but also effected ways of thinking in the society by its programmes. The Bhutto era was quite remarkable due to the induction of two new television centers and some liberal policies regarding production and presentation of the PTV programmes.

After the military coup of 1977, the PTV became a victim of strict censorship policies to promote the campaign of Islamization of General Zia. The Islamization campaign radically changed themes of the PTV drama and also of the Current Affairs programmes and of the PTV presentations. General Zia ordered that all the female presenters would wear *Dopatta* on their heads. This led to resignations and rejection from many. Mehtab Rashidi case was an example for she refused to follow the instructions and consequently she was ousted from PTV². PTV started 'Baseerat' and teachings of Quran programmes to follow the policy. Azan broadcasted three times a day because the transmission timings were afternoon to night. Farman-i-Ilahi was launched at the end of transmission under this policy. All divisions of the PTV got some rapid changes in their formats and presentations of their programmes.

Impact of Islamization on the PTV would be discussed in three categories: entertainment programmes, Current Affairs programmes, and the News.

Entertainment Programmes

i. Drama:

When Zia took the reigns of the government, he raised the slogans to Islamize the society according to Islamic values. PTV was the only state run television which was centre of public attention. People were used to gather at Baazars and houses of their neighbors to watch the drama or other entertainment programmes. Daily drama serial, songs of various artists, English and Urdu weekly movies were major productions of PTV, transmission timings were 4:00 pm to 11:00 pm during that period. In 1979, General Zia directed PTV drama writers through their respective directors and information Ministry that drama scripts should project mystic values and social issues and avoid love stories and close contact with female artists.³

In the same year PTV presented the most remarkable drama of its history "Waris" which was a direct hit on the feudal set up of society. End of the drama was quite spiritual rather than rational when the hero got punishment from God opted for

suicide due to burden of his sins. Another film based on Naseem Hijazi's novel "Khak aur Khoon" was televised to show the Muslim struggle for independence and to commemorate the agony of the partition of the subcontinent.

General Zia used PTV to legitimize his rule and coup by various means. PTV broadcasted a TV serial "Zulam Ki Dastan" which projected the grievances of the Bhutto's opposition and the political victims of Mr. Bhutto. Its format was docudrama serial which highlighted its objective covertly.⁴

Jhok Sial was a unique production from PTV Lahore centre in 1981 which showed Ishiq-i-Haqiqi and mystic thought to its viewers. Despite strict censorship and checks on drama Un Kahi and Shamma were moderate productions from PTV in 1980s.

Ashfaq Ahmad, Fatima Suriya Bajiya, and Haseena Moen served the purpose of mystic drama serials from PTV. Ashfaq Ahmad wrote his masterpieces for visual dramas during that period. Aik Mohabat Soo Afsanay, Man Chalay Ka Sooda, and Touta Kahani were televised during 1980s. Ashfaq Ahmad emphasized on strong and long dialogues instead of the plot of his plays. His characters were common men, without formal education, and used to earn their bread and butter through daily wages. This was an obvious example of Sufi thought which could be deemed as direct impact of Gen. Zia's Sunni thought and Islamic inclinations.⁵

Aik Mohabat Soo Afsany was drama series based on layman's problems. The characters of this series had emotional attachments that often culminate into either true/pious love stories. Similarly, Man Chlay Ka Soda was manifestation of some hidden Sufis who used to advice people by their long and interesting dialogues. These were uneducated people with long experiences of tough life and portrayed message of escape from the worldly desires and aspirations. This had direct impact on masses that showed their interest in Ulemas and Mushaikh's teachings. People started participating in yearly celebrations of shrines (this practice was augmented during Zia's Period). Touta Kahani had also the same theme and presentation.

In 1982, Haseena Moen wrote "Un Kahi", a weekly drama serial; which brought fame and PTV award for her. This play was different from the conservative trend of the dramas, but the director Islamized its presentation as its female characters wore Dopatta (veil) on their heads and close contacts were dropped from the play.

The year 1985 got a very different trend in drama production. Soonay ka bhao, Saanp aur Surahi, Khul ja Sim Sim, Na Nafs na Ashiyana, and your most obedient servant were prominent plays which came to the silver screen. Drama serial Na

Nafs na Ashiyana was another symbol of Islamization of PTV, it also had the same message of simplicity, mystic thought, and social behavior.

In Zia period, PTV started historical drama for the first time in its production history. Akhri Chatan was the first production based on Naseem Haijazi's novel. Its theme was Jilal-ud-Din Khawarzim Shah's struggle against the Monogols and the decline of Abbaside Caliphate. Another drama serial was presented on the martyrs and heroes of the war of independence and freedom movement. These dramas were full of Islamic concept of jihad against the aggressors and martyrdom for freedom.

On afghan Jihad, PTV televised a wonderful serial "Panah", which was produced in two parts. This drama projected the grievances and agonies of the Afghan refugees and citizens as well along with their pledges to get back their lands through warfare. The drama was highly patronized by the government agencies and army co-operated with the production team especially.

PTV launched another drama serial "Payass" in the year 1986. Suheel Asghar got fame through this drama. Again the script was representative of the Sufi thought. Its plot was similar to Man Chalay Ka Sooda characters were full of religion of tolerance and Sufi thought. The main characters were laymen and used to visit shrines for their internal satisfaction.

Apart from these popular plays, some other drama serials got popularity during the period from 1979 to 1988. Shama, Afshan, Zenat, Agehi, Tarekh-o-Tamseel, Ghar aik Nagar, Dhoop Kinaray, Kasak, 50/50, Neelay hath, Muqadma-e-Kashmir etc.⁵ All these dramas were directly or indirectly related to the campaign for Islamization and Sufi thought.

In 1982 some light topics were also included in the PTV dramas. Another series was started on monthly and yearly basis. These were long duration dramas which were related to the problems of society and common man. These were long duration dramas which were related to the problems of society and common man. Art and Music were absent from these long plays due to Islamic prohibition. None of these serials was related to problems of love in juvenile period. Close contacts on camera and sensitive dialogues were either deleted from the original scripts or edited under the policy of censorship. No drama had any relationship to the political situation because special directions were sent to all TV centers and the scriptwriters.

ii. Songs

Before Zia period PTV had adopted the policy to project the singers and local folks as much as it could. Current records of PTV Archives have a large

collection of songs on BETA Cam SP tapes and 16 mm Umatic tapes. That is a rare collection of classical and folk songs in the country.

But the new regime had intentions to promote Na'ats and Mushaeras instead of music and arts. PTV used to broadcast Na'atiya Mushaira on weekends either LIVE or recorded.⁷ New Na'at Khawan were introduced in the state channel who had capability to sing Na'at in various formats.

The ministry and the censorship board issued directives to ban "Do Gana" (Song by male and female signers) in order to project Islamic image of Pakistan. During 1980's there was no significant programme on music and arts from Pakistan Television. Most of the producers used to make music programmes of one or two songs without anchors due to policy matters. In other terms songs had been considered less important programme of PTV, the programme directors rejected many PED's (Programme Estimated Budgets) just because of their opposition to lyrics and sets of the signers and producers. Female singers were directed by the producers to cover their heads normally and wear full dresses instead of half arms Saari. Therefore, it was indirect Islamization of PTV programmes under Gen. Zia.

The Na'atiya Mushairas were a good projection of the government policy. These programmes had been recorded through EN (Electronic News Gathering) or OB (Outdoor Broad Cast) units from various parts of the country. In normal routine, OB is used for special VVIP coverage programmes. So, it was destruction of meager resource of PTV to appease ulemas that the government was keen to implement Islam in the country.

Sufi thought was another part of PTV songs. Qawalis and Sufi poetry were being telecasted more than once in the day. The producers used chunks of Sufi poetry in their dramas in order to make it more mystic and near to the thought of simplicity. Dramas like Man Chalaly ka Soda and Payass had repeated chunks of this sort of songs to attract and impress their viewers. PTV had been telecasting Qawalis on Friday for more than 10 years. Usually, Qawalis had been recorded in the studios by creating ambiance of Sufi shrines and Islamic color combinations.⁸

The other music bands related to pop music were late entry in PTV in 1980's. During 1970's, PTV had recorded the most remarkable and precious voices which are still available in PTV Archives.

iii. News:

News is another integral part of PTV because it was pioneer of visual news in the country. PTV is state TV channel and its policy manifesto declares support and projection of the government policies as its prime and topmost priority. News division is comprised of Director News, chief Editors for news, and Bureau chief.

All officials supervise the news stories and visual selection for news and reports. They make an order of news in accordance with priority of channel and the government.

Generally, activities of the president and prime minister are first in the news order. While the other national and international events are presented later according to their importance and urgency. During Zia period, the government was supporting Jihad in Afghanistan. Therefore, the freedom fighters were named as Mujahidden in the news stories and fresh or old visual were essential for every bulletin. In priority order, the news from Afghanistan were heavily censored and presented just after the activities of the president.⁹

Gen. Zia had ordered that all the female TV presenters must wear Dopatta on their heads. So, the dressing code for female TV newscasters had changed due to the government compulsions.

As far as news stories are concerned. PTV exaggerated the Islamic spirit in news stories related to Islamization. News reports were often broadcasted on the eve of urs (annual celebrations) of the Sufis. This was message to the people regarding the government inclination to Islamize the society.

There was gender bias regarding the selection criteria of the news casters during Zia period. Female candidates for newscaster jobs were often rejected before formal audition and interview. Only some extra ordinary newscasters were there to fulfill the government criteria for news anchors. Eshrat Saqab got opportunity during that want of female news anchors.

News editing was quite tough during Zia period due to strict channel policy regarding the issues related to political activities and opposition. Impartiality for news converge had lost its place in PTV news which was totally against the professional spirit of journalists. PTV was quite successful in projection of the government due to absence of any other rival TV channel. But, unfortunately, the same policy was adopted by the successors of Zia which ultimately marred credibility of PTV news.

The Muslim countries were also placed in the news priority list of PTV due to Gen. Zia's tendency towards Islamic system of government. But this was quite rare case due to lack some unique news items from the Muslim countries.

The Current Affairs Division:

The current Affairs Division was established a little bit late due to some structural problems in the organization. Initially, producers from programmes and the news were shifted to this division to start the work but later on professional staff was

hired/recruited and trained at PTV Academy for this division. 1980 was the first years for this division to work with its professional staff. Most of its work was recorded and presented form PTV Islamabad centre.

The objectives of this department were also same as of the other branches. Discussion on the current national and international issues, projection of the government policies, and defense of the government and Pakistan through media channel were its objective. The decade of 1980's was quite tough for the staff of this branch due to strictness of the monitoring cell to censor the programmes related to the government policies.

Impact of Islamization on PTV is obvious from the working of the Current affairs division. The first series of programme was started on the life sketches of the companions of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) and their families. The programmes were of short duration and personality based. For example, Hazarat Um-i-Salma, Um-i-Emen, Hazrat Umer Farooq, and the other pious caliphs were topics and titles of these programmes.¹⁰

Sufis, Saints, and other Islamic personalities were given coverage through various programmes which were telecasted occasionally. The programmes were in documentary format and research based. The level of research was ordinary to attract more people and convince them about the pious works of those personalities. Shrines and Darbars of the saints were projected through these programme along with their life sketches.

The third type of Islamization programmes was solo programmes or one plus two studio based discussions on the teachings and Quranic Dictations of Islam. These programmes covered almost all the occasions of the year. Programmes like Qasis ul Quran, Dana-i-Raz, Mehfil Ilm-ul-Quran, man Qasis Al Quran, nazran-i-Aqeedat, Tafaseer, and Baserat etc., were presented from 1980 to 1988. These programmes were recorded under strict censorship and previewing policies.¹¹

Fourth category of the current affairs programmes was projection of Islamic arts and crafts. Islami Khatati was example of these programmes. Muslim authors, handicrafts, construction code and ways of living were major topics of this series. Indeed, this was a overt attempt to Islamize people and make them cognizant to the Islamic culture and value system.

In 1984, a research based programme came to the silver screen with pure academic spirit. It was weekly Tehqeeq. The producers hired researchers from private sector to get standard researches for this programme. The theme of this series was to clarify various ambiguities about Islam. The Ulema often

emphasized on research to know about the facts of Islam. Therefore, this programme got popularity in the religious circles.

Special documentaries were assigned to the Current affairs Division during Zia period. Documentary on Islam was one of the master pieces of production of that period. This ushered a new series of documentary programmes on Islam. Special documentaries on Afghanistan caught attention of all producers to get praise and promotion.

Gen. Zia ordered to provide coverage to all Islamic events and conferences. The leaders of the Muslim countries were given special attention which was due to the government pressure. From 1980 to 1988, PTV Current Affairs had been busy in projection of these conferences which were, in normal days, just a news item because of their less important characteristics. Seminars on Islam were prevalent in the country due to perceived Islamization. PTV had covered more than 4 conferences/seminars through special OB units which was the expansive coverage during 1980's due to lack of satellite system. International Islamic Seminar, Hajj conference, inaugural, working days, and concluding sessions, Seraat Conferences, Islamic Science Conferences, Ulema Conferences, Women Seraat Conferences, OIC conferences, and local Elim-i-Quran conferences, Nafaz-i-Islam conferences had been broadcasted and given special attention on the orders of the I & B. During that period the Current Affairs Division presented coverage of the President and Islamic activities. While the issues which were hot and getting banner space of the newspapers remained neglected by PTV CA 9 Current Affairs).¹²

Records show that PTV CA remained busy in coverage of Gen. Zia and his Islamization mainly. Islamic Economic forum, delegations from the Muslim counties and their meetings, President's speeches at various forums and subsequent discussions in his favour had been recorded and broadcasted. Malis-i-Shura, and its proceedings were in routine work for CA staff.

Another category of the CA programmes was special events like Moharram and Ramzan Transmission. For the first time in PTV Shabeena Transmission was introduced in the last three days of Ramzan. Ramzan, Ramzan fi Alim, Tafaseer, daily programmes on importance of Ramzan had been regularly presented by PTV, Mehfil-i-Musalma and special programmes on Hazrat Hussain were broadcasted in the days of Moharram. During those ten days, another entertainment programmes were censored heavily to avoid songs and fast beat music.¹³

CA general programmes had also some imprint of the Islamization process. Hafta Rafta was the only programme to present Current national international affairs.

But the scripts show that Islamic notions were very much present there. The news of the Muslim countries and their developments and Pakistan's role in the Muslim world had been discussed in this weekly (after sometimes daily) programme. Light political topics were allowed which must had some content to justify Gen. Zia and his reforms. Nafaz-i-Islam and slogans to Islamize Pakistan were discussed in studio based programmes. The guests had been deeply scrutinized to avoid any moderate and anti-government guest which could defame PTV, the Director CA had been advised to discuss the list of participants for these discussions with MD and other higher authorities.

This was condition of PTV during Zia era which not only destroyed the credibility of PTV but also marred the professional skills of the working journalists and producers. It was easy to get approval of programme related to Islam or Islamization of Gen. Zia. Social and political issues were given least importance during the period of 8 years.

Conclusion:

PTV suffered a lot during Zia ear which has been considered an era of brutal censorship policies of PTV, Zia knew the public interest in the visual media because it was new and rare. People used to gather at shops or hotels to watch the programmes and drama. Therefore, every projection on PTV had deep impacts on the minds of people.

Gen. Zia endeavored to present a media which was Islamic and spokesman of the Ulema and his concept of Islamization. It had become duty of PTV to broadcast the Mushaikh conferences at any cost which marred whole professional spirit of the channel. There was no rival channel in the market at that moment otherwise PTV had lost its viewership quite earlier. PTV entertainment, the News and the Current Affairs were overburdened due to lack of resources and too much government pressure. Only the period of late MD, Aslam Azhar was a sign of relief for PTV because he opposed extra burden and censorship policy of TV. But till that, the Government policies had ruined the professional and creative skills of the producers and production teams. But still it is perceived as golden age of Pakistan Television because despite all these embargoes and censorship policies, the production standards were professional and artistic. Javeed Jabbar and Aslam Azhar beautifully produced many dramas against the government policies during 1987-88.

In overall analysis, Zia wanted to Islamzie PTV according to his vision for a Muslim state TV channel. But the outcome was not much encouraging from the professionals who condemned it. The Projections and special transmissions for Ulema and programmes made PTV a QTV like channel, whose policy was to project religious symbolism.

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