

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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TITLE: *Media as an Imperialist Arm: Radio and the Raj, 1927-47*

The endeavour in my thesis is to study how radio was installed and employed as an effective and significant arm of imperialist governance in the context of British rule over India. The power of the spoken word that could reach the illiterate masses of the sub-continent, made control over radio, vital for maintaining hold over the British Indian Empire. From a technological fancy, radio in India became an effective tool in the hands of colonialists in furthering their economic and political interests. They thus built up a highly centralised bureaucratic structure to manage radio. Radio functioned not as a popular media, as it did in other countries, but as a department of the British colonial government.

The government formulated policies, which placed the creative medium of broadcasting, into a straight-jacket of rules and regulations. The main factors influencing the official attitude during this period were the economic interests of the British Raj and their political and military requirements. Radio, like railroads, post and telegraphs, irrigation systems and similar projects were aimed essentially at meeting the immediate needs of the Empire. These were territorial expansion, consolidation of imperial authority and economic exploitation. The focus and the thrust of my research is primarily is to study this process by dwelling on official policy towards news and the other spoken word programmes, of a political nature.

Spread over nine chapters, the study emphasises how government control evolved in the period that ranged from the installation of the first radio stations at Bombay and Calcutta in 1927 until independence in 1947. At this time there were 14 radio stations of which nine were in British India, managed by All India Radio (Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Madras, Lucknow, Tiruchirapalli, Lahore, Peshawar

and Dacca) and five were run by princely states (Mysore, Baroda, Hyderabad, Aurangabad and Trivandrum).

The important findings of this pioneering study, which attempts a historical analysis of how the radio operated in India in the two last decades of colonialism, are summarized below:

1. Broadcasting in India was a government monopoly. There were spasmodic attempts at alternative broadcasting but these were short-lived and never a serious threat;
2. Radio was seen as the channel, which could hinder the progress of the nationalist sweep, by propagating the benefits for the Indian populace of being part of the British Empire.
3. The government of British India exercised an overall control over broadcasting, from Delhi, in spite of the so-called distribution of powers among central, provincial and local governments;
4. Inter-departmental linkages and structures, like advisory committees, and offices, like those of censor officers or special officers, helped in this exercise;
5. Propaganda and censorship over radio formed an integral part of imperial policy;
6. Radio was the chief publicity wing of the colonial government;
7. The publicity facet of early radio got converted into propaganda, during the Second World War.
8. The censorship that was imposed, and rigourously implemented, especially during the World War years, was mainly political;
9. All speakers were screened and their scripts 'vetted';
10. There was selective discrimination in the choice of programmes that were aired on radio. The British administration encouraged the sections that sided with it and disallowed Indian nationalist and patriotic sentiments to be expressed;
11. The other media, newspapers and films, especially in the regional languages, were largely left alone because it was difficult impossible to impose censorship in India with its multiplicity of languages. As a result newspapers and films often took the nationalist view; and
12. The External Services of AIR during the Second World War developed and expanded to propagate British imperial view and further their interests.