

Diffusion of television among the Muslim clergy: a case study of Pakistani Hanafi Thought

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Abstract

The present study analyzes the diffusion of television among the religious scholars of Pakistan, particularly the scholars of Hanafi Thought. Since its advent, television got animosity from the Muslims scholars of sub-continent. They considered television un-Islamic as it contained images which were disallowed in Islamic teachings. However, in the present times, many religious scholars are utilizing TV for promoting and preaching Islam. In Pakistan, scholars of Dawat-e-Islamy and Moulana Tariq Jameel (one of the leading scholar of Tablighi Jamat) have transformed their positions and are actively engaged in using TV for preaching. The huge audience following and market appreciation support that TV is a popular and the most feasible medium to promote Islamic teachings.

Key Words: Television, Preaching of Islam, Dawat-e-Islamy, Tablighi Jamat

Introduction

People's value system plays an important role in their cognitive and affective orientation towards other people, things, and practices. It channelizes individual's evaluation of other people and guides him/her in his/her actions.¹ Whereas religiosity has a positive relationship with what the person thinks about change, order and self-restriction.² Results of Schwartz and Huismans showed that religion discourages change and encourages social order.³ Hence, innovations are usually not welcomed by moralists and supporters of status quo because they consider the innovations as a potential threat to the existing social order of the society concerned. Essoo and Dibb in their study on 'religious influence on shopping behavior: an exploratory study' found that as compared to 'casually religious' respondents the 'devout' customers were more reluctant to adopt innovations.⁴

To thwart the diffusion of perceived negative innovations various propaganda devices particularly the techniques of name calling and card stacking are employed. In fact, the moralists and/ or supporters of status quo normally believe in the assumptions of moral panic theory and hence reject innovations and their adoption in the society. But it is a common observation that even then innovations of different kinds, including those which are initially strongly resisted are later on adopted in the society, and accordingly social and cultural changes occur.

As a matter of fact, religion and science are usually considered to be at odds. Religious scholars have found scientific claims about human evolution and inventions going against the dictates of religion. When Galileo claimed that the earth revolves around the sun, he was not only rejected by the Church but was also punished; his view was considered against the Christianity belief. The enlightenment period brought positive change about the adoption of technology in the Western world but situation in the Muslim world did not change that much.

Scientific development and technological inventions are mostly coming from the West; therefore Muslim always felt that these inventions are Christian trait. This modernism movement may have nothing to do with religion, but as it was coming from the Western world so Muslims were uncertain in adoption of these technological gadgets. Situation was most awful in those Muslim countries that were controlled by western colonial masters.⁵

The present study has been designed to find out that how television which was once viewed as a negative innovation by religious scholars, especially those belonging to Hanafi Thought, has got acceptance among them for their religious preaching and communicating their viewpoint.

Acceptance level of western technology among clergy in the Sub-continent

During the colonial rule in the Sub-continent, modern gadgetry was rejected due to its Western orientation. The Muslims of the Sub-continent were not ready to accept modern inventions because they thought that colonial power initiated these modern inventions just to prolong their rule and step astray the believers. For the same claim even the English language was not acknowledged. The religious leaders feared that society would be westernized by adopting their technologies and societal traits.⁶ Sir Syed Ahmad Khan realized the terrible condition and emphasized on the Muslims to pursue the contemporary knowledge and trends because it was need of the time.⁷

In the last two centuries, communication technologies have made huge advancements. In terms of media and communication in the Sub-continent, newspapers were introduced by the colonial masters in later half of eighteen

century. Newspaper and radio did not get too much opposition from the Muslim of India. However, the introduction of television medium due to its pictorial form was resisted by the Muslim scholars. They believed television as un-Islamic because it was containing pictures whereas according to their view making pictures was not permissible in the Islamic principles.⁸ The Muslims of Sub-continent feared that television would bring the western culture to their homes, so they rejected the use of television.

However, with the passage of time alternative perspective also emerged, which viewed television a good source of preaching and dissemination of the message of Islam. In fact, importance of media in general and that of television in particular in the contemporary world as a medium of communication and persuasion is something very great. Like other tools media can also be used for a good or bad purpose. Modern media can be used for educating the masses. In this study, focus is on the Hanafi School of thought that how a transformation occurs from being against the usage of TV to the modern-day practices where the scholars are increasingly using it.

Early Fatawa of Hanafi Scholars of Sub-continent about Picture and Television

Ahmad Raza khan Braelvi is acknowledged as the leading intellectual in Hanafi School of thought. A large population in the sub-continent follows the Raza khan fatawa on important issues. His book of fatawa named "*Fatawa Rizvia*" is an important source of knowledge about Islamic law for most of the Muslim scholars of contemporary time. By analyzing the *Fatawa Rizvia*, it is identified that image or snap is absolutely forbidden in Islam.⁹

Fatawa Rizvia explains that without any doubt the image or photograph of human creature is against the Islamic law, irrespective of its size-showing complete face or half of it. It also views that production of any image regarding human creature is forbidden in Islam. Imam Ahmad Raza wrote a complete book about the prohibition of image and photograph, which is named "*Tasveer Kay Shari Ahkam*". In "*Tasveer Kay Shari Ahkam*", Imam Ahmad Raza khan categorically described that taking image is absolutely forbidden.¹⁰¹¹ The Fatawa further elaborates that Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H) in the majority of his *Hadith* has prohibited producing pictures of all living creatures. Ahmad Raza has quoted a great quantity of *Hadith* of Holy Messenger (P.B.U.H) to support his position.

Hadith no.1: Prophet (P.B.U.H) stated that each visual artist will be in torture. Allah will inquire the visual artist on Judgment day, to produce a human creature firstly, which the artist has prepared via his paintings.¹²

Hadith no. 2: Prophet (P.B.U.H) said, visual artist will be in torment at the Judgment day.¹³

Hadith no. 3: Allah declares individuals who craft portrait, they attempt to copy mean they are the supreme of offenders.¹⁴

Hadith no.4: Persons who compose portrait will be chastised at the doomsday and will be called to put the spirit in these snaps.¹⁵

Hadith no. 5: People who form images will be penalized except they put the soul in their images, which they can't.¹⁶

Hadith no. 6: Hazrat Ayesha report that Holy Prophet was on expedition, during the absence; I brought a curtain which had a snap. The expression on the visage of Messenger (P.B.U.H) altered and refused to enter into the home. I inquired over the cause; Holy Messenger threw that curtain and reacted that people who craft photograph will be charged severe suffering on doomsday.¹⁷

In his Fatawa, Raza khan mentioned twenty-seven Hadith which reveal that there is no place for making or taking picture in Islam, and picture maker will be penalized on the reckoning day.

Moulana Muhammad Shaffi, another renowned religious scholar of the Hanafi School of thought, viewed that image in Islamic law is illegitimate.¹⁸ Muhammad Shaffi, while quoting almost an identical Hadith like the one referred to by Raza khan Braelvi, he tremendously affirmed that production of image is against the Islamic law.

Another distinguished Islamic scholar, Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi also holds an identical narrative about television and picture. An individual asked the Moulana *"currently a movie connected to Hajj is being shown in Amritsar by a movie company. What is your view regarding this movie whether watching this movie is permissible or not, while it includes no non-Islamic content? Purely the Islamic places have been shown in that movie, so what is your opinion about watching such films which contains only Islamic contents connected to Hajj"* (Thanvi, 2010). By response to the query, Thanvi clarified that despite the fact that this movie includes the Holly image but still watching such movies is against the Islamic teachings, because it contains image which is illegal in religious teaching of Islamic Shariah. By elucidation this Moulana Thanvi affirmed that Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) wiped out that image of Messenger Abraham (P.B.U.H) which was painted in *Kaba*. Therefore on the basis of this happening, Thanvi further elaborated that portrait or movies of Holly places or Prophets is also illegitimate.¹⁹

Fatawa Raheemia of Mufti Abdul Raheem Lajpoury also elaborated about the use of television or motion picture. In his fatawa Mufti Lajpoury, was questioned that whether keeping television at house is allowable or forbidden in Islamic teaching, if the intention is only to attain information through news. What does

Islamic law says about it, if news is being presented by women? By means of responding the question, Mufti Lajpoury declared that television is a resource of vulgarity, at the same time it has song and picture of living creature, as a result watching television is entirely illicit in Islam. Mufti Lajpoury in addition said that the news or information can be attained through radio because it does not have picture, hence using television cannot be tolerable even for listening news.²⁰

Mufti Kifayatullah Dehlvi followed the footsteps of his predecessors, and supported their stance- *“television or movie is prohibited”*. He explained that as a majority of the community utilizes television for amusement, and although some of its contents are also sacred but even then usage of TV can never be tolerable on the basis that it includes sacred content.²¹

Mufti Mahmud the leading Hanafi mufti holds a similar opinion that watching television/visual medium even for spiritual or sacred content is un-Islamic. Movies are disallowed as by and large they endorse the culture of Europe, accordingly on behalf of this cause movies or seeing motion picture is not permitted in Shariah. By describing all these saying of Messenger, Mufti Mahmud wrapped up that production of image or placing image in house is forbidden in Islam. Likewise watching film of religious places is also not allowed. As a result television in its sagacity is forbidden in Islamic teaching consequently it cannot be approved for good purpose.²²

Tablighi Jamat and Dawat-e-Islamy

Islam stresses on preaching the message of Allah. Generally, preaching is explained as calling people to perform good action in all aspects of life and it is not merely inviting people to convert into Islam, but more focus is on human development as a result that they will be capable to execute their responsibilities. The main spirit of both the Tablighi Jamat and Dawat-e-Islamy is to promote the message of *“Amr bil Maruf wa Nahy an al Munkar”*.

These two parties selected for the present study because both Tablighi Jamat and Dawat-e-Islamy are non-political parties, both are non-violent and both concentrate only on the work of Dawah. Both these parties follow the opinion of the Hanafi Islamic scholars on almost every issue. On the issue of use of television both follow their respected religious scholars which are stated above. In the next section the researcher have examined that what was their initial stance on the use of television for the preaching purpose and how they are now shifting from their original opinion.

Moulana Tariq Jameel Making Use of Television for Dawah

The movement of Tablighi Jamat started in 1926 from India. Tablighi Jamat is an Islamic religious movement based on the principle of the "Work of the Prophets" inviting to Allah in the manner of Prophet Mohammad.²³²⁴ Tablighi Jamat founder, Moulana Muhammad Ilyas, completed education from the Deoband School (Madrassa) in 1910 and, started work of Dawah between the Muslim of Mewat India (just south of Delhi). Moulana Ilyas eventually determined that "only through physical movement away from one's place could one leave behind one's esteem for life and its comforts for the cause of God." Moulana Ilyas was convinced that Dawah should be the liability of each and every individual Muslim.²⁵

Tablighi Jamat never sanctioned the make utilize of television for the intention of dissemination the message or preaching of Islam. Tablighi cleric always preferred to use interpersonal communication or face to face communication to spread their message.²⁶²⁷ Group communication is also a technique which is used by Tablighi Jamat. One thing is important that still entire Tablighi Jamat does not admire the use of television; only few individuals in their personal capacities are using television for preaching purpose.²⁸²⁹ The prominent personality of Tablighi Jamat which seems to be quite convinced for using television is Moulana Tariq Jameel.

Initially Moulana Tariq Jameel was convinced not to use the television for preaching purpose. In past Moulana Tariq Jameel did not record his lecture for Television viewers, he preferred to communicate people face to face. The real change in his opinion took place in the past few years. Since 2015, in the month of Ramzan, television industry persuaded Moulana Jameel to utilize TV for Dawah purpose by telecasting his speeches. Tariq Jameel permitted the television producer to situate their camcorder in mosque to capture his sermons. His missionary sermons were frequently telecasted from various Television channels. The state-run television channel of state (Pakistan Television) also airs his sermons very frequently.

Moulana Tariq Jameel in one of his lectures, which was telecast by PTV, accepted the influence of television. In the lecture he said that "*I did not obtain a single coinage from any broadcaster, my only rationale was just to increase my message to all parts of the Pakistan and rest of the world. This is only possible by using the electronic media particularly television. For this particular intention, I favored to broadcast my speeches. I collected a number of telephone calls from peculiar people which are inspired of my sermons. I received a telephonic call from a Christian young woman who endorsed to Islam by virtue of my sermon. That is the sole logic for which I approved the electronic media to broadcast my speeches*".³⁰ This wording of Tariq Jameel obviously depicts that the significance of television convinced him to modify his initial position regarding utilization of television. One thing must be remembered that Tablighi Jamat as a party never appreciated the use of TV for Islamic Dawah purpose,

merely few personality from Tablighi Jamat have approved TV for Dawah purposes.

Dawat-e-Islamy Makes Use of Television for Preaching

Dawat-e-Islamy is also a non-political faction like Tablighi Jamat. Scholars of Dawat-e-Islamy also focus on the work of “*Amr bil Maruf wa Nahy an al Munkar*”.³¹ The movement of Dawat-e-Islamy started in 1980. Scholars of Dawat-e-Islamy firmly take guidance from the Fatawa of Raza Khan Brailvi who called television as source of vulgarity.³² Initially Dawat-e-Islamy scholars were against the use of television but later they altered their stance and not only they used TV box for broadcasting their message but additionally started their own TV channel, Noor Madinah Network.

Muhammad Ilyas Qadri, initiator of Dawat-e-Islamy, in previous sermons was having a different stance regarding television usage, according to previous stance of Qadri, television is categorically banned furthermore TV set should not be positioned at home. In one of his early Books “*TV Kee Tabakarian*” Moulana Ilyas Qadri described numerous unpleasant incident regarding the harm of television. In the similar book Ilyas Qadri also counted quantity of physically harms which are connected with TV rays, which possibly will cause severe damage to body parts of human being.³³³⁴ Ilyas Qadri furthermore said that “*Television produces free radicals which produce cancer, heart diseases, joint problems and mental illness*”. Moulana Muhammad Ilyas further said that television weakens the brain cell which amount to number of disease. In the same book Moulana Muhammad Ilyas further ruled out that television should be thrown out from the home as quickly as possible.³⁵

After few years, the Dawat-e-Islamy launched its own Television channel for preaching purpose with the name of “*Madni Channel*”. Consequently along with traditional preaching technique Dawat-e-Islamy is using television as source for spreading their messages. Dawat-e-Islamy not only has television channel but also running their preaching program through their web site. The channel of Dawat-e-Islamy started in September 2007 and its program are being telecasted in Urdu, Bangla, and English. The sermons of Moulana Muhammad Ilyas Qadri are almost telecasted daily on “*Madni Channel*”. Ilyas Qadri is now so convinced about the use of television that he guides his follower to see the *Madni Channel*, he also asks his followers to place the television at home and tune the *Madni Channel*. Dawat-e-Islamy is now a day’s making full use of the electronic media just to disseminate their message. Along with television they are using all other newly available resources to disseminate their message.

Discussion

Electronic media is one of the vital inventions as it has turned the world into a global village. Among electronic media devices television has central position and its role in the society can never be ignored. Television at present is an important element of the family unit, almost another member of the family.³⁶

From the above discussion it is apparent that Muslims scholars seem to be quite convinced that television can be used for good and bad purposes. This stance is quite different from the previous stance where they believed that television is totally prohibited and hence cannot be used for preaching purpose. The contemporary Muslim scholars seem to be quite persuaded that television can be used for preaching purpose. Television in itself is not a bad or good, it is the content of the television that make it bad or good. It looks to be enough reason which molded them to use this technology to disseminate their message. Dr. Zakir Naik prominent Indian Muslim scholar, explained the use of television for the Dawah purpose, he said that television is just like a knife, with knife you may cut the apple and even you may murder somebody. Similarly television is like knife, if it is disseminating a positive message, it is the positive use of television, and if it is disseminating a negative message it is just like the murdering somebody. Television in itself is not good or bad. It is the content of the Television which makes it good or bad.

It seems quite evident that the initial stances of the religious scholars of Dawat-e-Islami and Moulana Tariq Jameel were not in favor of the television, but with passage of time the utility of television has encouraged them to reconsider their initial opinions. Now, both are making full use of television for Dawah activities. For the work of Dawah two names are quite prominent in our region which made use of television for their Dawah work. Ahmad Deedat, leading South African scholar became the known personality among the Muslim world through his video lectures. Similarly, another prominent personality Dr. Zakir Naik became the popular personality throughout the world through his "*Peace television*". He made a prominent and effective contribution in effecting the youngsters.

It looks quite obvious that mushroom growth of private television channels certainly affected the opinion of religious scholar. On the other side, it looks that this opinion was not molded suddenly but it took good amount of time to opt for this change. Therefore, it is concluded that the magnetic power of television has forced the religious scholars to change their traditional stance. The traditional method of Islamic Dawah, through interpersonal communication method can never be adequate to spread the message of Islam. George Gerbner many years back admired the power of television. His research work depicted that common man do not spend as much time with any other person as he spends with television. From the childhood to old age, most time is spent with television. From his work it looks as television has become the essential member of the family. Modern scholars do believe that contemporary electronic media has

developed in to a useful weapon in contemporary time. Therefore, it is very sensible to make use of this weapon in the current era to promote their message.

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