

the force.

All this happened and nobody did a thing. It was as though everyone was in a trance. My father said people had been seduced by Fazlullah. Some joined his men, thinking they would have better lives. My father tried to counter their propaganda but it was hard. 'I have no militants and no FM radio,' he joked. He even dared to enter the Radio Mullah's own village one day to speak at a school. He crossed the river in one of the metal boxes suspended from a pulley that we use as makeshift bridges. On the way he saw smoke so high it touched the clouds, the blackest smoke he'd ever seen. At first he thought it might be a brick factory, but as he approached he saw bearded figures in turbans burning TVs and computers.

In the school my father told the people, 'I saw your villagers burning these things. Don't you realise the only ones who will profit are the companies in Japan, who will just make more?'

Someone came up to him and whispered, 'Don't speak any more in this way – it's risky.'

Meanwhile the authorities, like most people, did nothing.

It felt as though the whole country was going mad. The rest of Pakistan was preoccupied with something else – the Taliban had moved right into the heart of our nation's capital, Islamabad. We saw pictures on the news of what people were calling the Burqa Brigade – young women and girls like us in burqas with sticks, attacking CD and DVD shops in bazaars in the centre of Islamabad.

The women were from Jamia Hafsa, the biggest female madrasa in our country and part of Lal Masjid – the Red Mosque in Islamabad. It was built in 1965 and got its name from its red walls. It's just a few blocks from parliament and the headquarters of ISI, and many government officials and military used to pray there. The mosque has two madrasas, one for girls and one for boys, which had been used for years to recruit and train volunteers to fight in Afghanistan and Kashmir. It was run by two brothers, Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid, and had become a centre for spreading propaganda about bin Laden whom Abdul Rashid had met in Kandahar when visiting Mullah Omar. The brothers were famed for their fiery sermons and attracted thousands of worshippers, particularly after 9/11. When President Musharraf agreed to help America in the 'War on Terror', the mosque broke off its long links with the military and became a centre of protest against the government. Abdul Rashid was even accused of being part of a plot to blow up Musharraf's convoy in Rawalpindi in December 2003. Investigators said the explosives used had been stored in Lal Masjid. But a few months later he was cleared.

When Musharraf sent troops into the FATA, starting with Waziristan in 2004, the brothers led a campaign declaring the military action un-Islamic. They had their own website and pirate FM station on which they broadcast, just like Fazlullah.

Around the same time as our Taliban were emerging in Swat, the girls of the Red Mosque madrasa began terrorising the streets of Islamabad. They raided houses they claimed were being used as massage centres, they kidnapped women they said were prostitutes and closed down DVD shops, again making bonfires of CDs and DVDs. When it suits the Taliban, women can be vocal and visible. The head of the madrasa was Umme Hassan, the wife of the elder brother, Abdul Aziz, and she even boasted that she had trained many of her girls to become suicide bombers. The mosque also set up its own courts to dispense Islamic justice, saying the state had failed. Their militants kidnapped policemen and ransacked government buildings.

The Musharraf government didn't seem to know what to do. This was perhaps because the military had been so attached to the mosque. But by the middle of 2007 the situation was so bad that people