

AMONG THE BELIEVERS

Directed by: Hemal Trivedi, Mohammed Ali Naqvi
Produced by: Jonathan Goodman Levitt, Hemal Trivedi
Written by: Jonathan Goodman Levitt

84 min / English and Urdu / 2015 / Color / Pakistan / USA / Digital



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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Logline

Among the Believers charts the personal quest of a firebrand Pakistani cleric whose schools are training thousands of children to take part in jihad (holy war).

Short Synopsis

Firebrand cleric Abdul Aziz Ghazi, an ISIS supporter and Taliban ally, is waging jihad against the Pakistani government with the aim of imposing Shariah law. His primary weapon is his expanding network of Islamic seminaries for children as young as four. Among the Believers follows Aziz's personal quest, and charts the lives of two of his teenage students who are pawns in his ideological war.

Synopsis

Charismatic cleric Abdul Aziz Ghazi, an ISIS supporter and Taliban ally, is waging jihad against the Pakistani state. His dream is to impose a strict version of Shariah law throughout the country, as a model for the world. A flashpoint in Aziz's holy war took place in 2007, when the government leveled his flagship mosque to the ground, killing his mother, brother, only son and 150 students. With unprecedented access, Among the Believers follows Aziz on his very personal quest to create an Islamic utopia, during the bloodiest period in Pakistan's modern history.

The film also follows the lives of two teenage students who have attended madrassahs (Islamic seminaries) run by Aziz's Red Mosque network. Throughout the film, their paths diverge: Talha, 12, detaches from his moderate Muslim family and decides to become a jihadi preacher. Zarina, also 12, escapes her madrassah and joins a regular school. Over the next few years, Zarina's education is threatened by frequent Taliban attacks on schools like her own.

Aziz's foil is nuclear physicist and leading educational activist Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy. He passionately opposes Aziz through his public appearances, lectures, and the media. Opposition against Aziz comes to a head in December, 2014, when Aziz insults a grieving nation by trying to justify the brutal massacre of 132 school children in Peshawar by the Taliban. The attack ignites a movement to end extremism in Pakistan's mosques and madrassahs. Led by Hoodbhoy and others, Pakistan's moderate majority focuses on Aziz and calls for his arrest.

Intimate and shocking, Among the Believers offers rare insights into the ideological battles shaping Pakistan and the Muslim world.

Directors' Statements

Upon losing a friend in the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008, I sought to understand the root cause of these attacks that were carried out from Pakistan. After careful study, I realized that ordinary Pakistanis are themselves victims rather than perpetrators. The same extremist elements who carried out the attacks in Mumbai are actually terrorizing their own people on a daily basis, and the country's very survival is at stake. I started filming in Pakistan in 2009. In 2010 I collaborated with producer Jonathan Goodman Levitt and Pakistani filmmaker Mohammed Ali Naqvi, and together we have been filming this ideological conflict that is ripping the country apart and causing it to implode.

- *Hemal Trivedi*

Growing up in Pakistan, I witnessed the burgeoning influence of militant Islam, one which violently silenced dissenting opinion from progressive Muslims. When I got the opportunity to work on *Among The Believers*, it was a chance to not only expose the rhetoric of militant Islam, but also highlight the progressive Muslim forces trying desperately to fight militancy. During the course of filming, we gained unprecedented access to Abdul Aziz, the Taliban's main spokesperson, and documented his growing influence over four years.

- *Mohammed Naqvi*

Filmmaking Team Biographies

Director/Producer/Editor Hemal Trivedi:

Hemal is a Mumbai and New York City based documentary films' editor / director for over a decade. Her credits include: Outlawed in Pakistan (Editor, Emmy-2014, PBS-Frontline, Sundance); Saving Face (Editor, Oscar-2012, Two Emmys-2013, HBO/Channel 4); Shabeena's Quest (Director/Editor, Witness, Al Jazeera); Flying on One Engine (Editor, SXSW, IDFA); Laughter (Editor, BBC); When the Drum is Beating (Editor, ITVS, Tribeca 2011); and Beyond Mumbai (Director, Camera & Editor, OWN, 2011 Webby nomination). She has produced and edited over 50 award-winning shorts for Odyssey Networks.

Director Mohammed Naqvi:

Emmy-winning filmmaker Mohammed is also a fellow of the National Endowment of the Arts and American Film Institute's Project 20:20 program. In addition, his work has received numerous awards including the Amnesty Human Rights Award, the United Nations Association Festival Grand Jury Award, and has been showcased at the Museum of Modern Art.

Documentary credits include: Shame (Showtime), Pakistan's Hidden Shame (Channel 4), Shabeena's Quest (Al-Jazeera), and Terror's Children (Discovery). Mohammed has produced two narrative feature films, Big River and I Will Avenge You Iago; starring Giancarlo Esposito and Larry Pine, recently directing narrative short Happy Things in Sorrow Times.

Producer/Writer Jonathan Goodman Levitt:

Jonathan's work as director and/or producer has been supported by broadcasters including BBC, PBS, NHK-Japan and over a dozen other broadcasters. His latest directing project FOLLOW THE LEADER was featured on C-Span, CNN & Fox; released by Angelika Film Center, PBS stations & Cinedigm; and was the only documentary to premiere during both the 2012 Republican and Democratic national conventions. His first feature SUNNY INTERVALS AND SHOWERS (Director, Producer, Editor, Camera, 2003) screened at Festivals including Sheffield, Chicago and One World; aired as part of the BBC Storyville documentary strand; and was nominated for Grierson (British Documentary) and Mental Health Media Awards. An equal Producer of AMONG THE BELIEVERS, Jonathan's company Changeworx's productions are currently being supported by funders including Ford Foundation, Sundance Documentary Fund, TriBeCa Film Institute, and Center for Asian American Media. Jonathan's other personal credits include roles on a film about North Face founder Doug Tompkin's Chilean conservation work; BEING BEBE, a decade-long project about performance in every day life featuring Cameroonian drag queen Bebe Zahara Benet; and a Best Documentary Emmy-winner with Stephen Fry. After studying social psychology, political philosophy, and painting at Stanford, Jonathan was a Fulbright Scholar studying at the UK's National Film School (NFTS) in 1999. He has been based in Brooklyn since 2008.

Executive Producer Whitney Dow:

Dow's credits include Two Towns of Jasper (Sundance, P.O.V) and the Beacon Award winning I Sit Where I Want: The Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education. He has worked extensively in Haiti since where he directed two films: Unfinished Country (Wide Angle), and When the Drum is Beating, (Tribeca, Independent Lens.) His producer credits include Freedom Summer, Banished: How Whites Drove Blacks

Out of Town in America, (Sundance, Independent Lens), The Undocumented (Independent Lens) and Toots (Tribeca, Theatrical) In addition to screening at numerous international film festivals and being broadcast on television networks around the world, Dow's work has been exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA, and the Smithsonian Institution. He is the recipient of the George Foster Peabody Award, Alfred I. duPont Award, Anthony Radziwill Documentary Achievement Award, and the Duke University Center for Documentary Studies Filmmaker Award as well as many film festival honors. He is currently in production on the Whiteness Project, and Bright Lights, Dark Minds, a series on mental illness.

Consulting Editor David Zieff:

David Zieff has been crafting documentaries, feature films and television for three decades, working in music, comedy and sociopolitical arenas, occasionally at the same time. Zieff recently directed and edited McConkey, a documentary about the legendary extreme-skier Shane McConkey which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. He also edited the Tribeca-opening, Time Is Illmatic, about rap icon NAS' landmark debut album, and Alive Inside, an exploration of music and memory that won the 2014 Sundance Audience Award. He edited and produced the critically-acclaimed Paul Williams Still Alive, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival, as well Sundance nominees Crazy Love, winner of Best Documentary at the Independent Spirit Awards, Happy Valley, Amir Bar-Lev's exploration of the Penn State scandal, and ESPN's Winning Time: Reggie Miller vs. The New York Knicks. He was also a creative consultant on the Oscar-winning documentary The Cove, won a coveted Peabody Award for the documentary mini-series Black Magic and was supervising editor of the multiple-award-winning Metallica: Some Kind of Monster, shaping over 1,600 hours of footage into one of the most celebrated music films of all time. He recently served as a creative advisor in the Sundance Institute's Documentary Edit & Story Lab and is currently teaching at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.

Composer Milind Date:

Milind Date is one of the most versatile musicians from India. He is known for his immaculate Bansuri (bamboo flute) playing and composing. Milind is a senior performing disciple of world-famous Bansuri virtuoso Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia. With more than 3,000 performances to his credit, Milind has vast experience of performing on various stages and for varied size of audience ranging from 20-30 to 50,000. Not only has Milind studied Indian classical and folk music; he has studied and featured in different styles of music from all over the world. Indian Classical Music, Indian Folk Music, Devotional Music, Jazz, Blues, Rock, Fusion-World Music, and Free Music are the common types in which he is seen performing and recording. An accomplished, versatile composer and arranger, Milind has experimented with several music and dance forms, as showcased in his band Fusion Ensemble. This experimental trait has led him to incorporate various dance forms and instruments and perform with several musicians from around the world. Milind has composed music for several short films and documentaries too. One of these documentaries was on The Dalai Lama and other one on Dr. Shardchandra Dicksheet the well-known Plastic Surgeon. These films were shown in many, many film festivals all over the world.

Co-Producer Naziha Syed Ali:

Naziha Syed Ali is based in Karachi, Pakistan and has been a journalist for nearly 25 years. For most of this time, she has worked in the print media both as editor and investigative reporter, focusing on stories about human rights violations, urban crime/land issues and religious extremism. Ms. Ali was assistant editor at Newline magazine for several years, during which time she won an award for best

coverage of violence against women for her story about honour killing. She is one of very few Pakistani women journalists to have travelled to Kabul, Afghanistan and reported from there when it was ruled by the Taliban.

As a TV journalist, Ms. Ali has worked as a stringer in Pakistan for Channel Four News (UK) and produced a number of documentaries that have been screened on local television channels as well as at various international film festivals. Among these documentaries is the very well-received Miseducation of Pakistan, a shocking expose of government education in her country.

An activist for interfaith harmony and democratic rights, Ms. Ali is an IVLP alumni and Chevening Scholar. She has master's degrees in English literature and TV journalism and is currently assistant editor at Dawn, Pakistan's most widely read English newspaper.

Co-Producer Syed Musharraf Shah:

Syed Musharraf Shah has been a freelance field producer and stringer in Pakistan for the past 7 years. He has worked with various national and international film crews, including BBC and Channel 4 to help them with location scouting and figuring out logistics in Pakistan. Skilled in helping film crews gain access into communities that are hard to reach, he was Field Producer for a Channel 4 documentary, Pakistan's Streets of Shame. The film premiered at Sheffield Doc Fest and several other documentary film festivals, and has won several awards. He has also worked as a Field Producer for Mohammed Ali Naqvi's film Happy Things In Sorrow Times, inspired by best-selling author Tehmina Durrani's book of the same name.

His family is spread out in the tribal areas of Afghanistan, the tribal areas of Pakistan, Swat Valley (hometown of the recent Noble Laureate, Malala Yousafzai) and Peshawar. He is fluent in Pashtu and Urdu. He was instrumental in gaining access to Maulana Abdul Aziz Ghazi for Among the Believers.

Assistant Editor/Assistant Producer Hina Ali:

Hina Ali is a young journalist from Pakistan. A recent recipient of a Fulbright scholarship, she has worked with Oscar winning documentary filmmaker Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy and BBC Media Action in Pakistan. She has eight years experience in broadcast journalism. She has studied journalism and documentary production from Arizona State University and University of Karachi.

Post Production Coordinator/Assistant Editor Chris McCue:

Chris McCue has worked in independent documentary films for eight years. McCue first worked with Maysles Films for six years, first as Office Manager then Assistant Editor/Archivist. He was Post Supervisor on Muhammad and Larry (2009) and Associate Producer on The Love We Make (2011). After a spell living in beautiful Austin, Texas, he has returned to New York working as a freelance Editor and Assistant Editor. He writes mystery novels under the pen name Richard H. North.

Cameraman Haider Ali:

Haider Ali is a Pakistan-based shooter with over sixteen years of experience, ranging from documentaries, news, studio based talk shows, corporate videos, TV dramas, and short fiction films. International clients and broadcasters include ITV, Channel 4, Al-Jazeera World, BBC, CNN, CNBC Pakistan, Clover Films UK, and 64th Street Media New York. Haider has worked with Emmy-winning

Directors Mohammed Naqvi and Hemal Tridevi, BAFTA-nominee and Emmy-winning producer Jamie Doran, and Sundance-winning producer Jared Ian Goldman. In addition to having shot extensively all over Pakistan, Haider also teaches cinematography and media science at Iqra University and Women Media Center. Haider is certified in hostile environment and first aid training, and has experience filming in high-conflict and war zones.

Archival/Researcher Mohammed Ali Sheikh:

Mohammed Ali Sheikh has been making documentary films since the age of 17, and now ten years on, he has been part of some groundbreaking documentaries, including *Outlawed in Pakistan* by Hilke Schellman and Habiba Nausheen, for which he won an Emmy award in the research category in 2014. Ali has in the past worked with numerous pioneering directors and NGO's including Academy Award winner Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, UNDP, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Vice and Charter for compassion. Together, they have managed to bring to the screen, stories of marginalized people, while creating dialogue over social issues. Ali endeavors to use the power of film making to raise awareness about those who the world has forgotten.

Press

[THE NATION \(PAKISTAN\)](#)

These "...are very real issues in Pakistan that need to be urgently addressed. Maulana Abdul Aziz and his supporters in the Lal Masjid continue to operate unimpeded despite their unrepentant support for militancy and terror. "

[THE NEWS INTERNATIONAL](#)

"Pakistan is witnessing worrying new policies and practices that can have serious consequences on freedom of expression and safety of media in the country" - Pakistan Press Freedom Report

[DAWN NEWS](#)

Our director Mohammed Ali Naqvi told Dawn that the ban "...is deeply distressing for me, because the film has been screened in 20 countries, and I wanted to screen it in my home country."

[CHATHAM HOUSE](#)

Listen to the directors discuss the making of "Among the Believers."

[THE NATION \(PAKISTAN\)](#)

"The tone of the film is a world away from hate-fueled infotainment, or being 'anti-state', as the government puts it. If by negative image, they mean the documentary shows the grave reality of the deadly influence of radical minds on the young, then it is time to see this reality." - The Nation (Pakistan)

[PAKISTAN VIEWS](#)

Our director Mo Naqvi told Pakistan Views, "Aside from following Maulana Abdul Aziz and his Lal Masjid network for five years, the film features the stories of Pakistanis that have never been shared before....Our team has taken immense risks to feature these voices to effect change in our country. "

[PAKISTAN TODAY](#)

"The ban raises serious questions about how far the state will go in its quest to insulate itself from criticism."

[THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE](#)

Director Anum Abbas of Islamabad's Face Film Festival, said of Among the Believers: "It is an excellent documentary that shows all sides of the picture but unfortunately, it has been banned"

[THE NEWS INTERNATIONAL](#)

"While the film has been lauded for its eye-opening narrative that gives an insight on the religious and ideological battles that prevail in Pakistan world over, local government has banned the film " -

[FORBES](#)

"Having been filmed over the course of five precarious years, Among The Believers follows the infamous Pakistani cleric and ISIS supporter, Abdul Aziz Ghazi, in light of a country on the precipice of acute religiosity and rising sectarian violence."

[GAZETTE XTRA](#)

"One of the best documentary films I've ever seen" - Rod Beaudoin, Beloit International Film Festival

[THE RANSOM NOTE](#)

"The whole film is a complete eye-opener to the sheer scale and impact that radical ideologies impact the lives of young children and how they shape Pakistan today."

[FLUX MAGAZINE](#)

"By turns stirring and horrifying, this fascinating film should be seen by all."

[INSIGHT ON CONFLICT](#)

"Trivedi and Naqvi are contributing to a vital conversation about Pakistan and the forces shaping it and the Muslim world."

[EURO NEWS](#)

"These are the type of films we watch and which stimulate high-quality debates afterwards."

[GORILLA FILMS](#)

"Among the Believers' offers an unusually intimate window into the world of radical Islam."

[AM NEW YORK](#)

"A superb documentary that offers an unfettered look at life inside and surrounding the extremist Red Mosque madrassa system... at once deeply scary when it comes to what it may presage about the future, and thoroughly enlightening." - AM New York

[BBC'S OWEN GLEIBERMAN](#)

"I found it alarming, but most of all I found it illuminating."

[THE TRIBUNE \(INDIA\)](#)

"...hailed for its even-handed tone and its balanced unbiased perspective."

[NON-RESIDENT INDIAN](#)

"An unbelievably powerful and informative insight into a war on education between Pakistan's secular government and religious extremists."

[BRANDSYNARIO](#)

"Directors Hemal Trivedi and Mohammed Ali Naqvi, from India and Pakistan, came together to create what might just be the biggest and the most important films of the year." - Rida Sadiq

[Review](#)

[THE DAILY BEAST](#)

"[...] an eye-opening behind the scenes portrait of the Red Mosque."

- Marlow Stern

[Review](#), [Interview](#)

[ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY - 12 MUST-SEE PREMIERES AT TRIBECA](#)

"Among the Believers might also qualify as Tribeca's scariest film this year. Boasting incredible access, directors Hemal Trivedi and Mohammed Ali Naqvi are invited into Red Mosque."

[Interview](#)

[FILM-FORWARD](#)

“Though the directors don’t shy away from describing the pain wrought by the Red Mosque... they also provide a look at Pakistanis fighting to pull their country back from the disturbing path it’s gone down.”

[Review](#)

[FLAVORPILL](#)

“Their film unveils the pressing ideological clash between moderate and fundamentalist Muslims, a divide plaguing much of the Muslim world.”

[FLAVORWIRE](#)

“Filmmakers Mohammed Naqvi and Hemal Trivedi are granted extraordinary access to the Red Mosque madrasa network, which teaches its young pupils to learn the Quran and then die for it. The film doesn’t scrimp on the scary details, though some hope is offered in the counterpoint of one poor educator trying to build and run a real school, and the stories of those who are speaking out against the system. A remarkable peek.”

One of the "Best of 2015 Tribeca Film Festival"

[INDIA ABROAD](#)

“One of 2015’s most important films” — Aseem Chhabra

[INDIEWIRE](#)

“This expose of schools teaching religious extremism in Pakistan is both infuriating and remarkable for the degree of access obtained by the trenchant filmmakers.” – Casey Cipriani, Indiewire

[METRO NY](#)

“The kind of film that’s actually useful in the debate about terrorism.” – 14 terrific films to see at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival, Metro NY

[THE TIMES OF INDIA - "FASCIST IDEOLOGY IS A RECIPE FOR CIVIL WAR"](#)

“...showcases an up close and personal narrative”

[Interview](#)

Tom Brook discusses the festival with BBC Culture film critic Owen Gleiberman and Aisha Harris, culture writer for Slate. [Full article here.](#)

Directors Hemal Trivedi and Mohammed Ali Naqvi speak with the BBC about the political divide in Pakistan. [Full article here.](#)

Director Mohammed Ali Naqvi speaks with the BBC Asian Network about radicalization in Pakistan. [Full video here.](#)

Director Hemal Trivedi speaks with IndieWire about the premiere of "Among the Believers" at Tribeca Film Festival. [Full article here.](#)

Honors

WINNER

ALBA Human Rights Film Fest – Best Feature
Beloit International Film Festival – Power of Film Award
Chagrin Documentary Film Festival – Best of Fest
CPH:DOX – F:ACT Award
Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH) - Grand Prix
Hollywood Film Festival – Best Feature Documentary
Human Rights Film Festival's Amnesty International Award
Oaxaca International FilmFest – Best International Documentary
SOMA Film Festival – Best Directors
Tasveer Seattle South Asian Film Festival – Audience Choice

NOMINEE

Asia Pacific Screen Awards – Best Documentary
Film Independent Spirit Award – Truer than Fiction Award
International Film Festival of India – UNESCO/FELLINI Prize

FESTIVALS

AFI Docs – Official Selection
BEST.DOKS/Human Rights Watch Festival, Munich – Official Selection
Cinema St. Louis – Official Selection
DMZDocs – Official Selection
FIFDH (International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights) - Official Selection
Heartland Film Festival – Official Selection
Human Rights Watch Film Festival - Official Selection
Human Rights/Human Wrongs Documentary Film Festival, Oslo - Official Selection
IDFA – Official Selection
Miami South Asian Film Festival – Official Selection
Middlebury New Filmmakers Festival - Official Selection
Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival – Official Selection
SOMA Film Festival – Official Selection
Stockholm Film Festival – Official Selection
Stranger than Fiction Series - Official Selection
Sydney Film Festival – Official Selection
Tallgrass Film Festival – Official Selection
Tribeca International Film Festival – Premiere
Vancouver International Film Festival – Official Selection