

Democracy has failed.
Dictators have failed.
Now there is a vacuum.

Someone's got to fill it.

AMONG THE BELIEVERS

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.

Official website

amongthebelieversfilm.com

Press Contact

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Presented and Produced by Changeworx and Manjusha Films

changeworx.com

manjushafilms.com

84 minutes, USA/Pakistan

Film Summary

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

Producer/Director Hemal Trivedi

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 by Pakistanis. 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.

Director Mohammed Ali Naqvi

Like many of the children in our film, reading the Quran was compulsory for me growing up in a religiously conservative Pakistan. And like them, I could read the script and sound out the words, but I had absolutely no idea what I was reading. What I knew of Islam was filtered through maulanas (clerics), and I found their teachings limited and shallow. Ultimately, as a reactionary stance to the ideological force-feeding, I compartmentalized my religious upbringing and made my way to the U.S. for college. It wasn't until I moved to New York right after college – and personally witnessed the 9/11 attacks – that was I forced to face my own religious narrative. Many of my films, for this reason, mirror my own spiritual quest. *Among the Believers*, for me, will always represent my path to reconnecting with God and a faith that I had abandoned long ago.



Filmmaker Biographies



Producer/Director/Editor Hemal Trivedi

Hemal has been a Mumbai and New York City-based documentary film 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 Ali Naqvi

Living between Pakistan and New York, Emmy-winning filmmaker Mohammed is a fellow of the National Endowment for the Arts and American Film Institute's Project 20:20 program. His work has received numerous awards, including the Amnesty Human Rights Award and the United Nations Association Festival Grand Jury Award, and has been showcased at the Museum of Modern Art. His documentary credits include *Shame* (Showtime-Toronto, IDFA, Tribeca), *Pakistan's Hidden Shame* (Channel 4, NHK, SVT, Sheffield, UNAFF), *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, and recently directed the narrative short *Happy Things in Sorrow Times*. Mohammed is also the founder of MuNan Pictures, an independent production house which has developed programming for Showtime, Channel 4, NHK, Al Jazeera, SVT, CNN, MTV, Current TV, New York Times Television, and has recently worked with Oprah Winfrey's Harpo Productions.



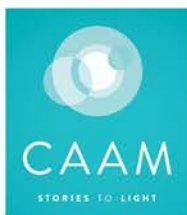
Producer/Writer Jonathan Goodman Levitt

Jonathan's films as director and/or producer have been supported by BBC, PBS, NHK Japan, and over a dozen other broadcasters. Personally or through his company Changeworx, he has worked on documentary features that follow people for multiple years on five different continents. Jonathan's latest directing project, *Follow the Leader*, was featured on C-Span, CNN and Fox; released by PBS stations and 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 multiple 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. Jonathan was a Fulbright Scholar at the UK's National Film School (NFTS) in 1999. He has been based in Brooklyn since 2008.

PRODUCED BY



SUPPORTERS



Among the Believers is a presentation of the Center for Asian American Media with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Credits

Changeworx USA and Manjusha Films present

A Changeworx USA and Manjusha Films production

Directed by: Hemal Trivedi and Mohammed Ali Naqvi

Produced by: Jonathan Goodman Levitt and Hemal Trivedi

Written by: Jonathan Goodman Levitt

Executive Producer: Whitney Dow

Co-Producers, Pakistan: Naziha Syed Ali, Syed Musharaf Shah

Assistant Producer/Assistant Editor: Chris McCue

Assistant Producer/Assistant Editor: Hina Ali

Composer: Milind Date

Consulting Editor: David Zieff

Editor: Hemal Trivedi

Cinematographers: Sardar Habib Ur Rehman, Haider Ali

Additional Camera: Hemal Trivedi, Mohammed Ali Naqvi

Archival Research and Clearances: Mohammad Ali Sheikh

Editing Assistants: Meghna Damani, Amanda Scherker

Colorist: Pedro Padilla

Sound Mixer: John Bosch

Title Design: Joey Salim

Music performed by:

Flute: Milind Date

Sitar: Sameep Kulkarni

Sarod: Anupam Joshi

Tabla: Charudatta Phadke

Saranggi: Dilshad Khan