

"INCREDIBLE ACCESS...A MUST SEE"

Entertainment Weekly

"A SUPERB DOCUMENTARY,  
AT ONCE DEEPLY SCARY AND  
THOROUGHLY ENLIGHTENING"

AM New York

"CHILLS TO THE BONE"

Variety



# AMONG THE BELIEVERS

presented and produced by CHANGEWORX and MANJUSHA FILMS directed by HEMAL TRIVEDI, MOHAMMED ALI NAQVI produced by JONATHAN GOODMAN LEVITT, HEMAL TRIVEDI  
written by JONATHAN GOODMAN LEVITT executive producer WHITNEY BURTON DOW co-producers pakistani NAZIHA SYED ALI, SYED MUSHARAF SHAH composer MILIND DATE  
cinematographers SARDAR HABIB UR REHMAN, HAIDER ALI assistant producers HINA ALI, CHRIS MCCUE editor HEMAL TRIVEDI consulting editor DAVID ZIEFF

changeworx



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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.

## **OFFICIAL WEBSITE**

[amongthebelieversfilm.com](http://amongthebelieversfilm.com)

## **PRESS CONTACT**

Adam J. Segal of The 2050 Group – Publicity

E-mail: [adam@the2050group.com](mailto:adam@the2050group.com)

Phone: (202) 422-4673

**Presented and Produced by Changeworx and Manjusha Films**

[changeworx.com](http://changeworx.com)

[manjushafilms.com](http://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.



Zarina, former student of the Red Mosque

## **MORE BACKGROUND ON THE ACCLAIMED FILM & THE CHALLENGES THE FILMMAKERS HAVE FACED**

*Among the Believers*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival last year, offers unprecedented access to Taliban Spokesperson, ISIS ally, and one of Pakistan's most dangerous terrorist -- Cleric Aziz. Following its premiere the filmmakers received a deluge of press/media attention. The film was ranked as one of the top docs of 2015. *Among the Believers* screened in over 50 film festivals in 25 countries, won 12 awards including an Independent Spirit Award nomination.

*Among the Believers* has received near-universal critical acclaim. **BBC's Owen Gleiberman** said, "I found it alarming, but most of all I found it illuminating." It received a rare "A" rating from **IndieWire**, which called it "remarkable" and "an intricate and frightening look into the microcosm of our world's biggest international issue."

**The Washington Post** called "Among the Believers" one of "three films you must see to truly understand Pakistan."

The filmmakers spent five years building relationships with the film's characters, allowing them to gain what **Variety** called "unprecedented access" to Cleric Aziz and two students within his Red Mosque network.

Despite the controversial subject matter, the team worked painstakingly during production and post-production to maintain objectivity, and ultimately created what **Reel News Daily** called a "beautifully balanced" film. **The Wall Street Journal** noted that, "Despite the hot-button nature of their material, the filmmakers strive to keep their tone evenhanded."

*Among the Believers* offers rare insights into the ideological battles shaping Pakistan and the Muslim world. Because it deals with such inflammatory issues, the film crew has faced very real dangers.

Almost instantly after its release, there was a reaction from militants who were sympathetic to Cleric Aziz, the subject of the film. The film's crew members in Pakistan were slammed with death threats, and several were forced to move houses and go into hiding out of fear for their safety.

Furthermore, Pakistani human right activists- and friends of the filmmakers- Sabeen Mehmud and Khurram Zaki, who spoke out against Cleric Aziz were murdered. To make matters worse the film was banned in Pakistan -- and it is still banned. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, The Sundance Institute, Tribeca Film Institute and IDA have currently appealed the Pakistani government to lift the ban.

The filmmakers had to make the collective decision to go into hiatus and not pursue any distribution until all the safety and security issues surrounding the film were resolved.

They finally showed the film to Cleric Aziz just in July 2016, and alleviated his concerns. The film is now set for its theatrical release in September, and it will be available on Netflix, iTunes and Amazon after. First Run Features is distributing the film.

*Among the Believers* is a cautionary tale for Americans - to show how much harm a bigoted despot



film, which is showing moderate Muslims fighting against extremist radicals and reclaiming their own faith. Furthermore- this is an indigenous film- it is a story of terrorism told by Muslims themselves (the majority of the crew is Muslim).

## **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.



Cinematographer Haider Ali on set with Maulana Abdul Aziz and his 5-year-old student.

## 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. She has edited films that have won three Emmys, One Oscar and seven Emmy nominations. She has won an Emmy for outstanding editing and was nominated for Independent Spirit Award. 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

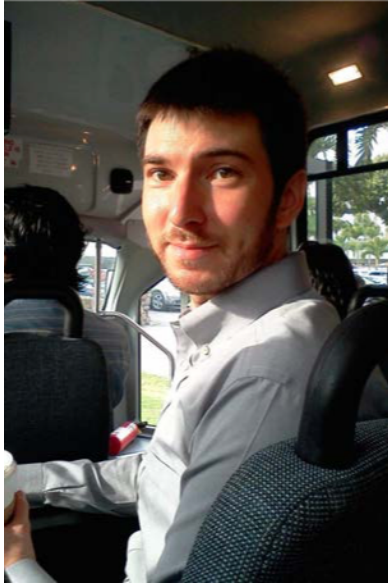
Webby nomination). She has produced and edited over 50 award-winning shorts for Odyssey Networks.



### **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, the United Nations Association Festival Grand Jury Award, an Independent Spirit Nomination 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.



Director Hemal Trivedi with co-producers Syed Musharraf Shah and Nahiha Syed Ali with Zarina's school teacher, Gulnaz.



## **AWARDS FOR *AMONG THE BELIEVERS***

### ***WINNER***

**Winner**, F:ACT Award Jury Prize, CPH:DOX Copenhagen Documentary Festival

**Winner**, Grand Prix, International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH), Geneva

**Winner**, Docu/Right Competition (Special Mention), Docudays UA Film Festival, Kiev

**Winner**, Best International Feature (Special Mention) & Best International Director, Doc Edge Festival, New Zealand

**Winner**, Best Documentary Feature, Hollywood Film Festival

**Winner**, Best Documentary & Audience Choice Prize, Tasveer South Asian Film Festival

**Winner**, Amnesty International Prize, San Sebastian Human Rights Film Festival

**Winner**, Power of Film Award, Beloit International Film Festival

**Winner**, Best International Documentary, Oaxaca Film Fest

**Winner**, Best Director, Documentary Feature SOMA Film Festival

**Winner**, David Ponce Award for Best Film, Chagrin Documentary Film Fest

**Winner**, Best Feature, Abraham Lincoln Brigade Association Human Rights Film Festival

**Winner**, Amnesty International Award at the San Sebastian Film Festival, Spain

### ***NOMINEE***

Asia Pacific Screen Awards – Best Documentary

Film Independent Spirit Award – Truer Than Fiction Award

International Film Festival of India – UNESCO/FELLINI Prize

### ***SELECT 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

AFI Docs – Official Selection

BEST.DOKS/Human Rights Watch Festival, Munich – Official Selection

Cinema St. Louis – Official Selection

DMZDocs – 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  
Bertha DocHouse's "DocHouse First" Series (London)  
International Festival of Audiovisual Programs (Biarritz, France)  
SOMA INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL (South Orange/Maplewood, New Jersey)  
HUMAN RIGHTS/HUMAN WRONGS DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL (Oslo)  
BELOIT INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (Beloit, Wisconsin)  
RICHMOND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (Richmond, Virginia)  
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH FILM FESTIVAL (London)  
OTHER LONDON SCREENINGS  
FIFDH - International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (Geneva, Switzerland)  
BEST.DOKS / HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Munich)  
STRANGER THAN FICTION SERIES (New York)

## REVIEWS OF *AMONG THE BELIEVERS*

### 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."

<http://www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/#7692b3832b84>

### 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

<http://www.amny.com/entertainment/tribeca-film-festival-2015-the-best-movies-we-saw-1.10335741>

### BBC'S OWEN GLEIBERMAN

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

<http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20150420-face-to-face-with-a-boy-jihadist>

### 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

<http://www.indiewire.com/2015/04/tribeca-review-powerful-among-the-believers-reveals-the-origins-of-religious-extremism-62933/>

### 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

<http://www.metro.us/entertainment/14-terrific-films-to-see-at-the-2015-tribeca-film-festival/zsJodm---PuEJgzYkASg/>

### THE TIMES OF INDIA - "FASCIST IDEOLOGY IS A RECIPE FOR CIVIL WAR"

"...showcases an up close and personal narrative"

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/Fascist-ideology-is-a-recipe-for-civil-war/articleshow/49954701.cms>

### THE TRIBUNE (INDIA)

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

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/spectrum/entertainment/a-tale-of-terror-and-belief/181423.html>

### THE NATION

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. "

<http://nation.com.pk/columns/01-May-2016/pakistan-s-image-problem>



#### THE DAILY BEAST

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

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/05/01/meet-the-next-generation-of-terrorists-who-support-isis.html>

#### 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."

<http://www.ew.com/article/2015/04/15/tribeca-film-festival-preview-2015>

#### ROGER EBERT

"Trivedi and Naqvi put together this multi-tentacled story using a daunting variety of footage, news reports and archival film mixed with interviews" ... "a far more disturbing portrait of obsession, with very real and cataclysmic political consequences."

<http://www.rogerebert.com/festivals-and-awards/tribeca-2015-gored-and-among-the-believers>

#### 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

<http://nation.com.pk/columns/01-May-2016/pakistan-s-image-problem>

#### 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."

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1255370/another-film-banned>

#### CHATHAM HOUSE

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

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/file/world-today-interview-hemal-trivedi-and-mohammed-naqvi>

#### GAZETTE XTRA

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

[http://www.gazettextra.com/20160218/20q\\_catching\\_up\\_with\\_beloit\\_international\\_film\\_festival\\_executive\\_director\\_rod\\_beaudoin](http://www.gazettextra.com/20160218/20q_catching_up_with_beloit_international_film_festival_executive_director_rod_beaudoin)

#### 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."

<http://www.theransomnote.co.uk/film/reviews/among-the-believers-is-one-of-the-most-powerful-documentaries-you-will-see-this-year/>

#### FLUX MAGAZINE

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

<http://www.fluxmagazine.com/among-the-believers-film/>

#### INSIGHT ON CONFLICT

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

<https://www.insightonconflict.org/blog/2016/03/waging-war-for-peace-in-pakistan/>

#### EURO NEWS

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

<http://www.euronews.com/2016/03/14/human-rights-film-festival-shines-a-light-on-human-wrongs>

#### GORILLA FILMS

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

<http://gorillafilmonline.com/reviews/documentary/among-the-believers-2016-review/>

#### NON-RESIDENT INDIAN

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

<http://www.the-nri.com/film/film-reviews/film-review-among-the-believers>

#### 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

<http://www.brandsynario.com/documentary-on-maulana-abdul-aziz-a-hit-at-tribeca-film-festival-2015>

#### 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."

<http://film-forward.com/documentary/death-drugs-religion-tribeca>

#### FLAVORPILL

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

<http://flavorpill.com/ntl/article/film/5-new-women-directors-to-see-at-tribeca-film-festival>

#### FLAVORWIRE

"Filmmakers Mohammed Naqvi and Hemal Trivedi are granted extraordinary access to the Red Mosque madrassa 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

<http://www.indiaabroad-digital.com/indiaabroad/20150501?pg=35#pg35>

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## PRODUCED BY



## SUPPORTERS





## **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: Haider Ali, Sardar Habib Ur Rehman