

## Book Review

# Activist Documentary Film in Pakistan: The Emergence of a Cinema of Accountability

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*Activist Documentary Film in Pakistan. The Emergence of a Cinema of Accountability*

Rahat Imran

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The author of the book is Dr. Rahat Imran -affiliated with the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab in Lahore (Pakistan)-, tries to close an existing gap in the field of contemporary documentary cinema and activists from Pakistan, proving rich contextual reading of activist documentary films.

Introduction section presents the subject of the book, explaining the reasons behind the emergence of activist documentary films in Pakistan and the impact of the Islamization process started during the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq, a long period (1977-1988).

The book is structured into 4 chapters. Chapter 1, entitled “Towards a Theory of Cinema of Accountability: Critical Perspectives on Activist Film Practices”, examines important activist documentary film studies topics and perspectives, such as the contextual and historical approach to documentary filmmaking, the activists and political intent of documentary film; feminist perspectives; and other perspectives. This chapter also explores perspectives on the gender-specific ‘spatial boundary’, women in public and the power issues of women in Islamic societies.

Chapter 2, entitled “Injustices on Film: A Reading of Activist Documentaries Against the Legacy of Islamization,” focuses on a specific kind of topic for films made in Pakistan: socio-political transformations and legislative reforms during the Islamization period (1977-1988). Films like *Diving Law* or *Law of One Man*, *A Sun Sets In*, *Who Will Cast the First Stone*, *Don’t Ask Why*, *For a Place Under Heavens*, *Hudood Ordinance*, and *Jaloos* (Urdu word that means “procession”):

Chapter 3, entitled “Cinema on Terror: Charting the Militant Mix of Politics, Religion, and Talibanization,” discusses religious extremism and militancy and its consequences. It also explores the role of a radical *madrasa* culture and the spread of Taliban related ideas in Pakistan. For these purposes Dr Inram choses 6 films made by Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy (*Terror’s Children*; *Reinventing*

the Taliban?; Pakistan: On A Razor's Edge; Pakistan's Double Game; Cold Comfort; and Pakistan's Taliban Generation).

And Chapter 4, entitled "Victims of a Vicious System: Women, Violence, and Human Rights ", explores the violation of women rights, violence against women, and extreme forms of victimization as well as socio-cultural and socio-economic factors underlying the violence against women. Films analysed in this chapter include Shame: A Tale of Karo Kari, Swara: A Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Stove Burning: Neither Coal nor Ashes.

Conclusion section enriches the reader with views on the activist role (also a critical discussion of its potential role) and how Pakistani filmmakers and films draw attention to events in socio-cultural life and history of Pakistan, the exhibition (locally and internationally) of these activist documentary films made in Pakistan.

The audience of this book will be mainly academics, students and general readers interested in Asian Studies, South Asian Studies, Media and Film Studies (Documentary, world cinema, political communication, film &TV communication), and politics and international relations (Social movements, film and politics, Asian politics).