LOCATING A DOCUMENTARY CINEMA
OF ACCOUNTABILITY: THE EMERGENCE
OF ACTIVIST FILM PRACTICES AS
A SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN
CONTEMPORARY PAKISTAN

Rahat Imran


Program of Studies: PhD in Film Studies by Special Arrangement at the
School of Communication.

Institution: Simon Fraser University, Faculty of Communication, Arts,
and Technology, School of Communication, British Columbia, Canada.

Abstract: Maintaining trends of resistance movements, activist agendas,
and advocacy campaigns initiated in opposition to the Islamization period
and the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988), contemporary
expressions of resistance in Pakistan have also begun to include ‘activist
documentary’ film practices. As issues of religious fundamentalism and
extremism, gendered violence, violation of human rights, impact of
Islamization and rigid Sharia laws, particularly on women and minorities,
besides the violent socio-cultural and tribal practices such as stove-
burning, acid-attacks, honour-killing, honour-rape, and swara continue
to haunt the civil society, a new generation of creative activists are using
documentary film as their activist vehicle of communication, resistance and
consciousness-raising. This thesis will focus on independent documentary
filmmakers, productions, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), as well as a government body, that have contributed to the emergence of an activist documentary film movement in contemporary Pakistan since the Islamization period. It will discuss their contribution and significance to the growth and progress of this emerging film category in the country, and argue for an investigative filmic body of work that can be identified as a critical documentary ‘cinema of accountability’ from within a Muslim society that seeks to provoke debate on crucial issues, stress legislative reforms, and promote social change.

Keywords: Documentary film, Pakistan, Islamization, human rights, activism, resistance and accountability, violence against women, Islam, Sharia laws, religious fundamentalism, terrorism, tribalism, honour.

Year: 2012.

Supervisor: Martin Laba.