

Waseb (Nation), 2015



Written and directed by Ali Nobil Ahmad
Documentary short, running time: 22 minutes
Language: Urdu/Saraiki, English subtitles

In 2010 catastrophic monsoon floods led to the worst natural disaster in Pakistan's history, displacing 20 million people and killing thousands. *Waseb* documents the response of one heavily affected community to these events. Investigative in scope but poetic in style and format, the film charts experiences of escape, survival and political mobilization through interviews with local people in the months following the disaster.

Whereas mainstream media portrayed flood affected populations as unfortunate victims of a climate change-induced tragedy, *Waseb* depicts them as agents in an ongoing political struggle with elites and the state. Emboldened by a little known eco-socialist variant of Islam embedded in local environmentalism, their struggle sheds much needed light on the impact of climate change in one of the most important, least understood countries in the world.

Synopsis

The opening sequences juxtapose the poetry of local bards with dramatic images of the flood's aftermath. The first half looks at causes and consequences of the flood at a brisk pace through interviews with local officials, activists and journalists. Investigation of the political controversies surrounding aid distribution and the breaching of embankments which directed the path of flood

waters uncovers shocking revelations of negligence and corruption among bureaucrats, local elites and Pakistan's central government. The second half of the film looks at how the community mobilized against those who were responsible for their plight in a bid to bring them to justice. The film is interwoven with poetry, giving dramatic voice and aesthetic power to the poor's collective grief and outrage against politicians and officials. It culminates in an inspiring explosion of civil protest and demands for provincial independence, providing rare insight into how ordinary people are responding to the challenge of climate catastrophe with cultural nationalism as a form of resistance

Filmmaker's Biography

Ali Nobil Ahmad is a journalist and academic specialist of Pakistan and its diaspora. Born in London in 1976 where he grew up and went to University, he has lived and worked in Pakistan, the United States and Italy, where he did a PhD in History. He is currently a Fellow at the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin where he researches Pakistan's political ecology, and Assistant Professor of History at LUMS University in Pakistan. In 2008-09 he was recipient of the Guardian's Scott Trust Bursary for Journalism and in 2011 he was co-curator of 'Winds of Change: Cinema from Muslim Societies', a festival of films and talks at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. He has authored and edited peer reviewed books, chapters and articles on migration, political ecology, film and media studies.

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