

LOVE IN THE TIME OF GENOCIDE

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### LOGLINE

A middle-aged Gujarati Muslim and a teenaged Kashmiri Pandit join forces in order to survive.

### STEP OUTLINE

Step One: Soon after the Godhra Train Burning of 2002, Asha meets Sanjay and they slowly unravel one another's secrets. She learns he is a Gujarati Muslim, and he learns she is a Kashmiri Pandit.

Step two: Chirag, a local child, reminds the town of Sanjay's identity. They quickly mobilize and seek a violent confrontation.

Step three: Asha and Sanjay flee, finding themselves at the shores of Sharmistha Lake. Choosing not to risk the mob, they dive in and pray.

Step four: They fall through space and time, surfacing in Srinagar, Kashmir in 1990, during the forced exodus of Kashmiri Hindus.

Step five: Asha leads them to her home, where she sees her own mother giving birth to her. At the same time, Sanjay is confronted by a militant looking to hurt Asha's family.

Step six: While Sanjay guards the house from militants, the child is born and named after Asha. She realizes she has just helped her mother give birth to herself.

Step seven: Asha's family flees the area, leaving Sanjay to hold off the militants. He is killed.

Step eight: A few months pass and, thanks to the support of local Muslims, friends, Asha's family is still alive. Asha gives an impassioned speech at Lal Chowk, stirring the crowd to revolution.

ACT ONE

EXT. STREETS OF VADNAGAR - EARLY MORNING

The rising sun cuts through the clouds. A breeze carries the dry sands of Vadnagar past SANJAY (mid 50s).

I/E. SANJAY'S SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Sanjay is the first vendor to open his stall. Sunlight floods the shop as he rolls up the shutter.

He settles on the stool behind the counter and reads his newspaper. "GODHRA TRAIN CARNAGE" shouts the headline.

INT. SANJAY'S SHOP - CONTINUOUS

ASHA (early teens) steps in. Shorter than him, she holds herself taller, over the years he'd lost his regimented posture. Her hair falls in a single braid to the center of her back.

SANJAY

Hello. We don't usually have customers this early.

ASHA

We?

Suspect, Sanjay sets the paper down and adjusts in his seat.

SANJAY

My daughter and I used to run this shop together...

Sanjay trails off; Asha nods in understanding.

ASHA

I'm so sorry.

He smiles gently and scratches his chest.

SANJAY

Poor Tara. But it has been some years. She would want me to forward. You look like her...

Asha notices his scratching and approaches the counter.

ASHA  
(knowingly)  
New shirt?

Sanjay forces his hand to his side and stiffens,

SANJAY  
Yes, thank you.  
(abruptly)  
Can I help you find anything?

She smiles coyly.

ASHA  
I love walking in the sunrise. Back  
home, the Aza'an would wake me-

SANJAY  
You are Muslim!?

Asha's smile softens and Sanjay settles into his seat.

ASHA  
I am a Hindu, actually. But I was a  
light sleeper in a Muslim area. So,  
while they were at prayer, I would  
take in the morning sun.

Sanjay, now comfortable, once more scratches his chest.

ASHA  
Doing this, while my mother slept,  
I learned about Muslims.

She stares into Sanjay's eyes. They are dark, the brown and  
black of the pupils and irides bleeding into one another.

SANJAY  
And what did you learn?

By the entrance to the shop, eavesdropping intently, hides  
CHIRAG (7-10 years), a child from the colony.

ASHA  
I found they are not so different  
from myself.

SANJAY  
Oh? How do you mean?

ASHA  
We all have something to hide.

Her eyes shoot down, she points to his chest.

ASHA

I had many Muslim brothers who  
sewed their ta'wiz inside their  
shirts.

SANJAY

And I have had Hindu brothers who  
still carried their kautukas, all  
that they had left from a lost  
past.

Sanjay stands and leans forward, staring into Asha's eyes.

ASHA

You are Muslim.

SANJAY

And you are Kashmiri. A Pandit.

In her eyes, he watches a spark of recognition battle the  
morning sun across her pale irises, like oceans on fire.

SANJAY

Why are you here?

ASHA

My baba [father] fled Kashmir soon  
after my birth. I want to find him.

Chirag runs past the entrance.

CHIRAG

Mummy!

EXT. STREETS OF VADNAGAR - CONTINUOUS

Sanjay and Asha rush outside and watch Chirag kick up dust as  
her runs towards the houses.

INT. SANJAY'S SHOP - CONTINUOUS

She drops the shutter behind them.

ASHA

That child was listening. He knows.

Sanjay stumbles backwards into the counter. His eyes are  
massive and his breathing heavy.

ASHA

You have to leave. Where is safe?

Sanjay is frozen. He is sweating.

ASHA  
Do you live nearby?

Asha shakes Sanjay.

ASHA  
Oy! You have to leave. Where can  
you go?

Sanjay trembles, she recognizes his sorrow.

ASHA  
Your daughter. Wasn't able to flee?

Sanjay shakes with tears now.

ASHA  
You said she wanted you to keep  
going, yes? Run. For her.

There is shouting in the distance, a mob has formed.

ASHA  
They're coming, we have to go.

She takes Sanjay by the hand and leads him to the exit.

EXT. SHARMISTHA LAKE - LATER

Asha leads them away from the crowd. They find themselves at the edge of the lake. Sanjay's eyes are puffy and bloodshot.

Behind them, the crowd is approaching.

They hug each other.

SANJAY  
(whispers)  
Tara.

KASHA  
(whispers)  
Baba [Father].

They release one another and dive into the water.

The lake drags them down and throws them around, they reach for one another, trying to see through the roiling waters.

**END ACT ONE**

**ACT TWO**

EXT. DAL LAKE - NIGHT

The stretching limbs of the Chinar trees fracture the reflection of the half moon on the still water.

Asha and Sanjay surface and search for the crowd. Nothing.

They swim towards and drag themselves onto the shore.

SANJAY

(coughing and panting)  
What happened? It's dark.

ASHA

(gasping)  
I don't know. But no one is following us.

Asha stands and surveys the area. Char Chinar stands out in the lake. The Himalayas rise in the distance. The sound of water lapping against houseboats replaces their panting.

SANJAY

What's wrong?

ASHA

I know this place. I would come here with my mouj [mother].

She leans onto Sanjay for support and points at the mountain.

ASHA

That's Shankaracharya Hill.  
(choking back tears)  
We're in Kashmir, in Srinagar.

SANJAY

What? How!? We can't be here.

Asha whips around to face Gujju.

ASHA

(gravely)  
Mouj [Mother].

She storms off, on a mission. Sanjay follows, hesitant.

EXT. STREETS OF SRINAGAR - NIGHT

Asha stumbles along the streets in a panic, trying to make sense of the environment under the moonlight.

SANJAY

Asha! How did we get here?

ASHA

Shh!

She drifts to a house on the corner. She pulls a piece of paper off the door.

The paper lists the address and instructions in Urdu for the Pandit men residing there to leave, convert, or die.

The deadline is 15 August, 1990. Sanjay looks at Asha.

ASHA

(weakly)

My birthday.

He freezes and drops the flyer. It floats to the ground.

He hears movement behind him and turns.

I/E. ASHA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Asha peers into the window at the side of the house. Inside, GHAZAL (early 20s) struggles to give birth, MOTILAL (mid 20s) kneels before her.

ASHA

Sanjay, come see.

Ghazal bites on a piece of wood.

MOTILAL

(hushed)

Come now, Ghazal. Be strong.

Asha recognizes her mother. She looks around for Sanjay.

ASHA

Sanjay! Where are you?

She looks back to see tears streaming down her mother's face.

Asha hears scuffling but can't look away.



SANJAY  
(strained)  
Ah-! Asha!

She scurries back to the door. Gujju fights a masked MILITANT holding a Kalashnikov.

ASHA  
Sanjay!

The militant turns his head to the sound, allowing Sanjay to disarm him.

SANJAY  
Ha!

The militant falls and Sanjay slams the butt of the rifle into his face, knocking him unconscious.

He looks at Asha, a fury in his eyes. Taking a deep breath, he hands her the rifle and finds a handgun on the militant.

SANJAY  
What is it? Show me.

Asha leads him to the window, they both peer in.

MOTILAL  
So close, Ghazal. Almost there.

ASHA  
That's my mouj [mother].

Sanjay is horrified.

SANJAY  
Get inside, I'll keep watch.

ASHA  
But-

SANJAY  
Go. Now.

Sanjay pulls her to the front of the house and pushes her in.

INT. ASHA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Asha hesitates at the inner doorway, watching her mother.

Ghazal, crying, sees the rifle and drops the piece of wood.

GHAZAL

No. Please!

Asha matches the tears. She leans the rifle in the doorframe and rushes to her mother's side. She takes her hand.

ASHA

Push.

Motilal looks from Asha to Ghazal, who nods. He offers Ghazal the piece of wood and returns to his duties.

MOTILAL

Push, Ghazal. Push!

Sirens sound, stealing their attention.

ASHA

Men are coming. Sanjay overpowered one, but there will be more.

Ghazal breaks a tooth on the wood. Finally, the BABY is born.

Motilal sits back, a proud father. He cuts the umbilical cord and passes the Baby to Ghazal.

MOTILAL

What shall you name her?

Ghazal looks at Asha.

GHAZAL

What is your name?

ASHA

Ah... Asha.

GHAZAL

Then her name is Asha.

Asha, Ghazal, and Motilal cry over the Baby.

SANJAY (O.S.)

Asha! They're coming.

MOTILAL

The neighbors. They are friends.  
They will help us.

Ghazal passes the Baby to Motilal and tries to stand.

Asha sees her father holding her, she resumes crying,

GHAZAL

It's no use. I can't stand.  
(resigned)  
Go. Take Asha and run.

MOTILAL

No.

Motilal passes the Baby to Asha and scoops his wife into his arms. He clearly struggles but ultimately manages.

They exit through the front door.

EXT. ASHA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Motilal passes Sanjay, whose focus lies in the distance.

MOTILAL

Shukriya [Thank you]!

Asha offers him the rifle, the Baby tucked in one arm.

SANJAY

No. You might need it.

Asha knows not to argue, she turns and follows Motilal.

Once they're gone, Sanjay runs inside and closes the door.

SANJAY

(to self)

Asha, I will not live to see  
tomorrow. But you must. For Tara.

The door flies open and two ASSAILANTS enter, guns drawn.

They fire.

**END ACT TWO**

### ACT THREE

EXT. LAL CHOWK - MORNING

Asha addresses a crowd from a platform. The Kalashnikov is slung on her back. Her braid is pulled over her shoulder.

ASHA

Pandits! Muslims! Kashmiris! We  
have spent years, decades, under  
the oppressive rule of countries  
who have no claim over us!

She throws her braid back, it falls to the base of her spine.

ASHA

They have battered us and beaten  
us, tried to infiltrate us, in  
order to force my family off of our  
ancestral land. And you off of your  
land!

She sweeps her arm across the crowd.

ASHA

The enemy has divided us for  
centuries. They have successfully  
used our identities against us to  
keep themselves in power.

People shift, unable to contain the brewing communal rage.

ASHA

But we have shown each other that  
no matter who we are, where we come  
from, or who we pray to, we are one  
people!

The crowd looks at each other hopefully.

Asha looks into the distance, searching.

ASHA

Months ago, our enemies came to  
destroy my family. They tried to  
drive my father out and take my  
mother... and her child.

She places her fist over her heart.

ASHA

But there was a brave Muslim, a Gujarati. I loved him like I love my own father.

She smiles down at Motilal, near the front of the crowd.

ASHA

He died, so that we could live. And thanks to him, and to all of you...

She once again motions to the people.

ASHA

You, who took us in when they razed our home. You, who fed and clothed us when they stole everything. You, who have shielded us Pandits from this violence. Thanks to all of you, we did live. And we are here to fight! Together!

Asha tucks the Kalashnikov under her right arm.

ASHA

We are here to fight for the Pandits! For the Muslims! For this Sikhs and the Buddhists! For the people and-

She throws her fist into the air.

ASHA

For a self-determinant Azaad [Freed] Kashmir!

The crowd shakes their fist and weapons in the air.

FADE TO BLACK.

**END OF FILM**