

2018 Guggenheim Fellow, Filmmaker and Author Parvez Sharma

"I am a storyteller and change-maker and if I stumble on what I think is truth, while telling that story or making that change, it is my job to share it with you, if I still have your attention"



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Our websites

parvezsharma.com -> ♥ <- mothership

asinnerinmecca.com

ajihadforlove.org



**I was just named a 2018 Guggenheim Fellow!
Two words = gratitude -> ♥ <- humility**



A SINNER IN MECCA -> ♥ <- asinnerinmecca.com

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The New York Times Critics' Pick: *"Mr. Sharma has created a swirling, fascinating travelogue and a stirring celebration of devotion... we emerge from his film more enlightened"*

The Hollywood Reporter: *"Wrenching... gritty... surreal and transcendent; Visceral and Abstract... an undeniable act of courage and hope"*

The Los Angeles Times: *"Challenging his own faith in the face of adversity"*

The Washington Post: *"Complex... Revelatory..."*

The Village Voice: *"Next time you hear politicians or right-wing broadcasters asking why "moderate" Muslims don't denounce terrorism, show them this movie"*

Thompson on Hollywood: *"Combines the political, personal and spiritual in a remarkable way"*

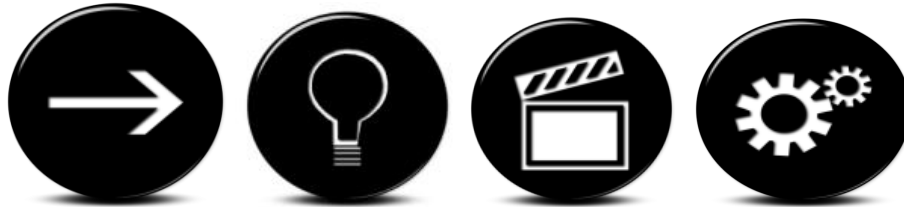
The Guardian: *"With poetic simplicity... a delicately personal story and a call to action"*

NBC News: *"The talk of the documentary circuit..."*

New York Daily News: *"Takes its audience where no movie has gone before"*

The Daily Beast: *"Goes Undercover... A Rare Look... Sure to be Controversial"*

Vice: *"Brilliant... Rare... Takes aim at Wahhabi Islam..."*



Slant Magazine: *"A work of vital political and social import"*

Paper Magazine: *"Surreal... Bold... An incredibly rare insight..."*

Yahoo News: *"A rebuke of Saudi Arabia"*

Indiewire: *"Powerful, Illuminating... a remarkable examination of contemporary Islam"*

BBC Persian: *"Shocking and Courageous"*

Screen International: *"Unprecedented... Surreal"*

Globe and Mail: *"A first-hand look at the Amazing Muslim Race..."*

The Toronto Star: *"A deeply personal film about faith and forgiveness"*

DocGeeks: *"Moving... Brave... Visceral... Insightful..."*

Screen Daily: *"Meaningful... a testament to courage..."*

The Daily Mail: *"Powerful"*

Jahan News (Iran Govt.): *"The disgusting act of homosexuality... an attack on Islam"*

*Visit <http://nyti.ms/lgRQPh1> for a feature profile on the filmmaker in **The New York Times**





A Jihad for Love", www.ajihadforlove.org →

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Critics' pick! Eye-opening, brave, brutally honest - **New York Magazine**

Revealing and moving-a gifted filmmaker! - **Wall Street Journal**

Dignity and Despair woven tightly together...Compassionate-
The Guardian

Lifts the veil of secrecy - **National Public Radio**

Courageous...invaluable! - **Boston Globe**

Fascinating, provocative! - **San Francisco Chronicle**

An alternative perspective on Islam- **Daily News, Egypt**

Provocative, deeply felt and emotionally complex - **Village Voice**

Heartfelt... Nail-biting! - **The New York Times**

A powerful, important documentary - **Film Journal International**

Illuminating! Joins two other very fine documentaries about faith and homosexuality: For the Bible Tells Me So and Trembling Before G-d. - **Denver Post**

*Rich with compelling, often heartbreaking stories...a much-needed reminder that the foundation of any great religion consists of love and understanding. - **Film Threat***

*Numerous compelling stories...socially groundbreaking work - **Slant Magazine***

*A remarkable exploration, six years in the making, of the lives and struggles of gays and lesbians in the Islamic world today- **Huffington Post***

*Powerful - **Entertainment Weekly***

*A Leap of Faith- **Time Out***

*Poignant...A quest for love, not war- **The Nation***

*Can your faith really kill you?...Will surprise a Western audience- **The Sunday Times***

*Sharma is right to keep his focus tight...Who should feel shame, gay Muslims, or the Muslims who oppress them? - **Washington Post***

*Path breaking- **CNN***



- World Premier, Toronto International Film Festival (2007)/ European Premier, Berlin International Film Festival (2008- Opening night film for Panorama Documentary)
- Screened at more than 75 International Film Festivals on all 5 continents
- Estimated 8 million viewers in more than 50 nations (includes television) and theatrical release across the US and Canada
- Funded by a record number of foundations including the Sundance Documentary Fund and the Andy Warhol Foundation

- Muslim nations public screenings in Turkey (2008 and 2009), Indonesia (2009–Eight city tour), Malaysia (2009,2010), Bangladesh (2010), Lebanon (2010), Pakistan (2011), Egypt (2011), Kyrgyzstan (2009)
- Private underground screenings in Tehran, Islamabad, Lahore, Kabul, Amman, Damascus, Cairo, Addis Ababa, Dakar, Jeddah, Kuwait, Tashkent, Bahrain and more
- Multi-city tours in Mexico, Brazil and Holland
- Winner of 7 International Awards including best film
- Winner, GLAAD Media Award (Best Documentary)
- Wide theatrical release in US (2008) and limited theatrical release in Canada (2008)
- Screened at more than a 100 college campuses in North America
- Parvez leads dialogue at more than 40 college screenings including Columbia, Yale, NYU, Stanford, UC Berkeley, University of Chicago, UCLA and Harvard
- Parvez, named one of “50 Visionaries Who Are Changing Your World”, a list headed by the Dalai Lama
- OUT names Parvez one of the “OUT 100” in 2007 and 2015
- Parvez does workshops with the US State Department, Dept. of Homeland Security, The European Union and the U.N. about the challenges faced by 21st century Islam → imploding and exploding; an Islam that is at war with itself.
- Declared one amongst the **“Top 25 films on religion in the 20th century”**(in 2013)





A Sinner in Mecca: A Gay Muslim's Hajj of Defiance → parvezsharma.com

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(BenBella Books, August 15, 2017)

Library of Congress Record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017008521>

The Guardian "The first book about the Hajj from this perspective...Written by a man with a deep knowledge of Islamic history. This pilgrimage is the centerpiece of his book, and he recounts it with courage and fierce emotion..."

Barnes and Noble "...Parvez's odyssey is at once audacious, global, and remarkable. He meets everyone from extremists to explorers of the spiritual kind and the world they open up is frightening . . . yet breathtaking..."

Towleroad "Sharma's . . . book uses that trip not only to gain perspective on extremists and religion, but as a glass to view the world here in the United States, the challenges felt by the Muslim community, and the oppressive weight of the Trump administration"

Washington Book Review "You will never think the same way about Saudi Arabia and Islam after reading this beautifully written book."

Foreword Reviews "Sharma's spiritual search is intimate and careful, and ultimately one of understanding."

1 NY Times bestselling author of *Zealot* and CNN host, **Reza Aslan** → "Parvez's heroism is rare and his courage well-

documented. Putting his own life at risk, he takes us on a surprising and compelling journey through the frontlines of his much contested faith. A brilliant follow up to his films, *A Jihad for Love* and *A Sinner in Mecca*."

Kevin Sessums, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Mississippi Sissy* and *I Left It On the Mountain* → "Parvez Sharma's Hajj pilgrimage is not only a journey to Mecca but to his deepest self. Both a Muslim and an out gay man, Sharma writes bravely and brilliantly. His religion is ancient. His story is timeless."

Asra Q. Nomani, Muslim women-rights activist and bestselling author of *Standing Alone in Mecca* → "In our lives, we face a choice of whether to live with judgment or reach deep within ourselves to find an inner moral compass that leads us to a metaphorical Mecca of unconditional love. With his powerful, brave book, *A Sinner in Mecca*, Parvez Sharma takes us on his hero's pilgrimage, teaching us of an ethereal truth: the qibla, or direction of Mecca, resides within each one of our hearts."

Cleve Jones, Author, legendary Harvey Milk contemporary and the man who conceptualized the historic *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* → "As a gay man and a Muslim, Parvez Sharma's unique personal journey is reflected in this powerful examination of faith, sexuality and gender. In a divided world, Sharma fearlessly crosses the boundaries and barriers that separate us from each other and finds common ground in the search for love and truth."

Nominated (as of April 1st, 2018)
(30th Annual) Lambda Literary Award, 2018
Foreword 2017 Indies Award



Biography

-> ♥ <- only 591 words? 2.83 minutes read #pretty good!



Guggenheim fellow, filmmaker, author **Parvez Sharma** grew up in a small town in northern India, just twenty minutes from the Islamic seminary that gave birth to the Taliban, while enrolled at a Catholic school called St. Mary's Academy. Sanskrit was a third language and P.E. was Yoga. He excelled at neither. Adding to this unusual childhood was an early realization that he absorbed the world in images and aspect ratios. In a **filmography** spanning four continents two of his best-known films (only during the American part of his career) are the multiple award winning "**A Jihad For Love**" and "**A Sinner in Mecca**", playing at TIFF, Berlinale, IDFA and more than a hundred other film festivals globally; available on streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime, broadcast on 33 television channels in as many nations and also past theatrically releases. The worldwide press and **controversy** these two films generated was **unprecedented** and Jihad has been seen by approximately 8 million people. Parvez has always made fearless, multiple award winning **films about** politics, faith, race, identity, religious **extremism** and social justice and taken them (on speaking tours) to the halls of Congress, the DHS and DOS, the UN and the EU parliament, high-schools, all the ivy's and even the Dar ul Uloom uber Islamic seminary in India. He lives the reality that **cinema** can cause (real) **change**.



Parvez's **career** has been one of many firsts. Jihad was the world's first film on homosexuality and Islam and Sinner the world's first documentary filmed on an iPhone in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, under threat **of beheading**. From being a NYT Critics' Pick to being hailed as a "gifted filmmaker" by the Wall Street Journal, an "iconoclast" by Vice, "an extremely polite spy" by the NY Times and "carrying out an attack on Islam" by Ayatollah Khamenei's regime in Iran, Parvez's multiple award winning creations of what he calls Cinema 3.0 **continue** to ruffle feathers.

His recently released book (a thoughtful and factual examination of the deep links between the Saudi Arabia Islam and ISIS) has received much attention; "**A Sinner in Mecca, A Gay Muslims Hajj of Defiance**", says the Guardian is written "with a deep knowledge of Islamic history and with courage and fierce emotion." Over the years Parvez has survived hate mail, death threats, trolling, fatwa's calling for his death, awards and honors, good and bad reviews and more. **Jihad, Sinner** and his **book** complete his "**Islam Trilogy**". Parvez was named one of "50 visionaries changing the world" in a list headed by the Dalai Lama. In his view each film he makes is a building block (with newer lessons) to a diverse and celebrated body of work he hopes to leave behind. With two new, game-changing films, mandated by his fellowship; (and neither Islamic or gay!) he is finally out of rehab for his Game Of Thrones addiction and back to where he belongs: **behind** the camera. In the past, Parvez wore many hats including a journalist plus blogger on Kashmir (1998), Egypt (2011) and Tehran (2009) with India's NDTV, the BBC, Democracy Now! **Huffington Post** and the **Daily Beast**. Grants and awards include the Andy Warhol Foundation, Sundance, Ford and **many** more.

At universities he has taught on subjects like Bollywood anthropology, the social web and middle-eastern studies. He works best in situations of peril where he can create and "find" cinema. Many have called his work, "**guerilla filmmaking**" Former first lady Michelle Obama, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, GLAAD and many more have hailed Parvez's work as "heroic" "exemplary" and "path-breaking"

