

# cinema



\* *The Patience Stone* ... director Atiq Rahimi has based the story on a real-life incident.

## A dramatic patience

The Soviet invasion and the destructive war in Afghanistan form the backdrop for Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*, writes **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

Often cinema is a culmination of experiences. Events in life form the inspiration for a movie or book. Of course some incidents just pass by, some experiences do not, and can be profound. So profound that it can drive you to desperation. A desperation that may bomb you out of your senses or bloom into an artistic urge.

Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*, screened at the just concluded Abu Dhabi Film Festival, grew and developed out of one such occurrence in the writer-director's existence. An extraordinarily disturbing event in his life pushed him to the pen. And later to the camera. His words formed *The Patience Stone*, which eventually transformed into images.

Rahimi was invited to a literary

conference at Kabul in 2005, and so was a young poetess, Nadia Anjuman. But just before the meeting, she was killed. Her husband, enraged over her brilliant collection of poems, *Dead Red Flowers*, had murdered her. He was sent to prison, where he fell ill and slipped into a coma.

It was this incident that got Rahimi thinking. He ultimately wrote a novel loosely based on the tragic tale of Nadia. There are significant differences in what actually happened before the Kabul conference and what later appeared on Rahimi's computer screen.

*The Patience Stone* is the second of Rahimi's efforts to adapt his own novel to the screen. The first was *Earth and Ashes*, which emerged from the tragedy of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. When an old man's village is bombed and

flattened, merely a few survive. His deaf grandson is one of them. The two set out through an unforgiving landscape, searching for the coalmine where the old man's son and the boy's father, works.

But when the meeting proves elusive and the wait gets longer, the old man and the boy are forced to live on tobacco, unripe apples and the kindness of strangers. Sparse and haunting, *Earth and Ashes* is all about a devastating loss and of human perseverance in the face of a bloody war.

The Soviet invasion and the destructive war form the backdrop for *The Patience Stone* as well, and it is as intensely personal as *Earth and Ashes* was.

*The Patience Stone* is part of a Persian myth about a stone that has this phenomenal strength to listen

newer dimensions to the book. "I didn't just want an illustration of my book," says Rahimi. "I wanted to discover other dimensions of the woman through cinema. Different mediums bring different aspects to the story."

A rare writer indeed, for most of his ilk would abhor the very idea of a novel being reinterpreted for the screen. There was this great novel, and there was this great scriptwriter, but where was the actress to play a character who was controversial in every sense of the term. And not just this, but also one who could emote joy as she could sorrow, as she could madness, despair and what have you.

Interestingly, Farahani was not Rahimi's first choice to play the part. But if Rahimi was adamant about not taking her on, she was determined to get him to agree. She threatened to enact scenes from the novel on the streets of Paris if Rahimi would not take her on board.

But then when he saw *About Elly* by Asghar Farhadi, where there is a wonderful portrayal by Farahani, Rahimi began to change his mind. "It is a role most actresses dream of. It is so full of monologues, and so challenging," she gushes.

*The Patience Stone* is certainly unlike most movies which emerge from the region. Farahani's character is not shown as a victim, which is why one does feel any great pity for her. But her lines and experiences are bound to stir a conundrum of controversy.

Is that not what cinema ought to do?

(Next Week: More about the Abu Dhabi Film Festival)

(Gautaman Bhaskaran may be contacted at [gautamanb@hotmail.com](mailto:gautamanb@hotmail.com))

to stories of suffering and sorrow — until of course that moment when it cracks and falls apart.

In the movie, the woman is seen tending to her comatose husband with a bullet in his neck, and as the plot progresses, she begins to confess to her husband — partly to fight her loneliness and her boredom. The confessions stretch over several days, and with the passing of time, they get increasingly daring and scandalous.

A point comes when they get so outrageous that they shake the man out of his coma. The film ends on a note of sheer drama which contrasts beautifully with the rest of the movie, which despite its moments of excitement and fear runs a rather placid course.

Born in Kabul and forced to take political asylum in France after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Rahimi is often viewed as a Bohemian poet, author and helmer. And it is not surprising that *The Patience Stone*, though set in Afghanistan and telling the story of an Afghan woman, seems so French, particularly in the way its protagonist, played by Golshifteh Farahani, thinks in the movie.

Not surprising again, for she is an Iranian actress exiled from her own country and now living in Paris. An unmistakable European sense and sensibility cannot be missed in the way the work has been styled and narrated.

Rahimi avers that he toyed with the idea of turning his words into visuals when Jean-Claude Carriere agreed to write the script, promising to find

