
SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

The Patience Stone

Directed by Atiq Rahimi

Afghanistan's Official Submission for Best Foreign Film 2012

Official Selection

Toronto International Film Festival 2012

Tribeca Film Festival 2013

Los Angeles Film Festival 2013

Best Film

Eurasia Film Festival 2012

Best Picture

Abu Dhabi Film Festival 2012

Best Actress

Abu Dhabi Film Festival 2012

Rated R | 102 min | Opens 8/14/13 (NY/LA)

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CAST

The Woman	GOLSHIFTEH FARAHANI
The Man	HAMIDREZ JAVDAN
The Aunt	HASSINA BURGAN
The Young Soldier	MASSI MROWAT

CREW

Director	ATIQ RAHIMI
Writers	JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIÈRE ATIQ RAHIMI
Producer	MICHAEL GENTILE
Executive Producer	HANI FARSI
Co-Producers	GERHARD MEIXNER ROMAN PAUL
Associated Producer	LAURAINÉ HEFTLER
Line Producer	PHILIPPE GAUTIER
Director of Photography	THIERRY ARBOGAST
Production Designer	ERWIN PRIB
Music by	MAX RICHTER
Edited by	HERVÉ DE LUZE
Casting by	AZIZA MARZAK

A production by
The Film

Produced in conjunction with
Studio 37 – Corniche Group – Razor Film – Arte France Cinéma – Jahan-E-Honar Productions

Made with the support of Fonds Sud, Medienboard and Mini Traité

The Patience Stone Synopsis

In a country torn apart by war, Afghanistan or elsewhere... A young woman in her thirties watches over her older husband in a decrepit room. A bullet in the neck has reduced him to a comatose state. He has been abandoned by his fellow combatants and even by his own brothers. One day, the woman's vigil changes. She begins to speak truth to her silent husband, telling him about her childhood, her suffering, her frustrations, her loneliness, her dreams, desires, and secrets. After years of living under his control, with no voice of her own, she says things she could never have spoken before, even though they have been married for ten years.

Her husband has unconsciously become *syngué sabour* (**the patience stone**) – a magical black stone that, according to Persian mythology, absorbs the plight of those who confide in it. The woman's confessions are extraordinary and without restraint: about sex and love, her anger against a man who never understood her, who mistreated her, who never showed her any respect or kindness.

Through the words she delivers so audaciously to her husband, the woman seeks to free herself from suffering. But after weeks of looking after him, she begins to act, discovering herself in the relationship she starts with a young soldier.

The legend of the patience stone also says that when it has absorbed all that it can handle, it explodes, causing the world to end. But, for one brave Afghan woman, it is a risk she's willing to take to unburden herself and be free.

The Patience Stone is adapted from the best-selling novel by Atiq Rahimi, director and co-writer, with Jean-Claude Carrière, of the film adaptation. The novel [The Patience Stone](#) has been translated in 33 languages and was winner of the 2008 Goncourt Prize, the most prestigious book award in France.

The Patience Stone **About the Director**

Writer and filmmaker Atiq Rahimi is a well-known representative of Afghan culture in Europe. A Francophile and former student at the Franco-Afghan high school of Kabul, Atiq fled his country in 1984 and received asylum from the French state, where he received a doctorate of cinema at the Sorbonne.

The author of several documentary films, Rahimi considers the cinema as a universal language, the best to discuss about the situation in his country of origin. Yet in 1996, when the Taliban took power in Kabul, he felt the need to switch to writing and wrote "Earth and Ashes", referring to the mourning and violence that afflict Afghanistan. He adapted it to the cinema himself in 2004. *Earth and Ashes* was shown in Cannes and received a glowing reception from the public.

As involved in writing as he is with filmmaking, Rahimi published "A Thousand Rooms of Dream and fear" in his native language in 2002, "le Retour Imaginaire", a photo book, and "The Patience Stone" in 2008.

The Patience Stone Director's Note

When I asked Jean-Claude Carrière to adapt my book *The Patience Stone*, he said “What are you expecting from me?”

“Betray me!” I answered.

It wasn't said in provocation, but through cinematic ambition. Because what is exciting and challenging for a writer-director is finding a way to exceed one's own book, to show and say in his film all the things he didn't manage to write using words.

The book's central idea is the myth of *Syngué Sabour*, the patience stone, a stone on which you can shed your misfortunes, your complaints, your secrets until it's so full it bursts. In this story, the stone is the husband, a warrior paralysed by a bullet in the neck. The woman, to bring him back to life, has to pray from morning till night for 99 days. But that prayer soon turns into confession. She murmurs into his ear all the things she has kept locked inside her for so many years.

As in my previous books, the characters evolve in extreme circumstances and in a single setting. Our film adaptation moves away from this static, theatrical situation, by rearranging the linear narrative to a more cinematic structure. By following the woman's point-of-view, the camera is able to leave the bedroom, to follow the main character out of the house, in to the streets of Kabul, into the heart of the war. The camera is mobile, light, wandering, like in Rossellini's *Germany, year zero*, giving the impression of capturing spontaneous moments. On the other hand, the interior scenes revolve around the heroine's thoughts and feelings. Sensuality, intimacy, dreams and phantasms, memories, regrets, and remorse prevail and haunt our heroine's mind. The camera harmonizes to the rhythm of the characters' emotions, to their very breaths. Supple, gracious, sensual, the camera slides through the bedroom, through the woman's intimate world, like a confidante, an accomplice.

The contrast between the two worlds, outside/inside, social/intimate, war/love... is interpreted by contrasting imagery and lighting: the crude exteriors, and those, soft and veiled, of the interior where the woman is lit like a source of light and colour, as can be seen in the miniature Persian carpets.

Passages lead from the present to the past, but the woman's memories aren't depicted as arbitrary flashbacks. It is always elements and situations in the present that lead us into the past; for example, the “combat quail” race scene that the heroine witnesses in the streets of Kabul, reflects not only what the character lived during her childhood, but transforms itself into a scene from

her own memory. Likewise, the wedding party in the whorehouse reincarnates our main character's wedding. In this way the flashbacks play a more poetical than simply structural role.

This is how characters in the book, who only exist through the memories and stories told by the woman, come to life—like the aunt who is a formative character in the life of our heroine, or her father, a breeder of combat quails.

-Atiq Rahimi

The Patience Stone About the Production

“Change doesn’t come through guns—it comes through culture, and women change the culture,” says **Atiq Rahimi**, director and co-writer of *The Patience Stone*, adapted from his Goncourt Prize-winning novel of the same name. “Afghan women are strong. In the west Afghan women are seen simplistically as victims of oppression—and my heroine is certainly that, but the important thing to understand is she is much more than that. Afghan women have the same desires, emotions, and complexities as women everywhere, and they are a powerful force for change.”

While the wartime setting in *The Patience Stone* is never explicitly stated as Afghanistan, “It is clearly Kabul,” says producer **Michael Gentile**. “The conflict doesn’t have to be named. There’s a universality to the story, and the folklore of the “patience stone”— *syngué sabour*—is known throughout the Muslim world.”

Describing the metaphor that anchors his story, Rahimi explains, “Everybody knows songs and stories about the *syngué sabour*. In very closed societies with so much censorship and prohibition, it symbolizes a common yearning to pour out feelings and desires that are kept locked away.” When the heroine dares to speak frankly to her paralyzed husband, he becomes her patience stone, absorbing her cares and secrets and enabling her self-discovery. “Shame about the human body is one of the fundamental forms of oppression,” says Rahimi, “And she learns about her own body.”

Speaking freely, but living abroad

Both the writer-director and the actress who plays his central character have lived and worked in a manner that defies the strictures of their respective cultures’ religious prohibitions. Since leaving Afghanistan at the age of twenty in the mid-1990s, becoming a well-known novelist and filmmaker, and winning the Prix Goncourt in 2008, Rahimi has achieved both admiration and infamy in his homeland and in the Muslim world. “Of course, there are the mullahs who condemn him, but Afghanistan is proud of Atiq,” says Gentile.

Similarly, **Golshifteh Farahani**, the Iranian actress who plays the film’s protagonist, was a beloved star in Iranian film, television, and theater since her early teen years, but has become *persona non grata* in Iran after appearing in the 2008 Ridley Scott thriller *Body of Lies* (plus, a sexy photo shoot in a western fashion magazine further damned her). Farahani can travel to Iran to visit family, but cannot work there and, like Rahimi, she now lives in Paris.

Anonymous on the streets of Kabul

With such highly recognizable and controversial figures leading the cast and crew, shooting the entire film in Kabul would have been fraught with notoriety if not danger. Most of the filming was carried out in Morocco with a full crew, including director of photography **Thierry Arbogast** (known for his stylish and arresting visuals in films such as *La Femme Nikita* and *Kiss of the Dragon*). “We found apartment blocks in Morocco that looked exactly like Soviet-era housing in Kabul,” laughs Gentile. The film is shot in Scope with a full-sized digital camera.

Exteriors, however, were shot in Kabul with stripped-down, run-and-gun anonymity. “We had a skeleton crew, Afghan line producers, and young assistants from both France and Kabul,” says Rahimi. The crew stayed in private homes among friends, and never shot in the same place for more than two or three days. “Atiq’s face is well known,” says Gentile, “And we needed to stay under the radar to get the work done quickly and cheaply. There are so many journalists and documentary productions around Kabul, we could pass unnoticed.” The filmmakers had procured permission to enter the country with a foreign crew and a small portable digital camera by claiming that they were making a documentary about “combat quail,” the racing birds who are featured in a subplot (their “combat” is a race, not a cockfight). “Afghanis love birds,” says Rahimi. “Every home has pet birds, in a beautiful garden or a poor hut.”

The need for anonymity was not so much about personal safety as about avoiding too many onlookers and official harassment. “At one location, we were scheduled to shoot three days,” recalls Rahimi, “But some soldiers came after the first day and demanded to see our permits. We showed them, but they said that wasn’t enough—we needed permission from the local mullah. I wasn’t about to go before some mullah to beg permission or give him a payoff, so we crammed the shoot into two days and got out of there. But you have to understand, the war is not in Kabul. Kabul is so busy that half the time we couldn’t get the crew across the city through traffic. Of course, some imbecile could come and blow himself up next to you—so it was better to stay low.”

Against her fervent wishes, Golshifteh Farahani was not able to come to Kabul for the shoot. “She wanted to hide in our suitcases!” says Gentile, “But she is so recognizable that she would have brought crowds down around us, and her safety could not be assured. She was disappointed because she felt so strongly about this character, it killed her to have another woman in a burkah playing her role.”

Rahimi coached his leading lady in the accents, movements and mannerisms of an Afghan woman of her character’s background. “She had hoped to spend a month or more living in an Afghan household, learning the part,” says Rahimi, “And we could have kept her out of sight with friends, but we couldn’t work it out in time. So we rehearsed intensively and she watched Afghan films and videos to achieve the performance.”

“We absolutely had to shoot the film in Farsi, not French or English” says producer Gentile. The film was produced on a modest—but not penurious—two million dollar budget.

Working with J-C Carrière

The Patience Stone, as a film, follows its heroine through daily life and through the past times of her life. “In my book,” explains Rahimi, “The woman is always by the man’s side, but in the film the camera is always at *her* side, altering the perspective and allowing us out of the confines of a small room and into her life experiences.”

Indeed, when Rahimi’s friend **Jean-Claude Carrière** first mentioned that he thought the novel was very cinematic, Rahimi was surprised, “But as Jean-Claude and I started to work together, we devised ways of opening up the story and revealing more of the woman’s life.” Legendary screenwriter Carrière, who has collaborated for over five amazingly prolific decades with a panoply of cinematic greats, is married to an Iranian woman and has a strong affinity for Muslim culture.

As for the source material’s cinematic potential, Rahimi says laughingly, “I have heard it said that I write like a cineaste and make films like a writer, which I hope is true.”

Warm reception in the Muslim world—or parts thereof

So far, *The Patience Stone* has been greeted warmly in the Muslim world, winning Best Film in the 2012 Eurasia International Film Festival in Kazakhstan and Best Actress in the 2012 Abu Dhabi Film Festival. It has been screened in Kabul and will play in public theaters; “Yes, in Kabul of course the film has been and will be screened in public, but not necessarily in other parts of Afghanistan. It won’t be shown in Iran at all—Golshifteh’s work is banned there—but she is tremendously popular and people will find a way to see it. There’s no question that the film is controversial in the Muslim world, but whether the mullahs are ready or not, people are ready to hear this story.”

Next generation of Afghan filmmakers

Rahimi is optimistic about the rebirth of Afghan culture after decades of war, occupation, and Taliban oppression. “We tried to employ many Afghan apprentices, including young women, and the young people are making movies everywhere you look! There is no money, but there is excitement and ingenuity and cheap digital cameras. Sometimes we couldn’t get the equipment or the operators we wanted because they were busy making their own films. That’s the change that will come to Afghanistan—through culture, not through war.”

The Patience Stone
About Golshifteh Farahani

Golshifteh Faharani is an Iranian actress. The daughter of the theater director Behzad Faharani, she began performing on stage at the age of six. When she was 14, she was cast as the lead actress in the movie ***The Pear Tree*** by Dariush Mehrjui, for which she won the award for Best Actress at the 16th Fajr International Film Festival. Since then, she has starred in more than fifteen films.

Recently, she's been playing in such films as Bahman Ghobadi's ***Half Moon*** (2006), which won the Golden Shell at the 2006 San Sebastian Film Festival. She's also been in Rasool Mollagholi Poor's ***M For Mother*** (2006), which was chosen to represent Iran for the Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards in 2008.

In 2008, she played with Leonardo DiCaprio and Russell Crowe in Ridley Scott's movie ***Body of Lies***, becoming the first Iranian actress to play in a major Hollywood production. Her last film in Iran, ***About Elly*** directed by Asgar Farhadi in 2009, won a Silver Bear in Berlin and The Best Narrative Feature at Tribeca.

In 2011, she played in Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi's ***Chicken With Plums*** with Mathieu Amalric and Edouard Baer. She also starred in Rachid Bouchareb's ***Just Like A Woman*** in which she stars with Sienna Miller. They were both awarded Best Actress at the Festival de la fiction TV de la Rochelle in 2012.

Recently, Atiq Rahimi also chose her to be the lead of his best seller novel cinematographic adaptation, ***The Patience Stone*** which he directed . Additionally, she will be starring in the lead role in Hiner Saleem's new film ***My Sweet Pepperland***.