

TIFF 2012 Film Review: The Reluctant Fundamentalist

• on September 13, 2012

by Preeti Thandi



Mira Nair's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a coming of age story about a young man who makes his way up the corporate ladder on Wall Street and how the socio-political climate post 9/11 transforms his life. Based on **Mohsin Hamid's** best-selling novel the film is serious, heavy and very political. Yet Nair weaves a rich tapestry with soulful music and vibrant colors. The film explores the 'other' side of the story and raises questions of identity highlighting the stereotyping and racial profiling of Muslims following 9/11. Nair peels off the layers of the 'American dream' and exposes the cultural conflict between the east and the west.

The film opens in Lahore, Pakistan with an enthralling Sufi concert and in another part of the city an American gets kidnapped on a dingy street. It appears that the young professor, Changez Khan (**Riz Ahmed**) is directly involved with the abduction. But it also becomes apparent that "looks can be deceiving", as Changez spells it out in the film. He agrees to be interviewed by

Bobby (**Liev Schreiber**), an American journalist at a Tea House. Here steeped in the simmering aromas of Lahore, the story unfolds. It traces Changez's life 10 years ago, how he finds and lives the American dream and how it is shattered. Nair deviates from the book, which is a monologue to make the story more engaging.

Featuring an international cast from Hollywood, Pakistan and India the film does bring different worlds together and is the first Indo-Pakistani production. Riz Ahmed is brilliant and intense as Changez and successfully portrays the inner turmoil of his character. His eyes express a lot especially in scenes when he is questioned by the journalist, strip-searched at the airport or at the definitive moment of his transformation.

Kate Hudson plays his high society photographer girl friend Erica in New York but somehow the chemistry between the two is not so compelling. Kiefer Sutherland is the "opportunist" boss at the Wall Street firm and effectively portrays a man with a "lethal mind." **Shabana Azmi** looks regal in gorgeous Pakistani wardrobe and jewellery as Changez's mom. **Om Puri** is a Pakistani poet and Changez's father in the film.

The film was shot in five cities - Atlanta, New York, Lahore, Delhi and Istanbul. Due to insurance issues parts of Lahore in Pakistan were re-created in old Dehli. It took five years in the making and was a challenge to finance. It would be interesting to see whether the film opens the dialogue and creates the bridge Nair hopes to create.