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NAHID

A film by

Ida Panahandeh

IRAN – 2015 - 105 min - 16:9 – COLOR

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SYNOPSIS

Nahid, a young divorcee, lives alone with her 10-year-old son in a Northern Iranian city on the Caspian Sea. According to the Iranian rules, the custody of the child belongs to the father, but he has granted her on the condition that she doesn't remarry. The relationship between Nahid and another man, who loves her passionately and wants to marry her, will trouble her life as a woman and as a mother.

As a female filmmaker, I've always been interested in women's issues in Iran, and on a larger scale, in the Middle-East. NAHID is one of the pioneer Iranian movies that portray divorced women's issues, including their right to the custody of children, and the question of temporary marriage. By making this film, I have highlighted the agonizing lives of these women by reflecting Nahid's life on the screen. I hope that by addressing such issues we can make a difference, at least on a cultural level. The focus of traditional societies is on a woman's motherhood, therefore, the main role of a woman is to live and act as a 'mother'; being a 'woman' and what womanhood might entail is not really recognized in such societies.

Ida Panahandeh

Director's Notes

THE ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

For years, whenever my co-screenwriter, Arsalan Amiri, and I started to write a screenplay, a young woman would pop up with her unruly and disobedient son, and would try to force us to include her in our stories. Occasionally, we also wrote a story for her, but the story would never turn out as we wished, so we would let go of it. Finally, we came up with a story about her. On the other hand, Arsalan and I had common experience during our childhood. Our mothers had brought us up without the presence of our fathers, in mother-headed families. We witnessed their struggles to prove themselves as independent women in the traditional society of Iran. The personality of this type of women is totally different from those who have a normal life. They strive earnestly hoping to live a better life, both for their children and them. Nahid is of that kind of woman. Perhaps, we somehow paid an unconscious tribute to our mothers! We were certain that the story should happen in a city other than Tehran. We were looking for a city where a young woman would always be under the scrutinising eyes of people, and could not do whatever she liked. As a result, during the process of writing the script, we went to a Northern city of Iran, Anzali, whose atmosphere we were very familiar with from the past. It took us a year and a half to write the screenplay.

THE SOCIAL ISSUES

The reason behind all the turmoil expressed in this film is the transition from the traditional society to a modern one in Iran during the past few decades. Iranian people are changing like the rest of the world; traditions have no choice but to retreat. However, the current laws are resisting the change, hence becoming asynchronous to the society. The aftermath of this heterogeneity is that different social classes, ethnic groups, and women and men become enemies unwillingly. Due to Iran's current laws, if a divorced mother remarries, the father has the priority to get the custody of the children. One of the solutions to this problem for such women in order not to lose the custody of their children and also to have a legal relationship with another man at the time, is to have a temporary marriage. Despite the fact that a temporary marriage - siqeh - is legitimate according to Sharia laws, most Iranians despise women who enter into such marriages. The Iranian society considers it as a taboo, and most people think these temporary marriages are a sort of exploitation of women, as men can have multiple "wives" even for a few hours. Therefore, Nahid and her lover Massoud hide their temporary marriage as a secret. They pretend to be in a permanent marriage.

THE WORKING METHOD

I started my work in cinema by making many 16 mm short films in film school. The visual forms of cinema fascinated me. That's why I selected Filming as my major during my undergraduate studies. At the same time, I became more interested in the theoretical and narrative discussions of cinema. So, I tried to focus on these aspects during my graduate studies. NAHID is a combination of my academic studies during

my two BA and MA studies and the lessons I learned from working on shorts, docs. and TV movies. My permanent concern is how I can find a suitable visual form to narrate my story. When starting to write the screenplay, I already knew that the best season for my story was autumn, as the cloudy, grey ambience of the city would reflect the innermost being of my heroine and other characters and enrich my film's visual palette. I had to watch for the colors of the costumes and use cool or neutral colors to emphasize on the effect of the red color of an element of the film that had a symbolic presence. Each character with their way of thought and lifestyle required their own special visual style and for example, the contrast between the warm and cold atmosphere of their houses helped characterize each of them. On the other hand, it was impossible to record the atmosphere of Nahid's hurly-burly life only by hand-held or still camera or by soft tracking. A combination of all of them was necessary for visualizing all the stressful ambience of the film. And more important, I didn't aim at making a full-fledged realistic film with all its details, but something far beyond sheer recording facts. I had been thinking about the elements that contributed to the creation of this sort of poeticism- *mise en scène*, objects, nature, music, Nahid's hands, colors, noises, since I started writing the screenplay.

THE ACTORS

Sareh Bayat, who plays Nahid's role, is one of the shining actresses in the Iranian Cinema, someone who is remembered in the role she extraordinarily played in the movie *A SEPARATION* by Asghar Farhadi. This very point was my biggest fear in choosing her. I did not want Sareh to be associated with the oppressed woman in *A SEPARATION* at any moment during this movie. Sareh was aware of my sensitivity towards that subject as well. I kept saying, "You should be a she wolf Sareh! Go! Attack! Don't be afraid! Answer back! ". She is a sensitive, flexible, and very capable actress who can convey different emotions to the viewers without even saying a word, and just through her eyes and facial expressions. Everyday , she would change more and give life to the character of Nahid. Pejman Bazeghi, playing the role of Massoud, is an experienced and also a charming actor who has had lots of experience playing different roles. In *NAHID*, he was supposed to be self-possessed, and a father and husband without being focused as a handsome man. While filming, I felt envious of his very high intelligence and cleverness. He understood my suggestions and ideas quickly, and would apply them right away. He had a very good emotional connection with other actors and actresses whom he played with. He had to play the role of a little-traditional and even-tempered man who was in love, and these characteristics were to be reflected in all of his behaviour: in the way he walked, talked, tidied up his desk, and so many other things. There were really moments when both my DP and I felt moved by his acting. Navid Mohammad Zadeh, who plays the role of Ahmad, is one of the most famous theatre actors in Iran. Watching him on a theatre stage is a wonderful experience. All actors and actresses in *NAHID* talk with the accent of people from harbour town of Bandar Anzali on the Caspian Sea, which is of course not possible to discern by non-Iranian viewers. Navid, like Sareh, although from a different province and ethnicity, showed an amazing perseverance, and gained the ability to skilfully talk with Gilaki accent in a very short time by hanging out at the harbours and cafés, and spending time and communicating with Anzali's fishermen.

THE IRANIAN FILM INDUSTRY

Among Middle Eastern countries, Iran is the only one exporting its own specific and special cinema around the world. We are a die-hard nation who have kept the torch of our art houses burning in the course of time despite all the turmoil we have gone through over the years, and then we have invited the world to see them. Kiarostami, Farhadi, Banietemad, and so many others have played a great role in expanding the borders of our culture. We are not able to make movies as easily as Europeans or Americans do by having million-dollar budgets. Our hands are tied in depicting our dreams. If my film is here today, it is not just because of my perseverance and hard work. Do not forget luck. There are a lots of young creative and well educated young people in Iran with the potential to make amazing films, who are way more talented than I am, and who are yearning for the possibility of making a movie, but have not been as lucky as I have been. Honestly, financial hardship does not give their talents the opportunity to flourish.

Ida PANAHANDEH

Ida Panahandeh was born in Tehran. She has an MFA in Film Directing, and a BFA in Film Photography. She started filmmaking when a student in Tehran Art University, and she has made many short films. As a talented filmmaker, she was invited to make TV movies for State Iranian TV and awarded in different national TV Festivals. She was chosen and invited to participate in 2009's Berlinale "Talent Campus" with her short film "Cockscomb Flower". As a female filmmaker, she has always been interested in women's issues and has tried to do her best in improving the cultural view on women's rights by making documentaries and also through her first feature film, NAHID.

FILMOGRAPHY

2005 Those Hands,	13 min
2007 City Lights	20 min
2008 Cockscomb Flower	17 min
2009 Winter Vases	48 min
2010 Irandokht (Documentary)	26 min
2010 The Story of David & the Dove (TV Movie)	90 min
2012 Ms. Ghamar's House (Documentary)	63 min
2012 The Lost Honor of Mr. Sadeghi (TV Movie)	90 min
2013 From The South East (TV Movie)	90 min
2015 Nahid (Feature)	104 min

CAST

Sareh Bayat
Pejman Bazeghi
Navid Mohammad Zadeh
Milad Hossein Pour
Pouria Rahimi
Nasrin Babaei

Nahid
Masoud
Ahmad
Amir Reza
Naser
Leila

CREW

Director
Director's Assistant
Screenplay
Photography
Editor
Sound
Sound Design & Mix
Music
Production Manager
Production Company
Producer
World Sales

Ida Panahandeh
Mohsen Hassan Pour
Ida Panahandeh, Arsalan Amiri
Morteza Gheidi
Arsalan Amiri
Jahangir Mirshekari, Mehdi Ebrahimzadeh
Mehrshad Malakouti
Majid Pousti
Vahid Moradi
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