

Spain ahoy for Iran's Asghar Farhadi

2016 01:55 AM



Asghar Farhadi is trying to rope in Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz for his latest film that will be in Spanish.

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By Gautaman Bhaskaran

Iranian director Asghar Farhadi, who won two awards for his competition entry, *The Salesman*, at the recent Cannes Film Festival, is now planning a Spanish language movie and is trying to rope in the husband-wife pair of Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz. It is said that Cruz — a favourite of the legendary Spanish director, Pedro Almodovar — was keen to work with Farhadi, whose recent works like *A Separation* and *The Past* have been critically lauded, more so the first.

Farhadi — whose *The Salesman* won the Best Screenplay Palm and the Best Actor Award (for Shahab Hosseini) — has not yet given a title to his new work, whose script has been completed. The helmer will be in Spain during June to scout for locations, and in what is Farhadi's usual style, the plot is not being revealed. But we do know that the story revolves around a family of winemakers living in Spain. "It's a psychological thriller with a dash of Agatha Christie in it," according to a report in *Variety*.

The new film may well offer a cultural and industrial crossover, which may be highly useful in the kind of times we live in. Often in these days, funding comes from multiple sources.

However, language may be a bit of hindrance with the new movie to be shot in Spanish, which Farhadi does not talk. But he did pull off *The Past*, which was set in Paris and was largely in French. This film also vied at Cannes for the Palm d' Or, and earned the actress, Berenice Bejo (who was earlier seen in *The Artist*), an acting prize. *The Past* also clinched a Golden Globe

nomination.

Farhadi's *The Past* is a beautifully written, crafted and acted film. Much like Farhadi's 2011 *A Separation*, which won the Foreign Language Oscar, *The Past* is about family and children. Both paint wonderful portraits of how relationships among screwed-up adults affect children — and deeply so.

The Past opens in a masterful manner when we see Bejo, portraying Marie, at the airport trying to catch the eye of a man, Ahmad (Ali Mosaffa), across a glass partition. He turns out to be her husband, who is returning to Paris after a four-year-separation to sign the divorce papers.

Marie wants Ahmad to stay at her place, not in a **HOTEL** , hoping that he would talk her teenage daughter Lucie (Pauline Burlet), out of her tantrums and sulky mood. Estranged from her father, Lucie is fond of Ahmad and does not want her mother to marry her third lover, Samir, (Tahar Rahim). The family is not just this: there are two other children; Marie's little daughter and Lucie's sister, and Samir's son.

Marie is all set to marry Samir, but there is something that seems to be holding her back. Perhaps, she is not sure that she wants to close her ties with Ahmad. Another part of her uncertainty about letting Ahmad finally go and getting into a more permanent relationship with Samir is the fact that his wife is in a coma following her attempted suicide.

A Separation — which I feel is Farhadi's all-time best — won the Oscar in 2012 for the Best Foreign Language Picture, and earlier that year, the film won the Silver Bears for Best Actor (Shahab Hosseini) and Best Actress (Leila Hatami).

Farhadi's tale of marital discord slips into the private chambers of a married couple, squabbling over their own future and that of their only daughter. The wife wants to divorce her husband, because he refuses to immigrate with her and their daughter to America. She says the little girl will have a bright future there, far away from Iran's suffocating conservatism and religious animosity. He does not want to go, because his Alzheimer's afflicted father needs him, and more than him, his wife. The daughter, 11 or 12, wants all of them, certainly her parents. And, when the wife leaves, the husband hires a maid, piously religiously and with a husband whose debtors are hounding him. Finally, when they all meet in court, they try taking refuge in lies and deceit.

If I were asked to describe *A Separation* in a single word, I would as 'dilemma'. Farhadi captures this troubling human emotion with pain and pathos. The husband wants to be with his wife, and go with her to the West, where he knows a better life awaits them. More importantly, he wants to be with his little daughter. But he is wracked by dilemmatic guilt: how can he leave behind his sick father. There is one extraordinary scene in the movie: when the old man holds his daughter-in-law, Simin's arm and refuses to let go as she prepares to leave her home.

Simin's predicament is no less: she is terribly afraid that she would find herself alone in the US, because her husband may not let their daughter go. The law would be with him on this.

The daughter is terrified at having to face a broken home, and she desperately seeks to get her father and mother together. In the final frames, when the judge asks her to decide whom she would like to live with, she is in quandary as well.

There are other dilemmas. The maid is torn between helping her husband fight his debtors and telling the truth.

All this is portrayed with haunting sensitivity and extraordinary performance by each member of the cast in a film that is as dramatic, albeit in a quite sort of way, as it is natural and real. Yes, real.

And, as far as the upcoming Spanish work is concerned, with brilliant performers like Cruz and Bardem for his new outing, Farhadi would be up there even before he begins his shoot.

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