

# 'Our story mirrors the mutual suspicion with which America and the Muslim world look at one another'

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At a café a dashing young Pakistani man named Changez (Riz Ahmed) tells Bobby (Liev Schreiber), an American journalist, about his experiences in the American corporate world. Roll back ten years, and we find a younger Changez fresh from Princeton, seeking his fortune on Wall Street.

The American Dream seems well within his grasp, complete with a smart artist girlfriend, Erica (Kate Hudson). But when 9/11 intervenes and the Twin Towers are attacked, a cultural divide slowly begins to crack open between the two.

Soon, in Mohsin Hamid's cryptic novel and Mira Nair's often intriguing and jolting thriller of a movie *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, we see a transformed Changez back in Pakistan faced with many hard choices and startling discoveries.

After successful screenings at a number of film festivals including the Toronto International Film Festival last year, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was screened exclusively by the New York Indian Film Festival organizers April 24.

The film hits theaters nationwide this spring, beginning with New York and Los Angeles April 26 followed by several major cities May 3.

'Over the last few years, we have seen many films about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, but always told from the American point of view,' Nair says. 'In our story, the encounter between the characters of Changez and the American interrogator Bobby, mirrors the mutual suspicion with which America and Pakistan (or the Muslim world) look at one another.'

'We learn that as a result of America's war on terror, Changez experiences a seismic shift in his own attitude, unearthing allegiances more fundamental than money, power, and maybe even love.'

The film shot in five cities on three continents with an international cast and crew of Hollywood, Pakistani and Indian also features Om Puri, Shabana Azmi and Kiefer Sutherland.

Nair hopes to reach young people around the world with this film. 'It's for them, so hopefully they can be strong and recognize their journey in Changez.'

The film opens up Hamid's novel. Hamid was aware of the changes right from the start. 'I trusted Mira with my book,' he says. She had read the manuscript of the book months before it was published in 2007 and was translated into many languages.

'What this film gives you is a human being with whom to empathize and with whom to relate on a human level,' Hamid says.

At the Toronto film festival, Nair had said it was not easy to adapt the book. 'It was to be a very complex adaptation and I wanted to be very involved...The book is basically a monologue. The thriller element is there, but in a very elegant and psychological way. The ending is more ambiguous.'

The character of the American, played by Schreiber,



Kate Hudson and Riz Ahmed in the film



Riz Ahmed plays Changez

needed to be fleshed out into a living and breathing character, she added.

Hamid recalls when Nair told him she was going to add a third act to the story of his novel. 'The book deals with the character of Changez going to America and then coming back to Pakistan. Mira wanted to have more of what happens in Pakistan, and the context for the conversation with the American, which is just hinted at in the novel.'

This addition was the first significant departure from the novel. 'My main sense was that Mira is a filmmaker and knows what she is doing...If her film needs to be this way, I was going to trust her on that.'

Ami Boghani, who has worked closely with Nair for years, and Hamid, who had never read a screenplay before joining the team, rewrote parts of the novel for the script.

Hamid confesses that he was hesitant to join the team. 'Partly because I was writing my novel, partly because I thought this was Mira's film,' he explains. 'I wanted to enjoy it as a wellwisher but I didn't want to get into the conflicts that I thought would be inevitable if we were having to argue out the details of how things should work. But then I kept telling myself the film is inspired by the novel, but it isn't the novel on screen. Once I embraced that way of looking at things, it became much easier to become involved.'