

The Stoning of Soraya M.

Mpower Pictures | Starring Shohreh Aghdashloo, Jim Caviezel, Mozhan Marno, Navid Negahban

I must first warn you: This film is based on a true story. A woman is executed publicly by stoning—and, yes, her death is portrayed in graphic scenes. Obviously this movie is not for children. But if you care about the global oppression of women, or the current crisis of freedom in Iran, *The Stoning of Soraya M.* is a must-see.

The story begins when a French-Iranian journalist named Freidoune Sahebjam (Jim Caviezel) has car trouble outside a rural Iranian village. While Sahebjam waits for his car to be repaired, a woman named Zahra (Shohreh Aghdashloo) begs him to listen to her story. He records it. That tape becomes the basis of both Sahebjam's 1994 book and this movie.

Zahra is distraught because the men of her village have killed her niece, Soraya (Mozhan Marno). Through flashbacks we learn that Soraya's immoral husband wants to put her away so he can marry a 14-year-old girl. He has also turned his two sons against their mother (but shows no interest in his two young daughters). When Soraya dares to defy her husband's scheme, he trumps up false adultery charges against her with the help of the local Islamic mullah. Zahra tries to stop the madness, but in the end the villagers commit the Islamic version of a lynching. Along the way we learn how thick anti-woman attitudes are in this part of the world.

The 20-minute stoning sequence is horrible. (I expect some comparisons to *The Passion of the Christ*, since Stephen McEveety produced both films). But if you close your eyes during some parts, don't miss how various villagers—including even Soraya's two sons—participate in her execution. You'll find it difficult to forget the way young men in the village

click their rocks together while they wait for the signal to kill.

Some movies are purely entertainment. *The Stoning of Soraya M.* is not that. It is artfully filmed, and Aghdashloos' defiant performance is stunning. Yet in the end this movie is meant to educate us—and hopefully inspire us to cry out for justice against all forms of gender oppression.

The Stoning of Soraya M. is in English and Farsi, with subtitles. It is rated R for scenes of brutal violence.

J. Lee Grady is the editor of *Charisma*. He also directs *The Mordecai Project*, a ministry devoted to confronting the abuse of women around the world. For more information, visit .