



## GHAFFARY, FARROKH

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**GHAFFARY, FARROKH** (Ġaffari, Farrok; b. Tehran, 7 Esfand 1300/26 February 1922; d. Paris, 26 Āḡar 1385/17 December 2006), artist, author, actor, film director, and film critic; he served as one of the directors of the National Iranian Radio-Television from 1966 to 1978 and also worked as the chief organizer of the Shiraz Festival of Arts (Jašn-e honar-e Širāz) project from 1966 to 1977. He was also the founder of the National Archives of Iranian Cinema (Film-kāna-ye melli-e Irān) and, along with Ebrāhim Golestān and Fereydun Rahnemā, one of the pioneers of the Iranian New-Wave (Mawj-e now) filmmakers of the 20th century.

Ghaffary's father, Ḥasan-'Ali Khan Mo'āwen al-Dawla (1886-1976), belonged to the Ghaffary clan of [Kashan](#), a branch that included numerous prominent politicians, artists, and intellectuals. Mo'āwen-al-Dawla was a high-ranking officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Qajar and Pahlavi periods.

In April 1960, Ghaffary married the novelist and translator Mahšid Amiršāhi (b. 9 April 1937), with whom he had a daughter named Maryam.

At age eleven, Ghaffary went to Belgium with his father, who had just been appointed minister plenipotentiary (*wazir-e moḡtār*) at the Iranian embassy. There he finished high school and then continued his education in France at the University of Grenoble, where he studied French literature and theater and started getting seriously interested in cinema and became chief of the theater group of the university students. He was first fascinated with silent films and the development of cinema around the world, particularly in France.



In 1950, he moved to Paris, where he served as assistant to Henri Langlois at the Cinémathèque Française, and from 1951 to 1956 as the executive secretary of the International Federation of Film Archives. Following his return to Iran, he succeeded in having the National Iranian Film Center (Kānun-e melli-e film) established in the Archeological Museum (Muza-ye Irān-e bāstān) and arranged its official inauguration in December 1949. Here, with the cooperation of Ebrāhim Golestān and Fereydun Rahnemā, he organized the First film Festival in Iran, screening British movies in 1950 and French films in 1951. The Center also became a favorite meeting place for intellectuals interested in foreign cinema. During the same time, Ghaffary started writing serious film criticism in the leftist press under the pen name M. Mobārak and also published his first articles on the history of Iranian cinema in *Positif* and *Archives du Cinéma*, two French magazines devoted to surrealist films and avant-garde cinema.

In 1958, Ghaffary produced his first film *Janub-e šahr* (South of the city; 35 minutes), which described in a neo-realistic and critical manner the poverty of the working class in the south of Tehran. For political reasons, the film was banned after a few days of screening, and its negative destroyed. Five years later, he produced *Raqābat dar šahr* (Rivalry in the city), which was just a modified version of *Janub-e šahr*, with the focus on rivalry and not on the social reality that would project economic or political criticism; so it was screened. The same year, he founded the National Film Archives of Iranian Cinema for providing a service similar to the one he had been directing in Paris. In 1959, he produced his second film *Arus kodum-e?* (Which one is the bride?; 90 minutes), which was a purely commercial film.

In 1975, Ghaffary produced *Zanburak* (103 minutes), a movie inspired by Iranian folk tales and reputed to be the first Iranian musical movie. It relates the story of a man in charge of the zanburak in the events following the disastrous defeat of the army he served. The term *zanburak* (the running cannon), sometimes referred to as the falconet, is the name of a small cannon mounted on a camel, usually used in Central Asia and Middle East; it was used in Iran from the Safavid period to the end of the 19th century (see FIREARMS i. History). His other film of the same year, *Mard-e kerāya'i* (The rent man), was left unfinished.

The period of 1960-70s marked a turning point in the history of film industry in Iran and saw the development of a new, “different” (*motafāwet*) cinema. At that time, cinema was an entertainment in the Oriental style, with insertion of



dance and music as in Egyptian or Indian films. So, a few intellectual filmmakers, whether influenced by Italian neo-realism or French Nouvelle Vague, who had a severe and radical position against the ordinary commercial makeup of the so-called *Film-e fārsi*, wanted to liberate this traditional Iranian cinema from its conventions. They tried to give, in a neo-realistic style, an aspect of the social climate in Iran during this period. In 1962, the well-known poet [Foruḡ Farroḡzād](#) produced *Ḳāna siāh ast* (The House is black), a documentary on the lepers' colony; in 1965, Ebrāhim Golestān made *Ḳešt wa āyina* (The Brick and the mirror), a realistic and introspective work; in 1967, Fereydun Rahnemā produced *Siāvaš dar Taḳt-e Jamšid* (Siāvaš at Persepolis), an experimental film on the notion of time.

Ghaffary's third movie, *Šab-e quzī* (Night of the hunchback; 100 minutes), produced in 1963, has a unique place in the history of Iranian cinema. It can be regarded as an intellectual film that developed the language and culture in Iranian cinema and also as a step towards the formation of Iranian "New Wave" cinema. 'Night of the hunchback' is an adaptation of a story from [Alfa layla wa layla](#) (*Pers. Hazār o yak šab*), a collection of tales composed in Arabic and known in English as *The Arabian Nights*. Ghaffary's film is a dark comedy about a hunchback in a team of entertainers, who dies in a farcical accident, and his dead body is passed around from person to person. The original story set during the reign of Caliph [Hārūn al-Rašid](#) was modified to reflect the political and social climate in Iran in the 1960-70s. Ghaffary, wrote the screenplay with the collaboration of Jalāl Moḡaddam, and made the film with himself and Pari Šāberi acting as its main characters. It reveals the corruption, hypocrisy, and fear in the different classes of Tehran society. The film was presented in 1964 at the International Cannes Film Festival and at the Locarno Film Festival. It was commended by Western film critics and historians, as well as local press, but was not welcomed by the ordinary film-watching public in Iran.

After this film, Ghaffary devoted himself more to research on Iranian cinema, on the establishment of the structure and objectives of the National Iranian Radio-Television (*Rādio wa televizion-e melli-e Irān*), on the management of the Shiraz Arts Festival, and on other administrative duties; he was also actively involved in some functions in the Ministry of Culture and Arts (*Wezārat-e farhang o honar*).

In the 1960s, production of documentary films was institutionalized, and films were framed by the Ministry of Culture and Arts and the National Radio-



Television. Ghaffary's productions in this genre included *Simān-e Tehrān*, *Now-Rūzemān*, on the Persian New Year, *Daryā-ye Pārs*, on the Persian Gulf, *Zendagi o naft*, and *Wezārat-e šanāye' wa ma'āden* (Ministry of industry and mines). Ghaffary had been assigned as head of the cultural department of the National Iranian Radio-Television and became responsible for the organization of the cultural festival of Shiraz. The festival of arts of Shiraz was founded on the suggestion of the Queen Farah Pahlavi, who inaugurated it in 1966. Sponsored by the National Iranian Radio-Television, it ran until 1977. It was an annual event and a wonderful occasion for the meeting of artists from East and West. Principally devoted to theater and music, traditional Iranian music and dance performed in the ruins of [Persepolis](#), it soon included the National Festival of Films (called Sepas) in 1969.

Those cultural events attracted national and international artists, including John Cage (composer), Maurice Béjart (choreographer and opera director), Bismillah Khan (Indian musician), Yehudi Menuhin (master violinist), Arthur Rubinstein (master pianist) Iannis Xenakis (composer), and others. In 1970, Peter Brook and Micheline Rozen who had just founded their International Center for Theatre Research in Paris, came to Iran. In 1971, Brook presented *Orghast*, an experimental play based on the myth of Prometheus and written by himself and Rozen. During the eleventh festival, a very special show (and the longest in the history of theater) was played: *Ka Mountain*, a story about a family and some other people, which lasted 164 hours with 47 performers acting continuously. This annual cross-cultural experiment was cut out by the Revolution of 1979.

Ghaffary in *O. K. Mister* (1979), a surrealist political comedy directed by Parviz Kimiā'i, played the main character, William Knox d'Arcy, a foreigner who arrives in a remote village in Iran with the planned purpose to exploit the natural resources of the land.

Ghaffary, who was traveling abroad at the time of the Revolution, decided to come to Paris for a while, but he stayed on in exile and died in Paris after a heart attack in December 2006.

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