



# A Study of the Aspects of Criticism of Ebrahim Golestan's *the Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries*

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**Abstract:** *The Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* is a film that has been produced based on political intentions and has its origin in the critical conditions of a society where corruption had permeated into every affair. The thinkers and intellectuals of past decades in Iran as well as the then official authorities who had ordered the film to be banned and those who assessed the film according to the social conditions of those times have always underlined the point that Golestan's film with its bitter metaphors sought to ridicule Pahlavi regime and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. But now we can have a new vision of the film and the comments that have been made around it. Having reviewed the film in the light of Golestan's works which have adopted alerting approach instead of predictive attitude, one can feasibly claim that Golestan intended to warn the men of power and people that the existing political conditions will lead to a gap. The inattention to this issue can result in misunderstanding which might have been the reason why the film was seized. One of the neglected aspects of Golestan's work is his attention to a criticism that he thought that could be effective of course not for incitement of people's emotions. Golestan himself did not see the intellectualism and criticism in insulting and rowdyism, i.e. the same event which happened for the *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries*. The current essay seeks to uncover another face of Golestan and his *the Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* based on analytical studies of the existing historical documents in this regard.

**Keywords:** *The Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries, Ebrahim Golestan, Criticism of Iran's Modernity*

## INTRODUCTION

What was the approach adopted by Ebrahim Golestan for criticizing Iranian society in late Pahlavi era? Did he have a kind of personal hatred of the ruling regime like the majority of his contemporary intellectuals? What is the place of the cinematic and then literary works the *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* and which reactions had they caused?

*In the land of sea, they are away from the concern of thinking...*

*They are neither after the mystery ... nor they build ... they are just dependent on the future decided by environment ...* (A Part of the Dialogue of Wave, Coral and Rock).

There are few people who are not familiar with Ebrahim Golestan in Iran. He is a writer, film maker, translator and a cultural activist who has devoted his life to the exploration of the fields in which he is interested. Golestan has left Iran long ago and now lives in a luxurious mansion in England. His immigration as he himself has said: "is of a political nature in the same way that all of our affairs are of political nature".

(Jahed, 2005) The latter clear remark of Golestan is perhaps the best gate to enter in one of the most political eras of his life and work which dates back to later years of his presence and the Pahlavi regime in Iran in 1970s the glorious decade of the power of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This decade was witness to the ambitious projects of Pahlavi regime that spurred numerous rallies against capitalism and social break. The surging corruption and bureaucracy, materialism, dependence on straw glories and also the police state which was expanding throughout the country were among the outcomes of it. In this era Ebrahim Golestan decides to return his homeland after living abroad for a while and when he sees the conditions of his country he decides to make a film in order to cast light on some aspects of society and give the necessary warning in this regard. "I left Iran in 1967 because I couldn't stand and decided to live abroad. Then I told myself I have to return and make this film. I came and made this film and left. That's it! I did not intend to make money or amuse anyone by this film. I wanted to prepare a brochure of the conditions of the country". (Jahed, 2005)

*The Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* is the story of a simple-hearted villager who accidentally discovers a treasure and after selling the treasure he builds everything for himself but an unexpected tremor happens and the palace of his dreams collapses. *The Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* was filmed in 1972 and 1973 and screened in a limited form in 1974.

### **The Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries**

Ebrahim Golestan in his interview with Massoud Behnoud about the documentary "Wave and Coral and Thorn" relates a considerable memory from his encounter with Mohammad Reza Pahlavi after watching the film. In the last episode of Golestan's film the narrator says: from this wealth (oil) nothing is for people but a foamy furrow. "I approached him he thanked me of the film and rose and went. I followed him. We went together and he continuously spoke of the film and I felt he is trying to say something... and he finally said that while we were walking together... it is still upsetting for me... He told me: an intelligent man who understands things this way and he cannot manage himself it is his own personal tragedy ... it is at least his own personal tragedy .... But Mr. Golestan about what you said at the end of film: "as long as I am in this country and people like you we will never allow the foamy furrow to reach anyone". Believe me I still get upset when I am thinking of this event even now that several years have passed. The first dialogue of the film is this: "What are you searching for?" I answer: "In the land of sea they are away from the concern of thinking". They do not think. They have no concern of thinking. "In the land of sea they are away from the concern of thinking. *They are neither after the mystery ... nor they build ... they are just dependent on the future decided by environment.* This is the beginning of the film and at the end of film I conclude: "And a pearl is lying in our coral land".

This vision of Golestan of the personality of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi persuaded me to approach the *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* from a different angle. I want not to see this film as a revolt against someone who is seemingly introduced in the story as a fool guy (according to Golestan's remarks about Mohammad Reza Pahlavi) rather as a warning to a simple hearted man who thinks by giving his cow to the villagers he has done something for them while he is himself the victim of the people. Of course, the same warning is given to the viewer and he is reminded that if this state of affairs continues it will end up in division and the disappearance of solidarity which is a dangerous situation where many people would fall victim to it.

In *Writing with Camera*, Parviz Jahed asks Golestan: Were you an opposition of the regime or not? Golestan answers this question in the following words: in those times there was no opposition and I was not a member of any group like PMO because they were on the wrong track. Jahed: Were you a critic of the regime or not? Golestan: One should always be a critic.

In the story of this film this simple-heartedness of the villager is screened in more colorful form by the role that Parviz Sayyad plays. The villager after finding the treasure goes home and decides to celebrate and slaughters his cow for the villagers. His wife does not know about the treasure and she thinks that her husband has lost his mind and asks her relatives to help her; when they reach the man had already slaughtered the cow. The angry crowd following the woman beats the man and takes the cow with themselves.

The woman goes to her brother's house with her son. The man decides to secretly sell the treasure. He earns lots of money and decides to prepare a luxurious life for himself and starts to buy things that he does not need them. He gradually sells all the gold and jewelries that he had found to an antique shop. The antique shop owner and his wife decide to find the treasure of the villager and own it. They teach their maid to deceive the man. The villager wears like the town men but he has decided to return to the village and rebuke those who had beaten him. He decides to reconstruct his house and buy luxurious objects for it in order to boast about them to his fellow villagers. The man does not know about the diabolic plans that have been plotted for him and brings many luxuries to the village. He puts the luxuries in his house and asks the teacher to reconstruct the house for him. The teacher restores the old mansion. At the end an environment is prepared that has no harmony. The house and garden is full of luxuries. The man orders some barbed fences to be built around his house and garden so that no one could enter. He arranges a magnificent wedding party in the garden for his new wife who is the maid of the antique shop owner. The man's first wife is sad and she is forced to take part in the wedding party of her rival wife. None of the villagers take part in the wedding party and do not know that how the man has reached that amount of wealth. In the party there are lots of bizarre extravagances. Iranian and foreign food is served and there are guests from town. Some days after the wedding a painter comes to the village from the town in order to draw a picture from the groom and bride. But while the painter is drawing the picture a tremor happens following the explosions arranged by the road constructors and destroys the mansion and turns it to rubles. After the explosion and the destruction of the mansion of the villager, his old wife, new wife, the jeweler's wife, painter and the teacher who were part of the jeweler's plan depart the village and go to the town and the villager is alone. After a while the villager knows that he can no longer have access to his treasure and he is alone.

#### **Criticisms of Iran's Modernity**

The picture that Golestan depicts of the villager represents a man whom everyone seeks to deceive. If we pay sufficient attention to the story line of the film, we find out that the problems of the villager begin when he decides to give something to his fellow villagers and the people of the village and his family cause him to suffer an unbearable pain due to their ignorance and ingratitude. Having seen this apathy, the villager decides to waste his money. Before making the *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries*, Golestan was accused by his close friends of nearing himself to the power through producing special films. Naser Vosoughi believed that making film for National Oil Company is a kind of collusion with Pahlavi regime and even his obituary was published in the Journal of Thought and Art. (Milani, 2015) However, with such a background making a film like the *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* was truly a shock. The film is full of amphibologies and metaphors for the viewer who can near his mentality to the social environment of those times in Iran. Nevertheless, there is no competent individual among so many characters in Golestan's film. The *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* is a story of the life of a man who is abused by the people around him and Golestan seeks to compare this issue with Iranian society in 1970s. In fact, Golestan does not struggle to make any individual or any political party the hero rather he warns the regime with a slap on the face to inform it that if it continues the way it acts the palace of dreams that it has erected for the people will collapse. Golestan believes that there is no comedy in this film against what some people suggest. Parviz Jahed: "We now turn to the *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* which is in fact a comedy work. Golestan answers: what the hell of comedy! This is one of the craps published in journals. Yes, it is a comedy by kicking and tearing the veils. The film is telling that this is not a comedy it is your tragic life. Jahed continues: how did you decide to make this film? Golestan says: because I was watching my country and I saw that it is farting and like the man who takes his rifle and goes to the top of mountain and shoots I did the same with the moving pictures of the cinema." (Jahed, 2005)

Besides cursory allusions to the story of sudden spike of oil price in 1960s and its aftermath, the *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* speaks of opportunism of the carpetbaggers who have taken advantage of the conditions of those times. The film does not trace the roots of these problems back to modernism or even the

partial modernism or to Shah rather it sees the problem in the very texture of the society and this idea can be criticized in an extensive manner. Importance and necessity of modernism and inattention to a class of people who were opposing the policies of the regime built a modernism that paid no attention to the indigenous values of people. The *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* does not expect such a modernism to make any reform. In his story entitled "*High Tide and Fog*" Golestan after describing the extensive corruption that has torn Iranian society asks: what will happen to this land? What will happen? There is a hasty cheap corruption. Golestan says: "I have spoken of the horrible conditions of a country that is plundered by corruption. Every single citizen in the society represents the same approach. None of them is there to laugh. I am not against modernism. Am I so fool that I would do that? (Jahed, 2005)

Parviz Sayyad once said that no one was informed of the whole story neither in the beginning of the filming nor in the course of the production. Everyone was enthusiastic about playing a role in a film by Ebrahim Golestan and he always would say that the film is about the story of a villager who accidentally becomes rich. The scenario scripts were given to the actors and actresses episode by episode. No one knew about the episodes' overall plan. (Fiad, 2016) In other words, no one of the actors and actresses knew the whole story until the film's screening. The *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* was first just a film but since Golestan was afraid that his film would never be allowed to be screened he simultaneously prepared a written version of the story like a novel. Surprisingly, both the film and book received the permission for publication and screening. Parviz Sabeti the general manager of third office of SAVAK says: it was two days since the screening of the *Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* that I read in the intelligence reports of SAVAK that during screening a number of students have clapped and shouted hurray (Milani, 2001). The report had described the film as political and it is very likely that in coming days it would cause unrests (Interview with Parviz Sabeti, September 10, 2015). I said that this film is concerned with the national security and has nothing to do with cultural issue. Since the day that I have undertaken the presidency of the third office of SAVAK I asked the Ministry of Culture to do the audit and censure of the films. I asked my staff to provide a copy of the film and I watched it in my office and I immediately wrote a letter to Mehrdad Pahalbud the Minister of Culture and Amir Abbas Hoveyda the Prime Minister. When I watched the film I understood that all signs were correct. I wrote that the villager is Shah and the treasure is oil and the Ghost Valley is Niavaran and the party in the film is referring to the 2500 years of celebration of Persian Empire. The building in the film is very similar to the Shahyad Square. I wrote to Pahalbud the film should be banned from screening. The novel was published three years later than the film and it consisted of 49 chapters and the government collected them from the book stores.

There are two views in this regard. First, the atmosphere that was created after the film screening which was resulted in film ban, was indeed plotted by Golestan himself and secondly, these events all had their origin in the mental background of the audience and there was no intention. In fact, the publication of the novel after the ban of film could not support as many as the audience that the film had attracted. Pahlavi regime's treatment turned Golestan's work to a historical statement about the conditions of Iran in those times. Perhaps if the Pahlavi regime decided not to act like the simple-hearted man in the film and neglect the hidden aspects and did not take tough actions against a cultural work, another destiny could have expected it.

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