

## Document Citation

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and beautiful that it will keep viewers rapt even when the narrative tantalizes with poetic opacity. Result is both distinctive and accessible enough to be assured an honored place on the fest circuit, and could catch the eye of discriminating art distributors.

Pic's unusual method places far more emphasis on visual than verbal elements. An early image that recurs, for example, shows a gorgeously colorful carpet floating downstream, its pattern containing a depiction of a couple riding a horse. The story later suggests various possible explanations for who those riders might be, but nailing down meanings ultimately seems less important than simply surrendering to the image's haunting mystery.

The carpet itself, though, has a functional meaning in the small clan of nomads we see here, because it is made from the wool of the sheep they raise. Such carpets are called *gabbehs*, and one of the women bears the same name. Gabbeh (Shaghayeh Djodat) is beautiful but looks forlorn as she watches an old man and woman of the tribe engage in what seems like an endless spat over romantic possibilities lost in the distant past.

These recriminations frame the question of why Gabbeh is unhappy. The reason, she testifies, is that family demands have kept her from marrying her intended. Her father insists she delay her plans until her uncle returns from a trip. When the uncle comes back, her father says that she must wait until the uncle finds a bride. A dream illustrates that the uncle's wife will be found next to a stream, "singing like a canary," which prompts a search that eventually turns up that woman.

The discovery doesn't solve Gabbeh's problems, though. Her would-be husband remains nothing but a silhouette on a horse, forever framed against the horizon. He follows the tribe as it moves from place to place, over terrain that ranges from verdant plains to craggy, spectral mountains.

Story manages to be rigorously simple yet fascinatingly resonant. Whether Gabbeh's state of perpetual yearning is taken as a metaphor for her endangered people, a comment on the disadvantages of women in traditional societies or a reflection of romance's eternal frustrations, Makhmalbaf's telling never falters in its grace or elegant economy. Likewise, pic is mesmerizing in combining elements of a first-rate documentary and a fantastical fable.

Compared with the hectic and ironic tones of helmer's past films, "Gabbeh" is limpid and full of a master's unerring confidence. Pic's dazzling use of color could almost be its sole motivation, but Makhmalbaf proves no less audacious in his juxtaposition of images and sounds, as in a scene where the weaving of a carpet is intercut with the birth of a lamb, and the noises of both events merge into a kind of rhythmic mantra.

Mahmoud Kalari's fine lensing adds immeasurably to a film that, like other Iranian works, amazes with the revelation of the technical sophistication that can be achieved on limited means. Indeed, pic suggests how much such feats depend on the kind of poetic sureness that Makhmalbaf displays here, adding to his reputation as a filmmaker of remarkable daring and sensitivity.

—Godfrey Cheshire

## GABBEH

(IRANIAN)

A Sanayeh Dasti (Teheran)/MK2 Prods. (Paris) co-production. Directed, written, edited by Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Camera (color), Mahmoud Kalari; music, Hossein Alizadeh. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Un Certain Regard), May 12, 1996. Running time: 74 MIN.

Gabbeh ..... Shaghayeh Djodat  
Old man ..... Hossein Moharami  
Rogheih ..... Rogheih Moharami  
Uncle ..... Abbas Sayah

**A**n exultantly lyrical vision of nomadic life in southeastern Iran, Mohsen Makhmalbaf's "Gabbeh" adds yet another jewel to the crown of recent Iranian cinema. In a manner recalling "The Color of Pomegranates" and other films by Sergei Paradjanov, pic unfolds imagery so startling