

## Professor M. Gholi Chams “Father of Modern Ophthalmology in Iran”

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Prof. M. G. Chams in his official university robe; 1970s.

My father, Mohammad Gholi Chams, was born in 1904 in Tehran, Iran, in a well-educated family. His father was a famous ophthalmologist (Professor Yahia Chams) who had studied at *Dar-al-Fonun* (house of technology) in Tehran and completed his ophthalmology degree in Paris under the guidance of Prof. Galsowski of Paris University. His elder son, Gholi, finished his primary education in Tehran in a French school, St. Louis, attended *Dar-al-Fonun* for a couple of years, and then left Tehran to go to Lyon University in France in 1923 to complete his education in medicine and ophthalmology. He also attended the military school of Lyon at the same time where he learned the very strict military principals of that school. He was a very serious student, a very hard working person with perseverance and not accepting any failure in his life and work.

On a Sunday morning, while visiting patients in a Lyon hospital to improve his knowledge, he accidentally met his future professor Rollet, who was there to visit a particularly recommended patient. He asked my father who he was and why was there on a Sunday while all his friends were away having fun. After my father introduced himself, they found out that Dr. Rollet had been a classmate of Dr. Yahia Chams, his father, in Paris. As a consequence of this meeting and talks, a deep friendship was developed

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between my father and his professor and his son Jaque Rollet, another famous ophthalmologist of his time.

During his internship in Lyon, a cholera epidemic burst out in that region. My father and few others volunteered to treat patients who were quarantined at the Croix-Rouge hospital of Lyon. Many died but my father survived and received the honorary badge of epidemics from the French government.

My father completed his ophthalmology education in Lyon and successfully passed two examinations in 1927 in Lyon and 1929 in Paris to obtain the professorship of ophthalmology.<sup>1</sup> Having completed his studies and being a military man, he was employed at the Val-de-Grace, a military hospital of Paris, to practice ophthalmology, teaching students and continuing his research on ophthalmic arterial pressure.

In 1931, during the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran, my father was invited to visit Iran and to treat one of the high-ranking authorities of the country who had ocular problems.

He returned to Iran by boat and train, visited many towns and people and wrote his impression: “They have no real universities, trachoma was expanded all over the country and many eyes were blind because of it. There was no sanitary system. There were just a few ophthalmologists, all very old”. He was very much touched and concerned about the situation. He visited his host Mr. Gharagozlou (minister of culture) and told him that “I stay here, if you give me the possibility to work and help with developing universities and improving the sanitary system, but above all you have to provide a hospital for me (Farabi Eye Hospital)”. All his propositions were accepted immediately, and he obtained:

1. Full professorship of ophthalmology at *Dar-al-Fonun* and later at Tehran University which was still under construction;
2. Chief of ophthalmology at army;
3. Director of ophthalmic sanitary organization of schools;
4. Member of the high council of education in Iran, where he requested that all medical students pass the six last months of their education in the department of ophthalmology.

The construction of Farabi Eye Hospital was offered to Swedish architect Mr. Meligard who was also in charge of constructing the Tehran University.

The ophthalmic center of the army was being built at Hafez Ave. of Tehran, near my father's house. Mr. Meligard had proposed his plans for construction of Farabi Hospital which was an enormous and time-consuming program. My father requested that a temporary small ophthalmic center be built in front of the garden of Farabi with one surgical ward, two examination rooms and 25 beds to start his training and work, until the main hospital was completed.



Prof. M. G. Chams in the center; next to him (from left), Prof. J. Amir-Aalam, Prof. Zarabi, Prof. F. Chams and staff and students of Farabi Eye Hospital; 1940s.

Prof. Gholi Chams went to Europe to request three European ophthalmologists from the director of International Health Organization to help him with teaching and also fighting trachoma, which was accepted.

Upon his return, the ophthalmic center of the army was completed and he started teaching residents and operating there at night, since Tehran had electricity only at night. The temporary Farabi Center was finished in 1934 and the students of ophthalmology were transferred there. Before the start of the Second World War, the first part of the main Farabi Eye Hospital was finished in 1938 with 120 beds, six examination rooms and four surgical wards, and after the war the hospital was completed with 220 beds.

In 1947, the Iranian Society of ophthalmology was founded by Prof. Gholi Chams and he was elected as president. The society was officially registered as a member of international ophthalmic societies in 1964.

In 1968, Professor Gholi Chams launched the Iranian Journal of Ophthalmology as the chief editor. The journal is still being published under the name of Journal of Current Ophthalmology, in English language.

In Farabi Eye Hospital of Tehran University, they had started educating students as early as 1934. The duration of residency was 2 to 4 years and the best students were employed at the university and many were trained to be in charge of the departments of ophthalmology at different newly founded state universities, for example: In 1945, Mrs. Ema Hagh-Nazarian and Dr. Gh. A. Jahanshahi left Farabi to go to Tabriz University. In 1947, Dr. M. Daneshgar chaired the department of ophthalmology in Isfahan. In 1948, Dr. N. Bidel went to Shiraz University, and was transferred from there to Ahvaz University in 1952 to direct the ophthalmology department of that university. Dr. M. Faghihi-Hokmabadi, who was associate professor at Farabi Hospital, left for Mashhad University in 1954.

The number of ophthalmologists in Iran was increasing progressively, covering all the country and the new universities; in addition, a few Iranian foreign trained ophthalmologists came back to Iran to participate in this heavenly task of educating students and treating patients: Professor Hassan Alavi came from England in 1937, Professor Masoud Zarabi came from France in 1941, and Professor M. H. Ghavam-Sadoughi from Paris in 1952, and before going to France, he was associate professor at Farabi center since 1945.



Prof. Rollet at the center, behind him Prof. MG Chams, at Lyon, in 1925

Teachers and nurses from all over Iran were invited to come to Tehran in summers to learn how to improve the sanitary system of the country and to fight trachoma which was eradicated from this land gradually.<sup>2,3</sup>

The problem of corneal grafting which was practiced since 1934 at Farabi Hospital was very much occupying my father's mind, because religiously he was not allowed to use cadavers for grafting. My father went to Iraq to visit high religious authorities and finally received their approval and blessing to do so which still continues.

My father was charged to prepare the international report on trachoma<sup>4,5</sup>; an enormous investigation which they had started in Iran for years. This was to be presented in Paris, in 1954, at the international congress of ophthalmology.

In 1953, he worked for one year in North Africa with Professor Nataf of Tunisia, Professor Mitzui of Japan and Professor Pagesse to complete his work on trachoma.

His report on trachoma was hailed unanimously and he received two honorary awards from the Iranian government for his achievements.

He participated in most of the international ophthalmic congresses, particularly the yearly congress of ophthalmology of the French Society of Ophthalmology. He insisted on taking as many Iranian ophthalmologists as possible with him, saying that "it is important for their education and particularly culture". In many congresses, he was the representative of Asia and in a few, the honorary president of the congress.

In 1955, he was invited to Egypt to demonstrate his technique of corneal graft, together with Professor Elliot who demonstrated his technique of glaucoma surgery for an international group of ophthalmologists.

He was retired in 1969 at the age of 65 from his hospital and university duties, but he continued his endeavors as chief deputy of medical order in Iran. He was still the president of Iranian Society of Ophthalmology and chief-editor of Iranian Journal of Ophthalmology.

In 1975, because of his long life efforts and merits, he was re-invited to the university and Farabi Eye Hospital to have the chair of ophthalmology and direct the hospital. During this period up to 1978 (Iranian revolution), he completely modernized the hospital, ordered the newest instruments and brought new technology to Farabi Hospital, such as lasers, sonography, electro retinography,



Prof. M. G. Chams at Farabi Eye Hospital in his room, 1970s.

angiography, phacoemulsification and intraocular lenses. He also created subspecialties in ophthalmology in different fields.

After the Iranian revolution in 1978, he resigned from his university activities, but remained on the board of directors of Farabi Hospital. The Iranian authorities had just occupied and demolished a large district of Tehran, situated in South of Farabi Hospital which had a bad reputation as a pleasure district occupied by prostitutes, bars and night clubs. My father, with the help of his faithful students and friend Dr. Abbas Sheibani who was very influential those days, succeeded to obtain this area of 80,000 square meters for construction of the new Farabi Center and installation of a large green park. The hospital was completed after nine years. It was constructed in three floors, each with an area of 7,000 m<sup>2</sup>, with several surgical wards and 210 additional beds and examination rooms for general ophthalmology, emergencies, and subspecialties with the newest instruments and technology. The hospital is still growing rapidly and covering all the remaining empty spaces.

During his life time, my father received the distinguished award of *Santé Publique* from France and was honored to be chevalier of *légion d'honneur*.

In an interview for the Iranian Television in 1995, one year before my father's death, the interviewer asked questions from a few of his most successful and faithful students and their responses give us a clear idea about my father's character and performances. Here are their answers:

Professor Amir Malekmadani, chief ophthalmologist at Jorjani Hospital of Tehran

I learned three important things from him:

- 1- Never stop learning,
- 2- To be very organized and precise,
- 3- To be sportive.

Professor M. Daneshgar, chief ophthalmologist of Isfahan University

1- He was an excellent lecturer and it is difficult to forget his teachings.

2- He was always present at the Farabi Hospital before the others and had everything under control.

Professor M. S. Pirouz, chief ophthalmologists at Farabi Hospital

1- He was very interested in research and had developed an important research center at Farabi.

2- The collection of his slides from all ocular diseases is unique and still kept and used at Farabi Hospital.

Professor Gholi Chams was asked about his feelings about Farabi Hospital, and he answered, "I love Farabi more than my home" – a feeling that still remains alive in all of us.

He was asked about the outcome of 70 years of his efforts; he answered, "We have no more trachoma. We have many ophthalmic centers. When I came here, there were just a few ophthalmologists, and all were very old. Now, we have hundreds and hundreds of young ophthalmologists and I am proud of every one of them".

Professor Gholi Chams died in September 1996, at the age of 92, after a day of hard work. He slept at night and left this world in peace.

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