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Author(s)	Kay Armatage
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Sib

The Apple

Samira Makhmalbaf

IRAN, 1997

85 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Makhmalbaf Productions/MK2 Productions**

Executive Producer: **Iraj Sarbaz**

Screenplay: **Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Samira Makhmalbaf**

Cinematographer: **Ebrahim Ghafari, Mohamad Ahmadi**

Editor: **Mohsen Makhmalbaf**

Sound: **Behroz Shahamat**

Principal Cast: **Massoumeh Naderi, Zahra Naderi, Ghorbanali Naderi, Azizeh Mohamadi, Zahra Saghrisaz**

Print Source/Foreign Sales Agent:

MK2 Diffusion, 55 rue Traversière, 75012 Paris, France. T (33-1) 4467-3000 F (33-1) 4341-3230

Production: **Makhmalbaf Productions, 1 avenue 45 Shahrak Dolotabad, Tehran, Iran. T (98-21) 374-5773 F (98-21) 374-5773**

The Apple is a remarkable combination of drama and documentary. Although it is scripted, staged and carves out a satisfying dramatic arc, it is shot in a documentary style re-enacted by the members of the family whose strange story it tells. The point of departure for the film was a news story of eleven-year-old twin girls who had lived virtually as prisoners of their poor father and blind mother. Kept in one room while their father is absent and allowed only limited movement in the house when he is present, the girls have been severely limited in their physical and mental development. Much of the film concerns their curiosity and desire to play beyond the gates of their house, and the difficulty social workers face in trying to persuade their stubborn father to allow them education (girls have been allowed to go to school in Iran since 1979) and freedom of movement.

The film raises issues specific to its form: the truth claims of reality-based drama, and the documentary ethical question of exposure of the real subjects of the film. The family seems to enter fully into the re-enactment of their story, with natural and un-selfconscious, although sometimes grotesque, performances.

Like her father, director Samira Makhmalbaf approaches filmmaking as a moral medium, one of research and reflection, in which the primary motifs are human dignity and the strangeness of human behaviour. She refuses to judge the father, who says

"My daughters are like flowers – expose them to the sun, and they will wither away," or the archaic codes of the traditions both parents have learned. Even the mother wants to keep them veiled and locked up for their "protection." In its painful contortions, their situation becomes a fable for the new spirit of emancipation that is energizing Iranian women in their fight against political, cultural and religious authoritarianism. In the end, one of the girls struggles to turn the key in the lock to release her jailer of a father from his own ancient prison.

■ **Kay Armatage**

Samira Makhmalbaf was born in Tehran in 1979. Her first film experience was a cameo role in her father, Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *The Cyclist* (88). From 1994-97 she studied film at a private school, directing two shorts, *Desert* and *Art Schools*. *The Apple* (97) is her first feature film.