



## KHACHIKIAN, SAMUEL

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**KHACHIKIAN, Samuel** (Sāmu'el Kāčikiān), Iranian filmmaker (b. 20 October 1923, Tabriz; d. 21 October 2001, Tehran; [FIGURE 1](#)). He was born to Armenian parents in Tabriz where his father, Arsen Khachikian, ran a carpet retailing business. Arsen Khachikian was the only survivor of a large family, who had perished in the Armenian massacres that the Ottoman authorities organized during World War I. He had fled to Russian Armenia, but migrated to Tabriz after the October Revolution in 1917 (Ḥaydari, p. 11). When the Soviet army occupied Azarbaijan in the late August of 1941, the Khachikians fled from Tabriz and moved their business to Tehran. Samuel, the third-born child of the family, had two brothers and one sister.

Samuel's father was a well-read man with a large private library, and his mother took her children to see plays and movies. The household was filled with books and music, and a lasting interest in artistic endeavors was instilled in Samuel at an early age. The teenager staged occasional shows for his family in their backyard (Milani, p. 1003), and by age fourteen, Samuel was directing Armenian actors on the stage of a Tabriz theater (Lazarian, p. 411; Sayyed-Moḥammadi, p. 277). After the family had settled in Tehran, he continued to write and stage plays as he founded an Armenian theatre society.

Khachikian made his film debut *Bāzgašt* (The Return), a romantic melodrama that pitted a hardworking village boy serving an affluent family in the city against the family's spoiled son in a rivalry over a young woman. The film's mawkish story, scripted by Samuel himself, shared the same banality of other formulaic Iranian films of the period, but it was technically more polished and



displayed a visibly faster pace. Khachikian admitted in an interview that it was his disappointment in aesthetic inferiority of Iranian films compared to American and European imports that motivated him to become a filmmaker. He also sounded quite candid about the insignificance of issues he dealt with in his films, and claimed his greatest contribution to Iranian cinema was in developing new ways of visual storytelling and judicious application of formal elements of filmmaking (Ḥaydari, pp. 17-23).

Khachikian's second film, *Doḡtar-i az Širāz* (A Girl from Shiraz, 1954) fared better financially. The film, for which he made the first ever trailer in the national cinema, was praised for its photography and editing, despite a weak script (Mehrabī, p. 71). Interestingly, the film's trailer was shown under the original title of *Āyeša*, the female protagonist of the film, but the Ministry of Interior ordered the filmmakers to change both the title and the name of the female lead for public screening (Ḥaydari, p. 26).

Khachikian wrote and edited many of the films he directed. His third film, *Čahār-rāh-e ḡawādeḡ* (Crossroads of Incidents, 1955), a narrative amalgam of young love, class differences, and criminal life, was a commercial hit praised for being comparable to foreign films due to its intriguing action scenes (Amini, p. 31). In 1957, Mehdi Miṡāqiya, an influential producer, hired Samuel to finish an expensive film another director, Mušeḡ Soruri, had started (Omid, p. 297). The film *Šabnešini dar jahannam* (Soiree in Hell, 1957) a morality tale about wages of greed, was the story of a miser's nightmare of spending one night in hell. The unusual plot provided a pretext for the filmmakers to construct elaborate sets and create unprecedented visual effects, which captured the imagination of the moviegoers and turned the film into one of the most popular of the 1950s.

A turning point in Khachikian's career came with *ṡufān dar šahr-e mā* (A Storm in Our Town, 1957). The chilly tale of a sinister-looking madman fleeing from an asylum and his subsequent encounters with an assortment of characters proved to be fertile ground for the director to showcase his ingenuity in making crime dramas that brought him a reputation as the master of suspense and an inevitable crowning as Iran's Alfred Hitchcock. While a testimony to the popularity of his thrillers, the nod never thrilled Khachikian himself, who denied any direct influence by Hitchcock and cited the Armenian genocide stories that his father had told him as his sources of inspiration (Ḥaydari, pp. 42-43). The somewhat irrelevant Hitchcock comparison also belies the fact that the majority of Khachikian's nearly three-dozen films, mostly maudlin



melodramas, were not thrillers.

*Tufān dar šahr-e mā* was the first production of Āžir Film, a film studio Khachikian founded along with producer Žozef Vā'eziān and several investors. The seven years he spent at Āžir Film (which included a stint at Studio Miṭāqiya to make in 1960 the *Faryād-e nima-šab* “Midnight Cry”) can be viewed as arguably the peak years of Khachikian’s career. This period saw the production of some of his best crime thrillers, including *Yak qadam tā marg* (One Step to Death, 1961), *Delhora* (Suspense, 1962), and *Žarbat* (Strike, 1964), best described as the Iranian counterparts of American *film noir* and the French *policier* genres.

In 1965, Siāmak Yāsami’s best-seller *Ganj-e Qārun*, a crude semi-musical melodrama, redefined the parameters of popular cinema in Iran and forced filmmakers such as Khachikian to abandon their own preferences to accommodate public taste. Though he managed to make some commercially successful melodramas in the sixties, Kachikian’s career never regained its luster and suffered further setbacks after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

After making four films in seven years following the revolution (including, in 1985, ‘*Oqābhā* “Eagles,” a war movie that was until then the highest grossing Iranian film), Khachikian was kept from filmmaking for six years and then asked to make *Čāvuš* (Herald, 1990) a film based on a religiously-themed script about a devout Muslim joining a group of pilgrims. Other filmmakers who had found the script excessively preachy and difficult to film had turned down the offer. Khachikian reluctantly agreed to make the film to placate the Islamic officials; he later told an interviewer, “As a Christian, I made a film my Muslim colleagues would not make” (Ḥaydari, pp. 163-65).

A consummate craftsman, Samuel Khachikian is generally regarded as one of the most prominent Iranian film directors of the fifties and sixties, which may be considered faint praise given the poor quality of Iranian films in those decades. In the final years of his career, Khachikian thought that in spite of spending forty years in film business, his expectations remained unfulfilled (Ḥaydari, p. 15). If Khachikian never achieved the artistic triumphs of the Iranian New Wave filmmakers that followed him in the 1970s, he deserves credit for his contributions to the relative vitality of the commercial cinema in the pre-revolutionary Iran.

List of films



*Bāzgašt* (The Return, 1952)

*Doḵtar-i az Širāz* (Girl from Shiraz, 1955)

*Čahār-rāh-e ḥawadet* (Crossroads of Incidents, 1955)

*ḵun o šaraf* (Blood and Honor, 1955)

*Šab-nešini dar jahannam* (Soiree in Hell, 1957)

*Ṭufān dar šahr-e mā* (A Storm in Our Town, 1957)

*Qāšed-e behešt* (Messenger from Paradise, 1958)

*Tappa-ye ‘ešq* (The Lovers Hill, 1958)

*Faryād-e nima-šab* (Midnight Cry, 1960)

*Yak qadam tā marg* (One Step to Death, 1961)

*Delhora* (Suspense, 1962)

*Žarbat* (Strike, 1964)

*Sarsām* (Delirium, 1964)

*Bā ‘ešq hargez* (Never with Love, 1965)

*‘Ešyān* (Insurgence, 1966)

*Kodā-ḥāfez Tehrān* (Farewell Tehran, 1966)

*Babr-e Māzandarān* (The Tiger of Māzandarān, 1967)

*Man ham gerya kardam* (I cried too, 1967)

*Jahannam-e safīd* (White Hell, 1968)

*Hengāma* (Tumult, 1968)

*Na‘ra-ye ṭufān* (The Cry of the Storm, 1968)

*Qešsa-ye šab-e Yaldā* (The Story of Yaldā, 1970)



*Divār-e šišā'i* (The Glass Wall, 1971)

*Busa bar labhā-ye kunin* (Kiss on Bloody Lips, 1973)

*Marg dar bārān* (Death in the Rain, 1974)

*Ez̄terāb* (Anxiety, 1975)

*Kusa-ye jonub* (The Shark of the South, 1977)

*Enfejār* (Explosion, 1979)

*Balaš* (1984)

*'Oqābhā* (Eagles, 1985)

*Yuzpalang* (The Panther, 1986)

*Čāvuš* (Herald, 1990)

*Mard-i dar āyena* (A Man in the Mirror, 1991).

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