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Moving Images, Powerful Messages

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Gauri Chadha, a young filmmaker, believes in the power of moving images. Her latest work *Gawah*, a documentary that runs through the grieving minds of the victims of the 26/11 aftermath, makes you put your faith in the medium too.

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We all believe in the power of an image what young filmmaker Gauri Chadha makes one believe in is the power of a moving image.

“They say an image speaks a thousand words now just imagine what all can a moving image say! I don't feel any other medium has the power to create a change as powerful as the medium of films. It transcends through all borders, cultures and barriers,” says Gauri.

It is hard to miss the enthusiasm, faith and passion for films in her voice. Her recent most work is a documentary called *Gawah*, a heart-warming and intense work that explores the lives & voices of the 26/11 victims post the aftermath. The official trailer of the documentary was launched through YouTube on the eve of 26/11/2012, the fourth anniversary of the terror attacks.

Currently keeping Gauri occupied is another documentary and also the scriptwriting of her first feature film; the latter a story to understand the alter ego of mankind. Ask the 26-year-old to pick a favourite role amongst that of a writer, director, producer or editor and you know you have put her in a tough spot!

“A professor of mine at the film school used to always say ‘making a film is like giving birth be sure you are ready for it.’ I guess this is the most enjoyable process for me being able to be a part of something from conception to its birth, following that vision and executing it is by far one of the most gratifying and fulfilling moments for me,” she says. Push her a little more and she'll make you happy by choosing two of her favourite loves, “Writing and directing.”

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During her growing up years Gauri battled the same question as many of us as young adults do, 'What are we going to do with our lives?' Interestingly, she found the answer while watching a film! But yes, no ordinary film but that of [Sir Alfred Hitchcock](#).

"I distinctly remember watching North by Northwest and suddenly beginning to experience this strange feeling powering through my body as though adrenaline had just struck. The more I watched, the more I wanted," recalls Gauri, who was in her first year of boarding school in Switzerland then. Next, she knew she was sitting in a film studies class.

“*“My sister introduced me to the world of films before this I used to think that film studies was merely about knowing all the names of movies and filmmakers. It was really ‘studying’ it that mesmerised my senses and opened up a whole new chapter of life. Soon, I found my voice, the voice of the world that I wanted to share, my true inner voice.”*

She graduated from the historical University of Miami in Film and Theatre Studies and later studied at the Met Film School at Ealing Studios in London, where she broke the school's record of the highest applicant accepted. Today having realised the power of the medium and equipped with skills to use the medium, Gauri uses the voice to talk about issues that affect her.

“*“The power of influence is so substantial that a film can change the entire thinking process of a society or even a nation. However, as a filmmaker it boils down to a very important point. We need to understand and respect the power we have in our hands, though many a times this may even be oblivious to us. We have to be aware of our responsibility to the message we are impacting our society with. It's sad when you don't see this happen at times.”*

And it was this strong urge that led Gauri to *Gawah* or rather how she'll like to put it *Gawah* came to her.

“*“It actually came to me rather than me searching for it. On a cold Thanksgiving dinner at a friend's house in London my attention was glued to the news flash of friends and family concerned about their loved ones in Mumbai, 26/11 had taken over an entire city. At that precise moment a severe and deep-rooted curiosity came from within me to feel connected to these victims. How is it that we are watching the terrorism rat through our land on our own TV screens in the luxury of our own homes and there was nothing we could do about it but watch? But, then what happened, when all the news coverage went away, absolutely nothing, this is what Gawah is about.”*

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The film meets those victims who walk through the same corridor they were traumatised in right after the curtain fell. It gives a voice to those victims.

“*At the same time it has helped me learn from them, hear them and feel them. I wanted to find the answer to the question, ‘What is that raw truth that they actually felt when that mask was gone, when no one was watching or caring anymore?’ And that was also brought me to the understanding that as a filmmaker I had some responsibility. How can I aim to explore the present without understanding the past? Thus the cobweb of the partition was born. Having left my arc at that, our nation was tested once again with the July 13th serial blasts, how was it possible is something that still boggles my mind? However, my search began and still continues with the Gawah’s as my leaders,” she shares.*

And why did she decide to call the work *Gawah*?

“*I was actually struggling with the title for a long time. Initially it was entitled *Jai Hind!* as the message was to explore the national identity of India. However, as I continued onto this journey and grew not only as a filmmaker but as a person I began to realise a much deeper meaning to the film, the pain and spirit of the victims is something our entire humanity can relate to. This was not subjected by any space, time or colour. Thus*

this led me to understand that it is through the courage of these witnesses that I was able to witness this cause - Gawah was born," she tells.

The film has also been submitted to a host of prestigious international film festivals like the Sundance Film Festival, Berlin Independent Film Festival, Tribeca Film Festival, Miami International Film Festival and Las Vegas Film Festival, to name a few.



As we continue talking to her we can't help but wonder that this young girl has voluntarily chosen a path that is surrounded by all things dark and grim. Would she not be surrounded by happy dreams at this age?

“*For me, youth is the beginning of a better and brighter future to come. It is the stepping stone to a change; youth is a time for learning, exploring and creating. It is at this age that our minds are the most curious, and we need to nurture this and allow our inner voice to mould us. We need to allow it to guide us for if we do it will take us to places beyond the realm of our imagination. It is only by doing this that I feel we can actually aim to create a change and build our brighter future," she explains.*

But still aren't there times when she feels the issues overpower her life as an individual, effecting her emotionally and mentally?

“*Undoubtedly, we are all human beings at the end of the day. We all feel, share and emote and this is perhaps the toughest part of making films on such causes. But, as the leader of a film one has to carry the entire weight of the film on one's shoulders. I keep telling myself that I have to be the driving force of courage and support to all others (cast or crew) at all times because they are all part of it for they have faith in my cause and it is my responsibility to remind them that I am standing right next to them no matter how difficult a subject matter can be," she says.*

Gauri is currently working on a short feature focusing on a hero's journey chasing his dream as he

struggles against the construction system of Dubai with a parallel flashback of how this man crosses the 'empty quarter' desert to reach the city of his dreams, *"Through this work we try to understand where is the man more powerless in the concrete jungle or in nature."* But that's not where her wish list ends! She shares a few with us.

"One would be Global responsibilities, being a global citizen this is something I really aspire to influence our society with. It saddens me deeply that so many of us spend our entire time focusing on 'I'.

We somehow seem to forget that we have a global responsibility towards one another.

“*"I complain that I don't have shoes, but the man to the left of me doesn't have feet. How do we forget this so easily? Second would be Suppression of knowledge, this is one of the cruelest acts of mankind. We are all the same, we all come into this world the same and all leave the world the same so, how is it that one man can purposely deny another man their right of knowledge and education? Knowingly, you see people confining less educated people into their chains of being less educated. Instead, shouldn't we help one another, share each other's strengths and weaknesses rather than projecting our deep insecurities onto one another? This thought always ponders in my mind. And the third would be Giving thoughts a vision, there are so many thoughts that cross our minds every day but how many of us actually articulate those thoughts and do something about them. This freedom of the mind is something that I really hope to inspire and explore within others."*

The trailer can be witnessed on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmjyzTpeclc>

To know more visit the Facebook page of Gawah <https://www.facebook.com/gawahthefilm>

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