

# TheNational



## Gauri Chadha focuses on the victims of the Mumbai attacks in new film

Ujala Ali Khan

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At a boarding school in Switzerland, a 16-year-old girl watched Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* as part of her A-Level film studies class.

"I suddenly felt something rush through my body," recalls Gauri Chadha, now 27. "I couldn't identify what it was. I had never felt such a connection with anything. With the help of my professor at that time, I realised this was what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Since then, that is what I have been doing every day."

An established filmmaker today, Chadha learnt the ropes at the University of Miami and then at Met Film School, Ealing Studios, in London. A resident of Mumbai, Chadha has dipped her toes in Bollywood and Hollywood, working on projects such as *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* and *Love Breakups Zindagi* (both in 2011), and *Gandhi of the Month* last year.

She came into her own with *Gawah*, a documentary she wrote, produced and directed, which explores the lives of the victims of the 2008 Mumbai attacks (dubbed 26/11) – 12 coordinated shootings and bombings across the western Indian city that left 164 dead and at least 308 injured.

"I was in film school in London at the time. We had to do a documentary as one of our assignments and I couldn't find a source of inspiration. Then I went for a Thanksgiving dinner and suddenly my phone started buzzing. I switched on the news and 26/11 was happening in front of me," Chadha recalls. "I had always been so disconnected with where I'm from, and this was the first time where I felt a pull. I needed to explore this. I really wanted to understand something so close to me, yet so far. That's how the journey began – through 26/11."

"I realised that it's not right for me as a filmmaker to push my own opinion, not knowing where we come from as a country," she says. "That's when I decided to include the [India-Pakistan] Partition, which led to the largest migration of human population in history. I wanted to understand what that generation had gone through, how we relate to those experiences today. I decided to use a hybrid of both laments, but something was missing. I needed farther comparison."

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The missing link came to Chada in the form of another round of attacks in Mumbai in July 2011 – bomb explosions that killed 26 and wounded 130. “The very next day I was at the sites, listening to people’s stories,” Chadha recalls.

*Gawah* has been submitted to about 25 film festivals around the world. Chadha, who is waiting to hear back from them, says she has been overwhelmed by the response in the two months since she released the official trailer of the documentary through YouTube on November 26 last year, the fourth anniversary of the attacks.

Did touching upon such a sensitive subject take an emotional toll?

“Yes, it did have an effect on me,” Chadha says. “This kind of thing definitely takes a toll, but I exorcised that weight through the film. Through my creative tools, I redirected it into the film.”

Chadha explains that, through her films, she intends to explore subjects with strong psychological elements.

“I want to provide an outlet for people who don’t have a voice – but in an entertaining manner,” she says. “I am drawn to stories of redemption, of people who’ve struggled, who’ve achieved something just by having a dream and standing by it.”

Meanwhile, her own dream is about to turn into reality – even if only a few festivals decide to screen *Gawah*, it is bound to be a success. But Chadha is not sitting idle while she waits. She is working on another documentary and already is writing the script of her first -feature film.

The HBO series **Bored to Death** is being adapted for the big screen. Jonathan Ames, the show's creator, will write the script. Jason Schwartzman, Zach Galifianakis and Ted Danson will all be reprising their roles



## 'I want to provide an outlet for people who don't have a voice'

Gauri Chadha, who has worked on films such as *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol*, tells **Ujala Ali Khan** about her new documentary on the victims of the terrorist attacks that took place in Mumbai in 2008

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Gauri Chadha released the trailer of her documentary *Gawah* on YouTube last year. Satish Kumar / The National