



Through the Lens | In Conversation with Gauri Chadha

By Muskan Ohri

Too often, **we are weighed down by shock, grief and our own lives, to take a stand for a cause** that affects us deeply. We spend many an hour discussing, debating and contemplating. **We have plans.** We are going to bring light to suffering. We are going to **scream and shout. Except we don't.** Life takes over. Work is overwhelming, our social lives too consuming. **We forget. But there are those who do not.**

Our world has countless unsung heroes. And if nothing else, we should celebrate them.

So, as I sit down to write this piece, I fear not being able to do justice to brilliance. **Every time I meet a personality that makes polished silver look dull, I am at a loss for words.**

Gauri Chadha has this effect on me. I'm privileged to have crossed paths with Gauri many times through our teenage years which has led to our comfortable, 'I've known you for years, without really knowing you' friendship. And I'm in awe of the woman she has become. Where did the rule breaking, gum-chewing, care free teenager disappear to? How did she **develop into a personality so incredibly profound, so ahead of her years?**

There are a few mediums through which human lives evolve into philosophical, reflective souls that reach out to enable change. **Film** is one of them. As **Gauri puts it, "It has the power to break barriers, cross borders and transcend cultures. It has the power to move."**

And as a filmmaker no one understands better than Gauri, the great responsibility that comes with creating powerful moving images. **Her love for film and her passion to act socially, allows her latest documentary, *Gawah*, to emote and reach out to audiences across our globe.** Gauri, has taken the film world by storm. **With five film festival awards to add to her success, this independent film maker has already created the movement that she intended to.**

Gawah explores **the aftermath, crossing through from the 1947 India-Pakistan migration to the Mumbai Terrorist attacks of 26/11 in 2008 and then the July 13 2011 serial blasts that took place in Mumbai.** The film brings to life the raw despair that comes with loss- it brings to life the stapled cry of the bitter smile.

Like most things exceptional, *Gawah* arrived almost like an epiphany. While in London, over Thanksgiving dinner at a friend's house, Gauri was glued to the news. The bomb blasts of 26/11 had Mumbai fighting for her life. **All of a sudden she had this urge, this curiosity to explore the after-hours of this tragedy. She started questioning.** What happens to the victims when media moves on to the next newsworthy story? What happens to their voices, to their tears? Her feelings were too strong to ignore. "For some strange reason, **I was immediately connected to the victims. I wanted to know more. Before I knew it, I was at the bomb blast sites interviewing people, speaking to victims and mourning their loss.**"



(<http://littleblackbookdelhi.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/gauri3.jpg>){**Gauri with crew; production still from *Gawah***}

And so began her awakening- from London to Mumbai. In essence, it was an awakening that finally fed her soul but fueled her war against the injustice and perils of life.

I would like to think that **Gauri** is fortunate to have been born **a child of this world. Her life has been borderless.** She was **born in New Delhi** to parents who encouraged her creativity – especially her father who, being a photographer, taught Gauri to look at life through a lens. As a young girl she went to **school in Dubai and later on to boarding schools in Scotland and Switzerland.**

It was in Switzerland that her cinematic journey truly began. For this, she owes Alfred Hitchcock. As part of her film study class she had to watch his movie *North by Northwest*. “It was almost like seeing the light,” she marvels. There was this sudden cloud burst of emotion and connection that drew her towards Hitchcock’s film. Though Gauri later realized, it was probably the intensity of the way a film could paint a picture that captivated her. **“At that precise moment I knew what I would spend the rest of my life doing. And you know what? I’m doing it and I love every minute of it.”**

How can I not be envious? I still dabble with paint when it comes to trying to figure out what I want from life. But here is someone, my age, all of 27 who knew, who stopped dabbling and, therefore, became.

Gauri went on to study Film and Theater studies at the University of Miami and then to Met Film School at Ealing Studios in London. Finally completing the study of film, she was thrown back into the world. It was now time to acknowledge the identity crisis that she constantly struggled with. Our lives have become so culturally rich that we oft are led astray. Who am I? Where do I come from? To whom do I pledge alliance? **If I am allowed to push forth my opinion,** I believe the questions we should asking ourselves are – **I am who I am, this culturally aware human being – do I need to identify myself with race, language and belief? Or is my identity developed through personal exploration rather than labels that society has imposed?**

However, life has its own way of showing and guiding. It was the birth of *Gawah* that finally answered her questions about self-discovery and identity. **“There I was in London, watching grief takeover a country that, in theory, is mine but in reality, it is a country that I felt so disconnected from.”** The making of *Gawah* has been emotionally heartbreaking yet therapeutic for Gauri. It enabled her to, finally, identify with the land that she comes from. Being a filmmaker, she has entrusted herself to tell a story as accurately as possible,

which is why she goes back into history and travels into the present. Gauri questions films that are made without a strong base. **“How can I tell a story, truthfully, without understanding the past?”** Thus, the inclusion of the India-Pakistan migration in *Gawah* - to transgress into the pain that our motherland has repeatedly gone through, will only help us understand why our wounds continue to remain open.



<http://littleblackbookdelhi.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/gauri4.jpg> **{Gauri with crew; production still from *Gawah*}**

Working on the sets of *Gawah* as the writer, director and producer helped Gauri appreciate who she is and where she comes from. It produced the missing link she was looking for. Though she now lives part in Mumbai and part in Dubai, she associates Delhi with her blood, with her family. **“It is a city that reminds me of my fore-fathers and my roots. It reminds me of all those who fought hard to let our generation stand where it is today. I absolutely love the history that makes Delhi who she is. I am really proud to be Indian. Being a *Dilli-wala* is in my blood.”**

Through my conversation with Gauri and in trying to comprehend her passion for doing right for the world and for being drawn towards the tragedies that mar life's beauty, I wanted to know **why she chooses to tell tales of woe.** Why is she drawn towards stories of redemption? You see, Gauri and I, together, have had our fair share of black cod and spicy tuna maki, knocked back {in the most lady like manner, mind you} with a couple of glasses of wine. I've also popped open bottles of champagne with her while celebrating something as mundane as our birthdays. **I'm not condemning her lifestyle choice, or mine; in fact I'm applauding her for being able walk pretty in her high-heels and pink lipstick meanwhile being able to create a difference where it matters.**

Understanding the **responsibility that comes with the glamour of global citizenship,** Gauri uses it as her tool to make the world a little

more perfect. **"We spend too much time focused on ourselves. Sure, I love to play dress up and eat good food but I also love to share. I am fully aware of the privileges that I have but I am also aware of the privileges that I withhold from others. We live in a world where injustice is a matter of life. But I know, as should you, that we can make someone else's life better,** if not equal to ours. Why do we continue to suppress those who are already suppressed?" I have the same the dream, the same thoughts. Why do we not step beyond our comfort zone and start contributing towards knowledge, education, elevating hunger and creating freedom?

Understanding the intricacies that lie in sending out an un-biased message to the world, Gauri says, **"I want to be the voice for the untold. But as a film maker, I would like to tell a story in an entertaining manner.** As citizens of this world, we should be accountable for our actions. We should also be accountable for our indifference. But my job isn't to point fingers. It is to tell a story that reaches out to the audience. I don't want to alienate them."



<http://littleblackbookdelhi.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/gauri2.jpg>

{Meet Gauri Chadha}

There really is something sage-like about Gauri. **Her soul is old and wise. But most importantly, she exudes compassion and awareness that holds promise for a better tomorrow.** "I really do wish we would start turning our thoughts into action, it would make for a brighter future"

{Gawah is currently being shown at film festivals around the world. Watch this space for more updates.}

1. Screened at the **"Short Film Corner"** section at the prestigious **Cannes Film**

Festival 2013.

2. Won the **“Best Producer Award”** across **“All Categories”** at the **Beverly Hills Film Festival 2013** when it was screened on the 11th May at the monumental Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles, USA
3. Won the **‘Best Documentary Short Award’** at the **Arizona International Film Festival 2013, USA** in April 2013
4. Won the **“Best Shorts Awards”** with an **“Award of Excellence”** at the **Best Shorts Competition Film Festival** in California, USA in April 2013
5. Won the **“Best Documentary Film”** Award at the **Bhopal International Film Festival** in February 2013
6. Received a **“Special Festival Mention”** at the **Dada Saheb Phalke Film Festival** in Noida on 30th April 2013, India
7. **“Official Selection”** at the **International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala 2013, India**
8. **“Official Selection”** at the **Third World Indie Film Festival 2013, San Hose, California**

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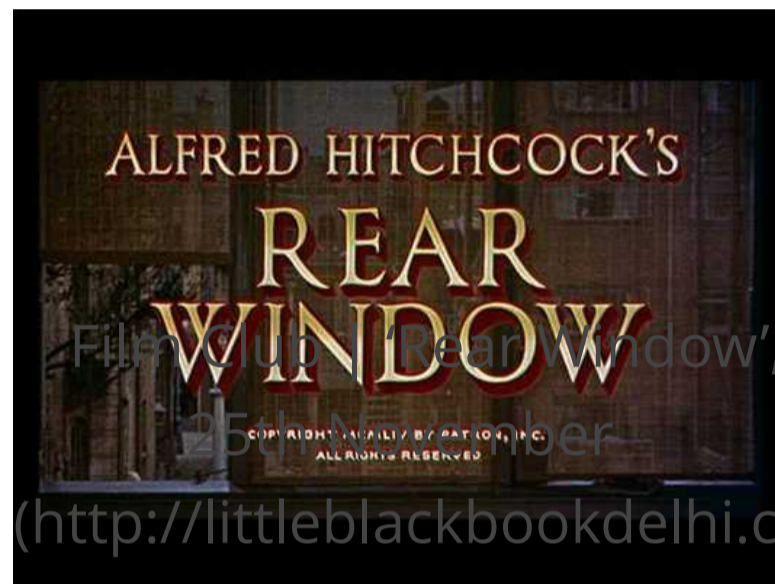
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suchita

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The former events manager, and PR and Marketing executive decided to give up the good life, to take on something greater- running her own start-up. Give her a non-fiction book, some place in the outdoors, running shoes, Bombay Bicycle Club and Jay Z, and you've got a happy camper.

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October 26, 2013 at 3:42 PM

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Well done Gauri and Muskan..keep touching lives

Nisha

says:

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Brilliant article !

Gauri Chadha

says:

June 14, 2013 at 9:43 PM

(http://littleblackbookdelhi.com/17336/film-gauri-chadha#comment-17835)

I would like to thank you very much for this very special 'write up.' This only goes to show what a talented, pure and soulful writer Muskan Ohri is. A true privilege!

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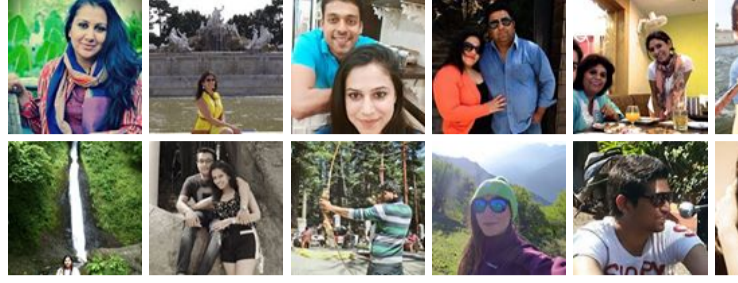
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