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by
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THEY BRING a freshness to documentary film-making — with themes that are bold and unconventional, they are pushing the boundaries of this medium with their passion for story-telling.

Now, who would have thought of making a film on what feelings urban women have about their breasts? Guess one would need a woman to explore such a theme — Divya Sachar, alumnus of Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune, did and called it *A Short Story About...* Yes, she found that the word was unspeakable, ergo the title of the film. Forget talking at length about what they felt about their breasts and the way men looked at the female body — Sachar found they weren't even ready to utter the word, 'breasts'.

And if you thought that a documentary would be the easiest thing to make, you need a re-think. Sachar thought so too — and what was planned to be a three-month project took her three long years. "It was very difficult to get women to talk about their breasts on camera. Some wouldn't even say 'breasts'," recalls Sachar. "There was a woman with large breasts — she wouldn't talk before the camera because she felt people would only look at her breasts and not listen to what she had to say. She felt she would give the impression of being an easy woman. That was really shocking," says Sachar. But then Sachar admits even she was embarrassed discussing the film with elders in her family. "The making of the movie was quite dramatic as many women either changed their version in front of the camera or just backed out," says Sachar. The film is being screened at the ongoing Public Service Broadcasting Trust's (PSBT) international film festival in the city.

Sachar is not the only one experimenting with the unconventional. There's Paromita Vohra who won a lot of acclaim for *Unlimited Girls*, a film about feminism in chat rooms. The chat group Vohra uses comprises women one would rub shoulders with in one's city on any ordinary day.

Of women who have a story to tell, this is what Vohra has to say: "Over the years, women are trying different forms to experiment. They are mixing fiction and non-fiction in the narrative to engage craft and art," says Vohra. And regarding documentary filmmaking, Vohra avers that it's a medium that is growing and changing fast.

Two decades into documentary filmmaking, Vohra's *Q2P*, deals with women who "queue to pee". Here, she tackles the subject of public toilets, in particular the shortage of women's facilities in Mumbai. The movie won her the best documentary film award at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles and at the Bollywood and Beyond film festival in Stuttgart.

Vohra's penchant for the unusual comes out in the choice

of subject for yet another film, *Where's Sandra?* The film is a light-hearted look at a popular motif Mumbaikars are familiar with: Sandra from Bandra. And for this film, Vohra interviews a cross-section of women, all of whom are named Sandra and live — yes, you guessed right — in Bandra, a Mumbai suburb. They laugh at the jokes that their name evokes. "The Anglo-Indian community in Bandra asked me to make the movie for their annual programme. It evoked a lot of interest," says she.

PERSEVERANCE, PASSION

IF YOU thought the film on breasts, required lots of perseverance and passion for one's work, you'll be impressed by the amount of hard work that went into the short film that Delhi-based filmmaker duo Samreen Farooqui and Shabani Hassanwalia made — it's about the history of Ladakhi cinema. An unusual topic, the film called *Out of Thin Air* generated a lot of curiosity indeed, and increased a bit of awareness about the

Ladakhi's love for cinema. Their work was selected as the opening film at Film South Asia - 2009 in Kathmandu earlier this year. Jamia Milia alumni Farooqui and Hassanwalia, who run the production house Hit and Run Films, stumbled upon the idea on a trip to Ladakh a few years ago. "We didn't want to make a movie on the scenic beauty of the place. What surprised us was the average Ladakhi's love for films. They are crazy about movies and have a flourishing local film industry," says Hassanwalia. Their documentary follows the release of the Ladakhi film *Las-del*, a love story featuring an Army man posted there and a local girl. "Film culture is so ingrained in the Himalayan state that you can see movie posters all over the place," says Hassanwalia.

Sponsored by a Bangalore-based agency, the film took a year to complete and was shot on a budget of less than Rs 6 lakhs. Self-confessed addicts of Bollywood cinema, the duo are now planning a short film on social networking websites.

TECH THAT

IF ARTISTIC experimentation and multi-layered narratives have helped documentaries grab eyeballs, then technology has been the catalyst that made the process easier. "Bulky cameras and editing equipment have been replaced by lighter, cheaper and technologically advanced ones. That leaves a lot of room for experimentation," says Sachar.

Agrees Akhila Krishnan, whose documentary, *Words in Stone*, traces the root of communal violence in Gujarat, starting with the razing of the tomb of Vali Gujarati, a seventeenth-century poet. "All one needs is a digital camera and one can find a way to

LIGHTS, CAMERA AND EXPERIMENT

With technology making things easier,
woman documentary filmmakers
toy with unconventional ideas
and forms like never before

