

Being Woman

Aabida, a short film about a day in the life of a Muslim widow after the terror attacks in Mumbai, is gaining acclaim for its quiet feminist stance.



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Aabida touches upon the various aspects of being a lower middle-class Muslim widow in Mumbai.

Minutes into the short film Aabida, as the viewers are taken through the titular character's daily chores — of going to the market and chopping vegetables — they realise she isn't exactly devastated after her husband's death. When a journalist of a local daily interviews her about how she has coped with life after losing her husband — a cop on duty in the terror attacks of 26/11 — expecting it to play out like a one-dimensional newspaper story, Aabida springs a surprise. She not only talks with ease, without much emotional baggage, but also asks the interviewee, and the accompanying photographer to join her over a meal of chicken. When asked what she remembers about him the most, Aabida talks about the long sleepless nights she would spend because of his incessant snoring.

One startlingly detailed day in the life of Aabida becomes a complex story of being a Muslim, a repressed wife, widow and finally, a woman in the

current socio-political environment. “The film says so many things through one short story,” says Lubna Salim, theatre and TV artiste who plays Aabida. The 26-minute film is made by 25-year-old Maaria Syed as part of her course at London Film School and has won acclaim internationally for its subtly feminist theme — it won Best Short Film award at the Mumbai Women’s International Film Festival, 2014. Aabida was an Indian entry for short films at NFDC, Film Bazaar, Goa, and was screened at London Feminist Film Festival.

As someone who faces discrimination for her religion daily —even “posh” societies in Lokhandwala have objections against meat-eating Muslims — Lubna has drawn a great deal from her personal experiences. “During my growing up years, Bombay was a different place. I didn’t even know what my name meant. It all changed after the 1992 riots and it has only become worse,” she says.

In spite of not living in a lower middle-class ghetto unlike Aabida, Salim has seen the life her character leads. In the claustrophobic chawls of Nagpada and Bhandi Bazar, women “don’t have a life” and are the last ones to eat — often small portions of left-over food — only after the entire family is done. In the film, enjoying lunch with guests and even a bite off a wholesome bone of chicken, becomes a great moment of liberation.

Ultimately, Aabida’s struggle is to lead a normal life, says Lubna.

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