

bigfashion



Tank and leather jacket,
Royal Enfield Lifestyle; jeans,
Jaded London; jewellery on
waist, Vasundhara Jewellery

RISING & SHINING

2024 has made a star of Sharvari. She may not agree, but as she talks about upcoming plans, family, food, and more, one thing is clear—there is no stopping her.

Interview: Stuti Agarwal

Stylist: Chandini Whabi

Photographer: Nishanth Radhakrishnan



Leather jacket and pants, Royal Enfield Lifestyle; mesh corset top, No Dress; boots, Oroh; hand bracelet used as waist accessory and rings, My Motifs by Surabhi Didwania; earrings, Vasundhara Jewellery

She ties her pinafore apron over her *ganji* (tank top) as the sweet morning sun rises to filter through the kitchen casement window in her apartment in Paris's Rue des Fossés Saint-Jacques. Only a few hours before her day begins at Le Cordon Bleu, but enough to try her hand at the madeleines she learnt in class yesterday, her dalmatian, Miso, snoozing next to her feet.

CUT TO:

It is July and she's on an assignment in Tanzania to photograph the great migration across the Mara River. Her moss-green *ganji* is a perfect camouflage against the beige of the car she is standing in. Miso, too, blends perfectly with the zebras he is silently watching hoisted next to her.

CUT TO:

The rutilant lights of Not Just Jazz By the Bay, Pune, shine down on her as she takes her seat on the grand piano, ready for her set in shiny silver *ganji*. She strokes Miso below the ear, both of them worried how her rendition of *Coral Keys* will match up to the suddenly popular Saturday Night Fever hits.

CUT TO:

She's in front of the camera and the clapper has signalled the start of the scene. She has only a day to shoot the *Delhi-6* song, *Masakali...*

"No! *Masakali* is out of the question. I have a very serious pigeon phobia," she chimes.

"What if we replace them with parrots or some other bird?" I ask.

"No, no birds at all. I think it is all the fluttering."

I'm on a WhatsApp call with Sharvari, talking about what she is reading while in Bangkok for a shoot (*Greenlights* by Matthew McConaughey by the way) and the conversation meanders to my recent read, *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig, me making her then digress into a quick game of multiverse meditation (for those in the unknown, try closing your eyes and imagining the many lives you are currently living even in the multiverse). Yes, the ones above are only a few of the universes the 27-year-old envisions traversing while she lives out her current one as what 2024 has sealed to be the Bollywood talent to watch out for. The last one, on the other hand, is my addition to what only seems like a nightmare to her list.

I had presumed she would want to live out all her 'lives' as the Bollywood star she aims to be—frills and frolics included—and the intention of the questions was to pry into her long-term vision as an actor. However, I quickly realise Sharvari's is a world vast and yet very tangible. It is this diversity of quests that is reflected in her film choices, and what makes her the star who really is working to do it all on her own (starting with winning a talent hunt hosted by an Indian publication in 2013)...And the one we are all rooting for.

Engineering entrance examination plans dropped—"With a family full of builders, architects, and interior designers, I thought I'd become a civil engineer," she reminisces—what followed the win for Sharvari was an audition call, and then a long, long string of them.

"I got my first audition call in 2014 after the winning moment from the talent hunt got printed across newspaper editions. When I tried my hand at it, I immediately fell in love. It was a dream away from the life I had—my family doesn't come from films—but I knew immediately that I was in love with the process...being in front of the camera, preparing my lines at home...It was a dream of a cinema lover," I can almost see the glimmer in

Sharvari's eyes as she takes us back on her cinematic journey, starting with the Sunday family ritual of watching movies together, whether with DVDs, CDs, or in the theatre, and even that one trip to Austria where her whole family went on *The Sound of Music* tour to serendipitously finding her way into the industry.

You would think when getting work as an actor took time, and with film schools in the country not accessible to her, Sharvari would have gone back to the comfort and surety of studying. Instead, she found in herself the deep-rooted resilience for a long time simmering passion for the movies.

"I decided to look for work as an assistant director. I wanted to see how films are made and what it is like to be on set, because it is a completely different world, and it felt like the only way I would get to learn the craft. That, along with a whole lot of acting workshops."

So began her juggling act.

When a successful audition for *Pyaar Ka PUNCHnama* (2011) didn't materialise as a role—"At that point, it was an adult film and while Luv (Ranjan) sir really liked my audition, I was only 17 and he said it wasn't the film for me," she says with no trace of disdain—she requested to be the Assistant Director (AD) on set. "He obliged and gave me my first job, and that is really how it began. I became a director's assistant first, got upgraded to being a clap AD on *Pyaar Ka PUNCHnama 2* (2015), went on to being an intern and AD on *Bajirao [Mastani]*, 2015], an AD again at *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweetie* (2018)."

Of course, all this while she spent every spare minute auditioning for movies, advertisements, web-series, and picking up everything she could about the craft from the workshops in and around Mumbai.

Five years later, she got her first break—*The Forgotten Army-Azaadi Ke Liye* (2020) with Kabir Khan—followed by *Bunty Aur Babli 2* (2021). "Again, there was a gap of almost three years post that, and speculations followed about what I was doing, comments on how people may forget me...but I just kept my head down and worked on the films that I wanted to."

Suffice it to say the years of work have added up for Sharvari to make 2024

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a year not many actors see, and every single one works towards. With three diverse releases this year—*Munjya*, *Maharaj*, and *Vedaa*—Sharvari has managed to really set herself as an actor everyone should be looking out for. And there is great confidence to draw from all the love she has received. "When you are new, when you're trying to figure if the steps you've taken and the choices you've made [in Sharvari's case, it has also been working across genres and picking diverse characters] are the right ones, validation for the work you have done really empowers you and motivates you in the right direction."

Today, Sharvari works to bring something new and exciting with each role, hoping every screen presence comes with the promise that the audience are in for a great performance. I can't help asking her, "Do you think you're a star now?"

"I aspire to be a star," she admits. "I aspire to be one of the best actors of this generation. But I have a long way to go."



Tank top, and jacket, Royal Enfield Lifestyle; pants, Papabau; boots, Saint G; jewellery used as accessory on boots, My Motifs by Surabhi Didwania

“I decided to look for work as an assistant director. I wanted to see how films are made...it felt like the only way I would get to learn the craft. That, along with a whole lot of acting workshops.”

Make-up artist: Shraddha Naik
Hair artist: Florian Hurel
Editorial co-ordinator: Shalini Kanojia
Styling assistant: Shubhra Sharma
Location courtesy: Darshana Enterprises

Invisible strap maxi dress, Y/Project;
black leather jacket, Rhycni; jewels,
Vasundhara Jewellery; boots, Saint G

“I have always been a confident girl, and I have to thank my parents for it. I take things head on. Sure, I have been vulnerable, and the journey has had moments when I did not get a role or things took time and I have been tested. But, as far as my looks go, I make sure I like what I am wearing, and as long as I am smiling throughout it, I am good.”

“What about in your work to upgrade your wardrobe? The last we heard you really wanted to go shopping for anything other than your *ganjis*,” I am curious.

She laughs out loud. “I am wearing a grey *ganji* as I speak to you! *Ganjis* are just so versatile, but yes, I really have to shop for tops and T-shirts. I am stuck in my *ganji* era.”

So shopping doesn’t seem like her opium. What is?

“Food! My mood can instantly elevate if I get what I want to eat on that day. And it varies all the time. I mean, I could be having a late night binge watching session with my sister and there is someone eating noodles on screen...I will want noodles immediately. In fact, there have been times when someone is eating cake on a show, and my sister and I have looked at each other and ordered cake! We can be very vulnerable that way.”

Of course, I think. Early on, in the interview we had yet again drifted into a long discussion about it.

“What are you thinking?” I

had asked.

“I’m thinking of dinner.”

“Oh my god, I hear Bangkok has a newly opened restaurant, Din Tai Fung!” I interject, cursing myself for doing so.

“I know! I plan to go post my shoot tomorrow for lunch.”

“Oh, you must have their xiaolongbao,” I say, using all my *Ugly Delicious* knowledge.

“100 per cent!”

“Wait, is that where Miso’s name comes from?” I suddenly realise.

“Yes! I love Japanese food and whenever I go to eat it, I start with a Miso soup.”

I couldn’t help but bore her with info about my pet hamster, who I named Pesto—for the love of the sauce—with her listening intently before seeing the clock ticking on the limited time I had with her. I quickly shift gear.

“What does love mean to you?” I ask.

“Respect.”

“What is Sharvari like on camera and off Instagram?” I follow.

“On camera you have me, complete

with an HMU and a stylist. Off Instagram, you have Sharvari in a *ganji*, her glasses.”

“What would you say to yourself just starting off in the industry?”

“That I am really proud of her,” she says solemnly. “Just keep going, and keep smiling.”

In fact, the actor believes her smile is what brings her confidence...no matter the place, no matter what she is wearing. “I have always been a confident girl, and I have to thank my parents for it. I take things head on. Sure, I have been vulnerable, and the journey has had moments when I did not get a role or things took time and I have been tested. But, as far as my looks go, I make sure I like what I am wearing, and as long as I am smiling throughout it, I am good.”

I can see I have exceeded my time with her, but I continue and she concedes without a huff: “Tell us a memory that has been life changing for you?” presuming, stupidly, once again, that it will be an answer to do with her film journey.

“It has to be the family trip I took to New Zealand last Christmas. It was the five of us, sitting in a car and driving for hours through these serene, pristine landscapes.”

“And this was all civil!” I exclaimed, again to my chagrin.

She laughs: “90 per cent civil! And, in fact, that was life changing. We are all of such different ages, with such varied music choices driving together. But we came up with a system by the end of it—each of us got the music control for each drive. Imagine my father listening to my younger brother play Travis Scott!”

I laugh, imagining him grooving to Sicko Mode. I have to ask, “Final question, what are you thinking now?”

“Oh, just where we are going to go for the upcoming Christmas holiday now!” she signs off, leaving me rethinking all the presumptions I had 30 minutes ago. ■