

Shaana Levy

"My growing up years were filled with a void. Although I had an innate understanding of different cultures, there was no sense of belonging," mediates Shaana Levy. The concept of home always translated into vacillating memories for the part Swiss-Hungarian Jew and part Gujarati girl. Born in Kenya, the mixed-heritage Shaana moved to London along with her parents a couple of years later. There as an 18 year-old student, she soaked into the vibrancy of New York to study theatre. Shaana, who visited the city of Mumbai along with her mother every year as a little girl, had never fantasised living in the land of "paan-beedi meets champagne-caviar."

Cut to six years later, and the 24 year-old actress lives under the shelter of Mumbai's blitheness. "Several people ask me, 'why have you chosen to live in Mumbai over the other beautiful cities in the world?' You know what, very often I find myself asking the same," she smiles. "The city is colourful and difficult, yet it has a soul."

Regardless of all the relocating, the one factor, which always remained constant in Shaana's life, was her deep passion for acting. She simpers, "I knew at the tender age of six, that when I grow up, I want to be a star...My parents even nicknamed me their little drama queen."

And as fate would have it, the commercial Indian film industry drew her and served as the original passport to the city. Shaana was a part of *Namaste London* (2007), essaying the role of Katrina Kaif's best friend. Soon after, the 5 foot 9 inch actress, who also played a cameo role in *Bhoothnath* (2008), bagged an ad and then won herself a music video. Trusting her gut, Shaana simply went with the flow. "Rational thought wouldn't have allowed me to come to Mumbai. But one thing led to another and voila! I found myself here," she exclaims. Besides, Levy is still to master the fine art of speaking chaste Hindi. The lucid speaker who's enthusiastic about her movie career, is currently taking Urdu lessons to brush-up on the language. "I must understand the language in

order to comprehend the script," she reasons.

Initially, despite all the effort, Shaana had to face the generic predicament of being an outsider and still does. "Quite honestly, Bollywood is not very receptive to a newcomer. You have to be genetically blessed or be fresh out of a beauty pageant," she laughs. While a few hiccups left Shaana a tad disappointed, Rage Production's popular play, *Chaos Theory* (2008), the only Indian play to be a finalist at the BBC World Playwriting Competition in 2007, saved the disheartened actress. Written by Anuvab Pal and directed by Rahul da Cunha, the play saw packed shows at theatre houses with seasoned actors such as Anahita Uberoi, Zafar Karachiwala and Sohrab Adeshir. The plot revolved around two Ivy League professors

whose interaction blossoms into love over the years but the protagonists do not express it to the other. Shaana plays brief, but impactful roles in the drama.

In many ways, Shaana is amazed that the stage scene is driven by the outcome for the love of theatre in the country. "The Mumbai theatre scene is no Broadway...there are no monetary gains, no huge recognition.

But it is commendable how most theatre professionals in the city carry out 10 other activities to make that one profession survive," she exults.

Next, a couple of *Chaos Theory* shows are in the offing. She is also yet to ink a few film deals. However, she prefers to keep mum until the contracts are signed and sealed.

That apart, Shaana has other plans up her sleeve. She hopes to write a book, since writing for her has become therapeutic. "It keeps my emotional sanity intact," she announces. The book will delve into the intriguing subject of cinema. In her own words, "it will be an international volume with Indian roots."

Ask the singleton what the one thing she's looking forward to the most? You assume the answer to be love. "Solitude," comes the surprising answer.

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