

I love everything about being a Gujarati!

Says spiritual pop diva Shivali, a rising star of devotional fusion music, in an interview with *BT*



Shivali Bhammer

Soumitra Das

As a three year old, Shivali Bhammer was quite different from children her age. In her own words, "I guess it was natural for me to get drawn towards devotional music. I was this strange three year old kid who used to shout 'Hari Bol' a lot, as if to start a revolution! Spirituality and devotion are embedded in my soul. I believe all of us are spiritual, it's just a question of whether we wish to expose ourselves to that side of ours or not." Shivali, who was brought up in London, merges her Western background with her Indian roots to create some soul-stirring songs, and the international success of her album *The Bhajan Project* is a testimony of that. Even *Urban Temple*, her recent album, has received rave reviews. Excerpts from a chat:

● **GUJARAT ROOTS:** My parents are Gujaratis, and while my mother's family was from Uganda, my father's family is from Rajkot. I love everything about being a Gujarati — the sweetness of our *daal*, our *rotlis*, *raas garba* and *dandiya*. I also love our language — it sounds so delicate!

● **MY ALBUMS:** I believed in *The Bhajan Project*, which was my gift to my Lord. Its success didn't surprise me. As for *Urban*

Temple, it carries the message of my life and everything that I am trying to achieve as a human being. The music is modern, contemporary, upbeat but also extremely soulful. I was born in London, lived a fast life and my music reflects that. But the music also speaks a devotee's language and about my own spiritual progression despite my very urban modern surroundings.

● **MY GENRE:** When I started, devotional fusion music wasn't really the 'done thing' and it's a genre that I have developed. If you want only fame, money or popularity, devotional music isn't for you. It requires you to have patience.

● **GAME FOR B-TOWN:** If offered to sing for a Bollywood film, I will consider it. I have to connect with the words and do justice to the song. I will never compromise on my ethics or principles just for an opportunity. And if I take up a song, I would prefer to dance too for that number. I have completed my grades in ballet, and I am also a Kathak dancer.

● **INDIA CALLING:** I come to India almost every year, and even lived in Mumbai for a year before my debut album released. I feel I have left a part of myself at Rishikesh and Vrindavan. The energy and vibrations are so intense near the Ganga, where you feel the acute pain and pleasure of being separate from the Lord and yet so divinely close!

● **MY HOBBIES:** I love playing the guitar and hopefully, one day, I will be half as good as my best friend Arjun, so that I can play at my own gigs! I love dancing and hitting the gym. Also, I got married recently and love experimenting in the kitchen!

● **MY FAV MUSICIANS:** I am a big fan of Vikram Hazra, Anoushka Shankar, Shreya Ghoshal and Lauryn Hill."