

# INDIA WEST Entertainment

## Sheetal Sheth Lands Role in Major NBC Television Film

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LOS ANGELES — Millions of American viewers saw actress Sheetal Sheth for the first time Feb. 17 when she played the supporting role of Layla in the NBC Television production of "The Princess and the Marine."

Based on a true-life Romeo and Juliet story about a princess from a Royal Bahraini family who falls in love with a United States Marine stationed at the American embassy, the film introduces Sheth early in the story as one of the princess' best friends from school.

"My character is the ultraconservative one," Sheth told India-West. In all her scenes, she appears with her head covered, while Miriam, the princess who opts for more Western dress,

(Cont. on page C6)



Sheetal Sheth: Breaking into primetime TV.

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[Cont. from page C1]

"sees a future different for herself than what is laid out for the women of Bahrain."

The character of Layla has "grown up adhering to (the culture) a little more strictly. So I'm more appalled at the fact that she has the guts to fall in love with somebody that wasn't chosen for her, and yet I'm worried for her," Sheth added.

Most of Sheth's scenes take place in a mall movie theater, where the princess first talks to the young Marine and then later continues to drag her friends to see even more films so that she can spend more time with him in the safety of the dark theater.

Though born in New Jersey, Sheth grew up in Bethlehem, Pa., and at an early age studied dancing but turned to acting when she was in high school. When she decided to study acting at NYU, her parents, "like most parents, weren't thrilled," she admitted, "but they knew I wasn't going to change my mind."

After graduating in 1997, Sheth confined herself to appearing in smaller projects at first "since I really wanted to focus on my training for a couple of years and not ruin any chance of being cast in bigger productions until I felt I was ready," she explained to *India-West*.

She broke into film in mid-1998 when she landed the lead role of the promiscuous Nina in Krutin Patel's award-winning "ABCD," and although the film has yet to be officially released, "I've gotten great reviews from it," Sheth stated.

After appearing in a spate of short films, Sheth landed the lead role opposite Ismail Vashey in Raj Basu's "Wings of Hope," which focuses on how alcoholism and drug abuse tears apart a young Indian couple.

"Basically, it's about the both of us having our own journeys," as Sheth described the storyline. "We started together, we went in our different ways, and get back

together at the end after going through every possible hardship we could possibly have."

From there Sheth went on to once again capture another lead role, this time in Anurag Mehta's "American Chai," which had its first public screening only a week before "The Princess and the Marine" aired on network television (*I-W*, Feb. 16).

Although "ABCD," "Wings of Hope," and "American Chai" deal with issues that Indo-American audiences can readily identify with, Sheth is adamant on the point that none of the films, nor any like them, should be labeled as Indian or desi films.

"Those films are in English, so I would consider them American films, even though they have an Indian cast," she pointed out. "They deal with Indian issues and should be considered part of mainstream culture, which they are. An Indian film is a Bollywood film. Until we change the terminology, we won't be able to cross over into the mainstream market as easily as we should."

Her work in those independent films helped her in getting the part of Layla in a major network film, "and it was nice to have the luxury of working on a larger budget film, because then people could just focus on their jobs and I wouldn't have to do about five other jobs on top of trying to perform," she laughed.

Sheth is in such demand now that she has moved to Los Angeles "and there is a lot of things in the pipeline with both film and television," she hinted. "So it is nice that people have come to know me. This is going to be a good year, knock on wood, but I don't want to get jump of myself."

As for her parents, now that they have seen her in a number of lead roles and with her having broken into network television, "they have seen over time that acting is not some fluke hobby but that I've made it my career," she told *India-West*. "Now they support it 100 percent, since I've made it my life decision, and they are enjoying it."



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