

# BEAT EXPECTATIONS

*Punk Rocker  
Meesha  
Shafi  
talks about  
modeling, music  
& motherhood.*

BY FAZEELAT ASLAM 

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ATHER & SHEHZAD**, CONCEPT BY **SAMINA KHAN**



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Black jumpsuit:  
Stella Mc-Cartney

# “I WANT TO THINK ABOUT ALL THE JOY & HAPPINESS AND POSITIVE CHANGES TO COME.”



Rolled-up boyfriend jeans:  
**J-Brand**  
Neon orange sneakers:  
**CONVERSE**

walk into Meesha Shafi’s home on a balmy afternoon to find her in a relaxed t-shirt and jeans. She looks better than most models do sauntering down the runway. Her husband, musician Mahmood Rahman, sits casually close by. As we talk, the complete lack of pretense makes me wonder if this laid-back, affable songstress is the same person as the Coke Studio sensation we’ve been hearing about for months.

Intrigued by her subtle but unique style, as well as by the lack of sequins and embroidery most choose to don for interview attire, I ask if she has any desire to jump on the design bandwagon. “I don’t want people to wear stuff that I wear,” Shafi responds. “The reason I enjoy fashion is because I can make it mine. I don’t even want my wardrobe photographed.”

It seems, by this distinction, she doesn’t want her hair photographed either; her long locks have been snipped into a coquettish pixie cut. I ask her what prompted the drastic change.

“I just got bored, so I chopped it off,” she says straightforwardly. “I heard from one or two people that it wasn’t ‘commercially viable’ in this market to have short hair,” she laughs, using air quotes, “but I’ve had long hair my entire life, I’ve worked in this industry for ten years and I don’t think it helped me too much because my face is not ‘commercially viable’. I don’t fit the cookie cutter mold. I can’t sell tea, nobody’s going to buy it!”

She takes a sip from her mug and clarifies, “I only started getting endorsements when I became Meesha.”

She is of course referring to the phenomenon that is her hit single with Arif Lohar, *Jugni ji*, from the 2010 Coke Studio sessions. Shafi can now be seen on billboards, magazine covers and popular advertisements all over the nation. You won’t see her with her new hair though; corporations have gone to great lengths to make sure she appears exactly as she did, down to the colour of her outfit, in the *Jugni ji* music video.

“And it’s not just the corporate mindset,” she exclaims. “At a wedding recently, countless people confronted me and asked why I wasn’t wearing red lipstick.”



Unfazed by the call of the crowd, Shafi plays by her own rules and has reached the top by straying from the trends rather than following them. As I take in the surroundings, I note that her creativity is present in the artwork that adorns the walls. A quirky self-portrait in oil hangs in the corner.

“I was always interested in the arts, as far back as I can remember,” Shafi starts. “Everything I have done academically and professionally has been related to the arts.” She pauses. “I don’t paint these days. Actually right now more than anything I’d love to paint because everything else has taken a backseat. But you’re not supposed to paint when you’re pregnant.”

To reveal pregnancy, let alone exhibit it, is a taboo in society. However this hasn’t stopped Shafi from her musical or modeling career. She is an artist by nature, a model and singer by profession, and a force to be reckoned with.

“It would be hypocritical to have a story done on myself and to exclude my pregnancy. This is an undeniable part of my life right now.”

Following in the footsteps of Demi Moore, Cindy Crawford, Halle Berry and Claudia Schiffer, Shafi is featured posing pregnant on a cover – the first woman in Pakistan to do so. When I ask her why she chose to make such a bold statement, she responds, “I don’t want to be all talk and not back it up. I talk about being progressive and helping reduce taboos. A large part of hiding pregnancy is superstition. You’d be surprised how many people buy into it. It’s not something to

hide – it’s something to celebrate.”

Shafi’s attitude and confidence is atypical, which leads me to ask her why she’s chosen the conventional option of becoming a young mother.

“I’ve always wanted to be a young mother,” she asserts. “I think young parents are fantastic. I want to be able to have energy to match my child’s and to be able to relate to my child. I think it’s probably a lot easier as a parent when you’re younger and before you know it, you’re friends.”

But unlike most young mothers, Shafi is at what some would call the pinnacle of her career. I ask her how she responds to those who criticise her timing and claim that she’s hurt her popular appeal.

“As far as timing is concerned, I try and make my decisions based on whatever I feel is instinctively right to do at any given time. I’m not doing any of what I’m doing to become famous. I never have. It happened by itself. In fact, fame makes me quite uncomfortable.”

Shafi is clearly not going to bend to popular opinion, but she’s still determined to surpass her previous achievements.

“This has been a fantastic year for me,” she says “but that doesn’t mean this is as high as I will go.”

Shafi seems to be confident in the choices she has made. I ask her ▶



“IT’S NOT  
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# Quick Q's with M

**P.** If I was to turn on your ipod right now, what five artists/songs would I see on your recently played list?

**M.** Beirut  
Florence and the Machine  
John Mayer  
Moloko  
Fiona Apple

**P.** If you could go open up for any artist on tour who would it be?


**M.** Red Hot Chilli Peppers

**P.** What is your most favourite recent fashion acquisition?

**M.** Neon sneakers.

**P.** What do you hate about fashion trends these days?

**M.** *Chapals* with heels and rhinestones, and jeans that don't fit right.



where she gets her strength from, and how she is able to disregard convention in favour of personal choice. She responds that she's "carefree but not careless."

"As a child I was told the difference between right and wrong but I was also given the freedom to try out what was wrong, which you have to be very brave as a parent to do. I'm hoping to raise my child the way I was raised. I'm just a lot more fortunate because I have a lot of support from my husband whereas my mother was a single parent."

Having been raised in a family of strong, working women and married into one with similar principles, Shafi attributes her strength in the industry to her family. "The biggest privilege of coming from a supportive family is the advice and support that you get from people you can trust unconditionally. There are girls in show business who don't come from a supportive family, or don't marry into one. They have to sometimes trust people who are not the best choice. When you can talk to people at home there's a huge difference, because they don't have agendas. Nobody can point a finger at you when you know that the people around you know and approve of what you do. What makes a difference, is if the people around you are supportive. That would be him." She points to her husband.

The two met at the National College of Arts in Lahore where they completed their undergraduate degrees. Rahman was Shafi's predecessor as director for the music society, and the two continue to work in the music industry together in the band Overload.

White cotton  
dress shirt:  
**ARMANI**  
Mauve plaid  
socks:  
**Stradivarius**

While the sheer might of *Jugni ji* has currently engulfed Shafi's career, Overload has had its fair share of success too. Unbeknownst to many, she penned the Urdu hit *Dhol baje ga* herself.

I ask Shafi what she feels the problem is with music these days. "Every song has the same words. Everyone is singing 'Where did you go? Why did you go? Why did you do this? How could you do this?' I wrote *Dhol baje ga*, and it's tongue-in-cheek, because why does everyone have to be deep to be taken seriously? You have 19-year-olds singing about experiences I doubt they've gone through. I can't relate to it and I don't buy it."

With a thriving musical and modeling career, Shafi is frequently on the go. I turn to her husband and ask him what he does when his wife is gone for long stretches of time. He turns to me and says, "I sob hysterically into my pillow and ask, 'why did she leave me? What did I do? Where did she go?'"

Rahman's response is indicative of the relationship they have. They don't take themselves too seriously - a rare quality amongst most people, let alone rockstars and models.

Shafi takes life "one day at a time," which is why this pregnancy is not something she's allowed herself to become frantic over. Her only concern is her lack of weight gain; in her second trimester (yes, she looks like that at 6 months) she's gained less than ten pounds.

"I take the dog for a walk every other day, but I'm thinking of doing some prenatal yoga, which is good for the mother and the baby."

Shafi's only real indulgence has been the setting up the nursery for the baby. And despite the calm she presents, she can't hide her excitement.

"I want to think about all the joy and the happiness and positive changes to come," says Shafi. "As a working person, soon to be working mother, I've already cut down work so I'll have enough time to balance my schedule."

Aside from bringing some serious natural talent to the scene, Shafi truly puts her money where her mouth is. She takes everything from her pregnancy to her success in stride without the histrionics that supplement most stars. In a time where it seems rationale has gone out of fashion in favour of the ridiculous, Shafi is both grounded and groundbreaking. ■

