



JULY 1976

"No," said the secretary, "no photographs at home!" We were crest-fallen. The story of India's greatest love-couple would've been so *pheeka* without lovey-dovey pictures to go with it. Dharam was sold on the idea instantly. "Tell Hema I want to do the session, and she'll do it for me," he said confidently. When the issue appeared, Hema cribbed about her double-chin and said we'd been partial to our "favourite" Dharam. She cribbed some more when a rival editor went and told her that the article and photography would damage her image. He convinced her that the implications were clear—Dharam was familiar with the out-lay of her bed-room. She kept a bar there especially for him. She used bad words. Fortunately, the stupendous reader response reversed any misgivings she might've had, and made this one of our "hit" issues.

LOVE IS... BEING 'AAS PAAS'



That Saturday morning, when I reached Hema's residence at nine, the whole house was in a tizzy. Dharam was going to call on her. No, it wasn't his first visit to her home. As a matter of fact, he's as much a part of her household and her life as her pet squirrel.

But today there was tension over his visit. For only the day before a magazine had come out with Amma's interview quoting her saying uncomplimentary things about Dharam. Though nobody put it in words, it was obvious what the thoughts were in the minds of the members of the Chakravorty household. Would Dharam be upset and not turn up? Would this be the end of a beautiful romance? An end to the highest-paid star screen coupling?

Hema had put on her best clothes and Amma (Mrs. Chakravorty) her best welcoming smile and Hema's two brothers were carefully keeping themselves out of the way and all their children and all the servants and the secretary were present.

The plan was to have a date-with-you session. I had not expected Hema to agree to my proposal, the proposal being an exclusive, informal session with her and Dharam. Not the usual publicity pictures to tie in with their latest release, but candid at-home pictures of India's greatest love-team. A few years ago, it would have been impossible to make such a suggestion to 'uppity' Hema. But this time, once I'd explained the idea to her, she was game and almost eager to get on with it. Dharam, of course, when consulted about the session, was as co-operative as he always is about anything to do with Hema.

We (the photographer and I) were received in some sort of an office that Hema has put up in one part of the house for journalists and producers. And we waited a long time, making small talk. Dharam had not arrived. I was worried that my bril-

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liant idea would die a premature death and there would be no lovely pictures in the boudoir.

An hour after the scheduled time, the great lover still had not arrived. I decided to go over to his house and find out what had happened. My offer to fetch him was received with great alacrity. Would I be so kind and please I should take their car and go.

I could easily have walked across, for Hema and Dharam stay *aas paas* and within walking distance. But the car was ready and waiting, and so I went, driven by a chauffeur.

Dharam stays in a huge four-storeyed house, filled with members of his family and his wife's family and their families. He stays on the top floor, in a glass house and amidst a lush terrace garden. And as you climb up, floor after floor, you see a great deal of activity. Children preparing to go to

school, servants rushing around, people playing music. It looks like a great big boarding house. Or a school (since there are so many children around), particularly at breakfast time as the children run down the stairs on their way to school.

Dharam was in the glass house, not sulking because of Mrs. Chakravorty's interview, but held up by some guests. Gulzar was around too talking in his usual intense manner. So I waited for the guests to finish, wondering what must be happening in the Chakravorty household.

And then we drove down (after Dharam told me, "You must come to my house again, and the next time, bring Hema with you. She has only come here once or twice") and as we approached Hema's house, the gates were flung open and the doors of the house too, and the family rushed out to meet Dharam. It was like witnessing the return of the prodigal son.

Amma was the first to greet him, she embraced him and hoped he was not upset and said that though what had been quoted was accurate, she had said a lot of complimentary things about him also which were left out. Hema looked on, looked on with happiness in her eyes, at the reconciliation between her two favourite people. Then she came tripping forward and he hugged her.

The brothers never came out, but all the others were there making a big fuss over Dharam. One of the sisters-in-law came out to say hello. She had had her birthday a couple of days earlier and Dharam pretended to be hurt because he had not been called.

"We did not call anybody," she said. "It was a homely affair, just the family."

Hema:
"He's my favourite person".

Dharam:
"Everything about her is nice....."

Hema:
"We are fighting all the time!"

Dharam:
"I object to certain 'poses' with the other heroes".

"That's why I was expecting to be called," said Dharam with his customary charm, that comes to him so naturally and in others seems so affected.

Throughout, he was his usual self. Carefree not overawed by the occasion, taking the whole thing in his stride. But with Hema it was different. She was visibly excited, on edge and eager to please and had a whole lot of different saris ready to put on for the photographs. This was definitely a new Hema. Happy, using four-letter words, cracking obscene jokes. When I asked her what had brought about this change, she said, "I don't think it's difficult for anyone to guess that. It's obvious. Everyone must be knowing why by now."

She very coyly wouldn't call Dharam by his name and when she wanted to speak to him, she'd say, "Listen . . .", take him to a corner or out of the room. After a mysteri-

ous five minutes they would return smiling, ready for the next photograph.

At one point, Dharam took over. "Let us take a picture with mummy," he said. "Who wants to take pictures with the daughter?" Everybody laughed.

Mrs. Chakravorty said, "Excuse me." She turned her back to us, took out a little compact that she always carries in her purse, and dabbed her face primly. Then she noticed that everybody was looking at her and she bit her nails self-consciously, exactly as Hema does in her coy scenes.

Dharam and the mother sat on the sofa and Hema sat at the feet of her mother. Dharam put his arm around the mother, the mother rested her hand on the daughter. It was a picture that could have made any photographer's day.

But the photographer's day was only beginning. Hema took us upstairs to her secluded suite of rooms. And Hema's own rooms are like an Englishman's proverbial home or castle. For instance, Rekha or Raakhee take their guests all over the house, but not Hema. She's very uptight and possessive about her "chambers" and not even members of the family are allowed up without special permission.

Dharam seemed to know his way around pretty well and was completely at home. I told him to relax since we were all by ourselves (Mrs. Chakravorty had left us downstairs and made a diplomatic retreat to the interior of the house.) Dharam said: "I am always relaxed here."

The room was filled with little trinkets that one buys in duty-free shops at airports. And since Hema travels a lot, there were a lot of these. Small, useless things that some slightly more sophisticated people (like Zeenat) would not even consider decorative pieces. But then Hema is.

like Dharam says, "bholi bholi". There was wall-to-wall carpeting and long curtains and nothing matched anything else. But then Hema is known not to bother about such things. In one corner was a mini-refrigerator filled with grapes for her favourite squirrel whose name is Poopsie and who looks like a mongoose. And on top of the refrigerator was a mini-bar, which looked incongruous in the otherwise chaste Ayyangar setting.

I looked questioningly at Dharam. "No," he said, "it was there long before I started coming here." But he was responsible for most of the half-empty bottles. When Hema would go downstairs to attend to some family matters, Dharam would quickly help himself to the liquor. However, that was all in the past. Out of "regard for Hema" and "respect for my own conscience" Dharam has been off-sharaab for over seven months. When he completes a year of abstinence, Hema will be so happy that she will probably throw a party!

It was decided that they switch over to informal at-home clothes. Dharam was saved the trouble of going to his house for a change of outfit for Hema happily lent him one of her *lungi-kurtas* and then looked for something casual for herself.

"Wear a swimsuit," Dharam suggested, with an obvious dig at Dimple's recent STARDUST cover picture "and hold a cigarette in one hand." Fortunately or unfortunately, Hema didn't take his advice. She also shook her hair loose. I'm glad she did that. For, when Hema does away with her wigs she knocks at least ten years off what she looks on screen.

Hema's letting her hair down was both literal and figurative. The atmosphere definitely became more informal and the talk warm and friendly.

Most of the talking was done by Hema. Whatever she would say, he would nod his head, agree and second the statement.

Hema told me: "We start each day with a fight. We are fighting all the time. It is HE who normally gives in and then we make up."

Dharam said, "Yes."

Over what do they fight? "Early in the morning when he comes to see me, he asks, 'why do you have a long face today and why are you spoiling my mood early in the morning?' As if I can help it, I am born with a face like this. Then we fight."

Dharam put in his two bits worth. "I object to certain . . . poses . . . with the other heroes, you know."

Said Hema, "As if I can't object! So many times I have caught him in all kinds of pictures with all kinds of people. And he says, 'It was only for the picture, there was nothing real in it'."

Said Dharam, "There is nothing real in it."

I asked if they found anything nice about each other. Dharam replied that he found everything nice about Hema. She was beautiful, she looked nice in whatever she wore, she had a nice nature, etc., etc.

And did Hema see anything nice in him? "What nice?" she asked. I explained — something nice in him that only she has seen and nobody else. She said: "Don't worry. What I have seen, a lot of others have already seen."

Speaking seriously, she said that any other person, after reading what her mother had said about him ("and it is something which is happening in my house all the time"), would have been annoyed and staged a scene or else said, "Damn you, you can go to hell." But see how nice HE had been about it.

She said she had always found him being nice to all the ladies in her household. He teases her mother and her aunt and her sister-in-law and he pampers them. But he is reserved with her brothers and her father. They do not talk much to him and he does not talk much to them.

They talked about their famous guest appearance in dozens of films. There was a time when Hema and Dharam used to make brief appearances in film after film. People said they wanted to go down in history as legendary lovers.

Dharam said it was the producers who kept asking them to appear in their films. They were always "emotionally blackmailing" them and they did not know how to refuse. In a way, they did not even want to refuse, for it gave them a little more time with each other. However, they have now decided to be more careful in future and not accept any more such honorary assignments. ("Unless, of course, it is something very good and subtle like what Basu Chatterji did with us in 'Chhoti Si Baat'").

Hema said that she was a bit tired of her career, tired of working, working, working all the time.

I suggested she should then do just one film a year with Dharam. "Why one film," said Hema. "I would like to do many, many films with HIM."

"I too," echoed Dharam.

She said she was tired of doing all these "dishum dishum" films with him. He was so good in films like 'Satyakam' and 'Chupke Chupke'. "When I tell him let us do such films together, he tells me that just because I am now working with Gulzar I want to do such films."

I asked her if he was her favourite actor. She replied: "He is my favourite person."

Dharam made his big statement of the morning: "I am scared of what will happen to me if we ever part."

Hema said: "I will never let anyone break this. From my side, at least, it is forever."

Dharam said, "Mine too."

