



FEBRUARY 1972

The "Devi" of the Hindi screen, ruined all the myths about her when she decided to reveal all in a session that turned out to be decidedly "non-spiritual". She lambasted everyone who had ever "wronged" her, including her mother. But the most sensational revelation concerned her one-time beau - Sanjeev Kumar - and the stinging slap he received from her delicate hand. After the interview appeared, she rang our office to thank us for it... but that must've been before her husband had read the piece. For, that was our last encounter of the nicest kind with Nutan. All future attempts were thwarted by the menacing Mr. Bahl, who answered all the calls and refused to let the lady speak for herself.

EXCLUSIVE!

The Untold Story

Nutan defends herself.

Hardly had the tumult of the Mother-Daughter fiasco subsided, than Nutan sprang into the news again with another daring act—she slapped Sanjeev Kumar!

We sat in the cozy balcony-converted lounge. She was dressed casually in white bell-bottomed pants and a smart printed shirt. Her make-up? Just eye-liner and lipstick. And this was Nutan, striking in her simple, natural beauty.

I observed her as she looked out of the window at the quiet road below, a remote look in her expressive eyes. She was telling me about the two poignant episodes in her life which wrecked her mentally, and which played havoc with her emotions to such an extent that she was left weak and exhausted physically! But helping her face both these odds was her husband... her tower of strength, her friend, her mentor. Her eyes shone with undisguised love and gratitude when she said, "I don't know what I would have done without him. If I've managed to survive those hellish times, it's because I had my man beside me all the time. If today I've got back my happiness, my peace of mind, it's because my husband helped me to find them!"



The Devi in a mini!

But let's get back to the beginning... to those days when rumours rent the air about friction between Nutan and her mother, Shobhana Samarth over some financial matter. But the details remained vague and

confusing and naturally lead to groundless assumptions and hypothetical conclusions. Even as people were wondering what's what, the private tussle turned public and the newspapers started carrying accounts of the court case between Nutan and her mother. Legal technicalities followed but only one thing seemed to stand out clearly: **that a daughter was fighting her own mother in court!** And since the daughter in question also happened to be a famous actress (and one who had earned for herself the 'devi' image at that!), the public interest in the case was enormous.

The dispute, to put it simply, was over income-tax liabilities that had fallen on Nutan's shoulders as a partner of the enterprise called Shobhana Pictures. Nutan, the only earning partner had only a 30 per cent share in the income, the rest being shared by the other three partners, namely Shobhana, Nutan's grandmother, and Tanuja (just a sleeping partner then, as she was a minor).

What Nutan failed to understand and accept was the fact that while only 30 per cent of her earnings fell to her share, she was being made to shoulder the tax on all of her earnings! "This was ridiculous, and I tried to explain to my mother that while I was ready to pay the tax on my share, she and the other two partners would have to settle the arrears on their shares. After all, the bulk of my earnings had gone to them. But my mother just wouldn't agree. She insisted that I would have to settle the entire amount myself. All my reasoning, all my pleas were cold-shouldered.

"Even my efforts to persuade her to sell some of our property to raise money to pay off the debts fell on deaf ears. She would not comply with any of my requests. Not even when I informed her that the Income Tax people were turning nasty and sending circulars to the effect that they would be obliged to assess my furniture, did she bat an eyelid! It was as though I was just nobody to her, and what befell me would mean absolutely nothing to her... and to think we were so close once. Ever since my parents separated when I was about eleven years old, I've lived with my mother until, of course, my marriage. I loved her so much..."

There was a quiet dignity in Nutan's voice. Only the slightest tremor revealed involuntarily the intense emotion she felt at the moment.

Such an inconsiderate attitude from the mother dried up all the daughter's warmth and affection. And Nutan realised that day that she could expect no help, no sympathy, no friendship from the woman who had given her birth. "I was shocked and numbed. For a minute, I couldn't believe my ears. But it was true and I told her that



Together... once upon a time. Shobhana with Nutan, Tanuja and Chatura.

day that henceforth we would go our separate ways, that I would deal with the matter as I thought best. Since that fateful day when she walked out of my house, I have not met her."

The situation was further aggravated when Shobhana started the construction of bungalows on property owned by Nutan without the latter's approval or consent. "The only sensible course I could see was to take legal action against my mother. And I did it."

And by such a bold but necessary step, Nutan incurred public displeasure and wrath. The general attitude was to sympathise with the poor mother and to rebuke the errant and ungrateful daughter for ill-treating the woman who had made

her what she was that day. Some said it was Nutan's husband who was encouraging her to go against her mother. "My poor husband did not even know that I had filed a suit against my mother. I knew he was not in favour of washing dirty linen in public, neither was I for that matter, but I really had no alternative. When he was away on a trip to Cochin, I grabbed the chance to engage my solicitors. I told him what I had done when he returned, and he decided to stand by me through thick and thin."

She remembered with a shudder the court proceedings. "I had briefed my lawyers to do their work thoroughly but to keep it formal and legal and not to bring up any irrelevant

points, and to treat my mother with respect and consideration. But my mother's lawyers! My God, how could she let me go through it without any qualms? They were merciless, they drilled me, they raised up particulars that had little bearing on the case, they brought in my husband as well, involving him with another woman ... she was my secretary ... oh, it was awful."

She paused. Her face was serious, taut, but suddenly, the lines relaxed and she smiled, "Well, that's all over and done with. My husband and I have just paid off, penny by penny, the entire arrears last June. It's a wonderful, heavenly feeling... to be free from debts." Her face glowed with a mixture of happiness, relief, and serenity. And she looked beautiful, then!

Yet, hardly had the tumult of the mother-daughter affair subsided, than Nutan sprang into news again with another daring act—she slapped Sanjeev Kumar, the then upcoming actor and her hero in 'Devi'! And what with the injured Sanjeev gallantly offering his other cheek, ("what else could he do?") Nutan once again offended public sentiment. How could the public, who saw her as the pure symbol of ideal Indian womanhood, (which in short means, suffering in martyred silence any and every humiliation that may befall an Indian nari), tolerate or understand such off-hand, blunt and un-devi like behaviour from Nutan? It did not become her image, they said. What they would not consider, was the simple fact that Nutan was first and foremost a woman, then an actress, that she had only the natural human emotions of an ordinary person and she could not be expected to endure any idle talk or false accusations without resenting it. After

all, it is easy to portray the martyr on screen, but next to impossible to be one in real life. And Nutan does not claim to be anything but a simple woman, a loyal wife, a devoted mother.

What caused the trouble between Nutan and Sanjeev? Hear it from Nutan herself. "Ever since I acted with Sanjeev in 'Gouri', my relationship with him had always been friendly and straightforward, courteous and professional but no more than that. It was a bolt from the blue when I read a report linking me romantically with Sanjeev. Yet, at first I took it with a pinch of salt and laughed it off. But later, I came to know that the rumours were gaining ground beyond limits. The gossip was threatening to become very serious and distasteful and I admit I was disturbed and perplexed. Besides being my co-star, Sanjeev meant nothing to me."

But the public believed the contrary. Nutan was supposed not only to be carrying on an affair with Sanjeev but also contemplating a divorce from her husband, in order to marry Sanjeev! The only hesitation on her part was because of her child.

"Just imagine, to what extent the yarns were being spun! And imagine my shock when a reliable associate of mine revealed to me that Sanjeev himself was responsible for such talk. And I had no reason to doubt this information. After all, he had been a witness to Sanjeev's manoeuvres. He had actually been with Sanjeev when the latter informed some reporters about our association. He even had the nerve to confess that I was living with him, that I wanted to marry him and that we were both wondering if we could get the custody of my child! Utter rubbish! What did

he think, that I would ever leave my most wonderful husband for him? Sanjeev isn't even worth his toe nail!" There was a quiet fury in her voice.

The inevitable happened when Nutan met Sanjeev on the sets of 'Devi'. (Only a week's shooting remained for the completion of the film.) There was a change in Sanjeev's behaviour, which Nutan was quick to notice. Gone were the courteous and mild manners he had always practised with her. The Sanjeev who always wished her with a polite, hand-folded 'Namaste, Nutanji', now merely gave her a meaningful (and intimate) nod while passing. There was a new swagger in his walk and an unusual brashness in his deportment. There was something insulting about the way he looked at her and it stung Nutan to the quick. She halted him, and this is how she describes the incident—"He stopped, with one hand on his hip, a bored come-on-get-it-over-with-fast expression, on his face. It made my blood boil. I told him quietly that I wanted to talk to him. With the same indifferent expression, he flicked his wrist disrespectfully at a corner and said, 'Let's go and sit there.' And that did it! I couldn't take it any more and I let him have one stinging slap, and a large piece of my mind. I don't regret my action. I had a clear conscience that I was justified in defending my reputation. He had no right to malign my name." (Is it a mere coincidence that Waheeda's name too was romantically linked with Sanjeev's just before the release of 'Man Mandir', and which undoubtedly is the cause of the present strain between them? Again, with 'Rivaaj' now nearing completion, Mala Sinha is being paired off with Sanjeev, and rumours about their romance are strong. Sanjeev's much publicised ro-

mances certainly are well-timed!)

But unfortunately, Nutan while safeguarding her personal reputation, harmed her professional name. In and outside filmdom, she had always been admired and respected. Now with these uncharacteristic deeds, she surprised and offended her followers. Instead of hearing both sides of the story (in both the cases), people merely listened to the one-sided version of Shobhana Samarth and Sanjeev Kumar. And Nutan had no choice but to bear with their lack of understanding and their doubts and criticism. The strain of these unpleasant times was telling on Nutan's health. Her husband advised and helped her to overcome the pain and distress. "He taught me to look at things in a more detached manner so that it would hurt me less. He was so kind and gentle and loyal and I knew he believed in me. And that's all I needed, isn't it? That my husband trusted me?"

There is a deep, personal relationship between Nutan and

her husband. "He's absolutely honest and frank, to the point of being blunt. He's cheerful and has a terrific sense of humour." As for Nutan herself, she's a level-headed, pragmatic person, with a receptive mind. She detests hypocrisy and is devoid of any snobbery or pretense. "Know thyself" is the Socratic motto she believes in. Her's is a down-to-earth personality. However much anything might hurt or pain her sensitive nature, her courage and hope sooner or later triumph... Her's is the 'while there's life, there's hope' kind of philosophy. Basically she is of a warm-hearted and generous nature, but under justifiable circumstances, she can be icy cold and hard. Critics today condemn her for rejecting the conciliatory overtures coming from her mother (her mother even has a large-sized portrait of Nutan in her house, so that anyone entering her house at first, tends to think they are entering Nutan's flat!), and for keeping her at an arms distance. They feel Nutan is being cruel and heartless, but doesn't

a burnt child dread the fire? Now she lives in a tiny, but extremely happy world consisting of her husband and her son. All her affection, all her care and devotion she showers on these two loved ones. And now that the rough and turbulent times are over, they are at peace and content. And Nutan aims to preserve this harmony for all the days to come.

What remains to be said of Nutan, the actress? It is a well-accepted fact that her artistic calibre is immense. Give her any role—good or bad—she'll do full justice to it. Even in a wishy-washy part, she'll come off making the best of a bad role. Acting comes naturally and easily to her.

She is very realistic about her success. "I have taken it in its stride. In a film career, there are bound to be ups and downs, and one must learn to cope with them without losing heart."

And to lose heart in any problem is the last thing Nutan's strong character will allow her to do.

— UMA RAO

Friend, guide, philosopher and director too! Nutan with her husband Rajnish seen here with Shakti Samanta.

