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The idea of court-martialling the stars was a brilliant one, even if we say so ourselves. It was an instant hit with the readers, and that was enough to make it a hit with the stars. It also caught on with the industry when they realized that here was one feature where they could have their say without us adding our two bits worth to it. The privilege of verbatim quotes took away some of the sting from the sharp questions. Saira was very keen on the C.M. since she's always prided herself on being a sport and wit. Unfortunately our reporter reached her bungalow on her husband's visiting day. She left the questionnaire behind, least expecting Saira to respond to it as soon as she did. It was returned the same evening, neatly and painstakingly written out in Saira's floppy handwriting...with a little bit of help from her loving husband, perhaps?



Her's is the ready wit that floors her interrogators ("tormentors" as she calls them), disarms her critics (who are comparatively numbered) and overwhelms her admirers (she does have more than her share). Filmiland's fairy-tale princess, SAIRA BANU, vivacious, spontaneous, occasionally mischievous, gave back more than she got in our Court Martial. . . . and we aren't sorry!

How did the 'Beauty Queen' label originate?

From my gorgeously beautiful mother of course! I'm sort of the 'pretender'! She's the one who really deserved the title — I mean it was a tab spontaneously and unanimously given to her — it was not the time of paid publicity stunts — she still is a most beautiful and gracious lady — far lovelier than I could ever hope to be!

Don't you think you've outgrown it now being a staid, married woman?

Oh boy! You make marriage sound such a disease! If it be so, then why does a much-married Liz Taylor remain forever beautiful — and even now, survives the 'ravages of marriage' to be the most gorgeous grandmother? Does Sophia Loren ring a bell, or Gina Lollobrigida or Brigitte Bardot or Raquel Welch? All married, I presume!

What is your reply to critics who insist you've made it on glamour and not on talent?

Maybe they are right — but what counts is that I am around, whether they like it or not! Remember, the same was said of a

great star called Madhubala, of another named Marilyn Monroe, and I am happy to be in such illustrious company!

Does being Mrs. Dilip Kumar have its advantages? Disadvantages?

Being Mrs. Dilip Kumar is like sharing a throne without having to slog for it. Disadvantages? Yes! Nosey Parkers like you, itching to find fault with a union that is beautiful and blissful! But then, I don't mind, 'cause it's your job and to each his own!

Have you at any stage regretted your marriage?

At frequent moments in my married life I have strongly regretted very much that instead of waiting till I was nineteen to marry him, I could have speeded it up and hooked him earlier. So many years of my life wasted!

Everyone presumes that your husband is a conservative — how do you enjoy total liberty as far as your roles and outfits are concerned? And what is your re-action to posters all over the town showing you in scanty costumes?

If you are referring to my hipster towel in 'Victoria 203' or my hot pants — it's silly to suggest that a bare midriff and bare legs

Saira Banu in 'Bairaag'





Saira with Dilip in 'Bairaag' - It's love that makes the world go round!

always spell vulgarity. It very much depends on how you carry yourself — on your breeding — I was never taught to snigger at the sight of a bare woman. Then again, a woman draped in a 'burkha' with just her eyes exposed, can sometimes be the sexiest sight. Years ago, when I was new to films, I did an entire water ballet sequence in a one-piece swimsuit for 'April Fool' — I wore it because there was reason for it — I really did have to get into the pool and slog and swim for my life — not just frolic around in the water and ooze sex appeal!

As one of our few intelligent and educated actresses, how do you consent to act in the kind of films we make here — doesn't it embarrass you to waltz around the mulberry bush?

No one starts a project with the intention of making a bad film. It isn't as though all our films are bad — we also have intelligent, industrious people in this trade who are doing sensitive and thought-provoking work. Personally speaking, there are moments when I feel tremendously rewarded and exhilarated when I am fortunate enough to work with people such as Tapan Sinha, my husband, Yousuf Sahib, or even Manoj in the capacity of a director. These are people, who are really masters at their jobs. Wish I could have been lucky enough to have worked with the 'greats' that were — Bimal Roy and Mehboob Uncle (Mr. Mehboob Khan). But this was an era of directors and a mode of work that I missed . . . that was before my debut. As far as the mulberry bush goes, I think that when we are all resigned to, and consent to live in a part of the world where there are indifferent roads, indifferent education, and an indifferent government, well then, why single out indifferent films?

What are your views on kissing, nudity, explicit sex scenes? Would your husband object?

Since much has been said on the subject (I am so bored with this question) it would suffice to say that kissing, nudity and all the rest of it on the screen would be repugnant to social norms and our behaviour pattern. The issue is being dragged too far and splattered all over. As for my husband, I would love to see the sight of you asking him this!

Why do you think you have not quite clicked as a star pair?

I don't think you could be very well-informed — brush up your homework, girl! We have done two films together so far — namely the Bengali 'Sagina' and the Hindi 'Gopi' — the former was a golden jubilee i.e. a 50 week run, and the latter was a silver jubilee, i.e. a 25 week run. Does that sound like not clicking!

Does his personality overpower you at times?

You said it — that's the reason I married him for — and I happily bask in his shadow!

Does it bother you that there were so many beautiful girls in his life?

The past? No! It does not bother me — you see, there may have been innumerable 'Les Girls' but I am 'his wife' — his present, his future.

What do you feel when you hear all the newer heroines voicing their desire to act opposite him?

Makes me feel mighty good and warm. It makes me a proud wife. He is more than a great artiste, he is a fine human being whom we all look up to.

— INGRID ALBUQUERQUE