

**A WAYWARD SHASHI, DISILLUSIONED KUNAL,
REBELLIOUS KARAN AND STAR-STRUCK SANJANA!**

HOW JENNIFER KAPOOR COPE WITH HER KAPOOR KHANDAAN!

Next to being the wife of a handsome star whose face is generally wreathed in crooked smiles, distributing come-hithers with the elan of a Don Juan, there can be nothing tougher than being the mother of a flop star. If you add to that another son who wears his rebelliousness in his ruffled hair, and who might possibly bring home one night a bride that nobody in the family fancies, what do you have? Maybe Jennifer Kapoor with a big frown?

But then there is the youngest child, an angelic daughter with a mind of her own who has her heart set on becoming an actress, a star, the kind that circumstances deprived her mother from being, the smile is back on Jennifer Kapoor's face.

Of all the wives and mothers in the film industry, nobody perhaps has her hands as full as Jennifer Kapoor. Apart from looking after her small but equally errant Kapoor *khandaan*, she is also deeply involved in her Prithvi theatre, from selecting the plays that get to be staged to managing the finances, and turning down a whole lot of amateur groups. Besides, Jennifer is also open to film offers, occasionally doing fantastic roles like in 'Junoon' and '36 Chowringhee Lane' more often wasting her talents in bit roles like in 'Heat and Dust.'

But her main priorities remain the same as more than twenty years ago—her family. Years ago, she had married the man she loved and quit her gypsy-like lifestyle with the Shakespeariana group to set up a home as an Indian housewife. That commitment continues. I wondered how Jennifer Kapoor managed her personal and professional affairs. Specially now that her elder son Kunal has returned bruised badly at the box office. As a flop star, Kunal's frustrations must run high, so how did the mother deal with his career problems. Did she console him on his failure and encourage him to try harder, or did she leave him to deal with his problems the way he thought best?

Instinctively mama Jennifer took up for her son. "Well our family has been in this profession long enough and have known right from the beginning how to face flops and hits without over-reacting to either", she said defensively. "I admit Kunal must

have been terribly disappointed when his first film flopped, but he took it rather well. He did not show signs of frustration because he had the..." she searched for the right word "...strength to face it. He knew he had to learn to take the rough with the smooth. It could have been in the beginning, or it would have been later. For him it came in the beginning and I personally think that is much better than being an overnight success and then flopping miserably". She tried to rationalise further, "In fact as a mother I would have been terribly upset and cross with him if success had come to him too soon and he did not know how to handle it. Because starting off at the top is a very risky proposition since it spoils you as a person, which is a much more serious proposition than starting off with a flop. I for one consider early success a big disadvantage and am glad that Kunal did not start off with a disadvantage."

Jennifer could well be talking through her stiff upper lip because generally she is quite flippant about the acting talents of her family. I remember how during the time Kunal made his debut on stage with 'Oedipus' at Prithvi theatre, Jennifer's only comment about 'dear Kunal' was: "At least he did not trip and fall on his face." Now, she is obviously more concerned. Though when I mentioned that Kunal had worked very hard for 'Vijeta' by growing his hair and beard for the role, and despite that had flopped, she could not resist remarking: "Well, growing your hair is not exactly working hard for a film."

Getting more serious she conceded, "I do agree he worked hard, but it should be that way; I hope that Kunal will always make efforts to get into the role of every film he signs in future also. I'd hate it if he got down to doing those meaningless formula films just for the heck of it. Incidentally, in 'Vijeta' he did prove to be success. You know success comes in many forms. And I considered him successful in 'Vijeta', because he did so many things which most of our young stars would not have been able to do."

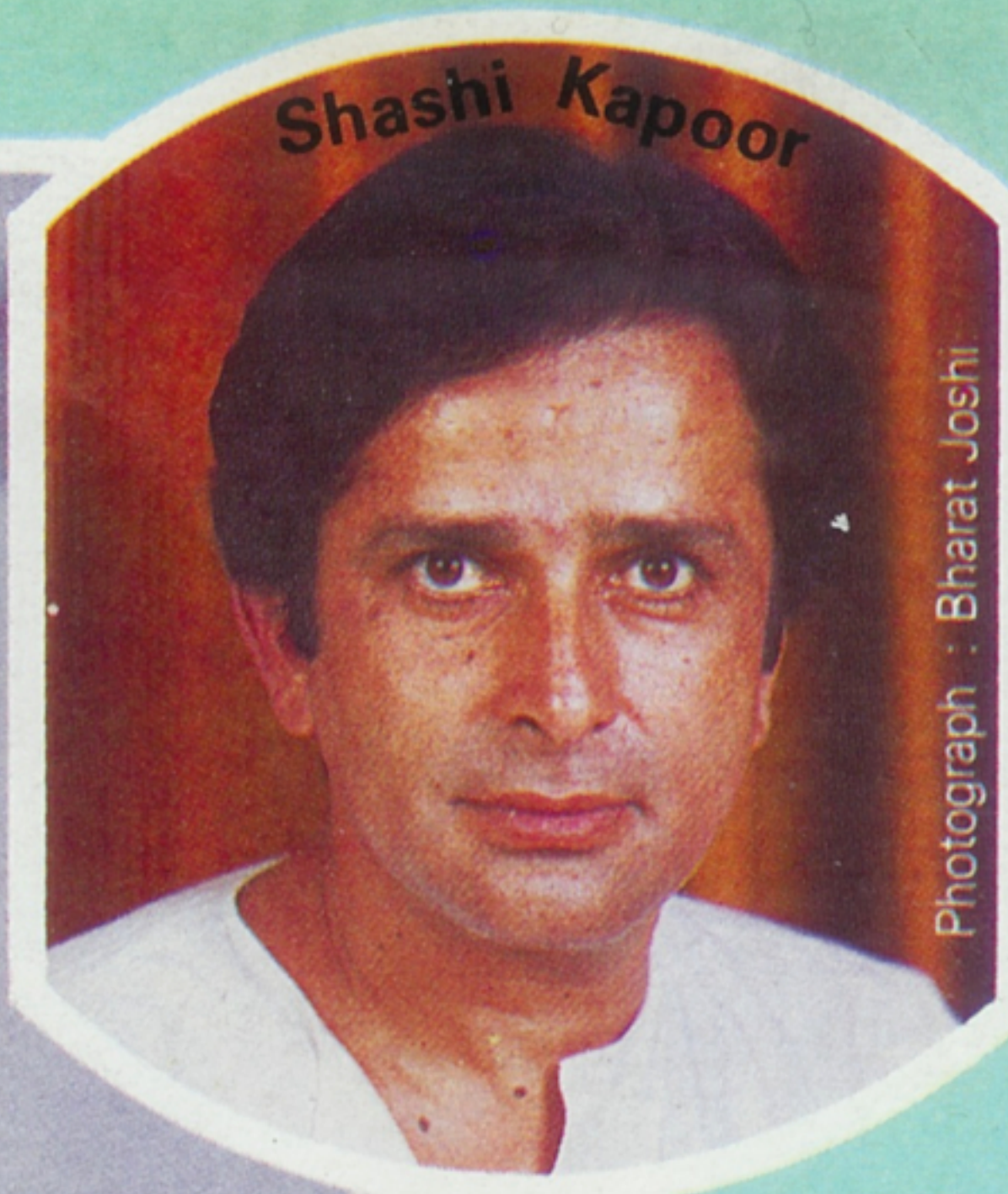
If all the pushing and prodding that Jennifer had to do, with a little help from Shashi who gives him meaty roles (the only films



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Jennifer Kapoor



Shashi Kapoor

Photograph : Bharat Joshi



Kunal Kapoor

Photograph : Bharat Joshi



Sanjana Kapoor



Karan Kapoor

Kunu has today)—makes Kunal seem a mama's boy, then younger son Karan is definitely his own man. He had made it a point to break every religiously observed tradition of the Kapoors and intentionally hold himself apart from the class. Where no Kapoor has thought of anything except the family business (acting), Karan has become a photographer and a model (slightly, ever so slightly the narcissistic streak does show in the ad campaign he's modelled for). He is the family rebel, posing rarely for even the together family photographs.

"Well, I would not call Karan a rebel", retorted mama Jennifer sharply as she once again took up very loyally for her son. "Just because he wants to become a photographer instead of an actor, and does not conform to certain set patterns of our life, does not make him a rebel!" But being a rather honest person, she did eventually let out, "I confess it was rather startling to know that we had a son who did not love acting like everyone else in the family but then we accepted it, since we are not the sort of parents to force our children into anything. If he loves taking photographs, he will do just that!" Sounding a bit wistful, she added, "probably when he gets tired, he will switch over to something else. Though, we hope he will become a cinematographer later on. Now that again depends on him."

Karan seems more familiar in the small, poky, suburban p.g. digs of Sarika than amongst the back-slapping, hug-hug-hugging Kapoor class. Though presently, he is abroad as the still photographer of a foreign film unit and will be away for a few months. Wanting to provoke Jennifer into making a comment about Sarika, I remarked, that his girlfriend must be missing him. Pat came the retort: "Girlfriends, you mean". Or may be that is her way of showing disapproval of her son's choice.

Just as I was going to enquire about her daughter who is yet another star-aspirant, Sanjana entered, as if on cue, looking gorgeous as ever in her casual jeans and a blue-checked shirt. Taking an instant liking to her, I curiously asked Jennifer why she had not bothered to put her up on stage, considering that theatre experience always counts. After all, how much had Kunal's formal training helped? I queried. "Of course she will be doing theatre, but let her finish school first. Then if she wants to get into this profession, I will send her to my parents for training," she disclosed as she went on to say matter-of-factly, "then probably if she wants to, she can take formal training at the drama school. She definitely won't balloon out just like that. It is only after she does her training that she can decide what line of this profession she wants to get into."

It would also give Sanjana an option to try for foreign films, which I think is Jennifer's real intention. She would like nothing

more than Sanjana making it abroad rather than have her in the kind of films her husband acts in.

But a more immediate question is whether the Kapoor *khandaan* will be up in arms, objecting to Sanjana joining films. After all, it is an unwritten law, a tradition that no Kapoor girl would enter the industry—a law which has been zealously followed through the years. "Oh! They would not dream of objecting to Sanjana becoming an actress", said Jennifer self-assured, "Anyway, it is not a tradition. It is just that things have worked out that way, through the years. Besides, I don't believe in tradition and customs for the sake of it. Nor does Shashi. I strongly believe in re-thinking, re-evaluating things for ourself and then following them only when we feel we are right. And then whatever decision each family takes, is totally personal and no one has the right to question the other," she ended off sternly, making it very clear that it would be unfair for the other Kapoors to set down rules for her family.

Listening to her sound rather severe about the whole issue of minding one's own business, I suspected that Jennifer was a typical British miss-prim-and-propah, who was a strict disciplinarian at heart. I even had a strong feeling that it was she who wore the pants in the house. When I told Jennifer of this, she light-heartedly brushed it off saying, "The only thing British about me is that I am a stickler for punctuality. Apart from that, neither am I a disciplinarian, nor do I wear the pants in the house. It is always Shashi who makes the major decisions. I am not an initiator. I am just a good worker. Once Shashi gives me the idea, I just work on it." It was more than easy to believe Jennifer, about her only British quality being time consciousness since at that moment she sounded like a typical Indian wife, giving all the credit to her husband, putting him on a pedestal all the time.

And the husband? Shashi Kapoor, an incorrigible flirt, whose affairs are not that unknown. How had the marriage survived so long? What has Jennifer done to keep up his interest in her?

"Oh! I do not have to try hard, you know," she quipped in her own brand of British humour, as she went on to relate good humouredly what a bad housewife she was. "I don't cook, nor do I put on my make-up and wait for him to come back home. I guess I am just lucky. But I don't find anything strange about that. My mother is seventy-five years old and she is still very much in love with my father and has managed to keep up his interest in her till today."



....With Sanjana

"I personally feel that children will always be children. How can they be friends?"



Karan and Kunal.

Not willing to let her get away so easily, I asked her how she reacted to all the gossip about her husband's waywardness and his various link-ups with different heroines. I realised I had touched a raw spot when Jennifer sighed and said thoughtfully, "Well, that all depends on Shashi. I don't go around inspecting what he does all the time!" Switching on to a more cheerful note, she chirped, "Though the fact remains that he is an incredible flirt and I don't think I can ever stop him from it. It is in his blood and I know he is going to do it all his life!"

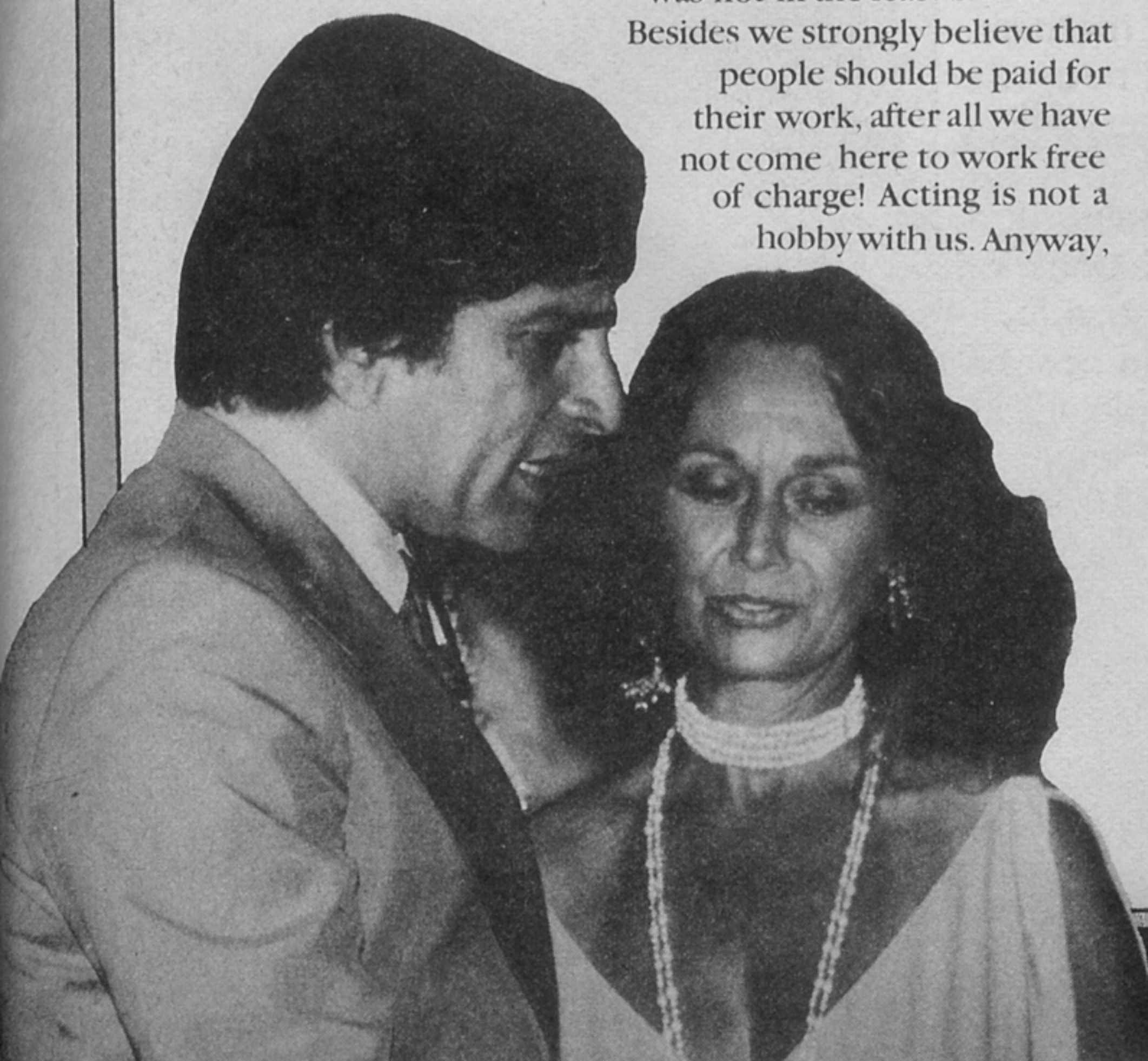
"As for gossip about his various link-ups, it all depends on my mood and the circumstances. Though most of the time I just laugh it off, but sometimes I may react in a different manner, though I definitely never question him on it. I think that would be a downright cheap thing to do."

Much as Jennifer might try and give credit to Shashi for various things, including wearing pants in the house, everybody accepts that Prithvi theatre is exclusively her baby. At the most, Shashi's involvement would be only financial. Even the Prithvi festival of plays is being handled almost solely by Jennifer. Unlike any other Kapoor *babu*, Jennifer has crossed all the boundaries to do just what she pleases. And at the moment she is out to prove that, "Theatre can be fun too. That is why I am also planning to have a cricket match of the Filmvalas v/s Prithvi theatre group. Right now Shashi and myself are fighting over who should be in whose team." Breaking into a big smile she added excitedly, "But I'm sure it's going to be fun, though right now I'm very busy with the festival which is to collect funds for the theatre. Because we need money for people to prance around on stage and play Hamlet." Quirking her eyebrows she threw up her hands saying, "You won't believe it but we literally lead a hand-to-mouth existence! Because you see we are not only a non-profitable organisation, but we are losing a hundred rupees on every show."

Mention of money made me remark that the couple had suddenly grown very money conscious. I thought it was rather irritating to hear Shashi harp all the time on the fact that he signed trash films only to earn money so that he can make good films. And the way he made his obsession for money obvious on television by making continuous cracks at Ismail Merchant for not having paid him for 'Heat and Dust' was rather embarrassing not only to Ismail Merchant but also to the viewers who literally watched the man flinch every time Shashi pulled him up in front of thousands.

"Oh, he said that jokingly," she said, springing instantly to her hubby's defence, like all good wives do! "The tone he said it in was not in the least bit vicious.

Besides we strongly believe that people should be paid for their work, after all we have not come here to work free of charge! Acting is not a hobby with us. Anyway,



he made his point jokingly and what is wrong with that? Everyone, including Ismail, was laughing." That the poor chap had no choice was besides the point. "And then people forget that we have to pay our workers too," quipped Jennifer, "and where are we supposed to get the money from?"

Since Shashi is too busy to involve himself in theatre, Jennifer makes up for him. Her involvement is total. As she voices her opinion about the quality of production—not too satisfactory—and expresses her displeasure at the lack of Indian playwrights for the festival, with the exception of Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar I wondered who, after Jennifer, was going to be so deeply concerned about it. I was eager to know which of the three children was going to carry on the Prithvi flag. Was it going to be Kunal, who because of his sagging career was showing maximum interest in Prithvi, I asked and was stumped with, "Why should it only be a Kapoor who should run it? Why should it be a Kapoor 'headache' forever?" she shot back unexpectedly. A Kapoor 'headache', I echoed not believing my ears. How could it be one, with all the satisfaction she got from being so creative, I countered logically, "Oh it's far from creative," she replied off-handedly. "In fact it gives me a lot of unnecessary anxiety, worry and neurosis which could well have been avoided otherwise. Like today I spent so much of my precious time hunting for blue beads at the market for the group—which is hardly my job you know," she let out exasperatedly. "I sincerely hope that the Prithvi theatre will not be a Kapoor responsibility forever. Any one can take over once it's established. As for Kunal, I think he is more interested in it as an actor and later perhaps as a director, but not as a producer. I hope so at least, for that means a lot of problems and unnecessary tensions once again."

The surprising thing about Jennifer is that not only does she manage Prithvi theatre, but also takes great interest in Shashi's projects—even when she has to design some ludicrous costumes for his ludicrous films. Is it that Jennifer is going through a phase of restlessness, emptiness because her children are old enough to be on their own? Jennifer of course thinks differently. "I am not one of those mothers who think that children need their parents much more when they are small. My children need me as much now! In fact, now they are of the age where I enjoy being with them. When they were tiny, it was a bit of a headache looking after them, since I had to clean their noses, wash their faces and run after them all the time. But now it's fun. I don't say we are friends like everyone is so fond of saying these days. Because I personally feel that children will always be children. How can they be friends? It's only those parents who want to show desperately that there is no distance between their children and them, who say they are friends. But when I say that we are not friends, it doesn't mean that there is a communication gap or that we are not close to each other, or that my children don't confide in me.

"If I do bit roles," continued Jennifer, "it's not because I am restless, but because I have always been very eager to work. It's rather sad that I have been kind of unfortunate in this case and have not got very many good offers. Frankly, I've never minded doing small roles as long as I believe in them. Like my role in Satyajit Ray's film was only two days work, but I consider it to be one of my best roles. Even in 'Shakespearewalla' and 'Far Pavillions' I had very tiny roles. But I did them for the love of acting and I thoroughly enjoyed doing them."

Perhaps that is the secret of Jennifer Kapoor—to enjoy to the fullest whatever she does. Be it bossing around at the Prithvi, shopping in Chor Bazaar, organising blood donation drives or cricket matches or doing two-minute roles in films. Or even mothering her children and boosting her husband's ego, and of course, keeping at bay her husband's flirtatious friends. Specially the latter, for there's nothing like a good fight to keep a marriage going and a woman alive.....!