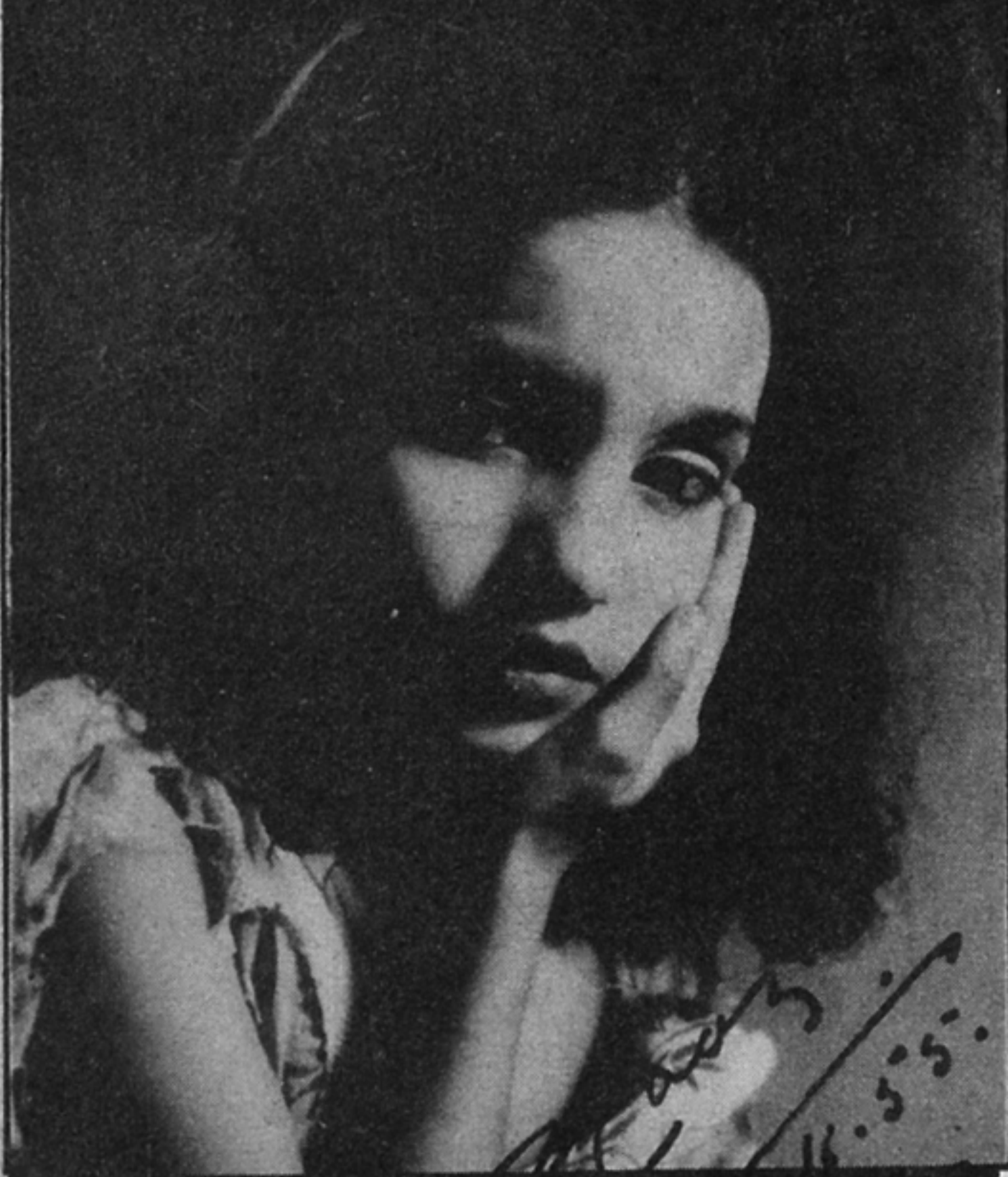


THE TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES OF A CHILD-STAR!



**Why The
Ten Years Old
Baby Naaz
Tried To
Commit
Suicide
Twice?**

Twenty years ago, on the Khar-Danda road, in a small suburb in Bombay, there used to be a big, deep well. It was used by people for two things — to draw out water in times of an emergency and to end lives in times of desperation. Baby Naaz can never forget this well of death. Not only because it was a few furlongs away from home, but also because she associated the well with peace and the end of her troubles, tears and trauma. In fact, at a tender age of ten, Naaz had tried to jump into it repeatedly two times to kill herself, but had been saved by an old faithful ayah in the nick of time.

Why? Because, behind almost every successful child-star, there has been an ambitious mother and a tragic story. And the tale of Naaz's childhood has been the most pathetic, morbid and perhaps the saddest story ever heard. For even though she was the only child of her parents, Naaz was neither pampered nor spoilt. She was the sole bread-winner of the family, was made to slog day and night to feed her unemployed father and ambitious mother and was sent to bed without even a glass of milk or a slice of dry bread after a hard day's work.

Naaz's eyes fill up with tears even today, when she talks about her days of success and hunger. "I was the highest paid child-star in my time," she began quietly, sitting on the sofa in her twenty-five year old flat. "I have worked in a hundred and twenty films as a child and that itself is an unbeaten record. Besides, I was the first Indian girl to get an award at the Cannes Film Festival for my performance in 'Boot Polish'. People had very high expectations of me and were sure I'd become a great actress when I grew up. But I neither took the place of Nargis or Meena Kumari as I was expected to." Naaz could never drop the 'Baby' from her name, and she blames her parents for that.

"Both my parents are dead now," Naaz explained choking with emotion, "but I will never be able to forgive my mother nor forget her greed for money." Baby Naaz began her career when she was just four years old. Since she was interested in dancing, she used to give stage performances. "I used to see heroines dancing on the screen and copy them exactly," smiled Naaz. "I had a cupboard full of cups and trophies that I'd

won for dancing. What started off as a hobby, soon became a compulsion for me. My father, Mirza Dawood Baig, was a story-writer who was not doing well in his profession. Our family has no other source of income and we were hard up for money. It was very difficult to make two ends meet and so I was made to dance on the stage for money. I used to get about a hundred rupees per show and somehow we managed. Since I loved dancing I enjoyed it in the beginning, but I was too young to realise, that slowly and steadily the whole responsibility of earning a living was being put on my little shoulders. I never realised how and when I was trapped into being the only earning member in the family."

She was eight years old when she got her first film assignment. Mr. Lekhraj, a producer, saw her dancing and approached her father to sign her to play Suraiya's childhood role in 'Resham'. "Even though he was a very good friend of my father's, my father turned down Lekhrajji's offer at first," revealed Naaz. "But then realising that we needed the money, he ag-

Older and happier! Naaz with her husband.



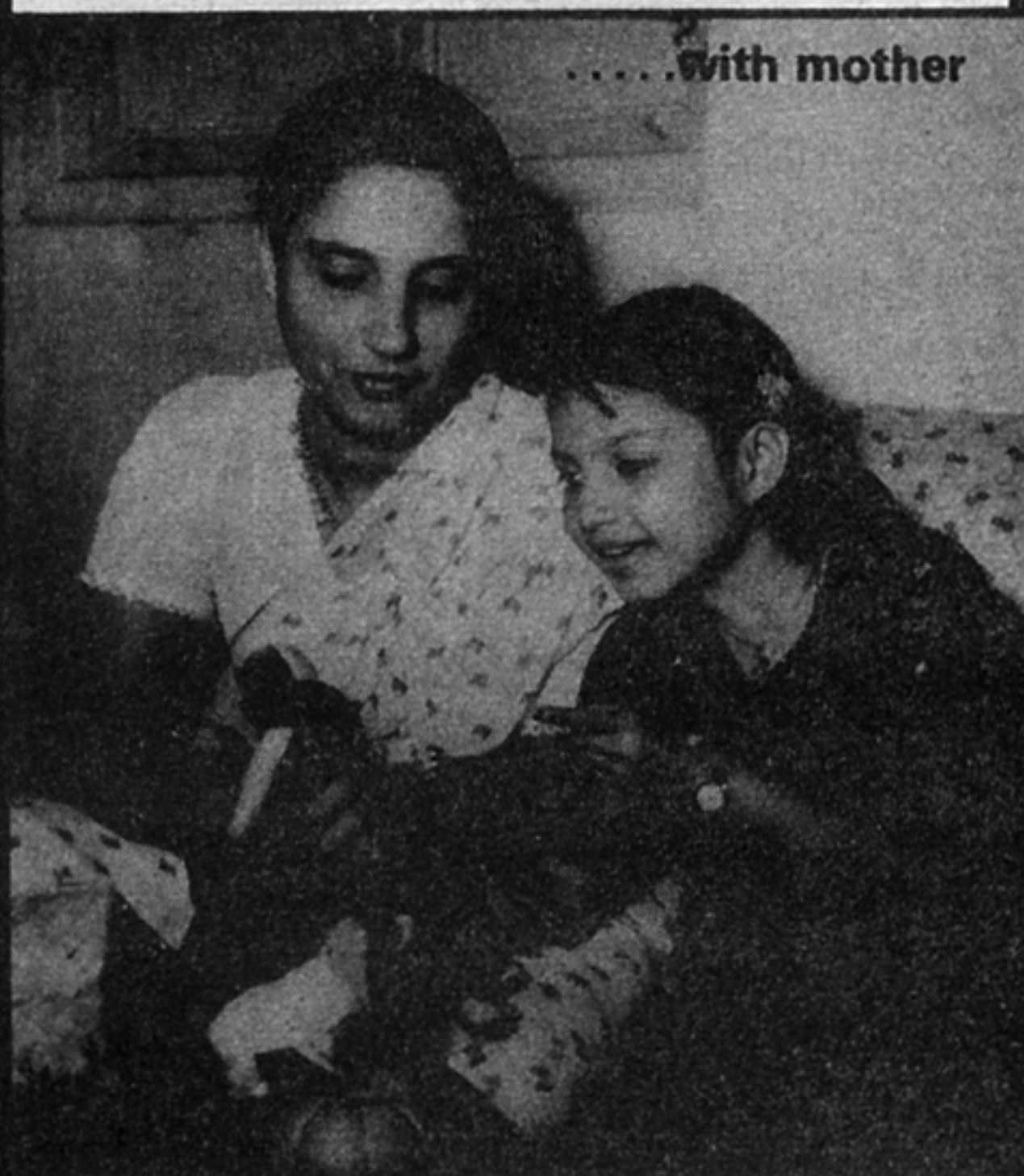
reed. My name was changed from Salma to Naaz and I faced the camera for the first time." Lekhraj was very happy with the child's performance and Baby Naaz was flooded with offers. Her mother accepted them all. Little Naaz was so busy attending shootings, that she had no time for school and studies and was rusticated. Her principal's decision had no effect on her parents. They continued to make her work harder than before till 'Boot Polish' was released and Baby Naaz became a star. No film's star-cast was complete without her name and Naaz was flooded with awards and more offers. In those days of single-shifts, this child-star was working in four shifts a day. She be-

came a household name and even her school wanted her back. "I was very happy," reminisced Naaz. "I wanted to study, but unfortunately I had no time to breathe and had to forget about school. I left studies, for my mother didn't stop accepting films on my behalf and my father stopped working. My mother was too used to making money out of me and didn't want to forgo this easy life. She wanted me to work for her comforts and I was both too young and in awe of my parents to refuse!"

However, she herself got no comforts, luxuries or the good things in life, even though she slogged day and night for them. "There were no games, no friends, no proper sleep or food for me," lamented Naaz. "Whenever I came back tired from a shooting, my parents were busy with their own problems and had no time for me. They fought with each other all the time. They didn't even realise that I had come back home and gone off to sleep without food. Even if they did, none of them even bothered to give me a glass of milk. I cannot count the times I have slept without food." More than her father, she blamed her mother for this child abuse. "I couldn't blame my father," she said emphatically. "He himself kept ill all the time and was neglected by my mother. It is she whom I blame. The only thing she bothered about was money. She got over ambitious."

All work and no play made Baby Naaz a very sad child. "I got fed up," she cried tearfully. "I felt choked. I wanted breathing space. I couldn't take it any more and that is when I first tried to end my life." Every morning whilst going to the studios and every evening when she got back home she passed a huge well. "My ayah used to tell me stories about how people ended their lives by jumping into this well," laughed Naaz. "So, one day when I was all alone at home, I ran to the well. Somehow, my ayah who spotted me, ran after me and brought me home. She was the only one who cared for me." She paused for a while and continued in a whisper. "Do you know what my mother did when she heard about my attempted suicide?" she asked. "No, she didn't take me in her arms and cry, nor did she plead with me not to do it again. She never shed a tear, instead, that woman

slapped me hard and screamed at me. I couldn't believe her reaction and it shattered me. I was more miserable than ever. Things didn't change with time. They went from bad to worse and I tried to run away from home and jump into the well again. But my ayah saved me a second time too."



When she was twelve years old, Naaz understood the reason for the daily fights between her parents. Her mother had fallen in love with another man and wanted a divorce. Her parents went in for a separation and her father was thrown out of the house. Baby Naaz was forced to stay with her mother. "I wanted to be with my father," she sobbed. "I loved him more than I loved my mother. But I wasn't even allowed to see him after he left us. For about two years, I didn't know where and how he was. I used to cry for him but my mother paid no heed."

Her mother's affair with Rajendra Malloni, a cameraman, was out in the open and Naaz was most resentful about it. "I hated the man," she lambasted bitterly. "I hated him for what he had done to my father. I hated him for ruining my life. It was because of him that my mother and father always fought. It was because of him that my father had to leave his own house and stay in dirty hotels." What upset her the most was that though she was aware of what was happening, she could do nothing about it. "I was so helpless," she screamed. "I had no bank balance. Everything, the house, the property, the jewellery, the cash was in my mother's name. There was nothing for me and my father. My

father was penniless when he left us and he was sick. I don't even know what he went through. I spent sleepless nights as a kid, just wondering where he would be."

However, it was the thought of earning for the man she abhorred that made her blood boil and hate her mother even more. "I wouldn't have objected if my mother had taken away the money for herself. After all she was my own mother, but what I detested was that she gave away every single paisa of my hard earned money to that man," she flared up.

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"He had three daughters and he got them married from my money. But I was made to slog away my childhood for this man. The man who was responsible for wrecking my life. My mother seemed to have lost all her senses. She blindly followed his orders and expected me to do the same. And when she finally married him it was the last straw."

The sixteen-year-old Naaz put her foot down and refused to accept her mother's second marriage. "I didn't want that man in my life," she hit out. "And I made that very clear to my mother. For once she paid heed to my words and kept me away from him. She stayed with me during the day and went to him in the nights. I used to sleep with my ayah."

In her loneliness she missed her father more than ever. "After my mother got married again, I started thinking more and more about my father," she explained soulfully. "I had no one to share my sorrows, no shoulder to cry on. I missed my father very much. So one day, I just decided

that I had had enough, and set out to find him." After a long search, she finally tracked him down and brought him home with her. He was a very sick man who needed immediate medical help. Seeing her father's sorry plight, Naaz was disgusted with her mother's behaviour and asked her to leave her house immediately. "But her second husband didn't want her," she exclaimed. "He who had lived on my money for so many years, was not ready to keep my mother with him. And my mother came back pleading to me to take her back. But I was determined and told her that since she had got married to that man out of her own free will, she had to stay with him and that I was not going to take her back under any circumstances. However, after a lot of begging, that man took my mother home, but treated her worse than a servant. He knew that since I had thrown her out, they would not get any money from me, and so he had no use of her. My blood really boils when I think about him. I can't tell you how much I loathe that man. I have never hated anyone so much in my life. My parents are dead and gone now, but he is still alive. They say that God doesn't take away bad people soon. My father never really recovered from his illness even after I brought him home. And my mother died soon after. She was tortured by her second husband in her last days. How can I ever forgive this man for playing such a havoc in my life? He still calls me up sometimes, but my husband or whoever receives his call, tells him I do not want to speak to him. I don't want to see his face or hear his voice ever again in my life."

Her traumatic personal life affected her career too. "I had no secretary to look after my affairs," she explained. "My mother handled everything and she believed in making hay while the sun was shining. She made me sign every film that came my way whether my role was good, bad or indifferent. The only important thing for her was money which she wanted for herself and her second husband." In spite of her neglected career, Raj Kapoor had offered to send Naaz to a finishing school in Switzerland for five years and pay for all the expenses there. He promised to launch her in a big way the moment she got back. "That would have really done a lot of

good to my career," sighed Naaz sadly. "But my mother refused the offer. She asked Mr. Raj Kapoor to send her along with me to Switzerland too. 'Who will look after us when Naaz goes?' she wanted to know. If only my mother had not been so selfish, I would have reached places today. She only thought of making money, not me or my career. Today, in spite of being in the industry for thirty five years, I am just where I started." In fact, Naaz is being treated by producers as a newcomer today. "Even after all this, I could have managed to get somewhere in the industry had I been ready to compromise. To be very frank, the producers and heroes, except a very few, only want

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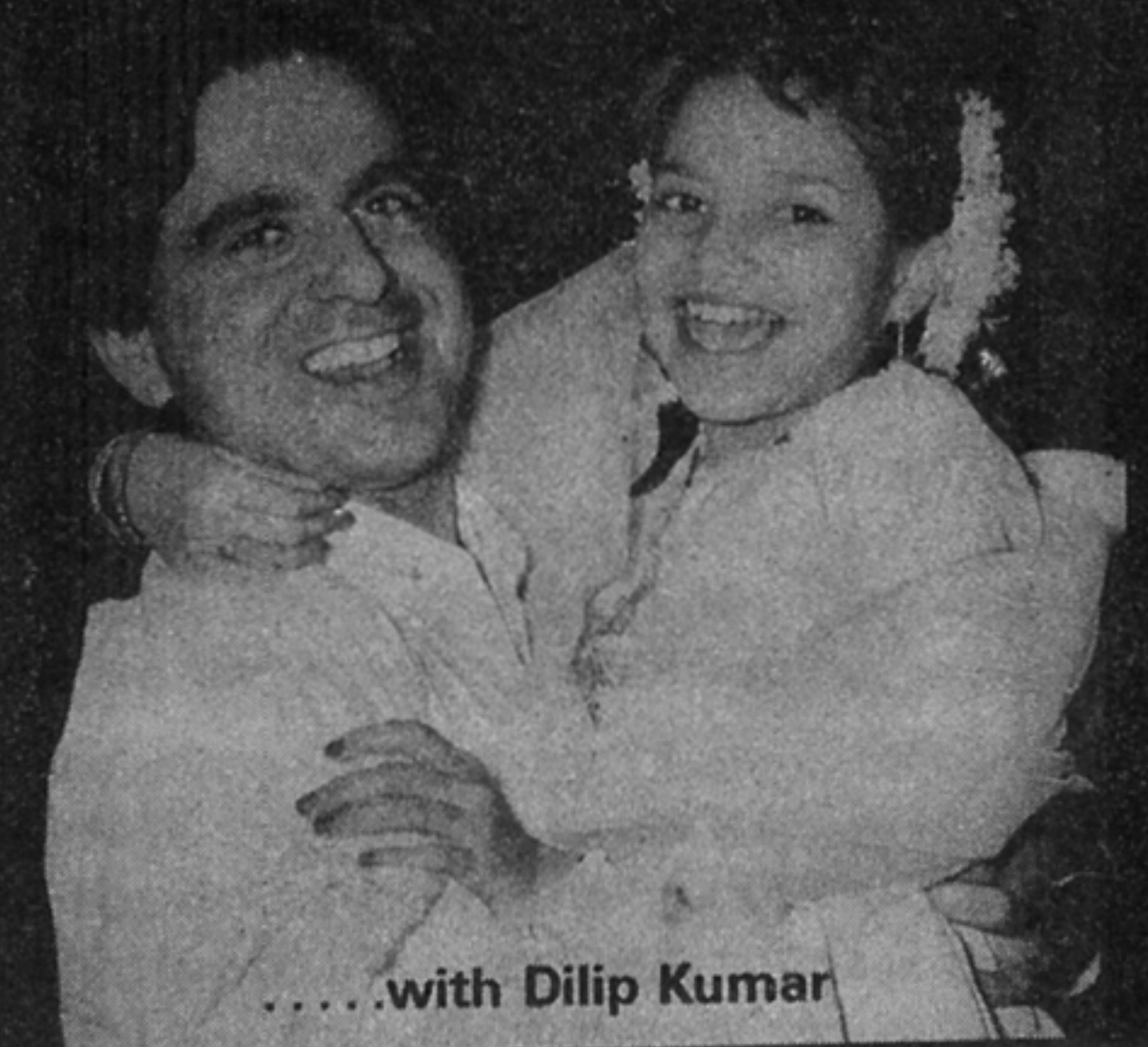


girls who can, along with acting in their films, warm their beds. I will not give their names but some of the top stars have tried to exploit me too. I run miles away from such things. I am not so ambitious as to go to such lengths. I have got a loving husband and two darling kids. I want to give them everything that I missed out on. My husband Subiraj is the first person in my life who has tried to understand me, given me a shoulder to cry on and shared my sorrows. He gave me the love and affection that I have never known. I am so happy that I married him in spite of our parents being against our marriage. My parents didn't want me to get converted into a Hindu and his family being a very prestigious one (Prithviraj Kapoor's sister is Naaz's mother-in-law) didn't

want a daughter of a mother who had left her husband. Today, even after eighteen years of marriage, we are very happy and in love. Of course, we don't have a massive bank balance, but we manage to make both ends meet. What is important, is that all of us are together."



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Naaz hasn't given up on her career even today. "I can never stop working," she smiled. "I have a few films on hand and I have also started compering Kalyanji-Anandji Nites here and abroad. I do occasional programmes for the Bombay Doordarshan and a lot of dubbing for some South Indian heroines like Sridevi. So does my husband. Somehow, at the back of my mind there always lingers a feeling that one day a break will come. I'll get a chance again, when I will be able to prove that I was not just a fluke. I don't know when I'll get the name and fame again, but I'll keep trying" And if and when her dream is fulfilled, it will certainly be well-deserved!