

other
side
of
Begum
Nusrat
Bhutto

Photos by Naim Beg



*Celebrity
to Celebrity*



BEGUM NUSRAT BHUTTO

does not like politics — or greasy food, is an avid video watcher and art collector — and is planning a face lift!

Read about all this — and more in this exclusive interview to NATION TODAY, so artfully conducted by TV personality RAHAT KAZMI

Do you like politics?

A. Not very much. But because my husband was in politics and he needed some political help, I especially started with organising the women. Because if you remember, in those days, women wouldn't mix so much with the men but now it's a different matter. People have started all this. So, that's how I came into politics. Then my daughter was there and I didn't want to come into politics at all because I was not feeling too well mentally, psychologically... I had suffered a great deal. But then, she said "Oh, I don't have my father, I don't have my brother here. Mummy! if you don't help me, what will I do?" I said okay, and I

again jumped into the fray.

What would you have chosen for yourself if you were not in politics?

I love travelling, I wouldn't have minded a diplomatic career. I like meeting people. I told my daughter. I said, 'Don't give me a minister-ship. Let me go as an ambassador abroad, anywhere.' She said, 'No, I need your vote in the assembly.'

Which country would you have chosen to go to, if you had a choice?

It wouldn't have made much difference. I would have either gone to Spain or Portugal. It would have been nice.

When you look at life, can you sum it up or you feel it's not time yet to sum it up. How would you say, it was — as you thought it should have been? Was it different than what you dreamt about?

Quite different. You see, I am from a business family. My father's a businessman. In Bombay he had a soap industry. This was before Partition. And in Karachi, he had this (factory of) silicate of soda which is a raw material used for the soap. So that's how we came from Bombay here. Because they had also started killing some Iranians in Bombay at the time just before Partition. So, we really came out just a couple of months before 1947. We came in June or July to Karachi because we already had this factory here. Then life changed. I somehow became friendly with some people here. My husband's sister was friendly with me. During her wedding days, he had come from America. We met there and we somehow fell in love and I didn't believe that he was really in love. He went away and after two years he came back and that's when he proposed to me. When you are young, you talk about politics, when you're eighteen, nineteen, twenty and this was the time of Partition — '48, '49. So everybody was talking about politics. I had joined the National Guards. I did the exams and I became the captain. Although my marks were the best, Begum Liaquat called me and said: "I know your marks are best but you are very young and there should be some senior lady to be colonel and general, that sort of thing. I said that's all right. So Mrs. Yousuf Haroon became the highest officer and Begum Razia Nazeer Ahmed — she was then the brigadier and I became the captain.

When you look back at your life, would you call yourself a successful person?

I don't know what that means.

Things that you set out to achieve, do you think you have really achieved them?

I did my best. What I was told to do. And because I loved my husband so much that I would do anything for him. Even though I didn't like politics, but I put my whole heart and soul in it and did as much as I

could. Same thing with my daughter. She is my eldest child, and so I did everything I could although, I didn't like what I was doing but I just didn't think much about what I liked and what I didn't like.

Would you say you have been happy?

I have been happy, but not anymore. When my husband was alive, my youngest son, all my children were there I was very happy. My husband kept me very happy. He was very kind, very nice, very loving. He didn't let me think of anything. A lot of people talked about his affairs. Why not? I wish I had given him more latitude to have more affairs. If I knew he was going to die when he was only 49 or 50, I would have let him have more affairs. But he never gave me any reason to be unhappy, he was so good to me in the house.

You have spent a fair amount of time abroad. Do you feel any difference between the people? What is the conclusion, the real conclusion that you draw?

Politically you mean?

Economically. Are the people different or are the circumstances different?

I think mainly it is circumstances which make the people different. Because it was a poor country when we got the country. What happened in the beginning, I remember, because we were here before Partition. The government started saying that we haven't got enough money. I think the root cause of this corruption and things is that we didn't have enough money to give proper pays. So they told the government servants that you get this much pay from the government, but you do separate jobs, so they used to do two jobs. This is what happened at the beginning. They would be government servants but on the side. And secondly, of course there were a lot of refugees. They were given free houses, free plots, and houses which the Hindus had left were given to them free. I mean, we must see the psychological part of what happened from the first day. So, we know, many people who didn't have much in India, made claims, and they were given... they became rich too. People who had genuinely left a lot of things behind did not get anything. They made a ceiling of only so much. All this had a lot of effect on them but even then it wasn't so bad. I think what happened was — the biggest mistake was that Zia, when he came, he allowed the Afghan issue. With the Afghan refugees came the guns and the drugs. That made people more greedy. They got easy money. Overnight people became rich. They were helped by the regime, that you can do it, make more money.' From then onwards, the country became something quite different. It was not what it was until the 50s, the 60s or the early seventies.

Wouldn't you say that almost all over the world that kind of phenomenon has taken place? I mean the general deterioration of morals and standards?

Yes, it is all over the world because people learn the world has become very small. So, of course, when the Americans say money is everything, and you must strive to make your life better — it just comes down through films, through TV and other media and that also is one of the points.

Would you feel the leadership failed the people here? Any occasion

'My husband kept me very happy. He was very kind, very nice, very loving.'

when people did try to sort of take the destiny into their hands and change it?

Yes, I think so. I think Mr Bhutto tried to change it. He didn't nationalise the banks for himself. He nationalised it in the interest of the country. He was the first one to start the coops. Co-ops were meant, so that people would put their money in them and those who are members, who have put money in these co-ops, will be allowed to take loans and that too not more than 10,000 rupees — which is uptill today. What has this government done, the recent one? But of course you can't help but talk about politics!

They have, without being members, put pressure on them, threatened the owners of these co-ops and taken in millions of rupees, which they should not have done. They have done the wrong thing, they have broken the laws. So this is what it is. It is now the poor man versus the rich man. It becomes like this — it's sort of a polarised thing. All these people who are rich and want to grab, grab, grab, they are on one side, and the poor people on the other side. He (Mr. Bhutto) tried to give jobs, he tried for the people and it is not only a gimmick because I know he tried to do it and I tried my best to help him in this sort of thing. As for the banks being nationalised, it is done in most of the countries abroad, in western countries. It's not that it was something new, or it was a Communistic thing in Pakistan. Even in England, they have nationalised banks, they have in other countries also. The only mistake I think Mr. Bhutto did was... you see there was a time when the hoarders started hoarding rice and wheat and then the prices went up and the poor people couldn't afford it. So what his advisors wrongly advised him was to nationalise these rice mills and the atta mills. That was wrong. Even we have a rice mill in Nau-dero, which he had inherited from his uncle, but even that was given. It's not that he did not do himself what he did for everyone else. It was the same thing. His rice mill was taken away by government because the law was for everyone. Our family gave thirteen thousand acres of land to the people. It is not that we had one law for us and one law for the others, like what these people are doing now.

But don't you feel that we, in this country, are in a very strange cycle because the same political figures keep getting elected all the time? It is the same feudal lords — one brother is in one party, other is in the other. Do you think there is a escape out of it? Do you think there is a way out? We are in the hands of one or we're in the hands of the other. We have to have elections on time, we have to have fair elections. If we don't have fair and free elections, this is going to happen all the time. If it is fair and free elections, where pressures are not put on the voters, where the I.D. cards are not bought.... you know they literally buy the ID cards. Those who have the money. We don't have the money. Now, all this money which is coming into the stock exchange, it's all drug money. Nobody has money. Government doesn't have money and private people have money. It's drug money being laundered through this. And who are these people? They are all those who were friends or close to Zia's regime, and Nawaz Sharif was part of Zia's regime. They were not even elected in Local Bodies. Zia wanted people to support him, and those who didn't have any principles, they are the ones who went and supported him — and they suddenly became rich.

Do you like eating a lot?

No. I am very careful about what I eat. I don't eat much. I have always done exercises, since my teenage days.

Even now?

Even now. Just about 10, 20 minutes, not much. For ten minutes, I do some exercise. Very light exercise. I don't like the wrong food. I don't have butter. I'll never eat chips or things like that.

No red meat also?

No, I do eat red meat and fish — all those in enough quantity.

What kind of cuisine do you like? do you like the Continental or Oriental, Pakistani or Indian cuisine?

I like Pakistani food. I love chillies, I love food, but without oil. I taught

my cook. He doesn't put much oil — very little. Mostly he grills for me and even the *salan* that he makes, or anything, has very little oil in it. I've taught him. Actually, it's very easy to make food in water. If you put onions, meat and the tomatoes, and put all masallahs that you like — haldi, lehsan, adrak, *waghera* — you put it in water and cook it, it's very delicious. The water dries up and the food is cooked. It's delicious.

I remember you used to wear saris a lot.

I still do so in the evenings. I think it's a very lovely evening dress. In the day time I always wear shalwar kameez, because I am always on the move, working or going about. In the evenings I prefer saris.

Even at home?

No, evenings means when I go out to parties.

Otherwise you wear shalwar kameez?

Yes.

Do you like watching films?

Yes, occasionally.

What kind of films do you like?

What kind of films?

Yes, what's your latest favourite, for example?

These days, my cook brings me, every night, an Indian film to watch.

Really?

And that makes me forget everything else — one just forgets — you know. It's one of those kinds of films which one just sits there lazing around — lazing in the bed.

I saw *Lamhe* the other night. Very nice film. Have you seen it? *Lamhe*....?

Is it a Pakistani or Indian film?

Yes, Indian — a very interesting film.

You know, I've seen so many, I can't remember... it's not what it is, it's just something to forget. What will be the end of the thing? That's what I want to know! Although we know in our hearts, what will happen — eventually — but still, it's nice to watch!

You have lived abroad a lot, and lived in this country too. What do you foresee for yourself? Do you think you will continue with this struggle and go on in this struggle?

Yes, because once you are in this sort of thing, you cannot give up.

You don't ever think of settling abroad and giving it all up?

I can't do it, as long as my children are here.

Won't you feel better, now if you were rather somewhere in the South of France?

Yes, I would love to be in the South of France because I go there every year and all my children collect there for about two weeks or so. I stay a month, but the others just go away. But how can I go? I have to look after the party. People get disturbed when I am too long out. Last year I went for two months and everybody was panicking — whether I was coming back or not! I think, most of the people know that I am just doing it for the sake of the party.

Do you find time to read occasionally?

Yes, I read in the evenings — at night before going to bed.

Regularly?

Well quite....

What would you like to pick up for your reading?

The books which come out. I bring some from England or from here. Mostly, either they are biographies or the books that are on the bestseller list.

What are you reading these days? Anything in particular?

I am reading about Marie Antoinette by a lady author. She's written her life story from Marie Antoinette's point of view, all that happened to her. It's very interesting, because everybody else have written from their own points of view.

That's a very interesting one. I must read it. When you sit with your children — when you are with them, do you sometimes feel that the path you have chosen for yourself, endangers their lives and creates problems for them?

'Why shouldn't I take the wrinkles out to look nice?'

It does. I did not want my children to be in politics, but they wanted to, they didn't listen to me. Of course my younger daughter is not at all interested in politics.

How would you see your grandsons grow up to be?

We always loved the children, we respected their views. And even my husband never forced or told them, whether it was religion, whether it was politics or whether it was... Of course we always gave them sound advice — what is wrong and what is right. We always taught them that more than anything in the world, first comes education and secondly your name — what you leave behind. These two are very important. We kept saying, when you grow up in this atmosphere, always be careful about the name and this and that.

Would you like to see them grow up as politicians?

Frankly, no, specially not in Pakistan!

When you sort of look back at your life — with your husband and those days — of course they were happy memories. I know of him, that he used to sleep very little. Was it bothering you a lot? He must be disturbing you a lot!

He did! That was the sort of bone of contention but what I had done was, it was very easy. I used to have my eye mask, and ear plugs, which I would get from abroad, made of wax, which completely closes out the sound. He used to sit and do his papers and I wouldn't hear the movement of the files.

I remember, he had this habit of getting up in the night.

He just wouldn't sleep. He used to come from office and would sit and do all his files.

Amazing!

He used to sleep for about three to four hours.

Maximum?

But then another thing. In the day time, if he had any time, on Fridays, holidays, or whatever, he would snooze and it was amazing because I am a very bad sleeper. I need at least two hours to relax, to be able to go to sleep. But he used to say, 'Listen Nusrat, I've got ten minutes, wake me up after ten minutes.' He would put his head down and he would go snoring — just like that — just like that! I just couldn't believe it! And after ten minutes I would wake him up — and he'd wake up — fresh. Some people can sleep like that. I can't.

We know of Napoleon who could do that. In history that's an example.

He used to sleep for only three minutes, on the horseback and he would wake up and say, 'Okay march on' and everybody would trudge along! Mr. Bhutto used to talk to us a lot about Napoleon.

Well, when you sat and talked to him... he had a vision of what he wanted to do for Pakistan. What did he tell you — what he saw Pakistan to be?

What he wanted was different. He always said that in this country we have minerals, we have the potential, why should our people be poor? He was always worried and troubled about the poor people, always. When he first came back, he was a lawyer. He got the first case of some murder. The man came and said: "Do my case, I am a poor man. I don't have money". This I remember very vividly. "I have sold my bullock and I have given money to other lawyers. I don't even have money to go to higher courts." He (my husband) said: "Don't worry, I'll do it." He won the case for that man, because he was innocent. The man brought a little child of four or five. I was sitting in my room. My husband brought this child in and said, "The man I won the case for says he doesn't have anything else. He wants to give this child to me as payment." I said, "What are you going to do? Are you going to keep him?" he said, "Of course, not! I didn't take money, am I going to take his son? He has to grow up and earn for him." He gave the son back. He was that kind of a man.

You loved him to distraction, didn't you?

Well, I loved him.

Was there ever a very big argument between you two... that left a bitter taste?



(Long pause) I don't remember it.

You don't? Perhaps you don't want to remember it as a happy memory!

Could you have foreseen that the kind of things that were happening are going to lead to problems?

Yes, when he proposed to me, he'd always say, "Marry me!" You know, my parents were not agreeing.

Really? Why? Why didn't they agree?

Because — one thing, we're Shias and they're Sunnis. And apart from that, I'm Iranian and they wanted me to marry an Iranian boy.

But his name was Zulfikar!

I know... but because we were in love, they agreed. In those days he used to say, "You must marry me because I don't have much time to live". I don't know why he knew it. Maybe this was behind his mind: when he was six or seven years old, his father — they were living in Bombay — or Delhi — in Bombay mostly — had his *janam patri* made and that was uptill his 48th year — everything was there, written in English. He told me this story. He said: "My father asked the man, 'Why uptill the 48th?' The man said, 'When he reaches 48, you can re-do the *janam patri*.'" It had everything. About his marriages too. He married his cousin, when he was fourteen, fifteen, a much older lady — so that the lands would not go, although he himself finally gave the lands away. And, about his education, about his name.

And about his marrying you?

Well, two marriages. One was his cousin, And another thing was, how he would make a name, just after his father died, that he won't see him successful.

It's all there?

Detailed. I can't remember all the details, I mean it's so amazing — from seven years on till the end.

'My passion is just to be alone and on my own'

Do you have that still? Do you have the *janam patri*?

He gave it to someone. When all these problems started, he knew he was going to die. In jail he told me, "Zia will not leave me, he is going to kill me." Anyway, that he gave, a few years before this problem started, to a friend of ours and said to this person, "You are going to India, have this re-done for me." Now, I met that person in London — he's living in London. I said "Where is it? We can't find it anymore." He said, "I went looking for that same man." Now how can that same man be alive, after so many years? "I brought it and gave it to the staff — your servant. I gave it to Babu." Babu is dead, he's gone. It's nowhere in the files. It's not here. I don't know what he has done with it.

Have you ever had your *janam patri* made?

I don't really believe in it.

Really? But with an example like that, you should be interested in knowing your future?

I haven't done it. I don't know who can do it, because that was all calculated. So this is it. I mean, it came true. Till the end.

How do you approach old age? Do you fight against it or do you accept it?

I don't like to be old. Because when you're old you look quite ugly. I don't like to look ugly, not that I am pretty, but one looks uglier with age.

But *Mashallah*, you're looking very lovely — after a long time.

That's why ... I am going to have a face-lift and I'll tell the whole world.

Who cares!

And why not?

Yes why not?

If surgery gives you that facility, why not?

I agree, we do make-up, don't we?

Yes.

To make ourselves presentable and nice. Why shouldn't I take the wrinkles out to look nice?

I absolutely buy that ... absolutely ... I agree with you!

Are you going to put that in the paper?

(Laughs)

No!

No. I don't care. Because when I do it, I won't hide it.

But look at, *Zsa Zsa Gabor*, people like *Joan Collins*.

It's just that we don't want to look uglier than we are.

In fact we don't even like to look pretty. I was talking to somebody the other day, I said, 'you look outside on the road and you don't see many people with a good physique, because nobody really bothers about it, not really cares about it.

Do you like the fine things in life? Do you, for instance like *Mont Blanc pens*, expensive watches and things like that?

I have a lot of expensive watches. My husband used to give me a lot of presents. And I think, since we got married, most of the time we were in government. When you are Ministers and all, you get a lot of facilities, you get extra foreign exchange and you get free tickets and whatever. So, he always used to buy me very nice watches from abroad. Pens, no. I use very ordinary pens. Because I am always losing my pens, I don't like using expensive pens. I use pens for autographing. People come — autograph *dey do*.

And crystal. Do you like crystal?

I love paintings.

Paintings? Really? How interesting!

Most of the paintings in my house, mostly, I have picked them. Even uptill today, I spend most of my money on paintings. My husband used to spend all his money on books — old books — and I still love spending what I earn — of my share — on paintings.

What kind of paintings do you like? Whose paintings do you like mostly? Anything in particular?

Oh, I've got *Ghulam Muhammads*, *Shakirs*, I've got *Amins*. I've got most of the.

... major painters of Pakistan?

Almost.

Where is the collection? It's not here.

(Laughs amusedly) It's not here!? That's *Hussain's* (pointing to one on her left). That's a very old *Hussain*. I've got them around. I don't like to show them, but I've got them. I wish there was light. I would take you around. (It's been dark for sometime. There's a power shut-down. "Happens almost everyday," says *Begum Bhutto*.)

But normally one likes to live with the paintings.

I do. They're all in my private quarters upstairs.

***Accha*. They are? How nice! How do you like this new wave of Pakistani painters? Have you seen some of their works?**

I've seen some of them.

***Meher Afroze*?**

No, I haven't seen her's.

***Zahoor Akhlaque*?**

No, I don't like all that.

***Colin David*?**

I don't like modern. I saw *Geoffery's*, I didn't like it — very artificial and made up.

Do you like impressionists?

I like mostly the natural. What they see and paint. I like that.

Like *Cezanne* — people like *Cezanne*?

Yes, but I don't have much foreign paintings.

***Accha - woh to* — nobody can afford them, they're so expensive!**

Those of course nobody can. But we had some copies in *Larkana*. My husband had bought a very good one, which is a limited sort of copy — we've got quite a few of those.

You still visit the National Gallery in London and the Tate Gallery of Art, when you go there?

Sometimes, I do.

The Louvre?

Yes.

You enjoy going there?

Whenever I go to any country, I must go to their galleries or the museums, whether it's in the Soviet Union, Spain, Holland, wherever.

What would you sum up and say is your major passion in life? You would say: 'This is my passion.'

Passion?

Yes!

Oh God! You'll be so surprised. My passion is just to be alone and on my own.

Really?

With my children. I'd love to — I long to do that. Just be in the house with my children and grandchildren. I'm a very family-oriented person. It's amazing how I do these things. That's why I have so much tension. Because I do things which I'm not very very happy doing. I mean I don't do the things which I enjoy. I think I'm a Shia, so I like persecuting myself.

(*Rahat* laughs).

Of course, you admired your husband. But did you admire any other man in your life?

Never.

Never.

Never. He was the first man.

How about film stars? Like *Warren Beatty*?

No.

No?

My favourite foreign filmstar was *Cary Grant*

***Gregory Peck*? You used to admire *Gregory Peck*?**

Gregory Peck and *Cary Grant*. But not those new ones. Not that I go to see any more of these movies.

There are no longer stars in that sense of the word, actually.

I know. I don't see these films.

'I miss my son so much'

People like Gregory Peck – they were more than life-size people. One didn't mind watching them. Was your husband fond of movies?

No, he wasn't.

Fond of books? When you sat together and talked and when you went abroad — was he fond of going to theatres? What was your idea of an evening out? You loved going to the theatres?

Yes, he loved going to theatres. The first time I went to any theatre was with him, after my marriage, when we were abroad on our honeymoon. The first play was ... how I am trying to blank out. You see, after what happened, I tried to blank out my life. That's why I can't even remember the things which I want to remember now. Because, if I hadn't, I would have gone mad. It was 'Pacific Island'. The year was '51.

You still go to the theatre?

I still go when I go to London.

You enjoy it more than film or...

Oh, definitely more than a film. It's nice.

Do you feel there's going to be an end to this struggle also, or do you feel it will go on and on and on?

Now you are struggling. Your daughter has struggled. Will this be a go-on cycle? Or do you feel some day it'll all end?

Oh, I don't know. I can't tell. It's upto the children. I wouldn't believe that it's going to end.

It'll go on?

It will go on.

But for yourself, you would like to end it?

I will finally end it, one day. Because I just can't go on and on.

Thanks a lot. Thank you very much for giving us the time. Anything

else that you'd particularly like to say?

Not really. The only thing is that I miss my son so much. And they keep saying he's in Al-Zulfikar, this and that. That he can't come. When we were in government he wanted to come but I told him, "Don't come, because the case is in Lahore and the Lahore government is against us. And they will do anything to — you know — false charges and fraud, everything. Because as far as the hijacking ... if he was involved ... he was, first of all, not available for two hours when the plane was hijacked to Kabul. Now, if he master-minded the hijacking, wouldn't he have been waiting there to receive the hijackers? And the hijackers were saying that "We will only talk through the Bhutto boys — Shahnawaz or Murtaza." And the Afghan government or police or whatever, went around looking where they were. And they were at their wife's house or somewhere. I don't know where they were. So, they had to look for them, to find them and bring them to the airport to talk through the loudspeaker, through the airport communication. And of course, Zia wanted to do it. Then recently, a person told me that it was Zia's maneuvering. And those two boys — Tipu and *patta nahin*, who the other one was, — they were Jamaat-e-Islami boys. So anyway. I just want that my son comes back. He's already out for such a long time. Since 1977 he's abroad. His daughter was born abroad. She's now nine years old. He's got a son. So then, when he wanted to come, I told him 'don't come' for his sake, although I longed ... he himself longs to come back. He hasn't seen his father's grave. He hasn't been to his brother's grave. I hope one day he returns.

Yes, let's pray! Thanks.



'I still love spending what I earn on paintings'