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Indian movie legend Suraiya dies

By Jawed Naqvi

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: Indian film legend Suraiya died in Mumbai on Saturday following a brief illness, her friends and family sources said.

"She was a caring girl, very affectionate, particularly with junior artistes," said Dilip Kumar, veteran actor, himself unwell. "Suraiya will be sorely missed, even though she had been a recluse for decades," he told *Dawn* from Mumbai. She was given a simple funeral and was buried at a city cemetery on Saturday.

Born in Lahore in 1929, as Suraiya Jamal Shaikh, she made her debut as a child star with *Taj Mahal* (1941). She did playback as a year-old in *Sharda* (1942) under the direction of the legendary Naushad. The maestro who directed the songs by Noor Jehan in *Anmol Ghari* also used Suraiya in the film, both singers finding success with their memorable numbers.

Naushad still recalls that as a teenage singer Suraiya had to stand on a stool to reach the mike.

Suraiya was effectively launched as a singing star in Bombay Talkies' *Hamari Baat* (1943). She made her presence

felt in perhaps India's first multi-starrer K.Asif's *Phool* (1944). It is not clear if this was the same film that Dilip Kumar said he was to act in with her but which was abandoned for want of funds.

Though Noor Jehan had perhaps the best of Naushad's compositions in *Anmol Ghari* (*Jawaan Hai Mohabbat*, *Aawaaz De Kahaan Hai*, *Aa Jaa Meri Barbad Mohabbat ke Sahare*, *Mere Bachpan ke Saathi*, *Kya Mil Gaya Bhagwan*), Suraiya too had her moments with *Socha Tha Kya*, *Main Dil Mein Dard Basa La Aayee* and *Man Leta Hai*.

She starred opposite the presiding deity of her time when she got three roles with K.L. Saigal — *Tadbir* (1945), *Omar Khayyam* (1946) and *Parwana* (1947), the last remembered for her haunting rendition of *Jab Tumhi Nahin Apne*.

The 1948-49 phase saw her rise to her peak. With *Pyar ki Jeet* (1948), *Bari Bahen* (1949) and *Dillagi* (1949) she became the highest paid female star of her time. At her peak, Suraiya generated hysteria comparable to any living legend.

It is said that shop owners would down their shutters to see her starred on the first day itself, crowds would throng outside her residence at Marine Drive in Mumbai just to get a glimpse of her. Actor Dharmendra recalls going to see *Dillagi* 40 times.

However, Suraiya's reign at the top was brief. Her films started flopping one after another in the 1950s. She had got involved with her junior actor colleague Dev Anand and the two of them did six films together (1948-51). It is rumoured that her strict grandmother put her foot down and the affair and their partnership ended. Suraiya died a spinster.

When Noor Jehan migrated to Pakistan, she inadvertently contributed to Suraiya's success story. What gave Suraiya an edge over contemporaries like Kamini Kaushal and Nargis was her ability to sing her own songs.