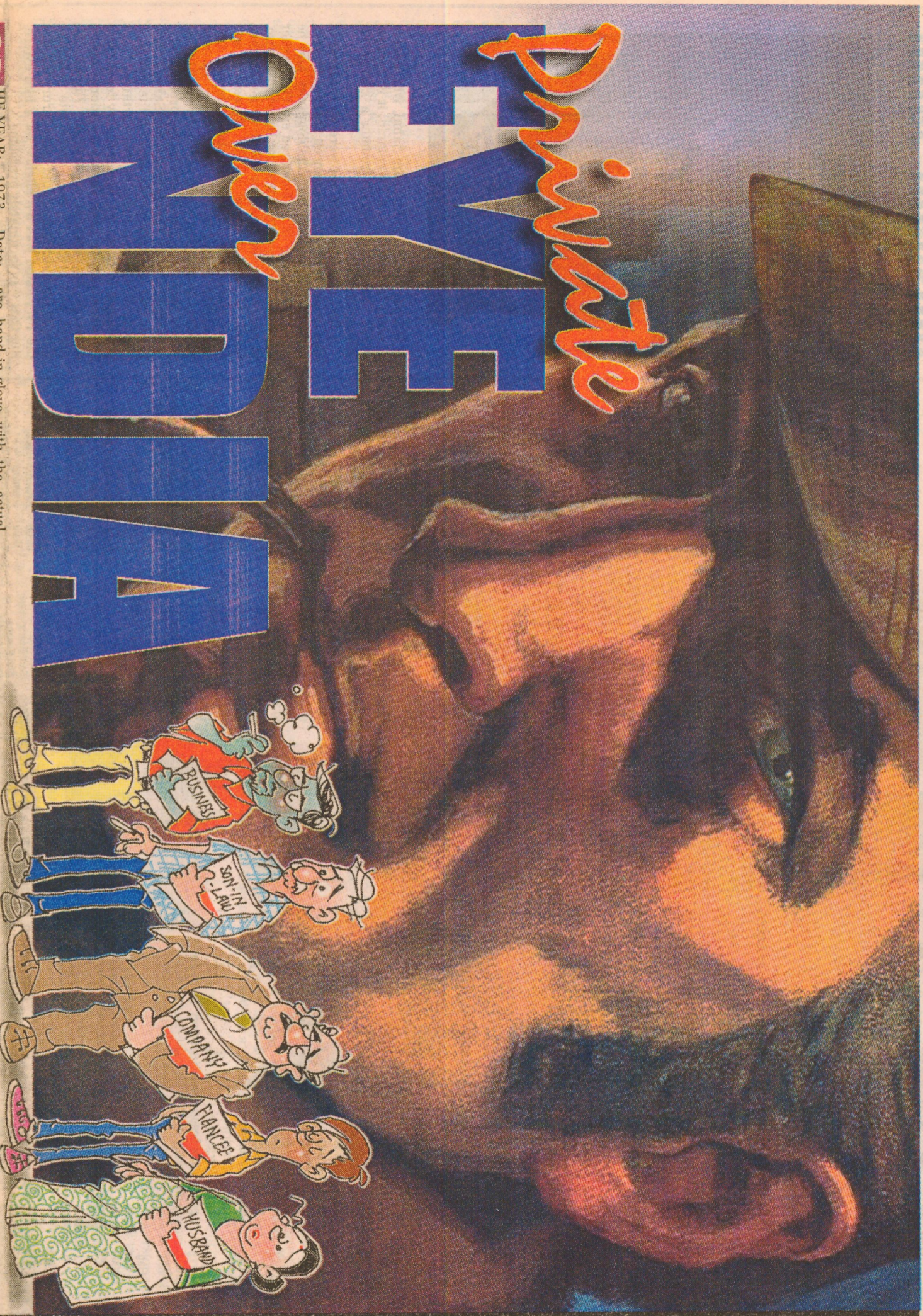


Private detectives are no longer a western breed. They are being groomed here in India, in increasing numbers. Over the past decade, detective work has grown in scope and stature, as more and more clients seek jobs that the police can't handle. These may simply entail checking the credentials and character of a prospective matrimonial candidate or keeping tabs on an errant spouse. At the other end, detectives are being called in for corporate assignments — snooping on employees, CEOs and rivals. They are even getting to solve murder cases that were earlier the sole preserve of the police.

JITENDRA VERMA writes on the arrival of the Indian detective



THE PIONEER FORAY

July 20, 2003

Holmes at work

THIS ONE was for Sherlock Holmes. Consider the facts: An unexplained box is found beneath the berth of a train at the New Delhi Railway Station. The Railway authorities get the police open the box. Inside is the body of an adult male who had been stabbed to death. A search of the body reveals no identification papers.

Despite repeated appeals by the police, nobody comes forward to claim the body. A top private detective agency of the Capital is called in.

The chief investigator minutely examines each article of clothing and finds traces of chemicals on the soles of the dead man's shoes. The post-mortem report reveals that the corpse has a false tooth. Investigators follow and it is found that the material used in the false tooth is peculiar to dentists in Germany.

The detective concludes: The dead man worked in a chemical factory and held a senior position there. Tracing the train route back, the investigators find a large chemical factory situated near Barilly.

Inquiries in the factory reveal that a senior engineer had not reported for work for some time.

The dead man is positively identified by his colleagues at the plant. It is found that a colleague had killed him when he found that the victim was having an affair with his wife. Elementary, wasn't it?

Verma. That threw Rakesh's life into turmoil.

He hired a top agency of the Capital to find out details of the divorce. It was easier said than done. There was no clue as to where Ragini got her divorce papers from. The company couldn't crack the case. But Rakesh was determined and hired another agency, Aalder Detection & Protection (P) Ltd. The agency also groped in the dark for months, searching for the papers at the various courts in the Capital.

Then, the agency focussed attention on Ragini's residence in South Delhi. They ransacked all family members. The family was well off and had its own advocate, who refused any help and even threatened the investigators. Yet the agency got some crucial leads and finally laid bare the truth. Ragini had visited New Delhi in 1999, when she had discussed the divorce matter with her advocate. Together, they hatched a plan. She hired a man to pose as Rakesh Verma in the Tis Hazari court, which granted divorce to the couple by mutual consent.

"These kind of cases show the direction our society is taking," says Sanjeev Deswal of Aalder Detection and Protection. "More and more people are dipping others."

Detectives get their share of the bizarre as well. Consider this case of Mohd Shamim living with his wife Reshna in North Delhi. Shamim was losing sleep over an obsessive man who, his wife complained, was stalking her. The man followed her everywhere though Shamim could never catch him. She claimed that the stalker belonged to a rich nawab family from Hyderabad.

Shamim hired a private agency to track the obsessive lover. The problem was, nobody except Reshna could see him. So, the sleuths started following her. It began with a love letter written to Reshna in blood. Other letters written in Urdu followed.

It seemed the man was omnipresent. He left flowers in the backseat of the couple's car, called

infringement of patents and trademarks, where a big business house wants to keep a tab on spurious products bearing its name. Then there are insurance frauds, forgeries, embezzlement and misappropriation, hand-writing identification, computer crimes and head hunting.

Corporate houses also seek information on sexual harassment cases involving their employees.

the agencies in the country," says Madam. "And, people have slowly developed faith in us."

Today, private sleuths are into everything. Talk to them and they will tell you that there are nearly as many scams as there are professions. But their bread and butter

Dr Rakesh Verma hired a detective agency to find out why his US-based doctor wife wasn't giving him a divorce, when the two had been separated for some time. What the agency found was startling: The wife had remarried after getting a divorce from the Tis Hazari court. She had hired a fake husband for the purpose



THE YEAR: 1973. Date: February 26. Date: the gruesome murder of Asha Ram, a servant at a rich Rajput landlord's house of the village. His body is found floating in the well. It bears 41 wounds and four contusions. Curiously, the police claim to have a clear trail. Ram was a servant at Man Singh's house, but had run away to work for the family of Om Prakash — a rival of Man Singh — before returning to his old employer. The police believe that Man Singh's family had killed the victim out of spite.

Six men of the family are arrested for the murder. For the next three years, the village reeks under shock, as everybody knows the family is being framed. Asha Ram was a small fry in the fight between the two landlords. He was killed for the specific purpose of getting Singh brothers involved. Investigations by the police are very shoddy. The lone eye-witness to the murder, Sheesh Pal, who was sleeping next to Asha Ram that winter night, is kept in confinement for 10 days. During this period, he signs a statement involving the six brothers.

The Superintendent of Police protects the investigating officer Atar Singh, till eight MLAs and MPs, and two MLAs force the Government to institute a CID inquiry. The CID officer alleges that the police have given him tampered records. A year later, when hearing reopened in the case, the new SP refuses to change the chargesheet. There is no hope for the six brothers. All their attempts for a fair trial have failed. They are doomed.

Enter Ramesh C Madan, head of a private detective agency in Delhi. Clutching at straws, they put their lives into his hands. Madan throws himself and his men on the job. For the next couple of months, the village is flooded with private sleuths. They introduce themselves as Government officials, census officers, etc., and record 23 audio cassettes with private conversations of villagers, police officers and others. The tapes and other evidence reveal the true picture. The police

are hand-in-glove with the actual

murderer. Om Prakash, the rival

in fact, the first informant report had been filed as late as 11 am on March 1, by a man who belonged to another village 25 miles away.

But the story was actually cracked when one of the sleuths in a tea shop patronised by the police, overheard a disgruntled cop saying that his senior officer hadn't given him his share of the money received from the landlord.

Faced with the massive mass of evidence collected by the detective agency and public support for the Sleuths, Additional Sessions Judge S K Jain of Saharapur acquiesces all the six accused.

Sherlock Holmes would have been pleased by the work put in by Madan, who has been in the detective business since 1958.

"I used all the skills I had picked up in the streets for the case," says Madan, who had hurried through 22 lines of work — as a coolie, dalton boy, *Fick-shaw-zaldin*, actor and cinema usher, among others — before he found his calling as a detective in a property dispute with his stepmother.

Asha Ram's murder was one of the rare cases where private detectives were used in those days. Thirty years on, hundreds of private sleuths are shaping the contours of a burgeoning industry. India's private eyes are no longer tough-talking thugs but smooth operators in buttoned-down collars and pin-stripes. The art of snooping is not only more sophisticated, it has gone high tech too. And, with the multinationals entering the market in the past 10 years, there's a boom in the investigation business.

"We have come a long way. The last decade has seen the establish-

BIG NAMES

Page 13

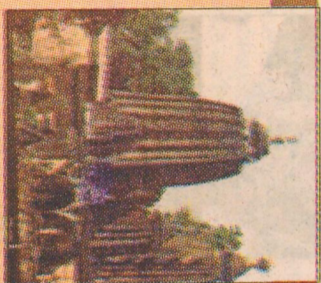
Sonia is the undisputed leader of the Congress. No one in the party questions her eligibility for the top job, but potential allies are squirming at the idea of accepting her as the leader



FACTOID

Page 14

A temple at Chhataka, awaits the arrival of Lord Jagannath for the past two hundred years. The temple was made after Achyutanand, Orissa's Nostradamus predicted that the Jagannath temple would submerge



TWILIGHT ZONE

Page 16

Ghosts with lanterns made life essential for the sceptical British in India. Even Jim Corbett revealed having seen them while hunting a man eater. Some others had more sinister experiences with them

