

# Sleuths rip open rural vendetta

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# SAVED FROM THE GALLOWNS



They escaped the noose: Bhag, Jabbar, Kadam, Ranjeet, Mohinder and Ram Kumar Singh.

## Our Delhi Bureau

SIX men of a Rajput family of Lakhnour village, near Saharanpur, have just escaped hanging for a murder they never committed. No one knows for certain who murdered Asha Ram, a harijan servant, as a result of a 50-year-old feud over land between two of the richest families in the village.

The six men—Bhag, Ranjeet, Kadam, Ram Kumar, Jabbar and Mohinder Singh—would have paid with their lives, but for the perseverance of Goliah Detective Agency, Delhi, and eight MLAs, and M.P., and two MLAs, who raised the issue with the government and got the proceedings stayed.

## Found murdered

The story begins on February 28, 1973, when Asha Ram was found murdered and thrown in a well. He bore 41 wounds and four contusions on his body. His brain had been blown out.

The sleepy village was shocked at the gruesome murder. In the next three years, it continued to live under terror, since it was known that the real murderers of Asha Ram were still in the village, behaving like highway robbers.

The door villagers were fur-

In our issue of August 21, 1976, the picture of Mr. Naval Kishore Sinha, M.P., was printed on the front page with our lead story on corruption. It was a mistake as he does not figure in the story at all. We sincerely regret the error.

—Ed.

ther shocked at the manner in which the investigations into the murder were conducted. Asha Ram, everyone knew, was a pawn in the long-drawn rural vendetta of the local landlords.

It is now revealed that he was killed for the specific purpose of getting the Singh brothers involved. It is also becoming increasingly clear that the local police too played a significant part in this medieval outrage.

The lone eye-witness to the murder, Sheesh Pal, who was sleeping next to Asha Ram on the fateful night, was kept in wrongful confinement for over ten days by the investigating officers. He was then made to sign a statement involving the six brothers.

The moment he was out of the clutches of the police, Sheesh Pal filed an affidavit involving some of the prosecution witnesses and some others. He also said he had been forced to implicate the six brothers, at the peril of his own life.

## Tampered police records

The Superintendent of Police chose to shield the investigating officer, Attar Singh, till the MLAs, MP and MLCs prodded the government to institute an inquiry by the CID. The CID officer was, it is alleged, given tampered police records, with a backdated chargesheet and other documents.

A year later, when the case came up for hearing, the new Superintendent of Police refused to change the chargesheet even though he himself had heard Mohar Singh, a prosecution witness, disclose the names of the real culprits. Asha Ram was a servant of Man Singh and his six brothers,

who were tried for his murder. At one stage, he switched his loyalty to the faction led by Om Prakash and turned into a litigant against Man Singh. For the wily farmland gangsters his murder would at once bring suspicion on his former masters.

When all other attempts to secure a fair and free trial had failed, the Singh brothers hired the detective agency of Delhi. The sleuths set to work, with taperecorders, for the first time in the remote village of Lakhnour.

## Private talks recorded

They filled 23 cassettes with private conversations, of villagers, police officers and others. The tapes told an entirely different story from what was narrated in court by an array of prosecution witnesses, who largely belonged to the Om Prakash group.

Recordings of policemen conversations of policemen showed the extent to which some of the investigating officers were involved in this story of personal vendetta and faction fights.

The police records showed that the first information report was filed at 11 a.m. on March 1, by a man brought from another village, 25 miles away. At least two of the Singh brothers, who helped fish the body of Asha Ram from the well, were not arrested for several days, even though they were named in the FIR.

The detective agency blew the prosecution story sky high. They had taped almost every prosecution witness outside the court in restaurants and private places. When word got round that the real story behind Asha Ram's murder was out, two of the principal prosecution witnesses turned hostile.

The tapes also revealed another conspiracy, which did not materialise obviously because Asha Ram did not play the game.

It had been suggested to him that a few bullets would be pumped into his legs and that he should then implicate the Singh brothers as the men who

had done it to avenge his defecation. He was assured that the bullets would be removed in a good hospital and that he would be duly compensated. It has to be borne in mind that carrying of country-made pistols is a common practice in the villages of U.P.

Asha Ram's reluctance to have bullets pumped into his legs, even from a friendly pistol, cost him his life.

Confronted with the massive evidence dug up by the detective agency and the public outcry, the Additional Sessions Judge S. K. Jain of Saharanpur acquitted all the six accused. He observed that Jai Singh, one of the main prosecution witnesses and a relation of Om Prakash, was inimical to the accused. The delay in lodging the FIR, he said, suggested that "actually the incident had not been witnessed by anyone." Mr. Jain has done his duty.

## NEXT WEEK

"I CAN DO WHAT SATYA SAI BABA CAN DO"

HE challenge to godman is snowballing. Next week CURRENT carries exposure interviews with two knowledgeable men who assert "What the Baba can do I can do better." and, they are prepared to explain how they do it.

YOGI MATHUR, RAO says: "If he demonstrates and produces currency notes, diamonds and rings and watches, I will put all my spiritual and material wealth at his feet and become his chela for life. If not, I expect him to reciprocate the gesture."

Professional magician N. Pronoun confesses: "I will continue to fight him till he pulls the curtain on his drama of miracles and horrors." Read the sensational exposures next week.

