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private detective agency in the country.

"I was nine when my mother died, 11 at the time of the Partition riots when my father lost his life. At that age," recalls Madan, "I was forced to look after my two younger brothers and my sister." Thus, his unusual curriculum vitae.

After some years, things settled. And slowly, the victims of the riots began laying claim to the property abandoned during the 1947 conflagration. "My stepmother grabbed our share of the property, and our lawyer said there was not enough evidence to buttress our claim. At the time, private detectives did not exist, so I set about trying to accumulate the necessary evidence." So successful was Madan that the lawyer, much impressed, hired him on the spot.

In 1961, Madan decided to go into business for himself. And established the country's very first private detective agency, Indian Detective. A few years thereafter, the agency was renamed Goliath Detectives and, true to its name, grew over the years to be a giant in the field. And this burgeoning reputation owed not little to Madan's own self-taught sleuthing skills, which he was to put to the test in case after spectacular case.

Why, went the whisper of the time, had the maharajah left his immense wealth to a dancing girl who made her tenuous living peddling her flesh?

The Case of the Maharajah's Will made its way, inevitably, to the office of Ramesh Madan. And the sleuth who is known in the trade as the Master of Disguises went undercover in a bid to uncover the truth.

After some routine enquiries, he was leaving the palace late one evening when he was alerted by the crunch of a twig underfoot. Ducking and spinning on his heel, Madan confronted a man wielding a heavy iron rod

which was even then poised to make mush of the detective's skull. The assailant was rapidly disarmed, and some rapid third degree revealed that he had been hired by the maharajah's dispossessed son.

The lead having been unwittingly provided, the rest proved mathematical. Investigations revealed that the princeling had, in an earlier time, raped the girl and killed her father. The tale came to the attention of the maharajah who decided, on his death bed, to make amends for his son's crime by bequeathing to the girl his fortune. Case closed, and yet another feather added to Madan's low-turned hat brim.

That was the first of three attempts on Madan's life. On another occasion, he had barely got up from his black leather sofa to fetch a book when a fusillade of shots smashed the windows, and bullets thudded into the chair he had just vacated. Again, Madan walked into his office one morning, opened the curtain and looked into the face of a man holding a gun trained at his heart. "I kept him talking, enticed him into the room and, when he was off guard, managed to disarm him. From then on, no more windows in my home or office."

Bricking up the windows, though, haven't helped keep out the death threats. Though a bulk of his cases involve shadowing errant spouses preparatory to divorce proceedings, or conducting pre-marital enquiries as to the suitability of the prospective partners, the country's changing economic landscape has also brought changes in the nature of the work that his agency undertakes. "Stock market fiddles, the purloining of trade secrets of rival companies, following through on cases of trademark infringement, insurance and credit card fraud — all these are part of a private detective's workload today. Private detective and security agencies have grown

into a four billion rupees business, and growing by the day. And when big money is involved, the enemies one makes are all the more lethal," shrugs Madan.

The ease with which one gains egress to his duplex flat in suburban Delhi's Vasant Vihar area would seem to suggest anything except a man living under the shadow of sudden death. One simply drives up to the doorstep, walks up the flight of stairs to the first-floor entrance and rings a bell. Lo, Madan himself — a short-statured man built more on the lines of a non-violent Hercule Poirot than the Sam Spade or Phillip Marlowe his exploits lead you to expect — welcomes you in. "For all you know," I suggest, "we could have been a couple of hitmen sent to bump you off, my colleague's camera bag could have contained a folded sten or something equally lethal."

The response is a knowing smile. "You left your office at 3.30, right?" Right. "You came by cab, driven by a sardarji, the cab is parked outside right now?" Right. "You saw a block of flats facing mine?" Yes we did. "In one of those flats, behind drawn curtains, are two of my men. They are in walkie talkie contact with me, and with my office. Two men are stationed there, in shifts, round the clock. Nothing moves without my knowing about it. And when I opened the door, my left hand was resting on a hidden alarm button. The merest pressure, and you would have been outnumbered by armed men in a trice. And then there's this," he adds, whipping a revolver out of a hidden holster, and a can of anti-personnel spray from a recessed pocket. "Not that easy to get me, right?" So very right!

The lady doctor looked curiously at the patient seated before her. His visiting card proclaimed him a private detective, and the injuries in his leg testified to a life lived on the razor's edge of danger.

She performed the necessary first aid, dispensed medication, asked him to return the next day for a change of dressing.

On day three of the treatment, the patient suddenly piped up: "Doctor..." "Hmmm?" "Will you marry me?"

"She did," says a gleeful Madan. "Probably was in shock when she nodded yes," he chuckles an instant later.

Today, Dr Pramila Madan heads the forensic wing of Goliath Detectives, aided by

the pitch will be imported from some third country. For instance, the first Test may

is not feasible, we have an alternative — neutral groundsmen. Four months before the

World International be kept out. But let us cross that

V Gangadhar contributes a weekly satirical column. SO

which one they are going to use on any given occasion. Also, they never use the same route twice, in a bid to thwart possible ambush attempts.

"Ours," says Madan, "is a well-structured organisation. Each of our offices is headed by a chief of operations, and he alone has access to the files. It is he who prepares a blueprint for the investigations, he who delegates assignments to the team members depending on their skills. All our operations are well-coordinated, multi-

tronic equipment is unmatched," says the man who, when still in his early 30s, once stumbled upon a case necessitating the taking of a long range photographs. "At the time, all I had was a Brownie camera, telescopic lenses were unheard of at the time. So I sat and thought, and came up with a brainwave: I bisected a pair of binoculars, welded one lens to the front of the camera and there I had it, the answer to my problem. The case was successfully closed, and I still have that old camera around somewhere," Madan says, his hand waving in an arc that takes in a den littered with every conceivable form of walkie talkie, camera, lenses

no place you can go, to learn the diverse skills needed in this demanding profession.

Thus, Madan coaxed and cajoled the authorities at the Indore Christian College into including, in the curriculum, a 'Course for Private Detectives and Related Studies', of which he is chief patron and visiting professor. "We began in August this year and, in our very first batch, we already have some brilliant young men and women. It goes to show what I have always maintained — the need is there, it only needed someone to fill it."

The industry, Madan feels, is rapidly gaining a respectable profile. And symptomatic of this is the symbiotic link that ties top flight agencies and the official police force together in a united front against crime. "We need their help, say to raid a premises in which we suspect hanky-panky to be going on or to arrest a criminal on whom we have built up a damning dossier."

More often than not, Madan and his ilk are retained by the unfortunate victims of the cops themselves. "Sometimes they jump to hasty conclusions, sometimes they collude with the actual criminals to catch a convenient scapegoat. And often, we are given the brief of overturning the official case."

Needless to say, such actions serve to antagonise certain sections of the force. Given the abysmal levels of training accorded to the official cops and their even lower motivation, though, it comes as no surprise when Madan says that he is occasionally consulted, albeit on an informal basis, by the official agencies when they come up against a particularly knotty problem.

"Just as Scotland Yard used to call in Sherlock Holmes," says Madan, just a trace of smug self-satisfaction marring those impassive features.

The train steamed into New Delhi's railway terminus. Alighting passengers glanced

suspiciously at the large metal trunk secreted under one of the berths, then alerted the railway police.

The trunk, opened under official supervision, contained the body of an adult male, who had obviously died of a series of stab wounds. A check of the pockets revealed no ID cards or other clues to the corpse's identity. And, weeks of repeated appeals later, none came forward to identify and claim the corpse. Clueless, the police called in the special skills of the Godfather and his team.

Madan had the body stripped, before minutely examining each article of clothing. He uncovered his first lead when traces of chemicals were found on the soles of the dead man's shoes.

The post mortem report revealed that the corpse had a false tooth and, further, that the material used was peculiar to the dentists in Germany. To the student of Sherlock Holmes, the deduction was obvious: the victim had to be employed in a chemical factory, and sufficiently senior to have undertaken one or more official trips to Germany.

Retracing the concerned train's route to Delhi revealed the existence of a large chemical factory near Bareilly. And on site investigations unearthed the fact that a senior engineer had not reported to work for some weeks now. Getting the staff to identify a photograph of the victim's body was the obvious next step.

Motive first, and opportunity — those two guiding dictums of a detective's life came into play again. Discreet enquiries revealed the existence of an inimical colleague, who suspected that his wife was engaged in an adulterous affair with the victim. A bit of sleuthing and one confrontation later, the culprit confessed all.

Case closed! "The Godfather always gets his man!"

Sleuth



KAMAL NARANG

the couple's daughter Anuradha. Both go out in the field when occasion demands, share in Madan's dangerous life and are equally subject to the death threats that come in via mail and telephone. "It is part of the territory," shrugs Pramila. "And it is not easy to get to us, here."

The Madans have four cars permanently stationed outside, and only at the very last minute do they decide

personnel efforts involving interviewing, fingerprinting, photo and videographing, trailing, the works.

"We keep, in every office, a whole range of uniforms, clothes worn in different parts of the country so that any of our personnel can instantly slip into the best possible disguise the situation demands. We have a stock of false ID cards, credit cards in various names.

"And our array of elec-

and, most importantly, a lethal arsenal ranging from a primitive shotgun to the latest in assault rifles.

At 57, the ace sleuth contemplates a life lived to the full. And works towards the fructifying of a long held dream. "I always remember how, when I started in this profession, I had no guide, no teacher other than the mystery novels I religiously devoured. And the situation is still the same — there is