

Lifeline etc

PEOPLE LIFELINE MOVIES CUISINE LEISURE YO! NEW GENERATION

PREM PANICKER

I he mirrored sunglasses reflect the twin barrels of the revolver trained with malice aforethought at my forehead.

I search the grim features confronting me for any sign of mercy, but see only cruel lips clamped tight below a menacing pencil-line moustache.

Sweat beading my forehead, I whisper a hasty Hail Mary while the thud of my heart threatens to drown the steady clank of the overhead ceiling fan.

The gunman sitting in the big black leather chair tenses slightly. "The Godfather always gets his man," he says, in a voice that sounds to my fevered imagination like gravel descending on my coffin lid...

Click! Click! Photographer Kamal Narang shoots off two fast exposures, and Ramesh Chander Madan relaxes in his chair, the gun twirling rapidly on his extended forefinger before disappearing into a hidden holster under his coat. The media-savvy head of Goliath Detectives Pvt Ltd has posed for enough of these photo sessions to respond to the lensman's cue with all the panache of a seasoned Bollywood badde.

"Godfather," he muses. "That is what my staff (500 detectives including 150 women at last count, and spread over 16 offices countrywide) calls me."

To the 26 innocents whom the ace sleuth has saved from certain judicial execution — a world record — the newly elected president of the Council of International Investigators is simply 'God'. "It was based on this record, coupled with my contributions to the private detective business, that led to our 500-odd council members electing me International Detective of the Year in 1989," says Madan, with a disarming lack of modesty.

When the body of Asha Ram was discovered in a disused well on February 28, 1973, the police officers of Lakhnaur village in Saharanpur found a clear trail. Asha was a domestic employed by a family of six brothers. Ergo, they had to have committed the crime.

He is brave, honest. He always gets his man. His name is Madan — Ramesh Chander Madan.

PERSONALITY



PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAMAL NARANG

Sleuth

The brothers were incarcerated, circumstantial evidence gathered in double quick time. An eyewitness came forward to describe in vivid detail how he had seen the brothers hold the poor domestic down, stab her repeatedly and then dump her body in the well.

The district and sessions judge doomed the brothers to death. Repeated appeals failed to reverse the verdict. Until, from their cells 'on death row, the brothers heard of Madan and

prevailed upon their lawyer to entrust their fate in his hands.

On receiving the brief, the ace sleuth swung into action. The village was flooded with operatives disguised as wandering mendicants, census personnel, forest officials et al. An array of sophisticated equipment was deployed in an electronic web that netted a cruel conspiracy.

"In that village," says Madan, recalling the denouement of what he deems his most satisfying case, "there was this family of landowners who had a running feud going with the two brothers. Asha Ram was in their employ, and it was they who induced her to seek office with the six brothers.

"Then, the landowners bumped her off and put up one of their own men to give false 'eyewitness' testimony. To make matters doubly sure, they bribed the chief constable. And that was where they made their fatal mistake — one day, in a tea shop patronised by the police, one of my operatives in the guise of an errand boy overheard a disgruntled cop talking of how his boss had not given him a cut of the amount received from the landowners. That was the key that unlocked the conspiracy, and led to my securing the release of six innocent men in one stroke."

Spectacular, by gumshoe standards. "Simple," says Madan, in unconscious imitation of the elementary, Watson' punchline popularised by his 'guru' Sherlock Holmes.

"I have read all his books," he says, waving a hand at a wall to wall bookshelf that sports, besides the works of Arthur Conan Doyle, paperback accounts of the doings of every fictional sleuth known to mankind. "I have a collection of tapes and movies based on his tales. And I like to think I learnt the basics of my art from his case studies."

Remarkable words, more so as they issue from the mouth of a man who had tried his hand at 22 different professions — coolie, electrician, tailor, mechanic, rickshaw puller, balloon vendor, singer, actor, painter... We are setting up the first ever... *continued on page 7...*

A group with a history of thirty successful