

# New look on Punjab

IT'S a sunny Saturday morning in one of Delhi's local gurudwaras. A film crew, handkerchiefs reverentially tied over their heads, are doing their best to go about the shooting without disturbing the aura of religious deference. Members of the gathering silently pray on, while a scene is being shot with Nisha Singh and Mandeep, the heroine and hero of the serial.

The ambience is a reflection of the man calling the shots — director M. S. Sathyu, shooting on location for the T.V. serial Choli Daman.

Funded by Doordarshan, Choli Daman is a love story set against the backdrop of Punjab today, on a story by K. S. Duggal, the respected Punjabi litterateur who, to quote Sathyu, "has also been in the government long enough to know exactly what can and what cannot be said on government media." K. S. Duggal says that he has tried to "reinforce the age old ties of neighbourliness and brotherhood between the Hindus and Sikhs". Though it is a piece of fiction, it has been drawn from actual situations that have arisen under present conditions in Punjab.

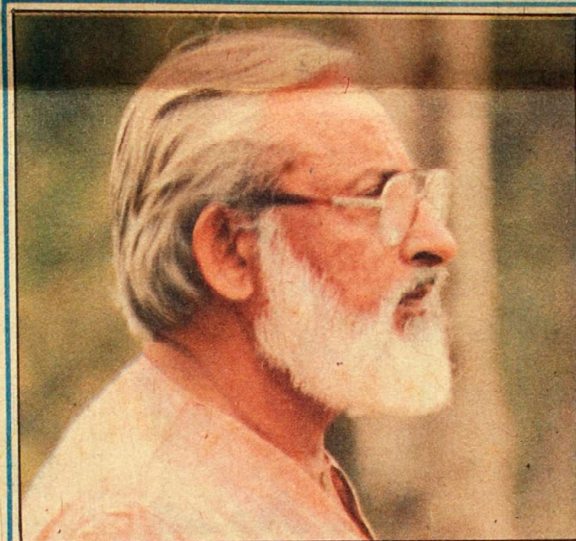
"I had been toying with the idea of a film on the Punjab situation for some time. This project attracted me, because it embodied a very positive and humanitarian approach towards the whole issue," said M. S. Sathyu. "What we're trying to say is that there is actually no disharmony between the two communities. All this talk about dissension is a kind of anti-propaganda by vested interests. Even terrorism is not a manifestation of a communal problem. For violence can become a part of any basic issue — as it has, for instance, in Bihar."

For Kuckoo Mathur, who is producing this serial, the assignment is much more than a weekly assignment. "Integration may be a cliché term but it is the most vital need of the hour," she said.

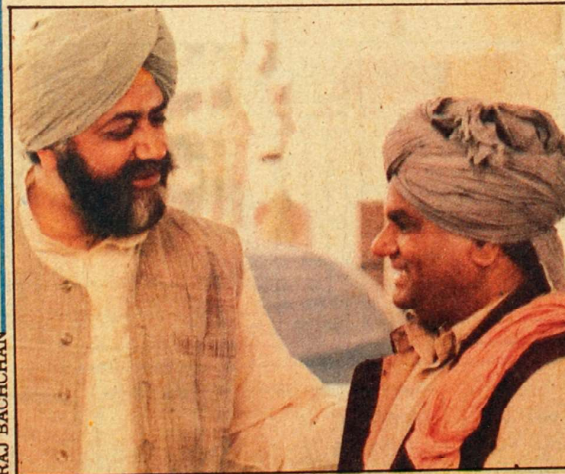
The social integration that the producer talks about is actually manifest in every facet of life. Music is one of them and it is an important constituent of this serial. Says Pandit Amarnath, acclaimed classical vocalist and music director of Choli Daman, "My attempt in this serial is to project the real flavour of the music of Punjab, especially its Sufi traditions. The Sufi tradition in Punjab is in itself evidence of the human integration in the culture of this area. Unfortunately, however, today the understanding of Punjabi music is limited to bhangra and noisy *lorées* only."

The sense of motivation in the team is rather striking and co-ordinating them all is

**GAJRA CHAWLA reports on a new serial being made by M.S.SATHYU and talks to him about his plans for a bi-lingual film**



M. S. Sathyu.



Mohan Maharishi and C. D. Sidhu in 'Choli Daman'.

the celebrated director. Excerpts from an interview with M. S. Sathyu:

**Like many other film makers you, too, have turned to television. Why?**

In recent times, the scope for off-beat cinema has become much less. In the first place, hardly any finance was coming forward. Even if it did come, most of these films fared badly at the box office. It is unfortunate, because while the movement lasted it was pretty good, in Hindi and even in Kannada. Now, whatever little is happening is in Kerala or to an extent in Bengal. So many of us have turned to television which reduces the risk factor. And for thought-provoking films television is the only medium that can assure you a definite and widespread exhibition.

**Do you have some kind of a political philosophy behind your films? And how would you define it?**

Well, I wouldn't call it philosophy, but political clarity

— yes. I feel that at some point or the other everything has to be analysed very dialectically, and that's what a play or a film should do. The main thing is to analyse an issue and put it before an audience. It's not important to give messages, for they will come of their own. People must only be exposed to reality — the reality in which they live, but have perhaps become immune to. It needs a certain distance to understand it and that's what a film or T.V. serial should attempt to provide.

**What are the constraints you've faced as a maker of political films?**

Well I've had fewer opportunities than others because of this, for very few people are ready for political cinema.

**But don't you think they've reacted well to political films in the past? We've had a profusion of them recently.**

Yes and no. Though we've had a lot of political cinema

late, there is, unfortunately, a fascist tendency being propagated through it. Though politically we've become more aware, the wrong kind of politics is being emphasised.

**The 'Pratighaat' variety?**

Yes, Pratighaat and even Ardh Satya or Ankush. Not to talk of all those Amitabh movies where in the climax scene the honest man shoots down all the villains. Shooting is not the answer, but unfortunately even Govind Nihalani has made it so. In a way this is dangerous.

I feel political cinema in this country has yet to come of age. In a political film, one can't start with a conclusion. Solutions must not be suggested in a political film at all, for they may not be the only ones. Leave it to the people to change systems and find solutions. For our part, we must only seek to expose the system. That is the first step towards changing it.

**Considering that you were one of the first directors to have used the Partition as the backdrop of your film 'Garam Hawa', how did you react to 'Tamas'?**

I wasn't the very first one to have made something on the Partition. Garam Hawa did get me a lot of acclaim and it was a success too. But there's a lot of difference between the two. Tamas deals with the actual days of partition — the riots to be more precise — and the sufferings of people, the reasons of partition etc. My film was about what a political decision — maybe a wrong one at that — was doing at a more human and emotional level.

**Yes, but what is your personal opinion about 'Tamas'?**

It's a well made and bold film and it's necessary to understand the recent historical past, especially for the younger generation. Moreover the row created by certain parties has only exposed their communal character.

Of course it was courageous of Doordarshan not to have caved in, as they did earlier when Raj Se Swaraj was stopped midway. It's also good that Tamas was released as a serial and not as a film because in the latter case the communal elements would have created greater havoc for it than they did.

**What are your plans for the future?**

Well, I'm getting a little impatient with television as a medium. I want to get back to a film I've been planning for some time now. This film is to be a bilingual, in Hindi and Kannada. It's an attempt to study how a myth — in this case the myth concerns Kumaraswamy, a son of Lord Shiva — is perpetuated over many centuries as a means by which a higher community exploits a lower class.