

Serial on Punjab being shot

Express News Service

NEW DELHI, April 11

"It is early morning. Lala Dhunny Chand's ear is slowly moving on the highway. Just as it reaches a muddy track, two turbanned youths on motorcycle begin trailing it. One of them overtakes from the left. (Sounds of stengun fire). The ear runs off the road and crashes into the bushes. The assailants flee."

These lines are not from a newspaper clipping on Punjab. This is a serial based on the Punjab imbroglio begins. A Doordarshan baby, the TV serial is being directed by the noted film-maker, M. S. Sathyu (of Garam Hawa fame).

The serial is based on a script penned by the noted Punjabi litterateur, Kartar Singh Duggal, entitled, "Choli Daman." "Hindus and Sikhs are like Choli and daman," says Duggal, who received a Padma Bhushan this year for his contribution to Punjabi literature.

The serial is aimed at foster in Hindu-Sikh amity in Punjab. The storyline is truly rustic Punjabi. It revolves around two Jalandhar-based families — one Hindu and the other Sikh — both of whom have been neighbours after the travails of partition. Gurmukh Singh and Lala Ramlal share a common boundary wall with a passage to facilitate interac-

tion. Gurmukh's son falls in love with Ramlal's daughter and their love is accepted by both the families. But once the bloodbath begins, relations between the two families become strained and a sense of mutual suspicion develops.

The serial picks up the day-to-day incidents in Punjab which do not necessarily relate to the two families, but one way or the other accentuate a rift. Like the news-of a plane hijacked by extremists and taken to La-

hore, divergence of opinion as regards candidates for the local Gurudwara elections, among a host other trivial issues.

In spite of the underlying communal build-up, the young lovers decide to get married. Ramlal helps retrieve the situation. The serial ends on a positive note, with the two families becoming good old neighbours again.

The serial is being produced by Ms Kitty Mathur. Shot at Gurgaon, Sathyu also plans to shoot in Jalandhar the unit has already filmed five

of the 13 episodes. Shooting will resume from April 24, and the unit hopes to complete the serial by June-end, soon after which, it is expected to be telecast on the national network.

Duggal began on the script in 1985 and completed it within a year. When Doordarshan evinced interest in serialising it, the producers approached Sathyu who agreed to take it on. Duggal points out he does not want the serial to become "controversial" like "Tamas". My intention is not to provoke; it is to make them think", he said.

Among the tele-stars who act in this serial are Mohan Maharishi (as Gurmukh Singh) ex-Director, National School of Drama, Shyam Arora (as Lala Ramlal); film actress Nisha Singh (as Ramlal's daughter) Rani Balbir Kaur (as Ramlal's wife) who heads the Department of Drama, Chandigarh University, and Dr Charan Das Sidhu (as the Hindu servant). He is a well-known Punjabi playwright who has also acted in Shyam Benegal's TV serial, "Yatra." A newcomer to the tube in Manjit Singh who plays (Gurmukh Singh's son), a young Sikh boy, who studies in Delhi University.

The background music is based on "gurbani" from the Guru Granth Sahib, adapted by Pandit Amarnath of the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, Delhi.



A scene from Choli Daman

Loity intentions, low drama

Choli Daman, directed by M.S. Sathyu, on Doordarshan, every Thursday.

WHEN *Choli Daman* set in the Punjab of recent times, started telecasting, explosive stuff was expected from the maker of *Garam Hawa*. The memories of *Tamas* were fresh in people's minds. The first episode in this 13-part serial was electrifying enough, but later it gave way to



Nisha Singh and Surinder Jain in 'Choli Daman', (left) director M.S. Sathyu.

with this TV serial. In fact I wasn't even satisfied with the fact that people lapped the sentimental story up. People also went gaga over *Tamas* which was highly melodramatic. Unfortunately all TV serials are melodramatic."

One should also keep in mind, Sathyu says, that barring a few skirmishes no riots ever took place in Punjab. So the goodwill shown in the serial is realistic and not imaginary. He did travel all over Punjab and even shot in the Anandpur Sahib gurdwara. The Punjab problem is a direct result of the communalisation of politics as well as the government's lackadaisical attitude. All ~~Alkal~~ groups are communal today. Communal politics was also the cause of Partition.

In terms of reach, Sathyu believes, television is very powerful. Of course, because of the government's monopoly, the whole truth cannot be told on it. But that is not reason enough to shy away from the medium. One

should strive to expose as much as is possible.

No fireworks are expected in the forthcoming episodes of the serial. Divisions on communal lines is municipal body elections has been tackled though. In fact, the explosive assassination of a Hindu leader in the first episode was not in the original story. Only a mention was made, but Sathyu opted for a visual enactment of the same. Expectedly, some people objected to that. Says Sathyu, "Unless you show conflict, there is no drama. The negative aspects have to be dramatised to highlight the positive."

Sathyu would have liked more Sikh actors to play the Sikh parts in the serial but it was not possible as Sikhs seem to be inhibited or may be they didn't agree with the script. Mandip Singh, who plays the lead role belongs to that community. Except for Nisha Singh and Shyam Mishra, most other actors were new to

Sathyu. He considers Mohan Maharishi's performance good and G.S. Sidhu as the servant Ganeshee commendable. Rani Balbir Kaur he found a bit theatrical.

The background score provided by Pt. Amarnath is a strong point of the serial. But Sathyu had conceptual differences with the music director. "He wanted the music to be totally classical. The fact is that shabad kirtan in gurdwaras today, including the Golden Temple, has incorporated the popular elements and is not sung in the ragas it is supposed to be sung in. So as a director I find Amarnath's music unrealistic. To give another example, there is a sequence of a faqir singing a Kabir bhajan which again is too classical for my liking. The score of *Mirza Ghalib* is also not realistic as it does not adhere to the period. Jagjit and Chitra Singh have rendered pop ghazals." Amarnath's plea is that we should not pander to the people's debasing tastes.

Sathyu wants to make a film on terrorism. He would like to tackle the questions like why terrorism, how to solve the problem in a so-called secular, democratic fashion. He would like to ask whether we are living in a democratic secular society as enjoined by our Constitution.

What kind of impact is he expecting from *Choli Daman*. "If family planning programmes on television and 'Freedom Run' can have impact, then *Choli Daman* can also influence people's perceptions of reality."



placidity. SUNDAY MAIL fired a volley of questions at M.S. Sathyu.

At the outset Sathyu says that the serial wasn't his idea. Kartar Singh Duggal and written the story and was pushing it and he was hired as professional director. "For certain personal (read financial) reasons one has to do hackwork also," says Sathyu, in defence. "The intentions of the makers were good: promoting amity between Hindus and Sikhs. The serial does skirt some aspects of the Punjab problem but perhaps they cannot be shown on Doordarshan."

He counters further, "Why compare a film *Garam Hawa*