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her at odd hours and even tailed the two on a motorcycle when they were on a picnic. When she visited a beauty parlour, he was there as a hair dresser.

According to Reshma, he was rich man, drove a BMW and wanted to marry her so that he could take her on a world tour. Yet, nobody except her saw him.

After months of pursuing the case, the investigators concluded that the lover was Reshma's imagination. No one was actually chasing her. Reshma had invented the lover in reaction to her husband's infidelity, who was making out with another woman.

Not shockingly so, private detective and security agencies have grown into a multi-billion rupee industry in India, and is constantly growing. The sleuth agencies have a strong network and a dedicated staff, where each member has a specialised job. The work involves trailing, interviewing, taking fingerprints, photographing or even video-graphing. Many times the detectives have to disguise themselves. For this, their offices are well stocked with a gamut of attires worn in different parts of the country. They have different uniforms, a stock of false IDs and a host of electronic equipment.

Detective agencies claim to work in strict confidentiality. Juniors who do the leg-work on a case seldom know all details about it. They almost never know who the client is. Secrecy is maintained at all levels and the only chief knows the complete details of a case.

These services, however, don't come cheap. Hiring a private eye can cost you anything from Rs 10,000 to Rs 2 lakh or even more. Matrimonial inquiry rates start from Rs 10,000 and go up to Rs 75,000,

depending on the nature of the assignment. Pre-marital inquiries into the character of a boy or a girl, usually cost Rs 10,000. A simple surveillance package comes for Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,500, while video surveillance is for Rs 5,000-7,000.

An instance of the growing faith in private eyes is this case of a man facing the gallows. The accused, a forest contractor, facing death sentence on the charge of murdering his supervisor, approached Ramesh Madan for help. The story doing the rounds was that the contractor had

illicit relations with the supervisor's wife and on discovering this, the supervisor had threatened the accused with dire consequences. So, the contractor killed him.

After reading the postmortem report, the detective concluded that the particular revolver used in the murder wasn't the one found with the contractor. In fact, there was only one such revolver in the entire area and it belonged to the SHO.

But the policeman was on leave, and when the sleuths tracked him

down to his village, they found that the supervisor's wife was also with him. The officer confessed his crime and the contractor was saved.

Such murder whodunnits rarely come to private detectives. But there are an increasing number of fraud cases being entrusted to them. One such case was that of Balbir Bring, resident of Jalandhar district in Punjab, who worked as a part-time cook in California. He lived in the US with his cousin Jagir Singh, who was a truck driver. In 2001, Bring

insured himself for \$1 million with the All State Life Insurance and made Jagir his beneficiary. While on a visit to Singh's sister at a village near Jalandhar in March 2002, Bring allegedly died of heart attack.

After a while, Jagir claimed the insurance money, whereupon the company began their investigation. When they contacted Bring's workplace, the restaurant owner said no such person had been employed there. Bring's residential address could also not be confirmed. As a

result, the insurance company hired a private detective in Delhi to investigate Bring's 'death'. The insurance company didn't even have Bring's passport details and other documents as these were claimed to have been stolen in Delhi. Bring's death certificate was, however, provided. The sleuths found the certificate had been faked. It was computer generated and not on the doctor's letterhead. The doctor had merely signed it for entries in the hospital register — one 'admitting' the patient and the other declaring him 'dead'. Even the village sarpanch denied any death had occurred on March 18, 2002. The detectives had cracked the case and concluded that the insurance claim was fabricated.

The case brings out another interesting dimension of detective work in India. In many instances, top detectives collaborate with the police in an arrangement of mutual

benefit.

Senior police officials often consult detectives over knotty problems. In turn, the detectives need police help in raiding premises or seeking protection. "There's mutual link between us," says Madan.

But there is a flip side to all the glamour of a detective's job. They are always exposed to great risks. Says Madan, "We just take precautions and ignore the threats."

Another problem, slowly creeping into the sector due to the mushrooming of private detective agencies, is one of credibility and competence. No license is needed to start a detective agency. Therefore, there's absolutely no check on what kind of people get into the profession. In fact, many detective firms are merely glamourised security agencies. "The business of detective work is all about faith. We have to produce results to measure up to our clients' expectations," says Madan. "Any fraud or incompetence gives bad name to the profession."

A detective is a self-made person. There are no rules or a training institutes to produce private eyes. Usually, training is on the job, under the guidance of an experienced senior. The apprenticeship is rigorous. After training, a detective can either strike out on his own or join an agency. Though demand for detectives is growing and there's money in the profession, only the best can survive in the long run.

Two registered organisations — the All India Private Detectives Association established in 1966 and the Council of Certified Indian Detectives founded six years back — discuss the problems relating to private detectives in India. These bodies strive to weed out elements defaming the profession.

(Certain names have been changed to preserve confidentiality)

