

Chasing a Crooked Shadow



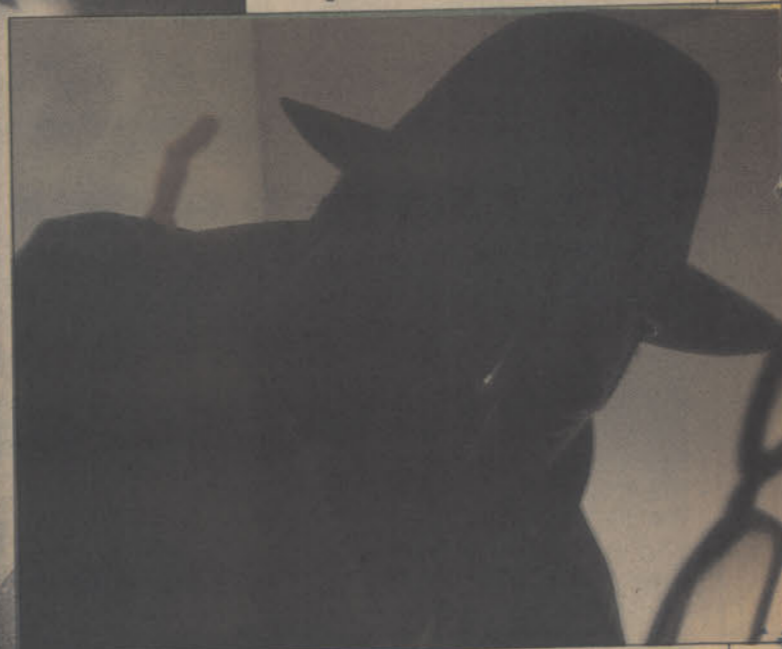
MADHUMITA GHOSH AND
G.V.M. SHAILENDRA KUMAR

Their image of leading a glamorous life, chasing crooks, dodging bullets is a misconception. The private detective, in real life, is in trouble with the cops, suffering setbacks, facing life-threatening situations, fighting, of all things, boredom. The only thing that keeps him going is the knowledge that ultimately he will win.

In many ways, the Indian sleuth is a far cry from the macho 007. No smoking gun, no bikini-clad brunette or speeding Ferraris for him. James Bond lives but only on celluloid or in the books. The imitators lack pizzazz.

A former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir was caught redhanded in an embezzlement deal when his telephone conversation was tapped and recorded by a Bombay-based exporter in New Delhi. The key dramatist was not the CBI or the police force but a private detective agency.

The trend in the 1990s seems to be making it the "decade of the private eye" in India. This, according to Subhash Wadhawan, chief of Universal Bureau of Investigation, is because of a higher incidence of "white-collar" crimes, like tampering with accounts, theft of business secrets, copyright and trademark infringements, frauds and counterfeits



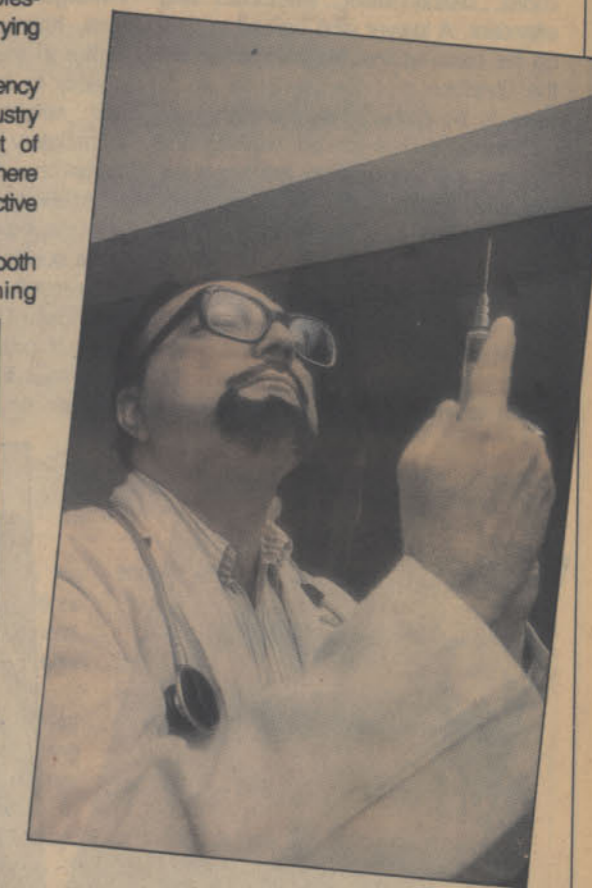
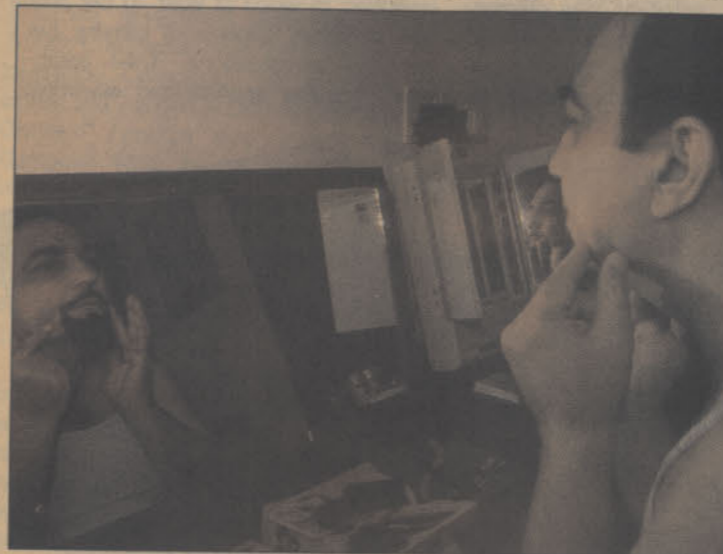
and extra-marital escapades.

Captain Vikram Singh who heads Lancers Detectives is a classic case of a man working under cover. Nothing about his get-up proclaims him the *desi* counterpart of the "Old Fox". In his pristine white khadi kurta, black woolen waistcoat and a black Nehru cap, he looks anything else but a private detective. In his opinion, the socio-economic changes have led to a complex

detective agencies pay professionals handsomely for carrying out industrial espionage.

The Globe Detective Agency is another giant in the industry capturing about 80 per cent of business in South India where 60 per cent of the total detective business is concentrated.

Mrs. Lahiri made a smooth transition from teaching



nature of individual problems. Also the new breed of management culture realises the necessity of correct information. All this creates greater involvement of this group of people who work incognito.

Ramesh Madan of Goliath Detectives claims to be the founder-father of this profession in India, after 33 years in the business. The others in the profession, he says, have been trained by him.

Nikhil, 23, and Nomita, 24, highly competent computer whizzkids, are the employees of a private detective firm based in Delhi. Both have edged themselves successfully into seven different companies, quitting after short stints at each of them, in a space of four years. They are undercover agents of rival companies, clients of the detective firm employing them. Nikhil and Nomita stole tenders, confidential project reports, blueprints and miscellaneous other secret documents. Today Nikhil and Nomita are probably the highest-paid computer professionals in India as

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Shakespeare to a hi-fi executive's job in Globe's Delhi office. She says the lure of excellent pay and "investigation" were what motivated this change of career. She's come a long way from her initial assignment, when she tailed a divorcee

in the Nizamuddin area and ferreted out the information that the suspect had a means of livelihood. Lahiri's evidence deprived the suspect of the grounds for non-payment of maintenance money to his estranged wife. "I was never a failure," she said. She recalls her involvement in tapping a former chief minister's telephone in an embezzlement case. Her team taped the conversation of the erstwhile leader of Kashmir in return for a fee. Telephone-tapping is illegal. Yet agencies all over the country carry on with it without any qualms.

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Like his profession, everything in the life of Ramesh Madan has involved high drama. Circumstances forced him to take up odd jobs, ranging from that of a