

COVER STORY

coolie, balloon-seller, electrician and attendant. A lawyer who agreed to take up his case against his stepmother set the condition that the evidence would have to be gathered by Ramesh.

Teenager Ramesh got working and secured the evidence to get his dues, unjustly appropriated by the stepmother. Later while working in a government office some dishonest officer had him dismissed. Ramesh, with the help of a lawyer, managed to secure confidential information and won his case. Finally his lawyer allowed Ramesh to investigate his cases. This is

investigative operations. The same criteria, however, does not apply here. Unlike in the West, there is no central agency to monitor their work. As a result, several unsavoury, corrupt and intimidatory practices are threatening to become the norm in the profession.

Intelligence-gathering, many claim, the respectable term for the disreputable business of snooping around, was till recently confined to state-owned agencies. The profession was originally born of political motives and legitimised as it was for supposedly "patriotic" purposes. Any detection conducted for

over Rs 400 crores, employing over 20,000 people all over the country.

The home ministry under whose aegis the industry should be placed does not consider it worthwhile to give it a second thought. A draft bill to legitimise and provide a licensing system to the private detective network was mooted in 1984 but has since been gathering dust.

In Delhi alone, there are over 600 agencies, of which at least 10 per cent are technically capable of carrying out sensitive investigations. Their equipment includes sophisticated electronic



how he began and went on to set up Goliath Detective Agency in 1958. Now, his entire family is in this profession. In Madan's words, "Nature was my teacher. I learnt alertness, wisdom and a sharp instinct from the lessons the lawyer put me through."

He is something of a connoisseur of the profession and recipient of many prizes. He has a cupboardful of hats, disguises of all kinds. Document-shredder, tie-pin cameras, tiniest of tape-recorders, high-powered field glasses, walkie-talkies, books and much else.

All the detective agencies claim to have solved several cases but in the absence of a written code or law. Their ethics depend on individual morality.

In Europe and the USA, private investigation is a lucrative business. But as the work is very sensitive, the state imposes restrictions upon the extent of

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personal gain through the application of underhand methods can be penalised under law protecting human rights in most nations. But India is an exception. "Nobody thinks of invasion of privacy. Nor do we," said Ramesh Madan. Today the industry has an annual turnover of

bugs, camouflaged tape-recorders, powerful transceivers and specially-built cameras which photograph at 90 and 180 degree angles.

Sometimes these agents also work as double agents. And there is nothing to stop them. This is a common practice in the USA, Japan, England and other developed countries. But there the activities are closely scrutinised by the licensing authorities, lest the detectives cross the limits. But in India, there is no authority to check the activities of these agencies. They register themselves under the Companies Act and enjoy all the privileges of a regular business house. Their so-called "ethics" are purely business ethics. "We have to think of business first and everything else later," quips Lahiri.

PHOTOS: BENYO THOOMPUNKAL