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THE INDIAN POIROTS

Quietly, but steadily private investigators have been setting up 'shops' with sophisticated gadgetry and an estimated four hundred of them are now doing big business, says PANKAJ TULLI

THE area is busy. Shakarpur road. The evening is cold and bleak, and shadows are fast lengthening. We are shadowing a white Maruti car No.... that has "Thriller" painted boldly in red on the back screen. Dark pants allow only a silhouette of the couple inside. From the motor behind, Delhi's unromantic detective, a senior employee of the Golshah Private Agency, is reporting, every move to head the Vasant Vihar head office through a tiny wireless. And you attractively bulge on his side trousers-pocket, one is sure, is not a handkerchief but a pressure-pistol.

Well, it is not one of Sherlock Holmes' seemingly insoluble cases. Just a simple case, but very tiresome. A suspecting husband gave Golshah chief R. C. Madan the name and address of the person with whom his wife had been reported fooling around. The couple had to be shadowed — the wife and her business executive paramour — and checked in accompanying press, as well as in the court proceedings.

Finding oneself in the role of an unwelcome peeping Tom was quite embarrassing at first. But the religious astuteness with which these gunshies go about their growing influence on society — the phenomenon of private eyes setting up shop in India. The roared gram-seller sitting in the shade of a peepul tree outside your house may well be a hawkshaw, tailing you everywhere and observing your



every movement. And you should not write off the grey-bearded unkempt looking fellow-passenger in the bus, who has been glancing sideways at you. He might be a gunshie hired by a jealous boyfriend of yours to keep watch on you.

"Several private detective agencies have come up over the last few years," says a suave, clean-shaven R. C. Madan, the only Indian private eye to head the World Council of Private Detectives. One probable reason for this new phenomenon is the fact that there has been an alarming rise in

white collar crime in our country, including large-scale hiding of accounts, theft of business secrets, copyright and other such things. Gunshies and their ever-present extra-mural escapades. However, a lot has changed in the modus operandi of private investigators from the times of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin and Doyle's Holmes to Christie's Poirot and sophisticated Gabroian.

A look at a private detective's underground operating room alone is evidence enough of the extent of gadgetry that has been brought to his work. There are top-notch wireless sets, telephones fitted with high-frequency recorders, a colourful assortment of face masks, hats and sound-proof pistols hanging like so many bats from the stand.

DESPITE their growing numbers in India, around 400, do not specialise in any particular branch of crime. "Detectives in the west are specialised," says Yogesh, also a detective, in corporate or purely criminal work, environmental or sexual harassment claims, forensic, bomb blast investigations, or electronic countermeasures. But in India, the private detective usually gets to investigate cross-references of a variety of factors brought to him by a client who wants to make sure their prospective employee is not a fraud.

And if you press the alarm bell at the door a bevy of armed sharks descend on you, as if out of the blue.

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one, the sleuth dropped into a reverie. "Well, we took up the case. I went to a small village near Jalandhar, where Gurnuth's parents were living. We made discreet inquiries. Can you believe what we found there? Gurnuth with his first wife and another woman. She had recorded the statement of the village sarpanch and others and handed everything to Margaret. The poor girl! She went hysterical on discovering the fraud."

As one looks at the grave, lit-aquid eyes of the detective behind thick glasses, one can't help admiring a quick, calculating mind masquerading behind the guileless expression. "Appearances are deceptive," says the over fifty-year-old Madan, quickly reading my mind. The detective, like his mentor Holmes, relies on what the mind rather than the eyes sees. Once an orange of passion tinged his nails, with his hair dyed henna. From his mumbajumbo, the detective could only make out that a friend had seen his wife moving around with another man in Connaught Place on a motorbike. "She is so pious, how could she?" groaned the husband.

A methodical search was started with detectives shadowing the stranger whose only identity was his motorbike number, which Madan had traced to the story seemed to be true for they were both seen together in a restaurant in CP. But the observation man posted outside the wife's house reported no aberrant behaviour, no movement. Strange. But the couple in the restaurant were smugging up to each other under the gaze of the

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Profile of a domestic airline passenger, until East West came along.



Remember those days? When travelling by air in India meant loss of time. Money. And self-respect. When you were unceremoniously herded by an indifferent staff, into long, long queues. Flights (lucky you)! And more queues. It was more than just the food on board that left a bad taste in your mouth. But there was absolutely no choice. Except to wait endlessly. And pray for something better to come along. And come it did. On 28th February 1992, East West started India's first successful private airline. And a new word came into existence in the domestic airline business: service. But, the fact is, a great smile alone doesn't make for a great airline.

It takes a lot, lot more. To begin with, over fifteen years of experience in the travel business. A fleet of 10 impeccably maintained aircraft (7 Boeing 737's and 3 Fokker's!) flying to 24 destinations across India. Daily. Engineering and technical support from Aer Lingus, British Airways. And Singapore Aerospace. (Goes a long way in boosting a passenger's confidence.) A very special team of pilots. (Most likely, you'll find yourself in the hands of pilots who have flown Prime Ministers, Presidents and other VIP's.) And an inflight crew that makes you wonder if you're aboard an international airline. Who, if ever you feel like a lamb, will serve it to you. With a smile.

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