



Hitting the bull's-eye. Madan has been quite a hit in his calling

## Super snoopers

There is much money and plenty of action in the shadowy world of private detectives

FOR some it sure pays to pry into other people's lives. The burgeoning tribe of private detectives in Delhi would agree. They are making a neat pile by not just snooping on people but catching culprits, too. Their bag of solved cases would make even the country's top cops blush.

Yes, the private dicks have never had it so good. For long, detective agencies had to make do with the stray case of marital discord. But not any longer. Today they have their hands full with cases ranging from corporate spying to asset investigation and computer frauds. The success has spurred many to enter the thriving business. Two decades ago there were just a handful of detective agencies. Today there are hundreds.

More and more people, especially in the cities, are beginning to trust private dicks more than the police. And not without reason. The private

agencies have a surprisingly high rate of success, never mind that the clients often have to pay through their nose.

But the clients do not mind paying for results. Take the case of the Delhi industrialist whose peace and prestige were shattered to smithereens the day his minor daughter eloped. Though he lodged a complaint with the east Delhi police the businessman had little faith in the cops to trace his daughter. He approached the Globe Detective Agency which soon collected names and addresses of the boy's friends and maintained a round-the-clock vigil on them. Two of the boy's friends were spotted entering a hotel in Connaught Place carrying food packets.

But the boy and girl sneaked out of the hotel and headed for Dehradun. But little did they realise that the detectives too were on their trail and had checked into the same hotel in the town. The love birds left for Mussoorie

the next morning, but before they could cosy up in the hill resort the police and the girl's parents moved in, abruptly ending the love story. The boy, a drug addict, was charged with kidnapping. The industrialist was pleased. So too were the detectives: with the handsome fee.

The detectives are sometimes called to solve murder cases, too. Like in the bizarre case of the trader from Shradhdhanand Market in Delhi who had gone to Daurala in UP with Rs 40,000 to purchase sugar. When he failed to return even three days later his wife contacted Associated Investigators and Detectives. The missing trader normally used to take a bus from the inter-state terminus, but investigations revealed he had never turned up. Detective Arvind Kumar Auluck of Associated Investigators scoured the bus route. At one village he learnt that the police had found an unidentified body and had

already cremated it. The trader's wife recognised the clothes and it was established that he had been strangled. The detective managed to lay his hands on an envelope at the police station that contained a lock of hennaed hair.

The trader's wife revealed that she had seen her husband talk to a neighbourhood trader on the fateful day. Kumar, as Auluck is popularly known, had got the clue he had wanted. He trudged to the neighbourhood trader's shop and was stunned to discover that his greying hair was dyed with henna. A check on his car revealed shards of glass from the dead man's spectacles. Armed with the evidence Kumar went to the police station and the killer was arrested. He confessed that he had offered the victim a lift in his car on the pretext that he too was going to the same sugar mill and strangled him inside the car.

Some of the cases the detectives solve are impressive. For instance, the case of the unclaimed trunk on a train in New Delhi. Unnerved passengers wondered whether it concealed a bomb planted by terrorists. The Railway Police broke it open and recoiled at the sight of a body inside. They summoned private detective R.C. Madan to sort out the puzzle. The autopsy revealed that the man had been stabbed to death.

The soles of the shoes of the dead man carried traces of a chemical: which had the detective wondering whether the man was working in a chemical factory. Madan examined the route of the train to ascertain whether there were any chemical factories. He finally homed in on a factory in Bareilly where a chemical engineer had failed to re-

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port for duty the day after joining. Ultimately the killer was nabbed—he had suspected the engineer's intentions towards his wife.

It is boom time for the detective agencies in Delhi. The giants in the field are Goliath Detectives and the Globe Detective Agency. The scores of others are small-timers. There are also lone rangers—Detective Vinod, Professional Detectives, Sherlock Holmes Detectives and Fairfax Services.

Not that the agencies specialise in criminal cases alone. The bulk of the business comes from matrimonial and employment checks and industrial espionage. Globe, which has 15 offices across the country, specialises in matrimonial investigation and cases involving trade mark and patents rights. Over the years, Globe, which has a tie-up with US and British detective agencies, has also diversified into manufacturing security devices.

It has its fingers in another pie: food processing. Products are exported to the UK, Germany and the US. "We do everything as long as it is legal," says Mrs Lahiri, commercial executive of the agency. Lahiri, also in charge of the investigating section, says there has been a spurt of cases in the last two years on matrimonial inquiries, employment checks and manufacture of spurious commodities. Banks also hire its services when big debtors vanish.

A large number of the agency's clients are industrialists who have a perennial problem of thefts in their factories. A drug manufacturing company despatched a consignment of chemicals from Punjab to Madhya Pradesh. Of the 42 drum-loads, two containing a very costly chemical were missing when the cargo reached Indore. Four Globe detectives rushed to Punjab where they found that the drums had been loaded in a Jonga instead of the usual truck.



Madan, a master of disguises, keeps chemical weapons, loaded pistols and multipurpose knives, too. Just in case.