

Headline Private detectives: A pre-nuptial priority for some in India  
Date 06 Jul 2010  
MediaTitle Daily Express (KK)  
Section People & Events  
Journalist N/A  
Frequency Daily (EM)  
Circ / Read 30,557 / 97,836

Language English  
Page No 18  
Article Size 361 cm<sup>2</sup>  
Color Black/white  
ADValue 744  
PRValue 2,232



# Private detectives: A pre-nuptial priority for some in India

**N**EW DELHI: The wedding, to be celebrated in sumptuous Indian style, was due for June and everything was progressing smoothly until the groom suddenly lost interest.

Suspicious of an affair, the bride did what increasing numbers of anxious lovers and nervous families are doing in India: she rang a private detective to find out why.

In a country where nine out of 10 marriages are still arranged and modern social pressures are putting the institution under pressure, the industry of snooping on lovers has expanded fast over the last five years, say insiders.

In this case an investigation by the agency AMX – “marriage is a gamble,” says its website – revealed that the groom had recently discovered he was HIV positive.

The discovery was made by an attractive female undercover agent sent by the agency, who befriended the groom and found his medicine.

The wedding was eventually

called off, like 20 percent of cases after a probe, AMX boss Baldev Kumar Puri told *AFP*.

“A pre-matrimonial investigation is your duty,” Puri said. “A post matrimonial investigation is much more costly.”

Puri and others, like Kunwar Vikram Singh, director of the New Delhi-based Lancers agency, are in a growth industry being driven by social changes and the way in which weddings are arranged.

In cities, families are relying increasingly on small advertisements in newspapers and websites or specialist dating agencies to find the perfect match for their children.

The problem is that everyone exaggerates, or even lies, about their qualities.

“Unlike the old days when a close-knit society meant that marriages were usually held between known families, these days marriages are increasingly being arranged through unknown, unfamiliar sources,” said Singh.

“There is an increased risk involved in dealing with strangers.”

To bridge the trust gap, private detectives are taken on to assess candidates without their knowledge.

Information given by potential partners can be verified, such as their financial position, educational achievements, health and even sexual orientation. Suspicions about business

or personal liaisons can be checked out, as well as former amorous relationships.

The detectives, are sometimes students recruited from university campuses, older people who are unlikely to be suspected, former policemen specialised in investigations or medical employees with access to health records.

An investigation can normally be carried out in seven to 10 days and costs 15,000-300,000 rupees (320-6,400 dollars) depending on the complexity and travel required. The family's wealth is also taken into account.

For Puri, there's nothing unethical about running background checks on a potential life partner.

“People are coming because they want to be 100-percent sure. It's like a medical check-up, you do it once a year just to be sure that everything is ok,” he said.

Ranjana Kumari, head of the Centre for Social Research and a leading women's rights activist, said the growth in private detectives was understandable given changes in the way marriages are arranged nowadays.

“Now marriage has become very impersonal and people are not sure. Investigating is the only way to know,” she told *AFP*.

In recent years, attitudes towards dating have changed dramatically in India among the middle classes, who generally enjoy far more freedom than their parents.

But when it comes to marriage, parents are still heavily involved and Kumari said couples often have too little time to really get to know their prospective spouses, which is why private investigators are being brought in.

Singh said he had a female client from the Indian army who wanted him to look into a divorced businessman she was planning on marrying.

“The businessman took her out. He behaved like a perfect gentleman,” he explained. “The marriage was fixed and the wedding cards were sent. But then he was always postponing their meetings.”

And the outcome of his investigation?

“He was married to a beautiful woman in Kolkata. No case of divorce was pending in the court,” he said. — *AFP*

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**In this photograph taken June 27, 2010, advertisements offering detective services are published in an Indian newspaper in New Delhi. — AFPphoto**



**In this picture taken on August 24, 2006, Indian detective Sanjay Singh uses a pair of binoculars to keep an eye on an apartment in New Delhi. — AFPphoto**