



## Marriages are made in the detective's office

Private sleuths in high demand as families touch base through internet and newspaper ads

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"Before, we were only a luxury for someone who had a hell of a lot of money," said Baldev Puri, the tough-talking 45-year-old founder of AMX, a large New Delhi-based agency where one-third of the business is pre-marital investigations. "Now, every family wants to know the maximum."

**No more a luxury** Want to have your daughter's fiance followed? Want to know his salary? Does he drink? Smoke? Hang out in bars? What's his blood type? No problem. It'll cost just \$300 (Dh1,101) or so for a basic investigation (surveillance teams cost extra). India has a per capita income of less than \$900 per year, but detective bills running into thousands of dollars are increasingly common.

"There are many ways to find out things," he said with a smile. The arranged marriage was long the iron-clad norm in India: Two sets of parents, aided by matchmakers and older relatives, would choose spouses for their children. Trusted friends were consulted to look for signs of trouble: a potential groom about to lose his job, or a potential bride too flirtatious with the neighbours. The couple-to-be were, by and large, left out of the discussions.

As views on relationships have shifted, however, and an ever-growing middle class grows desperate to ensure that their children's marriages do not end in disaster, a small army of detective agencies has sprung up across the country. A profession that once lurked on the shadowy fringes of society has moved quietly into the mainstream.

**Puri** summed up the situation simply: "Now, everything has changed in India." These days, Western-style "love marriages", with all the messiness that comes with love, are increasingly common, particularly in larger cities. Even the more conservative families are increasingly turning to "arranged-love marriage", where parents set up potential partners but leave the final decision to the couple.

**Arranged marriages** Even in the most traditional circles, arranged marriages are often between families that do not know one another, with introductions made through newspaper advertisements and a string of wildly popular websites. Anoushka, a 24-year-old investigator, has spent five years working in those neighbourhoods and says she has seen so many people go astray that she long ago lost count. A professional shadow who thrives on anonymity, she will not allow her last name to be used, or any description. She will not admit to caring whether her target turns out to be yet another philanderer. "We discover this stuff every day," she growled. "After you've seen this 20 times, what does it matter when you see the 21st?"