



The game is afoot at a college nearby

What do detective agencies do when they have to snoop on college students? They employ fellow students

PRAJAKTA HEBBAR

SHE ran her fingers through her hair and glanced at the mirror for the last time. Dressed in a pair of jeans and a tunic, she smiled at her reflection with satisfaction, slung the backpack over her shoulder and walked out of her house. It was an important day for her. The 20-year-old college student is an undercover detective working for a private investigation agency.

The girl who calls herself 'Nancy', is one of the many undercover agents working for private investigation agencies in Delhi. Baldev Kumar Puri, who owns the investigation agency AMX Detectives Pvt Ltd in Delhi, explains the importance of having undercover agents in colleges.

"We have detectives on our payroll and many more who work as freelancers and keep their current jobs and go to colleges. We get at least five phone calls from young students every day, asking us whether they can join as detectives. It's a very exciting profession," he adds.

Nancy's mission was to get friendly with a particular boy and find out whether he is dating a certain girl. "We don't know why we are on any assignment. We just get a call from our boss saying that we have to tail such and such person or make friendship with someone and find out things," says Nancy in a matter-of-fact way.

So what happened next? Nancy filled us in, "I got close to not only the boy but also the girl who was supposed to be dating him. I was such good friends with her that she let me use her phone also. I sifted through all the phone records, text messages and photographs, and found out exactly what I was looking for," she adds triumphantly.



ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

footloose IN DELHI

It turns out that the parents of the boy had called the investigation agency to find out about the kind of girl their son was dating. "We never ask what is the result of our findings," says Nancy. "We just complete one assignment and move on to the next one."

But is it just the thrill of the job that excites these youngsters or is there some other allure? "Of course there is. We pay around Rs 5,000-6,000 per assignment to these

youngsters. And they are given about three to four assignments per month. It's not bad money for a part-time job," says Puri.

Another young college-goer and a computer enthusiast who goes by the name 'Raj', wanted to become a detective since his childhood. "My brother works with the CBI, and he used to tell me thrilling stories about his work and his undercover escapades. I used to dream of becoming like him," he says.

The 23-year-old who also writes poetry, talks about his most interesting "case". The parents of a student in his college were worried that their son did not have any female friends. "I was supposed to find out about his sexual orientation, since he hadn't disclosed it to his parents," says Raj. "I pretended to be interested in guys and became friends with him. I observed that he would always reject any overtures by girls — even though he was a good looking guy," remembers Raj. All he had to do was gather enough "evidence" and submit it to his boss.

Any scruples? "No," says Raj firmly. "It's not like I have cheated him or anything, I have just gathered information that was plain for anyone to see," he says.

So how do these youngsters manage to balance their personal and professional lives? "It's not that big a deal, really. I have one basic rule — 'a detective doesn't even trust his own shadow'. If you follow that, everything else is easy," says Nancy.

This rule is apparently followed by her boss too. Because when we thanked Puri for his frankness, he remarked cheekily, "I was frank because I did a background check on you before the interview."

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