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	WORDS & PHOTOS PAYAL KHANDELWAL	
INDIA	MARRIAGES VIA SHAADI.COM 3.2 MILLION	ARRANGED MARRIAGES 90%

## Indian men and women seeking spouses online hire private eyes to suss out the liars and cheats —Marriage Detectives

**“He might tell you he has four flats,** but in reality he might not even have one,” Rajani Pandit, a private eye in Mumbai, warns of my hypothetical fiancée. “He could be having an affair with someone. Or worse, he could be already married.” She insists I consult with her when I get engaged. I suppress a laugh; her gaze remains steely.

Rajani is one of the many private detectives in India tasked with sniffing out dirt on men and women heading for arranged marriage. While matches are still primarily made by the couple’s respective families, Indians are increasingly turning to matrimonial websites like Shaadi.com. In the absence of familial ties, online pairing tends to breed distrust. So now, before dialing the wedding planners, would-be brides and grooms call on detectives to dig up the truth on everything from the fiancée’s social standing and personality to health

issues, political affiliation, and even whether they prefer cats or dogs.

India doesn’t formally regulate these PIs and their services, so unofficial detective work tends to fall into legal gray areas. Detectives share good rapport with official police officers and even trade cases, but these independent sleuths must still take subtle precautions to tiptoe around the law. They have to be careful not to divulge too much of the information they obtained illegally, in case they’re called in as witnesses or subpoenaed in court cases.

Rajani Pandit, seen in her Mumbai office, not only stalks and tracks would-be fiancées; she also counsels clients on their engagements.





Rajani says she receives around 35 arranged marriage cases a month. Before she cracks open an investigation, she encourages people to first do their own basic probe. If that leads to nowhere, she'll spread her tentacles as wide as necessary and vacuum up as much data as she can about the fiancé in question.

The most common way to gather information is to shadow the target and document his or her activities with video and photos. Undercover agents might also step in, with some going as far as joining the target's workplace or coming on as a house helper to covertly collect data, explains Rahul Sthalekar, CEO of Dash Detectives and Security in Mumbai. To test a man's character, his office might hire a female agent to flirt with the would-be groom. Among

male targets, ongoing affairs or pre-existing marriages are common discoveries.

Both genders frequently lie about their income or job descriptions, says Sunil Sharma, who runs Authentic Investigation and Detective Pvt. Ltd. in Delhi and gets about eight to 10 arranged marriage cases a month. Rajani says that in one of her recent cases, a man claiming to be an executive assistant to a high-ranking civil service officer turned out to be a servant. "The girl and her parents were fooled by his fluent English," Rajani recalls. "But they had their doubts."

Geography isn't a barrier if the bride or groom is a non-resident Indian. In these cases, detectives link up with their foreign counterparts to probe and stalk from afar. Rajani notes that many women no longer want to marry non-resident men given the high risk of overseas deceit.

At the end of each case, detectives hand their clients a consolidated report on the investigation. Some detectives like Rajani prefer to give the information only verbally to avoid legal hassles if their clients head to court.

Despite the slightly dodgy nature of their work, private detectives believe they're doing a commendable job. "We feel both the happiness and the sorrow of people when we tell them the outcome," Sunil says. "Many people have been indebted to us for helping them avoid an unhappy future and possibly maybe even a crime."

Rajani explains she takes her job one step further and counsels her clients. She recounts the story of a man who found out his fiancée had lied about her job. She said she worked in an office when in reality she was supporting her family by working in a bar, which is considered a social taboo for Indian women. Rajani told him the truth but also convinced the man to proceed with the marriage, since the woman genuinely seemed to want to better her life. "They got married. They even invited me to the wedding," she says. ⊗



A Mumbai detective studio beckons distrustful passersby.