

# Sakal Herald

## 12th April 2004

### Out: kundalis, In: HIV-free certificates

BY ROOPA CHAPALGAONKAR  
roopac@sakalherald.com

**FC ROAD:** When Meena's parents decided to get their daughter married, they were pretty sure that they wanted to counter-check the prospective groom's HIV status. As soon as a good proposal came their way, they hired a detective agency to check the groom-to-be's medical status. Within a few days the agency confirmed that the boy was totally fit to become their son-in-law.

On the other hand, Priya, whose marriage was almost fixed with a boy in Kolhapur, learnt that the boy had to be frequently hospitalised. Suspicious, she hired a detective agency to look into it. After a thorough investigation, it was learnt that he was HIV positive. Priya says she escaped a disaster.

It's not only Meena or Priya, who go in for such investigations. Many parents are now hiring the services of detective agencies not only for character verification, but also to find out the HIV status of either the bride or groom.

Parents, without any hesitation are willing to pay big money to ensure their child's post-marital safety. "To check

whether a person is, or isn't HIV positive, is not an easy job," says Col Vijaykumar Bhalla, advisor, Globe Detective Agency. He reveals that such an investigation not only requires money but is quite risky. Often, character verification itself leads the agency to check their target's HIV status. Of course, only if the client wants to know that.

The usual *modus operandi* of a detective agency is to first enquire with friends and neighbours. If these investigations do not help, then the last resort is to gain access to the hospital records, reveals Narendra Kulkarni of Focus Detective Agency.

P K Malhotra, manager, Federal Management Services, also accepts that parents, especially in the upper middle class, have become cautious and do not want to take any risks.

The trend to hire detective agencies has increased, especially due to lack of any concrete agency or people who can force an HIV test upon someone. "We can be of help, especially in the metros where one doesn't even know one's neighbour. In small towns at least, one can learn

more about a person through enquiries," says Kulkarni.

However, human rights lawyers in the city object to such investigations. Lawyer Aseem Sarode says that the disclosure of facts about anyone's HIV status is illegal. "It is violating the Right to Privacy of that concerned person", he stresses. He, however, believes, if done in good faith, the investigations must be kept as secretive as



possible. Advocate Ajit Kulkarni says that even if detective agencies are doing some great social work by carrying out such investigations, if a person who is investigated feels offended by the investigations, he can the agency and their client. When con-

tacted Dr Ramesh Maheshwari, who has been treating HIV patients, gets at least 10 phone calls everyday from panicky youths, who feel that they might have acquired the virus. "The situation is so grave", he reminds. Although, he justifies the stand of parents hiring agencies, he personally feels parents should make it mandatory for their children to undergo an HIV test. This small duty, if fulfilled, can save many lives.