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Yes! I'll marry you ... but you have to pass a lie test first



Mistrust of the police is helping to increase the popularity of polygraph tests Seth Joel/Getty Images

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Dipti Puranik stares straight into my eyes and fixes me with a steely glare. “We are looking for signs of a conflict response,” she says, glancing at a computer screen in her sleek Mumbai office. “It could be sweating, increased heart rate, changes in breathing or blood pressure — anything that suggests anxiety.”

Puranik, a professional polygrapher, is at the forefront of a booming industry in India.

Every day she earns a living conducting lie detector tests on behalf of growing numbers of Indians who are paying to screen their employees, their families — even their spouses.

“First we try to get a person’s baseline readings,” she explains. “Then we start asking prepared questions to elicit a response. It usually takes about an hour.”

Polygraphy in India is now big business. In most countries, the use of the machines is either banned or strictly regulated and limited to use by law enforcement officers. Not in India, where the technology is cheap, available to anyone willing to pay, and can be used with little or no official scrutiny — just a signature giving an individual’s consent.

“There are so many areas of life where people want answers based on forensic science — but they don’t want to go to the police,” says Dr Rukmani Krishnamurthy, the chief executive of Helik Advisory, one of dozens of Indian companies that offer the technology, and which employs Ms Puranik.

Widespread mistrust of the police is another factor driving interest in the technology, she adds. This week Helik tackled a case involving a Mumbai jeweller who paid to screen 20 employees after a theft from the company’s safe. Another recent investigation involved a case of arson at a local factory.

“We’ve solved several infidelity cases too,” says Dr Krishnamurthy, a former government forensic scientist, who adds that couples are increasingly turning to the technology to check out their partners before marriage.

At 8,000 to 10,000 rupees per session (£92-£115), the technology is affordable for millions of middle-class Indians and to growing numbers of corporate clients who use it to fight fraud.

Not everyone, however, is happy about a trend that they say poses a threat to India’s criminal justice system.

“There are big questions about the ethics,” says Justice Lakshmanan, a former chairman of the Law Commission of India and a Supreme Court judge. A refusal to take a test is often interpreted as a sign of guilt, he adds, while also questioning the reliability of the technology, which was invented in 1921 in the United States.

Rushank Shah, Helik’s marketing director, agrees there are legitimate ethical concerns but insists the group follow strict rules. He admits, however, that less scrupulous operators in India might be willing to bend the rules — or produce biased reports if paid enough money.

But Dr Gandhi Kaza, a former police detective who set up Truth Labs, a Hyderabad-based provider in 2009, rejects such concerns. He believes that far from being a threat, easy access to the technology is a force for social good in India.

“We are doing so many cases these days,” he says. “What does a rape victim or a wife

whose husband is murdered expect from the police when they walk into the police station? They come in the hope of getting justice quickly. And what do they get in return? The average time to solve such crimes in our country is five years. This is not acceptable at all.”

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