

# IT WAS NOT **GOLD**



ASHOK BHASIN

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# CHAPTER I

**I**T WAS 2.00 A.M., Saturday morning. During winter, there is a possibility of fog in the early morning in Delhi. Manish, a customs preventive officer, was sitting at his desk at the airport. The officers were in two shifts. One set of officers would be in day shift, which starts from 9.00 A.M. to 9.00 P.M., and another set of officers would be in night shift, which starts from 9.00 P.M. to 9.00 A.M. The shifts keep changing. There was hardly any passenger at around 2.00 A.M., and Manish was feeling sleepy. He could not get time to sleep during the daytime. He looked at the board displaying arrival schedule of various flights. The next flight was in fifteen minutes.

Manish was looking at the arrival hall. The customs officers in winter uniform similar to that of Air Force Officers were looking smart. All these officers were manning the customs counters. The preventive officers were not required to wear the uniform. They come in civil dress or say casual dress. Their job was to keep an eye on baggage that looks suspicious or passengers who were behaving in weird manners.

The telephone on his desk rang. It was the assistant commissioner calling him to his cabin.

“Yes, sir”, he said entering the cabin of Ramesh Chandra. He was about 50 years old and had got his first posting at the airport. He had otherwise served at the cargo section at various places. He had quite a good knowledge of intricacies of the import and export of cargo. Working at the airport was new to him. It was more of a passenger facilitation job than revenue collection.

“Come in Manish and close the door”, said Chandra.

Manish took the seat.

“Manish, I received a call just now. It looks like a hoax but it may be correct. The caller stressed that he was giving a big information”.

Manish kept on listening.

“The caller said that two passengers were coming tonight from Dubai, and they would be carrying 400 gold bars in checked-in baggage”.

Manish said, “Four hundred means 40 kg, if each one is 100 g”.

“That’s right”.

“Big one”.

“I doubt the information, but information is information and cannot be just brushed aside”.

“Did he give particulars of the passengers or the flight?”

“No”.

Manish laughed,

“Sir, such vague information does come every day. No authenticity”.

Chandra said,

“But the caller gave a clue. He said that each passenger would be carrying two checked-in bags. In fact, gold is said to be concealed in the linings of the suitcases”.

“False cavities?”

“And he said that all the four suitcases were identical and they look same. The uniqueness was that these would be of red colour with black stripes”.

“That’s interesting”.

“You may check which flights are coming from Dubai”.

“Two flights, sir. One is of Emirates at 3 o’clock and other one is of Air India at 3.50”.

“We have to keep track and look for the suitcases. You may take one more officer with you. Let’s see if the information is true”, Chandra smiled.

Manish was back to his desk. A lot of anonymous calls were received at customs PRO telephone number, giving the details of such prohibited goods. Most of such calls were hoax. Manish was used to such things, and with his vast experience, he never got excited, when someone gave fantastic information. He called Swamy, an officer from Tamil Nadu working at the Delhi airport, and shared the details of the conversation he had with Chandra.

Both of them went for a coffee at a counter located just outside the arrival hall. A lot of people who had come to receive the passengers were waiting. There was a long queue of drivers from various city hotels carrying boards displaying passengers’ names. Manish glanced at the crowd hoping to see some face he might know. None seemed familiar. Swamy was talking to someone in Tamil. Manish could not follow the Tamil language. Most Indians residing in the northern part do not understand the language spoken in the south.

There was an announcement, regarding the arrival of the Emirates flight from Dubai. They looked at each other.

Swamy said, “Shall we go inside?”

“Yeah, but it will take at least half an hour for the passengers to get past immigration”.

“Baggage might start coming on the belts. That is the only clue”.

“Yes, we have to keep an eye on the suitcases”.

Both of them mixed with the passengers at Belt No. 7, which was showing the arrival of baggage from the Emirates flight. Passengers were coming after getting clearance from the immigration.

A thought came to Manish’s mind. Sometimes, the hoax calls were made to divert the attention of the officers, and the real culprit might went out unnoticed through the green channel. He asked Swamy to look at the belt, and he himself went near the exit gate. Two more flights had come. The passengers from three flights were moving, and all were desperate to go out, carrying baggage on the trollies. The passengers coming from Dubai normally got noticed by customs staff. They were either labourers working with builders in Dubai or persons bringing goods for commercial activities. Customs officers would not much bother about such passengers, if the goods were in small quantities. These consisted of small-time traders who go to Dubai to buy cheap quality goods and sell the same in India for a profit. The next category was of families going for tourism.

Manish was attentive and vigilant. His experienced eyes were looking for suspects. He felt that his mobile was vibrating. It was Swamy.

“Sir, the two suitcases have come”.

“Same description?”

“Yes, sir”.

“Be there and keep a watch on who picks these up. I am coming”.

Manish rushed to Belt No. 7, and Swamy was there, who was visibly excited.

“Sir, the other two have also come. All four suitcases have come, but no one has picked them so far. These are moving on the belt”.

Manish glanced and could see the suitcases. After making one more round, when the suitcases again appeared, two passengers, both in their 30s, went near the belt, picked all four suitcases one by one and placed two on one trolley and the other two on another trolley. They started moving towards the exit. Manish and Swamy followed them. As they were near the exit gate, Manish and Swamy intercepted them.

## CHAPTER II

**B**OTH THE PASSENGERS were signalled to go for screening of baggage at the X-ray machine installed on the right side of the arrival hall. Manish took the passports of both the passengers. Both of them were Indian nationals, who were coming to India after more than one year's stay in Dubai. One's name was Baldev Singh and other's name was Avinash Sharma.

Yes, the information seemed correct. The screening showed dark linings of the suitcases. Manish asked Baldev and Avinash to take out the contents and empty the suitcases. There were a few clothes, a few chocolates and gift items, nothing much. Manish again screened the emptied suitcases.

The same shadow appeared again on the screen. It was almost confirmed that there was something in the suitcase, but one has to see it with the naked eye. Both Baldev and Avinash were taken to the interrogation room, where normally the suspects were interrogated. Manish called Chandra to the interrogation room. Both were asked to sit down. Three officers, Chandra, Manish and Swamy, were present there. Chandra took the passports and started scrutinizing the same.

“So, are both of you from Punjab?” asked Chandra.

“Yes, sir”, said Baldev.

“When had you gone to Dubai?”

“It was about four years ago”.

“Are both of you working there?”

“Yes, sir. We are working in a masonry there”.

“Building work?”

“Yes, sir”.

Chandra looked at Manish.

Manish asked, “When had you last come to India?”

“About a year ago”.

“Are you carrying some contraband?”

“None”.

“Gold?”

“No, sir”.

“Are you sure?”

“These are the only personal belongings”, said Baldev indicating the goods lying outside the suitcases.

Baldev was doing all the talking and Avinash remained silent. Manish was talking in a normal tone.

He asked Chandra, “Sir, shall we start?”

“Oh, yes”.

Manish looked at both the passengers. The preventive persons at the airport are equipped with a toolkit. He brought the knife and the screwdriver and told Baldev and Avinash:

“Look, we are going to tear off the linings of suitcases”.

“Sir, these will get damaged”, said Baldev.

“Don’t worry, we will compensate you for it”, said Manish and started cutting the linings from inside. It might have taken not more than ten minutes and things were open. There was a layer of gold bars wrapped in black carbon paper, which was subsequently wrapped and attached with brown Sellotape. Manish cut the linings one by one, and in each suitcase, 100 gold bars were found, each of 100 g. Each marked “Fine Gold, 999.9, Swiss Made”. A total of 400 pieces were there.

Both Baldev and Avinash were looking nervously.

“Now, will you tell me, what is this?”

“Sir, we are not aware”.

Manish told Chandra that he would interrogate them thoroughly and Chandra might like to inform the seniors about the recovery. Chandra was excited. This was a big haul in his shift. It was a remarkable case. He rushed to his cabin. Meanwhile, the news spread to other customs officers about the recovery of 400 gold bars from two passengers. Almost all preventive officers gathered at the room to see the gold bars lying on the table.

It was now 5 o’clock in the morning. Manish had almost finished questioning them. Manish was known to be a good interrogator. The story was like this.

There was a person in Dubai named Indeevar, who was a Malayali settled in Dubai. Baldev was approached by Indeevar about twenty days ago in Dubai through a common contact. Indeevar was running a gold business, and he offered Baldev that if he carried two suitcases having 200 gold bars to India, he would be given 2 lakh rupees and a return ticket. And when Baldev showed reluctance that he might get caught, Indeevar assured him that the bars would be concealed in such manner

that no one could detect these. He told them that Indeevar had already done like this on earlier occasions successfully. There would be no problem. When Baldev agreed to the offer, Indeevar asked him to rope in another person with the same offer. Baldev persuaded his colleague Avinash, who also agreed after asking a few innocent questions. Both of them were told to reach Dubai International airport and the four suitcases would be handed over to them at the airport. The significant question was as to whom these were to be delivered in Delhi.

Baldev was informed that two persons would come to Delhi airport to receive them. The names were not told to Baldev. Indeevar had told him that the photos of Baldev and Avinash had been shared via WhatsApp and the persons coming at the Delhi airport would identify them from the suitcases and would show their photos on their mobile for further confirmation. Both Baldev and Avinash were to accompany them.

Manish looked at the watch. It was 5 o'clock, almost two hours since the arrival of the flight. Swamy was sitting with him and two more preventive officers were sitting; Manish went to Chandra's cabin.

"Sir, two persons were to meet them outside airport".

"You want to track them?"

"Yes, but two hours have passed. All passengers from Emirates have gone out. I doubt there will be anybody now and if they are still there, they would have got suspicious, as to what is taking them long".

"But we can try. There is a possibility".

"Yeah, a chance worth to be taken".



Akram and Shakeel were desperately waiting outside at gate no. 6. They had reached there at 3.30 and were looking for those peculiar suitcases. Passengers were coming outside. But Baldev and Avinash had not come. Akram had made a few calls from his mobile and had worriedly told that they were yet to find the persons coming with peculiar suitcases. They were asked to wait. Suddenly, Shakeel saw both Baldev and Avinash each one pushing their respective trolleys on which the red suitcases with black stripes were kept. Shakeel pointed to Akram:

"They are there".

"Stay here. Don't move", said Akram. "Let them go past us and wait for us".

"But why? We are already late".

"No. Be here. We will wait".

Both Baldev and Avinash walked passed them and came at the end of the steel



railings. Akram first looked at the suitcases and then at their faces.

“Is something fishy”, he thought.

He purposely went near the trollies and watched the suitcases intently. He watched the edge of torn interlining at the corner of one of the suitcases.

He was back to where Shakeel was standing and asked him to wait for some more time.

Nothing happened, Baldev and Avinash were still there at the end of railing but not moving ahead to come somewhere near the taxi stand. Five minutes passed, ten minutes passed and then fifteen minutes passed. Akram and Shakeel were watching. They didn't move.

And suddenly, the four persons came from somewhere and escorted both Baldev and Avinash back inside the airport.

Things were clear. They had been caught.

## CHAPTER III

**I**NDEEVAR CAME OUT of washroom after having a disturbed sleep during the night. His phone was in silent mode. He picked up the phone. There were a number of missed calls from Vashisht. There was a message for him to call urgently. He called Vashisht.

“Hello”.

“Yes, sir, I was trying to contact you. A big problem has occurred. Both have been caught for smuggling gold”.

“No!” exclaimed Indeevar.

“Yes, sir, I had sent Akram and Shakeel. They informed me from the airport only”.

Indeevar didn't speak for a couple of minutes. He was listening to something unbelievable. It has never happened before. He was in gold business for the last twenty-four years.

“Tell me in detail”, he said.

“Sir, I don't have much detail. I had sent Akram and Shakeel to receive them at the airport and bring the passengers here to my place. Both of them came out of the airport after more than two hours. They were being followed by the customs staff. They perhaps wanted to apprehend Akram and Shakeel”.

“But Baldev and Avinash do not know Akram and Shakeel”.

“That's right. Customs officials were keeping a watch on them to see if somebody contacts them. But Akram was sensible. He noticed them standing there. After fifteen minutes, the officers escorted them back”.

“Akram and Shakeel are clear?”

“Yes, sir”.

“Can you imagine the loss?”

“Sir”.

“It cost me more than a hundred million Indian rupees”.

“What is to be done?”

“Who caught them?”

“Customs department”.

“I mean whether it is DRI people or Airport customs staff”.

“I am not sure but apparently local customs staff. DRI is not in the picture”.

“Arrange a lawyer for them. They have to be bailed out”.

Vashisht remained silent.

“There is a law firm in Bombay. They specialize in gold cases like this one”.

“Naidu and Naidu?”

“Yes. Talk to them”.

“Sir, but they are Bombay based and the help may be required at the Delhi court”.

“Just talk to them I have heard they have opened an office in Delhi also”.

“Okay”.

“And listen. Use some other mobile when you talk to me or talk to someone else”.

“I’ll do”.

Indeevar was surprised. It was a setback. He was known to be a perfectionist in the game. It had not happened before. Why now? Were the customs staff already aware? Or, was it just a chance? He was contemplating. Where did he get wrong? He had complete trust in his staff. They were with him for the last many years. He had made a lot of money in this business. He was least worried about the money. What was important for him was to find out the hole, or the mole.



Devyani was pulling the quilt from over her daughter.

“Get up, Anitha. It is already 8. I am going to school. Your breakfast is in the kitchen”.

“Okay, mom”, said Anitha.

“Be quick. Get up”, said Devyani, and she went out closing the door behind her.

This was a daily routine. After spending another five minutes in bed, Anitha got up, sat there on the bed and looked at her mobile phone. She started scanning WhatsApp messages. There was nothing worth. There were good mornings, wise quotations and jokes, which she would not even read. She prepared a nice cup of tea and again cuddled in the quilt sipping hot tea. She was thinking of changing the job. She joined this law firm because they were paying handsome amount but had not much work to do. There was no work for the last six months. Her phone rang. She

looked. It was Nitin.

“Hello”.

“Hello, good morning”, said Nitin.

“Good morning, Nitin”, said Anitha.

“Awakened?”

“Yeah, where are you?”

“On my way to the office”.

“Same routine”.

“Yes the same routine. Reporting time is 9 in the morning. No return time in the evening”.

“In the night”, she laughed.

“You are right, in the night”.

“Can we meet for lunch?”

“Not possible. You are aware of the schedule. We can have dinner”.

“That depends upon at what time you leave the office”.

“You took the right decision. Left this job and joined a new law firm. They are paying you double of what you were getting here”.

Anitha was earlier working with one of the top five known law firms of India. The pressure was too much. She used to leave early morning for office, which was in Gurgaon, a suburban area of Delhi. It used to take two hours to reach, and there was no time to return. She had even worked sometimes up to 12 o’clock in the night and again reported in the office the next morning at 9. It was too much. Her mom used to tell her many times that she was doing the job at the cost of her health and advised her to switch over to some other firm.

Anitha continued her conversation with Nitin:

“That’s okay but you know for the last six months, there is no work”, said Anitha.

“You mean they are paying you for not doing any work”.

“It is a reality. There are only two persons in the Delhi office. Bombay office, no doubt is a big one and there they have work also”.

“Then why did they open an office in Delhi? For giving you a fat salary”, Nitin laughed.

“I go daily, sit at the office and attend a few calls from the Bombay office. The petitions are normally prepared in Bombay and mailed to me. I take the printout, sign it and file here in the court, if the jurisdiction is Delhi. I do collect the papers here in Delhi sometimes and send these to Bombay, if the petition is to be filed in

Bombay”. She continued:

“And believe me I have not drafted any petition or appeal. I have not argued any case, since the time I joined here”.

“So it is sort of a collection centre”.

“You may call so”.

“But they are paying you”.

“I am getting bored, sitting whole day idle and having no work to do”.

“You are missing old office”, Nitin laughed.

“Let us stop talking; I am to get ready now, okay”.

“Okay”.

They disconnected.

Anitha belonged to Madurai, a town in South India. Her mother, Devyani, was a teacher at a school in Delhi. Her father had expired long time back. Anitha completed her law degree about four years ago. She got a campus placement and worked at earlier law firm for three and half years. Naidu and Naidu offered her a job at their Delhi office. There was one office boy, sort of a paralegal, with her in Delhi.

A small chamber was hired by Naidu and Naidu inside the court compound in Saket. Amit, the paralegal, was quite smart in handling the paperwork and had a good rapport with the officials at the registrar’s office and various court masters. Amit was also getting handsomely paid. Naidu and Naidu was Bombay-based law firm and was known to have expertise in gold cases. The firm was considered respectable and carried a good reputation in the legal fraternity.



Baldev and Avinash were arrested under the Customs Act. The charges were smuggling of gold into India. Both of them confessed in writing that they were carrying gold in a concealed manner. The 400 gold bars were seized and the *panchnama* was drawn in the presence of two witnesses. The gold was placed in two tin boxes, wrapped with white cloth and sealed with customs seal. The two tin boxes were later on deposited at customs godown located inside the airport premises itself.

V.S. Venkateshan, senior public prosecutor, was on his way to the court, when he got a call from Chandra, the assistant commissioner.

“Good morning, sir”, said Chandra.

“Yes, yes, good morning”, said Venkateshan.

“Sir, a big case, we arrested two passengers during the early morning. They were carrying 400 gold bars”.

“Each of 100 g”.

“Yes, sir”.

“That makes ...”

“Forty kilograms. And the value is around 12 crore rupees”, said Chandra.

“Indeed, a big one. Congratulations”.

“Both are to be produced before the magistrate today”.

“Yeah, bring them at 2 o’clock afternoon, as usual. Bring them to my chamber. Ask your staff to come to my cabin. My staff will first prepare the documents for judicial custody”.

“Right, sir”.

“Any follow-up arrest?” asked Venkateshan.

“No. None”.

“Who will be coming?”

“Sir, Manish and Swamy will come”.

They disconnected.

## CHAPTER IV

**I**NDEEVAR WAS SITTING in his office in Dubai. His office was located in Business Bay. He had come to Dubai in the early 1990s, when Dubai had started flourishing. A lot of construction activities were being done. A large number of labourers had been employed from Kerala for construction. Indeevar at that time was working as a supervisor in a manpower supplying company. Getting a resident visa at that time was not difficult. After working for two years in the manpower supplying company, he opened his own office for the supply of manpower. It started off well. He used to hire labourers from Kerala and supply to different contractors there in Dubai.

Soon he realized that trading of gold, import or export, is legally allowed in Dubai. It was sold in Dubai like any other consumer item. There was no doubt that the investment was much more, as compared to other items. Gold bars were openly sold in the shops in Dubai. Gold was in much demand in India. Initially, he started sending one bar or at the most two bars to his home town in Kerala through the persons returning to India. These were mostly construction workers who were always ready to carry such small quantity for a nominal amount. At that time, the gold rate in Dubai was 40 dirhams per gram. But he was definite that if he buys it at around 350 rupees per gram, it would sell in India at around 550 rupees per gram, which was a very good margin. He made it a practice. Wherever were the savings, he would send it to India in shape of gold bag and would earn a handsome amount. This gradually made him a trader of gold. He increased his net worth and would send gold bars to different countries, wherever the selling price was higher. His payments would be received only when the delivery at the other end was made.

This was a risk factor as far as the money part was concerned. It was for him to ensure that the delivery had to be made safely. He devised different ways to conceal the gold, if it was to be delivered to countries where it was prohibited. He had a core team of three/four persons, whom he could trust. And he had been successful.

Indeevar had a staff of nine persons. It was a well-organized business, which was all legal in Dubai.

Abu Hussain, a local insurance agent, came to meet Indeevar at his office. Indeevar had called him, before leaving for office.

“Good morning”, said Hussain.

“Yeah, good morning. I was waiting”, said Indeevar.

“Something serious? You are looking perturbed”.

“Our one consignment, a big one, has been caught today early morning at the Delhi airport”.

“Four hundred bars”, Hussain was aware of the recent consignment.

“Yeah, the same one”,

“No. Don’t tell me”,

“It’s true. I got a call from Vashisht. And it has been confirmed from other sources also”.

“It was more than 50 lakh dirhams”, said Hussain.

Indeevar nodded.

“It’s my loss. A big one”, said Hussain.

Abu Hussain was running an Insurance company, who had the business of insuring the consignments for the safe delivery of gold. It was not only for international trading but also for domestic transactions. The terms were simple. If the consignment was delivered, they would charge 1% of the value, and if it could not be delivered, they would pay 50% of the value. It was for this reason Indeevar had thought that it was better to talk to Hussain.

“It is our loss”, said Indeevar.

“It has never happened in the past”.

“Our bad luck”.

“Do you suspect some foul play?”

“No. I trust my staff. They are with me for last so many years. You know that”, said Indeevar.

“What about both the boys?”

“Arrested”.

“Any others got arrested?” asked Hussain.

“Not so far, as per Vashisht”.

“Tell Vashisht to be careful”.

“I’ve already told him”.

“Have you arranged a lawyer to bail them out?”

“I have asked Vashisht to talk to Naidu and Naidu”.

“Why don’t you talk to them directly? They may not entertain Vashisht. The commercial angle is to be seen by you”.



“You are right”, said Indeevar. He asked the receptionist to connect the call to Prakash Naidu in Bombay. After a couple of minutes, Prakash came on the phone line.

“Good morning, sir, I am Indeevar this side”.

“Hello, how are you?” said Prakash.

“I am fine, sir. Two of our boys have been arrested at the Delhi airport. See what can be done”.

“How much is it?”

“Four hundred pieces”.

“Forty kilograms?”

“Yes”.

“Big one”.

“Yeah. I will take care of the fee part. You just take over and move the bail application”.

“No issue. I will do. You send me the details of the persons who are arrested”.

“I am sending you the copy of their passports. You will get all the details”.

“Right”.

Indeevar disconnected the phone. Though his consignments had never been caught earlier, he had been instrumental in hiring services of Prakash Naidu for other persons, and Indeevar knew that there was no better person in India to handle the gold matters. He had met Prakash whenever he used to be in Dubai for personal or official trips.

Hussain shook hands and went out.



Prakash Naidu kept the phone and smiled. He was one of the partners at Naidu and Naidu, in fact, the founding partner. Another partner was his wife Indrani. Naidu and Naidu had four associates and four junior advocates at the Bombay office. They had one office in Trivandrum managed by one associate and two juniors. The office in Delhi had been recently opened with only one junior, Anitha. Prakash had made it a practice not to interact with juniors directly. The juniors were to report to the assigned associate. He called Kulkarni to his chamber. Kulkarni was one of the old associates and was respected well by all the staff members. He also carried a good reputation in his fraternity. He was a very humble and knowledgeable person.

“Sir”, said Kulkarni as he entered Prakash’s chamber.

“There is a case. Customs officials nabbed two passengers in Delhi, who were

coming from Dubai. They were carrying 40 kg of gold”.

“That much?” asked Kulkarni.

“Yes. The photocopies of both the arrested persons will be on mail. Take out the prints. Prepare the applications for bail and mail it to Anitha. Will she handle?”

“Yes, sir. Even otherwise no one is going to grant bail so early”.

“Minimum two months, you mean”.

“Yes, sir, unless the complaint is filed by customs. Anyway I will manage”.

“Okay”.

Kulkarni left Prakash’s chamber.



Baldev and Avinash were put up in a small lock-up inside the interrogation room. They were told that they had been put under arrest and would be taken to court at around 1 in the afternoon.

Manish and Swamy were to escort them to the court. All other officers of their shift had gone at 9 in the morning, and the new officers had taken over as usual. Chandra was staying in case of any eventuality. Moreover, he was to inform the chief who was yet to come. An additional commissioner was in charge of customs at airport. His duty hours started from 10 in the morning to 6 in the evening. Chandra had already informed the chief about the detection and seizure of 40 kg of gold on the telephone, but it was important to talk to him face-to-face.

Manish and Swamy were napping on the recliner-type chairs, after completing all documentary procedure.



Anitha had reached her office at the Saket court at around 10.30 A.M. Amit was already there, looking busy. Anitha sometimes wondered why he is always busy in spite of the fact that there is hardly any work. They greeted each other and Anitha settled down.

## CHAPTER V

**S**ATISH SRIVASTAVA AND GOPAL PRASAD were having a cup of tea in their office. Gopal Prasad was Additional Director General in DRI, an elite agency investigating economic offences. DRI had the all India jurisdiction. Satish Srivastava was Director General, the senior most officer of DRI. Satish Srivastava was in the habit of entering the room of his subordinates to have routine office talks. Satish Srivastava had a sip and asked:

“Anything new, Gopal?”

“You might have got the news”, said Gopal.

“What?”

“The Delhi customs have seized gold in large quantity in the early morning”.

“No, I am not aware”.

“Four hundred pieces”.

“Four hundred pieces. You mean 40 kg”, said Satish Srivastava widening his eyes.

“Yes, sir”.

“Nice catch”.

“Yes, sir. Two passengers have been arrested”.

“Was there some intelligence?”

“I was told that it was detected while screening”.

Satish Srivastava took another sip and said,

“Gopal, tell me when did DRI make such a big catch? When was it done last time? I don’t remember any such case in my tenure. I have been here for the last one year”.

“You are right, sir”. Gopal Prasad was getting the hint. DRI was supposed to be the first one to collect intelligence, having wide jurisdiction and having the finest infrastructure. They had made some minor cases in the past, and the persons sitting in the ministry kept questioning their ability.

“If such a big quantity has been found, this means gold is coming and if it is

coming, what are we doing? You understand what I mean”, said Satish Srivastava.

“Yes, sir”, said Gopal.

“You have the best of officers taken from all over the country. What are they doing?”

Gopal Prasad kept silent. This was expected.

“Sir, I will have a meeting with all SIOs today and motivate them”.

“I want results. We are all answerable, you know”.

“Yes, sir”.

Satish Srivastava finished his tea and left the room. As soon as he left the room, Vijay Singh, an SIO, entered his room.

“May I come in, sir?”

“Yes, Vijay”, said Gopal.

“Sir, you are looking annoyed”.

“DG was angry. He said we are all sitting idle doing nothing. And look Delhi customs got a good case. Are you aware?”

“Yes, sir. It is the talk of the town”.

“So, if they can, why can’t we. You know a sort of comparison starts”.

“Sir, was it information based?”

“I don’t know but have heard that it was detected during screening”.

“But as a matter of routine, they don’t screen the baggage of each passenger. It is not possible”.

“They might have picked the passengers randomly”.

“But that also requires some sort of profiling”, said Vijay.

Vijay Singh, a senior intelligence officer, was on deputation in Delhi DRI. He was instrumental in the deduction of various contrabands like drugs, armaments, gold, etc. He was good at gathering intelligence and was capable of working under great pressure.

Gopal Prasad told Vijay Singh to ask all SIOs to assemble in the conference room at 2.30 in the afternoon.



Chandra called Manish at around 11 A.M.

“I had talked to the chief. He is happy to have such a big case”, said Chandra.

“He must have informed the details to the commissioner”, said Manish.

“Yes. He was there only. He had gone to the commissioner’s office to talk to

him, and thereafter, he came here”.

“Sir, the commissioner must also be glad”.

“Yes. But he said that we have to investigate further”.

“Investigate further?”

“Yes. He says these two passengers are simply the carriers. Who is the kingpin? Who is the person to whom it was to be delivered? We have to find out that person. According to him, it is a mafia running a gold racket, and we have laid our hands on the carriers, who are just pawns in the game”.

“He is right. But it is always like this. The big ones ensure that no leads are left. It is difficult to track them, and it becomes more difficult to collect evidences against them”.

“In such a big case, question is always asked: who is behind the screen? If we cannot find out, then who will? It is part of our job”.

“Sir, we had taken both of them outside to see if somebody comes forward to talk to them. No one came”.

“I know that”, said Chandra.

“They do not know anything. They do not have any contact number. They do not know where they were to be taken. They only know the name of the person sitting in Dubai”.

“Manish, you have made a number of gold cases earlier. You have contacts. Someone may give a lead as to whom the consignment was meant for”.

“I can try but I am sure we will reach a dead end. Sir, you can ask Punjab customs to send teams at the residences of both the passengers as a follow-up”.

“I have already done that. The report will come in an hour or two”.



Vashisht got a message that Naidu and Naidu had been hired. He was told not talk to them. Vashisht was in the gold trade for the last about six years. He was working as a goldsmith somewhere in Gujarat and was in the making of jewellery. Many jewellers used to send the gold bars to him along with the design required. From there, he developed the contacts in jewellery trade. Carrying gold bars from one place to another was not only a risky job but also illegal. But money was involved. He would pool the money from various jewellers and would get the consignment, and the tendency was to dispose it off the same day, keeping a handsome margin. He was dealing with Indeevar as well as with other suppliers located in Dubai. Only once, in the past, he has been summoned and interrogated by DRI but nothing more. No evidence could be made against him. He knew that he was in the most

vulnerable position. Dealing with gold bars in Dubai is not illegal. People like Indeevar could do it openly but here in India, it was illegal. He was dealing in a contraband item as per the Indian laws. He was aware. He had to be more cautious.

Neither he was interested in engaging lawyers nor in making payments to them. He knew he could be tracked. The technology these days had made the tracking easier. So, when he got the message that Naidu and Naidu had been hired, he was relieved. He had already asked Akram and Shakeel to go out of town and not to be back unless told.



Hussain was back at his office. He was doing the business of insuring the gold consignments for a long time. The best part of gold trade was that the persons are honest. There is no written agreement with any of the clients. All dealings were verbal. So far, it was one-way traffic. Money was coming in, in the form of premium, and there was no outward flow. This time, it would happen. He made calculations. If the consignment was worth 5 lakh dirhams, he would have to part with 2.5 lakh dirhams. It was a shock. He perhaps realized the risk for the first time. You were happy when money was pouring in but then, the business of insurance meant to cover the risk. He would have to cover the same. He thought over it and decided that he would take about ten days' time from Indeevar for making the payment. He had to make the payments. It was a deal.

## CHAPTER VI

**A**NITHA'S MOBILE RANG. She looked. "Kulkarni Sir" displayed on the screen. She immediately picked the phone.

"Good morning, sir", she said.

"Good morning. Are you at office?"

"Yes, sir".

"Okay, listen carefully. There is a job for you", said Kulkarni. Kulkarni went on briefing the case to her. She kept on listening. He took about fifteen minutes to give her the details related to the arrest of Baldev and Avinash. He finally said:

"I am sending you the bail applications. Take out the prints. Go through the same".

"Okay, sir".

"And get ready the *vakalatnamas*. You can get the particulars of the accused from the bail applications".

"I'll do that".

"Find out who is the public prosecutor. They normally produce the accused before the court in the afternoon. Get the exact timings and in whose court, they will be produced. Probably in the court of CMM, Bhushan Kumar. All customs cases are listed before him. Be there on time".

"I will manage, sir".

"I think you will. You are an intelligent girl. You know what to do today".

"Yes, sir. I have to ask for copies of all documents once the bail applications are moved. I know it is not easy to have the bail at this stage and that too for such a big case".

"Smart girl. Try to talk to both the accused. If the statements have been recorded under pressure, ask them to retract the same before the magistrate".

"Okay, sir", said Anitha.

"All the best. Let's see how you handle it", said Kulkarni and disconnected.

Anitha was visibly excited. In the last six months, for the first time, there was a

work, work in a real sense. She had appeared before the courts in the earlier job as an assistant to some senior. She had appeared here in this job as a proxy or for seeking adjournments, but she never made the pleadings independently. “There is always a first time”, she thought.

Amit had taken the printouts of bail applications, which were nicely drafted. She arranged the papers in proper sequence, stapled those and asked Amit to put these nicely in a file. Amit gave her a file cover bearing “Naidu and Naidu”. She wrote down the names of the accused vs. Customs. She looked at the file cover and smiled. This was her first break through.

“Amit, who is the public prosecutor from the customs side?”

“Madam, there are four on the panel. I’ll have to find out who is handling the matter”.

“Go and find out. Also, check at what time they are bringing the accused”.

“Who is bringing whom, ma’am?”

“The customs have arrested two persons named...”. She looked at bail papers, “Baldev Singh and Avinash Sharma. Their officers are bringing them here to the court for production before the CMM”.

Amit left the cabin. Anitha went through the bail applications standard language. She had seen such applications earlier. The magistrate in lower courts normally did not grant bail easily. It’s a notion. But this ritual was necessary because once the bail was rejected, only then one can move the appeal before session or high court. Judicial hierarchy had to be followed.



Chandra told Manish and Swamy that the report from Punjab Customs had come. Both Baldev and Avinash belong to poor family. Their family members didn’t even know that they were coming to India. Their homes had been searched. But there was nothing significant to report. Manish said:

“Sir, I knew it is a dead end”.

“Anyway, we’ll check the CCTV footage just outside the exit gate. To see if there was any suspicious person”.

“Yeah sir, we may try”.

“We have to make efforts. The chief must know that we are making efforts”.

“Sir, the news is already spread. Maybe someone from the trade comes forward with some sort of information. There is always hope”, said Manish.

“We are not closing the file. We’ll make efforts and put up all details of such efforts in the file”.



“Yes, sir”.

“Okay. I’m going home. You and Swamy will manage the court routine”.

“No problem, sir”.

Chandra left. It was already 1 o’clock. They were to go to the court.



V.S. Venkateshan along with one junior was there in the court of CMM. Manish and Swamy were standing at the right side of the desk of CMM. Baldev and Avinash were standing with them. Mr. Bhushan Kumar, CMM, was attending some part-heard matters.

Anitha had obtained the signatures of both the accused on the *vakalatnama* or power of attorney or letter of engagement. She had prepared a list of documents that she required. She was standing there on the left side of the CMM’s desk, carrying the file. She was looking at the list of documents. These were:

- (a) *Panchnama*
- (b) Statements of the accused
- (c) Copies of passport
- (d) Arrest memo
- (e) Details of goods recovered from pockets
- (f) Copies of the boarding pass
- (g) Customs declaration forms
- (h) Baggage tags

The last document, i.e. baggage tags, was added by Amit, who was her paralegal.

“Yes, Mr. Venkateshan”, said Mr. Bhushan Kumar.

“Lordship, here are the applications for judicial custody”. Venkateshan got up and came in front of Bhushan Kumar.

“What is the matter?”

“Here are two accused: Baldev Singh and Avinash Sharma. I will be brief, lordship”, said Venkateshan. He narrated the sequence of events, the detection and seizure of four hundred gold bars that lead to their arrest.

“Lordship, the applications are for seeking judicial remand of both the persons for fourteen days”.

“Is your investigation complete?” asked Bhushan Kumar.

“Some follow-up action is required and if these persons are at large, there is a possibility that they may go back to Dubai or they may tamper with the evidence”, said Venkateshan.

Bhushan Kumar looked at Baldev and Avinash, and asked:

“What’s your name?”

“Sir, I am Baldev Singh”.

“And you?”

“Sir, I am Avinash Sharma”, said Avinash.

“You agree to what the prosecution is saying. You brought the gold concealed in suitcases”.

“Yes, sir”, said Baldev.

Anitha was looking at both of them. They were admitting before the magistrate. There was no scope of retraction.

“Who is your lawyer? Have you hired someone?” asked Bhushan Kumar.

Anitha came forward, placed the *vakalatnama* before the magistrate and announced:

“Lordship, I am representing both of them”.

“Never seen you before, in my court”, said Bhushan Kumar.

“Yes, lordship. I am appearing in this court for the first time”, said Anitha. She placed the bail applications before him and said:

“Your lordship, I am moving bail applications on behalf of both. And here is a list of documents I may need. The prosecution may be asked to supply one set of documents”.

Venkateshan signalled his junior to give one set of documents to Anitha. Anitha went through the documents and pointed out:

“Sir, the baggage tags are not there. I will need copies of baggage tags also”.

The junior whispered to Venkateshan, and he said:

“The baggage tags are not there”.

“Not there?” asked Anitha surprisingly.

“What I mean, the customs staff had not brought that. It will be handed over to you”, said Venkateshan.

Bhushan Kumar, who was sitting and listening to them, said to Anitha:

“What is the significance of baggage tags?” His tone was like a teacher asking his student a question during an examination.

“Lordship, the recovery is alleged to be made from suitcases. The fact that

suitcases belong to them can be verified only on the basis of baggage tags”, answered Anitha.

Bhushan Kumar smiled at Venkateshan and said:

“You provide her the copies of all baggage tags”.

He looked at the table calendar and fixed up the hearing on bail application for Monday, at 12 o’clock. Anitha bowed and came out. Venkateshan’s junior Raman, Manish and Swamy handed over the custody of Baldev and Avinash to police personnel present there, who would take them to a local prison. It was a relief for Manish and Swamy. They had not slept at night, and the day had also passed in completing all these post-arrest formalities.



Anitha was back in her cabin. Amit was there. He looked at her and smiled:

“What will you have, tea or coffee?”

“How do you know, I need it?”

“It is written on your face”, said Amit.

“Oh. Please get me a good coffee”.

“And Madam, there was a call for you on office telephone. Some man wanted to talk to you. I told him, you are in the court. He took your mobile number”.

“No problem. He didn’t tell the name”.

“No. He said he will contact”.

“Okay, now get me coffee and till that time, I will prepare a mail to be sent to Kulkarni sir”.

Amit left and Anitha settled down with her laptop.

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