

Prologue

The pot-bellied cop pushed me roughly into the tiny 8' X 10' cell. The cell door shut behind me with an ominous clang. There were eight people crowded into the small, stinking cell. In one corner, a young man was sprawled in drug or alcohol induced sleep. His expensive attire was stained and rumpled. He had apparently thrown up sometime in the night and he was sleeping in his putrid vomit. The rest of the detainees were crowding as far away as they could from that corner in a futile bid to escape the stench. The walls of the cell were covered with red blobs of betel juice expectorant. The cell did not have any windows and the light bulb was fused. The only light came from the blinking tube-light in the corridor.

Mahatma Gandhi—a grandfatherly man with a benign, toothless smile—looked on from a framed picture that hung on the wall. In the blinking light, it appeared that Gandhi was winking wickedly in incongruous contrast to the beatific smile.

I wondered what I had gotten myself into. It had been barely thirty-six hours since I landed in India; and here I was—hailed into the police station on charges of assault and battery. The whole experience was surreal. In a daze, I squatted in the cell pondering over the power that money and influence apparently wielded in India.

Pandurang Ghosalkar, the cop that arrested me, had taken off his shirt to beat the heat and was napping at his desk—his belt unbuckled and his dirty vest drenched with sweat. The fan panted piteously and ineffectively over his head. It was still morning but the day was already very hot and humid.

Gradually, anger and frustration replaced my sense of helplessness. I was the victim here and, instead of doing their job and arresting the culprits, the cops were hounding and harassing me.

“Hey,” I bellowed as loud as I could, “I demand to speak to the American Consulate.” Several minutes of stentorian yelling had the desired effect. His nap disturbed, Ghosalkar angrily charged to the cell.

“*Madarchod* why you are shouting and disturbing?” he demanded furiously.

“I demand to speak to the American Consulate and my lawyer,” I said.

“This is India, not Amrika,” he said, “I can hold you for 24 hours before producing in front of the magistrate. You will get lawyer only at that time.”

“The law requires you to inform the American Consulate immediately,” I insisted.

Ghosalkar laughed, "You are American? Then show me your passport."

I handed my passport to him through the cell door. He pocketed it with a supercilious smirk. "You Amrikans think you are the ruler of the world. You think you are very smart, huh? You are helping Pakistan and they are screwing you like anything from behind. Now I will destroy your passport. Let me see what you can do about it. *Ben-chod*, you are teaching me the law. You are teaching to Pandurang Ghosalkar! I will charge you with drug trafficking. You will rot in prison for half your fucking life. Now shut up and sit down. If you disturb again, I will beat the shit out of you."

Ghosalkar walked back to his desk to resume his nap.

An elderly man who was in the cell tugged at my trousers motioning me to sit down. I squatted next to him. "Son, it is no use. These people do what they want. They are a law unto themselves. Only if you have more money and influence than the people who have complained against you, will you be able to get away. Take my case; I own two small flats nearby. I live in one but the other is empty- I just have some things stored there. I had purchased it for my daughter but she moved to London some years back. I was in London with my daughter for 6 months. When I came back, I found someone else occupying the empty flat. He has some forged documents saying that my daughter sold him the flat. I brought the man here with me to lodge a complaint. When I came here, I realized the man occupying my house is the brother of a retired policeman. The police took a bribe from him and detained me instead. They offered the culprit tea and biscuits and put me here."

I remained silent. The old man continued, "This man Ghosalkar is the worst of the lot. Even his colleagues make fun of him behind his back- calling him *Ghoos*-alkar. *Ghoos* means bribe in Hindi. Others call him *Gho*-salkar. *Gho* means shit in Marathi. I tell you, this country was much better under British rule."

I forgot my troubles for a moment, "What will happen to you now?"

The old man was livid. "One thing is certain. I will give them a fight of their lives. Otherwise my name is not Tony Braganza. What the end-result will be I don't know. But I will fight as long as I am alive. I am not scared of prison. I fought for my country's independence and was jailed several times by the British and the Portuguese. I have even received a Freedom Fighter's certificate from the government to honor my efforts. I will fight until my last breath."

After a moment's silence, he calmed down and asked me with unbridled curiosity, "Forget about the troubles of an old man. My name is Tony Braganza. What is your name? Why you are here man?"