

# Sherlock Holmes and the Bujagotamma Diamond

by  
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"So, Watson, what do you know of the Bujagotamma diamond?"

I considered the question at length before answering.

"It belonged to Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam, a temple town close to Trichy, from which the famous Trichinopoly cigars come. It was one of the diamonds in His crown. It has the impression of a snake on it, which gave it its name."

"Really?" asked Holmes.

"Yes." I understandably felt smug. After all, it is not every day that I could show off my knowledge to Holmes.

"Pray, continue," said Holmes with a mischievous glint in his eye. He looked tired--he was out on a case and said that he had returned only around 3 AM--but as always, he had shaved before breakfast.

"Bujagotamma is one of the thousand names of Lord Vishnu, one of the Trinity of Hindu Gods. It means one who rules those without limbs and refers to snakes. Vishnu reclines on Adi Sessa, the snake with a thousand hoods. This is one of the reasons why he has this name. Ranganatha is one of the forms of Vishnu."

"Really, Watson, I think that we no longer need to keep the Hindu encyclopaedia. You know the subject so well!"

I couldn't tell if Holmes was joking, so I ignored the comment and continued.

"Since India is a part of the British Empire, this stone was forcibly taken from the temple. It is now being displayed at the London Museum. The diamond will soon be set in a crown that will be worn by the Queen."

Holmes looked displeased.

"What is worn by the Gods should remain with Them, Watson."

I was amazed that Holmes was taking such a stance.

"Surely, Holmes, don't tell me that you have started believing in the false Gods of the Hindus?"

"Watson, just as we feel that our God is dear to us, we should also respect the fact that other races too are fond of their Gods."

"And in any case," continued Holmes before I could interrupt him, "we have no right to take costly gems away from the Hindus under the specious garb of disbelief in their religion."

"Well, be it as it may, we now own the diamond. I want to request you to stroll with me to the London Museum later today so that we can have a look at the diamond."

"Well, actually..."

"No ifs or buts, Holmes," I said rather severely. "We are going there today, and that is that."

Before Holmes could reply, the door burst open and a rather overweight gentleman staggered in, followed by Inspector Lestrade.

"I'm ruined!" gasped the fat man before collapsing on the sofa. Holmes and I leapt to our feet and I reached for the brandy bottle and poured him a generous helping. A quick swig bought some colour to his cheeks.

"What's the matter, Lestrade?" asked Holmes, knowing that the inspector would supply the details of the case far quicker than the other man, who was still recovering his breath.

"This is Lord Dixon, who heads the London Museum. Yesterday night, the Bujagotamma diamond was stolen and since then, this man has been mad with grief. That is why I brought him here."

Holmes sat in his favourite chair, relit his pipe and asked, "Any suspects?"

"There are two guards, Mr Holmes," said Lord Dixon, who had regained his breath and wits somewhat. "Fraser and Hayward. Highly dependable men. They have both been with the museum for over twenty years."

"Let's go to the museum. I want to question them," said Holmes.

Lestrade hailed a Hansom and we were soon driving towards the Museum.

On the way, Holmes insisted on stopping at No. 3 Pinchin Lane, down near the water's edge at Lambeth to meet Sherman and pick up Toby, the dog who had helped us in *The Sign of Four*.

We took Toby and went to the museum.

Both the guards, Fraser and Hayward, looked at us apprehensively. They knew that if the diamond was not found soon, news of its disappearance would spread quickly and become a blot on their escutcheons.

"Here, boy," Holmes told Toby and as the dog approached, Holmes lifted it and held it so that it could sniff at the case that had held the Bujagotamma diamond.

Toby took a few eager sniffs and yelped in excitement.

"Good boy. Now, find the thief," said Holmes, putting Toby down.

Toby, instead of dashing off in pursuit of the thief, did something funny.

He started sniffing at Holmes.

"He seems to think that you are the thief, Holmes," laughed Lestrade.

"Very funny, Lestrade. I prefer to believe that Toby is more interested in showing his affection for me rather than in catching the thief."

"What should we do?" moaned Lord Dixon, wringing his hands in agony.

Holmes smiled. "Since I seem to be a source of distraction for Toby, I would recommend that Watson and

Lestrade should take him outside. The rest of us can wait here."

We did what Holmes suggested.

While walking around the building, Toby gave a yelp of delight and rushed towards the compound wall.

The ground showed no footprints, but we found something better.

The missing Bujagotamma diamond was lying in a corner hidden under a few small potted plants placed near the compound wall to add a bit of greenery to the otherwise forbidding exterior of the museum.

"Great! We have solved the case!" exclaimed Lestrade.

"Well, we didn't do anything. All the credit has to go to Toby here," I pointed out.

Lestrade gave me a sour look. "True, Toby found the gem. But you need an astute mind like Holmes' or mine to decipher what has happened."

"So, what do your deductions tell you?" I asked.

"Elementary, my dear Watson," said Lestrade. "The thief left by clambering over the wall. While doing so, the diamond evidently fell from his pocket."

"But we still need to solve many things. Who was the thief? How did he get in?"

"Who cares?" countered Lestrade. "We have recovered the diamond. Now, let's get back to the others."

The moment we entered the room, Lestrade took centre stage.

Often, he had been forced to stumble along while Holmes' genius solved the case.

But now, with the Bujagotamma diamond firmly in his grasp, he discussed his theory of how the thief had dropped the diamond and how he, Lestrade, driven by his usual intelligence, sagacity and shrewdness had saved the day.

The only thing that irked Lestrade was the fact that his glory would never become public--this would cause the establishment to lose face.

But Lord Dixon said that he had friends in high places and would ensure that Lestrade would be warmly regarded and even perhaps promoted for his contributions to the Empire.

If Holmes was upset by the fact that he had played no part in the whole episode, he didn't show it.

He was quite cheerful when we returned to our rooms in Baker Street.

The next day, as expected, there was no mention of the gem in the papers.

Evidently, the powers that be would have felt that it was not appropriate to discuss the issue, especially since certain sections of the media were criticising the Empire for being too free in taking precious and ancient art objects from other countries.

That day, shortly after breakfast, we had a visitor from India.

He wore religious marks over his forehead--what they call a 'naamam' in India--and he greeted Holmes with a traditional Indian 'namaste' by

pressing the palms of his hands in front of his chest.

Holmes greeted him in similar fashion and introduced him to me as Srinivasan Singaperumal, a priest from Srirangam.

"I came the moment I got your telegram. You have it, Mr Holmes?" Singaperumal spoke with a marked accent, but his English was flawless.

Without a word, Holmes handed over a small package to Singaperumal, who accepted it reverentially.

He opened it and revealed a sparkling diamond.

I have personally seen diamonds that are larger and brighter, but this particular stone had a small snake-like image embedded in the centre, which made it unique.

"Thank you, Mr Holmes. You have helped to restore the Bujagotamma diamond to its rightful owner, Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam."

"But Holmes! I don't understand! If this is the Bujagotamma diamond, what was the gem that Lestrade found yesterday? And how did this stone come in your possession?" I asked, confused.

Holmes laughed. "My dear Watson, some time back Mr Singaperumal approached me and requested me to help him. He said that for centuries, the Bujagotamma diamond was worn by Ranganatha. He said that it was wrong to take this gem away from Lord Ranganatha and asked me to help him get it back. That is why I broke into the museum to steal the Bujagotamma diamond."

"So, the gem that Lestrade found was fake?"

"Yes. Singaperumal said that his spies got word of the plan to forcibly take this diamond from them many months ago. When he told me about it then--we have known each other for many years--I told him to create a replica of it. Singaperumal gave this to me a few days ago and I dropped it near the compound wall, where Lestrade found it."

"But if you had a replica, why didn't you hide the original in India while the British tried to take it away from you?"

"Because, Dr Watson, we feared that if the British detected the forgery then, they would redouble their efforts to find the original. And once they found out, we would have been helpless. No, the best strategy for us was to let them steal the original, and then have somebody like Mr Holmes switch it for us," said Singaperumal.

"Then why create the furore? Holmes could have swapped the stone quietly when he broke into the museum and nobody need have known," I pointed out.

Holmes laughed. "Even now, Watson, nobody knows. If Lestrade had any deductive powers, he would have surmised that the reason why Toby was jumping all over me was because he had detected that I was the thief. We did all this so that we could involve the authorities. If I had swapped the stone silently and somebody had detected the swap at a later date, a hue and cry would have been raised. But now, since Lord Dixon and Lestrade are indirectly involved, you can be sure that if any suspicions are ever raised, they will

try to bury them to protect their own reputations."

"But Holmes! Haven't you, by stealing the diamond become an enemy of the Crown?"

Holmes seemed irritated by this question.

"Watson, I have been reading a lot of books on Hinduism that Singaperumal has gifted me. These books have bestowed upon me the ability to see beyond the obvious."

Before I could interrupt, Holmes continued, "I believe that the way to be a true Christian, Hindu or Muslim is to be true to your religion, while assimilating ideas from other religions. I consider myself to be a true Christian because I have learnt from Hinduism. Similarly, I think of Singaperumal as a true Hindu because he has learnt elements of Christianity that he says have made him a better Hindu."

"One of the books I have read is the Srimad Bhagavatam. In this book, in 7.5.3, it is said that the great child devotee Prahlada disliked the concept of politics because political philosophy involves considering someone a friend and someone else an enemy. Prahlada saw God in everybody and everything and so did not want to consider anybody as his enemy."

"Similarly, Watson, I try to ensure that I do not treat anybody as an enemy. I have not become an enemy of the Crown by this act. I have merely returned to Lord Ranganatha what is His, that is all."

Mr Singaperumal added, "Dr Watson, one of the things that Mr Holmes has learnt from his study of other

religions is the ability to respect the views of others without necessarily subscribing to them. For example, we believe that the Bujagotamma diamond represents Adi Sesha, which translates to the first servant. Adi Sesha thinks of Himself as the first servant of Vishnu. It is a belief among our people that if Adi Sesha is forced to associate with anybody else, He will be furious and this will result in great calamity. I don't know if your

friend Mr Holmes subscribes to this belief, but he has respected this belief of ours and has returned the diamond to us, for which we are eternally grateful."

"But what use is it to you, Mr Singaperumal? You cannot adore your Lord Ranganatha with it. If you do so, the British will find out and take it away from you."

Before Mr Singaperumal could answer, Holmes said, "The diamond will be hidden in India for the time being, Watson. One of these days, the sun will set over the British Empire in India. When the British rule in India ends, I'm sure that the Bujagotamma diamond can be officially returned to Lord Ranganatha, the rightful owner."