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Date: 25.06.2025

Delhi HC Orders Release of Detained Gold as Personal Effects Under Baggage Rules

Case Background

In a significant judgment, the Delhi High Court has quashed the detention of personal gold jewellery belonging to an Indian resident travelling from Dubai. The petitioner was intercepted by Customs officers at IGI Airport, New Delhi on 26th December 2023, while wearing:

- 80 grams gold chain
- 150 grams gold kada

These items were detained, and an Order-in-Original was passed without issuing a proper Show Cause Notice, later partially upheld by the Appellate Authority with conditions of customs duty, redemption fine, and penalty.

High Court's Observations

The Court decisively held that the detained articles were used personal effects, protected under the Baggage Rules, 2016, and their detention was:

“Contrary to law and violative of the passenger’s rights under the Customs Act.”

Key highlights:

- Used personal jewellery worn by the passenger qualifies as “personal effects” under Rule 2(vi) read with Rule 3 of the Baggage Rules.

- Customs cannot mechanically detain such items merely because they are gold.
- The Court relied on established precedents including:
 - **DRI v. Pushpa Lekhumal Tolani** (2017) 16 SCC 93 (SC)
 - **Saba Simran v. UOI** (2024:DHC:9155-DB)
 - **Mr. Makhinder Chopra v. Commissioner of Customs** (2025:DHC:1162-DB)

Legal Principles Affirmed

1. **Personal Jewellery Dutiable Goods:** If jewellery is worn and part of the passenger's personal use, it does not attract duty or seizure under Baggage Rules.
2. **Detention Without Show Cause is Illegal:** No show cause notice was issued within the statutory time limits under Section 110 of the Customs Act, making the continued detention invalid.
3. **Used Jewellery New Import:** Courts reiterated that used personal effects, even if gold, are not to be equated with fresh commercial imports.

Court's Direction

- The impugned orders were set aside.
- The detained jewellery was ordered to be released within four weeks, subject to verification.
- The Petitioner was allowed to authorize a representative to collect the goods.
- Storage charges to be borne by the Petitioner.

Implications for Travelers

- Indian or foreign residents carrying used gold jewellery need not fear unlawful seizure.
- Customs officials must conduct individualized assessments, not blanket detentions.
- Jewellery worn on person is protected under the concept of personal effects, even if valuable.
- The onus is on the authorities to prove intent to import or smuggle.

Conclusion

This ruling reaffirms the principle that Customs enforcement must be reasonable, lawful, and proportionate. Travellers with legitimate personal jewellery worn on their person cannot be penalized or subjected to mechanical seizures under the guise of Baggage Rule violations.

This Article has been written by Shri Ravi Shekhar Jha, Advocate Delhi High Court based on his interpretation of the law. He can be reached at his email id intelconsul@gmail.com or on his Mobile +91-9999005379.

Source: Delhi High Court

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* **IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI**

Date of Decision: 21st May, 2025

+ **W.P.(C) 6707/2025**

MANAN KARAN SHARMA

.....Petitioner

Through: Ms. Richa Kumari, Advocate.

versus

COMMISSIONER OF CUSTOMS

.....Respondent

Through: Ms. Anushree Narain, Advocate.

CORAM:

JUSTICE PRATHIBA M. SINGH

JUSTICE RAJNEESH KUMAR GUPTA

Prathiba M. Singh, J. (Oral)

1. This hearing has been done through hybrid mode.
2. The present writ petition has been filed under Articles 226 and 227 of the Constitution of India, *inter alia*, challenging the impugned Order-in-Original dated 11th March, 2024 and the impugned Order-in-Appeal dated 28th October, 2024 (hereinafter collectively "*the impugned orders*"). The Petitioner has also prayed for release and re-export of gold jewellery detained by the Customs Department *vide* Detention Receipt (old) dated 26th December, 2023.
3. The case of the Petitioner is that he is an Indian passport holder and a resident of the United Arab Emirates. It is stated that the Petitioner was travelling from Dubai to India on 26th December, 2023 and upon landing at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi, he was intercepted by the



Customs Department. The Petitioner is stated to have been wearing a gold chain of 80 grams and a gold *kada* of 150 grams (hereinafter “*the detained goods*”), which were seized by the Customs Department.

4. The Petitioner is aggrieved by the fact that no show cause notice had been issued and the impugned Order-in-Original was passed, which was challenged in appeal by the Petitioner. *Vide* the impugned Order-in-Appeal the Commissioner of Customs (Appeals) has allowed release of the detained goods, subject to payment of custom duty along with redemption fine and penalty in the following terms:

ORDER

6.0 In light of discussions and findings as above, I allow the appeal partially against OIO No.1289/003390/26-12-2023/WH/2023-24 dated 11-03-2024 passed by the Joint Commissioner of Customs, T-3, IGI Airport, New Delhi and order that the impugned goods “(I) One gold chain having purity 999, weight 80 grams, valued at Rs.4,77,794/- (II) One gold kada having purity 999, weight 150 grams, valued at Rs.8,95,863/- (Total value Rs. 13,73,657) be released after payment of redemption fine in total of Rs. 1,40,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Forty Thousand Only) under Section 125 of the Customs Act, 1962 along with applicable duty. The penalty under Section 112(a) and 112(b) of the Customs Act, 1962 is upheld to Rs. 1,30,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Thirty Thousand Only). The Appeal is disposed with such modifications and consequential relief as above.”

5. Heard the Id. Counsels for the parties. The Court has also perused the documents placed on record, including the photographs of the Petitioner wearing the detained goods. In the opinion of the Court, having considered the facts of the case and the documents placed on record, the detained goods clearly appear to be used personal gold items of the Petitioner.



6. In terms of Rule 2(vi) read with Rule 3 of the Baggage Rules, 2016 (hereinafter “*the Rules*”) the Petitioner would be permitted clearance of articles, free of duty in his bona fide baggage, including used personal effects. The relevant provisions of the Rules are extracted hereunder:

“2(vi) “Personal effects” means things required for satisfying daily necessities but does not include jewellery.

* * * *

3. Passenger arriving from countries other than Nepal, Bhutan or Myanmar:- An Indian resident or a foreigner residing in India or a tourist of Indian origin, not being an infant arriving from any country other than Nepal, Bhutan or Myanmar, shall be allowed clearance free of duty articles in his bona fide baggage, that is to say, -
(a) used personal effects and travel souvenirs; and
(b) articles other than those mentioned in Annexure-I, up to the value of fifty thousand rupees if these are carried on the person or in the accompanied baggage of the passenger:

Provided that a tourist of foreign origin, not being an infant, shall be allowed clearance free of duty articles in his bona fide baggage, that is to say, (a) used personal effects and travel souvenirs; and (b) articles other than those mentioned in Annexure- I, up to the value of fifteen thousand rupees if these are carried on the person or in the accompanied baggage of the passenger:

Provided further that where the passenger is an infant, only used personal effects shall be allowed duty free.
Explanation.- The free allowance of a passenger under this rule shall not be allowed to pool with the free allowance of any other passenger.

* * * *



5. *Jewellery.- A passenger residing abroad for more than one year, or return to India, shall be allowed clearance free of duty in his bona fide baggage of jewellery upto a weight, of twenty grams with a value cap of fifty thousands rupees if brought by a gentleman passenger, or forty grams with a value cap of one lakh rupees if brought by a lady passenger.*

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ANNEXURE-I
(See Rules 3, 4 and 6)

1. *Fire arms.*
2. *Cartridges of fire arms exceeding 50.*
3. *Cigarettes exceeding 100 sticks or cigars exceeding 25 or tobacco exceeding 125 gms.*
4. *Alcoholic liquor or wines in excess of two litres.*
5. **Gold or silver in any form other than ornaments.**
6. *Flat Panel (Liquid Crystal Display/Light-Emitting Diode/Plasma) television.”*

7. The issue whether gold jewellery worn by a passenger would fall within the ambit of personal effects under the Rules, has now been settled by various decisions of the Supreme Court as also this Court. The Supreme Court in ***Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and Ors. v. Pushpa Lekhumal Tolani, (2017) 16 SCC 93***, while considering the relevant provisions of the Customs Act, 1962 (hereinafter “*the Act*”) read with the Baggage Rules, 1998, that were in force during the relevant period, held that it is not permissible to completely exclude jewellery from the ambit of ‘personal effects’. The relevant paragraphs of the said order read as under:



“13. Insofar as the question of violation of the provisions of the Act is concerned, we are of the opinion that the respondent herein did not violate the provisions of Section 77 of the Act since the necessary declaration was made by the respondent while passing through the green channel. Such declarations are deemed to be implicit and devised with a view to facilitate expeditious and smooth clearance of the passenger. Further, as per the International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonisation of Customs Procedures (Kyoto 18-5-1973), a passenger going through the green channel is itself a declaration that he has no dutiable or prohibited articles. **Further, a harmonious reading of Rule 7 of the Baggage Rules, 1998 read with Appendix E (2) (quoted above), the respondent was not carrying any dutiable goods because the goods were the bona fide jewellery of the respondent for her personal use and was intended to be taken out of India.** Also, with regard to the proximity of purchase of jewellery, all the jewellery was not purchased a few days before the departure of the respondent from UK, a large number of items had been in use for a long period. It did not make any difference whether the jewellery is new or used. There is also no relevance of the argument that since all the jewellery is to be taken out of India, it was, therefore, deliberately brought to India for taking it to Singapore. **Foreign tourists are allowed to bring into India jewellery even of substantial value provided it is meant to be taken out of India with them and it is a prerequisite at the time of making endorsements on the passport. Therefore, bringing jewellery into India for taking it out with the passenger is permissible and is not liable to any import duty.**

* * * *

15. [...] Also, from the present facts and circumstances of the case, it cannot be inferred that the jewellery was meant for import into India on the basis of return ticket which



*was found to be in the possession of the respondent. Moreover, we cannot ignore the contention of the respondent that her parents at the relevant time were in Indonesia and she had plans of proceeding to Indonesia. Some of the jewellery items purchased by the respondent were for her personal use and some were intended to be left with her parents in Indonesia. The High Court has rightly held that when she brought jewellery of a huge amount into the country, the respondent did not seem to have the intention to smuggle the jewellery into India and to sell it off. Even on the examination of the jewellery for costing purposes, it has come out to be of Rs 25 lakhs and not Rs 1.27 crores as per DRI. **The High Court was right in holding that it is not the intention of the Board to verify the newness of every product which a traveller brings with him as his personal effect. It is quite reasonable that a traveller may make purchases of his personal effects before embarking on a tour to India. It could be of any personal effect including jewellery. Therefore, its newness is of no consequence. The expression “new goods” in their original packing has to be understood in a pragmatic way.***

8. In *Saba Simran v. Union of India & Ors.*, 2024:DHC:9155-DB, the Division Bench of this Court was seized with the issue of deciding the validity of the seizure of gold jewellery by the Customs Department from an Indian tourist. The relevant paragraphs of the said judgement are as under:

*“15. The expression ‘jewellery’ as it appears in Rule 2(vi) would thus have to be construed as inclusive of articles newly acquired as opposed to used personal articles of jewellery which may have been borne on the person while exiting the country or carried in its baggage. **Thus, personal jewellery which is not found to have been acquired on an overseas trip and was always a used***



personal effect of the passenger would not be subject to the monetary prescriptions incorporated in Rules 3 and 4 of the 2016 Rules.

*16. This clearly appeals to reason bearing in mind the understanding of the respondents themselves and which was explained and highlighted in the clarificatory Circular referred to above. That Circular had come to be issued at a time when the Appendices to the 1998 Rules had employed the phrase “used personal effects, excluding jewellery”. **The clarification is thus liable to be appreciated in the aforesaid light and the statutory position as enunciated by the respondents themselves requiring the customs officers to bear a distinction between “personal jewellery” and the word “jewellery” when used on its own and as it appears in the Appendices. This position, in our considered opinion, would continue to endure and remain unimpacted by the provisions contained in the 2016 Rules.**”*

9. This Court in *Mr Makhinder Chopra vs. Commissioner Of Customs New Delhi, 2025:DHC:1162-DB*, had the occasion to consider the relevant provisions of the Rules, as also the decisions of the Supreme Court and this Court. After analysing the same, this Court held as under:

“17. A conspectus of the above decisions and provisions would lead to the conclusion that jewellery that is bona fide in personal use by the tourist would not be excluded from the ambit of personal effects as defined under the Baggage Rules. Further, the Department is required to make a distinction between ‘jewellery’ and ‘personal jewellery’ while considering seizure of items for being in violation of the Baggage Rules.”

10. At this stage it would be relevant to consider the decision of the Madras High Court in *Thanushika vs. The Principal Commissioner of Customs*



(Chennai), W.P. No. 5005/2024 (decided on 31st January, 2025) wherein the High Court was dealing with a case where the gold jewellery of a Sri Lankan tourist was seized by the Customs Department. The High Court after analysing various provisions of the Act and the Rules held that the said Rules would only apply to baggage and would not extend to any article “carried on the person” as mentioned in Rule 3 of the Rule. This Court in **Makhinder Chopra (supra)** having considered the above decision, observed as under:

“19. Thus, it is now settled law that the Customs Officials are required to consider the facts of each case and apply their mind before detaining the goods of a tourist, either of Indian or foreign origin. The Customs Officials have to be conscious of the fact that personal effects including jewellery of tourists are protected by the law from detention and same cannot be detained in a mechanical manner.”

11. Thus, it is now settled that the used jewellery worn by the passenger would fall within the ambit of personal effects in terms of the Rules, which would be exempt from detention by the Customs Department.

12. In the facts of this case, a perusal of the impugned orders would show that the Petitioner has not been given the benefit of the detained goods being personal effects, which is very clear, even from the photographs of the Petitioner, who is a young boy, which have been placed on record.

13. The detained goods being personal effects of the Petitioner, the detention of the same itself would be contrary to law, Accordingly, the detained goods would be liable to be released on this ground itself. However, there is another issue which is required to be considered *i.e.*, non issuance of the show cause notice within the prescribed period under the Act.

14. Once the goods are detained, it is mandatory to issue a show cause



notice and afford a personal hearing to the Petitioner. The time prescribed under Section 110 of Act, is a period of six months. However, subject to complying with the requirements therein, a further extension for a period of six months can be taken by the Customs Department for issuing the show cause notice. In this case, the one year period itself has elapsed, yet no show cause notice has been issued. Accordingly, the detention is impermissible.

15. In view of the above discussion, the impugned orders are set aside and the detained goods shall be released to the Petitioner within four weeks, subject to verification.

16. The Petitioner may collect the detained goods through an Authorised Representative, in which case, the detained goods shall be released after receiving a proper email from the Petitioner or some form of communication that the Petitioner has no objection to the same being released to the concerned Authorised Representative.

17. The storage or warehousing charges shall, however, be paid.

18. The present writ petition is disposed of in above terms. All pending applications, if any, are also disposed of.

**PRATHIBA M. SINGH
JUDGE**

**RAJNEESH KUMAR GUPTA
JUDGE**

MAY 21, 2025/MR/msh