

The Fight

I

Introduction

Ranji had come to Rajpur only recently. He had not yet made any friends there. There were hills and forests on all sides of Rajpur. He roamed in these places alone. It was very hot. One day he discovered a pool in the forest.

The Pool

The water in the pool was clear. It came there from a cluster of rocks. In the monsoon the water came in large quantities. During the summer the flow was weak. Yet it never dried up like the pools of Rajputana deserts.

Ranji into the Pool

Ranji got into the water. He knew swimming. He had so far known only the muddy pools of Rajputana deserts. This pool was much better. His body was free of fat. It shone in the sunlit water.

Another Boy

The next day Ranji came again. He enjoyed a lot in the coolness of the water. After an hour, he lay to relax on the smooth rocks. It was then that he noticed a boy staring at him in a hostile manner. He was a little older than Ranji and had a well-built body. He stood on the edge of the pool. He seemed waiting for Ranji to explain his presence there.

The Verbal Duel

The boy asked Ranji why he was there. Ranji wanted to be friendly. So he ignored the other boy's hostility. He asked him to join him in the enjoyment. The other boy did not like it. He came closer to Ranji who was now sitting on the rock. He said that he was a Punjabi and did not like to talk to villagers. Ranji said that he was a Rajput, not a villager. The Punjabi tried his best to scare away Ranji. When Ranji did not run away, he warned that he would beat him.

The Real Fight

Now Ranji claimed vehemently of being a Rajput. The other boy claimed of being a Punjabi. The Punjabi boy made a strange hissing sound. They stared each other in the eye for a minute. Then the Punjabi boy slapped Ranji across the face with all his strength. Ranji felt dizzy. Thick red finger marks were there on his face. Then Ranji pushed a hard, bony fist into the other's face.

In the Water

Then they were at each other's throats. Fighting they rolled into the shallows of the pool. Even in the water, they continued fighting. Yet, after five minutes, both of them stood exhausted. Standing at a distance from each other both of them spoke proudly of their states. Then the Punjabi-boy had an inspiration. He proposed to continue fighting next day, Ranji agreed. Then they left the forest by different routes.

II

Ranji Away from the Pool

At home, Ranji could not hide his injuries. His mother insisted on his staying at home for the rest of the day. In the evening, he was able to slip out to the bazar. There he took some lemonade and jalebis. When he had finished it, he saw the Punjabi boy coming down the road. Both of them scowled at each other.

Next Day at the Pool

Ranji reached the pool unwillingly next day. He was feeling weak and knew he would be beaten in another fight. Yet, how could he refuse the challenge ? As long as he fought, he had a right to the pool. He saw the Punjabi boy on a rock on the other side of the pool. Seeing Ranji, he shouted a challenge. He asked Ranji to come to his side and fight. Ranji asked him to come to his side. The Punjabi boy ridiculed. He said that Ranji could not swim the length of that pool.

Ranji Accepts the Challenge

Ranji dived straight into the water. He surfaced on the other side without a splash. The Punjabi boy's mouth hung open in amazement.

Ranji Becomes his Teacher

The Punjabi boy exclaimed with surprise how he could dive so well. He asked Ranji if he would teach him how to dive. Ranji told him how to dive. The Punjabi boy landed in the water flat on his belly. There was noise which sent the birds screaming from the trees. Ranji laughed a lot. The Punjabi boy came out of the pool spouting water like a whale. Then Ranji executed another fine dive to teach him. It went on for sometime. Then the Punjabi boy said that Ranji must teach him everyday. Ranji agreed.

The Friendship

The two told their names to each other. Then the Punjabi boy asked Ranji if he was not strong. Ranji agreed and said that he (Suraj) was a real pahalwan. The Punjabi boy Suraj said that he would become the world's champion wrestler. Then looking

critically at Ranji he said that Ranji was strong too. However, he said that he was bony. He invited him to have food with him. Suraj proposed a deal. If Ranji taught him diving, he would make Ranji a pahelwan too. Again Ranji agreed.

"It is our pool", said Suraj, "Nobody else can come here without our permission." Ranji said that nobody would dare to come there now because now they were friends.