

THE VILLAGE JUDGE

A. Before you read :

- 1) Do you sometimes fight with your brother(s) and sister(s) ? Who do you go to settle your quarrel ?
- 2) Why do people go to the judge ?
- 3) Do you know about the village 'Panch' ? Can you tell the class what you know?
- 4) The title of the story you are going to read is "The Village Judge". Do you think it will be a story about friendship or enmity?

B. The Text :

I

Jumman Sheikh and Algu Chaudhuri were great friends. Each trusted the other completely. Jumman Sheikh had an old aunt. She had a small piece of property. Jumman had **persuaded** her to transfer the property to his name. So long as it was not done, the aunt had been treated with great kindness and respect. But when the property was transferred, all kindness vanished. Jumman and his wife, Kariman, became harsh and rude.

For some time the aunt bore all this. But when she could bear it no more, she complained to Jumman. "Soon, I can't go on like this anymore. You should give me some money. I shall cook and eat separately.

Jumman replied rudely. "Money does not grow on trees here."

The aunt grew angry. She threatened to call a panchayat. Jumman said "Certainly, have a panchayat by all means. I also would like a decision. I hate there daily quarrels myself."

For several days after this the old woman ran from village to village with a stick in her hand to support her. Most of the people did not hear the story of the poor woman with care and attention and did not offer her any comfort. After making her rounds, she came at last to Algu Chaudhuri. She threw her stick, waited for a while to regain her breath and said : “Son, you also should come to my panchayat for a short while.”

Algu : “I can come along if you like. But I shall not open my mouth there”

Aunt : “Why son ?”

Algu : “Jumman is an old friend of mine. I cannot quarrel with him.”

Aunt : “Son, will you hesitate to say the honest thing, because you fear a quarrel?”

Algu had no reply to give to his question of the old woman. But her words continued to echo in his heart. “Will you hesitate to say the honest thing, because you fear a quarrel ?”

Comprehension check :

- 1) Who are the main characters here ?
- 2) How did Jumman and his wife treat his aunt when she had her property?
- 3) Why did their behaviour change ?
- 4) What did the Aunt decide to do ? Who did she finally go to ?
- 5) Algu was not ready to help Jumm’s aunt. How do you think he felt after she had left ?



The panchayat met under a tree one evening. The old woman stated her case and then said to Jamman, “Whom would you like to be the panch?”

Jumman answered angrily, “Let me not say anything now, aunt. It is your show. Have anyone you like.”

She said, “Son, have fear of God. The panch is nobody’s friend or enemy. Do you accept Algu Chaudhuri ? I name him as Chief Judge.”

Jumman was overjoyed, but he hid his feelings and replied: “ Let it be Algu Chaudhuri.”

Algu did not want to be mixed up in this affair. He wanted to get out and exclaimed: “Aunty, you know Jumman and I are close friends.”

The aunt replied gravely: “Son, nobody can sell his **conscience** for friendship. God lives in the heart of the panch. Whatever the panch says is spoken by God himself.”

Algu said : “Sheikh Jumman, you and I are old friends. But at this moment, you and old aunt are exactly the same to me. You may state your case before the panchayat.”

Jumman was now confident that he had won. He imagined that Algu’s talk was mere show. Therefore, with his heart at peace, he stated his case.

Algu Chaudhuri started asking questions which Jumman found hard to answer. Finally, Algu gave his judgement. “ Jumman Sheikh ! The elders have considered this matter. They think it proper that aunt should have a monthly allowance. This is our decision. If you do not agree to pay the monthly expenses, then the property should be returned to her.”

Comprehension check :

1. Who was selected as the main judge ? Why ?
2. Algu was not ready to join the Panch. Why did he change his mind?
3. What was the judgement ? Did you expect this judgement ?

Do you think Jumman and Algu will continue to be friends now ? Read and find how far your answer is correct.

III

Jumman had never expected such a judgement from a friend like Algu. It broke up the friendship between Jumman and Algu. Now they were never to be seen talking together. Jumman began to think of taking revenge.

A year before, Algu had bought a very beautiful pair of bullocks from the fair at Batesar. **As hill luck would have it**, one of these bullocks happened to die only a month after Jumman's panchayat. Jumman exclaimed among friends. "This is punishment for his **deception**. God sees all the good and evil." Algu suspected that Jumman had poisoned his bullock. His wife said "Jumman is behind this."

A single bullock was of no use to Algu. So he decided to sell it off. There was a certain Samjhoo Sahu in the village who used to drive an **ekka** to the town. He would carry ghee and sugar to the town market and return from there with a lot of salt and oil, which he then sold in the village. He thought if he had this bullock, he could make three trips a day easily. He bought the bullock, and promised to pay off the price in a month's time.

Samjhoo Sahu began to overwork this bullock. He began making three to four trips per day. He worried neither about giving it fodder nor water. He worried only about his trips. Within a month the bullock became a mere bag of skin and bones.

One evening Sahuji put a double load on it during the fourth trip. The animal was dead tired by the day's work. It could not get going. Sahuji whipped it with the greatest cruelty. The bullock made a last effort, but fell down on the ground, never to rise again.

Comprehension check :

1. What happened to the relationship between Jumman and Algu after the judgement?
2. One of Algu's bullocks' died. What did Jumman say ? What did Algu think ?
3. A new character is introduced in this section. Who is he ?

4. Why did he want to buy the single bullock of Algu ? Did he pay Algu for the bullock ?
What did he promise ?

5. How did Sahuji treat the bullock ? What happened to it ?

What do you think will happen now ? Read and find how far your answer is right.

IV

When Algu asked for the price of his bullock, both husband and wife said angrily, "This is amazing ! He gave us a dying bullock and now wants the price for it."

Algu had many enemies. They too gathered and helped Sahuji. Algu was helpless. But how could he lose a hundred and fifty rupees ? He lost his temper. The good people of the village gathered round and advised them to take the matter to the panchayat. Both Algu and Sahuji agreed to this.

Three days after this, the panchayat again met under the same tree.

"Who should be the panch ?" Someone asked Algu.

Algu replied : "Let Sahu have his own choice."

Samjhoo stood up and thundered : "Jumman Sheikh on my behalf."

Jumman was at first surprised and then began to think to himself. " I am now a judge. Whatever I say now will be the voice of God. I should stick to the truth and nothing but the truth."

The elders put many questions to both the parties. At last Jumman gave the decision : "Algu Chaudhuri and Samjhoo Sahu ! The elders have considered your case carefully. Samjhoo ought to pay the full price of the bullock. The bullock died only because it was driven too hard and no proper arrangement was made to feed it."

Algu Chaudhuri was happy. He got up and gave a loud cheer. " Long live the God that is the panch !"

After a short while, Jumman approached Algu and embraced him, He said, "Brother ! After you gave your decision, I had become your **mortal** enemy. But today I feel sure that God Himself speaks through the panch."

Algu broke down. The tears washed away all the dust in their eyes.

Prem Chand :

Comprehension check :

1. Sahuji had not paid Algu for the bullock. When Algu asked for the money, did Sahuji pay him ? Why ? / Why not ?
2. A 'Panch' was called again. Who was the judge this time ?
3. What was the decision of the 'panch' ?
4. Everyone hearing the judgement said " This is the work of God " . Why ?
5. There were two unexpected judgements in the story. Which one surprised you more ? Why ?
6. Which character did you like the best in the story ? Why ?

C. Glossary :

Trust	:	to have faith in
Persuade	:	to convince
deception	:	misleading (being deceived)
fodder	:	food for animals
mortal	:	which must die or cannot live for ever.

D. Writing :

Answer the following questions in about fifty words.

- 1) Why did Jumman's aunt want a 'panch' ?
- 2) How did Jumman's aunt win the case ?
- 3) How did Sahuji's bullock die ?
- 4) Why was the second panch called ?
- 5) People who heard the judgement said that it was the work of God. Why ?

E. Activity :

The following is the summary of the story. But it is jumbled. Put the sentences in order to get the summary. Pay special attention to the underlined words. These are the clues to help you to arrange the summary. The first and the last sentence are in order.

- 1) Jumman Shikh treated his old aunt badly after she gave her property to him.
- 2) Algu's judgement was in favour of the old woman.
- 3) Sahuji treated the bullock badly and it died.
- 4) He decided in favour of Algu.
- 5) Jumma was very angry and decided to take revenge on Algu.
- 6) Now that the bullock was dead, he refused to pay the money to Algu.
- 7) A Panch was called where Jummun was the chief judge.
- 8) Soon after the judgement, one of Algu's bullock's died and he sold the other to Samjhoo Sahu.
- 9) So his aunt called for a Panch and finally Algu Choudhuri became the chief Judge.
- 10) All the people praised the Panch.

