

Fair Play

Part I

Jumman Shaikh and Algu Chowdhry were good friends. Both were also greatly respected in the village.

Jumman had an old aunt who had some property. She transferred it to Jumman. The condition was that she would stay with Jumman. Jumman would look after her well. For two years, the arrangement worked well. Then the situation changed. The behaviour of Jumman and his family changed. Even the little food which was offered to her was loaded with insults. At last her patience gave way. She realised that she was not welcome in his house. She asked Jumman to give her a monthly allowance to set up a separate kitchen. Jumman said that his wife knew best how to run the house. She decided to take the case to the village Panchayat.

The old lady went to the villagers explaining her case. Some showed sympathy. Some laughed at her. Others advised her to make it up with Jumman and his wife. At last she went to Algu Chowdhry. He told the lady that he could not go against Jumman as he was his best friend. At this she asked him, "But is it right, my son, to keep mum and not to say what you consider just and fair?"

Part II

The Panchayat was held under an old banyan tree. Jumman said, "Let my aunt nominate the Panch. I will abide by her decision". The old lady suggested the name of Algu Chowdhry knowing well that he was a close friend of Jumman. This, however, gladdened Jumman's heart. He thought that as his best friend Algu could not go against him. His happiness was only shortlived. Algu Chowdhry gave his decision in favour of the old lady. She said that God lives in the heart of the Panch. She meant that as Panch, one was bound to be just and fair. But Jumman was very angry. The incident broke the bond of friendship. The two were not seen together after the case. Jumman wanted revenge on Algu.

Part III

Algu found himself in a tight position after a few days. He had sold his bullock to Samjhu Sahu. Samjhu Sahu had agreed to pay the price after a month. Unfortunately, the bullock died before the date of payment. Sahu refused to pay. A case came before the panchayat once again.

This time Sahu proposed the name of Jumman as Panch. Algu's heart sank. He was sure that Jumman would give his verdict against him but he accepted the proposal. Though Jumman was burning with the desire for revenge, he could not do so sitting in the seat of the judge. He gave the judgement in favour of Algu. Algu was overjoyed. He cried that it was a victory of panchayat and justice. He said that God lives in the heart of Panch.

Then the two friends embraced each other and wept. The tears had washed away the dirt of misunderstanding between them.