

Bandhu's Branch

Adapted from an Indian Folktale



A majestic peacock called from the forest, “May-ewe! May-ewe!” Bandhu loved waking up to that sound. It made him think of the rich tones of a *shehnai*. He hoped that someday *he* could play one. He imagined making the instrument echo through the mud hut he shared with his mother.

The sun had not yet risen, but she had already left for work, to grind wheat. She was paid in flour, which she made into delicious *roti* bread. She also traded flour for potatoes or onions. They barely had enough for basic clothes. Surely not enough for a shining musical instrument.

One day, his mother said, “Bandhu, I found this beautiful branch by the sheesham tree. You could imagine you’re playing the shehnai.”

He smiled. “*Shukriyaa, Maa-ji.*” He went outside, following a peacock’s call in the distance.

He passed an elderly neighbor bent over her stove, coughing as smoke rose up instead of flame. Bandhu looked at his imaginary shehnai for a moment, then held it out. “Maybe this will help, *Dadi-ji.*”

“*Shukriyaa!*” she said. The fire crackled. He whistled tunes for her as she cooked. She gave him a piece of hot *roti*, and he took it gratefully.

The peacock called, and Bandhu ran along. He passed the potter’s wife rocking a crying child. The child looked so hungry that Bandhu offered the rest of his *roti*.

“*Shukriyaa!* My grandson needs food. We have little, but we do have *these.*” She gave him a big round pot. He said thank you and ran on.

At the river, Bandhu saw a washerman waving angrily at a horse. “This clumsy beast broke my last pot,” he yelled. “I can’t finish washing the clothes!”

The boy held out his pot as he patted the horse. “Maybe this will help, *Dada-ji.*”

The man took it, muttering, “Take this silly horse.”

With wide eyes, Bandhu said, “Such a wonderful gift! *Shukriyaa!*” He heard the peacock again and hurried on.

He came upon a bridegroom carrying a magnificent sword, his family and musicians in rich clothes gathered nearby. Even with the music playing, they slumped sadly. Bandhu hadn’t followed a peacock call—it was a shehnai!

The groom paced back and forth to the sad tune. Bandhu said, “Why do you look so unhappy?”

The groom moaned, “We were on our way to my wedding when my horse got scared by a snake and ran away. I *cannot* go on foot. A groom must ride like a prince!”



“Take my horse,” said Bandhu, handing over the reins. One musician began a happy melody, and the boy smiled, closing his eyes to listen.

“Musician!” cried the bridegroom. “Give this boy your shehnai, and I will replace it.” He said to Bandhu, “Thank you. I hope *my* children will be as generous as you!”

Bandhu accepted the fine shehnai. Beaming with joy, he rushed home to his mother. He told her how he ended up with his heart’s desire . . . by giving everything away.