

The Arrogant Peacock
(Adaptation of a Hindi story)
submitted by Rajashree Ghosh

Pankaj – a beautiful peacock made Sundarbans (an evergreen, lush forest in the eastern India) his home. The feathers on Pankaj's back were gold, resplendent green; his bright eyes and long slender neck attracted the attention of other animals in the forest. He was quite alluring and everyone praised him for his very attractive looks. Pankaj revelled in the attention he received.

However, Pankaj was neither humble nor did he make any effort to appreciate others. He spent hours preening himself and put up a show spreading his spectacular feathers. It was a sight to behold. He felt he was special and he also believed that he was better than everyone else. The other animals did not dare say anything to him because they were scared of his rough behavior.

One day the animals were busy tending to a bruised monkey. They forgot to watch Pankaj's dance. He screamed "how could you not be present for my dance? How could you just be paying attention to the monkey? My dance is more important. You should all be sorry!" Pankaj was fuming angry.

"But Pankaj, can you not see, the monkey is hurt? We need to help each other in times of need," said the animals.

Pankaj shouted, "Oh, what do you know? You are all useless good for nothings! You, Isha elephant, you are too fat and you have too many wrinkles. And you Chandni Crocodile, your skin is way too thick! Gautam giraffe, you are too tall. And Lakshman tiger, your teeth are too sharp!" He muttered many more rude words for the animals and walked away into the jungle without a sliver of repentance. Pankaj left the animals feeling very sad. They decided that they would not speak with him anymore.

The next day when Pankaj realized that no one was speaking with him, he felt miserable and went to seek the advice of the Wise Owl. He asked "O wise one! no one is speaking with me. What did I do? Please help me!" The owl responded, "You have been insolent. You were created beautiful but your behavior makes it difficult to appreciate you. The bad words you use for your friends might come back to haunt you later in life. What if you have children who may not be as attractive. They may have ugly feet and others may make fun of them!"

Pankaj was unrelenting. He continued to be ill-mannered. This went on for some time. In the end the animals were tired of his disrespectful behavior. They gathered around and decided to request Wise Owl to punish Pankaj. They implored "We are tired of Pankaj's behavior. Even though he has been warned several times he continues to be offensive and hurtful with his words."

The Wise Owl together with all the animals called Pankaj to a community gathering. The Wise Owl led the discussion. Each animal spoke to Pankaj "you said my skin has wrinkles," said Isha. "Do you know that my wrinkles help me retain moisture and regulate body temperature?"

"Yes, I have thick skin like you said but that is my armor. Did you know I have an acute sense of touch?" asked Chandni crocodile.

The tiger asked in his deep voice, "My teeth – you made fun of my teeth? I wouldn't survive without eating and my teeth are my best tools to help with that."

Gautam giraffe said "Because of my height I can eat the leaves off very tall trees. What is wrong with that?" Wise Owl said to Pankaj "we all care for each other and that includes you. We know that your feathers, colorful as they are, also scare away predators. And you cannot fight them which Lakshman and Chandni can

and will. We will not survive if we don't appreciate each other and live in harmony." Pankaj latched on to each word and thanked them all for helping him realize his mistakes.

In some time, it was noted that Pankaj would dance only sometimes and not all the time. On gloomy, cloudy days, he would lift up everyone's spirits with his splendid dance routine. Pankaj had learned his lesson. He was no longer arrogant.

His feet were ugly! Despite that, the peacock became the national bird of India. Peacocks are represented in Hinduism, Islam and Christianity as a symbol of grace, joy and beauty.