Haroon was a little boy who lived in a small village outside Karachi: the largest city and seaport of Pakistan. Haroon went to a small primary school in the village which was about a mile away from his house. His classroom was very spacious with long mats made of jute spread across the floor in straight lines. The children sat on these mats facing the blackboard and the teacher. There were no chairs or desks for the children, only one desk at the head of the room which was used by the teacher. There was also a cupboard to one side where the teacher kept the children’s exercise books. Apart from these few things, there was no other furniture. This was quite usual in a small village school in the old days.

Haroon was a good boy who respected his elders, his parents, and his teachers. He would get up very early each morning in order to get ready, eat his breakfast, and start off on the long journey through the fields, arriving at the school well before time. He worked hard and always finished his schoolwork. And he always remembered his parent’s advice about never putting off today’s work until tomorrow.

During break time, Haroon played Kabaddi in the playground with his friends. This is a popular sport among young people in the countryside and villages of Pakistan and Haroon enjoyed the game very much.

There was also a washerman named Taju who lived in Haroon’s neighbourhood. Taju owned a frail looking donkey, and every week he would ride that donkey to the nearest town and collect bundles of dirty clothes from the people who lived there. Then he would ride his donkey to the riverside where he would wash the clothes.

Taju had a bad habit of hitting the poor donkey’s legs with a long stick whilst riding. The donkey would make a terrible wailing sound, ‘dei hoon, dei hoon!’ while carrying Taju and the heavy bundles of clothes. In the evening, Taju rode back home with the bundles of washed clothes, always hitting the poor donkey’s legs with his stick along the way.

Haroon would often hear this terrible wailing sound as the washerman passed by, and the young boy could not sleep for worrying about the poor donkey.

In the mornings too, on his way to school, Haroon would see the washerman riding towards the town with his bundles of clean clothes, always hitting the poor donkey with the long stick. The young boy would often think long and hard about how to save the donkey from Taju’s beatings, but he could never come up with a plan.

This went on for a long time. The donkey grew old and frail. Taju also became old and frail like his donkey, and this meant that the washerman was not able to collect as many bundles of clothes from the town. It also meant that he became poorer still and found it harder and harder to look after his donkey. Taju started giving the donkey left-over food instead of fresh grass, and his habit of using the long stick did not change.

As it happened, Haroon passed his primary school final exam with the highest marks in his class. The headmaster presented him with a certificate along with a special prize. Haroon became very popular in the village and his parents were delighted and proud of their son. To celebrate his success and hard work, Haroon’s parents promised that they would buy him a gift of his own choosing.

That night, when the young boy went to his room to sleep, the window was open and he could hear the poor donkey wailing in the distance... ‘dei hoon, dei hoon!’ And so Haroon decided then and there that he would ask his father to buy Taju’s donkey from him. He was sure that his father would agree, but feared that the old washerman might say no.

The next day, when Haroon asked if he might buy Taju’s donkey, his father was very surprised at the unusual request. He said, ‘Son, what is so special about Taju’s donkey? You can have any animal you like as a pet.’

But Haroon said, ‘No father, I would prefer to have Taju’s donkey.’

Then the young boy told his father the whole story about how Taju would hit his donkey with the long stick, how he made it carry heavy bundles of clothes and feed it only leftover food instead of fresh grass. Haroon explained to his father how he wanted to save the poor donkey from such cruelty. After hearing the story, Haroon’s father agreed to buy the old donkey for his son.

And so, early the next morning, Haroon and his father went to see Taju and asked the washerman if they could buy his donkey.

Taju was very surprised at this request. Then he thought about how old and frail his donkey had grown, and how difficult it had become to feed and take care of. And so, after haggling for a good price, Taju agreed to sell his old donkey to the father and son.

Haroon and his father brought the donkey home with them and put it in the large courtyard at the back of their house. They also gave the old donkey fresh grass to eat and promised that it would no longer have to carry the bundles of heavy clothes or be hit with the long stick.

Haroon always made sure to look after the donkey and soon it grew strong and healthy even though it was still quite old. The young boy was very pleased because he could see how happy the donkey was in its new home. And now Haroon would never have to hear the terrible wailing sounds, ever again.