

Uttanka's Gurudakshina

Once upon a time, when the wise men of India dwelt in forest hermitages and made their homes of mud and straw, there lived in such a hermitage, a young boy called Uttanka.

Many years passed by, and he grew up. Soon he had learnt all that his master could teach him.

One day he went to his master and said, "Dear master, you have taught me all these years, and yet I have never once repaid you. Tell me of some gift I may bring you that will please your heart."

His teacher said, "Child, there is nothing that I desire, Go to your mistress and ask her."

So Uttanka went to his mistress and, bowing low before her, asked her if there was anything she desired.

"Yes," she replied. "I have long cherished a wish to wear the earrings worn by the queen. Go to her and get them for me. In four days a feast will be held. I want to wear them on that day. Get the earrings for me and I shall know of your true devotion."

Uttanka, hearing this, was filled with dismay. Nevertheless, he set out through the forest to the city, where he knew the king dwelt.

He had not gone far, when he saw a huge bull coming towards him. As it drew nearer, Uttanka saw seated upon the bull a man so large that he drew back in fear. But the man called out, "Uttanka ! Drink this," and he held out a cup full of dirty water. Uttanka turned his head away, but the man said "Drink, Uttanka, it will help you on your way."

At last he came to the palace of the king. He boldly went inside and did not stop to look about him, till he saw the king himself seated upon the royal throne. "Sir," said Uttanka, bowing low, "I have come from a hermitage in the forest many miles from here. My mistress desires to wear the earrings of the queen on the feast day and if I do not take them to her, I will lose favour in my teacher's eyes."

The king smiled kindly upon the boy. "You must ask the queen," he said. "Go to her chamber and ask her."

Uttanka went to the queen's chamber but he could not find her. He went back to the king and said, "Sir, I cannot find her !"

The king looked at Uttanka as he stood there, with the dust of travel upon his clothes, and his hands and feet dirty and stained, "Is that how you would go to the queen ?" he said.

Uttanka felt ashamed. Washed and clean, he again went in search of the queen. This time he found her.

The queen held out her hand, and Uttanka saw the ear-rings sparkling in her palm. “You are a good child, Uttanka,” she said. “I give you the ear-rings willingly. But beware ! These ear-rings have long been coveted by the Serpent King. Do not lose them.”

Uttanka thanked her and started for home. Dusk was falling and he was tired. Leaning against the trunk of a tree, he rested, placing the ear-rings on the ground beside him. Suddenly, he saw a hand snatch the ear-rings and disappear. He sprang to his feet and turned round in time to see a man dressed in rags, running through the forest. Uttanka ran after him as fast as he could when suddenly the man changed into a snake which wriggled into a hole in the ground.

Uttanka was greatly distressed for, try as he did, he could think of no way to get through so small a hole. He sat down to lament his fate, when an old man appeared before him.

“Do not worry, my son,” he said, “I have come to help you.” Even as he spoke, there was thunder and lightning and a great thunderbolt fell. The whole earth shook with the force of it. Suddenly all was quiet again, but the next to where Uttanka stood was a big hole in the ground.

Uttanka entered the hole and found himself in the kingdom of Serpent King. He walked slowly along and came to two women weaving a piece of cloth. He asked them the way to the palace of the Serpent King. They did not heed him and went on with their weaving. He saw that their cloth was made of black and white threads.

Next he came to a wheel with twelve spokes. Six boys turned the wheel round and round. “What are you doing ?” he asked the boys. They did not answer him, and went on with their work. So he went on till he saw a man with a beautiful horse.

Uttanka went up to him. He was so struck with the horse that he bowed respectfully to the man and said, “O, Lord, I bow to you. Grant me a favour.”

The man turned and said, “What can I do for you ?”

Uttanka replied, “Let the Serpent King be brought under my power.”

“Blow into this horse,” the man replied.

Uttanka went up to the horse and blew and blew, and from every hair of the horse’s body darted a flame that shot through every space in the kingdom of the Serpent King. It burnt the houses till all the serpents rushed out, begging Uttanka to save their lives.

“Let the Serpent King return the ear-rings,” said Uttanka.

All the serpents then clamoured for the king to return the ear-rings. He did so.

The man gave Uttanka the horse and in a few moments he was back at the hermitage, just in time to give the ear-rings to his mistress for the feast. She blessed him for his great courage.

When Uttanka related his adventures; his master smiled and said, “The dirty water you drank, my boy, was ambrosia, that will give you eternal youth. The two maidens weaving the black and white threads are night and day. The wheel with twelve spokes is the year with its twelve months and the boys, the seasons. The man was the God of Rain and the horse was the God of Fire. You have been well looked after, my child, and deserve my blessings. Go into the world now, for great fortune awaits you.”

Thus, Uttanka, having fulfilled his duties, went into the world to seek his living. He was not as other men, for he knew that God protected him. He had nothing to fear.

About the Story :

In Hindu mythology, Uttanka is the disciple of a famous sage. He goes through many hurdles in procuring the earrings desired by his guru's wife as Gurudakshina. Uttanka accomplished the task successfully.

Glossary

dwelt	-	lived
hermitage	-	a hermit's (saint's) living place
cherished	-	held dear
devotion	-	deep strong love
dismay	-	feeling of sadness and distress
coveted	-	desired eagerly
dusk	-	evening, twilight
rags	-	old and torn clothes
wiggled	-	moved with quick, short twisting
distressed	-	pained and sad
lament	-	sorrow or grief
thunderbolt	-	a flash of lighting with a simultaneous crash of thunder
heed	-	pay attention to, take care of
darted	-	moved forward suddenly & quickly
ambrosia	-	the food of the Gods, nectar

COMPREHENSION

(A) Tick the correct alternative :

1. In which ceremony did the mistress wish to wear the earrings ?
(a) marriage (b) a feast
(c) fair (d) fashion show
2. When Uttanka started his journey, he saw a _____.
(a) huge bull (b) horse
(c) snake (d) eagle

3. Suddenly the man changed into _____ and went into a hole in the ground.
 (a) an insect (b) a rat
 (c) a snake (d) a horse
4. Two women were weaving a piece of cloth with _____ threads.
 (a) red and blue (b) brown and pink
 (c) yellow and green (d) black and white

(B) State whether the statements given below are True (T) or False (F) :

1. Uttanka lived in the palace. []
2. The queen gave the earrings to Uttanka willingly. []
3. A big hole was formed by thunderbolt in the ground. []
4. The Serpent King did not return the earrings. []

(C) Answer the following questions in 20-25 words each :

1. Where did Uttanka live ?
2. What was The wish of Uttanka's mistress?
3. What did the man on the horse offer Uttanka ?
4. Where did Uttanka place the earrings ?
5. Who took away the earrings ?

(D) Answer the following questions in 30-40 words each :

1. Why was Uttanka filled with sorrow on hearing the wish of his mistress ?
2. Why could Uttanka not find the queen in her chamber at first ?
3. What was the queen's advice to Uttanka ?
4. How did the teacher interpret Uttanka's various adventures ?
5. What wisdom and truth did Uttanka finally realize ?
6. How did Uttanka humble the Serpent King ?

(E) Answer the following questions in 60-80 words each :

1. Describe Uttanka's appearance when the king saw him ?
2. Explain how Uttanka managed to fulfill the wish of his mistress ?
3. What is the moral of the story - Uttanka's Gurudakshina ?

ACTIVITY :

Explain the significance of mythology ? Tell the class other mythological stories you have read.