



Story of Urvashi and Pururava

Apsaras are the celestial maidens of Indian mythology. They are not to be confused with angels. They are extremely beautiful immortals who live in heaven and entertain the demi-Gods with their dancing and singing. Urvashi is one such apsara. There are many legends about her birth but the following one is most prevalent.

Once the revered sage Narnarayan was meditating in the holy shrine of Badrinath situated in the Himalayas. Indra, the king of the demi-Gods, did not want the sage to acquire divine powers through the meditation and sent two apsaras to distract him.

The sage struck his thigh and created a woman so beautiful that Indra's apsaras were left matchless. This was Urvashi, named from ur, the Sanskrit word for thigh. After his meditation was complete the sage gifted Urvashi to Indra, and she occupied the pride of place in Indra's court.

Atri was one of Brahma's seven sons who married Bhadra. He later went on to conceive a son named Som or the Moon. Som was a very attractive young man and eloped with Sage Brahaspati's wife, Tara. Som and Tara gave birth to Buddh during the absence of Brahaspati.

Vaivasvata Manu's daughter Ila fell in love with Buddh. They together conceived a son named Pururuva. Pururuva became a great king and established the Lunar Dynasty named after his grandfather. Ages later, in his incarnation as Krishna, Vishnu took birth in this dynasty.

Urvashi found the atmosphere in heaven stifling. Everything was cold and synthetic including the colours and the fragrances of the flowers. Urvashi often stole to the Earth at night with her friends to feel the wet dew under her feet and the soft breeze against her body. On the other hand Pururava envied the Gods.

He was a regular invitee to Indra's court and was haunted at night by the grandeur he saw there. He would then take his chariot above the clouds and hurtle through the skies at break-neck speed. It was on such an occasion that the two met.

Urvashi was returning to heaven just before dawn with the other apsaras, when she was abducted by a demon. Pururava saw this and chased the demon on his chariot and freed Urvashi from his clutches. The brief period their bodies touched changed their lives forever.

For the first time Urvashi experienced the warm flesh of a mortal, for the first time she heard blood pounding in veins and for the first time she heard the inhalation and exhalation of breath.

Pururava had seen Urvashi in Indra's court before and to actually be close to the most beautiful woman in heaven gave him a high. Pururava left Urvashi with her friends but when they parted each was madly in love with the other but unsure whether the love was being reciprocated.

Urvashi was a woman in a man's world and in keeping with the tradition of the times expected the man to make the first move. Pururava on the other hand feared rejection because he did not expect the pride of heaven to come and live with a mortal, and hence did not approach Urvashi. So both pined for each other. Urvashi was giving a dance performance in which she was portraying Vishnu's consort, Laxmi.

Her concentration was with Pururava and she called out her lover's name instead of saying "Vishnu". Her teacher, the sage Bharat, got offended and cursed Urvashi. "You will get to live with the person

you are thinking about," he said, "And you will also give birth to his son. But you will have to choose between the father and son, because the day they see each other you will have to leave them both and return to heaven."

The curse actually emboldened Urvashi. She wasn't even thinking about children, she was sure to get her love. She sent a friend to earth to find out about Pururava. The friend located the king in the garden of Gandhmadan (meaning intoxicating fragrance), whining away for his ladylove. The sage was set. Urvashi left heaven and went to the waiting arms of Pururava.