

= Uttanka =

In Hindu mythology , Uttanka , also spelled Utanka , is a rishi (sage) who resided in the Maru desert . The primary source of this account is found in the Hindu epic Mahabharata .

In the earliest version , Uttanka is described as the disciple of the sage Veda . In the second version , his guru is Gautama . In both legends , he is a learned sage who goes through many hurdles in procuring the earrings demanded by his guru 's wife as the fee for the teacher (gurudakshina) . The Nagas (serpents) steal the earrings , and the gods Indra and Agni help Uttanka to retrieve them from the realm of the serpents . Uttanka is said to have advised King Janamejaya to take revenge against Takshaka , the king of the Nagas , as the latter was responsible for his father Parikshit 's death by snake bite .

Uttanka is one of the few persons described to have seen the Vishvarupa (Universal form) of the god Krishna . Krishna blessed Uttanka with a boon that would quench his thirst whenever he remembered him . From then on , the rare clouds that bring showers in the desert have been called " Uttanka 's clouds " .

= = Gurudakshina = =

Uttanka 's legend is narrated in the Hindu epic Mahabharata in two versions . The first is the original narrated in the Paushya Parva chapter of the first Book , Adi Parva . The other version is in the Utankopakhyana (named after Uttanka) in the Ashvamedhika Parva , the 14th Book of the epic . A work in Malayalam , also called Utankopakhyana , is another recounting of the story from the 14th book , but uses the name Utanka , not Uttanka . The Ashvamedhika Parva version is believed to be a later retelling of the original account in the Adi Parva .

= = = Adi Parva = = =

According to the Adi Parva , Uttanka was one of three chief disciples of the sage Veda , who in turn was a student of Dhaumya .

Once , Veda left his ashram (hermitage) , entrusting all of the administrative duties to Uttanka . Veda 's wife was then in her menstrual period . The women of the ashram urged Uttanka to cohabit with her so that her fertility period would not be wasted , but Uttanka refused to oblige as he was duty bound to his guru and he considered the act immoral . When this episode was conveyed to Veda upon his return to the ashram , he was pleased with his disciple and blessed Uttanka .

After Uttanka completed his education , he asked his guru Veda about gurudakshina (fee to the teacher) . Veda suggested that he should ask his wife and give him the gift that she desired . The guru 's wife harboured a grudge against Uttanka , as he had refused to fulfil her desire in her fertility period . She asked Uttanka to get the earrings of King Pushya 's queen in three days so that she could wear them during a religious fast on the fourth day . Uttanka set out to accomplish the task . On the way , he encountered a giant who was riding a huge bullock and sought his blessings . The giant asked Uttanka to eat the dung and drink the urine of the animal . Uttanka hesitated but ultimately complied after being informed that his guru , Veda , had acted likewise . Uttanka then went to King Pushya and conveyed to him the wish of his guru 's wife for the earrings of his queen so that he could pay his gurudakshina . The king asked Uttanka to meet his wife in her chambers . However , he could not find the queen there . Pushya informed Uttanka that his queen does not appear before any impure person who has not performed the ritual ablutions . After performing the ablutions , Uttanka met the queen and asked her for the earrings , which she granted . She warned Uttanka that Takshaka , the king of Nagas (serpents) , was after the divine earrings and he should therefore take guard against him .

After Uttanka had met the queen , he was invited to dine with the king . The food was cold and had a hair in it . Enraged , the sage cursed the king that he would lose his sight . In turn , the king cursed Uttanka that he would not have any children . However , they reconciled and withdrew their curses .

As Uttanka was returning to Veda 's ashram , he decided to take a bath in a water tank . He left his

things on the bank of the river and went to take a bath . At that time , Takshaka came there in the disguise of a naked mendicant and stole the earrings . Uttanka tried to pursue the mendicant , but Takshaka had reverted to his original form of a serpent and slithered away into a hole in the ground , reaching Naga @-@ loka , the abode of the Nagas . Uttanka then tried to dig through the hole . Indra , the king of the gods , saw Uttanka in the process of digging and sent his weapon Vajra (thunder @-@ bolt) to help him carve a tunnel to the realm of the Nagas . When Uttanka entered the snake world , he started praising the virtues of the snake king Takshaka and his clan , but to no avail as Takshaka was not moved to give up the earrings .

Uttanka then saw two beautiful women weaving with white and black threads on a wheel fixed on the wall . The wheel had twelve spokes and was being turned by six young people . A horse with a rider stood near the wheel . Uttanka praised the functioning of the weaving process , the rider and the horse , and equated the rider to Indra . Pleased with this praise , the rider asked Uttanka to state in what way he could help him . Uttanka requested that he be given the power to bring the snakes under his control . The rider then instructed Uttanka to blow at the back of the horse . Uttanka did as suggested . Then flames emerged from all parts of the horse 's body and filled the realm of the serpents with fire and smoke . The terrified Takshaka came out of hiding and gave up the earrings to Uttanka .

Uttanka then wondered whether he could reach his guru Veda 's ashram to hand over the earrings to the guru 's wife before the prescribed time . The rider , noting Uttanka 's concern , gave Uttanka his horse , which took Uttanka to the ashram . He reached the ashram just before sunset as the guru 's wife was in the process of casting a curse on Uttanka for not arriving in time . When Uttanka narrated his experience in procuring the earrings , the guru and his wife blessed him . Veda then explained to Uttanka the significance of the sights he had seen in Nagaloka . The two women engaged in weaving were Dhata and Vidhata ; they were creating the world and all its creatures . The threads were day and night . The wheel with twelve spokes was the year with 360 days . The six boys were the seasons . The giant and bullock were Indra and his elephant Airavata . Its dung was amrita (elixir of life) , which kept Uttanka alive in Nagaloka . The rider and horse in Nagaloka were Indra and the fire @-@ god Agni . Veda also explained to Uttanka that his friend , Indra , had helped him during his journey .

After handing over the earrings and taking leave of his guru , Uttanka went to Hastinapur , the kingdom of King Janamejaya . He resolved to teach a lesson to Takshaka who had caused him trouble . He informed Janamejaya that it was Takshaka who had killed his father Parikshit and advised Janamejaya to perform a snake sacrifice to exterminate the serpents . Uttanka was one of the rishis who participated in the Sarpa Satra yagna initiated by the king . Sarpa Satra was meant to draw all serpents to the sacrificial fire to certain death by the chanting of mantras . After the serpents started falling into the sacrificial fire , Takshaka was not to be found anywhere . Uttanka then recited the mantras with great vigour to draw Takshaka to the fire . In mortal fear , Taskshaka took shelter with Indra and got himself tied to the throne of Indra for protection . Uttanka , who realised that Takshaka had taken refuge with Indra , intensified his mantras to ensure that not only Takshaka but also Indra along with his throne were drawn to the fire . Indra freed the snake from the throne and escaped . However , when Takshaka was about to drop to death into the sacrificial fire , Astika , a young boy well versed in scriptures , son of the sage Jaratkaru intervened with Janamejaya . Astika ensured that the Sarpa Satra was stopped and the life of Takshaka was saved .

= = = Ashvamedhika Parva = = =

In the Ashvamedhika Parva the tale is narrated with some variation . Uttanka is described as a brahmin who belonged to the Bhrigu race that lived in a hermitage in the Maru desert . Uttanka was the disciple of the sage Gautama , whom he served for a hundred years . Uttanka was very dear to Gautama , who did not let him go even after Uttanka had completed his education . Uttanka grew old over time . One day Uttanka collapsed while carrying a huge bundle of firewood . Gautama 's daughter cried looking at the sight . When called by his guru , Uttanka accosted Gautama , and with tears in his eyes asked him why he alone had been retained in the hermitage when thousands of

other disciples had been discharged after training . Gautama restored Uttanka 's youth , gave his daughter in marriage to Uttanka and then permitted him to leave .

Uttanka wanted to give the sage his gurudakshina . The guru told him to meet his wife Ahalya and inquire as to her wish . Ahalya suggested that he bring her the divine earrings of Madayanti , King Mitrasaha Saudasa 's wife , as gurudakshina . The king had turned into a cannibalistic rakshasa by a curse and was known as Kalmashapada . Uttanka met Kalmashapada , who approached Uttanka to eat him , but Uttanka stopped him and explained that he was duty @-@ bound to get Madayanti 's earrings as gurudakshina and that he , Uttanka , would return to Kalmashapada after fulfilling his obligation . Kalmashapada agreed and directed him to his wife , who refused to part with her earrings until Uttanka brought some token from Kalmashapada as proof of his consent . Upon returning from Kalmashapada with a token , Madayanti gave him the earrings . The queen warned Uttanka that her earrings were coveted by Nagas , Yakshas , rakshasas and the gods , who would try to steal them . Uttanka was therefore advised not to allow the earrings to touch the ground to prevent the snakes from taking possession of them .

On the way back to the ashram , Uttanka had tied the earrings in a deerskin . While travelling , he stopped and climbed a tree to pluck some fruit for his refreshment . He tied the deerskin to a branch , but the deerskin became untied and the earrings fell on the ground . A snake immediately got hold of the earrings and vanished into an ant @-@ hill . In grief , Uttanka fell from the tree . For 35 days , he dug the ant @-@ hill with a stick to get the snake out and retrieve the earrings . The earth began to shake due to the repeated strikes . At that time , Indra ? riding his chariot ? saw Uttanka 's futile efforts . As in the Adi Parva , Indra used his Vajra to enable Uttanka to enter the beautiful Nagaloka . There , Uttanka saw a horse with the " tail which had black and white hair , a copper @-@ coloured muzzle , and eye of the same colour that seemed to flame forth in splendor " . The horse told Uttanka to blow from behind , as in the Adi Parva version . The horse was the fire god Agni who was the guru of Gautama , who had offered his help to retrieve the earrings . When Uttanka followed the directive of the horse , flames and smoke emerged from every pore of the horse and choked the dwellings of the snakes . Thus choked , the serpents , headed by Vasuki came out , worshipped Uttanka and surrendered the earrings and asked that they be pardoned . When Uttanka returned to the hermitage of Gautama to give the earrings to Ahalya , he narrated the sequence of events that occurred in procuring the earrings .

= = Meeting Krishna = =

The Ashvamedhika Parva narrates Uttanka 's meeting with the god Krishna . As Krishna was returning to his kingdom Dwarka , he noticed the wandering ascetic Uttanka . Uttanka met Krishna and asked for news . Krishna told about the devastation in the Kurukshetra War . Uttanka was agitated and was about to curse Krishna for not bringing about a compromise between the warring cousins Pandavas and Kauravas . Krishna explained the necessity of war for restoration of dharma and revealed his Vishvarupa form to Uttanka . The sage bowed to Krishna . Krishna told Uttanka to ask for a boon . Uttanka asked Krishna to grant him the boon of finding water whenever he was thirsty . Krishna granted the boon to Uttanka . Uttanka was the only other person other than Arjuna and Bhishma to get a divine vision of Krishna .

Wandering in the desert , the sage became thirsty and , hoping to get water , thought of Krishna , but instead , he found a naked Chandala (an outcaste untouchable) urinating and asking him to drink the urine . The Chandala was covered in mud and surrounded by filthy dogs . The Chandala repeatedly requested Uttanka to drink his urine . But when Uttanka refused , the Chandala disappeared . Then when Krishna appeared on the scene Uttanka complained that it was improper of him to send a Chandala to quench the thirst of a Brahmin . Krishna explained that he had requested Indra to give him amrita , but Indra was not willing to give it to mortals . Finally , Indra had relented and had told Krishna that he would offer Uttanka the amrita as a Chandala , provided the sage did not refuse it . Krishna had agreed to Indra 's condition . Krishna then informed Uttanka that his refusal to accept amrita from the Chandala was improper . However , Krishna promised to keep his boon of providing water to the sage . He then blessed Uttanka that rain clouds would appear at

his bidding and bring rain showers in the desert . These clouds appear rarely , and in the desert rain clouds are still known as Uttanka ? s clouds (Uttanka Megha) .

In another version of this event , it is said that , to test Uttanka , Krishna once appeared before him disguised as an untouchable hunter and offered him water which was polluted with urine . Uttanka rejected the offer as it was being offered by the hunter , an untouchable . This displeased Krishna who then appeared before Uttanka in his true form .

= = Other legends = =

The Vana Parva book of the Mahabharata narrates that an asura (demon) named Dhundhu lived under the sands of the desert of Ujjalaka , in Marudhanva . Dhundhu terrorized the whole world . Upset by Dhundhu 's action , Uttanka ? whose ashram was in Ujjalaka ? performed tapas (austerities) dedicated to Vishnu . Pleased , Vishnu told Uttanka that the Ikshvaku king Kulavalashva would slay the demon . The sage went to the king 's palace and recounted Vishnu 's prophecy . Kunalasva and his sons went to the forest and killed the demon . As a result , Kulavalashva became known as Dhundhumara , the slayer of Dhundhu .

The Naradiya Purana narrates that Uttanka lived in an ashram in Ujjalaka . In his old age , he left for a pilgrimage and travelled to various temples . Once , the sage saw a hunter named Gulika stealing the golden plates of the temple of Vishnu at Sauvira . Gulika tried to kill the sage . Then Uttanka informed Gulika that the sin of murder would be to live through many births to expiate his sin . Hearing this the hunter was penitent and fell dead . Uttanka then sprinkled water from the holy Ganges on the hunter 's corpse , which restored Gulika who then attained Vaikuntha , the abode of Vishnu . As advised by Vishnu , Uttanka went to Badari , performed tapas and attained Vaikuntha himself .