

Vikram Aur Betaal

Introduction



The legend says that King Vikramaditya, in order to fulfil a vow, was required to remove a corpse of betaal from a treetop and carry it on his shoulder to another place in silence.

Enroute, the spirit of Betaal (in the corpse) used to narrate a story to the king and after completing the story Betaal would pose a query that if he (The king) knew the answer, was bound to respond lest he will break his head into thousand pieces.

But if he does speak out, he would break the vow of silence and Betaal would fly back to the treetop, leaving the king inches short of his destination! The king would go after the vampire and start all over again. And so on and on.

King Vikramaditya

In days gone by, Vikramaditya , a great king ruled over a prosperous kingdom from his capital at Ujjain. Mighty as the sun - he was a king with immense love for learning as well as for adventure.

King Vikram sat in his court for hours every day, rewarding the virtuous, punishing the evil doers, and encouraging scholars, poets, musicians, and artists.

During such sessions, numerous people came to meet him. They brought for him gifts of jewels, gold or other precious things.



Among such visitors was a mendicant who, on every visit, presented the king with a fruit. The king accepted his humble gift with the same show of courtesy with which he would have accepted a diamond from a rich merchant.

He used to hand over the fruit to the royal storekeeper. One morning, the mendicant gave him his usual gift just when the king was going out to inspect his stables. The king accepted the fruit all right and went out while playing with it, tossing it up and then catching it as it came down.

It so happened that after a while the fruit fell down from his hand. Instantly a monkey who was on a nearby tree swooped down upon it and tried to crack it with his teeth.

The fruit broke and pop came out a handy ball of ruby. The king's surprise knew no bounds. He picked up the ruby and sent for an expert.

He examined it and said it was the finest ruby he had ever seen. "What did you do with all the fruits I have been giving you?" the anxious king asked of his store-keeper.

"My lord, I threw them all into our store through the window!" replied the store-keeper. The king ordered him to fetch them, and when they were produced before him, he was further astonished and delighted to see that each one of the fruits contained a precious ruby.

When the mendicant came the next day, the king gave all attention to him and asked him: "Why have you bestowed so much kindness on me?" "To be frank, I expect you to help me in a very important work of mine, O king, but of that I'll tell you in confidence," replied the mendicant.



The king led him into the private audience chamber. The mendicant then said: "I know how brave you are. Hence I will ask you to do something which requires courage.

But, for that, you must meet me under a Banyan tree in the center of the cremation ground beyond the city, at night, on the 14th day of the dark half of the month."

Vikram hesitated for a while. But the spirit of adventure got the better of him. He agreed to meet the mendicant at the appointed hour. It was a dark night with a terrible gale blowing. When Vikram approached the cremation ground, he was received by the howling foxes and jackals. As he made his way through the ground, he saw in the flashes from lightning fearful faces of ghouls and ghosts staring at him or dancing around him.

But undaunted, Vikram reached the banyan tree. The mendicant was delighted to see him. "Now, what's the work you want me to perform?" asked the king. "At the northern-most corner of this ground stands a very ancient tree. You will see a corpse hanging from one of its branches. Go and fetch it for me. I am seeking certain occult powers which I will get only if a king brings this particular corpse to me and if I practice certain rites sitting on it," disclosed the mendicant.

To fetch a corpse that hung on a distant tree in that stormy night was not at all a pleasing task. But King Vikram braved the weather and the darkness as well as the menacing yells and shrieks of ghosts and ghouls and soon reached the old tree. Raising a burning torch he found the corpse hanging.

He climbed the tree and with a stroke of his sword cut the rope with which the corpse had been tied to the branch. The corpse fell to the ground, and gave out an eerie cry.



Vikram, not knowing that the corpse was possessed by a spirit, thought that the fellow was alive. He came down and lifted up the body lying sprawled on the ground. At that the corpse began to laugh.

Surprised, the king asked: "Why do you laugh?" No sooner had the king opened his mouth than the corpse slipped away from his hands and hung on to the tree by itself. Six times did King Vikram bring it down and six times the corpse gave him the slip. At last Vikram realized that the corpse did the mischief only when he talked.

On the seventh time Vikram put the corpse on his shoulder and began walking quietly. He had gone only a few steps when the corpse which, in fact, was a vampire, said: "O King, tiresome is the way. Let me tell you a tale to keep you amused!"

The End

A promise not kept

It was a dark night and was raining from time to time. Gusts of wind shook the trees. There were strange noises and in between the thunderclaps the moaning of jackals could be heard. Flashes of lightning revealed fearsome faces and there were strange and mysterious laughter of the spirits.



But inspite of such a weird atmosphere king Vikramaditya did not swerve a bit. He climbed the ancient tree to bring the corpse down and soon he began crossing the desolate cremation ground, with the corpse lying on his shoulder.

The Betaal that possessed the corpse spoke: "O King , I pity you as you are making untiring efforts without relaxing as if you wish to achieve something. Instead of enjoying a comfortable sleep on a cozy bed, you're still coming after me. You seem to be quite adamant. Such arrogance may not help you keep your promise if you had given one to anybody. You'll realize the futility of the whole thing if only you listen to my story."

The Betaal then narrated this story. The ruler of Kishanagar, Rajendra, was extremely strong and courageous. He was a good ruler and cared about his people very much as he would not do anything unjust. His subjects were happy and contented. They had no problems. His queen, Prema, gave birth to a beautiful daughter, Sona.

Being an only child, Sona enjoyed a lot of freedom and was brought up like a boy. She grew up clever not only in studies but in the use of the bow and arrow and sword. She learnt the art of self-defence. When she reached marriageable age, her parents began searching for a suitable husband for her.

But Sona disagreed to their proposal as she had some definite ideas and views.

She said to her parents that , "Dear Father, I want that my husband should be one who is highly skilled in fighting and who is able to overpower, me in fight.

Suppose if our kingdom face an enemy in the future, he should be able to fight & defeat them in war. If you agree to this condition then, you may make an announcement".



The King & Queen were very proud to hear about their daughter's thoughts. The announcement was made in Kishanagar as well as in the neighbouring kingdoms. Thinking that Sona is only a girl, and it should not be a difficult to win a fight with her, many suitors came forward to accept her challenge as they also knew that Sona being the only heir they would

have complete sway over the kingdom once they married her.

But when they (the suitors) met Sona face to face these princes realized it was not that easy to defeat her. Everyone of them was routed by Sona, and they had to go back disappointed. She was taking on the suitors one after another, among them was Udayavarma, the prince of Chandanghar.

He watched the fight every day , by joining the crowd. He carefully watched how Princess Sona fought and the different strategies she adopted to meet the method of fighting followed by each prince. One day, he could not control himself when he saw a particular way she used the sword.



He got up and shouted "Bravo!" in appreciation and encouragement. Sona turned to look at him, wondering who he might be who could understand the intricacies of each and every stance and step during the fight.

But among such a large crowd she could only get a glimpse of him.

By now Udayavarma had learnt all her strategies, and the next day he was ready to fight with her. The two fought cleverly and fiercely. Neither of them was prepared to surrender to the other.

During her fight Sona tried all her tricks, but Udayavarma was able to meet every one of them. She soon discovered that he was a good swordsman and that she would not be able to subdue him so easily. Soon Sona was defeated by Udayavarma. She stopped the fight and joined her parents.

Cheers rose from the audience who was watching the proceedings very eagerly. When Udayavarma came forward to present himself to the King and queen, Sona recognized him as the one who had cheered her in encouragement the other day. She asked Udayavarma and he confessed to it.

Now Sona knew how he had succeeded in overpowering her. She came forward and said to him that "My condition was that I would marry anyone who would defeat me in the contest. Though you've defeated me, I can't marry you. You can yourself find out the reason." Udayavarma thought for a while and said . "Yes what you say is right, O Princess. I should not marry you." He bowed to her and left the palace.

The king and queen were surprised over their daughter's decision as according to her contest Sona insisted that she would marry only that man who would defeat her in the fight and Udayavarma had achieved it , but now she was not ready to marry him and even Udayavarma, too, had meekly accepted her decision, saying he could not possibly claim her hand. How strange! They were unable to guess what really was the cause?

The Betaal concluded the story and asked King Vikramaditya,

- 1) "O king ! I've some doubts. I think Sona was proud of herself that she was an expert in warfare and that's why she announced that she would marry only whoever defeated her, didn't she?
- 2) As she scored a victory over one prince after another, she was becoming more and more arrogant.
- 3) Then came Udayavarma who succeeded in overpowering her. Again it was her from keeping her word.
- 4) Why did she say he did not deserve her hand in marriage in spite of his victory

over her?

It was all because of her arrogance, wasn't it? If you know the answers to my questions that speak out if you don't then I warn you that "your head will be blown to pieces!"

King Vikramaditya did not take much time to answer the questions Betaal had asked. He said

1 & 2) " I don't think Sona was arrogant."

3) Though she had agreed that condition that Udayavarma had defeated her in sword-fight but she didn't keep her word. That's true, but this doesn't makes her arrogant. If we think deep, we can find out what had prompted her to take such a stand. She certainly was one who would keep her word.

4) Unlike other princes, Udayavarma did not go for a fight with her straight away, instead he sat in the crowd and watched her fighting and in between he had studied all the strategies that she adopted while fighting, just as a disciple would learn from his teacher.



And a teacher cannot marry his or her student. It's universally accepted that one's father, mother and teacher are all like a god. Sona realized that Udayavarma was first her student and then a suitor and she was not willing to accept that relationship for the purpose of marriage. Udayavarma too thought on the same lines and realized that he could not marry Sona, because she was like his teacher. So he respected the wishes of his teacher, that's why he decided not to press his claim to her hand.



The relationship between a teacher and his student is more sacred than that between others. That's why Sona went back on the condition she herself had stipulated. Betaal knew that king will definitely speak out the answer so he flew back to the ancient tree carrying the corpse along with him.

Vikramaditya drew his sword and went after the Betaal.

The End

Reward of life

It was a dark night and was raining from time to time. Gusts of wind shook the trees. There were strange noises and in between the thunderclaps the moaning of jackals and flashes of lightning revealed fearsome faces and there were serious laughter of the spirits.



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to achieve something. Instead of enjoying a comfortable sleep on a cozy bed, you're still coming after me. You seem to be quite adamant. Such arrogance may not help you keep your promise if you had given one to anybody. You'll realize the futility of the whole thing if only you listen to my story." And the vampire began his narration.

Long long ago, Kanchannagar was being ruled by King Chandradeep . His daughter was Indumati . Being an only child, the princess was brought up like a boy, and given training in the use of arms and warfare. It was certain that whoever wed her would also become the ruler of Kanchannagar. The princes of many of the neighbouring kingdoms cherished a desire to marry Indumati, who was, besides everything else, extremely beautiful.



Whenever the king broached the subject of marriage, Princess Indumati, would hesitate to give him a definite answer, but one day Indumati said yes to his father, "Yes, father, but...". The king stared at her, waiting for her to complete the sentence.

"Whoever marries me must be strong and brave. And he must succeed in the tests that I give." Indumati, then spelt out what kind of tests she was contemplating for her suitors.

The king was horrified. "Don't insist on any such test," he advised the princess. "They're all hazardous. No one will come forward to undergo the tests for fear their life. Just forget about them."

"Don't worry, father," Indumati, assured Chandradeep . " All those who profess that they love me than their life will certainly take these tests. You just watch!"

The king consulted his ministers. They came out with a suggestion. "If the princess is determined to impose the tests, let her wish be carried out," said the prime Minister. "But when we make the announcement, let us not spell out the details. They will be let known only at time of the test."

Chandradeep agreed to the suggestion. The royal announcement about the princess wedding merely stated that the suitors would have to take certain tests.. The announcement was made in all the neighbouring kingdoms, including Jayanagar, where a young man named Kurupshana heard it.

He had been born with both hands stunted. His mother died soon after he was born, and his father took a second wife. The boy was named Kurupshana, the ugly looking.

His stepmother was not at all kind- hearted, and she ill-treated him much. It was seldom that he even got a full meal. She knew that the boy, with his handicap, would not be much use to her.

Kurupshana did not utter a word in protest or by way of complaint. But he lamented within himself. 'Mother is always scolding & harassing me under one pretext or other. Won't there be an end to all this? They feel that I'm no good and I had better die! I must take this as a challenge and show them that I too, can face life.'



He decided to go to Kanchannagar. Quite a few princes had by then assembled at Kanchannagar. There were some young men, too, wishing to try their luck, if the princes were to fail. They all spent their time guessing what kind of tests the princess would put them through. Some of them thought it could be wrestling. Some others thought it could be their performance with the bow and arrow.

The time came to announce the details of the tests. The King & Princess Indumati came to the stage and sat next to the king, and on the other side of the king sat the Prime Minister. He got up from his seat and faced the princely suitors. " The contest is about to start! Several suitors are present here to win the hand of princess Indumati. It is her wish that they are put to certain tests. Whoever succeed in the test will qualify to wed her. You all can see the wall in front of you. You have to climb the wall and jump down into the three- tiered cage of sharp knives. The test is, while doing so, you must be careful not to injure yourself. There should not be a single scratch on your body from the blades of the knives. Whoever is willing to participate in the test may step forward!"

Many princes rose from their seats, and went and took a good look at the high wall as well as the cage of knives. One by they went back to their seats. The wall looked too high for them; the cage was placed deep down below; and the space between the knives was very small. They would not be able to jump down without injuring themselves. None dared even to make an attempt.

As they went back to their seats, some of them protested. "What kind of test is this? It could have been a sword- fight or wrestling or archery, or any other of that kind. But not this! It is almost trap from where one can't escape with one's life. Why should any one sacrifice his life for the hand of a mad princess in the world!"



It looked as though no suitor was willing to take the test. The king was in a dilemma. He regretted that his daughter did not accept his advice and desite from insisting ontests.

Kurupshana was watching all this from his seat. suddenly a thought struck him. After all, people back home, like his stepmother, were only wishing for his death. If he were to succeed in the test by the grace of god, he stood to win the hand of none else than a princess!

So, why should he not try his luck? And if he were to die, nobody would grieve over his fate. He left his seat and walked up to King Chandradeep . "Your Majesty, can I have your permission to take the test?"

The king was shocked. Who was this ugly- looking handicapped youth? Suppose he were to succeed in the test? His daughter would have to marry him- according to the rules of the game. And if that happened, she would have to spend the rest of her life in the company of a handicapped husband!

Princess Indumati, too, was in a similar dilemma. She was expecting to be married off to a prince, brave, daring and handsome. But look at this ugly youth! Would it be her fate to become his wife? She regretted she ever thought of tests for her suitors.

Suddenly a doubt arose in her mind: would this young man be able to climb that high wall? How would he avoid a scratch while jumping into the cage when he had

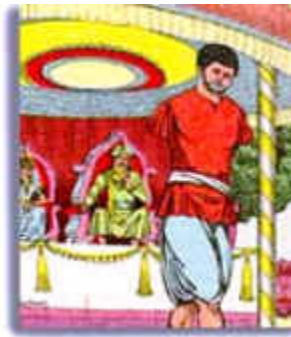
no hands to guide him through the sharp knives? She almost concluded that he would only meet with his end if he were to be foolish enough to attempt jumping down from the wall. King Chandradeep waited for a moment to know his daughter's reaction, and then gave the permission to Kurupshana.

Kurupshana went up the wall and asked the soldiers to take him to the top of the wall.



He then took a good look at the cage and jumped down. He landed between the knives arrayed all around on all the three tiers. He was unscratched! A loud cheer arose from the audience.

The cage was slowly raised, to allow the young man to come out. He then walked towards the king and the princess. Their face had gone a milky white.



Kurupshana realised their predicament. "O King! Please don't worry. I didn't wish to marry the princess. I had only wanted to take a challenge and I know I've succeeded.

That itself is a big reward of my life and I can now face life." He bowed low before the king and retreated.

The vampire ended his narration there and turned to King Vikramaditya. " O King! Didn't Kurupshana behave like a foolish? If he had no intention of marrying the princess, why did he at all decide to undergo the test?

And after having succeeded in the test and qualified to wed the princess, why did not want to marry her? What was the reward he was referring to when he said he didn't want to aspire for anything more? If you know the answer and still decide not to satisfy me, beware, your head will be blown to pieces!

""True, Kurupshana was a handicapped young man," said the king. " He was fully aware of his handicap that bothered his stepmother. He really wished that she changed her opinion about him. She should not any longer feel that he was no good. Instead she should know that where people with no handicap had failed, he could, despite his handicap, come out a victor.



That, for him, was the biggest reward he could aspire for. He decided to undergo the hazardous test not with the hope of marrying a princess. If he married her, he would one day be called upon to rule the kingdom. But as a ruler, he wouldn't be able even to hold sword.

If that was the case, it wouldn't be proper for him to marry her. That was why he



to her hand. It was not any act of a foolish person. On the contrary, it was the decision of an intelligent, wise person."

Betaal knew that king will definitely speak out the answer so he flew back to the ancient tree carrying the corpse along with him.

Vikramaditya drew his sword and went after the Betaal.

The End