

## Sakshi Gopal: The Witness for the Wedding

There once lived in Vidyanagar, South India, two Brahmins who decided to go on a pilgrimage. One brahmin was young and poor. The other was old and wealthy. The young man served the old man and made his trip as comfortable as possible.

First they visited Gaya, then Kashi, then Prayag. With great joy they went onto Mathura. From there they visited the twelve forests of Vrindavan and bathed in the Yamuna River. Then they visited the temple of Gopal. The deity of Gopal was so beautiful that they could not stop thinking of him. Thus they stayed in Vrindavan for several days.

The old brahmin was very pleased with the young man's services. "You have served me better than my own son", he said. "I did not grow tired during our entire journey. In return I promise you my daughter in marriage."

"Dear sir," the young man said, "I am not at all aristocratic or educated, and I am very poor. I am not a suitable husband for your daughter. I served you to please Lord Krishna, for he likes to see his devotees serving the brahmins. Besides, you cannot give me your daughter without the consent of your friends and relatives".

The old man assured him that no one could make him change his mind. "If you are fully determined to give your daughter to me", the young man said, "Please say so before the deity of Gopal. He will be my witness".

So together they entered the temple. The old man bowed before the deity and said, "Dear Lord, please witness that I have given my daughter in marriage to this young man".

Then the young brahmin spoke. "Dear Lord, if it is necessary later on, I may call for you to testify as my witness". With that, the two men returned to their village of Vidyanagar.

Some days later, the old brahmin said to himself, "I must tell my wife, sons and other relatives, and friends about my promise". So he called a meeting.

"What! Your daughter cannot marry a poor man!" they all cried. "Do not fulfill your promise!" Little did they know that even a poor man will be the best husband if he is a great devotee of the Lord.

"If you give our daughter to that man, we shall leave you! We shall kill ourselves!"  
"But if I refuse", the old man said, "The young man will call the deity as his witness. He will marry my daughter anyway, and Gopal will be very displeased with me".

Then the oldest son spoke. "The deity lives far away in Vrindavan. How can he come here? Do not worry. You do not even have to lie. Just say that you do not remember anything. I will take care of the rest".

The father prayed to Gopal, "Dear Lord, please help me to not break my promise and still save my family from killing themselves".

The next day, the young brahmin came to visit. He offered the old man respectful greetings and with folded hands asked about the marriage. The elderly brahmin said nothing, but his son rushed at the young man screaming, "You degraded boy! You want to marry my sister? I shall beat you with this stick!"

The young brahmin ran away, but the following day he gathered all the people of the village and told them, "This gentleman promised to give me his daughter in marriage. Now he refuses to do it. Please ask him why".

When all the people present requested him to answer, the elderly brahmin said, "My dear friends, I do not remember making such a promise". His son then stood up and said, "This boy is a thief who stole all my father's money while he was visiting all the holy places. Now this rogue is claiming that my father promised him his daughter in marriage."

The village people were bewildered. Whom should they believe? The young brahmin explained the whole story and told them of the witness Gopal.

"Everything this young man has told you is true", the elderly brahmin said. "If Gopal comes here personally as my witness, I will give him my daughter without fail". He was sure Gopal would help him keep his promise. In fact, everyone liked the idea of inviting Gopal to come - even the old man's atheistic son. He was sure that a deity could never walk or talk.

"Please write down your promise this time," said the young brahmin, "so that you may not break it again". Then he addressed the assembled villagers. "Gentle people, this good brahmin is a truthful and pious devotee of the Lord. He did not want to break his promise. He lied only out of fear that his kinsmen would kill themselves if he gave me his daughter". And then the young man left for Vrindavan.

As soon as he reached the holy village he went at once to see Gopal. "Dear Lord," he said, "I am not interested in getting the brahmin's daughter as a bride, but I feel great pain that he broke his religious principle of truthfulness. Please be merciful to us and save us from this sin by acting as my witness."

"Return to your village," Gopal said, "and call a meeting of the village people. Just think of me at that time, and I shall appear and bear witness to the promise".

"No one will believe you," the young man said, "unless you go in this form as Gopal."

"But I have never heard of a deity walking from one place to another," Gopal said.

"My dear Lord," the young man replied, "If you can talk, you can walk. You are not a statue. You are Krishna himself, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. For the sake of the old brahmin, please walk there with me in your deity form, even though you have never done so before".

Gopal was defeated. He smiled and said, "I shall go with you. I shall walk behind you, but do not try to see me by turning around. As soon as you look at me, I shall stop walking and remain fixed in that very spot. You will know I am walking behind you by the sound of my ankle bells. Cook rice daily and offer it to me."

The next day they started their journey. They walked and walked for one hundred days. Finally they arrived at Vidyanagar. The young brahmin thought, "I shall go tell all the people that the Gopal deity, my witness, has come. I should turn around and see if he is really there. Even if he stops walking and stays there, the people will accept his testimony.

With this thought, he turned around and looked into the smiling face of Gopal. "Now you can go home," Gopal said. "I shall stay here. I will not leave".

Quickly the young man ran to the village and told everyone of Gopal's arrival. All were struck with wonder and came to see the deity. The old man came too, and fell respectfully at the feet of Gopal, offering him his obeisances. Thus in the presence of all the villagers, Gopal bore witness that the old brahmin had indeed offered his daughter to the young man in marriage.

At that very place the marriage ceremony was held, and afterwards Gopal told both brahmins, "You are my eternal servants. I am very pleased by your truthfulness. Accordingly, you may ask for a blessing".

With great pleasure the brahmins replied, "Please remain here so that people all over the world will always know how merciful you are to your devotees".

Gopal agreed to stay in Vidyanagar, and to this very day he is worshipped there by truthful brahmins with great love and devotion. Hearing about the Lord's wonderful activities, people from many countries came to see Gopal. At last the king also came and built a beautiful temple for him. That temple has come to be known as the temple of Sakshi Gopal, 'the witness Gopal'.