

# **GAURA DEVI SAVES THE TREES**

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**Gaura Devi is eight years old. She lives in India, near very high mountains called the Himalayas. The tops of the mountains are covered with snow all year round. When the sun hits the mountain tops, they shine like diamonds.**

**Gaura Devi lives on a hillside below the mountain tops, in a house made of stone and slate. It is a good house. In summer, when the sun is hot, the house is very cool. In winter, when the snow is very deep, the house is very warm. Gaura Devi is poor, but she is happy.**

**Every morning, Gaura Devi takes her two goats down to the valley so they can eat grass there. On some mornings, she goes to the forest above her village with her aunt. The forest has many big trees. In the forest they pick special plants and flowers and berries. Gaura Devi's aunt uses the plants, flowers, and berries to make medicines. She takes care of all the people in her village when they are sick, and usually makes them well again.**

**In the afternoons, Gaura Devi goes with her mother to collect broken branches and twigs and dried grass. They use branches and twigs to make a fire for cooking. The fire also keeps the house warm in winter. The cow eats the dried grass and gives them milk every morning and evening. Gaura Devi and her mother walk very far every day to collect enough for the family.**

**Gaura Devi wondered why her mother does not go up to the forest nearby and cut down the trees. She asked her mother, "Why do we walk so far for wood every day, but leave the trees in the forest."**

**Her mother replied, "Gaura Devi, you listen to me. The trees are our brothers and sisters. They provide shade for the plants and flowers and berries that your aunt makes into medicine. They are houses for the birds and animals."**

**Gaura Devi's two goats stood still as if they were listening, too.**

**"The roots of the trees are like hands. They hold the earth to the side of the mountain. They also hold the water from the big rains and from the melting snow. If anyone ever cuts down our brothers and sisters, our village will be washed away."**

**Gaura Devi told all her friends what her mother said.**

**One day, Gaura Devi and her two goats walked up the mountain trail toward the forest. Suddenly, she saw a truck parked by the side of the road. Many men,**

wearing caps and carrying axes, were walking toward the forest. Gaura Devi went up to the leader. "Why are you going to the forest?" she asked.

The man said, "We are going to cut down the trees."

"My mother says the trees are our brothers and sisters. They are not to be cut down," Gaura Devi said.

The man replied, "We have orders from the people in the city to bring the wood to them. Now we have to go to work."

Gaura Devi thought. She began to walk down the mountain side. Then she began to run. She ran as fast as her legs would carry her. The goats ran behind.

She ran to the big gong in the open space in the middle of the village. She picked up a stick and beat the gong as loud as she could. Again and again she beat it until her arms got tired. All the women in the village came to the open space. The men were away working. Gaura Devi told them what she had seen. The women began to walk quickly up the mountain side. Gaura Devi's mother was the leader. Gaura Devi ran behind. The goats followed.

Soon they reached the forest edge. They saw the men preparing to cut down the trees. The women ran up to the trees and began to hug them. Gaura Devi's mother said to the leader, "We come as your friends and do not wish you any harm, but we cannot let you cut down the trees."

"Get out of the way," said the leader of the men.

"The trees are our brothers and sisters," replied Gaura Devi's mother, "If you cut down the trees, our village will be washed away when the rains come. We are hugging the trees. If you cut the trees down, you will have to hit us with your axes first."

The men looked around at the women hugging the trees. They knew they shouldn't cut down the forest, even though they were told to do so by the people in the city. They were ashamed. The leader said, "You have taught us a lesson. We will not cut down the forest. We will go back home with our axes."

The men walked slowly back to the truck. Some of the women ran back to the village and brought some tea. The men were thankful, for they were very thirsty. "We will tell others not to cut these trees down," they promised.

That evening, Gaura Devi's father and the other men from the village returned. When they heard what the women had done, they were very happy. The whole village had a big celebration. They ate fruits and sweet cakes and sang songs and danced.

**Gaura Devi was a hero. Her friends put a necklace of sweet-smelling jasmine flowers around her neck. She was a hero! The village women gave her a string of little silver bells.**

**Gaura Devi was very happy. Her two goats jumped to and fro as if they were dancing. The birds sang beautiful songs as the sun went down. The snow on the mountain tops glistened.**

**Soon Gaura Devi felt very tired, so she went to sleep. But in the nighttime the forest was not asleep. The animals whispered about what had happened, and how brave Gaura Devi and the women had been. Her sisters and brothers the trees did not talk. But they too were very happy. They did not sleep. They smiled.**