

Savitri

A Tale of Ancient India

Retold by Aaron Shepard

Adapted for reader's theater by the author, from the picture book published by Whitman, Morton Grove, Illinois, 1992

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GENRE: Myth

CULTURE: India (ancient)

THEME: Strength of will

READING LEVEL: Grades 4-9

READERS: 10

TIME: 10 min.

ROLES: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Savitri, Satyavan, King 1, King 2, Teacher, Narada, Yama, Goddess

NOTE: This story is probably around 3000 years old. It was first written down about 2000 years ago as part of the *Mahabharata*, India's great national epic. *Savitri* is pronounced "SAH-vit-ree." *Satyavan* is pronounced "SOT-yuh-von." *Narada* is pronounced "NAH-ruh-duh." *Yama* is pronounced "YAH-muh." *Mahabharata* is pronounced "MAH-hah-BAH-ruh-tuh."

NARRATOR 1: In India, in the time of legend, there lived a king with many wives but not one child. Morning and evening for eighteen years, he faced the fire on the sacred altar and prayed for the gift of children.

NARRATOR 2: Finally, a shining goddess rose from the flames.

GODDESS: I am Savitri, child of the Sun. By your prayers, you have won a daughter.

NARRATOR 1: Within a year, a daughter came to the king and his favorite wife. He named her Savitri, after the goddess.

NARRATOR 2: Beauty and intelligence were the princess Savitri's, and eyes that shone like the sun. So splendid was she, people thought she herself was a goddess. Yet when the time came for her to marry, no man asked for her. Her father told her,

KING 1: Weak men turn away from radiance like yours. Go out and find a man worthy of you. Then I will arrange the marriage.

NARRATOR 1: In the company of servants and councilors, Savitri traveled from place to place. After many days, she came upon a hermitage by a river crossing. Here lived many who had left the towns and cities for a life of prayer and study.

NARRATOR 2: Savitri entered the hall of worship and bowed to the eldest teacher. As they spoke, a young man with shining eyes came into the hall. He guided another man, old and blind.

SAVITRI: (*softly, to the teacher*) Who is that young man?

TEACHER: (*smiling*) That is Prince Satyavan. He guides his father, a king whose realm was conquered. It is well that Satyavan's name means "Son of Truth," for no man is richer in virtue.

NARRATOR 1: When Savitri returned home, she found her father with the holy seer called Narada.

KING 1: Daughter, have you found a man you wish to marry?

SAVITRI: Yes, father. His name is Satyavan.

NARADA: (*gasps*) Not Satyavan! Princess, no man could be more worthy, but you must not marry him! I know the future. Satyavan will die, one year from today!