

Savitri

A Tale of Ancient India

Told by Aaron Shepard

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

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PREVIEW: The princess Savitri must use all her wit and will to save her husband from the god of death.

GENRE: Myths, folktales, legends
CULTURE: Asian Indian (ancient), Hindu
THEME: Heroines, determination

READERS: 11
READER AGES: 9–15
LENGTH: 10 minutes

ROLES: Narrators 1–3, Savitri, Satyavan, Kings 1 & 2, Teacher, Narada, Yama, Goddess

NOTES: 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-ya-von." *Narada* is pronounced "NAR-a-da." *Yama* is pronounced "YAH-ma," rhyming with "lama." *Mahabharata* is pronounced "MAH-hah-BAR-a-ta." To hear the names, and for other special features, visit www.aaronshp.com/extras.

NARRATOR 1: In India, in the time of legend, there lived a king with many wives but not one child.

NARRATOR 2: Morning and evening for eighteen years, he faced the fire on the sacred altar and prayed for the gift of children.

NARRATOR 3: 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.

NARRATOR 3: 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.

NARRATOR 2: 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 3: 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.