

Savitri Brata: Hindu Tradition of the Well-Being of their Husbands by the Married Women in Odisha

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Abstract

Savitri by Sri Aurobindo does not only belong to the world of poetry but is a strong tale as well as the mirror of his religious ideas. The tale is of a king of Madra, Aswapati who underwent intense and profound modes of spiritual examinations to satisfy the goddess, Savitri. In a reward she gave him a daughter called Savitri. Savitri became a beautiful and wishful woman. Though there were many men who wished to marry her, she opted to marry Satyavan son of a blind king, so named, Dyumatsena, who was leading life in exile. Although the sage Narada advised her against marrying Satyavan on the grounds that he was going to die in a year Savitri never relented but actually married him. She had simple devoted life up porting her husband and taking care of his ageing parents. When Satyavan was killed and god of death Yama was sent to take his soul, Savitri followed him. Her sincere love, innocence and determination moved Yama into returning Satyavan to life. Sri Aurobindo claimed that he took this ancient legend and added some more sense into it. It told about the strength of love, faith and the strength within. To him, Savitri was the beacon of spiritual rejuvenation and that life can manage to overcome even death. The paper demonstrates that the qualitative interpretative proposal is applied to the analysis of a particular piece of art, the narrative composition, of Savitri by the Indian poet philosopher Sri Aurobindo, the use of poetic devices the evolution of the characters, and symbolic themes. It applies a symbolic approach to hermeneutics to unlock spiritual semantics, discovers central messages and examines its connection with Indian heritage and with contemporary spiritual development.

Keywords: Savitri Brata, Hindu Traditions, Story of Savitri and Satyaban

1. Introduction

There is a well known spiritual and cultural foundation of Odisha especially in terms of traditions such as Oshas, Bratas and Melas. The traditions are followed since centuries and people still take them as a significant aspect of their daily living. The majority of these rituals are found on ancient sacred books such as the Bhagavata, Ramayana, Mahabharata and Shiva Purana. Whilst Oshas and Bratas are generally watched by women, Melas are cheerful fairs and festivals which are enjoyed by the entire community including families as well. The traditions are important in the religious and social life of Odisha. Approximately, we have sixteen Oshas of significance: there is Budhei, Chaitra Mangala, Alana,

Shani, Dutiya (also, Puajuntia) and Bada Osha. In addition to these, almost thirty Bratas are practiced all over the year like Santoshi Mata Brata, Savitri Brata, Shivaratri and Krishna Janmashtami.¹ Among all these Savitri Brata occupies a distinguished space in the heart of the married Hindu women. It is a fasting and praying day used in thanksgiving to the health and long life span of their husbands. This ceremony is performed on new moon day in month of jyestha. On this occasion women are invited to listen to one of the famous timeless tales of love and commitment and eminent faith the story of Savitri and Satyavana. In the fable when Savitri shows her great devotion and bravery Yama who is the god of death revives the husband of Savitri Satyavan? This magnificent narrative is celebrated today in the name of Savitri Amavasya or Vat-Savitri Pujaa which is a very beautiful festival of love, fidelity and compromise of a faithful wife.²

2. Background of the Research

Savitri Brata is a Hindu religious practice that is performed by married women in eastern India and Odisha which is supposed to be centered on the welfare, long life and wealth of the husband of a woman. This ritual is on the basis of the ancient tale of Savitri and Satyavan who was a woman who had revived her husband Satyavan out of the grip of Yama the god of death. This tale includes the glorification of concepts like chastity, devotion, spiritual strength and moral determination which have been promoted as all time greatest of all wives in conventional Hindu culture. In Odisha, Savitri Brata is especially a local event and females belonging to different caste groups and communities join the ceremony.³ It entails an entire day of fasting, presents of seasonal fruits and practices around banyan trees as well as hearing or reading the Savitri Brata Katha. Mostly, women in their new sarees, sindoor and bangles signifying that they are married come in groups to temples or are seen performing rituals under a sacred tree with reverent feelings. Nonetheless, the emerging socio-economic and cultural condition of Savitri Brata creates the viability of academic and ethnographic interrogation because of the alteration in the socio-economic and cultural topography. Contemporary practices have changed this traditional practice due to modernization, urban migration, change in gender roles and the impact of digital culture and global culture. Younger women especially those in cities are not inclined to practice these rituals with same degree of commitment that earlier generations did. This study seeks to understand Savitri Brata as a practitioner culture and the issues of gendered traditions along with community identity and moral symbolism. It aims at getting to know how the ritual is practiced in present days and the differences it creates depending on the casts, regions and socio-economic classes and how women themselves derive meanings to its occurrence and position in their lives.⁴

3. Aims of Research

- To study the mythological and religious background of Savitri Brata within Hindu tradition.
- To observe the rituals and customs of married females followed in Savitri Brata in Odisha.
- To examine the place of Savitri Brata in strengthening the institution of marriage and female chastity in Odia society.

4. Research Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature and aspires to look into cultural, religious and social aspects of Savitri Brata as observed by married women in Odisha. The methodology has been about the following points:

4.1 Research design

It is an ethnographic-based, qualitative and descriptive research design that will be founded on interpretation of ethnographic fieldwork, folklore and content. The research is aimed at recording the voices of the women observing Savitri Brata recorded oral testimonies of the same, as also tracing the transformations and stability in the ritual practices between the generations.

4.2 Sources of Data

- **Primary Sources:** The study involves in-depth interviews with women, elderly community members, and local priests, participant observation during Savitri Brata rituals and group discussions with women in village temples and community centers.
- **Secondary Sources:** This text provides academic resources on Hindu women's rituals, Odia folklore and religious traditions, along with Scriptural texts like 'Savitri Brata Katha', archaeological material from Odia Lokachar o Brata Katha and other ethnographic compendium.
- **Tools of Data Collection:** The research contains a semi-structured interview protocol, audio-visual record and field diary to be used in daily notes checklist of ritual materials, sequence and narrative analysis form to be used in analyzing folk performances of Savitri Katha.

5. The festival's legend

Savitri Brata is a mythology of Hinduism and the personification of devotion, smartness and spiritual power. She was the daughter of king Aswapati who was the ruler of Madra Desa. Even though born to royal opulence she opted to live a life of pains and commitments by agreeing to become the wife of Satyavan a noble prince in exile in the forest who resided with his royal blind father King Dyumatsena. Savitri has forsaken her royal rights and she instead led the harsh life of a forest-dweller instead and she became dedicated to take good care of her in-laws and husband.

On a fateful day, Satyavan fell in the forest and Savitri with the fear and sorrow came face to face with Yama the god of death. She cried to her husband not to die and when her husband took his soul away she followed him. Savitri took quite a couple of boons but not the life of her husband. And in her last boon she demanded to have children with Satyavan which necessitated the revival of his life. Yama fulfilled her desire and gave her Satyavan back bringing him to life.

Savitri Brata is the spiritual and cultural basis towards celebrating Savitri Brata in Odisha and other regions in India. It represents spiritual power of a woman and how she can defy death with love, loyalty and righteous way of behavior. The vrata honours the strength of pativrata dharma the holy matrimony between man and woman and the notion that the prayer and ethical will of a woman can save and prolong the life of a man.

6. Obervation of savitri brata

Savitri Brata is a daylong fasting by Hindu married women in Eastern India mostly in Odisha and elsewhere in India, after Muhurta in the luni-solar calendar of India. It starts early in the morning even before the sun has risen, women have a bath, purification in order to prepare and they are dressed in traditional clothes. They adorn themselves with indicators of marital status like bangles, bindis and sindoor except the unmarried women who do not use sindoor. It is the celebration of the worship of Goddess Savitri, which entails marital virtue and moral power. During the puja women wash and adorn a grinding stone named Sila Pun which is believed to be the goddess and worship it. They take care of a

special preparing of a dish called the bhoga which is soaked rice, lentils and fruits of the season, thought to be her favorite.

Women observe the entire day on a strict fast (without food and water and focus their attention on prayers and ritual observances). The fast is done with a lot of spiritual commitment as signs of love, devotion, and wish to see the husband living long and prosperous. Another important component of the ritual is a legendary story named Savitri Brata Katha taken out of the Mahabharata. The women will break their fast in the evening where a common practice is to make offering to the deity and get blessings to have their family health and happy. Savitri Brata is a religious and cultural manifestation of marital faithfulness, female power, and respect of ancient customs in the Hindus lifestyle.

7. Savitri Brata folklore

When discussing a holy brata (vow or a ritual) that may be observed by women in order to attract blessings and good luck into their lives and avoid untimely demise of their husbands, Yudhishtira asked Lord Krishna regarding it. According to Lord Krishna all these rituals are strong and spiritually effective but the most efficacious of these is the Savitri Brata.

This literature is set in the context of the absence of an heir because of the wealth and glory of a noble king Ashwapati. One of the wise men came to the palace of the king and told him that he was a saddened man because he had no child. The sage gave the king a sacred mantra of which he had been reciting with great devotion and he got a daughter Savitri.

Savitri was an amazingly beautiful, intelligent, and very strong moralized woman who passed most of her days in visiting hermitages, and ashrams, worshipping sages and studying spiritual life. Satyavan, son of King Dyumatsena, lost his kingdom, his royal eyesight and went in exile into the forest one day when he met her. Even though there was a prophesied gloom, Savitri stood firm and chose to marry him. The wedding took place, and Savitri moved into the forest with Satyavan and his kin and learning all the duties of a daughter in law and wife and becoming fully herself dedicated to that service. When the day of death of Satyavan was so near Savitri undertook hard spiritual practices like fasting, Lakshmi Narayan Puja, and meditation. On the day of the death of Satyavan he got some sudden illness and fell down. Yama, the god of death was seen to take away the soul of Satyavan and Savitri followed him obediently.

During their journey, Savitri conversed with Yama and talked to him of righteousness, devotion and the role of a wife. Yama also gave her three boons which she could not ask the life of Satyavan. Nevertheless, intelligence and love of Savitri prompted Yama to revive Satyavan by giving his soul and thereby he came alive.

Savitri triumphed over death by her virtue, intelligence and her never-ending love. So wonderful was her righteousness that Yama announced to the same effect that any woman who will be/who practices the savitri Brata with purity and devotion, in particular on the Amavasya (new moon) day in the month of Jyestha, will be rewarded with an undisturbed long married life and will never have to face the status of a widow. It has since been observed with high sanctity by the female marital population to the health, wealth and lifelong marital happiness of their husband.

8. Traditions and ceremonies

Savitri Brata has been one of the most important and emotionally sentimental rituals to the Hindu married women, particularly the Hindu ones in Odisha and other regions of Eastern India. The basis of

such mythology goes far back into ancient times and the festival is celebrated with great faith in the epitome of marital faithfulness, love and soul power in the anthropomorphic character of Goddess Savitri.

During Savitri Brata day, married women wake up early on the same day just before sunrise and start off the day with a holy bath ritual that is considered to cleanse the body and mind. Then they dress in new and clean clothes usually traditional sarees in red, yellow or white color with red borders the color signifies fertility, auspiciousness and marital bliss. The decoration of the body is another important part: women draw the sindoor (vermillion) over their brows, use bangles, bindis, anklets, toe rings all of which signify that they are married or that they show their devotion and loyalty towards the well-being of their husbands.

One of the main customs of the brata is a preparation of nine types of fruits and flowers which are to be offered to Goddess Savitri. These are known as bhoga and typically comprise of washed pulses (mung, biri), rice (arua), seasonal fruits such as mango, jackfruit, dates, kendu (diospyros), bananas, coconut and palm fruit and all are served in a neatly prepared sacred place. These foods represent prosperity, fertility and appreciation of the good in familial life.

The center point of the ceremony is the recitation or listening of the Savitri Brata Katha a story that contains the legendary Savitri and Satyavan. The myth states that Savitri was a faithful wife to her man Satyavan who would pass away in a year and one day after the wedding. As the prophecy said, when Yama, the god of death, came to take away his soul, Satyavan always followed him into the forests and in the mountains arguing with him using her wisdom and her virtues, and also the constant love she had on him. Touched by her faithfulness and her wisdom, Yama ultimately complied with her desire and restored the life of Satyavan and gave him back his kingdom. It is a strong story, which is regarded as the representation of feminine power, faithfulness, and godlike stubbornness.

Women who watch the brata are strict ritual fasting participants (nirjala upavasa), that is, they do not eat or drink water the whole day, as a spiritual exercise and a symbolic sacrifice. They do not break the fast till evening when the rituals of puja are over and they could eat-up the fruits offered as Prasad. It is not just an act of piety, but also an imitation of the same endurance and determination of Savitri herself.

A Silapua (grinding stone) is usually placed as part of the ritual set up; the Silapua is bathed, is given a new saree, some haldi (turmeric), sindoor and ornaments and treated like Savitri herself during the festival. Women also pay a lot of homage to the Silapua considering it as a divine form of the goddess. Also during the puja symbolic form of banyan (Batabruksha) or a small branch of it is used since it is the sacred tree under which Savitri is said to have challenged Lord Yama.

Most women usually carry out the Brata in the nearby temples, but others can as well practice it in their homes. Regardless, the ceremonies are carried out with exquisite touch of tradition, as well as community and spiritual will. In other locations, female groups congregate to enact the Brata, which makes them feel a sisterhood and a common personhood in the culture.

On conclusion of rituals, women respect their husbands, as well as elder by touching their feet and blessings, which fortifies normal family values, as well as social coherence. This symbolical act is not a sign of submission in a subordinate meaning but as a form of reverence and thanksgiving to their family ties.

Actually Savitri Brata is not only a religious practice, but it is a still living cultural practice whose main ideology is to pass traditions about love, sacrifice and being strong to the next generations. It provides a rare insight into moral system and spiritual goals of Hindu womanhood, where the strength of prayers,

the sanctity of marriage and the boldness to stand against fate become its dominant motifs. Women can also pray that their husbands have a long life by assuming the character of Savitri but they can also pray the health, happiness, and well being of the family.

9. Love that triumph over mortality

The Savitri Amavasya or savitri Brata is a spiritually effective and emotionally rich practice by women who are part of the Hindu faith and are married most often, women whose husband is still alive. This divine day is deep rooted in Indian epic tradition and moral philosophy as it is not only the day of fidelity in marital points of view but also of power of love, loyalty, devotion and moral courage. The festival is received in great awe in Odissi, Bihar, West Bengal and other southern states (especially Tamil Nadu), as instances educating the social ideal of unity and faithfulness between husband and wife the legendary story of the conjugal pair of Savitri and Satyavan dating back to time immemorial.

The bulk of treadle is the unwavering beliefs of a wife who despite the strong love and spiritual powers overcame even the death that comes. Married women perform one-day fast of simple starvation, even water consumption in some areas, with the only aim to pray their husband's long and successful life, with good health. Clad out in their most elegant old-fashioned best, they dress in red or yellow sarees, sport sindoor (vermilion), bangles, and bindis and pray to Goddess Savitri to lend her spiritual power and set an example by her actions.

Epic, however, is not the most astounding factor about Savitri Brata rather it is the immortal narrative behind this epic- the story which tells the nations that the pure love equipped with virtues and willpower is capable of breaking even the death itself.

The book opens with Satyavan a noble but goodhearted prince who leads an exiled life with his blind father. Satyavan was a very righteous man with or without money. When Savitri, daughter of King Ashwapati, beautiful and wise, decided to marry Satyavan, since he was also a beautiful and agreeable young man and very special, the sage Narada warned her and told that Satyavan will die precisely one year after the wedding took place. But Savitri did not relent. She was not in love because of fear or warmth but truth and spiritual certainty. She knew her destiny to be so but being the strength of choice, she got married to Satyavan in a fearless heart.

When the fateful day of death drew near Savitri undertook a severe fast, yielding her absolutely to prayer and penance. She neither ate nor slept during three days and nights, but with constant attention called down the blessings of the gods. On the last day, she went with her husband to the forest, and there he felt tired, when he was chopping a tree. When he fell on the ground with his head resting lightly on her knees, the god of death (Yama) has come to take the soul of Satyavan.

Savitri sank not into despair. Calmly and with a determination in her heart she stood up and followed Yama and walked after him into the woods. She was not asking Yama to spare her but trying to explain to him the strength of righteousness, dharma and love with every step. Yama would keep on requesting her to come back and indicated that her time on Earth was not finished yet. But undaunted Savitri went on with her divine quest, challenged the divine being, appealing to him through argument to the excellence of devotion, to the sacredness of marriage, to the dharma necessity of even the gods themselves.

Yama granted her three wishes which included purity, intelligence and humbleness after being impressed by her purity, intelligence and humility. In the first boon Savitri was granted sight back to her

father in law and a kingdom that he lost. With the second she prayed that her own family be prosperous and happy. And the third she requested to have a hundred sons.

Yama agreed. But then, through Godly grace and cunning logic, Savitri asked a rather subtle question: How could she have children without her husband, when she became vowed never to remarry? It was true the god of death had been beaten by her piety and fairness. When touched by her courageous love and spiritual strength, Yama gave Satyavan life back, saying that true faith has the right to alter fate.

The awakening of Satyavan was like a man who had just walked up out of a profound slumber, without having had any clue of the battle of heaven that had been fought over his soul. The two came back home and they later to royal splendor. Together they led a long, happy and upright life never to be forgotten as a pair whose love had crossed fate.

Savitri Brata is to this day a very symbolic and still living tradition that reminds generations of women about the power of love and the moral willpower. It can be interpreted as the power that rests in women and it is not that loud, violent power but silent, sustained and graceful. The festival teaches us that love is not only passion but pledge, practice and dedication.

Women sitting under banyan trees or touching their home altars, tying holy threads, offering fruits, hearing the Savitri Katha are not simply going through a ritual they declare an eternal verity that all obstacles are surmountable by love by virtue and strength of soul.

10. Conclusion

Savitri Brata is an Indian custom, which motivates women to live a life of virtue, devotion, endurance, and moral principled. It also shows that faith, love, courage and patience will help overcome any situation even death so great. This tradition is said to have been conducted majorly by the Brahmin family, but since then it has not only crossed the folder and community lines but is also being served with reverence by women of varied social and cultural backgrounds in Odisha and the other Indian states. But with the speedy modernization occurring in the society the preservation and severity of these ancient traditions are under a lot of threat. The trend of urbanization, changing life style, shifting belief system and the imposition of the digital culture has blunted the sense of spiritual fire which been in precedence of rituals such as Savitri Brata. Somewhat in a given region, it has become more of a ritual affair than a spiritual experience. Nevertheless, all these challenges cannot eliminate the fact that a ritual remains an emotionally and culturally relevant part of the experiences of most women. The performance of assembling, the repetition of the mantra Hulahuli and Haribol, the sacred rituals and the telling of the story of Savitri encourage the feeling of devotion, unity and identity among the people. It turns into an instance of worship, glory to the femininity, uniting and love. Irrespective of these changes, the essence of Savitri Brata revelation is still in the air that motivates women of several generations to teach the values of love, sacrifice and faith.

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