



The Saga of the Blind
Translation of Surawa Naatak

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Surawa Naatak, translated into English as *The Saga of the Blind*, is a powerful cultural text centering the character of a woman addressed as Surawa's wife. Her name does not appear in the text of the play, nor is any paratextual clue given throughout. Having a protagonist from the marginal section of society, with high morals, gives this play a special place in Indian folk literature. Under Indian dramatic tradition, the major characters in a play mostly hail from the higher classes of society. In *The Saga of the Blind*, Surawa's wife hails from the *Dalit* community, and exhibits lofty morals and virtues, that fetches all the reasons to be recommended a place for her beside any great woman in history. The *Saga of the Blind* presents an interesting record of the vicious intrigues and conspiracies found in many joint families. Further the value and importance of cultivated land in the Indian agrarian household economy has been referred as having greater impact on social and familial relationships. The character of Surawa's wife in the play presents an ideal Indian wife, who by virtue of her inner strength proves a role model for the womenfolk. Although badly tortured and harassed in an orthodox patriarchal set up, she never succumbs to adversities, and thus proves that an Indian woman can brave any adversity.

I struck a chord with the plot of this play, watching certain performances in the Awadh and the eastern (Poorvanchal) regions of Uttar Pradesh. Upon inquiring about the published text of the play, the actors and owners of the theatre troupes could not provide the authentic copy. Different theatre groups blend local colours also with the main story line. In folk performances, interludes and farce also interfere with the plot. The version taken here is the most popular. Most of the folk theatre artists learn their dialogues and acquire an understanding of the plot through the medium of folk orality, as the play travels in time from one generation to another.

Mr. Vidya Naresh Singh an inquisitive member of my research team managed a published copy of *Surawa Naatak* from a rural weekly market from a place known as Rasara in Balia district of Uttar Pradesh. The published copy of the play credits its authorship to Sri Mahadev Prasad Singh. From the para texts and the blurb of the printed version nothing is known except his name. It is published from Thakur Prasad and Sons Booksellers & Publishers, Rajadarvaja, Varanasi. The text of the play is printed in 16 pages, and ends up in some verses on copyright. Various lines/dialogues/stage direction, etc. in the text of the play have been arranged as *Doha* (Couplet), *Chaupai* (quatrain) and *Kajali* meter, in the print version, but they seldom match the classical features of these meters, technically. In this version the punctuation marks are also not used correctly. When my research team recorded and analysed the popular oral versions of the play, several dialectic variations came forth but the theme remained the same. In the translation, I have followed an edited form of this folk cultural text – *Surawa Naatak*. The literary translation of the play, that I very modestly propose to be called “Translevelization” follows:

Text

***Surawa Naatak* as The Saga of the Blind**

Characters¹

Surawa

A young man

Savitri

Surawa’s wife

Shaila

Savitri’s sister-in-law (Bhaujai)

¹ In the source language-text the characters are not introduced. The text is unsystematically arranged, and the names of the characters are dubious and overlapping. For bringing clarity to the context and text, I have named the characters. The decision to give names to different characters, makes the text more accessible, and the overall meaning comes out well.

Sangya
Surawa's sister-in-law (Bhaujai)
Kutani
A provocateur
Ghurawa/ Fake Sadhu
A young man, who had a proffer for marrying Savitri
Sadhu
Genuine Sadhu

Invocation:

Chanting Rama brings eternal bliss, chant His name
by heart,
it shows us the purpose of life, even the Vedas so
affirm.

Introduction:

Now listen, one and all, with attention keen,
I narrate *The Saga of the Blind*,
Kajali meter makes the rhyme.
A true record of a Sati it has proved,
Mahadeva narrates that,
which was, henceforth:
Unheard!
Nondescript!
Unseen!

Scene: One

Narrator: Now worshipping the holy feet of Sita-Ram, I narrate
Surawa's saga, in verse:

Residing there in a Tappepur a small village Jhingru Rawat
did see every pleasure with kith and kin,
Two sons, he begot, managed their nuptial knots on time.
As ill luck would have it, illness caught suddenly the younger one:
he lost his eyes both. Unfortunately,
on the chap's turning blind, his connubial stage came at stake –
the wife decided to stay at father's home.
What happened next – to know it all, dear folk now lend your ears.

One fine day, perplexed by the words of his sister-in-law,
Surawa spoke so:

Surawa (to Sangya²):

In my tender years, you were so sweet,
What brought in you, this fateful turn?
See, it's a simple urge for water,
and you're making a mountain out of a molehill!
Why do you pinch my heart so harsh,
giving a look stoic and sparse!
Is it some purpose fetid that envelops your heart?

Sangya:

Hey, why you lock your horns in vain?
No hope I see for a household chain.
Take your spouse to a separate home
at her arrival, satiate, and be calm,
And yeah! Merry make, full swing, in her cologne.

Surawa:

Hearing it all, all hopes collapse,
Fully famished, I stand.
I'll go somewhere, to spend days on alms,
How can I earn, now, to resource you?
Live happily in peace, never think of me,
I'm now set to move
For making some establishment new.

Narrator: Surawa moves out. He has decided to go for begging.
Meanwhile Surawa's wife is pressurized at her parental home to
marry someone else which she resents, and speaks to her sister-in-
law this.

² This name has been given by the translator. In the folk text it was written
as Surawa's wife.

Nanad³ to Bhaujai⁴:

(*Savitri⁵ to Shaila*) My Bhauji! It's just a request;
Why don't you settle my Gauna's⁶ date?
Roamed debauchees around, when for shopping I
had gone,
and the guys extended, hey *Bhaujai*, just lecherous
glance.
Listen, my dear, some facts, serious to share;
Burgeoning youth taxes my heart
full grown blood now passions chant.
I too, here, a woman like you.
A sweet pain, my body feels
anxious I turn, and feel lovelorn,
With folded hands, I make request-
Why don't ye arrange my *Gauna* to the in-laws?

Shaila:

Listen! *Nanad*,⁷ my anxious babe,
Honey charm shall clasp you when you're grown.
So plain you speak
I see just fun over here.
I see just fun over here,
So impertinent you, my lass!
What else just fun I'll make
I do understand it all;
why so anxious have you turned?
You'll simply repent,
the day you'll move to the in-laws.
Intimacy with man, brings nothing but pain.
Only tears would solace you,
Smiting you, there, in nuptial bed.

³ Husband's sister

⁴ Brother's wife

⁵ The translator has given this name. In the folk text it was written as *Bhaujai*.

⁶ In some cases of Indian Hindu marriage, the wife stays back with her parents even after marriage. After some times the groom's side goes to fetch her.

⁷ Husband's sister

Savitri:

Hey, just tell me, my Gauna's date
When to the in laws, shall I move?
And when shall I see my man?
I'll narrate; and I'll listen –
close and closer-tete-a-tete- my man
I'll offer myself 24/7, at my lover's call.

Shaila:

What makes you so to speak,
putting on stake, the honour of the clan?
Why a gloomy look you've donned?
Why the tears make frequent flow?
Don't put our honour at stake,
Live in pleasure at the paternal home.

Savitri:

My burgeoning youth screws me deep,
An unknown pain my heart does feel.
The breasts too unwieldy to maintain.
How can I show my ailing heart;
to you who just fiddles in *Bhaiya's*⁸ arms!

Shaila:

Tender as you are, take my advice, by heart
Succumb you'll, to the travails at the in-laws.
How should I narrate, your man's vigor
He's manly grown-up figure.
He would tax, and of course grill,
mind you! Better realize it still.

Savitri:

Don't you see my body bosom-bowed
awaiting him relentlessly, so fervent.
Murky they feel *sans* my hubby's sense

⁸ Brother

he in my arms -- we will sleep.
Content in calm this heart will leap,
with my hubby in my slam, and
I would fetch ecstasy in the bed.

Shaila: (*angrily*)

Well, once out; always out.
In case you turn up, will get no retort,
To your brother, I'll report it all,
you would never be welcome back.
How dare you argue me at this instance?

Savitri:

Consecrate be the household to you alone,
how long should I impinge into it,
convey my memo to sibling dear,
that he should bid my better half,
with whom I have to spend the lifelong.

Shaila:

Now, listen, the truth I narrate –
You are married, but your man has lost his vision;
with who shall you spend your days?
Convincing your brother for some other match,
in a better household, we'll settle you again.

Savitri:

I know, my man is blind.
Taking care of him, I'll spend my days
Just my providence – that hubby has lost his vision.
I am not here to marry, the so called, better chap.

Shaila (*exasperated*):

Should you not heed upon me, I'll kick you apart.
For now, just, get out from my verge, my sight
Enjoy yourself with your man,
go to his home, or do whatever.
(*Savitri moves out*)

Scene: Two

Narrator (*addressing the audience*): Hearing this all, the Nanad⁹ moves out collecting her belongings all. She moves towards the husband's place. On the way, she comes across Surawa. (*Savitri does not recognize Surawa, yet associating some familiarity with the dialect, enquires about the address of her in-laws.*)

Savitri:

May you please direct, hey gentleman,
the direction of Village Tappepur?
which way would does lead to it?
I'm in great mess,
frenetic, searching it,
Won't you help, sir, tracking it?

Surawa:

Well! Just tell me the name to who you'll go,
to ease you, I'm Surawa,
willing to escort you to your spot.
I know everybody in the village,
and, shall narrate everything to you.

Savitri:

Destination is Tappepur,
Jhinguru Rawat heads the clan
visit of that, today, I plan.
His son wedded to me,
I am rushing to him;
he has met his vision-loss.
Won't you help me in locating the spot?

Surawa:

What a coincident! I'm from Tappepur,
Jhinguru Rawat – my father is called,

⁹ Mentioned here as Savitri

tell me the business that you mean,
and yes, from where have you come?
Your description connotes me as your husband!
Aren't you scared?
You are! For sure! clearly tell.

Savitri:

Thank my Goodness!
Me the wife, and, you, my man!
It's our relation that brings me from father's home.
I see you in this state –
this is the saddest of all moments.
I'm at loss;
I'm totally lost – my dear better half.

Surawa:

What is there in fate,
can never be late,
now tears can't make way.
You were merrily settled at home,
why have you come from there?
No quandary I see this way,
my company would, but give you pain.

Savitri:

You're my husband,
Why so dull, here you sound?
Let my world turn to ashes,
my life to become hell,
if it comes, your name to denounce.
Your feelings are splendid – my sweet compatriot,
I'll spend my days caring you around.
My duty, this life, is just devotion to my man,
My love for you, seldom has bound.

Narrator: At Savitri's statement Surawa turns the happiest of the men, and relishes it within his heart. In wife's company he goes care free, and softly sets his feelings roll.

Surawa:

We are getting late,
let's move; you guide me,
we'll reach some place a far,
in the guise of a beggar-couple
we shall spend our days over there.

Savitri:

You're my sincere man!
Why do, you sound so amateur?
We'll move to our home,
and shall spend our days there.
Nothing that Bhaujai¹⁰ construes malice in it,
once we shall show the things in detail.

Narrator: Deciding so, the couple made their way, with some unknown fear they reach home Bhaujai¹¹ is all set to reject their proposal of resort at home. As they're approaching the courtyard; watching them Sangya contrives a plan. Pat, she ignores, and her gesture shows her intent.

Surawa:

Bhaujai, your words fade!
Don't turn indifferent this way,
A little space, here we entreat.
Taking care of your kids,
I'll spend my days henceforth,
look at me, and be kind,
we, both, shall work for you.

Sangya (*indignantly*):

Get out rascal, take your way,
You won't find space over here,
Why have you come to me,
with wife, now you enjoy!

¹⁰ Refers to Sangya

¹¹ Refers to Sangya

Surawa (*irately*):

Listen *Bhauji*¹²!
I've my share in the household,
Give me my share; both in move and chattel.
You're enjoying resources mine,
and for me – even no resort over here!

Sangya:

O hello! Your share spent in wedding;
how come you, a part, claim?

Narrator: At this statement of Sangya, Savitri requests Surawa to accompany her to her father's home.

Savitri:

My Lord, let's move to my father's home,
we shall live peacefully there.

Narrator: (*Speaking so, Savitri takes Surwa to her parental home*)

Scene: Three

Savitri's Parental Home

Watching the couple together Sangya starts speaking tactfully

Shaila:

Nice is the deliberation that brought you here,
but a financial crunch scorches our household,
you know it too well.
So, take the route that brought you here,
no room, for you, is here secured.

Narrator: Listening Sangya's verdict, Savitri turns speechless and numb. She thinks for a while, turns numb as a statue and then takes her accompanying husband back. Both pent up in thoughts, all anchors lost, divinity is the only resort. So, in anguish acute, they reach a forest. Surawa falls asleep getting dead-tired on the way.

¹² Sister-in-Law

Savitri gives a gentle rub over Surawa's feet. On the other hand, Ghurawa, who had a proffer for marrying Savitri, comes to know that Savitri has attained her husband. Feeling cheated, Ghurawa takes some accomplice, and moves recklessly in search for Savitri. Ghurawa locates Savitri and Surawa in the forest. He disguises himself as a Sadhu, and speaks:

Ghurawa¹³ as Fake Sadhu:

From where have you come,
for staying at this forest?
Tell me, please,
it seems a decision wrong!
Accompany to my place,
both of you would merry-make,
Why, in vain, you experience pain

Savitri:

We're from Tappepur.
What to speak about me,
ill luck has struck upon.
We're spending our days in penury and pain,
see my husband – sleeping, journey's fatigue.
I take his care and knead his feet.
no charm can I find at other place.
The Almighty is here to take our care.
What is fated will show up for sure;
egotistic world turns worse in adversity.

Ghurawa , as Fake Sadhu:

Come to my cottage with your husband,
you'll have calm and content.
The jungle is occupied by violent beasts,
they are all there, set to harm.
The thought of staying pinches my nerve,
beware; you both may end your verve.

¹³ Ghurawa appears as a fake Sadhu . Mentioned as Ghantal also in some versions .

Savitri:

We're comfortable here, alone,
no sort of pleasure do we crave.
Our time onward is set for alms
Life always takes its course.
let the creatures do what they want.

Narrator: When Ghurawa as a Fake Sadhu fails to persuade Savitri, he comes to his real form and forces Savitri dragging. Savitri screams, Surawa wakes up listening her scream, but feels helpless in the lack of vision. With no help around, states Savitri with folded hands.

Savitri:

Sadhu,¹⁴ why are you doing this?
Hey, give it a thought:
You target and reprove my innocence,
you are assaulting a Sati like me!
Hey, speak; it is what makes a Sadhu-
such an indulgence in nasty creed?

Narrator: Ghurawa, a fake Sadhu throws away his Sadhu's cloak of
Coming into his real form, he speaks:

Ghurawa:

Now listen; find in me your husband to be,
your marriage was fixed with me,
and you deceived.
Now accept it and agree, that's it
I came here searching for you.
Your negation will bear the brunt,
mind it, lass, mind it!

Savitri:

You're sounding trash,
mind your speech,

¹⁴ Saint

You'll play, I, mean, foul with me?
A devoted wife her I am!
Why do you impose your views?
It's a clamor, throw it off, and keep away.
(Ghurawa suddenly takes out a firearm and starts bullying Savitri with it.)

Ghurawa: If you won't marry me, you would kick the bucket.

Savitri:
(looking apprehensively thoughtful)
Well, I'm ready to marry you,
but this gun frightens me of my death.

Ghurawa:
Come on, in vain you got frightened?
trust me,
I give it to you
(Ghurawa hands over his firearm to Savitri. Taking the firearm in her hand, Savitri plays with it for a while, grabbing a chance, she fires at Ghurawa and turns back to her husband)

Surawa:
Hey, what happened?
Why you screamed out,
and where have you been?
(Savitri narrates the happening in detail. Hurriedly they take their way onward. Moving ahead, incidentally, they come across one more Sadhu)

Savitri:
Hey, see another Sadhu!

Surawa:
No way, just hurry up. Sprint.
All black sheep, here, slip in Saint's robe.

Savitri:
No dear, he seems to be some sage real.

(Savitri touches the saint's feet, and offers a rubbing a massage. The Saint wakes up.)

Sadhu:

(Surprisingly)
My child, be blessed!
Express your wish!
Whatever they are, they'll see filled.

Savitri:

My only wish, Maharaj is my husband's vision
(The Sadhu touches Surawa's head, and Surawa recovers his sight. Savitri and Surawa prostrates in obeisance, and start groveling touching Sadhu's feet.)

Narrator: The couple's gratitude finds no words, simply they prostrate to the Saint's feet. *(The Saint is seen blessing the couple. Surawa has got his lost vision. They decide to come back their home.)*

Scene: Four **Surawa's Home**

Narrator: Surawa and Savitri reach Surawa's ancestral home. Sangya is astonished at Surawa's recovery of vision. Apparently, she allows the couple to stay with her. They receive welcome and enter the home. Sangya is seen with a woman who seems to be her close friend. She is a provocateur (mentioned henceforth as Kutani) by nature, and has been observing the state of affair, so close and keen. Now she is seen poisoning Sangya's mind. It may be easily construed that something unfair is set to happen.

Kutani¹⁵:

Hey! What a tantrum do you warrant,
clumsy adversity you have called!
I see uglier problems approaching your lot,
as you allowed the sister-in-law in your household!

¹⁵ A provocateur

You are ignorant of the consequences,
or have gone completely mad!
Suppose some issue is born
you'll face such a big thorn.
Half of the resources he will claim.
Come closer, and listen,
I offer an advice foolproof.
Do it so well, and yes, with care,
grow proximity with your brother-in-law,
and hatch with him some act astute,
Somehow accomplish Savitri's end.
As the bro in law becomes single
take no chance, just get mingle.
You'll see no blocks ahead,
gaily, cultivate his lands as well.

Narrator:

Delving deep into advice bleak,
prompt, she dons a thinking cap.
A shrewd design she conceives,
and sets all measures to dispense.
(A week later)
(Sangya is sitting concerned. Surawa comes and enquires the reason.)

Surawa:

*Bhaujai*¹⁶, you're feeling low!

Sangya:

Nothing, just concerned over my status,
as your wife controls the domiciliary.

Surawa:

What a fig: so is the fact!
Tell me frank, if she tortures you,
I'll oust that obnoxious, in no time.

¹⁶ Sister- in-law

Sangya:

Mere words I reek; action gives no sound.
(Facial expressions are seen, no words heard.
Sangya is seen whispering in Surawa's ears)

Surawa: *(In rising tone)*

I'm firm. Let the world doubt my paternity,
if I fail to marshal your command.

Sangya:

Are you sure? Can you dispense, as I suggest?

Surawa:

Of course! I'll.

Sangya:

If you're set to do as I say,
take your wife for pilgrimage,
switch her life off in some forest,
decompose her body immediately.
Finishing the deadlocks off,
gaily makes sweet return.
We'll have all fun together,
I'll cook your meals,
and accompany you in all hops.
Yes, my dear, in every walk.

Surawa *(smiling):*

With whom shall I spend my life
days after killing my wife?

Sangya:

Of course, with me!

Surawa:

And who'll mother my progeny?

Sangya:

Me, who else?

Surawa:

How to distinguish them? (Since, you are already married.)

Sangya:

The younger one yours! (And the earlier born, of your bro's!)

Narrator:

Listening Bhaujai's version so,
for pilgrimage with wife, he plans to go.
Reaching a forest, his joy leaps,
and sin blinds the vision hence far.
(The couple reaches a forest, and sets a space for their reclining)

Surawa:

My love, just take a nap, tiredness grasps your face.

Narrator: Savitri smiles, and feels drowsiness. As soon as she sleeps, Surawa drags his rapier for killing her. Instantly appears a Sadhu¹⁷, and holds Surawa's wrist firmly. The Sadhu speaks

Sadhu:

You bloody, sinner!
What adversities had she bore for you,
and you have fetched her to kill!

Narrator: After getting thrashed and admonished by the Sadhu, he escapes back to his home. Savitri is seen conversing with the Sadhu. The Sadhu is explaining some facts. Voice is not heard. It seems Sadhu is persuading her for some act, and she is unwilling. Now Savitri has come to know everything.)

Savitri:

I won't go, he will kill me.

¹⁷ A saint

Sadhu:

No fear at all! None is born here to kill you? I'll accompany you. You just proceed!

Scene: Five
Surawa's Home

(Savitri reaches Surawa's home. Sangya and Surawa dash at Savitri to kill her. The Sadhu is seen shielding her.)

Sadhu:

Listen carefully, if you'll harm her, you all shall meet devastation!

Sangya *(sarcastically)*:

I see, a paramour has accompanied to help!

Narrator: Listening to this, the Sadhu curses them¹⁸, and instantly they turn blind. Surawa's wife is seen in requesting mode. The Sadhu is unbending, after persuasion, he gets the curse redeemed. Everybody is seen prostrating to him in remorse.)

Speak up, folks, loudly
Hail to Lord Ram and Sita!
(God is great)

Note: The text of this play has been retrieved from many folk performances in the villages of eastern Uttar Pradesh. The text of *Surawa Naatak* is referred to match the storyline, yet the present work is not, completely, based on that. When it comes to match the syntax, and the semantic structures of the source text of a folk dialect, with the formal register of the target language, it offers many issues and concerns concerning paralinguistic features. These paratextual elements have been taken care of in the current translation. Issues of untranslatability come up on the one hand, and the patterns of

¹⁸ Sangya and Surawa

equivalence on the other. In this context, for the practice as referred above, the translator, very modestly, proposes the term “Tanslevelization.” When we aim at transference of meaning to the optimum level of accuracy and intelligibility, and there are deadlocks of cultural contexts, nothing can sound better than the expression “Translevelization.” We match different levels, and come up with a text in new form with the same spirit.

Works Consulted

Singh, Mahadev. *Surawa Naatak*. Varanasi: Thakur Prasad and Sons Booksellers & Publishers.

Singh, R.P. *Translating the Representative Folk Drama of Hindi Speaking North India into English: Remapping the Texts, Contexts and Connotations*. Report of UGC Major Research Project. 2013. Unpublished

Acknowledgements: This is the revised and updated version of a translated text that I submitted to UGC New Delhi under the report on my Major Research Project titled *Translating the Representative Folk Drama of Hindi Speaking North India into English: Remapping the Texts, Contexts and Connotations* (2011-2013).