



Touch as Metaphor: Reading “Ahalya’s Waiting” by Nandini Sahu

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To me, Nandini Sahu’s pivotal poem, “Ahalya’s Waiting” is the supreme example of protest literature. The Ramayana has been written by men from men’s perspective since time immemorial. Here Nandini takes up the responsibility of protesting against patriarchy in one of the world’s most powerful myths through her poem, “Ahalya’s Waiting” from her Amazon’s Bestselling poetry collection(2022), A Song, Half & Half. A first reading of the poem would apprise one with the question, ‘Was Ahalya actually waiting for a touch, in the first place?’. Because, the fundamental question of the poem is, ‘Was Ahalya waiting for the benevolent God to come someday, touch her, and redeem her of a sin that she actually never committed?’

With these tensions in my mind as a content reader of Nandini’s poetry, in this research, it would be pertinent for me narrowly to deal with:

✓ The anomalies of defining realism, modernism and postmodernism in the poem

“Ahalya’s Waiting” by Nandini Sahu

✓ Realism as content or realism as an effect on the reader vis-à-vis “Ahalya’s

Waiting”

✓ Modernism and postmodernism as a continuum and as typical classifiers vis-à-vis

“Ahalya’s Waiting”

✓ Post-Modernism and the inner self of Nandini as a creative writer

✓ Division of ‘realities’ in modernism and postmodernism, vis-à-vis “Ahalya’s

Waiting”

✓ The use of creative writing to explore extreme experiences in myth

✓ A comparative analysis of Nandini’s Ahalya with that of the character from Ramacharita Manas

✓ The apt use of the metaphor ‘touch’ in “Ahalya’s Waiting”

Nandini Continues to write social mobility literature here in her recent poetry collection, A Song, Half & Half, as elsewhere, through a poem like “Ahalya’s Waiting” where the personae Ahalya waits for a benevolent touch from her lord/lover, but not to redeem her of any sin that she never committed! This is the basic argument of the poem, while the persona is open for ‘touch’, both physical and metaphorical, by her archetypal Lord/lover to come and touch her as an elemental man would touch an elemental woman and both would complete each other in

the process.

Nandini Sahu is a progressive poetess. Her Ahalya is entirely different from Tulsidas's Ahalya. Because in this context , I can safely say that Tulsi Das advocated patriarchy. Tulsidas says in The Balkand (210/11, 12) of Ramacharita Manas:

आमएकदखमगमोः, ऋ खगमंगजशजन्तौतऋनां। ऋ
पउँछोपौनां००ंलोश्चभौदँख, कलकथोमौनको००शँह॥
(मोन, बोल 210/11-12)

(On the way, Ram saw an Ashram in which there were no birds and animals. Seeing a rock there, Shri Ramchandra asked Muni and he told the whole story in detail.) The essence of the story is,

गगतमनोर००पबउपलदँधौराधर
चरणकमलरजचोीतकं पोकररघौबर। (मोन, बोलकोऋड-210)

(O Raghuveer! Gautama's woman has patiently turned into a stone due to the curse, she wants the dust of your lotus feet, please be kind to her.)

The detailed story is that Indra and Moon together duped both Gautam Rishi and his wife. She had cohabited with Indra only after thinking him to be Gautam Rishi. Later, on the arrival of Gautam Rishi, when Indra was asked, she came to know that she had been cheated. When Ahalya told lie in such dire situation, the sage cursed her that she would become a stone immediately.

According to the Ramacharita Manas, Ahalya was guilty of two crimes, the first, sex with another man and the second, of lying. She had done the sexual crime as she was deprived and the crime of lying was done due to fear. These both crimes made her to remain stone for ages. Is there a single instance or example in all Indian mythological literature, where any Rishi had turned into stone because of someone's curse

for such a crime? After being a stone for ages, when Ahalya became alive by the touch of Ramchandra feet, she prays,

“म०नौरअपोशनक्षभौजगपोशनरोशनौरपौजनौखदोई-मोन,बोल 211/छऋ द2

(I am an impure woman and you are Ravanaripu who purifies the world and gives happiness to the devotees)

Now it is a matter of discussion that due to this crime, the moon did not become impure, he remained the Lunar God. Indra did not become impure, Indra remained a deity as yet, Gautama did not become impure, he remained Gautam Rishi forever. Then how did only Ahalya become impure? Apart from this, what other reason can be given that she was apolluted woman? Ram Laxman visit to Janakpuri, breaking the bow, Parshuram dialogue etc. are the most focused events of Ramcharit Manas When Shri Ramchandra went Janakpuri, one of Sita friend expressed her confidence about Ramchandra's virility and said,

परोंजो०ौपदपऋकजधउँौर,तारअो०ाल्योकं तअधभउँार।

०खोकरोीीबनौंशधनौचर७,यांशोततपौरौरअनभखर७।-मोन,बोल

223/5-6

(The Ahalya, the sinner, got salvation by touching the dust of lotus feet of Ramchandra, then How will he remain without breaking Shiva's bow!)

After Sita Swayamvar was over, the king and queen were hypnotically washing the holy feet of Ramchandra. How those feet are

जँपरोंमौनबोनतोला०गोतरा०जखपोतकमई (-मोन,बोल324/छऋ द2)

(By touching the Muni wife Ahalya, who was a great sinner, also got salvation, whether she was saved or not, it can also be the curiosity of a skeptical atheist.) But that is not the question

here. The question is, why has the poor Ahalya been remembered here as Pataki so quickly? Are both Chandra and Indra, who deceived her, being worshiped as Gods? The Muni who was duped by these two Gods also did not become the object of negation. Then why was Vanchita Abla forced to become the only stone?

To me, there is only one answer--she was the woman of Tulsi Das's imagination, not the radical ecofeminist Nandini's.

Different texts have various stories about Ahalya's salvation, I would like to draw a parallel of this poem with multiple mythical and literary texts. Commentators of Vedic literature have considered it a metaphor. 'Ahalya Bhoomi' means that the land in which the plough has not been carried out, it seems natural as the land is related to Indra, the deity of rain. In later literature, Ahalya's story developed substantially and the relationship of her salvation was linked to Rama. In the Mahabharata, Gautama is considered to be Ahalya's husband. In fact, it is written in Vedic literature that Indra used to call himself as Gautama.

There is a story in the book, Shadbish Brahmin, in which both the Gods and the Asuras were fighting, Gautama was doing penance between the two armies. Indra requested him to become his detective, but Gautama rejected him. Then Indra took the form of Gautama and proposed to become a detective, which he accepted. Perhaps on the basis of this story, it was believed that Ahalya's husband's name was Gautama and Indra was called Ahalya-Jar.

Valmiki Uttarakanda has presented another aspect in this context. According to it, Brahma took the best parts of other beings and created a woman who completely lacked 'hala' (ugliness). It is equally highlighted by the poetess Nandini in her poem in following lines,

‘Ahalya’ connotes the ‘one with no ugliness’.

The woman beautiful turned into a stone there and then.

Reek of patriarchy with the social game of victim-blaming began.

(Sahu, 28)

Sans all ugliness, she was named as Ahalya. Indra used to desire Ahalya, but Brahma kept her in custody of Gautam Rishi. After many years, Gautama returned her to Brahma and Brahma, seeing the accomplishment of the ascetic Gautam Rishi, presented her as his wife.

According to Harivansh Purana, Vaghyasva and Menaka had two children, Dividas and Ahalya. Ahalya became Gautam's wife and gave birth to Shatanand. The Brahma Purana says something else in this context. According to it, to get Ahalya as wife, there was a condition that the God who came to Brahma first after circumambulating the earth, would be given Ahalya. All the Gods went out to circumambulate the earth, but Gautama circumambulated the arddha-prasuta cow Surabhi and Shiva-Linga and got Ahalya as the reward.

In the post-modernist context, Nandini problematizes this 'trophy-wife' concept—of awarding/rewarding a woman of flesh-and-blood to someone without taking her will into consideration, and then redeeming her even without her appeal. To quote the poetess,

Father presented me, the puppet, to husband on his free will.

Husband couldn't fulfil me as a woman.

Indra tricked me to satiate his desire, not mine.

Inept, impotent husband cursed me

with what right, oh, with what right,

to become a stone exactly at a moment
when I was satiated as a woman!

And now why do I need yet another man, you, oh Ram,
to touch me and cleanse me of my uncommitted sin?
(Sahu, 29)

According to the Paumchariyam, Ahalya is the daughter of Jawalan Singh and Vedvati, who rejected King Indra on the occasion of her swayamvar and chose King Nandimali (or Anandmalakar). Later, Nandimali became disinterested in worldly pleasures and took initiation. Someday Indra had tied that meditating Nandimali, which resulted Indra to defeat by Ravana. In the Western account, Ahalya is mistakenly considered as Vishwamitra's wife. In the Skanda Purana and Mahabharata, the example of Gautama's son is Chirkari, who rejects his father Gautama's order to kill Ahalya for being an adulterer. In Chirkari's eyes, his mother was innocent, because Indra changed his form before Ahalya in Gautama's absence. According to the Assamese Balkand, Ranganatha Ramayana, this act was carried out with the aim of obstructing Gautama's penance. Brahmavaibrata Purana considers Indra a misdemeanor and Ahalya as innocent. According to Kirtivas Ramayana, Indra was the beloved disciple of Gautama. Similarly, there are many forms of Gautama's curse.

According to Mahabharata, Indra's beard was yellow, according to Valmiki Uttarkand,

Meghnad defeated Indra and he got half the fault of human sins, Indra being a snake etc. as

perValmiki'sBalkand, Balram Das, Kamban Ramayana, Indra became Sahasranayan,

According to Padam Purana, Ahalya got no curse in the myth.

Pashanbhuta Ahalya is mentioned for the first time in Raghuvansh and later in Narasimha

Purana, Skandha Purana, Mahanatak, Sarla Daskrit Mahabharata, Ganesh Purana. In

Valmiki's Balkand, Gautama said that after welcoming Rama, Ahalya would come to him in

her human body as before, that is, Vapurdhariyishasi. Perhaps this is story, from where the

notion of Ahalya becoming a rock arises. According to Ramkien, Gautama cursed her so that

at the time of Ramavatar, she would be used to build the bridge and should be buried in the

ocean forever. A curse of Gautama according to which Ahalya became a dry river, is less

prevalent. According to a legend, Ahalya's daughter Anjana is mentioned here and there. When

Gautama learned about Ahalya's adultery from his divine vision, he asked Ahalya about the

reality of the daughter. Ahalya replied that the man was Marjar, which had two meanings--

Indra taking two forms or her adultery. On this, he cursed Ahalya to become the rock and Indra

to become Sahasrayoni. Anyway, according to legend, Ahalya and Gautama had two sons Bali

and Sugriva.

In the story of Pashanbhuta Ahalya, the author of Adhyatma Ramayana connected Ahalya with

standing on the rock and doing penance. In this way, a famous mythological story of Ahalya

from Brahmin texts and merged into the devotion of Ahalya to Ram, taking many forms. The

playwrights have had no hesitation in changing the narrative of Rama. In Janaki Parinay, the

story of Ahalya salvation comes in such a way that when Rama wants to kill himself by jumping

off the rock after seeing the life of the elusive Sita in danger, Ahalya appears from the rock

with the touch of lotus feet of Rama and told him the secret of demonic Maya.

European scholars compare Indra to the Greek myth Zeus. Both are Gods of the sky and are

famous for their love affairs with women. Zeus, impersonating the sun's rays or their

husbands, rapes many princesses and nymphs, and gives birth to great heroes such as Porseus

and Hercules. Some critics conclude men with the sky culture and women with earth culture,

while some see this story as a symbol of the relationship between Dev culture and Aryan

culture. Narendra Kohli, in his novel "Ramkatha", attempted to keep the narrative of Ahalya

and Gautam in modern perspective.

Hindi poet Udbhrant speaks about Ahalya in his poetry collection "Treta" that there was a

great bonding of love between Gautama and Ahalya. But once he set fire to his family life by

inviting neighbor King Indra to stay at his place. Indra was the king of the nearby Surpur

kingdom. He was fascinated to see Ahalya. In the absence of Gautam Rishi, to fulfill the evil

wish of his mind, he tried to go to Ahalya in the guise of Gautam on the night of Amavasya.

But Ahalya's sixth sense caught Indra's intentions and signaled him to get out, but then the

entry of Gautam Rishi made her a victim of wrath. Gautam Rishi became suspicious of his wife

and left her alone to live life in a solitude like a rock. The condition of innocent women in the

then conservative society was not good. They were expelled from society. When Ram came in

contact with Ahilya, who did not go outside from her place, Ahalya again got social acceptance.

Narendra Kohli took this fact of Udbhrant with a different angle. At that time, the Ashrams

were equivalent to modern schools or universities, and the sages were the heads of departments

of those institutions like vice-chancellors. As per the contents of Narendra Kohli's novel,

Gautama gave shelter to Indra as he was the king of the neighboring country. Ahalya was

sleeping with her fever-stricken son Shat, but Indra, seeing the very beautiful woman,

considered her futile to suffer association with a poor sage. Indra accepted hospitality at

Gautam's place and while drinking alcohol, Gautam wanted to see Ahalya alone in the absence

of Rishi. Ahalya was asleep, but could experience that unknown touch well. When Ahalya's

mouth sneezed and her son started crying loudly. The people of the neighborhood gathered, at

that time Gautam Rishi returned to his hut, Indra threw a sentence towards the crowd with

shameless wickedness, "First she called me and now she is pretending"; --claiming this, he sat

in his plane and went to his country. The reason behind Vishwamitra telling this story to Ram-

Laxman was to present the background of revolution, not only the role of struggle in life. but

also to provoke anger against injustice in the public mind. If a woman calls a man and the

man accepts it and comes to her, then the society will blame the woman only, Indra has done

such a trick. By stigmatizing Ahalya, he wants to hide serious crimes and sins of raping a

Rishi's wife. Gautam Rishi put the matter of insulting Ahalya in front of the society and called

upon them to remove Indra, the devotee of Dev culture and the guardian of the sages, but even

though a section considered Ahalya innocent, but her chastity had been tarnished. Ahalya could

not be saved by punishing Indra or not. Due to the devaluation of social status, various

questions were raised about Gautam Rishi, being the Head of the Ashram. The question arises

that if a sinful man tortures a weak woman, will his Ashram also be considered as corrupt? Not

only this, wherever Gautama will go, every person raise a finger towards him as he is husband

of Indra's Bhogya Ahalya and even when his son will grow up, the society will not refrain from

sledging him. Such accidents do not unite the people to stand against the ruling class in the

general, holding the power of office, the power of money, the power of paramount. The pioneer

in the field of knowledge, fame and honor endangered the existence of citizens like Gautam

Rishi, who not only fed on their development, but also for future generation. These ideas made

Ahalya to go underground for living a lonely life and forced Gautam Rishi to go another place

for his future. When a great man like Rama saved Ahalya by finding that abandoned Ashram

at the behest of Vishwamitra, she regained social dignity and was freed from living an

unaimable, lonely life. On getting the protection of Ram, thinkers, sages, priests, Brahmins

stopped considering Ahalya as criminal at the social and moral level. Nandini problematizes

this 'victim-blaming' syndrome of our society and exposes its hypocrisy:

Touch sensitive, touch deprived,

touch-craving, I would rather wait till eternity.

I prefer to reject your offer of touching me

on the condition of taking me
into the snares of purity-pollution.

I am my own possessor, proprietor, I am my woman.

Let me remain ethically upright on my own terms—
this is my ultimate liberation.

(Sahu, 29)

Here I am reminded about Hindi Dalit Critic Kanwal Bharti.
He considers this story as a

relationship between Aryan and Dev culture. Ahalya of
Ramayana was not innocent.

According to the Ramayana, when Maharishi Gautam was not
at the Ashram, Shachipati Indra

went there in disguise of Gautam Muni and said to Ahalya,
"Always be careful, Sundari! The

lover do not wait for time. I want to have sex with you. "
Ahalya also recognized Indra in the

guise of Muni. 'Hey! Devraj Indra wants me'; – Out
of curiosity, she accepted the offer to have

sex with him. After sex, Ahalya said- "I am grateful to
have sex with you, now you leave soon

before Gautama comes and protect me."

Then Indra also said to Ahilya, "Sundari! I was satisfied
too. As I came, I'll go the same way

immediately. At that time, Gautam came and saw both of
them. Immediately cursed Indra that

his testicles should fall and he became testicleless. He then cursed Ahilya, "You will lie here

for many thousands of years only by inhaling air or fasting and will live in the ashes of this

Ashram by remaining invisible from all beings." The poem of Nandini's Sahu started with

these lines quoted from Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India

(Wendy Doniger, Mircea Eliade)

(Sahu, 28)

"Ahalya, you will live here for many thousands of years, eating wind, without any food, lying on ashes

and generating inner heat. Invisible to all creatures,

you will live in this hermitage. And when Rama,

who is unassailable, comes to this terrible forest,

then you will be purified. By receiving him as a guest

you will become free of greed and delusion,

you evil woman, and you will take on your own form

in my presence, full of joy."

Echoed husband Rishi Goutama's command

bestowed upon the beautiful wife Ahalya, who had just had

her first ever orgasm, the fulfilment of her

womanhood through Indra, in disguise of Goutama.

Later, on Indra's request, the seniors Gods saved Indra by putting sheep testicles, but Ahalya

was saved by Ram by touching his feet. The following questions emerge from this narration:

- 1) Why did Indra say that men who want sex do not wait for an appropriate time ?
- 2) Did Ahalya recognize Indra even in Munivesh?
- 3) After recognizing Indra, did Ahalya say that Aho, Devraj wants me?
- 4) Did Ahalya accept Indra's proposal?
- 5) Did Ahalya say after sexual intercourse that I was grateful for your intercourse?
- 6) Did Ahalya ask Indra to run away immediately after sexual intercourse ?
- 7) Bhadret Anand Kausalyan thinks differently, If the touch had to be done, what could not be done by hand ? why by legs ?

“मौनोत्तयतारलगतपगधौर, ोकरोतरां भौशनभारपउँर”

The only answer to these questions is that Ahalya and Devraj Indra had a physical relationship

with mutual consent. Indra was recognized by Ahalya because she was already aware of his

coming in Munivesh. Ahalya herself was willing to have sexual intercourse with Indra. So she

accepted Indra's proposal and both of them got complete satisfaction after intercourse.

All the above questions of critic Kanwal Bharati are, in a way, replied in this poem by Nandini,

using 'touch' as a powerful metaphor. As per her, Ahalya did not want touch by hand or legs,

but by sentiments, language and reverential behaviors, which
can be seen in the following lines

of poem,

Your touch should be your creative language,
your behaviour, your basic attitude.

With my touch, stars ought to dance across your skin.

Your touch must take away my fears of

all Goutamas and Indras.

Love, soothe my anxiety and
fill my senses with your compassion.

Touch my cognizance and you can redeem the stone.

Make me your Muse.

You know, touch is where miracles arise

And exchange of the light and dark begin.

The curse of Rishi Goutama may be immobilized

with your touch, with this assertion.

(Sahu, 28)

All the Indian litterateurs, whether Hindi poet Udbhrant was
writing his poem on Ahalya in his

collection "Treta", whether novelist Narendra Kohli
was writing "Ramkatha", no matter how

much mythological literature, all men were supremacists and
believed in man's dominance in

society. No writer has shown the courage to read Ahalya's sinner voice. It is not only right for the writer to raise questions of any character, but also to find the psychological reasons behind it. Nandini has dared to discover these reasons in her poem in these lines:-

Father presented me, the puppet, to husband on his free will.
Husband couldn't fulfil me as a woman.
Indra tricked me to satiate his desire, not mine.
Inept, impotent husband cursed me
with what right, oh, with what right,
to become a stone exactly at a moment
when I was satiated as a woman!
And now why do I need yet another man, you, oh Ram,
to touch me and cleanse me of my uncommitted sin?
(Sahu, 29)

Nandini problematizes the situation when woman has been considered as an attractive figurine and nothing more than that. In moments of rest, she is the beloved, otherwise she is an the object. The deep abyss of inequality between the male and female has been questioned by the poetess. Our country is debauched even today, despite we talk so much about sexual parity, but our ideas about marriage and sex are hypocritical. It is true that throughout the globe, only

men have framed protocols about the ideals of chastity, purity, specifically about

women. Regretfully these ideals are limited to woman’s body. Before marriage, It is prohibited.

Later on, touch is permissible only by husband. Once she is married, then no person other than

her husband should not come into picture in any condition. By religion, by formula, by social

organization and finally by body systems, it is engrossed in our mind that marriage is only

solution to transform the girl into a pure woman. Unless the girl is sanctified by marriage, she

has to spend her life in infinite loneliness—or become a stone! For thousands of years in Indian

history or mythological works, poets have created strange inequalities between man and

woman, while the poetess Nandini’s “Ahalya’s Waiting” gives the message about fundamental

right of womanhood. Nandini’s “Ahalya” is a symbol of the woman who understands her body

and mind, who respects herself, with conviction. According to her, unless the lost souls of

women do not awaken in our country, no matter how hard you try, human civilization cannot

be revived. She writes,

My redemption lies not just in your touch

but in zero tolerance of

any marginalization.

I need a rejoinder from the society
and from you, oh the most knowledgeable one,
for my quintuple patriarchal relegation.

(Sahu, 29)

I read “Ahalya’s Waiting” as an epic poem; a heroic character
like Ahalya creates this

estimation. Ahalya is a woman of strange distinctions, she
disrupts our very sense of

equilibrium and commands respect. She is the victim as well
as the eradicator. She is virtuous,

yet she has a much-questioned moral and social status. She is
dutiful, and yet she commands

dignity in her own terms. She is sovereign, yet she is the slave,
the puppet in the hands of time.

The metaphor ‘touch’ defines both the physical and the
metaphysical woman, Ahalya, in the

powerful poem “Ahalya’s Waiting” by Nandini. Such poems
are the need of the hour where a

woman looks in the eye of patriarchy, speaks clearly and
openly about her body and her

sovereignty, the multi-layered dignity thereof.

THE ART OF WINNING THE HEART

A Song, Half & Half by Nandini Sahu (Amazon’s
Bestselling Author, 2022)

Black Eagle Books, Dublin, USA, 2022. pp.124, Rs.250

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Reviewed by: Dinesh Kumar Mali, India

With a total of 65 poems written from her ‘Covid bed’, *A Song, Half & Half* by Nandini Sahu

came to me as a pleasant surprise, with a beautiful cover photo clicked by the poet herself. I

rather read the Editorial and most of the poems at one go, each one in tandem with the other,

and each piece addressing the very important theme, femininity and feminine power with

sublime love. The book has the art of winning a heart incline. The poems have a predisposition

to the theme of love as panacea, and as a reader, I felt this seminal book is the need of the hour.

In the midst of so much of odium and abhorrence in the planet, love is the answer to all our

existential questions—Nandini understands that, being a devotee at the altar of love.

The intriguing title, *A Song, Half & Half*, says half the story—a song of love, a life of love

written/shared half and half by two persons in love. The Preface by Nandini herself talks about

a world that is beautiful with the touch of Muses and free-flow of melody and euphonic poetry.

About this collection, Nandini herself says, “All the poems are about my moods, modes and

mores, they are about the roller coaster rides that I had, and of course about the most complex

human emotions. My readers and researchers may find these poems very different from my

earlier poems. Mythical poet, folklorist Nandini writing romantic, jovial, humorous, light

poems, while talking about the existential issues at the same time! I have always advocated

social mobility literature, Witness Literature, backed with myth and folklore as my poetic tools.

The mood of these poems is unlike my other collections." (Preface, A Song, Half & Half)

Nandini Continues to write social mobility literature even here, through a poem like "Ahalya's

Waiting" where the personae Ahalya waits for a benevolent touch from her lord/lover, but not

to redeem her of any sin that she never committed!

For thousands of years in Indian history or mythological works, poets have created strange

inequalities between man and woman, while the poetess Nandini's "Ahalya's Waiting" gives

the message about fundamental right of womanhood and equality. Nandini's "Ahalya" is a

symbol of the ever-marginalised women.

For the first time in Indian literature, a poetess has expressed fearlessly the voices of feminism

through the Ahalya myth with an open mind. In her poem, Ahalya embodies the women whose

parents marry them to their unmatched husbands. Nandini's Ahalya was married to a husband

selected by her parents, then it is natural for her to look for fulfilment. The poetess considers

her this step and advocates in favour of "woman's body, woman's right". In other words, the

concept of sin-virtue/ purity-pollution is completely wrong in the name of celibacy. Few lines

from her poem 'Ahalya's Waiting' can be quoted here,

My redemption lies not just in your touch

but in zero tolerance of
any marginalization.

I need a rejoinder from the society
and from you, oh the most knowledgeable one,
for my quintuple patriarchal relegation.

Father presented me, the puppet, to husband on his free will.
Husband couldn't fulfil me as a woman.

Indra tricked me to satiate his desire, not mine.

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Touch sensitive, touch deprived,
touch-craving, I would rather wait till eternity.

I prefer to reject your offer of touching me
on the condition of taking me
into the snares of purity-pollution.

I am my own possessor, proprietor, I am my woman.

Let me remain ethically upright on my own terms—
this is my ultimate liberation.

(Sahu, 28)

Writing poems on a subtle subject like 'love' is not
less than walking on a double-edged sword

in modern times. In the world of this formidable loveless
society, diving into the ocean of

distortions and inconsistencies and making effort to collect
the oysters and corals of love,

converting into literature, specifically into poetry is certainly a
very difficult task. Now the

question arises whether the poems of love can create a world
of peace by sowing the seeds of

love on the planet of the modern era? No, poems are not the
tools, weapons or guns that can

convey the message of reform, repair, maintenance and
revolution in society. Yet, love poems

have honied feelings embedded within to create a better,
positive society. Valmiki had also

said that the Ramayana was composed by the sigh of the
Cronch, this pain is the mother of all

poetry. This pain may be due to opposing the social
discriminations or passing the

uncountable ruthless moments in search of the 'self'.

Many poets have written poems on different forms of love--on
the tangible and intangible,

material and immaterial, divine and spiritual, in different
surroundings, different cultures and

different languages. Though their concepts are different, but the human mind has a wonderful

ability to hold the ultimate surface firmly. Love is the enduring theme of poetry since time

immemorial. Love is an important theme in Nandini's poems. Not to exaggerate, her love

poems are completely different. After reading her love poems, it becomes crystal clear that the

concept of Nandini's love is not the love that has been conventional and redundant. Her love

creates ambiances in human mind, originates the process of making a man into human, combats

against hatred and saves lives of people who are on the verge of death. That way, she is an

architect of destiny, a life saver.

It is very difficult to count how many stages can the yearning of a woman's mind cross, until

she does not find true love? One can curb desires to some extent due to the pressure of the

society, but she is the only empress of her dream empire. Where her own rule goes on, free

wills are born and there is no obstacle of any kind. In the modern era, the expansion of love is

necessary, but the expansion of love should not be abstract, it should be based on realism.

Abstraction always connects love to spirituality. When the poetess tries to give an expansion

of love in her poetry, the love automatically becomes limitless.
That means there is no boundary

line of love and cannot be accommodated in a narrow groove
of human brain. Love that is

complete surrender and renunciation is the tone of many a
poems in the collection, like 'A Man

Like You', 'To Laugh Like You', 'Touching You', 'You Are
Another Me', 'You Can Never

Unknow Me', 'You Before Me', 'You Own a Piece of Me' etc. In
the poem "The Sea of

Pedigrees", the woman sounds erotic and romantic at once,
when the poet writes:

I whispered, 'take me as you like me,
it's a complete surrender.'

You assumed I was right,
and you preferred the act of capitulation.

As I merged with you in you
and mocked to be asking for clemency
you smiled honored.

You said, 'you ain't seen nothing yet lady'!
That was my triumph! Making you the man,
the elemental man, was my resolution.

Now the memory of that moment is my safekeeping.

Ah, I have to rather safeguard it
lest time's talon corrupts it
in my myriad day long mundane action.

(Sahu, 100)

In the poem "You Before Me", the poet gives the indefatigable logic that the lover can love his

lady only when he loves and respects himself to the utmost. In this poem, artificial or forged

love is shown different from true love. If love is artificial, hate is a thousand times better than

that, because it will be true. The poetess's first condition is the honesty of love. Love determines

the shape of the relationship and the foundation of the friendship, when you love yourself, then

you are able to love your beloved. If you hate yourself, how can you love the other? If your

love is artificial, then the edifice will look like a rugged place. There will be experiences, but

no vibrations. To live in such a world is also equivalent to die every moment. Nandini wants

honesty in love. Fake crocodile tears may be a trick for getting love, but after sometime it will

automatically vanish. So, the poignant selection of imagery in her poems are influenced by the

best sublime of material love equipped with compassionate mind. That's why her love spreads

widely as infinity and becomes timeless. According to Sitakant Mahapatra, religions such as

Hinduism, Islam, Sikh and Christianity, all have the same purpose to achieve the Ultimate

Reality and replies to life's main three questions, Who am I? Why am I here? And Where I

have to go? In Sufi poems, the answer to all three questions is the same - love. Love and

happiness have almost disappeared from life in our difficult time, the main aim of Nandini's

poems is to bring that love and happiness back to life. There are some powerful lines in the

poem, "You Before Me",

In the Bhagavad Gita, it's deliberated, you were born to be real,

and not to be perfect. Realise that you are not made for anyone else.

You are complete when you are autonomous. You are your own.

Let me get stimulated by how you are in agreement with imperfections.

The real human struggle is to avoid being overwhelmed with how you think about yourself.

No one is you and that is your influence, your supremacy, that is your relationship with fair play and justice.

You before me—this sets the tone for every other affiliation you have. Falling in love with yourself

makes you indestructible, imperishable, therapeutic, miraculous.

That is the narrative of our extreme insurgency.

(Sahu, 118-119)

One poem caught my immediate attention where Nandini makes herself "The Lotus Leaf",
with complete detachment to happiness and sorrow. Although Nandini's love poems are
traditionally strong, she is rebellious in nature. Those are neither concerned about worldliness,
nor cared about being ignored. The poetess swims in the braids of the musical waves. She sings
chorus from the bottom of her heart. I believe that consciousness in her love poems are
strategically associated with ascetic life. She definitely mentions breath or breath with
consciousness in her new poems. Due to connection with life, her pain underlines the best
conditions of loneliness, separation. Even in this state, her love poems reflect her higher
elevated consciousness by detachment from worldly materials. The body is worldly power.
Love cannot take its original form unless it reaches beyond the body. This condition is only
possible when the feelings of 'giving' are given more importance. These feelings expand the
boundary of love.
I am the lotus leaf. I am ardent.
Nothing can hold me. And
I want to hold on to nothing. I have ultra-hydrophobicity as unveiled by the leaves of 'Nelumbo', the lotus!

Drop something on my peripheral, it floats and cascades.
I have been making the mountains float since decades.
I am the backwaters of Kerala, I recede
as much as I ensue and proceed.
My lotus-effect denotes to self-cleaning.
Dust particles picked up by water droplets
by the micro-and-nanoscopic architecture on my shallow
diminishes the droplet's adhesion to my surface.
I am conceited being seamlessly unsoiled.
My heart is impeccable, so are my passions and my soul.
I hold on to no anger, no greed, no jealousy, no callousness
and no love, no desire for that matter.
(Sahu, 96)

Again, love is the real tone of her poems, the original sound,
whose echo is present in all the
poems. She, the Ecofeminist, is also a conformist with
Masculinity Studies when she backers
the struggle of men to fit-in, to make a point in a society like
ours According to Om Bharti,
ritualism and love affair are major theme of Ritikaleen artists.
Kati, Kuch, Kelly and Kaya are

everything for them. Behind it, there may be their frustrations,
distortions and preoccupation,
but there is spontaneous love in progressive poetry of
Nandini. The main stream of poetry is

the love poem “When I Wiped Your Tears”, to discharge the ideology and fill the energy of love in a few lines,
Somewhere I read, if you let other people’s problems be your entire focus, you are co-dependent. Love, is it fact? However, all you silently did was you transformed pain into ecstasy, with your Midas touch. No man is an island. Now who says, ‘men don’t cry’? The calendar of wisdom doesn’t.
(Sahu, 113)

Nandini is an existentialist poet. She wants to live in the present moment. The future is full of uncertainties. She has a deep sense that human life has come only to live with a particular purpose. There is no guarantee of whether next life will be there or not. She has no faith in religious traditions, heaven-hell at all. The poem “My Tranquil City, Tonight” talks about the multilayered love where the woman is waiting for her love who she puts in highest esteem. The expansion of her love is so vital, she loves geographical places of the beloved in tranquility so much that the color of the earth also

becomes iridescent. After elevation from the body, love begins to enlighten humanity. The love expansion of the poetess is manifested through the images of the battlefield and the unusual moth. The battlefield is such an extension, which is the basis of existence of humanity and life, so the symbol of the moth favors love as the sweet shadow of happiness and peace and mutual harmony, where love is physical as well as spiritual. In this modern era, when the whole world is engaged in extinguishing the flame of love, the conscious poetess is engaged in a campaign to save love on this planet. Let me quote a few lines from the poem "My Tranquil City, Tonight",

To love you is like going to the battlefield.

One comes broken, bruised from the battle, for sure.

Still I feel like a lepidopterist, who has Gloriously peeved an unusual moth.

We couldn't have been written out of the past, right?

I know that you know that I know.

The untold and the told, I know it all.

Predictable, comforting, heartening sorrows, but trustworthy, consistent ones.

(Sahu, 80)

This bleeding time needs love and love poems the most. For sake of future generations, the

poetess has created deep insights of love. The children of future generation are not just beautiful

innocent beings, but they have sprouts of struggle. While the Odia poet Sitakant Mahapatra

nurtures love in nature and his sensibilities towards the country, Nandini seeks love in the

breakdown of taboos. In this context, she is more realistic. Completely different from the

traditional and mystic poems, she establishes her love for contravention of redundant traditions.

In the entire collection, the most intriguing poem, to me, is “Half of Her Lovers are Half the

World Away”, where the persona talks about her erstwhile lovers who adored her, but could

never subsist in the hidden chambers of her heart, her innermost crust,

Men who loved their wives and those who did not all fell in love with her

when she was simply out and about in the world.

Her ‘men’ knew, she was the brimming vessel with an eternal capacity to pour.

Well, she didn’t think much about love,

neither of the 'safe' love-loves, nor of any loves in the conflict zone.

Her dry sardonic wit made them only fall in love more with rationality.

Lost in time, with the audacity of hope, she was found in eternity;

turning her wounds into wisdom, an expert at the law of diminishing marginal utility!

(Sahu, 58)

Now let's talk about modern poems. What are the features of these poems? Is modern poem

a random game of words or the 'stream' of consciousness? The moment, any thought

perceived into your mind, you have to write the ideas by resorting to some new images in your

style. Nandini's poems meet both these criteria, there are always new images as well as

meaningful inclined words that arise in her mind carving out her innocence, helplessness.

Modern readers are basically readers of smart phones, internet, their fingers would catch

various information from all over the world in a fraction of second. It does not matter whether

they contain elements of beauty or not. Therefore, it is a general perception is that modern

readers run away from modern poems, but It would be wrong to say that modern readers do

not appreciate such poems. In the true sense, to understand these poems, curiosity, emotion and

one's own experiences earned from life are especially needed. Anyway, the concluding lines of

the poem are capable of piercing your heart with a heartrending tonal quality,

Her 'men' every so often left her drained, high and dry.

Some other times they cared to say a proper goodbye.

In any case, she didn't judge them, she just did low lie.

Her self-introspection and serious reflection were a caricature of living-loving.

Her faith was bigger than fears with time's intoxicants in her hands.

There was no wind in there—just air to protect her 'men' from fading.

Above her outer skin, there were wordless walls

with a fistful of sky. With time, invariably,

her men turned into distant memories.

She wrote the stories of many a life, but

her own story lay buried at someplace in a vault.

One day she lost the keys to that treasury that she had carefully concealed.

She had that habit—

save the best for the last.

But much cared-for-stuff from her wardrobe were always lost.

(Sahu, 59)

The anthology ‘Discovering the Inscape: Essays on Literature’ written by Dr. Sitakant

Mahapatra compiles an article ‘Love in Time of Plague’; depicting various concepts about love.

In this article, he raises some questions how does a book or novel remain in mind of a reader

for a long time? He gives an example of Dr. Bernard Ricks, an unforgettable character of

Camu’s novel ‘The Plague’, representing a person, who loves life immensely, knowing

everything about the anomaly of life and the tragedy of his fate. The poem “Dreams these

Days” is Nandini’s dream of a better world post-covid,

Dreams, these days, are of the moon and moon-manufacturer!

The gripe translucent skies in the night

the mood swings of solitude, the cognizance of the air, purer,

the memories of missing moon motif, a vanished delight.

Dreams, these days, are of the sea and the seafarer.

The uncluttered, sweeping ocean epitomizes much more

than an unbiased body of water; it embodies a malicious elegance

that never hesitates to induce the narrator.

...

Dreams these days are of a long life-- glorious, happier, healthier, better.

Still, if you succumb, the show goes on even minus you, so don’t despair.

Dream anyway, love anyway; you shall soon find your 'home'
awfully closer!

The marvels of the mourned sound colossal; they may, as well,
entice and lure.

(Sahu, 42-43)

The collection advocates humour in Indian poetry through
poems such as "A Parody of Love",

"To Laugh Like You", humour which is sadly missing from
Indian English literature. The

novelty of the collection is, Nandini experiments with unique
genres here. Her powerful

expression in spontaneous language, completely different
from the mystic and modern English

poets, Nandini has completed fearlessly her inner journey
through different flights of the

human mind. Even today, Indian society does not value and
respect the aesthetic sense of free

feelings of any poetess, but it is also true that still our
generation is not so dead that cannot feel

the value of love. It is the responsibility of modern writers to
make an environment for

overcoming negative forces such as fear, hatred and despair
and promulgating positive forces

such as hope, love and peace. According to her, love is
'super natural', which violates the basic

law of nature-- the more you give, the less you will retain. In
love - the more you give, the

more you will have --- the saying is meaningful. Feeling this harsh reality, the poetess believes

that modern poets should write more and more poems on human and divine love. Medieval

devotee poets Narsi Mehta, Dnyaneshwar, Namdev, Eknath, Kabir, Surdas, Shukdev, Madhav

Dev, Panch Sakha and Jagannath Das of Odisha are the pillars of love. Love is intangible. She

filled all the philosophy of her life in the following two lines of her poem ‘Isn’t Love Enough?’,

which is necessary for curing our deprived lives of love and solace.

“ With true love, either you forget everything or

You evoke who from the who”.

It’s only apt to conclude the discourse with Nandini’s own words from the Preface, “Words

have their own culture. They are independent once they are written, they have their own path.

But before creating those words, the writers form their own course under the guidance of some

divine agenda called love. Of late, I have been thinking a lot about love and God as counterparts

working towards eternity-- a love that is unrequited, a love that has no boundaries. The saplings

come out gloriously only when the earth cracks open; thus, life culminates only when love

happens. Love is the touchstone to deify life. Now I sense, I am the apex of love, and this is

my state of being. I would rather go with this quest for love till my last breath.”

It is commendable that Black Eagle Books from Dublin, USA, has published this formative

book with an admirable appearance and high quality. The book has the worthiness to adorn the

collection of any individual reader and any library. It’s a welcome aspect that the book has

been Amazon’s Bestselling book for months, since its release early this year.

Dinesh Kumar Mali

Dinesh Kumar Mali is a researcher, writer and translator of repute. He has translated more than 25 seminal books which are published worldwide. He has substantially contributed to the MA in Folklore and Culture Studies programme of IGNOU, New Delhi, India.
