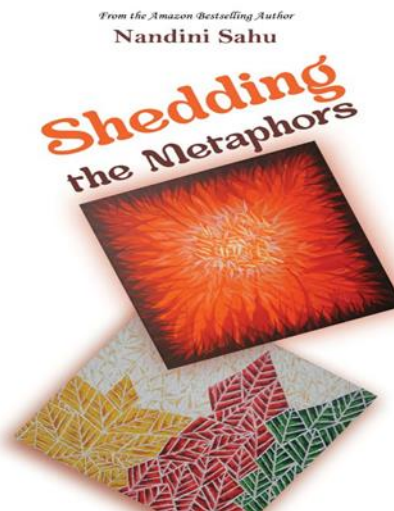
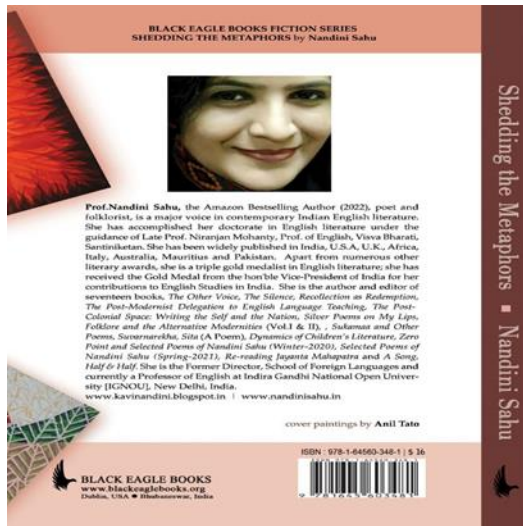


Shedding the Metaphors by Nandini Sahu, Black Eagle Publications, USA, 2023, ISBN: 978-1-64560-348-1, Pp: 260.

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Shedding the Metaphors (A collection of stories by Nandini Sahu) with a total of 160 pages and twelve stories in English came to me as a pleasant surprise from the erudite author who is best known as a poet and folklorist. A beautiful cover by the gifted artist Anil Tato adds to the aesthetic value of the book, I must say.

I read almost all the stories at one go, each one in tandem with the other, yet so different in theme and texture, and each story addressing the very important themes-- inclusivity and positivity--with an earthly, gender free and multi-ethnic slant. The stories have an inclination to the theme of 'letting go', 'shedding the metaphors', and as a teacher of literature, I felt, this seminal book is the need of the hour.

The title is indeed intriguing—why should the writer 'shed' any kind of metaphor in the first place? I would begin by quoting Sahu's Preface to the book:

“Now I realize, one sheds all metaphors when life comes to a full circle. It is a new beginning, being inclusive, empathetic, universal, accepting, reconciling and persistent. At such a landmark, one stops misconstruing and misapprehending. Now life is about evasion of delusions and reception of the present time in its multiple shades. Now one is complete, it's a commencement, at the same time it's the end. It's the mode of nirvana, abyss, all-inclusive,

nihilistic, irrationally-rational, non-judgmental, romantic. It's difficult to contain all such finer metaphors of life in one living, thus, shedding the metaphors and shedding my Id, Ego and Superego, now I am the Brahma. Now I am a clean slate, I write with an all-embracing rhythmical imagining, like an enormous river that conveys in its curve plentiful tributaries. I decline no knowledge, discount nothing, endeavour veracity in its enigmatic complexity. Precisely, I am shedding all the metaphors attached to me in the past, present and future.”(Preface, Shedding the Metaphors)

Some stories are the finest love stories I have come across; Sahu portrays love as a mystical experience, metaphysical, platonic, ideal, powerful, and all-embracing love. Love is God for the writer, it's the Generator, Operator, and Destroyer, that has come to the universe in a feminine form, in the form of her personae.

These stories interchange around her ideas of eternal life, human values, nature and beauty. Thus, creativity for her becomes therapy to live and sing in an admirable world, yet made obnoxious by some who do not understand aesthetics and higher values of life. 'The Alternative Masculinity' is one such story where the protagonist is manipulative. The stories in the collection disclose Sahu's quest for a better world, a magical world. The ideas of the stories are colossal and kaleidoscopically, mystifyingly alive. Social concern as a theme of literature and the role of the writer as the chronicler of her times, shady, shadowy or otherwise, have occupied centre stage for the better part of the country, and this is the ongoing deliberation for Sahu. Shedding the Metaphors is a key undertaking to the chronicle the events, activities, trends re-counting our times. Her sensible originality is manifested in her use of idioms and entirely her own thoughts. Her stories reflect the complex, paradoxically dramatic inner lives of modern men, women and the LGBTQA. 'Shadow of a Shadow' is a breath-taking tale of layered female bonding. Sometimes Sahu seems dazed by the enormity of the possibilities in life; perhaps she should guard her pen against it! The story-teller Sahu, who writes poetic-prose even in her stories, has an unquenchable desire to live and experience life, rejecting self-imposed isolation. She is delicate, complex, capable of experiencing a rich range of emotions, but perpetually tender, caring and reflective. Her autobiographical stories reveal her personality. To quote Sahu from the Preface, "The characters of my stories are mostly people around me, or people who I met far and near. When I am curious about someone's story, am pressed with the urge to talk about it, I pen it down, by imparting my character traits, my femininity into my fictional female protagonists. At the cost of sounding personal, I pour my

image, my personality into them. Thus, the narratives sound autobiographical, whereas in most cases it may not be so. A few stories in this collection, like ‘Being God’s Wife’, ‘A Very Different Story’, ‘Alternative Masculinity’, ‘The Juvenile Love Letter’, ‘The Wild Stream’ and ‘The Elusive Orgasm’ have autobiographical elements though. My stories are intricate as I play around the complex human emotions.”(Preface, Shedding the Metaphors)

Sahu reflects on the state of the contemporary world with its burning issues---her creativity is boundless like the writer herself, thus deliberately marking the continuity with a generation of Indian women writers. In this collection, each story is refreshingly diverse, and words have been used with great potential. In a retro of political uncertainty and changing social values, Sahu attempts to play the role of the harbinger of communal harmony in stories like ‘The Wild Stream’. I found a very soothing story in the book, ‘Being God’s Wife’, where she talks of family ties, of love that creates a bond, while giving space to the personae to foster; and she realizes that writing this story has been a purging experience for her. Sahu’s prose is lucid, candid, precise, earnest, and original, without hyperbole or hypocrisy. She is a writer of overflowing words, but honest ones. Her tone is conversational voice is vibrant and unswerving. Courage, conviction are the hallmarks of her stories. Her try-outs are a queer feminine sensibility, but at the same time Sahu looks at life from humanitarian point of view.

Spontaneity and flow give Sahu’s stories a kind of idealistic and graphic quality which is effective and poignant. She adventures into various images drawn from life, landscape, and all magnitudes of time. She is aware of the familiar currents and undercurrents of human psychology, her stories go with the stream which flows through the veins of each one of us. To her, love is a vital life-force, a beautiful and a tender experience at the same time. Her stories appeal to the heart more than the brain; in a sense, her story is an insurrection, a breath of fresh air, in conjunction with the ideas of sky-scraping possibilities. Sahu is here to stay, the storyteller-par-excellence. For Sahu, literature can help “construct a world in which the reader can find delight, inspiration, experimentation, information, understanding, passion, magnificence – all inclinations of art.”(Preface to Zero Point by Nandini Sahu) I felt, Sahu is more a storyteller than a story writer—given the conversational mode she has used in almost all the stories. Full of dialogues, the metanarratives are sans ethical instructional codes. They are stories, sometimes stories within stories, here and now, outside any Utopia. I can safely view Sahu as a maker of metanarratives--for many reasons. She uses a conversational mode of narration as her technique, with utter straightforwardness and fluidity.

These stories undeniably play around complex human emotions, they linger in the heart even much after reading them. I would like to conclude by quoting Sahu from the Preface, “My bigger concern, when I write stories, is the symbolic and the symbiotic connections between unworldliness, religion, theology, art, and more obviously, similar connections between language and literature that strive to interiorize men, women and nature. The symbolic connections between human and non-human play a rare enough role to show the greatest importance of time, place and people. Thus, it is apt to read my stories of feminine adept carefully, and understand how I feminize nature and naturalize women. It is my empirical and experiential connection, which scrutinizes age, sex, race, class and colour to shelter the naked empirical evidences—talking about subjugation of women and nature as well as mental health of men and women and the jeopardy thereof. The characters, major or minor, ever created by me, fall sick, fall in love, have mood swings like Nature, suffer both physically and sychologically or accept death without fuss. Certain others encounter difficult situations; however, it is dangerous and rackful because they have already waged a war against iniquitousness in human civilization. They live an unannounced, unconventional, prodigious Renaissance. And they aren’t tone-deaf to cultural moments.(Preface, Shedding the Metaphors)