

Editorial Introduction

Poet, professor, critic and folklorist, Nandini Sahu is one of the most important figures in contemporary Indian writing in English. The sky-high number of her readers, making her the Amazon's bestselling author for 2022, is a testimony to the sea-deep quality of her works. A professor by profession, a poet by essentiality, and a folklorist to the core, Nandini Sahu has touched the life and soul of many, in many ways. Her poetic output, one after the other, showed us new lights in which to see truth—an unfabricated truth. One of the chief proponents of 'Social mobility literature', Nandini has a vision, a cause.

It has been my most cherished privilege to have known Professor Nandini for years now. And from what I have gained in all these years of my close proximity with her, I can tell you with conviction that the poet in her would not yield a single line if it does not touch upon the life around her. She would often tell me, Sagar, what is a poem if it is not a story? What is a poet if she/he does not belong to a tradition? And unlike writers who propose theories about writing but in practice their own writing is derived of their theorization, Nandini's philosophy is true to her art, and her art, true to her philosophy. Her writings—poetry or prose—always has a story to tell. And as for tradition, a sense of belongingness, Nandini is definitely an unapologetic academic who, willy-nilly, tends to root her works in some or the other relevant academic discourse. The beauty of her art, however, is that it does not by any means, at any cost, sacrifice truth, and connection with real life situations, with flesh and blood people.

Even as a critic, Nandini does not prefer complicating the obvious. On the contrary, she puts in language lucid such discussions that are crucial but beyond easy comprehension. She makes art what it is supposed to be—liberal. Inclusivity, as she would tell me, is the ultimate purpose she intends to achieve through her writings. Born on the land of Lord Jagannath, who is inclusivity godified, Nandini intends to create a literature, if not a world, that faithfully represents the flora and fauna with equal respect as humans. This love for inclusivity, perhaps, makes her the fine folklorist she is. Nandini's years of scholarly and passionate investigation of mythology, folklore and history are manifest in her writings. Moreover, what is most interesting and awe-inspiring about her is that Nandini has the ability to be a poet, a critic, a

folklorist, a modernist, an ecofeminist and a reader--all at once. Her *Sita (A Poem)* is a written testimony of this observation.

Her writing, that is now globally recognized, first came in public sphere in 2004 when her first collection *The Other Voice* got published. The collection touches upon the themes of human experience of life, intersection of personal with the public, absurdity of the mundane. Remarkable in its own rights, Sahu's first collection is a curious mix.

The Silence is her second poetry collection. Fluent with words, the poet captures silences in all their hues. A poem by Nandini is a story in verse, and she has many tales to tell. Based on the poet's philosophical interaction with the matters of the heart, this collection contains many a personally public poem. The collection may best be understood in her own words: "I have taken care to include poems treating with the secret chambers of human heart, and poems revealing a complex and rich treasure of emotions." (Sahu) In this collection she pours out her "concerns, fears, ecstasy through these poems, attempting to trace the social, philosophical and spiritual environment around." (Sahu)

Published in 2009, her third collection of poems, *Silver Poem on My Lips* encapsulates songs that are therapeutic, songs that help the poet, and through her verse, her readers, 'live, breathe, sing in a world which, otherwise, is a pool of personal pain and suffering.' Nandini expresses her discomfort with the standard operating procedures of this world that does not spare even the poets. For her, such demands make 'todays, yesterdays and tomorrows monotonous, chronological terms that have petite meaning in the immeasurable milieu of ageless literature.'

Her fourth poetry collection *Sukamaa and Other Poems* is Nandini's tribute to all those people, and all influences that made her who she is.

Sita: A Poem, fifth book of the poet, is Nandini Sahu's most critically engaging, and challenging book. However, Nandini has had written many poems and collections before *Sita*, this work made Nandini a household name, the focal point of creative and critical discourse on gender, gendering, identity politics, body politics and feminist discourse. Without making any claims to be revisiting the epic tale, and even without denying the obvious, Nandini clears her stand as an essential ecofeminist. This rather long poem is her brand of alternative modernity. Through her indigenous brand of feminism, which problematizes the male-female dynamics, she lays bare the power politics at play, and the schemes of patriarchy. In a way, this work is an exercise in demythification.

Her sixth poetry collection is *Zero Point*, published in 2018. As is suggested by the title itself, this collection contains poems based in ideas that are simple yet complex, sequestered yet pulsating, puerile yet purgatory. The signature poem of this collection being “Song of Liberty”.

Her seventh poetry collection in two volumes: *Selected Poems* (Winter 2020 & Spring 2021) are selections from her old and new poems published from Signorina Publications, New Delhi.

Her latest poetry collection, *A Song, Half and Half* is a volume of Nandini’s love poems. The complexity of human emotions, romantic love, trials and tribulations that are a part and parcel of human existence make for the subjects of the poems included in this collection. Unlike her earlier poetry which is motivated by social issues, by and large, this collection has poems that belong to a different world altogether—the world of love, loss, suffering and redemption.

Her maiden short story collection, *Shedding the Metaphors*, published from Black Eagle Books, USA, is a collection of 13 short stories dealing with issues political, apolitical and unpolitical. *Shedding the Metaphors* is being received with a lot of love and appreciation. The book has created ripples in literary world. Apart from the works mentioned, Nandini Sahu has also contributed several important critical works. Her latest critical book was *Re-reading Jayanta Mahapatra*.

This special edition of *Creative Saplings*—an international, peer-reviewed journal that has created a space for itself and for important discussions on literature from across the globe—is a timely issue that records the various contemporary readings of and responses to the works of Nandini Sahu. Her works have been at the centre of discussion in literary and critical circles for years now. Many Ph. Ds have been produced on the works of Nandini Sahu. This issue of the journal evaluates, celebrates and registers, through the critically important papers collected herein, the beautiful literature that Professor Nandini has created over the years and which the scholars, academics, and literature lovers have all read and understood in the lights their own.

I am thankful to *Creative Saplings* for considering my proposal for this special issue. I extend my gratitude to the contributors whose sincere reading of the author, and their willingness to share their wisdom with the rest of the world, made this project possible. In my capacity as and beyond the guest editor of this special issue, this is my tribute to my professor.

Dr. Sagar Kumar Sharma