

Love, Detachment & Hope in the poems of Nandini Sahu

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ABSTRACT

A Song, Half & Half by Nandini Sahu is a collection of her love poems, published in the year 2022. The collection consists of more than sixty poems, each encapsulating an essential flavour of life. The book embodies a heart in solitude, that is accidentally shaken up by the sweet and sour turbulences of memory. A thoughtful poet is always indebted to its memory, one who cherishes nostalgia and uses imagination to weave the thread of past events with a needle of creativity to produce art. Nandini Sahu is one such poet, she is emotional and passionate in her poems, and honest towards her readers. Her love poems are a collage of chronicles that speaks volumes about her journey, full of success, struggles and epiphanies that shaped her personality and character. She is a chronicler who delves into the ocean of life, full of varied experiences and offers a scintillating bricolage to her readers. This paper sheds light on those poems by Nandini Sahu, that explore the themes of detachment, existentialism and absence of feeling. It also examines the idea of belief in fate and the importance of speaking the truth, when surrounded by hardships of life. This dichotomy of hope and despair fuels the poetry of Nandini Sahu, and encourages its readers to live life in the face of defeat.

Keywords: *Detachment, Existentialism, Feelings, Hope, Despair, Poetry.*

Nandini Sahu, academic, educationist, ecofeminist, novelist, poet, is a monumental name in the contemporary Indian English literary arena. For those who are familiar with the works of Nandini Sahu, would know that she is a writer with plenty of colours. The canvas of her writings is wide and versatile, which includes collections of short stories and several poetry anthologies.

In *A Song, Half & Half*, Nandini Sahu celebrates every available strain of thought associated with love, appealing to readers' innumerable and varied experiences of it. The collection has something for everyone out there who had lived in the times of love, or loved in the times of hatred. Love changes forms and takes shape of one's own idea of it. Humans nurture love and as it grows, love begins to nurture us. Nandini Sahu's love poems is a testament to life's rich tapestry that narrates the story of her encounters with love in different forms, Self-love, Ishq-e-haqiqi (Love for truth), Ishq-e-Majazi (Love for human beings), love for nature, etc. The author is nostalgic and travels constantly back and forth into the past, however, at the same time the poet's persona is not in search of the lost time. A sense of detachment, after long arduous struggles is felt, and as a result, pain attached with the memory of love is dealt with a touch of humour. In her poems, love and the memory of love is portrayed in all possible shades

of red, that is loving and affectionate, at the same time, it exudes excruciating pain. The horizon of A Song, Half and Half is like a meadow that encompasses every element in the universe and caters to a variety of human experiences and subsequent emotions.

Promises and uncertainty go hand in hand in life. The latter makes us anxious and devoid of us of taking decisions at the right time whereas the former fills us with fragile infinite hopes of a dreamy future. A lover lives somewhere between the paradigms of promise and uncertainty, a surreal space that functions in binaries. “No Next Birth” is a poem that delves into a similar territory where the speaker stands with a promise in hand, given in the past, of a beautiful future. This promise is a metaphor for next birth that is so far removed from the reality that it holds no assuring value anymore.

The readers hear the echoes of Rumi and Amrita Pritam in this poem by Nandini Sahu, the difference being, that hope is gradually diffusing and the assuring effect of promise is fading away. The speaker ‘dissents’ and ardently retires into oneself. “We will meet again in the next birth” (Sahu, 83), if understood in its very essence, is a half promise, an abstraction that holds no value in the present life. A sense of detachment has taken over the nerves of the speaker and shallow promises have created a vacuum in the soul (core) of the speaker. This interplay of promise and uncertainty has prolonged the suffering of the speaker who resolves to transcend it.

In the poems of Nandini Sahu, the speaker is often found at the threshold, contemplating the act of crossing the river. The lover is indecisive, searching for courage and strength to overcome the unbearable indifference of the beloved. Traditionally, lovers are not good analysts, they find glory in the idea of suffering and celebrate it as well. Nandini Sahu breaks away from this traditional idea of a lover and love, and creates a new order in her poems. In her poems, the lover questions, contemplates and retrospect to find new approaches in life. This lover does not believe in complete surrender to the mercy of the beloved, rather, constantly grows, pushing across the obstacles.

“Shipwrecked Souls” by Nandini Sahu is a poem about acceptance and facing reality in its true sense. “Yes, true that. Life is a shipwreck-but are we anticipating to live in a lifeboat?” (Sahu, 89) These opening lines shatter the traditional roles of a lover who was readily at the receiving end of the equation. Here, the lover is bold, confident and perseverant, someone who learns from the past and bid for a new future, constantly affirming to the idea that life is full of hardships, something that is not at all surprising to the speaker. In her writings, Sahu

successfully adds a new dimension to the idea of lover, breaking away from the stereotypical notions of love, someone who surrenders to love, but if ill-treated, has the capacity to protest as well. The poem upholds the real essence of life, that it has two sides. Yes, the goal of all the goals is to be happy but not all roads will lead you to happiness, and in this pursuit of happiness, at times, you will stand in the face of defeat and pain. Nandini Sahu advocates for a love that stands tall on a gloomy day and in a turbulent night. She promotes “camaraderie, when things get hard”. (Sahu, 89) The poem is a testimony to the idea of love that empowers a relationship and not otherwise. The poem reverberates the importance of support and camaraderie in adverse times, and believes that this idea of love only prevails and can prove the test of time. This subtle and scintillating tone, runs throughout her poems, making readers to take note of her modern outlook towards love.

In Sahu’s poems, the readers witness speaker in a dialogue with tradition that was long due. Silence, that was maintained for decades, to withhold the peace is on the verge of losing and when it finally does, gives rise to a new self, a self that has bottled up anger and demands answers to a long impending series of questions. Through her poems, Sahu questions the viability of tradition and its values that leads to the subordination of one half of the sex to another. In the poem, “Small Things Big Things”, Sahu uses paradox and irony to deliver the message. The use of ‘Small things’ is symbolic and requires minute attention, only a reader with critical eye would grasp the paradox here. Sahu argues that one’s ignorance can be seen as a form of weakness. Shushupal insulted Krishna and his origin 100 times, and took Krishna’s silence as his weakness, hence, was brought to his doom. The poem highlights the impact of ignoring ‘small things’ on the conscience of an individual. It clutters the brain as you gradually associate a sense of normalcy with such an attitude, which is diabolic to the mind and numbing to the heart. This constant feeling of numbness is in fact an absence of feeling, that leads to absurdity and submissiveness. The speaker in the poem attempts to transcend the social stigma of traditional values that is conveniently associated in general, with womanhood. Sahu condemns the conventional understanding of ‘Big Things’, that can be significantly patronizing. In “Small Things, Big Things”, Nandini Sahu demystifies the idealised conventions of traditional womanhood that systematically put women in a state of subordination and strip them off, of a free self.

The world of Sahu’s poems is not a forgiving one, pain and disappointments do not lead the speaker to become a vengeful human being. The sweet fragrance of hope amalgamates with

the glittering light of humanism that fuels the charge of optimism in her poems. We become what we hate, but the author's awakened conscience protects her from falling into this trap. In her poems, the lover hardly complains, rarely shows signs of absolute vulnerability, rather showcases strength and belief in idea of universal justice that provides a fresh reading experience to her readers.

“Stitching a Love” is a poem that exhales a breath of hope into the atmosphere. It validates the importance of looking back into the past, to rectify the errors, for a prosperous future. My grandmother used to emphasize the fact that, not always one should buy new clothes, at times, it is sufficient and wise to rafe (stitch) the old ones. Stitching a cloth is a metaphor used to highlight the need to get rid of feelings of animosity and start afresh. In the name of ‘camaraderie’, a time spent together and to value the promises, it is wise to look back, but not in anger. Looking back is not an equivalent to be stuck in the past, as people in popular culture would believe, Sahu’s poem endorses this as a healthy practice for a better future. ‘Home’ is a recurring motif in the poems of Nandini Sahu, according to her, home is not where you live, it is where you find yourself happy. The poem is a philosophical guide to a happy mind, a mind that suffers from proleptic anxiety, always too eager to act and eventually leaps over to the other side of intent. Sahu adopts a stoic approach in the poem, as she writes that “darned love tells our cherished tales” (Sahu, 94). Humans do not possess a linear memory, nor we are capable of filtering sad memories out. Life is a blend of moments, good or bad, one shall cherish the former and acknowledge the latter. ‘Stitching’ is an act of healing and possesses therapeutic qualities, that everyone shall practice to replenish the exhausted heart after a difficult period in life.

Spring is known for life, the season symbolises rebirth, joy and love. It represents the victory of justice over injustice, good over evil and love over hatred. Spring rejuvenates a hopeless soul, a soul that has been a victim of toxicity and constant blames. “Look Elsewhere this Spring” has an appeal to make to its readers, an appeal to start afresh and to break away from a life of forced ‘culpability’. Sahu argues that those who are in search of order in life, shall be prepared to undergo chaos, that will lead to a resurgence of sequence in life and will subsequently nourish the soul. Even the kindest of hearts showcase sheer lack of empathy when bullied into silence, that leads to loneliness in life. Tough decisions create tough people, who have grit and determination to overcome the adversities of life. ‘Tornado’ is a symbol of chaos, and according to the poet, it is essential to pierce through and when you come out, you are

never the same because you left every ‘immoral vibe’ back in there. Human beings have a tendency to find answers to every thing in life, we intend to figure out the scheme of things in life. Sahu in her philosophical wisdom argues that, “There is no need to explain or make sense of it. Trust your impression” (Sahu, 72). Human faculties are not designed to understand the cosmos in its entirety, hence an attempt to apprehend it, may not lead to absolute desired outcomes. The most poignant line of the poem is, “what you are seeking, is actually seeking you” (Sahu, 72). The line speaks volumes about human nature, we tend to look outside for everything, but at times, the substance rests within us. Towards the end of the poem, Sahu reiterates the importance of pressing the reset button in life that will revitalize the soul and the body.

“Eyes well up” is an emotional outpour of a passionate heart, the speaker in the poem is highly nostalgic and sings of a past that is full of love and tears. A well-balanced equilibrium is a notable feature of Sahu’s poems, a world where everything has a purpose and varied experiences serve varied motives. Human emotions are complex and therefore makes humans unpredictable as well, the poem opens up by charting out several reasons behind welling up of the eyes. The speaker is overpowered by emotions that bring tears to the eyes, all of this “just by watching you”. It is possible to be overwhelmed with emotions and cry while looking at someone in a pitiable state, but is it possible to feel so, when in love? Sahu’s lover imagines through eyes, as the lover travels into the past and recollects a memory that is complex in nature and brings smile on the lips and tears in the eyes simultaneously. Tears, usually associated with a sense of weakness and adversity is a long old traditional understanding for Nandini Sahu, she attaches a new dimension to it. Throughout her poems, Sahu continues to extend the fixed meanings of a word/idea and finds new meanings. For instance, tears are precious and necessary for a stronger self in the future, it reminds lover of a difficult past that was full of adversities, but the thought that the lover has survived the thunderstorm brings a sense of fulfilment to the lover. Sahu argues that tears “is a sign of implicit contentment”. A lover, more than often walks down the memory lane, to find inspiration, strength and resolve for the present. Revisiting the past is an essential exercise for an artist, it allows an artist to keep the soil moist for creative endeavours. Bottling up anger is a metaphor of bottling up experiences that one day will overflow as creative pieces. Sahu, like any thoughtful and wise artist understands the importance of archiving these love-hate experiences in life as this exercise adds mettle to one’s character.

“Eyes Well up” is a dichotomous expression of tears and smile. Sahu argues that both, tears and smile are unilaterally understood and there is a need to widen the horizon of their respective understandings. Smile can be used as a tool to camouflage true emotions. Sahu writes in the poem that, “And maybe, a smile is a sign of some silent, ancient ache!” (Sahu, 47). For Sahu, tears and smile are tools to understand the paradigm of love, these are recurring emotions for a person in love and help to assess the truthfulness and falsehood of love. Sahu argues that crying in love is a process of cleansing of the eyes, both literally and metaphorically, that helps us to view the world around with further clarity. The poem is a prime example of being in a state of continuous dialogue with the memory of love, where love has been personified and is a friend now, that does not inflict pain anymore rather offers a hand of companionship and camaraderie.

In *A Song, Half & Half*, love stands supreme and unequivocal. The poet never loses faith and belief in the power of love, even during the arduous struggles of life and amidst betrayal and loneliness, the hand of hope is held tight. In her poems, Nandini Sahu is a romantic and idealist who endorses a life that is based on love and kindness. The speaker undergoes changes after experiencing hardships in life, and is never the same but the positive outlook towards love never fades away.

“Isn’t Love Enough” is a poem that promotes love in all phases of life. The poet walks with love in heart and contentment follows all the way. The conversational tone of the poem adds a sense of familiarity on the part of the readers, the dialogic quality offers a soothing reading experience to its readers. The title of the poem extends a rhetorical question to its audience, it stirs the mind to seek answers to a highly philosophical question that is, “Isn’t Love Enough?”. For Sahu, love is an embodiment of truth and honesty, a companion who alongside treads the uncharted arduous territories. Love provides strength and courage in adverse situations, a beam of light that pierce through the heart of darkness. The speaker considers love as the ultimate goal in life, which is very quintessential of a typical lover. However, Sahu’s lover is not an archetypal image of a traditional lover, the lover in the poem is mature and poised in life. A lover who is not in love with the idea of love rather is a representative of stoic mind in love. Sahu’s lover is not a lopsided romantic, the idea of love here is ageless, genderless and to some extent timeless as well. The poet argues that love aids your struggles and helps you sail through the unfavourable times. Love has the capacity to reduce the effect of pain inflicted by the outside world. The poet advises its readers to not lose heart in the face of failure, rather keep moving forward in pursuit of love, in its varied forms. In the poem, Sahu appeals to its readers

to take control of things in their hand, to become the driving force of their own lives and refuse to lead a passive life. The poet urges that your character should reflect your thoughts and well-defined boundaries, that shall not be crossed by anyone. Love is a quality that should strengthen you and not otherwise. The idea of love in the poems of Nandini Sahu is not like that of a dreamy pastoral, rather it is complex and very earthly in nature, that is full of flaws, that makes it humane in its entirety. Even in its painful forms, love makes you tough to live through the various stages of life. In this poem, love is personified as a companion, a friend and a fellow sufferer, who takes your back in the thick and thin of life.

The speaker in the poems of Nandini Sahu is often found in dialogue with love, as if love is a counsel personified, this presentation of love breaks away from the traditional perception of love that describes love as someone that is mischievous, childish and innocent. Sahu's innovative techniques offer a fresh perspective on love that is rational and wise. The ability to empathize with others make human beings special and unique. A loving heart is not a vengeful one, rather possesses the capacity to perceive what others may feel at a particular point in time. The speaker in the poems of Nandini Sahu is a kind and forgiving soul, one who not only recognises the pain of others but also offers a hand of help.

“When I Wiped Your Tears” is a poem that delves into the theme of empathy and acquires a compassionate tone that endorses a true sense of love. The poem shatters the stereotypical conventions of ‘manhood’ and ‘manliness’, who is not expected to carry emotions up his sleeves, someone who is devoid of sentiments. The poem is an emotional interchange between two individuals who find themselves amidst a moment of passion and sentimentality. When the interior melts, the exterior cannot hold and as a result, the emotions appear on the surface, that are partially lucid but completely honest. The poem narrates a story that does not require words to express, eyes, a recurring image in the poems of Nandini Sahu plays a vital role here as well. Teary eyes communicate love that is born out of empathy, a moment that lived for a short while but is complete in itself. Sahu endorses an idea of love that is selfless and is devoid of any malice. This poem by Nandini Sahu epitomizes companionship and upholds the true spirit of life, that is in being grateful towards your happiness and empathetic towards other's sorrows and troubles. The poem echoes of Keats' watchfulness and sensibilities, as empathy offers a therapeutic and healing effect to someone in pain and agony. Sahu argues that at the core of a true human beings. rests a strong sense of empathy, that offers a helping hand to someone in a state of vulnerability. “When I wiped your Tears”, like many of Sahu's poems is

about amity and togetherness, that should not be mistaken for co-dependence. The line between the two is thin but not blurred, hostility is the enemy of love, and for love to prosper, “Empathy is the key word- in your unwritten space” (Sahu, 112).

A Song, Half & Half is a compilation of love poems by Nandini Sahu, though written between a period of one year, the anthology narrates a story of lifetime. The selection of poems is a reimagination of the past, produced in a creative form. Sahu’s literature is defiant, bold and showcases perseverance, something that the readers can readily draw inspiration from during challenging times. Traditional in ethics and modern in approach, the poems exhibit a range of emotions like love, hope, despair, remorse, resilience, grit and determination. The fabric of Sahu’s poems is a product of her sweet and sour experiences in life, a spectrum of colourful thoughts that reimagine the literary conventions of love. She endorses a love that may look incomplete, but is it a prerequisite of love? The beauty of her poems rest in the fact that they invite readers to add their stories to them, as it creates a never-ending continuum of love.

Works Cited:

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