

## Many Masculinities: Reading Stories from *Shedding the Metaphors* by Nandini Sahu

Suman Lata Chhachhia  
Ph.D Research Scholar,  
Discipline of English,  
SOH, IGNOU  
New Delhi  
Email: [sumanhw2005@gmail.com](mailto:sumanhw2005@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

This paper analyses some of the selected stories from *Shedding the Metaphors* and tries to show the different types of masculinities in the male characters influenced by many factors such as class, caste, age, nationality and identity. It is an attempt to read the selected stories in the light of ‘Many Masculinities’ which emphasizes that there are multiple ways to be masculine, challenging traditional norms and stereotypes that limit masculinity to certain traits or behaviours. This acknowledges the existence of various masculinities, ranging from dominant or hegemonic forms of masculinity associated with power and privilege to marginalized or subordinated masculinities that may face discrimination and social pressures. R. W. Connell provided a useful theoretical account of gender in her book *Masculinities* which has become a classic work on the nature and construction of masculine identity. Connell argues that there is not one masculinity, but many different masculinities, each associated with different positions of power.

This paper recognizes the importance of deconstructing and challenging notions of masculinity, promoting and accepting the diverse expressions of gender identity for all individuals. In the present chapter, seven out of twelve stories have been selected from Nandini Sahu’s *Shedding the Metaphors*, and by reading the selected stories in a new way, a critical analysis has been conducted on various types of masculinity and it tries to show how its form is changing nowadays.

**Keywords:** *Masculinities, Power, Hegemony, Gender, Incest, Modernity, Memoir.*

### Introduction

Rohit K. Dasgupta and K. Moti Gokulsing in their article “Introduction: Perceptions of Masculinity and Challenges to the Indian Male” on the question, ‘Masculinity in Crisis?’ talks about Anthony Clare who writes in his book *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis*, “At the beginning of the twenty first century it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that men are in serious trouble. Throughout the world, developed and developing, antisocial behaviour is essentially male.” [2001:3]. He goes on further to state that men who at one point knew of their role as providers for the family have found this role diminished in recent years and this set of changing circumstances of having to renegotiate their place within the social structure has exacerbated this “crisis.” It is observed that while Clare’s choice of the term ‘crisis’ may seem a little farfetched in this situation, it cannot be denied that the very form of masculinity is shifting and giving rise to new forms of masculinity(ies). This observation by Clare reflects a growing concern about the shifting dynamics of masculinity. It highlights the social, cultural, and

economic changes that have impacted traditional gender roles. The authors, Dasgupta and Gokulsing, argue that these changes have created space for the emergence of diverse and multiple masculinities. They also talk about Brittan (1989), a commentator on Masculinity Studies that women's demands for freedom and equality have left men confused about their role. The dependent housewife model of the family is in decline and one of the questions that come to haunt men is how can they prove their masculinity and superiority in these changing circumstances. Indian men growing up in the eighties and nineties have grown up seeing a particular form of patriarchal masculinity which is being challenged in contemporary times. (Dasgupta & Gokulsing 12)

The story "Alternative Masculinity(?)" revolves around a middle-aged couple, Dr Harihar Panda, an Associate Professor and his wife Mrs Savita Panda, whose stay in the guest house of a university was arranged by a young lady (who worked as a professor in this same institute), also the narrator of the story. They were accompanied by Manas and Shubhra who were old friends of the professor. Savita is a possessive, caring and overprotective wife. Her actions and behaviour are presented as obsessive and overbearing, irritating the other guests. Her matters of concern were every smallest thing which is related to the daily routine life of Harihar, but she took charge of all these works assuming it is a way to express love and care and she used to glorify it in public gatherings. Savita is so much overprotective towards her husband that she even checks whether he has washed his hand or not before eating. When the professor tells her to eat and not to worry about her husband, she replies, "No no!! How can he eat if I don't serve?" (Sahu 55) It shows she treats him as a small child, not as a partner. Savita was inspecting him from all directions. They all laugh at Harihar discreetly, but Harihar appreciates his wife by saying:

"Madam, do you know, Savita is the most loving and caring wife I have ever seen. She takes care of everything. From morning to night, twenty-four into seven, she is there for me. She takes care of my home, my children, me. She cooks, cleans the house, arranges my shattered books, shabby study tables, irons my clothes, feeds me. I simply depend on her for every single thing. In fact, for every small thing I need her." (Sahu 56)

Although he was appreciating her, when critically analysed, it seems as if Savita has no other work to do except working and caring for her husband. Harihar appreciates her as if she were his maidservant, not his life partner. Savita is proud of the chores she does for her husband and assumes herself to be the reason behind her husband's success, in his professional and academic life over the past 35 years, which reflects in her following words:

“Ask him, I am the one who made him do his PhD, I am the one because of whom he wrote his research papers and books. Because of me he got his promotions. Tomorrow if he is promoted to a higher position in his workplace, it will also be because of me. Minus me, this man is a big zero.” (57)

The professor was expecting Dr Harihar to contradict her but he only looked pleased by her love, and dedication for him, probably, to save his face before others. Dr Harihar managed to get the sympathy of the professor on the night when she finds it as male harassment. Because Harihar had no objection to whatever was happening with him—though the author had serious doubts about it. Dr Harihar sensed that the professor had some sympathy for his situation, so, somehow, he was keeping in touch with the professor on social media. In one incident, he reached uninvited at the airport to meet the professor and Padmashree poet Jayanta Mahapatra and spent hardly one minute and asked permission to click a photo with them, which he tagged on Facebook, with the caption “Wonderful time spent with Padmashree Jayanta Mahapatra and the unparalleled poet par excellence, Nandini Sahu, in Bhubaneswar. Had long dialogues with the poets on contemporary Indian literature, and possible future collaborations with both poets.” (Sahu 60) Even afterwards, he keeps trying to meet her on different pretexts and again asks for a favour to book a room in the University Guest house and reaches her house uninvited. But Harihar could not tell his wife over the phone that he is currently with a single female professor and lies in front of her son. Here professor feels very embarrassed to have an unwanted male in her house and especially one who didn't hesitate to lie before her child. She didn't even want to give him dinner, but at his shameless request, she gave him. Later on, it was realised by the professor that what they all have seen in the previous gathering was one side of the coin. Dr Harihar enjoyed all the food items, which he had hesitated to accept in front of his wife. Savita was from a rich and extravagant family. Dr Harihar willingly accepted her supremacy, and the reason behind marrying her was to enjoy economic benefits in terms of getting a good dowry. He knowingly engages her in all unproductive stuff like cooking, cleaning, and taking care of all his wishes, as according to him,

— “I get great food, clean bed, clean tables to work, fresh towels, clean book shelves, healthy tea, health care, in fact, everything for a comfortable living. In return, I ignore her foolish talks, her self-styled supremacy. She feels emancipated, empowered by ‘dominating’ me.” (Sahu 63)

Dr Harihar tactfully keeps her busy with household chores and his services so that Savita can never get time to think or desire any professional achievement. Dr Harihar ensures his comfort and lavishness at a very low investment for his entire life. Moreover, Dr Harihar cheated on his wife and snatched her entire property by taking her thumb impression in the name of securing her property. He told to the professor that which qualified person will believe that a class-three-

fail woman has actually shaped my great academic career? Dr Harihar knew that Professor has a deep sympathy for him that's why he shamefully kept in touch with her, if she was not intelligent, she also could get cheated on or get into trouble. Here, are two prominent messages we can find in the story, the first one to all women that don't be happy to hear appreciative words to do all unproductive work and let them do their work on their own. The second message to all that if you want the real welfare of your girl child, educate her otherwise, she might be made foolish by some greedy and selfish man.

So, the character of Harihar in this story shows Hegemonic masculinity. Connell refers to it as a culturally authoritative form of masculinity that supports the dominance of men and the subordination of women. To get sympathy from his friends, Harihar doesn't even oppose his wife when she gives all credit of his life's achievements to herself in front of them and tries every method to meet the professor because he knew that she sympathises with him. He was using Savita for his own benefit without giving anything meaningful to her in return. Harihar says it's a win-win situation for him because he has his own benefits with Savita. The professor was shocked to hear all this that she reached her home, ... absent-minded, with a void in my cognizance, rethinking, swotting 'masculinity.' (Sahu 64)

"That Elusive Orgasm" reveals the strategic conspiracy behind incest love. It is a story about the sexual assault of a sixteen years old girl by her father in the name of superstitious old beliefs to justify his sexual orientation. After the paralysis of half of her mother's body, one day Jhumpa stops coming to school and was not allowed to leave the house and meet anyone. Jhumpa was an intelligent girl who was dedicated to her preparations for the NEET for Medical Science to become a doctor. She has two friends Nanny and Grace during that time.

Years later, in 2020 when Nanny reconnects with Grace through Facebook, she goes to Kochi for summer vacation and both friends revived some past memories. Nanny heard Grace talking over the phone with Jhumpa in a suppressed voice and then Grace reveals that in 2005 after Nanny left Sonagachi, she became lonelier than ever as Jhumpa too had stopped coming to the school. Grace's father sent her to a hostel in Kerala for further study. In 2008, when Grace visited Sonagachi, she learned that Jhumpa's parents were away, leaving her alone with a maid who was instructed not to let her go out. Grace, along with her cousins, secretly entered Jhumpa's house and discovered her in a deteriorated state. She managed to bring her out of house arrest by giving a heavy bribe to the maidservant, Jhumpa came out in the streets after three years and was astonished to see the freedom of people there. Grace and her brothers made

her comfortable by talking, shopping and eating in restaurants. They took her to Church and here she decided to confess her feelings. Grace, with the help of her brothers, secretly recorded Jhumpa's confession. She confessed that when she was in class IX her mother was paralysed. One day during a prayer her mother chanted mantras and her father bathed Jhumpa with his own hands. Later he rushed into her and this process repeated every day. Grace and her brothers were shocked by the revelations she made about the hateful act of her father who enjoyed sex with her and the worst part was, she herself didn't consider this as unusual, obnoxious, or objectionable.

The silent consent of her mother to such a hateful act of her husband shows her indifferent attitude towards her daughter and her inability to provide sexual pleasure to her husband. Grace and her brothers with the help of church authorities managed to rescue her and facilitate her escape to the United States with other staff nurses, where she begins life anew. Jhumpa worked hard and did her Bachelor of Science in Nursing there. However, even in her new life, Jhumpa continues to carry the emotional scars of her past, which manifest in her inability to engage in a healthy sexual relationship with her husband, Abraham. Although he was nice and kind to her, Without the cooperation of Jhumpa their married life could not become successful and it turned out that they were just two persons living in one house like guests, who had nothing to do with each other.

When Grace tried to convince Jhumpa, she threatened her, “If you are not willing to keep me for a few days with you, I would rather go to Babai’s place and resolve with him.” (Sahu 109) and she comes back to India. Here both of her friends help her to get rid of her childhood assault but the innocent mind of the girl accepted that pain and assumes it an orgasm so, later on, she could not deny and willingly accepts her father’s sexual offer again.

An academically bright student who can do better in life had to leave her studies and couldn't enjoy her childhood. The writer highlights the psychological consequences of such abuse and explores its long-term effects on survivors' relationships and self-identity. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in “Under Western Eyes”, highlights the typical conditions of third world women as they lead "an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.).” (337) The character of Savita and Jhumpa shows the perfect example of third-world women as described by Mohanty. Jhumpa's father, Babai, is depicted as a complex and scornful character, contributing to the overall distressing narrative.

He exhibits a toxic masculinity characterized by scornfulness and engaging in incestuous abuse. This toxic masculinity involves a distorted sense of power, control, and dominance over others, particularly within the family unit. Here the dominance was not limited to the psyche of the other family members, rather it was extended to their bodies too. She was exploited to such an extent that her body could not respond to her husband's touch and craved the treatment her father used to give her.

It was described in the story that Jhumpa couldn't sleep properly. As Jhumpa confessed that from IX class onwards her father used to perform prayers activities and rituals after which he had sex with her. How is it possible that she didn't get pregnant even for more than three years? It may be possible that her parents used to regularly give her some intoxicant along with the prasad to avoid pregnancy and she got used to it. In the absence of that substance or its side effects, she could not get sleep and her body did not under her control to respond to her husband. We get a message from this story that if someone especially a teenager or our friend suddenly leaves the school or office, she may be in a bad situation. There's no doubt that Grace was an angel to him in real life.

The story "The Juvenile Love Letter" revolves around the writer's experiences of her school time when her science teacher Samal Sir gave her a love letter. She saw Samal Sir for the first time in class IXth at the age of thirteen. The story has autobiographical elements and it is written from the perspective of Nandini, who was so innocent at that time that she used to change her frock with her friend Saloni because she likes her frocks. She was very studious and competitive in nature, this is shown by the fact that when a new girl, Sonalika, got one percent more marks than the author, she cried for a whole week and got two percent more marks in the next exam. Samal Sir, a fresh M. Sc. graduate gave her tuition at her home at the request of her parents. He was the only young male teacher in a school with all girls and most female teachers, including the principal. But when his tuition is over, he expresses his intense feelings of love for her, and gives her a bunch of love letters equivalent to a PhD thesis, it is his one-sided romantic attachment to Nandini that surprises her. He was from the Science stream and Nandini's interest was in literature in which she can delve into deep thoughts of different dimensions and express her emotions in multiple ways but at the same time Samal Sir was of a very reserved nature and doesn't know how to express and perhaps this is the reason that he misunderstood her and expected from her love and complained to her that why she couldn't understand his feelings. Nandini reflects on various factors that may have contributed

to Samal Sir's attraction, such as his background, profession, and her efforts to make him feel comfortable. After twenty years of this incident, the writer remains unsure of who was right or wrong in that situation but regrets not reading a potential masterpiece. Nandini's this regret shows that she doesn't consider him guilty for giving her love letters. In her own words, "Did I hate that letter? Did I loathe the touch and feel of that letter? Honestly, no." (Sahu 114) It was his genuine feelings that he expressed in letters but because of hesitation or shyness, he couldn't give her on time. The thickness of the love letters shows that he had been writing them for a long time, but couldn't give her. In his own words, "I love you since two years now, write letters to you every day, store them in a folder, but I hardly do have the courage to go in front of you and hand them over." (Sahu 132) Thus, we can guess the profound depth of Samal Sir's affection for Nandini, as evidenced by his consistent practice of composing heartfelt letters on a daily for two years. Samal Sir represents a modern man of the twentieth century, exhibiting intelligence, emotional depth, compassion, and care.

Neither Samal Sir could understand Nandini's innocent feelings nor she could ever guess his feelings towards her. There was an age gap between Samal Sir and Nandini and he thought of her as his equal, because of that he expected her to be mature but Nandini was only a school child at that time. As she was very studious by nature, her full focus was on her studies. Her parents and elder sister were also concerned about her studies so in such an academic atmosphere of her house, there was no scope of diversion and fluctuation of thoughts. She respected and held Samal Sir in high regard due to their student-teacher relationship. He misunderstood her respectful and kind behaviour as an indication of romantic interest. Why is it that when a woman displays good behaviour towards a man, he automatically assumes that she is romantically interested in him? This observation questions the tendency of men to misinterpret a woman's kind gestures and friendly behaviour as indications of romantic feelings. Additionally, considering Samal Sir's young age at that time, it was natural that his attraction towards Nandini might have led to a misinterpretation of genuine affection as love. Samal Sir's love was the first sight attraction with innocent feelings. The title of the story, "The Juvenile Love Letter," also justifies it as Juvenile individuals are typically in the stage of adolescence or early youth, characterized by their transitional phase between childhood and adulthood. During this period, they often experience significant physical, emotional, and psychological changes. However, due to their limited life experience and emotional maturity, they may have a more idealized or exaggerated perception of love and relationships. This can

sometimes lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of others' intentions, as they may not yet have a fully developed understanding of the complexities of adult relationships.

“The Quarantined” and “Post-Quarantine” is the story of an independent lady, Joyita and her middle-class lover, Jayant who was immature to understand her true love. The story Both these stories were written during the outbreak of the Corona Virus; which shook the world. Nandini Sahu starts the story “The Quarantined” by writing about Sheela, Adarsh’s wife who wanted to be pregnant, so every night she used to try to fulfil her wish for a baby. Joyita was in a relationship with Jayant, Adarsh’s elder brother. Jayant and Adarsh’s mother Kamala doesn’t like Joyita, but because of her selfish motive, she allows her son Jayant to meet her. Although she knew that Jayant is sent to her by his mother by telling a lie only to get a job under her. Joyita enjoyed his company as she used to go out on the weekends, meet like teenage couples, eat out, do shopping, watch movies hand-in-hand, kiss in the darkness of the theatre, hold hands in the market and on the roads etc. All these beautiful moments were before the quarantine.

The outbreak of coronavirus in India was very horrible and because of that the quarantine was imposed to stop Covid-19 from spreading. According to Sahu during quarantine, “It was a war like situation, the government announced a curfew in mid-March, closed offices, schools, colleges, universities, malls, theatres, markets, flights, metros, buses, just everything. Only emergency services were allowed. The lockdown went for months...” (142-143) The quarantine time was very depressing. Relatives and friends couldn’t meet each other, Joyita also couldn’t meet Jayant during this time because his mother restricted him to go out in such a fearful period. But at the same time, Joyita kept herself busy cooking for migrant labourers and attending online official meetings. The description of Sheela given by Sahu is very realistic and it shows how her life is under the burden of all these things which made her depressed and frustrated. Here Nandini Sahu presented the condition of a middle-class woman who has no freedom, no rights, and no decision power in her house, but instead works for the whole family full day which affects her physically as well as mentally both as she writes about Sheela, “No one noticed or admired a short, flat woman; apart from that, a daily wage job, household chores in the morning-evening and busy weekends made her hostile to everyone, everything.” (138) When she was caught covid no one accompanied her to the hospital because of fear and when she came back from the hospital after recovering but so weak to do any work, her in-laws and husband didn’t accept her and sent her to her parents, after some time when she recovered physically from weakness and fit for household chores she again welcomed by her mother-in-



law, it shows how selfish and mean people were they. There is an economic and socio-cultural gap between Joyita and Jayant's family. While Joyita is an independent, broad-minded, learned and smart modern woman, Jayant and his family are narrow-minded, lazy, superstitious, mean and selfish people and their level of understanding is also very limited. Sheela is attracted towards Jayant as she thinks that Adarsh is not fit for her because she couldn't pregnant by him. When Joyita suggested to Jayant about adopting a child from an orphanage or consulting a doctor or a fertility clinic for this problem, Jayant himself couldn't convince and thought her a crazy woman. This indicates that their attention is not directed towards finding a solution to the problem; instead, they tend to rely on the conventional approach to problem-solving. Jayant and Adarsh both are the obedient sons of Kamla, while Adarsh earns for the family, Jayant does nothing and enjoys all rights and rest all the time.

The next story "Post-Quarantine" starts with the lines, "I am Jayant, Joy, as she addressed me sometimes. Joyita's Jayant. Or I better say, no-more-Joyita's Jayant." (Sahu 149) It suggests Jayant is narrating the whole story and the word 'no-more-Joyita's Jayant' suggests that now Jayant has no place in Joyita's life. Joyita left him and Mumbai both, but before leaving she said a proper goodbye to him. In her own words, "I had always told you that one must say a proper 'goodbye' in any relationship before they say quits. Good bye Joy." (Sahu 150) The new Joyita of Delhi is a very confident and strong lady, as in Jayant's words, "Yes, she always had been a strong woman, 'bold and beautiful', as everyone called her. (Sahu 150) Joyita moved ahead in her life leaving behind the people who do not have love and respect for her but only want to fulfil their motives. She proved herself by her hard work, determination and patience. Whenever there is any party Jayant's family doesn't invite Joyita but after the party is over, they sent leftover cake to her. In return, she sent an expensive gift through Shyamanand, her cook. One day she denied to accept that leftover cake by saying boldly:

"Joy, if possible, please ask your family not to send those leftover cakes to me to remind me how lonely I am, and that, no one invites me to their parties. It's actually not so. I have good friends who invite me every evening, but I don't go as I have work; and I don't want to roam after office hours. I want to read, write, relax, or at best meet you." (Sahu 158)

Joyita appears to be a somewhat introverted and work-focused lady who values time and prefers activities like reading and writing. She loves and cares for Jayant a lot. But when she found Jayant and Sheela alone in their house for five days and Jayant's mother and brother left them together intentionally, Joyita couldn't bear this cheating. Joyita should have understood this fact that how can she expect loyalty and trust from a family who treated their daughter-in-

law like a slave, persuades her to have sex relation with her brother-in-law, Jayant to get pregnant, tell lie to Joyita about Jayant's qualifications only for the job, allow him to meet her for his economic growth, charge more rent from Joyita than other tenants, restrict their tenants to meet with each other for their selfish motives and narrow thoughts and superstitious habits. There is no match between Joyita's intellectual rich thoughts and their narrow thinking. The family was below her level and indulged in suppressing a woman and giving space for extramarital relations despite going to doctors, how can they accept independent women around them? She should not accept that the family was directly asking for help for economic upliftment only and in any form, they don't have any emotional bond with Joyita. Every event of the story was telling one open fact that it was a one-sided attachment only from Joyita's side. Jayant realised her love but only after her leaving the city.

“Joie knew everything but still she ignored it. Joyita didn't know cleverness, she left Jayant and moved to Delhi without informing him, but with a note of goodbye and transferred all money from their joint account to his mother's account with a note “Mrs. Kamala, the entire money of this account belongs to Jayant. Please pass it on to him. Thank you.” (Sahu 163)

Joyita's love for Jayant was selfless, deep, profound, and Intense, while Jayant experiences a feeling of jealousy and insecurity when he witnesses Joyita's financial success. Seeing the substantial amount of money being credited to her salary account, even during the lockdown when financial stability is uncertain for his family, triggers negative emotions within him. Jayant's reaction when he thinks, “I hated to see a few lakhs credited to her salary account every month, even during the lockdown.” (164) implies that he perceives Joyita's success as a threat to his self-worth and talent. Joyita used to forget everything every next morning after the fight and wished him a fresh good morning, on it, Jayant used to tell her that she had three buttons in her head, “one to fight, one to love, and a third one to change your moods within no time and behave normal after a serious fight?” (Sahu 166) For this, she replied so beautifully, “My dear Joy boy, it's only the third button that gets the world going and keeps relationships alive, else we all would fight and break up with everyone every day. With this button, I forgive and forget hurts, this button is ego-free.” (Sahu 166- 167)

These lines of Joyita emphasize the significance of forgiveness and the ability to move past hurts to sustain healthy relationships and the third button symbolizes an important aspect of maintaining relationships and harmony. Jayant's personality is shown as a person who hurt Joy many times shouted at her, hurt her sentiments, used abusive language, asked her to leave the house and subjected her to various emotional tortures. He always tries to prove her wrong to

satisfy his male ego, but Joie never reacted aggressively. Jayant's this behaviour shows his aggressive, indifferent, lazy, and irresponsible personality. The influence of societal expectations and family dynamics on Jayant's masculinity is also evident. Jayant is influenced by the traditional gender roles and expectations imposed by his mother, brother and Sheela. However, the narrative highlights the need for growth and transformation, urging Jayant to challenge his toxic behaviours and embrace a more compassionate and respectful form of masculinity.

When Sheela gets pregnant after having sexual relationships many times with Jayant, the attitude of all members of his family changes, and after her delivery when her son was born, she is told to tie rakhi on Jayant's hand and treat him as her brother. Jayant now started missing Joie. After their home was seized, his parents went to the village, but Jayant denied to return and he reached Delhi in order to meet Joie, but was again assaulted by a Banzaran, a bangle-seller with garlic breath that smell like Sheela. Jayant realizes the value of Joie's presence in his life now. He realises his mistake that he gave more importance to his family who used him for a baby and after the fulfilment of their wishes sidelined him from their lives. He neglected the genuine relationship with Joie and failed to recognize the value of emotional connections. Jayant's character and masculinity undergo a complex evolution throughout the narrative. Initially, his relationship with Joyita is marked by her intense love for him, while he experiences feelings of jealousy and insecurity, particularly when confronted with Joyita's financial success. There are some instances when his behaviour is depicted as hurtful and abusive, subjecting Joyita to emotional torture and demonstrating aggression, indifference, laziness, and irresponsibility. But in the end, his realization of his fault prompts Jayant to transform.

The story "Octopus" is written from the perspective of a man, Varun who draws a unique comparison between his girlfriend and an octopus. He affectionately refers to her as his Octopus, highlighting her possession of three hearts. "—one to love me, the second one to love me more, and the third one to love me even more. Her name was Neelotpala. I called her Neelu." (199) Varun receives a message from a lady, Neelu on a dating site, and is shocked to see her innocence when she sends him her complete profile on a Dating App. The story explores the character of Neelu, a single mother who has been focused on raising her son and building her career. Neelu is depicted as a strong and dedicated woman who has succeeded in her professional life but feels lonely in her personal life. She is described as having a childlike

heart symbolizing her emotional depth and vulnerability. As a single mother, she takes on the roles of both a nurturer and a provider, challenging traditional gender roles that associate motherhood solely with femininity. She is independent and self-sufficient, holding a high position as a director and being a successful writer. Her accomplishments and confidence challenge the notion that only men can hold powerful positions and be career-oriented.

The description of Neelu being a single mother for many years and her dedication to her career showcases her independence and strength. However, her friends and family's insistence on finding a partner for her leads her to explore a dating app. This exploration brings a mixture of apprehension and curiosity, ultimately leading her to connect with the protagonist. The dynamics of their virtual relationship are portrayed through their conversations on the dating app. Varun's initial reservations about the sincerity of their partner and their intentions are gradually replaced by a growing connection and admiration. The story highlights their compatibility, shared sense of humour, and emotional support for each other. It also explores the delicate balance between revealing personal information and maintaining privacy in the context of online interactions. Neelu's journey into online dating reflects her willingness to free herself from societal expectations and explore new possibilities. Her friend encourages her to embrace their emotions and move on from her past, highlighting the importance of finding happiness and allowing her son to build his own life.

After some time, when Varun told her that his real name was Varun, not Ram, which he had used in the dating app to conceal his identity, he has a wife and a daughter but living separately, Neelu just said hmm. There was some sort of soul connection between them. Neelu wanted to meet him eagerly but she said, "Varun, I can wait for you till the end of the world. You cannot fathom my patience." Neelu considers Varun her ultimate man. she claimed that he not just completed her sentences, but even her thoughts, and he was her 'Stream of Consciousness', her 'Objective Correlative'. Neelu challenges traditional notions of masculinity through her emotional expression. When they both watch the movie and cry, she displays vulnerability, defying the stereotype that men should suppress their emotions. Neelu's question, "Varun, who says that men don't cry?" (sahu 210) highlights the need to embrace and validate men's emotional experiences. However, as Varun reflects on his relationship with Neelu and their interactions, he begins to recognize the importance of emotional connection and vulnerability. This growth suggests a move towards a more evolved and inclusive form of masculinity.

And lastly “Being God’s Wife” is a memoir and it starts with these beautiful lines by Nandini Sahu in the memory of her father,

“I look up the grey cold sky  
and try to feel the warmth  
of my father’s eye.  
His grave exists nowhere  
but in me  
and  
I am his epitaph” (236)

Nandini Sahu while remembering her loving father writes, “Baba. Father. My father. Such a calming, heartwarming, touching, euphonic word.” (236)

This story is about Sahu’s innocent and saint-like father, how he struggles to give good education to all his daughters by working hard throughout his life and how his last days of life become painful because of an acute disease psoriasis. Her father was of so good nature that people call him ‘Living God’ with love. Sahu writes about her father and how he was so innocent like a child, “He lived life of a saint, he was innocent like a five years old child even when he was 75.” (237) The writer’s mother is also a school teacher by profession and they are six sisters living jointly with love and care in her childhood days. Both her father and mother focus on good education for their daughters. Her father was the inspiration for all the people living there and have great respect for a man who in spite of limited resources tried to give good education and manners to his daughters. In India, a girl child is not given proper education and food compared to boys, but still, the writer’s father gave all facilities to his daughters, this thing makes him an inspiration in society. Sahu writes that the respect for her father in society was so much that people named their colony after her father’s name, “people named that colony as ‘Krushna Nagar’ in the small town G.Udayagiri, after my father’s first name”. (238)

Her baba got high blood sugar and acute psoriasis due to Pethas which a petha-walla handed over to him every day after her mother left for school and an unhealthy lifestyle in which Baba didn’t eat his lunch without her mother. Those days were very painful for her Baba and he had a brain stroke at 76. The writer recounts those moments when she went to see her Baba in ICU room, “I couldn’t imagine the tall, fair, handsome, ever-smiling man lying helplessly in the hospital, his mouth wide open, eyes fixed on the ceiling.” (Sahu 239) At last, he took his last breath on the lap of her mother. The writer shares many instances of his innocence, in one of

the incidents, when the writer sent him flight tickets, e-tickets so that he can come to Delhi, “but didn’t consider that as a ticket, and insisted that there should be glossy papered, coloured tickets, like the “real-real tickets” (Sahu 240) So much innocent was her father, far from the clever world like an innocent child. There is another incident that shows Baba’s kind-heartedness in which when her mother called a goldsmith home to take orders for the wedding jewellery for the writer’s younger sister, The writer’s mother instructed Baba before he comes, but when she went to the kitchen to bring some snacks and tea Baba said that goldsmith, “Beta, we cannot give you so much money because goldsmiths are clever people, and you may disappear after taking the money.” (240) On hearing this, when he asked who told this thing to him, Baba said that his wife told this to him. It was a very simple incident but it shows how pure was Baba’s heart, without any hatred and malice. Baba believed that only a disciplined person is successful. He always used to say “God helps those who help themselves” The writer gives full credit to Baba for her love for English and the art of writing. It was through Baba’s efforts that the local college at G.Udayagiri was built, he was the harbinger, almost the founder, he ran from pillar to post to convince the Collector, and then the Government of Odisha to introduce a college for women’s education. The writer was ‘Daddy’s Girl.’ In another incident after Baba’s retirement, Mr. Ratha, the Head Clerk of his school, expected the bribe to prepare his pension papers and when he said, “Sir, Chai-Paani ke liye kuch chhahiye”, (Sahu 246), Baba requested his wife to make some tea for him. When he made his intention clear, Baba slapped him tight because he doesn’t believe in bribe. Such was Baba, her mother’s ‘Demigod’. In the next incident, Baba returned the packet of money to the Bank Branch Manager when he gave three lakhs rupees extra mistakenly. He was really a Demigod as the writer calls him. He was an honest man and an ideal to the writer for her whole life.

The third incident of his innocence was when he reached Delhi at the writer’s house, where some of her daughter’s friends of all religions including Hindu, Muslim and Christians came to her house to celebrate Diwali, in which a Muslim colleague’s wife, Mrs Khan, was frying Puris in the kitchen, Baba said that lady, “Beta, see my daughter, she believes in sarva-dharma-samanwaya, she is secular. That is why, even if you are a Muslim, you are cooking in her kitchen.” Although the lady felt offended, the writer tried to convince her that he was appreciating our togetherness.

But, at one point, the writer was annoyed with him for being so apathetic to her pain when she was suffering domestic violence and miscarriages. The writer writes about this feeling with her

Baba, “I developed an acute love-hate-relationship with Baba after losing two girl children to marital rapes, just before their birth” It was when she felt connected to the poem “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath when he maintained a stony silence, but the writer realised later that it was because of Dementia, fractional Alzheimer’s. Five years after Baba’s death, when the writer visited Udayagiri, she found every belonging of Baba in the proper place.

The writer along with her son Sonu and her mother remembered all the incidents that had happened related to Baba. We found another memorable incident when their maid Tintumaa was cheating them by taking advance money for more than thirty months and did not return the money. When the author's mother showed Baba the notebook in which the balance was written, he tore it. It was Baba’s generosity and kindness who doesn’t want to stretch the matter which saved their maidservant. The writer’s mother got annoyed so much but after some time she left the issue as she loved him so much. Her mother became emotional when her daughter asked if she was okay, and she said, “I had a great life with your Baba. I have seen it all – being God’s wife!!”

In one of her videos on YouTube, Nandini Sahu talks about her book *Shedding the Metaphors* and says that the characters in the collection of stories are very inclusive and optimistic. She talks about all her twelve stories one by one in sequential order, she says:

A Different Story is a very romantic love story, “Alternative Masculinity” talks about some of our important social issues, "Echoing in a Lullaby" is a nostalgic story of my childhood spent with my teacher, “The Shadow of a Shadow” is a story dealing with lesbianism, and I'm sure that the readers are going to enjoy reading this story and also this will give them a food for thought to think about the queer, “Juvenile Love Letter” is a nostalgic story again, I took almost twenty two years to write this story I've been thinking about it, but finally I put the story together and this is the “Juvenile love letter” and then two more stories “The Quarantined” and “Post Quarantined” I wrote these two stories during Covid last year and I have taken inspiration from a friend and her life for it and then the “Scarlet fly” is a psychoanalysis can be done of this characters and “Octopus” is a romantic story, “The Wild stream” this is a political satire and it talks about a small child, Mami Pradhan who got trapped into some vicious circle of politics and then she became a victim of human trafficking and the story of Mami Pradhan I hope is going to touch the hearts of my readers from the title of the story is the wild streaming and the last story of the collection is “Being God's Wife” this is my memoir here I am talking from my mother's perspective and I'm talking about my great father late Shri Krishna Chandra

Sahu, he was instrumental in educating six girls in rural Orissa years back and he has been my source of inspiration. This is a memoir from my mother's perspective, which my mother will never write so I thought I should write it down and let the world know about my rich pedigree where my great father had inspired my six sisters to get education and to be a part of the larger social system and to contribute to society. (Nandini Sahu's Shedding The Metaphors in Panorama International Art & Literature Festival 3:13-5:51)

Nandini Sahu answers her own questions like “Why am I going to shed the metaphors and what are those metaphors, by saying that she has reached a point in her life where she is completely non-judgmental and doesn't want to judge anybody, dismissive of nothing and accept life and people as they are without passing any of her judgments on them, this is how life has been a learning process for her, everyone is good in some other way, actually there is no one who is a bad character in society, sometimes people become victims of the circumstances.” (Nandini Sahu's Shedding The Metaphors in Panorama International Art & Literature Festival 5:58-6:39)

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, these stories from Nandini Sahu's Shedding the Metaphors reflect the multifaceted nature of masculinities. Each story presents a unique perspective on masculinity, highlighting the complexities and contradictions inherent in societal expectations and personal experiences. In "Alternative Masculinity(?!)," Dr Harihar Panda's character represents a different kind of masculinity that involves both submission and manipulation. His relationship with his possessive wife, Savita, exposes the power dynamics within their marriage. While Harihar appreciates Savita's care and dedication, the story raises questions about his passive acceptance of her overbearing behaviour and his exploitation of her for personal gain and selfish motives. "That Elusive Orgasm" delves into the disturbing theme of incestuous abuse, exposing the toxic masculinity embodied by Jhumpa's father. This story reveals the devastating effects of patriarchal control and the long-lasting trauma experienced by survivors. It challenges societal notions of masculinity by presenting an abuser who manipulates religious beliefs to justify his actions, further perpetuating the cycle of abuse. "The Juvenile Love Letter" offers a glimpse into the complexities of relationships. Samal Sir's character represents the challenges faced by men who struggle with expressing their emotions and the effects of his immature young age and background within societal expectations of masculinity. In "The Quarantined" and "Post-Quarantine" Jayant's relationship with Joyita highlights the selflessness of her love and her ability to forgive, while Jayant's actions often reflect



aggression, indifference, and irresponsibility. The external pressures from his family and the societal norms surrounding masculinity further complicate his path. These stories challenge traditional notions of masculinity by presenting male characters led by societal norms and failing to understand and appreciate the true essence of love.

The stories "Octopus" and "Being God's Wife" from Nandini Sahu's *Shedding the Metaphors* shed light on diverse manifestations of the behaviour of the characters. In "Octopus," the protagonist's journey through online dating explores themes of vulnerability, emotional connection, and the complexities of human relationships in the digital age. The story emphasizes the importance of emotional openness and genuine connection over rigid traditional notions. On the other hand, "Being God's Wife" presents a memoir that portrays the innocence, kindness, and struggles of the narrator's father. Through his selflessness and dedication to his daughters' education, he defies societal gender norms and becomes an inspiration for others. This story showcases a different facet of masculinity—one that embraces nurturing, compassion, and sacrifice. Both stories highlight the multi-faceted nature of masculinities, moving beyond stereotypes and exploring the complexities and individual experiences of men. They remind us that masculinity is not a monolithic concept, but rather a rich tapestry of diverse identities and expressions. These narratives encourage us to challenge societal expectations and embrace a broader, more inclusive understanding of what it means to be a man.

Nandini Sahu's narratives offer a valuable perspective on the complexities of human relationships, the power dynamics within them, and the ways in which societal expectations shape individuals' experiences of masculinity. Her characters both male and female represent the common issues related to gender conflicts in relationships affected by socio-cultural differences. *Shedding the Metaphors* invites readers to ponder the complexities of masculinity and relationships, urging us to question preconceived notions and embrace a more compassionate and inclusive understanding. It serves as a poignant reminder that true masculinity lies not in dominance or aggression but in empathy, respect, and the capacity for personal growth.

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