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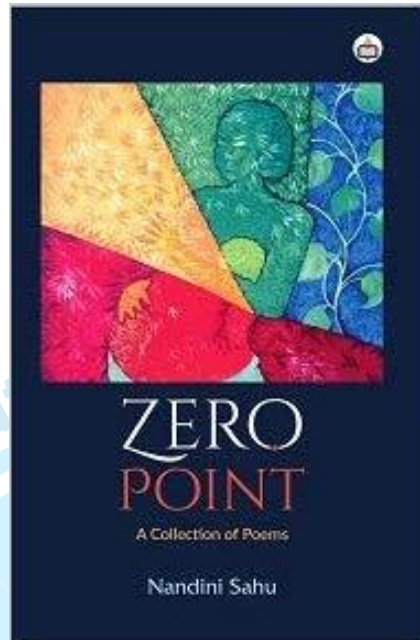
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The Celebration of Womanhood: a review of Nandini Sahu's *Zero Point*- A Collection of Poems

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Zero Point

By: Nandini Sahu

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With the release of Nandini Sahu's sixth poetry collection, *Zero Point* (A Collection of Poems) in New Delhi in August 2018, it is high time we look at this acclaimed collection of poetry again. Sahu's collection of poems, *Zero Point* is a work deserving of a place amongst classics. While posterity will have the answer for certain, yet in the humble opinion of this reviewer, *Zero Point*, will continue to let its lines shine forth for generations to come.

In this collection of poems each poem is a story in verse. In Sahu's words, "Zero point starts when life comes to a full circle, it's a new beginning-inclusive, compassionate, universal, tolerant, accommodative, acquiescent and patient". Sahu transfuses her intrinsic philosophy into a profoundly spiritual, and gloriously beautiful, experience.

Needless to add, she does credit to her Muse. At the same time, Sahu's poetry, belonging to the broad genre of contemporary Indian English Poetry, lends itself to a feminist reading. Her images are drawn from nature, and she often describes daily life, yet, an unmistakable divine spirit, an 'over-soul' is present in the pieces. Consider the poem entitled: These Days I do Only what the Heart says:

These evenings I have the time to water the
Plants without worrying much about the daily
Homework of my child
Or about the evening menu.
I have the rider of leaving the kitchen
To the cook, the worrying jiffy to time,
And the wind to blow whichever direction it pleases-
Without my approval.

In the poem "From Dust to Dust: A Voyage" the landscapes and their language are concerned with global environmental transitions. In ancient India land was worshipped as a mother, a source of nourishment and plenitude for her children. Man and earth were interrelated by the law of *Rita* which was seen as *dharmā*, an ethical goal. Any violation of this respect and integrity between humans and earth would disintegrate the balance in the ecological world. Sahu writes:

And then the Air went on wandering upon blue Water
Blue was the motif, pure blue, unguarded and blessed
Why did their guilty tongues stagger without a purpose?
Was a thirsty yearning woman denied water amid all
Abundance? Yes water is virtuous in myriad ways, not evil even
When not good.

The poems in *Zero Point (A Collection of Poems)* as this reviewer strives to show, is of that catalogue; it conjoins upon women the resolute task of summoning courage in the face of the subversive social tag of blasphemy, to stand up for their own rights and protest its violation. For her part, Sahu scripts *écriture féminine* by baring her own voice which comes through abject nullification of different versions of, narratives of the woman as subaltern. Sahu's intervention here becomes pivotal in charting the course of her life and of the text henceforth:

Round the gloom of my lonesome nightfall, ululates a carnival

Of lights,

Like Plato, I trust justice is loftier than injustice, they

Deliberate it or not!!! (22).

The poet then unabashedly says,

Swim against the tide.

If anything else, at least

I am a better swimmer!

I have the total control of my life

For better or worse.

Unorthodox and unapologetic

Facing life with glee

I swim.

I have become an expert at the game.

I call them colonizers

Who keep me ever dependent

And chum

Who toss me in the tide.

After all the friendly ebb awaits at the end. (Swimming against the Tide,).

The soul, indeed, has its own world and exists on its own terms. In her works she has pinpointed the attitudes towards hostility against women grounded in and intertwined with power and sexuality. She has essentially harped on the culturally-specific norms and social relations that have a profound influence on attitudes towards cruelty against the gendered subaltern.

My inner abacus shudders with a truth.

I settle down-

Let the imminent and the moral liberal.

Generations glare at me.

I am irredeemable.

A kind of gender resolution architect.

A perpetual, relentless,

Never-ending impulse towards the boundaries of the mind and spirit,

Frontiers I look out as I approach them. (Living in an Alternative Time)

The last poem in the collection, "The Song of Liberty," is an outstanding work, an apt finale. Here Sahu transcends all temporal barriers and questions subalternity inherent in stereotyping of gender, in a way that has always been a nagging thorn at the heart of the evolution of the Indian nation and its 'civil' society. She also mentions that the subject has been seminal to thoughts across her literary oeuvre, so this means this short poem in a way mark the culmination of Sahu's poetic flair while transcending the ever fleeting boundaries of the personal and the artistic.

Yes, I didn't 'have' the vagina.

A mother and a lover though I had been.

Until I became

This vagina-having-vagina-speaking woman.

Until I re-examined my existence

With the vagina as metaphor,

With an understated brilliance.

It is time now for a direct confrontation and the final one between thwarted male ego and the ability of the subaltern to speak. Speak she does, and as is her wont, Sahu collectively questions the commodification of the female body through the paradigms of sin and purity as mind-games.

But any spiky sharpness won't

stick into me. Those nights.

Because there was no none vagina.

He picked the parts of my body he

Wanted.

No lips, no none breasts.

No neck no nape no none cheeks.

Just the vagina. The dry-like-fig vagina.

To take a leaf out of her life is to re-define freedom– her rejection of male hegemony that is upheld as an illustration of the highest dignity of a just woman. It must be remembered, this freedom, this liberty has come about only after she has lived out the entire purpose of her life amidst all odds. Such organic criteria of completeness has been her own making, in keeping with Nature’s purpose of womanhood; she has neither ever paid any heed to scrupulous voices, nor does she now need to be perturbed by continuing debates over her purity and pollution.

She denies no knowledge, excludes nothing, ventures truth in all its mysterious complexity. The living and the loving spirit of *Nandini* in her asserts herself in her verses:

Let love, humane, though frail, sway

The coming days

Of Nandini, in Nandini.

Beyond Nandini. (43).

Nandini’s portrayal of *Nandini* thus comes to us through a gendered postcolonial adaptation of an allegory (Preface: 9) in a way that interrogates shared concerns over the ever-evolving relationship between a woman and her milieu, simultaneously narrativising her many selves through ever-renewing discourses.



BIO-NOTE

Sutanuka Ghosh Roy is Assistant Professor in Tarakeswar Degree College, University of Burdwan, West Bengal. She is currently engaged in active research and her areas of interest include Eighteenth Century literature, Indian English literature, Canadian Studies, Post-colonial Literature, Australian Studies, Dalit Literature, Gender Studies etc. She has published widely and presented papers at National and International Seminars. She is a regular contributor of research articles and papers to anthologies, national and international journals of repute. She is also the editor of the journal, IJLL (ISSN 2278-9170).

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