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Book Reviewed

Medusa by Nandini Sahu, *Leaves of Silence: Poems and Micropoems* by Ram Krishna Singh, *Tell Me, Please....* By Abnish Singh Chauhan, *Sunrise to Sunset: Poems and Short Stories* by S.L. Peeran, *The Making of Womanhood: Gender Relations in Mahabharata* by Shalini Shah, *Spun Yarn: Stories, Essays & other Miscellanies* by Richard Rose

Reviewers for January-June, 2026

Shatrughan Kahar, Wani Nazir, Pravat Kumar Padhy, Hemanta Pramanik, Soumita Mitra and Sulakshna Sharma

Reviews

**Nandini Sahu, *Medusa*, Black Eagle Books, 2025,
Pages-124, ISBN- 978-1-64560-693-2**

—Dr. Shatrughan Kahar—

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Nandini Sahu's most recent poetry collection, *Medusa*, represents a significant achievement in her artistic development. Focusing on the mythological character of Medusa from Greek mythology, this book provides a novel perspective on women's history, their struggles, and their resilience. Consisting of thirty-five poems, the collection intricately intertwines women's lived experiences with elements of Greek and Indian mythology, Odia folklore, cultural motifs, and personal memories. Beyond being, merely, a source of literary enjoyment, this work urges readers to engage in profound contemplation regarding the position of women in both historical contexts and modern society.

The initial poems, '*Medusa*' and 'Medusa on Fire in Long Covert Dusks', set the dominant tone of the collection. Sahu reinterprets the vilified figure from Greek mythology, transforming her into a powerful emblem of courage and self-determination. As she expresses, "Medusa is non-judgmental, audacious, beautiful, flexible yet unyielding." In these lines, Medusa surpasses her function as a symbol of monstrosity, instead emerging as a representation of a woman's resilience in the face of suffering and adversity. This reimagined depiction also draws connections with Indian figures like Ahalya, who endured condemnation and silencing by societal norms. Sahu's Medusa communicates across cultures, linking Greek tragedy to Indian patriarchy. Reinterpreting an ancient Western myth through a contemporary Indian feminist perspective illustrates the global exchange of symbols in today's interconnected societies. "Manthan—A Ghazal," referencing the cosmic churning of Indian mythology, situates this global feminist voice within a distinctly South Asian tradition of negotiating poison and nectar—pain and joy—within love and life. Poems such as "An Ode to Every Woman" and "Dushyant and Shakuntala" further this conversation by recognising how women have historically woven together the invisible threads of society while enduring patriarchal limitations, whether in Sanskrit drama or modern households. "Tapoi," inspired by Odia folklore,

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revitalises regional oral traditions, demonstrating how local legends continue to influence moral consciousness in contemporary times. In the intensely sensual, “Medusa on Fire in Long Covert Dusks,” Sahu challenges the cultural taboo surrounding female desire, affirming sexuality as a valid source of power and creativity.

In Sahu’s perspective, love transcends mere personal sentiment, evolving into a profoundly social experience influenced by cultural norms. “An Extra Mile” honors the bravery required to maintain love amidst uncertainty, whereas “Embroidering a Love” compares romance to the meticulous art of stitching, a metaphor rooted in domestic crafts historically associated with women. In “Me, in Your Mirror,” the acknowledgment between partners serves as a form of mutual affirmation, challenging the feelings of isolation prevalent in contemporary urban existence. Works like “Your Intimate Skies,” “A Country Called Love,” and “Petrichor” envision love as a limitless realm or the refreshing aroma of the first rainfall—symbolic gestures towards a culture of inclusivity that transcends the confines of caste, class, and national boundaries. “The Difficult Daughter” adds complexity to familial relationships, exposing the generational negotiations surrounding freedom that are increasingly apparent in India’s evolving social landscape, where daughters pursue independence while still honoring their inherited connections.

The collection also addresses the social challenges of endurance and equality. “As the Going Gets Tough” emphasises resilience as both a moral and communal strength, echoing the survival tactics of working-class and marginalised groups. “Barefoot on Branched Grass” honors the persistence of life following betrayal, serving as a metaphor for societies that continue to flourish despite exploitation. “Boys Don’t Cry” deconstructs the culturally imposed narratives of masculinity—“tears do not wear gender/ they are neither ‘masculine’/ nor ‘feminine’ and lenient, as their prerogative/ they are human”—and advocates for a more empathetic social structure. “The Clay Lamp” employs the simple Diwali diya to affirm that even minor cultural rituals can illuminate the way through collective darkness. The acute political awareness in “Creative Liberty, a Tool of Polity” cautions about how art can serve as both a means of liberation and a mechanism of control, while “Women’s Agency” asserts the hard-earned empowerment of women in a society that is still grappling with the concept of gender equality.

Memory and heritage constitute another dynamic thread, illustrating how culture persists through daily practices. “Culture Pickles” cherishes tradition akin

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to mangoes preserved in brine, encapsulating the manner in which food conveys familial narratives and the chronicles of migration, commerce, and environmental change. “Frozen in Time” embodies the trepidation associated with safeguarding that which cannot be eternally retained, whereas “Sonnet of the Taj” transforms a Mughal edifice into a contemplation of love’s resilience beyond the confines of dynastic authority. Poems like “She Lives in Beauty” and “Sisterhood” honor feminine elegance and unity, resonating with the networks of women—bhakti poets, reformers, activists—who have historically fostered India’s cultural revival. The concluding imagery of “The Akshyayapatra in Jagannath Puri,” the vessel that perpetually fills, serves as a spiritual allegory for cultural richness, implying that communal traditions can uphold societies even amidst scarcity.

The psychological poetry of Medusa is intricately connected to societal realities. “Hurt People Hurt People” reveals how trauma permeates families and communities, illustrating that suffering is not merely individual but also cultural. “I Rhyme” honors the universal desire to generate language and music, serving as a reminder that art itself constitutes a social legacy. “Imago,” “Genie,” and “God’s Elect” delve into evolving ideals and the repercussions of ambition, mirroring the concerns of individuals as they navigate a swiftly modernising world. “Revolt of Illusory Penchants,” resonating with postmodern thought, challenges the notion of absolute truths, a viewpoint that is increasingly pertinent in an era characterised by conflicting narratives and social media discussions. “The Subliminal” and “What My Mother Doesn’t Know” reveal the concealed legacies of silence, particularly the unarticulated burdens borne by women through generations.

The culmination of the collection is a profound socio-cultural reflection shaped by time and nature. The poem “Melancholia” articulates the dense fog of depression, an experience that contemporary societies are just beginning to confront openly. In contrast, “My Sense of the World” offers a perspective of cautious optimism, while “Nature’s Negotiation” challenges humanity’s unrelenting exploitation of the planet—“aren’t oceans ocean enough?”—providing an ecological critique that resonates with global climate issues. Works such as “The Unending Road,” “This Monsoon,” “Time is All We Have,” “Time Was All He Had,” and “Time, the Relic” contemplate how communities navigate impermanence, drawing from both Indian cyclical notions of time and the frenetic pace of modern existence. “Waiting, in Synaesthesia” conveys anticipation through a fusion of senses, encapsulating the heightened awareness of a society in perpetual flux. “Two Cities” reflects on the fractured geographies of identity, resonating

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with the cultural dislocations brought about by migration and globalisation. In “Letter to My Unborn Daughter,” Sahu transforms the personal sorrow of losing a female fetus into a compelling message of feminist empowerment. She poignantly writes, “Tiny limbs smeared with my fresh enflamed blood... I knew. I had lost you. Then and there. Shattered,” encapsulating intimate trauma while critiquing patriarchal oppression. By invoking mythological figures such as Ahilya, Draupadi, and Mandodari, she encourages her daughter to embody strength, autonomy, and courage: “Be you, the elemental, candid, real woman who is my ideal... be all that she could never be.” The poem culminates in a call for intergenerational empowerment: “I am not just a woman since that fateful night, but entire womankind... within me there is the power to create, nurture and transform.” It serves as both a lament and a manifesto, celebrating female agency across generations.

Nandini Sahu’s *Medusa* is, at its core, a profound chronicle of women’s experiences. It seamlessly interlaces myth and folklore with philosophy and the everyday, blending personal emotions with collective memories. The collection lends voice to silences long imposed on women, illuminating their suppressed yet vital place in history. Figures like Medusa, Shakuntala, Ahalya, and Tapoi are reimagined not as victims or abandoned beings, but as enduring symbols of power, memory, and rebirth. In this sense, *Medusa* is more than a collection of poems—it is a feminist manifesto, offering readers both a new history and a transformative vision.
