
A Study on Behavioural Shifts in Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter*

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Abstract

Anuradha Roy is a prominent Indian novelist, journalist, and editor whose works extensively focus on trauma, loss, memory, and the interactions between personal and political histories rather than adhering to postcolonial and post-modernist frameworks in her writings. In her novel *Sleeping on Jupiter*, Roy profoundly explores the various major tragic incidents in the life of the protagonist, Nomi Frederiksen, who is deeply affected by the abuse of war and a spiritual leader called 'Guruji'. Nomi admitting herself to Guruji's ashram as an orphan, experiences profound trauma in the temple town of Jarmuli. As a victim of childhood sexual abuse, Nomi's behavior and actions undergo drastic changes throughout the novel. Her life becomes desolate as she remains enveloped by the extreme violence, trauma, anger, anxiety, and fear inflicted by the perpetrator, Guruji. Reflecting on this serious issue in current contemporary society, one can witness similar acts of brutality around the world, where many women face similar challenges in their lives. This research paper aims to discuss how an individual's traumatic past shapes the identity, relationships, and emotional well-being of the present.

Keywords: Child abuse, violence, trauma, unhealthy relationships, fear, anxiety, resilience.

Introduction

Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter* delves deeply into trauma and its long-term impression on a person's psyche and actions throughout their lives. From beginning to end, Nomi Frederiksen's picturization as the central character in the novel strongly demonstrates the consequences of the traumatic past experiences that affect her emotional behavior and psychological well-being. Her father, mother, and brother were dislocated during the war, and the circumstances forced her to relocate to Jarmuli, where she spent her

childhood days. At mid-thirteen to fourteen, she was adopted by her foster mother and migrated to Oslo, Norway. Nomi's journey from a painful background in the ashram to adulthood in a later stage depicts the struggle of resilient nature and rebellion power against her staggering lifestyle. In an article published in *India Today*, Shruti Bansal discusses how childhood trauma shapes an individual through both psychological and physiological factors, causing disarrangement in their regular routines, fragmented identity, trust building, instability in aging, maintaining unhealthy relationships, memory, sexual interactions, and problem-solving skills. "To recover victims, those who shoot in such conditions, parents are the primary defenders, encouraging them to retain from pathetic environments. Then, the victims should seek secondary defenders, such as a therapist, counselor, and advisor, to regularize their lifestyle for better upliftment" (Bansal 2024). Similarly, in this novel, the protagonist, Nomi Frederiksen, is a victim of childhood sexual abuse by a betrayer known as "Guruji," a religious leader in an ashram in Jarmuli, whose entire life is ruined by him while she continues to search for her identity and lingering for the better life in the novel. This work vigorously expresses Nomi's dejected circumstances with uncertain assurance. Roy's depiction of behavioral changes in the novel is profoundly connected to the individual's reactions to grief, loss, and societal expectations. The novel's interactions and introspections deliver an investigation of how experiences shape human behavior over time. Despite that, she protests throughout the novel for her life improvement. The fundamental goal of this research is to examine how hierarchy upholds power, exploitation, and challenges faced by these vulnerable groups from their past to present lives, leading to behavioral changes, and how Nomi perceives a way to bring hope into her life.

Childhood Trauma's Prolonged Effect

The fundamental psychology of a human being begins to develop from birth and continues through early childhood. Previously, research on trauma has predominantly focused on psychological distress caused by catastrophic events beyond one's control, such as war and abuse (Rahim and Khan, 2024). Human psychology shapes an individual's perception of themselves and their world. The prolonged effects of childhood trauma can manifest in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) later in life, disrupting personal identity and daily life.

Anuradha Roy's novel *Sleeping on Jupiter* explores this phenomenon through its protagonist, Nomi Frederiksen, who endures severe psychological imbalances due to childhood trauma. Nomi encounters numerous distressing situations throughout the narrative, yet she faces her past with resilience. Her suffering begins with the loss of her family, followed by her placement in an ashram under the control of a revered religious figure, Guruji, who sexually abuses her. The trauma she endures in the ashram persists into adulthood, manifesting as PTSD, emotional instability, and difficulty in forming relationships around her.

A similar portrayal of childhood trauma appears in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The twin protagonists, Rahel and Estha, suffer from childhood hardships that leave lasting psychological scars. Estha's molestation in a theatre lobby deeply impacts his mental health, leading to withdrawal and silence. On the other hand, Rahel struggles to sustain meaningful relationships, including her unsuccessful marriage to an American man. Both characters experience PTSD, with their fragmented memories and emotional instability shaping their lives.

Fragmentation of Memory

In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, Nomi's memories shift between past and present, illustrating the fragmented nature of trauma. She reveals that she is a victim of childhood sexual abuse, a revelation that defines her adult life and causes ongoing psychological distress. A pioneer in trauma research described trauma as an emotional accident that leads to disjointed memories and mental suffering (*Sinha and Ali 2021*). The narrative structure of the novel reflects Nomi's mental state, as her recollections appear chaotic and disordered, demonstrating the lingering impact of childhood trauma.

“Like fungus that takes birth in warm and wet places, memories ooze from the crevices your brain: spawned there, living and dying there, unrelated to anything in the world outside, the slime can coat everything until you can't tell the real from the imagined” (pp.37-38, *Roy*).

Roy employs fragmented storytelling to depict Nomi's struggle with memory and identity and shows how deeply trauma is retained in the subconscious mind. Memory unfolds not as a continuous sequence but as scattered pieces- sensory desires, emotions, and transient images. The disjointed narratives not only immerse readers in mirroring her psychological turmoil but also capture her oscillation between past suffering and present attempts at recovery. The novel effectively portrays trauma's impact on Nomi through incoherent speech patterns and shifting timelines, emphasizing how childhood abuse disrupts the continuity of personal identity.

Power Dynamics and Exploitation

Modern society is often governed by authoritative figures who manipulate cultural and socioeconomic structures to maintain dominance. Religious institutions, schools, and families operate under hierarchical systems that can lead to exploitation. In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, Roy critiques these power structures through the character of Guruji, a religious leader who preys on vulnerable children in his ashram.

The novel exposes the hypocrisy of religious institutions that outwardly promote sanctity while secretly harboring abuse. Guruji's dominance allows him to commit heinous acts without consequence. “Stay inside the line, never go out. Understand?” (p.40, *Roy*). The young girls in the ashram are forced into submission, their agency stripped away by a system

designed to protect their abuser.

"I remember the time when Champa was brought back by the police. She had gone to them when she ran away the second time, and they brought her back because she was a ward of the ashram. She was dragged in by her plaits and locked up in a cottage" (p.170, Roy).

When a girl named Champa attempts to escape, she is captured, dragged back to the ashram, and locked away, highlighting the failure of law enforcement to address systemic abuse happening in society. The narrative underscores how patriarchal structures enable such exploitation, reinforcing cycles of oppression and trauma.

Isolation and Emotional Disconnect

Throughout *Sleeping on Jupiter*, Nomi experiences profound isolation not only as physical but also as an emotional detachment that prevents her from forming deep connections. Separated from her family at a young age, she struggles to form meaningful relationships. The trauma she endured at the ashram makes her distrustful of others, including strangers and acquaintances, creating psychological barriers between her and the world. The novel depicts the isolation that comes from unresolved distress, fractured relationships, and struggles. Despite shared experiences, such as traveling with strangers, she stays disconnected from her unpleasant memories.

Even after being adopted by a foster mother in Oslo, Norway, Nomi finds it difficult to assimilate into her new environment. Her past experiences of abuse and betrayal leave her emotionally distant, unable to engage fully in relationships. Roy uses the fictional town of Jarmuli to symbolize this dichotomy—while it serves as a pilgrimage site for many people, it remains a place of torment for survivors like Nomi. The novel illustrates how trauma isolates individuals, not only from others but also from themselves, as they struggle to reconcile their past with their present life.

Patriarchy and Oppression

This work delves deeply into the shadows of patriarchal structures and their negative effects on individuals, particularly Nomi and other female characters. The presentation of several narrations explicitly addresses female violence, cultural expectations, and oppression by patriarchal power; *Sleeping on Jupiter* explores the psychological and social consequences through the figure of Nomi, the protagonist, who is severely troubled by the spiritual leader 'Guruji.'

The novel's primary location is the temple town of Jarmuli, where patriarchal networks operate under the guise of devotion and tradition. Religious organizations should embody sanctity and ethical norms; nonetheless, this space serves as a site of exploitation and oppression of an individual.

"There is a dream I often have. I am a baby in it, held aloft by a man. He is on his back on a bed, his legs are bent at the knee, he is holding me high above

him, my face is above his face, his hands are under my arms, and he is rocking on his back until he almost somersaults. He takes me each time to the brink” (p.34, Roy).

Nomi’s childhood sexual abuse is reflected in her adult life; she frequently endures the anguish of a man, which always pushes her to the brink of despair. Whenever Nomi tries to heal herself from her tragic past, she is unable to remove the oppressive power of patriarchy from her existence. “I asked at your school here, you know, and they said, what? Doesn’t she talk at home?” (p.43, Roy). When Nomi relocates to Norway with her foster mother after surviving abuse, she is exposed as a silent victim of the long-term impact of the patriarchal struggle in her present life.

Subsequently, she experiences the same patriarchal approach from the character Suraj, a companion of documentary filmmaking in Jarmuli. “You don’t scare me,” she said. She was still looking past him as if her eyes were seeing something else. That look made him feel more afraid than he had ever been. He was trapped with a psycho.” (p.230, Roy). This quote from *Sleeping on Jupiter* explicitly shows the traumatized personality of Nomi under the patriarchal society. Throughout the novel, she is deeply affected by the physical approach of men, which changes Nomi into behaving as a psycho. Therefore, the abuse she encounters not only physically but also psychologically affects her; this atmosphere illustrates that social institutions have failed to meet Nomi’s suffering in society.

Conclusion

Roy’s *Sleeping on Jupiter* ultimately explores the deep psychological scars left by childhood trauma. This work exposes the repaired social institutions, which failed to stand with their moral righteousness, and the patriarchal power, which oppresses the religious institutions, family structures, and personal relationships in society. Through Nomi’s fragmented memories, the novel demonstrates how past abuse shapes identity, relationships, and emotional well-being. In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, through diverse narratives, Roy says that as a result of trauma, Nomi turns into a silent victim, and incidentally, her behavior shifts into more aggressive. Despite her struggles, Nomi’s journey is one of survival as she attempts to navigate a world that has failed to protect her. The novel serves as a powerful commentary on the long-lasting impact of trauma and the resilience of the human spirit.

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