

**Department of English and Modern European Languages
University of Lucknow**



**M. A. English Semester II
Paper VIII: Literature and Gender
Unit IV**

Anuradha Roy *Sleeping on Jupiter*

***(Course Instructor: Raj Gaurav Verma)**

Structure of the Novel

There are actually three timelines that the reader can identify in *Sleeping on Jupiter*

- 1) When Nomi is in India in her childhood
- 2) When Nomi is in Norway
- 3) When Nomi returns back to Jarmuli when she is adult

Accordingly the characters can be divided:

- 1) When Nomi is in India in her childhood

Nomi had mother, father and her brother.

Later Nomi lost her family and she lives in Guruji's Ashram

There are many characters that Nomi recollects through her memory in Asharam

Guruji

Bhola, Guruji's trusted man

Jugnu, Gardener

Champa, who was Guruji's favourite

Piku, Nomi's friend in the asharam

- 2) Nomi's life in Norway- She had her adopted mother

- 3) Nomi's present life when she came to visit Jarmuli

Three old women whom she met on the train- Latika, Gauri and Vidya

Badal, the tourist guide who was in love with men

Raghu, Badal's love

Suraj, who was assisting Nomi on her trip

Johnny Toppo, tea-stall owner where Raghu worked

Themes

- 1) **Sense of loss: Family, friends, Home, Homeland**
- 2) **Dislocation**
- 3) **Sexual Violence, Molestation, Abuse**
- 4) **Child Abuse**

5) Memory and Trauma

Title: Oxymoronic, ironic, satirical- conveying the conflict of the protagonist between her past and present, her memory and existence. *Sleeping* implies the vague attempt to refute reality. Jupiter further heightens this attempt by creating almost a reverie. Title may also indicate about the desire to have an access to alternate world, alternate reality but that is once again an extended expectation. Nomi exists in her own little world, inside her head, inside her mind, introvert and closed.

Introduction

Seven-year-old Nomita witnesses the murder of her father by armed men, loses her brother and is abandoned by her mother – all in the course of a couple of days. This brutal experience, recalled in deliberate and haunting prose years later, opens [Anuradha Roy's](#) novel.

Shorn of family and the familiar, the young girl ends up in an orphanage run by an internationally renowned spiritual guru, before being adopted abroad. After her move to Norway, she continues to be haunted by memories of being sexually abused by the guru during her time in the orphanage. Now, as a filmmaker's assistant, Nomita Frederiksen, 25 years old returns to the temple town of Jarmuli to tie up loose ends and keep promises made long ago. Interwoven into this narrative are the story of three conventional old women Nomi encounters on a train, Gouri, Latika and Vidya; the forbidden, same-sex love of her whimsical tour guide Badal for a young man, Raghu; and the hidden demons that possess the photographer Suraj who assists her research for the film.

Roy's chiselled prose allows her to expose the endless, treacherous hypocrisies of Indian society: bare-bodied priests who make a fuss about women's clothing; tourism that celebrates erotic carvings on temple walls while remaining in denial about the sexual abuse of children; holidaying old women tired of domestic drudgery who jump at the first opportunity to pass harsh judgment on each other and everyone else; the "progressive" man who can share a cigarette and whisky with a woman but is still ready to hit her when an argument gets out of hand. Violence and misogyny, as Roy drives home, is the norm here.

As in her previous novels, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* and *The Folded Earth*, Roy viscerally captures atmosphere: a train sways and moves faster, "as if lighter from shedding the girl"; Norway is the land with "the sun like a moon" and its midsummer nights "more light than dark, more dark than light"; and the pomegranate tree, the site of Nomi's first encounter with the Guruji, upon her subsequent return is "hung with what looked like organs India is evoked in the ginger and crushed cloves of a seaside tea-stall, the poetry of Jibanananda Das, the scent of grapefruit and above all, in the shame of speaking about sexual violence. There are allusions to the Mahabharata – the Indian epic where good triumphs over evil – but what emerges in *Sleeping on Jupiter* is the story of entrenched evil, an evil against women and children that cannot be challenged, only escaped.

Roy's narrative raises many burning questions. Will it ever be possible to police the crimes committed against women in the name of divine sanction and initiation rituals in a society steeped in religiosity, where wives still fast for the wellbeing of their husbands and subject themselves to exploitation in the name of spiritualism? Can we even envisage a situation where an Indian woman can confront gender-based violence without having recourse to a lucky escape to the west? In tackling these issues, Roy has used the most potent weapon in a writer's arsenal – the form of the novel, with its ability to simultaneously be universal and particular – to boldly unmask the hidden face of Indian spirituality and the rampant sexual abuse in its unholy confines.

Sexual Violence in *Sleeping on Jupiter*

Anuradha Roy takes such a newspaper headline and turns it into the theatrical performance. *Sleeping on Jupiter* is a courage book dealing with a timely subject- violence against women within the most unexpected walls. The intriguing title comes from the protagonist's quest, their sense of being trapped in their lives and looking for alternative universe. "One, a temple guide, finds himself at such a crossroads that he yearns for the solitude of a totally different world. For him this becomes a longing to sleep on Jupiter under its 16 moons" (26). There is a tapestry of lost innocence, displacement, rejection and pain in Roy's latest novel *Sleeping on Jupiter*. Her first book *The Folded Earth* was set around plateaus and rivers, the second novel *Atlas of Impossible Longing* was set in the hills, the third novel *Sleeping on Jupiter* is set by the sea, Jarmuli, a made up place fictional place, convincing complex location for the novel. Originally, the book started as a long short story. She then started following incidental characters, particularly a girl on a beach and an elderly tea-seller. Unpeeling the layers of their stories led me to unexpected directions. The narrative lends itself to jagged edges, spliced narrative and areas of mystery, so I structured it in a radically different way from my two earlier books. (45) The story occurs across a prologue like chapter documenting a violent past and then a chapter each across the 18 days, the various protagonists spend by the sea, unravelling their present. The scenes are so vivid, the first murder, the loss -of – innocence, the sea temple visit, the violence pin pointing a real event and Nomi, the girl who is made a refugee to be an Everywoman horribly affected from wars and violence. Nomita Frederikson, from Oslo, is travelling to Jarmuli to make a documentary on the temple town. But she has an unspoken reason for her journey. Vidya, Latika, and Gowri, senior citizens and close friends are travelling to Jarmuli in the same A2 compartment. They are concerned about the solitary young girl when she is attacked as she gets off the train. They can do nothing and watch from inside. The train leaves but they don't pull the chain. They are destined to 'meet' later, by the sea are Badal Raghu and Johnny Tepo, trapped in a life not of their choice. The context of the novel takes place over five days in the coastal temple town of Jarmuli in contemporary India. The town is populated ostensibly by priests and pilgrims and it is popularly known as a spiritual sanctuary, evil and brutality appear to trump goodness and innocence at every turn. Roy interweaves gracefully a cost of characters-a young woman, all braided hair, tattoos and piercings, Nomita Frederiksen, a refugee from her adoptive Norway; Badal, the temple guide, a trio of elderly Calcutta ladies holidaying together, Vidya, Latika, Gowri, Suraj, her photographer accompanying her on the filming assignment to Jarmuli, Johnny Tepo, the chaiwala on the beach. Nomi's pilgrimage and her travel to Jarmuli to pay homage to the

famous temple is an attempt to confront the traumas of her past, Nomi is both Indian and not Indian, having come from Norway: "The sun was like a moon in this country and in its light I felt as if I was looking at everything through a pearl" (11). She is transported with other orphaned refugee girls to the internationally celebrated coastal Jarmuli to seek the spiritual home and protection of Guruji "Who could see into me through my tunic and my skin and bones, right inside" (57). As the train continues on its way, her fate unknown to her motherly travelling companions "their holiday sprits snuffed out by the absence of a girl they knew not at all"(62) - until they encounter her a few days later in Jarmuli. She disembarked at a station en route, to buy some bread and tea from a stand on the platform but within minutes, the three old women see the girl running for her life after being aggressively accosted by two men. The story is told in flashback how six years of her childhood were spent living in an ashram, a spiritual sanctuary populated by pilgrims and their protocols, the tourists and their guides, priests and sadhus headed by a godman. When the guru was publically lauded all over the world, when the outside world wasn't watching, he inflicted emotional, physical and sexual abuse on Nomi and other children in his care. Anuradha Roy juxtaposes the sexual violence with the physical violence. A 7- year-old child witnesses the murder of her father by axe-wielding masked men who have invaded their home. The smell of a ripe grape fruit fresh from their garden is contrasted with the sight of the whitewashed wall inside their hut 'streamed red' with the father's blood and the echoes of his haunting screams as he is beaten by the miscreant and then butchered like the pigs slaughtered for their meat. The horror and barbarity of Nomi's physical violence inhumanly echoes the palpable helpless anguish of three women physically separated by the window. The novelist focuses on the sexual violence juxtaposed with carving of the temple evoking carnal desires. The town's temple depicts the carvings of lovers coupled in a variety of embraces inciting sexual pleasure. The guide explains to the tourists: "Nothing wrong. Please understand. In ancient India no barrier between life and love. Erotic is creation itself, so it is celebrated in our temples" (103). Sleeping on Jupiter revolves around the ethic and aesthetic instinct of Lost- and found concept- something oddly pleasing and anxiety- inducing that marks midnight thriller watching on television. In her list of acknowledgements, Roy weaves a common thread from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and Jibananda Das's poem Bonolata Sen and binds these texts with her novel. Das's famous poem is about a lover's search for the lost Bonolata Sen. Rama loses his wife to find her later; in the Mahabharata, the Pandavas lose their kingdom, property and wife and the Kauravas lose their lives. That is why Anuradha Roy places her novel by the sea, that ultimate metaphor for lost and found. Nomi feels, It's the sea. The sound of it. It brought back so many old things I had forgotten....At every sea, she would sit down like this and wait for it to tell her something, she didn't know what, but she'd know it when it came. (87) Roy scatters 'losses' throughout the novel-The novel begins with the death of Nomi's biological family, her mother, her brother, her childhood companion Piku and even her childhood. When Nomi arrives in India from Norway, to collect what has been lost, she gets lost herself. Suraj, the photographer who accompanies her on this filming assignment to Jarmuli, has lost his wife to his best friend; Badal, the guide, loses his scooter, a lover and almost his sanity; Tepo, the chaiwala on the beach, has lost his life as Jugnuin the ashram; of the three elderly women, one lost her husband to a secretary, another a Konkani lover and the third, a victim of dementia, her memory. The young Nomi says about her move

from Jarmuli to Norway “I was a parcel being sent from one country to another” (112). In the modern feminist writing, a woman’s body has acquired in-depth socio-cultural significations. It attempts to inscribe the internal or psychic engravings upon a woman’s body which is the ultimate site of self- realization and true liberation. According to Judith Butler, the modern feminist, gender, sex and gender identities are culturally constructed whereas sexuality along with sex is equally performative in nature. In her book *Bodies That Matter*, she writes “For surely body live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain and pleasure, endure illness and violence, and these ‘facts’ ...cannot be dismissed as mere construction” (11). The patriarchal perception of women as mute sex objects and mere bodies for sexual gratification is exposed through the novel. In spite of women’s education and the career oriented life style of the current generation; woman has been commercialized as an amorous commodity and a prey to appease man’s voluptuous desires. The novel successfully traces the grotesqueness and grossness.

Trauma in *Sleeping on Jupiter*

In the book “*Sleeping on the Jupiter*”, Roy tries to figure out a group of school students and a teacher who lived in the ashram were vulnerably traumatized. The ashram was run by a Guruji at Jarmuli. He pretended outwardly to be a spiritual saint, adorable person, pious, tender hearted, messenger of God, rendering service to orphans, helping the destitute, dedicated himself to religious works and in service to humanity. In reality he was monstrous, brutal, merciless, violent, abuser of abandoned personalities, sexual harasser, sexually ravenous etc. Trauma is categorized as i. Accidents and falls ii. Medical and surgical procedures ii. Violent acts and attacks iv. Grief and loss and v. Environmental stressors. Our protagonist and her friends, their teacher can be listed under the violent acts and attacks category. It is said that the people who falls under this category would have witnessed violence, physical and sexual abuse, neglect, violent attacks etc. They had experienced listed trauma in the category description attacks. While Nomi suffered in the hands of a religious leader whom she trusted to protect her, the complexity of betrayal, secrecy and additional shame is in itself overwhelming. Quiet often she dreamt that she was held as a baby by a man lying on the bed, rocking her keeping the face to face.”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.....He takes me each time to the brink. I want to beg him to stop but my voice has died....” “I woke from my old dream of the man rocking me as a baby, with the familiar terror suffocating me.”pg:34

Protagonist knew that her memories were true, concrete and detailed about the incidents happened.”Like fungus that takes birth in warm and wet places, memories ooze from the cervices of your brain spawned there, living and dying there...”pg:37, She also remembered during the day time schoolwork and at nights’ a girl’s grinding teeth noise and another’s sobbing sound. “I would hear one girl grind her teeth fiercely enough to set mine on edge and another girl sob.”pg:39. She had returned from Oslo to Jarmuli for a documentary work. One day, while taking snap shots, she viewed a monk who reminded off her past; made her to run down the beach, crossed hotels, moved away from crowded area, entered a birch forest,

where a house was burning, in a faraway place blood was streaming down its wall and heard a girl cried for her brother again and again.

Normally the person who undergoes sexual harassment, abuse at any stage is not only physically even mentally traumatized, thus the impact lies on their nervous system hence it is said trauma's part is not only physiological, even has psychological effect. Our protagonist carried the impact of trauma that retained in her cervixes turned into phobia in her later stages bursted out as Genophobia. This phobia arouses the physical or psychological fear of sexual intercourse. It induces panic, horror, terror and fear in individuals, like panic attacks. Nomi who suffered from the phobia was intensely affected by the attempt of sexual contact. It was one evening in the hotel room she argued with Suraj the guide for leaving her half the way and demanded to give her computer to complete the documentary work. Accidentally both ended in showers where she was slipped off, hurted with bleeding, unable to listen to his explanation; she sprayed anti-mosquito spray into his eye. He felt as if his eyes were burnt away. He could recognise the low monotone that heard was not hers. With an eye open he could see her coming towards him with a knife ripped open his cheek and he tasted his own blood. She continued throwing a whetstone that split opened his forehead. He fell down to his knees, without stopping she continuously flung chisels and gouges at him. She slammed her foot into his crotch. He assessed that he had been trapped by a psycho and managed to get out. "She pressed....He felt something in one of his eyes, was blinded by a fiery pain...The pain shot through the eye into the back of his head. He could smell his anti-mosquito spray. She lunged for his eyes, he ducked, and this time the knife ripped open the skin on his cheek. He could taste the salt of his own blood as it streamed down his face. He tried to move away and she threw the whetstone from the tool kit at him, splitting the skin on his forehead. He fell to his knees, but she would not stop, she flung all his gouges and chisels at him. She aimed a vicious kick at his side. He doubled with a howl as her foot slammed into his crotch. He was trapped by a psycho."pg:230-231 Being genophobic, Nomi should have avoided the intimate relationship with her guide Suraj, eventually the terror attacks took place.

Works Cited

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Course Instructor:

Dr. Raj Gaurav Verma

Assistant Professor

Department of English and Modern European Languages

University of Lucknow

Email: rajgauravias@gmail.com