
**Echoes of Silence: Trauma and Feminist Resistance in Anuradha Roy's
Sleeping on Jupiter**

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Abstract: This paper examines *Sleeping on Jupiter* by Anuradha Roy through the dual lenses of trauma theory and feminist criticism. At the heart of the novel is Nomi, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse in a religious ashram. Roy tells her story in fragments—snippets of memory that surface unpredictably—mirroring the disjointed ways trauma often returns. Her prose is quiet and restrained, never sensational, yet hauntingly powerful. Through Nomi's inner world and her interactions with others, Roy critiques not just the abuse itself but the silence that surrounds it: the silence of bystanders, institutions, and even fellow women. This paper explores how Roy uses narrative form, symbolic imagery, and character dynamics to question patriarchal complicity and religious hypocrisy, while also giving voice to suffering that is too often ignored. Ultimately, it argues that Roy's subtle, unflinching storytelling makes her an essential, if under-recognized, voice in Indian English literature.

Introduction: Pain that can't be spoken still seeks expression. In literature, such pain often emerges through fractured language, lingering metaphors, and silent spaces between words. *Sleeping on Jupiter*, longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, is Anuradha Roy's poignant exploration of trauma, memory, and the long shadow of abuse. At its center is Nomi, a young documentary filmmaker revisiting the seaside town where her childhood was stolen. What sets Roy apart is her delicate narrative style—marked by silences, gentle rhythms, and a refusal to dramatize horror. The novel doesn't just recount trauma; it examines how it is remembered, silenced, and carried. This paper explores how Roy's storytelling unravels trauma's many layers, critiques societal denial, and portrays survival not as triumph but as quiet persistence.

Literature Review: The theoretical foundation of this paper leans heavily on trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman. Caruth emphasizes how trauma distorts memory and narrative—how the mind fails to fully process the event as it happens, resulting in fragmented recollection later on. This is reflected clearly in *Sleeping on Jupiter*'s structure, which resists linear storytelling. Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery*, describes the long-term impact of trauma and the societal patterns of disbelief and silence that often follow.

Roy's novel echoes both scholars, portraying trauma as a deeply isolating experience worsened by a community unwilling to confront its own complicity.

In feminist and postcolonial literary discourse, scholars like Supriya Chaudhuri and Elleke Boehmer have emphasized how gendered trauma is mediated through cultural and institutional power. Although Roy's work has received less scholarly attention compared to writers like Arundhati Roy or Jhumpa Lahiri, it contributes uniquely by refusing spectacle and focusing instead on quiet, internal resistance.

Fragmented Memory and the Language of Trauma: Nomi's memories are not neatly arranged. They intrude—sudden, partial, sometimes too vivid, sometimes blurry. This fragmented recall captures the essence of trauma as theorized by Caruth: trauma does not return as a story with a beginning, middle, and end—it returns in bits and pieces, often through sensory triggers. In Roy's hands, even the act of filming becomes a means of confrontation. Nomi is not filming a documentary to expose her abuser. She is there to face the place itself—the setting, the silence, the past. Roy's minimalistic style underscores this emotional disorientation; the quietness of the prose invites the reader to lean closer, to feel what cannot be fully told.

The Sacred and the Sinister: Religion as a Site of Contradiction: The novel places Nomi's abuse within an ashram—a religious space expected to be safe, spiritual, and pure. This choice is not accidental. Roy is asking us to question the unchecked power of religious figures and the blind reverence they often receive. The godman who abused Nomi thrives in this protected space, shielded by trust and piety. Roy does not outright reject religion, but she makes it clear how spiritual spaces can be manipulated into sites of violence. Nomi's return to the town is not only a physical journey but an emotional and spiritual reckoning—an attempt to make sense of a belief system that betrayed her.

Women and Silence: Generations of Endurance: While Nomi carries the central narrative, Roy also weaves in the stories of three older women on a temple pilgrimage. Their conversations are filled with mundane chatter—food, travel, memories—but beneath the surface lie their own histories of repression and loss. These women represent generations taught to survive by suppressing pain. When Nomi briefly shares her past, they retreat—not out of cruelty, but from fear, discomfort, and perhaps recognition. Roy doesn't judge them. Instead, she reveals how silence becomes a learned behavior, especially among women. Pain is passed down, not through stories, but through avoidance. These women become both products and perpetrators of a culture that teaches survival through silence.

Masculinity and Complicity: While not all male characters in the novel are directly abusive, many are complicit through inaction. Nomi's adoptive father avoids hard questions. The godman is allowed to continue his abuse because no one dares question him. Even Badal, the temple worker who seems to sense something is wrong, remains caught in the system. Roy paints a picture of masculinity that is rarely violent in obvious ways but dangerous in its

detachment. In doing so, she points to a broader cultural issue: patriarchy often survives not through overt brutality but through indifference and denial.

Healing as an Ongoing Process: There's no dramatic confrontation or neat resolution in *Sleeping on Jupiter*. Nomi doesn't confront the godman publicly or find closure in the traditional sense. Roy rejects the common narrative arc where healing means forgetting or forgiving. Instead, she presents healing as a choice to live with the pain, to keep moving even when nothing feels resolved. In the final moments, as Nomi walks into the sea, we're left uncertain—has she chosen death or rebirth? The ambiguity is intentional. Healing, Roy suggests, is rarely complete. It's about continuing, even when the weight is heavy.

The Sea as a Symbol of Memory, Death, and Rebirth: The sea in this novel isn't just a setting—it's a metaphor that flows through the entire narrative. For Nomi, it's where her father vanished, where her past lies buried, and where she may find release. The ocean represents everything trauma is: vast, uncontrollable, sometimes beautiful, often dangerous. It holds memory, and it holds possibility. In the final scene, as Nomi enters the sea, we are not told whether she survives. That's the point. The sea, like trauma, does not offer easy answers. It offers movement, fluidity—a place where endings and beginnings are the same.

Humanizing Pain: Why Roy's Voice Matters: Anuradha Roy doesn't write for applause. She writes with compassion and clarity, choosing quiet realism over dramatization. Her characters whisper, and in those whispers lie stories that demand to be heard. Roy's refusal to make Nomi's trauma into spectacle is what gives it power. Her writing reminds us that not all survivors scream—and not all healing is visible. In centering voices like Nomi's, Roy pushes us to listen harder, feel deeper, and question the systems we often take for granted. Her contribution to Indian English literature deserves far more attention than it has received.

Conclusion: *Sleeping on Jupiter* doesn't offer solutions. Instead, it offers truth—raw, uncomfortable, necessary. Through Nomi's fractured memories, Roy shows us how trauma lingers, reshapes identity, and resists closure. But in telling this story, Roy also shows us something else: that there is strength in survival, even silent survival. That remembering, even when painful, is a form of resistance. That literature can make space for what society tries to erase. Anuradha Roy's work invites us to witness pain—not to fix it, but to understand it. And that, in itself, is a deeply human act.

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