



THEME OF LOVE AND DESIRE IN SLEEPING ON JUPITER BY ANURADHA ROY

Dr. P. Kalaivani

Assistant Professor of English,
Idhaya College for Women, Kumbakonam
(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University)
Tamilnadu, India

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Abstract

Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter* delves into the themes of love and desire, examining how these emotions intersect with trauma, societal expectations, and the complexities of human connection. The novel follows Nomi, a woman returning to the religious town of Jarmuli, where she confronts her past abuse at a spiritual ashram. Through Nomi's emotional journey, Roy explores how desire is often shaped by repressed trauma, societal conditioning, and the tension between personal longing and external expectations. The theme of unrequited and forbidden love emerges through Nomi's complex relationship with Badal, her childhood friend, whose mutual desire is constrained by guilt, repression, and the scars of their shared past. Additionally, Roy explores how gender and age influence the expression of desire, particularly through the experiences of the elderly women on pilgrimage, who confront their repressed longings within a rigidly structured society. *Sleeping on Jupiter* portrays love and desire as multifaceted forces, simultaneously empowering and destructive, shaped by the characters' personal histories and social contexts.

Keywords: Love, Desire, Emotions, Guilt and Forbidden love etc.

Introduction

In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, Anuradha Roy intricately explores the complexities of love and desire, presenting them as emotions deeply entwined with trauma, societal norms, and personal history. Set in the fictional temple town of Jarmuli, the novel follows Nomi, a woman returning to confront the painful memories of her childhood, which were shaped by abuse at a religious ashram. As Nomi's journey unfolds, the narrative weaves together the stories of various characters whose desires, whether suppressed or unspoken, reflect the deep emotional scars of their pasts. Through Nomi's relationships, particularly her bond with Badal, Roy examines the conflict between repressed desire and the yearning for connection. The tension between societal expectations, religious devotion, and the characters' personal longings is a key theme, especially as they confront the limitations placed upon their expressions of love. As the elderly women in the novel experience their own reawakened desires, the narrative expands to encompass the role of gender and age in shaping one's emotional life. Roy's portrayal of desire is not just about physical longing but about the deeper emotional and psychological needs that drive individuals to seek connection, understanding, and healing. *Sleeping on Jupiter* invites readers to reflect on how love and desire are shaped by external pressures be it societal, religious, or historical and how these emotions persist even when constrained by trauma, shame, or repression. It presents love as both a source of comfort and pain, urging an exploration of what it means to truly connect with others in a world defined by emotional, spiritual, and social complexities.

Love and desire

Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter* is a deeply reflective and evocative novel that explores the themes of love and desire, set against a backdrop of trauma, secrecy, and societal constraints. Through the experiences of her characters, particularly Nomi, the protagonist, Roy delves into the complexities of human longing and the ways in which love, both unspoken and repressed, shapes individual lives. The novel examines love and desire not only as emotional or physical experiences but as forces deeply intertwined with past suffering, societal roles, and personal histories. One of the central representations of desire in *Sleeping on Jupiter* is the forbidden and unspoken love between Nomi and Badal. Their bond, formed in their childhood, is one of emotional depth and unfulfilled longing. Nomi's past abuse at the hands of Guruji, a revered religious leader, has left her with profound emotional scars, making it difficult for her to navigate the complexities of love and intimacy. For Nomi, desire becomes something shadowed by trauma, something she cannot fully express or even understand. In contrast, Badal's feelings for her are equally complex; his love for Nomi is tinged with guilt and regret, which makes their connection even more painful. Their relationship represents the way that love can be blocked, distorted, or rendered impossible by past suffering, showing that desire

is not merely an innocent or straightforward longing, but something affected by external circumstances and inner turmoil.

The connection between desire and trauma is a prominent theme in the novel, particularly in Nomi's emotional journey. The trauma she experienced at the ashram distorts her ability to trust or even understand love. For Nomi, desire becomes something tainted with shame and fear, creating a barrier between her and the possibility of healing through love. Roy uses Nomi's struggle to illustrate how past experiences especially those of abuse can make love feel unsafe, and how individuals who have suffered violence often find it difficult to reconnect with their desires or see love as a source of comfort. The narrative depicts how love can simultaneously be a space for healing and a reminder of past pain, showing how trauma becomes an invisible filter through which characters experience their emotions.

Another key aspect of the novel is the repression of desire due to societal and religious pressures. Jarmuli, the town where the novel is set, is a place where religious practices and norms govern the lives of its residents, particularly women. In this setting, the desires of individuals especially women are often suppressed by the roles they are expected to play. The elderly women on the pilgrimage, who have spent their lives fulfilling societal expectations, are prime examples of how desire is often repressed in favor of duty. Their journey to Jarmuli is not only a physical one but also an emotional and psychological one, as they confront the desires that have been buried within them for years. The novel suggests that societal expectations, particularly those rooted in religion and patriarchy, often suppress women's desires, creating a sense of inner conflict where emotional needs are repressed in favor of conformity.

Roy portrays love as both a source of healing and pain. The characters in the novel are often caught in the tension between their longing for connection and the fear of being hurt again. Nomi, in particular, seeks love but simultaneously fears it because of the damage caused by her past abuse. Her relationship with Badal is emblematic of this internal conflict: their mutual longing is thwarted by emotional scars, and their love is unable to fully develop because of the pain they both carry. This theme of love as both a balm and a wound underscores the idea that desire is not always straightforward or fulfilling. It can be a force that offers comfort and solace, but it can also be a source of vulnerability and anguish.

In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, Roy also explores the theme of desire across different stages of life. The elderly women on the pilgrimage offer a contrast to the younger characters, as they confront desires that have been suppressed for years. In doing so, Roy challenges the assumption that love and

desire are only relevant to the young. The elderly women's experiences highlight that desire is not bound by age, and that even in later life, emotional and physical needs persist. Their journey is one of rediscovery, as they come to terms with their own desires and reclaim parts of themselves that had been suppressed by years of societal and familial expectations. This perspective offers a deeper understanding of love as a lifelong emotion, evolving over time but never fully diminishing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Sleeping on Jupiter* offers a rich exploration of love and desire, presenting them as emotions shaped by trauma, societal expectations, and personal histories. Through the lives of its characters, particularly Nomi, the novel reveals how love can be both a source of pain and a means of healing. The complex relationships between the characters, the repression of desire due to societal pressures, and the evolution of love over time are all central to understanding the novel's portrayal of these themes. Roy's narrative shows that desire is not simply a matter of physical attraction but is deeply rooted in emotional, psychological, and social contexts. Ultimately, the novel challenges readers to reconsider how love is experienced, how it is shaped by the past, and how it continues to evolve across different stages of life.

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