

Theme of Perversion in Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter*: A Psychological Perspective

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Abstract

*Sexual Molestation, a manifestation of sexual perversion, is a stigma on the human society. It impacts the victims not only physically, but more than that, torments them mentally, emotionally and psychologically. Sometimes the hurt is so deep that it ruins their complete lives. Anuradha Roy has brought this issue in the fore front realistically through her novel **Sleeping on Jupiter**. The book is a saga not only of Nomi's sexual abuse, but is also a pointer towards the possible solutions of such cases of perversion. Many psychologists and scholars have also studied about the psychological conditions of molesters and psychological aftermaths of its victims. The present paper explores **Sleeping on Jupiter** from the point of view of the problem of sexual perversion and, at the same time, suggests certain solutions that real life victims may adopt to protect their lives from the resulting excruciating mental agony.*

Key Words: Molestation, perversion, sexual abuse, mental agony.

Introduction

Perversion is an obsessive action that is a deviated or an abnormal way of doing things, not culturally acceptable, and therefore, prohibited by a civilized society. Sometimes it is also defined as changing something from right to wrong or good to bad. Martins and Paulo consider perversion as a subjective behavior and its application varies culturally. Osho's discourse on perversion throws more light on this act that the energy of a pervert does not go "in the natural way; the natural way has been blocked, suppressed, condemned. But the energy is there and collecting, it is bound to find some outlet. That outlet will not be natural. That outlet will be perversion ("Recognizing..."). Further Osho says, "...man is so much conditioned against a few things- sex being the main one- that if he lives sex naturally, he feels guilty that he is going against God, against religion. If he prevents his natural expressions, then soon his energies start moving into perverted forms" ("Recognizing..."). Broadly speaking, perversion is invariably assumed as an abnormal and obsessive sexual behavior. On the contrary, the fact is that "the perverse personality is characterized by constant manipulation of others, transgression of laws and disrespect of limits. Perversity does not refer to the presence of a sexual perversion, but to the fact that a same basic principle underlies the organization of the perverse personality and of the perverse sexuality" (Mormont 278). Perversion is an obsessive manifestation of a perverted personality in a direction that is culturally unacceptable. For instance, habitual sadism and a compulsive rape are equally the results of perversion.

Perversion as Viewed by Psychology

E.A. Bennet, the famous British psychiatrist and a close associate of C.G. Yung, worked extensively on the problem of perversion. His theories can be helpful in comprehending the issues related to perversion. Bennet explains:

CURRENT views upon sexual perversion are for the most part based on the work of Freud. The normal sexual life of the child, according to this school, differs from that which later is accepted as the normal adult standard. All children, it is held, exhibit in their undeveloped sexual life features which in the adult would be termed perversions (1933, p. 32).

Bennet somewhat seems to correspond with the work of Freud and explains about perversion. He says that when sexual life of a person in any way does not follow any traditional patterns then it is generally referred to perversion. He says that if the features of sexual life remain undeveloped or underdeveloped in one's life then perversion may result in one's personality. Bennet gives verbatim extracts for explaining reasons of perversion from a case study. According to him these are the causes that contribute to perversion:

- (a) The emotional relationship between the pervert and others is an essential element in the condition.
- (b) The physical aspects of the perversion are of secondary importance to the mental.
- (c) The perversion indicates a failure in personal and social integration; and an effort is made to alter this by means of aggressiveness, adopted child-like conduct, and perversions.
- (d) The perversions were manifold in type but uniform in purpose.
- (e) The policy of the illness was to regain a satisfying

personal and social life. (f) The same policy is found in the psychoneuroses (1933, p. 32).

Bennet sees physical aspects as secondary in perversion, although it appears that physical aspects are at the primary position, Bennet views them as just a reflection of the emotional aspect. Joy is actually not hidden in physical exploits but joy comes in perverted behavior psychologically and psychological conditions arrive from the emotional maladies. The third reason of perversion given by Bennet is the failure in personal and social integration. According to him a perverted person tries to alter it by means of adopted child-like demeanor, aggressiveness and distortions for social acceptance.

Moreover Bennet puts forth that perversions are manifold in types, but uniform in purpose. Different perverts can adopt different deviant ways and behaviors but their purpose is one that is they just want to satisfy their desires to saturate their psychological need. Moreover, they may try to obliterate that desire, but they find it very difficult on the conscious level as the problem is psychological in nature. For better understanding it can be compared with the patients of psychosomatic disorders. In which, disease is actually not there on the body of such patients but psychologically they feel that disease is there.

Sleeping on Jupiter

Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter*, the novel taken for the present study, majorly focuses on the theme of child molestation or abuse, which is yet another manifestation of perversion. It is a story of seven year old Nomita Fredrickson who gets ruined during the war of partition of Bengal. First, she loses her family during the war, and secondly becomes a victim of consistent sexual abuse by the leader of the *ashram* called "*Guruji*". Nomita who is called as Nomi in the novel, witnesses her father being assassinated by some armed men during the war and later her mother also deserts her. Her brother too gets lost somewhere and never comes back. So being wretched and alone she is brought to a religious sanctuary for protection, where, ironically, she is raped uncountable times by *Guruji*. Later she is adopted by a Norwegian couple. However, she comes back to India after a few years to face those atrocious memories. She takes it as a challenge and wants to fight back against the oppression. Therefore, she visits the *ashram* again where she was earlier molested by *Guruji*, however, she had already exposed *Guruji* by posting a diary in a newsletter box. Molestation is a key aspect of this novel because, along with Nomi, other residents of the *ashram* are also molested. Roy, through the novel, pours light on the treacherous hypocrisies of *Guruji* and tries to bring to light the hidden realities of the perverted practices of the so called religious *ashrams*. Although some more aspects are also there like- infidelity, helplessness, alienation, mental agony, empathy etc., but perversion is the dominant one.

The protagonist, Nomita, has been a victim of *Guruji*'s molestation since she was seven years of age. From the point of view of Bennet, *Guruji* is a pervert as he indulges himself in sexual child abuse; a behavior that is not only abnormal, but also debauched and unacceptable by the society. It is already a sign of perversion when a person makes coercion on someone and moreover if the person molests children, then it is definitely an act of perversion. What could have been the causes of *Guruji*'s perversion, the answer to this question can only be found in *Guruji*'s past. However, as the novel does not provide any direct or indirect reference to this information, it will not be justifiable to make it a part of the present discourse. However, one facet of *Guruji* is evident from the novel that he maintains a false aura of celibacy and renunciation in public, but behind the curtain, he is lecherous enough to gratify his distorted physical needs that has already taken an ugly form. *Guruji*'s hypocrisy, by which he maintains integration between his perverted and social life, can be seen when Nomi tells about his dual personality, "*Guruji*'s voice was soft. He never had to raise it, not even when he had a hundred people around him" (Roy, *Sleeping...* p. 89). Here Nomi conveys that *Guruji* shows highly lenient and sophisticated behavior in his social life and at the time of his preaching. On the other side, Nomi tells about *Guruji*'s cruel behavior which gets evident when he is among the residents of the *ashram*, behind the curtains. Nomi states, "I remember I saw *Guruji* poking Jugnu with his feet in the end. I remember *Guruji*'s face in the firelight. It had no expression, as if his feet were nudging a sack of mud" (172). These lines are uttered when Jugnu, a resident of the *ashram* was being beaten by some cruel members in *Guruji*'s presence. So this duplicity of *Guruji* is worth observing that at one hand he shows magnanimity and sophistication, while on the other hand, he crosses the limits of brutality in treating the residents of the *ashram*. Although *Guruji* is a kind of a semi-god to the devotees, Nomi is aware of the deceptiveness of his divine status, she expresses, "Some...devotees....came one by one...and touched their foreheads to the floor in front of his feet. The people in the hall craned their necks for a glimpse and chanted his name. Only I knew he had a stump between his legs oozing slime" (141). He talks about love and compassion publically, but off sight, in the guise of celibacy, he does exploit people sexually. These words of Nomi are the apt illustration of *Guruji*'s acts of abuse: "As his hand moved from scar to scar, it went under the skirt of my tunic and began to stroke the part between my legs. His hand went up my thighs and down" (Roy, p. 92). Molestation is a disgrace on society. It destroys the lives of the victims for always because it not only impacts them physically; the torment sinks deep into their very psyche, rendering the unfortunate incident as an unforgettable trauma for them.

What can be the psychological causes behind the incidents of molestation? The psychological studies have approached it from two sides - one of molesters and the other of victims, as both the aspects are necessary to have a better understanding

of the issue.

Psychology of Rape

Rape, another manifestation of sexual perversion, is a disgrace to the human society. Wherever it prevails, is a blot on the socio-cultural set up, and India is no exception. Although public retaliations and strict legal actions against this heinous crime can be noticed now, as was seen in the Nirbhya Rape Case, yet the number of rape incidents is still quite large. "Rape is one of the India's most common crimes against women.[1] It is reported that at every 20 min, a woman is raped in India.[2] The majority of reports reveal that female youth are vulnerable group for rape victimization.[3]" (Kamdar, 2017, p. 77). Therefore, it seems important to understand the psychology of rapists of such individuals and take curative measures. A lot of research has already gone into Rape Psychology, where Chabra et. al. have contributed by classifying rapists into four categories (2014, p.9002). According to Chabra et.al. there are four types of rapists. The first type has been termed as "disadvantaged men" who rape because they don't have any other means of secure copulation. They suffer from "mate deprivation", as the theory is also named as the "Mate Deprivation Theory or the Disadvantaged Male Theory." Rapists of low socio-economic status usually fall in this category. The second type is opportunistic rapists who search for amenable women, but if the consent from the women side is missing then they indulge into sexual coercion if they find low risk or danger of retaliation. The third type is "high-mating effort rapists" who are sexually very much experienced, dominant and aggressive. They apply various mating tactics according to the suitability of environments and often hunt "many partners" with "little investment". If non-coercive strategy fails then they make use of force. They are much more similar with opportunistic rapists in this regard. The fourth type is partner rapists who rape their partners due to an insecurity of "Sperm competition risk". The theory understandably symbolizes the competition among sperms to fertilize a woman's eggs. This kind of rape has been observed in the cases of infidelity.

Taking into consideration the concept given by Chabra et al., it seems that *Guruji* is a high-mating effort rapist. He is a consistent rapist thus sexually experienced, dominant because he uses coercion for sex and is aggressive too, as he is deprived of any compassion for the victim. An illustration from the novel can be taken here as evidence of *Guruji*'s dominance, pressure and aggression. There is a very young girl in the *ashram*, called as "Didi" by the children whom she teaches. Nomi narrates an incident of *Guruji*'s coercion done to her: "But our teacher did come back: maybe it was days later, maybe weeks.... Her head and one of her eyes was wrapped in a bandage. Her ribboned plaits were missing. Her lips were like too swollen rubber chillies" (Roy, p.42). Champa, one more inmate of the *ashram*, is another victim of *Guruji*'s sexual perversion and brutal rape. Besides, *Guruji* hunts "many partners" with "little investment". On failing with non-coercive strategy, *Guruji* uses force so all these actions indicate that *Guruji* falls in the category of the third type of rapist i.e. "high-mating effort rapist".

Psychological Aftermath of Rape Victims

Effects of molestation are not confined only to physical assaults; they touch victims' psychological parameters where they leave ineradicable marks. Therefore, victims find it impossible to forget their painful experiences. Chabra et. al.'s discourse also takes into consideration the psychological impacts on rape victims, namely Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, ordinarily referred to as PTSD in clinical psychology, depression, flashbacks, personality problems, suicide attempts, sleep disorder, eating disorder, anger and guilt (2014, p. 9006). These symptoms become relevant here as they also get reflected in Nomi's personality. Although she is not found anywhere attempting suicide, her life seems to be a living death as she shows signs of complete withdrawal from life. Other symptoms namely PTSD, depression, flashbacks, hallucinations, personality problems, sleep disorder, digestion ailments and anger are also perceptible in Nomi. The issue of PTSD has been researched by Javier Iribarren et. al. where they explain:

PTSD, is the psychiatric disorder that can result from the experience or witnessing of traumatic or life-threatening events such as terrorist attack, violent crime and abuse, military combat, natural disasters, serious accidents or violent personal assaults.... Subjects with PTSD.... report difficulty in sleeping. Their behavior becomes increasingly detached or estranged and is frequently aggravated by related disorders such as depression, substance abuse and problems of memory and cognition" (2005, 503-504).

Nomi noticeably illustrates her PTSD when she utters: "When I opened my eyes it was raining in the room, I could not see through the sheets of falling blood. I thought I was going blind, I thought I was losing my mind" (Roy, 119), is surely Nomi's hallucination that can be attributed to her PTSD.

Nomi also suffers from clinical depression. Depression is a "serious mood disorder that results in persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness, as well as a loss of interest in activities... symptoms of depression include weight changes, difficulty sleeping, loss of energy, difficulty thinking or concentrating, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt, and suicidality (Cooper et.al., 2020, p.1). Nomi's hopelessness and vulnerability to depression can be sensed here in these lines of Suraj, "She went so quiet he thought she had gone all glassy-eyed and weird again. Further Nomi's lack of interest can be

sensed when Suraj says, “What the hell was wrong with the kid? Wrapping herself in a bed sheet and getting spaced out this way?” (111). In addition, loss of energy or low vitality can be seen in Nomi’s personality when she asks Suraj whether he also wants to disappear from his life like her. It shows a kind of withdrawal from life. “Like stepping out of your life. Like leaving your own story. Like disappearing. Don’t you feel like disappearing from your life sometimes?” (109), she utters dejectedly, and the words do point to her unwillingness towards life, which is an indication of suicidal tendency. Guilt or repentance is also not spared from Nomi, which is also a symptom of her depressive state. She repents on her decision of visiting Jarmuli. In these lines it can be seen, “A sudden exhaustion permeated every bone, muscle, and tissue in her body. It was futile. She should never have come” (Pp. 161-162). So it becomes so unambiguous that Nomi suffers from anxiety and chronic depression. The other symptom of the psychological aftermath of rape is flashback. Nomi perceives flashbacks of her painful memories of father’s assassination and molestation every now and then. She shares one of her flashbacks: “When I opened my eyes it was raining in the room, I could not see through the sheets of falling blood. I thought I was going blind, I thought I was losing my mind” (119). Moreover she has several personality disorders like once her driver feels that she is an insane woman as he reveals: “The girl was unstable, he was sure, and the oddness of her interest in the ruin was unnerving him now” (164). Nomi has a lot of suppressed anger because once she almost goes mad when she bangs on Suraj’s forehead on his insolence. Here is an example of her anger, “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. His shirt was soaking red” (231). Sometimes Nomi’s actions were not unlike the actions of a psychopath. It is evident in these lines when Suraj gets stuck with Nomi in a room and she intimidates him, “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” (230). As per Suri’s research done on the rape victims of Delhi: “The psychological consequences of rape among victims tend to manifest in terms of shock, vulnerability, anxiety, depression, loss of self-image, adjustment problems etc. Victims suffer from psychological effects of embarrassment, disgust, depression, guilt, and even suicidal tendencies” (2013, p. 64). Suri’s research elaborates upon almost similar symptoms as Chabra et. al. have brought into light. Roy’s Nomi comes forward as a good illustration of the aforesaid psychological repercussions and psycho-somatic manifestations of rape victims.

In fact, evolutionary psychological perspective can work for this very well to explain the causes and solutions of rape as Mackibbin et.al. say, “...researchers using an evolutionary psychological perspective often frame hypotheses in terms of the costs and benefits to an organism of performing a particular behavior. These costs and benefits refer to the effects on reproductive success over evolutionary time” (2008, 87). According to Mackibbin et.al. this perspective tells about the reasons of rapes and also defenses which women have taken to spare themselves from rapes:

...women may have evolved psychological mechanisms designed to motivate rape-avoidance behaviors. There are several reasons why rape is traumatic for women. These include disrupting a woman’s parental care, causing a woman’s partner to abandon her, and causing a woman serious physical injury....variety of female traits evolved to reduce the risks of being raped....women form alliances with groups of men and other women for protection against would-be rapists” (2008, p. 92).

In this way this evolutionary psychological perspective can also be helpful to understand the depth of a case. Laws undoubtedly should be made against rape, but psychological study can bring revolution in this area. Gannon and Ciardha also inferred that “Psychological theories provide a neat conceptualization of the range of cognitive, social, developmental, and behavioral factors associated with sexual violence and abuse at the individual level” (2014, Psychological Theories...). Sharma et. al. also focus on psychological reasons of rape. They say, “There is possibility of psychological reasons which may compel people to commit such crimes. Rapists may be suffering from some emotional distress or abnormalities in their personality....Mental illness, dementia...child abuse, sexual inadequacy...are some of the other psychological factors leading to rape”(2014, 10).

Nomi’s Self-Help

Although the case of Nomi is fictional in nature, it does have a realistic background. Spirituality and *Guru Shishya Parampara* (Guru-Devotee Relationship) are the significant aspects of the Hindu culture, where the Guru is considered akin to God who leads the disciple on the path of *Moksha*, that is the ultimate freedom from the cycle of birth and death for the soul’s eventual union with God. This is the spiritual objective and responsibility of a genuine Guru. Ironically, there are fake gurus in society whose sole objective is to exploit their devotees for their perverted sexual needs and monetary advantages. Although, there are real life examples which the researcher does not deem appropriate to mention here, the activities of sexual abuse of devotees by spurious gurus are not just fictional. Considering it a taboo and disgraceful to talk about, even the victims remain silent who carry on with their ignominy as a psychological burden.

What is required here is an apt counseling for the victims and relevant literature in the form of fiction can act as a suitable counselor. Novels like *Sleeping on Jupiter* and the characters like Nomi can be taken up as pertinent models for the recuperation from the trauma of sexual abuse.

Unlike some real life examples, Nomi does not remain silent. She writes about all the malfunctioning of the *ashram* in

her diary. Nomi says, "I didn't talk about the ashram to them, but I wrote. All day I wrote. Half the evening I wrote" (239), and she drops the diary in a newsletter box before leaving for Delhi. She exposes *Guruji*. Later she comes back to India to visit Jurmuli again to fight against the horrible memories of her childhood. Nomi is a sufferer of PTSD and there are indications in the novel that she wants to come out of it. She efforts to cure herself therefore she gathers courage to fight against her hideous memories. When she visits the *ashram* to face her fears, she was shivering with utter horror but still she decides to fight back against it. For a moment her fears overpower her when the driver stops just in front of the gates of the *ashram*, but soon she gathers courage to go inside to face the imminent challenges. "She felt a prickle of fear at her neck, wanted to lock the doors of the car, turn back without getting out. They were at a pair of metal gates. The driver looked over his shoulder, despite herself she nodded, and he turned the engine off" (162-163). Definitely it must have been very difficult for Nomi to enter the *ashram*. However, Nomi firmly decides to come out of the car. She gathers courage immediately to face her trepidations. "The driver trudges her forward as if she were ill. When she reached the gates she peeped through them as a child might, frightened of encountering ghosts" (163). Although the *ashram* was in ruins then, Nomi, as she entered, started reliving the days of her abuse. She gets overwhelmed by hallucinations. One example can be taken here to understand her unstable condition when she hallucinates with the image of *Guruji* and desperately asks the driver, "Did you see something? Isn't there a man behind those bushes? There, look. In robes? The driver squinted. "I didn't see anyone" (165). Despite such apprehensions she moves forward and faces her painful and fearful memories of childhood.

Therapy for Real life Victims

Instead of escaping her fears, Nomi encounters them bravely, thus moves ahead in the task of resolving her psychological impediments. Her action of self-help can be taken up as a suggested therapy for the real life victims. So, Nomi shows courage at many places in the novel. Nomi is further able to placate the ghosts of her traumatic childhood memories by venting out her long suppressed aggression against *Guruji* by attacking Suraj, who makes an attempt to rape her. This act relieves her to a great extent. Nomi reacts, "You don't scare me," she said. She was still looking past him as if her eyes were seeing something else.... He was trapped with a psycho.... You don't scare me. I don't believe your bullshit." The words came from Nomi... that was not her voice" (230). Nomi attacks Suraj with a knife, "She lunged for his eyes, he ducked, and this time the knife ripped open the skin on his cheek... his shirt was soaking red" (231). Her out break of violence on Suraj is, in fact, a symbolic attack on *Guruji* against whom she takes her revenge. After this act Nomi really gets relieved as if she is rid of a great affliction. Nomi utters, "It is more light than dark, more dark than light, as is usual..." (249). It does not mean that violence is the solution to this problem. In fact, it was the outcome of Nomi's long suppressed feelings. Her act suggests that the victims of child abuse, especially sexual, must not suppress their fears as it would hamper a balanced growth of their personality, as it may move in a negative direction. The victims should be motivated to share their feelings, as they do have a right to lead a normal life, psychologically, physically and sexually balanced. Nobody can help them except themselves. They can write diaries, articles and probably such attempts can help them come out of their pathetic conditions.

The title of the novel *Sleeping on Jupiter* is itself symbolic of the victim's pitiable state. Jupiter is a planet with a big volume of high density gases, and if once one accidentally gets into it, cannot emerge ever until he or she tries exceptionally hard. Otherwise, the person will keep on plunging deeper and deeper into the depressive state of the Jupiter. The title represents Nomi's struggles and her depressive state is similar to the gloom of the Jupiter. Nomi was sleeping on the Jupiter, until she met her fears. It was only by her sheer will power, she could come out of her depression. Likewise, the sufferers of sexual abuse ought to use their inner strength and will power to emerge from their depressive states, lest they should be sleeping eternally on the Jupiter of their psyche.

Conclusion

Sexual molestation is a serious global issue and India is no exception to it. Many laws have been framed to resolve this issue but still the problems and risks persist (Kamdar et. al.). As the problem usually emerge from bad psychological conditions, and then solutions should also be based on psychological approaches. Prevention is better than cure, therefore, laws and execution of laws are definitely important for reducing this heinous crime, but employing psychological perspectives for solutions will be a revolutionary tool not only to reduce the rate of this crime, but also to empower the victims with apt emotional strength.

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