



Silenced Voices And Fractured Language: The Representation Of Nomi's Childhood Trauma In Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping On Jupiter*

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Abstract:

The relationship between trauma and language is complex and long-lasting as it can impact the individual's language abilities and communicative interactions through disruptions in speech and difficulties in memory retrieval. These difficulties are indicative of the internal turmoil experienced by the individual. Trauma's effect on memory and cognition may lead to fragmented memories and disorganised speech patterns, impeding the coherent articulation of thoughts and emotions as seen in Anuradha Roy's novel *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015). Using a trauma theory framework, the paper analyses the impact of the child sexual abuse on the characters' language, as well as the ways in which their trauma is represented through fragmented memories, flashbacks, and silences. The paper also examines the cultural and societal factors that contribute to the perpetuation of trauma, particularly in the form of sexual abuse against women. Through close textual analysis of the novel, the paper demonstrates how the characters' language reflects the complexity and depth of their trauma. This research paper argues that *Sleeping on Jupiter* offers a powerful and nuanced portrayal of the impact of child sexual abuse on survivors' language and communication, as well as the ways in which survivors navigate the complexities of their trauma.

Keywords: child abuse, trauma, silence, language, narrative, fragmentation.

1. Introduction

Trauma is a term used to describe an individual's psychological and emotional response to a distressing or disturbing event or situation that can have long-term effects on an individual's mental and cognitive health (Kolk, 2014). It can significantly impact an individual's language and communication patterns. Trauma survivors may experience difficulties expressing their emotions and experiences through language, leading to silence or avoidance of discussing their traumatic events (Kessler et al., 1995). This can be attributed to the overwhelming emotional and psychological impact of trauma, which can make it difficult for individuals to organize their thoughts and articulate their experiences. Moreover, traumatic events can disrupt the individual's relationship with language, causing changes in their linguistic style and vocabulary usage. These linguistic variations are related to mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder and reveal the psychological and emotional condition of the victim (Pennebaker & Chung, 2007). It is important to note that the effect of trauma is not limited to the individual level but encompasses social and cultural spaces as well. Social and cultural factors such as stigma, discrimination, and lack of social support can aggravate the impact of trauma making it multidimensional and more difficult for individuals to recover (Kirmayer et al., 2014).

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The exploration of this dynamic is frequently evident in various literary representations, where the interplay between language and trauma becomes a central theme. Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015) is one such literary text set in Jarmuli, a fictional coastal town in India. It follows the story of twenty-five-year-old Nomi Frederiksen, who revisits India after living in Oslo, Norway for a long time. Nomi's character personifies the language of trauma and silence in the aftermath of child sexual abuse. Her terrible past is progressively exposed in the novel as she comes back to the small town where she suffered abuse as a child. At the age of six-seven, Nomi seeks shelter in an orphanage run by a religious leader, Guruji. She looks to Guruji for safety and protection however he is revealed to be a perpetrator of abuse. Since her primary caregiver, a renowned religious man is the one who violates her trust, the complexity of betrayal, secrecy and additional shame becomes overwhelming. Through fragmentary recollections and flashbacks, Nomi's history of abuse is slowly revealed, demonstrating how she had largely suppressed her suffering. Throughout her life, she struggles with the traumatising recollections of her abuse and her mind would often wander back to the memories of the *ashram* where she was abused: "I would wonder what to say, where to start...I dissolved the lump that had somehow appeared in my throat... in my head the rasping calls of crows grew deafening and I was back in that hot classroom, the bench hard and narrow under me" (Roy, 2015, p. 29). Her silence regarding the abuse reflects the humiliation that many sexual abuse survivors experience, and anxiety caused by the possibility of being dismissed or getting blamed for the abuse (Herman, 1992b). Silence becomes a coping mechanism that shields survivors from judgment and disbelief in a world where victim-blaming is prevalent. The latter section of the paper deals extensively with these social and cultural factors that perpetuate abuse.

(i.i) *Literature Review*

The paper draws on essential references that contribute to the understanding of how trauma can affect mind, cognition, and language. Janet (1904) identified trauma as emotional accidents disconnected from conscious awareness, leading to fragmentation in trauma narratives. Kolk (1989) further explored how trauma is assimilated in the victim's psyche according to Janet's theories. Kolk (2014) emphasized the interconnection between brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma, shedding light on the extensive psychological effects of traumatic experiences. Additionally, Kolk, Roth, Pelcovitz, Sunday, and Spinazzola (2005) established the empirical foundation for understanding disorders of extreme stress, which are complex adaptations to trauma. Cloitre et al. (2011) conducted a survey on the treatment of Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) and identified best practices, emphasizing the need for effective therapeutic approaches. Cvetkovich (2003) explored the interplay between trauma and silence, highlighting diverse manifestations of trauma within different cultural contexts. A survivor of sexual abuse often faces difficulties in articulating the experiences for the fear of disbelief, reflecting the challenges trauma survivors face in articulating their experiences (Herman, 1992b). Fromm (2012) discussed treatment resistance and the transmission of trauma, emphasizing the persistent nature of trauma across generations. Hammel (2004) identified repetition as a modernist literary aesthetic in trauma narratives, mirroring the disintegration of traumatic experiences. The selected references collectively provide comprehensive insights into the complexities of trauma and its effects on mind and cognition.

2. Theoretical Framework

The research paper employs a trauma theory framework to examine how child sexual abuse affects body, cognition, and communication in Anuradha Roy's novel *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015). Through the works of trauma theorists like Pierre Janet, Bessel van der Kolk, and Judith Herman, the study explores how trauma disrupts cognition, leading to fragmented memories, disorganized speech patterns, and silence. Through close textual analysis, the novel's disorganised narrative structure and symbolic language vividly portray the characters' struggles to articulate their traumatic experiences. Deconstructionist insights reveal how the novel challenges societal norms and cultural constructs that perpetuate trauma, as characters' silence and authority figures' abusive practices are deconstructed. This study offers a comprehensive understanding of trauma's impact on communication, while highlighting the role of cultural and societal factors in sustaining trauma.

3. Discussion

(iii.i) *Trauma Narrative as Fragmentation*

According to Janet (1904), one of the early pioneers in trauma research, traumatic incidents become emotional

accidents (accidents émotionnels)— what is now known as traumatization— when a person is unable to fully incorporate what one experienced into their earlier experiences and memories, and to include it in personal narrative. According to Janet, traumatic events are stored differently, frequently disconnected from consciousness and voluntary control, and are therefore not readily accessible: “The subject is often incapable of making the necessary narrative which we call memory regarding the event; and yet he remains confronted by a difficult situation in which he has not been able to play a satisfactory part, one to which his adaptation had been imperfect” (Kolk & Hart, 1990). Consequently, traumatic memory may become compartmentalised, resulting in a disconnect between various aspects of the self and difficulty in processing the trauma. Fragmentation is a well competent narrative device in trauma narratives as it accurately portrays the disoriented and disintegrated nature of traumatic experiences. According to Herman (1992a), it is a relevant reaction to trauma, as survivors often face difficulties in constructing an organized narrative of their experiences. Fragmentation can take many different forms, such as inconsistent sentences, shifting viewpoints, and irregular temporal frames. The use of incoherent speech and a non-linear narrative framework in *Sleeping on Jupiter* effectively conveys the characters’ traumatised consciousness. The novel’s disjointed narrative design reflects the protagonists’ disjointed psyches as they deal with the effects of their childhood traumas: “Fragments of cloth, ribbons, pieces of tin, evidence of long-ago worship, now dead, were visible in the dust” (Roy, 2015, p. 122). The physical evidence of remnants of the past hiding by a thin layer of dust is symbolic for the memories of abuse that barely stay suppressed.

The narrative switches between Nomi’s memories of abuse and her present-day experiences, often without clear transitions or parallels between the two: “Like fungus that takes birth in warm and wet places, memories ooze from the crevices of your brain” (Roy, 2015, p. 28). These disorganised and unorganised memories illustrate how trauma can destroy a person’s sense of self, making it exceedingly difficult to construct a cogent narrative of one’s experiences. As LaCapra (2001) suggests, trauma operates on a deep structural level, defying conventional linear narratives and coherent portrayals. It profoundly affects an individual’s self-perception, shattering their ability to derive meaning from their encounters and, in turn, hindering their capacity to articulate their traumatic experiences. The novel’s fragmented narrative mirrors the chaos and disintegration of Nomi’s psyche as she grapples with the effects of her childhood traumas. Roy’s powerful narrative technique aptly conveys the complexities of trauma and its profound influence on the construction of personal narratives. It challenges conventional storytelling conventions and instead delves into the deep-seated impact of trauma on an individual’s psyche and their struggle to make sense of their traumatic encounters.

(iii.ii) Language of Trauma as Seen in the Novel

Roy employs symbolic language to depict the complex psychological and emotional ramifications of trauma on her characters. Nomi returns to Jarmuli for a documentary work and comes across a monk during her visit to the local market. Triggered by his saintly appearance, images of Guruji from her past come rushing back, causing her to hastily retreat from the market. In a vulnerable and anxious state, she seeks the company of an elderly lady to feel a sense of protection akin to that of a child seeking refuge in the arms of a caregiver. Nomi’s narrative account exhibits fractured and disoriented language, mirroring the disorder and disorientation of her psyche. She expresses an urge to achieve emancipation from the memories of past events. Roy writes, “She spoke faster and faster, riveted by the scenario she was conjuring up. ‘Don’t you wish it could happen? Your mind wiped clean, like a hard drive? Start again without memories?’” (Roy, 2015, p. 84). Her rapid speech indicates a state of emotional intensity and agitation, which could be linked to the re-emergence of traumatic memories. The sentence suggests that Nomi is deeply engrossed in a memory pile and wishes to escape from the burden of her traumatic past. The application of metaphorical language in this context depicts the challenge of cognitive processing of traumatic recollections and the affective upheaval that individuals who have experienced trauma, encounter. The intentional use of back-and-forth narrative framework serves to emphasise the recurring pattern of trauma and its long-term impact on the victims.

The novel’s language effectively elicits a profound sense of displacement, suffering, and the characters’ difficult journey to reconcile with their traumatic history. Roy’s adept utilisation of clear and intense imagery successfully communicates the extensive physical and emotional toll of trauma on her characters. The characters’ inner state of mind is unveiled through their associations with the natural world, employing the external environment as a metaphor for their internal struggles: “The sun hung over the sea, looking as if it would fall into it anytime. The water was high, there was too much of it. Waves came like white-toothed monsters and bit off the sand” (Roy, 2015, p. 10). Ken Hiltner’s *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader* (2014),

establishes the essential connection between literature and nature. Hiltner argues that nature is not merely a backdrop, but an entity with its own agency and significance. The utilisation of the natural world as a figurative representation of human experiences and feelings is a frequent motif in trauma narratives. The narrative structure and symbols used in the novel illuminate the continuing impact of past traumas on the characters' present experiences.

(iii.iii). When Silence Seeps into Dreams

The creative use of silence is a significant linguistic strategy employed to depict trauma. According to Cvetkovich (2003) and Herman (1992b), silence can serve as a potent mechanism for expressing the ineffable quality of traumatic occurrences. The narrative gaps or omissions are employed to depict the impression of an experience that is too distressing and traumatising to articulate. The novel's portrayal of Nomi's silence is conveyed via her disorganised and chaotic narrative, indicating that she has trouble in living with her traumatic experiences in her foster mother's home which was "silent enough to make it hard for her to cry at night without being noticed" (Roy, 2015, p. 88). The act of crying can be read as a manifestation of unprocessed emotions and a release of built-up tension related to Nomi's trauma. Traumatic experiences often involve feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability, and crying can be a natural response to these overwhelming emotions. Fromm's *Treatment Resistance and the Transmission of Trauma* (2012) reiterates the notion that individuals who have undergone traumatic experiences may find it difficult to articulate their feelings due to the overwhelming nature of the event. According to Fromm, in such instances, an individual's dreams might function as a platform for the individual to subconsciously process their traumatic encounters. It is only through her dreams and flashbacks that the past is revealed. She had recurring dreams of being held as an infant by a man who was lying in bed and rocking her while keeping her face close to his. "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" (Roy, 2015, p. 37). The dream paints a vivid picture of vulnerability, powerlessness, and discomfort. Nomi's voice becomes paralyzed in her dream, signifying her inability to articulate her feelings and seek help. The dream serves as a haunting representation of the traumatic events she experienced during her childhood, encapsulating the emotional turmoil she has suppressed for years.

She has another recurring dream of a man who she kicks until he was dead. "I would kick a ball hard and cry with joy...it made me weep because that ball wasn't a ball, it was a man's head, it was that man I was kicking dead." (Roy, 2015, p. 120). The act of kicking the man to death in her dream might symbolize her unconscious desire to exert power and control over her abuser, reclaiming a sense of agency that was taken from her during the traumatic event. The dream's violent nature can also reflect the overwhelming emotions of anger, fear, and helplessness associated with the trauma. Schredl and Engelhardt (2001) found that individuals with a history of childhood sexual abuse had more frequent nightmares and dream content that was negative and emotionally intense. The authors suggest that the traumatic experiences of abuse may lead to a persistent heightened state of arousal and reactivity, which in turn can manifest in violent or threatening dream content. Hammel's recognition of repetition as a marker of trauma finds resonance in the novel with the recurrence of dreams to convey the continuing experience of trauma (Hammel, 2004). Nomi experiences a recurring dream wherein a man cradles her as a vulnerable and powerless individual, swaying her according to his own desires: "He takes me each time to the brink" (Roy, 2015, p. 37). The use of the word "brink" here is crucial as it signifies the verge or the edge of the overwhelming past that Nomi constantly experiences, an anxiety that something terrible may happen again. The adoption of repetitivedreams mirrors the way in which traumatic experiences can become rooted in an individual's psyche. It symbolises a psychological state characterised by anxiety and uncertainty ultimately resulting in a sense of consistent cognitive dissonance. By deconstructing the dream within the framework of trauma theory, it becomes evident that the dreams serve as windows into the Nomi's unresolved trauma, offering insights into her psychological struggle to cope with and make sense of the traumatic event.

(iii.iv). The Cultural and Societal Factors that Contribute to the Suffering of Survivors

The practise of silencing the survivors of child abuse can be connected to social and cultural factors that have become deeply embedded over time. In India, where societal hierarchies are significantly established, abusers frequently occupy positions of authority or credibility, that includes family members, teachers, and religious

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leaders. For instance, the novel features Guruji as a prominent religious figure: “They said he had divine powers even when he was a child. He could turn into a cat or horse or wolf, then come back to human form again” (Roy, 2015, p. 67). His devotees hold him in high esteem as a spiritual leader and guru. The novel initially depicts Guruji as a welcoming character who wields a significant influence over his followers. The character of Guruji exhibits a complex and multifaceted nature. From one perspective, he is highly respected by his devotees and is regarded as a fount of sagacity and guidance. As the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that the principles espoused by Guruji are founded on deceit and coercion, driven by greed and lust. Nomi explains that this religious man who is shown to have dedicated his life to God “even had his own aeroplane” (Roy, 2015, p. 105). He is shown to be engaged in acts of child sexual abuse and exploitation towards the female minors residing within the walls of the orphanage under his supervision. However, he is never charged for any of his crimes against the vulnerable children in his orphanage: “Guruji had other rich and powerful disciples who respected his powers, and this was why even illegal boat girls were safe inside the ashram” (Roy, 2015, p. 105). The novel presents a critical perspective on how the quest for spiritual illumination can result in instances of mistreatment and manipulation. The character of Guruji serves as a means of providing commentary on the potential hazards associated with the uncritical acceptance of religious leaders, as well as the misuse of authority. Through his character, Roy exposes the possibility of spiritual leaders exploiting the vulnerable under the guise of spiritual enlightenment. The presence of religious biases makes it exceptionally challenging for survivors to come forward and share their traumatic experiences, as doing so may lead to further repercussions (Kacker, Varadan, & Kumar, 2007). The novel serves as a powerful commentary on the exploitation of vulnerable individuals under the guise of spiritual guidance and highlights the need for vigilance and awareness in religious settings to prevent the perpetuation of abuse.

The novel vividly portrays the pressure to maintain social hierarchy, particularly through the actions of the police. A significant moment in the book involves the character Champa, who attempts to escape the oppressive environment of Guruji's orphanage. When she encounters the police, she narrates the tragic truth of the orphanage, where young girls endure sexual harassment and abuse. However, the police officers, unwilling to confront the complexities of the situation, choose to return her to the same abusive environment: “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” (Roy, 2015, p. 126). Guruji's powerful influence is evident as the police defer to his authority, highlighting the prevalence of hierarchical power dynamics that perpetuate abuse. Champa's plight illustrates the cultural norms that prioritize preserving the social order over protecting survivors and seeking justice. This episode underscores the marginalization of survivors due to the cultural requirement of upholding hierarchies. The lack of institutional support for sexual abuse survivors, as depicted in the novel, exacerbates their suffering, and perpetuates the cycle of silence and humiliation.

4. Conclusion

Trauma survivors are often not very expressive about their experiences and instead display the effects of trauma through specific linguistic signals and layered metaphors. It is important to analyse such patterns to understand the psychological health of a trauma survivor. *Sleeping on Jupiter* by Anuradha Roy masterfully employs evocative imagery, dream sequences, fractured language, and a fragmented narrative to provide a powerful, multi-dimensional representation of trauma's impact on the human psyche. The novel delves deep into the characters' traumatic experiences, unravelling their memories through haunting dream sequences that serve as windows to their subconscious minds. The shifts between past and present, often without clear transitions, mirror the characters' fragmented psyches as they grapple with the enduring effects of childhood trauma. Roy successfully illustrates the complexities of trauma and its long-lasting impact on survivors by utilising metaphorical phrases and repetitive structures of traumatic memories. The paper underlines the significance of literary devices such as silence, dreams, and fragmentation in communicating the impact of traumatic experiences. This paper also highlights the need to address the cultural and societal factors that contribute to the suffering of victims of sexual abuse to not only understand the victim's psyche but also to help break the cycle of silence and humiliation. In the face of silence, literature becomes a decisive voice that demands justice and compassion for survivors, igniting conversations that lead to meaningful change. The novel, *Sleeping on Jupiter* becomes a compelling critique of the society that is often complicit in enabling abuse through its entrenched power structures.

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