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Unraveling the Threads of Oppression: A Narrative of Identity Crisis and Self-Transformation in Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter*

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Abstract: This paper examines Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter* as a nuanced exploration of identity crisis and self-transformation within the context of systemic oppression and trauma. Through a narrative imbued with emotional depth and cultural critique, Roy interrogates the personal and societal struggles of her protagonist, Nomi, while addressing overarching themes of gender inequality, violence, and displacement. Positioned within a fractured sociopolitical framework, the novel offers a critical commentary on the structural forces that perpetuate marginalization and human suffering. By analysing elements such as character development, symbolism, and narrative structure, this paper elucidates how Roy constructs a narrative of survival and resilience. Nomi's journey is presented not only as a testament to individual endurance but also as a lens through which broader cultural and societal tensions are reflected. By intertwining personal trauma with collective struggles, Roy crafts a narrative that is both intimate and expansive, highlighting the resilience of the human spirit in the face of profound adversity.

Keywords: Identity Crisis, Self- Transformation, Narrative Structure, Symbolism.

INTRODUCTION

A narrative is a structured and coherent account of a sequence of events or experiences, crafted to engage the audience and convey a particular message or theme. As Paul Ricoeur explains, "A narrative is not merely a recounting of events but an active process of shaping meaning, linking actions to a coherent sequence, and embedding them within a larger context" (45). This perspective highlights the narrative's role in not only describing events but also interpreting and organizing them into a structured form that resonates with the audience. They are a fundamental aspect of storytelling, spanning a wide range of forms, including written stories, oral traditions, films, and visual art. They typically include characters, a plot, a setting, and a conflict that drives the story forward. The purpose of a narrative can vary—it might inform, entertain, persuade, or inspire its audience. By presenting events in an organized manner, narratives help create a connection between the storyteller and the audience, often eliciting an emotional response. Key elements of a narrative include characters, which play central roles in the unfolding events, and a plot, which is the sequence of actions that propel the story forward. The setting, or the time and place of the story, provides context, while the conflict introduces a challenge or problem to be resolved. Narratives are also shaped by the perspective or point of view from which they are told, such as first-person or third-person narration. Themes and underlying messages give the narrative depth, inviting the audience to reflect on larger ideas or societal issues. "Narrative has the power to shape our perceptions of societal issues, to challenge dominant discourses, and to give voice to marginalized communities"(Bakhtin, M.M, 1981).Whether fictional or based on real events, narratives are a powerful way to explore human experiences and connect across cultures and time periods.

Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter* offers a poignant narrative that delves into the lives of individuals grappling with their pasts and striving for a sense of self amid deeply entrenched oppression. The novel's protagonist, Nomi, embodies the complexities of identity shaped by trauma and cultural dislocation. This paper seeks to unravel how the interplay of personal and societal forces in the novel creates a narrative of identity crisis, eventual self-transformation, and thematic exploration of Oppression. The novel addresses various forms of oppression, including gender-based violence, religious exploitation, and socio-economic inequalities. Roy uses Nomi's childhood experiences in an abusive ashram to highlight the pervasive nature of patriarchal and religious structures that exploit the vulnerable. "The Guru's ashram, where Nomi had been sent as a child, was a place of beauty and brutality, where the sacred and profane coexisted" (Roy, A, 2015). It analyzes how these systemic forces shape Nomi's fractured identity and perpetuate cycles of suffering.

This is a powerful exploration of trauma, memory, and resilience, told through a fragmented and non-linear narrative structure. "Non- linear narrative

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structure, which disrupts the chronological ordering of events, allows writers to mirror the fragmented and associative nature of human memory and experience"(Herman, D 2003). The novel unfolds across two timelines, alternating between the past and present, and is narrated from multiple perspectives. This structure reflects the fragmented lives of its characters, particularly the protagonist, Nomi, who is trying to make sense of her traumatic past while navigating her present. Her story is central to the novel. As a child, she survives the violent death of her family during a conflict in her homeland and is sent to an ashram, where she endures abuse at the hands of a revered spiritual leader. Nomi said, "When I was still a young girl, soldiers killed my entire family…I was taken in by a household of older women, but their home, too, was soon destroyed. Finally, Nomi was put on a boat to the sea-side town of Jarmuli, famed for its temples and ashrams, where she was taken in by a resident guru"(Roy, A, 2015)**.**Years later, as an adult and a filmmaker, Nomi returns to the coastal town of Jarmuli, ostensibly for a documentary project, but in reality, to confront the ghosts of her past. Her journey is both physical and emotional, as she pieces together fragmented memories and seeks closure for her painful experiences. Parallel to Nomi's narrative is the story of three elderly women—Gauri, Latika, and Vidya—on a pilgrimage to Jarmuli. Each woman carries her own burdens: Gauri is fiercely independent but disillusioned, Latika is bound by family expectations, and Vidya struggles with aging and unfulfilled desires. Their interactions, humor, and conflicts provide a counterpoint to Nomi's solitary quest and highlight the complexities of female friendships and the challenges of aging.

The novel also introduces other characters whose lives intersect with Nomi and the elderly women. Suraj, a local guide, navigates his own insecurities and societal pressures, while Badal, a young temple worker, struggles with repressed desires and societal taboos. These subplots deepen the narrative, exploring themes of love, identity, and societal constraints, and offer a broader view of life in Jarmuli. The setting of Jarmuli is a significant element in the novel, almost a character in its own right. The serene coastal town, with its temples and rituals, contrasts sharply with the dark secrets it harbors. For Nomi, it is both a site of traumatic memories and a place of reckoning. The sea, which dominates the landscape, serves as a metaphor for time, renewal, and the possibility of healing. Through its elliptical storytelling and sensory-rich descriptions, the novel immerses the reader in its world while leaving space for interpretation. The gaps in the narrative mirror the disjointed nature of memory, particularly for survivors of trauma like Nomi. By juxtaposing her harrowing experiences with the more mundane struggles of the other characters, the novel explores the intersection of personal grief and collective cultural practices. This novel represents a poignant meditation on the human capacity to endure and seek meaning in the aftermath of profound loss. Its fragmented structure not only reflects the themes of the novel but also engages the reader in piecing together the narrative, much like its characters reconstruct their lives. Through its intricate storytelling, the novel offers a compelling exploration of pain, survival, and the possibility of healing.

An identity crisis refers to a period of uncertainty or confusion about one's sense of self, typically regarding personal values, beliefs, and roles in society. This concept was first introduced by psychoanalyst Erik Erikson in his theory of psychosocial development, specifically during the stage of adolescence. "The identity crisis is a normative crisis, a necessary turning point in the life cycle, when the individual must struggle to reconcile contradictory childhood identifications with the demands and opportunities of adulthood"(Erikson, E.H, 1950). Erikson posited that individuals face the challenge of "identity versus role confusion," where they must explore different aspects of their personality to establish a cohesive sense of identity. Failure to achieve this integration can lead to prolonged uncertainty and difficulty in future decision-making. Identity crises often occur during periods of major life transitions or societal pressures. "Identity crisis occurs when an individual's existing identity structure is no longer adequate to meet the demands of a changing environment, leading to a period of exploration and experimentation"(Kroger, J, 2007). For instance, cultural expectations, familial responsibilities, or career demands can intensify feelings of uncertainty. Adolescents and young adults frequently experience these crises as they grapple with questions of who they are and what they want to achieve. However, identity crises are not limited to youth; adults may also face them during significant life events such as career changes, divorce, or retirement.

The impact of an identity crisis can vary. It may lead to personal growth and a stronger sense of self

when individuals successfully navigate the challenges and redefine their identity. On the other hand, unresolved crises can result in anxiety, depression, or a sense of alienation. For example, studies have shown that individuals who fail to reconcile conflicting aspects of their identity often experience lower self-esteem and a lack of purpose. "Individuals in an identity diffusion status, characterized by a lack of exploration and commitment, are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and a sense of alienation, as they feel disconnected from themselves and others"(Marcia, J.E, 1993). An identity crisis is a critical period of self-reflection and decision-making that shapes an individual's sense of self. Its resolution can either strengthen personal identity or result in prolonged struggles with self-definition. This concept, rooted in Erikson's psychosocial theory, continues to be relevant in understanding human development across all stages of life. Properly addressing an identity crisis often requires introspection, support from others, and openness to change and growth.

Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter* poignantly addresses themes of identity crisis, particularly through the character of Nomi, who is grappling with the trauma of her past and her uncertain sense of self. She said, "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 under, and he takes me each time to the bring…."(Roy 34). Nomi's journey back to the town of Jarmuli is not merely physical but also a search for her fragmented identity. She is a survivor of extreme violence and sexual abuse, and as she revisits the places and people of her childhood, she attempts to piece together her broken sense of self. Her identity crisis is triggered by the deep wounds from her past, forcing her to confront both who she was and who she has become. As she reflects on her traumatic experiences, she struggles with the uncertainty of her place in the world, particularly as a woman who has been marked by violence.

The novel's fragmented narrative structure mirrors Nomi's identity crisis. As her memories come in disjointed flashes, the reader experiences her confusion and internal disarray. This narrative technique highlights the difficulty of reconciling different aspects of her identity, especially given the trauma she endured at the hands of a revered spiritual leader in the ashram. Throughout the novel, Nomi must navigate her role as a filmmaker, a survivor, and a woman seeking closure, all while confronting the tension between the person she once was and the person she wants to be. Her struggle for self-understanding is compounded by the secrecy surrounding her past, which prevents her from fully embracing or rejecting the woman she has become. Other characters in *Sleeping on Jupiter* also face identity crises, but these are more subtle or embedded within their personal struggles. Suraj, the local guide, is another key character who struggles with identity. His internal conflict is primarily about his social position and his repressed desires, reflecting the broader societal pressures that shape individual identity in the novel. His crisis mirrors that of Nomi's in that both characters are trying to reconcile their past experiences with their present realities. These layers of personal identity crises add complexity to the novel, showing how external forces—society, history, and trauma—shape the way individuals perceive themselves and their roles.

The novel is a profound exploration of identity crisis, particularly through its portrayal of characters like Nomi, who confront the shattered remnants of their past selves while trying to build a coherent sense of identity. The novel shows how trauma, memory, and societal expectations intersect to complicate self-understanding and personal growth. Roy's use of a fragmented narrative structure deepens the reader's understanding of the complexity and difficulty of resolving identity crises, making it clear that personal healing is not a linear process.

Nomi's Displacement, Loss of Identity and Migration and its Psychological Toll on Other Characters:
Nomi, as a young girl, is a victim of brutal violence when her family is murdered during a period of political unrest. This violent disruption of her life causes not only physical displacement but also a profound rupture in her identity. She is taken to an ashram, far from her home, where she faces further trauma and abuse. This forced relocation—away from her family, home, and country—leads to a significant crisis of identity. Nomi's sense of self becomes fragmented as she grapples with the absence of familial and cultural anchors that once defined her. In this way, displacement is not just about physical relocation; it also involves the loss of personal history and cultural continuity. She struggles to understand who she is without the foundational aspects of her

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life—her family, her country, and her original self-concept.

As an adult, Nomi returns to Jarmuli, the coastal town where she spent part of her childhood, in an attempt to reconnect with her past and piece together her identity. This return symbolizes her effort to reclaim a sense of self that was disrupted by her forced migration. However, her return also highlights the difficulty of reconstructing identity after such profound displacement. The memories are fragmented, and the town is no longer the place it once was, adding to her sense of alienation. Even in her return to familiar surroundings, Nomi is caught between her past trauma and her present self, unable to fully reconnect with the person she once was. Her displacement has left her in a constant state of limbo, questioning who she is and whether she can ever truly belong again.

Other characters in the novel also experience the effects of displacement, albeit in different contexts. For example, the three elderly women—Gauri, Latika, and Vidya—embark on a pilgrimage to Jarmuli, which, though voluntary, represents a kind of personal migration. Their displacement is not marked by violence or trauma, but rather by the inevitability of aging and the desire to seek meaning in a changing world. While they do not suffer from the same kind of forced displacement as Nomi, they too face a crisis of self, as they struggle to reconcile their identities as they grow older and their roles in society shift. Gauri, the most independent of the three, is particularly attuned to the changes that aging brings, including a diminishing sense of self-worth and power. This internal migration, the journey toward self-acceptance and reconnection with one's values, underscores how displacement can affect people at all stages of life.

A key theme that emerges in the novel is how migration, whether forced or chosen, impacts memory and personal history. For Nomi, the town of Jarmuli is a place filled with painful memories of loss, but it is also where fragments of her old self linger. As she navigates her return, the town itself becomes both a site of healing and an obstacle to self-discovery. The migration from a familiar world into an alien one leads to the suppression and distortion of memories, making it difficult for displaced individuals to reconnect with their original selves. This theme is not just about geographical movement but the emotional and psychological dislocation that often accompanies it. The tension between remembering

and forgetting plays a crucial role in Nomi's identity crisis, as she is unable to fully integrate her past and present selves due to the scars left by displacement.

Anuradha Roy powerfully portrays how displacement and migration can shape a person's sense of identity. Through Nomi's journey, we see how the trauma of losing one's home, family, and cultural roots can lead to a fragmented self. Her return to Jarmuli, a place fraught with painful memories, highlights the difficulty of reclaiming an identity after being uprooted. The novel underscores that displacement is not just a physical relocation, but a psychological and emotional upheaval that can have long-lasting effects on an individual's sense of self. The exploration of this theme in the novel demonstrates how migration—whether forced or voluntary—can deeply impact one's sense of belonging and self-identity.

Nomi's journey is one of remembering and reconciling the pieces of her shattered identity. The trauma she experienced as a child—witnessing her family's brutal murder and enduring abuse in an ashram—has left her with fragmented and often disjointed memories. She remembered physical abusing by Guru Ji, "As his hand moved from scar to scar, it wend under the skirt of my tunic and began to stoke the part between my legs."(Roy 92). As an adult, Nomi's return to Jarmuli, where she spent part of her childhood, is an attempt to piece together these scattered fragments. However, the process of remembering is not straightforward. Her memories are often incomplete or disjointed, with some parts resurfacing clearly while others remain obscured or distorted. This reflects how memory is unreliable and fluid, particularly in the aftermath of trauma. Nomi's struggle to reconstruct her identity is directly tied to her struggle to make sense of these fragmented memories, which are crucial to understanding who she was and who she has become.

Memory, in this novel, is also shown to be deeply influenced by time and context. The further Nomi moves from her past, the more unclear and ambiguous her memories become. When she returns to the places of her childhood, they no longer provide the same clarity or emotional resonance. The town of Jarmuli, once a symbol of home, has transformed into a place that no longer fits into her reconstructed self. This demonstrates that memory is not just an individual process but one that is affected by external changes—time,

physical displacement, and the evolution of societal and cultural contexts. For Nomi, these transformations make the act of remembering both a painful and a liberating experience, as she faces the challenge of reconciling her past trauma with her present self. On other hand, Latika represents her loneliness to remember her dead husband. She said, "It was many years since she had been to the sea: the last time, a decade ago, it was with her husband, in Goa. He stood on dry land shouting, "You are too rash, Latika! You'll float away and not know until You're miles out and can't swim back"(Roy, A, 2015).

Storytelling as a Means of Healing and Reconstructing Identity:

Storytelling, a powerful narrative device, serves as a tool for reconstructing identity by allowing individuals to articulate personal and collective experiences. It provides a framework through which fragmented identities, especially in the aftermath of trauma or displacement, can be reorganized and understood. "Identity is the accumulated confidence of sameness and continuity, preserved through repeated storytelling that connects one's past to the present and future" (Erikson, E.H, 1950). Storytelling here becomes essential to the continuity and stability of self-concept, especially during crises. Through storytelling, individuals and communities engage in meaning-making, forging connections between their past, present, and future, thus enabling the reconfiguration of their sense of self.

Storytelling plays a central role in helping the characters in *Sleeping on Jupiter* reconstruct their identities. For Nomi, her film project is a form of storytelling that allows her to make sense of her past. As a filmmaker, Nomi is compelled to recount and document stories—both her own and others'—and in doing so, she attempts to reconcile the fractured pieces of her identity. Her engagement with storytelling, both as a means of external expression and personal reflection, is a way for her to reclaim power over her own narrative. She must confront her trauma and share it in order to find closure, even if that means revisiting painful events and exposing uncomfortable truths. In a way, her film becomes a metaphor for the larger process of self-reconstruction—an attempt to weave the scattered fragments of memory into a coherent, meaningful whole.

The act of storytelling is also shared among the other characters, particularly the three elderly women—Gauri, Latika, and Vidya—who embark on a pilgrimage to Jarmuli. Their interactions and the stories they share about their own lives provide a contrast to Nomi's quest for self-discovery. Through their storytelling, these women both affirm and challenge their identities as they confront the realities of aging, gender, and the roles they have played throughout their lives. While their stories differ from Nomi's in terms of the nature of trauma, they still reflect the essential role of storytelling in giving meaning to one's life and experience. The older women's discussions about their families, their pasts, and their roles in society highlight the fluidity of identity as it is shaped by both memory and the narratives we tell about ourselves.

In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, collective memory also plays a crucial role in shaping individual identity. The town of Jarmuli itself is imbued with collective histories, both sacred and secular, that impact how the characters view themselves and their world. For instance, the rituals, myths, and local narratives surrounding the temple where Nomi's past is buried create a backdrop against which personal stories unfold. The collective memories of the town, with its religious significance and cultural practices, provide a context for Nomi's individual experience of displacement and trauma. The ways in which the community remembers and retells its own history affect the individuals within it, especially in the case of those like Nomi, who are trying to re-anchor themselves after personal loss and migration.

The novel suggests that individual identity is often interwoven with collective identity. The characters' personal memories cannot be fully understood in isolation but are shaped by the broader histories and stories that surround them. As Nomi seeks to reclaim her personal history, she must also come to terms with the collective history of the town and the larger cultural forces that have influenced her life. This tension between individual and collective memory highlights the complexity of reconstructing one's identity. For Nomi, the process of storytelling is as much about navigating these larger cultural narratives as it is about her own personal recollections. In this novel, Anuradha Roy illustrates how memory and storytelling are integral to the process of reconstructing identity. Through the character of Nomi, the novel demonstrates how traumatic memories, when revisited and retold, can lead to a reformation of the self. The fragmented nature of

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memory reflects the difficulties individuals face in trying to make sense of their pasts, especially when that past is marked by violence and loss. Storytelling, both personal and collective, becomes a tool for healing and self-empowerment, allowing individuals to rebuild their sense of self within a larger social and cultural context. Ultimately, the novel reveals that identity is not static, but a dynamic construct shaped by memory, narrative, and the act of storytelling. She masterfully intertwines the personal and political to present a narrative of identity crisis and self-transformation. Through the lens of Nomi's journey, the novel offers a powerful critique of oppression while celebrating the resilience of the human spirit. By unraveling the threads of trauma and healing, Roy crafts a story that resonates deeply with contemporary struggles for identity and justice.

Self-Transformation through Agency and Resilience:
Despite the profound trauma she endures, Nomi's journey in *Sleeping on Jupiter* evolves into a narrative of self-empowerment and transformation, where she reclaims agency through meaningful relationships, self-acceptance, and creative expression. One of the key ways Nomi asserts her agency is by forming connections that transcend cultural and social boundaries. Her interactions with the elderly women, Gauri, Latika, and Vidya, help her navigate her trauma and rediscover aspects of herself that were once suppressed. These relationships offer emotional support and serve as a reminder that healing often requires vulnerability and community. Additionally, Nomi's acceptance of her fragmented identity becomes an empowering act in itself. Instead of viewing her fractured sense of self as a weakness, she learns to embrace it as a source of strength, recognizing that identity is fluid and can be reshaped through lived experiences. Lastly, Nomi uses her work as a filmmaker and her return to Jarmuli as tools for self-expression and healing. The act of documenting and revisiting her past, though painful, becomes a method of reclaiming control over her narrative, allowing her to process her trauma and reconstruct her identity on her own terms.

Symbolism, Narrative Techniques and Cultural and Sociopolitical Context:
Anuradha Roy employs rich symbolism and a non-linear narrative structure to reinforce the themes of oppression, trauma, and personal transformation. Recurring motifs such as the ocean and trains function as powerful metaphors for freedom and transition. The ocean, with its vast, uncontainable nature, symbolizes Nomi's desire for release from the confines of her painful memories and the societal structures that have oppressed her. The train journeys that punctuate the narrative mirror the passage of time and the movement from one stage of life to another, highlighting the idea of transition and the hope for new beginnings. Roy's use of a fragmented narrative structure reflects Nomi's fractured psyche, as the disjointed nature of the storytelling mirrors the disarray of her memories and the emotional scars left by her trauma. This fragmentation allows the reader to experience the complexity of Nomi's healing process firsthand. Moreover, the juxtaposition of multiple perspectives—ranging from Nomi's to those of the elderly women and the various townspeople—highlights the interconnectedness of personal and societal struggles. Through these diverse voices, Roy reveals how individual trauma is often a reflection of larger societal forces, creating a nuanced portrait of oppression, survival, and resilience.

This is deeply embedded in the sociopolitical landscape of contemporary India, offering a critical commentary on the forces of gender, religion, and human rights. The novel's exploration of Nomi's trauma and self-discovery takes place within a broader context of systemic violence and inequality, particularly against women. Roy critiques the ways in which patriarchal structures exploit and suppress women, both within private spheres and public institutions. This is reflected in the abusive experiences Nomi faces in the ashram, where the spiritual leader's authority is used to manipulate and control. The novel's critical stance on religion is particularly significant in a nation where religious and caste-based division, desuetude inequality and violence. By linking Nomi's personal struggle to the larger societal issues of discrimination, the novel calls attention to the inter-sectionality of identity, trauma, and societal oppression. In this way, Nomi's journey of self-reclamation is not just an individual act but also a resistance against the oppressive structures that seek to define and confine her. Roy's depiction of the cultural and political landscape highlights the enduring relevance of human rights issues and the need for collective action in addressing societal injustices.

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