
Deceptive Gurus and Babas in Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter*

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Abstract

Religious hypocrisy has deep roots in Indian society. It is widely spread throughout the entire spectrum of society, from the top to the lower rungs. Anuradha Roy's novel *Sleeping on Jupiter* depicts deceptive gurus and babas. Recently, these things have become quite common. Fake babas and gurus have been making our society hollow. Roy has highlighted the dark and ugly reality of religious Gurus and their Ashrams, which have become a haven for a lot of unsocial and criminal activities. Roy has exposed the truth of religious ashrams and their gurus in this novel. They cheat and rob people in the name of religion. Women are the most common victims. Perverted and criminal babas physically exploit them. They become victims of rape and physical abuse. Nomita, the protagonist in *Sleeping on Jupiter*, becomes a victim of a guru in her childhood. She can never come out of that trauma.

Keywords: Religion, Spirituality, Society, Ashram, Guru, Baba, Women's exploitation

Religious hypocrisy has deep roots in Indian society. It is widely spread throughout the entire spectrum of society, from the top to the lower rungs. From ancient times, religion has been closely linked to spirituality. But there is a difference between being religious and being

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spiritual. Most people believe in spiritualism and practise many religious rituals. Most people are also found to be followers of one or several saints or rishi-munis. Rishi-munis in ancient times were faithful followers of religion and practitioners of spirituality. They were genuine well-wishers and benefactors of the society. But in recent times, spirituality has been replaced by brazen hypocrisy. Today's religious gurus are fraudsters. Their deeds are opposite to their words. They deceive simple people with their false claims and fake narratives. They cheat and rob people in the name of religion. Women are the most common victims. Perverted and criminal babas physically exploit them. They become victims of rape and physical abuse. Ironically, all this happens in the name of religion. In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, Anuradha Roy explores the kind of depravity and malaise prevalent in Indian society. *Sleeping on Jupiter* is Anuradha Roy's third novel. It was published in 2015. Nomita, the female protagonist in this novel, is the victim of a religious Guruji in her childhood. Anuradha Roy unravels several hypocrisies of Indian society in this novel.

When we think about these 'Gurus' and 'Babas', a question arises: why have these 'Gurus' and 'Babas' been given so much importance? In ancient India, there was a tradition of the Guru-Shishya relationship. In Hindu philosophy, an honest 'Guru' is like a saint. A 'guru' shows his disciple the path to salvation. He directs his followers towards the divine glory. In India, there is a belief that the Guru has a higher place than God. He is believed to be a link between God and man. India has a rich tradition of great saints, including Gautama Buddha, Mahavira, Adi Guru Shankaracharya, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Maharishi Aurobindo, and a host of others. They spread wisdom and knowledge, showing their followers the proper path. They were the true gurus, revered by all. But today's Gurus are not real. Most of them are fake and mercenaries. They exploit their followers.

In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, the Guru presented by Anuradha Roy is a mean and crooked fellow. He is a hypocrite and an impostor. He holds the position of a spiritual cult leader. Behind the curtain, and unknown to the outside world, he is a perverted and evil person. He is, in fact, a molester and rapist of small and innocent children. He destroys not only the childhood of children but also traumatises their entire lives by molesting them while they are children. Nomita is one such victim. She cannot erase from her mind the sad and brutal memories of the days she spent at the ashram during her childhood. It has left a deeply disturbing scar on her heart and mind. She cannot free herself from that horrifying experience. Her memories of her traumatic past always follow her.

Nomita remembers the first day and the first meeting with the so-called Guruji. He tried to console her with his pampering words. He was everything to her --- his father, mother, teacher, and God. She vividly recalls pictures of her days at the ashram. She remembers the school inside the ashram and the teacher who met with an accident. In school, she met Piku, with whom she developed a friendship. There was one thing that everyone at the ashram taught: they should never cross the line. So, they never tried to go outside. If anyone tried to cross the boundary, they were killed or locked in jail. When the teacher had an accident, she told the kids that it was natural and that it would happen to all of them one day. The truth

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was that there had been no accident; it had been deliberately done to the teacher. In a cryptic and frantic tone, she warned all her students, "That's what's waiting for you all." (43) It was an example of how women were treated in the ashram. It could be gauged by the situation and the words of the teacher how much she was tortured at the ashram. Ashrams were considered clean places where people left their daughters and sisters in good faith. They felt that they would be safe there. But what was the result of that trust? The reality was that the girls were not safe there; they were regularly exploited and abused mentally and physically. Nomita and the other girls were familiar with Guruji's true nature, his evil thoughts, and his ugly acts. All that happened to her was within the precincts of the Ashram, the so-called safe and pure place. She could not forget all that and move on in her life, even after getting adopted by a good woman who was her foster mother. She took care of her, but she could not heal or soothe her emotional health. Many girls who did not obey Guruji's obnoxious instructions and who refused to fulfil his dirty desires were tortured and punished by the cohorts of Guruji. Champa was one such girl who was older than Nomita. She had also been molested and raped by Guruji. It was with her that Nomita ran away from the Ashram.

By telling the nefarious story of Guruji and his Ashram in *Sleeping on Jupiter*, Anuradha Roy has tried to lay focus on the burgeoning cases of rape and violence happening in Ashrams and such supposedly secure and austere places. There is another side to the grim stories of crimes against women, especially involving sex and violence. A report by NCRB (National Crime Research Bureau) says that in an overwhelming number of cases, the children are raped and molested by persons who are their relatives or who are close to their families or who are well-known to them. Predators of this evil kind exploit the familiar surroundings of home and neighbourhood, which are otherwise supposed to be safe and secure for children. Ironically, in most cases, the victims go defensive due to social stigma and infamy against them; they withdraw and hide themselves as though their molestation or rape happened due to their fault. A similar situation develops in this novel. The culprit, Guruji, remains untouched. No one blames him because he is a much-revered person in society.

Nomita is orphaned and homeless after the murder of her father and after losing her brother and mother. She is given shelter in the Ashram by Guruji, who provides her with protection and assures her that she is safe and secure under his care, and that nobody can harm her. She is a child; she trusts him and begins to feel comfortable in the ashram. But she is blissfully unaware of the true face of the monster this Guruji is. Everyone in the society considers an Ashram to be the most reliable place for homeless children, where they find love and care. Nomita believes she has found a good place after losing her parents and home. She has no idea that this supposedly safe place will become hell for her. Nomita painfully recalls the day when Guruji rapes her first time: "I remember how Guruji came in, locked the door, sat down and patted his thighs how he stroked my legs as he spoke. He told me I was a nun in the service of God. I was the chosen one. He had always known there was something special about me, and so, from when I was seven, he had been training me for this day. He said again that he was God on earth and I would be purified by serving him..." (173). It is not easy for

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anyone to forget such brutality. From the outside, the Ashram looks like a good place, but it is hell for everyone residing inside. It is the worst place for anyone who defies Guruji. Anuradha Roy shatters the pious and sacred image of ashrams, where people go to seek peace and solace. The Ashram, as shown in *Sleeping on Jupiter*, is a haven for perverts and criminals who commit heinous crimes in the name of faith and spirituality. Guruji destroys the lives of Nomita and many girls like her. He is a rogue and hypocrite who, in the name of religion, plays havoc with the present and future of innocent girls and children.

The narrative of *Sleeping on Jupiter* also depicts the inequality towards women in the name of religion. It happens with Nomita on her first visit to the temple. Badal (her guide on the trip) denies her entry to the temple because of her Western clothes. He says that she cannot enter the temple in such a weird dress. He tells her, "Nothing shorter than ankle-length, no tight clothes, everyone knew that". (55) The priest also does not allow her to go inside the temple. He advises her to rent a saree to drape over herself. How ridiculous it is to see that in the same temple, the priests are half-naked as they wear only dhotis. The same priests restrain women from entering the temple because they happen to wear Western clothes. Although Nomita is covered from neck to knees, it is argued that her clothes are not modest enough to go before God. Nomita is amused and also annoyed by this nonsense. She says all this discrimination is because men make the rules, and all the regulations made by them disfavour women. She points towards the pujari, who is not appropriately covered from top to bottom. It is a case of double standards in society, which is due to the patriarchal nature of human culture. Equality for men and women is only theoretical; in practice, there is a significant disparity in rules and customs between men and women. There is discrimination regarding dress code for men and women in almost all walks of life. Women are always the target. In Tamil Nadu, a dress code is prescribed for those visiting temples, with separate codes applying to men and women. Men and women are treated equally only under that law. Equality is the soul of our constitution. As we know, many traditions and customs are the result of the patriarchal nature of society, which does not give equal place to women. Even in modern times, which are otherwise known for freedom and equal rights for women, it can be seen in all sections of society that women are not treated equally. Some years ago, a woman was beaten up for not wearing the proper dress in temples. She was beaten for wearing a salwar kurta, not a saree. Salwar-kurta is not considered an Indian outfit for that locality. In India, a female goddess is worshipped in temples, but at the same time, a girl child is viewed as a burden. Gender equality remains a distant dream in our country. The girl child is killed at the time of birth or even in the mother's womb. If she is not killed, society finds various ways to suppress her throughout her life.

Anuradha Roy's vision is clear. In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, she boldly represents the double-faced social standards when it comes to treating women equally and respectfully. On one had there is great talk of women being respected and worshipped as Devi or goddesses in our culture and society, on the other hand, we come across fake and fraudulent babas and gurus indulging in rape and molestation of women. We see religious gurus or swamis of various

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hues preaching big about respecting the dignity of women and treating them like Devi. They pontificate on the importance of women as mothers, sisters, daughters, and so on. But most of them are the exact opposite of their public image. Roy presents the real face of such swamis and religious gurus. Nomita becomes a victim of societal hypocrisy at every stage of her life.

Religion serves as a source of hope and moral guidance for human beings, inspiring them to do good for others and the creatures living on Earth. To establish a connection with the divine, Gurus and Babas serve as mediators. An ideal 'Guru' teaches his disciples to follow the path of goodness. But fake Gurus are dangerous. They cheat people to make money. In the name of religion, they exploit faithful folks not only financially but also physically and emotionally. In *Sleeping on Jupiter*, Anuradha Roy portrays the real character of a guru who is a curse on society. He not only ruins the lives of Nomita and other girls but also ruins the lives of other people in the name of religion. Such gurus also shake the religious faith and belief system of ordinary, innocent people who become sceptical about religion and spirituality in general.

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