

Beyond Grooming the Child: Trust, Institutional Culture, and Reputational Power in Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter*

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ABSTRACT: Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter* represents child sexual abuse through a central paradox: Guruji gains access to Nomi as the figure who promises protection. Existing criticism has examined religious authority, trauma, institutional power, and public legitimacy in the novel. This article asks how trust operates across the child, the ashram, and the wider social world, and why these levels should not all be called grooming. Through close reading informed by grooming scholarship, research on organisational culture, and sociological accounts of trust, it distinguishes direct sexual grooming from enabling institutional culture and reputational power. Guruji's grooming of Nomi develops through dependence, specialness, secrecy, and expanding bodily access. The ashram makes his authority durable through restricted movement, delegated discipline, and normalised obedience. Beyond the institution, political recognition, religious prestige, international reach, and media representation give Guruji a favourable public reputation. Roy makes the consequences clearest when Champa expects his "rich and famous" disciples to make disclosure unbelievable and repeats Guruji's own language of "not a word." The novel thus shows how grooming can be amplified by institutional and reputational conditions that shape disclosure without themselves becoming identical to grooming.

KEYWORDS: child sexual abuse; sexual grooming; institutional culture; reputational power; *Sleeping on Jupiter*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter*, the man who becomes the greatest threat to Nomi first appears as the person who will protect her. War has separated her from her family and destroyed the ordinary sources of security around her. Guruji responds to this vulnerability by offering far more than spiritual guidance. He tells Nomi that he is now her "father," "mother," "country," "teacher" and "God," and promises her safety, food, clothing, companionship and education (Roy, "The First Day"). The contradiction is central to Roy's representation of child sexual abuse: Guruji gains access to Nomi through an identity associated with safety and care. Yet that identity is not sustained by Nomi's perception alone. The novel also places Guruji within a wider social world that already recognises him as important, benevolent and authoritative.

The state's chief minister is Guruji's disciple; he has rich and powerful followers; devotees visit from around the world; and his authority extends through ashrams abroad (Roy, "The Third Day"). Newspapers contribute to this public image. Nomi remembers a photograph in which Guruji stands behind the girls with a "fatherly smile," although the image cannot show what she physically experiences while standing in front of him (Roy, "The Fourth Day"). Roy therefore presents the identity of protector at two levels at once: Guruji cultivates it within his relationship with Nomi, while social institutions and public representations make the same identity available to people who know little about that relationship. Existing criticism has recognised many elements of this wider authority; the unresolved question is how they work together.

Prior studies already discuss several elements of Guruji's authority. Jove Jerina S and Chithra emphasise the betrayal involved when an apparent protector becomes a perpetrator (3066). Sinha and Ali examine Guruji's manipulation of religious authority and show how the social reverence surrounding a powerful guru can make abuse difficult to challenge (304). Chattopadhyay places the ashram within networks of international charity, neoliberal power and exploitation (220–22). These studies establish that Guruji's abuse cannot be separated from his wider authority and public legitimacy. The present article therefore does not treat his protective identity, religious authority, political influence or international visibility as previously unnoticed

features of the novel. Its contribution lies in asking how these different sources of credibility work together and how they differ from the direct grooming of Nomi.

The distinction becomes important once grooming is understood as extending beyond the perpetrator-child relationship. Craven, Brown and Gilchrist show that grooming may involve the child, significant adults and the surrounding environment (297), while McAlinden demonstrates how trusted institutional positions can provide opportunity and legitimate access to children (164–65). Yet some conditions may make abuse easier without having been deliberately created as part of a grooming process. Organisational culture can normalise authority or discourage challenge, while public reputation can make a person appear trustworthy to people who know little about his private conduct. The problem is therefore one of connection without collapse: the same perpetrator may benefit from direct grooming, institutional conditions and public reputation even when those processes do not operate in the same way.

This article asks: How does *Sleeping on Jupiter* represent trust operating across the child, the institution and the wider social world in ways that facilitate child sexual abuse and make it more difficult to recognise, challenge and disclose, and what does the novel reveal about the distinction between sexual grooming, enabling institutional culture and reputational power? Roy represents abuse within a layered structure in which Guruji's direct grooming of Nomi is strengthened by an institution organised around his authority and by a public reputation that makes the identity of protector socially credible. These mechanisms increase his access, constrain resistance and shape what the children believe they can safely say.

II. GROOMING, INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE, AND TRUST

Sexual grooming is often associated with the relationship between a perpetrator and a child, but the process can extend beyond that relationship. Craven, Brown and Gilchrist distinguish grooming the child from grooming significant adults and the surrounding environment. Their broader definition includes conduct that helps a perpetrator gain access, secure compliance, create secrecy or reduce the likelihood of disclosure (297). This broader account is necessary for *Sleeping on Jupiter*, where Guruji's authority extends beyond his private relationship with Nomi. Yet its breadth creates a problem: once grooming includes children, surrounding adults and environments, how do we distinguish grooming from conditions that merely make grooming easier?

Institutional position provides one part of the answer. McAlinden shows that a trusted role can give an offender legitimate access to children and allow him to appear as a father figure, rescuer or unusually committed carer (164–65). Trust, authority and opportunity can therefore strengthen a grooming relationship. Such authority can be deliberately exploited within grooming, but institutions also contain rules and shared habits whose effects do not depend upon the perpetrator having consciously created them.

Organisational culture describes this second problem more precisely. Palmer and Feldman show how shared norms and assumptions influence what members regard as ordinary behaviour, how they interpret warning signs and how an organisation responds when abuse becomes possible or visible (24, 30–31). Such a culture can facilitate abuse without itself being a grooming strategy. Kaviani Johnson similarly distinguishes grooming behaviour from organisational environments that enable it (357–58). The distinction matters inside the ashram, where everyday routines can support Guruji's authority without every participant sharing his intentions. It becomes insufficient, however, once the analysis moves to people outside the institution who encounter Guruji mainly through his public standing.

For those relationships, reputation becomes more important than organisational culture. Sztompka argues that people often estimate trustworthiness from reputation, visible performance and appearance when direct knowledge is limited (71–72). Luhmann explains why such indirect judgments are unavoidable: social life requires action before complete information can be obtained (32). Hardin similarly cautions that what is called trust in a large institution may differ from the interpersonal trust placed in another person (151–52). This prevents Guruji's personal trustworthiness and the ashram's institutional standing from being treated as the same phenomenon.

These distinctions make it possible to connect the three levels of Roy's representation without giving them the same name. I use "ecology of trust" as an organising phrase for the connected interpersonal, institutional and reputational conditions through which trust is generated, sustained and acted upon in the novel. The phrase is not an established category in grooming scholarship. Within this ecology, Guruji directly grooms Nomi; the ashram develops an institutional culture that supports his authority; and his public reputation gives people reasons to regard him as trustworthy before they possess direct knowledge of his conduct. I use "reputational power" for the advantage created when that established reputation gives Guruji a favourable starting position in judgments of his character or in the reception of competing accounts. The term describes an

effect of reputation rather than a separate established theory of trust. These distinctions become clearest first in the relationship where the evidence for grooming is strongest.

III. GROOMING THE CHILD: VULNERABILITY, SPECIALNESS, AND SECRECY

The clearest case of grooming in the novel lies in Guruji's relationship with Nomi. By the time Nomi reaches the ashram, war has left her without her family, home and familiar sources of security. Guruji responds by placing himself in the positions she has lost: "I am your father and your mother now. I am your country. I am your teacher. I am your God." He then promises safety, food, clothing, friendship and schooling (Roy, "The First Day"). Family, belonging, education, material security and sacred authority are thus gathered around a single adult. He therefore does more than answer several of Nomi's needs. He concentrates those needs around himself, creating the conditions in which later special treatment can carry unusual weight.

That special treatment appears almost immediately. Guruji gives Nomi a sweet that the other girls have not received, tells her to say "not a word" about it and calls the encounter her "Initiation" (Roy, "The First Day"). Craven, Brown and Gilchrist describe gifts or extra privileges and secrecy among the means through which offenders may maintain compliance and discourage disclosure (295), while McAlinden shows how trusted institutional roles can make access appear legitimate (164–65). The request for secrecy gains its force from what precedes it: Guruji has just claimed the roles associated with the care and security Nomi has lost.

Later encounters turn this privileged secrecy into increasingly explicit sexual access. Guruji tells Nomi that she is "the chosen one," again demands secrecy and promises further private bodily contact (Roy, "The Second Day"). He later tells her that he has been "training" her since she was seven before forcing sexual contact upon her (Roy, "The Fourth Day"). The later abuse also alters the context in which earlier encounters acquire meaning. In the pomegranate episode, for example, Nomi experiences Guruji's touch through memories of maternal care and through her belief in his divinity. The scene matters as one element in an accumulating relationship in which care, sacred authority, secrecy and sexual access become connected; it need not be treated as independent proof of Guruji's intention at that earlier moment.

This cumulative pattern gives grooming its clearest textual basis in the novel: Guruji uses an unequal relationship to establish dependence, specialness, secrecy and progressively greater bodily access. Yet the private relationship alone cannot explain why Nomi remains so difficult to remove from his reach. That durability belongs partly to the institution around him.

IV. WHEN THE PERPETRATOR IS AT THE CENTRE OF THE INSTITUTION

The ashram makes Guruji's access durable by controlling conditions that his private relationship with Nomi cannot control by itself. The ashram remains busy with people who are free to leave. Teachers return home, students depart and visitors withdraw to other parts of the grounds, while the boat girls remain. Nomi reduces the change to a stark sentence: "We were by ourselves then" (Roy, "The Second Day"). Roy makes mobility itself the distinction. The institution can appear open because people circulate through it even though the girls have little control over whether they can leave.

The same inequality appears in discipline. After Champa tries to escape, Bhola destroys her possessions and Savita-di tells her that she may leave only when Guruji permits it. Guruji himself watches silently from "the shadows." The girls then interpret Champa's punishment as deserved and conclude that he is just (Roy, "The Second Day"). Guruji does not need to issue every command himself. Adults around him already know how to enforce his authority, while the children have learned to treat obedience as the proper response. Authority has become reproducible: Guruji can remain silent while others enforce his rules and the children themselves learn the meanings through which those rules appear legitimate.

That reproduction of authority is better described through organisational culture than through grooming alone. Palmer and Feldman show that organisational norms shape what members regard as normal and how they interpret behaviour (24, 30–31). Kaviani Johnson likewise distinguishes grooming behaviour from organisational conditions that enable it (357–58). Roy represents restricted movement, delegated discipline and normalised obedience, but she does not establish that every rule or belief was deliberately created to facilitate sexual abuse. "Enabling institutional culture" therefore identifies what the ashram adds to Guruji's grooming: it stabilises his authority without requiring every rule, belief or participant to be part of a deliberate grooming plan.

Guruji's influence, however, extends beyond people governed by these routines. Politicians, wealthy devotees, international followers and journalists do not need to experience the girls' restricted life in order to encounter him as an important and benevolent figure. Outside the ashram, his standing depends less on its internal disciplinary order than on the reputation that travels beyond it.

V. MAKING A PUBLIC PROTECTOR: REPUTATION AND THE EXPANSION OF TRUST

Outside the girls' residential world, Guruji is surrounded by visible signs of status. The state's chief minister is his disciple; other "rich and powerful" people follow him; hundreds of devotees arrive from around the world; photographs show ashrams in Vienna and Geneva; and Guruji owns an aeroplane. During the chief minister's visit, devotees collect dust from the ground he has walked on, while Guruji sits on a velvet-covered throne beneath changing lights as followers prostrate themselves before him (Roy, "The Third Day"). Political recognition, wealth, international reach and religious devotion therefore appear together. These signs tell outsiders very little about Guruji's private conduct, but they tell them a great deal about how other people already regard him.

Sztompka identifies reputation, visible performance and appearance as common grounds for estimating trustworthiness when direct knowledge is unavailable (71–72). Roy gives Guruji all three. Political and international associations strengthen his reputation. The ashram's provision of shelter and education presents visible evidence of benevolence. Ceremonial display and devotional behaviour make his authority publicly visible. None of these signs reveals how he treats Nomi in private. They matter because people often have to judge character without such knowledge. Roy's public Guruji is therefore surrounded by reasons for a favourable inference even though those reasons do not disclose the life of the girls under his control.

Those reasons gain force because they do not come from Guruji alone. Politicians treat him as a spiritual authority; wealthy followers associate themselves with him; international institutions bear his name; devotees publicly revere him; and journalists treat the ashram as worthy of attention. These associations do not have to persuade everyone. Their cumulative effect is enough to matter. A person who knows little about Guruji may still see that other socially respected people already recognise his standing. Guruji appears trustworthy partly because people who already possess social credibility treat him as worthy of trust. A favourable judgment can therefore seem socially corroborated before the observer has independently investigated the person being judged.

Such reliance on indirect information is part of the ordinary problem of acting without complete knowledge. Luhmann argues that social life requires people to act before they can personally verify everything relevant to a judgment (32). Roy does not tell us what every visitor, official or devotee privately thinks about Guruji. She does show a social environment filled with favourable information about him and comparatively little public access to the girls' private lives. The danger lies in what happens when this ordinary reliance on reputation surrounds a perpetrator whose public identity differs radically from the child's private knowledge of him.

That gap gives Guruji what can be called "reputational power": the advantage created when an established reputation makes a favourable judgment seem reasonable before a competing account has been considered. Roy gives no basis for assuming a uniform response from every outsider. Reputational power means an advantage in how Guruji may initially be judged, not certainty that others will believe him.

One source of that favourable standing is sacred authority, but Roy does not present sacred authority in isolation. Copeman and Ikegame emphasise the diversity of guru figures and the varied ways spiritual authority can intersect with political and transnational life (1–5). Chattopadhyay has already shown how Roy places the ashram within international charity and wider structures of power (220–22). For the present argument, these connections matter because they add further public support to Guruji's identity as an important spiritual leader and provider of care. Religious, charitable, political and transnational signs converge around one public identity without needing to be reduced to one cultural explanation.

The newspaper photograph turns these separate cues into an immediately legible public image. Guruji stands behind the girls with what Nomi calls his "fatherly smile." Adult Nomi remembers that the photograph cannot reveal the bodily reality she experienced while standing in front of him (Roy, "The Fourth Day"). The contrast between the photograph and Nomi's experience has already been recognised in criticism. Its additional significance here lies in the reputation surrounding the image. The photograph enters a public environment in

which Guruji is already associated with political prestige, religious authority, charitable provision and international reach. It reinforces an existing identity rather than creating one from nothing.

Reputation matters most when an alternative account appears. Its practical force cannot be measured simply by how impressive Guruji looks in public; it becomes visible when the children themselves begin to calculate what will happen if they contradict that public identity.

VI. WHEN REPUTATION SHAPES ESCAPE AND DISCLOSURE

Roy gives Guruji's powerful social network two opposite meanings. During the chief minister's visit, Nomi remembers being told that Guruji's "rich and powerful disciples" are the reason even the displaced boat girls are safe inside the ashram (Roy, "The Third Day"). After Nomi and Champa escape, Champa invokes almost the same fact as a reason for fear: "Everyone rich and famous is his disciple," she says, and nobody will believe anything bad about him (Roy, "The Fifth Day"). The same network that first appears to guarantee protection later appears to protect Guruji's credibility.

Champa responds to that danger by changing the story before anyone hears it. She instructs Nomi to say that they are cousins who fled an abusive uncle, using the scars and burns on their bodies to make the invented story plausible (Roy, "The Fifth Day"). The girls have not yet accused Guruji and been disbelieved. Champa changes the account because she expects him to be believed over them. The credibility contest therefore begins before there are two competing testimonies. Guruji's reputation has already altered the account that can enter the contest at all.

Roy marks this movement from imposed secrecy to defensive silence through a repeated phrase. At the beginning of his relationship with Nomi, Guruji tells her there must be "not a word" about the special treatment he has given her (Roy, "The First Day"). After later sexual contact, he repeats the command: "Not a word about this" (Roy, "The Second Day"). After escape, however, the words belong to Champa: "Not a word about the ashram" (Roy, "The Fifth Day"). The phrase has changed speakers and functions. Guruji first uses secrecy to protect his private access to Nomi; Champa later adopts silence because she expects his public standing to make disclosure dangerous. The social consequence of grooming has therefore outlived the private encounter: Guruji no longer has to issue the final command to silence because Champa anticipates what speaking against him will cost.

Grooming research recognises a related problem once offenders acquire strong insider credibility. Craven, Brown and Gilchrist note that offenders who acquire trusted standing may eventually appear more believable than children who disclose abuse (293). Roy shifts the credibility problem to an earlier moment: Guruji's reputation is already shaping what the girls believe they can disclose before anyone has tested their account.

The girls nevertheless make several attempts to move beyond this barrier. Champa had earlier reached the police but was returned because she was treated as a "ward of the ashram," showing how recognised institutional status can work against escape without requiring personal trust in Guruji (Roy, "The Fourth Day"). Nomi later refuses complete silence: "I did not talk about the ashram to them, but I wrote," and eventually sends her account to the same newspaper that had once published Guruji's photograph (Roy, "The Fifth Day"). Roy leaves the newspaper's response unknown.

By the time Champa considers telling the truth, Guruji's public identity has already entered her calculation. Reputation therefore affects disclosure before any outsider has decided whom to believe.

VII. CONCLUSION

Sleeping on Jupiter shows how Guruji's private cultivation of Nomi's trust gains strength from conditions beyond their relationship. Inside the ashram, control over movement and punishment allows Guruji's commands to be carried out by others and absorbed into everyday expectations. Beyond it, political recognition, religious prestige and international visibility give outsiders favourable reasons to regard him as trustworthy.

These mechanisms reinforce one another without operating identically. Grooming describes the developing relationship through which Guruji establishes specialness, secrecy and sexual access. Enabling institutional culture describes the rules and shared assumptions that sustain his authority without requiring every institutional practice to have been designed for abuse. Reputational power describes the advantage created when established public standing gives others a favourable starting view of his character.

Roy makes their convergence clearest through two reversals. The “rich and powerful” disciples who first signify the girls’ safety (Roy, “The Third Day”) later become the “rich and famous” disciples who make Champa afraid to speak (Roy, “The Fifth Day”). Guruji’s demand for “not a word” (Roy, “The First Day”) likewise returns in Champa’s warning outside the ashram (Roy, “The Fifth Day”). His public credibility has entered the child’s calculation before any outsider has judged her account. Guruji is difficult to recognise as dangerous not despite his identity as protector, but partly because that identity has become socially credible.

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