



Marital Disharmony and Gender Discrimination in the novel *Bombay Time*, by ThrityUmrigar.

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Abstract:

Since times immemorial, woman has been the victim of male domination and oppression and is treated like a beast and an object for pleasure. Man looked at woman as weaker sex and his sole property. Women are not born to either fortune or position and may well have been living, adjusted to the terms and conditions dictated by the men-folk within the family and in the society at large. It is a fact that the woman is a victim everywhere of the prevalent social norms. She gets trapped within the set moral codes and social norms of the society and consequently leads an unhappy life. As a matter of fact, a woman is born to be as free as man but she is victimized, marginalized and subdued by the male community everywhere in patriarchal culture. She has been the subordinate sex, 'the second sex' and has to conform to the male standards. The term 'man' usually reveals the entire human race, while the term 'woman' is silent and not mentioned.

Keywords:

Marital Disharmony, Victimized, subjugation, marginalized, patriarchal, society, Discrimination, subdued, social norms, community.

Introduction:

Writing fiction is not a strange thing to Thrity Umrigar, an Indo American writer, critic, journalist and novelist. Born in the year 1961 she adopted this quality of writing in her early teens in India, she did not begin to devote herself seriously to the craft until she finished her doctorate in journalism. After completion of her dissertation, she won a Nieman Fellowship to study for a year at Harvard University. This gave Umrigar an opportunity to resume her work.

A Postmodern writer today is very easy to understand but proves difficult to find significance and value in their writings. Women writers made writing literature simple with their non-conventional writing. Women writers

write in free style using commonman's language to suit the needs of postmodern readers and they try to make literature more meaningful and less confusing. Women writers live in a world where many cultures are overlapped and so they question the orthodox living style of modernity and they are far advanced to mock at the conventional way of life of modernism.

Thrity Umrigar novels are psychological in nature which discusses the emotional strains and traumas undergone by the characters. Umrigar's fiction conveys her vision of life: change is always possible, hope never dies, and happiness can be found. *Bombay Time* her debut novel has won much applause, she remarked in her home page interview "the novel really took off," during a visit to Bombay during the Christmas holiday.

Marriage no longer a bliss:

Thrity Umrigar's woman protagonist Coomi from her debut novel *Bombay Time* (2001) is being discriminated within her own family, she undergoes through different hardships in her marital life. Marital disharmony is the root cause of Coomies unheard agony and she being treated impartially are the central themes of the novel, "Bombay Time".

Through Coomi's character the consummate craftsmanship of Thrity Umrigar is revealed. Women, like Coomi in general are the susceptible victims of certain ideological constraints perpetuated by the institutions of family and religion from times immemorial. The wretched condition of the women in patriarchy which has its roots spread deeply into gender discrimination and marital status becomes the other major issue in the novel *Bombay Time*.

The protagonists Coomi in her early days of her marriage that bloomed with care, mutual trust and conjugal bliss, withered as days passed by. She found her marriage strained into a loveless relationship. Where her relationship with her husband became mandatory, Coomi started to live for the sake of living and it has become a habit for them. She slowly realized the position given to a woman by the society. Even her life at her parental home and her in-law's home made no conspicuous change in her.

Coomi, who was previously imprisoned within the walls of her family and shackled by traditions, now, looks upon herself from a different angle. She decides to make her own choice in her future prospects. Like any other Indian traditional woman, Coomi has been tuned as a woman, as a preserver of her family. She is bound by the traditional pulls; women right from their childhood were taught that their main duty is to obey their men whom they come across in roles like father, brother, husband and so on.

The writer sincerely broods over the fate and future of modern woman particularly that engulfed her in a male-chauvinistic society and her annihilation at the altar of marriage. As Simone de Beauvoir remarks in her work *The Second Sex* (1949) "*Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society*" (445). Through the ages the Indian family and society have been throwing new strains and challenges. As a result the life of

married women has undergone gradual changes; torn between traditional and western models, married women have to face new challenges.

Women managed to survive in the centuries old patriarchal system. They knew not an option and ignorant of liberty they were not able to emancipate themselves. A Scholar Neena Arora in her *Nayanatara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison: Feminism* (1991) observes:

Woman's oppression is traced not to individual male malevolence but to the social and familial structures based on patriarchy. The problem as identified was that a woman's identity was expected to merge with, and grow from her role as a wife and mother (Neena Arora 16).

Sons are preferred more than daughters - Discrimination within the family:

Gender discrimination, grown out of social norms and tradition, goes hand in glove with patriarchy. Women have not been able to go away from its shackles and remained as captives by men. Under the patriarchy canopy, mothers prefer sons to daughters. The birth of a son is considered a blessing whereas a daughter a burden. So mothers under the patriarchal ruling prefer sons rather than daughters.

As rightly remarked by Andrienne Rich *Of Woman Born*, (1986) "Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence ... certainly it has created images of the archetypal mother, which reinforce the conservatism of motherhood and convert it to an energy for the renewal of male power" (273).

The mother who is a victim of patriarchy raises her daughter, inculcating in her the principles and values of patriarchy. Mother's passes on to her progeny unquestioned submission to male dominance. Sue Monk Kidd holds the same view in *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (1996):

Women themselves condition their daughters to serve the system of male primacy. If a daughter challenges it, the mother will generally defend the system rather than her daughter. These mothers, victims themselves, have unwittingly become wounded victims. Women need to attack culture's oppression of women, for there truly is a godlike socializing power that induces women to "buy in" or collude, but we also need to confront our own part in accepting male dominance and take responsibility where appropriate. (<http://www.notable-quotes.com>).

Woman is discriminated on various grounds. She is considered as a secondary object, undeserved made to lead her life that is set by patriarchy. As Amar Nath Prasad in his book *Women's writing in India: New Perspectives* (2002) opines

...apart from many other things, how women have to lead a life of suffocation and undeserved sufferings both physically and mentally in the male - dominated patriarchal frame work; ... how a girl child craves

for parental affection but in the end, gets nothing but frustration, isolation and unhomely treatment and, above all, how the neglected child solely develops the horrible sense of trauma and other associated psychosomatic diseases (WWINP 37).

Shift from stereo typed conservative to strong individual:

Coomi as a young woman is expected to fulfil all the expectations that are placed upon her. Society expects from her to be meek and malleable without any trace of assertiveness and individuality. Coomi understood ultimately that the world she is living in is a man's world. In the *TSS*, by Simon de Beauvoir opines:

Women herself recognizes that the world is masculine on the whole: those who fashioned it, ruled it, and still dominate it today, are men ... Shut up in her flesh, her home, she sees herself as passive before these gods with human faces who set goals and establish values ... She has no grasp, even in thought, on the reality around her ... (de Beauvoir 609).

Coomi as a daughter, as a graduate, is under patriarchal domination; the discrimination she underwent made her tough; in due course of time she realised she needed to change. She opted to be an individual, a woman who is confident in taking her own decisions pertaining to her life. This shift in Coomi paved the way for her to have her own choice regarding her marriage. "... she aspired to something even more fantastic marriage to a man with prospects and with good manners and culture that her family so badly lacked. Plainly said, Coomi was determined to marry above herself" (87).

One can understand Coomi's hesitance in revealing herself. She is to herself because when she revealed herself she was mocked and embarrassed. "Coomi's dreams remained unsaid, even to her closest friend" (86). A woman's assertiveness, her openness is not welcomed that freely when compared with men. Coomi had many dreams "she had wanted to be a hero. As a small child, she believed that being hero was a profession, so that one could choose to be a hero in the same way one could choose to be a doctor or a Tonga driver or a banker"(86). Coomi used to spend hours in the shower fantasizing her own day dreams not paying attention to the screams and constant banging on the bathroom door. She "barely heard her, dreaming as she was of rescuing infants from burning buildings, of stopping old people from getting evicted, of leading the Indian army into glorious battle" (86). She is always at a helping hand Coomi finds her place in rescuing team; her dreams are entirely to herself. She is a rescuer.

Coomi dreams are wild once she was caught by her family as she was so curious to see what's inside the brain of her doll, her whole family and her brothers were startled and embarrassed by the way she cut open the head of the doll to see what's inside the stuffing.

She wanted to discover everything - from the last tribes in dark continents to what lay inside people's heads. Coomi had smashed their wooden scalps and was pulling out the stuffing with a pair of scissors. ... She answered. I am just wanting to see what their brains look like (86).

Conclusion:

Thus Coomi became bold and intelligent; her sufferings have no end, apart from her in law's family, in her own home she is discriminated by her mother and brothers. "Surrounded by her teasing, boisterous brothers, Coomi grew up knowing that dreams had to be zealously guarded and kept secret"(86). Many women have taken keen interest in reading women's writings because from which other's come to know a wide range of women's problems her experiences and many more. One finds many similarities between Coomi and other protagonist by various novelists as women writers identified the plight of women in a wide range of characters and a variety of existences.

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