



Marriage As A Site Of Trauma In Thrity Umrigar's *Bombay Time*

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Abstract: Marriage is often viewed as a societal institution built on companionship and love. However, in the novel, *Bombay Time* by Thrity Umrigar, marriage becomes a site of trauma, patriarchal control and emotional neglect. Through the protagonist Coomi, the novel examines the psychological struggles of women who are imprisoned in unloving relationships, deprived of emotional fulfillment, and burdened by societal expectations. Coomi's marriage to Rusi begins with affection and hope, but soon worsens as she experiences emotional isolation, verbal and psychological abuse, and the intrusive presence of her mother-in-law, Khorshed Bilimoria. Rusi's emotional distance and unjustified blame further deepen Coomi's agony, reinforcing the idea that women in traditional marriages are supposed to put up with, adapt to, and remain silent. Through the feminist and psychoanalytic perspectives, this paper explores how *Bombay Time* critiques the patriarchal structures that dictate women's roles within marriage, ultimately questioning whether marriage is a source of fulfillment or only a means of oppressing women.

Index Terms – Marriage, Thrity Umrigar, Bombay Time, Trauma.

Introduction

Marriage is often portrayed as a holy bond between two people, signifying love, security and companionship. However, for many women, marriage becomes a site of trauma, emotional distance, and suppression rather than fulfillment. *Bombay Time* by Thrity Umrigar critically explores this reality through the character of Coomi, whose marital life mirrors the struggles of innumerable women trapped in patriarchal expectations. The novel reveals how gender roles, emotional detachment, and societal conditioning make marriage into a psychological burden for women, leaving them alone, unheard, and emotionally scarred.

The False Promise of Marriage: Love vs. Reality

Coomi enters marriage with lots of hope and expectation, expecting that her bond with Rusi will bring her with love and security. At the initial stage of marriage, their relationship is filled with admiration and affection, making her as though she had made the right decision. However, her dreams of her perfect marriage soon falls apart, and she finds herself stuck in a relationship where she is ignored, disregarded, and emotionally abandoned.

Rusi, once a loving spouse, constantly withdraws from the marriage, favoring his business, personal ambition, and most importantly his mother, Khorshed Bilimoria. Coomi, who is longing for intimacy and emotional connection, understands that she is merely not Rusi's equal life partner rather an ornament. The stark contrast between her expectations and reality is at the heart of her trauma. As she reflects on her unhappy marriage, she painfully acknowledges:

"For weeks after Khorshed's funeral, Coomi sifted through the sands of time to rediscover the fierce young man she had loved and married, but the tide had washed him away." (BT 111)

This powerful metaphor illustrates how time, neglect, and unmet expectations erode love in marriage, reducing it to a social obligation rather than a true partnership.

Emotional Neglect and Psychological Isolation

The emotional neglect is one of the greatest sources of Coomi's suffering in her marital life. Though she lives under the same roof of Rusi, she feels invisible and unheard as if her existence is inconsequential. Instead of being a good husband, Rusi refuses to accept his faults and failures onto Coomi; he shifts the blame, refusing to take responsibility for his own shortcomings. In a moment of frustration, he cruelly tells her:

"You ruined me. I could have been as successful as the Tatas or Birlas by now, but how could I concentrate, with half my mind always worried about you and Mamma fighting at home?" (BT 18)

This statement proves a common pattern in patriarchal marriages: men externalize their failures, making women scapegoats for their professional and struggles. Rusi's emotional detachment and tendency to blame Coomi for his frustrations leave her feeling, powerless, guilty, and emotionally drained.

The Role of the Mother-in-Law in Reinforcing Patriarchy

In many traditional households, marriage is not a union between two people, but an extension of family power systems. Khorshed Bilimoria, Coomi's mother-in-law becomes a silent enforcer of patriarchy, gently ensuring that Coomi never feels comfortable in her own marital life. Khorshed remains critical and cold by constantly monitoring Coomi's action and expecting for her to fail. Even after the death, the influence of Khorshed still continuous to dominate Rusi's behavior and Coomi's life. With Khorshed unseen influence over her marital life, Coomi bitterly remarks:

"Despite her death, Khorshed had once again managed to steal Rusi away from her... Even in death, Khorshed had triumphed." (BT 107)

This passage highlights how patriarchal control is deeply engrained in family structures and undergoes beyond physical presence to affect relationships even after the individual is gone. Rusi's inability to put his wife before his mother only deepens Coomi's emotional suffering, making her feel alienated in her own home.

Marriage as a Space of Verbal and Psychological Abuse

As Coomi's frustration increases, she starts using words as weapons, snapping out at Rusi when she feels powerless. However, while Coomi's verbal outbursts are seen as aggressive and irrational, Rusi's passive detachment and silent neglect are normalized. This gendered double standard is emphasized in Umrigar's narration:

"Coomi always claimed that the words she said in anger were pieces of paper that flew away once they left her mouth. But to Rusi, they were poison darts, powerful enough to destroy a man." (BT 17)

This passage demonstrates how women's expressions of frustration are ignored, while men's passive cruelty goes unquestioned. Coomi, like many women in traditional relationships, must internalize her misery, knowing that even speaking out will only make her feel alone.

The Burden of Women: Resilience amidst Trauma

By the end of the novel, Coomi accepts the reality of her unhappy marriage, knowing that she cannot change her husband, Rusi. Unlike women in more extreme feminist narratives, she does not escape or rebel instead, she suffers. This reflects real truth that the painful reality for many women, who are conditioned to believe that marriage, is about survival, not happiness. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, famously wrote: "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society."

Coomi's story results how this "destiny" is often one of sacrifice, not fulfillment. Women are taught to adjust, endure, and suffer in silence, while men are not held accountable for their emotional distance.

Conclusion

Through the life of protagonist, Coomi, *Bombay Time* by Thrity Umrigar reveals the harsh realities of marriage in a patriarchal society. What begins as a hopeful union based on love soon deteriorates into a site of trauma, where Coomi experiences emotional neglect, isolation, and unfulfilled desires? Rusi's detachment, his mother's interference, and Coomi's internalized suffering all contribute to a marriage that feels more like a cage than a partnership. The novel challenges the societal glorification of marriage, urging readers to recognize the psychological cost of forcing women into subservient roles. It raises a crucial question: Should marriage be about silent endurance, or should women demand more respect, more love, and more agencies over their own lives? Coomi's story is not just fiction, it is a reflection of countless real-life experiences, making *Bombay Time* a powerful critique of marriage as an institution that, when controlled by patriarchy, becomes a site of trauma rather than love.

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