



# Subjugation of women in the Indian Patriarchial Society in Thrity Umrigar's *Bombay Time*.

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## Abstract

Thirty Umrigar is a famous diasporic writer. Though she relocated to America, her novels explore the voice of Indian women against the Indian patriarchal society which is constructed by cultural and religious system. The novel *Bombay Time* mainly focuses on the theme of acclimation from the subjugation of Indian male dominated society. In Indian society, the people follow different cultures and religious system, they believe that men are superior to female; this is because of various cultures and religious values that play a dominant role in woman life. The novel portrays the influence of society and cultures tend to change the role of women. Through the novel, the author brings out how the protagonist Coomi suffers as a girl child, as a sister, as a graduate and as a wife. With her own experience, she realizes the problems of women and how she adopts herself to the circumstance.

**Keywords:** Subjugation, Discrimination, Diaspora, Acclimation, Culture.

## Introduction

Thirty Umrigar was born in Mumbai, India and immigrated to United States of America when she was 21. She is a famous Indian-American journalist and critic. Her writing mainly focuses on agony of Indian women who are suppressed by patriarchal society. Her wonderful piece of writings include, *The Bombay Tim* (2001), *The Space Between Us* (2006), *If Today Be Sweet* (2007), *The Secrets Between Us* (2018), *Honor* (2022). Contemporary Indian fiction mostly deals with women sufferings, men and women relationship and their family problems created by Indian society. Most of the Indian Writing in English is penned by diasporic writers such as Thrity Umrigar, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Anjana Appachana have become prominent writers who depict feminist picture of Indian society. In Indian English Fiction, women writers are examining the problems faced by

women in their family life, complex relationship between man and woman and sometimes acted as a victim of Indian society. Thirty Umrigar wants to showcase the real social condition of women in Indian Patriarchal society. India is a democratic country, People in India are different, speaking different languages, believing different religions and following different custom. In India, there is a common belief that a woman is an exquisite creature to be kept under the shadows of men for everything for her existence. In such case, the struggle of women is visible in a patriarchal society. The main purpose of this research is to study the struggle faced by the women and how they struggle to lead a meaningful life and to fulfill their aspirations. Thirty Umrigar believed that when women discover their dreams and the purpose of life, they would break the social condition of Patriarchal society.

Since from the Indian Civilization, India has principally become a patriarchal society where man performing supreme role in every stages of life, believing that woman as an exquisite creature to be ever dependent on him for everything for her existence. In family, the authority is bestowed to male members by patriarchal system so that women are pushed to a corner of the house. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright in her work *Feminism and Post-feminism* edited by Sarah Gamble (1998) remarked patriarchy as

The term ‘patriarchal’ refers to power relations in which women’s interests are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take on many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the labour and the social organisation of procreation to the internalised norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on social meaning given to biological sexual difference. (Stephanie 3)

Thirty Umrigar is a creative writer, whose debut novel is *Bombay Time* that narrates the story of a woman protagonist Coomi. She is a middle-class woman, lives in the crowded city of Bombay. When she was young, she had been discriminated by her own family members and she underwent difficulties in her marital life too. Through the character Coomi, author portrays the real social and economic condition of a woman under Indian Patriarchal society.

Coomi as a girl child, brought up among her brothers. Her mother failed to give equal importance to her children; she showed partiality between her sons and daughter. Though she was the eldest of all, she was not given much attention and importance. She had been discriminated by her own mother. As a married woman she remembered the partiality shown by her own mother. “She noticed how her mother unconsciously served the largest portions to her brothers, gave them the pieces of meat with the fewest bones” (BT 87)

In Indian society, it is believed that only male child would fulfill the dreams of their parents where as women could not do so. Besides, women are treated like slaves. When they are young, they must learn to do household works, after their marriage, they must fulfill the needs of their husband. In India, many women are blindly following the values of patriarchy. Her mother being one of the victims prefers sons to daughter. The birth of a son is believed to be blessing where as birth of women is a burden. Her mother’s disfavor over her sons and daughters shows inequality for women in the family.

In India, women are not allowed to play when they attain puberty. Coomi as a young girl plays game of thief and the police. Everyday her brother would be a police and she would be a thief, for a change when Coomi asked for the role of a police, her brother laughed at her and claims that her ideas are stupid. Though the character Sorab, the author picturizes the male domination even in the family. Following are the conversation between Coomi and her brother Sobrab:

“Today, she would be the policeman and Sorab would be the thief, Coomi declared. Her brother said,

We cannot do that,”

Why not? Why do I always have to be the poor thief?

I’m older than you, even.

Because you are a “girl”.

Everybody knows a girl can’t be a policeman. (BT 87)

Sorab cannot accept his sister being a girl as police. He strongly believed that women cannot have a power over a man and they should be low in their position. Sorab said with a higher tone that “It is my job to catch you.”(BT 87)

From the conversation, It is clear that women cannot have an authority over patriarchy. They are kept under a canon that women should not rises their voices and cannot have a dream for their future. According to Gerda Lerner, in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) remarked as

“it is this feature of male hegemony which has been most damaging to women and has ensured their subordinate status for millennia” (Gerda Lerner 223)

When Coomi entered into college life, she believed that education would enrich her knowledge but later she realized that there were some politics behind the idea of education. Women are not given proper education as men. Though education system are common for both men and women there a unfair belief that only men should go for a work and earn money for their family whereas women should be dependant. Coomi has been discriminated by her college professors as well. “She observed how all her professors assumed that she was in college to find a suitable husband.” (BT 87)

Though she secured good marks in all her subjects, she undergoes mockery by her Professors. Even her favorite professor Krishnamurthi is not ready to encourage her. According to him, education for women is merely waste of time and women’s life should fit only in kitchen.

“Such a shame you will settle down any day now with your own family. Such a waste for a woman to be as smart as you are,”(BT 87)

Coomi understands that the life which she is leading is in the world of men and 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)

In an Indian society, marriage plays a significant role in human life. Marriage is a custom that is followed by cultural norms and traditional values. Thrity Umrigar's woman protagonist Coomi is one of the victims of Patriarchal society who undergoes through different hardships in her marital life. At the time of marriage, Coomi has been given great care and love. When the time passes, she finds herself locked in a house that seems like a cage and her relationship with her husband strained with a loveless relationship. Coomi slowly recognized the role of women in marital life that they must obey the words of their husband and do the household works without questioning. Coomi also realized that she was imprisoned between the walls of the cultural tradition. Duty of the women is to obey their men when they come across in the roles like father, brother, husband and so on. As Simone de Beauvoir remarks in her work *The Second Sex* (1949)

“Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society” (De Beauvoir 445).

According to Coomi, Marriage is a commitment that brings two people closer with a promise to share everything and there would be no secret between husband and wife. Coomi as a wife believed that marriage life would bring her great joy and happiness but her ideas are vanished from day to day. As a daughter, sister and graduate, she faced a lot of social discrimination; this is because of male dominated society and cultural values that are followed in India. She wishes to escape from this society, so she believes that her marriage would bring her a great change in her lifestyle. She thinks that by choosing a husband on her own would help her desire come true. So, she fell in love with Rusi who is handsome and white- skinned man. Their relationship seems very good at beginning, as the day passes; she learns the real condition of Indian family system. Love marriages are welcomed by Parish community, when women get married, they have to shift their place of living to their husband's family. Coomi also shifts her place of living to her husband's house. Her mother-in-law, Khorshed Bilimoria does not like the appearance of Coomi as her skin is dark whereas Rusi looks fair and shining. Thus she has been discriminated by her mother-in-law who is also a woman. “Blamed me for not being as light- 99 skinned as you Bilimorias. Thought I wasn't good enough for her golden boy, at the first meeting only” (BT 95)

Coomi is a strong and educated woman who fights for her identity in a Indian Patriarchal society. Thrity Umrigar identified the plight of women and depicts through the character of Coomi. Her mother-in-law treats her son with kindness who is opposite in gender. Though she does not consider Coomi as her daughter but she expects her daughter-in-law to treat herself as a mother.

As a wife, Coomi finds many difficulties with her husband, there would be fight and also reunion. She would only remember her initial years of marriage. When they were in love, her friends would pass comments that they were the best couple in their gang. Now, Coomi wonders:

Those were the good years. In the early years of their marriage, she and Rusi had fought, but somehow there was enough elasticity in their marriage that it could snap back together. Sexual attraction, the optimism of youth, their hopes and ambitions, the desire for companion-ship all covered up the basic differences between them. Like boxers, they withdrew from each other as far as they could to nurse their wounds, but they always made their way back into the ring. Yes, those were the good old days. (BT 83)

Coomi as a family woman has to tolerate this social discrimination happens with her own family. Her expectations are destroyed by the canons of patriarchy. Though there are only tragic conditions in the life of Coomi still loves her husband Rusi. At last, Coomi accepts the social condition of patriarchal society. She understands the little value of a woman and developed to accept the conflict between tradition and modernity. The only hope of her life is her daughter Binny who acts as glue between Coomi and Rusi. Thirty Umrigar brings out the women's sufferings through the character Coomi and depicts the problems faced by the women under the patriarchal society.

### Conclusion

In the novel, *Bombay Time*, Thirty Umrigar provides comprehensive and analytical study of the events happening around the life of women. Thirty Umrigar is an eminent writer who writes about the sufferings of Indian woman. She wishes that her reader should recognize themselves through the characters and realize the universality of the story. *Bombay time* portrays the life of Coomi who went to lots hardships under patriarchal society. Thirty Umrigar claims because of patriarchy, women in India face lots of social discrimination throughout every phase of life. By bringing these issues to the forefront, Thirty Umrigar wants their reader to understand power of patriarchal society and how it is strongly influencing the life of women. Thirty Umrigar 's writing provides a strong and powerful thought-provoking exploration of the experiences of women in India.

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