CHAPTER TWO

SUBMISSIVE AND SUBSERVIENT WOMEN

The happiest women, like the happiest nations, have no history

- George Eliot.

Women are born to be submissive and subservient creatures. When they are kids, they look after their younger brothers and sisters. When they are grown-ups, they serve their parents. When they get married, they are at the service of their husbands and households. They are unpaid and uncared–for servants. They are beaten but they never cry. They are kicked but they never shout. They are tortured but they silently endure. They never protest against their oppressors and they never complain about their afflictions. They come to heel and even at their advanced years, they remain unchanged and unattended.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel *Roots and Shadows*, Mini’s full name was Padmini. She finished her schooling and then she was sent to college. Her parents felt that if their daughter was a graduate, it would be easy for them to find a good husband for her. When Mini was young, her family members instilled the idea that girls were meant for marriage into her. Contrary to expectations, Mini could not achieve the target. She attained marriageable age.

‘I’m (Mini) no good at studies. I never was. I went to school because I had to. And then to college because Akka said I must go. Boys prefer graduates these days, she said. So I went. But I failed and it was a relief to
give it up. There’s only one thing I’m really good at looking after a house.

And to get a home, I have to get married. This is not my home … Ever since we were small, we were told “You’ll be going away one day to your own home.”’ (RS 125)

Mini’s father, Anant was not in a good job to arrange marriage for her. He was living in a joint family and he was looking after the house. Akka was the linchpin of that family. She promised to pay for Mini’s wedding out of love for her but they found it a strain to meet a good boy. Proposals had come and gone. Getting hold of a bridegroom was no easy task. Mini had to dress up according to the taste of the boy during the time of meeting. If she heard that the boy’s family was old fashioned, she would dress up in an old fashioned manner to please that family. If she heard that the boy wanted his wife to be very smart, she would dress up modern. It was not a matter of personal taste and it made her sick.

… running around after eligible men. And then, sending the horoscope and having it come back with the message, “It doesn’t match“. And if the horoscopes matched, there was the meeting to be arranged. And Mother and Atya slogging in the kitchen the whole day. And all those people coming and staring and asking all kinds of questions … they would say, “She’s too fashionable for us“. Or too short. Or too tall. Or too dark. Or something. And Kaka (Anant) trying to laugh and talk to those
people, while his eyes looked so anxious. And I, feeling as if I had committed a great crime by being born a girl. (RS 126)

Anant was anxious for his daughter and Mini’s family members were crossing their fingers that their proposal should be accepted. Her father laughed and that helped ease the tension. Mini was anxious not to be rejected. It was excruciatingly embarrassing and uncomfortable. “I (Naren) really felt sorry for her (Mini) the way they were desperately parading her before every eligible man. And then, being refused for one reason or another.” (RS 84)

She was not in work and so many refused to marry her and it hurt her so much. She shared her grief with Indu. Mini said finding a match was not easy because horoscope should match. If the horoscope does not match up, they will abandon the alliance. They never see the hearts and minds of the man and the woman. It is based on the position of the stars and the planets when the person was born. Mini felt hopeless. She did not have the courage and determination to rise above her problems.

To her, it was marriage that mattered, not the man … ‘Any man, Indu?’

Yes, any man. Any man who says “yes” … “How old are you? And not married yet! What a pity!” I’m tired, Indu. I (Mini) don’t care what kind of a man he is.’ (RS 4, 126)

Wherever Mini went, people threw questions at her – how old she was and why she did not get married. They said it was a pity that she could not get a husband. Mini did not
want their pity. Their pitying and piercing look killed her. She was so upset and afraid that she could not manage to live normally. The result was Mini was ready to marry any man who was willing to marry her in consequence of their queries. She did not want to consider anything. She did not find out who’s who. She decided to take whatever came her way and she had been going through a highly charged atmosphere. She was worried about her marriage and she opened her heart to Indu and she shared her anxieties with Indu. ‘Mini, are you getting married because there’s nothing else you can do?’... ‘Of course I’m marrying him because there’s nothing else I (Mini) can do.’ (RS 125)

Finally when a man came forward to marry her, Mini readily and willingly accepted him. Even though he was jobless and faceless, she said a simple yes. It was a leap in the dark but Mini did not want to lean on her family. He was no match for her but Mini could not find her voice.

‘Naren tells me I’m a fool to marry. Padmini to that man. But tell me, Indu, what am I (Anant) to do?‘ ...’Do? Why, wait for a better chance!’ He gave me (Indu) the look an adult gives a foolish child.

‘Another chance? We had to wait long enough for this one. Padmini is past twenty four now. And there’s her horoscope. And the problem of finding a family with a status comparable to ours. And when everything clicks, there’s the dowry hurdle. What am I to do? ... May be the boy is
a little ugly, may be a little stupid but everything else is fine. The family is
good, it’s known to us, they have money, she’ll be quite comfortable.’

(RS 51)

Mini thought it was nobody’s fault but it was her own fault. She was exhausted
and fatigued and so noiselessly and silently Mini resigned herself to her fate. She could
not sleep and she was pierced to the heart with guilt. She did not want to be a burden to
her family. She felt guilty about being born a woman. She regarded that proposal as a last
resort, when all attempts had failed. She felt she could not be the master of her fate.

‘Tell me, Indu, how do you like this idea of Mini’s marriage?’ ‘I don’t
really know, Sumitra-kaki.’ ‘I think it’s stupid. Have you seen the
boy, Indu? No, of course, you haven’t. I came for the engagement
ceremony. God, he looks like an idiot! No education, of course.

And the whole lot of them so terribly uncultured.’ (RS 64)

Mini was a dutiful daughter. She had been working at her assignment all day. She
went cheerfully about her work and she never tried to get anybody in the house to share
in the housework. She was not off even on the day of her marriage. Despite her problems,
she carried on working as usual.

Mini had always been very much of a girl, the way a girl was expected
to be, helping the women with small odd chores from a very young age,
waiting on her father and brothers and being generally docile ... Mini
would, of course, leave no duty undone, not even on her wedding day. (RS 122, 1)

Mini spent a lot of her time on household duties and she carried out her work patiently and sincerely. On the day of her marriage also she did not get special attention. She ran a bath for her father. She did a lot of little jobs for her parents as if she was their servant. Really Mini was in a pitiable state.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel *Roots and Shadows, Narmada* (Atya) was a symbol of love, patience and tolerance. When she was very young, she got married. She started with a happy married life but later it became an ill-fated married life. Quite unfortunately her husband died and her in-laws began to ill-treat her. As a result she returned to her brother’s house and there could be no turning back thereafter. She (Narmada) had had a hard life. What else can a childless widow expect? Her in-laws had, true to tradition, ill-treated her after her husband’s death. And then, grandfather had brought her home. (RS 36)

Being a Brahmin, Narmada had to shave her head after her husband’s death but her brother was dead against the idea. Widowhood and childlessness knocked her for six. She had decided to settle permanently in her brother’s house. Thereafter she was no longer mistress of her own future. She completely depended on them and she was controlled by them. She was the servant of everybody, not for one day or two days but for all the time.
Her home, where she (Narmada) worked from morning to night, every day of her life, expecting nothing. In spite of all the household work she did, she was never too busy not to have time to give a hungry child something to eat, soothe a crying child, or relieve a tired, irritable young mother of her burden. (RS 36)

They had a large family and so Narmada had to work all the harder. She was at their command and she sacrificed everything for the family. She was a humble servant, devoted to all members of the family, both adults and children. She was not the decision-maker in the house. She carried out other people’s wishes and her work was highly commended. She put a lot of hard work and energy into her household duties but she was tireless and indefatigable. She was a committed member of the family and she treated all the children in that house as her own children, but the real mothers took rest.

‘More tea, I want more tea,’ I (Indu) can remember crying once, little horror that I was. And Kaki had slapped me for it. But Atya never lost patience … Father, as if determined to be contrary, drank only coffee while the rest of us drank tea. But Atya, by a miracle, as it seemed to me, had coffee ready for him whenever he wanted it. (RS 39, 161)

The children of the house were left in the care of Narmada. Narmada fed them with love and affection. She never made a face at them and she never shouted at them.
They made her feel less worried and she found strength in those children. Indu was a motherless child but Narmada had ensured that Indu wanted for nothing. Narmada had shown herself to be a caring mother. She was at one with them and she balanced work and childcare. Quite apart from all the work, she had personal problems. She had the almost overwhelming desire to have children of her own but she tried not to show how disappointed she was. She was in distress but she never let out her problems. She played it cool and she did not show what she was really feeling.

And there were her headaches, days when she (Narmada) could do nothing but lie in a darkened room and suffer … ‘My headache’ ‘Have you taken something?’ ‘Yes, and I’ve had a long sleep too. What’s the time? My God, they must have finished lunch. I must get up.’(RS 39, 67)

Narmada suffered from headaches occasionally. When she had a splitting headache, she could not do any work. She had barricaded herself in her room. Her inward agony and too much of work damaged her health. She should have a rest day but she was never asked to rest. She groaned inwardly and she tried her hardest not to show how disappointed she was. She never talked about her problems and worries, she kept them to herself. She simply endured all her sufferings without telling anybody. She did not express her innermost feelings to anyone but one day she revealed herself to Indu. Her open display of feelings to Indu showed her longing for her husband, her children and her family.
‘Atya, don’t you wish sometimes you had your own children?’ I (Indu) had asked. And for the first time I had seen her with her endurance mask off. ‘Wish? Put a person in a room this size,’ she had brought her hands together, ‘and for sometime he’ll scream and shout and rage and bang his head against the wall. Then he gets used to it.’ (RS 39)

When their house was scheduled for demolition, Indu invited her to come with her and Narmada also went over. In the beginning it was difficult for her to cope with the city life but soon she came to herself and she came to terms with Indu and Jayant. Very soon Narmada won the admiration of Jayant. Indu and Jayant were friendly and they were attentive to the needs of Narmada.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel ‘That Long Silence’ Jaya was her father’s goddess but she was her mother’s most hated enemy. She was born in a traditional bourgeois family. She had a happy childhood and those were the best years of her life. Father was compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. There was a close affinity between father and daughter. He had his daughter in the palm of his hand and he spent all his waking hours caring for his daughter. He wanted to show off his proud possession and so he carried her in his bicycle. He was a wonderful father to his daughter. “Appa coming to me in the morning after a night of fever, whisking the mosquito curtains aside, feeling my (Jaya) forehead with the back of his hand and saying, ‘There you are, quite well now. Up, up, you lazy girl.’ (TLS 178 – 179)
Jaya’s father doted on his daughter and her father predicted that Jaya would become a celebrity and she would shoot to fame. Praise acts as an encouragement to the young. Her father’s words boosted her confidence and boosted her ego. He wanted the best for his daughter. ‘I named you Jaya,’ he (Appa) said. ‘Jaya for victory.’ (TLS 15)

Even though Jaya was from an orthodox Brahmin family, her strong-willed father admitted her in a school run by nuns. Appa was a man of little education but Jaya had a good command of English. She kept a diary and made a note of her thoughts in her diary. She had a fond brother Dada and Dada was deeply attached to his sister. She was brave and brilliant and so she was given special attention by her father. Whenever she quarrelled with her family members, her father encouraged her to speak harshly and boldly.

I’d (Jaya) never taken my anger seriously. My outbursts had meant very little. Ai had taken them with equanimity, Ravi with total indifference, and Appa and Dada with genuine amusement. ‘You encourage her,’ Ai had reproached Appa once. ‘And why not? Such splendid tantrums – they deserve to be encouraged. (TLS 82)

Appa pampered his daughter and he waited on her hand and foot. Her father heaped praise on her but Jaya collected brickbat and earbashing from her mother. Jaya was forced to pander to her mother’s every whim. She captured the hearts and minds of her father and her brother but her mother came down on her like a ton of bricks. Much to
her disgust, her mother criticized and condemned her. Jaya hated the way her mother always criticized her. … her (Ai) constant prying questions: Why are you so late?

Who

was that you were talking to? Where are you going now? ‘She can’t dictate to me! I’ll do just what I want!’ I (Jaya) had declared with bravado. (TLS 75)

Jaya’s mother was as tough as nails. She felt nothing but hatred for her daughter. She looked as if she did not have a care in the world. She was a rough woman and she did not much care for Jaya. She did not mind her and she did not take anything seriously. Whenever she opened her mouth, she would shut her ears. She fought her own battles. She was able to win an argument or get what she wanted without anyone’s help. She never handled her daughter with kid gloves and she looked at her with intense hatred.

This from Ai who had so often said regretfully about me, ‘Why is she (Jaya) so dark when both the boys are fair?’ ‘Dark?’ Appa would retort.

‘She has a golden–brown wheat colour, the colour of honey,’ he said, lingering lovingly over the words, and then ended up grinning, ‘like me’.

(TLS 93-94)

Jaya’s mother got the hump but her much-loved father never wanted to hurt her feelings. Being her father’s pet, Jaya counted herself one of the lucky ones. She was excited by her father’s anxious care for her comfort, health and happiness. Everyone was
touched by his solicitude for his daughter. Parents are naturally anxious for their children. Jaya often shared her views with her father and he was solicitous for her comfort.

**And there was Appa who, like me, had cared immensely about dreams.**

**We had told each other our dreams, we had taken them seriously – our own dreams, that is, not the others. It had been like an unwritten pact between us that he would listen to my dreams, so that I, in turn, would listen to his.** (TLS 86)

Jaya’s father fulfilled her wishes, even if they seemed unreasonable in order to keep her happy. He overindulged his daughter and he killed her with kindness. Jaya acted without restraint and her actions remained undisputed and unquestioned. She took a firm stand on any and she was growing in confidence all the time. She was an arrogant and overpowering personality. ‘I feel sorry for your husband, Jaya, whoever he is,’ she had said to me once. ‘What for, ajji?’ ‘Look at you – for everything a question, for everything a retort. What husband can be comfortable with that?’ (TLS 27)

Jaya’s father spoiled his daughter by giving her too much of importance, by praising her, by tolerating her stupid ways and by being blind to her faults. Her father never set her straight. He was so kind to her that he in fact harmed her. There used to be a saying: ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child.’ Her father made a rod for his own back. Not knowing it would cause problems for his daughter in the future, he acted senselessly.
“…it was all Appa’s fault. Why had he made me feel I (Jaya) was someone special? Why had he made me feel different from the others?” (TLS 136)

Jaya’s father gave her complete freedom to do what she wanted. He let her go on and he never knocked some sense into his daughter. He let her loose and so she did everything of her own free will. By giving her freedom to do what she thought best, her father made a terrible blunder. As long as the father is alive, daughters are out of harm’s way. They are in a safe place where they cannot be hurt or injured. He gives help and support and he goes to bat for his daughter. There is no substitute for their father.

It was the first day of my S.S.C exams. I (Jaya) came out of the hall in the evening and one of the girls … there was a group of them, they fell silent when they saw me, and this girl came to me and said, ‘Jaya, go home at once, it seems your father is not well.’ I didn’t believe her. ‘Go at once,’ she said … But it was not Appa, it could never be Appa. ‘Do well, Jaya,’ he had said to me in the morning, showing me a V for Victory sign.

(TLS 154-156)

On the first day of Jaya’s S.S.C exams, Appa was dead. When they laid her father’s dead body down on the floor, Jaya burst into tears. She could not believe that it was her father. She gave a tearful farewell to her father. Dada took her to the examination hall the next day. He sat outside while she answered her papers. He sat out all the hours until the bell rang.
One morning, soon after Appa’s death, I (Jaya) woke up and remembered that he was dead. And I had a sense of loss that was not vague but specific. I thought of that place where he should have been at that moment, his bed. And with a picture of his absence from that bed, there was a terrifying sense of emptiness in me. I felt then that I had not known till that moment what death, what his death, really meant. Blankness. Nothingness. (TLS 66)

Jaya’s father’s death had a great impact on her youth. Her father died when she was fifteen. Her father’s death had created a vacuum which could not easily be filled. She went to pieces and the feeling of sadness caused by the loss of her father she had loved was upsetting her.

‘You are not like the others, Jaya,’ Appa had said to me, pulling me ruthlessly out of the safe circle in which the other girls had stood, girls who had performed pujas and come to school with turmeric-dyed threads round their wrists and necks, girls who, it had seemed, asked for nothing more than the destiny of being wives and mothers. (TLS 136)

Nothing can substitute for the advice their father is able to give them. When the bastion comes under heavy bombardment, a daughter is defenceless against attack. Their future is in the air. Who will sustain them? Who will pay their fees? Who will give them
love, affection and protection? Who will stand by them in the face of trials and tribulations?

… let’s go for a walk, Jaya, let’s go to a picture, let’s go to the shops.

‘No,’ I had said to her (Kusum), no and over and over again no. But she would never let me alone. Until one day, driven to desperation by her maddening persistence, I had screamed at her, ‘I’m not going out with you, I’m not going anywhere, I don’t want to go anywhere, my father is dead, don’t you know that, my father is dead. (TLS 125)

Jaya thought of her dead father with emotion and the memory brought a tear to her eye and there was an aching void in her heart. She was so upset and afraid that she could not manage to live. The pain of separation killed her and there was a terrifying sense of emptiness in her.

A wave of sickness overcame me and I (Jaya) found myself longing for someone to come and comfort me … I longed for a soft, motherly breast to cry on. And then I had to smile. Ai – I had never gone to her for comfort. (TLS 139)

When Jaya was admitted in the hostel, she thought that she was cast out of happiness. She had known then that it was all Appa’s fault. She was like a fish out of water. She was never at peace with herself, was always restless. Having no peace of mind, she struggled for an opening. She tried desperately to wriggle her way out. She
struggled and screamed for help. Her sorrows pinned her down and she was at the end of her rope. She was unhappy because life did not seem to have a purpose. She travelled on a lonesome road. “Appa is dead. No more sitting on his cycle before him, snugly enclosed by his arms.” (TLS 136)

At this juncture, somehow the daughters see their brother as a substitute for their dead father. There are many brothers who take the role of their fathers and love their fatherless sisters very truly. Thus the brothers lessen the stresses and strains of their sisters’ lives. Their efforts to improve the condition of the shadowy sisters are to be applauded. Dada is a classic example for this. Jaya was very lucky to have a brother like Dada. Dada was a God-given gift to the fatherless Jaya. He kept a fatherly eye on his sister. Dada was her rock and he fortified her against the loss. Dada was a father figure. He advised her and helped her like a father. He took charge of his sister after their father’s death. Dada’s strong brotherly love comforted and consoled her. She leaned heavily on her brother. Her brother was a balm and he made her feel calm and relaxed.

‘Have you no friends? Not even one?’ Dada had sounded both irritated and concerned. ‘Surely you’ve made some friends?’ ‘No.’

I shook my head, refusing to lessen my humiliation, to lighten Dada’s burden. ‘Try to make friends, Jaya. What’s wrong with you? You never used to be this way in Saptagiri. What about college? Are you okay there?’ (TLS 135)
Jaya’s life twisted and turned. Hostel life was very tough for her and she walked a tightrope. She did not fraternize with others and she never kept company with others. The whole world was laughing but Jaya was crying. She was in a tight spot. Then the tide turned and there was a change in her luck. She was a lot better and she learnt her lesson. She learnt what to do and not to do in the future because she had had a bad experience in the past. She learnt that she could not always have her own way. Her hostel experience taught her many valuable lessons. She was at last beginning to recover and she was left to cope on her own.

‘He (Mohan) said … “I’m glad. I want a welll-educated, cultured wife.” ’ ‘Cultured! Damn, damn. Dada, I (Jaya) can’t possibly marry a man who uses that word. Call it off, I mean take it back, withdraw it, whatever it is you do to a proposal you’ve sent out.’ (TLS 92)

Starry-eyed Jaya was too preoccupied with her marriage. She was too keen on marrying the best partner. She received a proposal from a young man named Mohan. Mohan was hard-working and ambitious. He did not smoke or eat in hotels. He came from a good Brahmin family. He was an up-and-coming young junior engineer. He had a low social position. He had risen from humble origins to high social position through sheer determination. He was looking for an English speaking girl. Jaya’s brother Dada and her whole family were satisfied with Mohan. Then the ball was in Jaya’s court. She faced a dilemma whether to accept or reject that young man. Finally she said yes to the
proposal. Mohan and Jaya were very happy in the early days of their married life. In the very beginning, Jaya lived in an atmosphere of happy domesticity.

The thought of living without him (Mohan) had twisted my (Jaya) insides.

His death had seemed to me the final catastrophe. The very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks. If he had been a little late coming home, I had been sure he was dead. (TLS 96-97)

Jaya went to Mohan’s abode with great expectations but nuptial bliss became a mirage. Her husband was not up to her expectations. She could not live in communion with her husband. Before marriage Jaya was a free spirit. She was a woman with attitude. She was confident and she did not care about other people’s opinions. She was independent and did what she wanted instead of doing what other people did. She refused to be dictated by anyone. She always got the better of an argument.

‘Why don’t you do the cooking today?’ … ‘You want me to cook?’

Mohan had smiled … ‘I’m sure you cook well. After all, your mother was a cook.’ … ‘My mother a cook? Who told you that?’ …

His anger had at first taken me unawares. Then, getting the feel of it, I (Jaya) had met his anger with my own, deliberately using it as a weapon. Raging, furious, I had flung accusations wildly at him, (TLS 81)
So with that same vigour and virility, Jaya entered into the gates of marriage. On one occasion Jaya got angry with Mohan. It was her innate nature but her anger destroyed and devastated Mohan. Mohan stopped talking to Jaya. Initially Jaya took it easy for a few days but when it lasted for days, she was much afraid. She did not give him up. For the first time Jaya lowered herself and apologized to him, but she was stung by Mohan’s criticism.

As my own anger had grown, I (Jaya) had felt his (Mohan) dwindling,
and finally I had found myself raging at a silent, blank-faced man. I had ignored his silence at first, but when it had gone on, not for hours, but for days, it had unnerved me. It was I who had made the first conciliatory move and only then, when he had spoken to me, had I realised what my anger had done to him. It had shattered him. Until then, I’d never taken my anger seriously … But with Mohan it had been different. He had been utterly crushed by the things I had said. (TLS 82)

From Mohan’s words only Jaya came to know how much her anger had hurt him. She was shocked to hear that she had upset her husband. She never dreamt that it would bring that much of horrible effect on her husband. She suffered from an oppressively dominant husband. He treated his wife in a cruel and unfair way and not giving her the same freedom and rights as himself. Mohan’s regime was an oppressive regime. Jaya did not poke her nose into her husband’s business.
Later, when I (Jaya) knew him better, I realised that to him anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’. My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her,’ he (Mohan) had said to me once. I had learnt to control my anger after that, to hold it on a leash. Terrified of his disapproval, I had learnt other things too, though much more slowly, less painfully. I had found out all the things I could and couldn’t do, all the things that were womanly and unwomanly. (TLS 83)

Jaya had learnt from bitter experience not to hurt her husband’s feelings and to hold her tongue. Freedom of expression is a basic human right. Jaya was beginning to withdraw into herself. She was disgraced and stripped of her title. He had every right to be angry but she had no right to raise her voice or to stop him from going anywhere. She had to tolerate his words and actions with uttermost patience. “I (Jaya) had neither any questions nor any retorts for Mohan now, and yet there was no comfort. So many subjects were barred that the silence seemed heavy with uneasiness.” (TLS 27)

After the event Jaya never rode roughshod over him. Thereafter she stopped short of shouting at him and she became a chicken. Only in her dreams, she did give expression to her emotions, fears, doubts and anger. She was cowed by her husband and so she turned a coward.

‘How we slogged in those days. I worked like a dog, ten, twelve hours a day. Remember, Jaya, how exhausted I was when I came home?’ And
irritable when Rahul, never a contented, placid baby, woke up and cried.

So that I had carried Rahul into the kitchen when he woke up at night,

and sat there, shutting the door behind me. (TLS 59)

A husband can get angry with his wife, he can scold his wife, he can beat his wife, he can take her to task, he can give her an earful, but the wife has to deaden her feelings and her husband desensitizes her to sufferings. Through his long silence and harsh words, Mohan taught her a lesson.

A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There’s no room for anger in my (Jaya) life, no room for despair, either. There’s only order and routine – today, I have to change the sheets; tomorrow, scrub the bathrooms; the day after, clean the fridge. (TLS 147-48)

The wife never knows where she stands with her husband – one minute he is friendly, the next he will hardly speak to her. Even then she will never let him down. Women are faithful to their husbands. Whether the married life is interesting or not, they are not ready to break up with their husbands. Mohan had a stranglehold on his wife. Jaya’s lips were sealed and she should not speak. She had soon learnt not to ask too many questions. She found out how to behave by learning from unpleasant experiences. “I (Jaya) did not know what to say, how to react. But he (Mohan) saw it otherwise. ‘Why
don’t you say something? You don’t seem interested. It seems to me you just don’t care.’” (TLS 32)

Jaya gradually changed her attitudes about family life so that she behaved in a different way. Before marriage she spoke with force and arrogance but after marriage she controlled herself by sheer force of will. Her husband said some very hard things to her and he did not keep her happy. Marriage brought her down and it made her lose power. Marriage spoilt her happiness. Jaya discovered later that she had made a mistake. Mohan and Jaya were not a happily married couple. She was expected to show too much respect for him explicitly and obey him implicitly. She was forced to take her lumps. She should accept bad things that happened to her without complaining. She should dance to her husband’s tune.

‘Why are you so late? What took you so long?’ … even if the peremptoriness of Mohan’s demand angered me, I (Jaya) found myself stammering excuses, though I knew, and he did, that it was he who had asked me to go to Churchgate. (TLS 75)

Jaya should do whatever her husband told her to. He dampened her spirits and her enthusiasm. She should spare her feelings. She should be careful not to say anything that might upset her husband. He treated his wife like a slave and he trained her to obey orders. If she revolted against her husband, it was considered to be a sin. In due course, she learnt to obey her husband keeping her feelings finally dead and buried. ‘I’ve done
everything you (Mohan) wanted me to.’ And now, I (Jaya) thought, I must add: ‘I’ve sacrificed my life for you and the children.’ (TLS 120)

If Jaya had not stepped into marriage, she should have spared herself from having to go through an unpleasant experience. Male chauvinist Mohan believed that men were superior to women and acted accordingly. After marriage Jaya had to sacrifice her life and her children for her husband’s sake and eventually lead a hard life. Mohan could not check his anger but he was keeping his wife in check. She allowed him to do what he wanted without trying to stop them. Toothless Jaya kept her mouth shut and she thought it better to mute her criticism. If she toned down her speech; if she was tongue-tied; if she remained silent and if she was not a brawler, she was branded as a very good wife.

‘Actually, my name isn’t Jaya at all. Not now, I mean. It’s Suhasini.’ …

’Marriage. It’s the name Mohan gave me when we got married.’ …

Though, when he wrote my name, it had been ‘Suhasini’, not Jaya.

And if I disowned the name, he had never failed to say reproachfully,

‘I chose that name for you.’ (TLS 15)

Jaya was very aggressive and adamant by nature and she was never under anybody’s thumb. Very unfortunately that jubilant Jaya was dead and buried but the submissive and silent Jaya was alone alive. She sacrificed her writing career for her husband and Jaya became Suhasini the day she got married.

What was he (Mohan) charging me with? And, oh God, why couldn’t
I (Jaya) speak? Why couldn’t I say something? I felt foolishly inadequate, having nothing to offer him in exchange for all these charges he was pouring on to me. It was only when he said, ‘I’ve never come in your way, I’ve let you do what you want …’ that there was a sudden painful quiver in me and I suddenly overcame my aphonia. ‘My writing,’ I said, clumsily abrupt. ‘I gave it up because of you.’ (TLS 119)

Women are expected to change their nature and to sacrifice their likes and dislikes for the sake of their husbands. After marriage the woman’s husband feels that he has every right to boss over her. Society gives more respect for the husbands. The husband feels that the property – the wife – belongs to him by right. Society has placed them on high.

‘Remember, Jaya,’ she (Vanitamami) had said, ‘a husband is like a sheltering tree.’ … A sheltering tree. Without the tree, you’re dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. This followed logically. And so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing. (TLS 32)

Before her marriage Jaya lived in great comfort. Her happy childhood stood in total contrast to her cheerless adulthood life in her husband’s house. Jaya and her husband were as different as chalk and cheese. The growing polarity between Jaya and her husband was disquieting and distressing. Jaya longed for peace and solitude. Solitude was her most treasured possession. “It was a relief to be alone. I’d always treasured my
(Jaya) hours of solitude without Mohan and the children. Mohan’s constant presence, … had become a burden to me.” (TLS 68)

Jaya gave birth to two children - Rahul and Rati. She was very much attached to her children. When they were kids, everything was all right. When they grew up, problems began. From that moment on, they were unmannerly and unruly. Her children became unmanageable and uncontrollable when they grew up. Against all expectations, there was a turn about in her children’s behaviour. Jaya felt her children were out of hand. At every turn, she met with disappointment.

Rati refusing to tell us who it was she was talking to on the phone, ...

And he (Rahul) was, in fact, doing nothing. The walls of his room were bare, his transistor was silent, his table had a few neatly piled textbooks and notebooks on it, books which were rarely opened. ‘Don’t nag,’ he said angrily when I (Jaya) reminded him he was wasting his time.

(TLS 9, 49)

Rati was on the telephone for hours, but she was not ready to tell her mother with whom she had a long talk. Malicious Rati refused to answer her mother’s queries. Jaya’s children turned her brain. One day Rahul asked his mother which party they belonged to. Jaya replied repulsively that they were nothing. That statement made him lethargic and the impact of the blow knocked Rahul off balance and it made him feel unimportant. He became uncommunicative and uncongenial. He lost his interest and involvement in
studies and games. Unfortunately Jaya’s words backfired and it had an adverse effect on him. Once Rahul absconded from the house and Jaya found it a strain to bring him back.

It seemed amazing that I (Jaya) knew so little, almost nothing, about my son. Whatever had given me the damn fool idea that once I became a mother I would know my children through and through, instinctively?

Yes, this was what they had told me: you become a mother, and everything follows naturally and inevitably – love, wisdom, understanding and nobility. But now I felt as helpless to deal with this despairing boy (TLS 173)

Rahul was a thorn in Jaya’s side. He was totally uninterested, unconcerned and uninvolved in day–to–day activities. He was sick at heart and so he shut himself off from the world. There followed a long period of confusion and muddle. Jaya pleaded with him but he remained unmoved. Rahul put down the shutters and he stopped letting his mother know what his thoughts were. Jaya was unable to hold back her children. She had no control over them. Embarrassment rooted her to the spot. She was put in an awkward position. “A mother? Despairingly I relinquished my halo. No, I had been unfit to be trusted with the entire responsibility of another human being. How had I dared to take it on? Mohan’s wife, Rahul’s and Rati’s mother.” (TLS 173)

A mother plays a predominant role in building a better life and so she should have a grip on her children. She should have her eye on her children and she should be a strict
parent. If her children go wrong, she should take them to task. She should take her children under her wing and she should correct them if they are wrong. She should remain vigilant at all times. A mother is the cornerstone of the family but unfortunately Jaya was a failure as a mother.

I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live… But I had been stubborn, terrified. I would be betrayed into letting the child live. I had had a feeling that Mohan would not allow me to unburden myself of the child… But there had been no guilt in me.

(TLS 2, 131)

After bringing forth Rahul and Rati, Jaya was tired of giving birth to children. She felt that the life of a girl child in the world was really a miserable one and so it was better for them to die in their mother’s womb itself. So when she conceived the third time, without telling her husband Mohan, she aborted the child. She hated herself for being born a woman and being caught in a tangled web of marriage. She could not stand the frustration of not being able to escape from the clutches of marriage. So out of fear she was not ready to allow her third child to come into the world.

I had read an account of how baby girls were done to death a century or so back. They were, I had read in horror, buried alive, crushed to death in the room they were born in; and immediately after that, a fire was lit on the spot to purify the place, they said. Perhaps it was to ensure death. All
those agonies … for days I had been unable to get it out of my mind. But now I wondered whether it wasn’t more merciful, that swift ending of the agony once and for all, than this prolonging of it for years and years. (TLS 53)

Jaya lived in a situation fraught with difficulties and frustration most of her life. So she nipped the child in the bud. She had always felt that the dice were loaded against women. So she killed the unborn baby mercilessly. She dreamt that she missed the train, lost her beloved and arrived after the expected time. Thus her dreams were negative and nightmarish.

I (Jaya) have dreams about trains leaving me behind or carrying me away, separating me from someone I wanted to be with. Sometimes I was trapped in ghostly passages and there were sepulchral, deep voices that filled me with horror. (TLS 87)

Jaya’s dreams had shown that Jaya was petrified with fear, she suffered from a lack of confidence and she was too worried. All those things were weighing her down and as a result she had horrible dreams. Even though she was safe in the garden of life, she was always alone. There was nobody for her and she really led a wretched life. Jaya was like a cat on hot bricks. “And so here we were, both of us (Jaya and Kusum) rejected by our husbands, our families, failures at everything. But Kusum was nuts.” (TLS 126)
Jaya identified herself with Kusum. Jaya felt that she and Kusum belonged to the same category – deserted by the husband, children and society. Kusum was a failure as a daughter, wife and mother. She did not have a supportive family. She had got loads of worries and problems, but nobody understood her or felt sorry for her problems or sympathized with her. Her complaints, comments and wishes were thrust aside. They refused to listen to her words. Even her husband and children did not like her and they were unkind to her.

... her youngest was nearly ten and perhaps despised her mother as, much as all the others ... ‘I (Kusum) want to see all my children.’ ‘They don’t need you,’ I (Jaya) had said brutally. What right did she have to make her suffering so loud, so obvious? ‘They are managing quite well without you.’ ‘But I need them.’ (TLS 20-21)

Kusum was rejected by everyone and they made her feel insignificant and stupid. Nobody made her feel better when she was unhappy and disappointed. At that time Jaya gave her a helping hand and lent an ear to Kusum but the situation was unmanageable. Kusum finally flipped under the pressure and she could not recover her equilibrium. Her problems drove her insane. Thus she became mentally defective and subnormal.

‘But this woman isn’t just sick, she’s mentally sick. Is it wise to have her at home? Think of the children’ ... but I (Jaya) couldn’t. I could
feel her anguish, her fears, her despair. They seeped into me drop by drop, until I felt myself burdened with them. (TLS 19, 23-24)

In the last resort, Kusum had thrown herself into a well. She committed suicide and she came to an untimely end. Nobody was moved with pity and nobody felt sorry for her death. Her death was not a big loss to anybody, not even to her husband and children but Kusum’s memories haunted and tormented Jaya. The news of Kusum’s death really threw her. When Kusum was alive, Jaya compared herself with Kusum and got joy. When Kusum had gone for ever, Jaya feared that she might one day become insane like Kusum.

When Jaya met her brother Dada’s friend Dr Vyas, he felt an immediate attraction for her. She did find him attractive physically. The talk had fired her but Jaya steered clear of him. She resented his persistent approach. Knowing it might cause problems, she avoided him. She held firm to her principles and she was careful to lead a blameless life.

‘Dinu said you were shy. I (Dr Vyas) thought …’ A pause. ‘Oh well, …’ Another look, more obvious this time, at his watch. The wistful young man disappeared. His going saddened me, though his presence had made me uncomfortable. Perhaps I (Jaya) had disappointed him again.(TLS 166)
Jaya felt completely at ease with Kamat who lived upstairs. She was charmed by his speech. She started expressing herself freely. He supported her and agreed with what she said. By and by their relationship gained ground.

... he (Kamat) had said to me (Jaya), ‘Your name is like your face.’

At first it had seemed strange to have a man talk so freely to me. All the men I’d known till then had put on a different face, a different tone, a false smile when they spoke to me ... With this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself – Jaya. There had been an ease in our relationship I had never known in any other. There had been nothing I could not say to him. (TLS 152-153)

Jaya had feelings for him and he also felt attracted towards her in a romantic way. Slowly Kamat drew her out and Jaya opened the way for him to come closer. He tried to get off with her and he was with her. He put temptation in her way and she opened doors for him. She provided opportunities for him to close the gap.

I (Jaya) told him things I’d never been able to speak of, not to Dada, not to Mohan. I had been talking about my parents and at something I had said, he (Kamat) smiled – his full-blooded smile that came out all the way to meet you. (TLS 153)

Jaya was on the point of yielding to temptation but she immediately resisted the temptation. She came to her senses and ran away from his grip. Knowing that the
consequences would be very grave, she made a rush for the exit. Even though she had got a chance to gratify her wishes, she resisted. Jaya proved to be a true family woman.

I (Jaya) had moved away from him (Kamat), from that scarcely touching grasp, I had left him without a word … ‘Jaya,’ he had said, and I had run away. He tried to reach out to me in his loneliness and it had frightened me. I’m Mohan’s wife, I had thought, I’m only Mohan’s wife, and I had run away. (TLS 157, 186)

To her horror, one day Kamat dropped dead. Jaya was deeply indebted to him for all his help. He gave advice to her and she took his advice. She did not do anything without consulting him. Kamat was Jaya’s advisor, Jaya’s mentor. There was no one to perform funeral rites. Jaya, the mentee, was advised and helped by a more experienced person over a period of time. She had to stay there and inform everybody and she had to make arrangements for his burial but Jaya took to her heels. “But I (Jaya) had found him dead – glassy-eyed, foul-smelling and dead – and I had walked away from him.” (TLS 157)

Jaya recoiled in horror at the sight of his dead body and she had to shoot off. She made a quick exit to avoid hearing wild accusations. Her name would be dragged through the mire. Her reputation would be ruined and people would sling mud at her. She would incur the wrath of her husband by helping Kamat without his consent. Mohan was dead to all feelings of pity. He would suspect her and it would lead to and pave the way for
divorce and desertion. She would be charged that she led a life of immorality. Society would scorn at her.

She was a weak and indecisive woman. Her behaviour was unfriendly, unpleasant and unkind. That was a risk she was not prepared to take. She felt Kamat’s death very deeply but she ran away from the situation a little selfishly. Her conscience pricked her as she left Kamat in his hour of need and so she sobbed her heart out. Of course she loved and respected Kamat, and she wished to sit through the burial rites. Under the circumstances, it seemed better not to remain there. Later at home Jaya was brooding over what she did and her degenerative deed put her in a spin. She could not spill out her troubles to anybody. The fear of losing their husbands and family lives drive women out of the quality of being humane. … marriage that had made me (Jaya) circumspect. (TLS 187)

Mohan and Jaya were star-crossed husband and wife. They had clashing personalities. On one occasion Mohan was displeased with Jaya’s behaviour and his flaming temper induced him to leave his wife. He did not inform her where he was going or when he could come back.

Mohan was not my love, he had never been that; he told me, ‘You’ve never cared for me.’ Then what have I (Jaya) been doing, living with him all these years … We could not go on as before. We had come to the end of this road … Two bullocks yoked together – that was how I saw the two
of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It’s wrong. (TLS 124, 127, 191)

Jaya was left alone and that time her children had gone on a trip. Darkness fell and she faced a torrid time in her life. She was left to cope on her own. She had to take parental rights and responsibilities. She could not sleep but kept tossing and turning in bed all night. Her children became her pigeon and a deep sense of despair overwhelmed her. She was beginning to fear the worst and she groaned in anguish. She was filled with the thought of desolate widowhood.

Even if Mohan came back, even if this trouble blew over, could we go back to being what we were? Something had been lost, only an illusion may be, but its loss had left such a rent in our lives that it seemed impossible for us to be able to mend it so that nothing showed. (TLS 182)

Women suffer a lot when their husbands leave them and they are in a pitiable state. They are on the losing side because they are not earning and for anything and everything they depend upon their husbands only.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel That Long Silence, Jeeja’s lot had been a hard one – a maid doing housework. Her husband was a bad lot. He had not done a hand’s turn. He was useless and worthless. Jeeja married a man who was not a drunkard then. Consequently their relationship started to go wrong when his friends led him astray and he started drinking after that. He was a waste of space and he was no match for Jeeja.
Jeeja was the sole breadwinner of the family but her husband brought her to heel. She was kept under by her husband and he forced her to obey him by beating her.

‘Don’t ever give my husband any of my pay,’ she (Jeeja) had warned me when she had started working for me, giving me a hint of what her life was like. There had been days when she had come to work bruised and hurt, rare days when she had not come at all. But I (Jaya) had never heard her complain.

What had surprised me then, what still surprised me, was that there seemed to be no anger behind her silence. (TLS 51)

Jeeja lost face and she was treated with less respect. The problem of having no children was eating her all the time. In the midst of all her problems, she had done her duties with the utmost sincerity and diligence. She never pulled a face at her husband or anybody else. She never complained about her loveless marriage and her good-for-nothing husband.

She (Jeeja) badly needed the money she earned, she knew her value as a good worker, she knew it was her reputation for reliability that enabled her to earn more than the other servants did … She knew what her purpose in life was – it was to go on living. Enduring was part of it and so she endured all that she had to. (TLS 51)
Jeeja arrived at the right time and she never failed to keep her word. She did not waste time in gossiping or spreading stories that were probably not true about other people. Many people expressed a strong preference for the reliable maid Jeeja only. She was never late for work and she made a conscious effort to get there on time. Her good manners earned her respect and admiration. Her promptness, politeness and punctuality were her distinguishing characteristics.

‘With whom shall I be angry?’ she (Jeeja) had asked me when I (Jaya) had once tried to probe her feelings … ‘God didn’t give us any children – that was his misfortune as well as mine. How could I blame him for marrying again when I couldn’t give him any children? How could I blame that woman for marrying him?

With whom shall I be angry? (TLS 52)

Childless Jeeja was beaten until she was black and blue, covered with bruises, but she endured her long sufferings with stoicism. The pain was almost more than she could endure. Still she lived with him till his last breath. Women endure pain as a natural heritage. Having no children to wipe her tears off, having no shoulder to cry on, having no one to hold her hand, Jeeja felt all alone in the world and she stood alone as a helpless woman.

Having no heir, Jeeja’s husband thought that second marriage alone was the answer for the problem. So Jeeja’s husband married another woman. Nobody stopped
him and his wife Jeeja stayed out of his way. Women are silent sufferers at the hands of men. Jeeja’s husband’s second wife lacked Jeeja’s toughness and resilience. Being timid and gutless, his second wife could not hold out against his attack. She had died of tuberculosis after her son was born. Leaving her son Rajaram in the custody of Jeeja, she breathed her last.

After her husband’s death, Jeeja was working on all cylinders. Jeeja loved her husband’s second wife’s son and she always treated him like her own son. She carried him on her shoulders. His drunkenness and bad behaviour never lessened her love for him. Once Rajaram was stabbed and then he was hospitalized and that news broke Jeeja’s heart. Jeeja begged many people for help and finally she saved his life.

Tara had none of Jeeja’s reticence or stoicism. She cursed and reviled her husband and, sobbing loudly, moaned her fate. ‘So many drunkards die,’ she cried, ‘but this one won’t. He’ll torture us all to death instead.’ Jeeja sternly shut her up. ‘Stop that! Don’t forget, he keeps the kumkum on your forehead. What is a woman without that?’ (TLS 53)

Jeeja was extremely reticent about her personal life but Rajaram’s wife Tara was the complete opposite. Tara’s emotions suddenly spilled over and she could not hide her disappointment. Jeeja kept her feelings hidden fathoms deep. Jeeja and Tara were very different from each other. Jeeja perfectly understood life and she knew that there was no point in getting angry with anybody. Anger would bring her nothing but misery. So she
never vented her anger on anybody else. She steeled herself for disappointment and bore her misfortunes bravely. She was reticent about what her husband had said to her but Tara cried her eyes out. Jeeja steeled her heart to bear pain and discomfort without complaint. She lived for years in a perpetual state of fear, disquiet, anxiety, apprehension, agitation and tension.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel That Long Silence, Manda was the granddaughter of Jeeja. Her family was living on the breadline and there was misfortune on every side. She led a life of misery and she never enjoyed a high standard of living or great prosperity in all her born days. Some people have got more money than taste but Manda’s family was short of even the bare necessities of life. They were handicapped by poverty of resources.

She (Manda) went to school in the morning, collected money for the milk in the afternoon, delivered the milk, stood in the queue for the rations, for kerosene, and helped Jeeja on her holidays, briskly scrubbing vessels in a parody of her grandmother’s actions. (TLS 53)

Manda led a wretched existence and she had always been surrounded with problems. She was under the yoke of poverty and poverty crushed all her hopes. Many children of her age go through life in a happy-go-lucky fashion. Living in wretched conditions and poverty in one’s old age is somewhat bearable and tolerable but living in misery and want in one’s younger days is quite intolerable and unbearable. Manda’s
whole life was a constant battle against poverty. Young people should be allowed to enjoy themselves while they can, because they will have plenty to worry about when they get older.

**Manda came back, saying wistfully, ‘I was going to wear my green and yellow maxi today, ajji had told me I could wear it for Ganapati. There’s another …’ Then she stopped and said, ‘No, we have to go to the hospital. Oh well, let’s do our work.’** She sounded like her grandmother as she said that, she looked like her grandmother as she set to work briskly. (TLS 163)

Manda was wornout due to poverty but sufferings moulded her into a mature adult. She did not squeak when poverty squeezed her. She was old beyond her years. She was more mature and wise than was usual or expected for her age. Her father Rajaram was a rough-and-ready drunkard. His manners lacked finish and he was totally inadequate as a father. He did not earn his bread. He was a wasteful person and he never made his living. Even though their family was in low water, Manda did not fume at their financial difficulties. It is frustrating to have to wait so long but Manda never felt frustrated at her father’s inadequacy, she never tried to break ties with her parents and she never felt tired but she felt in her bones that she would succeed. She never acted or behaved in an ineffective or time-wasting way. She did not keep her head above water.
She put her hand to the plough. She did not watch folding her hands and she did not stand about doing nothing but she made herself useful.

Manda’s grandmother was Manda’s caretaker. Manda did housework, following her grandmother’s footsteps. Her grandmother Jeeja taught her learn the ropes. Jeeja taught her how to do the housework so that Manda would be able to do it herself. Sometimes Manda teamed up with her grandmother and they worked together. Manda humbled herself and behaved very politely before the mistresses and she found favour in their eyes.

Manda took an active interest in her family matters and was aware of what was happening. She became a breadwinner at an early age. No one strongly advised against doing housework but everybody accepted her work more happily. For the sake of the family, she deprived herself of even simple pleasures. She had strong affection for her family. Manda was a rootin’-tootin’ lass. She was enthusiastic, cheerful and lively in the midst of a very difficult situation. She never pooped out. She was happy in her work and with her life. Progress was slow but she kept battling on. She did everything for the sake of her family.

We will never forget your help, tai, we will carry the burden of our obligation on our heads all our lives. I’ll leave this child with you, she’ll do all your (Jaya) work, anything you want, as long as you need her …’ Manda smiled at me, a smile of complicity; she seemed
to have no misgivings at being signed away, a bonded labourer, so lightly.

(TLS 161)

In spite of his drunkenness, Manda loved and respected her father very much. When her father was admitted in a nearby hospital with stab wound, her grandmother pleaded Jaya to speak for Rajaram to Dr Vyas. At that time Manda was not standing in the distance. She had voiced concern about her injured father’s safety. She promised Jaya to give herself over to work in Jaya’s house. Manda sacrificed her life for her good-for-nothing father. Readers’ hearts go out to Manda.

In Anita Desai’s novel Cry, The Peacock, Maya’s birth was a great and happy occasion, and the time she spent in her father’s house was a glorious and a wonderful one. Her father loved her with unlimited and immeasurable amount of love. He was all the world to his daughter and Maya meant everything to her father. God blessed them abundantly and gave them material riches. Maya’s opulent father had a massive great house, furnished with all luxuries, full of male and female servants.

His world was very big in which government servants and intellectuals were included. He was widely acknowledged and accepted by all the top-class people. He threw a party and shared his ideas, experiences and feelings with them. He had very expensive tastes in nature and he was bubbling over with excitement when he saw nature. He used to adore and worship nature. He was fascinated by wildlife and anything to do with nature. His wife died long ago after giving birth to two children – Arjuna and Maya.
When they were small, their mother died and so their father raised the family on his own. Maya’s father held her in high regard.

… he (Maya’s father) has looked after me alone, and his beam is especially tender, his attention especially loving. I think that he is like a silver oak himself, with his fine, silver-white hair brushed smoothly across his bronzed scalp. He is dressed in white. His eyes are half-closed to the sun, and small crinkles radiate from their corners. I hug his arm tightly, for I have always loved, instinctively, anyone who crinkles the corners of his eyes when he smiles. To me, it is a sign of warm-heartedness of tenderness, and reminds me, always, of this man’s open love for me. (CP 39)

Maya’s father never considered his son Arjuna who was a rebel by birth. He was furious with his son because he never fell in with his father. They were high-caste Brahmins but Arjuna moved in with the lower classes of society and thus he was out of line with his father. Like hot and cold, they were opposites.

One never knew where Arjuna went, exactly. His departures and arrivals were swift, silent, mysterious … one did not feel an absence, not Arjuna’s whose presence itself was so half-hearted, and barely felt. (CP 131-132)
Arjuna was an unbridled donkey. Until the very end he was a bitter disappointment to his father. As the son went astray, the father showered his love on his daughter. When he brought up his daughter, he breathed and infused his qualities and tastes into his daughter. He taught and enlightened her to admire nature and that habit was not ready to leave her until her death. She could not kick the habit. The moon and the stars were her kindred and all the plants in her garden were her friends. Perhaps Maya could live without food but she could not live without pets.

Gautama gave me a cat. She was white and had hair like tassels of silk.

Her large almond eyes were topaz, with undertones of grey and overtones of green … She would sit long hours on the verandah steps, gazing at the moon. This was a fascination we shared, and I (Maya) thought to found a friendship upon it, but she scorned to have me touch her secret dreams. She was exquisite, and disdained my sudden movements, my loud chatter. (CP 33)

Maya was too tender-hearted to hurt a fly. Her heart pounded for the oppressed and the suppressed. When she saw the ill-treatment and mistreatment of animals, she would burst into tears. When she was at a tender age, she was entertained by many things. Once a man brought her home a bear. On seeing the bear, Maya immediately understood that the bear was underfed and malnourished. Her heart went out to that bear. Immediately she brought big bananas and gave them to the poor bear.
Bearing two golden bananas in each hand - more I cannot hold - I
(Maya) come rushing out again, race up to the bear, then stop short,
for he is so wondrously large, so powerfully dark, standing there on
his hind-legs in an attitude of mourning. Then, timorously, I extend my
offering. Gently, the bear drops on all four feet, and comes eagerly
forward to take it from my hand. Transformed into an overgrown toy
through lavish delight, he settles down to strip the bananas, neatly
and deftly, and swallow them quickly, quickly. (CP 87)

Maya fed the starving bear on bananas. That night she could not sleep peacefully
and restfully. On another occasion she had an encounter with the caged monkeys in the
railway station. It pained her to see animals being mistreated. She tried her level best to
redeem and release them but she could not. She was very sensitive by nature. She had a
lovely nature and it was not really in her nature to be aggressive. She loved and adored
her father to a greater extent. She thought very highly of her father. She hero-worshipped
and idolized her father. In her world she was the princess and her father was the king.

As a child, I (Maya) enjoyed, princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the
fantasies of the Arabian Nights, … Our table is laid beside a mandarin
orange tree - there is one in each corner of the garden – a little faery
tree, with its glossy leaves, and an overload of small, bright globules
of fruit, like miniature lanterns on a carnival night. The servant … says,
‘The cook will make orange marmalade today,’ and begins to collect the fruit into a bowl. ‘Marmalade!’ cries my father, raising his napkin to his mouth. ‘What a dreadful thought connected with that lovely tree.’ But when I play battledore-and-shuttlecock, using the small bright oranges as shuttlecocks that shoot, bird-like, through the air and are broken, egglike, on the grass he only laughs to see me leap and fly, leap and fly. It is only from me that he tolerates such things, however. (CP 43-44)

Maya’s father pampered her and gave her a lot of attention, sometimes too much. He had an unconditional and undying love for his daughter. After marriage Maya got a life and in that life if the husband was not good, she had to suffer and Maya’s father had never given the matter careful thought.

People say he (Maya’s father) spoils me. This means that he fondles my cheek, holds my hand, and says to me, ‘It is getting warm. Time for us to retreat to the hills, isn’t it? Where shall we go this year, Maya? Choose!’ People say he spoils me. They also say that I can get anything I want from him. ‘Darjeeling!’ I cry, jubilantly. ‘Of course!’ and jump up and down at his side. (CP 39-40)

Many fathers pamper their children as Maya’s father pampered her. It is a very big mistake. If the girls are tough-minded and hard-headed, they can take the rough with
the smooth. They can accept the unpleasant parts of a situation as well as the pleasant parts. They cannot be dependent on their parents all their lives. Too much of love and affection will definitely lead to doom and gloom. They have had an exceptionally tough life. Instead they pamper their children and make them cowards and dependents. As a result they could not stand up to bullying and threats. Her daily life involved taking up a challenge and tackling a difficult problem or situation. Maya was father obsessed. He was the author of all her troubles. She was spoilt by her father. “The world is like a toy specially made for me, painted in my favourite colours, set moving to my favourite tunes … Delight makes me drowsy… I lived as a toy princess in a toy world.”(CP 36-37, 89)

Maya behaved like a child even after reaching the marriageable age. Physically she was a grown-up woman but she lacked a mature and sensible attitude. She was young and had little experience of life. Life can be hard. Life is not like in the movies. Maya’s father looked out for a marriage partner. Finally he found out a man who was much older than his daughter. Gautama was his friend and so he stupidly thought that his friend would take care of his daughter as he took care of his daughter. Gautama was a very famous lawyer and man of great wisdom.

… my father’s proposal that I (Maya) marry this tall, stooped and knowledgeable friend of his, one might have said that our marriage was grounded upon the friendship of the two men, and the mutual
respect in which they held each other, rather than upon anything else. (CP 40)

It was a big mistake on Maya’s father’s part to have trusted him because Gautama was not interested in Maya. Maya was ready to accept anything that her father entrusted her with. Though Gautama was her father’s choice, Maya wholeheartedly agreed to marry Gautama. Unfortunately marriage made Maya’s life miserable. Gautama and Maya were poles apart in personality.

In his (Gautama) world there were vast areas in which he would never permit me, and he could not understand that I (Maya) could even wish to enter them, foreign as they were to me. On his part, understanding was scant, love was meagre … The things we leave unsaid would fill great volumes; what we do say, only the first few pages of introduction. (CP 104-105)

Marital life brought her nothing but misery. Maya’s husband did not much care for her feelings. He was not worried about what happened to her. He had a rather cold, unfriendly manner and he did not really share in her love of animals. “Oh, Gautama, pets mightn’t mean anything to you, and yet they mean the world to me.”(CP 16)

Maya was never much of a scholar but Gautama was a very educated person whose interests were studying and other activities that involved careful thinking and
mental effort. “He (Gautama) was always the brainy type. He was always studying, always standing first in examinations.” (CP 74)

Gautama came from a large family. From his father to the last brother, everybody always talked about politics, parliament, cost of living and day-to-day problems. He had all the latest informations at his fingertips.

They had innumerable subjects to speak on, and they spoke incessantly. Sometimes, in order to relax, they played games of cards, so swiftly, so nervously, so intently, that they found they had to release the mounting pressure by conversing, and would begin to talk again, of political scandal and intellectual dissent …

But they left me out of it. (CP 47-48)

When her pet dog Toto died unexpectedly, Maya was unable to control her feelings. She broke down and wept, and could not get over the loss of her pet dog. She needed a shoulder to cry on. When her husband came home, she looked forward to hearing a few words of consolation from him. She thought that Gautama alone could make her forget the loss, but his words and his presence could not give her comfort and solace.

‘It is all over,’ he (Gautama) had said, as calmly as the meditator beneath the sal tree. ‘You need a cup of tea,’ he had said, showing how little he knew of my misery, or of how to comfort me. But
then, he knew nothing that concerned me … Yes, I (Maya) cried,
yes, it is his hardness - no, no, not hardness, but the distance he
coldly keeps from me. His coldness, his coldness, and incessant talk
of cups of tea and philosophy in order not to hear me talk and
talking reveal myself. It is that – my loneliness in this house. (CP 8-9)

Maya expected her husband to listen to her problems and give her sympathy,
emotional support and encouragement. A husband should stand shoulder to shoulder with
his wife. Gautama took the bad news philosophically. He did not even offer a few words
of consolation. He was philosophical about losing and he had a calm attitude towards a
difficult situation. Toto was buried under the lime trees. After some days Maya
mentioned about Toto to Gautama.

... asked, vaguely, half-interestedly, ‘Toto? Who was that?’ The
words were as grim as any death sentence, absolute and unredeemable.

It took me a long time to gather myself, to thrust aside the hurt he
had dealt, and to harden to it. (CP 198)

Immediately Gautama questioned her who Toto was. It hurt and stung her
feelings. She was upset and offended by his words. Her head throbbed painfully and tears
stung her eyes.

I longed with fiercest desire, not even for Gautama, but for my
gentle father who would have said to me, with that assured and
reassuring calm, ‘It will all be well, it will all be well soon, Maya.’

He had often had to hold me in his arms, or, when I was smaller, wash the tears from my face, and repeat those mesmerizing words to me in his deep tones … I cried, ‘I should like so much to see him,

Oh, I should like to see father again. It has been so long …’ (CP 52-53)

Maya felt that she had been treated unfairly. Her husband ruffled her feathers and tried her patience. The innocent Maya wept and complained bitterly. He laughed at her innocence and trod over her weaknesses and took everything for granted. The desolate Maya sank into deep despair. The headstrong Gautama was a successful and popular lawyer. Even after returning from his office, he continued to chew over his cases and clients. On the whole, they were not very suitable for each other. ‘You’ve never loved. And you don’t love me.’ … when I (Maya) tried to involve him in my matters, my wants and cares, which to him were childish, tiresome and even distasteful. (CP 112-13)

Maya expected that her husband should not leave her side. He should stay with her and take care of her. She opened her heart to him and started to talk more about herself and her feelings but it was of no use. Gautama put the blame for her behaviour on her father. Nature had never really interested him and he made fun of her love of nature. He did not seem very interested in what she was saying. She was deeply pained and pricked by his piercing remark.

‘A spoilt baby, so spoilt she (Maya) can’t bear one adverse word.'
Everyone must bring a present for little Maya – that is what her father taught her … He (Maya’s father) is the one responsible for this – for making you believe that all that is important in the world is to possess, possess – riches, comforts, posies, dollies, loyal retainers – all the luxuries of the fairy tales you were brought up on. Life is a fairy tale to you still. What have you learnt of the realities? The realities of common human existence, not love and romance, but living and dying and working, all that constitutes life for the ordinary man. You won’t find it in your picture-books. And that was all you were ever shown – picture-books. What wickedness to raise a child like that!’ (CP 115)

The turning point in Maya’s life came when she met an albino. One day when she went to the temple, very accidentally she stumbled upon the albino. The illiterate and ill-mannered fortune teller exploited Maya’s innocence and inexperience. He predicted that Maya would get married very young and after four years of her married life either Maya or her husband would meet their end.

‘Death,’ he (the albino) finally admitted, in one such moment, ‘to one of you. When you are married and you shall be married young.’ The light suddenly sank, and his eyeless face assumed
the texture of a mask above me.' Death - an early one - by unnatural
causes,' he said, ... ‘Four years after your marriage, so the stars prophesy
and the space between your eyes, the mark there, supports this prophecy.’

(CP 30-31)

The prophet of doom made Maya believe his humbug. Thus the illusion about
marriage was drummed into her at an early age. After her marriage everyday she was
labouring under the illusion. She could hear every word he said and his words were
driving her mad. She grew more anxious with every passing day. She felt that death was
approaching and she could not stand it. Everyday she expected that the prediction would
turn out to be true. She waited in an agony of suspense. Unfortunately she could not share
her agony with anybody else. That was the major problem. Pressure was mounting on
her. Had she shared her burden with somebody, her nervous tension would have
dwindled. She wished to share it with Gautama at the same time her soft heart did not
want Gautama shoulder that burden. “I (Maya) glanced at him now, slyly, for sly I had
grown with such a load of secrets that had to be hidden from him, such evil and awful
secrets.” (CP 165)

The disturbed Maya, who needed mothering, hushed up all her feelings and dug
her own grave slowly but steadily. Hardly a day went by without her thinking of the
albino’s prediction. Wherever I(Maya) laid myself, I could think only of the albino, the
magician, his dull, opaque eyes, the hand twitching the fold of cloth between the swallowing thighs. (CP 64)

In that difficult situation Maya longed for peace and quiet in her husband’s company but he hardly and scarcely realized her feelings. He did not mind her innermost feelings. When Maya understood that her husband could not give her any comfort, she was heartbroken. She slowly came to the conclusion that Gautama had already lived for many years and there was nothing left for him to enjoy. The astrologer predicted that one of them would die. Maya terribly wished that one should be her detached husband, Gautama. So she took an awful and dreadful decision to kill him. I (Maya) wondered why, from the very beginning, it had never occurred to me that it might be Gautama’s life that was threatened. (CP 164)

Maya was not ready to die and she wished to live on. Her husband had to lay down his life for her.

There is still so much left, I (Maya) have hardly lived yet. I never
did learn to sing, nor to read Persian. I never did go with my
father on his journeys, never saw the seas with him, nor the great
cities in their most becoming seasons that existed beyond the seas.

Why, leave alone what I have not yet seen, there is so much that
I should like to revisit before – so many people to revisit. (CP 177-178)
Maya always identified herself with peacock. There was a close correspondence between the two. Peacocks are very beautiful. Likewise Maya was also very beautiful. Maya resembled peacock in appearance. Peacocks sacrifice their lives for the sake of their lovers. Finally Maya also sacrificed her life for the sake of her husband.

‘Do you not hear the peacocks call in the wilds? Are they not blood-chilling, their shrieks of pain? “Pia, pia,” they cry.

“Lover, lover. Mio, mio, - I die, I die.” ... Living, they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life ...'Lover, I die.’

Now that I understood their call, I wept for them and wept for myself, knowing their words to be mine. (CP 95-97)

Even though Maya had father, brother and husband, she was just like an orphan. She felt everybody had let her down and she was orphaned. There was nobody to love her and nobody had enquired after her. She felt betrayed and she was not a much wanted woman. “Father! Brother! Husband! Who is my saviour? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living.” (CP 98)

Every human heart is longing for love and affection. There is always a craving for recognition and commendation. Maya had nobody she could turn to. She was just like a prisoner, a life prisoner and her husband Gautama was a jailer. Gautama’s rough handling resulted in damage and destruction.

I (Maya) was caged in this room that I hated … I walked to and fro,
fingering the few objects of value and loveliness that it contained –
all of them presented to me by my father, chosen by his forefathers.

‘Your knick-knacks,’ Gautama, who saw no value in anything less
than the ideas and theories born of human and, preferably, male brains. (CP 99)

Maya felt that life was no longer endurable because her husband turned in on
himself and he became too concerned with his own problems. She was a single red rose
and her husband was not much of a gardener. Everything in the garden was not rosy.
Maya had nobody to say a good word to her. Her heart missed a beat and she was
heartsick. I am grown thin, worn. My blouses hang on me, my rings slip off my fingers.
Those are no longer my eyes, nor this my mouth. (CP 179)

Maya’s tortured self was liberated through the death of the tormentor. Maya was
not the type to be murderous, but circumstances had conspired against her. If her father
had paid a visit to her home very often, the awful thought would not have struck her. If
she had occupied herself with any other profession, the terrible idea would not have
occurred to her. If her father had made her bold enough to approach anything, the terrible
thought would not have come into her mind. If she had not run into the astrologer, she
would not have run into trouble. I (Maya) pushed him, hard, and he fell. And when I went
down the stairs to the terrace, he (Gautama) was lying there. (CP 214)
Maya had a guilty conscience and so she could not sleep peacefully. It was impossible for her to shake it off. She felt extremely nervous and a feeling of guilt began to stir in her. It blew her mind and she was shot down by the guilty conscience. Guilt and horror flooded her in waves. A wave of fear swept over her. It had been on her conscience ever since she killed her husband and her conscience troubled her.

Then they (Maya’s mother-in-law and Nila) heard the patter of a child’s laughter cascading up and down the scales of some new delight … Then it stopped, suddenly, and they heard a different voice calling, shrilly and desperately, from some unimaginable realm of horror, calling out in great dread. (CP 217-218)

Maya felt compelled to take another harrowing decision. It was very shocking and frightening. She was quite defenceless against self-destruction and self-harm. She imposed punishment upon herself by jumping from the balcony. After committing a hideous crime, she committed suicide. Maya’s death really threw the readers.

In Anita Desai’s novel Cry, The Peacock, Leila was the friend of Maya. She was born in an honourable and reputable family. She was a studious young woman and she was aiming high in her life. She had fallen head over heels in love with a man. Against her parents’ wishes, she tied the knot. She left her family and stopped having a relationship with them. Her parents hung their heads in shame. They could not hold their heads high and ignore what people were saying. They saw their daughter’s actions as a
betrayal of their trust. So they washed their hands off their daughter. They left her to fend for herself. They thought that Leila was off her head and heads would roll for her act of betrayal.

He (Leila’s husband) had been dying of tuberculosis when she fell in love with him, and she had married the fatality of his disease as much as the charm of his childish personality or the elegance of his dark hair falling across his white brow. (CP 57)

Leila’s husband was dying of tuberculosis. He needed somebody to give him medicine, food and shelter and to take care of him. He was in need of a nurse to attend to his needs constantly. He perfectly understood that marriage alone could be the answer for everything and the wife should be employed. He had set a trap for her and Leila had walked straight into it. She was bowled over by his love. She was a learned professor. She was erudite and studious. She taught Persian Literature in a girls’ college. She was making money whereas her husband was slowly and deliberately enjoying her earnings. He did not seem to have any idea of earning.

In fact, he could not go to any job. He was confined to bed with tuberculosis. He was on his last legs but she carried him through his illness and inability and helped him survive a difficult period. He was sick and so she had to carry the ball. Fortunately she was going to job and making money. Leila’s husband was totally incapable of working by himself. Leila was criticized for marrying a good-for-nothing fellow. She soon
realized that it was too difficult for her to deal with. Above all, she was targeted to carry his burden. Her husband tied her down to look after himself. Leila had split up with her parents and fell into the wrong hands. The pain was almost too great to endure, still she showed remarkable endurance throughout her life. Her forbearance and fortitude should be greatly appreciated.

Sometimes I (Maya) thought of him (Leila’s husband) as an animal, a ferocious and wild beast that had allowed itself to become a house pet for its own reasons, and he accepted the food and drink she (Leila) earned for him, as his due, even teasing her about her parents who had not seen her, written to her, or in any way communicated with her since the day of her elopement. (CP 58)

Leila was struggling to make both ends meet. Her husband was in the happy position of never having to worry about money. All his hopes rested on his wife. He could beat ease knowing that she did his job. His wife was always there to smooth away his fears, so all went smoothly. She was patient and sympathetic towards her husband even though he had done wrong. She swallowed hard and forced back her tears. Leila was one of those who require a cross, cannot walk without one. (CP 58)

Leila hid her emotions and earned their crust. She shed tears of real grief and was sick at heart. She had no joy. She had fallen into the trap of trying to do everything for her husband. He had become a burden to her.
When I (Maya) saw her (Leila) hand him a glass of medicine, or lift his body into comfortable positions, I saw in her movements an aching tenderness subdued, by a long sadness, into great beauty and great bitterness. (CP 57)

Leila spent the evening correcting essays. She asked her husband to correct the scripts. In correcting the essays and totalling the marks, her husband was slipshod and slapdash. When she discovered mistakes in his corrections and calculations, she redid them without telling him. She felt that if she spoke her mind, he would be deeply affected. To such an extent she considered the feelings of her profitless husband in a gentlemanly manner. One time the attack of tuberculosis was acute. On hearing that Maya paid a visit to Leila’s house to console her. Much to Maya’s surprise, Leila was snarling.

She (Leila) let forth a torrent of hot words and such curses that I (Maya) sat shocked and silent, prim almost, beside her. But it calmed her to have me there, ... ‘Pay no attention to me today,’ she said, softening her hoarse voice deliberately. ‘I don’t know why I rave.’ She lifted one hand to her face, and, with four fingers, touched the centre of her forehead. ‘It was all written in my fate long ago,’ she said. (CP 59)
Too much of worries and problems will lead to insanity and psychosis. When the problem is becoming unbearable and intolerable, it will have dire consequences. The particular person is highly susceptible and vulnerable to mental disorder. These psychos should be given proper counsel and utmost care. Otherwise they will behave in a very strange violent way and put an end to themselves. Maya soothed her and took Leila under her wings. It quelled Leila’s pain and unpleasant feeling. Eventually, stormy Leila gradually quietened.

Her ill-fated husband was bedridden. He overburdened and overloaded his wife with responsibilities. Leila had no children to wipe out her tears of remorse. Her parents turned their back on her. She had no one to offer a few words of consolation. Single-handedly she was fighting an intense battle. She felt that she did not have the strength to drag out or prolong the battle. She was deeply affected and badly hurt. All she needed was unselfish love and true affection. Nobody is interested in carrying the burden of others. Leila’s husband was becoming gradually less strong and he was gradually sinking. He was close to death but he counted himself fortunate to have had such a dutiful wife.

If Leila had adopted a baby, it would have been a very intelligent move. The child-rearing would have lessened and deadened her sorrows. It would have given her remarkable fortitude and great courage. The house had been standing empty and there was no one around. Leila was a single tree in the very big garden of life. Her life seemed empty without children and every move was painful. Nobody could give her any solution.
She went wrong in choosing a partner. It was her bad luck to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Life is short. The right decisions make the life more interesting and the wrong decisions destroy the life once and for all.

In Anita Desai’s novel *Fasting, Feasting*, throughout her life, Uma tasted bitterness only. Nobody was kind to her including her father and mother. Then to whom would she turn for comfort and solace? Since the day Uma was born, nothing went right for her. She was not fair like her sister Aruna. She was dull-witted and simple-minded. She could not understand anything quickly or easily. She had never been good at studies. Of course she was sent to the best convent run by the nuns. She showed no sign of intelligence.

….. and over and over again she (Uma) failed. Her record book was marked red for failure. The other girls, their own books marked healthily in green and blue for success and approval, looked at her with pity on the day the record book was handed out. She wept with shame and frustration. (FF 21)

Had Uma studied well, perhaps things would have been different. She failed continuously and it made her parents think that she was not fit for studies but only for marriage. On one occasion, Uma was taken on as a domestic servant. She was compelled to take care of her younger brother Arun.
‘I have to go and do my homework,’ she (Uma) told her mother. ‘I’ve got to get my sums done and then write the composition.’ ‘Leave all that,’ Mama snapped at her … ‘We are not sending you back to school, Uma.

You are staying at home to help with Arun.’ (FF 18)

At such a tender age, Uma did not know what to do. A solution immediately suggested itself to her that was to seek the help of Mother Agnes. She strongly believed that Mother Agnes would help her to escape from the mesh. So Uma with the money she saved for a long time, stealthily journeyed to the school in which she studied. This scene portrays the helpless situation of a young girl who clutches at straws. She stormed into the convent without anybody’s support. Somehow she managed to meet Mother Agnes and that was followed by Uma’s passionate appeals to Mother Agnes to take her back to the school by convincing her hard parents.

Uma hurled herself at Mother Agnes, threw her arms around her waist, hid her face in the starched white cotton skirts, and howled aloud. She was a messy weeper: her face was wet, her hair distraught. Her mouth was twisted and her eyes and nose ran. She knotted her hands in Mother’s skirts and girdle. All the time she howled. ‘Mother, oh Mother,’ she wailed, and when Mother Agnes tried to pluck her off her skirts and hold her aside, she flung herself down at the nun’s sandalled feet and lay on the floor, abjectly wailing. (FF 27)
Readers are moved to tears. Uma was badly beaten up because nothing she said moved Mother Agnes to offer her help. ‘But I will work very hard!’ she (Uma) yelled. ‘I will pass next time. Please tell him, Mother, I will pass next time!’ (FF 28)

When Uma came to know that there was no possibility of getting her education back, she was under great mental stress and as a result she fell into the ground like a fallen tree and then she went into convulsions. That problem had beaten her. Her parents never took an interest in her studies. There was no one to soothe her pain or to heal her broken heart. There was no one to understand her. Her own father and mother thought that Uma did not deserve to have education. They kept grumbling that she was dull and unintelligent. They had a very low opinion of her. They were of the opinion that Uma was meant to look after their newborn baby.

Uma was imprisoned and deprived of basic rights and simple pleasures. She was always treated like a servant. It was shameful the way she was treated. She became an object of universal derision and became a figure of fun. Her sister Aruna also poked fun at her and said unkind things about her. She treated her abominably. Uma was defenceless against attack. She was downbeat and downhearted. Her life seemed to have lost all meaning. Children expect love and affection from their parents. Uma’s parents failed to understand that the rejected Uma was also a human being.

‘It is not good to be running around. Stay home and do your work – that is best,’ Mama opines with an air of piety. ‘I do my work all the time,
every day,’ Uma cries tearfully. ‘Why can’t I go out sometimes? I never
go anywhere. I want to go to Mrs. O’Henry’s party.’ (FF 114)

Her parents caused her a lot of grief and there was no one to share her joys and
griefs. If Mama had not given birth to Arun, things would have been much different and
they would have loved Uma to a greater extent. When Uma and Aruna were born, they
were left in the care of ayah. When Arun was born, it was entirely a different story.
Mama for her own reasons wanted Uma to play the role of ayah. Uma was saddled with
managing Arun.

Mama turned away with a sigh of relief: clearly she felt all was well now
– the baby could be left to his elder sister. ‘But ayah can do this – ayah
can do that –‘ Uma tried to protest when the orders began to come thick
and fast. This made Mama look stern again. ‘You know we can’t leave the
baby to the servant,’ she said severely ‘He needs proper attention.’ When
Uma pointed out that ayah had looked after her and Aruna as babies,
Mama’s expression made it clear it was quite a different matter now, and
she repeated threateningly: ‘Proper attention.’ (FF 30)

Mama was always too busy to look after her children. She was busy with her
clubs, wedding houses and functions. She did not want her daughter Uma to go to school
rather she wanted her always sit at home and take care of Arun. Indeed the birth of Arun
marked a turning point in the life of Uma. Before Arun’s arrival, she was able to do what
she wanted. She was free to come and go as she pleased. Uma’s life changed overnight.

Arun’s birth turned Uma’s world upside down.

He was responsible for all the trouble in Uma’s life. Uma tended Arun whereas Aruna never minded her brother Arun. Aruna led an easy and untroubled life. She was negligent and inattentive to the needs of Arun. She went to cinema along with her friends and passed the time boisterously. She had got a real knack for avoiding the unnecessary burden, but Uma did not know how to refuse the unwanted burden in her life. She did not know how to answer negatively and she was at a loss what to do next. She realized that her ignorance and inexperience were being exploited.

She (Mama) screams, ‘Uma, look, they are stealing the guavas again.

Uma, Uma!’ Uma, indoors, frowns. ‘What is it, Mama? I am sleeping you know.’ ‘Why are you sleeping? There are thieves in the garden, stealing guavas.’ She screams at the top of her voice … ‘There! There! See, they are running away – their hands full of guavas. Where is mali? Call mali.

Tell him to guard the garden.’ (FF 84)

At one stage, when Uma’s cousin Anamika got married, Papa and Mama felt that they should parcel up Uma as early as possible. They began to make a concerted effort to find a suitable bridegroom for Uma but the proposals did not come up to their expectations. After looking her up and down, they took to their heels. They kept out of
her way and they looked the other way. In the marriage market there was no demand for Uma.

Mama worked hard at trying to dispose of Uma, sent her photograph around to everyone who advertised in the matrimonial columns of the Sunday papers, but it was always returned with the comment ‘We are looking for someone taller / fairer / more educated, for Sanju / Pinku / Dimpu’, even though the photograph had been carefully touched up by the local photographer, giving Uma pink cheeks and almost – blue eyes as she perched on a velvet stool before a cardboard balustrade in his studio.

(FF 86-87)

All their efforts ended in failure and so they were tired of their pursuit. They soon grew weary of meeting with failures. Later they went through the matrimonial columns in the newspapers regularly and sent the photograph of their daughter Uma to their various relatives. They felt hopeful that they would find a suitable bridegroom very soon. Finally one family came to see her but the bridegroom, from the beginning itself, was indifferent to her and he was disinclined and reluctant to accept her. The bridegroom’s family left the house by saying that they would inform later.

But, unfortunately, none came, and they heard no more from the Syals.

The weeks went by with decreasing hope and finally Mama relinquished
it altogether as painfully as Uma had the ring drawn from her finger. ‘He
must not have liked Uma,’ she said bitterly. (FF 77-78)

Uma’s parents were all ears. They were waiting anxiously but the bridegroom’s family did not react or respond immediately. Later they informed that they were interested in marrying Uma’s younger sister Aruna and not Uma.

‘How can I tell you? But yesterday Mrs Syal came to see me and you know what she said?’ ‘What? What?’ Mama cried eagerly, swinging rapidly back and forth on the swing. When Mrs. Joshi bit her tongue and held back, she worried, ‘She did not like our -?’ Mrs. Joshi touched her ears to show that what she had heard had scandalised her. ‘He liked – he liked – but who do you think he liked?’ She leant forward and murmured into Mama’s ear: ‘Aruna. He wanted Mrs Syal to ask for Aruna, not Uma.’ (FF 78)

For a few minutes, Mama stood shocked and silent. Uma was shot down by the news. It gave her the shivers. She felt that she was a hopeless case. Her face clouded over with despair. She came under a lot of criticism from her parents.

… (Uma) went into her room and stayed there all morning, watching Aruna paint her fingernails and then her toenails with a bottle of pink polish. At lunch Mama said nothing of the incident but kept a gloomy
silence and threw significant looks at Aruna, partly in accusation and
partly in reappraisal. (FF 79)

Aruna came to life. That was the proudest moment of her life. Aruna came alive as her parents talked about her beauty. She was too big for her boots. There was no one to speak for Uma. Her parents gave her a hard time. Uma led a miserable existence whereas Aruna led a quiet life. She became too proud of herself and she had spent the days just lazing around.

While Mama searched energetically for a husband for Uma, families were already making enquiries about Aruna. Yet nothing could be done about them; … MamaPapa responded so eagerly to an advertisement in a Sunday newspaper placed by a decent family in search of a bride for their only son. MamaPapa went together to meet them and found it was a cloth merchant’s family from the bazaar which had recently begun to prosper and was building a new house on the outskirts of the city. (FF 80)

Mama and Papa felt healed by the second proposal from the Goyal family. Mama hankered after wealth and so she was in high spirits. She expressed pleasure and contentment. They were living in a rented house for a long time but their daughter was going to marry a boy who owned a big house and so Mama was delighted like anything. They did not make proper and enough enquiries. They immediately paid a large sum of money to get married but unfortunately the second go was also a complete failure. Papa
made a loss on the deal. Mama gasped, pressing her hand to her bosom with pain and horror, while Papa stammered, ‘And the dowry? The dowry? What about that?’ (FF 82)

The hard-earned money was wasted on a heartless groom. It was man’s inhumanity to woman. It caused untold damage to Uma. Her parents looked at her with hatred. Uma was vexed in spirit, inwardly. She was filled with a sense of loss and was emotionally inhibited. Papa persisted in his search for the groom. And all the bridegrooms in the marriage market for some reasons never cared about Uma. All were off to greener pastures and Uma seemed to them pasty and pallid.

There were so many marriage proposals for Aruna that Uma’s unmarried state was not only an embarrassment but an obstruction. Here was Aruna visibly ripening on the branch, asking to be plucked: no one had to teach her how to make samosas or help her to dress for an occasion.

Instinctively, she knew … Uma did not know what was expected of her in this situation; she waited patiently to be disposed. (FF 85)

Relatives tried to ask open questions but Uma’s parents were not in a position to answer their queries. They got into hot water. Aruna was full-grown and so Papa and Mama were under increasing pressure to find a partner for Uma as early as possible. They were all hot and bothered.

Uma’s ears were already filled to saturation with Mama’s laments, and Aruna’s little yelps of laughter were additional barbs. Had anyone looked,
they might have noticed that Uma’s face was losing its childish openness of expression and taking on a look of continual care. (FF 86)

Uma’s parents’ persistence was finally rewarded when Harish agreed to marry their daughter. They never took her feelings, expectations into account and they never took an interest in her wishes, likes and dislikes. She was never given free rein and her parents never allowed her feelings to be expressed freely. They did not give her complete freedom of action.

….. ‘he (Harish) was married before,’ his relatives wrote candidly, ‘but he has no issue. He was ’in the pharmaceutical business, earning decent income’, which was taken to mean that he was a travelling salesman who received a commission in addition to his salary. ‘He is a good family man with sense of responsibility,’ they wrote, which was interpreted to mean he was living with his parents in an extended family. Since it was clear Uma was not going to receive any other offer … Mama and Papa decided to proceed with the negotiations … The man looked as old to her as Papa, nearly, and was grossly overweight too, while his face was pockmarked. (FF 87-88)

No expense was spared. They spent as much money as was needed. Unluckily Uma married an unlovely and unsightly married man. He seemed cool and unemotional. He was tatty and untidy. Finally Uma was bundled off to her husband’s house.
Finally the sullen bridegroom broke in and said curtly to the priest, ‘Cut it short, will you - that’s enough now.’ The priest looked offended, Uma was mortified. If he could not even tolerate the wedding ceremony, how would he tolerate their marriage? (FF 89-90)

Uma made her way to her husband’s house in a train. She was delivered over to her husband’s door but he left in a heartbeat. He was out of doors. Her marriage was doomed from the start.

… their family home, a low yellow house in a lane where cows munched garbage and dogs slunk about, growling. Here Uma was handed over to her husband’s female relatives – a hardbitten mother who kept her teeth tightly clenched on a betel nut as she examined Uma with shrewd small eyes, and the wives of his brothers, and their children. Having shown Uma into a room that led off the kitchen, and put down the trunk that held her clothes – her husband muttered, ‘You may rest. I am going to work.’ ‘To work?’ Uma asked in surprise, for the wedding had surely been an unusual event, a kind of holiday, and she had not expected it to end quite so abruptly. He nodded and mumbled something like, ‘In Meerut,’ and disappeared. (FF 91)

They relegated their daughter-in-law to the position of a mere housekeeper. Uma served their needs and met their requirements. It was a sad fact that Harish left her for
ever. Uma was in a mess and could see no way out. Matters came to a head with her marriage. Slowly the awful truth dawned. Uma wanted to get married and settle down but it was an impossible dream. One day Papa stormed into the house and he had made a scene.

‘Papa had learnt that they had been duped. Harish was married already, had a wife and four children in Meerut where he ran an ailing pharmaceutical factory to save which he had needed another dowry which had led him to marry again. The scene that followed was surely a unique and memorable one but Uma’s response to it was to shut not only her eyes and ears to it – she had gone into her room, shut the door and sat on the bed, wrapping her sari over her head, around her ears and mouth and eyes, till it was all over … It consisted of Papa raving and ranting at one end, the mother-in-law screaming and screeching at the other, the brothers shouting and threatening in between, and the sisters-in-law clustering together to watch all the parties in a kind of bitter satisfaction.

So Uma went home with Papa. (FF 93-94)

It was a bruising experience. Papa got into a loud, angry argument with Harish’s family members. They were accused of cheating Papa’s family. When Uma heard the news, her legs just folded under her. It was the end of all her hopes and dreams. They had been hoodwinked into marrying a worthless man. Uma felt duped and thus doomed once
and for all. She witnessed some distressing scenes. She burst into tears. Tears began to flow from her eyes. After some heated argument a decision was finally taken. Uma abided by her father’s decision. Papa took her by train. There was not an ounce of sympathy in Papa’s heart for the unfortunate Uma. Rapacious Papa rattled on about the loss of money.

The compartment was crowded this time with strangers, but Papa had so lost control of himself, was so beside himself, as not to behave normally or sanely: he beat his head with his fists, and moaned aloud about the dowry and the wedding expenses while everyone, all of them strangers – women with babies and baskets of food, men reading papers or playing cards or discussing business - turned to listen with the keenest of interest, throwing significant looks at Uma who kept her head wrapped up in her sari in an effort to screen her shame. By the time they reached their own station, everyone along the way knew of her humiliation and her ruin. (FF 94)

Uma thought that she was under a curse. She got muddled when the sorrowing Papa started grieving and grumbling. She was writhing with embarrassment. Her misery was inexpressible and inestimable. Papa made an exhibition of himself. Uma covered her head with her sari and tried to hide her shame. She was caught in a web of worries and it
was inescapable and inevitable. Her father hit his head and cursed himself for his
stupidity.

Uma closed her eyes tightly in a vain attempt to hold back the tears. Papa
wriggled out of settling down Uma. He was out of his mind with grief. The failure left
him at a loss for words. The sad story moves the readers to tears. All her hopes were
destroyed and Uma cursed her bad luck. The whole affair ended in a tragedy. Uma was
ashamed to show her face in the street. Her future was uncertain.

The marriage was somehow cancelled, anulled. Uma was never told of
the legal proceedings involved. It was assumed she would not understand,
and was never quite certain if she had never actually married or if she
was now divorced. Divorced – what a scandalous ring to the word! …

Having cost her parents two dowries, without a marriage to show in
return, Uma was considered ill-fated by all and no more attempts were
made to marry her off. (FF 95-96)

They had been badly bruised by the defeat. It affected them badly and made them
feel unhappy and less confident. Uma’s family members talked with an air of
detachment. Marriage brought desolation and destitution. There was no one to restore or
rehabilitate Uma to a normal life. They were indifferent and uninterested. There was not
even a single person to feel pity for what Uma was enduring. To her life was completely
meaningless. Uma was one of life’s unfortunates. Their efforts to get a bridegroom for Uma proved unsuccessful.

They did not want to push the point any further at that moment. Papa gave up the chase. Making the wrong decision could prove expensive. Sometimes parents are hurried into making an unwise choice. There is no need to rush. It should not be a leap in the dark. Parents need to be very patient in the hunting ground. They should look before they leap. Rash decisions will destroy their daughter’s life and afterwards it is no use crying over split milk. They are entrusted with a great task. They should not leap into action immediately. Even a small mistake will destroy the life of their precious daughter. If mistakes are made in any other part perhaps it can be rectified but in the case of marriage there is no turning back. So parents should have this point in their mind.

‘But I was so happy to find someone for my Uma - after all, her cousin Anamika is already married. I didn’t like to wait longer, ‘Mama sniffed pathetically. ‘Yes, that is why the Goyals are able to do such things, because of parents being in too much of a hurry. If parents will not take the time to make proper enquiries, what terrible fates their daughters may have! Be grateful that Uma was not married into a family that could have burnt her to death in order to procure another dowry! (says Mrs Joshi) (FF 83)
Soon after the tragedy, the parents of Uma began to look for a match for Aruna who was a fully fledged girl. Papa and Mama showed her great kindness but they gave up the idea about Uma’s marriage with no intention of returning to it. It was the end of all her dreams. Since Aruna was sublimely beautiful, proposals came pouring out of many places. Sharp-witted Aruna selected a rich and wise partner. He had striking and stunning good looks. Their names were also evenly matched – Aruna and Arvind. Aruna was the complete opposite of her sister. She dictated the terms for her marriage to Papa.

She threw a cocktail party for Arvind’s family on the eve of her marriage. She put on airs. Arvind’s family gathered together at Aruna’s house and Aruna floated on air. She was extremely happy and excited. She kept her spirits up. Everybody showered honours upon Aruna and so Aruna was over the moon. Even though Uma’s parents put off Uma’s marriage, Uma bustled around in the house. Her marriage was a broken marriage but having it at the back of her mind she busied herself with the preparations for the party. Unfortunately Uma stopped the hustle and bustle of the wedding house by her convulsion.

She (Uma) fell heavily at the guests’ feet, managing to strike her head against the tin tray so that it was cut open dramatically, and when they ran to help her up, she began to roll on the ground, just as she had done at the ashram, her eyes fixed, her teeth clenched, jerking her shoulders and drumming her heels uncontrollably … Dr Dutt was fetched from the
other end of the marquee and came at once, thrust a handkerchief into

Uma’s mouth to prevent her from biting her tongue, washed her face

with a glass of cold water, and then had her carried to her bedroom, all so

quickly and efficiently that not everyone in the marquee even became

aware of the incident. (FF 101-102)

Aruna tore her sister to shreds. She attacked her with words and reduced her sister
to tears. Her voice was throbbing with emotion. She felt her sister was a fly in the
ointment. She flung sharp words and sharp rebuke at tongue-tied Uma. Aruna’s
annoyance showed itself in her looks and Uma’s fear showed in her eyes. Uma was
unable to speak out of fear. Aruna felt Uma cast a shadow on their happiness Uma looked
such a mess that Aruna was ashamed of her. Aruna felt Uma spoiled the pomp and
ceremony of the party and that Uma foiled and thwarted her plans. Uma was sublimely
unaware of the trouble she had caused. She was silenced by Aruna’s stinging rebuke.
Sharp-tongued Aruna tore a strip off her sister.

She (Uma) should be put away, locked up, Aruna sobbed. ‘I should be

locked up,’ Uma moaned, along with her. ‘Lock me up, Mama, lock me

up!’ … Aruna hissed one last threat, ‘Don’t you dare do that at the

wedding, don’t you dare!’ (FF 102)

Aruna’s remarks hurt her feelings but Uma endured the taunts of her sister. Uma
felt rejected and useless. The painful feelings of rejection killed her little by little and bit
by bit. Readers are on the verge of tears. Aruna was as vain as a peacock. She made a display of her wealth, learning and her abilities in order to impress people. She was conceited and boastful. She was always showing off and was vain of her beauty. After the marriage of Aruna, Papa and Mama began to treat Uma like a slave. For anything and everything they began to use her for their well-being. And Papa, after his retirement, showed his authority by commanding and dictating Uma.

All morning MamaPapa have found things for Uma to do. It is as if Papa’s retirement is to be spent in this manner - sitting on the red swing in the veranda with Mama, rocking, and finding ways to keep Uma occupied. As long as they can do that, they themselves feel busy and occupied. She has to write a letter to Arun, to find out if he has received the parcel containing the tea and the shawl they sent him through Justice Dutt’s son. In between she has to drive off the urchins who are after the ripe mulberries on the tree by the gate, and see if the cook has bought the green mangoes for pickling and has all the ingredients and necessary spices – but no extra that might be pilfered. Then, when Papa says his winter woollens must be spread out in the sun and sprinkled with dry neem leaves because he has seen moths hovering about them. (FF 133)

Papa derived great pleasure from bullying Uma. Uma ran errands for Papa and Mama. Parents should strengthen their children in the face of adversity. Sometimes Uma
was courageous enough to speak out against the injustice but whenever Uma registered her protest, it was brushed aside by her father. Her mother always took Papa’s part and also supported her daughter Aruna against her daughter Uma. Papa thought Uma was useless and no good at anything. Uma became part of the furniture. She led a purposeless and pointless life.

Uma had poor eyesight. At one stage she developed severe pain in her eyes. The local optician suggested that it was serious and it should be attended by a specialist in Bombay. When Uma conveyed that matter to her father, he was as cool as a cucumber.

‘My eyes are paining.’ ‘Your eyes are paining after just writing one letter? Oof,’ Papa lets her know what he thinks of such weakness. Uma is indignant. All the indignation of the morning has mounted and now reaches its climax. ‘I have told you many times my eyes hurt,’ she cries … Uma has taken off her spectacles and stands rubbing her eyes.

‘Everyone’s eyesight grows weaker as they grow older,’ Papa declares.

‘Don’t you know that? You think my eyes have not grown weaker?’ (FF 126-127)

Papa turned down her request. The hard-hearted father talked as if he had lost the milk of human kindness completely. Uma was under the shadow of her father and he had her in his clutches. She had fallen into his hands. It was the duty of Papa to meet the needs of Uma but he was never ready to consider her request. The selfish father cared and
worried about himself and not about his daughter Uma. He thought that Uma should not come to him to air her grievances. She had been cruelly treated. She did not have a shoulder to cry on. There was no one to listen to her problems and give her sympathy. Papa was the cruellest father.

She (Uma) looks around for something to do that she cannot do when MamaPapa are at home, needing her every minute as they do. She opens her cupboard, humming to herself musingly as she runs her eyes over her folded saris, her boxes full of matching bangles, the lace-edged handkerchiefs. Of course she knows what she wants to do: she reaches to the top for a shoebox full of old Christmas cards. Over the years, the collection has grown to a sizeable one. She carries it across to her bed and sits there cross-legged, looking through them … She binds them all up again with string and stows them away like treasure – to her they are treasure. (FF 98-99)

Uma was interested in collecting Christmas cards. She found true happiness in her collection. Even though she was a Hindu, the education she received from the Christian convent made her cultivate that habit. She derived immense amount of joy from collecting and retaining a lot of Christmas cards. She took no pleasure in household duties. Whenever her relatives came to visit them, she used to put the Christmas cards on display. Uma was too innocent to inflict damage on others. Her card collection denotes
her childlike nature. In her tempestuous life, it was a great consolation and gave her a
great deal of joy. It made her forget all her miseries at least momentarily and briefly.

She failed to withstand the stresses and strains of her life but somehow her private
collection acted like stress buster. It was a breathing space. It was a short rest in the
middle of a period of physical effort. She just wanted to be left in peace. Her Christmas
card collection was strongly reviled and rebuked by her parents saying that it would
convert her into Christianity. She received a severe reprimand for her childish behaviour.
Papa and Mama tried to break the habit of collecting cards.

The only comfort in the life of Uma was her card collection. Her parents envied
her and they wanted her to discard that habit. To such an extent her parents spoiled their
daughter’s enjoyment by trying to stop her from collecting cards. The parents of Uma
were not comforters rather they were the destroyers of Uma’s bliss and mirth. Dr Dutt
requested Papa and Mama to send Uma to her hospital for a supervising job. It was the
chance Uma had been waiting for and it was a window of opportunity. She thought that it
was the breath of life to her.

‘So, you see, I (Dr Dutt) thought of you, Uma. A young woman with no
employment, who has been running the house for her parents for so long.
I feel sure you would be right for the job.’ ‘Job?’ gulped Uma, never
having aspired so high in her life, and found the idea as novel as that of
being launched into space. Papa looked incredulous and Mama outraged.

Dr Dutt still clasped Uma’s arm. (FF 142)

A change of job would do her a world of good. Uma hoped for the best and she built up false hopes. Her parents locked her up and so she had little contact with the outside world. Uma, the caged bird, wanted to see the world and wanted to have a breather. She built castles in the air and she was hopeful of going to work soon. Her enthusiasm knew no bounds but it lasted only for a short time. Her parents could have given her half a chance but there was no possibility.

‘Papa,’ she (Uma) said pleadingly. It was Mama who spoke, however. As usual, for Papa. Very clearly and decisively. ‘Our daughter does not need to go out to work, Dr Dutt,’ she said. ‘As long as we are here to provide for her, she will never need to go to work.’ ‘But she works all the time!’ Dr Dutt exclaimed on a rather sharp note. ‘At home. Now you must give her a chance to work outside’ ‘There is no need,’ Papa supported Mama’s view. In double strength, it grew formidable. ‘Where is the need? Dr Dutt persisted. ‘Shouldn’t we ask Uma for her view? Perhaps she would like to go out and work? After all, it is at my own institute, in a women’s dormitory, with other women.’ (FF 143)

Mama’s face broke into a wide grin and stared at her daughter with wide eyes. She had strong and angry opposition towards that idea. Papa and Mama needed someone
to look after them and so they gave a blank refusal. Uma’s face fell when she heard her mother’s words. The blow knocked her flat and she looked blue. She was looking here and there for someone to support her cause and send her to the job and give redemption from the slavery. She was completely controlled by her parents. Mama had not done a hand’s turn. She gave lame excuses for not sending her daughter.

A career. Leaving home. Living alone. These troubling, secret possibilities now entered Uma’s mind – as Mama would have pointed out had she known – whenever Uma was idle. They were like seeds dropped on the stony, arid land that Uma inhabited. Sometimes, miraculously, they sprouted forth the idea: run away, escape. (FF 131)

Uma cried for the moon. She asked for something that was impossible to get. Mama was hostile to the idea and so she did not let her go. Uma was under the heel of her parents. They made her look small. Uma called out to her father and her mother for help but they did not care about their daughter’s future. Even after Dr Dutt had gone out, Uma was not ready to relent. Mama’s answer amounted to a complete refusal but relentlessly Uma talked to Dr Dutt on the phone stealthily in the absence of her parents and pleaded with her to take her. Uma was doing things quietly and secretly. Uma’s father used to lock the telephone but Uma knew where the key was. Taking her courage in both hands, she opened the door and walked in.
MamaPapa went to the club and Uma was alone in the house, she slipped into Papa’s office room. The phone which had once stood on a three-legged table in the drawing room and then moved to his desk was now locked in a wooden box, but Uma knew where he kept the key. She scrabbled around in the inky pencil box and found it amongst defunct pens and split nibs, unlocked the box and quickly dialled Dr Dutt’s number. (FF 144-145)

Uma wanted to be rid of her parents and their authority. She called her up. She was too young to understand the ways of the world. On one occasion she was caught by her father. Papa got very hot under the collar when he found out the truth. He cracked the whip.

Uma was in disgrace: she had forgotten to lock up the telephone in its box and Papa had returned from the club to find the evidence of her crime staring at him from his office desk. ‘Costs money! Costs money!’ he kept shouting long after. ‘Never earned anything in her life, made me spend and spend, on her dowry and her wedding. Oh, yes, spend till I’m ruined, till I am a pauper.’ (FF 146)

Papa used his authority and power to make his daughter work very hard by treating her in a strict way. It is the duty of the father to spend for his daughter. From dawn, till dusk, Uma’s only job was to attend to their needs constantly. Papa easily forgot
what his daughter was doing for him. He was totally ungrateful and he was repaying evil for good. Some fathers show their power only by scolding and beating their daughters. They always think low of their daughters. From their point of view daughters are born to serve and sons are born to rule. This is a man-made discrimination – discrimination against women and discrimination in favour of men.

‘Now where are you looking? Just concentrate on the letter, Uma,’ Papa scolds. ‘I am, Papa, I am. What am I to write?’ ‘Write “Dear Arun”;’

Papa clears his throat, speaking slowly. ’ “We are happy to hear you have done well in the examinations and can now take a well-earned rest”’

‘Wait, wait’ cries Uma, frantically trying to get the pen to catch up with the words. ‘Oof, you are so slow,’ he complains. ‘She is slow,’ Mama agrees, quite unnecessarily. (FF 124-125)

When Papa, the dictator, dictated letters to his son Arun, who studied in the U.S., Uma was expected to write down with a great deal of concentration and without making even minor mistakes. Sometimes tiredness affected her powers of concentration and at that time he barked at her.

“Mr O’Henry has come up with a suggestion. You may remember Mr O’Henry from St John’s School” put that in brackets, Uma.’ Uma had started out writing ‘Put that in brackets’ and now has to scratch it out.

She tries to do this unobtrusively but Papa notices, and explodes. ‘Don’t
you know what brackets are? What did they teach you at the convent?’ (FF 125)

Uma, the beast of burden, was brutally assaulted. She blinked back her tears and twiddled her thumbs. Appalling crimes were committed against her. She was compelled to take on the role of personal assistant to Papa and she was at his beck and call. On one occasion the electricity was off in the middle of the night. Papa and Mama immediately called her out and asked her to go to the sub-station and find out the reason.

‘Go and fetch candles, Uma,’ Mama cries in agitation. ‘Wait, wait, Mama. It may come back in a minute,’ Uma grumbles. ‘No, no, it is a major breakdown. Can’t you see, even the street lights have gone off? It will take hours to repair.’ ‘We must inform the sub-station. Go, Uma. Inform, must inform.’ ‘You want me to walk down to the sub-station in the dark? Now?’ Uma squawks indignantly. (FF 147-148)

Papa, the head of the family, was not ready to go out or send his son Arun, to know the real situation but he deliberately forced Uma to do the job. It shows the male domination and female subservience. Her parents did not care about her safety. It is a gross violation of human rights. They did not respect her wishes and opinions. This is a callous disregard for the feelings of others. Papa and Mama twisted Uma’s arm and they forced her to go to the sub-station. They treated her with disdain. Unfair and unjust treatment was meted out by her parents. All his work bore the stamp of authority.
The only person Uma loved very much in her life was her cousin Ramu. He was an unwelcome visitor to Papa and Mama. Uma’s parents kept him at arm’s length but Uma welcomed him with open arms.

Suddenly she (Uma) shrieks, ‘Oh, Ramu-bhai! It is Ramu-bhai!’ …

‘Come, come,’ Uma cries. ‘Come up here. Mama, Papa, look who has come!’ Mama and Papa are looking, but with such pinched expressions, such tight-lipped disapproval, that it is clear they do not share Uma’s delight in seeing the black sheep of the family who has the bad manners to turn up without notice. Both the parents draw their feet together as if to avoid a gutter that runs too close. (FF 45-46)

Bakul Uncle’s son Ramu was a sociable man who would talk to anyone and he had his unique brand of humour. Uma rolled out the welcome mat for Ramu. She prepared the best item for him and paid much attention to him.

‘I’ve told cook to heat some bath water,’ she (Uma) cries, ‘and he is going to make puris for breakfast.’ ‘Puris for breakfast?’ Papa exclaims, breaking his silence. ‘Puris? Puris? Did you say puris?’ The words explode from him with both excitement and horror: it is what they have on special occasions. Uma must be out of her mind if she thinks this is one. (FF 47)
Uma admired Ramu’s innate and inborn ability to crack a joke with a sense of humour. For Papa and Mama, he was a vagabond and they tried to get rid of him. He led a life of indulgence and he was riddled with vices and so he became the unwilling object of their attention. … both parents seem to have decided to use silence as a weapon against an unwelcome guest (Ramu) and insufficiently respectful nephew. (FF 46)

There was a close affinity between Uma and Ramu. Uma and her parents were incompatible but Uma and Ramu were compatible. Papa and Mama did not like her strong attachment to Ramu. Uma was an enthusiastic supporter of Ramu. She took up the cudgels on behalf of Ramu. She defended and supported him strongly but Papa and Mama did their utmost to persuade her not to talk to him. They had destroyed her hopes of happiness.

‘I’ll take you out to dinner,’ he (Ramu) offers grandly, throwing out an arm in invitation. Papa and Mama’s mouths fall open – their lips and tongues look white. Uma squeaks, ‘To dinner?’ in utter disbelief …

‘There’s Kwality’s!’ Uma cries suddenly, making her parents turn their faces from Ramu to her without altering their thunderstruck expressions: what could she be thinking of, suggesting dinner in a restaurant? She has never been to one in her life; how can she think of starting now when her hair is already grey. (FF 49)
Ramu took her to a bar and they enjoyed music and dancing. Indeed that was the only evening in her life Uma was very happy but when she came back, Mama bombarded her. She felt her daughter Uma played silly buggers. Mama’s threats chilled her to the bone and her snide remarks squeezed her out. Uma’s narrow-minded parents nipped her happiness in the bud.

**Uma finds herself grasped by the shoulder and pushed into her room so that her handbag and her flowers fall out of her hands. Still, she insists on turning around and telling her mother, ‘I had shandy to drink, Mama and the band played and Ramu and I danced.’ ‘Quiet, you hussy! Not another word from you, you idiot child!’ Mama’s face glints like a knife in the dark, growing narrower and fiercer as it comes closer. ‘You, you disgrace to the family – nothing but disgrace, ever!’ (FF 52-53)**

Every day seemed the same to her. By the time Arun had to leave his home country and to head for America, everyone came to the railway station to send him off. Uma was also standing with her head and shoulders bent forwards. Arun watched his sister with a sinking heart. Uma stood with stooped shoulders and looked so dejected and desolate. It broke his heart to see her like that and his heart went out to her. Looking back, he (Arun) saw Uma on the platform beside his parents and suddenly noticed how old she looked: his sister Uma, already beginning to stoop and shrink. (FF 122)
Her sorrow had turned her hair grey and she was beginning to feel her age. The stony-faced father and mother were not bothered about their sad-hearted daughter. Uma wept bitter tears of disappointment but her condition did go unnoticed and unseen by her parents.

In Anita Desai’s novel *Fasting, Feasting, Anamika* was the daughter of Papa’s brother Bakul. She was all the world to her parents. Her parents adored and worshipped her. She was stunningly beautiful and compellingly attractive. She was their pride and pleasure. She was a lovable daughter and was loved by everyone. From the young to the old, everybody fell under her spell.

She (Anamika) was simply lovely as a flower is lovely, soft, petal-skinned, bumblebee-eyed, pink-lipped, always on the verge of bubbling dove-like laughter, loving smiles, and with a good nature like a radiance about her.

Wherever she was, there was peace, contentment, well-being … everyone had to come to her, attracted to her as bees to a lotus. A lotus, with her deep, creamy, still beauty - that was what she was. Or a pearl, smooth and luminous. (FF 67-68)

Anamika had a good brain at an early age. She was the brightest student in the class. She studied exceptionally well. She set an example to the other students. Her studies showed great promise. Her father admired her enthusiasm. He was always
boasting about how wonderful his daughter was. Her stupendous achievement was she won a scholarship to study at Oxford.

Even the adults looked on Anamika’s glossy head, her thick dark braids and her big dreamy eyes, and smiled, sometimes sadly as if thinking how their own daughters and daughters-in-law could never measure up to this blessed one … Uncles and grandfathers liked to have Anamika near them, ask her about her school and studies, for it was the astonishing truth that Anamika was not only pretty, and good, but an outstanding student as well. In fact, she did so brilliantly in her final school exams, that she won a scholarship to Oxford. (FF 68)

Brainy Anamika grabbed the brass ring. It was a feather in her cap and it was an open sesame. Her parents were proud of their daughter’s achievement. The brilliant young scholar had a bright future. She had the world at her feet. The eyes of the world were on Anamika. Those were the glorious days in her life. Anamika’s only aim in life was to study well and earn a lot of money. Her aim was good. Parents’ support is required in order to achieve these aims. The world is her oyster. Instead of sending her to Oxford, her parents decided to give her in marriage.

‘Naturally her (Anamika) parents would not countenance her actually going abroad to study - just when she was of an age to marry - everyone understood that, and agreed, and so the letter of acceptance from Oxford
was locked in a steel cupboard … She could never bring herself to contradict her parents or cause them grief. (FF 68-69)

Anamika’s parents thought that marriage was the life force and lifeblood but Anamika was totally unprepared for her marriage. They thrust their opinion down her throat. Her father queered her pitch. If something works well enough, it should not be changed. He spoiled her plans, mindless of her future. She made a martyr of herself and sacrificed her own wishes and dreams. On the day of Anamika’s marriage, everybody seemed eager to see the lucky man. They were deeply saddened because gracious Anamika married a graceless, angry old man.

Uma, Aruna and all the other girl cousins crowded around to see the match when he came, a bridegroom, to the wedding, and they fell back when they saw him, in dismay. He was so much older than Anamika, so grim-faced and conscious of his own superiority to everyone else present … she was marrying the one person who was totally impervious to Anamika’s beauty and grace and distinction. He was too occupied with maintaining his superiority. (FF 69-70)

Her parents said that the bridegroom got so many degrees and so they had selected him. His profession lulled Anamika’s father into a false sense of security. Anamika was thrown in at the deep end.
In a way, it was Anamika’s scholarship that had summoned him up, brought him to her parents’ attention out of the swarm of other suitors, because he had qualifications equal to hers; he too had degrees, had won medals and certificates, and it seemed clear he would be a match for her.

(FF 69)

Poor Anamika as usual humbly obeyed her parents’ choice and accepted him as her partner. Then she learnt the unpalatable truth that she was in deep water. Her life after marriage bristled with problems. Mother-in-law made life difficult for her. The quick-tempered woman gave her a rough time.

Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by and approved or, at least, did not object. Anamika spent her entire time in the kitchen, cooking for his family which was large so that meals were eaten in shifts – first the men, then the children, finally the women. She herself ate the remains in the pots before scouring them. If the pots were not properly scoured, so they heard, her mother-in-law threw them on the ground and made her do them all over again. When Anamika was not scrubbing or cooking, she was in her mother-in-law’s room, either massaging that lady’s feet or folding and tidying her clothes … she had had a miscarriage at home, it was said, after a beating.

It was said she could not bear more children. (FF 70-71)
The slave-driver made her daughter-in-law work extremely hard. Nine times out of ten Anamika was doing household duties. When her mother-in-law gave her the rough side of her tongue, Anamika turned the other cheek. Anamika’s hard-faced husband unmasked his true character. Even on first acquaintance it was clear that he was not a congenial partner. Anamika and her husband were unsuited to each other; they did not have the same interests and were therefore not likely to make a good couple.

He was very unpleasant to his wife. Anamika suffered many hardships but the hard-boiled husband was very unwilling to interfere in her problems and stop the ill-treatment. Her husband, the educated elite, strongly supported his mother and was never her prop. Anamika was not allowed to go to her mother’s house and she was fettered like a bonded labourer. She looked sad and tired.

Unsung Anamika was in an unrelieved nightmare situation. Her mother-in-law’s words had hurt her but Anamika hardly ever opened her mouth. Anamika fell to brooding about what had happened to her. She kept a lid on her problems. They went unreported and they were left unsaid. Anamika tried to hush up the fact. Unfortunately there was no one to pull her back from the brink and from the rough end of the pineapple.

The news has struck like lightning … She (Anamika) turned off the gas cylinder they used for cooking. She filled a can with kerosene oil. She unlocked the kitchen door and went out on the veranda. Then she removed her cotton clothing. She wrapped a nylon sari about her. She
knotted it at the neck and knees. Then poured the kerosene over herself.

Then she struck a match. She set herself alight. (FF 150-151)

Anamika’s mother-in-law said that Anamika committed suicide by putting herself to the torch. Her mother-in-law only immolated her and Anamika had been charred beyond recognition but the hard-headed mother-in-law stubbornly refused to admit the truth and Anamika’s husband also refused to admit his guilt.

She (Anamika’s mother-in-law) herself, possibly in collusion with her son, had dragged Anamika out on the veranda at that hour when it was still dark – possibly before four o’clock – and that they had tied her up in a nylon sari, poured the kerosene over her and set her on fire. (FF 151)

Anamika’s parents accepted their words without protest. They thought it was an act of God. Anamika’s father was the unknowing cause of all her problems. That one mistake had cost him dear over the years. He nipped his daughter in the bud.

What Anamika’s family said was that it was fate, God had willed it and it was Anamika’s destiny. (FF 151)

Anamika’s parents were answerable for her death. Soon after the marriage they began to hear reports that Anamika was ill-treated by her mother-in-law and her husband. Immediately they would have brought her back. They could not understand any delay would be fatal. If they had acted on information, they would have safeguarded her. Anamika was dying for a bolt-hole and refuge. They should not have given her in
marriage to such an old man. If Anamika had a good job, she would have easily thrown away the yoke. Her parents delayed because they thought that it would bring shame to the family.

Anamika’s husband’s family perfectly understood that and so they ill-treated her. Anamika’s parents failed to understand a very simple truth – their daughter’s life was a more precious one than society, status, dignity and prestige. Their greatest dread was that society would talk ill of them. They could not take criticism. Anamika had got too used to the soft life at home. The soft-hearted woman felt completely crushed by her mother-in-law’s criticism. She could not find a way through the crush. Facing mother-in-law’s wrath, Anamika had vanished off the face of the earth.

... they sit motionlessly, their heads sunk onto their chests, silent. Bakul Uncle who always strode with his head held high and an air of invincible superiority, now seems almost invisible: he has retreated into a grey shroud of sorrow ... Lila Aunty, who had always awed them by her urban sophistication, her elegance and – it had to be said – her snobbishness, has collapsed into a heap of rags in a corner. (FF 152)

Everyone was charmed by her beauty and wit and her equable temperament. Anamika was the envy of her relatives and acquaintances. Her scholarly husband had never known the value and virtue of Anamika. He was a monster and the monster did not know how to protect and respect that great and unattainable treasure. In the midst of the
rough treatment, Anamika lapsed into silence. She was their unpaid servant. Even then they were not happy with her and finally they killed her. Anamika’s parents took their daughter’s death very hard. There was no point wailing and weeping about something that happened so long ago.

All the characters have been silenced by the male chauvinists. They feel the lashes of the men’s tongues but they never breathe a word and they never break their silence. They often lose confidence when they are criticized. They are trampled underfoot and they die a slow and painful death.

SILENT SUFFERERS

Women all over the world speak the same language: the language of silence - Lalithambika Antharajanam.

Women are the silent sufferers. They are treated like animals. It is a sad fact that women are not even given opportunities to express themselves. Their opinions have never been sought. Their feelings have never been respected. Their silence and their inability to fight back against the attackers made them undergo life-long sufferings. If they had registered their protests, they would have been spared. They shed tears of pain but their agonized cries never reach their fathers’ or husbands’ ears.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel Roots and Shadows, Indu had never tasted mother’s love and her father also failed to give care and attention to her. Nothing can compensate for the loss of a mother. Everybody left her to fend for herself. Grown-up
Indu fell in love with Jayant who belonged to a different caste and they entered into wedlock. Her family warned her that what she was doing would have an unhappy and unpleasant result. Indu was happy with him but very soon she felt she was manacled. What she liked very much, her husband did not like at all. He imposed his will on her and Indu fell to his lot. She was not permitted to make her own decisions and she should get the nod from him for all her actions.

She longed for Jayant’s love but he could not slake her passion. Jayant was not interested in physical pleasures and so he could not extinguish her longing. He was dead to all the feelings of love and he was unable to understand emotions. Indu was a spirited young woman but her husband was spiritless. She did not put pressure on him. She kept her feelings under control and she did not make noises about her condition. She kept a lid on her very strong feelings of love. She could not bend her husband’s ear but masterful Jayant bent her to his will. She was bitterly disappointed and she was not satisfied with what she had got but she refused to disclose his discriminatory practices. Indu moulds herself of satiate Jayant and prevents herself from retaliating, as it will certify her marriage as a failure. Indu foresees it and decides to hide the frictions of her marital life from her family. (Mohan 9)

Indu pretended to the world that everything was fine. She was afraid of losing her married life and so she changed her position to the whim of her husband. Discontented
Indu suppressed her feelings and surrendered herself to her husband and she pretended an interest she did not feel.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel **Roots and Shadows**, Akka was twelve years old when she got married. She gloried in her father’s house but without her consent her father pushed her into entering the portal of marriage. She was safe in her father’s house but her hard-headed husband pulled her down. Akka’s husband was above thirty and he was noisy, rude and aggressive. He was not gentle and careful with the delicate flower. Akka was constricted by marriage, and physical and emotional abuses were meted out to her.

She panicked when she saw her husband and she pandered to his wishes. His threats chilled her to the bone. Akka went to pieces and she could not live normally. Marriage defeated her completely and the finest part of her life was wasted. Akka’s husband had her in his clutches and Akka did not have the guts to go head to head with him or to walk away from her husband’s house. Akka had become the victim of the evils of patriarchal practices. She has to endure and submit to insults, injuries and humiliations with a stoic patience and never complain. (Mohan 5-6)

Akka was extremely sad and disappointed. Akka’s husband got the hots for a woman. Akka found out he had been carrying on with another woman. He led an immoral life. That woman pleased the eye but he made his wife look a complete fool. Akka was not loved or treasured or valued very much by anybody. Every night she cried unconsolably without having a single person to wipe her tears off.
She was under the heel of her husband and so he tried to loot Akka’s jewels and he thought it would make that woman feel happy. He gnashed his teeth when he could not get what he wanted. He growled at his wife and she groaned under the weight of her problems. The womanizer treated her badly and fear clutched at her heart. Akka toed the line and she never registered her protest. She looked sad morning, noon and night and she suffered at all times of the day and night. Her grief ground on for a long time. Later Akka’s husband suffered a stroke and she was burdened with the sick husband.

She carried him through his illness and she looked after her invalid husband nearly two years. Akka’s mental pain was very strong and it was giving a feeling of burning. She sat in gloomy silence. No one enquired after her and there was nobody to console her or comfort her. Her life was unendurable but she silently endured all her sufferings on her tod.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel **Roots and Shadows**, Narmada (Atya) was a childless widow. After her husband’s death, her in-laws began to gloat over her. They kicked her when she was down. They were happy about her terrible predicament in an unpleasant way. Her parents-in-law put the squeeze on her and so she returned to her brother’s house. She (Narmada) had had a hard life. What else can a childless widow expect? Her in-laws had, true to tradition, ill-treated her after her husband’s death. (RS 36)
Narmada (Atya) had a very crowded schedule and they treated her like a servant. Being a domestic worker, she was loaded down with a lot of domestic service. She strained every sinew and she worked her fingers to the bone. She was never given a holiday and they never told her to take rest. She acted with no thoughts of personal gain. She was no respecter of persons. She treated everyone in the same way. She was the servant of everybody. Her widowhood shut her up.

No one could restore her to her former glory and too many uncomfortable thoughts were crowding in on her. She was sick at heart and it resulted in her physical illness. Her illness never kept her away from work. She learned to shut out her feelings. She never gave a squawk of protest and she never even pursed her lips. She accepted everything without protest. She grieved the death of her husband but she did not express how she really had felt. She kept everything back from others and she endured all her sufferings without telling anybody.

Shashi Deshpande’s novel That Long Silence portrays another silent sufferer Jaya. Jaya was very happy throughout her childhood. She always looked so superior and she cocked a snook at others. Her father cocked an eye at her and he treated her with too much care and attention. Life was very interesting. When the time had come for her marriage, she reluctantly agreed to marry Mohan. There was a big change in lifestyle when she married Mohan. Before marriage she was never easily cowed by anybody. She had a mind of her own and was not afraid to say what she thought.
She had her own opinion and made her own decisions without being influenced by other people. On one occasion, Mohan started shouting and swearing at her. Jaya became very heated and she retaliated by raging. She got angry with her husband and she let rip at him but he was not in a position to accept her fighting fire with fire method. Finally she understood that her husband was deeply hurt by her words. He gave her the silent treatment and he made her have a difficult time. He put her through the mill. From that day onwards she stopped fighting with her husband and she fell silent. After that nothing ever seemed to rile her. Jaya is a woman who adjusts and accommodates … She believes that there is pain in hostility and rebellion is anguish and agony. Hence, she adopts a subaltern and subservient attitude. (Mohan 91)

Mohan destroyed her courage and confidence by his long silence. He showed her who was boss and it was etched on her mind. There was a turn around in her behaviour and Jaya became a coward. Her husband cracked the whip and she silently agreed with much of what he had said. He deadened her fighting spirit. He made her lose interest in life and lose enthusiasm for writing. Jaya went through a period of emotional adjustment and she ran out of steam.

She lost energy and enthusiasm and stopped fighting. She was expected to submit, serve, obey, praise, please and bow down to her husband. She should become a doormat. She should allow him to treat her badly but she should not complain. She should adjust herself to servile life. She should lick his boots. She should keep her mouth shut. She
should not talk loudly before her husband. She should be at his beck and call and she should worship him. When her neighbour Kamat died before her eyes, Jaya fled from him because she was afraid of the society, her husband and the break-up of her marriage. Jaya was down in the dumps. Once her husband left her without saying anything. There was no news about him. She was terrified at the thought of being alone. She cowered in the corner, gibbering with terror. As a result of the action of her husband, she developed delirium.

The husbands who leave their wives halfway, who suspect their wives, who beat their wives to death, who shut their wives away, who ill-treat their wives, who flee from their wives in times of crisis, who are off to greener pastures, who do not allow their wives to look after their parents, who do not permit their wives to go for a job and who run away should be punished severely. The government should pass a law to put them behind bars. It will teach the prospective husbands a lesson.

Mohan’s mother was a classic example of silent suffering. Losing her self-respect, she worked as a cook and fed her children. On occasions the children got very good food in wedding houses. She was very particular about her children. She did never leave her children unattended. After giving her children their dinner, she used to wait for her husband but he never gave her any indication of when he would be back. The poor mother did not make the children wait for him.
She never thought of filling her stomach but she was not ready to allow her children go on empty stomachs. She gave her children their dinner and then she cooked rice for him again because he would not eat what he called ‘her children’s disgusting leavings’. The deliberate cruelty of her husband’s words cut her like a knife. He wanted his rice fresh and hot, from a vessel that was untouched. On one occasion she had just finished the second cooking. Her husband came in and she had his plate ready.

‘Why is there no fresh chutney today?’ he asked, not looking at her. She (Mohan’s mother) mumbled something. The next moment he picked up his heavy brass plate and threw it, not at her, but deliberately at the wall, which it hit with a dull clang. (TLS 35)

He bit her head off and then he walked out of the house. Just the sound of his voice set their teeth on edge. Mohan’s mother had had a really rough time but she put up with him for the sake of the children. Silently, watched by the children, she picked up the plate. She cleaned the floor and the wall. Then she asked her son to go to their neighbour’s house and get some chillies. She put some rice on the fire and began grinding the chutney.

Then she was sitting in front of the fire, silent, motionless. She was a mild woman, who never shouted. He took her mildness of manner for granted. Her husband destroyed her confidence and happiness but she never complained that she had been unfairly treated. She was very careful that her children should be unaware of her
problems. She struggled to hide the truth that her husband gave her hell. He crushed her so that she could not rise. He had established total supremacy over his wife.

She gave him her head and she suffered silently. She tolerated everything without making a complaint. There are so many women especially wives suffer silently. They could not speak out against the sufferings. They wait eagerly for the day the children will become bigger, taller and develop into adults. If they get jobs, they will take care of everything but it is a long and painful process. They have to walk through the valley of tears. After many years of waiting if the children stand by themselves and if they are on a sound financial footing, it is great. If the children become prodigal and if the children do not have economic stability, their waiting and expectation will turn out to be illusion.

Kusum was a pitiable silent sufferer. Her husband was a pitiless, hard-hearted man. Her children were also completely out of control. Having husband and children, she felt all alone in the world. There was no one to share her joys and sorrows. Kusum was forsaken by her husband and deserted by her children.

He found his wife a real turn-off. She was no longer interesting and attractive and so her husband did not worry about her feelings. She became an unwanted mother to her children and her children failed to bond with their mother. It should not be forgotten that they had come out of their mother’s body at the beginning of their lives.

‘I (Kusum) want to see all my children.’ ‘They don’t need you,’ I (Jaya) had said brutally. What right did she have to make her suffering so loud,
so obvious? ‘They are managing quite well without you.’ ‘But I need

them.’ (TLS 21)

Kusum was in the grip of depression. Like many silent sufferers, deep down Kusum was unsure of herself. Loneliness and emptiness in her heart drove her mad. They should watch over her all day and all night but there was not a soul in sight to look after her. Her husband did not try to rehabilitate her or redress the balance or reinvigorate her or rejuvenate her.

If her family members had buffed her up, Kusum would have regained mental balance but they made a monkey of her. When she was all right, they were not ready to mingle and mix with her and then when she was mentally ill, who would pick her up? They closed the book on her case and her life was drawing to a close. Finally she threw herself into a well and killed herself. Kusum bade goodbye to the uncaring world.

One night Jaya overheard a conversation between a husband and wife. The husband grilled his wife about where she had been all night. He tortured her by asking many questions. He made rude and offensive remarks about his wife but she did not protest. The male chauvinist held all the aces and he hit her. She was beaten but she did not answer him back.

‘Where did you go today? Tell me. Open your mouth, why don’t you open your mouth, you bloody whore? Open your mouth and speak the truth.

Where did you go today? Can’t you reply? Has someone cut out your
tongue? … ‘Open your mouth, you bitch. Tell me where you went.

Speak.’ Another blow. And surely a kick? Moans again. (TLS 57)

The man criticized his wife rudely and unfairly but she did not air her grievances. He made wild accusations against her. She was deeply hurt when he called her a whore. He took her apart and caused her a lot of grief. He flung insults not only at his wife but also his wife’s mother.

He ill-treated his wife thinking that no one could touch a hair of his head, no one could question his authority over his wife and no one could speak for her. She cried for help but there was no one to save her. He got in his wife’s hair and he criticized her severely. The silent sufferer moaned and groaned but there was no one to understand and feel sorry about her problems.

In Anita Desai’s novel **Cry, The Peacock**, Maya was treated as a princess in her father’s house. Her father taught her to love plants and animals. She was brought up to respect the feelings of others. As a child she was surrounded by love and kindness. She never knew the cruel face of the world.

When Maya had reached marriageable age, her father gave her in his friend’s hands. There was a big age gap between them but her father thought that his friend would take care of his daughter as he took care of her. On the contrary Maya’s husband Gautama showed no mercy to his young wife. Gautama found fault with her for anything and everything. He made fun of her love for nature and she looked ridiculous. Her’s
(Maya) is the world of purity and peacock, of greenery and flower beds which are often overlooked by Gautama as the idle thought of an idle mind. (Choudhury 58)

Gautama was very intelligent but Maya was not the sharpest knife in the drawer and so he laughed in her face. His behaviour showed in a very obvious way that he had no respect for her. The tender-hearted woman’s true feelings were stamped on by her husband. Gautama had a casual attitude towards his wife. Throughout the day the innocent wife was sitting alone at home and waiting for her husband.

At last the husband came but he acted without much care or thought. He brushed her off. For him his court, cases and clients were important. He’s very widely read in law. The man who knew the law, the criminality of the human beings and the shrewd and cunning nature of people failed miserably to understand his loveable wife’s feelings. In his field he acted nimbly but he was not able to think and understand Maya’s problems. He read his clients like a book and he understood easily what somebody was thinking or feeling but he could not read his wife’s mind. She wished to live in peace with her husband but he disliked her.

He gave his wife hell and he made life unpleasant for her. Maya abandoned herself to despair and she suffered silently for a long time. Maya had obviously struck a chord with the readers. Her father garlanded her but her husband threw off her. Gautama crunched up her feelings and Maya was completely crushed under his ill-treatment and so she just sat there, sunk in thought. Gautama was a genius but the gentlemanly behaviour
was missing in him. He could have come down to the level of Maya; he could have tried his level best to spend time with her; he could have loved her and he could have tried to keep her chin up but he did not much care for her feelings.

**Maya represents a class of women who silently suffer at the hands of men**

... Her shattered world of dreams speaks more of her expectations and feminine personality. Scenes of rejection, with drooping images of caged monkey similar to the character, unveil the dejected spirit silently suffering and leading to terrible consequence. (Choudhury 60-61)

Even today many women suffer like Maya. She expects love and care from her husband. She longs to be with her husband at all times. She wishes to share everything with her marriage partner but he instead of showing care and consideration for his wife, he is engrossed with his official duties. None of her liking seems to have penetrated his thick skull. He does not listen to any of it and she has no place in her husband’s heart.

Waiting makes the heart sick and so the wife creeps silently out of the room. She sinks back into her seat, exhausted. She could not overcome that sinking feeling. Her husband does little to placate or pacify his crying wife. It is her unfulfilled wish to lead a peaceful life with her husband. If he despises her, her world will be darkened for ever. She leaves her parents and home and comes to live with a man who is not well known. The man should always keep this in his mind. He should love her, respect her, console her, soothe her and he should consider her opinions.
When the man forgets his duties, it ends in marital breakdown. The soft-hearted wife does not have the strength to rebel against her husband. She is surrounded with acute anxiety. She could not flee from her husband because she fears society and parents. It is a prolonged period of suffering. The fear suppresses her and so she surrenders herself to the cursed life. The agony continues for a long time. She can go nowhere and a peace settlement is nowhere in sight. She cannot hold on to her problems and so she turns in on herself and she stops communicating with others. The situation is getting worse and worse.

Maya was crying for her husband but he closed his ears to her pleas and he felt there was nothing to cry about. She was crying miserably and meaninglessly and she was under a lot of strain. After marriage Gautama became the light of her life. She waited patiently for a long time but she understood that her husband would never come down from his personal prestige. She felt that she was living in the desert and she could never see the oasis in her life. The problem made her think and worry about it all the time.

It preyed on her mind and it made her take a wrong decision. She killed her husband. Then Maya was on a knife-edge and she committed suicide. As a result of her husband’s rough treatment, she became delirious. Gautama did not set her mind at rest. He did not say anything to make her stop worrying. Had Gautama shown proper love and affection for his wife, the disaster could have been averted. They would have led a successful and happy married life.
Men go for work and do a lot of things everyday. They have the opportunity to meet many people from all walks of life but a woman’s life is not like that especially the housewife. Throughout the day she shuts herself in her house. She does cleaning, washing, cooking and scrubbing. She has not gone out; she has not met anybody and she has not talked to anybody. Her world is her house.

In the evening she will be on the lookout for her husband. She will open her heart to her husband only. If he is not ready to talk to her, she will linger on her husband’s indifference and inattention and she will keep her sufferings back from others. Consequently her loneliness will kill her. Silent suffering will result in madness in the long run and insanity will lead to death.

In Anita Desai’s novel *Fasting, Feasting*, Uma was a diligent student but she was not intelligent. She lagged behind her beautiful and brilliant sister Aruna. Big-headed Aruna was the big wheel in the family and her parents gave her free rein. Aruna felt exalted but Uma felt rejected and useless. Uma failed to shine academically. She wanted to study but she was not allowed to study. Mama and Papa took a dim view of her and they disapproved of her and they did not have a good opinion of her. She pleaded with her parents to send her to school. She hoped they would look kindly on her request but they refused to give in to her pleadings. She looked around for help but no one was very kind to her. Papa and Mama were deaf to her requests for help and they stubbornly refused to send her to school. Her efforts were producing diminishing returns and she left
school without finishing her studies. That one mistake seriously endangered the future of Uma. Uma receded with a heavy heart. She was given a new job - that was taking care of her brother Arun. Her parents made her life hell.

Uma is an eager, thwarted character of genuine pathos: clumsy, nearsighted, slow, she is treated with neglectful impatience by her parents and with some condescension by her smart and pretty younger sister Aruna. (Gaijan and Prasad 131)

Then it was her earnest wish to settle down. There was no demand for Uma in the marriage market. Men want to marry beautiful women only. It made her lose confidence and she appeared unnerved. Uma was unable to hide her unease at the way the situation was developing. She wanted to get married and settled down but it was an impossible dream. Uma felt very unimportant and unwanted.

Finally they found a bridegroom for her but the breakdown of the marriage shattered her. It was a knockout blow and it hit her so hard that she could no longer get up. Everything had gone so disastrously wrong. She wrestled with her thoughts and her sorrowful eyes shed tears but nobody took notice of her problems. She felt that she was a hopeless case. She wriggled and writhed with embarrassment. She looked more dead than alive.

In Anita Desai’s novel Fasting, Feasting, Anamika was an angel and her behaviour was exemplary. Cool-headed Anamika was extremely clever. Being the
brightest pupil in the class, she won a scholarship to study at Oxford but her wrong-headed father gave her in marriage and he did not know he had acted wrongly. Anamika’s husband was a crusty old man. Beautiful Anamika was beaten and thus cruelly treated by her mother-in-law.

She cooked, cleaned and did all the other jobs around the house. Her husband was brutal and he forced his opinions on his wife. Anamika could not extricate herself from the tangled web and so she had learnt to bury her feelings. She was in dire straits but she never opened her mouth. Anamika’s husband’s arm-twisting brutal force brought her to an end. Charming Anamika was charred and met with an untimely death.

The brilliant and beautiful Anamika is simply obliterated by the institution of marriage, relegated to the kitchen to toil for the family, never permitted even to attend any family gatherings, beaten, ill-treated and ultimately burnt to ashes. (Bhatnagar and Rajeshwar 253)

This is the difficult and sad situation of the silent sufferers. Many women maintain silence even in the face of great discontentment and discomfort. They are silently enduring all the hardships. As a result they are compelled to swallow a string of inedible bitter pills. From the very beginning itself, if one registers her protest, she will not be compelled to do that again. Silence gives consent and so it leads to many undesirable and unfortunate consequences. If these women show great courage and determination, what will happen? The answer is in the next chapter.