CHAPTER THREE

BRAVE AND BRILLIANT WOMEN

Woman is like the reed which bends to every breeze, but breaks not in the tempest – Whatley.

Like submissive women, these women also undergo the trials and tribulations of married life but they swim to the shore against a strong current. They are pushed to the ground but they stand up to the rough treatment. They find a way when there is no way. Their intelligence, fortitude and confidence are their crowning glories. They have pulled their community back from the brink. They break new ground and they are no longer puppets in the hands of men. They teach a lesson to the lonely and unhappy women.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel Roots and Shadows, Indu was a dynamic personality. She distinguished herself by her courage. She was a feisty young woman and she organized her own life. She was strong, determined and not afraid of arguing with people. She was a very independent-minded young woman. Sad to say Indu had never tasted mother’s love in her whole life.

Indu’s father Govind left the motherless child in his sister’s care and Indu was brought up by Narmada Atya. Her father occasionally paid a visit. Children need a caring environment but Indu’s father was distant and cold and very uninvolved in her life. He did not mind the child very much, he was very easygoing. He never gave his full and
undivided attention to his daughter. Parents are the most important people in a child’s world. Indu’s much longed-for maternal love was strangling her.

I (Indu) had lost my mother at birth. There is nothing unique about losing one’s mother. But a child, in spite of losing its mother, gets some idea of her from others, from photographs, from conversations. But I … No one had ever spoken of her, or even mentioned her name. For me it had been a total blank. A blankness that had left its mark on me … Father, who had never shown much interest in me as an infant, … How else could he have parted leaving me, a fifteen-day child motherless baby, with the family he hated and despised? He had not even come to see me until I was more than a year old. (RS 43, 81, 163)

Indu ran to everybody to be comforted. Inside most of the people is a small child screaming for attention. Indu did need an outlet for her unutterable pain and delight. Nobody could console and appreciate her but her distant relative Old Uncle was concerned for her well-being. Old Uncle was just the person she needed for the job. She was greatly encouraged by his positive attitude and suggestions. Many a time Indu relieved herself of worry by talking about her troubles to Old Uncle. Indu had told him all her likes and dislikes. She bared her soul to Old Uncle and he soothed her pains and aches. ‘Old Uncle had always been my refuge. What is Old Uncle to me … a friend, a confidant, an ally.” (RS 22)
Indu was a defiant teenager. She never wished to be controlled by others but Akka, Indu’s grandfather’s younger sister tied her hand and foot. When Indu was caught talking to a boy, she got it in the neck. Akka was very angry and annoyed with her and she wrung Indu’s neck. At first Indu was very patient and she tried to explain what had happened and her intentions were honourable but Akka stood her ground. Akka took a firm stand on her opinions and so Indu was beginning to lose her patience with Akka. Indu had the greatest difficulty in persuading her and she could not straighten her out. So she decided to make a stand against Akka.

‘What have I done, Akka?’ I (Indu) had demanded angrily. ‘Standing there in that corner alone with that boy’ ‘But Akka that’s the library,’ I had tried to be patient, to explain. ‘It’s full of corners, anyway.’ Trying to be gay and whimsical now, I had met a stone wall of refusing-to-understand. ‘And we were just talking. Is that wrong? It’s not as if we were holding hands, or touching and kissing.’ Akka had closed her eyes, a pained look on her face … The same day I had written to Father and made my plans for leaving. (RS 74-75)

Indu did not like to obey Akka’s unwritten rules. She felt Akka was only making things worse. So she wrote to her father and joined a hostel. She finally rebelled against Akka’s strict upbringing and she got out of the difficult situation. She was so bold as to leave her only refuge and she sought refuge in a hostel. She left home at the age of
eighteen. “I (Indu) had left home full of hatred for the family, for Akka specially. I had sworn I would never go back.” (RS 18)

Indu fell in love with Jayant. She crossed Jayant’s path and she had taken a liking to him on their first meeting. She proposed marriage to him and later their marriage was performed before a registrar. Her husband did not belong to their community and so Indu had come under fire from all sides. Indu had a great love for Jayant. She thought Jayant would make an excellent husband. In the beginning Indu could find her husband’s place a true home from home. She was comfortable and happy with her way of life. “I (Indu) had rejected the family, tried to draw a magic circle around Jayant and myself.” (RS 10)

Indu thought that marriage would give her a great deal of happiness. Jayant was somewhat rich and he was in a very good job. Like Indu, he was also self-opinionated. He was holding very strong views which he was not willing to change. He was not a henpecked husband. Indu was expected to follow her husband’s example. She had to sacrifice everything for the sake of her husband.

I (Indu) had thought I had found my alter ego in Jayant. I had felt that in marrying him, I had become complete … And in Jayant, I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self. Not only that, but total understanding. Perfect communication. And then, I had realized this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. (RS 114-115)
It galled her to have to follow and accept her husband’s decision. Their love had cooled and it was no longer strong and he was not to her taste. Their marriage had gone stale. They never spoke openly and naturally to each other. Jayant had played a decisive role. He called the shots and he never consulted with his partner. His decision was final and she should say amen to that. It was his call and she was not permitted to make her own decisions.

**When I (Indu) look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant … Always what he wants. What he would like. What would please him … And one day I had thought isn’t there anything I want at all? Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own? (RS 49)**

Indu was not allowed to express her view and to have her say. She was very keen on him and she was longing for Jayant’s love but he was always brushing her off. She had a desperate craving to be loved. She thirsted for Jayant’s love but he could not quench her ardent passion. Although she liked to give her opinion, she held her tongue. He never gave complete freedom of expression to her. She felt that he was deaf to her pleas. Jayant was not so interested in sensual pleasure and so he could not give pleasure to her physical senses. Indu felt frustrated. She did not prove his action wrong but she accepted it. She felt yoked with an unwilling partner and her life seemed empty.

**It shocks him (Jayant) to find passion in a woman. It puts him off …**

**We’re on different planes. He chooses his level. And I (Indu) try to choose**
the one he would like me to be on. It humiliates me … I (Indu) want to be loved. I want to be happy. The cries are now stilled. Not because I am satisfied, or yet hopeless, but because such demands now seems to me to be an exercise in futility. (RS 13, 82-83)

Finally Akka’s letter brought Indu to their house. There Indu met Naren, Old Uncle’s grandson after a long time. Indu and Naren cherished the memory of their childhood. Naren was a rash young man and he was a reckless spender. He had never had a steady job. He flitted from one job to another. He had an impulsive nature but Indu was very fond of him and Naren also showed love towards her. Naren was bedazzled by her looks. He had made advances to Indu. Impulsively he reached out and took her hand but Indu steered clear of him. She rejected Naren’s amorous advances. The thought of chastity put her to flight.

And I (Indu) was, yes, responding to him (Naren) with ardour and warmth. When I realized who it was ‘No, no,’ I cried out angrily, trying to push him … ‘Why not Indu? Are you such a faithful wife?’… ‘Stop that,’

I said harshly and pulled myself away from him. (RS 80)

Indu kept her emotions tightly reined in and she was not ready to break her marriage vows. She made it clear to him that she would not deceive her husband but the second time when Naren spread his arms, Indu ran towards him. She had tremendous drive and she could not control her feelings. Naren swept her up into his arms.
There was a joyous sense of release, of passion I (Indu) could experience and show and participate in. I clung to him (Naren) convulsively …

And knowing him for what he was irresponsible, unreliable, fickle, amoral, I clung to him as if he were a pillar. (RS 152, 156)

Naren pushed all the right buttons and so Indu without further ado flung herself at him. She seemed extremely agreeable and she approved of his activity. She could not resist the temptation. Indu and Naren were swept along by the force of their emotions and Naren made her forget everything else and he kept her in a good mood.

‘Come on, sit down,’ he (Naren) spoke soothingly, as if to a child … his voice, when he spoke, was unusually soft and gentle. ‘What is it, Indu?’

Indu. My name. And yet, the way he said it, it could have been, ‘my darling’, or ‘my love’ or any other endearment. (RS 78, 147)

Indu found Naren was more flexible in his approach and so she clung to him. He had set a trap for her and he caught her in a skilful way. Naren was a man after her own heart and Indu had a weakness for Naren. She found the temptation to meet Naren too hard to resist. She had butterflies in her stomach. She let her heart rule her head. She ran after him with a lot of energy and enthusiasm and Naren picked her up. They spent a most agreeable time together and their union gave her ineffable joy and unutterable delight. In the beginning Indu wanted to bail out of the adulterous relationship. She told him to take his hands off her. She took flight when she thought of her husband Jayant but
later she betrayed his trust over and over again. ‘You (Jayant) don’t know me, you know nothing about me,’ I (Indu) had once charged him in anger … ‘You don’t understand me,’ we had so often flung the words at each other. (RS 14, 115)

Indu never felt really at peace with Jayant but she felt at peace with Naren. She felt suffocated by all the rules and regulations but Naren was a breeze and so she had a fling with him. She enjoyed Naren’s new and refreshing approach and she passed the time enjoyably. Naren was to her taste but Jayant was not to her taste and so she rose to the bait and Naren netted her. Jayant did not keep her sweet but Naren was sweet on her and so she gave way to fleshly temptation. Indu had a great zest for life and she believed in living life to the full but her cold-blooded husband kept her at a distance and so she felt empty.

But my marriage had taught me this too. I (Indu) had found in myself an immense capacity for deception. I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage. (RS 38)

Naren offered himself as a sop to her heavy heart and he soothed her worries and calmed her nerves. Jayant bound her hand and foot but Naren had given her a free hand. For the first time Indu was able to speak and act freely without restriction. When Indu and Naren were together, conversation flowed freely and life with Naren was free and
easy. Indu felt that Naren was very approachable and so Indu succumbed to the lure. On the whole Jayant was responsible for his wife Indu’s fall.

I (Indu) had surrendered to him (Jayant) step by step. I realize now, that it was not for love, as I had been telling myself, but because I did not want conflict … I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure. I had to show them that my marriage, that I, was a success. Show whom? The world. The family, of course. And so I went on lying, even to myself, compromising, shedding bits of myself along the way. (RS 159)

The realization of what Indu had done suddenly hit her. The memory brought a tear to her eye. She felt she was out of her senses and she burst into tears. Her face was racked with guilt and she felt it was an act of betrayal. After she had committed the crime, her conscience was troubled. Guilt was written all over her face. She felt a twinge of regret. She was a broken woman after the act of adultery. Her face fell when her conscience pricked her. She buried her face in her hands and she groaned inwardly. She could not hide her inward panic.

And now, I (Indu) thought, the enormity of what I have done will come home to me. Adultery … I will now brood on my sin, be crushed under a weight of guilt and misery … that night, burst into a storm of weeping …

Wronging Jayant? … I had cheated him of my true self. That, I thought,
is dishonourable, dishonest, much more than this, what I have done with

Naren. (RS 155, 159, 171)

To Indu’s horror, Naren was drowned at tank and he died suddenly. Indu ran to
the place and saw the dead Naren. Indu was chilled to the bone and she was badly shaken
by his death. Death comes to all men but Indu never expected that Naren would meet an
untimely and tragic death. Naren’s death disturbed the balance of her mind. The wind had
dropped and Naren was below ground. His death struck terror into Indu’s heart and Indu
was dashed to the ground. She felt a bit flat after Naren had gone. Naren was her life and
so Indu went hot and cold. Naren showed a reckless disregard for his own safety but he
showed a lively interest in Indu. Naren, the man in Indu’s life, fell in with her views. He
accepted her ideas and opinions and so his death was a big loss to her.

‘Somebody’s drowned and they were trying to get the body out … I

(Indu) knew who it was. And all the blood in my body drained away.

Drained back to the heart which worked like some monstrous pump. It

was Naren. I had run to the place in the heat of the afternoon sun like a
crazed person … I could not control myself. (RS 175-176)

A wind of change was blowing through Indu’s world. At various times Indu had
felt alienated from society. Her married life with Jayant was a dead duck. She was
swaying in the wind. With the best will in the world Indu could not describe him as a
good husband. Their marriage had become a complete sham. Jayant was unable to feel or
understand his wife’s emotions. There was an aching emptiness in Indu’s heart. The light suddenly dawned on her. Indu decided to return to her husband. She put her adulterous relationship with Naren behind her. She kept her cards close to her chest. She tried to keep it secret from Jayant. She had had many problems in her marriage but she was determined to make a go of it. She had learnt to bury her feelings. She stopped hoping for Jayant’s love.

Yes, home. The one I (Indu) lived in with Jayant. That was my only home.

To think otherwise would be to take the coward’s way again. I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant. What kind of a life can you build on a foundation of dishonesty. I had asked myself once … I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me. (RS 186-187)

Indu was called back home by Akka. Akka, Indu’s father’s aunt was on her deathbed and she went through a period of emotional adjustment after her health broke down. After many years Akka could find it in her heart to forgive her. Obeying Akka’s summons, Indu came home to meet her. After marriage Indu was treated as an outcast. She felt strange and she was left in the dark. She came as an unwanted and reluctant visitor to the house. “You (Indu) leave home swearing eternal enmity against the old woman. and she (Akka) hates you too. And then you come home after ten years and suddenly she dies, leaving you all her property.” (RS 85)
Akka gave the full responsibility in Indu’s capable hands. It was something Indu never expected and Akka shocked and surprised Indu. Indu came into a fortune when Akka died and Indu never dreamt that she would get it. “No chance at all. Akka was very much in her right mind ... I (Shyamrao) can vouch for that. It’s all Indu’s. No question about that at all. If she gives anything to anyone, I’d call it generosity.” (RS 94)

After Akka’s death, Indu was in the saddle and that position made Indu think differently, act differently and behave differently. When Indu assumed her new responsibilities, she had a mountain of work. Akka was dead, so Indu had to carry the ball. Her household was a very big one. The family members all were different personalities. Looking after the people living in it was not an easy job and Indu was under pressure. Akka maintained order by sheer force of personality. Indu rolled up her sleeves and she was determined to face the challenge.

Sunil, unable to control himself, burst out with ‘I think it’s damned unfair. Why should all of Akka’s money go to Indu? We have as much right to a share as she has, if not more. She has no right at all, if you ask me. She isn’t part of the family now, is she?’ … ‘Not that I (Vasant-kaka) dispute the fact that women should have a share now. But to give everything to one person does seem unfair. (RS 93)

Everyone, great and small, could not accept the fact that Indu became an important and influential woman in their family and she was their mistress. It was
unthinkable and inconceivable. Her own people were burning with rage. They waited for a dead man’s shoes. They waited for her to die in order to step into her position. They felt they had been with Akka for many years but she did not consider them. It was indigestible and it was a bitter pill for them to swallow. “On seeing me (Indu), he (Sharad) bowed low, flinging out his arm, and bringing his hand, palm up, toward his chest. ‘Here comes the heiress. Welcome, Madam.’ I could have kicked him. Instead I smiled.” (RS 73)

Indu shot up and her rise shot them in the foot. Previously they did not care for her and they stamped her as sinner. She was neglected and forgotten by all. They were heedless and mindless of her but she looked perfectly respectable in her new job. She became the centre of attention and her opinion carried great weight with the family members. Madhav-kaka said, ‘Well, Indu, why are you so silent? You’re the most important person here. We’re all waiting for your decision. You must tell us what it is.’ (RS 97)

Indu stood high in their favour and she received a warm welcome. She was the favoured mistress. They fawned over her and they curried favour with her. Indu never asked for any favour from them but they asked her instead. They tried to get her to like and support them by praising and helping her a lot. ‘You know, Indu,’ and how placating her (Sunanda-aty) tone was now, ‘I think Akka was a wise woman leaving her money to you.’ (RS 135)
They coaxed her and cajoled her and they minded her p’s and q’s. They were
careful and polite about what Indu said and did. Their love was a sham. They only
wanted her money. Unlike Akka, Indu went cap in hand. She took no pride in her new
position. “I (Indu) would look after the old, help the deserving, scorn the weak and
ruthlessly turn my back on the useless ... And Akka thought I was one of the strong ones.
That’s why she put the burden on me.” (RS 144, 159)

Indu was never negligent in her work and she rose to the occasion. She treated
everyone in the same way. She respected their feelings and opinions. Her family
members were financially embarrassed. Indu had a generous and magnanimous mind.
She decided to pay for Mini’s wedding. She was unstinting in her efforts to help. ‘It’s a
good thing you’ve (Indu) done. It’s a wise decision.’ (RS 182)

It was a difficult job but Indu was the person to carry it through. She rose above
her difficulties and became a tremendous success.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel That Long Silence, Mukta lived next to Jaya. Jaya
had had a lot of support from her neighbour Mukta. Mukta was always polite and
considerate towards Jaya. Jaya was in the safe hands of Mukta and Mukta was always
willing to help out and she was never tired of helping others and it was in her blood. If
everyone gets a neighbour like Mukta, then there is no need to worry about anything in
the world. In truth, many people are crossing swords with their neighbours and many take
their neighbours to court. Mukta was a person of considerable refinement. Mukta, the
perfect neighbour who would, if you were not at home, not only take in your milk, but set your curds for you as well. (TLS 62)

One day Jaya’s husband Mohan left her without saying anything. At the time Jaya took refuge in the shelter of Mukta’s wings. At that juncture, Mukta acted as a mother hen to Jaya. Mukta cared for the people and protected the people and worried about them a lot, expecting nothing from them. If Mukta had not been there, Jaya would have perished long ago. If there was no Mukta, then there was no Jaya.

‘Nilima said you (Jaya) don’t look well.’ ‘I’m all right. Nothing wrong with me.’ ... ‘Anyway, can I get you some breakfast?’ ‘No, I don’t need anything. And I haven’t even brushed my teeth.’ ‘Do that. I’ll get you something in five minutes.’ (TLS 132-133)

Mukta belonged to an orthodox Hindu family. She married Arun and led a happy life. Very unfortunately her beloved husband fell out of the train and died. Her life had taken a turn for the worse. Still she lived in the vain hope that her unborn child would be a male child and he would redress the balance. Her unborn child was seen by her as a messiah but she gave birth to a girl baby, named Nilima.

Mukta fell short of expectations and she went to the wall. She did not go to earth but took her ease. She stopped worrying and started going ahead. She was not mowed down by failures. She studied and got a job. She earned her bread and she did not depend upon anybody for food and clothing and so she was not a burden to anybody else.
Success came after many failures. She was one who never troubled about her personal comfort. Her motto was one should not live for oneself alone. She went into overdrive and she did her work with utmost care or exactitude.

Mukta refused the biscuits. ‘Not today, Jaya. It’s my Saturday today.’ If it wasn’t ‘her Saturday’, it was ‘her Monday’, or ‘her Thursday.’ Mukta had more days of fasts than days on which she could eat a normal meal.

Her self-mortification seemed to be the most positive thing about her. And yet her piety … seemed meaningless. (TLS 67)

Mukta was a devout Hindu. She believed strongly in her religion and obeyed its laws and practices. She ate little food for a period of time, especially for religious reasons. Nothing could break her fast. She showed a reckless disregard for her health. She was as thin as a rake. Her habit of going on a fast had left her very thin. In order to bridle her passions, she went without food. Too much of food and rest will definitely make a person a pleasure seeker. She never ate a tasty meal even though she could afford to.

“My Saturday!” Oh God, Ma, what does it matter what day of the week it is? All your fasts are so stupid. Give them up, Ma, you’re really horribly old-fashioned.’ … ‘She’s right, Mukta, what do you fast for? Look at your arms – just skin and bone. At this rate, you’ll vanish into thin air one day.’ (TLS 68)
Mukta wanted to be faithful to her husband even after his death. She did not want to betray him or she did not want to bring shame to her family. Nothing disturbed the peaceful current of her life. Jaya became almost hysterical when one evening she saw an ugly scene in the bus shelter. Two young men were intimate with a young girl, who looked like her daughter Rati. Trouble and distress had come upon her and her heart was hammering. A feeling of powerlessness and negative thoughts took over and she took to her heels.

Jaya was caught up in the wave of encroachment and her heart was knocking wildly. Reaching her house, she tapped at the door but the key was with her only. That time Mukta came to Jaya’s rescue. She took Jaya inside her house and nestled her in the bed. Jaya lost her appetite and she could not sleep and bear the pain. Mukta volunteered to support Jaya at the time of crisis. She gave her food and her daughter Nilima was there to provide a service for her. Mukta supported Jaya through thick and thin and nursed her back to health.

I (Jaya) had a queer feeling, as if there were nothing left in my life, nobody but this one person, this companion who offered me nothing of herself, not even her (Mukta) despair. I wondered at her apparent tranquillity with the shadow of her dead husband behind her and the monstrous cloud of Mai looming over her daily life … ’Why are you here? I mean, why haven’t you gone to work today?’ ‘I’ve taken leave.’
‘For me?’ The thought struck me for the first time. ‘I couldn’t leave you alone, could I?’ (TLS 184)

Tireless Mukta tried her level best to restore Jaya’s confidence and reinstate her in her previous position. Mukta’s kindness had restored Jaya’s faith in human nature. Mukta was a relict. When her husband Arun died, her husband’s friend Kamat only advised her to study and he helped her a lot. Mukta followed Kamat’s advice and later she was able to find a good job and that job changed her lifestyle. There was no necessity for her thereafter to depend upon anybody Kamat was the architect of her life and so Mukta remained grateful to him until the end.

And after Arun died, it was Kamat who helped me, who gave me the courage to do my teacher’s training, to take up a job. They were all against it, yes, even Aba. ‘What will people say,’ he said, ‘they will think we are refusing to look after you.’ And there was Nilima, they said I (Mukta) should stay at home and look after her. But I knew I had to get out, yes, even for Nilima’s sake I was desperate to get out. And Kamat helped me. (TLS 185-186)

When Kamat met his end, nobody was with him. Jaya fled in panic as she saw the dead body of Kamat. Kamat lay helpless on the floor but Mukta’s heart jumped when she saw the dead Kamat. Immediately she jumped in and dealt with the matter as speedily as
possible. She acted promptly and efficiently. She was assiduous in her duties. Later Jaya was being quizzed by Mukta about her retreat.

‘Then why did you (Jaya) leave him alone the day he (Kamat) died? You left him to die alone, didn’t you? I (Mukta) saw you go up to his house that day, I heard you come down, and when I went up a little later, he was dead. You left him to die alone, didn’t you? Why did you do it, Jaya, why did you?’ … You could have been with him, you could have stayed by his side, but you didn’t, you just walked away. (TLS 185-186)

Mukta charged her with neglecting her duty and Jaya was wordless. Jaya was groping for the right word to describe her position. When Jaya had been confined to bed with fever, she was attended by Mukta. So Mukta pointed an accusing finger at her. Jaya was deeply ashamed of her behaviour and for a few minutes Jaya stood in shocked silence. Mukta was outspoken in her criticism. She strongly condemned the inhospitable attitude of Jaya. She was unafraid to speak her mind. She was really angry with Jaya but for that reason she did not hate her. Jaya listened to Mukta’s bitter reproaches and Mukta’s asperity terrified Jaya. Mukta led a perfect life and she never evaded her responsibility. Really and unquestionably, Mukta was a kind, motherly woman.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel That Long Silence, Nilima, Mukta’s only daughter, was a character. She was even-tempered and so she led a trouble-free life. She felt light-
hearted and optimistic and she took things easy. She played and moved around in a lively, happy way and she took great delight in proving others wrong. She was playful and merry and also very chatty. On the negative side, she was not pleasing to the eye. She was unattractive but she was an interesting person. She was a dark girl but she had a strong character.

… a fatherless child since birth, a dark baby, a crow in a family of fair-skinned swans. ‘How can the child be so dark?’ her (Nilima) grandmother often muttered. ‘None of our people are dark.’ …

‘They call me a crow too,’ she (Nilima) had said scornfully. ‘Just because I’m dark. Who cares! I like crows anyway. They’re so sharp, aren’t they, auntie?’ (TLS 62-63)

Mai, her grandmother was her only enemy. Nilima was in bad odour with her grandmother. She was always at odds with her grandmother. A heated argument always arose between the two. She was not one to be easily frightened. ‘A grandmother should be a nice, soft kind of person, don’t you think so, auntie?’ … ‘But I bet no one could be as foul as Mai.’ (TLS 183)

Nilima always got into an argument with her grandmother but she had filial affection for Jaya and she opened her heart to Jaya. She was very supportive during Jaya’s fits of delirium. She felt it was her bounden duty to take care of Jaya. Even though
Jaya was their neighbour, Nilima treated her like her mother with respect and consideration.

‘What do you want, auntie?’ I (Jaya) looked at Nilima dumbly. What did I want? ‘Shall I make you some tea?’ ‘No’ ‘I’ll make it, auntie. Mummy told me to make you some when you woke up. No trouble at all,’ she said like an adult. ‘Or shall I get you some Bournvita?’ (TLS 177)

Nilima inherited the quality of helping others from her mother. Her mother was a major influence in her life. Nilima never bragged or boasted about her action to anybody. She never expected to obtain an advantage or benefit from helping others. She was never opportunistic in her association with Jaya or others. She was very young but she had a great deal of maturity. She acted with no thoughts of personal gain. She was very much concerned about her nearest and dearest. Nilima’s special relationship with Jaya was undeterred. Every now and then she enquired after Jaya. She asked for information about Jaya’s health and about what she was doing. She cared for her neighbours as she cared for herself. “When Arun died they had tried to comfort her (Mukta) with the thought of the child who would be born; a son, possibly, who would be both her solace and her support. Instead there was Nilima.” (TLS 64)

Nilima was a posthumous child as her father Arun died in a train accident before her birth. She was born in a crisis situation and her birth itself was considered as an inauspicious occasion. It was an ill-omened and ill-timed happening. She did not care a
fig for those negative criticisms. She considered them as valueless and unimportant. Much of the criticism was totally unwarranted and so she put the thinking behind her. She was never upset and she regained her nerve. She recovered her courage and self-assurance. She had nerves of iron and so she put up a good fight. “She’s (Nilima) too curious about life; she’ll always want to know what happens next … She’s tough, she can stand it.” (TLS 183)

Nilima fought her way forward. She fought with courage and determination. Her fighting spirit, her mental fortitude and her great inner strength made her stand out from the rest of the characters.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel That Long Silence, Leena was Jaya’s best mate in the hostel. She played a predominant role in the life of Jaya. Jaya’s life had been an empty shell since her father died and when she was admitted in the hostel, she felt imprisoned in her room. It upset her that nobody had bothered about her. Perhaps her father sheltered his daughter too much and so her father’s sudden death turned her world upside down. Jaya was not able to cope with the stresses and strains of the life. In that situation, Leena went voluntarily and made herself known to Jaya, but Jaya did not know the first thing about her. “Yes, it had been Leena who had pulled me out of that ugly, self-hating despair, Leena who had taken away my bitter sense of failure, of worthlessness.” (TLS 141)
Jaya had developed a shell of indifference and so Leena consoled her not to be upset about it and made her come out of her shell. Leena genuinely cared about Jaya. Jaya poured out her heart to Leena. They got on well together although they were total strangers. Jaya gained confidence when she talked to Leena and she tried to forget about what had happened. Thereafter Jaya did not waste time feeling sorry for her father’s death – she just picked herself up and carried on. Jaya’s meeting with Leena marked a turning point in Jaya’s life.

Leena was easy-going and she never minded anybody or anything in her life. She had a will of iron and she had no hesitation in speaking her mind. Optimistically and fearlessly she conversed with others. She was having an affair with a man. Her behaviour was morally unacceptable but she did not care about traditional moral values. She had a freedom of conscience and she believed her actions to be fair. “Yes I (Jaya) had dropped Leena with a thud when someone had told me that she was not a ‘good girl’, that she spent her weekends with a married man.” (TLS 141)

When Jaya came to know of Leena’s affair, Jaya cut her out of her life. She had no regrets about leaving Leena but the decision could be one she had to regret later. Jaya maintained a distance from Leena and Jaya’s opinion of Leena had changed since she knew of Leena’s affair. Not knowing this, Leena went after her but Jaya kept avoiding Leena’s eyes.
'What’s the matter, Jaya? Why did you return those books in such a hurry? I got them specially for you. Why didn’t you open the door last night? I came for a chat. Why didn’t you wait for me for breakfast today? Didn’t you see me waving at you yesterday? Why, Jaya, why? (TLS 141)

Then only Leena came to know that something was wrong and there was no real possibility of changing her mind. Jaya did not let her be friendly with her, actually she avoided Leena like the plague. Their relationship had gone sour and Leena went away and she avoided getting too friendly and involved with Jaya. I’m sorry, Leena, I (Jaya) was stupid, naïve, ignorant, I was a narrow-minded idiot and the kind of person you were was beyond my comprehension then. Forgive me, Leena, I didn’t intend to be cruel. (TLS 141)

After many years one day Jaya happened to see Leena but Leena went unmindful of Jaya. Leena was not ready to forget and forgive Jaya. When she went after Jaya, Jaya was not ready to talk to her. Later Jaya realized her mistake. She felt sorry about her unmannerly action towards Leena who had lent a helping hand when she was thoroughly neglected by everyone else.

But Leena hadn’t forgiven me. I (Jaya) met her years later, and recognizing her, had involuntarily smiled at her; but she had passed me by, her face blank and closed up. No, she hadn’t forgiven me. Why should she? (TLS 141)
Jaya’s attitude towards her changed, making her feel more friendly and Jaya tried patching things up with her but Leena proved that she would not lower herself by submitting to others and she could not forget the hurtful things Jaya did.

In Anita Desai’s novel *Cry, The Peacock, Maya’s mother-in-law* had many children and they were all grown-ups. They did not care about their mother and did everything on their own. Every one of her children got their own way and they treated her with indifference. Sometimes they were busily engaged arguing about various things and at that time their mother did not stand in their way. She never took anything seriously especially her children’s cold and distant behaviour. She could not control her children and so she kept out of their way. They lived in a world of their own. As time went by they became more independent. Those independent children selected their professions on their own. “Her (Maya’s mother-in-law) children paid her little attention. There were many of them – two of them students still, the others journalists, teachers, scientists.” (CP 48)

Maya’s mother-in-law could not impose her will on her children and consequently that resulted in disaster. When her daughter wanted divorce from her husband after ten years of married life, she could not stop that even though she disliked it. As the situation at home got worse, she took refuge in her work. She did social work and was busy round the clock. A career as a social worker requires one hundred per cent commitment. She was busy with a wide range of outdoor activities.
She rushed away, like some busy rhinoceros charging through the forest, to her dispensary, or her crèche, or her workshop for the blind, the disabled, the unemployed. She knew so many people, gathered from such diverse backgrounds and situations. (CP 47)

Maya’s mother-in-law had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. She had much contact with the outside world and she could not stand idly by. In the evening when she was at home, she used to take her account books and begin to calculate. She was very happy with her eldest son Gautama’s marriage with Maya. Maya came from a good family and her father was a fine man. Maya’s mother-in-law thought Maya’s family was very well-off and so it would do some good.

She moved so much, worked so hard, in passing me by, smiling, said, ‘It was wise of Gautama to have married you, Maya,’ in a voice at once soft and broken with harshness, so that I could not tell whether she said this out of affection or had some motive far removed from any personal feeling. (CP 47)

When Maya’s mother-in-law was in need of money, she buttered up her daughter-in-law. On that occasion her mother-in-law had a big smile on her face. Maya grieved and groaned that her mother-in-law never considered her feelings and never tried to play the role of a mother at least a mother-in-law to the motherless Maya.
‘When will your father send me another cheque, Maya? Tell him I need it urgently – the nurses in the crèche have not been paid this month.’ … I knew I was not even one of those human beings whose comfort and health she (Maya’s mother-in-law) felt responsible for, but merely one of those outsiders who could be used of this purpose and were therefore necessary, though not necessarily loved. (CP 47-48)

Later, on several occasions mother-in-law was on friendly terms with her daughter-in-law. When Maya was so eaten up with the prediction, she was at a low ebb. She shut herself off from the world and deliberately avoided seeing people or having contact with anyone. Mother-in-law understood what Maya had been through and the situation was highly dangerous. She compelled her daughter-in-law to do shopping with her. Maya was not interested to go out and shop but her mother-in-law pulled her out of her cage. There she got special treatment. Mother-in-law treated her with consideration and without prejudice. That occasion made her feel comfortable and relaxed and Maya felt at home. When they cooled their heels in a bus stop, mother-in-law refreshed her daughter-in-law with a cucumber. … hailed the sleeping cucumber-man, and bought for us long slices of peeled cucumber, sprinkled with salt and lemon-juice, from off the trickling block of ice. Standing in the neem tree’s mythical shade, eyes cringing at the lurid glare of noon
beyond it, I (Maya) bit into my cucumber, crunched it, felt it cool, refreshing, and was suddenly revived.

(CP 160-161)

Maya killed Gautama unexpectedly and unfortunately. She began to think she had made a dreadful mistake and she was in mourning for her husband. Her injuries would take a long time to heal. At that time her father was on tour in Switzerland and so he could not be with his daughter. Maya became delirious and she was in a state of being senseless and speechless.

She shrieked and screamed in fright. She came close to peril and the situation was desperate. Maya confessed that she had killed Gautama but her mother-in-law did not lose her temper and shout at her daughter-in-law. Maya’s mother-in-law declared that her daughter-in-law was not guilty and she firmly believed that Maya was innocent of the crime. She found it hard to believe anything bad of her daughter-in-law. ‘It was an accident,’ she (Maya’s mother-in-law) had announced, overriding them all with a fierceness that had silenced them effectively. (CP 213)

Maya’s mother-in-law did not blame anyone for her son’s death and took it as an accidental death. Any mother in that position will definitely get angry and take any extreme decisions. Maya’s mother-in-law tried to cover up her daughter-in-law’s faults. Her son’s death happened unexpectedly and was not planned in advance. She managed to hide her disappointment. Her son’s death did not disturb her equipoise. She was very
busy in knitting garments for an orphan child who had just been admitted into her crèche. She masked her misery and melancholy with a cool head and nerves of steel. She did not leave her daughter-in-law’s side

Strangely enough, it was the older woman who gave way first. She (Maya’s mother-in-law) burst out, ‘How am I to tell him? What am I to tell your father?’ Nila stared at her mother. The dark eyes, moonless, starless, expressionless, she knew, but there was some new horrible, senile weakness in that mouth that shattered some child-like faith she had had in her mother’s invulnerability. The old woman was on the verge of crying? Actually crying? (CP 217)

In the end Maya’s mother-in-law lost her balance and fell bemoaning the fact that no one could console her husband. She cried out in pain and eventually her dynamic and fiery spirit shrunk.

In Anita Desai’s novel Cry, The Peacock, Maya’s sister-in-law Nila was a self-willed and self-respecting woman. She got married and gave birth to children but her husband was a wastrel. Nila’s marriage was on the rocks. Her husband continued to give her a migraine. After ten years of married life she wanted a divorce. She urged her brother Gautama to end her marriage by a legal process. Gautama had managed to patch up their differences and he was not ready to break up their marriage. He tried to persuade her to wait but she was not having any. She should try to settle the disagreement by
arguing about it openly. He was very careful that he should not be held responsible for her sister’s actions.

She (Nila) had come to consult Gautama regarding her divorce. Gautama had refused, in a noisy family conference, to have anything to do with it … ‘I (Gautama) haven’t time to waste on a case like hers – the mess she makes by being too bossy and self-willed and bullying.’ (CP 161-162)

Nila was able to do or decide things by herself. She was self-reliant and independent. She was able to remain calm and confident in a difficult situation. After marriage, she learnt to do everything by herself. Her husband was not very helpful and he never provided any financial support to his family. He was more of a hindrance than a help. He was a weak little mouse of a man. Problems stirred her up. Her husband gave her a hard time and rocked the boat but she was unafraid of the challenges and withstood difficulties and troubles. She perfectly understood that it was up to her to take care of the family. He caused problems but very bravely she rowed the boat.

She had no visible means of support and she was still financially dependent on her parents. In the face of husband’s death, divorce, joblessness and ill-health, women become despondent and they look so dejected. They are not in a position to believe that life is not all gloom and despondency. They have a long way to go. There are two options open to them – life and death. Women commit suicide because they think that it is all over after a failure in marriage. It is sheer stupidity. They believe marriage is for life. In
Anita Desai’s novel *Cry, The Peacock*, Nila set a precedent for the ill-fated women. She approached the advocate on her own and applied for divorce.

> And in high indignation Nila had found herself another lawyer, on her own. ‘You went alone and spoke to him?’ ‘And why not?’ she was wryly amused. ‘After ten years with that rabbit I married, I’ve learnt to do everything myself.’ (CP 162)

Many women suffer the same fate and they are in dire straits. Instead of living with a good-for-nothing husband, it is better for them to come out of the hellish life by getting divorce. There are many widows and they are very much alive. They are able to bring up their children successfully, and settle them in a comfortable position. The going gets tougher and tougher and in all aspects they are in a hopeless situation. Even then they have a strong will and by their great sacrifice and determination their children rise to lofty heights.

In those days women were expected to live with their husbands until the end and so they tolerated all the hardships, beatings, blows and torture. They led their lives with their husbands till their last breath irrespective of ill-treatments and shortcomings. Education has freed the subjugated women race from dependency. Many women are educated. So they have to learn to stand on their feet. They need to work hard to keep ahead. They should not look back on the past.
In Anita Desai’s novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Menaka* was the daughter of Sita but surprisingly she was the very opposite of her mother in everything. Sita could no longer distinguish between illusion and reality but her daughter never dwelt on any illusion rather she was highly realistic and eager to achieve something great. Menaka was very young but very mature. When there was nobody to take decisions for her, she herself took the decisions and those decisions were prompt and fitting and her move was smart and sensible. She looked purposeful and determined. She was dead set on getting a seat in the medical college.

There was a remarkable contrast between the mother and the daughter. Menaka had a sense of civic pride. She led a very busy and boisterous life in the city. She was on the boil and she did not want to spend time doing something that was not important. Sita was not able to cope with the stresses and strains of the city life. So she brought her to the island along with her brother Karan without their consent. She was a contented woman in the island. It seemed that she would spend the remaining part of her life in the island. It seemed she would live there all her life. She forced her company on her daughter and she pulled her daughter down. Her plans had raised angry protests from her daughter Menaka.

‘At night you see stars that you never can see in the city,’ …. ‘But no lamps,’ said her flat-voiced daughter. ‘No lamps? Of course there will be
lamps – real ones. Not electric bulbs but real lamps – lanterns. You’ll see,’

she (Sita) cried. (WWS 17)

Menaka was born and raised a city girl, but Sita shut Menaka in by hills, which make access difficult. Sita and Menaka held differing views. Menaka was a different kettle of fish. Sharp-eyed and sharp-witted Menaka thought aloud. She said what her thoughts were as she had them. When the woman (Sita) said, ‘How beautiful, look, how beautiful,’ her daughter (Menaka) pinched her nostrils and said, ‘Oh will they really drink that stinking water?’ which made the woman sigh reflectively. (WWS 22)

When there was no food, no light, no furniture and no entertainment, Menaka immediately burst out. She raised a storm of protest. If she had not done that perhaps Sita would have thought that Menaka liked the island. Very wisely Menaka was not giving her mother room for that. Plain-spoken Menaka was a forceful personality. She was unwavering and unyielding, and she was unshakable.

Menaka had grown into the most cool and self-possessed of her children,

most closely resembling her father in her ability to cope with life and accept it with no more than a careless shrug of the shoulders. By the time she was ten – a supercilious, self-contained, and beautiful young girl – she had made up her mind to be a doctor. (WWS 101)

The mother and the daughter were worlds apart. Mother was killing time but daughter did not want to kill time. Menaka was exceptionally talented with best prospect
and she was likely to be successful in the future. She was outspoken by nature and there
was little resemblance between her nature and her mother’s. She disliked her mother’s
odd nature and condemned her mother’s foolish behaviour.

So she (Menaka) knew it was not fear that made her grimace and turn
away from her mother: it was disapproval. Menaka – the calm,
reasonable, scientist to be – this Menaka loathed her mother’s proclivity
for drama, for theatre, for emotion, with more bitterness than any other
suffering relation of hers. Being her daughter, she felt most disgusted and
hurt by it. (WWS 101)

The young Menaka understood that her mother’s ways were not good. She was
strong-minded and strong willed. When no way was opened for her, she was making the
way for herself by bulldozing the oppositions. She was so calculating and she had a
methodical mind and she was good at planning things. She knew the key was with whom
and how to use it in her favour.

It was a brave and wise decision to pen a letter to her father. She knew she would
be penalised for breaking the law. She turned the tables on her mother. Quietly and
secretly, she penned a letter to her father. She strongly expressed her desire to continue
her studies. Her mother was digging her own grave by staying in the island but Menaka
did not want to die out. Menaka was as bold as brass. Receiving the letter, Menaka’s
father Raman hurried to the island Manori. Menaka touched a raw nerve when Raman came to pick her.

Sita saw the reason now – Menaka had sent for her father. Menaka had betrayed her. ‘Menaka! Why?’ … Their betrayal had torn her open with such violence, now violence poured from her like blood. In it was also the shame, the disappointment: he had not come to see her, to fetch her, as she had supposed; he had come because Menaka had called him.

He had betrayed her too. They had all betrayed her. (WWS 122)

With great difficulty, Raman successfully brought Menaka to the city. Had Menaka not written that letter, Raman would not have come to rescue her. Menaka only put a stop to the long tussle and the struggle.

‘She (Menaka) wrote…..’ he (Raman) began patiently enough, then suddenly shrugged his shoulders and spoke more sharply. ‘It’s time for the admissions now. She mustn’t miss the interview, sitting here on this island. She has to get back to her studies.’ (WWS 122)

Sita inveighed against her daughter. Her daughter’s rebellion and revolt incited hatred and kindled anger within her. Menaka did not want to fritter away her time on things that were not important. She found her mother’s suggestion unacceptable and hoped that it would never happen. She could not waste time on such frivolities.
‘Oh my dears,’ she (Sita) said, emotionally, to the children who sat dully watching as she dragged on that cigarillo with a white passion of satisfaction, ‘when I am on my death bed, hold one of Miriam’s cigars under my nose. If I don’t leap up to snatch it from you, you can coolly go ahead and burn me.’ Then she stopped short, horrified at her mistake – for Menaka turned away, her face clenched with displeasure. (WWS 100)

Menaka hated unnecessary waste of time. She was not only brave but also brainy. She was thirsty for education and empowerment. She was a highly intelligent child. Her chief interest was personal advancement in her profession. She was ripe for revolt.

‘There’s nothing else to do here.’ Accusations shot out from her (Menaka) like so many pellets from a burst cartridge. ‘What would you like to do?’

Sita spoke to her softly, as to an agitated bird she was trying to hold in hand and soothe, calm, not knowing it was the very touch of her hand that drove the bird wild. ‘I wish I were back in school. I wish it were time to join college. It is nearly time.’ (WWS 106)

Menaka was in the driving seat. Her mother tried her level best to control her but Menaka was a hard nut to crack. It was difficult to deal with or to influence Menaka. Nobody could force anything on her easily. Sita was cross with her daughter for writing a letter to Raman. She tried to pin her daughter down but her daughter resisted. Menaka’s father Raman took the wind out of Sita’s sails and Menaka bulldozed her way to victory.
She (Menaka) could not quite suppress the jubilant upward quirk of triumph from the corners of her lips. Sita stared at her hostilely and twisted her own lips in bitterness. She was a traitor and Raman had come for her sake, not Sita’s. (WWS 124)

Menaka’s methodical and systematic approach to reaching heights should be appreciated. Menaka was younger and wiser but her mother was older and dabbler. When her mother went astray, Menaka knew it was up to her to bring her round. She studied the situation carefully before making a decision. The striking feature of Menaka was she neither easily influenced nor easily cowed by anybody. She never allowed others to play a pivotal role in her affairs. She wanted to travel and see life for herself. She disagreed with her mother on most things.

Then she (Sita) sat down on Menaka’s bed – it was a matter of marvel how she unfailingly made the wrong moves, knowing them to be wrong yet making them as if there were nothing else she could do – and lit one of Miriam’s dark and powerful cigarillos. She had not noticed yet how the sight and smell of them revolted the fastidious girl. (WWS 107)

Menaka had made an enemy of her mother. She felt her mother was a stumbling block to achieving her aim. Sita found it very hard to subdue the rebel. Menaka was very independent and her father encouraged her independence of thought. Menaka had advanced ideas, ideas that were new and not generally accepted by her mother.
The moment she was hijacked by her mother to the island Manori, she instantly understood that persisting a life in the island was nonsensical and absurd. Many people are keeping mum even in the face of dejection and disappointment. 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 his protest, he will not be compelled to do that again. Silence gives consent and so it leads to many undesirable and unfortunate consequences. Menaka could not conceal the deep resentment she felt at the way she had been treated.

‘There are no dead ends, now, in art. That is something spontaneous, Menaka, and alive, and creative …’ Menaka lost interest – she had heard that argument too often. Arguments with her mother always ended in this kind of haze, of obscurity and nonsense that her trim and practical self loathed instinctively. (WWS 108)

Menaka was straightforward. The skill and daring of Menaka deeply disturbed her mother. Readers admire Raman’s darling daughter’s sheer daring and sheer determination to get it right. Menaka was on her mettle. There is a world of difference between the mother and the daughter. The plants that were in full bloom made Sita fall into oblivion, but Menaka enjoyed plucking the flowers. Although it was not a deliberate act of
vandalism, Menaka’s action froze her mother’s blood. She was condemned by her mother as lacking sense and sensibility.

No one offended her so much by violence as Menaka in her carelessness. She (Sita) watched disbelievingly as Menaka, telling her about a party she had been to, idly reached out her fingers and crumbled a sheaf of new buds on the small potted plant she had been labouring to grow on the balcony. ‘Menaka!’ she warned, on the edge of her chair, unable to bear the sight of such unthinking destruction any more.

‘What?’ ‘You’ve broken all the buds!’ Menaka looked down in surprise.

She had done it unconsciously, had not meant to destroy anything at all.

(WWS 41)

Menaka did not really share in Sita’s aesthetic appreciation of the landscape and love of animal. When her mother was on the run to safeguard a vulture, Menaka remained untroubled and unworried. Menaka locked herself up. By behaving in that way she added insult to injury. Sita had a love and understanding of art and beautiful things. Her daughter was a great artist. She drew pictures effortlessly but the next second she would tear them to pieces irrespective of the pains taken by her.

The third time she (Sita) opened the door to peep in proved too much. For all her contained poise, her smooth inward stance, Menaka was upset. She threw the board down on its face with a bang …’What’s the matter?’
Sita asked, shocked by the sight of the pastel sketch face-downward on
the floor … Sita hurried to turn over the board and rescue the sketch
but Menaka got there first, tore off the paper and shredded it violently.
Sita felt her heart beating and leaping sideways at all this violence that
she herself had ignited. (WWS 105-106)

Menaka felt her mother was making life very difficult for her and she felt her
entire world was turned upside down. Menaka and her mother often engaged in a
skirmish but Menaka was in her father’s thrall and she sat at her father’s feet. Menaka’s
life is a lesson for the timid and faint-hearted women. Women are expected to submit and
subdue to others but Menaka broke those barriers and wrong expectations into pieces.

In Anita Desai’s novel Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Moses’ wife
Miriam was bold and boisterous. The childless Miriam was not controlled by rules,
regulations or conventions and she was unrestricted. She was able to move about without
hindrance. It was Miriam, Moses’ wife who matched him inch for inch in height and
breadth. (WWS 23)

When Sita came to the island along with Menaka and Karan, Miriam went into
raptures and then onwards the island became a haven of peace and tranquility for Miriam.
Miriam’s monotonous and colourless routine had become colourful. ‘A little baba for me!
Ho, Moses, you have brought a little baba for me.’ (WWS 23)
The arrival of the child gave her childlike enthusiasm and delight. Karan’s presence in the island quenched Miriam’s thirst for children. The new arrival made her life really meaningful. Miriam gazed at Sita’s son in rapture and squealed with delight when she saw Karan. Miriam cackled and made pinching, snatching gestures at Karan’s shrinking bottom, pursing up her lips and making wet, kissing sounds as she did so. (WWS 23)

Miriam was a raucous woman and always she expressed her love for Karan with raucous laughter, hugs and kisses, but she failed miserably to win the heart of Karan. She was talking and shouting loudly and in an enthusiastic way, but Karan tried his level best to run away from her. Unfortunately Miriam was never aware of that.

A major part of Karan’s life on the island was taken up in hiding or escaping from the attentions of Miriam. He looked quite piqued, Sita noticed, from the effort of running away from the bulbous Miriam …

Miriam came screaming out of her hut to seize and smack her Karan-baba once again but he hastily scrambled up into the cart, out of her reach. (WWS 109, 141)

Miriam did not know how to deal with children. A childless mother could not stand the frustration of not having baby for many years. It is frustrating to have to wait so long and so it takes a heavy toll on her. It causes a lot of suffering and as a result she
falls. It is better for the childless mothers to adopt babies at the earliest so that they can enjoy the sweets of life.

In Anita Desai’s novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer? Jamila* was the wife of a tea shop owner. They lived and ran a tea shop in the wildest and most uncivilized part of the world. Even though they were uneducated and untutored, they were meticulous and systematic. Jamila’s husband was scrupulous in all his business dealings. When he was busy with his business, his wife did him a good turn.

**Moses rose and slipped through the back door of the shop into the smaller, darker, hotter precinct behind where only known and trusted customers such as Moses were permitted and welcomed. This was the domain of the tea shop owner’s wife, Jamila. She cackled to see him come and served him his favourite cashew nut spirits in a thick, smeared glass.**

*(WWS 7-8)*

Jamila treated the customers with utmost courtesy and civility. The customers were very pleased with her service. She was used to dealing with all kinds of people in her business. She felt completely at ease with the customers. Jamila, moving about them, refilling their glasses, touching them on the shoulders. *(WWS 12)*

When her husband was in difficulty, Jamila came to his aid. Very audaciously and courageously she tackled the toughest customers. She felt relaxed and confident with the male customers.
‘For God’s sake,’ cried the tea shop owner, inserting his frightened face in a crack of the door. ‘Jamila, keep order in there. Two policemen have come from Malad and are standing just outside the shop, drinking tea. They’ll make me pay.’ ‘Let the policemen come – let them come and count the bricks,’ roared Moses … ‘Keep quiet, you, we can hear you all right, we are not deaf,’ Jamila hissed at him. (WWS 10)

Jamila did the business in an efficient and determined way. She knew the tricks of the trade and her husband knew he was lucky to have Jamila as his partner. Jamila’s dual role as a responsible wife and diligent worker made her reach new heights.

These brainy women stand tall. They show that they are able to deal with anything and they rise to their feet. They are kept shackled but they manage to break free from their confinement. Their actions revive, refresh, and rebuild the lives of the wordless women. Their attitudes are just the tonic the silent sufferers need. They feel exhilarated and excited when they see their own community rise to power. If the brave and brilliant women turn into oppressive women, there will be a surprising turn of events.