CHAPTER FOUR

AGGRESSIVE AND OPPRESSIVE WOMEN

Women are ever in extremes; they are either better or worse than men.

Bruyere.

The long-suffering and oppressed women finally become aggressive. Suppression causes aggression. They dictate terms to others and they begin to dominate everybody. They manipulate people and try to bend them to their will. They behave in a threatening way and they treat others in a cruel and unfair way. Peace of mind is lost for ever.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel Roots and Shadows, Akka was the uncrowned queen of the family. She was the younger sister of Indu’s grandfather. She had a reputation for toughness and she was a strict authoritarian. Her domination continued until her last breath. “The same malicious, trouble-loving, trouble-creating old woman … And as strong as a horse.” (RS 93, 29)

When Akka was twelve years old, her father married her off to a man who was above thirty. Akka was dainty and delicate. On the contrary her husband was bulky and burly and he was no match for her. Akka’s husband was a great brawny brute of a man. Akka lived a miserable life at her husband’s home because her husband was grumpy. Even though he had all the bad habits, Akka’s father Okayed the marriage because he was rich. It was a hapless marriage.
She (Akka) was just twelve when she got married. And he was well past thirty … He was a tall bulky man with large, coarse features. And she was small and dainty, really pretty, with her round face, fair skin, straight nose and curly hair. Six months after her marriage, she grew up and went to her husband’s home. (RS 69-70)

Akka lived in troubled times. Akka’s marriage was a mistake because her mother-in-law thrashed her and never treated her very fairly. Her mother-in-law used to give her daughter-in-law hell when she was at her side. Mother-in-law had been preying on her piteous and pathetic daughter-in-law. She had locked her up and Akka was badly beaten up by her. Her mother-in-law was also a woman but it was very unfortunate that she was not able to understand Akka’s feelings. “Akka was not only beaten up but also she was left to starve for three days… twice she (Akka) tried to run away a girl of thirteen. Her mother-in-law I (Atya) heard, whipped her for that and locked her up for three days. Starved her as well.” (RS 70)

Akka’s mother-in-law tore her to bits. Akka burst into tears and she was scared to death. She had a rough ride but her husband watched from the sidelines. Akka was under the heel of her mother-in-law and her mother-in-law held the whip. There was no one to save her from the dreadful life and Akka bore the thrash silently.

What she (Akka) had to endure there, no one knows. She never told anyone. Our grandfather, her father, was a man who kept himself aloof.
No one could approach him easily. And her mother, our grandmother,
died when she was a child. (RS 70)

Akka had a miscarriage because she took a battering from her mother-in-law but
Akka was only blamed for the miscarriage. Her mother-in-law pulled her up. Akka had a
feeling of great sadness, disappointment and disgust. Akka’s eyes filled with tears, the
journey seemed endless and there was no other choice. “And Akka could never give birth
to a living child. Not surprising, considering the kind of life she led. But every time she
had a miscarriage, her mother-in-law blamed her for it and made life hell for her.” (RS 70)

In the end Akka battened down the hatches. She determined to go, come hell or
high water. Honesty is the bedrock of any healthy relationship. Akka’s husband was a
womanizer. Akka felt the hot prick of tears in her eyes. He was having an affair with a
woman and he spent a lot of time with that woman. They loved each other but they could
not get married. Akka’s husband was afraid of his mother otherwise he could have
brought her round to his house and he would have browbeaten his wife.

He (Akka’s husband) had a weakness for women … He always had
mistresses … And then, when Akka had been married for more than
fifteen or twenty years, he took up with one woman … he was crazy about
her. He would have brought her home but for fear of his mother. (RS 70)

The problem had been gnawing at her for months. Akka’s mother-in-law put the
knife into her and Akka’s husband twisted the knife in the wound. Really her marriage
was a miserable failure. Her husband was a bad-tempered man and he had a strong stomach. Akka had been physically and emotionally abused. Akka’s husband could do unpleasant things without feeling sick or upset. By leading an immoral life, he rubbed salt into her wounds. Pursing her lips, Akka patiently endured all the hardships.

Akka’s husband was passionately interested in her and one day he demanded the jewels of Akka to give it to that woman but Akka was shrewd enough to deposit those jewels in her father’s house. As a last resort the heartless husband came to claim those jewels from their house and he behaved in a rude and aggressive way. There was a squabble but Akka’s father successfully defended those jewels from that cruel husband. Thus he made her feel anxious, frightened and uncomfortable over a long period of time. Akka sat patiently waiting for her turn and she would get her harm back on him one day.

And then, one day, he (Akka’s husband) had a stroke … he was a hefty man, a giant of a man. It took six men to carry him home. He couldn’t even wiggle a toe. He lived nearly two years after that. Akka looked after him it was no joke but she kept him spotless. (RS 71)

Later Akka’s husband had a stroke. Narmada Atya was sent to be with Akka to help her. One night she heard Akka crying. When Atya enquired, Akka replied with a wry smile.

‘That night, I (Atya) woke up to hear Akka crying. “Akka,” I called out,

“Akka” … “Akka, why are you crying? What’s wrong?” And she began
to laugh in the middle of her sobs … And she said, “Every night I’ve
spent in this house, I’ve cried like this. And tonight, for the first time,
someone is asking me what’s wrong.”’ (RS 72)

There was an indescribable grief on Akka’s tear-stained face. Akka’s story moved
Atya to tears. Akka’s red-blooded husband lost his strength and energy. He wrestled with
the stroke and he could not even wriggle his toe. Sickness shut him up and he stayed in
the bed all the time. Akka made herself get used to sufferings and difficulties. Nearly two
years he was bedridden. He had to accept the results of his actions. He had fallen sick and
so his wife was free from all his torture and ill-treatment.

He had fallen into her hands and Akka took charge of the house. If Akka had
wished, she could have treated him badly but she did not harm a hair of her husband’s
head. He had done many things harmful to her but she was not seeking a chance to wreak
his vengeance on her. Akka did not want to harm him in reprisal and retaliation for the
affliction he inflicted on his wife. She stood at his side and she did not leave her invalid
husband. Since he could not speak, he was making some terrific sounds as if he was
trying to say something.

One day Akka found out what it was he was trying to say… He (Akka’s
husband) wanted her, that woman, his mistress. And Akka asked him, “Is
that it? Is it her you want?” and his face it was all twisted up on one side,
but his eyes brightened. And then Akka said, “If that’s what you want, you can go on wanting. She won’t come here I won’t let her.” (RS 71)

His sickness could not detain him from loving her. Even on his death bed his heart was panting after her. Akka’s face was a picture as she listened to her husband’s speech and she was unable to suppress her anger. Akka drummed her out. Akka acted with a courage born out of desperation.

And then he (Akka’s husband) began again, those terrible sounds that were not even human. And Akka, calm and cool, said, “Listen to me. It’s my turn now. I’ve listened to you long enough. She came here. Twice. She wanted to see you. She cried and begged to be allowed to see you just for a short while. I threw her out. You’ll never see her again.” … that man, that giant of a man, began to cry. Tears poured down his face. He cried like a child. He couldn’t even wipe his tears. (RS 71)

It was the first time Akka dictated terms to her husband and strongly refused to allow her to see him. Akka was inwardly furious. She distrusted his motives for wanting to see her again. She stayed firm and determined in that difficult situation. The long-suffering and oppressed woman finally became aggressive. Suppression causes aggression. The same is true of Akka. Her patience and perseverance moulded her life. When Akka was thirteen years old, she cried and cringed before that man and after many years that same man lost ground to his wife. Akka’s husband died and his death released
her from her sufferings. After her husband’s death, Akka returned to her brother’s house with a lot of money, jewels and property. Akka was a wealthy widow.

Since the day Akka had come back, a rich childless widow, to her brother’s house, she had maintained an absolute control over her brother’s children. Kaka, even after becoming a grandfather, could be reduced to a red-faced stuttering schoolboy by Akka’s venomous tongue. (RS 22)

Money talks. People who have a lot of money have more power and influence than others. Akka settled down and thereafter she had had a new lease of life. Soon the whole house was under her sole dominion. She began to dominate everybody and all the decisions were taken by her. Her strength was awesome and she was rock-steady. She was dealing with problems and situations in a determined way without being influenced by emotions. She was as tough as old boots.

The house fell into Akka’s hands. Only Akka had the authority to do everything. She manipulated people and tried to bend them to her will. She made them do what she wanted. Wealth gave her an authoritative tone of voice. They were awed into silence by the sternness of her voice. Akka had taken a back seat in her husband’s house but in her brother’s house she was in the driver’s seat. “Everybody tried to please her by praising her too much, helping her, in order to gain some advantage for themselves … they had, all of them, always been parasites on her.” (RS 42)
It was a one-woman show. Akka was the decision-maker in the house and nobody opened their mouth. She had unshakable authority over the family members. Akka never stooped down and shook off personal prestige. She was riding high. Till she drew her last breath, no one could stop her. She ruled with an iron fist. She was a lone woman. Everybody was waiting very patiently and eagerly for her end and some day her property would be handed down to one of the members of the family.

Akka had the final say in every matter. Family members shuddered with fear and no one had the courage to argue, fight or compete with her. She never hesitated to speak her mind and it would take a long time to heal. When people asked her for any help, she would say no and she would hurt their feelings. They found her difficult to approach. When Sunanda-atyaa asked for money on bended knees, Akka trampled on her. Sunanda-atyaa’s appeal had fallen on stony ground. ‘What!’ Akka had exploded. ‘Give that money to that waster of a husband of yours (Sunanda-atyaa)! I’d (Akka) rather throw it down the drain.’ (RS 135)

That was distinctly below the belt! Akka should have politely said ‘no’ to Sunanda-atyaa but she exploded with rage and pushed her over in the ground and so everybody was afraid of her. Akka was a strong personality. When Indu was studying in the college, on one occasion she had a long talk with a boy in the library and she received a severe reprimand for her behaviour from Akka.
‘That’s enough of such talk. And even if you (Indu) did nothing, it’s bad enough being talked about. Why, three people have spoken to me (Akka) about it since yesterday and to your Kaka as well. No girl in our family has ever been talked about. You have to promise such a thing won’t happen again. ‘I (Indu) won’t.’ (RS 74)

Indu’s father should have shouted at her and corrected her but he lapsed into silence. Indu did not approve of Akka’s action and Indu thought Akka tried to stick her nose into her personal life. Akka’s regime was a repressive regime and the regime oppressed her. Indu was openly refusing to obey laws that were not fair. Akka accused Indu that she inherited the bad quality of talking to men through her mother. Indu was deeply affected by Akka’s words and it resulted in Indu’s walkout. Indu left the family immediately after the incident.

‘I (Indu) haven’t done anything wrong. Nothing I need be ashamed of.’ ‘I (Akka) don’t know where you get it from. Your father was such a quiet boy,’ - she had eyed me with her shrewd, calculating look - ‘until your mother trapped him.’ (RS 74)

Indu had not been on speaking terms with Akka for years but Akka had given her all her money. The family members could not bear having Indu in the house. When Akka was alive, they did not have the guts to oppose her. After her death only they had the courage to scold her. They could not forget the hurtful things she said. Akka got a
mention even after her death and there was a hint of menace in their voice. In a walk down memory lane, she got a scolding from her family members. Her death had loosened their tongue. And I (Sumitra) shouldn’t speak ill of the dead, but Akka’s tongue was just poison. (RS 65)

Even though her married life was full of tears, Akka pulled up and she did not put an end to her life. There was no one to speak in favour of her but she battled with her husband and finally she conquered. Her tough life with the tough husband made her a tough woman.

In Anita Desai’s novel *Fasting, Feasting, Mama* was the jewel in the crown of Papa. She came from a rich family but her husband moved from a lower to a higher position. He was a lawyer. It was obvious that she adored her husband and was genuinely devoted to him and cared for him very much. Papa was the love of her life. She loved her husband more than her children. Even after his retirement, the love for her husband did not die down and did not die out. She was always very eager to please her husband. She did not leave his side and she hated being separated from her husband. She would keep a close eye on him and her love for her husband was never on the wane. She pleased her husband profusely. She was a true-blue wife and she never spoiled her husband’s reputation. As a couple they were very well matched.

When visitors came and enquired after their health, one of them would reply in the first and sometimes third person singular, but the
answer was made on behalf of both of them. If Papa gave his opinion of their local member of parliament or the chances of the government in the next election, Mama said nothing because he had spoken for her too.

When Mama spoke of the sales at which she planned to buy towels or of the rise in the price of silver that made her wonder if it was time to sell her plate, Papa made assenting grunts because his thoughts were one with hers. Their opinion differed so rarely. (FF 13-14)

Their relationship never went sour. Mama was at one with her husband. Both of them loved each other wholeheartedly. The intimacy between them increased day by day and it did not drop away. She never allowed anybody to speak ill of her husband. “MamaPapa. PapaMama. It was hard to believe they had ever had separate existences, that they had been separate entities and not MamaPapa in one breath.” (FF 5)

Arun being their heir, Mama was very proud of her son. Arun was the apple of Mama’s eye. After Arun’s birth, Mama walked tall because she had given birth to a boy child. Very soon Arun would take the helm. It was a sore point with Mama that she had two girl children and so Arun’s birth was a meritorious action. Mama was partial towards Arun. Unfortunately when a girl child is born, the mother seems cursed with bad luck. When a boy child is born, it is an occasion of great festivity.

A son. The whole family came to a standstill. Around Mama’s bed, in the hospital, peering at this wonder … Mama’s face, still tense from the
difficult delivery, began to relax and broaden into long-suffering pride.

(FF 16-17)

The mother thinks that after giving birth to a boy baby, she has grown in stature. It is nonsense. In their old age, the girl child is only going to take care of them. Still the mentality of fathers and mothers do not change. The insatiable appetite and thirst for boy children seems to be never quenched. Mama had shown too much favour to Arun. She thought that girls were meant for marriage.

‘What is the use of going back to school if you keep failing, Uma?’ she (Mama) asked in a reasonable tone. ‘You will be happier at home. You won’t need to do any lessons. You are a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you. Not now,’ she added, seeing the panic on Uma’s face. ‘But soon. Till then, you can help me look after Arun. And learn to run the house.’ (FF 22)

When Arun was born, Mama compelled Uma to take care of him. She did not want the servant to take care of him. The bloody-minded mother was a hard taskmaster. She had a very low opinion of her daughter Uma. She destroyed her daughter’s life in order to uplift Arun. Uma sacrificed everything for Arun. Mama was very good to her husband Papa, her daughter Aruna and her beloved son Arun but her eldest daughter Uma alone was in her bad books. Uma took a battering from her mother.
When Papa abused and accused Uma, Mama never came to her rescue. Mama folded her hands and watched her husband scolding Uma. She did not raise an objection to her husband’s action. She would have shielded her daughter from the attack. She was an ardent and fervent supporter of Papa and so she did not voice her objections. She was totally unsympathetic. The unrepentant mother made her daughter’s life a misery.

In Anita Desai’s novel *Fasting, Feasting, Aruna* was a success as a student whereas her sister Uma was a failure. Uma was unprepossessing and unattractive but Aruna was dazzlingly beautiful. Aruna was vociferous and strident and those who beheld her would completely fall under her spell. She was the embodiment of selfishness. She lived for herself and she had an air of importance and superiority. She did not allow herself to be dictated to. She was aggressive and determined and she expressed her opinions and feelings in a loud and confident way.

Woe betide anyone who got in her way. She was completely insensitive to her sister Uma’s feelings. Uma was suckered into doing household duties. She was hounded and harried day and night by her parents but Aruna never gave room for anybody to boss over her and she liked being her own boss. Aruna was crafty and wily, and she lived off the fat of the land. Uma was unpretentious but Aruna was pretentious. Aruna tried to appear special, intelligent and important in order to impress people. Uma was the lowest of the low. She was not respected at all because she was not at all important.
When they were younger, and Uma had brought back those report cards from school filled with red Fs, Aruna had watched in silence while Papa thundered and Mama complained, and waited for a decent interval before proffering her own report card, satisfyingly blue and green, and collected their praise. (FF 85-86)

Since the day Mama gave birth to her dream child Arun, Mama was of the opinion that her daughters should take care of Arun. Very easily Mama forced her eldest daughter’s hand but Mama could not bend her younger daughter Aruna to her will. Uma was born to take care of her brother Arun but Aruna’s mind was occupied with various things – studies, friends, entertainment, recreation and relaxation. She could never find time to be with Arun or to look after him.

When Uma was still watching to see that Arun did not crawl off the veranda and break his neck or put knitting needles or naphthalene balls in his mouth, Aruna was already climbing into bicycle rickshaws and going off to the cinema. (FF 80)

Mama’s expectations and requests were waved aside by her daughter Aruna. Aruna thought that it was the duty of somebody else and definitely it was none of her business and she went about her business. Arun, Mama’s blue-eyed boy was treated with special favour by Mama. Mama entrusted an endless list of things to Uma to do but Aruna mellowed out. Aruna had many people to bang the drum for her. She enjoyed
herself by relaxing and not doing much. That was the difference between Uma and Aruna. Nobody could force her to do anything. She got her own way and she did travel only on that.

She did not yield to anybody’s pressure. Uma looked after her brother Arun till he had grown up and left home but Aruna failed to think of her brother and she forgot where he was. When Arun left for America, he grew away from his motherly sister Uma. Arun failed to remember and failed to recall his sister’s long service. Uma was always at their command but everybody at home just took her for granted. Uma was burdened with worries, difficulties, duties and responsibilities. Uma’s family did not appreciate her or gratefully acknowledge her selfless service but the shrewd and smart Aruna dodged her duties and ran away from the unnecessary burden. Uma who had very little schooling spent all day cleaning and tidying. Aruna spent all day going out and meeting friends.

*Aruna was pretty too, and in her case it was also evident quite early that her future would be bright, but there was a sharp edge to her prettiness, a harsh edge given to it by a kind of steely determination, a dogged ambitiousness.* (FF 67)

The bright-eyed and bushy-tailed Aruna wanted to be successful in her career. Aruna’s youthful enthusiasm and energy made her go against the tide. Aruna’s schooldays were unforgettable because it was so beautiful, interesting and enjoyable. Her teachers were full of praise for the progress she was making. Her performance had won
high praise from her parents. Aruna enjoyed the sweet smell of success. Parents and teachers applauded and encouraged her and they accorded great importance to Aruna. Aruna was on top of the world. She was born to enjoy life and she was as busy as a bee. She did not have time to worry about anything.

At thirteen, Aruna still had the thin brown legs and wore her hair plaited and tied in loops over her ears with large ribbons. Even though she had to dress in the faded blue cotton slip ordained by the convent … there was already something about the way she tossed her head when she saw a man looking at her, with a sidelong look of both scorn and laughter. (FF 79)

At fourteen, Aruna was worldlier than her elder sister Uma. She had a lot of experience of life. She had very modern ideas and nothing could shake her. She found it easy to make friends with others and she had a wide circle of friends. Aruna was a live wire. She said little or nothing about her outside experience.

… going off to the cinema with girl friends from school, she said. That was quite true, but she (Aruna) did not mention the young men who took the seats behind them, or even beside them … then followed them home on their bicycles, weaving through the traffic and singing ardently along the way. (FF 80)

Aruna went through life in a happy-go-lucky fashion. She was a teenager, she was starting to be interested in boys. She was used to receiving admiring glances from men.
Her life had been a bed of roses and she lived a very peaceful life. She felt a thrill of excitement when she rode back from the theatre with the boys following closely behind. That was one of the happiest moments of her life. Aruna gathered life’s roses but the ill-fated Uma did not know all those things. Both young men and women living in modern times wish to enjoy themselves by merrymaking. They wish to talk, laugh, sing and feast together. It is a matter of the greatest importance to them.

Uma was dressed in a new sari of rose-pink organza and was allowed to use lipstick for the first time. Even Aruna was impressed by the results, and hugged Uma spontaneously. The fiancé proved quite presentable, to everyone’s surprise. (FF 81)

Aruna had a strong attachment to her sister Uma at an early age. She pitied her sister and she was very kind to her. Later she did not feel at all sympathetic towards Uma. As time went by the gulf between Uma and Aruna enlarged and the rift between the two deepened.

When the first two attempts at marrying Uma off had ended in disgrace, she had listened to Mama’s storms of temper, saying, ‘I told you he was no good, didn’t I?’ and looked sympathetically at Uma. But now a certain mockery was creeping into her behaviour, a kind of goading, like that a sprightly little dog will subject a large dull ox to when it wants a little action. (FF 86)
There was a large difference between them in the way that they thought, lived and felt. Aruna changed her tune and she was becoming increasingly impatient with her sister. As a sister, she could have supported Uma. On the contrary, Aruna behaved with an indifferent attitude.

When Aruna said to her, laughing, ‘Uma, why don’t you cut your hair short? Like Lila Aunty? It will suit you, you know,’ she retorted ‘Tchh! What silly ideas you have,’ and was not only annoyed but hurt as well: she had caught the mockery in Aruna’s tone. (FF 85)

Since her cousin Anamika got married, her parents were intensely looking for a bridegroom for Uma. At one time a suitor came to their house along with his family to look at Uma. Their neighbour Mrs. Joshi made arrangements but the man flatly refused to marry Uma. Later through Mrs Joshi he expressed his desire to marry Aruna and not Uma. That occasion marked a watershed in Aruna’s life. Then Aruna established total supremacy over Uma. She seemed very sure of herself and began to laugh at Uma’s failure and took malicious pleasure in teasing and mocking her.

Aruna was cock-a-hoop about the proposal and the thought filled her with pride. Her confidence grew with the passage of time and she was full of the joys of spring. Uma was under the heel of Aruna from that day on. Aruna had a low opinion of her sister’s worth and she was contemptuous of everything Uma did. Uma’s boat was being tossed by the huge waves. The faint-hearted woman failed in her marriage and so her parents
closed the book on her marriage. Papa and Mama were under the impression that married
life did not suit her. But for Aruna, proposals were coming in huge numbers.

… she (Aruna) was rebelling against the blue cotton tunic and the white
hair ribbons. At every opportunity she would shed them and change into
flowered silk salwars. ‘Silk!’ Uma would exclaim, and Papa would sit up
and take notice, frowning, but Mama was inclined to indulge Aruna and
perhaps realized, instinctively, that if she did, there would be rewards to
reap. So Aruna fluttered about in flowered silk. (FF 79-80)

Suitors were queuing up to marry her. The only problem was that Aruna had to
select a real gentleman. Nobody came forward to marry the unfashionable Uma but there
was intense competition to win the heart of elegant and attractive Aruna. Finally she had
chosen Arvind, the gentlest of grooms. He had a striking feature. He was both intelligent
and personable.

Aruna brought off the marriage that Uma had dismally failed to make. As
was to be expected, she took her time, showed a reluctance to decide,
played choosy, but soon enough made the wisest, most expedient choice –
the handsomest, the richest, the most exciting of the suitors who presented
themselves … Prudently, they (Mama and Papa) wished for someone a
little less handsome, a little less showy and bade caution, suggested
waiting to see who else might turn up. But when Aruna had made up her
mind, then no one could stop her, and she had her way. (FF 100-101)

Arvind won Aruna in the face of stiff competition. In her marriage she only called
the tune and Papa’s hands were tied. In her betrothal to Arvind, Aruna turned the old
systems inside out. She caused large changes by arranging a cocktail party. It was new
and nobody had done it before.

What was more, she (Aruna) persuaded Papa to throw what she called a
cocktail party to welcome Arvind and his family the day before the
wedding. This was to be an event so chic – and untraditional – as had
never been witnessed before in the town, at least by their relatives.

(FF 101)

It shook everybody but Aruna was not ready to change her mind for the sake of
anybody. She said she would do it, there could be no turning back. In the cocktail party,
Uma went into a swoon and the fall stunned her sister for a moment. Aruna made a face
at her sister and her face was like thunder. She felt that Arvind’s family would look down
upon her because of her sister’s mindless action.

She (Uma) listened to Aruna’s voice lashing at her, flailing her with
accusations. She had spoilt the party, the cocktail party. What would
Arvind’s family think of them, of Aruna who had a sister who was an
idiot, an hysteric? She should be put away, locked up, Aruna sobbed.
Uma dropped the ball and so she faced the music. Aruna poured out arrogant words and the deliberate cruelty of her words cut her sister like a knife. Aruna felt Uma made a mistake by her fall and spoiled everything. She asked Papa and Mama to put her sister under lock and key. She butted out Uma, and crushed and oppressed her lily-livered sister Uma. She made her sister who was unhappy feel even more unhappy. The relationship between the sisters is one of the strongest relationships in the world. Aruna failed miserably to understand the truth.

And Aruna was whisked away to a life that she had said would be ‘fantastic’ and was. Arvind had a job in Bombay and bought a flat in a housing block in Juhu, facing the beach, and Aruna said it was ‘like a dream.’ (FF 103)

After marriage Aruna went to Bombay. Their family was very well-off and very soon he bought a house near the beach. In the course of time they were blessed with two children – Aisha and Dinesh. Arvind earned a fortune but he never dominated his wife. Nothing else did matter to him apart from his job. Arvind, the head of the household, was a well-adjusted man. He was the strong silent type and he did not have a voice in the decision-making process. Aruna ruled her husband with a rod of iron and silenced him with a glare.
Mama was astonished at the way Aruna scolded him (Arvind) continuously. ‘Oh, you have again spilled tea in your saucer. Now it will drip all over you,’ she would cry, or pull at his shirt and say, ‘But this shirt does not go with those trousers. Why didn’t you ask me first?’

clearly Aruna had a vision of a perfect world in which all of them – her own family as well as Arvind’s – were flaws she was constantly uncovering and correcting in her quest for perfection. (FF 109)

Aruna condemned and criticized her husband but Arvind was blind to her faults. She found fault with everybody but he had no fault to find with his wife. Whatever Aruna decided, Arvind Okayed it. After her marriage, she found her feet and she was a key figure in Arvind’s household. She picked holes in everybody’s words and quibbled over small matters.

She (Aruna) spent the entire visit hissing under her breath at Uma,

‘Can’t you bring out a clean tablecloth? Don’t you see this one is all stained?’ or following Mama to her dressing room to complain, ‘Why have you washed your hair in the middle of the morning? … Aruna scolded him, ‘Don’t you ever get the house painted, Papa? Look how the walls are peeling. It’s just falling down,’ and, ‘What happened to the driver’s uniform? He used to wear one, where is it?’ (FF 108-109)
All Aruna ever did was criticize! Her life changed completely when she married Arvind and she enjoyed the fruits of married life. She travelled most of the time. Uma was fasting but Aruna was feasting. Uma’s idea of perfect home life and comfort was an illusion but Aruna enjoyed motherhood and apple pie. Uma shed tears of pain but Aruna shed tears of happiness. Marriage had worked miracles for the high-handed Aruna. Aruna was on cloud nine whereas Uma was under a cloud.

This is one aspect of a woman’s character one has not seen before. They are totally unsympathetic and they make life difficult for others. They take great pleasure in other’s suffering. They mock the needs of other people. There is a streak of sadism in their nature. The next chapter sheds new light on the fierce aspect of women.