CHAPTER FIVE

REBELLIOUS / VILLAINOUS WOMEN

The female of the species is more deadly than the male

– Rudyard Kipling.

This is the terrifying aspect of women. They are unwilling to accept normal standards of behaviour. They show a total disregard for other people’s feelings. They give full vent to their bitter feelings and their words are extremely unpleasant. They disturb the peace and they are always restless.

In Anita Desai’s novel Where Shall We Go This Summer? the protagonist Sita was tough and uncompromising. After her father’s death, Raman was a great comfort to Sita and his gentle words were a balm to her. In a rash manner he took a decision to marry his father’s friend’s daughter Sita and it made his life miserable. She crossed swords with her husband within a few days after tying the knot with him.

Sita and Raman were poles apart. In the marital relationship both the husband and the wife should adjust and cooperate. The self-important Sita never followed her husband’s word. She was a woman with a rebellious temperament. She was displeased with her husband’s household for giving much importance to food.

The whole house seemed to be a kitchen – kitchen smells filled each corner of it, everyone talked of the meal to come; if meals were not being eaten, then they were being cooked, or cleaned up after, or planned.
Coming from the island where one had scarcely been aware of what one ate, where no one gave a moment’s thought to food, and meals were hurried out of the way as quickly as possible. Sita found this at first so fantastic as to be unreal ... She took to smoking instead of eating, to staring about her in silence, to speaking provocatively. (WWS 44)

There Sita developed the habit of smoking saying that she was not comfortable in her husband’s house and smoking was the only way to relieve her worries. Her husband was very tolerant of harmful habit and he never expressed his disgust for his wife. She idled away her time but her husband was assiduous in his duties and he was making money but he was afraid of hurting her feelings. He lived with her for many years and four children were born. Nature interested her and inanimate things interested her but she was inattentive to the needs of her children.

When they lived, in the first years of their married lives, with his (Raman) family in their age-rotted flat of Queens Road, she (Sita) had vibrated and throbbed in revolt against their subhuman placidity, calmness, and sluggishness. The more stolid and still and calm they were, the more she thrummed, as though frantic with fear that their subhumanity might swamp her. She behaved provocatively – it was there that she started smoking, a thing that had never been done in their household by any woman and even by men only in secret. (WWS 43-44)
Her husband tolerated the habit of smoking until the end and he did not have the heart to desert her or drive her away. Even though they never interfered with her work, she felt that all of them were against her. They never stood in the way of her and never meddled in her affairs.

They did not often answer her provocative questions, nor did they complain of her to her husband as women in another household might have done, for they had a quite exceptional capacity to expand the household and accept even such an outrageous outsider, and beyond that they did not stir themselves. They wished to be left in peace to eat, to digest. ‘They’re nothing, they’re nothing,’ she stormed in her room.

(WWS 44)

Very adamantly Sita compelled her husband to find a separate living and succeeded in that. His brisk businesslike activities, professional friends, their visits and his problems in the industry – all made her hate him like anything. She did not share her husband’s opinion. She had never been in friendly and intimate terms with her own husband Raman.

She was struck by the sudden thought that he would never suit her tastes and he could never come into terms with her expectations. In her estimation, her husband often played the part of the villain and never acted the role of a warm and loving husband. She tried to impose her will on others. She lost her temper at the slightest provocation. Raman
was not easily provoked, but her behaviour was intolerable. He was remarkably patient with his wife. He was terrified and scared of his wife.

Yet, she (Sita) had arrived, she was on the island, in order to achieve the miracle of not giving birth. Wasn’t this Manori, the island of miracles?

Her father had made it an island of magic once, worked miracles of a kind. His legend was still here in this house – and he might work another miracle, posthumously. She had come on a pilgrimage, to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn. (WWS 28)

Sita was in the family way. She was engaged in a constant struggle with nature. She needed to break out of her daily routine and do something exciting. Diligent Raman was deeply concerned about their children’s future. Half-witted Sita was a thorn in her husband’s flesh. Sita and Raman had a falling-out.

‘What do you know about my condition?’ she (Sita) flared. ‘I’ve told you – I’ve tried to tell you but you haven’t understood a thing,’ and hurled slippers, papers, nightgowns. ‘I (Raman) don’t understand much, but I understand you are having a baby and must not be allowed to behave like this. You must stay where there is a doctor, a hospital, and a telephone.

You can’t go to the island in the middle of the monsoon. You can’t have a baby there.’ ‘But I don’t want to have the baby,’ she cried. (WWS 30)
Generally a woman thinks that her children are more precious to her than anything or anybody in this world but Sita had made an enemy of her children. She was of the opinion that they were all betrayers, persons who never took an interest in her world, heartless brutes, sadists and city lovers. Sita, the mother, was prejudiced against her children. She felt betrayed by her children’s lack of support. She was never ready to stoop to the level of her children’s mental status rather always stupidly expected them to stoop to her level. All fell behind the norms she put and they failed to keep level with her. She never felt completely at ease with her husband and children.

The monsoon flowed – now thin, now dense; now slow, now fast; now whispering, now drumming; then gushing. There was never silence – always the roar and sigh of the tide. The children stared about them with great, afraid eyes and spoke only to point out, bitterly, another leak in the roof, or a whole window frame comes loose from its hinges. It was clear they accused her of every mishap and misfortune. Whenever she turned or looked up, she saw them staring at her, watching her as though waiting for her to break down and admit failure. (WWS 95)

Sita forced her ideas on her children. Nobody is ready to be forced and nothing comes by compulsion. She was unwilling to change her opinions and behaviour. She was a mother of four. “She (Sita) smoked a string of cigarettes … Every time she caught their
(Children) eyes, the accusation in them made her turn abruptly away, having no answers for them.” (WWS 27)

Sita’s children wrinkled their nose in disgust at the smell. Menaka made a grimace of pain. Her children looked up with a puzzled frown on their faces but her husband never pulled faces at his wife. What exactly was the influence of the mother on her children? Sita forced her children to spend time with her, when they did not want to stay. She smoked herself sick. If a mother behaves like that, she will get herself disliked. Menaka disliked her mother’s oddity of behaviour.

Sita was not ashamed, embarrassed or affected by her children’s disapproval. Their mother looked such a mess that Menaka was ashamed of her. Her actions never made her children sit up and take notice. Mothers who are depressed sometimes fail to bond with their children. Mother’s love for children is the most valuable and irreplaceable thing in this world. It is only human to want the best for their children. Sita was inconsiderate of her children but Raman always took an interest in his children’s studies.

He (Raman) had suffered during these weeks that she (Sita) had been away – had suffered from worry and anxiety about her, the unborn child, Menaka and Karan, living alone on the island in this wild season. His boys at home must have worried him too, while he was at work in the
factory which was not without its problems, either – he never told her of them and she never gave much thought to it. (WWS 126-127)

Sita was not on intimate terms with her husband and children but she got joy from her companionship with animals and birds. Her love for nature blinded her and she behaved like a split personality. When a wounded eagle was cornered and trapped by the crows, Sita took action immediately to stop the attack.

… a woman (Sita) who had once stood all day on the balcony, keeping away the crows that were attacking a wounded eagle on a neighbouring roof top … It was true he (Raman) had laughed at her for acting the scarecrow over the half-dead eagle. (WWS 31)

When Sita was on the run, Menaka remained untroubled and unworried. It was a ridiculous thing to stand under the scorching sun throughout the day and protect a bird but Sita felt that her husband and children could not understand her real heart. She was not at all tired of safeguarding that unknown eagle. She screened and shielded that vulnerable eagle from the talons of the crows and saved its neck.

Menaka, coming home from a visit to a friend, stopped on the balcony to stare at the odd figure of her mother standing by the rails firing Karan’s pop-gun at the furious band of crows. She watched for a while, in astonishment, then pressed her lips together and went away without asking for an explanation. (WWS 36)
Sita smoked day and night in the presence of her husband, his household members and her own children. An overpowering stench of tobacco followed her about. She had a liking for cigar and cigars made an excellent hot main dish for her. It gave her a lot of pleasure and enjoyment and it was delicious and palatable.

Very soon her (Sita) cigarettes ran out. The last ones had been too damp to light and she had thrown them out, quite ashamed of the agony this waste caused her. Seeing her sit so desolate after this act of violence, Miriam – suddenly bared her bright pink gums in a laugh and crowed, ‘Amma, you have no cigarettes left. I shall make you some!’ … then handing her surprisingly neat and slim brown cigarillos with an odour Sita could not resist. They were too thick to fit into her old yellowed ivory cigarette holder so she threw that away and tasted the tobacco direct on her lips, as she sat down to pull at the first with an indrawn breath of gratitude. (WWS 99-100)

They watched their mother but Raman watched his mouth. He was very careful that his words should not offend her or make her angry. Sita was never questioned or interrogated by her husband and children. They never breathed a word of that to her. They never grilled her about her unpleasant actions and never raised an objection to her smoking. If a mother is a smoker, it is sure that the children also will soon fall victims to that habit. Very easily, they will learn this habit from their mother.
There is no need to go to a faraway place to find cigar because it is readily available at home. When the children begin to smoke, the mother can never object because she herself is a smoker and she does not have the right to question the children. For Sita’s children, smoking was a hateful and harmful habit. They showed a total disregard and disrespect for their mother. They expressed their disgust at their mother by dissociating and distancing themselves.

She (Sita) spent almost all her time on the balcony, smoking, looking out at the sea … she had admitted, out of a passion of boredom she could no longer contain and that burst, swamping her, that she was bored, bored.

‘Bored?’ he (Raman) had exclaimed, in genuine surprise. ‘Why! How? With what?’ and looked so puzzled and pained – she could not believe that he had really believed that all was well, not known that she was bored, dull, unhappy, frantic. She could hardly believe that although they lived so close together, he did not even know this basic fact of her existence. (WWS 45, 132)

Sita was fed up with the women in her husband’s household and that frustration and hatred drove her to get into the habit of smoking. Who is not having problems in this world? It is destined that humans should painfully toil and make their living and their days are marked by sufferings and sorrows.
She kicked over the traces and started to behave badly and refused to accept any discipline or control. Smoking in the presence of small children is the worst of all mannerisms. What Sita nurtured secretly, later she started doing before her family’s very eyes. Sita possessed that particular irritating mannerism and she should have cleaned up her act and behaved in a moral or responsible way.

He (Raman) suddenly thrashed his arms against his sides, like a large, grey bird in despair. ‘Any woman – any one would think you inhuman. You have four children. You have lived comfortably, always, in my house. You’ve not had worries. Yet your happiest memory is not of your children or your home but of strangers.’ … ‘Children?’ she (Sita) murmured, distractedly. ‘Children only mean anxiety, concern – pessimism. Not happiness. What other women call happiness is just – just sentimentality.’ (WWS 134)

There was an unbridgeable gap between the mother and the children. Sita was hard on her kids. Mending her fences with her children was unworkable. Finding a solution to her disagreement with her children was unthinkable. She had a heart of stone but her husband had a heart of gold. That sort of behaviour was not acceptable. Still he treated her with kindness and consideration.

He was blind to his wife’s faults. He certainly bore her no malice and he did not want to hurt her feelings. He was kind, generous and forgiving towards her. There was
hurt and real anger in her voice. Her husband and children were very tolerant, but sometimes she pushed them too far. What lies at the root of her troubles was a sense of insecurity. She felt it was time to put down roots in Manori. She wanted to make Manori her permanent home.

It was Raman who first suggested escape to her. ‘Where shall we go this summer?’ he innocently asked, for every year he asked her that … when summer seemed to squat on its haunches … To Manori, she (Sita) instantly replied, but in silence because with this idea there also sprang to her mind the idea that she would go alone. The plan to escape boiled up in her with such suddenness, she was herself taken by surprise, not realizing that it had been simmering inside her so long although she was herself the pot, the water and the fire. (WWS 51)

For her children, that decision, that option, that selection, was unjustifiable or indefensible. Their world was entirely different from their mother. Menaka had locked horns with her mother over her decision to stay in the island. In her view, it was stupid to spend time and energy on things that did not matter. Menaka thought that it did not make much difference to Sita’s life.

It was as though for seven months she (Sita) had collected inside her all her resentments, her fears, her rages, and now she flung them outward, flung them from her. Tossing clothes, cigarettes, books into the suitcase
that she had drugged down from the tops of cupboards, she was silent and
blind in the face of his alarm and disbelief as he stood watching and not
quite believing what he saw. (WWS 30)

Manori rekindled and revived her father’s memories. Memories came flooding
back. The long nourished love for her father was beginning to take shape. The island was
a world of brilliant colours and dramatic sunsets. “She (Sita) saw the island as a piece of
magic, a magic mirror – it was so bright, so brilliant to her eyes after the tensions and
shadows of her childhood.” (WWS 59)

The smell of the sea took her back to her childhood. Manori brought back lots of
good memories. Manori was etched on her mind. Manori became a magnet for her and so
she was not ready to come out of that island. Even her brother, her father’s offspring
Jivan did not come to live in that island but only the daughter Sita had that wish to come
and settle down in that island.

... drumstick trees with their long beans and twisted garlands of small orchid-
like flowers, tattered palms and palmyras, bushes of hibiscus and lantana in
bloom. The earth seethed with weeds and the weeds with minute wildflowers in
brilliant tints – waxy white stars, curled yellow ones, small blue eyes and clusters
of vermilion and coral ixora that Sita plucked and scattered for the pleasure of
smelling their sweet, tarry sap on her hands. Butter-yellow and kingfisher-blue
butterflies flew up like so many petals taking flight. (WWS 111)
Sita was clearly caught off balance by the unexpected arrival of her husband. Raman came to take Menaka. Sita felt that her daughter and son had betrayed her and it was a stab in the back. She was very shocked and upset.

**But the sight of the children’s almost unbearable excitement dashed cold water on her delight.** She (Sita) thought, bitterly, that they were being disloyal to her, disloyal to the island and its wild nature. She went into her room and shut the door on their giddy, whirling excitement. (WWS 118)

Raman reasoned with her for hours about the danger, but she would not change her mind. His kindness to her was met with a cruel rebuff. He always came down on the side of his wife. Her expectations and ambitions were highly unrealistic. She was not ready to surrender without a struggle.

**She (Sita) had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city, to the unlivable island.** She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child ... He (Raman) spoke very quietly, ‘But you knew you must leave. You will have to come back.’ ‘I can’t,’ she pleaded ... ‘You must,’ he said, she shook her head. It seemed to her that he was always saying to her, ‘You must. One must,’ and that she was always shaking her head, crying, ‘No, I can’t.’

(WWS 128-129)
Sita had gone completely round the twist. They found her attitude a little hard to take and it was impossible to excuse or accept because there was no good reason for it. She was lucky to have a husband like Raman. He was a very kind and helpful person but she did not seem to understand his magnanimity. She locked herself in the island and shut herself off from the world. He was very patient with his wife. “When he (Raman) did at last speak she (Sita) was taken aback for what he said was, ‘Then are you always sad? Have you never been happy? and looked at her at last with a shrouded, fearful look.” (WWS 131)

Raman’s patience was wearing thin and her children also had little patience with her. Spending many years working in the city helped to broaden his horizons. His tone became brisk and businesslike. Sita was not ready to go along with Raman but wanted others to follow her footsteps. She pulled herself free and ran off. Many a time he pacified her by explaining the situation but she was her own mistress. She was out of touch with reality and so Raman returned with a heavy heart.

‘Then,’ he (Raman) said, ‘I’ll go now,’ and turned and started to walk up the beach. From the way he turned, the way he disregarded her, did not see if she (Sita) followed or not, she felt him release her then – give her up. She felt it as surely as if his hand, till now clutching her hand, had let it drop, let her go. He did it not in a passion, but out of pure weariness with her, weariness with her muddle, her dark, muddled drama. (WWS 136)
Sita felt so lonesome after her husband had left and she felt that the world was against her. She was fading away, losing strength. She did not listen to her husband’s advice and so she would just have to learn the hard way. The future of Sita hung in the balance. Sita finally surrendered to her husband and Raman took her back. She fought an indecisive battle in Manori and she was faced with a difficult choice.

In brief, the decision was a disaster and she had no choice but to leave. Finally when she went out of that island Manori, she went out as a woman completely defeated. Until the end the miracle Sita expected never came to pass. Expecting a miracle is not bad but the miracle Sita expected was totally unreasonable and unrealistic. Finally she was shown as a symbol of failure and walked out of the island as a dejected woman.

Her (Sita) time on the island had been very much of an episode on a stage, illuminated by gaudy sunset effects and played to thunderous storm music. The storm ended, the play over, the stage had now to be cleared – then the players could go home. (WWS 138-139)

In the great Hindu epic Ramayana, Sita was very obliging and obedient to her husband Rama but Anita Desai’s Sita was defiant and uncooperative. She thought that she was more important than other people. She was fractious and completely inflexible. She quibbled over trivialities.

‘She (Sita) was mad,’ Moses explained. ’Got angry, too, just like that, for nothing, all the time.’ … ‘So angry always. Angry with me, angry with
Miriam, angry because it rained, angry because there was no food –
always angry. Mad people are like that.’ (WWS 143)

The fault-finding Sita was the decision-maker in the house. Her husband Raman was under her thumb. She expected to be obeyed by other people and she did not care about their opinions or feelings. Sita, the geek, was free to make her own decisions rather than being told what to do by somebody else.

The trouble was that they were as often taken aback by seeing her (Sita)
in the garments of a demoralized washerwoman – so limp, so faded, so
bedraggled and ragged were some of her cotton saris, in the shades of
fawn and grey that female birds assume. So they never knew how, or
what to expect of her … ‘Why can’t you just be neat and tidy?’ he
(Raman) had asked despairingly in the beginning … Now he said nothing
– her dress was the least of his worries. (WWS 119-120)

Sita brought her daughter and son to Manori. She brought her daughter up against her wish. She dictated to her children but she refused to be dictated by anyone. She wanted everybody to obey and pull the strings. Like her mother, Sita could not abide the thought of being cooped up and locked up in the house. Inevitably Sita took out her frustrations on the children.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel Roots and Shadows, Sunanda-atyā got married to Vasant. Vasant was the first man who proposed marriage to Sunanda and it had worked
out quite well and so she counted herself lucky. Everybody uttered a sigh and everybody said that she was lucky but very soon she found out she was down on her luck.

She (Sunanda-atya) had the pallid, slightly, concave face some anaemic women have. This same pallor had been taken for a ‘fair complexion’ in her youth. It had given her a husband at the young age of sixteen and that husband was the first man she had been proposed to. Lucky girl, they had called her then. Specially when her first child had been a boy. (RS 132)

In a short time she found out it was a curse in disguise. Her husband Vasant had been out of work. He had to work out his own salvation. He should save himself by his own efforts but he was shiftless. So Sunanda-atya was forced to depend upon her father. Marriage disturbed the peaceful current of her life. She lived under the shadow of her father. There she had to encounter many problems. Her in-laws became her enemies.

… her (Sunanda-atya) eyes were not only wet, but frightened and desolate … For her too, this house was a refuge. It was her security against a life with an irresponsible husband who had long periods of joblessness. (RS 135)

Before marriage Sunanda-atya was very pretty and innocent but after marriage there was a complete change – a change for the worse. Her actions were motivated by guile and greed. Circumstances conspired to bring about her downfall.
A slim, long-faced, large-eyed girl with a look of virginal innocence. The innocence, if it had ever been there, had long since turned to guile … A female, not as she was meant to be, but as she became in the process of adapting herself to her circumstances and environment. Cunning, greedy, devious and unscrupulous. (RS 132)

Sunanda-atya’s stay in her father’s house with her husband and children was causing her a lot of problems. Things had been going badly and she was disgraced. She lost the respect of her family members. Everything conspired to make her life a misery. Her family members were getting browned off with her stay.

Sunanda-atya’s husband Vasant-kaka had been unprofitable and unpromising since the day she got married and so circumstances compelled her to become selfish. She sang a different tune. If her husband had been in a good job, she would not have changed her ways. Even though Sunanda-atya hated her in-laws, she had pure love and affection for her husband and her children.

‘I’m sick with worry about that boy (Krishna). His father plays it cool, but how can I blame him (Vasant-kaka)? He has his own problems … there is no one I (Sunanda-atya) can turn to, Indu. You must help me. If he had a little money, he could start a small shop of his own. He’s good at repairing things. Or if his father becomes a partner, he could find room for the boy there.’ (RS 138-139)
Sunanda-atya continued to love her husband irrespective of his joblessness. She had not decided that he was hopeless. She pleaded with Indu to support her husband. She appealed on behalf of her husband. Her husband took a back seat. He allowed his wife to play a more active and important role. Her husband was unemployed with no prospects but she had a grown-up son, Krishna. So Sunanda-atya had a chance to redeem herself. She could redesign and redevelop her condition. She could recuperate at least some of her losses but her son Krishna was lazy and he had no ambition to succeed in life.

‘You know he (Krishna) failed his SSC twice?’ I (Indu) shook my head.

‘He did. And it isn’t his fault really. He’s a clever boy and he worked hard. But they failed him by just a few marks. It’s shameful. So many boys, not half as good as him, passed. But what can you expect these days when you’re a Brahmin?’ … ‘Anyway, that’s why Krishna refused to appear again. He knows they’ll fail him this time too.’ (RS 136-137)

Her son failed in his exam but Sunanda-atya felt it was an injustice done by other caste people to her son because he was a Brahmin. Krishna was not ready to continue his education and his mother was also on his side. Sunanda-atya sided with her son against his teachers. Her son gave some lame excuses. When her son decided not to sit for his exam, she backed him and she defended him.

She should have rebuked him for having neglected his studies. She should have compelled him to continue his education but she surrendered herself to her son. There
was no excuse for such behaviour but she excused him. Krishna failed to give his parents the help and support they expected. He let the side down. Sunanda-atya was riding for a fall. She had not learnt her lessons and her case was beyond redemption.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel *Roots and Shadows*, Kaku was an old widow. Her daughter-in-law did not feed her properly and so she helped many families in the kitchen. She got a square meal and an amount of money for her work. In the midst of her tale of woe, she talked venomously and she could not keep her mouth shut.

*Once that old woman starts speaking, she (Kaku) never stops …* She needs the money and the one square meal we give her. Her daughter-in-law denies her even that … She’s got the sharpest ears and the longest tongue in town. Your Kaka calls her All India Radio. (RS 118)

Kaku gave full vent to her bitter feelings and her words were extremely unpleasant and unfriendly. She never gave enough respect to Indu because Indu was a childless woman. Kaku did not consider Indu’s high academic standards. Indu was deeply hurt by Kaku.

*The old woman (Kaku) spoke contemptuously. I (Indu) knew these women had their own standards for judging people. Nothing about me … my academic distinctions, my career, my success, my money … none of these would impress her. To her I was just a childless woman. (RS 116)*
Kaku was completely unsympathetic and insensitive to other people’s feelings. She used rude, offensive and harmful language. She was a notorious one for idle gossip. She was very interested in learning about other people. Very inquisitively she would collect information from one house and then insensitively she would spread the news to other houses. She enjoyed spreading stories about other people and she enjoyed talking about other people’s private lives. Many people believed all the gossip they heard. She was too interested in other people’s affairs even though those things did not concern her. She was so nosy.

‘What’s your name?’, I (Indu) asked her (Kaku) suddenly … ‘Forgotten my name! What a thing to say! You think because you’re clever, all the others are stupid. Of course, I know my name. I have not just one, but two good names. One (Ganga) given to me by my father when I was born, and the other (Kaveri) by my husband when I got married. Both holy, sacred names, mind you! Not like these modern names.’ (RS 117)

Kaku was not aware of the insidious effects of unkind talk. It seemed politic and prudent to say nothing. She did not know how to make polite conversation. She never showed good manners and respect for the feelings of others. In addition Kaku had the habit of stealing things quietly and secretly. She had been stealing from the houses for years. That was a silly thing to do but she could not stay her hand. Thus she played silly buggers. Kaku was nicknamed All India Radio. Anything said in her presence would
definitely reach everybody in that surrounding. So they avoided speaking important things in front of her. There was no end to her idle chatter. ‘Have you left that old woman alone in the kitchen? You know her. God knows how many things will go into the folds of her (Kaku) sari before we get back.’ (RS 121)

Both Maya and Leila are gloomy characters as sketched by Anita Desai. At the same time Anita Desai’s portrayal of Pom is entirely different from Maya and Leila. Pom was Maya’s friend. She was pompous and hilarious. She had a very relaxed manner and did not care about anything.

… the pink, plump, pretty Pom who did not speak of fate, who had never been ill, or overworked, or bitter … Pom prinking before her mirror, tying up hair in pigtails with enormous ribbons, or twisting flowers into chignons of astonishing intricacy, painting her mouth, the outlines of her black eyes, her finger and her toe-nails. (CP 60)

Pom married Kailash who was a perfect match for her. She was never under her husband’s thumb. He let her rule the kingdom and so Pom was enjoying herself very much. Kailash gave her complete freedom of action. So she enjoyed meeting people and seeing new places. On the whole, she was given free rein. Kailash’s parents were also living along with her. Pom’s mother-in-law was a very good cook. Being a big eater, Pom enjoyed her mother-in-law’s food preparations.”… the vast lunches Pom could consume,
and which her mother-in-law, who had been born in a kitchen and married at its door, would prepare.” (CP 62)

The light-hearted Pom enjoyed excellent health. She dressed herself in the best dress. Being a happy-go-lucky sort of person, Pom took life as it came. She (Pom) was too good-humoured. Logic, tact, diplomacy – nothing mattered to her who chattered so glibly and gaily all the day long … never, never referring to family, tradition, custom, superstition. (CP 61)

Pom felt that her husband was caught in a tangled web of relationships. She did not want to be a part of an extended family. She tried her utmost to persuade and pester her husband to break free from the extended family ties. Her henpecked husband gave the nod to all her plans. The ill-mannered Pom’s behaviour was often appalling and bad. To fulfil her dream, she set up a nuclear family. “… then burrow through the bazaars like an avid rabbit, leaving a chaos of silks and cottons strewn behind her; as well as the cajolings and curses of a dozen frustrated shop-keepers.” (CP 60)

Pom was never satisfied with her purchase. When she was in the shop, she was obnoxious. After rummaging and ransacking thousands of saris, she used to feel that nothing was appealing. She was very obstinate at times and showed a total disregard for other people’s feelings. By taking a long time to purchase a single sari, she made life difficult for the seller. Without being considerate towards the seller, she made the seller’s life hell. Nothing could shake or rock her exaltation and elation.
She had no worries. There are some women who always worry about something like Maya. What is the use of worrying? By worrying nothing is going to change. Even then they keep on worrying. Some women use to think about unpleasant things that have happened or that might happen and therefore feel unhappy and afraid. There is no point in worrying over things people cannot change. Worries cause mental illness, heart disease and blood pressure. A person who worries a lot cannot concentrate on anything especially work, family, health. They are distracted and disturbed.

They are unable to pay attention to their work because they are worried and thinking about something else. Worry and fear are twins and those who worry will definitely fear. Fear plunges them into deep depression. They suffer from headaches and loss of appetite. When a thought preys on a person’s mind, he could not eat properly and he would lose a sound sleep. They lead an unfulfilling and uneventful life. Instead of worrying if they take the problems easily, happiness is within their reach. They should look ahead and see what other options are.

In Anita Desai’s novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita’s mother was an example of poor mothering. Sita never experienced and tasted mother’s love throughout her life. When Sita was born her mother was unwilling to take delight in that excellent and beautiful daughter rather she took flight to Benares and never returned. Sita was rejected and deserted by her mother. From that day onwards Sita lived in troubled times. Her father was totally involved and immersed in freedom struggle.
He dedicated and devoted the prime of his life for that noble cause. He was acknowledged as the Second Gandhi. He was very much interested in politics and so he was not able to pay enough attention to his children. He could not find enough time to spend with his daughter and moralize her and so Sita was wild and completely out of control. Various ideas entered and inhered in her mind in a very young age. She lived on her nerves. She believed for too long that her mother died. One day she questioned her brother Jivan who was very shrewd. He shared a secret with her.

‘Died?’ he (Jivan) murmured. ‘She didn’t die – she ran away, to Benares.’

‘Ran away? And left us?’ Sita stood clutching her hair about her ears and feet sinking rapidly into the sand. Then she shook her head and let her hair all come loose and stamped her foot so that one footprint in the silver sand was deeper than all the others, one desperate footprint among the oblivious others. (WWS 76)

Sita’s mother fled to Benares with jewels in a very young age deserting her husband and children. Sita raised her eyebrows when she heard the shocking news. She was too young to understand the reason for her mother’s desertion. There after she enquired about Benares and the nature of that city. After her marriage through her husband Raman, she searched in vain for her mother. She did not have a photo of her mother and so her quest ended in a fiasco.
Later, after her marriage, her husband tried, for her sake, to locate this ghost in white, stripped of its jewels, lost in Benares. But no trace was found. All efforts, all enquiries drew a blank. Benares was flooded with the lost, the runaway, the dying and the dead of Hindu society … Sita shrugged when her husband returned from Benares and gave up the pursuit. ‘After all, I can’t put her photograph in the papers, can I?’ she mused, ‘I don’t have one,’ and let it go at that. (WWS 79)

Sita felt terribly sad about it. She visualized her mother as a beautiful woman. When she was at her mother’s knee, her mother snubbed her husband and children completely. The mother never nestled the baby in her arms and the child never snuggled up to her mother. “Sita had imagined she came into the world motherless … She could not remember wanting or waiting for her mother.” (WWS 76-77)

Sita’s mother, a cold fish, treated her children in an unfriendly way. She gave her children the cold shoulder but her children were tolerant. Sita never swore to wreak vengeance on her mother who had betrayed them. She looked out for her mother and kept trying to meet her, but her mother disappeared and was never heard of again. Thus Sita had failed to trace her mother’s whereabouts.

At last, she had to face up to the fact that she could never succeed in her pursuit. Failing in her attempt, she collected herself and prepared herself mentally for the loss. Her mother’s whereabouts were unknown. They seem destined never to meet. The rash
and mad decision taken by Sita’s mother wreaked havoc on the family. She had easily forgotten her husband and children.

**Why had she (Sita’s mother) left? She continued to wonder. Why had she left three children – Rekha, who, it was true, may not have been her own but another woman’s child, the child of another ghost in her father’s life; Jivan, the quick, clever, unscrupulous and irresistible boy, and Sita? Why had she left her husband whom they called the Second Gandhi?**

*(WWS 78)*

Their mother’s desertion pushed the children into different directions. Her son became a rebel in the house and society. He resisted the authority of his father. A neglected child peeped out of Sita’s eye sometimes. Motherless children are like unfenced plants which are vulnerable to attack. Sita’s mother left home without telling anyone, because she wished to liberate herself from the bondage of domestic life. Evading and fleeing will never solve any problem. It is a wicked deed to forsake the innocent children.

In Anita Desai’s novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Rekha, Sita’s stepsister, was a talented singer. She had a beautiful singing voice and the whole village admired her voice. Her father was very affectionate towards her and he enjoyed her company. They had been so attached to each other. He never spoke to Sita and Jivan very
jovially or affectionately rather he was close to Rekha’s heart. He had a lot of importance and interest for his daughter Rekha.

As long as their father was alive, Sita did not have the courage to go and talk to him. She respected her father but she never felt completely at ease with him. He was not on friendly terms with his daughter Sita. The bond between father and daughter was not so strong even though they were living together in the same house in Manori. Rekha thrilled her father by her scintillating voice and it was painfully watched by the younger daughter. Sita had never been good at singing.

Sita had to admit that Rekha, unlike her and Jivan, had a gift – she could sing. Day and night she was reminded of this one glory her sister possessed … Brooding over this disparity between them, Sita chose to voice it with a false lack of pride. ‘Why can’t you and I sing, Jivan, when she sings so well?’ (WWS 70-71)

When Sita reflected upon her father’s partiality, it was nothing but anger and anguish which kept burning in her heart. He kept her at a distance and treated her with reserve. Sita hated having to share her father’s love with her sister. She had a possessive nature, wanted the whole of her father’s love and attention.

Observing that it was always across the older sister’s stolid shoulders that he placed his arm when they descended from the terrace to the casuarina grove and strolled out across the beach to watch the sun melt into the sea
… observing how he stretched out his hand and squeezed her fingers
when they sat on the veranda … perhaps it was no unusual prick of
jealousy that chilled Sita. (WWS 70)

The motherless Sita’s long-felt want for paternal love was not at all met until the end. Their father hardly seemed to notice Sita’s presence but Rekha’s presence had a calming effect. Sita grew away from her father but Rekha grew on her father. After his wife’s betrayal, a closeness grew up between Rekha’s father and Rekha.

She (Sita) heard Rekha, in the attic that was the prayer room, singing as if she were the bird that heralded the day. She could picture to herself her father’s face as he leant against a bolster and shut his eyes in ecstasy, sipping in the finely distilled wine of that pure voice. (WWS 71)

There was no love lost between Sita and her sister Rekha. Sita felt a sharp pang of jealousy. She had been nursing a grievance against her father and sister for years. Childhood formations are important for a person to become a full human being but Sita’s childhood was mutilated by a deep sigh and by silence.

There he (Sita’s father) was – so gentle, thoughtful, barefoot, dressed in homespun, fetching water from the well, a figure she respected, admired, and adored, was told by all to respect, admire, and adore – yet she could not talk to him. Perhaps because she never found him alone – always with Rekha silent at his side. (WWS 72)
Sita’s father paid no attention or concern or consideration for Sita. He went ahead and did it regardless of the consequence. Until the end father’s love was unattainable and inaccessible to Sita. Her heart longed for the love of her father but unfortunately her father never understood his daughter. A feeling of unhappiness and disappointment crowded Sita’s mind. Too many uncomfortable thoughts were crowding in on her. There was a feeling of restlessness deep in her soul.

The elder daughter’s tanpura was placed on a mat at one end of the room and, twice a day, there would swell and roll the poignant devotional music of a great temple. It would begin with a few notes, or even verses, sung in the exquisite voice of the elder daughter … the music rolled and rose with a power to rival the nearby sea. (WWS 61)

Rekha, the nightingale, sang sweetly and her father sang her praises. Sita felt that her father did not care about her. It is very sad when children feel unwanted. Rekha had been given an unfair advantage. Their father held her in high regard. He was addicted to his daughter’s devotional songs. He had great regard for her abilities. He beamed at his daughter. Rekha was the darling of her father and so the best things were creamed off by Rekha.

She took away usually the best things in order to get an advantage for herself. She was her father’s favourite. Sita was demanding to be treated on the same footing as her sister Rekha. Their father treated them in different ways that seemed unfair and unequal.
He did not treat his children equally and fairly. In the course of time their father fell sick and his days were counted. “He (Sita’s father) was dying. Myth, legend he might be but he was, physically, dying. Sita and Rekha watched him die, bit by bit. The days were wordless and grim.” (WWS 88)

When he was on his deathbed, Rekha and Sita did their filial duties. When he died, Sita was absolutely devastated and she lost control of her emotions. She was unable to keep back or restrain her tears and so she started to sob uncontrollably. She could not prevent her emotion from being expressed. Her body was racked with sobs. She could feel her heart pounding as her father breathed his last.

When he was alive, she found it difficult to show affection. When he had been confined to bed due to his old age illness, she sat beside him all night. Her life seemed empty without her father. She was alarmed by the prospect of mixed feelings of insecurity and anxiety.

She (Sita) saw, to her astonishment, Rekha lift her heavy arms from her lap and twist her long, dishevelled hair into a tight knot at her neck with a swift, determined gesture. She stabbed one or two long pins into it, securing it, then smiled at Sita’s startled, uneasy look. Her smile made Sita shrink – it was so saurian, so malevolent, cynical. Then Rekha nodded at their father, smiling, and Sita looked and saw that he had
stopped breathing. ‘Come,’ said Rekha, in a voice that rang, ‘we can
go now.’ (WWS 88-89)

Astonishingly, Rekha was not stirred by her father’s death, but it made a profound
impact on Sita. Her father had been the bulwark of her life, always a calming spirit, but
Rekha did not mind her father’s demise. Her father vanished into thin air suddenly and
completely. Sita could not shake the feeling but Rekha shook and shrugged off her
father’s memories very easily.

She (Rekha) went, immediately, as though she had waited for and
planned for this moment of release from the old man’s love. She seemed
to know exactly what to do, whom to go to. It was a matter of months
before she became the Nightingale of AIR and people, earlyrisers
sipping their first cup of tea or meditatively brushing their teeth, turned
the knobs of their radios to tune in to her voice singing a morning hymn
with that absolutely clear, utterly certain voice of a goddess. (WWS 89)

Rekha was her father’s soulmate but after her father’s death she was soulless. On
the other hand Sita was soulful and she expressed deep feelings of sadness.

This is the other side of the coin. These strong-willed women are tough and
uncompromising. They talk as if they have lost the milk of human kindness completely.
These trouble-loving and trouble-creating women are unwilling to obey rules. The next
chapter brings out the agonies of the silent sufferers.