Chapter 4
"Rebellious Spirit": The 1970s

The educated women characters I am going to deal with in this chapter are: Simrit from Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* (1971), Lalitha from Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins* (1973), Sita from Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), Manasi from Kamala Das' *Alphabet of Lust* (1976), Devi from Nayantara Sahgal's *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977), Geeta from Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (1977) and Shree from Raji Narasimhan's *Forever Free* (1979) will be looked at in terms of the issue of marriage; Simrit from Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* (1971), Lalitha from Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins* (1973), Manasi from Kamala Das' *Alphabet of Lust* (1976), Ila Das from Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), Devi from Nayantara Sahgal's *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) and Shree from Raji Narasimhan's *Forever Free* (1979) will be discussed keeping in mind the issue of career; and Simrit from Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* (1971) and Shree from Raji Narasimhan's *Forever Free* (1979) will be dealt with to discuss the issue of divorce.

Simrit in Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* (1971) falls in love with Som and marries him without her parents' consent. This earliest novel, in the 1970s discusses love marriage. In Shruti Vaidya's words: "[...] Simrit shows some rebellious spirit when she decides to marry Som much against the wishes of her family" (75). When a girl marries against her parents' wishes as a rebel, she expects her husband to be everything. She cannot expect any support from her parents even if her marriage fails. Sahgal is making her protagonist take a bold step and breaking the traditional concept of an arranged marriage. Simrit has resisted her parents' wishes of getting her married to a man from a decent family. Simrit has married Som with a lot of pride but all in vain. The reason is that he is a male chauvinist. Simrit has not studied Som's mind properly. Asha Choubey
opines that Simrit falling in love with Som may "be described as infatuation" (79). Some love marriages take place just out of infatuation. Also, "[h]er Brahmin parents with their instinctive withdrawal from anything outside the fold had been frankly upset at her choice of a businessman husband, but her friends had not liked him either" (Sahgal *The Day* 3). The above lines clearly indicate that both her "friends" and "Brahmin parents" have not approved the match. Perhaps the Brahmin parents may not like the business profession. She realizes later that she she has made a poor choice. She chooses love marriage, but it turns out to be unsuccessful.

Simrit has undertaken writing as a career. However, she does not write for commercial purposes but for her own personal satisfaction. She is an occasional freelance writer for the newspapers. In her conversation with Joshi and Mr. Shah, Simrit reveals this information:

"Then you must be working," said her companion. They had fixed her with a twin Joshi look. It made her feel she had broken out in spots and scales.

"I am a writer."

It sounded so terse and self-advertising.

"Which newspaper do you write for?"

"I freelance. But I don’t write much for the newspapers. Only the occasional article.[...]

"Simrit Raman?" the first woman placed her. "I’ve seen a book by you. It was about a place—a valley, wasn't it, or a stream?"

"A river," said Simrit, tormented.

"A river?"

"Yes", said Simrit [...]

"Mrs Raman, you have written a book about a river," stated Mr Shah. "I have read it".  

(Sahgal *The Day* 6-7)
Simrit has chosen her career as a "writer" out of interest. She has in fact written a book.

Though she had married Som for love, the marriage has now lost its meaning to her as there is no warmth or understanding between them. Som also should have the responsibility of taking care of his wife's needs. A couple marrying out of love look forward to being happy throughout their life. So it is unfortunate that such a couple wants a divorce. The reason for the divorce, according to T. Ashoka Rani is as follows: "Simrit and Som's relationship is marked by lack of tenderness and warmth, communication and compatibility" (74). I agree with Rani that in love marriages, tenderness, warmth, communication and compatibility are of prime importance. If these qualities are not shared between the couple, then there is no meaning to a love marriage. One may find it difficult to find these qualities in arranged marriages. Thus Sahgal takes a stand that if the husband does not have these qualities, then it is better to divorce him rather than lead a life of compromise. Susheela P. Rajendra too expresses her view in a similar way: "[...] lack of proper companionship, communication and equality between man and woman [could] wreck [a] marital relationship resulting in divorce" (233). Rajendra adds two additional qualities of companionship and equality between man and woman in a love marriage.

There is no warmth and tenderness between Som and Simrit. Their relationship is only business-like: "Simrit respects certain values of life more than material prosperity. But there is no end to Som's ambitions. For him the end is more important than the means. He does not hesitate to drop out a friend or his own wife if he feels he or she no longer serves him any purpose. He fails to comprehend the sensibilities of Simrit" (Bai 169). It is only a materialistic life that they lead. I always have a feeling that business people have no warmth and tenderness towards their family members as the case of Som suggests. People like Som think that they are doing the most for the family. But they forget that they spend very little time with family members, especially with the wife. Som says:
You have everything in the world any woman could want. [...] "Stop crying, Simrit. What on earth is there to cry about? I'm a damned good husband to you, aren't I? What have you got to complain about? We're having a wonderful life and it's going to get better and better." [...] "Think of it, we can go abroad any time we want, any bloody time, buy anything we want. We can air condition this whole place, furnish it all over again, and Rudy's right. You ought to have something to mark the occasion. What would you like? You didn't say." [...] She began, "Som, the world is so full of violence." "Yes of course it is. It always has been. Don't tell me that's what you're crying about." [...] I don't mean war—that's far away. I mean people with each other. And look at the arid way we live, without friends."

(Sahgal The Day 88-89)

Som believes that he is providing and can provide all that Simrit wants. He says that Simrit has "everything" in the world any woman could want. Som is only talking about the materialistic things that a businessman can provide. He claims himself to be "a damned good husband". For him a wonderful life is one where a person has all the comforts money can buy. Simrit does not subscribe to this view for she sees violence all around her. Though Som thinks that she is talking about the outside world, she is in fact describing her family world. She does not talk about "war" between people or between countries but with "each other", between Som and herself. She is here pointing out the lack of affection and communication.

If Simrit feels cheated in her marriage because her husband has no affection for her and is not able to communicate with her, Lalitha in Kamala Markandaya's Two Virgins (1973) has been cheated and exploited by a film Director who has made her pregnant and does not marry her and who has not offered her a role in the films. Avadhesh Kumar Singh observes: "Lalitha appears more as a rebel
against traditions and social taboos than as a violator of moral code" (123). Whether Lalitha "appears as a rebel against traditions and social taboos" or "as a violator of moral code", it is Lalitha who has to suffer humiliation as she has to abort the foetus and she finds it difficult to show her face to people. There is no marriage for her. She has chosen to act in films on her own though she has been advised to choose teaching as her career by her teacher Miss Mendoza:

There are a number of careers open to girls like her, Miss Mendoza was saying. Have you thought of a career? She wanted to know, fixing her eyes which were beady but brilliant on Appa and Amma in turn. [...] Appa cleared his throat. He said young women these days did go in for careers, and he brought out that, yes, his daughter might have one too. What had she in mind? he asked Miss Mendoza, and nothing was more clear than that his was quite blank.

Teaching, said Miss Mendoza, which made Amma stiffen. Or nursing, she said, which turned Amma to stone, some kind of glittering rock which you felt would draw blood if you so much as touched it. (61-62)

Miss Mendoza comes to Lalitha's place to find out what Amma and Appa have in their minds with regard to their daughter's career. Though Appa pretends to be open it is clear that he had not really given a thought to it as his expression "was quite blank". Amma too does not like Miss Mendoza's suggestions as is evident from the way her body stiffens and turns into a rock. But Lalitha is very particular about acting in films:

Lalitha told Appa and Amma. She had to, to get their cooperation, without it she could not have seized her opportunity. No one was clear what that was, not even Lalitha. A film star, she said, a film actress, a chance to be in a film: she whittled it down to fit the reality which would eventually have to be conceded. Appa said We must see. He said One must have the
full facts of the matter to enable one to come to the right decision. Not in this world, said Amma, in this world it is not possible to have the full truths on any subject. It was clear they were talking for the sake of it, to save face in front of their children by refusing to admit the subject was wholly outside their scope and experience. Appa said the Indian film industry was the second biggest in the world. He said it gave employment to two million people. (Markandaya *Two Virgins* 81)

Appa saying, "we must see" is not totally dismissive. However, Amnia straightaway disagrees. Both of them are unwilling to admit that "the subject was wholly outside their scope and experience". Later on Miss Mendoza also encourages Lalitha and hands her over to Mr. Gupta so he can help her act in a documentary film and later on in a film:

Miss Mendoza simpered, she took it as a compliment. We like to give our girls total opportunity, total experience, she said. Some are able to take advantage, she said in a vibrant voice; they are, shall we say, gifted. Her brilliant gaze was beamed straight on Lalitha. One of our most promising pupils, she cried, that is why, Mr. Gupta, I have not hesitated to bring her to your attention! Her hand was laid on his sleeve, Mr. Gupta looked at Lalitha, who was doing her eye act. Delighted, delighted, he murmured abstractedly, then suddenly became brisk, said crisply what he could use was some good folk dancing, or a spirited Indian solo. (Markandaya *Two Virgins* 90)

However it is a futile attempt for Lalitha. Mr. Gupta, a director of documentary film exploits Lalitha. She becomes pregnant and aborts the foetus, as he does not want to marry her. Markandaya seems to suggest that the film profession is dangerous for people like Lalitha who have dreams of becoming film stars. In order to impress the directors, the girls have to give in to their desires. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the directors would fulfill the girls' dreams of becoming film stars. P. Geetha observes: "With her illegal relationship with Gupta, she is
crippled morally. She has no place in her society. Her parents try to hush up the whole affair, getting the abortion done in secret. But Lalitha does not have the moral courage to face her fellow beings" (176). Geetha is very right. How could a girl who has had an illicit relationship, face society and fellow beings? The blame is on her teacher and her father. Appa's sister has cautioned her brother not to push her into acting in films. However, he ignores her suggestions and pays the price for it. Alice Drum also expresses a similar view:

When the village becomes the subject of a documentary film, Lalitha's dreams of a career and an escape [from the village] become a reality. Having been given a role in the film, she quickly begins a flirtation with the director and is invited by him to come to the city after the film is completed. There she is seduced by, or seduces, him - depending on who tells the story, Appa the father or Gupta the lover. In time, Lalitha's pregnancy and abortion bring the family, with the exception of Aunt Alamelu, to the city, where their problems are intensified by the pressure of urban existence. (324-325)

What happens to an urbanized woman like Sita in Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975)? Unlike Simrit, Sita has an arranged marriage with Raman. Raman is an industrialist. He is the son of Sita's father's friend. That is the reason why Sita is married to Raman. It is like Maya and Gautaina in Cry, the Peacock, marrying each other as a result of Gautama and her father being friends. It is a common belief that if parents are friends, their children too will have the same kind of relationship and understanding. Friendship is different from married life. There is a problem in Raman and Sita's marriage. Sita delivers four children. Again she is pregnant. At this point Sita is prepared neither to deliver the child nor to abort the foetus. She thinks that it is her choice whether to deliver the baby or not. Maithreyi Krishnaraj also supports Sita and says: "A woman's role in the reproduction of human beings far weighs that of a man. It is invariably a woman who mothers. Motherhood and mothering are usually perceived as naturally
related" (34). For this reason Sita goes back to her native place. She does not want to be with her husband Raman. Look at the connotations of the name, Sita. See how she does not adhere to the values that Sita of the Hindu epic Ramayana stands for. Sita in the novel never objected to deliver her earlier children. However, she does object to deliver the fifth child. Sita seems to prove that it is ultimately the mother's choice to deliver the baby or not.

Like Sita and unlike Simrit, Manasi in Kamala Das' Alphabet of Lust (1976) has an arranged marriage with Amol Mitra. Manasi is not happy with her marriage. She has high ambitions. Her husband belongs to an aristocratic family. But, later on, after his father's sudden demise due to liver disease, he is content with his job and looks after his family. However, Manasi is not content with her life with her husband and daughter. Look how Amol has come to his present status:

[•••] Amol managed to graduate on a scholarship and joined the Government service as a clerk.
It was his flamboyant background that fetched for him a marriage proposal from the father of Manasi. Who had not heard of Barrister Mitra? And one of the palatial mansions where he had lived and entertained? True, he died prematurely of a liver disease. But why blame the son for his father's excesses? Manasi's father was a true Bengali snob and liked the idea of his daughter marrying the son of an aristocrat. Amol was modest and unassuming. He did not ever talk of his father or of his glorious childhood.... (110).

Amol Mitra is a "modest and unassuming" person. That is why Manasi's father likes him. At the same time Manasi's father overlooks the age gap between them. Manasi is not happy with this marriage because of the age gap. We have already seen this problem in the case of Arjun Mitra and Uma in Nayantara Sahgal's This Time of Morning. Amol Mitra "looked old enough to be her father" (9). In an arranged marriage there could be a lot of age gap between the couple. There is a
reason for this deliberate choice. If the wife is much younger, then the wife can look after the husband in his old age. She will have more energy than the husband and so can look after her husband, which is a part of her duty in married life. But I do not agree with this view. It is because of this age gap that a woman looks for a relationship outside marriage like Manasi with Vijay Raje and Uma with Neil in Sahgal's *This Time of Morning*. Vijay is "a womaniser, a young and depraved politician, now a Minister, and a rising sun in politics. She [Manasi] wishfully feels that theirs would have been an ideal pair: 'We would have made an excellent pair. Poetess and politician'" (Srivastava 119).

However, Manasi goes to the extent of having an extra-marital relationship with Vijaya Raje the confidant of Mr. Desai, the Prime Minister, only in order to get political advantage and become a minister. She does not feel guilty, like Gauri in *Storm in Chandigarh*. She has gained from the relationship. She is a Bengali poet. She gets the Padmashree award just because of her extra-marital relationship with Vijaya Raje. He takes Manasi to Shimla for a week. Manasi can go to any extent for her selfish motives and even surrender sexually to Vijaya Raje.

Manasi initially has chosen writing poetry as her career and later on enters politics. Manasi is a good example of someone winning the highest literary award from the central government with the help of political links: "Manasi won the highest literary award for her latest book of poems in Bengali, and was invited to Delhi to receive the long citation and the money" (Das *Alphabet* 19).

This is a politically obtained award rather than an award achieved through one's own effort. However, once it is declared, it is considered an authentic award. Once she gets this politically obtained award, she does not stop there. She moves on to politics. She has been given a minister's post in the central cabinet. She has sexual affairs to get this ministerial position. There are two people involved in Manasi getting the award. First, it is Vijay Raje who introduces Manasi to the Prime Minister. Manasi expresses her desire:
I do not want to be only a poetess, she [Manasi] said. I want to be a woman who can be admired and loved. How like a child you speak, exclaimed Vijay. Today I am going to introduce to you to the Prime Minister, who wished to meet you. We are dining with the Minister for Information and Broadcasting who has also invited the P. M. (Das Alphabet 31)

One could ask why Vijay shows interest in Manasi. It is because she has no problem in having an affair with him. Moreover, he is her childhood friend and is in love with her. Manasi agrees to go to Shimla with Vijay to spend a week with him. So he shows an interest in Manasi. Apart from that, Manasi does not want just to be a "poetess" but also wants to "be admired and loved". Vijay understands her feelings regarding her aspiring for some political power through her body. Therefore, he wants to "introduce" her "to the Prime Minister" and recommends her for some ministerial position. After her meeting with the P. M., the P. M. is impressed with Manasi and intends to give her the portfolio of "Minister for Information and Broadcasting" provided she fulfills what the P. M. wants, that is to sleep with him:

The P. M. has fallen for you, and wants you to join his cabinet as the Minister for Information and Broadcasting. [...] Manasi straightened up all of a sudden. "But"? she asked him. Why do you say "but"? The Prime Minister is a womaniser, said Vijay. He will not leave you alone. Your name will soon be mud in the country. [...] Vijay, I am willing to do whatever the P. M. wants me to do. It is not as if I am a chaste woman now. A pativrata. You saw to it that I became a mere tart. I rented out my body for a pair of diamond earrings. And hereafter for power I shall rent it out to the influential tenant I can hope to get. (Das Alphabet 40-41)

She tells Vijay that she is willing to do anything that the P. M. wants, for the sake
of her career. She is no longer a "chaste woman". She has lost the confidence of her husband after having an affair with Vijay for the sake of getting "a pair of diamond rings". Therefore, why would she hesitate to sleep with the P. M. if she were going to get the post of a minister? However, she is in a dilemma:

The Prime Minister was above fifty. But he had a boyish appeal which women found difficult to resist. Manasi frowned for a moment, debating within, whether she ought to be unfaithful to Vijay, her lover of a mere year, and be the P. M.'s mistress. It was obvious that the man wanted to make love to her. She smiled once again. (Das Alphabet 59)

The dilemma is that of being "unfaithful" to her lover Vijay. Where is the question of "faithful" and "unfaithful" as far as Manasi is concerned? She is already "unfaithful" to her husband. For the sake of enhancing her career she does not hesitate to go to any extent. She need not be in a dilemma of being "unfaithful to" her lover "Vijay". She should think about her husband not her lover. Strangely she does not think about her husband at all. After the affair with the P. M., the P. M. discusses the matter of the cabinet reshuffle with his "principal adviser" (135) Vijay:

Vijay, we can have a reshuffle, said the Prime Minister. We can give Singh, Defence.
Ha, that will be another blunder, said Raje. He dislikes war. You must give Defence to a militant person. Manasi, for instance. Manasi? asked the Prime Minister, Why do you call her militant? She was a Naxalite once upon a time, said Raje. I used to read her articles in a journal devoted to the Naxalite movement. Set a thief to catch a thief. Perhaps I could give her Home, said the Prime Minister. It is entirely up to you, said Raje. (Das Alphabet 130)

From the above conversation it is clear that Vijay wants the Prime Minister to
give Manasi the Defence portfolio. But the Prime Minister wants to give her Home Ministry. Thus Manasi is able to shift from being a poet to that of a Home Minister. There is something negative about the way she comes up in her career. But it happens with some people. Kamala Das seems to suggest that politics is dirty. No longer do political leaders work for the sake of people but for the sake of their own selfish desires, either for earning money or for sexual pleasures.

Unlike Simrit and like Sita and Manasi, Geeta in Rama Mehta’s _Inside the Haveli_ (1977) has an arranged marriage with Ajay, a lecturer in a degree college. Ajay is a member of a joint family. Geeta is from an orthodox family but she is given freedom to mingle with "men and women". Malashri Lai opines: "[M]arriage brought Geeta from the outer world of modernity to the enclosures of the threshold. She had grown up in the bustling metropolis of Bombay. At a co-educational college, she was accustomed to a 'free mingling of men and women' (13) and had known of a different conservative society" (88). However, Geeta's opinion is sought about her future husband:

Two years ago when she left her parents' home in Bombay, she did not know that she was leaving behind a way of life in which there was a free mingling of men and women. Geeta had met her future husband Ajay in the company of her brothers' friends. She was not quite sure which of the young men had come to see her. When her parents asked if she liked the man in the grey suit, she had said, "Yes". Her parents seemed sure that she would. Her mother had told her that Ajay came from an old aristocratic family of Udaipur but he, unlike many in such families, was highly educated. He was a science professor. He was not interested in entering a more prestigious service much to the disappointment of his parents. Geeta's parents' only doubt seemed to concern Ajay's family. The women of the upper class in Udaipur, among them his mother, remained in purdah. Geeta had been differently brought up. She had gone to college and studied with boys. How would such a girl learn to live in the
constricted atmosphere for a world of women, to give her elders the traditional deference? [...] Her parents' anxiety was not really so much about Geeta's adjustment, but about whether a girl like her would be approved by Ajay's parents. The more orthodox relatives might be afraid of an educated girl and caution them against her, particularly one who was not from Udaipur. Geeta knew that her mother had worried that she would spoil everything by talking too much on the day Ajay came to see her.

(Mehta Inside 15-16)

In an arranged marriage, it is quite common for at least some of the family to go and see the girl to find out if she is suitable for the boy or not. In fact, they have to be satisfied. Only later is it the choice of the boy and girl. In the same way Ajay comes with some "young men" and Geeta does not know who Ajay is. In the meanwhile she has been asked her opinion as to whether she likes the boy. This is the first instance in a novel where an "educated" woman's opinion has been sought when the marriage is an arranged one. She gives a positive reply to her parents. In addition to seeking her opinion about Ajay she has been briefed about Ajay's family background, that he comes from an "old aristocratic family". In other words she has been advised to behave in an "orthodox" manner. Ajay is well-educated as he is "a science professor". He does not want to hold any other higher post as it would embarrass his family members. He gives importance to his family members. Geeta has also been told that her mother-in-law is still in "purdah". Naturally she expects her daughter-in-law to be in "purdah". Geeta's mother is also apprehensive about consenting to the match as Geeta has been "brought up" in a different environment where she mingles freely with "boys and girls" due to her higher education. Orthodox families generally avoid highly educated girls. After the marriage, Geeta has been advised by her mother to "[k]eep your head covered; never argue with your elders; respect your mother-in-law and do as she tells you. Don't talk too much" (Mehta Inside 16). It looks like Geeta is ready to face any kind of challenge to win her in-laws' favour and acceptance. She has been listening to every advice and does not react. It shows
that she has been digesting all the suggestions given to her. If the girl is happy with the choice then everything will be all right. The only thing is that the bride should be happy with the kind of match parents bring. Moreover Geeta's opinion has been sought. This is an appropriate action taken by her parents.

Geeta as an "educated" mother does not accept for her thirteen year-old daughter Vijay, the marriage proposal from Daulat Singhji of his son Vir Singh. Vir Singh is an arts graduate but would like to go abroad for higher studies. Geeta refuses to accept this marriage proposal: "'My daughter's marriage is my concern. I will never agree to Vijay's engagement like this, no matter what happens. Even if it were the son of Maharana of Udaipur, I wouldn't agree,' replied Geeta as if she had thrown all restraint aside" (Mehta 215). If a mother like Geeta exists in the generations to come, one can be assured that child marriages will not take place. One has to appreciate the kind of boldness she has shown in a traditional and joint family set-up. She is firm and blunt in her disagreement. For Geeta, Vijay is her daughter and it is her "concern". She bluntly replies that she will not agree to the marriage proposal and to the "engagement". She is ready to face any kind of consequence. Even Geeta's father-in-law Bhagwat Singhji is in support of her and tells Geeta that the proposal is not acceptable on his deathbed: "'I have told Daulat Singhji that under no circumstances would I permit Vijay to be taken out of school. I am against early marriages. Girls must study; they cannot be kept ignorant.' As if the exertion were too much for him, he fell back on the couch and closed his eyes" (Mehta 248). If the initiative is taken by the mother, then the elders of the joint family members too may support her. Bhagwath Singhji endorses that "girls must study" and "they cannot be kept ignorant". After revealing his conversation with Daulat Singhji, Bhagwat Singhji passes away. In support of Geeta, Kama! Bhasin says: "Personally, as a mother she would have the right to decide about her daughter's future. For her, women's education is a first essential step towards self-reliance" (120). This step of Geeta as an "educated" mother is a welcome step and an eye opener to all the "educated" women and mothers.
Geeta's work can be called a real and voluntary "career" of teaching the haveli maids and their children. Initially she teaches a boy called Ravi. Later on, she teaches the other boys and girls of the servants' quarters of the haveli. Can we call Geeta's teaching social work? Is social work a career? Yes, we can consider it so. It is a career with a difference. It is one of the greatest careers I would say. Generally people want to earn money, name and fame. But a career-oriented person is not just after money. Getting a name also brings in money. However, Geeta has chosen a career out of her own free will. She is teaching the boys and girls of a haveli without any charge nor is she offered any amount. It is a kind of social work. She has not been employed. As an "educated" woman she wants to help uneducated boys and girls of the servants' quarters. The following encounter with a boy, Ravi, motivates Geeta to undertake teaching:

"What did you do in the village?" asked Geeta. She was touched by the boy's sad, vacant eyes.

"In the morning, I helped my mother to collect cow dung, milk the cows, and in the afternoon I took the cows out grazing. My mother was going to send me to school, but then she got fever and now she is dead," said the boy acceptingly as if there was no point challenging fate.

"If you want to learn, come home in the morning," said Geeta, not knowing what else to say to the boy who stared at her big diamond ring. The next day after breakfast the boy stood outside Geeta's room and so from that day she started teaching him. After two days other boys and girls from the servants' quarters came up to Geeta's room with Ravi. The children sat quietly while Geeta first told them stories and then wrote out the alphabet and asked them to copy it. No one made a noise and after Geeta had finished with the lessons, instead of going home, they sat on practising the letters of the alphabet. (Mehta Inside 160)

Geeta initially has no intention of teaching the children in the haveli. However,
she is moved by Ravi's sad story. As a result she thinks of teaching him only. But it does not stop there. Rather, she becomes so popular that there is a rush to her house to learn from her as she has been showing interest and kindness towards them. Gradually it becomes a kind of a school or tuition centre without any fees. Malashri Lai opines: "Mehta points out that upper class educated women must provide the leadership to those born in less privileged conditions. For this they may need to sacrifice some of the modern principles of liberation that they could have grabbed for themselves" (101). I agree with Malashri Lai about the upper class educated women providing the leadership to the girls who are born in less privileged conditions. It is not just the upper class women enjoying the fruits of liberation but the need to share. Therefore Geeta has initially started telling them "stories" and later on she teaches them the "alphabet". Even after finishing the "lessons" they don't go home; rather they go on "practicing the alphabet". The satisfaction that the career woman gets in this kind of situation is immense. Later on:

News of the classes spread like monsoon floods and the young maids from the havelis came and joined the children. At first they just listened to the stories; they did not dare to take pencil in their hands for they were afraid the children would laugh at them. But gradually they started to print the letters and to their surprise found the alphabets were after all not so difficult to learn. Soon the maids began to recognize words, the meaning of which they understood. (Mehta *Inside* 160)

So the maids also show interest in learning the alphabet. It has been a great success. The simile of "spread like monsoon floods" very beautifully conveys the success of the "classes" of both "children and young maids". As usual the elders are hesitant to learn along with "children" as they might laugh at them. Geeta is very happy that being an "educated" woman she is doing something for the children and the young maids. Malashri Lai's observation of Geeta's initiative in establishing a school in the haveli is worth quoting here:
The school in the haveli is the outcome of Geeta’s complex emotions about tradition, modernity, poverty and affluence. Her agenda to introduce subtle change is nothing short of revolutionary. Education will pull down the barricade between the haveli and the outer world. The poor children will find employment beyond the haveli because the old system can no longer offer patronage. For the servant-maids too, Geeta has her own proposal for vocational instruction in sewing and needle-work if they find book learning difficult. As for the high-born women, they are welcome to the classes should they wish to use their time more profitably than in gossip. (95)

Unlike Simrit, Sita, Manasi and Geeta, Pinky in Nayantara Sahgal’s *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) has a love-cum-arranged marriage. Pinky has fallen in love with Arvind and has taken the consent of her parents. From the following conversation, we know how the love-cum-arranged marriage has taken place:

"Veena, how much does Pinky know about sex?"

"There you go being modern. What do you want her to know? Her in-laws are very conservative. They don't want one of these smart newfangled girls."

"Still—" began Devi doubtfully. "You and I did all right," interrupted Veena, "It's rubbish, this modern business about knowing everything before you marry." Parents had chosen one's husband, but then, as sometimes happened, as had happened to Devi, one fell tenderly, distractedly in love with him. But the Pinky-Arvind combine didn't strike her that way. Veena said with a ring of triumph in her voice, "Pinky couldn't have done better, Devi. How do you like the boy?"

"Did she choose him herself?"

"Yes, of course. As soon as we heard about him we arranged a meeting. And then we asked Pinky how she liked him. We put it to her frankly like
that. And she gave her consent".
"I hope it’s going to be all right." (41)

The above conversation also reveals that Devi’s marriage with Ishwar was a love marriage. But their married life does not last long as Ishwar dies very early in his life, leaving his son Rishad behind with Devi. Coming back to Pinky and her parents, this is one of the best marriages among all the marriages we have seen so far. I appreciate both Pinky and her parents—the way they have "arranged the meeting" with Pinky and Arvind and have asked their opinion before arranging the marriage. The parents are very liberal and broad-minded and are friendly with their daughter. The parents respect the choice of their daughter. Veena, the mother, is very confident and proud of her daughter’s choice when Devi asks suspiciously about the love affair between Pinky and Arvind.

Devi in the same novel has a love marriage with her husband Ishwar and is a widow after her husband’s death. She has a career in politics and is the Education Minister. Unlike Manasi who uses her body to become the Home Minister, Devi becomes an Education Minister on her own merit. She lives alone after resigning from her ministership and the deaths of her husband Ishwar and her son Rishad. She has a career of a cabinet minister but resigns as there is a rape case in the University Registrar’s office and there is a strike and rustication of three students from the university. As an aftermath of this incident, she has had to resign her post on moral grounds. Devi is thus very different from Manasi.

Ila Das in Anita Desai’s Fire on the Mountain (1977) remains single and has a series of jobs before she becomes a Welfare Officer. She starts her career as a lecturer in Home Science. She says to Nanda Kaul:

You know, it wasn’t easy at that time. To start teaching at the age of forty, Nanda dear, really wasn’t so easy. I couldn’t seem to control the girls. The teachers seemed ~ ooh, you know, of a different class, Nanda,
do you understand me? And my eyes were giving way. (120)

Da Das has started her "teaching" career very late. If you start a career "at the age of forty" it will be difficult to understand the psychology of the students. That is why Ila Das faces problems with students. She "could not control" the girl students. Even her colleagues are from a "different class". Moreover her eyesight troubles her. She is given this job due to the influence and recommendation of Mr. Kaul, the husband of Nanda Kaul, her schoolmate:

As for Ila, there was nothing for it but for Nanda Kaul to suggest to her **husband**, the Vice-Chancellor, that he create a job for her in the Home Science College. He had been gracious and kindly about it, and it was to **this** comparatively blessed period of her life, secure for a while as a lecturer, sure of her meals and a bed in the hostel, that Ila Das's jolly talk of badminton doubles and lawn parties belonged. (Desai *Fire* 124)

So the post of lecturer has been "created" in the Home Science College for her sake. She has "secured" a job "as a lecturer", is assured "meals", "bed", a game of "badminton" and "lawn parties". However, she is unable to continue the job. As she is unmarried, she has done a course in social work hoping to get a job:

For a while her sister had kept her, literally dividing each piece of bread in two between them—fortunately the mother died before she starved—and then Nanda Kaul had heard of the course in social service which, if Ila was willing to take it, would definitely lead to a Government job and with it would go the usual emoluments of pension, provident fund and medical aid that now seemed like pieces of gold to her. She had taken the course, triumphantly collected the rubber-stamped document qualifying her to be a social worker, and arrived in the Himalayan foothills to do her duty amongst the peasants, wood-cutters, road labour and goatherds. (Desai *Fire* 125)
Ila Das has proved that one can become or try to become whatever one wants to do at any age. At the age of forty doing a course in social work and getting a job as a Welfare Officer are eye openers to girls and women who aspire to become something. Ruth K. Rosenwasser enlightens us further on the achievement of Ila Das:

Ila Das is an example of woman's courage and strength when confronted by male dominance in terms of inheritance and education which perpetuate dependency. From her own experience, Ila Das realizes the importance of an education that will prepare women for the world outside of the home and the need for women to look after their own well-being. By challenging male authority, Ila Das espouses the feminist cause through her conscious need to empower women. Rather than becoming angry and destructive, she, as a social worker (sic), tries to restructure the lives of the poor and oppressed village women. Ila Das feels that it is necessary to "shoulder our responsibilities and do what we can". As a heroine and a feminist, Ila Das combines energy, determination, and courage to protest male dominance which relegates women to positions of subservience and submission. (102)

Apart from this, Ila Das has been writing for magazines and journals about Home Science:

Ila Das began to bounce again, as she piped optimistically, "I've been writing around to magazines and journals. I thought if one of them were interested in a column on home science, I could write one every month—or every week—and perhaps earn twenty rupees above my salary. Thirty rupees—" her eyes boggled behind the bifocal lenses—"thirty rupees would cover the cost of feeding me. It would be a fortune!" she exploded in a
spray of happy spit, and swung her little legs back and forth. (Desai *Fire* 127)

Though she is working as a Welfare Officer, she has not forgotten her earlier career of teaching Home Science in the university. So she has found time to write in "magazines and journals" about "home science" in the "columns". She does this not just to be in touch with her subject but also to earn "twenty rupees" or "thirty rupees" "above [her] salary".

As a Welfare Officer, Ila Das also compares herself with the poor people, the kind of struggle she has undergone before she became a Welfare Officer. She says:

"Oh, I *do* feel ashamed of myself," shrieked Ila Das. "Ooh, I do, when I think how much better off I am than the poor, poor people around me. Why, you wouldn't believe the things I see, Nanda. It isn't just that I have this little bit of security, this tiny bit of status--" she gave a shout of laughter at herself--"you know, as a welfare officer employed by the Government, while they simply starve if their cow dries up or the weevils destroy their potato crop--but the horrible, horrible degradation in which they live--ooh, Nanda," her voice plunged down, down into the deepest gloom, "why then, I *do* see the worth of our kind of upbringing after all. At least one is saved *that* degradation. (Desai *Fire* 127-128)

It is very rare that one finds welfare officers being compassionate towards the poor. She even "feels ashamed" of being their officer. She shares her experience with Nanda but Nanda cannot understand what she sees in the "poor" families. She gives examples of "cow drying up" or "the potato crop getting destroyed" or the "starvation" they face. They have such degrading lives.

Like Sita, Manasi, and Geeta who have an arranged marriage and unlike Simrit
and Devi who go in for a love marriage, Shree in Raji Narasimhan's *Forever Free* (1979) has an arranged marriage. She has a B. A. degree. She shows the certificate to her father and mother. Perhaps to please Shree, her mother Dhanalakshmi shows "eighteen sovereigns of gold" (6) to her daughter. This is perhaps to indicate that now that she has got her B. A. degree, she can get prepared for her marriage. After passing B. A., Shree wants to take up dancing. Shree's mother is traditional:

She showed me the jewellery again that night.
"I want none of all this, mother."
"What do you want, then?"
"I just want to go dancing-"

"Don't let anyone hear you say such things," she snapped shut a casket.
"Mother."
"What?"
"You wanted to go away."
"I did."

"Mother, make it so for me that I don't have to go away."
"You have your B. A. degree, by the grace of God."
"Blast my B. A. degree! I want my freedom!" (9)

Shree does not seem to be impressed by the "jewellery" Dhanalakshmi has shown her. She openly declares that she does not want "all" that gold. Dhanalakshmi asks what does a woman who is to be married very soon want if not attractive "gold". Shree indicates that she "wants" to learn "dancing". Look at the reaction of a traditional mother. Dhanalakshmi asks her daughter "let" not any one "hear" "such things". A member of a brahmin family going to learn dance is a kind of sin, according to Dhanalakshmi. Shree is not satisfied with Dhanalakshmi's reponse to her desire and reminds her mother that it was she who wanted to leave her husband. For Shree's mother the B. A. degree is something special. Look at Shree's reaction to it. She asks her mother to "blast" her "B. A. Degree". What
Shree wants is not just the degree but also her "freedom" to do what she wants to. For Dhanalakshmi education is the "best weapon" that she has gifted to her daughter. She says:

"It's the best weapon I'm giving you! What I never had. Know its value? Sillyhead?"
"We look a lot alike, mother, did you know that? For all my college-going, you and I look alike, do you know?"
"We are not alike! Don't say that!"
"Make me some other compensation, mother!"
"If you mean dancing, save your breath."
"You wanted to leave your husband!"
"And I'm making sure that you live with honour with yours!"

(Narasimhan *Forever 10*)

One has to appreciate Dhanalakshmi providing her daughter the "weapon" of education. She also reminds her daughter of the value of "education". It is true that only people who have missed education know the real value of education but people who have enjoyed the fruits of education do not realize its true value.

Shree has no permission to take up "dancing". Meanwhile, she has a marriage proposal from Swami. Shree's parents talk about the boy's visit to see Shree. Shree demands that she should be taken into consideration with regard to her marriage:

In the evening my mother spoke straight without fuss to my father.
"The boy's coming to see her in the vacation?"
I put down the food I was carrying to my mouth.
"Don't you 'hear' me! Speak to me! Speak to me! Am I dead?"
She kept her gaze fixed on him.
"This vacation?"
"Look at me and speak! I exist!"

"Shree, you can exist without being spoken to, Shree," my father smiled.

"But I want to exist by being spoken to! Speak to me!"

(Narasimhan *Forever* 16)

**Shree's parents talk** about the boy's visit "to see" Shree and settle the marriage proposal. As they talk Shree overhears and speaks out. She wants to be noticed. Meanwhile her mother wants to know whether Swami is going to visit in the coming "vacation". Shree constantly makes a point that she "exists". She is not a passive or dead woman. I am sure Shree is telling her parents that she is educated and she will have certain preferences and choices in marriage. She is indeed making her point that she too should be spoken to about her marriage. She also vehemently expresses her dislike of marrying Swami. The reason she gives for refusing to marry Swami is presented as follows:

> When they left, the play-acting went. The three of us looked at each other. My mother tackled me without ado.
> "You're not saying no."
> "Why?"
> "Are you?"
> "I might. I have every right to!"
> "Burn your right! Burn yourself! And then burn us both, your father and mother."[...]
> "Father!"
> "Yes?"
> "I can't marry him, father."
> "Can't you, Shree? Is it that final?"
> "Father, he didn't look at me right even once."
> "I'll search another boy for you, Shree" (Narasimhan *Forever* 19).

**Swami has come to** see Shree along with his family members and returns. Shree
and her parents have to decide. Therefore the three of them "look at each other". Dhanalakshmi insists that Shree "not" say "no" to the proposal. Shree questions her mother’s attitude of taking her for granted. Shree feels she "has every right" to say "no" if he is not up to her expectations. Look at Dhanalakshmi's reaction to her daughter's response to her question. She asks her daughter to "burn" herself first, "and then burn both", her "father and mother". Most of the parents put forth this exploitative argument before the woman who is then compelled to marry despite her dislike. After hearing her mother's reaction to her saying no she now addresses her father and tells him that she "can't marry him". In order to confirm her opinion her father asks once again whether that is her "final" decision. At this juncture, Shree gives her reasons as to why she does not want to marry him. She says that the man did not even look at her once. Perhaps this has hurt her. She feels that Swami who has come to see the girl he is to marry has no individuality even to look at her once. He seems to be obliging his parents, rather than making his own decision. The father seems understanding enough to agree to look for someone else. However, Shree seems to understand her retired father's tension at having his daughter not married even after his retirement. Though she is not keen on marrying a man like Swami, she agrees to marry him, taking her father's tensions into consideration. Look at her innermost thoughts:

No, you can't father, you can't. You don't ask the right way. You are tired. You never make it sound important enough. You make it sound so sad, father, gloomy, like the way you handed me over to Swami's father just now, both palms stretched out to him in such complete surrender. (Narasimhan *Forever* 20)

Having read her father's feelings, she gives her consent to her mother. So she is marrying Swami not out of complete willingness but to make her parents happy>

At the marriage ceremony Swami realises that Shree is not marrying him of her own accord. When either the bride or the bridegroom is not interested in marriage,
she or he is reluctant about everything. She or he does not enjoy all the rituals of the marriage ceremony. So Swami asks Shree: "You are not marrying me of your own will" (Narasimhan *Forever* 27). She immediately asks him: "Are you?" (Narasimhan *Forever* 27). These are incidents that will lead to an unhappy married life. Furthermore Swami is completely under the control of his mother. He also has a low opinion of women. He feels that they are nothing but sexual objects and ought to just listen to what the husband says. He seems to be a male chauvinist. He cannot bear certain things in Shree and uses his mother to ill-treat her. The first shock for Swami is Shree calling him by his name, while they are talking about the clothes women wear:

He placed his palm on my body. "All this clothing. What things do ladies wear?"
"Many things."
"I am very innocent about these matters."
"Are you? O it does not matter, Swami. See, I'm calling you by name. I know you don't like it. One day will you show me Arundhati? I never saw Arundhati. Did you?" (Narasimhan *Forever* 30)

Shree knows that he does not like his wife calling him by his name. Many of the husbands don't like their wives calling them by their names including educated men. Look at another of Shree's comments that irritates him—not having seen the star, "Arundhati" on her wedding day. She asks him whether he can show her the star. She asks him whether he has seen it.

Having seen Shree's attitude towards him Swami starts harassing her:

"You have a mole here on this side of your neck. It's big. What does it mean? You must tell me what it means."
"It does not mean cancer."
"How can you tell now? Do you have any more? Let me examine you
properly. Let me see the lines on your hand. The fate line and life-line must never meet in a woman's hand. They do, in your hand. Clearly." (Narasimhan Forever 30)

Swami seems to be trying to make Shree feel guilty about her "mole" and "long toes". He asks her for an explanation. In other words he is trying to trace all negative things in her. He goes on to say:

"Look at your feet. The second toe is longer than the big."
"What does that mean Swamy?"
"It means adultery, they say." (Narasimhan Forever 30)

K. Meera Bai in her article, "Feminism as an Extension of Existentialism: Woman in Indian English Fiction" says: "She feels crushed when Swami reads adultery in her second toe which is bigger than the first. She is disillusioned about her relationship with Swami the very first day and is left with a feeling that her self is insulted and her body handled without care" (29). One is puzzled as to why Swami is pointing out all these negative things in her. This goes further:

His hand swept down my body. "You have not enough fat? Why is that?"[...]
"And your toes, the second longer than the first. I am afraid of that. I am very much afraid". (Narasimhan Forever 31)

In the above lines he is commenting on her lean "body". He is perhaps hinting that she has some disease. Also when he points to the "adultery" sign in her feet, he is perhaps deliberately criticizing and making her feel low about the shortcomings in her body. All this criticism is only because she has called him by his name. He has already started taking revenge on her.

One more reason why Shree takes divorce from Swami is that he is a pet of his mother as has already been mentioned. He does not have any individuality. He
takes his mother's side rather than his wife's. Most of the wives would like their husbands to be on their side. Here is an example of Swami being on his mother's side:

"And so the daughter-in-law has shown her paces!" Swami squatted on the kitchen doorstep. "She doesn't yet look the part, does she, mother? All that fluffy hair. Lovelocks they are called, do you know mother? Pull her lovelocks back and make her a tight, respectable plait, mother."
"By and by; son, by and by. It's just launched, she is."
"I want that ego of hers scorched and buried."

(Narasimhan Forever 53-54)

Swami wants his wife to adjust and adapt herself to his family. He does not like her hairstyle. He does not express his feelings to his wife. Rather he asks his mother to bring necessary changes in her. What more does a mother-in-law want than this type of a son giving her this kind of a freedom to harass the daughter-in-law? Swami wants his wife's "ego" to be "scorched" and "buried". •

In order to bury her daughter-in-law's "ego", Shree's mother-in-law deliberately makes her daughter-in-law serve food to all the family members:

"Serve all those men you see sitting there. You know who they are? Yes, you know. The menfolk of the family. Each your superior in station! Don't like me saying this? But it's only a fact of life."
She firmed the platter in my hand.
"Serve them. Bend low. Serve them with humility."

(Narasimhan Forever 50)

The way Shree's mother-in-law asks her to "serve" the men in the family is to intimidate her. She stresses on the "men" sitting there. She proudly mentions them as the "menfolk of the family". Moreover, they are "superior in station". In what
way they are superior one does not know. Perhaps she means in terms of gender and age. However, what they are doing is not known. At the same time the mother-in-law reminds her that it is a "fact of life" and that she has to respect the menfolk. Furthermore, she asks Shree to "bend" low to serve food, as a mark of respect and "humility". How can an "educated" wife bear all this humiliation, making her feel that she has been brought to their home out of pity?

Shree's mother-in-law continues to harass Shree and kill her ego. One day she takes Shree to a temple and asks her whether she has prayed to god to give her a son:

"Did you pray to Devi to give you a son?" Swami's mother asked me when we came out.
"Yes," I said with good conscience. For I had been prayerful even if not praying.
"How glad I am. You must deliver more. One every year, year after year. Are you afraid? Are you afraid you'll be ripped to death?"
"That's not my fear," I tipped forward my braid and felt its thick, artful weave with false hair.
"What is your fear?"
"Nothing physical." My hands halted on the knob of the false hair they had set into my real hair.
"Nothing physical? Then what's the delay? Do you want to be like your mother? Producing one child and sealing up your tubes afterwards?"[...]
"Let me think it over," I said calmly, but laughing.
"No thinking over," she caught my hand.
[...] "And you have him on leash for the rest of your life! Understand? Give him full run of your body, then. Easy thing. Just let him tire himself out. And see him droop and sway to you afterwards."

(Narasimhan Forever 56)
Shree informs her mother-in-law that she has done so. But her mother-in-law wonders if Shree is "afraid" of delivering the children until she is ripped to death. She warns her that she should not "think" on the lines of her "mother producing one child" and planning on a small family. Swami’s mother is dictating terms to Shree about producing more and more male children. She asks Shree to "give him [Swami] full run of [her] body" until he "tires himself. She says this as though Shree has no part to play in this.

Shree finds the situation she is in with Swami unbearable. She decides to divorce him. There is a cousin of Swami called Vasu who has interest in literature and philosophy and loves to discuss books with Shree. Swami suspects she has had an extra-marital relationship with Vasu and wants to perform shudhdhi on her in order to continue having her as his wife, Swami says:

"You are in need of cleansing."!

"Witchcraft? Sorcery?"

"Priescraft. Prayer. The priest comes at dawn tomorrow. He will perform the Shudhdhi ceremony on you. He will call upon the earth to draw you down into her jaws, lick away the impurities and spit you out wiped clean."

"A clean wife to you. Yes? Swami?"

"A clean wife to me, yes."

"But not a clean woman. I want to be a clean woman, Swami. Will the priest clean me as a woman and not as your wife? You can't answer that, can you? You can't believe that I feel soiled a thousand times over, a million times over what you describe? It's my personal curse, my personal defilement, all my own. And I want a personal purification, my very own. Can you understand that?" (Narasimhan Forever 69-70)

Shree very diplomatically asks her husband to recommend to the priest to make her "a clean woman" not a "clean wife". She does want to be a cleansed woman,
breaking clear of the ties of marriage. She also feels upset for being "soiled a thousand times over and a million times over." She wants to have a personal "purification" on her own.

Moreover, Swami asks his wife to abort the foetus as he feels that she has conceived because of her affair with Vasu. He says:

"Can you choke this child of yours, Shree? Can you pretend he was never born? Can you swallow your ego, wretched woman? Be my wife, Shree! Forget all else. Walk round the fire with me again. Be woman by being my wife".

"I am that yet, Swami. Woman by being your wife. You unwive me by wanting me re-wived. But I feel unwomaned. Shouldn't I be woman again to be wife, Swami?"

"There's no help for you. The devil take you." He went back down the steps.

I knew that a divorce had been pronounced. The room was absolutely quiet. So was the staircase. (Narasimhan *Forever* 70)

His obsession with chastity and his desire for a wife can be seen in his asking her to abort the foetus, in having a purificatory ritual and in performing the marriage rites once again after the purificatory process. She would rather be a "woman", an individual.

Raji Narasimhan seems to suggest that as long as the traditional kind of mother-in-law like Shree's and a husband like Swami exist, women who marry traditionally will suffer. They try to have control over a person like Shree. This may lead to divorce.. In every possible manner, Swami and his mother try to have a hold on her. Shree would not have married him but does so only to oblige her father.
After leaving her husband she comes back home. Her father does not have anything against her but her mother cannot tolerate her leaving her husband and coming to her parents. She is not going to allow her daughter to stay with them. Her mother says:

"What am I to do with you, luckless, ill-starred one? Cut loose?"
"You wanted to be a cut-loose too, mother."
She released me.
"Go. Rent a flat. That's what you have to do. Pay rent every month and buy shelter for yourself."
"How? You'll pay my rent, mother?"
"I pay you nothing. I owe you nothing. You will get yourself a job."
"I am trained for nothing, mother."
"You are smart. You speak English."
"And I am a B. A. Don't forget that."
"You will find yourself a job. You have that luck granted to you."

(Narasimhan *Forever* 77).

The mother, caught up in the traditional patriarchal set-up, is unable to accept her daughter's decision. Shree is, in a sense, forced to lead her own life in a "rented" flat. Her education comes in handy in finding a job.

She takes up "journalism" and looks after herself. I feel that her education upto B. A. gives her this confidence. She need not depend on her mother. In fact she wanted to depend on her mother. But her mother has forced her to become independent. There is no career as such for Shree. She works for a newspaper named "The National Scenery". Shree should be appreciated considering the circumstances under which she is forced to take up a job and to withstand the situation.

As a divorced woman she becomes very close to Rao. They enjoy life together.
They booze and attend parties. They also have an affair. Then she is introduced to Carruthers, an Englishman. The association with Carruthers also results in an affair. He sees her as a goddess. In both these cases, the men have viewed her only as an object to satisfy their desires. Her father dies and she goes back to her mother and lives with her. After uniting with her mother she feels that she is forever free from men. She has a company of a woman, none other than her own mother. She is a divorcee and her mother is a widow. Both of them being single women thus feel forever free from men.

In the 1970s we have seen how women react to various kinds of marriages and to the careers they opt. Sita raises an important question about a woman’s choice to become a mother. Simrit opts out of an unfulfilled marriage to write; Lalitha opts to act in a documentary film but fails in the attempt; Geeta takes the right path in educating the underprivileged not caring for financial gains; Maaasi and Devi enter politics for the first time in women’s fiction and go up to the level of ministers. While one uses her body to do it, the other fights her way up the ladder. Ila Das changes different jobs to settle down as a Welfare Officer stressing that age is no bar. Shree after leaving her husband and mother becomes a journalist, and finally re-unites with her mother and remains forever free. Women like Simrit and Shree take divorce to emphasize their individuality. Between the two, one finds another man she wants to marry while the other remains a divorcee. Thus, in this decade we find at least some women protesting openly against stereotyped roles and trying to assert their individuality.
Works Cited


1 In an interview by Atma Ram entitled "Interview with Nayantara Sahgal" published in a book edited by him, *Interviews with Indian English Writers* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1983), Nayantara Sahgal says: "Of the five novels I have written, only *The Day in Shadow* was autobiographical, i.e., based on my own life's experience. Otherwise bits of my heroines and of other characters have been drawn from my own personal experience, but *The Day in Shadow* took its main theme, that of a disastrous financial settlement made at divorce, from my own situation" (46). I quote this here to indicate that even the writer herself found the issue of "divorce" problematic.