Chapter 2

"Trembling Silence": The 1950s

In this chapter I will be dealing with "educated women" characters such as Rukmani from Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), Mira and Premala from her *Some Inner Fury* (1955) and Kusum and Devaki from Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to Be Happy* (1958,) to examine the issue of "marriage" and Veena for that of "career".

Let us first of all see how the question of marriage is portrayed in these novels. Jasbir Jain makes a very interesting and relevant point about marriage and the way the literary and media projections help us evaluate it:

Marriage, home, the claims of the family are traditional goals set for the female child. It is only by examining and exploring the restrictive aspects of this value system that any change can be affected. Formal education does not equip women for this kind of self or social analysis—but literary and media projections are likely to be of greater relevance. (69)

I do not however agree with Jain when she says, "formal education does not equip women for [...] self and social analysis [...]" If the women are serious about formal education, they can utilize its tools for self and social analysis. Also women with a formal education may be in a better position to produce literary texts.

Marriage has been considered sacred in a human being's life. "From ancient times," as V. V. Prakasha Rao and V. Nandini Rao say, "marriage is considered as a ritual and a sacramental union. Marriage is an indispensable event of Hindu life and the person who is unmarried is considered unholy" (14). In Hindu epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* too we have the concepts of both arranged and love marriages. In India, it is often believed that arranged marriages
are the most effective. However, due to the literacy rate and education, the scenario has changed with regard to marriage. Qualities like independence, democracy, rights, self-reliance, self-respect, self-assertion, economic freedom, employment aptitude etc., have been the most significant reasons for the changing scenario. V. V. Prakasha Rao quotes Gore's study:

Education was considered a major differentiating factor in the attitudes of respondents toward arranged marriages [...]. He found that 73 percent of the respondents without a formal education as against 9 percent with graduate education hold to the traditional arrangement of marriages by elders. That means the more educated a respondent is, the more likely he is to give more freedom to the boy or girl concerned. In summary, he concludes that high education and urban residence are directly related to the attitudes of the respondents in regard to the freedom of choice of the parties to the marriage concerned. (20)

The alternative to arranged marriage is love marriage. The reason is that education helps them think and question their parents' attitude and adamant behaviour. However, in India, as Aileen D. Ross puts it, "love was not necessary prelude for testing the relationship" (251). Prakasha Rao says:

Love was regarded as an uncontrollable and explosive emotion which makes a young person blind to reality, reason and logic. The family's stability may even be jeopardized since the emotions might lead one to marry an unsuitable person not only to his temperament but to the entire joint family. [...] [T]he Hindu system regarded mate selection by self choice as undesirable and feared that freedom of choice might upset the process of adjustment of the bride in her new family. (16)

In spite of the above statement about Hindus regarding love as an "uncontrollable and explosive emotion" and emphasizing that love is "blind to reality, reason and
logic", the "educated" women feel that they have their own desires, aspirations and dreams about married life. If women do not like the proposal that the parents bring, they cannot be forced to accept the proposal. At the same time, the parents' point of view cannot be ignored. Girls/women may not be mature enough to take a decision about marriage, as they do not have enough experience. It could be just infatuation or lust, but sometimes they may mistake it for love and think they are capable of selecting their own life partners. Kalidasa, the Indian poet, remarked that "[y]oung people seek pleasures". Sometimes it may work out very well and sometimes it may not. Let us now see how the "educated" women in the novels in the 50s choose between arranged marriages and love marriages.

Rukmani in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) is not formally educated. She is from a rural background. In spite of being from a rural background and from a poor family, she had been "educated" by her father. Had she been in an urban middle class family, she would have done a marvellous job both at the family and at the social levels. Yet her rural, economic,-social barriers could not stop her from achieving a little education with her father's help. She is thus able to read and write. She has three elder sisters and one elder brother, all of whom are married. She is the fourth and the last daughter of her parents. Her parents have chosen a tenant farmer Nathan as her husband. Rukmani has this to say about the match:

> Our relatives, I know, murmured that the match was below me; my mother herself was not happy, but I was without beauty and without dowry and it was the best she could do. "A poor match," they said, and not always quietly. How little they knew, any of them! (2)

In an arranged marriage the problem is often with the "relatives". They come to the wedding and comment on the couple. They call it "a poor match". Of course in this case Rukmani herself is not happy with the match. Her parents cannot afford better, having already got three daughters married. She is very realistic and
practical in her approach towards life. Moreover, Rukmani realizes that she is "without beauty and without dowry". Rukmani is able to recognize her own physical handicap and her family's economic conditions. Her parents have no more money left to get her a better husband. The positive aspect of this arranged marriage is that the bride is content with her husband and is sympathetic, mature and broadminded enough to understand her parents' problems. Moreover, there is no question of career for Rukmani. However, she does some menial job later on in the face of utter poverty.

Like Rukmani, Premala's marriage to Kitsamy in Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury* (1955) is an arranged one. This marriage is seen as a marriage without love. The couple is not happy in the marital life. Although Premala is from an urban background and upper class family, there is no happiness in her marriage. This is in contrast to Rukmani who hails from a rural, lower class background but has no problem with her married life, except for the economic conditions. Moreover, Rukmani does not have much education as compared to Premala. This is what happens in an arranged marriage like Premala's if the couple does not like each other. Unlike this couple Mira and Richard in the same novel love each other but do not get married. There is Govind who spoils the mind of Kitsamy. Premala showing affection and love towards Govind hurts Kitsamy. Furthermore, Kitsamy has an inclination towards western culture and expects his wife to become westernised too. On the contrary, Premala believes in the "true" Indian culture. This is the main reason why there is no understanding between the couple. Another reason for the misunderstanding is that of Premala showing and "assert[ing] [her] individuality][...] by adopting a child against Kits[amy]'s wishes[...]]" (Srivastava 22). Premala is trying to fulfill her desire to have a child even if it were through adoption. Moreover, she does not feel that she needs to take permission from Kistamy. She has no children and therefore adopts a child.

Mira who is in love wants her parents' approval. She has been asked to wait for marriage for some days: "Her [Mira's] rich Hindu background and exposure to
western life style equip her with the knowledge to select the best from both Indian and British culture" (Jacob 109). Though she does not marry Richard, they behave as husband and wife. Mira belongs to a highly rich family. She has no barriers of traditions that prevent her from living with Richard without formal marriage. Though, the marriage does not take place in the course of the novel, we can definitely see that they desire to marry each other. There is a positive attitude towards marriage. Initially when they want to marry each other, Mira’s mother asks them to wait till she attains the age of marriage. Later on there is no reference to marriage. However, Mira goes away on a holiday to spend some time with Richard. Jacob says: "Despite their deep and lasting love for each other she is mature enough to understand the hindrances to their union"(109). A girl who is not married going away on a holiday with her lover especially in the 1940s makes us ask an important question. Are the socio-economic and urban background of the female character and her higher "education" reasons for such a step being taken? Can such a thing happen in a case like that of a Rukmini? No, never can such a thing happen to a person from a rural and lower class background. Mira may have felt that as they were getting married there was no problem in having an affair or pre-marital sex. Richard creates a situation so that he can have intercourse with Mira:

"I fevered for you so long" he said, "It became a permanent ache. Can you understand that?"
"Yes," I said.
"I'm still in a fever for you," he said, kissing me; and his lips on mine were without gentleness, and his body against me was no longer passive. Obeying some obscure instinct, I struggled away, moving away from him, his urgency, striving to sit up.
"Not here," I said, Not—"
"Yes, here. Now."
"No," I said breathless, "It's —" 
"We're alone," he said, holding me still. "Quite alone," and the skies were
empty, the sands were bare, I listened and there was only the sound of the sea.

"You see," he said softly, "There is nothing and no one. No one but us."

Slowly my senses awoke and responded, the buds of feeling swelled and opened one by one. In the trembling silence I heard the blood begin its clamour, felt its frantic irregular beat; then the world fell away, forgotten in this wild abandoned rhythm, lost in the sweep and surge of love.

(Markandaya Some Inner 168-169)

It is Richard who expresses a desire to have an intercourse with Mira before marriage. He says that he has been longing for intimate moments with Mira. He also tells Mira that it is his "permanent ache" and asks her to "understand". Mira agrees to his wishes. He again reiterates his feelings even after she has agreed to fulfill his "permanent ache". He starts "kissing" Mira and expressing his longing and continuing "fever". The moment Richard moves against Mira's body there is "some obscure instinct obeying" his desire, at the same time trying "to move away" from him reluctantly. The reason for moving away is not to resist or prevent him from advancing but due to the impropriety of the place. Had the place been different, she would not have minded. However, Richard is particular about the place as it is a lonely and conducive place. He gives reasons such as they are "alone", "skies were empty", "sands were bare", "nothing", "no one". Mira too is convinced. As a result her "senses awoke" and "responded" the "buds of feeling swelled and opened one by one". There is no reference here to show that Mira does not want to marry or that her parents are unwilling or have protested against the marriage.

Unlike Rukmani and Premala, Devaki in Nayantara Sahgal's A Time to Be Happy (1958) has a love-cum-arranged marriage with Girish. I think this is the best match if the couple is in love and gets the consent of the parents from both sides. Girish is a businessman and employed in the Calcutta office of James McDermott Ltd. Girish gets angry when any one calls his marriage an arranged marriage:
Devaki was both decorative and efficient, an altogether suitable wife for a young businessman employed in the Calcutta office of James McDermott Ltd. It was Rohan Masi who, with unerring instinct for matchmaking, had drawn Lakshmi’s attention to the girl one summer in Mussorie. Devaki’s parents had hoped for a son-in-law in the I.C.S., Rohan had informed Lakshmi privately, but Girish’s charm and his family’s considerable income, backed by Rohan’s own determined manoeuvres, had won them over. Girish would have protested had anyone suggested it was an arranged match. He had fallen in love with Devaki, he said; it was a marriage of choice. It was a marriage of choice, all right-Rohan’s choice—and she was delighted with the outcome. (72)

The marriage of Devaki and Girish ends on the happy note—all is well that ends well. Devaki finds Girish a "suitable" match for Girish is in love with her. He has no pride about his job. He is happy to marry Devaki. Moreover, he does not want his marriage to be considered an "arranged marriage". He will even "protest" if any one calls their marriage "an arranged marriage". Devaki’s parents are also happy with Girish’s "charm and his family's considerable income". Rohan, the unnamed narrator’s aunt and a family friend of Girish, has played a crucial role in the "delighted outcome" of his "manoeuvres".

Kusum in the same novel has a love-cum-arranged marriage with Sanad. Sanad is in love with Kusum and he proposes to her. The marriage is fixed without any difficulty and "a year later, in February 1947, Sanad and Kusum were married" (A Time 203).

After discussing the issue of marriage, it is logical to discuss the issue of career, as career and marriage are inter-related. Before I proceed further, I would like to define what "career" means to me. One has to be very clear about the difference between a "career" and a "job". In my view one takes on a career with "passion"
and "enthusiasm" and is completely involved in the work. This motivation has to come from "within", and cannot be forced from outside. One should not choose a career based on someone's advice. On the other hand, one does a job either out of one's own choice or out of compulsion. It could be to earn one's own livelihood. There is no passion or enthusiasm. It is only a mandatory, routine work.

Since the issue we are discussing is related to "educated" women, we have to look at it from the women's point of view. Is every career the same for men and women? Are there any careers that are male or female specific? Is there any change in anyone's perception regarding career? Does the career prospect reduce once women get married? How do "educated" women deal with this kind of a situation? What happens when a woman is asked to give up her career after marriage? Does she still hold on to her career and give up her marriage or wait for a person who can allow her to continue with her career? The issue of marriage has a dominant role to play in terms of career. The conflict of marriage and career may lead to divorce. This is one of the main arguments of the thesis and will be discussed at length in the next few chapters. There may be some women characters who are not married but have careers in their respective fields.

I feel that no "educated" woman should give up her career for the sake of marriage. A marriage can wait but a career will not wait for a woman. Marriage can be sidelined but not career. The tragic part is that marriage can completely undermine career. There are many problems for career women. Some of the problems for these "educated" career women are as follows:

Marriage can be one of the biggest problems for a career woman who wants to lead a happy married life. The man should be broadminded and should be able to understand the importance of career in the life of his wife. If he understands the importance of his wife's career, then that particular woman is lucky and fortunate. Otherwise her life will be hell.
Second, if both husband and wife are in different fields and different places, they will have unresolved problems. This will affect their children adversely, if they have any.

Third is the problem of getting or finding a suitable and well-educated husband. India is full of customs and traditions. In addition to these there are castes, religions and inter-state problems.

In the 1950s, though marriage is a significant theme in the novels, there are no "educated" women who have a career. Veena in Nayantara Sahgal's A Time to Be Happy has a job as an announcer in All India Radio, Delhi. Perhaps Veena doing a job itself is something unusual. There are not many cases of career women found in the novels of this period. Educated women themselves are not many. As a result the issues of career and divorce do not arise. There are in fact no cases of divorce in these novels. Therefore, let us move on to the 1960s.
Works Cited


Notes