Chapter 3
"Standing Up for the Rights": The 1960s

In this chapter I will look at the "educated" women characters from the 1960s' novels. Maya and Leila from Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), and Monisha from *Voices in the City* (1965), Nita, Uma, Rashmi from Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* (1965), and Saroj, Leela, Gauri and Tamara from *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) will be considered keeping in mind the issue of "marriage". Leila from Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), arid Amla from *Voices in the City* (1965), Nita from Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* (1965) and Tamara from *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) will be discussed in terms of the issue of "career". Nila from Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) and Rashmi from Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* (1965) will be examined to see how the issue of "divorce" is dealt with.

Maya in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) obeys her father as far as her marriage is concerned. Gautama is her father's friend. Maya says: "[M]y father's proposal [was] that I marry this tall, stooped and knowledgeable friend of his, one might have said that our marriage was grounded upon the friendship of the two men, and the mutual respect in which they held each other, rather than upon anything else" (40). Raisahib has asked his daughter to marry Gautama, his friend who is knowledgeable. What have friendship and knowledge got to do with Maya's marriage? In fact, Maya is a victim of their friendship as her marriage is an arranged one. Raisahib and Gautama may have mutual respect but that does not mean Maya must marry Gautama. Moreover, her father does not take her opinion but suggests that she marry him. One of the problems of arranged marriages is that parents decide without taking their daughters into confidence. The boy may be good to the father. He may behave according to the wishes of the father. But the girl may not like that kind of a behaviour. Parents imposing their likes on their daughters is not justified. Marriage is a life-long journey. The girl
must have a role to play while consenting to the match. I agree with M. Rajeshwar's opinion that Maya's father Raisahib has made a mistake in getting his daughter married to Gautama:

On Maya's attaining marriageable age he creates what appear to be the ideal circumstances for Maya to develop tender feelings towards Gautama, his protegé. Gautama is perhaps only the other soul that Maya is exposed to for any significant length of time and allowed to be on intimate terms with. And surely she finds in him some of the best qualities — intelligence, understanding — that her father has in plenitude apart from the similarity in age. It therefore comes as no surprise that Maya should meet with "quickening passion,"(40) her father's proposal to marry Gautama. But what intrigues us is: why in the first place does he propose Gautama's match? Gautama has none of the things that he admires. Gautama's financial position is anything but enviable (he always comes riding a bicycle; one remembers Raisahib's angry disapproval of Arjuna's buying a bicycle). To add to this, Gautama's life-style and circumstances of his family are just the opposite of what Raisahib cherished all his life. Gautama's father was a freedom-fighter and mother is a social worker. Yet Raisahib just cannot tolerate Arjuna's similar concerns. That Raisahib and Gautama hold each other in mutual respect itself cannot be a plausible explanation for his preference of Gautama as his son-in-law. (46)

Since Maya's model is her own father, she cannot enjoy her married life with Gautama, especially because of his family background. It is Raisahib's fault that has created chaos in Maya's life and ruined not only her life but also Gautama's. M. Mani Meitei comments:

Lack of mutual concern leads to apathy which causes the total breakdown of husband-wife relationship. In this case, it is Gautama who
is solely responsible for this breakdown. Maya's is a kind of forced marriage in which her father's interest rather than her own is served. Such a marriage is an institution intended to exploit women socially and sexually. It never considers women's freedom and liberty; it leaves them chained in their husbands' home. (46)

Maya has neither a career nor does she take divorce from her husband.

In the same novel we have Leila who has married for love. She has eloped with her lover without her parents' permission. She loves the boy even though he suffers from tuberculosis. They love each other until death. The narrator, Maya feels touched by the fact that the couple is fighting the disease with strong will power. Maya says: "When I saw her hand him a glass of medicine, or lift his body into comfortable positions, I saw in her movements an aching tenderness subdued, by a long sadness, into great beauty and great bitterness" (Cry, 57). She is surprised to see no hatred in Leila towards her husband. To Maya, this is a very touching and sad scene. Prabhat Kumar Pandeya says: "Leila's marriage is a love marriage and she had eloped with her lover who is a consumptive. She is an ascetic wearing neither bangles nor jewellery. She is an exact contrast to Pom in this respect. She was detached and worked tirelessly in college, and at home nursing her husband whom she had married knowing that he is a consumptive" (40-41). Leila has chosen a career as a college lecturer in a girl's college. Unfortunately her husband suffers from tuberculosis. Maya wants to see Leila:

Today I longed to see her. I even prepared to go out and meet her. Then I recalled that she would not be at home, but in the girls' college where she taught Persian literature to a handful of girls who, while waiting, coyly, for suitable marriages to be arranged for them, read allusions to sly and underhand sex in every romanticism, and yawned at the smallest sophistries. (Desai Cry 57)
Maya is angry with Leila's husband because he criticizes Leila's parents for not coming and seeing him, his wife and their daughter. Maya says:

Sometimes I thought of him as an animal, a ferocious and wild beast that had allowed itself to become a house pet for its own reasons, and he accepted the food and drink she earned for him, as his due, even teasing her about her parents who had not seen her, written to her, or in any way communicated with her since the day of her elopement. (Desai *Cry* 58)

Leila and her husband have been suffering due to their problems; yet their life goes on.

Having looked at the issues of "marriage" and "career" in *Cry, the Peacock*, let us now look at the issue of divorce. My opinion on divorce is that it should be the last resort if both the husband and the wife find it extremely difficult to adjust to each other. I completely agree with what Shakunatala Devi has to say:

Both the husband and the wife have to develop self-control and a high sense of responsibility. They have to realize that human nature being what it is, temperamental differences are bound to arise now and then in daily life, and they cannot be got rid off by divorce and a second marriage. Happiness in family is possible only if the husband and the wife are prepared to make great sacrifices in order to accommodate themselves to each other. Divorce should be the last remedy in very exceptional cases. (133)

After reading the novels I have found some reasons why "educated" women go in for divorce. They are (a) incompatibility, (b) extra-marital relationship, (c) age disparity, (d) physical assault, (e) the husband asking the wife to sleep with his boss, (f) patriarchal attitude of the husband (g) wife's working career or (h)
mental deficiency. There is a study done by J. N. Chaudhary on the causes for divorce and he states the following reasons and causes for divorce:

Role-conflict (or authority), poverty and non support, physical assaults, Family structure (very large family and inadequate home life), Illicit relations, Wide age disparity, Chronic diseases calling under Factors endogenous to Family; Secondly, Dowry, Wife's working career, calling under Factors exogenous to family; thirdly, Domineering nature, Impotency, Barrenness, Lethargic nature, Irritative nature, Mental deficiency under Personality factors. (51)

Not just studies on the causes for divorce, there have also been studies on the consequences of divorce like the one conducted by Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly which has been reported by Andrew J. Cherlyn in his book, *Marriage Divorce Remarriage* (Cambridge: HUP, 1981):

With the results of this national survey in hand, there are still no firm estimates of the proportion of children who experience harmful psychological effects from parental divorce. But taking into account the little that is known from recent studies, we might conclude that: (1) almost all children experience an initial period of great emotional upset following a parental separation; (2) most return to normal development within one or two years following the separation; and (3) a minority of children experience some long-term psychological problems as a result of the separation. (79)

As the above study reveals, it is not so easy for the couple and their children to adjust, and coming to a normal state will take time. Therefore it is suggested that divorce should be the last and final resort keeping the above implications on children. However, this study does talk about the effect on a couple who takes divorce before having children.
Nila in Anita Desai’s *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) divorces her husband. This is perhaps the first ever case of divorce in Indian English women’s fiction. Prithvi Nath Tikoo in his book *Indian Women: (A Brief Socio-Cultural Survey)* quotes Jawaharlal Nehru’s views in his chapter "Pro-feminine Reforms" that are very relevant to divorce:

> During the debate on Special Marriage Act in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said, "You will find women standing up for the rights of divorce though some men may challenge it because men happen to be in a dominant position. I hope they will not continue in that dominant position for all time. These different standards of morality cannot be maintained. Therefore, the approach is to bring about a certain measure of equality between them; it is a question of custom, education and basically the economic position of individuals". (105)

Jawaharlal Nehru also emphasizes the importance of "education" and "economic position" of women in order to attain "equality". He also suggests that the "dominant position" of men is not "for all time". Nila proves that with economic independence she can claim equality and can ask for a divorce from her husband. She is the sister of Gautama. She seeks her brother Gautama’s help in getting a divorce but, though a lawyer, he refuses to undertake his own sister’s divorce case. The reason is that he does not think what his sister is doing is right. When Maya asks her husband to take up the divorce case, he says:

"Nila," I said, and pressed her hand. She smiled, and tossed the black hair out of her long eyes. She had come to consult Gautama regarding her divorce. Gautama had refused, in a noisy family conference, to have anything to do with it. "Why Gautama?" I was shocked. "What does she take me for—one of those two-rupee lawyers that squat under the banyan tree outside the courts, waiting for clients low enough to consider them—"
prostitutes and petty swindlers? I haven't time to waste on a case like hers- the mess she makes by being too bossy and self-willed and bullying.”
(Desai Cry 161-162)

Nila comes with great expectations hoping to get a divorce without any problem, as her brother himself is a lawyer. Surprisingly, her brother "refuses" to fight on her behalf. Nila thus finds another lawyer to file a case for divorce: -

And in high indignation Nila had found herself another lawyer, on her own. "You went alone and spoke to him?" "And why not?" she was wryly amused. "After ten years with that rabbit I married, I've learnt to do everything myself." "Except lead a sensible life," said her mother, tartly, very tartly for her, for she hated this matter of a divorce in the family, and children going fatherless. But I was admiring, and "Nila" I said, pressing her hand in wonder. (Desai Cry 162)

There are mixed opinions about Nila's initiative to divorce her husband. Maya is surprised when she comes to know that Nila went alone to talk about her divorce case with a lawyer. Nila does not consider it anything wrong to go "alone" to meet a lawyer and file a case. At this moment Nila comments on her "married" life of ten years and calls her husband a "rabbit" and wants a divorce. This comment proves that they are incompatible. Moreover, she claims that she has "learnt" to do "everything" by herself. However, Nila's mother is not in favour of the divorce and calls her daughter insensible. Nila's mother does not want to see her daughter take a "divorce" and make the "children fatherless". For Nila her life is more important than the life of her children. Maya admires Nila for seeking divorce and as a sign of appreciation she presses Nila's hand in "wonder".

Nita in Nayantara Sahgal's This Time of Morning (1965) has been engaged at the age of 17. According to T. Ashoka Rani, "Nita resents arranged marriages and when she is engaged to Vijay, she is unhappy- She feels withdrawn with no
prospect of fulfillment" (125). Moreover, Nita is involved in pre-marital relationship\(^1\) with Kalyan Sinha, a minister. Nita is not responsible for this act. Nita's parents force her to get engaged to Vijay who she does not want to marry. Moreover, she does not want to marry at the age of 17. She wants to have a job. Kalyan Sinha, a minister, offers her a job, something her parents cannot refuse. She works in his office. She does not want to leave the office. She even refuses to go home and openly expresses her love for Kalyan:

"But don't make me go."
He rose from his chair, "Nita..."
She got up, too, and came like a sleepwalker into his arms, clinging to him.
"Don't make me go, please don't make me go."
He took her by the hand and then to his room. (152)

Kalyan is a fatherly figure to Nita. Yet she has pre-marital sex with him. There is an age gap between Nita and her fiance' Vijay. Also, she does not like the boy she is going to marry. Such a girl like Nita may indulge in pre-marital sex. Who is to be blamed for this kind of relationship? Are her parents responsible for Nita's lost chastity? She may have believed in chastity but her parents by bringing her a proposal that makes her unhappy may have perhaps led to her not wanting to retain her chastity. T. R. Dash comments:

[T]he new-found emancipation that has come Nita's way changes her whole mental outlook and turns her against the traditional ideal of arranged marriages. The western way of getting to know the prospective life partner over a period of time influences her so much that the usual match-making appears too hasty a beginning for a lifelong liaison. From this point of view her sexual inclination for Kalyan seems but natural. She displays no conscious love for Kalyan. Through this relationship, she rebels against the accepted norms and conventions of a traditional social
Nita goes in search of a job. However, she does not get the job by herself. The job she secures is through influence. But, Nita's interest in having a job is a fact. In fact, she wants to work so as to delay the wedding with Vijay. Kalyan is a minister without portfolio. Kalyan encourages Nita, an educated girl, to take up a job. He says:

"Narang," he [Kalyan] repeated the name. "Your father is the doctor, isn't he?"
"Yes he is."
"And what do you do? Are you studying?"
"I've done my B. A.," she told him, and stumbling bravely on, "I'd like to do something, some work, I mean."
"Is that such a problem? Do your parents object?"
"Well, not exactly," she had never felt so young and foolish.
"I mean not since Rakesh spoke to them."
"Ask Rakesh to bring you round some time. I see no reason why an intelligent, educated young woman should not have a job."
Her nervousness vanished and she looked at him with pure joy.
"It's so kind of you. But I couldn't think of taking your time. I know how busy you are."
He cut her short. "Come round with Rakesh." She found Rakesh. "He noticed me, me! He's going to give me a job!"

(Sahgal 79-80, 110-111)

I see Nita's search for a job as a means of delaying marriage by giving the excuse that she has just started working. In fact she does not have any passion for any career. I would like to disagree with Alladi Uma when she says: "Sahgal, who tries to break away from the traditional concept of women, does not view her women characters as 'wage-earners or career women but mainly as married
women—as wives, daughters and mothers—and it is in these roles that they wish
to experience freedom and to become aware of themselves as individuals to be
accepted as equals' (Jain 1978: 44)" (9). Here in the case of Nita it is clear that
she is not interested in becoming just a wife, especially to a man of her parents'
choice. In fact, as of now, she is not interested in marriage. She wants to work and
earn money. If not a "career" woman, she wants at least to be a "wage earner". She
would like to take some time to marry. In other words she has chosen her job
out of force. I use the word force because she does not want to marry at present.
She has also sought the help of Rakesh, a family friend, to tell her parents that she
is not interested in marriage at present but wants to work. She also uses Rakesh to
get the job. In Nita's case it is clear that she is not interested in any career. She is
willing to do "[a]ny work" as she tells Kalyan. Career is something one chooses
and it does not depend on some one's mercy or influence. Kalyan asks a valid
question—whether her parents would have any "objection". Many parents would
not like their daughters to work. If Rakesh recommends, her parents will not
object. A positive quality in Kalyan is that he identifies Nita as 'an intelligent
educated young woman" and so giving her a job is not at all a problem.

Like Maya in Desai's Cry, the Peacock, Uma in Nayantara Sahgal's This Time of
Morning (1965) has an arranged marriage with Sir Arjun Mitra. Mitra has a
western background but still he prefers to have an arranged marriage:

It was not unusual that despite this background of westernization his
marriage should still be arranged for him, but for years Arjun resisted the
idea of marriage. He was absorbed by his work and his books and there
would be time enough to marry later. His family did not press the point. A
man could, in fact, marry at any age. Arjun would always be eligible.
When he decided to marry there would be no difficulty in finding a
suitable girl for him. Parents would fall over each other in their eagerness
to offer their daughters to the grandson of the renowned Sarat Mitra. And
they did. The Mitra family had no dearth of offers. The one Arjun chose
when the time came was the nineteen-year old daughter of a judge of the High court. It had hardly been a choice on his part. Uma of the round young face, the feline brown eyes upfist at the corners, and the magnolia skin had jolted him to earth from his books, and pitched him into the realization that he had not even begun to savour life's offerings. He was thirty-three years old, still the dreamy-eyed ex-student. (Sahgal *This Time* 25-26).

It is an arranged marriage and Mitra "chose" Uma to be his wife. He does not bother to find out from Uma whether she likes him or not. Perhaps his stature and family background have made him take Uma for granted. Moreover, he may have felt he was an "eligible" bachelor. He has had several offers of marriage. He assumes that since it is an arranged marriage, she will obey the man chosen for her. That is the mistake committed by Mitra. How could he, a man of thirty-three choose a girl of nineteen as his wife? Is he conscious of their ages?

The huge age gap and lack of intimacy, tenderness, communication and companionship between Arjun Mitra and Uma are the main reasons why Uma has an extra-marital relationship with Neil Berensen. Arjun Mitra should have been broad-minded to understand that Uma is not mature enough to understand married life. Instead, he fails to understand her and concentrates only on his files and office work:

He had been a dutiful son, a brilliant student and he filled his office with distinction. Life as a district officer suited him. It brought him into contact with small towns and villages, yet kept him in touch with the central authority. [...] He played tennis, enjoyed the company of "a small social group that drank moderately and entertained in a friendly, informal way. The smooth course of this idyllic existence was interrupted by the arrival of Uma—Uma who hated the dull districts after life in Calcutta, Uma in whom marriage had released a torrent of hungry seriousness that brought
to startling focus her exotic feline beauty.

The childlike petulance that had so entranced him began to upset him. He could not understand her boredom. He himself had never been bored. Other women occupied themselves. Why couldn't she? He gradually abandoned his attempts to interest her in his library or the neighbourhood and he began to feel helpless to cope with her. f... She was only twenty, a mere child, or twenty two or twenty-four, as the years went by and they moved from one district to another. [...] He began to retire to his study after dinner. The smoke of his pipe and his favourite books in their shelves insulated him against the discord in his house. (Sahgal This Time 26-27)

Arjun "fails to understand" her "boredom" at home. A. V. Krishna Rao also opines that, "Uma feels extremely bored with her fruitless marriage and continually seeks to escape into the fakery of sexual freedom" (144). Arjun only compares her with other women who are occupied with household work. He wonders why Uma cannot do the same thing. He seems to be a "bookworm" for as soon as he finishes his "dinner" he goes back to his "study". He cannot understand the desires of a young bride and a passionate woman. He has grown UP physically but his mind has not grown up enough to understand a young Woman's feelings and aspirations. At one of the parties, Uma happens to see an oil painting of the Rani of Mirpur illuminated by a band of light beneath the frame. Neil says:

"It is exquisite, is it not?" a foreign voice behind her spoke. "Yes". She [Uma] did not know the man, but decided he must be from one of the embassies. Black hair, swarthy skin, silky voice. A South American perhaps.
"If I may say so," he bowed slightly, "not as exquisite as Madame". [...] "May I get you some champagne? That is, if you will not disappear while I go to fetch some for you".
The stranger returned.

"I drink to your eyes, Madame".

She neither encouraged nor discouraged him. She let his hand take hers, slide up her arm, go round her waist. Her headache receded slightly and she felt a relief in his skill and deftness. He got up again to lock the door. She wondered afterwards what it had to do with love. [...] It was complete in itself and needed no explanation. When he left she lay on the sofa a little while, soothed by the darkness. (Sahgal *This Time* 109)

From the above lines, we can see how a married woman allows a stranger to make "love" to her. Why does she allow him to take advantage of her? Is there lack of love between Arjun and Uma? She does not even feel guilty about the action. Another interesting question one can ask is as to why Uma does not protest against a proposal where there is an age gap? She could have avoided all these problems had she protested against the proposal. Both Uma and Arjun are at fault in entering into marriage when there is such a wide age difference.

Rashmi in the same novel must have had an arranged marriage. Rashmi too is involved in an extra-marital relationship with Neil. The break-up of Rashmi and Dalip leads to the close relationship between Rakesh and Rashmi. Rashmi seeks divorce from Dalip. She is not happy with Dalip. She does not "hate" him and does not want to "harm" him. Moreover she cannot think of the two of them any longer as "we" as the differences between herself and Dalip are too much. Nayantara Sahgal herself opines: "Rashmi leaves her husband when her incompatible marriage becomes intolerable" (84). She uses the phrases, "prolonged starvation", "wrong marriage", "defeating courage" and "will" to show why the marriage cannot last. Rashmi has to say this about her break up with Dalip:

The thought of a break burdened her with the guilt that her best had been enough, and that there was so frighteningly little truth or permanence in
even what one most wanted. Only one thing seemed clear at this moment, that love, if love is the terrible desire for one person, had left her, never to return. (Sahgal *This Time* 13)

The thought of a "break" is burdensome to Rashmi. Any marriage breaking up is always painful. There will be guilt in divorce. In fact, both Rashmi and Dalip do not want the "frightening truth" of separation, yet they do separate. The separation takes place as there is no "love" between them. There is a difference between separation and divorce. Separation can bring two people together even after a long gap but not so divorce.

We only know through Rashmi that they are separated. We don’t come across Dalip’s views but are told about him and his relation with Rashmi:

"Does your husband come to Delhi often?"
"Fairly often on business. We are ... separated."

[●●] "Marriage" remarked Neil conversationally, "does not really make for happiness. I think there is something wrong with people who stay happily married."

[●●] "A lot of people are happily married," she protested.
"But they don’t continue to be. That shows their intelligence."
She laughed again and he went on, "Discontent is the medium of our age."
(Sahgal *This Time* 140)

Rashmi declares that she and her husband Dalip are "separated". She wants to clarify to Neil that she is "single". Neil takes advantage of this situation and comments that marriage does not really provide "happiness". If there are couples with a "happily married life", then, "there is something wrong" with them he says. This view is not acceptable and Rashmi immediately replies that most of them are "happily married". She wants to tell him that just because she and her husband are separated, it does not mean that all married people are unhappy. Perhppers Neil is
trying to please Rashmi for his own selfish needs and desires. Although she does not agree with him, she continues to converse with him because she needs to talk to him.

Rashmi’s mother has not been happy with her daughter’s decision to get separated from Dalip. She says:

Rashmi’s announcement was worse than bad news. It was a mortal blow to all she held sacred. What had brought Rashmi to this pass? What reason under heaven could sever the marriage bond? Women stayed married, had since time immemorial stayed married, under every conceivable circumstance, to brutal insensitive husbands, to lunatics and lepers. And Dalip, God forbid, was none of these things. Fulfilment had lain in service and sacrifice. If there was suffering, too, it was a part of life. Her despair went far beyond Rashmi’s decision to unknown dangers she could not comprehend. Much of the distress she saw about her she put down to the tasteless parody of a transplanted modernity. And now it had invaded her own home.

"We’ve known for a long time that she has been unhappy," said Kailas slowly. (Sahgal This Time 146)

Mira wonders as to what made Rashmi sever her "marriage bond" with Dalip. She seems to expect her daughter to continue with her married life. She falls back on the Indian tradition with its emphasis on marriage in a woman’s life. She does not find fault with Dalip but with her own daughter. Dalip is a sincere worker who is ready to sacrifice his personal life for the sake of service. It is his work that feeds him and his family. At least "educated" women should understand this dedication of their husbands rather than blaming them and taking extreme steps to separate from their husbands. I too agree with Dalip and Mira as far as service and sacrifice are concerned. That leads us to Rashmi who has been narrow-minded. She has unnecessarily spoiled her married life and has an affair with Neil, an
outsider. Mira also considers Rashmi a victim of modernity. Kai.las, Rashmi's father, has no special feeling and concern for his daughter's life except to say that she has been unhappy with Dalip for a long time. Rashmi decides to separate from Dalip because she finds his spending time at work unacceptable. At the same time he too should have considered her feelings and could have looked for alternatives. She is not justified in her act of separation, as we can see from her mother's reaction too.

Like Maya, Uma and Rashmi, Monisha too in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* (1965) has an arranged marriage with Jiban and has no career or job. Perhaps Monisha does not want to say no to her father's choice of a bridegroom. This is wrong especially as far as "educated" women are concerned. However, her sister Amla is not happy with the proposal. She thinks to herself:

Why had [her] father chosen him from amongst other young men surely known to him, or to his friends and relations, whose names must have been proposed when word was sent around that the eldest daughter was to marry? Was it merely because Jiban was so unquestionably safe, sound and secure, so utterly predictable? Or was it because fathers did, unconsciously, spite their daughters who were unavailable to them? And why did Monisha, with that powerful silent stubbornness of hers, never rebelled? (198;

Amla tries to question her father's "proposal" and her sister's "powerful silent" acceptance of the match without any signs of rebellion. Further, she enquires from her aunt who has also played a role in this marriage proposal:

"Aunt", Amla asked, "why did they marry?"
Her aunt shook her long hands at the ends of stiff wrists in an awkward gesture that denoted bafflement.
"Did you meet him before they were married?"
"Yes. Your father asked me to visit his family and report, so I did. I met
Jiban and his family before your parents did."

"And what did you report?"

"That they were a respectable, middle-class Congress family, completely unsuitable to Monisha's tastes and inclinations. So your father decided he was the right man, that it was the right family." (Desai Voices 198-199)

So, after the visit, her aunt did report that Jiban and his family are from a "respectable" family. They belong to a "middle-class Congress" family. However, Jiban and his family are "completely unsuitable" to Monisha's "tastes and inclinations". In spite of all this, her father has Monisha marry Jiban, who he considers the "right man" for Monisha. Harveen Sachdeva Mann opines that:

Intelligent, well-read, and self-aware, Monisha is, however, given no voice in determining her spouse and hence the course of her life after leaving her parents' home. Her marriage with Jiban appears, at first, to have been arranged for the sake of social expedience [...] [S]he [Monisha] saw herself as a sacrifice to her parents' floundering marriage; because she felt compelled to play the part of a dutiful daughter conforming to the patriarchal practice of arranged marriage; or because she was overwhelmed by a sense of fatalism at the lot of Indian women. (162-163)

Amla in the same novel does not marry because she has seen the problems of her sister at her in-law's place. Ruth K. Rosenwasser observes: "As a modern woman, Amla has freedom of choice, and with choice comes the anxiety and stress of role conflict in deciding which direction her life will take. Though employed outside the home with career opportunities open to her, Amla hears Monisha's warning against marriage, to 'go in the opposite direction', meaning not to follow the path that she, Monisha, had taken" (95-96). In other words, Amla has followed her sister's suggestion and has remained unmarried. However, she has chosen a career of a commercial artist in an advertising firm. Amla's choice of career has been
appreciated by her Aunt Lila who wants her to enjoy her new job and independence. Aunt Lila says:

"Of course I'm glad you've come, Amla, it was inevitable, and perhaps you will not let it oppress you but will enjoy your new job and independence".

"Of course I will!" Amla insisted with laughing relief. "And Calcutta doesn't oppress me in the least—you can't imagine how exciting it is to arrive, to drive through Dalhousie Square with all its red gingerbread houses, their domes and cupolas and pigeons. When I drove into Ballygunge and saw its weather beaten old mansions and palm trees, I kept thinking of John Company and Sir Thomas Roe at Jehangii's court. It excites me, aunt"[...] "Good"[...] "That's the spirit in which to start your career, my girl. That's what I like to see in young people—spirit. There's not too much of it around," she added darkly. (142)

Amla is very confident about her career even at its starting stage. Amla shares her excitement of arriving at Calcutta. She is excited at the sights that interest her: "red gingerbread houses", "domes and cupolas", "weather beaten old mansions and palm trees". Her aunt is happy about her initial reaction and would like to see this spirit continue throughout her career. Amla meets her brother Nirode and informs him about her taking up a job at Calcutta:

"I've come because I've got a job here, in an advertising firm, as a commercial artist. I start work next week. I thought it was going to be exciting and wonderful but—" she saved her hand at the clumsy, formless traffic on the curdy river, "this city, this city of yours, it conspires against all who wish to enjoy it, doesn't it?" (Desai *Voices* 153)

Amla seems to express her unhappiness regarding the crowd in Calcutta to her brother. She comes to Calcutta with a lot of enthusiasm. However, she is not able
to adjust to the "formless traffic on the curdy river". She had expected that it will be "exciting and wonderful" to work in Calcutta. But she shares her feelings with her brother about the lack of enjoyment in her career in Calcutta. When Amla tries to find out whether he has any friends, he mocks at her and says she will make dozens of friends. She gives a befitting reply:

"I have come here to work," she said, made defensive by that laughter. "I have played enough in Bombay. And I've heaps of ideas—I wonder if I'll get the chance to use them, as a commercial artist." (Desai Voices 154)

She firmly says to her brother that she wants to have a flourishing career. Moreover she has come to Calcutta with heaps of ideas and given a chance she would like to implement them. The above lines clearly indicate how strong her conviction is in wanting to use her ideas. When Amla expresses her ambition of being a commercial artist again, Nirode looks down on it. He says: "Commercial artist. Sounds too bloody awful for words. Poor old Amla, do you really expect anything from a career stamped commercial?" (154)

He does not seem to like Amla's career. That is the difference between Nirode and Amla. She has chosen her own career. Her career has not been suggested to her by any one. She wants to try out and do what she can. She does not want to be upset about his comments on her career. In fact, she comments on his career: "'Ah, I heard you had lost your faith in commercial writing,' her hurt pride gave her the nerve to say" (154).

After meeting her Aunt and her brother she goes to meet Monisha, her elder sister. Monisha's mother-in-law overwhelms Amla with non-stop questions. In fact Monisha wants to ask Amla several things but her mother-in-law does not give her any chance:

While Monisha sat silently on the divan beside her sister, the mother
chattered and chirrupped avidly as a sparrow at a social gathering. She had so many questions to ask of Amla, concerning her career and her education in Bombay. "Is it true that the Parsis there throw their dead to the vultures? They do—ah, so I had heard...Is it true that young girls there wear frocks? ...Were there any men students in your college with you? ... Do you draw these pictures we see in the newspapers? They are getting more and more improper. There is one of a girl coming out of her bath, it is an advertisement for hair oil—do you know who drew it? ... How do you go to work every day? (Desai *Voices* 159)

Apart from people trying to know about her career or to appreciate her career, there are those who discourage her career. Amla herself has assessed her career prospects. Monisha asks Amla whether she has heard anything from their mother. Amla says that she has been busy and has no time to reply to her mother's letters:

"Do you come home very late from the office?" Monisha asked, without the faintest curiosity, standing still to study a spider enthroned on the exact heart of its sagging, sticky web between two twigs of the magnolia tree. "No, I get away from there as early as I can. I don't think I'm really made for a job in an advertising firm—" she pushed and pushed at the Tibetan turquoise ring on her finger—"it doesn't seem to be the right career at all." [• • •] "For me, I don't think I should have gone straight from art school into advertising, it is too violent a let-down." (Desai *Voices* 195)

Amla says that as far as possible she would like to go back "home" "early". She expresses that she has made a mistake by choosing to work in an advertising firm. In other words, she seems to tell that she should have worked as an art teacher rather than in an advertising firm. S. K. Tikoo opines: "Amla, a commercial artist with an advertising firm, has also romantic dreams of rising high in her job. But soon she finds that people around her are interested not in her art but in herself."
Like Maya, Monisha and Uma, Gauri in Nayantara Sahgal’s *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) too has an arranged marriage with Nikhil. She has studied up to high school and she has no college degree. Vishal Dubey wants to know about Gauri’s marriage:

"Yours was arranged?" asked Dubey.

"I never expected anything else. And I had no college degree either. I went to a convent in Calcutta and then sat around for a couple of years until Nikhil was found for me and then I married him." (160-161)

Perhaps, this arranged marriage has made her go for an extra-marital relationship with Dubey. Obviously, her opinion was not sought before her marriage to Nikhil. However, she has no complaints against Nikhil in any matter. She seems to be happy with her industrialist husband; yet she develops an extra-marital relationship with Vishal without any guilt:

After dinner they drove with Nikhil to the airport and then back to the house. During the four years since Dubey had known her, the urgency between him and Gauri had evaporated and they had settled into a friendly familiarity. But he had not been able to bring to an end the affair so mindlessly begun. As she undressed in the half light of her bedroom and came, warm and pliant, into his arms, he realized he could have done without making love to her for some time now and enjoyed just the sight of her. (Sahgal *Storm* 18-19)

Gauri just feels like having an affair with Vishal and she does it. Gauri seems to be unfaithful to her husband Nikhil by getting involved in an extra-marital relationship with Dubey. Her husband has neither troubled her nor has he ignored
her. Why then does she develop an intimacy with Vishal that leads to a sexual relationship?

In the same novel Saroj is married to Inder Mehra. Saroj is candid with her husband and reveals her pre-marital relationship with her boyfriend. This is a blow to Inder. Jasbir Jain says: "[T]he concerted effort of Inder is to make Saroj feel guilty for a pre-marital relationship" (15). He starts hating his wife. How can he start hating his wife who is trying to be frank with him? What would he have done if she had not revealed the fact? Would he have any evidence about the relationship? Perhaps his ego is badly hurt. We will see in a short while how he reacts to Saroj’s frankness.

Inder, in order to show that he too like Saroj can have an extra-marital relationship develops one with Tamara. However, Tamara is married to Jit who is a businessman. She herself has a career of running a school. The novelist does not provide many details about how she looks after the school but we gather that she is successful in running the school. According to T. R. Dash, "Mara [...] blissfully runs a kindergarten school all by herself. She symbolises the boldness and freedom of woman with her westernized outlook, and her occupation provides her with the opportunity for energy release"(99). There is only one place where we see her in her office. Inder comes to her office to see her on the pretext of taking the children home:

There were days when it soothed Mara just to arrive at the school and look at her own handiwork. This was not one of them. Her batteries needed recharging. She was in her office. Smoking her midmorning cigarette, piano music and sunlight from the schoolroom just beginning to weave a pattern of peace, when Inder arrived, filling the doorway with his restless brooding energy.

"I left office early," he [Inder] said unnecessarily.

"Have you come for the children? It's not nearly time, but I'll call them if
you like". "No," he said quickly. "I'll wait".[...]

"Can't you leave the school for half an hour?" he said suddenly. "I've got a painting just arrived from Delhi for the office. Gauri sent it--along with a vanful of things from kitchen utensils to heaters. And I have no idea where to hang it."

She considered this a minute. "I suppose I could. The children have singing from now till the end of the hour." (Sahgal *Storm* 168-170)

From the above lines Mara seems to be dedicated to her school. Inder was there neither to see his children nor to take them with him but he wanted Mara to go with him. She politely "considers" his request and decides to go with him so long as it does not affect her work in school. She does not compromise on her career. For her everything is after "school hours". That is the commitment she has towards work.

Mara has a relationship with Inder. Inder, in order to show his manliness, has an extra-marital relationship with Mara. B. D. Sharma and S. K. Sharma opine: "Inder [...] believes in two codes of morality, one for himself and another for his wife as even though he himself is not faithful to his wife Saroj, he resents her having lost her virginity before her marriage" (75). If Inder had forgiven and understood the pre-marital relationship, he would have been a great man. Instead he starts developing two codes of morality. At least he could have maintained his faithfulness to his wife. Sahgal seems to suggest that men can never tolerate if their wives have pre-marital or extra-marital relationships. Men also expect their women to be virgins and faithful wives. However, Mara comes out of the relationship with Inder after a talk with her husband Jit: "Jit is fond of Mara and of the school she runs on modern lines for children. Jit helped Mara out of the emotional jungle by talking to her of an unhappy experience of his own. Jit made communication possible with Mara on all fronts" (Rajendra 182).
Ultimately, Inder becomes lonely and loses his wife too. His wife has a relationship with Vishal Dubey. Saroj and Vishal go for evening walks. Gradually Saroj cannot live without Vishal. Once Inder tries to order Saroj not to go for evening walks with Vishal. Saroj says she cannot spend a day without going for a walk with Vishal. She openly declares this fact. Ultimately Saroj leaves Inder and goes away with Vishal Dubey and lives with him. In the novel there is no indication that Inder and Saroj obtain a divorce. But it is clear that Saroj wants to lead her life with Vishal. One has to carefully understand Saroj’s stand. When Inder can have an extra-marital relationship with Tamara, why can't Saroj leave Inder? In other words, why should she not divorce him and marry Vishal? In fact Saroj is open in revealing the fact that she had pre-marital sex with her boyfriend. Saroj thinks:

> Marriage is meant to provide comfort and strength through love and communication, and not through material possessions. It should be devoid of all secrets and firmly rooted in honesty and truth. Then only can the marriage bond strengthen itself and no incidents of the past destroy the future. Marriage does not allow either partner to be selective.

(Sinha 106-7)

Thus, she does not want to maintain any "secrets" with her husband. She wants to be "rooted in honesty and truth". Though he takes it as an offence, he commits the same mistake. Perhaps he wanted to show Saroj that if she had a pre-marital relationship, he too could have an extra-marital relationship with Tamara. However, he becomes a victim of his own ego. At the end, he has neither his wife nor his lover.

Vishal Dubey is a widower and has relationships with more than two women. Even before his affairs with Gauri and Saroj, his wife Leela had an extra-marital relationship with Hari. She lives a "life of pretence and hypocrisy" (Rajendra 180). Unfortunately she dies in the hands of an incompetent abortionist. Leela’s
relationship with Hari has led Vishal to convert his friendships into relationships. Gauri and Saroj seemed to be happy with their husbands. But when they meet Vishal, they enter into a relationship with him. The result of the affair is that Saroj’s marriage with Inder breaks up. There was a danger of Taniara and Jit’s relationship breaking up too. However, it is saved because of open discussions between them.

On the other hand, Nikhil does not know that Gauri has an affair with Vishal. Otherwise their relationship would have been in trouble. What I am trying to point out here is that women are drawn into extra-marital relationships. If Tamara and Inder had continued their affair, Tamara would have spoiled her life. Perhaps it could have led to divorce.

Most of the marriages portrayed in the 1960s’ novels are arranged like that of Maya, Monisha, Uma, Rashmi, Saroj, Leela, Gauri, Tamara. There is one love marriage of Leila portrayed in these novels. Compared to the 1950s, there are two educated women, Amla and Leila, who have careers and Nita, who has a job so as to postpone her forced marriage. The first ever case of divorce is that of Nila and one that follows is that of Rashmi. Saroj leaves her husband, with an intention to divorce.

Extra-marital relationships may be one of many reasons leading to divorce. But divorce as we have seen does not imply the rejection of the institution of marriage. While the women in these novels who get divorced or decide to go in for divorce have had arranged marriages, we cannot conclude from this that love marriages do not end up in divorce. Let us see how this issue is dealt with in the following decades.


Meitei, M. Mani. "Feminism and Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*" *Feminism and Indian English Fiction.* Ed. P. M. Naik and S. P. Swain. Bareilley: PBD, 1996. 43-55


Notes

1 Nayantara Sahgal writes in her article entitled "Passion for India" [Indian Literature 32.1 (1989): 77-88]: "When This Time of Morning was published, a lady here in Delhi called me a very naughty girl. She wanted to know why I had let Nita, a young unmarried girl, have an affair with the Minister, Kalyan Sinha? This lady didn't realize that characters can't be told what to do. Once they are on the page they have a life of their own. They speak and act as they want to. The writer is literally a witness" (85).

2 In his article entitled "Nayantara Sahgal and Feminism" [Feminism in Indian English Fiction. Eds. P. M. Nayak and S. P. Swain. (Bareilley: PBD, 1996), 97-100.] T. R. Dash mentions the character's name as "Mira". That is not correct. The correct name is "Tamara" but in the novel she is always addressed by the shortened name, "Mara".