Woe to that nation whose literature is cut short by the intrusion of force. This is not merely interference with freedom of the press but the sealing up of a nation’s heart, the excision of its memory. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Russian novelist. Time (Feb. 25, 1974).

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was born (11 December 1918 - 3 August 2008) in the resort town of Kislovodsk to the south of present day Russia. His mother Taisiya was a Ukrainian, her father had apparently risen from humble beginnings, and a self-made man, eventually went on to acquire a large estate in the Kuben region in the north foothills of the Caucasus. During World War I, Taisiya went to Moscow to study. While there she met and married Isaakiy Solzhenitsyn, a young officer in the Imperial Russian Army of Cossack origins and fellow native of the Caucasus region. The family background of his parents is vividly brought to life in the opening chapters of August 1914, and in the later Red Wheel novels.

In 1918, Taisiya become pregnant with Aleksandr, but Isaakiy died in a hunting accident before Aleksandr was born. Aleksandr was raised by this widowed mother and an aunt in lowly circumstances in Rostov-On-Don. His earliest years coincided with the Russian civil War. By 1930 the family property had been turned into a collective farm. Solzhenitsyn later recalls that his mother had fought for survival and that his father’s background in the old Imperial Army had to be kept a secret. His educated mother (who never remarried) encouraged his literary and scientific leanings and raised him in the Russian Orthodox faith, she died in 1944.
Aleksandr studied math and physics at Rostov State University, at the same time he took correspondence courses from the Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature and History, at this time heavily ideological in scope. As he himself makes clear, he did not question the state ideology or the superiority of the Soviet Union until he spent time in the camps.

On 7th April 1940 Solzhenitsyn married his first wife, Natalia Alekseevna Reshetovskaya. They had just over a year of married life before he went into the army, where he served as an artillery officer in the Red Army during World War II.

But in February 1945 while serving in East Pursia, Solzhenitsyn was arrested for writing derogatory comments in private letters to a friend, Nikolai Vitkevich about the conduct of the war by Joseph Stalin, whom he called ‘Khozyain’ (the proprietor). He was accused of anti-Soviet propaganda under Article 58 paragraph 10 of the Soviet Criminal Code, and of ‘founding a hostile organization’ under paragraph 11. Solzhenitsyn was taken to the Lubyanka prison in Moscow, where he was interrogated. On 7th July 1945, he was sentenced in his absence, by a Special Council of the NKVD to an eight year term in a labor camp. This was the normal sentence for most crimes under Article 58 at that time.

The first part of his sentence he served in several different work camps; the ‘middle phase’ as he later referred to it, was spent in a ‘sharashka’, where he met Lev Kopelev, upon whom he based the character of Lev Rubin in *The First Circle*. In 1950, he was sent to a ‘Special Camp’ for political prisoners. His imprisonment at a camp in the town of Ekibastuz formed the basis for the book *One day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. While there he had a tumor removed though there he was not then diagnosed for cancer.
In March 1953 after the expiry of Solzhenitsyn’s sentence, he was sent to internal exile for life at Kok-Terek in northeastern region of Kazakhstan, very close to the current border with Russia, as it was common practice for political prisoners. His undiagnosed cancer spread until, by the end of the year, he was close to death. However in 1954 he was permitted to be treated in a hospital in Tashkent, where his tumor went into remission. His experiences there became the basis of his novel *Cancer Ward*.

It was during this decade of imprisonment and exile that Solzhenitsyn abandoned Marxism and developed the philosophical and religious positions of his later life. Solzhenitsyn gradually turned into a philosophically minded Christian as a result of his experience in prison and the camps. He repented for some of his actions as a Red Army Captain, and in prison compared himself to the perpetrators of the Gulag. Solzhenitsyn had divorced his wife in 1952 a year before his release, because wives of prisoners faced loss of work or residence permits. After the end of his internal exile, they remarried in 1957. They divorced again in 1972. The following year (1953) he married his second wife, Natalia Dimtrievna Svetlova, a mathematician who had a son from a brief prior marriage. He and Svetlova (born 1939) had three sons: Yermolai (1970), Ignat (1972), and Stepan (1973).

Solzhenitsyn landed on the national and international literature stage with the publication of his novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, in the journal *Novyi mir* (New World). This deceptively simple novella describes a normal day in the life of a prisoner in a Soviet forced-labor camp in the early 1950s. It was the first work he had submitted for publication, though he had been writing for thirty years, *Novyi mir*’s chief editor Andrei Tyardovsky passed the story on to one of Nikita Khrushchchev’s aides. Khrushchchev had started a second round of de-Stalinization of USSR in 1961, found purpose,
so personally approved its publication, which would have been otherwise impossible.

A decade later there was a rapid deterioration of the relationship between Solzhenitsyn and the Soviet leadership, which developed into open hostility by 1969. A crackdown against outspoken writers began in late 1963 and intensified greatly after Khrushchchev was ousted from power in 1964. Solzhenitsyn was unable to publish any of his works in this new situation, even his two semi-autobiographical novels, *The First Circle* based on his ‘sharashka’ experiences, and *The Cancer Ward*, both of which were highly critical of the Soviet System. Their publication, even in revised form, was blocked by Party hardliners, who instead tried to coerce Solzhenitsyn to write more positive works about the Soviet Union.

In the meantime, some of Solzhenitsyn’s works began to circulate in *Semizdat* (*a secret practice in Soviet union were censored material was reproduced and circulated from reader to reader, under the danger of harsh punishment if caught in possession of such material*), and a few got published abroad without his permission. These developments, along with the accidental discovery by the KGB of some of his most critical writings in 1965, lead to a hardening of official attitudes towards Solzhenitsyn. In 1967 Solzhenitsyn attacked the powerful Union of Soviet Writers criticizing it for persecuting writers on behalf of the state, instead of protecting their artistic freedom. Solzhenitsyn’s approval of the publication of his works *Cancer Ward, The First Circle* and some other works, made things worse. Party and state officials responded by launching an escalating campaign of harassment, slander, and threats, including his expulsion from the Writers’ Union in 1969.

But Solzhenitsyn was part of a larger movement in the 1960’s and 1970’s his international prominence grew after he was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature in 1970, it protected him from arrest, and facilitated him to be more
confrontational in his expressions than most other dissidents. It also allowed him access to Western media.

Solzhenitsyn also pursued his political agenda. While most Soviet dissidents focused on the need for basic human rights, by the early 1970’s Solzhenitsyn began to focus on the issue of morality. He was of the opinion that the Russian people could only be saved by a rejection of Bolshevik ideology and returning to the traditional Russian human values practiced under the influence of Orthodox Christianity. He looked towards the pre-Revolutionary Russia for guidance, but not to the West, he also went on to suggest that these values could also save the West. Solzhenitsyn strongly criticized the western culture for its decadence and argued it was weakening the United States to the point where it would soon no longer be able to stand up to the communist threat.

In August 1971 Solzhenitsyn survived an assassination attempt allegedly by the KGB. In February 1974 Solzhenitsyn was arrested, charged with treason, stripped of his Soviet citizenship, and expelled to West Germany. Party leaders preferred to exile Solzhenitsyn than sending him to prison as it would harm their international reputation, as he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1970, his second wife and family followed him. After a brief stay in Europe he moved to the United States, where his western sympathizers lost their enthusiasm after he articulated his moral philosophy by a series of articles and lectures, which concluded with his 1978 Graduation Address at Harvard. His attacks on western culture alienated many, and he eventually withdrew into self-imposed seclusion in Vermont, where he worked on his Red Wheel series of novels.

Despite spending almost two decades in the United States, Solzhenitsyn did not become fluent in spoken English. He had, however, been reading English-language literature since his teens, encouraged by his mother.
Although he published some additional articles in the Soviet press, his absence from the scene limited his influence during the period of transition. Solzhenitsyn eventually returned to Russia in 1994 as his citizenship was restored in 1990, had a short-lived television talk show (1994-1995) also published several books, but in the changed scenario there was limited audience for his works and his influence declined.

In a series of writings, speeches, and interviews after his return, he spoke about his admiration for the local self-government he had witnessed first-hand in Switzerland and New England during his western exile. He ‘praised’ the ‘sensible and sure process of grassroots democracy, in which the local population solves most of its problems on its own, not waiting for the decisions of higher authorities.

Solzhenitsyn was the only author living among all the five authors chosen for this study, but unfortunately he died on 3rd August 2008.

The title ‘The First Circle’ is an allusion to Dante’s First Circle of Hell in The Divine Comedy wherein the philosophers of Greece, and other non-Christians, are doomed to live throughout eternity in a walled green garden. They are unable to enter Heaven, as they were born before Christ, but enjoy a small space of relative freedom in the heart of Hell.

Solzhenitsyn has written this semi-autobiographical novel from his experiences with the inmates of the various camps he was kept in during the serving of his sentence, incorporating the life and destinies of other inmates, their relatives and the prison staff. The novel depicts the lives of the occupants of a sharashka (a liberal prison with inmates involved in scientific research and invention) located in a suburb of Moscow. Many of the prisoners are technicians or academicians who have been arrested under Article 58 of the RSFSR Penal code in Joseph Stalin’s purges following the Second World
War. Unlike the inmates of the other labor camps and prisons the inmates of sharashka were adequately fed and enjoyed better working conditions; however if they found disfavor with the authorities they could be dispatched to harsher places.

The theme of the novel which reveals the world as a prison comes naturally to Russia initially under the Czars and later into the white hands of Joseph Stalin. A penal society thrown into deprived basic human conditions, where the trivial becomes tragic; the absurd becomes profound; weakness becomes strength and unreasoned faith gives life it’s only meaning.

The sharashka prisoners worked on technical projects that assist state security agencies and generally pander to Stalin’s increasing paranoia. While most of the prisoners are aware of how much better off they are than the inmates of the labor camps (as some of them had served there) some are also conscious of the overwhelming moral dilemma of working to aid an administrative system which itself is the cause of so much suffering.

The story is set in a brief period of little less than five days, Dec 24 to Dec 28 1949. The characters are the prisoners, their guards, the directors of the Institute, the high officials of the Police Ministry, Stalin himself in an unforgettable portrait, few Russian women, a few simple peasants and several pallid bureaucrats.

The People of Mavrino are divided into task groups with a assignment either scientific or technical, more of the kind that are destined to be used to strengthen the internal and external security system of Stalin’s administration. Although the plot is not of much importance because there is not much mystery as to the conclusion, but it is the lengths of description of the lives and situations of the primary and secondary characters that Solzhenitsyn has gone to detail, which outlines the various ideas that he has tried to portray.
The principal characters include Nerzhin and the talented Soviet diplomat Innokenty Volodin, as well as Nerzhin’s closest friends and principal interlocutors, Lev Rubin and Dimitri Sologdin, who are based on the real-life figures Lev Kopelev and Dimitri Panin. Rubin, a linguist and steadfast communist is torn between his humane instincts and his uncompromising commitment to revolutionary principles. Sologdin, an engineer, is a fierce opponent of the communist regime and a self-described Christian individualist. A host of other characters, from the half-blind janitor Spiridon (who’s more good sense owes nothing to philosophical reflection) to Stalin, provides a brilliant picture of Soviet society from top to bottom.

Solzhenitsyn makes a fantastic attempt in *The First Circle* to incorporate almost all the possible sections of the Russian Society by interlinking them directly, indirectly or remotely within the narration webbing on to the very end. As publishing a work of literature was one of the only medium of conveying the inside conditions of the extreme Soviet nation, to the soviets themselves as well as the outside world Solzhenitsyn touched upon all the elements of the average soviet citizen, food, clothing, education, employment, economics, misery, fear, faith, overall suppression and the overall political policy of the regime.

Gleb Nerzhin a mathematician by profession was also knowledgeable about linguistics, when Russian phonetics became a subject of research at Mavrino. He was to work with Lev Rubin on a project that was a device under invention to assist the Soviet security system. Nerzhin had been through many prison and camp experiences since he was sentenced on his return from the World War II. Being an educated, learned and married he had much to look ahead for his life after the war. In *the First Circle* he is the autobiographical character of the author.
Gleb Nerzhin was responsible for the mathematical programming of the methods to be implemented in the invention that was to logically conclude in identifying, muffling the voice of a speaker over a telephone, this device in Mavrino was termed as ‘the Voice Scrambler’. Nerzhin had adapted well into the prison system and showed no signs of hurry or a rebellion. He took his work casually and always wanted to relapse into idleness. He mentions at one instance to Simochka that: ‘I am active because I hate action’ (pg 32).

He had his own philosophy of life:

‘When I was free and read books of wise men who wrote about the meaning of life, or of happiness, I made very little sense of it. I took them seriously; after all it’s the business of the wise men to think profound thoughts. But what can you say about the meaning of life? We’re living—and that’s all there is to it. Happiness comes when things are going well, everyone knows that. Thank God for prison! It has given me the chance to think things out. To understand the nature of happiness we first have to know what it means to eat one’s fill. Remember how it was in the Lubyanka and when the security people were grilling us? Remember that thin barley or oatmeal porridge without a single drop of milk? Can you say you ate it? No. It was like Holy Communion, you took it like the sacraments, like the prana of the yogis. You ate it slowly, from the tip of a wooden spoon, entirely absorbed in the process of eating, in thinking about eating --- and it spread through your body like nectar. You quivered from the exquisite feeling you got from those sodden little grains and the muddy slops in which they floated. And you went on living like that, with virtually nothing to sustain you, for six months, or for twelve. Can you compare that with the way people wolf down steaks?’ (pg. 38)

Nerzhin was much annoyed for the reasons of him being in prison because he did nothing wrong or betray his nation but was imprisoned for the expression of his thoughts. So he saw no end to his sentence. When offered to work on cryptography, away from his ongoing programme he refuses on the grounds, that there was no hope, and that doing anything will bring no end nor lessen
his prison life as the Russian government would find ways to keep skilled people like him for their use. Hence all that he could look forward to was maybe a better prison defined working hours and edible food just for the sake for one’s bodily comforts and remaining alive for a hopeless future.

Nerzhin during his prison life kept notes very much like the author did in prison. He looked forward to working upon these notes when he would be free. Although he looked forward to reuniting with his wife after serving his sentence he was not much in hope of it as he was wise enough to evaluate the long term course of events and the consequences of it. So he does not have reservations while expressing his defiance to authorities. His inner soul is morally strong and hopeful.

Lev Rubin was a philologist and had landed at Mavrino accidentally but managed to hang around doing translations. He beefed up a reputation of having a good ear as his one ear had become slightly deaf from war. He used this reputation well. Rubin worked with Nerzhin and was keen on the ‘voice printing mechanism’, which towards the end of the novel is the technique implemented to narrow down the identification of a particular voice. At the end of the novel he prides himself of the new found application and the possibilities of having one more format of identification other than the much popular finger printing technique.

Rubin was a humanist but was not an anti communist. He strongly believed that the younger generation highly lacked moral guidance, that in the pre-communist times people depended on the church and the priests for moral guidance, which was a missing element in human life of a modern Russian. To cater to this hollowness he covers up with his grand proposal of establishing civic temples across the country much along the lines of establishment of the churches of Christianity. He was so consumed by the idea that he created a draft on the subject to be presented to the authorities for
the establishment of the ‘civic temples’, which according to his suggestions should architecturally be imposing and dominating the surroundings, a concept prevailing in the construction of religious structures.

Subdivided into sections and paragraphs his draft carefully detailed all the finer points of the organization very much in the lines of the Christian faith and practice, for instance the size and area of the temple structure, the number of people to be served by each temple, precisely which days in the calendar should be observed by mass meetings and how long the different types of rituals should last. Marriage ceremonies were also drawn from the Christian religious ceremonies, they were to be preceded by a formal engagement and a public announcement two weeks ahead. It was proposed that youths about to enter adulthood should be brought to these temples in groups and in presence of large number of their elders and made to take a special oath and solemnly vow loyalty to their country, obedience to their parents and adherence to a general code of ethics.

‘The proposal laid particular emphasis on the need to ensure that all these ritual observances should be carried out in a proper setting, that the garments of the Temple ministrants should testify by their magnificence to the purity of mind of those who wore them; that the form of words employed in the various rituals should, by its rhythmic quality, achieve maximum emotional impact; that every possible means should be used to affect the sense organs of visitors to the Temples: by impregnating the air with a special aroma, by choral and other musical performances, by the skilful use of coloured glass, spotlights and tasteful murals calculated to develop the aesthetic sense of the population--- not to mention the overall architectural design which should convey a feeling of grandeur and eternity.(Pg. No.419)

Rubin had agonized over every word, picking synonyms with the utmost care. One incautious word and people of shallow intellect might easily conclude that he was only proposing the reintroduction of the Christian temples without
Christ. Nothing could have been further from the truth! Persons with a
fondness for historical analogy, on the other hand, might well accuse him of
trying to bring back Robespierre’s cult of the Supreme Being. But this too
would be wide of the mark.

In Rubin’s view, the most original section of his proposal was the one on,
these new….. not-priests--- ministrants, as he called them. He felt that the
success of the whole proposal vitally depended on whether or not it would be
possible to establish throughout the country a body of ministrants who,
because of their immaculate and selfless personal conduct, would enjoy the
affection and confidence of the people. He suggested that the best procedure,
the one most likely to maintain high moral standards, would be for the Party
authorities to select suitable candidates from all walks of life and train them
as full time ministrants. Once urgent initial needs had been met, it should be
possible, as the years went by, gradually to widen the scope and duration of
this training programme, and give the ministrants an excellent all-round
education which should, he stressed, include the art of oratory and elocution.
(Rubin made so bold as to suggest that the art of public speaking had suffered
a decline—perhaps because there was no longer any need to exercise
persuasion on the people of a country, who unconditionally supported their
beloved Government without having to be told.)

Lev Rubin’s initiative represents the human civilizations craving for a
conscious bond amongst humans and divine, much above the influence of
philosophies, ideologies, and nationalism.

Joseph Stalin the Supreme Soviet leader’s stagnation is portrayed by the
author as one of the core causes of the state of affairs in Russia after the
World War II. The policies that he implemented ruthlessly from behind the
iron curtain made people live a life with fewer choices and almost with no
opportunity for better life conditions. The novel briefly encounters Stalin but
the author goes to length of elaborating upon the man himself. The novel is set around his 70th birthday and shows that he suffers from lapse of memory and attacks of nausea but aspiring to live up to ninety.

Stalin lived with the belief that the ordinary people loved their leader i.e. Him and really respected and understood him. This was obvious from the newspapers, the cinemas, and the exhibition of his birthday presents and from his speeches of the comrades, who spoke in his honor.

Life of this supreme leader was in total isolation from the people whom he presumed to lead. But the fact was he controlled and contained their life and misery from behind layers of security which made him unreachable by his people. He lived a life reflecting upon his past in which there was nothing much to be proud of. He envied other world leaders of his time who connected with their people and were very popular. But he Joseph Stalin could not trust anyone.

The author depicts the life in Russia, and the condition of its citizens, with limited resources and almost no opportunity and as a nation with very few hope for improvement. Stalin pondered over issues of how to tackle the youth, patriotism, and a vision, of which he himself was not much sure off. The only aim was to keep the people on their toes and enemies contained. Under his rule there was no hope for any reform or freedom of basic human needs. Fear was the instrument of control.

The author does not comment whether Stalin was aware of the limitations of the people who worked for him but he does mention how the prisoners at Mavrino and his officers devised ways and methods to lie about their success and progress, buy time for themselves and give false hopes. The resentment of the Soviet people on the helpless hopelessness of the communist ideology is prominent throughout the novel. It was important for Stalin’s regime to
pretend that all was well both for the people of Russia and the rest of the world. The image of a nation created for the welfare of its citizen was to be sustained at all forums.

Stalin took credit for many policies which he devised and decorated himself with medals of achievements and also honored himself. His view on the collective farms of Russia was that it was a great success, but when the new young people were migrating to the cities in search of a better living there was no practical solution to slow or prevent this exodus, so he wanted to lay down the rule that since the farms belong to the people the people born on that land are by default the members of the farm, but wanted it to be drafted in such a way as to sound like a privilege, and also that only the local Soviet body should have the right to release anyone from the membership of the farm. To prevent opposition a propaganda campaign should be launched and there should be articles in the newspaper with headline like “the collective farms should belong to the younger generation”. The Soviet journalists knew very well how to phrase such articles --- to please the supreme leader. Stalin thought of this decree as a complaint by the party secretary (whom he got shot) that the people who had been enrolled in the collective farms in the 30’s worked sincerely but the new younger generation was hardly interested and this might become a problem at the later stage. He even got killed a film maker who highlighted the fact that only old people were found working in the collective farm.

Stalin’s most powerful instrument of control was fear, which was an open secret. Men, officers who seemed to be loyal to the last drop of blood were in fact more concerned of just remaining alive by delivering or delaying what was demanded of them. But it was not the case with some of the prisoners of Mavrino, who had long lost reasons to be alive and so could listen to their conscious and defy the system.
Freedom of expression was not at all a privilege that a citizen could be proud of as is portrayed by Ilya Khorobrov. During the first election held after the war, he had given vent to his feelings and on the ballot paper had applied an obscene epithet to the genius of geniuses himself. That was the time when because of the shortage of labour houses were left in ruins and fields remained unsown. Never the less several detectives were kept busy for a month studying the handwriting of every voter in the district, and Khorobrov was caught. Khorobrov went to prison happy to be with likes of himself and speak his mind freely but there to the authorities were showered with informer’s reports and Khorobrov was silenced.

Abakumov’s attempt to find out the facts on the progress of the scrambler project from Pryanchikov in chapter 16 is how the Russian authorities struggled to keep up with systems that they themselves had no idea on how to make it effective. There was a clear divide amongst the people working under and those in demanding positions, an absolute state of hopeless administration.

Joseph Stalin’s most creative hours were the hours of darkness, as depicted in *The First Circle*, maybe by this the author wanted to compare Stalin to the Devil himself. All of Stalin’s best ideas came to him between midnight and four in the morning. For instance paying state lottery winners through new bonds than with cash, devising prison sentences for absenteeism, how to lengthen the working day and week, how to prevent people from changing jobs, frame new laws on forced labor and death penalty and how to discretely deport people to Siberia. The author also depicts Stalin summoning his subordinates for meetings also during these hours.

Ruska Doronin a young man of twenty three with a maximum sentence of twenty five years had a short hectic life outside the prison. His character and his views were formed less by his studies at the universities of Moscow and
Leningrad (as he had spent a fortnight at each) but by his two years of living on false papers after an all union warrant had been issued for his arrest and by the two years that by then he had spent in prison. In no time he mastered the jungle laws of the forced labor camps and was always on his guard. He spoke freely only to a few close friends. He is full of energy and tries to make best use of his time by reading. He was the youth icon and the reflection of the youth of Russia. He used his knowledge of forgery and the snags in the security system of the Government to have his way and aspired to be free from prison to live a normal life. He invented methods to expose the prison system but was cautious enough not to get exposed himself. In his desperation to get out of prison he proposes to Clara the prosecutors daughter and is confident of his skills and to live rest of his life with new identity.

Ruska was the youth icon of Russia a man who knew the system so well that he could make the best use of the flaws in it. He penetrates the hard labored informer network that Major Shikin had established and towards the latter half of the novel designs a method to expose it all using the tree rouble money order charge levied by the post office. This act of Ruska is portrayed as a demonstration of the flaw in the system that could someday make the entire system crumble.

Dimitri Sologdin an engineer at Mavrino who had served twelve years, but due to a second sentence the end of his prison term was no close. He was married but his wife had no hope about their future, so she lied to her employers about her marriage. She had been pregnant when he was arrested. So he never got to see his son. He had volunteered to chop wood for the Mavrino kitchen without any payment for want of exercise, was denied permission but was later allowed by the Governor due to the limitations of the prison system. He was part of the voice scrambler project. But he wittingly announced that his mind was chronically undernourished due to which he was
working only in an auxiliary capacity. This gave him ample time to ponder over his own design of the voice scrambler. He believed that a great idea can only be generated by a single enlightenment. Sologdin came up with his version of the scrambler that he thought the other engineers assigned to the task had missed upon. He submitted his design to Professor Chelnov for his opinion. This design although practical was vulnerable to inaccuracy but was still a practical possible implementable design. This was Sologdin’s achievement and his probable ticket to freedom. Having acquainted himself well with the prison and political system he takes the credit of the entire voice scrambler project.

Innokenty Volodin the son of a famous father who had been killed in the Civil War. A brilliant graduate of the diplomatic school with powerful connections and son-in-law of Pyotr Makarygin - the state prosecuting attorney, is the trigger character of the novel *The First Circle*. The story begins with a phone call Volodin makes to his loyal family doctor out of an obligatory human concern, the recording of that call and the investigation to identify the caller in it becomes the linking thread throughout the novel. The ultimate outcome of the investigation brings the novel to an abrupt end without any conclusion. The author has used Volodin to depict the prevailing human concern within the bureaucrat community that provokes a person to take an ultimate calculated risk to help another human within the then ruthless regime, the author also uses Volodin to elaborately explain the systematic automation of the prison facility installed in Russia at that time.

Major Adam Roitman was chief of the acoustic laboratory, one of the two major projects at the Mavrino. The other was a project generally termed as number seven. The voice scrambler project otherwise known as artificial speech device was behind committed schedule. Roitman struggled hard to
keep the project going especially with whatever was left of broken down equipments from Germany and the inmates he could keep on the project.

Anton Nikolyevich Yakanov head of the Mavrino’s prison was always on the lookout for ways to slow the progress of Roitman’s project. Yalanov took the best of the equipments and inmates to the number seven project and transferred inmates who did not fall in his favour. Roitman and Yakanov represent the means by which the Russian administration had set out to claim technological supremacy across the globe.

Yakanov after the war had held the position of chief engineer at special equipment section. His specialized knowledge had earned him the rank of colonel and he wore with dignity his silver epaulettes with their sky blue edging and three large stars. In this position he could direct a section from far without going into details. Occasionally he read a learned paper to an audience of high officials, occasionally he commented intelligently and in elegant language on a finished model submitted by an engineer, thus he maintained his reputation as an expert and, while bearing no responsibility, drew a salary of many thousands of roubles a month. Whenever a new project was born he made a speech at the christening kept away during the childhood sicknesses and growing pains, and reappeared for the funeral or the triumphant coming of age. He managed to have a fairly untroubled existence as he insisted to pursue each project personally at the Ministry but things changed in January 1948, the father of the people ordered the scrambler to be ready by first of may 1949. The slow progress on the scrambler brings back the thoughts of his convicted years. He feared a reoccurrence for the failure to deliver to the Supreme authority.

Major Shikin was the Security Officer who attached to much importance to himself and his work that he laid significant hypothetical possibilities of international spy networks operating in his domain. The author points out
here how the implementation is the opposite of reality. The free worker girls took all the liberty had affairs and sex under Shikin’s nose.

Solzhenitsyn has devoted considerable attention to the man behind the iron mask whom later on the inmates of Mavrino found that he was the special officer in charge of communications and had landed there for having fallen out of the good side of the Supreme authority. Mamurin had served with the utmost dedication and loyalty but misfortune befell upon him in the form of a static disrupted phone call between the Supreme commander and his counterpart in China. Mamurin struggled on the number seven project for hours on end to come back in the favour of the Supreme commander and reclaim his dignity.

Viktor Semyonovich Abakumov was the minister of state security, ‘he had worked as a messenger for the NKVD, he had managed perfectly well on his few years of primary schooling. He had acquired all the further education he needed by learning judo, and training in the gymnasium of the Dynamo Sports Club.

Later, in those years when there was a rapidly increasing demand for interrogators and personnel were constantly being replaced, Abakumov was found to have a flare for the work his long arms were a great asset when it came to “working over” people under questioning. This was the beginning of the great career. In seven years he had risen to be the head of the counter intelligence agency, SMERSH and now he was a minister. Not once in his long accent to the top had he ever felt at a disadvantage through lack of education, even in his present exalted position he managed to keep abreast of things well enough not to be fouled by his subordinates’. (Pg.76)

He had served as an instrument in Stalin’s regime, were fear was a very effective instrument to crush any form of rebellion or incompliance. He recommends the reinstallation of the death penalty to propagate fear. Since Stalin had in a spur of a moment put a cap on death penalty to contain
western criticism. The author also remarks on how the Supreme Commander jokes upon Abakumov with a life threat.

Abakumov is a task master with less education so ends up using threat as the most effective form to ensure that his subordinates do their jobs. Abakumov effectively used services of men like Mikhyl Dimitrivich (Mike) who during the war,

“had been assigned to the Navy and made an interrogator in the Security Section. He liked the work, and before long he had fabricated a case against a completely innocent war correspondent serving with the Northern Fleet. It was, however, such a crude and blatant frame-up that the Prosecutor’s office, which normally did not interfere in the work of the security forces, reported the matter to Abakumov. So the little SMERSH interrogator from the Northern Fleet was called in to give an account of himself. Thinking his last moment had come, he stepped timidly into Abakumov’s office. He came out an hour later looking important—he had been appointed to the central staff of SMERSH as a senior interrogator for special cases. From there on his star had been in the ascendant’. (Pg.77-78)

It is with characters like Abakumov and Dimitrivich that the author portrays how Stalin’s Russia was technically run by people who lacked in even basic education. Also the irony is of how these less educated administrators managed to control and dominate the intellectuals.

Valdimir Yerastovich Chelnov is also the author’s portrayal of himself to certain extend. An old mathematician arrested seventeen years ago and who when he had fill I a form, put down his nationality not as Russian but as prisoner, had applied his mind to many inventions, a former corresponding member of the academy of sciences and director of the Institute of Mathematics was kept at the disposal of Beria and sent to which ever special
prison had the most urgent problem to solve. As soon as he had solved it in principle and laid down the basic approach he was moved on.

Major Mishin incharge of Prison security and guard duty was a strong self imposed socialist who did his work sincerely but in Mavrino he developed a personal grudge towards Lev Rubin after Rubin refused to ally with him even though Rubin also had strong beliefs on socialism. Mishin was always on the look out to collect evidence against Rubin. The author has portrayed Mishin as the less opportunist working class trying to go up their career by showcasing their work in front of superiors and harboring a grudge towards those whom they consider a threat.

Spridon is yet another example of blunder. To make the valves and diodes glass blowers were needed. Spridon was skilled in the trade but used to work in a glass factory long time ago. When the authorities realized his inability to meet their demands at Mavrino they decided to send him back but Abakumov retained him at Mavrino as handyman. He swept the Mavrino grounds and worked his prison life sincerely. He was the only less educated inmate amongst the otherwise intellectual inmates.

Ivan, the glass blower was the substitute to Spridon. Ivan, according to his mother-in-law was a glorious workman and an even more glorious drunkard. He earned a great deal of money spent most of it on drinking, beat his wife and troubled the neighbours. He was offered three thousand roubles which was more than what was the standard wages but he struck to his demand of four thousand on which he was sent home, only to be arrested by the police for getting drunk and harassing the neighbours. The police never before showed up till then but he was presented the very next day in the court and sentenced to one year in prison, so Ivan was now blowing glass blubs for cathode tubes at Mavrino. Having been convicted once, he could not stay in
Moscow anymore, so he begged to continue at Mavrino, as a free worker for fifteen hundred roubles.

As the Christmas tree was announced Ivan blew two funny little glass hobgoblins who appeared to be armed with rifles, then he made a little cage out of glass rods and inside it on a silvery thread he hung a glass moon which tinkled sadly, the authors representation of misfortune.

Andrey Andreyevich Potapov is the author’s example of how Stalin saw no difference between friends and enemies. Potapov was an engineer who worked on the Dnieper dam power station. He was a dedicated workaholic uninfluenced by politics but loyal to his nation. His refusal to sign a declaration against his oath landed him at Mavrino with a ten years sentence. Markushev who had signed a similar declaration and did in fact work for the Germans also got ten years. That was Stalin’s hallmark, his style, that splendid disregard of differences that leveling of friends and enemies that made him a unique figure in the whole of human history.

Bobynin was no more important than an insect, an insignificant prisoner, a member of the lowest caste but an engineer yet Abakumov could not bring himself to distract Bobynin, much as he wanted to speak to him. The author explains how one could build the Empire State building, discipline the Prussian army, make a state hierarchy mightier than God, and yet fail to overcome the unaccountable spiritual superiority of certain human beings. There are soldiers of whom their company commanders are afraid, labours who intimidate their foremen, prisoners who make their prosecutors tremble. Bobynin knew this and while dealing with authorities made use of his power. The author voices the naked truth on the extent that a person could be pushed over through Bobynin’s perspective with Abakumov:
‘Listen, don’t go to far just because I choose to be polite to you……’

‘If you were rude to me I wouldn’t talk to you at all. You can shout at your colonels and your generals as much as you like because they’ve got plenty to lose.’

‘We can deal with your sort too if we have to.’

‘No you can’t,’ Bobynin’s piercing eyes flashed with hatred. ‘I’ve got nothing, see? Nothing! You can’t touch my wife and child---they were killed by a bomb. My parents are dead. I own nothing in the world except a handkerchief. These denims and these underwear---which hasn’t even got any buttons’----he bared his chest to show what he meant---‘is government issue. You took my freedom away a long time ago and you can’t give it back to me because you haven’t got it yourself. I’m forty-two years old. You gave me twenty-five years. I have done hard labour, I know what it is to have a number instead of a name, to be handcuffed, to be guarded by dogs, to work in a punitive brigade----What more can you do to me? You’d be the loser, I need a smoke.’ (Pg.87)

Stepanov the communist party moderator ay Mavrino in charge of conducting party promotional activities and is dedicated and sincerely follows all instructions handed down from headquarters and lives a very simple life on the outskirts of Moscow with his wife and a small farm, raising pigs. The author has represented him as the ultimate optimism of the communist regime. Stepanov sent all his three sons to study history but lost all three of them to the further most corners of Russia to become history teachers as there was no vacancies nearby and also because there was a rush of qualified history teachers and there was demand only for maths, science, technology teachers now.

Pyotr Makarygin is the author’s representation of the new order of bourgeois in Russia. A major general by rank, a lawyer by training with a long record of service as state the prosecuting attorney in special cases, such as, cases whose subject matter has made them unsuitable for public hearing and therefore
were dealt with in-camera. Although not exactly a famous prosecutor, he was very sound at his job and unwillingly firm in the execution of his duties.

Pyotr Makarygin has three daughters, all by his first wife. He had met her during the Civil War but she had died giving birth to their last daughter Clara. The three girls had been brought up by their stepmother who cared for them well and had succeeded in being what is known as a good mother to them. His daughter’s were named Danera, Datoma, and Clara. As was the fashion in those days;

‘Danera stood for ‘Daughter of the New Era’ and ‘Datoma stood for Daughter of the TOiling MAsses’, but Clara was just Clara, and nobody in the family could remember whether her name was supposed to mean anything. The girls had been born at two year intervals. The middle one, Datoma, finished school in 1940 and managed to outstrip her elder sister Danera somewhat by getting married a month before her in the spring of 1941. Datoma was a slim girl with blonde curls down to her shoulders and loved it when her fiancé took her dancing at the Metropole. Her father disapproved of her marrying so young, but he had to give his consent. His son-in-law was an extremely eligible young man; a brilliant graduate of the Diplomatic School with powerful connections, the son of a famous father who had been killed in the Civil War. He was Innokenty Volodin’. (Pg.235)

At the end of the war Makarygin was kept very busy in Europe and was not demobilized until the autumn of 1945, when he was appointed the state prosecutor and was immediately allocated a five room flat in the new MVD Housing Project at Kaluga Gate. On his arrival in Moscow he took his wife and daughter to inspect their new home. The mother and daughter wore dresses that rustled beneath their light raincoats, while Makarygin displayed a chest full of medals under his unbuttoned Generals overcoat.

The Kaluga Gate block of flats was crescent shaped with one wing on Bolshaya Kaluga Street, and the other on the ring road. The whole structure
was eight storied high with plans for a sixteen storied tower block, where the tenants could sun bathe on the roof which would be topped by a forty foot high statue of a pheasant woman. The building was still under completion. However some parts were hurried and completed for the MVD. When Pyotr Makarygin was visiting to see his allotted blocks the women cleaning the floors were ordered to make way and hurry up with their job by the foreman. Clara inquired about the social identity of the people doing the building work, the foreman smiled and said nothing but her father answered for the foreman, that prisoners were doing the work.

The author also describes how late in the night cattle trucks were shunted up to the transit prison so that the local inhabitants could not see anything.

“… lamps bobbing up and down and dogs yelping, with shouts, curses and blows, the escort guards packed the prisoners into cars, forty at a time, and took them off in their thousands to camps in Pechora, Inta, Vorkuta, Sovetskaya Gavan, Norilsk, Irkutsk, Chita, Krasnoyarsk, Novosibirsk, Central Asia, Karaganda, Jeskazgan, at lake Balkhash, on the river Irtysh, at Tobolsk, the Urals, Saratov, Vyatka, Vologda, Perm, Solvychegodsk, Rybinsk, Potma, Sukhobezvodninsk and many other lesser camps that were nameless. Smaller groups of a hundred or two at a time were taken in trucks to places near Moscow such as Serebranny, Bor, Khimki and Dmitrov, and to other locations in Moscow itself where, behind tall wooden fences wreathed in barbed wire, the new Moscow was being built…. ” (Pg. 208)

Makarygin found that in the four years of war his daughter had changed completely. Clara had seemed likely to be thoughtful and of the serious kind. She had turned out to be thoroughly wrongheaded, picking up stories that were not exactly favorable to his line of work. Year after year unanswered questions had piled up in her mind as there was no one she could talk to.
Makarygin’s flat was the envy of block number two. It consisted of two flats merged into one. Had two front doors (but one was boarded up), two baths, two lavatories, two corridors, two kitchens and five rooms.

Makarygin’s second wife Alevtina was aware that a family needs to be well fed; also that carpets and table linens are important status symbols and that cut glass is a fitting ornament for dinner parties. She had accumulated hers by collecting, from antique crystals confiscated from convicted prisons during the 20’s and 30’s. Occasionally to be found on sale in the special privilege shops for members of the legal profession, later from Latvia and Riga, from the second hand shops and flea markets, she had picked up a good deal in the way of furniture, glass, china and even some silver spoons. Her grand dinner table displayed a variety of crockery from the different ages of Europe.

Makarygin was paid a remarkable sum of eight thousand roubles a month whereas the char women got only two hundred and fifty roubles. The author here is quiet explicit to highlight the inequality in income for a society that strives to attain a global identity of equality among its citizens, Makarygin here defends his significant representation of bourgeois corruption, that life would not be worth living and equality did not mean, reducing everyone to nothing, but a situation where all should gain and prosper.

Danera, Makarygin’s elder daughter is the author’s representation of parenting without an ethical code of conduct and the resultant exercising ones freedom and what one could achieve with this kind of freedom. Danera was not a brilliant student at school, her mother had to cover up her poor marks in mathematics. After school and with no help from her father she became a student actress, at the institute of cinematography. Wherein, in her second year she married a well known director and evacuated with him to Alma-Ata. She played the heroine’s part in his film and divorced him for professional reasons, then got involved with a married man - a General in the army supply
services and set off with him for the battlefield. She toured war zones out of range of enemy shells and she lived unaware from the horrors of war at the home front. There she met Galakhov, a war correspondent, aspiring to be a writer. She toured the frontline with him too, gathering heroic copies of his newspaper. She then relinquished the General to his former wife and went back to Moscow with her new writer friend. Since then Galakhov has prospered. Danera held a literary salon and enjoyed a reputation as one of the most intelligent woman in Moscow.

Clara the third daughter of Makarygin was an average girl with an honest face. She seldom laughed, spoke little but preferred to listen. She finished school in Tashkent with no particular inclination towards any particular subject or career. When it came up to making up her mind on such a simple matter as to what she should study, she only knew that she wanted to do something where they did things rather than just talked. So she opted for one of the technological faculties, and since she wanted nothing to do with nasty, big, dirty machines, she landed up in electronics.

Lacking proper advice on career, Clara found after a while that she had made the wrong choice but she admitted this to no one, but determined to work hard and finish the course. Besides she was not the only one of her intake, to have chosen her subject at random. In grabbing at the golden opportunity of acquiring higher education, so many of her generation switched faculties; for example, if they failed to get into the institute of aviation they would sign on in veterinary surgery; if they were turned down by chemical engineering, they became paleontologists instead.

Clara served as a free worker at the Mavrino, she sympathized with the inmates there, for the conditions that they were in and eventually changed and stood up for their cause by using strong criticism in her arguments with her father. The author specifically cites the example were she uses a candle stand
to hammer down a lose nail in her sandal, a manner which her sophisticated father disapproved of. Solzhenitsyn uses Clara’s character as the sympathizing rebel youth struggling within the suffocating conditions of the new hypocritical bourgeois lifestyle.

Nadya, Gleb Nerzhin’s wife, had hardly spent a year together after getting married as it was their last year at the university. They had spent it working and taking their final exams. But immediately afterward their marriage war broke out. When Nadya had left Gleb at the warfront, driving away in a battered lorry, no one could have known that their separation was far from ending with the war but only really beginning.

The author uses Nadya’s character to expose the plight of deserving innocent persons, hard working citizens of the Soviet Union, a married woman, who has to dwell in denial because her husband was in prison. Solzhenitsyn himself had to divorce his wife, so that she could avoid harassment by authorities and seclusion by society. He remarried her later. Nadya in the novel is also portrayed as the biographical character of the author’s wife. Nadya is the wife of a sentenced soldier with whom no one preferred to associate with and those who associated were not aware of the truth. Her struggle to survive and her knowing that Gleb was alive, in prison was reason enough for her hope that sooner or later, they will be reunited and have a better life together. But fate was unexpectedly kind to her, as Gleb was not sent to some far away labor camp but to the Mavrino prison, in the outskirts of Moscow. A city in where she could hold on to, as a research student in the university and a part time job, which would keep her legally and geographically close to Mavrino. Prison visits were permitted but with restrictions that at times lacked reasons.

Nadya’s visit to meet Gleb changed her perspective from an emotional quest to the practical reality. She reaches the extremes of her isolation, in trying to
live with the hope of a better future together with Gleb. It is only after her return from the visit and her pondering over the last remark, which Gleb made, that he might be moved to another prison, it forces her to reconsider her situation as a woman living on a residence permit and a petty university job, having practically no real prospects or life to look forward to. This fact of her life breaks her down and brings her close to Shchagov.

Shchagov a soldier demobilized after the war is the author representation of the illusion that the soldiers at the front fight with. After his demobilization on his return with a year’s pay a bag full of German loot and the clothes he wore he realizes that life has changed in his home land. Even the soldiers who served in the army now wore different clothes and also acted differently. He realized that for a better future he had to complete his degree in mathematics to earn a good salary and get his doctorate. It had been his intention even before the war to make a career out of it. He sold of his German souvenirs in the market. He did not spend on fashionable clothes but wore the uniform he was demobilized in with army breeches and boots, a tunic made of English wool, still with its four ribbons and two wound stripes. All this carefully preserved aura of the front reminded Nadya very much of Gleb.

Shchagov’s perspective and ambitions take a turn when he visits the Makarygin’s house party where he comes to face the lives of the high profile Moscow socialites. He becomes the author’s representation of transformation of a person from a solider at the front to a reaper of benefits of corruption.

Yemina Larisa is the authors, portrayal of life in war torn Russia, of a young girl married to an MGB officer. It is the dullness of her life at home and the boor that her husband was that brings her closer to Sologdin. Her husband lived the conventional life that an employee of the state did. Coming home, listening to the radio, the Dynamo football matches and treating Larisa and
her mother like pheasants. There is also the fact that Sologdin told her how he had seized to write letters to his wife and have grown to ignore her existence.

Isaac Kagan had done a course in engineering but never taken his degree had been in charge of stores in a factory. He was passionately concerned about only one thing, how to make money. The MGB offered to enlist him as an informer for which he was not interested. This earned him the black mark with the MGB and they just bided their time. Under section 12 persons could be prosecuted for failing to inform the authorities of offences covered in the other sections of article 58, under which the offenders in his store were given ten years Kagan to got the same.

‘He had managed to have himself transferred to Mavrino from a labour camp thanks to his extraordinary ingenuity. At a difficult moment, when he was about to be thrown out of his comfortable job as an orderly in one of the prison huts and sent to fell trees with the rest, he had written a letter addressed to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Comrade Stalin, saying that, if given the opportunity by the Government, he would undertake to device a radio-control system for torpedo boats.

The ploy worked. No one would have shed a tear if Kagan had appealed for mercy on humanitarian grounds, but his offer to invent something of great military importance earned him an immediate transfer to Moscow. He was taken to Mavrino, and seen by various officials in MGB uniforms who were eager that he should at once start giving practical effect to his bold ideas. But, feasting now on the white bread and butter of the special prison, Kagan was in no hurry. With perfect composure he said that, since he was not himself a specialist on torpedoes, he would naturally require the service of someone who knew all about them. It took them two months to find another prisoner with expert knowledge of torpedoes, whereupon Kagan made the reasonable point that, not being himself a marine engineer, he would naturally require special assistance in this field too. After another two months they found him a prisoner who could help him out on the engineering side. At this point Kagan signed and said that radio wasn’t exactly his line either. There were plenty of radio engineers at Mavrino already and one of them was detailed to work for Kagan, who now gathered his
team together and said quite imperturbably, in a tone of voice which made it impossible to suspect that he might be pulling anybody’s legs: ‘Well, friends----now that you have all been brought together like this, you will be quite capable, by your combined efforts, of designing a form of radio control for torpedo boats, and it’s not for me to interfere and give advice to people who know their business as well as you do.’ Then, lo and behold, the three specialists were sent off to another special prison working for the navy, while Kagan stayed on in Mavrino (where everyone had meanwhile got used to him) as the man who looked after the accumulator room. (pg. 298)

The Mavrino prison, the central location of the novel is portrayed by the author as the icon of the hollow socialism like all great ideas mechanical in nature and ambitious in concept was the perfect example of philosophy gone wrong. In the pursuit of creating an identity of its own Marxism and Leninism had consumed entire generations of their own people. The Second World War brought in even the Germans as prisoners. Solzhenitsyn’s describes that the Mavrino was set up three years before the days in the novel and inmates were brought in with two train loads of equipments salvaged from Germany, mostly electronics that was damaged in transit and furniture for the military leaders.

At first it was not clear as to the purpose of this establishment but as things were put into place the purpose was revealed. Stalin’s Russia was desperate for a technological update and advantage to keep up with the global race.

But hollow as the author describes it the Mavrino laboratory depended on foreign magazines and random intellectuals to deliver the impossible. Fear being the thumb rule and manipulation being the instrument the inmates managed to time and again to show the administration a hypothetical success at the end of their venture.

In chapter 13 the author’s description of Mavrino is explicit.
‘They first set up a special prison in 1930 after the trial of the “Industrial Party”—they wanted to see how the scientists and technicians would work in prison. So the chief scientist in the first special prison was Ramzin. The experiment worked out very well. In normal conditions you could never have two top engineers or scientists on the same project—one would always oust the other in the fight over who was to get all the credits and the Stalin prize. That’s why all ordinary research teams consist of a colourless group around one brilliant head. But in prison it’s another thing. There’s no question of money or fame for anyone. It’s all share and share alike. You can have a dozen academic lions living together peacefully in one den, because they’ve nowhere else to go. They soon get bored just playing chess or sitting around smoking. So they set about inventing something. No end of original work has been done like that. This is the whole point of the special prison. (Pg.66-67)

Solzhenitsyn adds a bit of humour describing the purpose of high security and the systems installed within the Mavriino prison, which would otherwise have no logical reason. Only the “man in the iron mask” enjoyed special privilege. No other prisoner was allowed to spend even a moment in his work room without a free worker to watch him, for it was a principle of security that he would use any such moment to break into the steal safe with his pencil and photograph the secret documents inside with a camera concealed in his trouser button.

The privileges granted to Chelnov by hierarchy to the use of his own key became a major source of perpetual worry to the Security Officer Major Shikin. At night, when all the prisoners were safely locked away behind their double steal doors Shikin would go Chelnov’s work room, tap the walls, dance up and down on the floor boards and peer into the dusty space between the wall and the cupboard, he strongly disapproved of this exception to the rules. The char woman who checked the entry passes to the top secret sections had to struggle hard to keep awake as knitting socks was prohibited
both by regulations written on the wall and Shikin’s reminders. The check point was also a great nuisance to Colonel Yakonov, who was pestered all day long to sign passes.

The prison itself was a shadow of secrecy a structure chosen so as to raise no doubts about the inmates and their activities. A structure with permanently shut windows, dull and featureless. Even the locals who came on Sundays to the woods from Moscow would never have guessed about the tangle of broken careers, dashed hopes and thwarted emotions concealed behind the walls of that lonely old house. People in one room knew of nothing of those in the next, close neighbors were ignorant of each other and then there were the twenty two foolish unthinking women allowed in as free workers who flouted the security instructions and carried on furtive love affairs or to pity on prisoners and passed messages to their families.

‘For their recreation the prisoners had the run of ten rooms on two floors, the upper and lower corridors, a narrow wooden staircase linking the two floors and a lavatory under the staircase. Recreation consisted in allowing the prisoners to lie on their bunks as much as they liked (even to sleep, if they could amid so much noise), to walk up and down their rooms or even from room to room wearing nothing but their underwear if they liked, to smoke freely in the corridors, to argue about politics in front of the informers and to use the lavatory without let or hindrance. (Anyone who has done a long stretch in prison and has to relieve himself twice a day to order can judge the full value of this blissful sort of freedom). The real value of the ‘recreation’ was that the time was your own and not the state’s. For that reason these recreation periods were genuinely restful. (Pg. 295)

Mavrino hence was a representation of the impracticality that the Russian authorities indulged in to try and maintain their position in a global stage in which they had no more roles to play.
The author has presented a rather broad view, of the post-war Russia, in random descriptions, but with specific details of each scene. Politics, its ambitions, effects and consequences are addressed in a very remarkable indirect approach. The reader cannot but avoid seeing the author’s intention, to present the complete picture throughout the length of the novel. Although the story in the novel spans across just a few days, it does not fall short of portraying the time period from pre and post World War 2 in Russia.

Politics influenced every citizen of Russia and directly controlled their lives. Though the author does not mention much about the plight of children he does mention the quality of schooling, in the letter Vanya receives from his wife, she describes the kind of language that Valerik his grandson uses, and the headmaster inquiring on why Manya could not control her six year old son, who was now almost a hooligan, who one day, called his grandmother a bitch. The plight of education is addressed prominently by Solzhenitsyn time and again throughout the novel.

Simochka had graduated from the institute of communication but like many of her friends they had not learnt anything at all. This was because of various reasons, the girls had done very little mathematics or physics at school. In the final year it had come to their ears that the headmaster was always reprimanding teachers for failing too many students, the students realized that they will scrape through even if they knew nothing. So when the time came to go to the university they were completely lost in the jungle of mathematics and radio technology. Often they had no time to study at all. Every autumn they were taken for a month or so to dig potatoes in the collective farms, the rest of the year they attended classes lasting from 8 to 10 hours a day with no time left to digest the lecture notes.

On Monday evenings they had political studies where they were supposed to attend some meetings, obligatory civic activity, wall newspaper, organizing
workers concert sponsored by the institute. Time had also to be found for house work, shopping, looking after one’s clothes and for an occasional evening at a cinema, a theater, or a dance. When the exams came Simochka, like the other girls, wrote cribs hid them in her clothes, smuggled them in and used them at the right moment. The supervisors could have easily noticed these and caught the act but they themselves were over worked with committees, meetings and writing various memorandums and reports for the dean and the rector, moreover failing their students meant extra work, examining them a second time. So it was advisable for them to act prudent and pass out the students with higher marks. Simochka and her friends developed a sinking feeling that they had no liking for the subject and found it a terrible bore and trembled at the thought of actually having to do any responsible work in radio technology.

PhD’s and thesis were approved and rejected not on the basis of the authenticity of their content, but depended on the references contained in them. The political influence was strongly imposed even on research and scholarly work done by researchers and academicians. Direct foreign references were forced to be changed to general references and Russia or russified scholar’s full names had to be distinguished, to bring out his patriotism and immortal services. If a person or his work turned out to be anti Russia then all references to the person and his work were forced to be erased. Such was the plight of genuine hard working intellects. The PhD students survived on an allowance which barely made ends meet. At times some of them managed to make extra money by doing fringe jobs offered to them at the university. Due to which they could afford to rewrite and photocopy their thesis and keep resubmitting them. Thesis were rarely accepted but kept on getting extensions. The teaching of literature in school had consisted entirely of forced inclusion of instructions, in educating on the
meanings of works from writers like Goncharov, Tolstoy, Stepnyak-Kravchinsky, Dostoyevsky, Sukhovo-Kobylin and Pushkin, emphasis was laid to teach about their political attitudes and the ways in which they responded to the pressures of the laws of class struggle. These authors had often gone wrong, and made mistakes, but yet school children had to write essays about them and their works without making any spelling mistakes or putting a comma in the wrong place. What education actually delivered to this young generation was a question nobody bothered or dared to ask.

To talk on this all the hostel and other places frequented by students became recruiting grounds for the internal security agencies. Students like Musa were initially tried to be lured into becoming informants on the activities of their friends and colleagues, with talks on patriotism and national security but when failed to deliver they resorted to threatening the students with dire consequences with their academic performances damaging their prospects of a better career. Not stopping at this the recruiting officers would psychologically threaten the students by handling a gun in front of Musa, who is terrified by the sight of a lethal weapon.

The author here does not lose all hope and portrays Musa as a strong girl, who is not terrified by the gun or dying but more worried of not being able to complete her thesis which was almost done and being expelled from the university because of a negative remark was more fearful.

The author finds a comparison when Musa points out what makes the characters in Russian literature different from those in the western literature? In the west they have no time for anything except their careers, money and fame but in Russia they don’t even need food and drink all they seek is justice.
On the other hand Ruska the young inmate is used by the author to point out the imperfections in the security systems. Ruska could buy medals and identifications in Tashkent for a sum of money, a practice which could easily fool the administration. The persons in this business were also making good money openly. Ruska also learnt from his mistakes and became almost an expert on the strategies of taking advantage from the loop holes in the system. When the police set him free only to arrest him again on a higher charge he managed to evade them for two years by travelling the country on forged identifications and papers. Ruska also spent three months in prison under a false name, while across the country there was an all union warrant against his original identity. Ruska finds humor in how the police was looking for him all over when he was living right under their supervision.

The author sympathizes with Ruska here as he was serving in Mavrino due to his honest attempt to start a clean life. He was arrested trying to get educated in a university with his original identity and papers. He does not much approve of honesty and so is planning to escape from Mavrino at the right opportunity and return back to living on a different identity, the method that now suits him best.

Time and again Solzhenitsyn has in the novel lead the reader in the other direction but all the while promoting to understand the otherwise. Chapter 51 directly outlines the violation of basic human rights stating examples of the play enacted within the novel where a trial is performed by the inmates for entertainment.

‘The trial which had just been staged in the room was about the fate of prisoners of war: that is, about all the Soviet soldiers first ineptly lead by their generals into captivity and then callously abandoned by Stalin to die of hunger in German camps. The survivors, on returning to Russia at the end of the war, had been send straight to the labour camps and thus provided the main new contingent of forced labour in 1945 and 1946. Adamson recognized in theory the
tragedy of what had happened to them, but they were only one of many categories of prisoners, and by no means the most remarkable. They were interesting mainly because they had seen something of life abroad, and where, therefore, as Potapov joked, ‘living false witnesses’, but they were none the less a dreary, pathetic lot---- helpless victims of war rather than men who had voluntarily chosen to stake their lives for political reasons’. (Pg. 310-11)

Solzhenitsyn in chapter 54 details how the prison system in Russia had devised a mechanism which was almost a routine and well synchronized and executed the art of fooling the international community. The showcasing of the quality of life within the prison was a routine designed to fool the agencies trying to find out the truth of human rights violations within Russia. How Madam R returns from Russia convinced that everything is perfect and she has witnessed the truth is how the author has time and again criticized the west.

The guided tour and the inmates were part of a well planned system that Stalin maintained in his prison mechanism so as to not lose his hold on the administrative system falling victim to the inefficient western monitoring and verification concepts.

Death was never an issue as there were few emotions attached with it. The whole struggle was to remain alive and die with whatever dignity one feels is worth it.

“People die in camp as they do else were. And if it is time to die does it make any difference where you die”. (Pg. 374)

When he talks about human rights, Solzhenitsyn himself having experienced the system of confinement and failed attempts on his life becomes biographical in the contents of the novel.
The reference to various forms of bread; the black bread and the white bread made from coarse Siberian grain which was food for the prisoners and helpings of the boiled potatoes and soup was all that they could look forward too. Only the inmates of the special prison could treat themselves from the gastronome where the inmates could order goods from stores from Moscow, out of the money they earned or saved.

‘two prisoners from the Lubyanka to the ‘Sukhanov Villa’---a sinister prison on the outskirts of Moscow. Few returned from it to the Lubyanka, and many left it only for the madhouse or the grave. Nadelashin had not worked there himself, but had heard that even the food was used as a sophisticated means of torture: instead of the ordinary course, indigestible prison fare, the prisoners were put on a delicate appetizing convalescent-home diet; the torture consisted in the size of the portions—half a saucer of bouillon, an eighth of a cutlet, two shreds of roast potato. It was not nourishment but a remainder of what they had lost. This was much more depressing than the usual bowl of watery soup and helped to drive them out of their minds’. (Pg.No. 150)

Though the denims was a western invention it became the most popular garment or the preferred daily wear in Mavrino but since all looked alike the prisoners customized the denims to identify like a button less or some other form of identification. This hypocritic attitude in the official criticism of the west exposed the dual standards that the Russian regime adopted.

Nerzbin’s strong stand that he does not draw his conclusions on philosophies that he has read but from the stories that he has heard from the people in the prison and that he has read ancient philosophies and in these books he finds parallel of his own latest discoveries. Solzhenitsyn here again points a finger to the confinement of the thinking capacity of the human mind of which philosophy is the basis of a civilized society.
The author triggers the thought of how history has not helped by what Ruska says in chapter 14:

‘History is so monotonous it makes you sick to read it. The more decent and honest a man is the worse he gets treated by his compatriots. The Roman consul Spurius Cassius Viscellinus wanted to give land to the common people, and the common people sent him to his death. Spurius Melius wanted to give bread to the hungry and he was executed because they said he was trying to get himself made Emperor. The Consul Marcus Manlius, who woke up at the cackling of those famous geese and saved the Capitol, was executed as a traitor. Hannibal was exiled by Carthage, they confiscated his property and leveled his house to the ground, though we should never have heard of the place without him. It all sounds so familiar. They put Gauius Nevius in fetters to stop him writing plays in which he said what he thought. And the Aetolians proclaimed an amnesty to lure émigrés back and then put them to death. Even the Romans discovered it was more economical to feed a slave than to starve him, but that was afterwards forgotten. History is a farce from beginning to end. It’s not even a matter of truth or error. There are no signposts to anywhere, and there’s nowhere to go’. (Pg. 71-72)

Solzhenitsyn’s The First Circle would have been incomplete without touching the core issue of communism and its implications. He in chapter 23 takes up this issue by narrating about religion in the form of a dialogue between Yakonov and Agnia where the discussion revolves around church, Christianity, a reference to Mohammedanism, the historical operation of the clergy and how Christianity managed to survive the various regimes.

An indirect reference to how the state controlled and gave limited freedom to the clergy, showed how the freedom of faith was also influenced by the political will which would otherwise have been an individual’s right in any other country. The other reference to this secret not being exposed can also be drawn from the staged visit of the priest in the prison by Madam R, he
stumbles into the room being inspected and behaves as if he is a regular visitor.

Agnia’s faith in her today with her ignorance of history is a representation of the younger generation’s lack of concern, vision and attitude towards their own future. Solzhenitsyn herein forces the reader to reflect upon the hopeless helplessness without mentioning anything about it.

Another bleak reference to the skills of artisans is portrayed by the author in chapter 25 where Nadelashin who had tailoring in his blood, loud rustling and the feel of cloth like his father and grandfather had aspired to become a fine tailor but eventually joined the security forces and had become a warder. His aspirations to his passion surfaced when he chances upon a conversation of two prisoners.

‘They were cursing the Government and the Tsar, but not the Government of the day and not Stalin---they were cursing Tsar Peter the Great! What had he done to them? Yet there they were, cursing him up and down! One of the two objected, among other things, to his having deprived the Russians of their national dress, thereby depriving them of a part of their national identity. He listed the traditional clothes, knowledgeably and in detail----what they looked like and on what occasions they were worn----and he assured his companion that it was not too late to revive some of them, combining them in a dignified and tasteful way with contemporary fashions, which would be much better than blindly copying Paris. The other prisoner made a joke----they could still joke! ----about two people being needed for this: a brilliant tailor to design them, and a fashionable singer who would wear the clothes and be photographed in them, after which the whole of Russia would take them up.

Nadelashin was all the more interested because tailoring was still his secret hobby. After his duty in the prison corridor with its crazy feverish atmosphere, he was calmed by the rustling cloth, the soft pliant folds and the innocuousness of the work.

He made clothes for his children, dresses for his wife, suits for himself. But he kept it a secret.
It was thought to be no work for a soldier.’ (Pg. 150-151)

The author does not specify that similar was the plight of other artisans and skilled workers.

The engraver in chapter 32 who wrote short stories on pieces of paper about life in the prison us thinking, was it creativity, seeking a vent due to the small words of encouragement or was it a vent to the kind of life that the prisoners faced inside the Mavrino. The question remains unanswered but the author does enclose the skill of microscopic handwriting that the engraver used.

Solzhenitsyn questions the influence that the Russian system of education and media reporting had on children when he refers to Gleb Nerhzin in particular:

‘At thirteen and fourteen Gleb did not run out to play after he had done his homework but sat down to read the newspapers. He knew the names and positions of all the party leaders, all the commanders of the Red Army, all the Soviet ambassadors abroad and all the foreign ambassadors in Moscow. He read all the speeches at Party congresses, all the memoirs of old Bolsheviks and the successive histories of the Party--- of which there had been several, all different. In the fourth class at school they were already being told about the rudiments of political economy, and in the fifth grade they had a civics lesson nearly every day. Somebody gave him Lenin’s To the Memory of Herzen and he read it avidly.

Either because his young mind was still fresh or because he read other things besides newspapers, he could clearly detect the falsity in all the inordinate, gushing praise of one man, always that one man. If he was so perfect, did that mean that everybody else was no good? This seemed so unlikely to Gleb that he could not bring himself to share in the general enthusiasm’. (Pg. 203)

Nerhzin’s perspective about his situation is reason enough to question any man’s common ambitions. When he says that learning to make a shoe may also lead him to a God forsaken place in Siberia or in Krasnoyarsk or in
Angara, where that is the only skill required to remain alive. There is no place for high mathematical skills. The author’s reference that ‘a sentence is an elastic thing’ is a reflection of how intellectuals are put in a no minus use situation and prolonged to infinity.

All though the entire system designed by Stalin and his loyalists is to ensure a mechanism that is free of corruption the question the author asks is, where does the fellow in the market in Tashkent source his brand new medals complete with blank citation certificates? --- Either it is from an authentic source or may be entirely counterfeit. The availability of such items exposes the systems shortcomings and ethics. One more example of this can be of Makarygin in chapter 58, who defends his fat salary in comparison to what the char woman gets, throwing up the entire concept of equality by his justification that one’s entire: “Your first duty is to create your own happiness. If you are happy, you’ll make others happy too……” (Pg.No. 371)

Solzhenitsyn points out the failure of the core principle of the communist’s philosophy in the perspective that Ruska put forward to Clara.

‘Everyone should, but not everyone dose. Listen, Clara, let me put it quite plainly. Why did we have a revolution? To do away with inequality! What were the Russian people sick and tired of? Privilege! Some were dressed in rags and others in sable coats; some went on foot and others rode in carriages; some slaved away in factories while others ate themselves sick in restaurants. Right?

‘Of course.’

‘Very well, then. In that case, why are people still so keen on privilege? And how can you talk about me? I was just a kid---I could only go by what I saw grownups doing---and it was really something, believe me! In the small town in Kazakhstan where I worked for a while, do you think the wives of the local bigwigs ever went to the ordinary shops? Never! I remember once being sent to the house of the local Party Secretary to deliver a crate of macaroni. A whole crate---it had never been opened. You can bet this wasn’t the first time---or the last!’
‘I know, it’s awful! That’s always made me sick---do you believe me?’

‘Of course I believe you. I’d sooner believe a human being than a book published in a million copies. Privilege spreads like the plague. Once people are allowed to buy in special shops, they’ll never go anywhere else. Once they start being treated in special clinics, they’ll never want anything else. Once they have their own cars, they’ll never travel any other way. And if there’s any swank place “for members only”---people will break their necks to get in.’

‘Yes I know, and it’s awful.’

‘Any bastards who can build a fence round himself is bound to do it. When he was a kid, maybe, he thought it was alright to climb a rich man’s fence and steal his apples; now he puts up a great big fence of his own to keep everyone out, and he doesn’t see why he shouldn’t.’ (Pg. 233)

The First Circle is not only a book that focuses on the plight of its inmates but time and again the author has managed to rope in one or other forms of art. The painting of the oak tree ravaged and clinging from the cliff with its twisted branches was the visual expression of Solzhenitsyn’s perspective of an individual’s willingness to struggle to survive till the very end and against all odds. Nerhzin’s inquisitiveness on the landscapes in the paintings by Kondrashov that depicted the beauty of the Russian countryside is an ironical reference to the stark contrast of the sights that an inmate is limited to.

Galakhov’s dilemma on trying to write his own feelings was a struggle which he fought constantly. To fight not to get influenced by the surroundings, a letter, a newspaper article or Tolstoy’s works which were infectious. Every time he started a new book he was hopeful and swore to himself and to his friends that nothing and no one would prevent him and he would write a genuine book. He set about it with enthusiasm and very soon he noticed that he was not alone. Swimming in front of him was the ever clearer image of the one he was writing for and through whose eyes he reread every paragraph he
had just written. This habit of reviewing was not his friend, reader, or any famous reviewer but the reviewer in chief (Stalin). The author’s biographical role in The First Circle is a testimony to the struggle he faced in the attempts to tell the world outside of Russia about the plight of his nation.

Marxism although influential failed to impose the core concept of equality where some people had mansions where others had sheds, some had cars whereas others had holes in their shoes.

In chapter 61 Lev Rubin endorsed the fact that ‘the people’ was an artificial concept and unjustified generalization and that every people are divided into classes which even change their nature in the course of time. The author’s take on capitalism by citing example of the Ford assembly line that turned workers to machines was not out of turn but a concept that Stalin would have adopted if he was to implement a mass baptism of the Russian people and presented it as a new triumph for atheist propaganda.

The author’s perception about religion is of hope. The Christmas tree and the celebration are significant that faith itself prevents a man from losing his hope towards a better life with an uncertain future. In chapter 21 the author points out the obvious that though death and life were out of human control the aspirations of man blinded by his human limitations does not stop from playing God. Stalin’s mentioned as “leader elect of God” in the church prayers was reason enough to allow the church to survive. The word ‘supreme’ used as an adjective gave a sense of power to the new renamed ‘Supreme Soviet’.

The author points out on various occasions about the varying levels of faith, which is otherwise a form of sanity in the civilized world, existing under a forcefully imposed philosophical social system.
Although *The First Circle* is an elaborate piece of work, the few days around which the story revolves is Christmas. The Mavrino prison had different faiths that had a common reason to keep hope ignited. The Germans and the Latvians who were not ideologically imprisoned by Stalin and his influence were monitored on their religious activities. The fear of a counter influence of Christianity on the new order of Russia was always under observation termed as religious fanaticism.

In chapter 29 Solzhenitsyn does not accept Christianity as reliable and points out a major flaw. Rubin’s poem on how --

“Moses led the Jews through the wilderness emits privations, thrust and hunger and how the people furiously protested and rebelled, but they were wrong and Moses, who knew that in the end they would come to the Promised Land, was right.

Chelnov’s logic on the geography of the region: from the Nile to Jerusalem was 300 miles at the most, so that, even resting on Sabbath, they could easily have covered the distance in three weeks! Wasn’t it therefore to be supposed that for the rest of the forty years Moses had not so much led them as misled them?” (Pg. 172—173)

Solzhenitsyn’s skill of penning this work of fiction to sound almost biographical or a documentation of history is obvious from the description of the acoustic laboratory and the characters involved in the post war Russia.

“The Acoustic Laboratory was a wide, high-ceilinged room with several windows. It was untidy and crammed with electronic instruments on wooden shelves, shiny aluminum stands, assembly benches, new plywood cabinets made in a Moscow factory and comfortable desks requisitioned in Germany.” (Pg.19)

The interdisciplinary approach to incorporate various points of view during the course of the length of the novel is portrayed in Rubin’s remark that they
have got mathematicians, physicists, chemists, radio engineers, telephone engineers, artists, translators, book binders, architects, and even a geologist who got in by mistake.

Valentine invented a crude radio so they could listen to music and prerecorded speeches while working. Solzhenitsyn also adds to how Stalin could also have portrayed language as an instrument of production, for instance a lathe or a railway or post office because after all it was a form of communication. But since there was no second opinion to Stalin’s this interpretation he was hesitant to classify language as an instrument of production like any other machine.

The concept of the Acoustic Laboratory and the science involved was not something new to the rest of the world, the drawings, diagrams, concepts were more or less reinventions from what was already known or published in the west. Magazines and works were either smuggled in or were recovered from the war torn Germany.

The project of classifying and defining voice types excited Rubin. As a scholar he felt the first thrill of a new challenge: tracing a criminal by his voice print. So far there had been only finger prints, a science which had taken a long time to develop.

Inventions had made their way in art like the large completed picture that had been commissioned for the main entrance hall: A.S.Popov demonstrating the first wireless telegraphy apparatus to Admiral Makarov. Kondrashov Ivanov’s plight as an artist is compared to how land owners once kept talented serfs. Art was limited to fulfilling the demands of the new bourgeois order. Decorating hallways with paintings and portraits that directly or otherwise reflected the glory of the supreme authority, the plight of the literary
contributors, the likes of which the author himself was, is portrayed in just a simple paragraph in chapter 42:

It so happened that a certain unrecognized and unpublished author once wrote a novel and invited a couple of dozen friends to hear him read it aloud---something in the nature of a gathering at a nineteenth century literary salon. But the novel cost every member of its audience a twenty-five year sentence of corrective labour. Among them had been Kondrashov-Ivanov, the great-grandson of the Decembrist Kondrashov who had been sentenced to twenty years exile for his part in the uprising, and who had acquired fame from the touching devotion of a French governess who loved him so much that she had joined him in Siberia. (Pg. 255)

Letters play a crucial role when characters are isolated and at times they are the only means of expression and communication. In The First Circle Solzhenitsyn uses this instrument during various occasions to weave his characters together and also to embed ideas for the reader. Sologdin describes the challenges of writing a letter and why he can’t write to his wife any longer.

We often write letters much too carelessly and then we’re surprised when people grow away from us. My wife hasn’t seen me for years but she felt I was there. Letters have been the only link, my only means of keeping her for twelve years. (Pg.182)

Nadya’s note to Nerzhin though brief helps the author from narrating elaborate chapters to portray her plight. The hopeless helplessness is obvious in this note. The layer of meaning is almost transparent.

Beloved, however many years go by and however many storms we have to weather’ (Nadya often expressed herself in rather exalted language) ‘I shall be faithful to you as long as I live. They say that you “politicals” are being transferred. You will be far away, for many long years we shall be not able to see each other or even steal a look at each other through the barbed wire. If it helps to make that
grim life out there any easier for you, I don’t mind if you go with other women, if you’re unfaithful to me. You have my permission, my dear, in fact I insist on it. Anything to keep your spirits up! I’m not afraid; I know you’ll come back to me, won’t you?’ (Pg. 209-210)

Letters had emotions knitted into them. Musa could not concentrate on her letter to her parents and was conscious of the hollowness her letter contained; she feared her parents would sense the lies and know that something was worrying her. Letters have a special role in Mavrino as the author explains the procedure of giving letters to the prisoners with a certain amount of mystery.

Nothing could have been further from the commonplace business of delivery by a postman wandering from house to house like a tramp. Here letters were handed over behind closed doors by the Security Officer. After he had read it to satisfy himself that it contained no sinful or seditious matter, the Security Officer would make a short speech and give the prisoner his letter with the envelope conspicuously open, thus ensuring that any lingering sense of privacy was destroyed. A letter that had gone through so many hands, and being so closely scanned for incriminating material before being disfigured by the black smudge of the censor’s stamp, lost what little personal meaning it ever had and took on the aspect of an official document. (In some special prisons this was understood so well that prisoners were not allowed to keep their letters but only to read them through once----- in exceptional cases twice----- in Security Officer’s presence. The recipient was then made to sign his letter as an indication that he had read. If anybody tried to make notes while reading a letter from his wife or mother he was regarded with the same suspicion as if he had attempted to copy a secret military document. Prisoners receiving photographs from home were also only allowed to look at them. After signature they were then filed away in the prisoner’s record. (Pg. 465)

Though the author has tried to attach all the possible emotions contained in a letter he kills them when he describes how letters are treated.
The letters carried with them the intensities of human bonds and the influence of time. Ariadna’s letter to her engineer father whom she had not met since she was eight portrays a pure disconnect in their relationship as life had moved on outside the Mavrino. Solzhenitsyn pitches Musa’s letter that had lies to prevent her parents from feeling sad against Ariadna’s letter that contained truth but still failed to make the engineer happy.

The author does not stop at the emotions contained in the letters but also narrates how mission tries to dictate to Vanya on what kind of a reply he should write to cheer up his wife building up a false hope. This penetration of the administration into the private emotions of the inmates to maintain the state of affairs was a senseless, meaningless status towards destiny.

Although relationships were fragile and women were employed as free workers within the Mavrino it was obvious that physical indulgence between characters was unavoidable. The accidental touching of cheeks between Nerzhin and Simochka leading to Nerzhin kissing her on the lips, made her body feel faint. For the first time in her life a man had kissed her in this way. The cunningly wrought chain broke at the link found by a women’s heart. In the later part of the novel she gets herself a dress and prepares herself to indulge into a relationship with a man whose destiny he himself was not sure of.

Solzhenitsyn’s remark on how whenever anyone tells a story about an innocent girl all the listeners are just waiting for her to lose her virginity before the end. That is the whole point of the story for the prisoner. Isolation takes its toll and like a blind man wanting to be reassured by those who could see that the sky is still blue and the grass still green. A prisoner needs to know that there are still real, live attractive women in the world and lucky fellows who make love to them.
Sologdin and Larsia’s indulgence is one more aquittance that is forbidden. The time they spend together during the day helps characters know each other personally and many free workers like Larsia and Simochka look up to these prisoners who are intelligent and have no grave reason to be in prison for long. The possibility of a normal relationship that may someday materialize or the satisfaction of a casual relationship is something that the girls could look forward to. But the men who indulge were also more matured and constantly aware of the risks involved.

Solzhenitsyn also portrays a different perspective from the engravers first wife.

‘Nadya recognized her from a previous visit. Married to the engraver, she had been his first wife whom he had later remarried. She was quite ready to tell her story: she had always adored her husband and regarded him as a very clever man; but he had complained about her psychological complexes and had left her and their child to go and live with another woman, a redhead, with whom he had lived for three years until the war had come and he had been conscripted. He had been taken prisoner early in the war but had lived in Germany as a free man and there too, alas, he had had his little distractions. When he was released from captivity he had been arrested at the frontier and sentenced to ten years. He had sent a message from Butyrki to his redhead that he was in prison and wanted food parcels, but she had said: ‘Better unfaithful to me than a traitor to his country—I could have forgiven him that!, So he had turned with entreaty to his first wife, who had brought him parcels and gone to visit him---and now he was begging her forgiveness and swearing to love her forever. Nadya recalled how, in telling her story, the engraver’s wife had said bitterly that if your husband was in prison, the best way to make sure he appreciated you properly when he came out was to be unfaithful to him. Otherwise he would think there must be something the matter with you, because no one had wanted you while he had been gone.’

(Pg. 213)
Makarygin’s daughter Clara was a grown up woman learning her ways around the men’s world. Her narrowing proximity with the blue eyed Ruska and his influence on her was the author’s representation of the human side of life inside the prison.

The young men Clara met outside the prison were already well launched on their careers and their whole demeanor as well as their dress and conversation, was calculated to make them look dignified. But in Ruska’s company she felt young and wanted to let herself go. As she secretly observed him, she felt more and more drawn to him and could not believe that either he or the good natured Zemelya were in fact the dangerous criminals Major Shikin had said they were. (Pg. 248)

Her curiosity about Ruska is fulfilled by Ruska’s narration on himself. Her comfort with him made her break all the rules and give in to his demand. And the kiss they shared had left her tingling all over, certainly not from shame but with the thought that if this was happiness, then it was most unsettling.

Even outside the prison the girls in the hostel also associate with men at the cost of mental agony. The author points this as a means of survival and a feeling of protection.

The separated Nadya subconsciously craved for a relationship to keep her spirits high and avoid from going into a depression. Shchagov filled that place and though their relationship was casual it was only human as the author would justify. The need for a companion is focused upon in each relationship that the author has woven into The First Circle forcing upon the reader to imagine the consequences in the absence of these indulgences.

The author voices his views on the future of socialism and its definition. And the term
“the people” was an artificial concept, an unjustified generalization, and that every people is divided into classes, which even change their nature in the course of time.

To seek the key to an understanding of life among the peasants was quite futile, because only the proletariat was consistently revolutionary in its outlook; the future belonged to it and only to its collectivism and selflessness could give life a higher meaning.

On the other hand “the people” was just a general term for all those dull, drab, uncouth individuals who were totally absorbed in their joyless daily round. The great temple of the human spirit could not be built on such foundations. Only outstanding individuals shining forth like lonely stars in the dark firmament of our existence could embody the higher meaning of life’. (Pg.386-387)

The First Circle was written at a time when Stalin was in power and the experiences of that era, so the novel does not reach a conclusive end or offer a solution to the state of affairs the author elaborates upon in the novel. The hopeless helpless situation is obvious from the manner in which the intellectuals are contained by power and fear to which there is no immediate relief. The methods put into place by Abakumov were in fact pulling a nation down than helping to built it.

It was only the character that mattered and this was something that everybody had to forge for himself, by constant efforts over the years. Only this could make oneself into a human being and hence be regarded as a tiny part of one’s people. The fact, that Stalin in his ambition to become the leader of leaders had in fact driven his people and the future of his nation backwards.

In Bobylin’s outburst to Abakumov he tells that,

“you can tell old you-know –who –up there----that you only have power over people so long as you don’t take everything away from them. When you have robbed a man of everything he is no longer in your power he is free again”. (pg. 87)
Unlike the west which exercised democracy and its spirit of freedom was by the people and for the people in its true sense and no leader had a permanent status unless the people desired so. In contrast the absence of a system to replace a government was absent in socialist form of governance. Although the author outside the first circle criticized the freedom exercised in the west he was also partly appreciative of the contained discipline imposed upon in the socialist regime. Does that make him a socialist to? or is The First Circle a product of his narrative skills and a vent for his frustrations. Although the book is an elaborate description of the state of affairs and sporadic outbursts of analytical philosophies it does not contain any substantial solutions to the future of Russia. Stalin being accused as the root cause and his ambitions as the main hurdle towards liberation there is no hope that if he was other person things would have been different. In a way the novel is a documentation of the state of affairs and nothing more.

**Conclusion**

The author has made a massive attempt and a sincere effort through *The First Circle* to integrate the politically isolated Soviet Nation post the World War II which was under the rule of Stalin. It is a novel written to let the world know about the kind of life not only of the intellectuals but also down to the poor farm laborers, with specific emphasis on the youth. He depicts the absolute helpless hopeless condition under which a nation was struggling to sustain and heading towards an unknown future.

Not that any solutions are provided to any of the situations, nor is it a call for any external forces to help change the situation, but *The First Circle* is a sincere attempt by the author to provoke the thinking process of the Russian citizen to come to terms with the long term consequences of the administrative decay and the negativity of the socialist regime. The author
also illustrates the incident when a well established mechanism is also in place to dupe an international team paying a visit to verify prison conditions.

Solzhenitsyn has emphasized highly on the mentoring of youth of contemporary Russia, introduction of faith in some form of religion, and to give a moral and ethical value to their human existence. The length of the novel and detailed description of the anguish in which each segment of the society, workers and also the persons within the administrative system are condemned to, a desperate need to deliver the basic human right to be free to live.

The lack of progress is also portrayed by the slow pace of growth and life in denial of the rest of the world, the reference to the safekeeping of the western technical magazines and tinkering with the remains of salvaged World War II equipments is more of a ridicule of the progress of the technical and scientific progress of Russia under the rule of Stalin.

The lack of vision and administrative responsibility dominated by the flattery of a ruler who is totally isolated by the facts of human needs for survival is effectively elaborated upon. The extreme inhuman manner in which each anti-administrative situation is efficiently handled is explained in precision.

Though very few conclusions of each situation is presented it is entirely upon the reader to come to conclusions, though a basic awareness on the world wars and the natural limitations of Russia can give the reader a better insight into the extreme living conditions. Although Russia struggled to implement the Socialist Ideology while the west rejected it, there was not much scope for modification or adaptation within the political community. The suppression of the intellectual community was the policy adopted to sustain control over the citizens who had neither resource nor the freedom to own any.
The general feeling of lack of meaning to their own life was a common sentiment in almost all the characters in *The First Circle* the hope of freedom was a forbidden wish.

The author being a direct victim addressed each character and situation as a debate that may not necessarily conclude. Though the novel has a very thin storyline the content is rich with multiple stories told on the sidelines of the main plot, as just how a caller on the phone is identified and put in prison is obviously not what Alexander Solytzin wrote this novel for.

The First circle may not have any relevance for rest of the free world as its contents are limited to the natural, geographical, historical, and political conditions but, it does acquaint us with the Stalin’s era in post war Russia without directly criticizing it.

Though it is advisable for the reader to have some knowledge on the history of the World Wars and Russia, to relish the novel better, the manner in which the author has woven the plot truly justifies the length and the multiple layers of revelations concealed in the sub-stories. These characteristics of *The First Circle* qualify it in all aspects as belonging to the genre the Novel of Ideas.

The final novel of this thesis to be analyzed is Mr. Sammler’s Planet by Saul Bellow which reflects on the degradations of the city life while looking deep into the suffering of the human soul. Mr. Sammler’s Planet is a reflection which can be associated with by a reader at any point of the modern world. A novel that is not conclusive, but can be explained as inclusive of the experiences of its reader, having comprehensive instincts.
Chapter 5

Mr. Sammler’s Planet (1970), Saul Bellow

It is perfectly true that ‘Jewish Writers in America’ missed what should have been for them the central event of their time, the destruction of European Jewry. I can’t say how our responsibility can be assessed. We should have reckoned more fully, more deeply with it.

-Saul Bellow wrote to Cynthia Ozick in 1987.

Solomon Bellow was a Canadian born American writer (10 June 1915 - 5 April 2005). He is one of the most distinguished American novelists of the latter half of the twentieth century. Born of Russian immigrant parents, Lescha and Abraham Bellow, in Lachive, Quebec on July 10th 1915, he grew up in Montreal and Chicago. As a child he was bright and learnt Hebrew, Yiddish, French and English. At the age of eight a brief illness from a respiratory infection taught him self-reliance and provided him with the opportunity to satisfy his hunger for reading. He decided to be a writer when he first read Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s cabin. When he was nine, his family moved to Chicago, a city that he loved and formed the background for many of his novels.

Bellow’s father was an onion importer. He also worked in a bakery, as a coal delivery man and as a bootlegger. His mother died when he was seventeen. He was left with his father and brother Maurice. His mother was deeply religious, and wanted Saul to become a rabbi or a concert violinist. But he rebelled against what he later called the “suffocating orthodoxy” of his religious upbringing and began writing at a young age.

Bellow’s lifelong love for the Bible began when he was four, when he learned Hebrew. He also grew up reading William Shakespeare and the great Russian