Four

Women and Wedlock
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For centuries, women have been exploited and victimised by male-dominated societies in India and all over the world. Woman has been made to subserve the interests of Man at all costs, dispossessed of her soul, mind and self and reduced to lead a vegetable life, simply breeding and bringing up children. Taking of Woman M.Kumaraswamy Raju says,

Designated "weaker sex", hypocritically "fair sex" she is pilloried on the altar of marriage and family and this predicament of hers has not changed. Attempts to improve the lot of women by reformers and government legislation resulted in checking exploitation to a degree but the evil persists (1993, 78).

The continuing trend of exploitation of woman by man provokes her to revolt against the social system and aspire for its reconstitution under a more equitable dispensation. The awareness of the need for liberation from the shackles of marital bondage, has been felt by many an educated woman, in the India of the post-Independence era.
Nayantara Sahgal in her novels presents the emergence of the new woman who is no longer, "a sex object and glamour girl, fed on fake dreams of perpetual youth lulled into passive role that requires no individuality" (Sahgal 19 July 1970), but someone who can claim to be man's equal and honoured partner. As a liberal humanist, she "pleads for the new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centredness" (Asnani 3.1 (1978): 153). Different types of couples are presented in her novels who live behind a facade apparently basking in hypocritical terms of endearment and gestures of love in marriage, while several women in them undergo moments of excruciating mental torture deep within themselves, like Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House. There are certainly tradition-bound wives who patiently put up with everything in marriage and do not think of quitting the family structure as they are hamstrung in the fabric of Indian culture. However, some of them do dare to get over their state of dreary suffering in marriage.

Having experienced the agony of marital discord which resulted in a divorce in her own life, Sahgal
gives a vivid account of an Indian woman's plight of the present day and her quest for individual freedom and self-realisation.

In Sahgal's early novels the women portrayed on the whole are "very conventional traditional heroines, even rather boring and I don't view them as very dynamic or at all revolutionary" (Varalakshmi 1993a, 9). For instance, the women in her first novel *A Time To Be Happy* are all a bunch of extremely submissive housekeepers except Maya and Ammaji. In her second novel *This Time of Morning* there is only one woman, Mira, who remains very conventional amidst several other women portrayed in the novel. In the later novels of Sahgal, women are not so submissive as in her early ones except perhaps Nishi in *Rich Like Us* which happens to be her sixth novel and Anna Hansen in her seventh novel, *Plans for Departure*. But Nishi and Anna are exceptions rather than the rule. Sahgal's early women are supine and utterly submissive looking after the welfare of their husbands and children. They are all totally accommodative and self-effacing, trying their best to live in silent resentments and only occasional bickerings and confrontations.
As Sahgal's maiden novel *A Time To Be Happy* was written during the happiest time in India's political history namely India's Independence which also incidentally synchronised with the happiest days of the novelist's married life, the presentation of the married life in this novel is extremely happy and harmonious. The narrator's parents are "wonderfully suited to each other" (TH 8). In their fifty years of married life, "inspite of their disagreements .... they adjusted to each other's foibles, maintaining an outward harmony" (TH 8). Lakshmi Narayan is portrayed as "content to be a woman glorifying in her own femininity" (TH 73) and devoted to her husband Govind Narayan who in turn is happy to return all her love. "Lakshmi had responded to his devotion by providing him with a smoothly run household" (TH 73). Her daughter-in-law Devaki is "an efficient, an altogether suited wife for a young business man [Girish]" (TH 72) and is almost petted as a daughter would be, by her mother-in-law Lakshmi. Even the initial conflict between Govind Narayan's son Sanad who is extremely westernised, and his patriotic wife Kusum is resolved as they come to terms in course of time, accommodating themselves to each other's way of life. Sanad learns Hindi, dons Khaddar and learns to spin while Kusum begins to attend
clubs, wear high-heels and drink cocktails. Jasbir Jain is quite right when she observes,

The early months of their marriage are tense and unhappy. They are able to overcome some of these difficulties because they both are genuinely interested in overcoming them (1994a, 33).

In the early phase of her writing, feminist issues are not given any special priority by Sahgal. It is clearly evident in the case of Sir Harilal Mathur who marries for the second time in his desire to have a male heir with the consent of his wife and the approval of the society. The narrator tamely remarks, "she's quite happy. As it happens, he married again with her consent" (TH 162). As Prabha, Harilal's first wife "knew her husband wanted a son and she knew she couldn't give him one" (TH 162), she quite willingly consents to his second marriage as the Hindu law of that day too allowed it. Abbe J.A.Dubois, a great French scholar of the nineteenth century and a student of Indian subjects has made the following pertinent observation in his book Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies:

..... a man can legally marry a second wife, his first wife being alive; and that is when,
after he has lived for a long time with his wife, she is certified to be barren or if she had borne only female children. But even in this case, before a man contracts a second marriage it is necessary that he should obtain the consent of the first (1985, 207-208).

It is also significant that the narrator of the novel does not show any shock or reaction at Harilal having two wives as he tells a foreigner McIvor, in a matter-of-fact tone: "Harilal happens to have two wives" (TH 162). Harilal's polygamy is not presented in the novel as leading to any disharmony in the marital relationship of Prabha, who, as a conventional wife accepts the whole situation and cordially welcomes "his new wife as a sister and they live in the same house" (TH 162). She quite willingly allows Lady Nathur "make public appearances with Harilal" (TH 162) including on important public occasions like her own daughter's marriage as she finds it difficult to entertain the westerners due to her lack of proficiency in English. Again it must be noted that even though Harilal insists on a male child, he is not totally chauvinistic. He does not show any disrespect or disregard to his first wife. He continues to care for her and he would "never outgrow his need for her" (TH 201). In fact, the narrator goes out of his way to underline the strength
of his basic relationship with his first wife. In the stormy moments of his life, "she was his home, his haven. With her he could abandon all pretence, all ambition and most blissfully himself" (TH 201). Prabha is ready to vouchsafe for his love of their daughter Usha too:

He is very fond of Usha.... He had wanted a son badly. But Usha has brought us much joy. He adores her. He settled two lakhs on her at her marriage (TH 200).

In this novel Sahgal is not at all feministic in her presentation of Prabha who endorses in a matter-of-fact manner polygamy, just for the sake of getting a male child in the family, knowing fully well the fact that the second marriage does in no way guarantee a male child. We may venture to say that the marriage of Harilal and Prabha is saved from disintegration and dissolution just because of the mutual love, candour and profound understanding and tenderness of the couple involved. Thus, in her first novel Sahgal presents women in society as leading happy and harmonious lives, who accept unquestioningly the roles tradition has assigned them.
However, Sahgal gradually begins to deal with the problems of women who are not satisfied with the quality of their marital relationship in her next novel *This Time of Morning*. Here she presents Kailas's wife Mira as leading a happy and contented life like her women in the first novel. Mira seems to be the last representative of the dying generation of traditional Indian women. She is the exceptional one among the wives in high society who are hypersensitive and yearning for freedom. In fact, Kailas is "grateful for Mira's quiet house-keeping" (*TTM* 14). His marriage has "endured all the ups and downs and insecurity and frequent partings of a political career in a country struggling to be free" (*TTM* 14), just because his wife Mira belongs "to a fast disappearing race of women for whom endurance was a test of character" (*TTM* 147). Mira identifies herself totally with her husband's political cause.

It is quite significant that Sahgal's third and fourth novels are highly autobiographical. As the novelist underwent certain bitter experiences in her own personal life, which eventually resulted in bitter marital disharmony and divorce, the next two novels, *Storm in Chandigarh* and *The Day in Shadow* present women
as more conspicuously progressive and rebellious. If the women are utterly submissive and traditional in the first two novels, they develop a mood for confrontation and ultimately revolt in the third and fourth novels. Her fifth novel *A Situation in New Delhi* and her sixth one *Rich Like Us* are prominently political. In her fifth novel *A Situation in New Delhi* the focus is more on the disturbed political situation in New Delhi after the death of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru rather than on any man-woman relationship. Sahgal's next novel *Rich Like Us* is also political, as it deals with the impact of Emergency on society. Hence, for a cogent discussion of man-woman relationship in Sahgal, we have to turn our attention to her novels written after the 40's. In *Rich Like Us* Sahgal vehemently comments upon the enforcement of sterilization in India and the government's Twenty Point Programme.

In *Rich Like Us*, Devikins' wife is portrayed as submissive and accommodative. Much against her will, she submits herself even to the process of child-bearing for the sake of her husband. As for her delivering the children Sahgal writes:

A stranger laid the child she hadn't wanted, and next year the second child she did not
want, like trophies beside her and took them away to the trophy room when she shut her eyes pretending sleep or death (RLU 234).

Nishi suppresses her resentment and "she could smile and nod at telegrams, gifts and flowers" (RLU 234). Nishi gets actively involved in the new sterilization programme exhorting almost every man in the household to rush to the vasectomy camp, not even sparing Kumar, an elderly man, in support of the Prime Minister's Twenty-Point-Programme. Rose, admonishes Nishi for her over-enthusiasm: "This man is your father's age. Would you drag your father to a vasectomy camp?" (RLU 89). Nishi does all this to please the government and, she feels, that for "getting Dev ahead, the emergency had to be supported" (RLU 89). She is also very hospitable, in giving lavish dinners to her husband's foreign collaborator Newman and Ravi Kachru, the Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Industry. She diligently looks after the needs of her father-in-law Ram, who has had a paralytic stroke. "At home Nishi went to Daddy-ji's room to check if the nurse was on duty as she should be" (RLU 24). When Rose, her mother-in-law, is in need of money she appeals to Dev, "Devikins, Mummy wants some money" (RLU 78). She readily accompanies Rose on her evening walks and never lets her feel
lonely as can be seen from her words: "Mummy, you shouldn't be alone so much, why didn't you call me, I'd have come walking with you,..." (RLU 79). Once she tells Rose, "Mummy, make me a list. I'll go into town tomorrow and get you what you need" (RLU 80). As Varalakshmi puts it, "Married to Dev, she swiftly fits into the slot of the wife" (1993d, 50).

**Plans for Departure**, Sahgal's penultimate novel to date, focuses its critical attention on the subject of marital relationship once again. In this work, three western couples, namely, the Brewsters, the Crofts and the Nicholases are presented to the readers. In contrast to the first two couples who experience intense discord in their relationships, the third pair alone leads a comparatively happier, and harmonious life. While Anna spends three months in Himapur during her eleven months' visit to India, she develops a deep love for Henry Brewster, the District Magistrate and frankly confesses her admiration in her letters from India to Nicholas, her fiance, and even after her marriage she says, "There is the anti-imperialistic side of Henry I will always admire" (PD 191). However, as she suspects Brewster to be the murderer of his wife she hesitates to marry him: "And a murderer I never
could have married. Or even loved, once I knew" (PD 191). Nicholas accepts Anna as she returns to him because "to Nicholas's certain knowledge it had been a purely formal encounter" (PD 200). Nicholas never nags or ill-treats his wife over her pre-marital relationship with Brewster as Inder does Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh*. He is quite happy that the woman he loves has come back to him. Soon after their wedding, he tells Anna, "You were so bowled over by your noble District Magistrate, I thought you'd never come back" (PD 189). In the latter part of the novel, Anna is seen as a well-adjusted wife, despite Nicholas's obsession with war. Nicholas "had been away from home for most of the war and too war-racked, in any case, to register her curious condition" (PD 199). Anna and Nicholas take interest in politics and even contest in an election. Interestingly enough, "They became the only couple to sit on opposite sides of the House, living their triumphant parallel lives" (PD 213). Shyam M. Asnani and Ramesh Chadha observe "The success of their marital life is based on mutual give-and-take. They are willing to acknowledge each other's independent identity" (1992, 70).
In her latest novel *Mistaken Identity* Sahgal presents Bhushan’s mother as a very conventional woman who has to endure the fate of a victim of the conventional child-marriage. Bhushan refers to his mother's child-marriage thus:

The child had been pledged at five, delivered at menstruation to this house.... she had run to hide whenever there was talk of marriage. Her fingers had had to be pried [sic] loose from her mother's neck when it was time to say good-bye (MI 27).

Bhushan’s mother is even prepared to face the ignominy of the polygamy of her husband, but later, emerges boldly as a rebel, breaking the traditional boundaries by eloping with her lover Yusuf. Neena Arora is quite right in saying Bhushan's mother "suddenly creates a stir in the orthodox society of early twentieth century and elopes for good with a communist lover" (1993a, 176).

In the light of the above episodes, it becomes evident that Sahgal's early novels portray a great number of conventional -- and contented -- wives, compared to her later novels. There is an obvious evolution in the vision of the novelist's later novels
which present to their readers more sophisticated issues and themes of alienation, betrayal, marital discord and promiscuity.

A good number of Sahgal's novels mainly explore the plight of discontented wives of the urban upper class. They often feel neglected and victimized and yearn for love and warmth from their life-partners. Most of Sahgal's women suffer in marriage because their husbands remain locked up in their solitary cells of careers and do not make any serious attempt to reach out to them. Thus, in due course, such a lack of communication between the husband and wife widens the gulf between the couple, eventually leading to marital disharmony. Even in Sahgal's first novel *A Time To Be Happy* which mainly deals with congenial and cordial marital relationships, Maya, the wife of Harish, the Deputy Collector, finds it difficult to adjust to her husband as they are temperamentally poles apart. In contrast to her subdued nature, Harish is flamboyant and outgoing. The narrator observes:

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She had the cool purity of eucalyptus, as compared with his extravagant gulmohur. She was the mirror-smooth lake to his rushing water-fall (TH 42).
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It is true that Maya attends grand parties with Harish, yet she feels alienated within, and heads for home on the flimsiest of grounds. To her, the most important thing in life is "a response... not a good one or an approving one, necessarily, just a response of any kind" (TH 67). It is her emotional isolation in marriage that eggs Maya to move closer with the narrator. M.K.Naik is not far off the mark when he points out:

Maya whose traditional upbringing makes her marriage to the anglicised Harish "a sterile, if exotic bloom" is the first of Sahgal's trapped women seeking escape into extra-marital arms (1982, 239).

However, their mutual empathy is of little avail so far as Maya is concerned, as the narrator is a chaste Gandhian, devoted to the cause of national independence. Their relationship comes to a dead end as they come to realise that the marital bonds are indissoluble.

Unlike her counterparts in Sahgal's later novels, Maya takes life positively. In the teeth of stout opposition from her relatives, she spurns all the riches they offer and joins the Indian National
Congress and finds inner peace in propagating Gandhian principles among the poor villagers. Veena, her niece tells the narrator, "She's away all day in a refugee camp.... Aunt Maya goes about her work so cool and composed" (TB 251-252). Without fretting over her unhappy, fruitless married life, Maya sets about building another idealistic world of her own, in order to realise sublimation by herself as an individual.

Another discontented woman in the same novel is Ammaji. Maya’s mother-in-law, who is capable of a lot of frolicsome fun and comic charm and is yet unable to find any harmony between the views of her husband and her own. Her husband "an indolent, pleasure-loving man" (TH 28) never understands his wife’s "nun-like disdain of luxury" (TH 28). Eventhough she often talks of the days she had been the mistress of the house, she had never actually enjoyed that position. Both Ammaji and her daughter-in-law undergo sufferings in their respective marriages because of temperamental incompatibility.

In her next novel This Time of Morning Sahgal portrays Saira as a discontented wife again. Saira, the pretty, unorthodox wife of Saleem, an I.F.S. officer is
quite unhappy with her restricted life in Delhi as well as lack of material comforts like a commodious home etc., and she desperately wants her husband to try for a posting abroad. She often complains to Saleem, "We shall have to live in these dreadful flats every time we come home from abroad" (TTM 12). She wishes to have a home of her own like her friend, the Rani of Mirpur. Saira has an "easy-going and affectionate" (TTM 103) husband, who adores her and never quarrels with her. He even puts up with his highly westernised wife who wishes to attend parties. Once Saleem is quite disturbed seeing the brother of Saira’s friend Sally, planting a kiss on Saira’s cheek in a party and is annoyed at "the bloody pseudo-western public kissing" (TTM 105). But Saleem, at that point, does not quarrel with Saira as he has absolute confidence in her and he never thinks of his wife as 'a separate person':

She was as much a part of him as an eye or an arm.... She was his life, his love and his reason, and he could no more think of hurting her than of deliberately mangling himself (TTM 103).

This clearly shows that frustrations on materialistic grounds, need not embitter a basically sound marital relationship.
If material discontentment leads Saira to unhappiness and disaster in This Time of Morning, in the novel immediately succeeding it namely, Storm in Chandigarh, the disgruntled wife Mara, who is blessed with all the worldly comforts in life like beauty, wealth and social status, suffers from an acute sense of emotional void in her life. Her marriage with the sweet-tempered and considerate Jit, also has its moments of estrangements and misgivings. It is Jit's gentleness which makes her dissatisfied in her wedlock. Mara fails to respond to her timid but affectionate husband and is drawn towards the sensual warmth and energy of Inder. It is said in the novel, "she didn't want to be cherished and affection made no impression on her. He thought bitterly that she'd understand brute force" (SC 133).

Mara utilises her freedom in marriage to cultivate an illicit affair with Inder, causing a great discord in her family. She turns to Inder to get "the best of each, the softness of Jit and the hardness of Inder" (SC 55). But soon, Mara finds Inder a hypocrite, utterly lacking in understanding. Mara puts an end to her brief affair with Inder and turns to Jit for help. Jit, with passive acceptance, is still quite willing to
help Mara out of her emotional jungle and tells her, "let me help you, to find your way out, my love" (SC 232). Jit and Mara who had "no intimacies except in bed" (SC 232) earlier, now come closer. As in the case of Mara, "once the canker of distrust is gone and life is allowed to be governed by the light of sweet reasonableness, marital relations are apt to find a stabler level" (Malhotra 1971, 234). In due course, a new understanding paves the way for a greater communion between Jit and Mara. Such a possibility is beyond the reach of the other pairs namely Saroj and Inder; and Leela and Vishal Dubeyi, in the same novel. While Saroj emerges as a rebellious woman walking boldly out of her marital bond. Leela meets with a premature death because of her own self-repression and secretiveness.

Being a divorcee herself, Sahgal deals with the predicament of a divorced woman Simrit in authentic terms in her novel *The Day in Shadow* which depicts the sufferings of another woman who dares to walk out of her marriage. Simrit, on the other hand, faces the bitter fate of suffering and social disapprobation within the limits of her marriage and in society at large, due to her passive nature and excessive submissiveness.
Unlike her earlier novels, marital issues do not hog the lime light in Sahgal's fifth novel *A Situation in New Delhi*. Nevertheless, having experienced the pangs of marital disharmony in her personal life, Sahgal is always conscious of her own plight while casting her characters in the novel she was writing around this period. In *A Situation in New Delhi*, for instance, no true companionship exists between Usman Ali, the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University and his wife, Nadira. It is Nadira's obsession with sensual pleasures and innate possessiveness that causes disharmony in the marriage of the pair. On the other hand, Usman Ali needs a woman purely for intellectual companionship: "when he took a woman he took a mind as well. He had no use for just bodies" (*SND* 33), while Nadira "remained so determinedly a body" (*SND* 33). In this context, Jasbir Jain's comment is not far off the mark, though not adequately expressive: "The failure of their relationship is.... due to the limitations of their individual natures" (1994a, 45). As a Vice-Chancellor having to confront problems of students' unrest, violence and rape in the university campus, Usman needs to share freely his deepest feelings with his wife, but it all becomes impossible for him. In Sahgal's own
Nadira was durable as mistress material, problematic as a wife.... His enjoyment of her.... remained within the ambit of their physical relationship (SND 34).

It does not take long for Usman to find that his wife is "not with him in his friendships and loyalties in the passions of his mind and heart, in his central concerns" (SND 33). In course of time, he is drawn towards Devi, the Minister of Education, who can communicate with him with ease and respond to his intellectual preoccupations. This rouses the green-eyed monster in Nadira, who suspects Devi's hand in Usman's resignation of his Vice-Chancellorship. Once she bursts out: "But she does have an influence, a terrifying influence on everything you do" (SND 136). Usman tries his best to set her mind at ease saying "I am not Devi's love. I admire her. Has that really ever come between you and me?" (SND 136). In the end, Nadira feels a sense of profound regret and comes back to Usman, with a new resolution and with "a will to understand" (SND 138). Eventhough the voluptuous Nadira craves for physical and emotional intimacy with her husband, she never trespasses the limits of traditional marital bond unlike Sahgal's permissive women figuring
in her early novels, like Uma in *This Time of Morning* and Leela Dubey in *Storm in Chandigarh*. Just like Mara who returns to her husband Jit in *Storm in Chandigarh*, Nadira too comes back with a greater degree of self-realisation, into a resurrected marital bond. Though Nadira is presented as a belligerent woman in the early part of the novel, she becomes totally submissive in the end, realizing the futility of all her desires and finding a deeper fulfilment in her husband's exploits in politics.

Sahgal's sixth novel *Rich Like Us*, while presenting an account of the harassment caused to all sections of Indian society during the period of National Emergency under Indira Gandhi, highlights the exploitations of women in society. During this phase, as a mature artist Sahgal depicts the sufferings of a woman who is forced by circumstances, to live with a polygamous husband. While in her early novel *A Time To Be Happy* Sir Harilal Mathur marries a second time with the full consent of his wife and is not targeted for any specific criticism, in this later novel Ram, a business tycoon who, being totally insensitive to the feelings of his first wife Mona, brings home Rose, a London Cockney as his second wife, comes under a
scathing attack. His wife Mona, who has recently given birth to a male child, finds Ram's act utterly reprehensible and unacceptable. The polygamy of Ram is presented by Sahgal as anti-traditional and even illegal in the seventies. Our legal system too prohibits polygamy and the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 makes bigamy an offence. According to this Act, "No marriage can be solemnised between two persons if either party has a living spouse" (Ahuja 1992, 13). However, Ram considers polygamy as his own exclusive prerogative. The novel registers its unequivocal judgement in a statement: "They [Rose and Ram] never did have a marriage she or her parents would have called legal, him having a wife already" (RLU 45). Yet, to Ram, who considers "Hindu marriage is not a contract, it's a sacrament" (RLU 61), polygamy is also not at all an unnatural custom, but an acceptable one from the point of view of religion. He glibly says to Rose, who, as a Christian, is rather hesitant to accept an already married man, "My religion lets a man have more than one wife" (RLU 44). His wife Mona hailing from a typically conservative Punjabi home, finds no way out of her plight and takes refuge in prayers. Inspite of the grave injustice meted out to her, she keeps on praying and fasting for her husband's long
life. Sahgal presents this dramatic situation with humour as well as pointed irony:

She [Rose] and Mona, Ram's wife, live on different floors.... The first one Rose remembered was the elaborate prayer chanted in thanksgiving by Mona's priest for Ram's safe return.... the mistress fasted for her husband's long life and prosperity (RLU 46).

Mona expresses her displeasure only through her loud lamentations. When Ram goes down at nights "to console and comfort Mona in her weeping fits" (RLU 62), and stays with her for a few hours, or sometimes the whole night, Rose feels "angry, bitter, wronged" (RLU 62). Though Mona and Rose start resenting each other, they are not at all willing to give up Ram whom they both love passionately. Rose confides in her friend Bugs, "The only thing I couldn't bear in any circumstances would be a divorce .... I could never bear to lose Ram" (RLU 217). However, as Ram develops an illicit affair with Marcella, an upper-class English woman, Mona feels totally ignored and tries to commit suicide by throwing herself into a fire from which she is fortunately saved by Rose. M.Kumaraswamy Raju's observation that "Even her anger for Rose turns into love and comraderie [sic] after she was saved from death by Rose" (1993, 82) is quite pertinent in this
context. After this incident, there is a greater understanding between Mona and Rose in discussing their family affairs. Rose, who at one stage wished for Mona's death, is at last much upset when Mona actually dies due to cancer years later, at Delhi. At her deathbed, Mona entrusts her son and her would-be daughter-in-law to Rose. It is the curious realization of their common plight as victims in the hands of the same man, that ultimately brings Mona and Rose together, though they both resign themselves to their respective lots of subdued womanhood.

Sahgal's *Plans for Departure* which followed *Rich Like Us* is clearly a step forward in the novelist's efforts to present a convincing portrayal of liberated women characters. Due to lack of healthy understanding and proper communication, the marital relationship between Marlowe Croft and Lucilla (Lulu) is jeopardized, despite the fact they were in love with each other even before their marriage. The trouble begins when Lulu falls in love with Marlowe Croft, an American preacher, who displays singular courage in questioning her father's right to terrorize his workers. She is also greatly moved by Marlowe Croft's sermons in the country church. Eventually, Lulu marries
him with paternal consent, soon after his release from jail for meddling with her father's administration. However, Lulu does not marry him as M.G. Hegde says, "under hypnotic spell" (1989, 136) but is drawn irresistibly by his commitment to the ideals he professes. Soon conflicts arise between them, mainly due to Marlowe's utter devotion to his soul-saving activities, and obsession with the building of a church at Himapur. He tells Lulu "The church will be built, and no mistake. I've staked my life my very soul on it. In time, this will be a Christian land" (PD 81). Thus, Marlowe's excessive preoccupation with his work begins to tell on Lulu's patience, and she makes no bones of her displeasure:

I'm tired of hearing about the church from morning till night. The way you go on, one would think you're planning to build the Canterbury Cathedral instead of a little wooden shack where you'll have no one but coolies (PD 81).

Henry Brewster, the District Magistrate, figuring in the novel wonders in a moment of exasperation, how "the two such diametrically opposed nuisances could ever have got together at any level, much less in matrimony" (PD 31). It very gradually dawns on Lulu that, "He [Marlowe Croft] had never been dependent on her in any
vital sense but not till tonight had she understood his complete autonomy" (PD 146).

In other words, Marlowe has married Lulu simply for assisting him in his missionary activities. Feeling utterly neglected, she resolves at last, to leave him. Marlowe's baptizing a sweeper's child and contemplating on the adoption of the child proves to be the 'last straw' in the eyes of his wife. Marlowe is equally uncompromising on the issue: "No one under this roof is an untouchable. I want you to put that undemocratic idea right out of your mind, Lulu" (PD 85). However, her leaving Himapur turns out to be not so easy as she has already been curiously vulnerable to the charm of the place:

She had been a fool to imagine she could leave Himapur. She had never made a plan in her life or taken a journey alone, and Himapur must be the world's hardest place to leave. It was like discovering she was a cripple (PD 148).

Lulu decides to go to her parents in the hills without prior warning, with a request that they should take her to England. However, before she could leave Himapur, she meets with her fatal fall, down a ravine. Though Marlowe presents the event as an accident, Anna Hansen,
their neighbour, has her own reservations on the matter, as no one heard Lulu crying for help and "Anna had never seen wheel ruts on this walk. There was scarcely a visible foot-path" (PD 168). Further, Lulu's fatal fall does not disfigure her and there are no marks of a struggle on her. There are also hints in the novel to suggest that Lulu could have been murdered by Marlowe who comes to know of her plans for departure. Marlowe Croft does not seem unduly sad over Lulu's death. He resumes his routine of looking after the school-children, church-work and so on, within a spell of a single day, obviously putting his wife's death behind him. Sahgal remarks wryly at this point: "The school, the 'church' and zealous reform could surely wait twenty-four hours in memory of his wife" (PD 167). Lulu's inner discontentment finding expression in her querulous disposition had resulted in her estrangement from her neighbours. Moreover, Lulu is childless and feels utterly frustrated in marriage.

Thus, in Sahgal's fictional world, marriage is often presented as an experience of conflict, frustration and a long-drawn period of stress, through which characters mature and eventually find a stable identity of their own. Its central burden seems to be the plight of
women in the prison-house of loveless marriages and women's resistance and eventual rebellion against the institution of marriage. Further, Sahgal's female protagonists are neither passive nor conventional. Nor are they "pativratas", ready for instant surrender and devotional service to their husbands. On the whole, they are liberated women rebelling against the inequalities and injustices interwoven in the traditional texture of marital life in India. Rashmi in This Time of Morning, Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh, Simrit in The Day in Shadow and Bhushan Singh's mother in Mistaken Identity, all certainly have a mind and will of their own, and they are all brave enough to question the established norms of conventional marriage. However, Chaman Nahal observes that Sahgal's women are not outright rebels against marriage 'per se', but women who simply seek a better quality in marriage:

In each case the attack is not against the institution of marriage but against the inequality and injustice that is forced upon women by men using the institution of marriage (1985, 102).

As a writer, Sahgal never ceases to be an adult. In the first novel A Time To Be Happy, her concern is
self-expression within marriage as most of the women in the novel are docile and never emerge as individuals. But in her next novel This Time of Morning Sahgal widens her area of concern to the kind of freedom women desire, outside marriage. The female characters in this novel are products of the changed social condition in India and hence, they emerge as characters endowed with greater individuality. For instance, the vivacious and outgoing Rashmi in This Time of Morning, the only daughter of Kailas and Mira, comes back to her parents, having deserted her discontented husband, Dalip an I.F.S. Officer, contemplating divorce. And, Rakesh her childhood friend, meeting Rashmi after a long interval, observes, "Now she looks displaced. It was marriage, then, that had altered her, made her a moth trapped in cement" (TTM 35). Rashmi feels so alienated and distraught in her married life that she simply cannot get on with her husband who differs from her so much in temperament, and is almost on the verge of schizophrenia:

A part of her had married a man, loved him, given herself to the task of making a home and suffered the wilderness that only two mismatched people could create (TTM 123).
Curiously enough, Rashmi experiences all the pangs of a divided self, a vital segment of her being clamouring for separation and release from her husband, and the other part still cherishing the savoured moments of togetherness in the early years of her marriage: "I don't wish him harm but he and I -- she could not even think 'we' any longer -- cannot go on together" (TTM 13). Finally, Rashmi resolves to divorce Dalip. Her decision on divorce baffles her conservative mother Mira, who is a veritable personification of the ageless spirit of female submission in the Indian context of marriage. Naturally, Mira is utterly at a loss to empathize with her daughter's bold decision, as it is "a mortal blow to all she held sacred" (TTM 146):

What reason under heaven could sever the marriage bond? Women stayed married, had since time immemorial stayed married, under every conceivable circumstance, to brutal insensitive husbands, to lunatics and lepers. And Dalip, God forbid, was none of these things (TTM 146).

To Mira, Rashmi's decision is "a tasteless parody of a transplanted modernity" (TTM 146). However, it is Kailas, Rashmi's father, who understands his daughter's agony and tells his bewildered wife, "We've known for a long time that she has been unhappy.... If her agony
is too much for Rashmi, we cannot question her decision" (TTM 146-147). Kailas sees in Rashmi's decision "a torrential release from ancient grooves and bonds, ancient pain and suppression" (TTM 214). He also recalls, "how shaken he had been by her admission of hurt and unhappiness, how much her coming back saddened him" (TTM 214). As a loving father, "as long as he lived he had this function to help her when she needed him" (TTM 147). Sensing her father's empathy, Rashmi boldly asks him to talk to her mother about her decision to work and live alone in Delhi.

Eventually, an irresistible urge for communication in confidence, stemming from a certain emotional vulnerability in her, impels Rashmi to move closely with Neil Berensen, a Norwegian Architect of the Peace Institute. This, finally, nudges her to share moments of "closeness" on bed with him: "..... though she lay in Neil's arms they were strangers still, a man and a woman sharing an interlude of closeness" (TTM 158). What Rashmi looks for in Neil, is a life of intense, absorbing and congenial relationship. She tells Neil, "We have to invade each other's privacy a little, force things a little or we shall, stay just where we are" (TTM 156). Commenting on the validity of Rashmi's
brief love affair with Neil, Jasbir Jain lays stress, quite rightly, on her essential need for articulating her emotions in love:

Rashmi's divorce and her relationship with Neil are not a 'tasteless parody of a transplanted modernity' but an inner need for communication and involvement which remain unsatisfied. Sex is only of secondary importance (6.1 Jan. 1978: 43).

Soon Rashmi breaks off her relationship with Neil too, as he fails to satisfy her inmost need for communication. In fact, Rashmi shows a lot of interest concerning Neil's divorced wife Narta and his children. Similarly, she in turn, wants to be understood and accepted in totality by Neil. But Neil wants her "as he found her and was not concerned about the tangle from which she had emerged" (TTM 157). It is little wonder then that Rashmi feels dissatisfied soon, with Neil's companionship as "there had never been the wholeness of response between them" (TTM 215). When Rashmi tells him about her separation from her former husband, he never even enquires her about further details.

It is when Rashmi is about to leave for Lucknow where her father is posted as the new Chief Minister,
that she renews her relationship with Rakesh, her childhood friend, "who had been closer than a brother, more than a friend" (TTM 35). For a long, long while, "a communication between himself [Rakesh] and Rashmi... never had existed after childhood" (TTM 170). Now Rashmi realises,

She had lost the special contact she had had with him, the warm, strong invisible bond that she now knew nurtured and sustained her. She would have to recover it consciously, deliberately, little by little (TTM 216).

Without Rakesh, she feels "a stab of emptiness, almost of fear" (TTM 216). With such a deep longing for communication within her, she asks Rakesh when the train is about to leave, "Rakesh?.... Will you write to me? There's so much I'd like to share with you" (TTM 216). Thus she accepts Rakesh as a true companion. Sahgal's women are all on a quest for constructive and meaningful relationships with men demanding mutual understanding and involvement. Rashmi is not satisfied simply with her freedom in extra-marital relationships, but longs for communication and mutual response, lacking in her marital relationship with Dalip and in her brief affair with Neil.
Sahgal's maturity and 'linear' development of thought concerning man-woman relationship in the modern sexist* society, is clearly evident in her next novel *Storm in Chandigarh*. As Shyam M. Asnani rightly points out,

*Storm in Chandigarh* provides us with an unmistakable evidence that the novelist has developed a clear thought, she has vision, she has maturity, she has objectivity and she has spunk (3.1 (1978):155).

To Sahgal, failure to communicate and understand is the main cause of marital discord. Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* is unhappy, not being able to find a reciprocal emotional involvement with Inder, her husband. Besides, the temperamental incompatibilities of the pair vitiate further, their conjugal relationship. As M.L. Malhotra observes,

Their marriage, though outwardly successful is unhappy, reeling on the rock of temperamental incompatibilities, and a radial divergence of marital ideals. Saroj is a highly sensitive, child-oriented, marital creature raised in a free atmosphere, but yoked to an insensitive, self-centred, a western gloss. They belong to two different culture milieus (1971, 229).

* Sexism - Unfair or unreasonable discrimination between the sexes; unreasonable maintaining of traditional sexual roles (e.g. that men are strong & women are weak) [Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 782]. The usage of the term 'sexist' in this passage, is directly taken from this context.
Brought up by fairly liberal parents, Saroj has a pre-marital affair in her college days which she confides to her husband Inder, hoping for a clean break from the past. Unfortunately, to Inder, her confession marks the beginning of a nagging suspicion. Even after four years of marriage with Saroj and two children, Inder continues to harbour a deep-seated doubt with regard to Saroj’s loyalty, and brutally torments her with questions on her pre-marital relationship, while he indulges himself in an affair with Mara, their children’s teacher. He believes in two codes of conduct obviously, one for men, and the other for women. Inder can love Saroj only in the capacity of an obedient slave, a possession or commodity. He is utterly unequal to meet his wife on the ground of mutuality, a fact Malhotra points out:

Belong as he does to the he-man school, and born and brought up as he is in an atmosphere where male dominance is a formidable cult, there is no question of any freedom or self-expression for growth for Saroj, nor of any mutual co-partnership between them (1971, 230).

Initially, Saroj boldly puts up with Inder's idiosyncrasies for the sake of her two children, and as she expects her third child, accepting to live a
life entirely on his terms. Meanwhile, Inder views sex with her, increasingly as the performance of an act with no emotional involvement. But to Saroj, emotional communion is more important than mere sexual union:

Sex with her [Saroj] came easily and satisfactorily to him. It was an act with a beginning and an end, a need never put into words, neatly enacted and dispensed within darkness. There were no traces of it to account for in the morning (SC 53).

Thus, to Inder, "A wife was one half of an enterprise, the compliant partner who presided over home and children and furthered her husband's career" (SC 53). Shyam M. Asnani is right in stressing on the emptiness in the relationship between Inder and Saroj: "They have lived, loved, even produced and raised children and there has'nt been real understanding between them" (16.1-2 Jan.-June 1973, 54).

In course of time, Saroj realizes endurance in marriage is not a virtue in itself. She makes friends with Vishal Dubey a liaison officer, who has come to settle the political problem between the Chief Ministers of Chandigarh and Haryana. She finds in Dubey the understanding and mutuality in relationship which
Inder has denied to her all along. Dubey regards women "as the subdued sex, creatures not yet emerged from the chrysalis, for whom the adventure of self-expression had not even begun" (SC 189). To him,

Women were not a subject for discussion. They were wives, daughters, mothers. They belong to their men by contract or by blood. Their sphere was sexual and their job procreation. They were dependents, not individuals. When you wanted them it could apparently only be for sex. You could lust after their bodies and that was all right and the way of the world (SC 190).

That Vishal Dubey's views are pronouncedly feministic comes to light when he makes the following observation on women:

The one thing you could not crave, the thing that was crime, was that they should inhabit the world as your equals, with the splendour and variety of human choice before them (SC 190).

Coming under the influence of Dubey's views, Saroj begins to protest more and more vociferously against Inder's authoritarian ways and, consequently, she is manhandled and abused. Meanwhile, Dubey's frequent visits to Saroj rouse the green-eyed monster in Inder. Soon the situation worsens to a critical point, when
Saroj decides to leave Inder's home for ever. Shyam M. Asnani comments:

The ultimate assertion of Saroj's individuality is reminiscent of Nora's character in Ibsen's *The Doll's House* who also revolts against her husband's inhuman behaviour and plans a flight in the similar circumstances (3.1 (1978):158).

The above comment stresses the intensity of Saroj's revolt though Nora, as a character is much more independent. Hence Nora's revolt is far more basic and symbolic of women's liberation in general.

Further, Saroj has the solid support of Dubey in executing her revolt. Saroj, who longs for "the oxygen of understanding" (SC 220) finds it in her relationship with Dubey who instils in her the value of emancipation during their long walks together. It is Dubey again who suggests that Saroj must go to Delhi for her confinement. Lakshmi Sinha recognizes the dramatic significance of Saroj's departure to Delhi, as she calls it nothing short of a new life:

Saroj leaves domesticity and timidness far behind and emerges out of her chrysalis with new found confidence. Dubey has resurrected her personality.... (1987, 109).
If Saroj's marriage fails due to lack of understanding and communion, Simrit in The Day in Shadow fails to build up a satisfactory marital relationship with Som because of her own temperamental disparity with him. Sahgal regards Som as a typical chauvinistic representative of "ruthless, self-centred anglicized business tycoons, belonging to the 'he-man school', whose male dominance is the most formidable cult" (12 Dec. 1971) while Simrit "is a passive creature to whom things happen" (Uma 1989, 26).

In the earlier two novels, Rashmi and Saroj actively contemplate divorce, living in a state of security, whereas in The Day in Shadow, Simrit actually divorces her husband at the risk of facing misery, economic constraints, depressive bouts of loneliness and "a score of other existential problems" (Asnani 3.1 (1978):160). Even as Saroj, Simrit finds herself utterly shut out of the world of her husband, who never discusses business with her or in her presence. Ironically, Simrit realises that verbal communication is 'the missing link' in her relationship with Som and tries in vain to engage him in some meaningful dialogue or other. Som pays no heed to Simrit's words, even in making ordinary decisions of everyday life: "Not even
about chair covers and curtains. Even there Som had had a veto. Not even about servants" (DS 38). Instead, Som treats her merely as a sexual object.

Thus both Saroj and Simrit try, though in vain, their level best to adjust, compromise and revive their relationship with their husbands. In fact, to Jasbir Jain, "Simrit's story in The Day in Shadow is in many ways the continuation of Saroj's" (1994a, 40). The extreme limit of Som's chauvinism can be seen in his condonation of his friend Lall who has murdered his wife.

Significantly enough, his misogyny is directed even to his daughters. He loves his son Brij on the other hand and transfers to Brij's account, shares worth six lakhs, originally bought in the name of his wife. He deliberately keeps the shares under his control and makes his wife pay heavy taxes on the same shares even after her divorce. Som who is a business magnate, enjoying a life of luxury is utterly callous to the vital needs of his own wife. Eventually, what forces Simrit to rebel against her marriage is "her yearning for a free communication of ideas with her husband, beyond the glandular sensation of sex" (Rao 1976, 58).
On obtaining her divorce, Simrit promptly settles down to a life with her children in her newly rented flat in the Defence colony.

In terms of 'motifs' The Day in Shadow shows interesting parallels also with Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's Getting Ready for Battle. Like Simrit, Sarla Devi in Jhabvala's novel, is portrayed as a bold woman who dares to quit the structure of marriage when she senses incompatibility. She does not pine over what is denied to her. Neither does she give in and hesitate to sign the divorce papers. As she settles down in her new, single life, she keeps herself busy with social service. In short, she is portrayed as a daring woman who defies tradition like Simrit.

In hindsight, Simrit is just baffled at the speed of the divorce procedure under the Hindu law:

It took a year to get a Birla car, four or five to get a Fiat.... But no, you could get a divorce by mutual consent at the drop of a hat. The Hindu Code Bill had jumped two thousand years of tradition to confer that particular twentieth century blessing(DS 4-5).
However, on Simrit's part, the terms of divorce settlement prove to be extremely harsh, involving a heavy responsibility for outstanding taxes. Jasbir Jain is right when she points out the sadistic implications involved in the draconian laws pertaining to tax payments:

The heavy tax payments are an attempt to enslave her in every way... it pins her down to the role of a victim and attempts to crush her desire to be free in a positive way (1994a, 42).

For Simrit divorce does not simply spell freedom but direct confrontation with all that is ruthlessly orthodox in a male-dominated society. With regard to her inmost feelings as a woman, she finds divorce is not easy, but painful, "as the tissue of marriage could be dissolved by human acts but its anatomy went on and on" (DS 64). Suddenly, she feels uprooted and abandoned as divorce is considered as particularly scandalous and stigmatic in the Indian society, which refuses to recognise a woman's identity apart from that of her husband. Simrit is curiously looked down by others "as if divorce were a disease that left pock marks" (DS 4). She feels relatively more at home, only in intellectual circles and parties, such as those constituted by
journalists, just like herself. Once when questioned about the profession of her husband, she thinks aloud in terms tinged with bitter irony: "Wasn't it odd, when you are standing there yourself, fully a person, not to be asked what you did" (DS 6).

Moreover, the divorce in which Simrit seeks shelter, peace, freedom and independence, precisely turns out to be a potential source of further trouble. The huge tax she has to pay from her meagre income, makes her feel utterly devastated and overwhelmed. She feels reduced almost to the level of a beast of burden:

This is what an overloaded donkey feels like standing there as large as life with its back breaking, and no one doing anything about it, not because they can't see it, but because it's a donkey and loads are for donkeys (DS 56).

Throughout the world, in recent years, many a woman has voiced her protest against such 'slavery' in the hands of men. The protest of Mary Jacobus is typical of an emerging trend of feminism:

The fate of women is indeed different in different countries but in all they are more or less slaves. In some countries savage man not merely made woman a slave but has converted her into a beast of burden (1979, 117).
Eventually, Simrit seeks the help of Raj Garg, a Christian M.L.A., to get out of the legal morass created by her divorce settlement. Raj who understands and shares her agony, instils in her some positive thinking, to face the world with renewed confidence in herself, thus providing her the moral support she badly needs. Raj's broad sympathies and humane attitude draw Simrit towards him in course of time, and she decides to marry him. To Shyam M.Asnani, Raj-Simrit relationship makes a proto-type of man-woman relationship which is well-equipped to face the challenges of a materialistic world:

The personal world of Raj and Simrit, grounded in sympathy and understanding, human communication and friendship, rather than bestial sensuality and cruel insensitivity, seems to be the world that Nayantara not only wishes to depict but also prescribes as the only sane and sensible alternative to the machinistic world of power, atrocities and greed (3.1 (1978): 162).

It is significant to note that both Simrit and Saroj try their best to be good wives as long as their marriages last and never take the conventional family structure lightly. It is only circumstances beyond their control that make them quit their respective households. Saroj leaves home with extreme reluctance.
Even when riots break out in Chandigarh, it is only for saving her children and the third expected child in her womb, that Saroj decides to move to Delhi. Simfit too feels that "in some inescapable way a part of her would be always married to Som" (DS 220), even after her divorce. According to Jasbir Jain,

Simfit's divorce does not imply that marriage has failed as a social institution or that it has outlived its utility. It clearly demonstrates the need for reciprocal relationship in marriage. Nayantara's viewpoint appears to be a desire to place marriage in the proper social and emotional perspective (1994a, 42).

In Raj and Simrit, A.V.Krishna Rao finds "the reincarnations of Vishal Dubey and Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh" (1976, 65). In short, the trio namely Rashmi, Saroj and Simrit stand for the emerging women of India who refuse to remain silent and submissive like conventional 'pativratas' in marriage. It is true that all these women endeavour to escape the shackles of hapless marriages and prefer to live a life with their lovers who can provide them with understanding, love and warmth of companionship and help them to start life afresh. Neena Arora also observes a similar pattern in the triad of central relationships presented
in the three novels:

Sahgal's women depend on some help to escape oppression and exploitation which in their cases is usually provided by a man -- a friend or a father -- who often helps them to come out of the miserable relationship or give them moral strength to smash the taboos and assert their identity to live a meaningful life (1991, 102).

A similar liberated character is presented through Bhushan Singh's mother in Sahgal's latest novel Mistaken Identity, despite the fact that she is a product of a highly conservative age and society. Bhushan Singh recalls, for instance, how his mother had originally been confined to her 'Zenana' (women's section of the house), with its high walls blocking it off from the rest of the mansion:

Mother saw the world through the slit between her carriage curtain when she went out, more rarely through tinted glass after Father bought cars, because she preferred her carriage. And otherwise, she saw it through barred windows (MI 26).

The senior 'ranee' of the princely state of Vijaygarh in the novel, is hardly allowed any exposure to the outside world. Bhushan's mother (the senior ranee) was married at the age of five and brought to her husband's
home at thirteen and she had to wait for nine long years to be blessed with a son. Bhushan's father married thrice while his mother suffered literally in that prison-house of marriage, till her elopement with Yusuf. She was in no position to voice her disapproval when her husband took his second and third wives. In fact, after the third marriage of her husband, according to Bhushan, "she has never been the same since. She has another ambition. She wants to turn into stone" (MI 32). The reason Bhushan's father advances as the excuse for his third marriage is totally unacceptable to her:

He said his elder brother had insisted on it, to extend his influence in the district and make him more eligible for rajahood and he was bound to obey his elder brother. But mother never forgave him (MI 33).

Oddly enough, society encourages such ostentatious life-style of men and willingly approves of such marriages. The third marriage is 'very public and a very popular wedding':

Our public buildings were electrically illuminated by special generators... and there were more singers, dancers, wrestlers, acrobats, food, drink and poetry than the first or second time (MI 33).
With scant regard for the feelings of Bhushan's mother, society bestows blessings on his father's third marriage, while Bhushan's mother believes that she alone has the right to be his wife and she is certainly not content to be merely the mistress of the household. When her maid Bittan advises her to ignore her husband's absences, since "a man goes from flower to flower" (MI 29), she loses her temper, tears down the tapestry of a prancing Hanuman from the wall and sends the water pitcher crashing.

Bhushan Singh also sees his father in ironic terms: "a gleeful apparition, iridescent under globes of frosted glass, more like a heavy hot house butterfly than a human male" (MI 47). When Bhushan is told that two of his elder sisters were still-born, he suspects that they must have been strangled with their umbilical cords or administered pills of 'bhang' or buried alive. He suspects that even his mother could have been an unwilling partner in the crime. Referring to Bhushan's mother, Jasbir Jain writes:

She has always been a rebel. Her character has been one of restless questioning. She is a stronger person than her husband and refuses to accept his continued pursuit of pleasure and new ranees (1990a, 263).
As a discarded Ranee, deprived of freedom, choice and fulfilment, Bhushan's mother comes to know Yusuf, her son's prison-mate, very late in her life, when her son is about to marry Yusuf's daughter. Yusuf turns out to be extremely kind man, sensitive to her every need and equally desirous of freedom. And, at this point, as Satya Brats Singh observes quite rightly: "The Ranee wriggles out of her masks of motherhood and religiosity into a liaison with Yusuf" (1993, 144). The above passage throws ample light on the true nature of the ranee.

Deep within herself, Bhushan's mother has been all along an emancipated soul, and, when she comes across the right opportunity, she freely expresses her thirst for freedom and fulfilment. Her rejecting the social convention is like coming out of a chrysalis. Ironically enough, the same society which had garishly celebrated each of the weddings of Bhushan's father, taking his mother's acceptance for granted, feels quite outraged when she decides to take on another partner. Bhushan dismisses with contempt, the stand taken by the society and says:

Society has not forgiven this liaison between an illiterate ranee and her communist lover,
and the shameless public exhibition they make of it. But Mother and Yusuf are so love-mad, they haven't noticed their notoriety. I can't say any of it surprises me as far as Mother is concerned (MI 193-194).

According to S.Varalakshmi, the new episode of love in the life of Bhushan's mother, is a response to social oppression, rather than an instinctual leap for freedom:

I think it is natural, then, that Mother when she decides to leave Vijaygarh, does not care for social recriminations. What use has she for a husband like Father who had been a husband only in name?(1993b, 163).

In fact, Bhushan's mother who has been "sentenced to that greenish light of unfulfilled desire," (MI 194) ill-treated and despised by her husband, leaves the family mansion for a fuller life with Yusuf. Bhushan recalls in vivid, yet poetic, terms the moment of his mother's departure:

Early one morning she left the family mansion. I saw her hesitate for a second at the entrance and hold her breath before she walked out to star in the most sensational scandal of the generation (MI 193).
Yusuf promptly takes the travel-hungry ranee straight to Leningrad in winter, to show her the fall of snow flakes. Thus having thrown the taboos of the 'Zenana' to the dust bins, Bhushan's mother goes happily to live with Comrade Yusuf in whose arms she feels a fulfilled woman at last:

Unorthodox, unconventional and rebellious, she daringly breaks all traditional taboos and steps out of the palace [symbolic of traditional anchorage] forever to live openly with her son's erstwhile prison comrade, the urbane Yusuf, all for love (Asnani 1992, 72).

It is interesting also to note the novelist's own response to this sensational episode in her fiction. During S.Varalakshmi's interview with Sahgal, on being questioned about her women characters in Mistaken Identity, the novelist observed that the ranee had been visualized by her, almost as a role model for the new womanhood, and the contours and dimensions of her 'outrageous' character were deliberately designed:

The mother of Bhushan Singh is one of the strongest in the book and partly this is the story of her liberation. She is the archetype of the woman in purdah. The woman who has been shackled all her life. [sic] she had had no say from childhood about whom she would marry, when she would marry, whether she wants to have children, how many, and I have hinted
that two were disposed of because they were girls. In all this she has been an object. She has not been a subject. And yet this woman breaks loose and becomes the most outrageously liberated creature by getting this handsome Muslim lover, and they are madly in love (1993a, 17).

Bhushan's mother, like Sahgal's early protagonists Rashmi, Saroj and Simrit steps out of her conventional, sheltered household to step into the shadow of another man, Yusuf, who can understand her and communicate with her better than her husband, a mere "hot-house butterfly" (MI 47) flying from flower to flower.

Sahgal's women are thus "strivers and aspirers towards freedom, towards goodness, towards a compassionate world" (Sahgal qtd. in Jain 1994a, 116) as the writer believes in neo-humanism and a new morality. For Sahgal's liberated women, the new morality means sexual freedom, with sex no longer being absolutely tied to marriage contract. To M.L. Malhotra,

If Nayantara's women characters have any passion, it is the longing to be free, freedom from all restraint in word and deed, being their monomania. One and all, they want to be fully alive and themselves.... No taboos or inhibitions! (1971, 224).
Sahgal's women characters like Uma Mitra in her second novel *This Time of Morning* and Gauri and Leela Dubey in her third novel *Storm in Chandigarh* are all depicted as indulging themselves in smoking, drinking and free sex, treating their husbands as mere fools. Uma Mitra gets married at nineteen to Arjun Mitra of I.C.S. in his early thirties. They gradually drift apart from each other as the westernised bureaucrat turns a Nelson's eye to the basic needs of his teen-aged wife, by burying himself under his office work. In the young Uma, marriage has just then "released a torrent of hungry sensuousness that brought to startling focus her exotic feline beauty" (*TTM* 26). She takes to a lot of drinking because it gives her a "somnolence, a sleep-walker's gait and appearance" (*TTM* 108). Moreover, she wants to be treated on equal terms with men as she tells Neil:

> It always amazes me that what is taken for granted in a man is horrifying in a woman..... It is a man's privilege to drink..... and no one thinks him any the worse for it, or to be a libertine (*TTM* 162-163).

Also, for Uma "sex has nothing to do with love... It does not need the sanctions of a social or moral code" (*Bhatnagar 1980, 120*). And as a tormented soul Uma
registers her rebellion against neglect in marital relationship, and utilizes every available opportunity for indulging in flagrant, utterly uninhibited extra-marital affairs. Jasbir Jain has been quite perceptive in her diagnosis of Uma's behaviour:

For her [Uma] sex has become an escape from her own self and the pattern of her limited life. It is in a way a kind of revenge on her husband Arjun who fails to understand her need for exuberance and vivacity (6.1 Jan.1978:43).

Arjun, though brilliant and well-educated, lacks insight into the basic feminine physical and psychological urges and holds shockingly out-dated views:

He [Arjun] could not understand her boredom. He himself had never been bored. Other women occupied themselves. Why couldn't she? He gradually abandoned his attempt to interest her in his library or the neighbourhood and he began to feel helpless to cope with her (TTM 26).

It should also be noted that the society's hold on the pair is just marginal, even as the yawning gulf growing between them is suggested by Sahgal in symbolic terms and episodes. Once, "Arjun Mitra and his wife
left the party together and silence settled between them in the car. At home she went to her room and he to his" (TTM 24). M.L. Malhotra is quite right when he stresses that, "Arjun Mitra's utter indifference to his wife has turned Uma into a drunk and adventurist" (1971, 215). True, rumours of his wife's escapades that reach Arjun's ears have a disquietening effect on him, but unlike the impulsive and jealous husband Inder in Storm in Chandigarh, Arjun waits for the moment with a view to scotch all such reports, through a direct process of ratification, little realising the profound cravings of his sensual wife: "He pushed back his chair, went to his study, locked the door" (TTM 27).

Eventually, all Arjun could feel is a vague and helpless sense of shame in the context of the gossips of the community around, rather than any realisation of the need for intimacy in marriage: "They could occupy the same house and yet not be in each other's way. He had his bed moved to another room" (TTM 27). In fact, Arjun soon degenerates into a dry-as-dust bureaucrat lost in his files and career ambitions, utterly neglecting Uma's basic needs. Neither, do the pair attempt to seek a redress in divorce for fear of losing
their status in society. In Sahgal's own words:

There was no escape from marriage. They had been married according to Hindu law and there was no provision for divorce. Even a separation would have caused a scandal. Her father was an eminent judge and his own family had to be considered (TTM 28).

It is true that, Arjun does not deny "food, shelter and the protection of his name to the woman he had had the misfortune to marry" (TTM 28). He even tries to ignore Uma's growing addiction to liquor and promiscuous sex, but is mortally afraid of public opinion. Once in a party given by the Rani of Mirpur, Uma looks so bewitching in the eyes of a South American that he drinks to her eyes. Later, she finds a curious solace in the arms of this total stranger:

She neither encouraged nor discouraged him. She let his hand take hers, slide up her arms, go round her waist. Her headache receded slightly and she felt a relief in his skill and deftness. He got up again to lock the door.... it was complete in itself and needed no explanation. When he left her, she lay on the sofa a little while, soothed by the darkness (TTM 109).

On another occasion, Arjun finds Uma in room No.420 of a hotel in the company of Neil Berensen, a Norwegian architect belonging to the Peace Institute. Arjun and
Mira knock at the door and

Berensen answered their knock and behind him on the sofa they saw Uma asleep, face down on one arm. Arjun's paralysed glance took in the details of the scene, the empty glasses, Neil's tie on the chair, his shirt sleeves, the faint smear of lipstick on his mouth and he felt a sense of outrage that even the certain knowledge of any of her indiscretions would not have caused (TTM 166).

Uma's behaviour cannot be merely viewed in terms of deprivation of woman's sexual needs turning her into a nymphomaniac. Neena Arora detects a sense of despair, beneath Uma's licentiousness and defiance:

His indifferent behaviour makes her so desperate emotionally and sexually that she takes to drinking and moving alone with men, deviating from the social norms (1991, 69).

In fact, it takes years for Arjun to realise with regret, his own role in having contributed to the capitulation of his marriage, though he is still not prepared for a wholesome reconciliation with Uma. Arjun's feelings of repressed anger, show the realistic human side of his character:

Though we give our enemies another chance, he thought, we never forgive those we love. From them the full terrible penalty is exacted.
There was no recovering, what was lost (TTM 167).

While in the same novel extra-marital relationship becomes a liberating force to Rashmi, it results in a meaningless entanglement for Uma who flits from man to man, utterly lost in an endless maze of an absurd quest.

Another character thirsting for sexual freedom in the affluent society of Delhi is Gauri, the wife of a good-natured cuckold Nikhil Ray, in Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh. While in this novel both Saroj and Mara indulge in affairs outside marriage as they are discontented and unhappy with their husbands, Gauri has a her flings just for the sake of amusement. Eventhough she has comparatively a smooth married life with Nikhil Ray, a successful industrialist, she ventures into an adulterous relationship with Vishal Dubey soon after his wife Leela's death. Gauri makes "no emotional demand on him.... because she was happy with her husband" (SC 19). Everything about her is "lovely and languid and opulent, from her body to the embroidered coverlet on her bed" (SC 19).

Jasbir Jain considers the relationship between Dubey and Gauri as merely instinctual and
Within the secure precincts of her marriage she also has the need to be unfaithful to her husband, perhaps not too much in thought and action as in the physical act of love. Gauri's friendship with Dubey is based on sex and the urgency of a momentary need (1994a, 31).

Gauri calls herself "a social butterfly with positively no interest in life beyond my [her] own comforts and pleasures" (SC 162). Her hedonistic liaison with Dubey is momentary and it comes to an end as Dubey develops an interest for Saroj in Chandigarh. While Gauri derives comfort and pleasure from her extra-marital affair, Saroj pays severely for her pre-marital as well as extra-marital affairs under the brutal heel of an uncompromising, chauvinistic and fickle-minded husband.

Leela in Storm in Chandigarh uses her husband Vishal Dubey as a convenience, merely playing the role of a wife before her husband — "the facade of fidelity" (SC 214) — while her heart is lost to her lover Hari. Their marriage turns out to be totally loveless, as Leela lives, a life of studied pretence and calculated dishonesty, always acting or playing the wife and never being her real, true self, releasing
all emotions, in keeping with her code of wifely conduct... making a shipwreck of her marriage (Malhotra 1971, 234).

On the other hand, Vishal Dubey who wants to build a relationship on the foundation of truth, finds it an increasingly difficult task. Leela is plainly interested in getting a husband who is well-placed and influential:

She [Leela] had selected what she wanted of him: the distinguished escort at parties, the successful civil servant with a promising future, the husband who could be relied upon to take pains with whatever problems she took to him. And she had ignored the rest (SC 69).

Though Vishal Dubey comes to know of Leela's secret affair with Hari, he continues to love her and wants nothing but understanding and communion with her:

He [Dubey] had wanted the woman and won her and forever afterwards had tried to reach the person in her, the one to talk to when the day's work was done, the friend with whom one could be naked in spirit and to whom one could give the whole of oneself (SC 69).

However, inspite of Dubey's best efforts to reach the innermost self in Leela, she continues to remain an
elusive stranger to him, thereby turning his quest "out to be a vanishing search for communication" (SC 23). Leela's illicit affair continues to haunt and torture Vishal Dubey, finally resulting in the collapse of his seven-year old marital bond with Leela at her death. To A.V.Krishna Rao,

..... Leela's death due to the surgery of an incompetent abortionist has not touched the inner core of his personality; for, she has always lived a life of pretence and hypocrisy without even a peripheral interest in her husband (1976, 46).

If in the early novels of Sahgal, Uma, Gauri and Leela choose to remain within the folds of traditional marriage, despite their extra-marital affairs, in the later novel Plans for Departure Stella Brewster enters into an adulterous relationship with Robert Pryor and in the end runs away from her marriage. The Brewsters soon realize that they are incompatible with each other with their political interests running diagonally opposed to each other.

Henry Brewster is an anti-imperialist and is strongly opposed to Stella's self-image as "a soldier's daughter and grand-daughter" (PD 177). Their antipathy
which is compared to the widening hostility during "the American Civil War" (PD 128) makes them continue to drift apart from each other. Despite Brewster's liberal and compassionate nature, Stella is drawn towards Robert Pryor, the Home Secretary, as "she wants to share her life only with a man whose ideologies coincide with hers" (Varalakshmi 1993c, 106). Brewster who never expresses his annoyance at his wife's liaison with Pryor, is willing to tolerate her as a spoilt woman, as can be seen in the episode when he asks Pryor, "Is she pregnant? Is that the trouble? Because if she is, I'll adopt the child" (PD 198).

Brewster's desire to make his wife happy is also evident from his letter to Anna Hansen, "Happiness was important to Stella and I did all I could to make her happy" (PD 195). However, in spite of all the efforts of Brewster, Stella, with her daughter Jenny, makes her journey downhill only to marry Pryor. Brewster who refrains from scandalising her, gives the impression to others that she might eventually return to him. After nine months, the people in Himapur, including Anna Hansen, begin to suspect Brewster to be a murderer. Anna Hansen is shocked to see Stella in the company of her second husband Robert Pryor in England after
several years. Brewster loses his life in the war front and Stella has not entertained any memory of Brewster, after leaving him and refers to Brewster's death only in a casual manner to Pryor, "Poor Henry's dead too" (PD 206). Sahgal does not approve of Stella's desertion of her husband and her elopement with Pryor, but she highlights the fact that for a successful marriage both partners have to be loyal and frank.

Akilon, hailing from an orthodox Tamil middle class society, in contrast to Sahgal's North Indian upper class milieu addresses himself to the problems of women, predominantly from a man's perspective. Yet, surprisingly enough, even though his women characters are drawn from entirely different social strata and milieu, their sufferings and agony are in several ways similar to those of Sahgal's women in her novels. It should also be noted that Akilon's female protagonists are hesitant to come out of the shackles of their marital bonds being steeped in the age-old Tamil culture and conventions. According to the Tamil culture, a wife must be submissive and even worshipfully devoted to her husband and carry out her duties to him faithfully, irrespective of his virtues, values and nature.
The Law Of Manu, the most ancient of the Dharma Shastras of the Hindus (around 200 BC) stresses the following ethical code:

Though destitute of virtue or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife (Buhler trans. 1964, 197).

The great Tamil poet Tiruvalluvar of the second or third century of the Christian era, expresses in Kural 55, the view that a chaste Tamil woman will worship no God other than her husband:

No God adoring, low she bends before her lord, Then rising serves, the rain falls instant at her word (G.U.Pope trans. 1982, 10).

Ilankovadikal, an ancient Tamil epic poet of the fifth or eighth century, in his Cilappatikāram portrays Kannagi as a "Goddess of wifely chastity" (Pattini Teivam), as she continues to remain loyal to her husband, despite the fact that Kovalan, her husband, deserts her having fallen in love with Madhavi, a dancer. Kannagi continues to worship her husband as God and eventually attains divinity. Katturai venba of Maturali Kāntam, a chapter in this epic, asserts: "God will worship the woman, who worships her husband alone.
as God and no other 'God'" (Somasundaranar ed. 1970, 308). Kumaraguruparar, another Tamil poet of the seventeenth century, writes in his poem *Nītineri Vilakkam* (An Exposition of the Path of Righteousness) that for a 'daughter of the household' (Kulamakal), her husband alone is 'God'; "To a chaste woman her husband is her God so are parents to their children and Gurus to their disciples" (Krishnaswami trans. 1937, 109). There is a popular, oft-quoted maxim in Tamil, "Kallānālum kaṇavaṇ; pullānālum purucan", meaning "whether he is as dumb as a stone or worthless as grass, a husband remains a husband".

Marital life is a life of partnership and comradeship, in which, for an enduring relationship, both the man and the woman ought to show mutual understanding, and love. Akilon, in his first two novels -- *Pēn* (The Woman) and *Inpa Ninaivu* (The Happy Recall) -- looks at marital problems from a purely chauvinistic point of view, and portrays women as very adament in their nature, utterly unwilling to understand their men and hence leading very unhappy lives. The men feel the need for deserting their unhappy homes, in order to find sublimation in serving the cause of their motherland as true Gandhians.
Santhanam in *Pen* is so fired with patriotic zeal, that he finds it impossible to cope with his westernised wife Vathsala. Having spurned his father's wish to join the I.C.S. early in life, he consents to go to England after marriage on his wife's persuasion to be groomed for joining the I.C.S. Vathsala's be-all and end-all of life, is to be called a Collector's wife. She succeeds in her efforts to make him ape the western mode of dressing and discard his 'khaddar'. Roused by nationalistic fervour, seeing the plight of Indians in England, Santhanam returns home "not as Santhanam I.C.S. but simply as Santhanam, renouncing the British honour in its own homeland" (*Pen* 51). The utter disregard shown by Vathsala on his arrival at home, saddens Santhanam considerably. In great disappointment, he leaves her loveless bungalow for his native village, to render selfless service to the poor, telling his wife, "I don't like to live a luxurious life... I am going to live like the millions of poor people, and labour amidst them for their emancipation" (*Pen* 71). Nevertheless, at the time of his departure, he makes an earnest appeal to Vathsala, to go along with him which she turns down. Embittered in his marital relationship, Santhanam contemplates on
"womanhood":

What is womanhood? It is a mystery. Yes, men cannot understand it in the least.... The woman is the very personification of love; No, a veritable source of pride! She is the origin and the source of all sweetness; No, a fathomless pit of misery! (Pen 62).

On the other hand, Vathsala, like Uma Mitra in Sahgal's *This Time of Morning*, finds it difficult to accommodate herself to her husband's interests outside the home. But being a Tamil woman, she is prepared to accord due respect to the symbolic wedlock, and she never goes astray or indulge herself in extra-marital affairs, as Uma Mitra does. When Thomas, the brother of her friend Stella, who wants to exploit this occasion of breach between Vathsala and her husband, proposes to her through a letter kept hidden inside a book, Vathsala retorts with anger:

Shameless fellow! How dare he write a love-letter? To whom does he write? To a married woman? What is the meaning of 'love' in his dictionary? In what sense can he propose love to me? (Pen 78)

Subsequently, towards the end of the novel, a sea-change comes over Vathsala, when she sees for herself...
the selfless service rendered to poor villagers by the patriotic family of her friend Subathra. Shedding all her pride, Vathsala goes to meet her husband, now a newly released political prisoner. Eventually, Vathsala is reconciled with her husband like Nadira in Sahgal's *A Situation in New Delhi*.

Subbiah, in Akilon's *Inpa Ninaivu* is also not happy in marriage, because of his wife Kamalam's obsession with the memory of her pre-marital romance with Ramanathan, who took to the Gandhian way of life, vowing celibacy. She proves to be extremely secretive and her indifference turns Subbiah into a misogynist almost. Just like Santhanam in the previous novel, Subbiah too feels that women cannot be understood. Even while serving his turn in prison, he talks bitterly of women to Ramanathan, his cell-mate:

> The woman is a beautiful poison; tender personification of treachery; a source of gentle pretence; a flower with thorny petals; ..... women cannot be understood. Neither will they allow us to understand them (IN 8).

Unlike Inder who nags and ill-treats his wife Saroj for having had a pre-marital relationship in Sahgal's
Storm in Chandigarh, Subbiah tries his level best to understand Kamalam and reach out to her but all his efforts are in vain. Kamalam, on the other hand, is rather adamant in not sharing her inmost feelings with her husband. As Subbiah enjoys neither peace nor love at home, he deserts his home to join the Gandhian followers.

Only on her death-bed does Kamalam become self-critical and realise her mistake. "How long will a man remain indifferent to his wife behaving like a drop of water on a lotus petal" (IN 65). However, self-realisation dawns on her too late to renew her marital relationship. Yet she dies expressing her wish "to be born his wife in the next birth in order to serve him in total devotion" (IN 67). Just like Leela Dubey in Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh who fails to respond to the love and concern of her husband, and meets with premature death as she keeps her extra-marital affair a secret, Kamalam suffers from a prolonged illness and meets with a premature death just because she disregards her husband's love and concern, pining absurdly over her pre-marital romance.
In his later novel Cittirap Pāvai (The Portrait of A Lady) too, Akilon presents a woman who fails to achieve harmony in her marital relationship and causes a great storm in the life of Annamalai, the protagonist. In this novel, the marriage of Annamalai with Sundari seems to be on the rocks, owing to the former's disinterested commitment to art, and whose genius remains beyond Sundari's comprehension. Much against his wishes, he is persuaded by his pleasure-loving wife to accept the lucrative job as an artist in her father's new advertising company, in order to pay off an enormous debt.

Subsequently, Sundari gets annoyed with Annamalai, for slogging himself at the studio even during leisure, to draw illustrations for Kalaimalar, a journal, instead of accompanying her on picnics and tours. At times, she even reprimands him sharply: "When you are paid only one thousand rupees, why should you work so hard? Stop it right now, and get out" (CP 313). Annamalai is not a male chauvinist, and being sensitive to Sundari's feelings, he agrees to take her out twice a week, provided she assists him in his work. However, on one particular occasion, when Sundari fails
to appreciate his cover illustration of a Kalaimalar issue, and blames Saradha, one of his admirers, Annamalai beats his wife in anger, and she leaves for her mother's home. Later, Annamalai broods in silence, over the nature of his marital relationship and feels that, in modern homes marriage has turned out to be almost an exploitation of the man by the woman:

In everything, she accords the first place to her desires, her satisfaction, her needs, her likes and dislikes. When this happens to be the case, all the concern she shows for me is only because I am an aid to satisfy her desires (CP 353).

When Sundari leaves Annamalai for a second time, having been beaten severely for quarrelling with Anandhi on yet another occasion, she is not received with warmth at her home, which eventually leads to her suicide. Annamalai has a moment of genuine lament over Sundari's death, "I only killed her. She hated life only because of me. I was the cause" (CP 416). Kathiresan, Anandhi's father, cautions Annamalai against getting lost in his own despondency. He tells him: "Don't allow Sundari's memory to torture you even after her death, as she tortured you while she was alive" (CP 419). From these words we understand that
Annamalai has really had a very unhappy married life with Sundari, because she never understood him or appreciated his artistic talents. Like Vathsala in Pen, Sundari fails to understand the high ideals of her husband because of her hedonistic nature.

Of the three women discussed above, Vathsala in Pen and Kamalam in Inpa Ninaivu, find no other solution to their problems but to surrender themselves literally at the men's feet in the end. Vathsala is seen "Falling down and holding Santhanam's feet" (Pen 112) at the portals of the prison. In Inpa Ninaivu Kamalam is shown "suddenly falling at the feet of Subbiah and holding tightly his feet with her hands" (IN 68). The identical actions of both Vathsala and Kamalam symbolically represent the women's total surrender to the men in their lives. And even as they surrender themselves they are given a new lease of life. Of course, Vathsala may enjoy the 'new life'right in this birth but Kamalam dies at Subbiah's feet with the hope of finding a new lease of life with him in the next birth.
Sundari in Cittirap Pāvai never realises her error but goes on rebelling against her loving husband. She rejects Annamalai's call to start a new life of amity and harmony. When she leaves for her mother's house for the second time, he pleads with her: "I will forget whatever has happened so far. You too forget it.... Let us start living a new life from now on" (CP 409-410). But Sundari remains very stubborn till the end, and puts an end to her own life in a pathetic manner. Through Sundari, a "decadent symbol of the new, transformed generation" (CP 417), Akilon shows how excessive wealth, a liberal nurture and a life of luxury can make modern girls forget their essential feminine nature and ignore the roles, tradition has assigned to them.

Nevertheless, Akilon may not attract the label of a 'male chauvinist', subscribing to the principle of male domination. In his third novel Tuṇaivi (The Consort) and the fourth one Cinēkiti (The Girl Friend) Akilon, as a mature artist, portrays the plight of women in marital life with greater sensitivity and sympathy.

In the first two novels, the male protagonists are true Gandhians endowed with human sympathy and
understanding but in the third novel *Tunaivi*, the male protagonist, surprisingly enough, is full of all vices like drinking, smoking and running after other women even after his marriage. In *Tunaivi* the young Kalyani, a student in a city college is lost in her own dreams of her future husband:

I don't want an I.C.S. man with a bungalow symbolising his authority. I want only a young employee of dignity, drawing moderate salary who believes in unreserved mutual understanding (*Tunaivi* 9).

With this fond hope, Kalyani marries Murugesan, an engineer, proposed by her parents soon after her examinations even though she has already developed a silent soft corner for her class-mate Balachandran. She is shocked to realise Murugesan carrying on a liaison with Sundari, a harlot even after marriage, which eventually leads her to utter neglect and isolation. However, despite all this, Kalyani tries her best to play the role of a faithful and gentle wife. When her husband falls ill, she looks after him day and night with prayerful vigilance: "For a week he was bed-ridden and I ignored my sleep, keeping vigil throughout by his bed, and praying tearfully to all the gods I knew (*Tunaivi* 39)."
However, after his recovery, Murugesan takes to his evil ways again, ignoring his doctor's advice and his wife's earnest pleas. Once, irritated with him, Kalyani calls him a demon: "He doesn't look like a man at all in my eyes. He is a demon with a heart pumping poison instead of blood" (Tuṇaivi 40). She feels outraged when her neighbours inform her that Murugesan brought Sundari home on one occasion in her absence and had a pleasant time with her there. Unable to put up with her pains, Kalyani says: "How long can I be wriggling like a worm in dust? I can't stand this any further" (Tuṇaivi 45). Like Sahgal's early heroines Saroj in Storm in Chandīgarh and Simrit in The Day in Shadow, Kalyani longs for total communion with her husband in vain. She complains bitterly: "Not even once have we had an open talk, despite three years of married life" (Tuṇaivi 46).

Just then it so happens that Balachandran moves to her neighbourhood by accident and Kalyani becomes friendly with his mother with whom she goes to see movies. Akilon writes in his Kataik Kalai:

The women who in Sangam period tolerated their husbands' going to prostitutes' houses, do not
accept the bad conduct of their husbands in the twentieth century (1972, 102).

True to this statement of the novelist, once seeing Murugesan in the cinema in the company of Sundari, Kalyani rushes out in anger. When she meets Balu and pleads with him to rescue her, he simply advises her to put up with all her problems. Kalyani feels utterly lost and decides to leave the village for good.

Meanwhile, Sundari and Murugesan fall apart suddenly, as the former points out once that she is not his legal wife to be questioned on the matter of chastity. A sea-change comes over Murugesan, who says: "A harlot exercises power equivalent to that of a wife" (Thnaivi 119). Turning a new leaf, Murugesan resolves to turn a new leaf in his life with Kalyani. Thus Kalyani is driven to the verge of flouting the marital contract of loyalty in this novel. Fortunately for her, her prolonged passivity is rewarded in the end.

Akilon extols traditional bond of marriage through a dramatic transformation in Murugesan, the anti-hero of the novel. In the earlier novels, it is the women who surrender themselves at the feet of their husbands,
but in this novel Akilon makes a 'volte-face' with Murugesan's total surrender before his wife. Three months after his dramatic transformation from being a ruffian to a loving husband, he tells Kalyani:

Rani! I am a mere slave, who will not, in the least, resist your command. I will never act wrongly. If I do anything wrong, that I'll gladly submit to the punishment you deem fit (Tunaiyi 126).

Both Kalyani and Murugesan attain marital bliss, with renewed mutual understanding, and are eventually blessed with a child.

Lalitha at twenty wedded to the sixty-year old, impotent Narayanasami in Akilon's fourth novel Cinēkiti, is at first quite happy and contented: "When he wanted to marry me, I gave my unreserved consent. Now there is no scarcity in our life" (Cinēkiti 39). Soon her instincts begin to assert themselves and she is drawn towards Durai, the co-editor of a journal Centāmarai (Red Lotus). Their friendship which begins with literary discussions, soon ripens into love. Strangely enough, the old husband encourages this illicit love affair, as he thinks it would cheer up his young wife.
Meanwhile, Sethuraman, a relative of Lalitha, scandalises Durai's friendship with Lalitha out of sheer jealousy, through his fictitious accounts entitled 'True Stories'. In order to preserve their honour, Narayanasami and Lalitha plan to leave for Burma for good, after spending a month in Madras. Lalitha finds it almost impossible to part with Durai and requests him to meet them at Madras, just once before their departure. Meanwhile, Durai loses his reputation as well as his job.

While going to Bombay in search of a job, Durai further loses his purse and other pieces of luggage and lands penniless again at Madras. In a bid to end his life, he walks towards the sea with the manuscript of his unfinished novel in his hands. Suddenly he faints and is once again rescued by Narayanasami and Lalitha by sheer chance. Durai, in his delirium, prattles of his love for Lalitha, who nurses him with great love and concern. On regaining his health, Durai is impatient to leave the place and he spends the whole night talking with Lalitha. Meanwhile, Narayanasami leaves for the airport after requesting the lovers through a letter to live together happily after his
departure. In fact, he does fly off alone to Burma. Lalitha never trespasses the limits of propriety with Durai, in contrast to Sahgal's Uma Mitra (This Time of Morning), the teen-aged girl married to the middle-aged Arjun, who goes astray.

Akilon provides a happy ending to the lovers in Cinekiti because he considers human, natural instincts are sacred and believes their call must be heeded to. Lalitha, who is conscience-stricken, says that she would consider Durai her brother, but Narayanasami is categorical in his assertion: "I would rather be your father and Durai will be your husband, not your brother. This has been my wish for a long time" (Cinekiti 139). The ending of the novel is even more delicate as it speaks of an inner realisation on the part of Narayanasami, who upholds instincts against dry social customs and conventions. R.Dhandayutham makes an incisive remark while pointing out the merit of the novel:

Nowhere, and at no stage, anybody goes beyond the limit. Never do they share their inner struggles and conflicts. And all this is because of the enormous respect they accord to the bond of a traditional marriage (1975,183).
Eventhough Kalyani and Lalitha rebel against the injustice meted out to them in marriage, they are content to remain as silent sufferers. Kalyani, on the verge of running away with her old college-mate Balachandran, is advised by Balachandran himself through a letter "to be calm if it is possible for her to bide a little time. The human mind is likely to change.... At any moment, Murugesan may change his mind" (Tuṇaivi 103). Akilon portrays Kalyani as a passive woman putting up with her husband's illicit affairs patiently, till he comes back to her with a decision to start a new life. Lalitha's attraction towards young Durai in Cinēkiti is justifiable. But she is not bold enough to walk out of the marital bond, as Saroj does in Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh, being dissatisfied in her marital relationship with Inder. In Akilon's novel Cinēkiti Lalitha marries Durai with the consent of her husband.

There is a profound development in Akilon's treatment of marital relationship in his later novel Cittirap Pāvai. Unlike the earlier women in Akilon, like Kalyani and Lalitha, Anandhi in his later novel, emerges boldly as the 'new woman' breaking the shackles
of marital bond, and walking out of a loveless home, to meet her steadfast lover Annamalai. It is marital harmony that is at stake in Akilon's novel Cittirap Pāvai. Manickam's eccentric personal traits cause havoc in Anandhi's married life. She becomes embittered, and being unable to stand her physical and mental agony, she walks out of her marriage at the end in the company of her lover Annamalai.

Anandhi's marriage to Manickam, the foster-brother of Annamalai is itself in the first place, based on the extremely conservative notion prevalent in a society of male chauvinists, that any virgin touched by a man becomes instantly polluted, unless she gets married to him. Despite losing her heart earlier to Annamalai, a portrait artist of genius, admired by her own father, Anandhi decides to marry the venturesome Manickam, who just manages to plant a kiss on her cheek once in the dark.

Manickam's obsession with money and sex renders Anandhi's marital life miserable. To him, she does not mean anything more than an object for sexual pleasure. All the sacrifices of her youthful dreams, desires and
artistic talents are of no avail now, as Manickam cannot even appreciate her Veena recitals.

Gradually, Anandhi begins to resent her own mistake of sacrificing her life to a boorish man, just for the misfortune of having been touched by him once. According to M. Ramalingam,

There has not been any place for aesthetic sense in the life of Anandhi and Manickam. On the other hand, there has been excessive sexual passion. Anandhi struggles till the end with patience. But he treats her worse than he would a harlot (1974, 82).

Even then Anandhi, as a tradition-bound wife, tries her best to remain a dutiful and faithful wife despite all the inhuman treatment at the hands of her husband. She cannot but lament over her own pathetic struggle:

I am among the many women who marry the one that they had not loved earlier. But after accepting him in marriage, I have been trying my best to love him. Everyday, amidst so much of conflicts and failures I do not give up my efforts. Though it is true, that I cannot love him whole-heartedly or passionately, I am still struggling hard. In this regard, is my effort alone sufficient? (CP 373).

In the above context, Anandhi is portrayed as a passive character like Sahgal's Saroj and Simrit. In
course of time, she realises she just cannot tolerate Manickam's bestial nature any longer. Once, she catches Manikam red handed, making love to Muthammal, the gardener's daughter, behind a bush at night in their own garden. She begins to detest him, and feels sorry for the young girl Muthammal who has lost her virginity.

Anandhi now starts visiting Annamalai's house in order to encourage his artistic efforts, seeking brief respite from the pains of life. Obviously, Manickam does not approve of her going to Annamalai's house frequently and even beats her on one occasion, for this trespass. Also in anger and jealousy he contrives a plan to force Annamalai to sign a bond, for payment of the loan his father and Manickam had got from the money-lenders a long time earlier. The amount with its accrued interest is too heavy to pay off for Annamalai, with his meagre income as an artist. Hence, Annamalai and his mother are evicted from their home through a court-warrant.

As Manickam stands on his terrace watching the eviction with great relish, Anandhi goes to him and
upbraids him for his inhuman sadistic nature. Manickam tries his best to pacify her, but anger gets the better of Anandhi. As she continues arguing on behalf of Annamalai, Manickam gets highly offended and starts beating her mercilessly, though she is already physically very weak. Manickam, almost beside himself, in a sadistic, sexual frenzy, is intent on raping her, with a murderous violence. As he approaches Anandhi, she becomes alert and resists his sexual assault with a strong will. Dramatically enough, in Anandhi's efforts to free herself from the strongholds of Manickam, her chain of wedlock comes off in his hand:

When she pushes him aside with all her strength the wedlock chain which usually hangs around her neck comes off in his hand. It is not clear as to whether he purposely snatches it away or it comes off in his hand during the struggle (CP 507).

Suddenly, Anandhi feels herself liberated from the marital yoke, as she sees in the chain of wedlock, a symbol of her slavery in marriage. When Manickam makes an attempt to tie it around her neck again, she asks him angrily to tie it around 'Money' which he loves most. And she declares in a calm voice, "From now on, I am not your wife and you are not my husband" (CP 508).
As a newly released freedom-loving bird, Anandhi runs to Annamalai's house and takes shelter there. To her delight, she finds Annamalai deeply immersed in drawing her life-size portrait (the Cittirap Pavai), a work which he values as his most precious possession in life. When Saravanan, the editor turns up to take Annamalai and his mother home, Anandhi also goes along with them to start her life afresh with her true lover.

Thus Anandhi in Akilon's work is a striking parallel to Sahgal's Saroj and Simrit in their thirst for emancipation. Akilon's assault too is not directed against the institution of marriage as such, but against exploitation of women in marriage. To him, marriage is a holy sacrament and that is why he does not make Anandhi snatch her chain of wedlock off her neck, and fling it at Manickam's face in an angry revolt. It comes sliding smoothly into Manickam's hands and it is then that Anandhi has a brainwave and decides to part from him for ever. Eventhough Anandhi is portrayed as a very submissive woman, patient enough to endure endless misery in the first half of the novel, she emerges at the end, as a new, liberated woman shuffling out of the shackles of a humiliating, unhappy
Where is the justice in expecting a husband and wife who find no harmony in their relationship to live together till death, afraid and being manipulated by the mere traditional bondage fabricated by society? Akilon propagates to the world through Anandhi, the right perception that, in the event of a need, the right to go apart should be accorded to both the man and the woman (1974, 84).

Akilon presents in his novels also several couples living in perfect harmony. In the novel Peñ, Vathsala's friend Subathra and Ramaswamy live a very happy life which serves as a foil to the turbulent marital life led by Vathsala and Santhanam. Vathsala who comes to Subathra's house disagreeing with her husband is surprised at the intimacy that exists between not only Subathra and her husband, but also between Subathra and her parents who bear "an identical mind and purpose" (Pen 93), working for the uplift of the villagers as true Gandhians.

In the novel Eijke Pōkiŋōm? (Whither Are We Bound to?) the protagonist Chidambaram's mother Lakshmiammal is presented as an idealistic, self-sacrificing companion to her husband Ramalingam, an upright
Gandhian. Feeling thrilled to join in the freedom struggle, "she even participates in picketing a foreign cloth shop, supporting the cause of Khaddar" (EP 75). Like Lakshmiammal, Chandran's mother Parvathi in Vālvu Enkē? (Whither is Life?) too, puts up with many hardships as her husband Krishnamurthi involves himself totally in the freedom struggle. This couple is so loving and mutually devoted that even death fails to separate them, with Parvathi dying within a month of her husband's death. Akilon remarks, "Any wife having such a profound love and loyalty towards her husband, will live like Parvathi" (VE 41). Even though their marriage is an inter-caste marriage, initially much opposed by the relatives of Krishnamurthi who hails from a high caste, they lead a happy life as they love and understand each other.

Similarly, Vānamba Pūmiyā? presents a contented life led by the couple Meenakshi and Mohan in the happy company of their two daughters, despite the fact that they have to manage with a meagre monthly income of eight hundred rupees. Once, when they have to pay an advance of five thousand rupees for a rented house, Meenakshi comes forward, offering her jewels to be sold. To the husband, who hesitates to accept the
jewels from her, she says, "Do these jewels mean more than you and this family to me?" (VP 163).

Gauri, the wife of Tanikacalam in Pāvai Viḷakkku is the portrait of yet another paragon of domestic virtue. Even when Tanikacalam is drawn towards Uma, an alert, acute critic of his works and an excellent, voluntary scribe, who subsequently ends up as "his right-hand" (PV 495), Gauri remains loyal to her husband. As G.Vijaya Venugopal says,

Uma’s primary relationship with Tanikacalam, namely, that of an interested reader and a creative writer, gradually flowers into an all absorbing one (1976, 372).

To start with, Uma, a motherless girl with child-like innocence, sees only a loving mother in Tanikacalam: "You are my dead mother returned to life in flesh and blood.... You are my mother" (PV 351) and soon, she comes under the spell of love. Uma's love for Tanikacalam is much more profound than mere sensual attraction and her plea to him is quite simple and plain: "Do not separate me from your writing" (PV 544). Tanikacalam who understands the purity of Uma's affection tells her father, "Uma is chaste.... I can forget her only when I forget my writing" (PV 618).
Gauri allows Uma to move closely with her husband without any perceptible trace of envy and feels rather grateful to her for having tuned her perception "to realise the nobility of her husband" (PV 628). Gauri is quite content with her relationship with Tanikacalam and she willingly allows Uma to share with him his artistic interests. Curiously enough, she also understands Uma's pining for Tanikacalam's love and is ready to share her husband with her, even though tradition prohibits a man from living with two wives. Ultimately, Tanikacalam ends up marrying his 'ideal' woman, thereby recognizing his own deep sympathy for Uma and his profound appreciation of Uma's integrity and, above all, yielding to Gauri's persuasion, on the ground that the poor girl will die of unrequited love. Though Uma dies of an accidental fall from the staircase on the very night of her wedding day, soon after her conjugal union with Tanikacalam, she finds an everlasting home in his heart and continues to inspire him as a writer.

The foregoing discussion of the thematic affinity in respect of women and wedlock, as depicted in Sahgal and Akilon, highlights the fact that Sahgal is
comparatively much more progressive, in contrast to Akilon, whose ideas are by and large, traditional and conservative. Several among Sahgal's married, upper-class, westernized women do not have much qualms about indulging themselves in extra-marital affairs. K.C. Bhatnagar remarks:

Nayantara Sahgal becomes an apostle of the Lib. Movement in India advocating a new freedom for the traditional Indian woman on the lines of the 'New Woman' in the west (1980, 120).

Akilon's married women, on the other hand, never dare to think in terms of any new sexual quests beyond the frontiers of marriage. Thus we can say Akilon tends to present mostly idealistic or idealized, romantic roles of women in wedlock, whereas Sahgal's portrayal of them is rather closer to reality.

As marital conflicts of women in Sahgal's novels reflect her own personal experience, there is a certain authenticity, depth and intensity in her portrayal of women's agony and pathos. Shyam M. Asnani points out accurately the reason for Sahgal's success as an artist in presenting real-life conflicts, marital tensions and
domestic traumas:

.... she is not only a sensitive woman artist writing in India today gifted with keen observation and artistic imagination but has also been subjected to these problems in her own life, thus lending the quest theme a peculiar note of authenticity and immediacy (1992, 59).

Akilon, however, does not seem to have had any opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge relating to problems in his married life, though he focuses his attention often on the sufferings of women caught up in marital crises, with extraordinary, humanistic sympathy.

Also, it should be pointed out in this context, that there is definitely a gradual evolution about Sahgal's portrayal of women characters as Shyam M. Asnani and Mrs. Ramesh Chadha correctly point out:

There has been a visible progression in the vision of the novelist in that the female protagonists in the earlier novels have been vaguely craving for 'the air of freedom and freshness' and struggling 'to break off the orthodox Indian conventions and moribund tradition'.... whereas in the later novels we see that the women of Sahgal's fictional world have come out of the shackles of bondage in their struggle to regain their self-abnegated identity (1992, 72).
On the other hand, there is no such evolution traceable in Akilon's women who remain more or less convention-bound 'pativratas', adoring and serving their husbands with utter devotion, never daring to venture beyond the traditional bonds of marriage. His portrayal of Anandhi in Cittirap Pāvai and Lalitha in Cinēkiti, who manage to break the shackles of their marital bonds under extremely provocative situations, are exceptions, rather than the rule, in his art. Probably, Akilon is extremely sensitive to the notions of the Tamil society with regard to the portrayal of women in Tamil fiction.

The foregoing study also reveals that marital problems of women in wedlock form a primary 'motif' in Sahgal's fiction, vis-a-vis Akilon where much space is devoted to the delineation of other sociological problems of the new, free India such as nepotism, corruption of the bureaucracy, black-marketing and hoarding of tradesmen, unemployment and poverty. To Akilon, marital problem of women, is just one among the several social problems affecting the contemporary generation of Indians.
It is interesting to note that an analysis of the fiction of Sahgal and Akilon shows that these authors have never made any attempt to discuss man-woman relationship, in terms of parents and children. Though their female protagonists often have children, not much importance is given to the parent-child conflict in their novels and most of the children in them remain non-entities till the end. S.Varalakshmi comments on this fact while discussing Sahgal's fiction:

... the mother as an integral part of the woman is studiously avoided in all her novels, though most of the female protagonists have children. This suggests that the writer is uncomfortable dealing with maternal instincts.... Though Sahgal may have neglected dealing with this aspect of womanhood, she deals sensitively with man-woman relationships (1993c, 103).

Most certainly, Sahgal and Akilon are not opposed to marriage as an institution, but stress the greater need for loyalty and understanding in any lasting man-woman relationship. In Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* it is shown how lack of understanding, and inability to strike a sympathetic chord with the partner, leads to divorce. Alienation, resulting from the lack of communication and mutual infidelity form the 'stoff' of Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*. Through Vishal Dubey, her mouthpiece in the
novel Sahgal seems to ask, "Is there anything on earth to compare with the great glory of communication, and that is only possible when people accept each other in truth" (SC 224).

In Akilon's Cittirap Pāvai too, it is the lack of understanding and mutual loyalty and trust on the part of Manickam and his wife Anandhi that result in the ultimate rupture of their marital relationship.

To sum up, Sahgal and Akilon do deal with the problems of women in wedlock with an in-depth understanding and profound sympathy. By presenting several happy married couples living in perfect harmony in their fiction, both the artists have also shown that there is certainly the possibility of making an earthly home a veritable heaven on earth, if only both men and women can live with perfect understanding and mutual respect and love. Indra Kulshreshita, a feminist remarks:

Man and woman, in fact, are complementary to one another and this would be a different world if only both of them could lead a harmonious life, and work not in confrontation but with co-operation. If only women were also provided equal opportunities in all walks of life, the picture would have been very different (1992, 6).