Six

Freedom at Midnight and

Its Aftermath
Chapter Six

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Creative artists often cannot help referring to contemporary events and some of the best works of our times deal with the historic, political, social and religious movements of our age. In an age when political issues play a dominant role in the lives of the people of a whole nation, such works are likely to become an integral part of the consciousness of the artists of the age. Irving Howe defines the political novel as "a novel in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which political milieu is the dominant setting" (1957, 19). To Joseph L. Blotner, a political novel is "a book which directly describes, interprets and analyses political phenomena" (1955, 2). Political issues/themes constitute the primary focus of great literary masterpieces like War and Peace, Red Badge of Courage, A Tale of Two Cities and A Farewell to Arms. In the popular fiction written in pre-Independent India, struggle for freedom was a recurrent theme, irrespective of the language in which the works were written. M.K. Naik enumerates the 'stoff' of Indian
novels written during this period:

The holocaust of the partition; the tumultuous merger of the princely states; the murder of the Mahatma; the ongoing oppression of the Indians in Goa, who achieved independence some years later; the wars with Pakistan and China during the 1960's, all these readily invited fictional treatment. More recently, the working of political democracy in India and the clash of personalities among those who wield political power in India have also formed the subject-matter of some novels (1978, 7).

As a novelist, Nayantara Sahgal has recreated several Indian social and political scenes just before and after the Independence in her fiction. Born in a family of freedom fighters, Sahgal has a first-hand knowledge of the burning political issues of her times. Her novels present almost "a chronological account of Indian politics from the last phase of the freedom struggle to the breakdown of democracy in mid-seventies" (Bhatnagar 1991, 44). To Shyam M. Asnani, "her novels mirror faithfully the contemporary Indian political scene" (1985, 109). Of her eight novels, the first, the penultimate and the last works, namely, *A Time To Be Happy* (1968), *Plans for Departure* (1986) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988) are set in the first half of the twentieth century while the rest including *This Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The
Day in Shadow (1971), A Situation in New Delhi (1977) and Rich Like Us (1985) are set in the second half of the twentieth century. Rama Jha observes, "A specific political situation is invariably the backdrop of all her novels" (1983, 180). Urmila Varma also points out:

Political milieu is the dominant setting in her writings and if one considers the theme alone, her novels can be called political novels, but they are more than mere records of political events (1990, 104).

One of Sahgal's major interests as a writer, has been the theme of political struggle and her novels are unified in a sense, by virtue of their historical background.

As an eminent writer in Tamil, Akilon too has a first-hand knowledge of the political issues and personalities of his age, as he played an active role in the political struggle for freedom, right from his school days. In Tamil literature, the novels which were written soon after Independence, exhibit an intense political awareness on the part of the writers. Novelists like Kalki and Akilon threw themselves into the freedom struggle, often venturing to court arrest for political causes. Most of their novels present
the political events of the time as their backdrop. In Akilon's novels, the characters are depicted as profoundly patriotic and chivalrous. The plots of Akilon's early novels such as Пен (The Woman) and Ипна Ниаиву (The Happy Recall) are woven around the conflicts of freedom movement in India. In his novels, the setting is usually a city or a village which is engaged in constant political activities following the Gandhian way. Out of the sixteen social novels Akilon has written, eleven novels are concerned with a political vision. Akilon's political preoccupation is quite evident in the following novels:

1. Пен (The Woman) 1947
2. Ипна Ниаиву (The Happy Recall) 1949
3. Нечин Алаikal (The Waves of the Heart) 1953
4. Валву Енке? (Whither is Life?) 1957
5. Павай Вилакку (The Maiden Lamp) 1958
6. Путу Веллам (The New Flood) 1964
7. Пон Малар (The Golden Flower) 1965
8. СитирраСвай (The Portrait of A Lady) 1968
9. Енке Покиром (Whither Are We Bound to?) 1968
10. Палмак Каттини (In the Rubber Plantation) 1977
11. Ванама Пумия? (Heaven or Earth?) 1983
Of these novels, the first three are set against the backdrop of pre-Independent India. The protagonists in these novels take an active part in the freedom struggle risking their jobs, love-affairs and all comforts of life. They resist the British either in the Gandhian way of non-violence or in the terrorist mode, advocated by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. They struggle also in their personal lives, on account of their commitment to the freedom of the nation. Invariably, in most cases, patriotic fervour gets the better of amorous relationships in Akilon's fiction. The distress and disappointment Akilon felt about the post-Independent India, find expression in his later novels. The political and social setting for these novels is the India after its Independence, teeming with a plethora of social and economic evils. Akilon highlights in his fictional works, the snobbery and hypocrisy of politicians, especially those donning Gandhi caps.

The political pre-occupation of Sahgal and Akilon can be seen from the general political background of their entire fiction. Both the contemporary novelists did personally involve themselves, though in varying degrees, in the freedom struggle and continue to
observe and comment on the state of affairs in the post-Independent India with growing disillusionment. Weisstein means by the phrase 'contemporaries', 'sociological age groups' and he quotes Edward Wechssler, to explain it further:

A group of contemporaries in a nation, who, as a consequence of their near simultaneous birth and the similar experiences of their childhood and youth under the impact of a certain spiritual-moral situation and certain socio-political conditions, have fairly identical desires (1973, 90).

Viewed in the light of this definition, Sahgal and Akilon can be rightly called contemporaries.

As a novelist, Sahgal is pretty sure of the domain of her preoccupation. She tells Parsa Venkateshwar Rao, "What I am writing is the story of India. I am not writing about ethnic stuff. I am interested in what politics does to human beings" (18 July 1993:5). Akilon too feels naturally attracted towards the historic events and developments of his times, and has deliberately used them as the background of his fiction, a fact he acknowledges with self-conscious candour:

I am one of those seminal writers who made use
of the country's contemporary history as a backdrop for fiction. For, I was born in the historic Gandhian era when certain events took place in dramatic succession and I was fascinated by them as a youth. You may see this historical background in most of my social novels (Packiamuthu ed. 1974, 61).

Thus, in the novels of Sahgal and Akilon the drama of personal human relationship is presented in the context of the larger socio-political scenario of India, during the phase of her struggle for freedom.

Pre-Independence Novels:

As a political novelist, Sahgal has recreated in her novels the political events spanning nearly a century starting from 1885. Three of Sahgal's novels, namely, A Time To Be Happy, Plans for Departure and Mistaken Identity are set against the backdrop of pre-Independent India.

A Time To Be Happy covers a period of about sixteen years, ranging from around 1932 to 1948. It succeeds considerably in presenting an authentic picture of a tumultuous age. According to Shyam M. Asnani,
of the country during that turbulent epoch through the life of upper-middle class Indians -- especially of the Shivpals and the Sahais (1985, 109).

The novel presents the all-prevading impact of freedom movement in India under the charismatic leadership of Gandhi. Various historical events like Gandhi's imprisonment and the consequent nation-wide mass-arrests in the context of the Quit India Movement, are described in this novel. Even the narrator in this work gets arrested, for allegedly preaching Gandhian ideals to the villagers and abetting sedition. Sanad, the protagonist, joins duty in a British firm Selkirk and Lowe on August 9, 1942, the very day when the Quit India Movement is launched by Gandhi. His marriage coincides with the advent of India's Independence:

A year later, in February 1947, Sanad and Kusum were married.... In August of that year our country became free, and the future, which had always seemed so far ahead, so much in the realm of fancy was upon us (203).

In the same novel Raghubir, a clerk in Sanad's office attends office, wearing a Gandhi cap which provokes the wrath of the British officer Weatherby. "The cap was all that Weatherby needed to excite his irritability" (128). Raghubir "has been already a
victim in a students' demonstration" (139), during the August Revolt of 1942. The narrator himself had been an active participant in the Satyagraha movement. Of the women characters, it is Kunti Behen who gets involved in politics after Independence, being an active member of the Legislative Assembly. The narrator describes her political exploits thus:

Kunti Behen had become the most vocal M.L.A. in our province. Her ceaseless campaign against the evils of smoking, drinking, meat-eating and getting vaccinated against disease made her a most formidable politician (251).

Kusum's professor-father Madan Sahai and her four brothers are also directly involved in the freedom struggle. Sahgal has successfully portrayed in this novel which is set in pre-Independent India, the social attitudes of the Anglo-Indians through characters such as the Granges, the Weatherbys, Trent and Marion. She also presents in this work a group of anglicized Indians like Sanad's father Govind Narayan, his brother Girish, his uncle Harish, the Chatterjis, Harilal Mathur and Vir Das who are utterly unconcerned with, and unaffected by, the all-round tumult.
While each of Sahgal's early novels "more or less reflects the political era we were passing through" (Jain 1994a, 114), her seventh novel, *Plans for Departure*, takes us back to an earlier period — a period which can be called pre-Gandhian as Subhash Chandra points out:

The book is replete with the political history of the early phase of the Indian freedom struggle as there are extensive references to Tilak and his activities (1993,128-129).

Eventhough the main focus of attention in the novel is on Anna Hansen, the daughter of Johannas Hansen of Denmark, who is on a short visit to India, there are references to well-known national leaders like B.G.Tilak, Motilal Nehru, Ranade, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Bhagat Singh, Khudiram Bose and M.K.Gandhi in the novel. The newspaper items, despatches to Henry Brewster, the magistrate, from his immediate superior and conversation between Anna and Madhav Rao, the "local photographer-cum-chemist" keep the reader informed of the trial, imprisonment and release of Tilak. In fact, Anna is so greatly fascinated by the charisma of Tilak, that she excitedly writes to her fiance Nicholas in England, about the public meeting in which people
celebrated Tilak's return after a prolonged period of imprisonment:

Dear Nicholas - I was deeply moved by the meeting for Tilak. There must be something extraordinary about a man who can set even these woods ablaze, so far from Delhi, and after so many years' absence (143).

Meanwhile, Anna Hansen receives letters from Nicholas which keep her posted with the happenings in England and the outbreak of the Great War of 1914. The tragic death of the missionary's wife Lulu Croft in the novel, coincides with the outbreak of the First World War:

Before the posies on Lulu's grave had wilted, the outer world had exploded, into other declarations of war, Germany's on France, England's on Germany, Germany's on Russia and as part of the British empire, India was automatically at war on the midnight of August 4, 1914. But it was still the night of Lulu's burial (172).

The novel makes references also to the pre-1914 struggles of British suffragettes, the Mahatma's effort on behalf of the voteless citizens in South Africa and the condition of the oppressed peasants in Central America. Sahgal has chosen Indian as well as European political and sociological scenario as a backdrop to
this novel eventhough to A.V.Krishna Rao the novel simply "enacts the drama of socio-cultural change in the Raj in the late 19th and early 20th centuries" (18.2 July 1990: 36).

Sahgal's latest novel Mistaken Identity moves back in time, to the early twentieth century, and to the Trade Union Movement of the 1920s. According to Suresh C.Saxena,

In Mistaken Identity Sahgal frames her narrative against a turbulent period of Indian history. The novel paints the currents and cross-currents engulfing the country and other parts of the world in the first three decades of this century (1993, 133).

Perhaps the single great political/historical event of the pre-Independent India in this novel namely, the Salt-Satyagraha is referred to as part of the text. Bhushan gives an account of the Salt March prisoners in a language which smacks of barrack-style journalism:

Gandhi has marched to Dandi beach, a distance of two hundred and forty-one miles from his base to disobey the Salt Act and manufacture salt on the seacoast. A civil disobedience campaign is in full swing. Our newspaper says immense crowd cheered him on and thousands
joined the march. People are manufacturing salt in pans all over the country. Overnight our jail is full of Salt March prisoners, four in our barrack (MI 98).

In fact, Sahgal goes beyond the borders of India and is anxious to forge links with events like the Khailafat movement in Turkey:

.... the Khailafat movement was fizzling out. There was civil war in Turkey and the Sultan - Caliph's imperial Turkey was getting the worse of it. The Allies had forced a treaty on him, chopping the prize of Asia Minor into bite-sized pieces under their own command.... And no one—not the British, French or Italians or Greeks, who were attacking in the hills—had reckoned with Mustafa Kamal Pasha (MI 132).

Bhushan also describes at length the Lahore conspiracy and how the prisoners who avenged the assassination of Lala Lajpat Rai, went on a hunger strike protesting against the inhuman treatment meted out to them in jail and court, which triggered off sympathetic demonstrations and bandhs everywhere:

The conspiracy prisoners in Lahore jail have been on a hunger strike since July. Our newspaper tells us they are being force-fed and putting up a gruesome resistance.... They are protesting against the treatment they are getting in jail and court (MI 68).
and "we read of the public outcry, huge demonstration, shop shutters down, protest hunger-strikes in other jails" (MI 71). Employing effective episodes of flashbacks, sensational headlines and dramatic discussions among the prisoners, Sahgal succeeds in evoking vividly the tenor of the political events of the time. Neena Arora, in her review of the novel states what is most obvious:

**Mistaken Identity** is yet again a political novel imbued with socio-political events in India during the British regime in the year 1929. It was the time when the country was gradually awakening to nationalism and witnessing unrest, strikes and mass arrests (1993a, 175).

Thus, the three novels of Sahgal discussed above aim at depicting the political reality of pre-Independent India.

Akilon wrote his maiden novel before India attained her freedom, at a time when the violence unleashed by the imperialists, was at a feverish pitch, hitherto unheard of. Naturally, Akilon's first novel *Pen* centres very much around the freedom struggle. Santhanam, the protagonist, rejects a career in the I.C.S., spurns his wife's love and the comforts of an affluent home, in
order to serve the nation through a Gandhian kind of rural upliftment programme and his personal participation in the struggle for freedom. And Akilon defines in Kataik Kalai (The Art of Story-Telling), what he considers as 'commitment':

The message of the novel Pen is that only such a person who sacrifices his degree, his post, his money and his marital comforts for the cause of the poor in Indian society can be considered as socially committed. And Gandhian era has produced ever so many men like this (1972, 92).

As a student, Santhanam has already "led students' strikes, agitations and demonstrations" (Pen 36). As a lecturer, he boldly champions before the students, the cause of the nation's freedom and eventually, resigns his job as a revolutionary. In the preface to the novel Akilon writes:

It was a time when the country was enslaved. The fire of English dominance which was about to be extinguished, put out its last tongue of flame burning with singular intensity. The time between 1942 to 1945 saw the nadir of such repressive measures. Freedom of writing, freedom of speech etc. existed in the country only in paper (3).

Santhanam makes stirring speeches in his native village instilling in his listeners the yearning for
freedom. Eventually, he is arrested and sentenced to a year imprisonment for his seditious public speeches.

Akilon's second novel Inpa Ninaivu set in the pre-Independent India is also political in the vision it presents. Ramanathan, the protagonist is an ardent Gandhian who promises to Gandhi, that he would serve the motherland, as a bachelor, spurning the love of Kamalam, his sweetheart. He courts arrests time and again for the cause of freedom. In fact, the novel opens with Ramanathan's life in a prison:

Ramanathan was in that big prison as one of the second-class political prisoners. This was not his first experience and he was quite used to such a life in prison (IN 8).

Ramanathan is a patriotic political activist from his school days like Santhanam of Pen. He defiantly hoists the tri-coloured flag, an act which is strictly prohibited by the imperialist rulers:

During those days, repressive measures of the foreign rule were widely prevalent. Blind, hasty rules were the order of the day. Those who wore Khadi were kept under constant vigilance. Those hoisting Khaddar flag were condemned to prison life. For convening or
addressing a political meeting the punishment was instant imprisonment (IN 11).

Akilon's *Inpa Ninaivu* thus portrays the pre-Independent India which was facing a hard time.

While Akilon's first two novels present essentially a non-violent political struggle of the protagonists who follow the Gandhian way, *Neñcin Alaikal*, his third novel, presents a militant struggle put up in the cause of the freedom of India, under the leadership of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, during the Second World War. To present the events of the novel, Akilon relies heavily on the information about the Indian National Army (I.N.A.), gleaned from the newspapers of the time. He acknowledges this fact, in his preface to the fourth edition of the novel:

> As many Tamils joined the army led by Netaji, I took a special interest in it. In order to know more about this army I met in person several Tamil repatriates from Burma and collected information from the dailies (1977, 3-4).

Vasudevan, the protagonist, joins the Indian Army and is sent to Burma to fight for England against Japan in the Second World War. The time of action of the novel
is just when Gandhi has started the historic Satyagraha Movement and his followers are busy discouraging unemployed Indians from joining British armed forces, even as large masses of youth get lured by the huge material benefits offered by the British and opt for the service in the British army, fully aware of the fact that they are betraying the interests of their own motherland.

Through Vasu's experiences in the military camp, Akilon actually presents the humiliating treatment meted out to the Tamil conscripts, who were found to be unfit for the battlefront. The novel also describes the Japanese air raids on Rangoon which pose a grave threat to the Indian National Army. Soon, the city is reduced to ruins and the streets are strewn with rotting corpses. Akilon also vividly presents the long and arduous, trekking undertaken by multitudes of Indian repartriates who are constrained to walk all the way from Burma to the distant Indian border.

Thus, both Akilon and Sahgal use not only India's freedom struggle but also the eastern theatre of the World War as backdrops for their fiction. It is interesting to note that Sahgal alludes to even the
First World War in *Plans for Departure* in which, Henry Brewster, the magistrate in Himapur, meets with "his death in the Allied offensive on the Somme" (PD 196), as he "had fallen in machine-gun fire during the first warfare" (PD 196). In *Nečin Alaikal*, Vasu enlists himself in the Indian National Army and goes to Burma to fight the Japanese, though subsequently, he ends up fighting against the British under Netaji.

Post-Independence Novels:

Sahgal and Akilon employ the post-Independence socio-political scenario in India as the setting for several of their novels, where Gandhian ideals and values are reduced to rituals and pious conventions by the new breed of politicians, and devoted intellectuals and patriots get increasingly sidelined in the emerging scene. There is a distinct note of irony running through all these novels. Walter Allen considers contemporary novels as 'the mirror of the age' in *Reading A Novel*:

But since we are living in the present, immersed in it, it is exceedingly likely that we do not recognise its real nature, any more than we can see ourselves except in a mirror. Contemporary novels are the mirror of the age, but a very special kind of mirror, a mirror that reflects not merely the external features
of the age but also its inner face, its nervous system, coursing of its blood and the unconscious promptings and conflicts which sway it (1940, 18-19).

Walter Allen's observation holds good for the novels of Sahgal as well as Akilon, as these novelists faithfully reflect their contemporary age in their fiction. The new, emerging India has nothing to boast of, except an inexperienced parliament system and an inept -- and often corrupt -- administration put up by a monolithic ruling party.

In This Time of Morning, her second novel, Sahgal clearly shows "how the politicians of the pre-Independence days have degenerated into power-mongering, career-hunting and intriguing opportunists after independence" (Sarma 1978, 268). In the novel, Kalyan Sinha, the Minister without portfolio, is a shrewd pragmatist given to several unscrupulous ways of trading. Characters like Dhiraj, Hari Mohan and Somnath figuring in the novel, are prepared to mortgage the prestige of the entire nation to serve their petty materialistic ends, paying only lip-service to Gandhian values. Shyam M. Asnani is quite right when he
observes:

The novelist exposes the political opportunists who damage the country's reputation by resorting to inefficient, corrupt, irresponsible and unscrupulous practices and continue to enjoy the public positions though they have "forfeited the people's confidence" (1985, 111).

Nevertheless, in a welcome contrast to such self-seeking politicians, there are also conscientious and dedicated politicians like Kailas Vrind, Abdul Rahman and Arjun Mitra who are honest and courageous in their political convictions. For Kailas, the upheaval in the general matrix of Indian life in the post-Independence era,

... represented the birth pangs of a new civilization... the attainment of independence had been its starting point, but the human being's struggle for freedom and recognition in every facet of his life and environment went on (TTM 214).

The post-Independence political scene in India thus becomes in this work not merely a backdrop but the central theme and chief preoccupation.

Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh* describes the political turbulence in Punjab after 1947. The time
chosen for this novel is the late sixties when Punjab was further bifurcated linguistically into Punjab and Haryana with Chandigarh as its common capital, after twenty years of its communalistic partition soon after Independence. The story is about Gyan Singh the Chief Minister of Punjab and Harpal Singh the Chief Minister of Haryana, two rivals locked in a terrible battle of power. While Harpal Singh strives for national integration, Gyan Singh is ambitious and violent, often keen on "a demonstration to show the strength of his demands" (SC 167). The conflict between them "over boundaries, water, electric power continued, intensified by the presence of both new state governments in a common capital Chandigarh" (SC 13). Sahgal's own words describe the chaotic situation of the time:

Outburst of brutal, calculated violence had become a feature of the cities... Violence had become routine and expected. It was given different names, indiscipline, unrest, disorder (SC 6).

Harpal Singh juxtaposes the present situation against the unsullied past, and often feels like resigning his post:

In 1947 there was still an India left to serve. Now there is no such loyalty to bind
us. The long vision has disintegrated. At any rate, let some one who believes in the existence of Haryana and to whom carving out this extra state makes some sense, look after it. I have no heart for this job (SC 146).

Sahgal integrates artistically the theme of political violence, menacing the normalcy in the state of Punjab and Haryana, with that of the domestic disharmony perpetrated by male dominance. To Shyam M. Asnani,

The novelist succeeds not only in rendering into fiction the political issues of the late sixties, but also in capturing the 'zeitgeist', the political mood and intrigues of the post-Independence era (1985, 116).

In The Day in Shadow Sahgal combines the political and social issues like corruption and hypocrisy in public life that pose a grave threat to any developing country. Sumer Singh, the new Minister-in-charge of the Petroleum Ministry of the Union Government, represents the emerging kind of leadership in the country. To M.K. Bhatnagar, the novel,

depicts the post Nehru scene with "more fever than calm" in Delhi, "the belligerent new politicians" coming to the fore, the bureaucracy shedding its anonymity to assume a vague unobtrusiveness (1991, 46).
Like Kalyan Sinha in *This Time of Morning* and Gyan Singh of *Storm* in Chandigarh, Sumer Singh is a manipulator bent on achieving his own ends. Ignoring the possible threat to the defence of the country, he strikes an ingenious oil deal with Russia. In Sahgal's own words,

For him, he was convinced, it meant big things ahead—the prize—the Foreign Ministership which in the coming reshuffle would almost certainly be his (DS 186).

Sahgal is plainly sarcastic when she refers to Sumer Singh, who is being promoted subsequently, to the rank of a Central Cabinet Minister with the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. The socio-political conflicts of the age have been neatly interwoven in this novel. The oil-treaty made with Russia by Sumer Singh resembles closely Som's Consent Terms according to which, his sixteen-year old son Brij will inherit six lakh rupees-worth shares when he attains the age of eighteen, though the tax on this large amount is to be paid up by Simrit, his divorced wife. An ingenious parallel is drawn between Som, who is driven purely by his materialistic obsessions, and Sumer Singh, the shameless worshipper of power. As Sumer Singh talks of future ties and friendly relations, throwing the
concern for the defence of the country to the winds, Som talks of further benefits of the large amounts deposited in investments in the name of his son, paying scant regard for Simrit's financial burden. Both Sumer and Som are thus blind to the immediate risks involved in their deeds. Simrit makes a biting comparison of the two:

They're two of a kind though they might be on opposite sides of the fence politically -- big business and radical politician. There's no human difference between them (DS 222).

In contrast, the ailing Petroleum Minister never dreams of abusing his power, and is always preoccupied with national interests. In this novel, Sahgal also describes with pungent satire bordering on cynicism, the Indian assembly and the way parliamentarians function:

This was a place of business, enacted among men and women who were not all Parliamentarians by conviction or temperament. Some were openly committed to Parliament and Constitution by fair means or foul. This was and could not be anything but an Indian Assembly -- a microcosm of all the growth and decay, the hope and despair of India -- its brave modernity along with its gross old superstitions (DS 150).
Shyam M. Asnani is of the view that,

Nayantara Sahgal's involvement in Indian politics is embedded in her "bones and marrow" and in her "emotional and intellectual make up" to such an extent that she can no longer remain a passive spectator to the happening around (1985, 119).

Sahgal's *A Situation in New Delhi* is another historical novel based on modern India at the time of the demise of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first charismatic Prime Minister of India. It dramatizes the moment marking the end of an era of idealism and the unleashing of ruthless, unscrupulous political forces in the country utterly devoid of any moral values. The novel opens with the announcement of the news of the death of Prime Minister Shivraj. Michael Calvert, a British journalist, who lands in New Delhi at the time, observes the deterioration in the socio-political life of the country soon after the demise of Shivraj. Within a period of "a leader's death plus-one-minute" (54), the nation has been completely devastated.

There is a sense of an imminent chaos and disorder engulfing the new nation. Usman Ali and Devi, the true followers of Shivraj, refuse to mould themselves in
accordance with the requirements of the new, valueless society and in the end, resign their high posts as they would rather break than bend. Devi's young son Rishad turns a naxalite in his impatient desire for a thorough social change. As A.V. Krishna Rao says,

A Situation in New Delhi deals with the problems of alienation and frustration of the younger generation of Indians in the context of opportunistic politics pursued in New Delhi (18.2 July 1990: 33).

In the momentous student unrest at Delhi University, the Vice-Chancellor nearly loses an eye. Lakshmi Sinha is of the view that "the novel is the portrayal of the city torn apart by the failure of political leadership and violent student unrest" (1993, 49). The novel, in fact, presents the developments in politics preceding and succeeding the Emergency period in India.

Through Rich Like Us, her sixth novel, Sahgal shows how far politics of the bogus-Emergency has encroached on the personal territories at the individual level. The action of the novel actually dates back to the period of India's National Emergency 1975-’76, when the parliament
is in a state of suspended animation. M.K.Bhatnagar comments:

The Emergency in all its political and human fallout is graphically painted; trade union crushed, news blocked out; bureaucracy politicized, in short, the silence of suspended animation has descended on the nation (1991, 47).

The time of action of the novel is just one month after the declaration of the Emergency, and the novel is concerned with political events of the mid-seventies. Yet to Meenakshi Sharma, "Time swings back and forth from contemporary times to pre-Independence days and through the writings of Keshav's father....back to the 1890s" (30.3 (1995): 5-6). The Emergency in India was a period of profit and power for some people, jail for some others and vasectomy for thousands of ordinary men. Young men like Dev, view the Emergency purely from the point of view of their business interests:

This emergency is just what we needed. The troublemakers are in jail. An opposition is something we never needed. The way the country's being run now, with one person giving the order and no one being allowed to make a fuss about it in the Cabinet and Parliament, means things can go full steam ahead without delays and weighing pros and cons for ever. Strikes are banned. It's going to be very good for business. (RLU 10).
Sahgal, in *Rich Like Us*, gives a graphic account of the Emergency, in terms of its full and human implications, seen and felt through the lives of a few individuals like Sonali an I.A.S. Officer and Kishori Lal, the shopkeeper. Sonali, the Joint Secretary in the Union Ministry of Industry, finds herself demoted and transferred for honestly adhering to the government policy, rejecting a corrupt deal, on behalf of the government. Kishori Lal is imprisoned, and beaten black and blue by the police, for no crime except not paying due respect to the P.M.

Sahgal sarcastically points out how power is misused by the Prime Minister through Sonali: "We were all taking part in a thinly-disguised masquerade, preparing the stage for family rule" (RLU 29). R.A. Singh comments how politics has been transformed into an art form in this novel:

The political event [the promulgation of National Emergency in India] is transformed into powerful human drama enacted not only in Delhi, but in the theatres of the mind and soul of the people throughout the nation. It is thus the transformation of politics into art and is effected most successfully through multidimensional perspective in which the events and actions are presented (6.2 Dec. 1992: 34).
As C. Vijayashree points out, in this novel

Sahgal manages to bring together happily her gifts as a journalist and novelist reporting the contemporary socio-political situation as it exists while transforming the same into the imaginatively rich stuff of novelistic reality (1993, 30).

Just like Sahgal, her contemporary Tamil writer Akilon too was greatly distressed, and filled with agony over the state of affairs in India after Independence. Akilon's distress over the growing social injustice, corruption, hoarding, bribery, adulteration, poverty and caste distinction found expression in his novels, which are mostly set against the backdrop of post-Independent India. Sahgal's historical consciousness compels her to choose a specific political event as a background for each of her novels, unlike in the case of Akilon. In contrast, Akilon analyses the social problems of the Tamil society in the new situation, with the social-consciousness of a reformer. As a critic of the contemporary society, Akilon mirrors faithfully the Tamil society in the Independent India in general in his fiction. He is much worried to see the Indian society bidding adieu to all the Gandhian ideals and his later novels express his
profound mental distress on viewing such a development. Akilon confesses this in his book \textit{Kataik Kalai}:

As none of the social changes I anticipated after the attainment of freedom, took place in India, I was much distressed and my mental distress found expression in novels like \textit{Putu Vellam}, \textit{Pon Malar} and \textit{Cittirap Pavai} (1972, 95):

R.Dhandayutham makes the following observation, with regard to the thematic concern of the Tamil novelists in post-Independent India:

After the Indian freedom, the attention of the Tamil novelists turned towards society. The caste-distinction which abounded in the society and corruption which was seen here and there and several other problems became the themes of the novels. Among them Akilon, Dr. Mu. Va., Jeyakanthan, T. Janakiraman and N. Parthasarathy are to be specially mentioned.... Akilon's novels picture the social and political climate of the time in which they were written (1973, 38).

It is little wonder then that the 'stoff' in Akilon's \textit{Putu Vellam} is supplied by the struggles of the people around him during the fourth and fifth decades of the century. Akilon himself makes the following admission as regards the 'stoff' of his
Soon after the Second World War, I saw in our country which had newly attained her freedom the increase of several social evils of the war period. I was intensely worried. I pondered over them and decided to write in Kalki on such evil social trends prevalent roughly during the decade starting from the August Revolt of 1942 (Packiamuthu ed. 1974, 62).

Akilon presents in PutuVellam the self-seeking Mammon-worshippers like Kumaravelu and Manickam, who are bent on swindling what belongs to others. Murugaiyan's father loses all his property and ends up penniless because of Manickam. Kumaravelu revels in black marketing, hoarding and adulteration. Velammal, the wife of a poor rickshaw-puller meets with her premature death consuming the adulterated turmeric powder manufactured by Kumaravelu. On the other hand Murugaiyan emerges as a true Gandhian facing several conflicts in his life. He loses all his wealth and becomes jobless, just because he had undergone imprisonment for the national cause. Eventually, he is reduced to working as a labourer, in the Singareni mines. Though the novel is set in the India of the post-Independence period, the students' participation in the August Revolt of 1942 under the leadership of
Murugaiyan is presented in the novel through an effective flash-back.

In Akilon's *Cittirap Pāvai* Manickam figures as an ardent devotee of ill-gotten wealth. The father of Annamalai, the protagonist, and Manickam are driven by a crazy lure of money, which eventually leads them to sell plots on exhorbitant rates of profit, at the cost of the common people, and, eventually, they get arrested. Chidambaram though avaricious, is not such and audacious cheat like Manickam. In fact, he becomes so striken with the shame of his arrest that he dies of heart-failure. "He has desire, even greed. But he does not know how to cheat, defraud or deceive others and hence is intensely apprehensive of losing his dignity" (CP 294). In contrast, Manickam's greed makes him disillusioned in his domestic life. Anandhi and Annamalai fall a prey to his avarice. Through him, Akilon shows how the lure of money ruins the life of many.

As can be seen from the above argument, Akilon's novels can be studied as social documents. Rene Wellek considers "the most common approach to the relations of literature and society is the study of works of
literature as social documents, as assumed pictures of social reality" (1968, 102). Akilon's *Pon Malar* presents yet another realistic picture of the Tamil society of modern times. Here Akilon analyses certain social tendencies that motivate some characters. For example, through the Murthi brothers, he shows how the rich exercise their power to achieve their own ends. Having seduced his class-mate Sankari, Gurumurthi comes forward to offer her one thousand rupees, to seek release from his bond with the pregnant girl. Thirumurthi his twin-brother offers a lot of money to Dr.Sankari in order to do away with Kumutha, whom he has seduced. In sharp contrast, Dr.Sankari stands on her moral principles and dignity, unaffected by any lure of money. Similarly, Thirugnanam, a government official who investigates the affairs of Thirumurthi, succeeds in exposing his corruption, and Thirumurthi, is driven to his suicide. In the novel, Thirugnanam emerges as Akilon's mouthpiece:

I feel sorry for the difficulty a man has to undergo to satisfy his hunger. To get three meals a day an ordinary man toils hard for thirteen hours and yet it is not possible for him to make both the ends meet in his life. I see only such people all around me and they are millions. On the other hand, there are also a large number of soulless, selfish, plump and pot-bellied - parasites chasing
money like vultures. Do they eat money? No, certainly not; they are simply man-eaters and devils. Is it for this Gandhi secured India's freedom and gave up his own life? (PM 163).

In Enkê Pokirom, Akilon shows how Gandhian values have been thrown to the winds, and how only opportunists and blackmarketeers thrive in the post-Independent India. In this novel, Ponniah figures as an ambitious, power-mongering politician pitted against Ramalingam, a genuine Gandhian. To Ponniah, his Party means more than truth, justice and morality. He compels Ramalingam to sanction a contract for laying roads, showing undue favour for a dishonest contractor, all in the name of the Party. Ramalingam does not yield to Ponniah's unjust demand and says he would rather resign his post in the government. As in A Situation in New Delhi, where frustrated youth finally resort to violence by becoming naxalites, here young men like Ganesan, Subash and their followers, eventually, reject Gandhism and embrace communism in order to save the country from poverty and social injustice. In contrast, Ramalingam and his son Chidambaram stand as true Gandhians, striving hard for their own survival amidst a highly corrupt society. In this novel, Akilon directs his ire also on the bankruptcy of values in the fourth estate. Newspapers
which inspired the spirit of freedom once among the masses, now aim at only making money through sensationalizing news items, exploiting violence and sex. Editors like Panchu, misappropriate the freedom of the press and prefer to write for personal profit, power and fame. Chidambaram, who refuses to yield to Panchu's wishes has to resign his editorship and start a new journal Putu Vālyu (The New Life). Though a decade has passed by now since Independence, the country is still in bondage socially and economically. Akilon writes in the preface to the novel:

> I have been keenly watching with distress the tendency of the nation where opportunism, power of wealth and caste system have an upper hand over educational qualifications, fundamental human values, aptitude and proficiency in industry (3).

Akilon's sole purpose in the novel seems to be to uphold the Gandhian ideals in life. M. Ramalingam says:

> Akilon has very clearly shown in this novel, how far morality has gone astray in Indian politics in the post-Independence phase because of the behaviour of our national leaders (1974, 127).

While narrating the life story of his closest friend, the omniscient narrator of Akilon's Pāvai
Vilakku makes a clear distinction between his college days and the subsequent period of about fifteen to twenty years, thereby finding an occasion to introduce the events of the pre-Independence days also into the main narrative. Tanikacalam, a true Gandhian, takes an active part in the freedom struggle, and being an unemployed youth, takes tuition for some rural students of Kannapuram during the period of August Revolt.

Do you remember August 1942? Outside the border of the princely states, the British brought into force severe repressive measures. Thousands were imprisoned. Lathi charge, shooting and murder were the order of the day. Those who struggled hard for national freedom under brother Gandhi were severely persecuted (PV 246).

For his part, Tanikacalam instigates his own students to participate in the revolt. He tells them, "It is enough if you show your protest by abstaining from classes" (PV 246). The students take his cue and write on the walls Gandhian slogans such as "Quit India!" and "Do or Die!". Subsequently Tanikacalam gets arrested. Still later, as a clerk in the service of the state, he cannot stand bribery and injustice and pours his heart out in his creative works. As the secret crimes committed by the officers are brought to
light in Tanikacalam's short stories, he is dismissed from service. In the same novel, Akilon presents Kannusami the unscrupulous contractor, and the corrupt practices prevalent in the government offices, though the novel's main focus is on Tanikacalam's personal life and the impact of four women on the development of his personality. This shows that Akilon never misses an occasion to dwell on the political issues of the time.

In *Vāl̄yu Enke?* Akilon moves back in time to the turbulent days of national struggle for freedom as he begins by narrating the story of the protagonist's parents who fought for India's freedom, fifteen to twenty years earlier. Krishnamurthi, the father of Chandran, the protagonist, along with his two friends Sambamurthi and Rajagopal participated in the struggle. In fact, Krishnamurthi not only fought against the British but also against the social bondage of caste system by marrying Parvathi, a Harijan, braving all the challenges faced by an outcast. So also Chandran's marriage to Radhai is opposed, on the grounds of difference of caste. Thus caste system emerges as the central 'motif' in this novel. As the novel was written
soon after Independence, the novelist's attention naturally turned towards the society and its problems.

R.Dhandayutham writes:

As soon as the nation got freedom -- the great ideal dream suddenly came true --, the attention of Akilon, the novelist, turned towards society. Much distressed to witness incompatible marriages solemnized in the name of tradition and the cruelties inflicted in the name of caste, he chose to write Cinēkiti and Vālvu Enke? (1979, 267).

Akilon's Pālmarak Kāṭṭinile is set against the background of the estates of Malaysia. With a moving concern for the cause of the underdogs, Akilon depicts in the novel, the plight of the poor Tamil labourers serving as bondsmen in Malaysian rubber plantations. In his note on the novel in The Hindu (dated 25.7.78) M.R.Rangarajan writes:

The Phenomenon of exploitation of the timid illiterate masses of workers, toiling in the fields and plantations, by the rich and greedy owners and their henchmen is truly universal .... Akilon a writer committed to warring against such social evils through many of his novels.... has constructed the plot of this novel, against the fascinating backdrop of Tamil workers in the rubber estates of Malaysia (PK 3).

The novel presents a realistic picture of the cruelty, oppression and misery faced by the Tamil
labourers, who had gone overseas just in quest for a meagre livelihood. Balan, the protagonist, fights for the rights of the frustrated, illiterate labourers in the estates at first in a passive manner on Gandhian lines.

On one occasion, facing a British officer who picks up his revolver to shoot him, as he leads a procession of labourers in order to present a petition, Balan calmly asks him to go ahead, as he is quite prepared to die for his people. Such a defiant attitude on the part of Balan, makes the official put down his revolver and yield to the demands of the labourers though he angrily dismisses Balan from his teacher's job saying:

We cannot keep you here in the job. You are a terrible child. That old man Gandhi made our rulers quit India. If we allow you here, you will make us also quit from here! You have mastered the use of the same weapon employed in that country (PK 216).

Again, Akilon's social consciousness becomes quite evident when he portrays the struggles of the poor Indian labourers in Malaysia.
In Vanama Pumiya?, the central 'motif' is the housing problem in the city of Madras faced by its middle class. The publisher states it in fairly straightforward terms:

In Madras the question of housing is an unsolved problem especially for the middle class; it is a burning problem like plague. Keeping this modern problem as his central 'motif' Akilon has created an interesting novel (VP 3).

Murugan's quest for a proper house and the problem confronted by Mohan's family living in a small, rented house are presented in a realistic manner in the novel. Coupled with the housing problem is the unemployment problem faced by Gandhi, the protagonist in the novel. Being a graduate, Gandhi feels utterly frustrated and the omniscient narrator goes on:

Gandhi laughed within himself when he looked at the University buildings. The University which must produce men who have to play leadership roles in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres of the country, has today turned out to be a factory manufacturing masses of unemployed graduates (VP 34).

Despite being a meritorious student, Gandhi is rejected in an interview, whereas his own college-mate
who has managed to pay a large bribe, manages to secure the job. Gandhi, as an upright Gandhian, rejects the offer of an agent, who promises to get him a job for a sum of seven thousand rupees. The condition of the post-Independent India is miserable indeed as Mohandas, Gandhi's brother observes:

But this is not the age when our father gave us these names. Along with Mahatma they have shot dead 'Truth' and 'Justice' here! You and I have to live in a country, where the gutter of bribery overflows from top to bottom (VP 30).

In the previous generation a rich man presents his land, free of cost to Namasivayam, a Gandhian, to start a school for children, while in the present generation, his son Kannaiyerum extracts one thousand rupees as rent per month for the same school premises. Moreover, he is pestering the oldman to leave the place, so that he can sell the land for a tidy sum. Eventually, he even sets fire to the school. It is little wonder that Gandhi's younger brother Subramaniam becomes a naxalite who says:

They say that the country has got her freedom. But it has only changed hands from the whites to the bandits. It hasn't yet received any freedom. Have we found freedom from hunger, starvation and unemployment? ....This country
needs real freedom which is achievable only when each one of us turns into a fighter for freedom (VP 83).

Such a view has already been echoed in Putu Vellam, where the frustrated Perumalswami who ends up as a terrorist in the end says:

Don't think bondage has been abolished along with the whites' rule. Those who are rich and influential in the new India continue to swindle the honest, poor citizens. This can also be called a 'bondage' (Putu Vellam 117-118).

It should be noted however, that in Akilon, there is no in-depth analysis of any specific contemporary political event. His novels read like social documents, as his primary focus is on the social aspect of the modern society, and not on the political aspect, eventhough the freedom struggle and the socio-economic problems of the pre- / post-Independent India constitute by themselves a formidable backdrop for some of his major novels. His protagonists stand up firmly against corruption, adulteration, hoarding and suppression of the poor and down-trodden along Gandhian lines.
In contrast, Nayantara Sahgal's close acquaintance with great political leaders even from her infancy, stands her relatively in better stead in her attempts to fashion fictional characters modelled on them. To a critic, Bhatnagar, a noteworthy aspect of Sahgal's chronicling is that,

she captures the essence of some real historical figures so authentically and in so large a measure that their fictional counterparts immediately reveal the originals (1991, 48).

According to M.K. Naik also, some of Sahgal's characters are easily recognizable public figures:

Nayantara Sahgal's political personages have a distinct ring of authenticity. Kailas and Harimohan in This Time of Morning, Harpal Singh, the Chief Minister of Haryana, and the simple, homespun Home Minister, in Storm in Chandigarh; Sumer Singh, Deputy Minister of Petroleum, and the stern, unbending Senior Minister for Petroleum in The Day in Shadow and Shivraj and Devi in A Situation in New Delhi -- are all obviously thinly disguised and easily recognisable portraits of some well-known figures in the Indian political arena (1984, 129).

Kailas, Vrind the Chief Minister of U.P. in This Time of Morning, resembles Nayantara Sahgal's father Ranjit Sitaram Pandit in respect of his commitment to high
ideals in politics, concern for human values and scholarship. Just like Ranjit Pandit, Kailas too renounces his law practice and the comforts of a well-settled home in Allahabad, to join the National Movement. He courts arrest time and again defying the British rule: "Kailas believed the only way to serve his country was to give up his law practice and free himself for non-co-operation" (TTM 180).

According to Bhatnagar, Prakash Shukla figuring in the same novel "with his anti-corruption zeal, resembles Pheroz Gandhi" (1991, 48). Kalyan Sinha with his ego-mania and his preference for personal loyalty over ideology brings to our mind Krishna Menon a key-figure in the Nehru cabinet. Sahgal herself acknowledges this in her interview to Jasbir Jain, "the character of Kalyan Sinha in This Time of Morning is more or less based on Krishna Menon, the idea was inspired by Krishna Menon" (Jain 1994b, 178).

The fictional counterpart of Jeyaprakash Narain, a staunch Gandhian, and a selfless Sarvodaya worker, is Usman Ali, the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, in A Situation in New Delhi. To Bhatnagar, Gyan Singh, the Chief Minister of Punjab in Storm in Chandigarh,
"with his earthiness, his zest for action uninhibited by norms is suggestive of his real-life counter-part around the period, Pratap Singh Kairon" (1991, 48).

Even as critics have already acknowledged beyond any shade of doubt, "the Home Minister in Storm in Chandigarh is a thinly disguised portrait of Lal Bahadur Sastri" (Naik 1992, 240). Vishal Dubey in Storm in Chandigarh, and Raj Garg in The Day in Shadow, are fictional proto-types of E.N. Mangat Rai, an I.C.S. Officer at the Central Government, whom Sahgal knew personally well.

Devi, Prime Minister Shivrav's sister in A Situation in New Delhi, is none other than Nayantara Sahgal's own mother, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Jawaharlal Nehru's sister. Just like Vijayalakshmi Pandit, being given ministership in the post-Nehru Sastri government, Devi is made the Education Minister in the post-Shivrav government, "...they had made her Education Minister because, in the emotional aftermath of Shivrav's death, they could not very well ignore her" (SND 15). Ranjana Harish is quite right when she observes:

Devi is nobody but Nayantara Sahgal's mother who was undergoing an acute experience of
Vijayalakshmi Pandit felt increasingly isolated and dislocated in the post-Nehru era, and consequently, decided to resign her post. Her state of mind at that time is recorded in her own autobiography, *The Scope of Happiness* (1979) thus:

I decided to resign. The reason I gave was that I was increasingly out of tune with my party and with the government policies. It was a hard decision. There seemed to be no alternative. My sense of duty to the country led me to the further decision to remain out of the power structure (6).

In the novel, Shivraj’s sister Devi echoes the same feeling, as she feels out of place amidst the group of pleasure-seekers and power-mongers in the post-Shivraj cabinet. The omniscient narrator says:

There was a solid wall, a united will against her. She felt queerly isolated. The Party, the great sheltering Party under whose tutelage she had grown, was now an entity outside her.... She did not belong with this new aristocracy, these new privileged around the Cabinet table (SND 129-130).
Eventually, Devi resigns from the Party and the post of the Education Minister and retires into a private life.

The Prime Minister in *This Time of Morning* and Shivraj, the deceased Prime Minister in *A Situation in New Delhi*, are most unmistakably modelled on Jawaharlal Nehru, and they are presented as the very epitome of the highest democratic virtues. Jasbir Jain points this out:

The character of Shivraj is meant to be based on the character of Jawaharlal Nehru, the writer's uncle. His idealism and his faith in human values, later his sense of frustration at the turn events had taken is true enough..... In *This Time of Morning* the P.M. is no other than Jawaharlal Nehru, an anxious man, anxious for progress and development and for the country's place in the world community (1994a, 85-86).

Another critic, M.K. Bhatnagar, shares the same view:

The unnamed Prime Minister in *Morning* and Shivraj, the P.M. in *Situation* both visionaries as well as tireless workers for their ideals are clearly drawn from the figure of Jawaharlal Nehru (1991, 48).

In *This Time of Morning* "The P.M. was the revolutionary spirit in a bureaucratic administration" (18). To Rakesh, who arrives in New Delhi after six
years of absence, Saleem says about the P.M.:

You should have heard the P.M. in Parliament today. His speech was pure literature and about a hundred years ahead of its time. Our legislators looked quite dazed (TTM 8).

The Prime Minister is also described as "the man who had embodied the struggle and sacrifice of two generations" (TTM 51). Endowed with an uncommon generosity of spirit, extra-ordinary scholarship and immeasurable charm, this Prime Minister in Sahgal is none other than Jawaharlal Nehru. In A Situation in New Delhi, Sir. Humphrey remarks "These people need a strong leader, a father-figure. Shivraj was just that" (107). To Michael, "Shivraj was a democrat" (107) and also,

A leader—the leader—at least in inspiration, of so many beyond his own borders. And for Indians a man who took the people with him on uncharted journeys, on the frail, unbreakable, so very unpolitical bond of trust (SND 6).

Tributes of this kind reflect the impact Nehru's personality has had on Sahgal, at the time Sahgal imaginatively conceived and moulded the character of Shivraj.
Apart from these thinly-veiled portraits of great political figures in her novel, Sahgal makes a direct reference to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who took to authoritarian ways in her administration of the country in her novel Rich Like Us where 'the Madam' and 'the Madam's son' are just too familiar to warrant any guessing. M.K. Bhatnagar identifies them quite rightly and comments:

The Madam in the novel who has promulgated the Emergency is Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the son who uses the official pull to make his small car project a success is Sanjay Gandhi. The novel faithfully records quite a few of the developments historically set in motion by them; the family planning and afforestation drives, the move for Japanese collaboration in the small car project etc... (1991, 48).

In the novel Devikin tells Neuman, his guest from abroad: "The P.M.'s son is in business himself -- He's making a people's car" (12). Sahgal's deliberate sarcasm is seen in raising through Sonali, the question, "What was wrong with a son succeeding his mother in this particular republic? And which mother anywhere in the world wouldn't move heaven and earth for her son?" (91). Sonali summarises what 'the chief editor of an important daily newspaper' (91) has wittily expounded, in support of 'the Madam's son', with his
explicit reference to his 'organizational talent' (PD 91):

Madam's son had, [organizational talent] vasectomizing the lower classes, blowing up tenements and scattering slum-dwellers to beautify Delhi, setting up youth camps with drop-outs in command, loafers and ruffians who would otherwise have been no more than loafers and ruffians. With his ill-wishers out of the way now, a patriotic hand-spun, hand-woven car, every nut and bolt of it made in India, would soon be on the road. Look at the way he'd sprung full-blown, up and doing, into the power structure, while grandpa had had to spend years in jail and mummy had led doll processions before making it to the executive suite (RLU 91-92).

Here, Sahgal's pungent irony with regard to Indira Gandhi's designs to make her industrialist son an entrepreneur in his own right is evident. Sonali further adds, "The editor outlined tomorrow's editorial, in which he would say, Madam had in good faith thought it her constitutional duty to override the constitution" (94). One of the characters, Nishi, in a conversation about the Prime Minister who makes whatever changes she wants in the government, employs an ironic comparison, "Like changing the constitution to make herself President for life" (78). Thus, Sahgal is bitterly critical of her cousin Indira Gandhi, while presenting the Emergency in all its horrible reality to
demonstrate India's journey "from Mahatma to Madam" (RLU 49) in Rich Like Us.

On the other hand, in Akilon's novels, no such close-up description or image of eminent political personages is presented.

As the niece of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sahgal had the unique privilege of gaining intimate glimpses of Gandhi, even from her childhood days and, quite naturally, was immensely influenced by his ideals. The Gandhian ideals embedded in the impressionable mind of the young Nayantara, eventually found expression through her fictional creations.

In fact, Sahgal has made an explicit use of the Gandhian ideals of truth, non-violence and satyagraha in all her major works, employing them as the guiding principles which ought to be treated almost like a covenant, in respect of all personal and political problems, perhaps with the exception of Plans for Departure, a work set in the pre-Gandhian era, probably between 1885 and 1914, in which repeated references are made to Tilak and his role in the freedom struggle as Tilak was the then dominant figure in the Indian
political scenario. Gandhi made his appearance only in 1919 in the Indian political scene, perhaps to fill the vacuum created by the sudden demise of Tilak.

In Plans for Departure Sahgal does make a reference to the role Gandhi had played in championing the cause of the underprivileged Indians in South Africa. During a conversation with Anna Hansen, Marlowe Croft, a missionary in the novel, alludes to Gandhi:

I was thinking of the ones in South Africa. They've found a leader over there, a lawyer called Gandhi, who's got the right idea. He has organised the miners and led a very successful strike (141).

As all the other novels of Sahgal are set against the backdrop of the socio-political scenes of the period just before and after the Indian independence, they present several pro-Gandhian, as well as some anti-Gandhian, characters.

Akilon, a contemporary of Sahgal, also could not escape the magnetic spell of Gandhi's influence. In fact, Akilon himself took an active part in the freedom struggle like a true Gandhian. His preoccupation with Gandhian virtues and ideals and innate nationalistic
spirit, have found expression in many of his creative works. Of the nineteen novels he has written, eleven novels can be picked out as those dealing, almost exclusively, with the exposition of Gandhian principles, and values. They are: Peñ (1947), Inpa Ninaivu (1949), Neñcin Alaikal (1953), Vañvu Enkē? (1959), Pañvä Viñakku (1958), Putu Vellass (1964), Pon Malar (1965), Cittirap Pañvä (1968), Enkē Pōkirōm? (1973), Palmarak Kattinile (1977) and Vañnam Pümîyā? (1983). It should be readily conceded that Sahgal is by far more explicitly political in her treatment of the Gandhian themes than Akilon, who prefers handling Gandhian values and ideas in a more subtle, sociological context.

With regard to the mode of conception of 'Gandhian' characters in fiction, some similarities can be pointed between the two authors under study. Sahgal's portrayal of Sohan Bhai in A Time To Be Happy and Bhaiji, the fellow prisoner of Bhushan Singh in Mistaken Identity, are directly suggestive of Gandhi with their intense obsession with spinning and pronounced all-embracing humanism. It is interesting to note that Akilon's protagonists, Ramanathan in Inpa Ninaivu and Ramalingam in Enkē Pōkirōm?, with their preoccupation with
spinning and Gandhian idealism do bear some resemblance to Sahgal's portrayal of Sohan Bhai and Bhaiji.

The narrator in *A Time To Be Happy* describes Sohan Bhai as a political prisoner "spinning in a corner of the yard while the rest of us sat about idle" (TH 84). To Sohan Bhai, "The Charkha is medicine both for the body and for the mind. It keeps the idle hand busy and calms the mind" (TH 89). Having lost his wife and children in a house collapse during the Bihar earthquake of 1934, he finds comfort and solace only in serving the suffering humanity at large, during the Bengal famine of 1944 on the advice of Gandhi. Later, he starts "a home for children orphaned in the Bengal famine" (TH 266), and considers it "as a memorial to my family" (TH 267).

Bhushan Singh, the protagonist of *Mistaken Identity* describes his fellow prisoner Bhaiji who "belonged to the Indian National Congress" (MI 18) as follows:

Bhaiji sticks to his spinning. He's going to donate his yarn to his 'fallen sisters' in a red-light district somewhere in this area where he does 'social uplift' (MI 94).
Bhaiji has taught 'the fallen sisters' to spin in their leisure and patronise the Khaddar shop he has set up in the locality. Bhushan Singh says:

Bhaiji describes himself as a Khaddar worker. His leader's motto is 'clothe the nation in Khaddar'. Consequently, he has been given the task of setting up Khaddar shops and enrolling volunteers who go from door to door in towns and villages all over the province, collecting foreign cloth from householders and replacing it with Khaddar. He also goes about reasoning with people to give up drink and curb their carnal lust (MI 127).

When he is arrested and imprisoned, Bhaiji enters his name as 'Gandhi-bhakt'; his occupation as 'freedom fighter', his caste as 'no caste' and his address as 'India' (MI 128). He gives much importance to the Gandhian ideal of 'Truth'. To him "it is more important to be honest and sincere" (MI 15). He dies a natural death in the prison itself, breathing his last as a true Gandhian.

Just like Sohna Bhai and Bhaiji of Sahgal's fiction, Akilon's Ramanathan in Inpa Nigaivu is presented as a political activist. Being a Gandhian, he leads a simple life, wears 'Khaddar' and consumes only raw vegetables and ground nuts as food. Rejecting a
high post offered to him by a political party on his release from prison, he decides to settle down in Solaipalayam, a remote village, in order to promote literacy among the adults and children of the locality:

Teacher Ramanathan went round the village with four-cubit dhoti tucked around his waist and a towel on his shoulder. He laboured there in a detached manner like a hermit would, sporting moustache and a beard (IN 53).

As for his food habit, "The teacher cooked his own food. He had the cooked 'meals only once a day and he lived on raw vegetables, fruits, groundnuts etc...' (IN 54). Thus living a bachelor's life of total abstinence, Ramanathan renders a selfless, whole-hearted service to the society at large, imbued with a burning patriotic fervour:

Ramanathan sold khaddar carrying it on his shoulders. He was beaten severely as he picketed the shops selling foreign cloth.... He worked for the uplift of the down-trodden and worked hard to lead them in a righteous, Gandhian path (IN 47).

Ramanathan's keenness and concern for the propagation of Gandhian ideals in Tamilnadu, can be
Gandhism is the only way for the permanent liberation of our country. From now onwards, we should make arrangements to propagate it in every village of Tamilnadu. In future, Tamilnadu needs only a Gandhian way of life (IN 52).

Ramalingam in Akilon's Enke Pōkirm? also resembles Sahgal's Sohan Bhai and Bhaiji with his regular habit of spinning yarn on the wheel (Charka) and wearing khaddar. He even wishes "to die while spinning yarn, thereby getting the rare opportunity that was not possible for Gandhi"(EP 81). The omniscient narrator describes Ramalingam as he takes his spinning wheel in the novel:

When Ramalingam takes the spinning wheel in his hands, he becomes instantly a devotee who is eager to mingle with his God.... As far as he is concerned, it is a means for meditation. For him spinning is a penance, done for the benefit of others and to strive for others' good was all the explanation given by Gandhi for such an act of sacrifice (EP 80).

In A Situation in New Delhi, Usman Ali, the Vice-Chancellor of the Delhi University figures as an ardent follower of Gandhi. In the crisis that ensues the
death of Shivraj, culminating in a wild student unrest, Usman quietly says, "The only way.... if it's to succeed must be non-violent. There never was another way" (SND 116).

Usman Ali, is keen on bringing about some fundamental changes in the University through a document on educational reforms which is, sadly enough rejected ultimately, by the power-hungry politicians and he is forced by them to readmit three expelled student culprits involved in a rape case in the university campus. In the end, Usman tenders his resignation as he realises the futility of all his efforts to free the university from external political pressures. Sudarshan Sharma sees a "Gandhian" kind of detachment, honesty and fortitude in Usman's decision to resign:

Usman has the Gandhian courage to resign, to kick away power in order to lead [sic] peaceful action. He does not belong to the breed that needs power to do things (1982, 152).

Sahgal's Sonali in Rich Like Us is a conscientious I.A.S. officer in the Ministry of Industries, who does not see eye to eye with the economic policies mooted by
corrupt politicians. Sonali adheres conscientiously to the declared industrial policy of the government in rejecting a multi-national company's attempts to procure a licence for producing "a fizzy drink called Happyola" (RLU 30) and she is "demoted, punished and humiliated" (RLU 32) and eventually posted out in Uttar Pradesh on a lower cadre. Subsequently, the project turns out to be a phoney facade, to cover up some illegal import and storage of car parts: "... Happyola, a child of the Emergency with a blanket import licence... would store underground hidden wares for car manufacture while machines produced a fizzy drink above" (RLU 51).

Just like Usman Ali in A Situation in New Delhi Sonali, who refuses to yield to political pressure, eventually resigns, as she does not "want a career in the crumbling unprofessionalism that bowed and scraped to a bogus emergency" (RLU 36). Her decision to resign from the civil service indicates her staunch refusal to compromise with dictatorship, thinking as she does, on Gandhian lines. Sonali even admits that she has employed a mode of Satyagraha in resigning from the
oppressive corrupt regime:

When the Constitution becomes null and void by the act of a dictator, and the armour of a modern state confronts you, Satyagraha is the only way to keep your self-respect (RLU 175).

Sonali's admiration for Gandhi's creed of non-violence is seen in her words to Ravi Kachru, the young Marxist whom she loved once while at Oxford, and from whom she parted later, over a clash of ideologies:

Wasn't it time after all these centuries to produce a thought of our own and wasn't that what Gandhi had done, pack off an empire with an antique idea instead of an atom bomb? And half naked in his middle-class middle-caste skin he'd taken human rights a hundred years ahead in two decades without a glimmer of class war (RLU 113).

Sonali also admires the phrases coined by Gandhi:

I was thinking once again of the beauty of words and of their power to inspire, and the new vocabulary which had 'Daridranarayan' God of the poor. 'For the hungry, God is a loaf of bread'. And 'Harijan'. Words that had existed in no Indian language. This was the language of a new epic, invented by Gandhi. The man had used his brains, and what we needed now was a like inventiveness to suit our own conditions (RLU 113).
Thus, Sahgal has presented Sonali not only as an ardent admirer of Gandhi but also a diligent follower of his basic principles of 'Truth' and 'Satyagraha'.

Akilon presents a similar turn of events in *Enke Pōkirōm*, in which the educated and cultured Gandhians are not approved of by crafty politicians. In this novel, Ramalingam proves to be a true Gandhian, like Sahgal's Usman Ali and Sonali, standing firm in his principles and, finally, is thwarted by the nefarious designs of self-seeking opportunists like Ponniah. As an upright, high-placed official of the government, Ramalingam rejects the unjust appeal of Ponniah, the politician, to overlook the corrupt practices of a local contractor, entrusted with rural welfare and, consequently, is forced to resign his post to save his conscience. When Ponniah comes to him with his evil request Ramalingam expresses what he firmly believes in:

*Today is the Republic Festive Day. If at all this crop of democracy has to take roots and grow here, it needs the fence of 'Truth'. Gandhi never aspired to rule this nation!* (EP 61).
His resignation affects his family life at once, with an instant withdrawal of a doctor's proposal of marriage alliance to his daughter Bharathi. His son Subash who is emotionally upset over his father's decision shouts at his sister who closes his mouth to prevent him from talking too much:

Daddy is prating about 'Truth'! Your marriage now can't take place. We are going to stand helpless in the streets. Truth! Ahimsa! This Gandhi has spoilt daddy. He has spoilt the country too. I know everything. Leave me! Leave! (EP 78).

Ramalingam's eldest son Chidambaram, on the other hand, wishes "to lead a Gandhian revolution, remaining a bachelor" (EP 271). As the editor of the journal Viṭi Velli (The Dawn Star), Chidambaram fights hard to propagate Gandhian principles. He boldly writes an article in the journal, exposing some bitter truths about the government of Ponniah, highlighting the disparity between his views on rural self-government and the way in which rural panchayats actually function. Eventually, he is dismissed from the editor's post as Duraiswamy, the proprietor of the journal, fears that his journal will fall from the favour of the government.
Chidambaram does not lose heart but comes home endowed with a sense of Gandhian fortitude to start a journal of his own. When his father warns him of the large investment needed for such a venture, Chidambaram tells him:

Gandhi too has managed to conduct some journals like *The Indian Opinion*, *Young India* and *Harijan*. For these, he never relied on large investments or the advertisements from the rich men. He relied simply on 'people'. They gave him money. Like that I am also going to stretch my arms towards the people of our country to collect coins and tell them through the journal whatever I believe to be 'Truth' (*EP* 333).

Eventually, Chidambaram succeeds in starting a new journal entitled *Putu VālVu* (*The New Life*), financed by Bhuvana, his sweet heart. M.P. Gurusami in his article "Akilonin Iru Navalkațil Kantiya Părvai" ("Gandhian Perspective in two of Akilon’s Novels") recognizes Chidambaram and Ramalingam as "blemishless Gandhians":

Chidambaram, the protagonist of the novel *Eńke Pōkirōm?* and his father Ramalingam are blemishless Gandhians. Ramalingam who gives up his job first for the freedom struggle and then resigns from his high post not being able to serve the country with a good conscience stands tall almost measuring upto the skies in stature. Being the editor of *Viți Velli* Chidambaram fights without deviating from the righteous code of a writer (1976, 117).
Also Akilon himself writes in the preface to the novel, "I make an attempt to depict the Gandhian ideals in this novel. This is the first experimental novel in Tamil Nadu, to enunciate the Gandhian principles" (7).

Gandhi, in Akilon's novel Vānamā Pūmiyā?, is "just like the Gandhi whose name he bore" (VP 175). It is mainly because he was brought up like that by his father Muthuswami, a freedom-fighter:

His father Muthuswami brought them up like that. Eventhough many had forgotten Gandhi completely, after the nation attained her freedom and Gandhi was shot dead, Muthuswami did not forget him. He gave his eldest son the name Mohandas which was the first part of Gandhi's name. The second was a girl baby. He named it Kasthuri [Gandhi's wife was Kasthuribai]. Gandhi was his third child. For the fourth child, he gave the name Subramanian which was Bharathi's first name (VP 25).

Born to such a patriotic father, Gandhi, the protagonist of the novel, proves himself to be a true Gandhian in word and deed. In the first part of the novel, Gandhi is shown as an unemployed graduate seeking a job, and never yielding to the temptation of offering bribes. In the latter half of the novel, he gets a job in a real estate firm with the help of his classmate Adal Alakan. He works there for one year but
resigns from the job, as he cannot continue there against his conscience. When the manager Joshi suggests building a luxury hotel in a particular plot, he is shocked as that place was originally the site of a school burnt to ashes by Kannaiyeram, a business tycoon. Gandhi says:

I worked here so far against my conscience as I had no other alternative. The place where they are going to build the hotel is a place equivalent to a holy temple. It has produced ever so many good pupils for the country.... Gandhi’s principle is one should not be a party to evil deeds. I accepted this job only because of my poverty and hunger. Hereafter, I cannot bear this even for a day and hence give it up (VP 24).

Akilon’s Gandhi behaves in the same manner as Sahgal’s Sonali, who cannot compromise with evil, does and is ultimately forced to resign his job. They are both conscientious Gandhians in the strictest sense of the term.

Apart from such major Gandhian characters, there are also other minor characters imbued with patriotic fervour and wedded to Gandhian ideals, figuring in the fictional world of both the writers. For instance, the narrator in Sahgal’s A Time To Be Happy who comes under the impact of Gandhi’s magnetic personality and
ideology says:

Gandhi made symbols of the lowliest commodities, salt and cloth, both vital necessities of life, and both heavily taxed. Make your own salt, he said, and spin your own cloth. When I adopted Khadi, I made, I felt, the first major decision of my life, for mill-made cloth was my family's source of income and my own future inheritance. In choosing to wear khadi I surrendered forever my rightful claim to my inheritance (TH 9).

The narrator gets also occasionally imprisoned because of his participation in Gandhi's Civil Disobedience campaigns:

As a youngsters, and later too, I had my share of skirmishes with the authorities for defying the laws that Gandhi's "Civil Disobedience" campaigns bade his followers defy (TH 9-10).

But the Gandhian of this novel is more interested in social uplift than in political struggle, for he openly admits:

The movement far from being a purely political one, was a great social organization too, a channel whereby even the least politically minded could help to alleviate the awe-inspiring distress of the poor of our land... Gandhi's national movement was nearly as young as I was in those days... (TH 8).
In *This Time of Morning* Kailas Vrind is so powerfully drawn by Gandhian ideals that he renounces a lawyer's lucrative practice in order to participate in the freedom struggle. The omniscient narrator of the novel says:

Kailas belonged to the generation that had succumbed to the magic of Gandhi. The fire, the dedication and single-mindedness of the man in the loin cloth had attracted him, made him a member of the Congress, sent him to jail along with thousands of his countrymen, and trained and tempered something within him that might otherwise have developed haphazard and purposeless. What he had lost of his law practice he had gained in manhood (TTM 14).

To Asha Kaushik, "Kailas Vrind represents the generation that grew with the magic and the dedication of Gandhi and lived for such ideals in post-Independence India" (1988, 99). Like his mentor Gandhi, Kailas firmly believes in non-violence:

But he [Kailas] accepted non-violence as the finest way for India at that moment in her history to win her freedom. It was the only way to fight without resentment, to leave no trial of blood and despair, no gaping wounds of the mind and spirit that would never heal (TTM 46).
Kailas feels that though non-violence is valid as a way of life, "it could never apply to a sovereign state which would have to maintain armed strength for defence" (TTM 46). At times, he doubts and questions the validity of non-violence. However, as a disciple of Gandhi, he takes part in the Salt-Satyagraha led by Gandhi on 12th March 1930 at Dandi for, "the call for the break of salt law spread every nook and corner of the country and people from all walks of life participated in it" (Bakshi 1986, 55). All over the country satyagrahis broke the salt law, and in the novel Hari Mohan recalls:

... it had been one of the days of processions and boycotts and arrests. But isolated like a pearl among wooden beads, this had been the day of satyagraha at the Bharadwaj Ashram. Kailas and a band of workers had broken the law by manufacturing salt in tin pans near the Ashram (TTM 81).

Thus Kailas responds to the clarion call of Gandhi, though he never hero-worships Gandhi as 'Mahatma' and considers him only as 'a man among men':

Kailas had never liked the word 'Mahatma'. He had preferred Bapu or Father. Gandhi had been no saint who had stood aloof from the world's struggles. He had been a human being, a man among men who had demonstrated, as men did from
time to time, the glory and grandeur of human effort (TTM 82).

Thus, Kailas Vrind is presented by Sahgal as a genuine Gandhian protagonist having a simple faith in Gandhi's humanism.

Harpal Singh, the Chief Minister of Haryana, in Storm in Chandigarh is another Gandhian idealist whose patriotism is genuine. To Lakshmi Sinha, "Harpal Singh believes in Gandhian ideology of non-violence and is a milder person" (1987, 105). Another Gandhian character figuring in the same novel is the Union Home Minister, who is plainly referred to as "the last surviving figure of Gandhian era left in public life" (SC 7). The unexpected death of this Gandhian minister upsets Vishal Dubey so much that he comments:

It would make the end of an era known as Gandhian. In politics, that had meant freedom from fear, the head held high, the indomitable will in the emaciated body of India (SC 239).

The passing away of the older generation of politicians marks, also, the passing away of an era of Gandhian ideals and goals.
In Sahgal's novel *The Day in Shadow*, Raj Garg, the protagonist, stands up for Gandian values. Raj as a young independent Member of Parliament observes:

The Gandhi image sat farcically on the ruling party all right... but it had to be kept there because no one could yet capture and hold the masses without it (DS 10).

Raj's opposition to the oil policy as expounded by Sumer Singh, the self-seeking Union Minister, shows his mental acumen and deep insight into a situation. In the same novel, "Simrit could not fit Gandhi and the new radicals together" (DS 10) and she regrets the way how the new radicals are deviating from the Gandhian path. She, as a Gandhian, believes in non-violence as a creed and says:

I have wished non-violence had become a way of thinking, made into law or given some kind of sanction, so that it could be passed on like an inheritance. I've wanted to pass it on to my son (DS 177).

Sahgal, witnessing at first hand, the desperate state of affairs in the post-Independent India, longs for the fearless Gandhian era to come back in this
Once though Indians had been slaves, they have lived as if they had been free, heads held up, chests thrust out, invincible under Gandhi. And what price miracle if it had left not even a spark, if it could never happen again? (DS 181).

In Akilon's novels too, there are other Gandhian idealists, like Santhanam in Peñ, Tanikacalam in Pavai Vilakku, Murugaiyan in Putu Vellam and Balan in Palmarak Kattinile. It has been already discussed in some detail in the beginning of this chapter, how these Gandhians were carried away by the 'flood' of Gandhism and actively involved themselves, in a non-violent struggle in the post-Independent India and resisted social evils, championing the cause of the poor in the Tamil society. When Murugaiyan in Putu Vellam involves himself in the August Revolt of 1942, instigating his fellow hostelmates to protest against the British authorities, his British principal goes on a tirade against Gandhi, and Murugaiyan retorts saying:

Please don't say anything ill of Gandhiji. He is to us the same as Jesus is to you. He has transformed us the earthworms that we had been, to men (Putu Vellam 38).
When Murugaiyan hears the news of Gandhi's death, he is stunned: "Murugaiyan could not believe how bullets can pierce through the body of Gandhi: "How can our own country man dare to do what the whites didn't"" (Putu Vellam 413). Selvarathnam in the same novel, stands in contrast to his father Kumaravelu, who indulges himself in corrupt ways and tells his father, "You don't know how powerful is 'Truth'. This is Gandhi's land where he led a great struggle experimenting with 'Truth'" (Putu Vellam 332). Kumaravelu gets offended at this, and advises his son "to leave 'Truth' to Gandhi and behave intelligently in your job" (333).

In Vānāmā Pūmiyā?, "Namasivayam is a Gandhian" (VP 172). On his retirement, he starts a school named 'Vivekananta School for Children' at Madras. Having been an officer in Delhi during British rule, he had been highly westernized in his culture earlier. A sudden transformation comes over him after he realizes the greatness of Gandhi. Nalini tells Gandhi about Namasivayam's transformation:

On the day we got independence, Gandhi who ought to have sat on the national throne as an uncrowned king, chose to visit Naokali where a communal riot was raging, in order to bring about peace among the murderers. This incident
marked a turning point in Namasivayam's life. Within six months, Gandhi was shot dead and the whole country wept in distress. It was then that Namasivayam realized the profound love Gandhi had for the people of this country. He too joined that day in the fasting and mourning over Gandhi's demise. After six or seven years he, a childless man, came over here on retirement. And he spent all his savings on this school (VP 54).

Namasivayam leads a simple Gandhian life as Ramanathan does in Inpa Ninaivu. "Of the six hundred rupees he receives as pension, he keeps only one third of the amount for himself and donates the rest to the school" (VP 54). He tells Gandhi once about his food habit:

Only once a day in the morning I take a little cooked rice, sambar and buttermilk; in the noon, raw vegetables and in the night, curd. Altogether, my monthly expense over food comes to approximately one hundred rupees. My breakfast alone comes from the watchman's house (VP 49).

On the day Gandhi reports for duty, he is invited by Namasivayam to share his lunch with him. He is surprised to see "on the table well-washed carrots, radish, mint, tomatoes and bananas in a glass bowl and a sharp shining knife was kept by its side" (VP 49).
And, highly impressed Gandhi remarks:

Old Namasivayam is really a great man. Gandhi always emphasized simple living and high thinking. He also stressed that we must be philanthropists in our attitude, always working for the benefit of others. And this Namasivayam is indeed a philanthropist (VP 53).

It is ironic that such a Gandhian idealist is not allowed to continue his mission peacefully. The landlord in whose plot the school stands sets fire to the school and demolishes it, thus taking away his land, by force. However, with utmost equanimity, Namasivayam starts another school in his friend's bungalow with the help of Gopalan, a friend from Bombay.

Thus, some of the major fictional works of Sahgal which present the cultural conflicts of the age in the light of pre-colonial experience, freedom movement and the post-colonial experience can be looked upon as realistic documents of Indian history. The pressure exerted by History on some of Sahgal's fictional works is fairly obvious. Trousson points out the following limitations faced by a novelist, who chooses to write on
historical themes:

... he enjoys in this respect, considerably less freedom of choice than with regard to legendary themes, considering the pressure of historical facts which is exercised by the time... the place and... the veracity of facts (qtd. in Weisstein 1973, 143).

Some of Sahgal's novels are through and through historical, and they are loaded with historical facts presented either in the form of newspaper items, diary entry or the day-to-day gossip of the common people. The pressure exerted by these historical facts, brings about certain limitations in respect of time and place, as the veracity of such facts, limits the freedom of the writer in respect of the choice of her themes.

Akilon too presents historical facts but very sparingly and in no way can we say they circumscribe his freedom as an artist. However, he is able to deal with a much greater variety of themes. Often lengthy narrations of historical episodes in Sahgal lead to needless digressions from the main threads of her fiction. For instance, in This Time of Morning the whole of Chapter 15 is devoted to Gandhi, recounting the role he played in the political struggle in South Africa.
While presenting in their works Indian Independence and its aftermath, Sahgal and Akilon express also their strong disapproval of certain developments in the India of the present times. Addressing the Indian Constituent Assembly, on August 14, 1947, Nehru said, "At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom" (qtd. in RLU 165). Though India did win her political freedom from the bondage of the British rule, it is still fettered in chains of gross materialism, avarice, corruption, nepotism and injustice. In the light of the fictional works of Sahgal and Akilon, we see an India which apparently has a long way to go before realizing a true sense of freedom from the prevalent agents and perpetrators of evil.

Thus, we find both Sahgal and Akilon have transformed a number of political events of their time, such as, the Indian struggle for freedom and the steady decline of noble ideals amongst the politicians in the post-Independence phase in India as the 'stoff' for a number of their novels. They also show a tremendous common concern for the independence, growth and prosperity of the young democracy, and if ever there is any growing tragic vision presented in their post-
Independence novels, it has been warranted only by the collapse of several cherished virtues in public life they both had witnessed, in the lives of the Indian leaders during the phase of their struggle for freedom.

However, there are some striking differences in the presentations of the Indian political scene in the case of the two authors in question. While Sahgal utilizes her advantage of birth in perhaps the most prestigious Indian family at the time of India's Independence, portraying the characters and events connected with the towering personalities of the time, studying them from a very close range, Akilon has to content himself, presenting the lives of ordinary freedom fighters, by no means less virtuous or less admirable, as he saw them in the refracted light of Gandhian influence. It should be mentioned in this context that if the historical consciousness which Sahgal shows in her novels is circumscribed by a few centuries of women's evolution, that of Akilon extends to several centuries earlier as he is preoccupied with tracing the roots of Tamil civilization in some of his works including வேந்துரு மைத்தன் (The Son of the Tiger), a work not included for discussion in this thesis for want of space.
Also, as has already been pointed out, Sahgal's political vision is 'sociological', only with regard to issues relating to women's issues, whereas that of Akilon is more comprehensively 'sociological', as he is preoccupied with most of the burning issues in the Tamil society and the malfunctioning of democratic institutions in the India of the post-Independence period.

Sahgal presents the lives of several leaders in a mode of recognizable disguise in her fiction, while Akilon presents the struggles and lives of ordinary political activists of his time. Besides, most of the 'families' figuring in Sahgal's fictional world are quite obviously, drawn from the upper strata of the Indian society and, as such, they are more concerned about the quality of human relationship, unlike a good number of Akilon's characters who are engaged in a desperate quest for meeting their fundamental needs for survival and dignity in the context of a political juggernaut. Besides, while Sahgal presents at least some foreigners in her fiction, being especially mindful of her audience living abroad, Akilon confines himself to the portrayal of Indians, that too, Tamils in particular.
However, there is a certain essential affinity between the two writers, with regard to their thematic preoccupations as can be seen from their recurrent presentations of protagonists, which all emerge as essentially patriotic and idealistic. According to Weisstein, "themes are concretized through characters" (1973, 139). And, as patriotism and idealism are the dominant themes in both Sahgal and Akilon, several protagonists figuring in their fiction are nothing more than individualization of these themes.