Preface

This thesis entitled "Nayantara Sahgal and Akilon: A Comparative Study" aims primarily at studying the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, the Indian novelist in English and the well-known Tamil writer P.V.Akilandam, popularly known by his pseudonym 'Akilon'. Both the writers are contemporaries and can lay claim to similar cultural and political backgrounds for their fiction. They both have analysed in their works the life in India before and after Independence. They have also made several attempts to write on burning political and social issues/ themes of their times. The stories of Sahgal's A Time To Be Happy, This Time of Morning and Mistaken Identity and Akilon's Pen (The Woman), Inpa Niṉaivu (The Happy Recall), Pāvai Vilakku (The Maiden Lamp) and Neṉciṉ Alaikal (The Waves of the Heart) are woven around India's struggle for freedom. Sahgal's Rich Like Us concerns 'Emergency' in India and its aftermath. An undercurrent of patriotic fervour runs through the novels of both Sahgal and Akilon.

Virtues like love, loyalty, honesty, liberty and equality are accorded high importance by both writers in their novels. Both of them advocate the cause of the
woman's need for emancipating herself by embodying the ideals of dignity, equality and liberty in their women characters who stand boldly for their rights in a highly male-dominated society. Sahgal's characters like Uma Mitra and Rashmi in *This Time of Morning*, Mara and Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh*, Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* and Bhushan's mother in *Mistaken Identity*, resist male domination and put up an unrelenting fight for their fundamental rights. No longer do they see themselves as chattels or possessions in the hands of men but as individuals entitled to their own dignity and basic rights. Akilon's society is also highly patriarchal which makes every spirited woman rebel against the rigidity of social customs. For example, in *Cittirap Pavai* (The *Portrait of A Lady*), Anandhi the protagonist boldly breaks out of the limits of the marital bond inflicted upon her, in order to join her lover, Annamalai. Yet, on the whole, Akilon's women are more conventional than Sahgal's.

The Indian society of the middle decades of the twentieth century, be it in the north or the south, came under the irresistible spell of Mahatma Gandhi's charisma and his lofty ideals. It is little wonder then, that the novels of Sahgal and Akilon, written during
that period are peopled with idealistic Gandhian followers, firmly standing on their essentially Gandhian principles amidst adverse or challenging situations.

While Sahgal locates most of her fiction in North India, Akilon uses the cities and villages of South India as the background for most of his works. The predominant social milieux with which both the writers are preoccupied are also different. Sahgal's fiction presents, by and large, a vision of the upper stratum of the Indian society while Akilon's characters belong to the common run of the society of Tamil Nadu. Sahgal's novels, written in English, aim at an elite reader, inside or outside the borders of India. On the other hand, Akilon's sole medium is Tamil and so his appeal as a writer is confined to an audience who can understand only Tamil.

As there are pronounced similarities in certain vital respects in the fiction of Sahgal and Akilon, it is an interesting academic exercise to compare, analyse and evaluate each of the above writers, in terms of the other's creative writings.
The first chapter of the thesis - "Introduction: The Age" - presents a study of the growth of fiction in Indian literature in English and Tamil, up to the times of Nayantara Sahgal and Akilon respectively. It also makes a brief survey of the image of women in both the literatures ranging right from the early times of fiction in India to the time of the writers in question.

The second chapter - "The Foreground of Their Fiction" - makes an attempt to give detailed biographical studies of Nayantara Sahgal and Akilon. A special slant has been given in this chapter to their literary achievements as award-winning writers.

The third chapter - "Creators in Their Creations" - shows how the writers' personal lives have influenced the fictional characters in their respective works of art. It discusses Nayantara Sahgal's autobiographical novel The Day in Shadow and Akilon's Kollaikkāran (The Bandit) a novella, and Pāvai Vilakku (The Maiden Lamp), dwelling especially on the theme, events and characterisation of the above novels paying special attention to the protagonists who seem to be self-portrayals of the authors concerned. The chapter also
points out how certain events in the lives of the authors have been artistically transformed and presented in their fiction.

The fourth chapter - "Women and Wedlock" - presents an analysis of the issue of women in the context of marriage in the works of Nayantara Sahgal and Akilon. Some of their early novels present devoted and loyal wives who are self-effacing, self-sacrificing and ever-suffering. On the other hand, there are also women, liberated and courageous, walking out of their homes on the edge of a crisis, and also permissive women who revel in enjoying a life that offers them excessive liberty outside wedlock. As Akilon deals with a highly conservative Tamil society in his novels, there is not much room for him for presenting permissive women indulging themselves freely in extra-marital relationships in his fiction. This comparative study shows how both Sahgal and Akilon approach women's problems with enormous sympathy and concern. Women in their works long for a lifelong companionship and intimacy, mutual understanding and loyalty in marriage. Some of them undergo unspeakable sufferings and agony in their marriages, in consequence of their struggle for supremacy and power. Though the writers are not
against marriage as an institution, they condemn inequality and injustice in marriage and decry in the strongest terms possible, the dominance of male-chauvinists in marriage. On rare occasions they also present a world of marital relationship founded on equality, dignity, justice and love.

The fifth chapter - "Indian Women Through The Ages: A Historical Perspective" - brings to light the changes in the status of women in the evolving Indian society. It shows how the status of woman gradually deteriorated from the position she enjoyed during the glorious Vedic period in India. Even though the twentieth century ushered in several dynamic changes in society, most women still find themselves victimized and fettered by strict, unfair moral codes and social norms. This chapter throws light on the writers' portrayal of women as victims of child-marriage, female infanticide, 'Sati,' polygamy, 'devadasi' system, rape and seduction in their respective novels.

The sixth chapter - "Freedom at Midnight and Its Aftermath" - shows the political preoccupation of Sahgal and Akilon as novelists. It classifies their
novels into the pre-Independence novels, pre-occupied with issues like the freedom struggle and the post-Independence novels portraying a free but decadent India, with all its evils of a rule by power-mongering and self-seeking politicians resorting to all kinds of corruption, violence and social injustice. Even though India has won political freedom from a bondage to alien rulers, it still continues to experience a midnight darkness, awaiting the dawn of true liberation and truth. The chapter shows how some of Sahgal's characters are thinly disguised portraits of some well-known figures on the Indian political scene such as Pandit Nehru, Krishna Menon, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Lal Bahadur Sastri and Ranjit Sitaram Pandit. Sahgal, being a member of the Nehru household, exploits her close acquaintance with some national leaders, with regard to several burning political issues of her times. Gandhian influence on the writers under study can be also seen in their portrayal of Gandhian characters who stand firmly on the principles of non-violence and truth. Besides, some important historical/political events like the Quit India Movement, Salt-March, Civil Disobedience Campaign, the Bengal Famine and the Emergency of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's reign, find a place in the novels of
Sahgal and Akilon. The study shows how Sahgal is concerned mostly with issues which could be called 'political', while Akilon is more preoccupied with themes relating to 'social' progress.

The final chapter - "The Literary Techniques" - deals with the comparative merits of the two writers as creative artists, highlighting the similarities and dissimilarities between their works in the light of the basic tenets of modern poetics relating to comparative study of literature.

The closing section briefly summarises and consolidates all the salient conclusions arrived at in the course of the entire research project.