Chapter One

Introduction

“‘Comparative literature’ implies a study of literature which uses comparison as its main instrument”

(Prawer 2)

This study is an attempt to compare the selected short stories of the Canadian writer, Alice Munro, and the Keralite writer, Kamala Das, and to see how far they are similar in their perceptions of the phallocentric world as they analyse its sexual mores and moral values through their subjective narratives. It seeks to show how the woman in them sets out to recreate her own self and to refeminize her life and values. Most of their stories are seen to result from a transmutation of their personal experiences.

In his book, The Short Story: The Critical Idiom Ian Reid, referring to this literary form, says that “In its normally limited scope and subjective orientation it corresponds to the lyric poem as the novel does to the epic” (28). The short story has gained popularity across the world because of its brevity in
the depiction of life, characters or the narrators’ mood or impressions. A true short story, as W.H. Hudson says, “is not merely a novel on a reduced scale” but a genre which differs from the novel in its “motive, plan and structure” (337-338). He goes on to say, “By reason of its brevity and concentration, the short story manifestly demands particular care in all the details of composition” (340). Its range is unlimited where its theme is concerned.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the short story had become a notable literary form in America through the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce and O’Henry in France through those of Balzac and Maupassant; in Russia through those of Gogol, Turgenev and Chekhov. There are plotted stories as well as those built on situation, atmosphere or mood. Most of the stories of the American writers as well as those of the French writers in the first phase of the development of this form are found to be plotted ones. It is from the Russian short-story writers – Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Chekhov – that the modern short story proper gets its character. According to Valerie Shaw, “For Virginia Woolf, models of the kind of storytelling she felt modern literature needed came not from France or England, where even the best stories struck her as dull because ‘events seem threaded like beads on a string’, but from Russia” (230). In its modern form short fiction draws upon its authors creative
experience of life for communication in a highly suggestive phraseology which illumines a point of view, a mood or an atmosphere.

Valerie Shaw writes, “When Virginia Woolf described the power of great essays to ‘haunt the mind and remain entire in the memory’, she was using terms which apply equally well to the short story” (227). A.S. Collins is of the view that the “‘modern’ short story, often very far from being a story in the normal sense” is not for all and its appeal is “naturally rather to the younger readers than to their elders and to the literary rather than to the average reader” (265). This is certainly what lies behind Nadine Gordimer’s statement that “The short story is a fragmented and restless form, a matter of hit or miss, and it is perhaps for this reason that it suits modern consciousness – which seems best expressed as flashes of insight alternating with near-hypnotic states of indifference” (qtd. in Shaw 228).

Short-story writers today not only reflect the disturbingly fragmentary nature of modern or postmodern life but also seek to challenge what Valerie Shaw terms “irreality” of modern existence by recreating alternative worlds which defy the realm of reality. Reid says:

The tale-telling impulse is too irressibly fecund to be confined within any single narrative pattern. Therefore the history of the modern short story embraces diverse tendencies,
some of which have stretched, shrunk or otherwise altered
previous conceptions of the nature of the genre. (3)

Stories with a linear narration today looks a bit passé in the West, for Alice
looks upon the framework of fiction not as a “road” but rather as a “house” for
the reader to move around or “stay in” for a little while (qtd. in Gadpaille 57).
Kamala says, “I just depict a mood. Of late there is no employment of any
technique. There is no need for a plot as thoughts alone sustain it because
human life is lived mostly in thoughts” (qtd. in Vasudevan Nair 10-11). The
Irish writer Sean O’Faolain calls the short story a “personal exposition” and
argues that “What one searches for and what one enjoys in a short story is a
special distillation of personality, a unique sensibility which has recognized
and selected at once a subject that, above all other subjects, is of value to the
writer’s temperament and to him alone” (qtd. in Shaw 239).

Emergent women writers have found in the flexible form of short
fiction the best medium for the exploration of the masculinist world from the
feminist angle. One could see from the inception of the short story in the
second half of the nineteenth century the establishment of a “feminine”
literary tradition, which in the course of woman’s emancipatory endeavours
could be seen to assume “feminist” and “female” specificity, to borrow
Showalter’s terms of categorization (13). Feminism is basically a social force
or a political practice through which feminists confront masculinist ideas and
the exclusionary practices which men rationalize and through this political
process ultimately challenge what the male world considers to be the truth.

One may give Wollstonecraft (1759-97) credit for the formulation of gender
as a socio-cultural rather than natural construct in A Vindication of the Rights
of Woman (1792), which has become a manifesto of feminist criticism. Mary
Beard (1876-1958), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) and Rebecca Dame West
(1892-1983) began to be voices of the voiceless women in the first phase of
feminism. These women through their writings and speeches made a powerful
plea for fundamental change in society’s perception of the function, place and
potential of women. Virginia Woolf’s most powerful essay on women’s need
for emancipation is A Room of One’s Own (1929), which is based on two
lectures. She begins by announcing her basic thesis that “a woman must have
money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” (13). She examines
here the educational, social and financial disadvantages and prejudices which
have thwarted women writers throughout English history. She projects the
need for “the androgynous mind” while she deplores the male-centred
perspective of some of the finest works of our greatest living writers (103).

Mary Beard who became active as a member of the Woman Suffrage
movement (1910) in America authored several books on women’s issues
among which On Understanding Women (1931) and Women as a Force in
History (1946) became very influential. Rebecca West, the Irish woman was
similarly an ardent and vocal supporter of women’s suffrage. She became a political writer on the Clarion a socialist newspaper in 1912. Her lectures highlighted the need for woman to be empowered.

Shortly after 1920 when woman suffrage was won in the USA, the movement for women’s liberation faltered and came virtually to a halt. Then followed a period of dormancy and darkness when feminism almost seem to be a spent force particularly during the global economic collapse and the Second World War. But four years after the conclusion of the global war feminism regained its vigour and manifested itself in one of the most important books ever written about the oppression of women in the French book entitled The Second Sex (1949). The author Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) had already established her reputation as an existentialist philosopher, left-wing political activist and a writer of both fiction and non fiction. Its main goal was to show man that womanhood is really a social construct. The thrust of her argument is that the subordination of female to male does not really signify an immutable state of nature, but is only the result of different social forces. She asserts, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” (3). Another watershed was the appearance in the USA of Betty Friedan’s (1921) memorable book The Feminine Mystique in 1963 which had a more pragmatic approach than the previous book. It analyzed the role of women in US society and articulated their frustration but the book offered few
specific remedies for the problems of the homebound wife and mother who wanted to get out of domestic captivity.

The US feminist Kate Millett (1934) stirred a hornet’s nest with her powerfully written book Sexual Politics in 1970. Millett’s thesis is that patriarchal power is perpetuated through man’s control over the sexuality of woman. Pam Morris points out how “This need to retain sexual dominance explains the recurrent misogynistic images of women in literary texts, as whores or virgins, frigid or nymphomaniac, chaste or licentious” (15). Another path-breaking feminist text, The Female Eunuch, was authored in 1970 by the Australian academic, Germaine Greer (1939). This controversial book portrays marriage as a legalized form of slavery for women and attacks the denial and misrepresentation of female sexuality by male-dominated society. She writes about how women distort and suppress their human qualities in order to fit the fantasy stereotype created by men. The stereotypical female is a “Sexual Object ... a doll” (55-57). Her desexualization also involves her mind and feelings because she is supposed to be “without libido.” In short, the ideal woman has become the nearest thing to a castrated creature or what she calls “a female eunuch.” Kate Millet through her book made Freud and psychoanalysis to be inimical to feminists but it was Juliet Mitchell (1934) who through her book Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974) countered this opposition and pointed out that Freud’s
account of sexuality was socially and not biologically constructed and how his theory of the unconscious was helpful to feminists.

The French feminists – Helene Cixous (1937), Luce Irigaray (1939) and Julia Kristeva (1941) – formulated their theories of woman. Cixous’ work is mostly concerned with the relationship between psychoanalysis and language in its significance for women. She encourages the expression in language of female sexuality and has become associated with the theory of écriture feminine through which, she thinks, women will bring their bodily energies and previously unimagined unconscious into view. “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975) is her most impassioned appeal to women to follow her example and discover a positive feminine identity through writing. It could be called “the manifesto of feminine writing”. For Cixous a feminine way of writing has to be based on a very different order of meaning from that of the phallocentric symbolic order. Rejecting Freudian and Lacanian theories of woman as “lack”, she calls for an assertion of the female body as plenitude and concentrates on an erotics of writing to be derived from a feminine unconscious shaped by female bodily drives.

Luce Irigaray broke away from Lacan’s line of thinking and argued against Lacan’s conclusions about women. If women as subjects are outsiders to language, she argues, it is the consequence not of inevitable family arrangements but of years of cultural subordination of women’s bodies and
their sexuality to the needs and fantasies of men. In her major work *The Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), she says that “woman has been defined as irrational, the Other ..., an imperfect man, ... an object of exchange among men” (qtd. in Jones, “Inscribing Femininity: …” 84). Her contention is that phallocentric concepts and their historical consequences can be transformed only when women find ways to assert their specificity as women, their difference from men and men’s system of representation.

Julia Kristeva is like Cixous and Irigaray in basing language on the pre-Oedipal relationship between child and mother and in moving the emphasis away from Freudian and Lacanian concern with the Oedipal father. Kristeva uses the term “semiotic” for the first pre-Oedipal phase of life to suggest that it is at this stage that the first traces of what will become the signifying process of verbal language are established. Without this initial ordering of the continuous flux of physical sensation and libidinal drives experienced by the infant and the resulting simultaneous beginnings of separate identity, language would be impossible. This is what lays the foundation of language for the infant.

The most influential theoritician and feminist critic of the second wave of gynocriticism is Showalter (1941). Her widely read book *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) traces the development of a tradition of women’s fiction from the early nineteenth century to the 1960s. She feels that women’s
fictional writing can be seen as passing through three major phases in response to the changing cultural conditions in which they worked. She terms most of the nineteenth century as the “Feminine” because women writers imitated the dominant male modes and internalized male aesthetic and social values until the early 1880s. The late 1880s and 1890s saw the emergence of a more militant political consciousness among women, which Showalter considers as initiating the second phase of women’s fictional writing. There is in this “Feminist” phase not only protest against prevailing attitudes and ideas but also advocacy of the need for autonomy. She feels that the “Female” phase begins from the 1920s when there is the process of self-discovery. In this phase there is no outward reaction but a turning inward searching for their own independent female identity.

Two other critics of prominence in women’s studies are Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar whose book The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (1979) has become a classic. They expose the male disposition to consider artistic creativity to be the domain of man and to equate the phallus with the pen and to look upon female writing as an activity linked to pathology and madness.

Mainstream feminism has long assumed that it speaks for all women. It only articulates the views of white and heterosexual women. Feminism today has branched out into its diverse forms like lesbian, or Afro-American or
postcolonial or Marxist feminist criticism. Women like Alice Walker prefer to call themselves “womanist” signifying one who “Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility .... Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.” (xi).

Canadian fiction is the outcome of different cultures and forces both foreign and native. The fictional form has been shaped by European, American, Asian and Caribbean presence in the culture. The first writers of English in Canada in the early seventeenth century were visitors who wrote “unadorned narratives of travel and exploration” (“Canadian Literature”). W.H. New in Canadian Short Fiction says that “Canadian fiction has emerged from different sources.” To understand the current short story form “it is necessary to appreciate the many influences that have shaped the genre” (2). The two influences on Canadian-English short-story form are the romance adventure and the documentary sketch.

Short fiction came as a distinct genre only half a century after the novel began to be written. The development of the short story in Canada as in most other languages is the upshot of the growth of popular magazines. In the nineteenth century lots of stories were written that were mostly romances. The thematic patterns of those stories were principally borrowed from British models. The early readers of Canada were familiar with Thomas Chandler Haliburton’s series of sketches in Joseph Howe’s paper Novascotian which
was also called The Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick. These Sam Slick sketches could be considered as the early literary expressions of Canada along with Susanna Moodie’s 1850s sketches of the backwoods.

In the nineteenth century, the Canadian writers turned from the British model of sketches to the American model of the short story. They were very much influenced by the American short-story writers: Edgan Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Fictionists wrote stories in popular magazines like Scribner, Harper and the Atlantic Monthly. In the late nineteenth century the focus of Canadian short fiction turned to the naturalistic animal story and the local-colour story. There were wide readership for the stories of Charles G.D. Roberts and Ernest Thompson Seton who introduced naturalistic animals as characters with a realistic and regional setting. Whereas the local-colour stories were introduced by Gilbert Parker, E.W. Thomson, Duncan Campbell Scott and Sara Jeanette Duncan.

Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, (1860-1943) a man of letters wrote his first animal story “Do Seek Their Meat From God” in 1892. He was very much influenced by his observations of animals during his youthful wanderings and he portrayed animal behaviour in human terms and thereby evoked readers’ sympathy for the wild. He published his first book of animal stories, Earth Enigmas in 1896. Ernest Thompson Seton (1860-1946) published his first collection of animal story Wild Animals I Have Known in 1898. He
realistically portrayed animal activity as seen through human eyes. In his stories animals communicate and expressed human responses.

William Alexander Fraser (1857-1933), who was deeply influenced by the Scripture wrote animal stories that were rooted in ancient conventions. His *Mooswa and Others of the Boundaries* resembles Kipling’s *Jungle Book*. Animals in his stories have personalities. They even talk and feel emotions. Another contemporary of Roberts and Seton was Edward William Thomson (1894-1924), who wrote stories that depicted physical and psychological tensions. His best known story, “The Privilege of the Limits” was published in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1891. He brought out his best in *Old Man Savarin Stories* (1895).

Gilbert Parker (1862-1932) became famous with his historical novels of romance and adventure. His first collection of stories *Pierre and His People* appeared in the New York *Independent* in 1892. Gadpaille says, “The tendency of his characters to burst into spontaneous song, expressing emotion or atmosphere, places Parker’s stories firmly in the loose nineteenth-century convention of the sketch or anecdote” (11).

Two notable women short-story writers of 1880’s are Isabella Valancy Crawford (1850-87) and Susie Francis Harrison (1859-1935). Even though Crawford’s reputation rests on narrative poems she wrote narratives with high melodrama. She wrote stories in an era of romantic fiction as it was in great
demand. Thus she supported herself and became independent. Susie Francis Harrison published her first collection of stories *Crowded Out and Other Sketches* in 1886 under the pseudonym "Seranus." According to Gadpaille she "was able to convey – subtly, through gesture or demeanour – the psychological states of many of her characters" (12). Sara Jeannette Duncan (1861-1922) produced one collection of four stories *The Pool in the Desert* in 1903. She was influenced by Henry James and wrote articles and travel sketches with a journalistic skill. She created feminist characters who are "intelligent, independent, penetrating female: critical, appreciative and above all alive" (Gadpaille 16).

According to New, the period between 1890 and 1940 saw "signs of different forms of writing as well as signs of a different kind of realism emerging, affecting the subjects of fiction, its stance, and its modes of address." (Canadian Short Fiction 4). Another notable writer who demands high critical attention is Duncan Campbell Scott with his collection of stories *In the Village of Viger* (1896). He was more influenced by Flaubert and Maupassant than by American writers. Through his stories he dealt with complex psychological states to treat abnormal mental states. Another collection of his short fiction is *The Witching of Elspie* (1923). In *A History of Canadian Literature*, W.H. New says, "Scott emerges as the chief short-
fiction writer in Canada at the turn of the century, the one writer who turned the genre into its modern form” (129).

Stephen Leacock (1869-1944) who became widely known as a humorist in English speaking world came out with his humorous volumes, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) and *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (1914). They are portraits of Ontario town and they are sketches held together by common locale. Raymond Knister (1899-1932) edited the first Canadian short-story anthology entitled *Canadian Short Stories* in 1928. Introducing the anthology, Knister indicated that the Canadian short story was to enter a new era. In his stories, he creatively used ambiguity and employed themes that conveyed values and beliefs. A few of his stories were collected by Michael Gnarowski in *Selected Stories of Raymond Knister* (1972) and by Peter Stevens in *The First Day of Spring: Stories and Other Prose* (1976). A man of wide reading, Knister’s ambition to become a serious fictionist was not fully realized as he used affected and bombastic language.

But Morely Callaghan (1903) succeeded as a fictionist and continues to be popular till now. He used “urban landscape to create non-standard symbols and new structural metaphors” (Gadpaille 24). He made the urban setting the new territory for Canadian short fiction. He, like Knister, had an interest in the abnormalities of human psychology and wrote stories that deal with the dilemmas of the human mind. A selection of Callaghan stories appeared in
1959 entitled *Morley Callaghan Stories*, and in 1985, *The Lost and Found Stories of Morley Callaghan* was published. He has two more collections entitled – *A Native Argosy* (1929) and *Now That April’s Here* in 1936.

in 1968 and The Race and Other Stories in 1982. He played a major role in
the development of Canadian short fiction. His The Lamp at Noon could be
compared with Alice’s Lives as both explore the trials and tribulations of
ordinary people.

Short fiction began to be turned out in earnest from the late 1960’s
onwards by a galaxy of women writers. However the women pioneers of
short fiction in Canada could be seen in Isabella Valancy Crawford, Susie
Frances Harrison and Sara Jeannette Duncan. Right from the beginning of
Canadian literature Canada has had a female literary tradition. These women
writers are most widely read than male writers. Ethel Wilson (1888-1980) and
Mavis Gallant (1922) belong to this age and have created such characters who
register in their fiction the changes coming over society where women are
concerned. Ethel Wilson brought out her best in the collection Mrs Golightly
and Other Stories in 1961. Her stories deal with the middle class society and
their behaviour. Her stories are lightly ironic and modernist in tone. She has
employed new strategies in her narration of events.

The year of sixties were marked by many writers adopting “modernist
narrative strategies, writing realistic stories with a limited point of view that
leads the narrative through a series of pointed moment – in which
psychological truths outweigh the events of plot – to the achievement of a
revelation.” (Gadpaille 99). By 1970s Canadian short story widened
considerably. Marian Engel’s (1933-85) *Inside the Easter Egg* (1975) and *The Tattooed Woman* (1985) reflects a surreal quality where the author captures a new area of female experience with games of metafiction. Jane Rule (1931) wrote stories of their memories of childhood and questioned the imposed rules and codes. Her collection of stories is named *Theme for Diverse Instruments* (1975). Another Canada’s east coast writer like Jane Rule is Beth Harvor. She widely gained critical approval with her collections *Women and Children* (1973) and *If Only We Could Drive Like This* (1988). These stories balanced between sentiment and criticism. Like Munro’s Jubilee, Isabel Huggan (1943) made her characters live in the small town “Garten”. She like Munro, traces the growth of a protagonist in her collection *The Elizabeth Stories* (1984). Sandra Birdsell (1924) traces the pain of artistic and sexual development through her stories in *Night Travellers* (1982). Janice Kulyk Keifer (1952) and Robyn Sarah (1949) wrote stories in the form of urban realism. Their stories were of characters from middle class background with “faded dreams and compromised ideals” (Gadpaille 110). Another female short story writer who brought out the urban realism into the stories is Katherine Grovier (1948). Her collection *Fables of Brunswick Avenue* (1985) brings out a middle class background with bourgeois children and psychiatrists who often burn with passion. Helen Weinzweig’s (1915) anthologized stories bring out the author’s ability to picture the dark regions of the human heart.
Among the celebrated short women fictionists on the current Canadian literary scene one finds writers like Mavis Gallant (1922), Margaret Lawrence (1926-86), Alice Munro (1931), Margaret Atwood (1939) and Audrey Thomas (1935) enjoying a larger readership even to this day. Gadpaille feels that

It is difficult, however, to find collections by male writers that offer both reading satisfaction and complete representations of their writing at its best, such as one finds, for example, in The Other Paris (Gallant), Something I’ve Been Meaning To Tell You (Munro), Dancing Girls (Atwood), and Good Bye Harold, Good Luck (Thomas). (vii)

Mavis Gallant is widely known for her contributions to the New Yorker. Her major collections include The Other Paris (1956), My Heart is Broken (1964), The Pegnitz Junction (1973), From the Fifteenth District (1979) and Home Truths (1981). The main theme of her fiction is emotional alienation. Robert Weaver, one of her earliest enthusiasts edited a selection of her short stories named The End of the World and Other Stories in 1973. Keith says that “Gallant is less interested in plot than in mood and atmosphere” (158). Margaret Lawrence’s stories in The Tomorrow Tamer (1963) turned out to be one of the most memorable of her stories. Her second collection A Bird in the House (1970) set in the fictional town of Manawaka explores a young artists’ struggle to free herself from a strict household. The major theme in her stories
Canada’s most versatile and famous writer Margaret Atwood’s stories present a Canadian writers’ relation with the cultural and literary tradition. She has two collections of short fiction, Dancing Girls (1977) and Bluebeard’s Egg (1983). In her Dancing Girls, she deals with character’s inner lives and frustrated personal relationships. American born, Audrey Thomas introduced new techniques from American short story. Her first collection, Ten Green Bottles (1967) brought a new form and content into Canadian short story. She introduced the stream-of-consciousness technique into her fiction to map the relationship between life and art. Her other collections are Ladies and Escorts (1977), Real Mothers, Two in the Bush and Other Stories (1981) and Good Bye Harold, Good Luck (1986).

The Indian-English short story proper came into being during the Gandhian age. Most of the notable short-story writers of the period came from South India. T.L. Natesan wrote under the pen-name Shankar Ram. His stories deal mostly with the rustic life in Tamil Nadu. A.S.P. Ayyar published three collections of short stories – Indian After Dinner Stories (1927), Sense in Sex and Other Stories (1929) and The Finger of Destiny and Other Stories (1932). The constant theme in his stories is social reform, especially in the plight of women in traditional Hindu society. S.K. Chettur’s stories in Muffled Drums and Other Stories (1917), The Cobras of Dhermashevi and
Other Stories (1937), The Spell of Aphrodite and Other Stories (1957) and Mango Seed and Other Stories (1974) seem to be based on village feuds, murders and local legends.

The most productive of Indian short-story writers is Manjeri Isvaran. His books include The Naked Shingles (1941), Siva Ratri (1943), Angry Dust (1944), Rickshawallah (1946), Fancy Tales (1947), No Anklet Bells For Her (1949), Immersion (1951), Painted Tigers (1956) and A Madras Admiral (1959). He is successful in his use of fantasy and the supernatural. His stories are suggestive and poetic in nature.

The most significant contribution to the short story came from three major novelists: Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. Anand has to his credit seven collections and his fiction is exclusively concerned with India. His short-story collections include The Lost Child and Other Stories (1934); The Barber’s Trade Union and Other Stories (1944); The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and Other Stories (1947); Reflections on the Golden Bed and Other Stories (1953); The Power of Darkness and Other Stories (1959); Lajwanti and Other Stories (1966) and Between Tears and Laughter (1973). Raja Rao’s two collections include The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories (1947) and The Policeman and the Rose (1978). He writes of the past with a profound sense of richness and creativity. His work is metaphysical and poetic and traditional.
R.K. Narayan’s career as a short story writer began with *Cyclone and Other Stories* (1943). According to M.K. Naik, his stories “are uniformly compact and are told in his usual seemingly artless style” (183). His *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970) and *Malgudi Days* (1982) bring out Narayan’s compassionate feeling for justice and sense of humour. His other collections include: *Dodu and Other Stories* (1943); *An Astrologer’s Day and Other Stories* (1947); *Lawley Road and Other Stories* (1956); and *God’s Demons and Others* (1964). Kushwant Singh is the author of small volumes of short stories, which have now been published together in one collection titled *The Collected Short Stories of Kushwant Singh* (1989). He believes that

(1) a short story must be short and usually its outside limit fixed by him would not exceed 3500 words.

(2) a short story must be built around one incident or a series of incidents illustrating one theme or portraying one character or the equation between that one character and others.

(3) a short story or its characters can be as fanciful as the author cares to make them, provided they do not violate the law of probability and it has a message to deliver.

(4) a short story must have a compact plot with a beginning, middle, and end.

(5) a short story must have, like a scorpion’s sting in its tail, a curlicue which sums up the story.
Manohar Malgonkar’s three collections: *A Toast in Warm Wine* (1974), *Bombay Beware* (1975) and *Rumble-Tumble* (1977) ravished the readers with its glimpses of the world of activism including several areas of army life, espionage, hunting etc. Ruskin Bond portrays a mood of nostalgia for the sights and scenes of boyhood days. He has published a number of short stories: *Neighbour’s Wife and Other Stories* (1966); *My First Love and Other Stories* (1968); *The Maneater of Manjari* (1972) and *The Girl From Copenhagen* (1977).

Women writers have also made their mark in Indian-English short fiction. According to Iyengar, “Women are natural story-tellers even when they don’t write or publish” (435). Anita Desai well known as a novelist has only one short story collection named *Games at Twilight*. Her fiction mainly deals with the theme of alienation as a psychological state of mind. According to M.K. Naik, Desai “unravels the tortuous involutions of sensibility with subtlety and finesse.” Her ability to “evoke the changing aspects of Nature matched with human moods is another of her assets, though her easy mastery of the language and her penchant for image and symbol occasionally results in preciosity and over-writing” (243). Sashi Deshpande, a Sahitya Academy Award Winner, has not been a prolific writer of short stories. Most of her stories have come out in the book with the title *Sashi Deshpande: Collected Stories*. Her stories examine the inner turmoil of women. The silent female
mythological characters find new voices in her stories like “The Inner Room” and “Hear me, Sanjaya”. Her women are conscious of their predicament and they are creatures of conventional morality. She turns out to be their spokesperson who writes about Indian middle class women and their feelings. Ruth Prawar Jhabvala (1927) pictures through her fiction segments of Indian social life and intricate human relationships. She is at her best in dealing with the comedies of urban middle class Indian life and East-West encounter. Her short story collections such as How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories (1976) and Out of India (1986) centre on the viewpoints of the European woman traveller reflecting her own position as an “insider/outsider” in India.

The chief thematic concern of Dina Mehta’s stories in her sole collection, The Other Woman (1981), is woman’s sense of anguish and alienation that results from her acute consciousness of man’s perfidy. Her characters struggle to achieve emancipation from traditional constraints and orthodox morality. They later achieve a conscious identity for themselves. She could be considered as a feminist short-story writer pursuing an independent path like Kamala Das. She according to Iyengar, “is a good story-teller with a talent for creating the desired mood and convoluting the characters as wanted” (760). Winner of the Commonwealth Award for her first novel The Thousand Faces of Night, Gita Hariharan deals with the
problems of women in her writings. This novel can be considered a major contribution to Indian feminist literature. Her works display an urban sensibility engaged in the constant reinterpretation of myth, tradition, fantasy and fable. Her short-story collection *The Art of Dying* deals with death and its place in life. Calcutta-born Bharati Mukherjee is an expatriate writer living in the States. Her short-story collections – *Darkness* and *The Middleman and Other Stories* winner of the 1988 National Book Critics Circle Award – depict the trials and transformations of new immigrants in Canada and United States. *The Middleman and Other Stories* presents greater cultural diversity and celebrates the immigrant experience, reflecting the authors’ new “American” voice. Born in Kerala, Anita Nair began her career with journalistic writing. She wrote a few poems and a collection of short stories before her first novel *The Better Man* was published. While working as a creative director of an advertising agency in Bangalore, she wrote her first book, a collection of short stories *Satyr of the Subway* in the year 1997. In a recent workshop she spoke of her collection of ideas and events that undergo a chemical process in mind. It is these experiences that are brought out in the form of a piece of art. She goes on to say that a “writer is a scavenger, who collects materials from everywhere.” (Kavitha 2).

In her maiden anthology *Incantations and Other Stories*, Anjana Appachana handles different themes like mother-daughter relationship and
writes about the predicament of women in the emerging world. Her stories have been published in several journals, magazines and anthologies. She convincingly portrays the strains on women in contemporary India, showing how the forces of modernization and nationalism affect women’s daily lives. Another short story writer who recently came to limelight is Jhumpa Lahiri. Her short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* brings out typical Indian tradition and the Indianess in every human being. Lahiri views herself as “an interpreter of emotional pain and affliction” (5). According to Rashmi Gaur, Lahiri “boldly and brilliantly maps the shores of her protagonists’ inner worlds, often blurring the lines between the concepts of optimism and pessimism, constantly underlying the fact that questions on which a meaningful happiness of life depends can be tackled in two ways — intellectually and existentially” – (112). Manjula Padmanabhan published her first short story “A Government of India Undertaking” in the year 1984. In 1996, she published her first collection of short stories *Hot Death, Cold Soup*. Her humour and narrative tension in those stories paved the way for her major play *Harvest* (1988) that won awards in theatrical circles.

Among other writers to be mentioned are Krishna Hutheesing (*Shadow on the Wall*), Attiah Hosain (*Phoenix Fled and Other Stories*), Nergis Dalal (*The Nude*), Sujatha Balasubramaniam (*The House in the Hills*), Sadiqa Peerbhoy (*Faces in the Crowd*), Prema Shastri (*The Blue Convertible and*
Other Stories), and Jai Nimbkar (The Lotus and Other Stories). Among these women writers, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Sashi Deshpande and a few others tower over most of their contemporaries because of their illuminating insight into human nature and their incisive analysis of its convolutions.

Alice Munro (1931) has gained the reputation of being Canada’s most prominent short-story writer with her eleven collections – Dance of the Happy Shades (1968), Lives of Girls and Women (1971), Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You (1974), Who Do You Thing You Are? (1978), Moons of Jupiter (1982), The Progress of Love (1986), Friend of My Youth (1990), Open Secrets (1994), The Love of a Good Woman (1998), Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage (2002) and Runaway Stories (2004) – and has received progressively greater critical attention from the critical circles of Canada; but, Kamala Das (1932) who has not been so fortunate as to be given such a celebrity status, although her four collections of poems – Summer in Calcutta (1965), The Descendants (1967), The Old Playhouse and Other Poems (1973), Collected Poems (1985) – have been well received. Kamala Das’s fame outside Kerala rests mainly on her contributions as a poet. Her fictional writings – short stories and memoirs written both in English and Malayalam, are yet to be read with critical attention. Her novel, Alphabet of Lust, (1976) turned out to be a damp squib with critics flaying her for its structural flaws, but her admittedly autobiographical book, My Story,
published in the same year created quite a furore as it “demolished traditional sexual barriers by dealing in female sexuality” (Menon 7). This is exactly what most of her stories in Malayalam also seek to do. Unlike Munro, she straddles both the English and Malayalam literary worlds thinking in Malayalam and dreaming in English. Apart from her four poetic collections, and other works in English she brought out her English stories, Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories in 1992. Some of her Malayalam stories have been translated into English and got published with the title The Sandal Trees and Other Stories in 1995. She has more than 250 stories written in Malayalam under her pseudonym, Madhavikutty. Most of them are contained in her collection Madhavikuttyude Kathakal: Sampoornam (Madhavikutty’s Stories: In Full), which was published first in 2003; Kadalmayooram (The Sea and the Peacock), which published in 1989; Januamma Paranja Katha (The Tale Told by Januamma), which came out in 2002; and Pattinte Ulachil (Rustle of Silk) which has been brought out this year. Ente Katha (My Story), 1973; Balyakala Smaranakal (Childhood Memories), 1987; Varshangalkku Mumpu (Years Ago), 1989 and Neermathalam Pootta Kalam (The Time When Neermathala Blossomed), 1993 are her memoirs in Malayalam. Bhayam Ente Nishavasthram (Fear is My Nightgown), 1986; Diarykkurippukal (Jottings from a Diary), 1992; Ottayadippatha (Single Pathway), 1997; Ente Pathakal (My Paths), 1999 are her recollections in the essay form except Fear is My
Nightgown where her writing alternates between verse and prose. A Childhood in Malabar (2003) contains English translations of Childhood Memories and Years Ago. Her essays penned by her after her conversion to Islam came out in the year 2000 with the title The Path of a Columnist. Most of these stories in English and Malayalam serve to bring into focus Kamala’s attitude towards female sexuality, male cruelty and societal decadence which she attributes to the weakening of the familial system in the wake of the subjugation of women.

Neither writer could be categorized as a feminist belonging to a particular school of thought. Alice seems to have no goal other than exposing male tyranny and female attempts, to resist it and remake woman’s life and refashion her destiny. Kamala’s political satires and portrayal of patriarchs as the perpetrators of atrocities on women and her attempts to educate them on sexuality by inculcating in them a feminist vision of morality and subjectivity show how much committed she is in her role as the reformer of the socio-familial system. But what brings them closer together is their lack of reticence and their irresistible urge to pour out all their feelings of resentment and their secret longings to leave the world when the time comes with what Kamala terms “a scrubbed-out conscience.” (My Story, “Preface”). The fictional dimension of Kamala really gains a sharper focus when it is juxtaposed with the stories of Alice some of which are explicit expositions of the “Sex lives of
Canadians”, as Entertainment Today referred to her seventh collection (qtd. in Ross 89).

Alice won the Governor General’s Awards for her first, fourth and sixth collections of short stories. She was honoured by Canada Council Moson Prize in 1990, the W.H. Smith Literary Award (UK) in 1995, and the Canadian Authors Assoc Jubilee Award for short stories and the PEN Malamud Award for Excellence in Short Fiction (US) in 1997. David Stouck’s assessment of her work is noted down thus, “from among the many women writers who were published and enjoyed critical success in the 1970s, Alice Munro has emerged as the most accomplished artist. Her reputation as one of Canada’s best writers” is backed by the popularity that her stories have gained across the globe (257). Kamala has not been so fortunate in receiving the kind of recognition or rewards she deserves although regional awards have come her way. Her first collection of poems, Summer in Calcutta has won her the Kent Award, her Collected Poems has fetched her the Asian World Prize. She has won the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, Vayalar Award, Muttathu Varkey Award, Gandhi Mission Literary Award and the Ezhuthachan Award. She held several offices of prestige like the poetry editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India, Chairperson of the Kerala Forestry Board, Sahitya Academy Vice-President and Kerala Children’s Film Society President. The feminine way of writing which they have horned, the feminist views they have
propagated in their fiction and the female way of life they have envisioned have all brought them together and for the universal recognition that they deserve.

Susan Bassnett feels that “anyone who has an interest in books embarks on the road towards what might be termed comparative literature”. If asked what comparative literature is, one tends to answer that it “involves the study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space” (Bassnett 1). The boundaries that the French school led by Paul Van Tieghem try to erect between “Comparative Literature”, “General Literature” and “World Literature” are rejected by the American school led by Henry Remak whose essay, “Comparative Literature, Its Definition and Function” is regarded today as the “bible” of the American scholars in this field. They argue that “anything could be compared with anything else” (Bassnett 32). But the approach of these liberal scholars is viewed with suspicion by the postmodernist school which insists that the cultural history of the regions or countries which have produced the texts being compared needs to be taken into account. Comparative Literature, really seeks to iron out all racial, political, religious and social differences, and brings together writers regardless of their origin or cultural orientation. In Theory of Literature, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren say that comparative literature “asks for a
widening of perspectives, a suppression of local and provincial sentiments, not easy to achieve” (4). They recognize the unity of humanity and the universality of literature as they, “literature is one, as art and humanity are one” (50). The ideas thought up by the French school as well as the American school are for comparatists essential components to strengthen Comparative Literature as a scholarly discipline. One tends to value

Comparative Literature’s insistence on the knowledge about as well as the inclusion of the Other in the widest definition of the concept and its realities, its global and international nature, its interdisciplinarity, its flexibility, and its objective as well as ability to translate one culture into another by the exercise and love of dialogue between cultures. (Zepetnek 3)

Matthew Arnold saw the significance and relevance of comparative literature when he said in his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford in 1857, “Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures (qtd. in Bassnett 1).

Comparison has been used here as a tool to bring into focus basically the affinities discerned between the Canadian writer and the Keralite writer. So it is a parallel study. There is a striking similarity between the themes
found in the stories of the writers studied here. “In our field, themes are the
ideal objects of study,” as Weisstein points out (147).

This study has been carried out in five chapters of which chapter one is
Introduction. It has an explication of the title of the dissertation and sketches
the development of the short story followed by an overview of the feminist
movement. English-Canadian fiction and Indian-English fiction are outlined
followed by profiles of the two authors studied here. An attempt is also made
to see the advantages of a comparative study of this sort in the light of the
knowledge gained on Comparative Literature. Chapters two, three and four
are entitled “Sexuality”, “Morality”, “Subjectivity” with three divisions
bearing their respective subtitles. These core chapters are dual comparisons of
the two authors with their views on the subjects discussed. The fifth chapter
titled “Summation” is a recap of the major findings backing the hypothesis.
The bibliographical details of the works cited and the works consulted appear
at the end in two separate sections. By placing here the regionally admired
and nationally known Keralite writer, Kamala Das or Madhavikutty (lately
rechristened Kamala Suraiya) with the internationally acclaimed and adored
Canadian writer, Alice Munro, the researcher hopes to get the former’s
readership enlarged and thereby help her gain wider recognition throughout
the world by translation of the rest of her Malayalam stories into the major
languages of the world.