PREFACE

I am conscious of the fact that I'm treading on a comparatively new field in Tamil Literature. Critical works on Tamil fiction are rare and few. To be frank, for an earnest student of fiction who desires to have an academic pleasure of analysing the contents of a Tamil short-story or novel, there is no worthwhile guide book to help him. As it is an accepted fact again that the modern short story as well as critical books on them owe their origin to the west, it is but natural that a student of fiction turns to that direction for succour.

Whether a story is written in a foreign tongue or in our own, it will necessarily have to maintain certain norms of construction in order to deserve to be called a short-story. The ingredients of plot, characters, style, setting and theme are the common elements found in any short-story or novel. The location may be different, the characters may speak different tongues; still a fiction does not exist without those components.

I have dealt only with the author's original creations that have seen the light of day, while leaving aside a body of his translated works. Not all of them could be called short-stories in the true sense of the word; neither are they uniformly good. In fact, a few like 'Celmam', 'Cittam pokku', Puratci manappanmai, Tiruakkural Kumareca Pillai etc. hang on the border-line, between essay and fiction. An overall assessment of
Putumaipittan's short stories, I have attempted to make in the final chapter.

The dissertation has been divided under the heads of plot, Characters, Setting, Style, Theme, Story and Critic and Conclusion. In the Appendix I have included a list of the author's original short stories collected from the available publications. A few friends suggested to me to add a chapter on a comparative study of Putumaipittan with some of his contemporary story writers like Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan, Pichamoorthy, B. S. Ramiah, Chellappa etc. and I had to decline their suggestions on the following grounds.

A comparative study is another major work which is definitely outside the scope of this essay.

Even without a comparative evaluation we could assess the merits or defects of a particular story by finding out if a proper and harmonious blending of various elements like plot, character etc. is achieved which alone could ultimately produce a cumulative aesthetic appeal on the readers. Therefore it is not a 'Sine quanon' that a particular author should be compared with another in order to judge the merit of his output.

Again, the stories "In toto" of two authors could not be compared, as only those possessing identical subject or theme could be evaluated. The theme may be general or specific and it is rarely that two stories of different authors tally in their specific themes. Therefore only general themes such as anguish, love and poverty etc. could form the common plank for evaluation. A comparison of Putumaipittan's Ponnakaram and 'Kaṭavulum Kantacakippillāyum' with the stories 'Vayirrakkuttān' and 'Perianāyaki Ula' of Akilan and Pichamoorthy respectively, would make the point clear.
While 'Ponnakaram' speaks about prostitution among the slum-dwellers Akilan's story deals about immoral traffic king among the more affluent sections of our society. Though both the stories are based on the general theme of prostitution, Ponnakaram illustrates the specific theme that poverty inevitably leads to immorality whereas Akilan's story which is in a way an antithesis of the former reveals that poverty need not be the sole cause of this vice as it is found even among the 'haves' of our society. Thus both the stories are poles apart in their specific theme and architectonics eventhough they touch upon the general theme of moral lapses.

Similarly 'Perianayaki Ulā' and 'Kaṭavulūm Kanta-cāmippillayum' treat identical subjects but are different in many other details. The first story is about the sight-seeing of the Goddess Minakṣi during her stroll along the streets of Madurai, while the other is a recounting of God's terrestrial experiences gathered during his stay in Madras. The common point of similarity ends there. The experiences gained by the central characters are different and so are the themes. While the Goddess meets a trader, a film producer etc. Putkumaipttan's Paramacivam tastes a cup of coffee in a hotel, meets a Dewan Bahadur and so on. In Pichamoorthy's story the specific theme is not well-defined. Instead of it becoming a 'felt experience' of the character, the Goddess is taught by her escort that money is the most powerful medium in the world. But Putkumaipttan's God comes into direct contact with different kinds of people and his first-hand experience teaches him that it is well-nigh impossible to live among the humans in this world which incidentally is the theme also. His experiences are so lively and natural that they easily find an emotional echo
in the reader with the result that we get greater and fuller aesthetic satisfaction in Putumaipittan's story. This is not an attempt at making any analytical study of the two stories but only an impressionistic evaluation. What I am trying to bring home by these illustrations is the fact that a real comparison between two stories could be made only if they deal about similar subjects or specific themes.

As each story is an entity in itself the author's success or failure in his creative venture is assessed only in terms of the harmonious or inharmonious blending of the various fictional elements constituting the story. So comparison is not essential for deciding the artistic merits of either a single story of an author or his collection as a whole.

A word about plagiarism, a common bane found among the modern writers. Even Putumaipittan who himself is one of the sternest critics of plagiarism has not been spared of this charge. When someone accused him of having composed his 'Kaṭavulum Kantacāmippillayum' by copying a Western narrative, which describes Jesus Christ making a trip in a tram car around the city of New York, Putumaipittan retorted "When they could allow Christ to make a trip in a tram, what harm is there in bringing our Paramasivam down to the earth and taking him round the city of Madras. But it is not a blatant copy as some of you might be inclined to think. It is true, however, that the Western story gave me the inspiration to write the story 'Kaṭavulum Kantacāmippillayum'. But there are no similarities what so ever between the two".1 His

stories 'Tekkankanrukal', 'Camati', 'Payam' and Kolaikarankai because of the exotic nature of their characters, settings and atmosphere may raise a suspicion in the readers' minds as regards their origin. But so long as we have no evidence to prove otherwise, it is safe to assume that just like his other stories, these too are born of the author's fruitful imagination.

In the concluding chapter, I have given a brief objective (analytical) evaluation of a select number of stories which I consider to be among the author's best.

As there is only scanty critical material on Putumaippittan, I have included whatever was available, in the bibliography. Repetitions of names, descriptions and statements are inevitable in a work of this kind, since the topics plot, character and theme are highly interconnected.

My thanks are due to my supervising teacher Prof. C. Jesudasan for his invaluable guidance in the preparation of this dissertation. It was he who suggested the study of Tamil fiction which has remained an unexplored region for long and kindled in me a curiosity and interest in the subject.

I would like to thank Mrs. Hepzeba Jesudasan, Professor of English, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam for her rendering into English of two stories of Putumaippittan that I have made use of in the chapter 'Story and Critic'. After discussing about fiction in detail it is but fitting and proper for me to show how a modern story could be analyzed and enjoyed. For this, I have selected two stories as model specimens of realistic and symbolic
genre and made an analysis which I hope to be a judicious blend of the analytical (objective) and impressionistic (subjective) methods.

I am grateful to Dr. V.I. Subramoniam, Professor of Linguistics, University of Kerala for his kindness in going through the manuscript of my thesis and correcting it wherever necessary. His lively discussions with me on Tamil fiction revealed his flair and taste for modern literature. It is no surprise either, as he had guided the destiny of the Tamil Department of the Kerala University for nearly a decade. But what really surprised me is the speed and ease with which he could direct a linguistically trained mind to dwell upon a modern subject like fiction.

I have followed the Madras University Tamil Lexicon edited by late Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai for the transliteration system. It is applied strictly only for denoting the names of Putumalipittan's stories and the characters appearing in them.