INTRODUCTION

The modern short story flowed in twin streams from Gogol in Russia and Edgar Allen Poe in America, eventhough the latter earned the the title of "The father of the modern short story". During the same period i.e. in the nineteenth century, Balzac was busily engaged in the practice of the Art in France. Again by 1846, before Poe had died Turgenev had established a reputation as a writer in Russia. The influence of Poe met that of Gogol, Tolstoy, Turgenev and Flaubert in France, with the result, that the short story moved forward, revitalized, towards the form in which it became internationally famous and popular.

No completely satisfactory definition of a short-story has ever been formulated. The definitions made so far have been too narrow or too broad. Wells defined the short-story as any piece of short fiction that could be read in half an hour. Poe declared that in the whole
composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency is not to one pre-established design. Chekhov held that a story should have neither, a beginning nor an end. The late Sir Hugh Walpole\textsuperscript{1} asserted that a story should be a story; a record of things happening, full of incidents and accidents, swift movements, unexpected developments leading through suspense to a climax and a satisfying denouement".

All these definitions have one thing in common. None of them have a satisfactory finality; none defines the short story with an indisputable epigrammatic accuracy which will fit all short stories.

Instead of trying to define a short story in precise terms, it is more helpful to study its possibilities and its limitations.

The limitation of the short story is the limitation of space; it must be short. The average story has not the range of the novel. The short-story writer paints miniatures. The writer of the short-story ordinarily observes certain principles. He knows that he must limit the number of characters in it and that usually its focus

must fall on one character or at the most, on a limited group of characters. The possibilities of the short story are the outgrowth of its limitations. Its assets capitalize on its liabilities. Although a story cannot deal with subjects suitable for a novel, conversely, it can deal with certain situations that a novel could not handle effectively. Just because a story is short, the writer can concentrate his material most effectively, whereas the novelist may be more diffuse. The incidents in each story are calculated to focus the reader's attention on the ending. The novel too adopts this method of construction, but its subject is apt to be wider, its scope broader, its characters more numerous, it situations comparatively speaking, more varied and unrelated.

The short story has frequently been compared with some other literary forms, sometimes with some form outside literature. It is declared to have affinities with Drama, with the lyric, and the narrative ballad. Mr. A.E. Coppard has long cherished the theory that the short story and film are expressions of the same art, the art of telling a story by a series of subtly implied gestures, swift shots, and moments of suggestion. 2

One may ask himself what he may hope to gain from studying this literary form. Harry Shaw in his book "Reading the short story" enumerates the following advantages.

"Those who possess a critical turn of mind will derive both pleasure and profit from trying to find logical explanation for their likes and dislikes. Secondly it is socially important; it teaches us to feel and to think. As the French writer Guy De Maupassant put it, the public is composed of numerous groups who cry to the writers "Console me, amuse me, make me sad, make me sympathetic, make me dream, make me laugh, make me shudder, make me weep, make me think". Studying short stories helps us better to understand people. It helps us to understand life."

TAMIL SHORT-STORY

Tamil is a latecomer in the field of short-fiction. True, there is practically no dearth of legendary and folk tales in Tamil like Panchathantra and Vikramadityan stories which have long been in existence in our country. But it is well to remember that these were written mainly to convey morals, which function glaringly militates against the canons of modern short-story writing.

Scholars are of the view that many of the lyrical compositions in Tamil like Kalithogai, Ahananooru etc. carry each an embryo of a short-story, capable of growing into full form if only treated with a little more imagination. True, the genesis of short fiction is embedded in them in the sense that such poems are often spun round some dramatic situations like an encounter between a hero and his ladylove. Two or three characters appear in such compositions but they are not real characters; rather they are stereotyped caricatures having no individual marks of identification.

The lyric poem and the short story though both are short and the story may well carry a touch of poetry are in one respect sharply different, sharply clashing forms. It may be said that lyric is nothing unless it is honestly subjective but a story is nothing unless even the author's conception of it - not to mention selection and management of content - is objective. Moreover Fiction has an appetite for richness of circumstances and for sheer concretion that sets it well apart from any lyric. Yet the lyric shares with the novel a common

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Dr. A.C. Chettiar - 'Cirukatai Kalanciyam' Sahitya Academy. p.8.
fictionality. The most fragile lyric has at least one character, that of the implied speaker himself, and it has a plot—an arrangement of psychic incidents, with a development at least of mood."  

The brilliant story writers Frank O'Connor, and Chekhov however, bring the conception of story-telling very near to that of a lyric poem. "Story-telling is the nearest thing one can get to the quality of a pure lyric poem. It doesn't deal with problems; it doesn't have any solution to offer. It just states the human condition."  

Even the well-known stories "Paramartha Guru Kathaigal" of Father Beschi, popularly known as Veerama Munivar, are not short-stories in the modern sense of the word. With their heavy leaning towards didacticism they hardly meet the requirements of the art of modern short-story. That it was the maiden attempt of a foreigner at Tamil Prose writing is its only redeeming feature!  

The evolution of the short story has always taken a course away from its open avowed moralizing to a subtler way of implied suggestion. Measured with

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this yard-stick of progress, the real short-story in Tamil, one that is created consciously as a form of art starts from the period of two great stalwarts, Va.Ve. Subramania Iyer and Madhavayya. The collection titled "Mangayarkarasiyin Kathal" introduced Va. Ve. Subramania Iyer to the Tamil literary world in the year 1927. His story 'Kulathangarai Arasamaram' which, vaguely reminds one of Tagore’s early creations is indeed an excellent one even by the standard set up by the present-day critics. Compared with this author, Madhavayya is an inferior writer and his stories "Kusikar Kuttikathaigal" are aesthetically unsatisfying with their heavy dosage of didacticism.

After the passing away of these two early veterans around the year 1925 or so, an intense activity was witnessed in the field of novel-writing during the year 1925-'31 with the ushering in of authors like Reaguraju, Vaduvur Duraiswamy Iyengar, Arani Kuppuswamy Mudaliar, Kothanayaki Ammal etc. Curiously enough it was a period of lull for the short-fiction. This art-form picked up again only when it received stimulus from people like Kalki, B.K. Sundararajan (Chitty), Cangu Subramanian, and T.S. Cockalingom who began writing in the journals "Ananda Vikatan, Manikkodi,
Swatantra Changu and Gandhi respectively. These early authors realized clearly the potentialities of short-story as a medium of entertainment and education.

Putumaiippitan comes into the picture with the resurgence of the so-called "Manikkodi" band of writers comprising of Vē.Rē., Kū.Pē. Rajagopalan, Pichamoorthy, C.S. Chellappa, E.S., Ramiah, and others. Manikkodi, a monthly largely devoted to short fiction marked a milestone in the history of the Tamil story.

A period of two decades between 1930 and 1950 is a memorable one in that it witnessed a spurt of activity in creative literature, especially in the field of short-stories. Writers like Kū.Pē.Rajagopalan, Putumaiippitan, Pichamoorthy, Ramiah, Chellappa and 'Mowni' produced stories of quality that are comparable with the best in Western languages. Their writings appeared in the periodicals like Kalaimagal, Manikkodi, Anandavikatan etc.

From this group Putumaiippitan alone had the unique distinction of boldly bringing out a collection of his stories numbering nearly thirty, under the head "Putumaiippitan's stories". Short story has become so

popular and such a commonly accepted literary 'genre' that no periodical worth its name, except at the risk of a fall in sale, can afford to omit this important item from its table of contents.