ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore all writings in English from Puducherry either by the native or the settled authors and bring them under one umbrella with the term, “Puducherry Writings in English.” As the title reads, the researcher aims not only to provide a historical survey of those writings but also a critical insight in order to find out if the distinct cultural and social background of the territory of Puducherry is represented in any of those writings.

As Indian Writings in English (IWEL) as a broad field refers to the body of works, by writers in India who write in the English language, the term, “Puducherry Writings in English, may refer to the body of English literature produced by Puducherry native writers and settlers from across the nation and world as a constituent part of Indian Writings in English. Puducherry has been the literary hub of various languages since the dawn of 20th century. Compared with any other state or union territory of India, the union territory of Puducherry enjoys a distinct feature with its four regions spread across three southern states of India respectively, Puducherry and Karaikal in Tamilnadu, Mahe in Kerala and Yanam in Andra Pradesh. One may wonder what was responsible for these geographically and culturally diverse regions to be integrated under one umbrella. The reason was that all these regions were under the French empire when the rest of India was colonized by the Great Britain. At the time of Puducherry’s independence, the agreement signed between India and France made the point clear that the regions under the France’s possession in India would never be integrated with any state of India, instead they will be administered by the Government of India as a union territory with Puducherry as its capital. Owing to this, Puducherry today has people speaking different languages such as French,
English, Telugu and Malayalam along with the speakers of other languages such as Hindi, Oriya, Bengali, Kanada etc.

The Aurobindo Ashram has made Puducherry a land of spirituality for people across the Nation. Puducherry has never closed its door for any one from any where. All have been received with welcoming arms to seek shelter over here on different purposes. Mostly the people who sought shelter in Puducherry did so for political purposes as it wasn’t easy for them to operate the freedom movement against the Britain staying over their regions. As the territory of Puducherry was under France, it was very convenient for them to operate from here. The most eminent among the political firebrands who sought shelter in Puducherry were Aurobindo Ghose from remote Calcutta, Subramania Bharati, V. Ramaswamy Iyengar and V.V.S Iyer from Chennai.

It was only with the arrival of these people the literary activities had begun to blossom in Puducherry. This statement is not at all to underestimate the literary expertise of Puducherry such as Sri Anandha Rangapillai, Pandit Savariyar, Ayakannu, Ayasamy Pulavar, Savarayalu Nayagar, Bharatidasan (Kanaga Subburathinam) and Mr. S. Sivapragasam (Pudhuvai Sivam). The researcher only aims to illustrate that the arrival of those scholars from across Tamilnadu has boosted the revival of literature in Tamil from the territory of Puducherry. Though Telugu is also the official language of Puducherry, no writing in it by any scholar from Yanam region has so far been identified besides the contribution of Mr. Mugunthan from Mahe region to the literature in Malayalam. The French regime in Puducherry deserves appreciation for having encouraged its scholars to actively involve themselves in translating the reputed Tamil literatures like Thirukural into French. For the convenience of both the French administrators and the Tamil Speakers, a French Tamil dictionary running into 1270 pages also had been compiled by Messrs.
Mouset and Dupuis. Till this day, here and there, some writings in French from Puducherry along with the writings in Tamil spring up with the constant support of some renowned French scholars based in Puducherry like Justice David Annusamy, Prof. Krishnamurthy and Prof. Madhana Kalyani. On the other hand, not even a manuscript in English is found by the researcher prior to the arrival of Sri Aurobindo at Puducherry in 1910. Hence, for the amount of literature in English hail from Puducherry today, we should always stay indebted to Sri Aurobindo and his disciples such as Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta, Pavitra, A.B. Purani, Sri Dilip Kumar Roy, Champaklal, Nirodbaran, K.D. Sethna, M. P. Pandit, Satprem, Prithwindra Mukherjee and R.Y. Deshpande from across India and abroad. As all are aware, the French writers did not prefer the dominance of the English language in their regime. That was why, there was no ample opportunity for the citizens of French - occupied Puducherry to get exposure to English language and literature. However at present, inspired by the writings of Sri Aurobindo and his disciples, a handful of Puducherry natives such as Prof. P. Raja, Dr. Jayanti, and Dr. Clement Lourdes have begun to give a try in penning English literature and a few like Prof. P. Raja have even succeeded in their attempt on par with any other well established and renowned literary personality of India. At present, some contemporary disciples of Sri Aurobindo such as Aju Mukhopadhyay, Prof. Manoj Das, Shyam Sunder Jhunjhunwala, Shyam Kumari, K.M. Shantha, Seema Devi and Ashalata Dash produce an enormous amount of creative writings in English in addition to their hard core spiritual writings along with a few others like B.V Selvaraj (IAS), M.I. Thangappa, Dr. Rita Nath Keshari, Maria Netto, Prof. S. Murali, Prof. Sujatha Vijayaragavan and Anusha who came to Puducherry for their profession/education apart from the above mentioned handful of native writers.
For a sequential flow of the research, the researcher has classified the dissertation titled, “Puducherry Writings in English: a Historical and Critical study” into six broad chapters including the Introduction and concluding chapter. In the introduction, the Researcher illustrates the main aim and scope of his research with a brief about each core chapter namely “Puducherry Culture and Literature: An Overview”, “The Beginnings: A Historical Survey”, “The Contemporary Sprouts: A Historical Survey”, “Contemporary Puducherry Writings in English: A Critical Study” and “Summing Up”. Hence on going through it, one could understand the real essence of the entire dissertation in a nut shell.

As writings in Tamil and French had existed in a large scale in Puducherry before Puducherry writings in English came into existence at the dawn of the twentieth century, it would be unjust to look at the contribution of writers in English to Puducherry, leaving aside the prior literature of other languages. Accordingly, an attempt has been made to give a brief sketch about the contribution of other languages to Puducherry’s culture and literature. If literature is one side of a coin, culture is the other side. Hence, culture and literature are inseparable and that they both have to go hand in hand. Establishment of any distinct culture is determined by the history of that particular country, region or a territory. It goes without saying that the French regime in the union territory of Puducherry has made it distinct in the international community. In this connection, before analyzing the culture and literature of Puducherry, it becomes vital to look into the rich history of Puducherry right from its origin. In order to meet this requirement, the second chapter of the dissertation titled ‘Puducherry Culture and Literature: an Overview’ begins with a brief outline of the ancient history of Puducherry from the early fourth century to the present. Hence, the researcher opines that chapter two would be a showcase of Puducherry’s rich ancient history, its distinct and unique culture and literary heritage.
Chapter III ‘The Beginnings: a Historical Survey” has been divided into three segments. While the first segment deals with the early active political involvement, life and spiritual activities of Sri Aurobindo in Puducherry from 1910 to 1950, the second segment sketches down the information about a number of disciples who thronged around Sri Aurobindo from across the nation and even abroad inspired by his thoughts on divine life and philosophy of yoga. The third segment has been devoted to providing an over view of the establishment and mission of Auroville as a multicultural society envisaged by Mirra Richard, affectionately called ‘The Mother’ of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Though Sri Aurobindo has creative writings in English to his credit, none of them had been crafted in Puducherry except his writings on divine life and philosophy of yoga. More over, an enormous amount of research has already been done on his literary works from different angles by scholars across the globe. Hence the researcher does not attempt to analyze the literary contribution of Sri Aurobindo in a broader sense apart from giving an extensive list of his publications with a critical gloss. Though the disciples of Sri Aurobindo who opted Puducherry as their second native also penned many of their writings in English from this land, all were spiritual in nature in tune with Sri Aurobindo’s thoughts and philosophy. As this dissertation has been mainly devoted to exploring the creative writings in English from Puducherry, those writings have not been covered under the ambit of Puducherry writings in English beyond a brief historical sketch of each disciple’s stay and activities in Puducherry, his/her connection with Sri Aurobindo Ashram and an over view of his/her writings.

Before critically analyzing any creative writing, it is imperative to learn the author and his/her social background without which any reading would be incomplete. Hence prior to the critical study of each contemporary Puducherry writer’s renderings to each genre of English
literature in Chapter V, Chapter IV titled, ‘The Contemporary Sprouts: A Historical Survey’ introduces each contemporary Puducherry writer in English with an extensive biography and literary artifacts of each concerned. This includes a few of Sri Aurobindo’s disciples in recognition of their creative writings in English. Many of the writers discussed over here are the settlers from other parts of India and even from abroad including a few faculty members from the department of English at Pondicherry Central University and its various affiliated Institutions barring for a few natives of Puducherry

In continuation with an introduction of all contemporary Puducherry writers in English in the previous chapter, chapter V titled “Contemporary Puducherry Writings in English: a Critical Study” gives a critical appreciation of each of those discussed writer’s contribution to different genres such as short story, novel, poetry and autobiography. Certainly, this chapter would serve as an example about the literary genius of the Puducherry writers in English on par with any other reputed writer of Indian Writings in English Literature. Manoj Das, recognized as one among the foremost bilingual short story tellers of India always prefers to touch upon the Indian tradition and culture with a special focus over the village life and the delineation of rural culture following the introduction of machinery and modernity. Unlike the fictitious town of Malgudi created by R.K. Narayan in his fictions, Manoj Das sets almost all his short stories in Sankhari, a coastal village of Orissa, where he was born and brought up amidst Nature's splendor. He also experienced its fury when a cyclone devastated his area, followed by a famine and an epidemic that killed thousands of people. Added to that, his affluent house was twice plundered by dacoits. All those early life experiences have brought in him the thirst for portraying the reality of rural India in his writings. From realism to sublime, everything is present in his writings. His stories deal with the rural environment of India during the period of transition from colonialism to
independence. His fictions raise voice against castes much prevalent all over the country. From politics to science, and accumulation of excess wealth to poverty, all social issues are handled with great care by Manoj Das. All his short stories prioritize human relationships as the base of Indian culture. Prof P. Raja in his short stories and poetry touches upon the French influence over Indian culture in Puducherians. The typical South Indian household, the dignity of traditional womanhood and social evils that are threat to a uniformed society are mostly dealt with. His stories also depict the plight of Non-Resident Indians abroad, especially in Gulf countries who struggle as bondage laborers to earn their livelihood leaving aside the trouble free contented life in India. Aju Mukhopadhyay attacks the most crucial social evils in existence such as castes, communalism, atrocity against women, corruption among politicians and bureaucrats, female infanticide and trafficking of young innocent children. He recommends the spiritual divine life propounded by Sri Aurobindo as a remedy to get rid of any evil thought or deed. V.B. Selvaraj in his collection of poetry captures the entire picture of Puducherry, Delhi and Mizoram. His collection of Poems titled *Puducheria* travels along the entire history of Puducherry. The poetry of the women poets of Puducherry deal with a wide range of subjects in accordance with their social and cultural background. Feminism is much prevalent in the poetry of Rita Nath Kashuri, Seema Devi and a few others. Nature is much splendid in almost all poetry produced from Puducherry similar to the rest of the poetic world. In every sense, the writers who pen their creative writings from Puducherry maintain uniformity with the rest of Indian writers in English without any monopoly. The true sense of Indianness is vivid in all their writings in terms of theme, tone and diction. At the same time, reading chapter V any one could explore if the distinct culture and tradition of Puducherry is present in any other writings in English hailed from Puducherry.
After exploring the significant history, unique and distinct culture, literary artifacts of each language and the appreciation of Puducherry creative writings in English, Chapter VI sums up the entire dissertation in a nutshell and enumerates the fact that Puducherry’s significant history and cultural legacy is not echoed in most of the creative writings in English except in the writings of a handful of native writers like Prof. P. Raja, Dr. Clement Lourdes and B.V. Selvaraj. Today, it is a matter of pride that, more number of literary works in English are produced in from Puducherry than Tamilnadu which was under the British regime for over three centuries. Though the researcher rejoices at the amount of English literature produced from Puducherry, it is a saddening fact that almost ninety percentage of those writings are penned by the non-natives who have migrated to Puducherry on specific purposes. Any particular region would anticipate the writings that hail from that location to represent its social, political and economical conditions. Unable to enjoy the same from the writings in English from Puducherry, the researcher feels upset. Though it is an undeniable fact that Puducherry writings in English owe a lot to Sri Aurobindo and his disciples, it is also a fact to be admitted with no hesitation that they have benefited a lot from the land of Puducherry, and today almost two third of Puducherry is owned by Sri Aurobindo ashram and its associates. Having benefited a lot from Puducherry, neither Sri Aurobindo nor his disciples mentioned anything about the rich tradition or the distinct culture of Puducherry in any of their writings or public addresses.

Wherever a writer writes from, he or she stays connected to his/her native land. For instance, though most of R.K. Narayan’s writings had been produced from Madras (Chennai), the fictitious town of Malgudi from his native state of Karnataka is set in all his novels. Likewise, the writings of Indian Diaspora writers such as Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee
and Shashi Tharoor always tend to echo the sense of Indianness. It is vivid that a born child alone could understand the real love and warmth of its mother more than an adopted child. Hence, if the sense and sensibility of Puducherry is to be glorified by the writings in English, it should blossom from this land, and the writers should have their origin in Puducherry. With the amount of available resources today it is unfair for the native Puducherrians to stay idle from getting exposed to the world of English literature. As a gem on the crown, the department of English at Pondicherry central University does a lot to inculcate and improvise the art of creative writing in English among its students and scholars. To inspire the students and scholars, the renowned scholarly faculty members such as Prof. Sujatha Vijayaragavan, Prof. S. Murali Sivaramakrishnan and Dr. Clement Lourdes along with a few other academicians from the affiliated institutions always involve themselves in producing literary and critical works. Drawing inspiration from such notable celebrities, more number of Puducherry natives with interest in English language and literature should come forward to try their hand in English. By doing so, the uniqueness of Puducherry’s culture and tradition can be propagated to the rest of the non-Tamil speaking world. It is an undeniable fact that “literature is the mirror of life.” Hence for the rest of the world to evoke the rich and distinct culture of Puducherry, it is essential for the scholars in English from Puducherry to exhibit their literary talent in giving priority to the sense of Puducherriness in all their artifacts. Once it is initiated, the day when Puducherry could feel proud of its distinct writings in English will not be very far. The day when Puducherry writings in English is voluminous enough to hold a separate chapter in Indian writings in English Literature will be the day of jubilee for all those who have real flair for Puducherry writings in English. Any tool will be useless if it does not serve its purpose. Literatures are not only produced to exhibit the literary talent of the authors but also for the readers to enjoy reading
them. The genuine criticism and the critical appreciation of each literary work would motivate the author to come up with greater taste for English literature and aspire to welcome those who aspire from Puducherry to exhibit their literary talents.

It is a sheer matter of disappointment that though Puducherry has become a literary hub of various languages since the dawn of twentieth century, it has not retained much of that to claim the literary heritage. It lies vibrant with its shops, tourists and entertainment industry but in the literary sphere it seems to be an appendage of the metropolitan city Chennai, the old Madras. There were and are some local publishing establishments and local writers, writing in Tamil and English, and occasionally in French, but such productions and their circulation seem not to have acquired much significance. Portions of the pages of English dailies meant for this region and the weekly feature pages were being filled up earlier by writers from here. But such newspapers have now become less charitable. Feature pages have been abolished and for other things they depend entirely on Chennaites. Even the space meant for local area problems is getting filled up by letters from other regions. The Government does not have any problem to face by way of grievance or to see any writeup not to their liking. As there is nothing against the establishments, there will be no light of the day in any significant way in the English dailies. Media is satisfied with fat sops. Tourism is growing up at the cost of environment. Hotels and restaurants are expanding per force despite shortage of space. The number of vehicles is increasing at galloping stride despite a situation of roomlessness for the vehicles. They ply and rest on the congested roads everywhere. There is a big book shop in the town, storing and displaying latest works by the well publicized authors. Those are sold on the strength of publicity by big publishers, with the help of the media. Books by the local writers are jammed in a corner. As they are not patronized by the big media, multinational and big publishers, they go unnoticed. Merits may be
hidden somewhere but rarely focused. Only enthusiasts search and find them out from the shelves. But real writers cannot be cowed down. They go for internet magazines, or for blogging. These are acting as good shelters for writers in smaller areas. And in spite of all the barriers some have found their niche at the all India level and beyond. There are windows for spiritual books and school, college books but they do not cover the main body of literature. Book Fairs are held everywhere from time to time and people visit and buy some books. These are not problems endemic to this area only but they apply, more or less, to other areas too. On the whole, writing and publishing are not as strong activities as some other activities are here. Lack of verve keeps the unexplored areas silent.

Without thought provoking writings in English with the identity of Puducherry and interested readers for them, the Puducherry writings in English may never thrive. Hence it is the sole responsibility of the literary celebrities and the literate population of the territory of Puducherry to preserve and standardize the quantity and quality of writings in English from Puducherry in all genres in the years to come.

In every true sense, the wish of the researcher is that Puducherry Writings in English should be sufficient enough to occupy a separate volume in the History of Indian Writings in English with all its due charm. As this dissertation is just a historical and critical study of Puducherry Writings in English, one cannot find any hard core interpretation of the writings of the discussed authors. In future, scholars interested in this area may plunge into an interpretative research of those authors in detail. The researcher is sure that this dissertation would certainly form a base for it.