Chapter One

Introduction

"We need an intelligent critical understanding of writing that aims to respond adequately to the materiality of existence in all its sensuous plushness and its bloodied flesh" (Morris, Realism, 44).

This doctoral work here has evolved out of the belief that fruitful efforts could be gained from a comparative study of the nineteenth-century French master of the short story, Guy de Maupassant, and the twentieth-century doyen of modern Tamil short fiction, Sundara Ramaswamy. The primary aim of this study is to reverse the tendency of some current readers to consider the internationally known Maupassant to be a bit passé and to reassess the literary labours of the regionally known Tamil writer, Ramaswamy, so as to attract for him greater global attention from critics and historians of world literature so that they assign to these two literary giants the places they deserve. The hypothesis here aims to see the relevance of their portrayal of the materiality of modern life, the shift in its moral paradigm and its little ironies in the current scenario. This comparative study of the two authors in their roles as short fictionists demands an insight into the birth and growth of the short story genre in France as well as in Tamil Nadu and the
kind of social and literary influences that shaped the attitudes of the two writers. The need to recognize these two writers as outstanding authors united by a strikingly realistic vision necessitates this comparative study.

The short story or rather the tale grew out of a tradition that goes back all the way to the beginnings of recorded civilization; but its modern form is relatively new. At the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, short fiction could be seen to have assumed a definite form in the USA, France and Russia. The tales of the American writers, Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne; the stories of the French writer, Balzac; and the short fictional writings of the Russian writers, Gogol and Turgenev, paved the way for the emergence of the modern short story as a distinctive literary genre. The close of the century witnessed its perfection through realism in the hands of Guy de Maupassant in France, Chekhov in Russia, Ambrose Bierce and Bret Harte in the States. Valerie Shaw, discussing the development of the short story, points out that Henry James “saw France as ‘the land of its great prosperity’ ”, although he concedes that “Hawthorne, Poe and Bret Harte had given the ‘short tale’ eminence in America” (5).

In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the short story had only a casual existence in France. There were only contes or tales as in other countries. But they were mostly romances or romantically rooted tales. The trend that predominated in French literature in the first half of the nineteenth
century was romanticism. Romanticism came to France much later than to other countries. J.B. Priestley in his *Literature and Western Man* says, "The Romantic Movement began in France about the time it was ending in Germany and England" (159). He hails François-René de Chateaubriand as "the acknowledged father or high priest of French romanticism" (161). Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), Victor-Marie Hugo (1802-85), Gérard de Nerval (1808-55) and Alfred de Musset (1810-57) are the noted romantic writers in France. Unlike the romantic movement in other countries French romanticism had a peculiar nature, because there came what Priestley calls "a freedom from restraint, sweeping away moderation, good sense and manners" as a result of the artist's expression of personality "challenging" and "defying" social norms (160). Cazamian sees at "the very core" of romanticism the tendency to make the primary aim of art "the study of reality" (322). One may place among the harbingers of the realist movement in France, writers like Stendhal (1783-1842), Honore de Balzac (1799-1850), Prosper Merimee (1803-70), George Sand (1804-76), Theophile Gautier (1811-72) and Alexandre Dumas (1824-95). These writers are said to have seen the need for any kind of fiction to have verisimilitude or what Cazamian terms "resemblance to the truth" (322). He goes on to add, "The reaction against romanticism is instinctively in the direction of sober reason; and it was this silent shifting of temper that grew perceptible as early as the French forties,
and reached its full force about the middle years of the nineteenth century” (339-40). Realism, according to The Wordsworth Companion to Literature in English, is “A term first used in France in the 1850s to characterize works concerned with representing the world as it is rather than as it ought to be, with description rather than invention.” Champfluey (1821-89) and Edmond Duranty (1833-80) were “among its earliest exponents” (768). The realist school proclaimed its objectives through Champfluey’s book Le Realisme published in 1857.

Its adherents rejected idealization, escapist narratives and unreal qualities of romance and wanted the problems or harsh realities of worldly existence to be observed with sociological insight and described with accuracy in all their material details. Edmond Duranty’s opinion about the realist programme is that “realism commits itself to an exact, complete, and sincere reproduction of the social milieu, of the contemporary world ... this reproduction should therefore be as simple as possible so that anyone may understand it” (qtd. in Grant 27). In his work La Comedie Humaine, Balzac attempted systematically to present a picture of all aspects of society to which he belonged. His characters ranged from “the lowest thief or prostitute to the highest aristocrat or political leader” (“Realism and Naturalism,” wsu). F.W.J. Hemmings, in The Age of Realism of the Pelican Guides to European Literature, has said that Balzac believes in the “importance of preserving
word-pictures of reality, because reality was nothing but a flux of evanescent forms” (45). His “Droll Tales” penned on the Rabelaisian lines attracted attention for their fidelity to facts. It was Gustave Flaubert (1821-80) who in 1857 wrote the novel Madame Bovary from which later literary realism was to flow. Flaubert was unanimously hailed as the leader of French realism. Michael G. Lerner writes of him, “He … led a fairly hermitic existence at Croisset, devoted to creating an art-form in his writing that was impersonally and objectively realistic in content and the most individually apt and original in expression” (76). His short fiction “reveals his mastery of the short story and foreshadows the work of Guy de Maupassant,” as Chambers Biographical Dictionary puts it (7th ed.).

Edmond de Goncourt (1822-96), Jules de Goncourt (1830-70), Alphonse Daudet (1840-97), Emile Zola (1840-1902), Anatole France (1844-1924), Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907), Guy de Maupassant (1850-93), Jules Lemaître (1853-94), Henry Cead, Leon Hennique and Paul Alexis (1847-1901) were the widely known realist writers of the latter part of the nineteenth century. “The brothers Edmond (1822-96) and Jules (1830-70) de Goncourt,” comments Cazamian, “were an interesting pair who stamped themselves indelibly on the development of French realism” (356). Alphonse Daudet was a successful short story writer. Henry James praises him as an artist who “tells his stories as a talker” (qtd. in Shaw 86). Emile Zola was
more a naturalist than a realist and was hailed as the founder of the naturalist movement in French literature. "His theme," to put it in the words of Martin Turnell, "like that of any other considerable novelist was the nature and destiny of man, but the nature and destiny of man interpreted in terms of a naturalist philosophy" (94). Zola says that the works of writers like Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers and Daudet do not "depend on their imagination, but on the fact that they render nature with intensity" (qtd. in Grant 30). Joris-Karl Huysmans belonged to the school of Naturalism. In his work, he has dealt with the most sordid aspects of life and has given vent to repressed despair. His "works reflect many aspects of the spiritual and intellectual life of late 19th-century France," as stated in Chambers Biographical Dictionary (7th ed.). Though many writers had written short stories in French, it was Guy de Maupassant who was hailed as the master of the short story in France because of his prolific output in the short story proper. French literature like Tamil literature is one of the world's richest literatures. It has contributed to every literary form and is seen to excel in fiction in its later phase.

Short and long fiction has existed on the Indian soil down through the ages. In Tamil, the short story took shape forty to fifty years after the evolution of the novel. In the eighteenth century, with the invention of printing, oral stories and manuscripts were turned into printed matter.
Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there were attempts to write short stories. But such attempts became fruitful only by the beginning of the twentieth century. Just as in other languages, the growth of the popular magazines contributed to the growth and popularity of short fiction in Tamil. "The short story," avers Ramaswamy, "is the art form introduced to us through works translated into English" (Ivai... 93). It began to thrive in vernacular literatures at a time when people started to experience the social necessity "to leave an impression on the reader, provoke him or her to think and to communicate a deep experience," to borrow the words of Ramaswamy again (Ivai... 94). The last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century witnessed the appearance of numerous magazines among which one could cite Vivekacinhamoni, Vivekabanu, Vidhyabanu, Chakravarthini, Puduvai Kalaimagal and Vidhyavikarini. These periodicals turned out to be the forums for fostering the growth of short fictionists. The magazines that particularly nurtured new talents in this field of fiction were Manikodi, Chanku and Bharati Devi.

P.G. Sundararajan and S. Sivapathasundaram say, "The short stories that budded in Vivekacinhamoni towards the end of the nineteenth century gained visibility and appeared as experiments in the hands of different writers at the beginning of the twentieth century" (22). In the beginning of the twentieth century, Subramonia Bharathi (1882-1921) translated some stories
of Tagore, and thereby nurtured this literary form. After translation, he tried
to write his own stories. Although his attempts did not take a definite shape,
yet he is regarded as the pioneer of the Tamil short story along with
A. Madhaviah (1872-1925) and Varaghaneri Venkata Subramoniya Iyer
(1881-1925). In Tamilil Sirukathai: Varalaarum Valarchiyum (The Short
Story in Tamil: Its History and Growth), it is written that “It was A.
Madhaviah, Subramonia Bharathi and V.V.S. Iyer who wrote short stories
following the criteria laid for it” (Sundarajan and Sivapathasundaram 28).
T.P. Meenakshisundaram remarks in his book, Tamil Ilakkiya Varalaaru
(History of Tamil Literature), “V.V.S. Iyer wanted short fiction in Tamil to
grow on the lines of the stories written by Gogol, Edgar Allan Poe, O. Henry
etc.” (296). In Tamil, the first short story proper, “Kulathankarai
Arasamaram” (“Pipal Tree by the Pond”) was written by V.V.S. Iyer whom
Vallikkannan is of the view that “V.V.S. Iyer, who was deeply devoted to
World Literature and Literary Criticism based on sound aesthetic principles,
evined a keen interest in writing interesting short stories that met the primary
demands of aesthetics” (N.pag.). Though he wrote only eight stories, he has
been recognized as the man who paid equal attention to the manner and matter
of short fiction in the first phase of its development. A. Madhaviah in 1912 brought out in book form his uncollected stories
published in The Hindu under the title Kusika's Short Stories. He himself translated sixteen of those stories into Tamil and published them with the title Kusikar Kuttí Kathaikal (Kusikar Short Stories). It was in the 1930s that the short story attained an earnest form in the hands of the various short story writers. Dilip Kumar in the Editor's Note on A Place to Live says, "the modern Tamil short story, as it is perceived and understood today, truly blossomed only in the thirties" (x). During this period there emerged magazines like Manikodi, Ananthavikatan, Kalaimakal, Kanti, Suthantira Chanku, Pirasantavikatan, Kumaravikatan etc., which promoted the growth of the short story. This genre took on better shape in the hands of masters like Kalki (1899-1955), Na. Pichamoorthy (1900-76), T.J. Ranganathan (1901-74), K.P. Rajagopalan (1902-44), B.S. Ramiah (1905-1983), Pudumaipittan (1906-48), Mowni (1907-85), P.G. Sundararajan (1910-2006), Narana Duraikannan, M.J. Ramalingam and P.M. Kannan. Pudumaipittan, K.P. Rajagopalan, Na. Pitchamoorthy, Mowni and B.S. Ramiah are some of the writers who came to be known as Manikodi writers. Of the Manikodi writers Vallikkannan says:

The contents chosen for their content, characters, mode of design, depth of creativity, stylistic accomplishments, ambit of thought, perspective of life, sense of humour, and sociological
vision, culled out by Pudhumaippitthan for his creative art made him stand out the leading figure in this school. (N.pag.)

He adds, “Pudhumaippitthan exploited his short stories to highlight social evils and shortcomings of individual characters and eccentricities, often, in a satirical vein” (N.pag.). Dilip Kumar comments:

Pudumaippittan enjoys a special status and is considered a major influence even today. The Manikodi writers took from the Western short story only the form and its finer aspects; the themes and language were deeply rooted in their own world and circumstances, and resonated with the pulse of human experience, lending it a new literary vibrancy. (x)

In an article on the Internet, M. Sundaramoorthy writes, “The manikkodi trio, Pudumaipittan, Ku. Pa. Ra and Mowni are considered to be the leaders of the movement that shaped the art of short story in Tamil. They represented three entirely different trends of short story writing and left a legacy of rich writings” (“S. Mani (Mowni) ‘Thirumoolar of Tamil Short Story,’” Tamilnation). Na. Pichamoorthy wrote more than one hundred short stories. Ka. Naa. Subramanyam (1912-88) also wrote more than one hundred short stories and he is seen to have chosen intellectual rather than emotional themes. P.G. Sundararajan and S. Sivapathasundaram say, “His stories attracted writers rather than readers because of the symbols he had used” (141). K.P.
Rajagopalan gained popularity among his contemporaries. Though he died at an young age and had written only very few stories, each one of his stories excelled in concept, form and technique. The contribution of B.S. Ramiah is so tremendous that his name is mentioned in every phase of the development of the short story. Another name worth mentioning in the history of Tamil short fiction is Rajaji (1878-1973). All his stories are about social evils. Fascinated by the popularity of the short story, C.N. Annadurai (1909-69) started to write in this form. He used this genre to propagate his ideals.

In the 1940s, there appeared magazines like Kalki, Tinamanikkatir and others to encourage the short story writers. Most of the writers who wrote in the previous decade continued to write in the 1940s. Short fiction in the forties was sustained by La. Saa. Ramamirtham, T. Janakiraman (1921-82), G. Alagirisamy (1924-70), M. Chidambara Raghunathan (1923-2001) and M. Karunanidhi (1926). La. Saa. Ramamirtham is ranked with Pudumaipittan and Mowni because of his innovative techniques. T. Janakiraman, in his works, has portrayed the intricacies of the workings of the human mind. G. Alagirisamy wrote short stories following the example set by Pudumaipittan. M. Chidambara Raghunathan was very close to Pudumaipittan during the last four years of the latter’s life and wrote his biography. He is recognized as one of the leading modern Tamil writers. M. Karunanidhi followed in the footsteps of Annadurai. He occupies a
significant position among Tamil writers. And he has to his credit more than one hundred short stories. R. Krishnamoorthy wrote under the pen-name Kalki. He wrote short stories on themes that captivated the general body of readers. His humour appealed to them. He occupies a significant place in the history of Tamil short story. He started his own magazine under his pen-name based on his experience as sub-editor and editor of various magazines.

Magazines that encouraged the short story writers in the fifties are Amuthasurabi and Kumudham. The translations of Russian classics and translations from other languages enlightened Tamil writers. This paved the way for the arrival of great talents like Akilan (1922-88), Indira Parthasarathy (1930), Sundara Ramaswamy (1931-2005), Na. Parthasarathy (1935-87) and Jayakanthan (1934).

Among them, Jayakanthan and Sundara Ramaswamy have won the admiration of the general reading public and have the reputation of being acknowledged as iconoclasts. Jayakanthan is seen to be a serious, revolutionary and prolific writer. His language is powerful and he writes on popular themes. As a short story writer, he could equally manage to gain a popularity that was gained by Pudumaipittan. But Ramaswamy is seen to be a realist writer with a scanty output. Akilan has to his credit eighteen novels and seventeen short-story collections. He concentrated on social and familial themes for his stories. His works show the influence of Pudumaipittan, K.P. Rajagopalan
and Kalki. Na. Parthasarathy began his career by writing short stories, but later showed interest in writing novels. Indira Parthasarathy has to his credit four collections of short stories.

In the 1960s, among the literary magazines which nourished and cherished the short story writers are Deepam and Kanayazhi. And many writers started to show interest in writing short stories. S. Ramakrishnan, Muthusamy and Ashokamitran (1931) are a few writers deserving mention. Of these writers, Ashokamitran could reach a considerable number of readers. The present literary scene is dominated by writers like Jayakanthan, Sundara Ramaswamy, Adhavan (1934), Subramoniaraju, Jayabharathi, Balakumaran (1946), Vannadasan (1946), Malan, Ponneelan (1940), Vannanilavan (1948), M. Subramonian, S. Samudram (1941-2003) etc. Many women writers also top the scene. Among them one may mention Vaasanthi (1941), Sivasankari (1942), Ambai (1944), Indumathi (1948), Sindhuja, Kalasree etc. While Sivasankari concentrates on social problems, C.S. Lakshmi, who writes under the pen-name Ambai, writes stories that are more feministic in tone and theme. “Ambai and R. Chudamani are the two important women writers familiar to English readers,” says Dilip Kumar (xiii). The multi-faceted Vaasanthi has written over forty books including novels and short stories. Among the very few short fictionists who started his career in the early 1950s
and could retain their use of this literary form, one can place Jayakanthan and Sundara Ramaswamy.

Among the French founders of short fiction in the latter part of the nineteenth century, no one gained the kind of reputation and popularity which Henry-René-Albert-Guy de Maupassant has secured. Maupassant has to his credit around three hundred short stories, six novels, three travel books, three plays and one volume of poems as well as essays and articles. Two hundred and twenty three short stories are found in the primary text used here which is titled *The Complete Short Stories of Guy de Maupassant*.

Guy de Maupassant, son of Gustave-François-Albert de Maupassant and Laure-Marie-Genevieve, née Le Poittevin, was born on 5th August 1850 near Dieppe, in the castle of Miromesnil which he describes in the novel, *Une Vie*. Maupassant, like Flaubert, was a Norman. Maupassant’s grandfather was a wealthy land owner in Lorraine, and his father was a stockbroker in Paris. “Guy received his first schooling from the Church” (Turnell 198). “After being expelled from a Catholic seminary school, Maupassant finished his schooling at a Rouen boarding school before studying law at the University of Paris” (The Necklace/Author Biography,” *Enotes*). Maupassant was much obsessed by the quarrel between his father and mother and was “partially aware of his parents’ disagreement and suffered from it emotionally” (Lerner 23). Maupassant was more attached to his mother than
to his father. Martin Turnell says, "He sided violently with his mother. To the end of his days he remained 'mother's boy', and the failure of that marriage pervades all his books" (198). His father's brutality made him feel that life was horrible and especially married life a tyranny. Commenting on his father, Stanley Jackson writes, "The writer's father was later to supply the model for Julien de Lamare, the inconstant husband in Une Vie" (23). Maupassant's mother was what Jackson calls, "a writer's 'dream mother' " (24). Laure decided to make Maupassant a man of letters like her brother, Alfred. To Maupassant, his mother "was his first guide to Shakespeare and the beauties of nature" (Ignatus 60). It is said that "Under her adoring eyes, the lad read and recited passionately. Soon his brain began to swirl with golden images" (Jackson 24). Laure "clearly lost no time in initiating him into literature and perhaps hoped already to influence his choice of career in this field" (Lerner 27).

"In 1869 Maupassant started to study law in Paris, but soon, at age 20, he volunteered to serve in the army during Franco-Prussian War." After leaving the army, he worked as a clerk "first at the ministry of maritime affairs, then at the ministry of education" ("Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) – in full Henry-René-Albert-Guy de Maupassant," Kirjasto). In the meantime Laure put Maupassant under the care of Flaubert, her brother's friend, to fulfil her ambition of making him a man of letters. Of Maupassant's introduction to
Flaubert, Turnell says, “It was the beginning of the seven years’ apprenticeship which was the making of the writer” (199). The two literary figures who have influenced Maupassant are Louis Bouilhet and Gustave Flaubert. While at Rouen, Maupassant got the acquaintance of the forty-five year old poet, Louis Bouilhet. Bouilhet critically commented on Maupassant’s poems and advised him to be more realistic in his presentation. Most of the poems published by Maupassant were composed long after Bouilhet’s influence on him.

Turnell writes, “When Flaubert was in Paris, he used to invite Maupassant to lunch on Sundays, lecture him on style and correct his youthful exercises” (199). Flaubert found his ward to be “witty, well-read, charming” (qtd. in Steegmuller 49). Flaubert became his real mentor and pruned him for his career. “Flaubert,” says Paul Ignatus, “taught his disciple to concentrate on the ‘serious things’ of Art: originality and style” (104). The benefits that Merimee received from Stendhal at twenty could be compared to what Maupassant received from Flaubert. Referring to his long apprenticeship to Flaubert, Maupassant writes in his preface to *Pierre et Jean*, “During those seven years he gave me literary principles which I could not have acquired after forty years of experience” (qtd. in Jackson 52). While Maupassant was Flaubert’s apprentice, he stored little anecdotes and plots and waited patiently for technical perfection before his stories began to drop out of his pen “as a
Norman apple-tree sheds apples,” to quote the words of Stanley Jackson (161).

Through Flaubert, Maupassant got acquainted with leading literary figures like Turgenev, Daudet, Goncourt and Hippolyte Adolphe Taine. Again it was through Flaubert that Maupassant gained access to the literary circle led by Emile Zola. And this introduction almost became the defining moment in his literary career. Zola along with Paul Alexis, Henry Ceara, Leon Hennique, J.K. Huysmans and Guy de Maupassant decided to publish a collection of short stories titled *Les Soirees de Medan* (The Evenings of Medan) with war as the theme. Maupassant put in all his effort to write a very impressive story which came out titled “Ball-of-Fat”. Maupassant’s contribution to Zola’s collection gained much critical acclaim and praise from Flaubert who said, “I consider *Boule de Suif* a masterpiece” (qtd. in Steegmuller 106-7). Stanley Jackson in *Guy de Maupassant* says, “With the publication of ‘Boule de Suif,’ Maupassant was at once enthroned as a master of the short story” (146). His reputation began to grow from the day of the publication of his first story. From this time on, Maupassant, “at the solicitation of the entire press, set to work and wrote story after story” (“Guy de Maupassant: A Study,” *Etext*). Edward D. Sullivan in *Maupassant the Novelist* says that Maupassant “possessed his technique so completely that he could practice his craft with ease” (xv). But the fertile phase of his literary life
lasted only for twelve years - 1880 to 1891. There are lots of false or exaggerated anecdotes about his profligacy and propensity to seek the pleasures of the world without any moderation. It has to be pointed out that one leading a life of dissipation and debauchery could not have written so large a number of pages in so short a period. Maupassant and his fellow writers, says Stanley Jackson:

were a solid little band of young writers, sworn enemies of established names and all opposed to the pretty-pretty school of romantic writers. They were young and enthusiastic, reeking with Schopenhauer and utterly dissatisfied with established literary standards. Sheer rhetoric and phrase-mongering they professed to despise, and all talked rather vaguely of ‘Realism’. (88-89)

Edward D. Sullivan says, “All his life the disciple of Flaubert proclaimed the doctrine of accurate observation” (23).

Maupassant has open eyes and ears to observe all that crossed his attention. Nature, as in the case of many writers, had cast an overwhelming spell on Maupassant. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Maupassant’s descriptions of the landscape and the people are pictures painted in words. His admiration for Nature kindled his interest in human nature and he is “rich
in emotions and in the gift of recording them” (Ignotus 53). Paul Ignotus comments:

If the greatness of an author consists in his knowing much about people and in his ability to convey that knowledge in an easily readable and impressive way to others, then Maupassant was one of the greatest ever born – second only, in my view, to Tolstoy. (12)

Brander Matthews says that Maupassant’s “Short-stories are masterpieces of the art of story-telling, because he had a Greek sense of form, a Latin power of construction, and a French felicity of style” (qtd. in Fusco 3). His short stories, on which his fame principally rests, deal with phases of life with which he had himself come into contact. Maupassant’s service in the military for some time provided him with experience which he turned to good account when he wrote stories. Maupassant has written poems and plays as well, but it is not as a romantic poet or playwright, but as a realist short-story writer that Maupassant has achieved everlasting fame. His short stories are said to be “superior to the rest of his work, and many of them are said to be unsurpassed in their genre” (“Guy de Maupassant, French Literature, Biographies,” Bartleby).

Maupassant is said to be less at his ease with the novel than with the short story. His first novel Une Vie (1883) (A Woman’s Life) “rightly
regarded as Maupassant’s most autobiographical work, shows how clearly the boy realised his mother’s suffering” (Jackson 26). Of his next novel Bel Ami (1885) (Beautiful Friend) Michael G. Lerner says, “Maupassant’s entry into high society and his increased acquaintance with its scandals and business deals” are reflected here (200-1). In Mont Oriol (1887) (Mount Oriol), the author portrays “the finer, more sentimental feelings of passionate romance of more refined temperaments” (Lerner 221). Pierre et Jean (1888) (Peter and John) is “a work that is probably his finest and that Henry James pronounced ‘faultless’ ” (Steegmuller 241). His novel Fort Comme la Mort (1889) (Strong as Death) of which the title was taken from the Song of Solomon, “is a masterpiece of psychological investigation” (Jackson 260). His last novel Notre Coeur (Our Heart) was completed in 1890. Au Soleil (In the Sun), Sur l’ Eau (On the Water) and La Vie Errante (The Wandering Life) are the travel books written by Maupassant. The plays penned by him are La Paix du Ménage (Peace in the House), Musotte (Fascinating Face) and Histoire du Vieux Temps (History of Old Time). Des Vers (From Verse) is his collection of poems.

Born in the first half of the last century, Sundara Ramaswamy has been a towering figure in Tamil literary circles with his over sixty nine short stories, three novels, one book of poems, five books of critical essays, two translated texts and four other books. He was born on 30.5.1931 to S.R. Sundara Iyer
and V. Thankammal. Till 1939, his family resided in Kottayam, Kerala, as his father worked as an agent in Burmashell Oil Company. He had his primary education in Kottayam. He studied Malayalam there. In 1939, his family moved to Nagercoil and he continued his education at S.L.B. school. He learned English and Sanskrit here. He could not concentrate on his studies. He was only an average student in his class. At the age of ten, he was down with poliomyelitis which interrupted his studies. He was bedridden. Six years later, the doctor advised him to discontinue his education for the time being. The day on which the doctor made this recommendation was the happiest day in his life. In his childhood, he did not have the habit of reading. As his mother suffered from Asthma, he could not enjoy maternal care. His mother read Manikodi, and she often referred to writers like Na. Pitchamoorthy, B.S. Ramiah, Pudumaipittan, Na. Chidambara Subramoniam etc. He was much attracted by his father's sense of humour and power of imagination. He says, "It is from my father's words that I understood that imagination is more impressive than truth" (Kaatil ... 302).

At the age of sixteen, he started learning Tamil. He was thrilled to read Pudumaipittan's story "Maha Masanam" ("Great Crematorium"). In an interview with Prasanna Ramaswamy, Sundara Ramaswamy admits, "His [Pudumaipittan's] 'Maha Masanam' gave me some experience which transformed me into a different person" (Literary Postcard 116).
Pudumaipittan had the credit of ushering modernity into Tamil literature. It was this story which made Ramaswamy decide that he should carry on the work undertaken by Pudumaipittan. In 1952, he published Pudumaipittan Memorial Magazine. The story “Muthalum Mudivum” (“The Beginning and the End”) published in this memorial magazine, is the first story written by him. His story “Thanneer” (“Water”) won a prize in the Pudumaipittan memorial short story competition conducted by Pudumaipittan’s admirers in Tirunelveli. Ramaswamy’s main strength as a short fictionist is seen in his collection of short stories, which came out in 1991 with the title Sundara Ramaswamy Sirukathaikal (Short Stories of Sundara Ramaswamy). These stories with a few new additions came out in 2000 under the new title Kagangal: Sirukathaikal 1950-2000 (Crows: Short Stories: 1950-2000). Another collection of his latest stories came out in 2004 titled Maria Daamuvukku Ezhuthiya Kaditham (Letters written by Maria to Damu). A fourth collection of short fiction with talks and other writings titled Vaazhum Kanangal Su. Raa. Padaipukal: 2003-2005 (Live Moments in Su. Raa’s Writings: 2003-2005) came out posthumously in December 2005. These stories show how faithfully he has pursued the path laid by Pudumaipittan. His familiarity with current Western techniques of art could be seen in his short as well as long fiction and poetry.
His short stories, with which he started his literary career, show his natural instinct for style and structure. Right from the beginning, Ramaswamy developed for himself a unique skill for narration along with a keen flair for local language and humour. But what makes his stories delightful and true to life is his profound knowledge of human nature and the ways of the world. His first novel, Oru Puliyamarathin Kathai (Story of a Tamarind Tree), enlarged the scope of the Tamil novel and created new perceptions of long fiction. His second novel, J.J. Sila Kurippukal (J.J: Some Notes), defied all the notions prevalent in Tamil writing about the concerns, form and language of a novel. Its mode of narration has the tone of profound meditation on human life and the problem of maintaining human values. His third novel, Kuzhanthaikal, Penkal, Aankal (Children, Women, Men), has also been received by the critical world as a great work of art which reveals some aspects of the author’s personal and familial life. Lakshmi Holmström in the Introduction to That’s it But comments, “Sundara Ramaswamy’s three novels are all landmarks in Tamil fiction” (12). Since the publication of his first novel, Ramaswamy has given continuous proof of an intellectual honesty, a psychological intuition, an eloquence that place him high among the rising generation. He has an encyclopedic mind and remarkable linguistic gifts. He has a natural and powerful talent for short fiction which his latest story “Pillai
Keduthal Vilai” (“Child Spoiling Place”) demonstrates has not deserted him despite the passage of years.

Ramaswamy has been a dominant figure on the Tamil literary scene for more than half a century. Ramaswamy who started his writing career in 1951 passed through an unproductive period from 1966 to 1973. Aravindan asserts that the stories written before this interval and those written later show a marked difference in theme and presentation. The stories written earlier were simple but sharp and subtle as seen in stories like “Prasadam” (“Sacred Offering Distributed”), “Stamp Album” (“Stamp Album”) and “Enkal Teacher” (“Our Teacher”) whereas the stories written afterwards are serious and complex. He comments on the former thus:

Vivid portrayal, the casual exposition of the story like the blooming of the flower, subtle observation, soft tone, language that marked by sharpness and aesthetic appreciation, the ability and outlook of expressing better in unexpressed words, kindling questions related to basis of life and living, the form that conforms to the criteria of short story and above all the narration which makes reading enjoyable. (4-5)

His comments on the latter run thus:

Su. Raa. who has portrayed minutely and realistically different human characteristics carefully presenting life’s externals with
the outer world as the setting has revealed in the story “Azhaippu” (“Invitation”) a different dimension of his literary character. In it the outer world is only the background with the inner world being focused. (7)

About the earlier stories Lakshmi Holmström says:

These stories portray a harsher society, more complex in its demands, and at the same time, more subject to chance and opportunism; but in any case, the focus in the stories has moved from the external world, to an analysis of individual motives, and the failure of human aspirations and desires. (8)

Stories of the latter part like “‘Intoxication’ (1973), ‘Essences’ (1973), ‘Waves’ (1976) and ‘The Hollow’ (1979),” Lakshmi Holmström feels, “are all concerned with an examination of the darker and more violent aspects of the self and of society; the struggle to maintain an individuality in a world that is bent on crushing it” (9). She goes on to add:

the violent contrasts in the external world both parallel and reflect the bitter contradictions of the inner world in many of these later stories. By the same token, the different levels between which the stories move, their unexpected changes of tone, and their strikingly disturbing endings give them a technical brilliance. (9-10)
Gowri Ramnarayan writes in an issue of The Hindu, “Scholars note that Ramaswamy’s progressive socio-political ideals found more direct expression in the first phase of his writing, yielding to a later aesthetic subtlety.” Ramnarayan quotes Asokamitram to point out how “His standards in publication rank with the best in the world” (The Hindu Magazine 5).

as short fiction in Tamil to the status of art worthy of comparison with their counterparts in the West. All the same, Ramaswamy has not gained the kind of popularity and acclaim outside the academia among common readers.

Realism is the mode which both the writers prefer to write in. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines realism as “Close resemblance to what is real; fidelity of representation, esp. in art and literature” (def.3). Realism, one can say, purged fiction of idealism or what Philip Rahv calls the “beautiful lie” (qtd. in Grant 25). The reaction against the ideals and dreams of the romantics resulted in the practice of realism. Fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century began to be based on observation of human conditions and analysis of human motives. A notable fictional advocate of realism is Mr. Gradgrind in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* who demands, “Now what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life” (12). Realism is opposed to idealism which is based on a view of truth as “universal and timeless” but empiricism, the basis of realism, finds its truths in the “particular and specific,” as Pam Morris writes (*Realism* 3). He goes on to point out:

realism is associated particularly with the secular and rational forms of knowledge that constitute the tradition of the Enlightenment, stemming from the growth of scientific understanding in the eighteenth century. Underpinning
Enlightenment thought is an optimistic belief that human beings can adequately reproduce, by means of verbal and visual representations, both the objective world that is exterior to them and their own subjective responses to that exteriority. (Realism 9)

France is the country where realism in fiction was first practised in earnest and discussed in detail throughout the century. The realist mode with its strict adherence to the representation of historical time and place was seen to be a challenge to what Morris calls “the system of rules governing aesthetic conventions in France at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Realism 52). The realist way of writing could really be traced to the empirical school of philosophy which according to Ian Watt “begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses” (12).

This kind of emphasis on the individual perception of reality, Pam Morris says, “marks a shift from the classical concern with universal truth to a notion of particularity” (Realism 77). With this particularity as the aim of the artist, realists began to underscore verisimilitude and correspondence to external reality. George Eliot says in her novel, Adam Bede, that her realist aim in fiction is “to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves” in her “mind” (222). Pam Morris quotes G.H. Lewes to say that all “Art is a Representation of Reality” and so the logical conclusion
is that “Realism is thus the basis of all Art, and its antithesis is not Idealism, but Falsism” (qtd. in Morris, Realism 88-89). Morris argues that “realism is based on a defining commitment to the belief that there is a shared material world external to textuality and subjective, solipsistic worlds” (Realism 155).

Realism began to be discredited in the course of the twentieth century because it apparently took into account only the external world and ignored the vast area of the world of the mind. It came in for attack first from the modernists and then from postmodernists on the ground that it merely copied or reflected life in the world and that it did not generate a new form of knowledge and that it did not disturb or challenge conventional ways of thought. A new critical tradition was evolved starting from the Russian Formalists to Adorno and the Frankfurt School extending upto Roland Barthes and poststructuralist critics which highlighted literary productions that brought into question existing cultural values. The literary qualities valued by these new critical faces were those associated with what Morris terms “negative critique and self-reflexivity rather than verisimilitude” (Realism 121). These critics felt that the Enlightenment movement with its emphasis on reason and rationality sought to promote imperialist universalism and to totalize knowledge. The new tradition tended to focus upon the individual physical body as the most local site of cultural production. According to the detractors of the realist mode, “Too many domains of human experience and values have
to be excluded from the realm of knowledge and truth according to the verifiability principle” (Morris, Realism 134). The modernist, Rene Wellek points out, came to claim that the stream-of-consciousness was the only realistic method of conveying reality and that the subjective experience was “the only objective experience” (237). Both the structuralists and poststructuralists too brought into question the referential power of language. They made fun of realist writing with its claim to use words to create an accurate imitation of the real world. But Pam Morris argues that “structuralism can be understood as part of the Enlightenment project of producing systematic knowledge” (Realism 26). In the eyes of modernists, postmodernists, structuralists and poststructuralists realist fiction produces only readerly narratives that are offered for the reader to be passively consumed. They are seen to give “comfort to the reader’s moral and cultural expectations of what life should be like rather than challenging the existing conceptual and socio-political status quo” (Morris, Realism 37).

There is a whole range of texts which pass under the name of realism. Some of them are certainly conservative in theme and technique, but others not only communicate what Pam Morris terms “the material actuality we share as embodied creatures” but also create fresh insights into different levels of reality and seek to bring about attitudinal changes for a better social or familial order as in the case of the French and the Tamil texts studied here
Chris Baldick in *Criticism and Literary Theory: 1890 to the Present* comments, "The realist shows the impartiality or impersonality befitting an anatomist of human affairs, whereas the inartistic novelist intrusively comments and moralises upon events" (51). But the tools of a realist writer like Maupassant or Ramaswamy are seen to be different forms of irony which are employed to stimulate a rethink on vital issues or situations in life. Pam Morris says, "The Marxist critic of realism, Gyorgy Lukács (1885-1971), also sees irony as inherent to realist form" (*Realism* 48). There has been radical experimentation with narrative techniques in realist texts as well which the writings of the two authors confirm. Postmodernists maintain that it is not possible to represent a community without basic cultural roots but realist writers would hold that the members of such a community do not live in a hermitically sealed world.

Realist texts also offer deconstructive insights into conventional concepts and values. Sundara Ramaswamy's stories like "Lavvu" ("Love") frequently use narrative repetition to challenge simplistic views of reality. An event retold from different perspectives as in "Mei + Poi = Mei" ("Truth + Falsehood = Truth") by the same author is seen to suggest that truth may be shifting and even multiple. All kinds of even experimental texts are seen to resort to the realist mode to bring out the materiality of familial or social atrocities. A loosely systematic adoption of a mode of realism, according to
Pam Morris, could be seen to be adopted "by all kinds of writers at any historical period and in any culture" (Realism 44). The realist mode has survived all kinds of onslaughts on it precisely because every writer feels "the need to communicate information about the material, non-linguistic world" and because it is based on "the consensual belief that shared communication about material and subjective realities is possible" (Morris, Realism 44).

The stories of the two writers here exemplify the defining qualities of realism which consist in historical particularity and narrative innovation and a secular spirit which ironises idealist claims. Realist texts like them remind one of the need to have an idea of the material conditions of human existence in a concrete historical and geographical world and not a postmodern world of continuous flux, shifting identities and ubiquitous unlocated power. However, Guy de Maupassant was not satisfied with the presentation of just the external world of reality in its objective form as he perceived reality at different levels in a subjective manner. This is why he rejects the childishness of naïve realism in his essay "Le Roman" prefixed to his novel Pierre et Jean (Grant 51).

The similarities and differences seen between the texts of the two authors demand greater attention through the discipline of Comparative Literature. Comparative Literature, as S.S. Prawer says, "implies a study of literature which uses comparison as its main instrument" (2). Comparative
Literature helps a researcher to make a “study of texts across cultures,” as Susan Bassnett says in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1). Comparative literary studies can be done across linguistic barriers. One who studies Virgil’s *Aeneid* tends to compare it with Valmiki’s *Ramayana*. One reading the great Indian playwright like Kalidasa tends to compare him with the English bard of Avon, William Shakespeare. One admiring Bharathi’s revolutionary poems could feel an impulse to see what he has in common with the English romantic poet, P.B. Shelley. When one undertakes such a comparative study, one moves across frontiers and becomes familiar with texts beyond cultural barriers. Here one realizes the veracity of what Matthew Arnold comments on literary connectivity, “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 literature” (qtd. in Prawer 12).

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in their *Theory of Literature* say, “Matthew Arnold, translating Ampere’s use of ‘*historic comparative*’, was apparently the first to use the term in English (1848)” (46). R.K. Dhawan in the article titled “The Case for Comparative Literature” writes, “Comparative Literature is a literary discipline and ought to be recognized as the most important academic activity of the present era, in which the East and the West
are merging and unifying the world into a single whole” (9). He goes on to say:

The aim of a comparatist, in our opinion, should be to find out the implications and the underlying identities of both similarities and differences so that even the differences can be given their proper place in a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the artist. (11)

Henry Remak, who dissented from the conservative view of the French school and widened the scope of this discipline through the American school, asserts that comparative literature “is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression” (1).

The two authors studied here belong to two different cultural backgrounds and languages but one sees how comparative literature has broadened the scope of literary studies. So in the light of the comparative discipline one may set out to see how they club together in the domain of their art and give one the feeling of their belonging to the same family of minds. They are both seen to be careful observers of milieu and landscape as well. Their stories can be considered to be accurate records of the social classes that they viewed at a certain time and along certain lines in different stages of their lives. Both the writers choose their subjects mostly from the contemporary
scene which they could observe. The dominant tone in them is that of factual reportage and characters and situations are seen from the outside, as it were. The possession of a photographic memory enables these writers to gather a storehouse of information about men, women and children and their inner and outer lives which later helped them to re-create their fictional counterparts. Stanley Jackson says, "What he [Maupassant] saw he noted mentally, analysing reflections and shaping his phrases so that, when the time came to record them, he had but to transcribe from memory" (147). Like Maupassant, Ramaswamy excels many of his peers in composing a story, in arranging the parts of its storyline with fresh insights into characters and events. They both bring in at the end of their narratives something that provokes serious reflection as the comment in the "Moonlight" of the French author, "You see, Sister, very often it is not a man that we love, but love. And your real lover that night was the moonlight" (425) or in the Tamil writer's "Kagankal" ("Crows") "Even at that moment my inner awareness was acute. Feeling ashamed to see pretentious faces, I closed my eyes" (588). The sea holds an irresistible fascination for both the fictionists as their stories like "Madame Parisse" and "Alaikal" ("Waves") bear out. Both the writers have the remarkable ability to create a mood or atmosphere with only a few strokes of the pen even in their plotless stories as in the French story "He" or in the Tamil story "Konthalippu" ("Turbulence"). Apart from their narrative skills,
Maupassant and Ramaswamy display astonishing power in their character studies of men, women and children from different backgrounds and professions – lawyers, doctors, priests, businessmen, government officials, wealthy men, fashionable ladies, homemakers, promiscuous women, servants, labourers and children who are at the receiving end when adults deviate from the norm or children who clamour for attention of adults through their creative endeavours. Their characters are creatures of flesh and blood, whom they place in situations which are possible or probable but true as well.

Maupassant’s short stories on which his fame principally rests, deal with phases of life with which he had himself come into contact. Most of his stories are known to be the upshots of the author’s own direct or indirect experiences as Maupassant critics like Stanley Jackson confirm (26). “Maupassant,” Paul Ignotus says, “modelled all his characters on living persons” (47). Many of the Tamil stories here unveil for the reader the man behind their author. The author confided to this researcher that most of the characters are drawn from the people personally known to him in life (Francis 13 Feb. 2002). In the article titled “Kathaikkku Oru Karu” (“Basic Theme for a Story”), he refers to such characters. “Jannal” (“The Window”), “Pakkathil Vandha Appa” (“Father Who Came Near”) are undeniably autobiographical.

Maupassant’s stories have not lost their relevance to contemporary life primarily because many of the issues discussed in them continue to be debated
by subsequent generations of readers and the protagonists who figure in them resemble warm-blooded representatives even of the intelligentsia in the twenty-first century. Similar is the appeal one finds in Ramaswamian fiction. However, his stories have not gained the kind of recognition which they deserve and demand. Ramaswamy in comparison with the French writer is found to be among those writers who are worshipped from a respectful distance rather than widely read or reviewed outside the academia. Maupassant’s oeuvre includes novels, short stories, poems, essays, travel books and plays while the corpus of Ramaswamy contains novels, short stories, poems, essays and translations. While Ramaswamy lived a relatively long life of conjugality and passed away on 15.10.2005 after a brief affliction with pulmonary fibrosis, Guy de Maupassant lived a single life for only forty-three years when a disease of the brain struck him down and brought to an end his creative phase of life in 1892 and he passed away on 6.7.1893. Sundara Ramaswamy’s longevity has not enabled him to command a larger or more loyal readership. He deserves to be given due recognition throughout the country and introduced to people beyond its shores.

The study undertaken here is not one of influence as the Tamil writer denies being influenced by his French counterpart, “I have read some of his stories, but the way he writes, I think, differs from my approach” (Francis 13 Feb. 2002). His fiction does not seem to have been influenced by the
Frenchman. Besides the term "influence" here, as modern comparatists like Guillen would say, "presupposes a dearth of creativity and poetic imagination." Critics like him see influence "as a moment or phase of the creative process" (qtd. in Weisstein 40; 43). Guillen is known to have asked the rhetorical question, "Did a Renaissance poet have to have read Petrarch in order to write a Petrarchan sonnet?" His assumption is that "literary conventions are not only technical prerequisites but also basic, collective shared influences" (Weisstein 46). Ulrich Weisstein feels that "measurable influences play a minor role when we think of literary phenomena in relation to so vast a backdrop" as a period or movement in literature (69).

So it is a parallel study and a study of this kind has not been done on Sundara Ramaswamy. The present investigation gains relevance as it seeks to bring to the attention of a global readership the artistic achievements of a regional writer and show the rest of the world how they compare with the literary output of an internationally renowned writer.

This study has been carried out in five chapters of which chapter one is the introduction which explains the title of the dissertation, briefly surveys French as well as Tamil short fiction and profiles contemporary French and Tamil literary backgrounds of the two authors. Guy de Maupassant and Sundara Ramaswamy are introduced with their major publications and their receptions by their respective audiences followed by a note on school they
belong to. This chapter also facilitates a discussion on comparative literature which discipline has emboldened this researcher to embark on this comparative analysis of the two writers who come from different cultural contexts. Chapters two, three and four are devoted to comparisons of the two authors' perceptions of materiality, morality and irony which their short stories reflect through their protagonists and their responses to situations in life. In these three chapters there is discussion of the similarities and differences perceived between the French and Tamil writers in terms of themes as well as techniques. The major findings of the scholar here are brought back and briefly discussed in the fifth chapter. The bibliographical details of the works cited appear at the end.

By undertaking this comparative study of the universally read French writer and the regionally known Tamil writer, the researcher hopes to bring to global attention the literary labours of Sundara Ramaswamy and thereby enlarge his readership through translation. The study of these two short fictionists is expected to provide a true picture of nineteenth-century France and twentieth-century Indian cultural context as well.