Chapter Two

Materiality

“Naturalism and realism in writing presuppose a materialistic outlook on life, and nineteenth century materialism was predominantly French in its sources” (Artinian, Maupassant Criticism in France 1880-1940 146).

The short fictional creations of the French writer, Guy de Maupassant, and the short stories of the Tamil writer, Sundara Ramaswamy, studied here project these authors prominently as free thinkers where other-worldliness is concerned. They record empirical reality as they recognize only the materiality of human existence. None of their characters here is concerned about the spiritual significance of the cosmos. The two writers converge in their denial of a spiritual world or in their propensity to situate characters in a solely materialistic milieu. D.H. Lawrence, “tormented by his failure to define” his relationship with Jessie, his wife, is reported to have “brought her the short stories of Maupassant, in an attempt to win her over to a materialist view of life” (Delavency 51). Most of Maupassant’s men and women are highly sensuous or even sensual. Some of Ramaswamy’s protagonists are similarly sensitive to the point of being sensual but inhibited due to cultural divergence. The French writer is out to show one how some French people
release their spontaneous sexuality without inhibitions of any sort. The vision of the two writers appears to be limited to the material and worldly concerns of the characters.

The French writer's fictional creations make him out to be essentially a realist. He resorts to realism to register reality in wider terms. He makes his characters realistic in their mindsets and habits and makes them practise an ethic which borders in some cases on naturalism. He could be called an exemplar of nineteenth-century French realism in its naturalist phase primarily because he presents his characters as people who are governed by what Freud might call "id" or what Hinduism terms "kama". However, Maupassant's realistic aesthetic developed under the tutelage not of Emile Zola, but of Gustave Flaubert. In his stories life is stripped of its masks. He presents the life he saw around him in all its naked realities.

The Tamil writer creates through his stories a general reality within which his personal experiences of the outer world and the inner world gain room for narration. Ramaswamy in his art of short fiction has pursued the path prepared by his literary guru, Pudumaipittan who introduced modernity into Tamil literature. Ramaswamy could be characterized as one who broke away from the traditionally romantic fiction of the past and pursues the path of realism in its modern phase. He is a psychoanalytically-oriented realist who seeks to unearth subconscious complexes and repressions.
There is in the fiction of the two writers a synthesis of subjective and objective realities. The subjective and the objective are reconciled in a sort of absolute reality. This kind of reality differs from socialist realism because what leftists envision is a reality conforming to a particular political ideal. "The realist," says Maupassant in one of his critical essays, "if he is an artist, will seek not to expound to us a banal, photographic view of life, but to provide a vision more complete, more gripping, more searching than reality itself" (qtd. in Hemmings 209-10). In an interview Ramaswamy says, "I scrutinize my experiences through my writing. I try to see if the mask hiding them can be removed. It is a matter of pain to encounter and wholeheartedly accept reality. My writing is precisely to prepare myself and others for this encounter" (Virivum ... 15). The presentations of the French and Tamil writers here gain through realism greater sensitivity and immediacy. These authors give the impression of being socio-familial annalists and literary scientists as they display their familiarity with the facts of human life and behaviour. What separates these writers from traditional realists is their talent to paint psychological realities as well. They both choose heterodox subjects, earthier vocabulary, and explicit treatment of human sexuality. They have realistically created their men, women and children mostly from the contemporary scene which they have seen.
Realism sometimes gets dismissed as a "submission to exteriority and materialism" as Chris Baldick points out (49). Realism here, as Raymond Williams has put it, "is, rather, a way of describing certain methods and attitudes, and the descriptions, quite naturally, have varied, in the ordinary exchange and development of experience" (581). These writers here deal with everyday reality in life. In Maupassant's fiction one can see how naturalism has widened the range of realism as one can see in Ramaswamy's stories how exposure to modernism has deepened the Tamil writer's realist ambit. The range of realism in the twentieth century has been broadened to encompass "psychological reality" as Raymond Williams corroborates (582). Williams feels that

it is obviously true that the direct study of certain states of consciousness, certain newly apprehended psychological states, has been a primary modern feature. Yet realism as an intention, in the description of these states, has not been widely abandoned. (583)

The realist tradition pursued by twentieth-century writers like Ramaswamy is different in form, "altered in technique but continuous in experience," to borrow the words of Williams (588). The reality of human thought and feeling is recorded only from a different point in time.
Kama and Carnality

Maupassant and Ramaswamy have both been intrigued by the insight they gained into the allurements of love and lust in human life. Both have dealt with the irresistible sexual desire in humans. While Ramaswamy in the modernist context seems to dwell on its excess and sometimes to expatiate on its negative outcome, Maupassant seems to accept human carnality and celebrate its predominance in the naturalist ambience created by Zola. In their fiction the principal characters are subjected to the kind of psychological scrutiny which brings out their bestial instincts. All humans, whether rich or poor, learned or unlettered, are shown to be governed by the same urges produced by kama. The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana says:

Kama is the enjoyment of appropriate objects by the five senses of hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting, and smelling, assisted by the mind together with the soul. The ingredient in this is a peculiar contact between the organ of sense and its object, and the consciousness of pleasure that arises from that contact is called Kama. (64)

In his Introduction to The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana John W. Spellman writes that Kama in Sanskrit could mean “desire, affection, love, lust, sensual pleasure, and the like” (10).
Maupassant’s stories like “Magnetism” and Ramaswamy’s stories like “Oru Storyin Kadhai” (“The Tale of a Story”) drive home their view that most people are basically sensual not only in their instincts but also in the images they conjure up as memories crowd in on them or as they happen to hear sexually exciting reports of events. David Coward comments that Maupassant at one level “may be said to reflect the current fascination with the new interest in the subconscious. He attended lectures given by Charcot (as did Freud) and became interested in hypnotism and early forms of psychoanalysis” (xviii). In this way he came to a better understanding of the human mind and its subconscious and unconscious layers which helps him explain through his protagonists strange occurrences or incredible things, as he does in “Magnetism”. Here the narrator believes that only material things exist and that amazing coincidences could not be attributed to “the intervention of God” or to “magnetism.” He tells his table companions, “Just as others begin by believing, I begin by doubting, and when I don’t at all understand, I continue to deny that there can be any telepathic communication between souls, certain that my own sagacity will be enough to explain it” (523).

In Maupassant’s story one sees at the close of a dinner party how the diners “so skeptical, so happy-go-lucky, so indifferent to religion of every sort” all of a sudden begin “falling back into superstitions” and “beliefs” about
marvellous things of the spirit. There was among them only one man "in whose mind there was so much incredulity about everything that he would not even enter upon a discussion of such matters" (522). With a sneer he dismisses the queer tales by narrating two stories to justify his skepticism. The first story is about "the little son" of a fisherman from Etretat who one night "woke up with a start, crying out that his father was dead." A month later the death of his father "on the same night and at the same hour" was confirmed. The people looked on it as a "miracle, and the affair caused a great sensation." The narrator was asked whether he could explain it. He found out by inquiries that not a week would pass without one of the women in the village or their children "dreaming and declaring when they wake that the father was drowned" (523). Drowning accidents which the fishermen met with made their folks always talk about them. He took the view that if one of their predictions coincided by chance with the death of the man dreamed about, the simple villagers considered it to be a miracle.

The second story is about something that happened to the narrator himself. Among his "acquaintances in society there was a young woman" who had not apparently attracted him, although he is said to have been "a great pursuer of girls of light behaviour and a hunter also of frisky matrons" (523 and 522). She was not a bad-looking woman but the kind "who never excites desire" (523). All the same, the woman had fascinated him in
moments that obviously slipped into the subconscious segment of his mind. He tells his companions:

one night as I was writing some letters by my own fireside before going to bed, I was conscious, in the midst of that train of sensual images that sometimes float before one's brain in moments of idle reverie, while I held the pen in my hand, of a kind of light breath passing into my soul, a little shudder of the heart and immediately, without reason, without any logical connection of thought, I saw distinctly, saw as if I had touched her, saw from head to foot, uncovered, this young woman for whom I had never cared save in the most superficial manner when her name happened to recur to my mind. And all of a sudden I discovered in her a heap of qualities which I had never before observed, a sweet charm, a fascination that made me languish; she awakened in me that sort of amorous uneasiness which sends you in pursuit of a woman. (524)

He goes to bed and the rest of her attraction surfaces during his dream of her. He asks his listeners:

have you ever noticed what superhuman delight these good fortunes of dreams bestow upon us? Into what mad intoxication they cast you! With what passionate spasms they shake you!
With what infinite, caressing, penetrating tenderness they fill your heart for her whom you hold fainting and hot in that adorable and sensual illusion which seems so like reality! (524)

Freud believes that the unconscious segment of the mind which he identifies with the pleasure principle or id is a seething mass of primitive, anti-social drives. He interprets the unconscious as a reservoir of amoral impulses which are dammed behind the floodgates of a censorship that allows outlet only in the disguised and harmless form of the dream. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud writes:

> It may happen that a piece of material occurs in the content of a dream which in the waking state we do not recognize as forming a part of our knowledge or experience. We remember, of course, having dreamt the thing in question, but we cannot remember whether or when we experienced it in real life. We are thus left in doubt as to the source which has been drawn upon by the dream and are tempted to believe that dreams have a power of independent production. (45)

Maupassant in his portrayal of human life is seen to be at pains to reveal the influence of the senses. His stories like "Madame Tellier's Excursion", "The Mountebanks" and "Mademoiselle Fifi" as a rule initiate one into the world of the senses even when they dwell on psychological
realities. Maupassant is said to have been a hyperaesthetic man. Martin 
Turnell says, “His hyperaesthesia left its mark on his writings as well as his 
life. The emphasis on the sight, feel and smell of women’s flesh is obsessive” 
(199). This could be seen even when the narrator of “Magnetism” describes 
the impact of his dream fulfilment:

This woman was mine, so much mine that the pleasant warmth 
of her skin remained between my fingers; the odor of her skin 
remained in my brain; the taste of her kisses remained on my 
lips; the sound of her voice lingered in my ears; the touch of her 
clasp still clung to my side, and the burning charm of her 
tenderness still gratified my senses long after my exquisite but 
disappointing awakening. (524)

Maupassant demonstrates the Freudian theory that the sexual instinct or 
libido is analogous to hunger. How id or kama dominates the dreamer here is 
seen as the narrator goes on to say how he instinctively sought fulfilment of 
his irresistible drive, “When the day dawned she beset me, possessed me, 
haunted my brain and my flesh to such an extent that I no longer remained one 
second without thinking of her.” Unable to resist his desire, he goes to her 
apartment. She is surprised to see him. But she appears to be in the same 
frame of mind because he meets with no resistance as he abruptly flings 
himself “upon her, seizing her with both arms”, and his “entire dream was
accomplished so quickly, so easily, so madly” as if in a dream (524). The conclusion that the narrator arrives at is that “it was just a coincidence!” He goes on to recall how

Perhaps it was some glance of hers which I had not noticed and which came back that night to me – one of those mysterious and unconscious evocations of memory which often brings before us things ignored by our own consciousness, unperceived by our minds! (525)

The refusal of Maupassant’s protagonist to subscribe to the magnetic attractions of the souls and the predominance in him of kama remind one not only of Maupassant’s rational attitude of mind but also of the Tamil writer here who seeks to make his readers see how irrational they tend to be when they witness an apparently unusual occurrence like the event at Munivar Santhippu in “Oru Storyin” of Maria Daamuvukku Ezhuthiya Kaditham. These two stories seem to confirm the Freudian theory “that most of our actions are motivated by psychological forces over which we have very limited control” (Guerin et al. 127). Among them is placed the urge to seek sexual gratification. “Freud,” as Guerin and others point out, “designates the prime psychic force as libido, or sexual energy” (128). Freud contends that “because of the powerful social taboos attached to certain sexual impulses, many of our desires and memories are repressed.” In other words they are
"actively excluded" from the conscious segment of the mind. Ramaswamy may have written this story with a notion of the Freudian concept that all human behaviour is motivated ultimately by what one could call "sexuality" (Guerin et al. 128). Viewed from a slightly different psychological angle, this story could be interpreted as an allegory which points out modern humans’ growing preoccupation with the instinct to sexualise everything. It has underlying psychological implications that concern the inhabitants of any modern city. The apparition reportedly sighted at Munivar Santhippu can be seen as an image of the sensually bosomy woman, if one is to interpret it on the basis of Freudian symbology. It is the sudden eruption of the id, "the reservoir of libido", which obviously makes an apparently educated elderly man see the strange appearance of a "huge pillar" with the live figure of a woman with bewitching beauty just behind "the statue of the great man" in the capital city (Guerin et al. 129; Ramaswamy 62-64). Inside that pillar she could be seen "standing with her lower half hidden" (64). Everybody gathering there is so excited by the man’s story that they seem to see the woman’s upper half in the nude. One reads here, "It seems her freedom is limited to that extent by her coyness" (64-65). The psychoanalytic critic, according to Guerin and others here, tends to see all images whose length exceeds their diameter as "male or phallic symbols" (132). The writer empathizing with the spectators of the illusory sight exclaims, "Oh God what
breasts she has! Creation in reaching its victorious pinnacle is giggling in delight at their impressiveness and stiffness.” The viewers seem to feel that it is the smooth rosy skin gliding down from her neck that makes her breasts “so firm. Their nipples resembling unfading bachelor’s buttons are pulsating for the touch of fingertips” (65).

The rest of the city seems to get deserted as everybody rushes to see this uncommon sight. All sorts of people throng to get a glimpse of the voluptuous figure. The more they look at the apparition, the more they begin to suspect whether it is after all an illusion. They begin to wonder whether this miraculous sight is formed out of the chemical reaction of a combination of “vapour, light, cloud, fragrances, breeze and water.” When this feeling could no longer be suppressed it surfaces as whispers. When this interpretation is offered, those who could not accept it begin to retort by asking “whether corpses will bat their eyelids” (66). The image here seems to bat its eyes now and then. Besides, with a closer look one could sense the slight smile of the figure.

The author goes on to write, “But none of them could interpret the ever present expression of surprise on the face of the temptress” (66). One among the bewildered viewers is a psychologist. He attempts to give the students around him an explanation “with circumlocutory preface of how it would be only his guesswork” (66). He feels:
It is possible that this queenly woman is one who has not seen such a sea of humanity. It is possible that everyone in the crowd looking at her bosom without a bat of their eyelids is a puzzle to that woman. Why such an ecstasy envelops everyone’s face could be a question growing monstrously out of proportion for that woman. With this in mind she could have come to the wrong conclusion that all these people have sighted breasts only now. (66-67)

The strange sight causes a flurry of activity in the offices of all kinds of magazines and dailies. Such a day has not dawned for editors with this kind of event occurring anywhere else. All the journalists seek to cash in on this occurrence by the use of their talent and imagination. They know that the breasts of a woman will not make big news, “but their position and nudity certainly will” (67). It is their unusual erection that boils one’s blood. When nudity becomes the focal point of a story, then the visual image has a greater appeal than its written text. But the reporters here disagree on this point. Certain discerning reporters argue at their usual meeting in a pub that although the visual image is important in the arousal of interest, written matter has greater power to awaken interest in one. In this context, no one could give an answer to the question why in narrow alleys pornographic books kindling the imagination sell in larger numbers than collections of photographs portraying
the naked realities of sexual acts and their deviations from the norm. These are things quiet known to all the editors; but on that day they are seen to be in undue haste to look at the photographs of the nude image. It takes them all by surprise that the event does not get telecast in that night’s news bulletin. The woman’s bosom, surprisingly enough, fails to appear in the photographs of the journalists. All the photographers go back to the spot thinking that there is a technical snag. But on reaching there, they are no longer able to see the image. There is nobody at the spot except a lunatic who sits weeping in the rain.

Like Freud, the French and the Tamil writers here see the strange results of the excessive suppression of the libidinal energy in humans. The elderly educated man in the Tamil story who reports his strange experience and those who gather to witness the apparition are the victims of a culture that has obviously rejected sex as a natural part of humankind’s physical and mental constitution, a culture whose moral concepts would suppress too severely natural human impulses. The unusually large bosom of the woman could be interpreted as nothing more than the projection of the viewer’s repressed sexual impulses due to the domination of the tyrannous superego. When the ego or reality principle does not serve as the intermediary between the id and the superego, a kind of imbalance results between the head and the heart. The Hindus believe that the four goals of human life or “Purusharthas”
are “Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha” (Pillai 16). Hindu scriptures teach one how Moksha or liberation eludes one who ignores Dharma, which almost corresponds to what Freud calls superego and ego put together. It is Dharma which ensures right conduct. Excessive Kama or carnality corresponds to the domination of the Freudian id. In Fact and Fantasy in Freudian Theory Paul Kline clarifies the Freudian concepts saying that the id “is the core of our being within which the instincts operate and their sole endeavour is to seek satisfaction regardless of consequences, situation or logic.” Of the ego he writes, “Its function consists of interposing, between id demands and satisfying actions, intellectual activity aimed at calculating the consequences of any proposed behaviour” (169). Thus the ego must decide whether the satisfaction may be carried out or postponed or whether the demand of the instinct should be altogether suppressed. Here we learn that “If the main aim of the id is pleasure the main aim of the ego is safety” (Kline 169). The superego in Freudian theory is looked upon as “the heir of the Oedipus complex.” Paul Kline quotes Freud thus “it observes the ego, gives it orders, corrects it and threatens it with punishments exactly like the parents whose place it has taken” (170). Its domination could be seen in Maupassant’s memorable clergyman, Abbe Marignan in “In the Moonlight” or in Ramaswamy’s conscientious narrator of “Kagankal” (“Crows”).
The two stories discussed here go to prove the fact that what the two authors record is the materiality of life on earth and that empirical reality makes up the fictional framework within which they fit out the observable facts of human life and behaviour. The realist mode adopted by them does not limit their portrayal of life merely to its exteriority. Within its parameters they have accessed the inner life of the characters and analysed psychological realities without any kind of imbalance between thought and feeling. One sees here how the limits of realism get widened in the French writer’s fictional scheme of things and how its scope gets deepened in the wake of the Tamil writer’s familiarity with different techniques of presenting reality. However, most of the protagonists of Maupassant are found to be impulsive as physicality is seen to dominate. The reader of the Tamil writer also regains contact with the deep realities of life through the physical emotions which the veneer of modern life seeks to eliminate, weaken or disguise.

**Sensual Obsession and Sexual Orgy**

The French and the Tamil writers are basically material in their perceptions of life and society. Most of their characters demonstrate their essential belief that men and women are worldly in their pursuits whatever their station in life happens to be. Their ultimate goal is the fulfilment of their sensuous desires and sensual drives. What distinguishes these writers is their avoidance of idealisation of individuals or exaggeration of anything in human
nature or social settings. They both portray stark realities artistically as they set out to show that humans are no better than animals.

In Ramaswamy's story "Bhodhai" ("Obsession") the protagonist sets out to seek the woman whose imagined figure has fascinated him for ten years ever since he heard a man talk about her to a relative of his. She was said to be "an adventuress delighting one with absorption in coitus." He says, "The very utterance of her name fired my imagination beyond description. Imagination painted her figure on the canvas of the mind" (413). He goes to the Kerala temple in search of the woman who he believes could give him full sexual satisfaction. He deceives himself into believing that he could experience fulfilment through this woman whose very existence is uncertain. As the woman in the temple attracts this man, so does divinity attract the people here who take out a long procession with provocative slogans and assaults on whoever resists them.

The author here makes fun of not only human obsession with sex, but with religion where reason is not allowed to have its place. The fun of the situation here lies in a sexual freak finding fault with religious fanatics. What the author seeks to demonstrate here is the fact that excessive sexuality and religious bigotry are both passions which drive out reason. These people in the procession like the protagonist seek to fill the void in them with their passions. They do not turn back and find out what their void is due to. When
they deal with it at the emotional level instead of intellectual level, they like people obsessed with kama, become slaves of their passions. In a personal interview to this researcher Sundara Ramaswamy quipped, “There is a void in every human being. Some seek to fill it with drinking, gambling, loafing or sexual adventures, while others fill it with the pursuit of religious studies, incessant prayers or some other extreme activity” (Francis 13 Feb. 2002).

It is with “sexual adventures” that most of the central characters in the French writer’s world try to fill this void. Wanda von Chabert of “In Various Roles” was a woman “carefully brought up in every way” by her German parents. But after her marriage to “a rich and handsome officer of noble birth” at the age of sixteen, she began to enjoy the pleasures that worldly wealth offered her. Her spendthrift husband’s death two years later left her too impoverished to pursue the pleasures of her chosen way of life. Therefore “Even while she was still in mourning for her husband she allowed a Hungarian magnate to make love to her” for the sake of an “extravagant life.” Her lover ditches her two years later “almost without means” or what the Hindus term Artha. This time she wanted to be an actress to make her fortune, but “chance provided her with another resource” and she became a police informer. Her wit, charm, “linguistic attainments” and her “encyclopedic polish” coupled with her good looks and skill in the “arts of dress and coquetry” enabled her to conquer any kind of men (525).
The author characterizes her as “a woman of the world in the widest sense of the term, pleasure-loving, faithless, unstable, and therefore never in any danger of really losing her heart and consequently her head” (525). She travelled from one country to another in Europe captivating men and trapping them in her net. Different men saw in her different faces. Finally, she was profoundly charmed by a young man with whom she pursued for “four weeks” paradisal pleasures. But their relationship did not last long as it was based solely on love of the flesh in her and love of the lucre in him. He was discovered to be something of a “male courtesan” whose hobby was to assume different roles and roam round with rich women (526). She was duped and he disappeared only to be discovered by Wanda in different guises with different women. At last, she took revenge on him by getting him separated from the rich Austrian countess and taken into custody as “a dangerous swindler and adventurer.” Her ruthless victory over men began with the jailing of this “circus rider”, for she told his victim’s lover, a young officer that the man could be engaged to the countess “As long as” she chose and she dramatically brought the countess back to his “arms” in the wake of the rogue’s true colour being exposed. The young officer, before going to meet his lady love turned back “in order to thank beautiful Wanda, as he had promised, on his knees” (528).
The story of Wanda and her conquest of men could be seen continued in "Delilah" where she plays the part of the biblical heroine of the same name bewitching and betraying men one after another. The author here makes her out to be the most "attractive and seductive" coquette with a "low Grecian forehead, her bright, almond-shaped eyes, her small nose, her full, voluptuous lips, ... her small waist with its perhaps almost too-full bust" along with her "half-indolent" and "swaying" hips. These striking features in her "were all maddeningly alluring" (625). It is said that after her final betrayal of her Samson, she left for "Turin, where new lovers, new splendors and new laurels waited [sic] her" (629).

What the two writers constantly focus on are human predilections for material pleasures – Artha and Kama – which in the Hindu philosophy of life are two of the four goals in human life. Ramaswamy in his story, "Muttaikkaari" ("The Egg-Selling Woman"), describes humorously with realistic touches how an old man named Ezhakaram Narayana Aiyar pursues the vision of an egg-selling woman who has long excited his lust with her attractive bottom. Maupassant in a similar fashion highlights the excessive sexual desire of a woman in "Graveyard Sirens". The Ramaswamian protagonist Narayana Aiyar could be termed a "satyr" while the "graveyard huntress", Maupassant's heroine, could be called a "nymphomaniac".
The old man in the Tamil story found it very difficult even to walk to the bus station from the hospital. He was feeling so tired and giddy that he could not even read the letters on the bus arrival and departure sign; yet he felt there the absence of young woman. With great difficulty he got on a crowded bus. The man, suddenly remembering his umbrella, gets off the bus after the bus had passed the Tamarind tree junction. He walked back to the bus station forgetting his fatigue of mind and body to pick up his umbrella. Then came into his view the figure of the woman haunting his mind. He could catch glimpses of the woman walking with one hand swinging and the other gripping a cane basket on her head. Now with little thought of his umbrella, he followed the woman with great hurry of the head and hands although his legs failed to match their fast movement.

He was short of breath and tired but he was determined to catch up with her. In his younger days he could walk fast like a street dog. Now it was a torture for him to make it to the end of the park. The strong and well-built woman might have quickly walked away out of the park and disappeared into the distance. He could guess which of the three pathways she had taken because he had observed her daily errands for nine years. Now it seemed impossible for him to follow her through Kottar and Vadasery up to her house. He took a short cut thinking he could see her at Mandapam that afternoon. So he walked with vigour. He thought he saw her entering a house on the way
and asked a boy if the egg-selling woman had come there. Women were coming out of the typewriting institute and filling the street like pieces of decoration papers. The man walked on looking for the egg-selling woman who the boy said had gone ahead of him.

He fancied how he would broach the subject with her. He thought that, "it would be wise not to refer to his inability to fulfil his promise to her nine years ago" (324). In a flashback one sees how it all happened nine years ago in front of the Municipal Chairman's house:

He was sitting alone in the car while his friends had gone inside the house for a recommendation. While he was feeling bored and impatient at the awfully long time they were taking, the figure of the woman carrying a cane basket came into his view.

In that moment he was a bit agitated. The moment he had long waited for had arrived. (324)

He had seen her before here and there but she would disappear out of his view. His mind and heart would follow her till she disappeared into a crowd or into the distance. "The loveliness of her bum would turn him on. Ever since those days he had been performing penance for a chance to seduce her." She came and stopped between the car and the compound wall. She seemed to gaze at his eyes for a moment and then there came a smile around her lips. He experienced a unique sexual pleasure in that moment. There was no
corresponding surprise or agitation in the woman's face. In a cool manner she asked him, "Do you intend to come to me?" (324). He nodded his head. Naming the time and the place for it, she walked away.

He could hardly believe it now as he recalled it. When the time came the next day he backed out because of a strange lack of interest. Besides he was not seeking pleasures so madly as he used to do. Only the previous day he had gone out with his friends and enjoyed himself a lot. On his return at midnight, the fidelity of his wife disconcerted him. So throughout the rest of the night he had to have sex with her although even then he imagined her to be a harlot. Dream of the egg-selling woman was sweeter to him now than the reality of performance with her. But from the evening on he started regretting the loss of his opportunity to be with her. Over the nine years this sense of loss seemed ever to grow and never to diminish.

He was feeling giddy and gasping for breath. He could not even have a drink of water from a tap. But he seemed to hear now the voice of an aged woman inquiring whether the egg-selling woman had arrived. A young voice answered that she had just left. On hearing this he made up his mind to meet her somehow that very evening. He thought of telling her all the pains he took to meet her. He furiously thought of all the hurdles to the fulfilment of his desires in life. But he decided not to disappoint her this time. He could hardly move on, yet when he seemed to see her figure in the distance he grew
energetic. But now he seemed to see in her youthfulness leaving her buttocks like "a pair of shrunken Palmyra fruit" and her breasts "sagging like bats" (329). This deceptive sight troubled him because he began to doubt whether he had really seen her figure in the park that morning. He wanted to return home, but suddenly he saw a vision of the woman in the nude. He could not give this figure the former beauty of the woman. But in the midst of these thoughts and illusory visions he had a glimpse of a cane basket on a headload-resting slab. He pulled himself together and struggled forward. As he saw what appeared to be her hut he experienced a thrill and walked on. He opened the door of the hut and lay down there with his eyes closed.

Now in the senile phase of his life he possessed no virility but he continued to yearn wistfully for these pleasures. One could see here the conflict between the lustful longing of the mind and the powerlessness of the body to find fulfilment. As one comes to the end, one wonders whether what progresses as its storyline is a fantasy or factuality. But one does not find in the French fiction this kind of elaborate psychological analysis of a mind's craving for gratification of an unfulfilled wish. A hankering of this kind in a French character, whether it be a man or a woman, is seen to be instantly gratified as the social system portrayed is much less regimented. The unnamed female protagonist in "Graveyard Sirens" could be dubbed the female counterpart of the Tamil womaniser here. The anecdotal story narrated
by the "after-dinner speaker", Joseph de Bardon, centers on his strange encounter with a seductress in a cemetery. This bachelor at the outset asks his friends, "Why do we men always have the vague impulse to call on some pretty woman? We review them in our mind, compare their respective charms, the interest they arouse in us, and finally decide in favor of the one that attracts us most." One day, however, he had no such impulse and so he sauntered down to the graveyard where he says, "many of my friends are laid to rest" (313). He would "often dream beside" the grave of a woman he was in love with. He says, "After loitering awhile I felt tired and decided to pay my faithful tribute to my little friend's memory" (314). He "murmured a prayer which she probably never heard" and he was about to retrace his steps when he happened to catch "sight of a woman in deep mourning kneeling beside a neighboring grave ... She seemed bowed with sorrow" (314-15). He saw her weeping. Her eyes filled with tears charmed him. As he stood there fascinated by her lovely figure, he "saw her fall to the ground in a faint." He rushed to her side to revive her. As she told him about the death of her husband "within a year after their wedding", he consoled her and assisted her to get on her feet saying, "You must not stay here. Come away." When she heard about his friendship with the dead woman there, she said, "One may love a friend just as much as a wife, for passion knows no law" (315). He almost carried her out of the graveyard to a restaurant where a cup of hot tea
“appeared to give her renewed strength.” She started telling him about her lonely life at home “how terrible it was to go through life all alone, to be alone at home day and night, to have no one on whom to lavish love, confidence and intimacy.” She appeared to be a young woman of around twenty. He paid her the kind of compliments that pleased her. As it was getting dark, he offered to escort her to her house. In the cab, he says, “we were so close to each other that we could feel the warmth of our bodies through our clothing, which really is the most intoxicating thing in the world” (316).

One sees here the process of her angling for a sexual favour from him. On reaching her place, she pretends to be unable to walk upstairs to her room on the fourth floor and tells him, “You have already been so kind that I am going to ask you to assist me to my rooms.” In front of her door she tells him, “Do come in for a few minutes so that I can thank you again for your kindness.” Inside the apartment they sat down side by side. When she took off her hat she looked prettier and she became more seductive evoking his response thus, “Her clear eyes looked steadily at me, so clear and so steady that a great temptation came to me to which I promptly yielded. Clasping her in my arms, I kissed her again and again on her half-closed lids.” She pretended to resist his advances saying “Do stop – do end it.” But knowing its import at the unconscious level, he silenced her by transferring his osculation “from her eyes to her lips and gave the word ‘end’ the conclusion” he liked
better (316). They had dinner together at a restaurant where she "drank some champagne, thereby becoming very animated and lively" and returned to her apartment together. He says that "This liaison, begun among tombstones, lasted about three weeks" whereupon he invented an excuse and left her. But the woman, he says, "haunted me like a mystery, a psychological problem, an unsolved question." He had a feeling that he would find her again in the cemetery. He saw her in the company of a fine looking fifty year old man. She "blushed" as she saw him and gave him a little wink which seem to say, "Don't recognize me" and also meant "Do come back." The sight of her repeating with him the same scene took him by surprise making him ask himself, "to what strange tribe of creatures this graveyard huntress belonged." Like him the reader too would wonder whether she "haunted cemeteries for men disconsolate at the loss of some woman, a mistress or a wife, and hungering for past caresses." The story ends with the narrator saying, "I would have given a great deal to know whose widow she was that day!" (317).

The stark realities painted by the French and the Tamil writers here make humans out to be no better than animals when they are obsessed by erotic images or when their passions are aroused; but their descriptions of human sexuality are influenced by their different cultural milieux. Some of Ramaswamy's protagonists or narrators are seen to be obsessed with sensual or salacious visions or images while most of Maupassant's central characters
are seen to revel in sexual orgies, but as Francis Steegmuller observes, "Maupassant, the writer of fiction, is usually able to keep his obsessions from running away with him to the detriment of his art; or, to put it more properly, it is, of course, his obsessions plus his art which make the best tales the masterpieces they are" (170).

Loneliness and Lovelessness

Loneliness here is seen to be the outcome of one's loss of love or communication with another or with the world around. One often feels utterly alone and alienated even when one is surrounded by lots of people when one has none for communication on an emotional plane. It is this sort of loveless solitude which Bacon refers to as he writes, "But little do men perceive what solitude is, and how far it extendeth. For a crowd is not company; and faces are but a gallery of pictures; and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love" (66). Both the writers here are known to have sought maternal love to alleviate the poignancy of their loneliest moments. In "Jannal" ("The Window") Ramaswamy's mother alone is perceived to be the source of solace and succour to the authorial self. Stanley Jackson writes of the French writer, "His mother alone understood his loneliness, and it was to her he turned when Paris saddened and depressed him." Jackson adds, "on September 24, 1873 'I feel so lost, so isolated and so demoralised that I must beg you to send me some bright letters' ” (49). In "Nerukkadi" ("Crisis") Ramaswamy portrays
the lonely plight of humans. Their helplessness in the wake of loss and sorrow is depicted deepening the mood of loneliness.

One frequently notices how isolation assails the introspective individuals in the fictional world of Maupassant and Ramaswamy and how some of their protagonists prefer to end their existence rather than to endure their lonely and loveless plight. The persona in Maupassant’s story, “He” denounces what he calls “legalized cohabitation”, yet he wants to get married. It is precisely because he is “frightened of being alone.” He goes on to say, “I do not want to be alone any longer at night; I want to feel that there is someone close to me, touching me, a being who can speak and say something, no matter what it be” (823).

This story by Maupassant and Ramaswamy’s “Vazhi” (“The Way”) read like the reflections of existentially lonely men on their own inner life. Both the texts make their readers re-experience the fears that their imaginative minds subject them to. The similarity between the fears fashioned by their fancies could be seen and felt when the beginnings of the two stories are juxtaposed. Ramaswamy writes:

  The way is lost. There’s no doubt of it. I can’t even imagine finding again the way lost in some moment of agitation. I’ve got lost in this jungle where wild beasts dwell. The huge, naked trees with their flabby hips and thighs frighten me. The
robustness and dominance of the sky-touching trees with their cracked barks and roots spread inside the earth terrify me. Their dominion which turns universal light into darkness upsets me. I try to think what can be done next. The perplexed mind shuns the language of thought and keeps pricking me. Like a corpse I lie and wild animals and birds peck at me and I am torn. This scene alone haunts me again and again. (512)

The French writer says, "My dear friend, you cannot understand it by any possible means, you say, and I perfectly believe you. You think I am going mad? It may be so, but not for the reasons which you suppose ... the fact, however, is that I am frightened of being alone!" (823).

Ramaswamy's story symbolically describes his flight from the kind of isolation which Maupassant depicts in "Solitude" as well with a more incisive insight. The Ramaswamian narrator sets out to seek the stream of life whose roar he seems to hear in his loneliest and lost moments. The hardships he suffers in the jungle stand for what the narrator's friend in "Solitude" terms "the knowledge of our never-ending isolation" (659). The French protagonist experiences optical illusion while the Tamil narrator has auricular illusion. One hears the French narrator saying, "In the act of taking up a candle I noticed somebody sitting in my armchair by the fire, warming his feet, with his neck toward me" (825). He wondered who could have come in and gone
to sleep in the chair. But when he put out his hand "to touch him on the shoulder" he found that "There was nobody there; the seat was empty" (825-26). The Tamil narrator says that he seemed to hear the sound of the source of the falls in the distance. As he listened closely he says:

I felt that there was a change in the sound of the falls. It now sounded like the orgasmic cries of mating animals getting feebler and feebler. Do wild animals mate in a row for this sound to be heard one after the other? Is the experience of hearing this sound an illusion? (513)

Both the protagonists are men dominated by their sexual impulses, for Maupassant's hero says:

More than ever I feel that I am incapable of loving one woman alone, because I shall always adore all the others too much. I should like to have a thousand arms, a thousand mouths and a thousand-temperaments, to be able to strain an army of these charming creatures in my embrace at the same moment. (823)

In the Tamil story the narrator divulges his sexual deviation thus:

While I was drying my hair the old man and his evidently young grandson stood gazing at me. Theirs was not really a gaze but an inviting glance. What a lovely old man! What attracted me were his thin physical structure, his uniformly greyed hair,
narrowness of waist and the tautness of his muscles.... It was when I was hurriedly drying my body so as to pursue and sodomize him that I happened to hear a strange growl.... My face bloomed with curiosity as the sight of wild animals copulating appeared in the mind and when I got to the back of the falls, the old stranger said, 'Please don't do it, sir.' That voice and the request and the love that it contained still echo in my mind. (513)

He goes on to say what a folly it was for the mind to be sexually excited at the thought of seeing the act of copulation after a few paces from there. He confides, "Gasping for breath, I ran as I saw in my mind the sexual images and vehement passion of numerous wild animals and their irresistible urge to perpetuate their species" (513-14).

The French story ends on a note of perplexity and pathos but the Tamil story is optimistic in tone as the narrator recovers his way and returns to a familial way of life which his sight of the couple with their child seems to symbolize. In the French story the narrator's plan to enter conjugal life which he refers to and in fact longs for to lessen his loneliness does not materialize as the illusory figure of the man continues to haunt him. People addicted to the pleasures of sex or love are known to experience the agony of isolation when they are in a loveless plight.
The protagonist of Maupassant's story "Solitude" tells the narrator how miserably he is "condemned to this horrible solitude" (661). After a dinner, the narrator and the protagonist go out for a stroll. During their saunter, they happen to see "two people, seated side by side." This sight prompts the protagonist to confide to the narrator the discovery of his reflective mind, "Among all the mysteries of human life there is one which I have penetrated; our great torment in this existence comes from the fact that we are eternally alone – all our efforts and all our actions are directed toward escaping this solitude." He goes on to say, "Whatever we may attempt, whatever we may do, whatever may be the misery of our hearts, the appeal of our lips, the clasp of our arms, we are always alone" (658). He, like the protagonists of "He" and "Vazhi", seems to have been a pursuer of sensual pleasures. He recalls:

"Women make me still more conscious of my solitude. Misery! Misery! How I have suffered through women, because they, more than men, have often given me the illusion of not being alone!

"When one falls in love it seems as though one expands. A superhuman felicity envelops you! Do you know why? Do you know why you feel then this sensation of exceeding happiness? It is simply because one imagines himself no longer alone."
Isolation, the abandonment of the human being, seems to cease.
What an error! (660)

The pangs of isolation and the void that he feels are in a way the result of his
loveless state. When a hedonist is denied the pleasures of life, one naturally
concludes like Flaubert in an existentialist tone here, “We are all in a desert.
Nobody understands anybody” (659).

Both the writers have touched on the kind of ennui that drives humans
to commit suicide. What drives the persona to do it in Maupassant’s story
“Suicides” is the fear of having to pass through the misery of old age without
any of the delights that youth offered him. It is written that “M.X was fifty-
seven years old and prosperous. He had everything to live for, and no reason
can be ascribed for his tragic act” (960). What aggravates his loneliness and
loveless state is the sudden recollection through a rereading of all the letters
sent to him including the one from his dearest friend and confidant, and the
sight of his “love trinkets” (962). His “harassed soul beheld each one of” his
“loves at the moment of sweet surrender” (963). In the process of these
youthful recollections of his “romances” he “suffered worse torments than
those imagined in the descriptions of hell” (962-963). His advice to the reader
of his account of the tragic story narrated in an epistolary form is “Never read
over your old letters” (963).
The irony of life seen here by one who juxtaposes this story of Maupassant and Ramaswamy’s “Kolam” (“Appearance”) lies in that while Maupassant’s persona has “everything to live for”, Ramaswamy’s pitiable poor and miserable old couple have nothing to live for (960). The former has enjoyed all the sensuous and even sensual pleasures that wealth gave him access to. On the contrary, poverty has denied the old man and his wife even the bare necessities of life and even the love of their own kith and kin. But what unites the French protagonist and the Tamil couple is the realization of the futility of leading a lonely, loveless and monotonous life after the departure of youth which gives one strength to overcome the satiety of affluence and the severity of poverty.

It is the lonely and loveless plight that drives to madness the female protagonist of Maupassant’s story “The Mad Woman”. Ramaswamy in “Jannal” portrays the plight of a similarly bedridden narrator who lost his power of speech and could not make himself understood to others in the house. The major thematic strand in both the stories is the lack of communication between the physically isolated or the bedridden and the others. Both the protagonists suffer in silence terrible agony – Ramaswamy’s narrator because of his being unable to communicate with others and the world outside, and Maupassant’s woman because of her unbearable grief at the death of “her father, her husband and her newly born child, all in the space
of a month” when she was twenty-seven and consequently she insanely insisted on withdrawing into her world of silence. The former resists the denial of access to the world outside but the latter resents the invasion of her privacy and solitude of passive sorrow. The French story is narrated by the woman’s neighbour, M.d’Endolin, who could not put out of his mind the painful predicament of the bereaved woman and the merciless punishment meted out to her by the arrogant German commandant who had assumed that “the poor mad creature would not leave her bed out of pride” (271). She was ordered to go down to receive the swashbuckling officer. Seeing her apparently obdurate refusal to go out the man had her taken to the wood and left her there out in the cold.

Ramaswamy’s narrator says, “The bedstead I lay on was near a window. Some months ago, I crept into it one evening and could not get out of it. I never thought I would be confined to bed for so long. Five or six months went by or even more” (133). His limbs became very thin and his body lost its vitality. He very much wanted to look at his face in the mirror. He became just a bag of bones. He couldn’t bend or move his limbs. Sometimes he experienced excruciating pain. And “tears would stream out of the eyes” (134). He got used to bearing his pain in silence.

His only means of watching the world outside was a window with four bars. He would look at the holes in the bamboos of the summer shelter above
the window or at the rose plants. He would enjoy various sights and smells through the window. However, one day when he opened his eyes, there was no window. His bedstead was moved away from the window on the advice of the doctor because of the cold breeze. His bursting into tears at his removal from his only view of things outside brought all his folks together. He whispered in the ear of his mother that he was feeling suffocated. His father offered to fetch the doctor.

The contrast between the Frenchwoman’s aversion to the world of the living and the Tamil character’s attachment to the loveliness of the world becomes striking as one sees the loneliness of Ramaswamy’s protagonist attenuated by the familial attention and affection he got and the absence in the French story of familial love of any sort to alleviate isolation. How lovingly the parents of the bedridden narrator on the Indian side treat him and how callously the soldiers on the French side deal with the bedridden woman could be keenly felt as one reads the stories with a comparatist’s discernment of the cultural ethos of the two countries.

The French writer has in his portrayal here a larger canvas that encompasses the blessing of peace and the curse of war. The story is so designed as to end with the visualization of the utter disregard of human rights and human life displayed by the soldiers who understand only the language of violence. The narrator concludes the story of the woman and the cruelty of
the Prussian soldiers thus, "I only pray that our sons may never see any wars again" (273). The admittedly autobiographical story "Jannal" could be seen as an affirmation of the author's belief that there is no life worth living when the senses are denied their share in the pleasures afforded by the world. "The Window", signified by the title here could be interpreted as the "eye" which is considered to be the primary sense for the enjoyment of material pleasures. "I cried, sobbing," says the author-narrator, when the bedstead which he lay on during his speechless illness was moved away from the window and he was denied the lovely sights, sounds and smells of the world outside.

Loneliness in its formidable form thus irresistibly breaks forth in the course of certain short stories authored by either writer. The central characters discussed are saddened and dampened by the loneliness of life rather than by the solitude of the place where they live. When relationships of love break up or when they withdraw from the society of the opposite sex, they feel as if the world has disintegrated around them leaving a void difficult to fill. S. Jagadisan and M.S. Nagarajan in their article quote R.K. Narayan's words which gain significance here, "A profound, unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life" (The Hindu 3).

When one reads these stories, one is naturally reminded of Freudian psychology which describes mental and emotional structures of humans that contain on the one hand desires and drives contrary to the tenets of society,
and on the other the censor which strives constantly to keep such anti-social impulses out of one’s consciousness as well as out of action. The impression that the French writer seems to leave on one is that he has a remarkable talent for literary portraits of passionate men and women in their different moods. He is one who seems to believe that a man’s life becomes a silent wilderness in the absence of a woman. “What a man basically seeks can be given only by a woman” seems to sum up the fundamental thinking of his heroes. Some of Sundara Ramaswamy’s heroes too seem to have a leaning towards animality, although their author does not abandon the general direction of human progress, the path of consciousness and discrimination. Like the French writer the author of the Tamil stories is throughout conscious of the bestial longing in humans for the delights of the flesh but cultural compulsions make the Tamil protagonists repress their sexual vitality. The permissive social order in the West makes it possible for the French writer to let his men release their spontaneous sexuality. However, the fictional medium here seems to be the means for the two authors to get freed from the inhibitions and constraints of the moral education imparted to them in their younger days. The two writers in their fiction map materiality in such a manner as to show its primacy over morality.