A Comparative Study of Alice Munro and Ambai

Chapter One

Introduction

Purely comparative subjects constitute an inexhaustible reservoir which is increasingly being tapped by scholars whose predecessors seemed to have forgotten that the name of our discipline is "comparative literature," not "influential literature." (Remak 3)

This dissertation is an attempt to compare the short stories of the Tamil writer, Ambai, with those of the Canadian writer, Alice Munro, and examine the thematic strains and explicate the dominant fictional strategies employed by them. The oriental and the occidental authors chosen for this study are notable female fictionists whose literary labours command attention not only for their fresh female angle of vision on human experience but also for the formal innovation that they provide. They both boldly make "open secrets" of those parts of the female experience that used to be silenced or secreted in "dark kitchens in the corners of men's houses." Ambai's stories come out of her recollections or readings of life and...
society in the south or the north of India while Alice Munro's fiction grows out of memories of her life in Ontario and her meditations in British Columbia on man-woman interactions inside and outside marriage which make "progress of love" hardly ever possible. This parallel study brings out the points of similarity and difference in their attitudinal positions and fiction-making processes. The study has been done through an investigation of the experiences and fantasies of the two authors which provided them with the material to create most of their female protagonists. The study is comparative in the sense that the two writers' sensitive responses as females have been subjected to comparison. The cultural and regional differences between the two authors surface as their female subjects act and react. However, one could say that their stories make up the history of the "lives of girls and women." They both make use of old and new literary techniques and thus offer in their fiction a blend of the traditional and the sophisticated. Their works offer readings that reinterpret women's nature, motives and actions which defy sexist ideology. All the same, none of their reinterpretations poses a fundamental challenge to man-woman relationship or heterosexuality. They only posit new values which seek to subvert the social system that suppresses woman and relegates her to the role of man's "sexual servicer" in
his marital life or his slave in the cold kitchen of his cosy mansion.

"The human mind," Jawaharlal Nehru points out, "appears to have a passion for finding out some kind of unity in life, in nature and the universe" (110). Ancient sages and modern scientists alike have had the urge to look for points of similarity in the lives of different lands. Radhakrishnan, the former President of India, has said:

Politicians may differ, our economic interests may clash, but when we stand before the masterpieces of art and literature, we do not ask to what country an artist belongs or what nationality he comes from. . . . On the plane of spirit there are no racial or national barriers. The great people belong to the whole world. They are the contemporaries of all ages and of all countries. (27)

It could have been this urge of the critic in Matthew Arnold that made him refer to comparative literature in a letter written to his sister in 1848 (qtd. in Bassnett 12). In "Comparative Literature: Its Definition and Function," Henry Remak observes, "In brief, it [comparative literature] is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the
comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression" (1).

Some concept of comparative literature has been prevalent in learned circles, particularly in Europe, since the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The study of the influences has throughout been a feature fertilizing this field. Comparatists across the world have attempted to trace the spirit of a community or country in order to show how it has influenced the writer of a different culture. Translations of world classics have played a prominent part in patterns of influence. Source hunting, however, has now come to be frowned upon as it has frequently been resorted to without any caution or care for accuracy. The study of literary influence did not find favour with certain theorists in Europe initially as they could not stomach the concept of mutuality in comparison. Lord Macaulay, who believed in the superiority of his own cultural inheritance, would laugh away the idea that John Milton could have been profoundly influenced by the Sanskrit epic, Rāmāyana, in the composition of Paradise Lost. Bassnett writes, "Edward Fitzgerald, whose translation of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám became one of the great classic poems of the nineteenth century, also had a low opinion of Oriental literature" (18). She goes on to point out how Europeans, who looked upon Africans or
Asians as primitive or naive people, disparaged their art and literature in different ways.

Yet studies of direct literary indebtedness have continued to be undertaken and underscored in the discipline of comparative literature. The power and popularity of a great literary genius penetrate regional or national barriers and modify literary tastes and mould the artistic consciousness of the receptive author. British literature, for example, has influenced anglophone writers in Canada and India. It is now agreed that "comparative literature involves the study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space" (Bassnett 1). It is not infrequently that one notices similarities between texts or the techniques of authors from different cultural contexts. In their celebrated work, Theory of Literature, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren say that comparative literature "asks for a widening of perspectives, a suppression of local and provincial sentiments, not easy to achieve" (44). They recognize the unity of humanity and the universality of literature as they assert, "literature is one, as art and humanity are one" (50).

The boundaries that Paul Van Tieghem in his famous book, La Littérature Comparée, tries to demarcate
between "comparative literature," "general literature," and "world literature" are not totally acceptable to most contemporary comparatists. His limited definitions of this discipline have been discussed widely since 1931. Wellek has blamed the French School for the slow progress made by comparative literature. He feels that it is not possible to draw a distinction between "comparative literature" and "general literature." He thinks that the term, "general literature," is rather obfuscatory (qtd. in Bassnett 27). It is now believed that these distinctions do not really exist. Remak's essay, "Comparative Literature," published in 1961 became the "bible" of the American School of Comparatists. Remak and his fellow scholars sought to transgress the boundaries built by the French School and showed how "anything could be compared with anything else" (Bassnett 32). But the "melting pot" idealism of the American School and the approach of the formalists tend to be viewed with suspicion or disapproval in the postmodernist context. Current comparatists insist that the cultural history of the regions or countries that have produced the texts being compared needs to be taken into account. Contemporary scholars believe that this discipline loses its relevance once it is divorced from national or regional cultures.
One of the objectives of this comparative study is to highlight to western readers the literary progress that a Tamil writer in India, Ambai, has attained. The stories of the Canadian writer, Alice Munro, with their female protagonists have much in common with those of Ambai. Juxtaposition of comparable texts could have great value as they are viewed from different cultural angles. The importance of a parallel study lies in that it sheds light on the themes and forms of the individual works. It could also signify the similarities and differences between the literary traditions of the two nations, India and Canada.

Canada is a multi-cultural country of the west while India with its unique unity in variety is the most notable nation of the east. Both the countries have many things in common like their colonial past. The rest of the world has watched with wonder their rapid blossoming out as model democracies. The two multi-cultural democracies differ where their literary past is concerned. There has long existed in India an indigenous literary tradition out of which India could nourish her writers and nurture even in the distant past writers like Kalidasa in Sanskrit and Tiruvalluvar in Tamil. On the other hand, truly Canadian literature began to be produced only after Canada attained autonomous status in 1867, as W.H. New corroborates it thus, "By the mid 1860s there had come into existence a
belief in a commonality that could be identified as the 'Canadian' character . . ." (A History of Canadian Literature 80). He points out earlier in the same book, "Before 1867 there was no Canadian nation" (24). Consequently, the pre-Confederation history of Canada is different from the pre-Independence history of India. But, in the second half of the twentieth century, Canadian writers have been "Creating Fictional Worlds of Wonder" to such an extent as to make them compare with the literary creations of any modern or ancient nation (Keith 157).

Comparatists in the east as well as in the west could explode the myth of the British or American imperialist belief that their culture or literature is superior to those of others. A European scholar today, who cares to compare the literary labours of India, China and Persia, would instinctively dismiss as pure ignorance Lord Macaulay's memorably belittling words:

I have never found one among them (Orientalists) who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. I have certainly never met with any Orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. (qtd. in Bassnett 17)
Comparative literature has emerged as a discipline dispelling delusions and pooling "the best that is known and thought in the world," to use the words of Arnold. The body of comparative literature is sustained by the proliferation of translations which enable scholars to "establish a current of fresh and true ideas," as he would phrase it (Selections 55).

The present study derives its strength from the inherent and comparable qualities in the art of the two writers who are quite conscious of their contribution as women writers. Although comparative studies of a parallel nature have been done by eminent scholars in Tamil Nadu, they have mostly been confined to comparison of Anglo-American texts with Indian texts. The present investigation gains relevance as short-fiction writers of Canada and Tamil Nadu have not yet been taken up for doctoral studies. Ambai, who by comparison with Alice Munro, remains obscure, has not been chosen for any comprehensive study.

The development of the short story in Tamil, as in most other languages, is the upshot of the growth of popular magazines. In his introduction to Tamil Short Stories, Ka.Naa. Subramanyam confirms it when he calls the story a product which "belongs to the times of the rise of the periodical press" (7). In the nineteenth century, Tamil writers imitated the literary traditions of the west. Educational institutions and journalism
modelled on the west were founded. The old stories of Hindu Scriptures began to be recounted with a new message for the younger generation that looked for the ideals of freedom, fraternity and nationalism.

Short as well as long fiction has existed on the Indian soil down through the ages; but the novel and the short story proper got introduced here through the medium of English during the regime of the British. 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 Vivēkacintāmaṇi, Vivēkapāṇu, Vityāpāṇu, Cakravarttīṇī, Putuvai Kalaimakal and Vityāvikārīṇī. These periodicals turned out to be the forums for fostering short fictionists. The magazines that particularly nurtured new talents in this field of fiction were Manikkōṭi, Caṅku and Pārati Tēvi. V.V.S. Iyer, Subramanya Bharati and A. Madhaviah were the pioneers of the Tamil short story and were active in the 1920s. C.S. Chellappa, in his Tamil Cirukatāl Pirakkiratu ("Tamil short story is born"), says that the stories of V.V.S. Iyer and A. Madhaviah are the forerunners of the short story in Tamil (2). Subramanya Bharati was left out probably as he was more a poet than a fictionist. T.P. Meenakshisundaram remarks in his book, Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru ("History of Tamil literature"), "Va.Ve.Su.Iyer wanted short fiction in
Tamil to grow on the lines of the stories written by Gogol, Edgar Allan Poe, O. Henry etc." Talking about Subramanya Bharati's contribution to this literary form, he says, "Apart from translating eleven of the short stories of the Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore, he wrote some stories himself" (296). Navatantirakkataikal ("Modern fables of guile") and Kataikkottu ("Bunch of stories") are his story collections. Meenakshisundaram says that the form did not quite suit the content artistically. Bharati did not care about the structure of the story. V.V.S. Iyer, on the other hand, paid particular attention to the form of the short story that he wrote. His stories have been collected with the title, Mankayarkkaraciyun Kātal ("The love of Mankayarkkarasi"). "Kulattankarai Aracamaram Conna Katai" ("The story told by a peepul tree on the bank of a pond") is a heart-rending story. A. Madhaviah published a magazine named Pañcāmirutam with poems, short stories, literary reviews, political articles etc. His collection of stories came out with the title, Kucikar Kuṭṭikkataikal ("Kusikar short stories"). Madhaviah's widely read story was "Ennaí Manńittu Maṟantuvitū" ("Forgive and forget me"). However, V.V.S. Iyer came to be recognized as the father of the short story in Tamil, although he wrote
only eight stories. In them he employs the technique of Tagore with scrupulous attention to form.

The magazine in Tamil has helped to nurture the short-story writer's talent in every notable era as in the case of this genre in Canada. The magazine that really helped the modern short story take roots in Tamil during the 1920s was Cutēcamitiran. It published the stories of V.V.S. Iyer, Bharati and Madhaviah. In the 1930s this work was done by magazines like Maṇikkoṭi, Ānantavikāṭan, Kalaimakāl, Kānti, Cutantira Caṅku, Piracantavikāṭan, Kumāravikāṭan etc. In the 1940s appeared magazines like Kalki, Tinamanikkatir and others to carry on this work. Magazines such as Amutacurapi and Kumutam continued it in the fifties. Tremendous changes have come over the short story. They have been recorded by the magazines of the period starting with Cutēcamitiran and closing with Sundara Ramaswamy's Kālaccuvatu.

C.S. Chellappa points out that no story came out between 1925, when the pioneers departed, and 1932 (7). But it was in the thirties that the short story began to be written in earnest. It attained maturity in the hands of masters like Na. Pichamurthy, Pudumaippittan, Mowni, K.P. Rajagopalan, B.S. Ramiah, Kalki, P.G. Sundararajan, Narana Duraikkannan, T.J. Ranganathan, Va.Ramasamy, M.J. Ramalingam, Rali and P.M. Kannan. Literary historians like
P.G. Sundararajan and S. Sivapathasundaram feel that most of the stories written by the Tamil writers from V.V.S. Iyer down to Kalki are imitative and not innovative (76). Kalki's stories continue to be read and enjoyed as they are rich in humour. The next notable figure in the field of short fiction is Rajaji who used this genre to propagate his ideals. Rajaji wrote a critical treatise on the short story as well. He believed like Kalki that the content should have precedence over its form.

There appeared several magazines in English and Tamil promoting the growth of the short story. Chellappa says that Ānāntavikātān gave the readers their Kalki, Manikkoti produced Va.Ra, Kānti made Chockalingam, Cutantira Caṅku brought out the best in Sanku Subramanyam (7). Ānāntavikātān held the first short-story competition in 1933 and M.J. Ramalingam's "Ūmacci Kātal" ("Love of a dumb woman") won the first prize, although Ramiah's "Malarum Maṇamum" ("Flower and fragrance") was rated the best story by K. Swamynathan, one of the three judges. Other stories that gained popularity were Na.Pichamurthy's "Mullum Rōcāvum" ("The thorn and the rose"), M.P. Kalyanasundaram's "Tapālkkāra Aptulkkātar" ("Postman Abdulkhadar") and Kalki's "Cāntimatiyiṅ Kātalāṅ" ("Santhimathy's lover").

Na. Pichamurthy (1900-76) won no awards from government nor received any general public acceptance
in his long life, although he authored over one hundred short stories but his literary greatness has now been established. The *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature* has recorded his detached emotional handling of life and the moral and intellectual dimension of his fiction (Swaminathan vol.5). Another doyen of short fiction is K.P. Rajagopalan (1902-44) who wrote about the silent anguish and repressed yearnings of women. His first story, "Nūrūngica," was published in *Cutantira Caṅku*. B.S. Ramiah (1905-83) wrote over three hundred short stories. He edited *Manikkoti* in its most glorious short-story period. Meenakshisundaram observes that his well-known short story is "Naṭcattirakkulantaikal" ("Children of stars") (301). It was Ramiah who turned *Manikkoti* into a real forum for short fictionists. Pudumaippittan (1906-48) had only a short life like K.P. Rajagopalan. He was an unruly genius, as his pseudonym signifies (his real name was C. Viruthachalam). He is said to have been a masterly craftsman who dealt with frustrations and freaks in life, as in "Kāṅcaṅa." However, one of the best stories published by *Manikkoti* was his "Cirpiyin Narakam" ("A sculptor's hell"). Like the *Manikkoti* trio--Pichamurthi, Pudumaippittan and K.P. Rajagopalan--Mowni (1907-85) attracted critical attention to his short fiction although his output was scanty. Ka.Naa.Subramanyam comments that Mowni
tries to bring into the Tamil short story things which it could not easily contain. His expression derives mainly from his reading in English but he is meticulous as to form and theme. He is romantic in his concept of love but realistic in his handling of psychological insights into the motives of men. (13)

Chellappa characterizes as "absorbing" Mowni's story, "Yēn?" ("Why?"). which Manikkotti published in 1936 (142). Another short fictionist of the Manikkoto group is C.S. Chellappa with over one hundred short stories to his credit. His most widely known story is "Caracăvin Pommai" ("Sarasa's doll"). He started out as a short-story writer, moved on to longer fiction and ended up with being a critic, editor and publisher of a magazine called Eluttu.

Ka.Naa. Subramanyam (1912-88) started writing short stories in the mid-thirties and has over two hundred stories, according to his own reckoning. His recognition in the field was delayed as he preferred intellectual rather than emotional themes. He edited magazines like Ćūrāvăli and Cantirōtayam. His notable stories are "Căvītīri" and "Līla." He has gained greater reputation as a literary critic with an international outlook. Chitambara Subramanyan (1912-78) started his literary career like Chellappa with
short fiction and passed on to the novel. His knowledge of western fiction enabled him to develop the genre in Tamil. In his stories he deals with common familiar situations in life and portrays human desires with remarkable skill as in "Enru Varuvanō?" ("When will he come?"). He believes that "writing should have in it truth, goodness and beauty" (qtd. in Sundararajan and Sivapathasundaram 168). His collection came out titled Cakkiravākam ("Bird nocturnally pining for its mate").

Another writer who won recognition with his simple rustic themes and techniques was K. Ramachandran (popularly known as Ki.Ra). Everyday experience of the people was used as the raw material for his work. He laid the foundation for science fiction with his "Vicapānaṃ" ("Poisonous drink"). Ramiah has acknowledged his service and contribution to Manikkoti.

The next notable writer of the thirties was P.G. Sundararajan. He started out writing in English in magazines like Manjeri Easwaran's Short Story and Tiriveni. He assumed the name, "Ciṭṭi." He drifted to writing short stories in Tamil when he was induced to write by Ramiah and inspired by his fellow writers in this genre. His stories like "Rupperpantu" ("Rubber ball") and "Antimantārai" ("Twilight flower") show his ability to write in this art form.
The writers who appeared on the literary scene in the thirties are too numerous to be mentioned in a brief survey of this kind. It is to be noted that the man who made himself conspicuous as a journalist and writer with a zeal for reform in society was R. Krishnamurthy who adopted the pen-name, "Kalki."

His stories could be divided into three sections—those written between 1923 and 1931 when he was an assistant editor of Navacakti and Vimōcanam; those written between 1931 and 1941 when he was the executive editor of Ānantavikatan; and those written later and published in his own magazine, Kalki. Another writer who made use of short fiction as a vehicle was C.N. Annadurai (1909–69). This literary form helped him to propagate and promote the ideals he acquired from Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker. "Corkattilnarakam" ("Hell in heaven") is one of his most notable stories. When one reads his story, "Karuppanaṇacāmi Yōzikkiyar" ("Karuppannasami ponders"), one is reminded of Pudumaippittan's "Kaṭavulum Kantacāmippillaiyum" ("God and Kantasamippillai").

Short fiction in the forties was sustained by La.Saa. Ramamirtham, Thi. Janakiraman, G. Alagirisamy, Chidampara Raghunathan and M. Karunanidhi. La.Saa.Ra (1916) has five collections of short stories. He is identified by his taste for words and his use of symbols and figures of speech. He is said to have
perfected a kind of stream-of-consciousness technique. He ranks with Pudumaippittan and Mowni. His story, "Ammulu," illustrates his way of writing. His thematic range is limited as he deals mostly with human relationships inside a family. Thi. Janakiraman (1921-82) was a great classical scholar who wrote both short and long fiction. His stories like those of K.P. Rajagopalan ravish the readers with the charm of their content and form. His stories, "Maratikkku" ("For forgetfulness") and "Mulmuti" ("Crown of thorns"), are examples of the richness of their content and beauty of style. G. Alagirisamy (1924-70) followed the examples set by Pudumaippittan. According to Ka.Naa.Subramanyam, he claimed to be progressive but he is seen to be traditional in his themes (14). The influence of ancient Tamil scriptures and folk-songs can be felt in his stories like "Pāmpukuṭṭi" ("Young one of a snake"). Chidampara Raghunathan's admiration for Pudumaippittan led him to write his biography. He edited two periodicals, Mullai and Cānti. He paid equal attention to the form and content of his short stories, which his "Āṇaittī" ("Wild fire"), "Māyai" ("Illusion") and other stories demonstrate. M. Karunanidhi (1926) followed in the footsteps of Annadurai and has carved out a niche for himself in Tamil literature with his numerous contributions in different literary forms. His short-fictional
endeavours like "Kuppaittōṭṭi" ("Dustbin") could find room in any collection of Tamil stories. According to James R. Daniel of Scott Christian College in Nagercoil:

Most of the Dravidian writers—particularly Annadurai and Karunanidhi—have used the language which is far removed from the language or idiom of the common man. It is highly embellished, flamboyant and so alliterative that too much of it is jarring to the ears. (Telephonic interview 2 August 1997)

But he concedes the versatility of the writer, Karunanidhi. Among the other writers of the forties, one has to include R. Venkataraman and Karichankunju. According to Ka.Naa.Subramanyam, the former writer's "expression of experience is extraordinarily pleasing." The latter "has handled some themes that do not ordinarily lend themselves to handling in the form but has done it in a masterly way" (15).

The commercialization of journals in the late forties and fifties left very little room for nurturing new talents in short fiction. In the early fifties "Art for Life's Sake" began to be stressed. "Art for Art's Sake" was declared to be something devoid of meaning as the need for a sound society took precedence over art. One of the spokesmen of this doctrine was T.K. Sivasankaran, a writer with leftist leanings.
Very little room was set aside for serious short-story writers in Kalki, Kumutam and Anantavikatan. Vijayabhaskaran started Caracuvati in the wake of commercialization of the market for short fiction.

The translations of Russian classics were promoted by communist parties which resulted in the introduction of great writers like Tolstoy, Pushkin, Chekov and Dostoevski to Tamil readers. The translations into Tamil from other Indian languages like Bengali, Marati and Malayalam were becoming popular with the Tamils. Therefore, the literary environment became congenial for the emergence of new fiction writers. They were shaped by influences from abroad and the new-found mood of liberation in India. This facilitated the arrival of great talents like Sundara Ramaswamy, Jayakanthan, Akilan, Na.Parthasarathy and Indira Parthasarathy. The Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature notes that Sundara Ramaswamy (1931) and Jayakanthan (1944) are writers with "leftist orientations" (Swaminathan vol.5). Jayakanthan is shown to be a serious, aggressive and voluminous writer with a powerful language and popular theme while Sundara Ramaswamy is made out to be a sophisticated writer with a scanty output. Bala, a Tamil poet and critic, has told this researcher:

Sundara Ramaswamy's early writings were identified as the work of a committed author with leftist leanings, but his later
writings reveal a break from the political camp and reveal the modernist experimentalist in him. His recent novel, Cē.Cē: Cilakurippukal ("J.J: Some notes"), is praised for its irony and satire. His main strength as an artist, however, is revealed in his short fiction, now collected in book form with the title, Cuntara Rāmacāmiyin Cirukataikal ("Sundara Ramaswamy's short stories"). (Personal interview 15 June 1997)

Sundararajan and Sivapathasundaram say that one of his early stories, "Cannal" ("Window"), is acknowledged to be deeply autobiographical. In their opinion, "Piracātam" ("Sacred offering") is a story that shows how much Ramaswamy has been influenced by Puthumaippittan (241). His familiarity with the current techniques of art adopted in the west and imitated in the east could be discerned in his short as well as long fiction and poetry. His magazine, Kālaccuvatu, edited by his son, Kannan, and Manushya Puthran, shows the high literary standards and values maintained by him. Mostly self-taught like Sundara Ramaswamy, Jayakanthan has won the admiration of the general reading public and has the reputation of being something of an iconoclast. His early stories expose the plight of the poor. His stories came out first in Vacantam, Manitan, Camaran, Tamilan and in Caracuvati.
His open treatment of sensitive themes in stories like "Tämpatyam" ("Wedlock") made him a controversial writer at the outset. Among the stories brought out in Anantavikatan is his widely read story, "Akṇi Piravēcam" ("Entering the fire"). Commenting on this story, Ambai explodes the myth of his being an iconoclast. Ambai says:

Actually, the story itself was not as radical as it was taken to be. Some kind of purification was still considered to be essential and that is how the bath-giving scene seems to be fitted in. Whether by water or by fire, that the episode called for a process of purification itself was an evidence that the umbilical cord with tradition was not cut off. (Face 169)

Akilan (1922-88) started out with short stories and plodded through long fiction and gained great literary renown. His major concerns are social and national which are borne out by his stories like "Cakōtarar Aŋrō?" ("Aren't they brothers?") and "Kaṅkā Cnānam" ("Bath in the Ganges"). Na. Parthasarathy (1935-87) wrote romantic short stories and novels and carved out a name for himself with his purity of diction in Tamil. "Oru Putiya Āyutam" ("A new weapon") and "Takutiyum Taṇi Maṇitanum" ("Merit and individual")
are stories which indicate his stylistic expertise and thematic concerns.

Indira Parthasarathy (1930) has to his credit four collections of short stories. Commenting on his story, "Worship," Ka.Naa.Subramanyam writes, "it is quite characteristic of his writing in general and it offers in a sense a counterpoint to Pudumaippittan's 'Lifting of the Curse'" (16).

Short fiction was given a fresh lease of life by a new crop of writers and a cluster of periodicals promoting creative and critical activity in the sixties and seventies. Chellappa's Eluttu (1959) was started for publication of creative and critical endeavours. The best stories published by Manikkoti were brought out by Chellappa in order to create an environment for critical activity. Ka.Naa.Subramanyam floated a journal named Ilakkiya Vattam mainly for reviewing literary activity, but it lasted only for a few months. Na. Parthasarathy started a journal called Tipam in 1964. It won unique prestige and popularity as it was run by a well-read, widely-travelled, impartial scholar and lover of the Tamil tongue. Sundararajan and Sivapadasundaram in their history of literature have recorded the flurry of activity with B.S. Ramiah writing of his Manikkoti days, C.S. Chellappa talking of his experience as a writer in Eluttu, Vallikkannan dwelling on the literary efforts associated with
Caracuvati, Akilan writing of his experiences in life. All these kept their readers in touch with the course of the development of Tamil language and literature. Probably inspired by all these creative labours, Kasturirangan launched his journal, Kanaiyāli, which published stories of writers like Ambai, who broke new ground in Tamil literature. Popular magazines like Ānantavikatan, Kumutam, and Kalki continued with greater vigour to induce writers to bring out their best with offers of rewards for recognition. They got old writers to pick out the best among the new ones for awards.

In the seventies, entertainment in fiction took precedence over intrinsic literary worth. The new generation of writers did not rely on their art for livelihood unlike their predecessors. As popular magazines of the day did not suit their taste and temperament, they started their own small periodicals like Naṭai, Kacaṭatapara, Yātra, Pirakñai, Cuvatu, Kollippāvai, Vācakan etc. Most of these did not last long. Vanamalikai's little magazine Cataṅkai is said to have been in circulation since 1946 but its presence has not been felt by many readers.

The collection of sixteen stories entitled Kōñalkal ("Deviations"), authored by four writers indicates the new trend. A small group of writers called "Pālayamkōṭṭai Patippāl" brought out a
collection of stories entitled *Putiyamullaikal* ("Fresh jasmines"). Among them are writers like Ponneelan, Vannanilavan and Navabharathi. The themes of their stories are generation gap, selfless social service rendered by women or local squabbles. The work of Malan is an example of the new generation's urge to use the short-story form for the exposition of new themes in an artistic fashion. Malan's magazine, *Vacakan*, brought out in a special issue the stories of Athavan, Subramanya Raju, Jaya Bharathi, Kalakumaran, Vannadasan, Malan, Indumathi, M. Subramanyan, Sindhuja, Kavanthan and Kalasree with the title of *Oru Talaimuraiyin Patinonru Cirukataikal* ("Eleven short stories of a generation").

Among the writers who have successfully experimented with sophisticated techniques could be mentioned Na. Muthuswamy, Asokamithran, Konangi, Neelakanda Padmanabhan and others. The critic, Bala, feels that contemporary short-story writers could be divided into the following major categories: those sociological writers with a marked political content like Jayakanthan, P. Jayaprakasam, Poomani, Soorya Deepan, Gandharvan, Melanmai Ponnusamy and Vannanilavan; those who belong to the impressionistic-formalistic school of writers (which is a continuation of *Eluttu* generation) such as modernist writers like Asokamithran, Balakumaran, Subramanya Raju, Vannadasan
and highly experimentalist writers such as Tharmuh Sivaramu, S. Kandaswami, Subra Bharathi Manian and Konangi; and those women writers with feminist loyalties. The recent trends have brought to the fore two typical groups of writers who articulate the aspirations of the marginalized sections--the Dalits and the women. The newly emerging talents include writers who cannot be categorized into any group like Ira Murugan, Pavannan and S.M.A. Ram.

Canadian fiction has been moulded by diverse forces, both foreign and indigenous. The practice of this genre in other parts of the western world has considerably influenced Canadian practitioners of this literary form. W.H.New, introducing Canadian Short Fiction: From Myth to Modern, says:

To look back at the development of Canadian short fiction, however, is to discover not a single linear progress but a network of interconnecting traditions. To understand the heritage today--and the range and skill of current practice in the short story form--it is necessary to appreciate the many influences that have shaped the genre. (2)

Although the forebears of the short-story writers in both Tamil and Canadian English are Poe, Gogol, Maupassant, Mansfield, Joyce Anderson, O'Connor, Malamud and others, their fictional creations are
distinguished by the influences of their respective mythologies and socio-cultural environments. The short story as a distinct literary form in Canada came into vogue more than half a century after the novel began to be written. The development of short fiction in anglophone Canada, as in Tamil Nadu, is the upshot of the growth of serious as well as popular magazines.

Lots of stories were written in the nineteenth century, but their fictional quality was too romantic with little "sophisticated analysis of human motives, attitudes, and relationships" (Keith 41). Northrop Frye observes that in the literature of the nineteenth century "not all the fiction is romance, but nearly all of it is formula-writing" (qtd. in Woodcock, The World of Canadian Writing 19). The formulas, that Frye refers to are formal structures and thematic patterns borrowed principally from the British models. It was in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of this century that the newspapers and periodicals were growing. The development of the magazines helped short fiction to take on its characteristic form. Kent Thompson feels that "the growth, development, and health of the short story as a form is dependent upon the health and influence of the periodical" and that this genre had its origin in little magazines (15). The shapers of short fiction in Canada could be discerned in Gilbert Parker (1862-

Prominent among the kinds of prose being attempted ... were five types or patterns: documentary accounts of things seen and life lived; political and religious essays; romantic fictions made out of the conventional trappings that were borrowed from other traditions (oriental tales, tales of court, historical adventures); romantic fictions set in local landscapes (often a cross between the authentic and the stereotypical, depending on the author's experience); and dialect attempts (usually comic in intention) to record various kinds of character and 'low life' within the social structure. (20-21)

He goes on to point out how the short story in Canada is derived from the prose "sketch" which was so popular with the readers and used to be published in magazines like Edinburgh and Fortnightly. Stewart's Quarterly in the 1860s is said to have used the words "pen photographs" and "mental photographs" to define the sketch (22). The sketch was short and read like an
essay. One might cite as an example The Old Judge of T.C Haliburton brought out in 1849.

W.J. Keith writes that the short stories written in the nineteenth century seem little more than pale shadows of the later achievement. The more popular collections of the period, like Gilbert Parker's Pierre and His People (1892) and E.W. Thompson's Old Man Savarin (1895), relied for the most part on thrilling or sentimental plots and homely characterization, and now seem stereotyped and obvious to modern readers. (45-46)

Gilbert Parker began his literary work with a series of stories about the Northwest. He published his stories first in the New York Independent. They are a series of stories about trickery and fortitude. Michelle Gadpaille observes that "The tendency of his characters to burst into spontaneous song, expressing emotion or atmosphere, places Parker's stories firmly in the loose nineteenth-century convention of the sketch or anecdote" (11). E.W. Thompson, a journalist like Gilbert Parker, brought out his best in Old Man Savarin. His story "Petherick's Peril" won the Youth's Companion magazine's story competition in 1886. His best story, "The Privilege of the Limits," was published in Harper's Weekly in 1891. Gadpaille's
assessment of his stories is summed up thus, "Though Thomson had a journalistic facility with narrative, his banal, unfelt language prevents his stories from coming to life" (10). There was a popular market for the kind of romances produced by writers like him in periodicals such as Literary Garland and Victoria Magazine.

Some of the clergymen also had used fiction to portray their religious fantasies. One of them, who came into the limelight with the collection of short stories, Glengarry Schooldays (1902), is Ralph Connor (1860-1937). He used devices of realism to present his message although his plots were full of melodrama. Two other men who deserve attention for their realism in the midst of romances are Ernest Thompson Seton (1860-1946) and Charles G.D.Roberts (1860-1943). They used the short-story form to depict the animal world of forest and wilderness with remarkable realism. Roberts published in 1896 his first collection of stories, Earth's Enigmas. He continued to bring out his tales until 1936. The first of Seton's numerous books, Wild Animals I Have Known, came out in 1898. Woodcock says, "The outdoors story and the animal story became very popular around 1900, and this was the first period in which Canadian writers began to draw the attention of the whole English-reading world" (The World of Canadian Writing 25).
One collection of stories that, according to most critics, demands attention is Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger* which came out in 1896. The book has been structured as a series of ten stories which stick together forming a coherent whole. Another collection of his short fiction is *The Witching of Elspie* (1923). His stories demonstrate the fact that unlike his contemporaries, he handled this fictional mode with artistic seriousness like V.V.S. Iyer. In *A History of Canadian Literature*, W.H. New states, "Scott emerges as the chief short-fiction writer in Canada at the turn of the century, the one writer who turned the genre into its modern form" (129). Stephen Leacock distinguished himself as an international comic essayist with his little humour books. His best known classic, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), is a series of linked stories portraying life in the town of Mariposa, a fictionalized version of Ontario. The instinct to moralize and romanticize could be seen even in the works of D.C.Scott and Leacock.

It was Raymond Knister (1899-1932) who edited the first collection of short stories entitled *Canadian Short Stories* in 1928. Introducing the anthology, Knister indicated that the Canadian short story was to enter a new era. In the period between 1890 and 1940, realism emerged gradually displacing romanticism. The
subjects of fiction began to change. Gadpaille remarks:

A young writer of short stories himself (though he excluded himself from the collection), Knister had assiduously explored the whole field before arriving at his selection of seventeen stories, providing at the end of his book two appendixes that throw light on the work to date of Canadian writers in this genre. (18)

A man of wide reading, Knister's carefully planned stories were flawed by his archaic and unattractive techniques. Some of his stories were later collected in Selected Stories of Raymond Knister in 1972 by Michael Gnarowski and in The First Day of Spring: Stories and Other Prose in 1976 by Peter Stevens.

Keith comments, "Nothing much happens in these stories; the mood is all" (131).

Among the new writers included by Knister in his collection, only Morley Callaghan continues to be popular with his novels and short stories. He has three short-story collections--A Native Argosy (1929), Now That April's Here (1936), and Morley Callaghan's Stories (1959). The new writers in their stories diminished their reliance on plot and emphasized their interest in social life and character. In A History of Canadian Literature, W.H. New writes, "To Knister and
Callaghan (influenced by the American experiments of Sherwood Anderson, 1876-1941), it was a way of escaping the limits of elitist standards and plotted form" (164).

Frederick Philip Grove (1879-1948) is not a short fictionist proper but he deserves mention for a set of linked meditative essays brought out in 1922 with the title of Over Prairie Trails. They consist of seven sketches with a Manitoban setting. His influence on writers like Sinclair Ross and W.O. Mitchell is to be noted. Many of his stories were published in 1971 with the title, Tales from the Margin. Grove's naturalist fiction was a kind of model for Sinclair Ross. Ross was only twenty-six when his first story "No Other Way" was published in Queen's Quarterly. His stories got collected only in 1968 and 1982 entitled The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories and The Race and Other Stories. His stories, according to Gadpaille, highlight the conflict between man and nature and the friction between man and his folks. The failure of the man to understand his environment and family is intensified by his use of the prairie landscape as a symbol for "the territory of mind and soul" (32). W.H. New says that Sinclair Ross and Gabrielle Roy "ranged between the prairies of their memory and the urban pressures of contemporary Quebec" (A History of Canadian Literature 178). Keith includes Thomas H. Raddall as he "deserves
consideration here" (132) because he "is an unpretentious novelist content to be first and foremost a story-teller" (133). He goes on to say that this writer "shares the basic ingredients of romance and realism with his more probing and ambitious Maritime contemporary, Hugh MacLennan" (133). His short story collections include *The Pied Piper of Dipper Creek* (1939), *Tambour* (1945) and *The Wedding Gift* (1947).

Hugh Garner (1913-79) started his literary career in the same period as Ethel Wilson (1888-1980). Ethel Wilson carried on the female literary tradition until the appearance of her greater successors in the 1960s and 1970s like Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro. Hugh Garner, who inherited the literary tradition left by Morley Callaghan and Hemingway in the U.S.A, became the most widely-read short-story writer after the second World War. Numerous stories written by him appeared in various magazines like *The Canadian Forum*, *Chatelaine*, *Saturday Night* and *The Canadian Home Journal*. Some of them were also broadcast on CBC. His marvellous skill as a teller of tales could be discerned in stories like "The Yellow Sweater" and "The Conversation of Willie Heaps." His literary realism and preoccupation with social and universal subjects have helped him to retain his relevance to this day. His stories were collected in *The Yellow Sweater* (1952), *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963), *Men and Women* (1966), *The Legs of the

Canadian stories have been published in magazines since the second half of the nineteenth century, but Canada's stories began to be anthologized only from 1928. After Knister's collection there appeared in 1947 A Book of Canadian Stories by Desmond Pacey. Robert Weaver first edited a collection with Helen James called Canadian Short Stories in 1952. In his introduction to The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English (1988), he says that through all of the 1950s only a handful of writers in Canada were able to have a book of their own stories published, whereas by the 1970s and 1980s more short-fiction collections than this would routinely appear in every publishing season. (xvii-xviii)

The magazines through which short fiction has been mainly nurtured fall into three categories, according to Kent Thompson (15). The academic magazines which promoted serious writing could be counted on the fingers of a hand: Prism International, The West Coast Review, Quarry, The Tamarack Review and The Fiddlehead. The scholarly magazines in the second category promoting creative work are Queen's Quarterly, Malahat Review, Wascana Review, Windsor Review and Dalhousie Review. The stories published in these academic and
scholarly magazines are usually those written in a traditional vein. The third category of magazines, according to Kent Thompson, is the "little mimeographed" magazines which mushroom in unexpected places around a group of young and rebellious writers (16). Magazines like Copperfield, Salt and Tide fall into this category which publish the creations of budding writers.

The rapidly growing periodicals gave the short-story writers a platform. In the 1950s the atmosphere was made very congenial for the writing of short stories. Margaret Atwood in her introduction to The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English confirms the fact that short fiction was "easily publishable" in the 1950s (xiii). Two major developments that gave a fillip to the growth of the short story were CBC Radio Programme Anthology done by Robert Weaver and the starting of the Canada Council in 1957. Another notable factor was the founding of The Tamarack Review in 1956 with William Toye and Robert Weaver editing it. The year 1959 saw the publication of Morley Callaghan's stories which had been brought out in the 1920s and 1930s in little magazines of Europe and notable magazines of America like The New Yorker, Scribner's and Esquire. It was through magazines like The Montrealer, The Tamarack Review, The Canadian Forum and Chatelaine that Alice Munro brought
out many of her stories and attained national popularity and international prestige. There has been later in Canada a network of popular magazines that have promoted the creativity of short fictionists. Some of them which deserve mention here are Canadian Fiction Magazine, Ontario Review, The Malahat Review, Descant etc.

In the first part of the introduction to The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English, Margaret Atwood points out that there was an "explosion of talent in the sixties and seventies" (xv). Donald Stephens, in "The Recent English Short Story in Canada and its Themes," notes that the short story "over the past twenty-five years or so in Canada has witnessed as great a liberation from convention as did poetry in the 1880's" (50). Short fiction began to be turned out in earnest from the late 1960s onwards by a galaxy of women writers (dealt with separately) and a host of male writers like Norman Levine (1923), Hugh Hood (1928), Mordecai Richler (1931), Austin Clarke (1932), Rudy Wiebe (1934), George Bowering (1935), John Metcalf (1938), Jack Hodgins (1938), W.D. Valgardson (1939) and Clark Blaise (1940). David Jackel points out that "Rebirth, however, was followed by inundation" (47). Short-story writers since the early 1960s have by and large deviated from tradition and blazed trails in different ways that defy definition. The sixties,
seventies and even the eighties have been marked by impressive improvement both in the number of widely known short-story writers and in the variety of forms they have used. The broad fictional spectrum accommodates traditional realists, modernists, postmodernists, magic-realists and so on. The realistic tradition that Garner, Callaghan and Knister inherited from romantic realists like D.C. Scott and Leacock has been widened by Norman Levine, John Metcalf, Alistair MacLeod and many others (Gadpaille 99-100). Writers like George Bowering, Leon Rooke, Jack Hodgins and W.D. Valgardson have experimented with different themes and have challenged the conventional content and framework of the short story. The most experimental writers could be found in the Montreal Story Tellers, a group active in the late 1960s with writers like Hugh Hood, John Metcalf, Clark Blaise, Ray Fraser and Ray Smith. These writers promoted the popularity of short fiction among the general reading public. This group of writers carried on their work until the middle of the seventies. Another group introducing innovations consisted of women among whom the most prominent one was Audrey Thomas. She has made use of stream-of-consciousness narratives to capture external experience. She also employs the postmodern techniques of fabulation and metafiction to remake
words and stories from a female perspective. Marian Engel also made a mark in this group.

Dave Godfrey, David Helvig, Mordecai Richler and others try to paint the lives of their characters as they see them. There are writers who demonstrate that the past has not been forsaken. Rudy Wiebe makes use of his short narratives to capture what has disappeared into the distant past. He tries to rake up the past of the aborigines. Thimothy Findley is a notable writer who has contributed to the growth of long as well as short fiction. Keith says that Findley is a writer who "exposes the complex interactions of power, violence, and sexuality" in life (170). His collection, Dinner Along the Amazon (1984), demonstrates the thematic strains and strategies that he has concerned himself with. Another writer who resembles Munro in the depiction of family interaction is a male writer named Guy Vanderhaeghe. His collection of stories is Man Descending published in 1983, which won a Governor General's Award. There is here description of an urban world of divorced and drifting people. There are numerous other writers who deserve mention in a survey.

A lot of magazines and anthologies promoted the growth and popularity of short fiction during the flowering of this genre. The year 1960 witnessed Robert Weaver's second series of Canadian Short Stories. He followed it up with three more series to
introduce regional writers at national and international levels. Some of the other popular anthologies are Giose Rimanelli's and Roberto Ruberto's *Modern Canadian Stories* (1966), Levine's *Canadian Winter's Tales* (1968), Metcalf's *Sixteen by Twelve* (1970), *77: Best Canadian Stories* brought out by Oberon (1977), Donna Phillips's *Voices of Discord* (1979), *Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories* (1980), Rosemary Sullivan's *Stories by Canadian Women* (1984), W.H. New's *Canadian Short Fiction: From Myth to Modern* (1986) etc. Another feature of the contemporary Canadian literary scene is the increasing number of anthologies of short fiction by women writers which show the specific concerns and characteristics of fiction by female writers. Anthologizing facilitates the process of consolidation done by individual writers. Among those who have benefited by it are Howard O'Hagan, A.M. Klein, Joyce Marshall, Sheila Watson, Henry Kreisel and others. These anthologies referred to above provide their readers with an idea of which writers deserve attention and acceptance.

The short story is no longer studied as the minor work of a major writer. David Jackel recalls Grady's declaration that by interpreting for us the complexities of human life, by helping to bring the unarticulated soul of an entire community
into sudden and radiant being, the short story can be said to have assumed a social responsibility left vacant by poetry since the late 1950s. (50)

The contrast between the Tamil literary scene and the Canadian scenario comes into the focus as one notices the predominance of women writers. Canada's most prominent practitioners of the short story are all women. Gadpaille feels that

It is difficult, however, to find collections by male writers that offer both reading satisfaction and complete representations of their writing at its best, such as one finds, for example, in *The Other Paris* (Gallant), *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (Munro), *Dancing Girls* (Atwood), and *Goodbye Harold, Good Luck* (Thomas). (vii)

The masters of the short story in Tamil, on the other hand, continue to be mostly male writers like Sundara Ramaswamy, Jayakanthan, Asokamitran, Konangi etc. However, popular writers like Sivasankari, and serious ones like Ambai, have been trying to break the bastion of men. A notable feature of the Tamil literary scene from the 1970s has been the appearance of accomplished female writers of short as well as long fiction. Among them one has to take into account the dent made by prominent practitioners like Chudamani, Rajam Krishnan,
Anuradha Ramanan, Komagal, Indumathi, Vasanthi, Thilagavathi, Lakshmi Kannan, Lakshmi Subramanyan, Arasu Manimekalai, Vimala Ramani, Sivakami, Damayanthi and Leela Krishna. According to T.K. Sivasankaran, a Tamil critic, women short-story writers have emerged with pronounced feminist positions over the past few years. Their dominant themes include disruptions in familial and marital relationships which challenge the conventional values of chastity and assert women's rights (263).

Chitralekha observes that Tamil women writers subject the concept of chastity promoted by Tamil culture to subversion and interrogation. For instance, Chudamani's "Manita Amcam" ("Human element") treats the experience of Sarada who reacts to her husband's attitude towards chastity. She tells Divakaran, "I am not Mrs. Chidambaram. My parents named me Sarada. Address me by this name" (11). Her stories are simple but are notable for their treatment of subtle human emotions (Sundararajan and Sivapathasundaram 228).

Rajam Krishnan is known for her realistic and provincial writings but her perceptions are not narrowed down to female agony. She attempts a holistic vision of human agony in general. Rajam Krishnan won recognition through her story "Uciyum Unarvum" ("Needle and sentiment"). However, her preference for long fiction is quite evident. Chudamani and Rajam Krishnan...
are both relatively progressive writers. Anuradha Ramanan is one of the prolific women writers who has written around eight hundred short stories. In an interview with *Tinakaran* on 11 July 1997, she says that she has made writing her "husband." It has helped her to shun loneliness in the wake of her husband's death. Among the writers that she admires are Balakumaran, Sujatha, Sivasankari, Indumathi, Vasanthi, Vidya Subramanyan etc (II). Komagal is one of the traditionalists who has written numerous stories among which one could mention "Penmai" ("Womanhood") or "Kānal Nīr" ("Mirage"). Ambai points out that Komagal's heroines like Madhuram learn in the end that tradition is better than wisdom or rationality which brings on thinking that "leads to unnecessary struggles" (Face 119). Discussing the work done by Sivasankari, Ambai writes, "The extent of her popularity can be gauged from the visitors who come to see her to tell her how much her writing is appreciated" (82). She turns out fiction mainly to entertain her readers. So her stories are not complex, for she does not like to cause any kind of confusion in her readers who need relaxation in the midst of their daily chores. In an interview with *Tinakaran* on 1 August 1997 Sivasankari says, "First and foremost I am a female human being and then only a writer. Literary career adds to my duties as an ordinary woman" (II).
Vasanthi's stories trace woman's experience from childhood to motherhood. She condemns the prevalent opinion that a woman's life finds its completion only in her union with man. Her protagonists are found to resist the injunctions imposed on women with respect to education, marriage and independence (Kalanchiammal 48-49). The heroine of her story, "Ellaikalín Vilimpil" ("On the periphery of margins"), declares that "I won't wear the chains of marriage and family" (65). She is the kind of writer who could discern the virgin mind of a prostitute (Ambai, Face 87). Vasanthi's "Appointment order," Sivasankari's "Polutu" ("Time"), Indumathi's "Oru Kaṭikārattai Cuṭṭum Kaṇamāna Muṭkal" ("The heavy hands that go round a clock") and Lakshmi Kannan's "Cāvi" ("Key") go to show how different their themes and treatments are.

Most of the women writers write about the problems or pitiable plight of their fellow women. Some of them like Indumathi write about the feelings of young men living in cities as well. Most of the contemporary writers recognized as women writers by the consumers of popular fiction could not attain the identity as producers of distinctive feminine writing. However, there are a few innovators in short fiction such as Lakshmi Kannan who trace the subtle psychological insights into day-to-day events and actions. Lakshmi Kannan's perceptions gain a sharper focus when she
details human responses to events and actions. There is a hint of human helplessness in her stories like "Cāvi" and "Alai Kaṭalil Annapūraṇi" ("Annapoorni on the waves of the sea"). Her stories detail human reactions to unpredictable occurrences in life. Ambai's stories are strikingly different from those of her fellow women writers. Her themes and treatments are provocative or polemical as they derive their strength from her feminist readings of life around her. Gender concerns are quite discernible in her fiction. Her stance is identifiably feminist, although she does not belong to a particular school of thought. She could be compared with committed writers like Sivakami, who is more concerned with the marginalized untouchable Tamil women from rural backgrounds. Another writer who has feminist leanings is Leela Krishnan, author of around 400 short stories. She used to admire first the fiction of Lakshmi (Thripurasundari). She now prefers the work of Devabala whose fiction is, she feels, true to life. When asked why men outnumber women writers, Leela Krishnan told Tinakaran on 4 July 1997 that it was not on account of less female creativity but because of women's lack of time. She complains that men make women do their work as well (II).

It is to be noted that a female literary tradition in Tamil has long been in evidence, although women writers could not make their presence so conspicuous
here as in Anglophone Canada. Sundararajan and Sivapadasundaram hold that women have written stories ever since the beginning of this century when magazines like Vivēkacintāmanī and Vivēkapōtini were started bringing out fiction for popular consumption (225). They go on to mention Ammani Ammal who served as a forerunner with her story, "Cāṅkalpamum Cāmpavāmum" ("Determination and decisive event"). The Tamil Encyclopaedia, Vālvīyalkalānciyam lists Vai.Mu.Kodainayaki, Panditai R. Ranganayaki, K. Saraswathy, Saroja Ramamoorthy, Kamala Viruthachalam, Ki. Savithri Ammal, Kumudini, M.S. Kamala and Ku.Pa. Sethu Ammal as pioneers of women short-story writers (Muthappan vol.9). Visalakshi Ammal and Gugapriyai are also known to have written stories. Lakshmi (Thripurasundari), Anuthama, Saraswathy Ramnath, Vasumathi Ramaswami, Komagal, Chudamani, Krithika and others published their stories in magazines like Anantavikatan and Kalaimakal.

There were journals run by women as well. Visalakshi Ammal launched in 1909 Hitakārini for publication of stories and essays. Another journal, Peṇ Kalvi was run by Revu Thayaramma. In the 1920s Balammal's Cintāmanī and Vai.Mu. Kodainayaki Ammal's Cakanmokini published reading matter for women and induced them to take up the pen. Ambai's investigation has revealed the fact that "Among the journals for..."
women the one that was bold and most assertive and social reformist was Maadhar Marumanam run by Maragatavalli Ammal, published from Karaikudi" (Face 51). This periodical was founded in 1936 to protect the interest of women in general and widows in particular. Gugapriyai was the editor of two magazines, Mankai and Putumai Pen in the late 1940s. The literary commentators that this researcher spoke to feel that most of the stories published by women writers till the 1960s are valued more for their conventional content rather than for innovations in form.

Canada has had a female literary tradition right from the inception of Canadian literature. The female voice has been quite audible there on the literary front throughout whereas in the fictional world of the Tamils woman's voice began to be really heard only in the last quarter of this century. Canada's women writers have been more widely read than her male writers. Canadian women "have not had to battle against a predominantly masculine literary tradition" (Irvine 70). An early woman writer, Anna Jameson has said, "The condition of women in any community is a test of the moral and intellectual cultivation in that community" (qtd. in Irvine 78). If alive today Anna Jameson in Canada and Ammani Ammal in Tamil Nadu would be immensely delighted with the achievements of the
contemporary women writers of their respective countries. William French comments:

Three of the leading fiction writers in Canada today, by common consent, are women--Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, and Alice Munro. It was hardly a surprise that in a recent novel-writing contest sponsored by the government of Alberta, two of the three top winners were women. And no one raised an eyebrow in 1973 when the founding meeting of the Writers' Union of Canada chose a woman novelist, Marian Engel, as its first chairman. And no discussion of current Canadian literature could begin without mention of Marie-Claire Blais, or end without reference to Gabrielle Roy. (3)

Women writers in Canadian English and Indian Tamil burgeoned in the last quarter of this century. The doyennes of the short story on the contemporary scene of Canada are Mavis Gallant (1922), Margaret Laurence (1926-86), Alice Munro (1931), Margaret Atwood (1939), and Audrey Thomas (1935).

One of the complex writers that Canada has among her women is Mavis Gallant who turned to good account her experience as a journalist abroad and created fictional wonders in her books like *The Other Paris* (1956), *My Heart Is Broken* (1964), *The Pegnitz Junction*
Margaret Laurence has two collections of short fiction—*The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963) and *A Bird in the House* (1970). The former is a product of her memorable residence in Africa. The latter is a more popular collection of linked stories like Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* with a Canadian setting. The dominant theme in her work is woman's attempt to survive and succeed in life. Her central characters flee oppressive ambiances. Her work collectively gives one an insight into how women think and feel. They help to enlarge men's understanding of women's needs and sentiments. The major thematic concern of Margaret Atwood is the protest against patriarchal structures of power and domination which undermine the woman's identity. Through her long as well as short fiction she highlights the need for women to recognize and resist their repression by male chauvinists. What one finds in the anti-heroines of *Dancing Girls* is the author's own concealed fury at the unjust structure of female existence. She reduces situations of romance
and harsh female realities to slapstick. What Atwood seems to do in her two acknowledged collections of short fiction, *Dancing Girls* (1977) and *Bluebeard's Egg* (1983), is to create a funny world of fear and fantasy which parallels the real world with its adverse conditions that facilitate female exploitation and cannibalization. Modern man is ultimately found by females to be worse than the bluebeard of old. The short stories of Audrey Thomas have been brought out in four collections—*Ten Green Bottles* (1967), *Real Mothers, Two in the Bush and Other Stories* (1981) and *Goodbye Harold, Good Luck* (1986). Rosemary Sullivan says:

> The work of Alice Munro, Jane Rule, Audrey Thomas, and Margaret Atwood delineates another world— one that seems more stark than that of Laurence or Faessler, in which the need to be aware of, and note, the dynamics of power in relationships is all-important.

(xv)

Audrey Thomas uses sophisticated techniques in her stories to portray painfully traumatic experiences. The metafictional tools used by her remind one of Atwood. Her subversive language and her instinct to interrogate and explore female experience bring her closer to Atwood.
Others who have gained recognition and wide popularity are writers like Jane Rule, Marian Engel, Beth Harvor, Sandra Birdsell, Robyn Sarah, Isabell Huggan, Janice Kulyk Keefer, Edna Alford etc. Authors like Jane Rule have written numerous stories where there is transmutation of personal experience into art on the lines done by Munro. Like Alice Munro, Jane Rule deals with familial relationships and women's responses to common situations in domestic circles. Her stories are found to be well crafted such as "My Father's House," "Brother and Sister," and "The Bosom of the Family." She has three collections of short fiction to her credit--*Themes for Diverse Instruments* (1975), *Outlander* (1981), and *Inward Passage* (1985). She also deals frequently with children and family life in her fiction. Marian Engel has two collections of short stories--*Inside the Easter Egg* (1975) and *The Tattooed Woman* (1985). Gadpaille says that

Some of Engels' short [sic] short stories--'In the sun,' 'Banana Flies'--have a surreal quality; here the author plays games with the boundaries between the real and the unreal, and unleashes a refreshing female view of the world. (107)

Beth Harvor's stories collected in *Women and Children* (1973) and *If Only We Could Drive Like This Forever* (1988) portray the depth of loneliness and anguish
experienced by the characters that people her world. Stories like "Pain Was My Portion" indicates the author's insight into the plight of the protagonists in the drama of modern life. The stories of Sandra Birdsell appearing in Night Travellers (1982) and Ladies of the House (1984) show that there is resemblance between the world here and the Munrovian country. The heroines of Birdsell remind one of Munro's unconventional protagonists like Del in Lives.

The frustrated desires and ideals of modern humans are pictured effectively by younger writers like Janice Kulyk Keefer and Robyn Sarah. Gadpaille writes:

> In the early 1980s the influence of acclaimed writers such as Alice Munro began to be felt in the fiction of a younger group of writers. Isabel Huggan . . . did for 'Garten', Ontario, what Munro did for Jubilee: she made palpable the atmosphere of brittle respectability and secret scandal in small-town Ontario life. (108)

The female literary tradition dates back to the eighteenth century when the very first novel in Canada was written by Frances Brooke and published in 1769. Around the middle of the nineteenth century one finds a lot of books written by women—Anna Jameson's *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* (1832), Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), and her sister Catherine Parr Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836). However the pioneers of short fiction in Canada could be seen in Isabella Valancy Crawford (1850-87), Susie Frances Harrison (1859-1935) and Sara Jeannette Duncan (1861-1922). Gadpaille, commenting on Isabella Valancy Crawford's poems, says:

> But she also wrote stories to support herself precariously—in an era of magazine publishing that created an insatiable demand for romantic fiction of whatever quality—and was published in Toronto, Montreal, and New York (in the popular magazines of Frank Leslie). (11)

Susie Frances Harrison, a novelist and poet, wrote first a collection of eleven stories with the title, *Crowded Out! and Other Sketches*, and published it in 1886. Gadpaille goes on to say:

> The smooth assurance and attempt at sophistication with which Harrison relates this romantic 'idyl' would be seen again (and
improved upon), a few years later, in the stories of Sara Jeannette Duncan. (12)

Sara Jeannette Duncan was a journalist who took to long fiction, but she wrote a collection of four stories named *The Pool In the Desert* (1903). Rosemary Sullivan, in her introduction to *Stories by Canadian Women*, says:

> Crawford directs her resentment at the image of woman sketched by conventional society, woman as small-minded, half-educated, and self-congratulatory in her pettiness. . . . Harrison does not mount an attack on the rigidities of the institution of marriage, but grieves instead for one of its unfortunate victims. (xi)

Terming Sara Jeannette Duncan the bravest and most powerful of these three writers, Sullivan writes that being a feminist, she believed in careers and independence and considered marriage to be incidental (xi-xii).

The most notable woman writer between Sara Jeannette Duncan and the flowering of the short story in the 1960s was Ethel Wilson with her six novels and one short story collection named *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* (1961). David Stouck observes that "Human relations, their complexity, and their fragility, is Ethel Wilson's intimate theme, and an
oblique, elliptical style is the special signature of her prose" (94).

Ambai (C.S. Lakshmi) is a Tamil woman of letters whose literary distinction has been rather slow to be discerned by the reading public of her home state, Tamil Nadu. Despite the ambivalent attention that Ambai has lately attracted, the corpus of her fiction is yet to be given proper critical assessment. She has long been like Mavis Gallant, an outsider in her own native region. This innovative writer, who lives with her non-Tamil spouse in Mumbai, has been viewed in orthodox circles as a woman who has distanced herself from Tamil literature.

Alice Munro set out as a regional short-story writer with her early stories set in small towns like Jubilee or Hanratty in Huron County. Munro won the Governor General's Award for her first collection, Dance of the Happy Shades, but there were very few takers for the book (Batten 24). George Woodcock says when Alice Munro began her writing:

her work tended to be undervalued, except by a few exceptionally peripient readers like Robert Weaver, because her tales of Ontario small-town life were taken to be those of a rather conventional realist with a certain flair for local colour. (The Plots of Life 236)
Woodcock gives Robert Weaver the credit for popularizing Munrovian stories and says that he "more than anyone else 'discovered' her" (240). Munro's fictional output has received progressively greater critical attention from the discriminating body of Canadian readers helping her to win twice more the Governor General's Award for her fourth and sixth collections as well. Her celebrity status as one of the best writers in Canada has been unanimously accepted by the literary and critical circles of Canada. Munro's eight collections of short stories--Dance of the Happy Shades (1968), Lives of Girls and Women (1971), Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You (1974), Who Do You Think You Are? (1978), Moons of Jupiter (1982), The Progress of Love (1986), Friend of My Youth (1990) and Open Secrets (1994)--have attained immense popularity with the young and the old alike. David Stouck's assessment of her work is noted down thus, "from among the many women writers who were published and enjoyed critical success in the 1970s, Alice Munro has emerged as the most accomplished artist. Her reputation as one of Canada's best writers" is borne out by the popularity that her stories enjoy across her country (257).

A similar recompense or reward takes longer to be received by a regional writer in India. Ambai has not had the fortune to maintain such a high profile as the
Canadian writer. Her first collection of stories, Cirakukal Muriyum ("Wings break"), came out at the beginning of 1976. Recalling its reception by the literary world, Ambai tells her American interviewer, "It received absolutely no reviews. Well, there was only one review, by a male writer, who was an extremely biased person." The reviewer's response was, "Thank God I haven't written these stories" (Ambai, Dickman interview 9). In 1984 Ambai published a critical treatise in English called The Face Behind the Mask, which is a study of the concepts of women in Tamil fiction produced by traditionally brought up women writers. In most of the Tamil stories, Ambai holds, "To preach, to 'educate' the readers is still the basic purpose combined with beautification efforts drawn from the cinema, drama and fantasies, providing the elements of entertainment" (Face 227). Ambai finds most of the themes and techniques of her fellow-women writers rather passe, however, there were very few takers for her stories which deviated from tradition both in form and content. Her second collection, Vittin Mulayil Oru Camayal Arai ("A kitchen in a corner of the house") was published in 1988. Ambai herself comments on it thus, "The second collection, in terms of form, was very different from the first, but it also was not very easy for them to accept." It attracted more attention and got sold easily, but it did not get properly reviewed
except by a girl who had studied in America. The conservative circles could not accept her way of writing which was as one of them put it, "against the culture" (Ambai, Dickman interview 11).

The credit for discovering Ambai and uncovering her literary talent for a wider readership both at home and abroad goes to Lakshmi Holmstrom who translated some of her early stories which appeared in a collection brought out in 1992 entitled *A Purple Sea*. Out of the sixteen stories only two are from the first collection and three uncollected stories have been included. The others are from the second anthology. Talking about how Ambai mutilates the traditional short-story form, the writer-critic, Sundara Ramaswamy, has told this researcher, "She is a rebel basically in form and content. Unless you have a new form the content loses its novelty. In Ambai you always feel fresh because of the form" (Personal interview 28 August 1996). Most of Ambai's fellow-women writers use an idiom which has already been there. Ambai, on the other hand, has created her own language and expression. She writes her stories mainly for the consciously literary segment of society. An average reader finds her manner and matter difficult to understand and appreciate. The "modern" short story, as A.S. Collins points out, appeals "to the literary rather than to the average reader" (265).
The high literary quality of the stories that Ambai and Alice Munro have written could be attributed not only to their natural endowments but also to the immense care given to their literary labours. They are both artistically judicious in the choice of word, phrase and incident. In an interview with Graeme Gibson, Munro says, "It seems to me very important to be able to get at the exact tone or texture of how things are" (241). It is the presence of the adroit "craftswomen" in them that accounts for the fact that the intervals between the productions of the two writers are frequent and far between. Some of their facile fellow writers have proved to be prolific while their publications, particularly Ambai's, are fewer. There is in Munro what Helen Hoy calls "The uninhibited discussion of bodily realities" (17). There is explicit treatment of sex in Ambai as well. The main thematic strain that unites the two writers is the burden of conventionality which their protagonists wish to be free of.

Ambai and Alice Munro are both overt and covert feminists even though Ambai disowns allegiance to any particular school of thought, French or Anglo-American, and Alice Munro denies being a feminist at all. Ambai does not even like to be categorized as a "woman writer" because she does not like "to belong to any ghetto" or be "classified and given the position of
only a woman writer" (Ambai, Dickman interview 18).

Ambai, unlike Munro, used to be active as a feminist with leftist leanings, but the artist in her has emerged undermining her loyalties to ideologies. Sundara Ramaswamy feels that "Her basic ideals now are love of freedom and love of equality. She has the basic faith that a woman can do all the work that men do, provided the right opportunity is given."

Alice Munro denies that she is a feminist, for she has told John Metcalf, "I'm not really sure what a feminist is. You've got to define that further." She goes on to make it clear, however, that she is "sympathetic" with the Women's Liberation movement but, "not active because" she is "not a political person" (Metcalf interview 59). This is exactly the kind of stance that Ambai has finally adopted. Ambai refuses to be slotted either as a feminist or as a postmodernist. She says in a letter written to this researcher on 12 September 1996:

As for calling me a post-modern feminist, I don't think I will go with it. I don't think I am "writing the body" with the body fluids nor am I exaggerating the feminine, specially the maternal. I think my attempt is more to re-read the body and give it new meanings, not what it is already associated with it. . . . What I think I am doing in life and
hence my writing, is to use the body as something I should abstract from. Body is what I have; but it is not what I am. I don't think I would like to be trapped in any kind of biological determinism.

Although there are no anti-heroes or total rejection of the past and its value systems in the Ambaian or Munrovian world, the writers seem to have been conscious of postmodernist tendencies. Their stories demonstrate how they keep pace with the development of the short story in Europe, Latin America and North America. They have both created female protagonists who cross or wish to cross the borders of convention and subvert male bastions. Many prudish or puritanical people have been outraged by the explicit scenes or exposition of female eroticism by Ambai and Alice Munro.

Ambai is a bicultural and bilingual writer; but Alice Munro can be called a bicultural author from a bilingual nation. The differences between them have been determined by their respective cultures, national and regional divergences. Ambai's attitude towards male and female characters has been conditioned by the regimented male-oriented ambience of the east, while Alice Munro's mentality has been moulded by the atmosphere of the permissive social setting in the west. Both the writers are noted for the way they
combine realism with fantasy. Most of their stories are set in those parts of their own respective countries where they have lived, moved and have memorable connections. Some of their stories have their locales in foreign countries as well—London and Chile figure in the Ambaiian world while Scotland and Australia are chosen by Munro.

They are both novelists manque, who ultimately realized that the medium of short fiction was more suited to their temperaments and talents. Ambai's experiments with long fiction in Nantimalai Čaralilē ("By the slopes of Nandi Hills") and Antimalai ("Twilight") in 1962 and 1967 turned out to be romances from which the author distanced herself when the reality of life broke in on her. The big novel that Alice Munro planned to write remained unfinished in "Charlotte Muir" like Uncle Craig's ambitious tome on the history of Wawanash County and a family tree in Munro's Lives. Both the writers have been voracious readers which their literary creations bear out. During Ambai's younger days she read through all the classics in Tamil, English and Russian literatures. Later, Latin American, French, German and Spanish writers have been covered. The rich mythological literature of India also helped to enrich her mind. Alice Munro, like Ambai, cultivated the habit of reading to avoid loneliness and devoured English classics in her school
days. Later at Western, where she studied, she widened the range of her reading to cover the literatures of other nations like Russia, the U.S.A. and so on. In her maturer years the southern writers of America began to have a special appeal for her. There are in Ambai's and Alice Munro's stories references to their favourite authors and books.

The dissertation does not seek to suggest that Ambai is the Canadian writer's exact Indian analogue. Ambai in Tamil circles, one could say without hesitation, is closer to the Canadian writer in terms of artistic and humanistic perceptions and female responses to male practices. Ambai now lives in Mumbai with her unconventionally chosen spouse Vishnu Mathur, a film-maker; while Alice Munro resides in Clinton with her second husband, Gerry Fremlin, a Cartographer.

The study is limited to an analysis of the stories of the two authors. The scholar has not striven to read the stories in the light of postmodernist theories or subject them to an examination within any feminist ideological framework. This is not without justification, for both the authors have disclaimed allegiance to any of the known schools of thought. The two women have been found to be too individualistic to be ideologues of any kind. It is true that poststructuralist theories have profoundly influenced feminist literary critics since the 1980s. These
theorists point out, "Any simple identification of author and meaning seems to ignore the pluralized identity of the writing subject and the intertextuality of texts" (Morris 139). Pam Morris pauses to wonder, "If the notions of self and individual agency are replaced by a concept of the 'subject in process', the site of bisexual libidinal drives, how is political identity and struggle to be articulated?" (159). Ambai and Alice Munro have been found to be too subjective to be turned into mobile writing subjects with no fixed identity. Consequently, they have not been studied here strictly in the poststructuralist or postmodern context.