

THE USE OF INTERIOR MONOLOGUE TECHNIQUE IN THE SELECT FICTION
OF LA.SA. RAMAMIRUTHAM

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The stream of consciousness technique in Tamil is the off-shoot of the impact of Western literature on Tamil creative writers. The writers belonging to the *Manikkodi* group were mainly responsible for the introduction of this form of fiction to Tamil literature. It was ventured first by Pudhumaipithan in his short story “*Kayitraravu*”. Pudhumaipithan wrote this short story employing the stream of consciousness technique, inspired by Western novelists. In Tamil ‘*kayitraravu*’ means the twilight time betwixt day and night. By giving this title to the short story Pudhumaipithan suggests a dream-like state between sleep and wakefulness in the mind of the protagonist. In this short story, Pudhumaipithan projects the entire life of Paramasivam Pillai in the form of a long interior monologue, in just 8 pages. As the story begins Paramasivam Pillai tasks shelter from the scorching sun under a palmyrah tree. In his consciousness, thoughts concerning his childhood, adult age, married life and old age start flowing. In brief, Pudhumaipithan unfolds the entire life span of Paramasivam Pillai till his death using the interior monologue technique. The story begins with a metaphysical contemplation about the nature of time and life: “the eternal river of time keeps flowing like the floods in the perennial river Ganges ... the division of time into Sundays, Mondays and Tuesday are all basically the same... the present, the past and the future-all these are the products of our imagination to suit our convenience.”[1] This short story was well received in his inner literary circle and it was opined that he had employed James Joyce’s technique to perfection, but Pudhumaipithan did not want to continue such experiments. According to him, it was “just a trick played on the reader.”[2] Pudhumaipithan’s contribution to the development of this new form stopped at the experimental level itself due to his untimely death. The next significant move in this direction was made by Ka.Na.Subramanian in his *Oru Naal* published in 1950. “Written under the influence of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*”[3], this novel deals with a day in the life of its protagonist Murthy. ”Using the stream of consciousness technique, Ka.Na.Su. deals with the habits of small society and the inner feeling of a family”[4], in this experimental novel. During this period, several writer also showed interest in this technique and made minor experiments now and then, but no breakthrough was made until the arrival of Ramamirutham on the Tamil literary scene. It was Ramamirutham, who established the stream of consciousness technique in Tamil fiction on a permanent footing. Ramamirutham himself has observed that he has been acknowledged by the Tamil readers as the pioneer of stream of consciousness technique in Tamil. He recalls how the reader have been referring to him: “La.Sa.Ra.A Literary sculptor. A forerunner of the short story. The first to introduce the stream of consciousness technique in Tamil. Author of a poetic prose.”[5] Though this claim appears exaggerated, it contains certain accurate observations about his art. Time and again, literary historians have classified his novels as stream of consciousness novels and they have been read and interpreted only in terms of this Western technique.

La.Sa.Ramamirutham occupies a prominent place in the annals of Tamil literary history by virtue of his revolutionary role in the arena of modern Tamil fiction. Acclaimed as a pioneer of stream of consciousness fiction in Tamil by literary historians,

Ramamirutham has played a significant role in the evolution of this new form in Tamil fiction. The present chapter proposes to examine Ramamirutham as a stream of consciousness novelist with reference to the selected novels *Puthra*, *Apitha* and *Kazhuku*.

Ramamirutham started employing the stream of consciousness technique quite early in his career. Most of his short stories contain strong traces of the stream of consciousness technique. “*Parkadal*”, “*Dhvani*” *Idhazhkal*” and “*Putru*”, are all perfect stream of consciousness stories, to mention only a few. As the scope of the present study is limited to the analysis of Ramamirutham’s selected novels, his short stories, “*Idhazhkal*” “*Putru*” and “*Dhvani*” are briefly examined to see how this technique has been employed in his short stories. In “*Idhazhkal*”, within the constraints imposed upon him by the limited scope of the short story form, Ramamirutham portrays the inner life of the protagonist through a long interior monologue. When the story begins, Ram, whose days are numbered as he is suffering from a terminal illness, is visited by his doctor, a lady. When the doctor is gone, Ram involuntarily relives his childhood days. His experience as a seven months old baby, suckled by his mother is vividly relived. Ram, now a child in his unconscious mind, thinks that he is looking at his mother’s face and wonders, “this face-how am I able to recognise it though I am only seven months old? Is it because this face has been familiar to me for the past seven thousand years- a face that has never been forgotten. Mother!”[6] The next line that follows this mystic reflection narrates an experience which occurred in his life a couple of years later. This is followed by another incident concerning his boyhood days. Then a series of thoughts follows one after another pertaining to the birth of a brother, their growing up, his brother’s death, father’s death, his marriage, and his mother’s death and so on. The stream of incoherent thoughts continues to flow incessantly till his death. Strangely, Ram is able to see, even after his death, how the doctor comes and feels his pulse. The story concludes with the following thoughts of Ram after his death, ”staying in a petal of consciousness [*pragnai*] I am floating in the stream of life.”[7] In Tamil, the word ‘*pragnai*’ means consciousness.[8] This short contains the quintessence of Ramamirutham’s arts. His metaphysical predilections and the use of the stream of consciousness technique are present in apt proportions in his short story. While commenting on the improbabilities present in the story, Ramamirutham defended them as ‘poetic licence’. “The poetic licence speaks here. It provides scope for the writer to use his imagination. Is it fair to portray the hero’s thoughts even after his death? If he is dead so what? Let us assume that his consciousness exists after death and go ahead [with the story,]” [9]

Another early short story “*Putru*” deals with the experiences of a vengeful young man. The story begins with the young man getting bitten by a snake. As he realises that he is dying, the young man lives his past in his consciousness. A bitter incident which occurred in his childhood making him a thief, his fear of snakes, his mother’s concern about his wayward life, how he becomes a servant in a rich man’s house, the rich man’s daughter’ love for him, their elopement, his leaving her and his infatuation for another married woman, -all these memories crowd his mind. The recollections are described either as miniature episodes or in the form of third person narration. The dying man’s thoughts assume the dimensions in his consciousness. This technique of making consciousness an independent entity, which is not controlled by intellect or voluntary memory is one of the hallmarks of the stream of consciousness technique.

“*Dhavni*” is another milestone in Ramamirutham’s career. It tells the story of Saligram, a married man, who happens to see a dead body one day which triggers a series of thoughts in his mind. Saligram remembers, without his volition, his mother and his childhood days under her care, her death and how he had got into an argument with the priest while performing her last rites. Then, the story revolves round his attraction for a young married woman. When she leaves the town as her husband has been transferred, he learns that she is the daughter of the woman with whom he had once enjoyed a platonic relationship. He feels guilty about his attraction for a girl, who is actually the daughter of a woman he had once loved. The story is presented in the form of fragmentary swinging between the past and the present. It was this short story which served as the nucleus later for his novel *Apitha*.

From the three instances cited above, it becomes obvious that Ramamirutham’s technique is experimental and not conventional. Right from the beginning of his career Ramamirutham’s concern was primarily with the form of his fiction. He was aware of the latest developments in Western fiction and wanted to try those new techniques in his short stories and novels. In course of time, Ramamirutham began to explore the possibilities of the stream of consciousness technique in the novel form as “it provides more elbow-room and I can walk freely.” [10] All his novels have been written in the stream of consciousness pattern which is visible in many of his short stories in patches, attains fullness in his novels.”[11] He has written six novels till date. They are *Puthra* (1965), *Apitha* (1969), *Kal Sirikkiradhu* (1987), *Keralathil Engo* (1988), *Pirayachitham* (1989), and *Kazhuku* (1990). In all these novels the interior monologue technique is employed to unfold the contents.

When *Puthra* was published in 1965, it became a much talked about novel and in course of time, was acknowledge as a milestone in the history of Tamil novel. His second novel *Apitha* is autobiographical in tone and treats the theme of forbidden sexual attraction in a powerful style. *Kal Sirikkirathu* deals with the problem of crime and punishment. *Keralathil Engo* deals with the issue of generation gap. *Pirayachitham* is a sequel to *Kal Sirikkirathu* and contains the same characters and continues from where the latter ends. *Kazhuku* is his latest novel till date and deals with the theme of the essential goodness inherent in human nature. Though all these novels have been written in the tradition of the Western stream of consciousness fiction, considering the limited scope of the present study, Ramamirutham’s first, the best and the last, namely *Puthra*, *Apitha* and *Kazhuku* alone are taken up for further examination to arrive at a clear perspective of his art.

Coming to *Puthra*, it contains the essence of Ramamirutham's craft. It was with *Puthra* that Ramamirutham entered the threshold of the stream of consciousness novel and carved a niche for himself in the history of Tamil novel. *Puthra* was Ramamirutham's first attempt at major fiction. When it was first published, this novel had only a lukewarm reception among the common readers, but created a flutter in literary circles. Autobiographical in content, mystical in tone and revolutionary in style, *Puthra* heralds the evolution of the stream of consciousness novel in Tamil. A close scrutiny of this novel reveals how assiduously Ramamirutham portrays the flickering half-shades of the human consciousness, employing a unique vocabulary and syntax that border on intense lyricism. The theme of the novel appears simple but is rich with philosophical overtones.

The novel is divided into two sections and begins in a rather obscure manner and contains to be so till the end of the first section. Each section in turn has several divisions. To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the structure of the novel, the thematic contents of the novel are examined in the order of their presentation. As the novel begins, a mother, out of her indignation towards her son, curses him that there shall not be any male children to perpetuate his race: “The womb that carried you aches with anguish and I feel miserable to have given birth to you... You shall never have a male child and even if it were to be born, it won’t survive.”[12] Not realizing the implications of his mother’s curse, the son mocks at her. At this juncture, Ramamirutham shocks his readers by giving an entity to ‘the curse’ uttered by the old woman. This part of the proceedings is described by the curse which has come into being and continues to exist in a shapeless form. It mystically drifts and fro between the mother’s dwelling and her son’s house and many other places narrating the proceedings. What is normally done in a conventional novel by the omniscient author, is carried out by the curse in these portions.

Employing the first person narrative ‘I’ for the curse, Ramamirutham narrates its journey soon after its ‘birth’ from the son’s place to the mother’s house where her invalid husband is lying in death-bed. “I [the curse] followed my creator [the mother] ... Boarding train ... reached the place...”[13] As the mother, who is an old woman, walks from the station towards her house, the scenery of the village is described as ‘seen’ by the curse. “On the banks of the lake, in the footpath; palmyrah trees stand in a row. Down below, the fields are seen everywhere. Above, the blue canopy is spread. At sunset, when the occurrences evils of the night that the earth endures.”[14] Finally, it reaches the old lady’s house where it finds her husband lying in his death-bed. It probes the unconscious mind of the dying man, who, on learning about the curse is heart-broken but helpless.

The second part of the first section starts here. There is a long interior monologue of the dying man. Ramamirutham provides the reader with a deep probe into the unconscious mind of the dying man by portraying his unuttered anguish about wife’s curse on her son: “Fool. She has cut the roots. She has grazed the sapling. The mouth-axe has cut the roots...”[15] Here, Ramamirutham pauses the monologue for a while and introduces third person narrative containing only two words observing, “the eyebrows twisted.” and continues the monologue from where it left: “ Destroyer, You have destroyed not him but me. Not only me, but my ancestors, my race...”[16] This monologue is cut short abruptly, and the following prose poem follows:

*Grand sons are more important than sons, the flow of the same thread.
Head to foot
The protagonist of the race
Is born again and again
And perpetuates the race.
I am my grandfather;
I am my grandson
The spirit is immortal
It searches for new forms again and again to manifest itself
Repetition of life is its proof.
Again and again
Shape is proof of continuation
Again and again*

*Continuation is proof of venture
Again and again
Venture is proof of salvation.
Again and again
Again and again.[17]*

This prose poem is a part of the curse's reflections and is printed in bold letters to suggest that this part is different from the rest of the passage that precedes and follows it. Ramamirutham has adopted this device to suggest that the curse performs the role of a commentator. The novel contains many such instances. The significance of such passages is pointed out elsewhere in this chapter.

The old man's interior monologue begins and proceeds till the end of this section:

*By cutting the continuation you have annihilated salvation!
You have wronged the very essence of life!
You have committed a sin greater than our son's mistake. [18]*

And with this incoherent flow of thoughts that are not expressed, the father passes away.

The next section of the first division deals with the son who has incurred his mother's wrath. The link between the previous section and the present one is provided by the curse. When the father dies, it stays in his consciousness and when his spirit travels to the son's house it goes with it, "when consciousness escaped [from the old man's body] I stayed in it and followed it. The old man's life breath went far and reached his son." [19] Now it finds itself in the young man's bedroom and encounters him when he is the company of his wife who is expecting a baby. As the husband and wife are lost in a world of sweet nothings, it descends on the wife's womb carrying the unborn male child. In other words, it meets its victim.

Though the beginning of this section is obscure, a good part of it contains simple straight forward narrative and contains some lively dialogues and descriptions. But for the presence of the interior monologue, the narrative technique in this section is mostly traditional than experimental. When the curse visits them, the husband and wife are talking about his altercation with his mother. His wife admonishes him for his rudeness towards his mother which makes him angry and it result in a quarrel. He leaves the bedroom with a host of thoughts raging in his mind. His thoughts rock between the past and the present. As he is sitting in the drawing room, memories related to such quarrels in the past and how she has always won come to his mind.

She [his wife] knows that she always wins. How many situations like this, angers, quarrels not only verbal; -sometimes he has even beaten her- but; these are all proofs of her victory.

She knows that she always wins. How many situations like this, anger, quarrels –not only verbal; -sometimes he has even beaten her-but; these are all the proofs of his defeat.

We don't understand each other. I am short tempered. she is sharp tongued. We don't understand each other. When the youthful passions were strong, this did not occur to the mind. But the truth has to accepted now. But-How?

For ever-How?

Tut. Hereafter-with her-if I were a man-How many vows like this! But every time...

“Angry? What an anger! Looks like I can't stand it! How can I ?.

Hey Bhuvana, go out and play, go, go-“

When her arms encircle his neck, when breast presses against breast, when a dove like hum escapes her throat, when breaths becomes faster, when vows slip under his foot like sands, when modesty is violated, when becoming friends again-the mockery that glowed in such situation poked fun at him. After two abortions Bhuvana. After Bhuvana, Meenu. She enjoyed a beastly health. Don't know what is going to be born now.

“You won't have male child; even if it were to be born it won't survive”

-Nalayini! As if the sun won't rise.

But today the sun is rising; but in a melancholy manner without any enthusiasm. The east looks like powdered ashes. Is it my mellowing or the mellowing of the east?

Boldness, zest- are they intoxicants we take to keep us going?

Why do we trust these things? What are we waiting for?

The anklet is heard. Louder than ever. Is it because of the weight or done deliberately?

She comes to establish her victory.

Like playing with a gnat tied to a string, she comes to play with me. She stands in the stairs with a coffee cup in her hands. A cold, strange fear grips the heart.[20]

This long interior monologue demonstrates certain basic traits of Ramamirutham's craft. First, as is obvious from the above text, the story is unfolded as it flows in the consciousness of the character. The son's quarrels with his wife leads him to think about their past conjugal life, the quarrels they have had, how she has always won, how she has used her physical charm to subdue him, and his sense of shame while realising it. All these thoughts come ver close to the 'flash-back' technique normally adopted by writers. But in Ramamirutham's case, he doesn't employ connecting links like ' he felt' 'he thought' 'it occurred to him' etc., while presenting the character's past. Moreover, the thought sequences are not logically and chronological ordered. For example, when the son is wondering as to what the sex of the baby is going to be, suddenly, his mother's words flash before his mind. Again, thinking of his mother's curse, he is reminded of the curse of Nalayini's curse lead to certain metaphysical contemplations about life and its

demands and human expectations. All these thoughts flow in his mind without any apparent link nor are they presented in any logical sequence. In the middle of this interior monologue, his wife's words admonishing their daughter to go and play leaving them alone, are given within inverted quotations. But these two instance are not the omniscient author's descriptions. They are only the impressions of past incidents involuntarily recalled by the son. Thus, this interior monologue is an admixture of recollections, reflections, the expressions of hidden fears and admission of a sense of shame, metaphysical contemplations, and allusions to Hindu mythology.

The third sections of the first part is presented in the conventional mode of narration. The author is present throughout this section and comments on the proceedings: "she was standing near the well" [21], "the old lady laughed" [22] and "her face turned towards him". [23] This episode features the old lady and her son, who has come to see her after receiving the telegram about his father's death. He is sour with his mother for consigning his father's body to flames before his arrival, and informs her about the birth of a stillborn baby, a boy. When he mentions the baby's death, he is lost in thoughts and there is a short interior monologue: "My son, are you really dead, or have I buried you because others told me you are dead." [24] As the mother and son argue about her future, she refuses to go and live with him. Again, there is another short interior monologue: "I understand everything. I have nothing more to learn about you. You are a demon. I, your son, am another demon. The woman who came into my life is a demon." [25] In the same interior monologue in which thoughts concerning his mother, his nature and his wife begin to appear, suddenly his agony about the death of the baby is presented by the author: "when that face resembling that a Muruga, the lord's flashed in his mind, his heart melted. Was it Muruga or Murali?" [26]

The above section, which presents a dialogue between the mother and the son, written in simple prose, with the author being present while describing the characters' actions and reactions, is punctuated by the two interior monologues which are introduced without any connecting word or phrase. This takes the reader by surprise. But in reality, thoughts do flow in the unconscious mind even when a person is engrossed in a conversation or engaged in some action. The above interior monologues are illustrations of this.

The next section describes the son's journey back home by train. This is given in the form of one long interior monologue in which he experience memories about his past and thinks of his wife's health. The cesarean operation performed on his wife flashes before his mind gain. The thought of the operation leads him to recall the entire episode of the baby's birth and death. What took place several days ago is given to the incidents in the hospital where he had to agree to the operation to save his wife's life flow in his unconscious mind, suddenly there is a shift and he comes abruptly to the present, mourning his dead son: "My son. It was a murder. A little life was scarified to save the life of a grown up. A lawful murder. My words and another man's hands. What is the difference? I am your killer." [27] This interior monologue and section are brought to an end by the author's observation, "he buried his face in his hands and his body shook. The train running to a rhythm." [28]

The next section features the old lady and her neighbour. The passage of time since the last childbirth is subtly covered when the neighbour tells the old woman that her daughter-in-law is expecting a baby. This kindles the old woman's thoughts and her long interior monologue follows. Without her volition she is submerged in thoughts. She thinks about her dead husband, her son, his present affluence, and his wife's influence on him. In the middle of this thought flow, all of a sudden, thoughts concerning her daughter flood her mind. The entire past of her daughter unfolds, rather disjointedly, in her memory. She thinks about her daughter's timid nature, her arrogant husband and mischievous children. It ends with this lamentation: "Kappu I have lost you alive. Where are you? Are you at least alive?"[29] It will not be out of place to point out that Kappu, her daughter, is not actually on the scene. In keeping with the stream of consciousness technique, the old lady's thoughts in her unconscious mind are presented by the author without the distinctions of place and time.

The next section is written in the conventional mode dealing with the old lady, a shepherd couple and their goat which is causing a lot of anxiety to the old lady by grazing her kitchen-garden frequently. There is nothing very significant in this section from the stream of consciousness angle. The section comes to an end with a monologue by the curse, which is still afloat in the atmosphere.

The next section concerns the son and begins with a long interior monologue. In this interior monologue the son muses about his family life, his daughters and the three year old son, who is the apple of his eye. Again, Ramamirutham has bridged the gap of a few years by suggesting the boy is three years old. The son thinks about various things, mostly apparently unconnected with one another. The flow of his thoughts also attains metaphysical overtones. He thinks of his mother, the money orders he had sent her, and how they had come back. A good part of this interior monologue is devoted to the portrayal of his feelings towards his mother. "Mother I do not know how you are. But I am always thinking of you. The more I try to forget you, the more I am reminded of you. I am not fortunate enough to live in your company. What to do?" [30] The next sentence that follows this poignant expression is, "Meenu was standing outside the house wearing a green skirt and brown shirt." [31] This shift between inner life and outer observation, is in keeping with the stream of consciousness tradition that projects how memories and impressions flow in the human consciousness side by side, often overlapping each other. This section concludes with his giving the boy some chocolates and the boy swooning and dying immediately after taking the sweets.

The next two sections portray the reactions of the parents and the grandmother to the death of the little boy. There are two interior monologues of the son and the old lady. As she is tending her garden, the old lady is reminiscent about the curse but is not remorseful about it. Suddenly, she feels a prick in her finger and comes into the house wondering whether it is a thorn or snake. As she slowly slips into an unconscious state, her early life unfolds in a series of montages in her consciousness: "When everything is thoughts, age, aging, life's characters: husband, son, Kalpakam, daughter-in-law, affection, attachment, anger, conviction, fear, being and dying- all these are only

memories. What is going to happen is only imagination. Incidents are only the links between memories and imagination. All things are the manifestation of the fountainhead of life, which engulfs us like the blue ocean. Everything is blue.... “[32] This metaphysical interior monologue is abruptly cut short by the author with his description, “She felt giddy and feel down. He eyes sank in blue. “[33] Soon the old lady swoons, and the first division of the novel is concluded here.

There is an opinion that the second division of *Puthra* contains a different story. It has been observed that “*Puthra* his earlier novel, is about a mother’s curse affecting her son’s family. In contrast to his episode, the author describes the consequences of the demise of a mother-in-law who was kind to her son’s wife. “[34] This argument is untenable. Both divisions deal with the same story. Ramamirutham is too meticulous a writer to club two different stories together between the two covers of a single book and all it “ a novel”. [35] The Protagonist of the two division is the old lady herself. The link is very subtly suggested in the beginning of both the books. In the beginning of the first division the old lady tells her son, “I came into this house at the age of five. “[36] The very first line of the second division is, “She came to this house at the age of five.” 37] Again, the fact that her husband has never enjoyed normal health is mentioned in both the divisions. Being the careful artist that he is, Ramamirutham has introduced these two points only to indicate that both the division are the integral components of the same story.

The second division deals with the childhood and early married days of the old lady whose name is given only in the second part. In this part, the old lady who swooned at the end of the first division, is reliving her early days in her consciousness. In giving consciousness an entity, Ramamirutham is following his earlier short stories “*Putru*” and “*Idhazhkal*”. The entire second division is given in the form of one long interior monologue. Within this monologue, the impressions, reflections and experiences of the protagonist are given as independent episodes. In the second division, Ramamirutham ceases to be obscure and narrates the story in a matter of fact manner, but it is not the omniscient author’s narration but the delineation of the thought process of the main character that carries the narrative forward. Full of irony, sarcasm and mild humour, the events are represented from Jagatha’s (the old lady of the first division) point of view. Born in a poor family, Jagatha is engaged to a boy who is one or two years older to her at the tender age of five. The betrothal has been arranged at the instance of the boy’s father, a rich man. Jagatha’s mother suspects some ulterior motive behind the proposal, as she feels that there is no need for the wealthy man to choose his son’s bride at such an early age and that too from a poor family like theirs. but Jagatha’s father is insistent because he feels that they have no other choice as they are very poor. In spite of the cautions given by his anxious wife, Jagatha’s father proceeds with his proposal and Jagatha is sent to the rich man’s house.

Jagatha is brought up with love and soon after she comes of age, her marriage is solemnised. Only then does her father-in-law tell her that his son is suffering from a serious heart ailment and request her to look after him with care. Though shocked to learn this, Jagatha composes herself and accepts the inevitable gracefully. The story further

describes her relationship with her mother-in-law, the eccentricities of her father-in-law and her concern for her husband. Though there is not much of an action in this part either, the portrayal of events from Jagatha's point of view adds a peculiar charm to this division. In the last portions of the novel Ramamirutham delves deep into the mind of Jagatha, the protagonist, exploring the mind of a woman with minute accuracy.

The second division also contains several sections. The first deals with Jagatha's early childhood in her parents' house. The second depicts her life in the boy's house as a little girl and her attachment to her mother-in-law. The third presents her new outlook towards life when she attains puberty and becomes wife and mother. The fourth portrays her mental maturity as she takes over the household management from her mother-in-law. The fifth contains Jagatha's reflections about her father-in-law after his wife's death. The second division comes to an end with the death of Jagatha's little daughter, bringing the novel to an end.

The second division of the novel is nothing but a flash-back which occurs in the mind of the old lady as she is about to die. But the only discordant note is a brief interior monologue of the mother-in-law about Jagatha. It is obvious that Ramamirutham, carried away by the proceeding, has included the mother-in-law's monologue to highlight Jagatha's simplicity and devotion. But for this technical flaw, this section of the novel can be compared to Molly Bloom's monologue in *Ulysses*. In *Ulysses* Molly Bloom's monologue is presented in a seemingly chaotic manner, without any punctuation. But Ramamirutham has modified the interior monologue technique in this division of the novel and has presented it as a long flash back from Jagatha's point of view. Though incidents and characters are there, the reader's prime interests lies only in the flow of thoughts in Jagatha's consciousness.

An important feature of this novel is its symbolism. Ramamirutham resorts to symbols in keeping with the stream of consciousness technique tradition. Snake is one symbol that gets repeatedly employed in this novel. Ramamirutham introduces snake-symbol to suggest the mystery of life. Again and again, snake is either referred to or is seen or thought about by the main characters. Ramamirutham's repeated use of the snake symbol makes it the motif of the novel. That snake denotes the mystery of life is obvious from the final snake-bite and the old lady's subsequent death. Since Ramamirutham is concerned with the existential problem of the predicament of man, he is led to think about death and what happens thereafter. This mystery is primarily symbolised by snake, It will not be out of place to point out that snake, as a symbol and motif is employed in almost all the novels and short stories of Ramamirutham. Admitting predilection for the snake symbol, he once explained that as a boy he had a close encounter with a Cobra and "it looked as though there was a bond between us.... That impression is still fresh in my memory... In my writings, I often refer to snakes and employ them as symbols. I am not able to resist it. I will even say I like it. It is a **fixation**. "[38] Again, the device of giving a concrete form to the spoken word. (the curse) which is abstract, has symbolic implications. The curse or the word that exists in the atmosphere witnessing and commenting on the proceedings like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, in the first half of the

novel symbolises the presence of the cosmic force, adding a metaphysical dimension to the novel.

Puthra's style is unconventional and unique. It is a blend of short sentences, phrases and rhythmic prose. Sometimes the sentences are truncated like a telegraphic message leaving much to the inference of the reader. To cite an example, when Jagatha relives her first childbirth in her consciousness, Ramamirutham narrates Jagatha's reflections using words to the minimum extent possible:

'Boy'

Who shrieks? is it mother?

I feel light as though I have entered the clouds of foam.

I am Jagatha.[39]

Such instances of elliptical style are in abundance in this novel. In some places the prose is simple and lucid, making delightful reading. But mostly, the sentences are either broken or too long, suggestive of the incessant flow of thoughts in the mind of the characters. Ramamirutham lays so much stress on the rhythmic effect of his style that he employs unorthodox syntactical patterns for achieving the described musical effect, without taking the common reader into consideration. This results in obscurity making it impossible for the reader to decipher the meaning of a passage at first sitting. In this regard it has pointed out that "the way in which *Puthra's* author Ramamirutham handles his words enchants the readers and transports them to a dream world... He uses his words like a magical incantation. Often he [Ramamirutham] is lost the musical effect produced by his words and does not know whether the reader understands him or not." [40]

The structure of the novel is episodic and experimental. There is no story interest or conflict as seen in traditional novels. The first half begins from where the second half has ended. But by placing the first division first and in not giving any logical connection with the next which is only a flash-back of the first, Ramamirutham makes his intentions clear. He is experimenting a new form with certain new components without conforming to the existing mode of story telling in Tamil fiction. He does not follow the traditional mode of narrative with a plot, chronological sequence of events and story interest, attempted by his predecessors and contemporaries. His prime preoccupation in *Puthra* is the laying bare of the inner life of his characters, particularly Jagatha, the mother. This predilection for the inner life of the characters and the presentation of their thoughts as they occur in the consciousness at the pre-speech level are all the hallmarks of stream of consciousness fiction.

Apitha, Ramamirutham's second novel, is considered by most critics his masterpiece. In this short novel running to just 116 pages, Ramamirutham has incorporated all the essential ingredients of the stream of consciousness fiction to perfection. A milestone in his career, *Apitha* draws its inspiration from the author's personal life and an early short story "Dhvani". This novel is about unfulfilled love and the indelible impact it levels on the individual's consciousness.

Ambi, the protagonist, is an orphan who is brought up by his uncle. He falls in love with Sakunthalai, the local temple priest's daughter. They spend most of their time in the Thiruvellanathar temple situated on a nearby hillock, Karadimali. When his rich uncle comes to know of this, he doesn't relish it. In an angry mood he speaks ill of Sakunthalai and her father. In a fit of fury, Ambi assaults him and flees. He goes to Delhi

in search of a living. His efforts for finding an employment prove futile and he spends his days in poverty and misery. One day Ambi happens to meet a business man who recognises him to be a native of the Cauvery Delta and immediately takes a liking for him, as he is also from the same region down south. He employs Ambi in his business and in course of time gives his only daughter, Savithri, in marriage to him.

Savithri, who has lost her mother very early in life, has been brought up by her father as a frank and uninhibited girl. She is devoted to Ambi and leads a very happy married life contented with her lot. But things are different with Ambi. Though he has become rich as he has inherited the business after the death of Savithri's father, Ambi is not all that happy. He is often haunted by the memories of Sakunthalai, with whom he had been deeply in love back home in Karadimalai. The youthful memories of his unfulfilled love for a girl who had meant everything to him linger in his consciousness, striking a discordant note in his attitude towards Savithri. But being the simple minded woman that she is, Savithri simply ignores his indifferent attitude towards her and is deeply attached to him.

Many years later, Ambi visits Karadimalai with Savithri to meet Sakunthalai in the pretext of having a brief vacation. Back in Karadimalai, Ambi finds everything changed. Sakunthalai is not to be seen and he learns that her father, the temple priest, had passed away and a new priest has occupied their house. They stay in the priest's house, where Ambi had spent many a happy moment in Sakunthalai's company. He has the shock of his life when he meets a young girl who looks exactly like Sakunthalai. Later he learns that Sakunthalai was married to the present priest, a nephew of her father and had died leaving a daughter behind. He also learns that the girl, Apitha, is Sakunthalai's daughter, now living with her father and stepmother. Reminded of the blissful days spent in Sakunthalai's company, Ambi sees Sakunthalai in Apitha. A strange passion possesses him and he is caught in the whirlpool of a strong infatuation for Apitha. Savithri is blissfully unaware of Ambi's anguish for she knows nothing about his unfulfilled love for the girl's mother nor anything about the present fixation for the girl herself.

Driven by the thoughts of his love of Sakunthalai that he eluded him, Ambi starts secretly pinning for Apitha. What started as shock and wonder becomes a wild fetish. Though occasionally he feels that **Apitha** is like a daughter to him, he is not able to overcome the pangs of desire to own her. When Apitha's uncle, a young man, obviously in love with Apitha, frequents the house, Ambi burns with jealousy. He takes a secret pleasure in ogling Apitha. He learns from Apitha that Sakunthalai had led a very unhappy life and was found dead one day in the temple shrine. Ambi becomes more remorseful he becomes, the more is his desire to possess Apitha. One day Apitha's uncle comes in his motor-cycle to take her to his tent-theatre to watch a movie. The very thought that Apitha is going with him makes Ambi's heart ache and he experiences an unbearable pain. Apitha rides with her uncle, the motor-cycle hits a rock and Apitha falls dead, unpossessed either by Ambi or her uncle.

The structure of the novels is comparatively simpler than *Puthra's* but his experimental from the conventional view point. There is very little physical and even the little action that the novel exhibits, is portrayed through the interior monologues of the protagonist. The entire novel is a record of Ambi's inner life, who is rocking to and fro between the past and present in his consciousness. Thoughts concerning the present, past,

future and metaphysical contemplation about human existence keep flowing in Ambi's mind, forming kaleidoscopic patterns.

The novel begins with Ambi's return to Karadimalai with Savithri after several years. As they are travelling by train, the beauty of the countryside is described in a poetic manner. When the reader is about to settle down thinking that the description is made by the omniscient author, he is puzzled by the next few lines which begin with 'I'. Only after some serious effort, does it become clear that it is a long interior monologue in Ambi's mind, where thoughts about the present journey, the impressions of the scenery, Savithri's sitting by the window, his own past before he met Savithri, his poverty stricken days in Karadimalai, his mother's suicide, how he married Savithri, the painful awareness that he has no children and above all the persistent memory of Sakunthalai, his boyhood love crowd his mind. One thought leads to the other and the reader is taken deeper and deeper into the unconscious mind of Ambi with cinematographic swiftness.

Ambi's interior monologues have a dream-like quality befitting and reflective of his mood. The flux of thoughts in his consciousness and the disjoined manner in which they flow is clearly indicated by the use of carefully chosen and meticulously ordered words. For instance, as Ambi and Savithri are going in a cart towards Sakuntalai's house on their arrival by train, Ambi's thoughts begin to flow:

What will Sakku look like now?... How is Sakku?

*'Lodak' 'lodak' 'lodak'- there, the cart has reached the
Agraharam street corner. What agraharam! Even in those days
three or four houses were in ruins. Now the priest's house also
laming.*

Lame priest lame house.

How is Sakku now?

*If the body be a cage, the heart is the sparrow. As panic rises again and
again, it touches the throat in sudden spurts; there is a flame in the
stomach. The sparrow keeps pecking at my heart and it looks as if my
heart walls are breaking... Holding the chest with one hand I get down
from the cart.*

*The door is open. Antique teak. Even after the walls have failed it is
strong...*

what will Sakku look like ?

Nidhama, nidhamma, nidhammmm-mmmmmmm

The hum is heard near the ears. The hum that envelops the earth.

From this source how many 'I's, how many Savithris, how many, how

many -[41] This interior monologue contains the essence of Ramamirutham's stream of consciousness technique. From the present to the past and from the past of the primitive-thoughts keep on flowing incessantly in Ambi's consciousness. This interior monologue depicts a wide range of Ambi's thoughts and impressions like the cart's noise, the dilapidated condition of the priest's house and the memories of Sakunthalai which create the pounding of his heart. It also presents Ambi's metaphysical musing about the cosmic dance of Siva who, according to Hindu scriptures, is the origin of all things- real and illusory- on his earth. Thoughts triggered off by the conscious observation of the ruined house lead to the childhood memories that lie in the unconscious and then to the primitive

racial concept of the dance of Siva which lies in the collective unconscious. These thoughts are presented in a flow without any attempt at separating or ordering them, indicating that the human mind has several layers of thought and that these thoughts are always in a state of flux and flow.

The entire narrative of the novel is moved forward only by such interior monologues with the novelist behind the curtains. As the story progresses, Ambi's memories are presented side by side with his observations of what is happening around him. Thus, by making Ambi recall his past and record the present, in a seemingly disorderly fashion, the story is developed. At the same time prime importance is given to Ambi's mystical reflections pausing the narrative, thereby creating a rhythm of moves and pauses. To cite an example, in one of Ambi's meeting with Apitha, this technique is amply demonstrated. Apitha asks him to follow and walks with the pitcher of water and Ambi follows her. Their walk, talk and Ambi's inward journey are all presented in a long interior monologue, in montages, as they emerge in Ambi's unconscious mind:

As one hand encircles the pitcher, she wipes her face with the other.

She laughs.

When she walks overflows from the pitcher.

Is it me? Am I looking at myself?

High in the sky a star winks meaningfully.

She leads.

I follow. As she walks, my heart aches to see the curves in her waist.

Water overflow from the pitcher and falls in sparks on the ground making the places where it feel cool; but her gait kindles the fire in my heart.

The fire shows many images: " Is it me? or you? You or me?"

Hooks of question rise to reach my face to maul it. I close my face with my hands and walk.

But, Sakku you are not gone anywhere. Only I, out of my foolishness, wandered here and there. But where did I go. Here I am, to prove that I have nowhere to go and did not go anywhere.

You are also here.

But, Sakku you are always a dark question.

Is Apitha your answer?

Apitha, your light dazzles my eyes.

I Follow you with my eyes closed.

What do I feel? Why does that feeling come to me? What do I Understand?

Nothing is comprehensible.

Only one thing is clear; there is nothing to understand. Everything is what it appears to be at the particular moment. This has been going on from time immemorial. The one becomes two and after that division, the union of two follows again only to be separated again. The incessant pain as you and I merge, part and merge again-this is the only result.

Sometimes you are Sakunthalai

On another occasion Savithri.

Again Apitha.

All these are Your change of forms.

I-I-

*Waking out of my dream I rub my eyes and look around...
Sakku, why did you climb the hills and merge with solitude?
Did you do it to implore Him saying, "Oh Lord, Why did you give me up?"
"ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHA- NI"
Did you carry your cross yourself and climb the hills to breathe yours last to light
the lamp in others lives?....
"Why Have you stopped? It is dark. Come. "
She has gone far way, only her voice reaching me. Sakku's voice.
"I have come back as Apitha to tell you how betrayed me.
You have killed me. What are you going to do with her. I have come as Apitha
only to avenge myself."
I sobbed quite unconsciously.
Across the stream, the village lights have started blinking. [42]*

This poignant interior monologue presents Ambi's anguish. He is tormented by the thought of his betrayal to Sakunthalai. He is also tantalised by Apitha's beauty because he has superimposed Sakunthalai's image on Apitha. While thinking of Sakunthalai and Apitha, he is reminded of Savithri. This sparks the flow of a stream of metaphysical contemplation. He feels that he, Sakunthalai, Savithri, and Apitha are all the manifestation of the Supreme Mother, now symbolised by Apitha who is walking before him. Thoughts about the nature of birth and the reunion with the omnipotent after this painful affair called life storm his mind. The memory of Sakunthalai, and her helplessness and death on the hilltop brings in the Biblical allusion of Christ praying to the lord at the time of crucifixion. The exact Hebrew quotation is given to indicate that Ambi is every man. He is at once the individual lusting after a girl who is like his daughter and then, he also represented the Hindu concept of *Jeevathma* and Apitha becomes the Divine Mother, a manifestation of the *Paramathma*. Finally Ambi also symbolises mankind, for in thinking of his plight and Sakunthalai's death, in his collective unconscious he undergoes the painful experience of being an agent and witness of the crucifixion episode.

This interior monologue is significant in another aspect also. Like James Joyce who 'epiphanised' certain ordinary moments into fleeting revelations of truths far deeper and grater, Ramamirutham creates several *Tharunams* in this novels. Ramamirutham considers the present moments as a drop of eternity, containing the past, the present moments as a drop of eternity, containing the past, the present and the future. According to him, "all small moments are part of supreme moments. " [43] Such moments acquire a deeper significance when the characters experience the existential angst and yearn for a solution. At a crucial stage, such moments, though they might appear to be ordinary to others, bring the characters close to revelation. For example, as Ambi follows Apitha, attracted by her physical charm, he experiences a proximity to the eternal as thoughts about eternity begin to well up in his consciousness. First about the Hindu goddess *Amman* and then about Christ. who, according to Christianity, is the son of the Lord. Thus, as Ambi follows Apitha with lustful intentions, he goes back in his consciousness where the barriers of time, place and race cease to exists. Here, Ambi symbolises the individual's quest for fulfillment. There are several such moments in this novel, elevating it to a metaphysical level.

As pointed out earlier, Ambi's attraction towards Apitha is physical as well as metaphysical. When he sees Apitha standing in water washing clothes, he is captivated by her forbidden charm. He observes her physical charm with great relish. "The edge of the saree was touching the water. The wet saree stuck to her body exposing her curves. She had folded her saree up to her knees for convenience while washing. The untanned whiteness of the thighs shone brilliantly beneath the blue saree. "[44] Again, "Apitha stood like a statue. She was silent. Like a pall of clouds a new veil of beauty descended on her. In the forehead, in the chin, in the great veins visible in the white throat, in the shoulders, in the cleave that descended into the blouse... "[45]

His childhood memories of Sakunthalai have made him a prisoner of a desire which he knows is unfair and impossible to realise, but is helpless. He is torn asunder by carnal and spiritual desire and he sees Apitha as the embodiment of both physical and spiritual realisation. The heights of sexual passion leads him to spiritual reflections. Another interior monologue brings out dilemma in Ambi's mind. As he is eying Apitha, Ambi is reminded of the metaphysical truth that Apitha, Sakunthalai and Savithri are all manifestations of one supreme source, the divine mother:

Sakunthalai! Apitha!

The revelation!

The princess who lifted the Palanquin screen and showed me her face at Karadimalai!

Hemavathy, the daughter of Himavan!

When I have found all your intense beauty in Apitha, all of you appear to be the faces of the names I have been chanting all along. In this moment, Apitha, are you also indispensable to me?[46]

It is this conflict in Ambi, ever since his meeting with Apitha that creates an unbearable anguish for him. She is at once Apitha, Sakunthalai's daughter, Sakunthalai's image and the personification of goddess Hemavanthy of the Hindu scriptures. The timeless nature of man's existence is well brought out in such passages. Employing an offbeat theme, Ramamirutham has deftly handled the Eastern element of mysticism in the delineation of Ambi's conflict. When Ambi's mental turmoil is at greatest, he examines Ambi's tragic conflict which forms the bulk of the novel. The novel attains poetic depth and beauty as the reader is taken deeper and deeper into Ambi's mind. Carefully avoiding the chronological progress of the story by making Ambi's thoughts meander from the present to the past and the primitive, Ramamirutham succeeds in producing a dram-like state in the reader, analogous to the flux of Ambi's inner life where nothing stops and nothing stays permanently and where everything is flowing like a stream,

The novel's style is a fine fusion of poetic utterances and minute pictorial details. When dealing with Ambi's emotions, the prose borders on verse and is written mainly in an elliptical style. When Ambi's observations are recorded, the style becomes comparatively simple and descriptive. All the interior monologues have been written in elliptical and suggestive sentences, seldom punctuated. A good portion of the novel has been written in this difficult style which is typical of Ramamirutham's fiction and tends to be obscure.

As pointed out earlier in the course of this chapter, *Apitha* is a symbolic novel. While dealing with this story of inhibited obsession and anguish, by a careful employment of suggestive details, Ramamirutham implies meaning far deeper than what

the story appears to convey at the surface level. Ambi's lust for Apitha is symbolic of the individual's quest for fulfillment. Apitha symbolises the unattainable. This symbolic implication is hinted at by Ramamirutham in the monograph of the novel where he says, "among the many names of *Ambal* (the goddess) is *Apithakusalambal*...In usage this has become shortened as *Apitha*, meaning 'uneaten'. Attracted by the implications of this word, in my imagination I interpreted *Apitha* as 'untouched' and 'the untouchable'." [47] In the novel, when Apitha brings water for his bath, for a moment captivated by her physical charms Ambi experiences the sacredness of the moments and he sees Apitha as the manifestation of the supreme.

As stream comes out of the hot water, what strikes me are those two feet kept closely ...Ambal!. Your legs revealed only to me. That means you are true. Out of the confidence given by the sight of your feet, my gaze rises towards your face.

Oh, Is your face Apitha?

Is the sound of the anklets that filled my heart, the laughter of the Supreme

Mother? [48] There are several instances like this where Ambi experiences a great intensity of inexplicable feelings towards Apitha. Finally, the novel ends with Apitha's death symbolically implying that fulfilment and perfection are unattainable in this birth. It is indeed to Ramamirutham's credit that he has fused an earthly observation with the ethereal awareness and has employed the stream of consciousness technique to examine the spiritual anguish of man. "In *Apitha* the writer has subjected himself to a tortuous process. The agony and ecstasy which he has experienced [and portrayed] are not contradictions; they are the pain and pleasure of regeneration." [49]

In his introduction to *Kazhuku*, Ramamirutham observes that it took ten years for him to complete the novel. He points out that "any writing, be it a short story, or novella, or novel or poem, will reflect the growth and maturity of the author." [50] This novel dealing with the theme of compassion, like his earlier novels, is also autobiographical in treatment. The entire novel is concerned with the portrayal of the inner life of Ambi, the protagonist.

Ambi is an orphan boy who has lost both his parents early in life under tragic circumstances. He is brought up by an old woman who is distantly related to him. This old lady also doesn't have a family as she has lost her husband and has no children. She looks after Ambi protecting him from hunger but subjects him to rude treatments, which make him live in awe of her. One day, unable to bear her bullying, he retorts and runs away from home. After a day's wandering, he reaches the next village, where he climbs a coconut tree to pluck some tender coconuts to quench his thirst. But he is caught red handed by the owner of the grove and before he could get down, is stung by a scorpion and falls down, becoming unconscious. When he regains consciousness, he finds himself in the house of the owner of the coconut grove. He is haunted by the melody of nadhaswaram and later learns that the player is the man's daughter, Komathy. The man introduces himself as Muthiah, a peon in a bank. Ambi learns that Muthiah has lost his first wife, Komathy's mother, and is now living with his second wife. He also learns that Komathy is married to a police man and is keenly interested in nadhaswaram, an art which she has learnt from her grandfather.

Muthiah takes pity on Ambi when he learns of Ambi's past and gives him shelter. Soon Komathy and Ambi become close friends. Komathy's husband grows jealous of this. Muthiah showers love and affection on Ambi as if he were his own son. One day, he takes Ambi to the bank and introduces him to the manager as his nephew. He pleads with the manager to give Ambi some job. As luck would have it, one day a bank official comes for inspection. While checking the cash balance, he steals a bundle of currency notes which is noticed by Ambi. In the evening, when the account and cash balance do not tally, there is panic. Ambi informs the manager about the inspector's stealthy action and they go to his lodging and catch him red handed. The money is recovered but the manager does not make an issue of it and is grateful to Ambi. Making use of this opportunity, Muthiah presses the manager and succeeds in securing a job for Ambi.

Impressed by Ambi's honesty and behaviour, the manager takes him under his roof. The manager is a compassionate man who has lost his wife and has only a grown up daughter, Bala. Ambi does not see much of her as she remains in her room venturing out occasionally. Soon Ambi learns about Bala's love for music and is drawn towards her. But Bala keeps aloof. Days pass by and Ambi becomes very close to the manager. Encouraged by the manager, he writes a service examination and passes it. In the meantime his savings have been increasing considerably. Muthiah persuades him to buy a portion of his coconut grove with that money.

One day Bala becomes hysterical and confines herself to her room. Only then does the manager tell Ambi about her tragedy. Bala had been molested by someone year ago, and since then she has lost her mental equilibrium. Her mother had died only out of grief. Though Bala's illness is under control, frequently she becomes subject to fits of hysteria. Ambi is heart-broken to learn of this. Soon he leaves that place on promotion. One day he receives a telegram that the manager had committed suicide. The manager's doctor tells Ambi that only a few days ago, he had diagnosed that the manager was suffering from brain cancer and had only a few days to live. On learning of it, the manager, realising that Bala would be alone after his death, had made up his mind and administered an overdose of sleeping pills to her and had also killed himself.

The novel neither begins nor proceeds in the order of events narrated above. The entire is over long before the novel begins. Now Ambi is a retired man living with his wife and children. As the novel begins, one day he receives some letters which remind him of his life as a bank employee, thus setting in motion his thought current. On reading a letter, he is reminded of the D.O. letters he used to receive in the bank: "This is the fourth D.O. personally sent by me. You have not sent the above mentioned statement. If there is any further delay, severe action will be taken against you. "[51] A letter that is now lying in his hands has brought back the memories of the official letters he received years ago. Again, in the very next passage of the novel he is reminded of letters from his former customers. And this is followed by the thought of the various letters he used to receive, seeking his help. This association of ideas leads from present to past and from official to personal, connected by no apparent logic. As he is lost in his inner world, he is further reminded of the letters he once received from the old woman who brought him up when he was an orphan boy.

By carefully bringing in the memories of the old lady's letter, Ramamirutham takes the reader back through the corridors of time into Ambi's past. It is from this point that the entire story is unfolded as Ambi relives his past in his memory. He wonders to

himself at the flow of such involuntary thoughts: “What is this 70 M M in the consciousness. For how long?” But the thoughts process is endless and in his consciousness events, people, feeling and experience continue to flash taking the reader along with them.

The novel is primarily concerned with the inner life of Ambi and his reflections about the important people in his life. It is a record of the process of his mental maturity from an adolescent orphan boy to a retired bank official. As Ambi recalls his past in the presents memory, memories of old people and old experiences return to his unconscious mind. Such impressions of the past are rendered in the form of dialogues, description and interior monologues as enacted in Ambi’s mind.

Coming to the structure of the novel, it is one long interior monologue by Ambi which resembles a flash-back in movies. The novel falls into four division. The first division deals with Ambi’s boyhood days in the old lady’s house till he runs away. The second division deals with his days spent in Muthiah’s house. The third division presents his experience in the bank. The fourth and final division portrays his life in the manager’s house. The last scene in which he receives the telegram about the manager’s death serves as an epilogue even as the first scene in which he receives a letter acts as the prologue.

There are many interior monologues in the novel interspaced in the main narrative which itself is already a flash-back. For instance, When Ambi has regained consciousness after the scorpion sting and finds himself in Muthiah’s house, he is given some food. As he is eating, he observes Muthiah’s family and thoughts of his own lonely life flow in his mind:

Is this what is to be born in a family?

Is this family happiness?

Everything appears new to me. But not exactly new. All these things have been lying frozen in my blood, [52]

The story is carried forward by partly such interior monologues and partly by first person narration, which is nothing but Ambi’s matter of fact recollections of the past. When the situation is charged with emotional intensity, interior monologue is resorted to. For ordinary incident Ambi’s impressions are rendered in the first person narrative, often the one overlapping the other. To cite an example where the interior monologue is juxtaposed with plain description, Ambi is lying half asleep in Muthiah’s house, when he has vision of his mother in his unconscious mind and even talks to her:

Mother why did you leave me?

I didn’t cry. My flesh weeps. My heart hardens. She is standing so close but I am not able to touch her.

“Child we haven’t gone anywhere. There is no place to go. Ambi we are here with you. “

Mother, where is my father?

“He is standing by my side. He is smiling at you. Don’t you see him?”

No mother...

Komu [Komathy] is sitting with her hands round her knees. [53] His hallucination in which he meets his mother is followed by the observation that Komathy is sitting by his side which is described in a straight forward manner. But no connecting link is give. This is done deliberately to indicate the unconnected and dream-

like nature of the entire memories and reflections as they rise and recede in Ambi's consciousness.

Mostly, Ramamirutham introduces interior monologues to present the spiritual loneliness of Ambi. Such passages acquire a mystic dimension and are intensely lyrical. A fine example of this instance is Ambi's meeting with Bala in the prayer-room:

*In the pooja room two thieves are standing
Bala, embracing the Thambura
Unbearable beauty
Revelation, Bala
Is dressed in blue
She looks like a painting risen out of the lamp smoke.
In the rays of the holy lamp
She is another ray
What frenzied tune
What turmoil this?
The face changes in the picture
In the glitter of tear drops
Cheeks are shining
Will you come out of the picture
And embrace the girl!
'I am a musical vibration'... [54]*

This interior monologue is written in an elliptical style, trying to convey Ambi's observations, shock and sense of mystery in sudden spurts as experienced by him. When the monologue begins, it records Ambi's reaction to the situation. Stunned by Bala's beauty, he compares them both to thieves who are not able to come out with what they feel. As he stands there, in awe of Bala's beauty and reminded of her past, he realises the intensity of her suffering. Suddenly his gaze shifts to the picture of some deity displayed in the prayer-room for worship and imagines that there is a change of expression in the face of the deity. Then he notices that Bala is shedding tears. He is anguished to see that and wonders if the deity would step out of the picture and give succor to Bala. Now, Ambi has gone so deep in his consciousness that he imagines that the divine itself is addressing him and saying that it present even in a musical vibration. The last sentence alone is punctuated with double inverted commas to suggest that these word do not belong to Ambi. The words "I am a musical vibration", though unspoken and imagined, create a great anguish in Ambi's mind and he is lost in the world of mystical reflections, triggering off his metaphysical musings. The novel is rich in such metaphysical interior monologues that border on intense lyricism.

Ramamirutham introduces dialogues mainly while portraying events involving other characters. The bank scenes are fine illustrations of this. These scenes exhibit lively verbal exchanges between the characters. To cite a brief instance, when the inspector is checking the accounts he tells the manager:

*"It is late, shall we open the cash?"
"RSL, you open it today. Cash checking is your job today. At least today let me not have the agony of climbing the stairs..." "How old are you? Do you know I am three years older than you?"*

“So what? You look like a bridegroom...”[55]

Such dialogues are used to deal with ordinary situations. All scenes featuring Muthiah, Komathy and the manager contain such crisp and absorbing dialogues. But Ambi’s inner evolution and spiritual anguish is delineated through interior monologues.

Kazhuku offers many interesting characters. Muthiah, Komathy, her husband and the manager are all living characters of flesh and blood. This is a significant aspect of the novel because the reader’s interest does not rest only with the protagonist. They live in a world of compassion and understanding, glorifying values. In spite of their personal sufferings, they mean others well. They offer a foil to Ambi in that they are earthly and matter of fact unlike Ambi who is aware of his predicament in the cosmic flux.

The novel has its share of individual symbols adding a deeper significance to the narrative. For example, when Ambi runs away from his guardian’s house, he happens to see a vulture. as he looks at the huge vulture when it soars in the sky, it appears to be telling him : “ In my shadow, all of you are my little ones. (Or preys?).”[56] The vulture is introduced as a symbol for the unknowable omnipotent power, which is the origin and refuge of all creatures in this universe. Again, as is his wont, Ramamirutham employs the snake symbol to denote the mystery of life. Ambi wonders, “are you the serpent that is lying near my feet?”,[57] addressing the unknowable, when he is musing about his spiritual quest. Ambi himself symbolises the individual’s quest for fulfilment.

Kazhuku is another landmark in Ramamirutham's evolution as a stream of consciousness novelist. It is a fine fusion of simple reflections and profusely lyrical interior monologues. It deals with the inner life of the protagonist in retrospect. The narrative technique is unorthodox from the traditional angle and conforms to the norms of the stream of consciousness fiction. It is a powerful record of thoughts stream of an anguished soul which relives its past as it is waiting the ultimate answer for the mystery of life.

A close study of *Puthra*, *Apitha* and *Kazhuku* demonstrates the characteristic features of Ramamirutham as a stream of conscious novelist. The most striking aspect of the selected novels is their experimental nature. They are far cry from the conventional novels which boast of a story, plot, story, -interest, and dramatic twists and turns. Breaking free of all these barriers, Ramamirutham attempts to portray “the clouds of thoughts”[58] in the minds of men and does not bother much about “story value.”[59] He is primarily concerned with the inner life of men which makes him choose off beat themes and treat them accordingly. In the first part of *Puthra* he analyses the minds of a mother and her son locked in a conflict, that refuse to be cowed down by adversities. Again, in the second part of *Puthra*, he examines the evolution of young girl’s mind from the age of five till her motherhood days and the death of her daughter, with microscopic accuracy. In *Apitha* the torment of a man very close to a forbidden fruit which tantalises him and the resultant agony are presented with lyrical intensity. In *Kazhuku* the experiences of a sensitive point of view. All the three novels do not have the usual conflict or climax one normally finds in a traditional novel. What these novels offer is a journey into the psyche of the protagonists, where the reader is made to see a wealth of memories which are the real substance of human existence. When compared to the inner reality offered by the study of the psyche of the characters, physical reality which is only illusory and temporal fades into insignificance. With this objective in mind, Ramamirutham discards the descriptive details of the omniscient author for the interior

monologues which offers the past, present and even the future in the present moment. By juxtaposing the thought impression of his characters without intervening to inform the reader which is the past and which is the present and so on, he allows the memories of the character's to carry the narrative forward. As the novel progresses, the reader is also rocked to and fro between the yesterdays and todays and tomorrows with the characters themselves. For achieving this effect, the chronological time sequence is given a go by. This is the reason why all the three novels begin when the action is almost over, allowing memories to take over where actions have ceased.

The next important feature of these novels is the autobiographical element in them. *Puthra* is based on an incident which is said to have occurred in Ramamirutham's family. Again, in *Apitha* the inspiration was a purely personal one. According to Abibulla, a strange experience had overpowered Ramamirutham when he was worshipping the *Kanniyakumari Amman* in Tamil Nadu. This experience is given a fictional rendering in the story of Ambi.[60] *Kazhuku* deals with his tell tale experiences as a bank official. But Ramamirutham's versatile achievement lies not in handling such autobiographical subjects but in universalising the particular. What he thought, heard, saw and felt reaches the readers through fictional figures, making them relive Ramamirutham's experience themselves.

Coming to Ramamirutham's style, it is a curious blend of simple prose and intense lyrical utterances that defy all norms of grammar and syntax. To indicate the broken and seemingly unconnected nature of the thoughts of his characters, he employs a mixture of short, long and unpunctuated sentences written like a telegraphic message. "His intense involvement with the possibilities of language in which by mere rearrangement of words he can create fantasies, comes to his aid whenever he has to delineate the sub-conscious urges of his characters." [61] At the same time, he is also very exact in his use of words. In this regard he has observed, "I am concerned with man's emotions which emerge like the waves of the sea and my wish is that even as I utter a word, it should ignite action." [62] This preoccupation with the bridging of the gap between the word and action results in considerable obscurity keeping many an average reader at bay. Nevertheless, Ramamirutham's style is remarkable for its imagery and rhythm.

Ramamirutham's use of the Hindu mythologies and the two Indian epics is another important aspect of his fiction. To cite a few examples, in *Puthra* when the old lady is sitting alone, musing about her daughter, the lamp goes out and she searches in vain for matches to light it. She thinks, "it will be somewhere here. But wont be seen when needed. What is this, like Karnan's curse." [63] Karnan is the warrior philanthropist of the epic *Mahabaratha*, who conceals his kshathriya identity from his preceptor, Parasuraman, and learns all warfare, claiming to be a Brahmin. When Parasuraman learns of the truth, he curse Karnan that all his skills will fail him when he needs them most and it ultimately happens in the Gurukshethra war. This famed curse of the Indian epic is introduced to subtly indicate the helpless position of the old lady who finds herself alienated from her son and daughter in her old age, when she needs them most. Again, the son, while recalling his dead child thinks of Murali and Muruga, two gods sacred to the Hindus. In *Apitha* Apitha reminds Ambi of Hemavathy the Hindu goddess and consort of Siva. Again, there is an allusion to the cosmic dance of Siva. In *Kazhuku*, when a farmer tells the manager he is so grateful to the manager for having forgiven him once, that he wants to prostrate himself before the latter, Ambi thinks: "Dhuriyothanan

had it in his thighs. Karnan had it in his ear rings. For Dharuman it was truth. Manager sir, for you it is the feet, is it?" [64] Thus, the vulnerable point of Dhuriyothanan and Karnan and Dharuman's obsession for truth which made him undergo all those ordeals in *Mahabaratha* is brought in to highlight the manager's weakness in ignoring the mistakes of others when they ask for forgiveness. Like the samples cited here, Ramamirutham's novels have frequent references and allusions to the Hindu mythological stories and characters. As a result, in order to understand and interpret his novels in the right perspective, it becomes imperative to possess adequate knowledge of the Hindu scriptures and mythologies.

Ramamirutham believes that some moments in the individual's life are capable of giving him a revelation of fleeting glimpses of eternity. Calling it *tharunam* he creates such moments in the lives of his protagonists when they are facing a crisis or lost in the world of their inner being. Such *tharunams* are found in abundance in the above novels adding a poetic and mystic touch to the proceedings. As pointed out earlier in the course of this chapter, almost all the interior monologues in the selected novels are the poignant expressions of such moments in which the protagonists are tantalised by thoughts of eternity.

Yet another important quality of these novels is the presence of death throughout these novels. Death looms large over the characters and the awareness of death is an integral part of their lives. The pall of death hanging overhead and the lure of eternity appear to be the only real things in Ramamirutham's world. The stress on the inevitability of death leads to metaphysical preoccupations, endowing a deep mystic quality to these novels.

There is streak of abnormality about the main characters of Ramamirutham. They are men and women who have lost themselves in the whirlpool of some powerful passion and they never succeed in extricating themselves from it. There is nothing evil about them and they are people who believe in and adhere to traditional values. But one singular dominating passion makes them different from others and urges them on without allowing them to be average people. In *Puthra* the old lady is presented as an iron-willed stoic who is caught in the grip of anger towards her son. Her indignation is so great that she goes to an extent which normal woman would shudder to think of. Again, believing only in the purity of intentions, she performs the cremation rites of her husband ignoring all apprehensions of others. Her son is equally strong-willed. Even after he realises the power of his mother's curse, he does not ask for forgiveness. When the old lady refuses to accompany him, he leaves her to her loneliness and goes his way confining his feelings to himself. In *Apitha* Ambi finds himself in the grip of an irresistible passion for Apitha, which has possessed him in spite of his awareness that it is wrong. His obsession attains poignant heights when he sees Apitha both as an object of sexual attraction and as a symbol of salvation. His emotion is so intense that in all his interior monologues, the style becomes profoundly lyrical. Ambi's 'Hamletian predilections' endow his characters with taints of the tragic hero of a classical Greek drama. The last novel *Kazhuku* portrays the agony of another Ambi slowly inching towards self dependency. In the face of suffering and loneliness, he braves the odds of life with courage and fearlessness. He maintains a brave front even when he is experiencing many a pangs of agony in his heart of hearts. Nevertheless, the intensity of passions are too deep to calm down and he remains a cool fire.

To highlight the emotional intensity of his protagonists, Ramamirutham presents the other characters of these novels as down to earth person with a matter of fact attitude towards life. In *Puthra* Jagatha's mother, her father-in-law, mother-in-law and her neighbours are all characters who are governed by ordinary emotions with nothing extraordinary about them. In *Apitha*, Savithri, Apitha, her step mother and her father strike the reader as average people, with a mundane outlook towards life. *Kazhuku* also contains such ordinary men and women who offer a striking contrast to Ambi. Muthiah is a simple well meaning man whose only concern is his family and helping the needy, wherever possible. Komathy is portrayed like any other ordinary woman who is not able to get on well with her husband. Kamu Patti, Ambi's guardian is a frustrated widow like any other, with nothing remarkable about her nature.

A close examination of the selected novels reveals that Ramamirutham has made some bold experiments with the narrative technique. While presenting the story, he does not follow any logical time sequence or chronological evolution of events. The entire proceedings of these novels are presented as thoughts experienced by the protagonists. The past is re-enacted as thoughts, memories and reveries in which the clock time of hours, days and years is reduced to a matter of a few seconds or minutes. The omniscient author remains behind the curtains as in a drama. Whereas in a drama dialogues and monologues and soliloquies are delivered, in these novels the interior monologues of the characters achieve the necessary effect. These interior monologues are the unuttered thoughts which spring from the unconscious mind of the characters concerned. These thoughts are presented in a seemingly disjointed fashion and as being in a state of flux to suggest the flux and flow of time and life.

To sum up, Ramamirutham's use of the stream of consciousness technique in these novels is a good example of what Edourd Dujardin, the originator of the interior monologue technique said about the nature and function of this new technique in fiction:

The speech of a character in a scene, having for its object the direct introduction of the reader into the inner life of the character, without an intervention by way of explanation or commentary on the part of the author; like other monologues, it has theoretically no organisation in these respects; in the matter of contents it is the expression of the most intimate thoughts, those which lie nearest the unconscious. In its nature it is speech which precedes logical organization, reproducing the intimate thoughts as they are born and just as they come, as for from it employs direct sentences to the syntactical minimum, thus in general it fulfils the same requirement as we make today for poetry.[65]

Ramamirutham has attempted to achieve this effect in his novels by adopting the stream of consciousness technique in the wake of Western writers like James Joyce. From a close examination of the selected novels, it is evident that Ramamirutham has successfully exploited the Western stream of consciousness technique to explore the Indian spirituality.

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