

## **THE SHOW NEVER ENDS**

**(Translation of Jayakanthan's novel**

**Oru Nadigai Naatakam Parkkiral)**

### **Introduction**

Love is really about trivial things. In fact, trivial things can either nurture or destroy it. Even among people who are affected by it - what helps them grow stronger and more mature in love is not love itself, but the other qualities closely associated with it.

Neither Kalyani nor Ranga, the main characters of this novel, seek love as an ideal. They are engaged in different professions and pursue different goals. Such men and women, who lead full, meaningful lives, do not go about declaring, "This is my ideal, this is my only ideal." In general, people have certain principles, certain likes and dislikes, certain do's and don'ts, and lead their lives within those constraints. This doesn't mean one can condemn their lives for lacking an ideal. Except for a few who purposely seek to flaunt and declare their goal and ideals, a majority of the human population follows this trend.

But all of them are forever engaged in a process of opposing, destroying and controlling others who harbor views different from theirs. Even the ordinary men and women, who have no particular opinions on social, religious and political issues, try to seek, in their private lives, to manipulate or control not only the deeply cherished principles, personal likes and dislikes, but even their simple, ordinary interests.

These self-declared idealists and ordinary men and women are so deeply involved in intruding into other people's lives that they do not realize that such intrusion often becomes the only mission in their lives.

Now, control, manipulation, and intrusion, do not take place in a vacuum. To even accept that such acts as forcible entry into one's home or physical torture constitutes a basic violation of human decency indicates only an elementary acknowledgement of the issue of human rights involved. It took human history considerable time to realize that naked aggression in any form - committed against one's home or nation

and whether it had to do with a person, group or a nation - is a violent and uncivilized act. Indeed, there was a time when such acts were even viewed with admiration. Even those who condemn these acts tend to act in an opinionated way and thereby cause all kinds of problems in their private lives.

It is not that this aggression becomes a weapon only among the legal scholars, religious leaders, politicians and social reformers. The truth is that the fondest of our mothers, our siblings ever ready to sacrifice everything for us, lovers, couples, and others who seem to be acting in the best interests of their beloved ones, still commit aggression and mind control as their way of demonstrating what they consider love, duty, respect, and compassion and in the process, they spawn an entire generation bereft of hope and faith. Many of their victims end up openly cursing life for what it has handed over to them, while others fester inside with diminished love and warped compassion. In the final analysis they are reduced to paying lip service to honor but their values are lacking in self confidence and the affirmation of life.

This is a tragedy that often occurs. The rational thing for victims of such treatment would be to withdraw from life rather than dealing with it. Yet, some may seek to promote love as a weapon against these forces while others may play into denial and vehemently oppose it. Others may give up on life and retreat into solitude. All these actions, while justified and well-meaning, can never succeed in their goal. Even in our own, limited, individual lives, such actions can be of no avail.

What we perceive as peaceful moments in our lives may actually be cracks caused by warding off imminent flashpoints - ready to explode any time in a head-on collisions and conflicts. Thus it becomes imperative that we foster such values as peace, compromise, love, sacrifice, and detachment in our daily lives. If we do not, even what we experience between these successive conflicts is just a lull.

Such a lull can never become a permanent peace - in fact it bears little resemblance to peace. Potential conflict is just waiting to happen. Consequently, the conflict reemerges with even more vigor, leading to even more conflicts. None of this can ever be construed as peace. Real peace is something permanent, something that lays conflicts to rest. Human life has never been blessed with such a prospect.

A constant factor in human life is the lull between conflicts. We are forever engaged in conflicts, and every one of us tries to control and dominate others. This applies to human life at every level - global, social, familial and even individual.

The conflict between a husband and wife described in this novel is a lofty one and reflects my own view of an ideal wife who copes with it.

Kalyani is not my wife, neither is she my lover. She represents me. I represent Ranga as well as Annasami. I take upon all the characters in this novel, just like I do all those from my other short stories.

And you may note this - my characters are neither villains nor angels. They all represent me in various disguises of the men and women I come across in my daily life.

A physical entity like Kalyani is certainly possible, but only I represent the mystery and subtlety behind such a character. To the extent such a personality is viable, to that extent, it is also a fiction. I have depicted Kalyani as I think she ought to exist. I know no such person in real life, but that doesn't mean she can't exist.

Do you see the problems my heroine gets into because she is modeled after my desire? Her peaceful attitude, love as well as her non-aggressive behavior, become suspect even in the eyes of her beloved husband. When she makes no attempt to dispel the suspicions about her, she is accused of being indifferent. But her strong mental outlook allows Kalyani to cope up with conflicts in her life. She is strong enough not to be affected by the external forces even if the readers might be.

Such an attitude demands stoicism and a sense of resignation to external forces. But that might also lead to dire, unintended consequences. Life might become robotic or totally passive. A non-communicative attitude blocks any expression of feelings, robbing a person of the source of joy and wonder.

Rather than preaching communicative and non-aggressive behavior to others, peace ought to become a guiding principle in everyone's life.

When aggression takes place, it hurts the aggressor more than the victim. The aggressor, while 'celebrating' his victory, also suffers from an illusion. He feels constantly threatened by what he thinks he has wrought upon his victim and this only spurs him to commit even more aggression. This is exactly what happens to Ranga in the novel.

This aggression and threats are not just limited to two nations, two rival groups or two enemies. This is no mystery, it is acknowledged by all.

But it occurs in a very subtle process - a situation where even the participants are unaware of what goes on between them. The reason is not their enmity, it is love! It is not because they are alienated from one another, they are fiercely possessive of one another!

It is also a drama of aggression and destruction that repeats in many forms: invariably every time there is yelling and screaming (with no conscious awareness of what is going on) - between a father and a son, a master and servant, or a man and his wife, or when they love one another, care for one another, or show their solicitude for one another.

It is not only national sentiment, religious intolerance or a political doctrine masquerading as some 'ism' will unleash dark forces and destruction. Extreme love, a sense of betrayal, a controlling father or a domineering mother can wreck even more devastation.

When people profess their love for someone yet choose to deny that person's individuality, they 'destroy' their own uniqueness. Consequently, they wail they are denied love and that drives them to more belligerence. They feel proud their acts seem civilized enough to claim their lost love. Some civilization!

Some feel frustrated they have been cheated because they have failed in their aggressor's role, while others are only too happy to curse their fate. Someone may even resort to murder.

Let's recall a couplet from Kural:

"They are fools who say that love is for the righteous only. Even against the evil-minded, love is the only ally of man."

No man or woman ever understands a love that is free of jealousy. Love gains acceptance only when proffered with an element of control and dominance.

This is the main issue that Ranga faces in his relationship with Kalyani. Her love lacks jealousy, and is without manipulation. Full love with no touch of jealousy appears flawed and shunned.

We hear people constantly seeking 'meaning and fullness' in their lives. That is a lie. Human life is complete and full, but our wants are unlimited. At a minimum, we want to satisfy, stubbornly, our aggressive tendencies to deprive the 'other person' of something he cherishes as valuable. His loss, in a wicked way, serves us well.

Even Mahatmas come with the foibles of Ranga. Kalyani is an ideal of my creation. I didn't want her to soar into the sky. She is an earth-bound soul and I have deliberately made her lame. That's certainly better than heart-break, don't you think? So everyone, including Ranga, seems satisfied while extending their sympathy to her. That's how human life reveals itself.

Men are happy when women serve at their pleasure. Women too seem satisfied when men fawn in their presence. It appears this spectacle will undergo change only superficially even as social changes and family traditions continue to shape our society.

I am not sure how relevant this introduction is to this novel. I believe it puts in context the issues raised in the novel and benefits the readers.

#### TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

TheShowNeverEnds was my first attempt at Jayakanthan's novel ORU NADIGAI NAATAKAMPARKKIRAL when I began in mid-nineties translating the author's works from Tamil to English. That happened because it was the only Jayakanthan's work that I accidentally came across in June 1994 in the Cerritos Public Library, near Los Angeles. I had already read it in India it was serialized in the early Seventies in Ananda Vikatan, a popular Tamil weekly magazine. What renewed my interest in the book was the author's introduction - a long piece connecting many dots; it evoked a fresh order in the flux of human relationships - embracing the notion of marriage.

Unfortunately until now, due to circumstances beyond my control, I was unable to publish my translation. I am well aware there is already an English translation as well as one in Telugu. However, I continue to believe there is a room for a new translation for every work of art. Each translator brings his tone and color in his effort; it is in that spirit that I venture this offer.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Deepalakshmi for her permission and encouragement to translate and publish her father's works in the US.

In the nineties began working on Jayakanthan's short stories - recalling I had my own favorites from my earlier reading in India. I started this effort as a diversion - essentially to acquaint my two daughters living in US with modern Tamil literature. Daughter Anupama was the first who went through my drafts and offered valuable suggestions to improve syntax; she also suggested that I try to publish the translations in US.

I showed my translations to Prof. George Hart of the Department of South & South Eastern Studies in the University of California, Berkeley. He encouraged my efforts and posted one of stories - The New Molds - on his website under the category "Modern Tamil."

In mid 2000 when Jayakanthan was to visit USA to attend a Tamil Literary Conference, Mr. N. Muruganandam of Chintanai Vattam, New Jersey, learnt through Prof. George Hart of my involvement with Jayakanthan's works. I corresponded with Mr. Muruganandam and we both finalized a list of stories to be translated and published to coincide with the author's visit. My book TRIAL BY FIRE - an anthology of twelve stories - was published in June 2000. The book carried an introduction by Prof. George Hart. Jayakanthan released it on July 2, 2000 in Tampa, Florida.

After June, 2000, as I continued my literary pursuit with the author's works, I was fascinated by the author's treatment of marriage in his writings. Accordingly I published two Anthologies under my banner Kurinji Publications - TILL DEATH DO US PART (2005) and MADE IN HEAVEN (2006) - both dealing with the theme of marriage.

I thought the next logical step would be to publish The Show Never Ends - the author's yet another portrait of marriage - and I discussed my idea with the author in Chennai. He shared my sentiment and offered his encouragement. I went back to my MS, reviewed it and made some revisions. The author's introduction helped me gain new insights into marriage dynamics and reexamine the main characters Ranga and Kalyani. I found out that beyond acknowledging that "What sustains a marriage is not just love, it is respect and trust between the partners," Jayakanthan was also exploring the latent tension in their evolving partnership: the conflict between intellect and emotion.

Ranga is a dynamic character who undergoes a profound transformation as the narrative unfolds. When we first see him he is a rebel, a maverick, and with extreme views - notably strong dislikes. As an art and drama critic and, especially as an intellectual, he displays contempt for a variety of things: the quality of Tamil dramas he is obliged to review; the upcoming stage actresses who, according to him, are mainly interested in their ultimate goal to become a movie star; the quality of Tamil movies "catering to the lowest denominator in terms of taste and aesthetics of the general public." His strong disapproval extends to people who indulge in hobbies and diversions with 'bourgeois values' - such as caring for roses or raising pets. Ranga's proletarian obsession rebels at such "wasteful activities."

Ranga is initially warm hearted and trusting but as his intellect dictates his outlook; he grows cold, arrogant, and even disagreeable. The more he understands himself - he also suffers from an inferiority complex with respect to Kalyani's privileged background and wealth - the more he recoils from his

relationship with her. He acts foolishly and illogically because he is entirely ruled by his feelings. It is only in the final stages that he realizes he doesn't have to choose between his brain and his heart.

For Kalyani, the stage actress, her strength comes from her stoicism and unflappable demeanor. Even as she is fully aware of the sordid aspects underlying the world of popular culture - dramas and movies - she steers herself clear of the temptations to which an aspiring young woman might fall a prey. She also understands critics like Ranga have their own standards and vehemently denigrate the dramas and movies as formulaic and full of kitsch. Still Kalyani loves to act in plays because that is what inspires her and gives her the emotional satisfaction she craves. She passionately loves the opportunity to take upon a role and savors every minute of it - starting with the preparation of the role, donning the make-up, and appearing on the stage; she wouldn't trade her enthusiasm for stage with anything else as she explains to her mentor Annasami. Even as she admires the fact that Ranga always found flaws in plays that eluded other critics, she casually brushes off his harsh criticism. Kalyani also believes marriage shouldn't deprive her of her freedom to pursue her life as an actress.

It is Kalyani who cautions Ranga against attempting to tinge their marriage with romanticism - viewing it as a love story. Ranga is baffled, turns aghast when Kalyani tells him that love - the stock in trade of love stories and novels in popular culture - is not absolutely essential in marriage; she adds trust and mutual respect are the main criteria that define a marriage. That's when Ranga, always rational and analytical, convinces himself that his spontaneous plunge into marriage with her, in retrospect, was a mistake. With his enchantment of romantic love Ranga has become so possessive that he expects his wife to share his outlook in everything that matters to him. He expects Kalyani must be willing to 'sacrifice' some of her cherished values after marriage; that and, that alone, he concludes would prove her 'true' love to him. Slowly and steadily the seeds of discord - the trivial things the author alludes to in his introduction - intrude into their conjugal life and wreck havoc. But Ranga is honest enough to admit that it was he who 'lured' Kalyani into their hasty marriage. His intellect offers a ready plan so that they both wouldn't be compromising their values: they both must free themselves from a formal alliance called marriage and continue to "live their lives like two good friends."

It is Kalyani's non-aggressive demeanor and her generous instincts that gradually bring out a welcome change in Ranga's attitude. His character, one might say, reinforces the adage that "literature reveals the profound mystery of man to every other man and to himself." The Ranga we see at the end is the one who is willing to live at peace with himself - with his own set of values, unaffected by outside influences. He learns to integrate his intellect and emotion finding emotional pleasure in both his life and relationship with Kalyani. He ultimately finds true fullness with Kalyani.

The novel ends with a prologue - Kalyani attending a play with Ranga. We see her enjoying a new play the way she watched events in her life unfolding before her. To Kalyani human life is always fascinating -

a drama of its own kind - with sudden twists, some happy and some sad - but always an evocative experience. For her the show never ends.