

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

*Kurinji Publications* is proud to present the following two Jayakanthan's novellas translated into English:

1. Redemption

(Original title: *Rishimoolam*)

2. Rocking Chairs

(Original title: *Aadum Narkaaligal Aaduginrana*)

Both these were published in 1969 - the first in *Dinamani Kadir* and the latter in *Ananda Vikatan*. In both, the author takes on themes considered taboo by mainstream writers. He explores a dark corner of the human psyche, using his own inimitable style without coloring the sexual aspect with some cheap sensation or avoidable diversions.

The format the author uses to tell the two stories is equally revealing.

*Redemption*, the author tells us, is a case sheet of a disturbed young man suffering from guilt and self-hatred. The story is told with shifting viewpoints and flashbacks. The characters come alive as they move from event to event. What has actually happened between the protagonist Rajaraman and the person he adoringly calls 'Auntie'? If one sees life as a process of guilt and survival, how do these two characters emerge in the story?

Critics have suggested the author injected a Freudian theme into his story, but while Jayakanthan elsewhere made a brief reference to the Oedipus complex, he denied that was his prime motive when he wrote this story.

The story occasioned criticism (and also praise). While expressing their outrage, some of his leftist friends demanded to know how stories like *Redemption* could help advance the socialist cause. Responding to a reader's

outrage, the editor of *Dinamani Kadir* assured him "The magazine will never again publish similar stories in the future."

Jayakanthan called these criticisms "hollow - not based on literary merits."

*Rocking Chairs* reminds us of a dream-play in the tradition of Tennessee Williams, one of the American playwrights Jayakanthan greatly admired. We may note many similarities in the family dynamics between *The Glass Menagerie* and *The Rocking Chairs*, which is also about a possessive matriarch and her offspring (who are intelligent and have great potential). In spite of this, the family ends up as dysfunctional - it has too many rules and too little love.

*Rocking Chairs* is a dramatic representation of characters in conflict - with themselves, with others and with the situation in which they find themselves.

The rocking chairs of the title stand as a metaphor for a family that has a semblance of 'movement' - but really undergoes no change. The family members are self-centered and complacent, and it is only an outsider introduced into the story who might help them escape from their self-imposed entrapment, yet he also fails.

In the final analysis, the characters appear to be victims whose lives are shaped by forces beyond themselves.

Are they mentally disturbed? Certainly, we are left with an eerie feeling while we watch them.

To quote Jayakanthan on the protagonist from *Redemption*: "How strange and eerie one feels watching his conscience play havoc with him as his mind is tossed around by memories, feelings, arguments, denials and defenses. We should pity rather than condemn him."

These two novellas, which I finished working on in 1995, were the first ones I translated. I want to thank Deepa Lakshmi, Jayakanthan's daughter, for her encouragement in my continued efforts to translate and publish Jayakanthan's works in the United States.

El Cerrito, CA,  
January 19, 2016

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