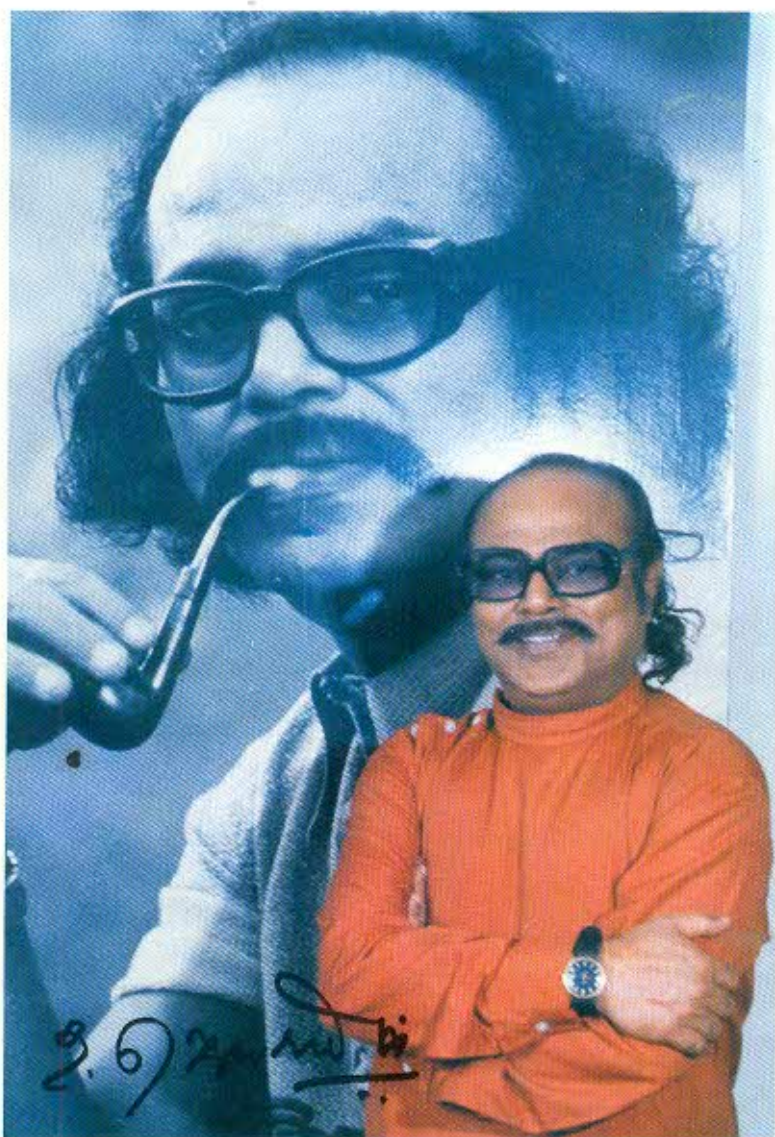




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Sahitya Akademi

meet the author



*"The belief that no stories of literary quality can be read in Tamil magazines, was wiped out by me. The readers and the editors duly acknowledged that. During the first half of the century many writers by their stories elevated Tamil Literature and themselves to the level of World Literature. I am one among them."*

**Jayakanthan**



Receiving Soviet Land Nehru Award from M. Hidayatullah, 1978

There is neither self-praise nor exaggeration in Dandapani Jayakanthan's Statement. It is a fact. Modern Tamil Literature was to wait till the entry of torch-bearing Jayakanthan, known as JK in literary circles, who handled certain themes which were considered to be taboos in the highly conventional Tamil Society, for spear-heading realism.

He stormed into the literary world through Tamil Journals. Within a short span of time, Jayakanthan became the household name in Tamil Nadu. He heralded a new dawn in fiction writing.

Born in a middle class family, Jayakanthan left home in 1946 and finally landed in the office of the then undivided Communist Party of India and took an entry into the cadre of comrades. It became his home as well as school. The Party 'trained' the full-timer as a compositor, proof reader, writer and in all

kinds of odd jobs like pasting posters, organizing meetings and rallies etc. The life in the company of the political and social leaders like Jeevanandham, Mohan Kumaramangalam, Baladayutham and others gave him a new vision into life.

Though he had no formal schooling, he proudly claims that he had better education because of guides like Vidwan B.C. Lingam who taught him Tamil. JK firmly believes that he acquired the knowledge of English through *Discovery of India* and claims Nehru was his teacher of English and History. Jayakanthan was strongly attracted towards nationalistic ideals of Nehru and Gandhi. He also believes that Subramania Bharati's ideology was closer to Nehru's and Nehru's ideas were nearer to that of Buddha's. The ideologies of those great minds shaped the intellectual perspective of Jayakanthan. In the midst of hectic party activities, he was blossoming into an accomplished writer.

The style of Puthumaipithan and Ku. Alagiriswamy, veteran short story writers influenced JK, who in course of time became the colossus of the post-Independence era of Tamil Literature.

He has to his credit about forty novels, nearly two hundred short stories and fifteen collections of essays besides some translations. Romain Rolland's biography on Mahatma Gandhi was translated by him into Tamil. He has narrated his experiences in the areas of politics and arts in two volumes.



With Poet Bharatidasan

He shook the popular magazines with short stories and novelettes of common themes with his unique touch. He grasped the intricacies of the human behaviour with great insight and portrayed them with deep understanding. He daringly deals with the problems of women. JK is a master craftsman in emphasizing the differences between the rich and poor. His claim that his short stories deal with the "problem of problems" is quite appropriate.

*Nandavanathil Or Andi* (A Fakir in the Garden) one of his earlier stories, gave him the self-confidence to continue his writings. While stories like *Naan Irukkindren* (I am alive) were well appreciated by everyone, stories like *Irulai Thedi* (In search of Darkness) gave a kind of shock treatment to the society. *Naan Enna Cheyyattum Sollungo?* (Tell me what shall I do?) depicts the madness and ignorance of the common folk to earn a fast buck. After writing *Suya Darisanam* (self-realisation) identifying himself a Brahmin in the story, Jayakanthan had anticipated a strong protest from the Brahmin community. Instead of protest, it created a renewed confidence in Jayakanthan

among the Brahmins. In *Oru Pakal Nerap Passenger Vandi* (In a Day Passenger Train) a Brahmin woman, while dying, leaves her child in the custody of a low caste old man and requests him to perform the funeral rites on her death. The old man, did so. JK says that he doesn't like pets. Yet his stories like *Nikki* and *Agraharathil Poonai* (Cat in a Brahmin street) brought forth his hidden love for them.

In 1954 the composer Jayakanthan composed a few short stories. That was the first short story collection of Writer Jayakanthan.

*Agnipravesam* created a furore in major Tamil news papers and the controversy led him to write the novel *Sila Nerangalil Sila Manithargal* (Some people at some moments) which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1972. For its realism, narration and depiction of individuals at various circumstances, this work has been hailed as an outstanding contribution to contemporary Tamil literature. When it was filmed with his screenplay and lyrics Jayakanthan won the Best Story Award from the Government of Tamil Nadu in 1978. Because of unusual courage in dealing

realistically with the problems of man-and-woman relationship, the novel created a controversy in the Tamil society.

In *Gangai Enge Pokiral?* (Where is Ganga going?) a sequel to the above novel, the author rehabilitates Ganga and makes her a responsible woman and a good friend of the person who had shattered her life.

In *Sundara Kadam* the heroine struggles to free herself from the shackles of economic and social conditions. It won him the prestigious Raja Rajan Award of Rupees One Lakh and a citation in 1986 from the Tamil University.

In the same year the novel *Jaya Jaya Sankara* got him the best novel award from the Government of Tamil Nadu. In *Oru Manithan, Oru Veedu, Oru Ulagam* (A Man, a House and a World) Jayakanthan propagates universal humanism.

In 1964 he ventured into the celluloid media. About ten of his works have been made into films. He directed and produced *Unnai-pol Oruvan* (One like you) which won President's Certificate of Merit and participated in several International Film Festivals. He directed *Yarukkaga Azhudhan* (For whom did he weep?) and *Pudu Cheruppu Kadikkum*

(New Shoe Pinches). JK actively involved himself in *Karunai Ullam* (Tender Heart) *Oru Nadigai Natakam Parkiral* (An actress watches play) *Kaval Deivam* (Protector) and *Ethanai Konam Ethanai Paarvai* (Many angles, many views). Three of his works have been successful on the little screen.

The continuous reprints of JK's works, establish that his earlier writings and the latter ones are of equal standard and popularity.

*Yosikkum Velaiyil* (While thinking) has been reviewed by the critics as one of the best non-fiction writings in Tamil. But Jayakanthan questions with a smile, "How can I tell them? They are also short stories."

Some of his works have been translated into major Indian languages and foreign languages—English, Russian, German, Japanese and Ukrainian.

In Tamil Nadu oratory and platform speaking are very popular. He is master in this art.

The one time compositor Jayakanthan rose to the position of Editor Jayakanthan when he took over the Editorship of the daily newspapers—*Jayaberkai*, *Nava Sakthi* and literary journals *Gnanaratham* and *Kalpana*.



With Afro-Asian Writers, Samarkand, 1983

The living legend lives in Madras with three children and family. In fact his name Jayakanthan literally means 'success' and 'magnetism'. He has both

in ample measure. As all know, repulsion is also a quality of magnet. Jayakanthan also repels at times. Some say, many times.

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## A Chronology

1934 Born 24th April  
Cuddalore  
 1946 Left home  
 1947 Landed in Madras  
 1950 First Short Story published in *Soubhagyam*  
 1952 Joined Communist Party of India  
 Activist in Indo-Soviet Cultural Society since then

1954 First short story collection composed by himself  
 1964 Left the Party  
 Entered Film World  
*Unnai Pol Oruvan* won President's Award and participated in International Film Festivals  
 1967 Editor, *Jayaberikai*  
 1969 Editor, *Gnanaratham*, Literary Magazine  
 1972 Sahitya Akademi Award  
 1973-82 Member, Tamil Advisory Board Sahitya Akademi  
 1977 Unsuccessful independent candidate in the General Elections  
 1978 Best Story Award from Government of Tamil Nadu for *Sila Nerangalil...* Soviet Land Nehru Award  
 1979 Editor, *Kalpana*, Literary Magazine. Best Story Award and Best Film Award for *Karunai Ullam* from Government of Tamil Nadu  
 1980 Visit to USSR  
 1983 Visit to USSR  
 1984 Visit to USSR  
 1986 Best Novel Award from Government of Tamil Nadu for *Jaya Jaya Sankara*, Raja Rajan Award from the Tamil University for *Sundara Kandam*  
 1988 Editor, *Navasakthi*



With his Malayalam translator, C. A. Balan