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CHANDU MENON

T. C. SANKARA MENON

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Literature



Chandu Menon was a pathbreaker in the field of Malayalam literature. His **INDULEKHA** was the first novel in Malayalam in the sense that it was no adaptation or translation, but a pioneer work dealing with the people and life in Malabar and written in homely Malayalam. It gives very good pictures of a typical Malabar institution, namely the *tarawad*.

By profession Chandu Menon was not a writer, but a judicial officer with a reputation for efficiency. **INDULEKHA** was translated by an English civilian, Mr. Dumergue, one year after the original was printed, as he liked it so much.

The author of this monograph, Prof. T. C. Sankara Menon, is an M.A. of Cambridge. He was in Kerala Collegiate Service and is a retired member of the Kerala State Public Service Commission. He gives a clear appraisal of Chandu Menon and his contribution to Malayalam literature.

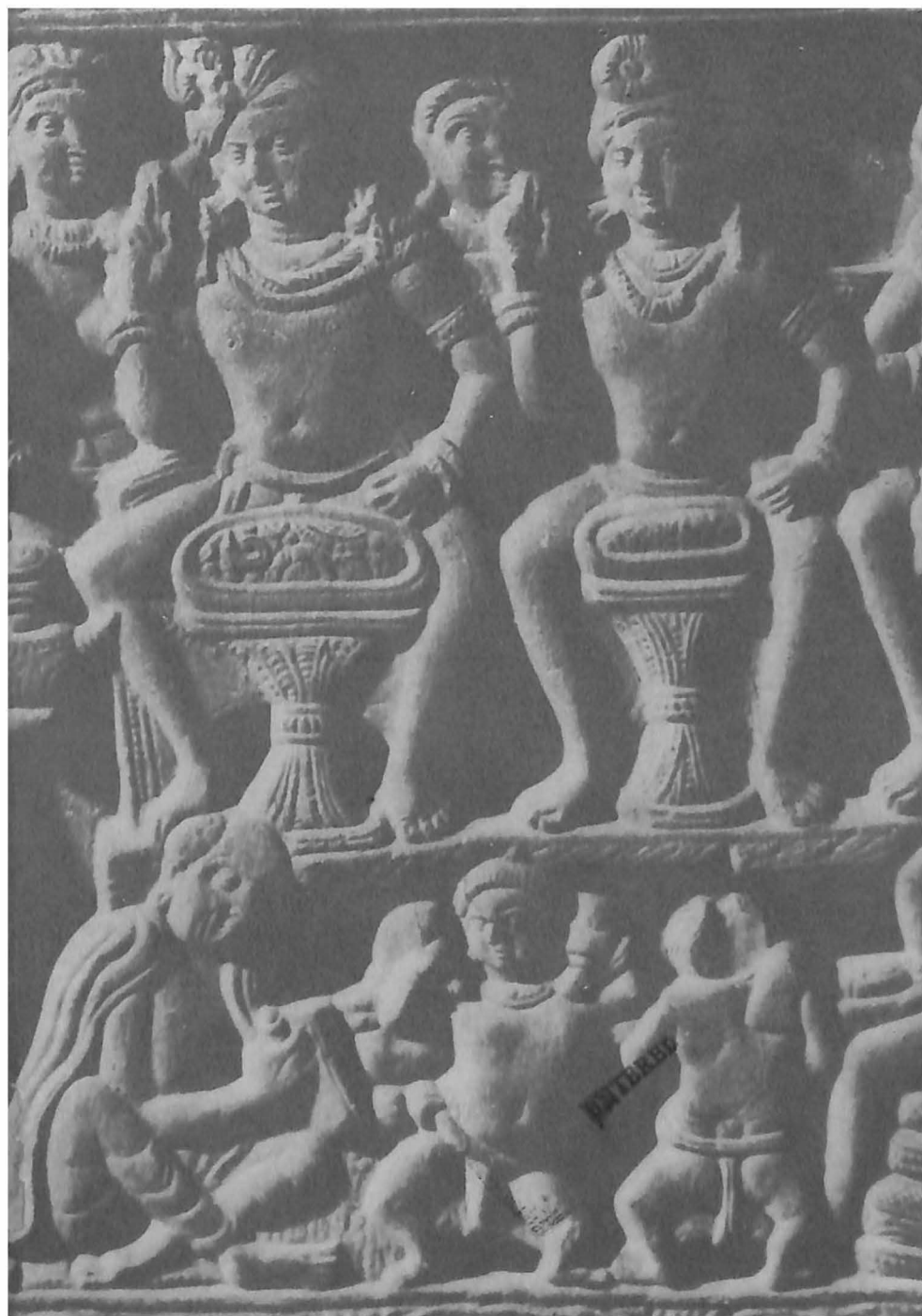
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The sculpture reproduced on the end-paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India. From Nagarjunakonda. 2nd century A. D. *Courtesy:* National Museum, New Delhi.





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CHANDU MENON

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

CHANDU MENON

BY

T. C. SANKARA MENON



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DEDICATION

To the revered memory
of my parents'

Sahityakusalan T. K. KRISHNA MENON

and

Sahityasakhi T. C. KALLYANI AMMA

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am grateful to the authorities of the Sahitya Akademi for the honour of the invitation to write this book about Chandu Menon.

He was an interesting individual, as a writer, as an officer and as a person. When we begin to know something about him, some of us may wish to know something more. When we start enquiries, however, we are disappointed, because biographical material about him seems limited. Anyway, perhaps it is too late now, more than seventy years after Chandu Menon's death, to get any new information.

So the life history in this book does not claim to present any fact about Chandu Menon which has not been published before. It was prepared with help of information found in the books mentioned in the list at the end of this volume and available in print. However, all of them, except two, are in Malayalam and so can be useful only to those who know Malayalam.

Chandu Menon wrote only one complete novel, *Indulekha* and of the second one, *Sarada*, he finished only one of the three parts which he had contemplated. *Indulekha* which was published in Malayalam in 1889, was translated into English in 1890, by Mr. John Willoughby Francis Dumergue of the Civil Service. *Indulekha* is the first Malayalam novel to be so much liked by an Englishman that he was tempted to translate it. I wonder how many among the numerous Malayalam novels published in all these years have fascinated any Englishman or foreigner so much, as to create the desire in him to translate it. Chandu Menon wrote an interesting letter to Dumergue when sending him a copy of *Indulekha*. It is published along with the translation. Dumergue says in his Preface that Chandu Menon perused the English translation and suggested desirable alterations. So it may be inferred that the translated version had the approval of the author. The passages quoted in this book from *Indulekha* are from Dumergue's translation. The second edition of this translation was published by the Mathrubhumi Publishing Company, Calicut, Kerala, in 1965.

As far as I know, *Sarada* has not been translated into English. So, I thought it desirable to give in this book a summary of the

story as far as Chandu Menon wrote it. The passages from *Sarada* which are given inside are my own translations of the original Malayalam version and I am to blame if any passage fails to do justice to the original.

After I finished the manuscript for this book, Prof. P. Balakrishnan Nair of the Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, kindly went through it with care and patience, though it was not easy to do so. Our discussions were helpful to me to see more clearly the reader's point of view. Later, the typescript was scanned by Sri. P. D. N. Menon, (Retd. Judge, High Court, Kerala) and Sri. B. V. K. Menon, (Retd. Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala). I thank all of them for their suggestions to improve the quality of this monograph.

Devi Nivas,
Thevara Road,
COCHIN-16.

T. C. Sankara Menon
14th December, 1971.

In the footnotes, page references are given for the longer quotations from Dumergue's translation of *Indulekha*, second edition, published by the Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing Co., Ltd., Calicut-1, Kerala.

1. CHANDU MENON

'Thou hast made me known to friends
whom I knew not. Thou hast given
me seats in homes not my own. Thou
hast brought the distant near and
made a brother o the stranger.'

—TAGORE

I

Here is the story of a path-breaker, a path-breaker in the field of Malayalam literature.

Malayalam is the language of the people of Kerala, where the percentage of literacy is greater than in any other Indian State, except Delhi. It is one of the fourteen national languages of India and is closely related to Sanskrit and Tamil, but with an individuality of its own. Modern Malayalam is said to be the product of evolution during ages, and attained its present form about the seventeenth century, having been introduced by Thunjath Ezhuthachan who is known as the 'father of Malayalam literature'. Today it has a fairly rich literary tradition in all branches, such as prose, poetry, drama and so on, and it is rapidly growing.

To give an idea of the relative standards in Malayalam literature, compared to the literature in the other Indian languages, it may be mentioned here that, when in 1969, the Bharatiya Jnanpith Prize was awarded for the first time, it was presented to a collection of Malayalam poetry by Mahakavi G. Sankara Kurup. It is the highest all-India prize for the best writing in any Indian language. Besides, quite a number of Malayalam prose and poetry pieces have been translated into English and other languages, because of their quality and wide appeal.

Among such translations, one of the earliest perhaps, is the translation into English in 1890, of the Malayalam novel **INDU-LEKHA**. The Malayalam original was by Rao Bahadur O. Chandu Menon and the translator was an English civilian J. W. F. Du-

mergue. The author was not a professional writer, but a judicial officer and wrote the story for fun to regale his wife and a circle of friends. All the same, it immediately became the rage of the times, and connoisseurs realised that it was a valuable contribution to Malayalam literature.

II

The author's father, Shri Etapati Chandu Nair (1805-1857) was also a judicial officer. He was born in Kelaloor desam, a subdivision of Pinarayi amsam, itself a part of Kottayam taluk in North Kerala. School facilities were rare in the place, but Chandu Nair had education in Malayalam and gained some acquaintance with English language also.

He entered government service in the Collectorate at Tellicherry. Senior officers recognised his superior abilities and granted him promotions. In 1837 he was a magistrate. Three years later, he was a Tahsildar and as such served in a number of places in Malabar.

He married twice. By his second wife, Parvathy Amma of Chittezath family near Kodungalloor, he had five children. Chandu Menon, the youngest, was born on 9th January, 1847.*

Ten years later, in 1857, Chandu Nair passed away when fifty-two years old, a victim to diabetes.

While Chandu Nair was tahsildar at Tellicherry, he purchased a plot there, constructed a house and made it his permanent residence. That property was named Oyyarath and probably because Chandu Menon grew up there, he came to be known as Oyyarath Chandu Menon.

He was only ten years of age when he lost his father and he grew up under the loving care of his mother Parvathy Amma.

* Sri P. K. Balakrishnan in his book on Chandu Menon gives 1845 as the year of birth (p. 213, edn. 1971). Sri P. K. Parameswaran Nair in his 'Malayala Sahitya Charitram' says that the year is 1846 (p. 118, Edn. 1958). In Sri Pala Narayana Iyer's short biography of Chandu Menon attached to the novel *Sarada* the particulars are given according to both Malayalam and English eras, as '22nd Dhanu, 1022 (1846)' on page 223 of the 1959 N.B.S. edition. Sri Moorkoth Kumaran, a friend and biographer of Chandu Menon, has recorded only the Malayalam date as 22nd of the month of Dhanu, 1022. This date is to be accepted as authentic, because it is supplied by a personal friend of Chandu Menon. The English date corresponding to the Malayalam date above is 9th January, 1847.

From a neighbour named Koran Gurukkal, little Chandu had his first lessons. His next teacher was Pandit Kunjambu Nambiar who taught him Sanskrit poetry, drama and grammar. About the same time, he received English lessons from a local school and later from K. Kunjan Menon who was then English Translator in the Tellicherry Civil Court, but gradually rose to be a Sub-Judge. Chandu had higher school education in the Basel Mission Parsi Memorial School in Tellicherry. While studying there he qualified for the uncovenanted Civil Service by securing a high rank in the test for that Service. All the same, he continued his studies. In 1864 his mother passed away, when he was in the matriculation class and then he left the school.

III

Chandu Menon was then seventeen years old and he felt that he must look for some work. He applied for a clerk's post in the Small Causes Court in Tellicherry. The Judge, Mr. T. R. Sharpe who interviewed him to assess his abilities was highly impressed. Chandu Menon was straightaway appointed as the sixth clerk in the Tellicherry Civil Court.

When he had been there some three years, his unusual abilities came to the knowledge of the then Sub-Collector Logan who asked for his services. The transfer was allowed and Logan posted Chandu Menon as the third clerk in his office. Soon he became the first clerk there and in 1871 was the Head Munshi in the Calicut Secretariat. It is said that he was very helpful to Logan in the preparation of the Malabar District Manual, which is considered a classic.

Justice Sharpe had evidently been watching his recruit's work and progress. So much so, when he came to Calicut as District Judge in 1872, he called Chandu Menon and appointed him as the Head Clerk in the Civil Court.

The year 1875 proved of great significance to Chandu Menon because then his clerical life came to an end. Satisfied with his performance so far, he was in that year appointed by the government as Acting Munsiff at Pattambi, and without delay was made permanent as such. As Munsiff he worked in various places like Mancheri, Palghat, Ottappalam, and Calicut. From 1886 to 1892 he was District Munsiff at Parappanangadi and while there, in

1890, he published his great novel *Indulekha*. Wherever he worked, he won the appreciation of the senior officers. We may even infer that, in a way, Logan and Sharpe competed for Chandu Menon's services, while some others, like Dumergue and Davids appreciated his intelligent work. Remember that they were officers very senior to Menon, they were Englishmen and those were days of British imperialism of an exclusive type. If these officers liked Menon it could not have been because he just proved a better clerk and 'dictation-taker' than others. They must have seen in him an enthsusaistic scholar, with keen observation, a penetrating intelligence, shrewd judgment, originality of approach and facility of expression. He must have done very well and won recognition as an efficient District Munsiff and as a good scholar and interpreter of law and custom in Malabar. Because, when in 1890 the Malabar Marriage Commission was appointed, Chandu Menon was nominated as a member, along with others of such status as Sir T. Muthuswamy Iyer and Sir C. Sankaran Nair. The Commission was to report on the marriage system in Marumakkathayam families and any modifications needed in the system. When the report came in 1891, while the majority favoured reforms, Chandu Menon had a dissenting note in it. In the dissenting minute he objected to changes in the time-honoured practices and conventions. He gave a detailed analysis of the marriage procedure in Marumakkathayam families* and contended that they had the sanctity and authority of long-standing local custom, that it was neither necessary nor desirable to introduce changes, the reform required was to give this procedure the proper legal recognition and status. Though there was disagreement on various points between Sir Sankaran Nair's opinions and those of Chandu Menon, there was general agreement between the opinions of Sir Muthuswamy Iyer and Chandu Menon. This dissenting Minute which became famous, is one example of Chandu Menon's independent approach to problems and his strength of conviction. In passing, it may be stated here that the then Madras Government also recommended legal recognition instead of alteration, of the existing procedure.*

Recognising his abilities, the government made him Sub-Judge late in 1892 and posted him in Tinnevely. There it was that he

* See extracts at the end.

began his second novel *Sarada* which he could not finish. A few months later, in 1893, he was confirmed as Sub-Judge and also transferred to Mangalore. He had not been there long, when he had a paralytic stroke and had to go on leave. During this period the writing of *Sarada* also was interrupted. After his return to duty he got a posting in Calicut in 1896.

Chandu Menon's reputation and rank in the history of Malayalam literature rest almost wholly on *Indulekha* and *Sarada*. These, however, are not his sole literary productions. He was so full of admiration for Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran's poems that at his own expense he got printed Thampuran's (Kerala Kalidasa) 'Mayoorā Sandeśam' with a preface, and had it distributed among his friends. Another poem also named 'Nari Charitam' (Tiger History) by Kunji Sankaran Nambiar, was printed at Menon's expense and he wrote a preface to it. By his own confession he was not a contributor to newspapers. Regarding his other literary activities, we learn from 'Modern Malayalam Literature', by Sri P. K. Parameswaran Nair, that Chandu Menon's two English speeches, one on 'Administration of Justice in Ancient Times', and another under the auspices of the 'Sir T. Muthuswamy Iyer Memorial Committee' have been published in book form.

The highest authorities knew that Chandu Menon was an extraordinarily efficient and talented officer. He was an exception to the Peter Principle and at every level of promotion proved his competence. In 1892 he received, it is reported, a letter from the Prime Minister of England, W. E. Gladstone, which said that Queen Victoria expressed her appreciation of the services which Chandu Menon rendered to the cause of Malayalam literature and thereby to India by the publication of his novels *Indulekha* and *Sarada*. The Government of India conferred on him the title of Rao Bahadur in 1897. In 1898 the Madras University recognised his merits, appointed him as Examiner for the Law Degrees and further honoured him by nominating him a Fellow of the University.

Menon's end came suddenly, in 1899. It was a Thursday afternoon, 7th September. He returned home from the court, a little earlier than usual. He had some refreshment and was relaxing on an easy chair. An old friend who was a lawyer had come on a visit and they were discussing some legal matters.

Menon felt unwell and he started towards his bedroom, but midway his steps faltered and he suddenly lay down on a couch at hand. That was all, and a great life passed away.

IV

He left a family consisting of his wife and six children. His marriage took place in 1872, in his twenty-fifth year. The bride was Lakshmikutty Amma, a girl of thirteen, from Kanjoli house. She was the daughter of Krishna Menon of Varachal house, an officer attached to the Koodalmanickam temple at Irinjalakuda in Central Kerala, and his wife Lakshmi Amma of Kanjoli house. Chandu Menon and Lakshmikutty Amma had five boys and a girl. Lakshmikutty Amma passed away when she was about sixty-seven years old. She was a cultured lady with literary tastes and was good in music. With her adoring affection for Chandu Menon and felicitous understanding of his tastes and talents, she was a fit and inspiring spouse for him. Lovers of Malayalam literature will remember her as the 'personage', or 'friend', or 'persecutor', whose pleasing but irresistible persuasions made her husband write his delectable novel *Indulekha*. In a letter to Dumergue who translated that novel into English, Chandu Menon, explaining the reasons for his writing the book, said 'First my wife's oft-expressed desire to read in her own language a novel written after the English fashion'.

V

Both with his family and friends, his associations were happy. His character was interesting and captivating, as his personality was attractive. He was big morally and physically. Fair in complexion, Menon stood over six feet in height, with a proportionately big body. In the photograph before me, he wears a white turban which adds nearly six inches to his height. He wears an open coat, but no tie. Besides the absence of the tie, there is something else that is incongruous in his dress. He has not only buttoned the coat, but has also fastened it with a tasselled cord tied round his middle ! Some wit has remarked that one who wears both belt and braces for trousers is a pessimist. Here is Chandu Menon using both buttons and a girdle to fasten his coat, which

is a more dispensable garment than trousers ! He was, however, no dour pessimist. Those eyes and lips in the photo may suggest sternness and determination. But somewhere underneath them there was a rich reservoir of humour which gushed out generously at good jokes, whether they were by him or against him. Without a good sense of humour it would not have been possible for him to write such an enjoyable story as *Indulekha*. Some of his merry sallies can be appreciated only by people who are familiar with Malayalam language. Thus, when once a friend asked Chandu Menon about his daughter, he replied that he had given her for 'paattam'. It was to Justice Narayana Menon of Paattathil house that she had been given in marriage. Paattam in Malayalam means rent or hire. So Chandu Menon could mean that he had given her to someone in Paattathil house, or for hire ! As you like !

There are, however, many instances of his humour which do not depend on the play of words and so can be appreciated by people who do not know Malayalam. We have known that Chandu Menon was of big build. He had a big paunch also. Once, when the lad from the tailor's shop came to take measurement for a coat, he found it inconvenient to do so by himself, because of Menon's girth. So he requested Menon, 'Sir, please hold this end of the tape in place while I come round with the other end'. If it was someone without a sense of humour, the boy might have got a smack across his face ! But Chandu Menon had a good sense of humour and could also understand the boy's innocence. When he heard the naïve request he burst out into laughter. He also gifted the boy with a rupee !

A brahmin visitor was not so fortunate. He wanted financial assistance and had informed Chandu Menon that he was a musician and a violinist. 'Let me hear you', required Chandu Menon. After the visitor had sung two or three pieces Chandu Menon suddenly said, 'Stop. Now the violin'. When the musician was handling the violin to tune it, Menon told him to put it away and asked him about his native place. The visitor named the place. 'How much does the railway ticket cost you ?' came Menon's next question. 'Fourteen annas' was the reply. Menon called his servant and ordered him 'give this Brahmin fourteen annas'. The servant disappeared, but soon returned and reported that there was no change. Menon then told him to take a rupee and the musician with him, get change and give him exactly fourteen

annas. We might notice Menon's sense of humour in assessing the musician's attainments as worth just fourteen annas and not a pie more.

That humour was sometimes mixed with an element of courage. There is a famous 'Drummer's case' associated with Chandu Menon. It became sensational, not because of the nature of the details of the case, but because of the way Chandu Menon handled it. While he was the Sub-Judge in Calicut, one Mr. Davids was the District Judge and they held court in adjoining rooms in the same building. Davids had the reputation of being very fastidious and insistent that while he held court there must be absolute silence and the dignity of the proceedings should in no way be disturbed. He was quick-tempered and his office staff were afraid of him. Chandu Menon felt that he deserved a lesson and was waiting for an opportunity. One day a case came up in Chandu Menon's court in which a drummer complained that when he was engaged for a certain festival, the employers paid him only the rate for a second class drummer, whereas everywhere else he had been paid first class rates. Menon's brain worked quickly, 'a decision for the drummer, an experience for Davids'. Taking up the case, he finished the oral work in the silent solemnity of the court and then ordered the petitioner to give a full performance then and there. The drummers' exhibition of his skill sorely disturbed Davids at work. Menon told him, 'I wanted to satisfy myself about his skill before giving a judgment'. At this explanation, Davids who had the sense of humour, broke out into laughter, and complimented Menon, 'You are an extraordinary judge !'.

To realise the full significance of the scene one must contemplate on it for a few seconds. An irascible European judge hears a case in all seriousness and dignity in one court-room, intolerant of the lowest whisper and the slightest movement. A mere Indian Sub-Judge, with complete nonchalance, holds a deafening drumming performance in the next room ! Surely it was a scene unheard of in the history of judiciary anywhere in the world ! We must remember also that this was a prank played in India, in the halcyon days of British power. Now we can correctly assess Chandu Menon's courage and independence. Certainly, he did not get his promotions or titles because of servility !

On one occasion in a rich family, when respectable guests were enjoying a feast, their conversation turned to corruption in the

services. When one made an off-hand, general remark that all officers took bribes, different comments began to come from the guests. Hearing them, Menon suddenly rose from his seat, a tall commanding figure and shouted, 'Here is one who never took a bribe, Oyyarath Chandu', then sat down abruptly and straightaway started in all seriousness with the pudding served before him. For a few moments the dining guests were aghast with embarrassment. They noticed Chandu Menon steadily enjoying handfuls of the pudding as if nothing had happened. Suddenly the humour of the situation dawned on them and there broke out a roar of laughter. One can visualise Menon slyly winking his eye and his lips curving into a mischievous smile, when the joke went home.

As he was frank, he liked others also to be so. There is the story of a young visitor to Chandu Menon. The youngster was of respectable appearance and was decently dressed, but a complete stranger. When Menon invited him to take a seat, he did so without any delay, though ordinarily a young man with refined manners might hesitate a little. To Menon's question regarding the purpose of his visit, he replied straightaway, 'I came to request you to be good enough to give me a character certificate'. This request, coming from a complete stranger, could have been considered as just impudence and Menon could have got angry. Instead, he got to talk with the youth, gathered the necessary information and gave him a testimonial. When a friend asked Chandu Menon how he could give a testimonial to someone whom he had never seen before, he seems to have explained, 'Ah ! he was so frank about it and he came to me with a complete faith that I would give him one !'

He pulled Judge David's legs for his censoriousness and made a pretentious musician eat the humble pie. But to the innocent tailor he was generous and to the frank testimonial seeker he was sympathetic. Chandu Menon's own frankness and humour can be seen in his comments on literary productions also. There is a well-known 'Vakils' Club' scene in *Sarada*. Through some of the vakils who are gathered there he makes fun of novels which have high sounding titles, which have no emotional appeal and which confuse the readers by the complexity of the plot. He used to laugh at Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran's Malayalam translation of the English rendering of a Dutch novel entitled *Akbar*. Kerala Varma has used heavily sanskritised Malayalam

for the translation, probably to add to the dignity of the book about a great emperor. The common man, however, would feel the language somewhat laboured and difficult to understand. It did not agree with Chandu Menon's idea of a felicitous language for a novel the test of which is readability and popularity. It is said that he used to open Kerala Varma's book, start reading the sentences to some friend, and laughing frequently ask in mock ignorance, 'Now, what is the meaning of that word?'. His comment on the book was that every copy of *Akbar* in Malayalam must be bound along with a Sanskrit-Malayalam Dictionary ! Remember, Kerala Varma was then the Sahitya Chakravarti in Kerala, the doyen of Malayalam writers of the time. But Chandu Menon loved Kerala Varma's poetical works, specially 'Mayoorā Sandesam'. It appears that he used to recite lines from it and his other favourite poems of Kerala Varma, just for joy, while relaxing on evenings at home. He said that, while reading Kerala Varma's poems, he experienced a great felicity, as if when groping in darkness, suddenly a floodlight had illuminated the area. These incidents show that Chandu Menon had definite literary tastes, and at the same time a fine sense of humour. Regardless of persons, he condemned what did not satisfy his standards, but generously appreciated what was good. Menon could do so because he had the strength of conviction and the requisite courage.

At the same time, note his humility while bringing *Indulekha* before the public, he wrote in the preface, 'I do not know how my countrymen will be disposed to regard a work of this description. Those who do not understand English have had no opportunity of reading stories cast in this mould ; and I doubt if they will relish their first experience of this kind of literature'. He confessed 'I cannot, however, claim for this book any such artistic merit as I have indicated (for successful novels) and I shall be much distressed if my readers think from what I have said that I have put forward such a claim'. Let us remember that *Indulekha* sold at a speed which was a record for any Malayalam book at that time !

In his humility, however, there was no trace of timidity or indolence. It is said that while he was only a junior clerk, he used to finish his work for the day much earlier than his less efficient or less enthusiastic colleagues in the office. He then used to wait quietly till the senior officers left for their homes. When they were

gone he would start singing kathakali songs, with drumming on his table. This disturbed the slower clerks who were still worrying and straining over their duties of the day. Some of them stopped their work in despair when Menon started his pranks, but some joined in the rag. No one, however, could dislike and all tolerated the lively mischief-maker. He was neither indolent nor diffident, but was vivacious and dynamic.

The reader would have correctly inferred that Menon was familiar with Kathakali literature. Among his hobbies were also the study of Sanskrit, Malayalam and English literature. He was an eager reader. He had some intimate friends whose company he enjoyed and who enjoyed his company with his gifts of conversation, recitation, drumming and story-telling. Though he was good in Sanskrit and held the language in high esteem, he realised its limitations. To him Sanskrit was an illustrious language, but useful mostly to know the glories of our past and to learn the use of figurative and romantic expressions. He believed that one had to learn English to know what was happening in the world and what was necessary for successful living in changing circumstances.

Chandu Menon had a great love for Kathakali. He was a patron and a connoisseur of that art. Whenever troupes visited the neighbouring temples he invited them to give performances in his house. He had some favourite scenes from various plays and these scenes he often wanted the troupes to play for him. In the course of their performance, if at any stage, the music or acting failed to attain the standards which Chandu Menon desired, he wasted no more time, but straightaway stopped the show, paid the troupe members their dues and sent them away. On the other hand, if it was good enough he allowed them full-time and remunerated them in ample measure. One Kunju Kartha was a favourite of his, an extremely good exponent of Kathakali, but somewhat an eccentric. He had the habit of talking on incoherently and what he would say or do next was unpredictable. In the green-room his hands had to be tied down so that he would not interfere with his make-up. However, when the make-up was over and he faced the audience, he became a changed man. Only just before he began the actual performance was he usually informed of the play and his part therein. Nevertheless, his representation of the character was superb, his acting perfect. Chandu Menon had a

great admiration for Kunju Kartha, and once, while watching his performance, Menon suddenly said, 'Please stop a minute'. Then, ascertaining the day's price for a sovereign, he got the equivalent in silver rupees, and then and there counted out the coins into the palms of Kunju Kartha. In his liberal appreciation of Kartha's great talents Chandu Menon could be large-hearted enough to overlook the irrelevant eccentricities of the veteran.

When he passed away the people felt that they lost from their midst a fine gentleman with versatile talents and delightful character, who had won their respect and affection.

As the years rolled on, his books made him known to friends whom he knew not, got seats in homes not his own, brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.

'I have had my invitation to this
world's festival and thus my life
has been blessed. My eyes have
seen and my ears have heard.
It was my part at this feast
to play upon my instrument and I
have done all I could.'

—TAGORE

2. THE SOCIAL FABRIC IN MALABAR

'I have brought in various characters, Nairs of high and low social status, Nambudiris of different positions, Pattar Brahmins etc.'

(Extract from Chandu Menon's letter)

Some information about the contemporary social structure in Malabar will be useful to non-Malayalees to appreciate better the characters and incidents in Chandu Menon's stories. The people belonged to different communities. There were the Malabar Brahmins or *Nambudiris*, Tamil Brahmins or *Pattars*, Tulu Brahmins or *Embrans*. There were non-brahmins like Nairs who formed a very important group, *Variyars*, and *Kaniyans*. Non-Hindus also formed a good section of the population, but their role in Chandu Menon's stories is insignificant.

The Nambudiris are considered the highest caste. Perhaps they were the first immigrants associated with the legend that Parasurama created and colonised Kerala. In the 19th century many of them were rich landlords, enjoying life without much anxiety about the future. If they took up any profession, it was only as priests in public temples or those attached to royal or rich feudal families. Their main avocations were religion, learning and pleasure. Their residences called *illams* were centres of learning, hospitality and entertainment. In the *padhasalas* or schools attached to the *illams* free instruction was given in Sanskrit and religious texts, in religious practices and free meals in *oottupuras* or mealhouses. For entertainment there would be a Kathakali troupe or *padhakam** expert. Some *Nambudiris* were good Sanskrit scholars. Outside these they had little interest and so they came to be associated with simplicity for which they have been even made fun of. They had a tradition of fine humour. The Nambudiris, being considered an aristocratic caste, the others like Nairs, used a special language while speaking to them, and also considered it an honour to be related to them. In '*Indulekha*'

*A type of story narration.

the head of the rich Puvalli *tarwad* says, 'The Nambudiripad is a great man, though he is a fool, and a match with him would certainly be a great honour to our family'. The *Nambudiris* gladly took the women of the other communities as their consorts, because for them, in those days, they were alliances without any responsibility, but a more important reason was that, in those days, only the eldest son was privileged to marry in his community. All these have changed to-day and the *Nambudiris* are in various professions, in India and abroad, and their women (*Antharjanams*) also enjoy more freedom and privileges than before.

The Tulu *Embran* in *Sarada* who feeds Sankaran while fleeing from the wrath of Koppunny Achan belongs to the Brahmin community. Tulunad is in Canara. They had almost the status of *Nambudiris*, but not quite, as is seen from the rates of *dakshina* (money offering) expected at Suri Nambudiripad's marriage, 'four annas will be given to Brahmins all round, and the *Nambudiris* will get eight annas each'. The *Embrans* migrated to Malabar and obtained a living as priests in temples. The *Pattars* rarely, if at all, had this privilege.

The *Pattars* were Brahmins from the Tamil districts. *Pattar* is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit word *Bhattar*. Though some of them have resided in Kerala for generations, they still talk Tamil at home and dress, specially the women, as in Tamilnad. They came to obtain a livelihood by trade or service. They became moneylenders, merchants, managers in feudal families or cooks. Some established marital relations with Nair women. They were capable of enthusiastic and sustained effort. In their eagerness to accumulate wealth, some resorted to improper practices which brought them a degree of discredit. The community, however, has produced many distinguished scholars and professionals like musicians, lawyers, doctors and administrators.

Thirumulpads are Kshatriyas. To this community belonged Rama Varma, the rival of Koppunny Achan in *Sarada*. Originally they were feudal chiefs with a status, but did not have powers of territorial administration as *Rajas*. Still, the residences of affluent *Thirumulpads* were known as palaces, at least till recently.

Sankara Variyar who appears in *Sarada* belongs to the *Amalavasi* community. The community-profession is service in temples. *Variyars* keep the temples clean, make garlands for the deities, and often are general assistants to the priest. They are

generally a simple, unsophisticated people. Most of them are acquainted with Sanskrit, some are good scholars and experts in astrology.

The Nairs have a special importance in Malabar. Most often, when one hears the word Malabar or Kerala, one thinks of the Nair community. They are Hindu non-brahmins. They are different from the Sudras of the Tamil district, though some people, out of ignorance, think that they are of the same stock and status.

They have a military tradition. In Malabar, before the establishment of British suzerainty, there were various feudal chieftains and there was little love lost between them. Skirmishes were frequent and the Nairs served as soldiers to the fighting chieftains many of whom were Nairs themselves. When they were not on the fighting fields, they were on the rice-fields. On account of these occupations they developed a strong spirit of independence, a high sense of self-respect and idea of hospitality.

Strong centralised administration and peace brought changes in the Nairs' way of life. Many made their swords into ploughshares, pens or spanners. They entered all the professions except perhaps priesthood. Being generally intelligent and versatile, many did well in their chosen professions. However, one feels that a surviving spirit of independence has obstructed the emergence of good leadership in Kerala and a peculiar or exaggerated idea of self-respect has, to some degree, hindered the Nairs' economic progress. Menon, Nair, and Pillai are only some of the titles used in the Nair community, like Reddy, Singh and Khan in some other communities.

An important characteristic of the social life of the Nairs is the *Marumakkathayam* system or matriarchal system. According to this, the family unit of the Nairs is the *tarwad*. It is a joint family consisting of an ancestress and her descendants in the female line, including sons and daughters. Property rights of enjoyment and inheritance rise through the mother. However, the actual management right and responsibility vest with the eldest male member, known as the *Karanavan*. Legally, the *Karanavan* holds the property in trust for the maintenance of the females and their descendants in the female line. He is the natural guardian of every member of the family. He has no sole right of alienation of the *tarwad* property.

Generally, the privileges of the junior members known as

anandaravans, are the right of succession, in order of seniority, to the management of the *tarwad* as *Karanavan*, the right to object to improper administration and use of property by the *Karanavan*, the right to see that the property is conserved for the continued benefit of the *tarwad*. Maintenance generally meant provision of the minimum needs, even though the *tarwad* had plenty of resources. There was no compulsion for the *Karanavan* to provide even for the education of the junior members. Often, there was a conflict of interests in the patriarch's mind. He had his duty to satisfy the requirements of the members of the *tarwad*. He had his duty to provide for the requirements of his wife and children. The cause of much litigation in *Marumakkathayam tarivads* was the feeling among the junior members that the *Karanavan* diverted unreasonably large portions of the *tarwad* resources for the benefit of his wife and children. The provocation was, sometimes, his discrimination among the juniors or callous administration. There were many benevolent *Karanavans* also and many bad ones were not always bad.

The system has been criticised, because the assurance of the needs of life and equality of the drones and workers in the enjoyment of the family resources would damp the spirit of enterprise and adventure which are necessary for progress and prosperity. Has it not been said that 'the unendowed younger sons of England built up the British Empire'? Whatever be the truth of this statement, the *tarwad* was the family system of which the Nobel Laureate Pearl Buck wrote, 'The family must be the individual's stronghold, his safety and his shelter, and there is no state or welfare institution which will do so well for the child or the aged'.

The typical *tarwad* house consisted of a quadrangular building (*nalukettu*) enclosing a central yard (*nadumuttam*). Tradition reserved certain portions of the building for the women, the men, and the *Karanavan*. The old rich *tarwads* would have separate shrines for the family deities, offices, *oottupuras* (to give free meals to travellers) and perhaps *kalaris* for weapon training. In *Indulekha* the *Karanavan's* residence consisted of two or three spacious two-storied houses, with a tank and bathhouses, a temple, the Brahmin mess-houses and other institutions. Sankaran, when he approached Sarada's *tarwad*, was amazed at the size, number and variety of buildings there. The tank with its crystal-clear

water was so big that it was not possible to recognise people on the opposite bank.

The bathing tank was an important feature because of the Nairs' emphasis on personal cleanliness. Man, woman or child, each must have at least one bath a day, generally an immersion bath. Generally also, each has a bi-weekly oil-bath. In *Indulekha* there are a number of references to the bath-houses or rooms built by the side of the tank to which easy steps lead down from the rooms. There would be separate rooms for men and women.

The big *tarwads* in those great days were centres of active social life. The many members and their relatives were always moving about attending to their various responsibilities; the servants, male and female, hurried here and there to finish their allotted duties, the priest was busy in the shrine, the manager and sometimes advocates came to discuss estate matters with the *Karanavan*, the tenants and cultivators came with their problems. The labourers in the yard awaited or fulfilled the orders for the day. Hawkers called with vegetables or other merchandise, friends and acquaintances came to exchange news, busybodies or destitutes haunted the place for a meal or a favour. Thus the different parts of the house, including the shrine, the *oottupuras* and bath-rooms were the rendezvous for various groups, for work or gossip. "It is difficult to describe the crowds which jostled about the temple, the tank and the premises of the place (*Pooncholakkara Edam*) during evenings.' Now and again there was the additional excitement of a Kathakali, Padhakam or Ottam Thullal performance, or the exposition of some religious classic by some Sastri. There was 'plenty of classic literature at Puvalli' *tarwad*. When Indulekha informs Suri Nambudiripad that there was no Kathakali performance at her home for some years, he is very surprised. He exclaimed, 'Four or five years! No play for four or five years in such a rich house as this! That beats me altogether'.

The picture of the *tarwad* would be complete only with a reference to the compound or manor-estate in which all the buildings were situated and the *tarwad* life was lived. This compound, fenced or walled all round, might be two or three acres in extent in the case of fairly well-to-do families. Within this area the family shrine, residences, cattle-sheds, tanks and so on would be located in positions as required by convention, that is, as directed

in *thachusastra* (science of architecture). The tanks were used for baths and irrigation. In addition, there would be two or three wells for drinking and cooking water. One of these might be reserved for the use of the shrine. A few yards to the east of the main residence, there would be a clean-kept bed of *thulasi* plants, where a lady member of the house must light a vegetable-oil-lamp every day at twilight. A front garden might have flowering vines and bushes as those of the jasmine, shoe-flower (*Hibiscus*), butterfly pea (*Clitoria fernatea*), chethi (*Ixora coccinea*) and mandaram (*Bauhinia purpurea*), while the tanks might have water-lilies and lotuses which supplied flowers for use in the shrine and by the ladies. Gardens at the side and the rear might have creepers and plants growing pumpkins, cucumbers, ladies' fingers, yams, ginger, turmeric, chillies and so on, the products from which would generally suffice for the daily needs of the household. The compound would be well-stocked with fruit-bearing trees, like mango, jack, tamarind and drum-stick, fruit trees, coconut and arecanut palms, banana plants and betel-vines. From these, supplies of fruits and vegetables are collected during proper seasons, and while portions are consumed straightaway, portions are also dried, pickled or otherwise preserved for use on later occasions. The paddy-fields also belonging to the *tarwad* sometimes lay spread out in the immediate neighbourhood of the *tarwad* compound.

To-day most *tarwads* have split up into smaller units of parents and children, and a genuine *tarwad* residence is becoming almost a curiosity for tourists.

Mr. W. Dumergue has given some notes on the Nambudiris and Nairs in his translation of *Indulekha*.

Chathu Panickar who, in expert fashion, pleases the rival litigants in *Sarada* is a Kaniyan Panickar, a Hindu, one of the old 'untouchables' by caste. He is different from Kalari Panickar whose profession is weapon training; Kaniyan Panickar is an astrologer by profession. There is widespread belief among Malavals, as perhaps among others also, in astrological predictions and so the Kaniyan plays an important and interesting part in Malabar domestic life. His advice is sought for any venture, business transactions, marriage, agricultural operations, litigation, first hair-cut, and so on. Kaniyan is said to be corrupted from *ganakan*, one who calculates. I have to say, that some of their predictions are surprisingly accurate in detail, but as among other

professionals, among Kaniyans also, there are tricksters as represented by Chathu Panickar.

Such various communities lived mainly their traditional lives in Chandu Menon's Malabar. Even Madhavan, the representative of a new generation, wore ear-rings and the long front tuft. Some of these people were good, others crooked and some were definitely wicked, like Vythi Pattar. As circumstances brought them together, their different qualities asserted themselves and reacted differently on their words and deeds. Naturally they formed varied interesting patterns on the canvas of domestic and social life in Malabar. In Chandu Menon's novels, the traditional types meet some modernised ones and there is some friction, when they cannot be reconciled. There is the hint that some of the old types cannot stand the test of new standards and old authorities might have to adjust to the pressure of new challenges.

In his novels Chandu Menon has pointed out some of the factors and influences which in his days were likely to change the pattern of social life in Malabar.

3. THE EARLY MALAYALAM NOVELS

Brief reviews of the first novels in Malayalam language will help us to assess Chandu Menon as an explorer and path-breaker in the field of Malayalam literature. The first novel in Malayalam language appeared in 1887. The volume was *Kundalatha* by Appu Nedungadi. One who is familiar with English literature may feel that certain incidents and characters in *Kundalatha* are strongly reminiscent of certain incidents and characters in Shakespeare's *Tempest* and *Cymbeline* and Scott's *Ivanhoe*. In *Kundalatha*, however, there is the Indian touch. Thus the place-names in the story are Indian, for example, Dharmapuri, Kalinga and Kuntala; so also are the characters like Taranathan, Kapilanathan and Kundalatha. Where the places were, or when the incidents took place, we do not know. They seem to have occurred 'once upon a time', in a 'never-never land'. The characters are non-Malayalee, the location is outside Malabar, many incidents are not realistic or associated with Malayalee life and culture. The language, however, is Malayalam, and in this sense only, it is one of the first Malayalam novels.

Then appeared *Indulekha* in 1890. Chandu Menon's *Sarada*, Part I, was published in 1892. In between these years C. V. Raman, Pillai gave his famous novel *Marthanda Varma* to Malayalam literature in 1891. It is a historical novel and deals with a great king Veera Marthanda Varma of Travancore, of about two hundred years ago. Naturally, the events take place in Kerala, the characters also are from Kerala. The language is Malayalam, but not the homely type. The historical novel is attractive because the distance of time lends enchantment to the view. *Marthanda Varma* is a novel of high quality, dealing with a king and feudal homes, the loyalties and treacheries in Travancore in the latter half of the eighteenth century. From the biographies of the author Raman Pillai, we learn that he was an authority on Malayalam literature, that he was a professional writer, and that he took some time to discuss, write, revise and polish *Marthanda Varma*. In all these matters relating to the profession of the author, the circumstances of writing, the matter and language, *Marthanda Varma*

is different from *Indulekha*. Some critics have referred to some resemblances between *Marthanda Varma* and Scott's *Ivanhoe*. For example, Sri Balakrishnan writes that C. V. (Raman Pillai) who started to write an original historical novel, wrote it, advertently or inadvertently, in the mould of *Ivanhoe*. On the other hand, Chandu Menon who started to write a novel in the model of *Henrietta Temple* created a new social novel. This is not to belittle Raman Pillai as a novelist or *Marthanda Varma* as a novel. He is an able novelist, his book is a great novel. This is only to say that Chandu Menon also is a gifted novelist, that *Indulekha* is a different and a completely new type of novel.

Another scholarly novel was *Akbar*, by Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran. It would appear that he wrote it about 1880, and there was nothing of Kerala in it, except the language. Even the language is not the ordinary popular Malayalam, but with so much of Sanskrit, that Chandu Menon indicated that it was somewhat difficult to follow. It was not an original novel, it was only a translation, actually a 'second-hand' translation of an original. The original *Akbar* was in Dutch language, it had been translated into English and this English translation was again translated into Malayalam.

Earlier we said that *Indulekha* appeared in 1890. Chandu Menon has recorded, 'I began to write this book on June 11, and finished it on 17th August 1889'. Perhaps the decisions about printing and so making it available for the public at large took a little time and some more time to print it. In the preface to the second edition of *Indulekha*, Chandu Menon has written 'all the copies of the first edition of this book which began to sell in the beginning of January 1890 were all sold out before 30th March 1890'. Even today such a demand for a Malayalam novel is unusual, in those days it was fantastic. In those days the book was something altogether new, and some critics are of opinion that even today *Indulekha* is a unique novel in Malayalam literature.

The Malayalam translation of *Akbar* came into being because a Maharaja of Travancore liked an English translation of the book and desired Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran to translate it into Malayalam so as to make it accessible to Malayalees. The genesis of *Indulekha* is different. Chandu Menon himself has given us the reasons why he wrote *Indulekha*. Actually

edition sold out in less than three months, between 1890 and 1956 it ran into fifty-three editions !

Two years after *Indulekha* was first published, that is in 1892, the first part of Chandu Menon's second novel, *Sarada*, was published. In those two years he could get ready the materials for writing a novel like *Sarada*, where the story is about litigation involving the claims of an individual for recognition and acceptance into a *marumakkathayam tarwad* and the bonafides of the individual. During the two years which intervened he gained more experience as a responsible judicial officer. More important was his work as member of the Malabar Marriage Commission when he was able to acquaint himself with very many details in the history of many families in Malabar,—the different domestic arrangements, the varied interests of members, of outsiders fanning differences into conflicts, of complicated and protracted litigation leading to ruin or resurrection. In the course of the Commission's investigations he came across various incidents and characters which he could fit admirably into his contemplated novel. From June to August 1889 he was writing up *Indulekha* during the hours left after his work in the courts. From January 1889 when he gave the promise to his 'persecutor' that he would write a novel, to June 11 when he actually began writing it, it can be presumed that he was making preparations to write it. In the preface to the second edition of *Indulekha* he has stated, 'Even some time before June, I had begun to think about the story in this book. And, from time to time, wherever necessary, I had also prepared notes and preserved them.' This also was done in the midst of his official duties. Similarly between 1890 and 1892, happy and confident with the popularity of his first novel, when he heard the cases in his court, and when he interviewed members of numerous *tarwads* in the course of the Commission work, he stocked materials for *Sarada*. And in 1892, one year after the report of the Commission was published, he gave us the first part of *Sarada*. All that he said in the preface to that book, dated August 19, 1892, was, 'In these days when novels in Malayalam language are daily increasing in number, I have nothing special to say as I write a second book of this type and publish it.'

This preface is less than twenty lines in all. The preface to *Indulekha* fills about five pages, because it was not only his first novel, but it was the first novel of its type. He thought it

fit to explain to the public the circumstances which induced him to write such a novel. Regarding *Sarada* he only said that the first part was being published earlier at the insistence of some friends and that he hoped to publish the second and third parts before the year ended. But death took him before his time. To the judiciary and Malayalam literature it was a great loss. To Malayalam literature the loss is irreparable.

4. INDULEKHA

‘ All Mankind loves a lover ’—EMERSON

Indulekha is a love-story, where the lovers are separated and unhappy for a while, but are united and happy at the end. This is a bare outline of the story.

A summary* was prepared by Chandu Menon himself for the information of Dumergue. That summary emphasised, one might feel, such features which he believed to be the highlights of the story and which he desired Dumergue (and other readers) to note. So, it is given below :—

“ It will be seen that my story commences with a conversation between Madhavan, the hero of the novel, and his relations (all members of a Nair *tarwad*) about a quarrel that Madhavan had with his karanavan or chief of his house, concerning the education of a juvenile member of the *tarwad*. The events are supposed to have taken place in our own times in some part of south Malabar. The scene of the principal events in the story may not inappropriately be fixed at some place not far away from native Cochin.

The following is a list of the chief characters in the novel :—

1. Panchu Menon, the Karanavan or chief of the Chambhazhiyot Puvalli house.
2. Panchu Menon's younger brother Sankara Menon.
3. Panchu Menon's direct sister's daughter Parvathi Amma.
4. Parvathi Amma's son Madhavan, B.A., B.L.
5. Panchu Menon's grand-mother's sister's grand-daughter Kummini Amma.
6. Kummini Amma's son Chather Menon.
7. -do- -do- Gopalan.
8. -do- daughter Kalliani Kutty.
9. -do- son Shinnan (a boy 9 or 10 years old).
10. Panchu Menon's wife Kunhi Kutty Amma.
11. -do- daughter Lakshmi Kutty Amma.
12. Panchu Menon's son Govinda Kutty Menon.
13. Lakshmi Kutty Amma's daughter and Panchu Menon's grand-daughter Indulekha.

* p. xvii.

14. Kesavan Nambudiri, the second husband of Lakshmi Kutty Amma who was first married to Kilimanur Rajah (since deceased), the father of Indulekha.

15. Madhavan's father Govinda Panikkar.

Chapter 1 opens, as stated above, with a conversation between Chather Menon and Madhavan. Chather Menon, though ignorant of English, is a very intelligent and prudent young man, and although Madhavan was advocating the cause of Chather Menon's own direct brother, did not approve of what Madhavan said to his karanavan. The cause of the quarrel was this :—

Madhavan wished that his karanavan, Panchu Menon, should educate the little boy Shinnan, but Panchu Menon, who was a narrow-minded old man of seventy years of age, did not agree with Madhavan's views and refused to pay for the boy's schooling, whereupon harsh words passed between the old karanavan and the young graduate. The karanavan was exceedingly wroth with what he considered Madhavan's impertinence. Madhavan, too, was exasperated at Panchu Menon's conduct, for that honest, brave young man detested his karanavan's partiality for his direct anandaravans. Panchu Menon would have spent any amount of money in educating Shinnan if the boy had been a direct anandaravan of his like Madhavan, but the boy (though in truth he had as good a right to be educated at *tarwad* expense as Madhavan or any other member of the *tarwad*) happened to be a distant relation of Panchu Menon and, as not infrequently is the case in Malabar *tarwads*, the old, ignorant, self-willed karanavans educate only their direct nephews and bring up their distant anandaravans as agriculturists or as servant boys in the *tarwad* house. The high-spirited and honest young Madhavan considered such conduct on the part of the karanavan extremely reprehensible and shameful, and consequently spoke on the subject strongly, with no great reverence for the high position of the latter in the *tarwad*. The chapter concludes with a further conversation on the same subject between Madhavan and his junior uncle Sankara Menon and his mother Parvathi Amma. This chapter also contains a detailed description of Madhavan both as to his physical appearance and intellectual attainments.

Madhavan is a graduate both in Arts and Law. He is extremely handsome in appearance and extraordinarily intelligent and a

good Sanskrit scholar. He excelled in sports and English games, such as cricket and lawn tennis.

The second chapter (Indulekha) is devoted to the heroine. The chapter opens with a few observations on female beauty in general considered relatively, and then goes on describing Indulekha's personal charms, her intelligence, her education, her manners, her dress, etc., and finally shows how Madhavan and Indulekha became engaged.

It must be remarked here that my story commences with the events that happened a few months after they had plighted their troth, but in this second chapter I have given some incidents of Madhavan's courtship which took place before the commencement of our story. As stated at the outset, my object is to write a novel after the English fashion, and it is evident that no ordinary Malayalee lady can fill the role of the heroine of such a story. My Indulekha is not, therefore, an ordinary Malayalee lady. She knows English, Sanskrit, music etc., and is at once a very beautiful and a very accomplished young lady of about seventeen years of age when our story opens. Some of my readers may object that it would be impossible to find a young Nair lady of Indulekha's intellectual attainments in Malabar. To this objection my answer is that those who make it are not acquainted with the educated women now existing in Malabar. I myself know two or three respectable Nair ladies, now living, who in intellectual culture (save and except in the knowledge of English), strength of character and general knowledge, can well hold comparison with Indulekha. As for beauty, personal charms, refined manners, simplicity of taste, conversational powers, wit and humour, I can show hundreds of young ladies in respectable Nair *tarwads* who would undoubtedly come up to the standard of my Indulekha.

The only thing which my readers might reasonably take exception to is Indulekha's knowledge of English; but as one of my objects in writing this book is to illustrate how a young Malayalee woman, possessing, in addition to her natural personal charms and intellectual culture, a knowledge of the English language would conduct herself in matters of supreme interest to her, such as the choosing of a partner in life, I have thought it necessary that my Indulekha should be conversant with the richest language of the world.

It will be seen that I have related the circumstances under which

Indulekha happened to acquire a knowledge of the English language and various other accomplishments found in her, and I shall leave it to my readers to decide whether there is any improbability suggesting itself in the narrative in connection with her education.

As regards the story of Madhavan's love and courtship itself contained in this chapter, there is, in my humble opinion, nothing in the conversation or the manners of the lovers which can be construed as strange in a pair of the educated class of Nairs. There are many Nair ladies in Malabar who would talk like Indulekha to their lovers, and as for the way the engagement was brought about, I think there is nothing strange or uncommon in the incident. I know of several cases educated and accomplished Nair ladies of respectable *tarwads* having married for love in utter defiance of the wishes of their karanavans or parents. Love is the same whether in England or India. In Malabar it is true that women are more or less subject to the tyranny of their karanavans or parents in matters relating to matrimony; yet in my opinion there are no women in India who enjoy, as a class, greater freedom in the selection of their husbands than the Nair women of Malabar. Even before the Western civilization began to spread its influence in Malabar, there were many Nair women who were learned in Sanskrit, who could compose Sanskrit verses and were good musicians. Twenty years hence there may be found hundreds of Indulekhas in Malabar who would be able to choose their own husbands for pure and sweet love. My narrative of the love and courtship of Madhavan is intended to show to the young ladies of Malabar how happy they can be if they have the freedom to choose their partners, and how supremely enjoyable a thing it would be for a young educated lady, at a time when she attains a marriageable age, to observe, to study, to admire and to love a well educated, handsome young man of unblemished moral character like Madhavan, who becomes first her companion and friend, gets gradually closer and closer in friendship, and finally falls in love with her, adoring her as the source of all his happiness in this world, as the person without whom he does not care to live, and for whose happiness he would sacrifice everything in his power. Alliances arising out of such pure, sweet, reciprocal love only deserve to be called marriages, and it is my earnest desire that this should be the way in which the Nair ladies, who already

enjoy much greater freedom in respect of matrimony than other Hindu women, should take their husbands.

The chapter concludes with an observation that though Panchu Menon knew enough to suspect Indulekha's inclination to marry Madhavan, he did not at the time actually wish to prevent such a marriage. It will be observed that the quarrel between Panchu Menon and Madhavan took place a few months after their engagement. It was after the quarrel that Panchu Menon resolved to break off the match.

Of course it will be impossible to give even a concise summary of the story contained in the twenty chapters (498 pages of closely printed matter) within the limits of an ordinary letter.

The events which follow Panchu Menon's resolution to break off the intended marriage of Indulekha with Madhavan are such as may ordinarily happen in a Nair *tarwad* in Malabar under the state of circumstances given and call for no particular explanation. They are intended to delineate the characters of various kinds of people in Malabar. How far I have succeeded in this is a question which my readers will of course decide. I have brought in various characters, Nairs of high and low social status, Nambudiris of different positions, Pattar Brahmins, etc. and have not even omitted to touch on what might, in my opinion, be the relations between high European officials and their native friends if they understood each other thoroughly. In order to introduce all these subjects, I have had to extend the scene of the story sometimes beyond Malabar;

It will be seen that Panchu Menon suspected that not only Indulekha but her mother (who is his own daughter) was also anxious that Madhavan should marry Indulekha, and secretly helped Indulekha and Madhavan in the furtherance of their object. The old man becomes almost mad with rage on knowing this, and takes an oath by his family goddess that he would never allow Madhavan to marry Indulekha, but the narrow-minded karanavan soon finds himself unable to persuade his grand-daughter Indulekha to give up Madhavan. He makes various attempts to break off the match. He makes Indulekha associate with a very rich and influential Nambudiripad (who represents the rich, licentious, profligate, unsteady Nambudiripad so often found in Malabar) in the hope that the rich man would be able to win Indulekha's heart. The Nambudiripad fails shamefully in his at-

tempt, but Panchu Menon, in order to please the Nambudiripad, gives a niece of his (an ignorant helpless girl) in marriage to the licentious, unprincipled man, who while he was making love to Indulekha, was doing the same thing towards some other ladies also, in Panchu Menon's house, including Indulekha's own mother!

After the marriage with Panchu Menon's niece, the Nambudiripad, in order to spite Indulekha, circulates a false rumour that Indulekha has become his concubine. A cunning and mischievous kariasthan or steward of the Nambudiripad succeeds in making various people believe this false report. Madhavan, while returning from Madras (where he had been residing ever since he left his *tarwad* house after the quarrel with his uncle) to marry Indulekha, openly disregarding the old man's opposition, is informed on his way that his Indulekha has become the wife or concubine of the Nambudiripad. Various reasons, all false but apparently plausible, unfortunately compel Madhavan to believe in the story and, having believed it, he of course feels so miserable and so aggrieved that he leaves the country as an exile, without making further enquiries, or even visiting his home in Malabar. Madhavan goes to Northern India. Various incidents that happened during Madhavan's sojourn there are related. Indulekha, true to her lover, finally succeeds in her endeavours to find the whereabouts of Madhavan. Madhavan learns the real state of things, and at once returns to Malabar and marries Indulekha, the old karanavan Panchu Menon (who, though narrow-minded, was not altogether a bad-hearted man, and was excessively fond of his grand-daughter, Indulekha), yielding to the pressure of circumstances, and retracting his oath by a penance prescribed by the avaricious Brahmin priests for their own good, and the story concludes.

Chapter 18 was written at the special request of some of my Malayalee friends. One half of it is devoted to a consideration of atheism, or the modern irreligion, as it prevails among the educated Malayalees, and the other half to a discussion as to the merits and demerits of the National Congress. This is brought in as a conversation between Madhavan, his father and a cousin of Madhavan, who is also a graduate, but anti-Congress and atheistic.

Madhavan is a moderate Congressman and not an atheist. Madhavan's father is a bigoted Hindu, and the conversation of

course shows how each of the three thought of religion, and how Govinda Kutti despised the Congress, while Madhavan was a moderate supporter of it, though he finds various faults in the present constitution and activities of the Congress which he would advise the Congress to remove."

5. INDULEKHA—A STUDY

Indulekha is a story of the nineteenth century life in Nair *tarwads* or Marumakkathayam joint families. Some of the usual events and the typical characters are brought before us. We have very good pictures of the presiding authority, namely, the karanavan of the *tarwad*, the nature of his domain, his treatment of the junior members and the women of the *tarwad*, of the relations by law and their reactions. Chandu Menon had some purposes in his mind while he wrote his novels and naturally the characters and events are selected and shaped to suit those purposes. Thus Panchu Menon in *Indulekha* and Koppunny Achan in *Sarada* the old karanavans are portrayed as quick-tempered, overbearing individuals. Panchu Menon aims to punish his grand-nephew Madhavan because he asked for fair treatment for a boy member of the *tarwad*. He is seventy years old, a retired tahsildar, and karanavan of the 'opulent house of Chembazhiot Puvalli'. He was a man of ungovernable temper, a patriarch of the old school. 'He was fair, short and stout and his complexion furnished the only claim he had for good looks. He was bald and had lost three teeth in the upper, five in the lower jaw ; his eyes were blood-shot ; he fastened the cloth which encircled his lower limbs with a gold belt, wore a rosary of the same precious metal round his neck, had a woollen cap on his head and carried in his hand a thick silver-mounted stick. It is doubtful whether any of the residents of Puvalli ever passed a day without being deafened by his vituperation.' This is only one example of the fine word-portraits which we come across in *Indulekha*.

He is not, however, always exploding and shooting sparks and in his relations with *Indulekha*, he is affectionate and penitent.

Suri Nambudiripad is shown as a rake and a fool. 'When he laughed his mouth stretched from ear to ear, his nose though not deformed, was too small for his face, and, instead of walking, he hopped like a crow. He had many mistresses, and he thought himself a veritable Cupid on earth.' 'Can a man find any greater happiness than pleasure from the favours of women?' asked the Nambudiripad. That was his philosophy. The character is well and strongly drawn and Chandu Menon suspected that he

might be misunderstood as scandalizing the entire community. In fact there seems to have been some excitement about this character soon after the novel was published. Chandu Menon has explained his views, 'there is, however, no class of men in Malabar for whom I entertain greater respect, than I do for Nambudiris. I am acquainted with several who are distinguished for their intellect and ability and I am proud to reckon some of them among my intimate friends'. He makes Indulekha also say—the girl who put the great Suri Nambudiripad in his place—'There are very sagacious people among the Nambudiris, just as there are in all castes.'¹

All the same it is through Suri Nambudiripad that Chandu Menon brings so much of humour into the novel. Like character delineation, the humour in *Indulekha* has been a powerful magnet to attract generations of readers. In every scene where Suri Nambudiripad appears there is laughter, when we read the story, and much more when we see it staged.² When he emerges from his palanquin as a golden Cupid, when he boasts of his so-called conquests of women, when we follow his remarks and reactions during his meeting with Indulekha, every time, there are laughs for us. Then there is that ludicrous scene where after being rebuffed by Indulekha, nothing daunted he hops hopefully after Kalliani Kutty into the bathroom for women. His servant Govindan hears of this escapade and hastens his master away before others catch the girl-hunter in that embarrassing situation. On various occasions, even Panchu Menon's fits of patriarchal fury are laughter-provoking, as when he meets Gopalan, Sheenu Pattar, Chather Menon and others. Chandu Menon makes them good entertainers, the Nambudiripad as a clown and Panchu Menon as an antiquated fire-spitter. Some other humorous scenes are where Kesavan Nambudiri shows his ignorance of machinery and when he fears that his wife may be taken away by Suri Nambudiripad.

There are other characters like Indulekha, Madhavan and Govindan Kutty who are cast in different moulds. Madhavan and Indulekha are ideal people. The former 'was a young man gifted with great abilities and remarkably handsome appearance'. He was a brilliant scholar, and a fine sportsman. 'All Europeans who

¹ p. 94

² The novel has been dramatised and staged very effectively on various occasions.

made Madhavan's acquaintance were fascinated by him at first sight, and thence remained his friends.' Was Chandu Menon autobiographical?

He gives a good word portrait of the other ideal character, Indulekha. Among beautiful women, 'Indulekha was supreme'. 'Her skin resembled so closely in colour the golden border of the embroidered robe' which was fastened round her waist, 'that it was impossible to distinguish the one from the other by sight'. He praises her hair, eyes and so on, and then confesses, 'it would be impossible for any pen to do justice to the countless charms which united in making Indulekha a peerless beauty'. She was good at English, Sanskrit and music; drawing and needlework. In her habits she was a happy combination of the progressive and the traditional. Her character was fascinating. She was 'named Madhavi at her birth, but when Krishna Menon (father) saw her growing daily in loveliness, he called her Indulekha, or moonbeam and the name clung to her ever after'. The description of Indulekha's many excellences fills six pages, and Chandu Menon concludes, 'Such an incarnation of all that is lovable was Indulekha, that no one in her grandfather's house could say nay to her slightest wish or fancy, but, notwithstanding the queenly position she occupied in the family, there was never heard a murmur of discontent against any of her actions or her demeanour'.*

In the portrayal of these characters we begin to see an important purpose of the novel, namely to emphasise the benefits which Malayalees, specially the women, would derive from learning the English language. In the story Kalliani Kutty is of about the same age as Indulekha, but she has no English education. She meekly submits herself to be treated like 'a live pig or some other animal'. She is 'pulled' along and 'thrust' into the room where Suri Nambudiripad is waiting for her on a couch! She, as ordered by her karanavan, had to be a consenting substitute for Indulekha who was to have been given to Nambudiripad.

On the other hand, Indulekha, English educated, dazed the Nambudiripad with her beauty, but told him off and refused to be forced into a matrimonial alliance which she did not want. When Panchu Menon broaches this matter to her, she is firm. Seeing that she does not yield, Panchu Menon remarks 'Did you see the

English cropping out?' Then Indulekha the eighteen-year-old girl, says, 'Surely grandfather, I spoke in Malayalam'. One can imagine how this reply would have stunned the supreme patriarch of Puvalli *tarwad*. To Indulekha, however, he could only say, 'Yes, my dear, yes. Don't I know how clever you are?'. Later Panchu Menon confesses, 'I am not afraid of anyone in the world. But I don't know how it is—I am afraid of Indulekha, and if she gets angry I can't stand it'.¹ She ticks off even Madhavan when he comments unfavourably on the women of Malabar.

At the end of the book Chandu Menon says that he wrote it 'Chiefly to impress on my fellow countrymen by means of it, about the advantage which would accrue if the women of India were given the same privileges of education that are enjoyed by the men. Referring to Kalliani Kutty's victimisation he says, 'My beloved countrywomen, are you not ashamed of this? Some of you have studied Sanskrit and some music, but these are not enough. If you wish to really enlighten your minds, you must learn English, whereby alone you can learn many things which you ought to know in these days and by such knowledge alone can you grasp the truth that you are of the same creation as men, that you are as free agents as men, that women are not the slaves of men'.² There are novels of purpose to expose the foibles of high society, the evils in giant industries, in medical practice, in asylums, in totalitarian administration and so on. Here is one to emphasise the spread of education, specially English education among the women of India, so that they may be free from humiliation and exploitation.

Indulekha is not a deep novel, as it is wide. In the story there are no characters with deep workings of the mind, nor are there complicated undercurrents in the plot. It is a simple story narrated in all frankness. If anything is not quite clear Chandu Menon has a delightful way of explaining it and taking the readers into confidence. Even before Madhavan and Indulekha meet in the story, Menon whispers to his readers that 'their innermost souls had already been wedded'. 'Love for the other had dawned in the bosom of each, but neither revealed it by sign or token', yet Chandu Menon reveals it to his readers! He explains to his

¹ p. 86

² p. 368

readers his opinion about the Nambudiris, because he does not want his readers to misunderstand him. He enables them to understand that Suri Nambudiripad took away Kalliani Kutty and not Indulekha, though he keeps the secret even from Madhavan. Perhaps another novelist would have kept the fact from the readers also to bring a mystery element into the story, so as to fabricate, according to his ideas, a superior type of novel. In *Indulekha*, however, everything is above board and, there are only such things which might normally take place in a *tarwad*. Thus there are differences of opinions between generations, between relations, marriage problems, beneficent and baneful influences from outside and so on. The Nambudiri element is very often seen in the old *tarwad* life. Chandu Menon has proved that such familiar people and mundane matters can be made up into a very popular story. The common man reading such a story often understands and appreciates it better than stories of strange people, of unknown lands, of ages far away. This is just as the common man understands and appreciates a realistic painting or sculpture, more than a cubist or futurist piece.

Like the events and characters, the language also is the familiar language of Malayalee families. There was a belief that the Malayalam which is used in daily life cannot be satisfactorily used for writing anything of recognisable literary standards. In his Preface to *Indulekha* Chandu Menon says, 'The language I have used in this book is the language I would ordinarily speak at home. Although I have some knowledge of Sanskrit, I have as a rule employed Sanskrit words only in the manner and to the extent in which they are employed colloquially by us Malayalees'. In Chandu Menon's expert hands this homely language makes the book more readable, the characters more natural and brings them closer to the readers.

Character portrayal is one of the outstanding qualities of *Indulekha*. Some novels attract us by the intricacies of plot and their unravelling, some by the weirdness of supernatural or mysterious elements, and some by the many-coloured splendour of events and characters. *Indulekha* however, is only a simple love-story, where the path of true love is not smooth because of the cantankerousness of an old-type karanavan, but where at the end grandfatherly love prevails over patriarchal anger and the lovers are united. There is not much of a plot in the story, but this short-

coming goes almost unnoticed, because of the homely conversation, the fascinating narration, and brilliant characterisation. Chandu Menon gives us fine sketches of Indulekha the exquisite, Madhavan the good, Suri the salacious and Panchu Menon the explosive. Very realistic are the commands and the procedure of the Police Inspector as he tries, ineffectively, to extract a confession from the waiter in the railway station restaurant. Some of the characters are so alive that they become independent in the sense that they live even after the story is ended, for example Suri Nambudiripad and Panchu Menon. This is because of expert characterisation. We have examples of such independent characters, such as Shylock and Falstaff in Shakespeare, Pickwick in Dickens, Jeeves in Wodehouse.

Madhavan is the ideal male character in the story. He is reasonable in his opinions and strong enough to argue about them, as when he argues with his irritable karanavan regarding the education of a boy of the *tarwad*, and later, with some of his elders regarding English education, and the changing pattern of the Indian political scene. Madhavan is the spokesman of the young generation, questioning the unfairness of the old customs in the domestic and social life of Malabar. He has visions also of a free India. Between him and Panchu Menon there was the generation gap and more than once the old patriarch refers to the sinful times and the wicked youngsters. 'All the boys are a perverse lot' is his comment on youth.

The question arises that Madhavan being intelligent and loving, why did he not verify, before he left Malabar in disgust, the truth of the rumour about Indulekha's marriage to Suri Nambudiripad. Indulekha herself is sadly disappointed. She said, 'What I feel most of all is that when he knew me so well as he did, he should have been so hasty in believing that I had become utterly worthless'. There is the old saying in defence of Madhavan that, 'Love is not prudent'. Further, he was only temporarily distracted. He wrote to his father, 'I am not going to commit suicide or any other crime. I have no intention at present beyond that of travelling, and you may be sure I shall come back' etc. Besides the major characters like Madhavan, other less important ones also come before the reader, now and again during the progress of the story. For example there are Madhavan's parents, Govinda Panikkar and Parvathi Amma, ever solicitous about his welfare and Indulekha's

mother Lakshmi Kutty Amma, seeing whom Suri Nambudiripad 'completely lost his head'. Chather Menon who gets some of the first blasts of Panchu Menon's fury, Indulekha's maid Ammu who tickles Suri Nambudiripad's fancy for a minute and Govindan who saves his master Suri from some awkward situations and suggests Kaliyani Kutty as a good (ignorant of English) substitute for Indulekha, are some others. They have all their short but interesting contributions to weave a fascinating story.

Indulekha has some excellent qualities as a novel. The continued popularity of the book is proof of these. Along with these however, a fault also has been pointed out, a structural fault. It is said that chapter eighteen was unnecessary for the story. It is the longest chapter in the book, covering a little more than one-sixth of it. It contains a discussion on the study of English, on God and religion, on the Indian National Congress and some political problems. The participants were Madhavan, Madhavan's father Govinda Panikkar and Panchu Menon's son Govindan Kutty Menon. The occasion was a happy reunion of the three in Bombay after Madhavan left Malabar without informing anyone where he was going. Govinda Panikkar and Govindan Kutty Menon had started in search of Madhavan and met him at a friend's house in Bombay and told him how Indulekha was pining for him. They were to leave Bombay for Malabar the next day. Before they retired for the night, they indulged in a talk on these matters. The critic says that when Madhavan is impatient to meet Indulekha, and Panikkar and Menon are impatient to see them meet, is it natural to indulge in such a long discussion on such subjects? Another can say, well, Madhavan after days of anxiety was happy with the news that Indulekha was waiting for him. Panikkar and Menon, after days of anxiety about Madhavan's disappearance were happy that he was with them, healthy and unharmed. Thus it was an evening when terrible tensions had been removed, the three had no other programme and so it was quite natural that they talked on various matters for a couple of hours into the night. Mr. Bala-krishnan has said that Chandu Menon has used this chapter to give a hint to the older generation in Malabar about the questioning spirit that was growing in India. The same commentator has also pointed out that other famous novelists like Tolstoy, Dostoevski and Victor Hugo have included such parenthetical sections in some of their stories. It has to be noted, however, that Chandu

Menon himself, had perhaps, some doubts about the propriety of the chapter, because, he has remarked, 'Chapter 18 was written at the special request of some of my Malayalee friends'.* Why does he make this apology? Another fact is that in a recent edition of *Indulekha*, the chapter is just omitted and the new reader does not realise it. Perhaps as a genuine novelist, Chandu Menon did not want the chapter in the story, but because there was something of a visionary and reformer in him, besides the novelist, he put in the chapter to oblige his friends. After all, the entire novel itself was written to please 'a friend'.

Apart from this controversial chapter, the novel has been criticised as a defence of English education. We have already said that in *Indulekha* we observe the recurrence of that eternal conflict between the old and the new generations, the passing and the rising. The important difference between these generations here is not so much the age, but seems to be English education. The old and old-fashioned characters like Panchu Menon and Suri Nambudiripad do not know English. Chandu Menon puts silly remarks into their mouths, for example that Madhavan is argumentative, he wears shoes, that women are not clean because of English education, and so on. Panchu Menon is portrayed as a conservative despot, raving at everybody (except Indulekha), because his mind is not broadened by the study of English.

Suri Nambudiripad is a clown, he is ignorant of English. See how Chandu Menon dresses him up for his visit to Indulekha's house. 'There leaped out of it (a palanquin) a golden form. Its head was covered with a gold coloured cap, and its body was clad in a gold coloured robe. Gold was the colour of its garments throughout and on its feet were sabots studded with gold. Gold rings were on all the ten fingers, and, as though this were not enough, it was enveloped over the above robe in a cloak all golden in colour and it carried in its hand a small golden mirror to be frequently consulted.' The use of the word 'it' instead of 'he' is to be noted. Opposite these Madhavan and Indulekha with English education are portrayed as almost perfect people. Again, after Madhavan's mysterious disappearance, his distressed mother Parvathy Amma suggests to Indulekha, 'Well, my dear, if you

* p. xxiv

¹ p. 132

will write to him in English and tell him that you are ready to marry him, my son will be back in two days'.¹ An amusing question may arise in the readers' minds, namely, why the letter should be in English. Would not Madhavan return if Indulekha wrote the letter in Malayalam?

In the present set-up in India, such championship direct or indirect, of English education will be considered by some as an unhappy feature of the novel. Perhaps, in Chandu Menon's days when Malayalam literature was not keeping pace with the expansion of knowledge, general and technical, Chandu Menon could correctly say, addressing specially women, 'you must learn English, whereby alone you can learn many things which you ought to know in these days'. He wrote also, 'I do not say that without English there is no knowledge'.

For this championship of English, Chandu Menon may be today considered a conservative imperialist. But considering him as a product of the 19th century, *Indulekha* becomes, in a sense, a novel of revolt and he, a rebel against illiteracy among Indian women, and in favour of spreading education, specially English education among them.

When we examine *Indulekha* as a novel of revolt of a rising generation against a passing one, we can see in it an instance where old Panchu Menon himself, when a boy, violated the convention then current that youngsters must not use footwear. Panchu Menon himself narrates the incident.²

He got a terrific whacking when discovered using sandals and lay in bed unable to rise, for about twenty days, while the sandals were burned to ashes by his uncle's orders. Since then he never wore sandals, and if he saw any he got into a fright.

Thus, in Panchu Menon's boyhood also there was the clash between the old and the young generations. Then, however, the old order was still too strong and the boy Panchu lost his sandals. By the time he grows old the new generation is stronger and Madhavan continues to use shoes and sandals. 'He uses them even inside the house !' Madhavan also questions the justice of Panchu Menon's refusal to teach one of his anandaravans. Another anandaravan Gopalan protests against some of the patriarch's un-

¹ p. 354

² p. 73

called for remarks. That it is a losing fight for the old generation is seen by Panchu Menon's words of remorse, 'Everything is going wrong now. It is a sign of the perverted age'.

Even Indulekha is not at all acquiescent or submissive when Panchu Menon and Kesavan Nambudiri tell her that it is not necessary to consult her to settle her marriage.

'This is preposterous', exclaimed Indulekha. 'If that is the case, then what is the use of asking me anything now. The affair can be settled without my knowledge ! It has already been settled !'

The author writes that Panchu Menon 'felt cowed by the resolution which flashed unmistakably from Indulekha's radiant features'.

She did not care for Suri Nambudiripad and would not tolerate his foppish, foolish talk. She was advised earlier that she must talk reverentially to the rich suitor, using appropriate words. When she mentioned that she did not know the words, she was allowed to speak to him as she liked. 'That is exactly what I intend to do', was Indulekha's comment. And she did tell him what she liked. She rapped him again and again for his foolish talk during the two interviews. The new educated Malayali girl is in revolt against victimisation. Chandu Menon believed that such victimisation was possible because of the lack of education among women and he was strongly against the contemporary practice of keeping women uneducated and away from schools. In some parts of Bengal it was believed that if women were educated they would soon be widowed!¹ In his days, that is about 1882, according to figures available, only one in eight hundred of the female population of India was under instruction.² He wrote at the end of *Indulekha* that 'the women of India should realise that if they are ignorant and illiterate, men will not only despise them, but show by their conduct the contempt they feel'. In this championship of women's education also, Chandu Menon was a rebel, considering the circumstances of the time. He had visions of the women of Malabar and of India, educated and free from victimisation, and the people of India free from foreign domination.

Judging from its continued popularity, *Indulekha* is a masterpiece. It is the more so and the more creditable to the author, because he used only a few ingredients, like character portrayal,

¹ & ² Report of the National Committee on Women's Education, 1959.

humour, and homely narration, to produce it. It is as if a painter having numerous colours in his paint-box, used only two or three of them and produced a glorious picture. The fact that he did not use all the colours is not a defect of the picture, on the contrary, it is a great credit to the painter. In the same way, even though there are many ingredients to write a novel, like plot, character, language, crime, suspense, humour, science and so on, one who can produce a masterpiece using only a few of them is without doubt, a novelist with exceptional talents. Such a one was Chandu Menon.

6. SARADA

‘ The charge is prepared, the lawyers are met ’ —GAY

The story opens in a hotel-room at Rameswaram. There Raman Menon, an artist, was staying with his wife Kallyani Amma and daughter, Sarada, who was about twelve years old. Sankaran, who was Raman Menon's student, and Krishnan a servant boy, were also with the family. One day Kallyani Amma suddenly became ill and passed away unexpectedly. Raman Menon, decided to stay at Rameswaram, till he could be sure of what to do next, because they were then only on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram from North India, where they had resided many years without any contact with South India. A couple of days later the fond father narrated to the innocent girl the story of their past.

Kallyani Amma belonged to Pooncholakkara Edam, a very rich feudal *tarwad* in Malabar. Her uncle Koppunny Achan the karanavan or head of the family was an extremely arrogant and wicked individual. For selfish interests he gave Kallyani Amma in marriage to a rich but old man, against her wishes. She could not reconcile herself to the marriage and grew very unhappy. Feeling desperate, she left home one day, accompanied by a family retainer named Vythi Pattar and a servant boy Krishnan. Reaching Benares, she decided to stay there some time. During this stay she met Raman Menon, then a well-known and prospering artist, practising in North India. He belonged to Theckillath house, an old respectable *tarwad* in Malabar, though not rich nor of the feudal status of Kallyani Amma's family. He had left his home to learn some profession for a living. He learned painting and starting work in North India, earned a good reputation and a substantial fortune.

It was thus that Kallyani Amma and Raman Menon got acquainted. Not much later they got married. At this turn of events, Vythi Pattar left Kallyani Amma and returned to Malabar. He had the appearance of a villain and he was a villain. He had hoped that by accompanying Kallyani Amma, he could steal, somehow and somewhere, her jewels and money and leave her. But when she met and married Raman Menon the Pattar realised

that his scheme would not work and so left her. She and Raman Menon had a daughter born to them, whom they named Sarada. While living happily with wife and daughter, Raman Menon got some infection in his eyes which compelled him to give up his profession of painting. About the same time, the bank where he had deposited most of his earnings went bankrupt. Worried by the double disaster, Raman Menon and family left for south India on a pilgrimage and reached Rameswaram.

Sankaran, now a youth of about twenty-one, had, as a boy of eight, joined Raman Menon to learn painting, even before the latter left for North India and was always with him. Raman Menon told his daughter that Sankaran was a very loyal and intelligent young man; that he was a useful friend and could be depended upon in times of need.

Raman Menon who felt dazed by the third blow, namely the sudden death of his wife, did not then know what to do. So he stayed on in Rameswaram till his mind could clear up sufficiently as to take advantageous decisions for the future. One day Sankaran by chance met Vythi Pattar who also had come to Rameswaram. Vythi Pattar met Krishnan also from whom he pumped out all the news about Raman Menon and his family. It was years after Vythi Pattar had left Kallyani Amma and Raman Menon in North India. When he got all the information, his brain got busy. He came to Raman Menon and told him the story of Kallyani Amma's *tarwad*, its great wealth and high status. Raman Menon heard also about the cruel karanavan, Koppunny Achan, and the other members of the *tarwad*. He learned that Kallyani Amma's younger sister, Lakshmi, had died of a broken heart. She had been married to a respectable and affluent landlord, Rama Varma Thirumulpad of Udayanthali estate. But Koppunny Achan quarrelled with him and prevented Lakshmi Amma from meeting him which proved a fatal disappointment for her. There was still another lady-member of the *tarwad*, but she was childless even after years of marriage and was not likely to have children thereafter. So, according to *marumakkathayam* law, Sarada would be the most important heir to Pooncholakkara estate, being the only hope of preventing the *tarwad* from becoming extinct. As Raman Menon listened to all this information about his wife's *tarwad*, he decided to return to Malabar. So, not many days after,

the whole group left Rameswaram and reaching Malabar, took temporary residence in Vythi Pattar's house at his invitation.

A few days later, Raman Menon sent Sankaran to Koppunny Achan with a letter. Therein he wrote about Kallyani Amma's death at Rameswaram, leaving a daughter Sarada. He explained his relations with them and how his recent misfortunes disabled him to bring up Sarada as her status required. He pointed out the unfortunate circumstances in which Sarada was placed at the time, that her future depended on the sympathetic and generous Achan. Finally he requested Achan to decide on how Sarada was to be brought up as a member of such a famous *tarwad* as Pooncholakkara.

Preserving the dignity of his position, Koppunny Achan would not either receive or read the letter himself, but had it read out by his clerk. Listening to Raman Menon's account, he thought that the whole thing was a fraud. He was shocked that some unheard of fellow should bring up such preposterous claims, disgracing the family. The greater was the disgrace, because the servants and busybodies also who always hovered about the *karanavan*, heard the contents of the letter. Koppunny Achan flew into a rage and shouted, 'Catch that dog who brought this letter. Thrash him! Break his bones! See how he has spoilt the reputation of people who live honest respectable lives'. Sankaran, overhearing this order precipitately fled, as Koppunny Achan's men began to search for him. Achan himself in the meanwhile discussed the situation with anandaravan Raghavan Unni and decided to send for and consult Vythi Pattar.

Sankaran, fleeing from Pooncholakkara, was met by a messenger from one of Achan's anandaravans, Krishnan Unni. He was a good man and full of sympathy for Kallyani Amma. He desired to see Sarada and find out whether the girl was in truth Kallyani Amma's daughter and if she was, he wanted to help her. Sankaran on his way met also one Sanku Variyar who had been in Benares and there had met Raman Menon, Kallyani Amma and Sarada.

In the meantime, Rama Varma Thirumulpad got information from a local busybody named Kundan Menon that Sarada and her father were in the neighbourhood. Achan had dragged Thirumulpad into much unnecessary litigation which resulted in expenditure and disgrace for Thirumulpad, because Achan always won, with his resources and manoeuvres. Achan had by filing

false cases, secured from Thirumulpad some temple property and privileges ; deprived him of some private property by instigating tenants against him ; humiliated him by frightening two Nambudiris out of their marital alliances with two ladies in Thirumulpad's family and in various other ways. It was a story of continuous harassment and humiliation. Achan had kept Thirumulpad and his wife, that is Sarada's mother's sister, separate which led to her emaciation and death. Thirumulpad could never forget these experiences and was always watching for opportunities to wreak vengeance on Koppunny Achan. Kundan Menon knew this, and true to his profession as a busybody,¹ advised Thirumulpad that here was a sure chance to triumph over his oppressor. Kundan Menon had information also that Sarada and her father were staying with Vythi Pattar. Thirumulpad asked Kundan Menon to get hold of Vythi Pattar and also bring Sarada and her father to his palace.

While Raman Menon was waiting for a reply to his letter about Sarada to her Karanavan, Vythi Pattar was scheming. He remembered that he could not swindle Kallyani Amma because of Raman Menon. He believed that Raman Menon had lots of money and jewels with him. A plot had taken shape in the Pattar's mind to deprive Raman Menon of the money and gold when the place and time suited. But as days passed he realised that so long as the loyal and watchful Sankaran was with Sarada and Raman Menon, no one would be able to do any harm to them. So the Pattar got a still greater villain to prepare some fatal poison, and arranged with the servant boy Krishnan to put the poison into the milk which Sankaran used to drink. The milk was, however, taken by a young Nambudiri visitor to Raman Menon and he died. The unfortunate Nambudiri had in truth, come to have a look at Sarada, hearing about her extraordinary loveliness. Krishnan who was only a monkey's paw in Pattar's hands, as per his special instructions, immediately washed all vessels clean. Vythi Pattar, exclaiming that the Nambudiri had died of cholera, hastened to cremate the body. Thus he hoped to destroy all clues about the heinous crime.

Raman Menon and Sankaran did not seriously suspect anything, but they, with Sarada shifted residence. Vythi Pattar still hovered

¹ Chandu Menon has given a very good description of such busybodies.

around them apparently as thoughtful as ever about their welfare, but nursing his hope eternal. It was however blasted by the sudden appearance of Thirumulpad's messengers to take Sarada and others to the palace. Vythi Pattar did some quick thinking and managed to extract some money and jewels from Raman Menon and Sarada by begging and whimpering.

Koppunny Achan heard from Raghavan Unni that Thirumulpad had given asylum to Raman Menon and Sarada. Krishna Menon the talented son of Raghavan Unni advised that a proper reply must be sent to Raman Menon's letter who might file a suit if he did not get any communication. Achan immediately asked another busybody, Thassan Menon, to consult their old lawyers Karpoor Iyer and Samu Menon about the action to be taken. They were at the Vakils Club of which there is a famous description in the book. Nothing was complete there, roofs had holes, walls had disappeared, and so also the legs and other portions of every bit of furniture in the place. Still some Vakils were there and at the time they were discussing literature. Chandu Menon puts in the mouths of these lawyers some of his own opinions about the novels and Sanskritised Malayalam used by some contemporary writers. As for the reply to Raman Menon's letter, Karpoor Iyer advised that a reply which had been drafted by Krishna Menon was to be sent to Raman Menon. The reply was that Raman Menon's letter was all a fraud and that he and his advisers would suffer if he did not give up his plan to exploit and bring dishonour to the *tarwad*.

A week later, Koppunny Achan received a registered letter from a vakil, Raghava Menon, requiring that Sarada be accepted and brought up as a female heir in the Pooncholakkara *tarwad*, that otherwise he had been entrusted to file a suit for the purpose. The letter irritated and worried Achan. He immediately sent for Vythi Pattar and the astrologer Chathu Panickar. Chathu Panickar knew that he had to please Achan. After a dramatic division and scrutiny of cowries, he announced, with the authority of many quotations interpreted by him, that the planets were in exceedingly favourable positions to Achan and success in litigation was a certainty. When Thirumulpad heard that Achan had consulted Chathu Panickar, he too got Panickar at his palace. Panickar inferred what Thirumulpad wanted. So he repeated the same stage tricks and cownie tricks as before Achan ; he quoted authorities, again

interpreted them as occasion required and convinced Thirumulpad that the planets and omens were most unfavourable to Achan; that they were most favourable to Thirumulpad, that victory was assured for him. Readers who have watched these astrologers at work will appreciate the admirable realism of these scenes.

Koppunny Achan had sent for Vythi Pattar also. This schemer had realised that he had extracted as much as possible from Raman Menon and that loyalty to him would no more be profitable, and his advantage thereafter would be from opposing him. So he readily appeared before Achan, loyalty and servility personified, and informed him that Krishnan, the servant boy, knew the true and full story about Sarada. Krishnan was sent for and he, as taught by Pattar, told Achan a fantastic story,—that Raman Menon was actually one Raman Pillai from Trivandrum, that he had a Muslim prostitute at Ujjain in North India, that Sarada was her daughter before her association with Raman Pillai and that Sankaran was a drunkard and gambler. He said that it was according to Sankaran's plan that Raman Pillai brought Sarada as Kallyani Amma's daughter and heir to Pooncholakkara.

Achan was furious and wanted that a letter be sent immediately to Thirumulpad to warn him that he must not pollute the temple, the tanks and the palace by harbouring a Muslim girl in their midst. On consultation Krishna Menon pointed out that it would be unwise to do so until definite proofs were available that Sarada was of the Muslim community. He said that he would not draft the letter.

In spite of his opinion, letters were sent to Thirumulpad and a Nambudiri Mutt in Udayanthali area, to give warning that Sarada residing in the locality was a girl belonging to the Muslim community. The letter created a stir specially among the Nambudiris in Udayanthali area. Thirumulpad got the letter and showed it to Raman Menon and Sankaran who were amused at its contents. As desired by him Sankaran wrote a reply. It explained that Raman Menon and Sarada were residing not in the palace, but outside, and not at the palace expense; that the insinuations contained in the letter were unfounded, scandalous and unwarranted.

Kundan Menon discussed the pros and cons of Sarada's 'claims' with the lawyer Raghava Menon. Like many of his type who knew only Malayalam, Kundan Menon too mutilated English legal terms. He was very anxious to show off his expert knowledge and though

vanquished, would argue still. Thus, he has terms like Rilly Act (Relief Act) alooppie (alibi) bonaffitt (bonafides) lavidence (evidence) melappittu (malafides) rees indravaliyam choodikettu (Res Inter Alias Adjudicate) and so on. Apart from the humour of the mutilation in these words, there is also the humour of association for Malayalam knowing readers, because they know that 'pittu' is a kind of pancake and sometimes dough and 'choodikettu' means a bundle of rope. As desired by Thirumulpad, Kundan Menon entrusted the case to Raghava Menon and another able lawyer, Madhava Menon. Sankaran in the meantime met Sanku Variyar and suggested his giving evidence regarding Kallyani Amma and Sarada. Sanku Variyar was at first confused between his fear of Koppunny Achan and love of truth. Sankaran emphasised that Sanku Variyar's father was a much respected scholar, that he himself was well-known for his piety and adherence to truth and so must necessarily state the true facts, Achan or no Achan.

The exchange of letters between the two old rivals and the discussions among the lawyers became known to all in the locality. The followers of each contributed what they could to intensify the rivalry between Achan and Thirumulpad.

Chandu Menon wrote eleven chapters of *Sarada* and brought us to the stage when two old rivals are poised to go full tilt at each other again in the court of law. Behind each rival, expediting and following the developments, there was a full contingent of relatives and lawyers, sympathisers and opportunists, sycophants and noseyparkers, all recruited from Chandu Menon's experience in the courts of law and on the Marriage Commission.

Suddenly the call came for him from beyond. And we are left guessing about Sarada, Vythi Pattar and others and the fate of Poocholakkara Edam.

He finished only part of the story namely the setting for the decisive scenes, before death took him away. The charge was prepared, the lawyers had met. Later, some enthusiasts, like Messrs. C. Anthappai, P. Gopalakrishna Kurup and recently, P. Radhakrishna Menon completed the story. How far their versions would have agreed with Chandu Menon's plans we could not say. There is a story that when he was down with the paralytic stroke, he destroyed the notes which he had prepared to proceed with the work on the incomplete novel. Perhaps he did not want them to be misunderstood or misused. Anyway, the feeling among the literary connoisseurs is that only a rare genius could attain the standards set by Chandu Menon.

7. SARADA—A STUDY

When we proceed to study *Sarada* we enter uncertain grounds. Chandu Menon gave us only one-third of the story and we have no idea how the story would have continued or how the characters would have behaved. We can comment on only what Chandu Menon has given us and guess what he might have given us. 'Rather than comment on *Sarada*, we might grieve over it', says Sri M. P. Paul in *Novel Sahityam*, because we are unfortunate that Chandu Menon did not complete the story which he began so well.

It began on a tragic note, namely, the sudden, untimely death of the heroine's mother. At the time, Sarada, the heroine, was only about twelve years old, the father had lost both his profession and earnings and both were stranded in Ramēswaram where they were strangers.

As the story proceeds, new characters appear before us, Krishnan, Sankaran, Vythi Pattar, Koppunny Achan, Chathu Panicker, Kundan Menon, Krishna Menon and others. The expert craftsmanship of Chandu Menon in the portrayal of character can be seen in the word pictures which he has drawn of the characters in this story also, as in *Indulekha*. Sarada is only a girl, but angelic in her beauty and character. Menon's language is poetic as he describes her. He uses about three pages to tell the reader of her surpassing beauty. She is the quintessence of loveliness and he expects her to be still more attractive by the time she attains maidenhood. He says 'Salutations to the eyes which are blessed as to be able to see the beauty of the girl increasing and maturing stage by stage, until she is so radiant as to enchant the world'.

Krishna Menon seems to have been intended by the author to be the parallel in *Sarada* of Madhavan in *Indulekha*; he devotes a few pages to describe the physical and intellectual excellences of Krishna Menon. His character is exemplary, he has high academic qualifications and he is a lawyer of great promise.

Koppunny Achan is the Karanavan, irritable, despotic, and scheming, of the rich aristocratic *tarwad*, Pooncholakkara Edam. Are there any redeeming features in his character, has he a soft

corner in his heart, as in the case of Panchu Menon in *Indulekha*? We cannot give a final judgement, because the story is incomplete.

Vyithi Pattar is just a fortune seeker and an arch villain. Chandu Menon makes the Pattar's features give us some idea of his crooked mind. 'He was extremely ugly in appearance. He was black as ink. The small tuft of grey hair at the back of his head was thin and long and looked like a rat's tail. Getting old he had lost many of his teeth and the three or four which remained protruded out of his mouth. He could see them well and for him and others these fangs were a sickly sight. The eyes were sunk into pits, but now and again they flashed like cobra's eyes. This nervous reaction occurred whenever he looked intently at anything or talked excitedly, or thought seriously or whenever he felt surprise or pleasure. Then suddenly the eyes thrust forward, the big pupils protruded and fixed themselves close to the nose on either side. Normally the eyes looked lifeless, but at the time of this reaction, the Pattar's face looked evil and cruel. Looking at it one got a fright. It was as if a furious cobra, with hood spread, was poised to strike. His body was bent, shrunk and reminded one of the scorched branch of a tree. In all, he looked like a repulsive ghoul'. That was Vyithi the villain.

Another interesting character is Chathu Panicker the astrologer. Koppunny Achan and Rama Varma Thirumulpad take him very seriously, but Chandu Menon makes us feel amused at his double dealing. Koppunny Achan and Thirumulpad believed in astrology and both blindly believed in Chathu Panicker. Chathu Panicker's displays as he pronounces prophetic words, mesmerise Koppunny Achan and Thirumulpad but make us laugh. He has clever questions and cleverer interpretations to convince Achan of success in litigation against Thirumulpad and Thirumulpad against Achan! He gets generous gifts from both and disappears, at least from Part I of *Sarada*. Chandu Menon, at his departure, moralises like the Greek chorus: 'I will not write any more about this rogue. Let him go about squeezing money from my countrymen bewitching them by his perfidious profession'.

Kundan Menon is a peculiar character whom Chandu Menon brings into this story. He is like a walking news-reel and belongs to the type known as busybodies. Here is a detailed description by the author, another of his vivid word-portraits: 'I give the name "local busybody" to one who has never plied, regularly or

seriously, any profession like Government service, trade, agriculture, house management, teaching, handicrafts, manual labour, pilgrimage or begging, but gained much experience in the conduct of litigation in Courts, lost all property, if he had any, by his craze for litigation, posed as adviser to lawyers in conduct of cases, and after mastering a few terms and phrases made the ignorant believe that he was a great expert in writing petitions, documents and family contracts. His activities often brought ruin to big, rich families by creating discord among members and leading them into wasteful litigation'. Kundan Menon was such a local busybody. Indulging in his professional activities he had ruined his own tarwad and become destitute. All the same, he was seen outside always clad in a clean dhoti, with a second cloth thrown over his shoulders, a cane walking stick, sandals, old and worn out, and a silk umbrella warped and discoloured with age. Proud was his bearing, haughty his words, even in his fallen days. Afraid of losing face, he never mentioned about his pauperism to anybody; and if anybody referred to it he even got enraged.

As in *Indulekha*, in *Sarada* also Chandu Menon brings the Nambudiris to ridicule. We are shown a group of them excited over the letter received saying that Sarada was the daughter of a Muslim prostitute. They crowd round the Nambudiri who is reading the letter. They are all almost naked, if not completely so. Some had stopped prayers and hastened to hear the news, some were about to go into the bath-room, some had just emerged from lavatories, a few had smeared oil on their bodies preparatory to bath, some came chewing betel. They were shouting remarks, asking questions and hopping round their elder who was reading the letter.

Besides such word-portraits of persons, we come across descriptions of places also occasionally, both in *Indulekha* and in *Sarada*. In the former, besides a short description of Puvalli tarwad and associated properties, there is a laudatory description of the harbour and the neighbourhood in Bombay, and another of Amaravathi, the luxurious residence of the Sens in Calcutta, with whom Madhavan got acquainted. In *Sarada*, we have descriptions of the impressive properties of the aristocratic tarwad, Pooncholakkara Edam, and of the populous busy town in which these properties and Thirumulpad's palace were situated. Somewhere among the imposing temples, offices and residences, there was a

Vakils' Club. It was a hole of a place, but Chandu Menon's remarkable description has secured for it a place in Malayalam literature. I venture a translation—'The building was dilapidated. Its eastern wall had tumbled down quite some time back and yet the old bricks and mortar still lay scattered there. In the place of the wall there was hung a mat made of the fronds of cocoanut palms, to keep off wind and rain. Visitors had to lift that mat to enter the "the club room". The room in those days had much more light than when it was built. My readers must not think that the increased light was due to the subsequent installation of bigger windows. Not at all. It was because donations for repairing the roof had not been received, the fronds on the roof had decayed leaving many holes which let in plenty of sunlight. The vakils who were in the room had thrown towels on their heads for protection from the hot sun-beams. They appeared to be engaged in very serious reading, unaffected by or in spite of the hot shafts of light which thrust through the roof. There was a table in the centre of the room. It had only three legs. It was none of new fancy patterns. It belonged to the age-old four-legged type, but the fourth leg had disappeared, and some bricks and woodblocks placed one over the other served as the fourth leg to steady the table. One vakil was seated on a fallen door-plank. Bricks from an old fire-place had been picked up and arranged like two dwarf-walls. On these the plank rested, and on the plank the vakil. A well-known vakil had a more dignified seat. As known in English, it was an "easychair". More truly it was only a portion of an easy-chair, indeed a very small portion, and anyone who sat on it had no reason to feel easy. The long leg rests, their supporting posts, and half of the backrest of the chair had all vanished. The cane weaving at the back had completely gone. On the seat section a little of the cane still remained but scarcely enough for one to sit on. The four legs were still attached to the chair, but surely one was all loose and wobbling, because the occupant was anxiously and frequently watching it. Another vakil, very seriously reading a newspaper, at the same time kept tight hold of a bar of a window nearby, because his chair was minus one leg of its original four. No more seats being available, another vakil had spread his towel on the fireplace, squatted there, thus making himself a lawyer on the hearth.'

As the vakils gather there, naturally they begin to talk on various matters. One day they discuss contemporary Malayalam literature. They make fun of the practice of some writers using high-sounding Sanskrit words in Malayalam compositions. Some reviewers, they say, write up reviews of books without reading them, but after looking up opinions which other people have expressed. They are satirical about a current opinion that a novel is the more scholarly and deserving of appreciation, the more intricate and confusing its plot is. 'Even the author must get confused when he reads it', that is the test of a great novel ! One can see that the vakils in truth are expressing Chandu Menon's own opinions on some literary practices of his day. Structurally this is a more satisfactory arrangement than the eighteenth chapter of *Indulekha*. Thus *Sarada* shows a more considered and better craftsmanship.

About the structure and the plot we cannot offer final remarks, because Chandu Menon gave us only the setting of the story. It involves the claim of a young girl for acceptance and maintenance by a rich and aristocratic *tarwad*. Will the claim be proved or disproved ? How will Achan and Tirumulpad proceed ? What will be the contributions of Sankaran, Kundan Menon and Vythi Pattar ? Will Sanku Variyar be the chief witness for Sarada ? Or will Chandu Menon bring other characters into the story later, like the Sens in *Indulekha* ? He can bring the doctor from North India who delivered Sarada or some North Indian millionaire for whom Raman Menon had painted portraits and who knew Raman Menon's family well. Will Krishna Menon play the deciding part in the case and later marry Sarada ? Regarding all these, Chandu Menon has left us guessing. There is another possibility. Will the parties now provoked, impulsively proceed with the case or will there be sober reflections on both sides leading to a reconciliation, to avoid wasteful litigation ? If Chandu Menon had intended to show his readers how prosperous *tarwads* were being ruined by litigation then the case has to go through its full course, involving heavy expenditure for the parties. We may draw an inference from an incident quoted by Mr. M. P. Paul. A friend coming on a visit to Chandu Menon, caught him laughing though he was all alone. When the visitor asked the cause, Chandu Menon explained, 'Oh ! I was thinking of Koppunny Achan's reactions while being cross examined'. So he must have been thinking of a court scene in *Sarada* and building up its details. With

his genius backed with long experience in the courts, that court scene would have been one of the grandest, if not the grandest court scene in all Malayalam fiction. That chapter would have been the chapter of destiny, where the fate is decided, of Sarada who young and innocent, became the centre of spirited litigation between two prominent rivals and considerable local excitement. Perhaps the fates of some other dominant characters also would have been decided in that chapter, of Koppunny Achan, Vythi Pattar, Krishna Menon and Sankaran. Very probably that would have been the most important and the longest chapter in the book. In *Indulekha* the longest chapters are about lovers, for example where Madhavan and Indulekha meet and where Suri Nambudiripad meets Indulekha and other women in the course of his marital campaign in the Puvalli family. This is only natural, because the one is a story about law and courtcraft and the other of love and courtship.

8. INDULEKHA AND SARADA

Both *Indulekha* and *Sarada* are fascinating stories of social life in Malabar, in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In *Indulekha* we get the complete story, in *Sarada* we get only the beginnings of one. They are different from historical novels which deal with the past and novels of fantasy which deal with the future, also from what are known as crime fiction and science fiction. The two books under reference belong to the variety known as sociological novels, and deal with life in the rich Nair *tarwads* in Malabar about one hundred years ago. There we see the domineering, raging karanavans, the docile or progressive anandaravans, the women members and relatives by law. We know of the parts played by Nambudiris, Pattars and other communities in the Nair families. The novels refer to some of the various problems which came up in those *tarwads* in those days, relating to finance, authority, marriage and so on. Their repercussions also, good or bad, on homes and society, can be seen by the readers. As true sociological novels, these books bring to the careful reader many interesting pictures of the life of the times. Only a few examples can be given here.

The *tarwads* had two or three-storied and four-winged residences for the members, kitchens and out-houses for different purposes. 'The guest-chamber was over the entrance'. The affluent *tarwads* had meals-houses where Brahmins got free meals and also rest houses. There were family temples. Indulekha went daily to the temple. Panchu Menon swore 'by the Bhagavati whom I worship'. Koppunny Achan also worshipped at the temple everyday. Learned men read and explained religious texts every day in the *tarwad*-homes as Sankara Sastry read Ramayana at Puvalli. Home libraries were not uncommon, which contained paper-books and cadjan-leaf manuscripts. There were special types of lamps burning vegetable oil, to carry about in the dark. For travelling, important persons like Suri Nambudiripad used palanquins, and less important people used litters. There were five or six palanquins at Puvalli *Tarwad*.

Chandu Menon describes¹ an exciting event in the *tarwad*, namely the arrival of Suri Nambudiripad in a palanquin to see and marry Indulekha :—

‘The scene of excitement which now ensued almost baffles description. The palanquin was carried by eight, and the litter by six bearers, while the men who relieved them in turns ran beside them, and all had orders to chant in chorus. All the fourteen of them had to echo and re-echo the same note, while three or four who led the way chimed in with their ‘Heigh Hu, Heigh Hu’. This peculiar chant was regarded as the special prerogative to the Nambudiripad, and in this fashion the palanquin was borne with noisy pomp into the courtyard. Cheruseri Nambudiri sprang from his litter at the gate, but nevertheless the bearers insisted on carrying it into the courtyard, shouting their refrain. With the exception of Indulekha and Govindan Kutty Menon, all the inhabitants, young and old, of Panchu Menon’s family mansion and private residence came thronging out in full force as if for battle and, taking up their stations wherever they could and as best they could, gazed intently at the new arrivals. The windows and balconies swarmed with women, while their lords and masters neglecting the midday meal, hastily crowded into the verandha with Panchu Menon at their head to meet the distinguished guest while Kesavan Nambudiri descended into the courtyard to receive him and assist him in alighting from the palanquin. The courtyard itself was filled with the estate superintendents and servants ; cooks and menials peeped through the kitchen windows and chinks in the wall, and maid servants, hiding themselves behind the plantain trees and garden hedges, strove to catch a sight of the pageant.

All the itinerant Brahmins who had finished their repast and were taking a siesta in the rest-house started up at the commotion and the shouts which warned the vulgar herd to keep their distance. Running out and tying up their hair as they ran, they occupied in dense masses every available place even on the banks and steps of the tank. ‘Hallo ! What is this ? Who on earth is it ? Are we in for an earthquake ?’ they cried, and in fact, all who lived round about Chembhazhiyot and Puvalli could not have been more madly excited if an earthquake had happened.

¹ p. 131

A marriage ceremony, arranged in desperate haste is described.¹ Invited by Panchu Menon, 'the Nambudiripad Cherusheru and Kesavan Nambudiri and their retinue proceeded to Puvalli. According to the usual practice, the Nambudiripad washed his feet at the entrance to the house and within the room arranged for the ceremony reclined on a couch spread with a rich silk coverlet. The eastern door of the room was shut, and then all the women of the house thronged in at the western door pulling along with them the gentle Kallyani Kutty, crowding round her as if she were a live pig or some other animal, and thrust her into the room. They then hastened out, bolted the western door and so the union was complete'. This is not to be taken as the usual procedure in a proper Marumakkathayam marriage. Chandu Menon's reference to Indulekha's marriage also does not give any idea of the procedure. He just says, 'On the seventh day after Madhavan's return, Indulekha gave him her hand in marriage'. If these references suggest that marriages among Nairs are just casual, if not crude functions, one should read Chandu Menon's own very detailed analysis of the procedure followed for Nair marriages or Sambandhams or Pudamuris as they are known. This analysis he gave in his Dissenting minute attached to the Malabar Marriage Commission report, to emphasise that the Marumakkathayam marriage was not a casual matter, but involved many details required and regularised by local customs of long standing.

We learn from these novels many details of the daily life also of men and women, about their baths, dresses, ornaments and so on. Panchu Menon had a gold rosary round his neck and Koppunny Achan a rudraksh necklace. Both had gold girdles at the waist. Madhavan wore his tuft long, had gold stone-set ear-rings. Indulekha, at eighteen, wore gold discs in her ears, Tanjore bracelets, necklaces one of which was studded with diamonds, emeralds and rubies and rings on her fingers. Sarada, at eleven, had gold studs in her ears, a pearl necklace in three rows, a couple of rings, a gold belt at her waist. Many interesting items appear in the collection of the woman-chasing Suri Nambudiripad.² 'A dozen or more costly robes, edged with gold and silver lace, some score

¹ p. 248

² p. 122

of silk-bordered clothes, a number of rings of various kinds, a rare vase of pure silver inlaid with gold, a small gold tube for carrying betel leaf, a silver pitcher and lamps of the same material, a silver box for holding arecanut, a gold watch and chain to be worn round the neck like a garland, velvet robes with gold and silk embroidery, caps, a silver vessel containing sandal for the sacred caste-mark, a mirror mounted in gold, a golden rose-water spray, vials of attar of roses and other things lay piled up in confusion on a table'.

Indeed he had very worldly tastes, but he was superstitious too like others. He believed that he lost a case because he signed the plaint on a Saturday. Other beliefs were that one should not shave by lamplight, that one should bathe after a shave, and only then start on any work. Panchu Menon believed that he would be absolved from his oath if offerings were made to the deity and Brahmins. People who called themselves astrologers had many clients among the rich and poor.

Only a few illustrations are given above, though in page after page, there are references to other matters like widow remarriage, courtesies between seniors and juniors or between different communities, Kathakali, use of betel, temples and thus the list can be lengthened. In short, these novels are good albums where one can see innumerable pictures of social life in Malabar in the nineteenth century.

In his letter to W. Dumergue who translated *Indulekha*, Chandu Menon has explained why he wrote these books. Besides satisfying those motives, the books, in effect, also exposed some factors which were undermining the solid strength of the old rich Nair *tarvads*, for example, the despotism of the karanavans, their conservatism and favouritism, the marital alliances with pleasure-seeking and irresponsible Nambudiris, the wasteful and frequent but avoidable litigation. Chandu Menon brought into the stories the various characters suited for his purposes, like Panchu Menon and Koppunny Achan, the shouting, despotic karanavans, Vythi Pattar the villain, Kundan Menon the busybody, and people literate and not literate in English, such as Madhavan, Krishna Menon, Indulekha and Kallyani Kutty.

In *Indulekha* we are shown how the high-handedness of Panchu Menon provokes Madhavan and Indulekha. We understand the disturbances and humiliation brought by the peculiar alliances

with Nambudiris. Marriage and love are the dominant themes in *Indulekha*. The longest chapters in the book, except for the controversial Chapter XVIII, are those where Madhavan meets Indulekha and Nambudiripad meets Indulekha and other women characters in the course of his marital campaign. Quite a number of women, perhaps half the number of characters are women, appear in the story. Besides Indulekha, there are Parvathi Amma, Lakshmi Kutty Amma, Kummini Amma, Kallyani Kutty and some serving maids. Here we see also the sorrows of love-sick minds. These are to be expected in a romantic novel.

Things are different in *Sarada*. Scheming by legal minds occupies a good deal of space and time in the book. The characters, both good and bad, in *Sarada*, are more mature and serious-minded than those in *Indulekha*. Koppunny Achan is more arrogant and vituperative than Panchu Menon. To Indulekha at any rate, Panchu Menon 'is in reality sincere and kindhearted'. None except sychophants, have said that much about Koppunny Achan in *Sarada* so far. He is cruel, wicked and vindictive. Sheenu Pattar in *Indulekha* is no match for Vythi Pattar in *Sarada*. The former is a simpleton. He has the status at least of being the husband of a lady of Puvalli *tarwad*, whereas Vythi Pattar planned to rob a lady of Pooncholakkara *tarwad*. We may give credit to Sheenu Pattar for having the appearance of a human being. Vythi Pattar, with protruding fangs and a cobra squint, was like a fiend, evil personified.

Chandu Menon finishes his appreciation of Madhavan's appearance and achievements in about two pages in the English translation of *Indulekha*. He requires four and a half pages to speak of the person, the character and high accomplishments of Krishna Menon in *Sarada*. Madhavan is portrayed as a young man in love. Krishna Menon has not 'fallen' in love. Madhavan stirs mainly our sympathy; Krishna Menon inspires admiration.

As for the Nambudiri characters, Cherusseri in *Indulekha* is intelligent and sedate. Suri Nambudiripad has some culture. Does he not like kathakali? He behaves like a clown and a woman-chaser, still, he appears in the story completely dressed, though in gold. But see that troupe of Nambudiris in *Sarada*. Some are naked, some unwashed, hopping round and round, blabbering about a letter regarding a girl. They seem to be a barbarian lot indeed.

Indulekha is exquisite, but her beauty has reached the zenith. Sarada is angelic, but she is only a girl and there is the promise of greater beauty as she flows into maidenhood. Then, perhaps she would be not angelic, but divine. She is a lone female character in the story so far, that is a pity. The names of two or three other women are mentioned only to inform us that they are no more. It is true that we hear Sarada's mother Kallyani Amma's voice in the first two pages of the book. But it is a feeble voice from the death bed and after a few sentences, is silent for ever. The masculine element is dominant in *Sarada*.

The men are interested in claims, cases, courts and matters related to them, in *Sarada*. The atmosphere is mostly grave, sometimes even grim as when Vythi Pattar conspires with the ruffian Karuppan to prepare the poison which was to be given to Sankaran to kill him. In the sister novel, how differently and humorously was the plot arranged to substitute Kallyani Kutty for Indulekha. In *Sarada* most of the pages are filled with talks about legal privileges, points of law, contents of legal books and correspondence and manoeuvres in litigation. In *Indulekha*, one reads only a passing reference to legal action, as when Suri Nambudiripad and his steward discuss the registration of a document. Otherwise the atmosphere is mostly idyllic. What stirs us in *Indulekha* is the excitement of solicitude and affection, in *Sarada* it is the excitement of apprehension and antagonism.

We may recollect here Chandu Menon's artistry in the description of places and persons, whether they are big or small, grand or humble. With his pictures he can provoke admiration or laughter, he can describe the sublime and the ridiculous with equal facility. For examples, we have the pictures of Suri Nambudiripad and Krishna Menon, of Sen's residence and the Vakil's Club.

On comparison, *Sarada* seems to be a more mature novel, though incomplete, than *Indulekha*. The characters, both good and bad, are built on a bigger scale in the sense that the evil characters are the more so in *Sarada* than in *Indulekha* and the good ones are better. Some places also in *Sarada* are grander than in *Indulekha*. For example in *Indulekha* the Puvalli tarwad had an income of twenty-eight thousand paras of paddy from rice-lands and ten thousand rupees from garden lands. On the other hand Pooncholakkara tarwad in *Sarada* had an income of one lakh paras of paddy from ricefields and fifty thousand rupees

from garden lands. The temple, sattrams, gosai lodgings attached to Pooncholakkara Edam were bigger. The tank was so big that from one bank you could not identify the people on the opposite bank. As for Brahmin feeding by Pooncholakkara *tarwad*, Vythi Pattar informs Raman Menon, 'Sir, in four mess-halls they give free food to Brahmins'. Poovalli *tarwad* had only two mess-houses in which meals were given free to Brahmins. The *tarwad* residence was located in an isolated rural area. Pooncholakkara Edam is a bigger and more impressive unit situated in a well developed area.

Chandu Menon thought longer and wider, he built bigger places and stronger persons for *Sarada*, than for *Indulekha*. *Indulekha* complete, is a very good story. *Sarada*, incomplete, has the promise of a better story.

9. SUMMING UP

'Render therefore to all their dues' —ROMANS

We shall complete the full circle now, with a recapitulation and a link-up of this chapter with the first. We began with saying that Chandu Menon was a path-breaker. He turned away from existing practices and beliefs and showed how to write, in homely Malayalam, a most popular novel about the life of the common people of Malabar. The theme, the characters and the language which he used in his books were different from those used in earlier and contemporary Malayalam novels. Dumergue, the English Civilian who translated *Indulekha* assessed the novelist's achievement as follows in his preface, dated 1890: 'Mr. Chandu Menon has quit the well-worn track, paved with plagiarism; modern Malabar is depicted in his pages and the language of *Indulekha* is the living Malayalam of the present day. . . . I may be permitted to observe that if this descent into a valley of bones which are very dry, is followed by their revival, the author deserves well of all, who, from birth, inclination or necessity are interested in a regeneration of oriental literature'.

During his days, poetry was the most important section in Malayalam literature. The path to obtain recognition in the Malayalam literary world was to write poetry; to be well-read in poetry was the distinction of a man of taste and refinement. This does not mean that prose was not written at all. There was prose literature, surely, but it was not accepted as the most dignified literary form. Another feature of contemporary literary activity was that in both the poetry and prose writings of Malayalam authors, there was a generous mixture of Sanskrit. Chandu Menon broke away from these standards and conventions. He wrote in prose, in simple Malayalam, with only such Sanskrit words as were ordinarily used during conversation in cultured homes. Even then, he won a popularity and a rank as a Malayalam writer which many poets could not secure.

We remember that when he was writing *Indulekha* some friends warned him that people read only books on science, while others observed that only ghost stories would be popular. He

was neither frightened nor discouraged by such comments. He disregarded them and wrote the story of the contemporary domestic and social life in Malabar. His book, instead of being sneered at or rejected, became the rage of the times, and has been a great favourite all these years.

Thus Chandu Menon achieved which no earlier novelist had dared to try. No one had attempted to write novels picturing life in Nair *tarwads* and in the language used in such *tarwads*. In short, none had written a Malayalam novel in the full and true sense of the words. Then appeared Chandu Menon's books. In them the location of the main incidents is in Malabar. Almost all the characters are of Malabar and the language is that of Malayalee homes. He had some misgivings about the success of his book. He wrote in the preface to the first edition about his doubts. But he had courage also. With his genius he proved that very popular novels could be written without bringing in ghosts or potentates; that ordinary human beings engaged in the various activities of normal life—not necessarily quite honest or friendly—can provide material for a good story, that common facts can be transformed into uncommon fiction. What he believed in was effective narration. In his preface he wrote, 'I think that the points which should receive particular care, are style and beauty of composition'. He repeated the same idea, 'if stories composed of incidents true to natural life, and attractively and gracefully written, are once introduced, then by degrees the old order of books filled with the impossible and the supernatural, will change, yielding place to the new'. Indeed, he wrote *Indulekha* to create a taste among Malayalee readers for this kind of literature. The success of the book proved that Chandu Menon's judgments were correct and that the readers would appreciate exceedingly well such a work of fiction.

His novels also exposed the foibles of the Nambudiris and the repercussions of their marital adventures on Nair society. The obstinate, domineering, litigious type of karanavans were threatening the structure and stability of Marumakkathayam *tarwads*. This fact also Chandu Menon made clear through his novels. When they are considered as fulfilling certain purposes, we are reminded of some other writers of novels of purpose, such as Thackeray, Dickens and Tolstoy. If, however, one proposes to compare Chandu Menon with these famous authors, one must remember that he,

unlike the others, was not a professional writer. As an officer in the Judicial department, his work was mostly hearing cases and deciding them, and had little association with literary compositions. His time was not his own and he could indulge in novel writing only if he got any free time after attending to his official duties. Those others, on the other hand, were writers by profession who could and did utilise all their hours and energies for shaping and writing their stories. They are indeed world-famous authors. All the same, Chandu Menon must be given his due.

An obvious and simple test for the quality of a novel is its popularity. Whether a novel deals with history or society, splendour or misery, whether it is humorous or serious, whether it has a purpose or not, if it does not attract readers and only collects dust on the shelves, it is not a good novel, as it has been said, it becomes a 'novel novel'. We know that *Indulekha*, went into many editions by 1956, and *Sarada*, even in its incomplete form, went into about twelve editions by 1958. These figures prove the quality of these novels, and the ability of Chandu Menon as a novelist. This ability is the greater, because success is achieved not by impressing the readers by the intricacy of plot or by scenes of regal splendour. We do not hear any shouted commands of kings, or tramp of armies on the march; we do not see witches or ghosts floating about; no splash of blood, no clash of arms. There is not even a scuffle or trial of strength in *Indulekha*. There is no thrill of even quick movements, only two characters do short sprints, Sheenu Pattar and son Gopalan, to escape Panchu Menon's walking stick !

One explanation for the success of the novel is the portrayal of ordinary people with extraordinary artistry. By such portrayal of characters and the facile description of the interplay of these, *Indulekha* keeps its rank as a classic. There are some scenes in *Indulekha* which will long live in memory, such as those where Panchu Menon, Suri Nambudiripad, Madhavan and Indulekha appear. Somewhat similarly memorable are the scenes in *Sarada* where Vythi Pattar and Chathu Panicker appear, and the Vakils' Club scene. In addition to these we can venture a guess, that if Chandu Menon had written that court scene where Sarada's claims are assessed, perhaps it would have been a gem of a scene, unsurpassed in Malayalam literature, so far. This is only a guess, but seems justified, by what we know already of Chandu Menon's

abilities. Some of his characters are so well drawn that they live not only inside but outside the story. They have become independent. Only very few novelists and playwrights have been able to create some characters who acquire an independent existence.

Not only by such remarkable character delineation, but also by delightful humour *Indulekha*, though eighty-two years old, has attracted and continues to attract generations of readers. Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her sprightly humour. Most sociological novels have plenty of the comic element in them. Thus in *Indulekha*, Suri Nambudiripad's personal features, get-up, conversation, and reactions to other people, all have a characteristic drollery. Whenever he appears he gives us laughter, so also Panchu Menon. These characters in the book or on the stage, are deadly serious during the verbal clashes, but to the readers or the audience they are uproariously funny. In *Sarada*, though the atmosphere is more serious than in *Indulekha*, Chandu Menon provides the humorous element at various places. His descriptions of Koppunny Achan, Vythi Pattar and Kundan Menon are examples. Among the humorous scenes are where Vythi Pattar is mistaken about the identity of the victim of the poison, where Chathu Panicker fools Achan and Thirumulpad, where the Vakils meet, and where Kundan Menon flings his legal terms at vakil Raghava Menon. Chandu Menon keeps his readers interested by striking various emotional chords, of humour, sympathy and resentment, with an occasional touch on tension.

He has also an unusual, but pleasant habit of taking his readers into confidence. 'I should not suppress any facts in my story on account of my affection for the heroine', says he before whispering into the readers' ears that Indulekha kissed Madhavan's letter three or four times after she read it ! There are various occasions when the readers suddenly hear Chandu Menon specially accosting them, to give them some special information. How naively anxious is he to keep nothing from the reader,—like an old pal patting you on the shoulder and whispering 'Listen, I know something !'

Chandu Menon has a very high rank among the builders of Malayalam literature. It is true that his contribution consisted of only one complete novel and one-third of another. However, they show fine workmanship and originality. The matter, the method and the medium which he used for his stories had never been used

before in Malayalam literature for novel writing. It was an unfamiliar mixture, but suited the popular taste exceedingly well. The wonder is that he wrote *Indulekha* without any literary apprenticeship or any other experience in story-writing, only as a pastime, a 'labour of love'. Still it became one of the best-sellers of the day. Such an achievement is possible, it seems, only for a genius. There are critics who assert that even to-day *Indulekha* is in its type, unsurpassed, and exclaim, 'If he had completed *Sarada* !' Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thamupuran, who was honoured in his days as Sahitya Chakravarthi, remarked, 'If, even when incomplete, *Sarada* shines so well, then if it had attained the full form, *Indulekha* would have shone as an *Indulekha* (moon-beam) and *Sarada* as the full moon with flooding radiance'.

In the previous chapter, we referred to Chandu Menon's ability, as seen in these novels to portray the life of the times. He has given us good pictures of the Nair *tarwads* and their premises; the people; their daily life; their dresses and ornaments; their problems; their inter-relations.

In the same way as Chandu Menon was an interesting chronicler of contemporary life, he was also a harbinger of coming events in the literary and social worlds in Malabar. In the literary world the sensational success of *Indulekha* hinted that good novels may soon prove serious rivals to poetry for pride of place for popularity, among the reading public in Malabar. He secured a new status for Malayalam novels.

As far as society was concerned, the same novel gave the cue that the dominance of Nambudiris and Karanavans in Nair *tarwads* would not long continue unquestioned. Specially, that educated Nair women, with English education as Menon would have them, will not tamely submit to exploitation and humiliation by dissolute Nambudiris. *Indulekha*'s first words to Suri Nambudiripad when he came courting were, 'I was not downstairs then', instead of the traditional usage 'Your slave was not downstairs then'. Her words hinted that a girl of her type was not interested in a Nambudiri of his type. Also that, even if they met, there was no question of any servile relationship. Chandu Menon wrote, 'The Nambudiripad's breath was almost taken away at *Indulekha*'s temerity in using the first personal pronoun in speaking to him, because no Nair woman had ever just ventured on such irreverence'. True, and afterwards there was more of it. When the Nambudiripad,

love-crazy, 'executed a leap in the air', Indulekha said, 'Enough of this nonsense. I will never be your wife as long as I live'. They were knock-out blows from the eighteen-year old Indulekha to Suri Nambudiripad, from all educated Nair girls to all libidinous Nambudiris.

Panchu Menon, representing the traditional authority had to meet new challenges as from Madhavan and Indulekha. 'I will never give Indulekha to this young varlet' (Madhavan), shouted Panchu Menon at the beginning of the story. That was the authority of the old order. At the end of the book he fondly informed Indulekha, 'Now my dear, there is nothing to make you sad. Your wedding shall take place as soon as Madhavan arrives'. That was the old order yielding place to new. Here we see some early signs of the revolt of youth and the dawn of greater freedoms.

At this stage perhaps it will be interesting to try and analyse some of the qualities which make a good novelist. We shall begin with mentioning the power of observation. With this gift or training he obtains the material for the story. He must have 'seeing eyes', as the phrase goes, to note both big and small things, material and immaterial, such as the extensive panorama of the Bombay harbour or the momentous flick in Vythi Pattar's eyes, or little Gopalan's resistance to Panchu Menon's sarcasm, or the tragic hostility between big people, the tenderness of lovers, the villainy of villains.

The power of observation must be backed by sensitiveness, so that what is observed may remain in the memory, as a picture on a photographic plate. The writer must have not only 'seeing eyes', they must be 'camera eyes'! Without sensitiveness, things observed are rubbed out of memory, but with it, a stockpile of material is built up, out of which the story-teller can draw his requirements as occasion demands. This sensitiveness also creates emotional responses in the writer which he can transmit to the readers and make the novel more alive. In order to have emotional responses he must be like a participant in the activities or events, and feel with the characters, that is, there must be a requisite degree of attachment.

Then, like an architect he must select, out of the stock which he has collected, relevant materials and give them their proper places so that a fascinating structure takes shape. The architect's skill is seen not only in the quality of each room and equipment, but

also in the appearance of the structure as a whole. Similarly, a great novelist's skill is seen not only in each scene, but also in the total impression created by the story. Such selection and placement of materials require a spirit of detachment.

Thus a good novelist must have both attachment and detachment in relation to his material. He must be both a participant and an observer. Our religious classics like the Bhagavad Gita inform us that God is both inside and outside the creation. Somewhat similar is the position of the novelist in relation to his novel, the characters and incidents in his story.

Another essential quality of a great novelist is the ability to communicate or transmit satisfactorily what he knows and feels to the readers. There are 'words, words, words', which sparkle, tickle or burn, which bring pictures and music before us. There is also the right word for each occasion, the

'Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach
Of ordinary men',

the correct word to describe an organism, a movement or an emotion. John Dos Passos whom Jean-Paul Sartre regarded 'as the greatest writer of our time', once referred to the intention or function of writers in the following words: 'To see clearly and express clearly what he sees is still the writer's aim, but with all the narrative skill in the world, how hard it is to attain!'

Discerning readers who remember the characters, the scenes and the treatment of the stories in Chandu Menon's books will agree that he had, in ample measure, the qualifications of a good novelist, specially the ability 'to see clearly and express clearly' what he saw. He had such a reputation so that the well-known Malayalam writer, 'Kesari' Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar told Chandu Menon, 'Not one of us will dare to write a novel in your lifetime'.

Chandu Menon passed away when he was only fifty-two years old. About three quarters of a century has rolled by since then, a period which saw great changes of an unprecedented nature. His name and fame have survived these changes and those who read his *Indulekha*, may like him not only as an entertaining writer, but also as a personal friend who shares his jokes and secrets with them. *Indulekha* is a happy memorial for him, and, as in the past, in the future also it will bring joy and laughter into many a home. He had intense sympathy for the exploited, specially for

the women of India, who were kept illiterate. Like an enthusiastic reformer he roused us from our torpor, from our indifference to this tragedy, and urged that all our women must be given education which was suited for the times. He studied the present and had visions of the future,—a happy future for the liberated women of India in general, of Malabar in particular.

Chandu Menon's influence on literature may be assessed on the following lines. He showed a new and fertile field for the growth of Malayalam literature. To writers he gave the confidence that novels also, not merely poetry, would be a popular and dignified type of literature. They knew from him, that, if they had the gift of narration, they had a choice of language and materials to write good novels. In such favourable circumstances, several writers entered the new field and there were abundant crops of Malayalam novels year after year. When, before *Indulekha* (1890) there was no true Malayalam novel, in 1892, Chandu Menon wrote that they were 'daily increasing in number'. As the years passed, novels multiplied perhaps more than any other branch in Malayalam literature, gained in status, and also came into the front ranks for popularity.

As a facile writer, an amateur who proved better than many professionals, as the father of the Malayalam novel, as an explorer who opened new and delightful paths for novel-writing in Malayalam, who had visions of enlightenment and freedom for his countrymen,—such, it appears to me, is the place of Chandu Menon among the makers of Indian literature.

NOTES

1. EXTRACT FROM CHANDU MENON'S MEMORANDUM WHICH WAS ATTACHED TO THE MALABAR MARRIAGE COMMISSION REPORT

'I would now briefly refer to the local variations to be found in the ceremony of the Sambandham, and also particular incidents attached to certain forms of Sambandham in Malabar. I shall describe the Pudamuri or Vastradanam, as celebrated in North Malabar, and then show how the other forms of Sambandham differ from it. Of all the forms of Sambandham, I consider the Pudamuri form the most solemn and the most fashionable in North Malabar. Of course my description will be borne out by the evidence that is before us. The preliminary ceremony, in every Pudamuri, is the examination of the horoscopes of the bride and bridegroom by an astrologer. This takes place in the house of the bride, in the presence of the relations of the bride and bridegroom. The astrologer, after examination, writes down the results of his calculations on a piece of palmyra leaf, with his opinion as to the fitness or otherwise of the match, and hands it over to the bridegroom's relations. If the horoscopes agree, a day is then and there fixed for the celebration of the marriage. This date is also written down on two pieces of cadjan, one of which is handed over to the bride's karanavan, and the other to the bridegroom's relations. The astrologer and the bridegroom's party are then feasted in the bride's house, and the former also receives presents in the shape of money or cloth; and this preliminary ceremony, which is invariably performed at all Pudamuries in North Malabar, is called Pudamuri Kurikkal, but it is unknown in South Malabar.

'Some three or four days prior to the date fixed for the celebration of the Pudamuri, the bridegroom visits his karanavans and elders in caste to obtain formal leave to marry. The bridegroom on such occasions presents his elders with betel and nuts, and obtains their formal sanction to the wedding. On the day appointed the bridegroom proceeds, after sunset, to the house of the bride accompanied by a number of his friends. He goes in procession, and is received at the gate of the house by the bride's party and

is conducted with his friends to seats provided in the tekkinī or southern hall of the house. There the bridegroom distributes presents (danam) or money gifts to the Brahmins assembled. After this, the whole party is treated to a sumptuous banquet. It is now time for the astrologer to appear, and announce the auspicious hour fixed. He does it accordingly, and receives his dues. The bridegroom is then taken by one of his friends to the padinhatta or principal room of the house. The bridegroom's party has, of course, brought with them a quantity of new clothes and betel leaves and nuts. The clothes are placed in the western room of the house, called padinhatta, in which all religious and important household ceremonies are usually performed. This room will be decorated and turned into a bedroom for the occasion. There will be placed in the room a number of lighted lamps, and Ashtamangalliam, which consists of eight articles symbolical of Mangalliam or marriage. These are rice, paddy, the slender leaves of the cocoanut tree, an arrow, a looking-glass, a well-washed cloth, burning fire, and a small round wooden box called 'cheppu' made in a particular fashion. These will be found placed on the floor of the rooms aforesaid as the bridegroom enters it. The bridegroom with the groom's man enters the room through the eastern door. The bride, dressed in rich cloth and bedecked with jewels, enters the room through the western door, accompanied by her aunt or some other elderly lady of her family. The bride stands facing the east with the Ashtamangalliam and lit-up lamps in front of her. The groom's man then hands over to the bridegroom a few pieces of new cloth, and the bridegroom puts them into the hands of the bride. This being done, the elderly lady, who accompanied the bride, sprinkles rice over the lit-up lamps, and the head and shoulders of the bride and the bridegroom and immediately leaves the room. The groom has another duty. At the tekkinī or southern hall, he now presents his elders and friends with cakes, and betel leaf and nuts. Betel and nuts are also given to all the persons assembled at the place. After the departure of the guests, the bridegroom retires to the bedroom with the bride.

'This is an unvarnished account of a "Pudamuri"'. Next morning the Vettillakketu or Salkaram ceremony follows, and the bridegroom's female relations take the bride to the husband's house, where there is feasting, etc., in honour of the occasion'.

(*History of Kerala*, Vol. III, pp. 270-272)

2. EXTRACT FROM THE LETTER SENT BY THE MADRAS GOVERNMENT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

'The Madras Government, in their letter to the Indian Government recommending legislation, observes thus with regard to the marriage customs of Malabar :—

"It appears to Government that the case may be briefly stated as follows :—The classes governed by Marumakkathayam Law form sexual connections which are at the time of commencing them, intended to be permanent until the death of either of the parties, and which, in the great majority of cases, are so ; these connections are publicly formed and socially recognised and are accompanied by ceremonies of a characteristic kind which have nothing in them of a religious element, but which otherwise are as much marriage ceremonies and entitled to the same respect as marriage ceremonies elsewhere ".

(*History of Kerala*, Vol. III, pp. 291-292)

3. NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION OF SOME WORDS

ā as in father,

ē as in eternal

Ambalavāsi

.. Mādhavan

Chāther

.. Marumakkathāyam

Chāthu

.. Nāir

Cheruṣṭhēri

.. Pāṭhakam

Ēmbrān

.. Pāṭhasāla

Indulēkhā

.. Pārvathi

Kaliyāni

.. Sārada

Kaniyān

.. Thirumulpād

Kāranavan

.. Vāriyar

4. NOTE ON SOME ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS

Illam, Illom

Kaliyani, Kallyani, Kalliani

Kutti, Kutty

Lakshmi, Lakshmy

Nambudiri, Namboodiri, Namburi

Nambiar, Nambiyar

Panikkar, Panickar, Panicker

Puvalli, Poovalli

Tarwad, Tarawad

Variyar, Warriar

Like Menon, Nair and Pillai, some other titles among different groups in the Nair Community are Achan, Adiyodi, Eradi, Kurup, Menoki, Nambiar, Nayanar, Panicker, etc.