

## **O. Chandu Menon**

- Oyyarathu Chandu Menon (popularly known as O. Chandu Menon) (1847–1899) was a Malayalam language novelist. He is the author of Indulekha, the first major novel in Malayalam published in 1889, for which he received a certificate from Queen Victoria.
- He was inspired by his wife to write his first novel Indulekha. He began a second novel named Sarada, the first part of which appeared in 1892. This novel was meant to be in two parts. However, he was unable to complete the sequel, which never got published.

## **Indulekha**

In the legacy of Malayalam literature, Indulekha (1889) by O. Chandu Menon holds the coveted position of the work that marks the birth of Malayalam novel.

## **First perfect novel**

According to some critics and scholars, Indulekha, was the first perfect novel to be written in Malayalam. The novel dealt with a wide variety of themes and issues pertaining to man in the society. It was a critique of the matrilineal system of governance and inheritance, joint family, the power of the karanavar in the taravad, issues related to Nair-Nambuthiri Sambandams and the impact of English education in the fashioning of a 'new self.'

The novel Indulekha discusses three important points:

1. the suffering of the junior men in the family (anandravan) who had no right to separate property and were victims of taravads who would not even pay for their education.
2. the informal and temporary nature of Nair alliances as reflected in the contractual, non-

sacramental sambandam ceremony.

3. the strange (to the British) practice of inheritance through the female line and the relative unimportance of the father in everyday family life.

These three points are fundamental to the understanding of the novel.

Indulekha is deeply rooted in society and reflects certain fundamental social issues. The themes are carved out of the life, customs and practices of people.

### **'new women'**

- the advent of a new category of women called the 'new women'. Indulekha belonged to the category of the 'new women' and depicted an image of a radical middle class Nair women who tried to inaugurate and establish their own individuality and distinctiveness.

- The novel, Indulekha, provided a fresh environment in which the emblem of woman had already witnessed changes due to education and other various social movements.
- Indulekha and Madhavan are beneficiaries of these advantages. In fact, Indulekha was the 'new woman' that Chandumenon wanted to project to society, a progressive and radical woman who wanted to establish her own individuality.

The spread and access to English education offered additional benefits to establish one's own uniqueness, although some may consider it means of colonial control.

### **Issues of marriage**

- The issues of marriage discussed in the novel is of importance as we consider the

transition—a journey to modernity. Madhavan and Indulekha decide to move away from an old system to embrace a new one. They decide to marry against the wish of their parents and relatives.

- Their marriage strengthens their individuality, because it is in uniting themselves in marriage they decide to move away from their families. It is a fresh beginning and a new step in their lives. Their decision to settle down in Madras, away from the joint family, has two implications.

On the one hand it is a break away from the tradition by embracing nuclear family and on the other, it is a move from the village to urban space. Most of the rigid practices are prevalent in the villages and therefore, moving away from the village would also mean moving away from some of these traditional practices.

## **Two standards of operation**

Chandumenon also discusses a misconception that prevailed among a few that marriage, loyalty and home are the domains of women, while religion and politics are of men. There are two standards of operation in society –one for women and the other for men.

There is also chasm existing between the older and younger generations and the older generation believes that the modern generation is devoid of faith in God, religion and morality and failed to love and show respect towards their elders.

## **V. T Bhattathiripad**

V. T. was a social critic, well-known dramatist and one of the leading lights of social reforms in Kerala, especially in the Namboodiri community of the State. He was best known for his contributions in the reformation of the casteism and conservatism that existed in the Namboothiri community.

He wrote a number of books which include a play, *Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku* and his autobiography, *Kanneerum Kinavum* (Tears and Dreams in English) and many critics consider them as notable works in Malayalam literature. Kerala Sahitya Akademi honoured him with distinguished fellowship in 1976.

He also conducted the first mixed-race marriage in the Brahmin society. He is credited with starting the progressive theatre movement of Kerala at a time when stage performances were in the hands of social reformers and political activists.

### **'Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku'**

- His motto was "make the Namputhiri a human being". He was co-founder of the Yogakshema Sabha and its youth wing Namputhiri Yuvajana samajam. He wanted to uplift the Namputhiri women folk.

- He worked for widow remarriage and education of Namputhiri women. For this purpose he wrote a famous literary work- *Atukkalayil Ninnu Arangatheykku*. (From kitchen to the stage).
- This play helped the growth of awareness about the evil customs prevailed among the Namputhiris.

His play (drama) '*Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku*' played a very powerful role in the social reformist movement led by Namboodiri Yogakshema Sabha. It was the first play in Malayalam to have a definite and concrete social objective.