

# Maname

With the vibrant melodic resounding golden voices of a cast that was totally anew gave birth to a new tradition of a play named “Maname” fathered by a University don of a luminary at the auspicious time in November 1956, at the Lionel Wendt Theatre in Colombo, which was at the time, the theatre castle exclusively of the English theatre. The father of this play was Ediriweera Sarachchandra, a great intellect, scholar and literary figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Sri Lanka.

All the critics raved Maname as a new genre of theatre in Sri Lanka that laid the foundation for a nationalistic identity creating a cultural uniqueness. The style of the play was *Nadagam* and it created an eastern resonance. It was appreciable by everybody, the rural or educated folks of the city, and indeed any where in the world. Sarachchandra created a universal language of theatre through the vehicle of *Nadagam* musicality.

While genera of *Nadagam* was prevalent in the country for centuries in the form of loose theatre of story telling, which the rural folks employed for their mundane entertainment, Sarachchandra extracted the essence of the *Nadagam* story after years of research and being with the rural folks for several years traveling from village to village collecting data and making comparisons of the styles and different modes of presentations. After such a period of toil he created a great drama in Maname. Its approach was novel, its theme and the quality of humanness impregnated the minds of the audiences with emotive feelings penetrating into the roots of the cultural milieu of our country.

The production of Maname in 1956 is important in so many ways. Up to 1956 everything in Sri Lankan city theatre was mostly western and translations and adaptations of the likes of Moliere and Chekhov. Maname built a consciousness among the middle class for ethnicity so far who had slaved for western mores. Though perhaps not intended, Maname altered the whole concept of social thinking, and paved the way for the people to look at life differently and change their attitudes and values. Thus, Ediriweera Sarachchandra ushered in a new era in the theatre scene with the production of his “Maname”, which still runs to capacity anywhere it is staged in the country.

Having peeped a little into the importance of “Maname” as a legend of an event, as this year is its golden anniversary, since its production, I am delighted as a drama lover of both eastern and western theater to learn that preparation are being made not only in Sri Lanka but also in the United States, beginning in Los Angeles, to celebrate its success specially by presenting it to a wider American and expatriate audience. Maname compares well with some of the greatest operettas of the west and I have no doubt, that any one brought up in the traditions of the western theater and opera will reap immense joy and pleasure from this “gem of eastern theater”.

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