

Maname By Kamalika Pieris

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'Maname' was a landmark event in Sinhala theatre. But the events leading up to it have received little attention. The emergence of 'Maname' at Peradeniya was no accident. The Arts faculty of the University of Ceylon was exposed to a new atmosphere when they moved to Peradeniya in 1953. Peradeniya was secluded, residential and 'outstation.' The students were no longer bound by Colombo's insistence on half-baked western culture.

There was a change also in the undergraduate population. A growing number of rural undergraduates were arriving, who were very enthusiastic about Sinhala theatre. The Rangha Sabha was renamed Sinhala Natya Mandalaya with P.E.E. Fernando, senior lecturer in Sinhala, as patron and W. Arthur Silva as president. The rest of the staff of the Sinhala Department, such as Ananda Kulasuriya, Siri Gunasinghe and D.E. Hettiarachchi also showed interest. M.B. Ariyapala had later sponsored 'Maname' performances in the south and 'hosted us warmly and lavishly accommodating us in an estate mansion owned by his family'.

When Sarachchandra returned in 1956 after a year abroad, studying theatre, the Sabha embarked on a series of 'play reading' sessions but what they really wanted was a new play from Sarachchandra. Sarachchandra had meanwhile realized that naturalistic Sinhala theatre had not gone down well with audiences. Something else was needed. Sarachchandra looked at the folk play and decided 'the most suitable for modern theater was the nadagama. Kolam and Sokari could not be used'. The advantage of nadagama, though Sarachchandra did not say so, was that it could be manipulated for artistic entertainment without creating a rumpus. It was alien anyway, with no ritual implications.

Persuading Sarachchandra was no easy task, said H. L. Seneviratne. Sarachchandra was not keen on doing a new play since his previous plays had not met with public approval. The university authorities did not respond to his requests for assistance either. So he hesitated, 'but he knew that he had got the right idea', and one day he said 'api ehenam nadagamak natamu'.

In a 'Nadagama' the story is told through song. There was also an element of dance, because each character had set movements which were performed on entry. Certain events were also depicted

through stylized movement. There was a narrator. The play was acted on a raised semi-circular platform adjacent to a shed, and the sloping roof of the shed became its roof as well.

'I did not try to reproduce the old nadagama style intact, but used its essence and certain aspects only', said Sarachchandra. He selected Chulla Dhanuddara Jatakaya for the story. "Maname" had been performed as kolam and kavi nadagama, but not as a sindu nadagama. Sindu nadagama went on all night for about 7 days and the 'Maname' story was too short for this. 'But I realized that I could create a good dramatic presentation of 'Maname'.'

When creating 'Maname', Sarachchandra first wrote the songs. For this Sarachchandra obtained the services of Charles Silva Gunasinghe. Charles knew nadagama songs including kavi nadagama and he could sing them without a break. He sang away, Sarachchandra listened, selected what he wanted and composed the lyrics. 'I used the most musical nadagama tunes that Charles knew'. Sarachchandra had included nadagama songs earlier in 'Pabavati' too.

'Maname' adopted the nadagama style for movement as well. Ina nadagama, characters come in dancing, as they are introduced. Each character had a different beat and different movement. They went round and round in a circle. 'Maname' performers did the same. Charles Silva Gunasinghe created the movements, using the dance steps of nadagama, selecting those which suited each 'Maname' character. Vasanta Kumar created two highly original Veddah dances and the combat dance between Veddah king and 'Maname'. The orchestra consisted of harmonium, flute, esraj and violin with only one nadagama instrument, the Tamil maddala drum.

'Maname' was uncharted territory and its creation was a collective effort observed H.L.Seneviratne. The greatest contribution was from Charles Silva Gunasinghe, who knew the nadagama tradition well. He knew Kolam and Tovil too. Charles was an outstanding performer, talented and versatile, he could sing, dance and play the maddala. Charles had provided the music for the two nadagama songs in 'Pabavati' and had acted as Poteguru in it. Sarachchandra admired his singing which he considered far superior to any Sinhala singer he had ever heard.

'Charles was with me at every stage of the writing of 'Maname', said Sarachchandra. He provided the music, he advised on dance and song movements and participated in discussions about the content of the play. Sarachchandra recalled, 'when I started rehearsing the play Charles demonstrated the traditional nadagama style but was agreeable to changes.' Charles also trained the performers. He was a good teacher, said Sarachchandra.

Siri Gunasinghe also made a substantial contribution to 'Maname'. Siri was the art director for 'Maname'. He designed the stage set, giving it a triangular board representing the thatched roof that sheltered the stage of a real nadagama. He designed the costumes as well. Their striking use of green and orange showed his exquisite color sense, said Sarath Amunugama. The costumes were part of the total color scheme of the stage. This was an unprecedented visual integration of different components of the performance. The theater program was also designed and drawn by Siri. Siri was a great support to Sarachchandra, said Amunugama. He was 'constantly behind' Sarachchandra, who consulted him on many matters. Siri also saw to the repairs to Sarachchandra's Volkswagen car.

H.L.Seneviratne observed that Aileen Sarachchandra would also have made a contribution behind the scenes, to the success of 'Maname'. She was a talented actress and very musical. Aileen had made the costumes assisted by her niece. The two had also done the striking make up, which resembled kolam, kabuki and kathakali.

HL is definite that without the insistent persuasion of a small group of enthusiastic students, who were members of the Natya Mandalaya, led by its president W. Arthur Silva, Sarachchandra would not have launched 'Maname' at the time he did. If 'Maname' had appeared later, the impact may not have been the same.

Sarachchandra was not sure whether the talent he needed for 'Maname' was available and whether the students had the staying power. The public auditions were unsuccessful and the students had to find promising actors through personal contact and networks. This placed a heavy burden on Silva and the other student enthusiasts.

For Prince 'Maname' they found Ben Sirimanne, a school teacher doing the two year diploma in Sinhala. He was not a raw undergrad. He had a rich and full throated voice, and a keen musical sense. To play the princess they found two excellent candidates, Hemamali Goonasekera and Tricilia Abeykoon (Gunawardena). Tricilia had sung on radio in Lama Pitaya and had seen folk plays. Hemamali is forgotten now, but she should not be, said HL, for it was with her formidable acting talent and her powerful stage presence that the play opened to an enraptured audience on the night of Nov 6 1956. She was only 18 then but was able rival her two world class male co-players.

Edmund Wijesinghe was discovered during an undergraduate 'sarong strike' where speeches were interspersed with singers like Wijesinghe. He vanished thereafter. He was not living in a hall of residence. He was re-discovered at a carnival in Bogambara, promptly captured and brought before Sarachchandra, who immediately took him over and 'accommodated the precious find' in his own home. He was a mature student who had been a school teacher before he entered university.

Shyamon Jayasinghe was the Potegura. He dazzled at the first performance, making a 'near miraculous transformation' of the role from humdrum narrator to an actor of extraordinary power. It was he who most captivated the audient on the first night and had it in his grip. The audience waited for him to come on after each episode. He had not shown this ability at the rehearsals. Sarachchandra later said that no narrator who came after Shyamon could excel him.

'Maname' owes much to W. Arthur Silva's perseverance, organization and personnel skills, said HL. 'Maname' would not have become a reality if not for Silva's relentless effort in dealing with the people involved, including Sarachchandra, who demanded very high standards from not only the actors but all associated with the play, including punctuality. The production side of 'Maname' was a 'very primitive affair amateur affair' which depended a great deal on personal and small group contact.

The only theatre spotlight available in Colombo was at the Lionel Wendt. M.B. Ariyapala and Arthur Silva went and met Mahinda Dias who did the lighting at Lionel Wendt and he agreed to loan it and also an assistant for all the 'Maname' shows in Colombo and outstation.

HL is definite that the success of 'Maname' is due to the support given by the rural students. This group understood what Sarachchandra was trying to achieve. Many of the performers, the orchestra, the helpers and organizers of 'Maname' as well as the office bearers of the Drama circle, who were responsible for the hard background and organization work that went into making 'Maname' into a landmark play, were drawn from this new rural group. Dedicated and hard working they assisted in creating the 'new' Sinhala theatre.

The entire orchestra consisted of students from rural schools. The harmonium performer, Kitsiri Amaratunga and flautist Somaratne Edirisinghe were found without difficulty, both had talent. A maddala drummer was needed. G.D. Wijayawardene had studied the tabla and found the Maddala easy. L.R. Mudalihamy played the violin. He was a school teacher attending the Sinhala diploma course. The esraj was played by Ramya Tumpala. She replaced HL who was the initial stopgap. A horanava player could not be found. Hemapala Ratnayake helped Siri with the theatre programme. HL had painted the title and Sarachchandra's name on the cover.

Rehearsals took place in the junior common room. Charles Silva Gunasinghe trained the performers. He taught them to sing nadagama style. The early rehearsals were in fact singing classes. He then trained them in nadagama movement, how to go round and round in a circle, using specific steps. Tissa Kariyawasam observed that Tricilia did not exactly follow the style given to her by Charles. She made the steps gentler. Most of the performers, had not seen a nadagama and knew nothing about them, but were very cooperative. Hemamali said it was a privilege to have been trained by Charles.

As the rehearsals progressed, the indications were that the play was going to be a success. The poetic excellence of the play, the allure of the songs, the music, the visual impact, the excellence of the acting, the perfection of its artistic unity, could be seen at the later rehearsals, especially the final dress rehearsal. But no one anticipated the impact it would have on the first night audience as indeed it did on all later audiences.

'Maname' was first shown on 3rd Nov 1956 at the Lionel Wendt Hall in Colombo. 'I selected Lionel Wendt as it had a good stage and auditorium, also the facilities needed for the actors. Its chairman, Harold Pieris gave me the hall free and it was shown for four days running.' The play was advertised in English as well as Sinhala in posters pasted side by side on walls. Slides were projected in cinema halls. Sarachchandra had invited Martin Wickremasinghe to an early rehearsal and Wickremasinghe had written about the play under the title "an intensified folk play' for Daily News.

Sarath Amunugama was at the first performance of 'Maname' in Colombo. The Lionel Wendt was half empty he said, but those who saw the play liked it. Gunasena Galappaththy later got pupils from nearby schools to come and fill up the hall. J. B. Disanayake recalled that his teachers at Ananda took them to see the play. Ranjini Obeyesekera recalls the first night of 'Maname'. 'As the curtain rose, the rich chant of the Potegura filled the auditorium in what seemed to me a theatrical miracle. Here was something new and exciting, different from anything seen in Sinhala theatre before. Sarachchandra had created from a traditional source a sophisticated modern drama, breaking way from the western influenced fourth wall proscenium drama.' Regie Siriwardena recalled that when he first saw 'Maname', what

struck him most forcefully was the breakthrough in theatrical form. This was the reaction of several other early critics of the play.

Before the performance Sarachchandra had told the cast that the press will attack the play and to be prepared and not to get discouraged. But the newspapers gave it rave reviews. The first performance of 'Maname' in Colombo was on a Saturday and the first review was by Regie Siriwardene in Daily News on Monday. Regi praised it extravagantly in English. He said he had gone to most Sinhala plays hoping that someday something would turn up which could give him hope for Sinhala theatre and this was it. 'Maname' had a finish and style which raises it far above the traditional nadagama. This was followed by an equally laudatory Sinhala review by Charles Abeysekera, in one of the Lake House newspapers. He was another 'western educated intellectual.' Never before had a Sinhala play been received so jubilantly by critics. These rhapsodic reviews gave the play an excellent boost, encouraging the upper class audience who read Regi, to go and see it.

It was only after 'Maname' was shown at YMBA hall at Borella several months later, that the other Sinhala newspapers responded. Sri Chandraratne Manawasinghe, who regularly disparaged the work of the Sinhala department at Peradeniya, went out of his way to praise this new play in his popular Vaga Tuga column in Lankadipa. He called it an abhiranganaya, a super drama. Other critics took notice.

On the other hand, it was triumphantly asserted that modern urban Sinhala theatre owes its very existence to Tamil culture, since the nadagama style on which it was based came from the Terukuttu performed in Jaffna by the Roman Catholics. That cannot be accepted. The Sinhala play was no longer trying to modernize by imitation. It had passed that stage. 'Maname' was to be an experiment in form using the nadagama style. It was a nadagama, not something 'influenced' by nadagama. Instead of creating new melodies of its own it used traditional nadagama melodies, whose origins can, apparently, be traced very easily. The fact that the music of 'premayen mana rangita' is from a Christian hymn in Tamil and 'lapa noma van sanda' and 'dula nethupula' are North Indian does not, therefore detract from the achievement of 'Maname', which lies primarily in its lyrics and not in tunes.

'Maname' expanded the audience for Sinhala theatre, in all directions. Firstly, it appealed to those in major towns, who were caught up in the resurgence of cultural nationalism. Even Colombo 7 types who used to wait patiently for the annual Dramsoc offering now went to the Borella YMBA, said Amunugama. Others pointed out that Sarachchandra found his initial and most ardent support, in the western educated elite and it was this which enabled the play to make its first forceful impression in the public. This is not surprising. Sarachchandra was specifically targeting the English speaking audience, just as he had done with his book 'Modern Sinhalese fiction' (1943). That is why he chose Lionel Wendt. He thought the western elite needed a substitute for English theatre. The villagers still had their kolam and sokari. However, Sarachchandra said that it was only when 'Maname' was shown at YMBA hall at Borella that 'we got the audience that could actually appreciate the play'.

Another commentator said 'from my impression of the audience at Borella, YMBA and Lumbini, I would say the new audience of 1956 and thereafter, was predominantly Sinhala speaking urban lower middle

class. Sinhala theatre was not able in those years to reach out to any group beyond the middle class. However the broadening of the theatre audience in 1956 was significant.

The real breakthrough was in the provinces, Amunugama said. The play went outstation, helped by young graduates who had fanned out into the country as school principals, DROs and social service officers. 'Maname' was taken to towns which had never seen 'serious' theatre before, with the local cinema hall or school hall used for the show. To accommodate the growing demand for the play from towns that could barely provide a school hall, the cyclorama was abandoned. Siri Gunasinghe's set which depicted a 'nadagam maduwa' was also abandoned as it was difficult to transport. Getting the cast, who were by now employed, together in some outlandish town was also difficult.

'Maname' was taken over by Jana Ranga Sabha in 1957, they took it round the Island. 'Maname' went everywhere, Ambalangoda, Anuradhapura, Bandarawela, Galle, Gampaha, Gampola, Kalutara, Kandy, Kegalle, Kurunegala, Matale, Matara. Moratuwa, Panadura, Ratnapura. Several towns were visited more than once. Ralph Pieris arranged for a performance at the Bogala Mines .He knew the owners. In Colombo 'Maname' played at YMBA, Lumbini and Lionel Wendt.

Sarachchandra had expected 'Maname' to be followed by several plays in the same style. 'Before long we would possess body of plays that would reflect our national genius like the Kabuki and Noh of Japan.' A.J. Gunawardene (Jayadeva) said that though 'Maname' did not succeed in generating a new dramatic tradition as the dramatist had hoped, it had released trapped energies.

'Maname' is still very popular and much admired .Sarachchandra's language and music, its sheer poetry still enthalls, said Obeyesekera (2014). 'Maname' was shown years later at Peradeniya, to a packed audience, of students, teachers, monks, workers, villagers from the surrounding areas. When the actress started to sing 'premayen', a student voice spontaneous joined in and instantly the entire audience burst into song. It was an unforgettable magical moment, she said.

"I intended 'Maname' originally to be an experiment in form but the fact that it has survived for thirty years when the form is no more a novelty must have some explanation other than its external attraction," said Sarachchandra. 'Maname' was an outstanding combination of theatrical craft, poetic sophistication and dramatic concentration, in which the folk theatrical tradition was [successfully] adapted to the modern stage, observed K. N. O. Dharmadasa (1992). Its success led to Sinhabahu, which remains the high point of Sinhala urban theatre today.

(The writings of Sarath Amunugama, T. Kuruwita Bandara, K.N.O. Dharmadasa, J.B. Disanayake, Walter Marasinghe, Ranjini Obeyesekere, H. Ranasinghe, H.L. Seneviratne and Ediriweera Sarachchandra were used for this essay.)

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Maname' needs serious critics By Bandu de Silva

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Columnist Kamalika Pieris deserves applause for her article published in the Midweek Review of Oct. 14 for detailing out the role of many of those who contributed substantially in different measure, in the production of Sarachchandra's 'Maname' Natakaya which has been much acclaimed as an original.

As with Wilhelm Geiger's name associated with Mahavamsa, which Dr. Ananda Guruge remarked in his annotated translation of the Pali chronicle, people had come to speak of it as if it were the German scholar's own compilation and many had come to believe that Sarachchandra was the real composer of the story of Maname and the Nadagama (Natakaya) which goes by that name. Such is the mysticism which has come to surround Sarachchandra's work. It is, therefore, good that someone familiar with events has reminded the reading public, at least briefly, as Kamalika has done, of the reality.

Kamalika highlights that there were many who could claim some credit for Maname play produced by Sarachchandra, leading among them being Charles Silva Gurunnanse from the area from which I hail, where a lively folk theatrical tradition existed which I recollect from my days as a child. The centre of this folk activity is the village Paragahatota, which lies embedded in between Ambalangoda and Balapitiya. It was not just a village for folk theatre alone. It was a real capsule of practically all cultural traditions of the country, perhaps, excluding Kandyan dancing traditions and Sokari, jewellery making and brass work. You name it, - Kolam, puppetry (Rukada), 'Hewisi', 'Yak-bera', 'magul Bera', 'Ana-bera', Mala-bera' drumming, 'Raban playing, and other forms of drumming including South Indian drumming like Maddala, crafts like 'Gokkola craft, Habarala leaf designing (a substitute for leather perforated designing of Kerala), designing out of banana - tree-trunks for Bali-Tovil and auspicious occasions, astrological work including horoscope-casting and writing on ola and reading/interpreting, (Nakshastra), 'porondam' reading, determining auspicious times for ground breaking, house construction, marriage etc, arts like mat weaving including making coir matting, 'Thorana' designing for festive occasions and at funerals- all that was found there.

Some of the painters of rolling curtains of 19th / 20th century theatre and later Wesak Thoranas also came from this area. I still recall the name of S. Dharmasena who rose to fame as a 'Thorana' artist.

These were specialities different caste groups excelled in. (Even in drumming, different types of drumming was done by people of different castes.)

It was from this artistic/dramatist tradition that Charles Silva Gurunnanse came. As I remember from the days I was under ten years, that Gurunnanse was known as not only a teacher of Nadagam in outlying villages but as a master of many other crafts but there were others like him.

Heartening

It is heartening to see Kamalika recognizing Charles Silva Gurunnanse as the greatest contributor to making Sarachchandra's Manamenatakaya. She writes:

"The greatest contribution was from Charles Silva Gunasinghe, who knew the nadagama tradition well. He knew Kolam and Tovil too. Charles was an outstanding performer, talented and versatile, he could sing, dance and play the 'maddala'. Charles had provided the music for the two nadagama songs in 'Pabavati' and had acted as Poteguru in it.'

She quotes Sarachchandra as having admiringly said he considered Gurunnanse's singing far superior to any Sinhala singer he had ever heard and acknowledging:

"Charles was with me at every stage of the writing of 'Maname... He provided the music, he advised on dance and song movements and participated in discussions about the content of the play" and recalling "when I started rehearsing the play Charles demonstrated the traditional nadagama style but was agreeable to changes.' Charles also trained the performers. He was a good teacher."

No recorded statement

Sadly, even though Kamalika has reconstructed these good words from Sarachchandra about the Gurunnanse, from memory as I suppose, Sarachchandra has not recorded anywhere as far as I know, a distinctly positive acknowledgement of the Gurunnanse's role.

In the introduction to the printed version of Maname (1958 reproduced by Lalitha Sarachchandra in 2011 with a strange interpolation-looking-post-death Dedication by deceased Professor to his loving (Senehebara) wife Lalitha), he mentions Gurunnanse only when he says he produced his version of Maname text after consultation with Charles Silva Gurunnanse, who had long experience in producing Nadagam plays, excluding what needed to be excluded." Sarachchandra, (Manamenatakaya, New Edition 2001, p.16).

One can see that Sarachchandra is retaining the primary role for the production of his text to himself, assigning not even the 'Pedura' role to the Gurunnanse. He is out of the 'Pedura' itself. In other words, he was not an equal, nor superior like the 'Rajaguru' of Maname story whom Poteguru described as :

"Dat-kalasoosetasahasivvedaapman a

Dak-walasisunsemagnanayapaturuvan a

Sip-kalaadipthiwachira-kalwejaben a

Tak-saladisa-pa-mok- edurupeminen a"

In the new edition of Maname text of 2011, the editor, (Lalitha) while giving the new names of personae mentions that 'Raga -tala' belong to old Nadagam which were provided by Charles Gunasinghe Gurunnanse. Was that all Gurunnanse provided? Kamalika contradicts it. She writes: "Charles Silva Gunasinghe created the movements, using the dance steps of nadagama, selecting those which suited each 'Maname' character". Besides she quotes Sarachchandra saying" (not written):" Charles was with me at every stage of the writing of 'Maname.' He provided the music, he advised on dance and song movements and participated in discussions about the content of the play. He (Sarachchandra) recalled, 'When I started rehearsing the play Charles demonstrated the traditional nadagama style but was agreeable to changes.' Charles also trained the performers. He was a good teacher, said Sarachchandra".

So from what Kamalika recalls of Sarachachandra saying what appears in published texts by Sarachchandra and his second wife, about the Gurunnansare very minimal indeed.

Adequacy?

Was what Sarachchandra wrote about the Gurunnanse sufficient enough? Where is 'guru-bhakti'? Was it infra-dig for a 'highly-rated' University Professor to admit publicly he learnt quite a lot on local folk drama from an acknowledged and versatile exponent of it?

What was the reason? Can one recognize a class distinction here? Sarachachandra admirers might shout "No"! How could this beetle-chewing person always dressed in 'soil-looking -clothes' with a small 'Konde' behind his head be admitted to the inner parlours of Sarachchandra residence to sit on an aged ebony couch dressed in faded red velvet?

An important question to ask here is if Sarachchandra's Manamenatakaya or even Sinhabahu for which he could make a better claim for himself of originality, could have ever been born if not for the inspiration he received from Charles Silva Gurunnanse? I think this is a legitimate question to ask. One may think it is in the Peradeniya academic tradition to ignore those whose contribution was uppermost to a cause if that would down-grade their own standing. That could be a general tendency even outside Sri Lankan academia, but that I find notable exceptions to that when I find academics like H. L. Seneviratne, J. B. Dissanayake and K. N O. Dharmadsa reverentially paying respect to their guru, the late Prof. M. W. Sugathapala de Silva, my former school contemporary from kindergarten days. That may be guru-bhakti which does that apply always.

Charles Silva Gurunnanse's place in Sarachchandra residence at Sanhgamitta Hill was always the 'Pedura' with a cushion with his hand on the Maddala in front as he sang for Sarachchandra. I had left Peradeniya when Maname first hit the stage at Lionel Wendt in 1956, but in its formative years from 1953 to 1955, I was around. When I returned to my village Batapola, where Gurunnanse had been a familiar personality who trained local talents in Nadagam performance and was at times called to perform other house-hold rituals, and also to my wife's home-town, Ambalangoda, I learnt that Gurunnanse was a much disappointed man for the reduced public recognition-role he was assigned to him in Maname play.

In 1970, when my wife and I viewed Maname for the first time at Ambalangoda, it was played at the Town Hall and not at the Regal Theatre (former Lakshmi Theatre owned by P de S Kularatne) then owned by my wife's father, which was the traditional venue for theatrical shows south of Bentota River. I do not know the reason but my father-in-law or rather, his wife who managed the Theatre, was a difficult customer, as my good friend, Somapala Gunadhera told me when he approached me to get terms softened for his own play. In defence of my late mother-in-law, I must say that she was not without a background of interest in traditional theatre as she was a close kinsman of Lakshman Jayakody's family which was closely associated with the Sinhala theatre.

I thought at last on the occasion Mamame was staged at Ambalangoda, it would have been a good gesture if Charles Silva Gurunnanse was given a place of honour at least in that home-town area of his.

Gurunnanse's role in 'Pabavati'

Kamalika writes that Gurunnanse Charles had provided the music for the two nadagama songs in 'Pabavati' and had acted as Poteguru in it. This needs verifying. Gunasena Galappatthy and I attended every rehearsal of Pabavati' at King George Hall at the then University of Ceylon in Colombo and its first performance there as well as post-Colombo performance for which we came from Peradeniya huddled in Sarachchandra's green coloured Volkswagen car. Both of us were helpers of Sarachchandra and I even assisted Father Keunaman, who volunteered with organizing the décor. That exposure saw the beginning of Gunasena's own career as a playwright and producer.

As far as I recall, there was only one song to be sung in Pabavati by Prince Kusa, whose role was played by Dingiri Banda, a final year student in the Sinhalese Department, with whom I shared a room in the popular boarding house at No.6. Arthurs Place Bamabalapitiya. This song (Kusa's lament) "Sondure,... Sondure.....Oba netimemata... raja sepakumata... Enu ...ma...wetata..., Sondure, Sondure" was composed by David Perera (who later became Amaradeva before going to Bhatkande) and he played the music and sang it from background since Dingiri was no singer. The latter only made body movements of singing on the stage. What a façade! Even the trainers of our village 'nadagamas', knew to select talented men from among rustic villagers. For the 'nadagama', Ajatasattu in my village, which was trained by Charles Gurunnanse, he had selected a rustic strong young man with white teeth despite the taint with red – coloured beetle chew, who, a cinnamon peeler. I could hear him sing practising songs for the night's rehearsal while rubbing the cinnamon stick with the brass baton.

When Kamalika says Gurunnanse had provided the music for the two nadagama songs in 'Pabavati' and had acted as Poteguru in it ..." does she mean the Poteguru's songs in Pabavati? Yes, a Poteguru was introduced into the play during the very last days of the rehearsal. The play was evolving. There were improvements added almost every night. I remember when the Poteguru idea came from one of the onlookers, Sarachchandra was highly excited and next day sent word to Deva Suryasena. The latter participated in the last two or three rehearsal. He needed no guidance. He performed the role so impressively. The entry of Deva Suryasena was also a strategy introduced in order to attract a more sophisticated audience and it did happen. The last thing was getting press publicity. Gunasena and I went to Lake House at mid night to meet the Editor. From there it was all go.

'Pabavati' was naturally, a hotch-potch, an experiment with a popular Jataka story which had an attraction to a certain section of the community and more directed to audience-attraction, aiming at the lower middle class while at the same time aiming also at the upper middle class symbolised by Suryasena and the socialite, Sita (main actress) and her husband Saliya Parakrama. Though not a success, this play opened Sarachchandra's eyes to the rich field of episodes found in Jataka and other popular story field to be used as a medium theatre.

(Part II of this article will appear in Satmag on Oct. 24)

A notable character associated with Sarachchandra's early dramatic career was his first wife Eyleen, directing almost everything, and facilitating contacts with Western theatrical groups in Colombo. As I saw, Sarachchandra could not stand alone in any endeavor and needed strong plodding. In Pabavati, I

saw how Eyleen was in control of almost everything. At times she was seen/heard shouting at Sarachchandra from behind the curtain, in her shrill voice when he was not found concentrating but enthralled by Sita Parakrama's (Pabavati) attractiveness or the gait (lesi-gamana) and smile (mandahasa). Those familiar with early years at Peradeniya would remember how this admiration of the female body movements, and body language had become an obsession with Sarachchandra that small chits expressing his admiration began to appear in the hand bags of the females who participated in rehearsals. This may have been the play - director's way of encouraging the participants in the play though the chit-recipient females attached motives to it and were seen having a hearty laugh the following morning sharing/comparing the notes each received in the 'pillaring' section near the Library. Such responses from play/film directors are not unusual. I remember seeing a TV film in London where a play - director seated alone in the audience hall, was seen masturbating watching the movements of a female actor.

Eyleen's role

Eyleen's role in transforming the old choir boy at the Christian Church at Dodanduwa into an accomplished dramatist has gone little acknowledged. What Sarachchandra is supposed to have said of Gurunnanse: "He was with me at every stage of the writing of Maname" was equally true of Eyleen before the split began to appear around the chits-in-the bag- post Maname days.

There were no accolades paid to this lady with accomplishments but only the role of "character-creation" in Sarachchandra's Maname.

The first Maname Nadagama:

Fact or Myth

Can Sarachchandra's claim that he produced the first Maname play in Nadagama style which has been supported by Sarath Amunugama be sustained? Yes, if one accepts the argument from silence (argumentum ex silentio). That is the non-discovery of (absence) any texts written in 'Sindu' (nadagamsindu) style. There is no record of such a statement by Charles Silva Gurunnanse anywhere. That is again an 'argumentum ex-silentio.' What Sarachchandra and Amunugama say is that there were 'Kavi-nadagama' and 'Kolam plays of Maname' but that Sarachchandra's was the first attempt to produce the play in 'nadagam' style. This is a clever play of words, making a claim stating a thing in the negative. How interesting! Sarachchandra himself once complained when he was Ambassador, that I was using diplomatic/journalistic style writing evading clear statement of a position!

University Library text of Maname goes missing

Neither Sarachchandra nor Amunugama has referred to the text of Maname which was available at the University Library at Peradeniya when the Library was moved there in 1953. The existence of this text was brought to my attention by former Librarian K. D. Somadasa who was also a specialist in Ola texts. It is strange that an accomplished academic who was looking for sources of inspiration to create a Maname play around 1953 when the University moved to Pera did not first look at what was close at

hand in the Library. Does that speak of shortcomings in Sarachchandra's approach to academic research, a shortcoming which was first noted in his seminal work 'Folk Play' where he discusses only two Kolam masks sets, one donated to the Dept of Cultural Affairs by its owner at the fishing village of Hirewatta, Ambalangoda; and the other, owned by Ariyapala Gurunnanse, whose workshop was right behind my wife's grandfather's third residence at Ambalangoda? Though there were other Kolam masks in neighbouring villages including my own village where there were two well - known traditions, one in my mother's family, where my maternal grandfather had been a reputed Gurunnanse, Sarachchandra had not even mentioned these. In fact, when I pointed out that his seminal work had been inadequately researched, he reacting like a non-academic, was offended and asked me to write a book if I was so familiar with folk play. That was when he was Ambassador to France.

Even on composing his Maname play, lack of precision was displayed when he made a remark about a Maname play he had seen at Aranayake. So it is with the Maname play he saw in a 'southern village', where he has not even mentioned the name of the village. Amunugama repeats Sarachchandra's words on this in his 'Maname Mathakwee'. Was there something to hide here? Or, a fear of other researchers following on which might lead to exposure?

How much originality?

The question is how much originality does Sarachchandra's Maname natakaya possess? My copy of Oxford Concise Dictionary describes the word 'original' as 'first, or earliest; newly formed or created, not copied or imitated; inventive' etc. In that sense, what is the originality about Maname natakaya that one can speak of, except in a very qualified sense. This was why it was so important for Sarachchandra to show that no Sindunadagama existed earlier which is a claim resting on a weak foundation such as 'Argumentum ex-silentio'.

Where lies the originality in Sarachchandra's work then? Not in the concept. KNO Dharmadasa's eulogy itself that "Maname was an outstanding combination of theatrical craft, poetic sophistication and dramatic concentration, in which the folk theatrical tradition was [successfully] adapted to the modern stage", (Dharmadasa, 1992), itself is an admission that it is not an original work but an imitation. It is then a 'recreation' which UNESCO adopted as a form of work of art at my suggestion when adopting criteria on the place of artist in society.

How Sarachchandra borrowed from classical Sinhalese literature in respect of ideas allegory, metaphor, simile has been pointed out by Amunugama. If one looks deeper one would find straight copying from other nadagams as the 'Tala-viriduwa' sung by Rajaguru on the occasion of the marriage of his daughter to Prince Maname. The Tala and words are taken wholesale from the marriage scene in Balasanthanadagama with a few changes in words though no acknowledgement is found. Sarachchandra could perhaps take cover under Charles Silva Gurunnanse as he has acknowledged that songs, raga belong to old nadagamas and were furnished by Gurunnanse.

Circumstances leading to 'originality' can also be created and that is not a novel situation in academia. This was an issue which was gone into during the UNESCO debate on the place of Artist in Society. The disappearance of the Maname text from the Peradeniya University Library at the crucial time was

pointed out. This is not to suggest that Sarachchandra was responsible for the loss. However, an explanation should be forthcoming for the loss. I would withdraw my reservations if anyone could find this text.

Suffice it to say that having worked with Sarachchandra for three years at a later stage as the Minister of the Embassy, i.e., when Sarachchandra was completely outside his familiar academic terrain like the proverbial fish out of water, I was a witness to how the official position as Ambassador was misused to get an advantage not offered to others. That was interfering with a selection made by an academic jury presided by Prof. Ashley Halpe from contemporary Sinhala writing for inclusion in the Anthology of selected writing which was sent for presentation to UNESCO. Though this was in relation to his own writing and could be justified in a sense, it pointed to a frame of mind that moral rectitude to follow which we as public officers, was not an issue for this academia-bred personality. That experience which was not the single instance, has remained ever since in my thought in judging Sarachchandra as an academic and artist.

Bol-Pilimaya'

These were the reasons which led me to suspect Sarachchandra's sincerity as a playwright in presenting Maname. I even thought to myself if he was a 'Bol-pilimaya' propped up and mystified as a 'Gal-pilimaya' (colossus), by his "caged" admirers of the Peradeniya school, a situation which finally led the formerly much accommodating academic of Pabavati days to sneer at university students who did not come to pay him accolades calling them "Kota-kalisanjonneys." (Amunugama) and resent just criticism as I offered to him privately on his seminal work, 'Folk Play'.

All comments on his 'nadagama's have been by people who see his productions in positive light only and there are some big names in academia among them. One exception I saw not long ago was by Hemantha Warnakulasuriya, though not an academic but a senior Legal Consultant with interest in theatre who called Sarachchandra's songs in his two Nadagamas mere 'tinsel'. This is a view hard to reject altogether. The emotion-creating quality found in the story itself, whether it is the Jataka story or the story of beastality and patricide, has to be separated from the total effect created by a drama based on them. This is no easy task but allowance has to be made for it. Sarachchandra saw the potential in these popular ancient stories as material for drama. From the experimental drama 'Pabavati' which was not a success, he moved on to folk drama proper with Maname for whose type there was a good response from the lower segment of the society. So, in a sense this move is not solely a search for aesthetics but also audience-seeking one. As I comment below, this is an aspect that present day re-creators of Maname play have exploited to the fullest.

The real test would have been if Sarachchandra could produce a 'nadagama' without these inherent emotion-creating stories. One sees Sarachchandra floundering when bereft of prop-up support as he found amidst the captive/caged audience as was present among the new breed of village students at Peradeniya, and with Sarachchandra's inherent in built fear of bureaucracy, both international and Sri Lankan, as displayed when he was Ambassador to Paris.

Maname today

The Maname Sarachchandra produced is no more today. The new production (nava-nispadanaya) is claimed by Lalitha Sarachchandra. (Maname Natakaya, New Print Edition, 2011,p.14). Only the text of the play Sarachchandra wrote remains. What does a production of a play mean? Is it merely getting together a new band of actors and singers, arranging costumes and decors, supervising rehearsals, advertising and reservation of theatre venues? Didn't something more go into production of the play by Prof. Sarachchandra, which is the spirit of the drama and the whole aesthetics he introduced for which he was eminently qualified? Can that sort of spirit and aesthetic be expected to be acquired by anyone else without the professor's background even to re-produce play? What then follows is not a production but a re-production and a second-hand imitation.

If Sarachchandra thought of his work as an aesthetic contribution, less meant as a money-making machine, one gets the impression looking at the frequently advertised shows appearing on bill-boards, that it is controlled today by a breed of Maname Mudalalis.

Maname, a comment by H. L. Seneviratne

Island October 26, 2015, 6:41 pm

This is a short comment on Mr. Bandu de Silva's recent article in The Island, "Maname Needs Serious Critics" which I read with great interest.

It is quite correct to say that Sarachchandra borrowed from existing works, both folk and classical, but that's a common technique of the poets. As is well known, Shakespeare borrowed copiously from Ovid, Plutarch and a variety of other classical sources. T.S. Eliot once said, "Good poets steal". Though not stolen, Wordsworth used two crucial lines suggested by his wife in 'The Daffodils'.

Sarachchandra never made a secret of borrowing from the tradition. In fact he saw that as the only meaningful path to a national art. In his literary memoir, Pin Ati Sarasavi Varamak Denne, he explicitly mentions that he borrowed from existing works, in some instances, wholesale, like the choral song at the marriage of Maname and the princess. The words on parental love, attributed to the king Suddhodana in an early Sinhala or Pali work inspired the play Sinhabahu, and Sarachchandra borrowed and used those words chorally with great poetic and dramatic effect. Further in Sinhabahu, the exultant choral song Andudiganganauratalayasakumkuma when Sinhabahu determines to slay his lion father, is straight from the vandibhatta repertoire of the Kandyan court.

When writing, Sarachchandra sometimes had a sheet of paper in front of him that had a list of words and phrases from traditional works, which clearly shows he was using those works, and was far from hiding it. What matters here is not whether an artist borrows or not, but the finished work, whether it is or is not an artistic whole, and Sarchchandra's plays are perfect in their artistic unity. His deleting of the love scene in the original Maname script attests to his constant vigilance that nothing noncontributory to the total effect was used, in keeping with, one might add, the Sanskrit poetic principle of relevance (aucitya).

I agree with Mr de Silva that Maname, indeed the theatre in general and the broader artistic field as a whole, needs criticism. Positive and meaningful criticism is a healthy development that can only help the advancement of literature and the arts. I also agree that Maname as it was first staged in 1956 with its tasteful minimalism and understatement in all matters of the stage has given way to a somewhat gaudy version. This however is an issue entirely separate from the questions of originality, and theatrical/dramatic quality. Irrespective of the sources from which these plays were derived, the undeniable fact is that in the major plays of Sarchchandra we have a well-crafted body of dramatic works that can comfortably equal if not rival the great dramatic works of mankind. Future producers will produce these plays with varying degrees of competence and tastefulness. Underneath that variation there will be the irrevocable text of the play, which, by virtue of its consummate dramatic and theatrical sense and its literary grandeur, will ensure it a standard below which it cannot descend. For nearly 60 years, Maname has run into packed houses consisting of the entire range of theatre goers from high brows to groundlings. The text of the play, irrespective of how it was put together, will ensure a performance, and constitute the magnet that will attract theatre goers to vote with their feet.

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Bandu vs Sarachchandra by 'Voharaka'

Island October 26, 2015, 6:42 pm

Bandu de Siva's hatchet job ('Island' 21 and 24/10) on "Maname" and Sarachchandra betrays his inability to rise above the clashes he had with the professor, whose assistant he was, in our Embassy in Paris long, long ago and his obsession with attributing all good things [e. g. Maname] to his native Ambalangoda and locations—'right behind my wife's grandfather's third residence'!

Bandu slanders Sarachchandra's Maname for being an 'imitation' based on an old 'nadagama'. Is he not aware that this 'nadagama' itself, is in his terms, an "imitation" deriving from a popular Jataka Story? Rarely is any classical work absolutely 'original'. Both in the East and West they derive from earlier works and folk tales, subsequently transformed by the genius of poets and playwrights. This is true of every single one of Shakespeare's great plays. Thank goodness there was no Bandu in 16th century England to trash the Bard for 'imitation' of some obscure old folk play or Italian work.

As a pre-Peradeniya student of the Thurstan Road era I was tremendously moved when I first saw Maname at the Lionel Wendt. Professor K. N. O. Dharmadasa's comment wonderfully sums up Sarachchandra's Maname - 'Maname was an outstanding combination of theatrical craft, poetic sophistication and dramatic concentration in which the folk theatrical tradition was [successfully] adapted to the modern stage.'

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Sarachchandra and Gurunnanse: The lines were clear A response to Bandu de Silva:

By Shyamon Jayasinghe (original pothe guru)

Island October 27, 2015, 5:29 pm

In his article, Maname needs serious critics, (serialized in the Midweek Review of Oct. 21 and the Satmag of Oct. 24) Bandu de Silva, one of our prominent diplomats, has dwelt on a well-worn topic relating to the authorship of Sarachchandra's Maname launched way back in the year 1956. Bandu attempts to resurrect an issue which he thinks is still unsettled. This is about the precise contribution by the veteran folk artist in Bandu's village of Ampe, Balapitiya. The artist was Charles Silva Gunasinghe Gurunnanse.

Being one of the living original artists of the play and having associated with both the late Professor Sarachchandra and the late Gurunnanse quite closely throughout the production days and even later I am in a position to throw some light on the issue. I was not a student of Sarachchandra.

Bandu claims that Ediriweera Sarachchandra did not acknowledge the critical authorship role of the folk artiste. Kamalika Peiris, who wrote recently on the subject of Maname, in The Island newspaper, mentions clearly that the professor did openly and unreservedly acknowledge Gurunnanse's contribution. Kamalika cites Sarachchandra as having said the following:

"Charles was with me at every stage of the writing of 'Maname... He provided the music, he advised on dance and song movements and participated in discussions about the content of the play" and recalling "when I started rehearsing the play Charles demonstrated the traditional nadagama style but was agreeable to changes.' Charles also trained the performers. He was a good teacher."

Yet, Bandu casts doubts about Kamalika's statement and wants recorded statements off Sarachchandra himself and Bandu is quite certain there aren't such statements. I ask Bandu to do just one simple thing: read Sarachchandra's autobiographical work, Pin Ethī Sarasavi Waramak Denne, and there he will find many statements that support what Kamalika has stated.

What Sarachchandra says in this book is basically what he has included as a production note in every Maname production souvenir. I can cite from the souvenir issued in 1986, which is with me:

"During the entire period and process of producing this play (Maname) I consulted with Charles Silva Gunasinghe Gurunnanse of Ampe Balapitiya who has considerable experience with the Nadagam tradition. I had many discussions with him and borrowed from his knowledge what is relevant to my particular production and set aside what was not. The new format of Maname was constructed in this way." Sarachchandra's production note was titled: Desheeya Natya Kalawa. My memory is that this note appeared in every souvenir published since 1956.

Well, this should clear doubts in Bandu's mind. I am disappointed that a person of Bandu's calibre has sought to denigrate one of Sri Lanka's greatest literary figures of the 20th century. I dare say nobody is sacrosanct and it is the journey of scientific inquiry to periodically review what has been taken for granted. However, in such a review the principles of sound inquiry must be adhered to. It is even more

disappointing to note how this critic has made venomous attacks on the character of Sarachchandra. My only explanation for this senseless tirade is that it probably suggests a breakdown of Bandu's personal relationships with the professor during the time the latter was Ambassador in Paris and when Bandu was working in the Embassy under him. I am aware that many overseas service personnel frowned on outsiders being appointed to fill top positions. Wonder how they reacted under the Rajapaksa regime!

I would like to correct Bandu in a more fundamental area that relates to his skimpy comprehension of Maname. Here, I stress that Bandu has missed the whole point in the play. The Maname of Sarachchandra is totally different from the Maname Katava of the folk tradition that Gurunnase belonged to. The folk version was in verse-style (Kavi Nadagama) or in the Kolam model. In conceptual terms the Maname of Sarachchandra is a manifestly sophisticated, modernised literary and dramatic version of the old story. Sarachchandra's presentation was not dreamed of in the older versions so much so that Maname of 1956 is really a different story altogether. The folk version, derived from the Culla Danuddara Jatakaya, was constructed to demonstrate to devout Buddhists the 'evils' of spousal treachery. That version proliferated in Bana Maduwas in the country. It was a trite, false and naive interpretation of human behaviour-particularly female behaviour- which, in turn, had been rooted in a feudal, patriarchal and male-dominated society. This crude attitude persists even today as seen by the numerous reports of women bashing and domestic violence in all parts of the world.

In this sense, the Maname of 1956 is not merely modern in insight but contemporarily and universally so. Women are naively perceived, suspect and bullied even today. Maname of 1956 attempts to focus the attention of the audience, in a serious way, on human behaviour as a complex phenomenon. Did the Queen give the sword or was it snatched from her by the Veddah King? What would have made the Queen react the way she did in the face of uncertainties and fears? Such issues and many others inevitably arise in the minds of a discerning audience and the viewers are left somewhat cathartically changed after watching the whole tragedy unfold.

Such considerations are born out of a modern consciousness. They could never have occurred in the minds of the old folk writers of the Maname Kathawa. In fact, the Queen was ruthlessly jeered at in the folk version. In the Sarachchandra version we get a new insight into an old story. The narrator tells at the end: "I know not whose fault that was." In other words, Sarachchandra leaves the whole question to the audience to answer and debate. This is great art. Art doesn't tell us anything with certainty; it leaves a lot to the play of our imagination.

There is the related theme of perceptual differences of an event also reflected in the Maname of 1956. This, too, was hardly a traditional perspective. Sarachchandra admits being influenced by the Japanese movie, Rashomon, which has as its theme the problem of perceived differences.

The real contribution of Gurunnase was in advising on the Nadagama format and style and in furnishing Nadagama music to Sarachchandra whose mission had been to create a modern dramatic form rooted in our national heritage. The drum is crucial in the Nadagama and Gurunnase excelled in that. We saw that collaboration and synthesis occur all the time during rehearsals and it had been considerable. Gurunnase co-operated positively with Sarachchandra's new conception and the new plot line.

Although imbued in tradition Charles Silva Gunasinghe Gurunnanse, a most amiable and erudite personality; he appreciated the scope for flexibility and was seen on stage enjoying every moment of the play with his lighted-up squint eyes! There isn't any doubt that he was an inspiration to both Sarachchandra and to us on stage. I would venture to state that Maname performances peaked during its very first phase at Peradeniya largely due to the physical presence of Gurunnanse on stage with us.

Sarachchandra's script, structured to cater to a modern audience, was wholly different to that of the Kavi Nadagama and Kolam versions. Even some of the techniques employed were outside the Sinhala folk format as Sarachchandra borrowed them from Japanese theatre. The Maname of 1956 had been a product of borrowing; yet, it was undeniably something very new both in conceptual being and in formal structure. If not for Gurunnanse, Maname would probably not have surfaced—at least at the time it did. However, Maname achieved distinction only by transcending tradition and that was a pure Sarachchandra vision.

Whether in the arts or in technology there are no lone giants. Newton admitted that he had stood on the shoulders of scientists before him. Likewise; artistes have borrowed extensively to create something new. The quality and novelty of the outcome is what makes the difference. Had Bandu understood this truth he would not have sought to belittle Sarachchandra's Maname in this manner.

Sarachchandra's creativity was something unceasing and Maname hadn't been a random fluke. Bandu's attempt to trivialise a sage with references to alleged personal behavioural characteristics that are simply untrue only points to bad faith on his part.

The theme of perceptual differences that I have referred to above also finds itself in Sarachchandra's next great play, Sinhabahu (1961) although he had borrowed a plot from the mythical story of the birth of the Sinhala people. In many of his 26 plays Sarachchandra had a similar approach. He picked a well-known plot and refashioned that into a new conception of human experience. Many great artistes have found this to be an appealing method. Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, refashioned an old folk tale to discuss universal theme in the behavioural experience of men and women. Thematic refashioning of old material is something creative.

(The writer was the first Pothe gurunnanse or narrator in Maname. He is currently resident in Melbourne.)