



**THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA LECTURE ON**  
**THURSDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2020**

**“PROFESSOR EDIRIWEERA SARACHCHANDRA AND THE ENRICHMENT TO  
SINHALA CULTURE”**

**By Emeritus Professor K.N.O. Dharmadasa**

**The 125<sup>th</sup> Session of the Monthly Lecture Series of the National Trust - Sri Lanka will be held via Google Meet at 6.30p.m. on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020.**

Professor Ediriweera Sarachchandra (1914 – 1996) is undoubtedly an iconic figure in modern Sri Lanka. His larger profile as playwright and producer overshadows his other achievements which are equally singular. He was fiction writer and poet in addition to being a pioneer in Modern Sinhala Literary Criticism. His critical stances form the basis of a school of thought which led many observers to recognize a ‘Peradeniya School of Literature’ which in fact was a misnomer because he never formulated a specific literary programme or organized a movement. Yet, his stamp on the formation of Modern Sinhala Fiction and Literary Criticism is unmistakable. The plays he wrote and produced number nearly 50 and among them, *Maname* (1956) and *Sinhabahu* (1961) are the most prominent and they continue, even today, to draw large audiences. In my view, Sarachchandra has earned a place in South Asian Drama as a pioneer who utilized traditional theatrical forms to create a modern dramatic mode. Some of the lyrical compositions he has included in his plays have been hailed as masterpieces and critics such as Gunadasa Amarasekera have hailed him as ‘the greatest Sinhala poet after Totagamuve Sri Rahula Thero’ (15<sup>th</sup> Century).

It was Sarachchandra who wrote the first critical study of a facet of modern Sinhala literature – *Modern Sinhalese Fiction* (1943). He was also the pioneer scholar to study Sinhala Theatre – *The Sinhalese Folk Play* (1952) which included a study of the theatrical creations of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as well. This study done after a good deal of field studies was one of the first such research work by an academic.

Sarachchandra has made a lasting impact on Sri Lankan academia. In 1952 he was invited to be a member of the academic staff of the Sinhala Department (from his first post as Lecturer in Pali) to organize the Modern Literature study programme in the Department. This was the first time modern Sinhala literature became a subject of study in the university. His broad vision and deep insights have been the mainstay in all academic programmes in this area in subsequent years. His overall impact as an academic, artist and critic has been such that one could say without fear of contradiction that Sarachchandra is the most well-known Sri Lankan academic of all time.



Emeritus Professor KNO Dharmadasa graduated with first class honours (Sinhala) from the University of Ceylon (Peradeniya) in 1963. Having been recruited to the academic staff, he proceeded to the University of York (UK) for postgraduate studies. Studying linguistics, he obtained the MPhil in 1968. For his PhD studies, he specialised in sociolinguistics and entering Monash University (Australia) he obtained the Doctorate in 1979. His thesis has been published as *Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness: the Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* by the University of Michigan Press (USA) in 1992. He obtained a Professorship on merit 1989 and was subsequently appointed to the Cadre Chair in Sinhala (1996). He was promoted to senior professorship in 1994. He retired in 2004 and was subsequently made Professor Emeritus.

During his career he has won several international awards which include The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Award (1985), The Fulbright Scholar – in Residence Award (USA) 1987 and Senior Fellowship, The University of London (2001-2003). His research studies in Linguistics, Literature and Sri Lankan History in Sinhala and English have appeared in books and journals both here and abroad.

Professor Dharmadasa has been an accomplished translator – English into Sinhala and has won State Literary Awards in the field. His translations include several Dhamma books by European scholar monks.

During his university career, Professor Dharmadasa has been Chairman, University Arts Council, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Member of the University Council – a position he held even after retirement as nominee of the University Grants Commission. He was invited to be the Editor in Chief of the Sinhala Encyclopedia after retirement and was able to bring out 5 volumes during his tenure which ended in 2014.

The Rajarata University conferred the DLitt (Honoris Causa) on him in 2012 and the Sri Lanka Arts Council conferred on him the Sahithya Ratna Award in 2018.

**The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures on the last Thursday of each month. The lectures are open to the members and the public at a nominal fee. The HNB Sustainability Foundation is the principal sponsor of the events of the National Trust – Sri Lanka.**

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