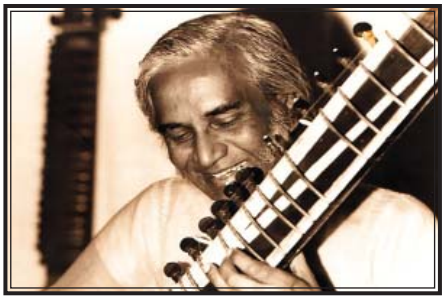
Builders of Our Nation:

6. Professor Ediriweera Sarachchandra



Professor Ediriweera Sarachchandra (1914–1996) stands out as a colossal figure in the cultural history of Sri Lanka, celebrated not just as an artist, but as a visionary. Born in Dodanduwa in the Galle district, his journey from a student with name Eustace Reginold de Silva to the father of modern Sri Lankan theatre reflects a deep quest for authentic identity. At a time when the country was emerging from nearly four centuries of colonial domination, Sarachchandra realized that political freedom was incomplete without cultural emancipation. He dedicated his life to restoring the country's self-respect and establishing a unique artistic landscape.



"Maname"

For the younger generation, Sarachchandra's life offers a blueprint for how intellect, tradition, and creativity can combine to elevate a nation. Educated at prestigious institutions such as Richmond College and the University of London, he possessed an expansive knowledge of both Western thought and Eastern philosophy. Yet, instead of completely imitating foreign cultures, he looked

inward. He deeply researched traditional village rituals, folk plays, and South Asian performance forms. By doing so, he managed to construct a sophisticated aesthetic framework that was deeply rooted in local soil.

His revolutionary contribution came to life on the stage. In 1956—a watershed year for the country—he produced his magnum opus, *Maname*, followed later by the iconic *Sinhabahu* in 1961. These masterpieces blended traditional *Nadagam* style, classical poetry, and music with modern theatrical structures. Sarachchandra effectively gave the nation its own distinctive voice. He transformed theatre into a mirror through which the citizens could view their values, long-standing dilemmas, and collective history.

Beyond drama, Sarachchandra was a brilliant novelist, literary critic, academic leader, and diplomat who represented his country as the Ambassador to France. His long tenure at the University of Peradeniya shaped generations of young minds, and the famous Sarachchandra Open-Air Theatre remains a physical testament to his commitment to fostering art in natural spaces. His immense global impact was recognized in 1988 when he received the ***Ramon Magsaysay Award,*** often described as Asia's Nobel Prize.



Open air Theatre

Sarachchandra's enduring legacy serves as an inspiring call to action for the youth. He demonstrated that true development is not measured solely by economic progress, but by the strength and richness of a nation's cultural soul. *His life challenges today's young generation to boldly explore the world, embrace global knowledge, and yet remain deeply anchored in their heritage*. He proved that by honoring one's roots while thinking innovatively, anyone can contribute to building a confident, self-reliant, and culturally vibrant society.

(Näṇasiha)

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