**Noh Drama, Its Portrayal of Buddhism and Its Influence on Sinhala Drama**

**Abstract**

Japanese Traditional Theatre can be divided into six categories.

1. Early dances imported and indigenous, dating from the 7th century.
2. *Noh*, a classical lyric drama beginning in the 14th century.
3. *Kyogen*, comic interludes in Noh, also beginning in the 14th century.
4. *Bunraku*, or *Ayatsuri Shibai*, the puppet theatre, dating from the 16th century.
5. *Kabuki,* popular classical dance dramas, dating from the 17th century.
6. Modern Theatre, foreign translations and original works dating from the 19th century.

Aside from its importance as the first reference to any type of dramatic performance in Japanese history, the ‘legend’ has a deeper significance. It includes three fundamental aspects of all subsequent Japanese theatre arts:

1. The supernatural or religious elements primarily associated with Noh.
2. The erotic element, particularly characteristic of Kabuki and certain types of post-war modern theatre.
3. The dance element, an integral part of all Japanese dramatic arts.

Early religion was animistic. It saw gods and spirits everywhere; in animals and trees. It worshipped the forces of nature. These beliefs survived the introduction of later cults, produced a wealth of folklore and greatly influenced the drama. In Noh, the spirits of the iris and the cherry can take human form and speak, and dead lovers assume the shape of trees. In Kabuki, men can be metamorphosed into animals and animals into men.

Comic vignettes called *Kyogen* provide the comic relief between the heavier *Noh* plays. These two forms have developed side by side through the centuries and are collectively referred to as *Nohgaku.*

This can be seen not only in *Zeami*’s Noh plays, but also his treatises, which were written about Noh theories. The religion of the Noh plays is predominantly *Amidist*; it is the common, average Buddhism of medieval Japan.

*Ediriweera Sarachchandra*, an authority on Buddhist Philosophy, was deeply influenced by *Zen* Buddhism through the Noh theatre while he was studying drama in Japan. This influence motivated him to develop an indigenous Sinhala dramaturgy. The drama *Maname* was based on the legend *Chulla Danuddara* which depicts a rebirth story of the *Bodhisatva*. *Sarachchandra* composed and produced the drama *Maname* selecting scenes from the narrative which were most suitable for dramatizing.