

Sri Lankan Music in Sigiri Graffiti

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to identify the evidence of Sri Lankan music encrypted in *Sigiri Graffiti*. The graffiti on the mirror-wall of the *Sigiriya* Rock belongs to the period ranging from the 8th- 10th centuries CE, and they are an example of the social and cultural background of the period. The depictions are of visitors to the Royal Kingdom of King *Kasyapa* (477-495 CE) from different parts of the country, and they belong to various strata of the contemporary society in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it can be assumed that, the graffiti on the rock wall represents not only the thoughts and ideas they had of the figurines on the wall, but of the melodic patterns and rhythms that the regional community practiced on particular occasions. Thus, the *Sigiri Graffiti* can be recognized as a cluster of musical components of contemporary Sri Lankan society that witnessed the elements of authentic Sri Lankan music and therefore provides a glimpse into the music of the Sri Lankan people during this specific period. The unique characteristic of this music and rhythm is the non-influential behaviour from its neighbor, India. The samples and examples for the present study were selected from the *Sigiri Graffiti*, and from the texts written on the subject. The evidence and elements of contemporary Sri Lankan music were obtained from the primary sources i.e. the *Mahavamsa*, the *Culavamsa* together with other texts, scholarly studies, and an examination of archeological information. The analysis proves that the lyrics and the rhythms embedded in the *Sigiri Graffiti* are homogeneous to Sri Lankan society and are instrumental to the genre of Sri Lankan music. The true impression of songs and dance together with the prosody and their unique number of syllabic instances provides an evidence of authentic Sri Lankan music in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Sigiri Graffiti, Sri Lankan Music, Poetry

1. Introduction

The graffiti on the mirror-wall of the Sigiriya Rock belongs to a period ranging from the 8th- 10th centuries CE, and undoubtedly they are an existent example of the social and cultural background of the period. Evidently, they were the visitors to the Royal Kingdom of King Kasyapa (477-495 CE) from different parts of the country, and they belonged to various strata of the then contemporary society in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it can be assumed that the graffiti on the rock wall represent not only the thoughts and ideas of the figurines on the wall, but also the melodic patterns and rhythms that the regional community practiced on particular occasions. Thus, the *Sigiri Graffiti* can be recognized as a cluster of such musical components of the contemporary society in Sri Lanka witness the elements of authentic Sri Lankan music providing a glimpse into the music of the Sri Lankan people during this specific period.

The unique characteristic of this music and rhythm is the non-influential behaviour from its neighbour India, as is usually discussed in relation to Sri Lankan music. The samples and examples for the present study were selected from the *Sigiri Graffiti*, and from the texts written on the subject. The evidence and elements of the contemporary Sri Lankan music were obtained from the primary sources i.e. the Mahavamsa, the Culavamsa together with other texts, scholarly studies, and an examination of archeological evidence.

2. Literature Review

The *Sigiri Graffiti* were noticed for the first time by H.C.P. Bell (1905) in his book *Inscriptions on Gallery wall-Sigiri-Gala*¹. Bell recognized that the earliest of these graffiti date, paleographically, from about the 6th century CE. He also concludes that the greater number of these records belong to the 10th century CE². S. Paranavitana (1956) recognized that these graffiti belong to the 8th-10th centuries CE². He deciphered 685 verses within their metrical forms in his book *'Sigiri Graffiti, Volume II*. Dr. Paranavithana in his book *Sigiri Graffiti* (1956) describes in detail the prosody; the number of syllabic instances (Matra) in a line (Matra- Chandas) of 685 graffiti. His study was based on the metrical compositions of *Elu Sandas Lakuna* (a book based on the characteristics of Sinhala prosody). The following authors have focused attention on the subject and contributed to evolve the novelty of the *Sigiri Graffiti*; K.Jayathilake (1963)-*Sigiri Gi Nirmana*; Nandasena Mudiyanse (1963)-*Sigiri Padyawaliya*; C. De. S. Kulatilake (1974) -"*Lankawe Sangitha Sambhawaya*"; Gunapala Senadhira (1956)-*Sigiri Peraliya*; W.J.M.

Lokubandara (1990)-*Sigiri Gi Siri*; Gunasena Vithana (1992)-*Sigiri Giye Samaja Dekma*; Rathnasiri Arangala (2009)-*Sigiri Pairu Gi*; Kanangamuwe Rahula (2013)-*Sigiri Gi Wimarshana*.

C. De. S. Kulatilake (1974) in his book "*Lankawe Sangitha Sambhawaya*" (Origin of Sri Lankan Music) mentions about the metrical compositions of the *Sigiri Graffiti* as a musical element. However, most of the studies reveal the ideologies about the Social, Literature and Language backgrounds of the *Sigiri Graffiti*. They lack the musical evidence. Thus, this study examines the evidence of music in *Sigiri Graffiti* that resemble the ideology in indigenous music of Sri Lanka which have not previously been examined by scholars.

The present study attempts to address the research question: "what are the aspects of Sri Lankan music that can be found in the Sigiri Graffiti?" The hypothesis is that, "the *Sigiri Graffiti* can be recognized as a cluster of musical components of the contemporary society in Sri Lanka that may necessarily witness the elements of authentic Sri Lankan music and that it provide a glimpse of the music of the Sri Lankan people during this specific period.

3. Methodology

The selected samples of Graffiti for the study were collected from the book '*Sigiri Graffiti*' (1956) by S. Paranavitana and the other texts written on the subject. The evidence and elements of the contemporary Sri Lankan music were obtained from the primary sources i.e. *Mahavamsa*, *Thupavamsa*, *Dhampiya Atuwa Getapadaya*, *Siyabaslakara*, *Sikha Valanda Vinisa*, *Elu Sandes Lakuna* and other texts. The study primarily followed the historical research methodology in the literature survey and further, a field study was conducted. The literature survey included library surveys and the consulting of primary sources and scholarly studies. The Field Study was performed to seek any archeological evidence to identify and analyze the musical elements belonging to the relevant period.

4. Results and Discussion

1. The evidence of Instrumental and Vocal Music

Graffiti number 19 explains about a lute (stringed instrument; also known as the *Veena*).

Kiye Laya Sivalu gī
'Tana ran malī vena atani hat ho ran van li
Niridu melen ekal no me be (ney) an nna hay yāvat'

Translation: 'Laya sivala recited this song
 She, the golden-colored *damsal* (wears) a golden chain on her breast and **has taken a lute (veena) in her hand**, does not speak to anyone else whomsoever, as the king died at that time. I, Mahamet, wrote (this)'

Graffiti number 84 describes about singing and playing a lute *Veena*).

*'Gana risi kot vayamini vena orat laga kot
Nirid isirā mele yi ana kanda no kala vena ran-van'*

Translation: 'The golden coloured one, being **desirous of singing (gana=gaayana), placed the Veena against her shoulder and was playing it;** (but having heard) that the king (her) lord had died, did she not strike (with it) and reduce the lute into fragments?'

In this graffiti, the word '**gana (gaayana)**' means singing. The word **gana** (singing) is also mentioned in, **SikhaValanda Vinisa** (953-970 CE) To portray the meaning "singing." The meaning of singing (this book was written contemporaneous to *Sigiri Graffiti*). The engravings with *Veena* have also been found from *Loha praasaada* (Brazen Palace; built by king Dutugemunu around in the 1st century BCE in ancient city of Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka) (**Fig.1**) and Mihintala Sinha Pokuna (**Fig.2**) (2nd century BCE) and Isurumuniya (**Fig.3**) (6th-8th centuries CE). In comparing these evidence, it is proved that the *Veena* (lute) has been used before and during the periods of the *Sigiri Graffiti*.

Some of the interesting hints that are found from the *Sigiri graffiti* are listed below;

Graffiti Numbers	Description (Meaning of the graffiti)	Significance (Musical evidence)
161	'The song which Mugalan ,who came from Ruhuna sang'	Song and sung
187	"The song sung by Bayuru Kasaba of the house of Lord Sena, a resident of (Gaduba)-vana'	
289	"When you, having ascended this mountain side, play music (accompanied) with Singing , the golden-colored one, o friend, thought: ' I shall climb up clinging on to the iron chain and remain (there)'	The playing of music (accompanied) with singing

Graffiti Numbers	Description (Meaning of the graffiti)	Significance (Musical evidence)
393	' Holding a flowering branch in front (of her), she, having adorned herself, came walking forward for the purpose of (providing) music to (her) lover ; (but when I attract her , (she) having bent forward, accepted (from me) the spray of flowers"	The purpose of (providing) music to (her) lover
526	'O flower-like ones, when the garland of flowers (was) dropping down, into whose midst did it come? It is by me that music is played to you at Sihigiri : but are not all others who have come (here) dear to you?'	The music is played to you at Sihigiri
543	' This song was sung and written down by lady Naal, wife of Lord Mahamet'	The song was sung and written
610	'O esteemed friend, do tell (me this). When said in what manner has this been thought (by you): (Her) anger will be mollified when it is said that the desire for playing music has been taken away?'	The playing of music

The Significance of Verbal structures

- I. Metrical Compositions (prosody)
- II. The 'Sound beauty' of the verbal communication (the ornamentation of sound such as Alliteration)

I. Metrical Compositions

There is evidence that the composers of the graffiti have known about prosody. Graffiti number 504 mentions about *Yaagi and Seheli* (*Yāgi* and *Seheli* are names of metres).

*'Matvaga Samana gii Sagal-re-jana ge Pasillan abuyu
Apa gahani ne vi bandi yāgī sahali tā'*

Elu Sandes Lakuna (the book of Sinhala prosody) was written during the 12th-13th Centuries whereas *Sigiri Graffiti* were depicted during the 8th-10th centuries CE. Therefore, the prosody of *Sigiri Graffiti* was composed before *Elu Sandes Lakuna*.

On the other hand, *Yāgī*, is built up of 9 and 11 syllabics respectively in the odd lines and, 11 syllabics in each of the even lines (9, 11, 11, and 11)¹⁴. About 400 graffiti are composed in *Yāgī* metre.

1 st line	2 nd line	3 rd line	4 th line	Total
9	11	11	11	42

Dasa dana ā da ali - 9 syllables
Disi raja vi siti sebvina - 11 syllables
Gala kala la beyadahi vesa - 11 syllables
Vi da tada asara yata tipi - 11 syllables

} *Yāgī* metre

Translation: 'O friend, though he who has come is a slave (of yours), has it really been thought that the king (himself) appeared? Having resided on the mountain side, has (your) heart been transformed into stone? Have you become hard to (those who desire your) company?'

Seheli is a metrical composition combined with *Gi* and *Sivupada*¹⁶ such as 12 syllabic (*Dolosmath*), 16 syllabic (*Solosmath*), 18 syllabic (*Atalosmath*) etc. The significance of the *Seheli* composition is that it is accessible and practicable and is also very suitable for singing.

Ledi mana bandnā - 9 syllables
Pehebar sinā rusnā -11 syllables
Katak hī tosnā -9 syllables
Mini akusu his hi lay gannā -14 syllables

Translation: To have one's ensnared, being attached to her, by a damsel who is winsome on account of her radiant smile and who is pleasing, is (like unto) taking a jeweled hook of an elephant-driver and placing it on (one's own) head.

The metre of the verse is not explained and named in the *Elu Sandes Lakuna*, though it occurs commonly in Sinhala poetical literature and rituals.

There are 10 kinds of prosody explained in *Elu Sandes Lakuna* as occurring in *Sigiri Graffiti*. However, the graffiti have been written three centuries

before the period of *Elu Sandes Lakuna* and therefore many metrical compositions can be found in the graffiti which are not explained and named in the *Elu Sandes Lakuna*. It can be assumed that, there were homogenous Sinhala prosody systems before it was mixed with Sanskrit prosody. Writing songs within systematic prosodies provides important evidence about the music in the relevant period.

The metres of the *Sigiri Graffiti* which are explained and named in the *Elu Sandes Lakuna* are scheduled as below.

Metre	1 st line (syllabic instance)	2 nd line (syllabic instance)	3 rd line (syllabic instance)	4 th line (syllabic instance)	Total syllabic instances
Gī	9	11	11	11	42
Yāgī	Luhu 9	Luhu 11	Luhu 11	Luhu 11	42
Kav gī	9	10	10	10	40
Duvanga gī	9	11	11	13	44
Yon gī	8	11	10	11	40
Bamara gī	8	11	10	13	42
Umatu gī	9	10	9	10	38
Piyum gī	8	11	8	14	42
Matwala gī	8	8	8	13	37
Kārikā gī	Luhu4,guru2	Luhu7,guru2	Luhu5,guru2	Luhu9,guru2*	14

(* Luhu=short syllables, guru=long syllables)

The quantity of Graffiti can be classified as follows, according to the prosody which is explained in the above chart.

1. Yāgī – 400
2. Kav gī- 85
3. Duvanga gī-73
4. Yon gī-40
5. Bamara gī-27
6. Umatu gī-12
7. Piyum gī-02
8. Matwala gī-04
9. Kārikā gī-02

Gī metres (*Gī virith*)

Some graffiti has been projected in the *Samuduragos* metre which consists of 18 syllables in each of the four lines. There are similar syllables included at the end of each line (*elisamaya*) and the singing ability is significant.

5. Conclusion

The lyrics and the rhythm (verbal and melodic structures) embedded in *Sigiri Graffiti* are homogeneous to Sri Lankan society and the singing, impression of songs and dance, the prosody, the number of syllabic instants, the aesthetic concept, religious and cultural values, the language and literature provide the significance of music in Sri Lanka. An examination of the evidence of music in Sri Lanka at the time of the writing of the *Sigiri Graffiti* reveals that, the music of the era perfected the socio-cultural-religious explorations, literary contexts, aesthetics and the emotional and intellectual platforms of the people. Music cannot exist alone. It has always been associated with the social, cultural and religious explorations of society. Therefore, the *Sigiri Graffiti* reflect the contemporary socio-cultural backgrounds. Religious explorations are also regenerative. They also embody the literary and aesthetic elements associated with emotions, beauty, and poetry.

Sigiri Graffiti provides information on the musical instruments such as the Harp (*Veena*), the songs sung, singing and playing at festivals, and rituals. These graffiti describe the cultural, religious and artistic aspects of that era. Thus, it can be revealed that, at the time of composing the *Sigiri Graffiti*, there was music with characteristics unique to Sri Lanka.

Figures



Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3

References

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Acknowledgements

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