

SINHALESE TRADITIONAL ART OF DRUMS

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Music which is an artistic heritage of both developed and undeveloped peoples of the world is loved by sinhalese people as well.

The sinhalese people have a history of over 20 centuries and in that history many aspects of their musical life have been recorded. According to Pali and Sinhalese chronicles and commentaries, the early Indo Aryan groups immigrated to this island, introduced their musical culture as well as other aspects of social life to the inhabitants. As a result of blending of the musical cultures of both peoples, sinhalese music came into being. Furthermore, cultural influx of many Asian people (South and South-East Asia, Central Asia, Middle East etc.) enriched the sinhalese art of music.

Mediaeval literary works of the sinhalese (Mahavansa, Thupavansa, Daladasirita, Sandesas etc.) mention over hundred various musical instruments and traditionally all of them are divided into Panchaturya ; Atata, one faced drums ; Vitata, two-faced drums ; Atata Vitata, the stringed variety; Gana, metallic percussion and Susira, the blown variety.

Sometimes we find an other interpretation of five groups : drums played with only hands, drums played with the sticks, drums played with the hands and the sticks ; metallic percussion and the blown variety respectively.¹

This Classification which excludes even the veena is generally unacceptable. Anyhow, we find a more suitable classification of Indian Musical Instruments which can be adapted : Tata, stringed instruments ; Susira, wind instruments; Avanadha, percussion instruments like drums; Ghana, instruments which are struck against each other.²

Musical instruments are as old as man himself and the emotional movements of the primitive man such as stamping the feet, clapping hands, beating chest, flanks and bellies with hands gave the ideas of the drum. Various sounds of Nature may have been imitated by them. It is possible that the stretched animal skin which produced sounds of wind-swept branches gave the idea of modern drums. When the primitive man was shooting animals with the bow, the sound of bowstring exemplified the Veenas.

The primitive man made rattles out of nutshells, seeds and stones keeping together or placing in a hollow gourd which resulted in making cymbals, bells etc., small bamboo with holes or buffalow horns used as blowing instruments.

This might be the beginning of the musical culture which has been developed with advancement of the man in the course of long history.

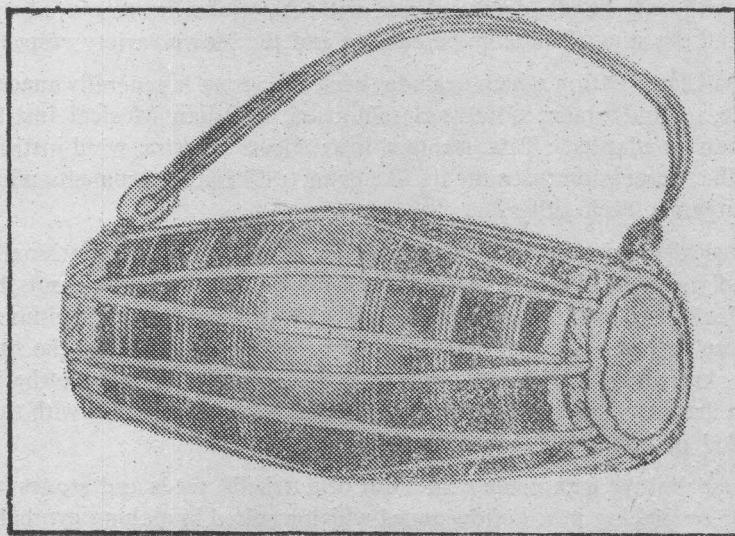
1. Udarata Nāṭum Kalava, Sedaraman J. E., M. D. Gunasena Co. Ltd., 1962. p. 48.
2. Musical Instruments of India, S. Krisnaswami, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1967. p. 21.

Varieties of drums and their usage

Among the sinhalese musical instruments drums are diverse and numerous throughout the history. The list of musical instruments mentioned in the Sinhala and Pali literature numbered over 100 items, of which over 30 are drums : gata bera, pana bera, ekas bera, mihingu bera, maha bera, roda bera, karandi bera, ghosa bera, talappara, virandam, tammattam, timbuluvi, davul, morahu, mallari, sirivili tappu, tatsara, dakki, udakki, mandala, damaru, sindi, madvani, prutu bimba, dundubhi, andabera, gatapahatu etc.

According to Mr. C. de S. Kulatillake even in Indian musical history there is hardly any situation in which such a number of instruments are played at one and the same time.¹ Anyway, one can trace some of these drums depicted in mural paintings and sculptures in Sri Lanka throughout the long history and some of them are used at present. Specimens of them are preserved in the Colombo National Museum.

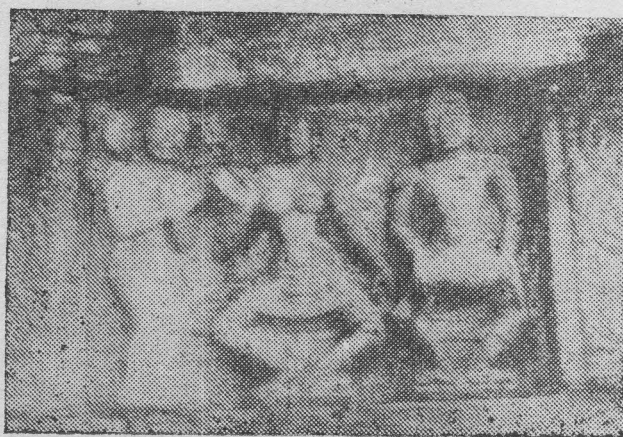
Gäta Bera known as Kandyan Bera has traditionally been used in the Kandyan (up-country) dance ceremonies and sometimes it is also called Mangul Bera, probably because it is played on the festive occasions² Although Gäta Bera is mainly used for Mangul Bera, other drums like Davul and Yak Bera (Low country drum) are also used for the same purpose.



Gäta Beraya

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1. Lankawe Sangeeta Sambhawaya, C. de S. Kulatillake, Lake House, 1974. p. 127.
 2. *Sinhala Natum: Dances of the sinhalese*, M. D. Raghavan, M. D. Gunasena and Co. Ltd., Colombo, 1967 p. 175.

The total length of the Bera Kanda is about 27 inches and in the middle of the Berakanda there is a Boss (Gätaya) bout 3 inches which gives the very name of the drum. Jak of the Varaka variety, Kohomba, Ehala, rarely Rathandun wood are chosen for Bera Kanda and usually ox-skin is taken for the left head and monkey skin for the right. The drum is beaten only with hands.



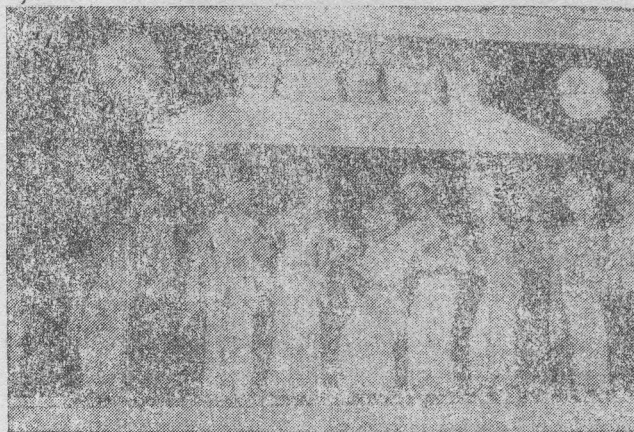
Dancing musicians at Yapahuwa

In India, the Mridanga Bera which has been depicted even in Ajanta mural paintings is still being used and is almost same as the Gäta Bera. The main difference is that the Mridanga has a layer of Badama on the left Bera eye.



Dancing musicians at Gadadeniya

In Sri Lanka the Gāta Bera is depicted in the frieze at Yapahuwa, in the dado of the Gadaladeni Vihara and Niyamgampaya Vihara ; In the wood carvings of the Galapata Vihara doorway and the Panavitiya Ambalama ; In the mural paintings of the Polonnaruwa Vishnu devale No. 2, Mulkirigala, Kelaniya, Karagampitiya Viharas, etc.



Mural paintings at Kelaniya

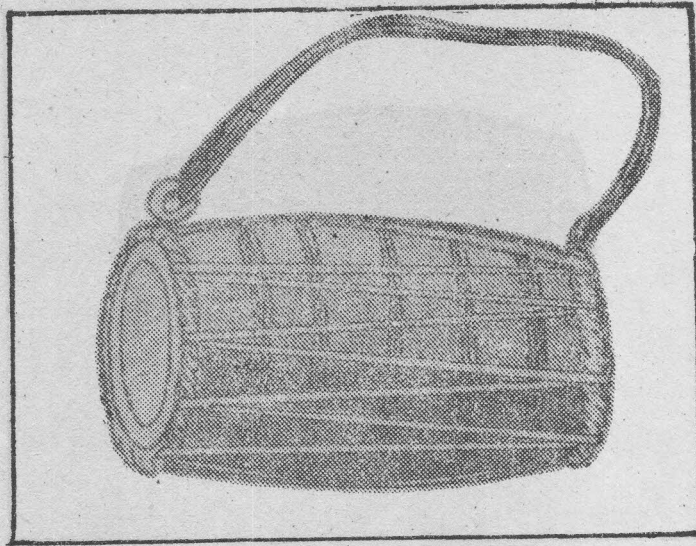
According to Mr. C. de S. Kulatillake, Pānā Bera was another name for Udakki¹, but Mr. S. Panibharata is of the opinion that there was no especial drum as Panā Bera and when a master showed off drumming before the king or elite using any drum, it was called the Pānā Bera.

The drum Patawa was used as the funeral and war drum. Especially when the cremation of dead boughs of Sri Maha Bodhi was to take place, Patawa was an essential item.²

According to Mr. S. Panibharata, Patawa looks like as same as Gāta Bera with the exception of having bigger heads than Gāta Bera and the absence of the Boss. Skin which was used for Patawa was calf-skin. Patawa was used at the beginning of the ceremonies. It is not functioning in modern Sri Lanka and Mr. S. Panibharata is keeping an old Patawa Bera Kanda at home.

1. Lankawe Sangeeta Sambhawaya, C. de S. Kumatillake, Lake House, 1974, p. 130.

2. Ibid.



Patawa

Dr. M. D. Raghavan says that Patawa was especially used for the dances performed by females. It had one head and a black spot of Badama in order to dampen the vibration of the head.¹

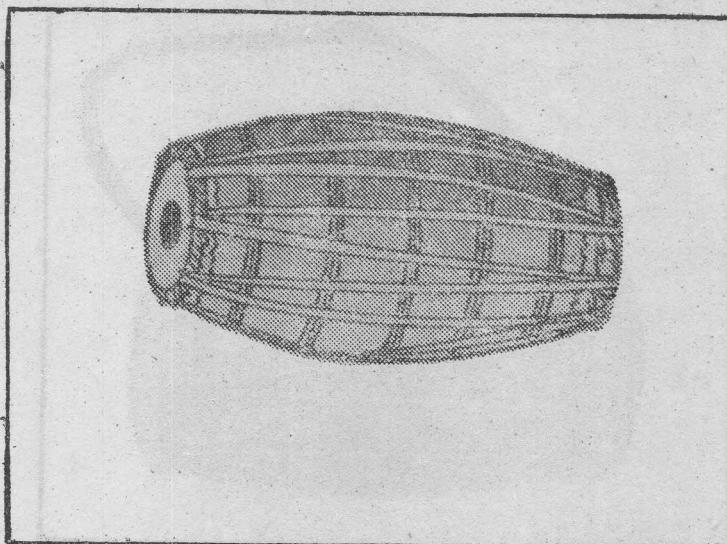
Though Maddalaya, Mihingu Bera (Mridanga) and Morahu are being mentioned as different drum varieties in the literature, Mr. C. de S. Kulatillake thinks that they all come under the same Category.



Patawa

(According to Mr. J. E. Sedaraman)

1. *Sinhale nāṭum : Dances of the Sinhalese*, M. D. Raghavan, M. D. Gunasena and Co. Ltd. 1967, p. 180.



Maddalaya

Mr. C. de S. Kulatillake thinks that some Vamana figures found in the Lowamahapaya premises (Anuradhapura period) are drumming Mihingu Bera or Haras Bera.¹



Mihingu Bera (Haras Bera), from Pillar Capital, Brazen Palace, Anuradhapura.
(According to Mr. C. de S. Kulatillake)

It may be possible that the Maddala was made of clay and later of wood. According to Mr. S. Panibharata, Maddala was also called Demala Bera and was used in Nadagama (folk play) in the coastal areas.

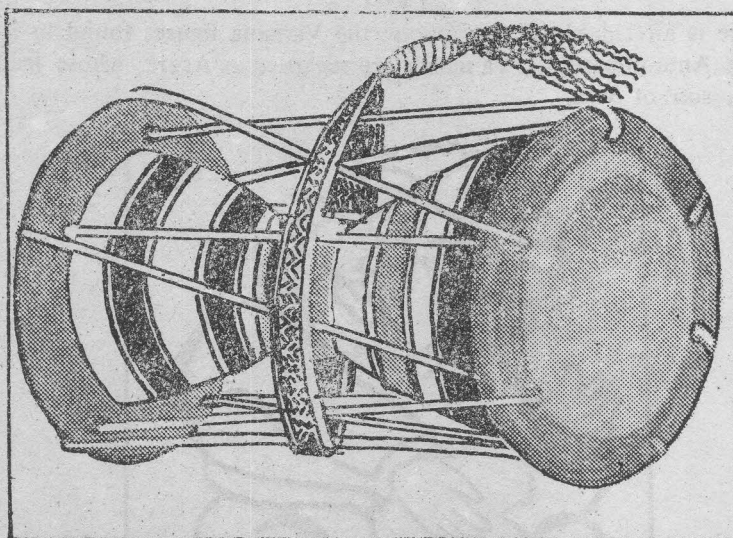
1. Lankawe Sangeeta Smbhawaya, C. de S. Kulatillake, Lake House, 1974, p. 84.

There are two varieties of drums-Tamil Drum (Sinhala Demala Bera No. mi. 27.106) and Sinhala Mridanga Bera (Nadagam Bera No. 75.17.1) in the Colombo National Museum.

According to Dr. M. D. Raghavan, Demala Bera came into being in Sri Lanka recently and disappeared. It was a little shorter than Gäta Bera and always used in Nadagams and were used in pairs but with two different sounds.¹

In India, variety of Urdhwa Mridanga drum was played in pairs.²

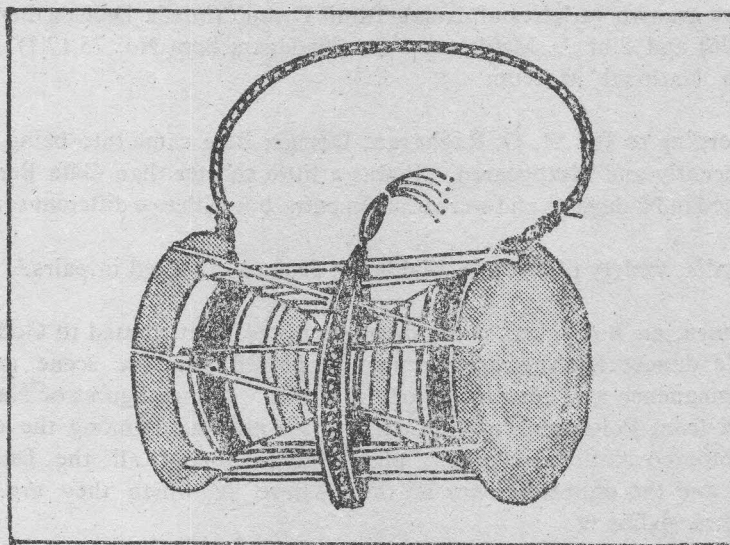
Damaru, an hour-glass shape drum seems to be attributed to God Siva. When He dances as Nataraja, Damuru is played and the scene denotes the impermanence and destruction of the world. Bronze figures of Nataraja excavated from Polonnaruwa (12 Cent.) which are found among the exhibits in the Colombo National Museum, play Damaru. And all the Damarus are alike and the only difference is the posture in which they are held, with fingers, palms etc.



Damaru

Udakki, Dakki, Daka Bera Bera and Ekka are also varieties of Damaru and the exception is that Udakki and Dakki are played in hands, but in the case of Damaru there is a piece of metal or wood hanging in the middle of it and it makes a sound by beating its heads, when player moves the Damaru rapidly.

1. Sinhala Nāṭum : Dances of the Sinhalese, M. D. Raghava. M. D. Gunasena and Co. Ltd. 1967. p. 181.
2. Lankawe Sangeeta Sambhawaya, C. de S. Kulatillake, Lake House, 1974, p. 131.



Dakki

There is an Udakki player among the Vamana figures found in Brazen Palace in Anuradhapura. Vamanas are regarded as Asura, whose leader is Ganesha, son of Siva.



Udakki Player from Pillar capital, Brazen Palace, Anuradhapura
(According to Mr. M. Wickramasinghe)

Bharata Natya dancers playing Udakki are found at Yapahuwa, Niyam-gampaya etc. The Elephant Lamp from Dedigama Kotavehera is adorned with a Udakki player.

Udakki is used broadly in the Kandyan dances and hindu temple ceremonies. Generally in the devil dancing ceremonies main drum is Yak Bera, but sometimes the Udakki is also played as an accompanying drum.¹



Udakki player from the Elephant lamp at Dedigama Kotavehera

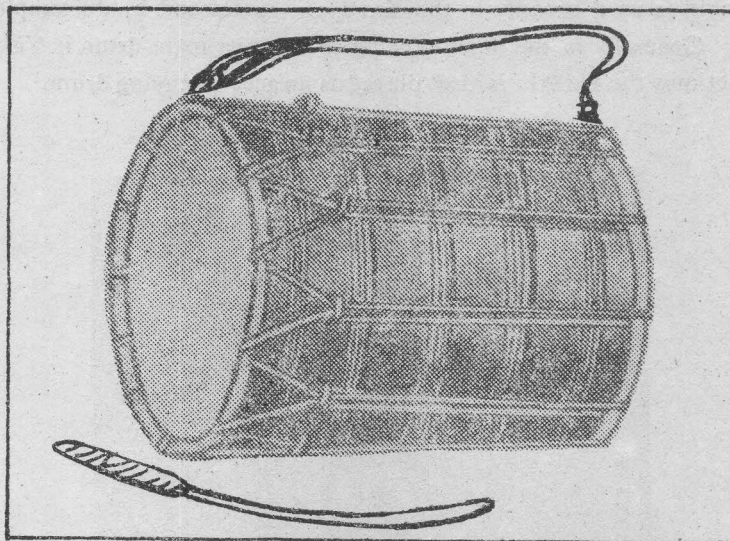
Dakki is as same as Udakki but is bigger in size and has a sling.

Usually the Udakki and Dakki are made of the wood called Suriya, Ehela and for the eye iguana or monkey skins are used.

Mr. C. de S. Kulatillake writes that the origin of the Davula dates back to to ancient Persia and it was named Duhul, Doli, Dolak, Dolki when it come to India.²

1. Ceremonial Dances of the Sinhalese, The Ceylon Historical Journal, Vol. 20 O. Pertold, Dehiwala. 1973, p. 101.

2. Lankawe Sangeeta Smbhawaya. C. de S. Kulatillake, Lake House, 1974, p. 183.



Davula (Sabaragamuwa drum)

Though Davula is famous as Sabaragamuwa drum, it is used generally with Tammattama and Horane all over the island especially in Hevisi and funeral ceremonies. In funerals, drums are covered with a piece of white cloth in order to muffle the sound.

Davula is known to Sabaragamuwa veddhas.¹

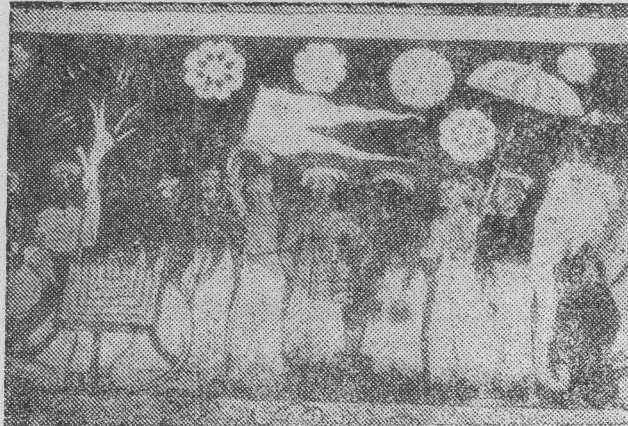
In the Kandyan period royal executioners (Gahalaya) played Davul as Mala Bera when they performed executions.

As Mr. S. Panibharata thinks, Loho Davul mentioned in the literary works, means a one-head drum with a Berakanda covered with or made of metal and it may have taken the shape of a big brass pot.

Usually for Anda Bera (Messenger's drum) Davula was used but as depicted in mural paintings of Rākava temple, there was a smaller drum which was

1. Lankawe Sangeeta Sambhawaya, C. de. S. Kulatillake, Lake House, 1974, p. 133.

hanging on the drummers shoulder. One specimen of Anda Bera is kept in the Colombo National Museum. (No. 17.664.353)

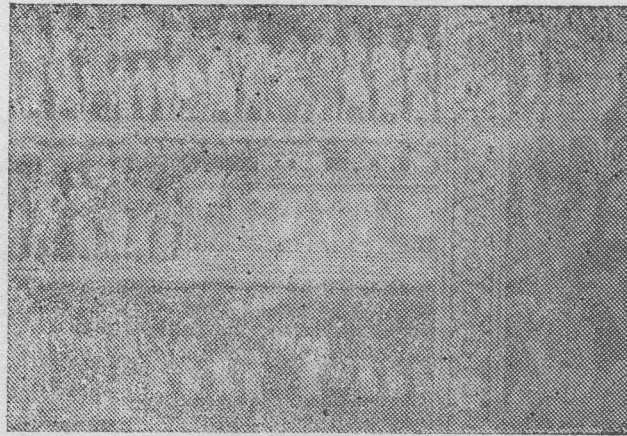


Mural painting at Kelaniya



Dances from Gadala Deniya

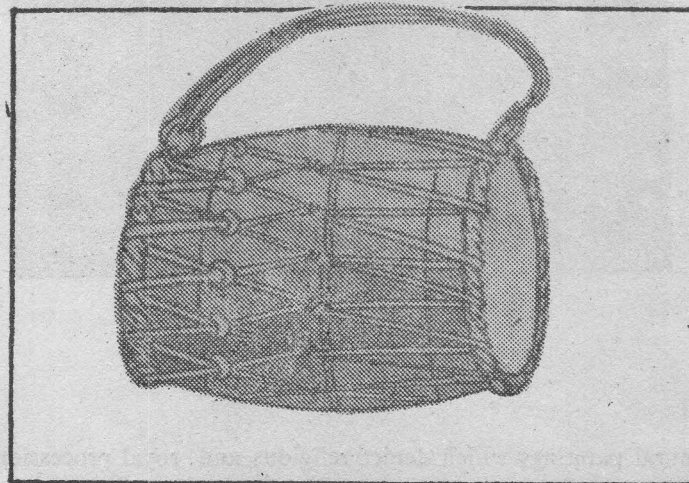
In mural paintings which depict religious and royal processions Davula is an invariably-portrayed musical instrument.



Mural painting at Mulkirgala Vihara

Berakanda for Davula is about 16-18 inches in length and for Anda Bera is about 12 inches. Ehala, Kohomba, Jak, Kithul wood is taken for it and Berakanda decorated in lac and silver strips. Ox-skin is used for Bera heads.

Mr. S. Panibharata is keeping an old Berakanda (Davul) and says that his ancestors used it in Hevisi of the Dalada Maligawa, Kandy. It is made of Rat Ehala and decorated in lac. "This drum was held in high esteem even by the Kandyan Kings, presenting 65 amunas of land for the use of its owners till the sun and the moon exist (Ira handa pawatina turu)".



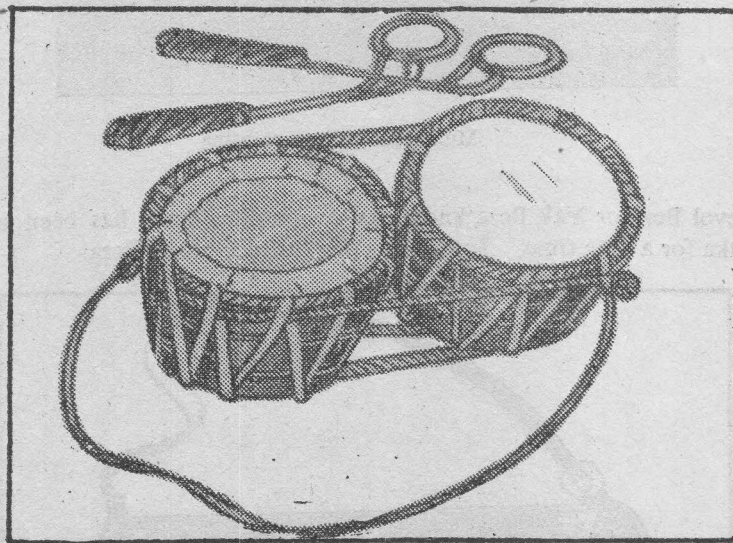
Tamboruwa

Dr. M. D. Raghavan writes that there was a very large drum Tamboruwa like Davula in shape, but heads were not tightened to the same extent as in the Davula. Tamboruwa was used in the Dalada Maligawa and in some other Rajamahaviharas and it emanated a muffled sound.¹

According to Mr. C. de S. Kulatillake Tamboruwa was introduced to Sri Lanka by the Portuguese².

There is an old Tamboruwa (Sinhala Tamboruwa, No. 57.19.3) in the Colombo National Museum and it is in the shape of large short cylinder and made of rolled bark of tree.

Tammattama or Pokuru Bera is a pair of one head drum played with two Kadippus. Mr. C. de S. Kulatilake writes that this drum originated in Babylon.³



Tammattama

Generally, Kitul is taken for Bera a Kanda and Ox-skin is used for both heads. But the left head gives muffled sounds. On various occasions Tammattama is played at the beginning of ceremonies and therefore it is also called Purappatu or Surappattu.

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1. *Sinhala Natam : Dances of the Sinhalese*, M. D. Raghavan, M. D. Gunasena and Co, Ltd., 1967. P. 180
 2. *Lankawe Sangeeta Sambhawaya*, C. de S. Kulatillake, Lake House, 1974, p. 192.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

According to Dr. C. E. Godakumbura, Tammattama probably is a newcomer to Sri Lanka.¹

This drum is depicted in mural paintings of many temples.



Mulkirigala Vihara painting

Devol Bera or Yak Bera known as low-country drum has been used in Sri Lanka for a long time. Sometimes it is called Ghosha Bera.



Yak Bera

1. *Sinhalese Dance and Music*, C. E. Godakumbura, Archaeological Department, Colombo, 1970. p. 26.

Yak Bera is depicted in the paintings of Dodanduwa temple and in a ivory cover of an Ola Book.¹

There are some drums look like Yak Bera in Mulkirigala paintings.



Mulkirigala painting

Yak Bera is played with hands and Ox-stomach (Harak Bokka) is used for heads.

Mr. C. de S. Kulatillake thinks that in Indian musical culture, it is impossible to find a drum like Yak Bera which contains Ox-Stomach and may be it is of a Malaysian Origin.²

In the traditional low-country ritual ceremonies like Devol dances, Sanni and Rata Yakum and Folk-plays "Kolam", Yak Bera is used.

Most researchers seem to have accepted the idea that early drums were made of clay. In modern Sri Lanka Bummendiya (Kumbha Bera, Pot drum) is a clayed drum. One head drum Bummendiya is played particularly in harvesting ceremonies. The iguana skin is chosen for the head and now Bummenidya is confined only to remote areas of Sri Lanka. Dr. M. D. Raghavan writes that drums resembling Bummendiya are Common in South India.³

1. Ibid.,

2. Lankawe Sangeeta Sambhawaya, C. de S. Kulatilake, Lake House, 1974 p. 58, 128.

3. Sinhala Natum : Dances of the Sinhalese, M. D. Raghavan., M. D. Gunasena and Co. Ltd., 1967, p.181.



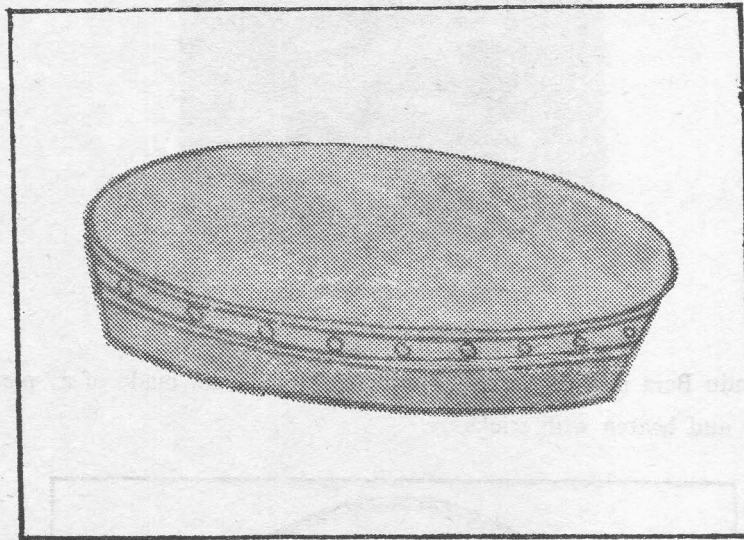
Bummendiya

There are some figures playing Kumbha Bera which are shaped like gourds excavated from Brazen Palace in Anuradhapura.



Kumbha Bera player from Brazen Palace
(According to Mr. C. de S. Kulatilake)

Rabana is a one head drum, covered with ox-skin around frame of wood, usually Gamsuriya, skin is fixed to wooden frame with nails. Rabana is found all over Sri Lanka. Hand Rabana is usually held in the left hand and sometimes played with both hands. The drum called Virandam mentioned in literature is also Rabana used for the Virudavali or eulogizing the Royalty. In modern Sri Lanka Rabana is drummed accompanied by Virundu songs. Now Rabana is used not only in folk ceremonies, wedding, Kotahalu, New Year, but also in Raban dances.



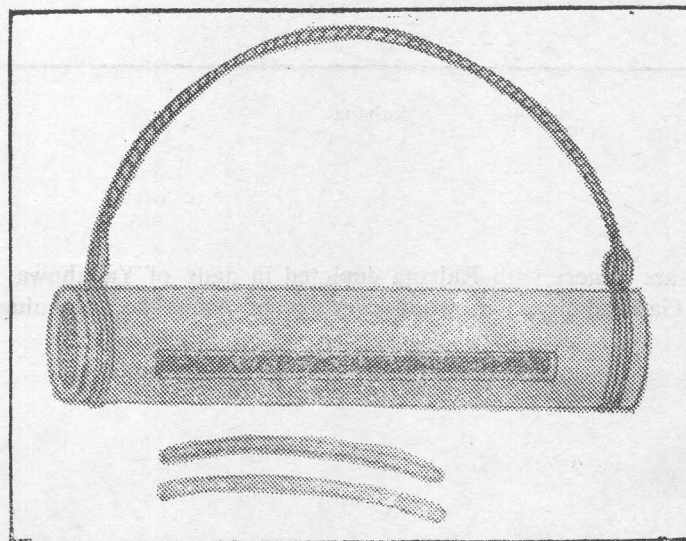
Rabana

There are dances with Rabana depicted in dado of Yapahuwa, Niyam-gampaya, Gadaladeniya ; in wood carvings of Ambakke, Ambulugala etc.



Wood carving in Ambakke

Dandu Bera is a very small, simple children drum made of a piece of bamboo and beaten with sticks.



Dandu Bera

The list of drums appearing in the literature as mentioned earlier is very vast, but most of them are not special drums, and only different names derived from the situations of drumming. For example, Mr. S. Panibharata says that Maha Bera was a collective drumming by a number of drummers in festivals ; Dāduru Bera might be any drum that is played with thundering sounds.

Methods of making of drums

It is appropriate to pay attention to methods of making drums though the relevant information available is scant.

Various drummer families have their own methods of making of drums but there are main features generally accepted by all of them.

After choosing a suitable log, the drummer digs it with instruments and makes the Berakanda about 1/2 an inch thick, polishes it and decorates with lac.

Dr. A. Coomaraswamy analyses the process of lac works.¹ In Sri Lanka lac is taken from two varieties of beetles. The branches of trees such as Kappetiya, Kon, Hinguru, Talakiriya which contain beetles are made to dry in the Sun and lac is separated from them.

After that lac is pounded in the mortar, fine powder is sifted and put into a cloth bag and held over the fire to heat it. After sometime the bag is pressed and the lac gets out of it. Thereafter lac is made into the shape of a bar. Then hot lac will be blended with lead powder. To get colours of red, yellow paccha and black, Sadilingam, Hiriya, Yellow and Andun Dali respectively will be added to the lac.

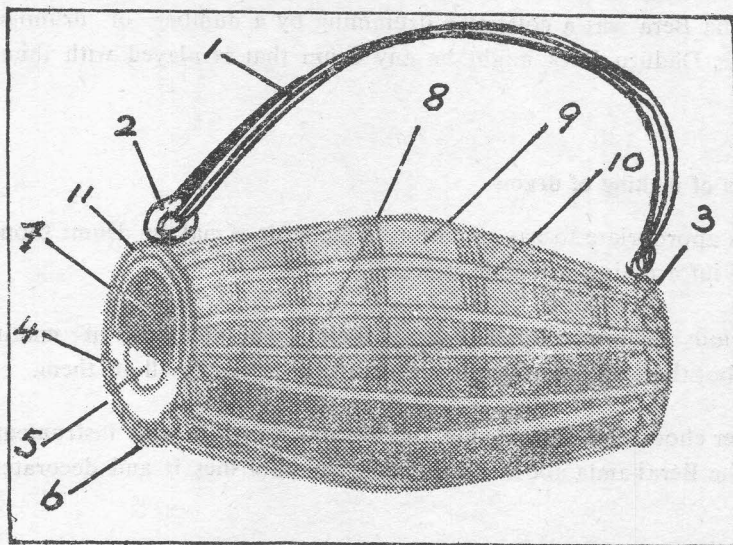
Lac is applied in strips to Bera Kanda when it rotates on the lathe.

Sometimes another method is used to apply lac ; hot lac applied to smaller wooden things with nails and a piece of Ola paper. In this situation lac was applied to heated things.

Suitable skin for Beratattuwa is prepared in traditional method. The flesh is scraped out of the skin. Then the skin is stretched in the sun or indoors and fixed to the ground with wedges made of areca tree. Ash is scattered on the

1. Mediaeval Sinhalese Art. A. K. Coomaraswamy, New—York, 1956. pp. 215–217.

skin and kept for a few days in order to dispel bad smell. The hair is removed with knives and suitable pieces of skin is cut for Beratattuwa. If it were an ox-stomach (Harakbokka) it is usually dried only in the Sun.



Parts of the Drum

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|--------------------|---------------|
| 1. Urapota | 7. Bera Esa |
| 2. Kanwaraya | 8. Bera Kanda |
| 3. Weniwarawalalla | 9. Gätaya |
| 4. Kepumahama | 10. Warapata |
| 5. Beratattuwa | 11. Andaira |
| 6. Gätaya | |

The plaster (Badama) for Beratattuwa is prepared out of cooked rice left over for a day, mixed with iron powder, resin, coconut charcoal and albumen.

If it is a Gäta Bera, a small line (Andaira) is carved on the edge of the Bera head and a kitul fibre is inserted before the fixing of Bertattuwa. The Andaira produce vibrations.

Kepum Hama, a round piece of skin is fixed on the edge of Bera head covering the Beratattuwa. Then the Bera Gätaya goes round the edges of both kepum Hama and Beratattuwa.

Warapata, a long band of skin (brace) repeatedly passes through the Bera Gätaya and connects two Bera heads. This leather strip is made out of cleaned skin. The strip is cut and stretched between two trees or poles and made to dry. Then the strip gets straightened. Sometimes Niyanda is used for Warapata.

On both sides of the Berakanda two brass rings through which the Urapata goes, are fixed.

Kadippuwa (drumsticks) is usually made of hard wood like Atteriya. Earlier ivory also was taken for them. Kadippuwa for Tammattama prepared from cane, Kirindivel etc. The end of the Kadippuwa consists of one or two rounds. Sometimes these two rounds are connected to the spine of kadippuwa in order to make it stronger.

This is the general way of the construction of drums by the Sinhalese people.

Ideological aspect of drumming

Music is a means of expressing religious faith and amusement. The Sinhalese Royalty has patronized music of Sri Lanka throughout the history. King Devanampiyatissa's musical group Talawachara, King Dutugamunu's Royal musical group; the Saraswathi Mandapa, Sinhala Gandabba, Srungara Mandapa in medieval times; Kavikara group, Nätum Ilangama, Vahal Ilangama, Tambaru-Purappettukara branch in Kandyan period etc. can be cited as examples.

In the vanguard of the armies marching to battle were the musicians and drummers who played martial music, so that in war and peace music played an important role.

Traditionally it is believed that music is divine and the God-Creator Mahabrahma presented it to Bharata Muni as fifth Veda for the benefit of all men and devas. Those engaged in the study of Art successfully explain that the roots of Indian classical music are found in vedas recital systems.¹

In most Hindu and Buddhist ceremonies music plays an important part. The Negative Attitude of Buddhism to secular arts has not exercised much control over the art of music but has led to its adaptation.

Students of Art history of India are familiar with Buddhist Arts in Bharut, Sanchi, Bhaja, Gandhara, Amarawathi, Nagarjunakonda etc. In Sri Lanka, religious monuments like Kanthaka sthupa, Gadaladeniya, Dambulla, Niyamgampaya, Yapahuwa, and many temples in Kandyan times etc. denote various aspects of musical life of the Sinhalese. Moreover, there are many Museum items, for example: Dalada Perahera which is carved in two Brass trays are among the exhibits in the Colombo National Museum properly depict the musical life of the Sinhalese. The dances such as Vidvat, Alatthi, Diggenätum, performed by women were devoted to religious purposes.

1. Lankawe Saangeeta Sambhawaya, C. de S. Kulatillake, Lake House 1974, p. 1—22. Musical Instruments of India, S. Krishnaswamy, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1967, p. 21-22.

God Sun dwells in Rabana, The skin is the abode of Ramasri and Virupaksha dwells in the nails.

According to Sinhala Talasastra, all drum rhythms (talam Savdam, Vannam, Adav, Sural, Kastiram etc.) consist of Tat, Dit, Ton, Nan and Ta swaras (primary sounds), sometimes the last Ta is missing. These first four swaras are imitation of thunder, roar of lion, bellow of bull and neigh of horse respectively.

Folk song illustrates swaras :

“ Tat kī akuru muniduta namaskāre	ki
Dit kī akuru devinduta namaskāre	ki
Ton kī akuru Guruhata namaskāra	ki
Nan kī akuru Sabayata namaskāre	ki ”

“Swara Tat is a homage to the Buddha, Dit to the God, Ton to the teacher and Nan to the audience.”

There are a number of works dealing with melodies and rhythms of drums. Therefore in this article no attempts are made to dwell on them.

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