

Impression of Dance and Music: expression on rock surface (Iconographic study based on Naranamula cave in Toppigala)

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Abstract

Sri Lanka has a rich tradition of rock art, and the first attempt to study on rock art was reported in the 19th century with the investigation made by H.C.P. Bell. According to Bandaranayake (2006), Sri Lanka has a long and rich tradition of rock and wall painting from the 2nd or 3rd century BC to the 20th century, extending possibly from prehistory. There is a few scholars who have contributed to analyzing rock art, but mere attention has been paid addressing the ethnographic and cultural context that represents. Deraniyagala's classification appears more vital, however, lacking with scientific dating of rock art by comparing with the socio-cultural context. Accordingly, the settlements at Naranmula cave appears to be of an earlier date than what has been identified and can trace some of the authentic cultural elements of Sri Lankan people. Thus, the present qualitative study attempted to analyze evidence found from Naranamula cave to establish that the *first Musical instruments are denoted on the rock surface of Naranamula cave*, expressing their feelings and emotions by way of engravings/ paintings. It is significant that there is a vacuum in the existing literature, on studying rock art by way of Sri Lanka's performing arts, especially the history of music and dance. According to the data analyzed, there is a significant amount of information to support that the use of musical instruments is not a new trend in Sri Lanka, but a derivation from the prolonged use of local/ indigenous cultural practices, which were later developed by incorporating new elements.

Keywords: Music Instruments, Rock Art, Prehistory, Iconography

Introduction

The ancestors story imprinted on the rock surface was filled with lines, colors, and dots. 40,000 years ago. Homo sapiens painted cave walls. Each period of the rock art reflects the aesthetic and intellectual values of its age.

Therefore, studying rock paintings is an understanding of signs and symbols in the context of religions, myths, rituals, arts, and languages in a culture.

The archaeological records explore how humans would have originated and evolved as a culturally rich species from the evidence supported from the Neanderthals and other larger brained hominids. Further, it was evident that the ancestors slapped their bodies, clapped, and made rhythmic movements imprinted in cave walls (Bragard, Ferdinand & Hen, 1986.p.19). This explores that rhythmic expressions are integral to human social life. On the other hand, manifestation of rock paintings is a creative process, and Sri Lanka has a longstanding tradition of rock paintings. As a fact, the meaning or a detailed interpretation of Sri Lanka's rock paintings has not been conducted. Somadeva (2012), strived to analyse the characteristics of these paintings and engravings from the ground level, while signalling the availability if authentic characteristics Sri Lanka's dance and music for a time innumerable with regard to its existence.

Hence, the research gap has been created to investigate the fact that the rock paintings and engravings in Sri Lanka representing its authentic cultural identity through ages to date. It was further revealed that scholars have not paid much attention on such cultural elements as dance, music gestures, norms and customs and other elements, as there was no such approach carried out during the past decades, due to the reason that the dance and music scholars have not attempted to analyse the assumptions founded by archaeologist. However, the archaeological evidence in the subjective viewpoints of dance and music, helps establish that dance and music history in Sri Lanka derives a strong tradition which is native to Sri Lankan culture and society that was later developed with the socio-cultural amalgamation with migrated socio-cultural elements. The particular absence causes academics to depend on the *Mahavamsa* as the earliest reference in dance and music in Sri Lanka with the story related to the Vijaya's arrivals.

Hence, the present study focuses on analysing rock art created by preliterate people depicting various movements i.e. dance postures, drumming, playing instruments etc., where directed, to establish music history in Sri Lanka. Further from the of view of some historians, most of the rock art in Sri Lanka was done by the Veddah community because their social and cultural life lay in caves. The Seligmanns (1911) were among the first to explore the connections between prehistoric man in Sri Lanka and essentially

Stone Age lifestyle of the Veddahs. They also brought attention to the rock shelters that both prehistoric man and the Veddahs occupied rock shelters and for many a purposes, they engraved on rock surface, sometimes painted, to express the psycho cantered feelings and emotions to each other.

Literature Survey

The music related evidence provided all over the world in the cave art context. An artefact was found around 82,000-43,000 years ago, as the world's oldest flute was found in Slovenia in a Neanderthal habitation site (Prunk, Pikalo, Milosavljevič, 2007. P.12). The equipment was made from a cave bear bone, and this bone flute dates to approximately 9,000-7,000 years ago. During the 19th and 20th centuries, attention was focused on rock paintings and engravings (RPE) in Sri Lanka by a few scholars i.e. Bell, Bandaranayake and Jayasinghe, Manjusri, Somathilake, Paranavithana, Deraniyagala, and Nandadeva after two centuries of providing attention on RPE during in the 17th century in the global context. The first attempt of the context was made by H.C.P. Bell, 1904, observed quint outline drawings of men, animals, etc., of the most primitive people who executed their skills and experience in white ashes in Konnattegoda and Arangoda Galge in the Polonnaruwa district. The significant approach on RPE records was focused by Somadeva in 2012 on semiotics and ecology in cognitive approaches, as the previous research was absent of raising the meaningful expressions of preliterate society in the country. The investigation not only benefited archaeology but also analysed rock art design, syntax of images, stylistic correlation, social practices, and figurative representations validating the cultural context of the pre-literate man in the country. The argument was supported by Illangasingha (2017) on studying drawings which enabled him to identify the craftsmanship of the pre-literate man from the perspective of their cultural and cognitive expressions. With such involvement, the present study typically put more focus on music and its evolution in the country by paying attention on rock paintings and engravings in Sri Lanka in the context of the visual tradition of music.

It is the known fact that music is a sensitive context that enables human beings to touch universal attributes in the human mind, such as expressing emotions, expressions and even mindfulness practices. The practice has been evident throughout the history, where the visuals on rock surfaces of pre-

historic and primitive cave dwellings have proved the sole cultural insight and behaviour through their practices and experiences drawn on the rock surface. Archaeologists have made great contributions to understand ancestors' livelihoods and cultural behaviours that directed communication through the generating of sounds. According to Piyadasa (1998), preliterate people interpreted the nature, and they expressed emotions by screaming, clapping, and tapping where some of these are of the tangible context: perhaps most of the expressions are intangible to date, and can be connected by properly analysing the available visible data. What is available to date is the what they have imprinted on cave walls with their experience, feelings, and culture. Hence, researchers focused on studying rock painting all over the world, where Sri Lankan scholars also attempted to establish a sound knowledge on preliterate creative society.

According to Deraniyagala, they have three main forms of rock art: incised depictions, polychrome paints, and monochromatic silhouettes . The 'artists' have used kaolin, ash, and white or colored clays, or they have just used a crude kind of engraving by bruising the rock's surface. Thick finger smears and line drawings, also referred to as "stick" figures, include stylized animal shapes, hunting figures wielding bows and arrows, men mounted on animals, and geometric or symbolic themes. Certain forms are incredibly creative or symbolic traditions where interpretation determines the topic matter. However, music is expressing and inducting emotions that preliterate man also wanted to symbolize by painting rocks. As per the researchers, they explored the generating sounds by using the mouth directed to the lexicon of words as well as music.

India

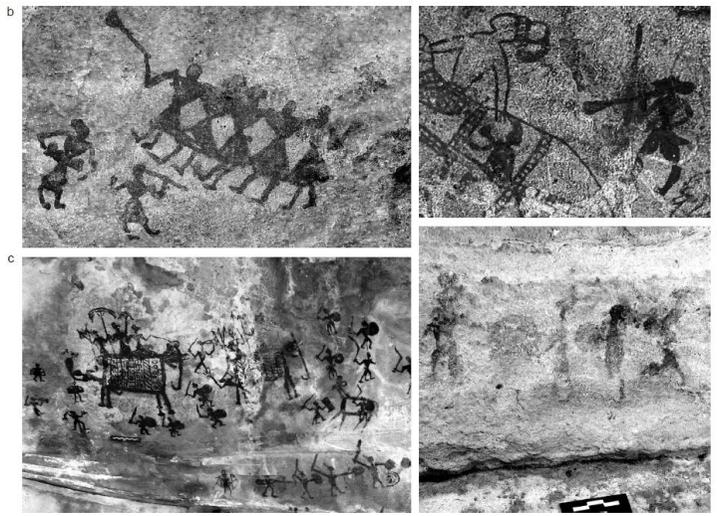
Pattak, and Cottes, (2021), focused on music denoted on rock surfaces in central India and mentioned that they were able to identify drums, harps, pipes, and cymbals. These researchers found the number of drummers symbolized on rock walls in Madhya Pradesh, and these paintings are considered Neolithic and historic.

Two types of drums are found among the rock paintings in the Chaturbujnath Nala cave in Madhya Pradesh (**Cave Art 1**). A big cylindrical drum hangs from the neck and is held in the middle of the body, and it is believed this drum can be used at both ends and may be played by using hands.



Cave Art 1 Source: Pattak, M., and Cottes, J, 2021

In the complex panel of Chaturbujnath Nala (Madhya Pradesh) depicted in **Cave Art 2**, at the top left, a line of people wearing elaborate headgear and wielding axes and shields are dancing to the sound of big drums.



Cave Art 2 Source: Pattak,M.,andCottes,J, 2021

And researchers found pipe players from sixteen caves. They may have used hollow tubes such as horns, bamboo, or bones. In early times, pipes and drums were also used to announce conflicts and warn other groups. Further, the **Cave Art 3** demonstrates two long rows of dancers converging towards a harp player depicted at left. Below them are smaller people probably also dancing

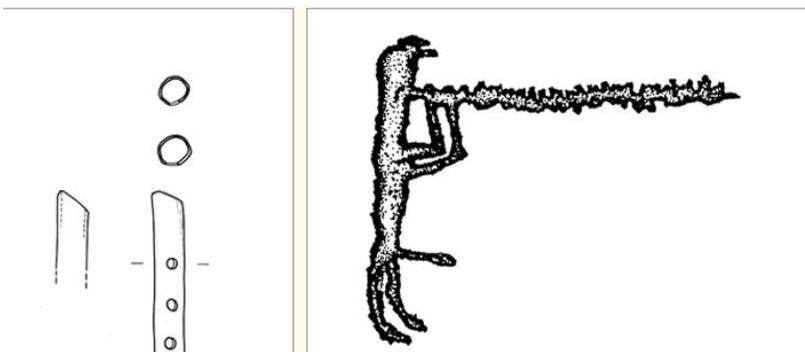


Cave Art: 3 At Kharwai (Madhya Pradesh),

Source: Pattak, M., and Cottes, J., 2021

Korea

The first attempt on prehistoric musical instruments in rock art by Cho Hyunjong, 2006, was a phenomenon in Korea. Cho, Hyunjong (**Cave Art 4**) found a naked man blowing a music instrument found in Eonyang-eup, Ulju-gun, Ulsan, and Bangudae rock engraving. This researcher quoted research data on the 1960-1964 excavation and identified nine cultural layers from Paleolithic to Neolithic to Bronze Age in Seopohang; the site is located in Seopohangdong.



Cave Art 4: Bone flute from Seopohang site (Cho Hyunjong, 2006)

The depiction of rock art not only reveals the socio-cultural engagement of the contemporary society, but also the music, dance and means of expressions

i.e. its instruments are its narrative symbolic and communicative function of the prehistoric societies.

Sri Lanka

According to Kasun and Wickramasingha (2021), **(Pic.1)** research on a bone with a hole found in the Bellanbedi pelassa excavation is considered a musical approach. The prehistoric man may have made this hole pipe purposely with the objective of using as a musical instrument. Further, Bellanbedi Pelassa excavated time to time, and Deraniyagale excavated in 1961 and revealed this site belongs to the Homosapian Balangodensis before 6500 years old (Perera, 2021). This bone is named PH 32, is 30 cm long and it can be seen in the National Museum at Rathnapura. According to Madushanka et al. 2021 research, it was found that there is a hole with a diameter of 2 cm, and there are six cuts done by using a stone tool. The researchers tried to play this and were able to generate a fawn's sound and a rabbit's and monkey's sounds.



Pic: 1 PH 32 Bone, Found in Bellan Bedi Pelassa

(Kasun, M and Wickramasingha, S, (2021)

According to the Sri Lankan rock art studies, there is a vacuum of studies related to the music. Bell (1904), Deraniyaga (1983), Manju Sri (), Bandaranayaka (2006), Nandadeva (2004), Somadeva (2012), and Illangasinghe (2017) analyzed rock art sites scattered over Sri Lanka and identified social and cultural behavior of the pre literate people symbolized on rock surfaces. Somadeva (2012) mentioned that it is a creative process that expresses cognition of the human mind. while Illangasingha (2017) analyzed its visual art aspects as colors, lines, and drawing techniques. However, there is a research gap within the context of music and dance where no detailed

examination has been evolved to date. Such non-attend/ed data create a vacuum in the history of art, especially the performing arts, which opens up wider array of notions to assume that Sri Lanka's performing arts is a subsidiary of migrant communities and cultures.

Research Problem and Methodology

It is apparent that most of the rock art belongs to the Veddah community, the descendants of the pre and proto history of Sri Lanka. They expressed their cognition on rough surfaces which to date represents a viable atmosphere to identify the authentic lifestyle and the socio cultural landscape through which we can trace the expression of music and dance and it is important to examine how they denoted the tradition of music in Sri Lanka. The research problem is significant as the first attempt at music related to rock art in Sri Lanka.

The study uses the primary and secondary data traced from the literary sources and from the field, especially by mapping the selected site as the nucleus. The study will apply a hermeneutic approach as illustrated by Ries (1989, 1993) where "the symbol is a concrete and sensible signifier that suggests the meaning and reveals it transparently." The symbol has a visible basis, an identifiable aspect. The meaning is the invisible and unknown part, the content that man must discover. The function of a symbol is to reveal a total reality, inaccessible by other means of knowledge. Hence, this research selected the above two cave art pieces as samples of the research. As a qualitative content analysis, this research collected primary and secondary data.

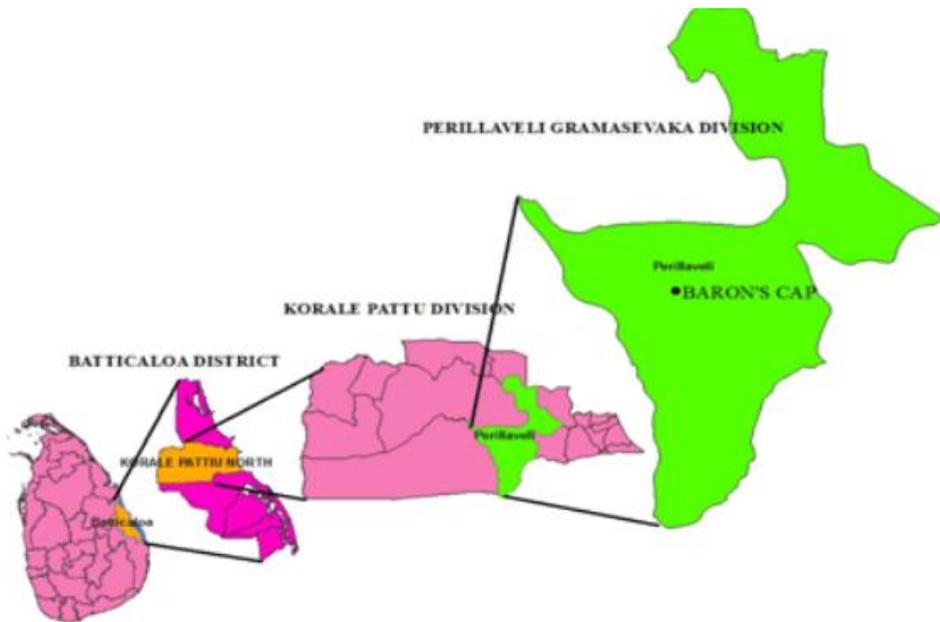
Discussion

As the world oldest expression, rock art scattered all over the world and Sri Lankan rock shelters providing significant evidence in the context. Toppigala is located in Batticaloa district in Eastern province also known as Baran's Cap and Kudumbimalai. Kudumbimalai in Tamil: translates to Hair knot rock and another Tamil name for the region is Thoppikkal, which translates to Hat rock (**Map 1**), hence in Sinhala it is called Thoppigala (Wijerathne, W., 2015).

In 2021 Somadeva, observed nine locations in this archeological sites and mentioned that all of them were ancient Buddhist monasteries fallen in to

period between 4th century BCE and 8th century CE which are partly or completely ruined state.

Among the sites Naranamula site hide in the forest and spread over the 18.34 hectares where exists a completely ruined religious area. This area of Buddhist monastery situated in Iruakkulam Grama Niladari Division of Eravurpattu divisional secrateriat. According to the Somadeva, this area would be a ritual space used by Buddhist monks. And there are significant rock paintings symbolizing a drummer with a musical instrument and other rock art representing ritualistic symbols one of which is the blower/whistler found from Naranamula cave site (**Cave Art 5 & 6**).



Map 01- Map of Toppigala per-history site

(Wijerathne, W., 2015)



Cave Art 5 A Drummer : Naraanamula cave

Source: Somadeva, 2021



Cave Art 6 Ritual : Naranamula cave art

Source: Somadeva, 2021

According to the music history reported in *Wamsattappakasini* the classification of musical instruments was done using the method of playing i.e. wing, string, hand or hand with stick etc.,

එක්ක පවාංගික කුරියා නාම - ආතතං විතතං
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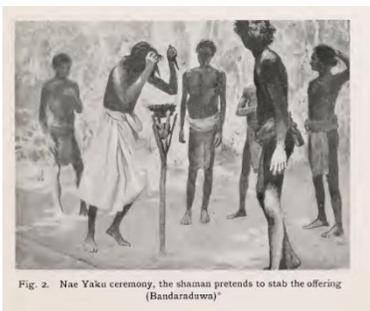
(Wp. Chap.XXIX. vs. 23-28 and the notes)

As per *Mahawamsa* Vijaya heard a musical sound and questioned about it in 6th BC and Kuwanna mentioned that it is a musical sound from a wedding ceremony in Sirisawattupura (Yakkha tribe). She broadly explained about the ceremony and its events.

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(Mv. Chap. VII. vs. 30-35)

There is a ritual among Veddah Community named '*Na Yakun Pidima.*' (Pic.2 & 3) Worshipping relatives is famous rite among them and that is inherited from yakkha tribe to Veddah community. In these rituals they dance, singing and they may generate sounds by using hands and instruments.



Pic 2 & 3 *Na Yakun Pidima* by Veddah community

Conclusion

The ancestors have been expressing their cognition of music from the human evolution by slapping their bodies, clapping and while dancing. The

acts would have led towards ritual enactments to venerate a particular local deity, a natural phenomenon, or their happiness at times. Such expressions and experiences which have been engraved or illustrated by pre-historic man are the solid evidence to identify, examine and investigate the cultural interconnectedness of people over millennia and semiotic expressions of the usage, especially imprinting rhythmic movements in cave walls. As per literature, identified drums, harps, pipes and cymbals in other countries like India, Korea in South Asian and East Asian region belonging to Palaeolithic to Neolithic to Bronze age reveals macro and micro level elements music, dance, constructing its relationship to modern understanding. Similarly, the bone found from Bellanbedi Pelassa, belonging to Homosapien Balangodensis, 6500 years old (Perera,2021), identified as a wind instrument could also be considered a native flute in Sri Lanka.

As Somadeva mentioned Toppigala, Naranamula Buddhist monasteries fall in to period between 4th century BCE and 8th century CE, the **Cave Art: 5** express their usage of rhythmical instrument with singing, as the dot indicated before the figure of the man on the rock surface demonstrates that the player has a blowing instrument in his mouth producing some music. Accordingly, Cave Art: 5 and 6 can be assumed as a ritual event on behalf of the Buddha or any other religious deity in local vicinity. This assumption can lead to a conclusion that Sri Lanka has had its own tradition of music which attempted playing blowing instruments to produce a rhythmic sound. And the present research findings clearly explore that ancestors imitated nature, and that directed to generating musical instruments.

Hence, Naranamula cave art of Drummer can be considered as one of the pioneering evidences with regard to the history of music in Sri Lanka.

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