

EXPLORING THE MUSICAL HERITAGE OF THE TRADITIONAL SRI LANKAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENT HORANEWA

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Abstract

Some historical information reveals that the art of ensemble playing in Sri Lanka dates back to the Yaksha, Naga, and tribal eras that existed even before the suggested arrival of King Vijaya. Indigenous ensembles can also be described as an art that evolved with the development of humankind in different periods due to various invasions. A large number of ensemble instruments used by the Sri Lankan village artist from then to now are revealed in bibliographical information such as the Mahavamsa, Thupavamsa, Dambadeniya Asna, Kuveni Asna, and Saddharmalankara. These ensembles are divided into five types, mainly, that which is described as the panchathurya, including aathatha, vithatha, vithathaathatha, ghana and sushira, of which sushira is the calibration of blowing instruments that includes the horanewa as well. The horanewa can be introduced as the only swara/ notes instrument used by the Sinhala folk artist of the day among the instruments of the panchathurya. The main purpose of this research is to investigate the technical methods used in the production of this musical instrument called horanewa and its special techniques adopted in playing. Why does the horanewa instrument used at present not produce its own definite melodic sound? In relation to this question that arose, data were collected, analyzed and interpreted and conclusions were reached. As revealed in this descriptive research, the horanewa is a special musical instrument built with the technology of three traditional manufacturers. This research will be important to introduce and preserve the arts related to this musical instrument which is gradually dying out.

Keywords

Indigenous ensembles, Panchathurya, Technical methods, Characteristics, Traditional use

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Introduction

There is historical information to confirm that group playing in Sri Lanka dates back to the era of the Yaksha and Naga tribes (Buddhadattha, 1959). The art of playing ensemble music has become a national heritage as it is regarded as a local cultural element. Many musical instruments used by Sri Lankan musicians have been explored in books such as Thupawansaya (Premarathna, 1987), Deepawansaya (Gnanawimala, 1959), Wansaththappakasiniya (Mallalasekara, 1935), Saddharamalankaraya (Sarananda, 1953), Dalada Siritha (Soratha, 1970), Dambadeni Asna (Gnanawimala, 1960), and Kuweni Asna (Gnanawimala, 1960). Those musical instruments are divided into five types, i.e. athatha vithatha, vithathathatha, ghana, and sushira are described under the name of panchangika thurya (Gnanawimala, 1960). In the study of panchangika thurya instruments based on various sources, many musical instruments are out of use and are in a state of not being recognizable, and some of them are only known by foreign names. Among them, the horanewa can be introduced as a musical instrument that supposedly can play according to harmonic progressions used among instruments played by modern village musicians.

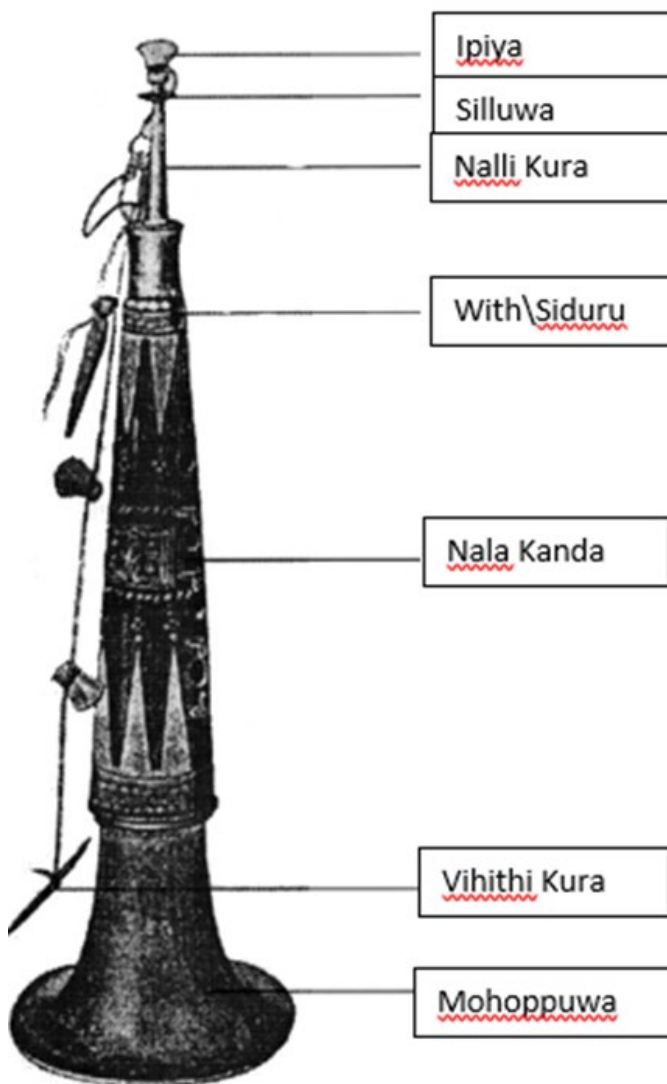


Figure 1: Main Parts of horanewa. From *Madya Kaleena Sinhala Kala* (p. XXIV) by Ananda K. Kumaraswami, 1962.

Literature Review

Different opinions on the origin of the name horanewa are available. According to the literature, it is a West Asian migrant instrument (Samarasinghe, 2023). There is no chord playing in the horanewa². Some scholars express the opinion that the horanewa is blown without a definite tone and also without accommodating harmonic progressions³. However, the above statement clearly proves to be false since some tonal manipulation takes place in the use of the horanewa.

C. de S. Kulathilake has shown that for the first time in the written literature of this country, the horanewa was called surana (Balagalle Wimalabuddi, 1967). He has further pointed out that the name surana was a synonym of the name surna in relation to the word quarna in Persia, and that the big instrument is known as quarna and the small instrument is known as a surna (Kulathilake, 1974). Meanwhile, Jayantha Aravinda says that the surnawa was the basis for the production of the Indian musical instrument about sixty years ago⁴. However, it was important for this study that the types of horane instruments were introduced as saranai in Malaysia, saranai in Vietnam, pinai in Thailand, shehnai, sahanai, and surnai in India. When asking questions, the common feature of all those names is that the sound 'nai' is applied to the end of each word. It is used in Egypt, meaning flute (Diagram Group, 1976). Apart from that, although certain types of horns have been introduced as surna and sona. C. de S. Kulathilake has further pointed out that the final "na" sound in those words has been shortened to nai. Considering the fact that nai is used for the horanewa, the use of "ne" in horanewa can also be recognized as a sound from nai or na. From the preceding facts, it is clear that it is difficult to find an etymological explanation for the name horanewa. Nonetheless, it can be identified as a wind instrument very similar to the types of double reeds used in Persia as well as in India.

Bibliographers, researchers, and reporters have expressed different opinions about the shape of the instrument. Meanwhile, in the Practical Sinhala Dictionary, it has been introduced as a wind instrument with a long body and with a wide foot. It also indicates that the name horanewa and *kahalaya* are used to refer to it (Wijethunga, 1984, p. 1909). The author of the Sinhala dictionary has also presented the same idea (Soratha, 2017).

Artist J. E. Sedaraman indicates that the body is carved from ivory or horn, the rest of the parts are made of brass, the blowing part is small, and the part that produces different pitches is made with holes. It is further mentioned that the holes are for playing tones that fit harmonic progressions and the singing of Kavi (Poem), "silo"⁵ and others including daul⁶, and thammattam⁷ verses are played through it (Sedaraman, 1997). It has been mentioned that the horn of the horanewa is made of palm leaves, the middle part is made of wood and the rest of the parts are made of brass, and a piece of wood called "fire string"

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2. S. Illesinghe, personal communication, February 2, 1999.
 3. J. Aravinda, personal communication, 2 April, 1999.
 4. J. Aravinda, personal communication, 2 April, 1999.
 5. Singing style.
 6. Sri Lankan cylindrical drum from Sabaragamuwa dance tradition.
 7. Sri Lankan kettle drum.

is used to separate the petals of the horn and widen the opening. It was stated that the sound of the horanewa is similar to the sound of the Scottish Bagpipe (Ellepola, 1967).

The Analysis of Sushira Musical Instruments

According to the world classification of sushira musical instruments, they are divided into three categories (Diagram Group, 1976).

- Single reed sushira instrument
- Double reed sushira instrument
- Free reed sushira instrument

According to the above classification, the horanewa is known as a double reed instrument (Meddegoda, 2019a and 2019b) by some musicians⁸. Considering the method of playing horanewa and how to prepare the ipiya, it seems that questioning that opinion is not the solution to the problems named. As a sushira with all its elements of more than 2 reeds clashing towards each other and producing sound through the interruption of the air flow in this way, the principle named with double reeds is not touched at all. It is still a concussive process. Insofar it is not a blank opinion but a hard fact. Here, the author tries to describe its modification.

The classification is done on the basis of reeds which are designed to produce sound. These reeds are delicately crafted from leaves and wood fragments as well as synthetic materials. The sound is generated by the vibrating of leaves and swinging reeds due to the strength and weakness of the air column created through blowing in the upper end of the mouth piece.

Reeds that produce sound using one reed are classified as single reed musical instruments. They are principally percussive in nature: the reed swings towards a solid base. Instruments that produce sounds using two reeds are called double reeds as they provide the opportunity to produce a concussive sound and instruments that produce sound without reeds touching any part of the instruments or themselves are called free reeds as they swing freely within the air. Single reed instruments include clarinet saxophone and double reed instruments including all oboes, nagaswara, and bagpipes which, in some cases, come under free reeds. Nevertheless, the harmonium and accordion are free reed musical instruments.

However, four reeds (quadruples) are used to produce the tones of the horanewa⁹. They work like double reeds.

8. C. de S. Kulathilake, personal communication, 4 December, 1998.

9. K. Danguwa, personal communication, 30 May, 1999.

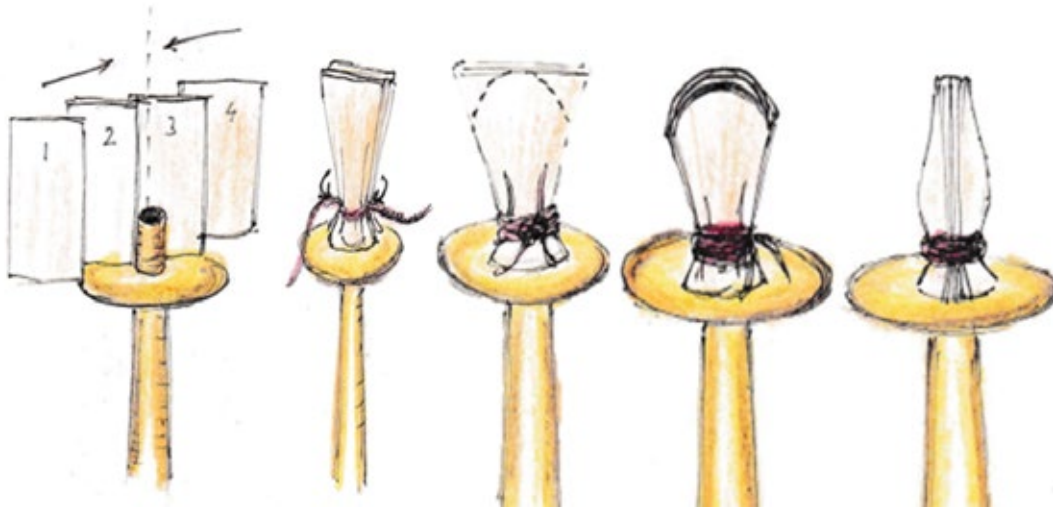


Figure 2: The way of making “ipiyawa” (the drawings were made by the author).

In pinai¹⁰, surna and Shehnai instruments, the ipiya is made using four reed parts called vocal reeds¹¹, but it is clear in the study that it has not been taken into account in the classification of sushira instruments. C. de S. Kulathilake suggests that the upper and lower vocal reeds are used as a support to hold the player’s lips. Therefore, the reed seems to be set. However, when playing horanewa in practice, the lips are held on the knot that is tied so that it rests on all the reeds.

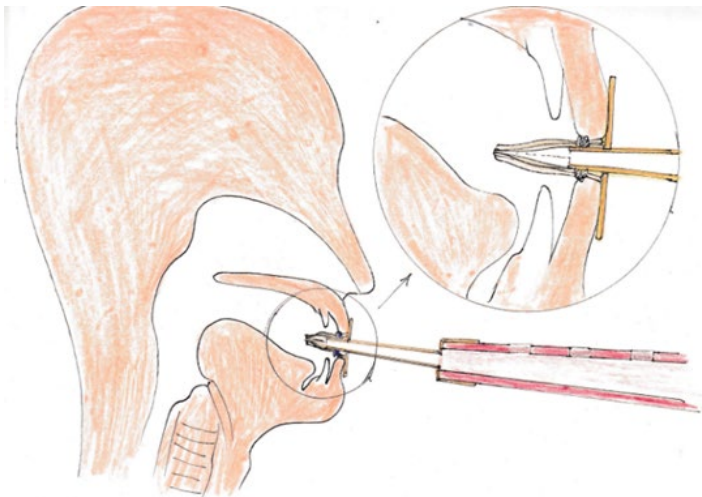


Figure 3: How to keep the lips on the ipiya while playing horanewa (the illustrations were made by the author).

As shown in Figure 3 above, it can be confirmed that the two upper and lower reed folds of the ipiya are not used as a support to hold the player’s lips.

It should be especially mentioned that in some musical instruments, simple double reeds are used for an ipiyawa. It is important to note that our focus here is only on the types of instruments that use four reeds like the horanewa. These wind instruments can be divided into two special groups.

- A. Instrument with the apparatus called silluwa.
- B. Instrument without silluwa.

Our research can show that the instruments related to the two sets are played in two ways. The sound of stringed instruments is produced by using the four reeds or leaves. It should

10. C. Patara, personal communication, 10 February, 1999.

11. M. Haneef & E. Husen, personal communication, 12 November, 1999

be noted that the player's lips do not rest on the leaves and they rest on the knot. It is as shown in the figure below.



Figure 4: How to store air in the mouth

Also, the air inhaled through the nose is stored in the mouth as the cheeks widen and is directed to the four reeds, and the pressure is pushed forward by the lips, preventing it from being further pushed through the lips. The author's observation of playing the horanewa in practice can be further confirmed by the given photographs.



Sri Lankan horanewa Player

Figure 5: Photo by Author.



Pakistani Shehnai Player

Figure 6: Photo taken by unknown person using author's camera.

When comparing the figures above, we can note how the playing styles of horanewa instruments and Shehnai players¹² are similar.

12. For more information about the Indian-shehnai players visit <https://images.app.goo.gl/DucnktVTLNkzmLr78>. Last accessed 17 August, 2023.

As a result, if pressure is applied to the ipiya, the leaves of the ipiya vibrate and produce a sound and that sound is released through the tubes. The tubes are arranged in such a way that the diameter gradually increases and finally through the mohoppuwa (part of horanewa) made of metal in the form of a cone. There, the sound produced by the instrument is doubled and directed away by the body and becomes specific in producing definite tones according to the physical nature of the instrument and the manipulation through the finger holes.

Wind Instruments without “Silluwa”

When playing the instrument without a mouthpiece, the lips are placed on the pipe and the air inhaled through the nose is not stored in the mouth so that the two ends are widened.



Figure 7: Shenai

<http://indianmusicsschool.com/shehnai/>



Figure 8: Pinai instrument of Thailand

http://www.istov.de/htmls/thailand/thailand_instruments.html

When playing the instrument without silluwa, the air inhaled into the mouth is directed to the ipiyawa at the same time and is not stored in the mouth. Sounds of the instrument or the tones are produced parallel to inhalation and exhalation and no continuous tone is maintained in the manner of playing with the silluwa. There, the mouthpiece stores air to the “silluwa”.

Accordingly, through this research, we have discovered that two types of sushira instruments were designed with four reeds. Also, it was found that while using the “silluwa” as a support, the air obtained by inhalation is stored in the mouth so that the cheeks expand and the air is continuously directed to the ipiyawa. At the same time, the air is continuously inhaled again in traditional horanewa playing. This playing process can be identified as a technique based on “circular breathing” .

Conclusion and Suggestions

The horanewa has a special place as it is the only musical instrument used in modern times belonging to the “sushira” group among the local instruments. In fact, it has become a sign of Sri Lankan identity although it has been fed by Persian and Indian cultural¹³

13. Circular breathing is a technique used by players of some wind instruments to produce a continuous tone without interruption.

influences. This can be revealed by the structure of the horanewa and its practical use. Among them, it was emphasized that the “circular breathing” technique can be identified as a specialty of horane playing found in the local system in Sri Lanka as an example called “dik osaya” and “pirith osaya” in horane playing. Based on this form, a series of tunes called “horane osaya” have been added to Sinhala folk singing. Accordingly, some scholars describe the horanewa as an instrument with double reeds, but in local horane playing, it is used with four reeds. The sound produced by playing the horanewa with two reeds is different from the sound produced by playing with four reeds. A new avenue has been exposed to music scholars or researchers to further enquire about this. Thus, we can state that the horanewa is a “sushira” instrument that is played using four reeds and is a special instrument that is played using the method of “circular breathing”. Also, we would like to introduce it as an instrument that should be developed with standardized tuning, and that it is one worthy of gaining the attention of local and foreign musicians.

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