

Unique features of Tabla compositions used in period of 1900 - 1950 in Sri Lanka

K.A. D. Ranga Perera

Lecture (Probationary), Faculty of Music, Visual & Performing Arts University, Colombo

The tabla is one of the most widely used percussion instruments in Sri Lanka. It is classified under the membranophone family of instruments. Most scholars believe that the tabla was invented in India in the early 18th century. It is developed under six repertoires called Gharana. Under the Gharana system, the study of tabla is in the oral tradition which later developed into a supremely refined style, technique, and composition. The vast compositions of drumming is divided into two categories, fixed rhythmic compositions and variations according to theme. Tabla language was developed using Bols (groups of syllables) which were descriptive of the sounds that the drums made. Groups of Bols make compositions. The music of the Nurthi Drama introduced the tabla to Sri Lankan in the mid-19th century. It is no doubt that Sri Lankan musicians of that period learned tabla from Indian players who came with drama troupes. There is insufficient evidence to show that tabla compositions prevailed prior to 1900. There are a few books and old recordings of Radio Ceylon which give us some idea about the compositions played by Sri Lankan players in the period of 1900 to 1950. There are some unique features and contradictions in compositions of that period compared to contemporary compositions. It can be assumed that the methods of learning and the lack of communication and knowledge of the Indian players who came with drama troupes was the reason for this deviation.

Key Words – Tabla, Gharana, Compositions, Nurthi Drama, Sri Lankan players, 1900-1950 period.