

A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF WILLIAM BANDA MAKULLOLUWA'S CONTRIBUTIONS

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Abstract

William Banda Makulloluwa (1922–1984) was a musician in Sri Lanka who made a significant contribution to preserving Sinhalese music. He dedicated his scholarly pursuits to the investigation of Sinhalese music and the cultural intricacies of Sri Lanka. Undertaking extensive fieldwork from the 1960s to the 1980s, he methodically documented and studied traditional music, with a particular emphasis on various communities in Sri Lanka. The objective of this study is to investigate the contribution of Makulloluwa's musical style, expectations, and ideologies to elevate Sri Lankan traditional music. The study is based on the narrative method of qualitative research. Interviews, records, autobiographies, various reports, and books written by Makulloluwa were used to collect data. Seven in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in November and December 2022 and January 2023 to gain a better understanding of his musical style, expectations, and ideologies. Non-probability purposive and snowball sampling were used as the sampling method. Content analysis was used to evaluate the data. Research revealed that he used techniques such as recording, documenting, rearranging, and educating to safeguard the distinct Sinhalese musical melodies. He established a formal framework for community singing, which helped to establish the foundation for Sinhalese traditional music. He assumed the task in a proactive manner as a musician, showing genuine interest in recording and conserving Sinhala traditional tunes. He worked very hard to locate, preserve, and share these tunes with the next generation. This study emphasizes Makulloluwa's unwavering commitment to the growth and preservation of Sri Lankan folk dance and music.

Keywords

Safeguarding Music, Sinhalese Singing, Traditional Music, W. B. Makulloluwa

INTRODUCTION

The transmission of knowledge, cultural and social values, and collective memory occurs through oral traditions and expressions. They are essential to the survival of cultures. Traditional music is recognized as part of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity by organizations such as UNESCO. This designation acknowledges the importance of traditional music in safeguarding cultural diversity, promoting sustainable development, and fostering dialogue between communities. Traditional music often reflects the cultural identity, values, and practices of a particular community, region, or ethnic group (Bohlman, 1988). It connects people to their roots and preserves their collective memory, acting as a potent emblem of cultural legacy. Music traditions that have been passed down orally are crucial to the survival of cultures (Wolcott, 2016). Furthermore, it was greatly associated with folklore and was passed down orally from person to person, town to town, and even country to country as this was the only way they could share music. American Blues was the foundation of today's jazz, rock, country, soul, gospel, and funk music

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(Cohen et al., 2015). The music has a strong nationalist (country of origin) component as it is associated with national culture rather than the artistic elite (Baro, 2019). Oral traditions are under threat from large-scale migration, industrialization, fast urbanization, and environmental change, just like other kinds of intangible cultural heritage. Traditional music is considered as heritage because of its intrinsic cultural, historical, social, and artistic value, as well as its role in preserving and transmitting cultural traditions from one generation to the next. An integral part of Sri Lankan civilization's long-term growth system are songs performed by common village people, whose social growth has been influenced by the unconscious and initiative exercise of natural and inborn facilities rather than any formal system of training or education. These songs inherit Sri Lankan culture in a number of ways. Its historical culture is diverse, and its unfolding process is adaptable and changing, allowing it to represent traditional national values, cultural values, and aesthetic values. Every major social movement in Sri Lankan history has relied heavily on music. Music was integrated into every aspect of Sri Lankan life. William Banda Makulloluwa was one of the first in the study of music in Sri Lanka (Manaranjanie, 2019). The research question of this study is "How did Makulloluwa's musical style, expectations, and ideologies help to elevate Sri Lankan traditional music?". This article aims to examine William Banda Makulloluwa's contributions to the survival of traditional music in Sri Lanka. The research objectives are to discover the factors that inspired him to search for Sinhalese music and to investigate his methods in building and sustaining the Sinhalese musical style. Several characters should not be overlooked when discussing Sinhalese traditional music. Among them, Makulloluwa (1922–1984) is particularly significant. This study will contribute to the preservation of musical knowledge by exploring Makulloluwa's contribution and supporting facts that effectively highlight his role in introducing Sri Lankan traditional music as a topic. Furthermore, it is hoped that the analysis presented in this short study will be useful for future research on musical diversity preservation and promotion.

LIFE HISTORY

Makulloluwa was born on 17th February, 1922, in the village Idamegama, district Harispattuwa, Kandy province. He began his formal education at the village school in Idamegama before joining Rahula College in Kandy. Later, he enrolled at Ananda College in Colombo for further education. As his parents were farmers, he was exposed to and studied many dancing and singing traditions associated with farm life from a young age. Young Makulloluwa was captivated by the popular Kandyan dancers Rangama Gunamala, Nittawela Gunaya, and Malagammana Gurunnanse's traditional dance, from whom he learned traditional Kandyan dance.

Throughout his student years, music was his main interest. His early musical inclinations began while attending Rahula Vidyalaya, a school that encouraged musical expression. As the award for the best singer in the school dance competition "*Anaatha Premaya*," he received a violin. This gift paved his musical path (Ariyaratne, 2020). His connection with contemporary aesthetic teachers no doubt influenced his later music and dancing activities which he pursued very zealously. All of the above demonstrate that music and dance have been his lifelong passions. He began his teaching career at Sri Rahula Vidyalaya in Kandy as an English teacher. He departed for Shanti Niketan in India to further his musical studies. He was a student in the College of Music (Sangit-Bhavana), Visva-

Bharati University in Shanti Niketan, India, and went through the full course of studies in instrumental music and Rabindra-sangit during the academic sessions 1944–1948. He also received training in Indian dance, both the Manipuri and Kathakali styles. As related by his son, Kosala, “three significant events in Makulloluwa's life are connected with Shanti Niketan.” (Kosala Makulloluwa & Samarasinghe, 2023) It was the center where his musical ambitions were realized, where he became its first Sri Lankan teacher. In 1951, he returned to Sri Lanka as he wished to work in the music department of Horana Sripali, founded by Wilmot Perera. In 1953, he was appointed as a Music Inspector in the Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka, and in 1956, he was promoted to Chief Music Inspector. In 1973, he was appointed as the principal of the Government Dance and Music Teachers College in Giragama. His vigorous aesthetic activities naturally led him to play a leading role in the country and became the director of research and creative in the Government Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1976 and retired from government service in 1982. He passed away on 8th of September, 1984.

METHODS

The methods of this short study are based on the narrative method in qualitative research. Biographies are compelling narratives. Biographies are often useful to better understand musicians, their music, and their cultural environment. The author conducted narrative research by studying people's lives and asking one or more people to tell their personal stories in this context. It allows to capture the rich data contained within stories, such as feelings, beliefs, images, and time. It also takes into account the connection between personal experience and larger social and cultural contexts (Creswell, 2009). Interviews, records, autobiographies, various reports, and books written by Makulloluwa were used to collect data. Seven in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in November and December 2022 and January 2023 to gain a better understanding of his musical style, expectations, and ideologies. The semi-structured interview method means that the author was gathering qualitative data in which she asks open-ended questions. Participants included his son, senior academics, contemporaries, and people who contributed to his creations. Participants were chosen based on their ability to best inform the research question and their understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2014). Non-probability purposive and snowball sampling were used as a sampling method. Content analysis was used to evaluate the data.

FACTORS THAT INSPIRED HIM TO SEARCH FOR SINHALESE MUSIC

The first objective of this study was to discover factors that inspired him to search for Sinhalese music. According to Sykes (2018), the conversation about traditional music that arose from the Shanti Niketan experience inspired Sinhala musicologists to search for a Sinhala musical system. Among them, Makulloluwa is a stalwart who has worked tirelessly to revitalize traditional music. Despite having studied Indian music at an Indian university, he used his musical knowledge to develop local Sri Lankan music. During the interview, his son claimed that his mother asked his father, "I hear the same Hindustani tunes here, why is there no unique music to Sri Lanka?" (Kosala Makulloluwa & Samarasinghe 2023). This remark jolted him. His great appreciation for tunes started in 1957

when he heard a violin rhapsody based on the music of the Hungarian community (Makulloluwa, 2000). Furthermore, the father William Banda Makulloluwa stated that he realized at this point that there is a lot of potential in transforming melodies and tunes into high-quality musical pieces. This was one of his major turning points. Ratanjankar, a Hindustani vocalist and musicologist who visited Sri Lanka in 1952, gave a speech on 'Folk Songs and Music' at the Ceylon branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. William Banda Makulloluwa said that "proper native music of Sri Lanka is in its villages. Vannams, the kavi, the astaka, and stotra are important specimens of the musical traditions of Sri Lanka, and must not let them fade away into oblivion. We can yet build upon them as independent systems of Sri Lankan music" (Makulloluwa, 2000: Kosala Makulloluwa & Samarasinghe, 2023). Ratanjankar's message deeply impacted his subsequent musical directions. At an undefined Russian music festival, Makulloluwa once represented Sri Lanka. There, the listeners requested a Sri Lankan song instead of the Sinhala song that had been sung to an Indian tune. The group, which included Makulloluwa, sang "Turaga Vannam" and "Tikiri Tikiri Tikiri Liya," both being Sri Lanka's traditional songs. When traditional Sri Lankan songs with original melodies were sung, the audience cheered (Gunatillake & Samarasinghe, 2022). From all these events, he realized that to preserve an identity as a nation, Sri Lankans must develop their own music. Ediriweera Sarathchandra's *Maname Natya* based on the *Sinhala nadagam* tradition and the section on *Hela Viri* in Somapala's book *Thala Gnanaya* also raised Makulloluwa's expectations for local music (Makulloluwa, 2000). He deeply believed that it is more important to protect the national honor by showing the manifested part than to be insulted by showing the popular and advanced sections as one's heritage. He realized that people should find their roots in their own culture. All of these instances made him realize that the country needs its own unique style of music and changed his musical expectations widely. He realized that the true Sinhalese singing style is found among the villagers and in village songs.

MAKULLOLUWA'S METHODS TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN A UNIQUE SINHALESE MUSICAL STYLE

The second objective of this study was to discover Makulloluwa's methods to build and sustain Sinhalese music. He toured village by village, collecting exquisite musical tune patterns close to the heart of the villagers. He focused on the folk tunes of Bibila, Monaragala, Pollebedda, Maha Oya, Rathu Pasketiya, and Ethimalae and then expanded his explorations throughout Sri Lanka. He asked people to perform songs for him, which he then wrote down carefully (Jayasinghe, 1968). He collected and recorded work songs, lullabies, vannams, kavi (poetic verses), astaka, Kiri-Amma² ritual songs, and many more voices of people bound up with their lives and daily routines. He shared this interest in collecting folk melodies with his contemporary Kulatilake, Rathnayake, Jayasinghe, Gunatilake, and many more (Jayasinghe, 1968).

He gained an understanding of different Sinhalese unique singing styles, tunes, and abilities. Makulloluwa (2000) divided Sinhalese music into two main subcategories: Gemi

² Deities.

gee (created and sung by common people) and Se gee (written by scholars). He discovered that Gemi gee verses and Se gee verses are sung by Sinhala characteristics and styles appropriate to the occasion and meaning. Accordingly, he further categorized Sinhala folk songs into many other groups such as Bethi gee (Worshipping songs), Yaga gee (songs sung in rituals), Mehe gee (related to careers in life), Samaja gee (Community songs), Keli gee (songs sung for folk games and dances), Nalu gee (songs used by dances or actors), Virudu gee (songs sung while playing the tambourine –Rabana, a hand drum held in one hand and played with the other), Rana gee (battle songs), and Venum gee (songs praising the beauty of nature or others). He stated unequivocally that the foreign music methods being tried to popularize in this country cannot create the musical taste of the Sinhalese. He was vehemently opposed to the country's promotion of foreign music by completely removing native country music. He used the notion of native Sinhalese music in school education (Aravinda & Samarasinghe, 2023). He believed that old musical habits associated with our culture which is the birth gift of our country's students should be taught as part of a school music subject so that the child can understand the terminology and sentimental habits of his people. Schippers (2010) proposed a five-domain approach to support music sustainability which includes systems of learning music, musicians and communities, contexts and constructs, regulations and infrastructure, and media and the music industry. Education is critical to the long-term viability of musical traditions. Learning systems for traditional music aid in the transfer of these traditions to the next generation and promote the long-term viability of a certain music form (Schippers & Grant, 2016). He included Nelum gee (transplanting songs), Goyam gee (harvesting songs), Seepada, vannaum, keli gee (sung while playing folk games and dances), lullabies (daru nelavili), and prasasthi into the school music syllabus. This would not only aid in the preservation of these songtexts and song melodies but would also instill a sense of pride and belonging in students. This ensured that the folk traditions would live on. Music teachers were also given special training in singing, and many workshops were held to help them improve their skills. He established a music teacher orchestra to increase the music teachers' familiarity with and proficiency in ensemble musical activity. The “centennial ensemble concert” he directed was without further proof well received by both teachers and students. His position as Chief Music Inspector at the Ministry of Education aided him in this endeavor. Cyril de Silva Kulatillake, who collaborated with him, used modified tunes to spread the ideology of indigenous music via radio. Kulatillake's position as the director of the music research section of the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Cooperation (SLBC) aided him in popularizing traditional music throughout the country.

His research on tunes, verses, and melodies have resulted in scholarly essays and books that have helped to build, sustain, and preserve knowledge. Grant (2016) expanded on Schippers' (2010) five-domain model to promote music sustainability by including documentation and archiving. Documentation involves more than preservation; it may also help to maintain and revitalize traditional music genres (Grant, 2016). Makulloluwa's book on traditional music *Hela Gee Maga* was published in 1962 and received a state literary award in 1963. This book established the basis for the Sinhala tradition of music (Fernando & Samarasinghe, 2022). He also published "Abhinava Moolika Geetha, Dances of Sri Lanka, Prasathi haa hatan kawyawala athi githama agaya and Singithi Geetha" books. In his book *Hela Gee Maga*, he stated that “comparing Sinhala traditional songs to other classical music and dismissing them as undeveloped and inferior is a national disaster” (Makulloluwa, 2000: ix). He taught his peers about the significance of

people’s music, how it is unique to one’s own culture, and how it represents Sri Lankan history and traditions (Jayasekara & Samarasinghe, 2023).

Nanda Perera (Perera & Samarasinghe, 2023) stated that Makulloluwa used his collected tunes in his musical compositions. He held a number of concerts in order to boost the musical taste of the general public by demonstrating the beauty of traditional melodies. He displayed the artistic value of the nation's unique singing practices in his Hela Mihira concert, which featured folk songs. All of his musical concerts and programs improved cultural awareness.

He thematically used his collected melodies to compose and design new musical works. Furthermore, Fernando stated that he experimented with folk songs and melodies and adopted the Western opera and symphony orchestra models for his musical compositions for concerts. His first Sinhala opera is *Depano*, a dramatic story told through the melodies of various songs of Sri Lanka. Apart from that, he produced *Pahanin pahana*, *Taraṇaya*, *Sakhañḍa*, *Anduru vala pala giya*, *Gamaṭa ira payayi*, and *Svarṇabhumi* musical dramas. His musical symphonies *Goyam Daa Magula*, *Mara Parajaya*, *Siragein Marumuwata*, and *Mahabhinishkramanaya* became without any doubt very popular in society. In these compositions, he demonstrated the spirit of songs. Festivals and innovation were recommended by Jia Kuang and Lan He (2022) as a protection mechanism for preserving community music. Makulloluwa’s *Goyam Daa Magula* is the first musical symphony in Sri Lanka (Ariyaratne, 2020). He laid the groundwork for contemporary Sri Lankan music compositions. He was determined to create a Sinhala music system. He formalized the local tal system known as ‘tit kramaya’ for this purpose. He believed that in order to preserve song styles, everyone in the community should be exposed to and imbibe them; he broadcasted songs and tunes on the radio, employing talented singers in programs. He raised song awareness in the community through his island-wide lectures and demonstrations. Among these, the lecture demonstration on methodical traditional singing styles aided many people in developing an appreciation for Sinhala-texted music. He established the ‘State dance and music ensemble’, which he used to popularize dance and music both locally and internationally (Balasuriya & Samarasinghe, 2022). Every one of the talented singers was recognized and featured. In summary, a range of methods has been identified from this data analysis that he used to build and sustain a musical style. The table shown in figure 1 mentions the identified methods that he used to survive village people’s music in Sri Lanka.

Identified methods
Organized programs of cultural awareness (engagement)
Provided an opportunity to participate in cultural ceremonies (engagement)
Encouraged people who perform/listen to traditional music (engagement)
Introduced unique traditional music into school and music college syllabi (formal music education)
Eradicated social discrimination
Wrote the lyrics and standard music notation into books and articles (documentation)
Recorded songs in the fashion of his time for future listening (archival)

Researched the origin of the songs to seek their provenance and to add depth to why they were originally written.
Designed and composed new productions

Figure 1: Identified Makulloluwa’s Methods. (Scheme by the author.)

CONCLUSION

The engagement of musicians and their dedication to the genre's survival is a vital aspect of music genre sustainability initiatives (Grant, 2016; Schippers, 2010). He was the pre-eminent activist in the development of the folk-song revival in Sri Lanka. As a musician himself, Makulloluwa took the initiative and a selfless interest to harbor and document Sinhala folk songs while dedicating a magnanimous effort by identifying, conserving, and presenting them to the next generation. After analyzing data, it was discovered that Makulloluwa used many methods to preserve the old Sinhalese musical melodies unique to the Sinhalese from being lost or destroyed by the influence of other foreign music, established a formal system of local singing, and laid the foundation for the Sinhala traditional music style. It has been observed that he sought the identity of our culture and music and encouraged traditional music in the country. Traditional music appears to be further safeguarded by his inclusion of folk songs from various communities in school curricula and government music college curricula. Most importantly, including traditional music and dance from our cultural heritage in the school curriculum increased the awareness among youth and interest in such activities, encouraging them to learn why people developed that particular melody and how it applied to their daily life and folklore. It connects the present to the past directly. It evokes memories of our ancestors' culture, heritage, and psyche. All his performances of dances and rhythms from the Sri Lankan culture as it is known, particularly *Depano*, *Swarbabhumi*, *Helamihira*, *Aduru wala pala giya*, *Kusa*, *Tharanaya*, *Gamata ira payai* (Sunshine of the Village), *Siragein marumuwata*, *Sak hada*, and *Mara parajaya*, have exemplified the beauty of folk songs and raised awareness. Everyone who took part in the cultural ceremonies did so with pride. He supported the young generation of traditional musicians by establishing a state music ensemble. He preserved his knowledge in books in a manner that can be used by future generations. According to the study, he was deeply committed to preserving and promoting Sri Lankan traditional music and dance created by the common people.

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APPENDIX 1

GLOSSARY USING KNOWN SOURCES

(Makulloluwa, 2000; Dissanayake, 2001)

Term	Definition (loosely based on translation)
astaka	Sanskrit origin with eight parts. Song used to get God's blessing.
bethi gee	Worship songs.
daru nelavili	Lullabies.
gemi gee	Created and sung by common people.
goyam gee	Harvesting songs.
Kandyan dance	A dancing tradition in Sri Lanka that is rooted in Kandy.
kavi	Poetic verses.
keli gee	Sung while playing folk games and dances.
kiri-amma	Deity.
mehe gee	Related to careers in life.
nadagam	Sri Lankan folk drama of South Indian taste.

nalu gee	Songs used by dancers or actors.
nelum gee	Transplanting songs.
prasasti	Court panegyrics composed in praise of Kings.
rana gee	Battle songs.
samaja gee	Community songs.
se gee	Songs written by scholars.
seepada	The singing of the quatrain. It is a common style sung to express the boatman's song, watch hut song, carter's song, miner's song, and honey-collecting song. Although all these songs agree on the common pattern of seepada renderings, the melodies have their modifications based provincially and also on their functional backgrounds. All seepada singing serves a communicative purpose (Kulatillake, 1976:11).
stotra	A Sanskrit/Pali phrase, a simple poem of praise and personal worship to God
tal	Indian term used in music. Literarily means the palm of the hand.
vannams	A style of versification where the phono-metric element is important. A majority of Sinhala vannams are composed to describe animals and birds, while some to eulogizing deities.
venum gee	Songs praising the beauty of nature or others.
virudu gee	Songs sung while playing the tambourine – Rabana, a hand drum held in one hand and played with the other.
yaga gee	Songs sung in rituals.