

Abstract

Local as well as foreign resources provide ample evidence for the influence of South Indian cultural elements on the Sri Lankan culture. But the modern scholarship seems to have paid no attention to the influence of South Indian classical music or Carnatic Music on the music of Sri Lanka. The present research focuses its attention on the influence of Carnatic music on an important cultural element of the Kandyan Period, that is, the *Kavikara-maduva* or Poets' Forum. The purpose of this study has been to trace the origin of Carnatic music in South India, to inquire into the times in which that music had made its presence felt in the Sinhala society and to examine any traces of Carnatic music that have been absorbed into, and indigenized by the local musical elements. From the time of Wimaladharmasuriya I (1592-1604) a royal Poets' Forum functioned in honour of the Tooth Relic on the orders of the king. Even the modern Poets' Forum attached to the Temple of the Tooth performs its traditional duties on the same lines as a royal personage is being extolled by means of a panegyric. Although they sing in praise of the Buddha, it more or less takes the form of a panegyric sung in praise of a king. Whatever it is, among all sorts of Poets' Forums that existed during the Kandyan Period, only one is in existence at the moment, that is, the Poets' Forum attached to the Temple of the Tooth.

The popular views that the influence of Carnatic music is to be seen during the Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Dambadeni Periods have been set aside by this study, simply because that system of music was not in existence during those times. It has, however, been revealed that it has made its presence felt in the Poets' Forum of the Kandyan Period. It can be seen that there is a long history behind the provenance of the panegyrics presented at royal Poets' Forum and the musical forms that developed therefrom. And it is reasonable to assume that Carnatic music has influenced the presentational aspects of the Poets' Form of royal courts. It is now almost two centuries after the fall of the Kandyan kingdom. And despite the absence of a State Music Ensemble, panegyrics, war songs and *vannams* etc. have been absorbed into the indigenous folk melodies. In this process, a local cultural identity has taken deep root at the expense of foreign elements. But it has to be mentioned with regret that old singing styles and old melodies are gradually dying out owing to the fact that old *vannams*, panegyrics and war songs are being handed down by oral transmission only. And there is no common agreement on old singing styles and melodies among the traditional dance families. Another reason for this is that the names of melodies and rhythmic patterns that were in use in the Poets' Forum have not been recorded, as for instance, they have been laid down in the *Gitagovinda*.

Key words:- Kandyan Period, *Kavikara-maduva*, Carnatic Music, Local cultural identity, Local Music.