

Unearthing Ancient Melodies: Sunil Santha, the Father of Modern Sinhala Music

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This abstract explores into the significance of ancient graffiti discovered at the Sigiri fortress site, which were subsequently adapted into songs by the renowned Sri Lankan musicologist, Sunil Santha. The research was conducted by the Research & Development Directorate of the Sunil Santha Samajaya.

The research methodology draws on the study of four Sigiri graffiti that have been reinterpreted as songs by the distinguished musicologist Sunil Santha, widely recognized as the father of modern Sinhala music in Sri Lanka, along with supplementary literature within the research scope. Sigiri, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1982, has gained recent attention through social media, particularly for its ancient frescoes and graffiti.

While these artistic expressions were initially deciphered by Professor Senerath Paranavitarana in 1940, their musical potential remained unexplored. Collaborative efforts in the 1960s aimed to interpret and create Sinhala music inspired by these enigmatic graffiti.

Most musicians initially perceived the graffiti as devoid of musical content. However, Sunil Santha, an exceptional musician and researcher, explored into Sri Lankan indigenous poetic patterns, Theravada Buddhist traditions, and traditional drum court rhythms.. His innovative thinking led to the creation of four Sigiri graffiti songs; '*Hamal Maru Yahassayo*', '*Sihi Raju Yasasa Piri*', '*Saraga Mala*' and '*Sirilak Diwe Pihiti Siri Bara Sihigira*' in 1966, a pioneering contribution to modern Sinhala music. With Sunil Santha's novel exercise in music, those very remote Sigiri graffiti are brought within the reach of the common man through the vehicle of four melodies note only.

Sunil Santha's revolutionary approach transcended conventional boundaries, bridging archaeology and musicology. His profound understanding of Sinhala cultural values, drawn from native poems and *Vannam* recitations studied under Banda Gununanse's guidance in 1939, laid the foundation for his ground breaking work on Sigiri's ancient melodies. His unique position as both a musician and anthropologist underscores the fusion of cultural meaning and artistic expression.

Sunil Santha's exceptional contributions to Sinhala music and his relentless pursuit of the ancient melodies hidden within Sigiri's graffiti distinguish him as a significant anthropologist and a cultural icon. His legacy endures as a testament to the symbiotic relationship between cultural anthropology and artistic innovation, leaving an indelible mark on the world of Sinhala music.

Keywords:

Sunil Santha, Sigiri graffiti, Sinhala music Dr. Tony Donaldson, Cultural Anthropology

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