Drums of Sri Lanka by Piyasara Shilapadhipathi

Sri Lanka has been having many types of drums in use from ancient times, and reference to these are found in some of the classical literature e.g. Pujawaliya, Thupawansaya, Dalada Siritha etc. Although there had been about 33 types of drums, today we find only about ten and the rest are confined only to names.

Drums in use today are:

1. Geta Bera (Bera Drum)
2. Yak Bera
3. Davula
4. Thammattama
5. Udakkiya
6. Dakkiya
7. Bummadiya
8. Hand Rabana
9. Bench Rabana
10. Dandu Beraya,

1. Sri Lankan Drum Tradition is believed to go as far back as 2500 years.

An examination of the village society in olden times would reveal that drums were used on special occasions during the life span of people, from their birth to the death. Drums, which were originally used, for pleasure and later for rituals, came to be used in the Buddhist Temples for the many ceremonies. At a later stage, Drums were also used as a means of communication. The Davula, Thammattama and the Bench Rabana have an important place in matters of communication. Some of these functions are:

1. **Ana Bera** - to inform the people about orders from the King.
2. **Vada Bera** - drums played when a criminal is taken for beheading,
3. **Mala Bera** - drums used in a funeral procession and
4. **Rana Bera** - drums used by the army when going out to meet the enemy.

**Geta Bera**: This is the main drum used to accompany dances in the Kandyan or the Hill Country tradition. This drum is turned out of wood from Ehela, Kohomba or Kos tree. The drum tapers towards the ends and on the right side, the opening is covered with the skin of a monkey while the opening on the other side is covered with a cattle skin. The strings that are used tighten the sides are from a deerskin. A student who begins his training in the use of the Greta Bera has to practice twelve elementary exercises.

**Yak Bera**: This drum is referred to by many names among which are the Ruhunu Bera, Devol Bera and Ghoskaya. This drum normally accompanies the dances from the low country, especially the mask dancing connected with rituals and the folk play Kolam. The drum is turned out of wood taken from the Kohomba, Ehela, Kitul or Milla trees. This is a cylindrical drum, fairly long and is played on both sides with hands. The openings on the two sides of the drum are covered with the stomach lining of a cow. The strings used to tighten the sides are from cattle skin. A student has twelve elementary exercises to learn to play this drum.

**Davula**: This drum is used in most of the Buddhist ceremonies all over the island. This drum is cylindrical, but much shorter than the Yak Bera. An important feature of this drum is that one
side is played with the hand while the other side is played with a stick. The sides are covered with cattle skin and the tightening is done with a string made specially for the purpose. These are also twelve elementary exercises to be followed by a person learning to use the drum.

**Thammattama:** This is also referred to as the Twin Drum. This drum is played with two sticks. The tow drums are of different sizes and while the right one produces a louder sound, the left one produces a looser sound. The drums which have only the top side covered either with the skin of the cow or a buffalo. The wood used is from Kos, Kohomba and Milla trees. They used special sticks to play drums and the wood is from a creeper known as Kirindi.

**Udekkiya:** The smallest drum among the local drums is the Udekkiya. This is played with one hand the sound is controlled by pressure applied on the strings. The drum is lie the hour glass and is made out of wood from Ehela, Milla and Suriya. The drum is painted with lacquer. The openings are covered with skin from the iguana, monkey or goat.

**Dakkiya:** This is similar to the Udekkiya, but bigger. This is used mainly for rituals. The drum is hung on the shoulder of the player and the sound is controlled by applying pressure on the strings.

**Bummadiya:** This is the only drum turn out of clay. The single opening is covered with the skin of goat, monkey or iguana. The drum is hung on the shoulder of the player and it is played with both hands. During harvesting, people could be seen playing this drum accompanied by singing. The drum is in the shape of a pot.

**Hand Rabana:** Rabana is about one foot in diameter and is turn out of wood from Kos and Milla. The skin used is that of a goat. Some performers keep revolving the rabana on the tip of their fingers while others play it accompanied with singing. This is played with one hand only.

**Bench Rabana:** This is the biggest of the drums used in Sri Lanka. The special feature of this drum is that it is played at a time by two or more people. They use both hands. This drum is commonly used for New Year festivals and there are many special rhythms played on them. It is mostly played by women.