Exploring the *Vīṇā* through the Buddhist Preaching Texts in Sri Lanka

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Buddhist preaching texts (*banapot*) played a key role in shaping a distinctly Sinhala tradition of Buddhist preaching in Sri Lanka. Major examples such as *Amāvatura*, *Butsaraṇa*, *Saddharmālaṅkāraya*, and *Saddharmaratnākaraya*, composed between the 13th and 15th centuries, contain valuable references to performing arts and musical instruments, including the *Vīṇā*. This is a qualitative study that employs thematic analysis, which enables the categorization of relevant findings. The research question examines how the noun *Vīṇā* appears across these texts and Jātaka tales, with the objective of understanding the ways in which the *Vīṇā* is associated with literary works. Unlike references to other musical instruments, the noun *Vīṇā* in these texts frequently occurs in association with three specific verbs denoting different modes of musical action. Classical sources use the phrase "playing the *Vīṇā*" and the phrase "singing the *Vīṇā*" denotes vocal performance accompanied by the instrument. Additionally, the expression "sounding the *Vīṇā*" appears in miraculous contexts in which the instrument produces sound without a human performer. Non-human beings such as *Pañcasikha*, *Māra's* daughters, and *Kinnaras* are depicted as symbolic performers of the *Vīṇā*. The *Jātaka* tales further demonstrate that the Bodhisattva, lived previous lives as a skilled musician, particularly as an expert in singing the *Vīṇā*, as illustrated in the Guttila *Jātaka* and the Kusa *Jātaka*. The instrument traditionally carries a symbolic role in Buddhist literature—particularly its sound being associated with the arousal of desire, attachment to worldly life, and the disruption of meditation. However, in other sections of the preaching texts, the *Vīṇā* and other musical sounds are portrayed as symbols of divine pleasure and the five sensual pleasures, following representational patterns similar to those found in the *Vimānavatthu* narratives of the Pāli Canon. Furthermore, the sound of the *Vīṇā* is presented as one of the musical offerings made by divine beings to the Buddha. Together, these representations demonstrate that the *Vīṇā* functions not merely as a musical instrument but as a complex symbolic device linking performance, devotion, sensuality, and spiritual tension within Sinhala Buddhist narrative tradition.

Keywords*: Vīṇā,* Buddhist, music and preaching texts