

The Vijayanagara Empire and the Evolution of Carnatic Classical Music: Historical, Geographical, and Cultural Intersections (14th–17th Century)

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Abstract

The Vijayanagara Empire (1336–1646 CE), the last great Hindu polity of the Deccan and peninsular South India, exercised a formative and enduring influence on the cultural geography of the Indian subcontinent disproportionate to the brevity of its political ascendancy. Spanning the territorial arc from the Tungabhadra basin in present-day Karnataka to the Kaveri delta of Tamil Nadu and the coastal trading ports of the Malabar and Coromandel seaboards, the empire's political ecology created the conditions — institutional, geographical, economic, and ideological — for the consolidation and systematic codification of the Carnatic classical music tradition that remains among the most sophisticated and intellectually rigorous art-music systems in the world. This article examines, through the convergent lenses of political history, historical geography, and musicology, the mechanisms by which the Vijayanagara court and its subordinate institutional network — temples, mathas, regional Nayaka courts, and the Haridasa movement of devotional saint-composers — shaped the theoretical foundations, pedagogical infrastructure, geographic diffusion, and social ecology of Carnatic music between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Drawing on epigraphic evidence (copper plate grants, stone inscriptions from Hampi, Tirupati, and Sringeri), contemporary literary sources (the Amuktamalyada of Krishnadevaraya, the Manasollasa, traveller accounts of Domingo Paes and Fernão Nunes), and musicological scholarship on surviving compositions of the Haridasa saint-composers — particularly Purandaradasa (1484–1564), Kanakadasa (c.1509–1609), Vyasatirtha (c.1460–1539), and Annamacharya (1408–1503) — this article traces the evolution of the raga-tala-sahitya (melodic mode-rhythm-text) trinity that constitutes the structural basis of Carnatic music. It argues that the Vijayanagara period was not merely a context of patronage but an active agent of musical systematisation: the empire's multilingual literary culture, its temple endowment economy, and the institutional geography of the Haridasa movement collectively produced the pedagogical framework attributed to Purandaradasa and the raga classification structures that would be formalised by Venkatamakhi in his Chaturdandiprakasika (1660) — the canonical text of the 72 Melakarta system. The article concludes with an assessment of the empire's legacy in the post-Talikota (1565) Nayaka successor courts of Thanjavur, Madurai, and Ikkeri, tracing the direct institutional and compositional lineages connecting Vijayanagara court culture to the Trinity composers of the eighteenth century.

Keywords: *Vijayanagara Empire, Carnatic classical music, Purandaradasa, Haridasa movement, historical geography, raga system, temple patronage, Deccan history, Krishnadevaraya, musicology, South Indian arts*

1. Introduction

The historiography of South Indian classical music has, until relatively recently, been largely divorced from the political and geographical history of the region — a disciplinary partition that has obscured the deep structural relationships between state formation, territorial ecology, and artistic systematisation that characterise all great classical traditions. The Carnatic music system did not emerge from the unmediated inspiration of individual composer-saints, however musically and spiritually towering those figures were. It crystallised from a specific historical conjuncture: the convergence of a politically stable and culturally ambitious imperial state, a geographically advantageous position at the confluence of multiple regional linguistic and musical traditions, a devotional religious movement (Madhva Vaishnavism and the broader Haridasa current) that required sophisticated musical expression, and an institutional infrastructure — primarily the Agama temple system and its endowment economy — that provided the material and social conditions for sustained musical practice and intergenerational transmission.

The Vijayanagara Empire — founded in 1336 by the brothers Harihara and Bukka Raya on the southern bank of the Tungabhadra river at the site that would become the capital Hampi — was, in its essential character, a reaction-formation against the southward pressure of the Delhi Sultanate and the Bahmani Sultanate that had disrupted the political continuity of the Hoysala and Kakatiya kingdoms. Its foundation mythology, associated with the sage Vidyaranya (Madhavacharya) of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham and with the divine sanction of the goddess Pampadevi (later Virupaksha), inscribed from its inception a Brahmanical cultural ideology that elevated Sanskrit learning, Vedic ritual, devotional practice, and the fine arts as instruments of both political legitimacy and civilisational identity. This ideological investment in arts patronage was not merely ornamental: it was constitutive of the imperial formation itself.

The geographical setting of Hampi — at the junction of the Deccan trap basalt plateau and the more fertile river valley system of the Tungabhadra, at the intersection of the major north-south and east-west trade arteries of medieval South India, and at a defensible location that combined natural granite fortification with agricultural sufficiency — enabled the empire to sustain a cultural economy of remarkable density. The capital at its height (c. 1520 CE under Krishnadevaraya) housed a population estimated by contemporary Portuguese traveller Domingo Paes at between 500,000 and one million — larger, he noted with evident astonishment, than contemporary Lisbon. This urban concentration supported specialist artisans, musicians, dancers, poets, philosophers, temple priests, and the full institutional apparatus of a mature court culture on a scale unparalleled in peninsular India since the Chola apogee of the eleventh century.

The present article is organised as follows. Section 2 surveys the political and geographical conditions of Vijayanagara patronage, with attention to the institutional mechanisms — temple endowments, court positions, matha affiliations — through which musical production was materially supported. Section 3 examines the Haridasa movement as the primary vehicle of musical innovation and geographical diffusion, with close attention to Purandaradasa's pedagogical systematisation and its relationship to the developing Melakarta raga classification. Section 4 analyses the geographical diffusion of the Vijayanagara musical tradition through trade routes, pilgrimage circuits, and the institutional corridors connecting Hampi to Tirupati, Thanjavur, Udipi, and the Malabar coast. Section 5 assesses the legacy of the tradition in the post-Talikota successor courts and traces its connections to the Trinity composers. Section 6 offers conclusions on the inter-disciplinary significance of the Vijayanagara case for the study of state patronage, artistic systematisation, and cultural geography.

2. Political Geography and Institutional Patronage

2.1 Territorial Extent and Cultural Ecology

Figure 1 presents the territorial extent of the Vijayanagara Empire at its two principal phases: the core Sangama period territory (approximately 1336–1485) and the maximum extent achieved under Krishnadevaraya of the Tuluva dynasty (c. 1520). The geographical reach of the empire — at its maximum encompassing all of present-day Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and parts of Odisha and Maharashtra — created a political umbrella beneath which the extraordinarily diverse musical and literary traditions of the Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Sanskrit, and Malayalam cultural zones could interact, cross-fertilise, and be selectively patronised and elevated. This multilingual cultural ecology was not incidental but structurally embedded in the empire's political economy: different regional languages and their associated art forms served as vehicles of territorial integration, community identification, and administrative communication with distinct regional populations.

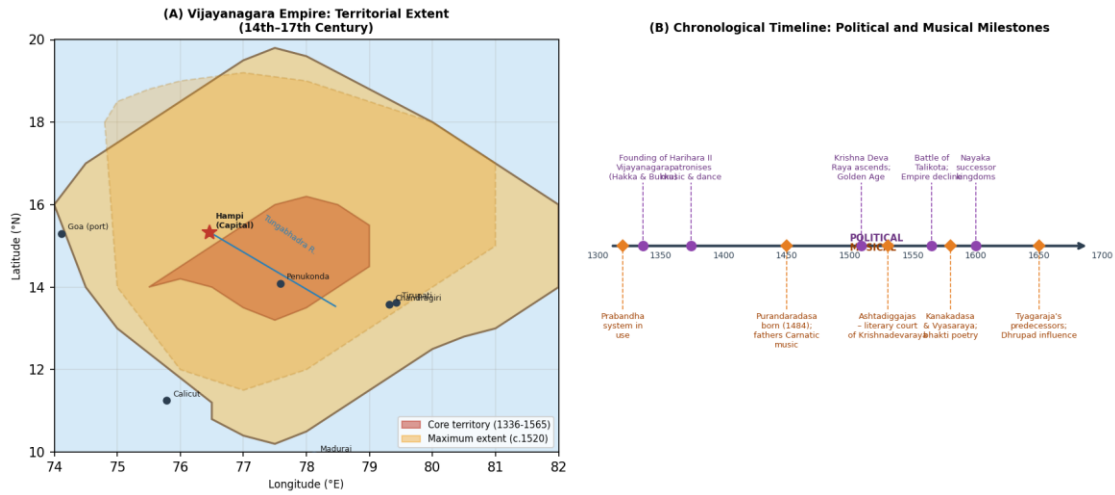


Fig. 1. (A) Schematic Map of Vijayanagara Empire Territorial Extent: Core Territory (1336–1565) and Maximum Extent (c.1520); (B) Chronological Timeline of Key Political and Musical Milestones (14th–17th Century)

The Tungabhadra river — visible in Figure 1A as the hydrological spine of the empire's core territory — was more than a strategic resource: it was a cultural boundary and conduit simultaneously. To its north lay the Deccan Sultanate sphere, characterised by Persianate court culture, Hindustani musical influences, and the Sufi devotional tradition that was, paradoxically, itself contributing to the synthesis of North and South Indian musical vocabularies through the dargah circuit from Gulbarga to Bidar. To its south lay the older Dravidian musical heartland — the temple cities of the Chola and Pallava legacy — where the Devadasi tradition of ritual music and dance, the Nayanmars' Tamil bhakti compositions (Tevaram), and the sophisticated raga vocabulary of the Natya Shastra had been continuously maintained. The Vijayanagara court at Hampi occupied this productive cultural boundary zone, able to draw simultaneously on northern theoretical frameworks and southern performative traditions.

2.2 Rulers, Patronage, and the Arts: A Chronological Survey

Table 1 presents the principal rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire and their specific contributions to literary and musical patronage, based on epigraphic records, contemporary literary accounts, and modern scholarship.

Table 1. Vijayanagara Rulers and Their Contributions to Literary and Musical Patronage (1336–1565)

Ruler	Reign	Dynasty	Literary / Musical Patronage	Key Cultural Contribution
Harihara I	1336–1356	Sangama	Establishment of court poets; Kannada literature promoted	Founded Vijayanagara; early temple patronage
Bukka Raya I	1356–1377	Sangama	Sanskrit scholars maintained; Veda pathashalas endowed	Consolidated Tungabhadra corridor; Sringeri Sharada Peetham support
Harihara II	1377–1404	Sangama	Patronage of Madhava (Sayana), Vedic commentary tradition	Systematised temple music endowments; dana-stutis inscribed
Devaraya I	1406–1422	Sangama	Telugu and Kannada prabandha poetry; Lakshmi Devi temple arts	Introduced Persian horse cavalry; cross-cultural influences
Devaraya II	1424–1446	Sangama	Srinatha (Telugu); Chandrashekara Varni; multilingual court	Peak of Sangama literary output; Kakatiya influence absorbed

Krishnadevaraya	1509–1529	Tuluva	Ashtadiggajas (8 poets); composed Amuktamalyada himself	Golden Age: Telugu literature; Vyasatirtha, Purandaradasa patronised
Achyutadevaraya	1529–1542	Tuluva	Kannada Ramayana traditions; Kanakadasa at Udupi	Post-Krishnadevaraya consolidation; music endowments continued
Sadasiva Raya	1542–1565	Tuluva	Aliya Rama Raya as regent; Telugu inscriptions multiply	Battle of Talikota (1565): empire fragmented into Nayaka successor states

Sources: *Epigraphia Indica (Archaeological Survey of India)*; *Saletore (1934)*; *Sewell (1900)*; *Filliozat (1973)*; *Nagarajan (1985)*

The reign of Krishnadevaraya (1509–1529) stands as the unambiguous cultural zenith of the empire and merits extended treatment. Born to a Tulu-speaking lineage that had supplanted the earlier Sangama and Saluva dynasties through military prowess, Krishnadevaraya cultivated an image of the ideal Sanskrit king — the dharmavijaya monarch of the Arthashastra tradition — who conquered as much through cultural and moral authority as through military force. His court hosted the Ashtadiggajas (Eight Elephants of the Eight Directions), the eight greatest Telugu poets of the era, including the celebrated Allasani Peddana (whose *Manucharitra* he completed), Nandi Timmana, Madayyagari Mallana, and Ayyalaraju Ramabhadru. His own Telugu poem *Amuktamalyada* — composed in honour of the goddess Andal — stands as a masterwork of Telugu literature. The institutional patronage machinery visible in Figure 2B — flowing from imperial authority through court scholars, Dasa saints, and temple authorities down to the raga-tala-sahitya synthesis of Carnatic music — reached its fullest elaboration under Krishnadevaraya's reign.

2.3 The Temple Economy as Musical Institution

The Agama temple system of South India — the ritual and institutional framework governing the construction, endowment, and management of major Hindu temples — was the primary institutional vehicle through which musical performance was materially sustained and socially organised in the Vijayanagara period. Temples received land grants (*dana*), cash endowments, and commodity contributions from rulers, nobles, merchants, and village communities, recorded in the copper plate grants (*tamrashasanas*) and stone inscriptions that constitute the primary epigraphic evidence for the period. A substantial proportion of these endowments were specifically designated for musical and dance performances — *nityotsava* (daily festivals), *pakshotsava* (fortnightly festivals), and the major annual *mahotsavas* — creating a stable and structured demand for professional musicians, dancer-devadasis, and their instrument-playing male accompanists (*nattuvanars*).

3. The Haridasa Movement and Musical Systematisation

3.1 Institutional Context and Madhva Philosophical Framework

The Haridasa (Servants of Hari/Vishnu) movement was a devotional current within the Madhva Vaishnava tradition founded by Madhvacharya (1238–1317) at Udupi on the Karnataka coast, which elevated vernacular Kannada devotional poetry and music as vehicles of *bhakti* (devotional participation) accessible to all social strata — in explicit contrast to the Sanskrit-restricted Vedic learning reserved for Brahmin males. The Madhva Vedanta philosophical framework — which posited a fundamental and eternal duality (*dvaita*) between the divine Vishnu and the dependent *jivas* (individual souls), rejecting the non-dualist Advaita position of Shankara — demanded a devotional practice of permanent loving surrender to Vishnu, for which music and communal singing (*sankirtana*) were identified as the most efficacious vehicles. The Haridasa saint-composers thus occupied a theologically mandated role within the Madhva institutional network, their compositions serving simultaneously as devotional practice, philosophical instruction, and social integration.

Figure 2 presents the diffusion of Carnatic musical tradition from Hampi (Panel A) and the court patronage hierarchy that channelled imperial resources into artistic production (Panel B). The concentric diffusion pattern in Panel A reflects both the geographical logic of imperial political control and the institutional logic of the Madhva matha network: Udupi's Ashta Mathas (eight monasteries founded by Madhvacharya for the ritual management of the Udupi Krishna temple), connected by pilgrimage circuits to Hampi, Tirupati, Srirangam, and the major Vaishnava centres of Tamil Nadu, provided the institutional infrastructure through which Haridasa compositions were transmitted, memorised, and performed across the empire's geographical extent and beyond.

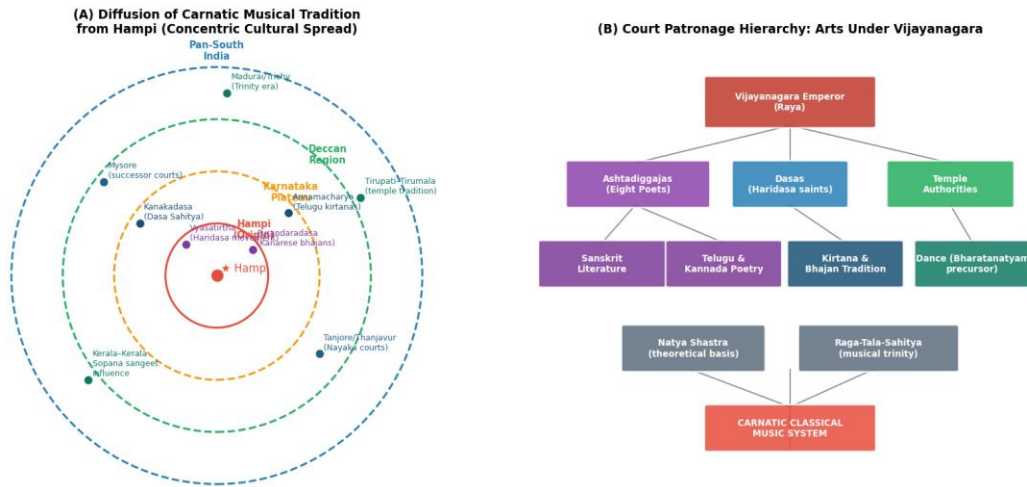


Fig. 2. (A) Concentric Diffusion of Carnatic Musical Tradition from Hampi through Haridasa and Temple Networks; (B) Court Patronage Hierarchy: Institutional Flow from Vijayanagara Emperor to Carnatic Classical Music System

3.2 Purandaradasa and the Pedagogy of Carnatic Music

Sri Purandaradasa (born Srinivasa Nayaka, 1484–1564) represents the single most consequential figure in the institutionalisation of Carnatic music as a teachable, transmissible, and theoretically coherent art system. His biographical narrative — the wealthy merchant-moneylender who renounced his fortune after a spiritual crisis, became a disciple of Vyasa-tirtha, and dedicated the remaining decades of his life to composing and teaching Vaishnava devotional music — is as much institutional allegory as personal hagiography: it encodes the transfer of musical production from the court economy into a more decentralised, socially accessible devotional economy sustained by the Haridasa network.

Purandaradasa's pedagogical contribution, as reconstructed by Subbarama Dikshitar (Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini, 1904) and P. Sambamoorthy (History of Indian Music, 1960) from living oral transmission and partial manuscript evidence, rests on several structural innovations. He standardised the teaching sequence for beginning students: from sarali varase (scale exercises in ascending and descending saptaswaras) through janta varase (paired note patterns), alankaras (35 ornamental exercises across the seven talas), gitams (simple melodic compositions for initial raga training), to the more complex suladi and ugabhoga forms and the full kirtana with pallavi-anupallavi-charana structure. He designated the raga Mayamalavagowla as the standard teaching raga — a choice that systematically exposes students to all seven notes of the octave in their most consonant forms before introducing variant (vikrita) degrees. Most significantly, he is credited with ordering and rationalising the use of the 72 Melakarta parent ragas — the comprehensive system of all possible heptatonic scales within the South Indian 22-shruti octave — that would be formally codified by Venkatamakhī in 1660 but whose conceptual foundations are traceable to Purandaradasa's compositional and pedagogical practice.

3.3 The Dasa Composers: Biographical and Compositional Survey

Table 2 presents the principal Haridasa and affiliated composer-saints of the Vijayanagara period, their compositional innovations, and their institutional legacies.

Table 2. Principal Haridasa and Affiliated Composers of the Vijayanagara Period: Innovations and Legacies

Composer-Saint	Period (approx.)	Primary Language	Compositional Innovations	Institutional Legacy
Sripadaraja	c.1422–1480	Kannada / Sanskrit	Suladi form; Haridasa movement initiation; ugabhoga	Founded Udupi Paryaya system; guru of Vyasa-tirtha
Vyasa-tirtha	c.1460–1539	Kannada / Sanskrit	Systematic tala exposition; debate-literature (vadagranthas)	Guru of Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa; Madhva Vedanta
Purandaradasa	1484–1564	Kannada	Sarali varase, janta varase, alankaras —	Called "Pitamaha of Carnatic Music";

Kanakadasa	c.1509–1609	Kannada	graded pedagogy; standardised 72 Melakarta as teaching framework Ugabhogga and kirtana forms; social reform through music; Ramadhanya Charite (narrative poem)	~4,75,000 compositions (est.); 475 surviving Challenged caste barriers; compositions sung across Karnataka to present day
Annamacharya	1408–1503	Telugu	Sankeertana (devotional hymn) form; 32,000 compositions inscribed on copper plates at Tirupati	Tirupati-Tirumala Devasthanams archive; inspired Trinity composers
Tallapakam Chinnayya	c.1470–1530	Telugu	Extended sankeertana tradition of Annamacharya; temple ritual music	Continuation of Tirupati manuscript tradition; regional synthesis

Sources: Raghavan (1966); Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini (Subbarama Dikshitar, 1904); Tirupati Devasthanam Copper Plate Archives; Ramanujan (1973)

Kanakadasa (c.1509–1609) deserves particular attention for the intersection of musical innovation and social critique that characterises his work. A shepherd by birth (from the Kuruba community), Kanakadasa's compositions openly challenged the caste-based exclusions of both temple access and musical transmission in a manner that exceeded the social radicalism of his contemporaries. His Nalikatundi Haadugalu (Songs of the Jackfruit Stem) and Haribhaktisara use musical settings of remarkable melodic sophistication as vehicles for philosophical argument about the irrelevance of birth-caste to spiritual and artistic capacity. The legend of his devotion piercing the wall of the Udupi Krishna temple — the "Kanakana Kindi" window through which the image is said to have turned to grant him darshan denied by the temple priests — encodes in devotional narrative the same social argument his compositions make in musical poetry.

4. The Raga System: Structure, Geography, and the Vijayanagara Synthesis

4.1 The Theoretical Architecture of Carnatic Music

Figure 3 presents the structural architecture of the Carnatic raga system (Panel A) and the comparative epigraphic and scholarly evidence base for Vijayanagara art forms (Panel B). The raga system's theoretical basis, as developed across the Vijayanagara period, rests on the concept of the seven swaras (saptaswaras) — Shadja (Sa), Rishabha (Ri), Gandhara (Ga), Madhyama (Ma), Panchama (Pa), Dhaivata (Da), and Nishada (Ni) — organised in relation to a fixed tonic (shadja graha) and subject to systematic permutation through varying the intonation of five of the seven degrees (Ri, Ga, Ma, Da, Ni admit multiple shrutis) to generate the 72 Melakarta parent ragas.

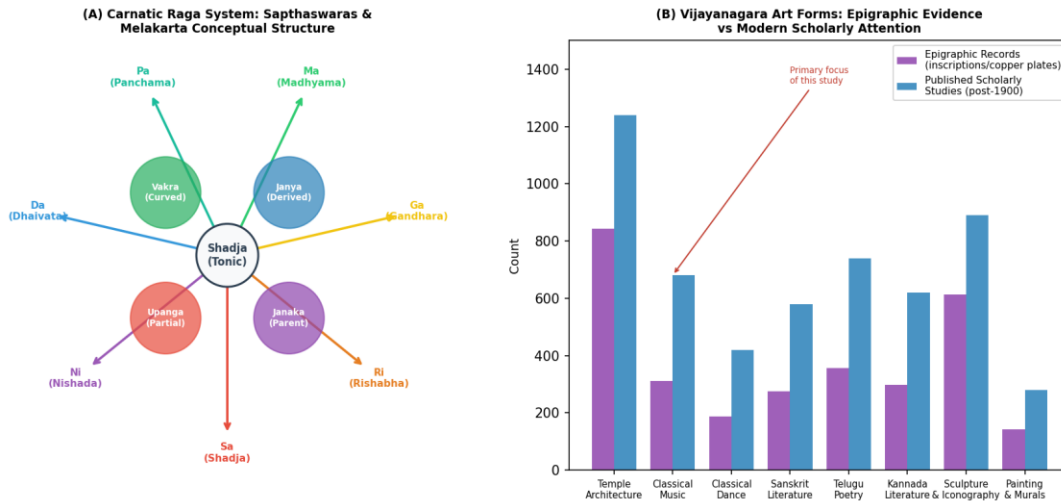


Fig. 3. (A) Carnatic Raga System: Sapthaswara Structure and Melakarta Conceptual Classification (Janaka/Janya/Vakra/Upanga); (B) Vijayanagara Art Forms: Epigraphic Records vs. Modern Scholarly Attention

The distinction between Janaka ragas (parent scales, of which there are 72 in the Venkatamakhi system) and Janya ragas (derived scales using subsets or altered sequences of the parent's notes) is fundamental to the Carnatic system's extraordinary generative capacity: from 72 parent scales, the tradition recognises several hundred Janya ragas, each with its own characteristic melodic personality (lakshana), emotional character (bhava), and performance conventions (chalan). This theoretical framework was not invented de novo in the Vijayanagara period — its roots lie in the Naradiya Shiksha, the Bharata Natya Shastra (c. 2nd century BCE–2nd century CE), and the Sangita Ratnakara of Sarngadeva (13th century) — but it was during the Vijayanagara period that the theoretical framework was articulated with sufficient rigour and pedagogical accessibility to become the stable foundation of a codified art music system rather than a flexible improvisatory tradition passed between individual practitioners without systematic notation or pedagogical structure.

4.2 Geographic Diffusion: Trade Routes as Musical Corridors

Figure 4 presents the geographical distribution of temple music centres under Vijayanagara influence (Panel A) and the compositional output of Purandaradasa by genre (Panel B). The pattern of musical diffusion visible in Panel A is not random but follows the empire's trade route network with remarkable fidelity: the corridor from Hampi south-east to Penukonda, Chandragiri, Tirupati, and the Kaveri delta (Thanjavur/Tanjore) follows the primary inland trade artery connecting the empire's heartland to the Tamil coast and its overseas trading connections. The south-western corridor from Hampi through Coimbatore to Calicut (Kozhikode) traces the pepper and spice trade route that connected the Karnataka plateau to the Malabar ports and their Arab and Portuguese trading partners.

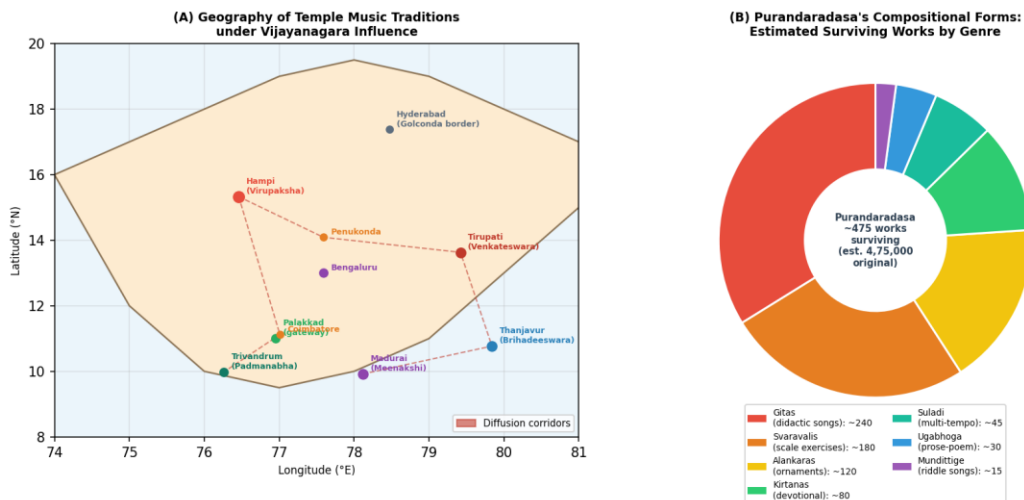


Fig. 4. (A) Temple Music Tradition Centres and Diffusion Corridors under Vijayanagara Political Influence; (B) Purandaradasa's Estimated Surviving Compositions by Compositional Form and Genre

The Tirupati-Tirumala temple complex on the Seshachalam hills of the Eastern Ghats deserves special consideration as a node of musical transmission. The temple's endowment records, preserved in copper plates now held by the Tirupati Devasthanams archive, document the appointment of Annamacharya as the Asthana Vidhwan (court composer) by the Vijayanagara feudatory Saluva Narasimha in 1476, with a specific endowment for the composition and inscription of sankertanas (devotional hymns). The copper plate archive at Tirupati, containing an estimated 2,800 of Annamacharya's compositions inscribed in Telugu script on copper, constitutes the largest surviving corpus of medieval South Indian musical compositions and represents a direct material legacy of the Vijayanagara patronage system's investment in musical documentation — an investment that preserved compositional practice across the political disruption of the Talikota battle and the fragmentation of the empire.

5. Legacy, Successor Courts, and the Path to the Musical Trinity

The Battle of Talikota (January 1565), in which the combined forces of the Deccan Sultanates — Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Bidar, and Golconda — defeated and killed the regent Aliya Rama Raya, initiating the sack of Hampi and the irreversible fragmentation of the Vijayanagara political order, did not terminate the cultural tradition that the empire had fostered. It dispersed it. The Vijayanagara nobility, administrators, temple priests, musicians, poets, and craftsmen who fled the burning capital relocated to the networks of Nayaka successor courts that the empire's decentralised administrative system had already established across the Tamil country and Andhra: Thanjavur under the Tanjore Nayakas, Madurai under the Madurai Nayakas, Ikkeri (Keladi) in coastal Karnataka under the Keladi Nayakas, and Senji (Gingee) in present-day Tamil Nadu under a further branch.

The Thanjavur court, which became under the Nayaka Achuthappa (1560–1614) and his successors the primary inheritor of the Vijayanagara musical legacy, is the critical institutional bridge between the Vijayanagara synthesis and the Carnatic Trinity. The court at Thanjavur continued the multilingual literary culture of Hampi — patronising Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil, and Marathi simultaneously after the Bhonsle Marathas absorbed the Nayaka line in 1674 — and maintained the institutional infrastructure of court musicians, temple endowments, and devadasi traditions that the Vijayanagara system had created. It was in this Thanjavur institutional environment that the theoretical codification of the 72 Melakarta system by Venkatamakhi (fl. 1620–1675) in his *Chaturdandiprakasika* completed the theoretical project that Purandaradasa's pedagogy had begun. And it was from this same institutional matrix, sustained through the Maratha Thanjavur court of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that the three composers known as the Carnatic Trinity — Tyagaraja (1767–1847), Muthuswami Dikshitar (1775–1835), and Syama Sastri (1762–1827) — emerged to compose the central repertoire of the Carnatic concert tradition as performed today.

The geographical and institutional continuity from Hampi to Thanjavur to the Trinity is not merely a narrative convenience: it is traceable in specific compositional lineages, pedagogical lineages (guru-shishya parampara), and raga usage patterns. Tyagaraja's extensive use of the Mayamalavagowla raga — Purandaradasa's chosen teaching raga — in a series of landmark compositions including *Endaro Mahanubhavulu* (in Sri raga) and the *Pancharatna Kritis* directly recalls the Purandaradasa pedagogical tradition. Muthuswami Dikshitar's 72 compositions specifically designed to systematically traverse all 72 Melakarta parent ragas — his *Melakartha Kritis* — complete the project of comprehensive raga documentation that Purandaradasa's compositional survey had initiated in the sixteenth century and that Venkatamakhi's theoretical text had organised in the seventeenth.

6. Conclusion

The Vijayanagara Empire's contribution to the evolution of Carnatic classical music was neither incidental nor merely contextual. It was structurally generative. The convergence of five historically specific conditions — a politically stable and ideologically committed imperial state; a geographically advantageous position at the intersection of the Deccan's multiple cultural zones; a devotional religious movement (Haridasa-Madhva Vaishnavism) for which musical composition was theologically mandated; a temple endowment economy that provided sustained material support for musical professionals; and the creative genius of individual composer-saints, pre-eminently Purandaradasa — produced the specific historical conjuncture in which a regionally diverse and theoretically inchoate set of musical practices was consolidated into the coherent, pedagogically transmissible, and theoretically systematic tradition that we recognise as Carnatic classical music.

The geographical analysis reveals that the empire's trade route network functioned simultaneously as a musical diffusion corridor, linking the pedagogical centre at Hampi to the temple archives at Tirupati, the devotional circuits of the Madhva

matha network, the coastal port cities and their cosmopolitan cultural exchanges, and the successor courts of the Tamil country that would receive and transmit the tradition after 1565. The post-Talikota dispersal of the Hampi cultural establishment was not a catastrophic rupture but a forced redistribution that paradoxically extended the tradition's geographical reach and institutional embedding across a wider network of successor patronage than the centralised empire had maintained.

The implications for the interdisciplinary study of art history, historical musicology, and cultural geography are significant. The Vijayanagara case demonstrates that classical music traditions are not the product of individual aesthetic innovation alone but of specific political-geographical conditions that create the institutional density, the resource base, the cross-cultural stimulus, and the protected space for artistic systematisation to occur. The destruction of Hampi in 1565 — one of the most consequential acts of cultural vandalism in South Asian history — did not erase the tradition it had fostered; the institutional depth and geographical breadth of the Vijayanagara musical investment proved more durable than the political structure that had created it. That the Carnatic classical tradition endures today, performed in concert halls from Chennai to Chicago, testifies to the extraordinary institutional legacy of a fifteenth-century moneylender from Purandharagadh who heard in the music of the Tungabhadra valley something worth systematising for all of time.

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