

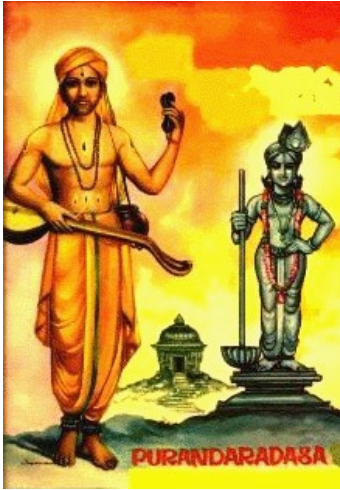


NEW

October 2010

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### Purandara Das



Purandara Dasa (1484 - 1564) is one of the most prominent composers of Carnatic music and is widely regarded as the "father of Carnatic Music". Purandara Dasa addressed social issues in addition to worship in his compositions, a practice emulated by his younger contemporary, Kanaka Dasa. Purandara Dasa's Carnatic music compositions are mostly in Kannada; some are in Sanskrit. He signed his compositions with the mudra (pen name), "Purandara Vittala" (Vittala is one of the incarnations of the Hindu god Vishnu). About 1000 of his songs are extant.

Purandaradasa was a great poet, social reformer, and a great composer. He preached the virtues of leading a pious life through his songs, known as padas. His innumerable compositions render themselves beautifully to music, whether they are lullabies, folk-songs (kolāta songs), bhajans, or devotional songs. All of Purandaradasa's works are in simple metrical songs, which can be sung on all occasions, and convey devotion in the Bhagavata philosophy. Purandaradasa was one of the foremost saints of India to understand the power of music and its appeal to illiterate common

folk. His songs are sung in every village of Karnataka irrespective of the community. He achieved a rare synthesis of music and poetry.

Purandaradasa was the originator of the musical scale by which all the rules of Carnatic school are formed. His classification of swaravali, jantivarase, alamkara, and lakshana factors are accepted and practiced throughout south India. Purandaradasa's Pillarigeete (or four compositions) in praise of Lord Ganesh are practiced by students of classical music even today. His musical scheme was followed by all subsequent great composers of south India like Venkatamakhi Kshetrajna, Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar etc., Purandaradasa is credited with creation of 75,000 compositions, although only a few hundreds survive till today.

### Biography

Inscriptional evidence suggests Purandara Dasa was born in 1484 AD in Kshemapura, near Tirthahalli, Shivamogga district, Karnataka state. According to other opinions, his native town was Purandaraghatta in Karnataka, or Purandaragad near Pune, but the latter is considered a historical mistake - connecting his "pen name" (his ankita) with a location that mainly served as a military encampment in the 15th and 16th century, and where neither could Kannada have been popular nor would any commercial activity have flourished. The only son of Varadappa Nayaka, a wealthy merchant, and Leelavati, he was named Srinivasa Nayaka, after the Lord of the Seven Hills. He received a good education in accordance with family traditions and acquired proficiency in Kannada, Sanskrit, and sacred music. At age 16 he married Saraswati bai, said by tradition to have been a pious young girl. He lost his parents at age 20, thereby inheriting his father's business of gemstones and pawning. He prospered and became known as "navakoti narayana" (abundantly rich man).

According to popular belief, he was led to devote himself to musical composition by a miraculous incident which made the heretofore greedy and miserly merchant realize the worthlessness of his attachment to worldly possessions. A Brahmin man wanted to perform the sacred thread ceremony (upanayana) for his son and came to Srinivasa's wife for money. She gave him her nose ring to sell, and the man sold the nose ring to Srinivasa himself. The miserly Srinivasa lent the man his money. Meanwhile, his wife was worried about what to say to her husband, so she prayed to her favorite deity, who gave her a nose ring just like the one she had just given away. When Srinivasa hurried home, anxious to know if the nose ring was hers, he was bewildered seeing her wear the same one! She confessed what had happened, and he was converted to belief in the virtue of a charitable life. 30 years of age, he gave away all his wealth to charity and together with his family left his house to lead the life of a wandering minstrel to proselytize religion.

In his very first song composition, he laments his wasted life of indulgence. It begins with the words 'Ana lae kara' in the Shuddha Savaeriraga, set to Tripata tala.

In the course of his wandering he met the holy sage Vyasatirtha. Srinivasa had his formal initiation at the hands of Vyasatirtha in 1525 when he was about 40 years old, with the name Purandara Dasa bestowed on him by Satyadharma Teertha, a later occupant of the Vyasatirtha Matha (or Vyasaraya Matha). Purandara Dasa traveled extensively through the length and breadth of the Vijayanagara empire composing and rendering soul stirring songs in praise of god. He spent his last years in Hampi. The mantapa (mandap) in which he stayed is known as Purandara Dasa Mantapa (mandap). He took sanyasa towards the close of his life. He died in 1564 at the age of 80.

### Purandara Dasa and Carnatic music

Purandara Dasa systematized the method of teaching Carnatic music which is followed to the present day. He introduced the raga Mayamalavagowla as the basic scale for music instruction and fashioned series of graded lessons such as swaravalis, janta swaras, alankaras, lakshana geetas, prabandhas, ugabhogas, thattu varase, geetha, sooladis and kritis. Another of his important contributions was the fusion of bhava,

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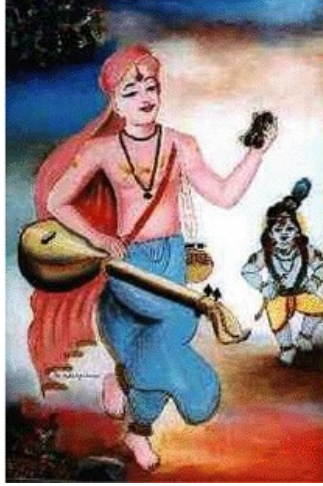
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raga, and laya in his compositions. Purandara Dasa was the first composer to include comments on ordinary daily life in song compositions. He used elements of colloquial language for his lyrics. He introduced folk ragas into the mainstream, setting his lyrics to tunes/ragas of his day so that even a common man could learn and sing them. He also composed a large number of lakshya and lakshana geetas, many of which are sung to this day. His sooladis are musical masterpieces and are the standard for raga lakshana. Scholars attribute the standardization of varna metrus entirely to Purandara Dasa.

The itinerant dasas who succeeded him are believed to have followed the systems he devised, as well as orally passing down his compositions. Purandara Dasa was a vaggeyakara (performer), a lakshanakara (musicologist), and the founder of musical pedagogy. For all these reasons and the enormous influence that he had on Carnatic music, musicologists call him the "Sangeeta Pitamaha" (grandfather) of Carnatic music. Purandara Dasa had great influence on Hindustani music. The foremost Hindustani musician Tansen's teacher, Swami Haridas was Purandara Dasa's disciple. Purandara Dasa's compositions are equally popular in Hindustani music.

Purandara Dasa has explained the essence of Upanishads, Vedas, in simple Kannada. His Keerthanas have simple lessons on leading a noble life.



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