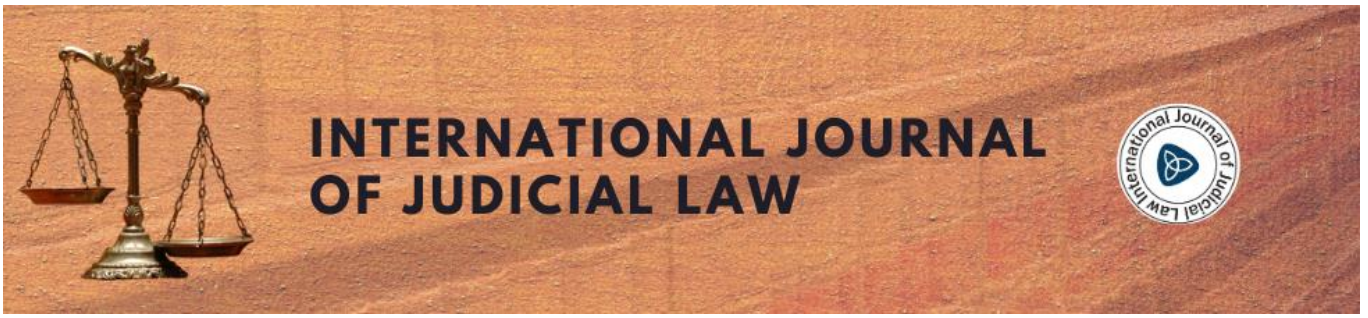




Carnatic Music in Kerala during the Post-Swathi Thirunal Period: Developments and Continuities

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Abstract

The history of Carnatic music in Kerala after Maharaja Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma reflects a remarkable process of continuity and transformation. While Swathi Thirunal established Travancore as a major centre of classical music through his compositions and royal patronage, the subsequent period witnessed the preservation and expansion of this musical legacy through composers, performers, educational institutions, festivals, and cultural patronage. Although considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to Swathi Thirunal, the evolution of Kerala's Carnatic tradition after his reign has received comparatively limited comprehensive study. This article examines the major developments that shaped Carnatic music in Kerala during the post-Swathi Thirunal period, with particular emphasis on the continuity of the Travancore musical heritage, the contributions of Kerala's composers and musicians, the institutionalization of music education, and the role of festivals, broadcasting media, and cultural organizations in sustaining the tradition. The study argues that the post-Swathi Thirunal period was not merely an era of preserving an inherited musical legacy but a dynamic phase that transformed Kerala into one of the leading centres of Carnatic music in modern India through the successful integration of tradition, institutional support, and cultural innovation.

Keywords: Carnatic Music, Kerala, Swathi Thirunal, Travancore, Music Education

1. Introduction

The history of Carnatic music in Kerala is inseparable from the extraordinary contributions of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma (1813–1846), whose reign established the Travancore court as a distinguished centre of Carnatic Music in South India. Through his prolific compositions, enlightened patronage of eminent musicians, and unwavering commitment to artistic excellence, Swathi Thirunal established a musical environment that profoundly influenced the subsequent development of Kerala's classical tradition.

Scholarly studies on Kerala's musical history have understandably concentrated on Swathi Thirunal's life, compositions, and patronage. Comparatively less attention, however, has been devoted to examining the evolution of Carnatic music in Kerala after his reign. The continuation of the Travancore court tradition, the emergence of distinguished composers and performers, the institutionalization of music education, the preservation of performance traditions, and the expansion of public cultural patronage collectively shaped Kerala's modern Carnatic identity. A comprehensive understanding of Kerala's musical history therefore requires an examination not only of Swathi Thirunal's achievements but also of the developments that sustained and expanded his legacy.

Unlike many royal musical traditions that declined with changing political circumstances, the musical culture nurtured in Travancore successfully adapted to new social, educational, and cultural environments. Court musicians and their disciples preserved established performance practices through the guru-sishya parampara, while educational institutions, music festivals, broadcasting media, cultural organizations, and government initiatives extended the reach of Carnatic music to wider sections of society. The continuing vitality of this tradition is further reflected in the contributions of contemporary musicians and cultural ambassadors who have reinterpreted and disseminated Kerala's musical heritage to new generations. These developments transformed what had once been primarily a court-centred tradition into a vibrant public cultural heritage. This study examines the major developments in Kerala's Carnatic tradition during the post-Swathi Thirunal period, tracing its evolution from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the contemporary era. Particular attention is given to the continuity of the Travancore musical heritage, the contributions of composers, performers, educators, and patrons, the growth of music institutions, and the role of festivals and broadcasting media in preserving and disseminating classical music. By bringing these diverse strands together, the article demonstrates that the post-Swathi Thirunal period represents not merely a continuation of an earlier tradition but an important phase in the transformation of Kerala into one of the leading centres of Carnatic music in modern India.

2. The Continuity of the Travancore Musical Heritage

The demise of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal in 1846 did not mark the decline of the musical culture he had nurtured. Instead, the strong foundations laid during his reign enabled the Travancore tradition to evolve while retaining its essential artistic values. Unlike many royal musical traditions that diminished with political and social change, the Carnatic tradition in Travancore survived through a combination of hereditary musicians, the guru-sishya parampara, temple traditions, educational institutions, and continued royal patronage.

A defining feature of Kerala's post-Swathi Thirunal musical history is the remarkable endurance of the Travancore court tradition. Court musicians transmitted their knowledge through successive generations, preserving established performance practices, stylistic nuances, and repertoire. The emphasis on sahitya bhava, classical discipline, and devotional expression remained characteristic features of the tradition. The interaction between Travancore and eminent musicians from the Thanjavur region further enriched Kerala's musical environment and strengthened its links with the mainstream Carnatic tradition. Among the most influential musicians associated with the Travancore court were the members of the Tanjore Quartet - Ponnayya, Chinnayya, Sivanandam, and Vadivelu - whose contributions to both music and dance left a lasting impact on Kerala's artistic life. Even after the reign of Swathi Thirunal, their disciples and followers continued to disseminate the compositions of the Carnatic Trinity and preserve important musical and dance traditions within Travancore.

Another significant manifestation of this enduring legacy was the preservation of Swathi Thirunal's compositions. His kritis, varnams, padams, and javalis remained integral to concert repertoire and music pedagogy through the efforts of

successive generations of performers and teachers. Among the hereditary musical families that played a notable role in this process, the Mullamoodu Bhagavatar family occupies a distinguished place. Closely associated with the Travancore court and the Navarathri Mandapam concerts, members of this family preserved traditional repertoire and performance practices across generations. Their continuing contributions as performers, teachers, and cultural figures represent a living link between Kerala's contemporary musical culture and its royal heritage.

Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar occupies a special position in the preservation and dissemination of the Travancore musical tradition. As the first Principal of the institution that later became the Sree Swathi Thirunal Government College of Music, he combined the roles of composer, performer, scholar, and educator. Besides enriching the Carnatic repertoire through his own compositions, he undertook important efforts to compile, preserve, and popularize the compositions of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal, thereby introducing them to a wider musical community.

The continued popularity of Swathi Thirunal's compositions among contemporary musicians further illustrates the enduring vitality of the Travancore tradition. Unlike the works of many historical composers that survive primarily in manuscripts, his compositions continue to be performed regularly in concerts, festivals, competitions, academic curricula, and research. Their sustained presence in the modern repertoire reflects the success of generations of musicians, scholars, and institutions in preserving and transmitting this remarkable musical heritage.

The post-Swathi Thirunal period in Kerala should therefore be understood not as the continuation of a static tradition but as a phase of gradual adaptation, during which the artistic ideals of the Travancore court were successfully integrated into changing social, educational, and cultural contexts. This continuity laid the foundation for the subsequent growth of Carnatic music in Kerala and shaped its distinctive musical identity.

2.1. Ayilyam Thirunal and the Revival of Carnatic Music in Travancore

The reign of Maharaja Ayilyam Thirunal (1860–1880) marked a significant phase in the revival and consolidation of Carnatic music in Travancore following the demise of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal. While Swathi Thirunal had established Travancore as one of the foremost centres of South Indian classical music, Ayilyam Thirunal revitalized the musical life of the royal court through his generous patronage of eminent musicians and scholars. His reign ensured the continuity of the Travancore musical tradition and reaffirmed Travancore's reputation as a flourishing centre of Carnatic music during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Among the distinguished musicians who continued to enjoy royal patronage during this period was Maha Meruswami (Ananthapadmanabha Goswami), a renowned Harikatha exponent originally from Maharashtra. Well versed in both Carnatic and Hindustani music, he had served as a court musician during the reign of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal and remained under the patronage of Ayilyam Thirunal. His performances and scholarly contributions played a significant role in popularizing the Harikatha tradition in Travancore. The popularity of this narrative musical form subsequently

influenced the development of Kerala's Katha Prasangam tradition, thereby enriching the state's musical and literary culture.

Ayilyam Thirunal also extended patronage to several distinguished musicians, including Coimbatore Raghava Iyer, Maha Vaidyanatha Aiyer, Parameswara Bhagavata, Kalyanakrishna Iyer, Mahadeva Iyer, Kunjari Raja, and Kittu Bhagavata. Their performances, scholarship, and teaching enriched the artistic environment of the Travancore court and fostered a new generation of accomplished musicians, ensuring the continued excellence of the Carnatic tradition. Instrumental music likewise flourished during this period, with accomplished exponents of the veena, violin, swarabat, jalatarangam, and mridangam contributing significantly to the cultural life of the kingdom.

Among the memorable musical events of Ayilyam Thirunal's reign was the celebrated encounter between Coimbatore Raghava Iyer and Maha Vaidyanatha Aiyer, held in the presence of the Maharaja and the learned assembly of the Travancore court. The event, noted for its brilliant display of raga elaboration, pallavi singing, and manodharma, reflected the exceptionally high standards of musical scholarship fostered under royal patronage. It also demonstrated Travancore's continued prominence as a meeting ground for some of the foremost musicians of nineteenth-century South India and highlighted the Maharaja's commitment to nurturing artistic excellence.

The patronage extended by Ayilyam Thirunal played a crucial role in ensuring that the musical legacy of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal was not merely preserved but further strengthened through the encouragement of outstanding performers, scholars, and storytellers. His reign thus represents a significant chapter in the history of Carnatic music in Kerala, providing a vital bridge between the royal musical tradition established by Swathi Thirunal and the emergence of the composers, performers, and institutions that shaped the subsequent development of Kerala's Carnatic tradition.

The enduring legacy of the Travancore musical tradition found its most visible expression in the annual Navarathri Mandapam concerts at Thiruvananthapuram, where the ritual, repertoire, and performance conventions associated with Maharaja Swathi Thirunal have been preserved through an unbroken tradition."

3. Post-Swathi Composers and the Evolution of Kerala's Compositional Tradition

The post-Swathi Thirunal period witnessed the emergence of a distinguished group of composers who enriched Kerala's contribution to the Carnatic tradition. While remaining rooted in the classical framework established by earlier masters, they expanded the repertoire through compositions in Malayalam and Tamil, devotional expression, literary refinement, and scholarly innovation. Their works not only preserved the artistic ideals of the Travancore tradition but also reflected Kerala's evolving cultural identity. Collectively, these composers transformed the post-Swathi period into an era of creative expansion, strengthening Kerala's position within the broader Carnatic tradition.

3.1. Irayimman Thampi: Malayalam as a Language of Classical Expression

Irayimman Thampi (1782–1856) holds a unique position in Kerala's musical history, serving as an important link

between the periods before and after Maharaja Swathi Thirunal. A distinguished poet, composer, and court musician of Travancore, he demonstrated the expressive potential of Malayalam as a language of classical composition at a time when Telugu and Sanskrit predominated in the Carnatic repertoire.

Although widely remembered for the celebrated lullaby *Omanathinkal Kidavo*, Thampi's contribution extends far beyond a single composition. His *sringara padams*, particularly '*Prananathan Enikku Nalkiya*' in Kamboji, exemplify the literary elegance and musical sophistication of Malayalam compositions. Equally significant is his *PadaVarnam Amba Gouri* in Arabhi, regarded as one of the finest Malayalam *PadaVarnams* in the Carnatic tradition. Through these works, Irayimman Thampi established Malayalam as a refined medium capable of conveying the aesthetic, rhythmic, and devotional dimensions of classical music, thereby laying an enduring foundation for Kerala's later compositional tradition.

3.2. Kuttikunju Thankachi: A Pioneer among Women Composers in Kerala

Among the composers of nineteenth-century Kerala, Kuttikunju Thankachi occupies a distinctive place as one of the earliest known women composers in the state's Carnatic tradition. At a time when opportunities for women in literary and musical pursuits were limited, she emerged as a gifted poet and composer who inherited and enriched the artistic legacy of the Travancore court. Her compositions, characterized by devotional fervour and literary elegance, reflect a sound understanding of Carnatic musical idioms and the rich cultural milieu of nineteenth-century Travancore. Beyond their musical merit, her works represent an important milestone in the history of women in Kerala's classical music tradition. Through her contributions, Kuttikunju Thankachi demonstrated that women could participate meaningfully in the creative and literary dimensions of Carnatic music, making her a pioneering figure in Kerala's musical and cultural history.

3.3. Neelakanta Sivan and Kerala's Tamil Musical Heritage

Neelakanta Sivan remains an important figure in the musical history of Travancore and Kerala. Although he composed primarily in Tamil, his long association with Thiruvananthapuram established him as an integral figure in Kerala's Carnatic tradition. Just as Irayimman Thampi enriched Kerala's Carnatic tradition through Malayalam, Neelakanta Sivan strengthened its Tamil compositional heritage with kritis distinguished by their devotional depth, lyrical simplicity, and musical appeal.

Several of his compositions, including *Ananda Natanamaduvār* (Poorvikalyani), *Oraaru Mugane* (Reethigowla), composed in praise of Lord Subrahmanya at the Ulloor Subrahmanya Temple, Thiruvananthapuram, and *Sambo Mahadeva* (Bowli), have become an integral part of the mainstream Carnatic concert repertoire and continue to be rendered by leading musicians throughout India. Their enduring popularity illustrates how a composer nurtured in Kerala's cultural milieu made a lasting contribution to the mainstream Carnatic tradition of India.

The enduring influence of Neelakanta Sivan in Kerala is reflected in the activities of the Sree Neelakanta Sivan Sangeetha Sabha, Thiruvananthapuram, established in 1975.

Through its annual music festival, organized in connection with the composer's samadhi observance, the Sabha has played an important role in promoting Carnatic music by presenting eminent musicians from across South India, encouraging young artists, honouring senior musicians, and fostering the performance of compositions by Neelakanta Sivan and other Carnatic composers. The festival continues to be a significant cultural event, contributing to the continued vitality and wider appreciation of Kerala's classical music tradition.

3.4. K. C. Kesava Pillai and the Expansion of Malayalam Musical Literature

K. C. Kesava Pillai occupies a significant place in the development of Kerala's Carnatic tradition through his enduring contributions to Malayalam musical literature. Building upon the foundations laid by earlier composers such as Irayimman Thampi, he enriched the repertoire with compositions that combined literary elegance with classical musical structure.

While Irayimman Thampi's compositions are admired for their poetic refinement and classical sophistication, Kesava Pillai employed a simpler and more accessible style of Malayalam, making his compositions more readily appreciated by the general public. His works encompass devotional, cultural, and patriotic themes, demonstrating the adaptability of Carnatic music to a wider range of literary expression. By combining literary simplicity with classical musical grammar, Kesava Pillai broadened the appeal of Malayalam compositions and contributed significantly to the popularization of Carnatic music among Malayalam-speaking audiences. Sri. Cherthala Gopalan Nair, the renowned Carnatic vocalist and All India Radio producer, further popularised Kesava Pillai's compositions by setting many of them to music and presenting them through Akashvani broadcasts, thereby bringing them to a wider audience.

3.5. T. Lakshmana Pillai: Composer, Scholar and Preserver of Kerala's Musical Heritage

T. Lakshmana Pillai (1864–1950), in which the initial "T." denotes Trivandrum, occupies a distinguished place among the composer-scholars of the post-Swathi Thirunal period. Trained in veena under Kalyanakrishna Bhagavatar of the Travancore court, he inherited and helped preserve the musical traditions of the royal court through his contributions as a composer, musicologist, writer, and teacher.

His compositions, predominantly in Tamil, are noted for their literary elegance, devotional content, and classical musical structure. Employing nearly eighty ragas, he also created the rare raga Amarasenapriya, reflecting his creativity and musical scholarship. A distinctive feature of his compositions is the inclusion of English explanatory notes, demonstrating his scholarly approach and his effort to make the literary and philosophical content of his works accessible to a wider audience.

Lakshmana Pillai also made enduring contributions to musicology through *Travancore Music and Musicians*, an important source for the study of Kerala's musical heritage, and *Tyagayya*, a scholarly study of Saint Tyagaraja that reflects his wide-ranging interest in Carnatic music and its composers. He was one of the founders of the Saiva Prakasa Sabha, one of the oldest music sabhas in Kerala, which has played a significant role in the promotion and growth of

Carnatic music in the state through concerts and other cultural activities. The Sabha continues to honour Lakshmana Pillai's contributions by organizing annual Carnatic music concerts in connection with his Remembrance Day, thereby preserving and promoting his musical legacy.

As a teacher, Lakshmana Pillai trained a large number of disciples who made significant contributions to the growth of Carnatic music in Kerala. Among them, Ranganatha Aiyar rendered distinguished service by publishing the compositions of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal with notation, thereby contributing to the documentation and transmission of the Travancore musical tradition. Other prominent disciples included Suchindram Sthanu Sastri, Attingal Padmanabha Bhagavatar, Palace Vidwan of Travancore, and C. Sarasvati Bai, a renowned Harikatha exponent. Among his later disciples, R. Krishnaswamy (1922–2015) became a prominent Carnatic musician, musicologist, and senior broadcaster of All India Radio, dedicating much of his career to preserving, performing, and promoting the compositions and musical legacy of his guru. This guru-sishya lineage was subsequently continued by Dr. R. Premalatha, daughter of R. Krishnaswamy, and Prof. Varkala C. S. Jayaram, a distinguished disciple of R. Krishnaswamy, both of whom played important roles in preserving and disseminating Lakshmana Pillai's musical heritage.

A collection of two hundred compositions of Lakshmana Pillai, with notation, was published in 1949 by his daughter, Mrs. Lakshmi Narayanan, ensuring their preservation and wider dissemination among performers, students, and researchers. Through his multifaceted contributions as a composer, scholar, teacher, musicologist, and historian, T. Lakshmana Pillai made enduring contributions to the documentation and transmission of Kerala's Carnatic tradition.

3.6. Puthukkode Krishnamoorthy: The Kerala Tyagaraja

Puthukkode Krishnamoorthy (1902–1973) stands among the foremost twentieth-century composers of Kerala. A native of Palakkad, one of Kerala's foremost centres of Carnatic music, he served as Professor at Sree Swathi Thirunal College of Music, Thiruvananthapuram, and later retired as Principal of Chembai Memorial Government Music College, Palakkad. Following his retirement, he continued his academic and musical activities at Kalakshetra, Chennai, before returning to Thiruvananthapuram, where he spent his final years. His life and career thus formed a significant link between the musical traditions of northern and southern Kerala.

The epithet "Kerala Tyagaraja" is well deserved for several reasons. Like Saint Tyagaraja, Puthukkode Krishnamoorthy devoted much of his creative life to composing kritis rooted in bhakti. His prolific output, deep commitment to devotional expression, and ability to create compositions that seamlessly integrated sahitya and raga bhava earned him this affectionate title. His Malayalam and Tamil compositions, characterized by their simple and accessible language, appealed to the common devotee, while his Sanskrit compositions reflected profound scholarship and mastery of the classical tradition.

Through his prolific compositions, Malayalam gained greater prominence in the Carnatic concert repertoire. His works demonstrate that Kerala's compositional heritage continued to flourish during the twentieth century while remaining firmly rooted in the classical ideals represented by the great composer-saints of the Carnatic tradition. Through his

compositions, teaching, and scholarship, Puthukkote Krishnamoorthy played a significant role in strengthening Kerala's contribution to the wider Carnatic tradition.

3.7. Tulaseevanam : A Contemporary Continuation of Kerala's Compositional Tradition

Sri R. Ramachandran Nair, widely known in the musical world by his pen name Tulaseevanam, stands among the most distinguished contemporary composers of Kerala. A distinguished civil servant who retired as Chief Secretary to the Government of Kerala, he simultaneously pursued an extraordinary career as a composer, scholar, and promoter of Carnatic music. His compositions have gained wide acceptance among musicians not only in Kerala but throughout the Carnatic world, reflecting their musical depth, devotional appeal, and literary excellence.

Tulaseevanam's compositional style has often invited comparisons with that of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal because of its combination of musical scholarship, devotional depth, literary elegance, multilingual expression, and prolific output. One of his most notable contributions is the Hari Bhakti Navakam, a set of nine kritis based on the Navavidha Bhakti (nine modes of devotion). While its conceptual framework recalls Swathi Thirunal's celebrated Navavidha Bhakti compositions, it simultaneously presents an independent and original creative vision. His Navaratna Malika, Navarathri Kritis, and numerous compositions dedicated to various deities further demonstrate his mastery of classical Carnatic grammar while reflecting a distinct contemporary sensibility. Beyond conventional devotional themes, Tulaseevanam also composed kritis on great spiritual personalities such as Sree Narayana Guru and Adi Sankaracharya, thereby extending the scope of Carnatic composition to include some of the most influential figures in Kerala's spiritual and philosophical heritage.

The continuing influence of Tulaseevanam is reflected in the activities of the Tulaseevana Sangeetha Parishat, which organizes the Tulaseevanam Music Festival, a ten-day annual celebration of Carnatic music, and confers the Tulaseevana Puraskaram on distinguished Carnatic musicians in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the field. These initiatives have played an important role in promoting Carnatic music while promoting and sustaining Tulaseevanam's musical legacy.

Tulaseevanam's oeuvre demonstrates that Kerala's rich compositional tradition continues to flourish in the contemporary period. Through his scholarship, creativity, and prolific compositions, he has made a lasting contribution to the Carnatic repertoire and the continuity of Kerala's musical heritage.

4. Leading Musicians and Teachers of the Post-Swathi Period

The continued vitality of Carnatic music in Kerala during the post-Swathi Thirunal period owes much to a distinguished group of performers, teachers, and scholars who preserved the Travancore musical heritage while expanding its influence across India. Through concert performances, teaching, publications, research, and institutional leadership, these musicians ensured that Kerala remained an important centre of Carnatic music during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Among them, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer occupies a pivotal place. At the request of the Travancore royal family, he

undertook the monumental task of collecting, compiling, editing, and popularizing the compositions of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal, thereby ensuring their enduring place in the mainstream Carnatic concert repertoire. His distinguished disciples, Mavelikkara Prabhakara Varma and Prof. Kumarakerala Varma, made invaluable contributions to preserving the authentic paathantarams of Swathi Thirunal's compositions. Prof. Kumarakerala Varma further enriched music education through his publications containing Malayalam notations of the compositions of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal and the Carnatic Trinity, making these works more accessible to performers, students, and researchers.

Kerala also produced several eminent performers and teachers whose concert careers and pedagogical contributions enriched the state's musical culture. Among them were Vechoor Harihara Subramania Iyer, Neyyattinkara Vasudevan, Prof. Parassala B. Ponnammal, Prof. Neyyattinkara Mohanachandran, violin maestro B. Sasikumar, and mridangam maestro Mavelikkara Velukkutty Nair, all of whom played significant roles in preserving, propagating, and disseminating the Carnatic tradition through performance and teaching.

Among Kerala's musicians who attained national and international recognition, Dr. K. J. Yesudas, an alumnus of Sree Swathi Thirunal Government College of Music, occupies a unique position. While celebrated worldwide as a playback singer, he has consistently upheld the Carnatic concert tradition through performances, recordings, and devotional music, introducing classical music to a wider audience without compromising its artistic standards.

Several Kerala-born musicians, including Palghat K. V. Narayanaswamy, M. D. Ramanathan, and T. V. Gopalakrishnan, achieved national prominence while pursuing their careers primarily in Chennai. Through their performances, teaching, recordings, research, and institutional contributions, these musicians further enhanced Kerala's standing within the wider Carnatic musical tradition. The contributions of these musicians were further strengthened by the emergence of organized institutions for music education, which transformed the transmission of Carnatic music from a tradition primarily sustained through the guru-sishya system into a structured academic discipline.

5. The Institutionalization of Carnatic Music Education in Kerala

One of the most significant developments in Kerala's musical history after Maharaja Swathi Thirunal was the institutionalization of Carnatic music education. While the guru-sishya tradition continued to remain an important mode of musical transmission, the establishment of formal institutions introduced structured curricula, examinations, and academic training, thereby broadening access to classical music education. These institutions played a crucial role in preserving Kerala's musical heritage while preparing successive generations of performers, teachers, composers, and researchers.

5.1. Sree Swathi Thirunal Government College of Music

Among these institutions, Sree Swathi Thirunal Government College of Music, Thiruvananthapuram, occupies a position of exceptional importance. Established under the patronage of the Travancore royal family during the reign of Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma, the college was founded with the objective of training music teachers and promoting

systematic music education. It also became a major centre for preserving, nurturing, and promoting the compositions of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal.

The institution's academic stature was enhanced by eminent musicians who served on its faculty. Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar, its first Principal, laid the foundation for systematic music education and scholarly activity. The college later benefited from the association of legendary musicians such as Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and G. N. Balasubramaniam, whose contributions greatly enhanced its artistic and academic reputation. Over the decades, the college has produced numerous distinguished performers, teachers, composers, researchers, and administrators who have made significant contributions to Carnatic music in Kerala and beyond. Today, it continues to function as one of India's leading institutions for higher education and research in music.

5.2. Other Music Institutions in Kerala

The institutional growth of Carnatic music education in Kerala was further strengthened by the establishment of several other centres of learning. RLV College of Music and Fine Arts, Tripunithura, has made important contributions through its programmes in music, dance, Kathakali, and allied performing arts. Chembai Memorial Government Music College, Palakkad, has likewise emerged as a prominent institution for higher education in music, while Kerala Kalamandalam, though primarily associated with Kathakali and other performing arts, has also contributed to the preservation and promotion of classical music through its academic programmes and cultural initiatives. Sree Rama Varma Government College of Music and Performing Arts, Trissur represents another important institution in Kerala's expanding network of Music education. In addition, music departments in arts and science colleges, including Government Women's College, Thiruvananthapuram, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, and Government College, Chittur, have broadened access to higher education in music across the state.

The establishment of these institutions transformed Carnatic music from a tradition primarily sustained through the gurusishya system into an academically organized discipline without diminishing the importance of traditional pedagogy. In recent decades, university departments, postgraduate programmes, and research centres have further strengthened musicological research, documentation, and scholarly discourse, ensuring the continued growth and vitality of Kerala's Carnatic tradition.

6. Festivals, Patronage, and Living Traditions

The continuity and vitality of Carnatic music in Kerala during the post-Swathi Thirunal period have been sustained not only through composers, musicians, and educational institutions but also through festivals, cultural organizations, broadcasting media, and governmental patronage. Together, these have created a vibrant cultural ecosystem that has preserved tradition while encouraging artistic excellence, scholarship, and public participation.

6.1. Navarathri Mandapam Concerts: A Living Musical Tradition

Among Kerala's most enduring musical traditions, the annual Navarathri Mandapam concerts at Thiruvananthapuram occupy a unique place in the history of Carnatic music.

Although the present concert tradition is closely associated with Maharaja Swathi Thirunal, the earlier musical tradition featured devotional group singing by the Mullamoodu Bhagavathars. Maharaja Swathi Thirunal enriched this tradition by composing the celebrated Navarathri Kritis, with one composition intended to be rendered on each day of the Navarathri festival. In the course of time, these musical observances evolved into the present concert format, in which distinguished Carnatic musicians present recitals during the Navarathri festival.

Since the time of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal, the Navarathri Mandapam concerts have preserved the ritualistic and artistic traditions of the Travancore court. The festival is distinguished by its strict observance of tradition, its emphasis on classical values, and its unique blend of devotion, scholarship, and musical excellence. As one of the oldest continuously observed Carnatic music traditions in India, it continues to symbolize the enduring legacy of the Travancore musical heritage.

The Navarathri Mandapam concerts are widely regarded as one of the most prestigious concert platforms in the Carnatic music world. Each year, only a select group of leading musicians from across India is invited to perform, and an invitation to present a recital at the Mandapam is considered one of the highest honours in the career of a Carnatic musician. The festival has therefore played a vital role in preserving the highest standards of performance while maintaining the unique musical heritage of the Travancore court.

In recent decades, the tradition has also demonstrated its capacity for thoughtful evolution while preserving its essential character. The continuing significance of the Navarathri Mandapam concerts and the important reforms that have widened participation while maintaining the sanctity of this historic tradition are discussed in the following section.

6.2. Chembai Sangeetholsavam and Festival Culture in Kerala

Among Kerala's music festivals, the Chembai Sangeetholsavam at Guruvayur occupies a place of exceptional importance. Conducted annually in memory of the legendary vocalist Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, it has evolved into one of India's largest gatherings of Carnatic musicians. The festival serves not merely as a commemorative event but as a major platform for the preservation and dissemination of Carnatic music. Its most distinctive feature is the collective rendering of the Tyagaraja Pancharatna Kritis, symbolizing the inclusive spirit of Chembai's musical philosophy. Comparable in cultural significance to the Tyagaraja Aradhana at Tiruvaiyaru, the festival continues to inspire musicians while strengthening Kerala's vibrant festival culture. Numerous temple festivals, sabha festivals, and cultural organizations across the state likewise provide valuable platforms for established and emerging musicians.

6.3. Prince Rama Varma and the Continuation of Royal Patronage

Among contemporary cultural figures associated with Kerala's Carnatic tradition, Prince Aswathi Thirunal Rama Varma holds a unique position. As a descendant of the Travancore royal family and an accomplished musician, he represents a living link between the musical legacy of

Maharaja Swathi Thirunal and the contemporary Carnatic world. Through concerts, lecture-demonstrations, recordings, workshops, and scholarly interactions, he has popularized numerous rare compositions of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal and introduced them to younger generations.

Prince Rama Varma also played a significant role in reforming the traditions of the Navarathri Mandapam concerts. Traditionally, women were not permitted either to perform or to be present as listeners inside the Mandapam during the concerts. By facilitating the historic performance of Prof. Parassala B. Ponnammal, he initiated an important and sensitive reform that opened the way for the participation of women while preserving the ritual and musical sanctity of the festival. Beyond the preservation of the Swathi tradition, he has also popularized numerous rare compositions of Kanakadasa, Annamacharya, Kaiwara Amara Nareyana, and his guru Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna, thereby broadening the Carnatic concert repertoire and introducing Kerala audiences to a wider spectrum of South Indian devotional music.

His contribution to Kerala's musical life was further reflected in the annual Swathi Music Festival held at Kuthiramalika Palace, which brought together leading Carnatic and Hindustani musicians and attracted rasikas from across India and abroad. Although the festival was discontinued following the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains a significant example of the continuing patronage of Classical music by the Travancore royal family. Through these initiatives, Prince Rama Varma has demonstrated how tradition can be preserved, revitalized, and meaningfully extended to contemporary audiences.

6.4. All India Radio and the Popularization of Carnatic Music

During the twentieth century, All India Radio (Akashvani) emerged as one of the most influential institutions in the dissemination of Carnatic music in Kerala. Its regular broadcasts introduced classical music to audiences beyond concert halls and urban cultural centres, enabling listeners across the state to engage with leading musicians and important compositions.

Educational broadcasts, including music lesson programmes, nurtured generations of students and contributed significantly to musical literacy. Special programmes such as the annual Swathi Thirunal Jayanthi Music Festival and Ganakairali, devoted to Malayalam compositions and Kerala composers, further promoted the state's musical heritage. Through broadcasts, archival recordings, educational programmes, and festival coverage, All India Radio became not merely a broadcasting agency but a major institution for music education, documentation, and cultural preservation.

6.5. Governmental and Cultural Patronage

The continued vitality of Carnatic music in Kerala has also been strengthened by sustained governmental and institutional support. The Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi, the Department of Cultural Affairs, and the Kerala Tourism Department have promoted Carnatic music through festivals, cultural programmes, seminars, workshops, and public performances. Concerts organized during the annual Onam celebrations have introduced classical music to wider national and international audiences.

Academic initiatives of the Government of Kerala have further enriched the state's musical environment. National seminars, lecture-demonstrations, workshops, and concerts

by eminent musicians have been regularly organized in government music colleges, providing valuable opportunities for interaction between students, scholars, and performing artists. Since 2025, Sree Swathi Thirunal Government College of Music has also organized the annual Swathi Music and Dance Festival, dedicated to the compositions of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal, further strengthening the institution's role in preserving and promoting his musical legacy.

Among the state's highest musical honours, the Swathi Sangeetha Puraskaram occupies a place of special distinction, recognizing outstanding contributions to Carnatic music. Together, these governmental, academic, and cultural initiatives continue to sustain and enrich Kerala's vibrant Carnatic music tradition.

7. Conclusion

The period following Maharaja Swathi Thirunal witnessed not a decline but a remarkable continuation and expansion of Kerala's Carnatic music tradition. Sustained initially through the patronage of the Travancore royal family, the musical legacy of Swathi Thirunal was preserved and enriched by a succession of distinguished composers, musicians, scholars, teachers, and cultural institutions that shaped Kerala's musical identity over the subsequent centuries. The contributions of composers such as Irayimman Thampi, Kuttikunju Thankachi, Neelakanta Sivan, T. Lakshmana Pillai, Puthukkote Krishnamoorthy, and Tulaseevanam, together with the efforts of eminent performers, educators, and institutions, ensured that Kerala emerged as one of the foremost centres of Carnatic music in modern India while remaining firmly rooted in the broader South Indian classical tradition.

The institutionalization of music education, the establishment of music colleges and university departments, the activities of cultural organizations, music festivals, All India Radio, and sustained governmental and royal patronage transformed Carnatic music from a tradition largely confined to royal courts and the guru-sishya system into a vibrant cultural movement accessible to wider sections of society. At the same time, these developments preserved the essential values of the tradition while enabling it to respond to changing social and cultural contexts.

As Kerala enters the twenty-first century, the future of its Carnatic music tradition will depend upon sustaining a delicate balance between preserving its rich heritage and embracing meaningful innovation. Continued support for the guru-sishya tradition, higher education, research, digital documentation, music festivals, broadcasting, and cultural institutions will remain essential for ensuring the vitality of this tradition. At the same time, the growing number of students pursuing higher education in Carnatic music underscores the need for greater professional opportunities. In earlier decades, music teachers formed an integral part of Kerala's educational system, serving in schools across the state and contributing significantly to the dissemination of classical music among younger generations. Revitalizing music education through the strengthening and expansion of music teacher positions in government schools would not only create meaningful employment opportunities for qualified graduates but also cultivate a deeper appreciation of Kerala's rich musical heritage among future generations. The enduring legacy of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal and the contributions of subsequent generations provide a strong

foundation for ensuring that Carnatic music in Kerala continues to flourish as a vibrant, evolving, and socially relevant artistic tradition.

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