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# Vijayanagara-Era Trilingual Inscriptions Found in Seshachalam Forest

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# Vijayanagara-Era Trilingual Inscriptions Found in Seshachalam Forest

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## WHY IN NEWS

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has documented, through estampages, a set of rare 16th-century trilingual stone inscriptions at in the **Seshachalam forest range**, Tirupati district, Andhra Pradesh (reported June 23-24, 2026). Engraved in **Telugu, Tamil and Kannada**, the inscriptions record a royal donation by **King Sadasiva Raya** (r. 1542-1570) of the Tuluva dynasty of the Vijayanagara Empire, who built a Siva temple and a mutt at Papavinasa.

## THE DISCOVERY IN THE SESHACHALAM HILLS

ASI epigraphists located the inscriptions at Sadasivakona, a scenic spot inside the **Seshachalam biosphere reserve** in the Tirupati district of Andhra Pradesh. The Seshachalam range, part of the Eastern Ghats, is best known for the rare red sanders (red sandalwood) tree and lies near the temple town of Tirupati.

The record was preserved using **estampages**, the standard epigraphic technique of taking an inked or pressed impression of an inscribed surface onto paper. Estampages allow scholars to read worn or weathered letters that are difficult to decipher on the stone itself, and they form the backbone of ASI's epigraphical archive.

## What the Inscriptions Record

The engraved text commemorates a grant by **Sadasiva Raya**, who held the Vijayanagara throne from 1542 to 1570. The inscriptions state that the king made a royal donation and constructed a **Siva temple and a mutt (monastic establishment) at Papavinasa**, a sacred site associated with the Tirumala hills.

The most striking feature is that the same royal proclamation appears in **three Dravidian and Dravidian-region languages, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada**. Tilingual royal records were a deliberate administrative and political device of the Vijayanagara state, which ruled over a multilingual population spanning the present-day states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Publishing a grant in three scripts ensured that local communities across this vast realm could read and respect the king's order.

## THE VIJAYANAGARA EMPIRE AND ITS FOUR DYNASTIES

The Vijayanagara Empire, founded in 1336 with its capital at Vijayanagara (modern **Hampi**) on the banks of the Tungabhadra river, was the dominant power in peninsular India for more than two centuries. It was ruled successively by four dynasties.

DYNASTY	PERIOD	KEY RULERS	NOTES
Sangama	1336-1485	Harihara I and Bukka I (founders), Deva Raya II	Founded by Harihara and Bukka; capital established at Hampi
Saluva	1485-1505	Saluva Narasimha	Brief interlude; seized power amid Sangama decline
Tuluva	1505-1570	Krishnadevaraya (r. 1509-1529), Sadasiva Raya	Empire's golden age; Krishnadevaraya the greatest ruler
Aravidu	1570-1646	Tirumala Deva Raya, Venkata II	Last dynasty; ruled from Penukonda and Chandragiri after Hampi's fall

**Krishnadevaraya** (r. 1509-1529), the most celebrated Tuluva ruler, presided over the empire's cultural and military zenith. A patron of Telugu, Sanskrit, Tamil and Kannada literature, he authored the Telugu work *Amuktamalyada* and hosted the eight poets known as the *Ashtadiggajas* at his court.

### Sadasiva Raya and the Regent Aliya Rama Raya

Sadasiva Raya, in whose name the newly documented grant was issued, was a Tuluva ruler who reigned in title from 1542 to 1570. In practice, however, real authority lay with the powerful regent **Aliya Rama Raya**, his son-in-law, who controlled the administration and the army while the king remained a nominal sovereign.

Aliya Rama Raya pursued an aggressive policy of intervention in the rivalries of the **Deccan Sultanates**, the successor states of the Bahmani kingdom. His diplomacy alarmed them, and four of these Sultanates, Bijapur, Golconda, Ahmadnagar and Bidar, set aside their mutual feuds and formed a confederacy against Vijayanagara.

The decisive clash came at the **Battle of Talikota**, also called the Battle of **Rakshasa-Tangadi**, in **1565**. The combined armies of the Deccan Sultanates defeated the Vijayanagara forces. Aliya Rama Raya was captured and killed, and the victorious armies sacked and devastated the imperial capital at **Hampi**. The city never recovered, and the empire entered a long decline under the Aravidu dynasty.

## EPIGRAPHY AS A SOURCE OF HISTORY

The Sadasivakona find underlines the central place of **epigraphy** (the study of inscriptions) in reconstructing India's medieval past.

- Inscriptions are **contemporary, dated and often verifiable** records, less prone to the exaggeration found in court chronicles.
- They reveal **administrative, religious and economic life**, recording land grants, temple endowments, tax remissions and donations.
- Multilingual records like this one map the **linguistic geography** of an empire and its policy of accommodating diverse communities.
- They help fix **chronology and genealogy** of dynasties where literary sources are silent or contradictory.

The ASI maintains a dedicated **Epigraphy Branch** (headquartered at Mysuru for Sanskrit and Dravidian inscriptions) that collects, deciphers and publishes such records in the annual *Epigraphia Indica* and allied reports.

## HAMPI, UNESCO AND THE ROLE OF THE ASI

The ruins of the Vijayanagara capital at Hampi, in Karnataka's Vijayanagara district, were inscribed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986** under the title "Group of Monuments at Hampi". The site preserves the Virupaksha temple, the Vittala temple with its stone chariot and musical pillars, the royal enclosure and the Hazara Rama temple.

The **Archaeological Survey of India**, established in 1861 and now functioning under the Ministry of Culture, is the nodal agency for the protection, conservation and study of monuments and antiquities. Its legal **mandate** (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/mandate/>) flows from the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958**, which empowers it to declare monuments of national importance, regulate construction in prohibited and regulated zones around protected sites, and conduct excavation and documentation work such as the present epigraphical survey.

## ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

The documentation of the Sadasivakona inscriptions matters for several reasons.

**Conservation.** Inscriptions exposed in forest terrain face weathering, vegetation growth and the risk of vandalism or illicit removal. Timely estampage and digital documentation create a permanent record even if the physical stone deteriorates. The find strengthens the case for a comprehensive, geo-tagged digital epigraphical database covering inscriptions lying outside protected monument complexes.

**Epigraphical scholarship.** A precisely dated, trilingual royal grant from the reign of Sadasiva Raya enriches our understanding of Vijayanagara administration, temple patronage (<https://ujijari.com/vocab/patronage/>) and language policy during the Tuluva twilight years that preceded the disaster at Talikota.

**Cultural continuity.** The record links the temple-building activity around Tirumala-Tirupati to imperial patronage, illustrating how Vijayanagara kings used religious endowment as an instrument of legitimacy and integration across linguistic regions.

The way forward lies in expanding the ASI Epigraphy Branch's capacity, accelerating digitisation of estampages, and involving regional universities and the state archaeology departments in collaborative survey and publication.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

**Prelims:** Vijayanagara dynasties (Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, Aravidu); Krishnadevaraya and *Amuktamalyada*; Battle of Talikota 1565; Hampi UNESCO World Heritage Site; ASI and the AMASR Act 1958; Seshachalam range and red sanders.

**Mains (GS1):** "Inscriptions are a more reliable source than court chronicles for reconstructing medieval Indian history." Examine with reference to Vijayanagara epigraphy. Also relevant for art and culture (temple architecture, language policy) and for the dynamics of Deccan politics in the 16th century.

**GS3 link:** The Seshachalam range and conservation of red sanders connect to environment and biodiversity questions.

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Site: Sadasivakona, in the Seshachalam forest range, Tirupati district, Andhra Pradesh; record taken via estampages by the ASI.

Languages: Trilingual, in Telugu, Tamil and Kannada.

Ruler: Sadasiva Raya (r. 1542-1570), Tuluva dynasty of the Vijayanagara Empire; built a Siva temple and mutt at Papavinasa.

Regent: Aliya Rama Raya held real power; killed at the Battle of Talikota.

Battle of Talikota (Rakshasa-Tangadi), 1565: Deccan Sultanates' confederacy defeated Vijayanagara and sacked Hampi.

Four Vijayanagara dynasties: Sangama (1336-1485), Saluva (1485-1505), Tuluva (1505-1570), Aravidu (1570-1646).

Greatest Tuluva ruler: Krishnadevaraya (r. 1509-1529), author of *Amuktamalyada*.

Hampi: Capital on the Tungabhadra; UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986.

ASI: Founded 1861; under the Ministry of Culture; legal mandate from the AMASR Act, 1958.

**Sources:** *Archaeological Survey of India* (<https://asi.nic.in>), *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com>), *Ministry of Culture* (<https://www.indiaculture.gov.in>)

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