CONCLUSION

This study of the songs of Purandaradāsā has attempted to present a culturally creative figure of the Vijayanagara Empire in a historical perspective. Purandaradāsā is popular among the students of music and musicologists of South India and no study has been done on this poet from a historical point of view. My study, has served the purpose of highlighting the life and career of Purandaradāsā who lived at Hampi in the sixteenth century, from a historical point of view and more importantly has looked at the relevance of his poems for the study of the period in which he lived.

The lack of biographical details pertaining to saint figures such as Purandaradāsā renders the task of the historian very difficult. There are no contemporary documents relating to Purandaradāsā and we have to rely on his songs in order to extract information about the world and society in which he lived. The biographical details of Purandaradāsā’s life have to be inferred from references to moments of crisis or disjuncture which find mention in an oblique manner in the songs.

This study has presented Purandaradāsā as a culturally creative figure, who recorded in his lyrics and verses – his imagination of the Vijayanagara era. I have made an attempt in this study to explore the religious imagination of Purandaradāsā by examining the tradition of Bhakti and cultural networks which spanned almost a century across time and space. Though Purandaradāsā is today regarded as the classical strand of Carnatic music it may be pointed out that the renewal of this tradition took place only in the seventeenth and eighteenth century in the Marātha court at Tanjāvūr. The songs replete with powerful but simple images became the
touchstone for defining the classical. In Purandaradasa’s own age, his songs retained the imagery of the folk element.

The songs of Purandaradāsā are often sung, taught and revered in a different regions. This study has sought to explore the interlinkings and continuities of the Bhakti tradition by analyzing the phrases, ideas, images and melodies echoed again and again in the lyrics of the Bhakti poet Purandaradāsā whose songs carried the 500 years old tradition of Vijayanagara empire to the present. Bhakti forms a theological undercurrent of India’s religious history and we have explored that theme through the songs of one creative composer.

In the poems of Purandaradāsā sangīta and bhakti combined to show a royal road to vision and self realization. In South India there are many schools of Bhaki. The sampradāyas such as the Nayanmars, the Alvars, the Haridasas and the Vārkari tradition represent different facets of Bhakti. In all these schools, intense devotion to a personal God or Ishtadēvatha is said to have led the bhaktas to a vision. The life of Purandaradāsā offers an example for this.

The life of many bhaktas is of a quest for vision of and that of Purandaradāsā is an example. Through his songs, he sought for a vision of Vishnu in the form of Viṭṭhala, his Ishtadēvatha. One’s favourite personalized form of God can inspire deep devotion. It is this vision of god that is often a hallmark of the Bhakta. Such visionary experiences reflected in their poems shed light on varied aspects of their identities and reveal how and why they are remembered by later generations. The historical context of Purandaradāsā as shown in this thesis is resolutely set in the Vijayanagara period.
Purandaradāsā used the Desi style (folk) to spread the marga (classical) tradition among the ordinary folk. We have argued that popular memory/ folk memory has always been a source for renewing history in that the songs circulated in an oral medium for long periods of time and were not written down until the nineteenth century. The most important development of the Vijayanagara period was the crucial divide in the intellectual history of the time when the Sanskrit mahākāvyas written in the alankara fashion co existed with the refreshing vibrant bhakti laden poems, the sort composed by Purandaradasa. The elite group identified itself with the state’s projects of legitimization, where as the other tried to attach its sectarian projects to the state and the court. The Bhakti poets of the Madhva sect are a classic example for this division in that they represented the dāśā tradition. Between the two groups there was hardly any creative exchange. Bhakti poets like Kanakadasa and Purandaradāsā did not share the Brahmin intelligentia’s enthusiastic endorsement of the state or king. Moreover these poets avoided the imperial literary forms and instead made use of the desi forms for their literary activities. In the desi or folk elements in the songs of Purandaradāsā are found in abundance an unconstrained perspective of the common people. His songs in general expressed the social and cultural identity of a community that Purandaradāsā represented.

In this study Purandaradāsā is represented more as a historical figure, whose poems shed light on the social, cultural and historical mileu in which the poet lived. The history, culture and tradition of Vijayanagara have been carried from generation to generation through the poems of Purandaradāsā who was the representation of a popular tradition. The songs left by Purandaradāsā in the context of mystic lyrics in Karnataka, provide a means to grasp the Haridasa religious way of life in a comprehensive manner. Haridasa tradition was deeply rooted
in Madhvacharya’s philosophy of Dvaita which was becoming popular during the heyday of the Vijayanagara Empire in the 16th century particularly through the efforts of the saints like Purandaradāsā. The popularity of Dvaita can be linked to the patronage extended to Vaishnavism during the Vijayanagara period.

Song is a metaphor or a paradigm for this study. In this study we have examined how songs can be used as a source to reconstruct history. Music as William Jackson says has a special way of reflecting some of the moods and the personality of a culture. Historically, there has been a close tie between music and religion and to the Bhakti poets of later period, music has been a primary vehicle for religious expression and the Bhakti poets like Purandaradāsā have been the carriers of a religious vision which connected the realm of god to the world of men. Music was the vehicle through which the experience of Bhakti was translated to the people at large. Simple rāga nd tāla animated this music making it popular among the common folk from whom the Bhakti tradition derived its support.

Purandaradāsas was, reaching out, taking in, walking, communicating, making his way through many lives in the Vijayanagara empire by singing songs about Viṭṭōba. The most important aspect of his songs was the power of god Hari and his supremacy which was an important feature of Dvaita. By singing of Hari and his māhātmya, Purandaradāsā brought the message of Dvaita to the common mass. It is the attitude of sharing that makes bhakti the component of devotion through music. Purandaradāsā in turn has his own self similarities with the previous bhaktas and the folk elements. His life and lyrics shared a part of larger wholes – connected to the continuous sequence of the lives and works of other singer saints, South Indian
village customs and other religious traditions. It is this spirit of sharing that is reinforced in Purandaradāsā.

Purandaradāsā had a spiritual voice with a strong social content. Like his predecessors in the Bhakti sampradāya, Purandaradāsā too infused spiritual values in his songs, and hence spread such values in the society. Purandaradāsā who sang to express his Bhakti feelings borrowed from the life and materials of his own times. His songs reflected the society in which he lived. The tradition of bhakti music which developed in the heydays of Vijayanagara was a revitalizing force in which the saints found in their own lives a platform for creative love. His songs expressed the feelings of longing and pleading, praising and rejoicing, complaining and criticizing and the genre of songs which has left gives a glimpse to the Haridāsā tradition which was reduced to writing only in the nineteenth century.

In the chapter entitled Bhakti cult in South India we have shown the lines of historical and intellectual continuity that stretch from the passionate devotion infused poems of the Nāyanmārs and alvārs in the seventh and eighth centuries to the unfolding of the Vārkari tradition under Jñānēsvār in the thirteenth century. We have argued that the intellectual milieu in which Purandaradāsā lived can not be deconstructed from the Bhakti tradition and movement which started in the Pallava period. The institutionalization of Bhakti began during the Chōlā period and acquired a degree of finality during the Vijayanagara period when Mathas came to be established and recognized as alternate centers of devotion and patronage. Several mathas like that of Sringeri (Sankara), Udipi(Madhva), Melukote and Ahobilam(Ramanja), Srisailam (Virasaiva) came into prominence and these were channels of spreading religious propaganda in the empire.
In this chapter we have also investigated the importance of tīrthayātra or pilgrimage as a strategy for the expression of Bhakti. Purandaradāsā in his compositions conjured a landscape of godliness in which the local deities residing in the temples was invested with the identity of Viṭhōbā. Thus the pilgrimage served as a metaphor for expressing devotion to his ishtadēvatha. We have on the basis of Sheldon Pollock’s arguments discussed that the Bhakti tradition could be located in the transition to a vernacular literary culture. We have also shown the growing influences of Madhva philosophy in Vijayanagara, a context that set the stage for the popularization of Viṭhōba cult. In order to explore the historical aspects of saintliness and its social reception we have drawn parallels with the medieval European cult of saints on the basis of the study of Peter Brown.

Songs of Purandaradāsā had diverse social implications. Purandaradāsā was very much aware of the happenings of his times and his spiritual wanderings helped him to come into contact with different sections of the society. His songs are in a simple, lucid style which all people could sing, which shows the down to earth flavor of his compositions. He was also a part of the caste ridden society of the Vijayangara times. Tradition says that Purandaradāsā born the son of a diamond merchant who was later initiated in to the Madhva order. But Purandaradāsā never took sides with the Brahmin intelligentsia of his times; at the same time he took sides with the common mass. His reference to ragi (a cereal common among the peasants), holeyas (agricultural laborers), Nayakas (the feudal chieftains), merchants, trade and commerce-which have been discussed in the previous chapters gives a clear picture about the social context in which the songs were composed.
In chapter III, we have examined the life of Purandaradāsā in the context of the dāsā tradition. Lives of Indian saints are notoriously difficult to reconstruct due to the paucity of historical and biographical details. We have culled out biographical information from traditional accounts and have situated the life of Purandaradāsā in the larger historical context of the Vijayanagara empire and the dasa tradition stemmed of Madhva’s concept of Bhakti. In the creation of saintliness, across tradition, we have the moment of epiphany when an ordinary mortal is touched by spiritual awareness. In the case of Purandaradāsā too notice the epiphanic moment he visited the Viṭṭhōba temple at Pandhārpur. While we do not accept the historicity of this event, we notice that saintliness has paradigm in which there is a moment of change. In this chapter we have also examined the relationship between Vyāsatīrtha, the Madhva philosophy and Purandaradāsā.

The chapter has studied Purandaradāsā in the context of the Haridāsā tradition and we have shown that the Sūlādis composed by Purandaradāsā were……in the Haridāsā tradition which acted as the basis for his poetic imagination. We have examined the contours of the dāsā tradition and have argued that the social and economic inequalities prevailing in Vijayanagara are reflected in Purandaradāsā’s compositions. This chapter also situates the songs of Purandaradāsā in the context of the agrarian structure and we show that his songs in a manner subverted the prevailing social order by ridiculing the nāyakas.

As noted in this chapter on the Dasa tradition, one of the important features of Purandaradāsā songs is that they are the vehicles for the spread of Madhvacharya’s philosophy. In Madhva’s Dvaita system devotion meant the endless flowing of love for god (Hari). Chanting the sacred name of Vishnu or Hari itself is sufficient for attaining salvation in the
kaliyuga. Repeating the holy name of Vishnu or Nāmajapa was a part of the Sampradaya to which Purandaradāśā belonged. There are many songs of Purandaradāśā which extol praise by means, of holy name. Purandaradāśā sang on his Vaishnava Bhakti teachings and visions to the Kannada speaking world of the Vijayanagara Empire. Purandaradāśā glorifies in his songs the name of Vishnu, comparing him to a set of gems possessing great value. In another song, Purandaradāśā extols the sweetness of the name of Hari by comparing it to sugar candy (Kallusakkare). In some songs Purandaradāśā criticizes the surrounding culture. He critiques false piety, reminding devotees that the true religious life is self-transcendence, not self assertion for personal gain. Purandaradāśā communicated all these teachings through his Kirtans. Songs on Vishnu’s name in Purandaradāśā repertoire still sound natural and graceful to Kannada speakers today more than four centuries later.

Chapter IV brings out an important aspect of his songs viz. the aspect of Sacred geography. We attempt an examination of the enduring relationship between the landscape of the empire as constituted in space and the spiritualized universe which is set out in the songs of Purandaradāśā. The songs of Purandaradāśā in order to glean the relationship between the conceptual mappings of a location within the territorial limits of the Vijayanagara Empire. Such soft materials which include songs, fragments of popular memory, legends, myths and oral traditions are interrogated in order to understand the relationship between the poet and the political empire.

Landscapes are important because they are the product of the most enduring sets of linkages: relationship between the physical environment and the society. Because of their time
depth landscape involve interactions between the present and the past and give a sense of identity at individual, local and national scales as Ian Whyte puts it in his book “Landscape and History Since 1500). He says landscapes constitute a form of memory in which is stored the history of successive periods of human activity on the surface of the earth. “They are palimpsests that hark back to the earlier engagements by different societies, emphasizing change both ancient and recent” (Ian Whyte, 2002).

Purandaradāsā was composing not only a group of poems but creating a text too in the form of a sacred landscape. Social structures, cultural traditions, economic activities and political patterns have played crucial roles in the shaping of Vijayanagara landscape. Purandaradāsā in his songs identified the political, cultural, social and mythological landscape of Vijayanagara. Purandaradāsā in his songs identified god Vishnu as belonging to a place. Purandaradāsā did not sing about any of the territories that Vijayanagara lost. He sang about the places within the nook and corner of the empire stretching from Pandharpur in the North to Srirangam in the lower Kaveri and beyond. Through his songs, Purandaradāsā was able to unify the isolated Vishnu temples on the physical map of Vijayanagara. Songs of Purandaradāsā in a sense constitute an important source for mapping the sacrality of Vijayanagara Empire.

The songs also help to construct the idea of a saintly community. The pilgrimage undertaken by the Bhakti poets, mentioned in the hagiographical texts added to the sense of a ‘communitas’, as Champaklakshmi understands it. During the Vijayanagara times pilgrimage attained great importance as a network for establishing relationships in which royal patronage and visits had a special significance from the politico economic point of view. Purandaradāsā, in his peregrinations is said to have met his early contemporary Annamacharya and Kanakadasa at Tirupati and Hampi respectively. The places or temples which Purandaradāsā sang about were
constantly bringing up the image of the localized, yet undeniably universal Vishnu. This religious experience was made accessible to devotees across space and time with remarkable vividness and immediacy, through the songs of Purandaradāśā. Purandaradāśa’s spiritual journey represented a trans-regional pilgrimage establishing a network, uniting the people of various cultural, linguistic and historical zones. The idea of a mythical landscape of Vijayanagara has provided a base for its imperial ideology.

The dāśā songsters like Purandaradāśa of sixteenth century popularized the Viṅhala cult which forms the subject matter of chapter V. The cult centered around Vishnu in the form of Vithala. It had its origins at Pandharpur in Maharashtra and was popularized by the Marāṭhi saints through their songs called Abhangs. There are similarities with the tradition of the Vārkaris of Maharashtra and that of Purandaradāśa. In both Vārkari and Haridāśa Panth, worship of Viṅhala was common. Another thread which connected both the tradition was the concept of pilgrimage. There was a network of pilgrimage centres in the Deccan region where the Maharashtra saints travelled singing songs on Viṅhoba of Pandharpur. Purandaradāśa was also in a sense popularizing this tradition in the Vijayanagara Empire, through his songs on Vishnu whom he identified as Viṅhala, his ishtadevatha. The word Viṅhoba was employed in the Marathi region while in Karnataka region the deity was referred to as Viṅhala. An attempt has been made in this study to examine the spread of this cult from the Deccan region to Karnataka and Tamil region during the Vijayanagara times in the sixteenth century. There are many inscriptions referring to this cult pertaining to Yādavas, Rāshtrakūtas, Hoysālas and the Chālukyas. But the number of inscriptions increase during the period of Vijayanagara kings. The patronage extended to this cult was an aspect of the Vijayanagara ideology of political
legitimization. This cult had a pastoral origin which shows that Vithoba was a folk deity worshipped by the pastoral communities of Deccan called the Danghars. They were well known for their martial qualities. First epigraphical reference to vithoba as a god who resides in the temple at Pandharpur appears in the Yadava inscription dated 1237 A.D which shows that they patronized the folk deity, inorder to consolidate the territories which they conquered.

Inscriptions give us several different versions of Viṭhala and by studying the distribution of the different names by which the deity is referred in different regions of Peninsular India, the process by which the forest or tribal deity is referred to as Biṭṭappa or Biṭṭeya got transformed into the Viṭhalesa, the god who appears for the first time in the inscription of the early thirteenth century. The slow and gradual process by which Biṭṭeya got transformed into Viṭhalesa and subsequently into Viṭhala or Viṭhōba underscores an important social and economic transformation in the region. The gradual absorption of nomadic and pastoral population of Deccan into the state society of Rashtrakutas and the Hoysalas made possible the integration of the tribal gods and deities into the expanding framework of Puranic Hinduism. From the Vijayanagara onwards the inscriptive references to Viṭhala increases and Deleury has argued that the decrease in the term Beṭṭa is indicative of the stability of the cult. During the Vijayanagara period important generals and ministers are found bearing the name Viṭhala which suggests that the cult became popular with the elite and it also suggests that forest dwellers were being incorporated into Vijayanagara state system.

In the chapter entitled ‘Purandaradāsā and the Viṭhala Cult’ we have traversed a wide historical territory. A question that has been raised frequently in the context of Vijayanagara imperial self image is related to the identity of the city as a sacred centre. We have shown that the imperial
ideology of Vijayanagara incorporated diverse cults and rituals as the empire integrated tribal and forest population. The transfer of the image of Viṭṭala from Pandharpur to Viṭṭala swāmi temple at Hampi, the royal capital was aimed at making Vijayanagara a city with a halo of religious mystique, and the presence of Purandaradasa at Hampi certainly helped to popularize the mystique of Vijayanagara and the Viṭṭala cult through out the empire.

The rulers of Vijayanagara, particularly Krishnadēvarāya were believers in the transfer of religious relics and icons. Krishnadēvarāya certainly transferred the image of Bālakrishna from Udayagiri to Krishna Swāmi temple at Hampi in A.D 1517 after defeating the Gajapathis of Orissa. In 1520-21, Krishnadēvarāya led a campaign against Ismail Adil Shah, Sultan of Bijapur. For a brief moment Pandharpur came under Vijayanagara control and it is possible that Krishnadēvarāya appropriated the image and relocated it in Hampi. This historical fact is corroborated by the Tīrthaprabandha composed by Vadirāja Tīrtha.

During the Vijayanagara period the display of military strength was an obvious expression of royal force and might. At the capital there were usurpations, invasions and the rulers kept a formidable centre of infantry, cavalry, elephants, artillery and a palace guard. The structures related to this military force, fortifications, defensive gateways, stores, treasuries were also indicators of royal might. The Vijayanagara rulers strengthened their military powers by incorporating the pastoral communities into it. The help of pastoral communities like Danghars and Kuruwas were sought by the rulers for defending external aggression. Moreover the Yadavas who claimed descent from the Yadu clan with which Krishna, the shepherd god is associated, began to give more importance to the Vaishnava traits of God Vithala. If we look at this aspect, the arguments in favour of the pastoral orgins of the cult and its patronization by Vijayanagara
rulers get strengthened, since history of Vijayanagara says that the peasant communities later claimed the position of powerful Nayakas or feudal chieftains who also served military purposes in times of emergency.

Extending patronage to the local cults and religious networks had the potential to integrate the polity and society and this technique was adopted by the Vijayangara rulers and the case of Vithala is one example. This study has also looked at how the songs of saints like Purandaradāśa acted as a medium to popularize this cult. Inscriptions pertaining to Vijayanagara, particularly at Srirangam and Tirupati have been made use of in my study to bring out the popularity of this cult in South India.

A temple for Vithala already existed at Vijayanagara in the early 15th century as the epigraphical records say. But during the reign of Krishnadevaraya, either a new temple was built or it was considerably renovated by adding many new features to the old temple. The architectural splendor of the magnificent temple of Vithala at Hampi attests to the devotion of Vijayanagara kings to god Vithala who was also the god of Pandharpur. The temple was generously endowed with munificent gifts for the upkeep of various ceremonies and rituals. Varkari tradition in the 16th century attained new spiritual heights in the Vijayanagara period, thanks to devotees like Purandaradāśa. The two traditions of Varkari and Haridasas existed simultaneously at different regions with Vithala as the central deity of worship.

Chapter VI analysed the imperial ideology of Vijayanagara from two distinct perspectives. At one level we examined the local myths and legends pertaining to the landscape around Vijayanagara. We have shown that Vijayanagara used the myth of Pampākshētra and the imagined associations with Kishkinda in order to create a space of sacrality. Further we have looked at the use of monumental architecture as a language for expressing imperial ideology.
Following the model of Burton Stein we too looked at the Mahānavami festival as a dynamic component of the imperial ideology. Finally we used the songs and compositions of Purandaradāsā in order to unravel the conflicting elements in Bhakti tradition and the reflection of Vijayanagara synthesis of folk and classical elements in his compositions.