INTRODUCTION

Vijayanagara Empire occupies a prominent place in the study of medieval Indian history. The formation of the Vijayanagara Empire took place in the mid fourteenth century, at a time when there was no single predominant power or competitive empire or states to lay claim to the territorial or imperial power in South India. From the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries the Vijayanagara Empire spanned a vast area and incorporated diverse ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, and political groups. The history of Vijayanagara has always been a fascinating subject to the historians since 1900.

Historians have analyzed Vijayanagara history using various approaches such as the Orientalist approach, the Regionalist approach, the Nationalist approach, the Segmentary Statehood approach and the most recent being the Material Culture approach. The recent approach towards the study of Vijayanagara is the one using an interdisciplinary method of correlating the archaeological remains or data with the reconstruction of the material culture of the period. The ruins of the city of Hampi afford a wealth of data to the historians who look at Vijayanagara from an interdisciplinary perspective comprising of the multifaceted aspects of the empire such as art, history, religion, society, economy, archaeology, anthropology and so on in

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1 Anila Verghese in her article on the historiography of Vijayanagara discusses on various approaches towards the study of Vijayanagara history starting from Robert Sewell in 1900 till the recent researches undertaken by scholars like John M Fritz, George Mitchell, Pierre Filliozat, Vasundhara Filliozat, Kathleen Morrison and others. She emphasizes on the interdisciplinary nature of the study of Vijayanagara.
understanding the questions concerning the empire. Scholars like George Mitchell\(^2\), John Fritz\(^3\), Vasundhara Filliozat\(^4\), Kathleen Morrison\(^5\), Carla Sinopoli\(^6\) and Anila Verghese\(^7\) have raised questions which are not discussed in the written sources such as the construction of ritual and cultural space and the kinds of activities that took place in these spatial zones such as the legitimationization of power, the elaboration of an imperial ideology, the articulation of beliefs practices, rituals and expression of art, architecture, craft production and courtly styles.

My study entitled ‘The Songs of Purandaradāsā in the Social, Historical and Religious Context of Vijayanagara Empire’ is an attempt to look at how songs can be used as a source to reconstruct history. Purandaradāsā was a bhakti poet of the sixteenth century Vijayanagara Empire who lived at a time when the Empire was at the zenith of its political power. His songs composed in simple, colloquial idiom are popular over the vast regions stretching from the Marathi speaking regions of the Deccan to the Lower Kāvēri in the Tamil country. The poets of medieval India gave voice to devotional love as Jacques Derrida says, ‘when one does something

\(^4\) Vasundhara Filliozat and Pierre Filliozat, Vithala Temple at Hampi
poetic, one makes for sacredness’.\textsuperscript{8} The singer saints have always used music as a vehicle and metaphor for their way of life. This study examines the life and songs of the \textit{dāsā} songster Purandaradāsā of the Vijayanagara Empire. Music and the lyrics entwined with it, as well as the life of Purandaradāsā giving voice to it, offer us ways to explore the social, economic, political and cultural history of Vijayanagara Empire in the sixteenth century.

\textbf{Objectives of the study}

The objectives of the study are:-

a. To see bhakṭi poetry hand in hand with its socio historical contexts, as a continuous poetic tradition

b. To look at how songs can be used as a source material to reconstruct history

c. To discuss the role played by Purandaradāsā in integrating the people of different cultural, historical and linguistic zones of Vijayanagara Empire through his medium of songs.

d. To find out how a sacral version of Vijayanagara was created by linking the sacred centres of Peninsular India on the physical map of Vijayanagara Empire.

e. To trace the Vijayanagara imperial ideology as reflected in the songs of Purandaradāsā.

\textsuperscript{8} William Jackson, \textit{Vijayanagara Visions: Religious Experience and Cultural Creativity in a South Indian Empire}, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007, p.23
**Historiography**

Purandaradāsā indigenized the bhakṭi movement by rendering the essence of the Vedas and Upanishads into Kannada, by making it intelligible to the common mass. He was in fact helping the common people of to participate in the spiritual life of Vijayanagara. Through the medium of songs, Purandaradāsā was integrating the people of different cultural, linguistic and historical zones of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Vijayanagara figures prominently in the new research on medieval South India. Important contributions have been made by scholars on the cultural history of Vijayanagara and serve as relevant source material for my study. Some important authors whom I would like to mention are William Jackson, Sheldon Pollock, Sanjay Subramaniam, Champakalakshmi and Anila Verghese.

William Jackson who is considered as the historian of religion has brought out fascinating works on the saint singers of Vijayanagara Empire. In his book *The Songs of Three Great South Indian Saints* Jackson presents three saint poets of Vijayanagara who were contemporaries- Annamacharya, Kanakadasa and Purandaradāsā. He has analysed the songs of those poets through select translations, capturing the essence of bhakṭi as a movement that belonged to the people and which spoke the language of the common people. In his work *Vijayanagara Visions* Jackson explores new ideas about religious imagination in the Vijayanagara Empire. He reflects on the works of
saints like Vidyaranya, Vemana, Potana, Kanakadasa and Purandaradāsā, highlighting their contributions. His book *Vijayanagara Voices* offers a unique insight into a rich and influential period in Indian History— the Vijayanagara period. In this work, he has brought out the tradition of bhakti in Vijayanagara by highlighting the role played by the saints like Kanakadasa, Annamayya and Purandaradāsā in disseminating the message of bhakti to the common mass. Though William Jackson’s research deals with the philosophical and technical aspects of the songs of three composers, he takes into consideration the historical and political context in which the songs are embedded. My approach is essentially to historicize the songs of Purandaradāsā by locating them in the historical milieu in which the poet lived and worked.

*Literary cultures in history – Reconstructions from South Asia* edited by Sheldon Pollock is a collection of articles by an international team of renowned scholars on the rich literary traditions of South Asia. This work has helped to a large extend in understanding the literary traditions of Kannada and Telugu, two languages patronized by the Vijayanagara rulers. It also sheds light on the literature of the Haridasa tradition to which Purandaradāsā belonged. His book *The Language of Gods in the World of Men* is a study on the influence of vernacular languages in late medieval India when local speech forms challenged and eventually replaced Sanskrit in both the literary and political arenas. It is a work which helps us to allocate Purandaradāsā as
a product of interaction between the vernacular and cosmopolitan cultural order. In this work of impressive scholarship, Sheldon Pollock explores the remarkable rise and fall of Sanskrit, India's ancient language, as a vehicle of poetry and polity. He traces the two great moments of its transformation: the first around the beginning of the Common Era, when Sanskrit, long a sacred language, was reinvented as a code for literary and political expression. The second moment occurred around the beginning of the second millennium, when local speech forms challenged and eventually replaced Sanskrit in both the literary and political arenas. Depicting striking parallels, chronologically as well as structurally, with the rise of Latin literature and the Roman empire, and with the new vernacular literatures and nation-states of late-medieval Europe, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* asks whether these very different histories challenge current theories of culture and power and suggest new possibilities for research.

The dialectic between the “Cosmopolitan” and the “Vernacular” was a fact of life during the Vijayanagara period in which we find the emperors—Rayas—issuing their inscriptions in at least three languages—Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada. Sheldon Pollock has argued that this epigraphical practice “offers striking confirmation of the political acknowledgement that vernacular language had become a basic condition of practical rule”\(^9\). The trend toward vernacularisation was indeed exploited by saints such as Purandaradāsā who composed his *Devaranama* in Kannada and circulated

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them through out the political space of the Vijayanagara Empire, there by imparting sacrality to the political landscape. Thus a cultural conjuncture of medieval South India had wider intellectual and political ramification.

My study has an interdisciplinary nature, looking at all aspects of the Vijayanagara Empire as reflected in the songs of Purandaradāsā. An attempt has been made to understand the economic conditions of Vijayanagara during the life time of Purandaradāsā, as is evident from his songs. He talks about the business and commerce in the empire that shows that Vijayanagara had a very busy and productive merchant class. For understanding the relationship between the long distance trade and economic and political structure of South India in the 16th century Vijayanagara, Sanjay Subrahmaniam’s work *The Political Economy of Commerce in Southern India 1500-1650* is of great relevance. It discusses in detail about the commercial expansion of the empire in the 16th and 17th centuries. Another work related to this field is *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance* by John Pau Rubies’ that gives an idea of medieval South India through the European eyes.

The songs of Purandaradāsā contains references to coined money, business practices and even speak of profit and loss accruing from trade and commerce. The work of Sanjay Subramaniam suggests that with the advent of the Portuguese maritime empire, there was a dramatic shift towards commodity production particularly in textiles and craft production. The economic life of the empire as is evident from numerous inscriptions referring to the gift of coined money by the kings and their officers to
temples was founded on monetized coin based economy and we have references to monetary transactions in the songs of Purandaradāsā.

The work of Jean Pau Rubies’ sheds light on the categories of thought and culture which were used by European writers and travelers who visited South India during the sixteenth century. While caste as a category of social analysis had not become prominent in the writings of sixteenth century European travelers they did dwell upon social hierarchy and its preserved spiritual foundations. In the case of Purandaradāsā we learn that he did not regard caste as a barrier for salvation though he too recognized deep divisions and cleavages in medieval society.

Regarding the religious traditions at Vijayanagara, Anila Verghese and Champakalakshmi have contributed through their works Religious Traditions at Vijayanagara as revealed through the Inscriptions and Religion, Tradition and Ideology- Pre Colonial South India respectively. Anila Verghese in her book looks at some of the important religious cults in Vijayanagara, like the Pampa Cult, the Rama cult, the Vithala cult and other local Vaishnava cults like those of Tiruvengalanatha, Ranganatha and Krishna using copious inscriptions pertaining to the period. Champakalakshmi in her book, addresses the issues like religion and its social base, the development of religious communities, religion as an ideology for state legitimization, temple as an institutional base for the bhakṭi movement, the transformation of bhakṭi into a personalized experience of godhead and divinity when songs in praise of the ishtadēvatā were
composed and circulated in the vast and complex region of the Deccan and Peninsular India.

To study the origins of the cult of Vithala, the work of the Jesuit Father G.A Deleury entitled *The Cult of Vithoba* is of great significance. He provides an excellent history of the Varkari tradition and the location of the Vithala cult in the dynamic literary canon of the Marathi saints. By singing in praise of his ishtadevata- Vithala of Pandharpur, Purandaradāśā was in a way linking the different cultural, linguistic and historical zones of the Vijayanagara Empire. Dr G.A Deleury draws attention to the tradition of pilgrimage with in the Varkari sampradaya. Purandaradāśā too sang songs relating to Vithala and located the cult of Vithala in different locales spread all over the Deccan and Peninsular India, thereby unifying a sacred geography centred around Pandharpur with the political power of the Vijayanagara Empire. It is not argued that Purandaradāśā consciously set about to sacralize the Vijayanagara Empire but by making the pilgrimage to different Vithala shrines located in the empire, Purandaradāśā achieved just this end at least in public memory.

Another important work which helped me to study the social and cultural context of Vithoba cult is Christian Novetzke’s *History, bhakti and Public Memory*. In this work, Novetzke analyses the life and poems of Nāmdēv, a Marathi saint who belonged to the Varkari Tradition which shared many characteristics of the Dasa tradition of Karnataka. Nāmdēv is a central
figure in the cultural history of India, especially within the field of bhaṅkṛti, a
devotional practice that has created a popular memory around the figure of
Nāmadēv for over eight centuries. Born in the Marathi-speaking region of the
Deccan in the late thirteenth century, Nāmadēv is remembered as a simple,
low-caste Hindu tailor whose performances of devotional songs spread his
fame widely. He is central to many religious traditions within Hinduism, as
well as to Sikhism, and he is a key early literary figure in Mahārāshtra,
northern India, and the Punjab. In the modern period, Nāmadēv appears
throughout the public spheres of Marathi and Hindi and in India at large,
where his identity fluctuates between regional associations and a quiet, pan-
Indian, nationalist-secularist profile that champions the poor, oppressed,
marginalized, and low caste. Christian Lee Novetzke considers the way social
memory centres around the figure of Nāmadēv from the sixteenth century to
the present, examining the practices that situate Nāmadēv’s memory in
multiple historical publics. Focusing primarily on Mahārāshtra and drawing
on ethnographies of devotional performance, archival materials, scholarly
historiography, and popular media, especially film, Novetzke vividly
illustrates how religious communities in India preserve their pasts and, in
turn, create their own historical narratives.

As this study is based on the songs of Purandaradāsā, many studies
based on the poems of the medieval saints have been consulted. One
significant work is Norman J Cutler’s *Songs of Experience: Poetics of Tamil
Devotion. The poems brought together in this work, as the very title of the book implies, are the songs of experience. The authors of these poems are regarded as saints and the experience embodied in these poems is no less than the experience of God. bhakti as it is known in Hindu tradition is the direct personal experience of God and the thirst for it. Norman Cutler in his work characterizes the devotees’ relationship to God as one that of Master-Servant, friend-friend, child-parent and most importantly beloved lover. Cutler emphasizes on the significance of bhakti in the Tamil context, as it is frequently expressed in the idiom of the relationship between the king and the subject. bhakti as movement began between the sixth and ninth centuries in the Tamil speaking part of Peninsular India and slowly spread to other regions of the sub continent. Cutler in his book analyses how bhakti took hold as a popular religious movement and served as a catalyst for the literary development of India’s vernacular languages.

Another work which sheds light to this aspect of my study is Indira V Peterson’s Poems to Siva. Indira Peterson eloquently renders into English a sizeable portion of the Tevaram hymns of the Saivite Nayanars, which provide vivid and moving portraits of the images, myths, rites, and adoration of Siva and which continue to be loved and sung by the millions of followers of the Tamil Saiva tradition. Her introduction and annotations illuminate the work’s literary, religious, and cultural contexts, making this anthology a rich source book for the study of the South Indian popular religion. Indira Peterson highlights the Tevaram as a seminal text in Tamil cultural history, a
synthesis of pan-Indian and Tamil civilization, as well as a distinctly Tamil expression of the love of song, sacred landscape, and ceremonial religion. Her discussion of this work draws on her pioneering research into the performance of the hymns and their relation to the art and ritual of the South Indian temple.

*Songs of the saints of India* is a text of similar kind by John Stratton Hawley who examines the poems of six North Indian Bhaktas. The six poets presented here—Ravidas, Kabīrdās, Nānāk, Sūrdās, Mīrābāi, and Tulsīdās—have contributed more to the religious vocabulary of Hinduism in north India today than any voices before or since. With a biographical and interpretive essay on each poet and a selection of representative verses in original translation, this book offers a complete introduction to a literature that transcends the boundaries we associate with religion and those of India as well. At a methodological level this book provides with a model of studying the poet in the overall cultural context.

Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulmen’s book *God on the Hill—Temple poems from Tirupati* is a collection of the devotional poems of Annamayya who lived in the fifteenth century which are perhaps the most accessible and universal achievement of classical Telugu literature. Annamayya an early contemporary of Purandaradāsā effectively created and popularized a new genre, the short *padam* song, which spread throughout the Telugu and Tamil regions and would become an important vehicle for the composition of Carnatic music. In this book, Velcheru Narayana Rao and
David Shulman offers translations of nearly 100 of Annamayya's poems. All of them are addressed to the god associated with the famous temple city of Tirupati -- Annamayya's home. This deity is sometimes referred to as "god on the hill" or "lord of the seven hills." The poems are composed in a simple and earthy language invented by Annamayya for this purpose and fall into two major categories, the erotic and the metaphysical. The erotic poems, usually in the female voice, sing of the intricacies of the god's love life. The metaphysical poems are sung in the poet's own voice and explore the relationship between the poet and his god. Though a small sample of Annamayya's surviving corpus, the selection in this volume suggests the scope of both genres. Rao and Shulman's elegant and lyrical modern translations of these beautiful and moving verses are wonderfully readable as poetry in their own right.

Sources for the study

This study is based on a good deal of primary and secondary sources. Songs of Purandaradāsā themselves constitute an important source which shed light on the milieu in which the poet lived and the impact he had on the Vijayanagara society. These songs are not just individual narratives, they encapsulate a very complex set of ideas, relationship between man and society, individual and political order and this mode of communication was used by the rulers to spread their political message to a wider public. Nearly 200 songs of Purandaradāsā have been used in this study and these were
chosen on the basis of two factors. One element in deciding the choice of songs pertained to the sacred centres or places visited by the poet during his peregrinations in the Vijayanagara Empire. Such a study combining the poetic elements found in the songs rendered by the poet composer with the political landscape of the Vijayangara Empire, enables us to understand the sacred geography of the intellectual and sectarian world of Purandaradāśā.

Another group of songs reflects the social, economic, cultural and political history of Vijayanagara as witnessed by Purandaradāśā. Since most of the poems were composed in Kannada, select translations of the poems have been used. The songs have been collected from the Directorate of Kannada and Culture in Bangalore. These were brought out in a collection of four volumes in connection with the 400th anniversary of Purandaradāśā in 1964. The Kannada Sahithya Parishad Academy in Bangalore compiled an authoritative volume on Haridasā Literature with critical annotations and was published by the Purandaradāśā Seva Mandala in Hospet in 1956. In 1959, in Hubli at Tulunadu, S.S Karan published 656 padas and 36 Suladis which are available in the repository of French Institute of Indology in Pondicherry.

As far as the inscriptive evidence is concerned the records directly referring to Purandaradāśā are few in number. In order to supplement my study with inscational evidence, I have used a large number of inscriptions which reflect the philosophy and world view of Purandaradāśā. In addition, inscriptions referring to Vithōbā have been analyzed in order to determine the
extent and social base of the worship of Vithōbā during the later medieval period corresponding to the life span of Purandaradāsā.

**Problem of the Study**

The historical authenticity of the songs of Purandaradāsā is a subject of considerable controversy because of the fact that the codification of the songs took place in a much later stage. So the textual fixity imparted to the songs of Purandaradāsā is of a late origin. The songs were orally transmitted to the posterity by the disciples of Purandardasa and initiatives to compile the songs were taken in the late 19th century. Hence it is certain that many additions and interpolations into the songs might have distorted their originality. In this sense, the historical authentification of the songs of Purandaradāsā may not be possible. But it can be said that the rhythmic structure of his songs is made very simple by incorporating the folk elements, public memory and the peasant memory. By doing so, Purandaradāsā was infact helping the people who had no access to the traditional texts, in understanding the philosophy of Madhvāchārya and the knowledge about the deity of Vithōbā, his *ishtadevatha*. 
Design of the thesis

The thesis has seven chapters including an introduction and a conclusion.

In the second chapter entitled “bhākṭi Cult in South India- A Historical Perspective” an attempt is made to analyze the concept of bhākṭi, that became a characteristic feature of the history of early medieval India. The changing religious milieu of the early medieval period is reflected in the concept of devotion or bhākṭi between the 6th and 9th centuries through the emotionally powerful hymns of the Alvars and Nayanars. As John Carman has pointed out the term bhākτi is used specifically to describe the human response to God and never to characterize God’s response to human beings.\(^{10}\) In actively encouraging participation, the poets represent bhākτi as a theology of embodiment. The poets encourage a diversity of activities, not limiting bhākτi to established modes of worship- instead making it the foundation of human life and activity in the world.\(^{11}\) The poems are personal, yet the poets encourage others to participate in their world view, similarly God is transcendent, yet he is locally concerned.

This chapter looks at how the concept of bhākτi was initially developed by the ālvārs in a systematic manner, and was subsequently carried on by the Nāyanmārs who took the message of bhākτi to the common mass in their own idiom, through the medium of Vernacular Tamil. Four important


\(^{11}\) Karen Pechillis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti*, p.6, para.1
themes of bhakṭi poetry- Personal relationship with the God, total surrender or Prapaṭṭi, the concept of Pilgrimage or sacred geography and the interweaving of folk elements are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Part two of this chapter discusses the transformation that took place in the religious scenario of the late medieval period, especially during the Vijayanagara period. During this period, bhakṭi was substantially transformed into the personalized experience of Godhead and divinity, when songs in praise of ishtadevatha were composed and circulated in the regions of the Deccan. The new kind of bhakṭi was institutionalized by a large network of temples and Maṭhās (sectarian institutions). The development of the canonical tradition of both saivism and Vaishnavism became a feature of this period, as a number of Saiva and Vaishna Maṭhās initiated the process of the organization of their respective canonical literature. The Vijayanagara phase also represents the collection redaction and interpretation of the Vachanās of Virasaivas leading to the systematization of the textual tradition. Likewise, a rich commentarial tradition developed for the Divya Prabandham and the Bhagavatha Purana got an important place in the Dvaita philosophy of Madhvā, who wrote a commentary on it. A pilgrimage network started with the hymnal literature and became more important from the fourteenth century, with Srīrangam as its centre and model to be followed by other temples. Mēlkote in Karnātaka and Ahōbilam in Andhra imitated

\[\text{\textsuperscript{12}}\text{R Champakalakshmi, Religion, Tradition and Ideology: Pre Colonial South India}\]
Srirangam and developed structures suitable to the regional variations in temple rituals and community organization. The Haridasas of the Madhva Sampradāya, whose songs of devotion to Viṭṭhalā form an important corpus belonging to the Vijayanagara period in which the cult was promoted through the construction of temples which included the magnificent temple of Vithalaswamy at Hampi, in the early sixteenth century. Vithala was a folk deity of Maharashtra, who was identified with Krishna, around whom a pastoral cult developed. The dasa saints like Purandaradāsā, Kanakadasa and their early contemporary Annamacharya were responsible for the spread of the Vaishnava bhakti amongst the pastoral communities including the Danghars\textsuperscript{13}, through their soul stirring songs on Vishnu. Thus, the rulers of Vijayanagara sought bhakti as a legitimating ideology, in trying to establish a supraregional peninsular state comprising the vast regions stretching from Pandharpur in the North to Srirangam in the lower Kaveri and beyond.

An attempt is made to introduce the biographical details of Purandaradāsā in the third chapter entitled “Purandaradāsā and the Dasa Tradition”. I have also analysed the impact he had on the contemporary society by looking at the select translations of his poems extolling the virtues of God Viṭṭhōbā (the form of Vishnu he worshipped). The society in which he lived and sang is interpreted not only on the basis of his songs but also with the help of inscriptive evidence.

\textsuperscript{13} For details on the pastoral community of the Danghars, see G.D Sontheimer, \textit{Essays on Religion, Literature and Law}.
Purandaradāsā is situated in the context of the Dasa tradition which is considered to be one of the turning points in the religious history of South India. There were two divisions in the Dasa tradition – Vyasakuta and the Dasakuta which followed the cosmopolitan and the vernacular or the marga and the desi cultural orders respectively. Purandaradāsā belonged to the latter tradition and by adopting the regional language of Kannada, Purandaradāsā was carrying certain values that were not accepted by the dominant Sanskrit literary tradition. By incorporating the folk structure that the Sanskrit literary culture was almost entirely devoid of, Purandaradāsā was taking the Marga tradition to the common mass in the Desi form. In my study I portray Purandaradāsā as a product of the interaction between the Vernacular and the Cosmopolitan cultural order. An attempt is made in this chapter to study the socio-economic milieu in which the dasa lived. In his songs are reflected, the society of Vijayanagara with its economic, cultural and political background. His songs discusses the themes like the caste divided society, Nayaka system, trade and commerce in Vijayanagara, conflicts with the external enemies, wars and a large number of other subjects. These are studied through the select translations of the songs of Purandaradāsā, who sang about Vijayanagara in the way in which he perceived it.

Another important aspect that I have focused in my study is the sacred landscape of the Vijayanagara Empire in the chapter “Sacred Geography in
the Songs of Purandaradāsā”. Here I have used the songs of Purandaradāsā inorder 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 inorder to understand the relationship between the poet and the political structure. The songs of Purandaradāsā are studied with a view to unpacking the concept of sacred territory which underpinned Vijayanagara concepts of Empire. Like all medieval empires Vijayanagara also believed in sacralizing the territory by creating myths, associating important landmarks with Puranic legends and folklore like the Pampa myth.

The landscape of Vijayanagara symbolizes central beliefs of the Puranic religion, evident in the monuments like temples and pilgrim journeys or Yathra within the empire. Pilgrimage, an act of journeying to a sacred spot associated with a cult or legend constitutes an important ritual of medieval religious experiences. The pilgrims’ path is marked spatially by temples which are located all over the pilgrim routes. Such journeys create an earthly template for realizing beliefs about the divine. Pilgrims as they move through the sacred space walking along sacred paths, visiting temples and bathing in the holy rivers- follow a process of ritual activity that again symbolizes religious beliefs. Although many pilgrims and visitors to Vijayanagara do not understand every symbol found in the landscape and the rituals, the layering
of interwoven and ritually reinforcing symbolic systems can create, especially for the true believer, a powerful expression of religious faith.\textsuperscript{14}

What makes the landscape of Vijayanagara sacred is the large network of temples and shrines that play a significant role in defining the local landscape. Religious monuments of Vijayanagara embody local and pastoral cults. These shrines demarcate physical territories according to social divisions.\textsuperscript{15} Through shrines and their associated rites and rituals Vijayanagara transforms the physical world into a ceremonial landscape. The transformation of the physical world is part of a ritual process involving the domestication of natural and spiritual forces. Shrines are sites of meditation where Vijayanagara repeats established meanings and generate new ones. Representations of Hindu faith in the built environment and pilgrim activities in Vijayanagara are explored through an analysis of sacred geography of the empire. Studies of pilgrimage and pilgrim behaviour occupy an important place in the geography of religion.

As a wandering singer Purandaradāsā traveled extensively through out the Vijayanagara Empire. He saw Vishnu as belonging to a place. He identified the deity of the temples he visited with Vithōbā, his favourite deity. Thus through his songs Purandaradāsā was able to unify the isolated Vishnu temples from the Deccan to the Lower Kaveri in the South, in the physical

\textsuperscript{14} Alexandra Mack., \textit{One landscape, Many Experiences: Different perspectives of Temple Districts of Vijayanagara}, Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory, Vol II, no.1, Recent Advances in the Archaeology of Place, Part 1, (March, 2004), pp.59-81

map of Vijayanagara. He was defining the cultural traditions in various places in Marathi, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil speaking regions. Through his travels he was able to integrate peoples of different cultural traditions and reinforce people’s identity with particular regions.

My study also focuses on another important aspect of the Vijayanagara religion to which Purandaradāsa was closely associated i.e. the cult of Vithōbā. This is discussed in the fifth chapter of my thesis – Purandaradāsa and the Vithala Cult. As an aspect of periodization of the medieval historiography of India, the proliferation of religious cults derived from Puranic traditions and its associated bhakti variants may be taken as a feature of medieval history particularly of Peninsular India. The wide network of cult centres around puranic and agamic temples played a major role in generating the political legitimacy for ruling dynasties who expressed their lordship in the language of devotion to a deity and the consequent status as the primary donor for maintaining ritual and worship in the temples. While during the chola period temples were the main beneficiaries of the royal largesse, during the Vijayanagara period other forms of political legitimation also took roots one of which was the sectarian cultic network constituted by the Madhva sampradaya. The medieval temple networks and cults played a vital role in integrating diverse elements of medieval society and polity into a state structure and therefore medieval statecraft especially under the Vijayanagara empire revolve around the use of such centres as resources for making the political structure visible in different geographical and social
locales. The cult of Vīṭhōbā was one such religious cult made popular in South India by the Vijayanagara kings, especially during the days of Krishnadevaraya. The songs of the Haridasa saints became a medium for popularizing this cult. Though there are inscriptions referring to Vithala during the reign of the Rashtrakutas, the Chalukyas, the Hoysalas, and the Yadavas the number of inscriptions seem to be increasing in the Vijayanagara period.

The image of Vīṭhōbā is worshipped in the temple at Pandharpur as an upavatara of Vishnu. The Yadavas of Devagiri was the first to patronize the cult of Vithala which originated as a pastoral cult among the Danghars a nomadic community of the Deccan. As the Vijayanagara rule expanded incorporating diverse ethnic and occupational groups, the Vithala cult incorporated the local pastoral deities by creating a homology between the local cult and the vernacular religions. Vithala was a pastoral deity worshipped by the shepherd communities of Danghars and Kurubas in the Deccan. The rulers of Vijayanagara incorporated these pastoral communities into the military structure of the empire inorder to defend external aggression. Thus the folk religious elements were also encouraged as a means to get support of strong pastoral groups who were known for their martial qualities. There are inscriptions referring to the spread of this cult in South India during the Vijayanagara rule particularly in Tirupati and Srirangam and these have been made use of in my study to a great extent, which will be discussed in detail in the chapters.
I have devoted a chapter for discussing the imperial ideology of Vijayanagara as reflected in the songs of Purandaradāsā. All empires in history need a justification for exercising power. In the case of Vijayanagara it makes certain claims to justify its imperial status. One is that they have freed South India from the invasion of Turks whom they call as Turushka. Secondly, that they have restored the Purvamaryadai or the ancient order i.e a language of restoration not of revolution. Thirdly on the political front they claim that they are Sthapanacharyas who restored many of the ancient cultures and re established ancient kingdoms like the Cheras, Cholas and the Pandyas. Thus they make a bundle of claims that justify their imperial power. If we look at the inscriptions of Vijayanagara the idea of restoration of an ancient culture is what manifested itself in their public acts. To do with this they invented a variety of rituals many of which did not have Vedic or Puranic sanction, an example of which is Mahanavami festival. Burton Stein’s idea is that whole Mahanavami ritual is a way of looking at how Goddess Durga has come to bless the Vijayanagara Empire. To claim its imperial status, the rulers linked the political geography of Vijayanagara with the mythical landscape of Kishkinda in Ramayana. It was about this landscape that Purandaradāsā sang in his songs. He refers to Hampi as Purapampa, with which the myth of Pampakshetra is associated. Yet another means of the legitimation of power by the Vijayanagara rulers is the incorporative ideology of the rulers which is also reflected in its architecture. Scenes from Ramayana were depicted on the temple walls that proclaimed its
imperial status. Vijayanagara existed in a complex network of competing empires and states that vied for territorial and political power across Peninsular India. These included the Islamic Bahmani Sultanates in the Deccan and the Hindu rulers of Orissa in the East. Though there were conflicts between Vijayanagara and these polities, it did not preclude other forms of interactions with both ideological and economic consequences.¹⁶ Vijayanagara’s interaction with the Islam is evident in the realm of architecture, courtly style, royal dress etc. A song of Purandaradāśā also testifies to the fact that Vijayanagara adopted many aspects of Islam towards their culture. In a song, he sings that god Purandara Vithala and Allah are the same.

Purandaradāśā sang about the image of Vithala in several temples like Tirupati, Kanchipuram, Srirangam, Ahobilam and Melukote. All these temples got considerable royal patronage during the vijayanagara period. Royal patronage coupled with the popularity generated by the songs of Purandaradāśā, served to strengthen the imperial ideology. Purandaradāśā does not speak of Vijayanagara as a great military power. Yet there are ample suggestions in the corpus of his songs to show that he imagined Vijayanagara Empire as the spiritual realm of Vithala. This elaboration and extension of the Vithala cult from the exclusive Marathi speaking territories of Western deccan into Peninsular India was achieved by saint singers like

Purandaradāsā who composed songs relating to the locales in which they identified their favoured deity (ishtadevatha). This fusion between the local cult with an imperial ideology served to sacralize the landscape of the Vijayanagara Empire. This would not have been possible but for the concept that this area was a political landscape governed by Vijayanagara that was rendered sacred by the act of ritual presentation and a powerful projection of temples as centres of royal power. Traveling saints and composers drew upon that resource in order to spread the imperial message of Vijayanagara. The temples which he chose were the temples to which Vijayanagara also extended their patronage. Poets like Purandaradāsā singing about the temples, gave the message of common spirituality that enabled the divide between the political and the non-political elements to be transcended. He did not sing about any territory that Vijayanagara lost or any territory that was outside Vijayanagara Empire. The songs by creating a web linking diverse cults and deities together in a way contributed to sacralizing the whole territory of Vijayanagara.

My study concludes with the findings that songs are relevant source materials for reconstructing the history of Vijayanagara. By studying his songs, it has been possible to understand the socio-economic and cultural milieu in which the poet lived. Through his songs, Purandaradāsā made it possible for the common folk to participate in the spiritual life of Vijayanagara. Through his religious wanderings, Purandaradāsā unified the isolated Vishnu temples on the physical map of Vijayanagara. A spiritualized
version of Vijayanagara is represented in his songs there by linking many sacred centres he visited, on an elaborate political landscape of Vijayanagara. The songs of poets like Purandaradāsā were used by the Vijayanagara rulers to sell its message to a wider public.

Purandaradāsā recorded in his lyrics and verses, his imagination of the Vijayanagara era. This study has attempted to explore the religious imagination of Purandaradāsā by examining the tradition of bhakṭi and cultural networks that spanned almost a century across time and space. A tradition is renewed by studying the songs of Purandaradāsā which were circulated in the nook and corner of the Vijayanagara Empire.