CHAPTER II

PURANDARADĀŚĀ AND THE DĀŚĀ TRADITION

Purandaradāśā who lived from 1485 to 1564 A.D is one of the best known and remembered composers who left a deep impression on the hearts and minds of people of South Peninsular India. Purandaradāśā was born at Purandaragād, a village near Hampi the regal capital of Vijayanagara Empire.¹ He travelled extensively through out the empire singing heartfelt songs on God Vishnu, which are still remembered by all sections of the society.

Purandaradāśā was a great devotee of god Vishnu though he wrote occasional songs to Siva and the Goddess Lakshmi. His life story reveals that he was dramatically called from his worldly life to a transformative intensity of devotion to Vishnu.² Vishnu is believed to be the divine maintainer of the universe, preserving it from harm. The mudra or ankīta he used in the concluding lines of his compositions indicated the form of Vishnu which inspired his devotion. He sang to Purandara Viṭhala – Vishnu standing on a brick, with hands akimbo, the form in which he is present in the famous Viṭhala temple at Pandharpur in Mahārāshtra.³ Purandaradāśā was a member of the Madhvā lineage of Vaishnava philosophy called Dvaita or dualism. Dvaita or Dualism is one of the leading schools of Hindu philosophy propounded by Madhvā in the 12th century. Its cardinal precepts are the supremacy of Srīhari and surrender to Him and service to Humanity as the sole means of Liberation. The philosophy of Madhvāchārya is pragmatic with relevance to everyday life. The basic feature of Madhvāchārya’s philosophy was the equivalence

² Ibid, p.5
between Brahman of the Vēdānta and the Ēkam Sat (the one Supreme real) of the Vēdas.⁴

Purandaradāsā has composed many songs bringing out the greatness of Madhvāchārya and his philosophy. Under the exegetical scholarship of Madhvāchārya reflected in the Gīṭā Bhāshyā Vishnu is extracted from a subordinate position in the Vedic pantheon and raised to the position of the true god. Sarvanāmavān mentioned in the Rig Vēdā is taken by Madhvāchārya as a synonym for Vishnu. By giving a Vedic sanction for the supremacy of Vishnu, Madhvāchārya made possible the spread of the philosophy of Dvaita. It was during the Vijayanagara period that Dvaita received royal patronage with prominent Madhva saints and gurus residing in the capital of Vijayanagara itself. The island in the Tungabhadra, ‘Navabrindāvan’ contains the sepulchers of nine prominent Madhva saints whose life and ministry coincided with the history of the Vijayanagara empire. The elements of bhakti which ties the philosophical strands of Madhva beliefs with the popular manifestation of religion found in Madhva’s svētāsvatāras in which he says that bhakti is the sole means of salvation.⁵

The biography of Purandaradāsā in all its historical authenticity is not available. Based on the popular beliefs, tradition and literary accounts an attempt is made to trace out the early life of Purandaradāsā. The Kamalāpura inscription of 1526A.D lends support to the period in which Purandaradāsā lived. The inscription records a gift of land and property to his three sons.⁶ This is the only inscription available as a piece of historic evidence to determine the period in which Purandaradāsā lived and worked. The inscription also gives the information that Purandaradāsā belonged to the Vasishta Gōthra. The name Purandaradāsā is beset with the same controversy.

⁵ Ibid., p.12
⁶ EC, Vol VI.,p.342
The tradition that the poet singer and composer was born in Purandaragada near Pune has been rejected by BNK Sharma who thinks that the fort and its associated habitation came into existence only after the life and times of the dāśā saint. The claim put forth by K Krishna Rao that Purandaradāsā hailed from ‘Kshēmapura’ in Shimoga district of Karnataka has also been rejected by BNK Sharma on the ground that the reference to Purandaragad or Amarāvati was a literary concept than a topographical fact. Thus the various places or sites attributed as birth places of Purandaradāsā are not backed with firm historical or epigraphical material. Sharma argues that it was a basic misconception to say that the Dasā’s name was derived from that of his birthplace.\(^7\) The place where Purandardāśā was born is mentioned in a song of his disciple Vijayadāśā “Purandaragada Janisi”.\(^8\) But the ambiguity remains as pointed out in this paragraph.

Purandaradāśā was born as the only son of Varadappa Nāyak, a diamond merchant. He was named Sṛṇivāsa after the God of the Seven hills, God Venkatēswarā of Tirupati. The Saluvas who were the rulers of the Chandragiri region in which Tirupati was situated became the rulers of Vijayanagara following the usurpation by Saluva Narasimha in A.D 1485. The popularity of Venkatesvara in the Vijayanagara region increased as a consequence of the Saluva reign. The Vijayanagara rulers by the beginning of sixteenth century had become ardent devotees of the God of Tirupati\(^9\) and it was not uncommon to find individuals who were named after this deity. Srinivasa received good education in accordance with family traditions and acquired proficiency in Kannada, Sanskrit, sacred lore and in music. When he was sixteen years old he

\(^7\) B.N.K Sharma, op.cit. p.599  
\(^8\) Ibid, p.599  
married Saraswaṭi, a god fearing girl. He lost his parents at his young age and he inherited his father’s business in precious stones and pawn brokering. In course of a short time he expanded it and amassed immense wealth, thereby earning the appellation ‘Navakōti Nārāyana’.¹⁰

**Purandaradāsā’s transformation in life.**

Purandaradāsā was not spiritual in the first half of his life and became a great devotee in the later half. Two incidents in life were responsible for his transformation into a faithful devotee of Vishnu, one about a dēvadāsi and a bracelet and another about his wife’s nose ring. Even though these stories cannot be taken into account due to the lack of authentic historical evidences, it is not altogether possible to neglect them since they are happily remembered by the villagers. The story of dēvadāsi and bracelet goes like this:-

Once Purandaradāsā felt immense thirst when he visited the Viṭṭhala temple at Pandharpur. He had to wait for a long time since he had no companions or disciples with him to get water. God came disguised as a fellow devotee and offered water to Purandaradāsā. However instead of feeling thankful, Purandaradāsā became angry because the water was not brought in time and so threw the pot at the fellow devotee who quickly disappeared. That night God assumed the form of Purandaradāsā and gave the bracelet from the Viṭṭhala image in the temple to a dēvadāsi. Next day the temple priest found that the bracelet was missing from the image and raised an alarm so that all villagers came to know about it. The dēvadāsi revealed that the bracelet was presented to her by Purandaradāsā. Temple officials caught hold of Purandaradāsā who was suspected of stealing the bracelet. They tied him to a pillar and interrogated him. Then

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the voice of God was heard saying that Purandaradāsā is innocent, and the other bracelet fell from the image as a sign. In one of his songs starting ‘Muyakke muyya’ Purandaradāsā narrated the whole story of devadasi and the bracelet.

“Tit for tat O Lord of the Universe
Lord who help devotees in ultimate victory
I thought he is just a small boy, so I asked him to get water
But this Krishna who stole butter brought water in a golden pot
I did not know what was up
I threw things at the boy, I even beat him up
O Lord, you gave a bracelet to the Devadasi
And made me responsible for that, you caused me to get beaten up
Now the accounts are settled”"\(^{11}\)

The other story revolves around a poor Brahmin trying to arrange the money needed for his son’s upanayana (thread ceremony). Purandaradāsā the miserly jeweler sent him away when the Brahmin asked him for help. The Brahmin then asked Purandaradāsā’s wife to help him, being compassionate and kind she gave her nose ring to the poor Brahmin. However when the Brahmin tried to sell the nose ring to Purandaradāsā, he recognized it and expressed his displeasure to his wife so much that she became depressed and decided to end her life. She put poison in a cup of milk and was about to drink when the nose ring miraculously fell into the cup. This incident changed the life of Purandaradāsā transforming him to become a dāsa, an inspired devotee, a singer of Lord Vishnu’s praise. Purandaradāsā lived at Pandharpur with his family for a long time. He never repented his action of giving away all his wealth to the needy and the poor. In

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\(^{11}\) Purandara Sahithya Darsana, Banglore, The Directorate of Kannada and Culture, 1964, Vol 1, no.53, p.169
fact he developed a sense of gratitude towards his wife and in that situation, he sang ‘Adadella Olite Ayithu’ that means:-

“Whatever has happened has happened for good and has become a fruitful means to the service of our Sridhara. I was feeling shy to bear the palanquin. May the like of this wife be thousand, she made me hold the staff of palanquin. I was feeling proud like a ruler and would not hold the beggar’s basket. She made me carry the beggar’s basket I was feeling shy like a king to wear the Tulsi garland on my neck. The lotus eyed Purandara Viṭhala caused me to put it on.”12

The two incidents mentioned above need not necessarily be believed as authentic biographical details. However there is an extensive hagiographical tradition both in Christianity and Bhakti which link a sudden gush of religious illumination with an epiphany which mark two distinct phases in the saints’ life. The pre conversion phase is in sharp contrast to the post conversion phase. The two incidents discussed above which are also found in the songs of Purandaradāsā are public expressions of a private moment of epiphany. These are incidents underlying transformative moments in the life of an individual. Though these incidents may find to be a construct of the oral traditions, they reflect the cultural universe of the times of Purandaradāsā. In medieval Indian texts the images are portrayed as those move their limbs, speak and also perform miracles. Images may act to settle disputes among their human devotees and in the words of 13Richard.H.Davis, they may engage in contests of miracles with one another to resolve their own disputes over status and authority. One can see that the central images are lords and owners of the temples they inhabit. As proprietors they carry out a host of administrative through functionaries who are themselves sometimes images. Medieval Indian images are even shown as rulers of kingdoms with human ministers under their command. For

12 Purandara Sahitya Darsana, Vol I, no.11, p.89
medieval Indians the power and efficacy of mages they created and worshipped was indeed great 
and even today these iconic deities retain much of their power.\textsuperscript{14} It is said that one day a call 
came to him in his dream that he should go to Hampi and seek spiritual guidance from Sri 
Vyāsarāya. Accordingly he went to Hampi and entered the Maṭhā of the great Guru. Vyāsaṭīrtha 
was pleased by the firmness of Purandaradāsā’s resolve to receive Vaishnava Dikṣha and gave 
him spiritual initiation. He taught him the necessary disciplines like dārsanās, Vedas, 
Upanishads, Mīmāṃsa, Vyākarana and the tenets of Dvaita Vedānta and also the importance of 
bhakti in the life of a Haridāsā. Vyāsarāya gave considerable impetus to the dāsākūta movement 
and the association of Purandaradāsā with Vyasarāyā helped the spread of the tradition in the 
Vijayanagara empire. BNK Sharma says “the political influence of Madhva school also rose to 
its highest level under Vyāsaṭīrtha. He enjoyed the closest affection and commanded the highest 
estee of the greatest Hindu Emperor of South India—the immortal Krishnadēvarāya”. While 
the purple prose of BNK Sharma may be set aside, the fact that Vyāsaṭīrtha had a major 
influence on the Vijayanagara polity can not be denied. Sṛṇivāsa Nāyaka became a true 
Haridāsā with the \textit{ankita}\textsuperscript{15} of Purandara Viṭhala, granted to him by his Guru Vyāsarāya. With a 
deep sense of gratitude he describes his first meeting with Vyāsarāya in one of his songs 
“Vyāsarāya Charana Kamala”…

\begin{quote}
\textit{The sight of Vyāsarāya’s lotus feet is the result of my good deeds of many births}
\textit{I have acquired the right to chant and praise the lord of Lakshmi}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, p.9
\textsuperscript{15} It is the phrase or set of words used by a Haridāsā usually at the end to sign off a composition. It is 
basically a literary signature or mudrika or pen name that identifies the composer. Each Haridāsā had her 
or his own \textit{ankita}. \textit{Ankita} was conferred by the Guru after being duly satisfied of the merits of the student 
aspiring to be a member of the Haridāsā line.
as the kindliness of the servants of blemishless Panduranga has been vouchsafed to me.”\(^{16}\)

This song makes it clear that Purandaradāśā was admitted to the order none other than Vyāsaśīrtha himself. Further it also elaborates that Vyāsaśīrtha himself was a devotee of God Viṭṭhala and a leader of the Madhva order. Purandaradāśā with his ankita (Purandara Viṭṭhala) began to preach the gospel of purity of devotion to Hari as the infallible road to moksha. The Vedic hymns, the Upanishads, the Purāṇas and the Ithihāsas were rendered into easy colloquial Kannada language by him. They were made easily accessible to the lower strata of the society which was not acquainted with Sanskrit.

Purandaradāśā gave much importance to Gurūpaḍēsa (spiritual guidance from Guru). He declared that the path of knowledge and meditation not initiated from a guru are of no avail in earning the grace of God. Further he says that “Guru Vyāsarāya has favoured me with the message that Purandara Viṭṭhala is the supreme God and removed from me all fears of sin and breathed into my ears the great mantra”\(^{17}\). He recounts in one of his kīrtans how he was given hariḍāśa dīksha by his revered Guru. He says that the Guru said that a body without dīksha symbol was profane; action without symbol was prohibited. That is why he was given the distinctive name of Puranḍara Viṭṭhala and the initiation was marked by the dīksha symbol of Hari being marked on his arm.

Purandaradāśā, as he lays great stress on hearing the greatness of Lord from a Guru, goes to the extent of declaring that until one surrenders completely to the Guru, no mukti or salvation


\(^{17}\) Ibid, p.20
can be attained. This attitude finds its effective expression in one of his kīrtans “guruvina gulamanaguva tanaka doreyadanna mukti” that means one can not attain mukti until one becomes the servant of Guru. Here the word gulama literally means ḍāsā, who has to gain the love of Guru by faithful service.

The utterances of Purandaradāsā were so clean, simple, direct and richly potent with the sacred philosophical thoughts which were enshrined in the sāstrās, the Purāṇās, the Veḍās and Upaniṣaḍs. His language was poetic, adorned with analogies, metaphors, similes and presented the sacred truth in an easier, intelligible medium than the original Sanskrit texts could give to the masses. Guru Vyāsarāya has praised him for his great work and paid him tributes through his kṛiti ‘ḍāsārendarē Purandara dāsāyya’(dāsā means Purandaradāsā) and described his work as Purandaropanishad. The quintessence of his teaching is: “there is only one god. He is omnipresent, and omniscient. The path of salvation is open to all human beings irrespective of caste and creed. Man should realize the illusory nature of body and the worldly existence. He should take to the life of devotion to God and make the best use of the human body. The human body is highly valuable as an instrument for securing the realization of the highest”.  

Purandaradāsā heartily sings the praise of God’s name and attaches great importance to it. He glorifies the significance of singing the supremacy of the Lord (nama-sankīrthana), cultivation of the company of the devotees (saṣṭang) and worship (Haripūja) as the best means for sustaining devotion to God. Commitment to man and commitment to God are considered integral to each other and both are emphasized in the teachings of Purandaradāsā. His teachings aims at

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18 PSD, Vol II, No.9,p.68  
changing the attitude of people from their materialistic approach towards spiritual mode of existence and his teachings have thus an ethico-religious mission.

William Jackson, popularly regarded as the historian of religion has made an intensive study of the cultural and religious history of Vijayanagara in which he has brought out the essence of the teachings of the bhakti saints like Annamāchārya, Kanakaḍāsā, Purandaradāsā and others. He says, after an analysis of some of the compositions of Purandaradāsā, the core of his compositions was devotion or bhakti- the method by which he attracted the people towards God and tried to relate his songs with realities of life. In one of his songs Purandaradāsā emphasizes this depth of bhakti.

What we hope with all our heart to get at some future time

Let’s get that today!

What we want to have today let’s get it right now

What we can get right now let’s enjoy this very instant

Let’s have the loving mercy of Lord Purandara Viṭhala!20

Jackson says “the relationship between Bhagavān and Bhakta, mutually inseparable God and Devotee is an all consuming relationship- of love, thanks longing, care and dependence. The Lord is the listener of urgent pleas, the understanding helper, the parent, the beloved and God of existence. Vijayanagara singer-saints like other culturally creative Hindu contributors to religious life, knew that bhakti had to be simple enough to be livable, rich and varied enough to be attractive and traditional enough to be acceptable. It had to be deep enough to be inexhaustible and always challenging, substantial enough to give meaning to all experiences, powerful enough to endow kings with legitimacy and uplift the lowest villager, with heartfelt

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20 PSD, Vol IV, no.34,p.326
sincerity and trustworthy touchstone”.21 This kind of close association with God and devotee is found in the songs of Purandaradāsā if one goes deep into the meaning of the songs. Moreover his songs deal with the daily incidents of life.

Purandaradāsā travelled extensively throughout the Vijayanagara Empire, met with different people and understood the realities of life. Unlike the court poets whose status and prosperity could shelter them from the grim facts of life, the wandering singers saw life’s harsh realities and their philosophy entailed addressing those realities rather than striking them.

**Purandaradāsā and the Dāsā Tradition**

The antiquity of Vishnu bhakti and the existence of a religious sect devoted to the worship of Narayana provide a strong proof for the popularity of the doctrine of Vaishnavism. The situation in Karnātakā was not far different. The Bhāgavaṭa Dharma had a strong base in Karnātakā even before the beginning of the Christian Era. The Ḫālmūḍī inscription of 450 A.D begins with a prayer to Vishnu22. In the 4th and 5th century Vaishnavism suffered a set back when the Kādambas supported and popularised Jainism. The Chālukyas of Badāmi revived the Vishnu bhakti tradition and it became a dominant force during the 6th to 8th centuries. The Rāśtrakūṭas who succeeded Chalukyas could not resist the Pallavas of Kanchi who were staunch Saivites. Therefore during their rule Saivism and Vaishnavism received equal patronage. Jainism was still a force and all the three faiths were together popular from 8th to 10th centuries. The Chāḷūkyās of Kalyāṇi who rose to power in Karnātakā supported Vaishnavism in the beginning of their rule. The Chāḷukyan Empire disintegrated towards the end of the 12th Century and the Hoysālas of

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21 William Jackso(1998), p.4
Dwarasamudra came to power in its southern region and patronized Sri Vaishnavism in the early part of its dynastic rule. Vaishnavism of the Dvaitha dispensation began to receive popular attention from the early quarter of the 13th century A.D which later came to be known as the dāsa tradition.

The evolution of the dāsa tradition is considered to be one of the turning points in the religious history of South India. This tradition brought in several saints who played a pivotal role in the spiritual growth as well as progress in the fields of art, culture and philosophy of South India in general and Karnātaka in particular. The dāsā tradition was spread by the Haridāsās (literally ‘slaves of the Lord’).23 The Haridāsas were greatly influenced and inspired by the philosophy propounded by Madhvaçāryya of Udi in the 13th century which gave an organizational base to the great Vaishnava religious devotionalism in South India. The Haridāsās were saints who considered themselves as the slaves of the Supreme Lord Hari. This concept of surrender to God was in existence ever since the age of ālvārs and nāyanmārs. Like ḍāsās of Karnātaka there were in the 7th and 8th centuries dāsīs or dēvadāsīs (handmaidens of the Gods) who are dancing girls attached to the temples whose source of livelihood was dancing and singing infront of the temple deities. In ancient times, women were dedicated to the service of the temples, they had to be married to God and had no other duty but to dance before his shrine hence called the God’s slaves (as Haridāsās also referred to them as Slaves of Hari). The occurrence of the term dēvadāsi in several of the āgamās, date from the tenth century and it is applied to women performing various ritual functions in the temple. The term appears to be a sanskritized form of the Tamil word Tēvaratīyār which means Slaves of the God. Leslie Orr in

her book Donors, Devotees and daughters of God, has looked at the concept of dēvadāsīs and their place in history on the basis of epigraphical evidences. The only inscriptional evidence available in which the term dēvadāsi is mentioned to refer temple women is a 12th century Kannada inscription. It mentions dēvādāsigal as women receiving support from a Jain temple. But near about 18 inscriptions belonging to the Chōḷā rule is available referring to the term tēvaratiyar meaning Slaves of the God. Another 24 inscriptions are found mentioning the term tēvanārmakal meaning daughters of the God. These terms apart from their high social and economic stability and its honorific character, indicate the notion of divine favour and intimate relationship with God. Like this in the 13th century Karnātakā, the ḍāsā tradition produced several bhaktas who sang on the glories of God Vithōbā, a form of Vishnu to whom they surrendered their lives. This tradition was a devotional one whose ideals and thoughts pervaded all sections of society. They found great patronage in the Vijayanagar kingdom which during its glorious reign ruled over entire South India. The rulers of Vijayanagara, encouraged religious activities which is revealed from numerous inscriptions pertaining to it. It included promotion of Vedic studies, generous patronage extended to Mathās and temples, support of Brahmins and celebration of public rituals. The sectarian leaders and ascetics were provided with gifts of various kinds. For instance, Krishnadēvarāya granted a number of villages to the Madhvā sage Vyāsarāya. Inscriptions record the consecration of the image of Yoga Varada Narasimha Swāmi in the courtyard of the Viṭṭhala temple at Hampi. Another inscription dated 1511A.D states that Vyāsatīrtha obtained from the king Krishnadēvarāya the lands located in the village Pūlampakkam in Padaivitta Rajyam for conducting the Āvani festival in his own name for

24 Leslie.C.Orr, op.cit, pp5-6.
Varadarāja of Kanchi-puram. The same inscription goes on to record the gift of a dēsavāhana of gold which was to be used in the fourth day of the festival. In yet another inscription found in the Viṭhala Swami temple at Hampi the king refers to Vyāsa as his guru. There is also an enigmatic reference to Vyasa in the contemporary account of Paes who refers to a Brāhmin who was a great favourite of the king. An inscription of Krishnadēvarāya dated 1526 A.D found at Hemmādi in South Canara district records a gift of 60 varāhās per year to Vyāsatīrtha as offering to finance the worship of Rāmachandra for the merit of the king. Endowments to Maṭhās encouraged religious learning and activities. The Vijayanagara rulers encouraged pilgrimages within their own empire. Since the North Indian pilgrimages became impossible for political and military reasons, pilgrimages to the sacred centers within the kingdom were encouraged.

By the end of the 16th century, the religion was under a more open minded variety encouraging rule. A European traveler named Barbosa described “the kings of Vijayanagara allowed great freedom so that every man could come and go as he wished, living according to his own beliefs without suffering any persecution and without having to be questioned as to whether he was a Christian, Jew or Moor.”

Though Vaishnavism became more popular in the 16th century Vijayanagara, it was not exactly a state religion. The state valued, encouraged and promoted the various sects and communities including Śaiva and Jaina, Krishnadēvarāya tried to harmonize faiths, rebuilding several Śiva temples including the Virūpāksha temple at Hampi giving land grants to several

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25 SII, Vol IV, p.48
27 SII, Vol XXVII, No.172, p.287
29 William Jackson, Vijayanagara Voices- Exploring South Indian History and Hindu literature, , New Delhi, OUP, 2005, p.14
pilgrim places such as Tirupati, Ahobilam, Tiruvannamalai, and Chidambaram. According to the Indian tradition to promote many sects and world views was to promote social uplift, noble values and harmony. Thus the Haridāsā saints also received great royal patronage from the kings of Vijayanagara. It can be said that it was through them that the Vaishnava philosophy began to spread and became more popular in the Vijayanagara kingdom.

The Haridāsās were ardent devotees of Lord Viṭṭala who is considered as a form of Vishnu. The Viṭṭalā temple at Pandhārpūr on the banks of the river Bhāma in the present day Maharashtra, the Viṭṭalāswāmi temple at Hampi in Karnātakā and the Śrīnivāsa temple on Tirumala Hills in Andhra Pradesh are considered the holiest of places in the Haridāsā context, the sacred geography of which will be discussed in the next chapter. There are a large number of inscriptions which prove the popularity of this god in various parts of Karnātakā and Andhra Pradesh.

The Haridāsās of Karnātakā were preachers of devotion to God and made distinctive contribution to the religious life of the people. They conveyed great and sacred truths in Kannada in a very simple and clear style so as to be understood by the common people. The followers of Madhvāchārya preached his doctrine of a knowledgeful devotion to God, through the medium of melodious songs called devāranāma. In this context Madhvāchārya’s concept of devotion or bhakti deserves special mention. Madhvā describes bhakti as a state of loving attachment born out of knowledge and regard for the object of devotion. The purpose of bhakti is to manifest the true relation of jīva with Brahman. It is only the knowledge or the Jnāna of the latter which can produce the feeling of love and absolute dependence on Him. Madhva regards Jnāna as a direct constituent of bhakti and bhakti as a combination of knowledge and love. The principle of
interdependence between jnāna and bhakti and the superiority of jnāna over bhakti is established by Madhvā in very explicit terms. This can be seen in the different categories and gradations he formulates of bhakti (devotion), bhakṭās (devotees), mōkṣa (salvation) and īśvara prasāda (divine blessing). According to him different souls are capable of different kinds of bhakti. In the words of B.N.K Sharma, “Madhvā’s peculiar doctrine of intruisic gradation of fitness among various orders of souls enables him to co-relate the different forms of devotion to different orders of selves”.30

Madhvā mentions three stages of bhakti, that which precedes paroksha jnana (intruisic knowledge), that which follows it, and that which comes after direct realization and wins the absolute grace of God. The final and the highest stage of bhakti is reached only when the true relationship between jīvā and Brahman is realized; the grace of God comes to the devotee after this. It is clear from this gradation that inspite of his emphasis on the principle of divine grace, Madhvā does not in any way minimize, the importance of individual effort towards correct knowledge and that bhakti for him is just not an attitude of faith and surrender. These aspects of Madhvā’s bhakti, existing within the frame work of his dualistic Vedanta, are significant and influenced the dāsā tradition.

Though initial inspiration of the dāsās was derived from Madhva himself who has given stirring devotional lyrics in such Sanskrit works as dvādaśa stōtra, it was another direct disciple of Madhvāchārya, called Narahari Tīrtha, who is regarded as the founder of the dāsā tradition. Very few compositions of Narahari Tīrtha are available in Kannada. A bold attempt was made by Śrī Padaraja Tīrtha, to compose songs in simple Kannada expounding the difficult and highly

30 BNK Sharma, op.cit, p.292
philosophical teachings of Madhva in simple and clear language. Srī Padaraja’s disciple, Vyāsarāya gave great impetus to the Hariḍāsā tradition and made it very popular by his disciples who are chief among Hariḍāsās- Sri Purandaradāsā and Sri Kanakadāsā. The centre of activity of the Hariḍāsās in the 15th and 16th centuries was Vijayanagara (Hampi) and nearby places. The Dāsakūṭa tradition inherited both the rich philosophical ideas of the dvaita stream of religion and the literary and cultural movement that aimed to popularize dvaita among the common people. B.N.K Sharma has rightly pointed out that:

“Those who know anything about the history of the Dāsakūṭa and how much Kannada literature is indebted to these poet saints of Karnāṭaka, will have no difficulty in realizing the importance of the service rendered by Vyāsatīrtha to the cause of “popular religion” and cultural revival; for no one can deny that Dāsakūṭa evoked popular enthusiasm for the philosophy of Vaishnavism in Karnāṭaka. These ideas reached the larger public through the soulful songs of poet-singers like Purandaradāsā.

**Divisions in the dāsā tradition**

Two divisions in the Hariḍāsā sect were that of Vyāsakūta and dāsakūta. The followers of Vyasakuta tradition were required to be learned in the Vedas, Upanishads and other darshanas. They claimed to be strict disciples of Vēdavyāsa tradition and through slokas and Kirtans in Sanskrit explained to the masses the implications, and propounded the significance of this great tradition. Those who synthesized all elements of value enshrined in the Vedas and in those involved in Vyāsa tradition and taught the masses through the medium of Kannada, the language

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31 B.N.K Sharma, op.cit, p.299  
of the region were known as the followers of dāsākuta tradition. They conveyed the message of
the Dvaitha philosophy and religion through the vernaculars. The poets of medieval times opted
to write in regional languages which we call as vernaculars. This resulted in a cultural
confrontation with the cosmopolitan order. Why the medieval poets chose the medium of
vernacular is a question to be discussed. It was not because they were not capable enough to
write in the languages of the cosmopolitan cultural order such as Sanskrit, Prakrit and
Apabhramsa. As they moved from one genre to another they had to enter into a different mental
domain of creativity and a different social perspective. Sheldon Pollock says “it was a matter of
asserting one’s choice of the language of the community to which one had elected to identify”.33
One chooses to become a poet of a particular language which inturn provides him with an
identity for his writings. By adopting a particular language, the vernacular poets carried along
with them certain values that were not accepted by the dominant literary authority i.e. Sanskrit
literary tradition which is referred as ‘high culture’ by Pollock. The choosing of vernacular by
medieval poets unleashed new cultural forces like ‘folk structures’ of which the Sanskrit
tradition was almost entirely devoid. There took place an exchange between the vernacular and
cosmopolitan order in the medieval times of which the poets of public narratives became an
important product. The idea of building a new cultural community was in operation everywhere
in the medieval times and the vernacular served as a medium for this. Here Purandaradāsā, by
adopting the medium of Kannada, is unleashing the cultural structure of desi tradition (folk
tradition) as different from the mārga (cosmopolitan). Vinay Bahl has defined dēśi as the
indigenous people’s music. He traces the Dhruvapad as an art form to the bhakti movement in
Northern India associated with the worship of Krishna. In South India the Kīrtans composed by

the Haridāsā composers were the equivalent of the Dhruvapad. In a very strict manner the bhakti movement shaped two distinct forms of devotional music. The Harikatha of Mahārāshtra was another form of popular communication of the ideas of bhakti through discourses on Vishnu interspersed with song and prose commentaries. 34

There was no philosophical or doctrinal difference between the two sects. Both affected Dvaita philosophy and religion of Madhva. A striking difference between the two lies in the fact that Vyāsakūṭa was knowledge oriented whereas the Dāsakūṭa was devotion oriented. The followers of Vyāsakūṭa tried to interpret the philosophic aspects of the teachings of Madhva in Sanskrit; the dāsākūṭas sang the praises of Vishnu through intelligible medium of the masses of persuading them to follow the path of bhakti.

Both the sects used the Kūrtan form for conveying the message of Dvaita philosophy for those who had no access to the scriptures. Kūrtans are the most attractive compositions of the Haridāsās. They are also called ‘dēvaranāma’ (dēvarapadagalu in Kannada). The Kūrtan as a genre was popularized by the wandering saints belonging to the Haridāsā tradition. At one level the term describes several varieties of performances. We have, for instance samkūrtan which means “collective performance” and nāmakūrtan which represents “performing the name of god”. The kūrtan as a form of Bhakti devotional music attained its most celebrated form in the compositions of Tyāgarāja. However, Kūrtan compositions adhering to the Vārkari tradition have survived from the times of Nāmdēv(1270-1350). The Kūrtan as anarrative form presupposed the existence of an audience which could relate to the performance of music, song and theatre to the

poetic composition which is partly sung and partly enacted before them.\textsuperscript{35} Poetry both in its written and oral forms partakes of the rhythmic quality of music. Bhakti poetry and its associated music draws its intellectual practices from a set of mnemonic devices which fix the words of a song to a common repertoire of images and ideas drawn from social memory. In this aspect, the songs of Purandaradāśā essentially adhered to the grammar inherited from the folk tradition.\textsuperscript{36}

\textbf{Purandaradāśā’s medium of expression}

One of the most valuable contributions of Haridāśās to Indian culture is the system of music called Karnāṭakā music. The Vijayanagara Empire stood as the patron of Vedantic and saivite culture and music as the sādhana of devotion to god. Richard Eaton has framed the spread of Bhakti into Western Deccan region following the end of the Yādava dynasty of Dēvagiri and the spread of Sufi movement against the historical backdrop of military and political changes engendered by the spread of the Delhi Sultanate during the tumultuous reign of Allaudin Khilji.\textsuperscript{37} Like Sheldon Pollock, Eaton too argues that the Bhakti movement in Maharāśtra and Karnāṭaka played a vital role in shaping the cultural tradition of the region.\textsuperscript{38} As he says “far from integrating peoples of different cultural tradition or core areas, Bhakti movement tended to be a regional phenomena that reinforced people’s identity with a particular region”.\textsuperscript{39} The Vārkari tradition was therefore ideally suited for the expression of the nascent linguistic and regional aspiration of the Western Deccan and parts of Karnāṭaka. Richard Eaton

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, p.8
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, p.10
\end{flushleft}
has very rightly argued that the widespread appeal of the Viṭhala cult was due to its ability to rise beyond caste barriers. The gradual crystallization of the Deccan Sultanate led to the migration of Sufis and the growth of Khanaqaks in the Deccan. Bhakti and Sufism therefore shared the same socio-political space. The fundamental cultural unity in their region was brought out through the compositions of Bhakti composers such as Purandaradāsā.

Haridāsās resorted to music as the medium of communication of the sublime thoughts of the Vedas and the Upanishads to import instruction and to enlighten the people. Of all modes of apprehension of God, music was the most effective and powerful when employed would persuade the Transcendental God to bless with his living presence.

Purandaradāsā is said to have composed numerous kīrtans which became his medium to communicate with the laymen. Kīrtans form an important element of the Indian Classical Music. The saints, seers and composers of classical music have basically composed songs only as a means of expressing their devout feelings and also to communicate with the ‘self’ and ‘soul’. Music when presented to god as an offering, inspires the person and the devotional excitement there in, gives rise to a torrent of tuneful outpourings. Singing in praise of god awakens the singer’s consciousness of the Divine and makes him/her sensitive to the divine message. Music therefore establishes a direct contact between the divine and human spheres, between the spiritual and phenomenal realms. Music is the element of motion that brings forth the desired union. This vital element and the vocalized glorification of god in the tradition of devotional religion indicate that the Indian bhakti movement must have initiated and advanced by poet singers rather than theoreticians. Spiritualism has been the key content of Indian classical music. The beautiful interweaving of the devotional element and aesthetics has made it ethereal and
eternal. In fact it has been said that the easiest way to attain salvation is to sing the greatness of Almighty. This is highlighted in many of the songs of Purandaradasa.

Apart from Kirtans, Purandaradasa’s compositions are classified into Suladis and Ugabhogas.

Suladis in their present form were procreated and propagated by the saint composers of the Harijñasaktas of Karnatakā in the 15th and 16th centuries A.D. Purandara who was the most prolific composer of Suladis must be regarded as the stabilizer of Suladis in practice. He was famous for suladis which exhibit his extra ordinary mastery of the technique of music. It is in fact a difficult and elaborate piece giving the most comprehensive view of all the important movement of notes.

Literally suladi means ‘easy path’ for the attainment of the eternal bliss. The subject matter of suladi is both devotional and mythological intended for conveying great truth to the masses. Their literary themes are purely religious and spiritual as in the keerthanas. They include biography, praise, ethics, social reformation, enunciation, interpretation of the Vedic and Upanishadadic thoughts, communion with God etc. the singing of Suladi is not much in Vogue as it involves a profound knowledge of Tāla and Rāga. The credit of systematizing the sūlādis into definite and standard measures chiefly goes to Purandaradasa. Thus King Tulajendra of Tanjore cites in his Sangīta Sārāmrita that the sūlādis of Purandarādāsā were the foundation on which various ragas were erected or improvised. In fact the famous Suladi of Purandara is a lullaby to Lord Krishna “Jo Jo Sri Krishna Paramananda”.40

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40 Dāsara Padagalu, Vol I, No.228, p.100
Ugabhogas

_Ugabhōga_ was the distinct creation of Purandaradāsā. It is an integrated musical piece of _rāga, bhāva, tāla_ and _samanvaya_. The subject matter of the ugabhōga is essentially spiritual and religious. In his musical compositions he has contributed not only to the world of music but also to several aspects of knowledge. His purpose was to speak about goodness, virtue and devotion to Lord. His kīrtans are noblest poetry, whose conception as a whole is magnificent and it is a mixture of _sangīta_ (music) and _sāhitya_ (literature). The great composers who came after Purandaradāsā faithfully followed his form of music and tradition. Tyagaraja, Syama Sastri and Muthuswamy Dikshithar were deeply indebted to Purandaradāsā for the rich contribution he has made to the field of South Indian music.

The use of analogies was yet another feature of his compositions. His main purpose was to communicate the message of Dvaita Vedanta to the common man. To make his task easy and effective, he used homely analogies. Analogies are the facts of life and the efficacy of analogy can be seen in all that he has written and preached. Stressing the importance of devotion to the One Supreme Lord, Hari, Purandaradāsā sings in a Kīrtan:

“When the Lord’s feet is available to us why should we bow down before other deities? When we possess manikya, why we should wish for borrowed jewels?” Here purandara has used a beautiful analogy in comparing the Lord to manikya and other deities to borrowed jewels to communicate the important doctrine of Harisarvothamatatva. In another Ugabhoga he expresses the same idea, “Hari charanu viralu mikka”

“When the feet of Lord are available why do you pray the sundry Gods? Being on the banks of the sacred river Jahnavi, are there people who drink well water to quench their thirst?”
Purandaradāsā on another occasion compares God to a doctor. He has used beautiful analogies to show that as a doctor cures the deseases (physical), Lord Krishna cures the desease of samsara (bhavaroga). This is expressed in the song, “Gunavayitu enna bhavaroga, Krishnanembo vaidyanu, dorakidanu”.

Social significance of Purandaradāsā’s songs

Devotion to God was the keynote of Purandaradāsā’s teachings and it was dominated by a mystical tendency. But through his songs, one gets the impression that Purandaradāsā was not resting peacefully in the mood of renunciation and withdrawal from the world, but was participating in the ethical and social life of his times. He believed that service to man was as important and service to God and both were interlinked in his compositions. The teachings of Purandaradāsā were intended to have its own impact on the social living of the people both directly and indirectly.

The kind of social service which a saint or mystic can do for his society is teaching, which will enable the people to see the social evils prevailing in their society and motivate them to work for their removal. In the case of a mystic, his social awareness does not arise out of mere empirical motives aiming at better social conditions or worldly life, but springs from a spiritual attitude or devotion to God. The betterment of social conditions would in this sense be intermediary and not the final goal of the mystic teaching, the final goal being the spiritual one of making all people irrespective of caste or creed- committed to the cultivation of devotion to God.

Purandaradāsā was a saint who was never tired of criticizing all evil practices of society with the view of spiritually uplifting it. He does not reject worldly life. In many of his songs he has tried to reveal his own life spent in luxury and extravaganza and has said that it was a

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41 Dāsāra Padagalu, vol II, No.153, p.66
psychological conversion that changed his entire life. He has used symbols, myths, parables, metaphors, parables etc to transmit his ethical teachings and his songs reflected the society in which he lived.

**His Comments on Caste System**

Purandaradāsā’s songs convince that he lived in a caste ridden society in which there was discrimination on the basis of birth. He had a keen insight into the social and religious conditions of the society of his times and observed that the common people were subjected to ignorance which was exploited by the upper caste people to their own advantage. He found that it is man’s selfishness which is the cause of all social evils and if selfishness can be eradicated through intense devotion and detachment, all forms of human wickedness would vanish. Purandaradāsā stood against discrimination among sects, castes or creed and respected all religions alike and had the courage to teach ‘universal religion’. For this he used his songs as a medium for communicating with the people. He used the local Kannada language which could be understood by the people concerned. He protested against the caste system and ridiculed the artificiality of castes and family barriers.

Purandaradāsā openly condemned the prevalent practice of trying to evaluate a man’s character by his birth in a particular caste which he mentions as ‘kula’ in his kirtans. He says that

\[ kula \] or birth in a particular caste is not an obstacle in the path to attain salvation or mōkshā.

‘Avakutavadarenu avanadarenu’\(^{42}\)

Whichever caste he might belong to and whosoever he be, it doesn’t matter when the person has realized himself. One should not be guided by considerations of his caste. For a

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\(^{42}\) Ibid, Vol III, No. 139, p.62
person who has acquired \textit{jnāna} or knowledge, caste does not matter. It is only through intense devotion to Lord Viṣṇu that one can attain \textit{mukthi}, he says.

During his days, clash between religious sects was common. He sings a noble song by bringing compromise between Vīrāsaivites and Vaishnavites. \textit{“Jangamaru navu lingangikalū”}

\begin{quote}
\textit{“We are jangamas in the world, Linga is our body. We are pure and meritorious. How can we be termed as people in the bondage of samsara? We take bath regularly, we have the sacred marks burnt on our body. We are great devotees of Viśnubhadra. We deserve very well the grace of Purandara Vittala”}\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Purandaradāsa declared that everyone irrespective of caste and creed is eligible for following bhaktimārga which serves as the easiest path to salvation. That was how the great devotee Kanakadāsa could live in the midst of orthodox people. There existed people who wanted to shut out this exalted devotee from the Hari dāsa panth, just because he was of a lower caste. But that was strongly condemned by Guru Vyāsaraṇa and also Purandaradāsa. They unceasingly criticized the outward show of the people who call themselves superior in caste and made it clear that the great and virtuous have certainly been born in all castes. He proclaimed that man would become great or small not by virtue of his birth in a particular caste but by virtue of the kind of life he lives. He has expressed himself bitterly against untouchability regarding it as a curse. He distinguished between community by birth and community by quality, declaring that a man’s inner being was more important than the social and religious background of his birth or status. His songs reveal that it is man’s moral and spiritual efforts that make him noble, and not his occupation or birth in a particular caste.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Dāsara Padagalu, Vol IV, No.139, p.68}
Vijayanagara society was riven with caste divisions that occasionally erupted into open hostility. The reasons for social conflict may be seen in the intensification of the amaranayaka system during the reign of Krishnadēvarāya. The depression in the position of the peasantry may be attributed to the presence of the vijayanagara warrior elites in the agrarian regions of the empire. Urbanization too led to the migration of artisans and weavers to towns known as pettai, puram and nagara, where they established their units. The high level of taxation imposed on the artisans led to frequent eruptions of conflicts. Noboru Karashima has documented several instances of caste conflicts during the Vijayanagara period. The intensification of caste and regional identity is also reflected in the songs of Purandaradāsa, who alive to the social reality of his times vehemently opposed caste feelings of hierarchy and division. The hierarchically divided society of Vijayanagara which is shown in Purandaradāsa’s frequent evocation of Bhakti as an antidote to human inequality was replicated at the lower levels of the socio political order in the form of amaranayakas who in the words of Dominic Jenkins, “assumed the responsibility for agricultural management” 44 while it is not possible to draw a one to one correlation between literary and poetic imaginings with historical reality, the conclusion is inescapable that the harsh social conditions based on caste and economic inequality is found embedded in his compositions. 45

Purandaradāsa ridiculed the crusty unregenerate pundits and die-hard orthodoxy of his times. In quite a number of his songs his broadsides against the overdoing of ceremonial purity and untouchability can be seen. For a person whose behavior was not marked by gentleness and god’s grace, whose conduct was not blameless, there is no point putting marks of holiness on his

body. Just as he condemned pedants and scholars who did not reduce to practice the great virtues they talked about, he did not even hesitate to put haridāsās under criticism. He has applied this warning to himself and has sung:

“Daubing the body with prominent caste marks
Holding a round vessel
Wearing a garment with a fine broad ornamental border
And striding majestically along the streets
Do not be deceived, O men of the world,
By all my holy pretensions”

Neither birth nor learning makes a man great. It is only his conduct and character that entitle him to honor. The practice of untouchability – segregating a group of people because of their birth and treating them with contempt and inhumanity was quite rampant in his days. Purandaradāsā had the courage to point out in those days that the word ‘holeya’ did not merely connote a caste, but bad conduct and character. One of his songs brings out this point.

Is the ‘holeya’ only outside the town
Is he not inside too?
Let the devotees of Hari answer if they know.

The Vijayanagara society was caste ridden with caste hierarchies working in full force. Every caste had a caste assembly headed by Kattemanes or Gurkars. These assemblies were dominated by agriculturists in the village and merchants in the towns. Separate bodies of professional guilds also participated in these caste assemblies. There is reference to the term ‘sreni’ in one of his compositions which he might have referred to the merchant guild of his

46 Ibid, Vol I, no.65, p.88
47 PSD, Vol II, no.55, p.133
times. Important decisions in the village were taken by *ayagars*, who became an important part of the village administration of the Vijayanagara Empire. They were twelve in number and they included the village headmen, accountant (*karnam*), craftsmen like weaver, carpenter, barber, potter, and also the disposer of the dead animal (*madiga*). They lived in localities where they controlled land and those dependent on land. They also enjoyed the status of the priestly class. With the growth of numerous temples and temple property the social and economic status of the Brahmins also went up. They were the trustees of the temples and they acted as the main functionaries of the temples. They could thus impose ritual control upon other castes and classes in the society. Caste was surely one of the principles of social organization in sixteenth century South India.\(^{48}\) In this context mention is to be made on the two fold divisions of Vijayanagara society- Right hand and Left Hand castes. These are two broad coalitions of agrarian and non agrarian groups respectively, which resulted in conflicts. Burton Stein observes that in social process, the left division of castes in the Vijayanagara Empire suffered the historical disadvantage of being marginal to the dominant rural centred society in which they lived.\(^{49}\) The left hand groups consisted of highly skilled artisan trading groups and regional merchant groups. This group also included the leather workers called variously as Chakkilārs and Mādigas. In Tamil country, the left division also included large cultivating groups called pallis. But most important cultivating groups- Vellālars, Vokkaligas, Reddis etc were either affiliated with the right division or were regarded with Brahmins and some transregional merchants and bankers as neutral or unaligned. Burton Stein states that the Palli affiliation to the left may be explained by their late emergence as dominant landholding cultivators and by their claim to a prior martial history and Kshatriya status. To the core of cultivators of right division were added other

\(^{48}\) Burton Stein, Vijayanagara, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.102

\(^{49}\) Ibid, p.102
agrarian groups such as most herdsmen, grain traders and transporters, those providing services and goods for village people, such as potters, barbers, washermen, non-brahmin priests, and untouchable field labourers (Hōlēyas mentioned in the songs of Purandaradāsā) Malas and Paraiyans of Tamilnadu.

The peasants formed the basis of the social order on whom all other sections of the society depended. A clear idea about the lives of the poor peasants in Vijayanagara society is not available. But from the songs of Purandaradāsā, one gets ideas regarding the lives of the farmers and the agricultural activities in which they were involved. His songs mentioned the names of crops cultivated by the farmers. In one of his songs ‘urige bandare’ he describes his village as a cowherd village.

‘Hey there ḍāsā, if you come to my village
I hope you will come to my neighborhood
And ḍāsā if you come to our neighbourhood
Please come to the cowherds lane’  

Purandaradasa’s life time spanned the heyday of the Vijayanagara empire, especially the reign of Krishnadevaraya (1509 – 1529) which witnessed a phenomenal increase in agricultural production due to the sustained investment in irrigation facilities. The picture we get from the songs of Purandaradasa is one of agricultural prosperity. Inscriptions found in Vijayanagara record the construction of a large irrigation tank during the reign of Krishnadevaraya. The contemporary Portuguese trader, Paes, had this tank in view when he refered to the large tank which was being constructed while he was a resident at Vijayanagara. Following the example of the raya, the nayaks or military leaders too invested their social capital in irrigation works.

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50 PSD, Vol IV, no.10, p.59
particularly tanks. The general picture of agricultural expansion found in the songs of the composer is corroborated by the references to tanks, well, channels and dams during the Vijayanagara period. As a long time resident of Vijayanagara, Purandaradasa would have been familiar with the tank at Kamalapuram which supplied water to the irrigated valley where crops were grown.

Pastoralists or herdsmen used to be more settled near Tungabhadra. Great care was given to the maintenance of pasture for the grazing of cattle and some tax was levied on the pasture land. Live stock like crops needed protection. Contemporary evidences testify to the fact that due attention was paid to the protection of live stock. Cattle were the main source of income. Cattle raids were common in those days and the villagers even did not hesitate to lay down their life in an attempt to rescue their cattle from the hands of robbers. Such acts of heroism were indeed always appreciated and gratefully acknowledged by the people by erecting memorial stones granting lands to the bereaved families. Agriculture was well cared for and its vital role in the life of the people was realized. The cultivators were called Okkala makkalu and were looked upon as the givers of the food to the society as a whole. Crops grown in a country determine to some extent the agricultural practice of the people. From the songs of Purandaradāśā, some references to the crops cultivated by the peasants are made out, both edible and non-edible. Rice was an important cereal cultivated on a large scale where there was plenty of water supply. The chief crops cultivated are jowar, cotton and ragi (finger millet). The peasants used the former principally for food.

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51 Gururajachar, S, Some aspects of the Economic and Social life in Karnāṭakā, Mysore: Mysore University, Prasaranga, 1974, p.41
53 District Gazetteer of Sholapur, 1875, p.519
In her study entitled *Fields of Victory – Vijayanagara and the Course of Intensification*, Kathleen Morrison has pointed out that the Vijayanagara economy was increasingly monetized resulting in two different kinds of taxations. Rice, the chief crop cultivated during the period was taxed in kind, probably due to its ability to store well for a fairly long period. However, dry crops such as ragi and millets were taxed in cash.\(^{54}\) Purandaradasa’s song captures the hierarchical distinction between rice and dry grains in the following lines:

“Have you brought ragi gruel?
Bless you- May your life be gracious and not grueling
May no one treat you cruelly, bless you generous feeder of the poor
Giving up talks, except songs of God, singing bhajans daily,
Have you brought ragi gruel? \(^{55}\)

This song makes it clear that ragi was the food of the poor peasants and it also shows that Purandaradasa always took sides with the common people. Kanakaḍāśā, who hailed from a lower caste family of Kurubas was a contemporary of Purandaradasa. In one of his poems *Ramadhanye Charite*, kanakaḍāśā expresses his deep regret over the caste distinctions of his times. He says that ragi and paddy should co-exist and one should not fight against each other by claiming superiority for itself. Here ragi represents the commoners and paddy stands for the higher castes.\(^{56}\)

\(^{55}\) Ibid, Vol I, No.33, p.136
\(^{56}\) Dr.Suryanath.U.Kamath, *Krishnadevarāya of Vijayanagara and his Times*, Bangalore: IBH Prakashana, 2009, p.67
Mystics often do not seek directly to confront and reshape society. They often function as a spiritual presence in a system and accept the current power structure as God’s will. Purandaradāsa cannot be ranked as a social reformer. But his songs have some social implications which he tries to explain through a number of metaphors and similes indicating and also ridiculing the degraded social life of his times.

Vaishnava bhakti and the songs of Vaishnava saints of the Vijayanagara rulers seem to be animal friendly. There are avatars of Vishnu who take birth in animal forms; fish, tortoise and boar. Each Hindu deity has a Vāhana or creature vehicle. Nandi- the bull is associated with Śiva, the Hawk Garuda with Vishnu; the lion with Goddess Durga. The peacock known for natural beauty is the vehicle of Murugan and its feather is a symbol of God Krishna. In Vijayanagara Empire there were a number of prominent symbolic animals. Boar was the emblem of the empire and is associated with Vishnu as Varāha. The boar during the time of Vijayanagara Empire was a more a visual emblem than one sung in the songs of singer saints. It was carved in stone, embossed on coins.

By adopting Varaha as their emblem, the Vijayanagara rulers claimed that their sovereignty is directly attributed to the Western Chalukyas who also adopted Varaha as their political emblem. Annamāchārya a Telugu poet-saint who was the contemporary of Purandaradāsa has described the greatness of man-lion (Narasimha) in his songs.

In the songs of Purandaradāsa, one can find that he has used the fresh images of birds, cow, dogs etc. at times he seems to ridicule the foolishness of social life through forceful songs about dogs. In a composition ‘donku balada nayakare’ Purandaradāsa connects two levels- the
lowly scavenger and the high class leader of the feudal segmental state. Nayaka in the time of Purandaradāsā was a title of a new military class. Though they were an important class in the society their behavior to others (local peasants) did not give them a respectable position. Purandaradāsā says that their character did not bring any respect to them. This song is also an indication to the feudal set up of the Vijayanagara period. Some scholars question the usage of the term feudal and they prefer to call it as a kind of landlordism, another aspect of feudalism. Nayaka in the above mentioned song was a military chief of Vijayanagara period who had been given the right to collect revenue. They assessed and collected the revenue from the peasants and a part of it was given to the king. Towards the later part of the empire, the nāyakas became too strong. They appointed their own revenue officials, gave gifts to temples, repaired and built tanks, reclaimed waste land, collected dues from the temples and paid tribute to the king. They maintained their own army consisting of infantry, cavalry, elephants etc and they provided a part of their army to the king. It is assumed that the strength of the Vijayanagara Empire was maintained by these Nāyakas through military and economic contributions. In course of time the land assigned to these nāyakas became hereditary and this increased the power of the nāyakas. They declared their independence from the control of the king and this led to the disintegration of the kingdom. Their approach towards the local peasants was not appreciated and this makes Purandaradāsā use such forceful terms like ‘dog’ while mentioning those nayakas.

**Economic Conditions of Vijayanagara reflected in the songs of Purandaradāsā.**

The songs of Purandaradāsā are to a great extent helpful in understanding the economic conditions of the Vijayanagara empire especially under Krishnadeva Raya. It is well known from

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57 PSD, Vol I, no.40, p.148
the inscriptions as well as the foreign travelers accounts like Barbosa, Nuniz, Nicolo Conti etc, that Vijayanagara had a sound economic background because of its flourishing trade and commerce within and without. These are to a certain extent reflected in the songs of Purandaradāsā. There are a number of songs sung by Purandaradāsā which highlight the materialistic background of the region in which he lived.

The agrarian economy of the Vijayanagara Empire is mentioned by Purandaradāsā by referring to the agricultural crops like ragi, jola, rice, sugar cane etc. Since Purandaradāsā travelled extensively throughout the Vijayanagara Empire, he came into close contacts with the common people their lives and activities, which he describes in his compositions.

From the songs of Purandaradāsā it is convinced that agriculture was the chief source of income for the people. The songs give an idea about the fertility, crops, cattle and agricultural operations in various parts of the empire. Purandaradāsā traveled from Paṇḍhārpūr to the Canara Coast which was very fruitful and contained many farmsteads.58 The route which he travelled from Paṇḍhārpūr to Hampi was well cultivated and very fertile provided with cows, buffaloes and sheeps.59 Foreign traveler Barbosa has described the cultivation of rice in the following words. “All around they sow it in valleys and flats with water for it is sown and reaped in water. they plough the land as we do it with oxen and buffaloes yoked in pairs, the ploughshare has a hallow in it where in the rice is carried when the land is flooded and as the share ploughs the rice goes on settling down under water and earth. On dry land they sow by hand. And every year this land (Canara Coast) bears two crops”.60

58 L Dames, p.184
59 S.Gururajachar, op.cit, p.46
60 Barbosa, I, p.192
Agricultural activities were facilitated by the construction of irrigation tanks by Krishnadēvarāya. He declared that “the state should create irrigation facilities by the construction of tanks and the excavation of canals; the land should be given on a favourable rate of assessment to poor ryots for cultivation which would of course bring in plenty of money to the treasury.”

Krishnadeva Raya built a huge tank near the Southern entrance to Hospet. The tank is called Rayarakere, but it is now dry. Vyasaraja who was honoured by Krishnadeva Raya by many grants of land built the Vyāsarāya Samudra on the border between the Kolar and Cudappah districts.

**Industries**

From the songs of Purandaradāsā it is understood that Vijayanagara excelled in industrial production especially in the manufacturing of sugar, cotton, textiles, mining and metallurgy. Purandaradāsā himself was the son of a diamond merchant and he followed his father’s footstep in business. Much of the diamonds in Vijayanagara came from Vajrakurur about 20 miles South West of Gooty. The governor of Gooty was to give all diamonds which exceeded 20 mangelins in weight to the king. Garcia de Orta who came to India in 1534 says that there were 2 or 3 rocks in Vijayanagara which yielded many diamonds. He also located another diamond mine in the Deccan. Purandaradāsā in his songs glorify the beauty of the deities in the Viṭṭala temple at Panḍhārpūr and Hampi and also lord Venkateswara of Tirupati. He describes the decoration of the deities with precious jewels, stones, gold etc. This shows that Vijayanagara had skilled
workers in metallurgy.\textsuperscript{66} Diamonds, pearls and precious gems of various sorts seen in the empire and capturing imagination shine in the lyrics of Purandaradāsā. He sang the song ‘Muthu kolliro’\textsuperscript{67} in the voice of the pearl salesman.

Pearls for sale! Come one and all, buy your pearls here!

The best pearl of all is one called being-Awareness-Bliss!

The divine pearl is strung on the thread of spiritual knowledge

You can possess it by becoming wise- why even the poorest devotee can

Easily afford it once he has become enlightened

Pearls for sale! Come one and all, buy pearls………..

In this song Purandaradāsā states that the supreme God is accessible to rich and poor people alike. He compares Lord Vishnu to the divine pearl and asks all people to buy it and make it a part of their life. The metaphor of pearl has been used in his songs which show that it was an important item among the ornaments of the people of his times. Men wore only ear rings set with fine pearls. But women wore nose rings, necklaces of gold and jewels and very fine coral beads and bracelets of gold and precious stones. Purandaradāsā also sings of receiving a diamond necklace designed around the jewel name of Lord Rama.\textsuperscript{68} A treasury of songs using precious stones as metaphors comes down to us from Vijayanagara singers depicting beauty, value, fascination and glory. They are among the bhakti legacy’s valuables as told by William Jackson.\textsuperscript{69} It also indicates the fact that Purandaradsa had a family background of being born to a diamond merchant whose profession was inherited by the son. Besides, there were jewelers who

\textsuperscript{66} Metal work consisted in making jewellery, weapons of warfare and household articles. Jewellery was required by temples, court and common people. Krishnadeva Raya presented precious jewels to the temples like tirupati, Kalahasti, Ahobilam, Viṭṭāla Temple at Hampi etc. (Copper plate no.150 of 1924, EI, Vol XIII, p.227)

\textsuperscript{67} PSD, Vol III, no 197, p.317

\textsuperscript{68} PSD, Vol II, P.289

\textsuperscript{69} William Jackson, Songs of Three Great South Indian saints, p.26
sold ornaments of gold, precious stones and pearls. Among these were gem studded bangles, waist girdles, belts etc. there were also some shops which sold only precious and valuable gems of various sorts and weights. The diamond cutters had their own shops where they were engaged not only in cutting the diamonds into various shapes and sizes but also in polishing and fixing them. There were also merchants who evaluated the purity of diamonds and precious jewellery and to negotiate transactions with the customers. The artisans known as chinnavaradaru extracted gold from wax balls which had absorbed it from the touchstones used by the merchants when testing the purity of the gold before setting the price of the deal.

Purandaradāsā weaves in the theme of profit from the trade in sugar in his song “Kallasakkare”, “How sweet it is”. As he says:

When you take this item
You will never suffer losses
It is not perishable, this merchandise
Won’t go bad and smell

He goes on to state ….

This wonderful product
is the best deal in town..
Don’t underestimate its wonderful properties.

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71 William Jackson
There is also a reference to weekly market in this song which suggests that commercial goods were transacted in markets. The time frame of Purandaradāsā coincides with the export of sugar from the Vijayanagara to the region of Persian Gulf.72

**Trade and Commerce**

Man’s love for money is also a special feature of Purandaradāsā’s songs. He sings about people engaged in various business activities like trade in precious gems such as diamonds, pearls etc. It is a well known fact that local and long distance trade existed in an advanced level in the Vijayanagara Kingdom. Towns emerged either as religious centres or administrative centres or commercial centres and in these towns trade was carried own. In Purandaradāsā’s times, Kanchi, Tirupathi, Kalahasti, Tanjore, Tirunelveli, Penukonda etc were important towns as is evident from his songs. The greatest city of the time was Vijayanagara itself.73

An essential feature of the economic life of Vijayanagara in the 15th-16th centuries was its flourishing trade and commerce. The metaphor of business was not always negative in the works of singer saints. The industrious spiritual activities of the Hariṇḍāsās could be troped well with the vigorous work of the busy and productive merchant class.

Peninsular India was involved in maritime trade with the mediteranian region from the early centuries A.D. the first half of the sixteenth century saw the gradual and steady progress of European traders into India in general and Vijayanagara empire in particular. The trade with the Iberian states brought a great deal of prosperity to the empire, and a number of foreign travelers who visited Vijayanagara have eloquently testified the commercial prosperity of peninsular

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73 Detailed description of the city is provided in the accounts of Abdur Razzak, Barbosa and Paes. The city as existed in the time of Krishnadeva Raya could be divided into three parts. Hampi, the nucleus of the city containing the virupaksha temple and the magnificent bazaar in its front, the citadel containing the king’s palace, the administrative offices, the Hazara Rama temple and the House of victory, and Nagalapur(modern Hospet) built by Krishnadeva Raya. (Robert Sewell, Forgotten Empire, p.246)
India. The discovery of Ming pottery in excavations at Hampi again shows the extent of trade relations. In the songs of Purandaradāsa there are hints of this larger economic and commercial world. In some of the Vijayanagara towns, there were separate markets for particular commodities. Markets for agricultural and non agricultural goods also had existed. In a song called ‘Vyāpāra namagayitu’\(^7\), Purandaradāsa uses the metaphor of business men:

“We have gone into business – it is a service industry
Dedicated to the lotus feet and this business keep us busy”

The mercy of Sri Hari has become the shirt I wear
The compassion of the Guru has become my turban
What do I wear beneath my feet? The worst sinner called Kali
And treading on the chests of evil souled people has become our commerce here
We have gone into business”

In this song he frequently uses the terms like business, commerce, debts, payments, deeds, documents, money bags, accounts, profit, taxes etc that are purely related to business transactions. Certain novel business practices such as credit documents are also mentioned in this song.

The trade goods that flowed into the empire included pearls and the source was obviously Hormuz. The relationship between pearl merchants and Vithala is brought out in an inscription found in the Tirupati temple which records the gift of 52 rekhai pon to the deity inorder to finance the Puratṭāsi - tirunāl.\(^7\) During Purandaradāsa’s times foreign trade in the empire was passing from the hands of Muslims to that of the Portuguese. Barbosa’s accounts written

\(^7\) PSD, Vol I, no.20, p.111
\(^7\) GT, 367.
between 1504 and 1515 give a description of this. “The Ormuz ships come hither (Bhatkal) every year, bring horses in great numbers and many pearls, which they sell here to the kingdom of Narasynga, but now on account of our armies they take them to Goa, with many other kinds of merchandise. A few ships belonging to the moors venture to come to this spot to take in loads of spices, not withstanding that the rules and orders of our people they are forbidden so to do”77. Goa in ancient literature is known by several names like Gomanta, Govapuri, Gomantaka etc. Gomanta was a kingdom mentioned in the epic of Mahabharata. Purandaradāśā also mentions Gomanta in his song as an extension of the Kingdom of Yadavas at Dwāraka.78 The Portuguese occupation of Goa adversely affected the trade in the Vijayanagara Empire and placed Bijapur and Vijayanagara completely in the hands of the Portuguese for all their foreign requirements especially horses from Arabia and Persia.

**Articles of export and import**

The articles of export were rice, sugar, spices, salt, cloth etc. The imports into the empire were pearls, copper, elephants, horses, coral, silk and velvet. Pearls came from Ormuz. There are inscriptions mentioning pearl merchants gifting pearls to Vițṭala swamy in the Govindaraja Temple at Tirupati, where Purandaradāśā is said to have visited.79 China supplied silk through the Portuguese and spices through the Muslims. Velvets came from Mecca.80 Elephants were imported from Ceylon. The Portuguese cared more for the improvement of trade than for the

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76 Ormuz here means the Strait of Hormuz which is a narrow strategically important water way between the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf. Vijayanagara had trade relations with these regions.  
77 Moreland, *India at the death of Akbar*, p.189  
78 Gomanta was mentioned as a kingdom of ancient India (Bharatha varsha) along with the Mandakas, the Shandas, the Vidarbhias etc. The Yadavas of Mathura, the capital of Surasena kingdom, fled from there due to the continuous attack of Magadha king Jarasandha. They have reached as far south as Gomanta, (Mahabharatha of Krishna Dwaiipayana Vyasa, translated to English by Kisari Mohan Ganguli)  
79 Copper Plate no.367, Govindaraja Temple(G.T)  
80 Robert sewell, *Forgotten empire*, p.276
friendship of Vijayanagara. Even then the relations with Portuguese and Krishnadeva Raya continued to be friendly.

In one of his Ugabhogas he sings:-

I have been loading up the boat called body
With the merchandise called harinama
As I go about my business, my senses block the way
Order me to pay the toll
So I show them the stamp of Lord Mukunda’s emblem branded on me
I arrive at the presence of Lord Purandara Viṭṭala
And receive the profit from this enterprise: Liberation’s bliss

This song has used the metaphor of tradesmen and business which throws light on the economy of Vijayanagara.

It is well understood that Purandaradāsā lived at a time when Vijayanagara Empire started witnessing the challenges from the outsiders. The Bahmanis of Deccan entered into the political scene in the mid 14th century and the period between 1422 and 1538A.D marked the beginning of the conflict between the Bahmanis and the Vijayanagara, with the Tungabhadra doab between the rivers Tungabhadra and Krishna as the bone of contention. The Vijayanagara Bahmani conflicts in the doab resulted in the great loss of life and property to the people in that area. They used to destroy cities, crops and kill innocent civilians.

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81 dāsāra Padagalu, Vol III, no-89, p.55  
Purandaradāsā in one of his songs expresses his agony and grief over the socio-political chaos that prevailed in his days. He sings in his composition ‘Yakenani’:

“Lord why did you drag me to this kingdom?
If you can’t feed me why did you create me?
I am a stranger here, knowing no one
And my body is weak
I have no inclination to follow any particular path
I have no other go but to feel regretful
No one wishes me well here, only Vasudeva knows my plight
None of my relations or friends is here
There is no king here who can recognize me
My mind is not very happy here- no money
Nobody to take care and help me
No one to show me compassion, my senses are all weakened
Lord Purandara Viṣṭāla knows this”.

The saints like Purandaradāsā encapsulate a very complex rule of ideas in which they talk about the relationship between man and society, individuals and political orders, sacrality and historical memory thus bringing out the concept of a political universe in a vague sense. All these are communicated through songs, poems and religious discourse which served as important modes of communication. Rulers used these modes of communication so that their political message could reach the wider public.

83 PSD, Vol 1, no.64, p.192
This chapter has traversed a complex set of issues. While taking Purandaradasa and his life as the main theme, we attempted an examination of the larger social and economic universe in which he lived and worked. We have drawn attention to the moment of epiphany in his life which transformed him from a merchant to one who has devoted his life to vithala. This feature is common in several traditions of saintliness. We then analysed the intellectual context of the Haridasas movement by using the insight drawn from the recent scholarship represented by William Jackson and Christian Lee Novetzke. The structure and the content of the devaranamas were discussed. Further, we investigated the social and economic implicatios of the songs of Purandaradasa with a view to deciphering the milieu in which the Bhakti form of religious feeling and expression existed. We have argued that the hierarchical nature of Vijayanagara society with both a ritual hierarchy and a politico military hierarchy made composers like Purandaradasa used the ideology of Bhakti as a critic of existing reality. We have finally shown that the widespread exposure of peninsular India to trade was to some extent mirrored in the compositions of Purandaradasa. In the next chapter we investigate the topography unfolded in the poetic universe of the medieval saint composers.