CHAPTER III

SACRED GEOGRAPHY IN THE SONGS OF PURANDARADĀṢĀ

In this chapter I have used the songs of Purandaradāṣā in order to glean the relationship between the conceptual mappings of locations/places visited by Purandaradāṣā within the territorial limits of the Vijayanagara Empire. Such soft materials which include songs, fragments of popular memory, legends, myths and oral traditions are interrogated in order to understand the relationship between the poet and the political empire. The songs of Purandaradāṣā 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 lore.

In the context of this chapter, the term landscape embraces a range of aspects which enable us to grasp the abstract, intangible landscape of the saints and singers within the fold of a more terra firma. David Lowenthal, one of the leading historical geographers has said quite pertinently that humans not only recall the past, but more significantly the past or rather some memories associated with it are invested in the buildings and the surrounding in it.¹ In a sense the landscape is domesticated by investing it with cultural memory. The rich genre of temple legends of South India known as the Sthalapurāṇa aim at the presentation of local myth and tradition within the larger corpus of Puranic and legendary history. As Lowenthal puts it, “we need the past to cope with the present landscape”. Therefore there is a strong undercurrent of history in the shaping of a landscape. With the passage of time and with the steady accretion of memory, the past invested in the landscape gets sacralized and in India, the tradition of Tīrthayāṭha

essentially celebrates the sacrality associated with landscapes. “Memory not only conserves the past but adjusts recall to present needs”. The past is therefore represented in public memory for present needs. The same argument is also put forth by Lynch who argues that the landscape was a best mnemonic system for the retention of group history and ideals.²

Vijayanagara Landscape

What makes the landscape of Vijayanagara sacred is the large network of temples or shrines that play a significant role in defining the local landscape. Shrines of Vijayanagara embody local and pastoral cults. These shrines demarcate physical territories according to social divisions. Through shrines and their associated rites 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.³ 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. Over the past few decades cultural geographers have contributed to the literature of pilgrimage.

Sacred sites comprise natural and human made assemblages of sacred symbols and landscapes markers invested with special meaning. A sacred geography maps a believer’s values, aspirations and beliefs. Mythical worlds are mapped to specific geographies of a holy space. The physical world is imbued with mythological or religious meaning. Like Rome and Jerusalem, Vijayanagara had a spatially sacred landscape with several facets. There is a natural environment

composed of a river (the Thungabhadra), streams and pools all believed to be holy. The city of Vijayanagara had built environment of temples and shrines which are physical manifestation of religious beliefs.

“India is engraved with traces of mythic sites, events. It is a living sacred geography”. The whole of India can be regarded as a vast sacred space organized into a system of pilgrimage centers and their fields. Pilgrimage to holy places is an important feature of India’s religious tradition. Pilgrimage to a specific place lets believer’s act out religious tenets in concrete ways. Whether they wish to absolve sins, cure disease, or pay homage to deities, people undertake journeys often arduous, that they believe will transform them. Although a particular pilgrim’s progress can be traced on a map, the true believer follows a trajectory of spiritual refinement and transformation that can not be represented cartographically.

Vijayanagara’s sacred geography is itself a spiritual path that one travels simply by walking its streets and visiting its temples. The water body that makes Vijayanagara a sacred city is the Tungabhadra River. Many shrines are located on the banks of this river. Throughout Hindu sacred space, places where pilgrims can cross bodies of water are known as ‘tīrthas’ from the Sanskrit root ‘tirath’, which means crossing point or place of pilgrimage. Transformation from human to non-human, and vice-versa is a universal Hindu belief: significantly these transformations are often associated with holy waters. The water in Thungabhadra (like Ganges) thus makes the landscape of Vijayanagara sacred with the presence of several shrines on its banks. The notions that religions separate space into sacred and profane realms is commonly

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4 Eck, D.L, Banaras: City of light, Princeton, N.J:Princeton University, pp.79-88
5 Bocking, B, “If You Meet Buddha on the map”, The Notion of Mapping Spiritual Paths, In Mapping Invisible Worlds, edited by G.D Flood, pp.159-162
7 Kumar, S.V, The Puranic Lore of Holy water Places, pp.66-67
invoked. Sacred geographies are intended to separate ordered sacred space from chaotic or unorganized profane space. In Hinduism, the distinction between sacred and profane is not always clear, if only because it is believed that one’s knowledge of the sacred can only be partial. Even the sacredness of an entire holy site is subject to change. Although Hindus believe that some places have become spatial through divine intervention or personal experiences, these sites may come and go, especially if they are associated with the goals of Artha and Kāma, Moksha sites are more permanent. In a sense, the whole earth is sacred, although people seek places of sanctity, ancient Hindu texts declare that looking for a particular site is unnecessary and that in fact, place itself is an illusion.

Landscape of Vijayanagara symbolizes central beliefs of the Hindu religion, evident in the monuments like temples and pilgrim travels to and within the empire. The sacred geography such as temples, representations of the other holy sites and pilgrimage paths- acts as a material or earthly template that provides a solid form of pilgrim activities and beliefs about the divine. Pilgrims as they move through the sacred geography 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.

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The Concept of Sacred Geography

Geography now a days is looking at its various aspects such as social geography, cultural geography, political geography etc. Historians of religion have coined a new perspective of geography called sacred geography. In Indian tradition sacred geography has played a significant role in shaping the religious thought. It is not easy to determine the limits of what we call ‘sacred’ since the notion of sacred is applied to material forms considered as support in the manifestation of supernatural powers, the perception of the transcendent or divine. The higher forms of religious experiences are beyond the sacred and are often in opposition to it. Mystics show great indifferences to observances, rites, sacraments etc. In its highest forms theirs is a direct experience of an essence whose manifestations alone constitute what is sacred. This is why the notion of sacred is so intimately tied to cosmological theories and to the language of symbols through which it is expressed. The mystic way is thus totally different from the way of ritual and sacraments to which the notion of sacred belongs. Essentially the sacred originates with the recognition of a directing consciousness beyond apparent forms. The elements that reveal or symbolize this consciousness represent the inner logic underlying the appearances of created forms.

Sacred geography is also termed as cosmography- the systematic study of what Eliade termed ‘hierophanies’ (the term hierophany from the Greek roots ‘hieros’ meaning ‘sacred’ or ‘holy’ and ‘phainein’ meaning ‘to reveal’ or ‘to bring to light’ signifies a manifestation of the sacred), those rare divine spots at which divinity reveals itself on Earth.

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13 Ibid
14 Mircea Eliade, Shamanism, p.xiii
In the religious tradition of India, mountains, hills, rivers etc are considered to be sacred. They are considered symbols through which the notion of sacred is expressed. Mountains associated with nāgas- divine cobras on the one hand and with milch cows on the other are among the most ancient objects of cult in India. In the Rig Veda., Vishnu is Girīkshit, ‘Mountain dwelling’, the lord of waters is Varuna; of plants Soma; of cattle Rudra. In later literature, Rudra himself is the lord of mountains – Girīsa as mountain dweller and lord of cattle, Krishna-Gōpal also relates to Rudra, thus assuming a Saivite background. As a cowherd hero Krishna assumes the dark hue of the mountain deity, Govardhan and engages in the activity of the pastoral castes. The Girimaha festival of the mountains was connected with pastoral life in which people subsisted mostly on cattle breeding. The supreme importance of worshiping hills forests and cattle is expressed in a well known passage of the Harivamsha in which Krishna as hero and leader of the cowherd tribe undertakes to wean away his companions from other folk festivals and to impress on them the extreme importance of worshiping the Govardhan hills. “Hills, forests and cattle, these are our supreme benefactors. From hills we derive the greatest of benefits; we should therefore start sacrifices in honour of the hills. Let cows and bulls decorated with autumnal flowers go round yonder hill”.

**Indian Context**

In South Asia the geographical environment has played a major role in shaping Indian thought. India thinks in terms of qualitative or mythical space in which each place has not only its own outward characteristics but also has significance for those beings that inhabit that space. South Asia is no stranger to the concept of sacred time, since most of the calenders remain sacralized. Nowhere else in the world has the tradition of pilgrimage and sacred geography

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15 Ibid
remained as pervasive and vibrant as in the Indian sub-continent. In traditions the world over, pilgrimage essentially refers to the passage or transformation of the soul that turns away from the periphery of the outward world of multiplicity and turns inward through deeper levels of awareness to arrive at the sacred centre. When the essential sacred centre within is seen to have its counterpart in a sacred geographical site, the two passages may be combined or integrated or rather comprehended to be inward or outward reflections of one and the same sacred passage: the return from multiplicity to one’s original nature at the center of the world. “The spirit’s active yet covert involvement is the vital or magical ingredient that transforms foot pilgrimage (PadaYāthras) from a mere walking journey into the experience of spiritual passage. By the power of an underlying presence that no one can understand earnest pilgrims traverse through the shadowy world of outward appearances and penetrate deep into an effulgent interior realm of light and delight.”16 For them the spiritual journey is not an empty metaphor but intensely vivid and real. In this sense only experienced pilgrims can appreciate what it means to cross the invisible thresholds and plunge into strange realms of sacred time and sacred space.17

Bhakti and Pilgrimage

In Indian tradition, the popular aspect of the saint’s devotions is reflected in their practice of travelling about the countryside, spreading their message by means of devotional poetry set to music. They visited temples and other places believed to be particularly sacred to their god. Of the hundreds of their surviving hymns, many celebrate the God’s connection with some particular place. The hymns constitute in effect a most useful kind of religious propaganda. In

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16 Patrick Harrigan, *From Kailasa to Kataragrama: Sacred geography in the Cult of Skanda Murukan*, p.8
17 Patrick Harrigan states that despite hunger, thirst, fatigue, illness and a host of very real dangers one may encounter while traversing jungles, hills, rivers forests etc, most foot pilgrims reach their destination in the outward sense at least. But the longer and deeper passage to the sacred centre within is beset with trials and obstacles of even greater diversity and subtlety which effectively screen out all but most dedicated and resourceful pilgrims. Bhakti saints of India are examples.
the great temples of south India, the priests are keenly aware of the association of a particular medieval saint with their temple. Such hymns helped to endow various temples with rich sacred traditions that undoubtedly helped to promote the growth of pilgrimage networks and the development of a “regional consciousness” among the inhabitants of the region. It was perhaps inevitable that an ambitious ruler should eventually seek to tap such useful channels of social communications for royal purposes, and temple patronage became a significant means of achieving that end.  

Pilgrimage to the holy shrines of Vishnu, emerges as an important metaphor in the hymns of Vaishnava bhakti saints. Nalāyira divyaprābandham of the Ālvārs of Tamil South has mentioned one hundred and eight sacred shrines of Vishnu and the pilgrimages of the Vaishnava saints to these shrines. Singing soul stirring songs about Vishnu, these saints traveled in the nook and corner of the country, carrying with them the message of Bhakti. This has influenced the bhakti saints of the later period of Indian history.

There is an interweaving of pilgrimage and poetry in Purandaradāsā’s songs. It contains several factors that constitute the life of a wandering saint. One such element is his longing for Vishnu that becomes his motivation for pilgrimage. Another important constituent of his poems is his travels to sacred places and shrines and lastly his experiences in the temple that prompted him to compose songs.

In the context of the songs of Purandaradāsā, sacred geography is invariably associated with the sacred sites of Vishnu temples associated with particular episodes in His divine career that are scattered across the length and breadth of Vijayanagara Empire. Purandaradāsā in the 16th century is believed to have traveled extensively through out the Vijayanagara Empire; from

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Pandharpur in the North to Tirupati in the South. Each song is said to have been spontaneously composed by the saint when he visited a particular shrine of Vishnu. In each song Purandaradāsā identifies Vishnu as belonging to a particular place. He also mentions a specific temple in a place and spontaneously sings about the virtues of the god as is depicted in that shrine. The physical, geographical location and surroundings of the shrines are beautifully described and precisely identified. The actual journeys of Purandaradāsā are commemorated in his songs.

Through his songs, pilgrimage acquires an influential metaphoric character and significance in Hindu devotionalism. Attitude of pilgrimage is common to all bhakti saints (Śaivites and Vaishnavites) and they considered it as a mode of devotion to God. This they do by singing of the God and his shrines.  

Purandaradāsā in his songs mentions the places such as Pandharpur, Hampi, Mēlukōte, Bēlūr, Udipi, Tirupati, Kānchi and Śrīrangam. What is common to all these places is the presence of a Vishnu shrine. He identifies the deities of all Vishnu temples he visited with the form of Vithala-his “ishtadēvatha”. Through his travels, Purandaradāsā tried to unify the isolated Vishnu shrines from Deccan to the South of India in a sacred geographical map - through the metaphor of pilgrimage – related with love, landscape and poetry – he unified the Vijayanagara Empire as a single religio-cultural region through his songs.

When the songs of the saints are observed carefully, they confirm the idea that pilgrimage is the context of composition for almost all the hymns. But a clear idea about the chronology of the saint’s journey and the events during his travels are not available. The visit of a saint to a

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particular temple is narrated in the oral traditions, but it limits itself to local legends surrounding a particular saint’s visit to a particular temple. But the historicity of the orally transmitted ideas is doubted. So it is always considered authentic to use the songs of the bhakti saints themselves as a relevant source for the reconstruction of history. One comes across the location of the shrines described by the saint poets with remarkable attention to geographical, topographical detail and accuracy. From these hymns it is possible to map the path of saint’s pilgrimages.

Most of the Vishnu shrines visited by Purandaradāsā situated on or near the bank of a sacred river – pre eminently river Tungabhadra but also others as Bhīma and Kāvēri. His course along the pilgrimage route can be traced on a physical map of the Vijayanagara Empire. His pilgrimages involved journeys along the river bank and frequent crossing of the rivers. As far as Purandaradāsā is considered, he traveled most extensively and frequently in the Tungabhadra region, the region of his birth and the area where the famous Viṭhala Swāmi temple at Hampi was located. Purandaradāsā Maṇṭapa (illustrated below) is situated on the banks of Tungabhadra, which was gifted to him by the king, where he sat and composed poems according to local tradition.

The Sacred Centre at Hampi

Hampi the site of the city of Vijayanagar which flourished from 1336 to 1565 is rich with memories going back to the days of Śrī Rāma. Legend says that it was the capital of the kingdom of Kishkinda and it was on the banks of the lake Pampa that the great epic hero made friends with Sugrīva and slew Vāli and secured forever the service of Hanuman. Later it was the seat of a thriving medieval Kingdom. Learned men and great religious leaders played as important a role in laying its foundations as mighty warriors and generous princes. The person who conceived the plan of bringing this new kingdom into being – to absorb with in itself all the
weak and warring principalities of old and to at as an effective check against the reckless hordes from the North – and making it a nursery for a new Hindu aspiration leading to a splendid renaissance of letters and arts, was not a soldier or a prince or a court intriguer or a local chieftain but a scholar and sage whose name has come down in the history of Sanskrit literature as well as in that of the great Hindu pontificate of Sringeri as Madhava Vidyaranya.\textsuperscript{20} The success of this gifted and broad visioned sanyäsi in the task of national regeneration was rendered possible by the work in other field of the celebrated Vaishnava teacher Śrī Vēdānta Dēsika\textsuperscript{21} and his contemporary Śrī Akshōbhya Tīrtha,\textsuperscript{22} an exponent of the dvaita Philosophy. Besides making ample contributions to Sanskrit and vernacular literatures, these saints brought about a moral and religious awakening in the land by their incessant preachings and discourses and by the austere and earnest lives that they led.

**Pastoral landscape**

It is also possible to trace out a ‘realistic geography’ from the songs of Purandaradāsā. His songs deal with the realities of the society in which he lived. He has witnessed the life of people belonging to different sections of the society, during his travels. Since he has traveled alongside the river banks, he became familiar with the socio-economic activities of the people. Tungabhadra region was inhabited by pastoral communities, which he mentions in one of his songs which he composed as an invitation to the God to his cowherd village.
"Hey there dāsā, if you come to my village  
I hope you will come to my neighbourhood  
And dāsā, if you come to our neighbourhood  
Please come to the cowherd’s lane  
O dāsā wearing a forest flower garland  
O dāsā who has lifted the mountain with just your pingie finger  
I am crazy about you, can’t live without seeing you day and night  
Hey dāsā if you come to my village  
Please come to the cowherds lane"²³

This song gives an idea that pastoralists or herdsmen used to be more settled near Tungabhadra. Cattle were main source of wealth. Great care was given for the maintenance of the livestock and protection of the cattle wealth. Pastoral communities of Deccan constituted mostly of Dhangars – lived on cattle rearing. The regions inhabited by these pastoral communities in Mahārāshtra were Pune, Satāra, Kolhāpur, Kurudwadi, Pandharpur etc. In Karnatakā the pastoral community of Kuruwas concentrated on the river valleys of Tungabadhra and Kāvēri²⁴. These valleys were well suited as pasture grounds for grazing cattle. The display of military strength was an obvious expression of royal force and might. At the capital there were many invasions, usurpation, assassination etc – for keeping a formidable centre of infantry, cavalry, elephants, artillery and a special palace guard. The structures related to this military force, fortifications, defensive gateways, stores, treasuries were also indicators of royal might. The Vijayanagara rulers strengthened their military powers by incorporating the pastoral

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²³ Puranadara Sahithya Darsana(PSD) Vol.IV, No.10. p.59  
²⁴ G.D Sontheimer(2004), p.54
communities into it. The help of pastoral people like Danghars\(^{25}\) and Kuruwas were sought by the rulers for defending external aggression.

The most important feature of Vijayanagara’s physical setting is the natural basin in which the city is located. Through this basin flows the Tungabadhra River in a North East direction. Most of the great sixteenth century temple projects at Vijayanagara such as the Virupaksha temple, Tiruvengalanatha and Vithala complexes are located in the sacred centre of the capital, the temples frequently visited by Purandaradāsā. The rocky terrain and the surrounding hillocks made Hampi an ideal defensive location – an important requisite of the capital of an expanding kingdom, whose early kings depended upon conquest to raise resources for themselves. This area was a dry, hilly area and faced a scarcity of resources particularly water. Later a far thinking administration invested in tank and canal irrigation. Water was diverted from the East flowing Tungabhadra, on whose bank Hampi was established, transforming the land into a city capable of supporting a large population. The river supported an extensive irrigated zone between the sacred centre and the urban core.

The chief crops cultivated in the Tungabhadra basin were Jowar, cotton and Ragi. The peasants used the former principally for food. Rice and sugarcane were grown to a small extent only under tank irrigation. Rice, ragi, sugar cane, and wheat – the crops grown in the Tungabhadra region occupied a prominent place in the songs of Purandaradāsā. He sings in his song ‘Rāgi Tandira’- O! Have you brought ragi gruel?

Bless you- may your life be gracious and not grueling

May no one treat you cruelly

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\(^{25}\) The Dhangar caste is primarily located in the Indian state of Maharashtra. The literal translation of the name Dhangar is ‘wealthy’. Their original home land is said to be at Vrindavan in Mathura. They are said to have moved from Vrindavan to Mewar, then to Gujarath and Maharashtra. They were noted for their martial qualities and were incorporated in to the army of later kingdoms like that of Yadavas, Hoysalas and Vijayanagara.
Bless you generous feeder of the poor

Giving up talk, except songs of God

Singing bhajans daily – have you brought ragi?26

Purandaradāśa used the dēsi (folk) style for his compositions. He compiled the hymns by following the oral traditional principle of grouping them according to the musical mode in which they were meant to be sung. This was considered to be the most useful and convenient method for systematizing the combination of melody and meter in the songs for all who wished to sing them—both for professional singers and for all devotees who used to sing these songs in their worship.

An idea of a saintly community is recreated through the songs of the bhakti saints. In the case of Vijayanagara singer saints – Purandaradāśa, Kanakadāśa and Annamācharya were contemporaries who traveled extensively throughout the empire. These pilgrim saints unite a saintly community by means of their meeting with each other. Purandaradāśa seems to have met Kanakadāśa and Annamācharya at Hampi and Tirupati respectively. Purandaradāśa’s sacred map of journey and hymns thus takes on the unifying dimension of community.

Purandaradāśa visited Hampi, where he met Kanakadāśa, who lived during the height of Vijayanagara Empire in the 1500’s. He belonged to the family of Kuruba tribesmen, who were a pastoral community.27 When listening to the songs of Kanakadāśa, it is convinced that this poet devotee has struggled a lot for the dignity of being accepted as an equal among upper caste Vaishnavas. Because it was a period of caste frictions and prejudices, status on the basis of birth and its disadvantages – all reflected in the poems of Kanakadāśa. Kanakadāśa received initiation

26 PSD, Vol 1, No.33, p.136
from Vyasaraja and had become known as a poet before Purandaradāśā came to Hampi. Purandaradāśā had all respect for Kanakadāśā as a senior scholar and held him in high esteem. No mention is made on Purandaradāśā in the songs of Kanakadāśā. Kanakadāśā is thought to be elder to Purandaradāśā, and when Kanakadāśā was composing poems, Purandaradāśā was not famous as a composer. But Purandaradāśā has mentioned Kanakadāśā in one of his songs Kanakadāśā Namela.28

When Vyāsamuni shows such high regard for Kanakadāśā
His followers in the matha are full of scorn and meanness
Everyday when giving tirtha, Vyāsamuni says
‘Call Kanakadāśā I want to give him tirtha’
And the cunning scholars will say ‘O yes
His attainment of Sanyāsa has now really become fruitful
And Vyāsamuni gives a smile
When Vyāsamuni shows such high regard for Kanakadāśā
His followers in the matha are full of ridicule and meanness.

Visit to Tirupati

Purandaradāśā is said to have often gone to Tirupathi, writing many songs to Lord Venkatēswara on the Tirumala Hills. Lord Venkatēswara became very popular in his time and even the Kings of Vijayanagara went to Tirupathi to worship Lord Balaji. Some of his songs reflect the prayers of Purandaradāśā at this sacred place of worship where he met his early contemporary Annamāchārya, a Telugu poet saint. Most of Purandaradāśā’s songs are in

28 PSD, Vol I, No.54, p.171
Kannada, but he has also composed songs in Sanskrit. One of those compositions is in praise of Lord Venkateswara dwelling on Venkatāchalam (Venkata Hills)- *Venkatāchala Nilayam Vaikunṭa puravasam* 29

Lord Venkatesvara has been at Tirupati a long time. Already in the earliest Tamil poetry from the early centuries CE, the Venkatam Mountain is mentioned as the historic boundary between the area of Tamil speech and the regions to the North. The shrine is strategically located over a group of seven hills which are a part of the mythological Mount Meru. Legend has it that the seven peaks represent the seven hoods of Ādisēsha, the king of serpents. The seven names of the hills are seshacahalam (bearing resemblance to Ādisēsha, the Serpent Lord); Vēdāchalam (since Vedas are recited in these hills); Garudāchalam (because the hills were brought to earth by Garuda, Vishnu’s vehicle); Vrishabhādri, (since Vrishabha attained salvation here); Anjanādri(because Anjanādēvi gave birth to Anjaneya or Hanuman here); Venkatachalam(since Lord Venkata resides here in Kali Yuga) and Anandagiri (as Ādisēsha and Vāyudēva exhibited their strenghts here) 30. In all likelihood, its God was already there in some form—perhaps, as the medieval mythic tradition suggests, as Varāha, the Boar. The Vijayanagara Empire had also adopted this Boar as its emblem. Certainly by the time of the long Tamil narrative poem, Silappatikāram in the middle of the first millennium CE, the god of Venkatam was Vishnu, with recognizable iconographic features. Today he stands as a black tall rock with four arms, a golden crown and rich jewellery as described by Purandaradāsā in his songs. Some twenty million pilgrims come to Tirupati each year to see him. As a result, Tirupati is the wealthiest of all Indian

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29DP, Vol I, No.34, p.65
30In ancient times when sacred geography played a significant role in the identification of powerful sites, a configuration of seven hills was considered to be the ideal location for the capital of a kingdom. Notable examples are Athens, Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem as well as Kataragrāma in Ceylon.
temples, a virtual economic empire ruled by the god through his officers in the Dēvasthānams, the temple administration. This economic regime has been in place since at least the fifteenth century, as a wealth of epigraphic and other sources attest. The rise of Tirupati from somewhat modest beginnings full-fledged political and economic system documented by the medieval inscriptions is a complex story still not properly understood. There was an ancient link between the temple and the local and the trans-local kings of southern Andhra and the northern Tamil country. Local tradition connects this god with both the Tondaimans of the Northern Coromandel and with the great Chōlā dynasty of the far South (9th to 13th centuries)\textsuperscript{31}. There is also an enduring memory of a far-reaching transition in both the internal organization and in the metaphysics of the Tirupati Cult at some point in roughly the 12th Century, the name of the philosopher Ramānuja systematizer of South Indian SriVaishnavism the worship of the God Vishnu as Supreme- is emaphatically mentioned in this respect. One could read the history of this cult as a slow process of transformation in which the early male dominated Vaikhānasa vision of the god was driven to expand and incorporate a sensual and personal Pancharātra theology in which the Goddess Lakshmi plays a significant role\textsuperscript{32}. Today this Goddess exists in Tirupati under the name Padmāvathi or Alamēlumanga. But she has not been accorded a proper place on the top of the mountain instead she has her own separate place in Mangāpuram at the foot of the Hill. There are references to Alamēlumanga in the songs of Purandaraḍāsā. More songs on Venkatēswara and Padmāvathi have been composed by his early contemporary Annamayya, perhaps the most accessible and universal achievement of classical Telugu

\textsuperscript{31} Sadhu Subramaniam Sastri, Report on the Inscriptions of the Devasthanam collections, p 104-112

literature. He effectively created and popularized a new genre, the short padam song, that spread throughout the Telugu and Tamil regions and later became a major vehicle for Karnātic Music compositions\textsuperscript{33}.

There is an important difference in the manner in which the songs of Annamāchārya and Purandaradāṣā were preserved. While Annamāchārya’s padams were inscribed on copper plates and preserved in a cell until their discovery in the early seventeenth century, the songs of Purandaradāṣā circulated amongst the Vārkari community and hence the songs may have been subject to interpolation and new material may have been introduced. David Shulman and Nārayana Rao have stated that 13,000 songs of Annamāchārya were inscribed on 2289 copper plates.\textsuperscript{34} One way of explaining the difference is the mode of preservation and the transmission of two sets of songs is by suggesting that Annamāchārya unlike Purandaradāṣā was closely associated with the ruling Sāluva dynasty and with the institution of Tirupati temple. Purandaradāṣā was however a travelling peripatetic poet and therefore did not find the loci for his songs. The songs of Annamāchārya clearly show that he chose to write them down there by fixing the texts in a manner that prevented interpolation. With Purandaradāṣā the emphasis was purely the circulation of the songs in an oral medium. Annamāchārya, the senior contemporary of Purandaradāṣā composed songs in the form of dēvaranāma. The former was restricted only to the Andhra region while the later circulated in Deccan, Karnātaka and Tamil region.

\textsuperscript{33} V Narayana Rao, \textit{Multiple Literary Cultures in Telugu: Court, Temple and Public, in Literary Cultures in History}, ed.S Pollock, 408-413, University of California Press, 2003
Udupi

Purandaradāśa’s visit to Udipi is mentioned in his song *kandena Udupiya Krishnana*:

“I have seen lord Krishna of Udipi,  
the greatest lover in the whole universe  
He can win anyone over  
Before going to the temple I saw the great pool and bathed  
I went to the temple of Chandramouleśvara – Shiva and prostrated  
Went to the temple of Anantēswara, then to the temple of Hanuman  
Then I went to the temple of Lord Krishna, and  
I have seen Lord Krishna of Udipi,  
the greatest lover in the whole universe  
He can win any one over  
I saw the river flowing all around  
I saw everywhere effulgence of the sun  
I saw the lake named Madhva Sarovar  
Saw the shrines of the eight great saints of the Madhva tradition  
And I saw the famous Lord Krishna of Udipi”35

In this song Purandaradasa states his explicit association with the Dvaita philosophy propounded by Madhvāchārya and his devotion to the *Ashtamathas* of the Madhva tradition. In another song Purandaradāśa eloquently praises the Madhva Matha in the following verses:

“The best matha is Mādhva matha  
The Pūja worshipping Raghuṣati is the purest holiest faith”36

He goes on to state that the Math encouraged the study of scripture, Vēdapārayana along with the study of śruti, smriti and Itihāsa. He ends by stating the equivalence between the

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35 PSD, Vol 1, no.77, p.224  
36 William Jackson
Mādhva faith and the cult of Viṭhala. What is interesting is the identification established between the Sanskritic traditional practice and the certainly pastoral and non-Vedic origins inherent in the cult of Viṭhōba. Thus Purandaradāsā played a role in harmonizing the great and little tradition through his songs.

Kāñchīpuram

It is found from the songs of Purandaradāsā that he had been to places like Kāñchīpuram and Śrīrangam in the far south. In one of his songs he says that he had witnessed the Garudaseva, which was an important ritual of Varadarājaswami temple at Kāñchīpuram. Śrī Varadarāja Temple is built on a hillock called Hastigiri (Satyavratakṣētra or Attiyur). Vijayanagara Kings had been great patrons of Varadarāja perumal and inscriptions reveal that King Achutharaya visited this temple with his queen and two sons on the day of the mula asterism, which was a Sunday and the first tithi of the solar month Karnataka of the Nandana year, while the visit to Kāmākshi temple at Kānci took place next year. The king also gave 17 villages to this temple. Varadarāja got in addition silk clothes and a breast plate in which, diamonds, lapis-lazuli, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, topaz and a large number of pearls were worked. About two months after the date of the first grant the king presented to this temple a conch, a discus, a pair of bands uplifted for protection and a Vaishnava forehead mark all set with jewels. The ancient records of this place show that Achyutharāya visited the temple and in commemoration of his visit he made large presents of pearls and a thousand cows. This important ceremony is called

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37 Ibid, Vol II, no.63, p.32
38 Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol IV, p.233
39 Jagadisa Ayyar, P.V, South Indian Shrines (illustrated), Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1993, p.615
40 ibid
‘Thulāpurushadānam’⁴¹ which is mentioned by Purandaradāśā in his song. It is also recorded that this city was visited by many ancient kings of India when this same meritorious ceremony also called Tulābhāra (weighing against Gold) and the gifts called Mahābhūtagāta were performed⁴². The sixteen gifts prescribed for kings are mentioned in one of the inscriptions at Nagalapuram, chingelput district- Brahmāndam, Visvachakram, Gadam, Mahābhūdam, Rathnadēnu, Sapṭhāmbōthi, Kalpavriksha, Kāmadēnu, Svarnakshima, hiranyāsva, hiranyaratha, Tulāpurusha, Gōsahasra, Hēmagarbha, Panchalanga and Hēmakumbha⁴³.

The Varadarāja Perumāl temple occupies a very significant place in the history of Śrī Vaishnavism in general and in the life of Rāmānuja in particular. Purandaradāśā visited all the four places associated with the life of Rāmānuja - Śrīrangam, Tirumalai, Kānchi and Mēlukōte. As a site where Rāmānuja popularized Divya-prabandham, the sacred corpus of songs, Varadarāja Perumāl temple was a major Vaishnavite pilgrim centre during the Vijayanagara period. This temple was visited by Krishnadēvārya soon after his campaign against the Gajapatis of Orissa. Two inscriptions found on the walls of this temple give a complete list of territories conquered by Krishnadēvārya.⁴⁴ There are records of Achyutharāya too visiting this temple and presenting gifts. Purandaradāśā too visited this shrine on the occasion of the ‘Garudasēva’ and he sang the song with the following lines:

“Khagavāhana Kāṇchīpura nilaye”.

⁴¹ ASI, 1912-1913, p.142
⁴² EI, Vol I, p.368
⁴³ Jagadisa Ayyar, P.V, op cit,
⁴⁴ ARE, 474 & 533 of 1919
Śrīrangam Temple

The great Vaishnava temple of Śrīrangam was the loadstar of devotional singers in the Vijayanagara period as well as in the days of the Ālvārs. Purandaradāsā visited Śrīrangam in the course of his bardic travels and composed several *padas* or songs of devotion in Kannada on Ranganātha. He often refers to the deity of Śrīrangam as ‘Ranga’ and ‘Ranganātha’ in his compositions. His song “Dayamādo Ranga” is an example.Śrīrangam temple is situated in Tiruchirapally district of Tamilnadu. The river Kāvēri which divides the district into two nearly equal parts, the Northern and the Southern splits into two, nine miles west of Śrīrangam. The Northern branch takes the name of Coleroon (Kollidam) while the Southern retains the name of the Kāvēri. The main river – Kāvēri, which takes its source in the Western Ghats in Coorg, enters the Tanjore district exhausts itself in the network of irrigation channels, and almost loses itself in the sands before reaching the sea. But the Coleroon, which forms through its entire length the dividing line between the Trichy and Tanjore districts, falls into the sea at the Northern most point of the Tanjore district as a wide mouthed river. Kāvēri is also known as ‘Akhanda’ or undivided Kāvēri. The Southern and Northern Kāvēri are mentioned in the literature of a traditional and religious type. Ptolemy refers to it in his Geography as Khaberos. The river has ever been an important adjunct to the Hindu temple and the former is as sacred as the latter. Śrīrangam temple lies in all the natural richness and sanctity that could be afforded by the two rivers that flow on either side.

Another important place which deserves mention in this context is Uraiyur, the capital of the earliest known Cholas referred to by the Sangam literature. It is an insignificant suburb of

45 William Jackson, *The Songs of Three Great South Indian Saints*, p.88
Tiruchirapalli today and contains a sub-shrine attached to the Śrīrangam temple, that of Uraiyyur Nacciyar, one of the two consorts of Alagiyamanavālan, the God at Śrīrangam, the other being Sriranga Nacciyar, whose shrine is contained within the main temple of Śrīrangam. In Sanskrit, Uraiyyur has been known as Uragapura. It is assumed that Purandaradāsā in his composition “Uragapureswara Śrīranganātha” is referring to the place called Uraiyyur.

Śrīrangam is rated as the first and most important among the 108 Vaishnava shrines which lie scattered throughout India. In Vaishnava tradition it has been known as the ‘koil’ – the temple par excellence and bears the same relation to Vaishnavism as Chidambaram does to Saivism. The temple walls contain inscriptions dating from the 10th century. A history of Śrīrangam resolves itself into an account of the growth of Vaishnava Cult in South India. Since its inception, the Vaishnava movement made Śrīrangam its headquarters and its rallying point, and the Vaishnava bards and mystics looked upon the shrine as the loadstar of their devotion and aspirations. All Vaishnava saints called Ālvārs have mentioned the deity of Śrīrangam in their works.

The reference to the ‘cosmic serpent’ on which Ranganātha is said to be resting is an iconographic marker that appears frequently in Purandaradāsā’s compositions on Ranganātha. The exact identification of the temple described can only be inferred on the basis of the collateral information provided in the song itself. Since Śrīrangam was the pre eminent Vaishnava centre

47 The Gadval plates of the early Chalukya King, Vikramaditya I, dated 674 A.D mention Uragapura on the Southern Bank of the Kaveri, referring to Uraiyyur. The Prapannamritam adopts this terminology. In Vaishnava tradition Uraiyyur is known as Nisulapuri, after Nisulai the mother of Kamalavalli, a Chola Princess, who became the consort of the God at Śrīrangam. Uraiyyur itself means nothing more than a place of dwelling in Tamil.
48 PSD, Vol II, no.88, p.58
49 Ibid, p.58
and there were close links between Krishnadēvarāya and the Tatāchārya of Śrīrangam, the descriptions of the Ranganātha shrine given in the songs of Purandaradāsā could apply only to the celebrated temple at Śrīrangam. V.N Hari Rao in his analysis of the Śrīrangam Temple has identified the Ranganātha temple near Tiruchirapalli as the one visited by Purandaradāsā.\(^{50}\)

In the song “Innu Daya Bārade Dāsana mēle” the composer refers to the shrine of Lakshmi who is the consort of Ranganātha. The Śrīrangam temple had a shrine dedicated to lakshmi. Further, inscriptions refer to the existence of temple for Viṭhala with in the prakāra of the Śrīrangam temple.\(^{51}\)

**Śrīrangam and the patronage of Vijayanagara Kings.**

In this context it will not be out of place to mention the patronage extended by the Vijayanagara rulers to the Śrīrangam temple. Purandaradāsā lived at Hampi when the Vijayanagara kingdom passed through the hands of eminent rulers like Krishnadēvarāya and Achyutharāya. The state of prosperity enjoyed by the Śrīrangam temple under the patronage of benevolent monarchs received a great set back when Islam over ran South India in the first half of the 14\(^{th}\) century. The temple lost its landed property. It was restored with the revival of Hindu political power in South India under the leadership of Vijayanagar. The inscriptions in the Śrīrangam temple of the early Vijayanagara chieftains paint a picture of a conscious effort on their part to resuscitate the shrine as the celebrated centre of Hinduism that it had been. Large numbers of copper plate grants begin to appear in the period of the later Vijayanagara kings. Most of these record the grant of villages to the wardens of the Śrīrangam temple. A few

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\(^{50}\) Ibid, p.174

\(^{51}\) SII, Vol XXIV, No.547/ ARIE, No.110 of 1937-38
inscriptions of the mid Vijayanagara kings give us important and useful details about the governors of Tiruchirapally region and their dealings with the Śrīrangam temple. For all these reasons we may conclude that it was Śrīrangam temple of Ranganātha which was visited by Purandaradāsa.

Inscriptions at Hampi refer to the presence of an Anantaśayana temple near the Viṭṭala temple located at Vijayanagara. This temple which has been ascribed to the reign of krishnadēvarāya(1509-1529) did contain an image of Anantaśayana or Ranganātha, probably the same image which is now in Hampi museum. However this temple did not possess a dedicated temple to Lakshmi and therefore Purandaradāsa may not have intended this shrine. The Anantaśayana temple at Śrīrangapattinam belonged to the Wodeyar dynasty and therefore did not exist during the life time of Purandaradāsa.

Inscriptions register gifts and endowments of a public or private nature to temples, mathas and Brahmans. As such they are of immense value to the history of any temple. A list of inscriptions of Vijayanagara Kings on the wall of Śrīrangam temple arranged chronologically, presents a succinct sketch of the history of the property of the temple, in lands, gardens, jewels of gold and diamonds, lamps, vessels and other objects for worship and finally in gold coins (varāhas). In the days of the flourishing Hindu Rajas the temple received very frequently rich presents not only from the local chiefs but also from their neighbors, who came down for the purpose of war or peace. The list of benefactors included important officers of the army, merchant princess and private individuals.

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52 V.N Hari Rao, op.cit, p.2
Quite a good number of inscriptions of Krishnadeva Raya have been found in Śrīrangam temple. Some of them are mentioned in this context. These are copper plates grants in the custody of the temple and register gifts of villages to Brahmins. The Śrīrangam temple appears as donee in a few cases. The earliest is a stone epigraph dated 1511 A.D. it registers a gift of land in the village of Manakudi Senthamaikkannanallur in Uraiyyur for daily and special offerings to the god by a villager. The next is a copper plate inscription dated 1514 A.D. it says that on the Go-dvadasi tithi in the month of karthika of that year, Krishnadevaraya being in the presence of god Virupaksha in the temple at Vijayanagara granted the village of Ennakudi christened as Krishnarayapuram to Allala Bhatta, son of Varadarāja who was a master of the six systems of philosophy. On this occasion the king made the Gosahasra mahadana (gift of a thousand cows to brahmanas). The village was situated on the banks of the Kāvēri, but its exact location has not been made out because some of its neighbouring villages, whose names are given, viz., Pelaikkudi and Karkakti have not been identified. The fact that the copper plate grand was obtained from the Śrīrangam temple suggests that the donee or his successors might have gifted away the village to the temple. An inscription dated 1516 is important because it says that in that year Krishnadeva Raya visited Śrīrangam and made a gift of five villages for providing offerings and worship to the god. In Kannanur there is an inscription of Krishnadevaraya dated 1517 A.D. it records certain remission of taxes amounting to 10000 gold pieces and consisting of Jodi, sulavari, piravari and arasuperu in favour of a number of Saiva and Vaishnava temples in the

54 CP No.23 of 1905-06; EI.XVIII.pp160-162
55 CP No.98 of 1938-39, EI XVIII.pp97-98
Tamil country.\textsuperscript{56} Apart from those, the inscriptions of Achyutha Raya and Sadasiva Raya are also found in Śrīrangam temple.

**Belur**

It is said that Purandaradāsā has visited the Chenna Kesava Temple at Belur. Belur on the right bank of the river Yagacher is in the native state of Mysore. In Puranas and inscriptions, this place is known as Beluhur, Velur and Velapura\textsuperscript{57}.

On account of the high religious importance Belur was also called as *abhinavakshoni-vaiyuntha* or the earthly Vaikuntha (the abode of Vishnu in heaven). It is also referred in one of the songs of Purandaradāsā\textsuperscript{58}. The Chenna Kēsava temple is the most important temple at this place. The temple has two gates on the East of which one on the North is surmounted by a lofty Gōpura and the other is called ‘Anebagilu’ or the elephant gate. It was constructed by Vishnuvardhana of Hoysāla dynasty to commemorate his conversion by the celebrated Vaishnava apostle Rāmānujāchārya from the Jaina to the Vaishnava faith. It is this king who consecrated on the one and same occasion the five images of Narayana—‘Pancha Nārāyana Prathista’ at different places i.e. Bēlūr, Talkād, Mēlukōte, Tonnūr and Gadag. The central deity of Vijayanārāyana at Bēlūr temple is very appealing and about six feet in height with *prabha* or halo having on it the *Dasavatara* or ten incarnations of Vishnu. The image is said to have brought from the Bāba Būdan Hills and that while removing this god they failed to remove the goddess also. This provoked the ire of the goddess who in consequence refused to be removed to the latter place and preferred remaining there itself. This accounts for the god’s being taken to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[56] K.A.Nilakanta Sastrī, ed, Punjai inscription of Krishnadevaraya
\item[57] Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol V, p.63
\item[58] PSD, Vol III, no.43, p.21
\end{footnotes}
the former place once during the annual festival occasion in the month of April. The one special feature then is that for a period of three days during this festival *panchamas* or the outcastes have the privilege of entering the temple to pay homage to the God on account of the fact that renewal of the slippers, which the God is supposed to make use of while going to the Hills to visit the Goddess is done by the cobbler's of the place. The few other temples where outcastes secure admission to the interior on occasions of the annual festival are the Nārāyana Swāmi temple at Mēlukōte and the Ranganātha swami temple on the Biligirirangan Hills. ‘Alagiri range’ refered by Purandaradāsā is confusing as Ranganatha of Biligiri Hills.59 According to the inscriptions in the temple at Belur, the affairs of the temple were managed by a committee of 88 SriVaishnavites. Also an account of the rise of the Yadu race is given and these are of great value from a historical point of view.

In a song entitled ‘Kandena Govindana’ Purandaradāsā refers to his adoration of Kēśava Nārāyana. This representation refers to the iconographic form in which Vishnu is represented in the Kēśava Nārāyana temple at Bēlūr. Keśava is one of the twenty four *upa-avatara*as of Vishnu and is mentioned in the Rupamananda. In the same song, Purandaradāsā also refers to Vasudeva and Achyutha and both these names figure in the list of upa-avatara of Vishnu. Lord Ranganatha is described as the son of Vasudeva, a leap in Vaishnava theology that can not easily be explained. Kēśava is generally indistinguishable from Pradyumna, a key concept in Madhva theology. The song ends with Purandaradāsā identifying Kēśava with Viṭhala as he says:

“He is merciful our Purandara Viṭhala
And I believe him as the god present in Bēlūr”

59 PSD, Vol II, no.66, p.181
Melukote

Melukote in Pandavapura Taluk of Mandya district is one of the sacred places in Karnataka, where Purandaradāsa is said to have visited. An inscription dated 1537 A.D refers to Purandaradāsa’s visit to Melukote which suggests that Purandaradāsa visited the temple during the reign of Achutharaya. He sings in his song *Indu Nanenu:* 

“I don’t know what good deed I have done
Lord Venkata has come to my home
Famous for sacred auspiciousness, today
Lord Venkateshvara has come to my home
That lord of Yadugiri Hills of Melukote,
Lord Venkateshvara has come to my home
I don’t know what good deed I have done”

In the inscriptions the place called Mēlukōte is also known as Tirunārāyanapuram. It is built on rocky hills known as Yādavagiri or Yadugiri overlooking the Cauvery valley. It is believed that early in the 12th century, the great Sri Vaishnava Saint Rāmānujāchārya took up his residence and lived here for fourteen years. It thus became a prominent centre of the Sri Vaishnava sect of Brahmans, who obtained from Vishnuyuddhana, the Hoysāla king, who had become a follower of Ramānuja, an assignment of the fertile tracts of land in neighborhood, especially Ashtagrāmas on either bank of the Kāvēri. In the 14th century the place suffered at the hands of Muslim invaders who wrecked Dwārasamudra and it was at Tonnur at the Southern foot

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60 EC, Vol 6, p.32
61 PSD, Vol I, no.95, p.273
62 EC, Vol 3, p.122
of the hills that the Hoysāla king at first retired. It was subsequently restored in about 1460 by Thimmanna Dannayaka, a chief of Nāgamangala who was an army commander of the Vijayanagara king Mallikārjuna or Immadi Prudhādeva Raya. The Brahmins deserted Mēlkōte which was then plundered. The principal temple at Mēlkōte is a square building of large dimensions but very plain dedicated to Lord Cheluva Narāyana Swāmi. The utsavamūrthi, which is metallic image representing the deity which is called Cheluvepille Raya or Cheluva Narayana Swamy whose original name seems to have been Ramapiya. But it is not all together possible to accept what Purandaradāsā refers in his song ‘Kandena Ramapiyana’\(^63\) is the deity of Cheluvaṇārāiyana Swāmi of Mēlkōte, due to lack of ample evidences. According to a legend this image was lost and was recovered by Rāmānujāchārya. The annual report of the Mysore archaeological department states on the strength of epigraphic evidence, that the presiding deity of this temple was already a well known object of worship before Rāmānuja worshipped at the shrine in 1098 C.E and even before he came to the Mysore region and that very probably he used his influence to rebuild or renovate the temple.\(^64\) From the lithic records of the period existence of Tamil influence and Vaishnava worship of the area is also evident. The temple is richly endowed having been under the patronage of Vijayanagara and later Mysore rājas. Vijayanagara king Venkatapati Rāya is said to have granted several villages to the temple at Mēlkōte.

Mystic moods of Purandaradāsā are reflected in many of his songs. His longing for Vishnu becomes his motivation for going to a sacred place. Each saint has one shrine which is dear to him. In the case of Purandaradāsā it is the Viṭhōba temple at Pandharpur, the site of his

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\(^{63}\) PSD, Vol III, No.53, p.65
\(^{64}\) MAD(1944), Mysore: 1945, p.57
psychological conversion. In his song *Dāsana Mādiko* he pleads to the Lord to make him His slave.

“Make me your slave
Why are you harassing me so much
Why are you cheating me, Lord Vishnu so full of mercy
Let me wear the protective armour called mercy of the Lord
Let me serve at your feet
Pleading for staunch devotion to you
I will bow down at your feet everyday singing your praises
Give me a side long glance with your eyes
Let me meditate on you
Make me your servant”

It is 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.

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

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66 PSD, Vol 1, no.64, p.192
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 Vīhala knows this”

Thus it has been possible to unite the isolated Vishnu temples on the physical map of Vijayanagara Empire, by analyzing the songs of Purandaradāsā. In the medieval contexts, cults or temples had potentials for integrating polities and societies- a valuable potential where the polity incorporates diverse segments. One way to integrate conquered areas would have been to extend patronage to local temple networks.67 This is what the Vijayanagara rulers also did. It was important for them to hold the conquered territories (starting from Pandharpur in the North to Śrīrangam in the South) under control and they were able to unify their kingdom using ideology. In this, temple network has played a very significant role. One of the most important features in the landscape of early medieval South India was the temple. It was the pivot round which much of the social, economic and cultural activities of the locality revolved.68

According to Stein “temples were in fact the prime locus of authority and dominance issues and decisions. In no other social or cultural context were matters pertaining to authority and dominance so explicitly raised and resolved”\textsuperscript{69} The role of temples in constructing and shaping the political edifice of medieval state has been the theme of several historiographical statements. Burton Stein has argued that the medieval temples served as the focal point for rituals of legitimation in which kingship was transformed into a dharmic idea of rājadharma through conspicuous patronage of Puranic deities. Āgamic Śaivism took an institutionalized form in the temples constructed and patronized by the Chōlas and as shown by one historian, the Chōla conception of kingship emphasized the king as the favoured devotee and there is no suggestion of divine kingship in the early medieval period.\textsuperscript{70} During the Vijayanagara period, sectarian institutions like the Mathas has emerged as centers of religious identity in their right. The development of a hymnal tradition especially the Vārkari tradition in the Deccan region helped to spread the idea of community and public memory by a spatial identification of the Viṭhala of Pandhārpur and several other shrines located in the empire. Bhakti as a religious ideology was redefined in the Vijayanagara period with the advent of circulating songsters who wove a tapestry of bhakti infused music around their chosen deities. The transition from Āgamic worship to more public community based sampradāya was under way during Vijayanagara period, when saints like Purandaradāsa lived. Champakalakshmi has also drawn attention to this feature when

\textsuperscript{69} Burton Stein , ed.,\textit{The South Indian Temples}, New Delhi, 1978, p.3-4

she argued that temples under the influence of bhakti served to transcend difference both social and sectarian.\textsuperscript{71}

The concept of sacred geography is vital to the understanding of the bhakti movement as it spread in the Vijayanagara empire, space was not the focal point of the implied sacrality, but rather the reimagined transcendental space created in the imagination of the composer united the physical locale of a shrine with the imagined space constituted by the sacredness of the deity and the social space occupied by its devotees. Thus the yoking of hymnal tradition with the tradition of pilgrimage realized the ideal of constituting a sacred geography of locales located in the Vijayanagara empire. The songs of Purandaradāsā do not mention this political hegemony of the Vijayanagara empire but the temples and the deities he sang about or alluded to in his songs were all located with in the domain of the rāyas. Hence the sacred geography of the Vijayanagara empire as imagined by Purandaradāsā was in reality the sacred centers over which the rāyas exercised their rule.

In a period when vast sections of tribal population were getting transformed as peasants and drawn into caste society, the temples played a crucial role. The temples which emerged as somewhat humble shrines in the early medieval period had a spontaneous development. Gunther Dietz Sontheimer in his Pastoral Deities of Western India has argued that Pandharpur was a Śiva center and an important center for Dēvi worship before being transformed into a Vaishnava center. In Seventh century inscriptions the town is referred to as Pāndarangapalli, a toponomy which alludes to the settlement of tribes or non peasant people.\textsuperscript{72} The association of Pandharpur and its location in a forested area is also reflected in the fact that the pastoral communities such

\textsuperscript{71} R Champaklakshmi(2010), pp 73-74
\textsuperscript{72} G.D Sontheimer, \textit{Pastoral Deities of Western India}, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, p.70
as kōlis and dhangars have traditionally enjoyed rights in the Viṭhōba temple. The kōlis also had the traditional right of plying the boats across the Chandrabhāga river.\textsuperscript{73} The cult of Viṭhōba which originated as a pastoral cult got gradually assimilated into Puranic tradition and this process is demonstrated in Pānduranga Māhātmya of Śrīdhar, in which Viṭhōba is rendered as a variety of Krishna.\textsuperscript{74} Such movements help in bringing about integration in a hierarchical caste divided social order. The pastoral nature of the cult of Viṭhala has been demonstrated by Ramachandra Chintamani Dhere and Ann Feldhaus in their work Rise of a Folk God: Viṭhala of Pandhārpur. They observed “the original devotees in lord Viṭhōba’s retinue were cowherds”.\textsuperscript{75} This aspect is discussed in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, p.72
\textsuperscript{74} I.M.P Raeside, ‘The Pānduranga Māhātmya of Śrīdhar’ in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol.28, No.1(1965), 81-100
\textsuperscript{75} Ramachandra Chintamani and Ann Feldhaus, Rise of a Folk God: Vithala of Pandhārpur, p.41