



Reflections of Contemporary Society of Vijayanagara through Purandara Dasa's Devaranamas



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Abstract

Vijayanagara Empire established its power in 1336 A.D till 1646 A.D. The empire had its geographical spread in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and parts of Maharashtra. The Empire witnessed prosperity during its reign. Apart from administration, polity, economics, Vijayanagara became shelter for art and culture. Performing arts, visual arts, literature and religion took its peak position during 14th to 16th century under the Vijayanagara empire, the impact of growth in such fields reflected directly on the society. Bhakti movement witnessed renaissance during Vijayanagara. The Haridasa movement rose to power, religious sects travelled across the Vijayanagar Empire. Music got a special seat in Vijayanagara Empire. Many songs were composed in vernacular languages by the Haridasa saints. One amongst them was Purandara Dasa who belonged to Dasakuta segment from the Haridasa sect. Purandara Dasa expressed his views and thoughts through musical compositions. This paper is an attempt to highlight the impact of songs on contemporary society of Vijayanagara through the Devaranama composed by Purandara Dasa. Purandara Dasa's devaranamas gives the experience to witness the unseen society of Vijayanagara Empire. His music is the true literary evidence to understand the society and communities who lived in Vijayanagara. Purandara Dasa's devaranamas takes the listeners and common people to the world of devotion with emphasizing the true reality of society. The songs of Purandara Dasa becomes a contribution in the field of literature and adds dimensionality to the realm of religious literature through his songs. Hence this paper is an attempt to highlight the impact of Purandara Dasa's Devaranamas on unseen society and the portrayal of unrecorded histories from Vijayanagara, the devaranamas of Purandara Dasa gives a holistic study of Vijayanagar's social and cultural history which can be supported or analyzed with the existing history of Vijayanagara's historical sources

Keywords: Vijayanagara, Devaranama, society, culture, religion, bhakti.

Research Paper

Introduction

Unlike any other empires the Vijayanagara Empire in South India had its beginning and end. The empire was established in 1336-1646 A.D. which dominated the present day Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The empire witnessed its proficiency in the field of polity administration, art, literature, religion and cultural heritage. The Vijayanagara Empire took its keen interest in the area of art and literature apart from the other dimensionality of the empire. There was royal patronage initiated for art and literature by the kings. Another great contribution of Vijayanagara Empire was the emergence of new sect in the realm of religion, the Sri Vaishnava sect. It is also during this period when the Bhakti movement rose and reached its highest zenith in the society. Bhakti movement led to the emergence of

many bhakti saints all over the Vijayanagara Empire. These Bhakti saints composed songs in vernacular languages and travelled to the pilgrimages from one site to another by singing the songs which were composed by them. One such Bhakti saint was Sri Purandara Dasa who's contribution in the field of Carnatica shastriya Sangeetha is immense. This research paper investigates to look at the compositions of Purandara Dasa and his contemporary witness of the society during the Vijayanagara period.

Purandara Dasa was born in 1485 A.D., he lived during the reign of Krishna Deva Raya who belonged to the Tuluva dynasty. (Rao 5) During this period around 15th century, the empire had taken flight to its zenith in terms of religious, economic, cultural and political growth. Bhakti saints started composing songs based on

Ishtadevata[1] [Ishtadevata-desired or most worshiped god of the devotee]. The devaranama composed by Purandara Dasa touches upon the different aspects on social, cultural and religious which needs to be unwrapped.

Vijayanagara had its spread in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, there are saints who are composing in vernacular languages. The literary works produced this period were in Kannada, Telugu and Sanskrit. The literary productions received royal patronage. Bhakti saints chose vernacular languages to compose music mainly to reach the crowd and give access the bhakti towards god to everyone. (Iyengar)

The Haridasa tradition is considered to be the turning point in the religious history of south India. It was part of bhakti movement during this period. There were two divisions within the Dasa tradition—Vyasakuta and Dasakuta. The dasa's of vyasakuta were supposed to be learned in Vedas and Upanishads. And in Dasakuta, the dasa's emphasized vernacular languages to reach the masses, they also emphasized on the Dvaita philosophy. The Haridasa's too got royal patronage from the kings. Purandara Dasa belonged to the Dasakuta, he composed devaranama and keertana in both Kannada and Sanskrit. There were other saint singers under Dasakuta who all focused on reaching the crowd through songs. (T. Divya 19)

Among other bhakti saint singers, Purandara Dasa becomes one such saints whose compositions gives reflections on issues based on socio-culture, religious, philosophical, economical, agricultural and geographical background encountered through his own eyes. This certainly allowed Purandara Dasa to archive his contemporary society during Vijayanagara and archives those moments during his saintly journey and record it in the forms of songs. Another interesting aspect which can be witnessed in his compositions is how Purandara Dasa has recorded the sacred pilgrimage centers and religious institutions which were popular during Vijayanagara period. Vithoba cult was given peak priority during this time. Another interesting aspect which can be noticed in his songs is his interaction with his contemporary musicians and saint singers.

Purandara Dasa's devaranama gives reflections based on the social life, particular communities associated at that time, food culture and most importantly through these aspects Purandara Dasa emphasizes on bhakti bhava and spreading the philosophical thoughts by composing and singing the devaranama. Therefore looking at the Purandara Dasa's devaranamas allows

understanding how society was actually functioning during Vijayanagara period.

Research Methodology

The data for this research is collected mainly through literature reviews, interviews with subject expertise primary.

Research Problem

Purandara Dasa has composed 475,000 (Isaac 145-161) compositions. Considering the massive works done by Purandara Dasa, it is difficult to pick specific songs which highlight the socio-cultural history from his composition. The songs are chosen through random samplings, the songs which are popular and sung regularly till date

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the social and cultural history of Vijayanagara Empire through Purandara Dasa's Devaranama.
- To know how Purandara Dasa's songs can be used as important source of evidence to reconstruct the cultural and social history of Vijayanagara Empire.
- To examine the contemporary society lived by Purandara Dasa during Vijayanagara Empire.

Findings

Impact on Society through musical composition

Purandara Dasa through his devaranama compositions highlighted the concept of bhakti in simple colloquial language which could easily reach the crowd and inspire them to follow the path of bhakti. Most of his compositions also discuss the marginalised communities. The songs also brings out the food culture, where Purandara Dasa keep mentioning about dairy products, different local cousins of Karnataka, specific ingredients used in the food will definitely give an holistic idea about food habits and the agro pastoral communities existed during those days. In the song titled Dasayya Purandara Dasa speaks about agro pastoral communities, which states:

"And dasa if you come to our neighborhood please come to the cowherd's lane" (Jackson)

Pilgrimage and sacred centres mentioned in Devaranamas of Purandara Dasa

Most of the devaranamas of Purandara Dasa directly mentions the religious temples and pilgrimage centres,



when Purandara Dasa takes such temple/place names it can be observed that, he might have travelled to those temples and have composed songs on those deities. In the song titled Bhagyada lakshmi baramma which one of the most popular and famous song he mentions Alagiri Ranga in one of the charanas which states:

“Come to our puja on Friday, O consort of Purandara Vithala at the time when canals of Sugar and ghee are overflowing, come to Alagiri Ranga (in Andhra Pradesh)” (Jackson, 84)

On the other side Purandara Dasa also mentions religious and sacred places such as Dwaraka, Brundavana, and Mathura. It is sceptical to believe that, how Purandara Dasa would have travelled to those places, mentioning of such far reach places can give us an idea that, he might have communicated with those saints who were living in those regions.

Impact of language in music on the society

When Haridasa movement came into light, the demand for vernacularism took its form. The dasakuta saints started composing songs in their regional languages. (T. Divya 19-20) This allowed all the people from all the caste and class to express their devotion through their spoken language highlighting that, to reach God one should not necessarily be aware of Sanskrit or Veda/shastras. The songs also reached everyone with having the devotion, spiritual and philosophical teachings in them. in the song titled ‘Ikkalare Kai Enjilu’ one of the charana says:

“I have to fetch rice from the attic, but my stomach is paining, do go away dasaya; I am sitting out (practicing menses) there is no one in the house, please don’t mind go away”

Lot of inferences can be observed from this song, this particular line defines the practices and beliefs believed and followed at that time. For instance how women used carry her days when she was on her menstrual days. Similarly in another song titled Janara the song gives reflections of various personalities of women in Vijayanagara period, the song talks about prostitutes and extra martial affairs.

“These men give up their virtuous wives then they give themselves to prostitutes”

“Sometimes a woman will give up her husband and traipse around with the lovers she keeps. I’m sorry to say that in today’s world examples of such affairs have only increased” (Jackson 107)

Discussion

Purandara Dasa portrayed the unseen picture of Vijayanagara’s cultural and social ambience in the literary form through Devaranama. As he chooses the bhakti marga (path), Purandara Dasa picks up the social and colloquial narratives witnessed by him to correlate and combines it to express the devotion towards god. He uses social and cultural narrative as tools to spread and reach the crowd in propagation of Madhva philosophy.

The analysis provides different layers of results. The results can be broadly categorized into five main denominations

1. Economic
2. Food habit
3. Social identities
4. Religious institutions

Purandara Dasa gives number of reference to the economic backdrop of Vijayanagara indirectly through highlighting materials. He constantly mentions about money, wealth, money transaction, debts etc. he also mentions those materials which are procured through trade, through this way, his songs gives insights indirectly on the trade and the import and export items. Silk, pearls, sandal wood, precious and semi-precious stones and many more have been recorded in his songs.

Purandara Dasa often mentions about dairy products in most of his composition, in songs such as Bhagyada lakshmi baramma, Hasimeyaguttide, Hari Kotta Kalake, Helabarada and many more which highlights the agro pastoral communities and agrarian society who lived in Vijayanagara. Also when he is describing or mentioning varieties of cousins of Vijayanagara, he mentions lot of food ingredients which are geographically abundant and grown, for example, in his songs titled Ragi Tandira Bhikshege Ragi Tandira, Ramanama Payasake, Hasimeyagutide, Purandara Dasa mentions millets, and its variations and varieties and other local food ingredients which are popular till today. This may throw light on how Purandara Dasa was in close contacts with agrarian society. Elaborating it further, since Purandara Dasa was wandering from village to village he had close proximity with such communities of people. This shows that, in these villages, the main occupation of those communities were related to agrarian based jobs, cattle rearing, manufacturing of dairy products etc. Since Purandara Dasa talks about the process of extracting dairy products and mentioning them so often would give us insight on how Purandara Dasa witnessed

these groups of communities and how these aspects are reflected in his compositions.

Another major remark which can be drawn from his compositions is position of women. When travellers are giving different picture about women in their respective travel accounts, Purandara Dasa's version of portrayal of women is quit straight forward and direct. Purandara Dasa brings out the wilder version of women in the society. Purandara Dasa talks how women are rude, and escapists. His remarks on women are quite surprising. He mentions woman having extra marital affairs and those women who fight with husbands, women who always fight with her husband. He even mentions prostitute in one of his composition. This again reflects how Purandara Dasa had met different kinds of people living in a society.

Another aspect which Purandara Dasa gives in his compositions is the sacred and religious places. During Vijayanagra, few temples were in their peaks which are mentioned in Purandara Dasa's compositions as well. The Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh, Melkote, Vithala temple, Virupaksha, Udipi temple, the Pancharanga temples were some of the major religious temples during Vijayanagara period. With this he also mentions about temples and sacred regions located in north such as, Dwarka, Mathura, Kashi, Ganga, Yamuna, Brindavana. It is questionable to know how Purandara Dasa able to mention these places did. It is unreasonable for Purandara Dasa to be travelled upwards in the northern region, but there may be high chances where Purandara Dasa might have met his contemporary bhakti saints from northern region who might have had conversation on cultural exchange and existence.

In conclusion, Purandara Dasa's songs takes us to an unseen world of Vijayanagara and gives an parallel study of socio-cultural history of Vijayanagara with those existing history of the empire. Through his songs, many inferences can be observed which results into understanding the dimensionality of the empire and the religious position.

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