Chapter 2 - Preliminary discussion and analysis

**Brief summary**

This chapter looks briefly at the statement of the thesis, with a little background on the following:

a. Definition of “Established Performing Styles” and their aspects, aesthetics and the “Manodharma” behind them. This is the main theme of this dissertation, and it is looked at closely.

b. Knowledge, ability and focus on a particular aspect of music lead to the formation of styles.

c. The performing style of an artiste indicates his or her potential.

**Definition of “Established Performing Styles”**

Herein it is proposed to look at how established Masters of Carnatic music (Recognised Vidwans in the past century, whose audio recordings are available) have characteristically handled various musical aspects, giving their own typical flavour or style, as it were.

References to Indian classical music have been made in many ancient texts, including epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Yajnavalkya Smriti* has the following shloka: 

\[ \text{vīNāvādana tattvajñāν śrutijātivisāradaḥ tālajñāscāprayāsena mokṣamārgaṃ prayacchatī} \]

- "The one who is well versed in playing the veena, one who has the knowledge of shrutis and one who is knowledgeable in tala, attains salvation without effort". Carnatic music is based as it is today on musical concepts (including swara, raga, and tala) that were described in detail in several ancient works, particularly the *Silappadhikaram*, and Bharata's *Natya Shastra*.

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19 Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, Uttara Kanda, Canto LXXXXIII, page 2164 to 2168, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1992

Alapana is melodic improvisation that introduces and develops a raga using Lakshana (grammar) and Bhava (feeling) in Indian classical music. In Sanskrit, alapana means "to speak, address, discourse, and communicate". The flavour of the raga is obtained by rendering the raga's permitted notes in structures and phrases unique to it. (Known as Raga Lakshana).

In addition, Raga can be said to be rendered with an ideal (Lakshya), which takes into account both the ‘personality’ of the Raga and the abilities of the performer.

In the krithi “Mithri Bhagyame” in Kharaharapriya raga, St. Thyagaraja says - bAguga vinta rAgamulan (A) lApamu sEyaga21 – beautiful Raga exposition is being done...

Raga names are associated with Deities, Nature or natural phenomena usually. Eg, Shanmukhapriya – Muruga, Shankarabharanam – Shiva, Deepakam – Agni, Amruthavarshini – Shive (Goddess) or Rain, Varunapriya – with Varuna (God of water) etc.

Many musicians had Raga names prefixed to their names as the titles: for example Shankarabharanam Narasayya, Begada Subrahmanya Iyer and Todi Sita Rama Iyer this indicates that many musicians were masters at singing Raga.

In the light of all the above, it can be concluded that such a detailed performing art, which has been described in detail, both in the ancient texts as well as in krithis of composers like St Thyagaraja must have had Masters – i.e., exponents of the art since time immemorial.

The reference to the episode in the Ramayana, where Sri Rama’s sons, Lava and Kusha were said to have been trained to sing the entire Ramayana (of 24,000 verses), set to melody (Raga) and rhythm (Tala), and who performed it in the court of Lord Rama, substantiates this22 conclusion well.

21 C. Ramanujachariar, The Spiritual Heritage of Thyagaraja, Page 151, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1958
22 Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, Uttara Kanda, Canto LXXXXIII, page 2164 to 2168, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1992
The following has been said about Lava and Kusha in the Ramayana:

"sthana-murchana-kovidau" i.e., the wandering Bards like Lava and Kusha were well-versed in the art and science of the Gandharva type of music: (a) "tau tu gandharvortattvajnau" (b) "bhrataran svararsaynpannau gadharvavivar rupinam" (vide IV Canto).

It is very interesting the find the usage of the words “sthana” referring to the placement or the accuracy of the note and “murchana” referring to the grammar of the movement of the melody along the notes.

Another epic reference can be seen in the Soundarya Lahari of Adi Shankara, in the shloka “Vipanchya gayanthi”. Here the masterly singing and playing of Saraswathi paled into insignificance at the sound of Parvathi’s voice.

Many episodes in the epics speak of Deities, Sages, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and even Asuras performing and rejoicing with music and dance.

It can further be concluded that the Masters of the art were creative and always on the look out to enhance the experience got by the musical performance. So, within the boundaries of the rules and guidelines, they must have always tried to make a lasting contribution to the art through their ideas. This gives life to what would otherwise be just a dull repetition of previous concepts. Thus, according to their capacities, the styles and the art of music kept growing.

Even today, many a master musician keeps the objective of achieving a distinct and suitable style in his presentation. These performances are best analysed by listening to the musicians in a live concert, as opposed to a recorded concert, as besides the non-verbal impact, there is also extra clarity while listening live: the live acoustics would be grasped better by the ear than by the technology available 50 years ago. Further, the music available loses quality usually as a result of transfer either from poor recording techniques or

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equipment, or from transfer from spool digital media etc. some degree of restoration is possible too, and hence it is necessary to depend on advanced hearing sessions, analytical tools like computer software and other theoretical methods to analyse ‘style’ in presentation.

**Styles are a necessary aspect of art and they go beyond the basic rules.**

Audio records have been available only since the early 1950s. Hence certain prominent vocal musicians of that era whose audio recordings are available have been taken up, for e.g. Shri Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Shri G.N.Balasubramaniam, and Shri M. D. Ramanathan etc. These eminent artistes have had a long and widely recognised career in their days and are talked of often even today. Also, the audio recordings of certain prominent violinists like Shri Papa K.S. Venkatramiah, Shri Mysore T. Chowdiah and Shri Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu and certain prominent vainikas (veena artistes) like Smt. Veena Dhanammal, Shri Karaikudi Samabasiva Iyer and Shri Emani Shankara Sastry have been analysed.

Basic rules from time immemorial (Ramayana) while singing include\(^{24}\) simple (or difficult) ones such as:

**Shruthi - singing or playing in tune** – Here the basic shruthi is set and for every raga, the flat notes (ones which can be sustained for long) as well as the gamakas are precisely defined with respect to pitch too.

**Laya – singing or playing with tempo** – An attempt has been made to show graphically how ‘going out of tempo’ can be understood with the help of software programs.

**Lakshana - singing with grammar** – In the course of say, Raga Alapana, manual listening as well as analysis through computers and software can show the actual swara notation as has been sung by the performer. Here the actual passages where the performer deviated from the grammar of the Raga can be shown too, by comparison of the computer analysis of the performance with that of the acknowledged Masters.

\(^{24}\) “Tantri laya samanvitham” occurs at least thrice n the canto LXXXXIII, Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, Uttara Kanda, page 2164 to 2168, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1992
Further, a perusal of the biographies of musicians can be condensed to make the following observations:\textsuperscript{25}

- Music is mostly considered as Yoga, or as a means to salvation- as opposed to mere entertainment.

- Great master performers combined their intuition (Gnanam) with many years of observation of their seniors and peers (Anubhavam), and hard work (Upasana) – selfless work dedicated to mental upliftment.

- This was subject to constant self-examination (Svanubhuti), as well as periodical reviews by their teachers and sometimes peers.

- Further, mere acknowledgement of their musical abilities as a good performer did not stop - some went on to achieve a distinct and recognizable style. This is a lot more complicated, as borne out by the following premises:

**Understanding the aesthetics behind the thought processes of the artistes.**

Raga Bhava is basically the emotion associated with a specific Raga. It can also vary according to the composition. In Atana raga, the Thyagaraja composition ‘Ilalo Pranatharthihara’ has the cutting edge of sarcasm and disappointment, whereas ‘E papamu’ by the same composer is full of soft appeal and deep felt remorse. The melodic range and the tempo of the composition need to be noted.

Ragas have traditionally been sung only at the appropriate times of the day.\textsuperscript{26}

It must always be remembered that in Indian melodies the mood or flavour is of primal importance; and so many things, which appear to the West to be merely fanciful, are important factors for the music of the East.

\textsuperscript{25} P. Sambamurthy, Great Musicians, The Indian Music Publishing House, 1959

The root meaning of raga is 'passion', and from very ancient times each raga has been
associated with particular passions and emotions.\textsuperscript{27}

Different forms of Martial arts have interesting and thought provoking names:
“Crouching tiger”, “Drunken monk” etc., which indicate that the inspiration for the style has
been chosen from the movements of various animals, etc.

Similarly, it is seen that the much older conception of Ragas are known to be associated
with particular deities or aspects of Nature\textsuperscript{28} etc. Some examples are:

\textbf{Deity specific Raga names:}

- Shanmukhapriya - Lord Muruga
- Shankarabharanam - Lord Shiva
- Rudrapriya - Lord Shiva
- Saraswathi - Goddess Saraswathi
- Simhavahini - Goddess Durga
- Lalitha - Goddess Lalitha

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Swara & Expansion & Meaning & Animal & Chakra & God \\
\hline
Sa & Shadja (षड्ज) & Sagar (ocean) & peacock & mūlādhāra & Ganapati \\
Ri & Rishabha (ऋषभ) & Aparajit & skylark & svādhiṣṭhāna & Agni \\
Ga & Gandhara (गण्धर्ग) & Gagan (sky) & goat & manipūra & Rudra (Shiva) \\
Ma & Madhyama (मध्यम) & middle & dove/ heron & anāhata & Vishnu \\
Pa & Panchama (पञ्चम) & fifth & cuckoo/nightingale & viśuddha & Naarada \\
Da & Dhaivata (धैवत) & Dharti (earth) & horse & ajāña & Sadasiva \\
Ni & Nishada (निषाद) & outcast/ hunter & elephant & sahasrāra & Surya (Sun) \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

Figure 2.1 The swaras, their meanings and associations

The table above, sourced from internet\textsuperscript{29}, also gives a representation of the associations of
the swaras with animals / birds / Chakras / Deities etc.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{27} H.A. Popley, The Music of India, page 64, Association Press, Calcutta, 1921
\textsuperscript{28} H.A. Popley, The Music of India, page 8, Association Press, Calcutta, 1921
\textsuperscript{29} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swara
\end{flushleft}
Nature or phenomena specific Raga names:

Some names of ragas and their corresponding associations.

- Jyothi Swarupini - Fire
- Deep / Deepakam - Fire
- Amruthavarshini - Rain
- Megh - Rain
- Varunapriya - Water

Also, the names of the swaras are derived from animals / birds and their sounds such as:

- Shadja - The cooing call of the peacock
- Gandhara - The bleat of the goat

Shadja is said to be the sound produced by the peacock at its highest rapture. Rishabha is said to represent the sound made by the cow in calling her calf. Gandhara is the bleat of the goat. Madhyama is the cry of the heron. It is also called the tonic of nature, being identified with the sound of falling water, the roar of the forest and the buzz of great cities. Panchama is the note of the kokila or Indian nightingale. Dhaivata is the neigh of the horse, and Nishadha the trumpeting of the elephant: the latter indicating clearly the lower note Ni, which was originally the starting point of the scale. Lower Nishadha is the first note of the Saman scale, and so the elephant has been called Samaja or born of the Saman.³⁰

Ragas as pictures:

In connection with the science of raga, Indian music has developed the art of raga pictures. Principal Percy Brown of the School of Art, Calcutta, defines a raga as ‘a work of art in which the tune, the song, the picture, the colours, the season, the hour and the virtues are so blended together as to produce a composite production to which the west can furnish

no parallel. It may be described as a musical movement, which is not only represented by sound, but also by a picture.\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{ranga.png}
\caption{Picture of Kedara Raga, H.A. Popley, The Music of India}
\end{figure}

Similar imagination also should have been the inspiration behind the styles of certain established artistes. The styles are carefully thought out and executed, tailored to the strong points and the natural abilities (voice or instrument) of the artistes.

The natural performing ability of a Vocal Vidwan depends upon the following factors:

- Nature of the voice – some voices have a free flowing ability and smoothness, rich tone (either bass or tenor or high pitched).

• Gamaka potential in the voice – the description of Thyagaraja’s voice – “ravai jathi saareeram” is one such\(^{32}\) – indicating the ability of the voice to reproduce the various gamakas. So, this is one of the most important characteristics of the voice.

• Tempo of presentation – certain tempos are more suited to certain types of voices - the nature of the voice and its ability to provide both speed as well as “weight” (fidelity to the gamakam) are very important.

• Range of the voice – here again it is the ability of the voice to produce notes in the different sthayis (octaves). The voice range of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer has been described in many books, including the SSP, as having a range of 3 and a half sthayis.

Thus the name, meaning, and associations of the Raga, combined with the natural performing ability of the performer, provide the focus on how artistes have modified their styles to suit different Ragas and different concert situations. Thus an aesthetic evaluation of the style can be made.

**Styles can also be analysed as different types of Manodharma:**

There are many krithis where St Thyagaraja talks about music, and the word Nadopasana occurs often. In the krithi, Thyagaraja says “Nadopasanache Shankara Narayana Vidhulu velasiri O manasa!” which means O My Mind (manasa)! Lords Shankara, Narayana and Brahma (vidhi) (vidhulu) are effulgent (velasiri) because of (che) worship of (or meditation on) (upasana) Nada (Nadopasanache). Again, in the krithi ‘Ananda sagaramidani’ – raga Garudadhwani, Thyagaraja states that a person who does not swim in the Ocean of Supreme Bliss is a burden on the earth.\(^{33}\)

So, the concept has been that the mind literally experiences happiness or bliss by swimming in the Ocean of music (Nadopasana) and that it is the ideal to be followed for both the divinities as well as human beings. Manodharma Sangita thus simply put, is the mind’s

\(^{32}\) Prof Sambamurthy, Great Composers, Thyagaraja, The Indian Music Publishing House, 2002

\(^{33}\) C, Ramanujachariar, The Spiritual Heritage of Thyagaraja, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1990
music. Thus, keeping the upasana (worship of Nada) and Sampradaya (tradition) in mind, and letting music flow freely from mind within the limits of raga can Manodharma Sangita.

The different ways in which manodharma comes into play in a performance are during alapana, tanam, niraval and kalpana swara

**Raga Alapana:** ‘Alapa’ in Sanskrit means to say or express something in detail and expand. The texts like Natya Shastra, Sangita Ratnakara and Caturdandi Prakashika call it Alapa or Alapti, when the expression is by the voice (sung). The 4 factors that contribute to alapana are:

1. Stayi - the urge to sing, which is related to the ebb and the flow in presenting notes
2. Aroha – the presence or melodic appeal in the ascent of the notes
3. Avaroha – melodic appeal in the descent of the notes
4. Sanchari – the path or the propensity of the performer, which can be a mixture of the above.

Knowledge of the raga lakshana and proficiency in right usage of gamakas are quintessential in manodharma.

Just as Raga Alapana is a vast subject, niraval and swara prasthara are also equally important. The notation based analysis of an aspect like niraval can show the difference in the approach to the same niraval by different artistes. It can also show how the same artiste in various niravals (spread over many Kirthanas) has used the same style. A good example is that of the niraval styles employed by a Master of the recent past, Musiri Subramania Iyer.

Similarly, this thesis can also be extended to show that swara prasthara can also be linked to different styles. The swara kalpana patterns of Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and that of Madurai Mani Iyer provide an interesting study into this aspect too.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are looked at:

- Focus on a particular aspect of music leads to the formation of styles.
- The performing style of an artiste indicates his or her level of achievement.
Focus on a particular aspect of music leads to the formation of styles.

Musicians of every era have been recognized for the varying abilities - singing with an emphasis on speed, or alternatively, on slow tempo. Singing to a different pitch and singing with distinctive gamakas also goes to creating a perceivably different style.

Bharata’s Natya Shastra talks in depth about gayaka doshas – the characteristic defects that can be found in a singer - some of these defects relate to facial contortions, some of them relate to the bodily positions, some of them relate to the defects in the words, defects in the pronunciation etc.

These defects could often be due to the inadvertent bodily defects of the singer when music is learnt with wrong body posture and when music is learnt with non-application of the mind. There are many deficiencies that can creep up during this process. They then become habit and a lot of confusion is created in the singer. As a result, basic technique and basic method is given the go by. Bharata in his Natya Shastra has devoted major part of a chapter to gayaka doshas (defects in singers). Thus, performers, in order to make the grade in music, must learn how focus on different aspects.

It is also pertinent to note ‘Electrifying brigas’, ‘long and smooth karvais’, ‘sophisticated gamakas’ are some descriptions that commonly occur in many a music review today. All these do indicate that the artistes have either been gifted with such voices or have worked very hard to achieve them: In the days of yore, there have been strong and often gruelling practices - Rakshasa sadhakam (literally severe austere practices of the demons) while standing in neck deep water and so many others.

The focus of this thesis will be to show the scientific basis behind such statements of abilities, with audio analysis of a few artistes to quantify these terms such as ‘electrifying brigas’, ‘long and smooth karvais’, ‘sophisticated gamakas’ etc.34

The performing style of an artiste indicates his or her potential.

The clear identification of the various factors that make up a style is the next important step. And just as these factors, once identified, will categorise the singing of the artiste as either following an established path laid down by a predecessor, or that he is now “breaking new ground” i.e. establishing a new style.

A case in point is the establishment of the modern day “Kutcheri bani” meaning the concert pattern by Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar (ARI) (1890-1967). Such a concert pattern was prevalent before his days, but different in that the concert pattern was based on a few krithis, with extensive elaboration of Raga.

A description of the musical giant, Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer:

The article\textsuperscript{35} provides a fascinating glimpse into the life and the music of the musical giant in the latter half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century – Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer (1844-1893), who lived a generation before ARI.

Given below is a tabulation – a description of his concert pattern which gives an idea of the items, and their proportion. Such a pattern suited the temple processions and also concerts at the Palace or at get-togethers of many Vidwans it is not worthy that in such concerts, the capacity of the performer to sing Raga extensively was put to the test. The powers, endurance and stamina of the singer were also fully on display.

\begin{table}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Item & Proportion & Description \\
\hline
Item 1 & 30 & Extensive elaboration of Raga \\
\hline
Item 2 & 20 & Temple processions and concerts at the Palace \\
\hline
Item 3 & 10 & Get-togethers of many Vidwans \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{35} M.N. Srinivasan, Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan – A legend of Carnatic Music (1844 – 1893)
http://www.carnaticcorner.com
Typical concert paddhati (format) of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer.

(Assuming a 3 hour concert)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vatapi Ganapathim</th>
<th>Hamsadvani</th>
<th>15 min</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ramaswamy Sivan's ‘Ekkalathilum Maraven’</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirthanas of the Trinity and others.</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ragam Tanam Pallavi (RTP)</td>
<td></td>
<td>95 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with alapana, tanam, pallavi, niraval and swarams</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tani avarthanam by Laya Vidwans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thillana (own composition)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ragamalika shloka</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or thevaram/thiruvachagam etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangalam</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.3 Typical concert Paddhati of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer

Today most concerts are much more time oriented, given the fact that open ended (even 3 or 4 hour) concerts are a rarity. But it can be inferred that the Raga alapana must have taken at least 50 minutes or more of the 95 min RTP section of the concert. Next, this concert pattern is compared with another epoch – making musician, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar.

One can look at what GNB had to say about Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar “He, it is, who has codified and adapted to modern times, the aspects of a concert, their spacing and timings and this so well done that both the lay and the learned never have a dull moment or feeling of boredom, throughout the concert.”

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## Typical Concert paddhati of Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Varnam</td>
<td>8 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillayar krithi</td>
<td>8 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirthanas</td>
<td>12 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub main</td>
<td>15 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Kirthanas</td>
<td>12 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main item</td>
<td>25 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ragam Tanam Pallavi (RTP)</td>
<td>30 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padam /Javali</td>
<td>8 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thillana</td>
<td>6 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ragamalika Shloka</td>
<td>6 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiruppugazh/ Pasuram etc.</td>
<td>8 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangalam</td>
<td>6 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub main usually a prati madhyama raga / krithi / niraval and swaram suite</td>
<td>15 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Kirthanas</td>
<td>12 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main item usually a suddha madhyama ghana raga with alapana/krithi/ niraval /kalpana swaras followed by a thani avarthanam</td>
<td>15 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A third raga was chosen, with another thani avarthanam</td>
<td>10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padam /Javali</td>
<td>8 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thillana</td>
<td>6 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ragamalika Shloka</td>
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<td>Thiruppugazh/ Pasuram etc.</td>
<td>8 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangalam</td>
<td>6 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.4 Typical concert Paddhati of Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar

Given the same 3 hour duration of the concert, we can see that the alapana segment (vocal + violin turns) could not exceed 15 minutes at the most for a 25 minute main kirthana segment or a 30 min RTP. Similarly, for a 15 minute suite of alapana/krithi/niraval/swaram, alapana could not be longer that 7 min in total, or 4 or 5 minutes for the vocalist.
This leads us to the comparative analysis of the styles as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer concert pattern</th>
<th>Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar concert pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concert duration</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Items (typical)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of raga alapanas sung</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of the Raga alapana</td>
<td>At least 45 min according to verbal accounts</td>
<td>Typically under 5 min for short alapanas and under 10 min for longer ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of items with kalpana swaram</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical Duration of longest item</td>
<td>2 hours or more</td>
<td>45 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.5 Comparative chart of the two concert styles

While the object behind Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengars’ concert planning could have been to provide importance to all types of compositional forms and moderation in manodharma (creative music) and variety in the concert, it also had the effect of reducing the length of Raga alapana and kalpana swara too. This can be easily inferred, given that the average
concert duration both during Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer’s time and that of Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar’s time was quite the same (refer to the previous table).

Thus, Sri Ariyakudi says that the concert tradition has been built up in his article, we can clearly infer that he was speaking from his own experience, thus validating the hypotheses proposed above, which relates the performance style of the artiste to his or her potential.

Styles in performance can relate to aspects of composed music: like the manner of rendition of a varnam. It is common to hear some vidwans present varnam in 2 speeds of rendition up to charanam, and then a single speed for charanam. This has its own advantages of warming up the voice or the fingers (in case of instrumental music) and also not taking too much of a strain on the voice or a risk of faulty rendition/making a mistake by attempting a 3 speed rendition right at the beginning of a concert.

In later times this concert planning proved to be of advantage to many, since the average singer's voice did not have the endurance of the stamina to sing Raga alapana continuously for a period of more than 20 to 30 min. Hence reducing the duration of Raga alapana does not necessarily reduce the quality of the concert. At the same time, shorter alapana could be used by the artist to display his or her repertoire, thus indicating his potential.

Similarly, the raga singing and playing patterns by musicians have also changed gradually. In today’s world, 1 hour concerts have become the norm in institutions like Radio and TV. So Raga Alapanas have also shortened in time, and in many cases, Raga Alapanas do not extend beyond four or 5 min and so the styles of rendering them have necessarily changed.

But this style of Raga alapana is not mandatory, and one can see signs of revival of the pattern of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer in some of today’s concerts, where the concert duration is 4 hours or more, and where the audiences turn up in large numbers and with a fairly large proportion of the concert goers expressing enthusiasm about expansive, long duration alapanas and long durations of varied and intricate kalpana swaras.

A similar reasoning can also be used to show how the marathon swara sessions at the end of the compositions, and the fiery and mind testing tempos of swaras or intricate mathematical calculations (which were in vogue before the period of Ariyakudi) were made
redundant by this kind of a structured and concise concert planning. All aspects were indeed presented by Sri Ariyakudi in a typical concert, but with excellent moderation. In Shri Ariyakudi’s own words “Kalpana-swaras must be limited and proportionate, and restricted to a few pieces, after a reasonable measure of niraval.”

It can be also reasoned that, by keeping “Vatapi Ganapathim” as the first item, with a fair dose of swaras, Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer was able to do justice to his voice potential. One comes across the following descriptions used to describe his music and performing style:

“Even as a boy of ten, Vaidyanatha Sivan could sing in all the three sthayi-s (octaves) with remarkable skill and accuracy. He used to sing in the Gandhara shruthi (third kattai of the Harmonium), and move between six kala-s (tempos) with great speed. At the age of 12, he gave his first public performance in Kallidaikurichi, in the distinguished presence of Subrahmanyaa Desikar and Ambalavana Desikar, the two chiefs (adhipati-s) of Thiruvaduthurai Math. Among the audience were two reputed musicians of that time, Periya Vaidyanatha Iyer and Chinna Vaidyanatha Iyer. Impressed with his performance and the depth of his musical knowledge, Subrahmanyaa Desikar as well as the sadas (assembly of men), conferred upon him the title ‘Maha.’”

Thus, performance style of an artiste indeed does indicate his or her potential.

References:
1) Tantri laya samanvitham: occurs in the Ramayana as a description of Lava and Kusha. Tantri refers to the veena, and hence refers to the style of singing where the placements of the notes (swara sthanas) are very important. Laya refers to coordination (Lava and Kusha were twins and they sang with instrumental accompaniment - either self-accompanied or by others. Hence the Laya system for reckoning time to the verses which were set in a particular chandas or metre - a 32-syllable meter called anuṣṭubh.