Chapter-5
Life and Biography of T. Chowdaiah

His Style, His Musical Vision

There is a school of thought that to be a great musician of Karnataka music, you need to be blessed with the serendipity of being born on the banks of Kaveri in a pious family leading an austere lifestyle in the vicinity of a temple. Chowdaiah was blessed with this fortune by birth.

We see a close link between Karnataka music and river Kaveri. The great Trinity of Karnataka Music—Sri Tyagaraja, Sri Muttuswami Dikshitar and Sri Shyamashastri—hailed from Tiruvarur, which is on the banks of Kaveri. Tyagaraja lived and died in Tiruvaiyar which is also on the banks of Kaveri. Veena Sheshanna grew up in Hanasoge which is on the banks of Kaveri. Rudrapatnam again is filled with music. Srirangapatnam, also on the banks of Kaveri, has a rich musical heritage.

Kaveri flowed here and expanded later. So also Karnataka music flowered here and expanded here, as well in the other three South Indian states—Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Kaveri joins Kapila in Tirumakudalu, T. Chowdaiah’s birth place.

Inspiring Ambience:

Tirumakudalu is a small village, about eighteen miles from Mysore. This is the place where Kumbha Mela is held once in three years. In Sanskrit this place is called Trimakuta. We find this as ‘Ankita’ in the compositions of T. Chowdaiah. The reason for this name: In this place three rivers Kaveri, Kapila and Sphatika join in a confluence, and it is therefore called ‘Triveni

1 ‘Sangeeta Ratna T.Chowdaiah’ by S.K.Ramachandra Rao, page no. 1
Sangama’. Chowdaiah refers to this in the charana of his composition in Dhanyasi, ‘Dēvi pūrNa MangaLe kāmākshi’: ‘Kāvēri Kapilā Sphatika Sarōvara tiradi hoLeva Trimakuta vāsini’. The place where Kaveri and Kapila join is called Tirumakudalu. One end of this place is Kaveri and the other end is Kapila. In between we find the town. If river Kapila is crossed we get to Narasipur, which is eighteen miles from Nanjanagud.

There is an old huge temple of Lord Agastyeshwara in Tirumakudalu. The Agastyeshwara Linga which is being worshipped here is believed to be installed by sage Agastya. It is believed that when Sage Agastya was on a lookout for a suitable place in South to install a Linga equivalent to the one at Kashi, this place on the bank of Kaveri came to his notice. The place looked quite convenient. But there were only three moments to install the linga. It was impossible to bring the Linga from Kashi within that time. Therefore the sage closed his eyes and beckoned Hanuman, who heeded to the request of the sage and flew to Kashi to get the Linga. The auspicious moment set for the installation of the Linga was approaching and there was no sign of Hanuman. Hanuman was on the search for a huge linga, which was not easy to find and was therefore held up. Time was running out and the sage had no other option. He hurriedly made a Linga of out of sand and installed it at the auspicious moment decided. Hanuman brought a huge linga from Kashi. But it was too late. Furious that his efforts went waste, Hanuman crashed the linga consecrated by the sage. The linga cracked in three places but did not give way. Lord
Eeshwara appeared and relieved Hanuman of his anger. The Linga brought by Hanuman was installed in another place in the same temple and was named as Hanumanteshwara.¹

Devotees visiting the temple visit the Hanumanteshwara temple before going for the Darshan of Agastyashwara. Thus separate emphasis was given to Hanuman.

The Agastyashwara idol thus treated by Hanuman in three places came to be known as Trimakuta. And, the place eventually came to be known as Trimakuta Kshetra. The temple is two miles away from Sosale where there is the Vyasaraya Matha. We see idols of Hanumanta in the temple installed by Sri Vyasaraya Swamy. Trimakuta Kshetra is also called Pancha Linga Kshetra. Hanumanteshwara, Agastyashwara, Someshwara, Markarkandeshara and Gargeshwara are the five Lingas.

In the upper part of the Agastyeswara Linga, there is a depression. Water poured into this flows through the linga and comes out from the bottom.

**Temple Architecture:**

The Agastyashwara temple belongs to the period of Chikkadevaraya. It was built by Dalavayi Linganna. The statue of Linganna can be seen on one of the pillars of the temple even today. On another pillar we see the statue of a girl.

¹The Sthala Mahatme of the place as narrated in the book ‘Mysooru Chowdaialnavaru’ by Rajashri.
playing an instrument that resembles violin. This instrument is given the name ‘Dhanurveena’.\footnote{"Piteelu vaadanada parichaya’ by R.R.Keshavamurthy- In the preface written by Chowdaiah, Chowdaiah mentions this instrument as the instrument played by our senior artists to please gods.} This statue seems to affirm the confident statement of Chowdaiah, who always propounded the theory that violin has originated in India and not in any western country. ‘The changed shape now may be due to the passage of time. But anyway it is something evolved on ideas and models borrowed from India’, was his firm belief.\footnote{"Murali vani – B.V.K.Shastri, p. no.333.} There is also a beautiful idol of Kumaraswamy in the temple, which is the best of its kind. Every inch of it is carefully sculpted. There is an old Ashwattha tree in the casting of the temple which is said to be planted by Brahma. It is therefore called Brahmashwattha. Under the tree are found innumerable number of snake shrines. Even today children aspirants install snake idols here.

Kaveri flows peacefully on the left side of the temple. The atmosphere is serene. On the bank of the river is a small place. This is the place which was the source of inspiration for the great Vaggeyakara Sri Mysore Vasudevacharya. It is learnt that the best of his kritis were composed here.\footnote{Mysooru T.Chowdaihnawanu by Rajashree, p. no. 5.} From the bank of the river Kaveri is also seen the Sangama. Kapila flows and joins Sphatika from the right and then joins Kaveri who flows from the left. The water of Kaveri is crystal clear. Kapila is of a dark complexion. The dark line at their union is clearly visible.

At the bank of the Kapila we find Narasipur. Gunja Narasimha is the Diety here. The legend is that long ago there was a washer man devotee who was ordered by Lord Narasimha in his dream that a temple be built in his name. When the washerman appealed to the Lord that poor as he was, he could not do so, he was told that he would find a treasure beneath the stone that he used for washing clothes. The next morning the washerman found the
treasure and eventually the temple was built.¹

After building the temple, the washer man had an intense wish to visit Kashi and bathe in the holy Ganga. But he was sad that his wish could not be fulfilled as he had no money for the pilgrimage. Lord Narasimha weighed the glory of Kashi on one hand and that of the isotope on the other, and it was found that the glory of the Swakshetra was greater to the extent of a bead fruit than that of Kashi, and therefore it was not necessary that the pilgrimage to Kashi be undertaken as the benefit of the punya can be had in the Swakshetra itself.

That is how we see a bead fruit and a weighing scale in the hand of Lord Narasimha here. This explains why The Lord here is known as Gunja Narasimha (Gunja in Kannada being the bead fruit or the Indian liquorice-botanical name- Abrus precatorius).

Surrounded by Narasipura, Kollegala, Mysore, Chamarajanagar and Nanjanagud, Tirumakudalu has thus attained importance. Sosale is close by, where we also find The Vyasaraya Math. That this sacred land has given birth to a legend like Chowdaiah is a matter of pride to the people of Karnataka and more so to the people of Mysore.

¹Five myths of the place as revealed by the temple priest. Also found in ‘Mysooru T.Chowdaiahnavaru’ by Rajashree, Sangeeta Nataka Academy Publication, page no.6.
Family

Chowdaiah’s parents belonged to Tirumakudalu. His father was Agastye Gowda, a landlord. His mother Sundarambike belonged to the clan of “Dasiyatta”, a well-known dancer of the region. She knew Sanskrit and she had an extensive knowledge of music. Known by the name Thirumkudlu Sundaramma she had mastery in both the spheres of performance and the treatises. She commanded respect and recognition not only in Mysore but also in neighboring States. Appreciating her expertise and command over the art, the Raja of Thiruvankur had honored her with Rs. Five Thousand and some valuable ornaments.¹

The learned artiste was also a scholar in Sanskrit and was learning violin with Pitilu Arunachala Bhagavathar and Venkatasubbiah. The first baby girl born to the couple died when she was one year old. Shaken by this, Sundaramma undertook various ‘vrata-s’ and prayed that she should be blessed with a handsome, learned and courageous baby boy. In the course of time she gave birth to Chowdaiah. Chowdaiah was born in Tirumakudalu on the 1ˢᵗ of January, 1894.² He was succeeded by Sharadamma, Lingappa,


²Rajashree’s book ‘Mysooru T.Chowdaiahnavaru’, page no.9 mentions the date as 01-01-1894. Anand, grandson of Chowdaiah likes to confirm the date as 1895. In all the other available
Chandramukhi, Subbamma, Puttaswamiah, Meenamma, Lalitamma and Dodda Raju. Chowdaiah was the eldest and apple of his mother’s eye. The second of the brothers was Lingappaji. The third in the series was T. Puttaswamiah. The last one was Doddaraju. Wife of Doddaraju is alive. She and Chowdaiah’s daughter Pankajamma were born on the same day.¹

T. Puttaswamiah became a well known vocalist. He was also a disciple of Bidaram Krishnappa. He served in the Bangalore University as a professor of music. He was devoted to his elder brother Chowdaiah and trained many disciples including A.R. Krishnamurthy, H.V. Venkateshiah, Violin S. Mahadevappa, Varadarangan, etc.

Chowdaiah’s Cousin T. Gururajappa was also trained by Bidaram Krishnappa and became a famous violinist. He served as an artiste in the A.I.R. Tiruchinapalli, Tamil Nadu. His son T. G. Thyagarajan is also a leading violinist.

Lingappaji, (1900-1970) was also a student of Bidaram Krishnappa. He knew both music and Sanskrit. He played the harmonium of 22 shrtis. He has also written a book on music titled ‘Shadragamamanjari’.

¹ Interview with Pankajamma, Chowdaiah’s daughter on 13-06-2010
Studies:

In 1899, when he was five years of age, Chowdaiah was admitted to School. There was no school in Tirumakudalu. So the child had to cross the river to reach the school in Narasipur everyday. Chowdaiah was not very keen on formal studies.

Distinguished Guide:

A well-known incident that occurred when he was nine years of age goes like this. One day when the boy was sitting on a rock, waiting for the boatman to go to school, Sri Vidyakantacharya of Vyasaraya Matha, who had come from Sosale reached the river bank as he had to go to Narasipur. While both of them waited for the boat, they talked. And in the course of the conversation he asked Chowdaiah how he liked the school and his studies. Chowdaiah’s reply was immediate and cutdry. He said he did not like going to school. Amused by the reply, the older man, who had the knowledge of palmistry, asked Chowdaiah to show him his palm and having carefully examined it, said, ‘my dear, your future does not lie in the school. You will do wonderfully well in music instead’. This made the boy extremely happy, as he was deeply interested in music. He explained that he loved music immensely, but was afraid that he could not quit school and take it as a profession, as his parents may not allow him to do so. Acharyalaughed and said he would talk to his parents. He accompanied the boy to his house to meet his parents. Chowdaiah’s mother was upset that he returned home without attending the school. Like any mother, her ambition was that her son should study well and get a good job. But Chowdaiah did not show keen interest in studies and she was aware of it.

The distinguished guest spoke to her and convinced her saying Chowdaiah would profit more by learning music rather than by going to school. So Chowdaiah stopped going to school, much to his joy! And, thus began a
new chapter in his life. His first music lessons began at home and the first Guru was his mother Sundaramma. She knew music, as it was needed for her dance.

**Choudaiah’s Distinction:**

Pakkanna, the step-brother of Chowdaiah used to play violin in the company managed by Varadachar of Drama fame. Chowdaiah started learning from him. But Pakkanna soon realized that Chowdaiah was too bright and was overpowered by jealousy, which showed in his teaching. Trouble started.

Chowdaiah was mischievous and adamant on one hand and Pakkanna was not willing to teach on the other. Fed up of both, the mother once hit Chowdaiah’s head with the plate with which she was eating and said, ‘Chowda, I prayed God that I should be blessed with a handsome and courageous child. I did not ask for a noble one. I now realize and repent for the same.’ So Pakkanna and Chowdaiah did not go well together.

**False Prophesy:**

One day Pakkanna took Chowdaiah to an astrologer by name Ahobalachar, who challenged saying, ‘Chowdaiah and music are two opposite poles and if Chowdaiah prospers in the field, I will throw away all my books into the river and quit astrology forever!’ Soon after this, one fine day Pakkanna announced that Chowdaiah was too dull to learn a sacred art like music and therefore his learning be stopped immediately and forever.

The mother was worried again. Listening to the Sosale gentleman’s advice, she had stopped his schooling. And now, five-six years have gone by in

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1 ‘Sangeeta Ratna T. Chowdaiah’ by S.K.Ramachandra Rao, page no.32
2 ‘Mysooru T. Chowdaiah’ by Rajashree, Sangeeta Natak academy publication, page no.12
trying to learn music after which Pakkanna’s refuses to teach Chowdaiah saying he has no talent for music!

But Chowdaiah was not to be misconvinced so easily. He vowed that it was music and music only he would learn. Chowdaiah was sent to Tirumakudalu Subbanna for the continuation of music lessons, and also to Ramanna for a few days.¹

After a few days, Sundaramma’s brother who lived in Mysore and whose name was also Chowda, came to visit her. He was a lover of music and was acquainted with many musicians. Sundaramma shared her son’s problem with her brother. He consoled her and said if Chowdaiah stayed in Tirumakudalu, he would never come up. He offered to take Chowdaiah with him to Mysore and get him trained up under a good Guru.

The boy was straight away taken to Bidaram Krishnappa.² Is it possible to teach this boy music? he asked him. Chowdaiah was sixteen years of age then. Krishnappa generously agreed to teach Chowdaiah and accepted him as his disciple.

**Bidaram Krishnappa A Great Teacher:**

Near Udupi is a place called Nandanike. A Brahmin by name Vishwanathiah lived here. His wife was Saraswati. Vishwanathiah was also known by the name Vishwanatha Bhatta. The couple had a son whom they named as Subbaraya. After five years they had another son. This boy who was handsome and whose face shone like Krishna was named Krishna by the couple.

There was a Yakshagana troupe which was famous for its ‘Dashavatara show’ then. Vishwanatha Bhatta who had a good voice and known for his

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¹ ‘Mysooru t. Chowdaiah’ by Rajashree, sangeeta Natak academy publication, page no.13

² Sangeeta ratna T. Chowdaiah’ by K. Srikantiah, page no.12
female roles had a prominent role in Dashavatara. Mysore was ruled by His Highness Sri Mummadi Krishnaraja Vodeyar at that time. When he visited Dharmasthala, The maharaja happened to witness the Dashavatara show staged by the troupe, and was greatly impressed. On returning to Mysore, he invited the troupe to Mysore and arranged a tent for their stay. The show was staged at the palace and was highly appreciated by one and all. Since the troupe stayed in the tent, they came to be known by the name Bidaram (Bidar: meaning Tent in Kannada). Thus Krishnappa was prefixed by Bidaram permanently.1

**Act of Providence:**

In course of time, Vishwanatha Bhatta passed away. The troupe lost the support from the palace. Subbaraya went out to earn bread everyday. Eventually when he married, Krishnappa and his mother were nowhere. Krishnappa spread a piece of cloth in front of the Kote Anjaneya temple at Mysore and sang what he knew. Out of the money so earned the mother and son earned the bread for the day.

One day Krishnappa returned from the temple empty-handed. The mother was angry and scolded the child for being irresponsible. The perplexed Krishnappa returned to the temple and sang whole-heartedly before Hanuman and fainted at the end of the song. Dr. Nanjunda Rao, who was passing by, came to the rescue of the boy. He gave him fruits and milk and some money, and accompanied him to his house. When Krishnappa reached home, a big surprise was awaiting him.

An official from the palace had sent for him. When Krishnappa reached the palace, he was informed that he was appointed as an actor for a monthly salary of Rs.5/- at the palace.

The reason behind this incident is- The kind King suddenly remembered Vishwanatha Bhatta one day and wondered what would have happened to his family after they lost support from the palace. He enquired about the family, and realizing the need of the hour, ordered that Krishnappa be given a job at the palace.

**Artiste’s Ascent:**

A rich man by name Timmaiah was one among Krishnappa’s well-wishers. He took Krishnappa to Karur Ramaswamy for advance training in music. His recommendation along with the hundred rupee note worked well, and Krishnappa was accepted as a disciple. Later Krishnappa also learned from Karigiri Rayaru.¹

Krishnappa practised so hard that his voice which was basically raunchy became smooth and melodious and he filled nāda into it. Purity of swaras and steady pace in laya in singing were the main features of Krishnappa’s singing.

Rallapalli AnantaKrishna Sharma, who was his disciple says,² ‘His mission was that the swaras should be sung in exactly the places where they are born, giving rise to Naada. His endless effort to achieve this is difficult to find in any of the artists. Chowdaiah was indeed fortunate to find such a Guru.

**The Gurukula:**

To learn under a guru like Krishnappa was like penance. How should a Guru be? Who is an ideal Guru? and who is an ideal disciple?

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¹ Mysooru T. Chowdaiahnavaru’ Rajashri, P.no. 22
² Mysooru T. Chowdaiahnavaru by Rajashree, Sangeeta Natak academy, Bangalore publication, page no.23.
“gu shabdah andhakārasmāt ru shabdastannirōdhakah
andhakāra nirōdhakdāt gururityabhidhiyate
tadvidhvipranipātēna pariprashnēna sēvayā
upēkshanti tatsarvam gnyāninastadarshinah “

In the word Guru, the letter ‘Gu’ means darkness and ‘Ru’ means dispel or brightening. So Guru is one who removes the darkness of ignorance with the light of knowledge. Extracting money from the disciple should not be his sole concern: He should be able to steal his heart. It is also said, “shishyādichchēt parājayam” - means, The Guru should possess a heart so pure that he should rejoice at his disciple’s victory over himself”. Rare is such a Guru found. Sri Shyamashastri’s Guru Pacchamiriyam Adi Appaiah, Sri Tyagaraja’s Guru Shonthi Venkataramaniah, Vasudevachr’s Guru Patnam Subramanya Iyer and Bidaram Krishnappa were few such Gurus.

**Who is a true disciple?**

vidyāturānām na sukham, na nidrā
kshaNashah kshaNashashchaiva vidyāmartham cha sādhayēt |
āpāda mauli paryantam gurūnām ākritim smarēt
kēna vighnaah praNashyanti sidhyanti cha manōrathāh |

A disciple should serve his Guru whole-heartedly. He should have a
constant thirst for knowledge. He should forego comfort and sleep. Commemorating the teacher all the while makes his path for knowledge easier and he is able to achieve his goal. To this list can be added Poochi Sreenivasa iyengar, Vasudevachar, Tiger Varadachar, Shemmangudi Shreenivasa Iyer, Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer and Chowdaiah.

The Luminary Teacher and His Ardent Disciple:

Chowdaiah’s discipleship started on a new moon day! And continued in an unabated manner for eighteen years from 1910 to 1918. This Guru-Shishya relation continued for twenty one years, till Krishnappa passed away.

Krishnappa was a tall, well built and handsome person with an excellent bearing. A strict disciplinarian, he led a pious and virtuous life and expected hard output from his disciples as well. A whole band of good musicians like B. Devendrappa, R. R. Keshavamurthy, B. Naranappa, and musicologist, Sanskrit scholar, Telugu and Kannada writer Rallapalli Anant Krishna Sharma as well as Bangalore Nagaratnamma trained under him.

Krishnappa was not only a vocalist but also a violinist. He discerned that Chowdaiah was not endowed with a voice suitable for vocal music. So he decided that he would train him in violin. He himself would not have thought that his decision would have a far-reaching effect on the career of the boy.

Each student was given individual attention. The Guru was an exacting master and would not brook even a slight lapse on the part of the disciple. Within ten months Chowdaiah attained swarajnana, but he had to undergo seven years of gruelling training.

1Mysooru Chowdaiahnavaru by rajashri, p. no. 26.
The Routine:

The disciples were to follow a strict disciplined routine every day. Chowdaiah had to get up at 4 in the morning and go for a run; exercise for an hour in the gymnasium and then practise music till 8 o’clock; An hour’s break for bath and breakfast; resume music practice from 9 o’clock till 12; lunch at 12 followed by a short rest and then continue music practice again. Free time for a stroll from 4 to 6 in the evening; supper at 8 in the evening followed by music practice again till 11 in the night. There was no compromise in this routine.

No new lesson was taught unless the previous one was perfected. Krishnappa insisted his disciples to practise in such a way that swaras and phrases moulded in the imagination should be implemented with clarity on the violin. This had to be made possible only by practice. If there be an error while practising, one had to begin right from the beginning and practise till the right notes were achieved. Many a time such practice sessions continued for 14-16 hours a day.¹

Each raga had to be practised continuously for a week. No other raga was to be treated during the week. This was the teacher’s order.²

Acuity and Acumen of the Guru:

One day it so happened that Chowdaiah was playing Kharaharapriya in a room upstairs. That was the raga prescribed for the week. Krishnappa was sitting downstairs with a guest. Under the impression that Krishnappa’s attention was engaged otherwise, Chowdaiah started playing some other raga. He immediately heard his teacher roar angrily. He beckoned Chowdaiah. Chowdaiah trembled and stood before his Guru apologetically.

¹Mysooru T.Chowdaiah’ –B.V.K.Shastri, p. no. 11.
The teacher told the guest, ‘I had given him Kharaharapriya and had told him to practise the raga for the entire week. But instead, he has disobeyed me and is playing some other Raga. He thinks he has achieved mastery over Kharaharapriya. Conceited fool that he is, is it possible for him to achieve or accomplish anything?’ Chowdaiah felt humiliated but did not speak a single word. Krishnappa turned to him and said, ‘Go and practise Kharaharapriya again. Interloper!’ With tears in his eyes, Chowdaiah went back to his place and played Kharaharapriya with total involvement. Several hours passed. After a long time Chowdaiah lifted his head accidentally to see his Guru listening to his playing. Chowdaiah hurriedly tried to get up, but Krishnappa stopped him, patted his back affectionately and said, ‘Chowdaiah, You seem to have forgotten the story of Veena Sheshanna’s practice that I explained to you. That man could earn such fame because he used to practise each Tana a hundred times with tamarind seeds next to him used for counting. When the mind is full of conceit, where is the place for the Goddess of Knowledge? Music is ocean deep and sky high. The more steadfast your penance, the greater will be your imaginative power. So do not ignore my words henceforth’. Convincing him thus, Krishnappa took his disciple for lunch.¹

**Vadya Kaaku:**

Krishnappa did not approve of singing with a false voice. “nābhihrtkanTa rasana’ was his rule. He proved it with his singing. He wanted that the same rule be applied to violin playing too. Accordingly he insisted that instead of changing the bows frequently, practicing should be done with a single bow. He taught his disciples how to play sarale, janti, alankara and varna in three speeds in a single bow. It is this kind of practice which gave such mastery of the instrument to the disciple Chowdaiah to play 256

¹'Sangeeta Kala nidhi T. Chowdaiah ṭ-S.Krishna Murthy, p. no. 20.
swaras in a single bow in the conference of the Madras Music Cademy, 1957, the year he was awarded the Sangeeta Kala Nidhi award. *Neraval, urutu-s, and gamaka-s* were made to practise every day without fail. Hours together were spent on this every day.

**Maiden Show before the Enlightened:**

Chowdaiah’s first appearance on stage was in the year 1911.¹ Shiva Ganga seer had come to Mysore. He stayed at the Sanskrit college. Everyday at the Puja time concerts by well known musicians were arranged. Bidaram Krishnappa’s concert was also arranged. The violinist booked for the concert did not arrive. But surprisingly Krishnappa was calm and seemed not to bother. He beckoned Chowdaiah and told him to get ready for the concert. Chowdaiah, not knowing Krishnappa’s intention, quickly got ready and was ready to start when Krishnappa smiled and said, ‘Are you going to play without the violin?’ Chowdaiah had never even dreamt that he would be allowed to play for his own Guru’s concert. He shivered with excitement and fear. Krishnappa spoke encouragingly to him and took him with him for the concert.

When he entered the stage, he saw the seer offering the puja to the Lord. The seer looked like Lord Shiva to him. Fear ceased and was replaced by enthusiasm. The concert began. Krishnappa sang without the least awareness that the accompanist who played for him was an inexperienced young boy. The seer blessed him heartily. The teacher nodded with satisfaction. Pakkanna’s reaction was ‘I knew Chowdaiah’s abilities before too. It was because I wanted to see him shine that I was harsh on him so that he would take music as a challenge.’ The astrologer threw his books to the river and stuck to his owe!²

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¹ ‘Sangeeta Kalanidhi Chowdaiah’- S. Krisjna Murthy, page no. 21.

² ‘Mysooru T. Chowdaiah’ by Rajashree, Sangeeta Natak Academy, Bangalore, page no.32.
Thus, Chowdaiah made the best use of the opportunity given to him, and the luck line started for him. His appearance on the stage that day was a big success. It became a preface to the concerts ahead. The Guru realized that a bright future awaited him. From then on, Chowdaiah played for most of his concerts. There was no looking back now. Life was promising.

**Guruprasada:**

Discipleship under Krishnappa was not a bed of roses for Chowdaiah. Though he played for most of Krishnappa’s concerts, Krishnappa rarely approved of what he played. So every concert was an examination for him. He had to be extremely careful while playing for Krishnappa. The least mistake and a big ordeal awaited him!

In 1914 Krishnappa performed at Ramamandira, Mysore. Chowdaiah accompanied him. It was not his day. He lost a *swara* in the middle of the concert. And lo! Down came Krishnappa’s hand on Chowdaiah’s cheek! Krishnappa’s cheeks were red with fury! “Concentrate!” the teacher roared. The audience was spellbound! Chowdaiah did not speak a single word. He did not lift his head that was down, but continued to play, now with extreme care.

**Benevolent Krishnappa:**

Krishnappa’s heart was soft as butter. He was hard on his students sometimes; nevertheless, he would compensate it with his unbounded affection later. Chowdaiah was the one who got the most of his wrath. But at the same time he was the one who got the best of his affections too. The teacher was extremely generous with regard to Chowdaiah’s food. If he scolded him, he would also repent later and enquire with his wife if Chowdaiah was served ghee and if he ate well. He would be furious with
his wife if there was any bargaining with regard to serving food to his students. Blessed was Chowdaiah to get such a Guru!

**Unceasing Lessons:**

By 1927 Chowdaiah had already established himself as a reputed violinist.1 Chowdaiah was presented with a gold pendant by some of his rich fans. It was a matter of pride for Chowdaiah and he enjoyed wearing it.

In a concert of Krishnappa, he wore the pendant and sat for the accompaniment. Krishnappa saw the pendant and gestured him to remove it and keep it aside. But the young and hot-blooded Chowdaiah wouldn’t listen. The concert was in progress and after some time chowdaiah played an apaswara. Furious, Krishnappa, unmindful of the audience, slapped his cheek with “will you take out the pendant now?” Chowdaiah quietly removed the pendant, and placed it safely in the violin box.

The concert continued with pure nada later and it was a feast for the audience”. See?, Krishnappa told his disciple after the concert,’ When you wore the pendant, you were filled with conceit and your concentration was more on the pendant rather than on your playing and therefore there was no place for nada. Once you took it out, nada replaced the pride and the concert was a success. Let this be a lesson to you. Do not lose yourself in conceit and arrogance hereafter”.2 Chowdaiah humbly took this as a blessing from his Guru.

**Frustrating Incidents:**

Such bitter (blessings on disguise) incidents were not uncommon for Chowdaiah. One such incident disturbed him so much that courageous as

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1 ‘Mysooru T.Chowdaiah’ by Rajashree, page no..51.
he was, Chowdaiah decided to take the extreme step of ending his life. Vainika Shikhamani Veena Sheshanna arranged concerts every week. Krishnashtami was celebrated with all the grandeur. People willing to perform before the King at Mysore palace had to perform here and get approval. Entrance to the palace for them was only after Sheshanna certified the artistes. Not only Karnataka classical Musicians but also Hindustani musicians aspired to perform before the Maharaja.

On one such occasion, after the artistes from outside Mysore performed, Sheshanna requested Sri B.Rachappa to sing. He wanted to exhibit the talent of Mysore artistes to the outside artistes. Chowdaiah took his Guru’s permission and sat for accompaniment. The music was heavenly and all were engrossed in the melody. Suddenly an apaswara was heard from Chowdaiah’s violin. Krishnappa turned furious again and oblivion of the audience, thrashed his student on his cheek without thinking twice. Chowdaiah was so humiliated that he needed great effort to gather himself to continue with the concert. Embarrassed, Sheshanna, not knowing what to do, consoled Krishnappa and tried to hush the matter. It was too much for Chowdaiah to bear the humiliation. Filled with pain, Chowdaiah could not sleep that night. He woke up in the morning at his usual hours, and deciding to commit suicide, started from home. On the way, he encountered Rachappa for whom he played the previous evening. Rachappa had somehow smelt the rat and anticipated the situation. He advised Chowdaiah and took him home. When asked why he had taken such an extreme step, Chowdaiah said, that his Guru was not pleased with the quality of his playing. After this incident, Chowdaiah practised more
and more, much more than what he did before so as never to get an apaswara again. Remembering this incident, Chowdaiah used to gratefully say, “If my teacher did not warn me so, I do not know where I would be today. If I have accomplished something today, it is because of my Guru.”

Troubled Household:

Chowdaiah’s family life started in 1918. He was 24 then. Ramamma, his wife was a noble, good-hearted wife. But unfortunately, within a year of their marriage, Ramamma became a victim to some disease and passed away. Chowdaiah began to lose interest in life. Music practice suffered too. Resignedness and asceticism began to rule. The elders of the family were worried. Chowdaiah was advised to marry again. Chowdaiah, though unwilling, finally gave in. He married Nanjamma five years after the demise of Ramamma.

The hard days began since then. Poverty overwhelmed. There were too many mouths to feed and only two hands to earn. One day there was literally nothing to cook at home. A perplexed Chowdaiah

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1 ‘Mysooru T. Chowdaiahnavaru’ by Rajashri, p. no. 38.
2 ‘Mysooru T. Chowdaiahnavaru’ by Rajashri, p. no. 38.
went to Prasanna Sita Rama Mandira and stood in the temple like a statue. A friend came to the temple looking for him. Grasping the situation, he immediately took Chowdaiah to a grocery shop and bought him groceries worth 200 Rs. Chowdaiah gratefully thought that Lord Maruti had come in the disguise of his friend to help him.

Chowdaiah had three daughters: Padmamma, Pankajamma and Mangalamma. Pankajamma passed away recently. Sri Hucchegowda is the first son-in-law, Bheeme Goda the second and Ramegowda, the third, who is a medical doctor.

After some time due to disharmony, the household broke and Chowdaiah got Rs.1000 as his share and Rs.25000 as debt! Anybody else in his position would have lost heart, but Chowdaiah was bold and strong. He trusted his Maruti and entrusted all his troubles to him. (It can be remembered at this point that Devendrappa was also an ardent devotee of Lord Anjaneya) It was this total surrender to the Lord that washed away all his troubles soon. Guru Krishnappa engaged him to play accompaniment for Gadwal AnantaBhagavatar’s Katha Kalakshepas, which earned him money and fame.¹

**Prasanna Sita Rama Mandira (Bidaram Krishnappa Mandira):**

Great buildings tell the story of their creator, their purpose and their ambience. The pyramids of Egypt, The Leaning tower of Pisa and The Taj Mahal at Agra are among the best of world’s famous monuments. There is a speciality in each of these historical monuments. Similarly in the world of

¹Mysooru Vaggeyakararu- Bharati Prakashana, Mysore, p. no. 45.
art, Prasanna Sita Rama Mandira at Mysore is a jewel in the history of Karnataka classical music. Like the Sangeeta Mahal at Tanjore, this music hall is built exclusively for music by a musician: Sri Bidaram Krishnappa. Though there are many other music halls in India like the Madras Music Academy, The Shanmukhananda hall at Bombay, The Gayana Samaja at Bangalore and the Ravindra Bhavan at Hyderabad, this historic temple of music stands out because a musician put his heart and soul to make his dream come true. It involves Krishnappa’s life of sacrifice, the trials and tribulations he faced and his unflinching devotion to the cause of building the Rama Mandira. Krishnappa firmly believed that Karnataka music is not just “art for art’s sake”, but indeed, “art for God’s sake”. The result is the magical environment of the Rama Mandira where performers surrender themselves through their music to the presiding Deity, Lord Rama. In the process, the performers transport themselves and their listeners to the world of divine nada through soulful music.

The Sitarama Mandira remains a monument to Krishnappa’s passion and perseverance. The Mandira which had its inauguration in 1929, is located on the Narayana Shastri road, Shivrampet, Mysore. The main concert hall is neither big nor small, but has a very intimate atmosphere. It can
accommodate about 500 listeners. Three of the walls are covered with beautifully framed oil paintings of Lord Vishnu’s ten incarnations and portraits of great musicians of yesteryears such as Veena Seshanna, Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer, Patnam Subramanya Iyer, Pallavi Namakkal Narasimha Iyengar, Parameshwara Bhagavatar and others. The sanctum at the west end of the hall features a large beautiful painting of Sri Rama Pattabhishekham. The dais faces the sanctum at the other end of the hall. The east wall is decorated with the portraits of the great Acharyas, Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhvacharya. Bidaram Krishnappa’s portrait is in the august presence of these philosophers. Portraits of musicians and vaggeyakaras from the late 19th and 20th century adore the walls facing north and south on either side of the dais. Very few places match the Rama Mandira in providing inspiration and creating the mood that enables them to give
some of their best concerts.

When Chowdaiah was in his twenties, Sheshanna, Bidaram Krishnappa and Bhakshi Subbanna were called the Trimurtis of Mysore. His Highness Sri Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar had honoured Sheshanna with “todas” for both his hands and also with the title, ”Vainika Shikhamani”. Krishnappawas an ardent devotee of Sri Rama and Hanuman. He did not care much for material life. When Krishnappa started the construction of his Rama Mandira, there were already a few Rama Mandiras in Mysore. Krishnappa used to visit these Rama Mandiras regularly. He had developed a great passion to build a Rama temple. When he started earning from his concerts, he tried to save every penny to realize his dream. The support from Mummadi Maharaja’s court was barely enough to maintain his family. His Highness Sri Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar increased the level of financial support. Still, Krishnappa was not really well to do. His fame spread in Tamilnadu after his student Nagaratnamma (who later built the Tyagaraja Samadhi at Tiruvayyar), residing at Madras, arranged several concerts. Wherever Krishnappa went, he sought for help and collected funds from friends and admirers for the temple.

Like Sahukar Chenniah in Mysore, a rich businessman Alwar Chettiar of Madras took a great liking to Krishnappa’s music. A few years later Alwar Chettiar suffered a huge loss in his business, went into depression, which showed on his health. One of his well-wishers suggested that listening to Krishnappa’s music would help him recover. The family brought him from Mysore, who was kind enough to consent. Krishnappa sang to Chettiar everyday for a few weeks. Miraculously Chettiar recovered with the music. When the family wanted to repay Krishnappa, he asked them to donate a few girders for the roof of the temple.¹

Krishnappa spent all his life’s savings in making the Rama Mandira a

¹’Sangeeta Ratna T.Chowdaiah’- S.K.Ramachandra Rao, p. no. 10.
reality. He even went to the extent of selling his wife Tungamma’s Mangala Sutra to raise money for the Mandira. His mission was, ‘This should be a temple for concerts. There should be endless Rama japa here. The place should earn good money and the money should be utilized for Rama Kainkarya’. So the Mandira was constructed in a unique way.

Krishnappa used great imagination in constructing the temple. The Mandira has a main hall that accommodates about 200 people and includes four small rooms in the four corners. The sanctum on the west side of the hall was built with an extremely beautiful oil-painting of the Rama Pattabhisheka painted by Krishna Rao of Mysore.

The south and north entrances feature triple arched colonnaded portico design and cornice work. Statues of Goddess Lakshmi and Goddess Saraswati crown the top of the building on the south and north.

The Dashavatara plays by his father’s troupe must have left an indelible mark on Krishnappa’s mind. He commissioned a well known artist, Achar of Mysore, to make oil paintings of the Dashavatara of 4’X3’ size. Each painting was framed with an artistic and uniquely different teak wood frame and fixed on all the four walls at the top. Smaller oil paintings of 2’x2.5’size of Adi Shankara, Madhwacharya and Ramanujacharya along with those of Vaggeyakaras and musicians from the late 19th and 20th centuries adorn the walls. Standing in the hall the devotee is watched by the gods, saints and composers like Purandaradasa, Tyagaraja, as well as Patnam Subramanya Iyer, Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer, Namakkal Narasimha Iyengar, Todi Raghava Iyer, Palghat Rama Bhagavatar, Parameshwara Bhagavatar and Veena Sheshanna. Bidaram Krishnappa helped the architect create a spiritually elevating atmosphere in the mandira.

The construction was completed in 1928. Krishnappa celebrated


The Mandira underwent renovation led by Prof. K.V. Arkanatha, the then president. Prof. Ramaratnam provided the much needed funds for the renovation by donating the award money of the “Kanaka Purandara Award for 2007’, received by the Karnataka State Government. Following this lead, the Rama Mandira renovation programme has received support from many art promoters in India and abroad.

**Disciples’s Promise:**

Before his death, Krishnappa had taken a word from Chowdaiah that the temple would be taken care of. Chowdaiah too kept his word to the extent possible, but later there came up matters which went to the court and sadly there were efforts to remove Chowdaiah from the temple. This was hard for Chowdaiah to digest. Moreover Sri B.K. Padmanabha Rao, who was one of the pillars of the temple passed away. It is learnt that this was one of the reasons which led to Chowdaiah’s death.  

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However, the happy thing is that this Mandira is now recognized as a heritage building by the Government.

**The Ayyanar Kalashale (at Prasanna Sitarama Mandira):**

Krishnappa had a dream to start an institution to teach Karnataka classical music in the Rama Mandira. He could not realize this dream during his lifetime.

After Krishnappa’s demise in 1931, his disciples T.M.Puttaswamiah and T.Gururajappa made an effort to start a music school. Unfortunately it did not last even a few months.

After India gained independence, royalty was abolished and land reforms, which affected the Zamindars were introduced. As a result, traditional patronage to music and musicians dwindled. The teaching-learning of music under the Gurukula system also began to disappear. Moreover, the majority of the would-be learners could not afford the fees charged. This was the context in which Chowdaiah started the Ayyanar college of music. His intention was to provide a music learning facility, under able teachers of that era, at an affordable fee structure. Vidwan Narayana swamy Bhagavatar was also associated with the college, as a founder-member, but later on moved out to start his own institution- ‘The Vijaya College of music.’

On 2nd April 1945, Chowdaiah established the Ayyanar College of music at

![Violin classes (ladies) at Ayyanar Kala Shale](image)
the Prasanna Sita Rama Mandira, Mysore. He named it so because of his ardent devotion to Lord Ayyappa. Veteran vocalist, Sri Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar inaugurated the school. It was first located in Chamarajapuram Extension. K. Puttu Rao, a senior advocate of the city, who was the secretary of the Bidaram Krishnappa Mandira then suggested to Chowdaiah that the school should be shifted to the Rama Mandira and Chowdaiah accepted his suggestion.¹ Chowdaiah appointed his disciple V. Ramaratnam as the vice-principal. Vocal music, violin, Veena and flute were taught here every day. The students of this college were trained to appear for junior, senior and proficiency examinations in music. Under the guidance and leadership of Chowdaiah and Ramaratnam, this institution became a well-known centre for advanced learning in music and has produced many performing artists of repute. Eminent scholars and musicians such as V. Seturamiah, R.K. Venkatarama Shastri and Palghat C.R. Mani were invited to give lecture demonstrations and concerts at the Ayyanar College of music.

Ayyanar College not only trained aspiring musicians but was also instrumental in developing a knowledgeable audience by arranging free music concerts in the college premises every Saturday, during Chowdaiah’s tenure, with the staff providing accompaniment.

**Under the Guidance of Anoor Ramakrishna Sharma (at Bangalore):**

Chowdaiah started Sri Ayyanar College of Music at Bangalore in the year 1952. Later, Anoor S. Ramakrishna led the institution for more than 4 decades. Violinist Anoor Ramakrishna, who also served as a professor of music in the post graduate department of the Performing arts of the Bangalore University, joined the school as a teacher and took over the mantle of Principal after the demise of Chowdaiah in 1967. He strove hard, till his death in 1995, to bring glory both to the

¹“A musician’s reminiscences” by Prof. Ramaratnam, page no.36.
institution and the students trained there. His deep interest in imparting training not only in violin-playing but also vocal and veena along with his capacity to take up the responsibility and fulfill his duty in a disciplined manner, made him the unanimous choice for the Principal’s post of Ayyanan College after the demise of Chowdaiah.

The weekly concerts which continued for a long time till recently, was shifted to Friday during Anoor’s tenure. The college has been imparting training in vocal, Veena, violin, Mridangam, Flute and Khanjira and has produced many performing artists of repute.

Apart from training students, the other activities introduced by Anoor Ramakrishna at The Ayyanan College of music include the presentation of musical features, like Tyagaraja Charitam, Ramakathasudha, Krishnaavalokanam: the multi-violin ensemble: the percussion ensemble (in association with Bangalore K.Venkataram) called Layalahari: pilgrimage to Tiruvayyaru for the aradhana: a yearly retreat at Nandi Hills, where students were encouraged to perform with accompaniments. The last two activities helped make the bond between teachers and students strong and cordial.

The annual Aradhana festival conducted by Ayyanan College of Music at the Pattabhirama Temple, Jayanagar, Bangalore became so popular that it gradually spanned an entire week.

The students were also encouraged to take part in workshops, study circles, discussions and listening sessions. A library has been built by Anoor with
books and audio cassettes for the benefit of the students. The college was shifted from its rented premises to a spacious structure built atop his residential house at Jayanagar.

Ayyanar College of Music completed its 50 years in 2002. Vidwan Anoor S. Ramakrishna and the staff members of Ayyanar College of Music have given several celebrated artistes to the music field.

Laya Lahari, Percussion Ensemble of Ayyanar College of Music, which emerged in the year 1980 largely due to the ideas and dreams of Anoor S Ramakrishna and Sangeetha Kala Ratna Vidwan Late Bangalore K Venkatram, is acclaimed a successful attempt of blending these hitherto different forms of percussion, where the charm of rhythm of the folklore is not dispensed at the cost of tonal value. This troupe is currently directed and led by Anoor Ananthakrishna Sharma. The members of this troupe are all the students of Sri Ayyanar College of Music. This troupe has given performances all over India and other countries.

After Anoor’s sudden demise in 1995, his elder son Dattatreya Sharma took over as Principal. Since then, with the active support of his younger brother Anantakrishna Sharma and a host of loyal teachers he has been upholding the tradition and the standards of the college as well as maintaining cordiality between the teachers and students.

The silver jubilee of The Ayyanar College of music was celebrated on the
11th of August, 1974. A library was started on the occasion. A souvenir was also released, which contained some interesting articles on Chowdaiah and Karnataka classical music.

At Bangalore the Golden jubilee of Ayyanar college of music was celebrated with enthusiasm and excitement at Gayana Samaja auditorium on 24th July, 2002. The then minister for Kannada and Culture Rani Satish presided over the function and veteran violinist R.R. Keshavamurthy inaugurated the ceremony. In the five-day event, spanning 24-28th July, 2002, 72 students of the Ayyanar college took part in the choir music of 15 minutes duration presented on all the five evenings and roughly 150 musicians participated in various concerts.

**Seven-stringed Violin (Instrument of the Genius):**

In his early years, Chowdaiah played the four-stringed violin, and by 1927 he became an extremely well known violin accompanist. Those were the days when there was no sound amplification equipment and it was rather difficult for listeners who sat in the back rows of music halls to hear the violin. Chowdaiah realized this shortcoming and launched upon increasing the sound of the violin.

When the idea of inventing a seven-stringed violin occurred to him, Chowdaiah experimented first by adding two strings to the fifth string in his
four-stringed violin. The sound seemed good to hear. So he added one more string. So three lower strings were added to the panchama, shadja and madhya panchama and the mantra shadja was left alone. Finally the strings were arranged this way- tarashadja- mandrashadja, madhya panchama- mantra panchama and madhya shadja-mandra shadja. Thus the strings were gothicised, keeping in mind the human voice. He experimented, innovated and practiced to achieve perfection, all without the knowledge of his Guru.

One evening at a concert in Mysore, Chowdaiah was to accompany his Guru Krishnappa. Chowdaiah was uneasy. ‘Perhaps I should have informed him’ he thought. He did not lift his head while playing as he was filled with fear. Krishnappa realized that there was something new in his playing. When the sound seemed to be louder than the usual violin, Krishnappa stopped singing for a while, looked at Chowdaiah first and then at the violin. He immediately discerned the three extra strings applied. He angrily asked him “what is this contraption?”. Chowdaiah gathered all his courage and in all humility said that he added three more strings and evolved this seven stringed violin so that the sound of the violin could be heard even in the back rows of the concert hall. There was pin-drop silence in the hall. Anxiety was built up in the air. People anticipated that Krishnappa’s hand would rise again and were planning how to stop it. Chowdaiah’s hand touched his cheek without his own knowledge. Drops of sweat collected on his forehead.

Veena Seshanna who was also present in the audience, was aware of the seven stringed violin. Pleased with Shri Chowdaiah’s accomplishment at innovating the violin, he had given him suggestions to improve it too. He now suggested Shri Bidaram Krishnappa that Chowdaiah must be allowed to play that violin.

Krishnappa took the violin from Chowdaiah’s hands and examined it. ‘When did you start experimenting? Why did you not tell me?’ He asked.
He asked Chowdaiah to play. Encouraged, Chowdaiah began to play. He played carefully without changing the bow too often as Krishnappa had taught him and applying all the techniques that he had learnt in the sixteen years of his training. Nada filled the hall like a full stream. Krishnappa was spellbound. ‘Sound should begin at the Naval, join the throat through the heart and come out through the open mouth.’ was Krishnappa’s saying. This feature of the human voice agreed with the seven-stringed violin and this made Krishnappa extremely happy and excited. And he patted Chowdaiah saying, “Play with this violin hereafter in your future concerts.” It was a heavenly moment for Chowdaiah. After practising incessantly, he began to use this new seven stringed violin in all his concerts. Krishnappa got a new seven-string violin made by Rangappa for Chowdaiah.

Sometime later, Chowdaiah accompanied his master again in another concert using this new violin and the master was pleased with it. Chowdaiah brought about a revolution, in the field of music.

**Luminary’s Appreciation:**

A few days later Chowdaiah played accompaniment for Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar in Madras. Ariyakkudi looked at the violin often as the sound was louder than usual. After the concert Chowdaiah asked him if he was angry. The elderly musician inturn asked him why the sound of his violin seemed boosted.

Chowdaiah showed him the violin and humbly said,’ Shruti is becoming lower and lower and there is no tightness in the violin string. Therefore I had to adopt this new violin. If you think it is right, I will continue with it or I will stop playing it.’ Ariyakkudi scrutinised the violin and realised that

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1*Sangeeta kalanidhi T.Chowdaiah by S.Krishna Murthy, p. no. 27.*
what Chowdaiah had said was true. He welcomed Chowdaiah’s idea.¹

When Chowdaiah invented this Instrument, several experiments had already taken place about Seven-stringed violin in western countries. Whether Chowdaiah was aware of this fact or not is not known. But it goes without saying that Chowdaiah was solely responsible for this instrument to become so popular in our country.

But some orthodox people in the music circle raised a storm of opposition to this instrument. There were hot discussions regarding the invention in the Madras Music Academy in 1952. Many musicians opined that it was unscientific and untraditional. A revolution thus started in South India. But Chowdaiah bore it all in a cool manner like a mountain. Paradoxically, Chowdaiah was conferred The‘Sangeeta Kalanidhi’ title in 1957 at the same venue five years later.

This is a proof of Chowdaiah’s bravery and courage.

A Tiger Among Tigers:

By devoted practice, application, grit and learning, Chowdaiah rose to Himalayan heights in the world of Karnataka classical music. With Bidaram Krishnappa’s encouragement, courage and mastery, Chowdaiah earned fame, affection and respect from all his great contemporaries. His style of playing the violin reflected not only the technique he had learnt from his Guru (Krishnappa played violin too) but also the musical violin he had absorbed from him. The strokes of his bow were firm and strong, but never harsh. The emanating sound would be strong too, reaching the far end of the recital hall without the aid of amplification. It would be full bodied as warranted by the music. The combination of his bowing and fingering techniques invariably enunciated well the musical phrases, their twists,

¹Article by Ellarvi, The souvenir of the 16th anniversary of The Rasika Ranjani Sabha, Calcutta, 1962, p. no. 16.
frills and turns. There was clarity even when the passage called for speed. His raga alapana-s emphasized profuse efflorescence rather than quintessence.

He put his mental abilities to the extreme during practice. He functioned like a giant when he played kritis. His style, as everybody knows, is unique. His violin playing technique was also unique. He used the ‘spring bowing’ technique to play tanam. He didn’t look at the strings nor at his left fingers for swara permutations. They came to him automatically just as a well seasoned professor draws an outline of his course clearly and precisely.

He became a bridge between Mysore and Tamilnadu.

**As an Accompanist:**

An accompanist is defined and described as-

A vocal or instrumental part that supports another, often solopart, or

Something added for embellishment, completeness or symmetry; complement.

The violin and Mridangam provide accompaniment in both senses. One can hardly think of a Karnataka classical Music concert without the minimal accompaniment of both these instruments. The vocalist needs an opportunity to recuperate after a strenuous alapana. It is feasible but not easy or pleasant to sing continuously for a couple of hours or more.

Sometimes even in Veena concerts violin is accompanied. But surely the violin accompaniment does more than provide rest and relief to the singer and the listener. To say that someone provided ‘Saath’ is to say that he or she merely accompanied in the sense of providing such relief. But to say someone provided ‘sat sangat’ is to say that he or she provided inspiring accompaniment, lifting the level of the concert. In Karnataka music parlance, this is the concept of nourishing the concert. The Violin repartees
can be inspiring to the vocalist or the main artist, especially in Swaraprastara and neraval portions as well as accompaniment during alapana. Chowdaiah’s forte as an accompanist had been that gift of personality and playing which would never allow a musician to pull a long face or give a dull performance.

While in Hindustani music the vocalist is clearly numero uno, in Karnataka music, he or she seem to be primus inter pares or ‘first among equals’. It is said that it was Pandit Ravishankar, who after seeing the importance given to accompanists in the south tried to boost the image of his Tabla players like Alla Rakha or Zahir Hussain, both unusually talented. This paddhati could have evolved because in the past, many Karnataka music accompanists, both violinists and Mridangists were stalwarts equalling the main performers in musical stature, many of them eventually Sangeeta Kalanidhis like Chowdaiah or Lalgudi Jayaraman or Palghat Raghu. After seeing the ease with which Lalgudi, as an accompanying violinist, matched T.R. Subramanyam in a highly complicated pallavi, Musuri Subramanya Iyer remarked, ‘Jayaraman’s musical intuition and grasp are amazing. If I were in Jayaraman’s place, I would have only two options - to run away from the stage carrying my violin or to run away faster leaving my violin behind’. In Classical Karnataka music concerts, the violinist or the Mridangist is many a time superior to the vocalist. So it is a sort of tribandi.

Talking about the duty of an accompanist, Sri L.S. Sheshagiri Rao says that a violin accompanist should take special care to flatten out the subtle nuances of the main musician. The role of accompanying violinists is to provide physical respite to the main artist, provide aesthetic respite to Rasikas and inspirational challenge to the main artist. Chowdaiah, as an accompanist, fulfilled all these requirements and much more.

Tirukkodikaval Krishna Iyer had stipulated that when Karnataka classical music is played on the violin, it should sound like vocal music. It is said
Krishna Iyer practised playing the violin with this in mind. Chowdaiah followed this. He practised like a devil and achieved mastery over the instrument. One can say he did not handle the instrument as a pakka vadyam(accompanying instrument) but as Pucca vadyam(a perfect instrument).

Chowdaiah’s style of playing the violin reflected not only the technique he had learnt from his Guru(Krishnappa played violin too) but also the musical violin he had absorbed from him.

He functioned like a giant when he played kritis. His style, as everybody knows, is unique. His violin playing technique was also unique. He used the ‘spring bowing’ technique to play Tanam. He didn’t look at the strings nor at his left fingers for swara permutations. They came to him automatically just as a well seasoned professor draws an outline of his course clearly and precisely.

Accompanying a main musician is an intricate art and mastery over it comes only with deep understanding of its possibilities and potential. Chowdaiah understood the role of a sideman admirably. Whoever the artist, he lost no time in understanding the style and treatment and caught on to the same with no effort. Whatever the areas of specialization and individual hallmarks of the vocalist, he could accompany with confidence. Thus, whether it was Chembai’s breath-taking speed or maharajapuram’s flash of ever-novel prayogas or Ariyakudi’s Kriti-dominated madhyama kala music or Madhurai Mani Iyer’s Fluent swarakalpana or G.N.B’s bhirka-s, Chowdaiah easily made sure his own contribution revolved around the core of the main musician’s style.

Musuri Subramanya Iyer said ‘The creative skill of Chowdaiah’s playing was equalled by few and surpassed by fewer. He had a large sweep over

1 Anasuya Kulkami in her interview on 26-6-2010.
the instrument which considerably helped the vocalist. Chowdaiah knew, none better, that the function of the accompanist is to follow the main artist attentively, faithfully assist him and genuinely help the musician to give a good account of himself. It is this superlative quality that endeared him to one and all.”

Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer said, “Fellows like me will render an alapana for hours and he will get thunderous claps with his finishing strokes on the violin! Though both of us were very good friends, somehow I felt nervous having him in a ‘kutcheri’ with me.”

A good, sensitive sideman, there was no leading musician of the time whom Chowdaiah did not accompany. All musicians desired to have him as their violin accompanist. It is said that the brilliant vocalist Shri G.N. Balasubramanyam would request Sabha secretaries, who wanted to arrange his concert, that they should talk to Chowdaiah first to make sure he was available to accompany on violin! There was no musician of the time whom Chowdaiah did not accompany. Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Tiger Varadachar, Maharajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar, Musuri Subramanya Iyer, Shemmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer, Madhurai Mani Iyer, Alattur Brothers, Mali, Pudukkotai Dakshinamurthy Pillai, Palladam Sanjeeva Rao, Palghat Rama Bhagavatar, M.S. Subbalakshmi,…. The list goes on and on. All the stalwarts looked upon him with respect. He played on the violin with most of them so often that he was instinctively alive to their stands and idiosyncrasies and knew how best to serve their needs. He was an accompanist in the ideal sense of the term. “Contrary to the popular belief, the function of an accompanist in Karnataka music is not as easy as it seems”, replied Chowdaiah to Sri B.V.K.

1Musuri Subramanya Iyer in his article on Chowdaiah- Journal of Rasika Ranjani Sabha, Calcutta.1962.

2The Hindu- Friday Review-Chennai and Tamilnadu-2nd April, 2010.
Shastri when he was asked what he considered as the essential qualities for success in the role. “His function does not end with trailing behind the vocalist. He has a more important duty to perform too. He has to enhance the vocalist’s efforts and musical appeal. For this he needs great fortitude and stamina and must never let himself get flustered. He must virtually integrate his musical personality into the scheme of the vocalist. Above all, he must have such confidence and control of his instrument that he can reproduce at will any theme or movement encountered without a second thought. And this comes only with steady and dedicated practice. And if the vocalist sets traps to test the mettle of the violinist, it is imperative that he should have the alacrity and presence of mind to grasp both the spirit and form in amoment and acquit himself creditably”.¹

**Musical Memory:**

Playing for G.N. Balasubramanyam, Chowdaiah practised what he preached. Apart from the confidence that he had gained through the immense experience, the other influence was his retentive memory. He had the knack of reproducing even intricate and labyrinthine passages with little effort after hearing them just once. As an ideal accompanist he would support the vocalist when he faltered, sustain the tempo in perfect harmony when it lagged and provoke the vocalist to good purpose when he was uncertain and drifting. The overall effect of any recital he participated in was one of vivacity, vibrant with deep tonal textures.

After Chowdaiah came into his own, all the leading musicians of South India then remember with pride and real joy that the great periods in their lives as a musician almost always synchronized with that when Chowdaiah was their accompanist.² Even at the age of sixty, his enthusiasm and

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¹ B.V.K. Shastri, p. no. 336.

² G.N. Balasubramanyam in his article on Chowdaiah, Rasika Ranjanai Sabha souvenir, 1962, p. no. 22.
sprightliness on the platform never left a dull moment in the concert, G.N.Balasubramanyam fondly called him ‘soundayya’. It is said in a concert of G.N.B. when he was struggling to align with shruti due to a bad throat, Chowdaiah discerning his off-key singing, managed the concert with his violin playing so beautifully that people hardly noticed the off-key singing of the main artiste.¹ His alacrity and resilience always stood him in good stead on the platform and elsewhere. It is for this reason no other violinist of the time had earned such reputation and remuneration or so much wealth.

Chowdaiah accompanied Bharata Ratna Smt. M.S. Subbulakshmi in many concerts and added charm to her concerts. Very well-known violinists did not accompany women artists then. But Chowdaiah did not care for this conventional taboo.

During Ramanavami celebrations every year, Subbulakshmi would visit Mysore and Bangalore and Chowdaiah used to accompany her.

Talking over his demise in 1967, Subbulakshmi’s husband Sri Sadashivam said,”Chowdaiah was a brave lion. There is nobody to match his courage and fortitude. That is the reason why he had the utmost courage to play for anybody.

¹ ‘Na kanda Sangeeta Kalanidhi T. Chowdaiahnavaru’- article by M.Cheluvaraya swamy. Souvenier, Silver jubilee year, Ayyanar College of music, 1974, p. no.2.
A seating should be created in his memory in either the Madras or Mysore University.”1

Chowdaiah encouraged numerous young artists by playing accompaniment for them. Chintalapalli Ramachandra Rao, V.V. Shatagopan, Ramnad Krishnan and Manakkal Rangarajan to name a few. He also accompanied Chintalapalli for a few of his gramophone recordings.

Some rare instances with Chowdaiah as accompanist are given below.

Till 1926 Chowdaiah had provided violin accompaniment only to his guru in various concerts. In 1926 he got an opportunity to perform his first concert with Sri Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar. Ramanuja Iyengar was a senior vidwan and a celebrated musician by then. Violinists of equal competence alone were allowed to accompany him. Chowdaiah was aware of this. His courage came in handy that day.

In 1926 in Madras Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar was booked to perform with Balakrishna Iyer for violin accompaniment and Mailattur Sami Iyer for Mrudangam. Due to reasons unknown Balakrishna Iyer did not turn up for the concert. Chowdaiah happened to be in Madras on this day. The secretary Muniswami Naidu requested Chowdaiah to play for the concert. Ariyakkudi did not have a high opinion about Chowdaiah’s violin playing

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then. But because he could not say no to Muniswami Naidu’s word, he consented to have Chowdaiah for accompaniment. Chowdaiah arrived late for the concert. Ariyakkudi did not wait for him. He started the concert with Mridangam accompaniment. Chowdaiah joined the concert by the time the varna was coming to a close. Ariyakkudi sang Shankarabharana that day. When he finished the Ragalapana, there was tremendous applause. When it was Chowdaiah’s turn, he played the Raga excellently with grahabhedha. The applause was louder from the happy audience. He was praised as the lion of Mysore. Overnight he became the talk of the town. Ariyakkudi thought that Chowdaiah superceded him. The remuneration Chowdaiah received for this concert was only 40 Rs.¹

The following week Chowdaiah was booked to play for the same vocalist. People thought that it was not a concert but a war that was going to happen at the venue. Rumour had it that a big fight between Chowdaiah and Ariyakudi was anticipated and tight security in the leadership of D.S.P. Parankusha Naidu was arranged! It was a delicate situation. That the concert took place in police security in anticipation of an unhealthy atmosphere is enough testimony. Anybody in Chowdaiah’s place would surely back out. But it was Chowdaiah. He sat on the stage as the personification of courage.

Ariyakkudi started the concert with the varna in Kalyani and continued with the ragalapana in the same raga. Chowdaiah replied with equal calibre. Tyagaraja’s ‘Nidhijala Sukhama’, the crown of the evening, was taken up for detail eboration. Instead of starting the kriti with one akshara eduppu as is customary, the vocalist started it with one and a half akshara eduppu and looked at Chowdaiah meaningfully. Chowdaiah followed suit and played the kriti with one and a half edupu too. But immediately after playing the pallavi, he placed down his instrument. Ariyakkudi looked at

him bewildered. Chowdaiah said, “Your calculations may be great for you but I value tradition more. I am not prepared to play.”

It was a tough time for the organizers to console and convince Chowdaiah to resume the concert. But the latter part of the concert carried on well with good understanding between the two artists and the audience returned home happily.

On another occasion Ariyakkudi sang for the Krishna Gana Sabha at Tiruchi. Chowdaiah accompanied on the violin, Kumbhakonam Rangu Iyengar on Mridangam and Pudukkottai Dakshina murthy on Khanjira. The usual practice is that when there are two Tala Vadyas, they play one after another to the vocalist and the violinist or sometimes Upapakka Vadya is played for the violinist. Chowdaiah waited for a while. There was no sign of either of the percussion artists playing for him. Both of them were playing for the main artist. Chowdaiah showed disapproval and gave indications. Dakshina Murthy looked at heaven and exclaimed, “God save me!” The audience had to intervene and it was decided that both the percussion artists should play for both the vocalist and the violinist in turn. Dakshinamurthy sounded his Khanjira with a sigh of relief and started playing for Chowdaiah. The applause from the audience reached the sky. And the concert continued smoothly. Dakshina murthy had such a high reputation in the music field then that It was only after he took his seat on the stage that the other co-artists including the main artist would climb the stage. It was after Palghat Mani Iyer came into limelight that there was a change in this pattern. Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar was responsible for this.

Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar sang for the Indian Fine arts society in 1935. Chowdaiah and Dakshina Murthy accompanied him. Just before the concert began, Mani Iyer requested that he being the mridangist be allowed

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1’Sangeeta kala Nidhi T. Chowdaiah’- S.Krishna Murthy, p. no. 40.
to sit in the front. “But that is the place of Dakshina Murthy. I do not know if he would like that’, said Chembai. After the announcement, Chowdaiah took his usual place on the stage and Dakshina Murthy sat in front with his Khanjira. Mani Iyer was sitting on a chair silently. Dakshina Murthy declared,’ Let the concert begin ‘. ‘How to start without Mani ’, asked Chembai innocently. ‘Hasn’t he come?’ asked Pillai. “He is here. But he is ready to play only if he is given your place.” ‘Oh! Is that the matter?’ said Pillai and immediately went to Mani, lifted him and took him to the dais, seated him in his own place and moved backward to take his place. From that day mridangam came to the front of the stage and Khanjira moved back. ¹But Chowdaiah was the only tiger among tigers.

Bidaram Krishnappa sang for a wedding in 1928. It was Chowdaiah’s accompaniment again. In this concert, Chowdaiah played with a four-stringed violin. The teacher is singing in D pitch. Chowdaiah is playing with full involvement and the guests are absorbed in his music. The sound of his violin was heard even at a distance of two kilometres. Palghat Rama Bhagavatar went to a distant place to listen to Chowdaiah’s violin, and after the concert requested Chowdaiah that he should play for his concerts too. The teacher granted the permission. Chowdaiah was paid forty rupees for each of these concerts.

Chowdaiah played accompaniment for innumerable concerts of Venugana Palladam Sanjeeva Rao. On one such concert in Bangalore in 1935 at Shivananda theatre (The Movie Land Theatre’ of today), Rao played Kambhoji excellently and when it was Chowdaiah’s turn, his playing was so divine that there were tears in many of the eyes of the audience. And then there was demand for Tanam. ‘It is wrong to play Tanam In the midst of the concert. I will play it after the ragalapana for the pallavi at the end of the concert.’ was Chowdaiah’s reply. Sanjeeve Rao said,’ That can be done

¹mysooru Sri T.Chowdaiahnavaru’- rajashri, p. no. 96.
later. Please play tanam now for kambhoji now’. Requested Rao! Chowdaiah had to say yes and he played Tanam. 

In 1937, Chowdaiah was invited to play accompaniment for Musuri Subramanya Iyer’s concert. Chowdaiah said he would say yes to the concert if he would be paid 300 rupees. There is a reason behind Chowdaiah saying this to Musuri. Musuri used to demand at least 1200 Rupees for a concert and 1200 rupees had a great value then.

He agreed to pay Chowdaiah whatever he demanded. The concert was superb. The audience enjoyed this pair immensely.

Musuri’s song ‘Teyil totattil’ with Chowdaiah’s Tanam was well received and drew handsome money.

In 1934 Kumbhakonam Raja Manikkam Pillai arranged music concerts in aid of the Toruvalainallur Ayyaval celebrations. Shemmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer’s concert was arranged with Chowdaiah’s accompaniment. That was their first concert together. Shemmangudi’s ‘Marubalka’ and Manasa Sancharare’ were highly popular. The hall was fully packed. Chowdaiah did not arrive in time. At 4, having waited for more than two hours, Rajamanikam Pillai climbed onto the dais. The unhappy audience showed their unwillingness. Raja Manikkam Pillai bowed humbly to the audience and appealed, ‘Chowdia has sent a telegram yesterday confirming his arrival. But there is a superior power that supersedes the human power. We

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1 ‘Mysooru. Chowdaiahnvaru’ by Rajashree, page no. 66.
do not know what trouble he has encountered. Please bear with me today. I will arrange for another concert of Shemmangudi with Chowdaiah again shortly.’ So the concert started. Shemmangudi was in his full form. He sang with enthusiasm. After about an hour one of the authorities whispered something in Raja Manikkam Pillai’s ear. Raja Manikkam Pillai suddenly stopped playing and sat quietly. Chowdaiah appeared. Pillai rose to his feet, went to Chowdaiah, led him with respect to the dais and said to the audience, ‘see, I have already kept my promise!’ While this incident shows Raja Manikkam Pillai’s humble and noble attitude, this is also a testimony to Chowdaiah’s repute as an ace violinist. After this concert Chowdaiah and shemmangudi performed together many more times.

Since 1950 Chowdaiah played for quite a few concerts of Ramnad Krishnan, T.K. Rangachari, Sattur Subramanyam and Palghat K.V. Narayana Swamy who was Ariyakkudi’s disciple. His duo concerts with Veena Doreswamy Iyengar’s veena were well known. In 1965 The Gayana Samaja celebrated its diamond jubilee. Chowdaiah was requested to give a solo violin concert on the occasion. But Chowdaiah refused saying he would be happy if Doreswamy Iyengar’s concert is arranged and he would happily provide accompaniment. The organisers obeyed and so V. Doreswamy Iyengar’s concert was arranged with Chowdaiah on violin and double mridangam by Palghat Mani Iyer and his son Raja Mani Iyer. After this concert, the duo concerts of these two artists became very famous.

Thus, Chowdaiah has played violin accompaniment to three generations of musicians, and all these musicians felt that his accompaniment would enhance the appeal of their own music. He had the ability to perceive instantly the merits of the vocalists he accompanied and then highlight the good ideas or sancharas. If he was the accompanist, then that concert was sure to be interesting, lively and absorbing.

The vocalist could not afford to be dull he were there. He never let down
any vocalist in the concerts that he accompanied.

He had such good stamina that it was not uncommon to see him perform successively for two or three concerts a day followed by an hour of playing in seclusion as refresher at his house before retiring to bed. Such tireless vigour not only commanded the all round respect of the maestros of Karnataka music but have also made them covet his presence as an accompanist who could bring out the best from all contributing to the success of a performance. This is perhaps the reason why he was paid higher than the main artist many a time. Even at the time of his death, he had a tight schedule of concerts. He was booked to play for Sri Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar the next day. But as fate would have it, the concert never took place.

**Remarkable Rapport with Chembai:**

Chowdaiah’s association with Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar started in 1928 and continued till Chowdaiah’s demise in 1967. He was booked for forty concerts with Chembai vaidyanatha Bhagavatar when he died. There was a sweet relationship between the two. Chembai had great affection for Chowdaiah, which remained till the end. Chowdaiah too had immense respect for Chembai,
and looked upon him as his second Guru. They were like one heart and two bodies.

Krishnappa permitted Chowdaiah to play for Chembai’s concerts in 1926. But Chembai and Chowdaiah were together on stage only in 1928. Chembai’s younger brother had come to the river bank for his sandhyavandanam. Somebody asked him who was playing violin accompaniment for his brother that evening. He replied uninterestedly that it was some unknown person from Mysore. Chowdaiah happened to be at the bank. Chembai’s brother had not seen Chowdaiah before. Chowdaiah lost his patience on hearing what the brother said. He would not tolerate humiliation. A quarrel started between the two. Chowdaiah was trained in wrestling in gymnasium. And so he had an upper hand. Chembai came there on hearing the news, redeemed his brother from the clutches of Chowdaiah, stared at him angrily and went away. Chowdaiah was also angry. The concert commenced in the evening. Both the artists sat tight-faced. But as the concert progressed, Chembai was greatly impressed by Chowdaiah’s playing and began to lose his anger. And at a point he even went to the extent of clapping his hands in appreciation. Mutual regard and amiability thus started, remained till the end.

Later the number of concerts that the pair performed together is uncountable. In Devakotai the two gave a concert. Chembai was given
Rs.175 remuneration for the concert and Chowdaiah Rs.200. This was embarrassing for chowdaiah, who did not like this. He thought that he being an accompanist, receiving more remuneration than the main artist was not right. He showed his displeasure to the organisers. Chembai consoled him saying, “This is for your talent, Chowdaiah. You deserve it. Your playing was par excellence today. I am pleased. Please accept it.”

Innocence of a Child:

In 1937 Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavavatar performed with Chowdaiah for a personal function of Narayana Nambudari Paad at Ulappa Manna Manaikkal. After the concert, Nambudari asked Chembai how much remuneration Chowdaiah should be paid. Chembai smiled and looked at the emerald ring on his hand. Nambudari immediately removed it and gave it to Chowdaiah. On the way back, Chembai took the finger ring from Chowdaiah.

After a few days the two met again for another concert. Just before the concert started, Chembai placed a ring on Chowdaiah’s hand. Curious, Chowdaiah examined the ring. Chembai had remade the ring that Nambudari had given him with two additional diamonds! Chowdaiah’s eyes were filled with tears of gratitude. Throughout the concert Chembai looked at the ring that glittered in Chowdaiah’s hand and rejoiced as a mother would over her child’s accomplishment.

Chowdaiah was booked to play for two concerts successively in Karakkad for a private function of a merchant. Chembai performed on the first day and Bidaram Krishnappa on the second. Chembai sang ‘Vatapi Ganapatim’ in the beginning of the concert and Raghuvara of Tyagaraja. Both these Kritis sung by Chembai have been immortalized.

1Mysooru T. Chowdaiahnavaru’ by Rajashri, p. no. 91.
Once Rajashree asked him after a concert in the Gayana Samaja, Bangalore why he should not choose some other kriti in the same two ragas instead of Vatapi Ganapatim and Raghuvara. Chembai’s reply was “No. I am ordained to sing Vatapi in each one of my concerts. I can change Raghuvara and sing some other composition in the same raga if you like”.

Veteran’s Versatile Interest:

Chowdaiah respected Chembai immensely. Chembai was supportive to him in many respects. Chowdaiah always thought that he should repay Chembai one day and was waiting for an opportunity. In 1940 he got the opportunity. Chowdaiah founded a film company called ‘vani Pictures’ and intended to produce a Kannada movie. Chowdaiah was a person who implemented what he intended at the earliest. He brought together some merchants of Mysore and a few friends from Chettinad for fund investment and ‘Vani’ took birth. The movie was based on the life of an artist. Chowdaiah himself acted in the movie. He played double role-the role of the hero and that of his father.

It was Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagatkar’s exvoto to adorn Lord Parthasarathi of his native place Chembai with a gold hull. But he was not able to do so with his limited income. Chowdaiah grabbed this opportunity. He requested that Chembai should participate in the movie for the scene of a music concert. Chembai demanded 5000 Rupees for the offer and Chowdaiah consented. The film was produced. There is a scene of a music concert of Chembai with Chowdaiah in violin and Palghat Mani Iyer on Mridangam in the film. Chembai has presented ‘Nikhila Papa Vinashini’, a Kriti in Shanmukhapriya set to Trishra Triputa Tala with Ragalapana and Kalpana swara. There is a separate reel for Mani Iyer’s Tani Avartana. Chowdaiah kept his word and paid 5000 rupees to Chembai.

Mysooru T.Chwodaihnnavaru’ by Rajashri, p.no.87.
Chembai happily adorned the Lord with the hull. And Chowdaiah had the satisfaction of being a part of this holy service to the Lord.

Chembai’s sixtieth birthday was celebrated in a grand scale at his place. Musicians from all over the country participated in the function. A festive mood was created. Veda Ghosha could be heard in the front yard. Chembai is accepting wishes and gifts from the revered guests. His neck and his broad chest are full with the garlands presented. But he is restless. He looks at the door frequently and shakes his head with disappointment. Chowdaiah had not arrived. ‘Chowdaiah cannot miss the function’, he thought. ‘Anna’, he heard the familiar voice of Chowdaiah suddenly. Chembai turned to see Chowdaiah who was tucking his dhoti, ‘Forgive me for being late. Please accept this small gift from me’, said Chowdaiah and garlanded Chembai. With immense affection Chembai embraced him and said, ‘Chowdaiah, I knew you would not miss the function. The place for your gift is this’. So saying, he rolled the garland around his head as his neck was full. And both of them were filled with a sense of gratification.

To sum up, the goodwill between Chembai and Chowdaiah made all their concerts together a big success.

**As a Soloist:**

While Chowdaiah’s claim to fame rested on his role as an accompanist, he developed a second string to his career as a soloist.

Since 1952, Chowdaiah started giving a number of solo concerts. Sri Arunachalappa invariably accompanied him on the harmonium. The pair was extremely popular. Chowdaiah fondly called him ‘Kalibheema’ as Arunachalappa brought out all the Gamakas that Chowdaiah played on his harmonium successfully. When Chowdaiah was invited to play before Jawaharlal Nehru, someone said that Jawaharlal Nehru did not like to listen to harmonium. Chowdaiah’s immediate reaction was that he would not
play either. But the concert materialized later and Chowdaiah played before
The Prime Minister with Arunachalappa on the harmonium.

In both his roles as an accompanist and a soloist, we see identical richness of
timber, breezy style and diversity of patterns. As an accompanist his playing
seemed to be quieter and tempered to the needs of the vocalist. But as a
soloist, he seemed to be more at ease. His playing, in solo concerts, attained
vigour, verve and directness. Loaded with many speedy feats and fast flying
rhythmical figures and pyrotechnics, his playing seemed to inflame his
audience. His music, in his solo concerts was exciting.

As a soloist, Chowdaiah had a distinguished record, when giants like Sri Pudukkotai Dakshinamurthy Pillai and Palghat Sri Mani Iyer played
accompaniment for him on innumerable occasions. He evolved his own
peculiar and exhilarating method of bowing while playing tanam for which
people were clamouring and of which people were never tired.

As a soloist, Chowdaiah was fond of presenting programmes featuring
more violins than one and many percussion instruments. He had some of
his disciples like V. Seturamiah and R.K. Venkatarama Shastri to accompany
him. For percussion, he liked the full complement of Mrudangam, Ghatam,
Kanjira, Konnakole and morsing. Even though he had a good repertoire, he
usually played a set format solo concert, consisting of such well known
kritis as ‘Vatapi Ganapatim’, ‘Raghuvamsha Sudhambudhi’,
‘Manavyalakim’ and ‘Brochevarevarura’. The reason for this is that his
listeners were more than satisfied with this menu. In fact they demanded it.

Testimony from a Learned Scholar:

Prof. Sambamurthy wrote: ‘There was fullness in his playing. When he
started bowing, the entire hall reverberated with music. It was all
‘nadamaya’. His playing of tana, with an undulatory movement of the bow
and his staccato bowing was remarkably fascinating. His performance in
the Tara Sthayi was captivating, passing the panchama easily and he could go even beyond the *tara sthayi shadja* into the *ati tara sthayi*'.

Chowdaiah gave uncountable solo concerts since 1952 and for these solo concerts he usually took Arunachalappa for harmonium accompaniment. The pair was extremely popular. Chowdaiah proudly said of him, ‘He is the Kali Bheema who reproduces all the *gamaka*-s that I play in my instrument’.

Once, Chowdaiah had to play before Jawaharlal Nehru. Some people told Chowdaiah not to take Arunachalappa with him for accompaniment as Nehru does not like harmonium. Chowdaiah firmly said, ‘Then I will not go either.’ The concert took place and Nehru was greatly impressed by Arunachalappa’s playing. Such was Chowdaiah’s boldness.

Sri T.V. Gopaladas is a familiar name in the world of Harikatha. He has founded ‘Prabhat Kalavidaru’, a company which has earned good fame and which stages a number of dance-dramas based on the stories of history and mythology. He also founded the ‘Prabhat Shishuvihara’ and the ‘Prabhat Sound systems’. Chowdaiah had great appreciation and regard for the gentleman.

Gopinatha Dasa invited Chowdaiah for his daughter’s wedding. Chowdaiah said as he was committed for a concert on that day at Salem, he would make it for lunch the following day.

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1Prof. Sambamurthy’s article on T. Chowdaiah in the souvenier, 16th anniversary celebrations, Rasika Ranjani Sabha, 1962, p.no.21.
So returning from Salem on the day, Chowdaiah went to Ayyanar College, for a bath and relaxation and was about to start for his house when Gopaladasa himself came with his car to pick up chowdaiah. When they entered the hall, Sri Subba Rao, father of Sheshagiri Rao, was giving a solo violin concert. On seeing Chowdaiah, Subba Rao stopped playing, but Chowdaiah politely told him to continue. Subba Rao played for a few minutes more and placed down the instrument. Chowdaiah picked up the same violin and said, ‘You are all waiting for me. So it is only right that I play at least for a few minutes. But It is time for lunch. So I will play only one kriti. Then we will all go for lunch. All right?’ So saying, he started playing. It was a four-stringed violin. People were immersed in his music and forgot about lunch. Even the cooks came out of the kitchen and sat listening to the magical music. The concert ended only at 3 o’clock.

Famine, Music and Relief:

Karnataka was affected by famine in 1950s. People suffered without food. The Government took suitable measures for the famine relief. Sri Rangamalliah was the deputy commissioner in Bangalore then. Chowdaiah, who was in Bangalore on work, was with the commissioner. The commissioner was discussing about the intensity of the famine with officials in his chamber. Chowdaiah told the commissioner, ‘
Sir, If you permit me, I have a suggestion. I can arrange concerts for the famine relief fund. I will give solo concerts all round Karnataka and give benefit concerts. Do not give me a single paisa. Please arrange for a good sale of tickets.’ The commissioner was thankful. The solo concerts were given publicity and the tickets sold. Accordingly Chowdaiah, with prominent artists, gave concerts in places affected by famine. Money poured in and it was all given to the relief fund. Going round the state giving concerts in a different place each day was no easy task. But Chowdaiah was determined to help the affected. His heart was soft as butter. The help that he offered at this time was immense and great.

Master of All:

Generally all famous violinists of the country have made a name either as good accompanists or as solo performers. But Chowdaiah’s artistic perfection was so high that he excelled both as an accompanist and as a solo violinist. The greatest quality in him was the fact that he boosted the confidence of the main artist and encouraged them to such an extent that they invariably came out with their best when he accompanied them. This is one of the main reasons why most of the artists wanted him to accompany them.

Crowds would swell on the news of Chowdaiah arriving in town. Such was Chowdaiah’s reputation; His appearance and demeanour were such that people instantly took to him. He had captured the hearts and minds of both ordinary listeners and knowledgeable artists and connoisseurs of Karnataka music.

Chowdaiah became so popular that people would walk up to the concert halls, ask who the violin accompanying artist was and then walk away if they were told that it was someone other than Chowdaiah.

Due to his own talent and through hard work, Chowdaiah reached the top
in the world of music. But fame and name never got into his head. He always encouraged young artists and those who approached him with trouble and was hence responsible for many artistes to come to fame. While many encountered him with jealousy, there were a couple of artists who led him to the place that he earned in Karnataka music. They were Bangalore K.S.Manjunath and Alangudi Ramachandran both of whom were *ghatam* players.

In 1946-47 at the residence of Munivenkatappa (of M.M& Sons) there was a wedding ceremony. V.V.Shatagopan’s concert was arranged for reception. Chowdaiah was to play *violin* accompaniment and Veerabhadriah *mridangam*. K.S.Manjunath who was coming into limelight then had an intense ambition to play with Chowdaiah. But somebody had bitten Chowdaiah’s ears regarding Manjunath and Chowdaiah would not even hear about him. Manjunath expressed wish to play with Chowdaiah to Gurappa, the owner of ‘Empire Electric studios’. The concert was scheduled to start at 6.30 that evening. Gurappa met Chowdaiah at The Malabar lodge where Chowdaiah usually stayed whenever he visited Bangalore. After a while he came to the topic. He said a senior person known to him was in a serious health problem and wished to hear Ghatam and if Chowdaiah consended, it would be possible. Surprised, Chowdaiah asked him how he can help the elderly person. Gurappa said as it was too late to invite...
another Ghatam artist from outstation, Manjunath who was present at the venue could be requested to play if Chowdaiah did not object. Due to obligation, Chowdaiah had to say yes. But after this concert, Manjunath almost always accompanied him in all his concerts in later years.

**Trist with Stalwarts:**

Though Sri B.Devendrappa and Chowdaiah learned under the same guru, there were differences of opinion between the two. And people made use of this fact for their own advantage. Therefore their coming together on stage was not frequent. But Chowdaiah was an appreciator and always appreciated the good in others. Once it so happened that the Sangeeta Natak academy organised a music conference in which Devendrappa was invited to sing. Chowdaiah sat in the front row and enjoyed the music. Devendrappa’s scholarly rendition of Devamanohari was well received. After the concert when Devendrappa came down from the stage, Chowdaiah said,’ Your rendition of Deva Manohari today brought the memories of our Guru in me. God bless you!’ Devendrappa, with tears in his eyes said,’ It is all your blessing!’ Chowdaiah shook his head saying,’ not mine. It is our Guru’s blessing. He is here today, though invisible. You have toiled your life for music. It will always protect you. You sang well and I enjoyed it. That is all.’ This is a testimony to Chowdaiah’s humility and culture.

**Jugalbandhi in 60’s:**

Sri Vishnu Jog, the well-known Hindustani violinist and Chowdaiah gave a jugalbandi concert together in 1960. Chowdaiah played Hameerkalyani in the beginning. Jog played its counterpart Kedar in Hindustani style. Chowdaiah then followed with the pallavi of ‘Manamuleda’ of Sri Tyagaraja. Jog chose a ‘cheese’, wherein he shifted the edupu at the
beginning of the composition. Chowdaiah played the same cheese at the *edupu* that he played previously and also did swaraprastara to it. Jog, who was highly impressed, did not have the courage to continue it any longer. Chowdaiah’s ability already established was thus proved once again.

Remembering Chowdaiah, Musuri Subramanya Iyer has said, ‘I first met him when he was eighteen years of age at a concert of Krishnappa. Krishnappa was accompanied by him. Curious, I wanted to know who the young man was when Krishnappa introduced him at the end of the concert as his disciple, I thought ‘Only a cub can play with a lion.’ Our friendship began that day and continued endlessly till his death. The concerts we both performed together are numerous. I can only say he was a great man.’

Chowdaiah thus earned predilection and wide fame from everywhere. There are very few musicians who are so greatly loved by such a large number of people. He was loved not only for his music but also for his good nature, humility and simplicity. There was no one in his time, not even a child, who had not heard of him. His predominance and brilliance was a household matter.

**Prestigious Award:**

In 1957 Chowdaiah was honored with the prestigious Sangeeta Kala Nidhi award by The Madras Music Academy, Tamilnadu. In his lecture demonstration at the academy, he emphasised the need for using the full length of the bow and the importance of practising the *sarale*, *Janti*, *alankara*-s and *varnam*-s in six speeds with onetwothree and four fingers, which would help to achieve mastery over *gamaka*-s. He stressed on a judicious use of all fingering techniques for a violinist to be a success. He also spoke about the need for a violinist to play sideman not only to vocalists but also to flautists. Demonstrating what he said, he played *sarale*
in six speeds and revealed that as many as 256 notes could be played in the 
length of a single bow, which is most difficult on a violin and especially so 
on a seven-stringed one. He had an amazing capability to play the *vilamba 
kala kriti*-s with equal calibre. The only explanation to this is that even at 
that stage he practised music as a beginner would. He never ceased to 
practise sarale and Janti even when and after the nation honoured him with 
the best of titles. H.S.K. said,” The way he majestically sat placing the bow 
on the seven-stringed violin with a tilted head was a scene by itself. He was 
an embodiment of Confidence without conceit and humility without fear. 
The seven colours of the rainbow were brought about in his seven-stringed 
violin.”

During one of the international conferences at Mysore, when Chowdaiah 
climbed the platform, he faced hard-pressed audience who were wary of a 
day-long programme. The steady look with which the Virtuoso dressed in 
spotless white addressed them cowed the audience and when Chowdaiah 
drew his bow across his instrument, the deep, metallic tone it called forth 
riveted the audience silently to their seats. After each rendition, deafening 
applause brought the house down. He thus conquered the audience 
wherever he performed.

**As Asthana Vidwan :**

In the normal course of events, all Mysore *vidwan*-s became associated with 
the Palace and were beneficiaries of royal patronage. Such association and 
patronage were both delayed in the case of Chowdaiah. Rasikas outside 
Mysore were beginning to wonder why Chowdaiah had not become an 
Asthana Vidwan still. His Highness Sri Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar 
sensed this and appointed Chowdaiah as a palace musician in 1939. 
Naturally, association with the palace carried enormous prestige. So

1Mysooru Sri T.Chowdaiahnavaru- rajashri, p. no. 131.
Chowdaiah happily accepted the appointment and participated actively in the palace concerts. A Chowdaiah had already attained fame. Whenever artists from outside were scheduled to perform at the palace, The Maharaja would first confirm if Chowdaiah was in station and free to accompany the visiting artists.

His Highness The Maharaja conferred the title ‘Sangeeta Ratna’ on him in 1940. In 1957, when Chowdaiah was conferred the title ‘Sangeeta Kalanidhi’ at The Madras Music Academy, His Highness Sri Jayachamaraja Wodeyar inaugurated the series. Chowdaiah thanked His Highness in his Presidential speech. He offers his salutation to the Maharaja in the very beginning: “Allow me first to offer my respectful gratitude to the Academy for choosing me as the president for this year’s conference and to His Highness The Maharaja, Governor of Mysore, who is our most beloved ruler an a great patron of music and musicians, for inaugurating this conference.....I wish to state, at this juncture, that the inauguration of this conference by our beloved ruler his highness The Maharaja, Sri Jayachamaraja Wodeyar Bahadur, is certainly a sign of propriety and success to the Academy.

Sri Jayachamaraja Wodeyar Bahadur is a descendant of the illustrious royal family which ruled Mysore and extends its patronage to all branches of arts particularly to Karnataka music. Many of the kings of this dynasty were themselves poets and musicians and great patrons of this art. The fame of Mysore has been firmly established through them. Our present Maharaja is himself a poet and a scholar in Sanskrit, Kannada and English and a musician and a musicologist.....’ And at the end of his address, he offers his regards to the Maharaja again, ‘I must offer my regards to the academy which had conferred on me the high honor in the very presence of our own beloved Maharaja, Sri Jayachamaraja Wodeyar Bahadur...’

1 The journal of The Madras Music Academy, 1958.
Chowdaiah and his Car:

Chowdaiah had a big craze for cars. His fondness for cars was legendary. The models he drove included Austin, Ford, Morris Minor, Prefect Ford, Chevrolet and Plymouth. “He would go to Bangalore in one car, and come back with another model,” remembers his grandson Anand,1 “Once it so happened, that we were driving to Hassan for a concert. The car was giving lot of problems. Finally we reached the place and then we had to drive to Bangalore from there. I teased my grandfather, ‘what is this Tatha, you are such a great musician but you do not have a good car. He was very upset with me. He gave me Rs 5 and asked me to return. After five days he came back in what looked like another car. To my surprise I found that he had changed the colour of the car and also the engine. He called me and asked me to take a drive and it was really moving as it had a bigger horse power”.

Car sellers were well aware of his naïve nature and easily induced him to buy one frequently. He would buy a car, spend a lot of money on its repairs and travel in the car to all distant places for his concerts. The result was –he never reached any place in time for a concert due to which he had to face embarrassing situation many a time. But a man of guts that he was, he always managed to face the situation defensively.

1Interview with Anand, grandson of Chowdaiah on 30-08-2013.
Chowdaiah told his students, ‘If you are my student, you should know how to push a car. Otherwise how would anyone recognize you as my disciple?’

It so happened that once he had to reach Salem for a concert. Three concerts were arranged there. Chowdaiah had to accompany Shatagopan on the first day and play a solo violin concert on the second day elsewhere. Chowdaiah decided to travel by his car. As the concert was scheduled for 6 o’clock, Chowdaiah set out from Bangalore in the morning. The car broke down twice by the time it reached Hosur. It was 4 o’clock when they reached Krishnagiri. Another 29 miles to go and the car broke down again. A bus passed by. The driver of the bus recognised Chowdaiah, tolled the car to his workshop that was close by and got it repaired. When Chowdaiah reached Salem finally, it was 9.30! The master of the house who had arranged the concert was furious. The car stopped in front of the house and a tired looking, worn out Chowdaiah descended from the car. The master of the house thought that the person getting down from the car was a mechanic. Grasping the situation, he grinned, but Chowdaiah, anticipating that he would show his disapproval at his inability to keep his schedule, explained the situation and asked for pardon and said, “please call the bride and the groom. I will bless them and leave.” On hearing this, the master of the house was alarmed and requested Chowdaiah to stay back and play for the concert scheduled for the next day. A huge crowd gathered for the concert next day and Chowdaiah was honoured with a handsome remuneration.

**Chowdaiah, a Household Name:**

Chowdaiah bravely undertook a journey to Kanyakumari in this historical car. Advocate Srikantiah was also travelling with him. On the return journey, the advocate who was orthodox, requested to stop the car near a

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1 Anasuya Kulkami’s interview on 27-08-2009.
Chowdaiah stopped the car near a village close to Madhurai. It is common to find a temple and a lake in many parts of Tamilnadu. The revered friend of Chowdaiah got down from the car and went to the bank of the lake for his sandhyavandana.

Chowdaiah was enjoying the nature at the bank of the river when he suddenly heard someone say, ‘Soudaiah!’ Looking back, ‘Soudaiah’ found a big crowd waiting to greet him. What is more, more people were coming towards them. Chowdaiah had become so popular that the news of his arrival had already spread! A senior man from the crowd approached Chowdaiah and requested that he should play at the temple as the crowd wished to hear him play. When Chowdaiah stood there not knowing what to do, the temple priest came there and explained the glory of the place to Chowdaiah and said that it was a pilgrimage. Now Chowdaiah had no heart to refuse! Within minutes the temple was prepared and decorated and Chowdaiah was requested to start the concert. Chowdaiah got his violin from the car. A local ‘dolu’ artist sat for mridangam accompaniment. Neither Chowdaiah nor the people assembled there were aware of the time. By the time the Mangala was played it was 10 o’clock in the night.

**Materialistic Luck Did Not Smile on the Intellectual Maestro:**

Chowdaiah visited Coimbatore frequently in this prodigious car! A brave man, he passed Bandipur forest, which is full of wild elephants fearlessly on his onward and toward journey. His Greatness The Mysore Maharaja Sri Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar camped in Bandipur three-four times a year. He had observed Chowdaiah’s car passing by but he was not aware that it was Chowdaiah’s car. He was curious to know who the traveller was. He sent his footman to enquire about the owner of the car and also instructed him not to reveal his name. The footman waited on the street. In

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1 ‘Sangeeta Ratna T.Chowdaiah’ by K.Srikanthia, p. no.21.
ashort while Chowdaiah’s car was seen (heard?) rattling down the street. Chowdaiah stooped the car on seeing him and asked, “What are you doing here?” “His Highness has camped here since four days.” The footman reported to the king, “Sir, the car belongs to Chowdaiah.”

After a few days, Chowdaiah was sent for by The Maharaja. “Are you doing well, Mr. Chowdaiah?” “Yes, Your Highness.” - said Chowdaiah. “What takes you to Coimbatore so frequently?” Chowdaiah replied humbly that he travels to perform for his concerts there. His Highness then enquired about the car. “It is an Austin, Your Highness. It has a very efficient engine. I have never had any trouble with it. No Rolls Royce can be equivalent to it. Many people asked to buy it from me. I have firmly refused.”

An officer of the Royal court who listened to the dialogue between the two revealed to Chowdaiah later that he could have owned the car worth Rs.20,000 which the Maharaja wanted to present to him as a gift if he hadn’t boasted about his own car in front of the Maharaja. Chowdaiah blamed himself for being excessively talkative!

So Chowdaiah’s car was as famous as the man himself! The rattling sound of his car announced his approach or arrival wherever he went. Sri Krishnamurthy, the grandson of Sri Mysore Vasudevacharya once said humorously, “What a wonderful car you have, Mr. Chowdaiah! All the parts in it popple except the four wheels! All the parts in it sound except the horn! All the parts are easy to handle except the doors!”

But Chowdaiah was fond of his car. Nay, he was proud of it!

In 1943 Chowdaiah attended Ariyakkudi’s daughter’s wedding at koyilur, near Karaikudi. Swamikrishna, an acquaintance of Chowdaiah, who met him at the wedding, suggested that he should go to Shabari Malai for the Darshan of Ayyappa Swamy. Chowdaiah did not pay much attention to what Swamy Krishna said that day. In 1944 When Swamikrishna met Chowdaiah again on another occasion, he reminded him of his due visit to
Shabarimalai again. Swamikrishna asked Chowdaiah if he would decide to go if encountered with such a situation and Chowdaiah said ‘yes’. On the way back to Mysore, he had to travel in the night. A tiger appeared before the car. Trembling with fear, Chowdaiah prayed that he would visit Shabari malai soon. The tiger went away immediately. Four years since then he successively visited Shabari Malai with forty days of Vrata prior to each visit.

Disciples:

Chowdaiah strongly believed that talent and tradition should be passed to the next generation. He was a strict, but affectionate teacher. Perhaps there is no other teacher of the age who trained so many disciples as Chowdaiah did. Nearly a hundred disciples have flowered into excellence under his tutelage. He encouraged and enthusiastically taught students who came to him in quest of knowledge and helped them build a career for themselves. He rejoiced at their success in life and in music.

Chowdaiah insisted that the disciples be disciplined in practicing akāra sādhana. All the disciples practised Sarale in six tempos. Only one raga had to be practised in a given month. This kind of practice was the means of developing voice culture and the knowledge of swaras. The students had to practise varnam-s in three tempos to his satisfaction. Chowdaiah had instructed them to do so, because that was the method of practice imparted to him by his master Bidaram Krishnappa.

Guru Chowdaiah was very affectionate towards his disciples. But he was stern when he corrected them. One of the disciples, despite repeated advice and correction, continued to play incorrectly. Provoked, Chowdaiah gave

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2 Professor Ramaratnam’s ‘a musician’s reminiscenses’ page no.33.
him enough money to reach his native place and told him to leave at once. The disheartened disciple left for the railway station. Soon Chowdaiah felt that he should give the youngster another chance. He sped to the station in his car and brought back the disciple.¹

Chowdaiah introduced his disciples to the famous musicians of his time and insisted that the disciples should learn the many nuances of the art of music from them. He took them with him for his concerts that gave additional opportunities to meet the giants of music. After each concert where he accompanied the great masters, he would sit with them at home, review the concerts and demonstrate the salient points by singing or playing. Whenever the students accompanied him on his concert tours, he would make sure that all of them were well taken care of. The respect and support he commanded in Tamilnadu was amazing. The top officials and leaders of the town would compete with each other to extend him a warm welcome and request him to stay at their homes.

Famous musicians Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, G.N. Balasubramanyam, Mahrajapuram, Chembai, Alathoor Brothers and others used to come to his house and also used to stay there. This enabled the disciples to get acquainted with them. These contacts and interactions increased the knowledge of the disciples in many subtle aspects of music.²

Unlike many of the Gurus of his time, Chowdaiah did not get himself served by his disciples. He was well aware of the disciples who were used mostly for the household work of the guru and his family, which he has depicted well in the character of Deekshita in the film Vani. But he always took care of his personal chores himself and would get really upset if he

² A musician’s reminiscenses’ by Prof. Ramaratnam.page no.35.
found any of his students folding his clothes, etc. He was very affectionate to his students and treated them more like friends than like disciples.

Chowdaiah had *brahmin* students like C.R. Mani Iyer and R.K. Venkatarama Shastri, who learnt from him in the Gurukula tradition. Chowdaiah had appointed a Brahmin to cook for these two boys and for fellow musicians who visited him.


Vocalists who learnt under Chowdaiah who have attained popularity are H.R. Seetarama Shastri, V. Ramaratnam, N.Nanjunda Swamy and Anasuya Kulkarni.

**V. Seturamiah (1917-1986):**

V. Seturamiah joined as a disciple in 1925. He was trained in Seven-stringed violin under Chowdaiah. He too rose to tall heights in music and played accompaniment for most of the top ranking musicians of the time. He served in All India Radio, Madras for many years. When Seturamiah accompanied Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar for the first

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1 A musician’s reminiscences by Prof. Ramaratnam, p. no. 33.

2 Chowdaiah’s disciple R.K. Venkatarama shastri on his Guru in the video 'E'-SWARA-Mysore-T Choudia-Violinist-A ten minutes Journey through his life-Uploaded on Feb 27, 2010, A sketch on Mysore T choudia 's Life History-Courtesy Podhigai TV.

time at The Pudukkotai Sangeeta Sabha, Chowdaiah went all the way from Mysore to encourage his student and was exceedingly glad at his success.

Talking about his teacher Seturamiah has said ‘He sat with us patiently. He would encourage us to be original. If any of us performed, my Guru would sit in the front row and give encouragement. He would make a note of even small and seemingly insignificant details and review them later with the disciple. He had great affection for us and cared more for our needs and health than his own.’

R.K.Venkatarama Shastri (1907-1993):

R.K.Venkatarama Shastri learned under Veena Subbanna for four years. In 1928 he joined Chowdaiah as a disciple. He was a senior disciple of Chowdaiah. After learning violin from Chowdaiah for about a decade, shastri moved to madras in 1936 and joined All India Radio. While some old timers believe that Venkatarama Sastry’s violin playing resembled his guru Chowdaiah’s seven-string style, grandson and top ranking Carnatic violinist R.K. Shriramkumar does not entirely agree. According to him, Venkatarama Sastry came under the influence of Papa Venkataramiah soon after moving to Madras and eschewed the seven-string instrument in favour of the orthodox four-string violin. Therefore his playing was a combination of Sri Papa Venkata Ramiah’s style and that of Sri Chowdaiah.

R.K. Venkatarama Sastri was respected by everyone throughout his career.

1 Article ‘Happy moments’ by V. Seturamiah in the journal of The Chowdaiah memorial hall released on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the hall in the year 1980.

2 Interview with R.K. Shriramkumar on 26-12-2011.
Like his Guru, he played accompaniment to most of the stalwarts of his time like Shemmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer, M.S. Subbulakshmi, Musuri subramanya Iyer, T. Brinda and T. Mukta and many others. When Chowdaiah passed away, Shastri wept like a child. ‘He did not look upon us as students, but treated us like his friends. He fed us all with affection and gave us his music’ - remembers R.K. Venkataramashastri in a video.²

**Prof. Mysore V. Ramaratnam (1917-2007):**

Professor Ramaratnam was known for seventy years of his service and contribution to music. He was the only vocal disciple of Chowdaiah. He was the first Principal of the University College of Music and Dance, University of Mysore since its inception in 1965, a position which he held till his retirement in 1987. He has trained hundreds of students, guided Ph.D students, authored books on the theoretical and practical aspects of carnatic music, and composed nearly 25 scholarly compositions in major ragas under the mudra “Rama”.

In his book, ‘A musician’s reminiscences’, he says, ‘My Guru was an unsparing taskmaster and insisted on regular and sustained practice everyday. Varnam singing in trikala was a daily must. He would not sit with his disciples during fixed hours as used to be the practice in those days. During my tutelage that lasted 7-8 years, I learnt about 8 to 10 compositions and several *pallavi*-s in Chowkakala. During this period, I used to get up at around 4 am and practice *akara* saadhana. My

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² video - 'E-SWARA-Mysore-T Choudiah-Violinist-A ten minutes Journey through his life-Uploaded on Feb 27, 2010, A sketch on Mysore T choudiah 's Life History-Courtesy Podhugai TV.
master insisted that I be disciplined in practising this. I used to practise Sarale in six tempos. Only one raga had to be practiced in any given month. This kind of practice was the means of developing voice culture and the knowledge of swaras. I had to practice varnams in three tempos to his satisfaction. My guru Chowdaiah, had instructed me to do so, because that was the method of practice imparted on him by his master Bidaram Krishnappa’.  

When Ramaratnam was the Vice-Principal of the Ayyanar College of music, he had arranged a music festival in memory of Guru Chowdaiah. Both Sastri and Seturamiah attended and not only provided violin accompaniment but also played solo concerts. Sastri spoke about Chowdaiah in a soul touching manner followed by Seturamiah. Thus, both of them displayed intense devotion to their guru.

**Kandadevi Alahar Swami (1925-2000):**

Kandadevi Alahar Swamy was fifteen years old when he joined as a student of Chowdaiah in 1940. He stayed in Chowdaiah’s house at Mysore and learned violin playing. On 10-04-1944 Alagiri played accompaniment for the first time. And then he played for Ariyakkudi and Chembai. On 08-12-1961 Chintalapalli Ramachandra Rao performed at Sri Prasanna Seeta Rama Mandira at Mysore. Alagiriswamy accompanied him on the violin. Ramachandra Rao sang Purvikalyani in detail for about twenty minutes.

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1 Professor Ramaratnam’s autobiography- ‘a musician’s reminiscences’, page no. 32.
When it came to his turn, Alagiri Swamy played the raga in brief and concluded. Chowdaiah, who was present at the concert stood up and said, ‘Alagiri, It is not right to play the raga in brief when it has been handled so beautifully and elaborately by Sri Rao. He has not stopped you from exhibiting your manodharma. Play it again in detail’. Alagiriswamy, still in fear, played the raga elaborately for about ten minutes. Chintalapalli encouraged and the audience clapped in appreciation.

**N. Nanjundaswamy (1935-:2005):**

On 20-05-1931, Nanjundaswamy was born to V. Ramiah and Anantalakshmi. He had his initial training in music from his mother Anantalakshmi. Anantalakshmi’s father Sri Madikeri Shrinivasa Iyer was a direct disciple of Sri Mysore vasudevachar.

When Nanjundaswamy was ten years old, he had already trained to perform at The Kote Anjaneya Swamy temple, where Chowdaiah happened to visit to seek Darshan of the Lord. Impressed by the boy’s singing, he accepted him as his disciple.

Discipleship in India meant Gurukulavasa. The disciple had to live with the Guru in his house, helping him and family with all the household work too in addition to learning music. Nanjundaswamy and another disciple Chinnappa took care of cooking whenever Chowdaiah was away on his concert schedules. Other disciples with him were Sundara Iyer, Shyamachar...
(flute), Nagaraja Rao (flute), Venkatarama Shastri and V. Seturamiah. M.S. Subbulakshmi and Chudamani too took guidance from Chowdaiah, it is learnt.¹

‘As the guru-Shishya relashoinship grew stronger, my Guru started taking me to concerts whenever he went out of station. So I had the opportunity to travel wide and visit many places including Singapore and Ceylon. During many of these tours, I would be made to perform and my Guru would play accompaniment for Me.’ says Nanjundaswamy in the interview.

In his 13lh year His Holiness Chandrasekhara Bharathi Swamiji blessed him during the navarathri clebrations at Sringeri. Prof. Omkarnath Thankoor expressed his appreciation of music of Nanjundaswamy in 1955. He was also honoured with the title 'Ganakalarathna' in 1978. Several organisations have honoured him and the title 'Kalanidhi' was bestowed by the Thyagaraja Gana Sabha, Mysore in 1986.

Nanjundaswamy has also acted as a child artist in the film ‘Vaani’ produced by Chowdaiah. He has acted as the younger brother of Smt. Pandaribai in the film. In those days, actors needed to have music knowledge to participate in Films and dramas. ‘Applications were called for and I applied’, he remembers, ‘The head of the selection committee was Sri Mysore Vasudevacharya. I sang his composition ‘Sri Chamundeshwari’. I was selected. For about two months we had practice sessions in the house next to the Seetavilasa Choultry. The music direction to this film was by my guru and the lyrics were by Hiranniah.

My Guru was also the hero of the movie in dual role and the heroin was Bellary Lalita (Chandramma) and Dhanabhagyam from Salem. The videography for this film took place at the Chamundeshwari Studio.’

Nanjundaswamy also worked as the vice-principal of the Ayyanar College

¹ This information is taken from an interview with late Sri Nanjundaswamy published in the ‘Star of mysore’, the evening daily, Mysore on 13-07-2003.
of music in 1958. He is the recipient of the ‘Karnataka Kalashree’ award from the State Government in 1998.

C.R. Mani Iyer (1915-2008)

He was born in 1915. He is the grandson of violinist Annaswamy Bhagavatar. Mani Iyer’s father C.A.Ramaswamy Bhagavatar was also a violinist. He had advance training in violin playing from T.Chowdaiah.

He was trained on the seven stringed violins as well as the four stringed violin. His earlier gurus were his grandfather Annaswami Bhagavatar and then Palakkad Rama Bhagavatar. He was the elder brother of Mridangam Subba Iyer.

He accompanied several prominent musicians including Mysore V. Ramaratnam at Bangalore Shankara Matt Sharada temple, Palakkad K.V. Narayanaswamy in the Madras Music Academy, Chembai, Semmangudi and many other stalwarts of the day. A music scholar, he was also invited to give lecture demonstrations in the Ayyanar college of music in Bangalore established by his Guru Chowdaiah. He also performed jointly with Chowdaiah all over India.

In the year 1995, Palghat C.R. Mani Iyer was honoured with the Deviprasadam Trust award instituted by the Olappamanna Mana for his contribution to music. He also gave solo performances on the violin. The violin trio concerts he played with R.K. Venkatramana Sastri and V. Sethuramaiah, disciples of Chowdaiah, are cherished by connoisseurs. He passed away in 2008.
K.J. Venkatachar : (1939 - 2010)

K.J. Venkatachar was another disciple who learned to play seven stringed violin from Chowdaiah and vocal music from Professor V. Ramaratnam. He served as the principal of Ayyanar Kala Shale at Mysore after Chowdaiah’s demise. He was the recipient of the Karnataka Sangeeta Nrutya academy award for his contribution to music in the year 2008.

Dr. H.S. Anasuya Kulkarni (1936- present)

Dr. Anasuya Kulkarni has established herself as a vocalist and as the sole player of the Indonesian instrument Anghklung. She is also known for her exclusive and extensive collection of musical instruments. Her music room is a mini museum.

As a child, Anasuya learned vocal music initially from R.R. Keshavamurthy and later became Chowdaiah’s disciple.

‘For my Guru Chowdaiah, all time was music time. He would come to our house at Bangalore at any time of the day or night. My mother affectionately cooked
for him and he would relish the food after which I was to render the previous lesson however difficult or long it may have been. He always listened to my programme on radio and he would ask me to sing the same again later and point out where I was wrong or where I could have been better’, says Anasuya Kulkarni about Chowdaiah’s teaching.¹

Anasuya recalls that her guru insisted on sarvalaghu swaras and enjoyed developing kalpana swaras of sarvalaghu to the chitteswara of a kriti, which is unusual.

Talking about her Guru’s bowing technique, Anasuya says, “My master used to say that bowing is very important to maintain continuity. He had his own way of playing Tana in a weavy manner and each note was distinct.”

**Dr. Padma Murthy (1932-present)**

‘He was a great personality, an institution by himself, a legendary!’ says Dr. Padma Murthy remembering her Guru Sri T. Chowdaiah.² ‘There was nobody in his time who did not talk of his goodness. I started learning from Sri Mysore Vasudevacharya when I was four years old. At the age of six, I began learning from Chowdaiah sir. He used to make me practise for hours together. He affectionately called me

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¹ Interview with Smt. Anasuya Kulkarni on 25-08-2009.

² Interview with Dr. Padma Murthy on 23-11-2010.
'Peddamma' (meaning a fool in Kannada) and if I cried, he would immediately console me saying Pedda means big in Telugu and so what he meant was that I would become a big artist in future and that is the reason why he called me so. I was eight years old when he arranged for my concert at the Co-operative Society in Gandhi square, Mysore.

Chowdaiah played accompaniment for me and Moogaiah Mridangam. ‘Peddamastart!’ came the instruction from my Guru. I sang for an hour with ragalapana and swarakalpana. I was applauded by the audience who requested me to sing Tamil songs. When I started to sing ‘Teeryada Vilayat Pillai’, My Guru placed the violin down and clapped to encourage me! After about eight days Chowdaiah came to my house at ten o’clock in the night with Moogiah and asked me to sing. “Sing Devagandhari. There should be no trace of Arabhi.

In Kambhoji this sanchara leads to Yadukula Kambhoji…” he guided. He taught me a number of Devaranamas, for which he had great love. He also taught me to develop creativity in Raga development. It is impossible to find such a teacher now.

**K.S. Sundaram Iyer:**

Sundaram iyer was also a disciple of Chowdaiah. Here is an excerpt from his tribute to his Guru:

‘Due to ‘purva janma punya’ I had a golden opportunity to learn violin playing under T. Chowdaiah from the beginning for nearly eight years, by way of Gurukulavasam in his house at Mysore. He was very liberal and kind to all of his disciples with an ever-smiling face.

I was studying in madras. I happened to visit a grand concert by Chembai, Chowdaiah and Palghat Mani Iyer. On the next day I approached Chowdaiah and requested him to take me as his disciple. Without any recommendation or objection, he took me in his car to Mysore and gave me
full training for eight years meeting all my expenses. He used to take me on
his concert tours too.’

**N. L. Cheluvaraj (1928-Present):**

Cheluvaraj was born on 13-7-1928, son of Nittur Lakshmiah in Kadiyala (Mandya Dist.), Cheluvaraj. He trained under Chintalapalli Venkata- Rao & T. Chowdaiah. He served in the field of Karnataka music for more than 35 years and gave concerts in Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Kerala& Andhra Pradesh. He performed for AIR. He trained students at Ayyanar college of Music, Bangalore for about 5 years and tuned number of Vachanas, Dcvaranamas & Kannada songs. In recognition of his services, Sri Dharmastala Dharmadhikari Sri Sri D. Veerendra Hegde awarded the title 'Ganarathna' on him in 1979. In connection with the Birth Centenary of Chowdaiah, N. L. Cheluvaraj was also felicitated by the Percussive Arts Centre.

**Madappa (1936-2010):**

Madappa was born to Smt. Timmamma and Ari Chikkasidde Gowdain 1936, at Moolepetlu, K.R.Nagara taluk. Father Chikkasidde Gowda was a farmer. Madappa was the third son of the family. Madappa was born blind.

When Madappa was ten years old, he joined The Ayyanar Kala shale at Bidaram Krishnappa Mandira, Mysore, where he was trained in Vocal and violin.

Professor V. Ramaratnam, who was in charge of the school then trained him in vocal music, while Chowdaiah trained him in violin. The Ayyanar Kala Shale trained had a schedule to teach music to blind children exclusively.

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1 Disciple k.S.Sundaram iyer on Chowdaiah in ‘Tributes from disciples’ , an article published in the souvenir released on the occasion of inauguration of The Chowdaiah Memorial Hall’, 1980.
Madappa did his S.S.L.C. and junior and senior examinations in music with distinction. He served as a music teacher in Government Higher primary school for more than 28 years till his retirement in 1996. He accompanied several musicians for several concerts in Coimbatore, Tiruvayyur, Mantralaya, Guruvayur, Tanjore, Horanadu, Banashankari, etc.

In 1964, Madappa played accompaniment for Vidushi Lakshmamma at vidwan Mariyappa’s residence. Chowdaiah, who was present on the occasion, spoke at the end of the concert and said, ‘you are not blind. Your inner eye is awake. Never forego your music. It will always protect you’. The words of his Guru meant much more than any award to Madappa.

He accompanied musicians like Dr. Ramaratnam, Sahukar Rajagopal, Vidushi K.J. Kanakalakshmi (disciple of Ramarathnam), R.N. Srilata and Chokkamma.¹

**Man of Manners:**

For a series of festivals, Chowdaiah was to play for Shemmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer. Chowdaiah had not checked the schedule properly and reached the place one day earlier. The following day he was engaged to perform for another concert and therefore could not possibly stay back. He asked the secretary if he and T.N. Krishnan, who was to accompany Ariyakkudi next day, could exchange dates. The secretary said it was a delicate matter and he was not willing to ask Krishnan. Chowdaiah told him he would sort out the mess. He went to Ariyakkudi and asked him in an offended tone whether he had abandoned him as he was getting on in age. A surprised Ariyakkudi asked him what made him say so, and assured him that his greatness was never in question. Chowdaiah then said that he wished to accompany him that evening. Ariyakkudi happily agreed.

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¹ This information is taken from an article on Madappa by H.N. Dinakar in the newspaper ‘Prajavani metro’, Tuesday, 30th November 2010.
Chowdaiah took leave of him and went to Krishnan and asked him if he had any difficulty in exchanging the dates with him as he was free neither that day nor the next. Krishnan agreed to oblige. Chowdaiah played for Iyengar that evening, received his remuneration and left on his onward journey!

**Honours and Titles:**

Chowdaiah was conferred with a number of titles and honors:

In 1939 he was bestowed with the Asthana Vidwan at the royal court at Mysore by the Maharaja Of Mysore. In 1940, he was honoured with two awards - ‘Sangeeta Ratna’ by The Mysore Palace and the Gana Kala Bhushana by The Gana Kala Parishat. From Shringeri Samsthana the prestigious ‘Gana Ratnakara’ was conferred on him. He was nominated as a member of the Mysore Legislative Council in 1942.

The Madras Music Academy conferred the prestigious title ‘Sangeeta Kalanidhi’ on him in 1957. He was also a recipient of the Central Sangeet Natak academy award in 1957 from President Sri Rajendra Prasad. He was a recipient of the Title ‘Gana Kala sindhu’ from Sri Prasanna Seeta Rama Mandira, Mysore.

Chowdaiah Memorial Hall situated in the Gayatri Park Extention, 16th Cross, Malleshwaram at Bangalore, constructed with the support of the Karnataka state government in his memory in 1980, resembles a violin in shape and structure.( Appendix-3)

**Veteran’s Deep Concern:**

Chowdaiah held the view that senior musicians should encourage and bring up younger and junior musicians. He voiced this view in his presidential address at the Madras Music Academy in 1957. Proving his view, he accompanied young Ramnad Krishnan on the violin at the
academy the following year. He was thus a peerless model for all Karnataka musicians after him.

Chowdaiah’s Guru Bhakti was unrivalled. After puja every morning, he used to pray before his guru Bidaram Krishnappa’s picture, play the violin for a little while and then only take food. ‘My Guru has blessed me all too well and whatever I am is due entirely to his great benevolence and generosity’, he would say. To him, his guru’s word was law. In the Prasanna Seeta Rama Manadira, the temple that Krishnapa built, he kept up the practice of pujas and concerts during Ramanavami every year, which is continuing even today. Writer Ellarvi sought his permission to write his biography, he refused saying his Guru’s biography should be written first.

Chowdaiah was child-like in his speech and behaviour. In his simplicity he believed everyone and sometimes his simplicity and credulousness caused him problems. He was generous to a fault. Whatever he earned, he gave out to many needy musicians and institutions. This explains why he has not amassed wealth in spite of his eminence in the field. His large commitments in the shape of his obligations to his big family, combined with the incapacity to meanness and stinginess which are contraindicative of nobility and large-heartedness, prevented him from being richer than he could have been. He would not allow anyone to stand before him with an empty stomach or a dissatisfied look. He was richer for all his experience and many stood to gain by this weakness of his.

With all the fame and name that he earned, Chowdaiah did not have a peaceful life in the evening of his life. He was extremely disturbed by the lop-sidedness in the administration of the Prasanna Seeta Rama Mandira. This was a shock to him and he gradually became a victim to heart disease. He was gullible and not a good judge of people and people took advantage of this fact. And also, years of travel to all kinds of far-off places had sapped him of his vitality and he was becoming increasingly tired. He was
admitted to The K.R. Hospital and was taken good care of by the specialists of the hospital. It is said lying down on the bed, Chowdaiah pleaded to the doctor to cure him fast as he had to play for Chembai’s concert at Bangalore. When he lay unconscious in the hospital bed, the fingers of his left hand held the posture of violin playing.

But all the efforts of the doctors failed and on the night of Thursday, the 19th of January 1967, Chowdaiah breathed his last. He passed away exactly at twelve in the night. His daughter Pankajamma was also by his side. The Sun of Mysore was no more. Soon after his death Ariyakkudi followed suit.

It was a strange coincidence that Chowdaiah was born and died in the month of January. Like Mahatma Gandhi he was a century maker.

**Chowdaiah’s Style:**

Each artist is recognized by his style of singing or playing. Chowdaiah is recognized by his very first bow even by a common man with the least music knowledge. Chowdaiah’s style of playing the violin was unique.

Chowdaiah’s style of playing was very close to vocal rendering. Krshnappa’s grueling had taught him to live music in his playing. Also his immense experiences of accompanying the maximum number of musicians in his time had given him a mastery over the compositions, which showed in his style.

In his play he made use of all the nuances of the instrument in playing sangatis made especially for instruments as in Raghuvamsha Sudhambudhi’ (KadanaKutuhala) or ‘Nagumomu’ (Abheri). As the violin is considered a very expressive instrument, which is often felt to approximate the human voice, his playing of these popular kritis with those well-known sangatis drew him an overflowing hall. It is said people would buy the tickets for concerts of The Ramanavami or Ganapati Festival only after ensuring that Chowdaiah was the accompanist.
Accompanying is a difficult art as the violinist needs to adapt himself to different styles according to the artiste. While Chembai was known for his metallic, powerful, booming, vibrant voice, G. N. Balasubramanyam’s voice was smooth and melodious.

If Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar was known for his Sangatis while rendering Kritis, M.S. Subbulaxmi was known for her involved and devotional singing. To suit the needs of each artiste was no joke. But Chowdaiah not only did this with ease, but he excelled in the art of accompanying. It was as if he did ‘parakāyapravēsha’ in the artist and foresaw what he was going to render.

His playing style synchronized so beautifully well with that of the artist that all the stalwarts of the time demanded to have him as the accompanist. In addition to adapting the style of the vocalist in his playing, Chowdaiah also had the greatness to bring out the best in the artiste. If a vocalist had a problem with his voice or shRti, Chowdaiah would well hide it with his bowing! His style was motivating and boosted the confidence level of the main artiste and the concerts invariably rose to transcendental heights.

His style had such bowing techniques that included dexterious fingering method and a sharp and intelligent brain. His devilish practice made it possible for him to raise up to the concert however complicated the pallavi or intricate the swara patterns would be.

Once in a concert at the Bidaram Krishnappa Mandira Alattur brothers rendered a pallavi in an unusual tāLa. In those days the main artistes enjoyed challenging the accompanist with such encounters. When Chowdaiah’s turn came for elaboration, the audience was anxious. But the undaunted Chowdaiah picked up the pallavi even before the main artiste completed the last syllable and was in perfect unison with the complexity of
the pallavi and mood of the artiste.¹

On another occasion, when Ariyakkudi started the well known composition of Tyagaraja ‘Nidhijalasukhama’ one and a half aksharas after the TāLa instead of the usual practice of starting it with one akshara, Chowdaiah immediately reproduced it in four aavartas successively with his pleasing style and unflinching courage.²

Gamakas were distinct in his style of playing. His invention- the seven-stringed violin came in handy here. Gamakas though difficult to achieve in this instrument, are heard distinctly when played efficiently.³

Chowdaiah’s mastery over the instrument was supreme. He implemented Gamakas in each raga suitably. His style of equating the same notes in different Sthāyis was also popular. He brought both melody and harmony in his style.

Playing in six speeds with perfect ease without faltering was another feature of his music. It was this caliber achieved through dedicated practice that gave him the ability to play 256 notes in a single bow.

Chembai’s ‘vatapi Ganapatim’ which was always rendered with great speed followed by KalpanaSwaras was faithfully and enthusiastically reproduced by Chowdaiah with great fervor. Chowdaiah also implemented dātuswaras in Kalpanaswaras in his solo concerts for which Chembai was popular. Chowdaiah’s style also included jantiswara phrases in developing Kalpanaswaras.

People clamoured to hear Chowdaiah’s tānam. He used the spring bow technique while playing tānam.⁴ In this technique the bow jumps, but the hairs don’t leave the string. The player lets the bow jump by itself by

¹Sangeeta Rasa Nimishagalu by G.T.Narayana Rao, p. no. 94.
²Sangeeta Kala NidhiT.Chowdaiah, p. no. 40.
³JyothsnaManjunath, seven-stringed violinist in her interview on 16th Nov.
⁴Anasuya Kulkarni in her interview on 6-7-2011.
keeping the joints loose and by pulling the elbow in so that the bow is not parallel to the bridge and then gives a slightly slanted impulse to the fingers and bow. So here the string needs to be digged in without lifting the bow. Like a basket ball, the more the string is digged, the more the bow will rebound.

Chowdaiah used this technique with skill. He didn’t look at the strings nor at his left fingers for swara permutations. They came to him automatically. Once when Chowdaiah played accompaniment for Chembai in a concert, the audience did not allow Chembai to continue with his concert till Chowdaiah played tānam.

Chowdaiah designed the seven-stringed violin to ensure that the accompanist could match the vocalist. And with his style his fame reached sky high. The style that he developed and immortalized and the life he has led and ennobled have left an indelible imprint in the field of Karnataka music.

**His Musical Vision:**

Some of Chowdaiah’s ideas on Karnataka music and musicians given out in his Presidential Address delivered at the 37th Annual Conference of the Madras Music Academy shows eloquently the breadth of his vision. In effect he observed as follows:

‘Musicians should eschew jealousy. There should be the spirit of team work. Musicians should not use the forum for exposing the weakness, if any, of the accompanists.’

‘Violinists should, as far as possible. Adjust with the vocalist. They should never render what was not sung by the vocalist and should not let his imagination run riot. The violinists should have good command of vocal music also.’
Chowdaiah favoured the old Gurukula type of education. He did not agree with the claim of the new promoters of Indian classical music that though with the abolition of the princely states and Zamindari it may have lost its Aristocratic character, it has not lost its aesthetic values by the democratisation of the taste. Chowdaiah, though not repugnant of modern concerts, thought nostalgically of the old type of concerts with a limited audience highly attuned to music.

Secondly Chowdaiah valued tradition to a great extent, especially in music. Rakthi Ragas like Kedara Gowla, Kamach, Kapi, Jhanjuti, Mohana, Kambhoji, Kalyani, Kharaharapriya and Shanmukhapriya impressed him. He would not approve of the Ragas which could not be elaborated or sung in detail. This does not mean that he did not play ragas like Nalinakanti, Kadanakutoohala or Navarasas Kannada. But he appreciated using these ragas or kritis in the concerts as fillers, not as the main attraction of the concert.

He discouraged Ragas of ‘vivadidosha’, Ragas with only four swaras, or rare Ragas which were unheard of. “Playing them brings down your longevity”, he said. ‘But as an accompanist he could not help playing some of these Ragas though he did not much enjoy playing them. So he would play them as short as possible. In a concert of G.N.Balasubramanyam, the artist sang Hamsanada Raga for about four minutes. Chowdaiah sketched the outline of the Raga and closed it within half a minute. G.N.B. looked at Chowdaiah enquiringly. Chowdaiah replied, “These are petty Ragas. You are singing scrumptiously. Please give us the joy of listening to a Ghana Raga.” G.N.B. nodded and sang Sri Tyagaraja’s ‘Bantureeti kolu’ in short and after three minutes took up Bhairavi. Chowdaiah’s response was immediate and appreciative. “shahbhash! This is the right choice. Sing throughout the whole night. I am prepared to play.” Amidst tremendous applause, G.N.B. continued to sing.
Chowdaiah was upset when some of his friends said that the relationship between himself and Sri Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu was not amiable. Dwaram performed at The Gayana Samaja, Bangalore. Tanjore Ramdas played Mridangam accompaniment. As Chowdaiah happened to be in the city, he went to the concert with Gurappa. Dwaram played with enthusiasm. Towards the end of the concert, Chowdaiah presented him with a laminated photograph of Dwaram himself as a token of respect, embraced Dwaram affectionately on stage and announced that there was no misunderstanding between them.

**Academic Chowdaiah:**

Chowdaiah founded The Indian Fine Arts society. He fully supported H.V.Narayana Swamy Rao, who was the founder of Sree Rama Seva Mandali, Chamarajapet, Bangalore, for twenty four years.¹ He was the secretary for The Prasanna Seeta Rama Mandira, Mysore and conducted eight annual music conferences. He founded the Ayyanar Kala Shala at Mysore and Bangalore.

His simplicity fetched him many friends. His music fetched him several well-wishers. To name a few- Tiruchi Mirasdar sri Ratnachalam Iyer, Sri Rangaswamy iyer, Dr.V. Ranganathan of Trichi, Dr.K.Puttu Rao, advocate from Mysore and his son Sri Srikantiah, Sri Ramarajappa of Mysoire university, Dr. Annajappa, Dr.C. Narasimbiah, actor Mohammad Peer, Sri Sheshu Iyer who was the owner of the Malabar lodge where Chowdaiah always stayed whenever he visited Bangalore, Gurappa, Dr.K. Subba Rao from Bangalore and Sri A.N.Rama Rao of Sri Rama Seva Mandali.

More than all this, no other musician or accompanist was as good a sport as Chowdaiah. When G.N.Balasubramanyam had to sing at Coutallam on the occasion of a common friend’s marriage, Chowdaiah was unable to go there.

¹ Mysooru T. Chowdaiahnavaru- Rajashri, p. no.116.
due to previous commitments. G.N.B. had performed for about an hour or so when suddenly Chowdaiah made his appearance at the gate of the pendal. And Chowdaiah had come in his historical car! The joy of the audience knew no bounds. Chowdaiah went to the dais and said he should join in the concert. The already performing violinist was visibly moved and it was with genuine happiness he requested Chowdaiah to play and step down from the platform. The performance lasted for another three hours from then. It was Chowdaiah’s great affection and loyalty to the common friend that made him surmount all other handicaps and obstacles and present himself on the occasion.

Chowdaiah encouraged deserving junior musicians and volunteered to accompany them, giving them all his support. He felt that it was the duty of the senior musicians towards junior musicians. In 1954 Music academy junior concerts, Ramnad Krishnan’s concert was scheduled. He was not much known then. Chowdaiah, who was a celebrity came forward and offered to play the Pakkavadya for him. When he played a duo concert with Veena Doreswami Iyengar at the Fort high school organized by the well-known Sri Rama Seva Mandali, Chamrajpet, Bangalore, one of the authorities congratulated and thanked the pair on the success of the concert.

Chowdaiah stood up and said that while he was grateful to the samiti for showering such love on him, it was not true that violinists like him were not easy to find. T.N. Krishnan, Lalgudi Jayaraman and M.S. Gopalakrishna were the Trimurthis of the younger generation and the future of Karnataka music was safe and sound in their hands. It was therefore time he stepped back and made way for them in the field. Such was Chowdaiah’s encouragement towards the younger generation.

A lot of research has taken place recently regarding the influence of music on plants. But Chowdaiah was the first person to propound the theory that music helps to improve the yields of crops. Chowdaiah tested this in his own house to prove this theory. When Chowdaiah talked about this to
people, they laughed at him and ridiculed him. So to prove what he said, Chowdaiah planted two lemon trees in his compound— one close to the room in which he practiced violin and the other a bit farther. After a few days it was found that the tree close to the practice room grew bigger and better than the one that was far from the window. A few days later Dr. Singh from Annamalai University did a lot of research on this topic and explained about the very theory in detail, which appeared in all major newspapers. Comments and ridicules reduced after this but people still did not accept Chowdaiah’s theory.

Chowdaiah was a century maker. He and his violin were virtually inseparable. The name Chowdaiah and the violin were synonymous with each other. Each great musician projects a unique sound quality of his own which envelopes his musical excellence. But Chowdaiah was able to please all types of Rasikas, from novice to pandit by the sheer mesmerising quality of the sound he produced.

That is how his playing was popular both amongst the commoners and the elite. There was a curious blending of tradition and innovation in him. As a product of the Guru-shishya mode of musical training, he revered traditional values in music.

In 1928 the construction work of Bidaram Krishnappa’s Prasanna seeta Rama Mandira was completed. Three years later Krishnappa breathed his last in 1931. In 1932 Chowdaiah and his friends founded a music association called ‘Guru Seva Sangha’. To raise funds for the association, the members toured. During the tour at Madhurai, Chowdaiah met Madhurai Shanmukha Vadivu and his daughter Subbulakshmi. Subbulakshmi had had her music lessons from Settuir Sundaresha Bhattar, a disciple of Nayana Pillai. Chowdaiah was greatly impressed by Subbulakshmi’s singing and volunteered to play accompaniment for her. When a meddler press reporter commented on this, Chowdaiah’s stand was, “What if she is a lady? Is it not...
music? Isn’t Goddess Saraswati also a lady? It is the knowledge which is important, not the discrimination.’ Such was his musical vision.

Chowdaiah was not a mere replica of his great Guru. He had an individuality of his own. To listen to him was a rare treat. His playing had such a magical effect on his listeners that even the most unmusical among the audience would succumb to the wizardry of his art.

Music was the very breath of his being. There was a soul in his melodious music and it was sublime.

In 1954 a tragedy occurred. Chowdaiah climbed the dais to play for a benefit show at Salem. The concert was arranged in a theatre. The theatre was jam-packed. The floor was not even and at the place where Chowdaiah placed his foot there was a pit. The pit was covered with newspaper which was deceiving and Chowdaiah fell down in the pit and broke his leg. The organisers immediately decided to cancel the programme. But Chowdaiah did not agree. He was lifted and carried onto the stage. It was a four-hour uninterrupted concert. Chowdaiah paid no heed to the wounded leg and played with total involvement. Both the audience and the organisers were pleased and blessed! But after the concert Chowdaiah found difficulty in getting up. He was carried into the car and padded with pillows, taken to a hospital where the bone was set right and then he was sent to Bangalore. It took six months for the leg to be repaired totally. This is an instance of his courage and his sense of commitment.

Chowdaiah would not tolerate if an artist was humiliated or not treated well. Irrespective of who the person was, he would objuragate. Once it so happened that Chowdaiah was invited to play at the place of a vizier in Bangalore. At the scheduled time Chowdaiah reached the place with his co-artists and friends. Though the vizier noticed Chowdaiah and troupe, he ignored them and went to the dining hall without inviting them. Chowdaiah’s anger knew no bounds. He took his troupe to a good
restaurant, and fed them with good food. The vizier, not finding Chowdaiah on returning from lunch stood helplessly, not knowing what to do. Chowdaiah took his own sweet time and returned to the venue leisurely. The vizier walked up to him and asked, “what is this, Chowdaiah? “and Chowdaiah coolly replied, “Nothing, sir. You took your friends in for lunch and I took mine out for lunch. How can I bear to see them hungry?” The vizier apologized to Chowdaiah with a pale face. The concert started and the melody washed away all the bitterness in the air.

**Humility Personified:**

In a concert of Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Iyengar sang ‘Evarikai avataramu’ of Sri Tyagaraja in Devamanohari. Chowdaiah closed his eyes and listened while he sang. He had stopped playing the violin. After the composition was completed, Chowdaiah with folded hands said to Ariyakkudi ‘Tyagaraja must have composed this kriti exclusively for you. May God bless you and may you live a hundred years singing like this! Ariyakkudi’s reply was, ‘If you are providing me violin accompaniment all those years, why not, Chowdaiah?’

In another concert of T.R. Mahalingam, He played Bhairavi raga so absorbingly that Chowdaiah, when asked to play, said, You have brought out the whole essence of Bhairavi with all the sweet sancharas possible. Let me not spoil the mood. You please continue’.

In yet another incident, a similar incident happened in a concert of Shemmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. Iyer sang mukhari elaborately and asked Chowdaiah to play. Chowdaiah humbly asked him, “anna, what is left for me to play? All the colors of Mukhari are brought out by you, which will be forever remembered by all of us. Let it stay in my ears too! and Chowdaiah saluted him.

Another incident is known where Chowdaiah, after listening to a
magnificent Saveri Raga sung by Maharajapuram Vishvanatha iyer kept his violin down and sat as if in a trance, refusing to play tani." If I play now, it would be doing an injustice, a dishonor to to the Raga! There is no need for my playing. Sing the Kriti!, he said to Sri Vishwanatha Iyer.

Once, Chowdaiah, full of happiness after Ariyakkudi’s concert carried him on his shoulders and rejoiced.¹

**An Upright Musician:**

There was a solo concert of Chowdaiah in Tiruchirapalli. At the concert, arasika stood up and requested Chowdaiah to play Janaranjani. Chowdaiah had never played that raga extensively before. So he asked, ‘Why that Raga? Why not a Ghana raga? Is Janaranjani a major Raga?’ That night when he was alone at the hotel, he thought what he had done was wrong. He practised all the compositions that he knew in Janaranjani and he also practised the Raga. Next morning some of his friends and fans came to congratulate him over the previous evening’s concert. The gentleman who had requested him to play Janaranjani was also among these admirers. Chowdaiah immediately said to him, “I did a dishonourable thing yesterday by not playing what you asked for. Please sit down. I will play it now.” Chowdaiah was a sincere and conscencious soul. He firmly believed that bringing happiness to the hearts of the rasikas was his foremost duty.

In a dual concert with Veene Doreswami iyengar, Chowdaiah chose the place,’ Tapatraya Harana nipuna’ in Deekshitar’s ‘Subramanyaya Namaste’.Iyengar was surprised. Chowdaiah explained saying he had promised to help someone, but had no money to help and was therefore upset and hence the neraval was spontaneous at ‘Tapatraya Harana Nipuna’. Next day Chowdaiah received a handsome amount as advance towards a concert for which he was booked. Chowdaiah immediately gave

¹ Article in ‘The Hindu’ by Deepa Ganesh dated 30-04-2013.
the money to the person promised and thanked God for being able to keep up his promise.¹

‘He never considered himself responsible for his music but asa medium in the hands of the devine artiste.He enjoyed his rapturous music as the loving gift of his Ishta Daivata through the blessings of his Guru.’,remembered V.Seturamiah,Chowdaiah’s disciple.’ When he had a sumptuous feast of devine music he would forego even his meal but revel in ecstasy.Such attitude was evident when after playing his role in concerts,he would retire to seclusion and attempt to catch the devine flow through his effort.’² This best explains Chowdaiah’s vision.

**Sayings of Chowdaiah Portraying his Musical Vision:**

The platform in a musical concert is a commonwealth of equal partners. Here, no one is more equal. Propreity has prescribed the domain of each partner and tradition has hallowed it. Any transgression of this lakshman rekha– the boundary of decency- by any one of the partners, however great he may be, adversely affects the mood of the rest and causes damage to music.”

In his presidential address at the Madras music academy annual meet, in 1957, Chowdaiah said” Profesional jealousy between the main artiste and the accompanists should be eradicated. A cooperative tendency should be present for the success of the concert.to achieve harmony the main artiste should not play hide and seek game i the delineation of raga and tala. He should refrain from any preplanned scheme to mislead and defeat the companions publicly. The violionist should closely follow the main artiste for whom he should be a friend, philosopher and guide. Success of the team

ⁱSangeeta Kala Nidhi T.Chowdaiah’ by S.Krishna Murthy, p. no. 82.

² V.Seturamiah in his article on his Guru in the souvenir released on the occasion of the Opening Ceremony of The Chowdaiah memorial hall,1980.
should be the only guiding principle to everyone on the stage.”

About the method of practising, Chowdiaiah said:

‘Akaara sadhana in six speeds help in voice culture and also in singing neraval’

1. When asked why he did this at the age of even 68, Chowdaiah’s answer was,’ I am trying to understand each of the swaras. Is it possible? Can I measure upto even one swara?Can I ever understand and master this instrument?

More Anecdotes

Not a Big Deal.

Papa VenkataRamiah had agreed to provide accompaniment to Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar at a wedding concert in the house of a bus fleet owner in Pollachi. Musiri Subramanya Iyer was to sing at the same wedding with T.Chowdaiah as his violin accompanist. As it happened often with Chowdaiah his arrival was delayed because his car had a breakdown en route. Thereupon, a responsible member of the bride’s party requested Papa to wield the bow for Musiri. Papa agreed to do so but said Chowdaiah was bound to arrive any time and he would play sideman only until the Mysorian was able to take his place on the platform. The concert had been on for about an hour when Chowdaiah arrived, looking a bit in disarray. He asked Papa to continue but the latter told Chowdaiah to clean up, get dressed up and return to the hall. When Chowdaiah did so, Papa moved back and asked Chowdaiah to take his place. At the end of the concert, a member of the bride’s party offered Tamboolam and a cover containing cash as remuneration. Chowdaiah said the tamboolam should be offered to Papa but Papa refused it saying all that he had done was to help his friend in a crunch situation and it was no big deal!

2. ‘Sangeeta Ratna T.Chowdaiah’ by K.Srikantiah’-p. no. 5.
A Matter of Comraderie

The occasion was The Upanayanam or the Sacred thread Ceremony of Papa’s two sons Tyagayya and Nagu. There were two kinds of feasts, one of victuals and the other of music by the outstanding nagaswara vidwan P.S Veeruswamy Pillai, the great and shrewd ariyakudi Iyengar, the great and noble G.N.Balasubramanyam and the one and only Flute Mali. Chowdaiah had been lined up to play strings for GNB. A guest approached the Mysore maestro and saying it was a busy day for auspicious functions asked, “How come you are here?” Chowdaiah replied, “May be so. But this will be the only sacred thread ceremony in my friend Papa’s house and it is important for me to be here today.” The reply underscored the kind of comraderie that existed between musicians in those days.¹

Why praise me so?

It is said at a concert, in a hall full of audience, when Chowdaiah was applauded for his music, Chowdaiah humbly said, ‘Why praise me so? Venkatasubbiah’s playing is much superior to mine.’ While this shows Chowdaiah’s simplicity and appreciation for a fellow violinist, it also proves Venkatasubbiah’s high calibre as a violinist.²

Journey interrupted

On another occasion, the violin maestro Chowdaiah and my grandfather, after a concert in Bangalore, were to travel to Mysore. Chowdaiah requested him to travel along with him in his car the same night.

After some initial hesitation, Mani Iyer yielded to the request. Chowdaiah drove the car, with his disciples sitting in the front, and provided the entire back seat to my grandfather so that he could lie down as he would do on a train berth. Soon, my grandfather realised that the car kept halting on more

¹Shruti, March 1987.
²piteelu Venkata Subbiah by T.N.padma, p. no. 45.
than one occasion for minutes together. A couple of times, Chowdaiah comforted my grandfather saying that the issue was nothing major; it was only a flat tyre.

The next time when the car stopped, Mani Iyer asked, “Chowdaiah Garu, I understand that it is only a flat tyre, but can you kindly tell me if we are at the same spot or a different one?”

**Paddy on the Head?**

Chowdaiah the violin virtuoso and the eminent flautist T.R. Mahalingam enjoyed humorous banter with each other. Once Chowdaiah remarked that whenever he played the raga Charukesi, paddy grew better in the fields. Mahalingam immediately rejoined that he should play that raga to Veena Balachander so that some hair would sprout on Balachander’s head as he was totally bald (collated from Shruti).

**Kalyani**

There is an interesting anecdote of Sri Bidaram krishnappa Rama Mandira where Chowdaiah had invited an eminent artist to perform at the Bidaram Krishnappa Mandira. The vocalist sang an elaborated Kalyani, after which the organiser, who had no knowledge about music, stood up and requested that Kalyani be played. The vocalist looked at Chowdaiah in apprehension, not knowing what to do. Chowdaiah stood up and said, ‘Please sing ‘manamu leda’ in Hameer Kalyani, hinting that the meaning of the composition should be addressed to the organiser as if asking if he had no shame to ask for Kalyani after hearing an elaborated form of the same raga. The vocalist smilingly sang Manamu leda of Sri Tyagaraja in Hameer Kalyani and the organiser beamed with satisfaction.

**Conflict in Chettinad [1936]**

Place - Kottaiyur in Chettinad. Occasion - a wedding. Chembai was giving a performance with Mysore T. Chowdaiah (violin), Palakkad Mani Iyer
(mridanga) and Pudukkotai Dakshinamurthy Pillai (kanjeera) as his sidemen. When there was a pause in the proceedings, a prominent person stood up and said the guests assembled desired to hear Chowdaiah play solo. The violinist could not find any reaction on Chembai's face. He continued to sing and the sidemen performed with him. There was another interruption soon. Now there was a chorus demanding a solo performance from the Mysorean. Chembai and his cohorts continued to ignore the clamour. In the event, there was confusion and many of the guests began leaving, while some came near the platform and shouted. Chembai now stopped singing and, with an air of insouciance, asked: "What is it you want, please?" The common response was: "We want Chowdaiah to play the English Note!" Whereupon, Chembai said: "That's all! Okay, I will conclude my concert in a few minutes and after that you can ask him to play for you what you want."

The chorus sang: "No! We want him to play now!"

Chembai spoke again now, quietly but firmly. He explained the tradition followed in music concerts and said that it was not the practice for an accompanist to play a piece which the main musician had not taken up.

The angry audience was not mollified; if anything, the lecture seemed to have irritated them further. Some said other musicians had heeded similar requests made by them.

Chembai said that he could not oblige simply because others had done so. "I will now conclude the concert by singing the mangalam. You can then do what you want."

An angry man shouted Chembai would not ever again be invited to perform in the town. Chembai replied that he was not born to sing only for the people of Kottaiyur and that he was not very earnest to perform there.

The news spread Chembai had antagonised the people of Chettinad. But, when tempers cooled, good sense prevailed. Members of the community
soon decided to invite Chembai to sing at another function in the town. Bhagavatar again performed with the same set. It had ended well; and all was well.

*Rama, Jayarama, Kodanda Rama, Kalyana Rama*

Lalgudi was the first Chennai-based musician to preside over the Bangalore Gayana Samaja’s annual music conference and decorated with the Sangeeta Kala Ratna title. He was a great admirer of Mysore T. Chowdaiah for his violin and his oratory. After listening to Lalgudi’s violin response in 1957 while accompanying the Alathur Brothers under the aegis of Bangalore’s Sree Rama Seva Mandali, Chowdaiah observed: ‘Jayaraman was born as Rama, took to violin and became Kodanda Rama, transformed to Kalyana Rama after his marriage and has indeed proved to be a Jaya Rama in his lifetime’.¹

*Play Ahiri and Starve?*

Chowdaiah wanted to play Ahiri for a concert. His family resisted as it is a general belief that food is deprived of on singing or playing Ahiri. He played Sri Tyagaraja’s ‘Sompaina manasuto’ in Ahiri in the concert and on returning from the concert, had a sumptuous meal at home.²

*Not a dangerous profession!*

Dwaram Venkataswami Naidu was in Bangalore to perform for Radio Sangeeta Sammelan concert. A grand dinner was arranged for him by a connoisseur where Doreswami Iyengar and Chowdaiah were also present. The three began to chat. ‘It is easy for a person to earn an academic degree because he has to study only till the examination is over. But not so a musician. Because every concert is an examination for him, isn’t it, Iyengar?’

¹narrated by Sri lalgudi jayaraman on 26-12-2011.

²This anecdote is narrated by Dr. Sukanya Prabhakar as narrated to her by her Guru V. Ramaratnam in a concert dedicated to Chowdaiah on 19th January, 2013 at Nadabrahma Sangeeta Sabha.
asked Chowdaiah. ‘Ours is nevertheless a safe profession. If a doctor loses his concentration, it is the question of life and death for the patient. If an engineer gets careless, crores of rupees go waste and the life of people is at stake. If a judge gives a wrong judgement, an innocent is hanged. and if drivers and pilots ignore their duty even for a moment, danger is assured. There is no such danger from a musician. The worst that can happen by him is a couple of apaswaras. No other harm from him except that the newspapers curse him. But that is not difficult to face. Just hide the newspaper and you are happy! ‘laughed Iyengar. ‘But if the concert is not a success, how can we face ourselves in the mirror? Even good food or sleep does not satisfy you!’, asked Chowdaiah. ‘Eat a full-stomach meal before the concert and avoid the mirror’, said Dwaram.¹

Playing concert for CM’s daughter’s wedding:

One day Chowdaiah visited the vidhana Soudha to meet the chief minister of the state. ‘The cabinet meeting in progress sir. Entry is prohibited.’, said the peon. ‘That is OK, I need to see him only for two minutes’. So saying, chowdaiah entered the meeting hall! The chief minister Sri Nijalingappa, happy to see him, welcomed him.’ I am extremely happy to hear the good news that your daughter’s wedding is arranged. There is no need to invite anybody from outside to give a concert on the occasion. My duel concerts with Doreswami Iyengar are quite famous these days. We will be happy to serve. Is it ok with you?’

‘Why not?’ said the Chief Minister, ‘Please leave a word with my personal secretary’. Chowdaiah went to the secretary. ‘It is the marriage season now. The accompanists have to be booked well in advance. For the time being 2000 Rs will do. The rest can be paid after the concert’, so saying, he received the money, went directly to Akashvani to inform Doreswami iyengar. ‘Note the dates sir. It is the big people!’ said Chowdaiah and

¹vidwan Mysooru T Chowdaiah’—S.Krishna Murthy, p. no. 74.
hurriedly left. Iyengar stood watching him open-mouthed.!!

**The missing bow**

The occasion was the inaugural ceremony of the Chowdaiah Memorial hall at Bangalore. Shemmangudi Srinivasa Iyer was invited. In his speech, shemmangudi asked the audience if any of them knew why the bow was missing in the statue of Chowdaiah’s violin before the building. None answered. With a smile shemmangudi replied,’ It is because Chowdaiah knew no one can play violin like him. So he has carried the bow with him’!!

**Thief in the House!**

Once Chowdaiah was urgently in need of 500 Rs. He had no money with him. His attention went to the kitchen where Nanjamma safeguarded some money in the kitchen containers. After a couple of days Nanjamma was in need of the money. On finding it missing, she understood the truth, but dared not ask Chowdaiah as she knew that if he asked him where she got the money from, she would have no answer. After a few days the couple happened to go to Putta parti. Respected Sai Baba blessed the couple with an immediate darshan. ‘Swamiji’, said Nanjamma. Chowdaiah, anticipating what was going to follow, tried to stop his wife. But Nanjamma boldly continued, ‘Of late, we have thieves in the house. With great difficulty I had saved 500 rupees, which is stolen. Swamiji, please let me know who the thief is.’ Baba smiled and said, ‘your money is with the right person. Do not worry.’ What followed later was a mini war between the two!

In January 1967 Chowdaiah played his last concert at The Prasanna Seeta Rama Mandira. Veena Venkatagiriappapa attended this concert. Chowdaiah was so happy at his arrival that he personally received him and played an elaborate Bhairavi, leading on to Sri Tyagaraja’s ‘Tanayuni Brova’.

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1 vidwan Mysooru T Chowdaiah’ – S.Krishna Murthy, p. no. 67.

Venkatagiriyappa was visibly overjoyed at his performance. After the concert he asked Chowdaiah if his health was alright.” Chowdaiah replied that he had been running fever for the past 2-3 days. ‘Why then did u have to strain yourself with this concert?’ asked Venkatagiriyappa. ‘May I leave this world playing my violin!’ said Chowdaiah, soon after which he breather his last.

Chowdaiah was a pioneer. He had a busy concert career that remained overflowing with performances for over five decades. His music became a marvel and he remained as the first choice of the leading vocalists. The audience was spellbound by his attractive music. His repertoire and idiom had a universal appeal, transcending the concert platform and reaching out to the hearts of millions of average music lovers all over the country. His renditions of tanams and kritis on his violin could transport the cognoscenti into a trance. A remarkable trait of his was that he was free of the green eyed monsters of greed and jealousy. He had strong convictions, tenacity of purpose, deep commitment to music and extraordinary respect for his Guru.

He lived a full life doing what he loved most. He was immersed in music making, performing, composing, teaching and propagating music.

The mosaic of Chowdaiah’s life and accomplishments brings to one’s mind Somerset Maughm’s autobiographical words: Having but one life, I should like to get the most of it. It did not seem to be enough merely to write (to play violin in Chowdaiah’s case): I wanted to make a pattern of my life……. Did Chowdaiah think along the same lines?

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1 Veena Doraswami iyengar’s article,’Nanu kanda Chowdaianavanu’, Silver Jubilee Souvenier, 1974, ayyanar kala Shale. p. no. 16.
Thus Spake the Great Men on The Great Man:

Smt. M.L. Vasantakumari

Chowdaiah’s service to Karnataka music is unique. He enriched its popularity. His music was loved by all with no language barrier. He was popular in Tamilnadu, Karnataka, in north, everywhere.

G.N.B. on Chowdaiah

‘After he came into his own, all the leading musicians of India remember with pride and real joy that the great periods in their lives as a musician almost always synchronised with that when Chowdaiah was their accompanist.’

Musiri Subrahmanya Iyer

"During the last half a century Chowdaiah was a compelling and dominating violinist, much sought after by musicians of repute. His playing on the violin is equalled by few and surpassed by none"

T. Sadasivam (Husband of the renowned singer M.S. Subbalakshmi)

"Chowdaiah was like a lion. Nobody possessed his courage, conviction, and musical skills. It is time an endowment is started in the name of Chowdaiah either in the University of Mysore or Madras..."

T.R. Mahalingam

The relationship between myself and Sri Chowdaiah will perhaps appear to those who may not be much aware of)rather incongruous. Let me be brief.

The first meeting between us was at Tanjore some 42 years ago. Listening to me play, to my infant impression, he appeared more concerned about me than about the other ‘bigs’ in the other art present there. Then a period of no

1 This is an article written by T.R. Mahalingam published in the souvenir released on the occasion of the inauguration of Chowdaiah Memorial hall, Bangalore, 1980.
contact till 1946. He was scheduled to play with me at Madras (V.P.Hall). I was too weak that day. He visited me to see my condition (perhaps) and examined me as a doctor and advised only rest. There was a paternal touch. I could feel it. The concert was postponed for a few days. Then we played. He accompanied me with some pleasure, I thought. Many concerts followed later with him.

One particular incident the readers may be interested to know- I write it here. It was at Madras. One fine morning he and the organizers of Utsavam met me. They wanted me to play that evening at Gopalapuram, Madras. I said yes. Here, excuse me if I am bit brazen.

Prohibition was in force then. With a doctor’s chit I took more than the usual dosage hoping to play better that day. But, I was helped by two or three people to the platform. I started the concert shakily. There was a large crowd because of free admission. Third or fourth item- some Raga I played-Wanted him to follow each sangati. He was understanding and followed me with only vocal expressions. “Go on, Mali, go on Mali”. I persisted in his playing on the violin. Yet the reply was, “This duel is unnecessary and you know it is also difficult though possible to play.” I still insisted (damn the liquor). He once again sympathetically repeated his plea. Then (damn the liquor thrice now). I wanted him to tell the same to the audience loudly taking the mike near him.

The already angry public mistook it for my attempting to hit him. Then it was a ‘concert’ of the public pandemonium. Progenies of rock were freely falling on the dais. I was whisked away by a sandow-looking person across a high compound wall and was locked in a house. All these I was aware; the rest was related to me later. He was asked to play solo immediately, but he refused, reason not known.

The very next day early in the morning he came to my lonely abode while I was reflecting on the previous night – call it ugly hundred times. My father
was there. What he did was, can you imagine? He only shed tears and again pleaded the same to save me from, mind you- excess of liquor only. The pleading was not to my father or anybody, but only to Him.

Perhaps it will be an everlasting touch in my heart. He always had that concern and affection to me till he breathed his last. One sentence I still remember is, while I was coming from a temple, we met accidentally on a footpath. He stared at me and the expression escaped was, “You will shortly become a ‘Swami’”. My feelings are there even while writing this. How he would have been ecstatic now seeing me completely away from my old habit! Yes, the Supreme was a little unkind!” Perhaps he is staring at my article now, yes from that eternal land.

**Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer on Chowdaiah**

“Fellows like me will render an alapana for hours and he will get thunderous claps with his finishing strokes on the violin! Though both of us were very good friends, somehow I felt nervous having him in a ‘kutcheri’ with me.”

**D.V.Gundappa**

Vidwan Sri Chowdaiah was a great master of his art and all Mysore is proud of him. The resonance of his violin is a beauty unforgettable. he was a unique master of the instrument and splendid was his raga elaboration. He could bring off the very subtle and the very intricate movements of a raga. I think his rendering of ‘Inta Soukhya’ in Kapi is marvellous. He will long be remembered for the excellence of his art, and he was a good man, kind and helpful to people in need and warm hearted towards friends.

**Madhurai Mani Iyer**

“You have sandwiched me between two elephants,” Madurai Mani is said to have remarked about his accompanists — Chowdaiah and Palghat Mani — as he performed for Kalaniketan at Raja Annamalai Manram in 1959.
The felicitation to the artist had the then Chief Minister, M. Bhaktavatsalam, presiding over.¹

_Shemmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer_

‘I had known Chowdaiah for the past 40 years. He has accompanied me on violin on several occasions. On none of these occasions has my performance been a failure. This is due to Chowdaiah’s contribution and his sole aim has been to make the performance a success. He is the master of the art. He is blessed with good qualities besides a sound physique. He is to his master what Vivekananda was to Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.’²

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