Chapter-9
Chowdaiah’s Multifaceted Personality

With Special Reference to ‘Vani’

Versatile T. Chowdaiah:
T he first thing that strikes one about T. Chowdaiah is the sheer breadth of his versatility. He has donned many hats and his talents have ranged from being an accompanist, a musician, a teacher, an organizer, an innovator, and a composer to an actor, film producer and music director. His varied interests and involvements or diversified nature have contributed to the production of the film, ‘Vani’ a complete picture of an artiste in the perspective of the prevailing society.

T. Chowdaiah had established himself as a seven-stringed violinist. Yet it cannot be concluded that it was only his seven-stringed violin that was responsible for his popularity. It was only one face of the multi-faceted personality.

As a Vocalist:
‘It is not known to many that Chowdaiah was also a vocalist, which is why we find that he followed the vocalists so faithfully.’- Musuri Subramanya Iyer.¹

Chowdaiah has sung a couple of songs for his film- Vani: ‘Chidambara Chaitanya’ in Kambhoji is sung by him. A short piece in gamaka-style, ‘Maya Chaya’ is also sung by him.

The influence of his Guru Ganavisharada Sri Bidaram Krishnappa who was a vocalist definitely had a deep impact on him.

**In Hindustani Music:**

T. Chowdaiah knew Hindustani music also. The influence of Hindustani music can be seen in his compositions of Hindustani ragas. For example, he has composed *tillana*-s in Kaapi and Hameer Kalyani. His *jugalbandhi* music concerts with Pt. Jog and other instrumentalists of the time were quite popular.

**Majestic Personality:**

Chowdaiah had an attractive physique. The disciplined training he underwent in the Gurukula also included a two hour schedule at the gymnasium every morning, which had given him a pleasing physique, robust health and stamina. There were many occasions when he performed three concerts a day!

**As An Organizer:**

Chowdaiah’s unparalleled Gurubhakti helped in making a good organizer of him. The Bidaram Krishnappa Mandira was a big inspiration for him to start the music school. Chowdaiah was the secretary of the Bidaram Krishnappa’s Sri Prasanna Seetarama Mandira for almost 10 years. As the secretary he conducted eight music conferences.

The Sangeetotsava which took place in Mysore under the auspices of Prasanna Seetarama Mandira used to go on for ten to fifteen days and Chowdaiah used to be in charge of all the arrangements. He would make the necessary arrangements for all the artists. His house was open to all, always filled with connoisseurs, admirers, disciples, friends and relatives.

He started and managed the Ayyanar Kala shale both in Mysore and Bangalore, in spite of his busy concert schedules. He was also a bridge

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between Tamilnadu and Karnataka. He brought all the eminent artists to perform in The Bidaram Krishnappa Mandira. When Chowdaiah invited, no artist would refuse to perform. He himself would visit Madras several times a month to accompany the top musicians of the time.

Chowdaiah was also one of the chief persons responsible for the founding of the Fine Arts College, Manasa Gangotri, Mysore. He founded The Indian Fine Arts society at Madras. He fully supported H.V.Narayanaswamy, who was the founder of Sree Ramaseva Mandali, Chamarajapet, Bangalore, for twenty four years. He was the secretary for The Prasanna Seetarama Mandira, Mysore and conducted eight annual music conferences.

**In politics:**

T. Chowdaiah was a member of the Legislative council in 1952 to 1957. He was asked to continue but on account of his busy schedules, he declined and requested that P. Kalinga Rao should continue in his place.¹ In the history of Indian politics and World politics, this is the first instance where a musician has become an M.L.C. Chowdaiah was 58 when he took over as M.L.C.

**Composer:**

As a composer too, Chowdaiah excelled. ‘He did not fail to come out with original compositions in praise of the devotees worshipped. Set to appropriate music, his compositions were taught to his disciples. In this he was chosen to go the way of the Nayamnars of ancient Tamilnadu and one is even tempted to rename him as Chowdaiah Nayamnar’.² He is said to have composed varnam-s, kriti-s and tillana-s. But no varnam is available. 25 kriti-s and 8 tillana-s are available with notation in two books, published by two of his disciples- Prof. V. Ramaratnam and Dr. H.S. Anasuya Kulkarni.

¹Sri Anand, grandson of Chowdaiah on 29-09-2013.

Devotee:

Chowdaiah was a great devotee. He was a great Rama Bhakta and devoted to Anjaneya, Saptagireesha and Ayyapaswamy. His faith in the Gayatri Maha Mantra was immense. Those who performed their daily Gayatri Japam were to him great benefactors of mankind. He visited temples frequently in his later years especially. He was an ardent devotee of Shabarimalai Ayyappa Swami. In 1943, Chowdaiah travelled by his car to Ariyakkudi to attend Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar’s daughter’s wedding. There he met a person by name Swamy Krishna of Ariyakkudi, who was also an ardent devotee of Shabarimalai Swamy. Swamy Krishna urged Chowdaiah to visit the Shabarimalai shrine. Chowdaiah reluctantly said that if he should come across such a situation, he would take his suggestion. On his way back, he encountered a lion in the forest of Coimbatore and immediately resolved that he would visit the shrine, upon which the lion disappeared into the forest. After this incident, for four successive years, he visited the shrine regularly. Prior to the visit every year, he observed the vrata for 40 days as is the custom.

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1. Seturamiah in his article in the souvenir released on the occasion of the Chowdaiah Memorial hall in Bangalore in 1980.
**Knowledge of Sanskrit:**

Chowdaiah was well versed in Sanskrit. This is evident in the scholarly *sahitya* of his compositions. Seventeen of his compositions are in Sanskrit. He has composed on deities like Shiva, Rama, Parvati, Ganapati and Subramanya. While the *sahitya* chosen prove his skill in the language, words like ‘Prasanna’ used in most of his compositions speak of his temperament as a musician and as a person of calm and pleasant nature.

**Bharatanatyam:**

Chowdaiah had great interest in Bharatanatyam too. Sri H. Dasappa, (Guru of V. Subramanya Kaushik) and Chowdaiah were great friends. Dasappa was the elder brother of Bangalore Nagaratnamma. When Dasappa and Chowdaiah met, they used to discuss and exchange their views on Bharatanatyam. When Kshetrajna’s Padam-s, (which Chowdaiah used to call ‘Muddu Gopala Padam-s’), *javali-s* and songs from the Geetagovinda were performed in Bharatanatyam, Chowdaiah would be carried away. If *nadebheda* was done during the dance performance, he rose from his chair and clapped with excitement.

**Scientific Temperament:**

Chowdaiah could be called an experimentalist and an innovator not merely because he invented the seven-stringed violin, but also because of his experiments with plants. Several people had conducted various experiments about the effect of music on plants before.

Charles Darwin had conducted an experiment by playing bassoon where sensitive plants grew. He could not show any appreciable change in the plants. In India Prof T.C.N. Singh of the Annamalai University, a pioneer in

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this field carried out his research work on the effect of musical sounds on plants. He did microscopic studies and noted the cumulative effect of musical sounds on the growth of flowering plants.

He used musical instruments like veena, violin, flute, mrdangam, and vocal music and found that the music was potent and effective to excite the protoplasm of the cells of hydrilla. Mayamalavagowla raga was played on the violin and the plant was exposed to this raga everyday and the growth results were found to be astonishing. The height of the plant was found to be double. Similarly, with Kharaharapriya, the plant produced taller shoots and numerous leaves.¹

Whether Chowdaiah was aware of all this is not known. But the fact that music had a magical effect on plants was established by him yet again by his own experimentation. He planted two lemon plants in his garden, one close to the window of his music room and the other - a little farther. In a few months he noticed that the plant close to the window of his music room yielded better results, while the other one dried away.² Chowdaiah also propounded the theory that cows yield more milk with music played at the time of milking.

A Rare Entrepreneur:

Chowdaiah started a bus service between Malavalli and Bangalore. This adventure which he was not used to, led him to terrible loss. He was not perturbed though. He consoled himself saying he was not made for that kind of work.³

¹Article ‘Effects of musical sounds on plants’ by Sri S.M. Krishnan, the journal of the BidaramKrishnappa’s Sri Prasanna Seetarama Mandira, Fifth Music Conference Souvenir, 1962.

²Information furnished by Sri Ambareesh, the cine actor and grandson of Chowdaiah in the documentary ‘Chowdaiah- a ten- minutes journey through his life’ on Chowdaiah by Pudugai channel.

Film Producer:

Impressed by the films of his time and by the fact that many musicians of the age also acted in films, Chowdaiah produced a musical film Vani. He was well aware of the fact that film production was no joke, but he bravely undertook the venture and the film was produced. K. Hirannayya, the father of Master Hirannayya, was his co-producer.

Music Director:

Chowdaiah not only produced his film, but was also the music director for it. His chaste taste in classicism is proved by the music he has provided for the film. While there is inherently classical kriti-s composed by Chowdaiah in the film, there are also light classical songs, composed for the occasion. Gamaka Vachana more prevalent then is also adopted in the film. Devaranama-s and pallavi-s are also composed exclusively for the film.

Actor:

Chowdaiah appears in dual role of father and son in Vani. There is so much difference even in the appearance of each role that it is hard to believe that it is the same actor in a different role. Chowdaiah was known for his attractive physique, which cast a spell on the audience as an accompanist too.

His regular exercises not only kept him fit and healthy, but inspired him to act in the film. While the father’s role is that of a resigned, ascetic musician, the son’s role (Shankara) is that of a hero, who is a successful violinist.

As a Teacher:

Chowdaiah was a genuine product of the Gurukula system and he was able to achieve such supreme distinction in his field because he faced the rigors of that system with patience and perseverance. He trained innumerable number of students including R.K. Venkatarama Shastri, C.R. Mani Iyer, Kandadevi Alahar Swamy, Prof V. Ramaratnam, V. Seturamiah and N.
Nanjundaswamy. Here are some quotes about his teaching as said by his own disciples:

‘He was always ready to share his knowledge with his disciples. He said, ‘If you diligently practice varnam-s in three speeds especially the three attatala varnam-s in Bhairavi Todi and Kalyani, you are sure to enrich your manodharma, get an insight into the ragabhava and acquire mastery over the laya…. I was always privileged to enjoy his affection and confidence.’ Prof V. Ramaratnam.1

‘When he came to our house to teach, he would sit in the easy chair and on many occasions he would fall asleep. But if I went wrong in singing, he would immediately detect and a bolt would fall on me. Most of the time, he would ask me to start my practice with sarvalaghu swara-s. Without my knowledge he attended a few of my programs in Kerala when he was in that area for his programs and commented on how my performances could have been better’- Dr. Anasuya Kulkarni.2

‘It is not possible to detail the affection he bestowed on his disciples. His one ambition was that all his disciples should prosper well in life and follow the correct path. He had few equals.’- Kandadevi Alahar Swami.3

‘As a master he sat with us patiently and showed the method of handling the violin, creating intricate swara prastara-sand complicated swara kalpana-sand watch us repeat the performance intently. He would encourage us to be original. ‘He cared more for our needs than for his own’- V. Seturamiah.4


2Interview with Smt. Anasuya Kulkarni on 27-08-2009.

3Kandadevi Alahar Swami in his article in ‘Tributes from disciples’ published in the souvenir released on the occasion of the opening ceremony of The Chowdaiah memorial Hall.

4 V. Seturamiah in his article in ‘Tributes from disciples’ published in the souvenir released on the occasion of the opening ceremony of The Chowdaiah memorial Hall.
‘It is because of Chowdaiah’s accompaniment we have earned a name in the music field’ acknowledged legends like Shemmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer in the Madras Music Academy. I used to go to his house every morning at 4 o’clock. Lingappaji, Gururajappa, B. Puttaswamy, C.R. Mani, Chinnappa and myself used to practice together. My master also joined us sometimes. One by one we played till eight every morning. He looked upon us more like friends rather than as students- R.K. Venkatarama Shastri.¹

Film Maker:

When Chowdaiah was 55 years old, he thought of producing a film.² In 1943, Chowdaiah founded a film company called ‘Vani Pictures’ and intended to produce a Kannada movie. He was a person who implemented what he intended at the earliest. Chowdaiah brought together some merchants of Mysore and a few friends from Chettinad for fund investment and ‘Vani’ took its inception.

When it came to the banner under which the film was to be launched, Chowdaiah decided to consult Achyuta Shastri, a well-known astrologer in whom Chowdaiah laid his firm faith. When he was close to Shastri’s house, Chowdaiah encountered with a man who was selling a two-stringed instrument on road. Chowdaiah bought two instruments from him, sent a young boy to fetch a cord and entering the house of Shastri, placed the two instruments side by side and tied the four strings, thus creating a violin with the two instruments. Tuning the violin, he began to play. Crowds began to gather. It was Chowdaiah playing. The ‘Concert’ continued for half an hour. Shastri was overwhelmed with joy. ‘What a feast of music even with a street instrument!, he exclaimed.

After some time, Chowdaiah explained the purpose of his visit. Shastri sat

¹ R.K.Venkata Rama shastri in his article in ‘Tributes from disciples’ published in the souvenir released on the occasion of the opening ceremony of The Chowdaiah memorial Hall

²Reminiscences of a musician’ by Professor V.Ramaratnam, page no.35.
with his eyes closed in contemplation for a few minutes, and then announced, ‘Name it as HRGC’S Sri Pictures Organization, HRGC would be an acronym where H is for Hiranniah, R for Ramiah, G for Gopal and C for Chowdaiah. It would be auspicious to name it in this order.’

Thus HRGC was launched. Chowdaiah and his friends intended to make two more films under this banner, ‘Krishna Leela’ and ‘Mandakini’, but could not do so due to shortage of money.¹

The movie ‘Vani’ was based on the life of an artist. Chowdaiah himself acted in the movie. He played dual role—the role of the hero and that of his father. It was not uncommon to see musicians acting in films those days. Vidwans like Musuri Subramanya Iyer, Papanasham Shivan, Dandapani Deshikar, G.N. Balasubramanyam, Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer and M.S. Subbulakshmi participated in films. And also, there had been many movies that had come to the silver screen from the early years of the Indian Film Industry, which were not only musical but also highly classical. To list a few: Tyagayya (1946) – Telugu, Baiju Bawra (1952) – Hindi, Nandanar (1942, 1935) – Tamil, Shakuntalai (1940) – Tamil and Meera (1945). There have also been musical movies which came later-Shankarabharanam (1980) – Telugu, Swati Tirunal (1987) – Malayalam, Amadeus (1984) on Mozart– (English) and Bala (1976) on dancer Balasaraswati. Undoubtedly Chowdaiah was motivated by the films of his time.

The famous Nadaswara Vidwan Tiruvengadu Subramanya Pillai was planning to direct and produce a film ‘Aryamala’ and fill the major role in it. But it never materialized. Chittoor Subramanya Pillai acted the part of Buddha in the film ‘Buddha Jeevana’ but the film was never completed. When the film ‘Nandanar’ was reproduced, Shemmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer was asked to play the main role. But the traditional temperament of his

¹Vidwan Mysooru Chowdaiah’- S. Krishna Murthy p. no. 49.
made him decline the offer to appear on the screen.¹

Throughout its relatively young life, the motion picture industry has produced an enormous number and variety of films that have ranged from glaring examples of artistic ineptitude to hallmarks of cinematic excellence. Although many of these films have proven memorable for both good and bad reasons, only a few have come to be regarded as true “classics.” The films in this category for the most part are centred on a universal and timeless concern that in turn helps those films achieve the enduring excellence that qualifies them as classics. One such film is Vani.

Vani is a musical based film. It is a film which rekindles classicism and respectability for classical music. The film proves that with a little onscreen magic, it is indeed possible to make a seemingly bewildering art form interesting and engaging to anyone and everyone.

The artistic presentation of the movie has an overall aesthetic appeal as a package. To understand the mindset of the composer Chowdaiah, one needs to watch this film - written, produced, music composed and directed and acted by Chowdaiah. He has acted in the lead roles: father and son-both devoted to music. His role is a memorable one, if not for the role of a saint artiste(the role of the father), but for the songs that he has composed and sung and directed in the film, which have come to stay in the minds of classical aficionados. The songs are inherently classical and are a rarity today. The aesthetic presentation of the movie has an overall aesthetic appeal.

The film hovers around the story of a dedicated and God-fearing musician, who devotes his entire life to the arts. It talks of the life and troubles of a musician. In between are a number of humorous anecdotes by Hirannayya.

The recording of this film was completed in 1943. The role of the hero was played by Chowdaiah. Not only did he act in the film, he directed it and

¹’Sangeeta Ratna T.Chowdaah’- S.K.Ramachandra Rao, p.no.67.
produced it. The well-known humorist K. Hiranniah was his co-producer.

The videography was done in the Pakshiraja Studio of Coimbatore.¹ The story was by Hirannayya and the direction was by M.N. Gopal and Hirannayya. The film was first screened at The Chamundeshwari theatre. The music was Chowdaiah’s. Harmonium Sheshagiri Rao helped Chowdaiah in composing music. Hiranniah acted in the film and also helped Chowdaiah with lyrics and scripts for songs in the movie. Ramaratnam supplied the notations and instructed the orchestra.

The lyrics for these songs consisted of dramatic tunes and, were not of the standard for compositions in Karnataka music. So, this motivated Chowdaiah to start composing. He has composed a number of compositions in Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada including kirtanas and thillana-s. Most of them are devotional songs. And the language is easy Sanskrit and Kannada. Chowdaiah has also sung in the film besides playing violin. Chowdaiah sang kriti-s like ‘Chidambara Chaitanya’. Bellary Lalita has also sung a composition with him.

In this film ‘Vani’, apart from Chowdaiah and Hiranniah, Phandari Bai, Bellary Ratnamala, Bellary Lalita, K.V. Achyuta Rao, Y. Ratna, Shanta Rajamma, Dikki Madhava Rao, Arakere Narayana Rao, MusuriKrishna Murthy, B.N. Subbia, A. Subbanna, M.S. Subbiah, M.R.P. Sarathi, master B.V.K. Murthy, Master H.N. Murthy and Chowdaiah’s disciple N. Nanjundaswamy have also acted. Bellary Lalita (Chandramma) and Salem Dhanabhagyam are the two heroines of the film. The photography is by V. Krishnan.

Pandari Bai, the first heroin of Shivaji Ganeshan, was introduced into the Kannada film industry by Chowdaiah through this film.²

¹Information furnished by N. Nanjundaswamy in his interview in the Star of Mysore, evening daily on 13-07-2003.
²Information furnished by Anand, Chowdaiah’s grandson.
The incident of Musuri Krishna Murthy being selected for this film is interesting. Those days knowledge of classical music was necessary to act in plays and films. Impressed by Musuri Krishnamurthy’s singing which had ‘birkas’ resembling Musuri Subramanya Iyer’s, Chowdaiah named him Musuri Krishna Murthy.¹

_Vani_

_The Theme:_

‘Vani’ is about a musician, his life, trials, sentiments, hardships and relationships. The problems and pressures in the life of a musician are dealt with in the film. The travails of a musician and incidentally exploitation of women form the main theme of the film.

_The Plot:_

The movie begins with the scene of dawn. Background music which is instrumental in the Udayaraga, Bhowli, indicates that it is the time of sunrise and raga Bilahari is chosen to show the religiousness of the saint musician taking bath and performing the sacred rituals in the holy river. The musician visits the temple and on returning home, adorns his violin with flowers, placing it before Goddess Saraswati,(which Chowdaiah himself used to do every morning) and then he teaches his child Sanskrit.

There is also a reference to Amarakosha. Chowdaiah’s seven- stringed violin finds a reference in the film too. The child tells his father that he had challenged his friend that his father would play a seven-stringed violin and the father inspired by the word seven-strings contemplates upon inventing one. He tells his wife, Chaya, the seven-stringed violin alone can be the means to please and propitiate the Lord now.’

¹Information furnished by Anand, Chowdaiah’s grandson.
But the wife’s worry is ‘how is she to run the household? But the artiste, who is already into asceticism, reacts, ‘effort is ours, the fruits are left to the Lord’. Even If I die in this effort, I will be immortal in the field of music.’ This again reflects the personality of Chowdaiah himself. This scene is followed by a cart sequence. Throughout this song, beautiful scenes of nature - paddy fields, coconut trees, bullock cart, etc. are figured.

The devoted musician practices violin rigorously day and night without attention to either food or sleep. Shankarabharanam of more than 5 minutes duration with no change in location and with no accompaniment is a unique feature in this sequence of picturization.

The musician starts composing, and being inspired, starts singing the composition in Kambhoji- ‘Chidambara Chaitanya’, in Adi Tala which describes Lord Shiva’s dance. This song is sung by Chowdaiah himself.

As the musician sings, he visualizes Lord Shiva performing dance along with his consort Parvati. The charana part of the composition describes Lord Shiva’s dance and is embedded with jati-s.

**Artiste’s Recognition by the Court:**

The musician opens his eyes to see the palace officials coming up with the offer of a music concert for the Gangadhareshwara festival, for which the remuneration offered is Rs.100. The family is overjoyed at the offer. The wife is told, ‘Chaya, bring all the groceries necessary for the house and sarees for you with the money.’ The value of money in those days can be
estimated here. That money had good value those days is evident. Chowdaiah’s attitude as a musician is seen again in his words, ‘the whole universe, including the birds and animals can be pleased with music’. The artist expresses his wish that his son, Shankara should earn name and fame as a musician when he grows up. This statement and also his return of the sacred ring to Chaya saying,’ Let it be with you. Give it to Shankara tomorrow’ hint that something bad is ahead.

The Concert:

The concert scheduled for the next evening begins before an august gathering. The choice of the raga is special. It has all the swara-s of Mayamalavagowla with special emphasis on ‘nishada’. The raga is presented with a different dimension. More stress is given to madhyama and nishada, pointing at the oncoming floods.

The Devastation:

Floods flow in, gushing into the village, sparing no one. The mother and sons are saved, but the musician loses his life in the calamity. When Chaya’s sorrows know no bounds, her husband’s words ‘Effort is ours, the fruits are left to the Lord’ rings in her ears and she determines to bring up Shankara well. The term ‘Aapadbandhava’ is uttered by Chaya as reply to her son’s query, ‘who is our bandhu?’ which is immediately taken up as the pallavi by Vidwan Prabhakara Deekshita, to whom Chaya takes her son Shankara for music tutelage ‘Aapadbandhava Bhairavi Deva’. The word Bhairavi in the pallavi is intellectually woven as ragamudra by Chowdaiah. The pallavi is a humorous anecdote, with the mocking expressions of Deekshita. The Pallavi is in trishrana ped rupakatala.

Shankara is accepted by Deekshita straight away as a disciple. Deekshita’s intention in accepting Shankara as his disciple is obvious. Exploitation of woman – in the case of Chaya and exploitation of disciple in the case of Shankara, which he acknowledges to his wife: ‘Chaya will do the
cooking, washing and cleaning and Shankara will massage my feet and wash my ‘panche’ (Dhoti). If there is any left-over food, you can give them some.’ The picture of gurukulavasa then is given here. How the innocent students and their family were expected to serve the household of the Guru can be pictured here.

Chowdaiah, who was friendly and affectionate towards his disciples mocks at the unhealthy custom of using the students for personal benefit, which was then prevalent. Exploitation to the core is seen in Deekshita’s handling of the boy and his mother. He does not even hesitate to kick the child when he pauses to answer the Guru, while pressing his feet.

Chaya takes care of the entire household work. And Shankara, though he is taught nothing by his guru tries to grasp while his guru sings. Trouble soon begins. Deekshita’s evil eye falls on the beautiful Chaya. He tries to make amorous passes at her. His wife intervenes and snubs her husband. Deekshita’s reply to her is a pun. He says he is trying to compose a chitte (meaning chitteswara) to a new composition. His wife’s reply to this is again a pun-’Why can’t you practice the chitte (meaning butterfly in Kannada) you already have, instead of forming a new one?’ His reply again a pun, Is cruel. ‘My dear, times are changing. New things have to be discovered and the old ones forsaken and discarded’.

Shankara’s progress is fast though he is taught literally nothing by Deekshita, whose attitude is-‘While the Guru is alive, the disciple should never earn name or fame’. The scene of Deekshita’s concert with Shankara proves the disciple’s skill. The child draws more appreciation and applause from the audience than the Guru, which is, of course, not tolerable by Deekshita, who is all the more disturbed to see his disciple garlanded by one of the audience- Kumara, another important character in the film. The concert continues with the devaranama: ‘Irabaradu, Illada Mele Irabaradu, Kripe Illada Mele Irabaradu, Paramatmana Kripe Illada Mele Irabaradu’ in
Kannada. This song is noted for its *yatisrotovahayati* is effectively incorporated here, bringing out humor at the same time. Shankara’s music is highly enjoyed and appreciated by the public and not able to withstand what he considers his humiliation, Deekshita cuts Shankara’s singing prematurely, and sings the Mangala, the concluding part of the concert, to avoid Shankara receiving further applause.

His wife is more kind to the boy. Discerning his talent, she teaches him the *kriti* in Kharaharapriya, ‘Navanandini’, which is also a composition of Chowdaiah.

Deekshita tries to persuade Chaya to yield to his desire, but in vain. His disappointment turns into vengeance. He tries to link her name with Kumar’s. Chaya’s repeated pleas are not heard. The mother and son are thrown out of the house. Having nowhere to go, the mother and son come to Krishna Sharma, a noble music teacher in the village. The disciples of Krishna Sharma try to exploit them again. They tell them that Krishna Sharma accepts disciples only after Rs.100 is paid, (which is not true and which Krishna Sharma is unaware of). Where to get the money from becomes a big question. Shankara suggests that Kumar can be sought for. So Chaya receives the money from Kumara, but unfortunately this scene is witnessed by Deekshita, who leaves no stone unturned in showing his vengeance.

Unaware of all this, Krishna Sharma accepts Shankara as his disciple. Shankara’s lessons begin with a violin presented to him with blessings by his Guru at the time of commencement of his music lessons. The sheer brilliance of Shankara is recognized and nurtured by Krishna Sharma. The lessons continue in a steadfast manner.

In the meanwhile, Kumar has to go out for 4-5 days. He entrusts the responsibility of his house to Chaya. This is noticed by the wicked Deekshita again, who takes advantage of the opportunity. He goes to
Krishna Sharma and builds up a cock and bull story about Chaya and Kumar. He tells Krishna Sharma that the 100 rupees that Chaya gave Krishna Sharma was given by none other than Kumar. Krishna Sharma is surprised to hear this as he has not received any money from Chaya. He asks Shankara where he got the money from and Shankara sincerely replies that it was given to him by Kumar. Enraged, Krishna Sharma starts to go to Kumar’s house to return the money to Chaya.

Having schemed a dirty plot against Chaya, Deekshita manages to enter the house of Kumar secretly in the absence of Chaya, and when Chaya enters, she is shocked to find Deekshita in the house. Deekshita abuses Chaya for not being pious. Chaya pleads, argues and then faces Deekshita with courage, telling him that it was because of men like Deekshita in our society that women are looked down upon now, though Woman in our country was given a sacred place by our ancestors. Furious and as preplanned, Deekshita attacks her. Just then Krishna Sharma enters and the scene there gives him a wrong message.

News spreads in the village that Chaya and Kumar have an illicit relationship. Krishna Sharma tells Chaya that if she is interested in Shankara’s welfare, she should go away, as he did not want Shankara to carry the slur and blur, which will affect his career as a musician. Chaya leaves Krishna Sharma’s house that night. Her reappearance in the film is only in the last scene.

Kumar returns to find a letter addressed to him by Chaya explaining her situation. The letter is also enclosed with the 100 rupee note that Krishna Sharma returned to Chaya.

Kumar entrusts the responsibility of Shankara to the Jahagirdar of the village, who is also a good promoter of music. The Jahagirdar, who is already impressed by Shankara’s singing, agrees to take care of him.

The Jahagirdar wants Krishna Sharma to teach music to his eight year old
daughter Nalini. So Shankara is brought up with Nalini in the Jahagirdar’s house, where Krishna Sharma teaches them music regularly.

The next scene shows the grown-up youth Shankara performing a violin concert for the All India Radio, Mysore. Guru Krishna Sharma, his daughter Radha, The Jahagirdar, his second wife Yashoda and the grown up Nalini are seen listening to the concert on the radio. Krishna Sharma is pleased at Shankara’s performance.

Deekshita’s villainy finds no end. He approaches the Jahagirdar with a marriage proposal for Nalini. But Jahagirdar does not want to do anything against the will of Nalini as he has given a word to her late mother that her marriage would be according to her wish. Nalini, who is already in love with Shankara, refuses to marry the old man whose proposal is brought to her by Deekshita. Shankara also loves Nalini, but is afraid of revealing it to her as she is the daughter of a rich man. Deekshita, still revengeful against Chaya, tries to persuade the Jahagirdar against Shankara, saying he is the son of a whore.

The forlorn lovers meet in the garden and exchange words of disappointment. But Nalini’s step-mother Yashoda enters the scene and unites them. The two are happily married.

The married couple obtains the permission of Guru Krishna Sharma, and goes to Mysore, where Shankara is scheduled to play for a concert. Here five historic places in and around Mysore are portrayed with beautiful photography- The beauty of the water in The Krishnarajasagara, The temple in Srirangapattana, The historical statue of Gomateshwara in Shravanabelagola, and the incomparable Sculptures of Beluru and Halebidu are shown, with a song in background, describing each the grandeur of each place and the song ends with a lively piece of music about Mysore.’

Krishna Sharma, suffering old age problems, wishes to see Shankara, who is
away on a concert schedule. The next scene is the famous scene of Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatam performing a concert with Chowdaiah (Shankara) on the violin, Palghat Mani Iyer on Mridangam and Sri Pudukkottai Mahadevan on morsing. It is this scene which has made the film unique.

At the end of the song something different from the usual concert tradition happens: swarakalpana on the violin by Chowdaiah after the taniavartanam at the end of which the climax of the film is brought out. Deekshita, chased by Kumara is made to fall on the feet of Chaya, and is made to confess his sins against Chaya. Chaya gracefully forgives him. He was the first to give them shelter after all. The film ends with the happy union of mother and son.

The Title Vani:

The title ‘Vani’, a Sanskrit word, is most aptly chosen for the film and suits the film satisfactorily, for the following obvious reasons:

- Vani is Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge, the symbol of sanctity. The word occurs frequently in the film. On several occasions, the idol of Vani is frequently displayed in the film—For example, it is shown in the beginning itself with the title card, when Shankara’s father worships the Goddess, when Nalini prays to the Goddess with the song, ‘Varadayini’, when Krishna Sharma sings the song ‘Vani Vani..’, etc.

- Vani is also the Goddess of music. The film is music based, and hence the title.

- Vani in Sanskrit means voice too. The voice of the society, the voice of a woman against social injustice, voice of Chaya, the voice raised against women exploitation- are all depicted in the film through the voice of Chowdaiah.
**Scenery in the film:**

Beautiful scenes of nature are captured in the film. The very first scene in the film is pleasant with the scene and activities of dawn. Sunrise, the holy river, trees and the purity of the village atmosphere are all brought out with beautiful photography. Peacock dancing is captured and in the cart sequence too, throughout the song, eye-capturing scenes are seen- paddy fields, coconut trees, white silvery clouds gliding almost imperceptibly against the blue sky.- Nature here is portrayed as a subject of joy and harmony.

Even as the film starts, beautiful scenes of dawn are shown. The sun rising in the east with the silvery surroundings, the trees, the water falls, the river flowing, the dew drops on the leaves- all this depict the serene atmosphere in nature.

**Social status of women as depicted in the movie:**

Throughout history, men have traditionally been regarded as superior to women in both power and status. A common view in most societies was that daughters should obey their fathers and wives should obey their husbands, and this view still holds true in most Eastern countries. Chaya’s role in the film is that of a submissive wife. We do not see her as an educated and independent lady, but we see her as an innocent and devoted wife, dedicated to her family. Throughout her life, Chaya suffers silently for no fault of hers. In the beginning, we see her as a happy, though not satisfied housewife. She is overjoyed to hear that her husband would receive one hundred rupees as remuneration for the palace concert, and when the blow came, she collects herself, and concentrates on bringing up Shankara, who is the only ray of hope for her. She would leave no stone unturned in seeing him prosper, would even stoop down to the level of serving as a maid in Deekshita’s house. But she rebels when Deekshita tries
to molest her. She tries in vain to convince him that he is equivalent to her father, as he has given them shelter. Here again, the social status of women in India is portrayed. Her helpless situation is taken advantage of by Deekshita, who continuously harasses her.

But later in the film a different Chaya is seen. We see her outburst in her dialogue with Deekshita in Kumar’s house. She quotes the famous saying that ours is a country where women were worshipped and now if this is the fate of woman today, It is because of the wickedness of men like Deekshita. She challenges him saying Truth ultimately wins. But the chauvinistic Deekshita wins and the hapless Chaya falls a victim to his scheme. As a sequel, she is asked by Krishna Sharma to go away. Chaya disappears leaving behind a note to Kumar, which also talks of the poor status of women in our society.

Deekshita’s wife’s role also talks of the role of a woman in a male-dominated society. As a wife she naturally does not like it when Deekshita is seen making passes at Chaya. When she questions, the answer she gets is shocking. Deekshita’s reply to her is, ‘my dear, times are changing. New things have to be discovered and the old ones forsaken and discarded.’

Chaya and Shankara are made to work hard in the ‘Gurukula’ and Chaya bears it all silently as she is solely interested in Shankara’s welfare. Neither Chaya nor Shankara is seen complaining against all the injustice they have to pass through. Even when Deekshita is made to fall on the feet of Chaya at the end of the film, Chaya’s reply is, ‘No. Please let him go. He is the first to have given us shelter after all’, which is typical of an Indian woman.

Ultimately truth conquers over the evil and Chaya is united with her son from whom she was long separated for years.

**Symbolism:**

As with its use of symbolism, Vani utilizes characterization to communicate
some of the major truths of the film. And, in fact, the characterization truly makes the film come alive in many respects. The individual characters are interesting in themselves, but the conflicts involving them and revolving around them are what make the characters of importance to the viewer.

The constant striving to maintain human dignity and family values against a system and against circumstances that seem bent on destroying those qualities is what gives Vani its drama and power. That conflict and its implied resolution for each of the main characters is the very essence of the film itself.

Chaya’s individual battle against the hardship, the injustices foisted upon her and Shankara and her sole effort to see Shankara mould into a musician bring the viewer a sense of kinship with the people on the screen. The very fact that not all of the characters survive the conflict just adds to realism. The saint artist dies in the floods, leaving behind his wife and son to face the cruel world. Without Chaya’s constant battle to survive amid the forces of nature and society, and without Chowdaiah’s music, Vani would not have emerged as the classic it is but would have joined countless unimportant films that have not survived the test of time.

Irony and all of the other dramatic and fictional elements utilized in the production of this film classic are made even more effective by their combination with the visual elements that are essential to the film medium. Unhealthy practices were there at that time too. Chaya stands as a symbol of Indian woman, Shankara is the symbol of an ideal student and a good son, Deekshita is the symbol of then prevalent practice of misusing the services of a disciple and his family, Krishna Sharma is the symbol of an ideal Guru and Nalini is the symbol of true love.

In the film, a continuous flow of starkly dramatic and powerful images are kept before the viewer, using a very tight and controlled cinematic composition.
Humor in the film:

Plenty of humorous anecdotes are introduced in the film. Major humor is seen in the character of Deekshita and the disciples of Krishna Sharma. Deekshita’s repeated dialogue that anybody who joins him as a disciple would be trained to render a *pallavi* within a year brings smile to the audience. Deekshita’s facial expressions and body language in rendering the *pallavi* is humorous and brings tears of joy to the audience. The disciples of Krishna Sharma trying to learn music in their practice session is also humorous.

Music in the film:

The use of sound can greatly enhance the dramatic message. The film is a music-based film. It is one of the very few films based on classical Karnataka Music. It is worth watching because a musician has made the film. It is because of this reason that good, chaste music is provided throughout to the audience that provides the emotional intensity emanating from the film. This makes the viewer concentrate on each word and every nuance of meaning.

Classical music is effectively made use of throughout the film. The lonely sound of howling wind is also used effectively to punctuate the dramatic movement within the film. The visual signs of a blowing wind serve as narrative transitions relating the death of the senior musician.

Another aspect of the film related to sound is the use of music as a background for the unfolding events. In Vani, the background music is rich.
The dominant theme music heard throughout the film is classical based. The very first scene has the background music in Udayaraga, indicating that it is morning. When Shankara starts learning from Krishna Sharma, lively music in western style is rendered in the background to indicate his swift progress. To indicate the natural calamity, a violent raga is played on the violin, adding to the foreshadowing. To show the grandeur of Mysore city, a lively song is sung again. The haunting refrains tunes are used sparingly to highlight the major emotional scenes. The music changes instantly into an optimistic and heroic hymn of hope, when Shankara begins his lessons with Krishna Sharma. From the opening to the final scene; the background music also plays an important role.

**Ragas adapted in the film:**

Variety of ragas is adapted for this film. Most of the ragas are Karnataka Music raga-s. The film starts with the title song which is in Mohana, which is a raktiraga. For the cart sequence Harikambhoji is chosen. Shankarabharana is dealt with in detail on the violin. Such an elaborate version of the raga is the first of its kind. Nowhere in any film do we see or hear such a detailed version of a classical raga in such a pure form. No accompaniment is being played. There is no change even in the location, which has made the film a classic.

Kambhoji is also explored to its minute details. The Raga is first played on the violin, which is then followed by the composition, ‘Chidambara Chaitanya’. Bhouli and Malayamaruta are chosen for Shiva’s dance with Parvati. Bhairavi is chosen for the pallavi, the sawarprastara of which suits the comic sequence most. Kanada is apt for the bhava of the composition ‘Irabaradu Paramatmana Kripe Illada Mele’. An elaborate rendition of Kalyani with violin accompaniment is chaste, with no glamour. Jhanjuti is chosen for the composition, ‘Varadayini Sree Vageeshwari Devi’. The raga enriches
the *bhakti rasa*. It may be remembered here that “*Kalaye Sree Kamalanayana Charane*” by Swati Tirunal on Devi is also in Janjuti.

Purity in the exposition of ragas can be enjoyed in Shankara’s violin concert for The All India Radio. A series of three ragas- Pantuvarali, Mohana and Madhyamavati are played. And lastly, to crown it all, Chembai sings Shanmukhapriya where not only the composition but decoration to it with *ragalapana* bringing out the essence of the raga, *neraval* to *charana* and *swaraprastara* followed by *taniavartanam* is planned with care and classicism.

Even in the background music, classical tunes are played. Most of the background music is played on the violin, which is a rarity. Flute is also used for background music. Harmonium is made use of in the film. The very first scene opens with a Udaya Raga, indicating that it is morning time, which is soon followed by Bilahari for worship of the Lord. Traditional Ragas like Natakuranji and Saramati are also used for background music.

**Songs:**

As music was an integral part of Chowdaiah’s life, his fictional characters not only talked about and spiritually debated several issues of public interest, they sang too.

All the classical numbers are delivered with clarity and authenticity. As many as fifteen songs- all either classical or classical-based are included in the film.
**Title Song-‘Vani, Vani..’**

This song is sung along with the display of the title card. It is set to Adi Tala with nade bheda in the last stanza. The song is in Mohana and invokes Goddess Saraswati. This is a lively song, classically tuned.

**Ide Nija Sadhana:**

This is a cart sequence. The simplicity and beauty of the village scene is portrayed in this song. Beautiful scenes of nature are captured in this song. This song is tuned to Harikambhoji and set to Adi tala.

**Chidambra Chaitanya:**

This composition is a purely classical composition and finds a place in Prof Ramaratnam’s book on Chowdhaiah’s compositions. This kriti is in Kambhoji and is set to aditala. The saint artist composes this song and sings before the idol of Shiva. He then drifts off to sleep, and in his sleep, he visualizes Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati dancing. The kriti is also embedded with jatis, describing Shiva and Parvati’s dance. Raga Bhupali and Malayamaruta are chosen for this dance. Harmonium is played for this song, which is a rarity now. The fact that the plays then used to be invariably accompanied with harmonium may be the reason for this, and also, Harmonium Sheshagiri Rao was a close friend of Chowdaiah and he helped him with the film immensely.

**Pallavi:**

This pallavi is in Bhairavi. This is a humorous anecdote in the film. Deekshita’s singing full of gestures not only makes one laugh, but also mocks at the unhealthy practice of musicians who do not sing without facial and body gestures. In his enthusiasm to show his talent, Deekshita half rises above the ground and throws his arms as if to hit the co-artists. The pallavi is in trishra roopaka tala.
**Kaliyugadali Harinamava Nenedare:**

This is a popular *devaranama* of Sri Purandaradasa in Kannada, adopted into the film. Little Shankara sings this *devaranama* in Raga Janjuti in the film. Saint Tyagaraja’s *Unchavrittiis* also being adopted in this scene. Shankara sings and collects alms from the people of the village. Impressed by his singing, Krishna Sharma comes out of his house and blesses the boy.

**Nanembude Bhanti:**

This is an *ugaboga* in Raga Dhanyasi sung in *gamaka* style. This is also sung by Shankara in the film. It explains the truths about life that this world is an illusion, and God is the ultimate Truth.

**Irabaradu Illada Mele:**

This is a *devaranama*, the *Pallavi* portion of which is shown in the film. The language is Kannada. Shankara is sitting with Guru Deekshita to perform. Deekshita takes up this *devaranama* in Kanada to impress the audience. He wants all the appreciation for himself and would not tolerate it if Shankara’s singing is appreciated by the public. His intension is clear: ‘The disciple should never earn a good name in the field as long as the Guru is alive’. Therefore he is extremely upset when Shankara is applauded and even garlanded by the audience. Burning with jealousy, he abruptly concludes the concert, with the Mangala.

Chowdaiah, while employing humor and entertainment in the song, also intelligently weaves the song in *srotovahayati*:

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Irabaradu
Illada mele Irabaradu
kripe illada mele irabaradu
paramatmana kripe illada mele irabaradu.
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Pun is also employed in the song. Not able to tolerate his student’s success, Deekshita sings, ‘*Irabaradu*’, meaning one should not live after seeing such a
success of his disciple!

While the facial expressions of Deekshita make the audience bubble with laughter, the jealousy he displays signifies his attitude towards his disciple.

**Navanandini Narayani:**

This is a *pakka* classical *kriti* in the raga Kharaharapriya set to Adi Tala. This *kriti* is also found with notation in Professor Ramaratnam’s book on Chowdaiah’s *kritis*. In the film too, it is presented traditionally by the wife of Deekshita in the traditional style with *tamboora*. The *kriti* is in Adi tala and when she sings the *kriti*, Shankara is seen listening to her attentively. The *kriti* has a *chitteswara*, which is sung after the Charana. This is sung by Bellary Lalita.

**Vaniveenapani:**

This is a beautiful song on Goddess Saraswati. This is in Dhanyasi, and is set to Adi tala. The song is in Sanskrit. Throughout the song, the idol of Vani is shown. Krishna Sharma is seen singing the song with Tambura before the idol of Vani in his house. At the end of the song, he blesses Shankara with a violin, which is already worshipped before the Goddess.

**Alapane in Kalyani:**

A detail rendering of Raga Kalyani for about three minutes is presented. The beauty of all the songs in the movie lies in the location. There is no shift in the location, which helps the audience to concentrate more on the music. Shankara is seen in his bed while presenting this *ragalapana* and Guru Krishna Sharma feels satisfied at his dedicated practice.

**Varadayini Shree Vageeshwari:**

This *kriti* is also a classical *kriti* in Sanskrit, which finds its place with notation in Anasuya Kulkarni’s book on her Guru Chowdaiah’s compositions. This is again a composition on Goddess Saraswati. Nalini, the daughter of Jahagirdar prays to the goddess with this song. Sanskrit
**Mateye:**

This is sung in *gamaka* style, with no laya. This is sung by Chowdaiah and Bellary Lalita. This is in Shuddha Saveri. ‘*Magana Abhyudayadasheyinda Kanmareyada Chaya*’ narrates the character of Chaya in the film. The scenery in this song is beautiful and pleasant, showing garden and landscape.

**Anuraga Avani Jeevana Nijabhoga:**

This is a love song sung by Nalini in the film. Nalini is happy and excited after her marriage with Shankara. This is a lively song showing her joy. Kadanakutoohala, therefore, suits the sequence. It is sung by Bellary Lalita.

**Ugaboga followed by the song ‘Mysuru Mysuru’:**

This song sequence is unique for its historical importance. Many historical places in and around Mysore are shown in this song. Krishnarajasagara dam is seen first, followed by the temple at Srirangapattana, the historical statue of Gomateshwara in Sharavanabelagola, the breath-taking, unforgettable sculptures in Belur and Halebidu. All this is sung with just violin accompaniment, concluding with Mysore and the tune immediately becomes lively, showing all the sight-seeing places of Mysore, including the legendary Mysore palace, and the Jayachamaraja circle. The song with the location at Mysore is tuned to Raga, Saama.

**Nikhila Papa Vinashini’ in Shanmukhapriya:**

An important aspect of ‘Vani’ is the on-screen appearance of a legend, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar. ‘Chembai’ had a poor opinion of
cinema and hardly saw films. The story goes that Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavat was not very willing to appear in the film. But the wily Chowdaiah introduced this scene and Bhagavat yielded. It was Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagatar’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 who came to know about this requested Chembai to 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. Chowdaiah kept his word and paid 5000 rupees to Chembai. Chembai happily adorned the Lord with the hull. And Chowdaiah had the satisfaction of being a part of this holy service to the Lord.

‘Nikihila Paapa Vinashini’ in Shanmukhapriya, composed by Chowdaiah exclusively for the occasion is rendered by Chembai in his usual lively and virile style. The song was shot at the Chembai village where a large crowd gathered to watch the proceedings, a novelty in those days. It was a long reel and its on-screen running time is 7 minutes and 28 seconds. This is the only classical song in Karnataka music in the film industry which is sung in the Kacheri style fully with alapana, kalpanaswara-s and tani avartanam for such a long duration. It is a musical treat.

The Kriti is set to Trishra Triputa tala. The specialty of this particular song is that it is sung by the great stalwart of the time Sri Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavat; Violin accompaniment is by Chowdaiah himself, mridangam is played for this song by Sri Palghat Mani Iyer, the Mridangam legend and the morsing is by Pudukkottai Mahadevan, who owned a hotel at Trichy in
later years. There is a separate reel for Mani Iyer’s *taniyavartana*. And another special feature is that Chowdaiah resumes *swaraprastara* after the *taniavartnam* in this song.

**Characters:**

**Shankara’s Father:**

Nowhere in the film do we come across his name. He is a devoted musician totally into music, so much so that Chaya complains about his being irresponsible. He is fond of his family, but his involvement in music leads him to intense spirituality, which in turn leads him to a sort of inevitable resignation, asceticism and a total submission to the realization of God. He is not only a true musician but also a composer. We find the portrayal of Chowdaiah’s character in him. A passing reference to the seven-stringed violin too, is made by him in the film. It is Chowdaiah’s words when he tells his son Shankara that Srihari (The Lord) has to be pleased with his seven-stringed violin. His routine every morning of worshipping the Lord and his violin is a replica of Chowdaiah’s own routine. This role is played by Chowdaiah in the film.

**Chaya:**

Chaya is the embodiment of truth and honesty. Chaya is a traditional Indian lady, who is devoted to her family. She is happy and proud of her husband, but a little displeased about him because he does not pay much
attention to the family needs. It is with great difficulty she has to make both ends meet. She is therefore very happy when her husband is offered Rs.100 as remuneration for a concert at the palace. It is also to be noted that a hundred rupees mattered a lot then. When fate takes away her husband, she finds herself in deep shock, but soon recovers and concentrates on the upbringing of Shankara, who becomes the sole source of joy for her.

She is naïve and simple. Her helpless situation is exploited constantly throughout the film. Deekshita’s ill intention in accepting Shankara as his disciple is made clear to her soon after her stay there. She is shocked to know his motive. She first pleads and tries to explain that being her benefactor, he is only a father to her. When her pleas are not heard, she rebels and argues that a woman is given a high pedestal by our ancestors, but it is because of cruel men like Deekshita that women in her situation are looked down upon now. Finding the unreachable grapes sour, Deekshita’s disappointment turns into vengeance and Chaya ultimately finds herself a pray to Deekshita’s trap.

Chaya’s unflinching affection for her child prepares her for yet another sacrifice and listening to Krishna Sharma’s advice, she quits his house silently, for the welfare of Shankara.

Towards the end of the film, we see her reappearance at Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavat’s concert with Shankara’s accompaniment. She is drawn to the boy playing violin and she screws her eyes to see the player.
Her inner being recognizes him as her son and soon after it is confirmed by Kumara, who brings Deekshita into the scene and before the world, Deekshita is made to confess his sin. Chaya again plays the Indian woman when she pardons Deekshita saying it was he who first gave them both food and shelter, and that a Guru should never be humiliated. This role is played by Bellari Lalita, who is also known by the name Chandramma.

**Shankara:**

In Shankara we see the image of Chowdaiah again. His sincerity in learning music, his steadfastness in achieving his sole goal and his final success in becoming a top ranking accompanist are all stages of Chowdaiah’s life.

He is an obedient son and very much attached to his mother. He is an obedient disciple too. Deekshita’s ill treatment of the boy is patiently borne by the boy, though he is young and hot-blooded. He is not moved by the applause of the audience when he is more praised than his Guru Deekshita. Success does not get into his head. He is panicky when he finds his mother missing, and is grateful to the noble Jahagirdar, who accepts to take care of the boy. He grows up with Nalini, to whom he is attracted. He is hesitant to reveal his love to her because of his status. He is extremely upset when he overhears Deekshita saying that he is the son of a whore. But he is soon consoled by Nalini and is happily united with Nalini by Yashoda, the step-mother of Nalini. Chowdaiah’s image is again exhibited in his character in his unrivalled gurubhakti, both towards Deekshita and Krishna Sharma.

In the end, he is happily united with his mother, towards whom his respect
and love are seen in his song, ‘Magana Abhyupdayadasheyinda Kanmareyada Chaya...Maya’, meaning Chaya, who disappeared from his sight for the sake of his well-being. The young Shankara’s role is played by Master Murthy and the grown-up Shankara’s role by Chowdaiah.

**Nalini:**

The daughter of a rich man, Nalini is a pampered child. She is fond of music and of Shankara. In all her desperate situations, she remembers her mother who is no more. She shyly reveals her love for Shankara to Nalini and prays to the Goddess that she be united with him. She has a good sense of humor, which is revealed when she chides Shankara that he need not teach her violin as she is well aware that if Deekshita is sought for, he will train her to sing a *pallavi* within an year. Being the only issue of a rich landlord, she finds herself lonely and therefore finds Radha’s company a solace. She boldly turns away the marriage proposal brought by the wicked Deekshita and expresses her wish to marry Shankara. In the end, she is happily united with her beloved surprisingly by Yashoda, her stepmother. This role is played by Salem Dhanabhagyam.

**Deekshita:**

Deekshita is the personification of jealousy, cunningness, wickedness and chauvinism. He is the storage
of all bad qualities and is also humorous. He loves to boast about himself, not only to his wife, but to the entire world. He cares not for ethics. His motto is- The disciple should never earn name or fame when the Guru is alive’. And also, when The jahagirdar informs him that Nalini’s marriage should be left to her choice as that was his wife’s wish, Deekshita’s reply is, ‘when there is no value even for the words for those who are still alive, where is the value of a promise made by someone who is no more?’.

He accepts Shankara as his disciple with the sole intention of exploiting him and his mother. His behavior towards his disciple is not only unkind, but uncivilized. It is hard for him to digest the fact that Shankara’s singing is of a higher quality than his own. He is therefore immensely upset when Shankara and not he is being garlanded at a concert by one of the audience in appreciation. He is suddenly seized by the fear that Shankara’s popularity may mar his reputation. He abruptly sings the mangala, bringing the concert to a close.

He is daring and even with his wife makes no attempt to hide his wish to have an illicit relationship with Chaya. He is not perturbed when he is found out by his wife, but cruelly tells her that new things have to replace the old ones with time. His pride is hurt when he finds Chaya not cooperative and he decides to take his vengeance against her. He cunningly schemes a trap for Chaya and she innocently falls a victim into it.

Not satisfied with all the bad done to Chaya and her son, he continues to
pester Shankara indirectly, though he is not under his control anymore. His wicked mind plans to separate Shankara and Nalini. He brings the proposal of an old man for Nalini as this would be a good excuse to separate her from Shankara and argues with the Jahagirdar convincingly that though the Jahagirdar has also remarried at an old age, he is happy with his wife Yashoda, whose proposal for the Jahagirdar was also brought by him (Deekshita).

Finding the *jahagirdar* convinced, he tries to brainwash the *jahagirdar*’s mind saying that Shankara is the son of a whore, but is extremely disappointed to find that it does not work. In the end he is made to fall on the feet of Chaya, who gracefully forgives him. This role is played by K. Hiranniah.

**Krishna Sharma:**

Sharma personifies a noble character. He is highly impressed by Shankara’s singing and recognizes the artist in him in the beginning itself and is therefore happy to accept him as his disciple when Chaya approaches him. He is nevertheless hasty in his decision in asking Chaya to go away if she is interested in her son’s bright future; but soon realizes his mistake when Kumar shows him Chaya’s letter.

Unlike Deekshita, he is sincere in his teaching Shankara. He openly appreciates Shankara’s dedication to music and determines to make his future. He is happy with Shankara’s learning and shows his satisfaction on accepting a deserving student like Shankara when he hears him perform on the All India Radio. Shankara is not only his student, but is like a son to
him. His children too, grow extremely fond of Shankara. Even on the death bed, he aspires to see Shankara, who is away on a concert tour. Arekere Narayana Rao has played this role in the film.

**Radha:**

Pandari Bai has the role of Radha, the daughter of Krishna Sharma in this film. This is the first film of Pandari Bai. Radha is a close friend of Nalini, and it is to her Nalini opens her mind. She and her younger brother are brought up without a mother. Shankara takes care of them like a brother.

**Murali:**

This role is played by N. Nanjundaswamy, the disciple of Chowdaiah. Nanjundaswamy has acted as the younger brother of Pandari Bai and the son of Krishna Sharma in the film.

**Vani - a Classic:**

Vani is a classic to the core. The theme, the artistic presentation and the music of Chowdaiah is a wholesome package. The beautiful photography, pure classical music with long *alapana*-s and *kriti*-s with no artificiality or glamour, relevance to the story, weighty dialogues
with no loose talks, flaccidity and laxity – all this make it a balanced whole.

In the film we see Chowdaiah as the kind of artist who walks the thin line between chaos and classical music and musically turns it into fusion. There are a few times when the movie feels a bit drawn out, but the gorgeous action scenes and impressive dialogues really hold the audience’s attention.

**Cinematic techniques used in the film:**

The technique of carrying a word forward to the next scene is used by Hirannayya and Chowdaiah in the film. The word ‘Aapatbaandhava‘ (he who saves the downtrodden, the needy) is uttered by Chaya as reply to her son’s query-’Who is our bandhu?’ which is immediately taken up as *pallavi* by Deekshita in the next scene-‘Aapatbaandhava Bhairavi Deva’.

When Chaya is asked by Krishna Sharma to go away for Shankara’s welfare, Chaya is in a dilemma. The technique of the image of the heroin appearing before herself, talking to her and finally helping her to solve the dilemma is used here, though this is a 70 year old movie.

The film when released did not make a hit. It was a flop and Chowdaiah had to sell his car. Chowdaiah’s money was lost and he did not venture on such a project again. "Everyone buys cars after making a movie, I had to sell mine” - he lamented. In any case, Chowdaiah gained valuable experience from this venture, and the film found a permanent place in Kannada Cinema, because of historical interest. This experiment shows Chowdaiah’s adventurous nature.

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