CHAPTER FOUR

4a. NAGASWARAM’S INFLUENCE OF KARNATAKA VOCAL MANODHARMA

There are many lines of thought when it comes to the extent of the influence of Nagaswaram on Karnataka classical Vocal music and rendition. While senior scholars and musicians such as R Vedavalli, RK Srikantan and Dr BM Sundaram believe that the Nagaswaram has made a deep impact on the system of Karnataka classical music itself, especially during its formative years, musicians such as Vid TN Sheshagopalan and Vid Sanjay Subrahmanyan believe that the influence of the Nagaswaram has been more on the individual musician than on the system. However during the course of my research I have found certain pointers suggesting that the influence of the stylistic rendition of Nagaswaram music on the individual inadvertently led to an influence on the system. There also are a lot of suggestive evidence as to the possibility of the Nagaswaram playing a crucial role in the evolution of the core content of Karnataka classical music. There is one fact on which all senior musicians agree, which is the impact Nagaswaram music and the Isai Vellala clan had on the element of Manodharma Sangeeta. This chapter looks into the influence of the Nagaswaram on the Manodharma Sangeeta of Karnataka classical music with special reference to Vocal music.

Of all the aspects of a Vocal rendition, the segment which is said to have been influenced by the Nagaswaram most is Manodharma Sangita or the art of improvisation. In case of the Krithi one can say that Vocal music influenced all other instruments since, vocalization of the lyrics was of utmost importance. There is again the exception in the case of the Nagaswaram which took up the Krithi and further embellished it with ornate sangathis characteristic of the Nagaswaram. These sangatis and stylistic Krithi rendition could have been picked up by Vocalists who were inspired by the Nagaswaram. Vocalists who have been influenced by the Nagaswaram style are known to have a very ornate rendition of Krithis. TN Sheshagopalan is one such vocalist who is known for intricate and extensive Sangathis in many compositions he sings such as the Bhairavi ata tala Varna or the usually plaintive Bindumalini raga Krithi- “Yenthamuddho”. During the course of my interview, Violin maestro M chandrashekaran went on to add that he tries to play many compositions
such as “Chinnanjiru kiliye” with the exact Nagaswaram-type sangathis due to his love for their style.

Karnataka music grew in the cradle of temple rituals and its festivities. Vocal music later branched off into the space of the Royal courts where it was practised as ‘art-music’. While vocal music went through many stages from the Royal courts, the Bhakti movement to the Music Sabhas’, Nagaswaram remained music largely relatively unchanged in its performance space and content till the emergence of the Sabhas. The journey of Nagaswaram music from the temples (music as a religious offering) to Sabha concerts (art-music scenario) runs parallel to the journey of Vocal (Vedavalli, Raga swaroopa lakshanam, 2014)\(^{84}\). According to Sangita Kalanidhi Vid R Vedavalli, the traditions of Karnataka music were born from the Nagaswaram tradition in temples, where there was “unbridled, free flow of Manodharma”\(^{84}\). Vid Padma Bhushan RK Srikanthan very authoritatively stated that today’s Alapana paddhathi (tradition or system) is entirely a contribution by the music of the Nagaswaram, during my interview at his residence. It is true that the Veena has been of great influence to Vocal music, however its influence holds significance in the area of Gamakas and Thana. He further went on to elucidate that the original Mysore Veena Bani laid more emphasis on Meetu rather than gamakas. The gamakas we hear today are a later addition. It is the Tanjore Veena Bani that laid more emphasis on Gamakas and it is from there that it spread to all of Karnataka classical music according Vid RK Srikanthan.

What is Manodharma and why is it given such an important place in Karnataka classical music. The term ‘Manodharma’ in Karnataka music refers to the skill of being able to expand or improvise on the basic melodic scale chosen. Most music systems of the world rely on the performer to be able to render pre-composed music to perfection. The composer and the composition attains a lot of significance in a performance. In most cases, the concert highlights the merit and charm of the composition, the performer either being the composer himself or a talented interpreter. The originality of the composition reigns supreme and the script is not to be tampered with. This is why concerts such as those of the western-classical system rely on many rehearsals to perfect a presentation. This is also made possibly by the fact that western music is largely based on the principles of Harmony and chord

\(^{84}\) Sruti – February 2014, Pg. 38 Issue 353
progressions which in turn demands careful composition. Whereas Karnataka classical music is essentially raga music. Its development is based on the melodic progression of musical notes within a scale. The Bhakti movement and composers such as the Trinity gave Karnataka classical music the gift of brilliant music compositions. However before these compositions attained popularity, the performance of Karnataka classical music was solely revolved around the display of the prowess to improvise or Manodharma with the aid of Raga alapana and Pallavi. It was the Mallari, Rakthi and Pallavi in case of the Nagaswaram. Even after the emergence and rise in popularity of the music compositions, the pull of showcasing one’s own Manodharma has been so compelling that Raga alapana, Neraval and Swarakalpana (tools of improvisation) came to be added to the rendition of Krithis to showcase the melodic scale it is set in various forms. The Krithis became a mode of raga-expression and a vehicle to carry forth the skill of Manodharma. It became a rather clever device in captivating the lay audience into listening to art-music. The Karnataka classical performer even today relies on Manodharma to showcase his or her musical prowess and individuality. It is Manodharma that enables the non-composer to still be a good musician by being a great performer. Here the interpretation of raga takes precedence over that of the composition. Manodharma ensures that an otherwise traditional system of music, classical in nature does not become stale. A beautiful balance of tradition and innovation is ensured.

Manodharma can be classified into 4 branches:

1. Raga Alapana
2. Thana or Madhyama Kala
3. Neraval
4. Swara kalpana.

Raga Alapana is considered to be the most beautiful and important technique of improvisation in Karnataka classical music. A good skill and bhava in alapana has been considered as the ultimate pre requisite for a good Karnataka classical musician. Raga alapana consists purely of raga exposition. (Janakiraman, 2008) According to Dr SR Janakiraman, raga alapana was traditionally done using the auspicious words “Anantham”. Later syllables and meaning less letters and sounds like ra and na got

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85 Essentials of musicology in South Indian Music – Prof SR Janakiraman, Pg. 265
added. It is possible that the “sthoba” syllables also contributed to the present usage of ‘Ta’ ‘da’ ‘ri’ ‘na’ as supporting steps to the alapana format. Like tiny ledges which serve as a foot hold while scaling a cliff. ‘Raga alapana is non-rhythmic in scope however does have some loose rhythmic progression, which should be clearly perceivable during the course of elaboration’ according to Dr SR Janakiraman. What is this loose rhythmic progression? The concept of a rhythm in alapana being perceivable to the trained ear could have come very early to the practitioners of Vocal Karnataka classical music. It is this rhythmic balance in alapana that holds it together and does not disturb the audience at a sub conscious level. This loosely kept rhythm differentiates the raga rendition between that of a young musician and a seasoned performer. The Nagaswaram had given this aspect of Raga alapana utmost importance and ensured that this loosely held rhythm is also perceivable by the lay audiences which often comprised of rural folk. It did this with the accompaniment of the Tavil, which maintained a soft accompaniment in a relaxed Eka tala, drumming on softly during Raga alapana. This practise almost gave their raga a pulse, which helped the Nagaswaram musicians hold during long durations of raga alapana (they would perform the alapana of a single raga at least forty minutes during temple processions) without losing their audience’s attention. The rhythmic accompaniment provided by the Tavil ensured that the alapana ran in a proper channel. These concerts were attended by many vocalists and the Nagaswaram’s progression and proportion of raga alapana is said to have made a deep impact on the musical sensibilities of the vocalists who often sat through the entire night. It could have been possible that the aesthetic sense of a “loosely kept rhythm in alapana” which we follow in Vocal music even till today is a result of a bequest from the previous generations of musicians who were all exposed to popular Nagaswaram music in the hay days.

If we closely look into the history of Karnataka Vocal music, it developed in its early stages under temple patronage and later on through court patronage. The first seeds of classical music were sown when the Vedas were set to a simple tune comprising of three swaras. The Vedas were clearly set to a melodic tune to facilitate memorization during the days when no music scripts had developed. Gradually from the three modes of singing the Vedas, the other swaras emerged. Thus the evolution of tune or melodic progressions in Karnataka classical music was closely related to the growth and singing of sacred literature. After the Bhakti movement sahithya or words
became an important part of vocal music. The format of vocal music always comprised of verses in praise of the lord set to music, which in turn gave way to ancient musical forms like the Sama gana, Tevaram, Tirupugazh, Divya Prabandha, Dasara pada, Druvapada, Pada, Varnam etc.

So when and how did the concept of improvisation and raga alapana emerge as a form of musical expression (independent of sahitya) in vocal music? Was this part of ritual too or did ancient society develop the concept of art for the sake of art? As a medium of expressing the artists music thought (independent of any words).

We find evidence of the emergence of improvisations in Vocal music within the Sangita Ratnakara of Sarangadeva (13\textsuperscript{th} AD). The development of melodic scales in the form of Grama, Murchana and Jati had facilitated the development of Ragas as individual identities. They were no longer tied down as a tool for Sahitya development. Passages of swaras in Raga sancharas had developed and were called Kaku. This Kaku formed the core of the Raga-picture. Thus these were melodic phrases that defined the Ragas identity and progression. “(Ayyangar, 1972)\textsuperscript{86} When the melody of a Swara overflows the Sruti on which it stands and embraces neighbouring Srutis it is Swara Kaku”. These Kakus’ gave rise to Alapti.

There were two principles of Raga presentation during the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. Presentation was called Vahini and its two branches were Gita Vahini and Alapti Vahini. This Alapti was the ancestor of our modern day Raga Alapana. Alapti was quite different from today’s alapana. The ragas were not rendered on one fixed shruti-swaras or Sadja. Each raga had its own tonic based on the principles of Graha-bhedha. This varying tonic was called the Sthayi-Swara. Sarangadeva mentions different stages of raga alapit. In the second stage of Alapti he specifies the mode of elaboration using tetra chords. Thus it is evident that being able to elaborate using minimal swaras or four swaras at a time was quint essential for Alapti. Thus this concept of a Raga elaboration is said to have developed in Vocal music around the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. However Nagaswaram which was known by names in Tamil works as ‘Peruvangiyam’ or ‘Utthaala Venu’ is believed to have developed the art of Raga elaboration based on the same principles quite early according to Dr. BM Sundaram. Regarding Vocal music, the Sanskrit treatises such as Natyasstra (Bharata) and

\textsuperscript{86} Sangeeta Damodara- History of south Indian (Carnatic) Music – R Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, Pg. 76, ch11
Brihaddeshi (Matanga) don’t give enough proof of Raga Alapana. (Ayyangar, 1972)\(^87\) However what Sarangadeva describes as ‘Roopaka Alapti’ during 13\(^{th}\) century was believed to have existed during the 3\(^{rd}\) Century and was called as ‘Pannalathi’ by Illango in his Sillapadikaram (3CE – 2AD). This Roopaka Alapti or Pannalathi was the ancestor of Neraval and represents early attempts of improvisational elaboration of parts of a composition. The compositions were set to a particular Pann, like the Tevaram. These attempts could either correspond to early attempts of Neraval or singing in the Viruttam or Ugabhoga style. This gives us certain clues that perhaps Neraval was an ancient practise in Vocal music, which started its journey as a celebration of religious texts and that Alapana was a later development which, inspired by the Nagaswaram, slowly found its foot hold in ancient singing. In any case, the ancient Panns were more similar to fixed tunes. On the basis of certain clues, Musicologists believe that the Pann alathi went hand in hand with instruments such as the Venu or Yazh which set the Pann before the vocalist could start the composition (the Pann was played on the instrument before the song was sung). Which means the artist first played the melodic progression of the raga (alapana) on the venu or yazh (which perhaps corresponds to a crude alapana on the instrument) and then stared the actual singing of the composition set it the particular pann. The instruments played an important role in establishing the melodic mode or raga. It is interesting to note that most ancient vocalists played on instruments to as suggested by ancient works such as the Sillapadikaram (Madhavi’s guru played the ‘Yazh’ and ‘Venu’. Madhavi herself was an accomplished singer and ‘Yazh’ player). The ancient artist communities were structured in a way that an artists needed to have the skill of playing an instrument and singing. Perhaps the divide between a singer and instrumentalist did not exist. The ancient Tamil works seem to suggest that the aalati was played on the instrument before the section of words which were sung or vocalised. The rise and advancement of art music could not have been possible without the experiments conducted on instruments. While the Veena played an important role in establishing grama, jati, murchana, the srutis and new scales through graha bheda (called Kuzhal thirippu in the Tamil Sangam works), the Nagaswaram picked up these music scales for further elaboration. Pann Alathi of Vocal music was a very basic form of Alapana in the midst of the rendition of compositional forms advanced at a quick pace in structural

\(^{87}\) History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music – R Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, Pg. 79, ch11
form than when compared to *Manodharma Sangita* according to Dr BM Sundaram. Thus history seems to have suggested the use of instruments as a crucial tool for the growth for Raga alapana and vocalists definitely looked at the instruments for inspiration and assistance. (This is made all the more possible since the lines between a vocalist and instrumentalist was blurred till the 15\(^{th}\)-16\(^{th}\) centuries).

As specified earlier it is important to note that the ancient temple rules dictated that Nagaswaram should not play *sahithya* for religious worship, whereas Vocal music was founded on the bedrock of chanting religious doctrines from the time of the Sama Veda. It also made no sense for an instrument to play compositions where the words are not perceivable anyway. Even though both Karnataka classical Vocal and instrumental music had its birth and development in the arms of Temple traditions, it is these very traditions that created the difference in the characteristics of Vocal and Nagaswaram music. Nagaswaram and Vocal music were siblings born out of the same parents with separate parallel paths cut out for them.

According to Vid Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer (N Ravikiran, 1998)\(^{88}\), Dr BM Sundaram, Dr R Vedavalli and Vid RK Srikantan, our *alapana paddhathi* or the format of raga alapana is structurally and conceptually, an inspiration from the Nagaswaram music traditions. Throughout the history of Karnataka classical music, we see the growth of Vocal music harping on the growth of compositional patterns. From the Samagana or the Sama Vedic chants, then the Prabandhas, then the Devaranamas or Dasarapadas, Geetha, Varnam, Padam, Keerthana and Krithi etc. multiple changes in ancient society like the Bhakthi movement resulted in the use of Vocal music as a powerful tool of social and religious propaganda. Thus the Sahithya content was of great importance to Vocal music. So where did vocalists derive the inspiration of alapana as a means of independent artistic expression. Most scholars believe that Raga alapana was an influence and inspiration from Nagaswaram method of expanding a raga. Alapana existed within Vocal music since the ancient times, however its horizons is believed to have been broadened by the Nagaswaram’s music which served as an inspiration. It was a time when the singer who specialised in the art of Classical music outside the realm of Bhakti Sangeet was the upper class

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musicians, maintained by the Royal courts. The practise of elaborating Raga alapana could have gained a foothold among Vocalists with the rise of Royal patronage, the general historical direction of music patronage being temple – royal courts – zamindars – Sabhas. Most of the other vocalists attached outside were singers attached to temples like the Oduvars who specialised in the Tevaram then saints who specialised in music for religious discourses like the Haridasas and the Natuvanars who provided Vocal accompaniment to the Dancers. The temples rarely patronised or engaged the Sangita Vidwans or classical musicians. Only the Royal courts maintained upper class Sangita vidwans who specialised in Raga and Pallavi. even while singing compositions the artists would render their own compositions and not that of fellow contemporaries and rarely of older musician (Kumaresh, 2014). Among all the vocalists till the early 19th century only the upper class elite practised Raga alapana and Manodharma Sangita within the Royal court premises. The Vocal communities outside the Royal houses such as the Haridasas and Bhagavathars were hardly considered as Sangita Vidwans and performed Bhakthi Sangita rather than 'Shastriya Sangita'. The court musicians practised raga alapana as part of the Raga and Pallavi concerts within the court. There were Isai Vellala vocalists and Devadasis who sang Karnataka classical music within the private constrains of rich zamindars and influencing patrons. Also, contrary to popular belief, there were very few raga which were in use for Raga elaboration and Pallavi, popular ones being Shankarabharanam, Todi, Bhairavi, Kamboji, Pantuvarali and Kalyani according to Vid PS Narayanaswami. Court musicians achieved (with special reference to Vocalists) achieved excellence even within a limited repertoire, be it compositions or Ragas. They would select their favourite raga and achieve high standards of Manodharma by relentless exploration and performance. Examples for this were the court musicians of the Tanjore Court, Todi – Sitaramayya, Attana Appaya and Shankarabharanam – Narasayya (Sambamoorthy, Great Composers - Tyagaraja, 1954). According to the journal of the Music Academy, even ragas such as Kharaharapriya gained popularity after Tyagaraja composed a large number of compositions in them. When Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer sang raga Kharaharapriya in the Trivandrum royal house in 1873, it was the first time the Kerala royal house had heard

89 "Patterns followed in a Karnataka concert" - a conversation with Dr Jayanthi Kumaresh. Ananya magazine, August 2014, Pg. 13
90 Great Composers – Book II – Prof P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 20
it as part of a Raga alapana (Lakshmanapillai, 1931). Whereas scales such as Varali and Kharaharapriya were already part of the Raga alapana repertoire of the Nagaswaram vidwans and very much part of the Temple tradition according to Dr BM Sundaram. The Nagaswaram had already established a very advance, elaborate and intricate technique of raga alapana by the 18th century. According to Rangaramanuja Ayyangar it was Nagaswaram Chinna Pakiri who popularised the exposition of ragas such as Hemavathy, Hamsabhramari, Keeravani, Simhendramadhyama and Vachaspathi for raga alapana. Chinna Pakiri also never played krithis (this is the same Chinna Pakiri who was famous for his alapana of ragas such as Begada for four hours). It was always Ragam, Rakthi and Pallavi. After him, TN Rajarathinam who came much later, carried the mantle forward playing elaborate alapana in ragas such as Charukesi (Ayyangar, 1972). The practise of rendering raga alapana in raga Charukeshi and Shanmukhapriya in vocal music is said to have been a direct result of the exposure to Nagaswaram music which inculcated these ragas music earlier into their improvisation. It is believed by many senior Vidwans that vocalists who were exposed to the alapana of the Nagaswaram picked up many of the Ragas which were played by the Nayanakaras and rendered it in their vocal elaboration.

Another important aspect we must consider is the frequency with which Vocalists were able to perform Raga alapana and duration of the performance, when compared to the Nagaswaram. Contrary to popular belief, the court musicians would sing a single raga Alapana and Pallavi in instalments over a couple of days and not at a stretch throughout the day. The duration of each performance for a day would not exceed four hours. For example a three to four hour Shankarabharanam alapana will be rendered along with Tana for the day’s performance with the Pallavi being elaborated the next day. It is humanly impossible otherwise at a period when the vocalists had no help from the mike and had to rely of singing in a higher frequency than their natural pitches to be heard. There are plenty of Royal court records like the Mysore, Travancore and Tanjore courts that stand testimony to this fact. Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer and Patnam Subramania Iyer themselves would not sing for more than 3 hours (Bharatham Narayanaswami Ayyar, 1934). In contrast, the

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91 1931- The Journal of the Music Academy of Madras Vol II No1, Pg. 82
92 History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music – R Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, Pg. 323
93 The Music Academy Journal, 1934 - Vol V, No’s 1 to 4, Pg. 119
Nagaswaram artists were known to play all night, a single raga as confirmed to me by senior musicians such as RK Srikantan and PS Narayanaswamy (who have taken part and witnessed these all night music performances). In the ancient music world, especially till the end of 18th century, the temple, its daily proceedings and special festivals actively engaged Nagaswaram artists with great frequency. It provided ample opportunities for the Nagaswaram players to explore Raga alapana, Manodharma being the most essential part of their performance. Added to this were the opportunities when the Nagaswaram was engaged at Naming ceremonies, marriages etc. in wealthy merchant households. Whereas things were very different for the classical vocalists, for whom opportunities to perform were much lesser. The upper class musicians, being the only ones specialising in Raga alapana, were exclusively attached to the royal courts and banned from performing in public. Those who performed in public were looked down upon. Coimbatore Raghavier was the first musician to sing in public and go against the wishes of his patron, His highness Aiyilium Tirunal Rama Varma, king of the Trivandrum royal court of which he was the Asthana Vidwan. He was banished to Haripad for this act and later called back for a competition with Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer at the royal house (Pillai T. L., 1930).

Till then no Classical vocalists dared perform in public. Even opportunities to perform in the Royal courts were rare for the classical vocalists. During the 18th century, the royal court records show that there were close to 360 musicians in the Tanjore court and each Vidwan had the opportunity of singing in the royal Sangita Mahal for only one day during the entire year (Sambamoorthy, Great Composers - Tyagaraja, 1954). This annual exhibition was the most coveted moment in the career of the classical vocalists. So there definitely must have been a great yearning among the Vocalists for performance space and inspiration. All this gives us an idea that perhaps the Nagaswaram artists had more opportunities to hone their skills of Raga alapana and challenge themselves during their performance which were definitely more frequent than the vocalists. Vid TN Sheshagopalan confirmed to me in a telephonic interview that in the hay days the Nagaswaram vidwans, who were heard more often, enjoyed more popularity and fame than the vocalists.

94 The Journal of the Music Academy of Madras 1930 - Vol I No1, Pg. 243
95 Great Composers – Book II – Prof P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 20
While describing the music of the Nagaswaram Vid Dr Ritha Rajan, Musicologist-Musician and the former Head of the Dept. of Music, Queen Marys' College, Chennai, referred to them as “Lakshiya Vidwans” or musicians who imbibed knowledge of the practise and rendition of music. She described it as singing or playing music by constantly imbibing what one has heard. She also went on to add that, learning through Karna parampara was and has always been the actual process of learning music. According to Dr Ritha Rajan, the Nagaswaram Vidwans are all Lakshiya vidwans. The court musicians had a very clear Lakshana or grammar in music that had to be followed by them. However the process which was and has been of utmost importance is the assimilation and learning of Raga alapana through the Karna parampara with utmost focus on lakshya in Karnataka classical music while the Lakshana of Ragas and the alapana has changed over the time based on the practise and rendition of music. In this context the Nagaswaram played an important role in the dissemination of the experience of Lakshya till the 19th century. Where else could anyone turn for listening to raga alapana? The only access for the practical experience of the Ragas and Raga alapana in its full glory was by listening to the Peria Melam. According to Dr Ritha Rajan, many court musicians would gather to listen to the music of the Nagaswaram especially during temple festivals to listen to the Alapana since that was the only publically available Karnataka classical music during the ancient times. Unlike our present times where Audio CD recordings, internet and Television cater to a lot of our music listening, the only scope for classical entertainment in a public and larger domain during the yester years was provided by the Nagaswaram.

Within our present system of Raga alapana there are some ornamental elements which are credited as contributions of the Nagaswaram to Karnataka Vocal music. They are Jaru, Bruga, Janti varsai or Viraladi prayoga and the Uruttu. There are also other elements such as distinct vocalisation of the syllables Ta da ri na in Alapana phrases, found in Vocalists like Semmangudi Srivasa Iyer and Madurai Somasundaram Pilai influenced by Nagaswaram music. Then one can also observe a distinct path in the progression, vision and elaboration of Raga alapana in artists influenced by Nagaswaram music.
One of the most significant impact the Nagaswaram music had on the Vocal alapana content today is the usage of ‘Jaru’ or gliding passages by vocalists. This Jaru prayoga was a very characteristic feature of the Nagaswaram music and has been explained in detail in the second chapter under the significance of the Nagaswaram music. Before the advent of the flute and violin, the Nagaswaram was the only instrument whose technique included polished rendition of the Jaru. The quality of the Jaru one gets to hear in the Nagaswaram music is of very highly quality in terms of clarity and smoothness. Vocalists who were inspired by the music of the Nagaswaram successfully absorbed this ornamental element and today it is an integral part of raga Alapana. The Jaru can be rendered very effectively in the human voice. One can hear it today in the vocalists who have been influenced by Nagaswaram music such as TN Sheshagopalan and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (AUDIO R4a.18). Many instruments include the Jaru in their rendition today however the Nagaswaram maestros such as TN Rajarathinam used it to maximum effect to create a cascading effect and there are many music records that stand testimony to it. TN Rajarathinam pillai’s Jaru gamaka still stands the testimony of time and is one of the most advanced kind.

The Uruttu is another embellishment which is very characteristic of the Nagaswaram. It is a unique kind of gamaka which features in the alapana of Nagaswaram music. The Uruttu was taken to great heights by them and many vocalists’ who were influenced by the Nagaswaram and had a flexible voice included the uruttu into their own. According to Vid PS Narayanaswamy, vocalists picked up the Uruttu from the Nagaswaram concerts they heard. PS Narayanaswamy himself imbibed this gamaka through the intense voice training which was given to him by his guru Nagaswaram Vidwan Tiruppambaram Somasundaram Pillai. According to him, most Nagaswaram Vidwans were excellent voice coaches and singers. Many of them sang brilliantly including, Chidambaram Vaidyanatha Pillai, TN Rajarathinam Pillai and they rendered the Uruttu effortlessly. Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, the guru of Sri PS Narayanaswamy, who had great admiration for the Nagaswaram employed the uruttu in his singing to great effect (AUDIO Ra4.19).

When it comes to the Bruga, there is almost no contest to its origin. Almost all musicians who I interviewed shared the same opinion that the Brugas’ sung in vocal music today are a result of the Nagaswaram influence on vocalists and vocal music. Till the emergence of the violin and flute there was no instrument that could
match the speed and intensity of the Nagaswaram’s Bruga. However the human voice being a very flexible instrument in itself lent itself to these speedy sangathis when well developed. Singers of the yester years who have listened to the music of the Nagaswaram and its lightning speed music phrases, undertook intense voice training to render the Brugas. Those who had a flexible voice flaunted their ability to render the Bruga. Generations of Vocalists have been inspired by the Nagaswaram such as Coimbatore Raghavier, Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer to present day TN Sheshagopalan, have successfully vocalised the bruga today. GN Balasubramaniam was said to have dazzled his audiences with his ability to render brugas which had an uncanny resemblance to the Nagaswaram music (AUDIO R4a.20). The bruga is a tell-tale feature in vocalists who have been influenced by the Nagaswaram as opposed to those who haven’t such as Brinda-Muktha, DK Pattamal or MD Ramanathan whose aesthetic appeal lay in their meditative Gamakas. Brunda and Muktha’s singing is said to be closely based on the ‘Veena Bani’. Among the female vocalists ML Vasanthakumari was known to have a ‘bruga-shareera’ or a flexible voice that lends itself to the bruga.

The Nagaswaram is said to have influenced the progression of Raga alapana to a considerable extent and this influence extended to the entire Karnataka classical music field especially vocal music. The Nagaswaram was expected to play a single raga alapana throughout the night whenever it played the Rakthi and Pallavi. This meant it had to explore all possible avenues within the raga, almost like squeezing every musical phrase from the Raga. They devised many clever ways to do so such as the maximum use of swaras within a small section of the raga. They would pick up three to four swaras and would elaborate as much as possible within that frame. There would be no excess or wastage. They would raise the challenge by bringing out all the possible swaras combinations within just the mandhra dhaivatha to rishabha. Without a through exploration of music notes from mandhra sthayi to Madhya sthayi Panchama, there would be no question of moving on. Another noteworthy characteristic of the alapana of Nagaswaram was that there would be a relaxed pace and a great restraint while rendering alapana. This would be done by sustaining key points of the Raga sancharas and giving appropriate pauses. These few seconds of silence would add weight to the air. All the above elements could be found extensively in alapana of Vid GN Balasubramaniam, who had great admiration for the
music of the Nagaswaram Vidwan, especially that of TN Rajarathinam Pillai. There
was a time when the music academy had decided that concerts should not go on for
more than two hours and that maximum number of Krithis should be included in a
concert. However GNB and Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer were both known for their
extensive raga alapana and Raga Tana Pallavi at a time when the music academy had
debated the necessity of singing the Pallavi and decided over the Krithi as a better
means of music expression (Iyer M. R., 1929). GN Balasubramaniam was known to
take several turns with the violinist and sing raga alapana. Another feature of raga
alapana which could be found in the raga alapana of Nagaswaram players was the
lack of template. There would be no predictable opening alapana phrase. Many a
times they would chose to elaborate on those swaras of the raga which do not
necessarily spell out its identity. They would chose unusual combination of notes and
chose to elaborate around them. Many vocalists such as Madurai Somasundaram and
TN Sheshagopalan found this unique ability of the Nagaswaram artists to think out of
the box and used it in their own music (AUDIO 4a.21). Even the choice of raga for
alapana by musicians influenced by the Nagaswaram is noteworthy. Till a long time
vivadi ragas such as Varali were elaborated only by the Nagaswaram vidwans with
great dexterity while such ragas were considered as inauspicious by many vocalists.
Nagaswaram exponent the late Chidambaram Vaidyanatha Pillai was famous for his
Varali raga alapana and his exposition of such ragas made a great impact on vocalist
Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer (N Ravikiran, 1998). Even though the trinity had
composed Krithis is Vivadi ragas, the ragas were not taken up for Manodharma
elaboration by the vocalists. Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer took his Nagaswaram
inspiration further and was known to sing a Raga Tana Pallavi in Varali raga, even
mentioning to the audience the need for listening to rare ragas. There are recordings
of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer that stand testimony for this.

In one his interviews Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer states that for a long time,
most Vocalists sang alapana in short phrases. This was because the style of most
Karnataka vocalist of the upper castes was based on the Veena style where gamakas
were given more prominence. The Veena was used extensively by the court musicians
both as a lead instrument and as a means of demonstrating musical facts which were

96 The Music Academy Journal- 1929 – Pg. 17
later inculcated into their rendition. It could also have been due to the absence of mike systems. Singing alapana with long phrases required not just breath control. The vocalists should sing the entire length of the phrases loud enough for the audience to hear and maintaining volume during long phrases is difficult. Srinivasa Iyer goes on to mentions that Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer’s (1878-1921) alapana as an exception and he was known to sing in powerful long phrases filled with extensive brugas (Dwarakanath, 1998)\(^98\) which could be heard even in a mike less situation. It is interesting to note that Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer was the disciple of a Nagaswaram Vidwan (Rajagopalan, 1992)\(^99\). Vaidyanathan was also the guru of Mudicondan Venkatrama Iyer and TK Rangachari. Mudicondan Venkatrama Iyer was deeply influenced by Nagaswaram music.

N Pattabhi Raman, the founding editor of the respected music journal Sruti writes about the music of the Veena and the Nagaswaram and of their influence on Vocal Karnataka Music. In his article he states that Karnataka music has by and large been influenced by “the great respect given to the Veena tradition and to some extent to the place given to the Veena at least in the past, in the teaching – learning process”. The Veena has no doubt been considered as par excellence when conveying the nuances of gamakas. However he goes on to say that the human voice has much greater flexibility than the Veena and that its potential has been realised only by those influenced by the ‘Nagaswaram Bani’. The Nagaswaram Bani is a term that has come to refer to the general stylistic similarity or ideas borrowed from the Nagaswaram. He also goes on to say that the Nagaswaram players have generally remained outside the influence of the Veena tradition, while their instrument has made it possible to give rein to the imagination music (Raman, 1998)\(^100\). Pattabhiraman also states that while the ideal held virtually for all instruments of melody was to follow the Vocal rendition as closely as possible, whereas, contrastingly it was the Nagaswaram that opened up new vistas for vocal music. The expansive raga alapana of renowned Nagaswaram maestros of the past like Tiruvaduturai Rajarathanam Pillai, P.S. Veeruswamy Pillai, Tiruvenkadu Subramania Pillai and Karaikurichi Arunachalam, has inspired generations of Karnataka Vocalists. Many vocalists have successfully imbibed several

\(^98\) The Hindu Folio – November 1998, Pg. 28
\(^100\) Sruti, May 1998 “Nagaswaram Bani” – N Pattabhi Raman, Pg. 28, Issue 164
aspects of the Nagaswaram into their alapana and the result has been very pleasing. This opening up of one’s creative capacities by listening to the Nagaswaram has added an extra dimension to their singing. According to Pattabhiraman it is the Manodharma from the Nagaswaram and its inspiration that has helped to emphasize that Indian classical music is Raga music and that the ethos of Indian music is to project the image of the selected raga using both Kalpana and Kalpitha sangitha. He mentions Vid GN Balasubramaniam and Vid Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer as some of the most prominent musicians that have been influence by the “Nagaswaram Bani”.

Swarakalpana

One of the earliest Vocalists to have started the practise of singing Swarakalpana was Coimbatore Raghavaier according to Dr BM Sundaram. Hailing from a Brahmin Natuvanga family, he had the best of both worlds. He had exposure to many of the Devadasi and Nagaswaram families and also had exposure to music of the royal court on account of being the Asthana Vidwan of the Trivandrum royal court. Apart from this he also performed at many public avenues. Dr BM Sundaram who hails from an illustrious family of Nagaswaram and Tavil artists himself remembers hearing vocal concerts as a child devoid of swara kalpana. This often left him bewildered as a young fellow who was used to swara kalpana being rendered by all the musicians (Isai Vellala) in his family. On the other hand many scholars believe that singing Kalpana swaras to Krithis and Pallavi was started by Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer (1844-1893) and Patnam Subramanium Iyer (Ayyar, 1931). Thus singing Kalpana swaras was of fairly recent origin and was just catching on with vocalists in the 1930’s. Today we have taken the technique of swara kalpana to great heights, however during the 1931 Music Academy conference, the very need and extent of rendering swara kalpana was passionately debated. The practise of singing swaras was even compared to having a “jwara” by MS Ramaswamy Iyer in his Presidential Address at the 1929 Madras Music Academy Conference. The 1932 expert committee comprised of Bharathan Narayanaswami Iyer, Ummayalpuram Swaminatha Ayyar and Mudicondan Venkatramayyar. There was a unanimous decision that singing of Kalpana swaras should be limited and used sparingly. They went on to add that Swarakalpana was of fairly recent origin and that even great Vidwans of the yester years such as Peria Vaithi and Chinna Chinna Vaithi only sang Raga and Pallavi but

101 Journal of the Music Academy of Madras – 1932 Vol III, No’s 1 & 2 – Pg. 61
not Swaras. The president of the 1931 music academy was Vidwan Palarmarneri Swaminatha Iyer, a direct disciple of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer. Till the time of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer the practise of singing kalpana swaras for compositions seems to be absent. Even court musicians specialised in singing Raga for several days in instalments, and the Pallavi or a Varnam. Singing Swarakalpana was not mentioned as a part of the tradition. There are court records of Patnam Subramania Iyer and Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer specialising in particular ragas and rendering them for days. Many a times one artist would sing a very elaborate alapana and another artiste would set a Pallavi in it. However there are no court records which mention the Vocalists singing Swara Kalpana. According to Dr BM Sundaram, Vocalists borrowed the idea of Swarakalpana from the practise of the Nagaswaram Vidwans who taken the art of swara Kalpana to great heights during the rendition of Mallari and Rakthi. Even the Veena did not render swara kalpana to the magnitude of which the Nagaswaram artists did. The Nagaswaram Vidwans who had to sustain on Manodharma the whole night devised swara kalpana as a clever trick to keep their audiences hooked. The Nagaswaram vidwan were also known to engage in complicated patterns of ‘kanakku’ within swara kalpana along with the Tavil at a time when swara kalpana barely existed in other forms of Karnataka Classical music and many vocalists would throng to listen to these concerts. They rendered several turns of Swara kalpana. During the course of my research I came across an interesting article written by the late GV Narayanaswamy Iyer (The father of GN Balasubramanium) which makes a reference on the practise of swarakalpana. He goes on to say that the practise was most prevalent among instrumentalists. Saint composer Tyagaraja himself showed no love for “swara demonstration” (Iyer G. N., 1931)\textsuperscript{102}. Among all the instruments present in the ancient music society till the 18\textsuperscript{th} century only the Nagaswaram was performing extensive swara kalpana. The Veena was to render only a few avarthas in the palaces, while the flute had not yet emerged as a full-fledged lead instrument. The flute attained its high place and pride in the able hands of Vidwan Sharabha Sastrigal (1872-1904). There also was a special time during the year when the vocalists would get a wholesome treat. On the last day of the Vijayadashmi day there used to be a royal ceremony which served to establish the Kings territory. The King would cross the boundary of his Kingdom and shoot an arrow towards the frontiers of his

\textsuperscript{102} The Music Academy Journal – 1931 – the first quarter. Pg. 59
Kingdom. An age old custom, this was symbolic of keeping ones enemies at bay and preventing evil spirits from entering the fort. On his journey back he would receive a royal welcome, during which he is received by the Nagaswaram vidwans’. During this time tradition dictated that the Nagaswaram artists play only Swarakalpana while receiving the king. The court musicians who were present along with other ministers and family who were exposed to this could have adopted it into their own singing according to Dr BM Sundaram. It could also be that the early Nagaswaram players who picked up the Krithi from Tyagaraja and from Mutthuswamy Dixitar (There were many Nagaswaram vidwans in Muthuswamy’s shishya parampara) were the first to render swara kalpana for the Krithi earlier than the Vocalists as they had more tendencies to borrow the idea from their own instrumental repertoire. Their music was predominantly about Raga alapana and swara kalpana and they rendered swara kalpana to almost any music piece they touched be it the Pallavi, Rakthi, Mallari, Odam, Udakuru etc. Rendering swara kalpana to Krithis would have been the most natural thing to do for them.

**TANA**

When it comes to Tana, one cannot say the Nagaswaram played much of a role in influencing Vocal music. Tana was never part of the performance repertoire for Nagaswaram, whereas the Veena would render the most delicate and beautiful Tana. The Nagaswaram did have “Chittai thana” according to Dr BM Sundaram which were Tana like phrases of swaras in threes or fours, however these were used more as Abhyasa gana. Vocalists are believed to have picked up the art of Tana rendition from the Veena. However, Vid HK Venkatraman believes that today vocalists include a lot of Uruttu prayogas in Tana which could have been the after effects of the Nagaswaram Uruttu on alapana. It is interesting to note that Tana was previously called “Madhyama kala” or medium tempo Alapana. This was how it was always rendered until the 18th – 19th centuries, in medium tempo, according to many scholars such as P Sambamoorthy, SR Janakiraman etc. Today it has changed a lot in its form and structure, so much so that we have fast paced or Dhrutha Kala Sancharas in the upper octaves. This is definitely a later addition which could have very possibly been an instrumental influence. Alapana phrases have spilled into Tana and Tana into Alapana, like ending an alapana let us say in Kharaharapriya raga by singing in mandra sthayi the phrase DNS- DNS – DNR,,, RRSNS,,, This phrase though in the
swara combination of threes which is more suitable for Tana can often be heard as an ending in Raga alapana. One must remember that the human voice is the most versatile instrument and can be trained into render any intricacy to suit any technique. It would not have taken long for competent vocalists to render the Nagaswaram-inspired uruttu into the Veena-inspired Tana, resulting in a completely unique Vocal style of Tana singing. The Nagaswaram, as rightly said by the founding Editor of the acclaimed Sruti magazine N Pattabhiraman, helped singers realise their true potential and challenge their vocal abilities.

NERAVAL

Sarangadeva mentions one Rupaka Alapti as an alapana being attempted with the help of some chosen words set to a particular Dhathu. It is the opinion of several scholars such as SR Janakiraman that this Roopaka Alapti is our present day Neraval (Janakiraman, 2008). Neraval has not changed much in its core characteristic. According to SR Janakiraman, the word Niraval is a Tamizh term and it means “filling up of the expression”. The Sanskrit term is “Sahithya Prasthara”. In the case of Neraval, it is my opinion that Vocalists have always been the totalitarians of Neraval. The structure of this format of improvisation is all about melody within the gamut of word-play. Here both word play and melody take equal importance. Both the Sahithya bhava and Raga bhava are entwined into each other, a Sahithya and Sangita Prasthara, a happy marriage and this can and always has been realised most successfully in Vocal music. You need a mouth to mouth the words. There have been influences of instruments such as the violin and Mrudangam mathematics on Neraval in the recent times, especially in the pace of rendition, however it is still very much a Vocal music phenomenon. Needless to say, the Nagaswaram whose traditional repertoire had no excesses and only played to its strength, did not include Neraval. Neraval has never been part of their Sampradaya.

The Nagaswaram is said to have influenced vocalists such as Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer, Mudicondan Venkatrama Iyer, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, GN Balasubramaniam, Madurai Somasundaram, PS Narayanaswamy, ML Vasanthakumari, Tanjore S Kalyanasundaram, TN Sheshagopalan, Sanjay Subramanian and many more vocalists. All the above mentioned vocalists have had a

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103 SR Janakiraman, ESSENTIALS OF MUSICOLOGY IN SOUTH INDIAN MUSIC, Pg. 272
huge impact on the Karnataka classical music field. They have been the core players in impacting the Karnataka classical vocal identity, especially in the realm Manodharma Sangita. These are vocalists who have gone on to define the very style and content of today’s Karnataka classical vocal music. They were extremely popular and influential not only through their position and status in the Karnataka classical music world but through their powerful profound music. Nagaswaram influenced not just the individual musician but generations of such musicians. It influenced TN Sheshagopalan who in turn influenced many vocalists such as Sanjay Subrahmanian, Abhishek Raghuram etc. Thus, though not explicit in certain cases, Nagaswaram music has had an implicit impact on their rendition and hence its larger contribution to the larger picture.
Coimbatore Raghavaier was one of the first Karnataka classical vocalists to give a public performance. Till then court musicians were closely guarded by the royal houses and nobles. How then did classical music find its audience in the ancient times especially before the Bhakti movement and the trinity? What was the role played by the other artistic communities that practised and performed Karnataka classical music like the Isai Vellalars who were temple musicians? According many scholars the music of the Isai Vellalar community was constantly heard during temple festivals and rituals, especially the Nagaswaram, reaching the ears of the common man and fired popular imagination and knowledge of their ragas in the ancient society. K Raghavendra Rao, the Mysore correspondent for the national Magazine Sruti, also spoke on similar lines while addressing a seminar conducted by the Percussive arts centre. While talking about the Nagaswaram Music in Karnataka he states that people of the earlier generations did not have easy access to the Royal court. They used to look forward for the annual Ramanavami festivals (festival of god Rama), Temple Rathothsavas (Chariot festivals) and other auspicious occasions of which Nagaswaram music was an important and integral part. He says, “Undoubtedly, it is this particular instrument that made Karnataka classical music popular amongst the general public. How the greats of yester years were influence by Nagaswaram music in their manodharmic essays is too well-known to be detailed here (Rao, 1999)104”. Apart from the Pradarshini-Vadya Veena (that used for the formation of the grammar of Karnataka classical music) it was the Lakshiya pradhaana Nagaswaram (that which was used predominantly for the performance of music) which served as a power inspiration and guide to the Manodharma and elaboration of ragas. Thus one can say that along with the Veena, the Nagaswaram played a definite role in shaping the Raga alapana identity of Karnataka Classical vocal music.

While Vid Sanjay Subrahmanyam believes that the Nagaswaram influenced the individual more than the system, one can say that it did so, on the most influential Vocalists of Karnataka classical music. Namely Vid Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and Vid GN Balasubramaniam. Both these vocalists rose to dizzying heights in popularity

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104 Nagaswara Music in Karnataka : Reminiscences of an Old-Timer, K Raghavendra Rao, Sruti Issue 179, August 1999, Pg. 17
and were role models for many subsequent generations of young singers. Even today many young vocalists try to emulate these senior Vidwans and theirs are the most easily accessible commercial music recordings. It is the belief of many present day musicians that Semmangudi and GNB, who so greatly admired the Nagaswaram, came to be admired by all and went on to almost define and shape the system of Karnataka Classical Vocal rendition. International violinist Vid Kumaresh of the Ganesh-Kumaresh duo told me during my interview that, in his opinion what we sing and popularly hear today is a result of the music GNB and Semmangudi have left us. Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer was hugely influenced by the Nagaswaram’s rendition of raga alapana in long phrases and felt that this kind of rendition brought out the “swaroopa” or complete form of the raga better than singing in shorter phrases. However his cousin and guru Narayanaswami Iyer was not impressed by Semmangudi’s obsession with Nagaswaram music. This resistance from traditionalists slowed down the pace of his pursuit of the Nagaswaram Bani in Vocal music. He had to inculcate this Bani, slowly without offending the traditionalists and succeeded in doing so. Today the earlier style of singing in short phrases has been completely forgotten and longer phrases are the rule of the day. The influence of ‘Nagaswaram Bani’ has been so strong and attractive that it stood the test of time. Apart from the above the Nagaswaram came to influence Karnataka Vocal rendition in many ways and this chapter delves deeply into the subject.

According to Dr Jayanthi Kumaresh the sustenance and continuity in today’s vocal music has definitely come as an inspiration from the Nagaswaram along with how to explore a raga. As Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer has said in many of his interviews, vocalists were known to sing in shorter Sangatis. This changed with the advent of vocalists such as Coimbatore Raghavaiyer and Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer who imbibed the resonating Tiruvaiyaru Nagaswaram music into their own singing style. Today sustenance of sound has become a prerequisite and even the Veena is expected to keep up this standard. Some talented Vainikas have pushed their technique to match the challenge of sound continuity, along with the help of modern technology such as the pick-up mike. Almost all vocalists have started singing in long phrases and rope in great applause for sustenance on the sruti swaras or tonic notes. Demonstrating one’s ability of breath control was once a realm of the Nagaswaram artists who blew audiences away with their Otthu Muchu. Now vocalists have adopted this and the
audience today gets a thrill in seeing and listening to sustenance to which they applaud. There are now very few vocalists who can be identified with the Veena Bani, which was about shorter phrases, graceful gamaka and elegant restraint. What we hear in vocal music today is the after effect of Nagaswaram influence according to many musicians such as Ashwathy Tirunal Ramavarma and Bangalore HK Venkatram. This was further made possible when male vocalists slowly started singing in their own natural pitches which suited the base male voice instead of the shrill and high pitched G or G sharp (singing in high pitches put a huge strain on the voices of the vocalists). Emergence of the mike system and amplifiers can be credited.

INFLUENCE OF NAGASWARAM ON THE KRITHI AND ITS RENDITION

The Krithi in Karnataka vocal music is a compositional form that has undergone many changes in form and script. It has been subjected to a difference in interpretation by generations of musicians. One has to accept the fact that even though the Krithis’ of the Trinity were a great contribution to Karnataka music, it has also been polished and altered to a great extent by all the musicians who have picked it up over the centuries. Even though the composer’s vision remains original, the personality of the performer plays an important role in the rendition, perception and transmission to the subsequent generations. Tyagaraja’s kritis were exceptionally accommodative of the changes since their structure is quite fluid. Thus we need to analyse the first generation of performers during and immediately after the period of the trinity, who picked up the Krithi and perhaps started initiating the changes.

For a long time in the history of Karnataka classical music (till the 18th century), each musician sang his own compositions. There is no record of Mutthuswamy Dixitar singing Tyagaraja’s krithi or Syama Sastri singing Mutthuswamy Dixitar’s. The trinity sang only their own original compositions. Even the vocal disciples of each of the Trinity took a while to incorporate their Guru’s composition into their performances. This is because they were still under court patronage and the court only promoted either original compositions or the Raga Tana Pallavi. Certainly not the Trinity’s compositions, especially Tyagararaja who chose to be outside the Royal patronage. Which is why musicologists find a gap in the years from the life and death of the trinity to the next two generations, with respect to the continuity of the Krithi. During this period, due to the non-performance of the Krithi,
many were lost, fell into disuse and many transformed. Simply because, the vocalists had few opportunities to perform them. This is when we get a historical reference to perhaps, the first public performance of a Krithi by an artist other than the composer, who wasn’t even from the same Shishya parampara (lineage of disciples). This important historical reference is that of the Nagaswaram player Dasari, who chose to play Tyagaraja’s composition Darini Telusukonti set in Shuddha savari raga to Adi Tala. One must keep in mind that it was rendered by a Nagaswaram artist. The Nagaswaram players were known to add their own Sangthis to any composition they touch, be it the Mallari, Rakthi, the Pallavi or as in this case the Krithi. According to BM Sundaram, the Nayanakaras cannot refrain from adding Sangatis, especially the intense Drutha kala or Bruga laden ones (AUDIO R4b.22). These sangatis give the Nagaswaram rendition of compositions its charm and majesty which otherwise would make the Krithi sound flat. Adding Sangatis was and always has been a very natural process of rendition for Nagaswaram artists (AUDIO R4b23). Perhaps, this was one of the incidents which was recorded while many other Nagaswaram artists could have played an important role in shaping and popularising the Krithi. The next generation of vocalists (after the trinity) such as Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer (who was supposed to have been inspired by the Nagaswaram according to Rangaramanuja Ayyangar) could have been exposed to the Nagaswaram rendering the Krithi with multiple sangatis and picked it up from there.

Vid K Ramachandran, senior research scholar in music, The University of Madras, made a very interesting speech in the Madras Music academy, about the role instrumentalists played in the distribution and dissemination of compositions. This holds particularly true in the case of Mutthuswamy Dixitar, who had a vast majority of Natuvanars and Nagaswaram artists as his disciples (such as Korainadu Ramaswamy Pillai, Tiruvarur Shuddhamaddhalam Tambiappan, Mutthuswamy Natuvanar etc.) and Tyagaraja whose composition lent themselves easily to instrumental rendition and were set in the simple language of Telugu (a mother tongue and familiar language to many Nagaswaram artists) To quote K Ramachandran, “It is well to take a note of the usual paradox. Viz, that the great composers were not all of them expert singers or even players; they gave the concepts, and these grew up into musical pieces and were given artistic life and permanence by the expert instrumentalists. It was not enough merely to be a perfect
master of an instrument; the sense of artistic perception was a necessary asset. The luminous circle to which Pillai belonged comprised many potential poets i.e. they were inborn artists and their genius lay in demonstration rather in the composition of Geetam etc.” Here the “Pillai” referred is Violin Malaikotai Govindaswamy Pillai (1897-1931) who belonged to an illustrious Isai Vellala family comprising of many Natuvanars and Nagaswaram artists. This paragraph not only talks about the contribution of one musician but that of the entire clan of Isai Vellala or the “luminous circle to which Pillai belonged”.

Also the author makes a clear delineation of the nineteenth and early twentieth century music society into Vaggeyakaras, Vocalists and Instrumentalists. He goes on to say that the composers depended on those specialised performers to popularise their works. Among the instrumentalists, along with the Veena, the Nagaswaram families were extremely prominent and ancient custodians of the art of music performance.

Vid K Ramachandran also makes an observation about the difference of performance styles between the Royal court musicians (mostly upper class) and the music of the Pillais’ or Isai Vellalas. It is very well known that the music practised by the upper class was very ornate and gave scope for the demonstration of musical scholarship. He goes on to say that while a great many court musicians distinguished themselves as both composers and singers, the predominant element in them was conceptual, they built up the science behind Karnataka Classical music and their demonstrations served as permanent examples. While the main contribution of the Isai Vellalas was to the art of graceful demonstration from the artistic point of view. They have an instinctive sense of rhythm and their natural aptitude for grace and “sukha-bhava” served as great examples to the upper class musicians. He names Tirumarugal Natesan as one such “giant” who influenced an entire generation of musicians (Iyer G. N., 1931)\textsuperscript{105}. His music is said to have made a deep impact on even Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer who remarked that there is no Vidwan who hasn’t melted at the music of Natesan (Sundaram, Mangala Isai Mannargal, 2013)\textsuperscript{106}. Tirumarugal Natesan has been mentioned as an influential Nagaswaram artist by Rangaramanuja Ayyangar too.

\textsuperscript{105} The Journal of the Music Academy of Madras 1931. The first quarter, Vol II, Pg.60
\textsuperscript{106} ‘Mangala Isai Mannargal’ – Dr. BM Sundaram.
The period of the Trinity saw great musical activity in the Tanjore court too. The Maratha rulers like Serfoji II had special interest in ensuring high cultural standards for music performance. It was seen as a traditional status and a benchmark for preservation of classicism. This was further augmented by the influence of scholars such as Venkatakamakhin (1660) who had served as the minister for three generations of Nayaka rulers. P Sambamoorthy talks about the conducive nature of the atmosphere in Tanjore and around Tiruvaiyyaru during Tyagaraja’s time (Sambamoorthy, Great Composers - Tyagaraja, 1954)\(^\text{107}\). However, the Saint composer Tyagaraja had a very different style. His style of composition seemed to reject the excessively ornate court music (Subramanian, 2006)\(^\text{108}\). So what was this conducive environment that was so nurturing of Tyagaraja’s music? We know from many accounts that he did not approve of Royal patronage. Neither were public music concerts in prevalence as yet. Even Royal patronage only ensured the growth of musicians attached to it. Perhaps one must also look into the fact that the Temple culture had reached its zenith during the trinity’s time. There were tremendous activities being carried out in the Temples in and around Tiruvaiyyaru. The full swing of temple activities also ensured the continuous services of the musicians attached to it namely the Bhajana Sampradaya, Devadasi and the Nagaswaram. The third wing of music, an offspring of the Bhakti movement, the Bhajana music (Karnataka classical and folk traditions being the other two) had fully emerged during Tyagaraja’s time. Tyagaraja himself conducted his Bhajana troupe consisting of students at the annual Sapthasthanam festival of Tiruvaiyyaru (Sambamoorthy, Great Composers - Tyagaraja, 1954)\(^\text{109}\). He attended and took part in temple festivals around the Tanjore belt including the Sivarathri puja at Manambuchavadi, Panguni Utthiram festival at Tiruvarur and pilgrimage to Varadaraja Temple at Kanchipuram, Parthasarathy temple – Triplicane etc. The Bhajana tradition had a huge influence on Tyagaraja (who is said to have given it the tough of classicism) but surely the great composer would have also been exposed to the music of the Nagaswaram at a time when no temple would have its festival without the Peria Melam. Being a man whose compositions suited the mood of his times and reflected the cultural activities of his

\(^{107}\) Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 1
\(^{108}\) From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy – Lakshmi Subramanian, pg. 11
\(^{109}\) Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 89
society, he could not have ignored the grand music of the Nagaswaram and not gain some kind of inspiration. He is even said to have spent his afternoons meditating at the Dakshina Kailash temple at Tiruvaiyyaru (Sambamoorthy, Great Composers - Tyagaraja, 1954)\textsuperscript{110}.

Tyagaraja was a revolutionary. His compositions marked a huge departure from the rococo style of compositions which were rendered by the Karnataka classical vocalists. Tyagaraja’s compositions were carried by simple language yet provided more space for musical interpretation, designed to bring out the fullest potential of the melodic design. P Sambamoorthy calls Tyagaraja a “daring experimenter and a successful one at that”. The royal courts of Tanjore took great interest in music throughout its historical existence. Patronage of music was seen as symbol of status. Many of the Maratha kings, especially Serfoji II were keen about establishing cultural standards for performance. The music of the court musicians was extremely ornate and sometimes to an extent rigid. This came from the focus on presenting scholarly music suitable for the intellectuals adorning the court audiences. Court performances consisted mainly of Raga and Pallavi renditions. According to the Sarvadevavilasa (an 18\textsuperscript{th} century treatise on Madras) they maintained their forte even after migrating to Madras during the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. The music was almost similar to the baroque period of music in western classical. They were professional musicians attached to the court who had a sound grounding of musical grammar. They were of upper castes and their musical practice combined the knowledge of Sanskrit scriptures and musicological treatises. They excelled in the technicalities of melody and rhythm and adhered to the music tradition of the pre-Tyagaraja period.

It is in this connection that we see Tyagaraja’s music which represented a rejection of the complex court music (Subramanian, 2006)\textsuperscript{111}. He focused on a new format of song that would be simple in terms of language, innovative in rhythmic structure yet provide ample scope for musical interpretation. The emphasis was on bhava and melodic design. The trinity arose as travelling composers who were engrossed in the poetics of devotion who ushered a period similar to the romanticism and renaissance period of western classical music (romantic-devotion or devotional romanticism). The court played an important role in formulating conventions and

\textsuperscript{110} Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 25
\textsuperscript{111} From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy – Lakshmi Subramanian, pg. 11
guidelines for practice and presentation. It patronized, established and promoted musicians like Virabhadraiyya, Kasinathayya and Margadarsi Seshayya. In spite of this the Trinity attained eminence and popularity by their sheer artistic conception. Their music transcended the conventional forms of court music. This makes us wonder as to what inspired this artistic conception? Mutthuswamy Dixitar for instance has often been portrayed as an ultra-conservative and his krithis’ are considered Sampradayika. However we find enough evidence of his modern outlook. He travelled extensively and was quite inspired by Hindustani classical music especially dhrupad. He adopted many North Indian ragas in his krithis’. His exposure to European military music in Madras through his family connections inspired him to compose Sanskrit lyrics for tunes such as ‘God save the king’ and he went on to give us the Nottu swara Sahithya. His brother was among the earliest to practice the western violin. Even his Krithis mark a strong departure from the music of the period which was either ritualistic or love poetry of art music as that promoted by the court. His work was a balance of ritual, theoretical and music education. His krithis were a refined structure of song and melody. Having said this, it is hard to not imagine Saint Tyagaraja and Dixitar not being influenced by the more popular music that was being rendered by the Nagaswaram and other temple communities around them. Their strategic location outside the formal domain of the court deepened and broadened their view and execution of Karnatak classical music. One finds no reference of Tyagaraja attending Karnataka classical concerts at the Royal court. If he heard any Karnataka classical music then it was from musicians who came to visit him, the music of the Nagaswaram and the music which was sung in the Nataka (the famous Ananda Bhairavi incident) or Dramas of that period (Sambamoorthy, Great Composers - Tyagaraja, 1954).

Rangaramanuja Ayyangar makes many references to the proximity in Tyagaraja’s free flowing compositional style and the abundance of Nagaswaram music that might have enriched his emotional outlook of the ragas. He was born in Tiruvarur, which was one of the chief centers of Nagaswaram music and moved to Tiruvayyar, which was the hub of all musical activity. Moreover the Pranatartihara temple in Tiruvaiyaaru echoed all day with the music of the Nagaswaram, Tevaram and Tirupugazh hymns. Tyagaraja’s music should be analyzed against this

112 Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 74
background according to Rangaramanuja Ayyangar\textsuperscript{113}. Tyagaraja’s treatment of Ragas has always seemed very close to the sentiments of the Nagaswaram music. Most of his compositions are filled with a malleable structure which holds the entire bhava and rasa of the raga as a beehive would hold honey. There was a period in history when prominent \textit{Sangeetha Lakhanakaras} of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century such as Venkatamakhi looked down upon Ragas such as Kalyani and Pantuvarali. Venkatamakhi called them Turushka ragas (unfit for composition) in his Chathurdandi Prakashike. However these were very popular ragas with the Nagaswaram musicians and Tyagaraja took these ragas to great heights. Another extremely popular raga among the Nagaswaram artists was raga Todi, this again was greatly cherished by the Saint who went on to set the highest number of compositions (31) in this Raga, while Mutthuswami Dixitar (1775-1835) favored Mayamalavagowla and its derivatives. A look into Tyagaraja’s compositions shows us that he uses \textit{Sahithya} sparingly and lets the melodic line do the talking. His \textit{Sahithya} is almost poetry in form but the beauty of the Krithi lies in the extensive picture of the Raga that he gives us within a nutshell. He also composed 130 songs in Raga Harikamboji and its Janyas. He is credited with one of the most beautiful innovations in Karnataka classical compositions called \textit{Sangatis}. It is the belief of many scholars that the \textit{Sangatis} in popular Krithi “Chakkani raja marga” (believed to be 42 in number), which is set in raga Kharaharapriya, mirror that majestic progressions of Pallavi rendition of the Nagaswaram vidwans. In Nagaswaram music, the RTP has a very different format. Tana was generally never part of the repertoire. Even \textit{neraval} is an later addition made in the recent times. After Raga Alapana, the Pallavi was taken up directly for elaboration. There would be no \textit{neraval}. Before going into \textit{thrikalam} or \textit{nadai} they would add slight variations in the basic line in the form of Sangatis. This practice of adding Sangatis to a Pallavi instead of \textit{neraval} is an age old tradition of the Nagaswaram music. Scholars believe that Tyagaraja could have gained inspiration to add variations to a melodic line to his own compositions from this practice of the Nagaswaram vidwans’.

According to Padmeshree Vid SR Janakiraman, the compositions of Saint Tyagaraja are very suitable for instrumental renditions. During a telephonic

\textsuperscript{113} History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music, R Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, Ch. 19, pg. 194
conversation with him he went on to say that though he is not much of an expert on the Nagaswaram music, the progressions, form and pace of the Sangatis do show a very clear instrumental influence. Among all instruments present during 17th-18th centuries, it is the Veena and Nagaswaram that seemed to have had the most prominently distinctive characteristics in Karnataka music, so much as to form two stylistic schools and there isn’t much similarity between Tyagaraja Kritis and the Veena Bani. Vid Janakiraman too mentioned the same Krithis’, Darini Telusukonti, Na jeevadhara and Dorakuna. The same Krithis (Na Jeevadhara, Bhavanuta, Dorakuna, Karuvelpulu, Chera Rava Damira, O Rangashayi etc.) which have found special mention by Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, for their extraordinary music content114. According to Vid SR Janakiraman, with special reference to Darini telusukonti, these Sangatis seem like a later addition by the composer, since addition of so many Sangatis could not have been a result of spontaneous emotion. When so many Sangatis are added, the Sahithya bhava tends to take a back seat and the driver’s position is given to the melody. Some of the Sangatis must have been an addition of later inspiration and contemplation. As the Krithis was repeated by his disciples or rendered by other musicians he could have added more sangatis to polish and refine the composition. Rest could have been added by the many shisha paramparas who carried forth his legacy (Walajapet, Thillaisthanam and Ummayalpuram). Janakiraman confirmed this with the great musician Vid Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer who himself comes from the lineage of Tyagaraja’s School. This seems like a very binding analyses and the oral history narrated by Vid RK Srikantan seems to fit perfectly like a missing link. RK Srikantan strongly believes that Tyagarajas Krithis have a strong Nagaswaram flavor to them. He even narrated a story, which has found mention in P Sambamoorthy’s book that has passed down generations from his guru parampara. This story was narrated by Veena Kuppaier (who was a direct disciple of Saint Tyagaraja) to his son Thiruvotriyur Tyagayyar (1845–1917), who was also a music composer. In their ancestral house (in GT Madras or George town Madras) a festival for eight days was arranged which the great composer Tyagaraja came to attend. For each day’s puja he composed a song in one raga called Devagandhari and thus were born eight krithis in the same raga. During the last day of Puja a procession of the deity was arranged with a Nagaswaram ensemble. Suddenly Tyagaraja heard an

114 History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music, R Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, Ch. 19, pg. 197
extraordinary rendition of his composition, Darini Telusukonti in Shuddha Saveri raga. He ran to the Nagaswaram artist and asked him who the composer is. He very innocently answered that it was a composition of Tyagaraja swami, not knowing he was speaking to the composer himself. Saint Tyagaraja was so pleased by the beautiful rendition heart that he hugged the Nagaswaram player (breaking protocols of class and caste) without a momentary thought of the Nagaswaram player’s lower caste. His heart was filled with joy on hearing the beautiful rendition of the Shuddha saveri raga and krithi rendition. “How can happiness or joy know any differences of caste”, narrated RK Srikantan during the interview. The same incident has been mentioned in the book, ‘Great Composers Book II, Tyagaraja’ by P Sambamoorthy in Page 79. However in his book the incident is said to have taken place at the South Mada street junction of Tirumanjnana Vidhi. Sambamoorthy also mentions the name of this famous Nagaswaram Vidwan as one “Dasari”. The rendition of Darini is said to have had such sparkling sangatis that it made a tremendous impression on the listeners who were accompanying the procession as well as Tyagaraja. It was the practice of all Nagaswaram vidwans taking part in the Tiruvaiyyaru temple festival procession to make a special halt in front of Tyagaraja’s house as a mark of respect to him and he reveled in their music

This link that Saint Tyagaraja could have heard the Nagaswaram vidwans rendering it with multiple Sangatis in their bruga and melody rich style attains great importance here. Careful observation of the Sangatis in krithis like Darini ( Shuddha Saveri), Dorakuna ituvanti (Bilahari), O Rangashayi ( Kamboji) Mariyadagadura (Shankarabharana), Chakkani raja (Kharaharapiya) and Bhavanutha (Mohana) show that they might have been later additions. This view has been shared by P Sambamoorthy, Vid Dr Ritha Rajan, Vid Dr. BM Sundaram and Vid PS Narayanaswamy. He too (Vidwan RK Srikantan) mentions the krithi Dorakuna. Even though there are no written records to prove the influence of Nagaswaram of Saint Tyagaraja, his Krithis do give us certain clues into the composition style. P Sambamoorthy has described the Sangatis of Tyagaraja as those which fall into two categories of Raga-bhava sangatis and Sahithya Bhava sangatis. Raga bhava sangatis are those which give variations keeping the melodic line as top priority

115 Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 76
116 Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 127
117 Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 29
whereas Sahitya Bhava sangatis are carefully constructed variations so as to give priority and not disturb the lyrics of the song. While the Sahithya bhava sangatis were composed at the very conception of the Krithi, the Raga Bhava ones certainly look like subsequent additions.

Many of his Vilamba kala compositions too are so flexible in format that the artist can render them at a faster pace, which is the case most often. On the contrary, Dixitar’s compositions are most suitable for vocal rendition. There is ample space for pauses (for breath) and the sahithya is very well rounded for vocalization. There is a clear influence of the Veena Bani on Muthuswamy Dixitar’s composition according to Vid SR Janakiraman. It is very clear from the compositions that Muthuswamy Dixitar’s outlook and conceptualization was that of a Vocalist. The tempo is measured and it has an inherent majestic gait. The addition of verbal imagery such as Swaraksharas, Prasa-anuprasa, Raga mudra etc. are an important clue that he definitely wanted his lyrics to be vocalized. How else will the Swaraksharas and Raga mudras be understood? Dixitar even took care that the language (Sanskrit) used in his compositions was of the highest literary standard. The tone of his Sahithya was scholarly while Tyagaraja’s was simple and lyrical.

Even in terms of Birukkas, Tyagarajas Krithi’s easily give way for fast musical embellishments. On the other hand if an artist choses to, he can try to fit in bruggas for Dixitar Krithis, however these would run the risk of sounding extremely out of context and unaesthetic.

Even the sheer variety of themes (from religious, philosophic like Dvaitamu and Paramathmudu to social and personal in the cases of Giriraja sutha thanaya and sitamma maayamma) in his songs and their proximity to situations in daily life (tussles with neighbors and relatives in sings like Palukavemina, Telialyleru) suggest a close bond to sentiment and a style quite close to the tevaram and tirupugazh hymns both which sounded at regular intervals as worship at the surrounding temples by the Nagaswaram (Along with the Oduvars the Nagaswaram played the Tevaram too). Both the Tevaram and Thirupugazh culture had rejected ritualistic orthodoxy and established the spoken language of Tamil to express religious worship through devotion and love. It may not be wrong to say that the thoughts of great saint was a stunning result of the music and sentiments around surrounding him. Dixitars’ themes
were more of Vedic lore and not of poetic output of the more recent past according to Rangaramanuja Ayyangar. However this ancient theme was presented by Dixitar in a new light and a sophistication witnessed never before. Both composers were clearly a product of their environment and both wished to define a new space for musical expression that was beyond the requirements of the court and conventional norms of musical expression\textsuperscript{118}. Their Krithis attained immense popularity because of their large \textit{Shishya Parampara} and not by the active patronage of the court. It was largely a mid nineteenth century phenomenon. One wonders even if their music was considered \textit{Sampradayika} or at that period. There are references to suggest that Tyagaraja was not accepted easily into the folds of the classical musicians of his time. The devotional content of his music resembled that of the \textit{Bhajana Sampradaya} vidwans who were not thought of highly by the Pallavi vidwans. Tyagaraja rose to bridge this gap. It was the opinion of many that he was writing light poetry\textsuperscript{119}. There were vidwans who specialized in aspects of Manodharma and performance such as Ghanam Sitaramanya, Shatkala Govinda Marar and also specialized in certain ragas such as Atana Appayya and Shankarabharanam Narasayya. Mainstream musicians rarely considered the Bhagavathars as musicians of rank. What changed their opinion about Tyagaraja? Perhaps it was the sheer musical content of his Krithis’. His are the most savored compositions among the Nagaswaram community. The easy thought, musical content and pliable format make his compositions the most suitable for Nagaswaram rendition (or any instrument for that matter) and they play it with great devotion.

According to BM Sundaram, there are two categories within Tyagaraja’s krithis. Some of them make a good piece for vocal rendition while some are more suitable for instrumental rendition. Nagaswaram artists were one of the earliest to pick up Tyagaraja’s composition and play it. Most of them would render the already pliable krithis with a free hand adding a lot more Sangatis. Most often than not they concentrated on the melodic and rhythmic construction of the song. This could have inspired Saint Tyagaraja and his disciples to add many more Sangathi progressions. Violin Vid Kumaresh of the Ganesh-Kumaresh duo shares his observation that the \textit{Pancharathna} Krithis of Tyagaraja feel very instrumental-based in musical nature.

\textsuperscript{119} Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 47
The entire chittai swaram seems to have been set by an instrumentalist or someone with an influence of the Nagaswaram style. There seems to be more emphasis on the melodic structure than on the lyrical content, in the way Tyagaraja has coined the phrases according Vid Kumaresh. I personally have felt this on many instances while singing phrases such as the last charana of the Pancharatna Kriti in Raga Shree, ‘Yendaro mahanu bhavulu’. There is a pause in the last words of the charanam “prEma muppiri gonu vELa nAmamu dalacEvAru rAmabhaktuDaina tyAgarAjanutuni nija dAsulaina vAr-” his pause sounds very aesthetic but comes right in between the Sahithya ‘Tyagaraja’. This is a very strategic an important phrase in the entire Pancharatna since it is his signature or Ankita. There are similar example in the fourth Charana of the Varali pancharatna “Kanakana ruchira” etc. The melodic construction results in a slight fragmentation of lyrical content. It is very unusual for a composer to have willingly composed in this manner if it wasn’t his intention to give more credit to the melodic line. According to Vid Kumaresh in the entire length of the charanam the sahithya seems to have been given a by-pass. Vid Kumaresh feels that this outlook towards music and composition of Tyagaraja’s could have been a result of the Nagaswaram influence.

Tyagaraja was the first South Indian composer to have composed in Desadi talas. This technique of a delayed start was used quite effectively by the folk and Nagaswaram artists especially in the Rakthi. Tyagaraja could have gained inspiration from these readily available music formats. He went on to immortalize many folk tunes in his operas too\(^\text{120}\). Tyagaraja also composed many Uthsava Sampradaya Krithi’s which stand proof to the fact that he was very close to the Temple festivals. Of these the composition called ‘Heccharikaga rara’ in Raga Yadukula Kamboji attains special significance. The Heccharika is a composition most characteristic of the Nagaswaram repertoire. It is played within the temple only by the Nagaswaram as part of the Temple tradition. There are no records of Vocalists including it into their repertoire, neither is there any context in which they could have rendered it during Tyagaraja’s time. Thus it is important to note the special significance of Tyagaraja being inspired by a composition of the Nagaswaram repertoire and composing one on the same lines. Another such composition is ‘Odam amujaripe’ which is closely related to the Odam of the Nagaswaram played during temple Teppothsavam. Again

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\(^{120}\) Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 34.
one find no mention as to the *Odam* (a composition essentially describing a romantic boat ride of the deity and his consort, in this case being Lord Krishna and the Gopis’) ever being part of the vocal repertoire before finding mention in the Tyagaraja Kriti.

In spite the Nagaswaram being at its height in the temple precinct during Tyagarajas’ time, why do we not find a direct mention of it in his Kithis, unlike Dixitar who has mentioned the instrument in his Shree raga composition. Perhaps this is because the lyrics of his songs were in a very simple format. The theme was almost in the form of a personal dialogue between him and divinity. It was not a description of god as a third person and did not involve the need for any adjectives or superlatives. It was a spiritual account of god and not a physical one. Tyagaraja was well versed in Jyotisha (Astrology), Mantra (sacred hymns) and Ganitha Sastras (treatises on Mathematics) yet did not incorporate these elements into his compositions unlike Dixitar.

One of the most important finds of my research is that Tyagaraja is believed to have learnt music from a Nagaswaram Vidwan. He is believed to have been the disciple of a Nagaswaram player called Tiruvaiyyaru Velan according to DR BM Sundaram. BM Sundaram explains that the brothers, Thiruvaiyyaru Velan and Swaminathan were very famous during Tyagaraja’s time and that he Tyagaraja sought guidance from Velan. This detail has been handed down as part of the family history of Nagaswaram Vid Swaminathan. His great grandson Vid Shivanthilinga Pillai has shared the details with Dr. BM Sundaram. Tyagaraja is referred to as “Iyeraval” in the accounts of Nagaswaram Vidwan Swaminathan. The fact that he was called “Ayyaraval” by his admirers and general public has been mentioned by P Sambamoorthy. Some details such as the fact that Tyagaraja was considered as an extraordinary composer yet ordinary man come to the fore. He had not yet gained the Saint like status that has been given to him in the later period.

Among the Trinity, one can find references of Tyagaraja rendering alapana of his favorite ragas for days together. According to P Sambamurthy Tyagaraja is said to have rendered the Raga Devagandhari (which is quite a small raga to elaborate) for days together, exploring and pushing the boundaries of its gamut further, a trait

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121 Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 2
122 Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 103
characteristic of the Nagaswaram vidwans who were conducting similar musical exercises in the same raga.

**Tyagaraja as a vocalist**

P Sambamoorthy gives us many references to the composers Manodharma capabilities. Tyagaraja was a prodigy who showed great depths in Alapana, Neraval. His music was described by many as grand and elaborate, which was quite characteristic of Vidwans who were inspires by the Nagaswaram. The timbre of his voice was outstanding. He mentions that Tyagaraja’s voice was high pitched. This was very much in tune with the kind of voice male vocalists had during the period. He possessed a silvery voice capable of “sweeping flights in three octaves” according to Sambamoorthy. While his elaboration of Raga Devagandhari is well known so is the incident where he sang the Raga Bilahari at a gathering of scholars organized by his Guru Sonti Venkataramanayya. He is said to have sang a raga Alapana followed by his own composition, Dorakuna ituvtani seva. He followed it with a thought provoking neraval to its third charana. Similarly sang Kamboji raga, Thana, his own composition ‘Mari mari nine and neraval in the presence of Sonti Venkatasubaiyya, the Asthana Vidwan of Tanjore court and this performance is said to have lasted for 8 hours! He was said to have added swarakalpana during this performance which was a novelty for vocalists. Another incident from P Sambamoorthy’s book tells us about an all-night rendition of Raga Saurashtra by the Saint. One definitely has to be greatly capable and inspired to render Raga Saurashtra for such a long period.

It is interesting to note that in the Western classical music world, the compositional style of the musicians always mirrored the general sentiment of the period or social and cultural mood. Like the medieval, Renaissance baroque or Romantic. However in the age of the Trinity itself, their compositions were quite different in theme and format from each other. Especially in theme and language. While Tyagaraja’s compositional style was more like a popular emotional ebb of tide, Dixitar’s was like an intellectual and cosmopolitan uprising (he internalized many Hindustani and western music elements). Nobody had combined the astronomical sciences and music to create such an aesthetic balance. Then there was Shyama Sastry whose compositions carried the sentiment of a child’s appeal to the great mother, set

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123 Great Composers, Book II, Tyagaraja – P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 82, 83, 110.
within unusual gait like the hypnotizing Mishra chapu. This could have only been possible because of the diverse influences to which these composers were exposed which played a crucial role of formal their melodic thought. Some by the royal and regal Veena and some by the majestic and popular Nagaswaram. Even the introduction of Desadi and Madhyadi Talas made the Laya in Tyagaraja’s compositions more malleable and catchy when compared to Dixitar whose krithi section lie exactly on beat.

THE NAGASWARAMS ROLE IN THE EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF RAGAS

During the course of my interviews with several vocalists and instrumentalists, I came to learn that the Nagaswaram has played a very important role in the evolution of ragas. Even though composers from the 17th century to the early 19th centuries, especially the Trinity had composed Krithi in almost all the Ragas between them (including popular and rare), it need not essentially result in the ragas gaining popularity. For that the composition itself had to gain popularity and even so it did not mean that that particular Raga would be chosen for Manodharma elaboration. Only when prominent performers (vocalists or instrumentalists) took them up for Alapana and perhaps Pallavi did they gain popularity. The instance of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer stunning his audience by singing the raga Chakravaka is a case in point to this. Dixitar had already composed the beautiful Krithi “Gajananayutham” (Adi Tala) in raga Chakravaka much before Vaidyanatha Iyer’s time. Yet when Vaidyanatha Iyer chose the raga to sing Alapana, it was never heard before and considered a novelty. Similarly there were many ragas which were taken up for elaboration by the Nagaswaram artists before the vocalists. According to Vidwan PS Narayanaswamy, the vocalists had quite a limited repertoire of ragas and even lesser number of Krithis. Many vocalists would choose their favourite raga and go on to attain proficiency in that one raga. Whereas the Nagaswaram tradition was such that it demanded that its players know a lot many more ragas and that they be capable of elaborating any raga. This is why even ragas such as Huseini found a prominent place for alapana. The Nagaswaram players had a whole array of ragas in their kitty. Many of these ragas were only emerging among the vocalists. Vivadi ragas were one example. There was a time when vocalists considered Vivadi ragas inauspicious. One wonders where Tyagaraja got the inspiration to compose many compositions in raga Varali. Whereas
the Nayanakaras did not have any such boundaries. Many of the Nagaswaram vidwans revelled by playing vivadi ragas. It was very much part of the Alapana Sampradaya. It is my belief that the vocalists who picked up Vivadi ragas must have been inspired by the Nagaswaram rendition to which they had been exposed. Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer has sung a very elaborate and scholarly raga Varali alapana and Pallavi “Sharavana bhava guhane - shanmukhane”, an expansion of Varali raga of the highest order. During the rendition of this RTP he goes on to specifically mention that he chose this raga to prevent it from going into oblivion. Semmangudi also mentions that he was deeply influenced by the Varali raga of Nagaswaram Chidambaram Vaidyanatha Pillai. Nagaswaram Vidwan TNR Natarajasundaram Pillai too was known to play a scintillating Varali raga.

As mentioned earlier it was Chinna Pakiri popularised ragas such as Hemavathy, Hamsabhamari, Keeravani, Simhendra Madhyama and Vachaspathi. Till his time no vocalist had taken up these ragas for elaborate Manodharma and he served as a great influence on all the musicians of his time. These are certain ragas which are believed to have attained their present form just because of the treatment the Nagaswaram Vidwans gave them. This was the time when Nagaswaram vidwans depended on their huge repertoire of Raga’s which they could apply to the Rakthi and Pallavi. Chinna Pakiri never played Krithis. He was also famous for his alapana of ragas such as Begada for four hours). We don’t know about how many people could have actually heard the court musicians singing Begada but when the Nagaswaram artists played them entire villages were given an opportunity to listen to a high order of music. Similarly even Veena Dhannamal who hailed from the same Isai Vellalar community found the Vachaspati ragam played by TN Rajarathnam Pillai very original and innovative. He took Vachaspati to great heights while the other were only catching up to him.

According to Vidwan Sanjay Subrahmaniam, the popularity of the raga Shanmukhapriya can be solely credited to the Nagaswaram vidwan who often picked it up for Raga alapana, Pallavi and swara Kalpana. The Nagaswaram players were said to have played the raga Shanmukhapriya during the time of the Trinity and perhaps even before .One must remember that Dixitar had many Nagaswaram

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125 History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music – R Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, Pg. 323
vidwans among his *Shishya parampara* and he has composed many Krithis in Shanmukhapriya. The raga shanmukhapriya could not have been alien to them. Whereas vocalists even after the Trinity are believed to have found the raga Shanmukhapriya, foreign. Not many vocalists picked it up for elaborate raga alapana in the 18th and early 19th century. However decades of exposure to the Nagaswaram’s brilliant rendition of Raga Shanmukhapriya changed things. They brought out the raga bhava, swaroopa and polished it into an attractive raga for the vocalists to pick up. Even when vocalists did pick it up in the later 19th centuries, it was considered as a foreign raga. Semmangudi refers to Shanmukhapriya and Charukeshi as a “Singapore raga” (N Ravikiran, 1998). He goes on to say that these raga were not preferred while creating the tunes for some of Swathi Thirunal compositions, when compared to “solid Carnatic ragas such as Thodi and Kalyani” (Mutthaiah Bhagavathar and Srinivasa Iyer popularised and created the tunes for the Maharaja’s compositions). However he goes on to acknowledge that there were instances of the Maharaja’s (Krithi’s) tunes originally set in the exotic ragas. Today vocalists have no difficulty in rendering both these Ragas and they are quite popular. Similarly Charukeshi is said to have been single handedly popularised by Nagaswaram Chakravarthy TN Rajarathnam Pillai (AUDIO R4b.24). My research has led me to believe that not many vocalists picked up Raga Charukeshi for alapana before TN Rajarathnam Pillai popularised it. When TNR picked up the raga Charukseshi for elaboration it was comparatively new to Alapana. However in the breath of TNR, this raga rose to great heights. To understand the ragabhava and technical brilliance (both technique of alapana and instrument) with which TNR played this raga one has to listen to his recordings. He set very high standards in this raga and it captivated not just vocalists but all other keen observers of Karnataka classical music. He churned out innovative sangathis from this raga. His music is on par with any musicians today even after several decades of instrumental and raga evolution. His attractive Charukesi was way ahead of its time and it inspired many generations to pick it up. Natabhairavi is another such raga which was extensively popularised by the Nagaswaram Vidwans and Rajarathnam Pillai played it in many of his concerts. BM Sundaram believes that even though TN Rajarathnam took the Raga Thodi to great heights, his true genius was in his handling of the Ragas Natabhairavi. His alapana in these ragas was nothing
short of genius and he change the way people looked at these ragas. They had never been rendered with such depth and variety by instrumentalists or vocalists other than the Nagaswaram. Similarly Megharanjini and Jyothiswaroopini are another set of rare ragas which were played very often by the Nagaswaram artists and they kept alive these ragas through their exposition. Many Nagaswaram artists even composed Varnams in these rare ragas. Later on Alathur Brothers (Srinivasa Iyer 1911-1980 and Shiva Subramania Iyer 1916-1965) are believed to be the earliest vocalists to sing the Raga Megharanjini as part of a raga malika in their Pallavi swaralakpana according to Vid Sanjay Subrahmanyan. Other ragas which are believed to have been handed down to us in their present format are Kamboji, Kedaragowla and Natakuranji.

Fig 10: THE NAGASWARAM AND MUTTHUSWAMY DIXITAR

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fig 10

Dixitar’s Shishya Parampara (Isai Vellala)

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<th>Tirukkadaiyur Bharati (Tamil Poet)</th>
<th>Tiruvarur Ayyaswamy Natuvanar (Author of Tana Varnas &amp; Padams)</th>
<th>Nagaswaram Mayavaram Vilvamangalam</th>
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<td>Natarajasundaram Pillai (First Nagaswaram Duo).</td>
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Mutthuswamy Dixitar’s compositions don’t give us any hints into the influence of Nagaswaram music in its musical structure or progression. However the Nagaswaram seems to have had a profound role in his life and work. An analyses of his life and work goes to show that the influence of the Nagaswaram music and its artists need not have been just an influence on an individual’s style. Dixitar was a Vainika and his compositions definitely show the Veena’s influence.

His Krithis are marked with distinct and well-rounded Gamakas, a leisurely pace and they are packed with technical and lyrical beauties’ like Swaraksharas. However Mutthuswamy Dixitar and his father had very close interaction with the Isai Vellala community and its musicians. A Dasi called Peria Kamalam was one of the very popular female musicians of her time and she lived in the opposite lane to Dixitar’s house. She was quite instrumental in singing and popularizing Ramaswamy Dixitar’s compositions according to Subbarama Dixitar’s Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini. Mutthuswamy Dixitar was believed to have sought her guidance in music from time to time. While composing in Ragas like Ahiri, Dixitar would often ask her to sing to quell his doubts according to Dr. BM Sundaram. ‘Peria Kalalamma’ as she was called made a written record of this and it has passed down in her family. The records of Tiruvarur Ayyiswamy Natuvanar, who was another direct and senior most disciple of Mutthuswamy Dixitar (he has been mentioned in the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini) also mentions the Guru-Shishya like relationship between Kamalam and Dixitar. Kamalam is said to have been instrumental in popularizing Ramaswamy Dixitars compositions. Aiyyaswamy Natuvanar was a prolific composer of Tana Varnams and Padams. His family handed over the document to BM Sundaram. It was handed over to his by the famous and outstanding Bharathnatyam exponent, Tiruvarur Gnanam, (Guru of Muthukuumara Pillai natuvanar) who was a direct descendent of Aiyyaswamy Natuvanar (The illustrious Tiruvarur Kondi Family).

Mutthuswamy Dixitar had many Nagaswaram artists as his disciples. In fact they far outnumbered his Brahmin disciples. They played a very important role in preserving and passing on of his krithis to the next generation. Ramaswamy and Mutthuswamy Dixitar knew the tendency of Nagaswaram Vidwans to only use the Swara layout of the Krithi, ignoring the Sahithya. Perhaps this is what made Ramaswami Dikshit and his sons, formulate and standardize kritis to be rendered by Nagaswaram vidwans. By then Devadasis such as Kamalam and Vallarkoil Ammani
Shuddha Maddhalam Tambiyappan, the artist attached to the Tiruvarur Thyagaraja temple was a senior disciple of Muthuswami Dikshitar. One of disciples who belonged to the Brahmin community was Sathanur Panchanada Iyer. He was the junior most disciple of Muthuswami Dikshitar and started learning from the great composer during his last years. After Dikshitar’s death, Panchanada Iyer continued his music education under Shuddha Maddhalam Tambiyappan. Many junior disciples kept the Dikshitar flame alive by honing their skills and perfecting their Dikshitar repertoire through tutelage under senior disciples which included many Isai Vellalas like Tambiyappan.

Panchanada Iyer has been referred to by the Tamil scholar U.V. Swaminatha Iyer as being one of the important musicians of the Tanjavur area during the 19th century. However Panchanada Iyer is also remembered by the music world for his unique contribution in siring two disciples, again from the Isai Vellala community who in turn, spawned a whole new world where Dikshitar kritis occupied the pride of place and were noted for their authentic versions. Veena Dhanammal and Tirupamburam Natarajasundaram Pillai, the Nagaswaram maestro were the two prime disciples of Sattanur Ayya, as Veena Dhanammal fondly referred to him. One of the earliest contributions of the Nagaswaram Vidwan was his publication of the book, which was a collection of fifty Mutthuswamy Dixitar’s Krithi’s called ‘Dikshita Kirtanai Prakashikai’ in 1936. Natarajasundaram Pillai and his brother Subramania Pillai were the first Nagaswaram vidwans to play as a duo and start the trend. Another interesting fact is that Sathanaur Panchanada Iyer was also the Guru of Violin Tirukodikaval Krishnaiyer who was known for his adherence to the Vocal Bani. However his nephew Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer was extensively inspired by the Nagaswaram and his other disciple was the great Nagaswaram exponent TN Rajarathnam pillai. Thus a study of Muthuswamy Dixitar’s lineage shows a very complex network interrelationship between the Nagaswaram artists and the Vocal musicians. Veena Dhanammal further went on to pass on her knowledge of Dixitar Krithi’s to her daughters Brunda and Muktha who rose to become outstanding musicians. They were known for their pristine rendition of Dixitar’s compositions like ‘Vina Pustaka Dharini’, ‘Saraswati manohari’ and ‘Mamava Pattabhirama’.
Nagaswaram Vidwan Nataraja Sundaram Pillai’s son, Swaminatha Pillai went on to become an accomplished flautist. Swaminatha Pillai inherited his love for Dikshitar kritis from his father and achieved excellence in them. He held his position in the music field against popular stars and great masters such as Palladam Sanjeeva Rao and later on TR Mahalingam. Flute Mahalingam was very open about his appreciation for the music and technique of Swaminatha Pillai. Swaminatha Pillai mainly followed the Dikshitar style of vilambakala and gamakas and played a lot of Dixitar krithis in his concerts. The Chaturdasha ragamalika, ‘Sri Vishvanatham’ is said to have been introduced to the concert stage and popularised by him. Similarly Raga Navaroj kriti ‘hastivadanaya namasthubyam’ was also popularised by him. He also patiently studied the 108 raga-tala malika of Ramaswami Dikshitar and taught it to deserving students. Swaminatha Pillai taught at the Central College of Music, Madras. During his tenure, he taught a number of Dixitar kritis to students as well as to other teachers, thus helping in wide dissemination of Dixitar Krithis. Swaminatha Pillai also taught for some time at the Annamalai University’s music department. He also taught a few earnest students in the gurukulA method. T. Viswanathan, a grandson of Dhanammal learnt the flute from him. T.V. Namashivayam, S. Narasimhalu and Sirgazhi Govindarajan learnt vocal music from Swaminatha Pillai. He passed away in February 1961 and has been remembered for nurturing the legacy and bringing to light many of the rare compositions of Muthuswamy Dixitar. Swaminatha Pillai’s son Tiruppamburam Shanmugasundaram also rose to great heights as a Vocalist.

Among the Nagaswaram Vidwans and other Isai Vellalars who trained under Muthuswamy Dixitar, one cannot ignore the contribution of the Tanjore Quartet who were his direct disciples. Ponnaiah Pillais compositions such as ‘Mayateetha Swaroopini’ (Raga Mayamalavagowla) and ‘Satileni guruguha’ (Raga poorvikalyani) refer to Muthuswamy Dixitar as their guru. Some rare manuscripts are still believed to be in the possession of their family. Thus one cannot ignore the contribution of the Nagaswaram community towards the dissemination of Dixitars Krithis and the intermingling of ideas which was prevalent between the Dixitar family and the Isai Vellala.
COMPOSERS AMONG NAGASWARAM VIDWANS

The Nagaswaram music as a whole inspired many vocalists during the past century. GNB was one such vocalist who was known to have been greatly influenced by the Nagaswaram. So much so that, people started addressing his style as the Nagaswaram Bani. His close friendship with Nagaswaram Chakravarthy Vid TN Rajarathinam Pillai was very well known. It is from this close association that many interesting ideas of music were exchanged between the two great musicians. According to K.S. Krishnamurthy (Calcutta Krishnamurthy), it was TNR who was the creator of the raga *Saranga Tarangini* (Doraiswamy, 2013)\(^{127}\). Later on, the credit for composing the kriti “Samana Rahite”, the first and only composition in this raga went to Vid GNB. This raga is the Gandhara varjya of 65\(^{th}\) Melakartha raga Mecha Kalyani i.e. sa, ri, ma, pa, da, ni, sa. Similarly during an interview with Vid Sanjay Subrahmanyans, he mentioned that the early introducers of Raga “Megha Ranjini” in the Karnataka classical context were Nagaswaram Vidwans’ while rendering Raga Malikas. According to Dr BM Sundaram, the Nagaswaram vidwans have had a deeper relationship with this raga. The Tiruvaarur temple used to engage Nagaswaram Vidwans for a series of concerts during the Vasanthsavam. During this festival the temple tradition dictated that the Nagaswaram Vidwan’s play the raga Megharanjini on the fifth day of the Uthsavam. Vidwan Korainadu Natesa Pillai even composed a Varnam in this raga during the early 19\(^{th}\) century. Similarly Raga Jyothiswaroopini was handled by Natesha Pillai in his Varna *Adinipai*.

Another very important aspect of the Nagaswaram’s influence, was their significant additions to the wealth of compositions in Karnataka music. Korainadu Natesa Pillai (1830-1929) Composed several Varnams the number being roughly around 118, which were later even set to Tamil script. Some of the famous ones are

- *Adinipai* - *Jyothiswaroopini*
- *Kasinchi poidhile* – *Megharanjini* (This raga was later picked up by Alathur brothers)
- *Mamatha ratiinchene* - *Shuddha Saveri*. The specialty of this Varnam is that it contains the mudra “Parimala Ranga”. Interestingly this Varnam has become a

\(^{127}\) PK Doraiswamy, quoting KS Krishnamurthy. Ragas without Krithis- Sruti, Issue 350 Nov 2013, Pg. 4
part of the Tiruvarur temple’s music tradition. Instructions given on the Tiruvarur leaflet specify that this Varnam is to be played in Tiruvaarur temple during Uthsavam time on the seventh day. One wonders the connection between Parimala Ranga and Tyagaraja Perumal!!

According to musicologist Dr BM Sundaram, the chittaiswaram in saint Tyagaraja’s composition ‘Niravadhi sukhada’ (Raga Ravichandrika) was an addition of Tavil Player Ilupur Panchami (Malaikottai Panchami) whose real name was Panchapkesha Pillai. He composed Chittaiswarams for around a dozen of Tyagaraja’s kritis including ‘Palukavemi na’ (Raga Poornachandrika) and Vararaga laya (Chenchu Kamboji). Dr BM Sundaram who spoke about composers among Nagaswaram and Tavil Vidwans during the December music festival- Chennai 2013 also went on to add that Panchapakesha Pillai, who died at the young age of 30 was a good singer and cut a disc. He was also one of the favoured Tavil accompanists of Vid TN Rajarathinam Pillai. His brother, Illupur Natesa Pillai was also a famous Nagaswaram Vidwan and the Guru of Clarinet Vidwan AKC Natarajan.

Another famous composer was Nagaswaram Ammachathiram Kannuswamy Pillai (1876-1927), who trained Mudicondan Venkatarama Iyer in the aspects of Laya. One can see his direct influence in the rendition style of Vocalist Mudicondan Venkatrama Iyer. Vid Kannuswamy Pillai was also the Guru who taught TNR the mastery of the Nagaswaram. He composed many Tillana and Krithis and Varnams. Only three of 3 of his Varnams are available now. Some of his Tillanas have been rendered by Sangita Kalanidhi Vid R Vedavalli (Disciple of Mudicondan) in her own concerts, the most famous being the Vasantha Tillana. His ankitha was ‘Parimala Ranga’. He was one of the earliest Tavil players to have dazzled the audience by using the Gopuccha yati in a Mukthayi and this became a trend setter for many percussionist in the later years.

Among the other Nagaswaram player who earned a distinction as composers too was Nagapatnam Veeraswamy Pillai. One of the foremost Nagaswaram Vidwans’ of the yester years who also was a composer was Mahavidwan Nagapatnam Venugopala Pillai (1861-1917). He was also the revered Guru of the great Tavil Vidwan Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1894-1949). Nagapatnam Venugopala Pillai was a prolific composer of Varnams and Vid BM Sundaram himself has a good
collection of his Varnams. It is also the belief of Vid Dr BM Sundaram that the Kalyani Adi Tala Varnam ‘Vanajakshi’ was composed by Venugopala Pillai and has been wrongly attributed to Ramanathapuram Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar (Sundaram, Composers among Nagaswaram and Tavil players, 2013)\(^\text{128}\). Defending his find, he says that the actual Ankitha in the Varnam is “Naagapuramuna velayu sami soundararaja” and after a deep analysis of the Varnam he concludes that the compositional style too, is an exact match to that of Venugopala Pillai’s when compared with his other Varnams. His second Varnam "Sami ni" in Panthuvarali has the same sahithya "Niluparaa ni mohamaaye" as its Charanam just like the Kalyani Varnam and this repeats in his Pantuvarali Varnam. ‘Naagapuramuna velayu sami soundararaja’ is the Ankitha used in all the Varnams except one which has ‘Naagapuri Nivaasa Sami soundaraja’ for a change. This mudra ‘Soundararaja’ refers to Lord Soundararaja Perumal of Nagapattinam. Nagapatnam Venugopala Pillai was himself a fathomless ocean of rhythm. He was known for his intricate arithmetic and Jathis and it is he who groomed the Tavil Vidwan Meenakshisundaram into a star performer. After Nagapatnam Venugopala Pillai’s death, upon his instructions Meenakshi Sundaram played for Semponnarkovil Ramaswamy who was a great Pallavi exponent.

Nagaswaram vidwan Chidambaram Natarajasundaram Pillai (1906- 1974) Also called CS Nataraj, residing in Chidambaram, composed 14 Varnams, and many Tamil compositions. Among them is the very popular Tamil song in Valachi ragam "Kaivida maatan" composed by him.

Dharmapuram Govindaraja Pillai was a great Vidwan of the Nagaswaram and a specialist of Laya. However due to his technical brilliance many Tavil Vidwans shied away from playing for him. He had the habit of doing graha-bheda in the main raga, then sing a kruthi in the new graha-bheda raga and then further picking another note and singing swarakalpana in the third graha-bheda raga. This sometimes got too complicated for the audience. However he was a brilliant composer. He composed popular songs, Sodanaidaano- Gambheeranattai, Thishra eka tala, Neevandanai - Neelamani Ragam - Thishra jathi ata talam, Shree Meenakshi - Mayamalavagowla Adi talam and many Varnam.

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\(^{128}\) Vid BM Sundaram – Composers among Nagaswaram and Tavil players, Parivadini, Chennai December 2013
Famous Nagaswaram maestro TN Rajarathnam Pillai composed the very popular Krithi “Sivaguruparaney” in Kalyani raga.

I also learned from Vid Ashwathi Thirunal Ramavarma, that while the most of the original tunes of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal’s compositions were lost, the only available original tunes for some of his Krithis were preserved and propagated by the family of Nagaswaram Vidwans’ who served as the Asthana Vidwans of the Trivandrum Padmanabhaswamy Kshetram. The family of Padmanabha Kambar and Nataraja Kambar were instrumental in bringing out some original scripts of Swathi Thirunal Maharaja in 1980.

During the course of my research I have also come across the important role Nagaswaram artists have played in the dissemination of Karnataka classical music and their distinctive styles as teachers or Gurus. Very little information is available on this subject. It took a lot of searching to find out the reclusive Nagaswaram gurus who often had exclusive vocal students. Many such students rose to great heights and went on to make a mark for themselves in the field of Karnataka classical vocal music. One such Nagaswaram guru we know was Vidwan Palanivel of Konerirajapuram. Known as one of the great Vidwans of his time, he was also the guru of Vidwan Konerirajapuram Vaidhyanatha Iyer. Based on accounts of vocalists such as Vid Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, one can definitely say that the stamp of the Nagaswaram style of singing with special reference to long phrases was passed down to Vaidhyanatha Iyer. He in turn passed down his distinctive style of performing to his start disciples Mudicondan Venkatarama Iyer and Vid TK Rangachari. Mudicondan Venkatarama Iyer was in turn a vocalist who was influenced by the Nagaswaram artists and its music from many sources. Not only did he have a deep interest and appreciation for the music of the Nagaswaram he also went on to learn from Nagaswaram and Tavil exponent Ammachathiram Kannuswamy Pillai (The Nagaswaram guru of Vidwan TN Rajarathinam Pillai). Ammachathiram Kannuswamy Pillai was remembered as one of the greatest laya Vidwans of his time and a great Guru. This line of musical thought and style further got passed down from Mudicondan Venkatarama Iyer to his disciple Sangita Kalanidhi Vidushi R Vedavalli. Similarly Nagaswaram Vidwan Tiruppambaram Somasundaram Pillai was known as a great guru and had many vocal disciples. One such disciple who went on to make a huge impact on Karnataka classical vocal music is Padmabhushan Vidwan PS
Narayanaswami. PS Narayanaswami went on to learn from Vidwan Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer later and that worked out very well for him in term of style since Semmangudi himself had incorporated many elements of the Nagaswaram music into his singing. Today Vidwan PS Narayanaswami is one of the most senior and well respected vocalists we have in Karnataka classical music. Apart from being a strong voice in the working and decisions of the Madras Music Academy, he is one of the most revered teachers and trained a very large number of successful young musicians today, from Ranjini-Gayatri, Kalavathy Avadhooth, Gayathri Venkatraraghavan to Violinist VV Ravi and many more. Vidwan PS Narayanaswami goes on to say that Tiruppmambaram Somasundaram Pillai played a very important role in shaping the flexible bruga shareera he had. Talking about his training, Vid PS Narayanaswami gives a detailed account of his training under a Nagaswaram vidwan and the effect it had on him. According to Vid PSN, not everyone had the wherewithal to find vocal teachers. Many leading vocalists and teachers had also migrated to the larger cities like George Town madras in search of better opportunities. Thus many youngsters would enrol under the Nagaswaram vidwans (as vocal disciples) who were present in larger numbers in and around the villages in temple services. The village Tiruvizhimalai had the famous Nagaswaram vidwans (brothers) who were reputed as great teachers. Swaminatha pillai (flute), Shivasubramania Pillai (Vocal Teacher in Annamalai University, Chidambaram) and Nagaswaram Somasundaram Pillai. PSN goes on to say that Somasundaram Pillai was not just a Nagaswaram Vidwan but also an expert singer like most of his clan. One of the biggest contribution of Somasundaram Pillai to his disciple was the transmission of a lot of Mutthuswamy Dixitars Krithis. The Nagaswaram Vidwan belonged to a direct shishya parampara of Dixitar. Classes were held in early morning or night. The vocal students were given the same kind of training as the Nagaswaram counter parts. The morning 4 am sessions included intense Aakara sadhakam under the watchful eyes of the guru. He was taught a lot of Varnas which were to be rendered as swara-sahithya and as Aakaras. The Sarali and Janti varsai were to be rendered in at least four speeds in all possible Sampoorna ragas both as swaras and Aakaras. Then the same exercises were to be sung in different nadais. Thus Somasundaram Pillai gave PS Narayanaswamy an extremely strong base in Shruthi, Tala, Varnam and Keerthana and most importantly made sure that the pupil had a well-developed flexible voice. Somasundaram Pillai taught all he could and once he finished teaching
Narayanaswamy his Dixitar Krithis, asked him to move on to another teacher who would teach him composition of the other Trinity too. His recommendation was Mudicondan Venkataraman was the choice of the guru. However PS Narayanaswamy went on to become Semmangudi’s disciple. The most important aspect of the Nagaswaram based training was that PS Narayanaswamy had the going very smooth for him from then on due to the intense voice training and laya exercises that was gives to him by his guru. The later imbibing of style happened from listening to the music of Nagaswaram Rajarathinam Pillai and Kuzhikarai Pitchiappa, Vid Pitchiappa being his favourite.

Another popular vocalist we have amongst us today who has had direct discipleship under a Nagaswaram artist is Vidwan Sanjay Subrahmanyan. After learning under Vid (Calcutta) KS Krishnamoorthy till his demise in 1999 he went on to seek guidance from Nagaswaram giant Semmbonarkoil Vaidhyanatha Pillai on the recommendation of Nagaswaram Vidwan S Kasim. Vid Semmbanarkoil Vaidhyanathan was one of the foremost exponents of Mallari and Rakthi. He was known for his expansive and emotive raga alapana. Many vocalists have been keen observers of his intricate Pallavi patterns and swara kalpana. It is interesting to note that most vocalists who have learned under Nagaswaram Vidwans’ or have been inspired by the Nagaswaram have one thing in common. They are not just good musicians but phenomenal performers. It takes a certain knack to get ones music across to the audiences apart from being a good musician yourself. Vid Sanjay Subrahmanyan is one such successful performer who has been singing to packed concert houses. He has one hand on the pulse of his audience and his music is not just challenging and scholarly but also very popular. Talking about his guru Sanjay Subrahmanyan goes on to say that Vaidhyanatha Pillai “opened my mind completely”. He went on to say that training under the Nagaswaram music freed him from any inhibitions and “quarantined music”. Although the changes made by his guru suited his own personality, his mind was almost “broken in” and his whole rendition went through a sea of change under the guidance of Nagaswaram Semmbonarkoil Vaidhyanatha Pillai. His new style was completely different from the style of his previous guru and today we get to hear a very refreshing approach in Karnataka classical vocal music.