CHAPTER FIVE:

SCHOOLS AND THE STYLES OF VOCALISTS’ WHO HAVE ADOPTED THE NAGASWARAM BANI.

WHAT IS BANI?

The terms and Bani and Gharana hold great significance in the world of Karnataka and Hindustani classical music. Hindustani music has always laid great significance on the various Gharana’s to which its musicians belonged to. Derived from the Sanskrit “graha” or home “gharana” denotes family ties, blood relation, caste or common heritage. Thus in music, Gharana denotes direct descendants of a Master musician who have trained under him and imbibed his style. The Gharana got established over time by collective adherence to style and technique. At least three generations had to be followers of the school to give the Gharana a name, fame and credibility. Usually the Gharana took its name from the place where the Master lived and taught and also found royal or noble patronage. Thus we have the Gwalior, Jaipur, Kirana, Patiala, Maihar Gharana etc. However in Karnatak music Bani is slightly different. “Bani” denotes a distinct style or school of singing perfected by a musician, which could also be transmitted to his or her disciples. It is derived from the word “Vani” meaning voice (Vishwanathan, 1998). It is said that in Karnataka music the Bani of individual artists has played a lesser role in the cultivation of disciples, than the oral tradition of learning the Trinity’s songs from a direct line of disciples. Moreover Bani was named after the Guru and not on Royal patronage or area where the musicians hailed from. For example there is no “Semmangudi” or “Mannargudi” Bani because all the musicians hailing from the same villages never sang alike.

The following of a particular Bani was perhaps pronounced when the Gurukul Paddhathi was in practise. Some gurus were extremely strict about the students’ adhering to the paathantharam. They even forbade their disciples from going to another musicians’ concert fearing an influence that would lead to the dilution of style. Mysore Vasudevacharya was virtually condemned by his guru Patnam Subramanya Iyer for attending a concert of Maha Vaidhyanatha Iyer. However by the time of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer this phenomenon had relaxed if not disappeared.

129 Lakshmi Vishwanathan – The Hindu Folio, Nov 1998, Pg. 32
Srinivasa Iyer himself in spite of being a disciple of Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer followed a very different style which suited his own voice and vocal technique better. Semmangudi’s style was very unique and had an aesthetic ease which many music students could easily follow (in spite of having a voice that was not considered particularly attractive). His school of music got carried forward in the able hands of his disciples. He had many disciples such as Smt. Seetha Rajan, MS Subbalakshmi, TN Krishnan, Mavelikkara Prabhakara Varma, Prof. Kumara Kerala Varma, K. J. Yesudas, P. S. Narayanaswami, V. Subramaniam, K. R. Kedarathan, Kadayanallur Venkataraman, V. R. Krishnan, Smt. Seethalakshmi Venkatesan, Smt. Radha Namboodri, Smt. Visalakshi Ramachandran and T. M. Krishna. Another musician whose eclectic style gave rise to a Bani was GN Balasubramaniam. His style was imbibed and carried forward by his disciples. ML Vasanthakumari, one of his foremost disciples was said to have the most noticeable stamp of her guru’s style in her singing. However today the lines of distinction between each Gharana and Bani have blurred. Now students of music and established musicians are exposed to different styles due to teaching of music at various Universities, music sources such as the AIR and Television. Every musician’s style of rendition is now a result of a lot of influences and one’s style changes over a period of time with experience and age.

NAGASWARARAM BANI

This brings us to the question. When did the term “Nagaswaram Bani” come into being? How did it come and what has been the basis of such a classification and its relevance. Throughout the history of Karnataka music, the influence of Veena on vocal music was always a known and accepted phenomenon. A study of the upper and literary class, the Veena Bani was considered scholarly, traditional and superior. However within the history of Karnataka music, the Natuvanars and the Nagaswaram clan remained one of the largest performing and teaching community. Their influence on the dissemination and development of music was quiet, undocumented yet strongly prevalent. Vocalists who had their training from the upper class court musicians have believed to have sung in short phrases which laid a lot of emphasis on heavy and intricate gamakas. However from the onset of the 19th and 20th century a lot of Vocalists started experimenting with their own styles of singing. Many of them found their artistic tendencies leaning towards the flamboyance and majesty of the Nagaswaram music. The Nagaswaram players themselves were very good vocalists
and their singing too seems to have fired the Manodharma of many upper class vocalists. This artistic freedom and the inclusion of Nagaswaram like phrases into the upper class vocalists singing arrived at a point when the stronghold of the royal courts as patrons of classical music had started to wane. The court had now slowly lost its privilege of chief patronage and its royal musicians had started performing in the public arena as in the case of Coimbatore Raghavaiyer. This meant that they no longer controlled the lakshya and lakshana of classical music and its musicians. Slowly many musicians started to sing in longer continuous phrases and include brikkas in their alapana. The number of Sangathis that got added to many Krithis increased and there was a lot interaction of ideas between the Nagaswaram vidwans and the upper class musicians.

In this backdrop there have been a number of Vocalists who have imbibed the Nagaswaram into not only their individual styles but have also passed it to their disciples. When the number of students increases over time both vertically and horizontally it leads to the genesis of a school of music which follows the style established by their Adi guru. Does that mean all the musicians inspired by the Nagaswaram can be bunched under one Bani? During the course of my research I found that there were many Vocalists starting from Coimbatore Raghavaiyer (Coimbatore Raghaver is the earliest vocalist about whose style of singing we find certain clues about) to GN Balasubramaniam and latest TN Sheshagoplan who all have been influence and inspired by the Nagaswaram. However one can’t bunch all these musicians under one style calling it the “Nagaswaram Bani”. Each one’s style is extremely different from the other. TN Sheshagopalan is one of the very few musicians presented today who have a strong flavour of the Nagaswaram in his Manodharma progressions and presentation of Varnams’ and Krithis’ and yet he cannot be classified into any one Bani (Vishwanathan, 1998). His style is an eclectic mixture of all traditions from the Tanjore belt including that of the Veena. Neither can all the Nagaswaram artists themselves be put into one style or Bani. Hence one must seriously reconsider the usage of the term “Nagaswaram Bani” from a musician’s point of view. However in a rare radio interview Vidwan TN Rajarathinam Pillai gives us a very interesting view on the usage and concept of Bani. According to Vidwan TN Rajarathinam Pillai, the term ‘Bani, is more a phenomenon

\[130\] Musicologist TS Parthasarathy for the Hindu Folio, Nov 1998, Pg. 33
belonging to the audiences rather than to the classical vocalists. He goes on to say that
the perception of similarities of style can differ from one listener to another. Thus
Bani and its conceptualisation belongs to the perceiver (audience) rather than the
performer. It is a concept that belongs to a Rasika. He goes on to say that each ones
Bani changes according to the place, time, age and audience for which one is
performing. Thus TNR gives us an insight into the understanding of Bani and that it
signifies a style with which the audience is familiar and can identify itself with.
Whenever a Vocalist singing showed imprints of a Nagaswaram influence or
inspiration, their style of singing was referred to as “Nagaswaram Bani”. The
influence may be in found in varying degrees. The term however does not mean a
singular format of presentation nor does it signify a hereditary transfer of styles from
one generation to another. Also the Nagaswaram Bani can only be a part of the
individual’s style. It need not enshrine a complete summary of the artist’s style.
Within Nagaswaram music itself there are many styles and schools of thought such as
the Chilakkuripettai Bani, Semmponarloik Bani etc. Thus the term “Nagaswaram
Bani” denotes a broader analysis and not a specific category into which a Vocalists
style can be categorised. A vocalist whose style gives a distinguishable flavour of
Nagaswaram music, to a sizable number of receivers is said to have a “Nagaswaram
Bani”. Needless to say this term comes under tremendous amount of subjectivity.

The golden age of Karnataka music from 1763-1900 saw the rise of many
brilliant musicians and composers. The trinity of Karnataka music passed away
between 1823 to 1847. However they left behind a rich legacy. The generation born
immediately in succession were talented musicians who carried forward this legacy.
Trained in the gurukul system, the next generation of musicians carried forward the
flame of music lit by the trinity. The economic and social conditions were also
favourable for this. Composers, teachers, vocalists and instrumentalists found rich
patronage from the princes, Zamindars and Mathadhipathis of Tiruvaduturai,
Ramanatham, Mysore, Tanjore, Travancore and Pudukkottai. Exponents of
Nagaswaram and Tavil were found in every village. Thirumarugal Natesan was one of
the leading Nagaswaram exponents during this period. He was a legendary figure. The
practise of holding annual festivals in temples and Mutts, a speciality during this
period ensured that Nagaswaram artists were in great demand. During this period

131 History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music – R Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, ch 21, pg. 215
there would be great competition between Asthana Vidwan and the visiting Nagaswaram Vidwan who played during the festivals. This resulted in complex Pallavis, Rakthi and extravagant Raga alapanas being rendered by the vidwans who wanted to prove their mettle. Musicians would come from far off towns and villages to listen to the Nagaswaram music entire night. Each raga chosen for a night was discussed in great anticipation by laymen and scholars alike. A noteworthy feature of this period was that famous temples would arrange these features in succession to ensure that dates don’t clash and music lovers had a treat throughout the year. Music was the most important attraction and show stopper during these festivals. This was also the age of sustained listening. The audience would sit through the entire night listening to concerts. This golden era has been the most important reason behind the vast diversity that Karnataka music has achieved in the area of improvisation.

The golden age saw the emergence of many great vocalist who drew inspiration from the Nagaswaram, particularly those from the Tanjore district. It is the opinion of many scholars that most vocalists hailing from the Tanjore district had some inspiration from the Nagaswaram. T.R. Venkatarama Sastry in his speech at the Music academy (1951) went on to say that the Nagaswaram had been his first instructor in music. The Tiruvadurai mutt were the chief patrons of music and that he had had the good fortune of listening to first rate Nagaswaram concerts there. These were held in more frequency when compared to vocal music. Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer who was an eminent performer himself performed only twice a year at the mutt which Venkatarama Sastry never missed (sastry, 1952).

According to Dr BM Sundaram, **Coimbatore Raghavaiyer (1824-1878)** was one of the earliest known vocalists who imbibed the Nagaswaram’s influence in his rendition. His extensive Raga alapana and special RTP were well known to have the over tones of the Nagaswaram style. He was also well known for his elaboration of raga Todi. He had the title of Todi Raghavaier too. Coimbatore Raghavaiyer was born into a Natuvanga-Brahmin family in Vadassery (Near Nagercoil), Trivandrum around the year 1826 AD. His father was a very popular Natuvanar who trained dancing girls, had close ties with the Isai Vellalas and at the same time maintained all the cultural norms of the upper class such as conducting Unchavrritti around the

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132 TR Venkatarama sastry, Music Academy Journal- 1952, Pg. 4 Vol XVIII
village. An early exposure to the music of both Isai Vellalas and the Brahmins must have enabled him to develop a very holistic approach to Classical music and in turn develop his own unique style. After his father, he trained under the famous guru Parameshwara Bhagavathar of the Trivandrum Royal court. He was supposed to have an assertive (in some accounts aggressive) style of singing. His Todi raga alapana was described as a “torrential rain”. This kind of descriptions suggests that his Raga alapana consisted of long phrases and brisk sangatis. He went to great lengths to be considered a “classical vocalist”. He wanted to leave the image of a “Nattuvanga – Brahmin” behind which was considered lower in status. This quest took him to Coimbatore where he trained under another famous guru called “Chidambara Natuvan” who was the grandson of the great Vadivelu Natuvan of Trivandrum. We get certain clues about Raghavaiyer’s style based on the accounts of his contest between Bhikshanderkoil Subba Rao (From Tiruchinapally) and Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer. Raghavaiyer was believed to have been influenced deeply by the Nagaswaram music that surrounded him and was known to compose many intricate Pallavi structures. He was very accurate in reproducing and elaborating the complicated Pallavis’ that were thrown to him as a challenge by many vidwans. His own Pallavis’ were known to be filled with Rhythmic intricacies often heard in the Tavil. Raghava Iyer was known to have a very majestic and original style. The Madras Music Academy Journal goes on to say the Raghava Iyer “was a man who despised the beaten grooves of singing and cut his own way”. He was heralded as one of the greatest vocalists of the Trivandrum asthanam. There were many vocalists who specialised in one Raga and had these ragas as their title. Ex Begade Narasimha Iyengar, Narayanagowla Kuppaier, Shankarabharanam Narasayya etc. Raga Tanam Pallavi was still the order of the day. The Krithis’ of the trinity were yet to be adopted in concerts. Raghavaier was the Asthana Vidwan of HH Maharaja Ayilyam Thirunal of Travancore. He later moved to Coimbatore. Anai and Ayya were two famous composer brothers (nattuvanar) who lived in Tanjore during the golden period. Their disciple Kamakshi passed on their compositions to her granddaughter Veena Dhanam. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was also a disciple of the brothers. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar (1844-1893) was another vocalist who was believed to have been inspired by the Nagaswaram, especially in his Raga alapana. R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar

133 Music Academy Journal – 1930 “My musical reminiscences – T Lakshmana Pillai” Pg. 239
narrates a contest which took place between the senior Coimbatore Raghavaiyer and Maha Vaidhyanatha Ayyar in the Travancore Durbar in 1872. He clearly mentions about the influence of the Tanjore tradition of Raga alapana developed by Nagaswaram players in both the vocalist style. Coimbatore Raghavaiyer chose Shankarabharanam and Thodi for RTP while Maha Vaidhyanatha Ayyar chose Kalyani and Kharaharapiya. Kharaharapiya was brought into the limelight by Tyagaraja, while Maha Vaidhyanatha Ayyar introduced it to Travancore. Ramaswamy Sivan was the brother of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. This duel which took place during Poojayeduppu (Dasara) festival has been mentioned in several accounts. Many accounts have dates which vary. According to T Lakshmana Pillai it took place in 1047 M.E (1873 AD) in the month of Purattasi. However all the accounts are unanimous when it comes to describing Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar’s style of singing. He is described as a fast and fertile singer with a bruga shaareeram and that his style included long Sangatis which were crisp and light. Pallavi singing came with great ease to him. According to T Lakshmana Pillai, Vaidhyanatha Ayyar was a master of many unknown ragas (during his time) and he had a gifted voice unrivalled in sweetness along with a capacity for fast paced performances. His singing was described to be “dazzling”.

Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer underwent most of his training under his father and under the guidance of the Pandarasannidhi of the Tiruvaduturai Matam, Tanjore. This was one of the most celebrated Matas in the Tanjore district for Tamil learning and Karnataka Classical music. This Matam was known to hold concerts every day, throughout the year and was one of the most prominent patrons of Nagaswaram music. There accounts which describe Nagaswaram concerts which were held day and night throughout the year at the Tiruvaduturai Matta. Keeping this in mind it would have been quite possible for Maha Vaidhyanatha Ayyar to have been influenced and inspired by the reverberating Nagaswaram music around him. There are many accounts which also talk about one of the greatest Nagaswaram player of history, Tirumarugal Natesan being a great friend of Vaidyanatha Iyer. Vaidyanatha Ayyar many a times remarked about the beauty of Natesan’s Manodharma Sangita saying “kurugiya kaalatthukulle miga perum nagaswara vidwangal ellam kettal

134 History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music – R Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, ch 20, pg. 210
135 Music Academy Journal – 1931 Vol II – Pg. 84.
Tirumarugalaar vaasippai kekavendum yendru potrum padi aagum, tirumarugalaar isai kettu ullam urugadhbaar yaar” 136(one should listen to Tirumarugal Natesan’s Nagaswaram to understand music within a short time and there is no one who has not melted at the sound of his nayanam). It is interesting to note that Nagaswaram Tirumarugal Natesan himself underwent training and received patronage from the same Tiruvadudurai Matam. The Music Academy Journals give us a detailed account of the period in which Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar lived and performed and the musical environment he was surrounded by. He was one of the next generation of brilliant musicians who came after Raghavaiyer (Coimbatore) along with Patnam Subbramania Iyer. Tirukodikaval Krishnaiyer (Violin) and Sharabha Sastrigal (Flute) were his contemporaries. All these artists were believed to be influenced by the Nagaswaram in some manner or the other. While talking about this glorious period of music, the Academy Journal goes on to say that “the art of music during the last century, which shows a marvellous expansion in all its branches by producing a master artist in each, reached its climax when it gave birth to Tirumarugal Natesan whose play on the Nagaswaram was as ravishing as that of Orpheus of old on his lyre (Iyer G. N., 1930)137”. Various such accounts go on to indicate that Nagaswaram artists Tirumarugal Natesa Pillai was a star during his period and went on to make a deep impact on all the musicians who were his contemporaries, just like the Nagaswaram maestro Vidwan TN Rajaratnam Pillai would in the later period.

Dr Ritha Rajan in her interview with me said that Maha Vaidhyanatha Iyer had a very limited repertoire of Krithis’. It hardly consisted of about six to ten of the famous Krithis’ and his main forte was the Raga Thana Pallavi. He was known for his exhaustive alapana which was matched only by Coimbatore Raghavaiyer and the music of the Nagaswaram. Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer was the son of Panchanada Ayya and his brother Ramaswamy Sivan was a famous composer too. Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer received his training under one “Anayya” 138 a composer of Krithis in Telugu and Tamil. He later trained under Manambuchavadi Venkatascbbyyar who was a direct disciple of Tyagaraja. Prof P Sambamoorthy in his book “Great Musicians” talks in detail of the exceptional rich tonal quality of Vaidyanatha Iyer’s voice. He sang in the pitch of G and was adept in singing six degrees of speed. One of the important

136 Mangala Isai Mannargal – BM Sundaram Pg. 33
137 Music Academy Journal – 1930 – Pg. 247
138 Great Musicians – Prof P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 2
references we find in this book is about the style of Vaidhyanatha Iyer’s rendition. Maha Vaidhyanatha Iyer was a vocalist whose voice was of extraordinary brilliance and that he packed his music with lightning speed Brigas. He is supposed to have sung break neck speed brigas through a range of two and a half octaves with surprising fluidity and speed. Prof P Sambamoorthy describes them as “They gave one the impression of brilliant sparks of dazzling beauty witnessed in fireworks”. Before one could grasp the swaras comprising the bruga, the phrase would be over and he would have moved on to many more. This description sounds very much like the characteristic brugas rendered by the Nagaswaram Vidwans’ of the time or that of a vocalist influenced by the Nagaswaram Bani. Brugas were their forte and among the many vocalists who successfully adopted them into their singing, Maha Vaidhyanatha Iyer comes out as a shining star.

Maha vaidyanatha Iyer had a very small repertoire of Krithis and the bulk of his concerts consisted of Alapana, Thana, Neraval and Kalpana swaras. Of these branches he was most fond of and known for his Alapana. He himself could sang about 6-10 Keerthanas. They were

- Vatapi – Hamsadhwani- Muthuswamy Dixitar
- Sri Subramanyaya namasthe – Kamboji
- Tyagaraja namathe – Begade
- Najivadhara – Bilahari
- Chintayama – Bhairavi
- Kanjadalayadakshi – Kamalamanohari
- Anandasagaramee – Garudadhwani

His leaning towards an elaborate alapana more that a large repertoire could have been due to his extensive exposure towards the music of the Nagaswaram in contrast to his contemporaries such as Patnam Subramanya ayyar who went on to perform and include many compositions especially those of Tyagaraja in his concerts. In fact Patnam sang only the Krithis of Tyagaraja apart from RTPs’ and included his own compositions only on request. Vaidyanatha Iyer himself appreciated

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139 Great Musicians – Prof P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 3
140 Great Musicians – Prof P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 23, Pg. 26
Subramanya Iyer’s krithi rendition. One must also notice the selection of krithis in Vaidyanatha Iyer’s concert. Most of them were those Krithis which admitted an elaborate treatment and had ample scope for manodharma. They were not lighter pieces. Even the krithi’s he chose served to quench his creative genius. Another important aspect one must notice is that he even went on to add Sangathis to Muthuswamy dixitar’s Vatapi Ganapathim, even though Dixitar was known to have abstained from composing Sangathis himself. This happy addition of embellishments to every Krithi he touched was very much a trait of the Nagaswaram artists who cannot render a composition otherwise. Maha Vaidhyanatha iyer is credited with the addition of the now famous Sangathis of the Krithis, Vatapi Ganapathim, Sri Subrahmanyaya and Chintaya ma. It is said that the great violinists Titrukodikaval Krishnaier was fully taxed while rendering his violin accompaniment for Vaidyanatha Iyer since he had to maintain an electric speed while answering to the vocalist’s swarakalpana.

**KONERIRAJAPURAM VAIDYANATHA IYER: (1878-1921)** Vaidyanatha Iyer was another vocalist who was known to have a very distinct Nagaswaram style of Vocal rendition. He was born in 1878 to Narayana Ayyar and Sitalakshmi in a Village called Vathima at Konerirajapuram. According to Vidwan PS Narayanaswamy many a times smaller villages would not have any Upper class vocalists of great repute since all the Vidwans would move toward bigger towns where the patronage was available be it from the Royal houses or religious Mutts. However each village temple boasted of many Isai Vellalas in service including good Nagaswaram Vidwans. This often resulted in some upper class boys learning music from the Pillais’. Thus Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer undertook his first music training under a Nagaswaram artist called Nagaswaram Palanivelu. He later underwent training under many vocalists from the Isai Vellala community such as Marudhanallur Kuldandasami and Chinna Kulandaisami. Later on he trained under Melattur Sundara Bhagavathar and Venkatarama Bhagavathar. He also went to Laya Vidwan Manpoondia Pillai for special training in Laya and this gave him a very special grip over complicated Laya patterns. His disciple Mudicon Venkatarama Bhagavathar undertook a similar Laya training under well-known Tavil Vidwan Kannuswamy Pillai. It is very

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141 Great Musicians – Prof P Sambamoorthy, Pg. 12
142 N Rajagopalan – Another Garland: Biographical Dictionary of Carnatic Composers and Musicians, Book II. Pg. 319.
unfortunate that there are no gramophone recordings which could give us an insight into Konerirajapuram’s style of singing. However, we do find descriptions of his alapana in the accounts of our past masters. Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer was known to have a rich raga bhava and also specialised in singing a variety of raga malikas. He had a large repertoire of Thillanas and Javalis too which were considered part of the Isai Vellala repertoire. He was a master of the Ragam Tanam and Pallavi. Kanchipuram Naina Pillai was said to have held Konerirajapuram’s music in great regard. Mudicondan Venkatarama Iyer spoke very highly about Konerirajapuram’s rich Manodharma Sangita in his 1949 presidential speech at the Madras Music Academy. He goes on to draw similarities of the raga alapana of the past Vidwans such as Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer, Ramnad Srinivasa Iyyengar, Palghat Anantharama Bhagavathar and Madurai Pushpavanam Iyer to that of the raga alapana practised by the Nagaswaram Vidwans. He goes on to describe the powerful and fertile voice of Konerirajapuram. While describing the importance of singing in the lower octaves he goes on to say that Konerirajapuram could sing in the Mandra sthayi with his mouth closed and still be clearly heard by all in audience (Iyer M. V., 1950).

Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer was a deep admirer of the Vaidyanatha Iyer’s Manodharma and has many a times listed him as one of the great Vidwans of the yester years along with Violin Malakotai Govindaswamy Pillai. He also mentions that Konerirajapuram was one of those vocalists who had a distinctive Nagaswaram influence in his singing. He would sing in broad long phrases with quick succession of Sangatis and he had tremendous breath control. Many of his contemporaries sang in shorter phrases packed with gamakas in order to be audible in a mike less scenario however Vaidyanatha Iyer boasted of a very commanding voice which enabled him to sing longer phrases with ample long breaths according to Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer.

Mudicondan Venkatarama Iyer (1897 - 1975) was one of the formidable Vocalists who imbibed many elements of the Nagaswaram into his Bani (AUDIO R5.25). Born on October 15th, 1887 he was considered a musician’s musician and was a recipient of the Sangita Kalanidhi title from the Madras Music academy. His father Chakrapani Iyer was noted for his Tevaram and raga alapana. Even his grandfather Srivanchiyam Srinivasa Iyer was a specialist in singing Padas and Javalis. He shared a very special friendship and was held in great esteem by Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer.

143 Madras Music Academy Journal – 1950 – Pg. 12
He started his training under Vedaranyam Swaminatha Iyer. His father wanted him to gain a formal education and be a college graduate for which he was sent to Madras. However the untimely death of his father forced him to return to his native place, Mudicondan. There he continued his music training under Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer and the Tavil Vidwan Ammachatram Kannuswamy Pillai and this training shaped his music and career. Many often described his Bani as a “Konerirajapuram-style” although he rose to even greater heights than his guru. Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha was a very popular and versatile vocalist. He was a keen listener to the Nagaswaram music and was greatly inspired by it. He was also the disciple of Nagaswaran Palanivelu, Marudhanallur Kulandaisami and Chinna Kulandaisami. Thus Mudicondan Venkatarama Iyer received both a direct and indirect transmission of the Nagaswaram school of musical thought.

He was considered a specialist in Raga Tanam and Pallavi presentation. It is from Kannuswamy Pillai that Venkatarama Iyer learned the intricacies of laya in Pallavi singing. This helped him later on his career immensely especially when he performed the Simhanandana Tala Pallavi (128 akshara including guru, plutha and kakapada angas) for the Music Academy concert in 1952 (accompanied by Lalgudi Jayaraman on violin and Pazhani Subramania Pillai on Mrudangam) and later on demonstrated it at their annual conference in 1970 at the age of 75 (accompanied by Lalgudi Jayaraman on violin and Ummayalapuram K Sivaraman on Mrudangam). His famous presentation in the 1950s includes the demonstration of a Pallavi in Simhanandana Tala consisting of 128 aksharas and a Shatkala Pallavi. Tavil Vidwan Kannuswamy Pillai was an all-round musician who stopped his Tavil accompaniment after the death of his favourite artist Tirumarugal Natesan Pillai (the same Nagaswaram player who influenced and impressed a whole generation of musician including Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer). Kannuswamy Pillai was an authority in swara kalpana and he could also play the Mrudangam, Ghata and Jalatarangam. It was Venkataraman’s learning under the guidance of Kannuswamy Pillai that laid the foundation for his expertise in singing Raga Tanam Pallavi. During his Madras Music Academy Demonstration, Mudocondan announced to the audience that he had learnt the Simhanandana Tala Pallavi from eminent Tavil pplayer Ammachathiram Kannuswamy Pillai. Mudocondan composed and set the Sahithya of the Pallavi to the
Solkattu of the Tavil (Ramarathnam, 2006)\textsuperscript{144}. He grew into a respected figure in the field of music and an authority on the subject. His lecture demonstrations in the morning session of the Music Academy were much sought after. His disciples include his son in law Mudicondan Krishnamurthy, Srivanchiya Ramachandra Iyer, Ranganayaki Iyyengar, B Krishnamurthy and R Vedavalli. He also gave his guidance to ML Vasanthakumari to hone her Pallavi singing. Even though he was a master of laya, he laid emphasis on aesthetic rendering of swarakalpana and did not engage in too many mathematical flights. He was known to revel in a lot of sarvalaghu swaras during swara kalpana. During an interview with BVK Sastry, published by the Bangalore Gayana Samaj he says that there is a bad tendency to impress an audience with excessive rhythmic patterns, resembling Jati which indicates that the musician is carried away by the Mrudangam instead of having it as an adjunct to his creativity. He stressed that Pallavi singing is not just about technique but also about Raga Rasa bhava, pada, swara, niraval and laya shuddhi. He stressed that the Pallavi should be rich in emotional content, spiritual in satisfaction and intellectual in appeal. It should overshadow the rest of the items in the concert in content and majesty and all its aspects should be dealt in equal balance and detail.

His raga alapana method was very and different from most of the artist heard during his time. He always indulged in a very elaborate treatment of the Raga be it in the alapana, Thana or Niraval. Even Vakra ragas received elaborate treatment in his hand. He achieved this elaborate singing through a very methodical approach which followed the core principles of Nagaswaram music. When he chose a particular segment in the raga, which would contain four to five notes in a particular octave, he would try to spin as many Sangathis as possible around that particular section before moving on to the next section. Apart from the average listener, his fellow musicians had many lessons in Pallavi and Manodharma to learn from him and he influenced many a budding talent including TN Sheshagoplan who greatly admired the senior vidwan as a young boy (Sheshagopalan T., 2006-07)\textsuperscript{145}. He was famous for raga bhava rich neralav and his swara kalpana. He included a lot of Janta swaras (a Nagaswaram favourite), Jati prastara and Datu swaras in his swara kalpana. He would reel off with great relish forty to fifty varieties of Sarva laghu patterns set to one tala

\textsuperscript{144} Prof Mysore V Ramarathinam – A musician’s reminices – Pg 68
\textsuperscript{145} Music Academy Journal – 2006-07 – Pg. 57 Presidential Speech.
avartha cycle which showed a very high level of creativity and spontaneity. Mudicondan was known for his impeccable sense of Kalapramanam and a tremendous hold on Laya. Pazhani Subramania Pillai was his favourite accompanist. According to Dr S Pinakapani when Mudicondan took up Adi tala, in four kalai, slow-tempo in Chaturasra nadai, he would mark only 8 kriya-s that belong to Adi tala but not (for convenience of maintaining kalapramanam) subdivide 8 kriya-s into 32 beats. This skill in itself was extraordinary and deserves high praise.

Mudicondan was always in great admiration of the Rakthi and Mallari played by the Nagaswaram Vidwans. He once said that his head reeled after listening to a gramophone recording of a Rakthi played by Nagaswaram Vidwan Semmponnarkoil Govindaswami Pillai and said that only members of the Nagaswaram community could perform such intricate patterns of music (Sankaran, The Maestro, 1994).

SEMMANGUDI SRINIVASA IYER (25th July 1908-31st October 2003)

Violin Vid Kumaresh of the Ganesh-Kumaresh duo has stated that what music have in the Karnataka Vocalists scenario today is entirely a contribution of two great Vocalists. One was GN Balasubramanium and the other Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. GNB’s style and Semmangudi’s teaching caught on like wildfire and fired the imagination of the entire generation of vocalists that came after them. Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer was one of the foremost musicians and teachers of the 20th century. He was considered as the Pitamaha of Karnataka music. Till this very day, if a young vocalist has any doubts about any phrase in a raga they pull out a concert recording of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer for reference. Sanjay Subrahmanian has called him as one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century. One of the milestones in the 20th century Karnataka music was the emergence of several krithis composed by HH Maharaja Swathi Thirunal. Behind this was the work of Srinivasa Iyer who edited and published many of the Maharajas works along with the Swathi Thirunal College in 1941. He also popularised these Krithis by including it in his own concerts. Most importantly both GN Balasubramanium and Semmangudi srinivasa Iyer were deeply influenced by Nagaswaram music according Vidwan Kumaresh.

146 DD Podhigai interview with R Vedavalli -20:01:2013
147 T Sankaran – Sruti Issue 121, Oct 1994, Pg. 34
Srinivasa Iyer was born on July 25\(^{148}\), 1908 in Tirukodikaval, in Tanjore district to Radhakrishna Iyer and Dharmasamvardhini Ammal. His initial training was under famous Violin Vid Tirukodikaval Krishnaiyer who was his uncle. He then underwent rigorous music training under his older cousin Semmangudi Narayanaswami Iyer who was a very famous violinist of his time. One of his fellow student under his uncle’s tutelage was the legendary Nagaswaram Maestro TN Rajaratnam Pillai and they were quite friendly with each other. Semmangudi held Rajaratnam Pillai’s music in great regard. However his concert career was shaped by his training under Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer, who was another vocalist known for his expansive alapana and Nagaswaram music likeness. Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer was a fifth generation disciple of Tyagaraja. His guru Umavalarapuram Swaminatha Iyer was a direct disciple of Maha Vaidhyana Iyer. Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer had learnt from a direct disciple of Saint Tyagaraja. As mentioned earlier Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer was a vocalist who could have been deeply influenced by the Nagaswaram Bani based on the Trivandrum court records. Unfortunately since there are no available audio recordings of these musicians one does not know the exact content and as to how they rendered it during their performances. At the same time it is hard to rule out the influence of the Nagaswaram on musicians who hailed from the Tanjore belt where its music held a huge sway.

However in the case of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer we are fortunate enough to get ample records which give us a deep insight into his style. One of the most important points we have to remember before the analysis of any artist’s style is that there are many factors which determine it and that style changes according to one’s experience, exposure and age. The live concerts of Srinivasa Iyer that are available and popular now are those which have been recorded at a much later stage in his life. Even in these, one can find an imprint of Nagaswaram music especially in the way he would approach raga alapana and his *Sarva laghu* swara patterns. However those who have heard Semmangudi sing when he was much younger all elucidate that the style of Semmangudi’s singing was extremely influenced by Nagaswaram music and that he would render all the Birukkas of the Nagaswaram music at lightning speed when he was younger (when his throat permitted). RK Srikantan who has heard Srinivasa Iyer in his younger days reminisces and confirms that Semmangudi’s rendition was

\(^{148}\) Semmangudi was born on August 25\(^{th}\) according to the Hindu Folio to Dharmambal

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very closely modelled on the music of the Nagaswaram. One must note that he was one of the youngest recipients of the Sangita Kalanidhi award from the Madras Music Academy at the age of 39. Semmangudi did not boast of a very mellifluous voice. It was often considered harsh, gruff and nasal completely unlike his Guru Vishwanatha Iyer whose voice was said to be very sweet. Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer could render many Hindustani ragas- structured as the lighter “thukkadas” at the end of the concert. This did not suit Semmangudi’s voice, style or musical frame of mind. He adopted the traditional Tanjore Nagaswaram style of musical thought. His somewhat harsh voice was quite flexible (the timbre need not affect the production of Birukka or Urruttus). He adopted his gruff voice into rendering assertive and forceful Karnataka classical music. According to RK Srikantan, he could also sing extremely fast paced sangatis in his younger days. However mere rendition of Birukkas does not make one’s style close to that of the Nagaswaram. The thought process or the ideas and opinions which he expressed through Raga alapana also reflects an influence of Nagaswaram school of thought. Talking about his Semmangudi’s style in his later years I would like to quote Sanjay Subrahmanyan from his blog, “We came to the conclusion that Semmangudi's music should not be judged with the recording of concerts after the mid-seventies. After all the man was already 65+ by then (Sunbrahmanyan, 2008)149!” During the course of my research I came upon a few gramophone recordings of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer which predate 1947 and seem to have captured him when he was much younger. These records paint a completely different picture (musical) of Srinivasa Iyer. These records show us that his music had a very close proximity to the vocalists who sang with an inspiration from the Nagaswaram. The Kapi raga alapana which precedes and the following Krithi Vaddaninae (AUDIO R5.26) stands testimony to the above. In another recording of a Krithi “Asai Mugam” in raga Jaunpuri, Semmangudi shows a very distinct pace of rendition, his compositional and performance style which gives us a flavour of the Nagaswaram rendition of Krithis. When compared to the music of his later years, they present a whole new person. Incidentally the music for this song has been composed by Semmagudi Srinivasa Iyer himself. The Krithi ‘Inta Paraka’ (AUDIO R5.27) has been topped with astonishing sarvalaghu patterns at a breakneck speed which could only be rendered by someone with intense spontaneity very similar to that which was

149 http://sanjaysub.blogspot.in/2008/07/happy-birthday-semmangudi-mama.html
found extensively among Nagaswaram artists. Similarly there is a very resolute rendition of the raga Sama (which otherwise is considered more suitable for a mellow handling) before he goes on to sing the Krithi Manasa Sancharare and the Krithi itself is packed with *uruttu*s’. Semmangudi was known to deploy this Nagaswaram type *uruttu* with great effect and he would sing it in almost all his alapanas. As pointed out to me by Vidushi Kalavathy Avadhooth one can find a small sample of it in his alapana of Poorvikalyani raga.

One of the key features in Semmangudi’s rendition was the approach towards raga alapana. At around the age of 9 or 10 he went for some rigorous training under Thiruvadaimaruthur Sakarama Rao, a famous Gotuvadyam Vidwan. This is the phase of his life that he considered as turning point in his life. During his stay in Tiruvidaimarudur, Srinivasa Iyer was introduced to the world of Nagaswaram music. In many of his interviews he would become nostalgic about the wholesome music of his favourite Nagaswaram artists who made a huge impact on his own style during the most crucial formative years of his music. They were Mannargudi Chinna Pakkiria Pillai, Kumbakonam Sivakozhundu, T.N. Rajarathinam Pillai, and Veeruchami Pillai. To quote an interview, Semmangudi would often describe *“Mallari rhythms launching the night processions of the deity around the streets. Midnight in *Terku Veethi* (South Street) would bring melodies divine – ragas Todi, Bhairavi, Shanmukhapriya, Kedaragowlai. Those nocturnal revelations stayed with him. They were to invest his music with depth, grandeur and incandescence”* (RAMNARAYAN, 2003). Semmangudi himself talks about the deep impact the Nagaswaram artists of the hay days had on his experience of raga alapana, “I can never forget some artists whose music I still cherish. For instance, Tiruvarur Natesan's Kamboji raga, Chidambaram Vaidyanatha Iyer's Varali and Bhairavi, the Keeranur Brothers' Thodi and Rajarathnam Pillai's morning ragas - Saveri, Bilahari, Dhanyasi, Sriragam and Natakurinji.” Grand and deep are definitely what we can call his alapana. The methodical approach to the development in his Raga alapana are also noteworthy features. He was exceptionally fond of raga Kharaharapriya.

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150 OBITUARY- The pitamaha of Carnatic music, GOWRI RAMNARAYAN, Frontline (The Hindu) Volume 20 - Issue 23, November, 08 - 21, 2003
During an interview Srinivasa Iyer states that most Vocalists during his time sang Raga alapana in short phrases. This was due to two reasons. One being that Karnataka music was often modelled on the Veena Bani while the other reason was being the lack of any mike or audio systems. To sing long phrases one needed extraordinary breath and volume control. He mentions that Konerirajapuran Vaidyanatha Iyer as one of the musicians who used to sing alapana in long phrases. However the flamboyant style of the Nagaswaram was many a times not appreciated in Vocal singing. Music in short phrases was not the style of the Nagaswaram players. They were predominantly unaffected by the demands of a Kutcheri Paddhathi and they did not need mikes. Their music was about long and continuous phrases. According to Srinivasa Iyer the Nagaswaram’s lengthy phrases brought out the raga swaroopa and beauty with more brilliance than the vocalists with short phrases. It had occurred to very few that the Nagaswaram’s rendition style could be adopted with suitable adjustments to Vocal music also (Dwarakanath, 1998). Violinist Titukodiakval Krishnatyryer was not impressed by Konerirajarupurm’s music and many a times rebuked him. In fact he was convinced Konerirajapurum to tone down his flamboyant style for perhaps a more subtle rendition. One can see the difference in the rendition of vocalist from different Bani’s especially from the Veena Bani and Nagaswaram. This difference can be easily perceived by a comparison of the Mayamalavagowla raga alapana between another great vocalist T Bruda and Semmangudi. T Brunda (1912-1996) was one of the very well-known scholars and Karnataka classical vocalists. Being the granddaughter of Veena Dhanamman she boasted of a rich heritage and imbibed the Veena Bani of Karnataka Classical vocal rendition. Semmangudi himself had a very high regard and they both admired each other’s musical prowess. She was known for her innate grip over laya which was a result of her training from Kanchipuram Naina Pillai. Yet if we listen to the raga delineation of both these artists who were contemporaries, we can experience two entirely different approaches to a raga. Their individual vision of Mayamalavagowla so very different from each other, Semmangudi’s being distinctively close to a Nagaswaram style while Brunda’s stress is on Gamakas. Both showcasing two brilliant visions of the same picture.

151 G Dwarakanath – The Hindu Folio Nov 1998, Pg. 28
Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer developed a great admiration for the beauty of Nagaswaram music, however his cousin Narayanaswamy Iyer was not impressed by the boy’s fascination. He did however allow Srinivasa Iyer to listen to Nagaswaram vidwans approved by him. The older generation of Vocalists and violinists were strict traditionalists and did not approve any changes in the pattern of rendition in their disciples. This pressure from the gurus’ might have slowed down Semmangudis ardent to adapt the Nagaswaram style into his vocal music. However his desire to do so never left. Thus he slowly developed his own style of singing from time to time. He gradually included a subtle inspiration from the Nagaswaram and evolved his own style without offending the past masters (traditionalists). Analyses of voice recordings clearly show a man who has had many changes in his style of rendition. Some earliest recordings have Srinivasa Iyer singing in short phrases, however by 1942 his recordings show that he was now singing in much longer phrases a marked difference in style. Then there is the Ragam Tanam Pallavi in raga Kamboji which provides evidence of further change. The moving rendition of the Khamas song Rama Jogi Mandukonare of Ramadas in 1979 is one continuous piece of musical excellence. However every change had a likeness to Nagaswaram music in one way or another. The earlier styles of rendition and the Veena Bani in Vocal has completely been forgotten now (unfortunately). All musicians have adopted the continuous style and this is Semmangudis’s singular most important influence and contribution to our music.\(^{152}\)

Srinivasa Iyer was known to have a very harsh voice. During his adolescence when his voice broke it turned very nascent and he was advised to discontinue singing and perhaps take up the violin instead. However his passion lay in singing and he immersed himself into demonic practise. He emerged as one of the foremost vocalists of Karnataka music in spite of his harsh voice. However the most important element in his singing which made his singing successful was the mode of expression, his successful technique of vocalisation. He was a student of Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer. Yet his own style was very different from that of his Guru. His guru had a very sweet voice and his shaarira enabled his to render lightning speed Sangatis. Viswanatha Iyer was known to use his shaarira for effectively rendering many lighter and Hindustani Ragas. Semmangudi knew that this would never suite his style. So

\(^{152}\) G Dwarakanath – The Hindu Folio Nov 1998, Pg. 28
then he developed his own Bani or style where he used many of his early impression of the Nagaswaram. He rendered many brigas in his alapana as long as his throat permitted. However the similarities to the music of the Nagaswaram lies in the progression of his raga alapana. He was not to dwell on individual swaras with delicate gam akas. Not that his music did not have gamakas but his music was more grandiose in nature. His alapana elaboration was based on the progression of phrases like the Nagaswaram music. Dr Ritha Rajan also feels that the base of his music lay in his admiration for the music of the Nagaswaram. She describes his Raga alapana like the folding of fabric into intricate folds. And phrases such as ngrgrn in Mayamalagowla stand testimony to his Nagaswaram like approach to raga delineation.

Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer was very well known for his Swarakalpana. He was considered as the king of Sarvalaghu pattern of swarakalpana. Sarva Laghu pattern means that all the swaras rendered would be of the value 1akshara kala. Thus there would very little mathematical combinations in his swaras and many at times it resembled a torrential rain. However rendering Sarvalaghu swaras in an aesthetic manner in no easy feat. There were definite patterns in his Sarvalughu swarakalpana. The pattern could be mathematical such as the multiples of five (GRSND RSNDP SNDPM) or could be patterns formed by the progression of the phrases of the Raga as in the case of Reethigowla NSMGRS-GMSNDM-NSMGRS etc. Srinivasa Iyer was known to be traditionalist yet he rendered many innovative phrases like NS NGRG SR NS NRSR in Reethigowla during swarakalpana. This Sarva laghu pattern closely resembles the swarakalpana of Nagaswaram players and they are known to render many avarthas of Sarvalaghu to maintain the continuity of sound. One can find Srinivasa Iyer also repeating many swaras just like the Nagaswaram players and using only three or four swaras while making permutation combinations during swarakalpana. For example his Bhairavi Ragam Tanam Pallavi has phrases like NNNNPNDDPMP, one should also note the speed at which he sang the Sarvalaghu swaras. Thus Semmangudi created a very distinct style of his own based on his inspiration of the Nagaswaram. It was an inimitable unmistakable style which left a deep impact on the entire Karnataka classical vocal field.
G. N. Balasubramaniam popularly known as GNB, was a Karnataka classical vocalist. He was born in Gudalur, near Mayavaram (Tanjore district) to GV Narayanaswami Ayyar and Visalam Ammal. He first performed for the Music Academy in 1938. His eclectic style influenced an entire generation of musicians including from his own like Bharat Ratna MS Subbalakshmi who adopted many concepts from his in her early life according to TJS George, the author of her biography, ‘MS- A life in Music’.

His father GV Narayanaswami Iyer was very active in the Madras music Academy and in the Karnataka music circles. He had a good friendship with many leading musicians whose music GNB eagerly followed. Many of them were Nagaswaram Vidwans. One such Vidwan was Tirumarugal Natesa Pillai. GV Narayanaswamy often considered his son’s tendency for speed a bane. Often an argument would lead to GNB pointing out a Nagaswaram Vidwan playing in the same speed. GNB would argue that if the Nagaswaram Vidwan could render it in his Vadya, why couldn’t he do so in his voice (Ram, 2009, Issue 303)\(^\text{153}\)? There were many Vocalists of the old guard who were critical of fast paced singing. They would emphasize on heavy gamakas. It took great courage for vocalists who had a facile voice to express their true potential without controlling their abilities. It was Ariyakudi Ramanjua Ayyangar who impressed upon GV Narayanaswamy Iyer to let the young GNB sing in his natural Bruga Shareera.

GN Balasubramaniam is believed to be one of the most influential musicians of Karnataka classical music. He was born at a crucial period when the audience of Karnataka classical music was being democratised i.e. Karnataka classical music was no longer a private entertainment for the privileged class. It had made a successful transition into the ticketed Sabhas’. This ensured that anybody who could buy a ticket would get to hear Karnataka classical music. This also meant that there was a very new kind of audience which demanded a lot more from Karnataka classical musicians. It demanded not just intellectual content but also entertainment quality. Karnataka classical music was now being consumed in many forms, in temples and in the urban Sabhas, in Theatre and also in movies. In this aspect GN Balasubramanium

\(^{153}\) “Debut” – Lalitha Ram – Pg 37, Sruti Magazine, December 2009, Issue 303
is thought to have revolutionised Karnataka classical music many folds, it has said that he innovated the art of Karnataka classical music through emphasis on laya control & reducing the gamakas which eventually made Karnataka music appealing to the lay and the learned rasika alike. He also carried his style of singing further into the masses hearts, penetrating deeper through the movies in which he acted and sang as the protagonist like Bhma Vijayam ( Sathi Anusuya), Sakuntala (Udayanan Vasavadatta (with Vasundhara Devi, mother of Vijayanthimala), and Rukmangada. In "Sakunthalai", he appeared as Dushyantha, alongside the vocalist M.S. Subbulakshmi.

The longevity of his school of thought was further enhanced by a long list of successful disciples who carried his style forward such as M. L. Vasanthakumari, Radha Jayalakshmi, Tanjore S. Kalyanaraman, Trichur V. Ramachandran, T. R. Balu, T.S. Balasubramanian, and Ragini.

Renowned journalist Rupa Gopal, has brought out many documentaries on GNB’s life and music. According to her, GNB made such a great impact on the music field that the "Nagaswaram Bani" that he adopted became a hallmark of his rendition. He took the concepts pf Nagaswaram music, successfully adopted it to suit his style and this was followed by so many subsequent generation of vocalists that it came to be known as the "GNB Bani". His style was described as having melody, speed, imagination and novelty with tradition. According to senior vocalist Dr. S Rajam, Nagaswaram has given Karnataka classical music a great pep. In a documentary on GNB’s centenary he talks about how the Nagaswaram Vidwans never knew any Krithis yet could play ragas such as Natabhairavi for four hours, churning out all the possible swara combinations. Nagaswaram music is marked by beautiful karve laden sancharas. He then goes on to say that GNB drew inspiration from the Nagaswaram Vidwans and absorbed many aspects of the Nagaswaram into his own singing. Another similarity GNB had with the Nagaswaram is the adoption of plain notes in his singing. He is credited to have reduced the number of gamakas used in Karnataka classical music thus making it more mellifluous. Like the Nagaswaram Vidwans’ he sang many "pure" "plain shuddha swaras" notes and won the hearts of his audiences according to Dr. S Rajam. Vid TM Krishna also shares the same views and points out that the frequency of the movements in the swaras in general was lower in GNB’s

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154 S Rajam was the brother of Veena Dr. S Balachander. He was the staff artiste and music supervisor of AIR and part of the Madras Music Academy expert panel.

155 ‘GNB’ Legend immortal – Rupa Gopal 2006
music. According to him even phrases such as $G \ g \ r \ r$ in Todi would be very controlled. The Gandhara would not be excessively shaken unless the context demanded it. He goes on to say that the general aesthetic feel one gets from GNB’s music is of “sharp straight lines”, even in ragas such as Sahana.

GN Balasubramaniam had a very resonant voice and a shaarira which could cover three octaves in very fast speeds. His was a Briga-shaareera, a voice that was most flexible and attractive. Tavil maestro Haridhwaramangalam AK Palanivel makes a special mention about GNB’s brigas. He goes on to say that adopting brilliant briga phrases into Vocal rendition is one of the greatest contributions of GNB to Karnataka Vocal rendition.\textsuperscript{156} He was attracted to the music of the Nagaswaram which seem to challenge and bring out the best of creative facilities from even the best vocalists. He started adopting the brugas of the Nagaswaram into his own vocal rendition. So much so that his colleagues and audiences noticed his successful flights of speed and his Manodharma with joy and envy. He was particularly fond of the music of his colleague and friend Nagaswaram Vidwan TN Rajarathnam Pillai and the most shared a great bond which resulted in a great exchange of musical ideas.

GN Balasubramanium along with Semmangudi changed the soundscape of Karnataka classical music. Both these vocalists were deeply influenced by Nagaswaram music, however they imbibed this influence in very different ways. TM Krishna points out to this aspect while talking about the “alavu” or sense of proportion during raga alapana which is found in the music of both these great artists. While each raga has a general sense of speed and proportion, it could vary from one artist to another. Nevertheless there is a broadly accepted bandwidth. Both GNB and Semmangudi had hit the exact balance in this regard and this could have been due to their exposure to Nagaswaram Music. In TM Krishna’s own words “No sancharam is unnecessarily slowed down or accelerated. This, I think comes from an uncanny natural instinct. The other musician who used the same process was Semmangudi. Maybe, this was the result of both their music being influenced by the Nagaswaram bani.” GN Balasubramanum was greatly influenced by the music and style of another colossus, his contemporary Nagaswaram Vidwan TN Rajarathinam Pillai while Semmangudi grew up in the cradle of native Tanjore were the lullaby of the city

\textsuperscript{156} Sruti Issue 121, October 1994, Pg. 31
was the final strains of the temple Nagaswaram. Nagaswaram music filled the soundscape of Tiruvidaimarudur and Semmangudi, the villages Srinivasa Iyer grew up in. Thus the Nagaswaram Bani got very intensely absorbed into his singing. It was a natural phenomenon on and it can be observed in the kind of ideas (musical) he brought out through his Manodharma. However a careful analysis of GNB’s style shows that the adoption of Nagaswaram like Brugas and progression was a process of deliberate absorption (which suited his voice and style exceedingly well) born out of a deep admiration for Nagaswaram music and a close friendship with TN Rajarathinam Pillai. It is in the bruga and the extended raga alapana that one can find the influence of Nagaswaram music especially TNR’s in him, whereas his style was still about shorter breaths. One could not find the long breath Karve type singing in his singing. Ex his Kalyani RTP raga alapana.

According to the violin maestro Vid Lalgudi Jayaraman, GNB had a “Bramippu” or mild obsession for the music of TN Rajarathinam Pillai. He was quite in awe of TN Rajarathinam Pillai’s Nagaswaram music. This friendship was reciprocated by TNR. The two friends spent a lot of time with each other discussing the various aspects of Karnataka Classical music and there was a lot of exchange of ideas relating to music among them. So much was GNB’s music identified with the Nagaswaram that the term “Nagaswaram Bani” came into to use to describe his music. One does not find a more frequent use of this term before his time. There were many other musicians who sang with a likeness to the music of the Nagaswaram, yet the adjective of “Nagaswaram Bani” was not used as frequently to describe their music as it was on GNB’s style. Rupa Gopal a leading journalist based in Chennai, writes an interesting foreword in her narrative collage on GNB as part of his centenary celebrations, “The melodious magic of GN Balasubramaniam transformed into the three letters of GNB. Age-old music received a new splendour, a lasting designer sheen. The Karnataka platform acquired style and grace, imparting infinite appeal, transcending the millennium. GNB’s Bani brought him name and fame – his stamp ensured success for his many followers too. GNB followed the incomparable liquid gold that flowed as musical notes from the nadaswaram of TNR. TNR was his idol – the ragas and songs adopted by GNB were often from TNR’s repertoire Todi, Hindolam, Kapi, Kapinarayani, Surati, Jayantasri, Bhairavam, Sindhubhairavi,

157 Rupa Gopal’s interview with Lalgudi Jayaraman on the occasion of GNB’s centenary celebrations.
Mohanam Pantuvarali. The nadaswaram bani became GNB’s, a salutation to the divine music of TNR, music that so captivated GNB”. This paragraph gives us certain vital clues as to the extent of GNB’s fascination of Nadaswaram music, particularly that of TN Rajarathinam Pillai’s. It also talks about the extent of GNB’s influence on Karnataka classical music. It indicates that a huge leap was made in terms of style and presentation of music. His rendition of raga alapana ushered in a new age of highly polished, evolved and advanced technique of vocalisation. The third element the above paragraph establishes is that GNB’s style got transmitted quite successfully through his disciples who were many in number and also went on to achieve great success, thus fulfilling the justifications of a Bani and its perception. His disciples were ML Vasanthakumari, TR Balu, TS Balasubramaniam (Palani Balu), S Kalyanaraman (Tanjore), L Krishnan, TV Vishwanathan, Komattil Janaki, Trichur Santhakumari and Trichur Ramachandra who joined in 1962.

Nagaswaram Vidwan TN Rajarathinam Pillai was a huge inspiration and influence on all his contemporary musicians. He reciprocated GN Balasubramaniam’s admiration and held the vocalist in high regard. He admitted that only GNB could render alapana the way he did so on his Nadaswaram. TNR would often ask GNB to render his favourite ragas and revel in his mastery. TN Rajarathinam Pillai’s Thodi raga delineation of Thodi raga had achieved legendary status even during his time according to Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. It is interesting to note that TNR at the same time was very fond of GNB’s rendition of Thodi raga. According to Someshwara Babu, one of GNB’s prime disciple, TNR requested GNB to sing the raga Thodi for a concert in Kallidaikurichi in 1956. It was almost as if it was the Nadaswaram maestro’s last wish since he died shortly after that.

According to Dr N Ramanthan, GNB made a conscious decision to design a very expansive structure for Raga alapana, especially during his elaboration of Ragas such as Todi, Shanmukhapriya, Natakuranji etc. during Raga Tana Pallavi renditions\textsuperscript{158}. His raga alapana can be partitioned into four or five stages. The first stage is the introduction of the raga with its most characteristic phrases. GNB chose to show the Raga swaroopa with a flourish of the scale with a rise from the Mandra and Madhya sthayi to the Tara and then return back to the Madhya sthayo Sadja.

\textsuperscript{158} Sruti Magazine Issue 303, Dec 2009 Pg. 12-13 ISSN 0970-7816
melodic sweep replete with raga bhava sancharas, instead of sticking to the Madhya sthayi and then going to the manda. It was an introductory sketch of the raga across three octaves leaving no doubt of the identity of the raga and the mood of the Pallavi. After the first phase is over, GNB choses to set up base camps on the first graha swaras. He establishes the most important swaras for elaboration in the first few Madhya sthayi swaras. The movement of alapana is now restricted mainly to a few swaras above and below it. The important factor is that GNB gave a variety of speeds within this section itself. Instead of restricting the brugas for the last section he would include them along with vilamba kala and madhyama kala sancharas in the first base itself. Having exhausted this stage he would then set out to explore the next group of Nyasa swaras. Slightly higher than in the previous ones, but not yet into Tara sthayi. Having finished this stage and the path way to a steady climb towards the Tara sthayi, he returns to render flourishes at the Madhya sthayi Sadja and at this juncture he allows the violinist to paint his canvas within the given lines. After this he explores the Tara sthayi. According to my observations there weren’t too many Karve laden sancharas in his alapana. The phrasings were crisp to the point affairs. The Sangathis were precise and even Ragas such as Sahana got the minimum amount of gamakas to maintain raga bhava. Vidwan TM Krishna states that the first thing that strikes him in the matter of aesthetics is the nominalisation of gamaka that GNB employed into his music as compared to many of the musicians of his era. If one listens to his usage of gamaka-s even in raga-s like Todi and Kamboji and compare it with a Musiri or Ariyakudi, the difference is quite evident. In the Brugas of many other great stalwarts, there is that slight gamaka like shake within the briga however in the case of GNB one never hears this. At the speed at which he sings, the swara-s seem to have almost no extra gamaka on them. It’s only pure fast briga. One can also see that all base camps are set up only during the steady climb of the raga alapana and not during the descent. The climb is a step by step extensively detailed affair whereas the descending is almost drastic with fast paced sancharas to reach the Madhyasthayi Sadja.

The mind of an artist influenced by the Nagaswaram way of thinking is highly creative. The musical scales and notes are constantly explored and pushed to greater heights by the Nagaswaram Vidwans who were so innovative that many a times their renditions were disputed. GNB’s contribution to Karnataka classical music is vast when we take into account his explorations within the existing ragas and his music
exploration resulting in new ragas. According to Someshwara Babu, GNB was known to include many rare ragas into his concerts such as Gavati. Other such ragas included in his concerts are Andolika, Takka, Malavi, Kapinarayani, Chenchukamboji, Kirnavali, Shekharachandrika etc. he even went on to invent his own ragas and composed in them which were picked by his disciples such as ML Vasanthakumari who popularised it through their concerts, such as Amruthabehag, sarangatharangini, Samakdambari, Chandrahasitham, Vandanadarini and Sivasakthi. These ragas and the compositions attained popularity during his time itself.

The late vocalist Vid TR Subramanyam was a great admirer of GNB. He keenly followed and analysed his idols music. He refers to the huge influence Nagaswaram music had on GNB in a commemoration volume brought out by the family of GNB. He goes on to say that it required a maestro like GNB to successfully and brilliantly synthesize vocal and Nagaswaram styles and evolve a “gharana” as it were of his (GNB) own. He was one of the very few vocalists who had the voice that could execute the Nagaswaram’s fast phrases. His unimaginable speed would even baffle TN Rajaratthinam Pillai. He was envied by many musicians of his era who craved for but could not lay their hands on the captivating Nagaswaram Sangathis according to TR Subramanyam (Subramanyam, 2009)\textsuperscript{159}. He goes on to talk about his own memories of GNB’s concert where he had heard him render an avarohana briga of three octave length starting from Tara nishadam and reaching Mandra Panchamam in a split second in ragas such as Todi and Kamboji. What makes his Brigas close to the Nagaswaram Bani is that they were not only fast but also long, often lasting over three octaves for three times at a stretch.

TRS goes on to give us certain vital clues about the popularity of the Nagaswaram Vidwans of the yester years and the magnificence of their raga alapana in his article for GNB’s centenary commemoration volume. He says “There was a time when Carnatic music was considered an empire of the nagaswaram vidwans. They were deemed to be the custodians of raga alapana. Their alapana stretched for hours, which was in sharp contrast to the music of the star vocalist of those days, Ariyakudi, who believed in brief versions of alapana-s of a large number of raga-s and more Krithi-s in a concert. It will not be incorrect to say that GNB rescued the

\textsuperscript{159}Sruti Magazine Dec 2009, Pg. 18
One of the most important accounts of GNB’s style and its likeness to the Nagaswaram comes from an interview with Mandolin U Srinivas, a child prodigy, superstar and stalwart performer of Karnataka classical music. He single handily developed the playing techniques for Karnataka classical music on the mandolin. U Srinivas came from an Isai Vellala family of musicians. His great grandfather and grandfather were Nagaswaram artists. He grew up listening to the music of the Nagaswaram. He was especially fond of TN Rajarathinam Pillai’s music. He goes on to say that when he first heard GNB’s rendition of raga Kalyani and subsequent rendition of the krithis Vasudevyayani in Adi tala, he was completely taken aback, not just by the beauty of the rendition but also by its proximity to the music he knew so well, the Nagaswaram. He recounts his father describing the music of GNB, calling him a revolutionary who brought newness to the Karnataka classical music field. Mandolin Srinivas in the same interview goes on to say that GNB’s music was very similar to that of TN Rajarathinam Pillai’s Nagaswaram. GNB would sing crisp and clear lightning speed Brugas, in an easy effortless manner. He goes on to say that GNB’s approach towards Manodharma Sangita was instinctive and natural. Being familiar to the Nagaswaram Bani, GNB’s style had an automatic charm and appeal to Mandolin Srinivas. He goes on to say that GNB’s rendition of Andolika, Gowda Malhar, Poorvikalyani and Madhyamavathy were most noted for carrying stylistic similarities to the music of the Nagaswaram.

During his peak days GNB sang many concerts that would last four to five hours. Once at a concert at Abhiramapuram GNB sang from eight in the night to one thirty in the early hours. He was accompanied by TN Krishnan on the violin and Palghat Mani Iyer on the Mrudangam. It was the occasion of Shankara Jayanthi organised by Sri Subramania Sastrigal. To fill up such a long duration demands very fertile Manodharma. GNB was especially fond of raga alapana and it was his forte. He would sing very elaborate raga alapanas taking several turns along with the violinist. A single raga alapana often lasted an hour. Madurai Somasundaram was a famous contemporary of GNB. He was another vocalist who had imbibed the Nagaswaram school of musical thought and rendition. Being from the Isai Vellala sect himself he would have had a great exposure to ragas played by the Nagaswaram vidwans.
especially those such as Shanmukhapriya. Yet he was completely mesmerised by the rendition of GNB. According to Vid RN Sankar, GNB once sang a 55 minute raga Alapana of Shankmukhapriya which captivated the hearts of his audience. It was a very memorable concert. Madurai Somasundaram happened to be amongst the audience and conveyed his deep admiration to GNB after the concert. A careful analysis of his raga alapana method shows a close alliance and semblance to the method in which Nagaswaram vidwans would develop their raga alapana. GNB would sing many new phrases and complex sangathis within tried and tested popular ragas too such as Reethigowla, Sreeranjini, Sahana, Senchukamboji and Shuddhabangala. They were so attractive that they caught the notice of many Nagaswaram vidwans according Radha-Jayalakshmi who were one of his many successful disciples who went on to make a great name for themselves. An extract from their presentation on their guru’s music at the Madras Music Academy during the 73rd conference proceedings goes as follows “GNB’s raga rendering has always been innovative and the new modes that he adopted in raga alapanas were also introduced into his Krithis, which became the typical GNB style. This is a feature which had a great impact on the then younger and aspiring artists, but more importantly on the Nadaswara Vidwans, who admired him and were inspired by his alapana methods. They gave life to his alapana style and songs in their instrumental music.” this paragraph also gives us an idea that his krithi’s were eagerly lapped up by the Nagaswaram Vidwans who played a definite role in popularising his Krithis. One can hear Nagaswaram artists playing many of GNB’s compositions such as Paramukhamelanamma (Kanada), Ranjani Niranjani (Ranjani), Samagana Iole (Hindola), Sadapalaya (Mohana) and Saraswathi namosthuthe (Saraswathi raga) according to Vid Charumathi Ramachandran.

An analysis of his compositional style, Krithis’ and Varnas’ show us that they lend themselves quite beautifully for instrumental rendition. Challenging chittaiswaras in Krithis such as Ranjani Niranjani and Kamala charane and challenging ragas such as Amruthabehag (an amalgamation of Amritha varshini and Behag) stand proof of this. His Andolika Varna is full of hrusva swaras which makes it quite challenging to render in Vocal music. The tight knit charana swaras of this Varna which do not have many deergha prayoga need a mastery of breath control but

160 RN Sankar in conversation with Rupa Gopal 24th January 2009
can be rendered beautifully on instruments such as the Nagaswaram. Some of his compositions that went on to become very popular are *Dikku theriyada kaatil, Kannane en kanavan, radha sametha Krishna, Sonnadhai Seidhida, Kannanai kanpadeppo*, his rendition of *Jayathi jayathi bharatha matha, Samarasa bhavana samrajya, samagana priya* etc. he even composed the Chittaiswarams for the Krithis “Vararaga laya” in senchukamboji and “Chalamelara” in Marga Hindolam.

According to his disciples Radha Jayalakshmi, GNB would take up the great challenge of taking up ragas such as Devamanohari and Sahana for elaboration as Raga Tana Pallavi. He sang a Raga Tana Pallavi in Devamanohari raga at the famous Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai which has kept a record of the concert.

GNB was most fond of the Sarvalaghu pattern of swara singing during Kalpana swaras. He did not prefer complex rhythmic patterns or Talams for that matter. He was a though rough performer and often remarked how one must know the pulse of the audience and perform accordingly. Both Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and GN Balasubramaniam were musicians par excellence with a strong grounding in laya. One wonders what made them so attracted to the sarvalaghu pattern so much. According to my research it could have been the towering presence of Nagaswaram Vidwan TN Rajathathinam Pillai. TNR was known for his speedy sarvalaghu which showed not only high levels of spontaneity but also scholarship in their arrangement. He made a huge impact on all his contemporaries both instrumentalists and vocalists. The Madras music Academy which had never allotted a main slot and stage for Nagaswaram music made an exception for TN Rajarathinam Pillai, giving him a prime slot. There were huge crowds for his concert with a traffic jam many times in front of the venue, even Music Academy. His impact fell equally on both instrumentalists and vocalists alike. He rose to the forefront of Karnataka classical music. His own music was known for its sparkling brilliance and bhava. He was considered the king of raga alapana and also the Sarva laghu. His Sarva laghu swaras were infectious and the envy of many a musician. He was a genius who specialised in speedy swarankalpana exclusively comprising of avartha after avartha of Sarva laghu swara patters brilliantly arranged and flowing like a torrential rain. This seems to have made a huge impact on every musician of his generation including Srinivasa Iyer and GNB. Sarvalaghu swaras became the trend and bench mark of scholarship. Even vocalists who had nothing to do with the Nagaswaram Bani such as DK Jayaraman
found inspiration from TN Rajarathinam’s Nagaswaram music (Siva, 2015). Lalgudi Jayaraman demonstrates how the idea of "Poruthamana swaras" or swara kalpana ending with a set swara combination to suit the raga bhava and melodic line of the Krithi, was first introduced by GN Balasubramaniam. He had not heard it before. As I have tried to point out earlier the concert of swara kalpana came quite later to vocal music however the Nagaswaram music already had developed a highly evolved (aesthetically and mathematically) technique of swara kalpanas. It is quite possible that GNB was exposed to this due to his deep interest in Nagaswaram music.

Rupa Gopals interview (For the DVD – GNB Legend immortal) with Lalgudi shows him talking about the concept of poruttham and that when he first heard it he was completely struck by the beauty. According to Lalgudi, GNB used to sing a lot of jaaru sangathis in his alapana too.

At one concert TNR offered a garland to GNB at Kallidaikurichi. Kallidaikurichi in Tiruchi district was famous for Nagaswaram music. It was the stronghold of the Nayanakaras. This town however liked to listen to GNB’s vocal rendition. He was given concerts there more often than other vocalists. Palghat Raghu mentions that Tanjore was the home town of all the great musicians and most of them would attend GNB’s concert. While mentioning the great vidwans who would attend, Palghat Raghu mentions two names Tiruvizhimizhalai Brothers and Raghava Pillai. It is interesting to note that both these names he mentions as "great" are Nagaswaram players. This shows not only the close affinity GNB’s music had to Nagaswaram but also the close relationship the mrudangists and vocalists had with the Nagaswaram titans. It also shows that they were still very popular at that point of time.

While talking about his crystal clear brugas, senior Mrudangist Ummayalpuram Shivaraman talks about how GNB would reproduce all the intricacies of the Nagaswaram. Both TNR and GNB used to try to outdo each other in Bruga rendition. He goes on say that he took all the best of Nagaswaram music from artists such as TNR, inculcated into his style, which came to be known as GNB Bani. Everybody started following this Bani and thus it attained a continuous flow throughout generations. Mandolin Srinivas has said that adored the GNB Bani because it was close to Nagaswaram Bani. He was also inspired by the way GNB

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161 Sruti Magazine July 2015, Pg. 36- Manoj Siva.
would take up small ragas such as Andolika and Saramathi and take them to very great heights.

**Madurai Somasundaram (1919-1989)**

Vidwan Madurai Somasundaram was one of the leading vocalists of Karnataka classical music. A contemporary of GNB he was popularly known as Madurai Somu. He learnt music under Sesha Bhagavathar, Abhirama Sastri and Chittoor Subramania Pillai. Chittoor Subramania Pillai was a renowned vocalist and the disciple of Kanchipuram Naina Pillai. Madurai Somasundaram’s first concert was at Tiruchendur in 1934. He received the Padma Shri award from the government of India in 1976 and Sangita Natak academy award in 1978 among many other awards.

The expression of classical music differs from one artist to another. Each artist’s classical music being an expression of his or her opinion (abhipraya). In this regard Madurai Somu’s music was very different from that of his contemporaries. Similarly, even though both GN Balasubramanian and Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer were both influenced by the Nagaswaram, their styles was two worlds apart. Madurai Somu’s music was raw, uninhibited and many a times challenged the usual classical idiom. He was known for a deep Manodharma and scholarly swarakalpana. His raga alapanas’ were open exhibitions of his imagination and not controlled by the need of rigid stage decorum, something which can be seen in the music of Vid Sanjay Subrahmanyan today. Madurai Somu’s music was highly appealing due to its rich emotional content. This music even though classical had a very earthy feel to it just like the music of the Nagaswaram music and he enjoyed immense popularity due to this. This emotional appeal can be most perceived in his rendition of the song “Yenna kavi paadinalum” which he single handily popularised. Lalgudi Jayaraman has provided accompaniment for this rendition and he comes out blazing aces with the ample space for filling up provided by Somasundaram. Similarly analysing his rendition of Shanmukhapriya (AUDIO R5.28), Begade and Saurashtra Krithi give us many instances where the influence of a Nagaswaram bani are quite evident. There are Bruga passages, rare prayogas in raga and a very assertive forceful manner in presentation. He was known to have huge stamina and sang eight hour concerts according to leading vocalists Kalavathy Avadhoot. Veteran Violinist M Chandrashekaran, who was Madurai Somasundaram’s stock accompanist for fourteen
years goes on to say that Somasundaram was hugely inspired by TN Rajarathinam Pillai and specialised in Raga alapana. He goes on singing alapana for hours and it had a very strong flavour of the Nagaswaram’s music, especially ragas such as Shanmukhapriya.

Madurai Somasundaram came from a family of Isai Vellalas yet gained a large fan following among the upper class elite audiences and patrons alike. Mumbai Shanmukhananda hall saw many concerts of him singing to a packed hall in 1968-69. One of his renditions of Raga Kamboji at this venue received a standing ovation and remembered well. He, stuck true to his Isai Vellala heritage and popularised many Tamil compositions. Even most of his Pallavi’s were in the Tamil language just like the Nagaswaram repertoire. He immortalised compositions such as ‘Andavane illaye, thillai Ambala’ (raga Kamboji), and ‘Maduraiyile arasalum meenakshi’\(^{162}\), (raga Durbari kanada). He was also known for singing ragas such as Charukeshi, Gowri manohari, Sunadhvinodhini, Andolika and Shiva ranjini.

The similarity of Madurai Somasundaram’s music to Nagaswaram music (in his intonation, style, voice culture and Manodharma) is most perceptible when one listens to Nagaswaram artists singing. Often when we analyse the human voice as against that of an instrument, many elements such as intonation, throw of the voice and timbre cannot be vaguely studied. However when one listens to Nagaswaram artists’ rendering the same ideas (of music) that they play on the Nagaswaram in their singing, we get a clear picture as to how they formulate and express the Nagaswaram music on their voice. This is perhaps the closest study of the Nagaswaram Bani. In this regard, Madurai Somasundaram’s rendition comes across as very much like a Nagaswaram artists singing.

Both these artists had a very different Vocalization which was very similar to the Thathakaram of the Nagaswaram.

**PS NARAYANASWAMI**

Born on February 24th 1934, PS Narayanaswmi was one of the principle disciple of Vid Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, who went on to attain success as a performer and as a great guru. He was born in Konerirajapuram in Tanjore District,
Madras Presidency. By the 1930’s most of the successful Karnataka classical vocalists had migrated to George town Madras and other bigger towns in search of patronage which was fast shifting from to royal houses into the hands of wealthy merchants. In his own village there were no “vidwans” left, thus he decided to travel to his neighbouring village of Tiruvizheemizhalai which boasted of many Nagaswaram vidwans. (Only this community stayed back due to the temple patronage it found). He became a disciple of famous Nagaswaram exponent Tiruppambaram Somasundaram Pillai (one of the Tiruppabambaram brothers) who a descendent of the Nagaswaram disciples of Muthuswamy Dixitar. The Tiruppambaram brothers, namely Swaminatha Pillai, Shivasubramania Pillai and Somasundaram Pillai had become very famous among the entire Karnataka music scene as eminent musicians. Shivasubramaniam Pillai was a vocal teacher at the Chidambaram Annamalai University while Tiruppambaram Swaminathan was a famous flautist who went on to win the title Sangitha Kalanidhi from the music Academy. After reaching a certain stage of his training he was sent by his guru to Vid Mudicondan Venkatiramaiyar, however as fate would have it he became the disciple of Semmangudi Srinivasa iyer who was also deeply influenced by the Nagaswaram. PS Narayanaswami goes on to say that during his Guru’s time and his own early years, one did not get to hear many vocal concerts. Vocal concerts were private affairs and open only to a few invited. Nagaswaram was the only publically available Classical Karnatak music. Whole of Tanjore district from Tirupambaram to Tiruvidaimarudur, was famous for Nagaswaram music. From temples to religious Matts one got to hear plenty of Nagaswaram music throughout the day and sometimes throughout the night on special occasions such as festival days. This made a deep impact on him and his music sensibilities were shaped by the influence of Nagaswaram music. During his days of youth he was even exposed to the Nagaswaram music tradition of the Mylapore Kapaleeshwaran Temple.

An observation into PS Narayanaswami’s style showed me that he had a very flexible shaarira. He reproduced many of the urruttu’s sung by his guru, taking it further with his silken voice. He himself was deeply influenced by the Nagaswaram music of Kulikarai Pitchiappa and often practised with the Nagaswaram Vidwan at his residence. He would sing while Pitchiappa would play on the Nagaswaram. It was at this point that PS Narayanaswami realised how challenging it was to sing in the Nagaswaram Bani. His sessions with Kulikkarai Pitchiappa made him work harder on
his music in an attempt to catch the Nagaswaram sangathis and apply it to his own singing. The characteristic karve laden passages, urruttu and viraladi prayogas can be seen observed extensively in his raga alapana. For Example During the course of our interview he goes on to say that the “urruttu” in Karnataka classical music came into singing exclusively from the Nagaswaram. His early training with Tiruppambaram Somasundaram Pillai ensured that he developed a very malleable voice. The Nagaswaram guru gave utmost importance to “Akara sadhane”. He ensured that the sarali, janti, alankaras and Varnas were sung as akaram in multiple speeds and Nadais. Voice training and laya exercises were given utmost importance under the training the Nagaswaram guru. By the age of twelve PSN had a very well exercised shaarira that could reproduce any kind of fast briga or urruttu. This voice training lasted him throughout his life. When he accompanied is guru Semmangudi, he was able to give sterling vocal support with the help of his extremely pliable voice.

However the Nagaswaram influence which can be seen in the content of his music was mostly a result of the extensive listening (AUDIO R5.29). Growing up in the villages of Konerirajapuram and Tiruvizheemizhalai which echoed with temple culture and Nagaswaram he was fed on a staple diet of Nagaswaram music. his favourite Nagaswaram artists being TA Namashivayam, Kulikkarai P Vishwalingam, Kulikkarai Pitchiappa, TN Rajarathinam etc. One can see an influence of the Nagaswaram mainly in his alapana and the method in which he builds momentum. Although it is closely structured and modelled according to his guru’s Semmangudi’s style, as he progresses towards the Tara sthayis’ he renders a volley of fast Sangathis in his alapana. These fast phrases become more effective due to the long karve laden Sangatis and the clarity of the phrases. His alapanas of ragas such as Varali, Natakuranji and even Bilahri show us the influence of the Nagaswaram in his singing style. He goes on to say that he learnt and tried to follow the Nagaswaram approach as much as possible when he sang alapana in the raga Natakuranhi. During the course of our interview PS Narayanaswamy goes on to say that the concept of music in long phrases was exclusively the realm of the Nagaswaram vidwans’. Their karve laden music was a source of envy for a lot of other musicians. When the Nagaswaram vidwans would sustain on a note there would be no shake or trembling. Many a times these plain notes were found to be more attractive than gamakas. The Otthu Nagaswaram served as a great boost to create the effect sustenance, an advantage
which no other instrument had before the time of the violin (till a very long period vocal was accompanied by the Veena). When the Nagaswaram artists would hit a plain Kakali Nishada against the Sadjam of the otthu it created a marvellous effect. Many vocalists envied them and tried to inculcate these elements into their singing including breath control. Plain notes were given a lot of prominence in Nagaswaram music. PS Narayanaswami goes on to say that it was the norm that vocalists should observe and sing the gamakas like the Veena, however to realise the full capacity and power of once voice, to be able to render fast sancharas with speed and clarity one has to listen to the Nagaswaram. Listening to the Nagaswaram helps a vocalist to develop a complete vocal technique. Almost all the Nagaswaram players especially Nagaswaram Somasundaram Pillai and Flute Swaminatha Pillai were expert vocalists and very sought after as vocal guides.

Another aspect which PS Narayanaswami picked up from the Nagaswaram music and close association with its Vidwans was voice modulation. Being an instrument with a huge capacity for volume the Nagaswaram Vidwans made it a point to control it when they would render the Tara sthayis’. This gave an effect of “nalinam” or delicacy to an otherwise majestic instrument. The lower and middle octave passages were rendered with greater force and throw. These principles were imparted to their vocal disciples too and PSN gained immensely from this voice technique. In his own singing one can find and open throated singing still balanced by lesser volume in order which sounds very pleasing. One can also see the same kind of vocal agility, modulation and flexibility in his disciple Kalavathy Avadhooth’s singing. Although one can be born with a facile voice, careful modulation and clarity are qualities that needs to be cultivated by observation and practise.

During the course of the interview Vid PSN goes on to talk about the influence of the Nagaswaram on swarakalapana. He goes on to say that the most important aspect of swarakalapana for which Semmangudi and he found inspiration in the Nagaswaram was the Sarvalaghu swara pattern. PS Narayanaswamy would listen carefully and absorb the beautiful sarva laghu patterns of TN Rajarathinam Pillai and try to apply them into his own music. He goes on to say that Rajaratthinam Pillai would play multiple avarthas of sarvalaghu swaras without a single Karve or repetition even in ragas such as Janaranjini. He was particularly fond of the Begade
swara kalpana of TNR which was a display of complete mastery over a tough vakra raga.

**ML VASANTHAKUMARI (3 July 1928 – 31 October 1990)**

ML Vasanthakumari was the foremost disciples of GN Balasubramaniam who rose to become one of the most sought after vocalists in the field of Karnataka classical music. She was born to a upper class Brahmin father Kuthanur Ayya Swamy Iyer, and an Isai Vellala mother Lalithangi (an alliance which was not uncommon) who were both very well-known and accomplished musicians. GNB who once happened to hear her singing requested her parents to put MLV under his training. She was his first disciple.

MLV imbibed certain traces of the Nagaswaram Bani as an indirect influence acquired from her guru GN Balasubramaniam. This was most seen in her approach to Raga alapana and the racy brugas she added to her rendition which was unseen in any of the other female vocalist of her times. SV Seshadri (renowned critic who wrote in Shankar’s weekly in 1963) remarked that Vasanthakumari’s voice was remarkable for its briga’s (those figures in which the notes are organised into roulades or turns or mordents). She would harness this quality to the utmost, but rarely at the expense of the mood of a raga.

She also took up ragas such as Andolika, Mohanakalyani, Saramathi, and Sivasakthi for full blown alapanas following in the footsteps of her Guru according to Sulochana Pattabhiraman. She also popularised rare ragas such as Bhavani, Hamsovinidini, Urmika, Sumanasaranjini, Rishabhapriya, Natakapiya etc.

She was also known for her Raga Tana Pallavi’s which she took forward from her colleague DK Pattamal who was the first upper class lady musician to sing RTP’s on the concert stage. The RTP became her forte. She sought advance training in Tana and Pallavi from the celebrated Pallavi Vidwan Mudicondan Venkataramayyar, who was another vocalist who drew inspiration from the Nagaswaram music. She was known more for her cerebral style and many of the male musicians often remarked that she sang in a fearless manner like a man. She was not a demure performer unlike the other lady performers of her time. Her music was assertive.
Like her guru she took the technique of Graha Bheda to greater heights. She followed her guru’s style and further enhanced it with her own Manodharma. GNB’s son GB Duraiswamy used to draw many parallels between the famous Guru and Shishya (Ramnarayan, ML Vasanthakumari, 2009). MLV was said to have electrified rasikas with exciting trills and brugas which came effortlessly to her in her mellifluous voice. She also sang many complex sancharas in the upper sthayi’s during raga alapana instead of reserving delineation to the middle octaves. She was also quite famous for scholarly Kalpana swaras which had many laya intricacies (mathematical combinations) in them.

By 1946 MLV had also become a popular playback singer following in the footsteps of her guru. Some of her popular songs include Ellam Inbamayam (Manamagal 1951), Chinnanjiru Kiliye (composition of subramania Bharathi), Parkadal Alaimele (Raja Desingu 1960), Konjum Purave (1952), Ayya Sami (Oru Iruv 1951) etc. She also ensured that her musical legacy and style is passed on through her disciples many of whom attained name and fame in the field of Karnataka Classical music. Some of disciples include K Srvidya (daughter), Sudha Raghunathan, Violin A Kanyakumari, Trichur V Ramachandran, Charumathi Ramachandran (wife of Trichur Ramachandran), Yogam Santhanam etc. She inspired countless other young vocalists from the next generation who tried to imbibe the best of her style into their own such as Vid Kalavathy Avadhooth.

TANJORE S KALYANARAMAN (2 June 1930 – 9 January 1994)

S Kalyanaraman popularly known as SKR was regarded as one of the foremost disciples of GNB after ML Vasanthakumari. He closely followed his guru’s style and went on to further enhance it with his own Vidwath. He was born in Tiruvengadu in Nagapattinam district to Srinivasa Iyer and Ammani Ammal. One must remember that district of Nagapattinam was also the stronghold of Nagaswaram artists. He came from a long lineage of musicians, his great-grandfather was Komal Muthu Bhagavathar and his grand uncle was the celebrated vocalist Madirimangalam Natesa Iyer, his father being a good musician too. Kalyanaraman was already singing many Vivaadi ragas in detail before he joined GNB. Not many vocalists could boast

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163 Sruti Magazine-Issue 303 December 2009, Pg. 12
of this feat. He gave his first concert in 1947 at the Nataraja temple of Chidambaram, soon after joining GNB’s guidance.

There are many musicians believe that one can find traces of the Nagaswaram Bani in his rendition which he inherited as an indirect influence from his guru Vid GNB. This influence can be seen in the brigas he would sing in spite of having quite a husky voice which would not be otherwise considered a “Briga-shareera”. He achieved this through an aware and detailed study of voice culture. Although he did not enjoy the same popularity as MLV he was very highly regarded in the musical circles and they both were considered the torch-bearers of the GNB tradition in their life time. This Nagaswaram Bani influence can be seen most clearly in an alapana of Raga Hamsanada (AUDIO R5.31). Here one can see that this Bruga rich cascading alapana is quite similar to the alapana of Vid TN Sheshagopalan of the same raga. It must be mentioned that Vid TN Sheshagopalan followed the Nagaswaram style of music quite closely. Similarly an analyses of his vision of the raga Todi, shows us how close it was to the Nagaswaram influence and his own Guru, GNB’s style (AUDIO R5.32).

While talking about the likeness of Kalyanaramans music to GNB Vid Sanjay Subrahmanian goes on to recollect a concert he attended in Tiruvaiyyaru in 1980-81. After the heavyweights had finished SKR was due to sing late at night. He goes on to say that he still cannot forget an alapana of Dhenuka that Kalyanaraman sang that night. “He was struggling for breath, the voice was husky and even sounded crackled, but the brighas were there and that was all that young GNB fan wanted!” says Sanjay Subrahmanian.

Tanjore Kalyanaraman also had a very vast Manodharma. He was known to be able to expand any raga at any time, be it a popular one or a rare raga. Alapana and Swarakalpana were his forte, which is perhaps the reason for his music being attributed to the Nagaswaram Bani. GNB often proudly spoke to his fellow musicians that his disciple (Kalyanaraman) could stand up to any test on any raga. Such was SKR’s prowess in Manodharma Sangita. Even senior artists such as Padma Vibhushan

164 Quoted from http://sanjaysub.blogspot.in/2011/06/tanjore-s-kalyanaraman-skr.html#sthash.psXIDnQ0.dpuf
M Balamuralikrishnan, Sangita Kalanidhi PS Narayanaswamy, and Kalaimamani M Chandrashekharan would marvel at his Manodharma. PS Narayanaswami and M Chandrashekaram go on to say that he had a profuse Manodharma, almost to the point of overflowing sometimes. He also sang swara kalpana with a lot of mathematical algorithm laya patterns according to TN Sheshagopalan. Kalyanaraman was very fond of Khand Nadai according to senior Mrudangist Vidwan Tiruvarur Bhakthavathsalam and often included it in his swarakalpana. He had many ideas in laya which inspired Bhakthavatsalam to make many Korvais out of it. In the DVD “Tanjor S Kalyanaraman – Sunada Vinodhan” by Sanskrithi series, Bhakthavathsalam has spoken about a korvai which starts with a thishram, then goes on to Chathurashram and then to Khandam combination which was inspired by Kalayanaraman’s mathematical expressions.

Kalyanaraman was also referred to as Pallavi Vidwan (a musician specializing in RTP renditions). He used to set many a complicated Pallavi’s and pulled it off with great élan according to TN Sheshagopalan. Senior violinist Naagai muralidharan remembers accompanying a challenging Pallavi in raga Shanmukhapriya, set in Khanda nadai rendered by SKR while Mrudangist Vidwan Mannargudi Eshwaran fondly remembers a Raga Tana Pallavi sung by S Kalyanaraman in raga Kadana Kuthuhalal! A very challenging raga to expand into a Pallavi. Mannargudi Eshwaran goes on to say that he could never forget Kalyanaraman’s rendition of a Dhanyasi raga-thishra jathi jhumpe tala-khanda nadai-three avartha anagatha pallavi, to which he provided his accompaniment. He did not enjoy as much popularity as ML Vasanthakumari during his time, however his complex Pallavi’s attracted the attention of a lot of young musicians after his time. Sanjay Subrahmanian has sung many challenging Pallavi structures of Kalyanaraman set in Mishra chapu. Well known for his extremely tough Pallavi structures, he was way ahead of his times matched only by TN Sheshagopalan. Also notable was his flair for setting raga malikas both in the Pallavi structure he created and in his swara kalpanas. PS Narayanaswami recollects a concert when Kalyanaraman took up a raga malika of kalyani, keeravani, surutti and sindhubhairavi for alapana after which he sang Tana in all ragas. He was known to compose pallavis’ on the spot. When PS Narayanaswami saw Kalyanaraman counting on his fingers he at once knew that a Pallavi was to follow. He went on to make a Raga malika Pallavi, then sing Swaras in all four ragas within one avartha! It was an
“unbelievable” pallavi, one cannot fathom it according to PSN. He used to compose Pallavis which had three ragas set to three nadais and thrikala according to violinist T Rukmini. He would often include rare ragas such as Manoranjini in his Pallavi.

One element that brought his style close to the Nagaswaram Bani was his varied approach to tried and tested ragas. He rendered common ragas with a very uncommon sangathis. He was very daring in his ideas while rendering ragas such as Arabhi, Bhairavi Thodi etc. according to Vid Sanjay Subramanian. Violin Vidushi Kanyakumari, who often accompanied him spoke of the well-spaced Dhatu swaras he would include in ragas such as Arabhi which made accompaniment quite challenging. He would render Bhairavi raga peppered with a lot of varjya swaras. He was a daring innovator and this approach was seldom heard of in vocal music. Leading vocalist Anuradha Sriram (who was his disciple) talks about his out of the box Manodharma. I quote her "so tradition bound but at the same time he was so innovative". He would sing a very traditional Kalyani and Thodi but with unthinkable permutation combinations of swaras still replete with raga bhava. He was a pioneer in vivadi ragas such as Chandrajyothi, Sucharitra, and Hamasanadam which were well received by the audience.

The most important reference to the influence of the Nagaswaram Bani on Kalyanaraman’s singing comes from Senior Violinist Nagai Muralidharan who was his staple accompanist (Khanthan, 2008). He goes on to say that when he would sing Thodi he would completely follow the Nagaswaram Bani. Extremely challenging phrases and lightning speed brigas. He modelled it to the Nagaswaram Bani so closely that if one closes their eyes for a moment one would feel as if it is not a voice but an instrument says Nagai sir. He goes on to add, that he would sound just like the Nagaswaram itself. Violin maestro Parur MS Gopalakrishnan who often accompanied Kalyanaraman calls him Shanmukhapriya specialist (which was also the case with his guru GN Balasubramanian). It was that masterly. Simhendramadhyama was another raga he took to great heights which was just coming into vogue with the vocalists. He gave many a brilliant rendition of this raga which gave one glimpses of the Nagaswaram Bani. He extended his voice culture training and fast brigas to his ace disciple Vocalist Anuradha Sriram, who is one of the most versatile vocalists we have

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165 Tanjore S Kalyanaraman – The Sunaada Vinodhan – DVD released by Sanskriti series and Tanjore SKR trust
today. His swarakalpana was sometimes very fast in tempo (ati drutha kala) was something very difficult for a vocalist to pull off, especially to maintain clarity while sounding the notes and having spontaneous Manodharma at that speed.

He contributed immensely to field of Karnataka classical music by leaving behind his disciples many of whom are successful musicians today such as his wife Bhushany Kalyanaraman, Prof. Gowri Kuppuswamy, Brinda Venkataraman and the popular cine playback singer Anuradha Sriram.

Kalyanaraman suffered from a congenital heart problem and other respiratory ailments, and said that he could not have survived singing all these years had he not learnt early to use his stomach muscles for voice production and projection. He stressed that one of the distinct characteristics of his technique was that the voice/tone/shruti will not "spill" when producing a pure note. However I would like to add that the music of Tanjore S Kalyanaraman underwent certain changes. He was known for many fiery brigas at a young age, when he was under his Guru’s training. However with age and health problems his music evolved and changed. He took the brigas from GNB and the technique of Manodharma but one can say that he certainly added more gamakas in his rendition. He would sing Natakuranji raga with a combination of fast sangathis and also a very pulling gamaka. One could find a reduction in the Brugas and more emphasis on Gamakas to suit his voice, age and health better and can see this difference in the concerts when he was accompanied by Parur MS Gopalakrishnan and the later on concerts when he was accompanied by MSG’s daughter Narmada. However his brugas have been acknowledged by all his colleges including TN Sheshagopalan who is known as one of the foremost vocalists today capable of rendering the Nagaswaram Bani.

TN Sheshagopalan

He was born on 15th September 1948, in Nagapattinam a place famous for producing eminent Nagaswaram Vidwans. He later on moved to the temple town of Madurai which again echoed of a strong Nagaswaram culture. Thus he was exposed to plenty of Nagaswaram music as a child. He considers his mother his first Guru who taught him classical bhajans and trained him to sing in many Dramas. His mother was not exposed to classical music as was the case in the earlier periods when women folk never ventured out. His training in classical music formally began only in his 16th
year. TN Sheshagopalan himself has heard very few Karnataka classical (excluding Nagaswaram) artists live (since Vocal concerts were not yet held very often in public), some being Flute TR Mahalingam, Alathur brothers, Madurai Mani Iyer and GNB (Ramnarayan, T.N. Sheshagopalan - Mirror to his audience, 1983). Although by his time, AIR radio broadcasting ensured that he was exposed to the music of many other vocalists. However in his town and around it was the Nagaswaram vidwans and their music which was more popular and sought after. TN Sheshagopalan is one of the musicians who has a strong flavour of the Nagaswaram’s music in his own rendition. He was also enamoured by the instruments music and has held its musicians in very high esteem. He never missed a Karukurichi P Arunachalam (Nagaswaram) concert in and around Madurai during his early days and the Nagaswaram vidwans Viraladi prayogas left a deep impression on him (Pitchiah, 2014).

Madurai, the temple town, was famous for its festivals which had all night Nagaswaram concerts such as the Kakathope Street Tyagaraja uthsavam, Dhanappa Mudali Street Tyagaraja uthsavam, Vyasarayapuram agarahara uthsavam, Adi Veethi Navarathri festival, Skanda Shashti festival, Sree Ramanavami, Krishna Jayanthi, Arasamaram Pillayar Chathurthi, Saurashtra Sabha festival and the Shankaramadam festival, all which would have held Nagaswaram concerts as part of the tradition. The Meenakshimi temple was famed for its Nagaswaram music festivals. Karaikurichi and AKC Natarajan were regulars.

In an interview Vidwan TN Sheshagopalan states that his style was very unlike that of his Guru, CS Shankarsivan who in turn never forced any straightjacket rules enforcing a particular style. He recognised Sheshagopapan’s special abilities i.e. a facile voice that lent itself to brugas and voice modulation quite easily, a natural control over laya and control even at tremendous speeds. His Guru gave him free reign over his imagination. Also that fact that he did not undertake formal lessons until the age of 16 have greatly contributed to his present style “or lack of style in the words of his critics” (Ramnarayan, T.N. Sheshagopalan - Mirror to his audience, 1983). Being a versatile musician he came at a time when many musicians had a trademark style. He was often criticised to having either no Bani or excessively

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[166] Sruti Issue. December 1983, Pg. 26
[167] Sruti Issue 359, August 2014, Pg. 15
[168] Sruti – Dec 1983 Pg. 29; “TN Sheshagopalan – Mirror to his audience”
following the Nagaswaram Bani (Sheshagopalan T. , 1983)\textsuperscript{169}. TN Sheshagopalan’s style could be called an amalgam of many factors. First was his deep rooted training in the Bhajana Sampradaya, the second was the influence of the Veena and its gamakas (he being a Vainika himself) and third the influence of the music of the Nagaswaram, its versatility and unbridled Manodharma. The influence of the Nagaswaram music added a whole new dimension to his music and made a huge influence on the music of many upcoming musicians such as Sanjay Subrahmanian. Vidwan CS Sankarsivan of Ramanathan was the elder brother and Guru of Mrudangam Vidwan CS Murugabhoopathy and also the guru of Ramnad Krishnan. Vidwan Sankarshivan himself was ardent admirer of the Nagaswaram music and would often instruct Sheshagoplan to model his music based on the electrifying effect Nagaswaram music, even though his own style was not at all based on the Nagaswaram Bani (his own style was a slow meditative gamaka based style). He instilled the right sense of tradition and classicism in Sheshagopalan. Guru Sankarsivan would often Sheshagopalan to render the Tara Sadja with the effect of a “Mohanastra”. Sheshagopalan narrates his Guru’s words about Nagaswaram music and it’s Mohanastra “There was a Nagaswaram Vidwan of the name of Mannargudi Chinnapakkiri. He was a great magician with the Nagaswaram. Those were the days of the Timiri Nayanam which made great demand on the lungs of the player and Tavil interludes were customary during raga alapana in order to help the Nagaswaram Vidwan recover his breath. These Tavil interludes were the signal for chewing betel-leaf among the listeners but so enchanting was the raga alapana of Chinnapakkiri that fingers would come to an absolute standstill in the act of applying Chunam paste to betel leaves as though he had aimed a mohanastram at the listeners (Ramnarayan, T.N. Sheshagopalan - Mirror to his audience, 1983)\textsuperscript{170}. Nevertheless his guru paid a lot of attention even to voice culture training and he was a strong follower of Karna parampara (he denounced the assistance of any sort of written notes). Whenever he sang at Madurai he would interact with many senior Nagaswaram Vidwans such as Madurai (MPN) Sethuraman who even awarded Sheshagopalan a Tambura as first prize at a Pallavi contest in 1966. Sethuraman was the Judge and Sheshagopalan sang the pallavi “undarisanam kidaikyumo Nataraja dayanidhe” in Chowka kale.

\textsuperscript{169} Sruti Magazine, December 1983, Interview with N Pattabhiraman, Pg. 35
\textsuperscript{170} Sruti – Dec 1983 Pg. 30; “TN Sheshagopalan – Mirror to his audience
The most obvious influence of the Nagaswaram on TN Sheshagopalan’s music is seen in the way he renders the veritable Bruga. The speed, clarity, the nature, the timing and the context of the Bruga suggest a deep influence of the Nagaswaram on his subconscious mind. A good example is his brief Hamsanandi alapana. In a 14 minute rendition of Hamsanandi raga alapana (a fourteen minute recording is a relatively short alapana by his standards) he chooses to render brugas which revolve around the gandhara (Audio R5.33). Three cycles of Brugas increasing in length and finished with datu swaras make this very close to the Nagaswaram Bani. More brugas follow at the Tara Sadja. It most definitely is emerging from his subconscious mind since he is a very instinctive musician. Or rather his musician very instinctive in nature and does not give one the notion of a tailor-made crafted style. By his own narration he says that his exposure to records of Nagaswaram Vidwan TN Rajarathinam Pillai’s music gave him the inspiration to reflect the same quality and nature of Brugas into his own flexible voice. Added to that was his Guru’s accounts raving about the live concerts he had heard of TN Rajarathinam Pillai in his time added to Sheshagopalan’s awe of his music. Sankarsivan would often narrate about how Rajarathinam would toy with just three swaras as the presiding deity left the temple on the procession night. When his guru gave such glowing accounts of TN Rajarathinam he would surely have to be very great! Sheshagopalan would often wonder about the three minute magic Rajarathinam could perform with the raga Todi and tried to imbibe as much as he could from what he heard. A multifaceted musician he was adept at playing the Khanjira, Konnakol and rendering the Sollukattu for the Tavil in its distinct phrases (Vijayaraghavan, 2006)171.

Other aspects that bring his music very close to the Nagaswaram Bani is the extensive use of Jaru phrases and the approach to raga alapana. In the same Hamsanandi raga alapana one can hear a whole volley of connecting swaras around the Nishadha and to reach the Tara shadja instead of taking the beaten path like NRS or SNGRS he chooses to go up to the Tara sthayi Madhyama and then rest at the Sadja. He had a very different approach to alapana and would attack it very differently when compared to his other contemporaries. TN Sheshagopalan’s music is full of very grand and majestic jaru prayogas. For example in his Hamsanandi raga alapana after a few phrases he stuns with a huge jaaru which goes from the tara sadja

171 Sruti Magazine, Cover story-December 2006, Pg. 20 “TN Sheshagopalan, A Nandavanam of music”
to mandra sadja give a brief panchama and then goes on to explore the tara stayi RGM,,GRS. Tara sthayi phrases such as MG,,MR,,GS,,RN,, which can be rendered well with a soft touch get a special kind of gamaka. Like a stress on the gliding second note. This adds a special kind of majesty, weight and grip on these jaaru phrases. He does this with the addition of syllables ra na ra na.

What makes his music closest to the Nagaswaram Bani is his amazing breath control. He is known for singing very long karve laden phrases at strategic points just like the Nagaswaram players. Such as at Mandra sthayi madhyama in the Shanmukhapriya alap, before reaching the Panchama or at Panchama. When at panchama it becomes a resting point or like a binding knot after a prolonged intricate filigree. His most impressive karve also come at the Nishadha (hamsanandi alap). It is most effective at this point in particular, the nishadha so that when he reaches the sadja it is almost final in nature. Sheshagoplan is known for his complex Raga Tana Pallavi, complex both in structure and the laya patterns he brings out within the Pallavi. He is known to mix raga malikas into many of Pallavi structures. Once choosing Bhairavi and Sindhubhairavi ragas he went on to sing a raga alapana where he expounded both ragas taking turns at each swara. Madhya sthayi sadja to Panchama would first be covered in Bhairavi and then again in Sindhubhairavi. Even the Tana had each raga showing itself in quick succession, taking turns at each resting point. Similarly the Pallavi and the neraval followed suit. Many young musicians have been inspired by TN Sheshagopalan’s complicated Pallavi and have rendered it themselves as a challenge. One such pallavi which became a famous audience favourite was his Pallavi in Kalyani raga “Padatthukaaga Pa, Layatthukaaga La, Vinyasathikaagu Vi ; sendhu amaindha murai dhaan Pallavi ; chithra thara margathil sollum porulum villanga yezhilmiga” This has been sung by the brilliant young musician Abhishek Raghuram. Sheshagopalan would surprise with the unexpected, strike a different path and hold on to his conviction against popular demand. There was a brief period in Karnatak classical music during the 1980s’ when the RTP was thought to be languishing except for a few artists who still revelled in it, one of the most prominent being TN Sheshagopalan (N Pattabhiraman, 1983)\(^\text{172}\).
A recipient of the Padma Bhushan, Sangeeth Natak Academy and Sangita Kalanidhi award, TN Sheshagopalan’s music found appreciation not only from audiences but also senior musicians such as Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, Lalgudi Jayaraman, Palghat Mani Iyer, TN Krishnan, Ummayalpuram K Shivaraman, Veena Balachander, PS Narayanaswami, RS Mani, VR Krishnan, Tiruvengadu Subramania Pillai and even T Brunda. During the course of our interview, Sanjay Subrahmanian goes on to say that TN Sheshagopalan was a huge influence on his own music. He was one of the most attractive and flamboyant musicians especially during the 70s’. There were virtually none who could match the speed, the laya control and the expansive raga alapana he would render. He would include many mathematical combinations in his swara kalpana. According to Sanjay Subrahmanian, TN Sheshagopalan was one of the first to render swaralkalpana on the shifting sahithya point of the Pallavi. Similar to the Nagaswaram’s Rakthi in principle he would shift the entire sahithya of the Pallavi by rendering it in three speeds and different nadais, thereby creating multiple Edupus to the same Pada garbha. This was a novel feature in Karnataka classical vocal music during the 70’s which TN Sheshagopalan brought out with telling effect.

According to my observation TN Sheshagopalan’s music too has undergone a lot of changes. His early days of performance during the 70s and 80s saw him sing with breakneck speed, not only were the Brugas fast but also the pace of the concerts. However today, the Brugas are rendered at the same speed however the pace of the krithis he sings and in general the concert has come down to a more relaxed level. In his own words he describes this change as “the stamina of youth against the rich experience of 23 years”173. Sheshagopalan acknowledges that his bani or style has often been compared to that of the Nagaswaram. However to him it came quite naturally, not as a cultivated style. Once during a concert in the presence of Semmangudi he was advised to sing in a leisurely manner with broad strokes by the senior Vidwan, “vishranthiya paaduda”. TN Sheshagopalan rendered an exposition of raga Shankarabharanam accordingly and gained a lot of praise from Semmangudi. Sheshagopalan (who does not like being boxed into a particular Bani) even went on to lament about the label of the Nagaswaram Bani against his style to Semmangudi.

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173 Sruti Magazine, Cover story-December 2006, Pg. 22
Srinivasa Iyer replied “take it as a compliment. People have the same thing about me too”. Thus one can say that the influence of the Nagaswaram music has seeped quite deeply and blended very well into his own style along with many other influences. TN Sheshagopalan’s music thus gives us strong glimpses of the Nagaswaram Bani. However it has changed according to age, experiences and situation.

SANJAY SUBRAMANIAN

Born on born 21 January 1968 in Chennai, Sanjay Subramanian is one of the leading and most popular Karnataka classical vocalists we have today. He is also the recipient of the precious award and title of Sangita Kalanidhi awarded by the Madras Music Academy this year (2015). He had his initial training on the violin under the guidance of violin Vidwan V Lakshminarayanan (father of international violinist L Subramaniam and brother of Ramnad Krishnan). He later commenced vocal training under his aunt Smt Rukmini Rajagopal and then under senior Guru Vidwan Calcutta KS Krishnamurthy till the guru’s death in 1999. In 2000 he became a disciple of Nagaswaram maestro Semponarkoil S. R. D. Vaidyanathan and stayed on until the latter’s death in 2013. It is his training under SRD Vaidyanthan that suddenly brought about a great change in his style and music. His whole performance and Manodharma had obtained a new dimension. The audience and discerning rasikas sat up and took notice of this huge change in approach and burst of musical energy when compared to his concerts before 2001. Sanjay was one of the brightest young stars of the younger generation and he was deeply influenced by GNB’s music and style. He was a huge GNB fan. However after his training under his guru SRD Vaidyanathan one could see a clear change in style. The style and the thought process of Nagaswaram music blended very beautifully into his own and this translated into on stage magic, making him one of the foremost and most sought after musicians today with a notable Nagaswaram influence.

I would like to present a brief introduction of the Guru Nagaswaram Vidwan SRD Vaidyanathan. He was born in Mayiladuthurai, the land of the famous Shiva temple and the bastion of Nagaswaram music, Tamil Nadu, India. He belonged to the most illustrious musician family of Nagaswaram Vidwans (Isai Vellala) the Semponarkoil clan. His grandfather Ramaswamy Pillai’s was a Pallavi giant and the first Nagaswaram Vidwan to be recorded by His Master’s Voice (78 rpm recording
company) and his father Dakshinamurthy also made a record for the Colombia company.

Fig 11: Semponarkoil Ramaswamy Pillai

Source: The Celestial Nagasvaram, Geetha Rajagopal

SRD Vaidyanathan was trained by Nagaswaram vid Mayavaram Ramiah Pillai. He also learnt vocal music from Thiruvizhundur. A.K. Ganesa Pillai and Madurai Mani Iyer. Thus his own music had a very rounded approach. He was considered a Pallavi (RTP) specialist with the Mallari and Rakthi being considered his family heritage which he inherited. The Rakthi was considered the exclusive property of the Nagaswaram vidwans’ hailing from the Semmponarkoil family and it is very sad that he was one of the last past masters of the Rakthi. Today it has almost become extinct. Vaidhyanathan’s forte has been the Mallari and the Pallavi. Doordharshan has done well to capture a concert of his where he “sings” a pallavi of large complexity, with four different thala-streams occurring without interruption — two on
the right and left hands and two on left and right feet, the pallavi progressing in its own track. He has also composed Mallaris in various ragas and talas’, even in ragas like Nilambari, unlike the traditional Ghambira Nattai (Sivakumar, 2008)\textsuperscript{174}.

One of the most evident influences of the Nagaswaram music and his guru can be seen in Sanjay Subrahmanian’s repertoire. He picked up the Mallari from his guru and has been including it into many of his concerts to great effect. He makes sure that he sings the solkattu as intended for the Tavil and also takes care that his Mallari presentations are usually at Temple concerts keeping the sentiment of the Nagaswaram Vidwans in mind. I include a Mallari that has been rendered by Sanjay at in Mishra jathi triputa tala. This change in style, voice, rendition and repertoire as said earlier were noted by rasikas and critics alike. To quote V Sriram, noted art historian based out of Chennai “Sanjay’s initial grounding as a vocalist was through two gurus – his grand-aunt Rukmini Rajagopalan and the musician’s musician, Calcutta KS Krishnamurthy. While these gave him the capabilities to make it as a top-ranking singer, it was his tutelage under the veteran nagaswaram artiste SRD Vaidyanathan that made his music extraordinary. This association began in the 2000s and lasted till the guru’s death. It was SRD who initiated Sanjay into the mallari – hitherto a nagaswaram staple. He brought in sonorous phrases in raga renditions, broadened Sanjay’s vision and added several songs to his stock. This training coincided with a sudden efflorescence in Sanjay’s voice – it became powerful (Sriram, Sanjay Subrahmanyan, a portrait of the artist, 2015)\textsuperscript{175}.” Another influence of the Nagaswaram music can be seen in Sanjay Subrahmanians’ rendition of Raga Tana Pallavi. One can notice that a large number of Pallavi’s he sings in the language Tamil, just like the Nagaswaram repertoire. The influence of the Nagaswaram became evident in his style and was first noticed when he rendered the difficult “Koniyyadina napai” Krithi in 2007 at the Madras Music Academy December festival in “the best Nagaswaram manner” according to V Sriram. The audience that was present, sat up when it realised a change in the nature of his music that had achieved a whole new emotional maturity. Since then Sanjay Subramanian has been on a steady climb, achieving dizzying heights in creativity and popularity.

\textsuperscript{174} The Hindu – June 6\textsuperscript{th} 2008 – Serene and Majestic
\textsuperscript{175} Sanjay Subrahmanyan, a Portrait of the Artist- V Sriram for The Wire – 23-06-2015
Sanjay Subramanian has been a keen observer of Nagaswaram music. He was taken to his guru SRD Vaidyanathan itself by Nagaswaram Vidwan S Kasim of the Kasim-Babu brothers’ fame (grandson of Sheik Chinna Moula). He has also been a keen listener of many vocalists who followed the Nagaswaram Bani, from GNB, Semmangudi to Tanjore S Kalyanaraman. He is also a great admirer of TN Sheshagopalan for his Nagaswaram Bani. He realised how difficult and challenging it could be to sing an alapana in this style. Thus Sanjay’s music is an amalgam of all the years of extensive listening to the “Nagaswaram Bani” in vocalists and to Nagaswaram music itself.

One of the most important aspects of Nagaswaram music that he learnt from SRD and his tribe of Nagaswaram artists (and applied to his music) was the ability to sing sans confinement (Anand, “Sanjay’s sojourn”, 2015). In an award acceptance speech at Bramha Gana Sabha, Sanjay describes his guru’s ideals quoting a famous quote from the famous Tamil movie Tillana Mohanambal -“Kalaignar sudhandhira paravaigal” meaning artists are like free birds. SRD stressed that one should not sing in a concert as if the artist has a strait jacket on him. Music is not to be quarantined. The mind be opened to freely express Manodharma. This ability came naturally to the Nagaswaram artists who did not play within the confines of a Sabha auditorium but in open air. The very nature and setting of Nagaswaram music embodied artistic freedom according to Sanjay. This was one of the biggest influences of Nagaswaram music which he got as a direct influence from his guru. So each swara is sung stressing on the joining points and links with a certain amount of force which is characteristic of the vocalists influenced by the Nagaswaram Vidwans. There would be a whole lot of play with intonation and stress points. “Bhava” or emotion is given the highest priority. One can see this in Madurai Somu’s rendition too. A documentary called “Arar asai padar” has captured the guru and shishya in one of their music lessons. Here the Guru SRD teaches the line “nava rathna thanga thodu” to Sanjay Subrahmanian. What is most noticeable is the stress on the word “thanga”, the typical intonation, distinct vocalisation that matches the Nagaswaram Guru’s vocalisation and the inlaid bhava suggesting a precious metal comes out (VIDEO R1) (Kapilacarnatic, 2011). Talking about his guru’s influence Sanjay states that “he

177 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1igZGA-o-10
completely opened my mind”. Almost like “breaking in” of the mind and artist who needs to be opened up a bolder expression of singing. SRD influenced not only his Manodharma but his entire singing style or vocalisation.

One of the biggest principles he was taught by his family who were keen rasikas of Karnataka classical music was to cultivate the habit of extensive listening. Thus Sanjay obtained immense kelvi jnanam. The Nagaswaram music came into his focus much before he even realised. He was close friends with Nagaswaram Vyasarpadi G Kothandaram and his brother Uttharakumaran. They were known to play together. Both Kothandaraman and Sanjay won the AIR national competition in their respective categories in the same year in 1986. Once when they were together (Uttharakumaran, Kothandaram and Sanjay) at a concert series Thiruvaivayaru, Uttharakumaran demonstrated a raga Huseini in typical Nagaswaram style, teaching Sanjay an easy approach to Huseini. This blew his mind and he still remembers this technique fondly. He goes on to demonstrate this during the course of my interview and the ease with which he navigates the Nagaswaram Bani is very evident (AUDIO R5.34). Uttharakumaran was the principle of Ramanathapuram College.

Many a times one can see multiple volleys of Karve laden phrases in Sanjay’s music. It need not necessarily be along with Birukkas but the long breaths make the Sangathi riveting and close to the Nagaswaram music. What makes Sanjay Subrahmanian’s music close to the Nagaswaram Bani is this Karve laden music. During the course of the interview he goes on to say that he has consciously adopted the core principles and over all principles of the Nagaswaram since it suite his personality and style. On a day when his voice is in great condition one can see more of the fast sangathis’. On other days one can find that the birukkas might be absent but the Karve and volleys of inter connected sangathis play the part of creating a Nagaswaram effect. More than the specifics the total effect of his music shows proximity to the Nagaswaram Bani (which includes his musical intonation such as “Ta ra na na” during alapana and their placement). While talking about the Nagaswaram Bani found in Semmangudi’s music Sanjay himself during the interview pointed out to me that very often the identification of the Nagaswaram Bani can be done more aptly by listening to the overall effect of the alapana than pointing out specific phraseology. One can see the influence of the Nagaswaram music especially in the way he frames sangathis during an alapana of ragas such as Bhairavi, Kalayani
and Thodi. Difficult Dhatu prayogas, uruttu’s and jaaru phrases which are rendered with a force which one can see hear quite often in Nagaswaram music, are characteristic features of Sanjay Subrahmanian’s music.

He also talks about the huge influence TN Sheshagopalan’s music had on him especially during the 1970’s when the maestro was at the heights of his popularity. The strong influence of the Nagaswaram Bani which blended with a lot of other styles in made TN Sheshagopalan’s a very attractive style which made a huge impact on Sanjay’s music and Manodharma. As a keen listener and observer of music, Sanjay became a keen admirer of the long drawn phrases of TNS’s Nagaswaram Bani. He also realised that the style needed enormous amounts of energy and vitality. It was a challenge to assimilate and deliver this approach of music (Anand, “Listening and Learning”, 2015). He took Sheshagopalan’s concept of singing swarakalpana’s to different points in the sahithya of the Pallavi (by shifting the entire sahitya line in three speeds and thishram to the arudhi) and further enhanced it into his own RTP renditions. He demonstrates this in his famous Nataikuranji Pallavi of the sahithya “Nataikurinji yenbar I yengaladhu II”. Here Sanjay varies only the line “Yengaladhu” and renders swarakalpana to the adjoining edupus that are created. Then he takes another Pallavi “taraka brahma swaroopini” and sings each word in a different speeds, either in ascending order or descending.

The Semmponarkoil school of Nagaswaram was extremely famous for “layavidwath” and amongst them SRD Vaidyanathan was considered a monarch of mathematics, especially since this school specialised in Mallari, Rakthi and Pallavi. Another school was the Nagaswaram players from Tirumeignanam. Observing this from his guru Sanjay Subrahmanian has taken a lot of influences into his music including many korvais using the Nagaswaram method of picking up the smallest denominator. He goes on to demonstrate a korvai taught to him by his Guru SRD, which he often sings in his swarakalpanas. Chathushram is taken as one unit, thishram is taken as three-fourth, khandam is one-one fourths while mishram is one-three fourths and Sankeernam is two-three fourths. These are the least common denominators. He demonstrates this using a simple calculation of four times patterns of 5 (Tha dhi ki ta thom). This starts from the middle finger where the first two times


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we sing tha dhi gi na thom in normal speed and then the last time in thishram vilamba and thishram madhyama kala. (AUDIO R5.35) similarly tha dhi gi na thom twice in chathurashram and the rest three tha dhi gi na thom in thishram (always starting from the middle finger).

AUDIO R5.35 has him showing longer patterns using the same principles and this was taught to him by SRD sir.

Tha . . .
Ta ki ta . Ta ki ta . Ta ki ta this equals 20 ( 1 is four, so 4 *5)
Tha . . .
Say this four times, we will get 2 and half avarthas.
tha . . .
Ta ki ta tha . . .
Ta ki ta tha . . . This makes ten
Ta ki ta tha . . .
Ta tha ki ta
Ta tha ki ta this makes five
Ta tha ki ta
Ta tha ki ta
AND THEN 3 THISHRAMS IN MEL KALAM. (MADHYAMA KALA ADI TALA)

Sanjay Subrahmanian has sung many times in his swara kalpana and goes on to acknowledge that everyone knows that he has taken a lot of such mathematical ideas from his guru. This is SRD's calculation method. He goes on to say that their concept of calculating starts from the lowest denominator in fractions which he finds very appealing and fresh. Thus we can see that the influence of the Nagaswaram extended not only on his approach to music rendition, alapana, raga phraseology but also on his swara kalpana in the form of calculations that are typically Nagaswaram. Needless to say that the change in style which came into Sanjay’s music after training under Semmponarkoil Vaidhyanathan catapulted him into being one of the most sought after Karnataka classical vocalists today.
Many a reference has been made as to the genius of TNR, MLV, SG Kittappa and MK Tyagaraja Bhagavathar. Clubbing all these artist into one category of genius was the famous critic Subbudu who once wrote in his series Karnataka Isai Vendargal, in the Tamil weekly Kungumam. He placed Karaikurichi in the same league. It is interesting to note that all these artists were influenced by the Nagaswaram (Pitchiah, 2014)\textsuperscript{179}. Similarly there many other vocalists such as Manakkal Rangarajan, Radha-Jayalakshmi and play back singer S Janaki who are believed to have traces of the Nagaswaram Bani in their singing. Artists such as Sanjay Subrahmanian and TN Sheshagopalan have mentioned the speedy sangathis and Bruga Shareeram of Manakkal Rangarajan. Sanjay Subrahmanian believes that there was quite a Nagaswaram flavour in the singing of Manakkala Rangarajan. Similarly Radha-Jayalakshmi are believed to have inherited traces of the Nagaswaram style in their (in the assertive nature of their singing and the brugas) singing from their guru GN Balasubramanian. Meanwhile veteran playback singer S Janaki has trained under a Nagaswaram artist. Hailing from Guntur in Andhra Pradesh she trained in Karnataka classical music under Nagaswaram artist Sri Paidiswamy, perhaps her only guru. Her versatile and powerful voice has all the traits of a Nagaswaram influence on her singing and for this she rose to become one of the most sought after singers in the playback industry. Even Nagaswaram artists such as Sheik Meheboob Subhani acknowledge the close proximity of her style to Nagaswaram music. Another playback singer who had a strong Nagaswaram Bani in his singing was Vidwan Sirkazhi Govindarajan who also regularly sang Karnataka classical vocal concerts. Vidushi Kalavathy Avadhooth is another vocalist who has great regard for the music of the Nagaswaram and has regularly looked towards it for inspiration. Blessed with a facile voice she is able to render many Nagaswaram like Bruga passages, \textit{urrutta} along with long karve with great originality. She has traces of the Nagaswaram style of robust music from both her Guru PS Narayanaswamy and her idol Vidushi ML Vasanthakumari. She combines elements from both these stalwarts to blend their music into her own style. An opportunity to showcase the Nagaswaram Bani for a lecture demonstration at Bangalore Gayana Samaj took her deeper into the world of Nagaswaram music. The topic was suggested to her by none other than Vid RK Padmanabhan who thought that her shaarira was most suitable for showcasing the

\textsuperscript{179} Sruti Issue 359, August 2014, Pg. 15
Nagaswaram Bani. Her demonstration was a great success and she was able to bring out the nuances of the Nagaswaram Bani with great precision. Hours of listening and researching Nagaswaram music made a deep impact on her music and one can find many elements of the Nagaswaram music in her music such as even the “viraladi” which she uses very judiciously. She is held in great regard by her contemporaries and has been a recipient of glowing reviews from audiences and critics. Hindu critic V Nagaraj while reviewing one of her concerts has described her music as “sprightly” and “invigorating”. She is known for her fast Sangathis and crisp akaras. Thus the Nagaswaram still continues to inspire singers of the present generation provided they are exposed to it.