

# Dominance of Chembai Music Festivals and the Prominence of Chembai Vaidyanathan in the Fraternity of Carnatic Music



*“Chembai: Artist with a strong voice and a noble heart, his Rigorous practice and sparse use of gamakas defined his music”*

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**ABSTRACT** - The contribution and dedication of Chembai Vaidyanathar Bhagavathar to the music festivals is astounding. So he is always come in to the major place in the fraternity of music festivals. Chembai Vaidyanathar is the musical emblem that has set a unique mark in the history of Carnatic music in Kerala. His name is still a form of worship for music lovers. This document is a musical concept for the Music Emperor of Kerala. Karnataka Sangitam or Carnatic music first focused on Travancore and Palakkad Iyers, but soon gained popularity throughout Kerala two centuries ago. Two centuries ago, several famous Carnatic artists came from Kerala. During the early stages in the history of vocal music, the distribution media were oral sayings and vocal exercises. Without outside help, depending on God's gift of speaking ability, classical music was given from Guru to word of mouth. Interestingly, even though external resources are widely used, signs and lines, symbols and characters, voice and oral exercises continue to be used, because resources and media are not the only devices for human voice sound.

**KEYWORDS** - Music festivals, Carnatic music, Chembai family, Guruvayur Temple, concerts, worship.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Chembai is a great genius who has created the amazing landscape of Nadabraham for over sixty years. Chembai is a music family in a village with only 50 families in the Palakkad region. Chembai Vaidyanathar was born on September 14, 1896. He was known by all as "Chembai". His father Sri Vidwan Anantha Bhagavathar was the great grandson of the famous singer Sree Chakrathanam Subha Iyer, one of Travancore State court artists. His father was a famous South Indian musician, who was famous in Thanam music. To sing Thanam, the artist must have wisdom, sound, gentleness, manodharma music and Bani. (Bani is a Thanjavur musical tradition) It is unlikely that even the greatest musicians of that time would have enjoyed this. Chembai's grandfather was so famous, so he was named

Ghanachakra Thana Subhayar. We can therefore understand the reality of the Chembai family in the Carnatic music relationship. He had a sense of humor and music. His concerts and presence are therefore drawn to the audience on an ongoing basis. He could make niraval and swaraprastara from any given point, which showed mental alertness at the concert. His empathy for his fellow students was remarkable, and he would do all he could to encourage them. Chembai Vaidyanathar was one of the leading performers in Carnatic Music. Older artists point out that he, along with Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer formed Modern Trinity of Carnatic Music, the three who were responsible for preserving the culture of the concert in that vacuum caused by the departure of the titans in the early 20th Century. Prior to the entry of young bright stars such as Musiri Subramania Iyer, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, G.N

Balasubramanian, Madurai Mani Iyer and three women including M.Subbulakshmi, D.K.Pattammal and ML Vasanthakumari, who entered the stage later. But what made Chembai different from them was his voice, that of a thriving, ironic, powerful voice that could not be seen from scratch. It has led to the marking of his name in the history of Kerala Carnatic music as he has dedicated his life to Carnatic music. The lesson focuses on Chembai's dedication and passion for Carnatic music and the amazing contributions he makes to the music festivals. The Chembai family had a great devotion and love for Carnatic music, and they made an effort to spread their eternal scent to a new generation as well. The village of Chembai is the best place to find evidence. He started Music College in Palakkad to explore Carnatic music of the new generation.



### Chembai Music Festival. Sreevar...

The renowned musician is on stage

Chembai and his brother Shri. Subramanian learned music from his father Shri. Ananda Bhagavathar. Shri. Ananda Bhagavathar was a talented musician and violinist. The Chembai brothers had their first concert in 1905 at a temple ceremony in Ottapalam. Their concerts at the temple ceremonies in Vaikom and Guruvayur were among the hallmarks of the brothers' early activity. At the age of eight in the wards Chembai, he performed in a concert that spanned seventy years of outstanding musical career. A.V. Krishna made a significant contribution to Chembai's life. He played a key role in advancing the work of Vaidyanathar Bhagavathar. While making a name for himself as a local artist, he was very young at the time Krishna Iyer was busy as a lawyer based in Trissur. He

studied music under Chembai's father. He later had the opportunity to develop his musical appreciation by listening to the best performances of the best artists in Malabar and Madras City. He was familiar with Kathakali songs based on Carnatic music and the songs used in Ottamthullal and Krishnanattam. He had the ambition and skill to take on the role of mentor for young Vaidya. Krishna Iyer later found Palakkad Mani who was trained as the father of the voice by his father and who helped to introduce the child in the field of reading as mridangam vidwan. A.V. Krishna Iyer had time to visit the village of Chembai. He commended the recommendations to his younger brother Subramanian (Chuppamani) for improving the appeal of their singing. But he did more than just give advice. He took the initiative to compliment Chembai with concerts outside the Palakkad area of Malabar, Travancore and Cochin. A.V. Krishna Iyer taught Chembai Sanskrit and persuaded him to sing Agre Pasyami thejo, a slogan from Narayaneeyam. He was the one who asked Chembai to sing the Karuna cheyvanendu, written by Irayyimman Thambi, on Guruvayoorappan in Malayalam.



### A glance at Chembai sangeetholsavam

The Guruvayur Temple was his abode and residence for the rest of his life where the performance of Chembai's music was a major event from 1907 on the day of Ekadashi until his death in 1974. Chembai was a very dedicated person to Carnatic music. Chembai attracted a much larger audience with his metal voice that is wide and wide. This has led to an increase in the number of singing artists. Chembai delighted music lovers for more than sixty years with his powerful and majestic voice. Some of his prominent

students include K. Yesudas, T. V. Gopalakrishnan, V.V.Subramaniam, Jayan and P P. Leela. Some artists remember this man and his music. Sangeetha Samrat, Sangeetha Kalanithi Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar is undoubtedly the living Doyen among the ancient South Indian artists. She has been a successful singer for the past 60 years and more, and is known for the continuous quality of her healthy voice. This is due to his deep devotion to Lord Krishna of Guruvayur, who donates money to his temple. He is the latest recipient of the Padma Bhushan award. Countless artists have been encouraged by him as partners and collaborators. Sri Chembai gave his full impression to the kriti "Ksheerasagara" expressing Thyagaraja's mind in the phrase "Tarakanama". Voice culture occupies an important place in Carnatic music with many important details provided by music experts from the past to the present.

The voice culture consists of two elements, the visual voice that executes the commands of the mind, and the mind, which makes musical expressions. When both elements work together seamlessly, a new world is opened up to greater opportunities. Chembai died suddenly on October 16, 1974, at the age of 78, from a heart attack. Shortly before that, he performed his last concert at the Pozozikikunnu Sreekrishna temple in Ottapalam (the site of his first concert), and Chembai had several phonograph records of his credit, recorded from 1932 to 1946. Those were the days before the arrival of the microphone concert, and the artist relied heavily on the status and the achievement of his voice in a successful concert. Chembai was blessed with a deep voice. In 1957 he founded a music college in Palakkad to spread the scent of Carnatic music.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To develop the knowledge of the Carnatic music in Kerala and to understand the influence of Carnatic music in spiritual life.
- To cultivate and enhance the interest in music.
- To gain familiarity with a range of different musical practices and traditions through music festival.
- To learn to think about cultural, historical, and cognitive dimensions of Carnatic music through Chembai vydyanathar's music.

## HYPOTHESIS

- It is hypothesized that the role and the contributions of the Chembai Vaidya Nathan and his influence in Kerala Carnatic music and in the music festival.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The study was based on different methods. The primary and secondary sources are used for collection of data and Constraint identification and classification through a structured approach is another step. Both quantitative and

qualitative method used in the same study.. Related Articles also referred to study the topic. Data collection through interview like Interview with the eminent personalities like the participant and the member of the festival for many years Dr. Manikantan and Chembai Suresh the grandson of Chembai and the secretary and the participant of the event. Primary data collection methods, Questionnaire sample size determination, Secondary data collection methods. Qualitative data analysis used for triangulation of the quantitative data analysis. The interview, observation, and report records were used to support the findings. The analysis has been incorporated with the quantitative discussion results in the data analysis parts. As a researcher I also have visited the place and attended the festival.

## IV. SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The aim of this article is to be mention and bring to notice about the significance role and contributions of Chembai vydyanathar and his family on music festival which held in Guruvayur temple as an annual function. Data collection has its limitations because it depends on the people. People's mental pleasures come in many forms, so their answers often do not have to be intended. It is not easy to get hold of questionnaire method in groups and there are some limitations in terms of language. The Chembai Music Festival was started to show devotion and love to Guruvayoorappan through his music. The great legend Chembai had been conducting a music festival in his native place in accordance to show the favor of music right from 1924 onwards. This continued by his family and now it's continued by Chembai Sreenivsan and Chembai Suresh. The concert is known as Chembai Ekadashi music festival and it held annually in the month of February or March in the same village in Chembai. He was also had been conducting sangeetholsavam in Guruvayur every year in the month of November. Now Chembai sangeetholsavam is conducting by the Guruvayur Devaswam board. This festival is have the significant role in the culture of Kerala, as the new generations are getting experience to explore the element of Carnatic music as well s the different singing style.

This study focused on the Chembai family and their great contributions to the field of Carnatic music. Chembai was the recipient of numerous honors. He received the 'Sangita Kalanidhi' title in 1951, 'Central Natak Akademi Award' and 'Padmabhushan' from President of India, and the 'Gayana Gandharva' title. Swami Savanna conferred on him the title of Sangita Samrat. Honours were also bestowed on him by the rulers of Cochin, Mysore, Baroda, Vijayanagaram, Bobbili and Jaipur. He lived a life of a savant and passed away on October 16, 1974. Even after his demise, Chembai continues to inspire countless musicians who participate in his memorial concerts. With his rich



vibrant voice and a ringing tone, Chembai's music had a direct appeal to his listeners. The research leads to the travel of Chembai to new generation of Carnatic music. Chembai had a vigorous, strong, vibrant, ringing and resonant voice. He would sing in a clear, open-throated style that requires high levels of physical and mental endurance to pull off, yet, he did so in a seemingly effortless manner.

The study emphasizes the contribution of Chembai family in the field of Carnatic music and his prominence in music festival. The study is mainly based on primary and secondary sources.

## V. FINDINGS

Chembai Vaidyanathar Bhagavathar and his contributions in Carnatic music have the great influence in the religious and cultural life of Kerala. Chembai himself had promoted many young musicians including Palghat Mani Iyer, Palani Subramania Pillai, T.V. Gopala Krishnan and K.J. Yesudas. The family's connection with classical music spans five centuries. Vaidyanathar Bhagavathar's father, Anantha Bhagavathar, was a violinist and singer from Chembai, near Palakkad, to whom a local Maharaja awarded the title "Ghana Chakratanam", indicating his mastery of a special closed-mouth style of singing tanam. An ardent devotee of Sree Krishna, Chembai attributed all his success to Guruvayoorappan. The maestro himself used to conduct the festival in the temple town during his lifetime. Chembai was a master of music. No other musician has worshiped Guruvayoorappan as much as Chembai. Music was his god and he believed that it was all due to the blessings of Guruvayoorappan when he conquered all spheres of music. When he lost his voice, he came before Guruvayoorappan and cried out to the Lord and he regained his voice. From the following year onwards he began to donate the proceeds from his concert to the Lord. He did not stop this routine until his death. He was a musician who was proud of the musical tradition and culture of Kerala. With his majesty of voice, he has no equal in the world of music. He also emphasized family friendships. The charms of the musical era of Chembai Vaidyanadar are still alive and well through the Chembai Music Festivals held in the wetlands of the country. On the occasion of his birthday, the Chembai Music Festival is being held at the Chembai home under the auspices of the Chembai Vidyapeeth and outside in Thiruvananthapuram by the Chembai Trust.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Chembai Music Festival is the venue for a new generation in the world of music. Music festivals are very important in the culture of Kerala. The music festival is blessed with leading musicians and singers. The new generation is able to meet many prominent singers and also the singers can sing in front of the Carnatic music legends. 3000 musicians, including classical vocalists and players of

various instruments, will participate in the 15-day Chembai Music Festival of Guruvayur Sree Krishna temple. It was his great desire to sing until his last breathe and the almighty God blessed him with the same desire. In 1974, October 16<sup>th</sup> he Attended Poozhikulam Concert. Chembai Vaidyanathar was a factual devotee of Lord Krishna. From his early age, he flourished devotion and respect for Sri Guruvayoorappan along with music. Therefore, it was customary to sing in the presence of Guruvayoorappan. He perceived it as a blessing to perform in front of Guruvayoorappan. Therefore, he and his family used to hold concerts on Guruvayur Ekadashi days. His family grew up in the musical tradition and everyone in that family studied music. Chembai arrives at the Guruvayur concert with his father Ananda Bhagwatar and brother Subramanian. The Chembai brothers were performed and the expenses of the festival concert also were borne by their family. Due to his intense devotion to Guruvayoorappan, he requested to the Devaswam members for permission for the concert and in the early days, the concert was held inside the temple. In 1974, after the death of Chembai Vaidyanathar, Devaswam board of Guruvayur temple took over the music festival in his honor and named it as Chembai Music Festival. In the early days, the concert was held for three days, then it was held for seven or ten days and now it is held for 15 days. The festival is now very popular and is being live telecast by All India radio and Doordarshan. Pancharatna chanting is has the popularity and prime item here as the Thyaga Raja Music Festival. Every year Pancharatna chanting is performed on the eve of Ekadashi. People reach here from all over India to relish the charm of the pancharatna. For the past fifteen years has been inviting top musicians to perform the concerts in the festival. Although all the Kritis are allowed to be sung here, But it is mandatory that on the last day of Ekadashi sings the Chembai's favorite Kritis like Vatapi, Pavanaguru, Sarasaksha, Dasham and Karuna with this hymn, the curtain falls on the music festival. Chembai Suresh and TV Gopalakrishnan and J.V.J are leading committee members for the music festival and there are several sub-committees too. Apart from this, there is a famous music festival that has been going on in the village of Chembai for one hundred and seven years in the month of August. Yesudas, one of the foremost disciples of Chembai, comes here every year to perform a concert to pay homage to his Guru. The music festival is held for five days at the Chembai House itself. Famous musicians are invited to perform the concerts for this five days festival and it is mainly the disciples of Chembai who come here to sing as a mark of love and devotion. On top of all this, a two-day music festival is organized at Chembai graham for children to make them more interested in music and to give them opportunities to perform. It is held at the Parthasarathy Temple in the village of Chembai on the occasion of Barany Day and About 300 children take part in it. It helps to inspire and

pass on the musical taste to the new generation and give opportunity to many talented children. The music festival is becoming more popular with every year and people are waiting for these days to enjoy the beauty of music. People from all communities gathering here to see the renowned musicians and to relish their music. Jyothi Venkatachalam, the Governor of Kerala, named the College of Palakkad Music College as Chembai Music College in honor of Chembai.

As a researcher when I visited the venue of Chembai sangeetholsava at Guruvayur and could experience and analyzed the momentous vital role of Chembai Bhagavathar's in Carnatic music and in the music festival. The venue was crowded with the melophiles. I experienced the positive vibrancy of Carnatic music and the spiritual ambience. The young singers even the beginners in the Carnatic music fraternity performed well in front of the dignified audience. An interview with Chembai's grandson Chembai Suresh revealed about, the music hereditary of Chembai's family and their interest in music. Chembai Suresh, who is also a participant and organizing secretary at the Chembai Music Festival, is one of the celebrities who sing Chembai's favorite Kritis on the last day of the festival.

The interview with Dr. Manikantan, who is the regular participant and the attendee of Chembai music festival, was very fruitful to get the clear perception about it. According to him the number of participants and attendees has been increasing year by year. This shows the influence of Carnatic music and Concerts in the present scenario. The intention and the dream which Chembai had about classical music is accomplishing through this Concerts. The Chembai Music College has a great reputation among the public and the students are attracted to pursue their higher studies in Carnatic music and instrumental music. When I conclude this article, I perceived and experienced the influence of Chembai Vidyathanar in the world of Carnatic music and music festivals.

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## INTERVIEWED WITH EMINENT PERSONALITIES

- 1) Chembai Suresh-Grandson of Chembai Vaidyanathar and the secretary of Chembai music festival.
- 2) Dr.Manikantan-performer of Chembai music festival for many years.