Maha Vidyanatha Ayyar
GREAT MUSICIANS

Section I. Pioneer Singers

MAHA VAIDYANATHA AYYAR
(1844–1893)

GENELOGY

Panchanada Ayyar

Sambamurti Ramaswamy Maha Vaidyanath Ayyar
Ayyar lived Sivan natha Ayyar Ayyar (lived
for 57 years 1839–1897 (1844–1893) for 60 years.)

Illustrious composers have lived in India. But it is the happy lot of musicians to make the beauties of their compositions known to the public. Talented singers endowed with powers of interpretation have been able to make the audience get a glimpse of the Vaggeyakara hrudaya.

In a concert of South Indian music, one listens to the music and the musician. One listens to the music composed already by vaggeyakaras and rendered by the musician in an embellished manner and he also listens to the musician’s own music extemporised on the spot and sung. The extempore music admits of the five branches—Alapana, Tana, Pallavi, Niraval and Svara. Whereas musical compositions present certain aspects of a raga in a rhythm c
form, manodharma sangita or creative music helps a musician to delineate in a comprehensive manner the various facets of the raga.

Amongst the brilliant performers-cum-composers of the post-Tyagaraja period, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar occupies an honoured place. His life and achievements offer inspiring reading. His meteoric rise to fame very early in his life is something remarkable. In this connection, he may be compared to the Western composer, Mozart (1756-1791) whose precocious rise to fame became the envy of his contemporaries.

**Early Life and Training**

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was born in 1844 in the village Vaiyacheri, near Tanjore. He belonged to the Kaundinya gotra. He had his early training in music under Anayya, a composer of Kritis in Telugu and Tamil and later under Manambuchavadi Venkatasubbayyar, a direct disciple of Tyagaraja. Thus Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar belongs to the Sishya Parampara (line of disciples) of the great composer, Tyagaraja. His father was Panchananada Ayyar who was also a good singer.

Once Panchananada Ayyar happened to sing in a street bhajana in Tiruvaayar, casually to the hearing of Tyagaraja. The great composer was attracted by his music. He walked from his house, came near him and blessed him saying that two sons who would make a mark in the realm of music would be born to him. True to his prediction, Ramaswamy Sivan and still later, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar were born to him.

**His Captivating Voice**

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar’s voice was rich in harmonics. It had a charming ring in it. It had a wide compass of
three and half octaves extending from Anumandra Panchama to Atitara Shadja i.e. the compass of the modern Vina. An analysis of the tonal spectrum of his voice would have revealed many colour bands. He sang to the pitch of G (i.e., 5). The ringing and fascinating character of his voice, and his ability to sing in all the six degrees of speed charmed one and all beyond measure. His was a naturally gifted voice. It was not a cultivated voice. He sang continuously in his concerts and without a break. He sang at a stretch brigas comprising a range of $2\frac{1}{2}$ octaves with surprising rapidity and fluency and they gave one the impression of brilliant sparks of dazzling beauty witnessed in fireworks.

People who heard his concerts have with one voice proclaimed that his music was gandharva ganam. The elderly rasikas of the period exclaimed that after Tyagaraja (1767–1847), the one voice that reminded all of the sterling voice of the great composer of South India was that of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar.

Before one could analyse the constituent notes of one sequence of his brigas, the singer would have already traversed through many more phrases. During his concerts, the audiences were virtually in a state of musical trance.

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar took extraordinary care to preserve the metallic ring and responsive character of his voice. He rarely spoke. The queries of visitors who came to his house were answered by his elder brother or other inmates of the house. His voice was the wealth of the family. All the members of the family took extraordinary precautions to see that no occasion arose for him to talk in a loud or angry tone. The so-called disciples of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar were only people who just heard his music and rendered some service in his house. They learnt music only
from his elder brother. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar adhered to a restricted diet. He abhorred all pungent diet. On the days of his oil bath, he did not sing.

While in their teens, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Ramaswami Sivan were invited by the Maharaja of Pudukottai to come and perform in the palace. The two boys sang remarkably well. The Maharaja was so pleased, that he specially decorated the two boys with luxurious costumes and presents. He had them seated in the Durbar carriage and had them taken in procession round the Mada Streets of Pudukottai to the accompaniment of music. The carriage was drawn by the horses belonging to the royal household.

**His Repertoire**

Since he started on his professional career early in his life, he had not the time to enrich his repertoire of classical compositions. In his concerts he sang only a few pieces but the bulk of the concert time was devoted by him to the rendering of Manodharma Sangita viz., Alapana, Tana, Pallavi, Niraval and Kalpana Swaras.

His repertoire included the following compositions:—

Vatapi Ganapatim - Hamsadhvani Raga.
Sri Subrahmanya Namaste - Kambhoji Raga.
Tyagarajaya Namaste - Begada Raga.
Najivadhara - Bilahari Raga.
Chintaya ma - Bhairavi Raga.
Kanjadalayadakshi - Kamalamanohari Raga.
Anandasagaraamee - Garudadhvani.

**The title 'Maha'**

In the history of Indian music, he has the distinction of being the only luminary to be honoured with the title
‘Maha’ (great). This title was conferred upon him in 1856 when he was a lad of just twelve years of age by Subramanija Desikar, the Pontiff of the Pandarasannidhi Mutt in Kallidaikurichi in Tirunelveli District. The title was conferred on the occasion of the Annual Guru Puja and before a learned assembly of vidwans which included musical stalwarts of the time like Periya Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Chinna Vaidyanatha Ayyar. The rising star in the realm of Karnatic music expounded the Chakravaka Raga on that occasion to the delight of the entire audience.

**Professional Career**

In his seventh year, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar acquired the ability to sing raga alapana and pallavi. As a boy of ten, he began to give concerts along with his elder brother Ramaswamy Sivan.

He was a scholar in Sanskrit and Tamil and well versed in the science of Music and in the mysteries of Anahata nada. He was a composer and Harikatha Performer. Usually he was given two concert engagements. On the first day, he gave a vocal performance and on the second day, a Katha performance.

When a concert was over, the fee for the concert was received not by Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar but by his elder brother Ramaswamy Sivan.

He has given a record number of remunerative concerts during his life-time. Once he was invited to perform during a marriage in the house of one of the relatives of the late Mr. V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar, a retired Judge of the Madras High Court, in the year 1887. The marriage took place in Tiruchanur near Tirupati. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was requested to sing for six days in succession. This
is a record without a parallel. That a single musician was invited to give concerts for six consecutive days at the same place and before the same audience, testifies to the greatness and supreme charm of his music. The people did not want to hear any other concert during the marriage.

At another concert of his in Palghat, listeners were so fascinated with his rendering of the Kriti, *Vatapi Ganapatim* of Muthuswamy Dikshitar in Hamsadhvani raga, that they requested him to sing it again during the middle of the concert. Not satisfied, they again requested him to sing the piece before the close of the concert.

He was invited to perform by the Rulers of Mysore, Travancore, Cochin and Ramnad and special honours were bestowed upon him on those occasions. The historic concert given by him in Trivandrum during the reign of H. H. Ayilyam Tirunal and the magnificent honours bestowed upon him on the occasion are too wellknown.

He once expounded a Pallavi in Simhanandana tala. This tala is the longest of the 108 talas and it requires rhythmical gifts of a high order to handle a Pallavi in this complicated time-measure.

Patrons who heard Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar's concerts generally avoided listening to the concerts of others. When other Vidwans came to sing before them, they were given the customary fee of ten varagans (Rs. 35/-) and sent away with nice words. Thus these Vidwans got a fee without performing.

During the eighties of the last century, the Kumbabhishekam in Chidambaram temple took place. A large gathering of devotees and scholars had assembled on the occasion. It was morning time, when the great function was
scheduled to start. Mannargudi Raju Sastrigal, the veteran Sanskrit Scholar of the time was present at the function and he was requested to initiate the sacred rituals by singing a sloka. Raju Sastrigal in his turn requested Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar to sing a Sloka and the latter sang to the great joy of all. Being morning time, he followed the sloka with the singing of Tyagaraja’s masterpiece in Bilahari Raga ‘Najivadhara’. The entire gathering that assembled, was thrilled with the divine music of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar.

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar had a reputation for singing in extenso even rare ragas like Kanakangi. Once in Merattur, just as he was about to commence a concert, Apasavya Arunachalayyar, a mischievous critic, who happened to be there, put him the cynical question ‘Can you sing Rasikapriya raga?’ Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar took it up as a challenge and sang the raga for three hours, to the joy of all. At the conclusion of the alapana, it was Sandhyakala (twilight), and the master singer went away for his evening prayers. The questioner who had a beard and who was stroking it with his left hand at the commencement of the alapana, was so spellbound with the music that he continued to keep his left hand on the beard in the same posture right through the alapana.

It is of interest to note that in his concerts, the tambura was always kept in the horizontal posture and played and not in the vertical posture. To the right of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, sat his elder brother Ramaswamy Sivan. The tambura was kept in their front and the dandi rested on the laps of both the brothers. Ramaswamy Sivan twanged the tambura while his younger brother sang. Ramaswamy Sivan also accompanied him with his vocal music—but he
invariably hummed the tune in a low tone while the full-throated song (Dhatu-cum-Matu) emanated from the voice of his gifted brother. Sometimes when his brother halted at one stage of the alapana, Ramaswamy Sivan pursued the alapana to another stage. The thread was picked up later by Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and the alapana concluded and finished.

**His Personality**

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar had an attractive and a lustrous personality. He was fair-skinned and of medium height. He wore a Gourisankara Rudraksha Mala. His beaming and radiant face reflected his spiritual greatness. All felt that he was a Sivappazham (இந்தியா மற்றும்). He was invariably addressed with the reverential appellation, Sivanval (சிவன்வல்) and very rarely by his name. The nadopasaka easily impressed every one.

Once he was invited to go to Cochin and perform. That was his first visit to Cochin. He went to Trichur and went to the Vadakkanathaswamy temple to worship. It was festival time and the Maharaja of Cochin had come to Trichur. He also visited the temple at the same time. He had not seen Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar before. On looking at him, he immediately remarked to his Minister “That gentleman must be either a poet or a Sangita Vidwan.” Immediately enquiries were made and it was found that the person was none else than Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. When the Maharaja came to know of it, he felt extremely happy that the first meeting with that great musician took place in the temple itself. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar gave his concerts in Cochin in the Royal presence and was profusely honoured.
His religious-mindedness

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was a religious-minded person. The great scholar and Vedantin, Kodaganallur Sundara Swamigal initiated him into Siva Bhakti and Siva Puja. Kodaganallur is a place near Shermadevi in Tirunelveli District. Sundara Swamigal was a Vadama Brahmin and a grahastha and he along with his wife lived in Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar’s house and taught him higher philosophy.

At the conclusion of his Siva Puja every noon, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar invariably sang a hymn from the Tevaram. To listen to that Tevaram at that time, hundreds of people used to congregate in the street and stand in the hot sun just to feast their ears with the Divine music though for a few minutes.

It was said that Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was an upasaka of Uchchishta Ganapati (उच्छिष्ठगणपति).

Just as he was punctilious about the Siva Puja, he was equally punctilious about the Sandhya Vandanaam - evening prayers. He generally accepted concert engagements which either finished before evening time or commenced after sunset. But if evening concerts became inevitable, he invariably left the concert hall during sunset for about 15 minutes for performing the Sandhya Vandanaam. At its conclusion, he returned back and resumed his concert. During his absence, one disciple of his continued playing the tambura. This is a point to be noted. The playing of the tambura without a break ensured the continuance of the musical atmosphere in the hall.

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar once went to Tiruppanandal to fulfil a concert engagement. There he went to see the
birth-place of Chandesamara Nayanar. This Nayanar, a Brahmin, was one of the celebrated 63 Saiva Saints. On the way, the axle of the carriage in which he was travelling broke down. He bitterly wept. Spectators thought that he was weeping because of the bruises received as a result of the fall. But the fact was, he thought it was a punishment for him and that it was Providentially Ordained that he should make the journey to the place of pilgrimage on foot.

Tiruchchenganoor is the birth place of Chandesamara Nayanar and it is on the way to Kumbakonam from Tiruppanandal.

**Musical Contest**

Madras was the scene of the famous musical contest between Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Venu. It took place in the eighties of the last century. Venu was a powerful singer and an adept in the intricacies of the tala system like his master Photograph Masilamani Mudaliar.

Venu challenged Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar to come to Madras and face a contest with him. The eminent Vidvan from the south accepted the challenge. A day was fixed for the contest and Mr. Masilamani Mudaliar was chosen as the umpire. On the appointed day, crowds of musicians and music-lovers had gathered in the Tiruvannamalai Matam hall, Nattu Pilliar Koil Street, George Town (the place of contest), Madras. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar came with Fiddle Venkoba Rao. At the time appointed for the contest, there was pindrop silence in the assembly. Venu had already prepared some very difficult pallavis, bristling with all types of intricacies in major ragas like Todi, Bhairavi, Kambhoji, Sankarabharanam and Kalyani. His plan was to forestall his opponent by giving him the option
of singing the raga first (thinking that he would after all attempt only major ragas) so that when his turn came he could easily stupefy him by releasing one of these prepared intricate pallavis in those ragas.

When the question was asked “Who is to begin the raga?” Venu straightaway suggested that Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar might begin. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar without saying anything just prepared to sing Sankarabharana. But the shrewd Violinist Venkoba Rao read something in the suggestion of Venu and immediately pulling Vaidyanatha Ayyar at the back hinted to him to sing the raga Narayangaula. The hint was given in their private dialect so that the raga name was not understood by anyone. The singer took the clue and developed this raga. He sang and sang beautifully well. But Venu was dismayed for he was not able to identify the raga. When he was not able to identify the raga, how was he to set one of his previously prepared pallavis in that raga and confound his opponent? Eventually Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was declared victorious. It was the intelligence and presence of mind of Venkoba Rao that saved his reputation.

**His Contribution**

His tillana Gauri Nayaka in Kanada Raga, Simhanandana tala is a brilliant composition. This is the only tillana in this tala. The entire composition consists of only two avartas—the first avarta containing the Sahitya in Sanskrit in praise of Nataraja and the second avarta consisting of beautiful jatis (rhythmical mnemonics).

His varna Pankajakshipai in Kambhoji raga, Adi tala is a remarkable piece of high craftsmanship. The sparkling gems of Svaraksharas as well as the phrases in Sama yati and
Mridanga Yati invest it with remarkable beauty. His Kriti, Pahiman Sri Raja Rajeswari in Janaranjani raga in Sanskrit has a fine chitta svara. His Tamil songs, Muthukumarayyane in Sankarabharana raga and Malmaruganai in Bilahari raga have just become famous.

The 72 Melaragamalika, the pride of Karnatic music and the longest single composition ranking along with Ramaswamy Dikshitar’s masterpiece, the 108 Ragatalamalika was composed by Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar in 7 days, an achievement without a parallel in the sphere of musical composition. This composition is his magnum opus and has both a lakshana value and a lakshya value.

He adopted the signature “Guhadasa” in his compositions. It was he that added the now famous sangatis to the kritis, Vatapi Ganapatim (Hamsadhvani Raga), Sri Subrahmanya Namaste (Kambhoji Raga) and Chintaya ma (Bhairavi Raga) of Muthuswamy Dikshitar.

Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Ramaswamy Sivan were a happy combination. The latter was a scholar in Tamil. The biographies of the 63 Saivite Saints had been rendered into song and verse by them, and published under the title of Periya Purana Kirtanas. Whereas the sahityas emanated from the brains of Ramaswamy Sivan, they were set to apt music by Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. Thus the saying “Sangita Vaithi—Sahitya Ramaswamy” came to stay in their family. On account of his extraordinary gifts in versification, Ramaswamy Sivan was honoured with the titles Sahitya Puli and Monai Singam (a veritable tiger in poetry and a lion in alliteration) by Bhaskara Setupati, Rajah of Ramnad.
Sanad Presented to Ramaswamy Sivan
by Vijayaragunatha Bhaskara Setupati
Anecdotes

The following anecdotes serve to throw light on certain aspects of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar’s life, career and character and the ideals held by him.

1. Both the brothers were very clever in the art of punning. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar always wore a Rudraksha mala i.e. a garland of beads. Between the beads and separating them were round silver pieces. The Rajah of Ramnad decided to replace those silver rings with golden ones. Accordingly he got the Rudraksha mala from Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. After replacing the silver pieces by gold pieces, he adorned the distinguished singer with the new Rudraksha mala at a special function in the Palace. The recipient humorously remarked “Velli villai tanga villai”, (வெல்லியால் விளங்குத்தையால்) with a double meaning—

(1) The Silver pieces have not stayed (2) Silver pieces (got replaced by) golden pieces.

2. Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar and he were very good friends. Whenever there was an opportunity for Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar to listen to Patnam Subrahmanya Iyyar’s concert, he did not miss it.

On the day of the Avani Avittam festival (in August), it is customary for Brahmans to be invested with new Sacred threads and begin Vedic studies. At the conclusion of the rituals on that day, it is the time-honoured practice for younger people to go to elderly people, prostrate before them and receive their blessings. On that day, every year Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar who was younger than Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar by 1½ years, used to go to Maha Vaidyanatha Iyyar’s house, prostrate before him and get his blessings. The latter out of a feeling of modesty used to
exclaim “Sir, it is not right that such a great Vidwan like you should come and prostrate before me!”. Straight came the reply from Patnam Subramania Iyer “I want Sivanval’s blessings!”.

3. Tyagaraja’s grandson also named Tyagaraja, became a good singer. He once wanted to try his musical prowess with Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. Manambuchavadi Venkata Subbayaar warned the grandson of Tyagaraja that it was dangerous to challenge Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and that he would get virtually lost in the contest. (“நூறு தங்குவிய; நூறு செறிச்சோ; ஆண்ட நூறுச் சிகையுடைய” was the actual warning given by him). Not minding the warning of Manambuchavadi Venkata Subbayaar, the grandson of Tyagaraja met Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar in a musical contest and soon discovered to his dismay that he was nowhere before him.

4. During the days of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar, the Sangita Sabhas with paying membership had not come into existence. The first regular Sangita Sabha with paying membership was established in Madras only in 1895. During the early nineties of the last century Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was invited to perform in Triplicane, Madras. The organisers, without his knowledge, collected at the entrance money from those who came to attend the performance. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar entered the concert place. He scented that money was being collected. He refused to sing that evening. He said that next day, he would sing in the Parthasarathy Swami temple freely and suggested that all can come and listen to his concert there. Accordingly the concert that evening was cancelled and the money collected was refunded. The next day thousands of people thronged to Parthasarathy Swamy temple and listened to his
divine music and were immersed in the ocean of aesthetic bliss.

5. Once he was honoured by the Raja of Ramnad with the present of a costly Rudrakshamala. On receipt of it, he decided within himself that he would make an offering of it to Sri Mahalingaswami, the presiding deity in Tiruvadamarudur temple. His elder brother Ramaswami Sivan did not like the idea of parting with such a costly present. On this account, there was a misunderstanding between the two brothers and the two brothers did not even speak to each other for some time. Ultimately Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar had his way and he made the present of that mala to Mahalingaswami. He prevailed upon his own elder brother to give it as a gift to the Deity.

6. Parasu Bhagavatar was a disciple of Bikshandarkovil Subbarayar. At a certain marriage house in Palghat, Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was invited to perform. A large crowd from the mofussil had come to Palghat to listen to his concert. The concert lasted for two hours. It served as an excellent treat and all people enjoyed it. The crowd from the mofussil did not disperse even after the concert was over. They stayed for the night. The hosts did not know what to do for them. Parasu Bhagavatar, a local musician was requested to sing. He agreed to sing on condition that the same vidwans that accompanied Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar i.e., Tirukkodikovil Krishnaier and Narayanaswami Appa should accompany him. The accompanists unwillingly got up on the dais. They were stunned at the music of Parasu Bhagavatar. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar who was sleeping in an adjacent house, was captivated by the music. He could not contain himself; he sat up and listened to the music. But his elder brother Ramaswamy Sivan said
'Vaithi! Sleep'. Sleep'. But Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar the true artiste that he was, was so captivated by Parasu Bhagavat's music that he went to the concert place to listen. The local Bhagavat felt honoured by the presence of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. The audience too felt thrilled at Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar's presence there. The concert went on well. The Bhagavat's voice was excellent and he was in good form that night. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar eulogised the talents of Parasu Bhagavat.

7. Approximately 30 people ate in the house of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar every day. The bulk of them were disciples who had come to learn music. They ate every morning 'Pazhayadu' (i.e., cooked rice soaked in water the previous night). Someone in the house grumbled that so many people were being fed and for nothing. Quick came the reply from him: "It is perhaps due to the good luck of somebody in this group, that we are all prosperous and living well. Let not this arrangement be disturbed." Forthwith the murmurer was silenced.

His visit to Mysore

He was invited to go to Mysore and perform before the Maharajah. He was told by the Durbar officials that it was customary for all musicians to wear a coat and turban and sing in the royal presence. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar never wore a coat or a shirt. He wore only a shawl over his body and he felt delicate about the wearing of a coat and turban. When his feelings were communicated to the Maharaja, the latter ordered a special gown of silk to be stitched for him for being worn the following day. He wore that gown and in the turban that was given to him for wearing, a special kalki saram was attached. In that way he
was honoured. He gave an excellent concert.

As he was singing the Kriti Chintaya ma in Bhairavi raga, the Maharaja without the knowledge of the singer, managed to record his music on Edison’s Phonograph (i.e., on a waxy cylinder). After the concert was over, the music was played back to him. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was pleasantly surprised to listen to his own music recorded on the cylinder. It is a misfortune that this cylinder was destroyed during the fire in the Jagan Mohan palace some years ago.

His Visit to Travancore

He sang the raga Kharaharapriya in the court of Ayilyam Tirunal Maharaja of Travancore. This raga was not well-known at that time in Travancore and thus he created a tremendous impression.

Kalyana Krishna Bhagavatar, the famous Vainika of Travancore was very anxious to perform before Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and get his approbation. Once he had the opportunity to do so. Although he was suffering from fever at that time, still he did not want to miss the opportunity of performing before Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. He gave a splendid Veena performance that evening and Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was very much impressed with his talent in Veena play and eulogised him.

On another occasion Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Kalyana Krishna Bhagavatar had the opportunity to perform before the Maharaja. Kalyana Krishna Bhagavatar with all his practice in fast tempo tried to reproduce all the phrases sung by Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar.

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But in one or two places he failed to repeat those phrases on his instrument. The Maharaja immediately remarked "Kalyana Krishna! Don't be disheartened; after all yours is an instrument and your fingers had to move over the strings and frets repeatedly in order to produce the phrases. But Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was easily able to negotiate those phrases because his was a voice."

In the historic contest that took place between Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and Coimbatore Raghava Ayyar, both of them sang in all for 7 hours before an audience consisting of the Maharaja, Sangita Vidwans and the elite of Trivandrum. The Maharaja was equally impressed with the extraordinary skill, creative capacity and attainments of both the Vidvans. He was not able to decide as to who was the superior amongst the two. He ordered for presents of equal value to be brought and gave the presents simultaneously to both the musicians. He held the two plates containing the costly presents one in each hand and asked the two musicians to come and stand before him. He gave the presents which he had in his right hand to Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and the presents which he had in his left hand to Coimbatore Raghava Ayyar. The presents were given simultaneously. Some court musicians asked him why he gave the presents that he had in his right hand to Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar. The Maharaja immediately remarked:— "Both are equally great. But still we must show courtesy and regard to the musician who had come from outside Travancore. For this reason I gave the presents that I had in the right hand to Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and the presents that I had in the left hand to Coimbatore Raghava Ayyar. No other discrimination was sought to be made by me."
8. Once he was invited to perform in a marriage house in a place near Tiruvarur. Whenever he accepted mofussil engagements, one disciple always carried his Puja box which contained the idols which he worshipped. This time, the disciple that carried it was Subbiah i.e., Subbiah Bhagavatar of Kodaganallur. At the Tiruvarur junction, two trains came at the same time from opposite directions. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar and his brother got into the second class compartment in the correct train and proceeded. Due to a stroke of misfortune, the disciple who had a third class ticket with him, got into the wrong train, instead of boarding the third class compartment of the same train in which the Vidvans travelled. Both the trains left the platform at the same time as per schedule. The musicians did not know that the disciple had got into the wrong train. When the musicians got down at the station where they had to disembark, they found to their dismay that the disciple had not travelled along with them. Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was very much disheartened. He refused to have his bath and food for the day. The concert fixed for him that evening had to be cancelled at his express wish. In the meantime, the disciple who got into the wrong train discovered the mistake, got into the next available train and reached the place where Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was camping, the same night. It is only after getting the Puja box that Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar had his bath, performed puja and had his meal. The concert that was cancelled took place the following day and all the people who were disappointed on the first day, were immersed in the ocean of celestial joy at listening to the divine music.
9. He was extraordinarily careful about the pitch in which he sang. The Mandara string of his Tambura was always kept steady at the particular pitch. Even before entering the concert hall, as his brother was walking along with him in the streets he used to call in a low musical tone, Ramaswami! When the friend who accompanied him, once asked why he called his brother when he was actually following him, he said "I just called him in the Shadja sruti of my voice to make sure that my voice had the grasp of the correct tonic note."

It was the custom of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar while in Tiruvaiyaru to go every day to the different Sannidanas in the temple and sing one or two songs in praise of each Deity and return home. The last day of his mortal existence came. He breathed his last during the evening of that day. Evidently his soul, after shaking off the mortal coil, went to each one of the Sannidanas and had the darsana of the respective Deities before going on the heavenly path. So much so, that when people heard of his demise, everyone exclaimed, What! 'I just now saw him in that Sannidanam, I just now saw him in this Sannidanam' and so on.

The Annual festival of Maha Vaidyanatha Ayyar was celebrated for many years in Tiruvaiyaru by his younger brother Appasamy Ayyar.