

Concert of a genre unique

HYMNS

It was a rare concert of songs from Vaishnava literature.

LAKSHMI DEVNATH



UNUSUAL: Jagannathan singing Prabandham. Guru Venkatavaradhan is behind the violinist.

PHOTO: S. THANTHONI.

The vocal recital at the Music Academy mini hall on September 17 was one with a difference. T. R. S. Jagannathan presented songs from the 4,000 verses of the Azhwars — Divya Prabandham, Ashta Prabandham (Pillai Perumal Iyengar) and Desika Prabandham (Sri Vedanta Desikar).

Sources revealed that Jagannathan had done gurukulavasa for seven years with Kanchipuram M. N. Venkatavaradhan. The 86-year old guru is an acknowledged authority on Pannisai. The Mahaswami of the Kanchi Math had provided him with support and encouragement in his mission and had blessed him with the title 'Tiruppavai Chelvan'. His other titles include 'Pannisai Tilakam' and 'Aruli Cheyal Tilakam'.

The hour-long programme on Saturday last began with a prayer to the Azhwars and acharyas of Vaishnavism. The pasurams presented that day, included three of Andal's — 'Ongi Ulagalandha' in pann Pazhantakkaragam (raga: Arabhi),

'Pullum Silambinakan,' presented as a suddhangam (viruttam) in Bowli followed by 'Kalai Ezhuntirunthu,' from Naachiyar Tirumozhi. Next came a verse from the Desika Prabandham of Swami Vedanta Desikar. Next followed the famous verse of Tondaradippodi Azhwar from the Tirumalai — 'Kuda Disai Mudiyai Vaithu, Guna Disai Padam Neeti ...'

On similar lines

The agenda included among other songs two verses from Tirumangai Azhwar's 'Periya Tirumozhi.' One of these was rendered with neraval and swaram probably as an indication that the Prabandham does lend itself to Manodharma Sangita. This was followed by a tani, which was a full-bench ensemble sans the konnakkol.

A few verses were presented in folk tune and one in Hindustani Behag too. The invitation mentioned that the performance would be both on pannisai and innisai. The artiste probably classified songs sung in popular ragas as innisai and those sung in pann as pannisai.

It is unusual that singer evinces such exclusive interest in spiritual hymns. Jagannathan learnt music from Krishnamurthy Iyer, S. Krishnamurthy Ayya and Tirubuvanam G. Atmanathan. He completed the course of 'Isai Kalaimani' from the Tamil Isai College. It was at the college that he once chanced to hear a South African singing Prabandham along with guru Venkatavaradhan. The programme made a deep impact on Jagannathan who felt that if a foreigner could display such interest in the Tamil culture he, a Tamil, should be initiated into it too. Formally trained in Carnatic music he decided to plunge himself into learning and propagating Divyaprabandham and the verses of Vaishnava acharyas.

As a token of his blessing, guru Venkatavaradhan, on the day of the concert, which incidentally is Jagannathan's first full-fledged public performance presented him with a tambura that he had inherited from his teacher and announced Jagannathan as his musical heir.