

## Robust style

M.V. RAMAKRISHNAN

Sirkazhi Sivachidambaram's recital resounded with the influence of his father, Sirkazhi Govindarajan.

PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN



**Sirkazhi Sivachidambaram.**

There are several well-known Carnatic musicians who have the privilege of prefixing the academic title 'Doctor' to their names. Some of them have undertaken some specific research concerning music and qualified for a Ph.D. In other cases the title has been conferred on them by some university in recognition of the impressive status they have attained in the field of music.

There are, however, two distinguished South Indian musicians who earned a doctor's degree by actually studying in a medical college. One of them, violinist L. Subramaniam, gave up his medical connection long ago. But Sirkazhi Siva-chidambaram (SSC) is equally active in his twin professions, practising and teaching medicine and also performing Carnatic music with a missionary Tamil orientation.

## **Resounding voice**

SSC is the son of Sirkazhi Govindarajan, one of the leading playback singers of yore who was also a highly accomplished vocalist in Carnatic music with a clear preference for Tamil devotional songs, ancient as well as contemporary. SSC has not only been strongly influenced by his father in evolving his whole perspective as a musician, but has also inherited the latter's resounding voice and vigorous way of singing -- so much so that his performance invariably makes you think of his father's forceful style.

But as if old memories aren't enough to confirm this fact, within a few days of his recent performance at Hamsadhwani, I came across an audio CD bearing the intriguing title 'Lord Muruga! London Muruga!' and containing a recording of his father's concert held in the Westminster Central Hall in London more than 30 years ago. Playing this CD alongside an audio-cassette of the Hamsadhwani recital, I couldn't help marvelling at how closely SSC's music resembles his father's!

Moreover, I discovered a very significant fact when I telephoned him to find out the actual date and context of this event (1978, in connection with a temple dedicated to Lord Muruga in London), and the name of the composer of the title song which intriguingly had lyrics in English (Swami Santhananda). Among other things, SSC mentioned that the title song (and some others) figuring in that London concert had actually been rendered by him, with his father's encouragement. Quite truthfully, I couldn't tell the difference until he told me!

Dr. Sivachidambaram is convinced that the most desirable venues for disseminating Tamil music are the temples and other places of worship, but he does appreciate the receptive attitude of the audiences in dedicated institutions and prestigious Sabhas.

The Hamsadhwani concert under review was marked, as usual, by brief sketches of ragas, clearly enunciated songs, rousing swara improvisations, and prayerful viruttams. The numbers, 'Kanaka Sabhaapathikku' (Atana, Gopalakrishna Bharati), and 'Poomel Valarum Annaiye' (Anandabhairavi, Mazhavai Chidambara Bharati) were substantial, and the song, 'Chinnanchiru Pennpolay' (Sindhu Bhairavi, Ulundurpettai Shanmugam) was sparkling. While the linguistic element was almost exclusively Tamil, the singer did render a Telugu song ('Karunaajaladhe Daasarathe,' Nandanamakriya, Tyagaraja).

The vocalist's robust style of singing justified the ringing percussion support provided by the rarely-heard morsing (Chidambaram Rajendran) supplementing the mridangam (Valangaiman Tyagarajan) and ganjira (Sai Krishna), with Nellai Ravindran on the violin.