

FRIDAY REVIEW

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At the altar of poetry

They sing and dance to Venkatakavi's tunes, but how aware are artists of the temple's plight?

GEETHA VENKATRAMANAN

Aruna Sairam, whose concerts are not complete without a song of Oothukkadu Venkata Subbaiyer, speaks with feeling. "Dr. Kris Yogam, a friend of mine in the U.S., was so moved by the dilapidated state of the temple that she offered the seed money to start the work. Everyone should pitch in to save the treasure," she says. Aruna grew up listening to Venkata Subbaiyer's songs thanks to Needamangalam Krishnamurthi Bhagavathar, a descendant of the Kavi. "He stayed in our house whenever he visited Mumbai and taught my mother a number of songs to which I caught on. We had bhajan sessions on Wednesday and these included four or five of Oothukkadu's songs," she explains.

It is the thillana that keeps the listener riveted. Percussion and vocal combine in a jubilant expedition, beginning on a low key to reach a crescendo, bringing alive Krishna's rhythmic steps on the serpent's head. "Again Needamangalam Bhagavathar was the inspiration," informs Aruna. "His rendition was awesome. I improvise here and there to give it a personal touch." The happy news is that Aruna will soon dedicate a concert to Oothukkadu and the proceeds will go to the renovation of the temple.

