

That special touch

IMPRESSION Sudha Ragnathan's concerts, dedicated to RRC, are always memorable.

M.V. RAMAKRISHNAN

Sudha Ragnathan's concert at Hamsadhwani this past week forcefully brought back memories of her last two recitals in this venue, where she seems to have acquired a special role as the one who sings what amounts to an annual RRC Memorial Concert. She had given a heart-warming recital in 2007 when the Sabha's Founder-Secretary R. Ramachandran was unsuccessfully battling for his life in a hospital from which he never returned home. And a review in these pages had summed up that performance as follows:

"Whatever Sudha sang that evening was sublime and beautiful, but her leisurely rendering of Bhairavi and Dikshitar's kriti 'Balagopala' deserves special mention. She distilled the essence of the raga in the alapana, niraval and swaraprasthara alike and dispensed it like perfume to the audience." (Requiem for Ramachandran www.thehindu.com, June 8, 2007).

Sudha had followed that up with an equally moving recital in Hamsadhwani's annual music festival last year. And recalling the earlier occasion, the report in the *Friday Review* said: "As highlights went, what was true of Bhairavi then was equally true of Sankarabharanam now. Seasoned rasikas are intimately aware of the many subtle shades and nuances of this basic raga which is heard so often in the concert hall, but this time there were some unusual passages of exceptional brilliance and beauty in the elaboration of the melody and the improvisation of swaras. And ideally for this number, the choice of the composition was Tyagaraja's 'Swara Raaga Sudha' which sings of the spiritual virtues of blending music with devotion." (Of serenity and sparkle, May 30, 2008).

Nostalgic spirit

Sudha re-invoked the same nostalgic spirit in this past week's concert, rendering a calm and colourful Thodi which revived vivid memories of those beautiful ver-



Sudha Ragnathan.

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ARRANGEMENT

sions of Bhairavi and Sankarabharanam. Her serene mood made the song 'Mama Kuleswaram' (composed by G.N. Balasubramaniam, to whom the concert was dedicated as a mark of respect in this centenary year) sound profound like a Dikshitar kriti; and the lyrics and improvised swaras seamlessly extended the meditative tenor of the raga alapana. Elsewhere, Sudha's singing was as lively as usual.

We had noted last year: "On these two occasions at Hamsadhwani, she had attained an unusually high degree of excellence, judged even by her own superior standard. The calmness required by the given contexts might have inspired her to moderate her characteristically vivacious style a little, resulting in a marvellous blend of serenity and sparkle." Just substitute 'three occasions' for 'two occasions,' and this statement will still ring true!