

Tamil colorful new year's gala

By Rohan B Preston
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Some 500 members of Chicago's Tamil community gathered Saturday evening to ring in their Tamil new year -2025-with a program that mixed spicy food, merriment and health education with traditional dance, devotional and movie sweet melodies, prayers, and poetry.

Women donned flowing saris, men wore kurdas, and irrepressible children romped about the Balaji Temple in Aurora where the 25th annual six-hour event was held.

Centered in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu (formerly Madras) and one of 58 major ethno-linguistic groups in India, Tamil culture holds that human history began with the birth of the great poet Thiruvalluvar, who is respected as a god.

His birthday ushers in the Tamil new year, usually observed in mid-April, a time of rice harvesting in Tamil Nadu. This year's celebration, organized by Chicago Tamil Sangam (Association), included adult performers. But the children were center stage.



"Singalathu Chinakuyile" C.S.Ainkaran

A humorous "surprise" dance with six very Americanized teenagers included stylized, ritualistic hand and eye movements. Going beyond their base of Tamil culture, the dancers subtly shimmied and writhed to music that owed as much to banghra, Indian pop music, as to R&B and American pop. (one of the dancers, a hard-to-keep-a-straight-face girl had a painted-on mustache.) Other performances by children included a

scarf dance and singing. "This program, with the children involved, gives them a good foundation in Tamil culture," said R.Balakrishnan, secretary of Chicago Tamil Sangam.

The adult singers, particularly the soloists with the Chicago Tamil Sangam Orchestra, got into their element as the evening progressed. In the fluid, off-the-page duet with the able M.Ramprasad, Devi Krishna Routhu wound her soprano around "Rajavin Parvai" ("The Looks of the King") from the famous Tamil Movie "Anbae Va".

But it was a special singer C.S.Ainkaran who also dueted with Routhu, who commanded the stage. His trilling and exuberant multi-octave voice was showcased on "Singalathu Chinakuyile"

a song about the place in Sri Lanka where he was born. Even Ainkaran's hums were expressive.

To be sure, this was a community celebration that moved on its own god-inspired, if not too time-conscious, schedule.

The evening also included detailed predinner slide presentations on nutrition, as well as angina pectoris (chest pains) and heart disease.