

Writers on stage at Alliance Francaise

Most writers do not like the spotlight. They prefer to remain somewhere in the background. One can guess their personality through their books. Some hide behind a character. Sometimes they sign their books at specific events and their fans have a chance to meet them.

On Friday 19th of October at 6.00 p.m. with "Writers on Stage", Alliance Francaise de Colombo, in collaboration of the Embassy of France, will give us the rare opportunity to meet not just one, but eight writers. It will be an unique evening of literature. They will present their works, including extracts, in Sinhala, Tamil, English and French.

This is one event that is part of the traditional "Lire en fete" celebration, which started in France and now exist in many countries around world. In Colombo, Alliance Francaise will organise a book fair from 18th to 20th of October and also have a French speaking evening of literature on Thursday 18th at 6.30 p.m. with five presentation of books and a reading competition for the Sri Lankan college students.

"Writers on Stage" will conclude these celebrations in a most interesting manner. Among the writers, Yasmine Gooneratne, Brandon Ingram, Dominic Jeeva, Soma Jayakody and Kamal Perera, have confirmed their presence.

"Writers on Stage" is a very promising event that will feature literature in the most attractive way.



by Vijaya Jayasuriya

Folk wisdom of elders was a major factor that made life in our traditional village a more peaceful one more or less without the many instances of man's inhumanity to his fellow beings witnessed in abundance today. These were the mature elders in the village, more often than not the chief incumbent of the temple, 'veda mahathaya' or even the 'iskole mahathaya' who day in, day out dispensed counsel to villagers in order to lead a pious life and avert disputes or disasters.

'Veda Mama' the native physician who was a cousin of my mother was the quintessence for this role of mentor in the village invariably held in high esteem by young and old alike. Diminutive as he was in physique, he commanded immediate and universal attention the moment he appeared in public and this was not only due to his renown as a luminary of wisdom, but also for his extraordinary gift of the gab, the witty remarks he uttered often ridiculing some despicable practice resorted to by some villager.

Once he nicknamed a police constable 'Bulatha' as he used to chew a mouthful of betel every time he showed up and another 'bonaya polis' as he used to stealthily creep into an illicit liquor den at the corner of the bazaar. He might have heard of the similar-sounding name of an American city, however the two names turned out so popular that there wasn't a single villager who did not know these two guys by their real names.

Vedamama had learnt his craft from a priest, a well-known indigenous physician who was said to have brought round patients with chronic illnesses. The 'golaya' was not second to his 'guru' and this proved to be the case when my elder brother Bandula, around 15 years of age at that time suddenly began to get an epileptic fit and fall unconscious. It was into the stream in the scrubland below our houses that he had first fallen one day and if not for a villager passing by at the very moment he would have kicked the bucket then and there.

Bandula continued to get the fit for a few months, at the rate of about once each fortnight and after watching him closely one day vedamama told my mother whom he loved a lot that he could treat my brother. At first a 'Hisakuditchiya' (a mixture of herbal medicines on top of the head held by a thick band of cloth around) was put followed by a concoction for a couple of weeks and Bandula miraculously recovered from his illness. 'I found this prescription in an old ola-leaf book' said Vedamama proudly after watching Bandula for a couple of months.

He not only cured patients with his esoteric kind of treatment, but also used the Sinhala medicine ingeniously for other purposes such as weaning people off depravities like what happened to my father. There was a time when my father had got accustomed to come home drunk

Vedamama: Moderator of the village



in the evenings and my mother used to come out with this grievance whenever vedamama her alter ego happened to visit us at least once a week. I saw his face grown grim as he heard it, but just kept quiet only casting a sympathetic look at his cousin.

One fine day father came home drunk as usual, and like on other days did not go to sleep but made a beeline to the toilet which was a few yards away from the house. In a while it was clear that he was having a bout of loose motion as no sooner had he returned from the toilet than he ran back there again and when this happened several times mother queried him what was wrong. Rather than being grumpy like other days he very meekly complained of a stomach ache and loosening of bowels and it is at this

point that mother gently asked me to go and tell vedamama about this. When I ran up to his boutique he greeted me with a broad smile and quipped: "Why Vijaya, are you having a 'bade gaya' (stomach ache) and smelling a rat as it were I cast an enquiring look at him saying: 'No no, mama, father is...'. He then took me by the shoulder saying: 'Ha yaman, yaman! (Let's go).

Vedamama gave mother a tiny 'guliya' to be given to father with lime juice and left not before delivering a barrage of tough advice to father: 'keep your self-respect without visiting such places like a hooligan being the gist of it.

It was a few days later that the story trickled into our ears - Podisingho, Vedamama's servant in his boutique had, on secret instruction of mama, got a boy in the grocery where the liquor

vendor usually bought his stock of dates for the illicit brew to mix some dates treated with 'vadakaha' - a strong laxative - into the latest stock he bought. The new brew turned laxative had got every customer who partook of it to make frequent trips to toilet with the result that many of them ceased their habit of visiting the particular spot thereafter. Father was no exception, he only brought home a 'sealed' bottle thereafter whenever he went to Ambalangoda, a town two miles away once in a blue moon.

Vedamama used to go for a bath in the spacious bathing well at the temple premises at noontide. One day when he was going there the chief priest was away and the novices numbering about ten were on the huge mango tree eating ripe mangoes. Always a stickler for tenets of

'seela' (self-restraint) vedamama had said 'bhikkhus who climb trees will be born monkeys in the next world'. On a subsequent day he found all the novices on the ground near the mango tree and heard the noise of someone on the tree. When he looked up, there was only a mask of a monkey peeping through the foliage and someone behind it was telling: 'I'm born a monkey because of climbing trees!' teasing vedamama. Being at a loss for a reply when he looked round there was a pair of sandals at the foot of the tree which he took with him to the well disregarding pleadings of the culprit. On his return he took the sandals to the temple and told the chief priest that there had been a monkey on the mango tree that had left these sandals below the tree. The priest got the owner of it to come forward and gave him a mild reproof for that little foible: 'if you become a monkey next birth you won't be able to wear this saffron robe' he had said winking at vedamama with a covert smile too on his face. Never did the novices climb trees thereafter, at least to be seen by visitors!

Vedamama's helper who provided him with medicinal herbs was Podisingho who used to frequent a concubine regularly. One day he had asked the other servant - a boy - to give him some aphrodisiac without telling the master. Not knowing what it was himself the boy had inquired Vedamama about it and when asked who needed it he had divulged it was 'Podda' as he was called. Vedamama gave the boy a certain 'guliya' and the following day Podda came to work late. Asked why he was late he said he fell asleep till very late and had later blackguarded Srisena the boy for giving him a drug that made him fall asleep the whole night. 'Where did you sleep last night, Podde?' when Vedamama queried Podda slipped away to the back of the boutique without even looking at Vedamama who he knew was behind the mischief.

Vedamama was an elder in our family circle who had a considerable impact on all of us in terms of our future. When my orphaned cousin Seethakka was bound to get only a fraction of my grandfather's property it was Vedamama who intervened and persuaded grandpa to give the ancestral home to her.

He was a master not only of medicine but also a clever astrologer who cast all our horoscopes. Whenever he visited our home on his way to grandfather's for lunch everyday - he lived in an interior village - he used to recite, hugging me dotingly an ancient Sinhala poem one line of which I still, remember: 'Vijayasiri Kagapatha'. In relating my name with 'Kagapatha' (the sword), it delights me to imagine that he had a hunch through his astrological prowess that I would some day master the English language, though of course the metaphor 'Kadawa' for English was coined much later, he during nineteen sixties by Peradeniya undergrads and brought to intellectual limelight by Professor Thiru Kandiah in his celebrated series of articles in 'Navasilu' - the journal of English studies.

Asian cinema is colourful and rich in diversity; many movies are made with local cultural imprints while others are influenced by Western culture.

India is among the Asian countries where the film industry is expanding not only quantitatively but also in terms of quality and its film industry is often nicknamed 'a melding of Hollywood and Bombay'.

"Bollywood is a derogatory term. The moment you call that, it is as if our film, industry not have an independent identity," says Indian, director/producer/screenwriter Ketan Mehta.

"Bollywood is actually Hindi language-based cinema, a term given to Hindi films that are made in Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay," Mehta says.

Mehta has won numerous awards, including a Unesco Club Award for Best Film on Human Rights for the film Bhavni Bhavni and Best Film at The Hawaii Film Festival for Mirch Masala. "The term 'Bollywood' is sometimes applied to the Indian film industry as a whole, but in fact there are 14 different languages in India, such as Hindi and Marathi, and there are five or six major centres of film-making; each is distinctively different to Bollywood. Bollywood means songs, dances, extravaganzas and unbelievable romances. I am not a Bollywood filmmaker," says Mehta, who hopes that people do not attach any particular stereotype to Indian cinema-the other Asian film industries, say Filipino or Chinese, do not have such terms.

The term Bollywood, which is usually synonymous with extravagance, is unsuitable for many Indian flicks, such as Dombivli Fast (in Marathi language) - you will not find any glamorous song-and-dance scenes in the movie. Instead, the film tells a tragic story of a depressed middle-aged bank employee who travels by Dombivli Fast (the name of a local train) every day.

"It's a dark film," says Mehta. Dombivli Fast has won several awards, including the Grand Jury Prize: Best Feature Film at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles and Best Director as well as Best Producer at the Asian Festival of First Films (Singapore).

"We knew that India produced more films than Hollywood. Today, you can watch Indian films in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and South Africa," says Mehta, also the chairman of Maya Movies Private Limited, a film production house based in

Unlike Hollywood

Asian films have the edge over US films—fresh ideas and raw talents



India. Mehta says that after a decline of 20 years, the Indian film industry is growing and part of the reason is because of the economic boom that caused the growth of multiplexes in India.

According to the Financial Times, theatre operators are building 10 to 15 multiplexes a month, each of which has four to five screens.

By 2010, India will have more than 2,000 multiplex screens, five times the number it had last year.



FRESH: Filipino films' quality have dwindled over the years but many new independent movies show depth and fresh ideas.

India produces more than 1,000 films a year. The fact that India is the second most populous country after China also has played a role in the growth of its film industry.

The estimated population in India is about 1.3 billion. "Hollywood has been trying to capture our domestic market, but we have a strong domestic market as Indians still enjoy watching movies from their homeland," says Mehta, a fan of Charlie Chaplin, Jacky Chan and Shah Rukh Khan.

Volker Langhoff, a German cinematographer-director, has seen Asian movies with glaring distinctions.

Langhoff, who holds a Masters degree in cinematography from the HFF-Babelsberg, Germany,

and a Masters degree in film-making from California Institute of the Arts, lists the late Akira Kurosawa, an internationally acclaimed Japanese director, as his favourite Asian director.

However, Langhoff thinks there is a lot of violence in Japanese films these days.

His favourite Japanese film (apart from Kurosawa movies) is the nonviolent (and not so

famous) Happy Go Lucky, a story about five fourth grader students who want to succeed in doing a back somersault over a horizontal bar in gym class in just one week. "The film is beautiful and quiet," says Langhoff.

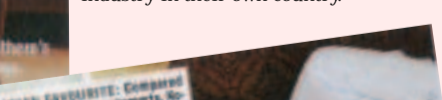
Last year, Langhoff taught at the International Academy of Film and Television in Cebu, Philippines. He asked his students not to try to copy Hollywood.

"I'm sorry to say, but, you don't have the skills - you cannot just pour money into something without the skills. Other than that you don't work for a very wealthy country. Hollywood spends lots of money in making its films," says Langhoff. He will give the same advice to any film students in other Asian countries.

In his opinion, the Korean film industry is growing, not only in terms of quantity, but also in quality. "Filipino movies are technically not as good as Korean films; however, movies from the Philippines come with fresh ideas and I think they have the potential to be as good as Korean films in the future," says Langhoff.

In Langhoff's opinion, people should watch films from a variety of countries as it can help them learn about other cultures.

Other than that, people who study overseas should return to their homeland and implement their knowledge and skills to improve the film industry in their own country.



He also gave a piece of advice not to copy films from other countries and Hollywood-one should make movies with one's own cultural imprint, he said.

(C) Asian News Network

Baby Daniella welcomed into the world over Sahara

Fri Oct 12, 9:27 AM ET

A baby girl was born over the Sahara desert during the night aboard a Brussels Airlines flight from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Belgium, the company said in a statement Friday.

Baby Daniella - named after the co-pilot for the Kinshasa-Brussels flight - "is doing fine thanks to the help of two doctors who happened to be aboard as well as the crew," the statement said.

A 31-year-old Congolese woman, who was not identified, gave birth to the child at around 0200 GMT as the Airbus A330-300 was flying over the Sahara.

"Given the absence of any nearby airport, the birth took place aboard," the company said.

Mother and child were taken to hospital on arrival in Brussels.

"Flight SN352, therefore, had 233 passengers aboard on departure and 234 on arrival," the statement ended. (AP)

SIMPLY RED: A fitted jacket and pin-striped pants elongate your line.



ALL'S FLARE: Skirt hems that fan out make legs look lean.



Fashion for a Curvy Figure

You've got it, so flaunt it. Show some skin and balance it with slimming black

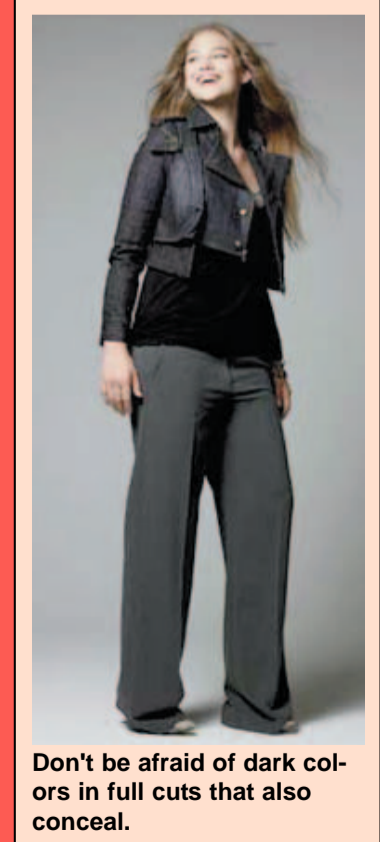
A classically slimming pea-coat in tomato red is tradition with a twist.



EMPIRE STRIKING: Balance your bottom half with an empire line that emphasizes shoulders.



SMOKE AND MIRRORS: The master of disguise—the wrap dress. Conceals lumps and bumps, reveals sexy legs and chest.



Don't be afraid of dark colors in full cuts that also conceal.



YOU'RE THE TOP: Think scoopneck, cuz covering up a large chest accentuates it.