

Season for Sri Lankan celebrities to migrate Down Under is different from that of the feathery denizens who arrive here from the far north in search of warmer climes. Sri Lankan celebrities on the other hand, come when their local fans are in a mood to receive, entertain and honor them in a fitting manner.

There are celebrities of the silver screen, who accompany the films they feature in, or directed by them. Then there are the celebrities of the stage – playwrights, directors and actors and actresses, who have captured the hearts and minds of young and old alike. Most important of them all are the musicians, singers in particular, who would keep an audience spell-bound any time.

We are not satisfied with only seeing them on stage, and showering them with applause. We want to greet them, witness them on stage, listen to them and applaud them, and at the end of it, entertain them with the best we can offer.

Thus have we feted and honoured our great artists, such as Dr. Henry Jayasena who came along with his superb production, *Humuwataye Kathava*. We did so honour our music maestro Dr. W. D. Amaradewa and other musicians and singers. We last honoured the great playwright R. R. Samarakoon when he brought his award-winning drama *ahasin warunu minissu* to be staged at a number of centres all over the country.

Although I said the most important were the musicians, it needs some correction, at least a bit of modification. For there is a special category of celebrities who cannot be either compared or put on the same footing with the ones already mentioned. That is the special breed of celebrities who for want of a better name, have to be referred to as **celebrity monks**.

One may ask a very pertinent question as to how the humble monk walking around with the begging bowl for his sustenance, can be called a celebrity? That calls for some explanation. To start with, let me tell you that going round with the begging bowl is not foreign to these celebrities. They take up the begging bowl on very special occasions when they have to prove a point, namely, when their image needs boosting at a particular point in time. There is a difference, though. They will be going round with the media in attendance, specially the TV crews and camera men to record each and every movement of these celebrities.

The celebrity monks stand out from the ordinary run of humdrum monks one can spot at every street corner. They wear a

Counterpoint

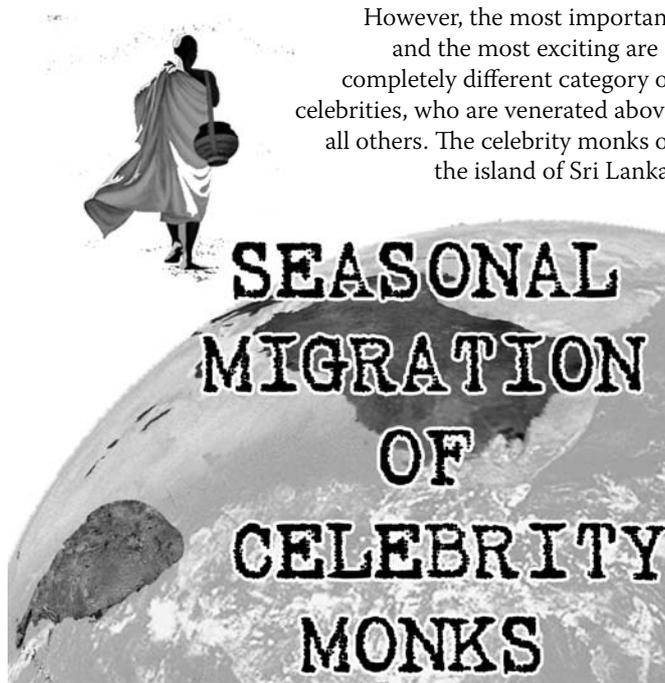
by
The Defector

robe like any other monk. But don't expect to see them in the chap rags that others are draping round their bodies. It is said that initially it was from rags picked up from the grave side that the robes of the monks were made. That was in the good old days when poor monks went to the burial grounds in

village woman. Their robes are stitched by experienced tailors at the most reputed tailoring establishments.

The most distinguishing feature to make out a celebrity monk with is his appearance. There is the supreme physical and facial appearance, which are undoubtedly what

However, the most important and the most exciting are a completely different category of celebrities, who are venerated above all others. The celebrity monks of the island of Sri Lanka.



search of cloths used to wrap dead bodies with, which were thrown away in the burial places. One has to remember that no monk living now does use such cloth to make robes with. Our celebrity monks have better and more expensive stuff to make robes with. They use the most valuable, softest and the most elegant cloth available to make their robes. That too not by some ignorant

they are gifted by nature. Added to this extraordinary gift of nature, they are also blessed with all that money can buy, in order to make them presentable to any type of audience. One may again question as to why presentation is important for a monk. There again we have to remind the questioner that we are not talking about any monk. We are talking about celebrity monks. They have to be spick and span any time of the day, whatever the occasion is or wherever the meeting takes place. They have the necessary staff to attend to the variety of needs, be it make-up or facial or whatever it is. No detail is left unattended to.

Don't they attend to the needs of their lay supporters? One may ask again. They do, and it is their primary function to administer to the needs of their faithful followers. They offer their advice, counsel them, preach the doctrine for their benefit, look after their welfare, and are available for any and all their needs spiritual as well as social. No important occasion in the lives of their devotees would pass without the advice and participation of these celebrities, who are spiritual custodians of these men and women. No one should be surprised to find the women seeking the celebrities' guidance far more than the men.

Remember these are different times. We live in a market economy, with strict competition for any thing and every thing.

That means things are not cheap and easy. That is for the poor and the down-trodden, but our celebrities cater to the needs of the affluent exclusively. It is not easy to work with the grumbling masses. There enough and more monks to look after them. Hence our celebrities have reserved their time and energy for this special class of people. They can afford to pay for their travel and comfortable living.. They can also provide the celebrities with the expensive and effective equipment they require for the delivery of their services.

This situation offers an effective cover for the safety and security of the celebrity monks. Every one cannot afford to pay for the quality transport the celebrities need, the high voltage equipment to broadcast the sermons to the audience without any disturbance, and to ensure that the monks are offered fitting gifts at the conclusion of the sermon.

These celebrities do not descend on us, any time we want. They arrive here among us, only at the invitation of important organizations, only for a very important occasion, such as the laying of a foundation stone for a religious construction, or the opening of a new temple or a new shrine room.

The very presence of one of these celebrities at such a function is sufficient to guarantee a large gathering at the temple that day. The devotees will flock from nowhere to see for themselves the radiant beauty of the celebrity and to listen to soothing voice of their favorite monk. What follows next is unimaginable. There will be requests for alms, sermons, blessings and all manner of things that the celebrity is equally clever at. Even if one succeeds in getting one's invitation accepted, one must have at one's command at least a brand new BMW if one expects the celebrity to come to his residence. If you cannot produce at least that, then forget about getting your home blessed by the presence of a rare religious dignitary.

Then you must also be prepared to part with a sizeable gift too, which again means a good chunk of money. Once a young celebrity monk on one off his rare visits offered a rare privilege to a devout supporter of the particular temple. It was not very difficult for the person concerned. He was only asked to a gift a valuable public address system for the visiting celebrity. That would have brought him a heavy load of merit, only if he was wise enough to grab the opportunity given. No, He failed to cash in. Avoided the celebrity and thereby lost a golden opportunity to acquire an immense quantity of merit. One cannot help such a foolish man, however much one tries.

The most recent and the most exciting opportunity came to a select few of the supporters of a temple which held a big function recently. There were two celebrity monks who descended on the suburb for the occasion, on the invitation, no doubt of the *dayakayas*. Those who were lucky enough to appear at the correct time are said to have received a rare and life-uplifting gift, which for want of a better term can only be referred as 'a process of energy-transference'

Lo and behold. None of those who received this extraordinary gift would utter a word about it – what was done – what was given or how it all ended up. It is utterly un-Buddhistic one would say, to be so reticent about it. But sad to say they are jealously guarding the secret of the whole affair.

Such is the practice of Buddhism these days. May all of them be happy and content. That is all that a humble Buddhist can wish.

ශ්‍රී ලාංකේය මාධ්‍ය කවුච්ච.
ගොඩවන්න අදාම

www.thisara.com

THISARA FM
97.4