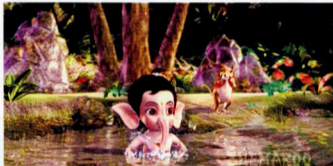


## Bridging cultures

**cinema** The animation film, *Bal Ganesh*, now dubbed into Thai, is proving to be a big hit with audiences in Thailand

The animation film on Ganesha, *Bal Ganesh*, made two years ago by Mumbai-based Shemaroo Company, has now been dubbed into Thai. Released in 32 cinemas across Bangkok, the film has become the starting point for a plethora of Indian cultural activities in Thailand by a newly formed Thai entertainment company called Agaligo.

*Bal Ganesh* has also become the launch pad for Indian film releases in Thailand. More than three decades ago, veteran Thai film distributor Somkiat Ruenpraphat had released the TV serials 'Mahabharat' and 'Ramayan' in Thailand, after dubbing them into Thai. Impressed with the Ganesha film, and knowing that many Thais have faith in Phra Phikaneth (as Lord Ganesh is known in Thailand), he decided to dub the film into Thai,



popular appeal *Bal Ganesh*

and release it in Bangkok.

The film recounts the many stories of child Ganesh, including how he got his elephant head, his encounters with other gods and his love for rats. Melodious songs by top singers including Asha Bhonsle and Hariharan are value additions. Somkiat is happy that those who watched the film enjoyed it thoroughly, including some members of the Thai royal family. For him,

Phra Phikaneth is the god who is invoked at the start of any new venture, and this film is an invocation to launch Indian cultural activities in Thailand.

Ganesha tour

"Indian culture has many things in common with Thai culture, and that's why we want to promote it here," said Somkiat at the premiere of the film in the Siam Paragon theatre, where Sanskrit

prayers were chanted and special Ganesha amulets were distributed to the audience.

The release of the film will be followed by a Ganesha Tour of well-known Ganesha temples in Mumbai and Pune. For this project, the Agaligo company has teamed up with Jet Airways and its sister company, Jet Tours.

Jet Airways Thailand Manager Lackana Wantaywin, who enjoyed

the film, felt it represents the old and the new India, where heritage meets technology. According to Ajay Pawa of Agaligo, the company plans to work with Shemaroo to bring more Thai-dubbed Indian films to that country.

"We hope to release the films on the same day as in India," he said, adding, "many years ago, we used to have regular Indian film releases here, but it stopped when Hollywood films took over and the taxes were raised."

The entertainment company also plans to release the DVDs and CDs of Indian films on a large scale, making sure they are available even in the neighbourhood 711 shops. With Somkiat's involvement in a local radio station, they hope to reach out to the provinces too, and hold road shows, film screenings and Indian food festivals.

Meanwhile, the first Ganesha Tour is scheduled for March, and will cover three temples in Pune, as well as the famed Siddhi Vinayak temple in Mumbai. In time, Agaligo plans to introduce more pilgrim trails to India.

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