

Department of English Osmania University Hyderabad 500 007 91-040-393753	Institute of English Kerala University Trivandrum 695 034 91-471-321455	Department of English JNU New Delhi 110 067 91-011-662238	University of Delhi S. Bhagat Singh College Triveni, New Delhi 110 017 91-011-5737849
---	--	--	--

The Asian Association for the Study of Australia (AASA)
Inaugural Conference
“Creative Configuration: The Expanding Australian Experience”
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala
16-18 January 1997

A Report

The first international conference of the Asian Association for the Study of Australia began with a prayer by Dr. B. Pushpa, Lecturer in Music, Government College for Women. Dr K. Radha, Vice-President, AASA, the Indian convener of the conference, Director, Centre for Australian Studies and Head of the Institute of English, University of Kerala, welcomed the audience. She hoped that the conference would create a new and deeper awareness between Australia and Asia, their peoples and their cultures.

Professor. M. Salihu, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Kerala, delivered the presidential address. He spoke of the geological and historical contact between Australia and India stretching back to thousands of years. He paid compliments to the dynamism of Dr. Radha and expressed the hope that the conference would bring the two nations culturally, intellectually, and emotionally closer.

Mr. Darren Gribble, His Excellency the Australian High Commissioner to India, inaugurated the Conference and delivered the inaugural address. He pointed out that 1991 was a kind of turning point in Indo-Australian relations, the end of the cold war and the introduction of the liberal economic policy in India being among the reasons for this. The relations between Australia and India have now reached a much higher and totally different plane. The Conference is sure to take it to still greater heights by adding one more thread to the tapestry of the bilateral relationship. Mr. Gribble handed over a gift of books to Dr. Radha for the Centre for Australian Studies.

Felicitations were offered by Mr. V.S. Hareendranath, Professor Antony Eapen, and Dr. P.K. Rajan, Members of the Syndicate, University of Kerala. Mr Hareendranath commented that to know the heart of Australia, we must venture into the unknown and that the Indians were getting an opportunity to feel the vibrations of Australian culture. Mr Antony Eapen who is also the principal of Mar Ivanios College said that in this age of globalisation, the two civilizations combined would give a facelift to the degenerating human values. Dr. P.K. Rajan said that the Kerala University was privileged to host the very first conference of the Association in the 60th anniversary year of the University. A right understanding between the continents would modify the very process of creative endeavour.

Dr. Cynthia vanden Driesen, Australian Vice-President of AASA, and the Australian convener of the conference, spoke on the occasion. Both Professor Radha and Dr. vanden Driesen referred to the financial assistance received from the Commonwealth Government of Australia through the Australia-India Council, its arts funding and advisory body, the Faculty of Arts and the office of the Dean of International



L TO R. PROF. K. RADHA, DR. C. VANSEN DRIESEN (ECU), PROF.
SALIHU, PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR, PROF. BABU, VICE-CHANCELLOR,
UNIV. OF KERALA 25 SEP '96

Development and Training of Edith Cowan University and the support given by the University of Kerala. Professor Bala Kothandaraman, the President of AASA, delivered the closing address.

Her Excellency Mrs. Darren Gribble graced the occasion with her presence. Mr. Tom Calma, Counsellor, Education and Training, Australian High Commission, also participated in the function. Several distinguished writers from Australia and India including Ms. Kamala Das were present. The keynote speakers, the Asian Patron of the Association Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah, the Australian Patron Ms. Alison Broinowski and Professor Chris Wallace-Crabbe were some of the other important participants.

The opening ceremony was followed by the Plenary Session (11.30 a.m.-12.30 p.m.) which was chaired by Professor Bala Kothandaraman, President, AASA. She introduced the speaker of the session, Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah, the Asian Patron of AASA, as a friend, philosopher and guide whose career spanned Mysore, Cambridge and Princeton. His Dhvanyaloka, she said, is a meeting place for scholars in American, postcolonial and Commonwealth literatures and Indian Aesthetics.

Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah in his lecture, "Note towards an Exploration of Australian Bonds," spoke of the meeting of the two giant continents, Asia and Australia—both parts of the world family. He pointed out that the Pacific was identified as the nerve centre of the world by Jawaharlal Nehru. He traced the ancestry of the aboriginals of both the continents and their common features. He remarked that both stressed the spirit of renunciation against commercialism and acquisition. Both revered the idea of the Absolute, apparently derived from Indian Upanishads and Shankara's philosophy. He also threw light on the various aspects of life and literature, which are common to Australia and India. It is the move towards asceticism, and the human values that bind the Australasian experience.

The afternoon session began at 2 p.m. In Panel A Dr. Adrian Mitchell chaired the session. The two speakers were Dr. Bill Aschroft and Dr. Patrick West. Dr. Bill Aschroft spoke on "Beyond Identity: Australia's Post-Colonial Future." He began by commenting on the importance of the study of Australia and the increasing identification of Australia with Asia. The powerful role that the discipline of English played in Britain's cultural dominance of its Empires was examined in the paper. It was initiated by Lord Macaulay's Minutes to Parliament-1835. The cultural values of Europe were propagated through the primary discourse. In Australia the cultural dissent showed itself in radical nationalism. The major argument of the paper was that postcolonial theory provided a path beyond nationalist response, into a questioning of all these assumptions of the dominant discourse. Dr Patrick West spoke on "Crowds and Power: Number and Movement in Postcolonial Theory and Australian Literature." He dwelt at length on the open crowd and the closed crowd. He critically analysed the writing of David Malouf and Gerald Murnane. The touchstone of his paper was the seminal study *Crowd and Power* by Elias Canett. The papers were followed by an interesting discussion. The session ended with a reading of a short story and a poem by Nicholas Hasluck.

In Panel B, the session was chaired by Kateryna Longley. David Carter read a paper on "Australian Popular Culture: Models of Culture Influence and Originality." The speaker traced the various stages in the evolution of popular Australian culture and the various influences that are shaping it. The second speaker Sharyn Pearce's paper was on "Portrait of a Nation? Children's Literature and National Identity." This was followed by Farmer's reading from one of her novels.

The afternoon session of Panel C was chaired by Dr. Laurie Clancy. Professor Lucy Frost presented a very interesting paper, "Passing in Australia: Questions of Cultural Appropriation." She analysed the case of Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo), who claims to have aboriginal identity. The case is presented through two narratives which appeared on 20th July 1996 in the glossy Sunday edition of the *Weekend Australian*. The second paper, "Towards Decolonising Australia" was read by Professor John McLaren, who compared the use of myth in Australia and India, metonymically and metaphorically. The settler's story in Australia is seen in terms of the quest myth, in which the land is portrayed as the grail and this provides the *raison d'être* for colonization and imperialism. Adib Khan, writer from Bangladesh, now living in Australia, read from his first novel, *Seasonal Adjustments*.

The second session of the afternoon at Panel A was chaired by Dennis Haskell. Three papers were presented in this session: the first by Professor Glen Phillips, the second by Dr Subhas Chandra Saha, and the third by Dr R.K. Dhawan. Glen Phillips in his paper, "Katherine Susannah Prichard: A Woman for her Time or A Woman for our Time?" examined the capacity of Prichard's work to interrogate issues in Australian life which challenged complacency, propriety and vested interests. He went on to speak about how Prichard emerged as one of the first internationally recognized Australian novelists, as well as about the characteristic features of her writing. Professor Subhas Chandra Saha presented a paper on "The Feminist Poetry of Australia: A New Creative Configuration." The last paper of the session "Australian Studies in India" was presented by Professor R.K. Dhawan. In order to promote the study of Australian literature in India, he suggested that books should be subsidised and journals should be made available. The information of AASA, he said, is a step in the right direction.

The parallel session in the afternoon at Panel B was chaired by Professor John McLaren from Victoria University. Professor K.C. Belliappa's paper on "Thomas Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith: A Critique of White Racism*," examined the novel in detail, laying special emphasis on the oppression of the aborigines. Adrian Mitchell's paper on "Heroic Inventions: C.J. Koch's *Highways to a War and Australian Fiction*," gave a new perspective of the Australian hero. Mitchell described Koch's creativity, as "permanent artistic work." Dr. D. Maya presented a paper, "Narrative with a Post-Modern Vision: A Reading of Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*."

The last session of afternoon at Panel C was chaired by Professor Brian Shoesmith. Dr. K.T. Sunitha's paper was a study of Patrick White's "'A Cheery Soul' and George Lamming's *A Wedding in Spring*." Professor Anniah Gowda's paper was on "Patrick White as a Playwright." Dr. A. Raghu presented a paper on "Kangaroo and Camel: James Wieland as a Critic of Nissim Ezekiel."

One of the highlights of the conference was the 'Writers' Meet,' which started at 4 p.m. and went on till 6.15 p.m. on 16 January. It provided a forum for the exchange of ideas between two groups of distinguished writers from Australia and Kerala. Professor K. Radha welcomed the august gathering. The Meet was inaugurated by Her Highness Princess Aswathy Thirunal Gouri Lakshmi Bayi who herself is an eminent writer. Fotini Epanomitis, Beverley Farmer, Yasmine Gooneratne, Dennis Haskell, Nicholas Hasluck, Beate Josephi, Adib Khan, Annalisa Orselli Dickson, Andrew Taylor, Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Beth Yahp from Australia, and Ms. Kamala Das, Professor O.N.V. Kurup, Professor S. Guptan Nair and Professor V.S. Sharma from Kerala participated.

This stimulating session was followed by the wonderful Cultural Show organized by Mr. George Zachariah, Lecturer in English, Mar Ivanios College with the talented artistes of his College. There was also a performance of Kalaripayattu, the martial arts of Kerala. This programme enabled the delegates from various countries to have a glimpse of the art forms of Kerala. At the end of the show Professor Chris Wallace-Crabbe spoke a few words in appreciation of the programme and thanked all those who were associated with it.

The proceedings of the second day began at 9.30 a.m. with the Keynote Address by Ms. Alison Broinowski, the Australian Patron of AASA and the author of *The Yellow Lady* (Australian Impressions of Asia). Ms. Alison in her lecture "Looking West and Looking East," spoke about the Australia-Asia connections and about the impression of Asia on the work of Australians. Dr. Cynthia vanden Driesen chaired the plenary session.

The next session began at 11 a.m.. Panel A was chaired by Professor Subhas Chandra Saha. ^{Dennis} ~~Nicholas~~ ~~Hasluck, Queen's Counsellor and~~ distinguished writer, presented his paper "'A' is for . . . ? Representations of Asia in the Poetry of Bruce Dawe." This paper examined Bruce Dawe's representations of Asia in his poems. "'A' is for Asia . . ." is a poem published by Dawe in 1965 in which he castigates Australian inattention to Asia. Valsa Elizabeth Koshy in her paper "Reconciliation of Contraries: Douglas Stewart's *The Golden Lover*" dealt with Stewart's use of a Maori legend in the play. At the end of the session

Professor Andrew Taylor, a well known poet of Australia, read his poems.

Panel B was chaired by Dr. Livio Dobrez. Dr. Basil Jayatilaka presented a paper on "Multicultural Impact on Music Learning in Australia." The second paper of the session was read by Dr. C.N. Srinath on "The Poetry of Les Murray." This was followed by Beate Josephi's reading.

Dr. David Carter chaired the session of Panel C. Ms. Kateryna Longley's paper was on "Worlds Apart: Diasporan Family History in Australia." She argued that the recent interest in immigrant family histories in Australia signals a change in Australia's understanding of its national history. Professor Chris Wallace-Crabbe who is a distinguished poet read some of his poems before the session came to an end.

In the afternoon session (2-3.30 p.m.), Panel A was chaired by Dr. Bill Ashcroft. Dr. Laurie Clancy's paper "A Passage to Australia" examined the recent work by authors like Brian Castro, Yasmine Gooneratne, Dewi Aggraeni and Beth Yahp and analyzed especially the attitudes taken towards Australia. The reading in this session was by Professor Yasmine Gooneratne, a recipient of the Order of Australia in 1990.

Panel B was chaired by Dr. C.N. Srinath. Dr. S.K. Sareen's paper "Race, Culture and Perception: Aspects of Aboriginal and White Fiction" was a study of Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling* (1965) and Thomas Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*. Dr. Suman Bala made a comparison of the fiction of Yasmine Gooneratne and Bapsi Sidhwa in her paper "Beyond National Territories: The Fiction of Yasmine Gooneratne and Bapsi Sidhwa." At the end of the session Professor Glen Phillips read some of his poems.

The afternoon session of Panel C was chaired by Professor Lucy Frost. The first paper "The Subaltern in Shadow: Reading Aboriginal Women's Life Stories" was read by Debjani Ganguly (student, Australian National University). She analysed the life stories written by some aboriginal women like Sally Morgan, Ruby Lanford, Labumore and Glenyse Ward. Carmel Kelly's paper "Negotiated Space: Women and Identity in Asian-Australian Women's Fiction" examined the writing of Dewi Aggraeni, Chitra Fernando and Beth Yahp, three Asian women writers now living in Australia. The session concluded with a reading of her story "Sister" by the writer Beth Yahp.

After tea, there was a Book Launch. Books by Professor Satendra Nandan, Professor McLaren, Dr. D. Maya, and Dr. R.K. Dhawan and a journal edited by Dr. S. Sreenivasan were released by Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah. Professor Chris Wallace-Crabbe released Dr. C.N. Srinath's book. After the book launch there was an excursion to Kovalam, mainly for delegates from abroad and for those from outside Kerala.

On the last day of the Conference, i.e., 18 January 1997, the plenary session began at 9.30 a.m. with Professor Chris Wallace-Crabbe's lecture on "Poetry, Prophecy and Vestige: The Survival of a Sublime Genre in Modern Australia." He made a poignant observation that for a few poets, bolder or more native than their late-modern contemporaries, a rhetorical and rhythmical raid on the Absolute eases the plain of the common situation. He added that a very common intermediate position in Australian poetry is that of examining a landscape in a finely artistic way and letting it speak visually, with its own Wordsworthian voice.

The next session began at 11 a.m. after Tea. Dr. R.K. Dhawan chaired the Panel A. Ms. R. Kamala presented a paper on "Elizabeth Jolley's *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* and John Wain's *Pardoner's Tale: A Comparison in Theme and Technique*." She analysed in detail the common features of the two novels, whose chief protagonists finally come to Australia. Dr. Gita Krishnankutty's paper was on "Patrick White and Raja Rao: A Comparison." The session ended with the novelist Fotini Epanomitis' reading.

The session at Panel B was chaired by Professor Lucy Frost. Dr. Livio Dobrez presented an in-depth study of "The Phenomenon of Contact: Mythical, Real and Discursive Antipodes." The paper focussed on the phenomenon of cross-cultural contact and its importance for those involved. Dr. Dobrez made a survey of the notion of Antipodes from the time of Pythagoras to the present day. The second paper was by Dr. Isabel Santoallala (Spain) on "Figuring it out: The Australian Spanish Mis-connection." She mentioned that Spain was barren of the images relating to Australia. The paper examined in detail ways in which the Australian experience can be figured or disfigured, in the process of assimilating the few Australian related

products that reach the Spanish cultural circuits. The session concluded with Dennis Haskell's reading of his poems.

Panel C was chaired by Professor K.C. Belliappa. Both the papers of the session were on Australian poems written under Asian/Indian influence. In his paper "*Salabhanjika: A Cultural Option*," Dr. C.P. Ravichandra took up A.D. Hope's poem "*Salabhanjika*" and showed how the poet who is aware of the entire western tradition turns to India. The poetic image of the *Salabhanjika* is taken from Sanskrit myths. He pointed out that the culminating experience of the poem has its parallel in Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra*. Professor K. Radha in her paper, "The Expanding Australian Experience: The Hindu Doctrine of Transmigration of Souls in Rodney Hall's *The Law of Karma: A Progression of Poems*" mentioned that Rodney Hall who had visited India and found Kochi to be one of the world's greatest "intersections," was influenced by the Hindu law of Karma and the transmigration of souls. Rodney Hall in his long poem deals with the fallen soul of a Hindu. The basic theme is that each betrayal of human responsibility opens the way to another more degenerate betrayal. The scene of action changes in every section with the rebirth of the soul in different countries in different important periods of history. After this paper, Annalisa Orselli-Dickson read some of her poems (and also showed slides of her poems) which were very original.

After the lunch break Panel A of the afternoon session was chaired by Professor K. Radha. A larger number of papers were presented in this session than in any other session. Dr. Sue-Ellen Murray's paper was on "All in a Good Cause: Australian Women's Experiences and Understandings of Menstruation 1900-1960." Dr. Lekkie Hopkins presented a paper on "On being Powerful." Dr. Hopkins pointed out that one of the strengths of women's studies in Australia had been the constant dialogue between grassroot women, activists, and democrats.

Dr. M.K.C. Nair (Director, Child Development Centre, Thiruvananthapuram) spoke on "Prevention of Childhood Disability: Newcastle/Kerala Model," showing slides. The next paper "The Mosaic Culture of Australia as seen in Patrick White's *Voss*" was by Fr. Sebastian Anand S.J. Dr. Evangeline Shanti Roy's paper, "Singing the World the Barramatijara Way in Thomas Keneally's *Flying Hero Class*" was about the treatment of the uncomfortable question of the place of the Australian aborigines in the white world. The last paper of the session was by G.S. Jayasree on "Multiculturalism and the New World (Dis)Order." The Chairperson Professor Radha concluded the session by thanking all those who participated in that session and in the whole conference.

The session at Panel B was chaired by Dr. Patrick West. Three interesting papers were read. Dr. Susan Kenworthy's paper "Racist Acts and Human Rights" compared the 1905 Western Australian Aborigines Act with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and examined the effect of the Act on the lives of the colonisers and the colonised. Dr. Colin Kenworthy's paper "Representing Colonization" threw light on the similarities in the constructions of colonized peoples by the British in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Australasia. The paper also outlined a number of teaching strategies for teaching postcolonial reading practices in secondary schools. The last paper of the session by Dr. Rajiva Wijesinghe (Sri Lanka) was on "Australia's First Major International Role: Human Rights and Child Abuse in Cambodia." This paper traced the social and psychological factors that contributed to the estrangement between Australia and Cambodia.

The three-day Conference at Hotel Fort Manor came to a close at 4.30 p.m. on 18 January 1997. It was indeed a great privilege to have more than forty eminent delegates from abroad, a large number of participants from Universities and Colleges from all over Kerala and from other parts of India, including teachers, research scholars and students.

May I thank all the office-bearers of the AASA, especially Dr. Cynthia vanden Driesen, Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah, Professor Bala Kothandaraman, Dr. S.K. Sareen, Dr. R.K. Dhawan and Dr. Suman Bala, for the help and cooperation extended by them in making the Conference a great success!

Director, Centre for Australian Studies
Institute of English, University of Kerala

K. Radha
Convener, AASA Conference