

ASAA NEWSLETTER

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AUSTRALASIA IN ASIA

Canberra Seminar: ASAA Publication Launched

The third Australia India Update Seminar was held at the University of Canberra on 7-8 November 2002. The Seminar theme was "Bi-lateral Relations Post September 11: Regional Security and Multi-Cultural Democracies." The Seminar, which was opened by Hon. Kim Beazley MP and the High Commissioner for India in Australia, was organised by Dr. Auriol Weigold, University of Canberra with Professor Marika Vicziany, Director, Monash Asia Institute.

Speakers examined regional security issues for these countries, including the possible repercussions for India and Australia of a war with Iraq and responses to terrorist activities in Central, West, South and South East Asia during the last year. Mr. Neville Roach AO, in his keynote address, spoke of the necessity to save multiculturalism in Australia and secularism in India, both of which he sees as being under threat from political rhetoric which inflames racial prejudice.

Other speakers addressed the importance of multi-cultural societies and their role in our democracies, on regional security issues which impact on Australia and India. Expert speakers included Dr. William Maley from the Australian Defence Force Academy. Dr. Samina Yasmeen, University of Western Australia, Professor Amin Saikal, Director of the Arab and Islamic Centre at the Australian National University, Dr. Ravi Tomar, Information & Research Services at Parliament House, Canberra and a panel from the Monash Asia Institute led by Professor Marika Vicziany. The papers are being prepared for publication.

The Seminar series began at the University of Canberra in 1999 with "Midnight to Millennium: Australia-India Interconnections" which examined the Australia-India relationship, post-India's nuclear tests in 1998, business relationships with India and shared issues in cultural heritage.

As an important forum which regularly highlights the Australia-India connection, the Canberra Seminar was the appropriate forum to launch the book of the ASAA Conference, Mysore 2000: *Austral-Asian Encounters*, ed. Cynthia vanden Driesen and Satendra Nandan (Prestige: New Delhi, 2002). A limited number of copies of this very handsome volume was made available, courtesy of Prestige Press, for the occasion. (An order form for the volume is attached to this Newsletter.)

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ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AUSTRALASIA IN ASIA

Portraying India: Image, Identity and Myth November 2003

A one-day symposium "Portraying India: Image, Identity and Myth" was held at India Habitat Centre on 3 September 2003. Organized by Australia-India Council and Australian High Commission, New Delhi, it offered stimulating discussions on some of the ways India has been portrayed in recent Australian writing and media. Ms. Penny Wensley, Australian High Commissioner at New Delhi, welcomed the guests and highlighted the importance of the symposium being held. The inaugural address was delivered by Professor Jim Masselos of the University of Sydney. He spoke on the "Multiple Reality" discussing the historical scene in the 19th century India. This was followed by a talk by Professor Narayani Gupta of Jamia Millia Islamia University on "What is the Use of a Book without Picture." Mr. Kory Medcalf, First Secretary, Australian High Commission gave a lively paper on the early Australian author John Lang, who lived in India in 1800 and who wrote in detail about his extraordinary experiences here. Inez Baranay, noted author of six novels, gave a stimulating talk on "Reading India, Writing India." The academic lectures were followed by a presentation by expatriate young film-maker Safina Uberoi. She talked of her experiences as a multi-cultural producer of documentary films. The symposium evoked a lively response. Dr. R.K. Dhawan and Dr. Suman Bala of the University of Delhi were vibrant participants in the programme.

ASAA NEWSLETTER

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AUSTRALASIA IN ASIA

Third International ASAA Conference

Mar Ivanios College, Thiruvananthapuram

Kerala, South India

8-10 July 2004

A Report



Opening Ceremony: Lighting of the lamp by John Fisher. Others in the picture: Principal, Mar Ivanios College, the Bishop of Kerala, and Vice-Chancellor of Kerala University

ASAA 2004 Conference Report

PTD

Participants: Third International ASAA Conference





Cultural Show at the Conference

Prof. K. Radha, Asian President of ASAA and Director of the Australian Studies Centre, University of Kerala

The Inaugural Session

The Third International Conference of the Association for the Study of Australasia in Asia on the theme of displacement, dispossession, seachange, commenced with great fanfare in the plush, ornately decorated Mar Ivanios College Conference Hall, Trivandrum on 8 July 2004. Supported by the Australia-India Council, the University of Kerala, Edith Cowan University, the University of Canberra, and the WA Govt. Dept. of Industry and Resources, the conference was a great success. About 100 delegates from across the country and more than thirty delegates from Australia, New Zealand and Singapore participated in the three-day deliberations.

The conference was inaugurated by Mr. John Fisher, Deputy High Commissioner of Australia in the absence of HE Penny Wensley, Australian High Commissioner in India who was, unfortunately, unable to attend due to unavoidable circumstances. Mr. Fisher addressed several areas of the Conference theme of Diaspora and "sea change" focussing particularly on the numbers of Indian migrants in Australia and the strengthening of educational and other links between India and Australia. His Grace, the Bishop of Kerala also addressed the gathering. Prof. K. Radha, Asian President of ASAA and Director of the Australian Studies Centre, University of Kerala, the local Convenor of the conference, welcomed all the eminent guests, delegates, students and other participants. Principal of the College Fr. Daniel Kuzhithadathil commented on the significance of the event as marking the importance of the Colleges' distinctive contribution to education in the region. Other dignitaries of the University of Kerala offered felicitations. Dr. Cynthia vanden Driesen, Australian President of ASAA and Australian convenor of the conference thanked the sponsors of the conference particularly the Australia-India Council, the West Australian Department of Industry and Commerce and the School of Creative Communication, University of Canberra. Ms. Asha Das, representative of the AIC in India, was also present. Dr. S. Kevin, Vice-Chancellor of Kerala University, presided over the function.



Professor Thumboo being greeted by the Bishop of Kerala

After the inaugural ceremony and a brief interval for morning tea, the first plenary address was presented by Professor Edwin Thumboo, renowned Singaporean poet and academic, Director of the Centre for the Arts, Singapore and the new Asian Patron of ASAA. The academic sessions of the presentation of Papers started simultaneously in three rooms. Academics, intellectuals, and policymakers from India, Australia and New Zealand discussed aspects of the worldwide phenomenon of diaspora with its particular application to the region. Academic debate was leavened and lightened by readings by creative writers from their works—on allied motifs of diaspora: Simone Lazaroo, Glen Phillips, Serge Lieberman were the writers featured on the first day.

The first evening's entertainment—a cultural show of music, dance and martial arts, embodying the culture of the South, presented by the highly talented students of Mar Ivanios College—held the audience enthralled. The gala evening ended with a lavish dinner hosted by the College. One of the highlights of the Conference was the Creative Writers' Session held on the second morning. The Australian writers attending the conference and prominent writers from Kerala shared the stage, reading from their works on the theme of diaspora and discussing its significance under the skilled chairmanship of Nicholas Hasluck. Australian writers present besides Nicholas Hasluck were Syd Harrex, Glen Phillips, Simone Lazaroo, Tony Casella, Jan Kapetas and Serge Liberman, besides the Australian Aboriginal writers Noel Morrison and Kay Whalley. The audience was privileged to listen also to the most eminent of Singapore poets—Edwin Thumboo. Amongst the Kerala writers who received warm acclamation from the audience were Ayappa Paniker and Chandrika.



Cultural Show at the Conference



Writers' Meet: Chair Nicholas Hasluck

compared Mena Abdullah's *This Time of Peacock* with Suneeta D Costa's *Homework*; Professor K.T. Sunitha (University of N Writers' Meet: Chair Nicholas Hasluck

Nicholas Hasluck, former Chair of the Literature Fund of the Australia Council, presented a plenary Address before the Writers' Meet which provided some provocative new ideas on the diaspora theme. Bringing together his legal expertise (he is also Justice Hasluck in his native state of West Australia) and writerly imagination, he presented a fascinating talk entitled "Diaspora as Alibi." In the second plenary session for the day, Adrian Mitchell presented an insight into his own distinguished research into the interface between history and culture exploring concepts of identity and migration as a never-ending problem of illusory dream and pragmatic politics. Papers presented during the day addressed a variety of perspectives as Australia's multi-cultural inheritance was discussed. A Paper on the Italian diaspora was presented by Anthony Casella, while distinguished Australian demographer Reg Appleyard focused on Greek Communities in Australia. The Islamic Communities and their problems were sketched by Ameer Ali. His statement that he had never read a novel in his life raised some eyebrows amongst the literati present but his Paper provided an insider's perspective that was particularly enlightening. (Ameer is Chairperson of the Islamic Councils of Australia.) Abu Siddique's Paper addressed the exigencies of illegal immigration and the continuing dilemma it presents in contemporary Australia.-again an authoritative pronouncement since Abu is Director of the Centre for Migration and Development Studies at UWA.

A further highlight of the day was the booklaunching ceremony concluded on the second afternoon. Bill Ashcroft launched the *Journal of Australasian Studies*, edited by R.K. Dhawan and Suman Bala. He drew attention to the interest of its contents and the fine quality of its production. Edwin Thumboo launched Syd Harrex's latest book of poems entitled *Under a Medlar Tree*. The packed schedule concluded with a dinner hosted by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kerala for the overseas visitors at the South Park Hotel.



Bill Ashcroft and Adrian Mitchell



Anjali Roy, Cynthia Driesen, Serge Walberg, R.K. Dhawan, K. Radha and Suman Bala

On the third morning, one of Australia's best-known cultural theorists, Bill Ashcroft presented a plenary address entitled, "Diaspora and Boundaries" an insightful study into the problematics of Boundaries eager to reach Horizons. Syd Harrex, Nicholas Hasluck, and Anthony Casella. Read from their creative work after each of the academic sessions. These were truly remarkable for their range and diversity ranging from philosophical and theoretical speculations as to the nature of home and displacement and concepts of heterotopia and vagrant space to some highly imaginative re-interpretations of the theme of diaspora in relation to knowledges and displacement in terms of intellectual disability. The New Zealanders made their contribution with Jane Stafford, Mark Williams and James Meffam giving the conference theme a distinctive New Zealand perspective. Earlier Rachel Simon Kumar's Paper on "Sexuality and the Asian Student in New Zealand" had sparked so much interest that her audience seemed disposed to miss lunch rather than abbreviate discussions.

On the last evening, a truly memorable presentation was made by Australian indigenous artists Kay Whalley and Noel Morrison. The session was chaired by Jan Kapetas and each item drew appreciative applause from the audience. Satendra Nandan's scheduled Plenary Paper was presented only in an abbreviated form since he was unable to attend. So the packed schedule of an exciting many-faceted conference drew to a close with a Reading by Cynthia vanden Driesen from Satendra Nandan's Paper and an expression of sincere thanks to all the participants who had contributed so magnificently to the success of the conference.

More than sixty papers were presented in the parallel sessions, spread over the three days. The lectures covered various disciplines in Australasian Studies including literature, engineering, computer science, library science, history, philosophy, media, demography, geography, economics as well as literature and creative writing.

The topics on which Indian participants presented Papers show the extent to which Australian literature particularly seems to have developed in India. Dr. Suman Bala (University of Delhi) explored South Asian Women's Writing in Australia. Dr. R.K. Dhawan (University of Delhi) compared Mena Abdullah's *This Time of Peacock* with Suneeta D Costa's *Homework*; Professor K.T. Sunitha (University of Mysore) spoke on the theme of dispossession in Simone Lazaroo's

An Australian Fiancé; Dr. Usha Dhawan (Delhi) presented a paper on South Asian Women in Australia; Dr. Malati Mathur (Alwar) and Dr. D.K. Pabby (University of Delhi) spoke on the diasporic writings of Satendra Nandan; Professor K. Radha presented a paper on Thomas Keneally; Mariamma Panjikkaran spoke on Elizabeth Jolley; John Cherian on David Malouf; Dr. D. Maya on Judith Wright; and Raghunatha Pillai on Hasluck's *The Country without Music*.



Indigenous Writers/Artists: Noel Morrison, Kay Whalley and Jan Kapetas

A word about Mar Ivanios College, the host institution. It is highly regarded as a premier centre of learning in Kerala. Its beautiful buildings and gardens are spread over 220 acres. It was meant to be a residential university, based on the model of Shantiniketan and one of its distinctive features is its building in of song, dance and cultural pursuits into the student curriculum. The impressive standard attained in these latter-named pursuits was amply attested by the quality of the Culture Show - the memory of which many of those in the audience will retain as one of their special memories of this conference.

The Conference received wide coverage from the media including television and daily newspapers both local and national.

R.K. Dhawan and Keya Majumdar

Note: The conference organizers would like to record here their profound thanks to the Principal, Staff and Students of the College for their magnificent assistance with every facet of the conference organization. The generous catering was especially appreciated by all the visitors as indeed was the ready helpfulness of all the staff and students involved. Mr. George Zacharia's efforts with the Culture Show and the cheerful co-operation of the Head of English Ms. Kristenne Moreira and all her team are gratefully acknowledged.



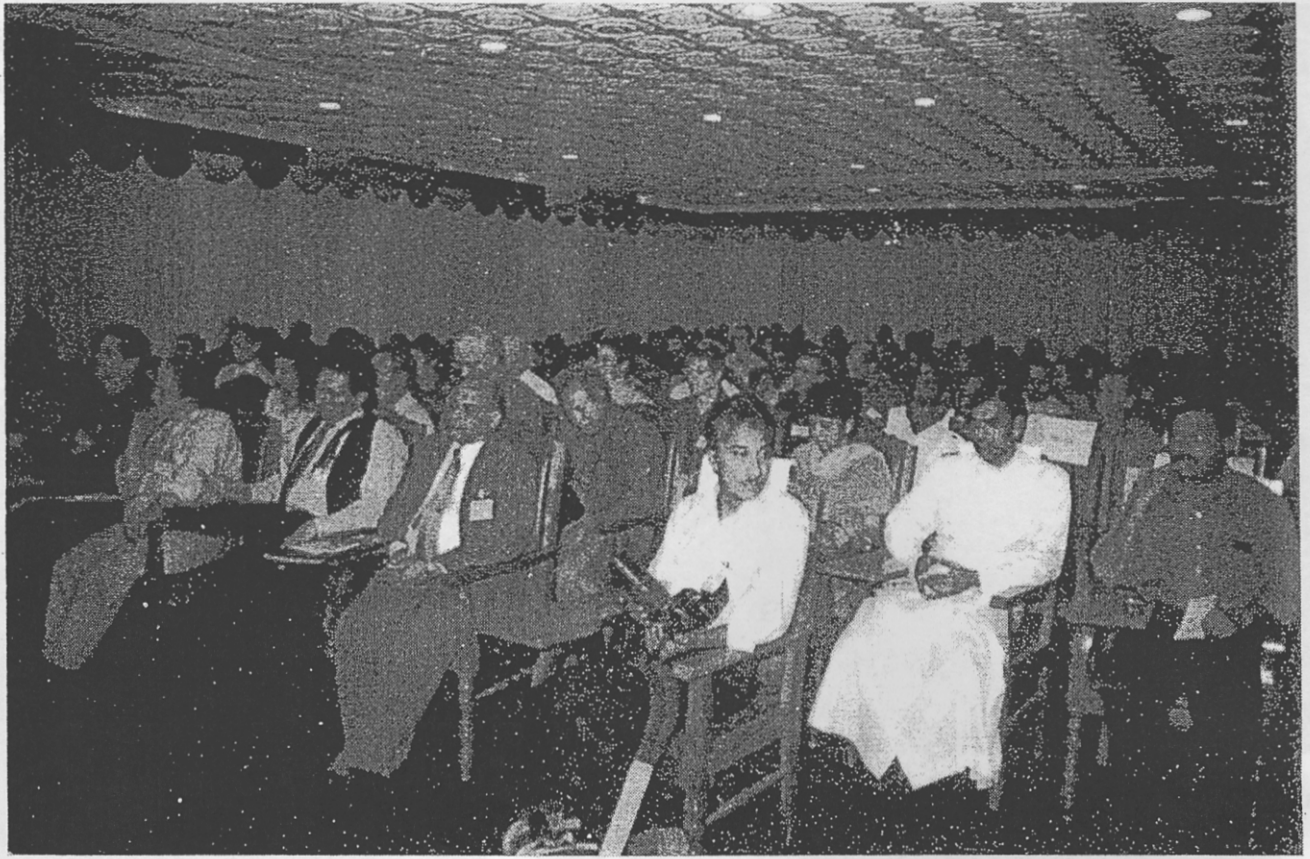
Asha Das, K.T. Sunitha, Malati Mathur, Anjali Roy, Cynthia, K. Radha, M. Dasan and another participant



A view of the audience

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The audience at the Third International ASAA Conference



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ASAA Conference: Special Session on Aborigines

Who are the people without a face,
their lives lost without a trace

Years have passed by

But they are still here today

Pain locked deep inside

In so many ways. . . .

The angst of the Australian Aborigine was very much in the air as Noel Morrison and Kay Whalley—aborigine writers—came on stage to read poems and narrate experiences from their lives in the aborigine reservations and missions in Australia.

The venue was the Mar Ivanios College and the occasion was the valedictory ceremony of the three-day international conference on “Diaspora—displacement, dispossession, seachange”, organized by the Association for the Study of Australasia in Asia (ASAA).

Kay, by reading poems and a short story, painted a poignant picture of how the aborigine of today is struggling to return to his roots and rediscover his lost culture and languages. She spoke of the importance of the home and the family to the Nyungar people and told the audience that “the spirit is still there, the culture is very much alive, hidden, but still alive.” With the help of graphs and charts, Kay also sought to highlight that aborigines suffer the highest incarceration rate in Australia.

Noel welcomed the gathering by singing an aboriginal song, in a language he had rediscovered after extensive research. As Noel kept up a commentary on his life in the aborigine reservations, he also showed pictures of how tin shanties and flimsy tents were the ‘homes’ of the aborigines for the better part of the twentieth century. As Noel bid farewell to the seminar with another song in an aborigine language, the audience comprising Australian and Indian writers and students broke out into a robust applause, causing Noel to break out into a broad smile.

The above item appeared in the Indian national newspaper The Hindu, 11 July 2004.

Call for Contributions

JOURNAL OF AUSTRALASIAN STUDIES

GENDER ISSUE

The special issue of the *Journal of Australian Studies* will be co-edited by Associate Professor Margaret Allen, University of Adelaide and Associate Professor R.K. Dhawan, University of Delhi.

The *Journal of Australasian Studies* is a new international, multidisciplinary refereed journal devoted to studies of Australasia. Scholars invited to contribute papers discussing aspects of femininities, masculinities, and gender in relation to literary, cultural and historical studies and the social sciences. Comparative studies on Australia/New Zealand/South Asia are welcome as well as studies focussed upon Australia or New Zealand or India. The volume will also be published as a book. Papers should be around 5-6,000 words although longer pieces will be considered. These and other contributions, reviews, interviews and fiction and verse may be sent to the editors as email attachments, along with a hard copy. Due date for receipt of papers is 31 December 2004. Dr. Margaret Allen (margaret.allen@adelaide.edu.au), Department of Gender Studies and Social Sciences, University of Adelaide 5005.

Dr. R.K. Dhawan (rkdhawan.vsnl.net), J 391, New Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi 110 060. India

Reports from the Indigenous Writers—Kay Walley and Noel Morrison Kadadjiny Mia Walyalup Aboriginal Writers' Group

Note: The conference organizers wish to note their appreciation of the assistance given them by the West Australian Government of Industry and Technology—particularly Ms. Marilyn Morgan Mgr. Indigenous Art and Marketing, to enable Kay and Noel to participate in the conference. They are very grateful to Mr. John Loney (WA Govt) for his helpful information of the possibilities of this assistance.

In early July, two emerging Nyoongar writers, Noel Morrison and Kay Walley of the Perth-based Kadadjiny Mia Walyalup Aboriginal Writers' Group, presented the Valedictory session at the 3rd International Conference of the Association for the Study of Australasia in Asia. Their presentation of stories, poetry, song and Nyoongar history not only received robust applause; it was covered in detail in *The Hindu* (Sunday 11 July, 2004). The success of their visit with their mentor, Western Australian poet, playwright and fiction writer, Jan Teagle Kapetas, can also be measured by the sale of more than fifty copies of the Kadadjiny Mia Walyalup Writers' anthology, *From Our Hearts: New Aboriginal Writing from Southwest Western Australia*, (2000), invitations to Jan to co-edit two new anthologies of Indigenous writing and scholarship with Indian literary scholars of Australasian literature, and requests for continuing relationships between Indigenous Indian and Australian writers. Permission has been given for some of Kay and Noel's writing to be taught in postcolonial literature courses, and a video discussion between Kay, Noel, and Jan will appear on an Indian web site.

Built around the themes of Dispossession, Displacement, and Diaspora in the contemporary world, the 3rd International ASAA Conference was held in the city of Trivandrum in Kerala, South India, and attended by more than one hundred scholars and writers from India, Asia, Australia and New Zealand—a daunting audience for anyone—and perhaps especially so for two emerging writers. Yet Kay and Noel moved the audience with their poetry and performed stories, historical images and songs.

Kay and Noel are not widely known as writers—yet. But both are well known in southwest metropolitan Perth for their involvement in cultural and community activities. Noel works with school children and community groups as a cultural tour guide and storyteller for the Waalitj Aboriginal Corporation. (Over the past four years more than 8,000 children have heard his stories in their schools or taken a Nyoongar environmental tour through the Bibra Lakes wetlands.) Noel also teaches cultural tourism at Challenger TAFE. Kay is a long time community worker who is currently employed by the Cockburn City Council as a domestic violence outreach worker with Moorditj Yoka. She is the Chair of the Waalitj Aboriginal Corporation, and an active member of many community committees.

For the past five years, both Kay and Noel have attended the regular writing and performance workshops held by the Kadadjiny Mia Walyalup Writers Group. Kay is a poet and fiction writer, who is currently completing her first play. Noel writes and performs stories for children and is working on his autobiography. They are among more than fifty Indigenous people who have attended the KMWWG workshops which are open to all Indigenous people who want to begin writing. Although both began writing five years ago, most of their time is devoted to the well-being of their Nyoongar community and to processes of reconciliation. Family and community come first in their lives—but they are beginning to realize that writing and sharing stories can

really make a difference to an imperfect world. As Kay said in her presentation, "I am not an academic or a scholar; I am a Nyoongar woman, a mother, a member of my community. My people come first—but I do believe in the power of the pen. That is why I write, and why I am here."

Opportunities for emerging writers like Noel and Kay to visit, share their work, and learn from well-known writers and audiences in other countries are rare. Their visit to India was generously supported by Indigenous Marketing and Exports at the Western Australian Department of Industry and Technology. Funding was sought by conference convenor, Dr. Cynthia van den Driesen of Edith Cowan University. Jan Teagle Kapetas extended her mentoring role to assisting the writers to organize their travel to India.

Kay Walley and Noel Morrison would like it to be known that going to India, performing their work, and meeting Kerala poets and India's Indigenous people has extended the horizons of these emerging Western Australian writers. The success of this visit and the sharing of knowledge and contacts have given the other writers of the Kadadjiny Mia Walyalup Group valuable insights into the true significance of their creative writing and performance activities.

Notes from Noel Morrison

Kadadjiny Mia Walyalup Aboriginal Writers' Group

It happened like this: I was eating my lunch one Sunday four weeks before the Conference when Jan rang me. "Noel," she said, "How would you like to go to India and perform some of your stories and poems?"

"What?" I wasn't thinking very clearly. My little great-grandson had woken me up through the night. "What are you saying? India? You mean the country India?"

Jan explained again, and then said, "It will be in four weeks' time. Will you be free then?"

I said, "I think I'd better come round. This is pretty big, going to India."

I went over to her house and we got out the map. "Where would I be going?"

I learned that there was funding for two Indigenous writers to attend the ASAA Conference, and that because of the date being so close, Cynthia had invited Jan to bring two Kadadjiny Mia Walyalup Writers. Jan and Kay had presented a couple of sessions at Edith Cowan University that went really well, so we were invited to India. I couldn't believe it. I knew Jan was going as a poet but I never in my wildest dreams thought I'd ever do something like that myself. I've been writing and telling stories for five years, and I've had my poems published, but I never thought I'd be given a chance like this.

Over the next three weeks we were really busy. I was running culture tours at Bibra Lakes and Kay was working too, but we spent a lot of time at Jan's organizing our presentation, and deciding what we'd perform at the literary session with Kerala poets. We had to get passports and visas, photos, birth certificates. Jan said that she was going to stay on an extra week, and if we could get \$500 together, we could all stay on together and really see something of the country. That was a bit of a struggle, but we wanted to stay on and family and friends helped out.

We arrived in Trivandrum in a huge monsoon storm. Four o'clock in the morning Australian time. It was unbelievable, racing through the dark down narrow empty streets, thinking what is this place? We couldn't see anything but darkness and rain in the headlights. Next morning, I looked out the window. In the light, it was still raining. Green tree tops in the rain. We went for a walk and found a market, the Connemara Market, and bought umbrellas. I had to pinch myself to

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see I wasn't dreaming. It was India just like you see it on television but with all the smells and sounds—horns beeping, fish gutters cleaning the fish, fresh fruit and vegetables, women in saris, mud, traffic.

At the Conference we met wonderful people. An Indigenous Indian professor and lecturer (Tribals, they call themselves), who took us to lunch, young Indian university students who were really generous and kind, Australian and Indian academics who were interested, too. I learned a lot about Indian ways of doing things. I learned how education is seen as really important—especially as a way of bringing better opportunities for people. What was really important to me was the many chances I had to share our Indigenous history and culture with many different audiences and the conversations we had with young university students during the breaks. I was surprised by how interested they are in Aboriginal things, and how much the Indigenous Indian professors already knew (and loved) about Aboriginal writers and writing.

After the Conference, a famous Kerala poet invited us to spend a day at her orphanage and asylum in the hills outside Trivandrum and shared her cultural knowledge with us. While we were there, we entertained her young people with songs and stories. We also traveled north to the Backwaters and then to Thekkardy the mountains to see how people in India live. Only ten years ago, the Indigenous tribal people of Thekkardy were dispossessed of their land in the forests. To see how they are living now in cardboard, canvas and tin shacks on the side of the road took me back to the hard years I've known. Some young ones are being trained up as cultural and environmental tour guides, but most of their people have nothing.

Going to India has made me even stronger about the need for people to understand one another. It has made me realize that sharing our stories and writing really matters. Not just in Australia, but with our brothers and sisters in other countries. We can learn a lot from each other. Most of all, knowing each other means we can support one another to make a better world for our children and grandchildren

Notes from Kay Walley Nyoongar Writer

The chance to travel to India and present our stories and our cultural history was extremely important. I found my heart going out to the people I met, and I know that what I saw and learned in India will stay with me in every thing I do through the years of my life. As a writer, I will be stronger, and I will never lack the courage to say what needs saying. At the Conference, I stood before a huge audience of academics and writers and read my poetry and the poems of other Nyoongar writers, and I saw how those poems touched the audience. This was a very important experience for someone like me—an ordinary Nyoongar woman who writes, but who hasn't really understood how powerful words can be. It was important to share the stories and poetry of my people, and it was important to see how warmly people responded. However, it was the personal connections and relationships we formed on the trip that matter the most.

The friendships we formed with university students, with Indian Indigenous professors (one gave a passionate paper about Australian Aboriginal poetry), and the words of the Kerala poet, Sugathakumari, who spoke with us about her work and life, and showed us her strength in helping her people. Sugathakumari is seventy years old. Her father was a friend of Gandhi. Like us, she writes poetry, but her deep passion is helping improve the lives of the dispossessed. Her poetry is

just one of the tools she uses to make the world a better place. Over the past forty years she has started and chaired the conservation movement in Kerala, opened up mental asylums to inspection and continued to make sure that women in them are properly cared for, and now she runs an orphanage (for sixty eight young girls who have been rescued from rubbish heaps and abuse), an asylum for forty young people who are suffering from trauma and mental illness, and a home for recovering drug addicts and alcoholics. Her guiding principle is the importance of the mind without fear.

Going to this conference, and going to India was a very important experience. As Aboriginal writers we were able to share our experiences as people and writers with many people. Our presentation was really heard by the audience. Yarning with lecturers, professors, writers and students, we were able to share something of our Nyoongar ways, our culture and our friendship. *The Hindu* printed the story of our presentation so that knowledge of Aboriginal Australian history will be more widely known. More than fifty of our books were sold and after they were read, we were told that people loved the work and that some of our poems will be taught in university literature courses. Lastly, we were invited, and made a video about our work as writers which will appear on the World Wide Web.

For myself, I believe my own writing will be richer and stronger because of this trip. I will also be staying in touch with many of the Indian writers and academics, and perhaps gain publication in several Indian anthologies.

Thank you for the opportunity.

ANOTHER WRITER'S PERSPECTIVE

A Backward Look at the Third International ASAA Conference

University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram

8-10 July 2004

SERGE LIBERMAN

Although originally and historically used most commonly to describe the dispersion of the Jews outside Judea after the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century before the Common Era (BCE), the Greek term "Diaspora" has come to be applied to the dispersion of any people belonging to a recognised nation or having a common culture.

Approaching the subject from the Jewish perspective—that which forms my own and my people's experiential legacy—diaspora has come to carry two connotations: the first, in Hebrew called *Golah*, being a simple purely descriptive term to denote living outside one's homeland, the second, termed *Galut*, superimposing upon *Golah* the subjective existential angst of being in exile, of not being at home, or of having no home, either because one has been compelled to flee that home or has been expelled from it, or refused entry, or because that home has been conquered, colonised or lost its borders by being subsumed into another national entity and its people dispossessed.

In the light of this, where diaspora was not so much *Golah* as *Galut*, what could then pass for home, where could one continue to belong when the context is another location, a culture, a tradition, a language, an ethnic group? And where, whether by choice or by force, one lived outside one's national home, how was one to deal with the special concerns and dilemmas that con-

one's national home, how was one to deal with the special concerns and dilemmas that confronted one's self as also one's particular ethnic group—when living as a minority within another generally alien majority milieu, raising questions of preservation of one's own language, folkways and traditions, and of adaptation, integration, cross-marriage and assimilation?



To myself as a Jew living in an Australian environment from childhood on, these have all been perennial part-and-parcel issues of the Jewish community in which I have lived. At the conference, it was salutary to learn of these similar concerns writ more broadly, albeit with assorted variations, challenging other communities as well, among them the Indian, Anglo-Indian, Italian, Greek, South East Asian, Chinese, Muslim and Aboriginal, and to be brought to reflect upon the larger political, economic, historical, moral, social and anthropological dimensions of borders, migrations, loyalties, multicultural ideals, and inclusion, marginality and personal identity.

What emerged most strongly for me was the recognition that in a global world, where it is not the consequence of necessity through coercion, displacement and dispossession, diasporic living—voluntary *golah*—is at once as unquestionably valid a choice for the individual as is residence in one's homeland and as universal and timeless ever since the first man stepped out of his tribal unit. All of this may be “ivory tower” kind of stuff . . . but nevertheless it was part of the experience of this conference.

Far more grounded in experienced actuality was the exhilaration of being part of a Conference, admirably brought together by hard-working organisers, of so many scholars and writers with illuminating things to say. This was enhanced by the unimpeachable service of the staff of the South Park Hotel (the chosen accommodation for overseas guests). The grace of the affable student volunteers and helpful staff of Mar Ivanios College helped the consistent maintenance of an easy camaraderie which has made the conference, for me at least, a distinct highlight of my literary career.

Literary Events

A New Indo-Australian Novel

Shantaram: A Novel, a 944-page epic by Australian writer Gregory David Roberts, has made its debut with a splash Down Under with ripples reaching all the way to Hollywood. Megastar Johnny Depp will play the lead role of an Australian fugitive who comes to Mumbai and re-launches a criminal career among the city's notorious underworld. Depp will soon be in Mumbai scouting for shooting locales for what is being called an eminently 'filmable' novel. In this autobiographical novel, Shantaram's narrator and central character is Lindsay who arrives in Mumbai after escaping from an Australian prison where he was serving a 19 year sentence for armed robberies to feed his drug habit. In the city Lindsay meets tour guide Prabhakar who takes him to his native village where the locals name him Shantaram and teach him Marathi, a prelude to his initiation into the Mumbai underworld. The jumbo \$24.95 novel was released in the US in October by St. Martin's Press. In Australia, Gregory Roberts is being hailed as a literary sensation.

ACSANZ Conference

The annual conference of the Association of Canadian Studies of Australia and New Zealand was organized on 23-25 September 2004 at Sydney. The theme of the conference was "Learning from Each Other." Dr. R.K. Dhawan of the University of Delhi presented a paper on "Multicultural Scenarios in Canada, Australia and India: A Comparative Study."

Three Australian Writers in India

Three eminent Australian writers Peter Goldsworthy, Kate Grenville and Tim Winton are on Indian tour from 16 November to 26 November 2004. On 16 November, a grand reception was hosted by Ms. Penny Wensley, Australian High Commissioner in India. Penguin India has published these writers and their works were on display. On the 17 evening, the writers were felicitated at Oberoi Intercontinental Hotel, New Delhi. They read extracts from their books which were followed by lively questions from the audience. Professor Harish Trivedi of the University of Delhi chaired the session. Participants included Dr. R.K. Dhawan and Dr. Suman Bala.

Yasmine Gooneratne

Yasmine Gooneratne, Emeritus Professor of English at Macquarie University, has edited and published the new edition of Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*. Woolf's contribution to Sri Lankan literature is significant. The present book is both a tribute to the author and a landmark in the history of Sri Lankan writing.

Australia-India Events in December 2004

Scholars interested in Australia and Australasian Studies will have a rare opportunity to interact with academics from Australia in the month of December 2004. A number of literary events will take place at New Delhi. *The Thesis Eleven Centre for Critical Theory* of La Trobe University is organizing a series of events from 4-14 December 2004 entitled "Australia and India: Cities, Nation-States, Alternative Modernities, Civilisations" in New Delhi. The ten-day schedule includes three public lectures and three seminars. The key objectives are to secure formal agreements between the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University and equivalent universities in Delhi; increase intellectual exchange between Delhi and Melbourne by enhancing and developing teacher exchange, visiting scholar schemes, research collaboration, publication of

public lectures and research papers in *Thesis Eleven* and in equivalent Delhi-based social and political theory journals.

Thesis Eleven, a leading international social theory and historical sociology journal, is well-placed to publish the best of the papers and lectures delivered. Over 20 delegates from La Trobe and *Thesis Eleven*, South Asian nationals, Area Studies specialists (South Asian and Australian Studies) and postgraduates will be participating. Dr. Leela Gandhi of La Trobe University will speak at Hindu College (where she formerly taught) on 8 December 2004. This will be followed by a two-day program at Neerana from 10-11 December 2004.

An Intellectual Potpourri

Professor Anjali Gera Roy, Vice-President (Asia) ASAA, was in Canberra from August to November 2004 as a Visiting Fellow at the Australian National University to work on a project on the globalization of a North Indian folk performance tradition. She visited Canberra first in July 2001 as part of an ASAA project entitled "Inducting Indian Scholars into Australian Studies". Generously funded by the Australia-India Council and co-ordinated by Cynthia vanden Driesen, the programme brought five Indian academics from four Indian universities to Australia where they participated in the ASAL Conference (Melbourne) and also in the ACLALS Conference (Canberra) in July 2001. Here, she shares some experiences of her second Australian visit.

The Humanities Research Centre (HRC) at the Australian National University (ANU) Canberra aims to stimulate and advance research in the Humanities at the ANU and in Australia. Each year the HRC funds a number of short-term Visiting Fellows (up to 12 weeks) to take up residence at the HRC. I was appointed a Visiting Fellow for the period September-November 2004. Scholars usually concentrate upon a particular theme of enquiry, although non-thematic scholars are also welcome. The theme for 2004 was Asia Pacific.

Asian Pacific translates concretely at the HRC and Centre for Cross Cultural Research as transculturalism in the Mauritian contexts, Korean popular culture, Chinese political posters, Buddhist art, Bhangra flows and multi-accented chats at Monday morning tea. The Conference on *Gandhi, Non-violence and Modernity* (1-3 September 2004) organized by John Docker and Debjani Ganguly at the Humanities Research Centre, which began after my orientation week at the Centre brought sharply home the gap between locals and cosmopolitans in the cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary, cross-national text that the global academia offers today. In a paper *Homegrown Wisdom: Gandhian Counter-Modernity* in a session on *Postcolonial Gandhi*, I inquire why the Nehruvian developmental paradigm was privileged over the Gandhian in the construction of the discourse on science and technology in post-independent India.

Ten weeks later, having accessed the excellent archives at ANU's Chifley, Menzies and NITA libraries and having tuned in to diverse academic voices at informal and formal presentations at the HRC, Centre for Cross Cultural Research (CCR) and ANU's other Centres and Departments, I am equipped to participate in the global cultural dialogue. In the Conferences that follow, on *Trans-National History Symposium* (8-10 October 2004) and on *Knowledge, Culture and Power: The Politics of Culture Studies in the Asia Region* (22-24 October 2004), I am able to contextualize and present local issues in a transnational intellectual context. I have had a glimpse into specific differences within Australiana, the different settler experiences and the aboriginal as reflected in literature, art, music, film, architecture and so on. The experience of new immigrants is particularly interesting, of their attempts to make a home in the new land while retaining links with the homeland. I learn about the amazing history of the one of the earliest Indian migration to Australia, which began in the middle of the nineteenth century from the authors of *Hindus and Sikhs in Australia*. I interview the Australian Bhangra artist Devinder Singh Dharia who performed at the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics at Sydney a few years ago in pure Punjabi and made contact with the Gurbani singer Dya Singh as well as members of the *Dholfoundation*, who performed at the *Womadelaide* in March 2004. I at-

tend events organized by Indian organizations in Canberra (Durga Puja) and Sydney (Diwali Mela) to understand the Indian diasporic culture.

I have had an intellectual surfeit during my Australian sojourn—reading, writing, talking, at meetings with writers and artists, conversations and discussions. I have been talking a lot the last couple of months to all who would care to listen about the global flows of Bhangra, British Punjabi film, Bollywood, the Partition of Punjab and Punjabi Migration from the North West Frontier Province. To my utter delight, I have had many in the audience pitching in on the finer nuances of Asian culture and music, Bhangra, Partition and the North West Frontier.

It has been AASA reunion, a carry-over of the conversations at the AASA Conference in Trivandrum in July 2004. I shared a couple of classes with Ralph Crane on his course on *Raj* fiction at the University of Tasmania at Hobart in the third week of September and spoke on the problems of Translating Difference in *Bend it Like Beckham*. A brief stopover in Melbourne had me comparing notes with Serge Liberman on 1947 Indian Partition and the holocaust, a dialogue that continues on the electronic media. In Sydney, I catch up with Bill Ashcroft and lecture at the University of Technology Sydney on *Bollywood Bhangra* and *After Partition* to three different groups. . . .

While I write this, I am looking forward to another view of Australia at the *Dialogues across Cultures* Conference next week at Melbourne organized by the *Centre for Indigenous Studies, Monash* and to speaking about the construction of *punjabiyat* in the Sikh Diaspora at the *Monash Asia Institute*. Before then, I wish I will have had enough time to have my fill of the lake outside my window.

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This anthology comprising papers from the inaugural conference of the Asian Association for the Study of Australia (AASA) refracts new trends in Australian studies over a range of disciplines—literature, cultural theory, education, women's studies, children's studies. Focussing on the innovative and the creative, these papers articulate perceptive insights from several eminent Australian academics and also record the burgeoning interest of Asian scholars in Australian culture. The consciousness of Australia's multicultural heritage and awareness of the ties with Asia which permeate these texts make the collection an important landmark in the emerging dialogue between Australian and Indian writers who attended the conference.

The Editors

Cynthia vanden Driesen was born in Sri Lanka and obtained a bachelor's degree in English at the (then) University of Ceylon, Peradeniya. She completed her Master's and doctoral degrees at the University of Western Australia. She teaches English, Australian and other new literatures in English at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia. Her publications include *The Novels of R.K. Narayan* (1986), *An Anthology of Australian Literature for Korean Readers*, trans. Jin Young Choi (1995), *Centering the Margins: Perspectives on Literatures in English from India, Africa, Australia* (1995), *Celebrations—Fifty Years of Australia/Sri Lanka Interactions, 1948-1998*, Co-ed. with Ian vanden Driesen (1998).

Adrian Mitchell is Associate Professor of English at the University of Sydney. His Ph.D. was from Queen's, Ontario, and he has taught at Adelaide, Vancouver and Texas. He wrote the Fiction section of the *Oxford History of Australian Literature* and edited a volume of Charles Harpur's poetry and co-edited an anthology of Colonial Australian poetry, *Bards in the Wilderness* and the *Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature*. He has written many articles on Australian literature. His current project is on Australian non-fictional prose.

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