

ASAA NEWSLETTER

Association for the Study of Australasia in Asia
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International Conference On Vanishing Borders in the age of Globalism : Australasian Perspectives
12th to 14th Dec 2011, OUCIP, India.



(LtoR) C.Vijayasree, Dr. Lachlan Brown, Nicholas Hasluck, Cynthia vanden Driesen, Anjali Roy.



Prof. S. Satyanarayana Vice-Chancellor opens the conference.

The Fifth International ASAA Conference on “Vanishing Borders in the Age of Globalism: Austral-Asian Perspectives” in collaboration with Osmania University Centre for International programmes (OUCIP). It was inaugurated by Prof. S. Satyanarayana, Vice-Chancellor, Osmania University. Prof. C. Vijayasree, Director, OUCIP, welcomed the gathering. President(Aus). Dr. Cynthia vanden Driesen spoke about ASAA – its beginnings in Sri Lanka in 1996 and its inaugural conference 1997 in Trivandrum and the years of its steady progress. Prof. Anjali Gera Roy, ASAA President (Asia), briefly discussed some aspects of the conference theme of globalization and its radical implications for the contemporary world. Guest of Honour Dr. Lachlan Strahan, Deputy High Commissioner for Australia, New Delhi, in his address touched on the bilateral relationship between India and Australia. Prof. T. Vijay Kumar, Co-Director of OUCIP proposed the vote of thanks. The inaugural session concluded with a group photograph, which will remain a good souvenir of the conference though some late arrivals from overseas (and interstate) were unfortunately, not present.

So many papers (over sixty) in three parallel sessions were presented that it was impossible for a single observer to keep track of them all. This account will focus on the highlights of the conference. The conference attracted close to 60 presenters, with as many as 20 coming from overseas (Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Singapore and Canada). The Conference featured 4 plenary sessions in addition to papers and readings by writers and academics from Australia, Canada, Austria, New Zealand and Singapore and India. Apart from the expectation of invigorating academic exchanges there were many who also looked forward to renewing friendships established over the several years of ASAA conferences, and bondings which have endured through the years--hence the references to an ‘ASAA’ family. The Papers addressed a number of themes, including (1) global culture, popular culture and modernity; (2) nation, language, indigeneity, migration and diasporic issues; (3) literary, artistic canons - formations, ruptures and reformations; gender constructions and interrogations;(4)implications for history, geography, education, environmental studies,

health, diplomacy, besides the dominant concerns of business and economics.

Nicholas Hasluck, eminent Australian writer who has combined a distinguished career in the law with a distinguished literary career, gave the Keynote Address. Alluding to Kafka’s *The Great Wall of China*, he inquired if globalisation has “transformed the nature of nation states to such an extent that politicians and the people they represent have a greatly reduced capacity to influence events”. In a deeply thoughtful presentation, he argued that “notwithstanding the tendencies associated with globalisation -its indifference to borders, its ominous presence - talk about rights and the provision of related remedies can’t be divorced from local ways and legal processes.” In the later plenary session, Amritjit Singh shared his ideas on the Asian American Diaspora, basing his discussion on his own vast personal experiences, a presentation which generated enthusiastic responses. This was followed by a number of parallel sessions. Papers on diversified explorations of the conference theme of globalisation: issues of marginalisation and identity, reconfigurations of gender, socio-economic concerns cultural and, literary issues were explored. The first day’s events closed with an elegant Dance performance by Ms. Sharvari Priya. This was followed by a dinner for all delegates hosted by OUCIP.



The highlight of Day two was the plenary address given by Bill Ashcroft, interna-

tionally reputed theorist and critic in the field of postcolonial Studies. His views on 'Vanishing Borders: Boundaries, Habitation and Transnation' outlined strategies of habitation, of ways of inhabiting bounded spaces and the existence of the transnational both of which reveal actual fluidity and instability of borders of all kinds. An interesting variation to the academic papers presented was the readings by creative writers from their own works. These took place after the paper presentations on both days two and three. Nicholas Hasluck, Serge Liberman, Githa Hariharan, Glen Phillip, Meira Chand and Julie Mehta were some of the writers who shared their works with the audience during the actual conference sessions.

Afternoon sessions were abbreviated in order to accommodate a Book Launch and the Writers' Meet both of which took place at the University of Hyderabad which collaborated with OUCIP in order to facilitate this event. All conference delegates were transported by bus to the fresh venue, a drive of almost an hour. Priti Aisola, a new young talent emerging from Hyderabad and Githa Hariharan famed Indian novelist with an international reputation joined the group of writers. The writers held the stage for over an hour and a half, reading from their work or generally discussing their views on writing and the conference theme. The Writers' Meet was compered by Professor Suneetha Rani of the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of Hyderabad. The Book Launch featured a number of speakers and was co-ordinated by Cynthia vanden Driessen. (See Accounts given below) All the conference attendees and the writers were guests of the Centre at the Dinner which followed.

On the final day, Mohan Ramanan, Dean of Humanities, University of Hyderabad kickstarted the day's proceedings with his plenary address, a thought-provoking paper on "The Local and the Global: The Future of the English Department." Many in the audience requested copies of his paper to be sent to them; so impressed were they by its intellectual content and grace of expression.

Mentioned below are some of the papers one of the observers selected as evoking particular interest throughout the three days of the conference. (Please Note: That other papers are not mentioned is no reflection on their quality, this particular observer could not

possibly attend three parallel sessions of papers each day.) Glen Phillips' evaluation of the poetry of John Kinsella, in his presentation, "John Kinsella and the Enduring Centre of the World"; Julie Mehta's views on the Asian Diaspora and allied issues in her paper titled, "Citizenship, Belonging and Terror: Diasporic Asian-Canadian Writers "Inventing" tradition through multicultural "tongues"; Arindam Das' paper on 'Ethnonationalism, Strategic Essentialism and Aboriginal Identity Formation' and another contribution of Australian Aboriginal culture in comparison with Dalit culture: "Songlines without Borders: Origin of myths of Dalits and Aboriginals" presented by K. Suneetha Rani and Ghanta Chakrapani all made for good listening. 'Islamic banking and Finance in the Global Village' by Ameer Ali was one of the few papers focusing on economic issues in a conference largely devoted to cultural and literary debates.

The work of Patrick White was the focus of a number of presentations: Bashish & Meenakshi Choubey jointly presented a paper on "Patrick White's *The Tree of man*. A melancholy longing for permanence." V. Sangeetha's paper probed the idea of 'Vanishing Cultural Identity in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* Yogita Bajaj spoke on 'The Concept of the 'Other' in the novels of Patrick White.' Interesting reconfigurations of gender issues were presented in papers by Divya N, Nishamani Kar and Advaita Kala.

Day Two: Sarbojit Biswas' 'Reading John Lang's *Wanderings in India and Other Sketches of Life in Hindostan as a Cross-Cultural text*,' and N. Bindu's paper 'Glen Phillips' Bonding through Poetry with the land Australia,' were examples of the growing familiarity with Australian literature on the part of Indian academics. Lachlan Brown's paper on Nam Le's *The Boat: Global Contexts and Identities*, and Dieter Riemenschneider's "The interface of the Local, Diasporan and Global: Some Literary Configurations by Aotearoan Indians." Overseas presenters offered good insights into the impact of globalism on aspects of education: Rita Tognini's paper, 'Combating Ecological Degradation: A case for Environmental Education' Julia Gross focused on Open access publishing in the age of globalism.

Day Three: While Professor Ramanan's plenary session was the day's highlight there were several papers of interest such as Ha-

rish Mehta's paper on Wilfred Burchett's Anti-Colonial writing during the Vietnam War and Ramesh Babu's 'Globalization: West and the Rest.', and Adi Wimmer's presentation on the works of Elizabeth Jolley

In the brief and informal valedictory session, two youthful members of ASAA Dr. Sangeetha and Dr. Bindu who have been regulars at the ASAA Conferences from 1997 on were asked to share and express their experiences of the conference just concluded. Dr. Cynthia vanden Driesen expressed her appreciation of all the efforts of the staff at OUCIP and all those who had worked to make the three-day conference a grand success. Bouquets and gifts were presented to Professors Vijayasree Chaganti and T. Vijay Kumar and other OUCIP staff. She also announced that there would be changes to the constitution and the membership of the Committee of ASAA in the not too distant future. She hoped that some of the younger members present at the gathering would take over the work of the Association which had now proved its viability over the past seventeen years. Life Membership of ASAA was awarded to Nicholas Hasluck and Bill Ashcroft. They have both afforded ASAA loyal support that goes back to the inaugural conference of 1997. Vijayasree Chaganti was also awarded the honour for her whole-hearted and friendly collaboration with ASAA in the organization of one of its most successful conferences. An important outcome of the sessions in which so many papers on Patrick White had emerged resulted in a spontaneous follow-up plan for a Patrick White Centenary conference to be held in 2012 – also in Hyderabad but this would be hosted by the University of Hyderabad. OUCIP had already contributed so much to promote the Australia – Asia dialogue. It will now be the turn of the University of Hyderabad 2012.

NOTE: The 2012 Patrick White Centenary conference will be out of the 'normal' triennial pattern of ASAA conferences. In order to continue ASAA's interdisciplinary focus, papers on other aspects of the Australia – Asia dialogue will be considered. Papers on Aboriginal issues (so important a concern of White in his later years) will be especially welcome.

Dr. V. Sangeetha, Periyar University. Salem

Dr. N. Bindu, Govt Arts College Tirrutani

Professor Anjali Roy, IIT, Kharagpur.

BOOK LAUNCH

The book publication of the last ASAA Conference, held in Sri Lanka in 2009, edited by **Cynthia and Ian vanden Driesen**, *Change, Conflict and Covergence* (Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan, 2010) was launched by Dieter Riemenschneider. (See brief Review, above)

Anjali Gera Roy, *Bhangra Moves: From Ludhiana to London and Beyond* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2010), was launched by Bill Ashcroft. Roy's *Travels of Bollywood Cinema: From Bombay to LA* (Delhi: OUP, 2012) was launched by Amritjit Singh.

Two important publications by two well-established writers present at the conference (who are also members of ASAA) were also brought to the attention of the audience by Cynthia vanden Driesen who compered the Book Launch.

Meira Chand, *A Different Sky* (New York: Harville Secker, 2010)

Nicholas Hasluck *The Dismissal* (Harper-Collins, 2011). Useful reviews of these significant books are available online.



Writers' Meet

The Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad hosted an international Writers' Meet on 13 December 2011. This was organized as part of the 5th international ASAA (Association for the Study of Australasia in Asia) conference on "Vanishing Borders in the Age of Globalism: Austral-Asian Perspectives" held in Hyderabad from 12 to 14 December. The event was compered by Dr. K. Suneetha Rani, Centre for Women's Studies, a member of the local organizing committee of the conference. Guests were driven down to the venue at the University of Hyderabad from Osmania University.

The gathering was welcomed by Dr. Deepa Sreenivas, Centre for Women's Studies and the inaugural session was chaired by Prof. Rekha Pande, Director, Centre for Women's Studies. Prof. E. Haribabu, pro-Vice-Chancellor of University of Hyderabad was the chief guest at the event. The Writers' Meet was

chaired by Dr. K. Suneetha Rani, Centre for Women's Studies.

Seven writers from different countries participated in this event. While some of them read out from their work, some others shared their experiences and views while some others analysed their translations. Priti Aisola, a poet, novelist, short story writer and a travelogue writer from Hyderabad read excerpts from her writing. Meira Chand of Indian-Swiss parentage read extracts from her works which focused on the search for identity and belonging and the fluidity of these concepts, which she held to be amongst the dominant themes of her novels. Githa Hariharan a renowned Indian writer, known for novels, short stories, essays, newspaper articles and columns as well as her work as a social activist in challenging the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act for being discriminatory against women held the audience with her feisty speech on literary and social issues.. Nicholas Hasluck well-

known novelist and former Chair of the Commonwealth Writers' Panel gave a measured and thoughtful reading from his works.

Serge Liberman, now an Australian citizen was born in Uzbekistan in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and is the author of a number of works on the Jewish diaspora and Jewish writing in Australia as well as the translator of a number of literary works from Yiddish into English. Julie Mehta from Canada has published extensively on postcolonial literatures and cultures, has translated Tagore's *Dak Ghar* into English (*The Post Office*) and works on exile and identity among diasporic novelists. Glen Phillips, from Aus-

tralia, has written over 30 short stories, a novella, children's books and more than 2000 poems. Most of these presentations were centred on women as writers, readers, translators and as a source of creation, motivation and inspiration. The event ended with a Vote of Thanks by Dr. M.N. Rajesh, Centre for Women's Studies.

All the ASAA conference attendees, along with the writers, were entertained to a dinner hosted by the Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad.

Suneetha Rani, University of Hyderabad.



Priti Aisola, Meira Chand, Gita Hariharan Serge Walberg, Julie Mehta, Glen Phillips, Nicholas Hasluck.

Glimpses ASAA Conference 2011



People and Events

Sri Lankan gets Best Novel Prize

The DSC Prize for South Asian Literature was given to Singapore-based Sri Lankan writer Shehan Karunatilaka for his novel *Chinaman*, published by Random House. The prize money of Rs. 25 lakhs was awarded to the author on 24 January at Jaipur LitFest, with Kabir Bedi as the host. *Chinaman* is a novel that explores cricket as a metaphor to uncover a lost life and a lost history. It skilfully uses sport and the notion of fair play to look at Sri Lanka in a fresh and exciting way.

International Conference in New Delhi

Sixth international IASA Conference was held at New Delhi on the theme "Australia and India: Market Economy, Ethics and Empowerment" on 19-21 January 2012. Special lectures were delivered by Australian High Commissioner in New Delhi H.E. Peter Varghese and Professor Gillian Whitlock, Board Member, AIC. Other participants included Paul Sharrad and Meeta Chatterjee (Wollongong), Peter Mayer and Amy Cleland (Adelaide).

Commonwealth Conference in Patna

The next Commonwealth Conference will be held at Patna University, Patna, on 29 September-1 October 2012. Theme: Commonwealth Literature: New Dimensions. New Literatures, being produced in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Africa, Canada and Australia are both varied and rich. The three-day conference will take stock of contemporary Commonwealth writing and critically assess its contribution to the world literature. As the conference is interdisciplinary and comparative in its import, papers are welcome from sister disciplines/ departments on themes having a close bearing on the following sub-themes: (a) Indian Diasporic Writing (b) Women's Writing (c) Adivasi and Aboriginal Writings (d) Protest in African & African-American Literatures (e) Literatures of

the Indian Subcontinent. Papers are welcome on any of the sub-themes of the conference. The list of the themes is only illustrative, not exhaustive. Participants therefore can write papers on any theme of their choice, relating it to the broad theme. Duration of the paper will be 15-20 minutes, followed by discussion. The intending participants may send in their abstracts (200-250 words) to the conveners: Professor Indibar Mukherjee, dr.indibar@gmail.com and Dr. R.K. Dhawan, rkdhawan@gmail.com. Enquiries about the conference may be addressed to Secy ISCS: iscstudies@gmail.com

BOOKS BY MEMBERS

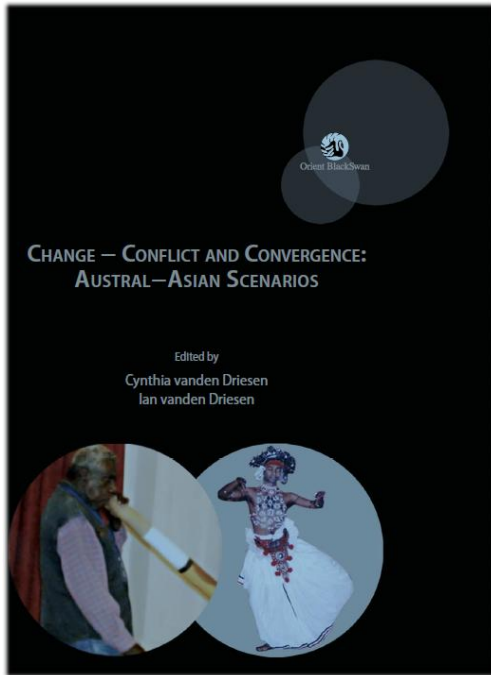
K. Suneetha Rani, *Flowering from the Soil: Dalit Women's Writing* (New Delhi: Prestige, 2012)

The book presents a collection of poems, short stories, and prose writings by Dalit women in Telugu, translated and compiled by Suneetha Rani. Their voices speak to the oppressed and protest the conditions of social oppression. Their writing is a crucial part of the aesthetic of resistance and self-affirmation. The resonances of the voices in this book speak beyond the borders of Telugu, India, to the wider world.

REVIEW

Jörg-Dieter Riemenschneider

***Change – Conflict and Convergence: Austral-Asian Scenarios*, ed. Cynthia van den Driesen, Ian van den Driesen, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan Private Ltd., 2010, 372 pp. ISBN 978-81-250-4219-8**



The present volume of about three dozen articles by scholars from Australia, Sri Lanka, India, Reunion, Malaysia, Spain and Canada represents a celebration of both an international and an interdisciplinary discourse on a topic which appears more relevant in the present age of increasing globalisation than ever before. There hardly any longer exists a spot on the globe that has not been affected by increasingly rapid changes of a diverse and multiply interconnected nature – be it in the political or economic sphere, socially or ecologically. And it is precisely in the dialectical opposition of conflict and convergence that change manifests itself. Scholars and critics assembled at the ASAA conference in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in November 2008, address this topic from as different angles as literature, history, fine arts and culture studies, sociology, political science and economics, psychology, anthropology and communication theory. Among participants we also come across a number of creative writers as well as civil servants and diplomats.

The important role of Australia at past ASAA conferences did not change sub-

stantially at the Kandy get-together since nearly every second article either related to Australia and/or was presented by a scholar residing there. Happily, topoi on the host country are not only addressed by participants ‘from home’ but also from Canada, Spain and even Iceland, lending the conference theme an international flair which is underpinned by several papers focusing on ‘The International Scene’ and by Chelva Kanaganayakam’s overarching discussion of “Post-Coloniality and Aesthetics”.

Editing an – at first sight – veritable mixture of Austral-Asian Scenarios must have been no easy task, and to choose a geographical grid was perhaps the least controversial solution to topics that range from Keith Truscott’s “The Rudd Apology: An Indigenous View” which opens the first section, “Change: The Australian Context”, to the Sri Lanka-born Arny Henriksson talking about ‘Post-colonial Iceland’ and the country’s most famous literary figure Haldor Kiljan Laxness that concludes an exciting and at times provocative assembly of essays bearing testimony to the continuing vitality of AASA and the dedication of its members, its conference organizers and editors of their publications. *Change – Conflict and Convergence* recommends itself to any reader, critic and scholar of transcultural studies who focuses in particular on the history and culture of the two ‘islands’ of Australia and Sri Lanka.

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Association for Australasian Studies in Asia is an international organization that aims at promoting Australian and New Zealand studies in Asia. To promote wider interest in Australasian studies, the Association organizes seminars, conferences and brings out periodic newsletters. The last international conference of the Association was held in Hyderabad. It organized conferences in Mysore, Trivandrum and Kandy, Sri Lanka. Conference papers, each time, have been brought out in book form. Scholars interested in Australian and New Zealand Studies are welcome to join the Association.

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