

Dec 2009

ASAA Newsletter Dec 2009

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Remembering Meenakshi Mukherjee

Tribute 1

To Professor Meenakshi Mukherjee, with love!

Meenakshi Mukherjee, a name synonymous with Indian Literatures including Indian English Writing for more than five decades, is no more. She passed away on the 16th of September 2009. The news came as a shock to her family, friends, students and innumerable admirers. Meenakshi-di, as most of her younger associates fondly called her, will no longer respond to their affectionate greeting — truth hard to be digested. That smiling face, encouraging word and enabling support is gone forever — how do we cope with this loss? This is the question well writ on the agonized faces of her associates — disciples, I should say, since she was not merely a teacher but guru to most of them. I have not figured out an answer to this question, even today, nearly two months after her sudden demise. I keep going back to the last two meetings where I had the good fortune to share the dais with her — one on September 14th when Githa Hariharan's latest novel was introduced at a Book shop in Hyderabad, and the other on the 15th September where Meenakshi-di chaired the key-note talk at a seminar I organized at Osmania University. When I saw her off after the inaugural function, little did I suspect that I was saying my last good-bye to my friend, philosopher and guide for two decades.

I was not a direct student of hers; my first contact with Meenakshi-di was through her path-breaking work on Indian Writing in English — *Twice Born Fiction*, on which I drew liberally as a student. When I got to know her nearly a decade later she was already a celebrity among Indian academics and had made a name for herself on the international scene as well. I approached her nervously to discuss the topic for my doctoral dissertation and in that very first meeting I was completely overawed by her scholarship, simplicity, and generosity.

The best time I spent with Meenakshi-di was the 9 year stint as Secretary of IACLALS (Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies) which she was heading as the Chair. IACLALS had no office; all its meetings were held at Meenakshi-di's. These meetings went on for hours though the business never lasted beyond a brief 30 minutes. The rest of our chat was filled with exciting exchanges including literary talk, film news, cookery recipes and local gossip. Meenakshi-di always had the most current news in every thing and she ensured uninterrupted

supply of tea, snacks and Bengali sweets during these sessions which became even more exciting when Sujit Mukherjee – Sujit-da to us—joined us during the long tea-breaks on the proviso that IACLALS would strictly be kept out of tea-time talk. This couple, really made for each other, knew how to live life drinking every drop of it with relish and any body that came into contact with them would not leave without learning a lesson or two about how to be happy and make people around them happy.



Meenakshi-di will of course be remembered by later generations for her many books — *Considerations: Twelve Studies of Indian Literature in English* (1977), *Realism and Reality: the Novel and Society in India* (1985), *Another India* (1990), *The Perishable Empire* (2000) *Early Novels in India* (2002), *An Indian for All Seasons* (2009) and for being one of the architects who shaped the discipline of Indian Literatures. But her friends and associates will also remember her with love and gratitude for her generosity in sharing her scholarship with the academic community. Above everything else, the most amazing aspect of her personality was the way she managed to wear her scholarship so lightly. Unassuming, objective, open for alternative views, ever ready to teach as well as learn – she embodied the true spirit of academe. At seminars it was always educative to see her listen intently to the youngest of presenters, making copious notes, initiating a discussion on the presentation and offering candid suggestions. Her presence itself radiated grace, and the vacuum left behind by her will be felt at all academic events for a long time to come.

I can only sum up Meenakshi-di in Tennyson's words on Hallam since these aptly describe her:

A life that all the Muses decked
With gifts of grace, that might express
All comprehensive tenderness,
All-subtilising intellect:

C.Vijayasree
Osmania
University
Hyderabad



EACLALS Conference 2005: (left to right) Isabel Carrera (Oviedo), Cynthia (Perth), Vijaysree Chaganti (Hyderabad), Carla Commelini (Trieste), Hena Maes-Jelinek (Liege), Meenakshi Mukherjee (Hyderabad), Shirley Chew (Leeds), Katie Gramich (Bath).

Tribute 2

Meenakshi Mukherjee, 72, passed away suddenly on September 2009 at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Hyderabad. She died at the airport, on her way to New Delhi to attend the release of her latest book, *An Indian for All Seasons: The Many Lives of R.C. Dutt*. One might say that Mukherjee was herself an 'Indian for all seasons' as a literary figure in the Indian academia— a teacher, scholar and critic. She was a versatile scholar, a pioneer in the field of research, having written extensively on Indian literature and the history of the novel in India. She is best known for her critical works *The Twice-Born Fiction* (1971) and *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (1985). In 2003, she received the Sahitya Akademi (Academy of Letters) award for *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*. A characteristic quality of her work, as is evident in this work, is that it reflects the predilections and concerns of her own country.

Mukherjee taught at a number of universities — Patna, Pune, Delhi and Hyderabad. Her longest stint was as Professor of English at School of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. It was mainly during this period that she achieved eminence as a critic and scholar. She was Visiting Professor at many universities abroad, including the University of Chicago, University of California at Berkeley and University of Texas at Austin.

After active teaching, she along with her husband, an eminent scholar and critic, settled down in Hyderabad. Her husband, Sujit, who died a few years ago, was a delightful company. He had a subtle sense of humour and was known for his witty remarks on writers and writing. Mukherjees were at home in Hyderabad, a city known for its mild culture and temperate weather.

I first met Mukherjee in the 1970s as a colleague when she taught English at one of the elite colleges, Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi. We often discussed common subjects, especially the Indian English novel, which we felt had not received sufficient attention from critics and academics. This was long before Salman Rushdie received the Booker Prize for his *Midnight's Children*. In a letter written to me in 1981, when she was teaching at the University of Hyderabad, she hailed the publication of *Midnight's Children* and said that the novel was a landmark in the annals of Indian English literature and would pave

the way for a rich crop of literature in this area. How perceptive a critic she was, we can judge it now, the Indian English novel has made great strides since then.

Mukherjee made a remarkable contribution to the field of the Indian English novel, for which she will always be remembered. She championed the cause of Indian writing at a time when it was a plant of poor growth. It was a time when British literature was the canon, and all other literatures — African, Indian and other Commonwealth writings — were on the margins. Her stupendous literary research, *The Twice-Born Fiction*, gave a great fillip to studies of the Indian novel in English in India. There was an awakening amongst scholars; they realized the importance of India's own literature. They felt that Indians were under no moral obligation to study British literature alone. We, she argued, need not question the validity of Indian English literature, for it truly represents the diverse cultures, ethnic affiliations and aspirations of the Indian people.

C.D. Narasimhaiah, a well-known Indian critic, in his seminal book, *Moving Frontiers of English Studies*, strongly pleads for the need to project Indian sensibility in literary criticism. Indian includes the question of expressing our national identity and asserting our self-respect through a legitimate recognition of the genius of India. It may be said of Meenakshi Mukherjee that she not only projected Indian sensibility in her criticism but also emphasized the need to highlight native tradition in literature. The great advantage an Indian English text enjoys in our classroom over any British or American text is that the student has direct access to the culture surrounding the text, even outside the classroom. Readers can be persuaded to see the text not only as something printed on a page but as something related to them in real life as well. When the cultural connotations of a text pose no barriers, the learner can grapple directly with the language of the text.

As a critic, Mukherjee may be classed in the category of liberal humanists. She stated her point of view without any radicalism or aggression. This was perhaps her strength as a critic. Her modesty as a person and as a critic will keep alive her intellectual presence in literary circles and we shall always cherish her memory.

R.K. Dhawan
University of Delhi

Forthcoming Events

Diaspora Space: Voices and Voyages 20-22 February 2010

Jamshedpur Women's College, is organizing an Interdisciplinary International Conference on the theme of "Diaspora Space: Voices and Voyages" on 20-22 Feb 2010. The flyer enlarges on the theme as follows:

"Travelling with the baggages of different ideologies, memories and myth, speaking out from the zones of silences, Diaspora has forged out a new definition of 'Space', creating an urge for mooring in Postcolonial global culture. And, this urge connects directly to the concept of World Citizenry. The Voyage that ends nowhere, the voice that has underpinnings of paradoxical paradigms of connecting itself in local/national/global frameworks, offer various points of interrogation and interventions. Hence, from local to global is the journey that this Conference wants to map out through discussions and deliberations."

Send 20 minute paper proposals or panel proposals consisting of three papers along with 50 words bio data of Presenter(s). Last Dates: 30th October 2009 (for abstracts) 30th November 2009 (for full paper) to Dr Keya Mazumdar, email: keyawho_08@yahoo.co.in.

Dr. Suman Bala is assisting the Conference Committee. There will be a special session devoted to Australian Studies at the conference. Keya Mazumdar has always been a faithful attendee at ASAA Conferences over the years and is a member of the Indian Committee.

Challenges of Diversity: Literature and Culture 22-24 January 2010

The Centre for Indo-Australian Studies & Department of English, Dayanand College, Ajmer, are organizing IV Biennial International Conference on Challenges of Diversity: Literature and Culture (Australia & India) on 22-24 January 2010.

Diversity and multiculturalism must be perceived as being the two basic planks of globalisation. A study of literatures of the two countries Australia and India does provide us with a knowledge of cosmopolitanism as reflected in the contemporary works by Australian and Indian creative writers. A global message of peaceful coexistence and interdependence is intended to be sent through the proposed conference to the wider community of readers and scholars and social legislators of mankind at large.

Abstracts of 200 words may be sent by 1 December 2009 to pradeeptrikha@gmail.com or sharma_anuraag@yahoo.com.

2010 ACSANZ Conference 5-7 July 2010

The 2010 Biennial Conference of the Association for Canadian Studies of Australia and New Zealand (ACSANZ) will be held on July 5-7, 2010 at the University of New England in Armidale. Conference Convenor: Dr Jim Maher emaher@pobox.une.edu.au.

Annual Asia-Pacific Week Conference and Summer School, Canberra 8-11 February 2010

This annual event at the Australian National University brings together hundreds of PhD candidates from Australia and overseas to workshop projects, to benefit from master classes and to form networks committed to understanding the world's most dynamic region.

Intersections of Area, Cultural and Media Studies Workshop, Canberra 25-26 March 2010

Hosted by the Southeast Asian Centre of the Faculty of Asian Studies, the Australian National University, the workshop represents collaboration between the Southeast Asia Centre and the Australian National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA). The workshop coincides with the screening of a selection of new cinematic works from Southeast Asia by the NFSA. For further details contact: Kirrilee Hughes.

Contextualising Geographica Approaches to Studying Gender in Asia, University of Delhi 3-5 March 2010

An international seminar organised by the Department of Geography, University of Delhi, and the College of Asia and the Pacific, ANU, with the support of the International Geographical Union. Contact Anindita Datta or Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt.

In The Image of Asia: Moving Across and Between Locations Conference, Canberra 13-15 April 2010

This interdisciplinary conference explores how 'Asia' has been imagined, imaged, represented and transferred visually across linguistic, geopolitical and cultural boundaries. It aims to challenge established assumptions (and consumptions) of cultural products of 'Asia', from arts, artefacts and film to performance.

Reading Dutch for Historical Research - Intensive Residential Course, Kangaroo Island, 14 June - 3 July 2010

Open to academics, professionals and current and intending postgraduate students. Participants in the course will receive instruction in reading Dutch historical texts, especially from the period 1850–1950. There will be some attention to correct pronunciation, but no formal teaching of conversational Dutch. Completing participants should be able to read complex academic and bureaucratic Dutch texts with the aid of a dictionary. Call for applications close 31 January 2010. Contact Helen McMartin for more info.

AASA Biennial Conference, Adelaide 6–8 July 2010

The 18th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia will be held at the University of Adelaide. Its theme is 'Asia: Crisis and Opportunity'. See the conference website for further details and call for papers and panels.

In Memory of Hena Maes-Jelinek 24-26 March 2010

A conference is being organised as a special tribute to Hena Maes-Jelinek, by the members of the ACLALS Board (Geoffrey Davis, Marc Delrez, Bénédicte Ledent). It will take place at Cumberland Lodge, a prestigious conference centre of which Hena was very fond, located in Great Windsor Park, just outside London (<http://www.cumberlandlodge.ac.uk/>). The dates which have now been confirmed are Wednesday 24th of March to Friday 26th March 2010.

It will be focused largely around issues arising from her work, particularly on Caribbean and Australian writing. Friends and colleagues of Hena interested in participating were invited to indicate their interest by end of May 2009.

Food for Thought 1-5 February 2010

"Food for Thought" is the imaginative, open-ended theme of an international interdisciplinary conference organised by Dr. Susan Ballyn, the intrepid director of The Australian Studies Centre, University of Barcelona.

Guest Writer from ASAA Conference Kandy, Sri Lanka, featured in Time Magazine, Aug 17 2009.



Meira Chand's Short List

A Singapore-based writer of Swiss and Indian ethnicity, 65-year-old Meira Chand grew up in postwar England and lived for a time in Japan, where she set four of her seven novels. Her eighth, to be published by Random House in early 2010, charts the lives of three families—Indian, Chinese and Eurasian—in Singapore from the 1920s to the political riots of 1956, which prefigured Singapore's independence. "I saw the same story again and again," Chand says of her research for the book. "It was the story of survival and reinvention."

HE. Peter Varghese - Appointed Australian High Commissioner to India

HE Mr. Peter Varghese, has succeeded HE Mr. John McCarthy as the new Australian High Commissioner to India. Mr Varghese stated (24 September 2009), on his arrival at New Delhi that Australia is committed to strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries - Australia and India. He said: "Over 1,000,000 people of Indian origin have made Australia their home. They live peacefully and harmoniously with migrant communities from different parts of the world." Australia, he added, looks forward to work constructively with India on a range of issues including the G20, climate change and the Doha Round. Mr. Varghese, said that the Australian government has "zero tolerance" against racial violence and was taking appropriate measures to deal with the situation with regard to the recent incidents reported against overseas students.

Mr. Peter Varghese is of Indian descent (parents hail from Kerala) and is an enthusiastic cricket fan. He said he understood "some Malayalam" but could not speak it fluently and would be working on improving his knowledge of Hindi.

New Releases

Writing the Nation: Patrick White and the Indigene

by **Cynthia vanden Driesen**

"A valuable contribution to Australian literature scholarship...has made me rethink many aspects of White's work"

John McLaren, ASAL Conference July 2009, Australian National University Canberra.

"A thoughtful book; an important book on important issues."

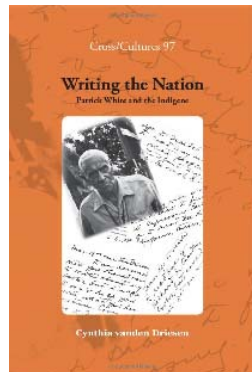
Fred Chaney, AO, Perth May 2009.

Cynthia vanden Driesen teaches Australian and postcolonial literature in the Faculty of Education and Arts at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia.

Online info: <http://www.rodopi.nl/senj.asp?BookId=CC+97>

Rodopi: Amsterdam/New York, NY 2009. XXXVI, 207 pp.

ISBN: 978-90-420-2516-5, Bound €50, US\$73

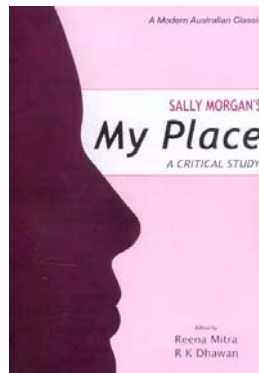


Sally Morgan's My Place: A Critical Study

by **Reena Mitra & R.K. Dhawan, ed.**

My Place is perhaps the best known text by an Australian indigenous writer and has had an immense appeal for readers the world over. In it, the reader is imperceptibly drawn into Sally's quest for her lost identity and follows closely the course of events that leads to her outrage at past injustices and humiliations inflicted on the community as a whole. The present volume makes an attempt to explicate the text and also analyses various interpretations it offers.

ISBN: 81-7851-051-0 Rs. 400



Apology

The publication of the papers from the ASAA Conference held in Sri Lanka (December 2007) is unavoidably delayed. Due to unavoidable circumstances, the Sri Lanka conference publication will not appear till June 2010.

From Previous ASAA Conferences

New Directions in Australian Studies (1997)

edited by **Cynthia vanden Driesen & Adrian Mitchell**

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. Focusing 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.

ISBN: 81-7551-084-6 485pp. Rs. 700 US \$30

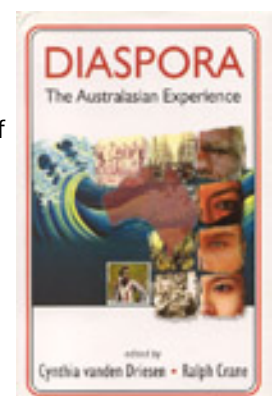


Austral-Asian Encounters: From Literature and Women's Studies to Politics and Tourism (2003)

edited by **Cynthia vanden Driesen & Satendra Nandan**

This collection of papers signals the emergence of innovative developments in Australian Studies. In the area of cultural theory some of the brightest talents from Australia, New Zealand and India theorize the fresh insights emerging through exploration of the commonalities of the shared colonial and postcolonial experience of these regions. The addition of perspectives from New Zealand to this Second-World / Third-World dialogue is another of the highlights of this volume. While on the literary scene new figures move into focus, fresh developments in other disciplines are highlighted: politics, diplomacy, tourism and even science show interactions across a whole range of areas. In the widening of its scope and deepening of its focus, this book adds a unique dimension to Australian studies.

ISBN: 81-7551-131-1 480pp. Rs. 700



DIASPORA: The Australasian Experience (2005)

edited by Cynthia vanden Driesen & Ralph Crane

The perennially engaging theme of diaspora has acquired an increasing, even an alarming resonance in the contemporary world. This collection of writings from Australia, New Zealand, India and Singapore straddles disciplines ranging from Literature, Media, and the Social Sciences to Computing and Library Studies. The medley of voices combines to illuminate a topic which must surely be one of the most challenging in current intellectual debates the world over. It is aerated also with insightful contributions from creative artists. The varied issues are probed with unusual depth and perspicacity, partly because while some of the contributors are recognized experts in the field, others are exciting new talents testing their strengths in the field of international scholarship.

ISBN: 81-7551-176-1 544 pp. A\$ 30 Rs. 900

ASAA Travellers

Glen Phillips travelling in China and Spain

Glen Phillips has been travelling in China and Spain attending conferences on Australian Studies.



Glen Phillips EASA Conference 2009, Majorca, Spain.



Shanghai Australian Culture Week Launch: (left to right) Interpreter; Cathy, Glen Phillips (ECU), Clive Barstow (ECU), Dorothy Zhou (lecturer Art History, SSTU).



Professor Ye Shengnian (former director Aus.Studies Centre, USST), Prof Clive Barstow (HoS Communications and Contemporary Arts, ECU), Assoc Prof Glen Phillips (ECU), Prof Lu Le (Dean, College of Foreign Languages USST).

Mad About Bollywood in Singapore

Anjali Gera Roy visited the Asia Research Institute National Institute of Singapore on a two-year Senior Research Fellowship in 2008-2009 where she was attached to the Cultural Studies Cluster to work on a project on Bollywood's Transnational Flows.

In addition to participating in Panel Discussions, Workshops and Conferences, she gave talks at the Asia Research Institute, South Asian Studies Programme, the Department of English and the Department of Sociology National University of Singapore during her visit.

With her cluster leader Professor Chua Beng Huat, she organized a Seminar cum Workshop From Bombay to LA: The Travels of Bollywood Cinema on 9th and 10th February 2009, an exhibition on the History and Travels of Indian Cinema and a Panel Discussion on Mad About Bollywood at the National Library at Esplanade.

Apart from formal exchanges and interactions with a wide range of scholars from across the world, she engaged in fruitful conversations with academics, creative persons and policymakers. She had the opportunity of working closely with the renowned historian Anthony Reid, geographer Lily Kong, cultural studies scholar Chua Beng Huat, Singapore poet Edwin Thumboo and novelist Meira Chand.

As the Asia Research Institute had a strong Australian presence at the time, she also made and renewed contacts from Down Under such as with historians Geoff Wade, Vera Mackie, and sociologist Gavin Jones.

She made two visits to Australia from Singapore to present an invited paper on "Singh is King: the Movement of Sikhs in the Indian Ocean" in an International Conference on Intercolonial Networks; Oceanic Circulations: Re-Thinking The Indian Ocean in the University of Technology at Sydney in Sydney ifrom 11-13 March 2009 and to deliver a talk on "One Land, Many Nations" at a Special Seminar on Special Seminar Promised Lands organized by the History Program Colonial and Post-colonial Histories at La Trobe University Melbourne on 26 March 2009

Reproduced below is a Review of the three substantial previous volumes of ASAA /conference publications written by distinguished scholar Dieter Riemenschneider - a feat of considerable scholarship. Acknowledgments are made to the Editor of Asiatic and to Professor Riemenschneider for permission to publish the review in full.

Asiatic, Vol. 2, No. 2, December 2008

Australia in Asia – Asia in Australia: An Intercontinental Cultural Discourse

Jörg-Dieter Riemenschneider¹

Frankfurt, Germany

Cynthia vanden Driesen and Adrian Mitchell, eds. *New Directions in Australian Studies. Papers of the Inaugural Conference of the Asian Association for the Study of Australia (AASA): "Creative Configurations," Kerala, India, 1997.* New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2000. ISBN: 81-7551-084-6.

Cynthia vanden Driesen and Satendra Nandan, eds. *Austral-Asian Encounters: From Literature and Women's Studies to Politics and Tourism.* New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2003, 440pp. ISBN: 81-7551-131-1.

Cynthia vanden Driesen and Ralph Crane, eds. *Diaspora: The Australasian*

Experience. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2005. ISBN: 81-7551-176-1.

In December 2007 the Association for the Study of Australasia in Asia (AASA) published a "Special Issue" of its AASA Newsletter to celebrate more than ten years of its existence and to announce its fourth conference to be held in Colombo, in December 2008. Looking back to more than a dozen years of conferences, publications and the establishment of ever-closer links among scholars from Australia, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Singapore and New Zealand, the Association's inaugural meeting in Colombo in 1995 deserves to be remembered and celebrated by having members return again to its founding city.

The "Special Issue" of the AASA Newsletter contains a wealth of information on the development of the organisation apart from references to conferences and meetings, reports on publications and exchange programmes, lists and photographs of many members, addresses and obituaries and a brief interview with Cynthia vanden Driesen, President of the ASAA and without doubt one of its most if not the most active member. She points out that born in Sri Lanka but having taught in Australia for many years, she considers it of prime importance to improve the "understanding of Australian culture in Asian countries" as most "Asians do not perceive anything distinctive about Australian culture," while a better understanding would "take the edge off the tensions that periodically surface between Australia and her Asian neighbours." She therefore pleads to set up Australian Studies centres in Asia to assist in promoting an "intercultural understanding within our region."

An outside observer like myself would be more than interested in being told a bit more about the connotations of "intercultural" because the impression I have gained from going through three conference volumes is that the promotion of knowledge of Australia in Asian countries is not matched by a reverse promotion of Asian countries in Australia. I may be mistaken since the Newsletter after all does not only refer to Asian scholars visiting Australia but also tells us about the three important conferences that took place in India with the 2008 Colombo conference coming up in Sri Lanka: all of them are certainly wonderful opportunities for Australian visitors to share their ideas, views and writing with their hosts, but certainly similarly great occasions for them to also listen to their hosts.

To probe into the Association's engagement in furthering an intercultural – an intercontinental dialogue – or to put it in today's scholar speak, discourse, it cannot but be instructive to have a look at the three conference volumes published between 2000 and 2005, albeit, I shall merely glance at them and offer brief comments rather than closely examine almost 1500 pages: a documentation that in itself is an astonishing achievement in black and white, immaculately produced by Prestige Books in New Delhi and immensely carefully edited by Cynthia vanden Driesen and her co-editors, Adrian Mitchell, Satendran Nandan and Ralph Crane, respectively.

Here I notice that a group of dedicated scholars has evolved who together with the editors have formed a consistent and dependable centre of Asian-Australian studies over the years. Names like Bill Ashcroft, Kateryna Longley, K. Radha, R. Kamala, R.K. Dhawan or Glen Phillips re-occur, as do those, incidentally, of several universities like Murdoch, Edith Cowan, Delhi, or Sydney or the Universities of Kerala, Canberra or New South Wales. But let me proceed by spelling out my observations on the first volume that was based on the 1997 Kerala conference on "Creative Configurations" and is entitled *New Directions in Australian Studies*.²

Apart from "Acknowledgements" and vanden Driesen's "Introduction," the book contains three dozen contributions including three "Keynote Addresses." It is rounded off by biographical notes on "Indian Writers at Conference" and "Authors from Australia," participants who read from their work. Arranged in seven sections, papers written by Australian and Indian scholars, including several who were residing and teaching in Australia, and one or the other from Bangladesh and Spain, address a wide range of topics which the editors have subsumed under the book's title, *New Directions in Australian Studies*. I'd like to ask straight away, whether these essays actually fulfil our expectations of pointing out, developing or offering "new directions." Not all do, I think, and some do not seem to mind that they

don't. Which, of course, raises the question why the editors did not stay with the conference theme. Does not the double claim of "new directions" and "Australian Studies" raise expectations as to the Association's academic objectives, its geographical epicentre(s) and its envisaged scholarly membership? Perhaps an answer is to be found in the AASA Newsletter of December 2007. The inaugural meeting of scholars, it says, took place in Colombo in 1995 (at the time of the Triennial Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, ACLALS) and was followed by setting-up the first Australian Studies Institute in India at the University of Kerala. Almost two years later, in January 1997, the Asian Association for the Study of Australia (as it was called initially) held its first conference in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. It appears then that both an Indian, or better a South Asian interest in Australian Studies formed the basis of these undertakings because apart from its organiser, Professor Radha, it was due to Cynthia vanden Driesen's initiative of creating the link with Australia. As an additional observation, it does not appear coincidental that quite a few scholars from Western Australian universities participated in the inaugural conference who are duly represented in the present volume: a fact that may have caused the Association to rename itself now as The Asian/Australasian Association for the Study of Australia. But to return to *New Directions in Australian Studies*.

Many Australian participants, as indicated, focus their attention on their own literature and culture encompassing such topics as approaching and defining it from methodological perspectives or focusing on one of three text corpora: Aboriginal, migrant and female writing. Such critical concerns direct our attention to the ongoing taxonomic process of grounding the term "Australian."³ Questions raised refer on the one hand to possible links between Asia and Australia (35), the perspective of overcoming national borderlines under conditions of globalism (56), or the relationship of popular and high culture (68). On the other hand, it is being argued that the term "Aboriginality" requires further reflection vis-à-vis the Mudrooroo "affair" (135); that distinctions need to be kept in mind between male and female

Aboriginal writing (142); and that the role of the media in employing racial stereotypes requires close observation (151). And as far as the contribution of (im)migrants towards shaping Australian literature goes, comparative studies offer as interesting insights (201) as women's writing opens new perspectives on the "Australian" vis-à-vis the postcolonial experience (281-83).

Nevertheless and by contrast, the volume also contains less "narrowly" centred Australian literature papers. For example, the important issue of relating Australian Studies to the outside world, especially to neighbouring Asia, is taken up by critics of such long-standing as Dennis Haskell and Adrian Mitchell even if they focus on the works of just a

single writer (Bruce Dawe and J. Koch, respectively). And Asian scholars make their presence also felt here by responding to Australian writing and criticism on Indian, Asian and European "topics" or to the (literary) reception of Australia. Yet in spite of all this, it appears to me, it is no more than a tentative beginning of an intercontinental critical discourse, which incidentally reminds me of an earlier attempt that can be read up in the special issue of *Australian Literary Studies* on "European Perspectives."⁴ Does the next volume then offer an answer as to whether and how the Association has followed Cynthia vanden Driesen's wish to bring(ing) Asia and Australia closer?

Based on the "Austral-Asian Encounters" conference held in Mysore in September 2000, the Association's second publication, as voluminous as the previous one, was released in 2003 and encompasses a much wider range of topics than the previous collection. Carefully edited and printed, it testifies to the ongoing if not increased interest of Indian, Asian and Australian scholars as well as of various educational and ministerial institutions to expand the field of Asian-Australian cultural cooperation. Dedicated to Anna Rutherford (1932-2000), whose presence in Mysore is being noted here as her last attendance at an international conference, the Association's driving forces have now, it appears, created a firmer and much broader basis for an enriching intercultural exchange by having drawn in participants from areas outside literary studies. This, I feel, has proved an important step towards creating a sound platform for an Asian-Australian cultural discourse.

In contrast to the previous volume, *Austral-Asian Encounters* is headed by "Tributes," here to three recently deceased outstanding literary figures: A.D. Hope and Judith Wright from Australia and R.K. Narayan from India, and instead of "Keynote Addresses" we are now being presented with "Overviews" that draw our attention to the expanded agenda of the Mysore conference on "Bi-Partisan Relationship(s)" by respective comments on its/their historical, diplomatic and political nature. Each of the five presentations aims at contextualising this relationship by supplying us with facts, figures and views on historical and political events of the recent past as well as by pointing out lacunae that need to be addressed in future. Another new feature is the remarkably close connection between academic papers and their author's personal involvement in their projects that mark many contributions; a fact, which I feel, is especially noteworthy in Lekkie Hopkin's "Working with Poststructuralist Feminist Theories of Difference: Making Connections between India and Australia," and in the presentation of a natural scientific analysis. Here, "The Genetic Perspective on the South Indian Tradition of Consanguineous Marriage" introduces a research topic that could very well be employed with reference to other regions, countries and cultures and would create a sound basis for comparative "nature-culture" studies. Finally, four New Zealand contributions represent a perhaps dubious

geographical widening of Austral-Asia. Though no convincing reasons are given, I am certain that the discussion of works by various New Zealand literary and film figures is not a late attempt at incorporating the country into Australia. But the widening of the field takes us back to the question of the Association's understanding of its own status and goals. For example, could the term "Australasia" perhaps enclose not merely New Zealand but also the South Pacific which, after all, is represented by Chris Griffin's stimulating paper on "Tribe, Indigene and Nation: Towards a Comparative Analysis of Aboriginal India, Australia and Fiji"? I think that the process of further reflecting on the Association's geographical-cultural parameters has not come to an end; the more so since the pursuit of cross-cultural studies is deeply rooted in our present-day general concern with migration, including the specific situation of Asian immigrants not only in Australia but also in the adjacent territory of New Zealand. Under these circumstances, would it not be worthwhile asking whether the Association's geographical orientation should not be subsumed to the overarching issue of crosscultural studies?

Returning to the book's seven sections following "The New Zealand Contribution" we are back on the familiar ground of the previous conference's collection of papers as we encounter Indian commentaries on Australian Literature and Australian responses to Indian literature; further, essays on Asian-Australian and on Aboriginal writing; on Australian writing on India and on contributions of a more general theoretical nature. These neatly drawn boundary lines are only abandoned towards the end when a few "less-classifiable" essays are assembled under the heading of "Expanding Horizons: Science, Social Anthropology, Tourism": a veritable collection of diverse approaches and topics ranging from genetics via tourism and research methodology to questions of poetic identity. But then "horizon" signifies a diversity of signs quite appropriately.

As there is no space to comment on each and every one of the 35 pieces, I shall confine myself to a few examples, and here I would like to point at comparative studies as particularly inviting and cross-culturally relevant; for example, Suneetha Rani's comparison of Dalit and Aboriginal poetry, or Bill Ashcroft's juxtaposition of Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* and Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*.

Both papers highlight cultural differences as well as enquire into possibilities of bridging them by directing our attention to common anthropological features and characteristics that may very well create a sustainable basis for a mutual crosscultural understanding. Of much interest also and even excitingly so because of its sustained archival pursuit, I found Chandani Lokuge's research into nineteenth century Indian women writing in English because the author questions and corrects often repeated and subsequently copied judgements on their work; judgements, Lokuge

demonstrates, more noteworthy for their inaccuracy than an in-depth research pursued over half a century. Adrian Mitchell's thesis of shared attitudes and values and "way of life" among the professional class of administrators in nineteenth century Australia and India (306), which he explores by looking at John Lang's writings of the 1850s, is yet another example of historically-oriented research of a comparative nature that strikes me as a hitherto neglected field within the ambience of the "new" English language literatures. Last but not least, the juxtaposition of John Gates's deconstruction if not ruthless demolition of the *Lonely Planet* version of India and Carmel Kelly's "Mysore" offer a fortuitous opportunity of comparison. While Gates reminds us yet again of the effectiveness of the colonial or Western discourse on "the other," an effectiveness that appears totally unaffected by our critical endeavour in postcolonial deconstructive strategies, it would be interesting to hear of readers' responses to Kelly's poems.

My focusing on comparative studies should not push other papers to the periphery, among them those dealing with the relationship and a possible definition of one's own minority situation, place, difficulties, understanding and literary task, which is being spelt out in terms of caste, class or "ethnic" background: a problem facing ever so many immigrants from Asia in Australia but also Indian writers.

Ralph Crane's discussion of Hugh Atkinson's *The Pink in the Brown*, R.K. Dhawan's piece on Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*, Chandani Lokuge's *If the Moon Smiled* and Babli Gupta's study of Adib Khan's *Seasonal Adjustments* reveal these writers' inner turmoil and anxieties translated into and finding expression in their creative work, as does Erica Lewin's problematisation of "In-betweenness" in the writing of Anglo-Indian women living in Australia. Here we have already a few pointers that lead us to the central topic of the following ASAA conference on living and writing in the diaspora.

Nearly fifty papers read at the third ASAA conference in July 2004, which was organised again at the University of Kerala in Thiruvananthapuram, compose the by far most comprehensive volume published as yet by the Association.⁶ They address multiple meanings of the "diaspora" concept from a very wide perspective. As we are informed in the "Special Issue" Newsletter, nearly 150 delegates from India, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore "participated in the three-day deliberations," and looking at the yield of their presentations it must be admitted that the choice of the conference topic has proved to have been not only fortunate but also especially fruitful; which is not to say that the introductory remark about the present "large baggy monster" (13) is far from the truth. But it must have been a thankless job to assign such a diversity of papers to one or the other of the seven sections of this compilation.

As we might expect from the choice of the conference theme, the taxonomic aspect of "diaspora" did not only

invite almost every speaker to point out their own parameters but also one or the other to adopt a more general approach: a task tackled in the first section, "Theoretical and Philosophical Issues." For example, examining the psychological dimension of "Being Not-At-Home," Jane Mummery argues that this existential state suggests that practices of hyphenation, like diasporic experience, "are exemplary of the human condition itself" (42). The ontological angle of this perception may be debatable but its very abstract nature endows the status and the experience of "diaspora" with a degree of insubstantiality that invites us to fill it in: an invitation readily responded to by virtually all speakers, for example by Bill Ashcroft who focuses on "horizon" or by Dennis Wood who talks about "experience of community."

The following six sections alternate between those that encompass papers of a broader nature, written from a socio-cultural, socio-scientific or simply "Broader" perspective, and those where literary texts are targeted, or writers or specific literary constellations in Indian, Australian or New Zealand writing. Here the section "The Literary Artists' Contribution" deserves special mention because the inclusion of literary texts, though often embedded in commentaries, does not merely give us a welcome respite from densely analytical or informative presentations but lends them flesh and blood. It is a very welcome move on the part of the volume's editors who must have felt with the readers' waning strength while trekking through more than 500 pages.

To illustrate the wide variety of articles assigned to the more general sections, I'd like to mention just a few. While Kateryna Longley talks about the defining and self-assuring acts of "Story-telling" for the diasporic person and thus gives rare prominence to the oral or audio dimension of the Asian-Australian cultural discourse, Ameer Ali's comments on "The Muslim Diaspora in the West" justifiably expose prejudices against Muslims professed "in the West," but at the same time the author also points out that for political reasons internal dissensions of this particular diaspora need to be taken into account. Stephen Alomes argues that our often overt critical concern with loss and exile should be balanced by noting that living in the diaspora might as well be seen as "the Promethean journeys of liberation, and discovery, celebration and recreation" (134). The most interesting "Socio-Cultural Commentary" to my mind though is contained in Adrian Mitchell's personal, lively, witty, well-researched and informative talk on the 19th and early 20th century German diaspora in South Australia: an exemplary essay of a quality which He Wei Gu's "Chinese Cultural Schema" unfortunately cannot match.

A further half dozen essays dealing with "Perspectives from the Social Sciences" expand the discourse on diaspora by focusing on one or the other ethnic group of immigrants and by discussing the pros and cons of Australian migration policy and legislation over the years. All are of high

informative value, statistically or otherwise, and more often than not focus on human and economic relationships between the First and the Third world. Robert Imre, for example, explores Australia's attitude to the threat of terrorism against the country's "diasporas [being] regarded as suspicious and problematic" (317) while Trudy Hoad and M.A.B. Siddique relativise this attitude by foregrounding that illegal immigration confronts Australia with political, economic and financial problems. Finally, Serge Walberg discovers yet another meaning of "diaspora" by having a look at "New Communications Technologies." Here globalised working conditions have brought about what he calls "live-in diaspora[s]" for a cyberproletariat that is working "'abroad' without leaving its home country" (520): yet one more "variation" of diasporic identity and community which we can add to Mummery's taxonomic deliberations.

Nonetheless, the importance granted to "non-literary" aspects of diaspora experience does not marginalise exploratory and analytical essays dedicated to its literary representation, and as in the previous volumes we encounter again a large variety of cross-cultural, comparative and individual studies. Here the section "Insights through Literature" is especially remarkable for the number of Indian and South Asian scholars addressing diasporan Australian texts and thus balancing the impression I had gained from the earlier volumes with their noticeable presence of Australian scholars talking about their own literature. Discussing the work of diaspora writers as different as Mena Abdullah and Suneeta de Costa, Satendra Nandan and Christopher Cyrill, Adib Khan or Yasmine Gooneratne, a critical discourse is being developed further that adds to our more conservative definition of cross-cultural studies since in these instances critics 'at home' and writers 'in the diaspora' basically belong to the same culture. It is a constellation we also encounter in the section "The Literary Artists Contribution" where diasporan critics-writers like Antonio Casella, Simone Lazaroo, Satendra Nandan and Serge Liberman talk movingly about their loss and their own or their families' personal fates in their often "grey drabness of my newer home" (496). All in all, a picture of diasporan living emerges here that in spite of its individual variety coalesces to a patchwork of shared emotions, memories and hopes in Australia from which the two New Zealand essays remain strangely excluded. Looking back at earlier contributions from here we must admit that New Zealand continues to make a strange bedfellow of Austral-Asia.

Where have we arrived? Which conclusions can be drawn from the Association's engagement in an Austral-Asian cultural discourse? And where may we expect to be led to in the future? If the three conference volumes reflect the work done over a decade – and why shouldn't they? – the move from literary to interdisciplinary studies is certainly a laudable step since the expanded scope of cultural concerns has drawn in and brought together scholars from

different disciplines to set up a "mobile" Institute of Studies that enables them to meet and exchange views and ideas at differing places. There should be no reason then why the next conference could not be organised in Australia and following it in another Asian country. In any case, participation by more South East Asian scholars would be desirable to lend further weight to Asian perspectives against the somewhat imbalanced past Austral-Asian encounters, I mean here because of the predominance of Australian and Indian voices. Similarly, the Association's efforts at aiming at a better understanding of Australia by Asians should not exclude inviting Australians to become more knowledgeable about Asia though I do not want to suggest that such interest has been altogether absent at the previous conferences. Admittedly, a topic such as diaspora would lend itself less to explore conditions in Asia

than Australia, but the country's cultural concerns abroad and in their widest sense definitely deserve the critical attention of an Association for the study of Australasia in Asia.

NOTES

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