AUSTRALIAN STUDIES NOW

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INDIALOG PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.
Published in January 2007 with the support of Australia India Council (AIC).

The Australia-India Council (AIC) is an Australian Govt. funded non-statutory body that initiates and supports activities to promote mutual awareness and collaboration between Australia and India.

Published by:
Indialog Publications Pvt. Ltd.
O-22, Lajpat Nagar II
New Delhi - 11 00 24
Telefax: 91-11-29830504, 29835221
www.indialog.co.in

Individual Essays © Contributors

Printed at: Chaman Offset, Darya Ganj, New Delhi.

Designed and typeset by Amit Sarwal.
Cover designed by Reema Sarwal and Amit Sarwal.

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ISBN: 81-8443-004-3
THE CRITICAL SCENE: RESPONSES ON/FROM DOWN UNDER

AMIT SARWAL & REEMA SARWAL

"There is today no English or American or European literature; literature is one and indivisible for, great literature, to whatever country it belongs, shall be studied by all."

— Prof. Rene Wellek (qtd. in Narasimhaiah xiii)

Australian literary studies began as an academic discipline in Australia after the World War II in keeping with the rising “nationalistic ideologising” (Priessnitz 307). The study of Australian Literature has now become a part of university syllabi in India, competing with its American and Canadian cousins, and it is therefore imperative to reflect on how this new literature has been and is theoretically approached, and to define the critical perspectives and reading practices employed by Australians and Indian scholars. These new literatures were introduced as “Literature other than British” in the Indian classrooms but have now asserted their individual identities while at the same time establishing their rightful place in the tradition of “great literature.”

On the other hand, Australian awareness of Asia, and particularly India, has a respectable ancestry of over a hundred years, dating back to the books of Australia’s Prime Minister Alfred Deakin — Temple and Tomb in India (1893) and Irrigated India (1893). Many creative writers also wrote “fascinating” tales about India from their travels across the length and breadth of the country: John Lang’s Wanderings in India and Other Sketches of Life in Hindoostan (1859), James Hingston’s Australian Abroad (1880), Molly
Skinner’s *Tucker Sees India* (1937), Ethel Anderson’s *Indian Tales* (1948) and Christopher Koch’s *Across the Sea Wall* (1965) are a few such literary efforts that have periodically “rediscovered” Australia’s close proximity to Asia (Walker 1).

These literary pioneers notwithstanding, South Asians had no clear identity in the eyes of the average Australian for a long time, and likewise did Indians lack a “narrative” of/about Australia. The Australia-India connection gained definition only when the South Asian diaspora, and with it Indians, settled in Australia; globalisation more than anything else has brought these two countries closer economically, culturally and academically, with a large flow of “academic traffic” made possible by exchange programmes, conferences, memoranda of agreement, and regular visits by and interaction with creative writers from Australia facilitated a greater understanding between the two countries. Despite this, as Makarand Paranjape notes in “Mirroring Ambivalences: Resistance and Reconciliation in South Asian Australia,” Australia with its “culture that is at once familiar and unfamiliar” (288), is a mixed experience for the coloured South Asian:

It is familiar because of the shared and enduring connection with the British Empire [...]. The cultural institutions are similar [...]. And yet, South Asians are definitely viewed as outsiders or “Others” of what is the dominant or culture-defining group, the white Anglo-American majority [...][with] a distinct sense that the South Asian is an alien, a foreigner, though not really a barbarian. That is why I am inclined to believe that while Australians like South Asians, resisted the empire in many ways, unlike the South Asians they also supported and extended it. (288)

The question that comes immediately to mind is this: is Australian literature an appendage of the Anglo-American canon fighting for inclusion? It may be argued that the literature of the United States of America, which was also a settler colony to begin with, had only to wait till that country gained military and economic supremacy to be canonized, and that it is just a matter of time before this happens for Australian literature. However, one sees no aggressive efforts, of the kind the Americans made, on Australians’ part to dissociate themselves from the erstwhile imperial hegemony of Britain: in 1999, the referendum to remove the British Monarch from the position of the (nominal) Head of Australian Federation was defeated. At the same time, Australia has endorsed the shifting of the “centre” to the USA (without “letting go” of England) after the disintegration of the British Empire and the rise of the US as a world superpower. In the Second World War, Australian troops fought alongside the British in Europe; Australia followed the USA into the Korean War, and
assisted it in the Vietnam War, and more recently, the same willingness and alliance was seen in the Iraq war. An alliance with the US has been increasingly positioned at the centre of Australia’s martial, diplomatic, economic and to some extent cultural endeavours post-1940s (when it had become clear that the British Empire could not last for long). While this may be seen as a wise strategic political decision, it has been aided, we contend, by Australia’s constant search for a partner with racial, historical and cultural resemblance as lasting military alliances are not made in isolation from the perceived commonalities or sympathies, as the case may be, in the cultural milieus of the allies. The following is a typical example of popular arguments in support of Australia’s alliance with the US in the Iraq war, the nature of which reflects not the military or political gains for Australia from such an alliance but “protection” from a cultural “Other”:

The US and Australia have a strong vested interest in eliminating all regimes committed to supporting terrorism against the West. Iraq is certainly guilty of that [. . .]. Long-term, if the trend of terrorism set by Iran and Iraq is not broken, Australia will be a target. We uphold the same kind of secular society and material prosperity that so upsets Islamic fundamentalists.1

This is not an argument put forward by a political leader but by a common citizen of Australia and it demands military alliance with the US based on cultural and social values of “the same kind” as those of the US, with “material prosperity” being seen as one of them.

In short, Australia supports both the UK and the US in their respective wars, almost before being asked. Australia’s perception of a common cause with Western powers, despite its geographical distance from them, places it, vis-à-vis a postcolonial framework for understanding its creative output, in what can only be called a no man’s land between the centre and the margin. It can never really be the centre until it asserts not just equality but supremacy in its very distinction from the “West” — the US-UK amalgam that Australia recognises as the source of its mainstream culture and civilisation. One major distinction, for instance, lies in the fact that Australians have never really been driven by Christianity unlike the English and the Americans and even Europeans. Religion cannot be said to have played a seminal role in Australia’s development as a nation — at no point in Australian history were Australians expected to follow any one sect of Christianity as the accepted “national” religion. Even at the social and cultural levels today, Christianity seems to be defined by traditional ceremonies and festivals that provide a spiritual experience as well as the opportunity for relaxing, socialising and celebrating life. Religion is not a force to hold the nation together. However, this is just one example. Australia, we believe, is fundamentally different as a nation from the nations of Europe and the US both in its history and its present.
On the other hand, in light its industrially-driven economic prosperity, development and population structure, it is by no stretch of the imagination a part of the Asian Third World.

This non-belonging is evident even from early times. Literary histories of Australia reveal that the challenge for the pioneers of Australian literary academia was to counter the academic dominance of American and European schools of critical thought within Australia. They have had to decide whether it is even possible for Australia to break away from these colonial canonical chains and the struggle to break free is much more evident in the spheres of literature and criticism in Australia than in the political one. This is not to say that literary criticism aimed at being anti-British or anti-American, which would be both impossible and irrelevant, but what it progressively looked for was to actively create a specifically Australian national sensibility that was openly different from that of any other Western country. As David Carter points out in the essay titled “Critics, Writers, Intellectuals: Australian Literature and its Criticism,”

Literature and talk about literature have played a central role since at least 1830s in debates about the status of the national culture. Literary criticism has rarely been about literature alone; at stake has been the nature of civilisation, culture and “character” in Australia and the authority to speak in their name. (259-260)

At the risk of oversimplifying, we negotiate in this paper with what has been called the “ambivalence” both in the north and the south of the Indian ocean. This word aptly describes not just the attitudes of both Australia and Asia towards each other, but also what Australians think of their literary and critical output, which forms the focus of this essay. Secondly, we look at how they have responded to, and represented Asia, their closest neighbour, in an amazingly large number of studies about it, like Colin Mason’s Asia Emerges (1968), J. V. D’Cruz’s The Asian Image in Australia (1973), Alison Broinowski’s The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia (1992), Stephen Fitzgerald’s Is Australia an Asian Country? (1997), David Walker’s Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939 (1999), and J. V. D’Cruz and William Steele’s Australia’s Ambivalence Towards Asia: Politics, Neo/Post-Colonialism, and Fact/Fiction (2001) to name a few.

We also touch upon the major trends in Indian responses to Australian literature, though it must be mentioned at the outset that despite a substantial initial (from 1960s) interest in Australian literature, there have hardly been, in the face of urgent need for the same, any full-length critical studies of “repute” and “substance” from India. While there are a few exceptions like Anisur Rahman’s New Literatures in English (1996) which devotes a fairly substantial
section to the Australian literary canon, and Harpreet Pruthi’s *Two Facets of Australian Verse* (2004), most publications related to Australian literature and the critical interest it has awakened in India are limited either to proceedings of seminars, e.g. *An Introduction to Australian Literature* (1965), *Austral-Asian Encounters* (2003), *Resistance and Reconciliation: Writing in the Commonwealth* (2003), *Cultural Interfaces* (2004), *English Studies, Indian Perspectives* (2006) and *Australia and India Interconnections: Identity, Representation and Belonging* (2006) or to articles in journals and in volumes devoted to new literatures in English or Commonwealth studies examining a number of contemporary theoretical issues, authors and their works (with much duplication). Indian critics, who largely began by approaching Australian literature as part of “Commonwealth literature,” have now taken to the rubric of “New writing in English,” itself a product of “the experience of colonization and the challenges of a post-colonial world” (Ashcroft et al. i). They now place Australian writing, formerly considered an add-on to British literature, in an independent international context, with the favoured Indian critical mode for the analysis of Australian literature being that of comparing it with Indian literatures.

II

Australian and Indian critics have both taken as their points of departure the notions of land, bush, and outback, speculating upon their roles in the construction and evolution of a national identity. While we as Indians are also engaged in forging a “modern” national identity, the ancientness of our civilisation has meant that we have not had to go about establishing a sense of being a nation quite like Australia has had to. However, there is much to learn by looking at the ways employed towards this end by a relatively new nation. While descriptions of landscape give Australian literature its distinctive flavour, a freshness and a vividness that accounts for much of its sustained interest value, feminist scholars have drawn attention to the underwriting of nascent national consciousness in Australian literature, through tropes of land and bush, of a sexist ideology or an impression of a forceful masculinity, maintained and showcased largely through the image of “bushranger” and male “mateship,” despite the fact that Australia has now become a predominantly metropolitan society.

This changed social order, together with an increasing cosmopolitanism and the much contested policy of multiculturalism, which is still in the process of evolving, have made Australia an attractive prospect
for South Asian diaspora in Australia. However, the problematics of the displacement and dislocation are invariably reflected in South Asian Australian writing, and it is this duality in the diasporic imagination and the varied production of cultural meanings as a result of it, that has attracted much literary analysis. It cannot be denied that South Asian migrants have contributed enormously to the rich intellectual and cultural life as also to the diversity of Australia. Immigration can well be considered a dominant feature of Australia and free settlers or voluntary migrants from the South Asian region and the children of Fiji-Indian indentured workers have arrived in Australia at various stages, or what have been called the various waves of settlement. South Asian migration began in the 1890s when many Indians, like the Sikhs, came to Australia as farm labourers. Others, like the Afghans (from the ports of India), came to run the camel trains that used to transport goods and mail. It was also at around this time that a number of Britishers who had been living in India, or Anglo-Indians, also settled in Australia along with their Indian "boys" or the household attendants. It may be noted here that post 1890s the trend has changed radically. Today a large number of teachers, doctors, engineers, software professionals, businessmen and women, relatives of already settled Indians and also Fiji-Indians, who came in large numbers after the successive coups in Fiji, have settled in Australia making it more culturally vibrant. Throughout the 20th century, because of a fast emerging global order and, as we earlier pointed out, through various Associations and collaborations — trade and academic — Australia has come closer to India dynamically and this coming closer was surely not possible without an active participation of the South Asian Diaspora.

To begin at the beginning, there was prevalent in academic circles a strong sense of "crisis" (till the 1950s), brought on by the perception that Australia has not produced, unlike British, European, Indian classical or American criticism, a single representative critic, theorist or even a school of criticism/theory of international repute. Robert Ross' *Australian Literary Criticism* (1989) tells the story of this critical "crisis" in its very early phase, which, however, does not mean that there were no critical responses or voices in Australia in the 1800s. A large number of reviews, and (fewer) critical articles on poetry, drama, short stories and novels, were published in journals or literary supplements of the newspapers, but the tendency among most academics was to critique and read only the imported texts — creative or critical — of British medieval literature, Shakespeare, the
Romantics, Victorian fiction and so on. This initial small output on Australian writing, until the 1880s, can also be explained by the fact that, as Chris Wallace-Crabbe has also observed, Australian intellectuals thought of themselves as isolated and never as "front runners," a perception helped by the opinion in Australian academia, ruled largely by British-born, Oxbridge-educated dons, that Australian writing was trash and second-rate, unworthy of critical attention as opposed to the classics or contemporary European literature. The rehabilitation of Australian writing as worthy of critical consideration was in the hands of the early Australian critics, journalists, creative writers and also a small number of readers, who performed the all-important function of foregrounding the Australianness of these works and their potential to form a canon in its own right. In this respect the publication of journals such as the *Journal of Australasia* in 1856 and the *Bulletin* in 1880, and later the call for Australian nationalism in literature by the Palmers in the pre-World War II period and the pioneering role of Jules Francois Archibald, the editor of the *Bulletin* and A. G. Stephens, editor of *Bulletin*’s "Red Page," cannot be overlooked. They not only influenced the authors and the critics of that time but also provided a space and the much needed encouragement for their creative and critical endeavours.

Literary magazines and journals, to name a selected few, like *Kunapipi, Meanjin, Overland* (edited by the left wing intellectual Stephen Murray Smith), *Antipodes, Quadrant* and *Westerley* which "were supported by the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom, an organisation dedicated to countering the perceived threat of communism to intellectual and cultural freedom" (Bennett 146), *Imago,* and *The Age, The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* (which carry literary supplements), played a seminal role in (successfully) popularising writing by and for Australians both at home and in the world. The articles published in them — both peer-reviews and the work of students — aimed to explore the whole range of Australian literature with debates on gender issues, science-fiction and fantasy, poetry, music, theatre, human rights, ethics, contemporary fiction, plays, visual arts, society, cultural developments and literary history.

The tradition of critical writing in Australia — with critics coming from the ranks of both creative writers and academics — has been and is governed largely by the debate and struggle between the “internationalist” and “traditionalist” views of criticism (Ashcroft et al. 133), whose origins can be traced to Frederick Sinnett’s "The Fiction Fields
of Australia” (1856), published in the *Journal of Australasia*, and now considered the first critical essay on Australian literature. Later, the *Bulletin*, begun in the 1880s, determined, for a very long time, with its concern for Australianness and the nationalist tradition developed by A. G. Stephens, the path Australian criticism was to take. However, Australian writing came to be placed within an international context only with the US-based critic C. Hartley Grattan’s essay, “Australian Literature” (1927), published in an American journal, the *Bookman*.

The contribution of two groups in the 1930s — now known as the Palmer and the Jindyworobak school — is noteworthy with respect to Australian criticism around the two World Wars. The Palmer School, after Vance and Nettie Palmer, tried hard to create a strong literary nationalism by appropriating for Australian writing the Arnoldian notion of a touchstone, as manifested in the oeuvres of Henry Lawson, Joseph Furphy, and Bernard O’Dowd, who, according to this school, showed in their creative works the true expression of the Australian spirit. The Jindyworobaks, whose name was derived from an Aboriginal word meaning “to annex” or “to join,” were led by Rex Ingramells, who expressed the goal of this movement in his manifesto, *Conditional Culture* (1938). This movement was inspired to a very large extent by P. R. Stephenson’s *Foundation of Culture in Australia* (1936), which called for a uniquely Australian art from Australia that would represent the spirit of the land. Both schools further alienated Australian literary criticism from the rest of the world and were opposed by the younger generation, whose disaffection was made evident most vociferously in the journal edited by John Reed and Max Harris, called *Angry Penguins* (1940-1946), which demanded and displayed a modernist approach to Australian literature.

Only after the Second World War did the Australian critical scene become more vibrant, in, we think, an attempt to break away from colonial literary attitudes and perceptions, though this rebellion was not strong enough to fight the critical output of either Europe or America. But the noted critic A. A. Phillips, jettisoning in toto what seemed in the 1950s to be the dated “internationalist” vs. “traditionalist” debate, advised Australians to give up the “cringe.” In his essay “The Cultural Cringe,” published in *Meanjin* (a journal that promoted national literature — creative and critical — by Australians), he suggested that the cringe could be done away with if Australians reading and writing an Australian literature stopped thinking constantly about what other readers (English ones) would think of this
literature and being crippled, in turn, by supposed non-Australian judgments. Similarly on the notion of “Australianness” Bruce Bennett writes in *Australian Short Fiction: A History* (2002) that after the second world war i.e. “in the period of postwar reconstruction, attempts to define ‘Australianness’ were evident in influential books such as Russel Ward’s *The Australian Legend* (1958)” (146).

More recently, critics from both Australia and India have started attending to the perspective of the Aborigines expressed in written as well as oral literature, in an English of their own, distinct from the mainstream Australian English. The first step in the blossoming of this branch of criticism, of course, was taken by the Aborigine creative writers themselves. Studies like *Aboriginal Writing Today* edited by Jack Davis and Bob Hodge published in 1985 brought together essays that added a new dimension to Australian criticism. The Indian interest in Aboriginal writing has been exceptional, one indicator of which is the amount of post-graduate research work being undertaken on Aboriginal writing. However, very often scholars try to make (forced) comparative analyses of the aboriginal experience, issues and works of Aboriginal writers with that of the dalits and other oppressed minorities in India. Now this theoretical and critical framework of drawing broad albeit strained parallels in experience proves that we still don’t have a clear enough understanding of “them.” Though an umbilical connection has been established, as it is believed that some of the indigenous Aboriginal tribes were descendants of Dravidian nomads, who migrated to Australia around 40,000 years ago, what we need, if we really want to make sense of the experiences of the marginalised and bridge the two cultures, is a further exploration or examination of the concept of the “Aboriginal nation,” as imagined by the Aboriginal people and contained by the model of the Australian nation.

It should be noted that 1989 may be called a turning point in the trajectory of criticism produced from Australia, as post-1989, after the publication of *The Empire Writes Back*, written by three Australians — Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin — Australian critics at last began to make a mark on the international critical scene, the huge body of postcolonial scholarship emerging from Australia providing adequate testimony. However, it is also important to note that this new scholarship thrives not on Australia’s foundational literature, but on the wealth of writing from a host of countries — India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, African countries, Canada, Malta, Sri Lanka, Caribbean countries, New Zealand,
Pakistan, Singapore, the South Pacific Islands — tied together by a shared colonial background. *The Empire Writes Back* also marks the seminal role played by Australia in making postcolonial “popular” throughout the world, giving an impetus to Postcolonialism as a discourse (while also using this discourse in turn as yet another means to draw attention towards Australian creative writing), as well as contributing critical and theoretical viewpoints, exploring and problematising the contemporary issues of gender, race, ideology, class, ethnicity, representation, discourse and narrative through an Australian mode of critical thought. Though critical work by Australians has also surged in the wake of other recent developments in gender studies, queer studies, media studies and contemporary popular culture, and Australian participation and contribution in these areas can in no way be undermined, it is our contention that it is the “postcolonial turn” to criticism emerging from Australia that really caught the attention of the world, both in the West and in Asia.

However, despite the veering away from the colonial cringe, the major preoccupation still remains, as in the earlier periods, with a historiography that aids the construction of a national literature, as evidenced in the incessant production “histories of literature.” As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note in *The Empire Writes Back*, “the task of compiling a national literary history has usually been an important element in the establishment of an independent cultural identity” (132). Also, it is an academically proven fact that literary history and criticism are of particular interest to students and scholars at all levels of higher education, and the huge Australian output in this regard has contributed to major re-evaluations of the shaping of the Australian nation. Among the major literary histories are H. M. Green’s *History of Australian Literature Pure and Applied: A Critical Review of all Forms of Literature Produced in Australia from the First Books Published after the Arrival of the First Fleet* (1950), L. Kramer’s *Oxford History of Australian Literature* (1981), *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* (1998) edited by Bruce Bennett et al., and Bruce Bennett’s *Australian Short Fiction: A History* (2002). The Aboriginal contribution to literary history is marked by Mudrooroo Narogin’s *Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature* (1990) and *The Indigenous Literature of Australia* (1997). This substantial and impressive body of literary histories produced from Australia, an ex-settler colony, according to Bill Ashcroft et al., is the result of a self-appointed task to prove that it “constitutes a literature separate from that of the
metropolitan centre" (131-132). Thus, literary history becomes an important player in the struggle to render visible one’s cultural and literary traditions vis-à-vis a dominant reading tradition that centers round the US and Britain, as also becoming in itself a way of reading Australianness, separating “an Australian colonial identity from a British identity” (Hassam 5).

In recent years, Australian critics have also produced meta-critical works such as Authority and Influence: Australian Literary Criticism 1950-2000 (2001) edited by Delys Bird et al., which provides a wide-ranging analysis of the most important trends in the development of Australian literary criticism, with A. D. Hope, Frank Hardy, Vance Palmer, George Johnston and Judah Waten representing the 1950s and 1960s; Bruce Bennett, Michael Wilding, Helen Tiffin, Carole Ferrier, Brian Kiernan speaking for the 1970s; Graeme Turner, Delys Bird, Laurie Hergenhan, David Carter, Patrick Buckridge, Sneja Gunew, Adam Shoemaker, Robert Dixon, and John Docker being representative of the 1980s; Karen Goldsworthy, Susan McKernan, Christopher Lee, Mudrooroo and Gillian Whitlock as the voices of the 1990s.

III

We now move on to the final part of this paper, which will discuss a major area of study, and one that as Indians we could take up further, that of Australian representations of Asia. The body of Australian creative and critical responses to the literatures of Asian countries, writing about or referring to Asia, is quite substantial. In this context belong studies like Colin Mason’s Asia Emerges (1968), an especially lucid account of Asia’s impressive progress in recent years, which argues that after several centuries of remoteness from Europe, India has rapidly emerged as a world power. These new powers like India are Australia’s neighbours and an unavoidable part of Australia’s future in the world. Alison Brinowski’s The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia (1992) is a pioneering work in its representation of how chances for harmonious co-existence with this neighbourhood were lost in the colonial period, discussing also the reasons for the economic prosperity of the ever-increasing Asian populations that migrated to Australia and other countries. Stephen Fitzgerald’s provocatively titled work, Is Australia an Asian Country? (1997), searches for answers to questions that Australians must of necessity seek answers to, recommending ways in which Australians need to change — such as setting aside their irrelevant sense of superiority — in order to make Australia a society that will hold a privileged place in the region even as it contributes as
an equal partner, and one that will take up the challenge of engaging intellectually with Asia. Similarly, David Walker in his seminal study of Australian representations of Asia, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939* (1999), showcases the attitudes of fear, paranoia and xenophobia, especially towards Asia, latent in the Australian mind. These attitudes are also evident in the themes of many “invasion narratives,” especially Ambrose Pratt’s *The Judgment of Orient* (1916), and novels of William Lane and Rata (R. T. Roydhouse). These depict Australia’s geographical nearness to Asia as a threat to the nation — culturally, economically, militarily, and even scientifically (!), like a mad scientist from Japan out to ruin Australia. In the final analysis, it was the fear of race mixing and “mongrelization” that can be identified as the root cause for such portrayals.

But Australian images of Asia have been moving away rapidly from these notions for quite some time now. Andrew Peacock, then Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs, in a lecture delivered in Perth on 15 September 1978, said that:

We should not see the Asian and Pacific area as it was a generation ago or as it is now, but as it is likely to be at the end of this century [. . .]. For Australia, the Third World should not be seen simply as a concept or a matter of cooperation among a group of countries in international bodies. For Australia the Third World is our own region. (Peacock 14)

Peacock was here not talking of the entire Third World but of Asia and he wanted to convince his audience that Australia could not afford to merely ape the US foreign policy towards Asia. And by the “end of the century,” and at the beginning of this new one, there has been a perceptible shift in attitude, with Australia increasingly looking towards Asia; there is now actually a debate within Australia about whether it should be considered an Asian country — Western in economic prosperity, development and its institutions but Asian otherwise! And thus one is again brought back to the notion of ambivalence, carrying on the debates that are presented in *Australia’s Ambivalence Towards Asia: Politics, Neo/Post-Colonialism, and Fact/Fiction* (2001), an important explorative intervention by J. V. D’Cruz and William Steele analysing the difficulties Australia has had in establishing a meaningful relationship with Asia. Drawing upon important junctures from Australian history, culture, literature, politics, media and society, it studies by contrast Asian traditions and the experience of non-Anglo migrants in Australia. Ashis Nandy, in his Foreword to this book, puts forward three kinds of ambivalence — Australia’s ambivalence towards Asia, Asia’s ambivalence towards Australia, and Australia’s ambivalence towards itself — all of which influenced fundamentally
and immensely the Asia-Australia relationship. Australia’s position as a Western country, though also distinct from other Western countries, and in the geography of Asia, especially fashions and motors the ambivalent stratagem with which it appropriates Asia. Of Australia’s ambivalence to itself, as evident in the Australian attitude towards Aborigines and Asians, Nandy says:

White Australia had to learn to despise the browns and the yellows of Asia and Australia because it itself was despised and the contempt had been internalized. [...] dentifying with a ruling culture [...]. Official Australia has to try to share the white society’s civilizing mission because that is very nearly its only means of gatecrashing the Anglo-Saxon world as an equal partner. It has its own past and its self-hatred to live down. (5)

This desire to have “their own inferiors in order to feel a bit like the British” (Paranjape 291), according to Makarand Paranjape, is also the reason behind “Australia’s participation in every major war on the side of the dominant power” (291). Paranjape further points that

Settler colonies, like Australia, share not only a complex relationship with their imperial progenitors, but also structural features. Each colony, as a fragment in a metropolitan complex, is a part of a larger colonial system, though at times at odds against it. So even as Australia resists Britain, defining its cultural and political independence from it and thus asserting its national identity, it also serves in its own way, not only as an agent of colonialism but as a minor colonizing power in its own right. (292)

And this discourse of internal colonialism, or even an external one if we look at Australia’s role in relation to Papua New Guinea, is evident to a great extent in its treatment of Aborigines and other cultural/racial minorities, especially Asians. As Jack Davis points out in Aboriginal Writing Today (1985), books like Faith Bandler’s Wacive throw light on “the forgotten black minority group of Australia, the people of the South Pacific, victims of Australia’s unofficial slave trade” (Davis 14). Thus, Australia, “as a postcolonial nation, demands both autonomy and dependence, both resistance to imperialism and reconciliation with it” (Paranjape 292).

Our purpose here was not to critique the reciprocal critical output created from Australia and India but to chart major literary, theoretical and critical traditions/ fashions and challenges to it, and to suggest research possibilities for Indian scholars in this field. We certainly regard the contribution of Indian (and Indian-born) scholars — such as Ashis Nandy, Makarand Paranjape, S. K. Sareen, Anisur Rahman, Harpreet Pruthi, Satendra Nandan, Vijay Mishra and others — as important in that their essays provide
new perspectives that contribute to the analysis and conceptualisation of the dynamics of the Australian literary and critical output, besides aiding in the fight against the dominance of the Eurocentric academic approach. The theorisations of Australian literary and social traditions by these critics and their alternative perceptions of Australia may also be thought of as providing a trans-cultural approach to the discourse of Australian literature, "forming the pre-history of the broader issue of Australia-Asia relations [. . .] [and] useful in understanding the mutual ambivalence between the two" (Paranjape 293). However, this output is as yet, from the Indian side, relatively small, and there is a need for greater contextual understanding of the critical and theoretical debates within Australia, as also an urgent need to strengthen the critical and theoretical institutional apparatus in India for a greater engagement with Australian literature.

NOTES


2 The idea of ambivalence in this context has been discussed at length by J. V. D'Cruz and William Steele in Australia's Ambivalence Towards Asia. Politics, Neo/Post-Colonialism, and Fact/Fiction (Melbourne: Monash UP, 2001; rev. 2003). Makarand Paranjape in "Mirroring Ambivalences" adds another dimension to the discussion by pointing out that the representations of Australia by South Asian diaspora "also contain ambivalence" (289).


4 For more details see Robert L. Ross, "Australian Theory and Criticism" (1989). A free version of this article is available at <http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/
For more issues and detailed analyses, see Santosh K. Sareen and Susan Thomas, "Re-Imagining the Australian Nation-Space: Voices from Aboriginal Australia," *Cultural Interfaces*, eds. Santosh K. Sareen et al. (New Delhi: Indialog, 2004) 30-40.


For a good review of the book by Jaroslav Kusnir of the University of Presov, Slavakia, visit <http://www.api.network.com/cgi-bin/reviews/jrbview.cgi?n=0702232033&issue=3>.


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