Landscape, Place and Culture
Landscape, Place and Culture: Linkages between Australia and India

Edited by

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Preface

As human future is colonized through environmental degradation, our relationship to “place” is revitalized. This is a response to significant changes in material conditions in the places we value. Urban landscapes, becoming ever more populated, develop as hubs of consumption and refuge for humans within collapsing ecosystems. Meanwhile those landscapes which extend beyond the cities—rivers, deltas, seas, air, soil, wild lands and other “commons”—yield to the excesses of human activity, bearing the “footprint” of human resource use and becoming places to disperse pollution.

As we struggle to contain and reverse the impacts of industrialization and urbanization, places and humans co-evolve. Environmental and social crises demand simultaneous response, and the cultural dimension of sustainability, through which we shape values, is critical. We trace the almost inescapable contours of modernity, charted by language, rationality, science, enlightenment, progress, colonialism, migration and globalisation. Yet we seek simultaneously a reconciliation between humans and a realignment of the human-nature relationship. This is the most basic meaning of sustainability.

The essays in this book arise from a particular gathering of scholars: The East India chapter of the Indian Association for the Study of Australia (IASA) held its inaugural international conference in Kolkata on 22-23 January 2009. With the title Landscapes and Rivers: symbolising cultural linkages between Australia and India, the workshop brought together around thirty Indian academics, mostly from West Bengal, along with Australian visiting scholars. The IASA conferences, and the networks of academics who organise them, represent a widespread and growing interest in Australia, across Indian universities. Originating mostly in English Literature departments, Australian Studies has branched to include history, politics, cultural studies, film, performance and media studies, immigration and family studies, linguistics—and recently environmental humanities.

Much of the work is comparative, exploring common Indian and Australian themes of colonial and postcolonial experience, implications of migration and diaspora, and shared language and literature. The work also explores shared environmental crisis, manifest in landscapes such as the
Mouths of the Ganges and Australia’s Murray Darling Basin—which typify extensive geographical regions most strongly affected by climate change. Such comparisons indicate our shared experience of the “crisis” of ecological, social, economic and cultural sustainability. Australia and India are linked by climate change, threats to food and water, deforestation and the destruction of valuable country and waterways through environmental degradation. In the face of such difficulties, we also have a shared commitment to multi- and inter-disciplinary approaches to learning about past mistakes and future opportunities, and a shared “ecological citizenship” which will be the means to deliver solutions.

This collection of essays marks such an interdisciplinary approach and an opportunity to consider the ecological, social, economic and, in particular, the cultural dimensions of a sustainable future. The chapters provide many levels of focus on environment, place and culture. Some evoke appreciation of particular “places”, either in India or Australia. Many explore how literature has treated “landscape”, while some are comparative studies of cultural, historical and political development.

The book opens with a rationale for developing Australia-India linkages. Sanjukta Dasgupta’s introductory essay contains a reminder of early comparisons of Australian and Indian agricultural development, for example in the study by the second Australian Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, *Irrigated India: An Australian View of India and Ceylon*. Dasgupta explores connections in cultural, political and economic realms, arising from migration and diaspora narratives, from concepts of “transnation”, from the “othering of the unknown as uncanny”, and the reversal of othering within the diasporic community. It is a call for a more holistic understanding of our varied political affiliations, the “sharing of capital at all levels”, and cultural exchange in search of new ties and new mappings of location and geographies. Santosh Sareen, in the second essay, backs the call for new negotiations of transnational identity, while making a re-interpretation of the importance of landscape, as it arises in Australian poetry. In the traditions of both creators and analysts of Australian literature, the “bush” retains a central influence. However, necessary reinterpretations arise from the history of European dispossession of Aboriginal land and culture, not least through language, and from the need for an evolving dialogue between humans and nature.

Part Two of this book makes explicit the role of “place, space, rivers” in fact and fiction. In the first of two complementary essays, Rick Hosking brings focus to the fate of early European explorers along the Murray River, giving context to present-day stress on the ecosystem of inland rivers where drought and excessive water use threaten food production and
ecological sustainability. The vehicle for this discussion is Hosking’s interpretation of the historical novels, memoirs and reports of a party of European travelers who meet tragedy on the Murray in 1839. This reveals the ambivalence and fear about landscape that counters the confident optimism of the settler-colony enterprise, an ambivalence that characterizes present-day environmental crisis. Paul Sharrad’s piece then extends consideration of “literary takes on rivers and landscapes”, giving focus to the novels of Nancy Cato, writing of Australia’s Murray and Darling rivers informed by her perceptions of India. The narratives of river systems—their ecosystem changes, their exploration and use by humans, and their importance in constructing regional identities—reveal and enhance the values which underpin human choice about how environmental challenges might be confronted and resolved.

The essays in Parts Three and Four of the book are primarily concerned with historical, political and economic ties between India and Australia. In Andrew Hassam’s essay, records of a ship wrecked in 1878 give insight to the nature of reciprocal trade in commodities such as castor oil, jute, tea and wool, as well as animals, and exchange of people and ideas between the two countries. Hassam argues that histories of “connectedness” rather than of nation formation need to move centre stage. Meanwhile the battlefields of the First World War constitute sites for emerging cross-cultural perceptions in Debamita Banerjee’s piece. Then Cherie McKeich and Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay, in their respective essays, use the history of museum and exhibition collections as the means to understand shared Nineteenth Century constructions of linked identity. The great exhibitions in Melbourne (1880) and Calcutta (1883), for which there was significant co-evolution, constitute a turning point in public understanding of Australia-India connections, not least via technologies, resources and commodities for trade, which inflect human-nature relationships constructed through colonial experience.

The connection between place and banditry sparks Jati Sankar Mondal’s interest in Australian bushrangers (especially Ned Kelly) and Bengali Dacoits. Opening the fifth part of the book, this comparison of how outlaws survive using topographical knowledges (of the Australian bush, of the Bengali deltaic landscape) leads Mondal to infer commonality in the rebelliousness inherent in shared colonial history and patterns of land and cultural exploitation. Other essays in Part Five likewise explore new measures of convergence and divergence in a re-mapping of Australia and India. Sarbojit Biswas and Arindam Das are concerned respectively with the novel and with film as media for cross-cultural imaginings. Biswas writes a revisionist examination of John Lang’s travelogue
Wanderings in India and other sketches of life in Hindostan, reading it as a powerful cross-cultural text. Das, concerned with present-day cross-cultural media, indicates that both Bollywood production and screenings of Bollywood films in Australia are on the increase. While this is a significant re-phrasing of the Indian-Australian relationship, it also raises new interpretations of Australia’s multicultural experience, challenging Australians to see value in the connections with India, and in Indian diasporic life, well beyond the function of enriching “Eurocentric-White” culture.

Part Five also includes two essays concerning the innovative Tramjatra project, a long running community cultural development program, originating in a creative comparison of Melbourne and Kolkata as urban landscapes with extensive tramway systems. Mick Douglas, an artist who has steered Tramjatra since its inception, explains current phases of the project. This includes the “walking the tracks” activities in both cities, a celebration of the renewed relevance of early industrial tramway systems in the current post-industrial context, which requires mobility in high density cities with low-polluting environmental impacts. In a second piece, to be read alongside Douglas’ essay, Sagar Dan warns about the dangers of cultural appropriation of Bengali indigenous scroll paintings with their associated “patas” and songs. Dan, who has been a Tramjatra participant, explains how trams are glorified by scroll painters, though this is not traditional subject matter, meaning that while Tramjatra is mythicised by indigenous culture the project thereby creates an artificial indigeneity.

We conclude this book with three essays which confirm the interconnectedness of social and ecological dimensions of sustainability. In Part Six, Susan Hosking pinpoints a problem—that “in spite of […] growing awareness of Indigenous contributions to debates about sustainability, a troubled and difficult history continues to leave Australians with a sense of unfinished business”. Hosking indicates that “water remains one of the most potent symbols of this divide”. She explores narratives concerning the forced migration of Aboriginal people, and the transport of Stolen Generation children to institutions in south-west Australia. By analysing the plays of Aboriginal playwright Jack Davis, No Sugar as a key example, and recent films such as Rabbit Proof Fence, she shows how the rhetoric of cleanliness became conflated with prejudice against Aboriginal and mixed-race people. This has occurred while the ongoing colonial project severed their connections with their land, and therefore with a culture that knew and valued interconnections between land, water, community and identity. As a theme, the organisation of imperialism is also taken up by Angshuman Kar, who compares early
newspapers in Bengal and Australia. Case studies are *The Flinders Island Chronicle*, usually considered the first Aboriginal newspaper in Australia, and *Samachar Durpun* initially published to meet the growing demand for the English language among the Bengalis, then a bilingual paper from 1829. Just as the narrative of indigenous peoples is controlled through these newspapers, diasporic and migration fiction helps mould perception of the Indian diaspora in Australia. In Part Seven, Sanghamitra Dalal shows how perception of landscape iconography changes, using Mena Abdulla’s *The Time of the Peacock* and Christopher Cyrill’s *The Ganges and its Tributaries*. These texts indicate evolving representation of landscape and place, which Dalal uses to mark phases of diasporic identity formation and of differing modes of integrating homeland and host land. The concluding essays provide insight into the nexus of Aboriginal, Asian and white race relations in contemporary Australia, and remind us of the unfinished business – the striving for intra-generational equity that constitutes a precondition for social and ecological sustainability.

As a co-editor of this volume, I express full appreciation of the many efforts of Deb Bandyopadhyay, who works tirelessly to develop the Indian Association for the Study of Australia, especially in the Eastern Region. This book and the associated conference are his initiatives. We thank the group of reviewers who gave generously of their time, and acknowledge financial support for the project from the School of History and Philosophy at the University of New South Wales. Chris Conti has proved a patient and dedicated co-editor, while Amanda Millar, Carol Koulikourdi and Soucin Yip-Sou at Cambridge Scholars Publishing have provided support well beyond expectations. Sincere thanks to all these people.

—Paul Brown

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PART I:

CONNECTING CULTURES
THE TWO WAY FLOW: CONNECTING CULTURES, UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

SANJUKTA DASGUPTA

In October 2008, Aravind Adiga was awarded the United Kingdom’s prestigious Man Booker prize for fiction. Adiga as most of you know is a PIO, a person of Indian origin, whose parents re-located to Australia when he was in middle school. Adiga is an Australian citizen and a dual India-Australia passport holder. Interestingly, as an Australian citizen, Adiga’s book *The White Tiger* would not have been included as a South Asian entry for the Commonwealth Writers’ prize, but would have been included in the Far East and South Pacific region category. That is, Adiga’s citizenship would have been the primary determining factor in terms of his identity. Though Adiga has spent most of his formative years outside India, mostly in Australia and some years in the USA and UK, his debut novel is entirely located in urban and suburban India. Instead of writing a fictional narrative about Australia, or a to and fro narrative about India and Australia, Adiga chooses a theme that has a tenuous resemblance to the erstwhile Commonwealth Writers Prize best first book winner title *The Sari Shop* though it lacks the zest of lived experience that is inherent in the Australian writer Gregory David Roberts’ much acclaimed novel *Shantaram*.

However, in the context of the diaspora and the problematics of the migrant standpoint therefore, Adiga can be claimed by both Australia and India as a cultural link, the in-between subject, positioning himself as a transnational bridge of social connectivity, though in his debut novel he does not mention Australia. It is this emergence of the cosmopolitan, global transnational identity, the speaking voice that is significant in terms of social cohesion and cultural understanding and the cultural politics inherent in the location of the performing subject.

But a writer of fiction of Indian origin is not my only example. As many of you may remember, in early December 2007, an Australian film crew and an Australian female movie star were spotted in Kolkata, shooting their film *The Waiting City* around Barrackpore and the Annapurna
Ghat. The Telegraph ran a report about the shooting stating that the blonde with the desi/Indian name was Radha Mitchell, the name Radha was given to her by her fashion designer Australian mother who had been charmed by her visit to India in the early seventies.

These are very recent instances of robust human and cultural mobility. If we zoom back in time, the Australian visitor whose name comes to mind effortlessly was Alfred Deakin, Australia’s second Prime Minister, who served as governmental head for three terms. He visited India in the 1890s and that visit resulted in two books of interest to cultural studies and area studies researchers. These books were — Temple and Tomb in India, which is about religion and architecture, and Irrigated India: An Australian View of India and Ceylon, a book about irrigation and agriculture at both these places. Both books were published in 1893.

In fact it is John Lang (1817-1864), who is now recognized by many as the first Australian novelist, who was born in Australia. Very interestingly for Australia-India academics, John Lang for the latter part of his life lived and wrote then died in India, and had also spent some time in Calcutta before moving to Meerut and thereafter to Mussoorie. Lang moved to India sometime after 1842, and in 1845 he established a paper named Mofussilite, in which among other reports he tracked the uprising in 1857 and gave very different versions of the incidents that took place between the sepoys and the British army. The India Office Library in London has microfilms of the issues though there are allegations that the missing issues were a deliberate act of omission and commission. There are many historical evidences about John Lang playing the role of the Rani of Jhansi Laxmibai’s legal adviser during one of the most crucial years of India’s colonial history. In her recent book titled Rani by Jaishree Misra, there are several references to the importance of the Mofussilite as the newspaper that offered a counter-discourse, at variance with the British government newspapers such as the Delhi Gazette (Misra 293-94).

The Australian High Commission installed a plaque in memory of John Lang in 2005 in Christ Church, the oldest church in Mussoorie. Lang’s grave was discovered by Ruskin Bond in 1964, a century after he had died in 1864. It is believed that he had died under mysterious circumstances. As an AIC initiative the entire corpus of John Lang’s writings will be published by 2016 and his biography titled, “John Lang, Australia’s Larrikin Writer” by Victor Crittenden was released in September 2005 at the Australian National Library, Canberra. I must add that I had the privilege of being present at the launch at the Australian National library, Canberra along with Bruce Bennet and Carol Robertson.
These descriptive details bear out the fact that there had been a steady flow of Australian visitors as well as some long-term Australian residents in India, mainly due to British governance of India till 1947. After a period of relative lull in mobility, in postcolonial times, in the past twenty years there has been an acceleration of economic and cultural interest with the changes in foreign trade and commerce policies as the visit last year of the Australian Member of Parliament Martin Ferguson, Minister of Resources, Energy and Tourism underscored when he stated unambiguously about the need to strengthen the relationship between the two countries. The ABIDC newsletter of December 2008, also carries a large image of Martin Ferguson shaking hands with the Indian minister of Culture, Ambika Soni. Ferguson had stated, “There is already a very strong association between our nations, and it is the Australian government’s view that for both nations, the Australia-India relationship is one of the great opportunities of this century” (Australia-India Focus Newsletter, Dec 2008, 5).

Also, very recently, my presence as a university teacher of primarily Anglophone literatures and cultural commentator in the extremely crucial and timely Diversity Matters conference held in November 2008, co-organized by the Commonwealth Foundation, United Kingdom and Monash University, Kuala Lumpur, focussed on the diaspora in order to explore the links between economic, human, social and cultural capital and how cultural and social capital can engineer the bonding and bridging of diverse cultures through creative writing and media representations.

On the other hand, cultural disregard leads to the construction of single affiliations instead of plural social affiliations and cultural pluralism. Amartya Sen pointed out that this is true of the present times as it was in previous centuries of human history. For example, Sen referred to Alberuni, the Iranian historian who visited India in the 11th century. Alberuni had made a very perceptive observation of human nature and its resistance to alien cultures and the social implications that adjoin the sociology of cultures. In his early 11th century text titled Tarikh al hind (The history of India) written in Arabic, Alberuni had observed, “In all manners and usages, the Indians differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us, with our dress, and our ways and customs, and as to declare us to be devil’s breed, and our doings as the very opposite of all that is good and proper. By the bye, we must confess, in order to be just, that a similar depreciation of foreigners not only prevails among us and the Indians, but is common to all nations towards each other” (Sen 2005, 145).

Interestingly, this brings me to Samuel Huntington’s observations regarding Asian migrants in America that in a way can be extended to
diasporic communities globally. Huntington categorizes the migrants as *diasporans* and *ampersands*. Huntington differentiates between the two by stating that ampersands are those who retain ties with both locations, unlike the diasporans, who privilege their transnational identity. Huntington offers an interesting analysis about the exclusivity of the ethnic immigrant, identifying three alternatives to Americanization or national identity that were being practiced by the immigrants by the end of the twentieth century:

 [...] for some immigrants, it is segmented assimilation, that is, assimilation not into mainstream American culture and society but into a subnational, often marginal, segment of American society [...] A second alternative to Americanization is, in effect, nonassimilation, the perpetuation in the United States of the culture and social institutions the immigrants had brought with them [...] The third possibility is the ampersand alternative, to capitalize on modern communications and transportation to maintain dual allegiance, dual nationality, and dual citizenship. One consequence has been the emergence of diasporas, transnational cultural communities cutting across the boundaries between countries. (Huntington 220)

In this connection, referring to the hype surrounding multiculturalism, cultural freedom and the reductionism implied in identity disregard, and the consolidation of the diversity of cultures in their exclusivist ghettos, Amartya Sen made an interesting comment in his recent book titled *Identity and Violence*: “[…] having two styles or traditions coexisting side by side, without the twain meeting, must really be seen as “plural monoculturalism” (2005, 157).

Citing the dating of an immigrant girl with an English boy, as evidence of multicultural initiative and cultural freedom, Amartya Sen argues that if guardians oppose such inter-racial dating it is “hardly a multicultural move, since it seeks to keep the culture sequestered” (2005,157). It is well known fact that migrants out of the homeland of one’s origins seek ghettization as a comfort zone. More Problematic and exclusionary are such practices as Indians forming cultural associations in their new homelands but rarely are they called Indian cultural associations, they are mostly region specific organizations. So there are Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati or Tamil cultural associations in the new homeland. Such organizations passionately try to preserve the tradition and customs of their respective regions like self-appointed vigilantes of their very specific regional customs and practices. Prioritizing one’s regional affinities and religious practices over one’s national identity bears the seeds of fragmentation that may often germinate towards fostering separatist
initiatives in the place of origin and voluntary social and cultural isolation in the new homeland.

The exclusionary zest for plural monoculturalism became apparent from my watching of various programmes on the multicultural channels in Australia and very recently in Canada—specifically news and views in Punjabi, which in fact is just one of the 18 officially recognized languages of India and that list includes English. When there is such a concerted desire to privilege and eroticize regional culture of the home left behind, the counter result inevitably is a splintered identity. Separatist desires for exceptionalism instead of cultural pluralism ushers in the risk of discrimination and the resultant disinterest in the society and culture of the re-located space. Hence the diaspora is caught between the desire and nostalgia for both the nation and specifically for the region of one’s origin that one has left behind while simultaneously there is an equivalent desire to be recognized as part of the host culture or the re-located home, not as a member of a model minority but as a first class citizen.

In this context the desire to belong in both worlds, to flow seamlessly from one to the other, is an idealized space of dual passports and fluid identities. Since 2003, India now hosts an annual get-together of NRIs and PIOs. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conference underscores this desire to engage, an intense longing to belong, not as an either/or choice but expressing a strong desire to belong to both the global and the local. This longing to be involved and recognized as cultural contributors and investors is contingent with a feeling of cultural alienation of an outsider in the mainstream culture of the re-located home. In this context it may be necessary to quote a few definitions about the diaspora at some length.

Stuart Hall prioritized the concept of hybridity and elaborated that, “Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Williams and Chrisman 1994, 402). Homi Bhabha identified a Third Space that engaged a spatio-temporal cultural negotiation. In Location of Culture, Bhabha explained:

The theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity. To that end we should remember that is the ‘inter’—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture […] And by exploring this Third Space we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as others of ourselves (1994, 38-9).
In a recent essay the post-colonial theorist Bill Ashcroft tells us how and why he differs from this sense of diasporic dis-ease. Ashcroft points out that as the global environment enables rapid commuting between multiple homes, single residencies are no longer the only statistically recognized norm in the global culture. Defining the position of the diasporic subject in the Transnation, distinct from both nation and the transnational, Ashcroft offers the concept of the Transnation as a Utopia. I am quoting Ashcroft’s essay in some length to highlight how the diaspora may be regarded as a confident transformed identity-

The transnation is more than “the international,” or “the transnational,” which might more properly be conceived as a relation between states. What China and India bring to prominence is the potentiality of the nation itself as transnation. Transnation is not simply universal, not simply between or across nations, but has its own historical and cultural currents, its range of orientations. Transnation is the embodiment of transformation: the interpolation of the state as the focus of power, the erasure of simple binaries of power the appropriation of the discourses of power, and the circulation of the struggle between global and local. But most importantly, it is the fluid, migrating outside of the state that begins within the nation […] (Ashcroft 12)

It is the Othering of the unknown as uncanny that has been addressed with serious purpose in migrant writing, as these record the migrant’s experience of uprooting and re-rooting in an unfamiliar space. Some of the memoirs and fictional texts that address the issues of displacement, re-location, loss, memory, and the paradox entrenched in the desire for and distrust of the unknown may be tracked in such texts as Meme Abdullah’s The Time of the Peacock, (1965), Leela Gandhi’s Measures of Home (2000), K.S. Manian’s The Return, Satendra Nandan’s The Wounded Sea, Christine Mangala’s The Firewalkers and Transcendental Pastimes (1991) and Inez Baranay’s Neem Dreams (2007) and the very recent still to be released Robyn Friend’s The Lovers’ handbook which the author describes as being a “cross-cultural love story set against a background of violent conflict in Punjab and submerged racism in Australia” (IJAS 50). These are just some significant texts that carefully deconstruct some of the essentialisms manifest in the extravaganza of ethnic exotic Other, but along with these mentioned there are many other South Asian-Australian migrant cultural fictions. Students may like to refer to Bruce Bennet’s collection of essays under the title Homing in that includes an Australian literary critic’s evaluation of cultural negotiation in the essay titled, “Glimpses of India” and also the Bruce Bennet and
The Two-Way Flow: Connecting Cultures, Understanding Others

Susan Hayes’ edited volume of short stories *Home and Away Australian Stories of Belonging and Alienation*.

In this connection Yasmine Gooneratne’s comment about cultural disconnect between Australian and Asia is an important observation, “I have no wish to generalize but, despite Australia’s proximity to Asia and the development of this country since 1974 […] it is clear to me from my reading of Australian literature that, to the great majority of Australian writers, Asia is still, and will probably remain for some time to come, the unknown, mysterious ‘other’ against which European culture has traditionally defined itself” (Gooneratne 1996, 50).

It is this cultural disconnect and disregard for identity that Amartya Sen highlights as the slippery space that retards the socializing of diverse races. There are issues of migration from developing locations to developed locations. There are also problems in the psychic terrain of migrants who may move and re-locate from one developed society into another, as we notice in M.J Hyland’s novel *How the light gets in*. In this novel the protagonist ruminates, “I thought that being in America, surrounded by wealth, the new air, the very idea of a fresh start, would obliterate all my fears. I thought I could change identities like a double agent” (Hyland 2004, 36).

In this connection, the cosmopolitan Australian woman writer who comes to mind is Christina Stead who left Australia, lived for long years in the UK and USA and returned to Australia after about forty-six years. However, the career graph of Christina Stead being considered as non-Australian and denied Australia’s most prestigious literary award, once again brings us to the endless debate about homes and homelands in the era of globalization and migration.

The most devastating reflective words in Hyland’s debut novel about negotiating cultures and the definition of the Other are the opening lines of Chapter 3, “I have read that a sheep raised by dogs will eventually learn to chase cars. But how long does it take to learn the tricks of another animal? How long will I need to live with the Hardings before I unlearn the tricks of my own family?” (Hyland 2004, 33). These questions open up debates about assimilation and acculturation that is becoming increasingly unavoidable in the growing global environment, despite the fact that Hyland is not writing about a migrant person but an exchange scholar.

Another riveting text is Jane Watson’s *Hindustan Contessa* in which an Australian woman who has married a second-generation Bengali immigrant records her experiences in the format of a fictionalized memoir, wherein fact and imagination are in playful interaction. Just a few examples will identify both the Othering and its reversal within the diasporic community.
Sanjukta Dasgupta

Jane Watson’s very first chapter begins with Milan and Tillie held as hostages by Kashmiri terrorists who appear to be strangely naïve. One of them asks Milan, “You are an Indian? Why are you carrying an Australian passport…?” Milan replies, “I was born in India. But my family all live in Australia. I am an Australian citizen” (Watson 2002, 4). In the very same chapter Tillie refers to the cultural resistance that she experiences in Milan’s family in India which she comes to visit as Milan’s newlywed sari wearing Australian bride. Again when Matilda makes an effort to learn Bengali, her mother-in-law’s sister Jyoti exclaims, “Why do you want to learn Bengali? […] Such a useless language. No-one in Australia can speak it […] You are going to India. It’s a dreadful place. Filthy and dirty. I wouldn’t waste my money […] But you’re Indian, I’m not—[…] I was born in Britain when Ma and Baba were overseas. I’ve got a British passport. I’m British” (Watson 2002, 88).

In an interview with Michelle Perry Jane Watson talks about the themes of the novel:

I intend to explore how things look different from the vantage points of different cultures, different ways of relating and to turn on its head our Western view of time and storytelling. I wanted it to be not just a tale of India but a story of people who try to exist in the global melting pot and who live on the edge. I was interested in trying to help people see India in a more three dimensional way. I think that Tillie uncovers much she did not understand about India before and during the trip as well as much she did not understand about herself. As an anti-racist, feminist academic resident in the Global South, however, I feel we need to engage in constructing a more critically informed world literature and cultural studies syllabus that can provide a more holistic understanding of our varied political affiliations. We are aware of the French sociologist Pierre Bordieau’s arguments about the deep intermeshing of economic and cultural capital. Following Aijaz Ahmed who interrogates the exclusionary dynamics of Frederic Jameson’s contentions about Third world literature as non-canonical, I would like to argue in favour of an inclusiveness that is not just about my South Asian locational identity but about the spirit of inclusiveness that ideally should be the ontological crux of a globalized world. Ahmed had stated, “Jameson’s is not a First World text; mine is not a Third World text. We are not each other’s civilizational Others”. (Ahmad 1992, 122)

At the 2005 World Social Forum, held in Porto Allegre, Brazil, Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy spoke about the function of literature for our times: “Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it […] With our art, our music, our literature […]—and our ability to tell our own stories.” In an article, “The Arduous Conversation
Will Continue,” published in *The Guardian* on July 19, 2005, Hanif Kureishi voiced a similar opinion: “[t]he only patriotism possible is one that refuses the banality of taking either side, and continues the arduous conversation. That is why we have literature, the theatre, newspapers—a culture, in other words” (*The Guardian* 19 July, 2005).

The dismissive Sanskrit signifier *Kupamanduk* (“well-frog”) that ridicules the resident well-frog’s myopia is not about social security but about social and cultural disregard and insularity and such disregard is neither blissful nor desirable as it underpins a possible potential for social crisis through misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

As it is now no longer unfashionable to refer to Marx whose arguments are being systematically excavated and extrapolated in order to posit such arguments as a counter discourse to the rather unreliable space of globalization that Gayatri Spivak in her recent book *Other Asias* dismisses with characteristic élan, challenging the privileged metropolitan centers and their agents: “Globalization is a false promise of socialism. It is capitalism pretending to be socialism. How can we be taken in by that?” (Spivak 2008, 244). Therefore, traversing beyond the free movement of economic capital, the following is what Marx writes welcoming the international cultural connectivity relevant and extremely crucial in the transformative environment of a technologically advanced cultural consumerism. I am quoting at some length:

*The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionaries, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.* (Marx 1848, 6)
Perhaps, Bhabha was reiterating the same thoughts when he observed, “America leads to Africa, the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the center; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis” (Bhabha 1990, 6).

So, moving beyond the rigid boundaries of racial pride and prejudice it is expected that the two way flow of culture specific productions, from texts to textiles, will promote social connectivity and social networks between India and Australia or Australasia. Thereby the Other is not perceived as bizarre and intrusive, the Freudian unhomely and the uncanny, but as complementary to the homely or familiar identity of both the nations in a relationship of reciprocity and engaged participatory cultural connectivity and understanding. This involves an active willingness to be contaminated as a positive performative act, as Appiah and Spivak advocated in their observations about the politics of identitarianism (Spivak 2008, 225). As a matter of fact Spivak’s query and the teasing following phrase may provoke very significant epistemic debate about mapping location and geographies and its co-relation with the geographies of the mind, “Is Australia in the Asia-Pacific? A labyrinth of investigation there […]” (Spivak 2008, 236).

It is this sense of philosophic and abstract internationalism that should inspire the dual relationship very specifically between Australia and India, a continent and a sub-continent, a dual negotiation desiring the sharing of capital at all levels, economic, social, human and cultural, that moves beyond nationalism, fascism, race identities, religious bias and gender oppression and their constructed database. This desire can be played out with dedication in the present century, which has just completed its 8th year. Perhaps it is this spirit that prompted Gregory David Roberts, the celebrated Australian writer, author of the extraordinary text *Shantaram* being made into a film by Mira Nair, the diasporan film maker of Indian origin. Gregory David Roberts wrote an open letter telling his fellow Australians and other visitors to India not to lose faith in India when the Mumbai carnage, the target of global terrorism, rocked the world: “I want to plead with you, to keep the faith with India and the city I love, Bombay. If we continue to visit the country and meet the people, if we spend our time in the beautiful chaos and chaotic beauty […] If we go on opening our hearts to the best that India teaches us, the people who did this violence can never win” (Roberts, 2009).

For Indians as Australia emerges as a vast and fascinating adventure on multiple levels, for Australians the cultural diversity of India can be an
equally alluring location. As the Australian poet Geoff Page who recently visited India wrote:

I thought perhaps eight lines would hold them
Store the details that I have seen
But India has proved much wider
Than any LA movie screen.

The sounds are too loud for the sound track
The film stock’s problems are the same
The images are small explosions
Everything’s outside the frame
(Australia-India Focus Newsletter Dec 2008, 12)

The spirit of intellectual curiosity and participation crucial in understanding Others leading to the recognition of heterogeneity and cultural pluralism, is that defining engaged spirit that can help in strengthening India’s ties with Australia, ensuring that the two-way flow will destabilize the rigid boundaries and borders of race, colour, religion, gender and location, and help in re-defining identity and community constructions.

Works cited

I propose to approach the issue of Landscape and Identity through early Australian poetry in the way I initiate my students into the beginning of my post-graduate course at JNU. The texts I am using here are by Frank MacNamara, better known as Frank the Poet, Charles Harpur, Gordon, Paterson and Henry Lawson besides some anonymous verse. I find that this provides students with a basis, a focus for formulating their ideas on the creation of the Australian identity and the notion of Australianness. They try and figure out how the writers grappled in the new land with the issue of a new found identity that initially was difficult to connect with. The early poetry is witness to the repressive regime of the Officials, the tribulations of the convict days, the hardships of early pioneering, the violent antithesis of topography and climate, the harshness and malevolence of nature from where it moves on to the slow but gradual formation of a civilization, the taming of nature, the mechanization of natural resources and the triumph over the bush. Its strength has been rooted in its capacity to overcome the English influence and creation of a distinctive national ethos, an ethos that tried to understand the contradictions of the bush, its silence created by the absence of the human, a psychic disturbance, its images of disease and death:

The same ragged gum-trees, reminding you of men with dirty, tattered shirts [...] the same charred, prostrate trunks like blackfellows knocked down in a drunken squabble [...] the same black, jagged stumps, like foul decaying teeth [...] the same not grass, but graminaceous scurf, as if the earth had got ringworm. (Rowe, “Peter Possum’s Portfolio”)