

Australian Stories of India 1850 -1950

Bruce Bennett

This paper grows from a larger project which examines Australian encounters with India and Indians in fiction, especially short fiction from the 19th to the early 21st century and may lead to an anthology devised with university colleagues in India. The focus in this paper is on the Australian colonial and Indian Raj phases of cultural history in our respective countries and their hangover into the early and mid-20th century—from about 1850 to 1950.

Few Indians may be aware of the pervasive lexical effects of the noun 'India' on the southern hemisphere. In 1770, Captain James Cook's naturalist on the *Endeavour*, Joseph Banks, wrote: 'Our boat proceeded along shore, and the Indians followed her at a distance, ¹ Indians?' This early linkage of Indians with a people later to be called, 'aborigines' 'aboriginals' or blacks has its counterpoint in early 21st century scholarship as a number of early career or senior scholars from India investigate psychological, social and environmental links between indigenous Australian people and similarly underprivileged Indians, especially Dalit people. And by one of those strange coincidences, 'India' is becoming a favourite name for European Australian girls, I have not yet heard of 'Australia' as a favourite name among Indian people of the Indian subcontinent.

The literary record of [white] Australian encounters with people of the Indian subcontinent, or with ideas of India and Indians, is a long one, which I will approach here in its early phases chiefly through published stories in magazines and newspapers. I might also note in passing that present-day Australian Aboriginal writers, including Sally Morgan and Alf Taylor, have indicated their affinity with India, and Jack Davis's grandfather was a Sikh.

Thanks to, or curses upon, the British empire, 21st century Australians can reflect upon a partially shared socio-cultural history of representations and misrepresentations with British people of India and Indian people with certain opinion-makers in Britain that represents a quite

different pattern from Australia's historic relationship with our other great northern neighbour, China. Invasion scare novels of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, feature China and Japan as invaders of Australia, but never India.² By the 1960s, Australian novelist Christopher Koch could write his novel *Across the Sea Wall* (1965)³ which showed a certain rapport with India, while Greg Clark wrote his symptomatic analysis of a still current attitude, *In Fear of China* (1967).⁴

By contrast with Clark's litany of perceived historical, political and psychological barriers to engagement with China, Koch shows his Australian protagonist travelling through India and recognising that he and his Indian friends are really 'brothers under the skin'. But it's an edgy, taut relationship between Robert O'Brien and Sunder Singh, which is exemplified in a stand-off between them on Marine Drive, Madras, when Sunder speaks out:

'You see O'Brien,' he said, you bloody Australians don't know what you are. You don't think much of colonialism, but then suddenly you're waving the Union Jack. It's disheartening'. They passed a statue of Queen Victoria, on a plinth beside the Drive, and he pointed up at her. There you are, why don't you salute her? You'd like her back, wouldn't you?'⁵

The novelist does not let his character off this particular hook. Indeed, he reinforces the point:

[To] his own surprise, O'Brien found himself looking up at the pudding-faced queen with a certain wistfulness. Relic of the Raj, bereft in independent India, she grilled in the terrible heat, a figure of fun, her majesty a joke; and he felt sorry for her, Victoria Regina, Empress of India, perhaps simply because she was familiar, and he had a sudden thirst for anything familiar.⁶

Koch's Indian scene reverberates backwards into our real colonial history and forwards into the new reality of the American empire vying with Australia's still awkward and tentative, though developing, cultural relationship with the countries of Asia, including India. (I differentiate

here between the notion of deeper *cultural* relations, which are my central interest, and the development of trade and commerce, though the two are clearly linked in some respects.)

In more visionary mode, Christopher Koch also wrote a scenario wherein a greater ‘family closeness’ might be developed through spiritual and cultural links between Australia and the countries of what he called ‘the Indo-European zone’, especially Australia, Indonesia and India :

Without myth, the spirit starves, and in postcolonial Australia, we are going to have to build a new myth out of old ones. And I would suggest that these old ones will not belong simply to the European zone, but to the Indo- European zone, of which India and Indonesia are both inheritors, as we are. Other great cultures, such as China, we may admire, we may-gain from, but we will not find such family closeness with; the sense of common roots.⁷

We have been made aware recently of fundamental geographic links between these countries through the earth’s plate. We are told by seismologists that when the India-plate — which is part of the Indo-Australian plate and is drifting north-east an average of 5cm a year — suddenly slipped 15 metres below the Burma plate in late December 2004, the seabed was thrust upwards by 10 metres. It would normally take three centuries for the India plate to move as much as it did in that instant. At any rate, the fourth largest earthquake recorded since 1900 unleashed what an Indian fisherman later called ‘the angry sea’ which devastated many coastal areas in the region.⁸ It remains to be seen how the slow recovery from this catastrophic tsunami will be played out in terms of ‘a family closeness’, or otherwise.

Against the background of such shattering events, the smaller human dramas of late 19th and early 20th century Australians’ encounters with Indians, and the idea of India, may seem inconsequential. Yet these are the kinds of small but significant human interactions, played out under the banners of different empires and geo-political forces, that are proceeding all around our

region today. Perhaps, in retrospect, - we can even afford the ironic smiles that our forebears' represented behaviour, as represented in short stories, novels and travel narratives, may evoke.

For in retrospect, it is clear that many white Australians who visited India, or thought about inhabitants of the sub-continent, saw themselves as proxy representatives of the British empire, however lowly their status in Australia may have been. Behind this, of course, was a racism that saw 'white men' as superior to 'brown men' (men, rather than women taking the role of representatives of their race). This, we have seen, was a continuing tradition of thought and attitude since as least Captain Cook's voyages in the 1770s. But for the particulars of lived experience and their emotional tonalities we turn here to literature, in particular prose narratives.

The place to begin is perhaps in the mid-19th century in the figure of John Lang, accurately described by C.D. Narasimhaiah as 'the first Australian-born novelist on Indian soil'.⁹ The grandson of a Jewish convict at Botany Bay, Lang was educated in Australia and in England and moved to India in 1842, where he continued in his profession as a lawyer, wrote novels, stories and a travel book, and edited a newspaper — *The Mofussilite* in Meerut. A recent essay by Rick Hosking has examined Lang's first novel set in India, which bears a typically long Victorian title: *The Wetherbys; Father and Son; Or, Sundry Chapters of Indian Experience*.¹⁰ The book was first serialised in *The Mofussilite*, then in *Fraser's Magazine* in London, before being republished in book form in 1853 by Chapman and Hall. Hosking summarises his impressions of *The Wetherbys*:

[The Wetherbys contains] no fine and solemn writing about Empire. Instead, Lang describes the sordid experience of cantonment life where rakish subalterns and ancient, incapable colonels are supposedly in charge of disorderly regiments, where 'the Titans of the Punjab' are seen as barely able to cope with disorderly marital situations and brittle domestic arrangements. India as a place has little impact on the colonizers, and India as a place of complex and ancient cultures simply does

not exist. The few Indians who are represented are without, exception subordinate and inferior, and typically nameless servants.”

Nevertheless, Hosking suggests an Australian slant to Lang's writing of India as that of ‘a larrikin outsider’ and ‘against the convention which found romance in empire’.¹² An aspect of research that remains to be done is a full bibliographical record of Lang's short fiction and other writings about India. But the available record suggests a mid-century perspective on British India that was alert to the absurdities of life there as in Australia.

Many Australian narratives of India are stories of travel. As David Walker has shown, Australia's first major travel book about India is James Kingston's *The Australian Abroad* (1880; 1885), which is witty, informative and unrepentantly imperialist in outlook.¹³ Hingston's enthusiasm for new places is infectious. Walker remarks that Kingston was drawn to ‘the strangeness and intractable difference of the mysterious East’ and was influenced in this by the *Arabian Nights* tales.¹⁴ According to Kingston, India had a special place in any educated man's imagination and was seen to have a spiritual dimension: to see India was to learn ‘there is an object in life.’¹⁵ Hingston's wit is his saving grace, and perhaps a sign of an emergent 19th century Australian-ness. Like Clive James, Kingston places an image of himself at the forefront of his travel stories, where he is vulnerable to the charms of places and people, and he looks for philosophies of living behind appearances. In his short narrative of a visit to the Parsees' Towers of Silence at Bombay,¹⁶ Kingston light-heartedly presents himself as a somewhat clumsy detective wanting to solve a mystery, who drops his new hat into an enclosure at the Towers and goes searching for it. He feels like ‘bluebeard's wife among the remains of her predecessors in the forbidden chamber’ and is swooped by the vultures who are there to pick the bones of the dead. Almost a century later, in the mid-1960s during a stopover at Bombay from the P&O liner, *The Himalaya*, on my way from Australia to study in Oxford, I too visited this same tourist site, but with a greater readiness to accept its evocation of awe and horror rather than to see myself as a detective and travel guide. I

suspect that some of my fellow travellers, though, may have viewed the Towers with something of the same jaunty insouciance as Kingston had shown eighty-five years earlier.

Military life provided one of the main avenues for Australian understanding of life in 19th and early 20th century India. Many narratives reflect this, ranging from journalistic sketches in magazines or newspapers such as *The Australian Town and Country Journal*, the *Bulletin*, or *The Lone Hand* to the whimsical, historical romance tales of Ethel Anderson and Molly Skinner's novel *Tucker Sees India* (1937). I will return to both of these women writers shortly.

A theme that runs through much early Australian writing about India is the puzzle of masculinity that this country poses. The 'manly' military virtues of courage, strength and solidarity are comically tested, for example, in an anonymously published piece, 'A Strange Night-watchman: A Story of Northern India', in *The Town and Country Journal* in 1889.¹⁷ The story features the fears of a tremulous English visitor, advisedly named Mr Tremmel, when he visits military and missionary friends at a hill station in northern India:

[Mr Tremmel] looked upon all India as a 'ravening tiger' crouching behind every tree, and a boa-constrictor, as long as a ship's cable, hidden in every thicket.¹⁸

His fears seem to be realised at the missionary's house, when he sees a six-foot black and yellow snake gliding along the floor towards him. He yells loud and long before he is told that this is Dickie, the 'house-snake' and a pet of the children. Like colonial tales of Englishmen lost in the Australian bush, this story purports to show the comical short-comings of men who fail to live up to the *Boys' Own Annual* adventure-tale format of stoical courage in adversity. Such tales reinforce notions of wild and exotic otherworlds where only 'true' men can be men. The men who retreat in fear provide a comic counterpoint to the many other action/adventure tales of tiger or cheetah hunting in India, in which men *are* said to be men.

Women's fiction contains some illuminating comparisons. Both Ethel Anderson and Mollie Skinner experienced something of barracks life in India and used it as a point of departure

in their fiction. Born in England of Australian parents in 1883, Anderson was educated in Sydney before, in 1904, she married a British officer who served for ten years with the Indian Army. Anderson's colourful *Indian Tales* (1948) and *Little Ghosts* (1959) range in their subject matter from the 16th century to the last days of the British Raj, and show an appreciation of Indian legends and folklore.

The women of India especially fascinate Anderson and many of her tales deal with thwarted love, or love triumphant, in the face of military violence or racial difference and discrimination, past and present. In the long story 'Mrs James Greene',¹⁹ the eponymous heroine survives uprisings, violence and threats to her virtue in Sitapur to become the adored mistress of Mirza Khan, to whom she in her turn devotes the rest of her life.

Anderson takes an inquisitive and ironic stance towards the complexities of racial and cultural inheritance in India in her story 'The Eurasian'. In Dinapore, where the story is set, Anderson notes a tendency towards isolation in the Eurasian community. Such households, she observes:

vary as their blood fluctuates between British, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Dutch origins on the paternal side and between the admixture of Mogul or Hindu strains on the maternal.²⁰

She also observes the extreme fascination of British-men, especially for Eurasian women, and the ironies of fate which sometimes enable the crossing of racial lines. Her appreciation of India, past and present, shows a curiosity about exotic facts and details, and is at times rhapsodic in its exuberant, peacock display of language. The following scene-setting paragraph from 'The Eurasian' shows something of the flavour of Anderson's prose:

So these figures met, the servant Nedoo with his child, the jealous colonel, the young soldier, the Eurasian girl, the half-seen watcher by the wall. They stayed grouped among the immense trees, under a sickle moon, beside an unruly river.

They had collected there by chances as fortuitous as those which assembled the butterflies in their dances above the red bouvardias, as causally gathered together, as carelessly dispersed. Yet forces which governed the human pattern—hate, greed, love—were perhaps deeper in origin than the love of sunlight, the joy of colour, that linked the dancing butterflies together above the red flowers. It may be so. For a moment the jealous colonel saw the young Eurasian girl in Hew's arms. For one moment Hew held her, a girl whose name was unknown to him (later, under tragic circumstances, he was to swear ignorance of it), and then the pattern made by those meeting figures dissolved. They parted and went their several ways. (186)

Mollie Skinner's novel *Tucker Sees India*²¹ is less subtle and insightful than Anderson's stories of India, but more definitively and self-consciously Australian. Skinner was the co-author with D.H. Lawrence of *The Boy in the Bush* (1924), a novel about the tribulations of English settlers in Western Australia in the 1880s which shows the passionate individuality of one of them, Jack Grant, in defiance of a conventional, colonial society and a sense of the threatening bush.²²

Tucker Sees India draws on Skinner's time when she worked during much of the First World War as a nurse at hospitals for soldiers in Calcutta, Rawalpindi near the frontier, Peshawar at the end of the Indian railway, Bunnu, the Malakand Fort, Lahore, Baroda and elsewhere.²³ As an Australian nurse in Lady Minto's private nursing service, Skinner was aware of the way Australians could be put down as mere 'colonials', by their British superiors and this insight informs her novel. Skinner's leading character, Tucker, is a member of the Australian Imperial Force sailing for Europe, who is left behind in Bombay when he misses the boat after a hard night out. Tucker is a rough-and-ready Australian male of his generation who gets caught up in a number of Indian adventures en route to the 'real' war. At the end, he has 'seen India' and is ready for anything life may throw at him.

In Skinner's novel, Tucker is a feckless but generous Australian, basically uninterested in authority or position, who is happy to throw himself into any adventure and make a joke of it. He specialises in narrow scrapes. In Chapter 7 of *Tucker Sees India*, for example, our hero, who has been in India for only a fortnight finds himself caught up in a kidnapping for ransom of a young English woman by tribesmen in the Khyber Pass. He disguises himself as a mad mullah and, failing to find himself a 'black tracker'—he claims he would be able to find one in a similar situation in Australia—he travels by camel with a local man, Ali Mohammed, to free the white woman. The events that follow are a comical adventure narrative of stock characters and narrow escapes. As he hurriedly disrobes from his mad mullah outfit, after saving the girl who has caused him too much trouble, Tucker remarks that 'if the only way to succeed in such stunts as these is to be the other fellow, we'll get away before the enemy knows I'm me'.²⁴ This is of course comical, opportunistic disguise rather than the more subtle merging of personalities in search of deeper understanding which we might find in other kinds of novels or stories. It shows the kind of straightforward narrative adventure tale that D.H. Lawrence transformed from Skinner's draft in the *The Boy in the Bush*.

The popular British image of an exotic, exciting, extravagant India on which Skinner could draw, albeit with a certain humorous undercutting of British pomposity, is deployed by a number of short fiction writers in Australian magazines and newspapers of the late 19th and early 20th century. Albert Dorrington's 'The Mouth of the Moon-God' in *The Town and Country Journal* in 1907²⁵ is a good example. Dorrington uses the figure of the legendary American pirate and buccaneer of the Pacific, Captain 'Bully' Hayes, to tell a yarn of an adventure in India after he has landed in Calcutta.

Dorrington's yarn is purportedly told in an opium shop in Port Darwin to a group of 'shellers and beche-de-mer men'. The story's subject matter and theme hark back to Rider Haggard and forward to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. 'Bully' Hayes, the storyteller within Dorrington's yarn is an

unreconstructed scoundrel who loots foreign treasure wherever he can find it. The specific adventure he recalls takes place in a Hindu temple in Meeraj, where a guide, Keddah Singh, has taken Hayes and his mate. The guide persuades the men to put aside a sack of their treasure from the floor of the castle, where the skeletons of previous looters, dead of the plague, lie around:

some lay in the open courtyard, others sprawled in front of the altars, with silver and gold gee-gaws clutched in their skeleton hands. We could see, too, where the jackals had been and stripped them bare, leaving nothing but the bones and the jewels.²⁶

Undeterred, the pirates continue their gothic adventure, but they have not counted on the treachery of their Indian guide. Persuaded by Singh to reach into the jaws of the moon-god to retrieve his tooth, Hayes is trapped when the jaws snap shut on his arm. A bizarre comedy ensues when Hayes' companion, Bill, uses a crowbar to smash the moon-god's face in and free his mate. The fabulous tooth is lost and Jeddah Singh escapes with the loot. No moral is drawn from this tale. Hayes, the loser on this occasion, concludes that much gold and silver remains in Indian temples. The American pirate vows he will return to get some more one of these days'. An old dream of imperial India—of a treasure trove to be plundered—is played out for Western readers.

A recurrent feature of exotic India in Australian magazine and newspaper stories in the early 20th century is the life of Maharajahs and their retinues. Australian playwright Louis Esson's 1910 story 'My Friend, the Maharajah', published in the *Bulletin*,²⁷ is a witty spoof on excessive wealth and the extravagant styles of living it generates. The chief figure of this story is the sporting Maharajah of Jodhpur, whose tailor has fashioned the Jodhpur riding breeches which became famous around the polo-playing world and beyond. Louis Esson's socialistic views do not lead him to sober criticism of the Maharajah's excesses, however. In present-day terms, his point of view might be described as that of a chardonnay socialist. Indeed, his own Australian-derived love

of sport draws him into an affectionately humorous account of quintessential Jodhpur polo among the Maharajah's elite followers and friends:

Was this polo, or was it only a dream? They didn't play that kind of game in Victoria. It was fierce. The Jodhpur team? Well, there was his Highness a reckless rider, famous for his dash, meteoric. There was Fute Singh, as solid as the Rock of Ages. There was Zelim Singh, blue-turbanned, a fierce set look in his eyes, cantering all around the gallant English officers, and giving them naught. And finally there was Dokal Singh, the world's Champion. Who shall describe Dokal? A handsome man, nearly 6 ft. high, 12½ stone, perfect in build, a cavalier in manner, a very Napoleon of polo. As rover he was everywhere, two men trying in vain to stop him. Full back, his defence was as that of Gibraltar. Shooting for goal, he would have bagged all the peanuts in the Eastern markets. His attack was a charge of the heavy brigade, officers, ponies, even his Highness himself, if he were in the road, being bumped, and then scattered like chaff blown before the autumn gale.....he was a whole team in himself, a champion, a Caesar. He was the personal factor in history. He moulded events.²⁸

The Australian visitor, feted by the Maharajah, seems to accept and enjoy these sporting excesses—in hunting, horse-races and billiards as well as polo— and the hyperbolic heroes that grow from them. 'This sporting Maharajah takes sport seriously', says an observer, admiringly. His companion agrees: 'The stables—they are the State.'

Esson's visit to India in 1908 also included a string of articles, essays and stories for *The Lone Hand*, an Australian nationalist journal which both played up the fear of China and Japan and criticised the morals and manners of the British in India and Australia. This kind of anti-imperialist nationalism, like Esson's rather theoretical socialism, was an avenue to uncertainty and confusion. As David Walker has shown, Esson mocked the 'unedifying mix of racial arrogance, brutality and

bureaucracy' in British India and the imperialists' tendency to see 'sedition' everywhere, and urged Australians to dissociate themselves from the British in India.²⁹ At the same time, he was drawn to the eccentric individuality of Maharajahs and to images of traditional village life in India.

If military life, and the high life of British and Indian elites are generally preferred by Australian writers in the era of the Raj to the life of the streets, and the ambiguities and troubling doubts about foreign occupation of India, there are nevertheless some exceptions. While many writers sketchily refer to beggars or the anonymous life of crowded streets and bazaars, Mary C. Elkington's 'The Soul of the Melon Man', published in *The Lone Hand* in 1908,³⁰ uses the form of a fable to contemplate foreign ways of thinking and believing, and how they may affect giving and receiving. In 'The Soul of the Melon Man', an Ayah tells her Memsahib about how, despite being hungry herself, she has given some pan to a poor, hungry family. What has helped her to do this, she says, is 'the soul of the water-melon man hovering near.' Then follows a tale about a seller of melons in the bazaar who was once generous but has selfishly and dishonestly grown relatively well-off by cutting thin slices or giving dry, stale pieces of melon to little children and other customers. When a traveller passes, he finds the water-melon man asleep beneath a tree with his soul departed from him in the branches above. The traveller persuades the soul to return to the sleeping body which, with some grumbling it does. The traveller then gives the renewed Melon Man two melons, to recommence his trade, one to eat himself and one for his soul which, 'if that is starved it is better that a man should cease to be'.³¹ After some temptation, the seller of melons responds to his now indwelling soul and becomes kind and generous again. When the soul grows, he feels it blossoming 'through all his being'.³² Thus, the Ayah tells her Memsahib, when 'we who pause and put our own needs before the sad lack of others, we hear the rustling wings of the melon seller's soul'.³³ It is a tale designed to appeal to the better, feminine self of imperious foreigners, which female rather than male writers in English seem more licensed to draw attention to. The contemplation of a single soul in this story transcends the confused messages of the crowded streets of poor people.

By the 1920s, a number of fissures were appearing in the easy confidence expressed by British authorities and their sometimes resistant friends and allies in India, such as the Australians. Mahatma Gandhi had begun his strategy of non-violent confrontation with India's British rulers in 1920. E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, which showed the near impossibility of an equal friendship even among liberal, educated men of goodwill across the racial divide was published in 1924. Occasional stories in Australian magazines and newspapers in this decade also showed cracks in the wall.

Such a story is R. Francis Strangman's 'Black and White', which appeared in *The Triad* in 1926.³⁴ The story's title seems to invite the rejoinder, 'There's no such thing [as black and white]'. The first-person narrator is identified early as an Australian who tends to see things in terms of his home country. As he sits on the verandah of his bungalow, where he is lord of all, he surveys the scene at dusk :

Looking before me, I could see the dull-green rolling plain scarred by yellow sheep-tracks; the narrow winding river and the trees, like willows, dotted along its banks; beyond this again the wheat-fields, miles in extent, and the little white farm-houses. Away in the distance, dark ranges of hills. What a pity there, were no rabbit-proof fences.³⁵

The writer has already shown readers that this Australian newcomer in India is a dreamer who does not see clearly what is before him. He is an unreliable observer. He is sufficiently self-aware, however, to recognise in himself 'the patronising attitude of all newcomers' when he speaks with his servant and bearer Naghu, and is mystified when Naghu speaks nervously and passionately about the 'damn Parsees' who are alleged to be taking the best jobs from other Indians. These are deep waters and the Australian is adrift in them. He recognises that in any conversation with an Indian there are 'so many detonators waiting to be touched off'.³⁶ He is even more surprised that evening when he learns from his chief that the bearer is using a false name and is suspected of

murdering a Parsee a couple of months ago. He must therefore be dismissed. But the story has a twist in the tail. The bearer has been using drugs supplied by Europeans—cocaine in this case—and a neat exchange between the newcomer and his chief concludes the story:

‘We do cause rather a lot of trouble—by being here, I mean—don’t we, sir?’

‘Oh yes. That’s one reason we’ve got to stay.’

‘Shall I get you a drink, sir?’

‘Oh please. Hell of a day this.’

‘Yes, sir. Hell of a day.’³⁷

Such stories hint at an unconscious sphere of colonial relations which Bart Moore-Gilbert has discerned in Homi Bhabha’s recognition of ‘complicitous kinds of psychic effect circulating between coloniser and colonised.’³⁸ In the 1920s, even in distant Australia, relations with India can be seen to become more interesting, intriguing, complex and dangerous than the prospect of cheetahs or tigers in the jungle. Yet it must be remembered that Australia was still six colonies of Britain until 1901 and the colonial hangover was evident until at least the mid-20th century.

What must be admitted is that none of the Australian story writers referred to in this paper from the mid-19th century to mid-20th century saw India or Indians with quite the range, depth and youthful enthusiasm of Alfred Deakin, who was to become Australia’s most literate and visionary Prime Minister. (Deakin University at Geelong, near Melbourne, reminds us of him.) Deakin vigorously promoted a federated Commonwealth of Australia during the 1890s and was a three-time Prime Minister of the fledgling nation in 1903-4.

At the invitation of the editor of the *Age* newspaper, Deakin visited India for two months in 1890, from which a series of articles and two books, *Irrigated India* (1893) and *Temple and Tomb* (1893) emerged. Deakin’s first biographer, Walter Murdoch, remarks that, ‘if his stay in India was brief, the preparation for it had been spread over many years of study; he knew the history of the

country as few Englishmen knew it'.³⁹ Although he considered British rule a net benefit to Hindus in India, Deakin remarked that 'Officialdom is nowhere more rampant than in India'; but that 'the net result is a beneficent tyranny'. He praised knowledgeably the irrigation systems of India and the temples and tombs.⁴⁰ Nor were Deakin's essays restricted to buildings and landscapes. An indication of the broad sweep of humanistic thinking allied with an astute sense of policy development that informs Deakin's *Irrigated India* is shown in the following brief quotation:

We are near enough to readily visit India and be visited.....Its students might come to the universities of our milder climate, instead of facing the winter of Oxford, Paris or Heidelberg. Our thinkers may yet become authorities upon questions which need personal acquaintance with India and its peoples.⁴¹

As Australia's first major international statesman, Alfred Deakin needs to be re-read and reconsidered. As a man of letters, he reminds us of the traditions, including literature, that provide an avenue of continuing linkage between Australia and the Indian subcontinent as our two-way exchanges increase. The 'family closeness' that novelist Christopher Koch envisaged between the literate peoples of our countries needs to be explored further and the links that were forged back then brought seriously into play once again.

Notes & References

¹ Joseph Banks, *Journal* 28 April [1896], p. 263. Cited in the *Australian National Dictionary*, ed. W.S. Ramson (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1988). 234.

² See David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999), Chapter 8.

³ C.J. Koch, *Across the Sea Wall* (Sydney. Angus & Robertson, 1965; revised edn, 1982).

⁴ Greg Clark, *In Fear of China* (Melbourne; Lansdowne, 1967).

⁵ *Across the Sea Wall*, 96.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁷ C.J. Koch, *Crossing the Gap: A Novelist's Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), 15-16. For a further consideration of some of these issues, see Bruce Bennett, 'A Family Closeness? Australia, India, Indonesia', in *The Regenerative Spirit*, ed. Nena Bierbaum et al (Adelaide: Lythrum Press, 2003), 57-67.

⁸ Robert Lusetich, 'Unimaginable Until Now', *Weekend Australian*, January 1-2, 2005, 13.

⁹ C.D. Narasimhaiah, 'Introduction', *The Literary Criterion* XV, nos. 3 & 4 (1980), xxi.

¹⁰ Rick Hosking, 'Realms of Possibility: Australia, Britain and India in John Lang's *The Wetherbys*', in *The Regenerative Spirit*, vol. 1, ed. Nena Bierbaum et al (Adelaide: Lythrum Press, 2003), 45-56.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 49.

¹² *ibid.*, 53.

¹³ *Anxious Nation*, 17-19.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶ Reprinted in *Hotel Asia*, ed. Robin Gerster (Ringwood: Penguin, 1995), 46-50.

¹⁷ Anon., 'A Strange Night-watchman: A Story of Northern India', *The Town and Country Journal*, 16 November, 1889, 29.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Ethel Anderson, *Little Ghosts* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1959), 57-87.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 180.

²¹ M.L. Skinner, *Tucker Sees India* (London: Martin Seeker and Warburg, 1937).

²² D.H. Lawrence and M.L. Skinner, *The Boy in the Bush*, ed. and introd. Paul Eggert (1924; London: Penguin, 1996).

²³ M.L. Skinner, *The Fifth Sparrow: An Autobiography* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1992), Chs. 14-15.

²⁴ *Tucker Sees India*, 132.

²⁵ Albert Dorrington, 'The Mouth of the Moon-God', *The Town and Country Journal*, 25 December 1907, 187.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Louis Esson, 'My Friend, the Maharajah', *Bulletin* vol. 13, no. 1574, 14 April 1910, 40.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *Anxious Nation*, 35.

³⁰ Mary C. Elkington, 'The Soul of the Melon Man', *The Lone Hand*, November 2, 1908, 53-55.

³¹ *ibid.*, 55.

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ R. Francis Strangman, 'Black and White', *The Triad*, June 1, 1926, 34-5.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 34.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 35.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Writing India 1757-1990* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, n.d.), 5.

³⁹ Walter Murdoch, *Alfred Deakin : A Sketch* (London: Constable, 1923), 170.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 172-3.

⁴¹ Robin Gerster (ed.) *Hotel Asia* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1995), 72-83.

(* From “Australian Stories of India 1850 – 1950,” by Bruce Bennett, in Bandyopadhyay, Deb Narayan; Banerjee, Shibnath & Chakrabarti, Santosh (Eds.), “Australian Studies: *Themes and Issues*” Volume II, pg. 14-26, 2007, Burdwan: *Centre for Australian Studies*. Copyright 2007 by *Centre for Australian Studies*.

Reprinted with permission.)