

ASAA NEWSLETTER

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AUSTRALASIA IN ASIA

Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah: First Asian Patron of ASAA

An Era Passes Away

Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah, the Grand Old Man of English Studies in India, is no more. The larger-than-life figure who was part of the generation of international scholars who helped set up the field of Commonwealth Literature was not unduly perturbed when the discipline took a postcolonial turn. Firmly in place at Dhvanyaloka, the Centre for English Studies and Indigenous Arts, that he established in Mysore, he continued to smile graciously and extended his fabulous hospitality to followers of all literary fashions. The history of English studies in India parallels CDN's personal journey from a young Leavisite, to the admirer of the work of Indian writers in English like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan and the discovery of the Indian traditions. Having personally monitored the phase, the shift from English Literature to literatures in English, his greatest contribution to the discipline, by whatever name it be called, was to help earn for writings from India and other parts of the Commonwealth, international recognition and respect.

The Karnataka Government honoured him with the Rajyotsava award and he was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India. However, despite the prestigious lectures and tenures, awards and honours, the highly acclaimed books, CDN described himself as "N for Nobody." This was the chosen title of his biography.

There were so many CDNS: the Leavisite and the Nehruvian, the British gentleman and the Indian guru, the demanding supervisor and the affectionate guide, the perfect conversationalist and the solitary walker, the ruthless critic and the charming host. Which CDN one knew depended on the time of his life one came to know him. I, with so many other scholars from all over India and indeed the world, from England, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Europe, will remember him as the spirit of Dhvanyaloka, leading generations of scholars and writers, to follow him in the consuming love of literature and cultural studies. Dhvanyaloka will never be quite the same without his physical presence but his achievements remain and his memory will be a continued source of inspiration.

ANJALI ROY

NOTE As the first Asian Patron of ASAA his suggestion that the Association first established for the "Study of Australia" extend its focus to include "Australasia" at a conference he had organized at Dhvanyaloka in 1998 brought in the valued partnership of New Zealand. The ASAA Committee is glad also that their invitation to Anna Rutherford brought her to visit Mysore for the last time (for the ASAA conference of 2000) and enabled her renew her old friendship with Professor Narasimhaiah.

EACLALS Conference: Malta 2005
Report: Cynthia vanden Driesen

The European Assn. for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (EACLALS) held its triennial conference in idyllic Mediterranean weather in Malta, an island rich in ancient historic traditions. It was also a venue with historic connections to the Commonwealth literary tradition and many of the speeches at the opening ceremony recalled the earlier conference held in Malta—thirty years before. Several persons who had been present then—were also present at the current conference and nostalgia for the halcyon days mingled with genuine celebration of the achievement represented by the attaining of such a milestone in the history of the Association and the University of Malta's association with it.

Huge plaudits are due to Dr. Stella Borg Barthels of the University of Malta who organized this conference almost single-handed. It was truly a splendid conference assembling over two hundred scholars—academics, writers, and theorists from all over Europe and beyond—Singapore, India as well as Australia, Canada, South Africa and the United States. It was truly heartening to observe the growing number of young European academics devoting so much energy and enthusiasm to the study of the new literatures.



Sightseeing: Good Friday Procession, Malta

L to R: Hena Maes-Jelinek (Univ. of Liege), Jitka Vlkova (Univ. of Brno), Shirley Chew (Univ. of Leeds) Cynthia, Elenore Wildburger (Univ. of Klagenfurt) (Photo: thanks to Amin Malak, Canada)
 Jitka and Elenore will be our new European reps.

Talking to one young woman from Spain—I was interested to note that she had travelled all the way to Ghana to interview the novelist Ama Ata Aidoo to whose work she has devoted her doctoral studies. Another—from Italy, presented a Paper on new African writing in Italian emerging from Africans settled in Italy, while an Austrian scholar spoke of her work on Australian aboriginal culture, a passion which has brought her several times to South Australia. What I noted at this conference was this sense of a “hands-on” approach to the topics of discussion—much less of sense of studies conducted from within an ivory-tower of distance which had been sometimes the feeling one took away from some of the Papers presented at earlier conferences.

The Keynote speakers at the conference addressed a range of contemporary issues. Beginning with a fascinating tracing of the past East/West routes Robert Young moved to explore the current international policies in dealing

with problems of illegal immigration; Dennis Brutus provided a rapt audience with his perceptions of the current situation in South Africa. Russell Dougall presented the Anna Rutherford Memorial Lecture. Beginning with some recollections of Anna as a one-time colleague in Australia, he moved on to present an intriguing Paper which provided food for thought in highlighting his research findings that showed the same author of a Work appreciating the great achievement represented in the famous Benin bronzes was also responsible for a tract that sought to construct the ruler of Benin as a depraved figure reminiscent of the Africans constructed in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Amongst Australians attending the conference were Ann Collet, Tanya Dalziell, Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, Helen Gilbert, Cynthia vanden Driesen and Carole Ferrier. Indian academics from India were Meenakshi Mukherjee, Jeyashree and Vijay—all from Hyderabad. As with all conferences of this nature, wonderful opportunities were presented for new friendships to be formed and for older friendships to be renewed.

While many of us missed the presence of Doireann McDermott—unable to be present due to family responsibilities—and also, of course, of Anna Rutherford whose spirit continues to be somehow present at these gatherings, it was wonderful to see Hena Maes-Jelinek—one of that early group of stalwarts who promoted the study of the new literatures (including Australian literature) in Europe continuing to take an active part in all of the proceedings—from the academic sessions to the sight-seeing (and what a lot there was to see in Malta—from the pre-historic temples on the island of Gozo and the Catacombs in Rabat, to the fantastic art works in the beautiful churches) and the dining and wining all along the marvellous sea-front! In the true style of those pioneers—Hena made time to catch up with as many old acquaintances as she could while keeping tabs on all that was going on with the serious work of the conference. The travellers' only complaint was the rapacity of the taxi drivers—but set against this was the amazingly cheap public transport which would transport you right across the islands for a minuscule sum.



Conference Dinner

L to R: Isabel Carrera (Univ. of Oviedo), Vijaysree Chaganti (Hyderabad), Carla Commelini (Univ. of Trieste), Shirley Chew (Leeds), T. Vijay Kumar (Hyderabad), Hena, Benedicte Ledent (Liege), Meenakshi Mukherjee (Hyderabad) (Seated) Cynthia and Nuria Casado.

(Photo: thanks to Katie Gramich, Bath, UK)

Possibly the biggest event of the conference was the judging and announcement of the Commonwealth Writer's Prize on the night of the conference dinner. The judges—who included Vijay Mishra from Australia—were closeted all week long going through the shortlisted entries. The final prize-winner was Andrea Levy for her novel *Small*

Island—another chronicle of West Indian experience in London but with its own fresh appeal. (Thank you Hena for giving me a gift of the book which I had not read)



L to R. Isabel, Cynthia, Vijaysree, Carla (our new rep. in Italy), Hena, Meenakshi, Shirley and Katie Gramich
(Photo: thanks to Hena)

New European representatives have been recruited to act as associate members of ASAA and to publicize ASAA activities in Europe. These are: Eleonore Wildburger, Univ. of Klagenfurt; Austria; Jitka Vlkov, Univ. of Brno, Czech Republic; Carla Commelini, Univ. of Trieste, Italy.