

REPORT



REPORT ON THREE DAY WEBINAR

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
**WHO STARTED THE BUSHFIRES?:**  
Australian Culture, Economy and  
Polity in the Post-Truth Era

SEP. 15-17, 2021 | VIRTUAL

*Organised by*

Postgraduate & Research Department of English  
University College, Thiruvananthapuram

*In collaboration with*

Centre for Australian Studies, University of Kerala

*Littcrit: A Literary Biannual Journal*

IASA: Indian Association for the Study of Australia

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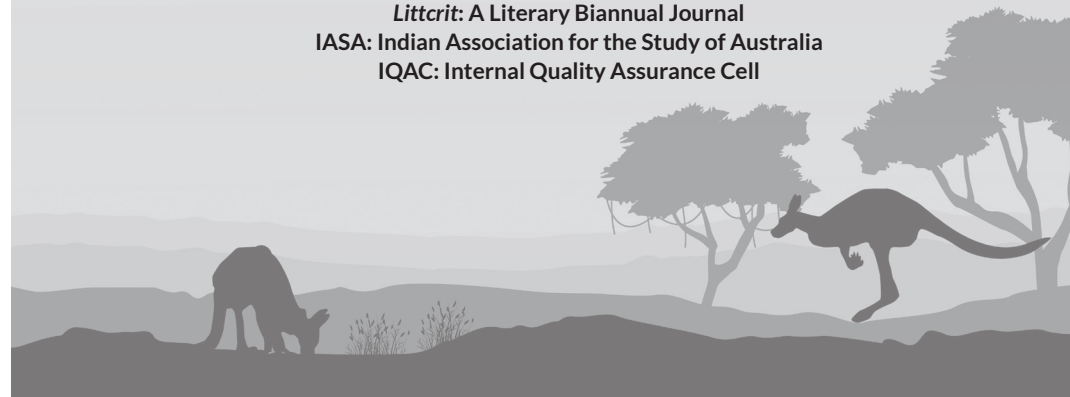
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The Postgraduate & Research Department of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram organized a three - day seminar on the topic 'Who Started the Bushfires?': Australian Culture, Economy, and Polity in the Post-Truth Era' from September 15 to 17 in the virtual mode. The conference was organized in collaboration with Centre for Australian Studies, University of Kerala, *Littcrit* - a literary biannual journal, Indian Association for the Study of Australia, and the Internal Quality Assurance Cell of the college. The webinar focused on the significant role bushfires have played in telling stories about culture, economy and polity of Australia in today's post-truth era. The programme started on 15 September 2021 at 9:30 am at the Senate Chamber of University of Kerala with the welcome address by Dr. S. Subramaniyan, Principal, University College, Thiruvananthapuram. The dignitaries on the dais were Dr. R. Bindu, Higher Education Minister of Kerala, Prof. (Dr.) V.P. Mahadevan Pillai, Vice Chancellor, University of Kerala, and Prof. (Dr.) P.P. Ajayakumar, Pro.Vice Chancellor, University of Kerala. Presidential remarks were given by Prof. (Dr.) V.P. Mahadevan Pillai, Vice Chancellor, University of Kerala. He praised the seminar's organizers for putting in such a tremendous

amount of work to host an international conference amidst the pandemic. He expressed his gratitude to the Minister of Higher Education for her support and presence. He noted that the day was a unique day for the University of Kerala because the Centre for Australian Studies is celebrating its silver jubilee that month. He highlighted that University College is one of India's top-ranked educational institutions, with a NAAC A grade Accreditation and a ranking of 25th in the NIRF India Ranking 2021. He underlined that cultural linkages are the foundation of political and diplomatic relations, and that international conferences like this one help to connect the disparate but related cultural and environmental challenges that exist around the world. Dr. R. Bindu, Higher Education Minister of Kerala delivered the inaugural address of the conference. She praised the Department of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram and the Centre for Australian Studies on organizing such a suitable tribute. She stated that cross-national contacts are advantageous in all disciplines of study, including cultural, political, and social ones. She was pleased to learn that the convention would focus on concerns related to the extinction of indigenous culture and nature, and she declared the conference inaugurated with this final comment. Prof. (Dr.) V.P. Mahadevan Pillai, Vice Chancellor, University of Kerala presented a book and also a booklet of conference abstracts as a token of gratitude to Dr. R. Bindu, Higher Education Minister of Kerala. Ms. Sarah Kirlew, the Australian Consul-General for South India, Chennai, delivered the special address. She mentioned that the ever-present threat of bushfires has been a strong theme of Australian literature. She shared her thoughts on the issue of bushfires in Australia, and expressed confidence that the webinar would touch upon important ecological and climatic challenges that contribute to natural disasters around the world.

The felicitations of the conference were given by Prof. (Dr.) P.P. Ajayakumar, Pro. Vice Chancellor, University of Kerala, Sri. Jayaraj J., Syndicate Member, University of Kerala, Prof.(Dr.) Meena T.

Pillai, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Kerala, Prof. (Dr.) B. Hariharan, Head, Institute of English, University of Kerala, Prof. (Dr.) Suja Kurup P.L., Director, Centre for Australian Studies, University of Kerala, and Dr. Manomohan Anthony, Convenor, IQAC, University College. Prof. (Dr.) P.P. Ajayakumar stated that the conference is an important occasion because the spread of Covid-19 has altered our lives and culture and what Covid taught us was that cooperation, not competition, is the key and the emphasis should be on collaboration when it comes to information dissemination. He stated that Mr. M. A. Baby, the former Minister of Education of Kerala had instituted the cluster college policy during his tenure but the policy could not be manifested because of the competition between colleges. He stated that should not be the case since the key to growth in any field is cooperation, not competition. He added that literary studies are now moving to a variety of fields, and he hoped that the conference will provide important contributions that would advance the subject of study. He ended by wishing the conference all the success. Sri. Jayaraj J. in his address emphasized that the very role of higher education research is to unmask the mask. Prof. (Dr.) Meena T. Pillai stated that the subject of who started the bushfires prompted her to inquire about who triggered the floods. She stated that the conference's theme reminded her of our Panchatantra, Aithiyamala, Yakshi, and other stories. She reminisced about her grandmother's recollections of surviving the 1924 floods and reflected that the conference is also about developing our personal connections with nature. Prof. (Dr.) B. Hariharan stated that the conference reminded him of two highly interesting narratives: Robert Frost's poem "Fire and Ice" and Frank Kermode's series of lectures titled *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. Prof. (Dr.) Suja Kurup P.L. in her address congratulated Dr. Chitra V.R., Organising Secretary, University College, Thiruvananthapuram and Institute of English, for the successful collaboration of the conference. She also stated that she expected the Australian Consulate to provide greater financial

and academic support in the future. Dr. Manomohan Anthony emphasized that the topic under discussion is extremely pertinent in today's world. The vote of thanks was given by Smt. Praveena Thompson, Head, Department of English, University College.

The keynote address was given by Dr. John C. Ryan, Adjunct Associate Professor, Faculty of Business, Law and Arts, Southern Cross University, New South Wales, Australia. The keynote presentation was titled 'GIBA JAGI BINJI (With Fire in Your Belly)' "Fire Ecologies and Human Nature Entanglements in Recent Aboriginal Australian Poetry, 2010-20." After Prof. Suja Kurup introduced Dr. John C. Ryan to the audience, Dr. Ryan discussed how recent aboriginals have dealt with numerous environmental crises, including the bushfire issue, in his lecture. He then gave the audience some ecocritical reading frameworks for aboriginal poetry and looked at human nature in general, with a focus on tree entanglements in aboriginal poetry and with some literary and aesthetic examples. In addition, he offered a brief overview of aboriginal cultural fires and fire ecology. He also presented two viewpoints on human fire interactions from recent aboriginal poetry, on two poems that showed both sides of the coin: "Thunder Raining Poison" (2016) by Yhonnice Scarce which depicts fire as an aspect of harmonious relationships with the environment and "Yuya Karrabura" (Fire is Burning) (2018) by Alice Eather which shows fire as an element of conflict with the environment. The presentation majorly focused on four key areas namely 1. Introduction to Recent Aboriginal Australian Poetry, 2010-20; 2. Reading Aboriginal Poetry Ecocritically: Some Frameworks; 3. Human-Tree Entanglements in Aboriginal Poetry: Literary Artistic Views; and 4. Aboriginal Cultural Burning and Fire Ecology. The presentation brought to light some of Australia's most notable literary works that depict fire ecology and human nature entanglements, such as *Fire Front: First Nations Poetry and Fire Today* edited by Alison Whittaker, "My Ancestors" by Sachem Parkin-Owens, *GUWAYU- For All Times: A Collection of First Nations Poems* edited by Jeanine Leane, *Ecocritical Concerns*

and the Australian Continent: Ecocritical Theory and Practice edited by Beate Neumeier and Helen Tiffin, *The Landscape of Australian Poetry* by Brian Elliott, *Ecopoetics and the Global Landscape: Critical Essays* edited by Isabel Sobral Campos, "Municipal Gum" by Oodgeroo Noonuccal, "Black Gum Trunk" by Lionel Fogarty, "Forest Giant" by Jack Davis, "Beautiful Yuroke Red River Gum" by Lisa Belleair, "The Tree, The Trees" by Peter Minter, "Story Tree" by Jay Hrjo and Ali Cobby Eckermann, *Fire and Hearth: A Study of Aboriginal Usage and European Usurpation in South-Western Australia* by Sylvia J. Hallam, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* by Bill Gammage, and *Dark Emu: Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* by Bruce Pascoe. The key themes discussed during the lecture were Environmental Texts, Ecocriticism, Ecopoetics, Animals and Literature, and Plants and Literature. Dr. Ryan also discussed some of the recent contributions to books on the Australian environment from different perspectives like environment to humanity, life writings, postcolonial literature, the philosophy of the seasons, ideas of wilderness, ideas of anthropocene, geopolitics and so on. Prof. (Dr.) Suja Kurup P.L., Director of the University of Kerala's Centre for Australian Studies, complimented Dr. Ryan for his informative talk. She stated that the audience gained a great deal of knowledge and information regarding aboriginal poetry, particularly current ones, as a result of his presentation. She expressed her gratitude and stated her desire to work with Dr. Ryan in the future also. The vote of thanks was given by the Organising Secretary of the international conference, Dr. Chitra V.R., Assistant Professor of English at University College, Thiruvananthapuram.

The afternoon session of the conference began with paper presentations at 1 pm. The first panel was chaired by Prof. (Dr.) Neelima Kanwar, Professor of English (ICDEOL) & Director, Centre for Australian and New Zealand Studies, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. She invited the paper presenters to the panel. The topic of the first presenter Dr. Pooja Joshi, Assistant Professor of English, University of Rajasthan was *Environmental Humanities: A*

*Postcolonial Response to Australian Crisis*. She talked about the human and non-human world depicted in Aboriginal postcolonial writers and highlighted the need to revisit the environmental crisis in Australia from a postcolonial perspective in the post-truth era. The second presenter Indrajit Mukherjee, Assistant Professor of English, University of West Bengal, spoke on the topic *Magic Realism as a Critique of Environmental Plunder through the Aboriginal Dreaming in Alexis Wright's "The Swan Book."* He examined the fundamental principles of a non-hierarchical network that depicts the connections between humans and non-human others in the novel using Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'rhizome' and Selvamony's pan-Indian concept of 'tinai'. The next presenter, Dr. Hem Raj Bansal, Assistant Professor of English, Central University of Himachal Pradesh titled his paper as *Political Mendacity, Asylum-Seekers, and Justice: Staging Hannie Rayson's Two Brothers in Post-truth Times*. He explained the concept of post-truth in the context of Australia's political situation in the last decade of the twentieth century. He also discussed the White Australia policy and the issue of Stolen Generations by studying Hannie Rayson's play as a text that fictionalised historical characters to expose the politics of both truth and falsehood. Gauri C. S., Research Scholar, Institute of English examined literature as a part of cultural ecology in her paper *Growing Up with Whales: Fiction as Cultural Ecology in The Whale Rider and Silver Bay*. She analysed the two novels to demonstrate the affective power of literature in cultural ecology by applying the triadic functional model of Hubert Zapf and also stressed the vital role children play in ecology conservation.

The Chair raised a question whether Jojo Bayes, author of *Silver Bay* could do justice to Australian aboriginals as he himself was a cultural outsider. Gauri responded to it smartly citing instances from the text. The Chair also wanted the presenter to look more critically at the texts rather than having a general study of literature and cultural ecology. The final presenter of the panel Jyothi Justin, Research Scholar, IIT Indore made her study on Joan Lindsay's

*Picnic at Hanging Rock* and its visual adaptations by analysing how space operates as a hegemonic tool. She also looked upon the campaign titled "Miranda Must Go" by Amy Spiers and highlighted the importance of restoring the indigenous sanctity and relevance of the Aboriginal space. The Chair of the panel concluded the session with positive remarks that many disciplines have come together in these papers such as postcolonialism, geocriticism and cultural ecology and they harmoniously synced with Australian culture. She wished all the best for the participants in transforming it into an academically enriching experience.

Panel 2 was chaired by Dr. Sruti Ramachandran, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Govt College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram. The first presenter of the panel, Surya P. Nair, Assistant Professor of English, Central Polytechnic College, Trivandrum used Homi Bhabha's concept of 'hybridity' to trace the evolution of the Aboriginal tribes that made a resilient transition from the bush to the city through symbiosis and conflict. She studied the works *Dark Emu* and *Dharmalan Dana* to see how the Aboriginal Australians used 'hybrid identity' as a convenient lie to mask the dispossession of land. Reshma P. K., M Phil Scholar, Institute of English came up with an interesting title *Is Kangaroo a Pest!?!; Revamping the National Icon through 'Kangaroo: A Love-Hate Story'*. She analysed the Australian Environmental documentary to understand the ways in which the national icon 'Kangaroo' was detrimentally labeled as pests and ruthlessly hunts them down for the majority's material benefits. The Chair congratulated the presenters for bringing up interesting themes in their respective papers.

The opening plenary talk of the conference titled *Perpetual Grief and Healing: Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Australian Bushfire* began at 3 pm. The speaker was Dr. Debashree Dattaray, Associate Professor, Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, and the respondent was Prof. (Dr.) Meena T. Pillai, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Kerala. Ms. Kaikasi V. S., the faculty of the Department of English, University College, invited

the panel for the discussion. The speaker discussed ongoing crises in Australia and explained the term perpetual grief as “a particular grief, to lose forever what connects you to a place in the landscape.” She reminded us that Aboriginal peoples live with a sense of perpetual grief that stems from the as-yet unresolved matter of the invasion and subsequent colonisation of our homelands. She pointed out the recent studies conducted in Australia to demonstrate that for Aboriginal people, healing from trauma is a cultural and spiritual process and inherently tied to land. She elaborated on the thematic areas of Indigenous Knowledge which includes local knowledge, health, agriculture, science and technology, value system, education and many others. She stressed the importance of placing Indigenous perspectives, values and protocols at the centre of inquiry. She also talked about the interwoven characteristics of Indigenous information protocols which are determined by Indigenous communities. She made a very interesting point on how Indigenous Knowledge could stop Australian bushfires. Subsequently, she brought the attention of the audience to the idea of ‘Cool burn’ which is an indigenous fire management practice that protects the landscape, and also to the idea of ‘patch burning’ which helps in modern fire management. Towards the end of her presentation, she showed a video on Badu Gilli, a free daily experience that explores First Nations stories in a spectacular six-minute projection on the Opera House, to signify the necessity of bringing back Aboriginal people to their land.

Being the respondent in the plenary session, Prof. (Dr.) Meena T. Pillai commented that Indigenous knowledge plays a crucial role in environmental sustainability and harmonious co-existence is not merely the need of the hour but also in the roots of the deeper philosophy of the environment. Fire management techniques like ‘cultural burning’ and ‘cool burn’ are not destructive as they do not destroy ecosystems. She raised a question that in the context of huge paradigm shifts, how do we narrate this grief which stems from within us. There are points in one’s life, she added, where lan-

guage fails you and narrating disaster is almost next to impossible. She concluded with a quote from Roland Barthes “There is a time when death is an event, an adventure, and as such mobilizes, interests, activates, tetanizes. And then one day it is no longer an event, it is another duration, compressed, insignificant, not narrated, grim, without recourse: true mourning not susceptible to any narrative dialectic.” The panelists were given vote of thanks by Ms. Shalini V.S., faculty, Department of English, University College.

Panel 3 and Panel 4 were chaired by Dr. M. N. Parasuraman, Assistant Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram. The first presenter of the panel was Karthika S., M Phil Scholar, Institute of English. Her paper titled *New Trepidations: A Study on Contemporary Bush Poets of Australia* analysed the environmental changes and development concerns addressed by contemporary bush poets with special reference to the poetry of Vivienne Ledge, Jack Drake, Kevin Magher, Wayne Pantall, Ric Raftis, Dennis Scanlon, Rod Williams, Col. Wilson and Anonymous. Dr. Hima S Madhu, Assistant Professor of English, Govt. Arts College presented a paper titled *The Political Ecology of Bushfires in Alice Bishop’s A Constant Hum*. The paper analysed the dynamic articulations between political and ecological processes within the contexts of human-environmental interactions in the novel. Abhirami S. R., M Phil Scholar, Institute of English presented a paper titled *Post-truth and Mediatization: A Study on Bush Fire (Media) Narratives*. The paper examined the role of media in the convergence of post-truth condition by studying the media narratives on Australian bush fires. Dr. Susan Alexander, Assistant Professor and Head PG Department of English, St. Cyril’s College, Adoor presented a paper titled *Changing Realities, Splattered Truths, Institutionalising of Indigeneity and its Resistance in Alexis Wright’s The Swan Book* attempted to look at climate change and how a return to indigenous ways might prove helpful to prevent an apocalypse. Roshin Panicker, M Phil Scholar, Institute of English presented a paper titled *Distorted Images of Aboriginal Cultures in Australian Literature and their Impact*

*in Society*. The study analysed Aboriginal cultures and how they are being distorted so as to shape them in accordance with the needs of Australian authors, thereby creating a fake sustainability which results in the destruction of the environment. The final paper presenter was Sangeetha A. S., M Phil Scholar, Institute of English. Her paper titled *Aboriginal Dreaming Ecology in Alexis Wright's The Swan Book* attempted to study the dreaming ecology of Aboriginals in the novel and the long endeavour to restore Australia's environmental balance in order to reclaim their old habitat.

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The second day of the seminar began at 8.30 a.m. with Session 2 of paper presentations. Panel 5 of the paper presentation session was chaired by Dr. Sajna Sanal, Associate Professor of English, University College. Dr. Mallika A Nair, Assistant Professor of English, Vimala College, Thrissur presented a paper titled *Silenced Voices and Blatant Biases: An Exploration of Australian Bush Life in Colleen McCullough's The Thorn Birds*. The study looked at ecocriticism from a different angle, highlighting how the theme of nature is handled, such as how the figure of nature is depicted, how the human-nature interaction is handled, and how nature embraces human life and tells human stories. The next paper was presented by Dr. Renjini Ramankutty, Assistant Professor of English, Government Arts College titled *Resistance through Poetry: Re-reading Oodgeroo Noonuccal in the Anthropocene Epoch*. The paper analyzed the work of Oodgeroo Noonuccal, whose poetry engaged in a political, spiritual and moral fight against colonial oppression as well as the formidable onslaught on nature, practiced by the white colonizer.

Panel 6 was chaired by Sri Vishnu Narayanan, Assistant Professor, Institute of English, University of Kerala. The first paper presentation was by Nilsha Nasreen P. M. & Sajo Jose and the paper was titled *Literature as Cultural Ecology: The Prophet in A.D. Hope's Poetry*. The paper looked at A.D. Hope's poetry which acts as an ecological force within the cultural discourses of Australian literature. The paper explored Australian poetry in an endeavour to recognize the reality of Australian culture, its landscape, history, and politics. Anandhu S. Research Scholar, Christ University presented the next paper titled *The Lost Dog: The Present-day Bushrangers in Australia's*



*Culture*. The study attempted to discern the similarities and dissimilarities in the causes and impacts of the intensifying wildfires in India and Australia. The next presenter was Aryalekshmi O., M.A. English Student, Sree Sankara College, Kalady. Her paper was titled *Mystery of Bunyip: Through the Vision of Australian Cultural Studies* and it was a short approach towards Australian cultural studies for the understanding of the beliefs in Bunyip in shaping the history and culture of Australia. The chair thanked the speakers for bringing forth such interesting and educational topics.

Panel 7 of the paper presentations was chaired by Dr. Krishnakumar R., Assistant Professor of English, Government K.N.M Arts and Science College, Kanjiramkulam. Kukku Xavier, Assistant Professor of English, All Saints' College presented the first paper on the topic *The Fabled Outback: Reading the First Nations in the Select Works of Alexis Wright*. The paper examined whether environmental problems are reflected in literary works focusing on these places and if so, whether they can prompt more concern, provoke attitude and inspire action. The next presenter was Sambhu R., Assistant Professor, PG Department of English, N.S.S. College, Pandalam. The paper was titled *Posthuman Geographies in The Swan Book: Climate Change and Fugitive Futures* and it explored the possibility of a non-dualistic and participatory ecological praxis informed by Deleuzo-Guattarian ideas of "becoming" that rupture and re-mold the boundaries between the human and the non-human.

The second plenary talk of the conference began at 10.30 am and was titled *Multiple Human Concerns in Bushfire Narratives*. The speaker was Prof. (Dr.) Pradeep Trikha, Head, Department of English, Associate Dean, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur and General Secretary, Indian Association for the Study of Australia (IASA) and the respondent was Dr. Rajesh V. Nair, Associate Professor of English, MG School of Letters. The speaker began his lecture by emphasising how bushfires have traditionally played an important role in conveying Australian stories. However, modern Australian eco-fiction authors are challenging the old bushfire nar-

rative, establishing parallels between climate change and bushfire, and demonstrating that what is happening in Australia is no longer "natural" or "normal." He also discussed 19th century fire stories like Ellen Clacy's 'A Bush Fire' (1854), and Anthony Trollope's *Harry Heathcote of Gangoil* (1874) that attempted to bring people together through adversity, as well as Victorian myths that emphasized the necessity for settlers to put their differences aside. The speaker also discussed the importance of HJ Weston's Recruitment Poster of 1918, Black Friday, and HG Wells's position on the fires where he explains it as "bushfires eliminate class and feuds." He also discussed World Humanitarian Day, which was held on August 19, 2021 that focused on the climate emergency and its impact on the lives and livelihoods of those affected by crises, encouraging world leaders to take action and assist the most vulnerable communities. The works *The World Without Us* by Mireille Jochau and *The Swan Book* by Alexis Wright were mentioned as two instances of depictions of ecological calamity and climate catastrophe in literature by the speaker. Prof. Trikha concluded his presentation by emphasising that reading Australian eco-fiction, particularly bushfire narratives, provides readers with an alternative climate narrative to that promoted by our elected leaders, one that is more truthful, thoughtful, and empathetic, and one that puts the blame for the crisis squarely on the shoulders of the people. A warm introductory welcome was given to both the panelists by Dr. Leena T.L, faculty, Department of English, University College.

Dr. Rajesh V. Nair, the respondent in the plenary session commented that he was particularly interested in the speaker's strategy of evolving the history of indigenous nations. He added that while fires can originate for a variety of reasons, from natural to man-made, the severity of fires and the damage they inflict is becoming increasingly related to climate change. Multiple climate change drivers to fire risk in Australia, as well as reported non-linear escalation of fire area and severity, heighten the probability of future fire events rapidly intensifying. The greatest option for minimizing

additional increases in fire danger in Australia would be to improve local and national adaptation measures while also supporting aggressive global climate change mitigation initiatives. He concluded by stating that the social and economic costs of restoring damaged infrastructure; long-term ill effects on physical and mental health; and environmental implications, such as damage to water catchments and potential repercussions on the global carbon cycle, are among the indirect effects of bushfires. The vote of thanks for the plenary session was given by Dr. M.N. Parasuraman, Assistant Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram.

The afternoon session began with paper presentations at 12 pm. The next panel of the day, Panel 8, was chaired by Dr. T. K. Rajendran, Assistant professor of English, University College. The first presenter Megha B., Research Scholar of English, Nirmala College analyzed *The Swan Book* as a survival narrative that explores different levels of trauma faced by nature, land and women in her paper titled *Surviving the Pluralistic Expressions of Trauma: A Reading of Alexis Wright's The Swan Book*. The next presenter Minnu Surendran, PG student of English, Sree Sankara College studied the film 'Samson and Delilah' which depicts the life of Aboriginal inhabitants in the central Australian desert in her paper titled *Racism and Marginalisation as Depicted in the Film Samson and Delilah*. In the paper "Are You Human?" Colonial Capitalistic Ravages and its Impact on Indigenous Life, Minu Melwen, Guest Lecturer in St. Aloysius College addressed the antagonistic nature of the colonial powers that wreaked havoc on the Indigenous people and their lives.

The next panel, Panel 9 was chaired by Ms. Anitha S., Assistant Professor of English, Govt. College, Tripunithura. The first presenter, Ashish Manohar, M. Phil Scholar, Institute of English, analyzed political cartoons as counter-discourse and also investigated how the environment is addressed in these cartoons in his paper *Canvassing Dissent: Political Cartoons as Counter-Discourse*. The next presenters, Aswanth C., Independent Scholar, University of Kerala and Aruna S. Ajayan, Assistant Professor of English, SN Col-

lege, Varkala dealt with the possible underlying narrative of power which controls the flow of information to the individual in the paper titled *Misinformation Still Burns: The Role of Online Media in the Australian Bushfire Crisis*. The final presenter of the panel, Famina A., Assistant Professor of English, Iqbal College, Peringamala attempted to study the Australian drama with particular focus on the plays by Jack Davis. Her paper titled *Self Definition and Assertion of the Aboriginal Heritage in Jack Davis's Kullark and The Dreamers: Conquering the White Spaces and Audiences* brought forth the argument that the very existence of the Aboriginal Theatre is to contest white values and thereby conquer the traditional white settlements in the minds and history of the Australian Aboriginal population to rewrite Australian history.

Panel 10 was chaired by Dr. Deepa Prasad L., Associate Professor of English, University College. The first presenter, Harsha U., M Phil Scholar, Institute of English attempted to study the interrelation between fire and nature within the framework of domestic space in her paper *Catastrophe of Globalisation: Depiction of Devastation, Trauma and Regeneration in Eliza Henry Jones's Ache*. In the paper titled *Constructing Readers: Children's Fiction on Australian Bushfire*, Gopika Gopan, M Phil Scholar, Institute of English analysed Justin D'Ath's *47 Degrees* and Sally Murphy's *My Australian Story: Bushfire* in order to understand how these works of children's fiction represent the realities of bushfires. The final presenter of the panel, Jayalekshmi B., Assistant Professor of English, M. S. M. College, Kayamkulam, attempted to unravel the binaries of anthropocentric politics in her paper *Ceridwen Dovey's Only the Animals as a Post-Human Critique on Anthropocentrism*.

Panel 11 was chaired by Dr. Lakshmi Priya N., Assistant Professor, Institute of English, University of Kerala. Muhsina N., Research Assistant, University of Wisconsin-Madison analysed the impact of bushfires on the Indigenous population with reference to the life of Annie and the events that are taken from the novel *Ache* using literary trauma theory in her paper *Bearing Witness to Bushfires:*

*Trauma and Memory in Eliza Henry Jones' Ache*. Manchusha Madhusudhanan, Assistant Professor of English, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam examined select fiction of Alexis Wright and probed the significance of bushmen and bushfires in the socio-economic domain of Australia in her paper *Looking Back to Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Micro Economic Polity through Alexis Wright's Select Fiction*. Razeena P. R., presented a paper titled *Ecological Conservation in this 'Brave New (Post-Truth) World' - Using the Narrative Lens to Explore Environment Narratives and the Need for Multiple Perspectives to Revive Degraded Landscapes in Australia*. The paper examined environmental narratives for their potential to contribute to the restoration of ecosystems in areas recently degraded by agricultural activities and mindless intervention by politicians in Australian rural landscapes.

Panel 12 was chaired by Dr. Anu S., Associate Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram. The first presenter, Sukitha, Assistant Professor of English, Bharatidasan Govt. College for Women, Puducherry, gave a detailed picture of the Stolen Generations through her paper *Follow the Rabbit proof Fence: A Complete Study*. Neena Babu, M Phil Scholar, Institute of English critically studied Australian poetry from an eco-critical perspective within the present scenario of the pandemic in her paper *Australian Poetry - Representing the Environment, An Analysis of Poetry of Australia in an Age of Environment and Crisis*. The final presenter in the panel, Meenu Jose, Assistant Professor of English, Mar Ivanios College argued that Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* can be reread as a survival guide to humanity facing unprecedented challenges, both ecologically and psychologically in her paper *'Locked in' with the Self: Rereading The Tree of Man as an Anthropocene Survival Manual*.

The third plenary talk of the conference began at 3 pm and it was titled *The Urgency of Prioritizing Sustainability Education*. Prof. (Dr.) C. A. Lal, School of Distance Education, University of Kerala was the speaker and Prof. (Dr.) Nisha Venugopal was the respondent. After the introductory welcome given to both the panelists by Ms.

Reeja Thankachan, faculty of the department of English, University college, the speaker began by defining sustainability education and the urgent need to prioritise it in our curriculum. He referred to four major books such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, *The Limits to Growth* (1972 report on population), *The Population Bomb* by Paul R. Ehrlich, *Future Shock* by Alvin Toffler. He attempted to trace the origins of the notion of sustainability. The word emerges in the 1970s and the initial idea refers to earth and its ability to sustain life on earth. He also mentioned earth systems and human systems wherein human system has to harmoniously sync with the earth system which eventually enables healing. Sustainability education evolved from this global consciousness around 1960s and 1970s. He suggested that sustainability literacy is more important which is about having sufficient knowledge and understanding to make a good enough choice or decision. He reminded that understanding sustainability involves emotional as well as cognitive processes. He talked about two informative books on sustainability education - *Leadership for Sustainability in Higher Education* and *Prioritising Sustainability Education*. He quoted from Jeannette Armstrong that "being in place" means knowing intimately that the human responsibility is to the living system, and "being out of place" means having little or no knowledge of it as a living system that requires reciprocal relationship and care. He also insisted us to rethink the concept of environmental education and also advocated the concept of micro models for sustainable living. He concluded the talk by highlighting the necessity of having a sustainable mindset which is required primarily while we re-vision environmental education based on sustainable literacy.

Dr. Nisha Venugopal responded by appreciating his thought of conceiving our planet as a single living unit and also for bringing forth the idea of micromodels as part of sustainability education. She said that his talk reminded her of an autobiographical work by John Fowles - *The Tree*, which discussed the essence of nature and its relation to creative arts, especially writing. She referred to this

work as the most original argument for wilderness preservation. She concluded with the remarks that sustainability literacy has to be taught from a very young age and along with that, children must learn to embrace the wilderness of nature. Dr. T. K. Rajendran, Assistant professor of English, University College proposed the vote of thanks.

Panel 13 was chaired by Ms. Praveena Thompson, Associate Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram. The first presenters are Anju Devadas R. D., Research Scholar, Mar Ivanios College and Anu Devadas R. D., Research Scholar, Institute of English. The paper examined the collective psychological trauma, climate change anxiety, and eco-grief in the backdrop of a post-truth politics and also explored the subjective experience of ABC Journalists on the ground during the Black Summer conflagration as elaborated in *Black Summer: Stories of Loss, Courage and Community from the 2019-20 Bushfires* edited by Michael Rowland in the paper titled *Post-Apocalyptic Hellscape of 'Black Summer' Bushfire: Denial of Mass Anxiety and Climate Emergency in Post-truth Politics*. Kesang Youdon, Ph D Research Scholar of English, Himachal Pradesh University examined the documentary film *Inside the Firestorm* on the Australian bushfires in her paper titled *Revisiting the 'Black Saturday': A Cinematic Representation*.

Panel 14 was chaired by Dr. Lakshmi Sukumar, Assistant Professor, Institute of English, University of Kerala. The first presenter, K. S. Anushya, Assistant Professor of English, A. P. C. Mahalaxmi College for Women, Thootukudi critically analysed the novel *The World Without Us* to showcase how climate change affects the lives of Muller family and gave an eco-pathological perspective of the lives of indigenous people in Australia in her paper *Fire on the Bushes, Run, Run, Run: A Critical Study of Eco-Anxiety and Solastalgia in Mireille Juchau's 'The World Without Us'*. Dr. Samana Madhuri discussed how children's fiction from Australia in recent times draw young readers' attention towards dystopian landscapes with particular focus on Alison Croggon's *The River and the Book* and Bren MacDibble's *How to Bee* in her paper titled *Unpacking Uncertain Futures: A Critical Reading of Select Australian Children's Fiction*.

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The third and final day of the webinar began at 8.30 am with Session 6 of paper presentations. The Panel 15 was chaired by Dr. Appu Jacob John, Assistant Professor, Institute of English, University of Kerala. The first presenter was Jobson Joshwa, M.Phil Scholar, Institute of English. His paper was titled *Aborigines in a Globalizing Australia: Unpacking the Ambivalence* and the paper tried to argue that globalization—far from being a cataclysmic force—has rather helped aboriginal people to reassert and reclaim their rights and traditions. This however does not preclude the possibility of exploring and documenting the downsides of globalization. The next presenter was Komal Yadav, Research Scholar, New Delhi. Her paper was on the topic *Role of Culture in Narratives* and the paper discussed different approaches in the social sciences dealing with narratives and introduced the reader to narrative terminology. Preetha Krishna L., Assistant Professor, Department of English, SN College was the next presenter. Her paper was titled *Being and Belonging: Metaphors of Indigenous Identity in Kath Walker's "We are Going"* and focused on exploring the metaphors in the poem "We are Going" by Kath Walker. The final presenter of the session was Gokul S., Research Scholar, Institute of English. His paper was titled *From the Direction Trees to the Sarpa Kavus: Tracing the Potency of Indigenous Eco-narratives in Developing a New Politics of Conservation*. The paper intended to locate traditions, myths and practices from Australia and India and study their viability in ushering in such a New Politics of Conservation.

The Panel 16 of the paper presentation was chaired by Dr. Sanchita J., Associate Professor of English, Govt. Women's College, Thiru-

vananthapuram. The first presenter was Anjali A. R., M.A. English, Institute of English and her paper was titled *Worsening Wildfires in the Wake of Globalisation in India and Australia: Uncovering Connections and Contrasts*. The study attempted to discern the similarities and dissimilarities in the causes and impacts of the intensifying wildfires in India and Australia. The next presenter was Dr. Raj Sree M. S., Assistant Professor of English, All Saints' College. Her presentation was on the topic *Appraising the Inconvenient Truth: A Socio-Ecological Study on Clade* and the paper focused on how the uncanny world of terrifyingly plausible climatic conditions and changes are intertwined with the life of human beings by resorting to a close analysis of the novel *Clade* (2015) by James Bradley. The final paper was presented by Ammu R. S., M.Phil Student, Institute of English on the topic *Bards and the Bushes: An Analysis of Australian Bush Poetry*. The paper examined the ecological strains in bush poetry along with its role in the burgeoning of Australian cultural sentiments.

The Panel 17 of the paper presentation was chaired by Dr. Leena T.L., Assistant Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram. The first presenter was Vidhupriya, B.Ed English Student, KUCTE, Kollam. Her paper was titled *Man and Nature: Depiction of Wildfire in Australian Documentaries* and it attempted to learn the webs of interpretation on Australian wildfires that intervenes in the most accomplished Australian TV show '*Wild Australia: After the Fires*' (2020). The next presenter was Nithin Lal, Research Scholar, Institute of English and his presentation was on the topic *Australian Bushfires - Coming in terms with the Hyperobjectivity of Climate Change*. The paper explored Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* and addressed the relation between colonization and climate catastrophe in its portrayal of a near-future Australia irreversibly affected by climate change. The final presenter was Shemin K., Research Scholar, Department of English, Farook College, Calicut. The paper was titled *The Project of Climate Change Denialism: Tackling Bushfires in the Post-Truth Age* and it attempted to examine the

political dimension of climate change in the age of post-truth politics and how post-truth narratives play a vital role in dealing with bushfires in Australia.

The closing plenary talk of the conference began at 10.30 am and was titled *Canvas of a Continent: Environmentalism and Land Management in Australian Indigenous Cultures*. The speaker was Prof. (Dr.) S. Armstrong, Head, Department of English & Coordinator, Centre for Canadian Studies, University of Madras, Chennai and the respondent was Prof. (Dr.) Suja Kurup P.L., Director, Centre for Australian Studies, University of Kerala. After the introductory welcome given by Dr.Sajna Sanal, faculty of the department of English, University College, the speaker began by highlighting the fact that fire symbolism in literature can simultaneously denote illumination and destruction. The hint of fire symbolizes kinship between mortals and Gods and he gave an insight into the Prometheus myth and Polynesian Gods. He specifically mentioned the work *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* by Bill Gammage which particularly describes how the First Nations managed their land using fire. Dr. Armstrong also gave the audience an insight into the concepts of 'Correct Fire,' 'Wrong Fire,' and 'Controlled Fire.' He concluded by pointing out that the more positive interactions with flames emphasize fire's crucial natural role and can help people go from shock to acceptance, which is a common aspect of the grieving process for those who have lost friends, relatives, or homes in a fire. While reading about flames and their aftermath can bring back memories for some people, literature for both children and adults plays a crucial part in comprehending fire and helping readers recover from its impacts.

Prof. (Dr.) Suja Kurup P.L., the respondent in the plenary session commented that the presentation was both interesting and informative. She emphasized a comment by Bill Gammage, the Australian National University Professor who is an expert in traditional aboriginal burning where he mentions that while the use of fire could be adopted across the country and used for a variety of land

management, we must also eliminate the adoption of traditional aboriginal burning, which necessitates a thorough understanding of local burning to ensure that the local conditions, climate, plants, and animals, as well as all other factors, are taken into account. The vote of thanks was given by Dr. Anu S., Associate Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram.

The Panel 18 was chaired by Dr. Liji Varghese, Assistant Professor of English, All Saints College, Thiruvananthapuram. The first paper presentation was by Soumilee Dasgupta, Student of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University. Her paper titled *Revisit, Recognize, Reclaim: Indigenous Responses to the Australian Bushfires* attempted to look at how Aboriginal people who derive their cultural identity from their land experience bushfires and respond to it. The next presenter was Parvathy Das, Research Scholar, School of Management Studies, NIT Calicut. Her paper titled *Land in Outback Noir Films: An Ecocritical Reading of Spatial Alienation of Aborigines in Mystery Road and Goldstone* discussed the ecological underpinnings of urban policies and land grabbing for Aborigines. The final paper presenter was Bejoy Sam P Winslow, Research Scholar, University College. His paper titled *Re-Envisioning Australian Economy: Climate Change as an Agent of New Power* explored the relation between power, anxiety and economy by analysing how the agency of climate change was employed by the banks to put them in power so as to control the economy and people in Australia.

The Panel 19 and Panel 20 were chaired by Dr. Al Muneera J., Assistant Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram. The first paper presenter was Soumya S., M Phil Scholar, University College. Her paper titled *Anthropogenic Bushfire and its Rashomon Effect* analysed the human errors behind the bushfire and how it is whitewashed using the facade of climate. The next presenter was V. N. Krishnakumar, M Phil Scholar, Institute of English. The paper titled *Capitalist Onslaught and Ecopolitics: An Analysis of the Australian Movie Scorched* analysed how globalisation and capitalism account to the creation of Homo Sacers in the movie by

the sovereign assertion of power over life and the use of biopolitics as a means to securing the stability of the sovereign state. The next presentation was by Dr. Sruti Ramachandran, Assistant Professor of English, Govt. College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram. Her paper titled *Bellwether Bees: Absences in Mireille Juchau's The World Without Us* attempted to investigate the ways in which "absence" is treated in the narrative. In the paper *Socio-Cultural Impact of Mining Activities on the Indigenous Communities in Australia*, Saurabh Meena, Research Scholar discussed the myriad challenges faced by the Indigenous communities in Australia due to the onslaught of globalisation, urbanisation and commercialisation. The final presenter was Neha N. S., M Phil Scholar, Institute of English. Her paper titled *Considering Community Engagement as the Cornerstone for an Environmentally Desirable Australia* dealt with how community engagement and civic participation are happening in Western Australia in order to protect the environment.

The Panel 21 was chaired by Dr. Manju C. R., Assistant Professor of English, Govt. Arts College, Thiruvananthapuram. The first presenter was Dr. Vidya Rajagopal, Associate Professor and Head, Department of English, MG College, Thiruvananthapuram. Her paper titled *Possession, Repossession and Dispossession in David Malouf's Harland's Half Acre* probed the various vicissitudes and tribulations in the life of the protagonist, along with the loss of a city's innocence and the end of an era. It also traced the physical and spiritual landscape of Australia. The next presentation was by Deepika K., Research Scholar of English, University College. Her paper titled *The Postcolonial Gothic: Atopian Tropes in Australian Cinema* attempted to map out the tropes of atopian landscapes used in two Australian movies - *Dying Breed* and *The Hunter* - which are set in Tasmanian wilderness, the heartland of the Australian Gothic. The next paper presenter was Praveena Thompson, Associate Professor of English, University College. Her paper titled *Ecological Concerns Haunting the Tasmanian Gothic: An Ecocritical Investigation into The Kettering Incident* scrutinised the television series through an ec-

ocritical lens to delve into the complicated relationship between man and environment, which plays out in tandem with and accentuates the eerie nature of unsolved disappearances and deaths. The next presenter was Dr. Anupama L., Assistant Professor of English, Iqbal College. Her paper titled *Broken Lives: Humanity versus Nature in Joan Lindsay's Picnic at Hanging Rock* attempted to examine the predicament of humanity as well as the enigmatic landscape depicted in the novel. Dr. Jaya Ghosh, Assistant Professor of English, Dr Gour Mohan Roy College presented a paper titled *Exploring Human-Nature Contexts and Diverse Ecological Perspectives in Selected Poems of Judith Wright*. The study focused on how Judith Wright tried to warn us about the imminent danger Man is to confront in the days to come and helped us to realise the need of protecting Mother Earth from forthcoming catastrophe so that life can move amidst the apocalyptic times we are living in. The final presenter of the session was Aiswarya Thara Bhai Anish, PG Student, University College. Her paper titled *Australia in the Poems of A. D. Hope: An Ecocritical Reading* looked at the representation of Australia in the aftermath of colonial era, through an ecocritical lens in the poems of A. D. Hope, with specific reference to poems such as 'Australia', 'Beware of Ruins', 'Tiger', and 'The Death of a Bird'.

The valedictory function began at 3 pm. Smt. Praveena Thompson, Associate Professor and Head PG Department of English delivered the welcoming words. Prof. P. P. Ajaykumar was the chief guest and he delivered the valedictory address. He appreciated Centre for Australian Studies and University College, Thiruvananthapuram for joining hands in conducting the seminar and making it a huge success. He highlighted the significance of such collaborations by pointing out present-day examples of interconnectedness, especially between nature and everyday life. He reminded us to embrace a strategy to connect disciplines so that knowledge can be shared with a wider spectrum of people. As most of the disciplines are distinct in curriculum, he stressed on the necessity of reframing the syllabi by interlinking disciplines. He concluded his

address by congratulating both teams and hoped similar collaborations will happen in the future also. Prof. (Dr.) Suja Kurup P. L., Director, Centre for Australian Studies, Institute of English made the concluding remarks. The Vote of thanks was proposed by the Organising Secretary of the international conference, Dr. Chitra V. R., Assistant Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram.

**Dr. Chitra V.R.**

Organizing Secretary  
Postgraduate & Research Department of English  
University College  
Thiruvananthapuram.

