

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

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Australia is exactly two hundred years old. From the period of settlement upto the present time, the history of Australia is one of the progress and development. The Australians are separated from European ancestors, and, with the growth of indigenious arts and literature. They can claim to be an independent nation- also separated from their European traditions and culture. Geography, of course, is a very important consideration, as Australians are separated from their ancestors even in a physical sense. Their nearest neighbours can be said to be the Asians. Asia has been defined by Donald Horne as follows :

'Asian' once had some meaning as an opposite to 'European'. With the liberation of Asia from the Europeans 'Asia' ceased to have meaning. There were no common characteristics between the races and nations that made it up. For those who find significance in the colour of skins or the shape of noses Asia is disappointing. It has all kinds of skin pigmentation; all shapes of noses. There is no pan-Asianism.....
.....

The reality is that Asians display versatality and difference more than Europeans. Pan-Africanism and Pan-Europeanism are now developing some signs of possible political reality. Pan-Asianism is not. Asia is too big, too diverse, to consider itself as an entity. It is a collection of sub-continent, themselves divided.¹

The same author asks the following questions in order to clear a misunderstanding about the Australians :

And what is European about the civilization that Australia is said to present ? Let us proceed beyond the official handouts :

Christianity, respect for human life, belief in democracy and so on. Can we seriously describe Europe, the continent of unparalleled slaughter and conquest as necessarily practising these ideals ? Are they really its distinguishing characteristics ? This is the way people in Asia sometimes see the Europeans :

They seem them as hypocritical conquerors and murderers. ²

The above quotations indicate the diverse attitudes of Asians towards the Australians, and the Australians toward the Asians

These attitudes are better illustrated in terms of literary works in the recent times in Australia. Asia, especially, a country like India has always attracted Europeans to view it from the Western angle. For example, E.M. Forster; and his novel - A Passage to India. The novel is, by far, supposed to be the best written by an Englishman on India, His attitude towards India is quite sympathetic, and yet probing and analytical. To Forster, India appeared to be a "muddle"; and confirms Kipling's thesis of "East is East and West is West, And the twain shall never meet".

Among the contemporary Australian novelists, C.J.Koch has proved to be, with his four novels published so far, The Boys in the Island (1958), Across the SeaWall (1965), The Year of Living Dangerously (1978) and The Double Man (1985), a significant interpreter of Asia, since two of his novels are set in Asia-- that is, Across the SeaWall(1965) is set in India, and The Year of Living Dangerously (1978) is set in Indonesia. This clearly shows Koch's preoccupation to find an alternative attitude toward Asian countries, different from the European attitude.

In Across the SeaWall, Koch seems to be struck and dismayed by the reeking poverty of India in the fifties. He also has a fortaste of Indian mysticism. We can say that both these themes are conventional and stereotypes. His hero Robert O'Brien travels through India and discovers at close questions- the poverty and backwardness of India. But he doesnot seem to be concerned very much with the Indian situation as such. To that extent the novel is unsatisfactory, and his interest in India seems to be of a tourist's. Perhaps, after A Passage to India, Koch cannot improve over it, and, so his characters are interested inwardly in themselves first and only, as a matter of curiosity in the surrounding conditions.

But The Year of Living Dangerously is a different novel. Here Koch seems to be entirely involved in the Indonesian situation. He is lucky to have landed a theme which is significant from the point of view of Indonesian history as well as its socio-cultural ramifications. The Civil War of 1965 and the fall of the dictator and megalomaniac Sukarno is theme of epic proportions, And, in fact, Koch peoples the novel with so many characters drawn from

different walks of life, and different nationalities, that the novel achieves the status of a prose epic. At the same time, the author seems to have matured in his handling of the material and the preponderant themes. He experiments with so many narrative techniques. In keeping with the political theme of the novel, he makes use of such devices as 'dossiers', and also the conventional device of 'diary' entries. The hero being again a newspaper reporter like the journalist O'Brien from Across the SeaWall has ample opportunity to be present at the ringside to watch and even participate in the great event of the Indonesian Civil War. The story of his love for Jill Bryant and the dwarf Billy Kwan, his photographer, is woven into the dense fabric of the narrative of the momentous event in the history of Indonesia.

These two novels of Koch, are indicative of his attitude as an Australian, towards Asia. It is very clear that his attitude towards Asia is not at all hostile or racial. As a literary artist, his perceptions of Asia may be described as humanistic and sympathetic. One may conclude that C.J.Koch as a novelist is a rationalist in so far as his Asian connection is concerned.

** NOTES AND REFERENCES **

1. Horne, Donald, The Lucky Country Penguin Books,
1965 Adelaide, P. 113-4.
2. Ibid., P. 116.