

Creating an awareness of the importance of reading in schools:

the whole school approach used by READ in the Independent Development Trust Project

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Ladies and gentleman, thank you for giving me the opportunity to describe to you one of the major projects in which READ has been engaged over the past few years. At the end of 1991, under the sponsorship of the Independent Development Trust, READ launched a new project in selected schools in 11 regions of South Africa. In this paper an attempt will be made to try to extract from what the IDT project has taught us, some experiences which I hope will be of interest to you.

We are all privileged to live in South Africa at this historic time, and to have the chance to participate in the process of transforming our education system. I believe that the READ/IDT project has important implications for the development of education in South Africa and particularly for all who believe that books are a key component of education.

We have to work for what we believe in. Unfortunately, we live in an era of enforced frugality. There simply is not enough money to do everything that needs

to be done. Since budgets are tighter than ever, we again seem to find ourselves in a situation in which library resources for communities and schools are not viewed by the authorities as a top priority.

The ANC Education Department's draft discussion document, "A Policy Framework for Education and Training", of January 1994, emphasises the need to develop human resources and to ensure access to information for all South Africans. The document also highlights the importance of redressing existing imbalances in the provision of Library and Information Services, but it nowhere specifically acknowledges the crucial role of books on the journey to universal literacy. Yet literacy is clearly a prerequisite to the kinds of access to information and development of human resources which the Policy Framework document wishes to promote.

Information can only be accessed by those who have the necessary skills. Quality resources, together with appropriate teacher training to promote their use are fundamental components of education. The ability to read provides the only means by which a huge variety of study skills and life skills may be acquired. Reading is therefore not a luxury, but a necessity.

I hope that this conference will lead to the strengthening of existing alliances and to the formation of new ones, as well as to the development of strategies that will promote the cause of literacy throughout South Africa. Perhaps the IDT project will help to demonstrate the benefits that can result from the provision of books together with the in-service and pre-service teachers' training necessary to ensure their use.

The READ organisation

The Independent Development Trust (IDT) project has to be seen in terms of READ's work over the past 14 years. READ was formed in Soweto in 1979 in response to community concern over the lack of reading materials and library facilities in the black community. An awareness of many of these concerns was the direct result of the student demands in 1976. The first READ committee decided to commence work in the schools without delay, and to follow up the school-based work with related community programmes.

The aim of the organisation is to promote communication and learning skills through the use of books and other media material. READ now has offices in most of the major centres and works with the staff of both urban and rural schools.

READ believes that daily contact with meaningful texts is the only way to motivate children to read and that success in reading, to a large extent, depends on pupils wanting to learn to read.

The Independent Development Trust grant provided READ with the exciting opportunity to work with teachers in 342 primary schools in the various regions.

Our aim has been:

- to stimulate an interest in reading through the provision of quality reading material

In this project we provided 2,5 books per pupil, mostly contained in portable, stackable, lockable wooden boxes. The bookstock included fiction (60 books for pupils to read), dictionaries (3 sets of 30 per school), group readers, story kits for teachers to read and tell, and selections of largely subject-related nonfiction

- to introduce teachers to ways of using resources (either those provided or those they make themselves) to enhance classroom teaching and learning so that the total dependence on a single textbook can gradually be replaced by the appropriate use of a variety of methods and resources

Development is a slow process and change is difficult for all of us. At times, the schools in this project faced considerable difficulties in implementing the programme during the pre-election and post-election period. They deserve to be thanked and commended for the persistent efforts they have made to implement the programme during the last three years.

The situation in schools

Any endeavour to create an awareness of the importance of reading in disadvantaged schools provides a special challenge. One reason why teachers do not find it easy to use a range of materials in their teaching is that they did not have access to such resources when they themselves were school pupils and student teachers. For this reason, teachers tend to rely on the single provided textbook for teaching purposes. In addition, through no fault of their own, they generally have little knowledge of how to encourage effective reading habits and the practice of information skills in their pupils.

The present generation of pupils comes from the same kinds of illiterate and semi-literate environments as their parents and teachers. To those of us fortunate enough to be brought up with books to hand, the educational disadvantages of not having books around are scarcely imaginable. Not only do pupils have to cope very early on, with learning through the medium of a second, or even a third language, but also with the unknown world of words and graphic information.

Sitting in the classrooms one observes that generally pupils have very great difficulty making sense of illustrations and other graphic cues intended to help them access the text. This inevitably impedes their reading progress. Their knowledge of print and book conventions cannot simply be taken for granted. Skills which are incidentally taught in a literate home environment need, in disadvantaged communities, to be explicitly practised and instilled. This must be the responsibility of the schools and become a top priority in the Reconstruction and Development Programme.

A great deal more research needs to be done in South Africa to explore ways of assisting pupils and teachers to overcome the environmental difficulties they face when learning to read. During the Independent Development Trust project READ has experimented with different strategies to this end. The results of these experiments provide the rationale according to which READ has begun to develop materials designed to facilitate solutions to these environmentally-based learning difficulties.

The project process

Consultative phase

The project commenced in the schools in August, 1991 when READ regional staff began consulting with the school communities in which they worked. After

the staff had received additional training, work began with the selection of schools. READ staff and committees agreed that the whole school community should be brought into the process and participate in the decision as to whether or not the school should be part of the project. READ staff pre-selected schools with a history of stability and good leadership. The criteria for inclusion were thoroughly debated with and agreed to by the schools, at the end of the consultative period of three months.

Principals, teachers and parents were involved in these discussions. READ staff tell stories of sitting for the whole of Sunday in the sun, without a drop of water to drink, waiting for an opportunity to describe the project to the parents! However, it was worth all the effort because the consultation phase created an interest in the project as well as an awareness of the benefits.

All of the schools which accepted the invitation to join the project did so voluntarily, fully aware of the fairly rigorous training process and perfectly willing to work with READ. In most cases obligations have been met and targets reached, and in spite of many difficulties schools have continued to participate.

This consultative phase had its humorous side. In one instance READ arranged an evening meeting to introduce the project to the parents. The teachers told READ staff that it would be too dangerous for them to attend. However, when our staff entered the meeting room, there the teachers were, sitting solemnly in the first row. The chairman of the parents' committee in the front row firmly grasping his traditional weapon, declared that the school would be part of this project, because it was for the benefit of the children. Needless to say, there was not much discussion after that.

Provision of books and materials

The books and other materials were provided in tandem with the training. This also proved to be an interesting experience! Most delivery drivers would not enter the townships at that time. Innovative ways had to be found to get the books into the schools. Taxi and truck operators offered their services, and this helped to spread a growing interest in the project throughout the communities. But READ staff also delivered the books themselves. The first requirement, if you want to work for READ, is a strong back!

Training

We decided at the beginning of the project, that in order to build a team spirit and to focus the attention of the whole school on the skills that we wished to promote, we would train every teacher, including the principal. This has been a huge, but worthwhile task.

The training included a whole continuum of courses and workshops, offered over three years. Each course is supported by its own materials. Teachers and pupils must have the tools to practice their skills.

The foundation course

This is the first course offered to all teachers. It shows them how to administer their resource collections and to use books in their teaching. The teachers learn how to produce posters in order to make their reading corners attractive.

Box libraries containing fiction, nonfiction and very basic reference books were delivered to the schools immediately after the course was conducted. This

demonstrated to the teachers that READ is a serious and active organisation, able to fulfill its obligations.

Using the story as a vehicle for language teaching

This is a course for all language teachers from Sub A to Standard Five (ie year 1 to year 7). READ places great importance on the use of stories in the classroom.

The material which accompanies this course is varied and colourful: story kits (collections of large posters, well-chosen and tested stories, and lesson notes for the teacher), the “Enormous pumpkin pack” and “The clever caterpillar pack” are used to provide useful models for the teacher to follow.

The value of this method cannot be over-emphasised. We encourage the teachers to use whatever language is comfortable and move to English once the pupils understand the story. This applies especially in the lower classes.

Using dictionaries

A course to promote the use of dictionaries in the classroom is offered. It is held in parallel with the provision of three sets of dictionaries so that each child in every standard from Standard Two to Five can practice their dictionary skills.

Silent reading and group reading

These two courses introduce teachers to ways of moving away from dependence upon the notion of learning to read from a single class reader. In silent reading pupils read from a book they have chosen and in group reading they read under the guidance of a group leader. We encourage the teachers to give all the pupils

an opportunity to read for 30 minutes a week during class time, and also to take books home to read. The children are taught to examine the cover of each title they read, look at all the pictures, find out about the story by scrutinising the book before they begin to read. Sixty books are provided for the pupils to read silently. A box of six copies of 10 titles are made available, together with task cards for group reading lessons.

Shared reading and writing

This course encourages teachers to use stories they have read to the class as the basis for writing a story and making a big book with the class. We find this an excellent way to compensate for the lack of reading material in the vernacular, since the big books can be created in any language.

Using books in subject teaching and teaching information skills

These courses are attended by all teachers. The idea is to encourage the staff of the whole school to understand their role in the teaching of information skills. During the course, teachers use a variety of books to prepare sample lessons. Skills dealt with include copying and enlarging diagrams and making big books and other teaching aids to use in subject teaching. Feedback suggests that most teachers find the practical workshops very useful and gain confidence in using these methods through the presentations they give to their colleagues.

Courses are presented in many ways according to local circumstances; for example, whole day courses may be held, or a series of afternoon workshops, or a programme run in the holidays. READ's undoubted preference is for afternoon workshops held in the school itself, with the whole staff participating.

Monitoring and mentoring

READ staff work closely with the teachers in the schools, providing step-by-step support. This is by far the most important single part of the process, as it has a significant influence on results. We are very committed to working in the classrooms. Our biggest frustration is the shortage of time to do so. Everyone attempting new methods needs encouragement, guidance and feedback. Staffing for any project is expensive and it is difficult to persuade sponsors that the success of development programmes depends, to a large extent on having sufficient staff.

Motivational programme

Why should teachers, working in poor conditions, attempt new and, at first sight, difficult teaching strategies? What will make their efforts worthwhile? The appearance of new books and other materials do provide the necessary incentive and when the pupils begin to make visible progress this gives further encouragement to their teachers.

Teachers nevertheless need constant motivation. In the READ programme this includes participating in project planning and evaluation, visits to the schools by READ staff, the sharing of experiences, newsletters and the formation of discussion forums. In addition, READ provides certificates, ties, scarves, badges, et cetera as small tokens of appreciation. Our Festival of Books, which is implemented in all regions, allows teachers to tell their best loved stories to admiring audiences and pupils to present a story they have explored in class as a drama. This is enormous fun for everyone and involves over 10 000 children and 2 000 teachers. All the schools which are part of the Independent Development Trust project participated in the event in 1994. The exposure to new vocabulary,

new language structures and stories goes a long way to encourage the on-going use of books in the classroom.

Evaluation and assessment

During 1994 we incorporated an evaluation system into our programme. The evaluation forms designed for us by a consultant are discussed with the teachers at every course. They take them away to use to assess their own and their colleagues' progress. When READ staff visit the schools they will use the same forms to evaluate progress and set new goals with the teachers. The data is fed into a computer system and is used by the organisation to assess the standard of the training and the usefulness of the courses.

Leader teachers

In each province, teachers nominate colleagues who have demonstrated leadership qualities, to be trained as leader teachers. These teachers receive special training in the holidays, usually ahead of their colleagues so that they can lead and advise them. The leader teachers run workshops, give presentations, invite neighbouring schools to visit them to see what they do in their schools and organise open days for visitors to their areas.

Despite all the constraints, the majority of these leader teachers are now not only practising new skills in their own teaching but introducing their colleagues to them as well. Certainly, schools which have leader teachers demonstrate a more successful application of the READ programme than other schools.

We believe that the long term sustainability of the programme will depend very largely on the efforts of the leader teachers. Their acceptance of the methods,

their ownership and their promotion of the programme will provide the key to large scale implementation.

Constraints

The constraints and difficulties experienced in the programme include:

- a lack of commitment and leadership from some of the principals. Where this happens the success or otherwise of the programme depends on the dedication of individual teachers;
- teacher attrition rates. In some areas this is particularly serious and the staff are constantly having to train new teachers, which substantially limits progress;
- teachers moving from standard to standard. This means that they have no sooner become accustomed to their materials, than they have to begin to learn to use other materials. Again, a very limiting factor. We do try to encourage principals not to move teachers, but instead to allow them to work at the level to which they feel most suited and thereby let them become experts at that level;
- in many projects school teachers are studying to improve their own qualifications and, while this is understandable, the education of the pupils really suffers as a result. Sadly, these qualifications, necessary as they are to the teachers' salary increments, are rarely connected to the subjects the teachers teach or aim to enhance their professional ability in any way. It is absolutely crucial that the certification system, of the future, limits the recognition of qualifications to those which enhance the ability of the teacher to teach their particular subject and their general teaching performance.

What has READ learnt?

1. To begin with far more consultation and orientation is needed before a programme begins, to ensure that everyone is committed and understands their role. It is very important to establish agreement early on with reference to course dates and times, performance standards, and the accountability of all parties in the programme.
2. As a result of this programme we now work far more closely with the principals so that they are able to manage the programme more efficiently. This includes the management of the assessment process. We would like in future programmes to offer training and orientation at every level of the management structure of the education department in the areas in which we operate before the project commences. We would include the directorate, circuit managers, subject advisors and principals to ensure that we are all working together.
3. We have learnt that the story has immense value as a teaching tool. We intend to explore every possible way of using stories in the future. We have begun to run staff workshops and workshops for teachers to encourage the writing of stories. When teachers write and use stories from their own environment and experience in their teaching we believe that they will begin to relate to and take ownership of the printed word more completely and this will have important spin-offs in terms of the pupils' language learning. We urge publishers to join us in this important endeavour and to publish collections of relevant, exciting, affordable stories.
4. Our own materials development programme has become extensive and an important part of our work. Books are very expensive and we aim to publish a series of low cost but high quality big books and kits of stories at every

level to make the purchase of useful material for schools more possible. These developments start with a series of no-text material as a first phase to help pupils develop their ability to access the graphic information and to help them to understand the sequence in stories. This in turn, will positively affect their ability to access the text in more complicated study material at the higher levels of their schooling.

5. Exploring additional strategies to ensure that the schools take ownership of the programmes is a high priority.
6. The involvement of parents is a very important part of the development of the sense of community in the school. READ has recently written a course designed to train principals on how to involve parents in their childrens' education, particularly in their reading progress. Many of the schools which are part of the Independent Development Trust project have begun to involve the parents more fully, and this process needs to be accelerated.
7. Work with the teachers' colleges is very important. Student teachers who come to the colleges often lack the reading experience they need. Since their own reading experiences in all probability centred on rote learning, they need to be introduced to a wide range of appropriate methods and resources.

In future all interventions should be introduced in a given area simultaneously in both the colleges and the schools so that the work in the colleges can be more closely linked to the work in the schools.

8. Certification of in-service training.

What are the results of the project?

In most areas in which the project operates there has been a definite increase in the awareness of the importance of reading. In addition, teachers are now more

conscious of the need to use a variety of teaching methods in their everyday teaching. In many, although not nearly enough schools, parents have become more involved in the school through open days and festivals. Pupils are definitely exposed to the books we have provided, although the amount of time allocated to reading practice varies enormously from school to school. Information and book care skills are gradually improving. We are delighted that, in many areas, constructive partnerships between publishers and non-government organisations are emerging to the benefit of education.

We would say that the whole school approach and the involvement of all the teachers in the school in the training process has encouraged a sense of team spirit and, in many cases, cooperative strategies and the sharing of ideas to make the project work.

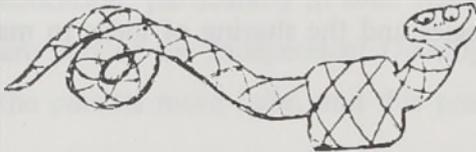
The leader teacher programme has many important implications for future similar interventions in schools and communities and we need to evaluate this programme thoroughly, in cooperation with these teachers.

We see the results of the Independent Development Trust programme in the increased motivation of the teachers and in the definite improvement of morale. We hope that in the long term the pupils at these primary schools today will become the successful, skilled South Africans of tomorrow, as a direct result of the richer educational experience they have enjoyed.

Ladies and gentlemen, books are expensive, quality education is not without its cost. The challenges are serious. We need to take a new look at our priorities.

Pupils must have books if the standard of education of our country is to be improved, and if the graduates of the system are to take this country into a prosperous future.

Affordable material, long print runs, bulk buying consortiums and sponsored publishing programmes are necessary. Partnerships between publishers, non-government organisations, the state and educational institutions are vital. We need to make this all happen. I hope that this conference will lead to a new effort to do so.



Panchatantra and the epics as children's literature experience

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Story telling as a pedagogical technique has been used by the world's greatest teachers. Jesus used it, as did Plato, Confucius, and other great philosophers and teachers ... The modern teacher who employs this technique as a teaching tool is using a technique of teaching that has stood the test of time (*Chambers Encyclopedia* 1970:43).

Martin Pederson (1995:2) rightly observes:

Oral stories are a direct expression of a literary and cultural heritage; and through them that heritage is appreciated, understood, and kept alive.

It is through oral stories – traditional tales, fables, fantasy, myths and legends – that people express their values, fears, hopes and dreams. Augusta Baker and Ellin Green (1977:17) assert:

Story telling brings to the listeners heightened awareness – a sense of wonder, of mystery, of reverence for life. This nurturing of the spirit-self comes first. It is the primary purpose of story telling.

When children listen to or read stories from different parts of the world they experience:

A vicarious feeling for the past and a oneness with various cultures of the present as they gain insight into the motives and patterns of human behaviour (Pederson 1995:2).

Such significant literary experiences contribute to children's cognitive development. It enables them to acquire confidence to cope with the psychological problems of

growing up in the complex social and emotional environment in which they live. As they come across stories and fables from far and near children gradually acquire a perspective to understand what has transpired in the past and what is happening in the present. Hence listening to or reading stories – fables, fairy tales and fantasy – offer children a variety of enchanting and fascinating experiences. Fables illustrate animals associating with each other and also socialising with human beings. They set children off in flights of imagination which is thought provoking and rewarding.

The paper attempts to show how effective and beneficial simple narrative – folklore, fantasy and mythology – are for the intellectual and psychological development of children. Furthermore it emphasises the overwhelming influence *Panchatantra* – the oldest collection of Indian fables – exerted in enriching children’s literature in every nook and corner of the world by being the first set of stories to have travelled from one civilisation to another through the medium of translation. The paper finally hopes to dispel the idea that the epics, the “Ramayana” and the “Mahabharata”, are solely meant for adults and not for children. The stories, incidents, and characters that abound in both these epics make an impact on children’s outlook on life. Epics modify children’s attitude and behaviour within their society and offer outstanding insights and experiences to make them spontaneously acquire cultural awareness and direction in life.

Folklore as simple narrative is an adjunct to the study of literature. To see how efficient and beneficial it is, one needs to make a humanistic and scientific study of folklore – fables, fantasy, myths and adventure stories – to see the dimensions of scholarship imbued in them. These tales are thought provoking and offer children rich, versatile, and meaningful experiences.

Fables have all along been in circulation through oral transmission. Jean de la Fontaine's apt observation unveils the universal truth, that

Fables are not what they appear;
The moralists are mice and such small deer.
We yawn at sermons but gladly turn
To moral tales, and amused, we learn (Hines 1995:6).

The evolution of the fable and its coming into being is significant and interesting. The four outstanding sources John Vernon Lord (1989) highlights seem quite reasonable and convincing. For, it is quite possible that fables were first related by members of primitive societies whose occupations brought them into close contact with animals. Secondly, shepherds or hunters would have watched animal behaviour and likened it to that of human beings. Next we have close-knit communities who would have found the fable an ideal vehicle through which to offer advice without causing direct offence. Finally, it is felt that in Government and court circles of the past, when blunt criticism could result in punishment, the fable proved a safer and more palatable way of counselling or conveying hometruths.

These sources culminated in transforming stories into a different shape and form which resulted in the birth of the fable. It paved the way for a prolific children's literature to come into existence throughout the world. This proliferation of children's literature – stories, fables, fairy tales and fantasy – moved from the oral tradition to the written form. The contribution one culture made to another in the course of time was not merely in multitudes, for the fable began to acquire a distinctive multifarious character. They were either set in prose or verse form or presented combining prose with pithy verses. It is observed that they were:

translated, paraphrased, enlarged, freely adopted and altered over the centuries. They migrated from one place to another and assembled to form collections and then anthologies ... Some lost their original form but then discovered through coincidence to be found in later transmitted compilations (Vernon 1989:xv).

The Evolution

The evolution of children's literature experiences seemed to have started through fables that had been in circulation from ancient times. All along they had been offering joy and guidance especially to children as they see animals in action making apposite comments on the human condition. These fables in translations sprung up like mushrooms in ever nook and corner of the world and became popular, offering children fascinating insights into other worlds. The Greeks seem to have been the first to assemble the fables that trickled from the East into countries around the world. Lord (1989:xiv) endorses that

Bidpai was first translated into Greek in around 1080 and the first English translation was made by Sir Thomas North, published under the title of *The moral philosophie of Doni*. Later the nineteenth century folklorist Joseph Jacobs edited North's version of the Bidpai fables saying he had edited Sir Thomas North's English version of an Italian adaptation of Spanish translation of a Latin version of a Hebrew translation of an Arabic adaptation of the Pehlevi ... Sage Indien.

The Panchatantra: the literary vanguard of children's literary experiences

Panchatantra appears to have made its impact on Aesop for, in his Fables one can decipher the influence of Mahabharata, the Indian epic, and the Jataka tales which are the birth stories of the Buddha. The original Sanskrit version of the

Panchatantra included the fables of Bidpai and the similarities between Aesop's and the Bidpai fables have been noted.

An overview of the *Panchatantra* would reveal the power and influence it exerted on fables around the world. It is one of the best known classics of ancient India. GL Chandiramani (1991:v-vi) states:

The *Panchatantra* is essentially connected with one of the branches of science known to the Indians as the "NITISHASTRA" which in Sanskrit means "A book of good conduct in life". It attempts to teach us, how to understand people, how to choose reliable and trustworthy friends, how to meet difficulties and solve problems through tact and wisdom, and how to live in peace and harmony in the face of hypocrisy, deceit and many pitfalls in life.

Millions of listeners and readers for the last 2200 years have benefited from this unique book of stories. The genre of the composition is known as NIDARSHANAKATHA, or illustrative story, which is satirical and intended to teach by example. It belongs to a class of literature offering teaching in accordance with practical ethical standards for ordinary life. Historical facts confirm not only the popularity and spread of *Panchatantra* tales in and around India but also reveal the maximum influence these tales exerted on children's literature in different parts of the world.

"Pancha" means five and "Tantra" means systems or books. The author, Pandit Vishnu Sharma, a renowned Brahman scholar, composed these lively stories in Sanskrit having taken up a challenge to enlighten three "dud" sons of a king. The tales are in simple prose while the doctrine and maxims are often summed up in verse. The characters in these fables are animals as well as human beings. Haskar (1992:vii) observes that

The mood ranges from the didactic and cynical to the ribald and comic. The characters enact the foibles and follies, the virtues and the villainies of human conduct. They utter wise words and perform good deeds as well as indulge in every kind of sharp practice. Set in ancient India, they could exist at any time or place.

By narrating these tales to the princes Vishnu Sharma assured that they would acquire sufficient literary experience to stimulate a thirst for knowledge and thereby redeem them from sloth and vice. By looking into other worlds and other lives *Panchatantra* tales enriched children's literature through translations into a variety of languages. Navarana (1962:vi) succinctly states:

Centuries ago *Panchatantra* stories had already passed into universal currency. Age after age, and in every part of the world they have brought delight to old and young alike. What is the secret of this unrivalled popularity? The answer is that no other book in the world contains so much practical wisdom offered in such a palatable form and expressed with such a subtle understanding of the aesthetic as well as psychological requirement of human nature.

The Legend

A legend states that King Amar Shakti reigned in the South Deccan region of India in a city called Mahilarophya. He was learned and an adept in sciences. To the multitude of supplicants in his kingdom he was like the "wish fulfilling tree". His three sons: Vasu Shakti, Ugra Shakti and Anek Shakti were "supreme dunderheads", irresponsible and averse to learning and knowledge. The king was very much distressed and eager to find a way to enlighten his sons, so that they would become worthy of inheriting his kingdom. With this in mind he approached his ministers and learned scholars and gave vent to his feelings rather blatantly saying:

Better than a foolish son
Is one deceased or never born.
The pain that gives at least is brief
But the fool gives cause for lifelong grief.

Better abortion or no cohabitation,
Better still-born or even a daughter,
Better a barren wife, but not a foolish son,
Even if a rich or handsome one.

What can one do with a cow which gives
Neither calves nor milk
What's the point of having a son
Who's neither devoted nor learned? (Haskar 1992:2).



One of his ministers observed that they should think of a “summary method” to enlighten them for:

Endless is learning and brief is life
There are many obstacles in the way.
So, grasp the essence and leave the rest
As with milk and water do swans, they say (Haskar 1992:2).

Minister Sumati then suggested to the King that the young princes would enlighten and inculcate in them rules of conduct befitting their status and dignity. Consequently Vishnu Sharma accepted and vowed he would fulfil the king's desire and ambition. Furthermore the 80-year-old scholar assured the king that he would instil in them an awareness and within six months make them adept in the rules of conduct.

Vishnu Sharma then composed a treatise of five chapters to teach the princes Nitisastra the science of conduct. Lessons were conducted by narrating the

“beastly” fables from the treatise. In a remarkable and ingenious way Vishnu Sharma eradicated the ignorance and arrogance in the princes, thereby successfully fulfilling his vow and promise to the king. *Panchatantra* was thus born and came into existence. Ever since then the *Panchatantra* has been current on this earth for the enlightenment of the young. Now we look upon it as part of children’s literature reflecting other worlds and other lives.

The Five books of *Panchatantra*

Panchatantra is a collection of 99 stories, and stories within stories. The five books or chapters as they were then called are independent, but connected by an introduction which shows the dissatisfaction of a king with the ignorance of his incorrigible sons. Vishnu Sharma educates them by going through these chapters and sharing with them the experiences they come across. The titles of these books are: *Losing or splitting friendship*, *Making friends*, *The Crow and the owl*, *The Loss of what was gained*, and *Rash deeds or action*.

In each book there is frame story into which subsidiary stories are introduced by the device of placing them in the mouths of the characters in the Frame story, and occasionally the structure is further complicated by the introduction of stories within these subsidiary stories (*New Encyclopedia Britannica* 1987:108).

The first book is the longest. It deals with estranged friends. The fable relates how two jackals sever the firm friendship of a lion and a bull. It also warns kings of the dangers of paying heed to perfidious counsels of those whose interest it is to sow divisions between a king and his true adherents.

The second book reveals the “effective alliance” or strong friendship among the dove, mouse, crow, tortoise and the deer. The fable’s emphasis is on winning or maintaining friendship.

The third book tells the story of war between the crows and the owls. The maxim here serves as a warning for it relates the dangers of trusting unknown men. The fourth book is a framed story of an ape and a crocodile. From it we learn that by sheer imprudence we can lose hard-won gains. The fifth book narrates the tale of a Brahman and his mongoose. We learn from it the dangers and consequences of inconsiderate action. It is said that:

He who heeds and oft peruses
This work on conduct proven
Never the course of success loses
Even to the King of heaven (Haskar 1992:3).



Different versions/translations of the *Panchatantra* in India

The original text of the *Panchatantra* was composed in about 200 BC in Sanskrit by Pandit Vishnu Sharma. *The Tantrakhavika of Kashmir* appears to be the closest to the original. Two Kashmiri poets, Somadeva’s version called, *Katha Sarithasagara* and Kschemendra’s *Brihat Katha Maniari* were also popular. In Bengal Narayana’s *Hitopadesa* (Good Advice) was much in circulation. Though based on *Panchatantra*, it was reduced to four books. However, the order of the first two books was changed.

***Panchatantra* in countries abroad**

Between 531 to 579, a Sassanian king Khosrau Anushirvan ordered the translation of *Panchatantra* into Pahlavi.

In the sixth century Burzoe, the Persian Royal physician's translation, (though lost now) helped in bringing out a Syriac translation of the collection. This in its turn encouraged Ibn al Maqaffa to translate *Panchatantra* into the Arabic language which was popularly known as Kalilah wa Dimnah: the names of two jackals that appear in the first story. This Arabic translation triggered various other translations. A second Syriac version came into existence and its impact was observed in the literature of Western Europe.

In the 11th century the Greek version called *Stephanities kai Ichneletes* further encouraged translations into Latin and other Slavic languages.

In the 12th century a Hebrew version became the source for most European versions. In the 15th century the Persian version of *Panchatantra* was called *Anwar-e-Suhayli*. This formed the basis for the 17th century version called *Humayan-Nama*.

Panchatantra stories seemed to have travelled to Indonesia through Javanese oral and written literature. Gypsies helped in spreading these tales in Europe, while travellers took these stories with them to Persia and Arabia and finally through Greece they reached Europe.

Popular fables have been told and retold for more than 2000 years now. For example, the moral of the famous fable, *The Fox and the grapes* is neatly summed up in the expression “sour grapes” to express man’s dislike for what he cannot achieve. Similarly James Joyce gave the fable a “literary” form. He wove *The Fox and the grapes* and *The Ant and the grasshopper* into his *Finnegans wake*, “to create the mood of fantasy that characterises the novel”. Fables therefore attract and appeal to adults too but they still remain as popular children’s literature to this very day.

Contribution of the epics the “Ramayana” and the “Mahabharata” to children’s literature

Generally it is assumed that the epics are meant only for adults (who look upon such monumental works with austerity and reverence) and not for children. Contrary to this attitude and thinking this study reveals how abundantly the epics contribute to children’s literature. The intriguing stories, incidents, and dynamic characters that abound in both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* convey significant outstanding messages to children. The characters in particular make an indelible impact on children’s minds while the stories and incidents inculcate ethics as they explore other worlds and meet characters who even offer hilarious entertainment.

The Ramayana

The author, Valmiki, lovingly unfolds the story of Rama’s life. The original composition is in Sanskrit. The 24 000 stanzas composed in a state of inspiration is a masterpiece of literary composition. It can be viewed at different levels.

Ramayana is a book of “perennial philosophy” revealing the triumph of good over evil or right over wrong deeds. This is dramatised in the conflict between Rama, the hero and Ravana who symbolises the “evil antagonist”. The epic offers children unlimited insights and experiences of other worlds and other lives. Though a scripture for the Hindu community, the *Ramayana* can be looked upon as a traditional storyteller’s narrative or even as a mere tale with innumerable impressive character studies. Rama’s implicit obedience to the dictates of his parents would undoubtedly astonish and even impress children today. The manner in which he discharges his duties and obligations tends to make children conscientious, and is likely to instil in them, a deep sense of responsibility. In Sita, the heroine, we see a woman who is capable of sacrifice. Illustrations of her endurance and determination to set right a wrong, are exemplary. While in the attitude and behaviour of Lakshman and Bharath, the brothers of Rama, children are bound to admire the display of filial affection.

For children in particular, the most fascinating and dominating character, is Hanuman, in monkey form, who is the Wind God. He is also known as Pavana, Vayu or Marut. His celibacy is supposed to give him extraordinary bakti (devotion) and physical strength. He can fly and change shape at will. Rama gives him the gift of eternal youth and longevity. Hanuman’s adventures in “Asoka Vana” (Ashoka Forest) when he takes the memento from Rama to Sita, offers children a thought provoking experience. Hanuman’s power to shrink himself to an unnoticeable size to begin his search for Sita and his ability to assume an enormous stature to destroy Lanka (Ceylon), and teach Ravana a lesson is very exciting and appealing to children. The flame that sets fire to the city of Lanka was not the torch at the tip of the monkey’s tail, but the flame that rages in the soul of Sita in distress.

This chapter which reveals Hanuman's humility, devotion and prowess is known as "Sundara kanda" (The auspicious book). It affirms that every wrong has its retribution and shows the triumph of good over evil. Hanuman's intelligent handling of the situation undoubtedly appeals to children making him the most revered character, admired and loved by both young and old. A striking comparison to the oft repeated recitation of this chapter is similar in significance to the enacting of the Passion story of Jesus Christ and His resurrection on Easter Sunday.

A Bird's eye view of stories in the Ramamayana Dasaratha story

From the Dasaratha story emerges the saga of the Ramayana. Dasaratha meets two interesting characters, the King of Anga and Rishya Sringa, who find a solution to his problem and his desire is fulfilled. It is a fascinating story of Rama's birth.

Thataka story

This story illustrates Rama's life mission of destroying evil and demonry in the world. Just as "loba" (meanness) disfigures the whole human personality, Thataka, a monster and scorcher, turns fertile lands into arid deserts. The story is thought-provoking and revealing. Rama's esoteric techniques in weaponry to quell the monster would undoubtedly appeal to children and even entertain them.

Mahabali story

In this story Vishnu incarnates as a dwarf with the purpose of bringing about awareness of righteousness in Mahabali, who though renowned, for his generosity and valour, had become avaricious. The three steps of the dwarf who assumes a majestic stature, sends Mahabali to the nether world, thus disposing of the tormentor of the worlds. This story is very exciting and gives joy to children.

Ganga story

The Ganga story is very interesting and sets children thinking. It tells us how the river Ganga is tamed and controlled before she touches the earth. Only then could Ganga, from the Himalayas, carry on with her flow down the valleys, with serenity and grandeur. This would make the water holy and sanctify the path of her flow. Here we meet Bhagiratha, (his name is a byword for indefatigable effort, for having done much meditation and experienced severe austerities) who was responsible for bringing the Ganges down to earth.

Rama's wedding

This is the most fascinating section of the epic, *Ramayana*. It appeals to both young and old. Rama overcomes the insurmountable condition put before him, to claim Sita as his wife. It is exciting to youngsters who are prone to revere and admire Rama – the ideal hero of the epic.

The Mahabharata

The Mahabharata was also written in Sanskrit. According to Hindu tradition, wise man Vyasa, dictated the *Mahabharata* to Ganesha, the God of Wisdom. “Mahabharata” means “Great King Bharat”. The epic tells the story of his descendents. Actually, the epic is a collection of writings by several authors and from various other sources. It is quite probable that Vyasa compiled the material and made this unique contribution to posterity. Munshi (1945:vii) observes:

The Mahabharata is not a mere epic, it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but above all, it has for its core the Gita, which is, as the world is beginning to find out ... to be ... the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas.

The central theme of the story is the struggle for control of a kingdom. The main story in the *Mahabharata* illustrates the futility of war. In a game of dice Kauravas cheat their Pandava cousins and send them off to the forest. After many struggles and much suffering the Pandavas decide to wage a war against their Kaurava cousins on the battlefield of Kurukshetra in order to establish justice and truth. A mighty struggle ensues and many lives are lost but ultimately truth triumphs.

The main story of the *Mahabharata* is fascinating and appealing to both young and old. It is interrupted for the Gita, the popular epic poem to come into being. It is an exposition of Hindu Dharma and a philosophic dialogue between Arjun, the warrior and Krishna, his chariot driver. It illustrates Arjun's agitation, when he saw his kith and kin, near and dear ones arrayed on either side for mutual slaughter on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. According to Gita one should discharge one's duties conscientiously with love and devotion.

These ideals that the Gita expounds are meant to indicate not only the best way to gain salvation, but also to show us how we can make our lives more meaningful in this world of trials and tribulations. Rajagopalachari (1963:10) observes that:

... like the father in the old story telling his sons to dig for treasure in the family garden. The gold was found: not as coined treasure hidden away in a pot, but as the reward of toil, a plentiful crop the garden yielded for the digging ...

If readers are induced to dig, the Gita, our precious heritage, will yield a rich harvest for the striving soul.

The story of the *Mahabharata* is further interrupted by other stories with dynamic characters, myths, heroic legends and didactic passages on various topics. We do have fables, fantasies and anecdotes too. Monumental as the epic is, it offers children interesting stories and characters most appealing to them.

Last but not least, the 10 Avatars of Vishnu, the preserving power of the universe, is fully developed and illustrated. Krishna describes the purpose of an Avatar (incarnation) and expresses:

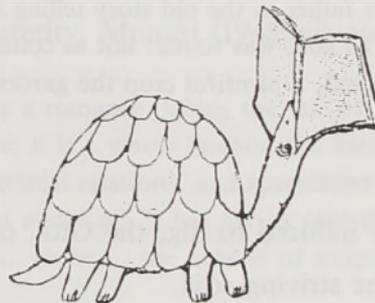
Whenever there is decay of Dharma (truth) O Arjuna, and an outward break of Adharma (injustice), I embody myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of Dharma, I am born from age to age (Gita).

The Ten incarnations of Vishnu

This takes us back to the fable which offers children's literature experiences by exploring other worlds and deriving much from experiences of other lives, whether these lives are those of man or beast.

The 10 incarnations are:

1. Matya – The fish
2. Kurma – The tortoise
3. Varah – The boar
4. Narasimha – The man-lion
5. Vamana – The dwarf
6. Parasimha – Rama with axe



7. Ramachandra – Hero of Ramayana
8. Sri Krishna – The Bhagavan of the Gita
9. Buddha – Founder of Buddhism
10. Kalki – Hero on white horse (who is to come at the end of Kali Yuga – the present era).

Similarly the common mythological deity in Hindu religion who is significantly appealing to children is Ganesha. He has a human body with an elephant head. This fascinates children who adore the elephant-headed deity to whom Vyasa dictated the Mahabharata. Several interesting stories relate to how Ganesha happened to be elephant-headed. The mythological delineation of this cosmic fact may prove appealing to both children and adults. The propitiation of this God in any project ensures protection against all obstacles. Every Hindu parent instills this thought or idea in the child's mind.

Profiles of such historical and mythological characters, together with the interesting stories from the epics are abundantly illustrated and simplified in children's books like *Amar Chitra Katha* and *Chandamama*. They are published in English and in several other languages with wide circulation. They are popular among children and adults too. These books make a significant and outstanding contribution to children's literature. Children on reading them, explore other worlds and other lives and thereby gain unique literature experiences.

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Asia and Asians in Australian children's literature

John Foster



The new South Africa, with its white-dominated past, is, it goes without saying, an African country. Australia, with its white-dominated present, is trying to claim that it is an Asian country, largely because it is tied to Asian nations economically and, by claiming it is one of them hopes to do even better. Geographically, in fact, it is as much a Pacific as an Asian nation.

In fact, Australia – again like South Africa – has a long Asian history, in our case, from Chinese explorers who placed it on their maps two and a half thousand years ago, to Japanese ships which visited in the year 1626 to, much more importantly, the thousands of Chinese labourers, farmhands and goldminers who came over in the mid 19th century, and the Afghan camel drivers and Japanese pearl divers who followed them in the 1870s and '80s.

This was all too much for the new government of the Commonwealth of Australia, which brought in the so-called White Australia Policy in 1901 in order to prevent Asian immigration. At least Asians were considered to be worth worrying about: Aborigines, Australia's indigenous people, were not even counted in censuses until decades later, and so did not even officially exist. In other

words, there was a racial hierarchy similar to that which once operated in South Africa.

The aim of this paper is to examine the portrayal of Asians in Australian children's novels, picture books and comics, and to chart the progress of this portrayal vis-à-vis that of more general changes in attitudes towards Asians in the wider Australian society. Together with this portrayal, some comment will be made on the depiction of Asian beliefs and culture, and on the effect of Asia and Asians on Australians.

The most important early Asian character in Australian children's literature was one Lee Wing, the Chinese vegetable gardener in Mary Grant Bruce's "Billabong" series, which was set on a station – a ranch, in other words – in South-Eastern Victoria, where the owners lived a comfortable life surrounded by a bevy of servants. Here is our introduction to Lee Wing in *A Little bush maid*, published in 1910 and the first novel in the series:

Lee Wing was very fat, his broad, yellow face generally wearing a cheerful grin – unless he happened to catch sight of Hogg [the head gardener]. His long pigtail was always concealed under his flapping straw hat. Once Jim, who was Norah's big brother, had found him asleep in his hut with the pigtail drooping over the edge of the bunk. Jim thought the opportunity too good to lose and, with such deftness that the Celestial never stirred, he tied the end of the pigtail to the back of a chair – with rather startling results when Lee Wing woke with a sudden sense of being late, and made a spring from the bunk. The chair of course followed him and the loud yell of fear and pain raised by the victim brought half the homestead to the scene of the catastrophe.

We can safely say that this is not the description of a character who is seen as being equal to the protagonists. However, Asians in the "Billabong" books can

be depicted positively: witness the Indian Lal Chunder, literally a lifesaver in *Mates at Billabong*, who rises above the stereotypical to the heroic.

It is in the comics that the next Asians can be discovered. One of Australia's favourite strips is "Ginger Meggs", which has been going for some 70 years, outlasting not only its creator but also a couple more artists. Horgan (1978:26) points out that Ginger's decision not to throw a rotten tomato at a passing Chinese is based on pragmatism, not on racial equality.

More serious and even more negative are the portrayals found in the next examples. Let us remember that many Australian servicemen and women suffered cruelly at the hands of the Japanese during World War II, and that the next war fought by Australians was against two other Asian enemies, the Chinese and the North Koreans. Even without taking the Vietnam War into account, it is unsurprising to find portrayals such as that of Dr Gojo in the 1943 story "Commando Conn of the Rough and Tough" who, in learning that some captured Australians will be at his disposal, laughs "H'H'HE-HE, MY NEW EXPERIMENTS NEED HUMAN GUINEA PIGS!" (*Kayo comics*, unp) as he attempts to perfect his poison gas formula.

However, it is in the series entitled "Punch Perkins of the Fighting Fleet", published during the Korean War, that Asians are treated most negatively. The Mongoloids, as they are called, are pictured torturing Australians (Reilly 1951:2): it is here that the portrayal of Asians reaches its nadir, with the negative emotions of two wars being coupled with the ever-present fear of the Yellow Peril. It should be realised that, for at least a century, Australians have been afraid that their sparsely-populated country would be over-run by the land-hungry

hordes from the North, hence the expression “Yellow Peril” came into being. Anyway, like the Japanese, the Mongoloids’ aim is to conquer Australia: racial paranoia struck deeply in the early 1950s.

Times changed, however. In 1973 the White Australia Policy was removed and with it the bar to Asian immigration: in fact, immigration from that time was specifically nonracial. An Australian community which enjoyed its curries, sweet and sour pork and Bruce Lee martial arts movies could hardly be totally racist and, as in life, so in literature.

Even so, it took time for many Asian characters to reach children’s literature, at least partly because, except for the denizens of Australia’s Chinatowns and isolated towns on the northern coast, there were still comparatively few Asians in the country. This state of affairs changed dramatically after the end of the Vietnam war, as Indochinese refugees entered Australia in increasing numbers. In 1981, in fact, some two and a half percent of the population was born in Asia. Now, these people were not exactly invisible, and they began to find their way, in increasing numbers, into books – and comics – for children.

If it is presumed that what children read affects their attitudes and values towards the subjects at hand, an examination of more recent material should be undertaken. Will we find yesterday’s racist overtones? Or evidence of the acceptance of a multicultural Australia? A demonstration that Asians are just yellow or brown Australians? Or a celebration of the differences between Asians and Australians.

The earliest post-White Australia Policy novels were historical in genre and usually centred around the goldrush so that the Asian characters were, necessarily, Chinese. David Martin's 1973 novel *The Chinese boy* was the first of these, and it is noteworthy because it was narrated from the point of view of the Chinese boy of the title, albeit in the third person. Throughout the novel, many whites' hatred of the Chinese miners is made apparent and, with it, the reasons which lay behind that hatred:

One ought to be disgusted, but in your country, they say, there's always more people than jobs, so you grab what's going, never mind how. Here it's the other way, specially since we had the gold. More jobs than people. We've learned not to be afraid of the masters, and you haven't yet. That's what our men have against you. They see you pushing in just when they're starting to stand up for themselves, and they reckon you're here to stab 'em in the back (p 117).

So many misapprehensions of the Chinese – their use of torture, never finding new gold – are listed that, had they been true, it would be easy for the reader to understand the racists' attitude towards them. However, the most telling comments are found in the author's afterword. Firstly, in discussing the goldfields, Martin states:

At Lambing Flat, violent race feeling and democratic enthusiasm went hand in hand, which is perhaps less odd than it may seem, especially for Australia (p 196).

Secondly, the reader is given the author's opinion of the European/Asian confrontation:

A famous Australian artist, Sir Lionel Lindsay, recalling his youth, wrote: "The Australian boy likes the Chinese, yet nothing will keep him from pelting a distant Chow. Now when I think of this great race, with its positive virtues, its ancient art, its profound philosophy, I know that we were the barbarians ... compelled by our instinctive savagery. The honours were with the Chinese."

Yes. But time heals much (p 198).

David Martin is, in fact, probably Australia's most racially aware children's writer. With *The Chinese boy* and *Hughie*, a novel about an Aborigine, comes *The Man in the red turban*, published in 1978. Martin, an immigrant from Hungary himself, obviously sympathised strongly with members of other ethnic minorities, in this case a Sikh hawker who travelled up and down the River Murray with his wagonload of goodies for the dwellers in small towns and on farms. It is set in the Depression and, again, Martin has combined real political and historical events, a fictional narrative, and points about race and culture.

Ganda Singh, the hawker, dominates the novel in every way, because the reader gains an understanding not only of his lonely life in Australia – women, even wives, were forbidden to immigrate because of the controlling nature of the White Australia Policy – but also of his life back in the Punjab when he was a young man. In fact, “educative discourse”, about Sikh beliefs, their history in Australia and so on, tends to slow the narrative on a number of occasions.

Witness:

They were of the five K's that mark a Sikh as a fighter and a devotee: *kirpan*, the sword; *kara*, the bracelet; *kesh*, the long hair; *kangha*, the comb that holds the topknot in place, soldier style; and finally the plain, white military drawers, *kach*, which leave a man free to crouch and spring and even now he always wore (p 96).

This is interesting, certainly, but adds little to the plot.

Martin's importance, with *The Man in the red turban* and *The Chinese boy*, lies in his desire to prevent young readers from becoming racial bigots. After all, for someone to get to know those from other countries or races, and to realise how hard their lives are when separated from their homes and families, is the first step in preventing racism. Moreover, this knowledge and understanding of Asians

is even more necessary, because they *do* look different and have beliefs and customs which can seem strange to some.

Ruth Manley, an Australian interested in the history and culture of old Japan, won a grant to visit that country and subsequently wrote two novels, *The Plum-rain scroll* (1978) and *The Dragon stone* (1982) which were based on ancient Japanese myths and legends. The former won the Book of the Year Award, but both novels seem to have disappeared without trace. Even so, they gave the reader an insight into the traditional literature of Japan, with all its complexities and huge variety of characters.

To use an old Australian term, the next book is a *ring-in*. In other words, William Mayne's 1980 collection of linked short stories entitled *Salt River times* should not, perhaps, be included here, as Mayne is not an Australian; however, he wrote it while living and working in Australia and, of course, it is set in that country.

Salt River times is typical vintage Mayne: not all is spelled out, and echoes and seeming loose ends abound. The lives of three generations of Chinese people are included with those of Anglo-Saxon Australians as well as those of Greeks and Russians, for it is today's multicultural Australia which is displayed here. So, Joe being Chinese is not central to the book, and he is just one of the local lads. In fact, he is accused one night of being a white oppressor, and retorts, "I'm Chinese in the daytime." (p 25) because, if nothing else, he *sounds* Australian.

Joe's easy life is contrasted with that of his grandfather, Mr Young (formerly Lao Yung), and his relative Mr Lee (Cheng Li), who were market gardeners –

and night-cart hauliers – many years earlier. In fact, Mr Young and Mr Lee are found guilty of a murder they did not commit:

“Then we go a long time in the city jail. Not speaking much Australian then, and getting to be hanged up every day, we think. Cheng Li and I. But no boat, nowhere. Boat gone. Cargo gone. All money gone, all gone. Two poor Chinamen, Cheng Li, Lao Yung come out of city jail.”

“And then what?” said Miss White. “Wifes and childs all dying out of hunger,” said Mr Young. “We go up country a long time, working.”

Moreover, the one example of half-hearted racism against Joe is neatly inverted when it becomes apparent that old Mr Young is a racist himself:

He took his grandfather by the arm and said, “Mel knows about the dragon’s head.” “Don’t speak about it,” said Mr Young. “He’s a foreigner.”

Joe turned to Mel. “You can’t get through,” he said. “He gets like this, everybody isn’t Chinese is foreign devils. He’s old.” (p 72).

Of course, Joe kicking a footy (Australian for football) around with his mates comes as no surprise when an opening batsman for the New South Wales cricket team, Richard Chee Quee, is of Chinese blood himself.

It may be said that the years 1973 to 1984 marked the first post-war period of the portrayal of Asians in Australian children’s literature. Beginning with *The Chinese boy*, the period ends with Garry Hurlle’s pair of humorous novelettes entitled *The Rusty Kee adventures*. Like Martin’s novel of 11 years earlier, the setting is the goldrush and the protagonist a Chinese boy or, more accurately, a *half-Chinese* boy. Not surprisingly, only the unpleasant characters are racist: the Widow McDuff, for example, considers that “... the only thing lower than the

Chinese gold diggers were the Aborigines and the flies'' (p 35). The widow hates children, too, demonstrating how awful she is.

Although a minor work, this book handily closes the period. Like its predecessors over the decade, it can be seen as an effort through which Australians can come to terms with their history, largely 19th century history, vis-à-vis Asia and Asians, especially the Chinese. In the main, white racism is emphasised and, with it, the hard and misunderstood lives of the Asian immigrants. Most events and people are seen through Asian eyes, allowing sympathy for, if not identification with, the protagonists. The majority of Asians presented are portrayed positively, but there is certainly no idealisation: Asians, like Europeans, are just people, and can be good or bad.

The second post-war period began in 1985 with two novels which could not, basically, be more different: David Lake's *The Changelings of Chaan* and Allan Baillie's *Little brother*. The former is what may be termed a spiritual fantasy and is set in a mythical country, probably Thailand; the latter is the story of the escape of a Cambodian boy from his war torn country via a Thai refugee camp to a peaceful haven in Australia. There are two important similarities between these two *very* dissimilar novels: both are set in the present – and characters and physical settings are of Southeast Asia. This setting is used largely because of the thousands of boat people and other refugees who tried so desperately to reach Australia, and, also, because of increasing cultural and economic ties between Australia and the countries to the north of it.

The Changelings of Chaan, although short-listed for the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award, need not be mentioned further, because it was a dead

end. *Little brother*, however, can be seen as the forerunner of a line of books in which Cambodian refugees flee to Australia after facing the horrors of life under the Khmer Rouge. Unlike the others of the type, however, *Little brother* is set entirely in Southeast Asia, except for the final two pages: this means, of course, that there is no contrast with Australia and its culture.

Little brother is, basically, about the horrors of civil war and how individuals can survive through strength and bravery. This is true, also, of Steve Tolbert's 1991 novel *Channeary*. In this, however, the reader discovers the unfairness that a girl who suffered so much in her efforts to leave her own country then finds racial intolerance in her promised land, Australia. She is befriended by nice Australians, and her new life may well be happy: that which she left behind, though, was terrible "... another soldier rammed a rifle butt into his face, smashing his nose and cheekbone" (p 70).

The Khmer Rouge are also the villains of Mary McCarthy's 1987 novel, *Saret*. Actually, they are very handy villains: it is impossible to say a good word for them because of their cruel, genocidal behaviour, and no reader will be offended by their portrayal thus. *Saret* is of particular interest because it is based on an episode of a television mini-series highlighting the problems of migrant teenagers in Australian society. *Saret*, like *Channeary*, is haunted by his past while finding racism and exploitation in a land in which all are supposed to be free and equal. His sister's ignorance of the English language leads her to go out on a date with someone quite unsuitable, who rapes her – and gets away with it. The reader is shown, however, that many Australians are not really anti-Asian, just ignorant about their cultures and beliefs.

Similar in a way to *Saret* and *Channeary* is *Onion tears*, Diana Kidd's 1989 novel for younger readers, which was shortlisted for book of the year by the Children's Book Council. The protagonist is Vietnamese, one of the boat people, so many of whom perished on their way to Australia, like Nam's grandfather here. She meets racism, initially, but wins friends through taking interesting lunches, which she shares, to school. It is all rather simplistic, but the Vietnamese people in the novel come across as being lively, humorous characters who would be fun to meet.

In fact, as has been apparent from the preceding discussion, *every* Asian character – with the exception of the Khmer Rouge, of course – has been portrayed in positive terms. The negativity of earlier times has been replaced, it seems, with idealisation: where, then, are realistic Asian characters, real people coloured with shades of grey, not simply black of white? Fortunately, they do exist, and most of them are in Allan Baillie's 1991 novel, *The China coin*. Like David Lake, Baillie used his own experiences and knowledge in writing his novel: it just happened that he was in Beijing at the time of the Tienanmen Square massacre, so it is not surprising that he used it as the centrepiece of *The China coin*.

Leah, half Chinese and half English, visits China with her mother, who is an overseas Chinese, born in Penang. In what is really a picaresque novel, they ramble around China meeting villagers, Communist officials, students, shopkeepers, everyone. The reader gains an insight into both rural life and the plight of the pro-democracy students, as well as into the problems faced by someone who is half Asian and half European.

The last of the novels of the second post-war period is Caron and Nigel Krauth's *Sin Can Can*, published in 1987, another book giving an insight into an Asian people and culture, in this case those of Bali. So many Australians go to Bali that a hit song about the experience, called "I've been to Bali too" came out a few years ago. The girl in *Sin Can Can*, however, gets beyond the tourist traps and ripoff merchants into the heart of Balinese culture, and really does gain an understanding of the people. The Balinese characters are depicted positively, in the main, and Ashlie, the girl, falls in love with – I quote – a "yummy-looking" Balinese boy, who becomes a faithful friend.

In this group of novels, then, Australian readers are introduced to peoples and cultures very different from theirs, while Asian readers will discover reflections of themselves and their lives that were previously missing from the children's literature of this country. The positive depictions of Asians found in these books can, on the one hand, show that these people are worthwhile individuals and, on the other, that many faced great hardships to reach Australia as refugees and should, at the very least, receive sympathy.

Picture story books, of course, can hardly be used to foster such ideas. Junko Morimoto, born in Hiroshima and living in Australia for the last decade, has illustrated either traditional Japanese tales or stories which have a traditional feel about them: in both types, the characters are interesting and unusual like the hunter in her very successful *Kojuro and the bears* (1986). Books like these give young readers an insight into another culture, as Manley's do for older readers: the difference between the work of the two authors lies in the fact that Morimoto is writing from the inside, Manley merely as an observer. Morimoto's touching *My Hiroshima*, is a statement of Japanese feelings and emotions about a terrible episode in their history but, as nonfiction, it is not within the scope of this paper.

Two books remain for discussion in this section and, in both, the fact that characters are Asian is unremarked, indicating that they are merely part of the Australian social fabric and, as we shall see, have been so for many years. Libby Hathorn and Armin Greder's *Big dog* (1991) merely shows a little Vietnamese girl having the bright idea of how to frighten the fearsome dog, and she reaches into her culture to do so. Nadia Wheatley's *My place* (1987) demonstrates, primarily, Aborigines' hold over the land but, secondarily, the roles played by immigrants of all races – for Australia is, basically, a nation of immigrants. Of all the double page spreads in *My place* – one for every decade between white settlement in 1788 and its bicentenary in 1988 – Asians or Asian-owned businesses are mentioned in every decade between 1858 and 1908, then in 1928, and 1988. The Vietnamese cafe, the Lebanese takeaway and the others are anonymous; Wong Ga Leck and his market garden are anything but. Mr Wong is regarded as being “a heathen savage” (unp) by the conservative German settlers of 1868, but he is young Minna's friend because he gave her a kitten.

This sympathetically portrayed Chinese from last century has his modern counterparts in *Streetwise comics*, a series produced by the Redfern Legal Service in Sydney with financial assistance from the Commonwealth government. The aim is to show young people their rights, and one way in which this is done is by using protagonists from many different backgrounds, including Asian countries. One story concerns an unemployed Vietnamese boy who wins a snooker championship over a white adversary: the Vietnamese are shown to have strong family values and an interest in education. Real Laotian script is used in one illustration, surely indicating the acceptance of Asians at this level of society, at least (*Streetwise comics*, no. 9:6).

Thus ends the second post-war period, for a new, more balanced period has begun, admittedly with the publication of only two novels – both by the same

author, at that. The writer concerned is John Marsden, whose *Tomorrow, when the war began* (1993) and its sequel, *The Dead of night* (1994), have started a new trend – perhaps. The novels are set in the Australia of the near future, an Australia invaded by a northern Asian neighbour. So, it seems, the Yellow Peril rides again; however, the balance lies in the fact that one of the group of heroic adolescents battling these villains is, himself, Chinese. In fact, stereotype of all stereotypes, his parents own a restaurant: but, it must be asked, why else would a Chinese family live in a small Australian country town?

Lee, for that is his name – another stereotype? – enjoys horror movies and serious music and has a sense of humour, even when wounded. Ellie, the white protagonist, dreams of undressing and fondling him, and eventually does something similar. The fact that Lee is Chinese is, for the most part, unremarked and unremarkable for, like the Greek adolescent who is in the group as well, he is part of a truly multicultural Australia.

More interesting than Lee's role is the fact that some of the others almost stand up for the invaders. Here is part of an exchange, after "The General", one of the invading force, has claimed over the radio that "... the invasion was aimed at 'reducing imbalances within the region'" (p 168):

"What does it mean 'reducing imbalances within the region'?" Kevin asked.

"I guess he's talking about sharing things more equally." Robyn said. "We've got all this land and all these resources, and yet there's countries a crow's pit away that have people packed in like battery hens. You can't blame them for resenting it and we haven't done much to reduce any imbalances, just sat on our fat backsides, enjoyed our money and felt smug."

"Well, that's the way the cookie crumbles," Kevin said uncomfortably.

"And now they've taken the cookie and crumbled it in a whole new way." Robyn said. "In fact it looks like they're taking the whole packet."

“I don’t understand you,” Kevin said. “You sound like you don’t mind. You think it’s fair enough, do you? Let them walk in and take everything they want, everything your parents have worked for. Help yourself guys, don’t mind us.”

“Of course I mind,” Robyn said. “If I was a saint maybe I wouldn’t mind, but I’m not a saint so I mind rather a lot. And it’s not as though they’re acting in a very religious way. I don’t know any religion that tells people to go in and steal and kill to get what they want. I can understand why they’re doing it, but understanding isn’t the same as supporting. But if you’d lived your whole life in a slum, starving, unemployed, always ill, and you saw the people across the road sunbaking and eating ice cream every day, then after a while you’d convince yourself that taking their wealth and sharing it around your neighbours isn’t such a terrible thing to do. A few people would suffer, but a lot of people would be better off” (p 70).

Despite these sentiments in *Tomorrow, when the war began* and, especially, in *The Dead of night*, it is made clear that the invaders – Indonesians, probably, but perhaps Vietnamese or Chinese – are villains, indeed. Lee, good Aussie that he is, has no doubts about fighting the soldiers so that, for one of the few times in Australian Children’s Literature, we have Asian-on-Asian violence on Australian soil. These two novels could be the first of a wave of nonracist but non-idealised portrayals of Asian characters. Today, it seems, that Australians have not only come to terms with their “Asian History”, as it were, but also contemporary Asian life, especially within Australia, of course.

Pre-war and post-war, the reflection in Australian children’s books of current racial attitudes is, for the most part, undistorted. Certainly, *Streetwise comics*, with its federal government funding, smacks rather of that same government’s social justice and multicultural policies, but the other works seems genuine enough. John Marsden’s resurrection of the old Yellow Peril fears would have been even less politically correct a decade earlier: at last, it is hoped, the pendulum of Australian attitudes towards Asia and Asians has stopped swinging from one extreme to the other and will remain where Marsden has left it, in neutral.

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