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**Completion Report of Two-Day International Conference on
*Beyond Borders: Cultural Negotiations and Global Engagement in Australia
and India***

Organized by: Centre for Australian Studies, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore

Mode: Online

Conference Dates: 18–19 February, 2026

Conference Time: 11:00 AM to 04:30 PM (each day)

Venue: Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore, West Bengal

Mission

The Centre for Australian Studies, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore, organised this two-day international conference titled “Beyond Borders: Cultural Negotiations and Global Engagement in Australia and India” with the mission of fostering meaningful academic dialogue on the rich cultural, literary, and political intersections between Australia and India. The conference sought to create a rigorous intellectual platform for scholars, researchers, and thinkers to engage with questions of identity, postcolonialism, migration, indigeneity, and global engagement as they manifest across the two countries and their diasporas. By bringing together international and national academics, the conference aimed to deepen institutional and scholarly connections between Australia and India, and to explore the multi-layered ways in which cultural negotiations shape both societies.

Vision

The vision behind organising this conference was to establish the Centre for Australian Studies at Swami Vivekananda University as a leading node in the network of Australian Studies scholarship in South Asia. By facilitating substantive conversations between leading scholars from Australia and India, the conference envisioned building lasting bridges across institutions, disciplines, and intellectual traditions. The event aspired to illuminate how the legacies of colonialism, the politics of belonging, and the aspirations for cultural sovereignty continue to shape Australia and India in the twenty-first century. Through its sessions and deliberations, the conference sought to inspire new research, publications, and collaborations that would carry forward this essential dialogue.

Concept Note

The international conference “Beyond Borders: Cultural Negotiations and Global Engagement in Australia and India” was conceptualised to open up a comparative and transnational academic space for examining the cultural, literary, political, and philosophical dimensions of the Australia–India relationship. Australia and India share histories shaped by British colonialism, and both nations have grappled with the complex aftermath of empire — including the displacement and marginalisation of indigenous peoples, the formation of postcolonial identities, and the negotiation of their places in a rapidly globalising world. At the same time, the two countries share a growing bilateral relationship marked by significant people-to-people ties, a large Indian diaspora in Australia, and an expanding academic and cultural exchange.

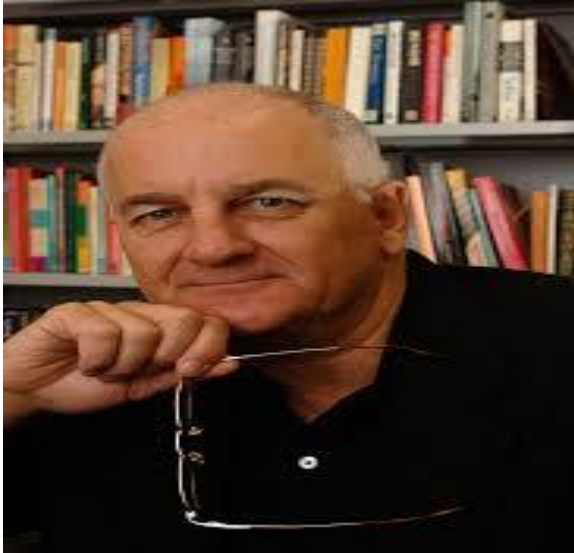
The conference brought together leading scholars to address questions of cultural hybridity, postcolonial theory, Aboriginal and indigenous rights, diasporic identity, literary exchange, and political philosophy. Sessions were designed to move beyond disciplinary boundaries, drawing on literature, history, cultural studies, political science, and sociology to illuminate the complex ways in which Australia and India have engaged with each other and with the broader global community. The event provided a unique opportunity for scholars based in India to engage directly with voices from within Australian academia, enriching local scholarship with international perspectives.

Conference Schedule

Day 1 – 18 February 2026	
11:00 – 11:30	Inauguration
11:30 – 12:30	Keynote Address — Prof. Bill Ashcroft
12:30 – 14:30	Break
14:30 – 16:00	General Session I (Chair: Sharshina Swastyaneek)
16:00 – 17:00	Special Address — Dr. Michael Griffiths
Day 2 – 19 February 2026	
11:00 – 12:00	Special Address — Dr. Helen Pringle
12:30 – 13:15	Plenary Session — Dr. Sibendu Chakraborty
13:15 – 14:00	Break
14:00 – 15:30	General Session II (Chair: Sutadripa Chowdhury)
15:30 – 16:15	Valedictory Session (Prof. Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay)
16:15 – 16:30	Conference Close

Guest Speaker Details

Prof. Bill Ashcroft



Prof. Bill Ashcroft is Emeritus Professor in the School of the Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney, and one of the most distinguished figures in postcolonial literary theory worldwide. He is the co-author of the foundational text *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989, Routledge), which established the disciplinary framework for postcolonial studies and has been widely cited as one of the most influential works in contemporary literary criticism. Together with Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, he also co-authored *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* and *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, both standard references in the field.

Prof. Ashcroft has published extensively on topics including postcolonialism, utopianism, Australian literature, and the relationship between language, power, and cultural identity. Among his sole-authored works are *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of a Colonial Culture* (2001), *Caliban's Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures* (2009), *Post-Colonial Transformation* (2001), and *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures* (2017). He has held visiting professorships at universities across Europe, Asia, and the Americas, and has delivered keynote addresses at major international conferences on literature and cultural studies.

A Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Prof. Ashcroft's scholarship has shaped the way scholars around the world understand the relationship between empire, language, literature, and cultural agency. His work engages deeply with the Australian

experience of colonialism while consistently reaching toward universal questions of human freedom, creativity, and the transformative power of narrative.

Dr. Michael R. Griffiths



Dr. Michael R. Griffiths is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Wollongong, Australia. His research lies at the intersection of postcolonial literary and cultural studies, settler-colonial theory, and Australian indigenous literatures and performance. He is a leading voice in the field of settler-colonial studies and has written extensively on the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian literature, theatre, and culture.

Dr. Griffiths is the author of *The Distribution of Settlement: Appropriation and Refusal in Australian Literature and Culture* (UWA Publishing, 2018), a landmark study that examines how settler-colonial narratives both distribute and are disrupted by Aboriginal presence and refusal. He has published widely in leading journals including *PMLA*, *ARIEL*, and *Textual Practice*, and has contributed chapters to major edited collections in postcolonial and world literary studies.

His scholarly work draws on a wide range of theoretical frameworks — including those of Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe, and Glen Coulthard — to examine the politics of recognition, sovereignty, and cultural survival in settler-colonial contexts. Dr. Griffiths brings to this conference a sophisticated engagement with the way Australian literature and culture negotiates its colonial past and its responsibilities to Aboriginal peoples, offering vital perspectives for comparative conversations with Indian contexts of colonialism and indigenous rights.

Dr. Helen Pringle



Dr. Helen Pringle is Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney. She is a political theorist and philosopher whose research engages with questions of human rights, political obligation, freedom of expression, and the politics of dignity. She has long been associated with the politics of recognition as it pertains to women, minorities, and indigenous peoples in Australia and internationally.

Dr. Pringle has published widely on topics including hate speech and the limits of freedom of expression, political theory in Australia, women's rights in international and domestic law, and the philosophical foundations of human dignity. She has contributed to major policy debates in Australia on hate speech legislation, indigenous recognition, and the protection of vulnerable groups under law, and has appeared as an expert commentator in national media.

Her scholarship is distinguished by its rigorous engagement with both philosophical theory and political practice, and by its commitment to examining the relationship between political ideas and the lived experiences of those who have historically been excluded from the mainstream of political life. Dr. Pringle brings to this conference a deep and nuanced understanding of the Australian political landscape, and the ways in which questions of rights, representation, and cultural recognition are negotiated within Australian democratic institutions and civil society.

Dr. Sibendu Chakraborty



Dr. Sibendu Chakraborty is Assistant Professor of English at Charuchandra College, affiliated to the University of Calcutta. He is one of the most active Australian Studies scholars in India, with a doctoral dissertation focused on Australian Aboriginal theatre and its politics of cultural sovereignty, memory, and resistance. Dr. Chakraborty was awarded the Australia India Council Fellowship in 2012, which enabled him to conduct archival and fieldwork research at leading Australian universities and cultural institutions.

His research interests include Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literary and performance traditions, postcolonial drama, contemporary Indian writing in English, and cultural theory. He has presented his work at national and international conferences and has published in peer-reviewed journals and volumes on Australian and postcolonial literatures.

Dr. Chakraborty's work is particularly significant for its capacity to bring the Australian experience into productive dialogue with South Asian scholarly and cultural contexts, illuminating shared and divergent histories of colonialism, indigenous resistance, and cultural negotiation. As a scholar based in West Bengal, he represents the growing body of Indian academics who are contributing to Australian Studies from the vantage point of the subcontinent, enriching the field with perspectives that are grounded in but not limited to the Indian experience.

Conference Committee

The committee was constituted one month prior to this conference. The committee members included Prof. Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay, Chief Executive Director (Academics), Swami Vivekananda University and Director, Center for Australian Studies, as the Mentor, and Dr. Rituparna Chakraborty, Head, Department of English and Deputy Director, Centre for Australian Studies, as the Convener. The committee also comprised the following members:

- Dr. Madhumita Roy (Assoc. prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Dr. Shubham Bhattacharjee (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Dr. Soumyarup Bhattacharjee (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Dr. Tirna Sadhu (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Dr. Shreyoshi Dhar (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Dr. Natasha Verma Chatterjee (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Mr. Debarshi Arathdar (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Mr. Agnidepto Datta (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Mr. Sudipta Dutta (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Ms. Sharshina Swastyaneek (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Ms. Sutadripa Dutta Chowdhury (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Mr. Sumit Saha (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)
- Mr. Soumya Goswami (Asst. Prof., Department of English, SVU)

Seminar Report on Beyond Borders: Cultural Negotiations and Global Engagement in Australia and India

The two-day International Conference Beyond Borders: Cultural Negotiations and Global Engagement in Australia and India was organised by the Centre for Australian Studies, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore, on 18 and 19 February 2026. The event brought together scholars, researchers, and students from across India and Australia to engage in substantive dialogue on the cultural, literary, political, and philosophical dimensions of the Australia–India relationship. Drawing on the disciplines of postcolonial studies, cultural theory, political philosophy, and literary criticism, the conference fostered rich interdisciplinary conversations that illuminated both the shared and distinct histories of the two countries.

Inaugural Session and Keynote Highlights

The conference was inaugurated on the morning of 18 February 2026 in a ceremony presided over by the Chief Executive Director (Academics) of Swami Vivekananda University, Prof. Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay, along with the esteemed invited guests and the Head of the Department of English and Director of the Centre for Australian Studies, Dr. Rituparna Chakraborty. The ceremony was attended by faculty members, research scholars, and students of the university, as well as academic guests.

Prof. Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay delivered the opening remarks, welcoming the delegates and contextualising the significance of the conference within the broader intellectual mission of Swami Vivekananda University. He drew attention to the growing importance of Australian Studies in the Indian academic context and underscored the university's commitment to fostering international scholarly partnerships. He highlighted the two countries' intertwined postcolonial histories and the importance of comparative perspectives in understanding the complexities of cultural identity and global engagement in the contemporary world. Dr. Rituparna Chakraborty then introduced the theme of the conference, tracing the intellectual genealogy of the phrase "Beyond Borders" and articulating the theoretical stakes of thinking about Australia and India in relation to each other.

Keynote Address I – Prof. Bill Ashcroft

The Keynote Address of the conference was delivered by Prof. Bill Ashcroft, Emeritus Professor at UNSW and the co-author of *The Empire Writes Back*. Prof. Ashcroft opened the conference with a provocative argument: every map is not merely a technical document but an act of possession. To name a territory on a map, he argued, is to claim it — and the

history of Australia's cartography is the history of that claim being made, consolidated, and contested. He also spoke extensively on the early maps of Australia made by Europeans who never set foot in Australia, and often used to their own imagination to make fictional maps of the country.

He traced the history of cartographic representations of Australia from the European concept of *Terra Australis Incognita* — the hypothetical southern continent imagined into existence before any European had set foot there — through the Dutch VOC charts of the early seventeenth century. The voyages of Janszoon, Hartog, and Abel Tasman gradually inscribed the Australian coastline into European knowledge; the naming of the Gulf of Carpentaria after a Dutch governor-general was not geography but erasure — overwriting tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal place names and spatial knowledge in a single cartographic stroke.

General Session I (Chair: Sharshina Swastyaneek)

The afternoon of the first day was dedicated to General Session I, chaired by Ms. Sharshina Swastyaneek, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Swami Vivekananda University. The session featured paper presentations by research scholars and faculty members from universities across West Bengal and beyond. Papers addressed a range of themes including representations of migration and diaspora in Australian fiction, comparative readings of postcolonial identity in Indian and Australian literature, and the politics of cultural memory in settler-colonial contexts. The session was marked by lively and productive discussion, with the chair facilitating an engaged exchange between presenters and the audience.

Special Address – Dr. Michael R. Griffiths

The first day concluded with a Special Address delivered by Dr. Michael R. Griffiths, Senior Lecturer at the University of Wollongong. Dr. Griffiths' address was built around a single, powerful claim: that Alexis Wright's 2006 novel *Carpentaria* is not simply literature but an act of Indigenous political philosophy — a sovereign assertion of Aboriginal law, knowledge, and belonging that refuses to seek legitimacy on the settler state's terms.

He introduced the novel's setting — the fictional Gulf town of Desperance, under threat from a multinational mining corporation — and its cast of Aboriginal characters navigating the overlapping pressures of community fracture, colonial dispossession, and the desecration of sacred land. Its non-linear structure, polyphonic voices, and vernacular poetry, he argued, are not stylistic choices but political ones: they enact an Aboriginal

relationship to time and story that is incommensurable with the linear, progress-driven conventions of Western fiction.

Special Address – Dr. Helen Pringle

The second day of the conference opened with a Special Address by Dr. Helen Pringle, Associate Professor at UNSW. Dr. Pringle addressed the politics of recognition and its limits, focusing on the ways in which Australian democracy has responded — and in many cases failed to respond — to the claims of Aboriginal Australians and the diasporic communities for recognition, sovereignty, and rights. She reflected on the 2023 Voice Referendum in Australia, offering a nuanced account of the arguments for and against constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and situating these debates within a broader global conversation about the rights of indigenous as well as diasporic communities.

Plenary Session – Dr. Sibendu Chakraborty

The Plenary Session on the second day was delivered by Dr. Sibendu Chakraborty, Assistant Professor of English at Charuchandra College, University of Calcutta. Dr. Chakraborty spoke on Aboriginal theatre in Australia, drawing on his doctoral research and his fieldwork conducted during his Australia India Council Fellowship in 2012. He offered a detailed and insightful account of the development of Aboriginal performance traditions from the 1970s onward, examining the ways in which Aboriginal playwrights, directors, and performers have used theatre as a form of cultural and political resistance, community-building, and historical reclamation. He also addressed the question of how Aboriginal theatre has engaged with questions of land rights, intergenerational trauma, and cultural continuity that remain urgent in the present. His address provided the Indian academic audience with a vivid and scholarly account of one of the most significant areas of Australian cultural production, and sparked rich discussion.

General Session II (Chair: Sutadripa Chowdhury)

General Session II, chaired by Ms. Sutadripa Chowdhury, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Swami Vivekananda University, featured the second round of paper presentations by research scholars, faculty members, and students. Papers in this session engaged with topics including ecocriticism and environmental writing in Australia and India, the representation of gender in Australian and Indian postcolonial fiction, cultural exchange and soft diplomacy between the two nations, and the place of Australian Studies in Indian university curricula. The session was notable for the breadth and quality of its presentations and for the substantive discussion that each paper generated.

Valedictory Session and Conference Close

The conference concluded with a Valedictory Session that brought together the keynote and plenary speakers, the organising committee, and the assembled participants to reflect on the proceedings of the two days. It offered a synthesis of the key themes and arguments that had emerged across the sessions, noting the conference's success in generating substantive comparative scholarship and in building new connections between Australian and Indian academics. She expressed particular gratitude to Prof. Bill Ashcroft, Dr. Michael Griffiths, Dr. Helen Pringle, and Dr. Sibendu Chakraborty for their outstanding contributions to the intellectual life of the conference.

The closing remarks were delivered by Prof. Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay, who congratulated the Centre for Australian Studies on the success of the event and reaffirmed the university's commitment to international academic engagement. He urged participants to carry the conversations of the conference forward into new research and publications, and expressed his confidence that the dialogue initiated over these two days would bear rich scholarly fruit in the years ahead. The vote of thanks was delivered by Dr. Tirna Sadhu, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

Paper Submission and Publication

Total number of papers submitted for publication: 15
(from students, research scholars, and faculty members)

Total number of papers accepted for presentation: 8

CERTIFICATE FOR PARTICIPANTS:



Programme Outcome

The two-day International Conference Beyond Borders: Cultural Negotiations and Global Engagement in Australia and India yielded several significant intellectual and institutional outcomes:

1. Deepened Understanding of Australia–India Cultural Relations:

Participants gained new insights into the historical, literary, and political dimensions of the Australia–India relationship, including the shared legacies of British colonialism and the distinct trajectories each country has taken in the postcolonial era.

2. Advancement of Postcolonial and Settler-Colonial Scholarship in India:

The conference introduced Indian scholars to cutting-edge developments in settler-colonial theory and Aboriginal cultural studies, enriching the postcolonial studies discourse in Indian universities with perspectives specific to the Australian context.

3. Interdisciplinary Dialogue:

By bringing together scholars from literature, political science, cultural studies, and history, the conference fostered productive cross-disciplinary conversations that illuminated the complex intersections of culture, politics, identity, and global engagement.

4. Strengthening of Institutional Ties:

The conference strengthened academic connections between Swami Vivekananda University and leading Australian universities, laying the groundwork for future collaborative research, exchange programmes, and joint publications.

5. Promotion of Indigenous Studies:

The conference significantly advanced awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural traditions and political struggles among Indian scholars, encouraging comparative reflection on indigenous rights in both Australia and India.

6. Platform for Emerging Scholars:

The two General Sessions provided a valuable platform for research scholars and junior faculty members to present their work to an international audience and to receive feedback from leading scholars in the field.

7. Publication Opportunities:

The forty-two papers presented and submitted for publication will contribute to the growing body of Australian Studies scholarship produced in India, and will ensure that the dialogues initiated at the conference continue to reverberate in the academic literature.

8. Consolidation of the Centre for Australian Studies:

The successful organisation of the conference affirmed the Centre for Australian Studies at Swami Vivekananda University as a significant institutional hub for Australian Studies scholarship in India, enhancing its national and international profile.

Conclusion

The two-day International Conference Beyond Borders: Cultural Negotiations and Global Engagement in Australia and India was a resounding success, fulfilling and in many respects exceeding the intellectual and institutional aspirations with which it was conceived. By bringing together leading Australian scholars — Prof. Bill Ashcroft, Dr. Michael Griffiths, and Dr. Helen Pringle — with the home-grown expertise of Dr. Sibendu Chakraborty and the assembled research community of Swami Vivekananda University and its peer institutions, the conference created a dynamic and generative space for comparative postcolonial scholarship.

The sessions illuminated the many ways in which Australia and India share a postcolonial inheritance while negotiating its legacies in distinctive ways — from the politics of Aboriginal sovereignty and constitutional recognition in Australia to the ongoing questions of tribal rights, cultural identity, and global engagement that animate Indian scholarship and public discourse. The quality of the keynote and plenary addresses, the richness of the paper presentations, and the sustained engagement of the audience all testified to the depth of scholarly interest in Australian Studies within the Indian academic community.

The Centre for Australian Studies at Swami Vivekananda University has, through this conference, affirmed its place as a leading institutional home for Australian Studies scholarship in India. The connections forged and renewed at this event -- between scholars, between institutions, and between the intellectual traditions of two great postcolonial nations -- will continue to enrich research and teaching in the years ahead. The vision of the conference, that thinking across borders enriches both those who think and those about whom they think, was thoroughly vindicated by the proceedings of these two remarkable days.

The primary aim of the conference — to foster interdisciplinary and international dialogue on the cultural, literary, and political dimensions of the Australia–India relationship — was achieved with distinction. The event has set a high standard for future conferences organised by the Centre for Australian Studies, and has laid a strong foundation for the continued development of this vital field of scholarship within Swami Vivekananda University and in India more broadly.