

I am fascinated by India



Alf Taylor, a well-known Australian writer was recently in Chennai, India to participate in a seminar organised by the Madras University. An Australian aborigine by birth, Alf Taylor, is the foremost writer from this tribe. Born in Perth, he has written three books so far, 'Long Time Now' (2001), 'Winds' (1994) and 'Singer Song Writer' (1992). He is currently writing a book titled 'God, the Devil and me', which is a first person narrative of Alf Taylor's childhood. He is also planning to write a book on his mother's life and times.

When informed that we wanted to do a short interview for chennaionline, he retorted that he was scared of media people and started talking rather shyly.

- About your birth, growing up...

I am an aborigine. (one of the most well-known aborigines from Australia, is Evonne Cawley, the tennis star). I completed schooling, did not go to any university. I served in the Australian army for sometime; while in the army I started writing. One of my friends who read my poems egged me to write more and more. Encouraged by this, I took voluntary retirement from the army and started writing full time.

- How do the Australian "whites" treat the aborigines?

I think one example should suffice to answer your question. Aborigines are allowed to enter churches only when the whites come out after saying their prayers. That is the extent of discrimination in this place. Contrary to your belief that Australia is a very prosperous country, in reality it is a very conservative nation. The life of the aborigines has become a big question mark, particularly after the so called globalisation.

- When their life is so shaky, how does society accept the writings of aborigines?

Society does not give us any preference or special encouragement for our writings. When I published a book on my own, they dismissed it with disdain, "one more writer" without bothering to even read the book. The Australian universities and the main stream Litterateurs recognise neither us nor our writings.

- What about the students? Even they don't read your writings?

Students do read, but they do not discuss or debate. Whereas in India, you have read and know more about our writings than we do. You discuss with us, raise questions. This does not happen in Australia. I have taken a very strong liking for your students and Litterateurs.

- This is your first trip to India, right? What was your opinion of India before coming here? What places would you want to visit?

Yeah, it is my first trip. Before coming here, I had not read much about your country, but after coming here, I feel like reading a lot about Indian culture. I am sure to do that. I did not really plan on visiting any particular place; I came here essentially to look at the Indian people; I came to observe Indian culture. After my return to Australia, I plan to write a book on Indo-Australian cultural exchange and collaboration.

- What were your first impressions on your arrival in India?

I was very glad. In a new place, among new people, I felt like a bird released from its cage.

However my heart has skipped many a beat, thanks to your traffic!

- How do you look at the Sept.11 incident?

Even before we started the conversation, I told you that I'm scared of media people, very scared. If I answer this question, my government will not allow me to enter Australia. Please excuse me. I cannot answer this.

- About your family life?

My wife gave birth to eight children. Only three are surviving. I divorced my wife eight years ago. I'm looking for a companion now.

- At this age?

Why not? What's wrong with that? Why don't you look out for a beautiful Indian girl for me!

Following this remark, Alf broke into heavy laughter. Laughing all the way, we took him to a roadside tea shop, where he really enjoyed drinking coffee. He coolly told the coffee-wallah that his coffee was the best and whenever he came to India, in future, he would have coffee only in his place!

When asked to pose for a photograph next to an auto, he readily obliged and broke into a big laugh, like a kid. We took leave of Alf, ruminating.... Alf, for all his external show of happiness was carrying the huge burden of thousands of hapless aborigines.