

The Immigrant Space: Readings of *Obasan*, *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Electrical Field*
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Diaspora writing in Canada forms an important segment of Canadian literature. Japanese – Canadian writing in particular is interesting as well as relevant providing as it does a penetrating awareness of the space occupied by the Japanese immigrant in the overwhelming vastness of Canadian life and society. The focus of this paper will be to review the immigrant space that is manifest in three texts, representative of Japanese-Canadian writing. The texts in consideration are *Obasan* (1981) by Joy Kogawa, *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994) by Hiromi Goto and *The Electrical Field* (1998) by Kerri Sakamoto. The selection of these books is deliberate as they are written by authors who belong to different generations and hence give a varied perception of the immigrant experience of the Canadians of Japanese origin in their works. The Japanese arrived in Canada in distinct periods in history and have now become an integral part of Canadian society contributing to every field of life. The Canadian nation as it stands today is indebted to the contribution of its citizens of Japanese ancestry who have not only helped in its development and progress but have helped it to maintain and reinforce its multicultural image in the world.

Joy Kogawa, a *Nisei* or second generation immigrant of Japanese ancestry was born in 1935 in Vancouver of *Issei* parents or first generation immigrants. Hiromi Goto, born in Chibaken, Japan in 1966, migrated to Canada at about the age of three in 1969 while Kerri Sakamoto is a *Sansei* or third generation immigrant born in 1960 in Toronto. Their writings thus cover a wide spectrum of experiences from different perspectives cutting through generations and offering a comprehensive understanding to the Japanese-Canadian situation and the dynamics of space negotiated in it.

Before analysing the novels it would be useful to first look at the space from where Kogawa, Goto or Sakamoto writes. As Japanese-Canadian women they write from a space that is greatly marginalized. In the enormous corpus of English literature, Canadian English literature finds a small place, having come to prominence fairly recently. As writers of Diaspora fiction, they occupy a marginal space and again as women writing about the discrimination and social ostracism of the Japanese in Canada, they indeed are heroic but are again in a minority.

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Uma Parameswaran, writing about South-Asian Canadian poetry, says that there are numerous references to ‘alienation, nostalgia and transplantation’ but a certain ‘cultural passivity’ prevented the ‘South-Asians’ from writing explicitly about blatant racist practices or ‘white-brown’ confrontations. (59) In contrast, Kogawa writes with both frankness and determination to produce the realities of the space occupied by the Japanese in Canada, the authenticity stemming largely from the fact that she and her family suffered the trauma of internment and relocation personally. Not only Kogawa but Goto through the representation of women belonging to three different generations in *Chorus of Mushrooms* reflects the diversity in the immigrant experience within the same space. Sakamoto a third generation immigrant views the consequences of the internment on the Japanese community and the damaging impact it had on them. All three writers write with passion and an authentic historical sense that leaves a lasting imprint on the reader.

Before embarking on the main thrust of the paper it would be convenient to acquaint oneself with an overview of the history of the Japanese in Canada. The first Japanese to land in Canada was Manzo Nagano a stowaway who came in 1877. (Takata 168) The year 1977 was celebrated as the centennial year to mark the arrival of the Japanese to Canada. (Miki 218) The Japanese came to Canada primarily in search of work. Both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors worked to bring them in. Poverty, unemployment, stringent laws of inheritance, where only the eldest son could inherit the major chunk of the property leaving little for the others, along with a deep passion for adventure and a thirst for a knowledge of the world account for some of the reasons behind the large scale exodus of the Japanese from their homeland to the Americas and Hawaii. (Takata 13,15) After World War II those who came in first to Canada from Japan were mostly the Nisei who had had been ‘stranded there in wartime.’ (Takata 166) The new immigrants who emigrated after Canada had ceased to make race a criterion for immigration were, unlike the first generation of Issei, educated and skilled professionals who fitted in easily into Canadian society. (Ayukawa and Roy 844, 845)

It was the hope of freedom from grinding poverty and the monotony of life and the desire for a good life that brought the Issei to the cold frosty land so many miles away from home. Northrop Frye, the great Canadian writer once said that to enter the United States was a matter of crossing

an ocean, but to enter Canada was a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent.²

The land in fact assumes the space of an overwhelming experience where the geography not only fascinates the visitor but seems to reduce him to a mere speck. This bewildering space that the immigrant encountered was in fact the site for liberation and financial security.

The Issei, or first generation of Japanese immigrants suffered many atrocities in White society. They were mostly agricultural labourers and fishermen settled in the west coast, who usually got wages lower than that paid to White labourers and were targeted for their race and colour. They were considered socially inferior and segregated. The Nisei or second generation though Canada-born, English-speaking and western in lifestyle were not treated much the better. Denied voting rights, barred from pursuing many professions and refused entry to many clubs and institutions, the Japanese were also victims of violence and mob fury on many occasions. Nisei women though talented and hard working found it almost impossible to find suitable employment.

Except for domestic positions and some needle-trade work, jobs for Nisei women were scarce outside their own community. Stores and offices would not hire them, teaching was out and B.C. hospitals refused non-whites for nurse's training. A young woman could top her high school class with honours, but end up as a live-in maid, or a seasonal cannery worker or berry picker. (Takata 23)

The place of dreams was slowly turning into a living hell where the host land and supposed space for growth and prosperity was virtually transforming into an alien hostile land. Too impoverished to return to their native land, and with the second generation culturally bound more to the host land, the Japanese had no option but to form their own enclaves where they lived and celebrated the Japanese way of life. Traditional festivals, rites and rituals were observed and Japanese culture and tradition glorified. The Japanese were in fact in a state that Himani Bannerji rightly describes as a 'paradox of both belonging and non-belonging simultaneously' (65)

The woes of the Japanese however climaxed with the bombing of Pearl Harbour by Japan on 7th December 1941. Suspected of treason, the Japanese were forcibly uprooted from the familiar surroundings in the coastline and interned in huge numbers. Families were fragmented, men

2 Frye, Northrop. *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Quoted from www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/58765.Northrop_Frye Web. Accessed on 29 Sept. 2014

were sent off to hard work and women and children confined to camps and remote towns. The entire foundation of the community was devastated by a series of actions under the notorious War Measures Act, even though the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Armed Forces found that the Japanese did not pose a serious threat to national security. (Harris 140) After the war was over, the nightmare did not end and the Japanese were coerced to relocate once again to work in farms or in remote mountainous regions. The nightmare lasted seven years. Apology, compensation and Redress came as late as 1988 after the concerted efforts of many groups and individuals. By then most of the Issei were dead. The younger generations were scattered with a diluted sense of unity or belonging. According to Statistics Canada, 2001, the number of Japanese of mixed ancestry is on the rise. Today after a long struggle the Japanese are part and parcel of every aspect of Canadian life. Many have achieved fame and excelled in practically all fields of life.

Obasan, by Kogawa, written in 1981, is a bold and brilliant attempt at capturing the anguish of the Japanese community in Canada during and after W.W.II. It deals with the traumatic victimization of the Japanese community in Canada by a pitiless society. It is one of the earliest attempts in Canadian writing at exposing the horrors of internment or forcible relocation, and its consequences on the Japanese people. Following *Obasan*, many other writers started writing on their experiences as immigrants in Canada. Kogawa thus initiated the space for the publication of writings on immigrant life.

Obasan tells the story of Naomi Nakane a school teacher whose family survived the war internment and relocation. In the book Naomi recounts her childhood, sudden disappearance of her mother and gradual fragmentation of her family by war and internment. The home and family is presented as sites or spaces of security, love, Japanese values and unity. The Katos and Nakanes, families from her mother and father's sides are described as being 'intimate to the point of stickiness.'(20). Canada the country is projected as a perfect land. Her uncle says early in the book, 'This country is the best. There is food, there is medicine. There is pension money.' (42) Both the home and country are spaces of comfort and well being. This idealistic state is intruded upon first by an elderly, evil white man called Gower who molests the child Naomi. The near perfect world is splintered and this gap widens with the disappearance of Naomi's mother and then war, loss of home and property, followed by a segregation of the family and disappearance and death of the father. The violation of the sanctity of the young Naomi by Gower is an eye

opener in the violation of the sanctity of the Japanese race by the white. When the family is forcibly relocated, Obasan, or aunt, bravely faces the adversities and takes her family to safety in a ghostly mining town in Slocan. The trauma of internment and the steady fragmentation of the family are captured brilliantly by Kogawa. Aunt Emily Naomi's outspoken aunt later recollects:

They took away the land, the stores, the businesses, the boats, the houses—everything. Broke up our families, told us who we could see, where we could live, what we could do, what time we could leave our house, censored our letters, exiled us for no crime. They took our livelihood (36) This in fact summed up the entire situation of the Japanese in Canada, when they were deprived of their very 'livelihood'.

The back-breaking experience at the Barker's farm in Granton where Naomi's family was sent almost completes the horrors of the war experience. Memory is an important device that helps in reconstructing the space of oppression and relives the grimness and outrage that characterised Japanese Canadian life. It is interesting to note that though the Issei suffered the most, it was the Nisei and Sansei who recreated the site of trauma and anguish in their writings to make known to the world about the devastating experience of their forefathers.

Obasan ends with Naomi's discovery of the truth behind her mother's disappearance--- her disfigurement during the war and the calm acceptance of the loss of others in her family including her Uncle Isamu. *Obasan* is essentially a tale of loss, the loss of a dream, the loss of innocence, the loss of childhood and the loss of loved ones. Undoubtedly, the novel embraces many spaces---- Canada is the site of hope, success, prosperity turns into a site of conflict where identities are asserted and created. The small ghettos become sites of traditional self assertion. Finally Canada again turns into a site of fear and isolation with internment camps and coercive relocations.

Michel Foucault in his famed essay, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* talks of different heterotopias and argues that 'there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias.'(4) The enclaves where Naomi and hundreds of other Japanese lived were creations of spaces with a specific purpose, spaces where the community would feel protected, secure and united. They were also deliberate symbols of a desire to reinvent an identity to create a unique space. At the same time they were also spaces which were created out of compulsion and imposition. The internment camps and relocation centres written about in the book which were a stark reality in the life of the Issei and Nisei were spaces specially created to

isolate them on account of race in blatant violation of human rights. These were spaces consciously created to segregate some from the rest as they were different.

The Japanese have like other non-white migrants been labelled as ‘visible minorities, immigrants, new comers, refugees, aliens, illegals, people of color, multicultural communities and so on.’ (Bannerji 165). After Pearl Harbour, they were uprooted and driven to ghost towns and remote camps. Their fishing licenses and boats seized. In *Obasan* Naomi recalls-

There it was in black and white--- our short harsh history. Beside each date were the ugly facts of the treatment of given to Japanese -Canadians. “Seizure and government sale of fishing boats. Suspension of fishing licences. Relocation camps. Liquidation of property... Deportation. Revocation of nationality.” (Kogawa 33)

Immigrant life in Canada created the sites for survival in the most terrifying conditions – the internment camps. They were the nightmarish spaces of the immigrant experience.

Sakamoto’s *The Electrical field*, though published four years after Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* in 1998 gives a harrowing picture of the consequences of the internment on the Japanese community long after the war years. In a conversation Sakamoto said:

My book focuses on the trauma and repression associated with the experience of internment and the particular ways individuals carry this history. I wanted to portray the characters in my book as individuals with their own personal experiences that were colored by internment in many different ways.³

The Electrical Field tells its story through the character of Asako Saito an unmarried Japanese young woman who lives with her father and younger brother Stum. In the same neighbourhood many Japanese families live including that of a fiery and spirited man named Yano. Disgruntled, rough and nursing a deep hatred for the whites who he believed had done great injustice to the

3 Sakamoto, Kerri. “A Conversation” *The Electrical Field*. New York: W.W.Norton & Co, 1999. Print.

Japanese community, Yano blamed the war and its consequences on the Japanese-Canadians for his dissatisfaction in his profession:

If things had been different, if it weren't for the war, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing. Pressing collars and cuffs all day, cleaning other people's dirty clothes. (121)

Chisako his delicate and beautiful wife is found murdered one day along with a *Hakujin* or white person. The plot traces the mystery behind the murder of Chisako and her white lover. Though apparently simple on the veneer, it is deeply enmeshed in issues related to the Japanese experience. Asako and Sachi a young girl try to investigate the murder on their own based on newspaper reports and their own understanding of the situation. A shock awaits the reader when Yano and his children are also found murdered and the end is left ambiguous but with evidence that it was Asako who enlightened the police on the identity of the murderer. The narrator Asako is unreliable and unpredictable and in trying to trace the story through her takes the reader on a difficult ride.

Sakamoto has succeeded with aplomb in revealing the trauma languishing in the minds of the characters that have gone through the terrors of internment. Asako was constantly haunted by the death of her elder brother Eiji in the internment camp. Yano was throbbing with anger and frustration at the injustices meted out to the Japanese by the whites. He organised meetings and distributed pamphlets to fight for compensation for the Japanese for the years spent in the camps. The reception he received was cold even from his own community. His wife Chisako who had come from Japan was disinterested in his passion and emerges as a mysterious figure in the book who confides in Asako about Yano's violent behaviour at home. Not having been through the horrors of the camp years she appears distant and untouched by her husband's fervour for justice and redress. Instead she starts working for a white man and ends up having an affair with him. One day she is found murdered along with her lover. Soon her husband and children are missing and an enquiry starts. Asako realizes that she was unconsciously in love with Yano but finally betrays him to the police. Asako terminally anguished by her brother Eijo's death and hopelessly possessive of her younger brother Stum is unable to express her love for him or recognize her own feelings about him.

Like Naomi or Aunt Emily in *Obasan*, Asako is also a spinster. Finally she tells the police about Yano's involvement in the murder of his wife and the Hakujin Boss. Yano was not only guilty of

killing his wife and her paramour but had also turned the gun on his young children and himself, thereby extinguishing the entire family. Sakamoto shows how the internment had taken its toll on the Japanese. The young had indelible hurts on their minds and the older who could comprehend the extent of injustice done to them spent their life mostly seething in anger. The psychological damage done to them was immeasurable and they lived lives with highly charged emotions which they could hardly trust. Those who lived in the camps lost out not only on many good years of their lives but spent much of the rest in strange discomfort and trauma. Only characters like Stum who had escaped the horrors of internment or the young Sachi could dream of love and think of building a new life.

The Issei like Aunt Obasan or Uncle Isamu who imbibed Japanese values of stoicism and calm acceptance of all the vagaries of life, were happy to forget the past and take delight in the comforts of life in Canada and remain grateful for the bounties received. The Nisei like Yano and Asako suffered complexities that ruined their lives. Though Asako was not vocal about her feelings about the need for redress, Yano, like Aunt Emily, spent his life spreading awareness to arouse the need for redress and to bring to light the injustices done to the Japanese by the whites. Asako suffered frustrations in her personal life but did not voice anything on behalf of the community. Her obsession with her brother's death consumed her totally. While Asako suffered silently, Yano was vocal about his feelings for the Japanese and the wrongs done to them by the whites.

Kogawa was a Nisei who went through the internment with her family and is able to capture the torment of both the Issei and the Nisei. The Nisei though young at the time of the internment knew only one country, that of Canada and hence the internment and the labelling of 'enemy aliens' was a shock to them. The discriminations they suffered and the ostracism they faced had an injurious impact on their minds. Sakamoto was a Sansei and had heard about the horrors of camp life from her parents and grandparents. She is therefore able to capture the trauma suffered by the Japanese based on the experiences of her family though she too admits that she faced racial discrimination.

I grew up in the shadow of internment. I felt that history cast itself over the present because it remained perpetually unspoken. I grew up in the suburbs of Toronto,

which in the '60s and '70s were predominantly white. Racial taunts were a fact of daily life.⁴

The internment remains a major motif and concern in Japanese-Canadian writing and features in the writings of all generations of writers. The Nisei and Sansei in particular were moved by either its experience or memories of it.

The writings of Hiromi Goto, however, belong to a somewhat different space of Japanese-Canadian experience. Goto came to Canada at a tender age in the 1960s long after World War II and is fascinated by the myths, legends and folklore of Japan. In *Chorus of Mushrooms* she gives a refreshingly different picture of the varied generational responses to life in Canada. Published in 1994 it is an amazing commentary on the different attitudes to life in Canada as experienced by three women living under the same roof. Goto steers clear of the internment or any event related to it but explores issues related to the marginalization and discrimination of the Japanese in Canada. The novel concerns itself with life in Canada and the concept of home as perceived by the young Murasaki, her mother Keiko and grandmother Naoe. Having come to Canada in 1969 long after internment, Goto's book has to do with the lives of people who came to Canada from Japan after the internment and how their lives have been in more recent times.

Muriel also called 'Murasaki', meaning 'purple' in Japanese is the child who is privileged to shape an idea of Canada from the different points of views held by different generations of people, thanks to the fact that she lived with her grandmother and her mother. As a Japanese-Canadian born in Canada she forms her own concept of home and culture. Murasaki is in fact witness to two almost distinct styles of life. Naoe her grandmother who came to Canada in her old age still basks in the glorious memories of life in Japan when she was a pampered child of wealthy parents. The food, the house, the weather or the love of her dear ones in Japan are still vibrant in her mind. Canada was claustrophobic to her. Her greatest joys were in secretly eating Japanese food without the knowledge of her daughter.

While Naoe lived mostly in the realms of memory and restlessly passed her days in her daughter's house in Canada, she tried to recreate her own world where she retreated every day,

⁴ ibid.

by eating Japanese food secretly under the quilt without her daughter's knowledge or speaking in Japanese and regaling her granddaughter with stories, myths and folklore from Japan.

It is Shige and his wife who send me the packages, of course...I have my own box at the post office, but you don't know, Keiko. I pay for it with my own coins I collect from the couch cracks after dark...They send me salted squid. Not always, because it is so expensive, and *osenbei*. Crisp rice crackers dipped in soya sauce, I crunch them in bed at four in the morning...It's Muriel who sneaks the packages up to my room when everyone is asleep...She brings the packages and we crumble the *osenbei* together in my narrow bed. (Goto 15)

Naoe is at home with Japanese food and is disgusted with the manner in which her daughter only cooks western food and speaks in the English language. Her daughter's adoption of western culture disturbs her and she tries to stubbornly cling on to everything Japanese. Her attempts at inculcating Japanese food habits and speaking in Japanese with her granddaughter Murasaki meet with some success. But her grudge against her daughter Keiko's complete rejection of her Japanese culture for a foreign one breaks her. She says with remorse:

But she ignores me. Keiko. My daughter who has forsaken identity...Converted from rice and daikon to wieners and beans...This Western food has changed you and you've grown more opaque even as your heart has brittle. (Goto 13)

Naoe feels suffocated in Keiko's house and finally runs away one day. She goes on adventure and never returns. Her disappearance breaks down Keiko who slowly starts discovering her roots as a Japanese and is no longer the 'converted' person she was.

Naoe's desire for freedom led her to leave her daughter's house and seek a life of her own. Her story is fascinating as it was for freedom and independence that she lived her whole life. She divorced her husband at a time divorce was almost unheard of.(24) She attributes her plight to the betrayal faced by fellow Japanese who tricked her father to parting with his land and property. Naoe's character screams of freedom and self sufficiency. She dissolved a bad marriage, moved from place to place in China and Japan and finally came to Canada. Even there she left her daughter's house to live an independent and happy life without compromising with her values. Her refusal to substitute Japanese culture and language with the Canadian stands as

further testimony to her independence. Unlike the Issei who came before her and who were believed to be complacent and easily accommodating in nature she stands as a rare exception.

Her daughter Keiko who came to Japan with her husband had decided early on immigrating, that she would have with little to do with Japan. Keiko preferred to speak in English and only cooked and served western food in an attempt to assimilate with the culture of Canada. She was her mother's despair as she failed to assert a Japanese identity and preferred instead to project a Canadian one. Keiko however was a devoted daughter who took good care of her mother. After Naoe's sudden disappearance she sinks into depression and becomes physically weak and sick. Now it is the turn of her daughter, Murasaki to take care of her ailing mother. Something she does with dedication and unflinching love. Keiko now undergoes a change with her mother's disappearance and learns to rediscover her Japanese roots by appreciating Japanese food cooked by her daughter and even eating them with chopsticks made crudely with two twigs by her delighted husband. Keiko's acceptance of the Japanese way of life brings happiness and a state of calmness in her life.

Her daughter Murasaki or Muriel is an interesting mix of the traditional Japanese and the Canadian way of life. Born in Canada and raised in the Canadian way she prefers to eat Canadian food and speak in English. She begins her story by admitting her limited knowledge of her native tongue:

Sure, but bear with my language, won't you? My Japanese isn't as good as my English, and you might not get everything I say. But that doesn't mean the story's not there to understand. (Goto 1)

Murasaki, however, develops a close bonding with her grandmother Naoe and delights in the secret nocturnal feasts with her. She laps up the stories and folklores recounted by Naoe who ensures that her granddaughter is not deprived of the rich storehouse of native Japanese fairy tales and myths. As Murasaki thus grows up, she develops with a balanced perception of two cultures. She looks after her mother in the time of need and develops her personality in her unique way imbibing both cultures. She cooks, shops and eats Japanese food and looks after the household like a devoted daughter. At other times she wears western clothes enjoys her share of fun like any Canadian young girl. In fact there is in the characterization of Murasaki, a picture of the ideal immigrant child absorbing more cultures than one but never forgetting her own.

It is to Murasaki's credit that she discovers the real meaning of her family's last name – Tonkatsu. She learns from a cookery book one day what 'Tonkatsu' meant:

Tonkatsu (Deep fried breaded pork cutlets) *It's true.* (Goto 150)

She is taken aback and approaches her father who enlightens her saying that when they, her parents came to Canada they decided that they would allow their children to grow up the Canadian way and would put everything Japanese behind them. The decision to speak and eat Canadian was a deliberate one and in the process a terrible loss occurred, it was the near complete loss of their knowledge of the Japanese language. However with the sudden discovery again one day that Shinji the quiet partner and father of Murasaki could still understand Japanese, he started collecting books and reading in Japanese to recall and retrieve what he had forgotten. He also admits that he had forgotten their last name and could only remember one word --- 'Tonkatsu'. When Murasaki asks him innocently if the word actually meant a cutlet, he says:

The translation isn't literal as that, but that's what it signifies. The thing is, tonkatsu isn't really a purely Japanese word. *Ton*, meaning pork, is Japanese, but *katsu* is adopted from 'cutlet', and I don't know the origins of that word. (Goto 209)

Though a strange thing to happen, the incident has an interesting implication in the sense that it gives the impression of the creation of a new identity; a mix of the Japanese and a foreign one, something which the family was in fact trying to attain. The Tonkatsus were in fact the new face of the immigrant, a healthy combination of two cultures like their name. The native could never be forgotten but the foreign was added to create the new identity.

Chorus of Mushrooms thus creates an interesting platform to analyse the Japanese identity and space. Naoe represents the older generation that looks back to Japan with longing and never quite at home with the Canadian way of life. Keiko and Shinji come to Canada not as children but as adults looking for a new life. The reasons that drove the Issei to Canada like poverty, difficult laws of inheritance, political and social upheavals and so on are not mentioned here. Instead there is an assertion presumably by Shinji about his decision to emigrate:

I deserve to be here. I earned the right to live here. (Goto 211)

Keiko and Shinji deliberately try to erase and forget their native tongue and culture but cannot. The joys of speaking one's own language and eating one's own native food is overpowering and

Shinji tries to relearn Japanese again and like Naoe secretly relishes Japanese food. The blunder with the last name paves the way for a new identity combining the Japanese and the foreign. Keiko is ironically driven to her own culture by her daughter when the latter takes charge of the household during her mother's illness. Murasaki or Muriel is the ideal face of the immigrant. Known by two names one in Japanese and the other in English, she balances two cultures to emerge as the privileged citizen of a new world embracing many cultures all of which become her own.

The three texts give an incisive perception of the Japanese-Canadian experience from different points of view. While Kogawa deals with the lives of the Issei and Nisei and their differing attitudes to Canada and Japan, she highlights the plight of the community during the internment and subsequent dispersal all over Canada. Sakamoto elaborates the effects of the internment after it is over and the ugly scars it has left behind that have led to disturbing trends in human psychology. Goto deals with a time long after internment or war and gives a picture of life in Canada from the perspective of three generations of Japanese people living together yet viewing life differently. The trajectory covered is vast and gives an all encompassing picture of the lives of the people of Japanese ancestry in Canada. Serious issues relating to immigrant life in Canada are raised whether they are of discrimination, marginalization or outright victimization and violation of basic human rights.

The space created by fiction is an apt reflection of the life and history of the Japanese community in Canada. All the writers have a keen sense of history which they are able to utilise in their reinvention of the Japanese immigrant space and experience in Canada. Linda Hutcheon writes that

Like women writers in general, Canadian novelists must return to their history (as do Wiebe, Swan, Bowering, Kogawa, and so many others) in order to discover (before they can contest) their historical myths. (6)

Kogawa's personal experience in the internment and Sakamoto's family's experience lend a staunch authenticity to their writings about the loneliness, alienation and dilemma of the Japanese, particularly of the confusion of the Nisei who only knew one homeland that is Canada and many of whom had even fought on behalf of Canada during World War II. Goto who came to Canada in the late 1960s when rules of entry were more relaxed gives an authentic picture of

life in Canada from the perspective of different generations of people living at the same time. Goto's book pertaining to a later time in history than *Obasan* or *The Electrical Field* when the redress had not been attained also addresses issues like racial discrimination and marginalization of the Japanese-Canadians in Canada. When Murasaki questions, 'Why do you leave a homeland in the first place...And if you don't like the way the new country treats you, why would you bother to stay?' The answer she gets from her father who owned a Mushroom farm is, 'I *deserve* to be here. I *earned* the right to live here...I provided new jobs for the people here and I've never been on welfare.' (211)

Goto also makes it clear that a constant stream of understanding between two cultures could create a happy ending and bring in development and healthy change in the lives of all communities. Compromising on the native culture was not a solution or the complete adoption of the new culture at the cost of the native was not advisable either. Instead a healthy understanding and respect of the new along with one's own culture could create the most perfect space for any individual.

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