CHAPTER IV

SOME REFLECTIONS ON JAPANESE CANADIAN WRITING

Japanese Canadian novels offer an interesting space to explore the real life experiences of the Japanese in Canada through the medium of fiction produced by Canadian citizens of Japanese ancestry. The Issei were busy negotiating several areas of conflict and confusion, the entire task of leaving one nation under various distressful circumstances to settle in another, many miles away is in itself a daunting one. The challenges posed by new environment, hostile social conditions, barriers of language, discrimination due to colour and race, not to mention the adversities of nature and weather, left the first generation of the Japanese in Canada with little desire to indulge in literary practices. Though poetry was written and Newspapers published, the Issei due to their inherent potential for suffering quietly (much written about in Nisei and Sansei writing) preferred to keep silent. ‘The Issei are viewed as stoic, constrained by a culture of complex codes…to persevere…in silence in the face of what would for others be intolerable oppression’ (Kobayashi 216). No wonder that the zealous and defiant Aunt Emily is described as “completely non-Japanese in her exuberance.” (Kogawa, Itsuka 3) The literary produce of the Issei was mostly poetry as poetry writing was popular in Japan among all sections of society. ‘The Issei literary legacy… (was) a rich tradition of vernacular poetry’ (Kobayashi 217) which never received the acclaim they deserve as the Nisei had a poor understanding of Japanese and the Sansei practically had none; also their content was largely ‘ephemeral’ (Kobayashi 217). The burden of letting the world know about the tribulations of the Japanese was left mostly to the
Nisei or the Sansei, second and third generations, born in Canada and raised in Canada and who sometimes made reverse journeys to Japan to see the country of their origin.

A close reading of some texts by writers like Joy Kogawa (1935- ), Hiromi Goto (1966- ) and Kerri Sakamoto (1960- ) illuminate important themes recurrent in Japanese Canadian writing. This chapter will focus on some of the works of these writers and will attempt to analyse the experiences of the Japanese in Canada as reflected in these works. Aunt Emily, a frank and fiery character says in Kogawa’s *Itsuka* (1992), ‘Our story is about how our stories disappear’ (239). And to prevent such a disappearance and to make known to the world about the plight of the Japanese in Canada, some brave writers have wielded their pens to write about the world of the Japanese in Canada, mostly unknown to the rest of the world.

It is quite rightly said that, “Literature is a mirror of its time of creation” (Malshe 73) and in the works of Kogawa, Goto and Sakamoto we get a glimpse of contemporary Canadian society in general and a reflection of the consequences of the government policies, rules, laws and regulations on the small yet significant Japanese community in particular. Kogawa born in Vancouver, Canada in 1935 concentrates chiefly on events in Canada from World War II, through the internment and dispersal to the Redress offered by the Canadian government in 1988, in her works, *Obasan* (1981) and *Itsuka* (1992). Goto who was born in Chiba-Ken, Japan, in 1966 migrated to Canada at a very tender age in 1969. In *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994) and *The Kappa Child* (2001), she concentrates on the lives of different generations of immigrants and their divergent attitudes to life in Canada, their varied responses to their native country, Japan as also their dynamic relations with one another. In short the immigrant experience spanning different generations is captured through fiction and though the
characters are mostly women, Goto provides a clear unbiased perspective purely from the immigrants’ point of view and not necessarily only the women’s.

Sakamoto, born in 1960 in Canada like Kogawa, writes about the effects of the internment on Japanese families after they have relocated and settled down after the dispersal of the Japanese after World War II but before the Redress in The Electrical Field (1998). In One Hundred Million Hearts (2003), there is a journey to Japan to unearth mysteries and gain a better understanding of the effects of war on later generations of Japanese, in Japan and in Canada. The six works studied will attempt to provide an in-depth understanding of the Japanese-Canadian experience from multiple perspectives.

Kogawa’s Obasan, published in 1981 created history in many ways. First it gave voice to the Japanese Canadian ordeal in fictional mode and introduced a new genre in Canadian writing where a writer from a small marginalized community exposed startling realities that were previously suppressed or even unknown. Again it became a source of inspiration to the movement for Redress. Though Japanese Canadians had written about the internment and Kogawa was influenced by the writings of Muriel Kitagawa, Obasan was a first of sorts in that it created the space for immigrant writing, a novel expression of immigrant feeling in the host land. Plainly, it paved the way for writers to publish books based on their Diasporic experiences in Canada. As a kind of fiction which takes material out of history in order to reconstruct history, Obasan, stands out as a magnificent example. The acclaimed novel that was published in 1981 was actually based on a short story “Obasan”, written by Kogawa and published in the Canadian Forum in 1978 (Lane 137). Miki writes that during the 1950s and 1960s, there was hardly any writing activity on the part of the Japanese Canadians except for the lone figure of Roy Kiyooka whose first book Kyoto Airs ‘a serial text written during
a trip to Japan’ largely went unnoticed (Miki, *Broken Entries* 112-113). Diaspora writing is the manifestation of multiple sentiments experienced by a community provoked by unique circumstances and situations. The writings of the Japanese in Canada is also one such manifestation where their inner battles and outer conflicts find an aperture for ventilation.

It is interesting to note that certain common features bind the works of these novelists together and help reflect Japanese history in fictional form. The history of the Japanese as boat makers, fishermen and farmers among other things has been depicted quite clearly in these novels. In *Obasan*, we are introduced to the Katos and the Nakanes --- two Japanese families bound by love, marriage and strong family bonds. Uncle Isamu is a fisherman whose boat was seized during the war and who dreamt that someday he would go down to the sea again. References to the sea, fishing and boats abound in the novel. When Uncle Isamu’s boat was seized along with other Japanese boats in 1941 he hoped that someday-‘itsuka’, he would be able to go back to the boats. “But he never did” (22). Japanese men as history tells us were mostly occupied in fishing, farming and carpentry besides several other professions. In Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the protagonist Murasaki’s father is a mushroom farmer. The family has sympathy for other ‘boat people’ and offers them shelter. They turn out to be from Vietnam (34). Though from different countries, Murasaki’s family sees in them their own predicament as Asians in a strange new country and therefore wish to offer help and shelter. Murasaki’s neighbours, Chinese Canadians called ‘the Ching girls’, start out as grocery store keepers along with their mother but change jobs later and prefer to work like Whites, managing gas stations or condominiums or even studying to be lawyers.
And there were Chinese-Canadians who’d been around, I was certain forever. Jim Wu’s family who ran Ginger Jim’s on Main Street and Mrs. Ching with no Mr. Ching. She had three daughters who helped run the grocery store until they left, one by one a gas station in Winnipeg, manage a condominium in Edmonton, and enter law school out east...The Ching girls were long gone and I envied them their escape from rural hell. (125)

The gradual change in the second or third generation of immigrants is reflected in a slow, steady but sure absorption of the Canadian way of life which even incorporated a deliberate rejection of the traditional professions for more varied, modern and unconventional ones. This was also a sign of ready accommodation to the western way of life and a gentle push backwards to traditional Japanese lifestyle. In later years the Japanese would absorb the Canadian way of life and the ethnic customs, rituals and even language would be almost lost to the later generations. Like the Chinese who came in as miners and railroad workers but moved on to running restaurants, laundries and other businesses, the Japanese too changed from traditional professions like fishing, farming and boat making to other kinds of jobs. In Chinese writer, Judy Fong Bates’s, *Midnight At The Dragon Café*, Lai-Jing the mother hopes her daughter Su-Jen would excel in school and would one day pursue a profession other than running a restaurant.

In Sakamoto’s *The Electrical Field*, Yano, an Issei and an important character is portrayed as a carpenter and also an activist. Stum, the chief protagonist Asako’s brother, is shown to work in a poultry farm along with his girlfriend Angel, another Asian immigrant. Both work in a poultry farm owned by a fellow Japanese Fujioka Kaz, who plants a Sakura tree in his farm and says with pride and nostalgia that he had it specially brought from Japan. Tengu, the lover of Murasaki in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, is a teacher of Ikebena,
the special Japanese art of flower arrangement. References to different professions pursued by Nihonjins or Japanese are scattered in these books. Interestingly, as in *The Electrical Field*, the ‘Hakujin’ or White man is shown working in an office while the ‘Nihonjin’ or Japanese are shown running stores, working as carpenters, poultry farmers, fishermen and so on.

Apart from describing the different professions pursued by the Japanese in Canada, all the books try to capture the Japanese way of life as something treasured by the community. Hence Japanese words are sprinkled generously in all the books to create an authentic Japanese atmosphere where the essential Japanese-ness may be felt. Kogawa was a Nisei who obviously spoke Japanese at home with her Issei parents and relatives. Her grasp over Japanese words and language is sound just as Goto’s and Sakamoto’s is, even though Goto was born in Japan and immigrated to Canada aged about three and Sakamoto is a Sansei. This may be seen as an indicator that the Japanese were genuinely attempting to preserve their language and culture in a foreign land even through their literature and not permitting western culture to overshadow their linguistic identity completely.

To capture the aura of Japanese tradition and ethos, the novels are replete with descriptions of knick knacks that are suggestive of the uniqueness of Japanese homes. Hence references to paper lanterns, Japanese ink sketches, bamboo bric-a-brac and wind chimes which jostle for space with goldfish bowls and alarm clocks are common. In a similar vein the Chinese writers fill their novels with unique details and descriptions. In *The Jade Peony*, by Wayson Choy, ‘Third Uncle Lew’ uses an abacus, a Chinese counting apparatus (18). Chinese games are played by the children. (19) Japanese habits like using rice
grains to seal letters (Kogawa, *Obasan* 115) or eating with chopsticks (Sakamoto, *Electrical Field* 19) add to the atmosphere and help build up a typical Asian atmosphere, different from the Canadian. These descriptions not only help to create a distinct atmosphere but also give a fascinating journey into an ambience, quite at odds with the world outside. This difference between the two worlds, the Chinese-Japanese or Asian and the Canadian, serves as a mild warning to the differences in their cultures and perhaps to a confrontation between them sometime. If the space within the Japanese home is built to recreate a Japanese world, it is successful in capturing a Japanese entity within a larger Canadian one.

The Japanese space within the home is thus defined by the Japanese articles used and treasured. In *The Electrical Field*, the Sakura tree defines the pride of a Japanese farm owner as it is the little piece of Japan that he preserves with joy. In Japanese-American writer, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston’s *Farewell to Manzanar*, Mama’s set of Japanese crockery becomes the prized possession that defines the intrinsic identity of its Japanese owners who prefer to break it than let foreigners use it during the internment. The emotional attachment of the Japanese to the objects brought from Japan is enormous and they act as reminders to their basic identity in a hostile world. Mama’s crockery set or Obasan’s albums or Naomi’s mother’s patchwork quilt acquire a significance far more valued in distant Canada than they would have in their native land. Also in the absence of direct contact with the country of origin, Japan in this case, Japanese objects serve the purpose of symbolising or reminding one of his Japanese identity. Such an identity may be the closest the immigrant may come to attain as a ‘Japanese’ and hence the attachment to
things of Japanese origin. They fulfilled the desire of the immigrant to assert his identity as ‘Japanese’ in Canada despite his frail and often lack of contacts with his native land.

There is also a constant recourse to Japanese myth and folklore in these books which enliven the narrative and even give an exotic oriental feel. In Obasan, there is a reference to Momotaro the Peach Boy while there are references to various Japanese myths in The Chorus of Mushrooms like that of ‘Izanami and Izanagi’ the celestial siblings who left the heavens and came to earth crossing a bridge and of ‘Issun Boshi’ the ungrateful boy. The Kappa Child is built on the myth of ‘kappas’ or mystical water sprites. Apart from enriching the works, they help to convey the writer’s message in a symbolic manner.

An adherence to Japanese values of togetherness abounds in the works of all these writers. In Obasan, Naomi says that her families from her father’s and mother’s sides were strongly bound to the point of stickiness and to drive home the point she says that they were close like ‘mochi’, a kind of sticky Japanese rice. ‘We were the original “togetherness” people’ she observes (20). The intimacy between the Katos and the Nakanes is underlined by their united picnics and outings, photo sessions and caring for one another. Japanese values are upheld in the name of concern for the young by the elderly or for the old by the young. “Kodomo No Tame” or “For the sake of the children” is on everyone’s lips in the face of a crisis (21). When her grandmother is ill, Naomi’s mother goes to Japan and never returns. Her disappearance is a mystery to the young Naomi who is haunted by the misery of losing her mother. It is only at the end of the novel when she is over thirty years of age that the truth is revealed
to her---- that her mother was crippled by bombings at Nagasaki and did not want her children to know the unpleasant truth about her, but to carry on with their life in as normal a way as possible. This noble sacrifice of denying oneself the comfort of one’s family and the underlying hardship faced by Naomi’s mother are a pointer to the typical ethnic values upheld by the Japanese people. The absence of the mother is substituted by the presence of the aunt or ‘Obasan’ who showers love on the children, Naomi and Stephen and protects them during the internment years and nurtures and loves them all through life. In Itsuka, when Obasan dies, Kogawa writes that though she was old and feeble and dying, she still could not eat without offering food to others. The most extreme instance of obedience is seen in Obasan, in the tragic molestation of the young Naomi by old man Gower, and her subsequent silence, because “One does not resist adults (63). It is Mason Harris’s belief that the only Canadian critic who found ‘Asian values (to) provide the central reality of the novel’ was Erika Gottlieb. (156) However, even if this were true, there is no denying that the adherence to a strict value system is a general characteristic of the Issei who preferred silent suffering to resistance or protest. The underlying suggestion is as much to the stoical nature of the Japanese, as to the exploitation of the minority by the majority. Obasan like other novels written by Japanese Canadians display the importance of Japanese or Asian values in life which help them through their distress and tribulations.

The strong Japanese value system is also seen in Chorus of Mushrooms, where the young Murasaki looks after her mother during her illness, shops and cooks for the family and also looks after her father. Her mother too had taken care of her own mother. Though continually at loggerheads, clashing over
differences in taste for food, preference of language spoken and a variety of things, Keiko, loved and looked after her mother like a dutiful Japanese daughter, washing her hair, cooking for her and so on. Her duties as a daughter were carried out with devotion, though unfortunately the clash of cultures and Naoe’s supreme love for freedom drove her out of the house to seek adventure and freedom. Keiko’s subsequent shock and illness at this sudden disappearance of her mother stands as testimony to her unalloyed love for her mother.

*The Electrical Field*, the chief protagonist Asako is a single unmarried woman who devotes her entire life looking after her father who is bedridden and in keeping house for her unmarried brother. Asako’s daily routine involves cooking for the family, tending to the garden and busying in household chores. Japanese rituals, customs and culinary habits add to the distinct Japanese atmosphere in the novels, against which different issues are discussed or raised.

Japanese values of courage and honour are seen most explicitly in Sakamoto’s gripping novel, *One Hundred Million Hearts*. The story traces the efforts of a young Japanese-Canadian girl Miyo, in finding the truth behind her father, Masao’s past. Raised in Canada, she travels back to Japan with her stepmother to meet her step sister. The book looks at Japan from the perspective of a Canadian in Japan and not from that of a Japanese in her homeland. Miyo is clearly uncomfortable in what is her native land and once her mission is accomplished, returns home to Canada. She discovers to her surprise that her father ‘who only took…trains’ (86) had actually been a pilot, a ‘kamikaze’ during World War II. He was sent on a special mission where,

If they survive they fail. They live in shame. They must die honourably for their families and the emperor and for Japan. (75)
Miyo discovers that her father had switched places with another person named Hajime who piloted the bomber plane and died in his place. Hajime, raised in Japan with tremendous faith in the Japanese system of values believed that Masao failed to accomplish his mission as he had not only suffered indignities in a foreign land like Canada but also ‘did not grow up under the protection of our loving emperor’ (264). He was a Nisei who was overcome with fear at the last moment and Miyo writes to her Canadian friend David, ‘my father…was a pilot in the Special Attack Forces of the Japanese Imperial Army. He survived, but another man died in his place’ (274). This was in fact his lapse and failing. As a Kamikaze he was expected to die gloriously for his country and his Emperor but he questioned several Japanese beliefs and panicked at the eleventh hour. He later returned to Canada where his past was unknown, leaving behind in Japan a daughter Hana, with whom he made no communication. The stigma attached to his act made him a shame in Japan but he led a secret yet guilt ridden life in Canada with his second daughter, Miyo who he knew would discover the truth of his life later. Happily, Miyo is ready to forgive him. However in Hana’s eyes he was a coward and a worthless father. The manner in which he neglected her also hurt her. The injustice done to Hana is unforgiveable by any standards but Masao’s decision to back out of his mission makes him a coward by Japanese standards of honour and courage.

Apart from the few common features seen in most works by these writers, there are certain thematic concerns explored by all the three writers which are reflective of a collective approach to the whole concept of analysing the immigrant experience of the Japanese in Canada, even though the writings
cut through different generations of writers capturing the lives of different generations of Japanese immigrants - the Issei, Nisei and Sansei in Canada. Early Issei writing, mostly poetry was concerned with themes that reflected the trauma of the first generation settler in a new country, hence ‘nostalgia for home’, ‘resolve to adapt to a new life’, ‘resignation’, or ‘perseverance and stoicism’ featured prominently in their works (Kobayashi 219). The effect of writing poetry was obviously therapeutic and served to make life more liveable and bearable despite the many odds.

The concerns of the Nisei writers were different though they also included the stock themes of the Issei writers. Kogawa, Goto and Sakamoto wrote with spirit and fervour to expose things hitherto left unsaid, yet also gave a broad all encompassing view of the Japanese-Canadian experience. Having witnessed the trauma of their families, like the Chinese writers Wayson Choy or Fred Wah, they felt a compulsion to bring out the truth and place it before the world rather than suffer in tortured silence or accept the humiliations of life passively. Their writings therefore may serve as much as a cathartic release of pent up frustrations and deep rooted pains as they serve to expose the wrongs done to their community before the rest of the world. A historic evidence of this being the citation of lines from Kogawa’s Obasan during the signing of the Redress Agreement in 1988 in the House of Commons on 22nd September in Ottawa. (Miki, Redress 7). The astounding success of Obasan in influencing writers, critics and the general public can hardly be underestimated. Kogawa’s presence at the Redress Agreement and the impact of her writing to bring justice to the Japanese Canadian people hammers clear the truth that the works of these
writers were intended to enlighten the world about their plight and that they indeed succeeded.

One of the most important themes dealt with in their novels is that of identity. This is actually of little wonder since any Diaspora community undergoes a crisis of identity in a foreign land. The theme of identity looms large in the novels of the Japanese-Canadians. In the novels concerned, the theme of identity is explored not only through social, literary or political assertions but also through nomenclature, linguistic practises and food habits. The writers attempt to highlight Japanese social culture in the lifestyle of the characters and project the marginal space the Japanese occupy in Canada which make the need for an establishment of identity a social need. Discriminatory government policies and planned moves to isolate and humiliate the Japanese compelled the community to seek its own identity. Japanese Canadian writers have detailed the discriminations faced by their community in Canada and have written on the life they led celebrating their native culture, food and tradition as far as it was possible for them to live with dignity and carve an identity of their own.

Identity may be considered as the most fundamental expression of a person’s individuality. Identity could, apart from other things refer to the ‘characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is.’ It becomes the most important aspect of one’s being and in due course may be equated with dignity, self esteem and the basic idea of who one really is. The need to establish an identity gains greater importance in unfamiliar or hostile environment where there may arise a need to create a new identity in order to fit in or assert an identity different from the rest. Something which was hitherto
taken for granted in otherwise ‘normal’ circumstances and familiar surroundings becomes an all important part of existence. The unskilled labourers of China or the fishing and farming communities of Japan perhaps cared little for their individual identities back home or in the beginning of settlement in the host land, Canada. Their primary concern was to find a better life in the ‘promised land’. Often exploited in the hands of agents and middlemen, adjustment and survival in Canadian society were the major preoccupations of the early settlers. Like Uncle Isamu in *Obasan*, who considered Canada the best place on earth since he found life’s basic comforts in it and was contented with it, the Issei devoted themselves selflessly to developing the country and contenting themselves with whatever they got in return. This of course did not deny them an identity, the motivation to assert an identity different from the dominant group and yet be a part of the larger Canadian identity became a major engagement with the Canada born Nisei. Identity is in fact a dynamic concept and develops and changes with time. The entire concept of identity has grown and acquired a different meaning and shade over the years for the immigrant in Canada. From being the faceless labourer or miner or farmer or fisherman with no voting rights and denied entry to privileged jobs to becoming a prominent strand in the multicultural fabric of Canada took many years of sweat, toil and heartache.

According to Weinreich, ‘A person’s identity is defined as the totality of one’s self-construal, in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future.’

This idea of continuity or carrying forward the basic identity of the Japanese or
the Chinese before them is expressed by preserving the ethnic culture of the communities through a number of interesting ways which will subsequently be discussed in detail. Moreover the concept of identity and the changes or modifications associated with it with many years of stay in Canada are tackled in varied ways by Kogawa, Goto and Sakamoto in their works to link it to the history of the Japanese community in Canada and trace its changes with changes in time place and circumstances. The identity of the first generation or the Issei represented by Naoe in Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* is different from that wished to be established by her granddaughter Murasaki. The assertions of identity by Aya Obasan and Emily in *Obasan* are in total contrast. The fluidity associated with the concept of identity becomes apparent through different markers and different situations, even though the characters shared the basic identity of being Japanese-Canadians.

Identity is established by several parameters. The choice of food and language is highly relevant to the establishment of identity. Food is not only an important source of nourishment to the body and mind but a vital component of one’s culture and hence identity. The food one eats, serves to indicate the cultural background of the person. Very often a particular food is itself identified with a particular people or community. Traditionally, food cooked, served, eaten or appreciated by a particular community has been equated as a key aspect of the community’s identity. Fine distinctions within a community have been differentiated by dialectic variation, sartorial preferences as also by culinary and dietary distinctions.

Despite globalisation and the availability of different foods all over the world, the traditional association of a food with a race or people always
remains. The ever popular ‘chow mein’, originally a Chinese noodle based preparation and a ‘romanization of the Taishanese chau-meing’ is available worldwide despite its many variations. It remains a popular Chinese dish and one who enjoys it is said to appreciate ‘Chinese food’. Similarly, the Japanese ‘sushi’ considered a delicacy made with vinegared rice, raw fish or meat and relished by people worldwide will always be a ‘Japanese’ delicacy in spite of multiple variations to suit diverse gastronomic tastes. This association of food with people is undoubtedly a result of the fact that food is indeed a traditional marker of one’s identity. It has even been observed that one’s identity can be evidenced at a glance as much by markers like language or clothes as also by food. It assists in placing a person’s origins and differentiates it from that of others.

The food eaten by the Japanese and the Chinese in Canada are as much a marker of their ethnicity as it is of their distinctiveness from the dominant majority. The first generation is mostly seen to prefer traditional food and to cherish memories of savouring the same back home in Japan or China. This is partly due to the fact that old habits do indeed die hard and also perhaps embracing or experimenting with new food habits at a mature age is easier said than done. The second or third generation prefer the food of the host country as that is the food familiar to them and its consumption is a symbol of their acceptance of the dominant culture and a token acceptance of them by the majority since they are capable of appreciating if not anything, at least their food habits. However, though subsequent generations of immigrants take to new food habits, traditional foods are cooked and served during special occasions, festivals and family celebrations as a reminder of their ethnic identities.
The reason why food is such a significant marker of one’s identity is perhaps because many factors contribute to its association with a particular people and these include factors like weather, availability of condiments, traditional styles of preparation and so on. Though fusion food is a rage these days, it is again a reflection of the emergence of a new identity from the merging together of many cultures. In the novels being studied, traditional food is frequently referred to, mostly to secure ethnic identities, to provide a comfort zone, a warm retreat, a reminder of happier days back home, an antidote in times of illness and above all to establish a distinction from the larger Canadian community. It is not particularly unusual for a Diaspora community to cling on to their native eating habits even when they may have exchanged other traditional identity markers like clothes, hairstyles and so on for western ones. An important characteristic of a Diaspora community is to maintain a connect with the homeland through food. Hence we see in Obasan, constant references to drinking tea with rice puffs; ‘mochi’ a kind of sticky rice is used as a metaphor to indicate intimacy between two families, the Katos and the Nakanes. In Itsuka we learn that the world of the Japanese Canadian is not only about ‘ojisans and obasans, isseis, niseis, sanseis, threaded together through history, language, geography…’ (130) but is also about ‘daikon’, ‘sehikan’, ‘tonkatsu’, ‘nishimo’, ‘steamed napa’ and green tea among other things.

In Itsuka, when the indefatigable Aunt Emily is suddenly taken ill and she is treated to ‘umeboshi red salty plums, and some shiso flakes to have with her hot tea and rice’ (238) Naomi, her niece, wisely comments, “Mrs Makino says we should eat Japanese food when we’re not well, because our bodies are
Japanese” (238). It is not unusual for people to fall back on the traditional or conventional in times of crises in order to gain confidence and comfort.

In Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the elderly grandmother, Naoe regales her granddaughter with stories of exotic foods consumed back home in Japan creating a picture of profuse abundance and plentitude. There was, she says, ‘soft dried persimmons and the sweetest smoothest casks of sake. There was fresh fish and salted fish and great urns with shoy and miso’ (7). While the Issei like Naoe sought strength in their Japanese identity by rigidly resisting Canadian influences either by simply saying- ‘Obachan no speeku Eenglishu’ (4) or eating Japanese food secretly under the quilt or still later finding joy in eating ‘Shrimps and squid and scallop… And crisp mein, deep fried and such a sauce … after twenty long years of boiled beef and macaroni’ (146). The Nisei like Keiko, Naoe’s daughter and Murasaki’s mother preferred to adopt the Canadian way of life by rejecting the visible codes of Japanese culture like chopsticks, substituting them with forks, cooking only steaks, smoked ham, macaroni and cheese. While Keiko deliberately flowed along the current of Canadian lifestyle, Murasaki the Sansei born and bred on Canadian culture finds herself trying to balance herself between two cultures—the grandmother’s Japanese and the mother’s adopted Canadian. She was equally at home with peanut butter sandwiches as with osenbei or crisp rice crackers and salted squids nibbled excitedly with Obachan in the secrecy of her room at night. Speaking about her daughter, Keiko, Naoe says,

‘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 brittled.’ (13)
There is a touch of wry humour as well as bitterness as Naoe watches her daughter’s incredible transformation which ironically will collapse with the passage of time. When Naoe disappears suddenly and Keiko subsequently falls ill, Murasaki finds her frail shoulders burdened with the responsibility of looking after the household. It is interesting to note that despite being a third generation immigrant, a sansei, she prefers to run the house on Japanese lines of culture. She goes shopping at the ‘ethnicChinesericenoodleTofupattiesexotic vegetable section of Safeway’ (90) armed with a list of ethnic Japanese vegetables, names learnt from her grandmother – ‘hakusai leaves’, ‘shoyu’, ‘kome’, ‘konbu’ and so on. Murasaki’s ignorance of Japanese food puzzles the shop assistant who asks her curiously ---

“…Is your mom white?”

“No, she just doesn’t make Japanese food.”

“Oh, that’s too bad. Eating’s a part of being after all.” (138)

The mother’s deliberate rejection of her native culture explodes when she becomes frail in health and dependent on her daughter, in her delicate state she eats not the westernized food she was fond of but the ‘miso soup’, ‘sea weed’, rice... with pickled yellow takuwan’ and ‘tonkatsu’ or pork chops. She discovers her true identity as she calls out for ‘hashi’ or chopsticks, which she had never used before. In joy, her husband rushes out to make a pair out of dried branches. This rediscovery of the thrills of Japanese cuisine and the indigenous way it was served in bowls and eaten with chopsticks brings about a change in her and her journey back to her roots helps her to come close to her daughter. A real and more natural bonding between mother and daughter develops as a result
of the adoption of ethnic habits which creates a relation between them based on a commonness of culture and a genuine understanding of each other. Keiko who once dreamt of being like the white and decided not to teach her daughter Japanese in order to merge in better with their Canadian surroundings now finds her real self in accepting her native identity rather than the adopted Canadian. Like Aunt Emily in *Itsuka*, who was fed with Japanese food when ill, here too ethnic food brings both comfort and closeness.

A great mystery is unfolded to Murasaki when she discovers that her quiet and soft spoken father who religiously ate the Canadian food cooked by her mother actually bought and relished Japanese food secretly without informing the family. Like Naoe he too only felt complete only when he consumed Japanese food. The essential ‘Japaneseness’ does not desert a person even after many years of stay in foreign land. The climax is of course reached when Murasaki is enlightened about the fact that her family name, ‘Tonkatsu’, meant a ‘pork chop’--- ‘ton’ from pork in Japanese and ‘katsu’, a corruption of the word ‘cutlet’ (209). The fusion of the two words, one from Japanese and the other from Canadian works up a new identity, the Canadian–Japanese, which the later generations embraced. Also Murasaki’s choice of cooking Japanese is shown as a triumph of the native within one over the influence of society and circumstances; all the more since Murasaki had never seen Japan but was willing to adopt ways that would exhibit her ‘Japaneseness’ in Canadian society.

Kerri Sakamoto, a Sansei, writer of the Japanese–Canadian novel, *The Electrical Field* fills up her novel with plenty of references to Japanese food. How Asako cooks, washes and serves rice in bowls and keeps a clean house for her father and brother, creates a beautiful picture of a well
maintained Japanese home, complete with a pretty garden. When the gorgeous Chisako, wife to Yano and a Japanese born, new to Canada, decides to undergo a makeover, she wears her make-up and hair like a Canadian girl. She changes to western wear and even changes her gait. What invariably does not change is the cuisine of her house. When Asako visits her, the ‘smell of fried fish and daikon’ is unmistakeable (114). Chisako tries to impress her White Boss by making him sardine sandwiches and when she offers Asako tea, it is served with sandwiches that are clumsily made. Unfortunately for Chisako, the inclination away from Japanese habits proves costly and she loses her life. The divergent attitudes to food as well the writers’ employment of the food metaphor may be seen as an attempt to establish food as a fundamental marker of the Japanese Canadian identity. The generational gap stares one on the face through the preference of each to different types of food even as it shows food as a great unifier which in times of crises serves as a comforter to people who despite living for many years in a country find their roots in the traditional food of their ancestors.

The question of identity is complex and apart from food habits, the Japanese identity is preserved by a widespread use of Japanese words which help the characters express their real selves. Hiromi Goto says in an interview with Gavin J. Grant that the stories she heard as a child and her personal experiences provide material for her novels.

‘I develop many ideas for stories and novels from my life fragments of every day.’
The sprinkling of Japanese words and phrases gives an impression of authenticity to the characters distinguishing them from their white counterparts in the novels or simply to underline the singularity of their character in their familiarity with the language of their ancestors. In the same interview, Goto has also said about her novels:

For people who know next to nothing about Japan may be my books could serve as a starting point on a journey if they were interested in, say, folk legends… If there have been bridge-building tendencies, perhaps they would be between the conceptual gulf that exists between of-color North Americans and white North Americans who self identify as “not having a culture.”

Goto may or may not have been intentionally creating a distinct Japanese identity in her novels but there is no doubt that both *The Kappa Child* and *The Chorus of Mushrooms* are essentially Japanese works crafted in a particular environment where the identities of the characters are established on the basis of certain parameters that help create a work of art that is Japanese-Canadian. She too uses common markers used by other fellow writers to assert the Japanese-ness of her writings.

The use of language as a marker of identity is fascinating. Sapir writes in *Culture, Language And Personality. Selected Essays*, ‘Language is a great force of socialization, probably the greatest that exists. By this is meant not merely the obvious fact that significant social intercourse is hardly possible without language but that the mere fact of a common speech serves as a peculiarly potent symbol of social solidarity of those who speak the language.’ (15-16) This is evident in the case of the Japanese in Canada who apart from other ways tried to preserve their identity by speaking their native language.
Language has often associated with nationality and is almost synonymous with a person’s identity. Subtle variations in language within a community reflect the variations within the sub-group of a community. In other words, the language spoken by a people is a sure sign of their native identity. This perhaps acts as a push to the writers to include words of the indigenous language of the Japanese as in the case of the Chinese to give an authentic feel of their ethnicity. This accounts for the abundant sprinkling of Japanese words and phrases in the works of the immigrant writers. Sapir has also opined that a language may die out in the primary area where it was spoken, but may continue to exist among communities that were hitherto hostile to the original speakers. This shows a unique quality of language which also proves that a language may have an entity of its own and not be dependent on its native speakers. The fear of losing or forgetting one’s native language due to a change in the environment as in the case of the Japanese immigrant, may in fact, serve as a cause for the inclusion of the Japanese language in the writings of the Japanese immigrant writers.

Goto handles the subject of linguistic identity deftly. In an interview she says’ “I also integrate Japanese words for my Japanese Canadian characters who are bilingual. This is the language I speak with my sisters and bilingual friends.” In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, three generations of women live under one roof struggling to assert their independent identities. Naoe the grandmother speaks Japanese abundantly, is most at home nibbling Japanese food and recalling her days in Japan. Her sparkling wit and impish humour not withstanding she is a shrewd observer of people and things. She disproves of her daughter Keiko’s rejection of her Japanese roots and she keeps her granddaughter enthralled in her stories about Japan and its myths. The words
‘Mukashi, mukashi, omukashi’ repeatedly in the book, which translate as ---in ancient times, very ancient times, haunt the readers and transport them to an exotic bygone era.

When the book begins, Murasaki the granddaughter confesses ‘My Japanese is not as good as my English…’ (1) Brought up in Canada she is naturally more familiar with English but her interest in her native tongue is worth noting as she soon lapses into telling a tale about Japan to her lover beginning in the same manner as her grandmother – ‘Mukashi, mukashi, omukashi’, making the wheel of experience come full circle. Murasaki’s mother Keiko’s refusal to speak Japanese is deliberate, causing Naoe pain:

‘I speak my words in Japanese and my daughter will not hear them. The words that come from our ears, our mouths, they collide in the space between us.’ (4)

Language, the most essential mode of communication, instead of bringing them together actually creates a distance between mother and daughter. Naoe takes pride in her language while Keiko refuses to even understand her mother when she speaks in Japanese though she spoke the language twenty years ago (13).

She tells her mother:

‘You sit there and mutter and taunt me in Japanese just for spite’. (21)

Naoe has her own grievance:

My granddaughter, your daughter, Keiko, you taught her no words so she cannot speak, but she calls me Obachan and smiles (15).

She says in her despair:
A child from my heart, a child from my body, but not from my mouth (48).

About Shinjo, her son-in-law, she says with humour that he has forgotten his native tongue by staying in Canada so she tells him things in Japanese knowing he would not understand her and would merely answer ‘Glad to hear it’ (48) Naoe’s philosophy is simple and logical and she says, You cannot move to a foreign and call that place home because you parrot the words around you. Find your home inside yourself first (48).

Even Murasaki, the sansei granddaughter is compelled to say that she was the ‘daughter of a mother who became an other’ (36). According to Krech, one of the functions of language was to make possible the growth and transmission of culture, the continuity of societies, and the effective functioning and control of social group. This is true in the case of the Japanese community to a good extent, especially in the case of the Issei who had strong bonding and united in the face of hostility by living together in their enclaves and interacting as much as possible both socially and linguistically to show solidarity as well as to resist atrocities on them. No wonder Japanese language newspapers were published and during the internment their publications were stopped. Also with the orders for segregation during the war, the Japanese families came together to pray and express oneness with each other in their moment of crisis. In _Obasan_, neighbours rush into the house of Naomi on hearing about the orders for segregation.

_Obasan_, Father, Uncle, Sachiko, Stephen, Nomura-obasan, and I kneel on the floor but Saito-ojisan remains standing, leaning on his stick as
Sensei says loudly, “Let us pray.” He begins the service, speaking rapidly, sometimes in Japanese, sometimes in English…His head is tilted up as if he is addressing the ceiling…”Zen no Kami yo subete no hito no kokoro wa Shu ni araware "---” (175)

The Japanese words of prayer serve as a source of comfort and though English is also used, it is possibly because the families were followers of the Christian faith and the priest used the English language familiar to the White Christian society and which would be familiar to this small congregation too. The prayers are followed by songs:

*Till we meet

*Till we meet

*God be with us…. (177)

Then in Japanese:

*Ma-to o-o-o

*Hi-ma de

*Ma-ta o-o

*Hi-ma de

*Kami no-o-o

*Ma-mo-ri

*Nagami o

*Hanate za-re (177-178)
When the song is sung three times, the shaken much maligned gathering gain confidence and hope that someday they would meet again. The coming together of people suffering the same crisis gives them a boost. The songs and prayers and words spoken in their own tongue give them comfort and the strength to face adversities and future challenges as also the hope to meet someday again. It is here that Obasan says her famous words:

“Mata itsuka. Again someday. Let us meet.” (178)

A faint feeling of buoyancy fills the room and they are ready to meet their uncertain future; their confidence arising mostly from the presence of fellow sufferers and the comforting words in their native tongue.

Language as identity is seen in its most conventional form in Naoe who preserves her identity in Canada by speaking in Japanese, not unaware of the language around her. Keiko rejects her roots in many ways and Murasaki is seen as the model who fuses both. This is typically reflective of the way language is accepted in a Diaspora community. The first generation clinging possessively to the native language, afraid not to lose it in the complexity of the new world outside, but the subsequent generations feel more at home with the language of the dominant group since that is the language of their surroundings. Crises in identities may arise when the language spoken at home clashes with that spoken outside. This happens in Chorus of Mushrooms and is also seen in the writings of Chinese writers like Judy Fong Bates who writes about Su-Jen the young protagonist in Midnight At The Dragon Café who finds a wide cultural and linguistic gap between her home in the Café and the world outside.
In *The Electrical Field*, Sakamoto generously sprinkles Japanese words and terms of endearment --- ‘Saito-san’, ‘Asa-chan’, ‘Ne-san’, to create a distinct feel for the Japanese characters as different from the Canadians. Sakamoto’s familiarity with the Japanese language is as sound as that of Kogawa who is a Nisei writer. The Japanese Canadian characters are made to speak Japanese words and phrases to lend a distinct Japanese atmosphere in the novel. The practice seen in Kogawa is visible in Goto and Sakamoto too. As in the case of food, language too proves to be an ambiguous marker of identity. The same language that unifies Naoe, Keiko and Murasaki as Japanese, also divides them. What was easily the simplest form of communication and identity, the native language, now challenges the Issei. Naoe’s predicament is evident. Apart from losing touch with her country of origin she undergoes the pathos of losing her daughter to a strange language and culture. The comfort zone within the four walls of the house, recreating a miniature homeland with ethnic bric a brac where Japanese was spoken, Japanese stories relived and Japanese food was cooked is suddenly threatened with the entry of non-native food and language creating a new disharmony.

The generation gap not only widens but it seems that with the coming of the second and third generations of immigrants born in Canada, the Issei who hoped for respite after a long struggle with outside forces find themselves confronting a new situation. If the early phase of struggle meant fighting the dominant culture and their discriminatory ways, the new challenge was the invasion of the dominant culture into their homes and distancing them from their loved ones. This situation was perhaps a difficult one for the Issei to accept but keeping in mind the Canadian government’s policy of dispersing the
Japanese community after the Second World War to prevent them from living a united community life this was perhaps destined to happen. Harris believes that white culture was forced upon the Japanese so that they could not unite ever again (141). The result was that every house had a heart broken Naoe and distant Keiko and a Murasaki, torn between two worlds.

Yet it can hardly be denied that both food and language have been used successfully as markers for establishing identity the Japanese identity in the midst of a White world. The need for such markers are also evident since the writers were all writing from a space far removed from the native land but from where they wished to project their ‘Japaneseness’ in order to assert their individuality and ‘otherness’ from the White society they now were inhabiting.

In *Obasan*, the question of identity is more complex. There seems to be an emphasis not on a separate Japanese identity as on a Canadian identity. The struggle of the entire Japanese community, represented by the Katos and the Nakanes to demonstrate its loyalty to Canada becomes the principle motive of the text. Rather than assert a separate Japanese identity they seem more concerned to prove their Canadian identity because as Japanese people born in Canada or as immigrants to Canada they seem more preoccupied with their desire to establish a Canadian identity. Uncle Isamu despite facing terrible adversities in life still has the optimism to say, ‘this country is the best’ (42). Having lost his livelihood, having endured the humiliation of internment and the trauma of dispersal, he still asserts bravely – ‘In the world, there is no better place…There is food. There is medicine. There is pension money. Gratitude. Gratitude.’” (42) This attitude perhaps justifies the very reason why the Japanese came to Canada --- in search of food and good living. Aunt Emily who believed
that “We are the country” (42) along with Uncle Isamu stand for the silent suffering Issei who came in search of a new life and new identity and despite all adversities found only the Canadian identity to be their real identity. Naomi, Stephen and Emily found other ways to establish their identities. The Japanese were in fact caught in a strange web where they lived a life which was a ‘paradox of both belonging and non-belonging simultaneously’ (Bannerji 65). Emily’s stand was to combine her two identities into one where the Japanese and the Canadian side could co-exist or merge harmoniously and not confront and conflict with one another. This is almost an idealistic situation desired by every individual in a Diaspora community. The desire to merge as well as retain one’s uniqueness becomes the ultimate dream which the Chinese in Canada too desired.

To Emily, even the story of Momotaro, the peach boy, a popular Japanese myth is considered a Canadian story by Aunt Emily because she argues that anyone living in Canada is a Canadian and everything they do is Canadian (57). The focus of both Obasan and Itsuka where identity is concerned is to drive home the point that the Japanese in Canada despite their unique appearance, food or culture, were as Canadian as any other person born in Canada. Aunt Emily, described in Itsuka as ‘a militant Nisei, a second generation, made in Canada woman of Japanese ancestry’ (3) is outraged in Obasan because of the discriminatory attitude of the Canadian government towards different immigrants. A staunch believer of her Canadian identity she questions with anger---

“Why in a time of war with Germany and Japan would our government seize the property and homes of Canadian-born Canadians and not the homes of German-born Germans?” (38)
The reference to the Canadian government as ‘our government’ is noteworthy as Aunt Emily is an activist fighting for the rights of the Japanese in Canada and is at the same time loyal to the Canadian land and country considering it her only home. Bitter at the treatment meted out to her community she voices the anguish of the Nisei who were vocal about their sufferings and hapless about the government’s apathy towards their loyalty to the Canadian nation. Unlike the Issei, like obasan who believed “Everything is forgetfulness. The time of forgetting is now come” (30). Obasan’s attitude is the quintessential Japanese first generation attitude that preferred to swallow its grief and forget the past.

Emily’s outburst may be seen as the changing attitude of the later generations to the internment and dispersal of immigrants after the internment. She rages and not without reason:

We were rioted against back in 1907, for heavens sakes! We’ve always faced prejudice...we were no military threat...As long as we have politicians and leaders and media people who feast on people’s fears, we’ll continue making scapegoats (35).

Her resentment is also towards the Canadian government that was far sterner in its treatment of the Japanese than the American, which cared more for its Japanese citizens and if not anything, did not strip them off their property or possessions. The Issei bore the humiliations quietly and suffered silently but the later generations had to speak out. The pain was too much for them to bear in silence. Sakamoto, writing much later echoes the same idea in an interview where she says:

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. My response
was silence --- not unlike my parents’ to the internment. As I got older, I felt compelled to articulate my response to that racism.\

Interestingly, Sakamoto seems to echo Stephen in *Obasan*, when he comes back home from school one day, humiliated and ashamed. Refusing to divulge the cause of his embarrassment he remains silent and tearful. Finally he confides in Naomi and blurts out that during an alarm, he lay down with his classmates on the ground and he is taunted by a girl that:

All the Jap kids at school are going to be sent away and they’re bad and you are a Jap (70).

Stephen wallows in his shame and confusion, further confounded when his father tells him that he was not Japanese but ‘Canadian.’ The paradox of being both Japanese and Canadian was ruining and unmaking not only Stephen but thousands like him who wanted to live not on the edge but on firm land, to feel secure as a citizen. Being a minority he could not voice his feelings. It took an Aunt Emily to gather courage to speak out. Kogawa and Sakamoto felt the compulsion to speak out strongly enough to write history in fiction and give a chance to their much maligned community to be heard. In *A Hundred Million Hearts*, Hajime the pilot who sacrificed his life attributes Masao’s frailty and lack of courage partly due to the fact that life was ‘difficult for him in Canada, where he was trampled on by the white race all his life, from birth’(264). Masao too suffered a crisis of identity. He was never fully accepted in Canada because of his Japanese origins and was discriminated against in Japan because of his Canadian connect. Personally he suffered an ambiguity in character as he could
not embrace Japanese ideals nor be completely in agreement with white Canada
waging war with his homeland.

The dilemma of the immigrant is portrayed in all its pathos in the
character of those who left Japan for Canada but were never wholeheartedly
welcomed in the host land as well as in the character of those who returned to
the motherland to serve it but failed. Masao swayed between his new world
ideas and old world ideals while the likes of Stephen struggled to create a new
identity while denying the old. Somewhere neither could achieve a proper
balance and instead disturbed middle-of-the-road identities were created.

According to the Spiral of Silence theory propounded by the
German Political Scientist, Elisabeth Noelle Neumann, the fear of isolation may
drive a person to remain silent and refrain one from voicing one’s opinions if
one is in the minority.⁸ In the context of the Japanese in Canada the theory
would perhaps explain why the older generations preferred to maintain an
uneasy silence rather than openly address their grievances. The Issei given to
their sacrificing and stoical nature and driven by the need to find firm feet in a
new country preferred silence over resistance. Though they voiced their
unhappiness through their poetry composed largely in their vernacular language,
like Naomi’s aunt Obasan they preferred to forget and carry on with life.

The act of writing about the experiences of the Japanese in
Canada is also an expression of the Japanese desire to break the silence and
overcome the feeling of fear and isolation that envelopes the immigrant. It may
be seen as a source of seeking an identity for the Japanese people and preventing
their voices and culture to be swept away by the dominant majority.
So terrifying was the experience of forced relocation during the World War II years, that most often the response to it was a stunning silence. Garrett Hongo, Hawaiian Sansei writer, writes in his essay “Kubota”:

It wasn’t in our history books, though we were studying World War II at the time. It wasn’t in the family albums of the people I knew and whom I’d visit staying over weekends with friends. And it wasn’t anything that the family talked about or allowed me to keep bringing up either... It was as if we had no history for four years and the relocation was something unspeakable. (533)

His observation is echoed by Sakamoto who said, ‘No one talked about internment--- not the history books at school and certainly not my parents at home.’ This would explain why all the novels under consideration are shrouded in an inexplicable sense of loss accompanied by an apprehension of fear which becomes central to the immigrant experience. The Japanese in Canada witnessed and experienced one of the worst travails in modern history. Always held with suspicion and exploited and marginalized in society in spite of their invaluable service to it, they faced the most horrific atrocities during the World War II. On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl harbour, Hawaii, an American naval base, thereafter the history of the world changed and life for the Japanese in America and Canada was never the same again. The Japanese were mercilessly uprooted from their homes, stripped of private property, segregated from family members and sent off to ghost towns. The haunting trauma of the internment years is recorded by Kogawa in a most chilling manner as she and her family had suffered the agony of internment. Sakamoto, a Sansei escaped the harrowing experiences of internment, but she records the after effects of the internment on the Japanese community in her works which bare the trauma of the dark years in intense terms.
The response to the internment and the experiences of World War II are treated differently by different authors. In Sakamoto’s, *One Hundred Million Hearts*, Masao, a young Nisei from Canada decides to fight for his country during the war. He is discriminated against because he is not purely Japanese but an immigrant. His life in Canada was a rough ride again because he was a coloured man from an Asian country. He questions the idea of dying for the Emperor and the latter’s powers of divinity. He fails in his mission as a kamikaze as he could not sacrifice his life and die a glorious death for his country and Emperor. He suffers a deep sense of guilt and his life shrouded in shame and mystery. Though he escapes to Canada, his wife Setsuko undergoes terrible trials at the internment camp. His daughters suffer at a different level. Hana the deprived child abandoned in Japan loathes her father for his cowardice and indifference to her. She is the child who knows about his hidden guilt of failing as a kamikaze. Miyo the Sansei daughter in Canada is ignorant of her father’s past. The burden of discovering the truth behind his past becomes an obsession with her that takes her to Tokyo to dig up the past.

Miyo’s mother suffered from the radiation of the bombing in Japan. She too was a cripple possibly having inherited her mother’s deficiency. Like Naomi’s mother who was disfigured and died an anonymous death, Miyo too lost her mother and lived with her father. The war caused umpteen sufferings. The agony of the two surviving girls Hana and Miyo linger long after the mindless war is over and their father Masao is dead. Hana openly showed contempt for her father, but Miyo who had seen his gentler side, loved him. She realized his frailties but had faith in him and his beliefs. The crisis that arises is
whether they were children of a coward or simply a human whose thoughts were different from others haunts the reader.

The theme of isolation is commonly recurrent and though Canada has been reinforcing its multicultural, multiethnic face there is ample indication in these works to suggest the existence of racial discrimination. Kogawa never really supported the idea of multiculturalism as she felt it made the distinctiveness of the communities more apparent. In an interview she confessed, ‘Ethnicity is something that got put onto me by the country.’

Other writers have shared her opinion and the feeling of isolation and exclusion in Canadian society is not a myth but a reality in Japanese life in Canada. The Japanese experience is perhaps different from that of other immigrant communities as they underwent a trauma which many other communities did not.

The Japanese were however, not the first community to be interned in camps. During World War 1, the War Measures Act was introduced on 22nd August, 1914, by virtue of which, A total of 8,579 Canadians were interned between 1914 and 1920. Over 5,000 of them were of Ukranian descent. Germans, Poles, Italians, Bulgarians, Croatians, Turks, Serbians, Hungarians, Russians, Jews and Romanians were also imprisoned...Upon each individual’s arrest whatever money and property they had was taken by the government."

During World War II, the War Measures Act was again used to intern people including the Japanese and many camps were set up. The sufferings of the internment and the consequential sense of loss it gave rise to is seen nowhere more explicitly than in Kogawa’s Obasan. In order to gain a sound
understanding of the novel and the sense of loss it conveys, it is imperative to first look at the space from where Kogawa writes. As a Japanese-Canadian woman she writes from a space that is at least thrice marginalized. In the great corpus of English literature, Canadian English literature finds a small place, having come to prominence fairly recently. As a writer of immigrant or Diaspora fiction, she occupies a marginal space. Again as a woman writing about the public humiliation and social ostracism of the Japanese in Canada, she is indeed heroic but is again in a minority.

*Obasan*, is a unique and courageous attempt at capturing the anguish and trauma of the Japanese community in Canada during and after World War II. It deals with serious issues related to racist attitudes rampant in Canada and the traumatic victimization of its Japanese migrant community. It is one of the earliest attempts in Canadian writing at exposing the horrors of the evacuation, internment or forcible relocation, and dispersal of Japanese Canadians during World War II. Not only is the loss of property, of land, of houses, of boats and indeed of livelihood, shown in graphic detail but a shameful picture of a so called civilized nation emerges to the world. When the War measures Act was implemented, the Canadian government got a free hand to strip the Japanese people of their possessions and send them off to camps in remote ghost towns. Aunt Emily says in *Obasan*:

“*You know those prisons they sent us to? The government called them ‘Interior Housing Projects’! With language like that you can disguise any crime*” (34).

Horrors of the internment and the treatment meted out to the Japanese are vividly narrated to give the reader a true picture of the harrowing years. Through the diary entries of Aunt Emily, some of the atrocities are made evident. She writes- ‘Signs have
been posted on all highways—“Japs keep out” (86), or ‘The government has requisitioned the Livestock Building at Hastings Park, and the Women’s Building, to house 2,000 “Japs pending removal”… We are the billygoats and nannygoats and kids — all the scapegoats to appease this blindness.’ (88) Again she writes ‘Mothers are prostrate in nervous exhaustion --- the babies crying endlessly --- the fathers torn from them without farewell --- everyone crammed into two buildings like so many pigs… forbidden to step outside the barbed wire gates and fence…’ (91) or ‘The toilets are just a sheet-metal trough and up till now they didn’t have partitions or seats.’ (97) The jottings of Aunt Emily in her private ‘journal’ epitomise the utter loss of the Japanese people in the face of a crisis, a disaster and a devastating experience which they suffered for no fault of their own. The most pathetic entry is about the fight among the Japanese themselves with ‘The RCMP … happy to let us argue among ourselves’ (102). The tragedy of the situation being that the Japanese considered Canada to be their own country and the humiliation of the experience heightened with the realisation that they were considered worse than animals in being herded together and being denied basic human rights. The sense of loss is further aggravated by the fragmentation of the family, with men being sent off for work and the women and children left to fend for themselves ‘stripped of all privacy’ (98) in the terrorising environment of the internment camps. The loss of home, of privacy, of property, of family and of essential human basics complete the picture of the sense of isolation and loss that the Japanese felt in the country they came to with so much hope.

As in Canada, in America too, the Japanese as well as the Chinese were subject to horrifying atrocities. The Japanese came to America for the same reasons why they came to Canada. The attitude of the government and that of society was no different there. The Japanese came to America to search for a better life. After the bombing of
Pearl Harbour the Japanese community suffered like the Japanese in Canada. However as Emily puts it in *Obasan*, their condition was better than that of the Japanese in Canada. American Japanese writings too capture with vividness and detail, the terrifying experiences of internment.

In *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973) by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and her husband James D. Houston, we are introduced to the horrors of internment across the border in America. The book traces the travails of the writer’s family both before and after internment. The pathetic conditions of internment and its effects on the Japanese community are related with authenticity as Wakatsuki like Kogawa went through the trauma of internment along with her family. The subject of the role of women becomes implicitly linked to that of suffering during the internment. Kogawa emphasises the role of *Obasan* in the absence of Naomi’s mother. Aunt Emily is an admirable example of courage personified. Modelled on the character of Kitagawa who inspired Kogawa, she is the fiery activist who takes on the government to provide justice to the Japanese Canadian. And it is the women in the novel who are both the bearers of values and the pillars of strength, exhibiting an indomitable will to battle their hostile surroundings. Though Mason quotes Coral Ann Howells in his essay “Joy Kogawa” who says, ‘All the themes of women’s fiction are here ---- marginality, lack of political power, patterns of submission, enforced silence…’, (156) it may well be argued that the women exhibit a totally different show of power. Naomi’s mother in her resolve to tend to her mother in Japan expresses the power of sacrifice, devotion to the elderly and in her preferred silence over her disfigurement she shows rare courage and admirable stoicism. *Obasan* whose tear ducts had long dried up and who believed that the time for forgetting had come, had in fact attained great heights of nobility in having calmly accepted both life and death with stoical silence. The courage she showed in protecting her family during
the internment and the subsequent dispersal deserves credit. It was Obasan who fled with the children to the ghost town of Slocan and took care of them in times of crisis. During the harrowing time spent at the Barker’s farm, again she showed great courage and determination in keeping the family together.

It is no myth that in times of crisis women have risen to the occasion and provided support to family and community. In Naomi’s other aunt, Aunt Emily, we have a contrast to Obasan. Emily is fiery, candid and verbal. She is an activist who believes in fighting for the Japanese cause. The novel in fact succeeds in combining fiction and history remarkably, with the introduction of Emily’s character. Kogawa was herself a combination of both the quiet Naomi and the firebrand Emily. The internment curiously brought out the best in Japanese women, the adherence to Japanese values of sacrificing and living for others and when required, standing up for oneself in a more independent western sense. The combination of Naomi and Emily can be the most perfect woman, imbibing the best of the two worlds. As the novel scoops out the hidden trauma behind the Japanese internment, the gradual strengthening of its women characters is laid bare. The quiet Aya Obasan, the frank Emily, all learn to rise to the occasion to create a space of her own, the most remarkable, being the gentle, frightened Naomi who with experience and with the unfolding of events, holds out hope, that the transformation of women is possible in times of trial and subversion.

Wakatsuki recounts how her father was taken away for interrogation and her mother otherwise a gentle Japanese home maker and rose to the occasion by shifting the family to a minority ghetto. With the patriarch of the family gone it was essentially her mother on whom the burden of taking care of the family fell. Like other Japanese families, the Wakatsuki family too had precious Japanese heirlooms like kimonos, delicate tea sets and so on. The most coveted being a set of china, blue and white
porcelain. As the family prepared for the inevitable, second hand dealers came to buy off expensive objects at throwaway prices. Mother or ‘Mama’ as she is referred to with a rare show of matriarchal dignity preferred to smash the precious set to smithereens rather than have it sold for a song to a Caucasian. Here the china set becomes symbolic of the Japanese identity and heritage and in an attempt to preserve this valued remnant of ethnic origin, destruction was preferred to paltry financial gain. The act is heroic as the writer says ‘mama’ had no work hence no regular source of income at that time and even the 15 dollars offered could come of help to a hapless family facing evacuation and surviving without its breadwinner.

As in *Obasan*, here too the writer stresses the adjusting and sacrificing nature of women. In spite of all odds, mama tells the children not to complain about the food, she cleans and tidies the small room they all huddle into, takes pains to ward off the cold and tries ways to cheer up the family. The issue of women and the role played by them forms an important theme of immigrant writing in Canada. In both books we see the gradual strengthening of the women characters who take control of the situation and handle the atrocities meted out to them in a calm and mature fashion. The internment made the women strong and the men vulnerable and frail. The former learnt with the passing of time to combine both Japanese values and discipline along with western codes of independent thinking. *Obasan* remained steady as a rock despite the atrocities she and her family suffered. She even accepted her husband’s death calmly. Stephen on the other hand is shown weak and irresponsible. However in Hisaye Yamamoto’s *The Legend of Miss Sasagawara*, we see the steady psychological degeneration of a once famed ballet dancer--- the effects of life in an internment camp.

In both U.S.A and Canada, internment seems to have been a result of baseless fear and prejudice on the part of the government. Neither the Royal Canadian Mounted
Police nor the Armed forces found any serious threat posed by the Japanese in Canada. (Harris 140). In the U.S.A, neither the FBI, nor the War Department found evidence of betrayal by the Japanese. The whole exercise of putting thousands of innocents to such harrowing experience was after all a result of miscalculation and faulty judgement. Though the Japanese suffered in both countries, there were differences in their experiences in the two countries.

In Obasan, the protagonist Naomi’s Aunt Emily says:

The American Japanese were interned as we were in Canada and sent off to concentration camps, but their property wasn’t liquidated as ours was. And look how quickly the communities re-established themselves in Los Angeles and San Francisco. We weren’t allowed to return to the West Coast like that. We’ve never recovered from the dispersal policy. But of course that was the government’s whole idea—to make sure we’d never be visible again (33-34).

The effects of the internment are also seen with its tragic perceptions in Sakamoto’s The Electrical Field where almost all the characters suffer from the after effects of the internment. A foreboding sense of loss prevails through the book that touches the lives of all the characters. Yano a carpenter by profession and an activist for the Japanese cause by passion appears as crazy, half witted yet violent by nature. The scars of life in the camps have not faded and he tries to enthuse people to join his meetings to seek justice for the Japanese cause. He is a failure as hardly anyone goes to his meetings and his frustrations spill out to his personal life. His domestic life gets jeopardised and he often turns violent. In the end he is a disturbed fugitive running away from life. By then he has killed his wife, her lover, his children and finally himself. Another enigmatic character in the book is the central character Asako whose ways are mysterious and who serves as the unreliable narrator of the story. Having lived in the camp where she lost her beloved brother Eiji, Asako could never really piece her life together and live
normally. She betrays her compulsive obsession for her younger brother Stum without whom she cannot live and whose marriage or engagement to a girl she could not bear. A confirmed spinster, she slowly reveals her weakness for the married Yano with whom she shares her some ideals. Ultimately she informs the police about his involvement in the murder of his family.

Asako’s own reliability as a person remains a mystery. Her overriding guilt concerning the death of her brother Eijo, her obsessive love for him even in death, her strange closeness to her younger brother Stum and refusal to accept anybody in his life, all make her a controversial character who seems deeply distracted by the haunting memories of the internment years. Asako may be compared to Japanese-American writer Yamamoto’s Miss Sasagawara who slowly faded away and lost her stability of mind in the internment camp. Asako may not have disintegrated like her but gradually sinks into unreliability and inconsistency.

Sakamoto does not give us the kind of details Kogawa gives, but clearly makes evident in her work, how the internment affected people during their stay and how the scars jeopardised their lives many years on. Like Kogawa who lived in internment and was dispersed with her family after the war, Sakamoto too gives us biographical details to construct her story. The loss of her mother’s brother is reflected in the death of Eiji in *The Electrical Field* and about her lost uncle she says that she regrets his death in an internment camp and that he became ‘all the more tragic because he died without a country, without a home.’ The theme of loss is extended not only the loss of identity along with the losses of property, home, peace of mind or loss of self esteem it is also intricately woven with the loss of innocence. The violations of old man Gower on Naomi causes panic but terrifies her all her life, her association of the loss of her mother with the Gower incident, has tragic dimensions. The extent of loss suffered by the
Japanese in Canada during the war years, the years preceding it and the years following it are difficult to make an account of. All the writers have tried in their individual ways to do justice to the Japanese cause by writing about it but the trauma of those who lived through it will always remain immeasurable.

In *One Hundred Million Hearts*, Sakamoto describes the tragedy of the women who survive the loss of their loved ones. Setsuko copes with life after the death of Masao. His daughters are anguished and divided over his actions during the war. Miyo’s mother is affected by the radiation of the bombings. Miyo is a cripple. The war widows stare at the cherry blossoms in memory of their loved ones. Hajime’s fiancée Kiku lives in his memory. The women are strengthened in the adversities of life and in their personal grief.

Entwined inextricably to the theme of isolation, internment and suffering is that of justice and Redress. Bearing in mind the fact that the Chinese and Japanese writers in Canada wrote with a purpose to expose the atrocities inflicted on them, the abrogation of their rights at different times in history and the discriminations suffered by them, the inevitability of the presence of such themes is evident. Justice for a displaced community removed first by choice from their native surroundings, then by force from familiar ethnic enclaves in the host land during the war and then again dispersed or deported after the war, is an issue of much importance. As members of a minority Diaspora community, Kogawa, Goto and Sakamoto, have along with their families undergone harrowing experiences in the host land. The problem of marginalisation within a society, complicated further by the concept of ‘home’ and ‘identity’ naturally demands a plea for justice.
The issue of justice is tackled by Goto and Sakamoto chiefly through detailed characterisation. Emily in *Obasan* and both Naomi and Emily in *Itsuka* carry forward the writer’s concerns about justice for Japanese Canadians. In *The Electrical Field*, the matter of justice is explored by Yano a disturbed excited young man shaken by the internment experience seeking justice for his community. Emily who is an activist and fiercely proud of both her Japanese as well as her Canadian identities holds grudges against the Canadian government. As a Nisei, Canada is her only home. Her ire is directed towards the ill treatment of the Japanese before the war when their properties were seized unjustly. Her anguished words in *Obasan*, “They took away the land, the stores, the businesses, the boats, the houses—everything. Broke up our families…exiled us for no crime. They took our livelihood—” (36) echoes Roy Miki who wrote,

In 1942 the Canadian government of Mackenzie King... ordered the mass uprooting of all people of Japanese ancestry living in the “protected zone,” an area that extended along the west coast of British Columbia and 100 miles (160 kilometres) inland... Between March and October their citizenship rights were revoked, their properties, businesses, assets and personal belongings were seized— and, soon after, sold without their consent— and larger groups were scattered to what the government called “resettlement camps” but which in fact were sites of confinement’ (2).

Not only so, Emily is vocal about her feelings about the government’s policy of dispersal after the war not to speak of the atrocious treatment meted out to the Japanese when they were forcibly interned during the war. Unlike *Obasan* who believed in forgetting and relapsing into silence, Emily the activist believed in openly questioning the government and seeking redress for the much maligned community. Emily is the voice and character through whom the question of justice is raised because the other characters in the book play completely different roles. Aunt Obasan and Uncle Isamu,
representing the Issei were silent sufferers and spectators, seeped in gratitude for the basic comforts provided by the Canadian government after the dispersal. Naomi, quiet and understanding lacked the zeal and vibrancy of Emily but was slowly evolving into an activist under the influence of the latter. Stephen took the simplest way out, ignoring his roots he preferred to move out pursuing a career in music.

If the silence of the characters in Obasan was meant to reflect a silenced community, the book ironically helped break that uneasy silence, corroborating what Caldeira said, ‘when history is written in a fictional mode the impact is even more powerful’ (Caldeira 103). Obasan ends on a poetic note combining emotion, memory and nostalgia in a dream like reverie. Though it was the first book to tell the story on internment of the Japanese in Canada, it was published in 1981 at a time when the movement for Redress was on full swing with the National Association for Japanese Canadians playing a dominant role in settling for an agreement and for an acknowledgement of injustices done to the Japanese in Canada. Redress was achieved only in 1988. Obasan therefore stirs up sentiment in the reader and gives the first insight into the trauma of the Japanese immigrant. Its narrative form works at two levels. At one plane it is a long wait of Naomi for the arrival of her brother Stephen and Aunt Emily on hearing the news of the death of Uncle Isamu. While waiting at her aunt or Obasan’s house, she lapses into reminiscences and slowly the objects of Obasan’s house awaken things stuffed to the inner recesses of her consciousness. Though Naomi tries to relate to events gone by, the narrative never loses track of the present. Her narratives are dated and appear like diary entries. The strange interplay between the past and the present creates a complex situation, with the intervention of folklores, dreams, fears and nightmares along with her continued obsession with the mystery of her mother’s absence the book takes a fascinating shape.
Kogawa does not give a stiff linear account of the internment and its consequences. Instead we are led through an imaginative journey through Vancouver, Slocan and Alberta, Granton through a spell binding narrative. The resolution comes at the end when the mystery comes to an end with the translation of Naomi’s grandmother’s letters describing the death of her mother. During the bombing at Nagasaki, her mother had been disfigured and later succumbed to her injuries. An elegy like tone is reached and the taut silence and enigma about the annual visits to the coulee are broken---- the visits were a memorial to the day her mother died. As the book closes, we return to the present. A truly fascinating book which without being militant or didactic drives home Kogawa’s view on the injustices done to the Japanese, in Itsuka the question of the Redress movement gains prominence and before its actual publication, Redress was achieved.

In Itsuka, we meet Naomi the activist. Itsuka, meaning someday, the someday uncle dreamt when he could go back to his boats, a day which never came, or someday when justice would be done to the Japanese and when there would again be laughter, is a less passionate book than Obasan, however it is the realisation of a dream. A reluctant and passive Naomi is shown slowly turning an activist. Life after internment and dispersal in the imaginary town of Granton is elaborately portrayed. Naomi’s loneliness, Aunt Emily’s untiring efforts inspiring Naomi and accelerating the movement for redress are accounted with ease. A reverse journey to Japan to visit the mother’s grave also features in the book, typical of many books by Diaspora writers. Though not as lyrical as Obasan, largely due to its content--- the movement for Redress, Itsuka has its own charm-- the transformation of a passive reluctant school teacher to an activist, fighting for injustices done to the Japanese community and above all freeing herself from a myriad of complications to find true love. The self reflective
nature of the narrative performs the task of illuminating the reader with intricacies of the movement for redress and also a glimpse into the personal life of Naomi. The most tragic incident in the book is the death of Obasan which leaves Naomi lost and rudderless. Her coming to terms with life without Obasan and Uncle Isamu and an indifferent brother Stephen and to enter into a meaningful relation with Cedric, a priest along with active participation in the public services gives her a fresh thrust of life. Her narrative thus runs along two lines--- her personal life and the activist movement. The achievement of Redress is described emphatically. Kogawa who was present at the House of Commons when the agreement took place has described in *Itsuka*, the announcement of Redress and acknowledgement of past injustices, how the words of the Prime Minister, “Nearly half a century ago, in the crisis of wartime, the Government of Canada wrongfully incarcerated, seized the property, and disenfranchised thousands of citizens of Japanese ancestry…” (Kogawa, *Itsuka* 274) had a euphoric effect on Naomi. The ecstasy of the moment is described beautifully and one of the characters, Ken actually says, “I finally feel that I’m a Canadian” (277). This confession perhaps sums up the entire attitude of the Japanese who never felt truly accepted by Canada until the apology and compensation. Though compared to the losses suffered in both material and non material terms, the compensation was small; it was the fulfilment of a dream. Till the end, *Obasan* and *Itsuka* remain testimonies to the unjust history of the Japanese in Canada. The unflattering truth of history and the fictional recreation of a lost time are superbly juxtaposed to reconstruct through the realms of memory, a time, not to forget but to remember forever so that real stories really told never allow such incidents to recur. Kogawa combines hard hitting historical facts like the descriptions of life in camps, liquidation of the property of the Japanese and so on to bring the past alive.
Sakamoto who heard stories of the internment from her grandparents and parents and faced discriminations regularly as a child deals more with the psychological effect of the war and internment on the Japanese yet the question or issue of justice so close to the Japanese cause never escapes her. *The Electrical Field*, written much after *Redress*, but refers to a time when after the internment, the Japanese had been dispersed all over Canada and had begun to rebuild their lives and fight for their rights as citizens of Canada. The book has an angry tone that shows that the Japanese still had many scars to heal. Yano the young agitated Japanese is shown organising meetings and distributing flyers to motivate the Japanese towards a settlement with the Government for compensation and apology. His anger seems to consume him and the effects of the internment seem to have deeply affected him. Angry with a hill named after Prime Minister Mackenzie, angry at the injustices done to the Japanese people, angry at the lukewarm responses to his meetings he is even angry at his wife and finally the bottled anger spurts out with the discovery of his wife’s infidelity and he shoots his entire family including his wife’s lover and himself. This ultimate act may be seen not only as an outcome of the devastating effects of the internment on the health and sanity of individuals long after the ordeal was over but as a private and quick way to deliver justice speedily. The inability of the Government to give justice to the Japanese or the inability of the Japanese community to unite and collectively fight the government for justice translates into the dreadful act of genocide as a means to bring justice swiftly. Yano’s frustration was perhaps heightened by the fact that his wife cheated on him for a Hakujin or a White. Here the white man’s name becomes immaterial because he stands to represent an enemy race that denied the Japanese many human rights and destroyed their lives and dreams.
The idea of justice is dealt with in an interesting manner the novels under discussion. The whole purpose of writing the novels was to bring justice to the Japanese people in Canada. *Obasan’s* success and Kogawa’s activism helped the process of Redress. The concept of justice is central to both Kogawa and Sakamoto though their approaches are different. Kogawa highlights the internment, dislocation and relocation of the Japanese and brings out the contrast of the two generations of Japanese in Canada. The silence of the Issei compared to the vocal outpouring of the Nisei. By the end of *Itsuka*, the elusive ‘someday’ actually arrives and Redress is celebrated. One can actually claim to be a real Canadian. In this sense justice is achieved. Sakamoto too never abandons the experience of internment, but the delayed justice is achieved in a violent manner. At some point the yearning for justice at a personal level merges with the apparent elusiveness of justice for the Japanese in Canada. There is no celebration at the end of *The Electrical Field*, as Redress had not been achieved and justice still not delivered, but the thirst for justice is quenched in a rather perverted way at the personal level with death as the final answer to deception and betrayal.

An assortment of themes seems to surface as one analyses the books under study. The primary search for and establishment of identity in a foreign land through the discriminations faced, conflicts and confrontations at multiple levels, with fighting different patterns of isolation in society to being shunted off outside society to ghost towns and remote camps during the war, not to mention the travails and tribulations faced by women and the need and hope for justice, the Japanese Diaspora writing in Canada has seen it all. Ultimately with Redress the concept of ‘home’ and ‘country’ arise. Though both are in reality old concerns that touched the life of the immigrant right from the early stages of settlement, their importance as social factors may be explored and their relevance reviewed since the Government of Canada had apologised.
and offered compensation to the Japanese people in 1988. What exactly were the new notions of ‘home’ or ‘country’? Or for that matter, what were the old?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word ‘home’ is the ‘place where one lives’, it can also mean ‘native land.’ Taking off from this point, home is the place of origin and at the same time the place where one lives. Complexity arises in this situation with the increase in the movement of people from one land to another. The concept of migration or of the Diaspora is an ancient one. When one leaves his place of birth or native place to work in a new land, one is in fact leaving his home and at the same time making a new one. As Bill Ashcroft et al say in *The Post-Colonial Reader*:

“The situation of the increasingly large number of diasporic peoples throughout the world further problematizes the idea of ‘exile’. Where is the place of ‘home’ to be located for such groups? In the place of birth (nateo), in the displaced cultural community into which the person is born, or in the nation-state in which this diasporic community is located?” (93)

For the Japanese who left their homes much like the Chinese before them who sailed to Canada, the notion of leaving home and coming all the way to a distant snow clad country was surely a daunting one. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the Issei grandmother Naoe cannot forget her happy and prosperous days in Japan unlike the Issei grandmother obasan in *Obasan*, who believed in the goodness of life in Canada and forgiving and forgetting the past. The attitude of the first generation of immigrants or the Issei who migrated from Japan and lived in many homes in many nations is interestingly varied. In fact the response to the idea of home is divergent among the Japanese community, not only across the different generations but also within the same generation of migrants. The issue of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ are also naturally interrelated and to examine how the Japanese characters in the books under study respond is thought provoking.
The Issei, it would be imagined, should feel most at home in Japan, long left behind and in leading a life in Canada that would remind them of Japan. Such an attitude is seen clearly in Naoe the grandmother of Murasaki in Chorus of Mushrooms. Naoe cannot quite forget her happy days in Japan when she lived in luxury in a carefree and secure atmosphere.

I remember so well, the soft spring breeze rustling *midori* green bamboo leaves. *Sara sara sara.* Gentle as wish, as thought and certainly no need to challenge it with my voice. A breath of leaves. My sticky child feet slapping *bata bata* the freshly laid *tatami* sweet as straw. My brother and I drank *misoshiru* from black lacquer bowls and crunched daikon left over from the pickling bins...Waiting for Okasan to bring our rice and Otosan to come home. For the cicadas to cry *tsuku tsuku boshi, tsuku tsuku boshi* and the cat to jump up on the verandah. (5)

This delicate, charming and idle world is Naoe’s home. Her world and her home are only reminiscences now. Lost forever in the abyss of time but treasured forever in the recesses of the mind. Her lost world is a beautiful world of bamboo leaves and healing breeze replete with the sound of the cicada, the bouncing of the cat and the rustling of the bamboo grass in the breeze, where the innocence of childhood merges with the beauty and mildness of the natural world. Where the most cherished food is consumed with passion and love and could now only be recalled by using words in a language that she hardly heard. The shade of green of the bamboo around her could only be described in her native tongue, ‘*midori*’, the sound she made with her feet, could only be echoed by her native vocabulary, ‘*bata bata*’, the food she relished was Japanese food and the company that gave her comfort and the warmth of love was that of her brother and her mother and father who she could best describe in her own loved native tongue, her ‘Okasan’ and her ‘Otosan.’ Her Okasan gave her rice, the staple food of the Japanese while her father, Otosan the provider gave her security and she waited for him to come home. This picture perfect world is her idea of home, where the language spoken and
the food eaten or the natural surroundings were all Japanese. Her idea of home and comfort is suitably described by her:

When there is food and song and happy myths told long into the night. When you sleep beneath blankets made of silk. I could only trust what I had known in the house of my father. (9)

On the contrary in her new home in Canada,

My words are only noises in this place I call home. (11)

Naoe’s state of mind is understandable. Like the Issei who came before her she could never perceive a sense of belonging to Canada. When circumstances force her to leave Japan and seek shelter in Canada, she can only find solace in leading a secret life where she reinvents her life in Japan. This happens when she recounts stories of Japan to her granddaughter Murasaki or when she tucks into salted squid, ‘osenbei’ and crisp rice crackers dipped in soya sauce in bed in the early hours of the morning unknown to the rest of the house. She tries to make a home out of her house by speaking to Murasaki in Japanese and reconnecting with her roots by remembering the days gone and never to return. Towards the end of the novel she abandons her daughter’s house and seeks a life of her own where she gobbles Japanese food at the first opportunity and gets into a series of adventures to beat the boredom and staleness of routine life.

If Naoe’s penchant for freedom from the closed atmosphere of her westernized daughter’s house and inclination to rebuild the Japanese way of life is considered more of a typical Issei response to the Canadian way of life, then Obasan in Kogawa’s Obasan is quite the opposite and yet she and her husband Isamu despite being Isseis and diametrically opposite to Naoe actually epitomise the intrinsic values of the Issei and build their home along those lines.
Obasan and Uncle Isamu, though thoroughbred Japanese themselves, exhibit their loyalty to Canada which is unflinching. ‘Home’ to them despite the atrocities faced, which include the seizure of their boats, property and all belongings and a wretched life in the ghost town of Slocan followed by dispersal to Alberta, is not in distant Japan long left behind but the new country, the country of work and food, Canada. Isamu never tires of praising the country that gave them food and medicine. Obasan is all for forgiveness. She believes that:

‘Everything is forgetfulness’ (26)

Naomi says that her language of grief is silence. (14) She does not crave for her long lost native country and neither does she remember with nostalgia the days gone by. Unlike Naoe she does not tell her grandchildren about the wonderful days spent in Japan. She is the wise mother who faces life bravely and accepts its trials and tribulations. Though she too treasures many a Japanese trivia, like her husband she too considers Canada to be her real home. With her stoical attitude and reluctance to betray her trauma, she exhibits traits characteristic of the Japanese.

About her, Naomi says,

Over the years, silence within her small body has grown large and powerful. (14) She shows her ‘Japaneseness’ not by lapsing into reminiscences but by imbibing Japanese values of patience, gratitude and fortitude. She builds many homes, first in Japan, then in Canada before the war, in the remote town of Slocan alone with two small children, in Alberta after the war and then again with her husband after the dispersal of the Japanese post-Second World War.
To the Nisei or second generation of immigrants, home is usually Canada, the country of birth and cultural familiarity. To Aunt Emily, home is Canada, Japan was close to her heart and the cause of the Japanese in Canada the purpose of her life, but her identification and sense of belonging was related to being a Canadian. Her grudge against the Canadian government was its apathy to its own people, the Japanese Canadians. Such was her faith in the Canadian way of life that she believed that the story of Momotaro the Peach boy was a Canadian story and not only a Japanese myth. Home to Murasaki and her mother Keiko, in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, is Canada, the country of their birth. Keiko, a Nisei adopts the English language and Canadian way of life. Murasaki her daughter is a Sansei or third generation Japanese in Canada. Murasaki’s attachment to Canada is again most natural. Though her role is seen as that of a negotiator between two cultures, she strangely does not outrightly reject her Japanese roots like her mother. To Keiko the Nisei, Canada is home and everything else. In Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café*, Mui Lan can never forget life in China, the men in Chinatown appear like stone to her. The customs and traditions of old China still beckon her. When uneasy or in a state of frustration, she imagines what life would be like had she been in China. How she would be gossiping with old women and eating melon seeds instead of being bottled up in Canada and leading a life that was unfamiliar and way too liberal for her.

To the second or third generation of immigrants the whole act of life becomes a matter of balancing two cultures. Miyo the Sansei girl in *One Hundred Million Hearts*, cannot fit in comfortably in Tokyo though it is in her native land and she yearns to go back to Canada and to hear English being spoken. (71) In *The Chorus of Mushrooms*, Naoe’s constant prattle about Japan and constant bickering about her daughter’s westernised life probably add to the latter’s unconscious distancing from her Japanese
culture. Keiko’s preference for the English language over Japanese, her preference of Canadian food over Japanese food is perhaps accelerated by her mother’s complete disgust for them. It is interesting to note that once her mother has quit the house, Keiko’s realization of the values of her Japanese culture dawn upon her. The westernised Keiko who along with her husband Keiko deliberately rejected her native culture and who only cooked ‘cheese and macaroni’ relishes Japanese food that too eaten with chop sticks! However much the succeeding generation of Japanese in Canada adapt to life there, their innate affinity to their roots cannot be denied. The case of Kaz in The Electrical Field, who planted a Sakura tree in his courtyard and treasured it with pride is a point or for the matter that of Asako in the same book who cooked Japanese food and kept house like a typical Japanese woman despite living for so long in Canada. On the contrary, Chisako who came from Japan and did not go through internment shows signs of preferring the Canadian way of life rather than the Japanese. The innate genetic impulse is obviously strong enough to contend the impact of the environment.

This actually brings one to the question of which factor actually influences a person more -- the environment or one’s roots. A reading of the books under scrutiny reveals that both work with great intensity on the community. The environment and so called place of ‘cultural displacement’ has a great impact on the second generation who are more drawn to the Canadian way of life. If Keiko wishes to be identified by her Canadian-ness due to her dislike for things Japanese, Emily wishes to identify with Canada because she feels a strong bonding with it. None really reject their roots. Emily is thoroughly Japanese and Keiko senses her closeness to her roots after the shock of losing her mother.
The Japanese immigrant has multiple identities and also multiple homes. If home is where one lives then Canada the country and the different places in it where they live will be their home. Asako builds a very Japanese home in Canada after the internment and dispersal. Her home with her ailing father and brother and then his girlfriend is her real home. Her heart bleeds for her dead brother; her possessiveness of her younger brother and closeness to her father are all part of her notion of home. Home then rises above the physical dimension and enters a space of emotion and individual identity. The thought of her little brother who she mothered, leaving her for a woman and settling down on his own away from her is devastating to her. She imagines her home being truncated and incomplete. She tries to reconcile to the fact that this was the order of the world, but found it difficult to accept. The towering electrical posts, the field, the neighbourhood, the Japanese houses and well kept gardens are all part of her concept of home which she treasures. There is no clash between the environment and the Japanese culture in her world or home. The clash takes place in her friend’s house, the house of Chisako, the breath taking beauty who came from Japan to live with her uncouth husband, Yano.

The clash in Chisako’s life was at two complex levels. At first with her husband who was Japanese and with whom she did not share a compatible relation and the second which was a fallout of the first, her affair with a White which led to a clash of cultures and more within her home. Chisako breaks her home in a subtle and unintended manner while her husband completely obliterates it. Consumed with passion and tired of her husband, she enters the dreaded territory of adulteration with a Hakujin. An affair with a White is perhaps not as terrible as it appears, but to her husband it meant betrayal in many ways, of the marriage, of the race and of the sanctity of the home. The only solution for him then was to destroy everything and find peace in the
greater silence of eternity. The silence of the Japanese so much a part of their nature and existence acquires a different meaning as home, family, love, trust and faith fall victim to the shattering of bullets and silence things forever.

Home to the Japanese was indeed a personal creation. They lived in many homes and built their lives in adjustment to society. The Issei were forever grateful and adjusting. Given their nature, they were non complaining and almost stoical in their attitude. It is ironical and tragic that their hard work and unflinching loyalty was never really accepted by Canadian society until much later. The writings of the Japanese writers are testimony to the fact that they were looked upon as unwanted and unreliable elements in Canadian society. Instead of upholding their admirable skills and readiness to develop Canadian society, they were mostly looked upon with suspicion and contempt and were interned, dispersed, denied the franchise and even deported mercilessly. The Japanese despite all their efforts have had to bear the burden of being identified as Japanese–Canadians, a hyphenated identity in spite of many years of stay, toil and immense contribution to Canadian life. The Nisei, Sansei, Gosei and subsequent generations have sometimes even lost touch with their native tongue or country and have merged effortlessly into Canadian life and society. The process has involved an adoption of the language and ways of the Canadian people and a gradual loss of the native. Though some characters like Emily in Itsuka or Miyo in One Hundred Million Hearts have made the reverse journeys to visit the country of their origin, they have come back to what they have considered home – Canada. The eagerness to identify with Canada has given them a new identity but the sad loss of their original culture seems to torment all the Japanese Canadian writers and the theme of loss in its many shades string their works together into a sad melody.
The theme of loss is all pervasive in Kogawa’s writings. *Obasan* and *Itsuka* are focused primarily on the interpretation of Japanese history from the experience of the Japanese during the Second World War and after, including the struggle for Redress. The theme of loss runs in an agonizing silence through them. The losses suffered by the Japanese were many, the loss of home, property, family, innocence and identity to name only a few. When in *Obasan*, the Katos and the Nakanes, families on Naomi’s father’s and mother’s side come to Canada, they have already lost a lot but are happy to settle down and make Canada home. With Naomi’s mother’s disappearance, and the war, the family suffers a fragmentation. The loss of the mother’s presence in Naomi’s life is irreparable and haunts her throughout life until she learns the unpleasant truth much later. She was as she says, ‘Devoured alive’ everyday by the mystery of her mother’s sudden exit from life. (26) When old man Gower molest her, she is unable to even realize the significance of his perverted act and in her innocence attributes the pain experienced to the vacuum in her life due to the absence of her mother in her life. Though her aunt, Obasan steps into the maternal role willingly, Naomi never confides this ugly truth of her life to her and carries the burden of a strange guilt in her heart believing that the horrible experience was due to the absence of her mother in her life and she was somehow to blame for it. Naomi’s family life is further shattered with the attack on Pearl Harbour by the Japanese in December, 1941. Slowly she witnesses the steady loss of home and belongings in a most pathetic manner. Uncle’s boat is seized, all property taken away and the family segregated and sent off to different places, her father to New Denver and she with uncle Isamu and Obasan and her brother Stephen move to Kaslo. She does not see Aunt Emily for four years. Her uncle receives a letter where it is ordered that:
Beds, tables, stoves, stools, and all fixtures must be left in house or rooms you are now occupying. (173)

If the loss of an integrated family life was not agonizing enough, the loss of their carefully built home was now coming apart. Their Japanese friends and acquaintances are similarly segregated and along with family life, community life is also lost. The loss of an entire way of life and its alarming consequences on a people is brought out in a candid manner in *Obasan*. The strange personality that Stephen develops, shy of his roots and distant from his family are again a fallout of the Canadian government’s deliberate policy of isolating the Japanese people during the war and segregating them later. Emily’s outrage, Naomi’s inability to fall in love or openly express her feelings towards Cedric or get married, *Obasan*’s silent endurance are all linked to the sad losses suffered in their lives as a community.

In *The Electrical Field*, Sakamoto draws another poignant picture of isolation and loss. The lives of all the characters are fragmented and isolated. Though Asako lives with her father and brother, she is a complete loner. The better part of her time is spent in reliving memories of her dead elder brother Eiji. Like Naomi and Aunt Emily in *Obasan*, she never married. Secretly in love with Yano, she does not even realize her feelings. Like Naomi whose relation with Father Cedric is destined never to mature to fullness, Asako’s love for Yano lies buried deep within her without her own realization of it. This failure to achieve success in love or to even express it clearly but lead a life of isolation can also be attributed to the agony and pain experienced by the generation during the internment and which left a terrifying scar on them preventing them from forging new relations. Emily’s life was spent in pursuing the cause of Redress, Naomi though a teacher and an activist could not build a home of her own. Asako, secretly in
love with Yano, her friend’s husband ultimately betrays him to the police. By the end of the book she is frail and dependent on her brother Stum and his fiancée Angel.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the void in the grandmother’s life could only be filled by quitting her daughter’s household and on going on a road adventure that climaxes rather dramatically. Keiko her daughter is bed ridden on the disappearance of her mother and the responsibility of the household falls on the shoulders of the young Murasaki. Naoe attempts to solve the problem of her disillusionment in her daughter’s house in a daring manner. To go on a road adventure and strike up a new friendship is romantic and quite unbelievable at her age. But she belonged to the generation who came for adventure and good life. She overcomes her isolation and sense of loss by indulging herself in things which gave her pleasure --- Japanese food, the company of an adventurous man, Tengu and finally in the exotic bull ride in the Calgary stampede, whereby she actually jumps the fine line between an Asian and a Canadian and defeats her isolated status to identify with the culture of the land she had chosen to be her home.

Keiko loses her vitality with the disappearance of the mother and slips into a passive role. The cultural marriage Naoe initiated is kept going by her granddaughter Murasaki who can only see Canada as home. Untouched by the horrors of the internment, it was easier for the third generation or the sansei to lead a more normal life. This strain of hope emerges emphatically in the novels too. When Redress is attained, the Japanese are shown ecstatic. The ending of *Itsuka*, after the long struggle for justice is sheer poetry.

And I’m thinking of Uncle’s words and the words of an old man in Slocan…”But itsuka, some day, the time for laughter will come.” (279)
That hope and that ‘time for laughter’ comes, according to the book after attaining Redress. No wonder, Naomi says,

I can hear the waves from childhood rippling outwards to touch other children who wait for their lives…It speaks through memory, through dream, through our hands, our words, our arms, our trusting. I can hear the sound of the voice that frees, a light, steady, endless breath. I can hear the breath of life…Thank you for this. (279)

The ‘children’, she talks about are the future generation of Japanese whose lives she hopes will be less harsh. To a race of people who faced restrictions and discriminations all through life, the greatest gift can only be freedom and that is why Naomi in her relief and ecstasy, can hear ‘the voice that frees’. What the Issei suffered for and the Nisei fought for, the Sansei and the generations to follow would reap and enjoy. It is on this note of hope that Itsuka ends. Murasaki has the luxury to combine two cultures, her grandmother lived in discomfort in an unfamiliar hostile culture, her mother was trapped between two and developed an awkward attitude to her own roots, while knowing she could never really belong to the culture of the host land. Perhaps the freedom dreamt of by Naomi can be lived by Murasaki, Miyo, Stum and Angel. Perhaps, ‘itsuka’ the ‘time for laughter’ had begun to arrive.

With Canada’s adoption of the multicultural policy in 1981 and wide welcoming of people of all races, the matter of acceptance in white society has partially been fulfilled. With inter racial marriages and people of Japanese origin occupying positions of importance in social, political and public life, Uncle Isamu’s dream may have come true. The infusion to the Canadian way of life could spell the loss of the Japanese way and the slow death of Japanese culture, remaining alive only in the celebration of certain festivals and rituals. It would be the responsibility of the generations to follow to strike that right balance and keep both cultures alive so that every Japanese person in
Canada could be equally, Japanese and equally Canadian and truly live up to their Japanese-Canadian identity. Though as Fred Wah said in *The Diamond Grill*, race divides but nation unites; in Murasaki, Stum and Angel it is hoped that while retaining their Japanese cultural values they would be called Canadians and when their stories are written, they would be about Canadians and not about Japanese-Canadians alone.

Like the Canadian writers of Chinese ancestry, the Canadian writers of Japanese ancestry also write about life in Canada and the experiences of their people in Canada. Their writings should not be clubbed only as ‘Japanese-Canadian writing’ as it gives a narrow and parochial view of Canadian writing. Instead the writings of Kogawa, Goto, Sakamoto and the many contributors to Canadian literature who are of Japanese descent should be brought under the fold of Canadian writing in order to reflect the grand perspective of Canadian writing and the glorious mosaic that it represents. Canadian writing is in fact as much the writings of its white citizens as it is of its many Diaspora. To parenthesize these landmark writings as mere ‘Diaspora writing’ or ‘Japanese-Canadian’ writing would mean doing grave injustice to Canadian literature and writing. Like the Canadian citizens of Chinese ancestry, those of Japanese ancestry too should be embraced within the larger folds of Canadian writing as they represent different facets of Canadian life and literature. Such a step would not lead these writings to lose their uniqueness but would enhance the magnitude of Canadian literature and widen its scope. They could in fact fill up the gaps and spaces in the bigger body of Canadian literature by providing the missing pieces of the mosaic puzzle that Canada presents.
ENDNOTES


5. Ibid.


12. Ibid.