Chapter 4

REPRESENTATION OF JAPANESE AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE: HISAYE YAMAMOTO
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The first generation Japanese immigrants, known in the Japanese American community as *issei*, were mostly poor farmers and labourers with little or no knowledge of English. They were busy in their day-to-day struggle for survival and were not able to record their experience in works of literature. Their children, known as *nisei*, grew up mainly in the 1930s and 1940s in a bicultural environment. They had acquired English well and began to write down their experience in memoirs, autobiographies and fictional writings, obviously from the point of view of their community.

S. Frank Miyamoto describes the differences by which one can distinguish the two generations. The *issei* in their social interactions maintained traditional decorum of behaviour (like bowing, talking about the network of familial or societal relations, ritual acknowledgement of obligations incurred and to be incurred, and the like) and talked with the "soft modulations" peculiar to Japanese language. Miyamoto observes:

> And in the networks (of social relations) one tended to observe the play of what Chie Nakane has called the vertical structure of Japanese society, the tendency to grant special rights, privileges, and authority to those in higher status: elders over youths, males over females, employers over employees, and teachers over students.¹

By contrast, the *nisei* 'subculture' was one of alienation. The *nisei* could speak English with American accent; they were familiar with popular American songs and could dance with the latest dance steps. Their idols were Babe Ruth, Joe Di Maggio, Clark Gable, and Katharine Hepburn. They attended 'American' schools. But, as Miyamoto rightly notes, they were socially isolated from white American society, and participated only...
marginally in it. The works of Yamamoto and Sone demonstrate this basic element of two-way alienation in the mental make-up of the nisei.

In Japanese American writings one finds a constant intersection between the experiences of two generations. Their internment during the Second World War was perhaps the most traumatic experience for them. It had generated a rich crop of autobiographical and fictional works. As Wakako Yamauchi, the author of And the Souls Shall Dance, observes in an interview:

I don’t think you can write about the Nisei and not include the internment experience in some way. It would be like writing about Black Americans and ignoring slavery and the Civil War, about European Jews and denying Holocaust. The incarceration profoundly dominated Nisei lives.

The historical experience of internment, which is found in many nisei writings, is thus central to the understanding of their works. Attainment of selfhood through interrogation of their lived individual and community experience as immigrants constitutes the main element in the Japanese American literature. We find a large number of autobiographies and other writings with overt or covert autobiographical elements. The works of the two particular authors under review here are no exceptions.

Both Sone and Yamamoto are nisei ‘daughters’. Both underwent internment experience during the Second World War. They were writing at the same time, about the same sort of Japanese American experience and raised similar issues of individual and community interests. They wrote about the issei generation and issei culture from the nisei perspectives. Themes like generation gap within the community, inter-ethnic relationship, assimilation and identity problem in the new world and gender consideration figure prominently in their works. Internment experience itself triggers important questions. But despite all these similarities, their worldviews are different. To be sure, the world they depicted is ethnicity-specific. But Yamamoto is also
specifically concerned with gender issues. Sone examines the uncertain immigration space and is not primarily bothered about the question of gender subordination in the ethnic community. She examines the cultural assumptions that construct Japanese/Japanese American womanhood in contrast to those that construct white American womanhood, and finds the latter appropriate for the purpose of assimilation. On the other hand, Yamamoto, whose stories are set mainly in the pre-War or post-War rural America, is intensely gender-conscious. She exposes the cultural construction of male superiority and disempowerment of the female. Feminine attempts at self-fulfilment are discouraged and violently put down in a society regulated by norms determined by patriarchy. Although she writes mainly about the Japanese immigrant community in America, she does not seem to find any vital difference in situations prevalent in different ethnic groups, and even in the white communities. In her short story “Eucalyptus” Toke Gonzales, the narrator, voices her concern about the roots of “our (i.e. female) malaise” and wonders whether it lies buried in “the ways we (women in general) are nurtured or not nurtured.” The use of the word ‘nurture’ and the passive construction of the sentence suggest an absence of choice. Although Yamamoto’s stories were written before the first crop of feminist writings proper made their appearance in America and although she “seems to dislike theoretical discussion of her fiction,” her fictional works sensitise the issue of gender subordination in Japanese immigrant community in America. In this chapter we shall first take up Japanese American women writers’ treatment of the immigration issue and then their treatment of the gender issue.
4.1 Immigration Perspectives

Yamamoto evokes the condition of the marginalized ethnic groups in the socio-political space in the US. Although the role of the white communities is not specifically mentioned in many of her stories, the power they wield is palpably felt. In stories like "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" the power and authority of the white Americans loom large in the background. Yamamoto subtly suggests that there is a possibility of good understanding among different ethnic groups in America. Such a possibility is, however, foiled by mutual misunderstanding that exists among the marginalized groups. Social situations within the country and political developments in the international arena often create divisions. With a clearer understanding of these situations, the existing misunderstanding can be overcome.

The story "Wilshire Bus" describes a bus journey. The bus is symbolic of the USA as a nation, which accommodates people of different ethnic groups. There is, however, a simmering tension among ethnic communities. This is brought out by the behaviour of a white passenger in the bus. In an inebriated state he unleashes virulent racist insults against an old Chinese American couple. He repeatedly asked them to "go back where you came from". He continued:

Why don't you go back to China, where you can be coolies working on your bare feet out in the rice fields? You can let your pigtails grow and grow in China. Alla samee, mama, no tickee no shirtee. Ha, pretty good, no tickee, no shirtee!?

It is clear from the above comment that a deep racist prejudice lies dormant in his mind, which comes out in the open when he is drunk. Estha, the narrator, remembers a wisecrack she heard earlier: "People say, do not regard what he says, now he is in liquor". On the contrary, she comments, it is perhaps the only time he ought to be regarded to be truthful because he is off his guard of any pretence at that moment. A
white passenger who sympathized with the couple of course asserted that all white Americans were not like that drunk man, and then affirmed his faith in America as a "melting pot of all sorts of people", he himself being of Scotch and French origin. However, this did not carry much conviction for Estha. She thought of the War times when Japanese Americans were interned. She also felt that a lack of fellow feelings among the "Orientals" in America stood in the way of any solidarity and coalition among the marginalized groups. She remembered that soon after her return to Los Angeles from concentration camps in Arkansas she looked benignly from a bus at "a fellow Oriental" but was taken aback by the sign on his button that read, "I AM KOREAN". There were at that time similar buttons with the words "I AM CHINESE". Such buttons and other signs were devised during the War to distinguish Chinese Americans and Korean Americans from Japanese Americans whose country of origin had bombed Pearl Harbour in Hawaii. The distinction between some Asian American ethnic groups is not very obvious to the white gaze, and hence other communities found out ways of distinguishing themselves from Japanese Americans. The lack of friendly contact and mutual warmth continued even after the War. Estha’s attempt to convey sympathy to the Chinese couple in the bus also failed. In response to Estha’s smile the Chinese female passenger presented a face "so impassive yet cold, and eyes so expressionless yet hostile that Estha’s overture fell quite flat." The racial boundaries even between people of two Asian nations were so formidable that any coalitional effort is indeed hard to succeed.

Indeed there are many instances of race-specific harassments in Yamamoto’s stories. There the persons who are responsible for the harassments are mostly drunk and are thus uninhibited. In the story "Las Vegas Charley" Kazuko Matsumoto, who later came to be known as Charley, was twice intercepted, once by a white American and
then by a Mexican, both of whom were drunk. In the first incident in Los Angeles’s Little Tokyo, just after the War, a white man shoved him against the wall and threatened to kill him. He, however, let Charlie go unharmed for reasons not very clear. On the other occasion a Mexican man, whose son had died in the War, accused that “You Japs keel him! Only nineteen years old and you Japs keel him! I’m going to keel you!” (72). Charlie, who had employed Mexican farmhands in his own farm, felt more comfortable with the Mexican perhaps because he sensed that Mexicans after all belong, like the Japanese themselves, to the periphery of power. Japanese involvement in the War had made the Japanese immigrants and Mexicans mutual foes in America. But Charley too had lost a son in the War which fact, when revealed, made the Mexican’s grip on his hand eased.

Yamamoto perceives similarities among people of Asian ancestries. In “Yoneko’s Earthquake” Yoneko, a young Japanese American girl, is intrigued by the fact that Marpo, a Filipino farmhand, is like a Japanese. He, for instance, eats rice just as a Japanese does. But she is at the same time overtaken by the ill repute of Filipinos as dog-eaters. Unable to hide her disgust, she asks Marpo whether they really eat dogs. Flashing an attractive smile, he replies, “Don’t be funny, honey!”10 This friendly reply dissipates the innocent girl’s suspicion. But the grown-ups, particularly the male members, often prefer to focus on ethnic differences rather than on similarities. They hardly realize that in America they need to have a good inter-ethnic relationship. Mr. Hosoume, Yoneko’s father, for instance, stereotypes the Filipinos as indolent and chides his daughter for wearing extravagantly bright flamingo nail polish like a Filipino. His comment “You look like a Filipino” is followed by the narratorial comment – “for it was another irrefutable fact among Japanese in general that Filipinos in general were a gaudy lot.”11 Mrs. Hosoume contests her husband’s comment by pointing out that even
young girls in Japan wear nail polish, and in the process incurs her husband’s wrath. Through this trivial incident Yamamoto seems to point out that both the issei mother and the nisei daughter are more open-minded than the issei father. In Yamamoto’s stories women like them are more qualified to establish closer links with people outside their own community. In “Brown House” also it is Mrs. Hattori who points out her husband’s hypocrisy about black men. Even though the husband has no “compunction” about gambling together with a black man, he objects when he finds a black man taking refuge in their car to save himself from being arrested during a police raid on the gambling house.

Yamamoto does not take a naïve, sweeping view about inter-racial relationship. She problematizes it to offer us a glimpse of the complicated nature of the issue. In “Life among the Oil Fields – a Memoir” (1979) she mentions how callously a white couple knocked down the narrator’s brother on the street and denied their involvement in the accident and never visited the young boy in the hospital. The author finds a racial attitude in the incident and comments, “Were we Japanese in a category with animals then, to be run over and left beside the road to die?” In another story “Underground Lady” (1986) Yamamoto presents a homeless white American lady with an unbalanced mind who constantly imagines, and speaks of, threats from the Japanese people, even if they are American citizens. Obviously, she has a deeply ingrained racial suspicion against the Japanese. She alleges to the Japanese American lady in the story that her Japanese neighbour had burnt down her house, as he hated her. She informs that Stanley Onodera, her neighbour, worked for the Harbour Department and then comments, “What better way to infiltrate eh, to signal the Japanese in the World War II? Remember Pearl Harbor?” On enquiry, the narrator comes to know that Onodera is
about forty-five at that time. So he must have been about five at the most during the War, and therefore the ‘underground’ lady’s allegation is simply absurd.

Among people of Japanese descent American government’s decision to intern thousands of Japanese Americans as a result of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour in Hawaii triggered different reactions. To the issei who had a strong bond with the Japanese culture and little or no pull towards American mainstream culture, the decision did not appear to be very unusual. From their own immigrant experience they were convinced of white American prejudice and racial intolerance. They bore the trauma with patience and even indifference. But for the nisei it was predictably a very difficult experience in view of their own cultural position. While they were strongly imbued with American cultural norms, they were equally exposed to their parents’ influence at home. Their food habit remained Japanese. Stories of nisei authors are usually replete with culinary references. Charley in “La Vegas Charley” mentions that the nisei are ‘Americanized’ now, and then clarifies that “while most of them still liked to eat their boiled rice, raw fish and pickled vegetables, they usually spend New Year’s Eve in some night club.”¹⁴ So they have retained their ethnic food habits but have also picked up social practices in course of their interactions with the mainstream culture. There is a perceptible hybridization in the habits of the nisei. But Charlie and his wife Haru, like other issei people, spent the occasion in Japanese style in their own community.

Yamamoto has brought out dissensions that existed within different sections of the Japanese American community with regard to the War and the incarceration that followed it. For the kibei (Japanese born in America but raised in Japan) the internment was a source of a serious psychological dilemma. They were American citizens but usually had an inadequate knowledge of English and American culture for which they were looked down upon by the nisei. Some kibei refused to be drafted in the American
army and decided to return to Japan. Some others showed over-enthusiasm to fight for America, thereby trying to show their loyalty to the country. Charlie’s first son Isamu unhesitatingly volunteered to join the all-Japanese group in the US army and was killed in Italy. He, like his younger brother Noriyuki, was a kibei. But Noriyuki, unlike his brother, ‘decided in favour of Japan’ and refused to be drafted in the American army. He was, therefore, sent to Tule Lake for deportation to Japan. He, however, revised his decision later as he had been in love with a nisei girl. Charley, their father, was an issei and therefore was not an American citizen. He adapted to the ‘heat and dust and mud storm’ of the concentration camp and was ironically willing to stay in the camp:

As for himself, he would be quite content to remain in the camp the rest of his life – free food, free housing, friend, flower cards; what more could life offer? It was true that he had partially lost hearing in one ear, from standing by those hot stoves on days of unbearable heat, but that was a small complaint. The camp hospital had provided free treatment, free medicines, free cotton-balls to staff in his bad ear.

The incisive irony that lies behind the garb of apparent gaiety and satisfaction is not lost. Apart from the inhospitable terrain where the concentration camp was situated and the physical harm (partial loss of hearing) his job had done to him, the camp life for the issei had also encouraged lethargy. Moreover, the real nature of the free hospital or free ‘housing’ is provided in another story entitled “The Legend of Miss Sasagawara”. Miss Sasagawara was examined in the makeshift camp hospital. The condition of the hospital is revealed through very casual references given in parenthesis in the text. Dr. Moritomo’s professional title was technically ‘premature’ as the “evacuation had caught him with a few months to go on his degree.” Dr. Kawamoto, the other doctor, was a “trembling” old man who had retired “several years before the war.” As to the ‘free’ housing we may note that Miss Sasagawara’s ‘apartment’ was “really only a cubicle because the once empty barracks had soon been partitioned off into six units for families of two.” Michi Weglyn comments in Years of Infamy that evacuees “ate
King-Kok Cheung points out that Miss Sasagawara's decision to dine and shower alone seems eminently sensible in the above context of total lack of privacy. All these details, scattered innocuously in the stories, become significant when considered in larger perspectives. Stan Yogi mentions that in 1949 when Yamamoto's stories were first published the "World War II was still a fresh memory, and the antagonistic attitudes towards the Japanese Americans that landed them in internment camps during the war still remained." He also says that through the use of narrators with limited perspectives Yamamoto develops 'buried plots', veiled means of conveying stories, stories with meanings that hint at powerful undercurrents. The Japanese American point of view needed to be told with utmost care and caution. The community was slowly recovering from the trauma of internment, and the second generation was trying to protect, through silence, the later generation from shame and ignominy. The *issei* were not American citizens but they paid taxes and contributed to the overall development of the country. They had strong ties with the 'home' culture, a natal bond that made them susceptible to mainstream suspicion and hostility. But the *nisei* were more inclined towards the white American culture, and they had little or no contact with Japan. The internment came as a great shock to them because they considered the incarceration decision as a great betrayal. The *nisei*, who were born and brought up in America and were American citizens, went through a severe identity crisis. Kristine C. Kuramitsu writes:

... for years a heavy a silence hung over the 1940s; in many families, parents attempted to keep the fact that they had been interned from their children. When these children took part in the community empowerment in the 1970s, they were startled to find that these camps had existed. Anger against their country for its racism and their parents for their acquiescence welled up in the *Sansei* (third-generation Japanese Americans).
Both Monica Sone and Hisaye Yamamoto started the process of breaking the silence in the early 1950s.

The internment experience, as may be expected, became a constant reference point for Japanese American writers who began to speak out rather late. Years later Gene Oishi, a writer of Japanese origin, speaks of the emotional effect of the episode: “I began that most important aspect of my research was not knowledge but my emotional reactions to it. I could finally shed those tears that I could not shed as a child.”

Hongo points out that the nisei wanted for their children “no heritage, no culture, no contact with a defiled history.” The nisei tended to shed their own past and were psychologically preparing themselves for a new post-internment life. According to Hongo, the distancing from their own history and all things Japanese was necessary for them to “make their way back” into the American social and economic life. This psychology is very much evident in Kazuko Itoi, “anglicized as the author Monica Sone.” We shall come to that later.

Both Sone and Yamamoto testify that the camp life was a prisoner’s life. Many bore it with a shikata ga nai (“can’t be helped”) mentality. Hardly did anyone find beauty in the relocation centres. The most poetic-minded among the inmates tried to find some consolation in natural objects like a mountain far beyond the barbed wire. Kazuko’s mother in Nisei Daughter was upbeat at the prospect of moving to Area D from Area A because she could see mountain peaks from Area D barrack doors on a clear day. Tongo Tanaka in Voices Long Silent comments, perhaps a bit ironically, that while his own eyesight in the Manzanar camp was fixed on the “barbed wire and the armed guards and the watchtower”, one of his fathers-in-law, an artist, “could see only the beauty of Mt. Whitney and Mt. Williamson and painted these things. Out of the experience in Manzamar came a great deal of beauty in his life.” Seen from the
hindsight, however, most writers found in the camp experience a repository of huge emotional associations. Yamamoto, for instance, experienced an emotional upsurge years after the incarceration:

The camp experience... is an experience in our collective life which wounded us more painfully than we realize. I didn't know myself what a lump it was in my subconscious until a few years ago when I watched one of the earlier television commentaries on the subject, narrated by the mellow voice of Walter Cronkite. To my surprise I found the tears trickling down my cheeks and my voice squeaking out of control, as I tried to explain to my amazed husband and children why I was weeping.

Wakako Yamauchi, a close friend of Yamamoto and a reputed writer, was interned in the same Poston camp in Arizona. She made the following unforgettable comment:

The Sansei accused us of not wanting to talk about the evacuation experience. And it is true. I speak for hundreds of Nisei like myself, or perhaps just people like myself who are sometimes overwhelmed by a current of events we can neither understand nor stem.... And we do see those old photographs of the mass evacuation... we can see the mirror of our tragedy. Few of us can hold back those tears that most often smack of self-pity but may be somewhat behind those tears we know that this is the event that changed the course of our lives.... May be in our silence we ask you to honour (us) for that survival. We ask that you don't indulge us with pity, neither then nor now. The fact of our survival is proof of our valor. And that is enough.

A nisei girl’s anxiety for belonging to America is articulated in Monica Sone's autobiography Nisei Daughter. This anxiety and tension, along with identity crisis, were evident in the culturally hybrid nisei generation.

Monica Sone’s book is characterised by an eagerness to participate in the mainstream life. She was supposed to have a more direct contact with a large cross-section of white society and therefore a greater sense of ease in that society. S. Frank Miyamoto observes that an “American perception of the world” emerges in the first few pages of the book. Shirley Geok-lin Lim points out that white reviewers of the book had praised the author’s worldview while avoiding the “core story of American injustice
against Japanese Americans.”34 She cites the example of the review in The Christian Monitor. It largely ignores the main issue. The reviewer just mentions the author “brushes with race prejudice” and concludes that “Monica Sone’s book is an encouraging reminder of the melting pot at work, even under apparently unfavorable circumstances.”35 Kazuko Itoi, caught between two worlds, two contrasting models of socio-cultural norms, decided to move along the dominant paradigm. In doing so, she ignored and neglected some unpleasant memories of racial prejudice against her own community. With the advantage of hindsight, we may problematize her location in the cultural milieu of her time.

_Nisei Daughter_ is about Kazuko Itoi’s early childhood in Seattle, her experience of growing up as a Japanese American girl, her relocation experience in camps in Idaho, and thereafter her journey deeper into the heart of America in search of a meaningful personal life. There is a linear progression in the book. At the end of the book, we see her saying goodbye to her parents, still in the camp. This signals a new future for her in which her parents would not have any say. The book opens with “the shocking discovery” of Kazuko, then six-year-old, that she “had Japanese blood” (ND 3). Her mother announced one day that Kazuko and her brother would attend Japanese school after grammar school every day. The announcement was received with disgust, dismay and protest. Kazuko sensitises her own identity crisis right from that time onwards. She tried to figure out her own location in the two apparently mutually exclusive cultures. She is obsessed with a vision of bipolarity (‘Yankee’/Japanese) and in the end causes a sort of merger of the two. In course of her encounter with the dominant culture, she is subsumed by its homogenizing discourse. A sense of instability – and “inauthenticity” – constantly prodded her on to aspire after some sort of stability. She appeared to be
located in an in-between state which offered a better view of life to her than to those who were essentially monocultural.

So far cultural encounter is concerned, Chapter VII of Sone’s book entitled “Paradise Sighted” offers an excellent illustration. Kazuko was infected with tuberculosis for which she had to be admitted to a sanatorium. She was glad to be roomed with three white women, vibrant with speech, energy and hope. She blames her racial origin for her own depression. Here she underscores the superiority of the mainstream culture that had produced women like Hope, Wanda and Chris, her roommates, who, as she says, “did not hear my ideas about dying” (ND 137). The generalization is apparent when she says, “I thanked fate I was not rooming with three Japanese girls who would have had the same sense of futility as I did. We would have died together.” (ND 138). The encounter with the cultural values and attitudes of the dominant culture has thus affected a self-conscious scrutiny of her own values and she stressed the need for a change of her ethnic attitudes in order to be acculturated. She was confident of her ‘Americanization’ but she detected some ‘discrepancies’ in herself. The discovery of these discrepancies was ‘tiny shocks’ to her. Some pre-requisites of ‘Americanization’ were present in her; she could, for instance, speak English, she had no hesitation in using cosmetics which white American women wear. But deeply embedded in the Japanese cultural ideology as she was, Kazuko was slow to detect the ‘American’ proprieties of socializing, the norms of which were directed by the hegemonic culture. Japanese, and Japanese American women were brought up on the diet of feminine timidity, obedience, self-sacrifice and silence. Any deviance from these was considered extravagant and often dealt with severity. The nisei girls who always kept a low profile were a contrast to the loud white girls like Kazuko’s roommates. When Kazuko was introduced to Laura Wilson, she smiled one of her
‘most cordial smiles’ and said, “How do you do?” (ND 140). In the dining table the white girls “exchanged confidences” and were involved in most absorbed conversations while Kazuko “sat contentedly by, listening” (ND 140). Her silence was interpreted as “coldness” and “rudeness”. The difference in cultural norms – speech set against silence – became most evident. The privileging of speech over silence became for the first time most glaringly evident to Kazuko. She discovered her own deficiency in the images of Nami and Marie, the two nisei girls in the sanatorium who too were used to minimum of speech even with Kazuko. Kazuko said, “Their response was typically Japanese, and that was the way I behaved with Laura. No wonder Chris and Laura thought that I have been deliberately impolite” (ND 141). The two Japanese American girls thus served as a mirror for Kazuko who was clearly in the process of understanding the white cultural norms. But the white girls never tried to understand the differences and were offended by Kazuko’s failure to adapt to the norms. This failure also instilled a sense of inferiority in Kazuko but she traced its source to the Japanese cultural norms of how to become “modest maidens” (ND 141):

At home whenever I was introduced to friends, I always bowed low and said, “I meet you for the first time.” I did not lunge at the visitor and start cross-examining him. Instead, I sat down and never uttered a word unless the guest spoke to me. Then I would answer politely and briefly “yes” or “no”. The important thing was to sit quietly and let the other folks talk about what they wanted to talk about, smile agreeably at all times, and keep the guest’s tea cup brimming full (ND 142).

With such analysis Kazuko now proceeded to complete her “Americanization” process. The “perpetual rudeness” among the white inmates initially baffled her. She noted that the person nearest to the doorway went through first, while she herself always tried to let others precede her in entering or leaving a room. She invariably stood at the tail end of queues. When Kazuko gave up her image of being “the most polite person in the sanatorium”, nobody noticed the change but she herself felt more comfortable. Through
such trials, she supposedly achieved a high level of acceptability among the white American inmates. The sanatorium in fact becomes in her eyes an American crucible or some sort of “melting pot”. She observes, “They did not care that I looked different, said or did a few odd things because basically we liked each other. For the first time in my life I felt sheer happiness in being myself” (ND 143). This might well be a new beginning on Kazuko’s part. But Kazuko’s statement need not be taken at the surface value. She was accepted because she was willing to change her socio-cultural norms and adopt, or adapt to, the dominant normative paradigm of the American society. In reality, the difference in Japanese looks and all that it socio-culturally connotes, cannot be just wished away on the part of the white Americans. The white women felt comfortable as long as Kazuko’s behavioural norms conformed to their own, which is a way of stressing the need for homogenisation. But when she differed and behaved according to her own Japanese norms, it had a jarring effect on them, as is evident in Laura Wilson episode. The two other Japanese girls, with all their differences, remained in the background, ‘silent’ and silenced before the white American gaze. Outside in the wider socio-cultural life, the difference, both physical and cultural, cannot be easily erased as is evident from the long history of anti-Japanese sentiment in America.

Monica Sone describes the white racial prejudice in the pre-internment period in the book. She records the strong anti-Japanese feelings prevalent among the white Americans through some incidents in the pre-World War period. Kazuko and her mother were on the look out for a summer cottage near the Alki beach in Seattle. They were refused on one pretext or another. Most of the time they were told that the cottages have already been lent out. A landlady went to the extent of telling them that she did not “want Japs around here” (ND114). Kazuko as a nisei was greatly shocked by the revelation of this racist mentality. She found herself in confusion. She says, “All
day I had been torn apart between feeling defiant and then apologetic about my Japanese blood” (ND 115). She knew that there was a difference in citizenship status between her parents’ generation (issei) and that of her own (nisei). She was aware that “there was a law which said they (issei) could not become naturalized American citizens because they were Orientals” (ND 113). But she, like other members of her generation, was an American citizen and was not prepared to face the negative reality she confronted. The real picture began to emerge more clearly from now onwards. She observed carefully the divide between the issei and the nisei. Even among the nisei, difference of opinion and perception remained. Dick, a nisei, felt that in Japan he would be judged on merit, while in America he could only expect discrimination on ethnic grounds. He even left America to join a Japanese farm in Japan. He traced his intense dislike for America to a certain incident in which a white vegetable vendor shouted at him, “Ah, why don’t all of ya Japs go back to where ya belong, and stop cluttering up the joint” (ND 122). Everybody of Japanese descent was aware of the discrimination and racism that prevailed but going back to Japan was not an alternative either. Dick, it was felt, would find himself on a “social island” in Japan because the Japanese also hate the second generation Japanese Americans as well. Sone felt that they had distaste for their “crude American manners” (ND 123). Kazuko herself wondered whether they would have to beat their heads against the wall of prejudice all their lives (ND 124). But at the same time, she felt herself bound to the American soil by an “elemental instinct” – she was born in America and wanted to live in America. She was effusive about American freedom and “its brave hopes for a democracy” which, ironically, would soon be belied. As Pearl Harbour was bombed, its echoes were heard in Seattle. The community became tense and the nisei generation was caught in a syndrome of bipolarity. A Japanese American girl asked, “Do you think we’ll be considered
Japanese or Americans?” (ND 146). The Chinese Consul announced that the Chinese would carry identification cards and “China” badges to prove that they were not Japanese. FBI agents carried out raids in Japanese homes and business places and arrested prominent community leaders. All Japanese insignia were burnt down to avoid FBI harassment. There was also a growing demand from some quarters for wholesale arrest of all people of Japanese ancestry. Kazuko points out:

For years the professional guardians of the Golden West had wanted to rid their land of the Yellow Peril, and the war provided an opportunity for them to push their program through. As chain of Pacific islands fell to the Japanese, patriots shrieked for protection from us (ND 157).

Those who raised such anti-Japanese propaganda did not pay heed to Edgar Hoover’s special report to the War Department. It stated that there had not been a single case of sabotage committed by a Japanese living in Hawaii or on the Mainland during the Pearl Harbour attack or after (ND 158). Kazuko points out that there were “pressures from economic and political interests who would profit from such a wholesale evacuation” as ordered by General J.L. Dewitt of the Western Defence Command. She says that in the Hawaii the situation was different:

In Hawaii, a strategic military outpost, the Japanese were regarded as essential to the economy of the island and powerful economic forces fought against their removal. General Delos Emmons, in command of Hawaii at the time, put his authoritative voice to calm the fears of the people on the island and to prevent chaos and upheaval. General Emmons established martial law, but he did not consider evacuation essential for the security of the island (ND 159).

Kazuko and her family were first moved to Yokohama, Puyallup and then to Minnidoka in the midst of a vast Idaho prairie, where “the sun beats down fiercely”(ND 188). They were known as “Family # 10710.” In the camps there were total chaos initially. Camp quarters were not hospitable, food was below standard, and there was even an instance of severe food poisoning. The unusual activity of sick people rushing to the latrines at night roused the suspicion of the guards. Afraid of a possible uprising, they sent
messages for a plane, which arrived and hovered over the camp to investigate the commotion. Through such incidents Sone evokes the atmosphere of subjugation and mutual suspicion that prevailed at that time.

After such harrowing experience, one is expected to stonewall oneself against the mainstream discourses of all kinds. But it was a time when the “melting pot” idea was in operation and, as pointed out by Carnevale and Stone, cultural pluralism received scant public attention in the 1950s. Carnevale and Stone comment, “We were in fact more homogeneous than in earlier decades in some important aspects. Immigration percentages were spiraling downward. During the later, immigration had decreased and by the mid-1960s more than 95 percent of Americans were native born.”36 The demographic trends enhanced the tendency to conform to the mainstream norms. Kazuko, with a strong feeling of violation of her rights as an American citizen, blamed it only on a misguided section of white Americans. The ideological seepage of the dominant discourse made her ignore the plight of Japanese Americans and take an assimilatory stand. Kazuko mentions that in the camp “we had drifted farther and farther away from the American scene. We had been set aside, and we had become adjusted to our peripheral existence” (ND 197-8). She also knows that she had been robbed of her American ‘freedom’ because of her Japanese ancestry. However, the sense of trauma is overshadowed by her eagerness to “melt” into the mainstream.

The dominant discourse was activated in the camp life. Two examples, which may be mentioned, would testify to this. The Reverend Everett Thompson, a missionary who was in Japan for sometime and who could speak Japanese fluently, had an easy access to the community. He acted as an agent for changing the ideological outlook of the camp inmates: “Bit by bit our minister kept on helping us build the foundation for a
new outlook” (ND 185-6). He read from the Book of Psalms in unison, particularly the lines

Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee forever (ND 186).

This had a peaceful effect on the inmates. The Biblical discourse drugged the feeling of discontent and struck a chord of unity and it dawned gradually on some that they had not been physically mistreated nor would they be harmed in the future (ND 186). She ‘realized’ that “the greatest trial ahead of us would be of a spiritual nature” and that “the time had come when it was more important to examine our own souls, to keep our faith in God and help to build that way of life which we so desired” (ND 186). The desire to turn towards spirituality instead of castigating the socio-political factors in America indicates a self-deception on the part of the narrator.

An illusion of appropriating those on the margin into the centre was provided by the military discourse. Here the emphasis was on nationalism and patriotism. The decision of the US War Department to form an all-nisei special combat unit was widely interpreted as a decision to create a “suicide squad” (ND 186). The nisei also interpreted it as an attempt at segregation. The attention of the disgruntled nisei was drawn towards a Presidential statement which said that no ‘loyal’ citizen, regardless of ancestry, “should be denied the democratic right to exercise the responsibilities of his citizenship” (ND 198). The internment experience was effectively elided and the ideas of “democracy” and “Americanism” in their abstract forms were foregrounded. Kazuko was dazzled by the rhetorical excellence of the discourse which ran like the following:

The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and the heart. Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry. Every loyal citizen should be given the opportunity to serve this country wherever his skills will make the greatest contribution ...
whether it be in the ranks of our armed forces, war production, agriculture, Government service, or other work essential to the war effect (ND 199).

The army spokesman defended the decision of setting upon all-nisei combat unit as a necessary step to preserve “your significance as Nisei,” thus recognizing the importance of diversity in a multicultural society which they had earlier flouted. The spokesman’s persuasion was accompanied by the projection of a threat perception from some “powerful organizations,” which were then strongly “campaigning on the Coast to deport you all to Japan, citizens and residents alike” (ND 199). The spokesman avoided the issue of incarceration and interpreted the War Department’s offer as a “chance to volunteer and to distinguish yourselves as Japanese American citizens in the service of your country” (ND 200). Surprisingly, the discourse eased the tension of the inmates.

The ideological seepage of the dominant discourses on Kazuko’s mind perhaps makes her praise American freedom and democracy, diluting the relocation experience. Elaine H. Kim comments that Monica Sone here lapses into “a pitiful civics classpolemic on ‘democracy’.” Kazuko’s praise appears to be a forced pledge of loyalty to the white American ideal of democracy and homogeneity. Her anger melted into nothingness as she tried to buy peace and to secure a safe future.

4.2 Gender Perspectives

The immigrant space, from women’s point of view, has been experienced as more liberating than the one prevailing in the mother country. In many stories we come across an intense feminine urge to escape the social reality of the home country that restricted freedom of women. The remote western location is anticipated in the stories as a possible space for more freedom and less restrictions. Mrs. Hayashi in Yamamoto’s story “Seventeen Syllables” (1949) informs her daughter Rosie that she
came to America to marry Mr. Hayashi as an alternative to committing suicide. In Japan her lover who belonged to a well-to-do family and was not obviously prepared to cross the class barrier jilted her. In fact, many such women immigrated to America between 1910 and 1920 as “picture brides”. The convention of “picture marriage” flourished in the early twentieth century for the convenience of the issei men who could not go to Japan for immigration restrictions then in force. This practice of marriage helped to establish Japanese immigrant families in America. Thousands of Japanese picture brides set up homes in America. Although the consent of individual brides was not always sought, the brides found in the arrangement chances of a better life in America. Sone, the main character in Marie H. Hara’s story “1895: the Honeymoon Hotel”, is evidently relieved to have arrived in Hawaii. Despite the immigration hassles in the Angel Island Immigration Centre, she is glad to think that her parents will have now one less mouth to feed, particularly of one, who as a girl is not a ‘child favoured.’ Of course, on her arrival she had found her husband to be much older than he appeared in the photograph. This was a familiar trick with the issei who had been frantically trying to establish families in America at that time. She, however, resigns herself to her fate as she had been trained to do all her life. She accepts her husband who turns out to be good humoured and sympathetic. In Yoshiko Uchida’s story “Tears of Autumn” the picture bride Hanna, on her arrival in San Francisco, also discovered that her husband Taro Takeda “was already turning bald” and looked older than the age he had mentioned. After the initial shock was over, she found her husband to be good-natured. The thought that “I am in America now” greatly comforted her. Earlier in the story we see how Hanna longed for something more than her sisters had got in “their proper, arranged and loveless marriage.” This intelligent young woman who had graduated from Women’s High School in Kyoto, fits into her uncle’s prescription of a ‘picture
bride' for Taro Takeda, the prospective bridegroom: "a fine young woman who is strong and brave enough to cross the ocean alone." Hanna indeed wanted to escape "the smouldering strictures of life in her village" and recognized that the "lonely man in America was her means of escaping both the village and the encirclement of her family." By family she particularly meant the husband of her sister who was the head and the only male member of her household and who evidently was not pleased with "the spirited young sister who stirred up her placid life with what he considered radical ideas about life and the role of women." Evidently, he too would be glad to be relieved of Hanna who, according to him, "had too much schooling for a girl." Her enthusiasm at the end of the story — "I am in America now" — is therefore quite understandable. For the "picture brides" America was thus a land to look forward to. Sucheta Mazumder in the General Introduction to Making Waves has quoted a rather over-enthusiastic response of a Korean "picture bride" to the prospects in America. The response summarises the longing of the brides of the stories just discussed:

Ah marriage! Then I could get to America! The land of freedom with streets paved of gold! Since I became ten, I have been forbidden to step outside our gates, just like all the rest of the girls of my day.... Becoming a picture bride, whatever that was, would be my answer and release.

These were first generation immigrant women. Hisaye Yamamoto makes some sensitive representations of such women whose pursuits of personal aspirations and happiness were rudely dealt with in the immigrant community, which had retained some of the strong patriarchal traits of the Japanese society.

Yamamoto perceived a clear sexist orientation in the Japanese American community. Even in her own family, there was a blatant sexist attitude. Higher education for women was not considered necessary. Such attitude, quite common particularly among issei men, is ingrained in many of her characters. Yamamoto brings
out in a subtle way the intensity of anxiety and frustration that sensitive issei women felt in an overwhelmingly claustrophobic immigrant society. The obstacles that they face often drive them to the edge of insanity. She interrogates in her stories the received opinions about the ‘normal’ woman who is generally shown as passive and content with domesticity and subordination. Any deviation from the model is likely to be labelled ‘silly’, ‘crazy’, ‘eccentric’ or ‘mad’, depending on the degree of deviation. Her stories present many such women characters who aspire to be more than just ‘home makers’. They crave for creativity and go against social norms in search of love and liberty. In an article McDonald and Newman rightly point out that Yamamoto

... selects as her main characters those who are hurt, who have deviated from the norm, who are grasping for some bits of beauty in their desperation... all those who seek but lose are of interest to Yamamoto, and somehow she wins our understanding, largely through the accepting interpretations of the narrators. 43

These narrators are young, immature and inexperienced. They interpret the world of women in their own innocent ways. Their observations create an illusion of naivety, but their innocent, uninhibited narration offer clues to the real state of affairs in which the immigrant women find themselves. The readers understand what the immature narrators describe but cannot make full sense of them. The author thus deliberately creates a gap and ambiguity in the narration, which makes the stories suggestive in nature. The narratives in reality run deeper and indicate the existence of ‘buried plots’.

Tome Hayashi in the story “Seventeen Syllables” (1949) is called ‘crazy’ by her husband as she is obsessively interested in writing haiku. Haiku in fact is the central metaphor in the story. It represents artistic creativity. It provides and heightens tension in the Hayashi family. It is through the obsession with haiku that Tome Hayashi unknowingly drives a wedge between herself and her husband, and invites a violent reaction from him.
Mrs. Hayashi’s immersion into haiku was brief – about three months. It came to an abrupt end when her husband made it clear that no obsession with creativity of any sort would be tolerated. A thoroughly shaken and depressed Mrs. Hayashi then revealed to her daughter Rosie her own experience of a frustrated love with an upper-class boy in Japan. As a result of the affair, she had given birth to a stillborn child. Her love affair parallels her adolescent girl’s attraction for Jesus Carrasco, a Mexican boy hired for harvesting tomato in the Hayashi’s farm. In Rosie’s case the possibility of a male betrayal, as in the case of her mother, could not be ruled out. The possibility is reinforced by the fact that Jesus belonged to another ethnic community with different cultural norms. Jesus was also obviously guided by physical urges. He had enticed her to a packing shed in the field with the promise of a ‘secret’ that he would tell her. He kissed her and touched her, and Rosie “fell for the first time entirely victim to a helplessness delectable beyond speech.”

The story opens with Mrs. Hayashi trying to read a haiku to her nisei daughter who could hardly comprehend Japanese. Rosie nevertheless pretended that she understood it. Mrs. Hayashi’s interest in haiku began to grow and she became a regular contributor to the haiku section of Mainichi Shimbun, a Japanese daily newspaper published from San Francisco. She wrote under the pen name “Ume Hanazono”. As her obsession with haiku began to grow, her husband’s irritation increased. He saw this as an act of transgression of the socially sanctioned boundary for women, an act aimed at gaining authority. It is not that she did not perform her usual domestic chores. She also helped her husband in the field during the harvesting season. This aspect of Mrs. Hayashi conformed to the social norms. But the poetic aspirations of the woman violated the usual social norms prevalent in the immigrant community. Her husband had no control over this self of his wife. It was thus a potential threat to his authority.
Her poetic activities, which were carried out under her pen name Ume Hanazono, appeared strange and challenging. Her role as a poet is described to the following effect:

Ume Hanazono, who came to life after the dinner dishes were done was an earnest, muttering stranger who often neglected speaking when spoken to and stayed busy at the parlor table as late as midnight scribbling with pencil on scratch paper or carefully copying characters on good papers with her fat, pale green Parker ("SS" 254).

So Mr. Hayashi and Rosie felt as if they lived for a while with “two women” – Tome Hayashi and Ume Hanazono. The dual images of this woman created tension in the family and a sense of profound uncertainty in the husband. The husband’s anger was slowly but surely building up. He began to behave rudely. On one particular occasion when the Hayashis visited the house of a Japanese American family in the neighbourhood, Mrs. Hayashi found a patient listener in Mr. Hayano, the host. Mrs. Hayashi had an easy communication with Mr. Hayano on the intellectual and artistic plane. This was reason enough for the husband to react. Abruptly and very offensively, he started for the car. Mrs. Hayashi, thrown out of her poetic absorption, apologized to the “perturbed” hosts for her husband’s abruptness and followed him. In the car she apologized for her own obsession with haiku. She obviously felt guilty. Traditional women often feel such a sense of guilt when they step out of their conventional roles to pursue something they have a passion for. This other role is not usually sanctioned by the society. Since they accept, even internalise, the social sanctions, consciously or unconsciously, they feel a sense of guilt for overstepping their limits. Mrs. Hayashi accepted the denial of self-expression as normal in an overwhelmingly patriarchal community. But Rosie as a girl belonging to the next generation emotionally reacts to Mrs. Hayashi’s submission. Sitting between her parents in the car, she “felt a rush of hate for both – for her mother for begging, for her father for denying her mother” ("SS")
12). Rosie protested by invoking an imaginary act of violence on her family. She wished that the Ford in which they were travelling would crash. A vision of the car, "crumpled in the dark" with "three contorted, bleeding bodies" passed through her mind. She was revolting imaginatively against the gender inequality and injustice by wishing the destruction of the family.

Rosie’s mother was incapable of such fits of anger, but she resumed after some time her discussions of haiku with sympathetic visitors. Rosie noticed her father’s irritation. While her mother failed to take note of her father’s disapproval and displeasure, Rosie instinctively felt angry at her father’s irrationality. She felt a gender bonding with her mother and distrust for her father.

Haiku figured again when Mr. Kuroda, the editor of the haiku section of the Japanese language newspaper Mainichi Shimbun, visited the Hayashis. It was a busy harvesting time, and Mr. Hayashi rued his wife's happiness in meeting, and spending valuable time with, someone who represented diametrically opposite interests. The conflict between the material necessity of harvesting and the emotional urgency for poetic expression was inevitable in a family of incompatibles. The wife’s interest in writing haiku was incomprehensible to the materialist farmer. He felt a kind of assault on his right over his wife. So he exercised his patriarchal authority to frustrate her poetic efforts. And the busy harvesting schedule provided a scope to Mr. Hayashi to reprimand his wife for neglecting her duties in the field. He sent message to his wife, then engrossed in discussions of haiku with Mr. Kuroda, to return to the field. She said that she would be back to the harvesting in a minute, but Mr. Hayashi stalked back angrily to the house. A frightened Rosie observed from a distance her father entering the house, Mr. Kuroda emerging in haste and driving out, and then her father coming out with the picture of Hiroshinge which Mrs. Hayashi had won in a haiku competition,
smashing it, “glass and all”, and finally burning the wreckage. His “act of cremation was irrevocable” (“SS” 18).

Rosie, anxious for her mother, burst into the parlour and found her there. Together they watched the dying fire. Mrs. Hayashi was very calm. She then unburdened to Rosie the secret story of her frustrated love affair we have mentioned earlier. The intensity of the memory of love and pain, of fruition and frustration, lived in her and sought expression. Haiku served as a medium through which she could release the intensity of her pent-up feelings. One cannot fail to note Mrs. Hayashi’s enthusiasm when she speaks passionately about the effectiveness of haiku for accommodating meaning and passion: “She said, it was a haiku, a poem in which she must pack all her meaning into seventeen syllables only” (“SS” 8).

Rosie felt that the story of her mother’s love affair “was told perfectly, with neither grasping for words nor untoward passion”. She said that her mother must have “memorized it by heart, reciting it to herself so many times over that its nagging vileness had long since gone” (“SS” 19). Her anger had turned inwards and was so deeply embedded in her psyche that it could hardly be found on the surface. Rosie felt that the telling of her mother’s story would deeply affect her own life. Intuitively she felt that her mother’s gender-specific experience both in Japan and in the close-knit immigrant community in America would not be an isolated event, unrelated to her own life. Then suddenly came her mother’s request, coercive in its ferocity: “Promise me you will never marry?” (“SS” 19). The mother, unaware of Rosie’s sexual awakening in the company of Jesus Carrasco, intuitively anticipates another sexual and marital disaster, as it is conceived as a part of female experience. The narrative thus interlinks the mother’s and daughter’s stories as part of the same female tragedy.
The mother’s request and the daughter’s sweet memory of sexual awakening are in direct contradiction, and Rosie’s slow, hesitant affirmative answer was in fact ambiguous. Rosie was quite capable of pretence as we can see earlier in the text when she said that she had understood her mother’s haiku, although she had a very poor knowledge of Japanese. The mother seemed to have seen through her pretence. The ‘familiar glib agreement’ failed to convince her. Despite gender affiliation it is doubtful whether Rosie and her mother, belonging to two different generations, could agree on marriage as a space for unhappiness and non-fulfilment for a woman. Rosie began to cry—it is not clear whether in empathy or for the false promise—and the “embrace and the consoling hand came much later than she expected” (“SS”19). Though delayed, the two women—the issei mother and the nisei daughter—were at last close to each other as female characters, the delay indicating the complicated nature of their relationship which is not devoid of doubts and differences.

Not all the women characters of Yamamoto seek happiness in artistic pursuits. Some are quite ‘normal’ Japanese immigrant housewives engaged in domestic duties. Mrs. Hattori in “Brown House” is one such woman. She naturally takes it as her duty to look after her children and to provide emotional succour to them. She accepts child rearing and ‘making a home’ to be recognized feminine duties. Mr. Hattori whose strawberry business ran into rough weather, decided to make easy money by gambling. Although he felt guilty after losing twenty-five dollars on the first occasion, he developed the habit of visiting the gambling house regularly. Mrs. Hattori who suffered from a sense of insecurity protested. She complained that the children would be deprived of food and care, and the family would be ruined. She mocked her husband who enquired about supper, and said, “Do you have any money for groceries?” When the conflict in the family became intolerable, Mrs. Hattori left her husband, taking two
kids with her. Her subsequent attempt to bring back her other three sons from him failed. Mr. Hattori strongly told the mediator, “Tell her if she wants the boys, to come back and make a home for them” (“BH” 44; emphasis added). Here Yamamoto depicts how issei women were often trapped in a situation from which they could not extricate themselves. Mrs. Hattori had a deep emotional attachment to her children; obviously, she could not live without them. Her husband exploited this weakness in her. This duty of keeping a home is particularly entrusted upon women and this perception is deeply embedded in Mr. Hattori’s psyche. His wife, for her attachment to the children, had to yield to this. Ultimately, she returned. This return implies condoning of her husband’s irresponsibility. Yamamoto thus suggests that women’s protests are usually temporary and short-lived. By being forced to return to her husband, she demonstrates women’s weak position owing to claims of motherhood in the battle for rights.

The social structure accepts her role only as a homemaker and bearer of children. She has no emotional life except her love for her children. On one occasion she was even beaten up in front of her children. Issei women usually took their daughters into confidence to share their grief. Mrs. Hattori, having no daughter, unburdened her ‘adult sorrows’ to her eldest son Joe. She said, “Sometimes I lie awake at night and wish for death to overtake me in sleep. That would be the easiest way” (“BH” 43). Thus she appears to be a weak woman, but then Yamamoto usually deals with the average woman who protests only intermittently. She, like other issei women in her stories, goes on living in a situation that is hostile to her emotions and aspirations. Her ‘bleak eyes’ indicates the depth of her despair.

The mother-daughter bonding is also evident in the story “Yoneko’s Earthquake”. The story is based on the relationship between husband and wife in the Japanese immigrant society. The relationship is embittered by the presence of Marpo, a
Filipino farmhand, who assumes an increasingly important role in the family because of the husband’s incapacitation in an accident. The significance of the title operates at two levels. On the literal level, it refers to an earthquake that took place in the evening of March 10, 1933 and continued intermittently for several days afterwards. It traumatized Yoneko, the young girl narrator, so much that the “Hosoume household thereafter spoke of the event as ‘Yoneko’s earthquake’” (“YE” 51). The earthquake seriously injured Mr. Hosoume, a farmer in rural California. But on the metaphorical level, the earthquake refers to the radical psychic changes in the characters brought about by the arrival of Marpo. As Marpo takes greater control of the day-to-day affairs of the family and as the mother and daughter began to admire his efficiency and skill, Mr. Hosoume’s sexual jealousy and anger began to grow. Marpo’s role as a protector is shown when he ran from the field during a quake and gathered Mrs. Hosoume and Yoneko in arms as the “world about them rock(ed) and sway(ed)” while “Mr. Hosoume huddled on the ground near his family” (“YE” 50).

Yoneko, through whose eyes we see the events in the Japanese American family, could not properly understand the developments that had taken place in the adult world. However, her observations throw enough hints of a developing affair between Marpo and Mrs. Hosoume. One day Yoneko was surprised when her mother rushed breathless from the field, threw a gold-coloured ring at her, and forbade her to tell her father where the ring had come from, and then went back to the field again. Yoneko readily agreed, as this was a chance to have a “secret revenge” on her over-bearing father. In the loveless marriage of the Hosoume couple the wife secretly strikes a pact with her daughter. On another occasion Mr. Hosoume picked up a quarrel with his wife and accused her of being a nama-iki, “which is a shade more revolting than being mere insolent” (“YE” 53). When she protested, she was hit. She invited him to hit her again.
Marpo's intervention stopped the row from taking an uglier turn. Marpo, however, lost his job.

Yamamoto posits the issue of moral transgression by women in their search for emotional security or fulfilment. She seems to suggest that the incidents of transgressions occur because the members of the family or the community are insensitive to their emotions and yearnings. It is clear from the stories we have discussed that the marital relationship in an average Japanese immigrant family was not mostly based on love and mutual trust. The families usually placed importance on things on which their livelihood depended. Women were generally under strict patriarchal supervision, and no diversions, particularly those that would secure an emotional and cultural freedom for them, were tolerated. In many cases they were restrained with violence. The prospect of America as a space for freedom remained an elusive dream for many of these early immigrant women.

Yamamoto does not simplistically blame her male characters who irritate, harass, or violently abuse her women characters. In an interview Yamamoto comments about her treatment of Mr. Hayashi in "Seventeen syllables": "... I didn't think, I was being vicious towards the husband, because he was only acting the way he'd been brought up to act, the way men are supposed to be." This is true of most of her male characters we have discussed. She had a rare insight into the social dynamics that make man act macho. The social constructions of male and female roles, bipolar opposition between the two, privileging the male and depriving the female of legitimate power create a situation in which the female is the underdog, the victim.

In some stories Yamamoto describes some harassments that women of all communities suffer. "The High-Heeled Shoes – A Memoir" is an emotionally involved recollection of memories of sexual harassments, which sends the female narrator reflect
on the agony of being born a woman. She also speaks of the insensitivity and indifference of the law-enforcing machinery to the harassments meted out to women. Even a great leader like M.K. Gandhi, who preached non-violence during the struggle for Indian independence, is severely criticized for evading the question of female harassment. The narrator in the story is clearly disillusioned with Gandhi who, in an interview, supposed to have offered a "pacifist approach in this crisis" without any clue to real resistance for women. In another story "Eucalyptus" the narrator Toki Gonzales catalogues some other factors that take place in the close, family circles and affect them seriously and cause mental dislocations: "Unwanted sons, intransigent married lovers, husbands and sons who treat us like dirt, father who wanted a son instead – this aggregate of female woe, are we all here because of what men do or don't?" (110). Yamamoto criticises the patriarchal system through her narrator who speaks of a particular husband's impatience in tackling his wife's psychic scars: "The husband is not alone, men tend to respond to this kind of experience with impatience and anger. They have been on the receiving end of care so long, taking for granted all the work that goes into a smooth-running household, that they cannot seem to grasp that they will have just to do without for a while" (105). Most males thus only expect care, and get angry when they have to take care of their wives or children.

Toki Gonzales, the narrator, uses the phrase 'our malaise' (meaning of course 'female malaise') which has a close correspondence with the well-known feminist critic Elaine Showalter's use of the phrase 'the female malady'. By the phrase Showalter refers to the overwhelming sense of domestic entrapment and psycho-emotional disturbances in women. We find a striking attitudinal resemblance between Yamamoto and Showalter who have used two slightly different phrases to mean the same old thing. Showalter feels that the "equation between femininity and insanity" is generally "the
price the woman artists have to pay for the exercise of their creativity." Phyllis Chesler describes madness in women as an "intense experience of female biological, sexual and cultural castration, and a deemed search for potency." The thwarted women in Yamamoto's stories, particularly in "Seventeen Syllables", which we have discussed earlier, and "the Legend of Miss Sasagawara" bear testimony to the critical comments quoted above. The underlying attitudes in all societies are basically the same, although their manifestations may vary in degrees or in forms. Jacqueline de Weever, while discussing madness in Black American women writers, makes the same point when she argues that the reason behind it is more basic than the denial of artistic expression: "the situations of the illness or suffering are personal, to be sure, but those situations are bred by the structure of the larger society in which the personal lives are lived." "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" (1950) is a moving and much more complex tale of a Japanese American woman in her late thirties, told against the background of an arid internment camp in Arizona during the World War II. Here the issue of ethnic subordination intersects with that of the position of a woman in an ethnic family. Miss Sasagawara, a psychotic woman who was transferred there from 'one farther north' after her mother's death, lives a secluded life. Her father, a devoted Buddhist monk, is usually the only link between her and the world. This 'mad' woman capable of immense violence soon becomes a topic of discussion in the camp and grows into a legend. This story, unlike "Eucalyptus", is not of an insider of an asylum -- it is an assortment of impressions of normal members of the community, about the 'mad' woman told through Kiku, the narrator with limited perspective. Very early in the story Kiku's friend Elsie comments, "the gal is really temperamental." According to the Sasakis, Miss Sasagawara's neighbour, she is "crazy" ("LMS" 21). Mr. Sasaki who ventured to help her in cleaning her barrack on the day she and her father arrived at the
camp, was accused of espionage: “Spy on me?” (“LMS” 21). She followed up her threat by throwing “that water at him, pail and all” (“LMS” 341). He called her a “mad woman” (“LMS” 21). George, an ambulance boy, on another occasion exclaimed: “Cripes, what a dame!” (“LMS” 26).

The camp inmates construct Miss Sasagwara’s madness from her deviant behaviour. Miss Sasagawara avoided people. She walked alone at night all the way from her barrack to the camp’s hospital “a good mile off” – with the complaint of appendicitis pain, then left off in a hurry without informing anyone. On another occasion she escaped from the hospital with just a nightgown on, resisted the hospital staff when caught and said that she did not want any more of those doctors “pawing” her. She was caught watching young boys playing – she had a “beautific expression” on her face. Sasaki chided her: “You’re old enough to be their mother!” (“LMS” 31). Mrs. Sasagawara, startled, went back to her room and barged on the door for about five minutes. Joe Yoshinga used to find every morning his magazines neatly stacked inside an apple crate. He felt that someone must have been doing this regularly in his absence from the room. One night at sleep he had a feeling that he was being watched. On opening one of his eyes, he found Miss Sasagawara “sitting there on his apple crate, her long hair all undone and flowing about her. She was dressed in a white nightgown and her hands were clasped in lap” (“LMS” 31). She fled as Joe screamed in panic.

What lies behind this madness? Is her suffering gender-specific? Has Miss Sasagawara, a ballet artist and a poet, felt her ambition of artistic fulfilment ‘castrated’? Could she as a Japanese American, being incarcerated for ethnic differences, ascribe her ‘madness’ to the political maltreatment alone?

So far as the text goes, there is not much to suggest that she was harassed on gender grounds, except perhaps when she spoke of her unwillingness to be “pawed” by
doctors. She was not married and she said she was not sorry because “she had her fun ... she got to go all over the country a couple of times, dancing in the ballet” ("LMS" 21). But this claim seems unacceptable because in her subconscious state she appeared to have nurtured a common girl’s desire for a life of love and sex and family affections.

Kiku, the narrator, says:

Elsie puzzled aloud over the cause of Miss Sasagawara’s derangement, and I, who had so newly had some contact with the recorded explorations into the virgin territory of the human mind, safely explained Miss Sasagawara, had no doubt looked upon Joe Yashanaga as the image of either the lost lover or the lost son ("LMS" 32).

This impression is reinforced by Miss Sasagawara’s unconscious doting on the young boy who might represent the images of either a ‘lost lover’ or a ‘lost son’. In any case there are symptoms that are clearly indicative of a disruption of usual feminine desires. Her mother’s death and her devout father’s indifference to her sentiment and ambition intensified her anguish. This is supported by Kiku’s discovery of a poem written by Miss Sasagawara in a poetry magazine. The poem speaks of a man who was keen to achieve nirvana (salvation) but whose saintly aspirations clashed with his responsibility towards his family. The death of his wife released him of this responsibility. Miss Sasagawara must have been trying to suggest some of her own experience in the poem.

As one digs deeper into the text, other explanations for Miss Sasagawara’s madness surface. She was endowed with a keen artistic sensibility. Even her measured walk said, “Look, I am walking!” ("LMS" 20). Her poetic fervour was limited to one known piece only. In the magazine her poem is introduced as “the first published poem of a Japanese American woman who is, at present an evacuee from the West Coast making her home in a War Relocation Center in Arizona” ("LMS" 352; emphases added). The irony of making a ‘home’ in an internment camp is not missed. Miss Sasagawara, in a state of incarceration at the time of writing the poem, must have felt
the need for being listened to. But the situation was most hostile and the internment cannot be an ideal, ‘homely’ situation where poetic efforts could prosper. The poetic exercise should be viewed along with her very successful organization of a children’s cultural function in the camp during her lucid period. She might have other unpublished poems and she could have continued with her exercise in future also. But the War, and the large scale evacuation, dealt a rude blow, and even the magazine in which her poem was published, stopped publication: “the last issue of a small poetry magazine that had suspended publication midway through the war” (“LMS” 32; emphasis added). This probably was the end of the road for Miss Sasagawara’s hope self-expression.

In an interview Yamamoto says that the camp robbed the ballet dancer and her co-performers of their medium. She adds, “if it weren’t for being put in the camp, she might have gone on” (Crow 81). But what is intriguing is that in the story itself there is no open criticism of the racist programme of the government that ‘castrated’ Miss Sasagawara’s artistic career and prejudiced her identity as a Japanese American citizen. This silence over the injustice is more surprising because the camp experience, as we have seen earlier, was a very painful chapter in the life of Yamamoto herself, who was interned in Poston, Arizona, camp from 1942 to 1945.

What then was the rationale of this silence? King-Kok Cheung calls this textual suppression as a manifestation of “rhetorical silence” and feels that Yamamoto carefully camouflages political allusions in the text: she may have felt “the pressure of personal, communal, and societal censorship” at a time when anti-Japanese feelings were running high. In the story Yamamoto mentions ‘monotonous’ days in the camp, which is a “place of wind, sand, and heat” (“LMS” 20). Kiku and Elsie ‘talked … nostalgically of the few ballet we had seen in the world outside (how far away Los Angeles seemed!)’ and spoke of finishing their education and then marrying “if the war ever ended and we
were free again” (“LMS” 21; emphasis added). Marriage and all personal happiness then really depended on the end of the war which these young girls longed for. Miss Sasagawara could not hope for getting any chance for that. Yamamoto subtly brings out the inhuman conditions in the camp, its total lack of privacy, an ill-equipped hospital and so on. As King-Kok Cheung rightly comments, Miss Sasagawara’s “hypersensitivity to being spied upon not only mirrors the wartime hysteria and paranoia of the white majority but also reflects back on the plight of her whole ethnic group.... The isolation and eventual institutionalization of Miss Sasagawara correspond to the exclusion and ultimate detention of the race.”56
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Miyamoto xi.

3. The Japanese bombing on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941 unleashed a severe anti-Japanese hysteria. The US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed "Executive Order 9066" which authorised military commanders to designate military areas from which anybody can be evacuated. General L. Dewitt, Commanding General of Western Defence Command, then issued orders to designate a vast area of the Pacific Coast. About 120,000 Japanese Americans were relocated from the Pacific Coastal states and southern Arizona to ten relocation camps. There were about 50,000 women among them, of whom 60 per cent were nisei. The camps were established in isolated semi-desert areas and had rows of army barracks with surrounding barbed wire fences and guard towers. The relocation centres were under the supervision of War Relocation Authority (WRA). For details, see Valerie Matsumoto, "Nisei Women and Resettlement During World War II," Making Waves: An Anthology of Writing by and about Asian American Women, ed. Asian Women United of California (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) 115-26.


21. Cheung 64.

30. Quoted in Kuramitsu 622.


33. Miyamoto, Introduction xiii.


35. Quoted in Lim “Life Stories” 311.


40. Uchida 41.

41. Uchida 41.

43. McDonald and Newman, “Relocation and Dislocation” 28.


47. Crow 80.


54. Crow 81.
