

CANADIAN LITERATURE

Unit 5 Asian Canadian Literature

Unit 5 A Introduction Page 1

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Unit 5 B Sri Lankan-Canadian Writing

Page 7

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Unit 5 C The Chinese in Canada

Page 23

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Unit 5 E Chinese Canadian Literature

Page 30

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INTRODUCTION TO ASIAN CANADIAN LITERATURE

The term "South-Asian" refers to individuals from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, as well as to those from Africa, Mauritius, Fiji, the Caribbean, Great Britain and European countries who trace their origins to the sub-continent. The term "South-Asian" is a socially constructed term, and a generic label applied to this very diverse group. The individual immigrants from the countries that constitute South-Asia do not consider themselves part of the sub-continent; rather, they identify themselves as former residents of separate socio-political entities. There is a considerable competition among India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for power and influence in the region. There is a great diversity among the people of these countries in terms of their language religion and other cultural traits. On the surface, it seems almost impossible to find common characteristics and shared experiences among "South-Asian" in Canada, but a common region of origin and common historical experience make it possible to consider South-Asians as a group.

In Canada, South-Asians also belong to the socially constructed categories of "immigrants," a term that is frequently used to refer to people who are foreign looking or non-white. Thus many South-Asians are now second generation and consider themselves Canadian or, as hyphenated South-Asian Canadian. My article provides a brief overview of the South-Asian experience focusing on Indians, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans in Canada.

Due to the diversity and complexity of South-Asians in general and their immigration and settlement experiences in particular, this article presents a cursory view of this experience. I would also like to apologize to the readers for the impossibility of encompassing the wide range of scholarship on South-Asians in Canada such limited space.

A HISTORICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

I. India

As the world embraces the millennium, some 7,50,000 people can trace their cultural roots to South Asia, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It is safe to say that a great percentage of this number have immigrated to Canada from Asia's subcontinent. The first South-Asians, mostly Sikhs from Punjab, settled in British Columbia at the turn of the century. By 1908, chain immigration had encouraged over 5000 Punjabi pioneers to find work in British Columbia; evidence of their presence can be seen in the establishment of two community organizations in Vancouver: the Khalsa Diwan Society and the Hindustan association. In 1907, nativist opposition to an Indian presence and fear of "the Asian peril" encouraged a range of discriminatory legislation: it restricted migration by requiring additional personal wealth, limited political rights, and stipulated that one must arrive by "continuous journey" from India and not from other parts such as Hong Kong. The hostility to South Asian immigration crystallized in 1914 when a ship called the Komagata Maru entered Vancouver harbor carrying 376 potential immigrants of East Indian Origin, the majority being Sikh veterans of the British Army. The Komagata Maru was a Japanese steam liner that sailed from Hong Kong to Shanghai, China, Yokohama, Japan and then to British Columbia, Canada in 1914, carrying 376 passengers from Punjab, India, most of whom were not allowed to land in Canada and were returned to India. Of these 340, 40 were Sikhs, 24 were Muslims, 12 were Hindus, and all were British subjects. This was one of the most notorious 'incidents' in the history of exclusion laws in Canada and the United States designed to keep out immigrants of the Asian origin. The ship had been chartered by a business man, Gurdit Singh, and was scheduled to leave Hong Kong in March, but Singh was arrested for selling tickets for an illegal voyage. He later was released on bail and given permission by the governor of Hong Kong to set sail and the ship left Hong Kong in April. At that time, Canada had recently passed several bills

limiting the civil rights of Indians, including the right to vote, to hold public office, to serve on juries, or practice as lawyers or accountants. Indians were not targeted by open exclusion laws from Canada, as was the case with the Chinese. India, like Canada at the time, was part of the British Empire. The Imperialist authorities in London had noted Indian resentment when the White Australia Policy was put in place in 1905 and was in turn adopted by New Zealand. So when Canada started making provisions to block immigrations from India, it was warned by London to be cautious in its approach and to be aware that its actions might inflame nationalist fervor in India. This in mind, an ingenious method was devised. To be admitted to Canada, immigrants had to come by 'continuous journey' from their country of birth and enter with at least 200 dollars cash on their persons. This Continuous Journey Regulation did not mention race or nationality and on the surface seemed fair and applicable to all immigrants. It was however an open secret that the regulation was to apply only to people from British India. Canadian Pacific did run a very lucrative shipping line between Vancouver and Calcutta. However, the Canadian government forced the company to stop this service. It was now impossible to come via continuous journey to Canada. This was one of the many hidden measures that Canada undertook to enforce a hidden 'White Canada policy'. In chartering the Komagata Maru, Gurdit Singh's goal was to challenge the continuous journey regulation and open the door for immigration from British India to Canada. When the Komagata Maru arrived in Canadian waters, the passengers were not allowed to disembark. A legal battle was ensued lasting two months. In the end, only twenty-four passengers were admitted to Canada, since the ship had violated the exclusion laws, the passengers did not have the required funds, and they had not sailed directly from India, another requirement to make entry more difficult. The ship was turned around and forced to sail back to Asia, departing on July 23rd. The Komagata Maru arrived in Calcutta, India on September 26th. Upon entry into the harbor, the ship was forced to stop by European gunboat, and the passengers were taken prisoners. The ship was then diverted approximately

17 miles to Budge-Budge, where the British intended to put them on a train bound for Punjab. The passenger wanted to stay in Calcutta, and marched in the city, but was forced to return to Budge-Budge and reboard the ship. The passengers protested, some refusing to reboard, and the police opened fire, killing twenty and wounding nine others. This incident became known as the Budge-Budge Riot. Gurdit Singh managed to escape and lived in hiding till 1922. He was urged by Gandhi to give himself up as a true patriot. He was imprisoned for five years. In 1951, the government of the New Republic of India erected its first monument and it was at Budge Budge to commemorate the massacre at Budge Budge; the 75th anniversary of the departure of the Komagata Maru was placed in the Sikh Gurdwara (temple) in Vancouver on July 23, 1989.

II. PAKISTAN

The term Pakistani is commonly used to describe all citizens of Pakistan, regardless of their ethnic background. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is characterized by great ethnic and linguistic diversity. Flanked by Iran, Afghanistan in the west and China in the north, Pakistan also shares a border with India to the east. Within its 7, 96,000 sq.km lives 138 million people including Punjabi, Pathan, Baluchi, and Sindhi groups. In contrast to its ethnic and linguistic variety, Pakistan is homogeneous in terms of religion: fully 98% of the population is Muslim; the remaining 2% includes Hindus, Christians, and Zoroastrians. Settlement in Canada from that part of India today known as Pakistan began at the turn of the century with the migration of perhaps 200 pioneers from what would become the Pakistani part of Punjab. Within a few years, the majority of these travelers returned to Asian sub-continent. what followed may be described as the exclusion era because , as a result of the 1907 immigration ban , no South-Asians, including people of Muslim and Sikh origin, from what is now Pakistan , were allowed to immigrate to Canada until after Second World War. In 1951, the Canadian government introduced a quota system for South-Asian immigrants that allowed for the migration of 100 Pakistanis a year.

From 1967-75, immigration statistics recorded the presence of 13,811 immigrants of Pakistani origin in Canada. By the mid 1970, Pakistanis immigration came to be characterized by a significant number of skilled or semi-skilled workers. Pakistanis in Canada lived mainly in large cities of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver where they were dispersed across the residential areas of these urban centers. With the growth of the communities, an entrepreneurial infrastructure began to develop where traders of import and export firms came to predominate. The community has also established a noteworthy in the food franchise industry and in accounting and finance. Pakistanis created a host of cultural vehicles to provide support and to ensure a sense of continuity and survival. A number of journals, periodicals and newspapers are published by and for Pakistani immigrants in Canada. Urdu, the national language of Pakistan has become popular; and is highly celebrated. In terms of Muslim faith, Pakistanis, as the member of Muslim community at large, have helped to establish parochial centers and numerous mosques in almost every city where they have settled in substantial numbers. In addition to life centered on mosques and Islamic, the community is an attempt to establish a firm cultural base in the Canadian diaspora; has also supported such secular organizations as the Pakistani-Canadian association and the various Pakistani- Student Association.

111. SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, is an island off the Southeast tip of India. It is inhabited by about 17.5 million people made up of four groups:

- (a) Sinhalese (75%)
- (b) Tamils (19%)
- (c) Moors and Malayas (6%)
- (d) Burghers of mixed Europeans and Tamil blood (less than 1%)

They speak mainly three languages namely Sinhala, Tamil and English and follow four religions namely Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The Sinhalese are mostly

Buddhist and the Tamils are mostly Hindus but there are Christians in both communities. Moors are exclusively Muslims and Burghers are mostly Christians, but with a few well-known Buddhists among them. While in general, the linguistic and ethnic boundaries overlap, a sizeable number, speak English. The Burghers use English as their mother tongue and the Moors speak the language of their local community but more commonly Tamil than Sinhala. The four ethno-communities, the three languages and the four religions are all represented in the Sri Lankan-Canadian community.

Sri Lankan immigration to Canada began after the Second World War. It is known that twenty-seven Sri Lankan Burghers had immigrated to Canada by 1955. The numbers would increase dramatically after Canada revised its immigration policies in 1967 from an ethnic European basis to a point basis benefiting people of Asian descent. In 1996, the Canadian census-31,435 persons indicated that they were of Sri Lankan ethnic origin and 30,065 individuals declared themselves to be of Tamil origin in census reports as a special category. The Sinhalese, mostly English educated too, came in search of employment and social opportunities, bringing with them many skills. During the 1980s, the number of Tamils grew rapidly as a result of anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka. Inspired as well by the Canadian governments special Tamil refugee settlement programme created in 1989, they arrived in Canada as both genuine refugees and economic refugees. Over 1,800 Tamils were admitted during the first year of the programme. Most of the new arrivals went to Ontario. Small numbers also contributed to the growth of urban communities in Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia. Most of the early immigrants who had British educational and professional qualifications and experience have continued in professional, technical and managerial positions in Canada. Most of the 1983 arrivals established small businesses. Tamils, for example, climbed to the entrepreneurial class by becoming grocer, marriage and insurance brokers, real estate and travel agents. All however, have consistently made efforts to integrate with and contribute Canadian society, at large, through organizations like the Canadian-Sri

Lankan association. Among Sri Lankan Canadians, the poet and writer Michael Ondaatje is probably the well known. He has helped put Canadian Literature on the world map and garner international acclaim.

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SRI LANKAN-CANADIAN WRITING

The south Asians are the second largest visible minority group in Canada, next only to the Chinese. They are easily the most varied consisting of an assortment of cultural, religious and linguistic groups whose ancestries; migration histories and personal experiences are quite wide-ranging.

Not all South Asians living in Canada came directly from their native countries. Many came via Africa or the Caribbean, where their ancestors had settled in British colonies either in the 19th century or the early 20th century. For the Sri Lankans, in particular, immigration to Canada began after the Second World War. However, initially the number of immigrants was small. It increased substantially after 1967, when Canada revised its immigration laws and opened its doors to South Asian people. The patterns of migration differed

racially. For example, changes in Sri Lankan Law required use of Sinhala prompting the Burghers to migrate. Sri Lankan Tamils migrated primarily after the eruption of the Civil War in the wake of the 1983 riots against Tamil civilians that killed between 1000-4000 people.

The Sri Lankan diaspora has enriched the Salad bowl and mosaic image of Canada. It has contributed to the growth and development of Canada in many fields. Prominent Sri Lankans-Canadians include Christopher Ondaatje, the Financier, Nirmala Basnayake, the musician and Sanjayan Thuraisingam, the Cricketer.

In the field of literature also Sri Lankan-Canadians have contributed vastly. They are an important part of South Asian immigrant writing. Some of the major themes in their writings are:

- 1) **Nostalgia for the Home- land (Sri Lanka):**
- 2) **Conditions of dislocation and loneliness:**
- 3) **Intergenerational Conflict:**
- 4) **The experience of racism**
- 5) **The process of assimilation and its accompanying problems.**

Sri Lankan-Canadian Poets:

The Sri Lankan-Canadian poets are a welcome addition to the immense multicultural Canadian literary field. Coming from a country, which has only recently emerged from Colonization and is currently beleaguered by civil war and terrorism, the poets write on painful issues like war, death, poverty, bigotry, exploitation and neo-colonialism. Their poetry is therefore, the poetry of anguish.

Among the most popular poets is *Michael Ondaatje*. As a poet and novelist, Ondaatje has won several prestigious awards. Among his collections of poems are *The Man with Seven Toes* (1969); *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems* (1970); *Rat Jelly* (1973); *Elimination Dance* (1978); *The Cinnamon Peeler* (1989) and *The Story* (2006). *The man with seven toes* deals with the Australian legend of Mrs. Fraser, a nineteenth century white woman who was shipwrecked and spent some time with the aboriginals before finding her way to the White settlement. For Ondaatje, Mrs. Fraser is an adventurer who has managed to reach the fringes of humanity. Ondaatje's poetry does not mention his cultural baggage. In this he is very similar to Neil Bissoondath, the Caribbean writer who also denies his milieu. Arun Mukerjee takes Ondaatje to task for forgetting his Sri Lankan backdrop. She says, "Ondaatje's work gives few indications of his Sri Lankan background. Ondaatje, coming from a Third World country, with a colonial past, does not write about his otherness. Nor does he write about the otherness of the Canadian society for him. Intriguingly enough, there is no trauma of uprooting evident in his poetry." (1988, 33). Other critics have pointed out the unfairness of this criticism. Ondaatje first immigrated to England where he spent his formative years and gained education. His attraction for Western poetic form is, therefore, only natural. This type of poetry allows him to express his creativity without the burden of history, culture and ideology, which is so customary in other Sri Lankan poets living in Canada. He cannot write about his displacement in Canada simply because he experienced no displacement.

Reinzi Crusz is recognized as an outstanding talent in the art and craft of poetry. His first collection of poems **Flesh and Thorn** (1975) is very personal and is an example of the nostalgic element in Sri Lankan-Canadian writing. Crusz uses the native lingo and symbols to evoke the image of his native Sri Lanka. For example, the use of regional references like frangipani and the cadju pulang trees accentuate the Sri Lankan flavour. In this he is vastly different from Ondaatje who keeps references to Sri Lanka to the minimum. Ondaatje has been condemned by critics for having forgotten his roots; a charge which cannot be laid at Crusz.

Elephants and Ice (1980) as the name suggests, is evocative of the East-West encounter. The Elephant is the symbol of Sri Lanka and the Ice stands for Canada. The Sun-Man represents the immigrant experience and the differences between the native and the adopted land are brought out in a matter of fact way. The process of acculturation to the new and harsher environments is depicted. Also pointed out are the instances of racism. A similar treatment is seen in his third collection titled **Singing Against the Wind** (1985). **Still Close to the Raven** is the product of Crusz's encounter with multiculturalism. It erases the ethnic tag on Crusz. The poems are more 'Canadian' and deal with images drawn more from Canada than Sri Lanka. **Lord of the Mountains: The Sardiel Poems** (1999) is a retelling of an ancient Sri Lankan legend of a Robin Hood -like figure (Sardiel).

Crusz's poems are exotic and paint nostalgic pictures of Sri Lanka. For example in *Faces of the Sun Man (Elephant and Ice)* he says:

When winter comes,
He crawls
Into his sun-dial nerves
And sleeps

With myths and shibboleths
As central heating steals
Under his dark eye lids
To dream of blue Ceylon
Where palms bend
Their coconut breasts
To the morning sun.

Crusz has a good knowledge of rhythm and metre and intuitively understands how to evoke pertinent images.

Jean Arasanayagam is acknowledged as one of the foremost voices in Sri Lankan-Canadian writing. Arasanayagam's lyrical and evocative writing incessantly interrogates issues of cultural difference. As a Burgher woman married to a Tamil, the investigation of the various strands of her cultural pedigree is fundamental to her writing, as she has faced ostracism from society. In fact, the governing sweep of her work can be seen as a process of negotiating her subject position within this cultural environment. Her collections of poems include: **Kindura** (1973); **Apocalypse'83** (1983); **The Cry of the Kite** (1984); **A Colonial Inheritance and other Poems** (1985); **Fragments of a Journey** (1992) and **All is Burning** (1995). **Apocalypse'83** records her experiences in a refugee camp in 1983 as she and her family took shelter to escape from rampaging mobs intent on genocide. As a Burgher married to a Tamil, Arasanayagam had to face the wrath of linguistic fanatics who were keen on keeping 'outsiders' like her in their place:

It's all happened before and will happen again

And we the onlookers

But now I'm in it

It's happened to me

At last history has meaning.

Arasanayagam's poems in *Apocalypse '83* are powerful and spontaneous accounts of the futility of violence.

Personal experiences and her childhood reminiscences form a major theme in her works and in this she is similar to most immigrant poets. For example one of Arasanayagam's earliest works "*Kindura*" brings out her hybrid nature (Burgher-Tamil). The poem uses the half-bird half-human creature portrayed in an ancient Buddhist legend to suggest hybridity:

Your imperturbable profile
Does not suggest
Discrepancy of disembodiment
Yet your folded wings
Unruffled feathers
Suggest an immobility
Of flight arrested
And I see in my own
Submerged personality
A strange, restless
Ghost of *Kindura*.

Asoka Weerasinghe is a poet who is very close to his homeland. The civil war in Sri Lanka is a pet theme for Weerasinghe. In "*The Birth of Insurgents*" he says:

I was at home
When April showered
Guns and bullets
Eight borrowed helicopters
Droned like ailing mosquitoes
While offspring of the guilty
Book-paddled in Paris and Oxford.

Other important poems include "*Looking Back*", "*Sahelia*", "*Drought*" (about Africa) and "*Dev*" (about India). In *Kitsilano Beach Songs* (1990) he demonstrates his political ideology. He says that he supported the Tamil Cause initially but when he "... saw big-bellied women/lying dead on the

floor/bringing revulsion to my mind/and taunting my kind/Buddhist heart to hate”. The Canadians who fund such terrorist activities earn his displeasure.

Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta is a new voice in Sri Lankan Canadian poetry. Unlike other poets of his creed, Bhaggiyadatta is more concerned with the problems of assimilation with Canada. Racism and otherness are the most important of the themes he deals with. In his opinion, the policy of multiculturalism has been a failure and he makes bitter and ironic comments on the Canadian mosaic. His first collection **Domestic Bliss** was published in 1981. One of his poems “*What City? Ethnicity? How to Make an Ethnic Newspaper*” is quite biting in its satire. It is about the political scenario in Canada. The poem ‘offers’ rules for publishing ethnic newspapers:

Place as many photographs of the Prime Minister,
Minister of Immigration, Secretary of State for
Multiculturalism, Minister of Citizenship and (then)
Culture, Leaders of the Parliamentary Opposition,
Federal Provincial Regional Municipal
On the front pages...

On one instance he terms multiculturalism as “multivulturalism”. He goes on to say:

In this zoo
The animals only come together
When the keeper brings them out
In a caravan
To dance for the visiting citizenry
To throw exotic food at each other

Bhaggiyadatta is different from other Sri Lankan poets in Canada who focus more on nostalgia and personal ‘memory banks’. He gives voice problems faced by the immigrants in Canada.

Other poets include *Siri Gurusinghe* who has introduced the use of free verse in Sinhalese poetry with his published works like **Abinikmana** and **Hevanalla**. Poems like “*Renunciation*” and “*The Water Buffalo*” display his diverse themes and feel for rhythm. *Tyrrell Mendis* began his poetic career with **Broken Petals** in 1965. His subjects are the pain and frustration of human life. He has not published any new collection recently.

The Sri Lankan poets have contributed widely to the development of the Canadian salad bowl. For one, they have offered diverse themes and settings and by this they have enlarged the canvas of Canadian Poetry. Their criticism of the Canadian mainstream establishment and the multicultural polity has pointed out the inherent flaws in the Canadian system.

FICTION WRITERS:

Michael Ondaatje is the foremost of the Sri Lankan-Canadian novelists. His novels lend themselves to both the postmodern and postcolonial interpretations. His first work of fiction was the novella **Coming Through Slaughter** (1976) that tells the story of Buddy Bolden, ‘the grandfather of jazz’. It covers the last months of Bolden’s sanity as his music became more and more eccentric. The novella is patterned on the jazz style with unrelated scenes following each other. This pattern is also symbolic of the schizophrenia affecting Bolden.

Running In the Family (1982) is a memoir written in a fractured style. It is about Ondaatje’s return to his native Sri Lanka in the 1970s and his imaginative reconstruction of the family history. In a way, it is Ondaatje’s attempt to rediscover his roots. The novel consists of stories about Ondaatje’s family interspersed with accounts of Ondaatje’s experiences while visiting his

native land. As the novel progresses, the reader learns that Ondaatje left Ceylon to live with his mother in England and that his father, who remained in Ceylon, has died in his absence. It becomes increasingly clear that Ondaatje's desire to understand his family is in fact a desire to know and understand his father. His lack of knowledge about his father is a vacuum in his identity and this emptiness haunts him throughout the novel. As he meets various friends and relatives and listens to their stories, Ondaatje struggles to understand his father's life and his father's relationship with his mother. The novel presents a total confusion of identity. More than once Ondaatje mentions his double identity wherein he is neither able to accept his native land nor able to reject it. He reveals the inconsistency within him when he says, "I am the foreigner. I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner" (79). Though western critics have been articulate in their praise for the novel (Margaret Atwood says that the novel "attains the status of a legend"), South Asian critics have expressed their reservations. According to Arun Mukerjee, **Running in the Family** gives few indications of Ondaatje's Sri Lankan background. She terms the novel 'elliptical' where "we are given paradisiacal images of flower gardens, paddy fields, tea estates, and forest reserves but no contemporary picture of Sri Lanka - which Ondaatje calls Ceylon - emerges (1988, 39). Chelva Kanaganayakam claims that Ondaatje's attempts at representation (of Sri Lanka) are an outright failure (1984, 40).

In **In the Skin of a Lion** (1987) Ondaatje re-writes the history of the immigrants whose contributions in the building of Toronto have never become part of official history. It exposes the cult of multiculturalism and reveals the migrant condition. It deals with the lives of several different characters in and

around Toronto during the 1930s. Using and adapting information from official records and filling in additional details wherever possible, Ondaatje creates a fictional account of history in a way similar to M G Vassanji in **The Book of Secrets**. The novel's framework is narrative in which one of the characters Patrick Lewis tells the stories to Hana about the others. The central theme of the novel is the loss and retrieval of identity. Patrick Lewis is a lost soul and a searcher on a constant journey. The title, "In the Skin of a Lion," can also be used to exemplify Patrick's perpetual exploration; as Patrick has no identity of his own, he becomes like the people he associates with, and he gains a temporary identity and purpose. Searching for identity is a powerful motif in all immigrant writing. However, Ondaatje inverts this by departing from the conventional we/they categorization and locating European characters within this framework. Patrick is a Canadian by virtue of his nativity and language. He belongs to the majority community. Yet, in Toronto, he is an outsider. Ondaatje seems to suggest that the process of identity construction is universal to all.

The English Patient (1992) is a sequel to **The Skin of a Lion**. It won the Booker Prize and can be regarded as Ondaatje's finest work. It follows the design of his earlier novels - mixing facts with imagination to produce fiction. The setting of the novel is the North African Desert and Italy during the end of World War II. Hana (who features earlier in **In the Skin of the Lion**), a young Canadian Army nurse has in her care a man nicknamed "the English patient". The only possession that the patient has is a copy of Herodotus' **Histories**. The patient is, in fact, László de Almásy, a Hungarian desert explorer. One day, two British soldiers enter the villa. One of the soldiers is Kirpal Singh (Kip), a Sikh

who has been trained as a sapper. Kip and the English patient immediately become friends.

Encouraged to tell his story, the Patient reveals his past: An Englishman Geoffrey Clifton and his wife, Katharine, accompanied the patient's desert exploration team. Almásy fell in love with Katharine Clifton one night as she read from Herodotus' histories aloud around a campfire. They began a very passionate affair, but Geoffrey came to know of their affair and tried to kill all three of them. Geoffrey Clifton died instantaneously; Katharine survived, but was horribly injured. Almásy is arrested as a spy.

Over time while Almásy divulges the details of his past, Kip forms a romantic relationship with Hana. Then he hears news of the atomic bomb being dropped in Japan and feels deceived and betrayed by the Western world into which he had tried to assimilate. Hana and Kip separate and towards the end Kip is happily married, but he cannot forget Hana.

Anil's Ghost (2000): this novel is Ondaatje's second literary journey back to Sri Lanka after. It narrates the story of Anil Tissera, a forensic archeologist working for a human rights commission who returns to Sri Lanka after a 15-year absence. She is assigned the task of exploring the terrible murders that may have been brought about by the ethnic war. With the help of Sarath Diyasena, Anil exhumes a skeleton, which she suspects to be of a recent death. She attempts to identify the skeleton (which she nicknames Sailor). Anil becomes suspicious of Sarath's motives and sees his remarks as a hint to silence her, as the discovery would implicate the Sri Lankan government in the death of Sailor. Anil meets Sarath's brother, Gamini a doctor who helps them in the process of

identifying sailor. Anil and Sarath eventually are able to identify Sailor with the help of Ananda who has the ability to paint and restructure the faces. Ultimately, Anil is not able to validate her claim as the skeleton of Sailor disappears. All her possessions are confiscated and she has to leave Sri Lanka in a hurry. Sarath, whom she had suspected all along, helps her in her escape though he loses his life in the process.

Shyam Selvadurai, like many of his Sri Lankan literary counterparts, lives outside Sri Lanka, but writes about it. He uses his “shards of memory” to recreate the lost world. This looking backwards, for him, is not just wistfulness. It is in fact a conscious political choice to narrate histories in order to come to terms with the anguish and sense of loss. As an émigré writer with a hyphenated status, Selvadurai creatively uses his ‘belongingness’ to his native land and writes stories, which provide ‘alternate narratives’ that challenge ‘official truths’ and provide new readings of established historical, social, economic and political codes. Sri Lanka looms large over his novels - **Funny Boy**, **Cinnamon Gardens** and **Swimming in the Monsoon Sea**. This preoccupation can be explained in terms of a deep personal anguish - a need to write about/reclaim what is very close to the heart.

Selvadurai’s first novel **Funny Boy** is personal and confessional. The main theme of the novel is the skilful interweaving of issues of sexuality into the customary narrative of immigrant cultural dislocation. Set against the backdrop of mounting tensions between Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese and Tamil communities that culminated in the outbreak of civil war, the novel is a coming to age story of Arjie Chelvaratnam, the “funny boy” of the story (funny because

he is gay). The novel posits Arjie as a double marginal - Tamil and queer in Sri Lanka - and presents his predicament in a world that considers him the other.

Funny Boy can also be read as a Bildungsroman. Arjie, who is the second son of a prosperous Tamil hotelier family, is around seven years old when the novel opens. By the time it ends, he is on the brink of adolescence. The novel consists of six stories, chronologically connected and with Arjie featuring in all of them. Each story centralizes a character who can be classified as marginal in terms of race, sexuality or gender. The first and last stories are about Arjie himself, the second about Radha aunty who dares to respond to the advances of a Sinhalese boy although her family is arranging for her wedding with a Tamilian, the third concerns the Burgher Daryl Brohier who was once Amma's lover; the fourth is about Jegan, the son of an old chum of Appa's, who has connections with the LTTE and the fifth involves Shehan, the boy who initiates Arjie into homosexuality. The sixth and final story is in the form of a diary entry, which chronicles the fateful events of violence against Tamils and the subsequent emigration of Arjie's family from Sri Lanka.

Shyam Selvadurai confronts the problematic issue of being different in terms of race and sexuality. Each of the six stories posits the outsider - Arjie, Radha aunty, Daryl, Shehan and Jegan - against the mainstream/dominant culture and narrates his/her experiences. **Funny Boy** is thus an example of postcolonial discourse that draws its sustenance from presenting a counter discourse. It makes a valuable contribution to the mosaic of Canadian culture.

Shyam Selvadurai's second novel **Cinnamon Gardens** is not just about an individual's past. Rather, the novel is about Sri Lankan history. **Cinnamon**

Gardens goes back in time to the 1920s, during the declining days of colonialism when Sri Lanka was still Ceylon. It is a historical novel, which locates itself within a particular period of Sri Lankan history (1927 - 1931) and the central character; Annalukshmi is one of the new emancipated women who do not hesitate to speak their own mind.

The novel's epigraph is from George Eliot's **Middlemarch**: "For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs". That is what precisely the novel is about - people who lead 'hidden' lives - Annalukshmi, who wants to be different from the other Sri Lankan Tamil women who lead a conformist life of marriage and household; and more importantly, about Balendran, the clandestine homosexual who consents to lead a 'hidden' life and who ultimately sacrifices self-desire for the good of the family. **Cinnamon Gardens** is thus a historical novel, which portrays history's forgotten people, and their memories. As an immigrant writer, Selvadurai's fiction is always set in his native Sri Lanka thereby reinforcing the idea that the immigrant's moorings are always in his/her homeland.

Linda Hutcheon says "the cultural richness that immigration has brought to this country (Canada) has changed forever our concept of what constitutes 'Canadian literature' (1990, 13). This is true when applied to the Sri Lankan-Canadian writers. They have pushed the boundaries of Canadian literature into new realms. The works of the Sri Lankan-Canadian writers are part of Canadian literature as they present a wide range of identity-construction that is only

possible in a pluralist society like Canada. If we take the promise of multiculturalism positively then the works of such writers provide us with insight into the lives of all Canadians - irrespective of class, origin, colour or creed. Thus the future of these writers reflects the future of Canada.

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Abdul Mohammedali Jinnah

The Indian Diaspora in Canada

It is good to remember that European vicissitudes have not been the only influences that have shaped Canada and the Canadian literary imagination.

There has been a lively contribution to the Canadian ethos by South Asian immigrants to Canada since the earliest settlements at the beginning of the twentieth century. The term 'south Asia' has acquired numerous imaginative

The Chinese in Canada

The Early Chinese Migrations to Canada.

It has been pointed out that a Buddhist monk Hwei-Chin was the first to mark the beginning of Chinese immigration to Canada in the 5th century. It is said that Hwei-Chin had taken a voyage to North America about 993 years earlier to Columbus, but this has been contested by many. The early recorded immigration to Canada from China dates back to 1778, when a group of fifty Chinese artisans accompanied Captain John Meares to build a trading post of Vancouver Island. However only in 1858, the Chinese immigration became quite popular, when Asian gold prospects came to British Columbia. Like other European, African and other Asian immigrants to Canada, the cause of immigration was identical... the miserable conditions in the native land and the alluring factors in the new land. In the 19th century the migration from China were on the increase due to unfavorable conditions like floods, typhoons, earthquakes, famine, local wars, etc. Further the “Gold Mountain” or ‘gum san’ syndrome represented hope, prosperity and stability. But the chances for the Chinese gold miners were not favorable and so they found themselves doing all types of jobs like public construction in British Columbia; building Caribou Wagon Road in 1863; stringing telephone wires for western union in 1866; digging canals, reclaiming wasteland etc. Between 1881 and 1885, when the Canadian Pacific Railway was constructed, Chinese were brought in large numbers from China to help build the railway. It is said that, over 15,000 Chinese moved over to Canada and about 6,500 of these were employed directly by the CPR. As soon as the CPR was completed, the Federal Government started to restrict the immigration of Chinese to Canada and the first federal Anti-Chinese Bill was passed in 1885 which imposed a Head tax of \$50

upon every person of Chinese origin entering the country. It is said that during that time no other group was targeted in this way. The Head Tax was increased to \$ 100 in 1900 and to \$500 in 1903. \$500 was equivalent to two years wages of a Chinese labourer at the time. Meanwhile, Chinese were denied Canadian citizenship. In all, the Federal Government collected \$23 million from the Chinese through the Head Tax. Despite the Head Tax, Chinese immigrants continued to move over to Canada. On June 30, 1923 the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed allowing only diplomats, children born in China, students and merchants to enter Canada. This bill was a thunderbolt to the laborers as it destroyed their dreams of a reunion with their families. The Head Tax and Exclusion Act resulted in a long period of separation of families. As a result, the Chinese community in Canada it is claimed, became a "bachelor society". Back in China, the women, separated by their husbands, found themselves abandoned and confronted with poverty starvation and other extreme economic hardships. This Exclusion Act, which came into effect on July 1, 1923, in Canada was considered by the Chinese Canadian community as "Humiliation Day" for many decades. Lien Chao points out "although Chinese Canadians deserve the title of pioneers and nation-builders, systematic racism in Canadian history has denied them recognition" (17).

The Anti-Asian Vancouver Riot of 1907: In September 1907, there was a serious riot against Asian businesses in downtown Vancouver that was started by members of the racist Asiatic Exclusion League. Because Canada was in a slight recession that year and a fair amount of white people were out of work on the west coast, there was a great deal of anger and hostility directed towards the Asians. Generally, unemployed Whites in blue-collar labour jobs felt that Asians were taking

job opportunities away from them. A mob of about 9,000 white people attacked all the business establishments of the Asians, causing immense loss of property. Later that year, a federal government inquiry was held and future Prime Minister Sir William Lyon Mackenzie King in his final report on the matter recommended an amount of \$26,000 to Chinese businesses and \$9,000 to the Japanese community in damages.

When the ban was lifted in 1947, there were many migrants from China to Canada but they also exhibited the same characteristics as those who came during the first wave of China-to-Canada immigration. They tended to speak neither of Canada's official languages and also held on firmly to their Chinese heritage and culture. This has, of course, changed considerably and in 1967 when the Point System was introduced, immigrants of different races, color or nations were judged by the same standards. Consequently, in almost every Canadian city grew a Chinatown. Between 1983 and 1996, about 700,000 Chinese business people (mostly from Hong Kong) came to settle in Vancouver and, to a lesser extent, Toronto. They brought billions of dollars worth of investment funds with them and the image of Chinatown has changed dramatically, reflecting the social changes in the broader Canadian society.

Chinese Canadian Literature: During the one hundred years of silence Chinese immigrants and their descendants were confined within Chinatowns with their only heritage language. But as Chao pointed out, ".Although Chinese language still plays an important role in the community today continuous enclosure in that language for contemporary Chinese-Canadian writers would suggest a self-imposed and self-prolonged silence and isolation in Canadian culture." This realization and the historical transition experienced by Chinese Canadians from a collective silence to a voice gave

birth to contemporary Chinese Canadian literature in English. The writers adopt dialogue as an approach to Canadian history and launch a "bone-hunting journey" as a metonymy of research to recover the historical documents in the community. A socio-historical milieu "Gold Mountain" is consistently validated in Chinese Canadian writings in which bachelor laborers and their generations are positioned as speaking subjects. By celebrating the survival and the development of the community, Chinese Canadian literature displays 'the collective self' as the sum of its common values and honors individual men and women. They have endured unusual physical and mental hardships and existed as 'eternal immigrants' "forever poised on the verge of not belonging" (115) and whose lives constitute a resistant voice against discrimination.

In 1976, a group of Chinese in Vancouver organized a Writers' Workshop together with Japanese Canadians, which resulted in the anthology *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Anthology* is published in 1979. The anthology laid emphasis on the political agenda of the Chinese Canadian Literature, as Donald Yee points out that Chinese Canadian writers have to write about racism, while celebrating the struggle, survival and growth of the individuals and the community: "Racism was part of our history. But there were also neglected heroes and stories, glazed-over events and memories. Chinese Canadians had a history, and in this lay the sense of community, and the context of our belonging here in Canada. These we believed were important cultural components of our lives...."(66). Thus the publication of *Inalienable Rice* symbolizes the beginning of the collective transformation from silence to voice and a sign of reterritorialization, thereby opening up of a forum for the participants to question the lack of representation of their experience in Canadian history. Twelve years later, the same political agenda found expression in another

anthology *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians* (1991). Both the anthologies are multi-genre productions ranging from poetry, short story, essay and interview, visualizing throes of a once silenced community. The writers envisage the epic struggles, collective self, the identity crisis, the searching of the bones and Gold Mountain in their works. A few examples shall be given:

Jim Wong-Chu's lyric "Old Chinese Cemetery" published in *Inalienable Rice* describes the poet going through a phase of identity crisis. His search leads him to the burial ground of the Gold Mountain men, where the bones of the community ancestors were deserted as their deeds were forgotten in Canadian history:

I walk
On earth
Above bones of a multitude
Of golden mountain men
Searching for scraps
Of haunting memories
.....
Peering in
For a desperate moment
I touch my past(8)

Paul Yee's *The Grass Dragon* symbolizes the birth of Chinese Canadian literature:

To celebrate
Our first dragon
Made in Canada.

We can only wait

We can hardly wait. (40)

The repeated use of "we" and "our" epitomizes "the collective self" as predominant discursive paradigm. While *Inalienable Rice* symbolizes the birth of Chinese Canadian literature, *Many Mouthed Birds* presents its future. (I shall make a reference to just one or two short stories and a poem) in *Many Mouthed Birds*—"Why My Mother Can't Speak English" by Garry Engkent. It depicts the mother who has been isolated from the rest of Canadian society, as she is confined to the kitchen of her husband's restaurant in Chinatown. This becomes a pointer of the invisibility of the immigrant Chinese women in Canada. Contrary to this depiction there is another story in the anthology, "Mabel's Hockey Game" by Winston Christopher Kam, which portrays the life of a poor black servant woman, Mabel, whose interest in watching field hockey leads her gradually to enter the traditional male domain of field hockey as an amateur referee.

Laiwan's bilingual poem "The Imperialism of Syntax" raises the question of the overwhelming power of the English language. She writes: "you had traveled long and far to be subjects to another's language/ another's syntax/Right away those rules of grammar were the forgetting of yourself" (58). Laiwan's bilingual version of the poem explores the migration, colonization and the inevitable linguistic dispossession experienced by thousands of people.

The significance of the title *Inalienable Rice* is the allusion to "unalienable rights" which was the key phrase of the American Declaration of Independence. As rice is the indispensable food for all Asians, the title is a commentary on the social and

racial equality that Asian Canadians are entitled to but were deprived for many decades. The front cover is quite symbolic--- a rice bowl flanked by a pair of chopsticks on one side and a knife and fork on the other. Outside the circle is printed 50 lbs and on the right 22.68 kg. The choice for the Chinese Canadians is between chopsticks on one side and knife and fork on the other or the British system and the International system or the choice to accept both—denoting a double cultural identity. Likewise the title *Many Mouthed Birds* originates in Chinese and is translated into English indicating a linguistic appropriation. The use of the plural form in Many-Mouthed and Birds is indicative of plurality. Bennet Lee comments in *Many Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians*: "the potential conflict arising from the friction between the two worlds and the powerful influence of the secondary-culture lurking offstage account for what is fresh and energetic and unique about much of this literature"...The writers in this anthology are "many mouthed birds" because they are breaking a long and often self imposed silence.

Inalienable Rice and *Many Mouthed Birds* aimed at challenging the hegemony of the "monolithic, exclusionary systems of authority" conveyed by some of the existing Canadian anthologies. Both the anthologies presented a collective social advancement and cultural development of contemporary Chinese Canadians. They have gone a long way to convey a community history, to define and redefine the Chinese Canadian identity.

Yet another collective memoir *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* (1992) challenges the myth that there have been no Chinese, women until recently. Paul Yee claims:

Historically, Chinese women came to Canada as early as Chinese men. Though outnumbered by their male counterparts for many decades due to the Exclusion Act Chinese Canadian women have a parallel herstory. "On March 1, 1860, Mrs. Kwong Le, whose husband was a prosperous merchant from San Francisco, was the first Chinese woman to arrive in Canada."(89).

Jin Guo is a testimony to the shared racial and gender background. It is the first written document that has been able to transcribe the oral history of Chinese Canadian women in English. The women who were interviewed for the collection expressed a peculiar identity as Chinese and as Canadians.

The recent writings by Chinese Canadians although burdened by a cultural baggage. I feel, do not tend to create a sense of total exclusionism particularly because recent discussions of ethnicity, highlight the heterogeneity and multiplicity, of the ethnic in any multicultural context. For instance, the third-generation Canadian-born Chinese (CBC) have very different experiences, allegiances, and history. The images of the Chinese are changing as their roles in the society have changed. In fact, some of them are proud of their double cultural identity. They feel that being Canadian cannot exclude their Chinese identity and vice-versa. For instance, Winnie Ng evaluates her own identity according to her role in the community today. She claims:

For me, the whole identification of myself as a "Canadian" has been a very gradual process...But once you get involved in working in the community.

Eventually there's a process of moving from identifying yourself as an immigrant to identifying yourself as a Canadian of Chinese origin...(Lee 167-

68)

Being only Chinese or Canadian is very restrictive, as Romana Mar points out that Chinese Canadian culture is” not solely Chinese, nor is it white Canadian. Our culture is a blend of both.”(Chao 177). The poem “Orientation” by Gunn sums up the present status of the Chinese as an adjective rather than a noun when used in Canada:

In the world today
Chinese
Are people
Who live in China
On the local scene
Chinese
Are adjectives
That modify people (38).

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CHINESE CANADIAN LITERATURE

Denise Chong, Sean Gunn , Jam Ismail, Winston Cristopher Kam, Evelyn Lau, Sky Lee, Jim Wong-Chu and Paul Yee are well-known names. There are also other minor writers like Weyman Chan, Wayson Choy, Garry Engkent, Larissa Lai, Lucy Ng and so on.

Evelyn Lau belongs to the CBC. She was born on July 2, 1971 in Vancouver and began publishing her works in literary journals at an early age of 13. Her fictional works have been accepted by magazines like *Vancouver Magazine*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Queen's Quarterly* and *Step Magazine*. Her experience of running away from home has been chronicled in her autobiography *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*. Her work exemplifies the plight of “the enormous social problems experienced by hundreds of high school drop-outs and runaways, who are likely to become ‘sad and tawdry child welfare’ recipients” (Chao 158). Prostitution and quest for a father’s affection inform her writings. Lau’s *Fresh Girls and Other Stories* (1993) also harps on the above theme *You are Not Who You Claim* is her poetry collection wherein she expresses her desire for authorship and personal success. She has also authored *Oedipal Dreams* and *In the House of Slaves*. Lau at present is working on her fourth collection of poetry. Lien Chao, in *Beyond Silence* observes that “Lau’s prose is characterized by a single Freudian psychoanalytical drama -- the Oedipal paradigm” (157).

Fred Wah is yet another Canada born Chinese who grew up in the West Kootenay region of British Columbia. He has attained recognition in Canada and has won the Governor General’s Award for Poetry in 1985. Presently

working as a teacher, Wah had studied music and English literature and is one of the founding editors of the poetry Newsletter *Tish*. He has edited quite a number of literary magazines. His most credited work is his book of prose poems, *Waiting for Saskatchewan*. He has authored seventeen books of poetry and has written a book called *Diamond Grill*. The work celebrates hybridity. The Shavian stress on chocolates is reiterated by the writer here when he considers “bread, and butter as daily necessities for everyone” (Chao 144). His prose work ‘Elite’ employs first person narration, takes the reader into confidence and stresses on the importance of memories. It delineates clearly the immigrant’s plight and invokes life on the prairies. He deals at length with the issue of liminality, being part of different worlds but belonging to none. Wah’s use of “parallel unrelated nouns” proclaim him to be a conscious writer (Chao 133). His father looms large in many of his poems and the theme of the search for the “genetic bag” is found to recur in his works.

Sean Gunn, a fourth generation Chinese Canadian born in British Columbia was “an activist in Chinatown during the 1970s” (Lee and Chu 181). One of the editors of *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology*, Gunn lives in Vancouver where he is a music composer and a gas-station attendant. He writes poetry and is like e. e. cummings in the use of lower case letters alone, except for the 'I' which alone is capitalized. This poet makes use of onomatopoeic expressions and uses appropriated English. He shows his indebtedness to both China and Canada by using colloquial English interspersed with expressions like ‘number one son’ when this is not at all important in the Western countries. He dwells on the themes of culture and

identity. Sean Gunn explores the relation between poetry and performative media” (Chao 128).

Jam Ismail, the poetess, unlike the others, was born in Hong Kong. She has undergone multiple migrations, had been in India and Hong Kong before moving to Canada in 1963. She shuttles back and forth between Vancouver and Hong Kong. She is a writer who plays with syntax and even uses musical notations as part of her poems. Ismail deliberately violates “the rules of capitalization, spacing, punctuation, paragraphing, structuring and typesetting” (Chao 130). Writing poems numbered in “itemized paragraphs”, Ismail “writes the resistance of the colonized into her poetry” (130).

Sky Lee is a towering female presence in the field of Chinese-American fiction. Born in Port Alberni, British Columbia, she has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of British Columbia and a diploma in nursing. She works as a nurse and a writer. She has bagged the Vancouver Book Award for 1990 for her debut novel, *Disappearing Moon Café*. She has published her short stories in *Vancouver Short Stories*, *West Coast Review*, *Asianindian* and *Time Capsule*. Her novel *Disappearing Moon Café* spans four generations and tells the story of the largest restaurant in Chinatown Kae Ying Woo, the narrator, in the course of the novel reveals murky family secrets. The deftness of Sky Lee lies in that she is able to combine the experiences and the cultural identity of the immigrant Chinese along with family history. Sky Lee is also the author of a collection of short stories titled *Bellydancer: Stories*.

Denise Chong is also a Vancouver born Chinese Canadian and was economic adviser to Pierre Trudeau. Chong got recognized despite her ethnic

origin and left public service in 1984 to become a professional writer. She got married to Roger Smith in 1989, following a visit to China in 1987 which served as an inspiration for her work *The Concubine's Children* (1994). The two worlds of China and Canada are depicted in this work and the pang of separation is also highlighted. The family history dealt with in the text spans from the time of Chong's grandmother to that of Chong. Denise Chong relies upon her mother's memory in writing the book. The titular concubine is Chong's grandmother. Chan-Sam, her husband moves between China and Canada. Immigration on false papers, detention of immigrants, and the throes experienced by a divided family are some of the central concerns of the work. This work won the Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-fiction and the City of Vancouver Book Award. The writer has also delivered a speech, "Being Canadian" in 1994 which reflects nationalist sentiments. Denise Chong has also written *The Girl in the Picture* (2000). The book is all about Vietnam war and the war victim Kim Phuc. Chong was honoured with a doctorate by the University of Northern British Columbia.

Winston Christopher Kam, though of Trinidadian origin, has been acclaimed as a Chinese Canadian playwright. His three act play, *Bachelor Man* "is about a group of Chinese men who are forced to re-examine their relationships with their women and, in the process, learn about themselves" (Chao 66). The play has as its backdrop the Chinese Exclusion Act passed in 1923.

Weiman Chan, the poet is a CBC and has published short stories and poetry in *Ne West Review*, *Vox*, *Calgary Herald* and *Secrets from the Orange Couch*.

Yuen-fong Woon, in the novel *The Excluded Wife*, like Winston Christopher Kam deals with the pangs of exclusion.

Besides these, there are upcoming writers in the Chinese Canadian literary scenario like Garry Engkent, Weyson Choy, Anne Jew, Lydia Kwa, Larissa Lai, Ariel Grue Lee, Paul Ching Lee, Lucy Ng, Ben Soo and Paul Yee.

Paul Yee, whose birthplace is Saskatchewan, is an archivist and volunteer for the Chinese Cultural Centre. He has authored the books *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver*, *Teach Me to Fly*, *Skyfighter*, *The Curses of the Third Uncle*, *Tales from the Gold Mountain* and *Roses Sing on Fresh Snow*. In his poem 'Last Words II' the speaker is an old man, who while young, had been "broad of shoulder/and supple as bamboo." (190). The Chinese practice of cooking rice "at break of work" is pictured. Separation of the young men from Chinese women is also a central concern of the poem.

Garry Engkent, as introduced by the editors of *Many Mouthed Birds*;

immigrated to Canada from Sun Wui country in Guangdong province in the 1950s. He has a doctorate in English literature and has taught in the universities across Canada, including the University of Toronto, where he is now teaching English literature and creative writing. His novel in progress, *A Chinaman's Chance*, covers the period 1920 to 1970 and chronicles the struggles of a Chinese family in Canada. . . ." (181).

In his story 'Why My Mother Can't Speak English', Garry Engkent presents the fear of an old Chinese immigrant who had lived in Canada for thirty years that she would be sent back to China. To acquire citizenship, she has to speak either English or French which she doesn't know. Her husband had dissuaded her from learning the language and now that he is dead, she affectionately blames him even while performing the rituals for the dead. The fear of the husband that his wife will cease to be Chinese once she learns Canadian ways is also delineated. The woman manages to acquire the citizenship papers, but her love for China does not lessen even a little bit.

The poet Laiwan, though born in Zimbabwe, has parents who were born in Toi San in China. The writer had immigrated to Canada in 1977 and writes English and makes the translators translate her works into Chinese. Her poems are laden with the process of migration, subjecting oneself to the syntax of another land and the idea of belonging. Lien Chao rightly observes, "Laiwan's poem also exemplifies the resistant nature of postcolonial poetry. By writing about non-white or non-European experience, postcolonial poetry helps dismantle the power of the imperial syntax with its resistant context" (128-129).

Another writer of considerable merit is Larissa Lai, who has published poems in *Room of One's Own*, *Contemporary Verse 2* and *Matrix*. She is a member of the Asian Canadian Writers Workshop. Her poems are filled with images of bones, steamed rice and restaurant stairs.

Lucy Ng, a young emerging writer, has her poetry published in *Dandelion* and *The Antigone Review*. She is also the recipient of second prize for

fiction in the 1990 CBC Literary Competition. The extract “From ‘The Sullen Shapes of Poems’” expresses the immigrant’s enthusiasm in telling his host land born children about his trip to China and the CBC’s complaint that the father forgets that Canada too is home. The Chinese rituals retained even on staying in Canada finds mention. The hard work of the Chinese going unrewarded and the visit to China all ends in a final tribute of having inherited the sullen shapes of poems.

Wayson Choy, a Vancouver born citizen is a short story writer. His story “The Jade Peony” deals with the passing away of an old woman who is full of love and firm in her Chinese beliefs.

Ben Soo, who immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong in 1967, has his publications in periodicals and in the anthologies *Lakeshore Poets*, *Cross/cut: Contemporary English Quebec Poetry* and *Many Mouthed Birds*. He is the author of the short story titled ‘The Water Story’ and the poems ‘Prentiss and the Island’ and ‘The All Edges Band Estuary, Side Two Lizards!’

Paul Ching Lee is a first generation immigrant in Canada from China. He is a poet and translator and his works have appeared in *Prism International* and *New Orleans Review*. He has written a poem ‘Port Moody’.

Lydia Kwa is a poet who lives in Calgary and an emigrant from Singapore. “Her poems have been published in *CV2*, *Matrix*, *Antigonish Review*”, “*Descant*” and “*More Garden Varieties II*” (Lee and Wong-Chu 182). Her story ‘Hardhats and Safety Boots Must be Worn on this Project’ speaks of what it

feels to be born a girl in a patriarchal Chinese society. She has also written the poems 'Still Life With Frangipani' and 'Orchid Riddles'.

Anne Jew is a writer of short fiction and has publications in *Proem Canada* and *A Room of One's Own*. Her story 'Everyone Talked Loudly in Chinatown' is from a teen age girl's point of view and is about Chinese culture which the elders strive to maintain, her lover, the hurdles in immigration and clash between values of different cultures. It offers a description of Chinatown.

Ariel Grue Lee, a youngster born in British Columbia writes poems and stories. The poems 'The Dream' and 'Snow' written while she was in Grade I heralds the gradual progression into a genius.

The Chinese Canadian writers have proved that "silence can be transformed to a voice in a dominant discourse" (Chao 22) and herald social changes.

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