

**Women**

# **THE ASIANADIAN**

AN ASIAN CANADIAN MAGAZINE

THE ASIANADIAN VOL. 6 NO. 2

*The Story of an Indo-Canadian Marriage*

*A Film Maker Talks About Her Art:*

Midi Onodera

*I Live By My Dance:*

Rina Singha

*Can an Asian Play Lady Macbeth?*

Jean Yoon

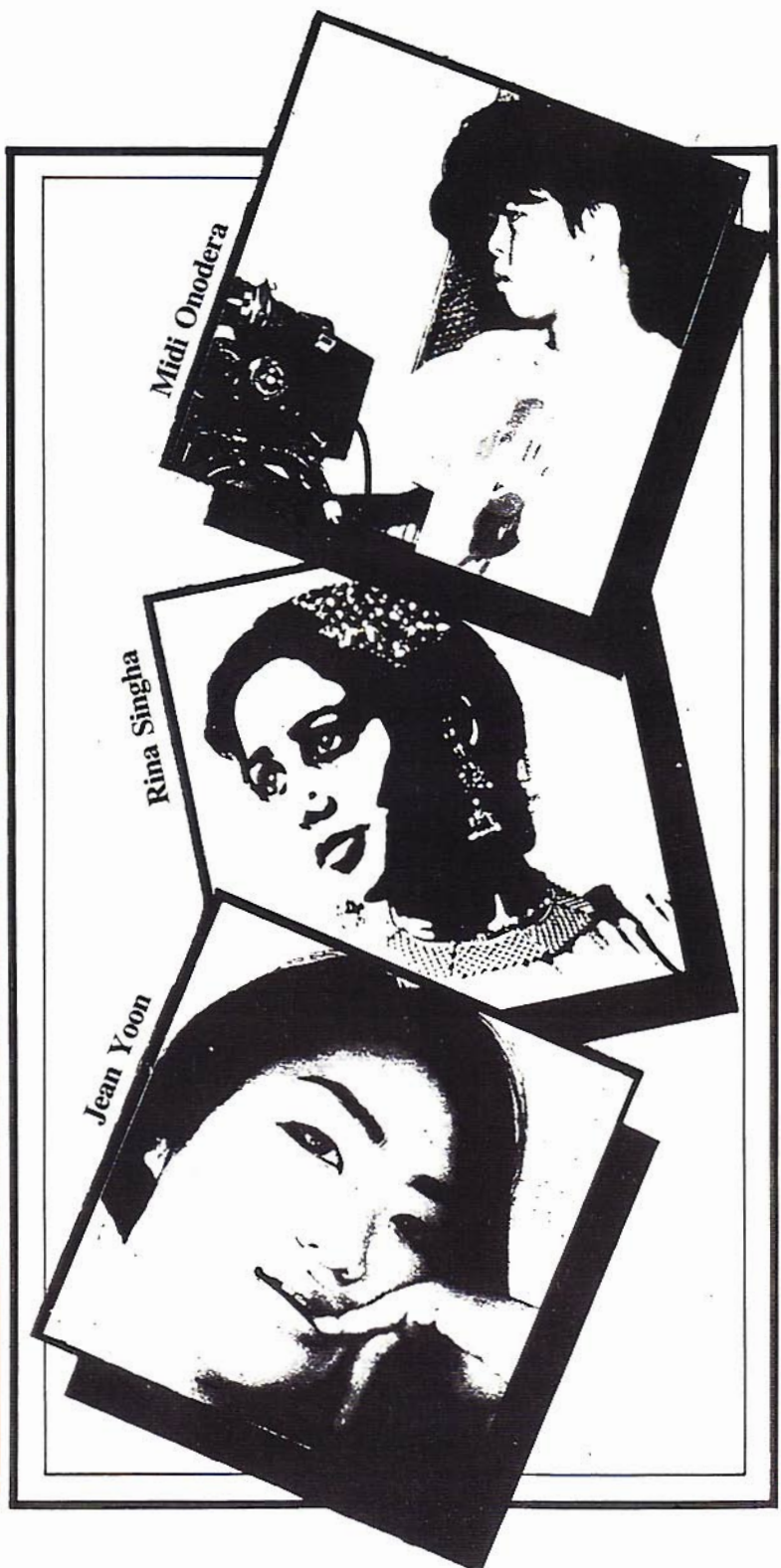
*Short Stories • Poem*

*• Asian Canadian Lesbians*

Midi Onodera

Rina Singha

Jean Yoon



**ORDER NOW**

ASIANADIAN RESOURCE WORKSHOP'S  
**Comprehensive Bibliography  
on Asian Canadians**

**ASIAN CANADIANS:  
A Bibliography**

compiled by

**Tariq Kidwai**

in collaboration with

**Jean Chong & Bobby Siu**

Subjects covered:

**Education • Employment •  
Family/Health • Race Relations •  
Media • Politics**

Nationalities covered:

**Chinese • Filipinos • Indians  
• Japanese • Koreans • Pakistanis  
• Sri Lankans • Vietnamese  
• Immigration**



Asianadrian Resource Workshop

Price:

\$15 (individual rate)

+

\$5 postage charge

\$20 (institutional rate)

To order write to:

Bibliography  
The Asianadrian Resource Workshop  
P.O. Box 1256  
Station Q, Toronto, Ontario  
M4T 2P4

# CONTENTS



## FEATURES

- 3 ASIAN CANADIAN LESBIANS**  
*Why They Don't Trust Each Other*  
by Phoenix
- 5 BEING A POLITICAL ACTIVIST IS RISKY**  
*An Interview With Martha Ocampo*  
by Meena Dhar
- 8 NO HELP FROM ANYONE**  
*The Trials of Women Garment Workers*  
edited by Christine Almeida
- 12 ARRANGED MARRIAGE: REARRANGED ROLES**  
*Story of an Indo-Canadian Marriage*  
by Anonymous
- 15 THE WAIT**  
*A Short Story*  
by Arun Prabha Mukherjee
- 18 SACHIKO**  
*A Short Story*  
by Kerri Sakamoto
- 21 CAN AN ASIAN PLAY LADY MACBETH?**  
*Jean Yoon Discusses Her Theatre Experiences*  
by ~~Jean Chong~~ Momoye Sugiman
- 24 I LIVE BY MY DANCE**  
*A Conversation With Rina Singha*  
by Meena Dhar
- 27 A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY**  
*Midi Onodera: A Film Maker Talks About Her Art*  
by ~~Momoye Sugiman~~ Jean Chong.

## DEPARTMENTS

- 2 EDITORIAL**
- 30 POETRY**  
*Halmonee*  
by Jean Yoon
- 31 COMMUNITY NEWS**  
*Hong Fook Mental Health Centre*
- 31 CONTRIBUTORS**

**Editors for this issue:** Meena Dhar  
Momoye Sugiman

**Editorial/Production Coordinator:** Satish Dhar

**Editorial Assistance:** Teri Chan

**Graphic Design/Layout:** Andy Tong

**Cover:** Andy Tong

Seven years ago *The Asianadian* published its first issue devoted to Asian women (Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall 1978). It was a pioneering effort which touched on many sensitive areas: our alienation from the larger society; the cultural values which define a woman's role in the community as well as in the family; our isolation from the mainstream women's movement. A common theme that emerged was one of isolation and frustration faced by Asian women in all these spheres.

Many exciting things have happened in the past decade. Although the issues are by and large the same, we feel that a new collective consciousness and sharing of common aspirations is growing among Asian women. Alienated by the radical chic of the mainstream women's movement with its yuppie, man-eater image verging on female chauvinism, immigrant women have begun to organize on their own. In the last few years the national and provincial networks of immigrant women have emerged.

A coalition of visible minority women has been formed in Toronto. Chinese, Filipino, East Indian, Korean, Latin American and Black Women have joined in these organizations to share, work together and build bridges between our diverse communities. Coming together in these forums we realize that there are many similarities in our communities. While struggling to find a new definition of our roles within the family and in our communities, we recognize that as the "other" in Canadian society, our men and children also experience race discrimination and alienation from the larger Canadian society. Within the context of socio-economic class and race which determine the position of our immigrant communities, how do we, as women, begin to define our role? This is the central question facing us today.

In traditional Asian societies there is a strong bond among women, particularly among family members and friends. This friendship between women is what we miss the most in Canadian society. What is exciting about these women's groups and organizations is the non-competitive and empathetic milieu in which women share, discuss and enjoy each other's company.

Germaine Greer, a leading mentor of western feminists, has recently discovered that the women of these cultures know how to co-operate and share and work collectively. This quality is somehow lacking in the western world where women are individualistic and competitive and their position in society appears to be determined more as a result of reaction to the male position than from a collective female consciousness. In fact, she sees the future of the feminist movement not in western society but in societies such as India, Bangladesh, Africa and Iran.

This collective, cooperative consciousness among us Asian women is our strength. We find it easier to work collectively as well as to cooperate with and understand our men. This strength is what we must nurture.

As relatively new immigrants in Canada Asian women are only beginning to understand their new identity. Of course, there are among us many individual success stories of women who have "made it" in the mainstream Canadian society, career-wise or through their academic achievement. However, even for these women, the structure of their communities creates a tension between their aspirations and the traditional cultural values. The politically active woman, the professional or working woman is still struggling to define her role in the family and to gain acceptance in the community. This tension can either be viewed as a positive force or a destructive one. It can be a challenge which can bring a new resolution not only in the lives of women, it can help shape the larger community.

In this issue of *The Asianadian* we have consciously focussed on the struggles and hopes of women who are not yet success stories. These are women who are in the process of "becoming". There are few models for them to follow nor any easy answers. In that sense their individual struggles are totally creative and inspirational. We have deliberately done little academic analysis. We have presented the stories of these women, as much as possible, in their own words. We hope that their stories will strike a resonance in the reader as they did in us.

---

## The Strength of Asian Women

---

by Meena Dhar  
Momoye Sugiman

# Asian Canadian Lesbians

## Why They Don't Trust Each Other

by Phoenix

*The following article was written by a gay Asian woman living in Toronto. She does not attempt to speak for all Asian lesbians – or to draw any definitive conclusions. What she offers us are some deeply personal thoughts, feelings and questions about being a “minority within a minority within a minority”.*

**A**s Asian or Asian Canadian women in this country we are often placed in situations where we must ask ourselves the question, “Do I see myself as Asian?” Personally, when I look into the mirror I do not see an Asian face immediately. First I see myself. Generally, I have not felt very self-conscious about my race. However, a recent experience with racism has forced me to confront the fact that most people see me as an Asian first, a woman second – and, finally, as a person. And along with the obstacles of being non-white and female in this society, I also have to deal with the obstacle of being gay.

Society still finds it difficult to accept lesbianism. Thus, as Asian lesbians we sometimes find it hard to come to terms with our sexuality. We do not have the freedom to simply be ourselves. When we look around us we find very few vocal Asian lesbians – women willing to discuss such matters as prejudice, Asian Canadian identity, and, particularly, lifestyle and sexuality. In fact, while working on this article I had problems finding Asian lesbians willing to be anonymously interviewed. Asian lesbians tend to be less visible, more low profile than gay Asian men. Hence, society is given the false impression that Asian lesbianism is non-existent.



As an active member of the gay community and Gay Asians of Toronto, I have only managed to meet a handful of Asian lesbians. These women are either Canadian-born or they immigrated to Canada at a very young age. Many of them revealed to me that as young teenagers they emulated their white counterparts, either consciously or subconsciously, in order to be accepted. But now, through their realization of who they really are, they are developing pride in their cultural heritages and are just trying to feel comfortable about themselves.

The Asian gay male community appears to be larger and more cohesive than the Asian lesbian community – if such a distinct *community* exists. I can only speculate from my personal viewpoint. As far as I am aware, Asian lesbians do not have a specific hang-out or organization that they can really go to. What they have is what one might call a subculture. A newcomer is introduced into the general lesbian subculture by a recognized member of that subculture. An Asian lesbian who finds a lover might 'settle down' with her lover (if she does not break up with her from fear of being found out). And if an Asian lesbian does participate in gay community events she does so at a very low profile.

In general, my lover (who is white) and I find that gay men, Asian or white, are much friendlier to us than any lesbians are. It is also interesting to note that straight Asian women are much more approachable and friendly than fellow lesbians whom we meet for the first time. Our experience as a couple is not unique. Our close lesbian friends and the Asian lesbians whom I have interviewed comment on the same phenomenon.

I think that if Asian lesbians could somehow overcome this irrational, nebulous sense of distrust they could really gain a lot of support and strength from each other. For

once I would like to be able to walk up to an Asian lesbian whom I have never met before and simply say "hello" without being resented and looked at suspiciously. The goal here is not necessarily to form a separate *Asian* lesbian community, but just to create open lines of communication and break down these self-defeating barriers which contribute to our invisibility and isolation. An Asian lesbian is clearly a minority within a minority. But she can help free herself and strengthen herself by becoming less invisible – and by taking pride in the fact that other Asian lesbians exist.

---

### One look from her tells me, "What the hell are you doing here?"

---

I presume that the lack of warmth and solidarity arises from insecurity, that is, these lesbians feel that we are breaking into their territory – or that we, as individuals, are a threat to their relationships with their lovers. There are times when I walk into a bar and chance to see another Asian lesbian. I feel compelled to run up to her and greet her as a long lost friend. However, one look from her tells me, "What the hell are you doing in here?" This kind of reaction, of course, makes me back off immediately. What I do not yet understand is why this distance and often hostility exists between one Asian lesbian and another when they encounter each other for the first time. Is it because they have adopted a straight white man's view



of an Asian woman – that is, a passive, submissive and exotic object? Hence, does the Asian lesbian think she is in great demand by white lesbians, and thus does she see the presence of another Asian lesbian in the room as competition? Is this why even straight Asian women who are strangers to each other tend to size each other up? Has the narrow media image of the submissive, exotic Asian doll become so deeply entrenched in our psyches that we must see other Asian women as threats – as potential competition? If this is how the Asian lesbian feels on a conscious or subconscious level, then she is greatly mistaken and doing herself a disservice. All the Asian lesbians whom I have gotten to know are in no way a threat to other Asian lesbians, or to the larger lesbian community. The only disadvantage/ advantage they might have is that they are a visible invisible minority.



# Being a Political Activist Is Risky

An Interview with Martha Ocampo

by Meena Dhar



*Martha Ocampo, Coordinator of the Coalition Against the Marcos Dictatorship/Philippine Solidarity Network in Toronto, is a rare example of a woman who has made a solid commitment not only to raising a family and pursuing a career in social services, but also to a meaningful political cause. Martha speaks candidly about her political involvement and its effect on her personal life in the following interview with Meena Dhar of *The Asianadian*. This interview took place in Toronto in September, 1984.*

**ASIANADIAN:** *As a woman who is politically active, what does it do to your personal life – your family?*

**OCAMPO:** As a woman, as a political activist, you go through a lot of junctures. In my case, one would be in the marital relationship. Both my husband and I were apolitical at first, so when I got into this organization he couldn't really understand why. At first, he thought it was alright, but when I started spending less and less time at home he wondered whether I would really prefer my politics over him and the children. So you reach a point where you have to examine the marriage and where it's going. As a woman, being politically active is risky. If your spouse doesn't have the understanding and patience, there's the possibility of a split up. In my case, the marriage survived, but I

know of cases where the husband and wife have had to move in different directions. When you become more politically conscious more aware of your role as a woman, the quality of your relationship with your family can actually improve. It can become richer because your values are deeper. Your children become more exposed to the realities of the world. They see that their mother has other roles besides that of the mother. At first they might go through a period of feeling neglected, wondering why their mother is not at home as often as the mothers of their friends. But I feel that my kids have adjusted well. It's hard in such a family-oriented society. But I too am family-oriented. I

try to get across to my children that what I'm doing is important and it is really for them, for their future, that I do what I do.

**A:** *How has your husband adjusted to the change in lifestyle? How does the average husband of a 'woman activist' adjust?*

**OCAMPO:** In one way my situation is very different. Even before I became politically involved my husband and I shared household responsibilities. Our relationship wasn't always a traditional one. The tension between us stemmed from my absence. I was simply spending less and less time with my family. My husband and I have reached a real understanding now, but I'm sure we'll come to another juncture one day because you can't stay in one spot forever. My husband has become very supportive. However, in general, women in our group have had to contend with sexism and machismo in their personal relationships. There seems to be an underlying fear in some men that when we develop and move forward they will somehow be left behind – and “women should never be further ahead than their men.” Ostensibly, the married woman in the group has a husband with an open mind, but he still expects her to do all the housework and meet all the traditional responsibilities of wife and mother. And he fears that her political activities will eventually take over, leaving no room for him.

**A:** *What about the unmarried woman in the organization?*

**OCAMPO:** If the single woman decides to have a relationship, she must face the same backward tendencies. On the other hand, if she decides not to have a man in her life, the community would attribute this to her being too assertive, too aggressive – traits that scare men away.

**A:** *How do the women in your organization relate to the men within the organization?*

**OCAMPO:** We do have the problem of male chauvinism. It's going to be around for a long time, but it's our responsibility to constantly raise the issue. For example, sometimes a man might make a joking, off-hand comment like, “Oh, she's a typical woman” – or “How can your husband permit you to be out so late at night?” We don't allow such comments to go by without questioning them and pointing out the sexism. However, we don't view the men in the group as our enemy. We always make sure we are very clear about who the enemy is: the Marcos dictatorship and U.S. imperialism.

---

**“There seems to be an underlying fear in some men that when we develop and move forward, they will somehow be left behind.”**

---

**A:** *How have your friends and the Filipino community in general reacted to your growing political involvement?*

**OCAMPO:** Well, at first any woman who is a bit more assertive than the norm is labelled as the one who wears the pants in the family. But now, because of the consistency which I've shown over the years, my friends respect what I do. Not all

my friends support my cause. For some, I'm far too radical. At first, I felt uneasy with some of them. But now we both accept each other and they are no longer hurt when I can't show up at their baby showers. My exposure in the community has made them more aware of my commitment – my priorities. In general, many Filipinos here may not always agree with us, but they respect us, our analyses, our consistency. In the Filipino community, there are those who idolize us and those who label us a “communists”, “radicals”, “subversives”. When you ask these people exactly what these labels mean, they don't know what to say. It's just something they've picked up from Western propaganda. Then there are also those who support Marcos. They might try to intimidate us by taking our pictures at demonstrations or attacking our newsletter. We can't really be bothered responding to them all the time because there are so many more important activities to pour our energies into.

**A:** *Do you feel isolated at all?*

**OCAMPO:** At first, but not now. When you're feeling isolated it's put within a political context and the group helps you understand what you're going through. There's a strong support network within our group on a personal level. I think that's very important. You can't really grow fully when you're on your own. We put a lot of emphasis on the collective style of work.

**A:** *How much of your time is consumed by the organization?*

**OCAMPO:** I have regular meetings every week, sometimes 'til 2:00 a.m. after work. We also have a lot of work on our newsletter – writing, editing, distribution. And then we have our specialized committees: a human rights committee, a labour



committee, anti-U.S. intervention and others. As CAMD/PSN's coordinator, I have to keep on top of everything. We lose a lot of sleep and we don't see our families as often as we would like to, but we always make an effort to arrange some activities that will include our families.

**A:** *What was it that drew you into the organization?*

**OCAMPO:** As far as I'm concerned, I came in with the inspiration of my sisters who are very much involved in the anti-Marcos movement. If you look at my personal situation you might say, "Hey, you're not treated so badly here." But I have *accumulated* memories of racism and exploitation in my life – I was always aware of the injustices, but I could never put it all into a political framework. My involvement in the organization has helped me to understand these things in a global context.

**A:** *Has the organization focussed on other issues, aside from what's going on in the Philippines?*

**OCAMPO:** The Philippine struggle is not isolate from the struggle all over the world, including Canada. The Philippines is of very strategic importance to the U.S. in Southeast Asia because of the U.S. bases there. Our group's strategy is to stop U.S. intervention in the Philippines as the U.S. will not tolerate any threats to their interests in the country. As we focus or work in support of the Philippine struggle, it becomes our responsibility to make the links. For example, we raise issues which are relevant to the Filipinos in Canada – racism, workers' rights, peace, etc. Increases in the military budget mean social service cuts which hit minorities the hardest. We oppose cruise missile testing because it's clearly a war preparation. We support self-determination for all nations. U.S. military intervention in Central America violates that principle and will embolden the U.S. to intervene in the

Philippines. Our support for the rights of Filipino domestics in Canada is tied to the economic crisis in the Philippines.

---

**“Occasionally a man might joke: ‘How can your husband permit you to be out so late at night?’”**

---

**A:** *Many people came to Canada to escape political repression. But one thing that seems to happen here is that you are numbed into alienation and apathy. You go to work in the morning. You go to sleep at night. You begin to lose sense of who you are. Very few immigrants seem able to maintain strong links with what's going on in the homeland. When you come to Canada you begin to get preoccupied with everyday struggles here – racial discrimination, unemployment, inflation... Have you found this phenomenon in the Filipino community?*

**OCAMPO:** Yes. We find it difficult to get more support from the community because people are busy trying to get assimilated into the mainstream. Even though their sentiments might be with the Anti-Marcos struggle, the reality is that there's a more immediate reality here that they have to deal with. Filipino immigrants are different from say, Latin American immigrants because most of them are *not* political refugees. They came here by choice to better themselves economically. So you have to convince them of the importance of

maintaining the link with the Philippines. It doesn't happen overnight. We have to make them realize their identity as workers and their responsibility to help out fellow workers in the Philippines... After the Aquino assassination there was a qualitative change in the community. People became much more open in denouncing Marcos. There was more anger and outrage. We need to do a lot of work to sustain that awareness...to keep that light burning.

△



# NO HELP FROM ANYONE

## The Trials of Women Garment Workers

Edited by Christine Almeida

*Their lives are largely invisible to mainstream Canada. Marginalized, but not without hope and solidarity, they are the women of Canada's garment industry. Predominantly immigrants, and increasingly of Asian origin, these women are confronted by factors beyond their individual control: the descent of the Canadian garment industry within the changing international distribution of manufacturing industries; transcultural and patriarchal barriers to their full participation at work and in society; trade unions that, as yet, do not reflect the gender and cultural composition of the garment work force. These issues are elaborated upon in the following pages. Olivia Chow provides material on Toronto's garment industry. Tanya Dasgupta describes factors perpetuating cultural and sexual discrimination. To conclude, Winnie Ng suggests how collective integrated action can empower immigrant workers to change the conditions that limit their participation.*

**A** large part of Canada's garment industry is concentrated in downtown Toronto's Spadina district. It is Canadian manufacturing's third largest employer and its largest employer of women. Most of Spadina's 10,000 workers are immigrant women – Chinese, East Indian, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Vietnamese. For some, wages are low and working conditions far from pleasant. Some work at noisy, stressful sewing and ironing machines. Some work at home.

Others, mainly in union shops, earn a modest wage, working at more comfortable machines installed to modernize production.

Recently, Canada's garment workers have been faced with the prospect of a declining clothing and textile industry. One of the reasons for this trend is the phasing out of import controls that have protected and strengthened the industry for nearly a hundred years. As protective policies decrease, imports are increasing and giving rise to heated debate over the need to maintain and develop Canadian manufacturing to meet the needs of Canadian workers and consumers.

In Spadina, the industry concentrates on clothing manufacture. There is a small amount of textile production that makes the raw material from which our clothes are fashioned, plus such items as draperies, blankets and upholstery fabrics. Only a very small percentage of the garment industry is now under direct foreign control. About 82.2% of its assets are under Canadian control.

Another reason for the shrinkage of our garment industry is the increasing relocation of industry in those parts of the world where labour is cheapest and where police-state governments suppress free labour unions and human rights. Most of the workers in these countries can't afford to buy the clothing they make, so their labour produces mainly goods for export. The chief beneficiaries of such migrant industries are transnational corporations, local wealthy elites

and banks. Ultimately, such trade relations result in Canadian garment workers (many of whom are of Asian origin) and foreign workers (many in Asia) cutting each other's wages in order to retain the employment provided by manufacturing plants.

Then there is the use of new technologies. While increasing productivity and competitiveness, the introduction of new technologies can cost workers their jobs. Dan Heap, federal Member of Parliament for Spadina, suggests that new technology could serve persons rather than the reverse when he says: "This technology must have the capability of matching the needs of the Canadian market...Of equal importance, this new technology must not rob workers of all their skills, but must give their work more dignity. Workers must have a say in how the new technology will be used and productivity gains must be shared by the workers whose labour makes it possible, in the form of shorter hours, higher pay and better working conditions."

---

**A**mong the most recent immigrant women to provide their labour to Canada's garment industry are women from Asia: women whose origins are Bangladeshi, Chinese, East Indian, Pakistani and Viet-

*nameese, to name some. Responding to The Asianadian's enquiries about South Asian women in the garment industry, Tanya Dasgupta writes below on forces that prevent these women from full participation in shaping the processes that affect their lives.*

**M**any South Asian women coming to Canada face this society as total strangers marked by their "strange" dress, customs and behaviour. They remain "outsiders", i.e., not belonging to the dominant culture in a predominantly white society. Whether they work as factory labourers, as office workers or key punchers, they are under pressure to reject their own lifestyle. They soon find out that employers and co-workers accept them better if they abandon their customary dress (*sari* or *shalwar-kameez*) and adopt pants or western-style dresses. Only a few women in professional positions can continue to wear dresses of their own cultures.

Customs regarding dress can be readily compromised. However, what South Asian women often complain about as a source of great tension and stress is the prejudicial and sexist "chit-chat", especially during breaks. They generally prefer to be quiet and reserved. They have not been socialized to be vocal and aggressive. This cultural difference seems to have generated a widespread belief that South Asians are arrogant, uncommunicative or grim.

Many South Asian women workers



also face the barrier of not being fluent in English, a fact that hinders communication with other Canadians and restricts their access to such information as labour laws and rights at work. Consequently, many South Asian women end up as assembly line workers, garment workers, helpers in ethnic restaurants and in a variety of other low-paid jobs which are marked by lack of security and hazards to health. It also seems that ESL (English as a Second Language) and skill-upgrading classes are inaccessible to many of these women because of the admission criteria (e.g. minimum level of proficiency in English), the expenses involved, and the lack of transportation and day care. Experiences of many women, however, reveal that South Asian women, with or without such upgrading, are forced to remain in the low status jobs with which they started.

Coming from semi-feudal patriarchal societies, South Asian women continue to experience male domination at home and exploitation at work. Transplanted into a highly industrialized society, they lack the informal support system of the extended family and friendship networks. In many instances women are completely isolated in their apartments, venturing out only to bring home wages. They exist only for the comfort of their families, no matter what hardships they may have to undergo, and if they dare to raise a voice against decadent patriarchy, they are often severely chastised.

South Asian women, perhaps like many other working class women, act primarily as housewives and mothers despite working full-time. After a full day of labour (or sometimes night shifts) they are invariably expected to cook, clean the house, wash dishes and send the children to school. Hence, they often work almost 20 hours a day. At home they provide free labour. In the job market they are, in a

sense, a captive labour force, drawn on whenever the need arises.

---

**A**ware of the obstacles to full participation faced by immigrant women in the garment industry, Winnie Ng moves us from recognizing the problems to taking action for change. Her proposal below was presented at the Future of the Garment Industry Conference and the Workers and their Communities Conference, both held in Toronto in 1984. It offers an alternate model for organizing and building a stronger workers' movement in the garment industry.

**T**he need for organizing immigrant garment workers stems from my experience in working with immigrant women, in particular, Asian women who are the newest arrivals in the industry's labour force. This need applies to both unionized and non-unionized workers.

### **South Asian Women experience male domination at home and exploitation at work.**

In reviewing the scenario of unionized women workers it was found that women comprise over 85% of the workforce and over 90% of them are immigrants, yet union leadership has failed to reflect this ethnic and gender composition. Certainly, immigrant women workers have more than their share of constraints militating against their coming out to union meetings or running for executive positions in the union. But is it not the responsibility of unions

to facilitate their participation by reducing some of the constraints, rather than using those constraints as their excuse to do nothing?

One example to illustrate this point is the lack of interpreters at union meetings. What is the point of sitting through a meeting if one doesn't understand what's going on? Eventually, the original enthusiasm felt by the women when they first sign their union cards fizzles out. The union becomes invisible and the past becomes history. The union continues to struggle in the name of the workers but not *with* the workers.

Another example is the issue of piece-work versus time rates. It is unfair for union management to say that the workers love the piece-work system, and thereby absolve itself of the need to negotiate for time rates, when, in fact, the women have never been offered any alternative – or when the time rate is kept so low that one has to “become one's own boss” to make a decent living. The voice of immigrant women workers needs to be heard. The workers need to be heard. They have to speak for themselves.

With non-unionized women workers, isolation and working conditions are even worse. Yet with the high unemployment rate in the manufacturing industries, a lot of husbands have been laid off. Thus many women are on the verge of breakdowns because they have to take on a triple-day role. A woman will work as a sewing machine operator from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., then rush to a hotel to be a chambermaid or to an office building to do cleaning. She returns home at ten or eleven at night to do house work. For those women whose families rely on them to put food on the table, it will take a lot of consciousness-raising and education to get them to organize and break the isolation. At the same time, they also have to realize that, with the unavoidable high tech changes within the next ten years,

a lot of their work could become obsolete. What will happen then?

The labour movement in the garment industry must become organized to ensure that technological innovations and international relocation of industries are not carried out at the expense of workers. The workers have got to realize that *they* are the union. Building a strong immigrant workers' movement doesn't imply that it will be separate and segregated from the mainstream workers' movement. On the contrary, they will enhance each other's strength. The Garment Workers' Action Centre which I have proposed is meant to serve as a workers' education and resource centre – a stepping stone to organize the unorganized – to develop and empower immigrant women workers towards becoming involved in the larger workers' movement.

When we talk about the future of the garment industry, we are considering not only strategies for its survival, but also the improvement of working conditions and benefits. In order for the garment industry to be publicly recognized as a viable and permanent manufacturing enterprise, it must divest itself of the old image of a fly-by-night or sweatshop operation. This change in image will be realized when there is a strong organized sector in the industry – when justice is done to improve the working conditions of these producers.

When we talk about an industry that provides jobs and livelihood for 15,000 workers and their families, it is not a token industry, and it should not be wiped out in exchange for high tech imports. Furthermore, with the gradual development of technological changes, government, labour and manufacturers have a responsibility to ensure that this process is not implemented at the expense of workers. There is a concomitant need for a better trained and more stable workforce.

The need for a strong organized

workers' movement and a better trained workforce are the main essence and rationale for proposing a Garment Workers' Action Centre. This proposal envisions a building, right in the heart of Toronto's downtown garment industry, that will house all the services necessary to the workers, both employed and unemployed, in order to build a common front. The Centre will focus primarily on workers' education, the key to stronger worker participation.

### **Ninety percent of the garment workers are immigrant women: the union leadership does not reflect this composition.**

Since the overwhelming majority of garment workers are immigrants from different cultural backgrounds, English as a Second Language (ESL) is essential for breaking down the communication barriers between workers. From our experience in teaching ESL in the workplace, we feel that locating classes in the workplace has its limitations. It only reaches a small sector of the workforce and attendance fluctuates because of seasonal layoffs, overtime and the constant watchful eye of management. Thus an ESL for the Workplace Program at the Action Centre would ideally reach out to more workers, both organized and unorganized.


To better prepare workers to cope with the new tech changes, skills retraining and upgrading, as well as academic upgrading, will be offered to those who wish to attain the equivalent of a high school education. Courses in the academic program would be geared to the needs of working people as well as the unemployed and would deal with such subjects as Canadian labour history, geography, nutrition, literature drawn from novels about

working class lives, mathematics and science courses. The labour education aspect of the program would be based on practical concerns of working people with an emphasis on how to organize the unorganized, the problems of racism and sexism, union counselling on legal rights of workers, and courses on the nature and operation of a union.

The Centre will also operate as some form of commercial co-operative, offering rental space for community agencies. Several agencies, each retaining its own autonomy under one roof, would provide: employment counselling, preventative health care, legal clinics, interpretive and information services, general counselling and other public services. Such an integrated services approach will greatly enhance the accessibility and delivery of services to workers.

The Centre will house a library and recreational facilities for workers. The publication of a newsletter in different languages would be a major contribution to workers' development. Further, workers would be involved in setting up clothing and food co-operatives as viable fund-raising ventures for the Centre.

Last, but not least, emergency day care services and regular day programs will be set up. They will offer the convenience and opportunities that promote women workers' participation in all programs of the Centre.

In essence, the main thrust of the Garment Workers' Action Centre is education – the key to empowering immigrant women workers. It is a vision that will truly create a workers' culture and sense of belonging to the labour movement. It is my dream that the Centre will serve as a model for other industries with high concentrations of immigrant workers, for example, hotel, food and assembly-line industries, to adapt and follow in the years to come. That'll be the day..... 

In India, marriage based on love is the exception, rather than the norm. Much more common is the 'arranged marriage', where the families of marriageable sons and daughters work with various mediators to choose a bride or groom on the basis of criteria such as religion, caste, language, family status, education and physical attractiveness. Even many Indian parents who have made Canada their home find themselves following this traditional route.

One person who entered into an arranged marriage is the woman whose story follows in her own words. Raised primarily in Canada, she shares with us what her marriage to a man from India has meant for their lives together in Canada. Through perceptions that are at once Indian and Canadian, she speaks of the expectations that have not been met, the struggle to come to terms with what has been for her a disconcerting reality, and the developments in herself and her marriage as new and difficult circumstances arise. Because of the very personal nature of her story, the writer has chosen to remain anonymous.

# Arranged Marriage: Rearranged Roles

## Story of an Indo-Canadian Marriage

by Anonymous



Andy Tong

**T**he story of our marriage has been one of continued compromise and growth, despite our difficulties. Ours was an arranged marriage, a common occurrence in India, but alien to the Western way of thinking. The unique thing in our case was the diversity of our backgrounds. I was raised and educated in Canada, yet returned to India to be married. Why?

The reasons were varied and complex, but, basically, my predicament can be described with the expression 'Indo-Canadian' – my interests and hobbies are Canadian, yet my inner core is Indian. By inner core, I mean those things which are most important to a person: attitudes towards sex, money and the raising of children, to name

### **My interests and hobbies are Canadian, but my core is Indian.**

---

---

a few. These core values are those that my traditional Hindu parents instilled in me at a young age. If it is true that one's basic personality is developed prior to the age of five, then my personality was already formed at the time I came to Canada in my pre-teens.

When I visited India after an absence of more than a decade, I felt an instant kinship with relatives and others whom I met there, even though two-thirds of my life had been spent in Canada. There was, of necessity, a difference in my outlook on certain subjects, especially the role of women in the home and society, but, overall, I felt on this visit that I was coming back to something refreshingly familiar, a place where I belonged.

On my return to Canada, I was

faced with the dichotomy of myself – the Indian interior and the Canadian exterior. The conflict between the two strands was most apparent when I was faced with the question of marriage. The ideal thing would have been to marry someone in the same position as myself – of Indian descent, but raised in Canada. However, such an arrangement was not feasible in my case because with only a very small number of such men being available, the choice amongst them was limited. Consequently, several years after my first visit, I returned to India and married a man with a communal background similar to mine who had been raised and educated in India. Our marriage, which is not yet ten years old, is thus an unusual blend of East and West – as I myself am.

Like many others who have done what I did, I married a professional, in the hope that he would be able to continue his career after coming to Canada with a minimum amount of trauma. Unfortunately, the transplant was not successful, and he will now have to change his career. As a result, in addition to being the mother of two pre-school children who arrived soon after our marriage, I have had to become the proverbial 'bread winner' in the family, a fact which has led to problems in our life together. This shifting of roles has caused some difficulties, and I would like to briefly speak about the adjustments we have made and their effect on us.

Let me begin by saying that my husband and I have been extremely lucky in that our views on most subjects coincide. We get along well together. In fact, my husband has stated several times, in jest, that the only thing lacking in our marriage is employment for him. Of course, we do not take this matter lightly. My husband's unemployment has been the biggest hurdle we have faced up to now. It has been and continues to be an ongoing difficulty, and I have found it hard to

accept. At first, I refused to admit that he could not succeed in his chosen career. My ideas at the time of marriage about what my future life would be were vastly different from the reality I now face.

I had always prided myself on my liberated views on woman's place in the home and in the outside world. I never wanted to become a housewife, with all the connotations which that word carries. In my opinion, both partners should contribute equally inside and outside the home. If this arrangement was not possible, I wanted my husband to be the major wage earner. In that case, I wanted to work for my personal satisfaction.

### **I found my husband was even more liberated than I. Initially, I was taken aback by this.**

---

---

To my surprise and chagrin, I found that my husband was even more liberated than I. Not only did he not mind my working outside the home, he was also willing to accept me as the sole wage earner! He did not enjoy this state of affairs, but being a practical, as well as a family man, he felt that it would be better, in the long run, for him to stay at home and raise the children rather than go out and pursue another career while my parents raised our children. He encouraged me to advance in my own career and reach my full potential.

Initially, I was taken aback by these somewhat revolutionary ideas. After all, my goal in the past had always been to marry someone who would respect my career abilities. Contrary to my fears, my

husband not only respected my capacity, but felt I should accept the responsibility associated with being a career woman. It was the logical extension of my desires: if a woman has a career, there is no reason why she should not exploit it as a means to support a family, as a man customarily does.

My ideas had not been liberated to the extent that I wanted a reversal of roles, simply a sharing. However, I realized at this point that I may in fact have wanted the best of both worlds without responsibility for either one – working part-time and raising children part-time. In other words, my views were only a slight modification of the traditional, no doubt partially as a result of my orthodox upbringing.

In addition, my views have been shaped by an observation which I have made since becoming a mother. Unlike a man, a woman cannot divorce herself from family life. The responsibility for child-bearing and breast-feeding, of biological necessity, falls metaphorically on the woman's shoulders. Also, very young children seem to emotionally crave their mother's presence more so than their father's. Babies appear to respond more quickly and strongly to their mother's voice and touch. I have experienced this phenomenon personally and feel that child rearing, at least in the pre-school years, requires substantial input from the mother. Both parents working full time during this crucial period in the development of a child increases the level of stress exerted on the family. To ease this burden as much as possible, my husband has chosen to temporarily remain at home full time. He will pursue some form of self-employment when the children have entered school and are less demanding of our time.

Originally, I felt that it was improper for him to stay at home for several more years before entering the

work force, not so much because of lack of money, but because I felt that the longer we continued with the present arrangement, the more likely it was to become permanent. I wanted, and still want, my husband to share the financial responsibility of supporting the family. Both

ence in the handling of our dilemma? After all, the term 'arranged marriage' implies mutual convenience, with each party considering his or her overall gain in the scheme. My reasons for getting involved in an arranged marriage were cultural rather than financial.



Andy Tong

of us feel, though, that the children must take priority at the present time, and so we have decided to postpone any endeavours which would require both of us to work full time. It has been a blow, but not devastating, to our egos, that my husband has had to sacrifice his career as a result of coming to Canada. However, all immigrants gamble on their success in another country, and everyone does not come out a winner. Many immigrants have had to make career changes after arrival, and one must be flexible enough to accept this situation if it arises. We have considered the possibility of moving back to India, but feel this option is impractical at the present time.

Has the fact that our marriage was an arranged one made a differ-

I wanted a companion with whom I would have emotional rapport, a desire shared by my husband. Thus, we have been able to come to a harmonious decision on our future course together. As explained, the acceptance of reality has caused pain, but flexibility has helped us survive this setback in our married life.

In the final analysis, what we have learned from this experience is the value of striving for clear communication in marriage. Objective and open-minded discussion of our problems and feelings, and mutual support of each other through times of crisis usually dwarfs the dimensions of those problems. We find that solutions can be found for any dilemma as long as we do not remain rigid in our demands and wishes.





# THE WAIT

## A Short Story

by Arun Prabha Mukherjee

She watched him go out the door, making a rather lukewarm gesture of farewell with his hand. He was, as usual, immaculately dressed: carefully polished shoes, ironed smart black pair of trousers, and a carefully selected tie which added a final touch of grace, neither too flamboyant nor overly subdued.

She closed the door and heaved a big sigh. She was still in her nightgown which had become faded after the first few washes in the laun-

dromat. She thought she must look pretty dowdy. Or else why had her husband cooled towards her so quickly? Back in India he never left home without a kiss and a hug. In fact she used to push him away as he routinely messed up her lipstick and *bindi*. A faint smile came to her lips remembering those days. Theirs had been a love marriage unlike the arranged marriages of her class-fellows at this girl's college. He had singled her out among the crowd of girls at the Maurice Nagar

bus stop and pursued her non-stop until she had caved in. It was fun to run away from the college and go to restaurants and movies and then hold hands in the dark. At times they even managed to steal a kiss. It was amazing how those kisses electrified her – they came when least expected and required such daring. She wondered if the white folks got as much pleasure out of their kissing which seemed to her rather unadventurous in the absence of the restrictions which had



made it so exciting in India. That thrill of breaking the rules and taking a risk .... *Zamane ki dushmani*.... What did the white folk know about it?

But what was the point of remembering all this? She had a drastic shock when she came to join him in Canada, a year and a half after he left India. From the airport itself she had sensed a change. He had seemed so distant, so cold. And somehow more handsome. Dressed in a Canadian made suit she noticed. The Indian suits have a different look, not as sleek and well fitting. In India, she and her friends could spot a Western-made suit among a thousand. Wandering in Cannaught Place or Janpath, they enviously sized up these men, hoping to get married to a man settled abroad with a four figure salary..... They talked about their fantasies about going abroad ever so often, re-reading the letter of one such girl who had been married off in England. She had got all imported saris and imported make-up as her wedding present from her would-be husband. Even her shoes had been imported.

She had felt so excited when her husband had wangled and appointment abroad. She didn't know the details of his work or how he got it. All she knew was it was something to do with computers. It was a bit disappointing that she could not accompany him. But then, the time will pass quickly, she had told herself. She would have ample work getting matching blouses in duplicate for all her saris. Many trips would need to be made to Karol Bagh to get the exact colour... there were five hundred shades available in *rubia* these days. Then the *Master Ji* took so many weeks to make the blouses. Fittings alone would require several trips to Karol Bagh. Then there would be all the farewell trips to be made around the city. All the dinners to be eaten at his or her relatives.

And time had really gone by quickly. What with the visa for-

malities, the shopping expeditions to Cannaught Place and Karol Bagh, the fitting sessions with the *Master Ji*, the session with the embroiderers, and jewellers, and visiting, she had no idea how the eighteen months had passed by. She was so busy making her preparations, she hadn't minded the perfunctory nature of his letters. After all, he was all alone in a new country. It must be difficult for him.

And here she was now in her faded night gown while the saris gathered dust in the closet. She laughed at her intensity about

**She had put him to shame in front of his colleagues, he had said.**



exactly matching the shades. And the intensity of thousands of women who milled around in Karol Bagh in the same quest. Here people did not seem so obsessed with it. The women seemed to wear rather sober things. She laughed again at the wardrobe she had assembled with such care. It was O.K. to wear while you sat behind your husband on his Vespa and went to visit relatives or to see a movie at the Plaza. It wasn't O.K. here as she had learned from experience. People had given her strange looks as she had gone out dressed in a silk sari and a big bouffant. She had guessed from her husband's face that he was embarrassed by her get-up though he hadn't said anything. Now she went out in the pair of slacks and a shirt she had bought from Honest Ed's for ten dollars. She had stopped putting on a *bindi* and lipstick and putting her hair up

as well. At least people didn't look at her so strangely any more. It was also a lot more comfortable.

But she still missed that life. The day they were going to eat out, she would spend hours in front of the mirror. Her husband liked her to dress up and had bought her a lot of expensive make-up. It took her about two hours to get the right look. She started with a foundation, put on rouge, face powder, made up her eyebrows, put on mascara, lipstick, the *bindi* matching the shade of her sari. Then she teased and fluffed her hair and made them into the latest style bun learned from *Dharmayug* or *Femina*. After this she put on her jewellery, ear rings, bangles, necklace and a nose ring... The *mangal sutra* and toe rings were never removed anyway. Then she put on the *sindoor* in a neat straight line. Now she would be ready for the final touch: to put on her high heels and drape the sari carefully in neat folds.

By the time she was ready, her husband would walk in, sweating from the heat outside and look at her admiringly, not daring to touch her lest he spoil her make-up or her neatly folded sari. He would take a quick shower and then they went out on the Vespa while the neighbours watched or said hello always asking jokingly where the prince and princess were off to. But now, they had stopped going out altogether. She did not understand the English movies and he hated to go to Gerrard Street. In the beginning they had been invited to one or two parties. She had gone dressed up in her embroidered French chiffon sari, looking rather pretty she had thought. However, her husband had completely abandoned her to her own devices while he had sat and chatted with a group at the other end of the room. She had not dared to follow him and had been completely confused. She had sat demurely with a lemonade in her hand, pretending to listen intelligently to the conversation which was about some man name Dijkstra

or Kiegstra, she wasn't sure. She had not known what to say and had remained quiet. Then, a woman had come and said how nice she looked in her sari and could she teach her how to wear one. She had suddenly felt interested and started to explain the intricacies of the sari but then she had noticed that the woman's eyes had wandered elsewhere. Even before she had fumbled to a stop, the woman was talking to a man who had walked towards her. She had felt tears beginning to come up to her eyes and could hardly control them. For the rest of the evening, she had sat stony-faced, somehow trying not to burst out sobbing.

To top it all, her husband had chided her on their way home for being so unsocial. She had put him to shame in front of his colleagues, he had said. Why can't Indian women be more than dressed up dolls, he had wailed. She had swallowed up her tears then, refusing to retort back that she didn't understand OFS or NDP or Love Canal and nobody had bothered to explain them to her. That night she had slept on the living room sofa for the first time. He had not come to ask her to come to bed as he used to when they fought in India. Her pride had refused to bow down and now she regularly slept on the sofa while he occupied the bed.

Her body craved for him. But he obviously had other women to sleep with. She was sure of it. Hadn't the Indian women in the apartment two doors away from theirs hinted to her so blatantly? They had been invited to supper with these people just after she had come from India. The woman had said, jokingly of course, "You had better take care of your husband. He has so many *Gopis* hovering around him. And white women really like married Indian men whose wives are in India". Everyone had laughed and so had she. Later she discovered that no Indian party was complete without such jokes. All Indian men were supposed to have affairs with white

women while their wives went to visit India.

She knew her husband met many women at his place of work. In the beginning a few had come home, ostensibly to visit her. But they had only talked to her husband while she had served them tea. Later her husband had again accused her of insulting him in front of his friends. Why couldn't she say a few pleasantries, he had demanded. She hadn't of course asked him as to when she could have interrupted their conversation. When she had accused them of having an affair with him – for hadn't they kissed him right in front of her eyes? – he had slapped her hard. She had cried all day after he was gone.

**“Better take care of  
your husband. White  
women really like  
Indian whose wives  
are in India.”**



She laughed again, thinking of her stupid dreams. Going abroad had been the dream of her life. It was a land of chiffon georgette saris, mixies, tape recorders, cameras, cars ... She dreamed of coming laden with bounteous gifts for everybody she knew. And she wished to light the glint of envy in other people just as she had once been lighted with it. She wanted to walk on Jan Path in her Japanese sari with an expensive vanity bag slung from her shoulder and watch the reaction in the eyes of strangers.

And now she was afraid to go back to India, even though she had

practically lost her husband. Though she knew he wouldn't divorce her for the fear of dishonouring her family, he had become a total stranger to her. Now if she did go to India, even for a visit, her face would betray her. They would laugh at her behind her back just as the Indian families in her apartment building laughed here behind her back. For every time they greeted her, she would detect a sneer in their voices. And why shouldn't they sneer? When did they ever see them going out together?

She knew her husband met many women at this place of work. In the beginning a few had come home, ostensibly to visit her. But they had only talked to her husband while she had served them tea. Later her husband had again accused her of insulting him in front of his friends. Why couldn't she say a few pleasantries, he had demanded. She hadn't of course asked him as to when she could have interrupted their conversation. When she had accused them of having an affair with him – for hadn't they kissed him right in front of her eyes? – he had slapped her hard. She had cried all day after he was gone.

She had even stopped writing letters to India. Her mother was very unhappy; her brother had written. But what could she do? Every time she sat down to write, tears began falling on the paper. She had never been good at faking.

There was not much she could do, she thought as she decided to go to bed. She had the whole day to kill and it had just begun. The house seemed like a big, empty prison with no one to suffer along with her. She wondered as she did every day if she should turn the gas on and kill herself. But she knew, she couldn't do that while her mother was still alive. She would go crazy with grief. She had to go on, living in this emptiness till then. It was a long wait, but she owed it to her mother.





by Kerri Sakamoto

The first thing he noticed about her was the simple blackness of her hair. Each strand was perfectly and uniquely straight. As he gazed at her hair it became a silvery black river that flowed endlessly, propelling him into perpetual motion. Later he would watch her hair spread out upon his pillow, a darkness more strange and intense than that of the night and he would feel that he could lie there forever, still, yet eternally rushing forward within that blackness. It was in the elevator of the building where he worked that he first saw her. He discovered that she worked in the small library located on the sixth floor. The next day he entered the library. Her desk was tucked away in a quiet corner far from the reading tables. He pretended to be looking for a book and was able to view her from between the shelves. Her head was bent over a book she was studying. The sight of her brought back to him the serene figure of a woman in a Japanese mural he had once seen in a gallery. The figure was enfolded in a kimono of dove grey with blushing pink flowers. Her face was drawn with tender yielding strokes of a brush. That was how he saw this girl in the library. He was continually intrigued by the uplifted outer corners of her eyes, the pale pearliness of her skin. An elderly man approached her desk. As she spoke, her slender arms formed the fragile branches of a symbolic Oriental flower arrangement evoking the positions of heaven and earth. And her hands gesturing with open palms blossomed forth such softness. They caressed air floating down through it in gentle harmony with gravity. In nodding her head, it was with an arc-like movement, never with a straight line, as if she

# SACHIKO

## A Short Story

were dulling the hard absoluteness of an emphatic yes or no. She led the man to some books on the shelf opposite to where he stood. When he heard her speak for the first time, it seemed to him that she had polished all the edges of the words which slipped out from between her lips until each phrase was a rippling undulation. The man thanked her and her smile, sweetly contained, was a perfect cadence. As she turned to go back to her desk, she discovered his observation of her and he felt suddenly very aware of himself, very awkward. He tried to smile but his lips hesitated and she turned her eyes to the ground walking carefully back to her desk.

He finally introduced himself. It was in the coffee shop on the third floor at lunchtime. She was sitting alone, her face partially eclipsed by the sandwich she was holding. He said hello and sat down opposite her, stumbling at the vision of her face so close to his. He feared his tumbling words sounding too glibly high-pitched. She said very little. He sensed her silent nervousness but she agreed to see him again.

Since then, whenever they had been out somewhere together and returned to his apartment, she would pause before the mirror that hung in the hallway. Then she would ask him to stand beside her. How do we look together, Daniel, she would ask him. Wonderful, he would answer, holding her close to him. Wonderfully right. And he would steer them both away from the reflection into the living-room. He disliked seeing himself there beside her. There he could hardly deny that the translucent see-through shadow was truly him. And she beside him. Her lustre. His eyes promised nothing beyond nor within,

their colourless green the colour of a dead sea in which no life form could survive. A dull stagnant film floated across their surface. But her eyes, how precious they were to him. Their slenderness calmly enclosed a round darkness of unwavering potency. Every object that fell within her gaze was given mystical dimension. He loved to see himself reflected in her eyes. He could scarcely recognize the dark stranger there. The world reflected in her eyes was a beautiful one he longed for. It was a world of compelling darkneses brilliantly illuminated by a speck of momentary light flitting across her eyes. It was, like she herself, ultimately unattainable. He was afraid but exhilarated; he had the sensation of dangerously walking a charged highwire between darkness and light.

As she lay in his arms, she peered up at him. Daniel, she asked him, do you like the way I look? He took her face in his hands. You are beautiful, he told her. The word seemed hollow, meaningless. But my face is so fat and my eyes are so small, she protested. Will you ever get tired of me, of the way I look? Her voice trembled. Never, he thought. He held her tighter. I will never tire of you, he told her. He needed her so much more than she needed him. She tilted her face up to him, smiling. Everything was so easy for her. There was so much of her, such enveloping resonance to her being. She had the power to bewitch, to haunt. He needed so badly to possess her, to have some assurance that he would never lose her. Strands of her hair fell over his eyes as he embraced her, the black mass becoming more diffuse. Would he ever be able to gather all of it, hold all of it in his hands. That night

he made love to her frantically gasping after some fleeting possession.

He fell into an uneasy dream-filled sleep. He was in a garden which was unfamiliar to him. It was night. He stood at the base of some kind of tower. She was there at the window several storeys above. Her moonlit face appeared. Come, she said, gesturing with her hand. Cascading whirls of black suddenly slithered out of the window and down through the air. He grabbed hold of the ends of her hair and began to climb. He felt sure of his weight being supported for the strands had somehow melded together into a thick coarse twine that became softer in his hands as he neared the window. But the twine, her hair, it began to unravel, to spill all over him, twirling around his limbs, his arms, his neck as he tumbled backwards. He awoke, startled, sweating. Beside him she slept, hair quietly streaming across his pillow like a fan. He watched her breast rise and fall as she evenly breathed in the night air and expelled it in a serene sigh; the settling darkness was dispersed into millions of sparkling dots that danced about sprinkling colour all around them. He was enchanted.

In the morning when he awoke, she was not there beside him. He called her. He heard a sharp metallic clipping sound. He jumped out of bed and ran to the bathroom. She was standing there wearing one of his shirts with a pair of scissors in one hand. What are you doing? he asked with force that surprised himself. You mustn't do that. He watched as she snipped and bits of hair fell onto his shirt, slid into the rolled-up cuffs. She tried to brush them off but they clung, stark lines upon the faded flannel. Some

fell onto the floor forming an abstract design on the white tiles. It was like reading tea leaves, he thought. If he studied the pattern long enough perhaps he would see how the jagged chafing edges of their existences could fit together into something recognizable. The scissors clattered on the counter as she set them down. There, she declared. Finished. She asked him if it was even and twirled around for him. Yes, he said, smiling. He gathered her hair up in his hands holding the strands together as he would the stems of a flower bouquet. He raised their freshly cut edges to his face; they bristled against his cheek. The feel of each strand, coarse and cutting, made her seem at once more powerfully magical to him and more real, more of this world. It frightened and assured him.

They had been spending so much time alone together that they decided that they would attend a party to which an old friend had invited him. She was always asking about his friends, wanting to meet them. So they arranged to meet one another in the lobby after work. From there they would leave for the party. When he first saw her, he couldn't believe that it was her, though he recognized the coat and the shoes. This was why she couldn't meet him for lunch. What do you think, Daniel, she asked smiling shyly. He felt a knot forming in his stomach as his eyes travelled the length of her now kinked hair that had taken on a brownish tint. The loveliness of her cleanly spaced lashes was now grotesquely cluttered by the impurity of eyeliner in an unnatural purplish shade. The line of uneven thickness seemed to imprison her eyes. Red stained her lips and cheeks. She continued to look at him questioningly. Tell me what you think.

They were greeted at the door by a woman he didn't know. She indicated a room in which to leave their coats and told them to help them-

selves to drinks in the kitchen. The woman smiled and disappeared down a noisily congested hallway. The two of them took off their coats. He told her that he would get them both drinks but she insisted upon making her way to the kitchen herself. He watched after her as she pittered with tiny apologetic steps around and between bodies down the hallway. He smiled and thought to himself how much he loved her, how he would take her home tonight and wash her face and hair and how clean and fresh she would be to him once more. He felt better.

As he progressed down the hallway, he recognized two old friends from school. He stopped and talked at length with them before excusing himself. He was vaguely worried about her, wondering if she had made it to the kitchen after all or gotten lost in the crowd. The dimly lit livingroom was brimming with jumbled shadowy faces. The music bleated from speakers placed in either corner of the room. He scanned the crowd but couldn't see her. The kitchen was at the end of another narrow dark hallway into which harsh light bled. As he neared the kitchen, the light cut startlingly across the darkness to which his eyes were accustomed. He heard tinny laughter that reverberated against the hollow kitchen walls. The first thing he noticed when he stepped into the room was a pot sitting on top of the stove whose lid rattled with the bass beat of the music. Opposite the stove, she was sitting on a stool and a man, whose face was a blur, was leaning close against her. Two drinks were sitting in front of her, one of which was to be for him. She was giving all her attention to this man, this stranger, allowing him close to her, could she have forgotten him? Her eyes were glistening. Those eyes, he thought that he alone had penetrated to their deepest depths yet now he realized that he had merely been slipping and sliding on their perilous sur-

face. She began to laugh uncontrollably at something the man said. Her hair looked wild, some of it fell over the side of her face and a bit of red lipstick smudged onto her front tooth. Before his mind could restrain his body, it was done. The empty glass, the ice cubes in her lap. If he could barely recognize her before, there was now nothing left that was familiar. She was silent. But her look tore into him, he felt her rage ripping into him, wracking his body backward until he was plunging back from darkness into gradual blaring light. He felt her brush past him into the narrow hallway.

She was everywhere. He sat in the armchair in the middle of his bedroom. The faint moonlight that floated in through the window glimmered against something on his pillow. It was a singular strand of her hair. It lay there thick, strong, resilient. He drew the curtains against the light and sat back down. This strict, unsubtle darkness was now a door that would never again open onto the other teeming world of dancing colours in the dark. Now he felt this terrible sensation of dangling in randomness.

He slept more soundly than he had in weeks because he didn't have to wonder whether she would be beside him in the morning when he awoke. He knew that she was gone. He later learned that she no longer worked in the library. The emptiness from which he always fled stabbed deeper and deeper. As the weeks went by, the pain did not lessen in intensity but he began to feel strangely removed from it. He carried on with his work mechanically, training himself not to think about anything. In the mornings while shaving he noticed how his features quivered uncertainly across the pallor of his complexion. He often wondered if he could go on.



# Can an Asian Play Lady Macbeth?

Jean Yoon Discusses Her Theatre Experiences

Momoye Sugiman  
by Jean Cheng

Jean Yoon was born in the United States in 1962 and came to Canada at the age of three. Currently an arts student at the University of Toronto, Jean has appeared in various U. of T. productions; such as: *The Dream Play* and *The Three Penny Opera*. Other acting credits include Toronto Free Theatre's *Midsummer Night's Dream* in High Park and Upstage Theatre's *As You Like It*. Her most recent and noteworthy performance was in the penetrating, multi-dimensional role of Grace in David Henry Hwang's *F.O.B.*, a Canasian production at Toronto's Free Theatre. When Jean is not on stage, or studying for exams or writing essays, she is busy with non-academic writing and editing. She is the author of two plays: *The Barber* and *Ruby Shoes Barefoot*, both staged in 1983. She is also the co-

founder and co-editor of the Innis College review, *SCAT*. In addition, she has a short story in *The Dream Class Anthology* (Coach House Press, 1983) and is a frequent contributor to various U. of T. periodicals, including *The Grammateion*, *U.C. Review* and *The Varsity*. Jean Yoon was interviewed in Toronto in August, 1984 by Momoye Sugiman of *The Asianadian*.

**ASIANADIAN:** When and how did you develop your passion for theatre?

**Yoon:** I think everyone starts in school. School plays in grade four. They always found a part for everyone. Then in high school, I had a very good theatre program and excellent teachers. Then when I was in my first year at university I

began looking for roles because I figured there were enough good theatres on campus so I could have some fun. After *As You Like It* I started to realize what it meant to be in theatre. I enjoy doing theatre because ideally it's a group effort. Everyone is equally important – the techies, the director, the stage manager, the lighting people. If any of these individuals is off, forget it. When it works it's such a joy, such a high. When you have a good play you can feel yourself communicating with the audience. It's immediate and direct.

**A:** In your experience as a Korean Canadian actress, do you think your Asian face has prevented you from getting certain roles? To what extent has it stereotyped you?



**YOON:** I haven't been stereotyped so much as limited. In other words, it's not unreasonable for a director to require a certain type of actress for certain roles. And if you've got brown hair and are a certain height and weight, then you've got a better chance for a whole lot of roles. So basically, I can't get any roles in a family context because there are few plays written in a kind of *Asian* family context. What has determined the kinds of roles I get has been the fact that I move well on stage. So I tend to get roles that require a more stylized movement. I haven't played a human being in a long time. I tend to get chorus roles – singing and dancing, that sort of thing. When I played Audrey in *As You Like It* I was a cute little wench. I also played a lady-in-waiting, one of the court people and a bird in the *Forest of Arden*. I think I was also a horse. In *Midsummer Night's Dream* I was a fairy. And in *Ivona Princess of Burgundia* I played Checkers the butler who was always coming in and out. Yes, a lot of *éxits* and entrances, where you have to be clean. If I didn't have this talent for movement I wouldn't get any roles. But I'd like to play more real human beings.

**A:** *Who for example? Which characters do you dream of portraying?*

**YOON:** It's hard to say because so often when I read plays I don't really look for roles because I know from the start there's no chance for me. So I look at playwrights – styles I like – what they're doing with structure, language. I would love to play any part in a Brecht play or Shakespeare....As soon as the Asian population in North America is more interwoven and more understood – first by ourselves – and then by everyone else, it won't be unreasonable for an Asian actor or actress to say, yes, I want this role or that role. I can build a career and I know the roles will be out there for me. But right now we can't do that. Right now almost all the roles open to

Asians in the mainstream theatre world are secondary ones. But you rarely see Asians on stage at all. I do keep my eyes open for them though.

**A:** *In the Korean community do you think your pursuit of a theatrical career is perceived as weird?*

**YOON:** I don't know what people think. But I'm sure some of them must think I'm weird. I just haven't met any other Koreans who are doing theatre in English in the theatre community of Toronto. I don't think my enjoyment of theatre is something they can't understand, but perhaps the way I pursue it is something else.

**A:** *What would be more appropriate, acceptable pursuit for a young, intelligent Korean woman?*

**YOON:** Oh, I should probably be going into pharmacy or computer science.

**A:** *How did your two visits to Korea affect you?*

**YOON:** Seeing Korea made me more interested in Korea. Until then, I didn't want to have much to do with Korea. At the time of my first

**“There are too many things about the Korean way of thinking that I can never get used to.”**

visit, Park had just been assassinated. The country was under martial law. There were student riots. Lots of students had been killed or imprisoned. It made me sad and it made me want to learn Korean. Until then, I couldn't speak it. All I knew was “good-bye”, “brush your teeth”, “you're a bitch”. I've learned a lot in the past few years. I can get by, but I'd probably have to go back to Korea for about six months to be alright. One reason why I'd like to get my Korean down is so I can

read Korean literature. There are some good writers. The problem is that right now many of them are imprisoned or scared – or silenced. Most of these writers are not in translation, so there's no way I'm going to find out about their work unless I can read Korean. Korean is quite an interesting language. There are so many native Korean words that are onomatopoeic, and there's also a big influence on the language from Chinese where you can see the words being constructed like images.

**A:** *Do you think you could ever live in Korea permanently?*

**YOON:** No. There are too many things about the Korean way of thinking which I could never feel comfortable with. I find certain traditional attitudes intolerable – the way some people respect power, position and money – the whole patriarchal system.

**A:** *You recently conducted your own personal survey of Asian American theatre. What were some of the highlights of your findings?*

**YOON:** I guess Frank Chin was the first major Asian American playwright. He was driven a lot by anger and frustration. There's some good stuff in his plays, but there's this voice you can't help assume is Chin's voice. I find this very unpleasant and for that reason I wouldn't consider staging his plays. But I can understand his anger and frustration. It must have been awful to be that confused, to have to say all the time, “Hey, I'm Chinese!” It felt like a scream. David Henry Hwang has written some wonderful plays. I guess you needed a Frank Chin before a David Henry Hwang. You needed that scream first before you could get some articulation, a more balanced voice. Hwang's *F.O.B.* is very good and *The Dance and the Railroad* is absolutely beautiful.



**A:** Tell us something about the two plays you've written, *The Barber and Ruby Shoes Barefoot*.

**YOON:** I hate having to explain what a particular play is about. *The Barber* is a strange play. It leaves people feeling disturbed. I learned a lot from it – how to build dramatic moments, how to write and workshop with actors. Sometimes they'd say let's try it this way instead. Anyway, it's a weird play with strong layers of symbols established through sound and imagery. It leaves people wondering. *Dancing Barefoot*, the original title of *Ruby Shoes Barefoot*, is a children's play. It's about a girl who's a natural dancer. She meets this conniving shoe salesman, a peddler, and falls in love with a pair of ruby shoes in his pack. She doesn't have enough money to buy them, so she steals them. Unfortunately, I never got a chance to see the staging of this play because I was in Korea at the time.

**A:** Do you think there will ever be a day when you could be playing *Lady Macbeth* or *Titania* instead of a lady-in-waiting or a fairy?

**YOON:** There's really no reason why you couldn't cast an Asian as *Lady Macbeth* or *Titania*. *Lady Macbeth* doesn't have a mother or father appearing in the play. And *Titania*'s kind of weird anyway. There should be no problem casting these roles regardless of race. The problem is whether or not there will be people out there with enough acting experience to take on these major roles. I'm sure there will be, eventually. But it's hard to get that kind of experience. I'm sure in ten or twenty years Asian Canadians will be offered some major roles. In the States they're probably doing some stuff already.

**A:** Would you ever consider doing a TV commercial or a play or movie role which you did not find personally meaningful. I mean, would you ever take any acting job you could

get?

**YOON:** I'm not acting for survival. I'm not acting for money. In *Midsummer Night's Dream* I was getting minimum wage. I might do a commercial if it were okay because it's a lot of money. But I'd never do anything that was Suzy Wongy. What's the point? Why not mutilate yourself? There's little point in doing theatre if you're not expanding possibilities of presenting a clearer view of Asian Canadians or Asian Americans. In the end, what has to happen is that you will get human beings, not reincarnations of old stereotypes. No black actor today would consider doing something remotely Uncle Tom unless it was obviously satirical. Every now and then you see white actors playing Asians. I can think of a couple of examples in Toronto theatre. You see these characters with caricature accents and caricature gestures. The whole business of playing up the Charlie Chan cartoon is so offensive. That's what you see when white actors play Asians. I think things are going to change. The Asian population here is becoming more pervasive and vocal.

**"But I would never do anything 'Suzy Wongy' – What's the use? Why not mutilate yourself?"**

**A:** If you had to choose one or the other to devote most of your time and energy to, which would it be – acting or writing?

**YOON:** To me, they go hand in hand. There will be times when I'll devote more energy to writing and times when I'll be concentrating more on acting. It's hard to write when you're doing theatre, but usually after the run is finished I like to write because doing a play sets you on a kind of energy high. Ideally,

I'd like to do both and alternate. But who knows, I might just starve and end up working at Loblaws. You never know where you're going to be. When I was in high school I never expected this. I was actually a candidate for engineering.

**A:** How committed are you to a career in theatre?

**YOON:** I'm going to do theatre as long as I enjoy it. But there aren't an awful lot of roles out there for me. There aren't enough roles to sustain a career and living, but simply an interest. If you keep doing the same thing in theatre it can get boring – and if you're bored it's hard to do a good job. Then the audience gets bored. There are, of course, some actors who can do the same roles over and over, but frankly I would get bored. I guess that's one reason why I like to write plays. I used to say jokingly, "Well, since there aren't enough good roles out there for me, I'm just going to have to write them myself." Someone has to write them.

**A:** Do you feel that you've been exceptionally lucky?

**YOON:** Definitely. It's all luck – 102%. I was lucky to get into the Dream Class. I was lucky to get *As You Like It*. I was lucky to get *The Dream Play*. I was lucky to get *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Yes, sometimes I wonder if it's all a dream....Lucky.... In theatre a lot of the time it's a matter of being in the right place at the right time. When you're auditioning for any play, after a point there are so many people who are talented, but the directors are usually looking for a specific thing and you have to convince them that you're what they want. As I mentioned earlier, I'm very good with movement. In that way I've been lucky...I certainly haven't been unlucky.



# I Live By My Dance

## A Conversation with Rina Singha

by Meena Dhar

**R**ina Singha, who immigrated to Canada in 1965 from India, is the founder-director of the Kathak Institute in Toronto, and the Canadian Multicultural Dance Theatre. The objective of the theatre is to develop school and community projects for the purpose of fostering intercultural understanding.

Presently Rina is experimenting with biblical themes for her Kathak dance performances. *Kathak* is the ancient classical dance of North India.

Rina's upcoming work, which she hopes to perform this year, is entitled *Illuminations*. This work explores the theme of God's love for man. She has over the last few years performed and choreographed *Genesis* (1981) and *Rites of Spring* (1980) and many other solo concerts.

Rina recently completed her M.Ed. degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto.

Meena Dhar of *The Asianadian* interviewed Rina Singha recently in Toronto.

**ASIANADIAN:** *You have very high academic qualifications and you have also studied Kathak. How did this come about*

**SINGHA:** I started learning Kathak as a hobby while I was at University. It really took hold of me. When I finished my M.A. in Geography I got a government scholarship to study under Shambhu Maharaj Ji, at that time the greatest living exponent of Kathak. I studied at the *Bharatiya Kala Kendra* in Delhi, which is one of India's best known institutes of classical dance.

I graduated with a first class in Geography and incidentally also stood first in the University. So I always had the idea, even when I was with Shambhu Maharaj Ji, that if things didn't work out in dance, I could always fall back on an academic career. But after having learned dance for four years with Shambhu Maharaj Ji my heart was in dance.

**A:** *What was it like to study under a great master like Shambhu Maharaj Ji?*

**SINGHA:** We worked day and night, eight hours of hard physical labour. Looking back on those years now – they were the "God's Gift" years of my life. Look at the teachers we had – Shambhu Maharaj Ji, Dagar Brothers, Hafiz Ali Khan – all really great people. I was watched over by these people for whom there was nothing else but God and Art. Their influence has stayed with me up to now, even though I finished training with them in 1960. I was very lucky to have had them as my teachers.

I still think of my teachers and the inspiration they instilled in me. They pushed your inner self to do its best. By teaching with love, they didn't just set high standards and demand that we meet them on our own. Instead they encouraged us with love and brought us up to these standards.

They didn't have to do that. We would have been happy just to walk in their shadow. Yet they reached out to each individual student. We were people to them. We weren't

just numbers, which is what happens in institutions now.

**A:** *Why did you decide to leave India?*

**SINGHA:** There were many things I saw around me in the dance world that I didn't like. At a certain point in your career you had to make compromises or you wouldn't get ahead. I didn't like that. It conflicted with my values. I decided I had to get away for a while.

**A:** *You have academic qualifications as well as dance training. How did you decide which direction to take?*

**SINGHA:** Shambhu Maharaj Ji used to say to us: "Why do I insist that you must practice and learn well? Tomorrow if anything happens at least you will be able to earn your livelihood with your dance."

At that time I felt that this statement didn't apply to me. I had an M.A. degree and a job waiting. However, at every crisis point in my life, dance is what has always come to my rescue. When I got a teaching job in England there were many other teachers who applied but I got the job because I could teach geography and dance. Now I have been separated from my husband for over two years and I have been earning a living by my dancing – only by dancing.

**A:** *How did you adjust to life in Canada?*

**SINGHA:** I feel that my life has now

come a full circle. First I was given a scholarship to study *Kathak* and now I have started a school of *Kathak* here.

I have been in Canada now for 19 years. It's only in the last two years that I have been able to get back to my dream of doing *Kathak* and imparting that traditional training to other people. It has taken a long time. You can't come here and start right away. There was my personal adjustment, my family adjustment, and the thing about being an immigrant woman.

**A:** *What kind of family adjustment did you have to go through?*

**SINGHA:** When I came to Canada my older daughter was little. She is deaf. So I used my dance and my education to help her and other handicapped children to adjust.

I've used dance as a way of reaching my daughter, helping her understand her own identity. My daughter would ask: "Why is my mother brown and why is everybody else around me white? Why am I brown and all my friends white?" She had a limited vocabulary of about a hundred words and yet she was asking questions about the brown colour of her skin.

I had to get to her in a creative way – at a child's level. Make her understand that there was nothing wrong in being a different colour just as there was nothing wrong with her being a handicapped person. She had to accept herself in both of these things.

**A:** *How did you use dance to cope with these problems?*

**SINGHA:** I developed an educational programme called *A Cultural Approach to Learning* in which I combined my personal experiences with my daughter, my academic training and my training in dance and the related arts.

Also I taught *Kathak* at York University and I wrote a book on Indian dance. I started working with immigrant children in the Toronto school system. My focus was on intercultural understanding. I learned the dances of other countries and incorporated them into my educational programme.

I did an interesting project in one of the inner city schools. I had been hired to teach the kids a little bit about India and some Indian dance. But I used the occasion to tell them about respecting themselves and respecting other people. That is foremost in my philosophy of life, art and teaching – that people must respect each other. I really believe that.

Sometimes I found children pushing each other and wanting to be at the front of the stage. It bothered me a lot. I would say to them: "You are supposed to be working in groups. If you fight each other it will



never work out. The audience will see lots of little individuals fighting with each other. They will not see groups doing things together." At times I felt I was going against the grain – against the competitive attitude of Western society.

**A:** *You said you are teaching Kathak now. Who are your students?*

**SINGHA:** They are older Indian girls who want to go back to their roots.

Some of my students are already good dancers. I am teaching them to learn in depth. It is very beautiful to watch them at work. You can see doors opening for them leading them deeper into their roots. Certainly deeper than they would by watching Indian movies or experiencing Indian culture at the pop art level.

The search of these children is initiated from within, they are learning dance of their own choice. I try to teach with love, something that I find missing in the world nowadays. I try to impart to them the feeling that art has to better us as people and not to bring us down. Because whenever you bring someone down you are dragging yourself down as well.

### **“At every crisis in my life dance has come to my rescue.”**

**A:** *Could you explain a bit about your philosophy of teaching?*

**SINGHA:** In North America you are expected to be competitive and publicity conscious. You can't succeed without that. If somebody doesn't matter to your career you walk all over him. It is very difficult for people who are trained like me to do that, because of our gurus' example. They were so great in ac-

complishment and yet so humble in attitude. I want to impart that quality of character in my students.

I believe that if you have a problem in your life it can be solved through your proper use of your knowledge and your art. When my daughter was discovered to be deaf I went to my art to seek ways to ease her problem. And that developed into a whole area of work for me.

I am going back to the very traditional form of teaching, which you may think will not go down well in Canada. Maybe it won't for the average student. But I want only a few genuine searchers. I am not interested in 50 students. I am interested in the handful who have discovered themselves; because in teaching them I know I will leave my guru's stamp.

So often my guru's words come back to me. He talked about discipline, practice and doing things to the best of your ability. I teach this to my students.

There's a lackadaisical attitude among kids today, even my own. I can't understand it. They feel, "We don't *have* to do our best...we'll just get by...the audience doesn't really know what we are doing anyway". These values carry over into other areas of one's life and pretty soon one becomes lackadaisical about everything.

When I was training I wanted to do my best in everything. Life for me wasn't for me a "dance part" that I did well and everything else I might or might not do well. You have to get personal satisfaction out of what you do. There may or may not be monetary satisfaction involved. But personal satisfaction can only come from doing your best.

**A:** *You have started performing recently. What kinds of things are you doing?*

**SINGHA:** For 12 years I researched Indian miniature paintings. I am

using the imagery of these paintings in choreographing my dance concerts.

Some of the themes I use in my concerts are Christian and biblical. The Bible is really quite eastern in its thought. Classical Indian music and Hindu lyrics, however, are a problem. So I use commentary and slides to explain my dances.

### **“I am using the imagery of Indian miniature paintings in my dance concerts.”**

At present I am choreographing for a dance concert on David and Goliath. For me Goliath is all of those things within us, giants of fear, ignorance, violence, poverty and sickness all merged into one. These giants in our lives are conquered by David. David's love of God and trust in God is the creative force in life that defeats fear.

**A:** *How do you feel about communicating your dance to people who have no understanding of the Indian classical tradition?*

**SINGHA:** I don't aim to have an audience of thousands of people at my concerts. I am happiest when I am dancing in front of a few people. Then I *do* communicate.

Most of my audience is Canadian. Only a few Indians come to watch me. Generally I have an audience of about 150 to 200 people. These are not your average concert-goers. The average concert-goer would say: "Oh! We saw her last year. We don't need to see her again."

But the faithful are curious to see the new things I do each year. They come because they like my dancing. That is all one can ask for. ▲

# A Minority Within A Minority

## Midi Onodera: A Film Maker Talks About Her Art

Jean Chong  
by Momoeye Sugiman

**M**idi Onodera was born in Toronto in 1961. She graduated from the Ontario College of Art in 1983 where she concentrated on film, studying with such noted Canadian filmmakers as Ross McLaren. Since 1979 she has completed over a dozen films, primarily in Super 8. One of her most recent films, *Idiot's Delight* (1983), a 16 mm. film on celibacy, was screened at the 1984 Festival of Festivals in Toronto. In addition to filmmaking, Midi is a serious writer and photographer, with pieces in local magazines like *FUSE* and *Incite*. She is currently employed as equipment manager at The Funnel, a non-

profit, film production, distribution and exhibition centre for artists, located in downtown Toronto.

Jean Chong of *The Asianadian* interviewed Midi Onodera in Toronto in the summer of 1984.

**ASIANADIAN:** *Could you tell us something about your background?*

**ONODERA:** I was born in Toronto. I'm a third generation Japanese Canadian – a *sansei*. I went to the Ontario College of Art for four years. There I studied painting, sculpture, film, photography. In my last two years I concentrated mainly on film and photography.

**A:** *Then is film your primary medium for self-expression right now?*

**ONODERA:** Primarily film. But I do some writing and photographs. For example, I had a short article on the effects of the atomic bomb in a visual arts journal called *Incite*. And the most recent piece was a year ago in *FUSE*. It was on the internment of the Japanese Canadians. It was also published in English and Japanese in *The New Canadian*, a Japanese community newspaper.

**A:** *What about your film Idiot's Delight which deals with the subject of celibacy?*

**ONODERA:** I just found out that the



Festival of Festivals is going to be showing it. It was a big shock when they called me about my application. I've been going to the Festival for years and always dreamed that maybe one day....I wanted to make this film because celibacy is such a difficult subject and I didn't find people talking about it in a very positive light. I wanted to make a positive statement about it. People think of this film as a negative film because of the graveyard scenes, but I personally like gravestones. I'm not morbid or anything. I just find them peaceful. Death does not necessarily have to mean the end. It could be the continuation of the spirit or soul – or whatever you want to call it. It's like a higher plane.

**A:** *So what would celibacy represent in this context – some idealized goal that transcends death?*

**ONODERA:** I meant to compare my idea of death to celibacy, since celibacy can be seen as a taking of one's personal self, taking total control. It's very selfish, but also very positive if it's the result of choice and not external forces and circumstances. If it comes from within, then it's part of your spirit and that transcends physical contact, just as the soul transcends physical death.

**A:** *Is this combination of text and photography a new interest you're developing?*

**ONODERA:** It depends on what I have to say. If something comes across better in film, I'll do it in film. If it doesn't work in film, maybe it would be better in photographs and accompanying text.

**A:** *What is it about film that attracts you?*

**ONODERA:** I sort of grew up on old Hollywood movies I saw on television. I was really influenced by them. I like the idea of people sitting in an audience for a set period of time and concentrating on the same thing. I like that sense of control. It's

the kind of control you could never get with a group of people viewing a painting.

**A:** *Can you sense a maturation in the three films we've just seen when you view them together? [Ed. i.e. The Bird That Chirped On Bathurst Street (1981), Home Was Never Like This (1983), Idiot's Delight (1983)]*

**ONODERA:** Definitely. Seeing these three films together does show a progression of ideas and technique. The first film we saw, *The Bird That Chirped On Bathurst Street*, is about changes and how changes aren't really recognizable as they're happening, but only afterwards. Because when you're involved in the change you're part of the process and you can't notice that it's happening. This film marked the first time I used the technique of optical printing, so it was actually shot originally in colour Super 8 and then blown up on this machine called the optical printer. That's how I got the dissolves and freeze frame effect. The second film is *Home Was Never Like This*. The home in this film is my parents' house where I grew up. And the soundtrack is the story of *The Country Mouse and the City Mouse*, one of my old childhood records. The film concerns my coming to grips with my childhood and how my parents tried to raise me. They were your average parents, always trying to protect you, trying to play it safe – the look both ways before you cross the street attitude. But playing it safe all the time doesn't get you anywhere. You almost become afraid of change, afraid of anything new out there. In this story the country mouse is very set in her ways and is freaked out by the cars and buildings in the big city. She won't take the risk of the vacuum cleaner or the dog. She'd rather play it safe at home in the country, in her quiet, predictable world.

**A:** *Do you see yourself strictly as an artist or do you see yourself as a female, Japanese Canadian artist?*

**ONODERA:** It's very interesting that I'm doing this interview at this particular time. I had my palm read recently at a Six Nations Indian Reserve pow-wow. Anyway, this very powerful man from a tribe in the States told me that I was torn between two sources – two directions. I took this as meaning I'm torn between my Canadian upbringing and my Japanese roots because I've been thinking about my Japanese roots quite a bit lately.

**A:** *Has Japanese culture influenced your work to any extent?*

**ONODERA:** I think so. One of my friends, who is not Japanese, saw my films and wrote me this long letter about how they reminded him of haiku poetry. I can see that my films, when compared to any American films, have a different feeling, a distinctly different cinematography. They have a more meditative quality – a very Japanese quality. I didn't intend for that to happen. I didn't sit down and say "I'm going to make a Japanese film." Part of my sensibility is simply because of my Japanese background.

**A:** *Do you think this will pose any kind of problem for you in filmmaking, since you might be labelled as a 'Japanese Canadian filmmaker'? Would you feel constricted if you were always identified as a representative of a particular ethnic group?*

**ONODERA:** Being an artist is already being part of a minority group. Society doesn't really regard artists as anything great. If anything, people say, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" I'm obviously in a minority because of my appearance and because I'm an artist.

**A:** *The artist has an ambiguous role in society. She is seen by many*

people as one who provides entertainment, and perhaps by others as one who instructs – one who has a special message to convey. How do you view your role as an artist?

**ONODERA:** I don't think I'd go out and make *Star Wars*. If I really wanted to concentrate on film as entertainment I would have gone to Ryerson for their commercial film program and then try to get into the industry. As an artist I feel that I can choose a number of different formats or media. Film is just one of all the number of vehicles for artistic expression. I could get into print making and graphics. But I would never do graphics for Eaton's. So I definitely have certain things to say and hopefully people will try to understand and question my work.

**A:** You work primarily in black and white. Is that for budgetary or artistic reasons?

**ONODERA:** When I was working in colour I realized that I was relying too much on colour, mistreating it. When you have a nice colourful set people won't always pay attention to what you're saying because they are too distracted by the beautiful colour. I wanted to get back to the basics of film – looking at grain, shadow and focussing on content and actual cinematography – the image within the frame.

**A:** How do your parents feel about your role as a filmmaker?

**ONODERA:** At first when I decided to go to the Ontario College of Art my parents announced that they were not going to pay for it. You see, I have three brothers. All of them went to the U. of T. and now have high paying jobs. But I told my parents that I didn't expect them to finance my art education. I'm putting myself through school because this is what I want to do! I couldn't understand why they were giving me this flack because my father used to be a photographer and he also did Japanese brush painting. However, now that I've finished and

## “Now I really want to explore my Japanese identity.”

I'm out there making films, they're very supportive and proud of me.

**A:** What future plans do you have? What new projects do you have in mind?

**ONODERA:** I have this footage of an oriental fashion show in the sixties with all of these young women in mini skirts. I think I'm going to incorporate it into a film on racism and stereotyping. I've also got some KKK footage that I hope to use. It's not going to be a preachy film, but it's important for me at this time to deal with the subject. People have such stereotyped images of orientals. First of all, they don't differentiate between Japanese, Koreans, Chinese or whatever. They just look at us all and think chopsticks, rice, black hair. But the last time you saw me I had blond hair – and I have never been able to use chopsticks.

**A:** Right now it seems you're coming to a greater awareness of your Japanese identity.

**ONODERA:** I think it's about time that I did. A few months ago I felt too bombarded by the fact that I was Japanese Canadian. I felt that I was being pushed into it. But now I really want to explore my Japanese identity.

**A:** How did you view your Japanese-ness when you were growing up here in Toronto?

**ONODERA:** I grew up in a practically all Jewish neighbourhood. It was very unusual. We were the only Japanese family in the neighbourhood. There may have been one black family, but basically it was all white and predominantly Jewish. For a long time I thought, hey, I want to be Jewish too. I thought I had a lot in common with Jewish people because of our experience in World

War Two – that experience of being treated as non-human, non-people. Both my parents were in camps, but they have different views on the matter. My mother says that it really didn't harm them. But my father still feels very strongly about it. He protested at the time against the breaking up of the families. I think I have to side with my father. It was such an injustice. Now I have to become more aware of my roots and encompass my roots in my art... I think I'll try to include something about the internment in my film about racism. The whole issue of the internment is politically very important to Japanese Canadians right now – and it should be to all Canadians, as far as I'm concerned. It was a mistake. It happened, yet the government (*Ed. i.e. Liberal*) doesn't even want to apologize. I went to a couple of redress meetings recently and this Japanese Canadian man actually stood up and said, “Why are we bringing this up now?” I had heard that there were people like this, but I couldn't believe it. Oh my God, he's really saying this. Of course, he was yelled at. The emotions were very high.

**A:** Did you ever go through a period of trying to hide or minimize your Japanese-ness?

**ONODERA:** Oh, sure. I tried to blend in. For a while when I was growing up I was very conscious of the fact that I was different. I felt uncomfortable about my Japanese-ness. I just didn't want to have anything to do with being Japanese. I didn't have any Japanese friends who were close, so there was no problem of going downtown and being seen in public with another oriental person. Now I sort of wish that I had established that base. I wish that I had stayed in contact with the few Japanese Canadians I knew back then and established some friendships. I wonder sometimes if these people are also making an attempt to get in touch with their Japanese roots. ▲

## Halmonee

Cushioned old woman whispering toothless  
her gummy tongue rolling soft rice balls sweetly

I bring her a glass of water  
lean over and wait for some sign  
some scrap leftover from her eighty-three years  
a lingering ghost memory that I can caress and hide away

Halmonee  
Grandmother in Korean  
Say it:  
'Hal-mo-neece'

Lipsmacking handtrembling  
an empty cup drained but not dry  
returned in response

Holding her hand while she sleeping dreams  
I can feel the dry rib shudder of ghosts escaping her body  
old woman rattle snores

inhale pause exhale shuddersnore  
inhale pause exhale shuddersnore

I hold her hand  
all around ghosts scatter  
like leaves in frost chill

by Jean Yoon





# COMMUNITY NEWS

## Hong Fook Mental Health Centre

### The Service and the Association

The Hong Fook Mental Health Association was formed in 1977 by Chinese health and social service professionals concerned about the inability of the system to adequately serve the needs of Chinese and South-East Asian clients. The Hong Fook Mental Health Service, the central focus of this association, is a non-profit organization funded by the Ministry of Health. Operating as a small mobile, multilingual team, it consists of a director, three mental health workers, a secretary and a part-time psychiatrist. There is also a body of volunteers comprised of psychologists, social workers, nurses, teachers, lawyers, psychiatrists and concerned citizens from various ethnic communities.

In addition to liaison work, Hong Fook also provides assessments, referrals, escorts, counselling, hospital and home visits, as well as extensive public education programs such as public forums on relevant mental health issues.

In a relatively short period of time, the Hong Fook Mental Health Association has helped the Chinese and South-East Asian communities overcome language and cultural barriers which had previously stood in the way of proper mental health treatment.

#### Rose Lee – Director

Rose Lee, the present Hong Fook director, has been involved in several high quality service organizations for Asian women over the past six years. To date, she has been a project worker at Employment Services for Immigrant Women, coordinator of the Health Education Project for Immigrant Women, acting director of the Immigrant Women's Centre – and executive director of the Chinese Canadian National Council.

In her present position, Rose is responsible for planning and developing programs and preparing the annual budget in cooperation with the administration and executive committees. In addition, she is responsible for evaluation of the Hong Fook Service Model, identification of the target population's needs, advocacy work, supervision of staff, inter-agency liaison, public education and direct service. Thus she is not only a successful administrator, but also a sensitive front-line worker involved in actual casework.

According to Rose, working in community organizations is "most rewarding and challenging", as it brings "diverse interests together to develop innovative programs to meet community needs." She adds, "Another fulfilling aspect is working with people on a one-to-one basis or in a group. I enjoy the rapport established with my clients and I feel relieved and happy for them and their families when I find they are getting the services they need. I believe every individual, regardless of his or her cultural and linguistic background, is entitled to adequate social and health services. This is what we are trying to do at Hong Fook."

When asked if her job allows her to fulfill her potential, Rose replies, "Yes, my job gives me an opportunity to develop a career in multicultural social services. Previously, such an opportunity might not have been available to a woman, especially a woman from an ethnic background."



# CONTRI- BUTORS

**Christine Almeida** is on the office staff of the Third World Development Project Department of the Anglican Church of Canada. She is also involved in community groups working with immigrant women.

**Olivia Chow** is a freelance graphic artist and has worked with Dan Heap MP for many years.

**Tanya Dasgupta** is a doctoral student of sociology in Toronto. She is committed to the efforts of South Asian women to integrate meaningfully into Canadian society.

**Meena Dhar** is a member of the Asianadrian Resource Workshop. She is on the Board of the Riverdale Immigrant Womens' Centre and a city planner by profession.

**Arun Prabha Mukherjee** writes frequently on literary criticism and has taught English Literature at several Canadian universities.

**Winnie Ng** works with Dan Heap MP. She was a counsellor with the Immigrant Womens' Centre in Toronto for many years. She is actively involved in issues facing immigrant women.

**Kerri Sakamoto** is a sansei writer living in Toronto.

**Momoye Sugiman** is an ESL teacher and a veteran member of the Asian Resources Workshop.

**Andy Tong** has just completed a course in graphic design at George Brown College in Toronto. He has worked as a freelance graphic artist.

Watch for the forthcoming issues of  
**THE ASIANADIAN**

**Asian Canadian Youth**

Planned Contents:

Unemployment Among Asian Canadian  
Youth · Generation Gap · School Life ·  
Heritage Language Experiences · Short  
Story · Dating

# MOVEABLE TYPE

Digital Typesetting

A quality typesetting shop offering the powerful capabilities and precision of the latest in digital technology. We welcome "difficult" design work. And we're fast... most small-to-medium sized jobs turned around in a day.

- excellent selection of text and display typefaces – over 120 typefaces in all.
- all our typefaces include accents for eight languages.
- horizontal and vertical rules, electronic condensing and expanding of any face, automatic reverses (white image on black background), and many more features. Full page make-up capability.
- discounts for non-profit organizations.

67 Mowat Ave., Suite 235  
Toronto, Ontario M6K 3E3  
Telephone: (416) 532-5690

## NOW AVAILABLE

### Directory of Asia Scholars in Canada/ Répertoire des Asianistes du Canada

(1983) 227 pages

\$16.

750 Asianists — their addresses and institutional affiliations — areas of interest — fields of teaching and research — arranged alphabetically and by regions of interest.

**Order From:**

**Canadian Asian Studies Association  
1321 Arts Tower, Carleton University  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada K1S 5B6**

### **ASIANADIAN ADVERTISING RATES**

*Effective 1st November 1983*

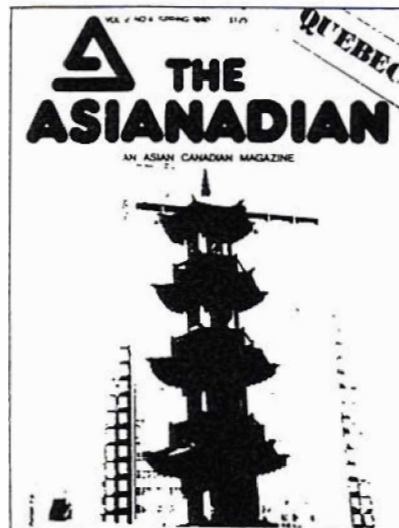
SPACE	RATE/ISSUE	SPACE	RATE/ISSUE
1/12 pg.	\$18	2/3 pg.	\$105
1/8	25	3/4	115
1/6	32	1	150
1/4	45	Outside	
1/3	55	Back Cover*	300
1/2	80	Inside Cover	225

\*Includes Front Cover Colours.

**Discounts:** 10%-2 issues; 15%-3 issues; 20%-4 issues

**Special:** Business Card under Classified Ads \$18/issue

# SUBSCRIBE NOW! «



DON'T miss this opportunity — subscribe to the **ASIANADIAN** and be here and now with us, keep current on the latest Asian Canadian affairs and issues, know what Asians are talking about these days, be here, and tell your friends you read it first in the **ASIANADIAN**.

**THE ASIANADIAN**, published quarterly by the Asianadian Resource Workshop, P.O. Box 1256, Station Q, Toronto, Ontario M4T 2P4

## BACK ISSUES

Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1978: **Asian Canadian Sensibility**. Gerard Baba's Best of Both Worlds • Anthony Chan's Chinese Community in Canada: Teaching Resources • Interview with Maria Lee

Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1978: **Our History**. Lao Bo's Toronto Chinese (1880-1947) • Gao Wensiang's Hamilton: The Chinatown That Died • Poems by Lakshmi Gill, Cyril Dabydeen, Sandy Jew, B. Kanbara, I.A.I. Iacaba

Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall/Winter 1978: **Women**. Kobayashi's Sexual Slavery in Canada • From Chapathies to Hamburgers • Dawn K. Orr's White Male Supremacy and the 'Oriental Doll'

Vol. 2, No. 1, Summer 1979: **Sexuality**. Gerald Chan's Out of the Shadows • A.C. Hori's Are the Samsui Avoiding Each Other • Interview with Joy Kogawa • Cheuk Kwan's You Don't Count Unless You're Counted

Vol. 2, No. 2, Fall 1979: **Children**. Bobby Siu's What Does Children's Liberation Mean • Joyce Ge's Why Can't They Understand Us • H.T. Nip's From Saigon to Sudbury • Poems by Children

Vol. 2, No. 3, Winter 1979-80: **Political Movements**. T.T. Mao's Asianadia and the Anglo Left • M.L. Handa's The Struggle of South Asian Canadians • Cheuk Kwan's Foreign Threat That Never Was • Omatsu's War Measures Act 1914-1979 • Carol Matsui's Poems

Vol. 2, No. 4, Spring 1980: **Quebec**. Shima Okuda's Two Worlds Apart • W. Ise's Quebec Referendum and the Chinese People • Cheuk Kwan's Anti-W5 Movement • David's 'Prison' for Chinese Immigrants • Imur Khan's Separatism: Bangladesh and Quebec

Vol. 3, No. 1, Summer 1980: **Media**. Richard Fung's TV Dinner in 24 Languages • Nancy Ing's Behind Golden Mountain • Bhaggiyadatta's Carved History • Shiomi's U.B.C. Co-ed Kidnapped Part I • J. Mavalwala's Aftermath of Misinformation • Sean Gunn's Lofawn Town • Bannerji's Poems

Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 1980: **Vancouver**. Sky Lee's Glg Goes Island Crazy • Paul Yee's Morning Heat • Jim Wong-Chu's Poems and Photographs • Rick Shiomi's UBC Co-ed Kidnapped II • Interview with Pender Guy

Vol. 3, No. 3, Spring, 1981: **Poetry**. Poems by R. Cruz, S. Namjoshi, Ram Rajh, Stephen Gill, Matsui, Joy Kogawa, S. Jong, Sean Gunn, S. Padmanab, C. Dabydeen, S. Hussein, Nirmla Singh, Lakshmi Gill, A Weerasinghe

Vol. 3, No. 4, Summer, 1981: **Chang's Chinese Pioneers in Newfoundland** • L. Waxer's How The Noon Meal Got Its Name • D. Lee's Bridging East and West • Poetry by R. Miki

Vol. 4, No. 1, Fall, 1981: **M. Wilkinson's Some Stayed On** • R. Fung's From Brixton to Brazil • Anthony Chan's No Name China Jacks • K. Wan's Memoirs of a Chinese School Drop-Out • S. Singh Gill A Minority Within A Minority • M. Suggiman's Asian Women for Sale

Vol. 4, No. 2, Winter, 1982: **B. Siu's The Bubble Bursts** • A. Wong's Six Years in Canada • P. Khosla's Indian Mahila Association • Reviews: Joy Kogawa's Obasan, D. Blair's Writings by Women of China and Japan

Vol. 4, No. 3, October, 1982: **Prem Ghosh's Interracial Relationships** • Racial Harassment • Leonard Preyra's Ethnic Semantics • S. Dhar's India Bazaar • R. Fung's Festival of Festivals • Dora Nipp's Wayne Wang

Vol. 4, No. 4, December, 1982: **M.G. Vassanji's Short Story** • G. Wong's Learning English • V. Padmanabhan's Short Story • Khandwani's Muslims in Canada

Vol. 5, No. 1, April, 1983: **Shin Imai's Japanese Canadian Reparation Campaign** • Ian Bharati's Conflict in the East Indian Community in Toronto • A. Rahim's Is Oriental an Occident? • Fred Honn's Asian American Art

Vol. 5, No. 2, Summer-Fall 1983: **Interview with Dan Heap MP** • Edy Goto's Program for Japanese Canadian Children • Ramcharan's Non-Whites in Canada • R. Fung's Interview with Lino Brocka • H. Bannerji's Review of Yellow Fever

## ORDER FORM

	VOL.	CAN.\$
[ ] Nov, 1983	5.2	1.75
[ ] Apr, 1983	5.1	1.50
[ ] Dec, 1982	4.4	1.50
[ ] Oct, 1982	4.3	1.50
[ ] Winter, 1982	4.2	1.50
[ ] Fall, 1981	4.1	1.50
[ ] Summer, 1980	3.4	2.00
[ ] Spring, 1981	3.3	2.00
[ ] Fall, 1980	3.2	2.00
[ ] Summer, 1980	3.1	2.00
[ ] Spring, 1980	2.4	2.00
[ ] Winter, 1979-80	2.3	2.00
[ ] Fall, 1979	2.2	2.00
[ ] Summer, 1979	2.1	2.00
[ ] Spring, 1978	1.4	out of print 3.00
[ ] Fall/Winter, 1978	1.3	3.00
[ ] Summer, 1978	1.2	3.00
[ ] Spring, 1978	1.1	3.00

## SUBSCRIPTION RATES (Check one):

- One Year, Individual \$ 7.00  
 One Year, Institution \$13.00  
 Two Years, Individual \$10.00  
 Two Years, Institution \$19.00

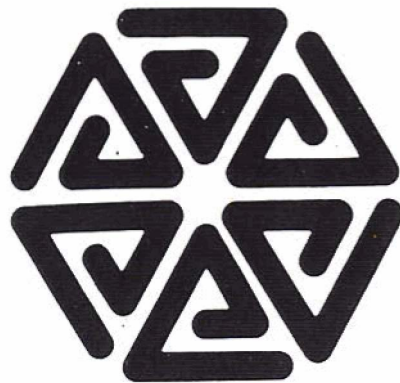
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Prov.: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

U.S. and overseas subscribers: add \$3.00 per year.  
 Back issues: Postage and Handling Charges are extra. In Canada, add \$1 for 1 copy and 25¢ per additional copy. In the U.S., add \$1.50 for 1 copy and 30¢ per additional copy.



Return Postage Guaranteed

 **THE  
ASIANADIAN**

P.O. Box 1256  
Station Q  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4T 2P4  
Canada

Second Class Mail  
Registration Number  
4438  
Postage Paid At  
Toronto, Canada