

## **(Translation)**

### **An Ever-changing Mosaic**

#### **Overcoming disputes of ancestral lands to find coexistence in Canada**

##### **The experiment of the Mosaic Institute in Toronto**

By Kazuyo Nakamura

In Canada, where people gather from around the world, those who might have confronted one another violently in their homelands face each other as “neighbours”. But even when the surroundings change, it is not easy to get to the point where relationships are based on mutual acceptance. However, among immigrants, a struggle to overcome such difficulties has emerged as they try to deepen the roots of “multiculturalism” in society.

In Toronto, said to be the most multicultural city in the world, the Mosaic Institute has recently been established. When I visited the Institute’s offices in a downtown highrise in mid-March, a group of Sri Lankan university students were meeting to prepare for a forum scheduled for this summer. They were having a serious discussion:

“I invited someone to join us and he asked me who is involved, and I think that he wanted to check that there was no one from opposing groups here.”

“If we don’t take care to choose neutral sponsors, a peaceful forum can turn into a confrontation.”

In Sri Lanka, civil war between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils has waged for more than 20 years. Both groups are represented among Toronto’s immigrants and they have kept separate; the burning of a Buddhist temple in Toronto may be related to the conflict in their homeland.

The young people who gathered at the Mosaic Institute are from both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities, and they believe that only they can change the situation because they have lived in Canada since their childhood.

U of T student Jothi Shanmugam is a Tamil. Her father came to Canada in the 1980s when the conflict in Sri Lanka became violent and he could not continue to work. In 1994 Jothi and her mother came to Canada. Jothi joined the Mosaic project because she believes that “our generation may be able to change the two communities that have remained separate even in Canada”. She talked with a Sinhalese student and felt that “we can understand each other if we talk; the number one enemy is ignorance”.

The founder of the Mosaic Institute is entrepreneur Vahan Kololian. The room where the students were meeting was in the offices of the Mosaic Institute. Mr. Kololian, of Armenian descent, came to Canada from Egypt at the age of nine and cannot forget the experiences of his own university days. Students who came from countries in conflict rubbed shoulders on the Canadian campus, without feeling uncomfortable. It made an impression on him because he was raised in a community that held strong animosity for Turks. He realized that in Canada understanding comes from people respecting each other’s differences, and that, if such relationships flow back to ancestral homelands, we may find the road to peace.

After thirty years, having succeeded as an entrepreneur, he wanted to realize his long-held dream. In 2007, he established the Mosaic Institute with a policy researcher from Iran. The following year John Monahan joined from the Ontario government. Working with government, the Institute is trying to find a new structure for international cooperation.

Mr. Kololian said, “Canada is a politically stable and prosperous country. At the same time, it is not a major power, has no history as a colonizer, is neutral, and is unique in its diversity. It is also well known in the field of international cooperation. However, one thing is still missing: using the power of those immigrants living peacefully in Canada to help solve some of the problems in their homelands.”

Having participated in a number of forums in which immigrants from regions in conflict like the Middle East have participated, he said, “sadly, some people cannot let go of their hatred. I was lucky to be able to let mine go when I came to Canada. If there is a way not to hate each other, surely everyone would choose that way”.

Ms. Shanmugam, the Sri Lankan immigrant who is working on the preparations for the forum, has a dream to work someday for an NGO or international agency to help refugees of wars. She says “Canadians have roots in many countries. Each person can be a “citizen expert”, working hard to solve humanitarian problems and playing an important role in the world.”

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