It was the summer of 1984, when I had just completed my M.Phil. dissertation on "Ageing in Japan and its socio-economic implications", that I began searching for a suitable topic for further research leading on to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. As a student who had majored in Japanese language and literature, it was naturally uppermost in my mind to use my experience in writing the M.Phil. thesis and choose a topic which would give me a chance to apply my knowledge of language and literature to examining one of the most important social problems in Japan, namely, the place of women.

Even as I continued my search for a good topic, I read in a Japanese newspaper an obituary of Ariyoshi Sawako about whom I had heard much but had not read any of her writings. The obituary note made a reference to her best sellers novel, 'Kokutsu no Hito' (The Twilight Years). My interest in the book lead me to procure a copy of the novel for reading. Having worked on ageing in Japan, I was impressed by Ariyoshi's characterisation of Akiko and her relationship with her senile father-in-law in the book. Unconsciously I was drifting in the direction of Ariyoshi's writings and her portrayal of women characters in her novels. I made up my mind to work on the subject.

A very tentative proposal on the subject was presented to my supervisor Prof. P.A. Narasimha Murthy, of the Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. After several discussions with him I drafted a final proposal for acceptance by the Research Committee.

It was no smooth sailing for me even after the proposal had been accepted. I was working as a full-time employee of Maruti Udyog Ltd., and it did not take me long to realise that Ph.D. research and company work did not go well together. Consequently, very little progress was registered. Not until my switch-over to Delhi University as a Lecturer in the Department of Chinese and Japanese Studies in 1986 did I find enough time to read and reflect on the subject.

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of my proposed research. A six week visit to Japan in 1987, sponsored by the Japan Foundation, helped me to collect more information on Ariyoshi. Upon return I sat down to writing the first chapter of the thesis. Soon, however, there was an unexpected break, as I was awarded a Mombusho (Japanese Ministry of Education) Research Scholarship and had to leave for Japan.

The research scholarship enabled me to spend 18 months at Nara Women's University, Nara Prefecture, where I had the privilege of working with Professor Katsuhiko Hamakawa, Professor of Modern Japanese Literature. Exposure to his lectures for research students and several discussions held with him helped me to plan my work thoroughly and purposefully. Returning to India in 1992, in right earnest I started drafting the first, tentative version of my doctoral dissertation. It was this draft which formed the basis for my interaction and dialogue with my supervisor during 1994-95. Professor Murthy's comments, suggestions and encouragement helped me to continue my work with sustained interest and give the thesis its present form. It is not possible for me to put in words the gratitude I owe him for this.

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My warmest thanks go to my husband and children for the patience and understanding they showed during the period I was fully immersed in my research. It is difficult for me to claim that the completion of this work adequately compensates them for the moments of joy and happiness which they missed by not being able to see me as often as they wished.

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Last but not least, my thanks are also due to Mr. Praveen Sachdeva for elegantly typing out the thesis.

A word about citations may not be out of place here. As per the conventions, the Japanese names appearing in the citations follow the Japanese style i.e. first name follows the family name.

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