CHAPTER III

JAPANESE PROSE LITERATURE : THE DOMAIN OF MEN?

This chapter attempts to present a brief review of the history of literature in Japan, with reference to the special characteristics of some of the important literary creations particularly in prose. An examination of the history of prose literature has been attempted here in terms of its form, content and tone; and changes therein since the early times.

Another important objective of this chapter is to provide a general frame of reference in order to place Ariyoshi Sawako's literary works, particularly her fictions considered for a detailed examination in this study. In view of the above, it becomes imperative to devote greater space to the description and analysis of developments and trends in modern prose literature, the period to which Ariyoshi belongs.

It has been generally observed that the Japanese literary art has developed in a condition of "chemical combination" with foreign cultures. ¹ Before the

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middle of the 19th century, the sources of influence were Chinese followed by the impact of western culture from the middle of the 19th century. "The ratio of these combinations" has varied depending upon the period and situation: sometimes the foreign element increased, while at other times indigenous culture prevailed. Nevertheless, the Japanese literary art continuously strove to acquire characteristics which could be distinctly Japanese.

III.1 Special Features of Japanese Literature

One such quality has been its strong inclination for brevity, noticeable not only in poetry but also in prose. Long fiction is a rarity. Even in modern times, despite tremendous influence of western styles of fiction writing, the Japanese proclivity for short or middle-length stories continues. However, lack of structure and unity in the so-called "full-length" novels of the early literary phase such as "The Tale of Genji" were replaced by compositions largely owing to the impact from the West.

Another important feature of Japanese tradition in fiction writing has been the projection of harmony or lack

2. Ibid.
of stark oppositions between the human and the natural; the individual and the group, and, mutual interdependence between the author and the reader. Although phenomenal socio-economic changes since the Meiji Restoration have given rise to individuality of thought, aspirations and actions, a strong note of individuality has remained at best half-expressed rather than strongly explicit. Similarly, even the modern literary figures of Japan have successfully preserved this traditional harmony. Perhaps, this could be a factor which made some of them outstanding authors, as opposed to those who failed whenever they attempted to separate the two.

Besides the characteristics mentioned above, to which one may return a little later, Japanese literature has shown a strong preference for emotionality and implicitness of tone. In poetry, as well as, in prose feelings do not find a direct expression, but rather through the "refraction of reason" (Kotowari, ri). The emotional attitude coupled with introverted implicitness, of tone, in principle, suited narratives which are predominantly sorrowful, dipped in

5. Ibid., p. 16.
grief and misery of unconsummated love relationships, of intrigue and destruction, where a protagonist confronts destructive circumstances, but does not exhibit "the (solemn) resolution to gamble personal ruin for the resolution of the problem. Instead, (he) gives over to the inevitable fate...and abandons solutions in the actual world. 6 This sense of abandonment to the dictates of inevitable fate indicates the superiority of social to that of personal or individual. If one is inclined to replace 'group' by 'social', then the relationship between the individual and group could at best be seen as what one may call 'implicitly contradictory' and 'explicitly harmonious'. While the protagonist suffers in pain and sorrow, confronting odds at the hands of society, he/she may be said to be in antagonism with society which the protagonist chooses not to express directly. Thus, right beneath the notion of harmony between individual and group, one of the essential characteristics of Japanese literature, one may also find the implicit tone of rejection, and of contradiction. One may, therefore, suggest that it is, in fact, the superiority of social mores, norms and practices to which the individual is often seen to be trying to

6. Ibid. p. 18.
'assimilate', rather than a situation in which he/she is perfectly 'integrated' into it, and hence in harmony. This 'harmony' is thus cosmetic: a product of social coercion. It is quite different that in the self-destruction of the protagonist the Japanese find feelings of 'purity and nobility'.

The affective-introverted-negativeness of Japanese literature thus stands in contrast to aggressive-extroverted-positiveness characteristic of western literature. This is not to suggest that the positive and explicit, tone has been totally absent. A few modern Japanese works began to take a positive tone due to the impact of modern western literary art. But they could never find an appeal among the Japanese who always found beauty in destruction. The works of most popular and notable modern Japanese novelists such as those of Tanizaki Jun'ichiro and Dazai Osamu are indications of the degree to which this attitude has been persistent.

Another aspect which may have influenced implicitness of tone in Japanese literature, may perhaps be associated with the practice of writing nikki, monogatari and poetry during the Heian period. The style, tone and contents of

7. Ibid.
these classical works set the standards for works which were to appear later. Most of these were written by women who placed emphasis on the 'superiority of romantic feelings'.

For example *Ise Monogatari* presents an account of unhappy marriage, indicting Heian polygamy, digging deeper into the psychological and emotional aspects of characters is fully bathed in social realism of the time (as also in *Kagero Nikki*). One of the woman poets of unusual ability, Ono no Komachi who was forthright in declaration of passion, brings to it a dark intensity and a sadness all her own. Her works stand in the minds of the Japanese as the very embodiments of the Heian ideal of courtly love. Similarly, another talented court lady of the late 10th century, Izumi Shikibu, who belonged to the tradition of the passionate poets, in her famous works *Izumi Shikibu Nikki* and *Izumi Shikibu Monogatari* presents a distinctly melancholy picture.

One of the most fascinating and immortalized works of the time by Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji* is also set in a defensive introvert tone. "The work, though rich with memorable scenes of sensuous beauty, is deeply and bitterly pessimistic". It is only natural that when a highly

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9. Ibid., p. 35.
introspective account of frustrated love, is presented the narrative would tend to employ negative and affective-emotional expression. The role of women in setting this tone thus needs to be underlined.

Yet another feature of Japanese literature is marked by a lack of class differentiation in literary practice, despite the fact that until the modern times, Japanese society has been highly stratified. The high and elegant literature termed 'ga' by Konishi and the lower and popular, termed 'zoku', have found their echo almost equally in the mainstream genre of literary creativity. However, there were periods when the 'ga' literature predominated the scene as opposed to those when 'zoku' had its hey day. Although the literature of Heian and the medieval periods flourished in the Imperial courts, all literary idioms drew much from the popular folk traditions of aesthetics. Konishi is justified when he says, "Waka and Renga were not literature possessed solely by the nobility. A number of kyogen (comic noh interludes) concern the enthusiasm of common people for renga...".10 The early breed of waka anthologies list a great many poets who came from lower ranks of the imperial court and it may not be wrong to suggest that a good number

of them who have remained anonymous may have been common people. However, one may safely conjecture that because of the initial preoccupation with composition in Chinese, especially Chinese poetry (Kanshi), popular people's literature had to wait until Kana was developed.\(^{11}\)

The interaction between popular literary pursuits and those of the aristocratic helped the former to "ascend in estimation." Konishi says, "As haikai no renga (go-zoku level linked poetry) emerged to take the former low position of Renga, fondness for it led to its acceptance by the warrior class... the phenomena of ascending can only have been possible because in literary matters there was no firm separation between classes".\(^{12}\) While the literary standard in serious drama and poetry were set according to aristocratic standards, the popular tales, including those chanted or recited, played a significant role in laying the foundation for the development of literature. Ruch says, "...they built a body of vocal literature, a repertory of heroes and themes that permeated all genres and became Japan's first natural literature. This literature was

\(^{11}\) Cranston, n. 8, p. 29.

\(^{12}\) Konishi, n.1.
performed for people at all levels of society and served basic needs that were shared by all classes equally.\textsuperscript{13}

III.2 'Periodizing' Literature

Attempting to document developments in the history of Japanese literature, one must first resolve the problem of classifying such a large span of time. Konishi\textsuperscript{14} presents a detailed discussion on this aspect. For the sake of convenience the periodization of literary history used here are based on the framework suggested by him; however, some alterations here and there have been made to make them compatible with the equivalent cultural sequences and nuances which are popularly used in Japanese literary studies. Thus, while the periods are those defined as 'Early', 'Middle' or 'Medieval', and 'Modern', the second level of periodization refers to 'the Heian', the 'Genroku', and 'the Contemporary'.

The scheme of periodization as suggested by Konishi, is essentially different from those adopted by Kato and the


\textsuperscript{14} Konishi, n. 1, pp. 52-77.
Kodansha's Encyclopaedia of Japan. The Encyclopaedia relies more on the scheme generally adopted by the social and political historians, while that by Konishi is based on conceptualization of literary events and, therefore, is esoteric. In the Encyclopaedia, the medieval period ends by 1600, i.e. termination of the Azuchi-Momoyama period. The period between 1600 and 1868 (the beginning of Meiji) is termed as Edo or Tokugawa (or perhaps pre-modern); while Konishi categorises this period as late Middle Ages in Japanese literary history. For Konishi, the Middle Ages begin with the compilation of Kokinshu (905 AD) in the Heian period, while the Heian period in history begins from 794 when the capital was shifted from Heijokyo (present Nara) to Heiankyo (Kyoto). The Encyclopaedia places medieval literature roughly between 1200 and 1600. Thus, while half of the Heian may belong to the ancient, those from the compilation of Kokinshu to 1205 when Shinkokinshu was compiled, may be placed as 'early middle'. The high middle age terminates around the Genroku culture which marks the beginning of the late Middle Ages. The Heian in the present scheme is taken as a representative of a period of literary consolidation. The Tale of Genji marks the glory of this era. The scheme of dividing the chronology of literary history in Japan, as
adopted below, may perhaps be useful in bringing about a synthesis between the general periodization of socio-political history and the history based on conceptualization of literary idioms.

As has already been mentioned earlier, the literary traditions in Japan grew initially under the influence of the Chinese cultural idioms and later under the influence of western culture. The indigenous element, however, remained active. It adapted itself under 'new' influence and found fresh expressions and a literary awareness. It was also instrumental in providing those elements by virtue of which Japanese culture and literature could maintain its separate identity.

Initially, there was no differentiation between literature, and other branches of knowledge such as politics, history, religion etc. The process of differentiation takes place towards the close of the 10th century, when literature could develop its separate identity, from other intellectual and aesthetic pursuits. It was, perhaps owing to the Western influences which once again brought in vigorous interaction with other branches of knowledge such as social sciences, humanities, philosophy, phychology, and also the natural sciences. The variety of literature in the mainstream as well as those on
the periphery indicated a continuous process of differentiation as well as integration. The intellectual inclinations of literary creations were secular, not in as much as they were non-religious, and non-moralistic, but essentially because of their extent of coverage and relationships with variety of ideas, contents, and objectives.

The sections below do not intend to offer a comprehensive introduction to Japanese literature. They only purport to serve as a necessary background documenting some of the prominent literary events in their historical context. Also, to underline the themes and especially the treatment of the women protagonists in the representative literary pieces incorporated here. The preceding section has however, provided a glimpse, and some comments on the special characteristics of the Japanese literary history.

III.3 Early Literature

Early literature refers to a wide variety of extant literature which were composed, recited or sung, and later compiled during the 8th century. The chief sources are Kojiki (Records of Ancient Matters), Nihon Shoki or Nihongi (Chronicle of Japan), and Man'yoshu. Kojiki and Nihon Shoki are a compendium of ancient Japanese legends containing rich
harvest of songs. They draw upon native myths and legends, genealogies of the main figures who created the ancient Japanese state. Although, much of what appear in the two compilations are mythologies, however "they are studded with memories of actual events". 15 

Man'yoshu is considered as the first anthology of waka poetry compiled by the beginning of the Heian period. It contains over four thousand five hundred poems, composed during the fourth and eight centuries and contributed by emperors, the nobility, the court poets, and a number of anonymous poets drawn from the ranks of the public, including housewives. The most notable among the Man'yoshi poets are Otomo no Yakamochi, Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, and Nukata no Keimi. The latter may be said to have "established a worthy beginning for the long line of great women poets in Japanese literature" 16, Man'yoshu contains some of the best examples of Japanese love poems: "It takes us a long way from the feel of myth and ritual, war song, and folktale". 17

17. Ibid.
Besides, their literary significance these texts became the basis for the development of the Japanese phonetic syllabary Kana in later years.

III.4 Literature of the Middle Ages:

III.4.1. The Heian Literature:

The Heian period is generally considered to be the formative period in the history of Japanese literature. During its initial phases the literature of Japan developed under the direct influence of Chinese art and culture and literary traditions. Even the script was Chinese. The knowledge of reading and writing Chinese was a status symbol which only a few could possess. The character of literature was thus elitist\textsuperscript{18} and the predominant form was poetry. Although external influences, particularly that of the Chinese, has been there all through Japan's history in one form or the other, indigenous attempts at developing literature based on native script and styles, forms and contents which could be truly indigenous also began during the Heian period. Hence, a phase of fusion started by combining native with the borrowed elements. It made Japanese literature rich and also helped

\textsuperscript{18} Murakami, n. 15, p. 20.
it obtain a distinct character. Hiragana, the native script was evolved by simplifying the Chinese characters. This gave the much needed stimulation to the development of Japanese literature:

"Tales, poems and intimate letters could now be written in Japanese, in a style near to everyday speech, by those who had no great knowledge of Chinese, and especially women, whose education was not supposed to include the classics." 19

It is interesting to note that it was the Heian noble women whose creative sensibilities became the glory of Heian literature. The path treaded by them during this pursuit was, by no means, simple and easy as "their literary contribution was born in a highly discriminatory situation." 20 A few literary creations may be mentioned here.

Taketori Monogatari considered to be one of the earliest literary pieces of the time is a fiction part-excellence. Its characters however, are contemporary. 21


Taketori, Utsubo, and Ochikubo Monogatari may be said to belong to one stream and Ise Monogatari and Yamato Monogatari to another. Genji Monogatari was the combination of these two. After the compilation of Kokinshu, the first anthology of poetry, in the year 905 there arose an interest for writing prose literature for the first time in Japan. Taketori Monogatari, Utsubo, Ochikubo and Ise Monogatari were the outcome of this interest.

After prose, literary diaries (Nikki), were introduced. The first diary was written by Ki No Tsurayuki after his return from Tosa in 935. Utsubo Monogatari (The Tale of the Hollow Tree), Ochikubo Monogatari (The Tale of the Lower Room) and Taketore Monogatari are attributed to Minamoto no Shitago (911-83), a learned scholar of Chinese Buddhism. Utsubo Monogatari is an attempt at a thematic novel. It suffers from extreme unevenness of style and jerky storyline.22

Ochikubo Monogatari is the story of the step-daughter ill-treated by her step-mother who made her stay in a sunken room, and that is why she was called Ochikubo no kimi, (Princess of the Sunken Room). This story does not

22. Cranston, n. 8, p. 34.
include the imaginary and fairy past, its characters though are drawn from the real world. 23

_Ise Monogatari_ is in the form of songs. All the stories use the same pattern of opening, beginning with, "Mukashi Otoko..... (once a man)". Most of them describe a love situation, usually with a sad ending, contributing to the formation of the ideal of Heian country love, with its emphasis on the superiority of romantic feelings over all other considerations. It was the period when Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1028 A.D) began his long dominance of the court, and when his son-in-law, the boy Emperor Ichijo (980-1011) was on the throne, and Ichijo's consorts set up rival coteries of talented literary ladies, that the "Pillow Book" by Seishonagon (Makura no soshi) and the Tale of Genji by Murasaki Shikibu were written.

During the 11th century, historical literature became very important. The earliest of such works was the _Eiga Monogatari_. The author is considered as Japan's first thematic historian. _Eiga_ turned out to be a trend-setting work and was soon imitated by other lively historical narratives that used a story-telling style. 24 _O Kagami_ runs parallel to _Eiga Monogatari_, covering the period

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23. Tanaka, n. 21, pp. 246-254.
from 850 to 1025 and it too concentrates on the fortunes of the major Fujiwara personalities, especially Michinaga. If *Eiga* is the first thematic history of Japan, *O Kagami*, which attempts to dig into the mechanisms of events, may be called the first critical one. Both mark the beginning of a genre of Japanese writing called the *Rekishi Monogatari* or "historical tale" that continued well into the Kamakura period (1185-1333). *'Konjaku monogatari'* at the beginning of 12th century, is a collection of *setsuwa*, presented in a highly structured manner. Some of the stories have a moral-ending.

In most of the literary works written during this period, the women characters are depicted predominantly as sufferers of pain and disaster at the hands of their husbands, lovers, and parents. It has been observed that most of the literary contents were the actual social realities, whether it is *Ise, Genji* or *Ochikubo*. The story of the woman in Tattayama legend (*Ise monogatari*) reflects a society in which *Tsumadoikon* is prevailing. The groom has to depend financially on the girl's parents. The groom deserts the girl when her parents die, as there was no financial security any more. He starts living with another woman. The woman suffers from loneliness and she is
helpless. She is hurt emotionally.25 Princess Ochikubo undergoes a similar experience but at the hands of her step mother. She is submissive and quiet and does all the house jobs. She never protests against her mother's ill-treatment. This is the story of the time when children were expected to follow and obey their mother's instructions. By doing so it was believed that fortune may come their way.26 If songs and beauty were the only way for a woman to bring the husband back to her in the Tattayama legend (Ise monogatari, tolerance and submissiveness were the only way for princess Ochikubo to bring fortune for herself.

Atemiya (Utsubo monogatari) has bitterness in her life because she could not marry a person of her choice. Her marriage and future plans were decided by her father who arranges a political marriage for her. In the Heian period, political marriages were a means to gain access to positions of power. Though Atemiya's marriage certainly minimized the conflict between two families, the Fujiwara and the Minamoto, and also gave her a high position in the court as her son was made the Crown Prince, for Atemiya these indicated only material gains. She was never

25. Noguchi Motoo "Isemonogatari no tattayama densetsu no onna", Kokubungaku Kaishaku To Kyozai No Kenkyu (Tokyo, 1969), p. 41

satisfied and happy throughout her married life as none could ever understand her inner feelings. Perhaps, her life was like living in a hollow tree as the name *Utsubo* suggests.

The author of *Kagero Nikki* who was one of the wives of Fujiwara Kaneie also narrates her own experiences where her husband used her literary and musical talents in order to promote his political interests. He never considered her his companion and wife as she could not give birth to daughters. Giving birth to a daughter was considered to be an added advantage at that time for establishing favourable political connections.

In *The Tale of Genji* many women suffered disasters because of the hero, Genji. Genji was the lover of many, an attractive figure but self-centred. Among many women Murasaki was his faithful, attentive and patient wife. She too was no exception in this regard. She is presented as a true replica of Japanese woman. The novel "attained profundity through the way the literary genius of its authoress combined refined psychological insights cultivated through contemporary diary writing, with the lyricism of the stories that mixed prose and poetry... This book reaches
the deepest part of the human psyche, and the indistinct pathos felt there...". 27

To sum up, the early Middle Ages of Japanese literature can be distinctly recognised as a period when the prose genre of literature became profound, and also as an era when feminine literature not only prospered but also flourished in order to become the glory of the 'Golden Age of Heian Literature'. This age also acquires the distinction on account of the development of Kana, which could provide the much needed linkage between the intellectual pursuits of people with the idioms of indigenous culture, which was increasingly coming under the threat of imitations of Chinese culture by the nobility. Development of Kana became a weapon in the hands of women, who created such works which can truly be termed as classics.

III.4.2: High Middle Ages:

By the time Shin Kokinshu was compiled in 1205 by Fujiwara no Sadaie and others, the classic period of relative peace and prosperity came to an end. The late 13th century saw a number of wars, and was marked by internal

strife within the clans for political supremacy. The period was also marked by innumerable miseries caused by natural disasters. It was against this background that the literature of High Middle Ages took shaped.

The cataclysmic events found expression in the form of war chronicles (Gunki monogatari). The most notable belonging to this category of literature are Hogen monogatari, Heiji monogatari, Heike monogatari, and the Taiheiki (Chronicle of the Great Peace). Among these the most outstanding work is undoubtedly the Heike monogatari. Another work, the Gempei Seisuiki has also been categorised as technically a war chronicle.\(^{28}\) It deals with the same story as Heike but differs fundamentally. Glorification of the warrior (Samurai) in these works, indicates the predominance of the Samurai syndrome in the social, political and economic events of the time. The earliest version of the chronicle may be traced back to Shomonki written in Chinese, which dealt with how

Masakado, a landholder in Shimosa Province (presently part of Chiba and Ibaraki prefectures), fought against other warlords. during his rebellion against the central government.

\(^{28}\) Mills, n. 13, p. 84.
III.4.3 Late Middle Ages:

The Genroku Period: This period marks material prosperity and peace in urban life and the blossoming of art catering to the tastes of merchants and town folks. The aristocratic, warrior and the priestly art moved into the hands of common people. There arose a fresh interest in realistic literature in the form of essays, travel records, and chronicles of noted places. The new art of Kabuki, a mixture of folksong and popular dance, and a new type of haiku (seventeen-sylable verse), and kyokei (comic verse), were derived.

Until this time, the professional haiku poets, joruri writers and ukiyo-e painters were treated low in social position as opposed to "those inspired imitators of Chinese classics, art and literature, who had little to offer in vindication of their superiority, in character or conduct, were treated with great deference as poets, musicians, painters or men of letters."29

The nation was then lacking a sense of self-respect as well as a sense of keen self-examination and had no noble thoughts or strong passion worth expressing in the form of

literature, probably because people lived in an age of peace when they could somehow manage to pick up a living, and also because they were too occupied in worldly activities aimed at mundane pleasure and success, to pay any attention to other matters. However, the literature of Soin, Basho, Saikaku and Chikamatsu wore an original outlook of its own. These writers created literary pieces which were full of intellectual insights. Ihara Saikaku, initially wrote love stories (Ukiyo-bon and Koshokubon) for the amusement of the town people. Ukiyo signifies the "floating world" or "current society" and also expresses a kind of hedonism or a life devoted solely to pleasure. The love story "Five women who loved love" takes five typical women of the time with love as its major theme. They considered love as the most superior and in course involved themselves in illicit adventures in a society full of strict moral codes and conventions. Finally, the protagonists are shown as bravely meeting tragic ends due to their passionate nature.

The heroines are generally direct, and bold in what they wish to do. The impetuosity of the heroines is most noticeable. They do not wait to be wooed by the men of their choice, or stand by timidly while customary procedures

30. Ibid.
decide their fate. In each case the heroine makes advances, forces the issue, decides what must be done in a crisis. And when her impetuousity leads to ruin for herself and her lover, as most often happens, it is the heroine again whose unchastened spirit dominates the final scene at the execution ground. 31 In most of these stories one finds that the leading part is almost always played by a heroine, even in historical pieces (e.g. Yari no Gonza). In the Soga Tora-ga-Hikiusu a woman prides herself on her superiority to men in love, declaring "(only) in two points is woman superior to man, bearing children and making love." In the Muromachi era there were many stories told of men pining for love and going through much hardships to win their loves. The noble ladies in the Heian era, though aware of their helplessness and ultimate necessity of depending upon the help of the stronger sex, maintained an unyielding attitude and made those who came courting them amidst winds and rains, drink many a bitter cup of love. 32

In 1686, when Saikaku wrote this novel, freedom of love was the most dangerous of all games. Society was still feudal, having its own strict heirarchical order, where love

32. Tsuda, n. 29, p. 204.
affairs were considered "illicit". There was no simple crime of seduction, abduction, elopement, rape or murder. Saikaku's depiction of love may be seen as a crime against feudal law. Nevertheless, Saikaku, while presenting his heroines the way he did, made them meet with tragic ends (or death) as it would have been the result in real life too.

'Five Women Who Loved Love' marks the first appearance in Japanese literature of woman as a dominant heroine - "an innovation that was to have reverberations throughout later Edo literature". 33

III.5. The Modern Age:

Towards the end of the 19th century, in response to the challenges of a quickly changing society, a new kind of fiction began to appear which, without being entirely imitative of western fiction, expressed the new self-awareness or individualism and the accompanying confusion and loneliness of the modern Japanese. There was a depiction of contemporary society, and the conflicts that lay within, between the old and the new, between individual values and accepted conventions. Fiction of

the late 19th and early 20th centuries were a considerably different from their predecessors. It was raised from the status of low or popular entertainment to that of serious art. Realistic novels emerged during this period.

At the beginning of Meiji period, writers were busy in writing for newspapers and hence could not produce good literature. Readers were now educated and they forced the writers to become professional in their approach. New universities and institutions were started in order to improve the educational status of the Japanese people.

Literature and science were now being taught at universities. It also exposed the Japanese to western history and thought. Tokutomi Roka (1868-1927) and many others, who were born in the Meiji era and were taught by western instructors and missionaries, did not believe in the idea of attaining high position on the basis of one's social status and class. They gave importance to merit and ability.

In order to infuse a professional attitude among the writers and promote literature, Ozaki Koyo (1867-1903) formed a society called 'Ken'yusha' (Friends of the Inkstone) in 1885. The members of the group found

themselves attracted to the new idea of discovering psychological truth and realism in literature postulated by Tsubouchi Shoyo (1859- 1935). Tsubouchi's theoretical essay *Shosetsu Shinzui* (The Essence of the Novel)\(^{35}\) appeared the same year when *Ken'yusha* was founded.

*Ken'yusha* wanted to achieve the objectives suggested by Tsubouchi but its structure was ill-suited for it. *Ken'yusha* was organised on the lines of the traditional Japanese social structure. The teacher-student relationship between the senior and junior members was modelled after *oyabun-kobun* relationship in the family.

When the writers were still groping for something modern in their style of writing, there appeared 'Futabatei Shimei's *Ukigumo* (1987-8) (Drifting Cloud, 1965). It is considered to be the first modern novel which gave priority to the development of character over plot.\(^ {36}\) Futabatei's style is more modern than Shoyo's *Tossei Shosei Katagi*

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35. An excellent description of Shoyo's, The Essence of the Novel has been presented by Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era: Fiction* (New York: 1984), pp. 96 - 118.

(Manners of Contemporary Students, 1985-86), but is still encumbered with traditional mannerism and cadences.37

Futabatei's ideas were too progressive for the Ken'yu-sha dominated literary world. He refused to be identified with the members of the literary circles. He rather believed that the individual should rely on his own efforts knowledge and skills, than on the joint efforts of the group. He should accept responsibility for his own actions rather than seek the security and guidance of the group.38

Like Futabatei, Kitamura Tokoku (1868-94) also dissociated himself from the Kenyusha group, and headed another literary group which came to be known as Bungaku Kai. A noted woman novelist of this group was Higuchi Ichio (1872-96) whose literary works in plot, form and diction were based on traditional and classical Japanese literature, but were no less modern in content. Her literature has been treated under the category of romanticism.39 One may, however, mention that Bungaku Kai was an important

37. Mc Clellan, n. 34, p. 51.
'institution' promoting the romantic movement. Kitamura emphasized individual freedom but at the same time he was quick to criticise western utilitarianism, which was fast gaining ground in Japan at the time.

Osei (Ukigumo) in all respects is a modern girl who changed herself according to time. She asserted her freedom of individualism by doing whatever she wanted to without any hesitation. She followed blindly whatever was western. According to Bunzo, the male protagonist: her beauty is superficial and her thoughts are hollow. Osei has come out of the old norms while Bunzo is still struggling with them.

On the other hand, Oseki in "Ju'sanya" (Thirteenth Night) by Higuchi Ichiyo wants to come out from the set patterns of society. She is in search of her freedom and identity. She runs into problems with her husband and decides to leave him, but cannot do so because of the pressure from the social order. For the sake of the family, she gives up the idea of divorcing her husband. When she meets her childhood friend on the way she maintains the dignity of a woman married to a dignified family. Inspite

of her problems with her husband she didn't disclose it to her friend whom she had once wished to marry.

Characterization of Osei (Ukigumo) and Oseki (Ju'sanya) and Higuchi Ichiyo's other women protagonists like Oriki (Nigorie) and Midori (Takekurabe) have the zeal and temperament to fight irrational attitude of society towards women but lack direction and ways to fight with it. Higuchi herself in her personal life was unable to come out of it.\(^{42}\)

III.5.1. **Naturalism**

When self-consciousness and individualism became the main motto of the authors, art developed in total disregard of the conventional rules and behaviour in society. It is said naturalism emerged then in a true sense. It gained momentum after the Russo-Japanese War. Tayama Katai (1872-1930) was the chief representative of the naturalist movement. Its members included writers of reputation such as Shimazaki Toson, Kunikida Doppo, Tokuda Shusei among others. These members came from different groups. Tayama Katai originally belonged to Kenyusha while Shimazaki came from Bungaku Kai and Kunikida from Kokuminha.

\(^{42}\) Izumi, n. 39.
Japanese naturalism has its roots in the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) who believed in the anti-societal, pro-individualistic model. In Japan it was received enthusiastically when the concept of individualism had just awakened the Japanese after centuries of convention-bound Confucianism."

The foremost novels of naturalism are Unmei (Fate), Hakai (Apostasy, 1906) and Futon (The Quilt, 1907). Among these, Hakai, a modern realistic novel is a direct attack on the restrictiveness of socio-moral convention, and urges for the need to fight for freedom against feudal society. This novel definitely gives a new trend to the romantic novel.

'Futon' on the other hand, is autobiographical, where Tayama Katai's own experiences have been depicted to reveal the true nature of man. This started a new autobiographical genre, later to be known as the "I novel" (Watakushi sho setsu). Naturalistic "I novel" was quite fit in an environment where ideas of naturalists were fundamentally not in conformity to the social and political ethos of Imperial Japan. According to them, the best way of describing truth and reality is to describe oneself.

43. Henshall, n. 40, p. 3.
In the process of writing the "I novel" and to be able to appeal to the public, they became self-destructive. The element of histrionics in the lives of the Japanese I-novelists is observed and recognised by most Japanese literary scholars as being at the root of their self-destructive behaviour. Nakamura Mitsuo says:

"For them, the novel was not merely an artistic representation of human life. Rather, it was a means of searching for a new, true way of living. At the same time, it was a record for this search. This was the hazardous quest for the sake of which the writers of Meiji and Taisho periods risked tragedy in their real lives. They had high, probably exaggerated expectations of the novel and they dared to believe in them and to live them."

"For them, art was a part of mental and spiritual training, and the search for truth meant living without pretence. This ethical passion made these people, eking out their meagre lives in obscure corners of society, the conscience of their society. By speaking out their own minds honestly, they succeeded in grasping the very nature of the civilization in which they lived in ways which were possible to none other than their contemporaries."  

Natsume Soseki (1867-1916) chose the middle way. His works may be categorized as neo-romantic. Mori Ogai like Natsume Soseki opposed the I-Novel. His samurai upbringing and acquaintance with western literature gave Ogai a systematic way of thinking. He felt that it was his moral duty to enlighten his fellow countrymen with western thoughts, at the same time preserving the traditions of one's own country.

Toson, after writing Hakai (1872-1943) started writing the I-Novel in which he wrote about his own family and friends, Ie (Family, 1971). It is needless to say that the family system in Japan has the overwhelming power to suppress and kill the desires of the individual. In this novel, Toson perceived the fatal flaws in the entire system. He showed how the system suppressed the freedom of the individual. He scorned at the virtuous custom of mutual help within the family, which drained away the money of those few who were able to work. He concluded, that a long illustrious family lineage produced nothing more than impractical misfits in a changing society, and he felt that many members of his family were doomed to moral decay.

Neither he nor his nephew, was able to establish the modern family they desired. 47

Toson viewed the family system as anti-modern, opposed to the individual and progress. Otane and Oyuki are the female protagonists in Toson's "The Family". Otane is Sankichi's eldest sister, who was disturbed by her husband's flirting nature. She, however, honestly performed her duties as a wife because she was thoroughly drenched in the moral duties of a Japanese wife. She scolded Sankichi when he persuaded her to allow her son Shota to marry a girl of his choice. She said, "Marriage is not done between individuals but it is between one family to another".

Oyuki, the other female protagonist, came from a wealthy family and married Sankichi by her father's will. She obtained modern education and bore a modern outlook. Her father was a self-made person and his affluence was due to his efforts. Though she was brought up in a prosperous family and was married to a poor schoolmaster where old ethos were deeprooted, she, worked hard and did her best to support her family. She had to sacrifice everything as the family was burdened with misfortunes. Oyuki's three

47. Cecilia S. Segawa, "Translators Introduction" to The Family (Tokyo, 1976), p. 32.
daughters died due to poverty as she could not provide good food for them. She had to struggle with poverty because Sankichi was busy writing, and his meagre income was shared by a large number of family members.

While she very honestly took care of her responsibilities she also continued her correspondence with her boy friend before marriage. This became the root cause of misunderstanding and conflict between her and her husband. This was a great misfortune for them because Sankichi had a dream to make new house with Oyuki. Oyuki's simplicity and honesty proved quite contrary to their dream in life. She was humiliated and made to suffer while Sankichi himself carried on an affair with a lady. Oyuki and Sankichi's misunderstanding would have been avoided had Sankichi acted wisely as the wife in Shiga's "Reconciliation" did.

III.5.2. Shirakaba Group

Shirakaba was founded in 1910 and its name was taken from the magazine Shirakaba. Its leading members were Shiga Noaya, Mushanokoji Soneatsu, and Arishima Takeo. Most of its members were from Gakushuin. At that time, society was highly status-conscious and the persons going to this institute belonged to the upper class. In terms of their
way of life and activity they were a bit liberal and believed in the revival of individualism. Most of the members were influenced by the humanism of Russian author Tolstoy and the Christian ideology of Uchimura Kenzo:

"To respect the human as human being and to build the self were their main motive. They were opposed to Nagai Kafu's principle of art for art sake." 48

They adopted a positive approach towards life as opposed to while that of the naturalists, which was gloomy. They were critical of the irrational aspects of the Japanese society, at the same time they had a great interest in traditional arts of Japan.

Despite the liberal approach of the group, women authors could not join Shirakaba. Persons who were going to Gakushuin at that time were only men. Shirakaba was a small group built around the strength of its members. They valued their own freedom. For them "self" was very important. They thought that if women were included in the group, it will be necessary to respect their freedom also. They used to respect women as objects of love, as mother etc. However, they could not think of a situation where women could write with equal capacity and

eloquence. Shiga Noaya in Anyakoro (A Dark Night's Passing, 1976) stated in the scene where Naoko meets Kensaku: "She is like mother." In the Shirakaba journal Saneatsu stated: "I give value to woman when she is a lovable object than giving value to her freedom". Keene observes "Shirakaba school was kept away from women though members idealized women, finding in them the embodiment of the loftiest ideals in practice, they looked down women as inferior beings." 49 Miyamoto Yuriko points out in "Fujin to Bungaku" that the Shirakaba group was a hinderance for women's work and literature. 50 In this kind of situation there was a need for women authors to organize themselves. Hence Seitosha' was formed in 1911 under the leadership of Hiratsuka Raicho.

Shiga Naoya (1883-1971) used to write fiction based on his own experience. A literary work, he thought, should be autobiographical in the strict sense of the word, that is, it should be a conscious effort at self-revelation. 51 He liked people who used their wisdom and recovered from

49. Keene, n. 35, p. 444.


disaster. For that matter he didn't have regard for novelists as they ended their lives in tragedies. He said,

"Everybody, wise or foolish, has misfortunes that are due to fate; it is impossible to avoid them. Yet one should wish to tide over them as wisely as possible."

This forms the theme of Shiga's *Anyakoro*, written during 1921-37. The male protagonist of the novel, Kensaku is a modern man—egocentric, willful, full of self-doubts—a man who eventually frees himself of uncertainty, nihilism, and despair to move to a state of spiritual understanding.

Kensaku suffers two misfortunes as a result of which he is totally heart-broken. One pertains to his incestuous birth, and the other was his wife's rape. In despair he leaves everything and goes to the mountains. Kensaku did not care for the cries of Tokito, his wife when she requested him to forgive her for whatever had happened. She tolerated all sorts of harsh behaviour from Kensaku for no fault of her own. As a woman she was exploited, and suffered many a humiliation. Despite all these, she quietly followed him to the mountains and sat before his

sickridden bed. She said that she will not leave him come what may. Her continuous efforts and submissiveness ultimately won the heart of Kensaku. Kensaku felt a strange happiness when Tokito followed him quietly. While she was a source of strength for him, he abandoned her just because he could not get to terms with events in his life.53

Arishima Takeo also took up themes in which he gave prominence to female characters. Takeo, wanted to portray a strong-willed, sensitive, progressive woman, awakened and self-aware, but not knowing which direction to take.54 His subject was a woman's dilemma who was enslaved by the society dominated by man. Selling her sex as her only weapon, but unable to divest herself of her capacity for pure love.55 'A Certain Woman' (Aru Onna) was first published in 1919. Three years later when he returned from abroad, his thinking had changed a lot. In Aru Onna, he


depicts his own inner tensions in relation to ideas which he learned and brought home from abroad.

Satsuki Yoko, the woman protagonist of Aru Onna fights for her freedom. Her fight was not directed at achieving political emancipation for women, but she wanted simply to have the right to lead a dignified life over which only she could exercise control without interference from family, and social conventions. In her search for individuality and freedom she is caught up in an economic crisis, as a consequence she had to spend her life in a dilemma and in turmoil. Arishima Takeo who had western ideas could not help her protagonist come out of turmoil.

In the tragedy of Satsuki Yoko, one may see a reflection of the author's inner struggle. After fighting for individual freedom she suffers mental and physical torment only to realize that she was born in a country where social conventions had precedence over human individuality. Some Japanese critics have said that Yoko in "A Certain Woman" takes little positive action to further her independence in a hostile world. She despairs too easily. Of course, the reason is partly that Arishima was concerned to show, if only by implication, how few possibilities were open to women in her position. This work was written immediately after the Russo-Japanese War. Japan was in a
state of disorder then. Females were longing for individuality and freedom but at the same time were in a state of disillusionment. "A Certain Woman" is partly based on the Japanese movement for women's emancipation which was gaining strength at that time. Arishima reflects on this in chapter six of the novel. Critics were of the opinion that characterization of Satsuki Yoko resembles the famous actress Matsui Sumako.

III.6.3 Art-for-Art's Sake:

The group of authors represented in this category withdrew from realism and explored the world of fantasy. Tanizaki Jun'ichiro (1886-1965) was an adherent of the romantic movement in Japanese literature, he opposed Japanese naturalism throughout his literary career. Tanizaki's concept of art can be seen in the following passage:

"Some of today's writers or I should say the great majority of them - are


inclined to shun tales that present imagination, labelling them all as 'fabrications. Yet has there been any poet or man of letters, ancient or modern, who did not make free use of his imagination? How could art exist if imagination were eliminated from the realm of art? In my opinion, only those who live by their imaginations are qualified to become artists. The artists' imagination may wander far from nature. But as long as it is living, moving power in his brain, isn't it just as real as any other natural phenomenon? The artist justifies his existence only when he can transform his imagination into truth". 59

In Tanizaki's view, a work of art presents truths that, because they are hidden under the surface of ordinary life, can be grasped by creative imagination. Art imitates nature not merely in its visible appearance but in its hidden depth. Tanizaki further says:

"I want to draw a truly lifelike portrait of a woman who believed in the neo-confucian moral codes and who was, therefore, bound by them - a woman of bygone days who was reserved in all things, who was taught to suppress her feelings on all occasions, and who seldom showed her face to any person of the opposite sex except her husband. Yet it would not be easy to portray the hyper-sensitive workings of such a woman's mind. Despite her wholly virtuous appearance, she could have been harbouring thoughts of an illicit love that had not yet taken definite form.

59. Ueda, n. 51., p. 55.
Jealousy, hatred, cruelty and other dark emotions may have cast their dim shadows on her mind time and again without ever floating to the surface. It would be difficult, indeed, to create a vivid portrait of a woman of this type, a woman whose entire life was confined to her inner world." 60

These features are highlighted extensively in *Shunkinsho* (A Story of Shunkin, 1933) and a number of other stories by Tanizaki. The female protagonist Shunkin treats Sasuke like a slave and never discloses her relationship with him in public. She humiliates and tortures him. She maintains her status and is fully conscious of the class she came from even though she is blind from childhood.

On the other hand, Sasuke derives almost masochistic pleasure from submitting himself completely to a beautiful Koto player Shunkin. In the end, Sasuke too becomes blind and then explores the realities of their mutual love.

The other main proponents of art-for-art's-sake were Yokomitsu Riichi, Akutagawa Ryunosuke and Kawabata Yasumari. Akutagawa's brilliantly told stories "combining psychological subtlety and modern cynicism with a fancifulness that delights in the grotesque. 61 Some of the writers of this stream also intended to discover their

60. Ibid., p. 59
61. Mc Clellan, n. 34., p. 55.
inclinations for placing the plots of their narratives in the past. The idioms of traditional art and sensibilities found subtle reflection in their artistic creativity.

Late Taisho and early Showa periods were marked by the emergence of proletarian literature which was suppressed by 1935. The brief period of proletarian literature was initially welcomed by many intellectuals as they sought to portray the social realities, but in a manner different from those of the naturalists. The proponents thought that the earlier literature was not in a true sense literature which did not present the idioms of freedom and rationality. However, in the literary tradition of Japan it also could not thrive, and eventually vanished. The works of three women writers, Miyamoto Yuriko, Hirabayashi Taiko, and Sata Ineko can be taken as typical of the periods "proletarian" literature movement.62

III.5.4 In Search of Identity: The Post-war Period

Search for identity was the theme of both Abe Kobo (b 1924) and Oe Kenzaburo (b 1935). Their literature was distinctly different from the pre-war trend of I-Novels. They wrote about the society and its people who did not know

their destiny in a fast changing society, and thus suffered from isolation. Kenzaburo tried to seek identity in indigenous culture in contemporary Japanese society, where the native tradition was in jeopardy due to the accelerating process of modernization which was started under western influence in the Meiji period and had perhaps got out of hand. 63

'The Woman in the Dunes' (Sun a no onna, 1962) represents all of Abe's major themes, where his woman protagonist has strong adaptability to the environment where she lives. She is satisfied with her existence, but at the same time, has a tremendous urge to live. She never tries to come out of the dunes where she is living. 64

Similarly, writers like Dazai Osamu, Ishikawa Jun, Sakaguchi Augo and a few others attempted to portray the joys and sorrows of a confused Japanese post-war society.

The echoes of war just recently concluded, however, bore direct relationship with the themes of a new band of writers who appeared soon after World War II. Notable

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among them are Umezaki Haruo, Mishima Yukio and Ooka Shohei. They presented a picture of sufferings, devastations and psychological impairments caused by the war.

As time passed by and a reign of peace set in, Japan took on the path of industrialization and modernization rather vigorously. The elements of tradition were now at loggerheads with the forces of change. The fabric of Japan's social order was swiftly changing. New problems were now being faced by society. It was at this juncture that one finds Ariyoshi Sawako, Kaiko Takeshi and Yoshiyuki Junnosuke emerging on the scene. They occupy an important place for having taken up themes which were distanced from ideological moorings of the first wave of post-war writers. They took up subjects of psychological nuances in everyday life which they treated with a blend of detached pathos. At the same time, writers like Ariyoshi sought to address themselves to some of the problems being faced by society. Her works on traditional Japanese artists and their life were directed towards drawing attention to those who were now on their way out. The aged too needed a place.

Documenting strands and shades of contemporary literary genius can only be a highly unsatisfactory venture, as they tend to vary in content, forms and objectives. Perhaps a
few decades later one may be better equipped to establish some dialogue with the contemporary times.

The brief survey attempted above was purposefully a little tilted in favour of writers who took up themes pertaining to women. In this sense, it can't qualify for an objective assessment of the literary sensibilities in Japan. The works of some major literati are not included. They are Kawabata Yasunari, Akutagawa, Kafu, and a few others. However, despite the shortcomings one may be in a position to identify the turning points in the history of Japanese literature. At the same time, one may also take note of the changes and elements of continuity carried down the ages particularly since the early middle ages, when the literary standards were, in fact, laid down.