CHAPTER IV

NATSUME SOSEKI (1867-1916):
HIS LIFE, WRITINGS, AND IDEAS
Natsume Soseki, along with Mori Ogai, occupies the unshakeable position of a novelist representative of modern Japanese literature. While there may be some questions about Ogai as he was not considered a writer of the masses, Soseki's position as a truly modern but 'Japanese-in-spirit' novelist is beyond doubt. The amazing versatility of his genius can be ascertained from the fact that he represented in himself a rare combination of a novelist, story teller and essayist, a fearless, rebellious, and penetrating critic and a haiku poet of high quality and above all an intellectual par excellence.

Soseki's works written nearly 80 years ago still delight millions of Japanese readers. Some of his works like Wagahai wa Neko de Aru (I'm a Cat), Botchan, Kokoro etc. are regarded as indispensable not only for the students of Japanese literature, but also for every Japanese for a variety of reasons. They are regarded as model works of fiction, written in a beautiful colloquial style; works that are replete with satire and humour, but full of moral and social purpose, and at the same time strongly imbedded in the socio-cultural milieu of the time. Further, perhaps
there is no other author about whom so much has been written. There are countless books, theses, research papers, special issues of leading literary magazines, multiple editions of his complete works, published from time to time as a homage to his revered memory, and to unravel his multifaceted personality. And every year witnesses many additions to this already rich library. Moreover, he is one of the few Japanese writers most of whose works have been introduced abroad through translation into various languages of the world.

Soseki became a legend during his life time. It was because of his popularity that the Asahi Shimbun, the then largest daily in Japan, offered him the job to write exclusively for it at very attractive terms and conditions in 1907. A popularity poll conducted by the Taiyo Magazine established as early as 1909 that he was the most popular author of the time. It goes to Soseki's credit, that he enjoyed all this popularity despite the fact, that he never wrote with the utilitarian aspect in mind. It was also for his contributions to the development of Meiji Literature that the government conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Letters in 1911, though he declined to accept it. He enjoyed tremendous following among the young literati of the time, with many of his protege' dominating the literary scene after his death.

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Soseki's emergence on the literary scene in 1905 after the Russo-Japanese war coincided with the most turbulent period in the history of Japan. He grew up at a time when Japan was undergoing rapid modernization, and change and there was conflict between the traditional order, morality and values, and new ones causing tremendous psychological and mental strain on the people. On the social front, the evils of rapid westernization were beginning to surface in the urban society, and on the literary front, works were unnecessarily being put in a western garb without intellectual foundation, or proper understanding of the philosophy behind. Soseki, due to his sound grounding in both Eastern and Western literatures and cultures,\(^1\) tried to provide important clues to the eclectic approach to be adopted with regard to tradition and change through his works. Impelled by a powerful moral thrust, Soseki not only chose to remain out of the main stream but expressed his views in a forthright and direct manner without mincing words, at a time when there was ruthless suppression of intellectual freedom. The most commendable fact about Soseki was that he could achieve all this while maintaining the literary value of his writings. His satire, wit,

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\(^1\) Soseki had formal training in Chinese classics early on and specialized in English literature at the Tokyo University.
anecdote and a unique colloquial style, called "Shaseibun", made him a consummate master of prose. Thus, he is credited with the distinction of raising the artistic quality of the modern Japanese novel to a point where it could match the western novel in treatment of characters and presentation. All this made him stand out among his contemporaries, and he is rightly regarded as a titan among men of letters.

**EARLY YEARS (1867-1894)**

Natsume Kinnosuke was born in Tokyo in a middle class family on 5 January 1867, on the eve of the Meiji Restoration. His birth was not really welcomed by his parents, as he was the sixth child of the couple and eighth of his father (his father had two daughters from his first wife) and also because his parents were in advanced age - his father was 54 and mother 41 years old. He was put out to nurse at a junk dealer's place. However, it is also believed that his father was willing to give away the child for a financial consideration, and ultimately at the age of two, Kinosuke was adopted into Shiobara family. He was with his foster parents for five years when he was taken back into the Natsume family. Due to these changes, Kinnosuke

2 Natsume Kyoko, Soseki no Omoide (Kadogawa Bunko, Tokyo 1980), p60
never got parental affection. Even after Kinnosuke was back with his parents, he was not legally reinstated in the Natsume family until 1888, when the sudden death of his two elder brothers within a space of three months forced his father to settle his legal status paying a huge-sum of 240 yen to the Shiobara family. All this left a deep scar on young Kinnosuke's mind, as he recalled later that "his was not a life meant for domestic happiness". In two of his explicitly autobiographical works, Garasudo no Naka (Inside the Glass Door) and Michikusa (Grass on the wayside), Soseki reveals his emotional shock quite vividly. For instance, Kenzo, the protagonist of Michikusa and a self-caricature of Soseki, explains the attitude of his parents, both real and foster parents, towards him as under.

To his father he was simply a nuisance. He would look sometimes at the boy as though he could not quite understand how such a mistake had been made. Kenzo was hardly a child to him; rather, he was some animate object that had wandered uninvited into his household. And the love that was in Kenzo's expectant heart was brutally pulled out by the roots and left to wither in the cold... With too many children to take care of already, Kenzo's father was very reluctant to assume any responsibility for him. He had taken the boy back only because he was his son; he would feed him, but he was not going to spend a penny on him if he could help it... Besides, Shimada saw to it that Kenzo remained legally his adopted son. From his father's point of view, then, Kenzo was a bad risk; for what is the point of spending money on the land when Shimada could come and take him away any time he wished? I'll feed him if I must, was his attitude, but let Shimada take care of the rest - it's his business.
Shimada was no less selfish. He was content to stand by and allow the situation to continue as long as it suited him. They won't let him starve, he assured himself, when he is old enough to earn some money, I'll get him back, even if it means going to court.

Kenzo had no home, either in the sea or the hills. A wandering creature that belonged nowhere, he found his food sometimes in the water and sometimes on land. To his father and to Shimada, he was not a person. To the former he was not more than an unwanted piece of furniture; to the latter, he was some kind of investment that might prove profitable at a later date. 3

Thus young Kinnosuke developed a dislike for his parents, both real and foster. He left his father's place at the earliest possible opportunity, when he joined the preparatory school for entrance into the University, never to return again. He also took up a part-time job teaching geography and geometry at a preparatory school, so that he was not dependent on his father for monthly remittance, though he continued to help his father financially till the latter's death.

Chinese classics were Kinnosuke's first love, and his ambition at one time was to distinguish himself in Chinese. Although he was born at a time when Chinese learning was on the decline, he had his earlier schooling with Kambun as the

3 Extracted from Edwin McClellan, "Grass on the Wayside" (Translation of Natsume Soseki's Michikusa) (Tokyo, 1977), pp.148-49
main focus. This exposure to Chinese classics went a long way in fostering in him a sense of tradition. He records in the preface to his work Bungakuron (Comments of Literature) that "though he studied Chinese classics for a short while, it led him to form a concept; even if vague, of what literature was". However, he then decided to pursue English Literature, as it promised to his generation a new world and a new vision. It was at the First Higher Middle School where he studied English that literary luminaries of later years like Masaoka Shiki and Yamada Bimyo were his classmates, and Kawakami Bizan, Ishibashi Shian, and Ozaki Koyo were his seniors. He was specially close to Masaoka Shiki, later leader of the new haiku movement, and it was under his influence that Soseki the poet was born. He composed a large number of haiku poems.

He adopted his pen name Soseki, meaning stubborn or eccentric person, in 1889 for the first time when he wrote Mokusetsuroku (Collection of Chinese Poetry). Soseki joined the Department of English Literature at the Imperial University of Tokyo in 1890, as it seemed to be the surest road to success. He graduated successfully in 1893 and took up a teaching assignment with the Tokyo Higher Normal School

5 Ito Sei, Bungaku Shojiten (Tokyo, 1968), p869.
as a teacher of English against his own wishes. He wrote later in *Watakushi no Kojinshugi* (1914): "I was dragged into the teaching profession through an acquaintance and when I started teaching, I felt like a fish dealer working with a cake shop." Soseki was never satisfied with his knowledge of the English language and was modest enough to admit the same openly. However, most scholars and critics regard that not only his command on English was impeccable but he started scholarly study of English literature in Japan.

YEARS OF RESTLESSNESS (1895-1905)

Because of self-imposed standards and the attitude of moral uprightness, Soseki became a victim of a vague anxiety and despondency, and suffered from depressions quite often. He increasingly became skeptical about his capabilities as a teacher. For the next seven years till he was sent to England for higher studies in 1900, he wandered about changing his job twice. First in 1895, Soseki left his job with the Tokyo Normal school and took up a teaching assignment with a high school in Matsuyama in Shikoku, at a time when everyone aspired to work in Tokyo. His experiences at Matsuyama became the subject matter of one of

6 *Natsume Soseki, "Watakushi no Kojinshugi" in Natsume Soseki Zenshu*, vol.10 (Chikuma Shobo, Tokyo, 1979), p.126
his most popular works viz. *Botchan* (The Little Master) whose protagonist fights although against injustice and hypocrisy and obviously it was a self-caricature of Soseki.

However, he did not stay in Matsuyama for long. Just after a year he resigned and took up a teaching job with the Fifth High School in Kumamoto, Kyushu. It was here that Soseki married Nakane Kyoko in June 1896 and probably stuck to this job for four years for family reasons.

The turning point in Soseki's life came in 1900 when a scholarship awarded by the Ministry of Education enabled him to go to England for higher studies. These two years in England proved to be a very trying experience for him. Upon his arrival in London, the biggest disappointment for Soseki was that he could not converse with the local people, thereby confirming his long-standing suspicion about his own knowledge of the English language. Moreover, there was a distinct cultural shock, as he found himself in the most advanced country of the time. Soseki wrote in *Rondonto* (London Tower) later: "Upon my arrival in London, I felt like a rabbit of Gotenba thrown out in a crowded place like Nihonbashi".  

Soseki was already a middle aged man, making it difficult for him to adjust, and had left his family behind in Japan, and was, therefore, homesick, as is obvious

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7 Natsume Soseki, *Rondonto* in Natsume Soseki (Tokyo, 1966), p.408

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from his letters written to his wife. Nonetheless, he observed the Western materialistic culture with considerable interest and curiosity, but this admiration did not last long, and Soseki began developing a sense of inferiority and despair, due to the attitude of the British towards Asians, as also the superiority of the western materialistic culture. In the Preface to *Bangakuron* (On Literature) he observed:

> The Two years I spent in London were the most unpleasant two years of my life. I felt like a shaggy dog among British gentlemen.\(^8\)

And his diary written while he was in London said:

> We are country bumpkins, nicompoop monkeys good for nothing ashen colored impenetrable people. So it's natural the Westerners should despise us. Besides, they don't know Japan, nor are they interested in Japan. So even if we deserved their knowledge and respect, there would be no respect or love, as long as they have no time to know us and no eyes to see us.\(^9\)

On the other hand, Soseki found the lectures at the University of London falling short of his expectations and he stopped attending them. Hereafter his only academic contact was his tutor Dr. William J. Craig, a Shakespearean scholar. Instead Soseki preferred to shut himself indoors

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and sank himself in books in an endeavour to re-examine literature on the most fundamental level, and seek a universal definition of it - a definition which reconciles the differences between the Oriental and Western concepts of literature. In the process, Soseki read a whole lot of books not only on English literature but books on philosophy, religion and even sciences. Thus, from here on it was no longer the despairing Soseki, but a reoriented Soseki. He recounted later in his speech delivered in 1914 entitled *Watakushi no Kojinshugi* (My Views of Individualism).

One day sitting in my room, I realized that I will have to form my own fundamental concept of literature if I were to understand what literature was. I also realized that till that time I was judging things on the basis of what others said (tanin-honi) and that it would get me nowhere since it was like a rootless plant floating about all over the place aimlessly...

Suppose a westerner says that a poem is good or it has an excellent tone. It is, however, a westerner's point of view. It is certainly good for my reference but unless I am really convinced by it, I cannot accept or convey it to others as my own opinion. I should not change my opinion since I am an independent Japanese and not a slave of the British.

Yet I am a student of English Literature. I should feel uneasy if there were discrepancies between the English critics views and those of my own. I, therefore, have to consider whence these discrepancies derive...

I then began reading books that had no immediate bearing on literature in order to consolidate the basis on which my views of literature should be founded. In short, I hit upon the idea of judging things on my own basis (Jiko-honi).... Frankly speaking, I made a fresh beginning after my discovery of this notion and it helped me to find what I thought would be my life's mission. I resolved to write books to tell people that they
need not imitate Westerners, that running blindly after others as they were doing would cause them more anxiety. If I could spell this out for them in definite form, it would give me pleasure and make them happy as well. This was what I hoped to accomplish. My anxiety vanished all of a sudden and I who till then was lost in a thick fog, found my way on which to proceed.

Hereon, his approach towards the Britishers, and Western culture also changed from one of inferiority to that of hostility and self-respect. He expressed in the Preface to Bungakuron thus:

Besides my friend, I met two or three Japanese at Cambridge. They were all sons or younger brothers of wealthy merchants, who were prepared to spend thousands of yen per year in order to become 'gentlemen'. My allowance from the government was 1800 yen a year. In a place where money controlled everything, I could hardly hope to compete with these people.... I thought my purpose in coming to England was different from that of these easy going people. I do not know if the gentlemen of England are so impressive as to make it worth my while to imitate them; besides having already spent my youth in the Orient, why should I now start learning how to conduct myself from these English gentlemen who are younger than I am.

Soseki, however, had to pay dearly in terms of his health for this enlightenment. His solitude further worsened his neurosis. One of his poet friends Doi Bansui discovered from his landlady in London that Soseki had been confining himself to his room for days together and had been

10 Natsume Soseki, "Watakushi no Kojinshugi", in Natsume Soseki Zenshu, vol.10, n.6, pp.128-130.
11 ibid, p.47
desperately crying in the dark at times.\textsuperscript{12} His ulcerous stomach also got worsened during this time and afflicted him for the rest of his life. His ailments not only came in the way of his creative writing often, as he needed hospitalization and operation, but also marred his family life.\textsuperscript{13} Incidentally, a friend of Soseki in London Okakura Yoshizaburo even sent a telegram to the Japanese government informing that Soseki was on the verge of insanity.\textsuperscript{14} Since this happened anyway towards the end of his stay in London, there was no occasion for the government to call him back, and he left London in December 1902 and arrived in Tokyo in January 1903. However, in Soseki's own words, his gain was much more than his loss. Years later in the Preface to \textit{Bungakuron}, Soseki remarked ingenuously as follows:

When I consider that I owe to this nervous breakdown and insanity 'I am a cat', 'Yokyposhu' and 'Uzurakago', I think it quite proper to acknowledge my indebtedness to this condition. As long as there is no change in my personal position, this condition of nervous breakdown and insanity will continue for the rest of my life. And since as long as they last, it is my hope to produce many an 'I am a Cat'... I only pray that nervous breakdown and insanity may never desert

\textsuperscript{12} Kyoko, n.2, p.106.
\textsuperscript{13} ibid, p.127.
\textsuperscript{14} ibid, p.106

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On his return to Japan, Soseki once again had to take up teaching despite his reluctance, as he was under an obligation to serve as a teacher for four years. He succeeded Lafcadio Hearn (popularly known as Koizumi Yakumo in Japan) and taught English literature at the Tokyo University. Soseki's task became all the more difficult because Professor Hearn was very popular among his students for his style of teaching and Soseki's analytical method was found to be too difficult and in direct contrast to his predecessor and hence Soseki was not received very well by his students, at least to begin with.

To supplement his modest annual income of 800 yen, he simultaneously took up teaching jobs with the Meiji University and the First High School, thus teaching for as many as 30 hours a week. At the Tokyo University, he lectured on three broad themes namely 'The General Concept of Literature', 'On Literature', and 'Eighteenth Century English Literature', later published in book form. These theoretical studies on English literature and literary criticism are regarded as valuable scholarly contributions. Although Soseki went on to complete his four-year obligatory

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service, on a number of occasions he expressed his restlessness and dissatisfaction with the profession he was in. For instance, in a letter dated 1 July 1906, to his friend Komiya Toyotaka, he wrote that he would prefer to die rather than prepare notes for lectures.

Despite such heavy teaching schedule, Soseki began writing in various magazines to satisfy his creative urge. If on one hand, he wrote scholarly articles as "On the Ghost in Macbeth", on the other, he wrote "My Bicycle Diary" about his London reminiscences, poems in English and Japanese, translations and so forth. It was, however, from the first month of 1905 that in a unique sudden outburst of energy Soseki produced a large number of works in a short span of a decade, that immortalized him.

YEARS OF SUCCESS AND FAME (1905-1916)

(a) Early Writings

Soseki shot to fame almost overnight with the publication of his small piece Wagahai wa neko de aru (I'm a Cat) in the January 1905 issue of Hototogisu. Soseki used the noval idea of using a cat as the narrator looking at man and society whimsically and with detachment. 'Wagahai' meaning 'I' was used by the bureaucrats of the time with a highly arrogant tone and by using this for a cat, Soseki indirectly attacked such arrogance. It became so popular
that Soseki was asked to continue the same by the publishers and he went on to write in all 11 installments, though he had intended it to be a single shot affair. The work was a delightful satire on the contemporary Japanese society, specially Japanese intellectuals of the late Meiji era who were indiscriminate admirers of the West, and showed a glimpse of Soseki as a critic of civilization and society. In addition to the plot, it was the Shaseibun style which was largely responsible for its popularity. The work launched him definitely as a literary writer.

Simultaneously with Wagahai..., Soseki wrote seven short stories during the course of this year. Rondonto (The Tower of London), Karairu Hakubutsukan (The Carlyle Museum), Maboroshi no tate (The Phantom Shield), Koto no Sorane (The Song of Evanescence), Ichiya (One Night) and Shumi no Iden (The Legacy of Love), constituted his first collection of stories entitled Yokyoshu (Drifting in Space). While Ichiya, Koto no Sorane and Shumi no Iden had their setting in Japan, the remaining stories were either drawn from Soseki's own experiences in London or had their setting in medieval England. All these works had a strong romantic tone with a distinct influence of symbolism. In these stories we see more of Soseki the artist at work.

Then came one of Soseki's most popular and memorable works 'Botchan' (The Little Master). The work is set in
Matsuyama where Soseki had taught for a year. Botchan is a naive, ingenuous, reckless bravado who fights against a group of sycophants and hypocrites in the corrupt school atmosphere. Due to a remarkable similarity between turn of events in this novel and Soseki's own life, Botchan is often regarded as a self-caricature of Soseki. Its plot and style is filled, on one hand, with satire and humour derived from English literature and ethical idealism on the other, a sort of extension of Wegahai.... According to a survey conducted in 1967, more than two million copies of Botchan were sold in the two decades after the war alone. Its enormous popularity is due to Japanese readers finding it intelligible regardless of age and identify their own natures with the hero's straightforward decency and sense of justice.

Close on the heels of this work came Kusamakura (The Grass Pillow), Nihyakutoka (210th Day) and Nowaki (The Wintry Blast), of which Kusamakura needs special mention, as not only Soseki regarded it as one of his best works for he made a conscious effort to include traditional literary techniques in it, and the work was different from those

16 Eto Jun, "Soseki to Gendai o musubu mono" (Jiyu, October, 1970), p.142.

being produced at that time, but it earned Soseki a job with the Asahi newspaper.

It is the story of a painter who sets out on a journey weary of the monotonous world. At a hot spring he meets the beautiful daughter of the inn-keeper, Nami who has separated from her husband. He desires to catch the beautiful girl at just the right moment for artistic creation. The moment arrives at last when both go to station to see her cousin off to war. Her eyes happen to see her divorced husband going to war on the same train. At this moment, the artist discovers the sentiment of compassion (aware) in her eyes in which he finds a feeling of aesthetic beauty. This work has a kind of aesthetic and ethereal other worldliness. The work was very well received as a beautiful artistic piece.

Thus Soseki who joined the Asahi in April 1907, in the first phase of his literary career did not develop in a straight line. He wrote a wide variety of works but in most of them we clearly see a strong emphasis on the romantic ideal, with a glimpse of subjective realism in Wagahai and Botchan. From here on, with the exception of Gubijinso (The Red Poppy), Soseki moved strikingly in the direction of idealism.

As Soseki's fame and status as a literary writer grew, he became a center of attraction for his former and present students aspiring to be literary writers, who started
gathering around him. Soseki, on his part, dissatisfied with the existing literary trends, regarded it his responsibility to guide and train these youth about literature. He wrote in October 1905 as under:

Meiji literature is just beginning, so far it's just born. Young people from universities are going to make it a great one. Now we are facing a period of rich promise. Since I am fortunate enough to be living in such a wonderful time, I am prepared to work myself to death to clear the way for you young people and set a great stage for many a genius to unfold. It may get dark while we are undecided. We must hurry. We must work with might and main.18

His young admirers included distinguished men like Takahama Kyoshi, Morita Sohei, Abe Yoshishige, Komiya Toyotaka, Suzuki Miekichi, Kume Masao etc. many of whom he himself launched, and this circle of disciples and admirers widened so rapidly that, from October 1906, Soseki fixed Thursday for a weekly session, popularly known as Mokuyokai, with these young men. This literary salon soon came to exercise a significant impact on the contemporary literary world.

(b) **Soseki with the Asahi**

Under these circumstances when Soseki had gained recognition outside the academic circles. In early 1907 he was offered a job by the Asahi, the then largest selling

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daily of Japan, to write exclusively for it. Soseki accepted the offer for a variety of reasons. First and foremost was that he regarded it a good break from teaching which he never enjoyed, and had always wanted to be a whole-time writer. Secondly, Soseki was not required to attend office, and his only obligation was to supply his writings at the appropriate time. This was perhaps the biggest attraction for Soseki as he could devote himself to what he wanted to do in a relaxed mood. Yet another attraction for Soseki was that the job was lucrative 200 yen a month and 2 months' bonus a year. In terms of money what he was offered was much more than he could earn lecturing at three different places. Since Soseki was about to complete his four year obligatory service in April, he accepted the offer.

However, Soseki's joining of Asahi raised many eyebrows as it was an unprecedented thing in tradition-bound and honour conscious Japan. A university professor throwing away academic career for the "vulgar" world of journalism. Many of his critics and even admirers called it a madman's behaviour.19 But Soseki silenced his critics through his strongly worded announcement in the paper about his decision.

If journalism is a business, teaching in a University is also a business... If journalism is

19 ibid, p.59
vulgar. University teaching is also equally vulgar... For me, there is nothing better than dedicating myself to writing and there is no more prestigious profession than it.  

Soseki's joining the Asahi was significant in one more respect. It broke the long standing social prejudice against professional writers in Japan. And by making a highly successful literary career, Soseki paved the way for many a youth to take to writing as a full time occupation.

From April 1907 till his death in December 1916, Soseki wrote all his works for the Asahi. As for his contract, he was to write two full length novels (100 installments each) per year, or three novels of lesser length. Actually Asahi asked him to write more frequently than stipulated in the contract and he obliged quite willingly. Thus, besides his major novels, he also wrote many small pieces in between. In addition, he also headed the Asahi Literary column from 25 November 1909 through 12 October 1911.

Soseki's last decade of remarkable creativity began with the serializing of Gubijinso (Wild Poppy) June through October. He followed it up with Kofu (The Wayfarer) (January to April 1908), and two short pieces Buncho (A Rice Bird) (June 13-21) and Yumejuya (Ten Nights' Dreams) (25 July to 5 August 1908). These works fell much short of  

20 Natsume Soseki, Nyusha no Ji (Message about Joining Asahi) in Natsume Soseki Zenshu, vol.10, n.6, p.158.
people's expectations but gave full measure of Soseki's ability to develop plot and situation, create characters from day-to-day life presented in a matter-of-fact style.

It was with Sanshiro (1 September through 29 December 1908), the first of Soseki's trilogy, Sorekara and Mon being the other two works that formed this trilogy, that Soseki was at his best. Sanshiro is a country lad who comes to Tokyo for higher studies at the Tokyo University. He is a simpleton and equally clumsy and naive as Botchan. During his journey to, and a year's stay in metropolitan Tokyo, he meets many sophisticated people who shock him out of his innocence and naivety. He falls in love with a girl but unable to know her mind, confesses his love for her too late and ultimately loses her.

Although the plot is very simple, it was the character of Sanshiro - so common place and so natural with his simplicity and lack of guile, that most of the youth could identify themselves with him. Another charming feature of Sanshiro was that Soseki was very successful in analysing and portraying the psychology of the youth, the conflict between the old and the new, and the problems of the youth coming to big cities in search of wisdom and wealth. Beginning with this work Soseki gradually perfected the art of psychological analyses of characters and is rightly regarded as the master of psychological fiction.
Between January and March 1909, Soseki wrote twenty-five small pieces entitled *Eijitsu Shohin* (Spring Miscellanies) which were more of personal reminiscences about people, things and places, and throw light on Soseki - the man. Soseki started serializing his next major work *Sorekara* (And Then) from 27 May through 14 October 1909 as a sequel to *Sanshiro*.

Daisuke, the protagonist of this novel, is a bachelor of thirty and the second son of a wealthy businessman. He maintains a separate household as he is resolved to maintain his complete independence, though financially supported by his father. He views everything - his family, society and life with detachment. The society does not understand him, and he despises the inhuman society and remains aloof, thereby unable to put his talents to the use of society. He creates a furore when he confesses his love for his friend's wife Michiyo whom he had once conceded in marriage to him but her unhappy married life rekindles in his heart his love for her. Disowned by his family and on the look out for a job, he is still seeking to obtain his friend's wife. What happened to him thereafter is left to the reader's imagination.

In *Sorekara*, Soseki, through the depiction of clash between love and conscience and social morality; tried to portray the spiritual anguish of the modern man torn between
old and new morality - a theme which found true expression in this work and recurred in most of his subsequent writings.

Soon after completing this work, Soseki made a private trip to Korea and Manchuria from 2 September to 17 October, and upon his return, he started serializing his travelogue entitled Mankantokorodokoro (A Passage through Manchuria and Korea) in the Asahi from 21 October through 30 December 1909. He discussed the people, places and nature in these countries. It was around this time that Soseki was asked by the Asahi to also take charge of its literary column. He accepted the offer readily as it gave him an opportunity to express his views on literature of the time, specially the naturalistic literature which was at its peak. Soseki was ably assisted by Morita Sohei, Komiya Toyotaka, Abe Jiro and Mushakoji Saneatsu and it became a channel for animated debate on literature and other related subjects.*

What could have happened to Daisuke and Michiyo is the subject of Mon (The Gate), his next work serialized in Asahi from 1 March through 22 June 1910. It is the tale of a

* Soseki headed the column till 12 October 1911, when due to a clash between Ikebe Sanzan, the man instrumental in bringing Soseki to Asahi and his colleagues over Morita Sohei, angered Soseki who not only gave up the responsibility of this column but also tendered his resignation to the Asahi. He was though prevailed upon to withdraw his resignation.
childless couple, Sosuke and Oyone. Oyone had been the wife of Sosuke's friend but as they fell in love, they decide to take up life together. A sense of guilt, however, constantly haunts their minds and they live an isolated life with very little social contact. They regard every misfortune that befalls them, including their being childless, as the divine retribution for betraying Yasui, Sosuke's friend and Oyone's former husband. This prolonged and persistent self-reproach, and resulting mental anguish forces Sosuke to seek shelter in a zen temple to attain mental peace but he keeps standing outside the gate not having the courage to open it. The end symbolizes that any gate to a better life is shut for both of them.

There was a gap of nearly a year and a half before Soseki wrote his next full length novel Higan Sugimade (1 January to 29 April 1912), as he fell critically ill suffering from stomach ulcer and was even in a state of coma for some time. He somehow survived this crisis, popularly known as the Shuzenji crisis - Shuzenji being the name of a hot spring in Izu where Soseki convalesced for some time. This encounter with death is believed to be a turning point in Soseki's life as a writer, as he realized that he did not have many years to live. Hereafter, Soseki began searching the patterns of existence, the real meaning of life, and religious enlightenment more earnestly.
During this period of prolonged illness, Soseki published only *Omoidasu Kotonado* (Random Collections), excerpts from his diary serialized from 29 October 1910 through 20 February 1911. In these pieces Soseki talked about his encounter with death, his rediscovery of his own self and his views on life and death. In addition, during this time, Soseki visited Nagano in June 1911 for a lecture entitled "Education and Literature", followed by an extensive lecture trip to the Kansai region sponsored by the Asahi. On this tour, he delivered four lectures viz., "Vocation and Avocation" at Akashi, "Enlightenment of Modern Japan" at Wakayama, "Substance and Form" at Sakai and "Literature and Morality" at Osaka. These lectures have been discussed elsewhere in the thesis and are a key to Soseki the thinker and the critic.

*Higan Sugimade* is a collection of six independent short stories connected together by an epilogue. In order to give it the form of a novel, Soseki creates a character called Tagawa who is a link between all the stories. The first three stories are about his encounters with various people - his friend Sunaga, his (Sunaga's) uncle Taguchi, Sunaga's fiance Chiyoko and Taguchi's brother-in-law Matsumoto etc. and in the next three stories he is reduced to a listener to stories told by each one of them. Sunaga is expected to marry Chiyoko but he suffers from mental anguish over the
mystery of his birth. Finally when he discovers that he is
the child of his father and a housemaid, he is unable to
overcome the shock and sets out on a journey in quest of
inner peace and search for identity.

Although some of the stories are independently good,
due to a loose plot, it fails to impress as a good novel and
is one of the least popular works of Soseki. Many critics
attribute Soseki's failure to his prolonged illness and the
painful circumstances in which he wrote the work; Soseki
lost his fifth daughter in November 1911.

His next work *Kojin* (The Wayfarer) appeared in the
Asahi from 6 December 1912 through November 1913. This work
too, like its predecessor is a collection of four short
stories but this time the stories present a unified theme.
The theme of this novel is a love triangle but with a
difference. Ichiro and Onao are husband and wife but they
do not have a smooth relationship, as Ichiro suspects his
wife of harbouring illicit love desire towards his own
younger brother Jiro, whom she knew before their marriage.
He asks his brother to test her honour which Jiro refuses to
carry out but he tries to intervene so as to improve their
relationship. Soon thereafter, Jiro and Onao are forced to
spend a night at a seaside resort due to a storm. Nothing
however happens and Jiro tells his brother that his doubts
were baseless. Ichiro, however, continues to suffer from
mental anguish and completely isolates himself. His parents and his brother, with a view to drag him out of his solitude, send him out with a friend on a trip. Ichiro, however, says "There are only three courses left open for me - to die, to go mad or to enter religion." It is from around this time that Soseki begins hinting at religion as the solution to various maladies. His solution is the much discussed philosophy Sokuten Kyoshi (follow the heaven and forsake self) or in other words, surrendering of self to something larger than himself, which was the undercurrent of most of his subsequent works, though the phrase does not occur in his works but figures in an account of a conversation with his disciples.

It was in Kokoro (20 April to 11 August 1914), the most moving novel of Soseki, that he found true expression not only of his art, but also his thought. It is the story of a young man "I" who meets "Sensei" and they become quite fond of each other despite the age difference. "I" starts visiting Sensei's home where he lives with his wife. Sensei is lonesome and detached from the world and the relation between him and his wife is also far from a happy one. "I" returns to his native place as his father is critically ill and while he is still there, he receives a letter from Sensei in which Sensei informs him that he is ending his life. "I" rushes to Tokyo leaving his father on the death
bed. On the way, he reads Sensei's detailed letter all over again and discovers the reason behind Sensei's anguish. Sensei when young lived as a paying guest with a widow and her beautiful daughter "Ojosan", along with a friend, "K". Both young men love Ojosan without each other's knowledge. One day "K" confides to his friend about his love for "Ojosan" but Sensei got ahead of him in asking for Ojosan's hand. "K" commits suicide when he learns about it. Though Sensei went on to marry Ojosan, the painful sting of conscience for betraying his friend and forcing him to end his life, haunts him for the rest of his life. His mental anguish and inability to disclose the truth to his unsuspecting wife prevents him from having a smooth relation with her. He tries everything to overcome this sense of guilt but of no avail, and finally he ends his life on the day General Maresuke Nogi committed harakiri, the day of Emperor Meiji's funeral.

Although Kokoro too has a love triangle but Sensei's character represents common tragedy of modern intellectuals isolated from their own world, as they follow the dictates of their heart and pursue individual happiness initially, but are subsequently tormented as they are morally fastidious. Sensei, inspite of suffering all his life, refuses to draw his wife into his sin and chooses to embrace death. On the other hand, Soseki does not deny love, as
Sensei drags his life on and on for the sake of his wife whom he really loves. In this sense, Sensei's death is one of dignity and Kokoro is a tragedy. It is the moralist side of Soseki that is the hallmark of Kokoro.

Once again before writing his next major work Michikusa (Grass on the Wayside), Soseki first delivered his most famous lecture Watakushi no Kojinshugi (My Individualism) which is an index to Soseki's thought,* in November 1914 at the Gakushuin University, addressing an audience consisting of young members of the aristocracy, and then wrote a series of short pieces entitled Garasudo no Naka (within the Glass Door) serialized from 13 January 1915 through 29 February 1915. These writings are on varied subjects ranging from various recent happenings around the author and his reminiscences of his own past, to his views about life and death and the supernatural. The work gives the impression of a man who is staring at death and is reflecting back on his own life.

Michikusa, Soseki's penultimate work which appeared in Asahi from 3 June through 14 September 1915 was also a personal writing, as it was Soseki's first explicitly autobiographical novel. All the happenings in this novel are quite identical with the course of events in Soseki's

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* This lecture has been discussed at length in the next chapter.
own life after his return from England. Kenzo, the protagonist is besieged by his foster parents and relatives who hover around him for money. Kenzo has very unpleasant memories about his childhood. All this affects his behaviour so much that he gets increasingly alienated from his wife Osumi too. Things improve for Osumi when she gives birth to a child but for Kenzo there is no respite and he retreats further into his own world. Thus, in Michikusa Soseki creates yet another character who is struggling with his past. Soseki, the man, himself had perhaps reached a similar impasse in his actual life so that he has to turn to his past in pursuit of the most basic question before his death i.e., his present self. It is reflected in Kenzo's question that he poses to himself - "How have I become what I am?"

It was in May 1916 that Soseki started writing his unfinished work Meian (Light and Darkness) which he hoped to finish by October but continued till his death on 9 December 1916 and was still far from complete. It is regarded by many critics as a very mature work of fiction and one of the best works of Soseki. The plot of Meian is, however, deceptively simple. The story revolves around Tsuda, the hero, his wife Onobu, his sister Ohide, Mrs. Yoshikawa his employer's wife, Kobayashi his friend and Kiyoko his former fiance who deserted Tsuda and married someone else. Tsuda
is a physically and spiritually ailing person. Onobu is quite devoted to her husband and tries to pull him out of spiritual depression but does not succeed. Ohide holds Onobu responsible for Tsuda's alienation from the family. Kobayashi too tries to change Tsuda the better but fails. Tsuda travels to a hot spring to overcome his depression and here he meets Kiyoko. The novel comes to an abrupt end here due to Soseki's death.

For a novel of Meian's length, which in unfinished form was serialized for 188 installments, there is very little external action but it is the psychological analysis of the characters which is the characteristic of Meian. Soseki very successfully and artistically portrays the constant clash between the egos of its leading characters. Dramatization that is absent through action comes alive through dialogue. For that Meian is considered to be a fitting finale, as it has the stamp of Soseki the artist all the way.

Soseki had an attack of ulcers resulting in serious hemorrhage on 28 November, and breathed his last on 9 December 1916. Thus the curtain was drawn on this consummate master of belles-lettres.

While Soseki, the man died in 1916, Soseki the artist has continued to survive till date and perhaps will survive for all times to come.