CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

I have already discussed the main motive which seemed to have driven Toson to depict various real aspects regarding the life and status of Meiji woman, through Kyushujin, Rojo and other short stories in Ryokuyoshu. Apart from the depiction of 'tragedy' of the new, enlightened Meiji women, Toson also wanted to express his distrust towards them with a strong warning, that learning and enlightenment do not mean independence from the society or over indulgence in sensual pleasures. Blind denial of traditions and social customs will definitely lead one to destruction as was the case of Uryu Natsuko of Rojo. The slogan, "we shall never marry", raised by the enlightened and educated Meiji women who actually intended to follow the footsteps of their 'fathers' instead of mothers, by taking up jobs outside the house and unwilling to take up the basic responsibilities of a woman like giving birth to children and supporting their family through household works, brought the society to the brink of collapse. The number of unmarried women increased proportionate to the increase in the number of educated women and both the government, society and the intellectuals were equally worried to see the new trend in the society. This is the reason why the Meiji government during the last half of the Meiji era,
introduced strict rules and norms for women's education, under the new Motto of 'Ryosai Kenbo' (Good wives and wise mothers). Toson, being a first hand observer of these changes in the society could not ignore them. When the modern style of poetry, 'new-style poetry', was introduced to the Japanese society Toson spared no time to react and ultimately he pioneered the movement. Same way, in this case too, it was Toson who took the pen first to depict the actual picture of enlightened Meiji women through a series of short stories. Was Toson against the emancipation of women? No, he was not. He was a staunch supporter of women's emancipation through education and equal rights. For the enlightenment and education of women, Toson later on even supervised the publication of "Shojochi" a magazine meant for women only. The first issue of 'Shojochi' was published in April 1923 and its publication was suspended after the tenth issue in January 1924. Toson also was one of the main contributors of articles to 'Jogaku Zasshi', published between July 1885 and February 1904, under the leadership of Iwamoto Yoshiharu, for the enlightenment of Meiji women. What he disliked or what he disagreed was the infidelity of women, their faithlessness to their husbands, which not only destroys the foundation of

1 Ito Kazuo, Shimazaki Toson Jiten, pp.214-16.
family set-up but also destabilizes the society and the country.

The relevance of these stories in the society is a matter of great dispute among scholars both within and outside Japan. Some of the Japanese scholars branded Kyushujin and other short stories in Ryokuyoshu as best examples of explicit expression of women's sensual life and man's jealousy towards them. Yukio Miyoshi views these works as "legacy of author’s youth", which were written at a time when "Toson become conscious about the end of his heydays." On the other hand, according to Senuma Shigeki, Toson’s motive for writing these short stories, especially Kyushujin, was to "express his (author’s) feeling of distrust towards the chastity of women and to highlight the disillusion and irony of (the term) love". Yet another scholar, Hirano Ken, had the opinion that when Toson wrote Kyushujin "he was greatly disturbed mentally by topics such as women's chastity, adultery etc." Wada Kingo has commented that the motive of writing Kyushujin was "man's doubt and jealousy toward his wife's chastity". Hence, Kyushujin, Rojo and other works of Ryokuyo-shu with the

2 Miyoshi Yukio, 'Shimazaki Toson-ron', p.119.
3 Senuma Shigeki, 'Shimazaki Toson', p.15.
4 Hirano Ken, Commentary for 'Kyushujin and Mebae' (Shincho Bunko, Tokyo, 1969.)
5 Wada Kingo, "Shimazaki Toson" (Meiji Shoin, Tokyo, 1966.)
exception of Suisai gaka, hitherto were considered as works which deal only with women’s sexual urge and indulgence and therefore, they were neglected virtually and never subjected to systematic and critical study. Neither the social background and history of the period in which these stories were written, nor the continuous and vigorous conflict between 'self' of its protagonists and the society were taken into consideration. Toson had written these stories with specific objective in mind, i.e., to highlight the changing attitude of women and its adverse effect on the existence and continuation of the society. In this process, certainly the bitter experiences in his marriage and personal life as Senuna Shigeki and Hirano Ken viewed, acted as catalyzers. His selection of the theme, story, plot and the course of progress of the story are relative and systematic. He had dealt with one after another almost all problems of Meiji women’s problems either faced by them or caused by them, carefully and systematically with a vigilant mind.

New trend or movement in the world of literature had always fascinated Toson. It was he who pioneered the romantic movement in Japanese poetry immediately after the introduction of its concept into the Japanese society from the West. In 1904, when 'Toson Shishu' (collected poems of Shimazaki Toson) was published Toson wrote in its preface the following heart rendering revelation which gives us an insight to the attitude
and psychology of this versatile writer. "At last the time for a new poetry has come. A beautiful new dawn is upon us. Some cry aloud, like the prophets of the distant past; some sing like the poets of the West. All are intoxicated with the brilliant light, the new voices, the dreams.... The imagination of youth has awakened from its long sleep to revive poetry with the living language of our people. Legends are reborn, nature takes on new colours. Before our very eyes a powerful light has shone upon new emerging life, and upon death, the grandeur and decay of the past. Most of our new poets are simple, earnest men. Their art is childish, rudimentary; but there is nothing false, no more ornament, in their work. The life of youth spills over from their lips, tears of true feeling stream down their cheeks.... For many, the flood of new ideas draws all thought of food or sleep. The sorrow, the agony of our present age has driven many to madness.

Forgetful of my own unworthiness, I too have joined in their chorus. Poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquillity". This is true of my poetry, which is a confession of conflict. Grief and pain remain in my poems. It is good, I believe, to speak out. To speak out without faltering. I too have been saved, body and soul, by the little poetry that I have managed to achieve. Who can rest in the old life? To strive to open the door to new life - this
is the task, the duty of the young. Life expresses itself in energy; energy, in the speaking voice, the voice, in words. New words mean new life." According to Toson, life is energy, energy is voice, voice is word and new words are the source of new life.' This philosophy has guided him throughout his career. The moment he realized that there is a dearth of "words for poetry" he quit it immediately and embraced prose writing. However, in the early days of his career, neither the style of modern prose nor the technique of novel writing had been established in Japan. Toson learned much from the translations of Russian Literature by Futabatei Shimei as well as his own readings of English, French and German literatures in English.

In prose writing too, Toson had taken the leadership to write novels based on naturalism although he never considered himself a naturalist neither publicly nor privately. His thorough reading of Zola, Flaubert, and Maupassant initiated him to the concept of naturalism, based on which he experimented his initial short stories and major novels like, Hakai, Ie etc. In fact, Naturalism was first introduced to Japan through Zola's novels in the 1890s. Zola's theories emphasized a scientific approach where the characters are to

6 'Introduction', in The Broken Commandment (Toson's Hakai), translated by Kenneth Strong.

7 Soshun Kinen, Shimazaki Toson Zenshu-1, p.301.
be analysed scientifically, but the Japanese writers drifted away from his theories and just initiated the salient features of his novels, by narrating the realities of the society truthfully. However, Toson at least in the beginning of his career as a prose writer had deviated greatly from the general trend of naturalism as propagated by his contemporaries. His works in Rykuyoshu and first novel, 'hakai', although considered as products of naturalism, are best examples of descriptive realism based on analysis developed largely through his encounters with man and observation of nature around him. He had developed his view of literature independently at least until he finished writing Hakai. However, from his second novel, Haru onwards, Toson too came under the influence of typical Japanese version of naturalism the so called "I"-novel or autobiographical novel where the protagonist of a novel is identical with the author himself.

Toson was certainly not a literary giant, if we compare him with Western writers like Shakespeare, Goethe, Flaubert, Tolstoy or even his contemporary Japanese writers as Natsume Soseki, Mori Ogai etc. His ability to create characters from imagination was nearly zero and, therefore, in his works we see only real copies of people 'living around us. His characters are common people whom we encounter in our daily life regularly and, interestingly, they are the people who gather attention from the society. In our modern society too,
we often find Ayas, Natsukos, Osadas, Arais and Sakurais. Such characters will be there in the society always and hence what Toson tried to convey through his works is relevant to us even today. These prose works of Toson, which he wrote during the most turbulent period in the modern Japanese history are the best sources to get first hand information and knowledge about the newly emerging women of late Meiji period. A novel (or a novelette or a short story even) is the best suitable literary medium to expose and reflect the truth and reality of the society we live. As Nakamura Shinichiro said, "Novel is a mirror of society. By reading it the reader will come to know the real side of the society where he lives and will be able to realise the pleasures of life. But for making the novel a mirror of the society, the writer of the novel must naturally view the society wide and deeper than its common readers." Toson had very sincerely reflected the contemporary social aspect realistically in these stories. Hence, these should not be pushed to the back merely taking in account only the sexual behaviour and indulgence of its protagonists and ignoring the historical and social importance.

In this study, I have tried to highlight the importance of these stories in the changing pattern of the society in the modern world. Toson had certainly foresighted the social

calamity which might occur if more and more educated women prefer to choose the path Aya or Natsuko have taken. Education and enlightenment should not misguide people but guide them to strengthen the social and family setup. Precisely, this is what Toson wanted to convey to the outer world. Certainly, his own married life made him to look upon women with doubt and his distrust in women continued till the end. But, such an attitude in women was created by their improved but misleading education and wrong understanding of concepts such as equality, freedom etc. and on the one hand, it threatened the dignity and the divinity of marriage and family. Education must be utilised for enhancing oneself not to destroy it. This is what Toson meant when he said, "education will misguide one's self".

Finally, in Kyushujin and Rojo, the following points and problems are either criticised, discussed or highlighted. They are, (1) true nature of human being, especially of women; (2) heredity and basic human instinct; (3) conflict between flesh and spirit; (4) society and individual; (5) doubts on education and scholarship; (6) man's youth and its creative and destructive powers; (7) expectation of a new life; (8) realistic depiction of life based on descriptive realism and naturalism; (9) importance of mutual respect, trust and love between husband and wife for a strong family and social setup. Toson had successfully incorporated all the above said
points and problems into his stories, although he had to "face the dilemma of a writer who has no established guidelines for writing fiction." His works may be lacking in artistic perfection but he achieved the distinction of a pioneer in exposing the social evils which might otherwise uproot the very existence of the society. They are the mirrors of the era in which he lived, and it is right time now to review his early works more critically and deeply, and give them appropriate place in the world of literature.