CHAPTER III
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SHIMAZAKI TOSON - HIS LIFE AND WORKS

The Meiji period (1868-1912) in Japanese history was a period when tradition gave way to modernism, feudalism to militarism, democracy and capitalism under the influence of Western culture, science and philosophy. Especially, introduction of Western science and education system into Japanese society influenced the outlook and concept of Japanese people towards their society, and enhanced the social status of the citizens who were in the bottom strata of the society. Gradual advancement in science and technology, and evolution of a modern society based on industrial growth and trade made the Meiji Japanese aware of the importance of self-expression, individual freedom, etc. Besides, scientific and economic influence, a third sphere of Western influence was literature. In the early days of Meiji period, many of the classical as well as popular works, specially novels and poems of West were introduced into Japan through translation. As a result, people in Japan come into contact with the existing modern trend in Western literature such as romanticism, realism, naturalism etc. Many Japanese literary figures,

1 G.C.Allen, An Economic History of Modern Japan, pp.30-46.
2 Nakamura Mitsuo, Meiji Bungaku-shi, pp.70-90.
engaged in writing modern poetry, novels and stories based on the above said concepts started appearing in the literary world from the second half of the Meiji period. Shimazaki Toson was one of the stalwarts of modern Japanese literature, who outlived all his contemporaries, and whose literary career continued for more than fifty years without any break. He started his career as a romantic poet during the second half of the Meiji era, and ended as a powerful writer of autobiographical novels based on naturalism.

Shimazaki Toson (Haruki) was born on 17th February 1872, in Magome, Misaka village, Nishi Chikuma-gun, Nagano as the last son of his father Shimazaki Masaki and mother Shimasaki Nui. Shimazaki family was an ancient and famous family, because it held the traditional post of Honjin (officially designated inn for using as a daimyo’s lodge), tonya (wholesale store) and Shoya (village headman). However, after the Meiji restoration, Shimazaki family lost its traditional position as a result of abolition of the political system and social set up of the Edo period. Toson’s father was an ardent follower of Kokugaku (National learning) of

3 Shincho Nihon Bungaku Album "Shimazaki Toson", p.6; Ito Kazuo, Shimazaki Toson Jiten, p.410.
5 Fukuda Kiyoto, Shimazaki Toson, Hito to Sakuhin, p.13.
Hirata school' and he was a good composer of Waka poems. Toson's father wanted his son to follow his footsteps and in fact, he often used to say that Haruki (Toson) is his real son because only he has got his taste and talents.

As a child Toson used to roam around the neighbourhood of his house and enjoyed the scenic beauty of hilly surroundings. The eternal and evergreen beauty of the countryside impressed Toson's young mind very deeply that most of his literary works contain the taste and flavour of the countryside. It had in fact, made him a romantic at an early age of eight when he had experienced a kind of love and affection towards an older girl, namely, Owaki Yu, who was his neighbour.' Toson narrated his first love affair in a poem called 'Hatsukoi' in 'Wakanashu', the first ontology of poems by him.

At the age of seven, Toson was put into Misaka primary school. Meanwhile, his father taught him 'Senjibun', 'Sanjikyo', 'Kokyo' and 'rongo' (The analects of Confucius).'' However, at the age of ten he was sent to Tokyo along with his elder brother Tomoya. In Tokyo, for some time he stayed with his elder sister's family, the Takase family," and got

6 Ito Kazuo, Shimazaki Toson Jiten, p.196.
7 Ibid, p.410.
8 Fukuda Kiyoto, Shimazaki Toson: Hito to Sakuhin, p.17.
9 Ibid, p.17.
enrolled in Taimei primary school" which was situated in the former Sukiya-Cho. Thereafter Toson did not visit his native place for long time, until the death of his mother. His life in Tokyo, especially during the initial years, was not comfortable as he had to shift his residence several times. Still, he was an outstanding student who was even given an award for the best result in 4th grade in the Kyoritsu Gakko (Kyoritsu school).

Although Toson as a child was trained by his father in the Kokugaku philosophy, his interest was in learning English literature which was a fashion among youngsters of his time. Ignoring his father's opposition, Toson started learning English and that was a major turning point in his life. At the age of 15, he graduated from Taimei school and thereafter he started intensive study of English under the English scholar, Shimada Keigi, and entered Meiji Gakuin,¹² a mission school, in 1887 when he was sixteen years old. May be, his limitless quest for knowing the current of new age was one of the main motive forces behind his serious intention of learning English. In Meiji Gakuin, he also came into contact with modern (western) philosophy and literary trend. Realising that Christianity is an integral part of Western

cultural and civilizational and owing to his quest and ambition for knowing the Western philosophy and culture thoroughly, and not because of his interest in Christian faith, Toson converted into a Protestant Christian in Meiji 21. He was baptized in Takanawa Dai Cho Church, by Kimura Kumaji, his teacher and benefactor at Kyoritsu Gakko.

During the first two years of his study in Meiji, Gakuin, Toson lead a very carefree, and jolly life, like any youth of seventeen or eighteen years old would have done. He used to wear very fanciful western dress and colourful socks. He used to roam around meeting places and other spots where young and beautiful girls used to gather. Toson himself narrates us his life in Meiji Gakun in the following way. "For about (one to) two years after entering into the school (Meiji Gakuin), Sutekichi (Toson) spent his time buoyantly, enjoying life fully.... Wearing light cap and half pants made as per his taste, and putting on long woollen socks for show, he upon invitation, along with his cheerful and bright looking friends used to participate in literary forums where many young girls get together. Once the announcement for the start of programme made, he would sit properly on the seat patiently, and listen to English recitation and chorus by girl students, with full concentration, to such an extent that he would

forget everything else around him. Happiness is waiting for him wherever he goes, he felt so. He went around the places where young girls and boys used to get together, or to the houses of elders of church in search of a pretty, lovely partner who would make him happy...." Toson, because of his carefree and jolly life during the initial years of his study in the Meiji Gakuin was known among his friends by the nickname of "Ikakeya no tenbinbo" (carrying pole of a tinker). However, during the second half of his study, his character changed altogether, and most of his time was spent in reading. His nick-name suddenly changed into "Sennin" (mountain hermit) and virtually he spent all his time by reading books in the library. He finished reading the works of Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe, Byron, Wordsworth, Futabatei Shimei, Tsubouchi Shoyo, Mori Ogai, Koda Rohan, Matsuo Basho etc. during this period."

Toson graduated from Meiji Gakuin in 1891, at the age of twenty. Soon, with the help of Kimura Kumaji, his benefactor, he was assigned to the sub-editor’s job for a magazine called "Jogaku Zasshi", which was edited and managed by Iwamoto Yoshiharu. Through a literary criticism titled "Ensei Shika to Josei" in Jogaku Zashi, Toson, for the first time, came

14 Sakura no mi no juku suru toki, Shimazaki Toson Zenshu, vol.12, pp.9-10.
into contact with Kitamwa Tokoku, who was his mentor ever since. In this essay, Tokoku emphasized the liberation of self though the liberation of love (renai) between man and woman. According to him, renai (love) is the secret medicine of humanity. Love existed first and then only this world came into existence. Human life loses its charm when there is no renai (love). Tokoku’s philosophy on ‘love’ influenced the youth of his time extremely, and Toson was also no exception to this. Toson resigned from this job and took up a teaching assignment to teach English in Meiji Jogakko which was then controlled by Iwamoto Yoshiharu. There he fell in love with one of his students, Sato Sukeko, who was older to him by one year. However, this affair could not be continued for long as Sato Sukeko was already engaged to another man called Shishiuchi Toyotaro, and got married to him soon after Toson met her. This was a very sad event in Toson’s life. Unable to withstand this crisis, Toson after resigning from his job and leaving the church started wondering through the Kansai region of Japan like the famous Haiku poet Matsuo Basho, meanwhile reading the works of Byron carefully. After returning from his tour, he rejoined Meiji Gakuin but resigned

17 Ito Kazuo, Shimazaki Toson, pp.76-87; Fukuda Kiyoto, Shimazaki Toson, Hito to Saku hin, pp.35-36.
again and joined Tohoku Gakuin in Sendai as a language teacher in September 1896, when he was 25 years old."

Toson's failure of love affair with Sato Sukeko was perhaps the most crucial turning point in his life. Soon after returning from his wandering in Kosai region he even thought of committing suicide by drowning. However, overcoming the despair and feeling of nothingness, Toson determined to live as a poet. At Sendai, he started writing romantic poems in the "Shintai-Shi style" and published them in "Bungakkai" a literary journal founded by Kitamura Tokoku and other naturalists of Meiji period, including Toson. It is very difficult to express one's feelings fully through the traditional 31-syllable Waka (Tanka) style poetry. In order to overcome this difficulty, the enlightened poets, including Toson, of Meiji period adopted the Western style of poetry writing as their model, which is called Shintai-shi Style. Yatabe Ryokichi, Toyama Masakaza, and Inone Tetsujiro, all scholars of Tokyo University, were the pioneers of this reform movement of poetry. They published an anthology of poems in this style, under the title 'Shintai Shi-Sho' in 1883. The Toson we know today would not have been there, had he not experienced a broken love affair with Sato Sukeko. Toson who

18 Ibid, p.45.
started his life as a poet during the Sendai period, continued
to be active in literary life till his death in 1942. His
accomplishment in this fifty years is consisted of four
volumes of poems, five volumes of short stories, seven volumes
of novels, five volumes of children's stories, seven volumes
of impressions and thoughts, four volumes of travelogue and
many other works. Compared to other writers of naturalism,
volume of his works is not much, but most of his works, unlike
others, are considered to be of high value and importance.

In fact, Toson was the only writer in Japan who firmly
got deep into the social life of common Japanese people in the
modern society and built up his literary career from there.
Therefore, he deserved to be called as the real pioneer of
people's literature in Japan. He was a "people's poet" who
represented the thoughts and emotions of common Japanese (in
the society) living in the midst of love, sorrow, troubles and
difficulties. Even after several years of their original
publications, various works of Toson are read now widely by
people from all strata of the society, because his works are
consisted of a fusion of various aspects of social life of
modern humanity, especially, highlighting its characteristics
such as individualism, romanticism, realism and naturalism."

20 Edwin McClellan, "The Novels of Shimazaki Toson," Harvard
Journal of Asiatic Studies, vol.24, p.89; William
F.Sibley, "Naturalism in Japanese Literature", Harvard
(continued...)

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The style and pattern of his writing were not only an embodiment of influence by western culture and civilization on Japanese literature, but also contains the essence of typical Japanese literature of the modern era.

The total span of Toson's literary career can be roughly divided into mainly five periods. The first stage of his literary career is the "age of romantic poems" or more precisely the period of poetry and romanticism. Toson's career as a poet was very short. Actually, he remained as a poet only for about five years, between the age of 25 and 29 years. He published the first collection of poems, "Wakanashu" in 1897. Toson started writing the poems of Wakanashu when he was teaching in Tohoku Gakuin in Sendai. For him, poetry was an experiment as he was not confident about his ability to write poems. Both in reality and perception, Tason was a wayfarer, and his lyrics are essentially monologues of a wanderer who lived in a secluded place like Sendai. However, Toson loved poetry and it was his great ambition to become a pioneer of Shintai-shi. After writing poems at Sendai, he for the first time felt that a "sun is rising in him too". However, poems of Wakanashu are not the poems of

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21 Taiyo no Kotoba, Shimozaki Toson Zenshu-18, p.251.
a person in love, but they are in fact, the poems of a person who abandoned love. Toson, perhaps, would not have taken up the task of a poet if he had not had a broken love affair with Sato Sukeko.

After one year in Tohoku Gakuin, Toson resigned from the teaching post and returned to Tokyo by the middle of 1897 and he published his second collection of poems "HITOHABUNE" in June 1898, at the age of 27. In the same year, during summer he stayed with his elder sister (Takase family) in Kiso Fukushima and, meanwhile observing and studying the nature around there he completed his third collection of poems, "NATSU-KUSA", and published it in December of the same year. By this time, Toson started realising his limitations to remain as a poems and before publishing Natsu-Kusa he made an attempt to write prose. The result was a novel called "Utatane". Although he got it published in a journal called "Shin-Shosetsu", in 1898 this attempt was a total failure and he had to again return to poetry. He published his fourth collection of poems, "Rakubai-Shu" in August 1901. Later on all these four collections of poems were compiled into a single volume, "Toson Shishu" and published in September 1904.

The romantic poems (or the poetry in new style) by Toson are in fact, true manifestation of inner most feelings of emancipated Meiji youth. Toson had the vision and thorough knowledge of the human mind. And he thrust deep into the
human mind, dissected it, analysed it and expressed his findings in abstract but easily comprehensible terminology. He was a poet with human touch, a poet who viewed the human relations, specially the relationship between man and woman, in accordance with nature and the environment where people live. For him, love was not a mere means to satisfy one’s passion, but he considered it as the best medium to liberate one’s self from the tradition-bound unnatural social restrictions and discrimination. Specially, many of his poems in Wakanashu are centred around female characters who are traditionally considered to be weak and exploited by the society. For example, the titles of first six poems in Wakanashu are, Oefu, Okinu, Osayo, Okume, Otsuta, and Okiku, which are all female names. Through these poems, he established himself as a pioneer of romanticism in Japanese literature. These are the manifestation of the concept of "renai", (love between man and woman) upheld by Kitamura Tokoku. He was the first persons in the world of Japanese poetry to project love as the nucleus of human relationship and, that is precisely why his poems are still read and appreciated by large number of people in Japan.

However, Toson was not a born genius but a self-made person who after bringing out his fourth volume of poetry realised that it was impossible for him to continue as a poet as he lacked the ability to express his ideas and feelings in
verse properly. Toson did not write any poem after the publication of Rakubai-shu. Regarding this change in his career, he later on explained in the following way: "I write novels because they are the best medium for what I want to say. There seem to be quite a few people in Japan today who have turned from poetry to prose." However, writing in prose was again not an easy task for him initially. As mentioned earlier, his first attempt in prose writing (Utatane) was a complete failure, and he did not want to repeat the same failure again. Therefore, he spent several years in silence observing nature and the society around him, before he started attempting his experiment in writing prose for the second time. Toson's shift from a romantic poet to a prose writer of naturalism was the second great turning point in his career.

The second stage in his career as a writer is the period of "Ryokuyoshu", a group of short stories written between 1902 and 1906. This period in Toson's life is considered to be the formative period, when the poet Toson turned into a matured self respecting, and fearless prose writer. Factors such as growth in age, multitude of changes in life and job, and above all, the rapid change and transformation of Japan as a nation during the period between Sino-Japanese war (1895) and Russo-

22 Asakusa Dayori (Shinkatamachi Yori), Rokuin Zatsuwa, Shimazaki Toson-Zenshu-6, p.297.
Japanese war (1905) have inserted great influence on Toson, and he started gradually shifting his career to live the future life as a writer of prose (novels) according to the principle of naturalism. Many of Toson's colleagues and friends had joined the army during the Russo-Japanese war of 1905. Toson too wanted to join it as a war correspondent, but he could not get through it. Therefore, he decided to stay back and enrich literature with his pen, saying that; "life is a huge battle field. A writer is nothing but its war correspondent". With this ambition, and to fulfill his aim of becoming a prose writer he conducted several experiments and studies of the nature and devised various plans and sketches. His study of nature was later on compiled into a book called "Chikuma gawa no sukechi" (The sketches of Chikuma River) in 1912.

Toson went to Komoro school (Komoro Gijuku), a small secondary institution founded and directed by his spiritual mentor Kimura Kumaji, to teach English and Japanese, in April 1899, with his wife Hata Fuyuko whom he got married in the same month at the age of 27. He taught in Komoro Gijuku for seven years and during this period he earnestly read Tsurgnev and scientific writings of Darvin. These books taught him how

24 Ito Kazuo, Shimazaki Toson Jiten, pp.147-49; Namiki Miharu, Shimazaki Toson to Komoro, pp.97, 201.
to conduct scientific and objective observation of man and nature. For Toson, observation of common man's daily life, his job and profession was one of the most important concerns during his stay at Komoro. Komoro region of that time was mostly inhabited by traditional peasants whose life and profession he used to observe carefully from various angles. He observed the change in clouds and climate, transformation of mountain sceneries and change in the flow of rivers. Regarding this he wrote the following in the preface of Haru, "I went to northern Shinshu in the spring of 1899. That time onwards, I started experiencing the real country life. I decided to depict whatever I found or felt around me realistically. I started my work by sketching the rough and simple life of the farmers on the countryside." Again in the preface of Chikumagawa no Suketchi, Toson further revealed his decision to leave poetry and take up prose, "I spent a long period of seven years in those mountains of Komoro. My mind became ready to leave poetry and take up the novel as a medium for expressing my feeling." As this indicates, Toson's decision to leave poetry, and then take up the novel

26 Postscript to Haru, Shimazaki Toson-Zenshu-5, p.231.
27 Postscript to Chikumagawa no Suketchi, Shimazaki Toson-Zenshu-2, p.98.
was not an accidental occurrence but was a well-planned and
prepared action.

The first successful novel Toson wrote was Kyushujin. He
published it in Shinshosetsu in November 1902. However,
branding it as a slander' exposing the private life of Kimura
Kumaji, the founder of Komoro Gijuku, and his wife, Kyushujin
was soon to be banned from publishing and selling. Therefore,
this work did not appear in Ryokuyoshu initially. Other
important works of this period are, Warazori (November 1902),
Oyaji (January 1903), Suisai gaka (January 1904), Yashino
hakage (March 1904), Tsugaru Kaikyo (December 1904), Asa meshi
(January 1906) and Kachiku (October 1906). However, out of
this only Kachiku was written after Hakai and therefore we may
replace it with Kyushujin. Thus, these eight works can be
considered as the initial prose works tried out by Toson as a
step to become a full pledged prose writer. Many critics
consider these works as trial works by Toson before the advent
of novels based on the concept of naturalism. Therefore,
hitherto such powerful works like Kyushujin, Warazori, Rojo
and Suisai Gaka were even ignored and left behind by scholars
of Japanese literature as worthless works.

Another characteristic of these short stories or
novelettes is that Toson had written them in the colloquial

28 Shimazaki Toson Shu-II (Nenbu); Nihon Kindai Bungaku
Taikei-14, pp.496-97.

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language of contemporary Japan. In fact, concept of genpun itchi" (unified written and spoken language) style was initially tried out in prose writing by Futabatei Shimei in his novel Ukigumo. The first part of 'Ukigumo' (The Drifting Cloud) was published in 1888 and the complete novel was published in 1892. Its excellent psychological description and narration in 'genbun itchi' style was totally a new experience to the enlightened youth of Meiji. This had set a new trend in prose writing among young and energetic Meiji writers like Toson etc. It not only had simplified the prose writing, but also increased the number of readership among common people.

Ozaki Koyo, one of the pioneers who emphasized the need for introducing genbun-itchi style stressed the need to write things which appear natural even if they are not real and he opposed the philosophy of expressing straight everything only because they are real. According to him some cases may be real but they may not appear natural. As against his assertion, Tayama Katai, a pioneer in Japanese naturalism, emphasised the need to write whatever actually happened or really existed even if that seems to be unnatural, and do not write whatever really not existed or actually not happened.

29 Nakamura Mitsuo, Meiji Bungakushi, pp.102-105.
even if that is found as if quite natural." Western writers of realism like Zola and Flaubert emphasized the need to observe nature and then, analyse and criticise it appropriately, and thereafter reconstruct a plot fitting to the reality. Whereas Japanese realists and naturalists deviating from the original western concept of naturalism, turned to their own real personal experiences and eventually, the Japanese naturalism evolved into a kind of autobiographical narration of personal experiences."

Influenced by Genpun itchi style and the newly acquired knowledge of literature based on realism and naturalism, Toson decided to express his ideas more clearly and emphatically. Like the period of romantic poems, during this period also, Toson was very concerned about the historical movement for the liberation and emancipation woman. Therefore, all his short stories and novelettes, except Asameshi, Tsugaru Kaikyo and Yashi no Hakage, of the Ryokuyoshu period are centered around female characters. Especially, it is more evident in Kyushujin and Rojo, the two stories which are taken up for special study and analysis as the subject of this thesis.

The third stage in Toson's literary career is the period between Hakai and Shinsei, during when Toson established his

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position as a powerful novelist towards the end of Meiji era. Three of his major works during this period are Hakai, Haru and Ie. After seven years stay in Komoro, he resigned from Komoro Gijuku and left Komoro in April 1905. After settling down in Tokyo, he engaged full time in writing Hakai which he completed and published in March 1906 taking all the expenses by himself. In Hakai, Toson narrates the miserable life of an educated and intelligent youth from Eta community, an out-cast in the Japanese society. At the time of its publication, Hakai invited countless number of criticism both in favour and against its theme and it is considered to be the first novel dealing with social problems in Japanese society.

Toson started writing Haru for publishing in Tokyo Asahi Shinpun as a serial from January 1908. It was his first novel to be published through a newspaper. Unlike Hakai which is considered to be a novel dealing with social problem and written in a realistic manner, Haru is a fictionalised narration of the real life of the author, his family and his friends and colleagues of Bungakkai during the periods between Toson’s stay in Meiji Gakuin as a student and his debut as a romantic poet. Haru gives us a clear picture of enlightened Meiji youth, mainly the members and activists of Bungakkai.

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33 Fukuda Kiyoto, Shimazaki Toson: Hito to Sakuhin, p.152.
who were impressed by the modern thought of middle Meiji period. Toson continued to write his novels hereafter in the pattern of Haru style and it was the first, true autobiographical novel written as per the principle of naturalism."

The next year of Haru's publication, that is in 1909, Toson published his second collection of short stories, "Toson-Shu", and his first collection of impressions "Shin Katamachi Yori". Serialized version of part-1 of his third novel "Ie" was published in Yomiuri Shinpun newspaper in 1910. The part-2 of the same novel was published in "Chuo Koron", a literary journal in the following year. In Ie, Toson narrates the ups and downs, the trials and sorrows of his family (Shimazaki family) and his sister's husband's family (Takase family) for a period of about twelve years. Toson's Ie is considered to be a master piece written during the peak of naturalism in Japan and it is often sighted as the best example of Japanese naturalism.

The fourth stage in Toson's literary life is the period of Shinsei and many other works which followed that. After the death of Toson's wife Fuyuko in August 1910, Toson led a lonely life for some time. After a while, his second elder brother's daughters Hisako and Komako started staying with

34 Ibid, p.159.
him. After Hisako got married Komako continued to stay with Toson and their relationship turned out to be that of lovers and Hisako finally got pregnant. Knowing this truth, Toson, in order to save his name and conceal this scandal, went to Paris in 1913 and stayed there for four years during World War I. He returned to Japan in April 1916. While in Paris, Toson got published "Sakura no mi no juku suru toki" in "Bunsho Sekai" in 1914. Toson started publishing the serialised version of Shinsei in Asahi Shimpun from 1st May 1918, when he was 47 years old. In Shinsei Toson narrates the story of 'incest', his illegal relationship with his niece Komako after his wife's death. He exposed his sex scandal to the outside world through this novel and got himself liberated from the psychological pain and trauma he had been undergoing. Besides Shinsei and Sakura no mi no juku suru toki, Toson wrote many other stories, novels and travelogues during this period (Arashi, Furansu dayori etc.).

The last stage in Toson's literary career is the period during when he wrote Yoake Mae. Yoake Mae was published (part-1 and part-2) from Shincho-sha in 1935. (The first part of this novel was completed in 1931 and the second part was completed in 1935). Yoake Mae is a historical novel, in which his father Shimazaki Masaki is the central character. Besides

these major novels, Toson had written several other short novels, like Arashi, Aru onna no shogai, Nobi shitaku, Bunpai etc. which are worth mentioning. Toson died at the age of 72 in August 1943, before completing his last long novel "Toho no mon" which he started writing in January 1943. Had he lived few more years, Japanese literature would have definitely been enriched further by his valuable contribution.