CHAPTER IV
THE TWO STORIES

Toson was always a keen observer of the world around him, and this close observation of people, nature and social surroundings enabled him to understand various truths regarding human relations and the society. However, instead of following the conventional form of observing the world on the basis of conventional ideology and philosophy, he preferred to study and understand it through direct observation with his own naked eyes. As Miyoshi Yukio pointed out, "Toson never tried to anticipate reality on the basis of set ideas or concepts. Though he had the quality of an outstanding thinker, he never tried to understand a reality only on the basis of mere conventional thought."  

Especially after the death of Kitamur Tokoku, whom Toson respected as his mentor and guide ever since they got acquainted, he realised the powerlessness of a particular thought or concept. Tokoku was a pioneer of romanticism in Japan, who preached that 'love' between man and woman is the foundation for everything in human life. He even said that there would be no life if

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1 Miyoshi Yukio, "Shimazaki Toson Hikei" ("Toson, Hito to Bungaku"), p.11.
there is no "love". Tokoku, convinced by his own philosophy, went for love marriage, but he soon discovered that his philosophy had several contradictory aspects and finally his marriage ended in utter failure. Ultimately, Tokoku committed suicide in order to liberate himself from his own ideology. This incident was a real shock to Toson, and therefore he followed a more practical method of confronting nature and reality not on the basis of any conventional ideology but through his own observation and study. For him the happenings of everyday life in the world around him were sufficient enough for making himself busy with his literary work. It can be even said that he never thought of becoming a philosopher or a writer with a set cluster of thought or ideas for renovating, reforming or liberating the contemporary society of which he was also a member. On the contrary, his purpose was to depict things of interest around him realistically as they are, so that the people in the outer world would also come to know the real aspects of the society in which they lived.

Among other things, the problem of women was a matter of constant concern to Toson sometimes as a sympathiser or

2 Ensei Shika to Josei, Kitamura Tokoku-shu (Gendai Nihon Bungaku Taikei-6), p.63; Hiraoka Toshio Kitamura Tokoku, (Kokubungaku Kaishaku to Kansho-46-5), pp.47-56.


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severe critic or sometimes as a mere observer. Toson tried to assert and manifest various aspects of woman as a human being, mother, wife and lover especially through his short stories which he wrote during the Ryokuyo-shu period. Through these works, Toson was in fact trying to expose the real condition of Meiji women who were on the path to liberation from the male dominated society based on Confucian and Buddhist philosophy. In this study, two of Toson’s initial period works, namely Kyushujin, 1902, and Rojo, 1903, will be subjected to special study and investigation, in order to define the female characters in them on the basis of social, economical, educational and historical perspectives.

Toson had carried out considerable amount of ground work, in the form of observation and investigation of the countryside before he initiated his career as a fiction writer. He lived in Northern Shinshu for seven years, as a teacher of English and Japanese in Komoro Gijuku. "Woman" occupies a major part in his long observation. The emancipated status of women in the post-Meiji society had given rise to various problems. In some cases, their emancipation, liberation and acquisition of equal rights even brought the society into the

5 Chikumagawa no Suketchi, Shimazaki Toson-Zenshu-2, pp.97-249.
brink of collapse. Toson could not ignore this situation and all his major short stories written between 1902 and 1904 depict this dilemma of the society. In short, tragedy of emancipated woman of post-Meiji Japanese society was one of the topics Toson was most concerned about, and precisely, that is what he tried to project through two of his major short stories, Kyushijin, and Rojo. Before entering into the critical study of each of these two short stories, first of all, it would be appropriate to give an outline of the respective story.

Kyushujin (The Former Master)

"Kyushujin" is a story narrated by a first person narrator, Osada, who herself is one of the main characters of the story. She narrates to an unknown listener the tragic end of married life of her master Arai and mistress Aya (ko), in whose house she worked as a servant when she was young, due to the illegal affair of the mistress.

Following is an outline of the story:

Osada, a poor peasant girl from the Saku hills has come to the Arais to work as a maid servant. Her master Arai is a middle aged, bank manager who is a very prominent personality in Komoro region. His young and beautiful wife Aya (ko) is a Tokyo born and brought up lady with urban, modern background who is frustrated by the life in the countryside and dissatisfied with her married life with her middle aged
husband Arai. Osada maintains good relationship with her mistress, Aya, in the beginning to such an extend that Aya does not even hesitate to reveal her secrets to her. Aya, who is dissatisfied with her husband, maintains an affair with Sakurai, a dentist, whom she knew even before her marriage. Osada is aware of this illegal affair of her mistress, but out of sympathy and fellow feeling, she hides it from her master Arai and helps Aya to continue her affair. In return Aya gives her (Osda) many valuable presents. Even Sakurai brings her gifts every time he visited Aya so that she would hide their secret from Arai.

Osada’s love and respect towards her mistress increases day by day. She, who was a dirty, uncultured and rustic countryside girl before coming to the Arais, gradually turns into a modern woman under the influence of her mistress. However, her happy days do not continue for long. Out of anxiety and fear, of being discovered her illegal affair with Sakurai by her husband, Aya wants to terminate Osada from her job and send her away to her village. Thus, Aya hatched up a slander against Osada. Aya tells her husband that Osada is a insincere, disobedient, unreliable country girl, a vicious girl who steals her precious goods and spreads slanderous rumours about her in the neighbourhood. Unfortunately, Osada overhears their conversation and gets disappointed thoroughly and all her respect and concern for the mistress vanishes away.
in a moment. She turns into a beast who determined to take revenge. She does not want to be just overthrown by her mistress for no fault of hers. She reveals Aya’s illegal affair to Arai on the next day. Arai witnesses the scene where his wife and Sakurai in a compromising position, kissing and embracing each other. The story comes to a tragic end here.

"Kyushujin" (The Former Master) is a multifaceted valuable and (meaningful) short story (it is better to call it a novelette) which precisely deals with the tragic and negative effect of a modern theory of equality of sex and freedom of self which emphasized the realization of a society where man and woman with liberated self live together in equality. It depicts the tragedy of an urban raised amorous lady who got the right to express her indignation and discontent towards her husband, as a result of political and social reforms during the post-Meiji period. It also depicts the courage and vitality of a poor, innocent girl from the country side, who not only rebelled against her master (mistress) hitherto unheard in the history of master-servant relationship, but also proved her innocence by revealing the secret and conspiracy of her vicious mistress. Further, Kyushujin also depicts the pathetic fall of a rich man, a man of high status who is respected by everybody in the society around him, because of his inefficiency in fulfilling his
marital responsibilities. Hence, Kyushujin is a very complex story which must be studied and analysed thoroughly keeping in mind the changing attitude of society in the post-Meiji period.

A close analysis of "Kyushujin" will certainly enable one to understand two parallel activities by women from two different strata of the society who declared war against tradition and the feudalistic and Confucian set-up of the Japanese society before and after the Meiji Restoration. Urban born and educated Aya is attacking the ethical aspect of human relationship, more precisely the relationship between man and women or husband and wife based on Confucian and Buddhist ideology, traditionalized and perpetuated since the starting of the feudal era in Japan. For the people of the outside world, the life of Aya and her husband seemed to be a perfect and happy one, and they even felt envy towards her. But was her life happy and satisfying? Of course her husband Arai was a rich and influential banker of Komoro, a town which prospered during Meiji period with modern facilities like bank, school etc. "I am not boasting, but it is true that business of Komoro today moves under my control. Although the businessmen here always complain about depression in business,

6 Takamure Itsue, Josei no Rekishi-II, pp.532-541.
7 Onna Daigaku Hyoron, Fukuzawa Yukichi Zenshu, vol.6, pp.467-503.
they do not face any financial problem because of the efforts I am making to run the bank. Even the business and planning of Town assembly are carried out on the basis of my opinion. The prosperity or decline of Komoro entirely depends on the measures I execute...." Arai was a great, highly respected businessman. But only material wealth and abundance alone do not make Aya happy. As a young woman, who is aware of her right and freedom, Aya sought for greater spiritual satisfaction which her husband failed to provide her because he was "an old actor dressed in a young and colourful costume". Therefore, Aya, who "makes up in the morning" and "polishes in the night" and whose "life is dogged by dreams" turns to Sakurai. Thus, Aya has broken the traditional concept of marriage and husband-wife relationship.

Traditionally, a man can have any number of wives or concubines but a wife should remain loyal to the husband and his family." Cemented on Confucian and Buddhist philosophies, this traditional concept of marriage and family life remained the corner stone of family system in Japan

10 Ibid, p.10.
11 Ibid, p.43.
throughout the Tokugawa period and early Meiji period. Whether she is spiritually satisfied or not, a wife is supposed to remain as a subordinate to the husband and act as per his directions. However, by keeping an illegal affair with Sakurai, Aya has challenged the existing social set-up, although she has taken an undesirable means to accomplish her objective. In fact, Arai loved his wife sincerely and he tried to make her happy always in the beginning, although he did not have the fascination and attraction of a young man. "When you have come to my house to work as a servant, for the first time, I have been busy in my job and working restlessly with only one intention in my mind, that is to make my wife happy. But, these days I am completely getting involved in my work in order to forget her." These words of Arai shows how sincere he was in his intention but his wife not only not acknowledged it but even betrayed him. If she is not satisfied with her married life with Arai, Aya should have sought for a divorce and then continue her affair with Sakurai. Actually by the middle of the Meiji period wife's right to divorce was legally allowed in Japan. But Toson did not allow his heroine to go into that direction, because one of his motives of writing this short story was to expose the

13 Kyushujin, Shimazaki Toson Zenshu, p.49.
"true nature of woman". As Masubuchi Toshio had pointed out, "Toson’s eyes are keenly observing the process how a woman, who though lives in (all kinds of) material luxury but leads an empty, monotonous and boredom mental life, gradually falls (starts) into an illicit affair." But at the same time, it also indicates that how even the educated class of people have understood wrongly the modern concepts of equality, right and freedom and self expression.

So far only one of the faces of Aya has been discussed. She has one more face, that is reflected in her relationship with the maid servant Osada. Aya was very kind and affectionate towards Osada, at least externally, ever since Osada joined the Arai family as a servant. She, in fact, treated Osada like a friend (not as a servant of lowly birth), and did not hesitate to reveal even her personal secrets to her in the beginning. However, it was a trick, a womanly tactic, to keep Osada friendly, so that Osada does not expose her love affair with the dentist. At the same time, Aya was afraid of Osada, so she wanted to get rid of her. She hatched baseless slander and false allegations against Osada behind the curtain, while showing extreme kindness and affection

towards her externally, and persuaded her husband to send Osada back to her village. Her fear of being exposed compelled Aya to make such a move. In spite of her urban background and modern thinking, such a move had converted Aya into a mean woman of low birth. Her "true nature" had got exposed and from that moment onwards Aya's tragedy started. Aya could not carry out her conspiracy successfully, because of the clever and revengeful actions of Osada. "There is nothing as short as the happiness of woman". Aya herself fell in the ditch she dug for trapping Osada, as she had been caught red-handed by her husband with the help of Osada, while she was making love with Sakurai, the dentist.

As against the urban background of Aya, Osada, who is both the narrator and a central character in the story, has rural background. She had neither received any formal education nor had any knowledge about the modern concepts of equality, freedom or liberation of self when she came to the Arais as a servant. For her coming to the Arai family in Komoro was a god-sent fortune, because she had never dreamt of such a luxurious life in her whole life. Women in the country-side around the Kashiwagi area and Saku hills, including Osada and her mother have to do manual work in the field everyday in order to survive. Osada narrates the

hardships of Kashiwagi and Saku women including herself in the following way: "The woman of Kashiwagi area, like the Saku hills should work hard against very rough weather, in order to maintain their livelihood by helping their male-folk. I started to work in the field under the guidance of my mother when I was only thirteen years old. When other girls of my age, with running noses, used to enjoy their life like any children are expected to do, by playing rope skipping etc. I had already started to taste the pleasures and agonies of this world." Coming from such a background, Osada has been observing the activities of urban born Aya constantly and trying to be sincere and helpful to her mistress always.

Toson has given Osada the role of first person narrator in this story, may be because of his intention to depict the real life of an urban couple through the observing eyes of a rural, uneducated girl, so that truths and facts would not be tampered. Osada is observing her master, mistress, Sakurai and even the people around the neighbourhood. However, it is difficult to say whether Osada's observations are true or her judgement are correct always, because being the narrator she has the advantage of twisting the story into a direction best suitable for her own survival. One interesting point is that Osada does not give us a clear picture of her own "true

17 Ibid, p.5.
nature" except in one occasion when she overhears Aya's conspiracy against her. "...I had soon changed into my "true beast-like nature" of rough Saku woman...."

Osada decides to take revenge on her mistress whom she hitherto worshipped as an embodiment of all virtues.

However, in this study focus is not to emphasize Osada's role as a narrator, but instead, her role as a servant, one of the central characters of the story, which is more important. As mentioned earlier, in Kyushujin we can see two parallel uprisings by women - wife versus husband and mistress/master versus servant. We can also put it in the following way: woman versus man (Aya versus Arai) and urban woman versus rural woman (Aya versus Osada).

Aya of Kyushujin has violated all those restrictions placed on women in "Onna Daigaku" (The Greater Learning for Women), written by Kaibaru Ekken. By disobeying her husband in many occasions, she violated the concept of complete submission to husband (or man) by wife (or woman). In other words, she violated the concept of "docility". Young and beautiful Aya expected very warm and affectionate love from her husband but her husband failed to provide her that although he is a rich and influential business man. However,

18 Ibid, p.44.
19 See chapter-2, p.
unlike the traditional Japanese woman, she did not hesitate to express her dissatisfaction openly and instead of being submissive to her husband, she turned to the dentist, Sakurai, who was young, vigorous and was known to her even before her marriage to Arai. Aya whose "life is dogged by dreams" turned to this dentist for fulfilling her dreams and, by doing that, she strongly expressed her "discontent" towards her husband. However, she did not know till the end that, that was the beginning of tragedy in her life.

Aya did not hesitate to make false allegation against the servant, Osada who respected her, defended her and followed her like a sincere, obedient and faithful disciple. This act of Aya is again indicating her "true nature" hidden behind the polished, urbanized and modern mind of an awakened woman. In fact, as a fellow woman, Aya’s attitude towards Osada was very rude and unpardonable. She betrayed Osada’s faith and confidence in her. It clearly indicates that higher education or urban background does not change basic human nature much.

Next, the role played by Osada in Kyushujin is as significant as the role played by Aya. Whereas Aya attacked, although in a negative manner, the age-old social custom of male domination, restriction on female’s sexual life and suppression of women based on Buddhist and Confucian ideologies, Osada attacked the centuries old custom of the suppression of servants by their masters. During the feudal
era, disobedience by a servant or planning a conspiracy to expose a scandal involving his master was considered to be something unimaginable. However, Osada in Kyushujin boldly violated this feudal custom by exposing selfish Aya's (Osada's mistress) illicit affair with Sakurai. Originally, Osada was an obedient, sincere and trustworthy servant but upon hearing her mistress's conspiracy to trap her, she turned into a beast like Saku woman, who due to her contact with the urbanized life of Aya became aware of her own personal freedom, liberty and emancipation of self. Osada decided to revenge herself on Aya by exposing Aya's secret love affair with Sakurai to Arai. "For a moment the thought of condemning the mistress (Aya) boiled up in my mind. I wanted to condemn everything she possessed including her proud features which I considered beautiful so far and her elegant manners which I used to envy always. My mind, full of goodwill towards her so far was completely shaken off by wrath and indignation...." "I too do not want to be kicked out from here just because of my mistress's conspiracy. I decided to prove my innocence first and then leave that house." Osada knows that she is innocent and she will certainly win in the end. Her awakened 'self' protected her from utter ruin as planned by her own mistress Aya. And finally, Osada succeeded in exposing the

20 Kyushujin, Shimasaki Toson Zenshu-3, pp.44, 48.
evil minded Aya’s scandal and illicit affair and thereby saved her "self". Certainly the act of Osada is a pure violation of the feudalistic and Confucian ethic of "obedience and submissiveness" to one’s lord.

Rojo (Old Miss)

In Rojo (Old Miss) too, Toson is dealing with the "tragedy of awakened woman".21 Toson had written Rojo in June, 1903 and published in Taiyo. Compared to Kyushujin, Rojo is short in length in which the author dealt with the pathetic fall of a highly educated, brilliant modern lady who questioned the conventional social custom of marriage and family set-up. Like in Kyushujin, Rojo also has two female characters both are highly educated but one going against the social conventions and the other following in silence the established customs of the society. Following is an outline of the story.

Uryu Natsuko and Sawa Sekiko are friends since their school days. Both are around thirty, unmarried, intelligent and highly educated. They meet in an inn called Masuya at a hot spring called Tazawa Onsen first time in ten years after they graduated from the same school. Sekiko has come there with a group of girl students on an excursion. On the day

before her departure, Sekiko and Natsuko talk each other their future plans.

During their talks, Natsuko reveals Sekiko her intention of not to return to her home. Natsuko wants to be free from all bonds and she prefers to travel around, and work like men. She also tells Setsuko that she does not want to get married. She knows that Setsuko would be getting married in the near future. Natsuko challenges Sekiko, saying that "Let us see who will be happy, you who gets married or I who remains unmarried". The tragedy of Natsuko begins from here. The next day Sekiko departs. Natsuko, determined and strong-willed, neither returns to her home nor intends to get married. She hates men, but she cannot live a single day without a man besides her. Natsuko abandons her present boyfriend Mikami also.

After five years, Sekiko visits Natsuko's house. From her mother, Sekiko comes to know that Natsuko has not returned home since long. On her way back Sekiko meets a man whom she knows before. He tells Sekiko that Natsuko is staying with her wet-nurse. Sekiko visits the house of Natsuko's wet-nurse, but Natsuko refuses to meet her. On the next day Sekiko comes to know that she (Natsuko) has given birth to a illegitimate girl child. However, Natsuko's child dies after some time. After few days, Natsuko, forlone and insane, comes back to her home town. Roaming around here and there, she
asks every male passer-by on the street whether he is ready to marry her. Here comes the tragic end of this short story.

Uryu Natsuko and Sawa Sekiko in Rojo are two different representatives of post-Meiji women, who were allowed to come out of the dark rooms of their house and avail equal opportunity for education along with men. Both Natsuko and Sekiko are highly educated unlike other heroines of Toson’s short stories in Ryokuyo-shu. Even, Aya of Kyushujin, although has urban background, was not such a highly educated person, compared to these two characters in Rojo.

Uryu Natsuko, like Aya in Kyushujin (is a modern educated, urban lady who) has wrongly understood the western concepts of equality of sex and emancipation of women etc. For her, education means independence from society and family. She wants to work like males and travel around the world freely like any man will do.²² Because of her educational background and consciousness of freedom, equality and liberation of soul and self, she attacked even the ethical aspect of subordination of women to men. She challenged the concept of marriage which according to her opinion is a burden forced on women by the male dominated society so that women will always remain their subordinates. Natsuko has strongly resisted this social system and determined not to obey the

conventional rules. "...Ah, I should not have obtained education - had I not known the taste of new wisdom I would have accepted any male as my husband as per my mother's decision and I would have been satisfied with that throughout my whole life. It would have been better, had I not obtained any education at all. Had I not come into contact with the concept of freedom of self and soul, I would not have tried to fly out of the cage like this. You see, is it not good to be independent of any help or service even from your mother or elder sister? Why is that our life does not become as we wish? Why is an unmarried, single woman considered crippled? Why are we despised like this? ....Just giving birth to a child is not the only business of woman." Natsuko attacked the existing social custom based on Confucian principles.

The ideal image of women held by Meiji society was primarily (was) an image borne out of feudalism and its underlying thesis was the preservation of a male-dominated society in which men were likened to heaven and women to earth. Women were destined to serve and obey men, to be gentle and meek, pure and clean, and accomplished in housework. The mastery of these virtues was the ultimate aim of womanhood. During Tokugawa period the most important responsibility of a wife was to give birth to a male child so

that family lineage would continue. If she failed to give birth to a male child, her husband can marry again or keep any number of concubines and his first wife has no right to resist it. After the Meiji Restoration, although the new government declared equal opportunity and rights for both males and females and abolished the system of polygamy, by 1880s the political atmosphere in Japan was gradually changing to militarism. The government realized the necessity for bringing up patriotic citizens and therefore, it moved towards creating a society and family set up again based on pre-Meiji Confucian principles. Consequently, the concept of "Ryosaikenbo" (Good wives and wise mothers) was introduced and new restrictions were put on women. However, a group of educated women of the society protested this movement and challenged the concept of marriage and child rearing.

In this background, Uryu Natsuko wanted freedom so she refused to get married. Not only that, she even challenged her friend Sawa Sekiko who was planning to get married in the near future. "Let us see who will be happy, you who are married or I who remain unmarried." Natsuko with confidence told her friend that she would prove that Sekiko is doing a foolish thing. Sekiko decided to follow the social convention, although highly educated like Ntsuko and got

24 Ibid, p.112.
married. She leads a normal life although she had to sacrifice her interest in learning and music. Natsuko on the other hand with her zeal and enthusiasm, tries to live an independent life, free from social bondage and responsibility. However, being a woman she is unable to find happiness without the support and affection of man, in spite of her education and strong determination. Thus, she who refused to marry and had bitter hatredness towards men could not spent a single day without the presence of a male. "During the last ten years after graduating from the city school, there had been hardly any day she spent without a lover. A man can live if has job and honour. But a woman cannot live without loving and being loved." Natsuko knew that in the present society she cannot survive physically without the help and support of a man, but her emancipated self did not allow her to accept that truth openly. She sought the love of man but she never trusted them or loved them. Her intension was to "throw away the flowers after enjoying their fragrance". Moreover Natsuko’s desire to get rid of the pain of being a spinster has all the more forced her to indulge in fervent love affairs. She, a down hearted women today, "depressed and withered in grief like a
withered grass"," sought comfort from men. In fact, her
decision to remain as an unmarried woman was the beginning of
her tragedy. Finally, she gave birth to an illegitimate child
and became insane. Certainly her spinster life has given her
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28 Ibid.  

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28 Ibid.
stay unmarried. She knows that all her friends are living a happy and harmonious married life. She too wished for such a life but now she is very late. She is around 30 years old, prime time of her youth has passed and the society see her as a Rojo (old miss) as it was the custom of Meiji and pre-Meiji society to call unmarried women of above 25-26 years as "Rojo".

Finally, Natsuko of Rojo can be compared with Aya in Kyushujin in several respects. Both of them are urban born and educated and have challenged the traditional customs of the society, though in different ways, and finally ended their life in tragedy. Aya's forbidden love affair destroyed her life and Natsuko's indiscriminate amorous adventures with countless number of men whom she never loved destroyed her life. In both of their cases the flesh has taken an upper hand over spirit and in the process they forgot the conventional social customs, which ultimately led them to destruction. Similarly, Osada and Sekiko have also many similarities. Both have better future compared to Aya and Natusko. Both of them represent the traditional Japanese women who have understood the modern concepts of equality correctly and put them into practice in the right way.
painter, she became very excited and restless just by hearing that he is coming to Tazawa on that day to meet her. "She had suddenly remembered about her place of concealment.... Verdant shades have great magical power to console a lonely mind. This place is blessed with such natural surroundings.... This was the place she used to weep sometimes in pain (of love) lying on the grassy ground. "Mikami", "Mikami", she called out his name aimlessly. But, it was quite everywhere and nobody responded her." 31 She was really in need of Mikami but her emancipated ego (self) did not allow her to accept it openly. She waits for Mikami impatiently, but the moment she saw him coming, her attitude changes again because she does not want to express her true feeling to him openly. When Mikami wooed her courtship she refused it promptly, but after returning to her room she wept. "As if in dreams, Natsuko walked away quietly without even turning back.... She had rushed to the first floor of Msuya. As soon as she entered her room, she fell on the bed and burst into tears. "Mikami, please pardon me." 32 The pain of separation from Mikami was unbearable for her, but at the same time, Natsuko was conscious about her deeds. First of all she did not want to betray her own commitment, her decision to

31 Rojo, Shimasaki Toson Zenshu-3, p.114.
32 Ibid, p.123.