

**Status of Geisha in the Japanese Society as Portrayed in
'Udekurabe' and 'Nigorie':
A Study Through the Perspective of Gender**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the award of the degree of*

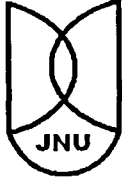
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

SUPRITI SETHI



Centre for Japanese, Korean and North-East Asian Studies
School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
New Delhi -110067

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CENTRE FOR JAPANESE, KOREAN & NORTH EAST ASIAN STUDIES
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE & CULTURE STUDIES

जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110 067

Date: 29/07/2008

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "Status of Geisha in Japanese Society as Portrayed in 'Udekurabe' and 'Nigorie': A Study Through the Perspective of Gender" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

SUPRITI SETHI

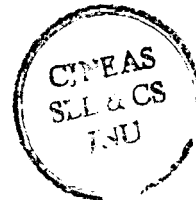
CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. (Dr) ANITA KHANNA
Chairperson, CJKNEAS

Prof (Dr) ANITA KHANNA
Supervisor

Centre for Japanese, Korean & North East Asian Studies
SLL & CS
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067, India



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Chapter 1

Introduction

Geisha have always been a subject of amusement and mystery for the non-Japanese. Literally, the term 'geisha' is a compound word of 'gei' meaning art and 'sha' meaning person. Hence, the term geisha refers to a 'person of art.' The geisha has always had a very unique place in the Japanese society where she has been viewed as the cultural reminiscence of the traditional seventeenth century Japan which evokes nostalgia for the Japanese people. The world of the geisha had been of great interest to not only the non-Japanese but also for the natives. The geisha quarters in the seventeenth century were the cultural centers where the men of rank and influence sought the geisha for entertainment and companionship. The Edo period (1600-1868) of Japan witnessed the rise of the geisha where the society; consisting of high ranking officials of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the commoners, looked up to the geisha as fashion icons. The demimonde culture was at its peak where the literature written was also based on the themes centering the lives and the intricacies of the then high profile licensed pleasure quarter of cultural Edo, the *Yoshiwara*. Popular writers like Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693) named it as *Ukiyo* (the floating world of pleasures) and the genre of fiction written about it was *Ukiyo-Zōshi* (Floating World) where the popular theme of his works center on the demimonde. The end of the Edo period and post Meiji Restoration (1868) further saw the decline of the geisha where

the name her 'profession' got tarnished and the thin dividing line between the geisha and the prostitutes blurred, consequently leading to her downfall. With little distinction left between a prostitute and a geisha, and with the fall of the *Yoshiwara* quarters, many illegal brothels came up under the name of drinking establishments, restaurants etc. where the so called 'geisha' now not only sold her arts but also her body. Following the bad phase, newly set up geisha districts in the new and fashionable upstart areas saw the rise of geisha, however, the new geisha was in many ways different than the *Yoshiwara* geisha that had once ruled the demimonde culture of Japan.

Further, during the influx of the American soldiers into Japan after Japan's defeat in the Second World War, poverty driven women started selling themselves under the name 'geisha' to the soldiers. The term geisha therefore became synonymous with prostitute. The present image of the geisha in the western world is attributed to the impression the American soldiers carried with them about the mesmerizing oriental culture of the geisha. Henceforth, the western world has always been amused and confused regarding the intricacies of the geisha profession and their role in the Japanese society. The geisha of Japan gained wide attention after the publication of Arthur Golden's 'Memoirs of a Geisha' in 1997 where the world of the geisha, unknown to the non-Japanese till now was beautifully portrayed with the help of complex plots and strong characterization. The movie adaption of the same novel was released in 2005 which further created ripples worldwide and attracted the attention of all who knew very less about the Japanese geisha. As an Indian and a student of Japanese language and literature, striking similarities between the geisha and the 'Devadasi' and the 'Tawaif' culture of India immediately triggered my thoughts to explore the institution of geisha of Japan.

This research is an attempt to explore the true meaning of the geisha, their nature of profession and their status in the Meiji society, when Japan was on its path to transition; from a closed traditional nation to an 'enlightened' one. As mentioned

above, the real meaning of the geisha underlines ambiguity not only in the minds of non-Japanese but also for the Japanese, for the meaning of the term 'geisha' had different connotation according to the area of practice and the era of existence. Geisha, is often viewed as a 'Japanese prostitute' as opposed to the Japanese who profess that a geisha is not a prostitute but an accomplished female of arts such as music, dance and calligraphy etc. However, it is important to establish a true definition of the geisha before exploring the nature of her profession and status in the society.

1.1. What is a geisha?

The term geisha has not only found a secure place in the minds of non-Japanese but also in renowned English dictionaries. In the Compact Oxford English Dictionary, a geisha is described as "a Japanese hostess trained to entertain men with conversation, dance, and song."¹ Whereas, according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary a geisha is "a Japanese girl or woman who is trained to provide entertaining and lighthearted company especially for a man or a group of men."² The Britannica Online Encyclopedia defines a geisha as "a member of a professional class of women in Japan whose traditional occupation is to entertain men, in modern times, particularly at businessmen's parties in restaurants or teahouses."³

From above, a geisha can be termed as a Japanese woman who entertains men with song, dance and conversation. However, looking at the geisha world, one can see the diversity in the very 'nature of the profession' of the geisha; one in the *Hanamachi* (a licensed geisha community) of the hot spring resorts and the other in the *Hanamachi* of *Shimbashi* of Edo or *Pontochō* of Kyoto. The difference between the two is clearly stated by G.G. Rowley (2006) in her 'translator's introduction' to the autobiography of a former hot-spring geisha, Sayo Masuda:

¹ Online Compact Oxford English Dictionary

² Online Merriam-Webster dictionary

³ Online Britannica Dictionary

a geisha at a hot-spring resort where the realities of sex for sale are unembellished by the aura of rich, famous, or powerful patrons, and the arts of song and dance that were the geisha's stock in trade are often simply bawdy, even lewd. (Pg.1)

To further elaborate the difference, Edward Seidensticker, the translator of Kawabata Yasunari's *Snow Country*⁴, says in his introduction:

If a hot-spring geisha is not a social outcast, she is perilously near being one. The city geisha may become a celebrated musician or dancer, a political intriguer, even a dispenser of patronage. The hot-spring geisha must go on entertaining week-end guests, and the pretense that she is an artist and not a prostitute is often a thin one indeed. (p. vi)

Clearly, though the term 'geisha' has been used for the women who entertain their clients in the hot-springs and also for those working in the refined cities like Edo in Japan. However, the 'nature of their professions' is poles apart. The Japanese despite the wide difference between the both has attached the term 'geisha' to both the 'professions'. However, the question remains, who is a true geisha?

Further probing into the olden times, one can find references to the word 'geisha' in Japanese literature. In the later half of the eighteenth century, the term geisha, literally "artist" referred to women with different professional women. There were the *Shiro* (white) geisha who were purely entertainers whereas *korobi* geisha just flocked to the guests. On one hand there were the *Kido* (gate) geisha, who attracted

⁴ Translation of the original novel '*Yukiguni*' published in 1937 in Japan by Kawabata Yasunari, winner of the Nobel Prize in literature. *Yukiguni* centers around the life of a hot-spring geisha and her relationship with her client.

the guests by playing *shamisen*⁵ at the entrance to carnivals and the *yuujo* (whore) geisha on the other hand who did not sell their musical skills only. During the feudal times, the dancing girls (*odoriko*) of the town came to be called as '*machi geisha*' or 'town geisha' contrary to the geisha who emerged in the licensed quarter of the sophisticated cities in around 1770.

Whereas an "onsen geisha is a euphemism for a prostitute" and the geisha in general terms are a part of the service industry where the sexual aspect of their profession is matter of speculation. (Dalby 1983: 242, 178) Hence, once again, it can be said that the term 'geisha' refers to a woman whose performances are a blend of art and sexual labor and the profession of whose has had different connotations and meanings according to their place of work and the era of their existence in the Japanese history. (Matsugu 2006)

1.2. Research Objective

As discussed above, though the term geisha has been coined as late as seventeenth century when they marked their presence in the Japanese society in spite of their emergence in ancient times. And since then, their role in the society has been changing with the passage of time. The Chapter 2 in this research work is dedicated to the history and the evolution of the geisha profession where I have traced the origin of the geisha since the ancient times up till the Second World War. In the chapter, I have explored the existence of the practice of prostitution and its mention in ancient Japan texts and how in the later periods, prostitution flourished and evolved into an organized trade where ranks were created leading to a hierarchy within an organization. Following the period of the rise of high ranking prostitutes, these women of pleasure acquired various arts such as singing, dancing and playing *Shamisen* to entertain their clients. Therefore, these 'artist' prostitutes were now distinguishable from common prostitutes. For the sake of ease in understanding I

⁵ A three string instrument, originally called as Jabisen, since the strings were made of snake skin, was introduced from the Ryūkyū islands of Japan later used extensively as an accompanied instrument for traditional Japanese music.

have denoted the word 'courtesan' to this new class of prostitutes. In short, the chapter provides details about the emergence of the geisha in the seventeenth century and the reason for their decline during the Meiji period. I have only traced the history of the *Yoshiwara* pleasure quarters since the focus of my research is on the geisha in Tokyo, as portrayed in the two literary works which I have selected for my research namely *Udekurabe* (1916) and *Nigorie* (1895).

Both the works *Udekurabe* (1916) and *Nigorie* (1895) are accomplished works of Nagai Kafū and Higuchi Ichiyō respectively. Though both these writers belong to different schools of writing in terms of style, where Kafū portrays his women protagonists as strong characters, Ichiyō on the other hand depicts the underlying emotions and pathos surrounding the women. However, set in the Meiji backdrop, both these works belong to the category of the Japanese demimonde literature where a reader gets an insight into the world of the geisha, courtesans, concubines, mistresses, bar hostesses etc, in other words, the 'women entertainers.' The story in both these works centers on the main female protagonist where other characters; the patrons, mistresses, barmaids help the reader grasp the realities of the 'entertainment' profession of the Meiji era, which was an era of enlightenment and the influence of western ideals, the glimpses of which can be found in these works. After the fall of the feudal Tokugawa period and the Meiji restoration in 1868, Japan moved into a new direction of modernization. It was an era of great socio-economic transformation in Japan. Therefore, both these works successfully provide an understanding of the structure of the Japanese society, standing at the threshold of enlightenment with the elements of traditional beliefs still deeply rooted.

My choice of both these works is influenced by the fact that both the writers had a deep understanding insight into the mysterious world of the pleasure quarters. Kafū had spent his time frequenting the pleasure quarters and based on his experiences he depicted his characters in the demimonde set-up whereas; Ichiyō had lived near the Yoshiwara quarters in Tokyo and had written extensively about the lives of the

women in the entertainment business. The Chapter 3 in this research is dedicated to the life and works of the authors; Nagai Kafū and Higuchi Ichiyō, with emphasis on characterization of major protagonists in *Udekurabe* and *Nigorie* respectively.

The main objective of this research is to find out the status of the geisha in the Japanese society through a perspective of gender. To analyze the real position of the geisha with respect to the men and women, (other than those in the ‘entertainment business viz. wife.) in the Japanese society, I have undertaken text-based analysis of three major relationships portrayed in the novels namely: The wife and the husband, the geisha and the clients/ patrons, the wife and the ‘other woman’. In Chapter 4, I have discussed the dynamics between the man-woman and the woman-woman relationships and how these relations are place in a social order giving rise to a gender order. The gender dynamics portrayed in the novels is further compared with the existing social milieu where the social realities of the Meiji Japan, as expressed in the *Meiroke Zasshi*, a journal started by the group of Meiji scholars and statesmen called as *Meirokeusha* (Meiji Six societies) in 1874. The *Meiroke Zasshi* is the best existing source of study of the Meiji Society which is a collection of articles on various topics about Japan; human rights in Japan, education system, status of wives in respect to concubines etc.

The Japanese words used throughout in this work are italicized whereas the word geisha is not since it is an accepted term in the English dictionaries. Further, though my research analysis is strictly based on the primary sources which are in the Japanese language, for the sake of convenience, I have borrowed the textual citations from the renowned English translations: ‘Geisha in Rivalry’(1963) translated by Kurt Meissner with the collaboration of Ralph Friedrich and ‘Troubled Waters’ (1981) by Robert Lyons Danly in his book ‘In the Shade of Spring Leaves’ for *Udekurabe* and *Nigorie* respectively.

Chapter 2

History and Evolution of Geisha

The term 'geisha' was coined during the Edo period only when the profession had emerged as the new breed of entertainers among the existing prostitutes and courtesans. The 'geisha' emerged as pure entertainers who sold only art and not their body. Historically, the first geisha that appeared in the 1600s were males. Then, they were also called jesters (*houkan*) or drum bearers (*taiko-mochi*) who entertained their guests with their lively performances. In 1751, in addition to the male geisha, the 'female geisha' made their debut and in those days were referred to as female drum bearer (*onna taiko mochi*). By 1780, the popularity of the female geisha soared, soon the number of male geisha started to decline and by 1800, "a geisha, unmodified, was a woman." (Dalby 1983: 56-58)

Before the emergence of the geisha, various types of women entertainers paved their path who entertained the clients. Tracing back to the olden times, the first kind of 'entertainment by women' was prostitution, known as the world's oldest profession, was prevalent in Japan as well. These women entertainers were much in demand until the end of the sixteenth century where they existed in places like Kyoto, Osaka

and Edo (present day Tokyo) and other urban center and along the key areas of business and thoroughfares. With the passage of time, the trade of ‘entertainment’ got more organized and prostitutes now entertained their clients with art, music and dance. These women, the courtesans, belonged to the higher rank compared to the prostitutes. Hence, with the establishment of the licensed *karyūkai* or the ‘flower and the willow world’ as it is commonly referred to, flourished rapidly. It was during the time of political stability, peace and tranquility in the Edo period, the term geisha was used for the first time.

Contrary to our understanding today, the term geisha had meant different things in different periods. During the Edo period, which lasted from 1603, from the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate to the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the scholars of Confucianism, Shintō, poetry, and astronomy, as well as doctors (including surgeons and dentists), were all known at times as geisha since the word ‘geisha’ literally meant ‘artist.’ Masters of such martial skills as sword fighting, archery, equestrianism, gunnery, spear throwing, horse training, and blade testing were called *bugeisha*, where *bu* means “military.” And in the Meiji era (1868–1912), geisha was occasionally used in reference to teachers of foreign languages. The narrators of the *bunraku* puppet theater, that flourished during the Edo Period were customarily referred to as geisha, whereas the puppeteers themselves were called *yakusha*, “actors.” In the world of kabuki, the dancers were referred to as *geisha*, likewise distinguished from the *yakusha*. (Tanaka 2003). Moreover, even during the Edo period when the geisha first appeared, their status and ‘role’ as entertainers also differed depending on the area they ‘carried out their trade’ from. The geisha of the licensed quarters were viewed as elegant entertainers, quite different from the courtesans and prostitutes whereas, geisha from the unlicensed places were no more than simple prostitutes. Therefore, the role and the term geisha are difficult to understand without exploring the existence and evolution of the demimonde culture of Japan from the ancient times.

2.1. Ancient Times

Though, the inferences about the practice of prostitution in ancient Japan have not been recorded, there are various theories about the development of prostitution. Cecilia Segawa Seigle (1993) in her book *Yoshiwara* suggests that it might have started as religious prostitution to serve 'indigenous gods' or it might have begun with 'itinerant female shaman/ entertainers of Korean origin. Early Japanese literature suggests there was 'free love' in the Japanese society which can't be termed prostitution. Stating Nakayama Taro's views in his 1928 treatise on this subject, *Baisho sanzennen-shi* (History of 3,000 years of prostitution), Seigle (1993) points out three conditions that are necessary for a profession to be termed as prostitution; first, the woman accepts unspecified number of men under contract for compensation; second, continuation of such profession; third, accepting men under the agreement bound by contract. It can be inferred that these three conditions are not fulfilled in the ancient literary texts such as *Man'yoshu*¹, *Kojiki*² or *Fudoki*³.

Poems in the *Man'yoshu* suggest the prevalence of sexual freedom where men and women gathered in the fields to celebrate festivals by feasting and singing and making love. Wives were 'lent out' or exchanged among men. Sex was seen as a shamanistic symbol and was encouraged for agricultural fertility. With the introduction of Confucianism, given the principles where the woman was now 'subordinate' to man, she would have easily given in. Sexual services might have been exchanged with food items, clothes but this form of 'act' was not considered prostitution in ancient Japan. It was only in the seventh century, after the Taika Reforms (A.D. 645)⁴ that many families lost their lands allotted to them and displaced many families. Women became wanderers and might have started to

¹ "Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves"- Oldest existing compilation of Japanese poetry. Compiled in the Nara or early Heian Period.

² Also known as "Records of Ancient Matters", is the oldest surviving Japanese book. Written in 712.

³ *Fudoki* is the record of culture and geography about provinces in Japan. Its compilation began in 713 and finished in the period of 20 years.

⁴ Set of doctrines issued in the year 646 to bring about land reforms based on the Chinese Confucian ideals and philosophy. Envoys were sent to China to learn literature, religion, architecture etc.

engage in sex, this time in return for payment. Called as *yuko jofu* (peripatetic woman), *ukareme* (frivolous women) or *Sabukuro* (serving women), these women got invitations into high profile gatherings. Names of such *Sabukuro* are mentioned in the *Man'yōshū*; Kojima (vol. 6: 965-966), Tamatsuki (vol.15:3704-3705), Sano no Otagami no Otome (vol. 15: 3723-3726, 3745-3753), Haji (vol. 18: 4047 and 4067), Famau no Iratsume (vol. 19: 4232). Thus, by the eighth century, due to economic needs, the profession of prostitution was established (Seigle 1993).

2.2. Heian Period

The Heian period (794-1185) saw an increase in women entertainers. This was the era of peace and tranquility where many strong women writers emerged due to the popularity of the *kana*⁵ script. Literature flourished and many works were written by and about the court culture of the Heian period. The diary literature and the Monogatari literature bear numerous inferences about the court culture and the presence of professional women entertainers and their role in the court (Khanna 2002).

The rich court nobles of the Heian period enjoyed the pleasures of exchanging poems with court ladies. The married men had concubines anything from four to eight in number and promiscuity was expected out of him. He sought to have affairs with the wives of other men, concubines and the ladies-in-waiting. A man faithful to one was considered an oddity. The society was governed by Confucian principles where marriage was a political union of the two, arranged by the parents when both partners were young to create “an advantageous alliance between families.” Such marriages were performed to maintain family lineage and for procreation; love and marriage had nothing to do with each other (Downer 2000).

⁵ The *kana* script refers to the general syllabic Japanese scripts *Hiragana* and *Katakana* which are based on phonetic characters derived from the ancient Kanji (pictographic) script borrowed from ancient China. The *kana* also includes *Man'yōgana* in which the old Poetic anthology *Man'yōshū* was written. In ancient Japan, prior to the advent of *kana* script, *kanbun* (Classical Chinese script), *Hentai Kanbun* (Japanized version of Classical Chinese) was used.

Women who made living out of entertaining men and prostitution during the Heian period increased greatly. Now, these women practiced prostitution in cities, along well traveled rivers, seas, roads between the capital city of the Heian court, Kyoto. In *The Tale of Genji*⁶ there are descriptions of the scenes where some ‘women of pleasure’ approached Genji’s attendants. Siegle (1993) mentioned the observations of a noted scholar/ aristocrat, Oe no Masafusa (1041-1111) has described the prostitutes he has seen in *Yujoki*. He has portrayed the rural prostitutes in a sympathetic manner and that various ministers patronized these prostitutes. Some of the prostitutes were from good family background and were also talented singers and dancers. Thus, by the time of Heian period, various classes of women entertainers or ‘pleasure women’ got established out of which some women entertainers were of a higher rank, had better education and training who commanded higher price and also had better patronage than the existing prostitutes.

2.3. Kamakura Period

During the end of the Heian Period and early Kamakura period, ranks within the ‘pleasure women’ community had developed and one such high-ranking class was the *Shirabyoshi*. Appeared in the Kamakura period (1185-1333), these women were skilled musicians, dancers, and singers and were sought after by the nobles and aristocrats for company. *Shirabyoshi* wore white male clothing with manly court caps and also carried swords. Their dance was highly erotic which they performed on erotic songs. Not only performers they could also become concubines of the men of powerful status and give birth to nobles (Downer 2000). Literary texts such as *The Tale of the Heike* (*Heikei Monogatari* written in 1219) carry descriptions about the women who retired to a nunnery after leading their lives as *Shirabyoshi*. The *Shirabyoshi* appeared at a time of structural change, where the power shifted from one clan to the other; the Fujiwara to Taira, from Minamoto to Hōjō.⁷ These women

⁶ The Tale of Genji is regarded as the world’s first novel was written by a court lady, Murasaki Shikibu. Written in early 11th century, The Tale of Genji centers around the life of prince Hikaru Genji and his love affairs with the women in the court.

⁷ One of the major clans of early Japan the members of which served as regents in the Shogunate

who belonged to aristocratic families where forced to become *Shirabyoshi* once their finances started to dwindle. The travel between the Kyoto and Kantō increased when the first *bakufu* (military government) was established in Kamakura. The number of prostitutes who worked between this travel route increased rapidly and soon, such 'post stations' were developed where the head of such stations, the *Chōja*, who were not only the owners but also providers of food and accommodations but women for pleasure to the travelers. The women of pleasure in the Kamakura period were more organized and most of them were the concubines of the rich and kept young women under them.

2.4. Muromachi Period

During the Muromachi period (1392- 1573), the centre of prostitution now was Kyoto. Japan raged in the fire of civil wars and more and more women got displaced and became wanderers. Nuns who lost their positions in the Buddhist temples became *Bikuni* (itinerant nuns) or *aruki miko* (wandering shrine maidens). These displaced nuns were forced into prostitution. And during the seventeenth century, the Ashikaga Shoguns patronized the sophisticated *Shirabyoshi*, who had already set themselves apart from the ordinary prostitutes. With the motive to increase state revenue, taxes were levied on the prostitutes. The state ordered taxation of the prostitution was a clear indicator of the establishment of the trade and the taxation was a step towards legitimizing prostitution. It was not until Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598), who rose to power that prostitution was brought under control. In the interest of military security, brothels that plied freely in Kyoto were brought into a single area. Hideyoshi is said to have frequented the pleasure quarters in disguise, the records of which can be found in *The Great Mirror of the Way of Love (Shikidō Ōkagami, 1678)*. After the setting up of the first walled-in pleasure quarter in Kyoto, licensed quarters *Shinmachi* (Osaka) and *Yoshiwara* (Edo, old name for Tokyo) came up. *Shimabara* was a place where the upper class and well educated gentlemen were entertained in contrast to Shinmachi, where local merchants frequented upon their visit to Osaka for business purposes; for Osaka was the national hub of

commerce. Detailed accounts of activities of the pleasure quarters can be seen in the novels of *Ihara Saikaku*, the famous Edo writer like his *Great Mirror of Love (Shoen Ōkagami, 1684)*.

2.5. Edo Period

The Beginning of the Edo period (1600-1868) was the golden era for the pleasure women and for the ones who frequented them. This was the era of peace and tranquility where the Shogun's seat of government shifted to Edo and the city got its first and only licensed pleasure quarter in 1618, the *Yoshiwara*. The *Yoshiwara* pleasure quarter was surrounded by thick walls and moat on three sides and one side by river. The entry to the *Yoshiwara* was strictly restricted from one main gate. The quarter had bordellos, teahouses, catering shops with other enterprises within the *Yoshiwara* complex. Tight security was observed where apart from doctors no one was allowed to ride horse, palanquin or carriage inside the *Yoshiwara* gate. Long swords and spears were prohibited inside.

The pleasure women, now courtesans- for they now sang and danced in addition to providing sexual services, were of higher rank compared to common prostitutes. Now the city of the Shogun was Edo, the 'official' pleasure quarter was *Yoshiwara* which soon became the cultural center hub of the city. In addition to licensed courtesans, the 'unlicensed brothels' were also present and were scattered all over the city. The officially licensed prostitutes who plied within their domain of pleasure quarters and the unlicensed prostitutes, who, despite high risk of being caught were equally prevalent throughout the cities and these illegal prostitutes were under constant police vigilance were primarily in existence. Of all the pleasure women inside the *Yoshiwara*, the *Tayū* were of the highest rank followed by the *Kōshi*. The term *Tayū* was originally used for theatrical performers. The next rankers in the hierarchy, the *Kōshi*, were back-ups or trainees who could rise to the rank of *Tayū* by the evaluation of the experienced associations comprising of residents, *ageya* proprietors, teahouse proprietors and veteran *Yarite* (supervisor/ chaperons of

courtesans) based on her beauty, intelligence, cultural refinement, deportment and earning power. (Seigle 1993; Yasutaka 1999)

Since the government backed the institution of “entertainment by pleasure women”, the Yoshiwara women were often required to visit the houses of high-ranking Samurai. For this the courtesans of highest rank, the *Tayū*, were summoned to perform tea ceremony. Since the banquets were performed in the company of high ranking officials, the *Tayū* were required to behave elegantly and appear intelligent. The *Tayū* were way beyond the reach of the commoner who could only dream or worship these elegant figures who the symbol of beauty and class. The seventeenth century pleasure women of the Yoshiwara were encouraged to imbibe *Hari*, a trait that showed ruthlessness towards the low and the commoners. They exhibited no sympathy for the weak, often hated for this attitude and their pride for material wealth, these women exhibited these traits as a rebellion against the social stigma attached to this profession (Gerstle 1999). On the contrary, the low ranking *Hashi* were approachable by the commoner and the rules governing their conduct were not as strict as those for the *Tayū*. The *Tayū*, would often reject the suitor if she found him unattractive. As a practice, even a man of rank could not approach his desired *Tayū* till the third meeting when he was conferred upon the title of a *najimi* or a regular patron.

2.5.1. Young girls and Prostitution

The *Tayū* and *Kōshi* were always accompanied by one or two *Kamuro*, who were little girls as young as six or seven, who were often attached as attendants to the high ranking *Tayū* or *Kōshi* depending upon their beauty and talent. The *Kamuro* were the daughters of poor debt-ridden agrarian families who sold their daughters to the brokers who promised a luxurious life in the pleasure quarters. Unable to feed many mouths gave rise to the practice of infanticide and selling off the daughters to brothels was a common practice in those days. With failure in crops and inability to sustain themselves, daughters were the saviors for the family who could be sold off

for money. Sadly, the supporters of prostitution viewed it as a necessary evil to keep single men living in big cities satisfied and not run after women of 'refined families.' The brokers openly advertised asking if anyone was interested in selling their daughters. The parents, with a heavy heart and a thought of having to feed fewer mouths, sold off their daughters with a hope of being saved from poverty and that their little daughter might be able to find a suitable patron who would buy her out of the quarter or get married if she is lucky. These little girls, once brought into the world of pleasure quarters, were destined to become prostitutes while still in teenage. As a justification to this act, these daughters were made the apostles of 'sacrifice' and filial piety in accordance with the Confucian principles. The society made their daughters believe that it is their ultimate duty to look after their families in poverty even by selling themselves. Often, these young girls did not even know what they were getting into and what their lives would be (Hane 1982). These girls were taken in by brothels and groomed to become prostitutes. These girls were taken as apprentice or *Kamuro*, to established courtesans. During apprenticeship and before making a debut as professional prostitutes, *Kamuro*, were taught the tricks of the trade and were often used as messengers for exchange of letters or messages between the patron and the *Tayū* or the *Kōshi*. The *kamuro* were taught music, calligraphy and other arts as well. It was only when they were initiated into prostitution, marked by a deflowering ceremony for which a high fee was charged to the client, she was promoted to become a *Shinzō* (literally 'a new boat'). The *Shinzō* was a young prostitute who could rise to the ranks of *Tayū* or *Kōshi* depending upon her beauty and skill.

2.5.2. Unlicensed Prostitution

Apart from licensed entertainment, 'unlicensed entertainment' came up as a threat to the *Yoshiwara*. The popularity of the *Yuna* (bath women) took away many of its customers. The first bathhouse came up in 1591 but it grew in popularity only by 1630's where the bath women practiced prostitution. The *Yuna* worked in these public bathhouses, where children, women of common townspeople were not

allowed, till the evenings after which they dressed up, played *shamisen* and served Sake. In 1657, however, after the *Yoshiwara* was relocated to the new place, at around Asakusa, the proprietors of the bathhouses had no choice but to shut down their business. The jobless bath women were inducted as prostitutes in the new *Yoshiwara* quarter which was shifted to the new location in Asakusa when the old *Yoshiwara* caught fire and had to be relocated. The bathhouses now converted into “teahouses” where the prostitutes were called “waitresses” who were now called *Sancha* (literally ‘inferior tea’). The *Sancha* were placed below *Tayū* and *Kōshi* but above *Tsubone* and *Hashi*. Soon, the popularity of *Sancha* soared high due to the less fee charged compared to *Tayū* and *Kōshi*, which included the fee of the *ageya*, and the *Sancha*’s popularity too surpassed that of *Tayū* and *Kōshi* (Seigle 1993). By the end of the eighteenth century, the *Sancha* replaced *Tayū* and *Kōshi*, following which the *ageya* also disappeared which prospered due to the service provided to the patrons of *Tayū* and *Kōshi* (See Fig. 2-1 for the tabulated chart of the information given above, pg.26.)

2.5.3. Townspeople Culture (*Chōnin Bunka*)

The *Chōnin* or the ‘townspeople’ were the merchants and shopkeepers, who otherwise, the lower classes in the feudal hierarchy started to emerge as an economically stronger group of people in the era of peace and tranquility. The rise of wealthy merchant class paved the way for various luxuries that they could not afford till now whereas on the other hand, due to fires, famines, earthquakes, the accumulated wealth of the Samurai continued to dwindle. With the change in the social hierarchy, a new social structure was being formed that was based purely on economic strength of the individual. This gave birth to the emerging ‘townspeople culture’ or ‘*chōnin bunka*. The *Yoshiwara* was now a cultural center where many teahouse proprietors went on to become singers, *shamisen* players, composers, lyric writers and dancers. Many musicians emerged from within *Yoshiwara*. The Kabuki theatre also had strong alliances with the *Yoshiwara* where both shared a somewhat symbiotic relationship (Seidensticker 1983). Men, who played feminine roles in the

Kabuki, known as *onnagata*, looked up to the grace and elegance of the *Yoshiwara* pleasure women. The settings and themes of many Kabuki plays were related to the pleasure quarters where the hero had a lover in the *Yoshiwara*. Not only the art forms but even literature in that period, roughly the Genroku era (1688-1704) was extensively written on the pleasure quarters. It was an era where arts like calligraphy, tea ceremony, and flower-arrangement received patronage not only from the Samurai class but from the rich merchant class who had developed the taste of aesthetics and had the means to indulge in luxuries.

Yoshiwara was now the central theme of the Edo literature. With different genres of literatures like the *Sharebon* (literature of the pleasure quarter- the how-to-do books) and *Kibyōshi* (yellow cover-illustrated books), *Yomihon* and *Ninjōbon* gained acceptance among the Edoites, more and more such works were published which often had hilarious and sometimes sarcastic connotations than being purely erotic. Most of the *Sharebon* and *Kibyōshi* writers were also experts of *Kyōka*, the comic poem of thirty one syllables. Later comic poetry called *Senryū* came in vogue which bore references to obscenity and mocked social phenomena, politics and issues concerning the general masses. These writers often met at the *Yoshiwara* for poetry and light interaction. The humorous poems usually centered on the life of the pleasure quarters (Seigle 1993).

Another art that flourished during the second half of the eighteenth century under the *Yoshiwara*'s influence was the '*ukiyo-e*' (painting of the floating world) woodprints, where the theme was again, the life in pleasure quarters. Moreover, the '*Ukiyo*' literature or the *Ukiyo-Zōshi* (Tales of the floating world) also gained immense popularity. Noted writers like Ihara Saikaku and Kiseki wrote about the pleasure quarters, the stories were often humorous and erotic. Pioneer of the *Ukiyo Zōshi* genre of writing Saikaku, established himself as a popular Genroku writer with his first novel 'The Man Who Spent His Life in Love' (*Kōshoku Ichidai Otoko*) in 1682. Saikaku's best selling work 'The Women Who Spent Her Life In Love' (*Kōshoku*

Ichidai Onna) focuses on the bold confessions of the women protagonists. One of his heroines, blessed with good face and figure, ventures into the profession of a courtesan of a high rank, to bath girl to an unlicensed prostitute from a bored housewife. Through his fiction, Saikaku gave the genre a psychological and poetic depth. In the era of *Ukiyo-zōshi*, another form of erotic literature, the *Kana-zōshi* became highly popular. These books were first published keeping in mind the newly educated townspeople who could now learn to read and write at *terakoya*-the temple schools. Born a generation later than Saikaku, writer Ejima Kiseki gained popularity with his work 'A Courtesan's Amorous Samisen' which was kind of a guide-book arranged in the form of many tales from the floating world. From the *Ukiyo*, a separate genre of purely erotic *Ukiyo*, known as *Shunga* (literally spring pictures) or *waraie* (laughing pictures) emerged which depicted explicit sexual acts. Though many such 'how-to' manuals on sex were in circulation and the masses showed keen interest in them, these were not official manuals published by the *Yoshiwara*. These works were written by those outside the *Yoshiwara* who wrote through their imagination, often for popularity.

Poets like Matsuo Basho (1644-94) surfaced as a popular *Haikai* poet, the 31 syllable Japanese poetry which later came to be known as *Haiku*. Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1723), noted play writer wrote for the puppet theatre-the *Jōruri*. These plays appealed to the townspeople culture of the Genroku era. The plays depicted the themes of the 'floating world' and brought the actors and courtesans together to form an entertainment business that appealed to the masses. Popular theme was the *Shinjū*, the double suicide of lovers, which were often inspired from the real life incidents. With the growth of theatre, elaborate costumes, fashion and style of the 'floating world' came in vogue. People of all ranks were drawn to the theatres to watch the elaborate performances. The actors, their private lives, personal fashion now became the food for gossips. The themes of the plays centered more on the realistic townspeople lives; love affair between a shopkeeper and a courtesan and other modern domestic tragedies which lead the theatres go house full. Two kinds of

popular theatres of the Genroku era were the *Jōruri*, puppet theatre and *Kabuki*, with human actors. *Jōruri* performances were about heroic narratives of brave men and vengeful demons. The *Kabuki* was an adjunct of prostitution which later developed into theatrical form. The singing and dancing was a means of luring men by the prostitutes which later evolved into art when covered theatres were built for performances. Women were later banned from the *Kabuki*, perhaps on the complaint of the brothel keepers. (Hibbett 1959)

The prosperity of the arts made the pleasure quarters the centers of high society cultural activities. The *Yoshiwara* in Edo, *Shimabara* in Kyoto and *Shinmachi* in Osaka were clusters of elaborate buildings and tastefully decorated tea-houses where men of rank invited the courtesans for candle-lit banquets. After the disappearance of the last highest ranking courtesan, the *Tayū*, from the *Yoshiwara* in 1761, another class of high ranking pleasure women called *Oiran* had started to appear. Though present since 1750, this new *Oiran* class consisted of the *Sancha* (teahouse waitress-cum-courtesans) and now the '*Oiran*' were the highest ranking pleasure women of *Yoshiwara*.

2.5.4. Rise of the Geisha

The *geisha* or 'artist' literally, had appeared as early as in the seventeenth century where they were men known as *taikomochi*. As the name suggests, their job was to entertain the wealthy visitors at the *Yoshiwara* along with the group of lower ranking *Shinzō* and apprentice girls, *kamuro* till the arrival of the *Tayū*. The male geisha were much in demand for they provided entertainment through singing, dancing, playing *Shamisen* and comical story telling. By 1770 and 1780s, female geisha started gaining popularity and could be seen walking in the streets of *Yoshiwara*. The female geisha soon outnumbered the male geisha and by late 1780s, the world geisha was used for female geisha only.

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The geisha followed a different set of fashion norms than the courtesans of the *Yoshiwawa*. The geisha wore their hair in the traditional married women style-*shimada* style. Her kimono was simpler as compared to that of the courtesans' and she blackened her teeth just like all married townsmen and *Yoshiwara* courtesans. The geisha prided themselves with the fact that they sold only 'gei' or art and not her flesh and in the old age she had an art in hand to rely upon to earn a decent living.

The geisha profession among females is said to have been developed by the tradition of *Odoriko*, young dancing girls of the 1680s who were hired to perform at high-profile parties at the *daimyo* household. Though originally meant to be pure professional dancers only, with the passage of time, they fell into the darkness of prostitution. And with the rising popularity of the geisha, many *Odoriko* started to call themselves as 'geisha.' The geisha of the *Fukagawa* pleasure quarter freely practiced prostitution. By 1755, the name of *Odoriko* underwent a change and now they were known as *geiko*. The *geiko* were different from the geisha, however, a clear difference is difficult to highlight. The geisha depicted in the *Ukiyo* paintings are shown followed by a *hakoya*, or a person carrying *Shamisen*, that was used for geisha performances. The rising number of geisha led to competition not only among themselves but to the courtesans also, who were the real glory of the *Yoshiwara*. Many geisha started luring the customers of the courtesans and engaged in prostitution. Though, geisha advocated themselves as artists only, the line between being entertainment and prostitution had been somewhat blurred. The geisha of other regions of Edo; *Ryōgoku-Yanagibashi*, *Tachibanachō*, *Yotsuya* were famous for practicing prostitution, whereas, *Fukagawa* geisha were prostitutes under the name of geisha. Hence, the term 'geisha' implied different professional connotations depending upon the area and the time of their existence. However, the common factor being the fact, that they entertained their clients by singing and dancing.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the hierarchy in the *Yoshiwara* quarters had undergone a significant change. With the rise of the *Oiran*, after the *Tayū* disappeared, the *Sancha* emerged as the highest rank. The *Sancha*, later split into



three classes namely *Yobidashi* (literally 'on call'), *Chūsan* and *Tsukemawashi*. At the lowest level, a teenage girl, after serving as a *kamuro* progressed onto becoming *Shinzō*, after sexual initiation. Both *Kamuro* and *Shinzō* served as apprentices to the *Oiran* who were now the highest ranking courtesans like the *Tayū* and the *Kōshi* earlier. These apprentices could rise to the level of the *Oiran* depending upon their social status and beauty. The *Shinzo*, could also expect to become a *zashikimochi* (owner of an apartment) or *heyamochi* (owner of a room) as well. Towards the end of the Edo period all the class except *shinzō* and *kamuro* were together called as *Oiran*, high ranking courtesans (See Fig. 2-2 for the tabulated chart of the information above pg.27).

The custom of *Mizuage*, 'deflowering' of the virgin courtesan by the highest bidder to mark the 'launching' into the market was inherited by the geisha as well. The geisha, though traditionally were only entertainers, practiced *Mizuage* when an apprentice geisha or '*o-shaku*' or '*hangyoku*' is initiated to sex and termed as full-fledged geisha. This is marked by an elaborate ceremony where the apprentice now changed her Kimono and this was called *Erigae* (literally 'changing collars')

A courtesan usually retired at the age of twenty seven, at the time when the terms of their contracts ended. The debts had to be paid off by the time of retirement as well. The next goal for most of the courtesans was to seek a man who would marry them or keep them as concubines or mistresses. The beautiful and talented ones stood a better chance of finding a suitable man whereas the less fortunate ones settled to become *yarite* in the *Yoshiwara* in their declining years.

2.5.5. The Declining Prosperity

The ending years of the eighteenth century saw the decline of the *Yoshiwara*. The illegal brothels around *Yoshiwara* surpassed in business and the geisha of *Fukagawa*, who were mere prostitutes, now basked in glory and luxury. Whereas, *Yoshiwara* courtesans struggled for livelihood. These situations lead to the change in the

professional divisions between the geisha and prostitutes. By early 1800s, the prostitutes and courtesans, who were the crowning glory of the *Yoshiwara*, were made to work harder at lower prices. During the *Tempō*⁸ Reform in 1841 to check illegal brothels, many women who called themselves geisha were arrested. Many of them were singers, dancers and practiced prostitution. Not only geisha, these women practiced prostitution in the name of other professions such as waitresses, maids, hairdressers etc. Of the women who were arrested, those who wished to remain as entertainers only were allowed to remain as geisha. The term geisha came to be used for women who were now 'forced' to provide entertainment only. On the other hand, popular *Sharebon*, *Yomihon* and *Ukiyo* picture books were banned. Following the strict reform, the business of the *Yoshiwara* declined rapidly and now the frustrated proprietors were crueler to the courtesans and often tortured them.

The true geisha started to dwindle in numbers drastically as they required training in music and dance. Instead, unlicensed prostitutes started calling themselves geisha. Between 1853 and 1869, the number of geisha increased due to their rising popularity though most of them were mere prostitutes. By 1868, the year of the Meiji Restoration, *Yoshiwara* reduced to low ranking pleasure quarters whereas the illegal quarters around it were doing better business. The final blow to the pleasure business came in the year 1872 with the 'Maria Luz incident'. Maria Luz was a Peruvian ship that stopped at Yokohama port for repair and during that time, one of the Chinese coolies, unable to bear the cruel treatment, jumped into the sea. When Japan authorities protested against 'human trafficking,' and set those coolies free, the Japanese were reminded of the 'buying and selling' of prostitutes in their own country. Following this incident, the Meiji Japan that was on its path to modernization immediately took action and in the same year in 1872, came out with the 'Prostitution Emancipation Act' under which strict punishment was announced for those involved in buying and selling of prostitutes. The debts of the prostitutes

⁸ Refers to the set of reforms introduced by the Tokugawa Shogunate in order to restore the traditional agricultural society. The reforms were ineffective in dealing with problems like growing agrarian discontent, poverty, urban crime and rigid administration.

were declared cancelled and the prostitutes were 'set free.' However, government licenses were issued to those who willingly wanted to practice prostitution. By this time, the term geisha had become synonymous with prostitution as many geisha in areas other than *Yoshiwara* practiced prostitution. And many geisha had two licenses; one for being a geisha and the other for prostitution. The status of the *Yoshiwara* continued to decline and by the year 1883, geisha of upstart areas like *Yanagibashi* and *Shinbashi* were considered first class, those in *Sukiyachō* and *Yoshichō* as second class and *Yoshiwara* geisha as third class. (Seigle 1993)

2.6. The Meiji Period to The Second World War

The unlicensed brothels under the name of bath houses, tea houses, restaurants etc did good business since as early as 1658. The unlicensed prostitutes offered their services at lower prices and were easily approachable for a commoner compared to the high ranking courtesan of the *Yoshiwara*. These unlicensed brothels mushroomed in various parts of Edo near the *Yoshiwara* and were called '*Okabasho*' The enterprises in the *Okabasho* were always present and posed competition to the *Yoshiwara* courtesans (Kasuma 1937). However, it was after the decline of the *Yoshiwara*, these small enterprises gained momentum and many prostitutes were put up for sale to attract customers. Sometimes, free sake or food was also advertised to lure the customers (Seigle 1993). The wealthy merchants migrated to the newly developed areas of Tokyo and left the old and the crowded Edo area. And with *Yoshiwara* losing business and unlicensed prostitution flourishing, the dividing line between the geisha, courtesans and mere prostitute became blurred. With other places like *Yanagibashi* and *Shinbashi* basking in the glory or patronage from the men of rank, *Yoshiwara* was in ruins and so were the women who worked in it for livelihood. The small teahouses looked more like the brothels in the *Okabasho*.

As Japan entered into the Taisho period (1912-1926), the *Karyūkai* (literally the 'flower and the willow world' refers to the pleasure quarters) were known as 'geisha quarters.' With the glorious days of the *Yoshiwara* gone, the remaining prostitutes,

courtesans, geisha were treated more cruelly and made to accept any customer just for money. Therefore, in the name of courtesans, entertainers or geisha what remained was only prostitution. In the Meiji period, many women who worked as prostitutes started calling themselves 'geisha.' However, even the Japanese authorities often viewed geisha and prostitutes together since the contracts which governed geisha and prostitutes were similar and which authorized the male family heads to transfer these women to their new owners. The Meiji government, in 1868, had emancipated not only the 'prostitutes' but also geisha from their contracts. According to the proposal by the Ministry of law, prostitutes were to be registered officially as 'geisha' however, it was decided that a hierarchy is maintained in order to save the image of 'geisha' from getting tarnished. Later in 1872, the geisha and the prostitutes were governed under a different license system where both were ordered to undergo medical examination for Syphilis. The prostitutes were directed to take the exam every month whereas the geisha only had to undergo the tests once in every three months. The very fact that the geisha were 'required' to take such a test is evidence enough that the authorities viewed geisha as potential prostitutes.

These women also suffered from tuberculosis and poor health. The late Meiji Christian activists tried to get the flesh trade abolished but to a small extent. However, the license system governing the geisha and the prostitutes continued throughout the Meiji period till 1945 when Japan was defeated in World War II (Matsugu 2006:244). The pathetic condition of these women continued to be ignored by the Japanese authorities till in 1945 when the *Yoshiwara* was reduced to rubble during the Second World War. After the occupation of Japan, the American soldiers swarmed the city of Tokyo and came across the 'geisha girls', many of whom were prostitutes who started calling themselves geisha. The distorted image of the geisha spread into the western world and gave birth of the stereotypical image of the geisha as high class prostitutes belonging to the mysterious world of glamour and luxuries. The ambiguity in the present day English definition of the geisha is attributed to the image of the 'geisha' which the fascinated western world carried with itself.

Classification of Courtesans

Before 1750 to 1760

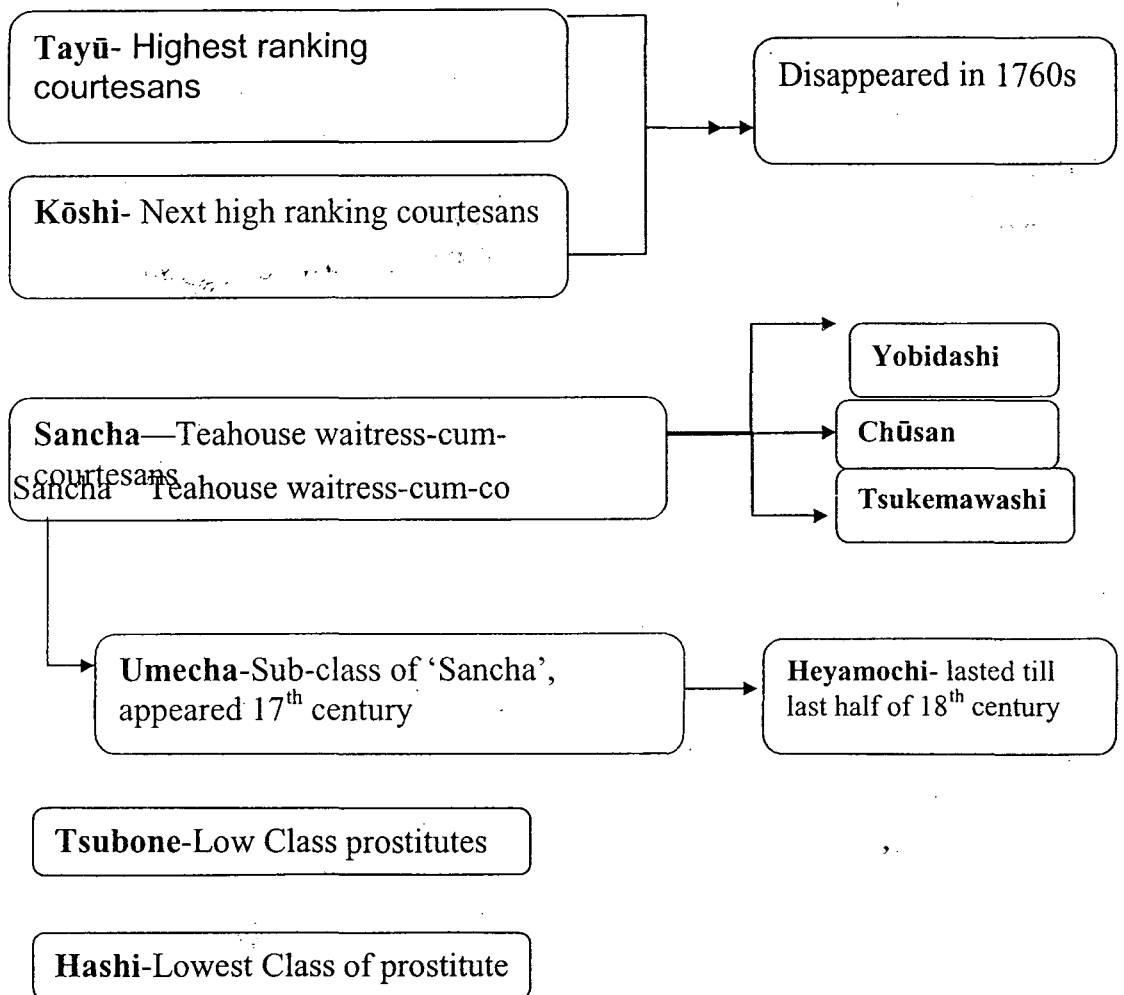


Fig. 2-1

Classification of Courtesans

After 1760

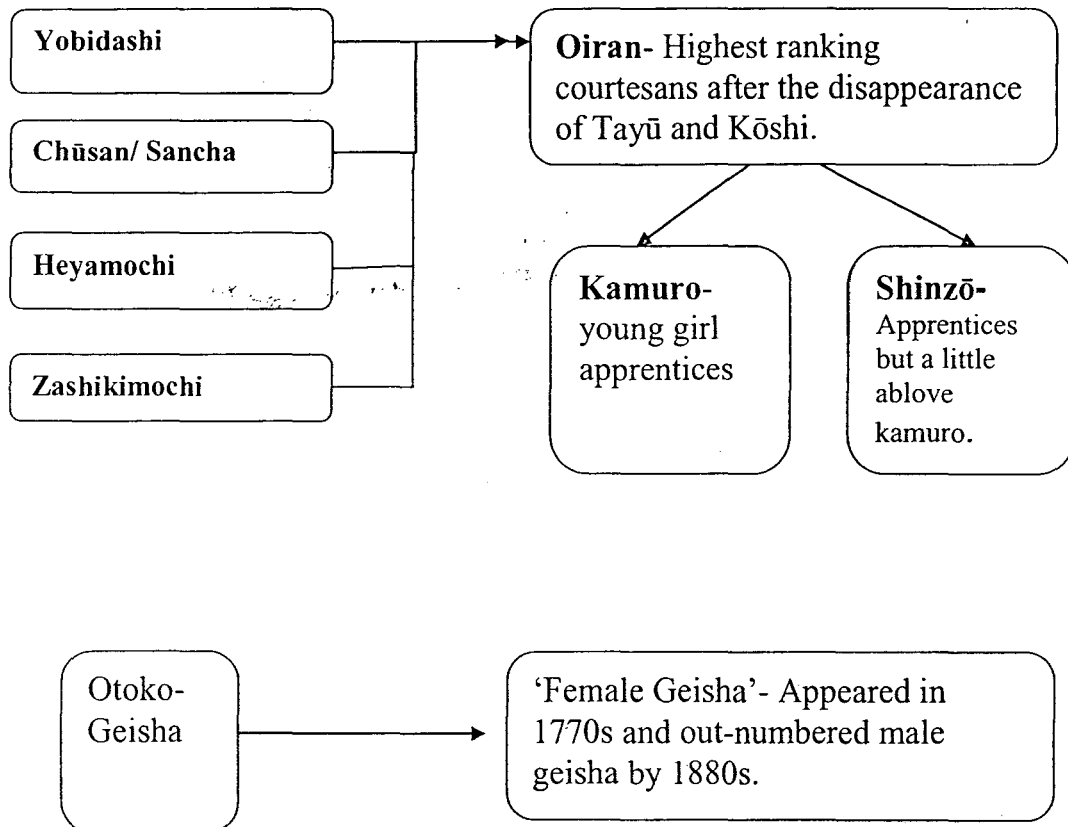


Fig. 2-2

Chapter 3

Higuchi Ichiyō and Nagai Kafū:

Nigorie and Udekurabe

3.1. The novels: *Nigorie* and *Udekurabe*

Both the novels are set in the city of Tokyo: *Udekurabe* being in *Shimbashi* and *Nigorie* in *Yoshiwara*. Kafū and Ichiyō belong to different genres of writers, which is clearly reflected in the mood of respective stories. On one hand, where *Udekurabe* is an account of series of events and interactions between various characters that appear throughout the novel, *Nigorie* is full of pathos where the female protagonist ends her life with a tragic 'love suicide' at the end of the story. Both the novels are pioneering works on the demimonde of Japan, where the true character of the women entertainers has been captured. The heroines of *Udekurabe* and *Nigorie* belong to two different worlds where their social influence and status is different from each other due to the place of practice of their profession which is evident from the kind of clientele both keep. Despite visual differences, the similarities are many as well. And by reading both the novels together, the overall picture of the demimonde society can be easily understood. By comparing and contrasting the portrayal of the

heroines, along with the analysis of the character relations, the real essence of the institution of the geisha can be learnt. However, in addition to textual analysis, it is also indispensable to study about the life and works of the authors whose personal experiences and style of writing contribute greatly to the characterization of their protagonists. Moreover, it is also necessary to understand the socio-political fabric of the times when these novels were written. The developments on the political front in addition to the reading of the literature would together justify the true understanding of the status of the geisha with respect to men and women in the Japanese society.

Therefore, for the understanding of the institution of geisha in the late Meiji society, two renowned works by the time; *Udekuabe* (1916) and *Nigorie* (1895) are selected. Both these novels are written by the celebrated authors of those times who are well versed with the customs and the dynamics of the secret world of the demimonde in Tokyo. Novels *Udekurabe* was translated as 'Geisha in Rivalry' by Kurt Meissner and Ralph Friedrich and *Nigorie* as 'Troubled Waters' by Robert L. Danley. This chapter discusses the life and works of Higuchi Ichiyō and Nagai Kafū, the story synopsis with special reference to the characterization of the central characters.

3.2. Higuchi Ichiyō (1872-1896)

Higuchi Ichiyō was born in 1872, as Higuchi 'Natsuko' in Tokyo in the fifth year after the Meiji Restoration when Japan was on its path to modernization. Her father, Noriyoshi, was a low level bureaucrat of the Tokugawa shogunate, and perhaps because of this status, he had had bitter feelings for the old regime when the shogunate was overthrown in 1868. When the Meiji government was established, he became a minor official in the Tokyo prefectural government. Ichyō's immediate family consisted of her parents, two older brothers, and a younger sister. Fallen into hard times, Ichiyō's mother even took up a job of a nursemaid to sustain her family.

Ichiyō showed her intellectual abilities in her early years, and seeing this her father got her enrolled in a private school run by a Buddhist priest and later to *Seikai Gakkō*

in 1881. Since she grew up during the early years of Meiji, her mother, Taki thought it to be inappropriate for her daughter to acquire higher education for it could hurt her daughter's chances of finding a suitable match for marriage. Therefore, after completing formal education, she was sent to a famous poetry school in Tokyo, *Haginoya* which was run by poetess Nakajima Utako where she received lessons in poetry, which was considered a culturally appropriate activity for her status. Her dream during these years was to be able to give poetry lessons to others (Tanaka 1956). The *Haginoya* was a poetry school attended by girls from wealthy families of status which often made Ichiyō feel inferior to others but she tried very hard to impress others through her intellectual abilities and consequently, she won the first poetry contest she entered at *Haginoya*.

In 1887, her father lost his job and her older brother died of tuberculosis and shortly thereafter, and the other brother was disowned by the family. After trying numerous means to earn a living, and leading a life of stress and pain, in the year 1889, Noriyoshi also passed away when Ichiyō was seventeen years old. As the oldest of the remaining children, Ichiyō was forced to head the family and provide for her widowed mother and her fifteen year old sister. She joined *Haginoya* where she performed menial kitchen work that left her with no time to write poems. The opportunist Nakajima Utako did little to help her career advance in the literary field. Impressed by the debut as a writer of her genteel rival at *Haginoya* Miyake Kaho, whose original name was Ms. Tanabe, who received not only wide attention for her work but also considerable sum of money, Ichiyō shifted her focus from poetry to prose writing. To achieve her dream she sought a mentor who could train her in this field and help her launch her career as a writer.

With a desire to earn a living through royalties paid for writing novels, and sought out Nakarai Tōsui (1860-1926), a writer of the popular serials for the Asahi newspaper, to teach her how to write novels. Ichiyō was smitten by his charms and his appearance. She later writes her impression about Tōsui in her diary:

His greetings when we first met were friendly, but I was still such a novice at such encounters, that I felt my ears grow hot and my lips become dry, and I couldn't remember what I had intended to say. Totally incapable of speech, all I could do was to bow profusely. It embarrasses me when I think what an idiot I would have seemed to an outsider!

Mr. Nakarai must be about thirty. I realize it is unladylike for me to comment in detail about his figure and appearance, but I will set down my impressions exactly as they came to me. His coloring is excellent, and his features are composed. When he gave a little smile he really looked as if even a child of three would feel affection for him. All the same, he is most impressive, no doubt because he is considerably taller than average and well built."¹

In 1891, she assumed her pen name 'Ichiyō' prior to which she was known as 'Natsuko.' Tōsui agreed to be her mentor and advised her to write in the popular colloquial style rather than in classical Heian style which she had picked up from *Haginoya*. Tōsui agreed to check her drafts and following which Ichiyō's meetings with him increased and with each meeting she grew fonder of him. Tōsui cautioned her that his frequent meetings with him would give birth to gossips but Ichiyō paid no heed to it. In later years she published many works which established her identity as a writer in the literary world. She continued to write due to financial constraints. However, whatever little money she received for her story contributions to the *Bungakkai* during 1893 it wasn't enough for survival and she opened a cheap candy and sundry shop near Yoshiwara quarters. Though the shop did well initially, the Higuchi family ran into losses when a rival shop opened right opposite theirs. Forced to close the shop, Higuchis moved again, this time to a place famous for its drinking establishments. The experience of staying in these places and having been able to

¹ Translated excerpt of Ichiyō's diary from "Higuchi Ichiyō" in Keene, Donald. (1998). *Dawn to the West*, Columbia: Columbia University Press .P. 168

observe the life of the courtesans, barmaids etc provided as backdrops for her famous works like *Takekurabe*, *Nigorie* etc. Ichiyō died on November 23, 1896 of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-four, leaving behind four thousand classical waka poems and around twenty-one short stories (Danly 1981).

3.3. Ichiyō's Works

Her first work was published in *Musashino*, a journal that Nakarai Tōsui founded in 1892. The first story published was titled *Yamizakura*. In this work she described the romantic relationship between a boy and a girl where the girl develops feelings for him whereas the boy only thinks of her as his little sister. In most of her earlier stories Ichiyō's characters and plots revolved around one-sided love and tragedy. (Keene 1998). After seeing her talent as a writer, Tōsui agreed to introduce her to the big name in the literary circle, Ozaki koyo. However, before this meeting could materialize, Ichiyō politely declined this offer after hearing the rumors about her involvement with Tōsui from her friend from *Haginoya*, who also warned her to cut all ties with him to save her reputation. Upon hearing the gossip about Tōsui publically calling her his "wife", young Ichiyō decided to end her relationship with her mentor to safeguard her reputation. Tōsui later admitted to having said such a thing in front of his friends and agreed to end the relationship (Danly 1981). Perhaps inspired by her real life incident, Ichiyō wrote *Yuki no Hi* in 1893 where the characters bore resemblance to her mentor and herself. The theme revolved around the love the female protagonist develops for her teacher and decides to elope with him to Tokyo but is saddened by the pain she had caused to her aunt who opposed this relationship and resulted in her death. Here, too, the story is in the lines of secret love and tragedy (Keene 1998).

In 1894, Ichiyō wrote *Ōtsugomori*, which centers around the theft by the poverty stricken girl working in the house of a ruthless woman. The theft is apparently observed by the step son of the woman and he covers up for the girl by leaving a note saying he has 'borrowed' the money. And the girl manages to save her uncle

from a loan shark from the stolen money. The strong characterization and detailed account of the circumstances of the female protagonist can be attributed to Higuchi Ichiyo's own life, which was full of struggles due to poverty after the death of her father where she was under a strong pressure to write novels to earn a living, in the era when work opportunities for women were limited (Tanaka 1956). The pathetic condition of Ichiyō is narrated in her diary where, as the sole breadwinner of her family after the death of her father, she struggles to meet her ends meet:

“...I have been having a difficult time even to let my mother have the simplest of meals, and this is the greatest cause of worry for my sister and me. I have lost all hope in this world. What am I good for if I live on? All I think of is about my mother. And so, by sacrificing myself and by taking a great risk, I would like to go into speculation...”² (Tanaka 1956)

Danly (1981) states Ichiyō's *Ōtsugomori* carries influence of the famous Edo writer Ihara Saikaku in terms of style and structure of the story. However, it was after her short story *Takekurabe* in 1895 which was published in the January issue of the *Bungakkai* she gained attention in the literary field. It was for this masterpiece that she received praises from the established writers of the time; Mori Ōgai, Kōda Rohan and Saitō Ryokū. *Takekurabe* is set in the 'red light' area, Yoshiwara and the life of the children who grow up there. The story is about the adolescent love between the shy son of the priest Nobu and the younger sister of a courtesan, Midori. Both feel the love for each other but do not disclose them realizing that they are soon going to step into the world of adults, leaving behind the innocence of their childhood and both must move on their separate ways for they both belong to two different worlds in the same society.

² Translated by Tanaka (1956). Original text taken from Higuchi Ichiyō Zenshū IV, pp. 121-127.

Ichiyō wrote valuable stories like *Jūsanya* and *Nigorie* in 1895 before she died. In *Jūsanya*, the female protagonist is a mother of a son who is mentally tormented by her husband due to which she decides to leave him. Though she makes a decision to leave him, it is under the social pressure and persuasion of her parents that she decides to return to her husband's place, only to find her old lover on her way back who works as a rickshaw puller. Whereas, *Nigorie* portrays the life of a courtesan in a restaurant who is unable to forget her former customer who loses his business and fortune only to be nagged by his wife for not being able to provide for her and their little boy child. The courtesan, Oriki, pours her heart out about her painful life to a customer who she is impressed with and shares her agony about being in this profession. Both the stories portray the situation of the women in Meiji society and the struggles they faced living in the patriarchal set-up. Most of Ichiyō's women in her novels are depicted with great detail which enables the reader to understand the challenges and distress faced by the women of those times in which the stories are written.

Apart from her short stories, Ichiyō's diary is also valued high as a piece of literature. Written in the classical style, Ichiyō covers many aspects of her personal life and feelings from where the reader gets a glimpse of the characters she has portrayed in her novels. The diary contains references and mentions of western elements such as street lights, gas lamps, iron bridges, lighted signs, telegrams, handkerchiefs, and ribbons as Japan passed through the phase of "civilization and enlightenment" (*Bummei kaika*). Even though Japan was on the spree to westernize her, the lives of ordinary people like Ichiyō did not change much from the Edo period (Tanaka 1956).

The stories of Higuchi Ichiyō center on the women and the characterization of the women protagonists gives an insight to the reader about the feelings, sadness and the inability to break the norms of the society. However, with each story, the women protagonists become stronger and more vocal about their feelings and desires. Comparing her earlier works *Takekurabe* to *Nigorie* the reader sees the difference in

the nature of the characters. The Midori of the former hides her feelings and never lets out her love she feels for Nobu for she has compromised with her fate and knows she is destined to be a courtesan just like her elder sister. Whereas, Oriki goes a step further and voices her opinion about her life and expresses her desire to be able to free herself from her profession. Though she is not able to completely run away from the situation, however, she is vocal about her opinions.

However, Ichiyō's later novels *Ware Kara* and *Wakaremichi*, written towards the end of 1895, portray the female protagonists in as independent decision makers. *Ware Kara* strongly projects the female protagonist as a strong character, who challenges the social norms which permit a man to get away with infidelity whereas a woman has to abide by the old Confucian beliefs of filial piety and service to her husband. As a result of continuous suffocation in a bad marriage, she vents out her feelings in forms of affection that she develops for the houseboy, who later becomes known to her husband and she is thrown out of the house which she has inherited. Moreover, Ichiyō's last completed short story before her death, *Wakare michi* in 1896, beautifully portrays the relationship between a poor young boy and a seamstress who, tired of sewing and washing, decides to become a mistress of a wealthy man out of her own choice. Okyō, of Ichiyō's *Wakare michi* is introduced as an independent woman who makes a 'bold' decision to take up the 'indecent' profession of a mistress willingly despite being able to feed herself through her job as a seamstress. Okyō shows no regret in choosing to become somebody's mistress to be able to enjoy good life since she was tired of 'washing and sewing.'

It can be inferred here that perhaps with more confidence and a good reputation in the literary field, the heroines in Ichiyō's novels reflect the life of the author herself, who grew more confident and bold with her success as a writer. It can be interpreted that, towards the final years of Ichiyō's life, she grew stronger as a woman who was able to gain reputation in the 'respectable' profession contrary to the obvious 'work'

women of those times had to opt for; to become a courtesan or a mistress of a wealthy man.

Danly (1981) writes about Ichiyō's refusal to become a mistress when she was given this offer while running her shop in *Yoshiwara* which clearly indicates Ichiyō's boost in confidence as a writer when she was in a position to refuse such an offer even during acute financial conditions. Having being able to survive despite all odds reflects directly in her works as well, especially through the women protagonists in her stories. The portrayal of the 'bold' women protagonists in the last of her short stories can be interpreted as Ichiyō's reaction towards the various challenges women had to face and live with the bias created by the society which raised fingers on any women who raises a voice against oppression.

Both these novels reflect the flame of rebellion, where Ichiyō, through these characters voices her thoughts. No longer were the women in Ichiyō's novels timid, self-sacrificing and shy. Ichiyō's novels give an insight about the struggles and dilemmas of the women in the Meiji society. Ichiyō's novels carry a spark about the issues surrounding women, which were taken up by many women writers later and finally gave birth to feminist movements that took place in Japan, where the women refused to be treated subordinates to men and be brought up under the name of '*ryōsai kenbo*'. The era of enlightenment saw the rise of women who voices their opinions through formations of various groups like the *Seito* (Bluestocking) group, founded by a pioneering Japanese feminist, Hiratsuta Raicho (1886-1971) in the year 1911. Magazines like '*shufu no tomo*' '*jogaku zasshi*' came into circulation where women got a platform to share their opinions and connect to each other.

3.4. Higuchi Ichiyō's *Nigorie*

The short story *Nigorie* was published in the *Bungeikurabu* magazine in 1895 in the Meiji period. The story is set in the downtown area of Edo (presently in the old eastern Tokyo). The main character Oriki is the attraction of a drinking establishment

called Kikunoi where she works as a waitress-cum-prostitute (*Shakufu* in the Japanese language) who also dances, sings and plays *shamisen* to entertain her customers, more aptly a courtesan. Driven into this profession due to poverty, she is introduced as confident woman who knows the tricks of the trade and is an object of envy for her fellow courtesans in the Kikunoi house. She is famous despite her unladylike behavior at times like consuming excess alcohol. The story opens in a scene where her fellow courtesans, all masked behind heavy white make-up of thick layered powder and red crimson lips calling out for the potential customers at the Kikunoi doorstep. These women are described as “man eating dog than a courtesan” (Danly 1981).

The story slowly unfolds with the introduction of Yūki Tomonosuke who is ‘smartly dressed, complete with a bowler hat.’ Yūki asks about the whereabouts of Oriki and the initially reluctant Oriki lets out her feelings to him and reveals her love for Genshichi, the forlorn lover who lost his fortune on his frequent visits to Kikunoi. Once a rich bedding dealer Genshichi was reduced to a pauper and yet he is unable to stop himself from his desire to see Oriki. On the other hand, Genshichi is taunted by his wife, Ohatsu who had to take up menial jobs to feed the family including their only son, Takichi. All attempts made by Ohatsu to make her husband take responsibility for the house and concentrate on his work fall on deaf ears. Well aware of the poor conditions of Genshichi’s house, Oriki buys a piece of rice cake for his son Takichi, who often calls her *Oni* (demon), accepts it and shows it to his mother in excitement. The already distressed Ohatsu loses her control and throws the rice cake away which triggers a heated argument between her and Genshichi resulting Ohatsu walking out on him along with their only son. The next scene of the story is the discovery of two dead bodies in a temple where rumors suggested Genshichi had committed *Seppuku*³ after killing Oriki.

³ A Japanese suicide ritual by disembowelment, by piecing a sword in the abdomen and slicing it in left to right motion. Originally performed by the *samurai* to save honor and pride rather than being killed in the hands of the enemies, later came to be viewed as a heroic way of committing suicide.

Like most of Ichiyō's works, *Nigorie* gives an insight into the social structure of the Meiji period and especially about the lives of the commoners living in the old Edo. The story is written in the pre-modern classical style where story ends with a *Shinju* (double suicide of lovers) which was a famous theme in the Edo period and especially in the plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon. However, the double suicide is done for union after death by lovers whereas, the *Shinju* is a 'forced' one on Oriki where she is apparently killed by Genshichi after he commits *Seppuku*. (Fujisawa 1993). The titles of all the works of Ichiyō are known to be taken from some classical work and *Nigorie* is no exception as it is said to be taken from some classical Waka. The title could also have Buddhist influence and suggest the presence of Oriki in the 'muddy' business as a lotus exists in the dirty swamp. The term *Nigoru* in Japanese means 'dirty', 'muddy' or 'troubled' as well, therefore the 'troubled relationships' portrayed in the story also justify the title (Aichi 1996).

Though the writing style is classical in nature the theme has a modern touch through which Ichiyō explores the realization of the 'self.' Through her works Ichiyō tries to throw light on the plight of women in the male-dominated society and in *Nigorie* she does so through Oriki (Ogihara 2000). The main protagonist Oriki is said to have been modeled after a courtesan who often sought Ichiyō's help in writing love letters to her patrons when Higuchis shifted to Maruyama-Fukuyama district. Ichiyō had lived in close contact with the second class courtesans where she could observe their lives and customs. Ichiyō's close contact with the demimonde culture provided for the setting of *Nigorie*. Like Oriki the courtesans of the inferior district longed to get married or cling to patron who would take them out of the dirty business they were in. Women like Oriki in the Meiji period had little choice of freedom where a woman could either be a wife and a mother or be a 'professional woman' like her. The 'self' of the woman was stifled and lost in the roles she was expected to play.

As the story unfolds, the reader is sympathetic towards the heroine Oriki, yet she does not come across as a weak or oppressed woman. Oriki is depicted as a strong

woman who knows her strengths; her beauty and charms that entices her customers. Though she is unhappy with her profession, she is apparently very good at it. She doesn't let her emotions overpower her decisions which are evident from the fact that she tries to forget her former patron and lover Genshichi and looks up to Yūki as a desirable customer. Being a 'pleasure woman' Oriki knows age old tricks like asking for a photograph in order to display concern and affection towards the customer; a practice which was followed in the 'world of flower and willow.' Oriki's professionalism is further portrayed in a scene where she hides Yūki's pair of shoes and makes him spend a night with her at Kikunoi (Tomatsu 1998). Apart from being a desirable customer, Yūki plays an important role in the story, of that of a sympathizer. Unlike most of the customers, he tries to find out Oriki's past and in return Oriki also starts to narrate her past to him. She starts giving him accounts of how her grand-father and father suffered a bad fate and how she too was destined to suffer. She even shares her agony of being hated by her lover's little son who calls her 'demon' and how she hated to be in this profession. Even though there is a glimpse of 'professionalism' in Oriki's actions in getting close to Yūki, somewhere she sees him as somebody who would take her out of this 'dirty businesses' and marry her.

Ota Michie (2002) suggests Yūki was seen as a potential savior by Oriki who looked smart in his western style hat, popular in the Meiji period when western influence had started seeping into Japan, and was 'different' from other men she encountered every day. Though little is revealed about Yūki himself in the story, he seemed to have been well accustomed to the ways of the 'pleasure districts' the way he comfortably introduced himself saying he was a 'government official' during his first visit during daytime on a working day. He quickly covers it up when this was pointed out by one of the girls at Kikunoi. Yūki is smart, good looking and impressive and Oriki is taken to his charms much like Ichiyō was mesmerized by her mentor, Tōsui's personality. There is much evidence in Ichiyō's diary that the character of Yūki is modeled after Tōsui (Hashimoto 1989).

3.5. Nagai Kafū (1879- 1959)

Kafū was born on December 3, 1879 in the Koishikawa district of Tokyo as 'Nagai Sōkichi. Though he called himself the true son of Edo (*Eddoko*), Kafū's parents were originally from a province called Owari. Kafū was born as a son of Nagai Kigen, a wealthy landowner, and Tsune, the daughter of Washizu Kodō, a distinguished Confucian scholar. Though his parents adhered to strict Confucian principles, Kafū was raised in a relatively cool emotional environment (Lewell 1993). Educated in the west, Kafū's father believed in the material progress and was truly the man of the Enlightened Japan:

My father first studied Western learning at the Fukuzawa School in Shinzenia, and continued these studies in America in 1871. After his return to Japan he became an official. For a while he was quite a worshiper of the West. Along about the time when I was born (in 1879) my late father installed a table and chairs in our ten-mat sitting room, and in winter this room was heated by a coal stove. Every day, after my father returned home from the office, he would remove the coat of his western style suit, and change to a maroon smoking jacket. He smoked a bit, English pipe when he was reading. If it rained he would go to work in boots with wooden soles over his shoes. I frequently had occasion to reflect, in my childish way, on what a large number of peculiar objects my father owned.⁴

Kafū grew up in the comparatively 'western' environment compared to many of his counterparts in Japan. Kafū's father pursued a highly successful career at the Ministry of Education, where he was engaged in drafting the Imperial Rescript of 1890. Though Kafū's father was a believer in the Confucian values, Kafū rejected those and despised the modern world. Even in high school, Kafū spent most of his time reading pornographic literature from the Edo period. By the time Kafū turned

⁴ Translated excerpt of the original writing by Kafū from Keene, Donald, (1998), "Nagai Kafū" in *Dawn to the West*, Columbia: Columbia University Press. P.388.

eighteen he started frequenting the *Yoshiwara* pleasure quarters in Tokyo. Soon, Kafū started writing stories at the bank of River Sumida.

After graduating from the school at the age of eighteen, he failed in the entrance examination for the prestigious First Higher School, famous as an institution that produced famous bureaucrats, lawyers, and businessmen as well as scholars. Kafū joined his father in Shanghai who was there as branch manager of the Japan Steamship Company. By the end of 1897, he joined the Chinese Language Department of the Tokyo Foreign Language School (Iriye 2000:ix). As Kafū's love for the Edo culture intensified, he worked as an apprentice to a teller of *rakugo*⁵ comic stories and later joined the Kabuki Theatre as an apprentice to the chief playwright, Fukuchi Ochi (Lewell 1993). He also took *shakuhachi* (bamboo flute) and *Shamisen* lessons.

Kafū was deeply impressed with the writings of the French writers Zola and Maupassant, who was pretty much in vogue in Japan those days. Kafū read from the available translations and learnt French in the evening from the Gyōsei High School to be able to read the French works in original. However, by the time Kafū turned twenty-three in 1903, through the good offices of his father, he was sent to the United States of America where he started writing short stories which later compiled into 'American Stories' (*Amerika Monogatari*). When Kafū expressed his desire to visit France, it was again, his father who got him transferred to France. However, after spending less than an year in France, Kafū resigned from his job and returned to Japan and never went abroad again (Iriye 2000:xiii).

Kafū was labeled a 'naturalist' before his departure from Japan, however Kafū's reputation as an 'anti-naturalist' was established after his *Amerika Monogatari* was published and some of the works which were later compiled as *Furansu Monogatari* were doing the rounds in the literary field. The autobiographical writers or the

⁵ Traditional Japanese verbal form of entertainment where the narrator uses only a paper fan as a prop and without standing up from his seat, depicts the entire comical story.

'naturalists' of Japan were becoming out of vogue and Kafū found himself in a strong position in the *bundan* (literary circles). It was after his return, Kafū was drawn to the culture of the demimonde and wrote many memorable works on it. He married twice, once to a famous geisha. The first wife was divorced after a few weeks of his father's death in 1913 and married Uchida Yae, the second one in 1914, who was a famous dancer and a Shimbashi geisha under the name Yaeji. Kafū was apparently with her in Hakone while his father was on the death bed (Seidensticker 1965:54). Nevertheless, it was this attraction towards the demimonde culture of old Japan which he viewed as the legacies of old Japan, that he wrote many of his works on the lives of geisha, prostitutes and waitresses. Kafū took to liking of old Japanese traditions which he had despised in his younger days. His life came a full circle in his later works that clearly reflect the nostalgia of a son of Edo who longed for the old traditions and customs which were swept away in the age of westernization.

Japan's transition into the Taishō era in 1912 marked the "withdrawal" period of Kafū when he retired from important positions; as the Editor of *Mita Bungaku* (Mita Literature) and instructor of French at *Keiō Gijuku* (later Keiō University) in 1916. His retirement from these positions pushed him into the state of recluse where his relations with *Bundan* strained leading to estrangement from all his acquaintances in the *Bundan* (Seidensticker 1965:53). However, it was during this time, that he wrote *Udekurabe* and *Okamezasa* which explored the themes of the demimonde. Kafū was now painted as a selective recluse who withdrew himself from everybody and was only but sought endless solace in the demimonde where he looked forward to the many 'pleasures' of life. And it was during this period of recluse that Kafū wrote many works related to the world of the demimonde which reflect his nostalgia for the Edo culture and withdrew himself from the limelight of the Meiji enlightenment. Snyder (2000) further notes the central of most of Kafū's works, the 'desire' was a result of Kafū's fascination with the French literature where desire was 'killed upon fulfillment' and perhaps it could be Kafū's inability to deal with the women must have strengthened this desire. So much so that even when he thought he found the

love of his life in a girl in America, he dreaded marriage and pulled himself back (Keene 1998: 402)

On the personal front, Kafū remained secluded for the most part of his life and pretty indifferent towards his parents. In early 1920s, combined with the chronic Dyspepsia Kafū slowly went into the world of complete isolation and silence. And it is only in the early 1930s that Kafū was able to write something comparable to his highly acclaimed *Udekurabe* and *Okamezasa*. It was his work *Tsuyu no Atosaki* (During the Rains) which is regarded one of his finest works. On the personal front he remained aloof from his family and just as he did not attend his father's funeral, due to bitterness over property issues with his brother, he grieved alone but could not attend his mother's funeral as well. In 1940s, he refused to go to a nephew's funeral fearing he might encounter his brother there. Kafū adopted son of his cousin in the war years who was after Kafū's money and though Kafū wanted to disown him he was not allowed to do so. This resulted in his foster son inheriting his entire estate in 1959. (Seidensticker 1965). Finally, Kafū who spent his live as a hedonist, lived as a recluse due to dyspepsia and failed relationships, he died alone in 1959 leaving behind many valuable works.

3.6. Kafū's Works

Kafū is known as an aestheticist who openly extolled the beauty of the female body much to the admiration of his fellow aestheticists. His works, though were primarily based on the old pleasure quarters, his writings were not sensual in nature (Powell 1983). Kafū always believed in presenting facts as it is without any falsification and with this thought he encouraged beginning writers to present their work as faithfully as possible after making careful observations; an advise which he strictly followed himself as well (Ueda 1976).

Kafū's literary career had started very early, when he wrote some stories sitting on the bank of River Sumida in Tokyo. However, those stories did not get published.

His oldest work *Oboroyo* (Misty night), written in 1899 was on the geisha and the story consists mainly on the conversations between them. The story centered on the bitter feeling of a geisha who was sold to the *Yoshiwara* brothel in childhood is asked to give up her profession by her mother who now runs a successful shop. The mother, fearing her reputation on customers after learning that her daughter is a geisha tries to persuade her daughter but to no avail. In 1901, Kafū published his work *Sayo Chidori* (Night Plovers) where a prostitute returns to her home after her ten year contract expires. Contrary to her father's wishes, that she gets married to a man who can handle their farm business, she is unable to adjust to the new circumstances. Finally, she returns to *Yoshiwara*. The theme is a bold one where a prostitute is portrayed as a woman who enjoys her profession. Kafū's keen interest in French literature encouraged him to learn French and soon the influence of Zola started showing in his own works. By 1902, he started to translate Zola's essays and got some of it published as well. His first two novels, *Yahin* (Ambition) and *Jigoku no hana* (The Flowers of Hell) appeared in 1902 as well which were clearly influenced by Zola. The following year, *Yume no Onna* (The Woman of the Dream) got published which was an account of a wasted life of a woman (Keene 1998).

A big turn came in his life when he left for America, the land of opportunities, as it was viewed by many Japanese who settled there as migrants with starry dreams in their eyes. The *Amerika monogatari* (Tales of America) was published in 1908 upon his return to Japan. The short stories written in America were primarily based on his own observation as an outsider who could not help but be amused by the freedom people enjoyed there. Most of the stories depicted the lives of the poor Japanese migrants who lived a poor life and suffered discriminations. While in America, where he stayed for about four years, Kafū always longed to go to France. His desire was fulfilled thanks to his father's influence; he got transferred to France (Lewell 1993). France was, according to Kafū, better than what he had imaged. While he was happy to be in the country of his dreams, his stay there was cut short and due to economic reasons he had to return to Japan. Some short stories based on his short

stay in France came out as a compilation called *Furansu Monogatari* (Tales of France). The content of these stories reflected the reluctance in him to return to Japan which he referred to as 'the land of Civilization'. In 1909, his *Furansu Monogatari* ran into trouble with the Japanese censor authorities on the grounds of immorality and was subsequently banned.

Once back in Japan, he continued his career as a writer and upon the recommendation of Natsume Sōseki, his novel *Reisho* (Sneers) was published in Asahi Newspaper in 1909-10, which appreciated the old Edo instead of the Meiji Tokyo. *Reisho* was predominantly an exploration of happiness. In the novel, the male protagonist Kōu is surrounded by gloom even in the situations where one should feel happy. The character Kōu believes that he cannot enjoy the beauty around him for everything beautiful must fade away one day. Kafū highlights the 'sorrow' embedded in the character's mind, the sorrow of being a human that is imperfect. It is this imperfection of the human that has continued even though the surroundings had always been so perfect and beautiful. The western influence on Kafū can be seen in this work as well, where Kafū compares the 'sorrow' of the orient with that of the occident.

Famous as a hedonist writer, Kafū undoubtedly had fascination for the prostitutes, geisha, waitresses who he found truly Japanese in nature where everything around him had been eclipsed under 'civilization'. After his return from his five year long stay in America and France, Kafū had painfully realized that his roots lie in the orient and he could not deny his identity no matter how much he tried (Ueda 1976: 38-39). In 1909, Kafū wrote *Sumidagawa* (The River Sumida), which is regarded as one of his masterpieces, which has the geisha as the central theme. The main characters in *Sumidagawa* are disinherited heir of a pawn shop, where the main protagonist earns a living by giving *haiku*⁶ lessons to amateurs where his widowed sister gives *shamisen* lessons, while her teenage son studies for an entrance exam

⁶ A type of Japanese poetry that contains 5-7-5 syllable pattern.

reluctantly for he longs to become a Kabuki actor, and his girlfriend is preparing to become a geisha. In 1916, Kafū's *Udekurabe* (Geisha in Rivalry) further unfolded the otherwise secret world of the geisha, their lives, rivalries, loneliness, tricks and jealousy among themselves over a desired patron. The theme centering tricks and deceit was again used in *Okamezasa* (Dwarf Bamboo), 1920 where all the characters in the story get some kind of set-back in the hands of the other. The novel not only focuses on the female protagonists who become geisha but also on the male clients who are ousted from the decent society.

Ueda (1976) argues that Kafū's writing style was clearly inspired by his fascination for the real life characters that were downtrodden but belonged to the real world where Kafū felt in tune with all the characters he portrayed in his works. His choice to write on the geisha and prostitutes is due to the fact that he considered them the true part of the life and society contrary to the 'respectable part' of the society which was ridden with falsehood. Kafū's narration of his novels had been from a standpoint of an observer not a participant where he empathizes with each of his characters.

Kafū's next important work was *Ame Shōshō* (Quiet Rain) in 1921 which was set in the nostalgic mood where the story contains reflections of the true self of the author, Kafū himself. His later works that appeared in 1931; *Ajisai* (Hydrangea) and *Tsuyu no Atosaki* (Before and After the Rains) were again about fidelity and the low class women of the demimonde in Tokyo. Then in 1931, *Hikage no Hana* (Flowers in the shade) was published which was based on the testimonies of the women and men who had spent their lives in the pleasure world of geisha and prostitutes. The celebrated author continue to roll out good work and with *Bokutō Kidan* (Strange Tale from the East of the River) in 1937, he created waves among the critiques who praised his writing style and for the portrayal of the longing for the past which was on the verge of disappearance. Apart from writing novels and stories, Kafū also started to maintain a diary which was titled *Danchōtei Nichijo* which he kept from 1917-1959 and kept in safety with him while his house and many of his collections

of books was bombed during the war. His personal diary was only published after the war was over. Kafū continued to write almost till his death. He died alone on April 30, 1959 (Keene 1998).

3.7. Nagai Kafū's *Udekurabe*

Udekurabe appeared in *Bunmei* magazine as a serialized full-length novel from August 16 until October 1917. The version that was published in *Bunmei* was thoroughly revised and following numerous deletions, three chapters were added to it. The second version appeared as a private version in 1917 and the following year the 'expurgated' commercial version appeared. The bolder version came out in 1949 however; it was still not the complete version. It was not until in 1956, the complete original text of 1917 saw the light of the day. Seidensticker (1965) notes that the difference between the 'bold' 1949 version and the 1956 version lies in the two passages in the latter which are a racy description of the advantages and disadvantages of the career of the geisha. The passage carries description of the brutal way the male protagonist Yoshioka exercises sexual prowess on the heroine, Komayo. Whereas, the former version portrays Komayo in an independent and enthusiastic manner, that exhibits a geisha with professionalism. The deletions could have been done as Kafū already had faced problems with the censors at the time of the publication of his *Furansu Monogatari*. It is in the edited version that Kafū sketches the character of Komayo in a manner that suited the theme; *Udekurabe* or Rivalry where the lead heroine is suited in the carefully constructed setting, plot, and the narrative where the entire 'rivalry' is for the money and desire in the demimonde world. Further, Kafū's fascination for the Edo demimonde culture is evident in the creation of the plot of the story where Komayo falls in love with the kabuki actor, Segawa Isshi (Snyder 2000). Kafū introduces many characters in the story; the geisha, patrons, characters that come and go where Kafū stages a drama through these various characters that play their role effectively.

Udekurabe revolves around a naive geisha Komayo of the upstart Shinbashi district, who is left devastated at the end in the hands of her male clients and her lover, a Kabuki actor. On the professional front, she is a popular geisha who is back in town to take up her old profession, of that of a geisha, after the death of her husband. Her decision reflects her realization of her declining age where she might find it difficult to find a suitable *danna* (patron), which is usually an ultimate goal for a geisha. Upon her return into the profession, she is in a kind of hurry to seek a 'suitable' man for herself.

In the opening part of the novel, Komayo comes across as sought-after geisha who is full of vigor and is happy, enjoying the status and popularity. At a Kabuki theatre, Komayo bumps into her former client, Yoshioka whom she had known before he had gone abroad for higher studies and the accidental meeting triggers all the emotions in Yoshioka's mind upon seeing her after a long spell. Yoshioka's nostalgia however, is not for the 'love' that he had for Komayo but for the image she represented, of the good old past. Snyder (2000) argues here, the attraction he felt for Komayo was not so much for her physical attractiveness for the breeze of nostalgia that she brought with her.

In those days, when he hadn't really known anything at all, geisha had seemed to him the most beautiful and enchanting of creatures. When a geisha said anything to him, it made him so unspeakably happy that he hardly knew what to do. Today, even if he wanted to, he could never return to such an innocent state of mind...As the music of the samisen orchestra reached him from the stage, Yoshioka recalled the day he had come to carouse in Shimbashi for the first time. Today all this appeared so funny to him that he involuntarily smiled. Nowadays reveling and carousing with geisha was an ordinary, everyday affair with him. As he thought of it, he had the strange feeling of somewhat ashamed at how shrewd and calculating he had become in everything, including his sex life. Even in such matters, he told

himself, he had been too clever and cunning. Somehow, without realizing it, he had become too exacting in all the details. Now, thinking how much he regretted this, he had the feeling that he had recognized himself for the first time. There seemed to be no doubt that it was true (Meissner 1963: 15)

As can be derived from above, the chance meeting with Komayo took him back to the times when he was innocent and not as calculative as he had become now. With those innocent memories, Yoshioka wished to re-live those moments with Komayo. And in the fit of emotions, Yoshioka proposes to be her *danna*, but Komayo refuses him for her newfound love in the Kabuki actor, Segawa Isshi. Komayo's refusal comes as a blow to Yoshioka's ego who seeks 'revenge' on Komayo by patronizing another geisha. Here, again, Yoshioka's present 'calculative' persona overpowers him and he seeks to humiliate Komayo by buying another geisha. It is this sense of 'revenge' that drives him to an extreme of patronizing Kikuchiyo, a geisha who envied Komayo. In the fit of rage, upon hearing the gossip while watching Komayo's performance in the theatre about her alleged love affair with Segawa, Yoshioka instantly makes his mind, there and then, to buy another geisha. And while he is looking for the 'potential' geisha he would like to have he wished to have them all, all the geisha his eyes fell upon. Yoshioka succeeds in getting the geisha as he desired. Whereas, Komayo still lives in the illusion of love which she enjoys not for so long.

Segawa Isshi, another main character, is introduced as a soft character to who Komayo takes liking to. Here Snyder (2000) points out Kafū's characterization of Komayo as a geisha who falls for the Kabuki actor, much similar to the affair between the women in the demimonde with the *iro-otoko*, the Edo period dandies of the pleasure quarters. The theme of the novels bears traces of Kafū's nostalgia with the demimonde literature of the Edo period which he had taken liking to. Segawa Isshi comes across as a famous actor, the association with which helps Komayo build

her reputation. The very thought of her popularity being influenced due to her alliance with Segawa points at the 'professional' side of Komayo as a geisha. However, as the various illicit dramas and plots that follow throughout the novel, mainly between these characters together with the rivalries that appear within the geisha world over 'desirable' patrons add an interesting dimension to the story. Towards the end of the story, Segawa dumps Komayo rather brutally for a rich widow, with whom even his step mother has no objection to marrying her son, Segawa. The whole novel ends with the heroine being wretched and forlorn; however, Kafū adds a fairy tale ending to the novel as Komayo inherits the geisha house when the mother of the geisha house-*Obanaya* dies and her old husband hands over the business to her.

In *Udekurabe*, most of the characters are full of manipulations and rivalries thereby using others or being used by other. Even the minor characters, like Umibōzu, the sea monster, who comes across as a monster of desire who has no qualms about seducing reluctant geisha, is effective in show-casing the life of an aging geisha Komayo who has no choice but to accept his patronage. Many characters introduced in the novel are in the mid-fifties who are symbolic of nostalgia of Edo compared to the fresh and naive Komayo. Kafū presents the world of geisha which is full of deceit and jealousy although all these emotions are aroused within the strictly regulated norms of the standard geisha world, full of specific formalities, expectation, sophistication, and obligations.

Chapter 4

Status of Geisha:

Through the perspective of gender

Historically, ancient Chinese texts suggest Japan was ruled by a woman empress and the society was matriarchal. The imperial line headed by the mythological figure still continues till today in Japan. During the Nara period (710-794), women enjoyed equal political rights and influence. Subsequently, the Heian period witnessed the emergence of women writers where women as writers from aristocracy like Murasaki Shikibu carved a niche for themselves and exhibited brilliance in learning and scholarship (Khanna 2002). However, the rise of military generals militarization in the later years slowly eroded women's writings. Further, in the Edo period, with the feudal system strengthened combined with the neo-Confucian principles professed by the Chinese scholar Chu Hsi (1130-1200), women lost their position to men in the age of swordsmanship which restricted their freedom. The strict feudal structure forced them to an inferior position and made them exist as only support structures in the hierarchy. Slowly Japan witnessed the society change from a matriarchal to a patriarchal one, where by the end of Heian period the society practiced *Yomeirikon* (where the bride lives with the groom's family after marriage) instead of the

prevalent system of *Tsumadoikon* or *Kayoikon*¹. In the Heian period, polygamy was not unusual and the husband-wife relations were based on very fluid factors. The factors that established her as a wife among the many women he had were based on the number of worthy children she bore, her father's influence, her own education and intelligence. Based upon all these factors coupled by the opinions of the popular courts, the woman was granted the status of that of a wife. Whereas, the wife in such an alliance had the freedom to judge the merits of her husband and leave him at her will and seek to live with a man wealthier or higher in ranks. It was during the Heian period when the Fujiwara clans rose to power and established maternal relations with the imperial house by grooming their daughters in arts such as poetry, music, literature, sewing and incense making. The little girls of the Fujiwara were groomed to become the desirable wives since childhood. Those who were born into lower ranks strived to marry their daughters into the Fujiwara family (Schalow 1996).

During the Edo period, women were reduced to inferior objects in the hands of men. The Confucian principles, which were biased towards the women, worked as a catalyst to further push them out of the feudal social order. The Confucian principles accepted the position of the woman inferior to that of a man where her primary role was to serve her husband as wife, serve her son as a mother. A woman is respected only when she becomes a wife or a mother. Under the same principle of loyalty which was expected from the women, they started to be used as pawns and married off to men of rank to establish social ties. Confucianism further fanned the biased social norms which required the women to be devoted and loyal to her husband contrary to whatever treatment she receives in the hands of her husband (Reichauer 1997). Under the Tokugawa Shogunate, the society witnessed further downfall of women, especially of the Samurai class who were made the targets of the Neo-Confucianism, developed by the Chinese thinker Chu Hsi (1130-1200). The women were used only as "borrowed wombs" to produce male heirs or accept a male heir

¹ Tsumadoikon or Kayoikon was a widely practiced form of marriage till the Heian period where the groom visited the woman's house at nights and left in the morning. When the visits stopped it was taken as 'divorce'.

produced by a concubine. Clearly, the feudal society practiced *danson johi* “respect the male, despise the female.” (Sievers 1983).

With the Tokugawa regime gaining root in the early seventeenth century, and women now out of the feudal order, another group of women emerged strongly in the social scene; the women entertainers. As discussed in Chapter 2, though the conventional type of women entertainers, the prostitutes had been there much earlier than the Tokugawa period, due to the setting up of legal brothels that prostitution became a legalized institution in this period. The women were now clearly divided into two groups; the wife/ mother and the entertainer. With the oppression of the wife/ mother at home, who was confined to domestic responsibilities only, the women entertainers; prostitutes, courtesans and geisha were used to satisfy carnal desires of the Samurai who basked in the glory of swordsmanship. The woman entertainers worked in the brothels and had little chance of escape. These highly organized brothels were based on a hierarchical structure where the ‘pleasure women’ rose in ranks, the significance of which kept on changing with the passage to time.

The fall of the Tokugawa regime and the Meiji Restoration in 1868 brought about a drastic change in the political fabric where Japan chose the path of ‘enlightenment’ and western influences were welcomed to seep into Japan. The Meiji period holds a very important significance in the history of Japan when, engaged in wars with China and Russia on one hand, Japan was on a path to modernization. The new Japan was torn between nationalism and westernization. While westernization was viewed as a sole way to achieving economic success, it also appeared as a threat to the traditional culture of Japan. It was Confucianism with which Japan chose to associate herself to create a national identity. The adoption of Confucian principles led to the enforcement of a patriarchal family structure where women ideal role was to be a good wife, mother and homemaker (Eckert 2003).

However, even during the era of ‘enlightenment’, the status of women didn’t improve as drastically and her role in the society: as a wife or a mother, remained the same. On the other hand, the traditional set up of the pleasure quarter *Yoshiwara* also crumbled and many unlicensed brothels mushroomed in various parts in Tokyo. As established in Chapter 2, during the Meiji era, the margin between a courtesan, geisha and a common prostitute blurred and a new class of women entertainers emerged. This new type of entertainer was beautiful, attractive, who would not only entertain her clients by singing, dancing, playing *shamisen* but also poured saké for them and satisfied their carnal desires as well. Therefore, the purist ‘geisha’ did not exist anymore and this new form of entertainers, under the generic name ‘geisha’ continued to entertain men during the Meiji period.

On the other hand, as a mother, a woman’s role was primarily procreation and rearing of her children. The traditional role of a Japanese woman continued to be gendered; being the mistress of her house, she looked after the household work and her children whereas, men enjoyed high socio-economic status. Hence, any disobedience to the husband in any form was synonymous to committing a sin. In a social order where the woman as a wife and the women as entertainers, (henceforth ‘geisha’), have been oppressed, it is difficult to define the actual status of the wife/ mother in respect to the geisha.

With the help of textual analysis based on the three major relationships; the wife and the husband, the geisha and the patron, the geisha vs. the wife as portrayed in two popular novels of the times; *Udekurabe* (1916) by Nagai Kafū and *Nigorie* (1895) by Higuchi Ichiyō. This study is an attempt to establish the status of geisha in the Meiji society. The dynamics of relationships between the protagonists will help in clearer and deeper understanding of the complex gendered social order, or more aptly the gender order where the individuals in a society carry out their respective roles.

4.1. Gender Order

The word 'Gender' is a "social arrangement, and every individual's gender is built into the social order. Gender consists in a pattern of relations that develops over time to define male and female, masculinity and femininity, simultaneously structuring and regulating people's relation to society." (Eckert 2003: 32). Hence, the word 'gender' is a social phenomenon than a biological one where the individual's gender is conditioned according to the existing social set-up. Whereas the 'gender order' is defined by Imelda Whelehan and Jane Pilcher (2004) "as a patterned system of ideological and material practices, performed by individuals in a society, through which power relations between women and men are made, and remade, as meaningful. It is through the gender order of a society that forms or codes of masculinities and feminists are created and recreated, and relations between them are organized." According to the pioneer, who developed the concept of gender order, Jill Matthews (1984), "the idea of the gender order gives recognition to the fact that every known society distinguishes between women and men, while allowing for variations in the nature of the distinctions drawn" whereas, it is not logically necessary that gender orders should be hierarchical, in equitable or oppressive. In other words, a gender order may not necessarily be patriarchal only. Therefore, the gender order can be understood as a social order whereby men and women are placed in the society governed by various factors creating a power relation.

With the above stated understanding of the gender order, the position of the central characters, both men and women in both the novels, in the existing social framework can be interpreted with special reference to the geisha in the Meiji society.

4.2. The women protagonists

The female protagonist of *Nigorie*, Oriki, is a professional 'shakufu' or a 'sake-pouring woman' working in a newly established drinking establishment near the *Yoshiwara* district. Oriki, who pours sake for her customers, entertains her clients by

singing, dancing and light-hearted conversations and can be classified under the generic term 'geisha,' though she is not one in the purist sense. However by understanding the 'nature of her profession' where she is a woman of arts, she fits into the definition of a 'geisha' already established in Chapter 2. Oriki belongs to the lot of the women entertainers who are the successors of the purist geisha of the pre-Meiji period but took to prostitution due to the decline of the *Yoshiwara* and with the emergence of new and upstart geisha districts in Tokyo (Tomatsu 1991). On the other hand, Komayo, the main character of the novel, *Udekurabe* is a geisha from *Shimbashi*, the upstart district of Tokyo which gained popularity among the rich and the influential men after the decline of the traditional *Yoshiwara* of the old city of Edo. Hence, both Oriki and Komayo are the 'geisha' from Tokyo who are in a profession of entertaining clients; where one belongs to the old district which has lost its glory and the other from the upstart geisha district. However, their life styles, clientage and the course of their lives bear some differences but nevertheless, their feelings and anxiety is beautifully painted by the writers in the novels concerned. Both the stories revolve on the same platform where the male characters that come into their lives also bear similarities not only in their appearances, which bear western influences, but also in their overall mentality and approach towards these women.

Both the 'clients' of the geisha in the selected novels, Yūki in *Nigorie* and Yoshioka in *Udekurabe* ,are depicted with a shade of 'westernization' in their appearance and interestingly both are somewhat 'grey' characters, moreover both are single and have enough money to enjoy the pleasures of life! On the other hand, Genshichi is a lover of Oriki but as a husband, he is cruel to his wife. Similarly, Komayo's lover, Segawa Isshi is initially good to her but later dumps her as he gets tired of her and moves on in seeking company of another geisha. The similarities in the fates of both the female characters and the pattern of relationships of the male and female characters present a very organized social fabric where the heroines struggle for their survival.

4.3. The wife and the Husband

The ancient Japanese literary works, *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* (*Taketori Monogatari* written in ninth century; translated in 1956) and *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari* written in eleventh century; translated in 1925-33) have portrayed Japanese women as maidens, who are pure and innocent. The modern works of Higuchi Ichiyo's "Growing Up" (*Takekurabe*, written in 1895-96; translated in 1956) focuses on the young innocent girl who is destined to become a courtesan just like her sister. Nobel laureate Kawabata Yasunari's women protagonists in "*The Izu Dancer*" (*Izu no Odoriko* written in 1926; translated in 1955) and *Snow Country* (*Yukiguni* written in 1937; translated in 1956) are always 'pure' and innocent. The women protagonist in *The Makioka Sisters* (*Sasameyuki*, 1943-48; translated in 1957) is naive and shy, so much that she unable "to answer phone call from a man she does not know well."

In literature, the image of a 'good wife' is of a woman who is submissive and not aggressive, someone who doesn't challenge the decisions of her husband. Looking at ancient literature, *Records of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki*, written in 710; translated in 1882), the first attempt of procreation of Japan fails because the Goddess speaks before the God does. Contrary to the submissive image of a wife in the Japanese society, virtues of self-sacrifice, perseverance, devotion to husband is associated with a wife. Wives in *The Gossamer Years* (*Kagero Nikki* written in tenth century; translated in 1955) and later in Chikamatsu Monzaemon's *Love Suicide at Amijima* (*Shinjūten no Amijima*, written in 1720; translated in 1953) are the ever-enduring and sacrificing to the extent they compromise with the agony they face seeing their husbands with the 'other woman'. Higuchi Ichiyo's "The Thirteenth Night" (*Jūsanya*, written in 1895; 1960-61) is also a modern literary work where the loneliness and pathos of a wife is beautifully portrayed. (Ueda 1986)

4.3.1. The Traditional Role

Not only in literature, traditionally, a Japanese wife always had a fixed area of domain; her household. The territory of a wife is only her house and she is not expected to keep any information regarding her husband's public life. The domain of the wife is only within the four walls of her house or the 'Ie,' which roughly translates into the word 'family'- which is a group of individuals living together. Here the 'Ie' includes all the members of the 'branch families' where the younger sons of the family split from the 'main family' and form a new 'Ie.' The eldest son is the head of the family and he is succeeded to the family property and family business. Regarded as the by-product of feudal social structure, the system is clearly patriarchal in nature, which is based on the Confucian norms of hierarchy and filial piety; where a woman as a daughter obeys her father, as a wife she obeys her husband and as a mother she obeys her son in old age (Goodman and Refsing 1992). The daughters of the 'Ie' are inessential to the family and are put to use for taking care of household chores. The wife of the house head takes care of petty financial decisions only after getting her husband's approval. In this way, the 'Ie' system has been a major reason for the low status of the women in the Japanese household (Fukutake 1982).

Not only among the urban, but in the agrarian families too, women had been treated badly. In pre-war villages, under the strong patriarchal system women; as daughters and wives had no say in the household and no rights in the property. The woman was not only dominated by her husband but also by her in-laws and the older members of the extended families who often stayed together to earn a living through tilling land. The agrarian families had no access to education and even in the age of 'enlightenment' of the Meiji period, the social structure changed little over the period for education was not a requirement on the fields. The women contributed equally on the fields but required to adhere to the orders given out by the in-laws. Therefore, it is apt to comment here, that in this case it is not the male dominating the female but a woman dominating another woman. The gender discrimination exists; however, it is

the 'rank' which played a major role. Therefore, a woman suffered double oppression; as a wife and as a daughter-in-law (Hane 1982). The lines below from *Udekurabe* clearly reflect the status of the women in a house; that is apart from listening to whatever her husband says; she is lower than her mother-in-law. It is interesting to note, that a bride must obey the mother-in-law, another woman. Here, in a relationship between the mother-in-law, the husband and his wife, the status of the wife is undoubtedly the lowest.

But listen, a wife who doesn't pay attention to her mother-in-law is a wife who won't pay attention to her husband either. You have to think about such matters apart from love (Meissner 1963:123).

Similarly, the fate of the 'wife' portrayed in *Nigorie* is not more different either. In *Nigorie*, Genshichi's wife accuses her husband of having wasted all his money on Oriki and compelling her and their little son to live a life of misery and poverty. Nevertheless, just like Oriki, Ohatsu also suffers in the hands of a man, her husband who leaves her despite her pleas that she has no one to fall back to (Tomatsu 1991). Responsible for all the pain caused to Ohatsu, she in turn tries to encourage her husband to gather courage, achieve social standing once again, and after which he can again, get any woman he wants! Clearly, for a Japanese wife, her husband's alliances with 'other women' are not viewed as a threat to her married life and moreover, she accepts the idea that for her husband's social standing in the society it is necessary to keep the 'other women' besides her.

Be a man, Genshichi, and get over it! All you need to do is make some money, and you can have any woman you want, Komurasaki, Agemaki-not to mention Oriki. You can build her a house in the country. Wouldn't that be nice? So stop pining away (Danly 1981:229)

It can be noted here that a man in the Japanese society could develop a broader social and sexual life and had almost no responsibility towards the household. A man could keep mistresses, concubines or frequent the pleasure quarters where they could be entertained in theatres, restaurants by women of artistic talents in dance and singing. These women entertainers were professionals and catered to their customers from various economic backgrounds. Therefore, social life only existed for men where women were left to be oppressed and exploited. Marriage was only for procreation and continuation of the family which was based on the hereditary system. Therefore, marriage, though, considered compulsory was only a social obligation to produce heirs and maintain bloodline. (Tsuda and Matsuda 1970).

4.3.2. Women during the Enlightenment period

Later, in the age of “*Bunmei Kaika*” or enlightenment, the intellectuals of the Meiji Japan, argued on the women’s suffrages. Intelligentsia carried out discourses on women rights which ranged from granting political and social rights while others believed in improving the education beyond the ‘feminine’ culinary skills. Caught in the zeal for westernization, the Meiji policy makers of the 1870s did little in the name of making policies for the upliftment of women. In 1874, *Meirokusha* or the Meiji Six Society was created which consisted of the group of pioneers in the field of Western Studies. The *Meiroku Zasshi*, a magazine published the Society carried articles reflecting the existing social realities through the views of the intellect of the Meiji era:

...If you ask what these rights and obligations are, they may be described as the paths of mutual assistance and mutual protection. That is, the husband has the right to demand assistance from the wife while he shoulders the obligation to protect her. And, conversely, the wife has the right to demand protection from the husband while she bears the obligation to assist him. Unless the marriage is strictly according to these principles, it cannot be

recognized as human marriage. Looking at marriage customs in our country today, the husband treats the wife as he pleases, and there is still no national legislation [protecting the wife] against arbitrary divorce by the husband simply because she does not please him. Since husbands and wives cannot mutually honor their rights and obligation and since, even though persons are husbands and wives in the name, they are far from such in actuality. I would affirm that our country has not yet established the fundamental of human morals...”
(Braisted 1976:pp. 104-105)²

The above excerpt by Mori Arinori reflects the social Meiji scenario where the women has no right to question her husband and has no choice even by law to break away from a bad marriage. Not only socially and politically, the ‘wife’ is clearly a non-entity in the society which in turn reflects in the Meiji literature as well. The fact that both Komayo and Oriki never talked about their mothers testify the point that a woman had no significance for the members of the household for whom she toils for day and night. Both the heroines of the respective novels, though reluctant in revealing their past to their customers when asked, open their hearts out to them. However, in their conversations, they only mention about their poor backgrounds and the financial condition of their father. Therefore, a woman as a mother doesn’t receive a due acknowledgment from her children for her loyalty and sacrifices.

Mori Arinori further elaborates on the husband-wife relations of ‘enlightened’ Japan in part three of the same article in the *Meiroke zasshi*:

Just relations between husband and wife are not in the least practiced under our national customs. In

² From the article “On Wives and Concubines” (Part one)” by one of the founding members of the *Meirokekusha*, Mori Arinori, a great statesman of his time who contributed his thoughts in this article and evaluated the institution of marriage in respect to the concubine system.

truth, the husband is entirely the master of the slave, and the wife is no different from a chattel. It is the wife's duty only to follow her husband's orders without questioning in the least the merit of his directives. From morning to evening, therefore, the wife obediently runs about serving her husband with body and soul almost like a spiritless machine. Furthermore, if she fails to meet her husband's wishes, he scolds, hits, curses, and kicks in a manner that is often really beyond description. Because of woman's fundamentally patient character, she has not yet come deeply to resent even such violent conduct by man...If we really want to achieve marriage worthy of name, there is no better approach than to spread education generally and then await the time when women voluntarily protect their chastity. (Braisted 1976: 189-90)

As evident from above, women were not only discriminated against in terms of laws regarding property but also in terms of divorce. The right to divorce or *mikudarihan*, was only granted to men who could divorce their wives if they found their women disobeying them in any regard. The following lines from *Nigorie* portray a devoted wife, Ohatsu, begging her husband not to leave her and apologizes him for saying bad things about Oriki, whom her husband frequented and spent his entire fortune on her. Despite being responsible for leaving her and their only son to suffer in poverty, Ohatsu has no option but to beg her husband for mercy:

Please reconsider. You know I have no parents or brothers and sisters, only my uncle, my caretaker, who stood in at our wedding. If we are divorced, I'll have nowhere to go. Please forgive me. (Danly 1981: 239)

Further, the following lines from *Nigorie* clearly bring out the relative 'ease' with which a man could divorce his wife:

Genshichi can divorce his wife anytime he takes it
into his head (Danly 1981: 220)

The above mentioned lines are from Oriki's fellow courtesan in Kikunoi who insists her to write to Genshichi, who still loves her and to such an extent that he can even divorce his wife and take Oriki as his wife if she desired. Here, the man, Genshichi was responsible for causing agony to his wife and child and despite that the society does not look down upon him and hold him responsible. Instead, the right to divorce and the decision to part with his wife lies with him.

4.3.3. "Good Wife, Wise Mother" (*Ryosai Kenbo*)

Apart from rights, education for women was restricted to cultivating 'feminine' arts like cooking, sewing and learning poetry. The emphasis was on creating women who would grow up to become obedient wives and good mothers. In the name of education women followed principles of the *Onna Daigaku* established by Kaibara Ekken in the 17th century emphasized on the moral duties, womanly virtues such as loyalty, devotion and subservience to her father as a daughter, to her husband as a wife and to her son as a mother (Sansom 1963).

Later in the Meiji period the traditional 'education' came to be known as *Ryosai Kenbo*, "Good Wives, wise mothers" which was the term coined by Nakamura Masanao, a *Meiropusha* member. In the Meiji society as well, the women's education was primarily aimed at creating good wives to look after the household where a traditional Japanese wife did the cooking, clearing and obeyed her husband. Formal education in women was restricted to only to accomplish feminine arts which prepared them for married life. Higuchi Ichiyō was also withdrawn from formal school once her mother insisted Ichiyō might lose her chance for finding a suitable

groom if she was over-qualified. Upon her husband's request, Ichiyō was later allowed to attend a poetry school which was considered fit for a woman:

When I was eleven, I stopped going to school. According to mother's opinion, it did not do a girl's future any good to spend too long in the classroom. She wanted me to learn how to sew and how to run a household. Papa did not agree with her at all. 'Let her study a little longer,' he would say to mother and this would provoke an argument. Then they would ask me and I wanted to do. But I was born so timid and meanly-mouthed and I couldn't tell them. And so I stopped going to school. I would have died, of course. I felt so miserable. Things were the same until I was fourteen. I took sewing lessons and helped out around the house, and, somehow, the time went by. Every night, I worked at my desk. Papa bought me collections of poetry and some of the other classics, for he was determined to help me overcome these obstacles thrust in the way of my education. ³(Danly 1981:14)

Like Mori Arneri, many champions of women rights had emerged during the Meiji period who analyzed Japanese society in respect to those in the western countries. Among the many discourses that took place, some scholars disagreed with granting 'excessive rights' to women as it could disrupt the Japanese social frame' which had been continuing since the ancient times. Eminent member of the same *Meirokusha*, Katō Hiroyuki commented in his article "Abuses of Equal Rights for Men and Women" in 1875:

At present, when we are putting into practice in our country the principle of equal rights for men and

³ Excerpt from Ichiyō's diary translated by Robert Danly (1981) from "Chiri no Naka," 10 August 1893. *Zenshū*, vol. 3-a, pp. 315-316.

women, we shall finally reach the point at which we are unable to control the injury of excessive women's rights if men of intelligence, fully recognizing this danger, do not prevent in advance (Braisted 1976: 377)

In the light of the husband-wife relations portrayed in both the novels together with the social views, it can be concluded that the Japanese society in the late Meiji period provided no social and legal rights to the wife/ mother concerning decision making. The role of the wife/ mother in the social order was completely gendered where she was tied into the shackles of old feudal and Confucian norms which could not be broken even during the period of 'enlightenment' when so much was being done on the political front in the name of 'modernization,' little was done for the women who continued to play the same role even after the Meiji period.

4.4. The Geisha and the clients/patrons

The word 'patron' or '*danna*' in the Japanese language refers to an older man who pays buys a house, bears all the expenses of the geisha he keeps (Downer 2000: 49). The geisha may have more than one patron at a single time. A geisha continues to entertain clients, while she is attached to the geisha house, called *okiya* until the time a patron buys her freedom from that house. In broader terms the male clients of a geisha, pay for her professional services for the time she spends entertaining them. Whereas, a patron is more like a 'provider' for her who not only buys her freedom but also 'rights over her.' In the geisha world, the status of the patron in the society defines the popularity of the geisha and vice versa (Dalby 1983).

The geisha/ mistresses have been kept by men for sexual services since the olden times in Japan. However, in ancient Japan, the man-woman relations were not clearly defined in terms of 'husband-wife' since polygamy was common and under the practice prevalent in those times, *Ipputasai* a man was allowed to marry two or three wives and any other spouse was considered 'concubine.' Eventually, the second and

third wives lost their status in the society and had come to be treated as concubines or even servants by the end of the sixteenth century. Engels (1884) argues it was the introduction of monogamy, which was done to determine the paternity of the offspring to determine a legal heir, that prostitution flourished while the marriages were performed for procreation of the heir and such alliance were only “based on economic conditions, namely, on the victory of private property over primitive, natural, common ownership.” As discussed in Chapter 2, the Japanese society was not rigid on morals attached to matrimony and sex was not viewed as dirty or impure. The ancient texts also do not suggest the practice of prostitution, though swapping of partners was a common practice. Therefore, it can be said that the social views became rigid only with the passage of time.

Japanese literature has also portrayed the mistresses/ geishas/ courtesans as more attractive and beautiful than wives. These women are usually described as sad beauties that are brought up in adverse environments and forever remain lonely. In literature, great sympathy has been shown for them. Famous examples are the accounts mentioned in *The Tale of Heike* (Heike Monogatari, nineteenth century; translated in 1975) where the sad death of Lady Giō and two other dancers is lyrically depicted and Chikamatsu’s *Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (Sonezaki Shinjū, 1703; translated in 1955), where the romance between a young merchant and a courtesan ends in a sad love suicide (Ueda 1986).

4.4.1. The Forced Choice

The geisha/ courtesans are depicted in different shades in not only ancient literature but also in the modern literary works. These women are shown to be confident, professional and ‘desirable’ on one hand and sad and lonely on the other; manipulative at one time and gullible and exploited figures in other times. The sad and lonely side of the geisha can be clearly understood from the portrayal of Komayo and Oriki in *Udekurabe* and *Nigorie* respectively. Komayo is introduced as a confident geisha in the opening paragraphs of the novel and so is Oriki who is the main attraction of her

house, Kikunoi. But as the stories unfold, the both show their common pathos attributed to their 'forced' entry into this profession, sense of pride in their beauty, talent and popularity, accompanied by guilt and loneliness. Though they were forced into this profession, they have little choice to quit for they have no one to look after them if they leave this profession. The layers of emotions of these geisha are captured in a way to enable the reader draw a real image of their true self.

It's no good brooding, I try to be cheerful in front of others. And then what happens? People think I'm carefree and thoughtless! There are men who come here who think I've never had a worry in my head. It's my fate, I guess. I wonder if anybody suffers more than I do. (Danly 1981: 226)

The pain of the female protagonist, Oriki in *Nigorie* can be felt through the lines above where she is in a profession where she has to put an 'attractive face' in front of her clients who see her not more than a mere object of entertainment. It is the expected 'image' of that of a geisha which Oriki is supposed to live up to. Like Oriki, Komayo finds herself in a similar situation where she finds herself reflecting on her profession and ponders over the void she suffers from:

I hate being a geisha, once you become a geisha, no matter what you do, it's hopeless...She suddenly for some unexplainable reason found herself wondering if perhaps she hadn't been born to spend her whole life in tears (Meissner 1963:33 &174)

The glorious beauties, though had a sensuous and attractive image like the star attraction of the newly opened drinking establishment, Kikunoi, there is an echo of sadness in her thoughts. She, like most of her counterparts in the Meiji era had to take up the entertainment profession to save not only themselves but their families from poverty. As already discussed in Chapter 2, small girls from poor agrarian families or those fallen to hard times, were 'bought' by the agents in exchange for

the contracted sum of money. These girls were later sold to brothels and groomed to become prostitutes, courtesans etc. and they rose to fame only based on their beauty, talent and the influence of the patrons she had.

(Yūki):...Did you lose your husband? Or maybe you're doing this for your parents?...

(Oriki):...I am a human being, you know. There are things that weigh on my mind, too. My parents died when I was young. I'm alone. Oh, there have been men who didn't let my profession stop them from asking me to marry them, but I've never had a husband. I come from such a worthless family, I'll probably spend the rest of my life like this." She was not flirting or trying to win his sympathy, but speaking from the heart. (Danly 1981: 221)

Oriki, quite evident from the lines above, belongs to a poor family and probably took to this profession not out of choice but for survival. As mentioned above "she was speaking from the heart" about the unhappiness she is surrounded with in a profession she has been forced into. Similarly, Komayo's poor financial background is responsible for forcing her to take up the geisha profession:

Komayo had lost her mother just at the time she began to go to school. There had been a stepmother who treated her harshly, and because of this, Komayo had been taken in by her maternal grandmother. Her father, who had worked as a plasterer, died while she was still growing up. Then, during her married days in Akita, she had lost her grandmother, so that now she had no relatives at all. She was completely alone in the world (Meissner 1963:202)

Hence, clearly it was the unfortunate circumstances that surrounded komayo, where she had no one to fall back upon, that she as a woman had no choice but to take up some profession to earn a living; in an era where little opportunities were available for the women who wanted to pursue a career. And the only option for a woman other than being married was to become a mistress of a wealthy man or work as a geisha.

4.4.2. The Married Geisha

The women taking up the geisha profession due to poor financial background only was not the sole reason, but other reasons also came into play. In a citation above, where during an opening conversation between Oriki and Yūki where the latter tries to probe into her past to learn the reason for her landing up in this profession, Yūki clearly asks if she was doing this for her husband, clearly indicating the common practice prevalent in the society, where a woman could be compelled to take up this profession even after marriage. The same feelings are resonant with those of Komayo's in the *Udekurabe* as well who also 'returns' to her profession of that of a geisha, after the death of her husband:

...my husband died. And since it turned out that way-well, I was still a geisha. His parents were both in good health. Besides, there were two younger brothers. What with one thing and another, I couldn't go on being alone among them (Meissner 1863:28)

Hence, it can be understood that the Japanese society witnessed many women working as entertainers who had taken up the profession after marriage. Hence, even after marriage, the woman's future is not guaranteed and she may be forced to 'enter this profession' or 'return' to being a geisha after unforeseen circumstances; divorce from or the death of the husband. Further, also evident from the lines above that no social stigma is attached to the geisha once she is married. Marrying a geisha was in no way taboo in the society and was indeed a common practice where a man could

easily divorce his existing wife and marry the geisha, though the woman had to give up her profession as a geisha and take up a role of a traditional wife and a mother. Therefore, the geisha always had a 'chance' or the 'choice' of leading a married life even after having been forced into this profession. The following confession of Oriki testifies the fact that at least the sought-after geisha never had any dearth of marriage proposals from her patrons:

My parents died when I was young. I'm alone. Oh, there have been men who didn't let my profession stop them from asking me to marry them, but I've never had a husband...(Danly 1981: 221)

Similarly, Komayo is also approached by Yoshioka who offers to be her patron and provide for all the comforts she desires:

I'll build you a villa and buy you your freedom, and we'll celebrate with a big farewell party for you (Meissner 1963: 53)

Japanese literature has always depicted the complexities of the lives of the geisha arising due to the nature of their professions or from self pity. Like Oriki, some meet a tragic end and some like Komayo, who are dumped for another woman by the patrons and treated like a commodity. However, apart from literature, the geisha have been an integral part of the Japanese culture and society. The difference between a wife and a concubine can be clearly grasped with the help of the popular views expressed by Mori Arinori in the remaining part of the article, "On Wives and Concubines", in the *Meiroku Zasshi*:

There have hitherto been a variety of marriage practices [in our country]. Persons married through the agency of a go-between (*nakōdo*) are known as husband and wife, and the woman in such a union is

recognized as the wife. The woman is called a concubine in a union not arranged by a go-between. Sometimes there may be one or even several concubines in addition to the wife, and sometimes a concubine may become the wife. Sometimes the wife and the concubines live in the same establishment. Sometimes, they are separated, and the concubine is the favored one while the wife is neglected...

The true image of the geisha in respect to the 'patron' can be understood from above, where the man enters into the institution of marriage only as a political alliance. In tune with the portrayals of the geisha in the selected novels; *Udekurabe* and *Nigorie*, the man had all the authority to get into a relationship with any 'other woman' without the consent of his existing wife. The geisha was the 'favored' woman in the life of the man whose wife had no choice but to accept her fate and perform her duty of that of a 'good wife and wise mother.'

In both the novels, *Udekurabe* and *Nigorie*, Komayo and Oriki are the main characters that enjoy are famous for their beauty and talent. Despite being lonely and sad about their lives, both exhibit a level of confidence and comfort in 'enticing' their potential clients and apparently both are good at their professions too! Oriki uses the age old tricks used in the 'pleasure world' by asking for a photograph from Yūki (Refer to Chapter 3, pg.39). Komayo on the other hand uses all her charms to 'get' Segawa Isshi, the kabuki actor whom she falls in love with. Despite being in 'love' both these female protagonists are well aware of the limits of love and profession. The love here is not 'blind love' but love with 'professional benefits.' The following two sets of citations from *Nigorie* and *Udekurabe* respectively clearly indicate the same.

Careful how you talk. These aren't private quarters.
People will hear us. I don't want anyone to get the

wrong idea. What if they start saying I have a workman for a lover?(Danly 1981:220)

“Now she had taken a tremendously popular actor for her lover, and her reputation as a geisha was established (Meissner 1963:64)

4.4.3. The Professional

The status of the patron with whom a geisha is associated with is of prime importance and a geisha is torn between the ‘professional self’ and the ‘personal self.’ While in the profession, a geisha is left with no choice but to suppress her feelings for a particular man and look for a ‘desirable’ patron who would take her out of this profession through marriage. Even during the glorious days of the *Yoshiwara*, the courtesans and prostitutes were not allowed to have affairs with the residents but were allowed to marry them provided the residents agree to purchase their contract (Seigle 1993). Since, marrying a woman from the pleasure world was not a stigma in the Japanese society; the women often wanted a wealthy client for a patron or *danna* or for a husband who could ensure a stable life for her.

Though Oriki still had love for her former patron Genshichi, she hopes to marry Yūki and she hides his slippers to make him stay overnight with her at the Kikunoi to win his trust. This indicates the zeal for winning the heart of the man she desired to marry or have him as a *danna*, where she chooses to accept the limitations of her profession and seeks the best option available for her to ensure a comfortable life.

However, it is not only that the geisha are calculative; the patrons were equally conscience about the ‘benefits’ of being associated with a certain geisha. Of course it was a ‘manly’ virtue to keep a geisha/ concubine if a man had the money and rank, but it was always wise to be seen with a geisha who was influential and could help a man gain contacts. Yoshioka, in *Udekurabe*, is portrayed as an enterprising man, just returned from abroad after finishing his higher studies. Upon his return from abroad, he encounters Komayo, who he used to frequent in his student days. However, once

he returns as an adult, his associations with the geisha are only for 'benefits' even to an extent that he showed 'fake' love to the geisha to save money! Knowing the dynamics of the society, he makes a conscience effort of choosing his geisha:

For a man like Yoshioka, who moved in the center of business and social life, it was most advantageous to keep one or two geisha whom he could rely on for entertainment at banquets and parties (Meissner 1963:16)

Hence, it would be apt to say that relationships with geisha were not only based on 'entertainment' alone. Maintaining relations with geisha was a social necessity that could provide social and political advantage. Since marriages were only political unions between the families to produce an offspring, much of 'sanctity' was attached to the relationship. It was an unmanly virtue to express love or enjoy carnal pleasure with his wife. Therefore, for his romantic needs he visited the pleasure quarters. There were many women on 'sale' in the pleasure districts and men had no shame or any sense of stigma in buying sex for self (Downer 2006).

4.4.4. The Forlorn Beauty

In the entire entertainment business, despite the fact that there is equality in the 'desire' for both the patron and the geisha for favorable alliance, where a man seeks a geisha of influence and the geisha looks out for a man who is wealthy to support her living. The man in both cases, being a husband or a patron, is seldom a 'loser' in the relationship. It is the woman who is to accept her fate and suffer in the geisha-patron relationship. Though the wife had to compromise with her fate and not interfere with the 'social life' of her husband where he may choose to keep a mistress upon his wish, the geisha/ concubines also live with loneliness and discrimination. The man may dump the concubine as easily as he chose her whereas; the geisha were often expected to display their loyalty to their patrons. The practice of cutting off a lock from the hair was considered a great sacrifice as mentioned in the *Sharebon*. Later,

such practices evolved into more painful ones like the cutting off one's finger. The patron always sought to hear words of 'true love' from the geisha whereas the geisha always longed to hear 'promises of a marriage' though both knew it was part of the game. The *Shinjū* or double suicide was the ultimate gesture of showing love and loyalty (Seigle 1993). The women who died in *Shinjū* with their lovers were glorified in the literatures. The double suicide was a common theme during the time 'Nigorie' was written and hence as a loyal heroine, Oriki is attacked by her lover who expected to die with him to prove her loyalty towards him. Whereas, Genshichi, otherwise leading a poor and a miserable life after losing his entire fortune on Oriki, appears as a hero at the end by committing the glorified brave act of committing *Seppuku* and emerges as a man who saved his honor.

4.5. The Wife and the 'Other Woman'

In the Japanese society the man enjoys a superior position compared to women and he is the sole decision maker in the family and is free to enjoy his life in the pleasure quarters. It is solely up to him to buy any woman as a concubine and dump her later for another one. As already discussed above, the status of women, be it the wife or the geisha, is inarguably lower than that of the man. As a wife, a woman is confined within the four walls of her house, whereas the geisha or the 'other women' in her man's life plays a subservient role to him. In a society where both women are oppressed by men, the question regarding their status with respect to each other is also an important one to ponder over. Therefore, in case of the woman vs. woman relationship it is necessary to learn the equation both share in the Japanese society and the kind of dynamics they share in this unique relationship. To understand the position of the 'other woman' or the concubine in the Japanese society, it is necessary to establish the definition of a concubine.

Taking a concubine is by arbitrary decision of the man and with acquiescence of the concubine's family. The arrangement, known as *ukedashi*, is made by paying money to the family of the

concubine. This means, in other words, that concubines are bought with money. Since, concubines are generally geisha and prostitutes patronized by rich men and nobles, many descendants in the rich and noble houses are the children of bought women. Even though the wife is superior to the concubine in households where they live together, there is commonly jealousy and hatred between them because the husband generally favors the concubine...⁴

...Even though the child of a concubine commonly is made heir to the house after the wife fails to give birth to a son, the wife continues in her previous station thereafter and the concubine also placidly remains a concubine. The heir treats his real mother like a nurse and look up to his father's unrelated wife as his mother.⁵

The Concubine is a kept woman, in addition to the wife, who also gives birth to children fathered by the man who bought her. Again, there is no social stigma attached to the child born out of such relationship and the society accepts the child as the 'heir' of the family. The child is then formally adopted by the 'wife' of the man, though clearly against her will but given the fact she has no say in the decision making. Further, once adopted, the child enjoys all the rights as a 'legal heir' would. As the quoted lines suggest, Japanese society has always accepted children born from the concubines wombs and these children have been the part of many aristocratic family bloodline. Further, since the concubine enjoys more attention compared to the wife, the concubine is thus the target of her hatred and jealousy. The jealousy is obviously present in the woman-woman relationships; the professional jealousy among the geisha for a higher rank or towards a geisha who is going around with a rich and desirable patron.

⁴ Part One, Mori Arinori in "On Wives and Concubines", issue eleven. (Braisted 1976:105)

⁵ Part two, Mori Arinori in " On Wives and Concubines", Issue Eleven. (Braisted 1976:144)

4.5.1. Jealousy

The novel *Udekurabe* focus on the mean world of the geisha where the strong and clever geisha don't shy away from playing any dirty tricks to get the patron they set their eyes upon. The jealousy is also portrayed in *Nigorie* where her fellow women entertainer, Otaka scorns at Oriki for being snobbish and 'unladylike' in her mannerism and yet being the star of attraction of the house, the Kikunoi. The obvious jealousy is dealt with and portrayed with a touch of realism in both the novels. However, the hatred between the wife and the 'other women', the geisha can be understood by the fact that Genshichi's little son refers to Oriki as 'demon.' The little boy's reference to Oriki as demon is the reflection of his mother's hatred for her:

See the child buying peaches at the fruit stand? The cute little one, about four? He's the son of the man who was here tonight. I must be hateful to him. He calls me a demon when he sees me. Do I look that evil? (Danly 1981: 227)

Here, Ohatsu vents out her anger towards the 'other woman' in her husband's life by teaching her little son to always refer to Oriki and the women of her lot as 'demons' who are born to entice men for money and drain them off their finances without caring what havoc it creates on the family of those men. Ohatsu here displays these emotions towards 'another woman' indirectly through her son which shows the extent of hatred she has for Oriki in her heart. On similar lines, Ohatsu expresses her anger in front of her husband, Genshichi, and encourages him to focus on his business than still be lost in Oriki's thoughts:

Women in that profession have all the advantages. If a man is stupid enough to let himself be fooled, it's his own fault. Make up your mind and put your energy into business (Danly 1981: 229)

Though the hatred of Ohatsu towards the 'other woman' Oriki is clear, her earlier words of encouragement to her husband juxtapose her actions. On one hand she

expresses her anger towards Oriki and on the other hand she pleads her husband to focus on his work and earn enough money to be able to get any woman he wants later on. The reaction of Ohatsu in both cases is a product of social conditioning which a Japanese woman is subjected to. Eckert (2003) describes this phenomenon as the “face” that an individual acquires after assuming gender identity and that “face” is the social image that the individual projects. And it is the powerful force behind the gender order where the individual avoids “face-threatening” situations or acts. Here, the “face threatening” act is the rebellion which Ohatsu is not conditioned to do against her husband. She must show her ‘obedient wife’ face, which she acquired after the ‘*Ryosai Kenbo*’ training.

Therefore, Ohatsu, as a wife is helpless as she is expected to endure and not question her husband’s deeds. And her husband has the liberty to keep another woman and the society doesn’t view it as a ‘threat’ to a married life. Though, the Japanese society is ‘tolerant’ towards a man keeping a geisha besides having a wife, the wife on the other hand is unhappy with the presence of the ‘other woman’ in her husband’s life. In other words, the ‘acceptance’ shown by the wife is not by ‘will’ but is forced upon her by the society. Instead, as a typical ‘good wife’ she stays with her husband and takes all the dominance from her husband who doesn’t seem to suffer from any pangs of consciousness.

4.5.2. Geisha’s Guilt and Desire

Though the geisha is a target of hatred of her patron’s wife, it is not always the wife who is unhappy with her fate. The geisha also live in guilt for being hated. Like Oriki, who is unable to hide her guilt of destroying Genshichi’s married life and causing pain to his wife and their little son. Oriki feels the pain when an innocent child calls her a demon. Oriki is full of misery and her “sigh one could hear all her suffering” when she points at the little boy from her window and tells Yoshioka that even a small boy hates her. She is aware that she is hated by Geinshichi’s wife but the small boy calling her a ‘demon’ causes her endless pain and leaves a scar on her heart

where she suffers from endless guilt for ruining only Genshichi but his entire family (Akiyama 2001). It is this guilt that compels her to buy a small rice cake for Genshichi's son, who out of poverty is not even able to buy it for an important festival, 'The Day of Souls' when all children are off to the Shrine to pay respects to *Emma*. Unable to see Genshichi's son not being able to enjoy like other children, who made marry upon wearing new clothes to the Shrine, feeling the guilt and somewhere finding herself responsible for the condition of the little boy who was at no fault, she buys him a rice cake which brings happiness on his face.

The wife has always had hatred for the geisha, who is seen as a culprit who entices her man for money. The geisha are scorned at for being heartless professionals who trap their husbands with their charms and beauty. Though, the geisha is undoubtedly professional whose popularity and influence depends upon the clientele she keeps, nevertheless, she is also human who longs for a companion; a patron, for this is the most she can aim for being within her professional limits. The 'piece of advice' given by Oriki's friends in her house in reference to Yūki, in *Nigorie* throws light on the geisha's longing for a married life. In *Udekurabe*, Komayo finds the lover of her life in Segawa Isshi whom she loves and above all, an alliance with him would assure "professional benefits; establishment as a popular geisha. The following lines give an insight into the desire of the geisha to live with a 'desirable' man who could promise them a happy life.

How happy you must be, Oriki, with such a
handsome and generous man! He's the kind to be
successful. He'll probably ask you to marry him...
...If you don't learn a little humility, no one will
ever take you for a wife! (Danly 1981:224)

It can be inferred that a geisha longed for a married life; however, it is not always the case that a geisha is happy leading a life of that of a wife. Keeping Komayo's example in mind, where she decided to return to her geisha profession after the death of her husband probably because she didn't find any marked difference in her status;

in other words, there was something which could not fill the void and she chose to return to her profession than continue living with her in-laws. As it can be interpreted here, Komayo decided to take up the geisha profession after experiencing married life, which is an indicator that after the death of her husband, the 'married' status could not keep her happy. This view further gets strengthened with the fact that Oriki, too, "never had a husband" even though many men had approached her with marriage proposal she didn't jump with excitement to get married at any cost to leave this profession. Finally, it can be commented that the geisha were not under 'mental pressure' or longed for married life to such an extent that they quit their professions as soon as the opportunity arrived.

Moreover, it may not be wrong to understand that the status of a geisha is lower than the wife, but at the same time, it cannot be said to be higher than that of a wife either. In other words, the gap between the status of the geisha and the wife may not be very wide. The reasons could be, as discussed above, a very low and servile status of a wife in a Japanese household where the wife is treated as a doormat. And as a geisha, she is treated as a plaything in the hands of the men. Hence, in either case, a woman is not treated with 'respect' and has little choice of freedom in which ever role she is; of that of a wife or a geisha.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Japanese women have come a long way from playing traditional and biological roles, subservient to men in all respects. From young maidens to wives, mistresses and concubines, Japanese women have been looked at as objects of art with melancholy beauty. The women have been expected to be pure, nurturing and self-sacrificing in their traditional roles of that of a mother and a wife. The stereotypes regarding the role and status of women have been depicted in the Japanese literature; from ancient till modern. Among the women, the portrayal of the 'kept women', 'mistresses', 'concubines' or the geisha in early modern literature paints an inspiring picture as to how these women survived and lived, within the strict domains created by the Japanese men folk.

The analysis of the man-woman and woman-woman relationships brings out the fact that in whichever domain a woman serves her role, her status in respect to the men in the Japanese society is subservient. Therefore, the woman in the role of geisha is no different in terms of her status as compared to the wife in the society. Though the

geisha is portrayed as beautiful and attractive, she must be submissive like a wife and as a concubine; her status is not equal to that of the real wife in the household. Hence, though the geisha is both independent and manipulative; like Komayo and Oriki, both must give in to the demands of men and obey them.

As discussed in Chapter 4, in the husband-wife relation, the wife 'must' suffer in the hands of her husband and maintain her loyalty towards her husband which is expected from her by the society which is based on the traditional Confucian values that impose the virtues of filial piety and service to husband upon the women. Under any circumstances, the wife is not to raise her voice against her husband who has been granted full freedom to enjoy the carnal pleasures with any other woman he desires. It is the virtue of the woman to follow the '*Ryōsai Kenbō*' education imparted in her and remain in her social domain that lies with-in the four walls of the house, the *Ie* where she is expected to look after the affairs pertaining to household chores and child rearing. In a social set-up where marriages were performed only for procreation and maintenance of the blood line, the wife is reduced to nothing more than an indispensable piece of furniture at home which has no place in the life of her husband. The Japanese society, on one hand views marriage as a necessary 'political alliance' between two families, the same society encourages the man to frequent the pleasure quarters. A man of rank who doesn't is scorned at and looked down upon or not considered 'manly enough.'

The geisha, as established in the analysis of the Geisha-patron relation, is in no better position as compared to the wife where she is objectified by the society and appreciated till the time she is in the prime of her youth. The discussion in Chapter 2 highlights the plight of the women entertainers who are portrayed as glamour dolls and fashion icons. The pleasure women have always been a part of the Japanese society who have always taken to roles more than those of mere 'sexual slaves' or 'entertainers' in the later years. The women entertainers have stemmed out of the desire of the men for the 'other women' where the domain of the wife is strictly

restricted to her household. The geisha, with her arts, attractive feminine qualities have always been playing an active role in the 'social life' of the man outside his household. It will not be an exaggeration to say the geisha were the 'social wives' who offered not only entertainment and carnal satisfaction, especially during the declining age of the *Yoshiwara* pleasure quarters, but also companionship to various important banquets and social gatherings. It was only after the decaying of the institution of geisha and the mushrooming of various illegal geisha quarters that the purist 'geisha' lost her reputation of that of an entertainer only. The name of the geisha was tarnished by the time of the Meiji period when the women working as unlicensed prostitutes also started calling themselves geisha; and it continued till the second world and the tarnished image got crystallized in the form as it is understood by most of us today.

In the gender order, where men and women are placed in a society which is clearly gendered, it is difficult to clearly state who occupies a higher status; the geisha or the wife. However, it can be said that in the social milieu, on one hand, where a wife doesn't have a choice but to accept her husband visiting the geisha, the geisha on the other hand does have a freedom to choose; to become a wife, have a patron of her choice and also choose the number of patron she wants. Although women did not enter the profession by choice but were sold into the brothels by unscrupulous agents who trafficked little girls from poor households; especially agrarian households, who were often debt ridden and had little choice but to sell off their daughters, the geisha lived in a female-dominated world and a community where the women had a chance to achieve economic independence.

Here, it is clearly evident that a geisha is economically independent and therefore has a wider range of 'choice.' Just like Komayo and Oriki, these women had accepted their fate and strived for achievement within the domain they were confined to. The geisha emerged as strong and independent women who, in the unfair male-dominated world did not shy away from 'enticing' a man to make him her patron

who could ensure a comfortable life in her declining youth. As a geisha, a woman had a chance to change her destiny and gain power and influence using her beauty, talent and manipulations. Therefore, where the wife had no choice but to compromise with her fate, the geisha could seek patronage from the rich and influential and also enjoy power.

In the Japanese society, where the association with an influential geisha could guarantee success and status, the men strived to seek company of the much sought after geisha. Just like Yoshioka in *Udekurabe* who carefully chooses his geisha to improve his social standing and political ties. Therefore, in such a scenario, the geisha can be said to have achieved a superior position compared to many men around her who could only dream of seeking alliance with her. In this set-up, the social 'gender' of the geisha in the patriarchal Japanese society does not hamper the geisha from rising in social ranks; strongly proving the 'gender order' is not based on patriarchy but only power relation between the individuals placed in a social order. It proves that the society is driven by power and not the male gender and further that 'gender' superiority is not driven by biological reasons; that a woman is always inferior, but from social power. To further elaborate, the power can be observed in the geisha house where a woman of a higher rank dominates a young geisha and the behavior and the rights of both are based on pure power relations. Hence, it is not only the gender of an individual that determines the status in the society but the power, whether economic or physical.

The geisha can be said that the cultural ambassadors of Japan, the geisha have always acquired a special position in the Japanese literature and society. The Japanese societies has been witnessing these women rise to fame with their struggle and hard work and emerge as powerful role models who can be looked upon as the prototypes of the first modern working women of Japan. The society that oppressed women, in various roles she played, it was only in the case of geisha where she could break the norms and in turn dominate the men. It was this profession which not only

empowered women but also provided them with artistic skills; singing, dancing and *shamisen* which they could use to earn a decent living after retirement. The geisha are the apostle of struggle and hard work who were not born with any choice but later carved a niche for themselves.

To Conclude, geisha with the freedom of 'choice' for their desired patron, with the position to be able to 'decide' if she wanted to enter into matrimony, acquisition of the artistic skills and finally the 'chance' to work hard and achieve the high status and dignity in the Japanese society puts the geisha above the women who spend their lives as wives and mothers only. The geisha, through hard work could rise to a level even much higher to the men folk and enjoys a position where now she can manipulate the workings of the society. Needless to say, the modern Japanese working women owe a lot to their traditional working sisters whose efforts have borne fruit where the rules of the power relations have been re-defined where the modern Japanese society has come a full circle where the tables have once again turned; and the male geisha are in vogue again¹, to entertain the women clients this time.

¹ "Male Geisha: New fad for working women in Japan", The Times of India, New Delhi, April 19, 2008.

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