

# The Neglected Heian Woman: From the outlook of *Kagerō Nikki*

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## ABSTRACT

*The Heian Society is mainly noted for being the Golden Age in the Japanese history for its native cultural achievements in the Imperial court, Kana literature and well-designed city plan. The literature in Heian period written by the women revealed their secluded lives while throwing light at the manipulated society which was in favor of men. The primary objective of this paper is to examine the sidelined woman of the society and the author's psychological perspective through textual analysis of the Poetic literature work- Kagerō Nikki. It throws light at social practices which were often followed in the middle-class society with the help of arguments which are further proved.*

*The introduction focuses on the background of the period and the initiative of diary usage from Asuka Period onwards. It also focuses on the usage of Kana and introduction to diaries written by women while emphasizing on the significance of women diary literature. Secondly, the literary work is studied from the socio-economic and political viewpoint to examine the hypothetical position of the author- Michitsuna no Haha. Apart from her diary, very little information is available in other work regarding her existence. This work gives a detailed description of Michitsuna no Haha's married life and her position as a secondary wife in the society. Therefore, this diary is analyzed to find the traces of gender discrimination and the estimation of social conditions of noblewomen in Heian aristocratic society. The findings indicate that Michitsuna no Haha lead a disparaged life with psychological difficulties, being the victim of polygamous society. The author resisted the discriminatory social practices in her own way and moved to the outskirts of the city and broke off her marriage with her husband Fujiwara no Kaneie, who was busy with his consorts, finding her true self in Pilgrimages.*

## INTRODUCTION

Heian period (794-1185AD) was named after the Imperial capital moved from Nara to Heian Kyō (currently known as Kyōto). The term Heian comes from two Kanji characters 平 and 安, which respectively means peace and tranquility because of the prevalent 'no war' ambience in the society. This period is considered to be the peak of Japanese art,

architecture, and mainly literature. Japan's art, architecture, dress codes and script have been imported from China through the *Kentōshi* and *kenzuishi* missions. These missions helped Japan adopt the Tang dynasty models, which further developed into the unique Japanese culture after Emperor Uda put a halt to these imperial embassies under the influence of *Sugawara no Michizane*.<sup>1</sup> There is also another quite familiar fact among the Japanese

<sup>1</sup> Kitagawa, Hiroshi. (1975). The Tale of the Heike, p. 222.

culture and language learners that is Heian literature was dominated by women writers. During the mid-Heian period, many female writers such as Izumi Shikibu, Murasaki Shikibu, Sei Shōnagon, Akazome Emon, Koshikibu no Naishi (Izumi Shikibu's daughter), etc. who valued education and learning and served in the court of Empress Akiko. The lyrics of *Kimigayo*, which is the modern Japanese National Anthem was written by Murasaki Shikibu.<sup>2</sup> These women were in limelight for their prose literature and poetry in the era. In the Heian society, poems were regarded as of great importance. A single poem had the power to influence a person's reputation, i.e. it could easily hamper a poet's reputation forever as the poems were the key to social interactions.<sup>3</sup> The women writers wrote several *kana* poems and proses produced several literary works in different genres such as *Monogatari* (narratives), *Nikki Bungaku* (Poetic Diary literature), etc.

The rise and fall of the literature were directly related to the role of noblewomen in the Japanese society, who had seen both a lavish lifestyle of court and poverty-stricken provinces. Several women of Fujiwara family (also known as the Fujiwara daughters) which was one of the 4 great families in Japan during the Heian period, wrote the vernacular literature of this period. The literature by daughters of the provincial governors (lower middle-class nobility) exhibited that they did not thoroughly enjoy their politically and economically stable life (as in *Kagerō Nikki*), depicted the powerful Fujiwara family, the marriage system that supported the sociopolitical practices, disenchantment from court life (as in *Sarashina Nikki*), and paid respect and recognition to their financiers, Fujiwara family. (As in *Makura no Sōshi* and *Murasaki Shikibu Nikki*). To the first time readers, the literary works written by women give off a sense of independent lifestyle, entertainment and enjoyment in the society, but their memoirs and diaries show the

exploitation and the social inequalities between the genders.

## BACKGROUND

“Writing a diary is extremely interesting. It is interesting when one is actually writing it, but when one reads it again years later the interest is all the greater.” (*Ishikawa Takuboku*)

During the Asuka Period, i.e. late sixth to early seventh century AD, the terms *Nikki* or daily record and *shuki* or “notebook” (literally “Hand record”) were in common use.<sup>4</sup> These diaries were written in Chinese script, *Kanbun*, which were based on Chinese grammar and constructed with native sounds. Men wrote their diaries and official records in Chinese characters which were essentially neither wholly Chinese nor Japanese. The by-product was a strange and complicated text. Diary-writing earlier began with writing public records of court functions, occasions, ceremonies and court duties by the officials, etc. Later, these records also started to be used for including personal daily accounts, ancestral records, poetry contests and travel diaries.

In Heian period, *Nikki* became a medium to express one's feelings, emotions, outrage, which was substantially different from being an exclusive travel diary or poetic anthology which was a more common genre in the period. Initiated by *Ki no Tsurayuki's Tosa Nikki* (Tosa Diary) began the tradition of writing in *Wabuntai*,<sup>5</sup> which later resulted in the construction of *Kagerō Nikki* by *Fujiwara no Michitsuna's* mother who is known for beginning the golden age of *Nikki Bungaku* i.e. poetic diary literature genre. She is said to be the first **woman** to write a diary. Other prominent works in *Nikki Bungaku* are *Sarashina Nikki* (Diary of Lady Sarashina), *Izumi Shikibu Nikki* (The diary of Izumi Shikibu), *Murasaki Shikibu Nikki* (Diary of Murasaki Shikibu). The works of *Nikki Bungaku* were mainly written by noblewomen belonging to the

<sup>2</sup> Morris 1964 p. xiv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180- 182.

<sup>4</sup> Marilyn Jeanne Miller, the Poetics of “*Nikki Bungaku*” (Garland, 1985), 66-118.

<sup>5</sup> the literary style from Heian Period onwards, which was often written by women

lower-middle aristocracy. The *Nikki* also overlapped with the *zuihitsu* i.e. occasional essays written at random, and *Watakushi Shōsetsu* because of the confessional nature of diaries in the modern Japanese literature. In *Nikki Bungaku*, style of writing, narration, subject matter differs from each writer, hence, each work is unique. These works include fine verses and prose and left a great impact on the future modern writers of prose and poetry. The legacy of Heian noblewomen was carried further in form of many diaries that were written in the Muromachi and Edo period as well.

There are two main reasons why there was active women participation in literature in this era. Firstly, some women writers such as Murasaki Shikibu, Sei Shōnagon, Michitsuna no Haha, etc. were either at or had close connections with the Imperial court which gave them access to practice writing in the court. As these diaries were written in the Heian Kyō, which was the social and political center in this period, the proses, poems and diaries revolved around royalty, aristocracy and court. Furthermore, Exchanging *waka* (poems) was an important part of love affairs in society. The better poems a person writes, the more interested the significant other. The *waka* sent by the girl's admirer is first answered by her maids or mother as a mediator. If considered right for the girl by the family, the girl to whom it was addressed finally replied to him. These open marriages and exchange of *waka* transformed the lives in court circles. In these conditions where the maids and parents tried to create a liking for their daughters, a talented and well-groomed daughter who was well versed in writing poems, calligraphy, etc., was demanded in the society, which helped facilitate the development of women's writing.

Similarly, the development of women's writing can be accredited to the political and socio-economic importance given to the lady-in-waiting (maids of the Empress) and female tutors as well. Through the *Sekkan* or regent system, the Fujiwara family's male members became the uncles and grandfathers of future

emperors through the alliance of the matrimony i.e. by marrying their daughters to emperors or higher officials of courts, which made the Fujiwara family an eligible choice for the rank of the regent who ruled in place of the emperor. The influential Fujiwara family established their stronghold in the mid-Heian period and invested their resources into the residences, cultural ceremonies and attendants of their Daughters. For the matrimonial alliance, their daughter's work was to woo the Emperor or any high official with her charm, poems and other skills. The skills involved Chinese literature and poetic techniques. The poems sent to the suitors were mostly written by the ladies-in-waiting of the Fujiwara daughters because of which women who could write were in demand in the court circles. The lady tutors and the ladies-in-waiting belonged to middle or lower ranks. Some of them had a famous literary personality or poet in their families because of which they obtained the literary tradition. Exchanging *waka* significantly changed the socio-political scenario of this period and the lady-in-waiting helped in facilitating the importance of writing.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, the main reason for women's active participation in this era was the introduction of *kana*<sup>7</sup> syllabary. *Kana* became more prevalent in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century which enabled the writers to express their feelings without the boundations of the script. Before the introduction of *kana*, the imported Chinese characters were used to transcribe the native language of Japan because Japan lacked a script. Chinese was considered to be a reputed language because it was used by the government for documentation of official court records. As the script was used in the official court by males, it was also given the name of *Otokode* (男手) or men's writing. Women were prohibited from thorough education, therefore, studying Chinese. Women were given a very limited form of education. The subjects of history, law, philosophy, and every other form of scholarship have been closed to all but the most enterprising and talented ladies of this period. Heian aristocrats believed that a woman should have a

<sup>6</sup> Khanna, Anita. "Nikki Bungaku: The Heian Diaries." pp. 131–132.

<sup>7</sup> Syllabary that forms parts of the Japanese writing system, contrasted from the Chinese characters known as Kanshi. It evolved from man'yōgana

general knowledge of many topics, but she should appear to be unaware and limit herself to casual remarks, otherwise, it would be rude in society. Similarly, the usage of *mana* (Chinese script) by women was considered rude in the society and the woman who studied Chinese was looked down upon and seen as someone lacking feminine qualities. Due to the exclusion from studying, women created *Kana*, which became the native script of Japan. *Kana* started to be known as *Onnade* (女手) or women's writing. Even after the vernacular syllabary was invented, male aristocrats and officials continued to write in *Kanbun*<sup>8</sup>, which was still the language of government, used by the scholars. The noblewomen made *kana* their first language and used it to write diaries, memoirs, fictions, prose and poetry. The fiction of any form was disdained by the upper class of Heian society and only suited for women in general, which was also true in later centuries. But most of the *Monogatari* was probably written by men, but they seem to have been especially appreciated by women. *Kana* had a simpler writing style, pronunciations and could be mastered easily without much training. Even after years of training men's expression of feelings and emotions were limited due to the difficult Chinese script which was harder to write because of its complex characters and pronounced with several sounds, whereas, women who were excluded from elite *kanbun* using class, did not suffer from this limitation due to *kana*'s uncomplicated nature and wrote literary works, poems and prose which were ahead of their time. It was not acknowledged that the literary work of female authors was worthy of Academic significance. The main literary circles did not comprise of women which was a blessing in disguise for women because they were not restricted by norms of the literary scholars of that time. *Kana* gave the female writers the freedom to express themselves with lesser complications from the script.

*Waka* or the thirty-one-syllable Japanese poem became the most native genre which was written in *Kana*. The topics ranged from love to the seasons, separation, travel, etc. Some private collection of poems also gave rise to poetic novels which contained anecdotes about poems that were compiled to create a biographical Narrative like *The Tales of Ise*. These diaries are a beautiful blend of prose and poetry, which is why they are also known as 'poetic diaries'. Some scholars deduced that the autobiographical *The Gossamer Years* (commonly known in Japan as *Kagerō Nikki*) was also a set of private poetry by Michitsuna's mother (the writer). Women's writing had an emotional perspective which was difficult to express in *Kanbun* and cannot be seen in men's literature. The text provides the background for *waka*, which is interwoven with the plot, and it makes it more intriguing.

#### JORYŪ NIKKI BUNGAKU

The poetic diaries written by Heian noblewomen, generally called *Nikki bungaku* (or 歌日記) is more specifically referred to as *Joryū Nikki bungaku* (women's diary literature).<sup>9</sup> Heian *kana* literature has historically been affiliated with Femininity, and as a result of the phonocentric notion of "national language" (*kokugo*) that arose in close connection with the *genbun itchi* movement, the basis of "national literature" was designated and that direct and unmediated discourse was increasingly stressed.<sup>10</sup> Although these texts were more than a thousand years old and they did not receive any scholarly attention until the first decade of the twentieth century. Moreover, *Joryū Nikki Bungaku* did not become a topic of discussion until the emergence of I-novels (*Watakushi Shōsetsu*), with its emphasis on self-exploration and confessions. *Kana Nikki* was highly regarded from the 1890s to the 1910s because it was seen as a direct expression of emotion and a significant step towards a realistic novel.

<sup>8</sup> A form of Classical Chinese as used in Japan.

<sup>9</sup> A six-volume of essays on women's diary literature, Ishihara Shohei et al., eds., *Joryū Nikki bungaku kōza* (Benseisha), appeared in 1990-91.

<sup>10</sup> *Inventing the classics*, ed. Tomi Suzuki, Haruo Shirane (Stanford, 2000), 72.

With the notions of *Joryū Nikki bungaku*, the modern perspective towards the Pre-modern classical works changed. Many modern writers adopted literary techniques from Heian diary literature such as “Allusion” and poetry that expressed the personal emotions of writers and helped in advancing the plot.<sup>11</sup> For example, In *Izumi Shikibu Nikki*, the narrator's allusions to popular romances suggest that she wants to draw the reader's attention to the parallels between her romance and her concepts of love. Furthermore, the intervening *Waka* in *Murasaki Shikibu Nikki* is the only way to know the author's personal opinions or feelings. The emotional strength of classical *Nikki* writers like Izumi shikibu and Michitsuna no Haha urges them to use lyricisms in the diaries frequently. Such Premodern Japanese techniques were the base of many Meiji writers who experimented with western techniques. Meiji author's like Natsume Sōseki validated fiction with the use of allusions and lyricism similar to the ones in literary diaries.<sup>12</sup>

Another literary technique that evolved through *Nikki bungaku* genre is the use of controlled narrative voice. For example, *Kagerō Nikki*'s author who was an extremely jealous woman who transforms into a calmer lady in the latter half of the diary during her middle ages. As the diary proceeds to talk to about her life, her tone of writing became composed and calm. New forms and prospects for modern Japanese novels or fiction were created by the narrative techniques used in classics such as *Nikki bungaku*. A lot was said about *joryū Nikki bungaku* from the Meiji period onwards, other than literary techniques by modern academics, scholars and critics who redefined the literary perspective towards these diaries, due to tremendous research carried out in this unexplored area.

**Ikeda Kikan** was the first scholar to research extensively on *joryū Nikki bungaku*, and developed the idea of *Jishō bungaku* (literature of self-reflection). Ikeda positioned, *Jishō bungaku* and *Nikki bungaku* in particular, at the center of Japanese literature, in contrast to “popular literature” and proletarian literature. He stressed on the core of classical Japanese literature as the prototype of “genuine and mainstream” literature, characterized by honest, self-expression. He was supported by many *kokubungaku* scholars and intellectuals on this point. He was especially concerned about *Jishō Nikki bungaku*. Therefore, he invented a typology of “women's inner life experience”, emphasizing on the “eternal image” or “eternal agony” of womanhood.

In his *Kyutei Joryū Nikki Bungaku* (Imperial Court Women's Diary Literature, 1927), the first extensive research on Heian noblewomen's *kana Nikki*, Ikeda expressed a “mixture of uncertainty and intense joy in exploring the hitherto uncultivated virgin forest” of *Kagerō Nikki*, which had been hardly examined until then. Ikeda believed that, despite its complicated text, *Kagerō Nikki* was an “acute, living human document immediately relevant to all women in all situations.”<sup>13</sup> He described each diary as a “sincere confession” of different aspects of womanhood illustrating inner development of women.<sup>14</sup> Ikeda believed that if *Kagerō Nikki* conveyed the “painful cry of a woman growing into a wife from a virgin and then into a mother”.

Later, in the mid-1920s, as the number of readers and writers increased, the concept of *Joryū Bungaku* emerged as a different journalistic category.<sup>15</sup> Many *Kokubungaku* scholars too described Heian women's literature as pure literature portraying it as modern women's literature. Women writers in Heian were regarded as protectors of national folk culture, against

<sup>11</sup> Marilyn Jeanne Miller, "Nikki bungaku: Literary Diaries: Their Tradition and Their Influence on Modern Japanese Fiction", Vol. 61, No.2, The Diary as Art (Spring, 1987), 207-208

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 208.

<sup>13</sup> Ikeda Kikan, *Kyutei Joryū Nikki Bungaku* (1927; reprint, Shibundo, 1965) 36.

<sup>14</sup> Inventing the classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature, ed. Shirane, Haruo and Suzuki, Tomi, 87.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pg-88-89.

the heavy foreign presence that was prevalent during that period in Japan. As compared to western literature, where the primary element was fiction, it is sufficient to characterize a modern Japanese novel as an account based on real-life experiences. The idea of modern women's literature and traditional *Joryū Nikki bungaku* started to take shape as distinct genres in the late 1920s, but modern scholars and writers commonly agree that the autobiographical novels of these women were a continuation of the indigenous literary tradition, which is rooted in *Joryū Nikki bungaku*.

### KAGERŌ NIKKI

*Kagerō Nikki* is an autobiography-diary spanning twenty-one years in the life of a Heian Fujiwara noblewoman, "the mother of Michitsuna". This work gives us a hypothetical view of a woman's life in Premodern Japan. The work shows the marginalized life of *Michitsuna no Haha* (the author-narrator) and her life in the Polygamous society. The *Kagerō Nikki* is an outstanding honest personal confession and a remarkable effort to portray a turbulent relationship and a disturbed state of mind. It has played a significant role in the development of Heian literature.

Traditionally there have been two theories of the meaning of *Kagerō*; either it is a **mayfly** or it is a **heatwave**. The expression *Kagerō no Nikki* can be found in a passage at the end of book-I, in which the author reflects on her history and remarks on life's vulnerability. "Indeed, as I think of the unsatisfying events I have recorded here, I wonder whether I have been describing anything of substance. Call it, this journal of mine a shimmering of the summer sky".<sup>16</sup> Since *Kagerō Nikki* is a combination of waka and prose, in a poetic manner the "Shimmering of the summer sky" can be interpreted as the Heatwave. The reason for *Kagerō*'s translation to be a mayfly is because of the author's short-lived love life. A third hypothesis has also been advanced. Professor Kawaguchi Hisao, the editor of the new Iwanami text, argues that *Kagerō*, "a film of cobwebs floating in the

air in calm, clear weather," means gossamer in the original context established by Webster. In support of the theory, no proof is provided. Nevertheless, one can suspect that it comes from Dr. Arthur Waley, who called the work the gossamer diary. In poetic value, his title makes up for what is lacking in philology.<sup>17</sup>

The author writes down the purpose and makes it clear that her writing would be different from other current works in the opening sentences of the diary. She refers to herself in the third person and says: "... as the days went by in monotonous succession, she had occasion to look at the old romances and found them masses of the rankest fabrication. Perhaps, she said to herself even the story of her own dreary life set down in a journal, might be of interest; and it might also answer a question: had that life been one befitting a well-born lady?"<sup>18</sup>

It is a record of her unhappy marriage to **Fujiwara Kaneie**, beginning in 954 with his first love letters, and ending in 974 with their complete separation. In the intervening years, the author occasionally expresses her resentment at successive discoveries of rival wives and consorts, and the diary seems to be a protest against the marriage system of polygamy prevalent during that time, and her outburst against men in general. The book seemed like a protest against the system and at the same time finding friends for herself as at the beginning of her memoir the author-narrator says that she wants it to be read by other people, perhaps as she was perpetually alone, and women who were facing the same things as her could have a common factor and become friends with her. Most of the women led a monotonous, boring life with not much to do in particular. This is not visible in most of the works written by women writers, as they were usually court ladies who had a comparatively liberal and active life. However, in *Kagerō Nikki*, the author-narrator of which is restricted to idle existence of a housewife like most aristocratic women.

<sup>16</sup> Seidensticker, *The Gossamer Years*, 69

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* pp.8

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.33

Apart from the diary, there is very little evidence for their real lives to support existence. As not much is known about her life after 974 AD, a series of poems attached to the book makes it evident that she was still an active poet in 993 AD. She perhaps died in the small-pox epidemic in 995 AD. An entry in *Shōyūki*, the diary of Kaneie's cousin Sanesuke describes memorial rites of the death anniversary of *Michitsuna no Haha* in 996 AD but does not specify which anniversary.<sup>19</sup>

As the diary proceeds, the narration gets better. The Book I which is the shortest among the three, covers fifteen years of her life, while Book II and Book III both cover three years each. The first part of the work is not a true diary but precisely written memoirs, not being the exact representation of facts. Gradually, however, the incidents become more detailed and the last half of book II and the whole book III seems more like a day-to-day record. Recorded towards the end of book two, the author returned to the city from a mountain temple and began to get disinterested in Kaneie (her husband) and his new affairs. After returning from the Mountain Temple she seemed to have gained the perception of life and tries to write her versions of struggles. The book III was calmer and the diary ends with her restoration to her lonely self. The book III is more consolidated and close to realistic fiction. There is a very clever usage of suspense and depth in the incidence encircling Kaneie's brother Tonori and Michitsuna no Haha's adopted daughter. This way of description is also seen in Murasaki Shikibu's way of writing. It is quite probable that Murasaki Shikibu's work was influenced by Michitsuna no Haha's diary. Nevertheless, there is no denial that *Kagerō Nikki* lacks the imaginative style of *Genji Monogatari*, the predominant reason for it being the lack of exposure because seclusion was a part of the society. Michitsuna no Haha lived in the confined world of her house in Kyoto. In book III, she seemed to have detached from her writing.<sup>20</sup> By the end of book III, she loses interest from the memories of her

youth and her diary. It is evident that whoever came "pounding" that New Year's Eve sidetracked her and she had no motivation to begin writing again.<sup>21</sup> Book III too ends on New Year's Eve like Book I and II.

In the late Heian and Kamakura times, the *Kagerō Nikki* was acknowledged in the oldest surviving text in the early Kamakura journal of *Fujiwara Teika*, from the seventeenth century. The first textual study was the annotation of "the Mitobook" by Priest Keichū, a student of Japanese classics in the seventeenth century. It survives in the *Shokokan*, the library of the Mito Tokugawa family.

*Kagerō Nikki* is an excellent personal confession of life of a noblewoman and describes the unstable relationship and her mental state well. It has played an important role in the development of Heian Literature. Such a realistic and confessional expression given in the book was never experimented by any writer before. It is right to say that her writing style was ahead of its time. Though, Michitsuna no Haha, considering her class, as a second wife of a well-mannered gentleman would have been a quite fortunate circumstance in the opinion of many Heian women, the author Michitsuna no Haha could not accept herself as a mere second wife. She was hasty and moody by nature. She desired a husband to be fully devoted to her. Her anger against Kaneie and sheer jealousy towards other women gave strength to the loosely knitted plot of the literary work. In short, it was made for the noble ladies who had never travelled outside Kyoto. The value of *Kagerō Nikki* is becoming apparent. It is the first work in Japanese literature, or, in any case, the first surviving attempt to capture the elements of a real social condition on paper, without denial or idealization.

#### THE POSITION OF THE NOBLEWOMAN IN THE HEIAN SOCIETY AS DEPICTED IN KAGERŌ NIKKI

The Fujiwara family retained their monopoly by 'marriage politics,' i.e. their daughters were married to

<sup>19</sup> Seidensticker, *The Gossamer Years*, 10

<sup>20</sup> Tr. Miner, *Earl. Japanese Poetic Diaries*. USA, University of California Press (1970).33.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 33-34.

the emperor, and thus served as regents and chancellors of their grandsons. This was possible in this period because it was a Polygamous Society. The emperor had not only one or two wives, but a rigid hierarchy specifying the status of each woman. The highest grade was that of the empress, followed by an open concubine, a secret concubine, and an imperial lady. The empress was the main wife, so there couldn't be more than one. There were two open concubines, and they were known as Chugu; Nyogo (junior consorts) was the designation of secret concubines and there were three in number; officially, Imperial ladies were four in number. In fact, with the emperor, only the hidden concubines and imperial ladies slept. Whoever had the higher social rank among the open concubines, as she grew older, was made an empress. Since the emperor had so many wives, it was purely incidental that a male child would be born and the birth of a boy child was important. Without any doubt, those who were cherished by the emperor had better chances of reproducing an offspring. Therefore, to establish one's stronghold in the imperial household, it was necessary to have a well-groomed, beautiful daughter. Furthermore, for aspiring clans other than Fujiwara, it was particularly relevant. It was very unusual for a daughter of any other clan to become a concubine of the Emperor. Although, they could reach the palace as imperial ladies.

Even if the Fujiwara Daughters could not gain the affection of emperor, they could still vie for a high-ranking aristocrat or become ladies-in-waiting at the palace, as it ensured a comfortable life. It shows that women had an extremely important role in the community and their birth was desired in the communities. When the families did not have a girl child, they specially adopted one. The way *Michitsuna no Haha* adopted her husband *Kaneie*'s daughter from another wife of his. Women were desired in the families to uplift the family's status in society but were never valued. The noblewomen of Heian period were wanted so that they could produce male heirs to the thrones. After marriage, they were considered baby-making machines.

The women had property rights and many women-owned tax-free land estates but were manipulated by men. Daughters of the provincial-governor class tend to have been especially well provided for, usually to receive a share of the inheritance in the form of real property or property rights, and to be guaranteed, by rule, to hold their own homes. *Kagerō Nikki* suggests that while the author-narrator owned her home, the description of her home and garden indicated that they were in poor condition, which implies a lack of money for the household budget. Middle-ranking court officials were faced with financial difficulties. While women had the right to inherit property, they needed the support of their family or any powerful man to maintain and manage this property efficiently. Since the immobile, restricted life of a noblewoman rarely permitted her to exercise effective control over her manor estates or to gain substantial tax exemption privileges from government offices. Women required a guardian or protector to help cope and protecting from instability in society. As these women were not allowed to engage in public spheres, they would not have been blessed with a daily source of income at times, unlike men, so many women may have had financial difficulties as well.

Essentially, women were used as mere puppets for the sake of politics. For example, when *Fujiwara Kaneie* was involved with his cousin brother in the power struggle, first the latter made his daughter consort of the emperor, then Kaneie himself did the same thing by marrying his daughter to the emperor. A son, however, was born to Kaneie's daughter, which marked his success. Later, when his grandson became crown prince, he forced the emperor to abdicate quickly, allowing the throne to replace his grandson (this was Emperor Ichijo). As a result, he became the regent, and Sadako, the daughter of his elder son, married the emperor again, and the cycle went even further.

The women were known by their father or son's name. In this case, *Kagerō Nikki*'s writer *Michitsuna no Haha* literally translates to Mother of *Michitsuna*. Neither the real name nor the year of birth or death of the writer is known to the readers. The only fact known is who



was the writer's father, husband or son. This shows that women, in general, did not have an identity of their own. They were only known as someone's daughter, wife or mother. The role of women in the lives of men defined their identity.

Men in the Heian society first saw the lineage of a woman, and then her appearance and lastly her nature and calmness. In terms of love and relationships, Heian society was very free. The society was open to multiple relationships both by men and woman. It had traditions and customs from earlier centuries and was carried on. In this situation, it can be believed that all this was based on healthy equality of gender, but on the contrary, it was an old system that permitted men to do whatever they wanted. Women were mere sex objects to men. To make things easier for men, sexual equality and open relationships applied to both men and women. However, *Michitsuna no Haha* did not have multiple relationships, *Kaneie* continued to see other women even after she had given birth to his son. *Kaneie* (author's husband) had many relationships with women and he did not settle down with just one woman till the end. Men had sexual liberty and the system of open relationships was much more in favor of the men. Women still had societal constraints and could not even enter the house of their husband if she's not the primary wife (first wife).

### THE PSYCHE OF MICHITSUNA NO HAHA

As the diary begins with her marriage to *Kaneie*, the following texts talk about her distress after her father leaves the province. She feels that even after her marriage, her father is the only man that she can trust and rely on. "And then, just as the gloomiest time of the year, my father left for a post in the far north. My last meetings with him were sad ones. The Prince seemed aware of my unhappiness and vowed that he would never desert me, but I had doubts about the reliability of human affections and did not really feel that our relations had progressed to the point where I could depend on him." (P.36) she did not trust *Kaneie* fully, knowing that he was unreliable. He too instead of consoling her says "What is the matter with you? It is common for officials to go off to the provinces, and

this indicates that you do not trust him." (P.36) He was not emotionally supportive of her, and these are some of the reasons she found him unreliable and untrustworthy.

He visited her whenever he desired. She often thought he would never come back to meet her. After giving birth to *Michitsuna* in 955AD, she comes across *Kaneie*'s affair with a new woman. 'But the following month I received a shock. Toying with my writing box one morning just after he had left, I came upon a note obviously intended for another woman. My chagrin was infinite, and I felt that I must at least let him know I had seen the thing. "Might it be a bill of divorcement," I wrote, "this note that I see for another?"' (P.37) It shocks her but at the back of her mind such thoughts always prevailed. Her suspicion quickly changes to jealousy towards the other woman and this jealousy and agitation make it difficult for *Kaneie* to visit her. This is a usual thought pattern of humans after finding about the partner's affairs. She felt that it would be better off for him to stop seeing her at all than his "irregular and unenthusiastic" visits.

Due to the prevailing polygamy in society, she remained insecure even after being married in the Fujiwara family. She could not live in *Kaneie*'s house as she was the second wife. It is essential to analyze how disadvantageous it was for the noblewomen to be a secondary wife. It did not matter even if a girl married a high-ranked aristocrat, her position was secure only when she was fortunate enough to be the official wife. In other words, the custom of polygamy left Heian women at the mercy of wandering aristocrats, who struggled throughout their life for their husbands' attention. For instance, the author-narrator of *Kagerō Nikki* always lives her life in uncertainty and despair, although she was married to *Kaneie*, son of a high-rank official.

The following text describes her mental state after her sister leaves the house with her husband: 'With that they drove off, and thereafter; as I had foreseen, I spent my days and nights alone. Life for most part was not uncomfortable; it was simply that the Prince's behavior left me chronically dissatisfied. And I was apparently

not the only one thus troubled: the lady in the main house, I heard, was also being neglected. We had occasionally exchanged notes...’ (P.39-40) she was perpetually gloomy as she felt neglected by everyone close to her. In some areas, it seems like *Michitsuna no Haha* was persistently needy for attention and company. She needed friends and constant love from *Kaneie*. One can presume for once that she was self-centered and jealous,

But it was perfectly normal for a person to be like that in this situation, and her sympathy with *Tokihime* (*Kaneie*’s primary wife) indicates that she recognized the suffering that was a part of the life of women in aristocratic society. Materialistically, she had a very convenient life but she could not get one thing that she desired the most, *Kaneie*’s constant love. What she desired was practically impossible for her to receive as she was the second wife in a polygamous society and mainly because of his promiscuous nature. One can say that she was needy and jealous but looking at the plot from her perspective, her emotions were genuine.

When her child, *Michitsuna*, started to speak she draws a constant parallel with her son’s words and *Kaneie*. ‘I heard but I saw him rarely as ever. The child, who was beginning to talk, took to imitating the words with which his father always left the house: “I’ll come again soon, I’ll come again,” he would chant, rather stumbling in the effort. I was sharply conscious of my loneliness as I listened to him. My nights too were lonely; there was indeed no time when I was completely happy.’ (P. 44) As a mother she was happy to hear her son talk, she draws a parallel that her son speaks the words of his father, which altogether leaves her sad. As she was disappointed by her husband’s empty and false promises and whenever her child would say “I’ll come again soon, I’ll come again” (P.44), she would get a sharp realization of her loneliness without her husband. She feels her life is colorless and lonely without *Kaneie*.

After the death of Emperor Murakami, there was a slight turmoil in Kyoto but *Michitsuna no Haha* failed

to mention it in her diary. *Fujiwara Saneyori*, the minister of left suddenly became the regent. She mentioned a small detail about her family sarcastically commenting there was a single lack of gloom over the death of the Emperor and the sending of a sympathy poem to one of his concubines.<sup>22</sup> In 969, *Minamoto Takaaki*, the minister of the left, was charged with plotting to make his son-in-law, *Tamehira* the crown prince, and was thus banished to Kyushu. It would have been a significant threat to the influence wielded by Fujiwaras through their imperial sons-in-law and grandsons if the plot had succeeded. While the rising power of the warrior clans of the provinces presented an increasing unrecognized issue, *Takaaki*’s exile had set aside the last-minute immediate threat to Fujiwara’s supremacy for about a hundred years and ushered in the superficially prosperous period.<sup>23</sup> This particular incident is written in details in the diary. It was only because the author was extremely sympathetic to *Takaaki*. She was either not aware of the threat he posed to the Fujiwara family, or she is quite aware of it and oversaw a chance to overthrow the Fujiwara’s rule, indirectly seeking vengeance against her husband.

Further, after the death of *Saneyori* and the succession of his nephew, *Kaneie*’s brother *Koretada*, occurred in 970, an occurrence that essentially placed the regency within the reach of *Kaneie*, but received only a slight mention in the diary. Then a fierce argument broke out between *Kaneie* and his brother *Kanemichi* over the succession in 972. With *Koretada*’s death, the author suggests at this stage with either sheer ignorance or disdain for the fact that *Kaneie* “seemed to prosper”. *Kanemichi* won the battle, and the career graph of *Kaneie* went downhill, from which it did not begin to recover until the death of *Kanemichi* in 977. It may be that the journal was written for waiting ladies who did not need to be lectured on political intrigue, but it seems more likely that the author was dimly aware of what was going on outside, shut off with her dilemma.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Tr. Seidensticker, *The Gossamer Years*, 14-15

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15

<sup>24</sup> Tr. Miner, *Earl. Japanese Poetic Diaries*. USA, University of California Press (1969).30-31.

In the year 966, *Kaneie* comes to visit her and leaves with severe pain. Since he could not visit her, he tells her to visit him instead. ‘I was worried about what people might think if such an expedition became known, but when he pressed me a second time to come, I decided I had to take the risk and asked for a carriage ... “For me to have come at all”, I protested, “will stir up I don't know what gossip, and it will only make things worse if you go with me.”’ (P.57-58). This passage clearly shows that subsidiary wife or concubine cannot enter the husband's house until he takes her with him. Therefore, if *Michitsuna no haha* is seen visiting her husband, she would face problems and become the new hot topic. On the contrary, A man like *Kaneie* could keep as many concubines as he desired and had no restrictions. There are fewer barriers for men in the society formulated by upper-class men and women. Even after spending more than a decade with her husband, she never felt he can become a devoted husband. As a wife, she was obedient and willing to take risks for him. Furthermore, it was next to impossible for Heian women to go as they could not leave their mansion, and even if they did, they could not move without their servants, always hidden inside their carriages. Moreover, a messenger soon followed to deliver a letter or poem from their husband or lover; thus, they could never liberate themselves.

‘He was kind enough in his own way, and we had been together for more than ten years. Yet I could not but be conscious of my irregular position, and indeed was aware of little else. I think that was not unnatural; on the nights when prince did not come, we languished for want of company, and my father, really the only person on whom I could depend, had been away in the provinces now for more than ten years.’ (P.81) *Michitsuna no Haha* has been with *Kaneie* for ten years, but she still thinks she can't trust or depend on him. Because of his promotions or new concubines, he rarely visited her, so she was concerned about what would become of her. Her father, too, had been posted

far away, and she was very unhappy with life in general. She seemed to have desired a husband who was always devoted to her, which, in a way, was not wrong, for she was also an obedient wife.

Concerning her perpetual sadness, there are accounts where she talks about her death and suicide: “I have felt rather strongly that I should like to die, but the thought of you has kept me alive until now” (Seidensticker 103). The reason that kept her alive was her son. It is not wrong to say that she was not just sad, but depressed. It seems like in the book I and II, she would write only when she has a sudden outburst of sadness. She just writes the main events of her lives. The diary helped her relieve stress and outburst of emotions since she did not have many people around her.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP SHARED BY MICHITSUNA NO HAHA AND FUJIWARA NO KANEIE

*Michitsuna no haha's* husband *Fujiwara no Kaneie* was the third son of *Morosuke*, who was the Minister of Right<sup>25</sup> and an influential member of the northern branch of *Fujiwara* family who was gradually capturing power as regents. There was a very big gap in between *Fujiwara no Michitsuna* and *Fujiwara no Kaneie's* family. He was twenty-six years old when he married her but her exact age when she married him is not mentioned in the diary.

When *Kaneie* married her he already had a wife named *Tokihime* and had a son with him named *Michitaka*. There was not much difference in the ranks of *Tokihime's* father *Nakamasa* and *Michitsuna no Haha's* father *Tomoyasu*. *Michitsuna no Haha* soon gave birth to *Michitsuna* and could not reproduce further. Even though *Tokihime* and *Michitsuna no Haha* though had fathers of the same ranks, *Tokihime* earned more respect from the society and *Kaneie* as she gave birth to five children- three sons including

<sup>25</sup> 右大臣 (Udaijin) was a government position in Japan in the late Nara and Heian periods. The position was consolidated in the Taihō Code of 702.

*Michinaga*, and two daughters named *Choshi* and *Senshi*; her sons were vying for the position of regent, and her daughters became imperial consorts.

When *Michitsuna* was born, Kaneie had started visiting a new lady. She was quite shocked when she got to know about “Komachi no Onna” (Lady referred in the text by the author). Though this was natural in a Polygamous society, she felt cheated and was quite disheartened to have witnessed her Husband’s infidelity. After a while, when Kaneie becomes intimate with this lady, one-day *Michitsuna no Haha* hears the sound of her husband’s carriage. Kaneie was travelling with his consort and she is soon about to give birth to his son. Quite naturally, it makes *Michitsuna no Haha* very jealous. Around 957, after the childbirth in the next three-four years, Kaneie’s new wife’s child died and Kaneie’s visits become rarer. She heaved a sigh of relief but he did not change even after that and their life continued like this which later made her immune to all his affairs. When his affection died for “Komachi no Onna”, he started spending more time with *Michitsuna no Haha* and they both led a slow and boring life for a while.

*Michitsuna no Haha* was an educated and good looking woman, as well. As it is quite familiar with Japanese history learners, the Heian women participated in artistic and cultural events- Exercises of calligraphy, exchanges of poetry, the practice of music. Many Heian ladies have taken pleasure in sewing and dyeing-or at least in managing this work. At that time, dyeing involved an especially high degree of ability and artistic sensitivity. It can be seen in the plot as well as Kaneie had always made *Michitsuna no Haha* mend his dresses, suggesting that she may have been adept at sewing. She composed poems on his behalf, which indicates slight closeness amongst them.

In 964, Kaneie got promoted and returned to politics. Just like before, he again started visiting her less. At that time, it was unimaginable for a wife other than the primary wife, to visit her husband in his mansion; but it became an unforgettable experience for the author when she went to see Kaneie and spent a night with

him in the same house where Tokihime lived. Later, she expressed her resistance to getting involved with him by going on Pilgrimages rather than attending celebrations which involved Kaneie’s family and children of Tokihime’s appointment as an imperial lady.

As time went by, Kaneie’s visits became less frequent and she tried to keep herself occupied by going on Pilgrimages and raising her son. In the later years, she isolated herself in the mountain temple to become a nun and tried to free herself from her attachment with Kaneie but she is taken aback by her feelings for him. This did not change her life in any way, but it certainly allowed her to discover her true identity. There came a major turning point in her life observing her state of mind. She could not free herself from the pain and despair but she found a way to overcome her feelings.

Later in the diary, she becomes strong enough to observe him from a distance and yet not get affected by his presence. She could not have more than one offspring; therefore, she adopts a daughter born to one of Kaneie’s wives; in the hope that this daughter may also become an imperial consort like her other sisters. As mentioned earlier, one of the reason for Kaneie’s primary wife to have a higher position in the society was because all her children were working either in the court, or were well-to-do people in the society. The accomplishments of children mattered in the society, so for the same reason, *Michitsuna no Haha* adopts the daughter of Kaneie’s one of the wives to improve her status in the society. With her realization of her reality as an old woman compared with her high-rank husband, she got embarrassed and tried to do damage control for her position. She moved to the outskirts of the city, which breaks her relationship from Kaneie who cannot visit her anymore and they communicate only through their son. The diary ends when one day she is composing a poem and she hears a knock on the door; perhaps it was Kaneie visiting her again, but it cannot be confirmed.

Their marriage showed the reality of the Heian society where Polygamy was practiced by both men and women but *Michitsuna no Haha* chose to not have

multiple relations with other men. She longed for a healthy relationship with a man who did not change. The poems of **Man'yōshū** hints that duolocal residences are common in the society where the husband visits his wife's house by night, stays overnight and leaves the following morning. Some scholars believe that permanent patrilocal marriage was practiced by the upper classes in developed areas of Japan, while duolocal marriage was the norm for the lower classes.<sup>26</sup> The institutions of Nara marriage remain uncertain since there is no current eighth-century prose literature deals with marriage in sufficient detail to permit accurate interpretations of official records, or to provide evidence of the poetry's suggestions. However, in the early centuries of the Heian period, appropriate prose works began to appear, and literary and historical sources became sufficiently insightful by the tenth century to provide a generally clear overview of the key characteristics of contemporary marriage practices among the Heiankyo aristocratic society.

In Kagerō Nikki, It is quite clear that the marriage remained a visiting relationship from start to end. The anonymity of the author makes it difficult to decide exactly where she lived in Kyoto, but she still stayed apart from Kaneie, certainly. For most of the marriage, she seems to have stayed in her mother's house "beside the cavalry grounds in the First Ward,"<sup>27</sup> i.e. near the north-eastern part of the capital. She lived in two other houses for brief periods in later years: one of the uncertain ownership near the home of her husband<sup>28</sup> and, on the other hand, a house owned by her father just outside the eastern city limits. Although Kaneie visited these houses occasionally during the daytime, his visits occurred more often at night and were followed by an early morning departure on the following day. The frequency of the visits varied from time to time and seemed to decrease through the years,

but the author of the diary continued to be recognized as Kaneie's wife, which is proved by the clothing she supplied for him and the correspondence that was maintained between them. Kaneie also never ceased to recognize his duties towards their son, *Michitsuna*. Though, He participated in the boy's training for court activities and obtained an appointment to an appropriate official post for him after he had come of age.<sup>29</sup>

It is also pertinent to mention that Michitsuna no Haha was neither from a powerful family nor gave birth to a daughter. Since her husband needed a daughter to enter the marriage alliance politics which the Fujiwara family solely depended upon, it was a hard life for Michitsuna no Haha as the rest of Kaneie's wives had their daughters as imperial consorts and it was of great prestige to the mothers.<sup>30</sup> It brought her great pressure and jealousy from society and within herself. One of the other reasons why Tokihime had a superior position among Kaneie's wives is suggested by the positions of all her children i.e. sons and daughters in the imperial court, whereas Michitsuna no Haha's son never rose above the position of Dainagon<sup>31</sup>.

The concept of class-restricted marriage has remained very strong. This suggested that the Heian aristocrat, outside the comparatively small circle of families, practically never married that were permitted to hold court rank and office ranks, and even within his circle, his primary wife appeared to come from a family of about the same status as his own. Nevertheless, it must always be recalled that these limitations were not Legal yet customary and that several exceptions to them existed in fact, at least within the court circle between the classes. Most of the Fujiwara leader's marriages adopted the class endogamy principle, with the husband and wife coming from families that were roughly equal in social standing. Tokihime, the wife

<sup>26</sup> Ishimoda Sho, "Nara jidai nomin no kon'in keitai ni kan-suru ichiko-satsu", *Rekishigaku kenkyu*(1939).

<sup>27</sup> Seidensticker, *The Gossamer Years*, p.60

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 63

<sup>29</sup> McCullough, William H. "Japanese Marriage Institutions in The Heian Period." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 27, 1967, pp. 107. *JSTOR*

<sup>30</sup> Arntzen, S. (2020, May 20). *Histories of the Self: Women's Diaries from Japan's Heian Period (794–1185)*.

<sup>31</sup> Cited from *Heian Marriage Institutions*.

of Kaneie, had a less illustrious birth than her husband, too. Nakamasa, Tokihime's father, was a commissioner and held the Junior Fourth Rank, which excluded him (those of the Third Rank and above) from the circle of senior officials.

Michitsuna no Haha was a secondary wife which was a typical status of a woman involved in a duolocal marriage during the Heian period. Although there was no rule that the first married wife of a man should be his primary wife, these cases in the mainline of the Fujiwara family and parallel cases from other families suggests that this was, in fact, the custom. There were undoubtedly exceptions to the rule, but under such well-established tradition, the husband's discretion in recognizing a woman as his main wife was hardly considered. A primary wife could not be removed unless she was dead. As seen in polygamous societies, the number of wives kept by a Heian aristocrat at one time was very small, usually no more than two or three.<sup>32</sup> Under the conditions of duolocal marriage, it was relatively simple for a man to maintain marital relationships with several women simultaneously, but even a noted man like Kaneie seems to have restricted himself to three wives (although he had many concubines), as it was more difficult to arrange multiple marriages, and very few men could manage more than two wives at a time. The husband was normally expected to live with his main wife; if he had a secondary wife, his relationship with her would usually be of the duolocal type in a separate house.

#### THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND PILGRIMAGE IN KAGERŌ NIKKI

Heian women very often made sacred journeys to temples. In Japanese texts from the Heian period, pilgrimages are called *monomode*, which means to go to a place that is highly revered, especially to a temple or a shrine. Thus, a pilgrimage could be said to be a path to a sanctuary, such as a temple or a shrine. What attracted pilgrims were temples known for their

miracles. *Kannon* was the most famous deity to be worshipped in these miraculous temples. The most popular pilgrimage temples belonged to three sects: Tendai, Shingon, and Hosso. The most popular temples among noblewomen were Ishiyamadera (Shingon) and Shiga-dera or more precisely, Hatsuse-dera (also Hase-dera; Hosso) in Yamato, Shitenno-ji in Settsu, Kiyomizu-dera (Hosso, main image Kannon), and Koryui-ji (since mid-eighth century Shingon; main image Yakushi).<sup>33</sup>

There were various factors such as dress, the ritual behavior, the journey, and the economic background that were a part of the pilgrimage. The noblewoman usually made pilgrimages in spring or autumn. Pilgrimages to temples took place throughout the year, but pilgrims usually preferred spring and autumn since those were the seasons when the weather was ideal for travel. Furthermore, it allowed the pilgrims to enjoy spectacular views of blossoms or fall sceneries on the way.

Before embarking on her pilgrimage, the pilgrim prepared for the trip by observing a small period of abstinence. The pilgrim observed a special retreat in her residence or a family or household member's residence during which she kept a special diet (no fish or meat) that would be continued through the entire pilgrimage. The abstinence aimed to become ritually pure, a state that also was to be maintained during the stay at the temple. Several reasons, and in this case in *Kagerō Nikki*, menstruation was a reason to delay or interrupt one's stay at a temple because it was pollution (*kegare*). However, it was not a permanent defilement. As soon as it passed, the pilgrim was again ritually pure and allowed to enter inside the temple. During the abstinence, the pilgrim set up a sacred space by lighting piles of incense and engaging in devotion to a Buddhist deity using a rosary.

<sup>32</sup> McCullough, William H. "Japanese Marriage Institutions in The Heian Period." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 27, 1967, pp. 103–167. *JSTOR*

<sup>33</sup> Ambros, 302-303. (Refer to Journals)

During the fast, the pilgrim paid attention particularly to their dreams, which were believed to have oracular qualities. For example, the author-narrator of the *Kagerō Nikki*, who on a long preparatory fast takes note of two dreams: “On about the twentieth day of the retreat I dreamed that my hair was cut and my forehead bared like a nun. Seven or eight days later I dreamed that a viper was crawling among my entrails and gnawing at my liver, and that the proper remedy for the difficulty was to pour water over my face. I did not know whether these dreams were good or bad, but I write them down so that those who hear of my fate will know what trust to put in dreams and signs from the Buddha.”<sup>34</sup> Pilgrimage to a temple was accompanied by preliminary rituals that marked it off against the routines of daily life. The female aristocrats, who spent most of their time inside their residences anyway, this restraint required observing special rituals. For male aristocrats, this preparatory abstinence was more difficult because it forced them to refrain from engaging in their regular official duties. They did not attend court events for the time of abstinence but remained in seclusion. They have abstained from drinking alcohol, a pastime that has been tightly incorporated into their official duties and functions.

For an aristocratic woman who spent much of her time indoors, a journey would be a tireless adventure, even if it were a trip to the nearest temple. Roads were not absolutely secure, and her station requested that she ride in style. Hence, when an aristocratic woman set out on a pilgrimage, she never travelled entirely by herself, but kept at least a small group of attendants. At any rate, most pilgrimages, even those near the capital, were made by carriage. Pilgrimages on foot were rare and limited to the vicinity of the capital.

“Presently the road turned into the mountains. It was as though we were cleanly shut off from the city, and I felt a strong sense of release, a reaction no doubt from the depression that had been plaguing me so. At the barrier we stopped to rest and feed the animals. Some wood cutters came pulling their carts down from the dark woods above, so new a sight to me that it was

almost as if I had been reborn into a different world. I was overwhelmed with emotion as we rode down from the barrier, the vista stretched on into the distance, endlessly it seemed. As I stared at what I first took to be a couple of birds, I saw that they were fishing boats on the lake. Dulled though my emotions had become, I was moved to tears by the beauty of the scene; and my companion even more strongly.” (Seidensticker 1990, p. 83) Pilgrimage and travel was a unique experience for noblewomen, as they felt liberated from their worries, giving them an opportunity for self-introspection, which helped them in discovering their true identity. It was a diversion from one's daily routine and depressing life. *Michitsuna no Haha* only had the solace of religion while raising her son, in the absence of her husband. Even when she tries to escape her monotonous life by travelling to Buddhist temples on the outskirts of Kyoto, she does not seem to be satisfied, because her mind is mostly preoccupied with thoughts of Kaneie. Gradually, the release from her attachment came after she retreated to Ishiyama as she focused on her life from a religious angle. By solely diverting her mind to the religion she was able to release herself from the thoughts of Kaneie.

## CONCLUSION

During the mid-Heian period that had a span of hundred years, almost all the outstanding writers were women. It is astonishing to note that a country, where women were not treated at par with men traditionally; could witness an unprecedented dominance by them in the literary field.

The major factor that was responsible for the literary accomplishments of Heian noblewomen was the importance of the Chinese language and letters. During this period, *Kanbun* played an important role. It was the language of scholars, monks and officials. Chinese characters were the only medium for any kind of serious writing among men. On the contrary, women were restricted to use it, which enabled them to write the native Japanese language, the colloquial language, directly and simply which was not possible

<sup>34</sup> Seidensticker, p.140.

in *Kanbun*. Thus, the prominent growth of vernacular literature during this time was achieved through the use of the phonetic script. The native syllables were called *onnade*; *otokomoji* or (Otokode) being the men's letters or Chinese characters; women undoubtedly had an advantage with the script being easier to master and they wrote many genres of literature in this script. The social image of women in the Heian aristocratic society depended on their literacy and cultural knowledge, since music, incense preparation, calligraphy and so on were highly regarded for women. Calligraphy, music and poetry-these were the key components of a woman's education; and together they provided a strong base for the type of cultural life she was meant to lead.

While writing about society from the perspective of *Kagerō Nikki*, only a small percentage of the population of noblewomen were dealt with. In most other premodern societies, a large majority of women in Heian period did labour work in the fields, were ill-treated by their men, married young, bred frequently, and died at an early age. In short, they lived a life without material independence and cultural enjoyments, unlike women who worked in the Imperial court. The daughters of low-rank governors like Michitsuna no Haha faced a financial, emotional and social crisis.

Michitsuna no Haha was anxious to be abandoned by her husband and feared for the future of her son, while Kaneie's other wives and their children also fought for his affection. These problems are the direct consequences of polygamy. This marriage structure has made the status of Heian women extremely poor and insecure. The women were entirely dependent on men; their innate longing for a husband or lover who would be devoted to them, their fear of losing him to another woman-all this made it difficult for them to absorb the uncertainties of the polygamous culture, and that anxiety often culminated in hysteria or even insanity. Although this theme of envy is especially common to the feminine literature of this period, Kagero Nikki expresses it more clearly. Michitsuna no Haha feels this emotion of envy in extremes and expresses to her all the grievances, all the anger, and

anxieties that had accrued over the long hours of waiting because the social convention prohibits her from venting out in any other direct way.

At the beginning of *Kagero Nikki*, the author-narrator is convinced by her mother to accept Kaneie's proposal, although she is very reluctant to do so because she already had a wife. But because of his place in power circles and close relations, and a far higher social standing than the author, her parents assume that she is lucky enough to receive such a suitor as her future would have been secured once she is married to such a prestigious aristocrat. Yet, after reading the diary, one can understand that Michitsuna no Haha's condition changes from better to worse after she's married to Kaneie, which was somewhat contrary to her parent's wishes. Even though she has the help of her father, who has been moved to the provinces, she still leads a lonely, melancholic life confined to the walls of her home, waiting endlessly for her husband, who pretends to be unaware of her depression, to continue his routine life without showing any concern or remorse for his behavior. He sees the author's envy and anger entirely unfounded, because for a Heian noble, splitting his time between many old, new consorts and wives was a well-accepted social reality. Michitsuna no Haha's undying love and the attachment for her husband, in a way, makes her life difficult. She strived for attention that should have been rightfully given to her, but it could never be attained in those circumstances. But, the only way to release herself from all her troubles was to completely divert her mind from it, which she did by going on pilgrimages. Ultimately, she decides to break her hopeless relationship by focusing on spirituality and religion, showing great dignity and moved to the outskirts of Kyoto, so that he could no longer visit her.

With my attempts to explore oppressed life from the point of view of Michitsuna no Haha, it is clear that the Heian noblewoman did not have a very high social status. Michitsuna no Haha chose a different direction and liberated herself from her husband, for a change. She took extreme steps to improve her position in society and for peace of mind. She fought the



patriarchal society, resisting the system with great might.

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