

The Essence of Co-Existence in Kenji Miyazawa's 'Yukiwatari'

Sukanto Mazumder*

Abstract- Kenji Miyazawa (1896-1933) was a Japanese literary figure, particularly a children's writer. In 1921, he left Hanamaki and went to Tokyo because of his father's differences with his religion. He joined famous Nichiren monk Tanaka Chigaku's organisation 'Kokuchūkai' (Pillar of the Nation Society) there. During that time, he preached the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism for several months in sheer poverty. Through the influence of Nichiren Buddhism, humanitarian concepts like co-existence can be seen in his literary works. In this paper, the researcher attempts to trace the elements of co-existence in the story of 'Yukiwatari'. This narrative depicts the co-existence of human beings and foxes. The fox is a metaphor for cunning, intelligence, and trickery in many cultures. But, in this story, the author, Kenji, breaks the conventional notions about the fox community. Through the inter-relationship of the human world and the animal world, Kenji visualises a harmonious co-existence of the animal and the human beings through which co-prosperity of both sides can be observed; the researcher attempts to show that Kenji goes far beyond to show us the peaceful co-existence with nature to promote love and compassion towards all beings. And the entire process is based on mutual sharing and caring.

Keywords Co-existence, Yukiwatari, Nichiren, Kokuchūkai, humanitarian concepts

* Research Scholar, Visva-Bharati, E-mail: bindas.sukanto@gmail.com

1. Brief life and works of Kenji Miyazawa

Kenji Miyazawa (1896-1933) was born in the Iwate town of Hanamaki; he was the eldest son of a wealthy pawnbroker, Masajiro, and his wife, Ichi. Like the farmers in the area, his family was a member of the Pure Land Sect. Kenji and his younger sister attended meetings in a district where monks and Buddhist followers presented talks from an early age; his father hosted regular sessions since 1898. His family's preoccupation with money and social standing bothered him in the region. Kenji was a great natural history student in his early years, and he became interested in poetry, influenced by the local poet Takuboku Ishikawa. After graduating from middle school, he assisted himself in his father's pawnshop. By 1918, he had already authored two stories for children.

He left Hanamaki for Tokyo in January 1921 due to his father's religious disagreements and general resistance to trade, particularly with the family pawnshop. He joined Kokuchūkai there. Furthermore, he taught Nichiren Buddhism in abject poverty for several months. Following eight months in Tokyo, he began creating stories for children by convincing Nichiren religious leader TakachiyoChiyō that their profession best served the faithful of Nichiren. He returned to Hanamaki at the time since his adored younger sister had been unwell once again. After that, he was hired as a teacher at the Hanamaki Agricultural School. Ultimately, Toshi died on November 27, 1922, at twenty-four. Kenji was never the same after that terrible incident. He penned three poems titled "Voiceless Sorrow" on the day she died.

In April 1924, he published "Spring and Asura," a collection of poems. His collection of children's stories and fairy tales, "Restaurant of Many Orders," was published in December of the same year. Even though he had no commercial achievements, his work was brought to the notice of poets KōtarōTakamura and Shinpei Kusano.

He learnt Esperanto and German in 1921, and the translated version was published in 1953, long after his death. Kenji's work was inspired by modern romanticism movements as well as the movement of proletarian writing. He was also greatly influenced by Buddhist literature, particularly the Lotus Sutra, to which he dedicated himself.

In 1933, he passed away from pneumonia. Kenji was almost unknown as a poet during his lifetime, but he rose to prominence after his death. In 1982, a museum was dedicated to his life in his hometown. Many of his children's stories, particularly 'Night on the Galactic Railroad,' have been adapted as anime. Several of his tanka and free verse poems are still popular today and have been translated into multiple languages.

2. The notion of co-existence in the story 'Yukiwatari'

This story portrays the co-existence of human beings and foxes. In many cultures, Fox is an emblem of cunning, intellect, and trickery. However, the author, Kenji, breaches the convention notion in this story. In Japanese, for example, there is a proverb '狐につままれる'. This proverb is interpreted as "bewitched by the fox." Nevertheless, this story portrays the fox as honest, loyal, and social.

The main characters are Shirō, Kanko and Konzaburō. This tale relates the story of the siblings Shirō and Kanko, who play in the forest. At that time, they meet the fox cub, Konzaburō, despite the parents' warnings that foxes are mischievous and cunning. Despite their cordial interaction, Shirō and Kanko are still apprehensive about accepting the dumplings offered by Konzaburō. However, they take the tickets for the slide show by the fox students. The two return to the forest on the next full moon for the Slide Show and are greeted by the fox cubs. The fox community also shares their culture with Kanko and Shirō. Kanko and Shirō initially hesitate to visit them, but their admiration and affection for humans transform their attitude towards the fox community. Professor Yoshiro Yamada articulates, "The basic plot of this story portrays the visit of Shirō and Kanko to a so-called "ideal world", where Konzaburō eradicates the preconception about the fox."¹

Below, in this passage, the first interaction between Konzaburō and Shirō is given; it begins in this way-

“かん子もあんまり面白いので四郎のうしろにかくれたままそつと歌いました。

「狐こんこん狐の子、狐の団子は兎のくそ。」

すると小狐紺三郎が笑って云いました。

「いいえ、決してそんなことはありません。あなた方のような立派なお方が兎の茶色の団子なんか召しあがるものですか。私らは全体いままで人をだますなんてあんまりむじつの罪をきせられていたのです。」

四郎がおどろいて尋ねました。

「そいじゃきつねが人をだますなんて偽かしら。」

紺三郎が熱心に云いました。

「偽ですとも。けだし最もひどい偽です。だまされたという人は大抵お酒に酔ったり、臆病でくるくるしたりした人です。面白いですよ。甚兵衛さんがこの前、月夜の晩私たちのお家の前に坐って一晩じょうりをやりましたよ。私らはみんな出て見たのです。」

四郎が叫びました。

「甚兵衛さんならじょうりじゃないや。きっと浪花ぶしだぜ。」

子狐紺三郎はなるほどという顔をして、
「ええ、そうかもしれません。とにかくお団子をおあがりなさい。私のさしあげるのは、ちゃんと私が畑を作って播いて草をとって刈って叩いて粉にして練ってむしてお砂糖をかけたのです。いかがですか。一皿さしあげましょう。」
と云いました。

と四郎が笑って、
「紺三郎さん、僕らは丁度いまね、お餅をたべて来たんだからおなかが減らないんだよ。この次におよばれしょうか。」
子狐の紺三郎が嬉しがってみじかい腕をばたばたして云いました。
「そうですか。そんなら今度幻燈会のとときさしあげましょう。幻燈会にはきつといらっしゃい。この次の雪の凍った月夜の晩です。八時からはじめますから、入場券をあげて置きましょう。何枚あげましょうか。」²

(Miyazawa Kenji Zenshū 8, 1986, pp.126-128)

(Kanko got interested in it and sang softly, hiding behind Shirō.

“Kitsune konkonkitsuneno ko,
Kitsune no dangowausanokuso!

(The dumpling of the fox is like the dung of a rabbit)

Then little fox Konzaburō said, smiling, “No, it is not like that. Can human beings of high descendants like you ever eat brown rabbit dumplings? We have never cheated human beings, yet we have been convicted based on false accusation.”

Surprised, Shirō asked, “So, is it a lie that foxes are cheating people?”

Konzaburō enthusiastically said, “It is a lie. Certainly, it is an absolute lie. When it comes to cheating people, 'drunken people' and 'coward people' are just such people. It is fun to cheat them. A few days ago, Mr. Jinbei was sitting in front of our house on a full moon night. We all went out and saw it.

Shirō shouted and said, “If it is Mr. Jinbei, then it’s not Joruri. Surely it is Naniwabushi.”

Then little fox Konzaburō turned his face in consent and said, “yes, yes, maybe. However, please take dumplings. I prepared the field, spread the seeds myself, picked up the grass myself, cut it, shook it, then crushed it into powder, boiled it, and spread sugar on it, and these are the dumplings that I am offering you to eat. Won’t you eat? Let me serve you a dish.”

Shirō laughed and said, “Mr Konzaburō, we are not hungry at all because

we have just eaten dumplings. Next time, we will definitely accept your invitation.” The little fox, Kanzaburo, overjoyfully clapped his hands and said, “Well, is that so? Then let me offer you at the time of this slide show. Please come to the slide show. It will be arranged in the next snow frozen moonlight. The show will start at eight at night, so I will give you the ticket in advance. How many tickets do I have to provide you with?)

(Translated by the researcher)

Through this dialogue, Konzaburō attempts to eliminate Shirō and Kanko's preconceptions against the fox. When the children, Shirō and Kanko, realise they have misconceptions about the fox, they gradually begin to trust Konzaburō and exchange many words. Throughout this conversation, Konzaburō exhibits profound respect and compassion towards humans. Moreover, he shares his dumplings with them, which he has prepared with enormous labour. This custom of offering food represents etiquette in Konzaburō. In this context, Prof. Yamada states, “Konzaburō’s consideration towards Shirō and Kanko portrays the benevolence and as if shows his endeavour to demonstrate his personality.”²³

On the other hand, Shirō and Kanko accept the invitation to the slide show. It is very noteworthy because Shirō and Kanko respect Konzaburō and appreciate the fox community's culture, which is why they are eager to witness the slide show.

In this way, Kenji breaks the customary notion about a fox and portrays Konzaburō as a loyal, trustworthy character via whom the human beings and the fox established their friendship. Therefore, in this very first conversation, Kenji constructs the basis of trust among them.

In the next passage, one may observe that after accepting the invitation for the slide show, Shirō and Kanko visit there. Moreover, through this portion, one may also understand the essence of mutual sharing between them in this auspicious cultural event. The conversation has been stated below-

“不意にうしろで

「今晚は、よくおいででした。先日は失礼いたしました。」という声がしますので四郎とかん子とはびっくりして振り向いて見ると紺三郎です。

紺三郎なんかまるで立派な燕尾服を着て水仙の花を胸につけてまっ白なはんげちでしきりにその尖ったお口を拭いているのです。

四郎は一寸お辞儀をして云いました。

「この間は失敬。それから今晚はありがとう。このお餅をみなさんであがって下さい。」

狐の学校生徒はみんなこっちを見えています。

紺三郎は胸を一杯に張ってすまして餅を受け取りました。

「これはどうもおみやげを戴いて済みません。どうかごゆるりとなすって下さい。もうすぐ幻燈もはじまります。私は一寸失礼いたします。」

紺三郎はお餅を持って向うへ行きました。

狐の学校生徒は声をそろえて叫びました。

「堅雪かんこ、凍み雪しんこ、硬いお餅はかつたらこ、白いお餅はべつたらこ。」

幕の横に、

「寄贈、お餅沢山、人の四郎氏、人のかん子氏」と大きな札が出ました。狐の生徒は悦んで手をパチパチ叩きました。²⁴

(Miyazawa Kenji Zenshū 8, 1986, pp.133-134)

(Suddenly, someone from behind said, “Good evening. I am so happy you came. I am so sorry for that day.” Hearing this, when Shirō and Kanko turned back in surprise, they saw it was none other than Konzaburō. Konzaburō wore a beautiful coat, attached a daffodil flower on his chest, and wiped his sharp mouth frequently with a white handkerchief. Shirō said with a bow, “Sorry for my rudeness on that day. And thank you for tonight. Please, all of you, eat these cakes.” All the fox students stared in this way.

Konzaburō took rice cakes with utmost joy.

“Honestly, I feel ashamed to take this gift. Please take a rest. The slide show will start shortly. I am sorry, I will be back soon.”

Konzaburō took the cake and went to the other side.

All the fox students shouted together-

“Katayukikanko, shimi-yukishinko,

Katai omochiwakattarako,

Shirōiomochiwabettarako”

(Deep fried rice cake is very hard

White rice cake is very sticky)

From the side of the curtain, a huge poster came out with the words, " huge quantity of rice cakes received as a gift from the humans Shirō and Kanko."

The fox students clapped their hands in joy.)

(Translated by the researcher)

Mutual sharing and mutual respect for fellow beings are two aspects of co-existence. Shirō and Kanko visit the slide show and present cakes to the foxes, as seen by this discussion. Through this gesture, the author portrays amicable sharing and friendship between these two classes. Konzaburō, on the other hand, treats them with the utmost respect as a representation of the fox. Furthermore, in

their presence, all the foxes sing joyfully. ‘寄贈、お餅沢山、人の四郎氏、人のかん子氏」と大きな札が出ました。狐の生徒は悦んで手をパチパチ叩きました。’ as these lines are already cited, it portrays the absolute happiness of the foxes at receiving gifts from high descendants like human beings, and it is a matter of honour to them. Besides, displaying a poster for the announcement also shows a feeling of deep admiration and dignity for the human being, and they are proud of getting along with human beings like Shirō and Kanko.

In this regard, Professor Helen Kilpatrick remarks,

“Kenji’s multi-layered tale ‘Snow Crossing’ celebrates cultural and ethnic diversity. In this tale, he constructs a set of dualistic relationships that gradually break down through intercultural negotiations, demonstrating the positive potential of such dialogism.”⁵

At the end of this story, through the co-existence between the fox and the human beings, the author symbolizes moral values and prioritizes them through the fox. The interaction starts in this way-

“笛がピーと鳴り幕は明るくなって紺三郎が又出て来て云いました。「みなさん。今晚の幻燈はこれでおしまいです。今夜みなさんは深く心に留めなければならぬことがあります。それは狐のこしらえたものを賢いすこしも酔わない人間のお子さんが喰べて下すったという事です。そこでみなさんはこれから、大人になってもうそをつかず人をそねまず私共狐の今迄の悪い評判をすっかり無くしてしまうだろうと思います。閉会の辞です。」

狐の生徒はみんな感動して両手をあげたりワーツと立ちあがりました。そしてキラキラ涙をこぼしたのです。

紺三郎が二人の前に来て、丁寧におじぎをして云いました。

「それでは。さようなら。今夜のご恩は決して忘れません。」

二人もおじぎをしてうちの方へ帰りました。狐の生徒たちが追いかけて来て二人のふところやかくしにどんぐりだの栗だの青びかりの石だのを入れて、

「そら、あげますよ。」「そら、取って下さい。」なんて云って風の様に逃げ帰って行きます。

紺三郎は笑って見ていました。”⁶

(Miyazawa Kenji Zenshū 8, 1986, pp.138-139)

(The whistle sounded 'piiiiii'. The curtain lightened up. Konzaburō again came out and said, “This evening's slide show is coming to an end here. This evening, everyone can remember one thing deeply in their hearts. That is, the wise and not drunk children ate the foods prepared by the fox

class. From now on, even if we become adults, we will not tell a lie, nor will we become jealous of human beings. I think we can get rid of the bad reputations that we have had till now. This is my closing address to all of you." Being deeply moved emotionally, all the fox students raised their hands and stood up joyfully. And the tears dropped down glitteringly from their eyes.

Konzaburō came before them, bowed politely and said, "Well then, Goodbye. I shall never forget your kindness for tonight." Shirō and Kanko also bowed and went back towards their house. The fox students came after chasing the two and inserted acorns, chestnuts and bluish stones in their pockets and said, "We are offering these to you. Please take these things." After saying this, they all vanished like wind. Konzaburō was watching and laughing.)

(Translated by the researcher)

With the co-existence of foxes and humans, the author emphasizes moral standards through the foxes. They are determined to uphold moral ideals such as not deceiving others and leading an honest life. As a result, they place a high value on human traits and values. And the writer considers co-existence as a way of self-development and self-reflection of one's character. In this connection, Prof. Yamada articulates,

"The vital point is how the main characters (Shirō and Kanko) have changed as a person after returning from the slide show. For example, having a pure and enjoyable exchange with fox children helps them to become mature inside their hearts."⁷

Through this coexistence, the foxes inculcate honesty and values to enhance their character. On the other hand, Shirō and Kanko experience the truth that foxes are not mischievous for all. They only cheat wicked people.

3. Conclusion

An idealistic set of intercultural negotiations among children of two different sets exemplifies a meaningful interchange between dominant human/adult and minority animal/child cultures. At the story level, 'Snow Crossing' challenges fixed notions of identity by first 'othering' adult foxes as untrustworthy or inferior and adult humans as avaricious and then using the negotiations between the fox and human children to break through these constructed stereotypes. In this way, one may observe many aspects of co-existence through this story. Therefore, in this context, the author ideally portrays self-evaluation or self-reflection through the notion of co-existence.

References

- Yamada Yoshiro. (2012). A Study on the Fairy Tale “Yukiwatari” by Kenji Miyazawa. *The Bulletin of Tsurumi University* (vol. 49), p-45.
- Miyazawa Kenji. (1986). *Yukiwatari*, Miyazawa Kenji Zenshū 8, Chikuma Bunko, pp.126–128.
- Yamada, op. cit, p-50
- Miyazawa, op. cit, pp.133-134
- Kilpatrick, H. (2007). Beyond dualism: towards interculturality in pictorialisations of Miyazawa Kenji's 'Snow Crossing'(Yukiwatari). *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, 17(2), 26-35.
- Miyazawa, op. cit, pp.138-139
- Yamada, op. cit, p-50