



Kenji Miyazawa's Journey into the world of Nichiren Buddhism

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Abstract

Kenji Miyazawa had been a legendary personality in Japan, he is notably a children's author. He was from the prefecture of Iwate, in the town of Hanamaki, Japan. Besides being an author, he engaged in geology and was a fervent devotee of Nichiren Buddhism, which is founded on the Scriptures. Due to religious conflicts between him and his father, he went away Hanamaki and stayed in Tokyo during 1921. Then, he entered the 'Kokuchukai' (Pillar of the Nation Society), group of legendary Nichiren priest Tanaka Chigaku. At that point of time, he spent a few months advocating the principles of Nichiren in economic hardship. He ventured extensively towards writing for children following eight months in Tokyo, under the supervision of Nichiren monk Takachiyo Chiyo, by encouraging him that the loyalty of Nichiren were best achieved through the writing. He talked him out of becoming a priest. Kenji attempted to create an ideal society based on Tanaka Chigaku's realistic teachings. He expressed his admiration towards the leader of 'Kokuchukai' (Pillar of the Nation Society), Tanaka Chigaku. And urged his close friend Hosaka Kanai, to adhere to Chigaku's Nichirenism. Kenji's eternal commitment and conviction in Nichirenism commenced at this point through Chigaku.

Keywords: Kenji Miyazawa, Nichiren, Tanaka Chigaku, Kokuchukai(Pillar of the Nation Society), ideal world, Hosaka Kanai

Introduction

Nichiren Buddhism is a Medieval Buddhist sect that is focused on the teachings of Nichiren, a 13th-century Japanese Buddhist monk. Nichiren Buddhism has centred Lotus Sutra's belief that all individuals get an inherent Buddha essence and therefore fundamentally capable of reaching nirvana in their present form. The Lotus Sutra is a sacred and well-known text of Mahayana. The Lotus Sutra is an authorized Sutra in Korea, China, Japan, and other Eastern Asian countries. The Lotus Sutra depicts occurrences in a huge cosmic globe, a cosmos that, in several ways, follows Indian conceptions of the galaxy's formation. It contains twenty-eight anecdotes that were employed in Teachings of Buddha. "The Kokuchūkai ("Pillar of

the Nation Society") is a lay-oriented Nichiren Buddhist group in Japan. It was founded by Tanaka Chigaku in 1880 as Rengekai ("Lotus Blossom Society") and renamed 'Risshō Ankokukai' in 1884 before adopting its current name in 1914."¹ The institution's core doctrines are reconnecting to Nichiren principles and uniting other Nichiren sects. And a prominent kind of Nichirenism characterized the group's teachings.

Kenji headed to the Kokuchukai headquarters in Tokyo in January 1921 to interact with the Nichiren sect ('Lotus Sutra') of Buddhism. He visited Chiyo Takachio, a direct descendant of Tanaka Chigaku. Takachio, though, denies his request for spiritual training since there are so many eager to join. Takachio, on the other hand, inspired him to compose the "Lotus Sutra literature." According to Takachio, "a literary work was written by a Lotus Sutra believer as an irresistible manifestation of his faith."² As a consequence, Kenji authored numerous stories and poems that were influenced by 'Mahayana Buddhism', primarily the Lotus Sutra. He authored two volumes, the 'Spring and Asura' volumes of poems, and the 'Restaurant of many orders and other stories,' both of which were published during his lifetime, in 1924, and there are numerous publications that were released following his death.

Research Methodology

The study focuses on a pivotal period in Kenji Miyazawa's life, with a special emphasis on his involvement with the Nichiren sect. This research concentrates upon library materials, and secondary sources, such as published articles and web citations. Nevertheless, in the context of this article, the library research method has been mostly adopted. The research will also use qualitative approaches to analyse various secondary information on Kenji Miyazawa's significant activity focused on his religious beliefs. The primary data used for this study will be the entire volume of the author's writing. In addition, a periodical assessment of his life has been used. The technique or approach by which the researcher engaged with the systematic review of existing records as a source of information is known as periodical evaluation.

Short biography of Kenji Miyazawa

Kenji Miyazawa grew up in Iwate of Hanamaki, the oldest son of a pawnbroker; his father's name was Masajiro, and his mother was Ichi. The family, such as the farmers in the region, were 'Pure Land Sect' adherents. Kenji and his younger sister attended meetings in a neighbourhood where priests and Buddhist disciples presented talks from an early age; his father arranged regular sessions from 1898. His family's concentration on money and social position bothered him in the region, which was a poor agricultural region. In his formative days, Kenji was a passionate student of natural history, and he also gained an interest in poetry, having been inspired by the regional writer Takuboku Ishikawa. After finishing middle school, he assisted himself at his family's pawn shop. Around 1918, he had authored two tales for children. Upon studying the Lotus Sutra, he entered the 'Hokke sect' in secondary level, which caused him to clash with his father. In 1918, he finished Morioka Agriculture and Forest College. He had become a vegan at that time. He had become a good geology student who engaged in soil science, then he relocated to Tokyo, and his mother looked after his younger sister Toshi, who had become ill while studying at 'Japan Women's University.'

During 1921, he again headed for Tokyo due to his father's religious disagreements and general reluctance to business, especially with the family pawnshop. He joined Kokuchukai there. Furthermore, he taught Nichiren Buddhism in economic hardship for a few weeks. He stepped extensively engaged in writing tales for children following eight months in Tokyo, under the guidance of Nichiren leader Takachiyo Chiyo. He persuaded the author that his work better represented the loyalty of Nichiren. He talked him out of becoming a priest. Again he returned to Hanamaki since his loving younger sister had been unwell once

again. Later, he was employed as a teacher at the 'Hanamaki Agricultural School'. Toshi died on November 27, 1922, at the age of twenty-four. And Kenji was never the same after that terrible tragedy. He penned three poems titled "Voiceless Lament " the same day she died." By 1924, he published a poetry book naming "Spring and Asura." In December, he published "Restaurant of Many Orders," a compilation of his children's fables and fairy tales. Despite having no commercial achievements, these masterpieces were brought to the notice of poets Shinpei Kusano and Kotaro Takamura.

His students considered him a dedicated educator. He insisted on having direct experience with subjects. He frequently took his pupils out for hikes in the hillsides and fields, not just for training. Kenji encouraged them to participate in dramas that they had written themselves. In 1926, he resigned from his position as a school teacher and became a farmer, seeking to help the plight of other farmers in Japan's poor north-eastern area by teaching innovative, modernized farming practices. Moreover, he often imparted them cultural practices, including poetry, music and whatever else he believed may change their lives. He introduced children to classical music by playing pieces by Schubert, Beethoven and Wagner on his record. In 1926, he established "Rasu Farmers Association." Academic seminars, operas, singing, and other cultural activities are also part of the organization. He studied Esperanto and German in 1921; Kenji had been forcefully removed from his day's literary societies. He was a keen reader of contemporary Japanese poets like Hakushū Kitahara and the Sakutarō Hagiwara, and one can observe their influence in Kenji's poetry, but his life with the farmers has been said to have motivated him to compose poetry more than these literary interests. When he first began writing 'modern poetry', Kenji was attracted by Kitahara and his fellow Takuboku Ishikawa. Kenji's work was shaped by 'modern romanticism movements' as well as the 'movement of proletariat literature'. He was also greatly influenced by Buddhist literature, specifically the 'Lotus Sutra', to which he attached himself.

He died in 1933. Kenji is recognized as a writer throughout his lifetime, but he rose to prominence following his demise. By 1982, an art gallery was dedicated to his life and accomplishments at his birthplace. His children's literature, notably 'Night on the Galactic Railroad,' has been adapted into anime. Almost all of his tanka poetry and free verse poetry has been translated into various languages.

Kenji Miyazawa's Journey into the world of Nichiren Buddhism

Kenji Miyazawa is well-known in contemporary Japan as a poet and a children's author. Because of his grassroots efforts for underprivileged farmers, the Japanese view him significantly. Kenji entered Tanaka Chigaku's 'Kokuchukai' in 1920, and there are shreds of evidence indicating that he stayed loyal to the Organization and most of its Nichirenist doctrines until he passed away at the age of 37. He spent his whole life following the Nichiren faith, which became the core of his spiritual path. In this part, the researcher will illustrate the author's affiliation and experiences with Nichiren Buddhism, with a particular emphasis on 'Kokuchukai,' the Nichiren society formed by Tanaka Chigaku, an enlightened priest of Nichiren Buddhism whom Kenji revered as his spiritual master.

“The fundamental connection between the thought of Chigaku and that of Miyazawa centers on their notion that this world, just as it is, is a Buddha realm and that all living things are ultimately the same in essence and substance as the Buddha. In more secular terms this means that an ideal world is always living things are thoroughly imbued with the purest divinity. What within our reach and that all remains for human-beings is to actualize this preexisting reality”³ Kenji sought to create an ideal world after studying Tanaka Chigaku's realism teachings.

Miyazawa first encountered Tanaka Chigaku and the Kokuchukai around December 1918 and March of the following year.⁴ He then travelled to Tokyo with his mother since his sister Toshi was unwell and was admitted to the hospital. He once went to the Kokuchukai headquarters in Tokyo. He also heard Chigaku's speech, which touched him greatly. In 1920, he wrote a letter to his friend Hosaka Kanai wherein he admired Chigaku. He also expressed his allegiance to the head of Kokuchukai and encouraged his companion to join the Chigaku's Nichiren organization. Kenji's undying loyalty and belief in Nichiren began with Chigaku at this point.

Kenji formally joined the Kokuchukai upon arriving at Iwate. He soon became a passionate member and was brought back to Tokyo to participate in the group's affairs. After enrolling, he shortly got a copy of the group's interpretation of the Nichiren mandala, "a symbolic representation of the cosmos featuring a calligraphic representation of the name of the Lotus Sūtra."⁵ Just after the ceremonial consecration of the mandala, Kenji and his cousin Seki Tokuya held meetings, which grew into an unofficial local organization of the group. Kenji was very involved in his area. "During this period he began to publicly post freshly published copies of the Kokuchūkai organ, the Tengen minpō (People of the heavenly task report) outside of his home. He also attempted to publicize works by Chigaku including Nichirenshugi no kyōgi (The doctrine of Nichiren), Sekai tōitsu no tengyō (The heavenly task of world unification), and Myōshū shikimoku Kōgiroku (Lectures on the systematic formulation of the wondrous sect's teachings)."⁶

On the other hand, Kenji's commitment to Nichirenism increased the tension between him and his father. Even though "Jodo Shinshu" (or "the Pure Land Sect") was followed by his family, young Kenji sought to convert his entire family to Chigaku's beliefs. After landing in Tokyo, Kenji went straight to the Kokuchukai headquarters in Ueno to meet Takachio Chiyo, a lecturer at Kokuchukai. Kenji stated Takachio that he is now a follower of the Kokuchukai, and he had come to Tokyo's headquarters because he wanted his family to be converted to Nichiren's teachings. Nevertheless, Kenji stated that his father would be unable to convert due to Kenji's inability to nurture him spiritually. As a result, one could see Kenji's commitment to Nichiren.

Throughout his nine-month stay in Tokyo, Kenji routinely attended seminars at the Kokuchukai and engaged in other group activities, "including sidewalk proselytizing in Ueno Park to make an effort to increase the organ's readership."⁷ Kenji often delivered spiritual talks from the Nichiren book "Myōshū Shikimoku Kōgiroku." These texts had a significant impact on Kenji. And "Miyazawa completely read the dense 3308 pages of text five times according to his cousin Seki."⁸

On the other hand, Kenji departed Tokyo in August 1921 and never returned. The recurrence of his adored sister's condition finally drove him away, although his sincere desire to persuade his family to Nichiren had begun to fade by the previous month. Some scholars disagree on the exact nature of Kenji and Tanaka Chigaku. Tanaka Chigaku's granddaughter Ōhashi Fujiko says, "despite Miyazawa's separation from Kokuchūkai activities after moving back to Hanamaki, he never separated himself from the group in his heart. She claims that his literary work and attempts at social activism are evidence for this." ⁹ She further says, "egoistic nationalism is not consistent with the true teachings of her grandfather's aim to establish the 'moral nation' of Japan as a Buddha-realm in accordance with Nichiren's prophetic vision." ¹⁰ Scholars such as philosopher Tsurumi Shunsuke and psychologist Kawai Hayao of Kyoto University disagree with Ohsashi's assessment of Kenji's affiliation with Kokuchukai during 1921. Tsurumi argues that despite Kenji's passion for Kokuchukai, he preferred to separate from the organization, and as a consequence, his writing had almost no connection to Tanaka Chigaku. Tsurumi reasons that "Miyazawa once admired Chigaku because he was 'sort of fresh from the country, he didn't know anything, and obviously, he just ate that stuff

up.' The editors agree with Tsurumi that the Kokuchūkai and Chigaku had no relationship to Miyazawa's work."¹¹

The reason for Kenji's interest in Nichiren Buddhism is unclear; nevertheless, one supposition appears to be obvious: the doctrines of the Nichiren sect were exceptionally 'extroverted' and 'dynamic', as well as "optimistic," in comparison to the introverted and "pessimistic" Shin sects. Nichiren is commonly considered to represent cosmic life and energy through the song, much as the cosmic Buddha does. That 'optimism' must have enchanted Kenji, for, despite the religious sensitivities, he was enthusiastic and compassionate to the animistic pleasures of life, both due to his mindset and his upbringing.

Including the Lotus Sutra, Katayama Masao, a reputed scientist, writes a thorough description about 'physio - chemical', 'make-up of matter,' implementing the most recent theories and inventions, like 'thermodynamic laws', the notion of energy, the 'Brownian movement', and 'electrochemical' reactions in particles of matter. Kenji came upon this book some few years later studying the 'Lotus Sutra', whose influence seems to be as significant. Saito Bunichi argues that "through this book Kenji gained a scientific view on the apparent metamorphosis but real continuity of matter and existence."¹² A comparable notion of substance and existence may be found in Buddhism. According to Kenji's brother Miyazawa Seiroku, Kenji was a voracious reader who had the 'Lotus Sutra' and 'The Major Theories of Chemistry' on his table. The importance of these two texts to Kenji shows a crucial feature of his writing: the integration of 'religion and science'.

Conclusion

As one can observe that Buddhism had a significant impact on Kenji. On the other hand, he was undoubtedly indebted to Christianity. It may be observed in particular images derived from nineteenth-century 'Common Christian tradition.' 'The stranded passengers on the 'Titanic episode' of the story "Night on the Milky Way Train" started to sing 'Hymn No 306' as they expected to die. He valued 'universal humanity' over religious disagreements during his final years. During the early twentieth century, Kenji earnestly explored the essence of religion as 'pacifists'. Kenji was most probably unfamiliar with 'Theosophy'. At the onset of World War I, he strove to create a pathway in Buddhism through the explicitly or implicitly influence of Nichiren Buddhist activities. Although Kenji did not particularly express anything against war, he produced several 'anti-war' short tales and poetry. In this regard, he was one of the 'Buddhist pacifists', Japan ever had.

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