

Indo Japanese Relation- Traditional and Present Scenario

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Abstract

India and Japan, two Asian civilizations, have been in continuous contact with each other for more than 1500 years. India was known to Japan as 'Tenjiku' or Heavenly Abode. And since 13th October, 538 CE Japanese started admiring Tenjiku as their spiritual motherland. But the Buddhism which was nourished in China and later found way to Japan through Korea had developed a new flavour of its own, that was in some respect deviated from the original Buddhism of India. Another surprising fact is that, it was Indian culture which only migrated and not accompanied with the Indian people. Later, visit of Indian monks and sages strengthened the Indo-Japanese spiritual relations. Moreover the zeal and interest of Japanese Buddhist monk-scholars fostered the tie more strongly. Names of the Japanese scholars like Eisai, Myoe and Indian scholars-monks like Bodhidharma, Bodhisena, Dharmapatha may be mentioned.

Since 19th century this relations took a new form and dimension. Visit of Swami Vivekananda, Tagore to Japan and visit of many Japanese scholars like Tenshin Okakura re consolidated the Indo-Japanese fraternity. Some courses introduced by the Tokyo University, instead of the policy of 'getting rid of Buddhism' by the then government of Japan, popularized Indian philosophy in Japanese Archipelago. Two stalwarts of Indian independence movement, Rashbehari Bose and Netaji had very close contact with Japan.

Since the First diplomatic relation between these two countries established in 1952, many summits and different bilateral contact made this relation stronger in every year. And it will continue to become stronger day by day.

Introduction

India and Japan, two Asian civilizations, have been in continuous contact with each other for more than 1500 years.

In past, India was known to Japan as 'Tenjiku' or Heavenly Abode. And since 13th October, 538 CE Japanese started admiring Tenjiku as their spiritual motherland, when the Koreans (and not the Indians) introduced 'Buddhism' or 'Butsudo' to Japan for the first time. Soon after Buddhism introduced into

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Japan, it did not take a long time to become the central force of spiritual as well as cultural belief in Japan. As a natural embodiment different aspects of higher culture brought about enormous changes in the life of the people of Japan. Here it should be mentioned that, as Buddhism did not enter into Japan directly from India and it had to pass through China and Korea, for obvious reasons Buddhism absorbed many indigenous influence of both the countries. Thus the Buddhism which was nourished in China and later found way to Japan through Korea had developed a new flavour of it's own, that was in some respect deviated from the original Buddhism of India.

Longing for Spiritual Motherland

However, since its inception to Japan on 13th October, 538 CE Buddhist Culture, ideology and pattern of Buddhist life-style strongly influenced Japanese archipelago. As Buddhism is basically an Indian belief or ism, along with Buddhism, Indian Cultural elements influenced the life and culture of the then Japanese Society.

But the surprising fact is that there is no record of direct contact between India and Japan in the initial stages. And also it is interesting to note that barring a few legends, there is dearth of historical evidence of migration of Indians to Japanese mainland. It was Indian culture which only migrated and not accompanied with the Indian people. Even without the presence of Indian people in Japan, the cultural activities of the ancient Indian people had created a strong appeal only to be cordially embraced by the people of ancient Japan.

It is believed that one South Indian Buddhist monk reached Japan after completion of his work in China around 536 CE. This Buddhist bonze is known as Bodhidharma. One research by Tsutomu Kambe (one physicist by profession) reveals that Bodhidharma who was a prince by birth had some spiritual attitude from his very childhood. Thus he turned down his princely life and became a monk. As per the Chinese records, after a lapse of sixty years after the Mahaparinirvana or death of Gautama Buddha, Bodhidharma realised that now is the time to popularize master's idea to the East Land (China). He realized most of the tenets of Buddhism in China do not have any clear idea about Mahayana Buddhism. Thus he sailed for China probably around 521 CE and after a long journey through sea he landed in China in either in 524 or in 527 CE. He stayed in China for almost nine years in austere religious practices. On completion of his work in China for about nine years he might went to Japan.

Due to meagre historical evidence concerning Bodhidharma, paradoxically, is offset by countless legends about this sage and was deified in Japan. But the importance of this Indian sage on Japanese psyche, is evident from different common belief among the people. Bodhidharma is popularly known in Japan as Bodai Daruma. A particular example of believing Bodhidharma or Bodai Daruma in his deified form is worshiping a particular doll named after him. This Daruma Doll is regarded as the symbol of good luck and at times it acts as solace to common people.

According to hearsay, one Indian priest named Dharmamarga or Dharmapatha (called Hodo in Japan) went from Rajagriha during the time of Emperor Kotoku in Japan in Nara period (645-654 CE). But no details of his activities in Japan are available.

Indian Culture was migrated without Indian diaspora which has created a new social order created by Indian Philosophy in Japan, which is the reverence towards Sanskrit Language. It was Sanskrit that bridged the gap left with limited opportunities of migration of Indian or Japanese priests and common people. Sanskrit became a favourite subject of learning because many important Buddhist texts were composed in Sanskrit. These texts travelled to China from India and then to Japan. One of the eight great Buddhist priests, Kukai or Kobo Daishi as well as many other Buddhist priests learnt Sanskrit in Japan and China. Kukai had been to China between 804-806 CE and learnt Sanskrit from an Indian monk, Prajna who also was staying in China during that time. It was Kukai who introduced a slightly altered form of Devanagari in Japan called Shittan. The word Shittan is derived from Sanskrit word *Siddham* or sacred letters of *Devanagari*. Learning the Shittan letters is also pursued in Japan even today. In the modern cemeteries too, the Shittan letters can be found engraved or written on four sides of the vertically-placed appreciably large memorial stones. The letters philosophically indicate five elements in which the body is transformed after death. The tomb stones are of various designs following the *Stupa* design. In general, the Gorinto or the tomb stone or memorial stone comprises primarily of five layers.

The Supplementary Chronicles of Japan (Shoku Nihongi) indicates that the first official visit of one Indian Buddhist monk took place in 8th Century CE., to be more precisely in 736 CE. This monk was Bodhisena.

Bodhisena, was a South Indian Brahmin by birth but he consecrated to Buddhism and trained as monk in India. Seeing the deep interest the Chinese showed for Buddhism, and also with a believe that *Manjushri* (the bodhisattva of wisdom or future Buddha) lived on the Chinese mountain of Wutai, he went to China on his own and became acquainted with many Buddhist scholars from different countries. He also met the Japanese ambassador to the Tang court while he was in China, who induced him to go to Japan.

Then, in 734 CE he sailed for Japan with a few Chinese and Cambodian Buddhist priests. But a severe sea storm and rough weather prevented them from reaching Japan. Finally in 736 Bodhisena again sailed for Japan and managed to reach. There he stayed for a few years in the Daianji Temple. There he met important Buddhist priest of Japan, Monk Gyoki.

During this period Japanese Emperor Shomu (C.701-756 CE.) who was a devout Buddhist sent an envoy to China after a gap of 16 years and also thought of inviting a Buddhist priest either from China or from India, who could teach the necessary commandments to Japanese Buddhist priests. At that point of time Gyoki introduced Bodhisena with Japanese Emperor Shomu. Emperor's dream became successful with the visit of Bodhisena or Baramon Sojo (Brahmin high priest).

As it was rare in those days in Japan to come across with an Indian Buddhist priest, Emperor Shomu was highly pleased to meet Bodhisena. In 751 CE, Bodhisena became the priest in chief and put in charge of Buddhist priests and nuns. In 752 CE Bodhisena received the highest honour from the Japanese government as well as the Buddhist polity of Japan.

At this time, the Todaiji Nara was preparing for the eye opening ceremony or *Kaigen* rite of its great Buddha. It was also decided that the sacred rite to be performed by Emperor Shomu, who had patronised this major construction that took place over nine years. But Emperor Shomu fell ill. According to the Records of Todaiji (Todaiji Yoroku) the emperor himself selected Bodhisena to perform that grand service of the colossal image on 9th April, 752 CE. This incident goes on to show to what extent an Indian Buddhist priest was able to impress the Japanese mind.

The Kaigen Rite or Eye-opening ceremony by Baramon Sojo or Bodhisena to the Todaiji Temple of Nara. was an impetus to grow a stronger cultural as well as historical ties between India and Japan. In a way, Bodhisena was the first official emissary of Indo-Japanese friendship and the colossal image of the Great Buddha of Todaiji still stands as a symbol of fraternity between our two countries from the middle of the 8th century.

Bodhisena also established one temple Ryozenji/ Reizanji on the foot of Tomi Mountain on the south of Tomi Cho is Nara. Tomb of Bodhisena remains in the complex of that temple. The main hall of this temple is now treated as National Treasure.

Gradually belief towards Buddhism and also the number of follower of Buddhism increased a lot in Japanese Society. Japan's Princely Imperial Priest, Shinryo Hoshinno, who was the son of Emperor Heijo, gave up his position of Crown Prince and entered in a monastery in the Todai-ji temple and became monk. He was known as Takaoka Shinno before he became a monk. In 861, he left the Dazaifu Shrine of Fukuoka, Kyushu with his 23 associates and he came to China and also attempted pilgrimage to India for studying Buddhist Philosophy. But he could not reach India. According to popular legend, on his way through Laos he died from an attack by tiger. However, he was the first Japanese Buddhist who tried to visit Tenjiku.

A few other monks and travellers tried around the 8th/9th centuries to visit India which was their spiritual motherland, but the difficult terrains through China hindered their attempt to reach India and they could not accomplish their desire.

Mention may be made of Eisai, Myoe and a few more.

Eisai was basically founder of Zen Buddhism in Japan, the concept of which was brought to Japan by Bodhidharma. He studied Buddhism in China and went to China twice for learning Buddhism and finally tried to visit India. But he was also unable to complete his attempt.

At the same time of Eisai another Buddhist monk scholar Myoe planned his trip to Tenjiku. He

belonged to Kegon sect of Buddhism and was the priest in Kozanji Temple in Kyoto. Myōe is perhaps most famous for his contributions to the practice and popularization of a mantra associated with Shingon Buddhism.

Myoe is also well known for keeping a journal of his dreams for over 40 years which continues to be studied by Buddhists and Buddhist scholars and for his efforts to revive monastic discipline. In his “Journals on the Distance to the Great Tang and India. Myoe mentions his plan for visiting India, the land for the origin of Buddhism. But finally he cancelled his planning.

After Myoe no other Japanese Buddhist monk probably tried to visit India for a long time. Again during Edo period (1603-1868) situation was changed. Some books like The “History of the Indian Collection” by Hirata Atsutane opposed the traditional view of the world and argued that Buddhism is nothing but merely a part of Indian Custom. In spite of all these controversies Buddhist priests had an interest in India as source of the Buddhist World view. And many Japanese Buddhist priests and monks aspire for visiting India. But no authentic record is available about the fact that how far and how many of them were successful to accomplish their dream.

Officially, the first Japanese to set foot on Indian soil was Yajiro or Anjiro in 1587 A.D. It is said that Yajiro met Saint Fransisco Xavier in Malacca and visited Goa with him. Thus Yajiro did not visit India in connection with Buddhism. But he might have some interest to visit the spiritual motherland of his own country.

One of the most famous Japanese travellers to the Indian subcontinent was Tenjiku Tokubei (1612–1692), named after *Tenjiku* ("Heavenly Abode"), the Japanese name for India. Tenjiku Tokubei was more popular as a Japanese adventurer and writer of the early 17th century. He travelled to Southeast and South Asia. In 1627, Tokubei visited China, Vietnam and Siam (modern Thailand) as a sailor of a Japanese merchant ship. He spent some time in Siam and again visited the country with Dutch ships. He also sailed to India, to visit the source of the Ganges and the country of Magadha. He returned with great wealth and numerous stories to tell. Upon his return to Japan, and after the introduction of the Seclusion policy (Sakoku) of Japan, Tokubei wrote an essay titled "Tenjiku Tokai Monogatari" or "Story of Sea Travels to India" on his adventures in foreign countries, which became very popular in Japan. As Tokubei visited India around 17th Century, he might not experience the life and culture of a purely Buddhist state of India. But undoubtedly, his accounts are good source of information regarding India to Japanese people.

Visit of Shimaji Mokurai to India in 1872, on his way back to Japan from Europe, opened a new chapter in Indo-Japanese Buddhist relationship. He is regarded as the first Japanese Buddhist monk to visit India. Mokurai, was a Buddhist priest and reformer of the Jodo Shin sect, who strongly advocated freedom of religion and the separation of religion and government. He was also the founder of Japanese Red Cross. But how far Mokurai influenced the then Indian Buddhism with his ideas and philosophy is still a subject of research. He stayed in India for a very short period.

During Meiji Period (1868-1912) the trend towards foreign contact got a new dimension. Meiji Government selected some scholars and students to travel abroad to study various fields. As well as many foreigner teachers and instructors were hired to teach their respective field at Japan and many Japanese students studied under their guidance. Buddhist studies were also not an exception. But surprisingly there were very few Japanese scholars who wanted to visit India to study Buddhism. Because there was an idea that, Buddhism was disappeared from India by that time. Instead many Japanese Buddhist students-scholars went to Europe to study Buddhism under scholars like Max Muller and some of them had stopped in India on their way to Europe or their return to Japan for just to visit the Buddhist ruins or monumental sites.

Mention may be made of scholars like Nanjo Bunyu and Takakusu Junjiro. Both of them studied at Europe. Nanjo Bunyu visited India 1887 via Srilanka. To discuss about these two Buddhist Scholars some very brief discussion about Tokyo University may be mentioned. Tokyo University was established in 1877 (10th year of Meiji Era). Initially it was an University to train the government officials. Two years later, i.e. in 1879 Kato Hiroyuki, a Professor and head of the department of Literature of that University invited one Buddhist monk-scholar Hara Tanzan and started a course on Lectures on Buddhist Works as an optional course in the department of literature. Incidentally, in 1868, the government had issued an order known as SHINBUTSU BUNRI REI or “Order to Separate Buddhism and Shintoism” and unfortunately ushered an era known as HAIBUTSU KAISHAKU or getting rid of Buddhism.

In this environment of anti-Buddhist sentiment, the establishment of course on Buddhism at a state university was indeed a courageous step for Prof. Kato and Prof. Rev. Tanzan. During first series of his lecture Tanzan used Buddhist Philosophical Work known as “The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana”, a text that is popular in Japan even today. Two years later after the initiation of this course the subject was included in the department of Philosophy and not in the department of Literature.

In fact, Tanzan himself considered this course as “an experiment in Indian philosophy”. One of the well known scholars from this department was Murakami Sensho, a devout Buddhist.

But he propagated the theory that “Mahayana is not Buddhism”. Though this theory was not well accepted but it was representative of a critical view of Buddhism which began during that era, in contrast to the sectarian Buddhist studies of the past.

A few years later Nanjo Bunyu returned Japan after completion of his studies in Europe via Srilanka and India. He was carrying impression of Indian Buddhism and began the studies of BONGO literally means “language of Brahmins”, i.e. the Studies of Sanskrit.

Later on another Scholar Takakusu Junjiro has taken the charge of the studies and created the course entitled “The History of Indian Philosophy and Religion”. Like Bunyu Junjiro also had the experience of Buddhist Life in India. Though both of them studied in Europe mainly under Sanskrit Scholar Max Muller but they visited India.

New Dimension of Indo-Japanese Relation

Over the ages, influence of Indian Buddhist priests, pilgrims and philosophers to Japan consolidated this age-old cultural relation which is continuing since 752 CE.

But till the middle of the 19th Century Japan's contacts with India were governed by their contacts with Great Britain. To the people of India, "Japan became an example to be emulated, as it had been successful in modernizing and preserving its independence".

Swamiji was overwhelmed with the sincere workmanship of the Japanese people during his visit to Japan on his way to the World Congress of Religion at Chicago in 1893. He had opinion that Indians could learn a great deal from Japan and he encouraged Indian youths to go to Japan for their study and development of their skill. From about the last decade of the 19th Century Japan's trade relation with Japan started by the shipment of a cotton bale to Japan by Indian merchants.

From the end of the 19th Century, however, the relations between India and Japan started assuming an elaborate and different form. Later in the 20th Century again a cultural and intellectual exchange between Japan and India was reinstated through the historic meeting and friendship between Rabindra Nath Tagore and Tenshin Okakura, a great Japanese thinker and pioneer of modern Japanese art in 1902.

Tagore's visit to Japan on several occasions, following his first visit in 1916 may be regarded as another turning point of Indo-Japan cultural and academic relationship. From then onwards the relation assumed a new content and value. Later, after the re-consolidation of Indo-Japanese fraternity owing to the visit of Tagore to Japan and visits of some dignitaries from Japan to India, the nature of ties between these two age-old cultures got a new dimension. Many Japanese scholars, being fascinated by the Indian heritage and culture, started their studies on Indian literature and culture. Thus, the studying of language also became necessary for them. Similarly, Indian scholars and others interested also started studying Japanese language and culture. The initiation of study of Japanese language and culture started in 1954 at Visva-Bharati.

India's freedom movement also received considerable sympathy and support from Japan. Two stalwarts of Indian independence movement, Rashbehari Bose and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had very close association with Japan. The trust and friendship between India and Japan built by them is also considered as strong pillar for modern bilateral ties between these two Asian Nations. Rashbehari Bose's advent in Japan in 1915 gave fresh life to the Indian revolutionary movement. He convened a conference in Tokyo in March, 1942. In that conference, establishment of the India Independence league was decided. In recognition of the spirit of Rashbehari Bose, the Government of Japan honoured him with the Second Order of merit of the Rising Sun. Not only in the political field, till today Rashbehari Bose is also remembered in their everyday life of the common people of Japan for introducing the unique and traditional cuisine of India, widely known as Indian Curry. And this

INDO-KARE has become a most popular food item in modern Japan.

In June 1942 it was decided to invite Subhas Chandra Bose to join as President of the India Independence League established in March of the same year. After joining of Subhas Chandra Bose, the League gained momentum and led to the participation of many Indians irrespective of caste, gender, religion. The determination and commitment of Netaji had also touched the heart of the people of Japan and they also lent a hand of friendship and cooperation to further enhance his patriotic efforts.

When Japan suffered from her first defeat in and lay prostrate, India went out of her policy and become friendly and generous to Japan. Moreover Justice Radhabinod Paul's dissenting opinion on Tokyo Trials exonerated each and every one of the accused on each and every count of the indictment. With such cultural and political relationship people of both the countries felt necessity to know each other and gradually this age-old bond became stronger and stronger day by day.

In the first decade after the diplomatic ties were established in 1952 several high level exchanges took place. One of the important such delegations was Japanese Prime Minister Nobuke Kishi's visit to India in 1957 following Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's return visit to Japan in 1957 and visit of Indian President Mr. Rajendra Prasad in 1958.

With the emergence of a technical civilization and the idea of globalization, Japan has gained even more prominence in the world's trade market and business field. Indo Japanese relations took another dynamic shape. India-Japan relations have made a steady and significant improvement especially since 2000s. One of the important and defining features about this is the establishment of an annual summit between the Prime Ministers of two countries. Japan is the only country in Asia with which India has institutionalized an annual summit system.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's visited India in August 2000. This visit of Mr. Mori provided the momentum to strengthen the Japan-India bi-lateral relations. Mr. Mori and his Indian counterpart Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee decided the establishment of "Global Partnership between Japan and India"..

Since Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to India in April 2005, Japan-India annual summit meetings have been held in respective capitals. When Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Japan in December 2006, Japan-India relationship was elevated to the "Global and Strategic Partnership", which was designed in 2000.

In 2006 the then Prime Minister of Japan Mr. Shinzo Abe and his Indian Counterpart Dr. Manmohan Singh signed the "Roadmap for new dimension to the strategic and global partnership between Japan and India". Both the leaders had the same view regarding the use of ODA (Official Development Assistance). A Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between Japan and India was concluded in 2011.

The year 2007 had a special importance in the bilateral history between Japan and India, especially of West Bengal. Firstly the year was the centenary year of Consulate General of Japan in Kolkata. Moreover, that year celebrated as Japan-India friendship year in commemoration of the signing of cultural agreement between Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi and Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1957.

As the regular programme of an annual summit between the Prime Ministers of two countries, in September 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid an official visit to Japan and in 2015 Prime Minister Abe's visit to India upgraded Japan-India bi-lateral relations and also resolved to transform the Japan-India Special strategic and Global partnership into a deep, broad based and action-oriented partnership. They announced that, 'Japan and India Vision 2025', which is a special Strategic and Global Partnership for working together for the establishment of peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World. This is a joint statement that would serve as guidance for "new era in Japan-India relations."

In November 2016, Prime Minister Modi's official visit to Japan for the summit meeting with his Japanese counterpart opened another new sphere of India Japan fraternity. Prime Minister Abe stated, that summit meeting was a magnificent meeting that substantially advanced the "new era in Japan-India relations," and he hoped the two countries would lead the prosperity and stability of the Indo-Pacific region as a result of coordinating the "Free and Open India and Pacific Strategy" of Japan and the implementation of "Act East Policy" by India.

As effect of this Act East Policy Indo-Japanese Relation gained strong base not only in the technical or economic field but also it enhanced cultural and academic relations. Since 2006, DST or Department of Science and Technology initiated through JSPS (Japan Science and Technology Agency) and MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology) different opportunities to Indians for their development of skills through various programme.

These schemes have given chances to different scholars and students to visit Japan for their academic accomplishment, which was one of the ideas of Swami Vivekananda after his visit.

In August 2017, the two countries announced the establishment of the Japan-India Coordination Forum (JICF) for Development of the North-Eastern Region, described by India as "a coordination forum to identify priority development areas of cooperation for development" of northeast India. The forum will focus on strategic projects aimed at improving connectivity, roads, electric infrastructure, food processing, disaster management, and promoting organic farming and tourism in northeast India. In May 2023, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced a new Indo-Pacific plan during his visit to India.

Moreover, both the countries decided to continue efforts to revise the memorandum on simplifying visa procedure which may enhance people to people exchanges in business and tourism areas. Not

only the economic or commercial ties were entangled, but has also already enhanced and will enhance the cultural ties between two countries.

Concluding Remarks

As a concluding remark I would like to say that, India and Japan have had a long and strong bond. Even in the modern age of highly advanced technology and industry both countries share a deep affection for each other's views and inter-country relations which is reflected in the current trend of professional ties as the two countries declare themselves as global and strategic partners. Moreover, in recent years, the influx of large numbers of Indian professionals, mainly IT professionals and other professionals with Japanese language skills, have entangled a strong tie between two countries, which may foster stronger ties in the years to come.

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