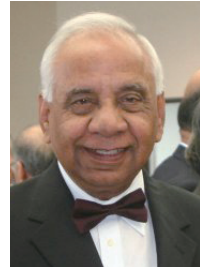


New “Discover India Club” in Japan



Promoting Japan-India Friendship & Cooperation



Author Rabinder Malik

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Golden Period in Japan-India Relations

After World War II, it was Justice Radhabinod Pal's courageous dissenting opinion at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Tokyo that gave a very friendly impression about the people of India to the war-stricken and desolate Japanese. This feeling became even stronger when in 1949 Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru donated a baby elephant, named “Indira” after his own daughter, to Ueno Zoo for the enjoyment of Japanese children. Then in 1952, when Japan regained its sovereignty, India and Japan signed a bilateral treaty of peace and friendship. In 1957, Nehru paid a visit to Japan, accompanied by his daughter Indira Gandhi, who herself subsequently became prime minister of India. However, the most remarkable event of that golden period in India-Japan relations was the memorable goodwill visit to India in 1960 by Crown Prince Akihito and Princess Michiko of Japan (now the emperor and empress).

Memories of that visit were revived again recently when, in November 2013, Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko paid a state visit to India where they were welcomed very warmly by the government and people. Indians like me who live in Japan were delighted and felt honored by this momentous visit. The bonds between Japan and India are based on the strong foundation of centuries-old spiritual and cultural ties, as well as the scholarly contacts between Okakura Tenshin and Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore that developed in the 20th century.

New Era of Bilateral Relations

In recent years, Japan-India relations have undergone a significant and qualitative shift. The establishment in 2006 of the Strategic and Global Partnership between Japan and India has started a new era of bilateral relations which are marked by mutual goodwill, friendship and respect. The momentum of these close relations is sustained by annual summits between the prime ministers of the two countries. The strong bilateral ties between Japan and India now also encompass converging political and strategic interests, and will not only be beneficial for our two countries but also contribute towards long-term regional and global prosperity and stability in the 21st century.

India, the largest democracy in the world, has accomplished

remarkable economic development and is recognized today as an emerging economic power. Japan has provided consistent support for the development of the Indian economy and is deeply involved in India's infrastructural development, including metro rail projects in Delhi and other metropolitan cities, as well as other flagship projects. The Japan-India comprehensive economic partnership agreement signed in 2011 has opened up new opportunities in the bilateral economic engagement. This includes technology transfer, especially in the areas of energy and environment, with which I am personally involved as coordinator of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in Japan.

While recently there has been a remarkable increase in business collaboration between Japan and India, difficulties have arisen not only because of differences in business styles but also because of the very low exchange of people and information between the two countries. The primary purpose of the “Discover India Club” is to promote a better understanding in Japan about India and its people and culture.

Origin of “Discover India Club”

The “Discover India Club” (DIC) was originally founded in 1978 by some members of the Indo-Japan Association, with Saichiro Mismi, director-general of the Indo-Japan Association, serving as adviser of DIC. (Please note that the current name of the Indo-Japan Association is “The Japan-India Association”, which celebrated its 110th anniversary in 2013.)

The major activities of DIC were inspired by the expertise of its members. Hideo Takahashi, its first president, gave lectures about the relationship between the images of Hindu gods and goddesses and those of Japanese Buddhist gods. Soichiro Imanishi, vice president, made tremendous contributions over a period of 20 years and directed the publication of “Qitaab” containing a list of books on Indian culture and social systems. Eight editions were published, and the number of books listed increased from 660 in the first edition in 1983 to 3,255 in the eighth and last edition published in 2003. Under the direction of Tatsuma Tamura, DIC general secretary, official guidebooks were made for the “Festival of India” sponsored by the Indian government and held in Japan in 1988. In 1991, under the direction of the second president, Masanao Ohno, DIC published a

guidebook on India in four parts: (i) general affairs, nature and animals in India; (ii) arts and relics; (iii) textiles, crafts, festivals and cinema, and (iv) eating habits, foods, restaurants and hotels.

Unfortunately, membership of DIC kept declining and after President Ohno passed away the activities of DIC came to a stop some years ago.

Re-establishment of DIC

The new DIC was inaugurated on July 13, 2013 when it held its first general meeting at the Kanagawa Kenmin Center in Yokohama. The newly-formed DIC has some of the older DIC members and some new ones, who come from all walks of life and who have started DIC activities around the theme of “finding the real India” and are responding to various needs of the present era. DIC is a society of people living in Japan who love Indian culture and who want to know more about India. It aims to draw people from diverse fields, especially younger people, and also Indians living in Japan. It is a forum where Japanese and Indians can make friends and get a better understanding of each other’s country and culture.

I feel grateful to the members of DIC for placing their confidence in me and electing me as president of DIC. As a long-term resident of Japan, it is a privilege and an honor for me. My connection with Japan began in 1976 when I came to Tokyo to work for United Nations University, and after retirement I stayed on in Japan and got involved with teaching at Japanese universities and voluntary activities promoting international exchange and cooperation. I have many friends in Japan and am a great admirer of Japanese culture and its egalitarian society. Fortunately, my keen interest in traditional Japanese *enka* and *minyo* helped me understand Japanese culture a little better, and I could see certain basic similarities in the customs and traditions of our two countries.

The new DIC consists of people who have rich experience of India and who will start exploring India further from now on with the aim of contributing to building and expanding bilateral relations through cultural festivals, music and dance, stage dramas, arts and architecture, and textiles and fashion. The rapid economic development of India has brought about many changes in the lifestyle of Indians. We plan to collect information on the Indian way of life, business and society and disseminate this among the general public through our website and through seminars and cultural and educational functions, including music and dance from both countries.

DIC plans to organize tours to India on specialized themes and subjects, including those of special interest to Japanese university students, which would include interaction with local people in India as a component of the tour. Enhanced people-to-people contacts, particularly among the youth of our two countries, would provide a strong foundation for long-term, mutually beneficial relations.

Last but not least, it is also important that information about Japan and its society and culture is disseminated among people in different parts of India. We shall consult with the Japan Foundation and other groups that are already involved in disseminating information about



Japanese *minyo* “*Otachi zake*” performed by Rabinder Malik; *shakuhachi* by Kaoru Shibuya; *Nihon buyo* dance by Ryuhou Masuda; drums by Hiroko Kato.

Japan in India and promoting social and cultural exchanges between the peoples of the two countries. Our endeavor will be to explore the possibility of establishing a “Discover Japan Club” in India so that we have a partner to work with.

The foundation ceremony of the new DIC was held on Oct. 18, 2013 at the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) Auditorium at the Indian Embassy in Tokyo. It was a great success. Messages of strong support were received from Her Excellency Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, ambassador of India, and from Ambassador Hiroshi Hirabayashi, president of the Japan-India Association. The hall was full and ICC staff made meticulous arrangements for the stage and sound system. The rich cultural program included performances by famous Indian sitar player Kishor Ghosh and Tsugaru shamisen player Misao Habu, winner of a recent All Japan contest; as well as the Indian Odissi dance by Sachiko Ito from Japan, and Japanese *minyo* songs performed by an Indian (myself), accompanied on *shakuhachi*/shamisen by Kaoru Shibuya.

DIC held another successful program of “Japanese and Indian Music and Dance” on Nov. 21 at Totsuka Sakura Plaza Hall in Totsuka Ward, Yokohama, which was attended by 300 people.

DIC will continue to work closely with the Indian Cultural Centre and the Japan-India Association in planning its future activities. Many DIC members are also members of the Japan-India Association. DIC will also keep in contact with other groups in Japan that are involved in the promotion of business and economic relations between Japan and India and with another group that has been successfully implementing an annual Japan-India Student Conference for several years.

We invite all those interested in promoting Japan-India relations to join us. Complete details about DIC, its programs and operations, and a membership application form, are available at our website: www.discoverindiaclub.org. The activities of DIC for this year are starting now. Any valuable suggestions, cooperation, support and donations will be highly welcome. Our contact address is otoiawase@discoverindiaclub.org. **JS**

Rabinder Malik has been living in Japan for 38 years and is president of DIC. He had a long United Nations career, including 20 years with UN University, and with UNDP and WHO in India and Indonesia. He is a visiting lecturer at Keio University, representative of TERI in Japan, and a member/adviser of several social, cultural and educational institutions in Japan.