

# India-Japan Relations: Future Avenues of Cooperation



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## Brief History of Relations

Speaking at Keio University in 1916, the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore described the historical relationship between India and Southeast and East Asia in the following words: “The whole of Eastern Asia from Burma to Japan was united with India in the closest tie that can exist between nations. There was a living community of hearts, a nervous system evolved through which messages ran between us about the deepest needs of humanity... Our arts and literature put on new leaves and flowers under the influence of this sunlight of united hearts; and races belonging to different lands and histories acknowledged the highest unity of man and the deepest bond of love.” Yasunari Kawabata, another Asian Nobel laureate, was present during this visit of Tagore to Japan. Kawabata recalls that “the poet seemed wreathed in an aura of peace and calm which was palpable to all in the audience.” Many persons in Japan shared Kawabata’s views, though staunch nationalists like Mitsuru Toyama thought Tagore effete and representative of a “ruined country”.

Tagore in his inimitable poetic style had made a reference to the message of tolerance and non-violence, which came to Japan via China and Korea 1,500 years ago. Prince Shotoku Taishi used the prestige of the Imperial Court to spread this message throughout Japan, underlining the essential unity of the human race.

The gentle message of the Buddha conveyed from India to Japan had a profound impact on Japanese people from all walks of life. The connections between Japan and India continued in the succeeding centuries. The Indian monk Bodhisena was invited to witness the opening of the great Daibutsu of Nara in the 8th century; scholars like Kukai, also called Kobo Daishi, travelled to China to meet monks and scholars from India and to translate Indian texts into Japanese. These are the civilizational foundations of our relationship: a meeting of minds, a beating together of hearts, a spiritual union. There were other less spiritual and more material examples of cooperation which will be mentioned later.

During the 260 years of isolation imposed by the Tokugawa shogunate which lasted till 1868, contact with India both intellectual and material continued. Trade from Dutch colonies in India like Serampore in Bengal with Dutch trading posts at Dejima in Nagasaki continued throughout this period. Indian cotton goods, gold and silver items and Japanese silk, ceramics and lacquer were well known to our ancestors. After the Meiji Restoration, direct links with

India were established; trade and people-to-people contact developed steadily. Till the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, ties with India had grown to the extent that India was Japan’s third-largest trade partner after the United States and China. Leading intellectuals and artists of both countries had a mutually enlightening intercourse. From India came Swami Vivekanda, a religious leader, who along with the head priest of Enkakuji in Kamakura attended the first World Congress of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Tagore, the poet mentioned earlier, visited Japan several times. Political leaders like Rash Behari Bose who came in the 1920s and Subhash Chandra Bose, who came to Japan during the Second World War, established important links with members of Japanese society and the government. Portraits of the two men, not related to each other, may be seen in the Yushukan attached to Yasukuni Jinja. From Japan, artists and historians like Okakura Tenshin, Yokoyama Taikan, Arai Kampo and later Akino Fuki went to India. These exchanges led to a cross-fertilisation of ideas, art styles and a deeper understanding of each other’s culture, aspirations and the civilizational foundations of our respective countries.

After the Second World War, there were some important gestures of friendship shown by India towards Japan which had an impact on the Japanese people and government. The dissenting judgement of Justice Radhadinod Pal, the Indian judge on the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, which held Japanese wartime leaders to be “not guilty”, gave India a positive image in Japan once the judgement was made widely known through the efforts of men like Yasaburo Shimonaka, head of the publishing firm Heibonsha. His book *Toyo no Shinjitsu*, which carried the dissenting judgement, gained a favorable response throughout Japan.

India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was an ardent admirer of Japanese culture, though not of Japanese Imperialism. He persuaded Indian exporters of iron ore to freely sell their products to Japan to help rehabilitate its steel industry shattered by the war. Nehru’s touching gesture of presenting a baby elephant to Ueno Zoo in 1949, in a situation where most animals had perished, was deeply appreciated by the children of Japan and their parents.

## Postwar Political & Security Relations

The establishment of diplomatic relations in 1952, India’s decision to waive claims of reparations for wartime damages from Japan, combined with the kind of gestures mentioned above, helped to set

relations on a friendly course. In 1958, after Japan's economy had revived, thanks in some measure to the demands of US troops in Korea and later Vietnam, India became the first country to receive ODA from Japan. Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda made a remark in 1962 which shows the affinity with India: "Japan and India are the natural pegs in a security system" for Asia.

The advent of the Cold War, however, the Security Treaty Japan signed with the US amid the political commotion of 1960, India's perceived closeness to the Soviet Union and the socialist policies of Nehru, were among the factors which led to a drift in our relations. Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi and Nehru exchanged visits in 1956 and 1957 respectively, but Yasuhiro Nakasone, in 1969, was the first Japanese premier to go to India after a gap of over a decade. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her successor Rajiv Gandhi in turn paid visits to Japan but the frequency was nowhere near what is witnessed today. Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu went to India in 1990 and then for 10 years no Japanese premier visited until the path-breaking visit of Yoshiro Mori in August 2000. India's nuclear tests of May 1998 had led to a chasm in India's relations with Japan. Mori succeeded in breaking the ice which had set in.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's return visit to Japan in December 2001 set the trend for the next 16 years. Now, the premiers of the two countries exchange visits once a year. They also make it a point to meet at multilateral events like the G-20 summits. In addition, ministers of defense, foreign affairs, trade and commerce meet regularly.

The important fact is that the bilateral relationship is completely bipartisan. In December 2009 after his election victory, Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of the Democratic Party of Japan visited India and his example was followed by his successors from the DPJ, Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda. Similarly the Liberal Democratic Party prime ministers who followed, Yasuo Fukuda and Taro Aso, carried on the practice of annual summit meetings.

In strategic terms, Mori and Vajpayee had laid the foundations for a closer connection between the military leaders of both countries, with special focus on the navy and the coast guards. The December 2006 visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Japan led to the expansion of the Mori-Vajpayee "Global Partnership" to a "Global and Strategic Partnership". After the return to power of Shinzo Abe in December 2012, ties were further strengthened; in September 2014 Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Abe further elevated the partnership to a "Special' Strategic and Global Partnership".

In practical terms this has meant joint naval and coast guard exercises; also it has led to a growing strategic relationship between the two countries and the US on the one hand, and between India, Japan and Australia on the other. These triangular relations have led to several joint naval exercises. The first triangular exercise took place in April 2007 in the waters off Okinawa, when the navies of the

US, Japan and India were together. These three countries were joined in September 2007, in the Bay of Bengal, by the navies of Australia and Singapore. The most recent triangular exercise between India, the US and Japan, "Malabar", was held in the Indian Ocean in October 2015.

The strategic significance of the joint exercises of these navies is underscored by the fact that there are eight choke points that we have to deal with: the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Bab el Mandeb, the Cape of Good Hope, the Malacca Straits, and the straits of Lombok, Sunda and Ombai Wetar. Some experts in India believe that Malacca is not as vital to China as Lombok, since the bulk of its oil comes through Lombok. For India and Japan, Hormuz is crucial for our oil supplies. So guarding all these sea lanes is vital to our energy security. In view of its geographical position, Indonesia is thus a key country for India, Japan and indeed Australia. Japan and India can also cooperate in developing the rich Blue Economy in the Indo-Pacific, including deep sea mining.

Another area of cooperation between the two countries is the development of the northeastern region of India, which shares borders with Myanmar, Bangladesh and China. As part of India's "Act East" policy, there is an effort to build road and rail connections linking the Indian subcontinent with the ASEAN region. ASEAN and the East Asia Summit (EAS), of which ASEAN is the core, bring ASEAN together with China, Japan, the US, Russia, Australia and New Zealand. Japan and India recognise the value of strengthening the EAS, an appropriate forum for enhancing peace and security in the entire Indo-Pacific region. Similarly Japanese ODA for the development of India's Andaman Islands, located in the Indian Ocean, assumes strategic importance. The most remote of our Andaman islands is a mere 90 kilometers from the northern tip of Sumatra, making India a close maritime neighbour of Indonesia, a key country in the security architecture of the entire region. In view of the claims made by China over the Natuna Islands administered by Indonesia, Japan and India's cooperation in the region assumes enhanced significance.

In December 2015 Abe and Modi signed landmark agreements for the transfer of defense-related technologies to India and the protection of classified military information. These technologies include the US-2 amphibious aircraft, which has important strategic significance for the navy and coast guard.

At each meeting of the leaders of the two countries, the importance of the security of the sea lanes, with special focus on the South China Sea, is underlined. Both countries emphasize the importance of observing the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). Also they underline the need to abide by the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. This must be done by consensus and not by force. India ratified the UNCLOS in 1995. In the context of the behavior of the Chinese

towards their neighbors and their territorial and maritime claims against India, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia, the security relationship between the powerful military establishments of Japan and India assumes added importance and will grow in significance in the future.

In recent exchanges at the summit level, including the December 2015 meeting between Abe and Modi, both leaders have expressed concerns about North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs and the issue of abductions of Japanese nationals by the North Koreans. This expression of concern by India over an issue of paramount security interest to Japan is symbolic of the extent of mutual trust and support that exists between the two countries.

There is also a wide measure of agreement on the need to work together on reform of the UN Security Council to make it more reflective of the realities of the 21st century rather than 1945 when the council was set up. Similarly Japan and India have expressed "zero tolerance" for terrorism in all its forms. They have called upon all countries to abide by relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, such as Resolution No. 1267, and to oppose vigorously the succour given to terrorists by certain countries such as Pakistan.

India has expressed full understanding of the legislation for peace and security which Japan is seeking to bring about. India welcomes a more proactive role by Japan in enhancing its military contribution to global peace, stability and prosperity.

### Economic & Trade Cooperation

Japan's economic cooperation has been growing over the last 10 or so years. Bilateral trade has grown five times between 2000 and 2014-15 and now totals \$15.5 billion. China's trade with Japan, however, is worth \$335 billion and with India, China trades goods worth over \$72 billion. India's bilateral trade with Japan is, therefore, way below its real potential.

Japan has been deeply involved in India's automotive industry since the 1980s with Suzuki being the pioneer. Now Toyota, Nissan and others are expanding in the Indian market. Some 250 component manufacturers from Japan have a presence in India. The entire value chain of this industry has benefitted greatly from Japan.

The future should see expansion in robotics, automation and artificial intelligence, where India's software and Japan's hardware expertise can come together. Japan is a world leader in miniaturization, renewable energy, control of air pollution and water-saving technologies. Modi's four important initiatives – "Clean India, Make in India, Skill India and Digital India" – are initiatives tailor-made for cooperation with the leading technologies of Japan in all these areas.

There are other complementarities which suggest greater synergies: a shrinking population in Japan and a rapidly expanding

one in India; a zero-growth economy and one of the fastest growing economies; capital-rich Japan and capital-starved India; these are all areas of potential growth. In April 2005, when Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi came to India, he and premier Singh agreed to set up the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor as an exclusive area for Japanese investment. The area covering six of India's most industrialised states is the size of Honshu at 1,483 square km. With Special Technical loans where 30% of the equipment has to be sourced from Japanese companies, a Dedicated Freight Corridor is being set up to speed up the movement of goods. In December 2015 during Abe's visit, the two sides also reviewed progress on Smart City projects and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for Japanese companies.

In September 2014 during Modi's visit to Japan it was agreed to encourage 3.5 trillion yen worth of investment in infrastructure via the Public Private Partnership route into India. Among the projects agreed upon was the Bengaluru [Bangalore] Chennai [Madras] industrial corridor, the Metro projects in Chennai and Ahmedabad, and some new ports. It has been agreed that Japan industrial townships will be developed with facilities at par with the prevailing policy for SEZs and National Investment and Manufacturing Zones. The idea is to attract Japanese investment in these new townships and ports.

Another significant project agreed to by both sides in the last two summit meetings is the introduction of shinkansen technologies into India. The first segment will be the Mumbai-Ahmedabad sector. For all this varied investment India receives large amounts of ODA, likely to be 400 billion yen in the last financial year. As mentioned, an important aspect of our work together is Japanese support for the "Skill India" campaign under which training at vocational schools is to be aided by Japan.

Nuclear energy is a vital component of our bilateral cooperation. The two sides have been discussing the matter over the last few years. In December 2015 it was agreed that the details regarding India's laws, especially with regard to the liability of manufacturers of nuclear plants, will be resolved, so that agreements can be concluded. Toshiba, the parent company of the American Westinghouse, and Hitachi, the partner of GE in the US, are closely involved in these negotiations. India is aware of the need for sensitivity in dealing with Japan on nuclear matters because of the nuclear attacks in 1945.

Japan has been most helpful in assisting India to gain entry to the Missile Technology Control Regime and other international groupings related to nuclear energy. Regrettably China, in a recent exercise, successfully resisted India's entry to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, despite the support of Japan, the US and other leading members of this group.

Space is another area in which we have worked together since

2005 when JAXA and the Indian Space Research Organization signed an agreement. Disaster risk reduction, using the technologies available in space satellites, is the kind of cooperation that the two countries envisage.

Rare earths have become an important aspect of our economic cooperation which has strategic implications. In 2012 China, which is the principal source of rare earths, abruptly cut off its exports to Japan citing bilateral territorial disputes. Japan thereafter made agreements with India to exploit rare earth sources which are vital for a number of high-tech industries, including chip manufacturers.

### Culture, Crafts & the Imperial Family

As mentioned earlier, there has been a long history of cultural interaction. Apart from the realm of philosophy and religion there has been strong influence from India on textiles and other crafts. The *Mingeikan* (Japan Folk Crafts Museum) in Tokyo shows this graphically in the calico or *sarasa*, the bandhani or *shibori*, the tie and dye techniques, *ikkat* and *kasuri* weaving techniques and in several other areas. Folk art, unlike art works which bear the signature of the artist, is for the community, in which the creation is greater than the creator.

*Gagaku*, the Imperial Court dance, is said to have its origins in India, having come to Japan via the Silk Road. The shamisen and the shakuhachi, along with many other musical instruments, have replicas in India and indeed in other countries along the Silk Road – Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, China and Korea.

The martial art tradition of Japan, *budo*, is said to have had origins in India, where it was developed by Buddhist monks and travellers, as a means of defense against robbers and brigands without the use of lethal weapons. Kalaripayattu in the southern state of Kerala bears many similarities to karate and other martial arts.

The *hiragana* and *katakana* scripts are said to have been introduced to Japan by men like Kobo Daishi, who were exposed to the phonetic scripts used in Sanskrit and Pali, the languages in which Indian texts were written.

In modern times, dance and music festivals have taken place in both countries. The year 2007 was declared as the “Year of Japan in India” and the “Year of India in Japan”. Scores of groups representing every aspect of culture and craft travelled in each direction. Clearly, in the future, the two countries will have to develop these ancient links in order for the younger generations to appreciate that our friendship has ancient foundations.

The historic visit of Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko of Japan to India from Nov. 30 to Dec. 5, 2013, was another milestone. As crown prince and princess the imperial couple had come to India in November 1960, shortly after their marriage. Their return to India after an interval of over half a century was full of nostalgia and

special meaning for them. For India, the visit of the emperor and empress, one of the highest symbols of Japan’s soft power, was a recognition of the extraordinary expansion that has taken place in our ties, especially in the last 15 years.

### Education

This is an area where despite encouragement by the two governments there has been little progress. Compared to the 95,000 Chinese students in Japan, and several thousand Vietnamese, Koreans, Indonesians, Bangladeshis and Nepalis, there are a mere 727 Indian students in Japan!

While there has been some institutionalization of doctoral and post-doctoral research fellows, there has not been much movement in the field of exchange of faculty members. Abe hopes that over the next five years 10,000 talented young Indians will visit Japan as part of student exchanges, IT and other short-term training.

### Conclusion

I will conclude this piece with a quotation from the last paragraph of the Tokyo Declaration issued, on Sept. 1, 2014, on the occasion of Modi’s visit to Japan. As mentioned, it was on this occasion that the Strategic and Global Partnership, signed in December 2006 in Tokyo by Abe and Singh, was elevated to a “‘Special’ Strategic and Global Partnership”. These words make clear the sentiments that impel us to build ever closer relationships, as well as acknowledging our debt to earlier leaders who laid the foundations of this unique friendship which is shorn of all historical baggage:

“Conscious that from time immemorial whenever Japanese and Indians have come together, they have struck a deep chord in each other; recognising the importance of their countries’ success; grateful to previous leaders for their invaluable contribution in building this relationship; aware of their enormous responsibilities to lead at a moment of great opportunities and challenges, the two prime ministers decided to create a relationship that will shape the course of their countries and the character of this region and the world in this century.” **JS**

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