

Japanese Language Boom in India — Part 2

By Mukesh Williams



Author Mukesh Williams

Introduction

The first part of this article titled “Japanese Language Boom in India” (see Special Article 5 in *Japan SPOTLIGHT*, July/August 2018) dealt with the shortage of native and non-native Japanese teachers in India and the inadequacy of traditional Japanese teaching methodologies. Part 2 deals with the setting up of language departments in colleges in India, student-to-student language learning, traditional and innovative teaching methods, and expanding job opportunities. As mentioned in Part 1, Japanese language learning in India has undergone a resurgence and will soon outpace the learning of traditional foreign languages like French, German, Spanish and Mandarin. The pictorial aspects of the Japanese language and the mysteries of Japanese culture have captured the attention of Indian students both at school and college. Though Japanese characters — kanji, hiragana and katakana — are very different from Devanagari, Nastaliq or English, the fascination with Japanese culture helps students to overcome the difficulties. An interest in Japanese literature, especially the haiku of Basho and the novels of Natsume Soseki, has always been the forte of the older generation born in the 1950s; the young generation born in the 1990s or later are more attracted by Japanese anime, manga, bullet trains, the aesthetics of the *kawaii* (cute) and food.

The opportunities for both native and non-native teachers of Japanese language are increasing as new colleges and universities are using their language centers to attract students, generate capital and remain globally competitive. Popular and branded colleges, like St. Stephen's College, Delhi, attract 20 times more students to their

Japanese programs than other lesser-known colleges. Native teachers are in great demand both at colleges and universities and often take home a salary of 80,000 to 100,000 Indian rupees, excluding free board and lodging. The salaries for non-native teachers are about 40% less. However, being foreign staff, native teachers are subject to a 30% tax levy by the Indian government on their income.

The interest in Japanese language in India has gained from a new interest in Japanese food, which is considered healthy and nourishing. With a rising expatriate Japanese population in urban centers seeking Japanese cuisine and a new interest amongst locals in fish-based light meals, Japanese restaurants are booming. With a desire to provide authentic Japanese cuisine, restaurants like Fuji in Connaught Place, New Delhi, are attracting Japanese chefs to create Japanese dishes at a reasonable price. Also, the introduction of the Delhi Metro and Shinkansen in India has reinforced the reliable Sony-Suzuki brand of Japan.

Interactions between Japan and India date back to Buddhist expansionism during the sixth to eighth centuries. In August 736 the Buddhist monk Bodhisena visited Nara at the behest of Emperor Shomu and conducted the opening-of-the-eyes ceremony for the bronze statue of Vairocana at Todai-ji temple. Some traditional Japanese court dances and music are influenced by Indian tradition, and it is believed that the hiragana syllabary shows the influence of the Sanskrit linguistic system introduced in Japan by Bodhisena. In 1916 Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem highlighting the journey of Buddhism from India to Japan and what we can learn from Japan.

Wearing saffron robes, the masters of religion (dharma)



Photo: Author

At St. Stephen's College Chapel with Japanese students



Photo: Author

Japanese language class at St. Stephen's College

Went to your country to teach,
Today we come to your door as disciples,
To learn the teachings of action (karma).

The historical bonding, religious interaction and sharing of linguistic traditions between India and Japan make us believe that Japanese language education will grow in the coming decades to the advantage of both nations. The following stories by my colleagues and students will show how the Japanese language is loved by many Indians and how important education in the Japanese language has become in India.

Japanese Language Teaching Centre at St. Stephen's College

Told by Renish Geevarghese Abraham,
Bursar and Director, Centre for Languages, St. Stephen's College

The Centre for Languages is a self-financed educational body under the St. Stephen's College Delhi Educational Trust. The Centre offers Japanese language courses at three levels — Certificate, Diploma and Advanced Diploma. These courses are affiliated to the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Delhi. The Centre is committed to promoting Japanese language and culture among Indian students with a view to strengthening the ties between Japan and India. In St. Stephen's College, the teaching and promotion of Japanese language is especially inspired by a 25-year-old partnership with Soka University in Japan.

Admission to the Japanese course at the Centre is strictly based on merit. The Centre receives around 400 to 500 applications from various parts of the country every year for admission to the course at beginner's level. Based on the academic scores of the applicants, the Centre decides a cut-off point that allows 40 candidates to be admitted to the Certificate level. For admission to the Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels, a candidate needs to have a Certificate and Diploma respectively obtained from either the Centre or from the University of Delhi. In all academic matters, including the appointment of teachers, syllabi and conduct of examinations, the Centre follows the routine directions issued by the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Delhi. The Centre has highly qualified faculty appointed from a panel prepared by the University based on interviews. There is also a provision to recruit faculty from Japanese universities, following the norms of the Indian government in this regard.

The Centre uses *Nihongo Shokyu* and *Nihongo Chukyu* published by the Tokyo Gaikokugo University for teaching Japanese at the beginners and advanced level respectively. These texts focus not only on imparting Japanese language skills but also various aspects of Japanese culture. The primary concern, of course, is with reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. However, the major components of the syllabi include lessons on conversations in various contexts, learning vocabulary, grammar practice, and learning and practicing



Renish Geevarghese
Abraham

kanji. Conversations in every lesson are centered around various aspects of Japanese culture, including an introduction to festivals like *Obon* and to *minshuku*, cities like Kyoto and Tokyo, and encounters at various places like hospitals and restaurants. At the advanced level the text also deals with literary pieces to give the students a sense of Japanese short stories and writing styles.

The language instructors at the Centre are given an orientation by the University every year before teaching commences. They generally follow the direct method in teaching Japanese. Lessons are taught in Japanese from the beginner's level and if the students face difficulty in comprehension, they use the medium of English and Hindi to facilitate. At the Advanced Diploma level, the medium of instruction is fully Japanese. Besides classes, the students are also encouraged to do various performances on the "Language Day" which is celebrated in February every year. On this day, the Japanese students introduce to the College some art forms or poetic forms from Japanese culture. Learning at the Centre therefore is a fulfilling and wholesome experience for the students in the sense that they not only get introduced to a new language but also a new culture, which would make them good ambassadors for India if they are employed in Japan or Japanese partnership companies.

Teaching Japanese Language at St. Stephen's College

Told by Ui Teramoto, Visiting Lecturer at
Centre for Languages, St. Stephen's College,
Guest Lecturer at the Department of East
Asian Studies, Delhi University, Senior
Researcher at Keio University-SFC



Ui Teramoto

Japanese language courses provided by St. Stephen's Centre for Languages attract considerable numbers of students with various Japanese linguistic, cultural, academic and business interests. In the academic year 2018-2019, St. Stephen's College offers Certificate and Advanced Diploma courses to 40 and nine students respectively, taught by both Indian and Japanese instructors. Having been selected after a highly competitive exam by the College (only one in 12 students could register for the Certificate course this year), students are keen to acquire linguistic skills as fast as they can. Most students are in their early twenties and pursue Japanese as an extracurricular class aside from their main undergraduate studies. While some attend classes from neighborhood areas, others commute for an hour and a half to the North campus for two-hour classes held three times a week. Riding the wings of Japanese animation and pop culture, employment opportunities for those with Japanese language skills in India are expanding.

An interest in Japanese culture and expanding job opportunities are two reasons why Indian students seek to develop Japanese linguistic skills. The case of Ms. Himani pursuing an Advanced Diploma in Japanese at St. Stephen's College is one example. Before she entered the College, she studied English language at the British Council. Here she met an old man whose daughter became proficient in the Japanese language and travelled the world. Inspired by the story,

Himani started studying Japanese in earnest. In 2017, after completing two years of study she won the 30th All India Japanese Language Speech Contest (Junior Category) organized by the Monbusho Scholars Association in India (MOSAI) and will take part in the South Asian Federation of Japanese Universities Alumni (SAFJUA) Speech Contest this year as an Indian contestant. Now she wants to find gainful employment in a Japanese company and become a travelogue writer. Also, Ashima Garg, a commerce student who enrolled in the Japanese Certificate course, wants to read Haruki Murakami in the original and find a job in a Japanese company. According to her, trade between South Asian nations and Japan is rising and “the demand for individuals who can speak and write Japanese fluently is more than the supply.”

Buttressed by cultural products from Japan and professionalism in business, Japanese language education in India has a bright future. However, most students only see career paths in automobile, IT, service and translation sectors. Healthcare and artificial intelligence (AI) are new areas that the governments of both countries should also promote based on the needs of both individual learners and industries.

My Japanese Study & Indian Students' Motivation to Learn Japanese

Told by Marshall Sherrell, Keio University
Exchange student from the University of Washington

Perhaps the most difficult language for a native English speaker to learn is Japanese. With a grammatical structure nearly opposite that of English, two syllabaries and thousands of kanji, Japanese poses a unique set of challenges for aspiring polyglots. I have pursued fluency in Japanese mostly the “traditional” way through classroom study, but a couple of less conventional study methods such as immersion learning and listening to spoken Japanese have yielded better results.

More than any other export, Japanese entertainment media has caught the attention of the world. After dominating the videogame industry in the 1990s and early 2000s, Japanese media exploded onto the world stage with the proliferation of large quantities of Japanese animation. Formerly a niche market, anime has enjoyed worldwide fame in recent years through increasing accessibility via Internet streaming services. One butterfly effect of this phenomenon has been a rise in interest among young people for all things Japanese. Like my experience, many Indian students are coming to appreciate Japanese culture and subculture, which is also drumming up interest in the Japanese language.

With business ventures between India and Japan on the rise, career-minded students are also considering the benefits of Japanese proficiency. When business activities mandate linguistic proficiency, the invisible hand of capitalism will always work such magic. Those prohibitively expensive immersive language courses will be discounted or funded, visa restrictions will be loosened — as Japan loosened such restrictions for Indians at the beginning of this year;



Marshall Sherrell

and long-term enculturation will likely ensue. Whether the current Japanese language boom represents a passing trend or a cultural shift remains to be seen.

Teaching Japanese to Students at St. Stephen's College

Told by Harumi Yokokawa, Assistant
Lecturer, Tokyo IT School, System Shared Inc.

My experience of teaching Japanese to students of St. Stephen's College reveals that there is a keen interest in Japanese culture and language amongst students in India. I taught popular Japanese phrases and structures and grammatical structures to Indian students during my stay at St. Stephen's College as an exchange student. Most students already knew some Japanese phrases and customs through anime and manga. I helped them to speak those phrases correctly. After teaching basic greetings or *aisatsu* and basic reactions or *aizuchi* I made them practice and converse using SNS chat.

When I was in College residence some students came to my room to learn about Japanese aesthetics through paper craft and fashion. Also, when we had the opportunity to perform a Japanese dance called *soran-bushi* during morning assembly many students learnt the steps and used them at other dancing events in College. In spring 2018, I was invited to a Japanese class conducted by a Japanese professor at St. Stephen's College where students were quite fluent in Japanese and possessed a strong desire to go to Japan. Most enjoyed manga, anime and television drama which motivated them to learn Japanese. Even after returning to Japan I continued to interact with students from India through SNS chats, sending them pictures about Japanese life using Japanese phrases. Professor Mukesh Williams, coordinator of Stephaninan Alumni in Japan, told us that St. Stephen's College had established a Japanese Society in which hundreds of students enrolled. Such interest amongst Indian students is encouraging news for Japanese education in India.



Harumi Yokokawa

My Journey to Japan

Told by Arpita Victor, St. Stephen's College
Exchange Student at Soka University

Having lived in the same house, locality, city and country for all my life, the way I chose to broaden my horizons was reading whatever books I could find and watching what most of my peers did not. Among other things I began watching anime instead of Cartoon Network. At the time I would never have imagined that this would grow into a full-fledged academic interest further on in life. Back then, I would watch a lot of anime, like *Inuyasha*, *Saiunkoku Monogatari*, *K-on!!*, *Suzumiya Haruhi no Yuutsu* and anything else that showed on Animax. As time passed I grew interested in how anime stories were made, and I discovered manga. I eventually came to spend more time



Arpita Victor

reading manga than watching anime, and soon manga became my most favored form of entertainment. More than anything else manga was how I learnt most of what I know about Japanese culture. By the time I started college, I wanted to take my interest in Japanese culture to the next level by reading literary works in Japanese and I started with Haruki Murakami's *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*. Then I moved on to a couple of classical works, particularly Ryunosuke Akutagawa's short stories translated in a volume called *Rashomon and Other Short Stories* and Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro*. Reading the introductions of these editions I realized that the nuances and implications of the original texts are very different from what I was reading in English.

It was around this time that I came upon the opportunity to join a two-semester part-time certificate course at my college conducted by the Department of East Asian Studies of the University of Delhi. It was a decision that I made very organically, without any form of compulsion or need, except for the wish that one day very soon I would be able to read Japanese books and manga without any translation. Once I began learning Japanese, I found that my awareness of Japanese culture grew more grounded, in that I had an otherwise obvious realization that acquiring Japanese language is not out of my reach in spite of having been brought up in a very different culture and country. By the end of the course I had learnt over 300 kanji and could understand basic grammatical forms in the Japanese language. Taking this course also opened many possible avenues for me not to mention the exchange program with Soka University which I am a part of currently. Whatever basic Japanese I learnt in the language course has helped me a lot after coming to Japan, enabling me to understand and use basic instructions and phrases. When once I traveled in Japan vicariously through television and books, now I am in Japan solving the mystery of the Japanese language and culture.

Of Manga, Anime, J-pop & Everything Japanese

Told by Wafa Hamid, Assistant Professor,
English, LSR, Delhi University

From teenagers swooning over Atsushi or Wataru, from the J-pop boyband *B2Takes*, or heated discussion on the *Death Note* series, Indian engagement with Japan and its culture has grown over the years. Japanese culture has influenced India more than any other East Asian culture. This includes Indian intellectuals such as the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore writing about India learning from Japan and himself maintaining extensive contacts with Japanese intellectuals. Beyond intellectual discourse, Japanese popular culture has begun to permeate India, especially its cities. This is reflected in the launch in 2011 of the first comic convention in Delhi with many events and stalls dealing with Japanese manga. The comic con has expanded to other cities in India such as Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune and Hyderabad. There are annual comic cons now in all these cities. In fact, Indians have been one of the largest consumers of anime, so much so that when the anime *Naruto Shippuden* came to an end in 2014, thousands were disappointed. This fascination has come of age



Wafa Hamid



Photo: Author

The iconic Taj Mahal and modern cultural interaction

with many people taking up the study of Japanese culture, literature and language in their higher studies. Many researchers are now engaged with Japan on a completely new level. There is an increased interest in the study of literature, the visual arts and media of Japan. Students in the premier institutes of India, including Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University and IIT Mumbai have successfully defended their dissertations on Japanese literature and graphic narratives. This has in turn manifested itself in a boom in demand for Japanese language instruction and learning in India. The firmly established Centre for Japanese Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University and the popularity of the Certificate and Diploma courses in Japanese language at the Centre for Languages at St. Stephen's College are some examples of interaction between the two cultures. With many collaborations and exchanges between universities in Japan and India, this interest is only going to grow further into a more engaging partnership.

Conclusion

The opinions of three students and three instructors reveal the strong interest of Indian students and professionals in acquiring Japanese language skills to understand Japanese culture and gain a professional foothold in the world. With expanding opportunities to learn Japanese in Indian institutes, colleges and universities, the popularity of the language will grow. Together with iconic brands like Sony, Suzuki and the Shinkansen, Japanese language education will soon acquire its own iconic identity. The inter-Asian cooperation as Tagore envisaged in the early 20th century is now becoming realized in the 21st century.

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