India-Japan Relations: Cultural Syncretism and Civilisational Ties

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India and Japan share a long-standing friendship rooted in spirituality, strong cultural syncretism and civilizational ties. Historically, India's first direct contact with Japan occurred at the Todaiji Temple in Nara, where Bodhisena performed the consecration of Lord Buddha's statue in 752 AD. The transmission of Buddhist teachings and texts from India to Japan in the sixth century contributed to the unique adaptation of cultural, interpretations and religious development of Japan.

Take for example, India and Japan share similarities in deities, particularly through Buddhism and cultural exchanges. Bodhisattvas, such as Siddhartha Gautama, are venerated in both countries. Deities like Mahakala and Daikokuten protect the Buddhist Dharma, while Lord Ganesha and Kangitenis associated with wisdom and obstacles. Japanese Buddhist kami is called Benzaiten which originated from the Hindu goddess of all learning, Saraswati. Similarly, Lakshmi became Kichijoten and Kubera, a Bishamon. Dragons, like the Nagas in Indian mythology, are revered in both cultures. Deities like Lord Indra and Inari are connected to water, rainfall, agriculture, and rice.

The Japanese cultural practices in business, such as Kanban, Hansei, TQM, Kaizen, and Muri, Muda, Mura, are widely recognised. India's Make-in-India initiative and Japan’s Monozukuri combines these practices with technological prowess and spirit. These practices are relevant to India's automotive industry, which has transformed its landscape especially in the standardisation of technologies and the skilling of labour force.

India is expanding its railways in order to keep up its rapidly expanding economy. Japan has made significant contributions to India's railway infrastructure through various projects and collaborations. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is providing financial assistance for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail project, and Japan's Shinkansen technology is being used for the high-speed trains. Japan has provided financial assistance, technology transfer, and expertise for the construction and operation of the metro system in India. The first three lines of the Delhi Metro used Japanese rolling stock and technology. Japan has been involved in the development of two dedicated freight corridors in India, the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC) and the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC). Japan and India are collaborating on railway research and development projects, enhancing freight movement and reducing congestion. Japan offers training and capacity-building programs for Indian railway personnel, improving infrastructure, passenger safety, and freight transport efficiency, while promoting bilateral ties and technology transfer.

While launching the ambitious Skill India Mission in July 2015, PM Narendra Modi noted that India had the potential to provide a workforce of about 4 to 5 crore to the world if the capabilities honed. There is a strong potential in promoting cultural exchanges between India and Japan through ‘’Specified Skilled Worker’’ (SSW) route. India should emerge as the "human resource capital" of the world, he further said. Moreover, data shows that since 2015 the workforce in Japan has rapidly expanded to include the Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Filipinos, and the Indians. India has the potential to provide job markets to Japan. Japanese

training programs can be highly beneficial for Indians during their stay in Japan, especially for those who are visiting for work, study, or other purposes. Moreover, the Indian workforce can learn specific skill sets, language abilities, and certification from training programmes on Japanese work ethics and imbibe good practices during their stay in Japan. This will provide a further change in the Indian workforce's technical know-how work culture and skills.

Japan's advanced healthcare system and expertise in various medical fields, including geriatric care and trauma care, could potentially assist India in the Ayushman Bharat healthcare sector. Collaboration between Japan and India could lead to advancements in healthcare delivery and sustainability, as Japan is known for its commitment to environmental sustainability. This could help India make healthcare more environmentally friendly.

Japan's Miyawaki forest technology, developed by botanist Akira Miyawaki, has been adopted by Indian environmental organizations and local governments to combat deforestation and improve urban greenery. The technique involves planting native tree species in small areas, creating dense, rapidly growing forests. Japan's involvement in sharing the technology may vary, with collaborations and pilot projects aiming to replicate Japan's success.

Shinto is Japan's major religion and is as old as Japan itself. The Shinto idea is coexisting in harmony with nature. There is a Japanese philosophy that says that every individual should have a personal responsibility towards protecting nature. They see that every living thing has a spirit and therefore should be shown respect. Japan's Jokaso technology encompasses various sewage and wastewater treatment methods and technologies, including decentralized sewage treatment systems, advanced sewage treatment plants, and eco-friendly approaches to wastewater management. India faces numerous challenges related to wastewater management and sanitation due to its rapidly growing population and urbanization. The introduction of Jokaso technology could help address sanitation and environmental sustainability challenges in India.

Japan and India are collaborating on blue economy initiatives, focusing on sustainable ocean-related resource development. Both countries recognize the potential of marine and coastal sectors for economic growth, food security, environmental sustainability, and technological innovation. Japan's heavy consumption of tuna fish raises concerns about overfishing and depletion. India exports skipjack, yellow fin, and other species to meet Japan's demand while diversifying supply sources. Japan and India are enhancing defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, focusing on maritime security and freedom of navigation. They conduct naval exercises, explore defence technology cooperation, and participate in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

Conclusion

The Indian community in Tokyo has seen a shift with the arrival of professionals in IT, management, finance, education, and research. This has led to the Nishikasai area becoming a "mini-India" and promoting cultural and social activities. The Indian community lives harmoniously with its neighbours and has developed relations with local governments to become valuable members of the Japanese community. Also, India has implemented economic reforms to attract foreign investment and international trade, with Japanese

companies now allowed to invest through joint ventures in India. These initiatives could alter India's *Atman Nirbhar Bharat* Scheme in defence, robotics, and unmanned ground vehicles.

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