

A Cultural Perspective on Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's July 2026 Visit to India



India and Japan share a unique civilisational partnership rooted in centuries of cultural exchange, Buddhist heritage, democratic values, and enduring people-to-people ties. While the relationship has expanded significantly across strategic, economic, and technological domains, its enduring strength lies in the shared cultural values, historical memories, and mutual trust that have evolved over generations. These civilisational linkages have also enabled both countries to harness culture as an important instrument of soft power and international engagement. The Japanese Prime Minister's official visit to India reaffirmed that the India–Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership is sustained not only by common interests but also by a deep sense of civilisational connectedness and cultural understanding. Through traditional ceremonies, symbolic gestures, references to shared heritage, and meaningful cultural interactions, the visit demonstrated how cultural diplomacy, as an important instrument of soft power,

continues to strengthen bilateral relations, deepen people-to-people ties, and build a resilient partnership for the future.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi was accorded a ceremonial welcome at Rashtrapati Bhavan, reflecting India's longstanding diplomatic traditions and the cultural ethos of *Atithi Devo Bhava* ("The guest is akin to God"). During the ceremony, she greeted her hosts with the traditional "Namaste", a gesture widely regarded as conveying respect and cultural sensitivity. The exchange contributed to a cordial atmosphere that complemented the formal diplomatic proceedings and underscored the importance of cultural protocol in India–Japan engagement.

During the Annual Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised that India and Japan are connected not merely through economic cooperation or technological collaboration, but also through shared cultural values, mutual trust and a common developmental outlook. His observation underscored the idea that enduring international partnerships derive their resilience from common civilisational values and societal understanding rather than from transactional interests alone. An especially significant moment of the visit occurred during lunch at Hyderabad House, where Prime Minister Takaichi interacted with the **Santoor**, one of India's classical musical instruments. Appreciated by Prime Minister Modi, this gesture symbolised the capacity of art and music to transcend political boundaries and foster genuine cultural dialogue. Such moments of artistic engagement represent important instruments of soft power, enabling states to cultivate emotional connectivity alongside formal diplomacy.

The visit further reflected the growing importance of personal diplomacy in international relations. Prime Minister Modi's affectionate reference to Prime Minister Takaichi as his *choti behen* ("younger sister") transcended diplomatic protocol and conveyed a sense of familiarity, trust, and emotional closeness. Such

symbolic expressions humanise interstate relations and contribute to the development of long-term confidence between political leaders and their societies. A defining cultural dimension of the visit was the reaffirmation of the shared Buddhist heritage that has connected India and Japan for more than a millennium. Prime Minister Takaichi observed that her hometown, Nara, continues to preserve Buddhist traditions whose intellectual and spiritual origins lie in India. This acknowledgement highlighted the continuing relevance of Buddhism as a living civilisational bridge linking the two societies. Rather than being confined to history, this shared heritage continues to shape cultural exchanges, mutual perceptions, and contemporary diplomacy.

Prime Minister Takaichi also emphasised the importance of people-to-people exchanges, recognising cultural interaction, educational collaboration, tourism, youth mobility, and academic engagement as indispensable pillars of bilateral relations. She expressed confidence that the forthcoming 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations would provide renewed momentum to these exchanges, thereby strengthening societal partnerships beyond the governmental level.

One of the most intellectually significant cultural references during the visit was Prime Minister Takaichi's invocation of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's address to the Indian Parliament, in which he quoted Swami Vivekananda: *"The different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea."* This philosophical reflection represents India's enduring civilisational vision of unity amidst diversity. By recalling Vivekananda's words, Prime Minister Takaichi situated the contemporary India–Japan partnership within a broader framework of shared ethical values, cultural pluralism, and peaceful coexistence. The reference demonstrated that the bilateral relationship draws

legitimacy not only from strategic convergence but also from a shared civilisational imagination that values dialogue, inclusiveness, and harmony.

Collectively, these cultural interactions illustrated that the India–Japan relationship is increasingly shaped by soft power, cultural symbolism, and societal engagement. Traditional greetings, artistic exchanges, Buddhist heritage, philosophical references, and interpersonal warmth transformed the visit from a routine diplomatic engagement into a meaningful expression of civilisational partnership. Such interactions strengthen mutual trust and foster a favourable social environment for expanding cooperation across strategic, economic, and technological domains.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s visit reaffirmed that the India–Japan relationship is fundamentally a civilisational partnership rooted in shared heritage, cultural values, democratic traditions, and enduring people-to-people ties. Symbolic moments such as the exchange of *Namaste*, the Santoor interaction, the reference to “Choti Behen,” recognition of India’s Buddhist legacy in Nara, and the invocation of Swami Vivekananda’s civilisational philosophy collectively highlighted the cultural foundations of bilateral relations.

The visit underscores an important principle of contemporary diplomacy: while strategic and economic interests define the scope of cooperation, it is shared cultural memory, mutual respect, and societal trust that sustain long-term international partnerships. From this perspective, India and Japan increasingly represent a model in which cultural diplomacy functions not merely as a supplement to foreign policy but as one of its core pillars.