

Japan Awakened Asia—A Miracle of the 20th Century
The Road to the Independence of India
—A Story to Be Passed Down to the Next Generation
By Probir Bikash Sarker

Introduction

From an address by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo in India

On August 22, 2007, while visiting India, the then Prime Minister Abe Shinzo gave an address titled “Confluence of the Two Seas” at the Indian Parliament. Although Prime Minister Abe while in office was severely exposed to various criticism, as a Bangladeshi, I highly appreciate his address. Prime Minister Abe spoke most clearly and in a very dignified manner about the relationship between India/Bangladesh and Japan and emphasized its historical significance, among Japanese statesmen. His address shall be long remembered in history. The following is excerpt from the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Today I have the great honour of addressing the highest organ of state power in this largest democracy in the world. I come before you on behalf of the citizens of another democracy that is equally representing Asia, to speak to you about my views on the future of Japan and India.

“The different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their waters in the sea.”

It gives me tremendous pleasure to be able to begin my address today with the words of Swami Vivekananda, the great spiritual leader that India gave the world.

My friends, where exactly do we stand historically and geographically? To answer this question, I would like to quote here the title of a book authored by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh in 1655. We are now at a point at which the *Confluence of the Two Seas* is coming into being.

The Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and prosperity. A “broader Asia” that broke away geographical boundaries is now beginning to take on a distinct form. Our two countries have the ability--and the responsibility--to ensure that it broadens yet further and to nurture and enrich these seas to become seas of clearest transparency.

This is the message I wish to deliver directly today to the one billion people of India. That is why I stand before you now in the Central Hall of the highest chamber, to speak with you, the people's representatives of India.

A number of times in history, Japan and India attracted one another.

Vivekananda came to be acquainted with Tenshin Okakura, a man ahead of his time in early modern Japan and a type of Renaissance man. Okakura was then guided by Vivekananda and enjoyed also a friendship with Sister Nivedita, Vivekananda's royal disciple and a distinguished female social reformer. Many people are aware of all that.

Tomorrow I will be taking a morning flight to Kolkata, where I expect to meet the son of Justice Radhabinod Pal. Justice Pal is highly respected even today by many Japanese for the noble spirit of courage he exhibited during the International Military Tribunal for the Far East.

People from the Bengal who forged a relationship with Japan — be it the person whose name graces Kolkata's international airport (Chandra Bose), or, going back a bit further in time, the ageless poet Rabindranath Tagore — were engaged at the deepest level of their soul with their Japanese contemporaries. Indeed, the depth and the richness of the exchanges that the intellectual leaders of Japan and India enjoyed during the early modern age are in some ways beyond what we in the modern day can imagine.

[Omitted]

Here, I would like to share with you my own views on the many contributions that India has made – and can make – to the world. I realize that it may seem odd to speak of India's contributions to a congregation such as this, but I ask your indulgence, as it ties to what I will touch upon soon afterwards.

I would argue that among many contributions that India can make to the world history, there is first of all its spirit of tolerance. I would like to quote, if I may, Vivekananda again, part of the conclusion of deeply meaningful remarks he delivered in Chicago in 1893. He said, *“help and not fight,” “assimilation and not destruction,” “harmony and peace and not dissention.”*

If you insert these exhortations into the context of the modern day, it is clear that these words preaching tolerance can hardly be considered relics of the past. Instead, we can recognize that they now hold a tone that is even more compelling than before.

From the reign of Ashoka the Great to Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha movement of nonviolent resistance, the Japanese people are well aware of the unbroken spirit of tolerance in Indian spiritual history.

I would like to emphasize today to the people of India that the Japanese people stand ready to work together with the Indian people so that this spirit of tolerance becomes the leading principle of this century.

[Omitted]

My friends, Japan and India have come of late to be of the same intent to form a "Strategic Global Partnership," in which the two countries are going to expand and fortify their relations. As for how Japan has come to such a conclusion, I hope that through what I have just laid out as my personal views you have come to understand the recognition and expectations Japan has towards India.

This partnership is an association in which we share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the respect for basic human rights as well as strategic interests.

Japanese diplomacy is now promoting various concepts in a host of different areas so that a region called "the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" will be formed along the outer rim of the Eurasian continent. The Strategic Global Partnership of Japan and India is pivotal for such pursuits to be successful.

By Japan and India coming together in this way, this "broader Asia" will evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States of America and Australia. Open and transparent, this network will allow people, goods, capital, and knowledge to flow freely.

Can we not say that faced with this wide, open, broader Asia, it is incumbent upon us two democracies, Japan and India, to carry out the pursuit of freedom and prosperity in this region?

“Confluence of the Two Seas,” Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, Website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

The region combining the eastern part of India, including the present state of West Bengal and Bangladesh, came to be called Bengal by the British. Although at the time of independence of India, Bengal was divided into two countries on account of religious reason, ethnically the same Bengal people live in the region.

As a person born in Bengal, I am very much pleased with former Prime Minister Abe’s speech in which he mentioned our great Bengalese, Swami Vivekananda, poet Tagore and Justice Pal. Especially, I am grateful to Mr. Abe for referring to the relationship between Vivekananda and Okakura Tenshin, which probably most Japanese people have forgotten.

The relationship between Japan and Bengal has been developed through a grand drama in an age of turbulence and drastic changes in the history of Asia by prominent players, Vivekananda, Tagore, and Okakura Tenshin; Rash Behari Bose, Touyama Mitsuru; Subhas Chandra Bose and Tojo Hideki during the Greater East Asia Conference; and Justice Pal and Shimonaka Yasaburo during the Tokyo Trials (the International Military Tribunal for the Far East).

I want to tell this historical story to the people of Japan from the standpoint of a Bengalese.

Since names of Indian people are sometimes different from the actual pronunciation, I use Indian names generally known in Japan. In addition, as of 2001, Calcutta became Kolkata and Madras became Chennai. In this book, however, the former names shall be used.

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