

Inaugural Address by Ambassador Satoshi SUZUKI
on the International Seminar
“Japanese Studies in India and South Asia: A New Integration”
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Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Introduction)

Namaskar and Konnichiwa to all.

I am delighted and honoured to join this international seminar, “Japanese Studies in India and South Asia: A New Integration.” I would like to express my special thanks to Professor P. A. George and Professor Abdullah-Al-Mamun for co-organizing this first-ever occasion.

As was mentioned by previous speakers, this year 2022 marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Japan-India diplomatic relations, as well as the 75th Anniversary of Independence of India.

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Japan-Bangladesh diplomatic relations. In order to commemorate this special year which is also significant for Japan and other South Asian countries, the Government of Japan decided to celebrate it as the “Japan-Southwest Asia Exchange Year” together with each South Asian nation respectively.

Keeping in mind the prominent role of “Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership” as well as “Japan-Bangladesh Comprehensive Partnership,” it is undeniably an excellent idea to provide esteemed academics from these three countries with a common forum to share their knowledge, ideas and experiences on Japanese studies. I hope this seminar will provide the necessary impetus to encourage Japanese studies at universities in India as well as in Bangladesh and help them achieve their true potential.

(Japanese studies in India)

Today, I would like to reiterate the significance of JNU as the eminent hub of promoting Japanese studies in India for many decades. Japanese language course was introduced in JNU in 1973, following Delhi University that set up the Department of Japanese studies late in the 1960s. As economy and trade ties between Japan and India evolved, the demand of Japanese language experts surged. JNU has played a pivotal role in imparting education of Japanese language as well as facilitating researchers and scholars of Japanese literature, culture, society, religion etc., which is unique feature that has made JNU stand out remarkably. The contribution of JNU in translating and introducing Japanese literature to the Indian society has been immense. Apart from JNU and Delhi University, several universities in other states in India have established Department of Japanese studies by now. A number of young Indians have

acquired their knowledge and skills in Japanese language through similar educational institutions, including private schools, and have obtained proficiency certificates through “Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT)”.

However, I should say the potential of magnifying the scale and capacity of propelling Japanese studies in the concerned region is still immense. According to the statistics by the Japan Foundation in 2018, the number of Indians learning Japanese language is around 38,000 while the number of Chinese people studying Japanese is more than one million.

To address such disparity, the governments of Japan and India signed an MOC in the field of Japanese Language Education in India in 2017. According to this memorandum, the Embassy of Japan and Ministry of External Affairs, in collaboration with Japan Foundation New Delhi, have been working together to expand the training opportunities for Japanese teachers. As Japanese studies are essential in facilitating efficient and dynamic political and economic dialogues as well as people-to-people exchanges, both counterparts share a common perception that we should raise the level of Japanese studies in India in a way that it is suitable for our Special Strategic and Global Partnership. Although we are facing an immense challenge in the form of the pandemic of COVID-19 for the last two years, we have continued our endeavor to increase opportunities for Japanese language education, and we are committed to continuing it.

(Japan-India relations)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to look back at the history of Japan-India relations and to envision the future direction of our cooperative partnership.

As all of you know, historically, the two nations have enjoyed long-standing cultural exchanges for more than a millennium. Starting from the arrival of Buddhism in Japan in the 6th century, Japan had earnestly assimilated the religious and philosophical values of Indian civilization. For example, Buddhism, deeply rooted in Japanese basic way of thinking, has been one of the keystones of the Japanese culture.

Let me give a concrete example in this context from Japanese literature. As you know, Professor George is a renowned researcher and translator of Miyazawa Kenji. Miyazawa Kenji was an ardent follower of Hokkekyo or Lotus Sutra. He sublimed his experiences as a robust peasant and agricultural teacher in the cropping fields into ethical poetry laced with fragrant imagery and anchored by his belief in incarnation and the truthful Dharma. Presently, the works of Miyazawa are one of Japanese national favorites and, through the translations done by Professor George, they are binding Japanese and Indian readers, playing a huge role for common understanding.

On a similar note, the introduction to Japan of the works of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore contributed immensely to Japan-India cultural exchange. Amidst the modernization of Asian countries in the early 20th century, Tagore recognized the importance of revitalizing the traditional art forms of India, and was inspired by the ideas of the Indian monk, Swami Vivekananda. The interaction between Tagore and the Japanese art historian Okakura Tenshin needs a special mention here. Tagore's works were translated from Bengali into Japanese and it deeply resonated with the Japanese authors.

Based on this lasting tradition of mutual respect and

understanding at the core, the Japan-India relations have continued to flourish. After 70 years of multi-layered exchanges, the relationship between our two countries grew into a Special Strategic and Global Partnership. Our partnership is based on deep respect for each other's contributions towards promoting peace, stability and development in Asia and beyond. Under the leadership of our respective Prime Ministers, we recognize each other as a natural partner to work together for Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and various other global issues.

(70th anniversary of Japan-India relations)

Turning to the 70th anniversary of Japan-India relations, its theme is "Building a future for our Centenary." This is the mantra that will guide us throughout this year. The motive is to together create our future and propel towards the 100th anniversary landmark and beyond. I strongly believe that the future offers enormous possibilities for our partnership in the positive direction. Here I would like to mention three areas.

First, Japan and India, as democratic countries in Asia, can cooperate each other to contribute to global peace and prosperity. We share political, economic and strategic interests, based on the firm foundation of common values and traditions. We are particularly continuing our efforts to build a rules-based free and open international order. There is a plenty of fields where we can cooperate, including security issues, especially cyber, outer space and economic security.

Secondly, economic relations can be further augmented. For instance, the number of Japanese companies in India reached a record high of 1,455 in 2020. As the Japanese companies are becoming indispensable partners for India to promote the "Make in India" initiative of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the

increasing number of Indians working in Japanese companies act as a bridge between Japan and India.

For economic relations, let me emphasise one important aspect, which is the close relation between Japanese studies and economic collaboration. You may have heard the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail project. This project is to completely adopt the Japanese Shinkansen Technology for its rail systems. However, its implementation would require a deeper understanding that the Shinkansen doesn't only represent the technological and engineering aspects, but that Japanese culture and work ethics are deeply embedded in it. Therefore, I strongly believe, enhanced Japanese study and our cultural exchanges would contribute to promote this historic project. They are truly the preconditions for further promoting Japan-India economic relations as well.

May I quote one sentence from Dr. Jaishankar's writing: "An earlier generation of Indians will recall how much the arrival of the Maruti-Suzuki cars changed not just their transport but the way of life. The next generation probably feels the same about the Delhi Metro Rail project." (p167, "The Indian Way")

I totally agree with him in terms of the interaction between economy and culture. High Speed Rail project will be another case.

Last, but not least, cultural exchanges should be promoted in all of the areas in a comprehensive manner, not only traditional areas but also the modern and contemporary areas. We can here easily mention literature, movies, music, animation and sports and so on. Sky is the only limit of our cooperation.

(TITP and SSW)

Before conclusion, I would like to mention one assistance tool of the government of Japan, which may attract your interest: namely, Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) and Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) status of residence in Japan.

TITP enables Indian youth to develop skills through on-the-job training in Japan across diverse industries, including manufacturing, caregiving, hospitality, agriculture, construction and so forth.

Also, Japan and India signed an MOC of SSW last year. This is a newly created status of residence in Japan. This agreement will also help in promoting the movement of skilled workers from India to Japan. The MOC covers 14 categories of specified skills under which Indian skilled workers who pass the tests in skills and language would be eligible for employment in Japan on a contractual basis. On this note, I am delighted to inform that in January this year, the SSW tests in the field of caregiving finally started in India, the first test location being Gurugram.

Furthermore, we also expect that the venues and job categories of SSW tests will expand soon and it will lead to the broadening of opportunities for Indian skilled workers to stay and work meaningfully in Japan in the near future.

On the other hand, I have to admit here, unfortunately, due to recent surged Omicron variant, the entry of foreign students to Japan has been temporarily suspended. As Indian students cannot resume entering Japan under the Japanese Government scholarship program at this point, I fully share the concerns and frustration of the Indian students as well as their teachers and

families. Currently efforts are being made for exceptional entry of foreign students to Japan. So I hope the situation will improve and we together overcome the challenges in near future.

(Conclusion)

In concluding, I wish this seminar all the success and hope the Center for Japanese Studies at JNU continues to strive as one of the pioneer institutions in promoting Japanese language and Japanese studies.

Thank you so much. Namaskar.